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Spring 2020 Remote Learning Survey: A Summary

In May 2020, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) sent a survey to 527 public districts, charter school districts, collaboratives, and private special education schools to learn more about their strategies, pain points, and plans for delivering remote learning. By mid-June, 436 entities had responded: 66.3 percent (289) of respondents were from public districts (not including charter schools), 17.2 percent (75) were from charter schools, 12.4 percent (54) were from private special education schools, and 4.1 percent (18) represented collaboratives. Below is a summary of responses in three key areas: remote learning, educator support, and preparations for the fall, as well as an analysis of open response items.

The Department's initial fall school reopening guidance was released on June 25, 2020. Please note that the results summarized here reflect districts' perspectives and plans <u>before</u> the fall guidance was provided. The information contained herein largely describes districts' expectations for remote learning in spring 2020; this summary does not make claims about the extent to which those expectations were met.

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EDUCATION

Remote Learning

- *Expectations for engagement* - The survey revealed a range of responses regarding the expectations communicated to students and families about how many hours per day students were to engage in school-related work. In this case, "school-related work" includes engaging in lessons, completing assignments, and participating in virtual meetings and enrichment activities.

What is the expectation your district has communicated to students and families about how many hours per day students are expected to engage in school-related work (including engaging in lessons, completing assignments, virtual meetings, enrichment activities, etc.)?
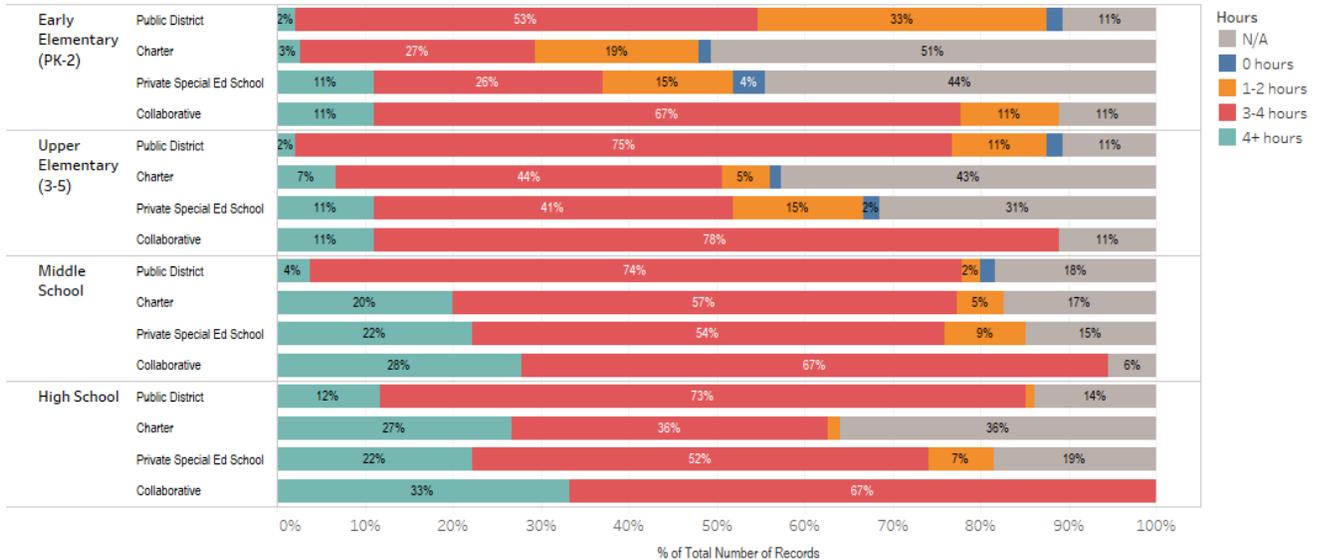
- *Methods of remote learning* - The survey asked participants how they delivered remote learning. Those options included non-virtual independent work (e.g., packets, projects, exploratory learning), virtual asynchronous whole-class sessions, virtual independent work, virtual one-on-one sessions, and virtual synchronous whole-class sessions.
    - Between 75 and 95 percent of districts, charter schools, and collaboratives reported employing all of these methods to deliver remote learning.
    - 98 percent of private special education schools reported using non-virtual independent work, with less reliance on the other methods.

- *Availability of remote learning plans* - Most districts (81 percent), collaboratives (78 percent), and charter schools (64 percent) reported having their remote learning plans available online.

- *Monitoring student engagement* - At least 67 percent of all entities reported they were able to accurately monitor which students were adequately engaged in remote learning. Among districts, 32 percent reported they could somewhat successfully monitor these cases. All employed varied approaches:

- Most districts, charter schools, private special education schools, and collaboratives reported monitoring log-in and work progress in virtual learning programs, tracking submitted student work, and creating contact logs for individual check-ins with students. Roughly 70 percent of districts, charter schools, and private special education schools reported taking attendance in synchronous sessions.
    - Nearly all entities reported that they developed a strategy for connecting with students who have not participated in remote learning.

- *Supporting student groups*
    - English learners (ELs) - A majority of districts and charter schools provided instruction via telephone or video conferencing, additional resources and supports (e.g. projects, packets) with parent communication, and shifted services to include more virtual programming and general assistance to support ELs. Seven percent of districts contracted with additional external service providers.
    - Students with disabilities - Most entities reported providing additional resources and supports (e.g. packets, projects), remote instruction and services, and additional co-planning between core content and special education teachers. A third of districts purchased specialized or assistive technology, and nearly half provided additional support and training for caretakers to aid in remote learning. Nearly 20 percent of districts and charter schools reported contracting with an additional external service provider.
    - Students performing above grade level - A majority of districts, charter schools, and collaboratives reported giving students choice in assignments and activities and providing them with enrichment activities and lessons. A little over 50 percent of districts and charter schools reported providing individualized content and instruction based on student readiness, and approximately a quarter allowed students to access classes and assignments beyond their current grade level.

- *Students' social-emotional learning (SEL) and mental health* - A hefty majority of all entities reported: 1) they were connecting students/families to community resources; 2) educators were building relationships and maintaining connections with students (93-100 percent); 3) they were incorporating enrichment, exercise, and play into daily student schedules; and 4) they were monitoring and/or assessing students' SEL and/or mental health. Approximately 64 percent of districts and 56 percent of charter schools reported providing explicit SEL content and instruction and related development and training for educators.

- *Family engagement* - Nearly all entities reported having sent regular district-wide communications and provided multiple methods for families to contact schools and district staff. Nearly 75 percent of districts and charter schools established expectations around educator-family communications. About 64 percent of districts reported both assigning personnel to serve as family liaisons and regularly seeking student/family feedback on remote learning.

Educator Support

The survey asked respondents to identify strategies they utilized to sustain and support a quality workforce. A majority of all entities (82 percent and above) reported they were:

- Encouraging school leaders to check in frequently on the social-emotional, mental, and physical well-being of staff;
- Offering additional flexibility and autonomy for work assignments and schedules;
- Promoting and providing additional time for collaboration;
- Providing training and resources to educators to support the transition to remote learning; and
- Reviewing and offering feedback on remote learning plans and instruction.

About 62 percent of districts and 73 percent of charter schools reported differentiating roles and responsibilities based on capacity, skill set, and experience.

Preparation for Fall 2020

- *Support from the state* – Nearly 75 percent of all respondents requested high-quality resources for remote learning. Roughly 60 percent of districts and 50 percent of other groups requested professional development for educators. Approximately 50 percent of districts, charter schools, and private special education schools requested assistance with technology and internet needs. Roughly 60 percent of all districts, charter schools, and private special education schools want shared practices/lessons learned from other districts.

What would be most helpful from the state during this period of remote learning (select all that apply)?

Category	Org Type	Count	Percent
Assistance with technology and internet needs	Public District	134 / 289	46%
	Charter	44 / 75	59%
	Collaborative	5 / 18	28%
	Private Special Ed Sch..	31 / 54	57%
Guidance for specific areas (such as those discussed in this survey)	Public District	164 / 289	57%
	Charter	31 / 75	41%
	Collaborative	12 / 18	67%
	Private Special Ed Sch..	23 / 54	43%
High quality resources for remote learning	Public District	214 / 289	74%
	Charter	48 / 75	64%
	Collaborative	12 / 18	67%
	Private Special Ed Sch..	38 / 54	70%
Professional development for educators	Public District	172 / 289	60%
	Charter	36 / 75	48%
	Collaborative	10 / 18	56%
	Private Special Ed Sch..	30 / 54	56%
Shared practices/lessons learned from other districts	Public District	182 / 289	63%
	Charter	48 / 75	64%
	Collaborative	9 / 18	50%
	Private Special Ed Sch..	31 / 54	57%

Org Type
- Public District
- Charter
- Collaborative
- Private Special Ed School

Analysis of Open Response Items

The survey asked districts and schools four open-response questions. Trends from their responses are captured here. Note many responses cited multiple challenges and/or requests within a single response.

1) *Student social-emotional learning and mental health* – About 90 percent of all entities responded to the question, "In what ways is the district considering assessing students' social-emotional learning and mental health needs upon re-entry, particularly in regard to any increased needs as a result of COVID-19-related trauma?"

- 66 percent of those responses referenced programming for SEL, including offering services outside of the school day, supports over the summer, counseling, outreach to families/students, and instructional programming;
- 35 percent of all responses reported using staffing solutions to address the challenge posed by the question. They mentioned assigning dedicated staff to students, training and supporting staff, or hiring new staff;
- 22 percent reported utilizing or planning to utilize an SEL assessment;
- 19 percent discussed instructional programming (e.g., wellness classes); and
- 15 percent cited a specific SEL program.

2) *Intermittently engaged and disengaged students* – The survey asked, "In what way is the district considering supporting intermittently and disengaged students during the transition into the next school year and during the next school year?" Almost 80 percent of all respondents answered this question. Of those responses:

- 84 percent indicated there was programming in place for disengaged students. Programming included family services and student outreach (most mentioned), summer programming, tiered interventions, and specific behavioral programming (least mentioned in this category);
- 36 percent of the total respondents discussed assessments; and
- 32 percent mentioned increasing, training, or reorganizing staff to address disengaged students

3) *Students with disabilities* –The survey asked: "In what ways is the district considering supporting students with special needs during the transition into next school year and during next school year?" About 78 percent of survey respondents provided information. There were many in-depth responses with various types of interventions detailed. Typically, the level of intervention described was commensurate with the type of disabilities present in the student population and the type of school setting. In general education settings, the instructional strategies described to meet this population included inclusive strategies, scheduling solutions, and tutoring. Of those who responded to this question:

- About 80 percent mentioned at least one service in place;
- 50 percent mentioned at least two or more services in place;
- 22 percent cited monitoring and assessments;
- 35 percent reported student enrollment in extended school year services; and

- Nearly 30 percent reported employing services that extend beyond academic supports, including occupational and physical therapy, counseling, or additional wraparound services.

On the whole, many responses referred to evaluating student progress and providing tutoring or other intensive interventions to remediate learning loss.

4) *Challenges and requested support* – The survey asked, "Tell us more about the challenges you are facing right now and the challenges you anticipate facing in the fall"." About 83 percent of respondents answered this question. Most responses fell in three broad categories:

- Distance learning – Approximately 75 percent of respondents cited distance learning, educator training and support, supporting families to partner in distance learning, and/or staffing in response to this question. About 14 percent of respondents specifically cited the need for expanded access to devices and Wi-Fi. When discussing their distance learning challenges, respondents cited concerns such as supporting younger and early elementary children, student engagement at all levels, and data security concerns. Lack of equity was a primary and frequently mentioned concern.
  - 25 percent explicitly cited and/or requested educator support and training on remote learning instruction, technology competence, and/or educator burnout prevention and support;
  - About 14 percent requested statewide (or regionally available) resources such as a common remote learning platform and tools, a virtual academy, or common learning management system;
  - 7 percent of all respondents discussed SEL and behavioral supports; and
  - 3 percent explicitly mentioned student diagnostics.
- Planning for challenges related to COVID-19 – About 40 percent of respondents cited concerns about re-opening in light of COVID-19. Their responses included:
  - COVID-19 requirements (e.g., safety equipment and enforcement of health measures, especially related to younger grades and students with certain disabilities);
  - Facilities (e.g., building maintenance, social distancing in smaller spaces);
  - Logistics (e.g., transportation, incompatible schedules for teacher-parents);
  - Staffing (e.g., staff that are vulnerable to the virus, supporting nurses); and
  - Extracurricular activities.
- Budget – About 20 percent of respondents expressed concerns related to their budget. Typically, respondents reported being concerned about increased costs (e.g. safety supplies, transportation that accommodates social distancing) and simultaneous budget cuts.