

Parent/Family Distance Learning Survey

Executive Summary

June 2020



In the spring of 2020, the School Transformation Collaborative (STC) and the Jay and Rose Phillips Family Foundation of Minnesota (JRPFF) with research support from ACT Research conducted a survey to capture families' experiences with the shift to distance learning that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic and to gather feedback to inform distance learning and support in the future. A diverse group of 98 family members with children in Minnesota schools responded. Major points from open-ended and forced-choice responses from these families are highlighted here.

Key Themes

- The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on Minnesota's students ranging from social isolation to mental health impacts to struggles with distance learning to missed milestones like senior spring and graduation.
- Nearly a quarter of families reported that their children were not keeping up with their distance learning work.
- Nearly a third of respondents do not feel prepared to help their children with distance learning. Family members with children in Minneapolis Public Schools are less likely to feel prepared to help their child/children with distance learning than families with children in other districts and less likely to agree strongly that they have the technology and connectivity necessary for distance learning. This was also true of families with children in middle/high schools compared to families with children in elementary schools.*
- More than half of families responded that their children were not interested in their distance learning work.



Major challenges with distance learning mentioned in open-ended feedback include a lack of live interaction with teachers and classmates; a confusing and frustrating instructional experience characterized by variable instructions and a lack of clarity and organization; and competing responsibilities that prevent families from supporting students as much as they would like to. Many students struggle to stay motivated, focused, and engaged during distance learning.

"Both of my children dread daily distance learning. They have to track and organize over 30 emails per day, 7 classes worth of daily work, daily attendance, and deal with technology. They miss their peers and the important interactions of school. They miss the in-person instruction from teachers that help with comprehension of content - they can ask questions ..."



Although many students are struggling with distance learning, the experience has been at least "okay" for many students, and even better for others. Some teachers and schools are communicating well, organizing work effectively, and building real-time interactions that help students feel connected and learn.

"One of my kids' teachers stays in contact with me and my child, and when she noticed he has been avoiding work, she sends a joint email to my child and myself and arranged a Google Meet so she can walk him through the missing assignment ... We really like the more flexible schedule so that we can sleep in and do the assigned work at our pace."

Key Themes

- Although many respondents feel like teachers and administrators have put effort into reaching out to get feedback about learning during the pandemic this spring, about a quarter do not, and many (43%) do not feel like they have a voice in informing what school will look like during the 2020-2021 school year.
- Looking toward the summer, respondents are concerned that students will lose a lot of their learning that was already compromised by the switch to distance learning, keeping children busy and occupied, continued social isolation, and uncertainty about what the fall and longer-term future will bring.
- Looking toward the fall, respondents have a lot of uncertainty and concerns about what will happen. Will students be able to return to school or will distance learning continue? How can we keep children safe? Have students fallen behind?

“ If distance learning continues in the fall, many family members feel like academic learning will be maximized if there is a lot more real-time interaction with teachers and other students, more use of paper and physical textbooks, and a better organized online learning environment. They would also like to see schools and districts make sure that families have the devices, internet access, and materials that they need and are actively helping families to help their children learn.

“There should be a hybrid structure where students can meet in person on a regular basis with teachers, small groups of students, etc. There should be mandatory synchronous class time. Teachers should assign projects and creative assignments to engage the students at home.”

“ If distance learning continues in the fall, many family members feel like students' social emotional learning and wellness will be maximized if there is a lot more real-time interaction with peers, intentional social emotional learning and counselor support.

“Offering Google meets, open times to meet with teachers, students, doing small group work to promote social/emotional interactions.”

• Current levels of real-time interaction with teachers and peers fall far short of what families would like to see. Although most students (86%) have at least occasional real-time interaction with teachers or other staff members, but fewer (62%) have weekly or more frequent real-time interaction, and fewer still (28%) have once a day or more frequent real-time interaction. Likewise, although most students (83%) have at least occasional real-time interaction with peers from school, many (15%) never have this type of interaction. Based on responses, students in Minneapolis Public schools may be less likely to have daily real-time interaction with teachers this spring; this also held for children in middle/high schools compared to children in elementary schools.*

“Making sure that the counselors do more reaching out to the students individually to see how they are doing.”

*Respondents for Minneapolis Public Schools were more likely to have children in middle/high schools than respondents for other districts and this may explain some differences. There were not enough responses in each combination of district and grade-level to statistically test whether differences between districts held after controlling for grade-level differences.