



The State of **SPECIAL EDUCATION** During COVID-19 in KCPS and Charter Schools

Presented November 2020 by





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Let's face it; people with disabilities, as well as their families and teachers, were experiencing a pandemic long before COVID-19. The pandemic intensified feelings of isolation, frustration and despair that has long plagued this marginalized population.

“Lying, thinking; Last night; How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty; And bread loaf is not stone
I came up with one thing; And I don't believe I'm wrong
That nobody, But nobody, Can make it out here alone.”

an excerpt of *Alone* by Maya Angelou

OBJECTIVE

The coronavirus pandemic has presented unique challenges and opportunities. Families and students with special education needs are at increased risk of adverse impacts due to school closure and limited access to professional services. The purpose of this project was to assess the impact of coronavirus on the academic, social and emotional well-being of KCPS and charter school students with special education needs, their families and educators.

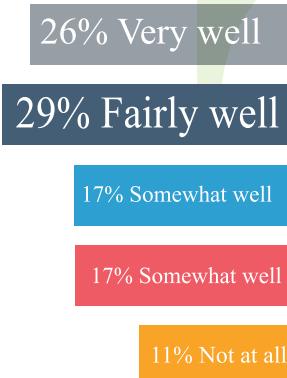
METHODS

Parents/guardians and educators of special education students in Kansas City Public Schools and area charter schools were invited to participate in an online survey and focus group on special education during COVID.

PARENT RESULTS

Most parents indicated their child's school was at least somewhat effective in meeting their child's education needs during COVID school closures.

How well is the school addressing your child's education needs during COVID school closure?



What impact has the school closure had on your child?



Parents cited a number of adverse effects of school closure on their child's and their individual academic, social and emotional needs.

What impact has the school closure had on you as a parent/caregiver?

- 48%-- Inability or reduced ability to participate in paid work due to caregiver responsibilities
- 74%--Increased stress**
- 57%--Increased worry about well-being of family
- 74%-- Feeling overwhelmed**
- 6%--No or limited impact
- 6%--Other

More than half of parents were satisfied with the support received from their child's school.

The tools that were most beneficial to parents was **one-on-one time with teachers, specialists (i.e. speech therapists, occupational therapists), communication and access to educational resources and social and behavioral skills.**

How satisfied are you with the support your child has received from their school?

- 17% Very satisfied
- 43% Satisfied**
- 23% Neutral
- 14% Not very satisfied
- 3% Not at all satisfied

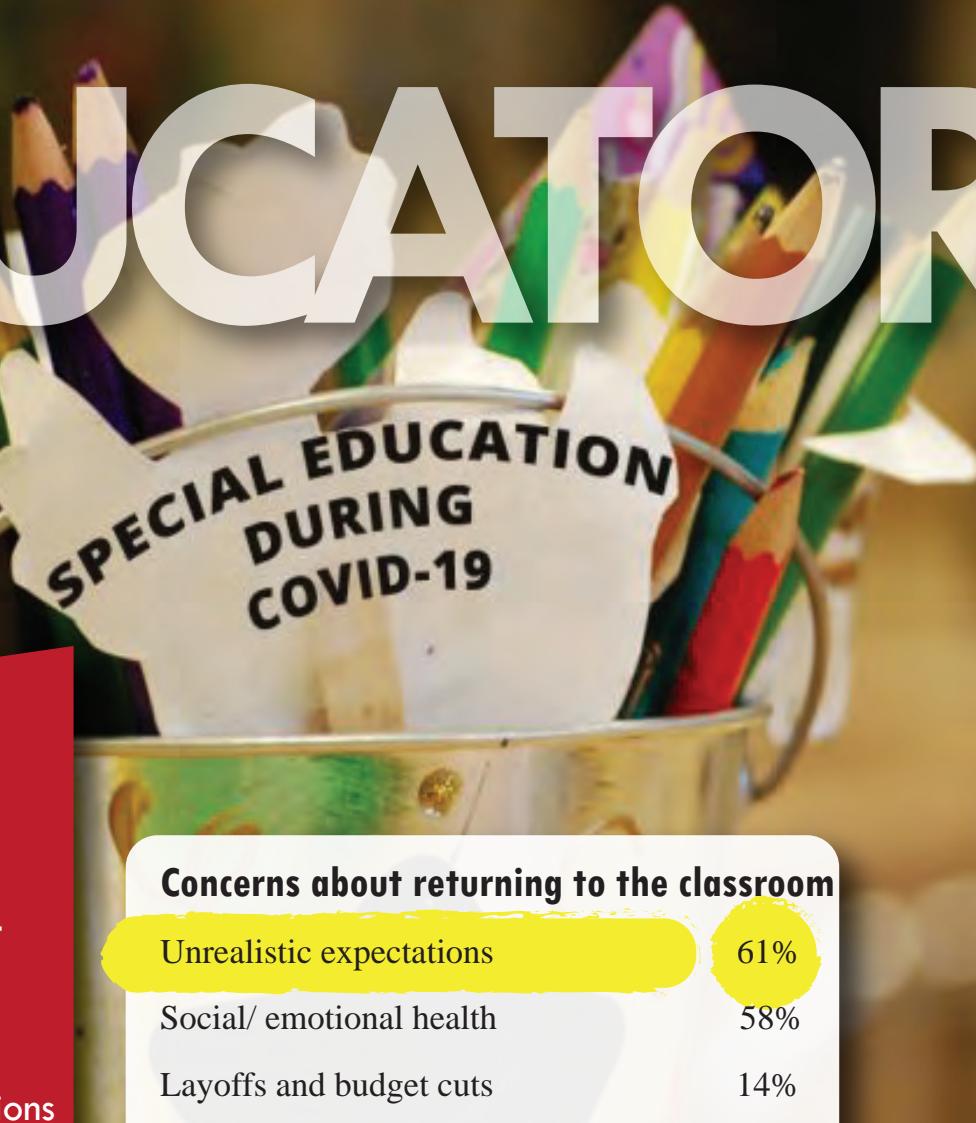
“Not being around other children frustrates her really fast, her attitude has changed drastically towards life, she often feels as if she isn’t smart enough to do certain things and her attention span is very low.”

English 504 Plan
Graduation
Career Ready
Autism Virtual Learning Equity
Kansas City MO Public Schools
SPECIAL EDUCATION + COVID
Math Charter Schools
History Diversity IEP
Inclusion History
Science Success

EDUCATORS

Teacher Results

Teachers' top concerns about returning to the classroom included unrealistic expectations and their social, emotional and physical health. With respect to their student's return to the classroom, teachers were most concerned with academic decline, social-emotional health and behavioral issues.



Concerns about returning to the classroom

Unrealistic expectations	61%
Social/ emotional health	58%
Layoffs and budget cuts	14%
Physical Health	44%
Receiving adequate professional development to meet student's needs	31%
None of these	11%

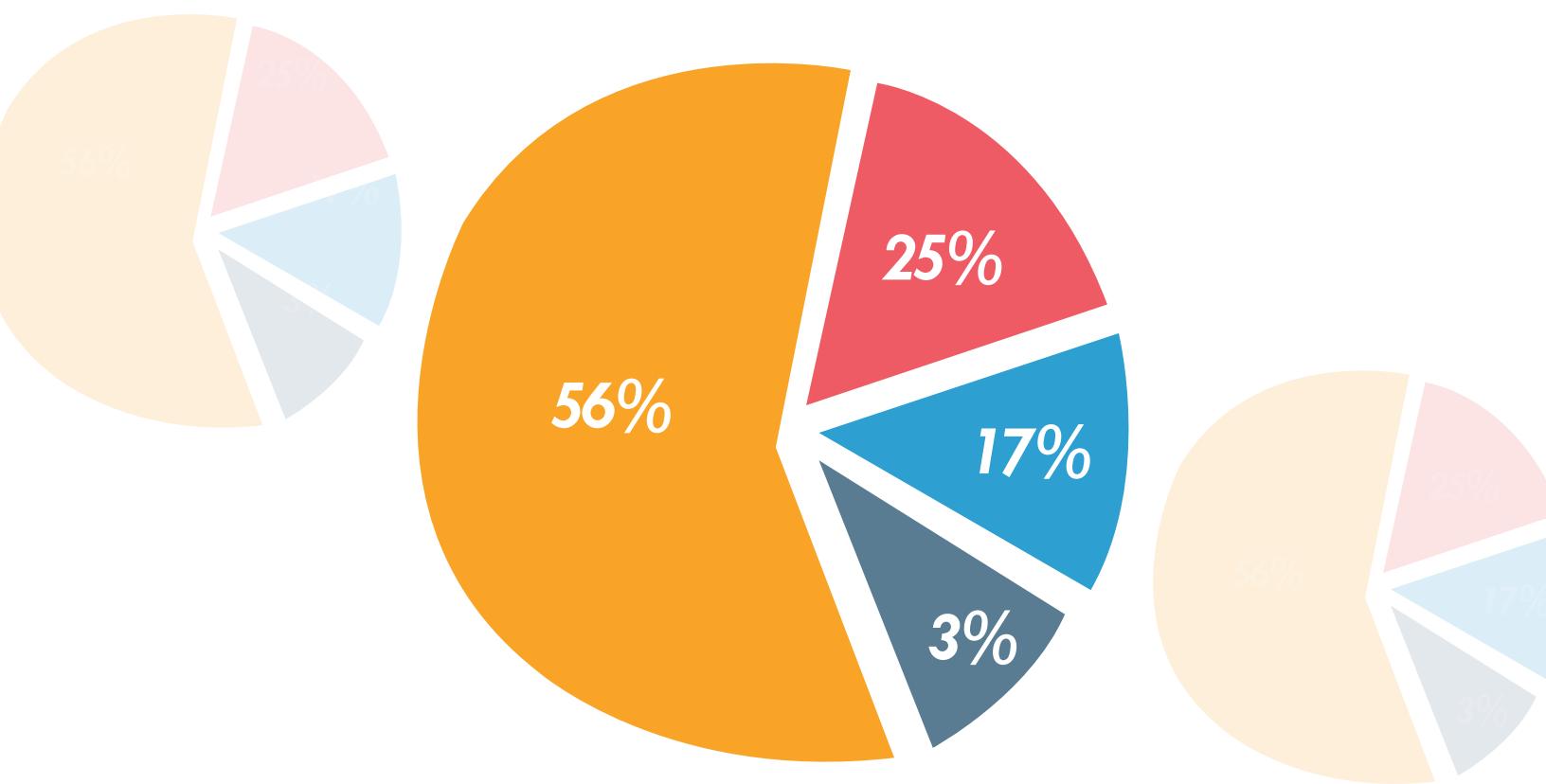
Concern for students

Academic decline	69%
Social-emotional health issues	61%
Behavioral issues	56%
Physical health issues	44%
None of the above	6%

EDUCATORS SAID

In the event of a future school closure that requires distance learning, what is most important for districts or charter networks to do?

- 56%** Have a plan in place to provide students with the necessary learning tools they would normally have at school (e.g., books, personal learning devices)
- 17%** Have high-quality curricular tools for distance learning ready that teachers have received training on previously
- 3%** Set clear guidance for teachers' roles during distance learning
- 25%** Have a plan in place to ensure students have access to physical and mental health supports (e.g., meals, counselors)





FAMILY SURVEY

Responding families came from KCPS, Charter and other area schools.

5 KCPS

24 Charters

8 Others

DEMOGRAPHIC Questions:

In addition to you, who is currently available to help meet your child/youth's needs in the home?

Another parent/guardian

Adult family member

Older sibling

Respite

No help is available/
has been provided

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

If your child has a diagnosis,
please identify their special
education need?

40%

Attention Deficit
Hyperactivity Disorder

37.14%

Learning Disability

28.57%

Autism Spectrum Disorder

20.00%

No diagnosis

14.29%

Intellectual Disability

2.86%

Blind/Visually Impaired

2.86%

OTHER
Speech, Anxiety,
Down Syndrome

What is the age of your child/youth
with special education needs?

5-9 / 45.71%

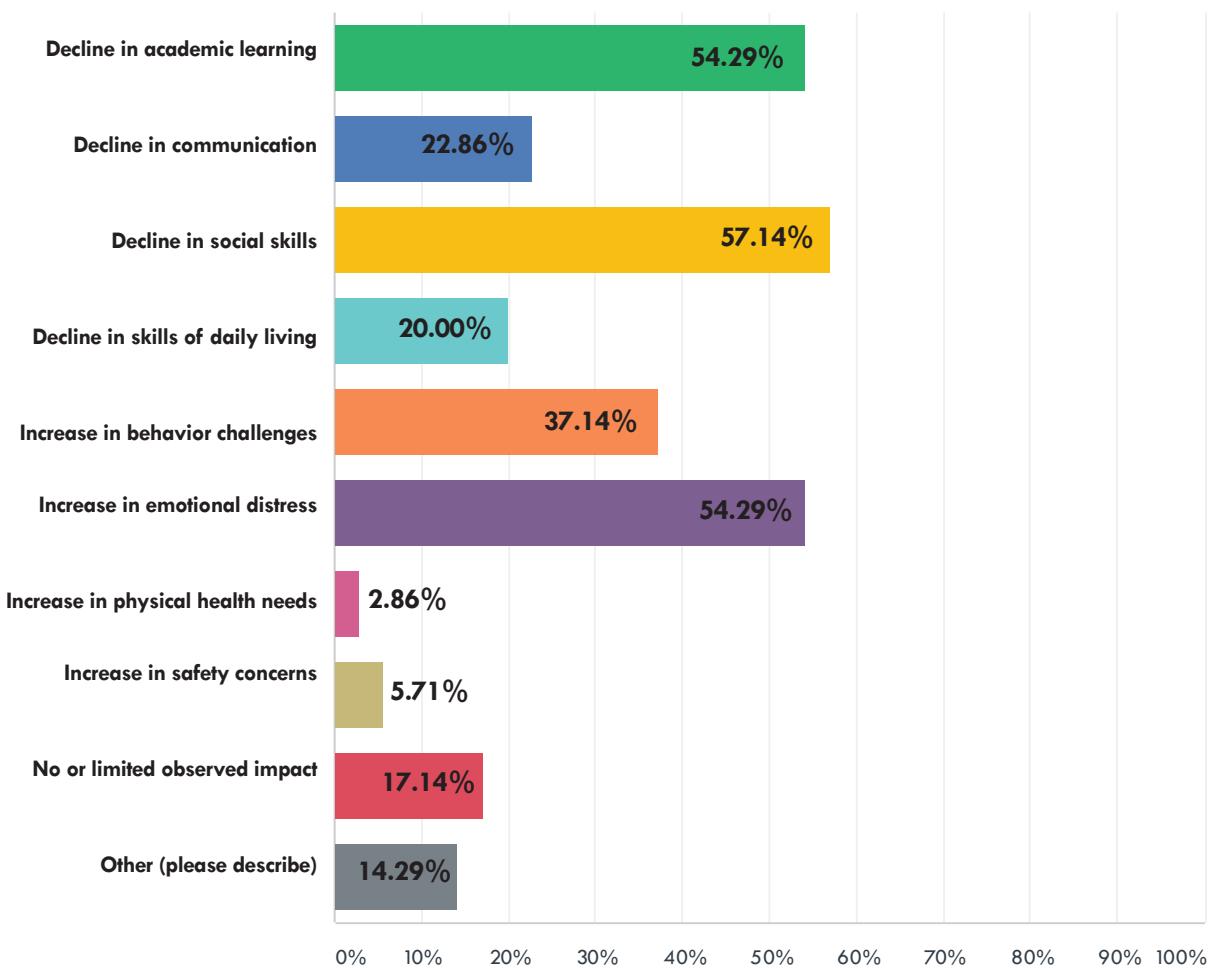
10 -13 / 25.71%

14 -18 / 22.86%

Over 18 5.71%

FAMILY SURVEY

What impact has the school closure had on your child/youth?



Is the remote instruction time that your child/youth receiving sufficient to address their needs?

57.14% NO

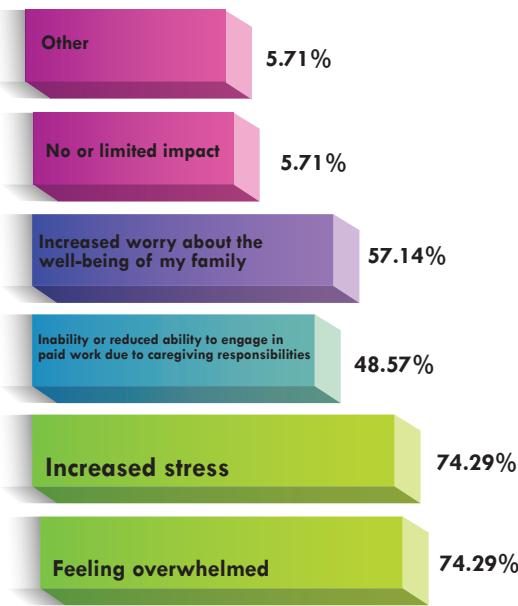
YES **42.86%**

74.29% YES

NO **25.71%**

Do you have sufficient technological resources to support your child's learning (e.g., Wi-Fi, laptop, scanner, printer, communication devices)?

What impact has the school closure had on you as a parent/guardian?



FAMILY SURVEY



How confident do you feel about your ability to support your child's learning at home?

Moderate confidence

42.86%

No confidence
2.86%

High confidence
22.86%

Slight confidence
31.43%

Please provide an example of the impact school closure has had on your child.

"He has struggled with getting on every class, every day. It is a lot of transitions and he struggles with transitions. He has become more verbally aggressive at home and has become more defiant. He will argue instead of doing his classwork and trying to get him to becomes a battle, I try to coax him to do his work, he becomes defiant and will do everything he can to not do the work. He has cried himself to sleep because he was so angry."

"Grades are up but so is his stress."

"My child would greatly benefit from structured social interactions with peers. To date, the school has not offered any opportunities for students to engage in group discussion or interaction."

Please provide an example of a situation where your child required support but was unable to receive it.

"My child is struggling with online learning. The teachers and administrators have reached out, they have tried different things.

My child is not doing those things that the staff has suggested. My son has mental health services through Truman but he is struggling with even getting on his classes. I don't know what support he even needs right now other than me having to quit my job and staying home but that isn't a real option because then we would lose our home due to lack of income."

"Our son usually has behavioral support in place for when work is challenging so that he doesn't spiral to violence and self-harm. We don't have that in place now and it's incredibly challenging and he has begun to threaten self-harm again."

"Our teacher is amazing, and able to help so much but she's got a full class to support. We haven't been contacted about anything else since the beginning of school. We are new to IEP/SPED stuff, we only started the process in March. We don't have the time or resources to figure out what help she even needs."

OPEN RESPONSES

What would you identify as the most significant unmet need for children/youth with special education needs during school closures?

"Figuring out what support we could put in place to help her. Understanding how to implement the IEP in terms of remote."

"Technology support for parents. Sometimes when I call, I'm not understood because I don't speak tech talk... they don't understand what I'm trying to say."

"I would say the extra help to redirect them and keep them on task. It feels as if it is put solely on the child to ask for help and many won't or don't know how. As a single working parent knowing that my child could face truancy officers or an unknown person showing up at our home for a wellness check because they are struggling to adapt to online schooling is a fear. Our kids are asked to do the same amount of time and schoolwork as kids without special needs and our kids are struggling more with the amount of time needed to do the work. Special needs kids are trying to adjust the best that they can but they are being overwhelmed and they are shutting down. I wish I could be at home to help my son with all of this but my employer requires me to be in the office and I am a single mom just trying to keep us afloat. I don't think the school staff is doing anything wrong, I just think that special needs kids are not getting the extra personal one on one help that they are used to. I think that the staff are doing what they know to do and that we just need to figure out a way that the supports can be given without in person interaction."

What would you identify as the most significant unmet need for parents/guardians of students with special education needs during school closures?

"Support of all types. Some of our kids cannot be successful with distance learning and there has been no alternatives offered unless we pay for private, in person support."

"The need to have a Special Needs Pod or connection with other parents to support each other."

"More support and resources for home and the resources to better assist the children."



What things can be helpful for you and your family during the Coronavirus pandemic?

“Social connections/activities with classmates. Connecting regularly with his SPED team and other families to share resources, ideas... support each other.”

“Opportunity for in-person OT/Behavioral therapies (with covid safety measures in place), more communication on what the school expects from the students.”

“I’m not sure. It’s been a hard time though. I feel bad for my child. The information he needs to know is put on us to teach him and we not teachers.”

Can you provide any insight or advice to parents who are doing virtual learning with their children?

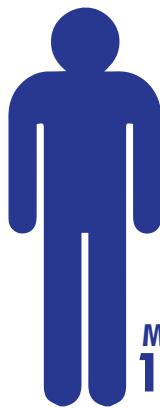
“Realize these kids would never do this work alone at school. There would be discussions, group work, questions asked. Don’t be afraid to contact the teacher and it’s ok if something is just hard.”

“Get a schedule asap and stick to it.”

“Put emotional well-being before academics right now. They will more likely be able to catch up on academics, but it’s much harder to address emotional/mental stressors after they’ve become an issue.”

TEACHER SURVEY RESPONSES

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION



MALE TEACHERS
11.11%

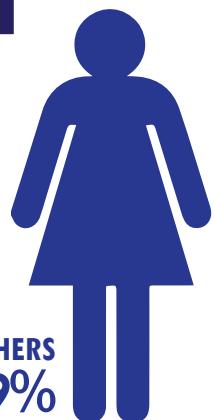
AGE

<30
19.44%

30-49
55.56%

50-54
11.11%

55+
13.89%



FEMALE TEACHERS
88.89%

Race/Ethnicity

White = 80.56%

African-American
Black = 16.67%

Asian/Pacific
Islander = 2.78%

Grades Currently Teaching

elementary 41.67%

middle 13.89%

high 8.33%

combined 36.11%

NUMBER OF YEARS TEACHING

1 8.33%

1-3 8.33%

4-6 19.44%

7-10 22.22%

11-15 5.56%

16-19 8.33%

20-24 8.33%

25-29 5.56%

30+ 13.89%

TEACHER SURVEY RESPONSES

What type of special education do you teach?

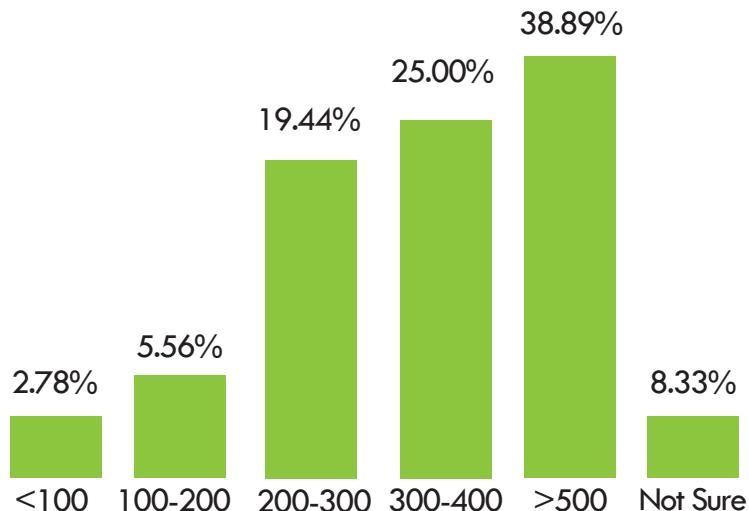
(i.e. certified and taught "cross categorical" special education)

- Learning Support Specialist
- Certified cross categorical
- Para-professional
- Speech language therapy



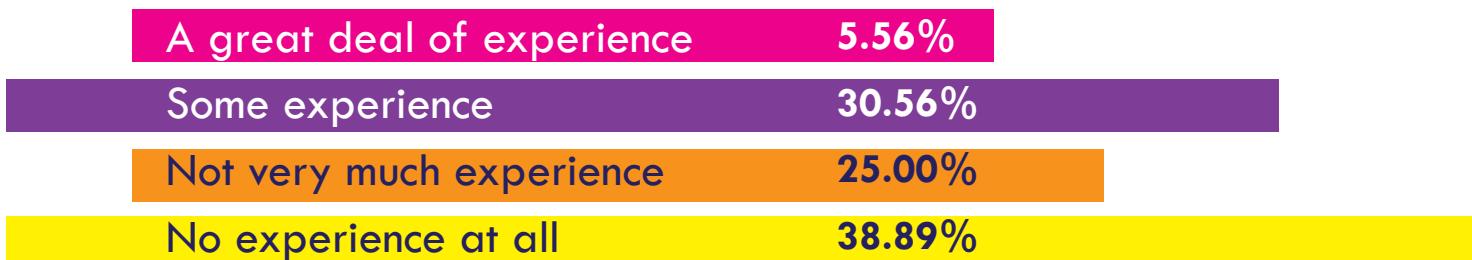
TEACHER SURVEY RESPONSES

NUMBER
OF
STUDENTS
IN
YOUR
SCHOOL



Before the Coronavirus outbreak, how much experience did you, personally, have with e-learning?

(i.e., computer-based or online learning)



Compared to the period of time before distance learning, how much time would you say you are spending now on reaching out to students?



TEACHER SURVEY RESPONSES

Compared to the period of time before distance learning, how much time would you say you are spending now on reaching out to parents/guardians?



Which of the following do you think should be the focus for distance learning during the Coronavirus outbreak?

Teaching new content, but modified greatly from lesson plans developed before the coronavirus outbreak

55.56%

Reinforcing old content and/or addressing learning gaps

55.56%

Teaching new content, as planned before the coronavirus outbreak

8.33%



How accurate is the following statement about the distance learning curricula being used with your students?

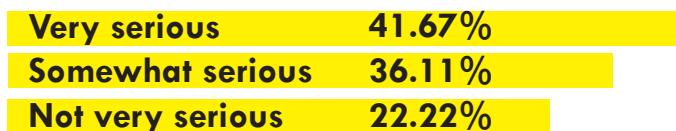
"The distance learning curricula are accessible and appropriate for all learners in my classroom."

Very accurate	13.8%
Somewhat accurate	33.3%
Not very accurate	41.6%
Not accurate at all	11.11

TEACHER SURVEY RESPONSES

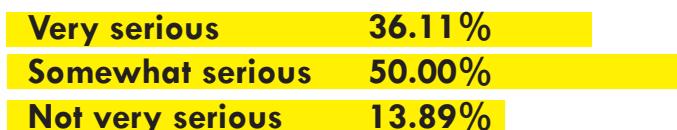
In your opinion, how serious of an obstacle do you think the following has been to the effective implementation of distance learning during the Coronavirus outbreak?

My students' lack of access to high-speed internet.



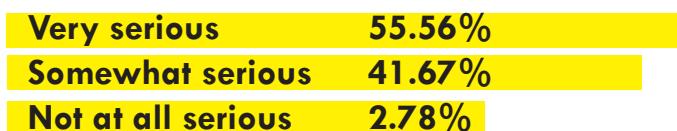
In your opinion, how serious of an obstacle do you think the following has been to the effective implementation of distance learning during the Coronavirus outbreak?

My students' lack of necessary technology skills.

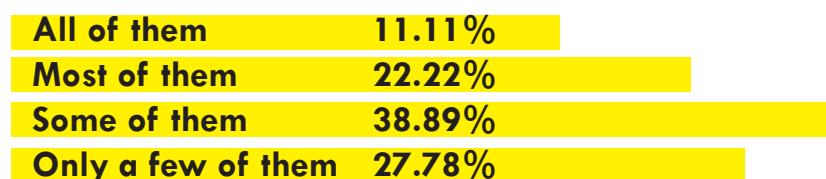


In your opinion, how serious of an obstacle do you think the following has been to the effective implementation of distance learning during the Coronavirus outbreak?

Low student engagement.



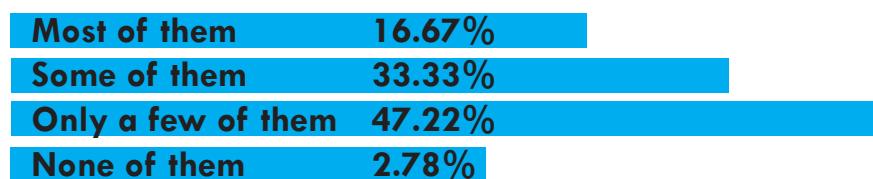
Approximately how many of your students have the following? The skills to successfully navigate technology for distance learning (e.g., know how to type, use online learning platforms).



TEACHER SURVEY RESPONSES

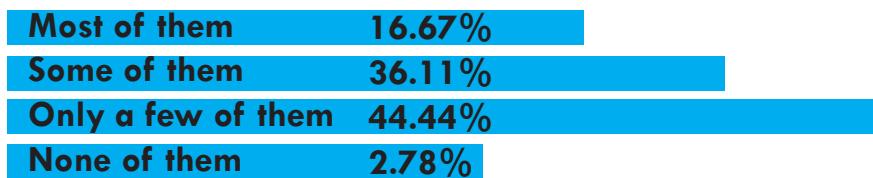
Approximately how many of your students have the following?

A quiet place to study and/or attend virtual class.



Approximately how many of your students have the following?

Family members or guardians who are available to assist with their learning needs.



Would you say that your teacher preparation program adequately prepared teachers to facilitate online learning?



How relevant has the professional development you have received since the start of the Coronavirus outbreak been in relation to your distance learning?



TEACHER SURVEY RESPONSES



Which of the following are you most concerned about when you return to the classroom?

Unrealistic expectations for getting students back on track	61.11%
Social-emotional health issues	58.33%
Layoffs or budget cuts	13.89%
Physical health issues	44.44%
Receiving adequate professional development to address student needs	30.56%
None of the above	11.11%

ADDITIONAL RESPONSES

- Both social emotional needs of students and families and the increased gap of ability for students that have not logged into classes.
- Adjusting to the changes that the schedule will need to accommodate the students who returned and those who are still participating in virtual learning.
- Time!
- Getting Covid and bringing it home to my family.
- Making sure other colleagues follow the safety protocols. Children are really good at. It is 20% of the adults.

TEACHER SURVEY RESPONSES

Which of the following are you most concerned about for your students when they return to the classroom?

Academic decline 69.44%

Social-emotional health issues 61.11%

Behavioral issues 55.56%

Physical health issues 44.44%

None of the above 5.56%

ADDITIONAL RESPONSES

Adjusting to the new "norm".

Flipping back and forth between virtual, hybrid - keeping the kids and families on the schedule.

Impact on post-secondary options.



Can you provide any insight or ideas for other teachers that have helped you be successful with your students during the Coronavirus outbreak?



“I'm not feeling very successful right now.”

“I suggest doing mental check ins with students at the beginning of class and doing whole class resets when you see the majority of students are not engaged during a lesson. Also, zoom lunches with their teacher can be a great way for students to not only connect with you but also with others. Give students a “tour” of your home, play energizer games at the beginning of the period such as a scavenger hunt where you ask students to find something at home (ex. Find something in your house that is red, you have 20 seconds). Play Simon says through zoom. These are a few different ice breakers/energizer activities that I have used that do not require students to play through their computer.”

“Set and maintain a schedule with students; knowing exactly who they'll see at what time/day may be the only consistency they have right now. Our consistent presence in their world can stabilize some social/emotional struggles.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Community Building

Teachers and families were thrust into the world of virtual learning with little advance notice or preparation. Both indicated feeling overwhelmed and alone. Special education students were accustomed to more one-on-one assistance at school and are often not able to get that from home. Parents feel ill equipped at being teachers, especially while juggling parenting and work responsibilities.

Maya Angelou's poem "Alone" speaks to the desperation and despair that isolation breeds. Now more than ever before, special education students, families, teachers and support professionals need the opportunity to connect with other members of the special education community in safe and sacred spaces.

Peer Networks

We recommend the establishment of peer-to-peer networks that allow families, teachers and professionals who support diverse learners to seek advice as well as share knowledge and expertise. This community of special education families and educators could launch within KCPS boundaries with the possibility of extending across the metro. After all, the need to establish social capital within this historically disenfranchised population is universal. And this urgent need to create a sense of belonging greatly enhances the overall health and wellbeing of the community.

Interdisciplinary Approach

During in-school learning, schools have the option of implementing interdisciplinary teams to meet the needs of students with IEPs and 504 plans. These teams typically consist of regular education teachers, special education teachers, psychologists, therapists, school administrators and process coordinators. Interdisciplinary teams are especially helpful to educators when issues arise that require more nuanced approaches. For example, a teacher may reach out to the interdisciplinary team when seeking support for a child whose behaviors are interfering with learning. The team, who is familiar with the child, convenes and offers strategies to manage the child's behavior and improve the learning environment.

Just like teachers use interdisciplinary teams to assist with in-person learning, these same teams could be a valuable resource to families encountering similar issues at home during remote learning.

"Now if you listen closely; I'll tell you what I know
Storm clouds are gathering; The wind is gonna blow
The race of man is suffering; And I can hear the moan,
'Cause nobody, But nobody, Can make it out here alone."

an excerpt of **Alone** by Maya Angelou

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Transition Academy would like to thank the following organizations and individuals for their support for this study:

**Andrea Bradley-Ewing, Children's Mercy Hospital
Raven Bunn
Kansas City Special Education PTA
Kansas City Teacher Residency
School Smart Kansas City
Sherman Family Foundation
Show Me KC Schools
The Transition Academy Board of Directors
Vivid Creative Services**