

OCTOBER 2020

**HOW COVID-19 AFFECTED EDUCATION FOR
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND ENGLISH LEARNERS:
THE LATEST RESULTS FROM A NATIONAL SURVEY**

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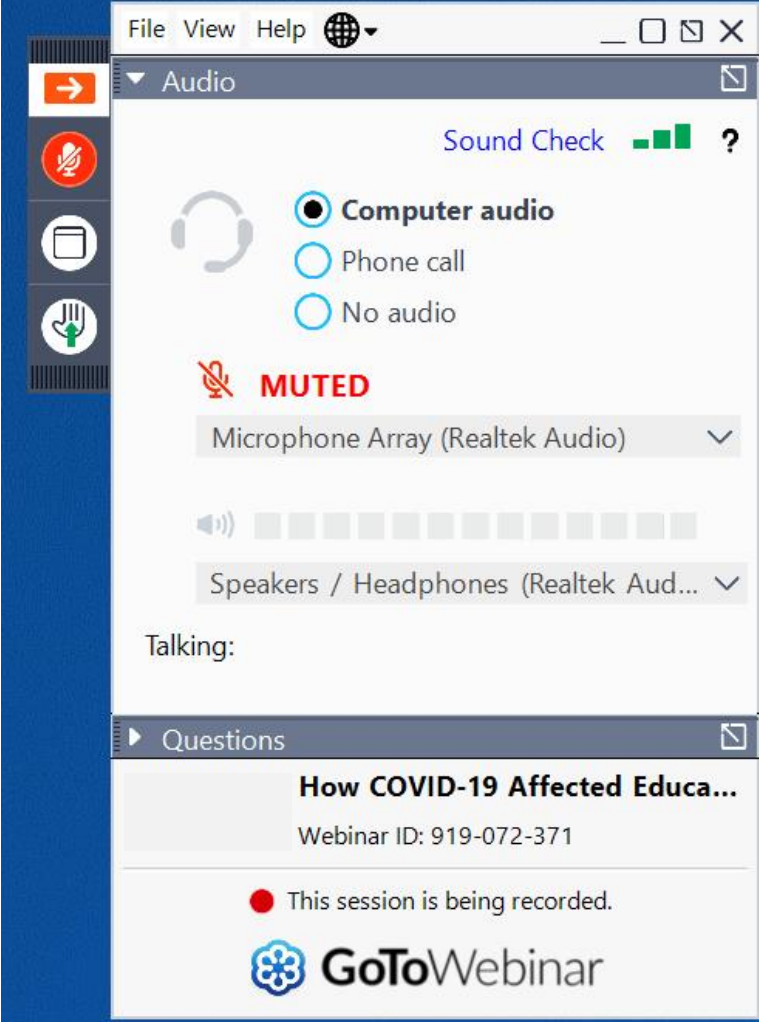
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Introductions

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About the National Survey of Public Education's Response to COVID-19

- **Purpose:** AIR surveyed a large, nationally representative sample of districts and charter management organizations (CMOs) to understand how they have adapted to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Follow the conversation on Twitter using [#AIRCOVIDSurvey](#).

About the National Survey of Public Education's Response to COVID-19

- **Administration:** The survey was administered by our partner, NORC at the University of Chicago.
- **Sample:** We surveyed superintendents in a nationally representative sample of 2,536 districts and 260 CMOs.
- **Timeline:** The survey was launched on May 20 and closed on September 2, 2020.
- **Response:** The final response rate was about 30% (753 districts and 91 CMOs).

Topics covered

The survey covered the following topics:

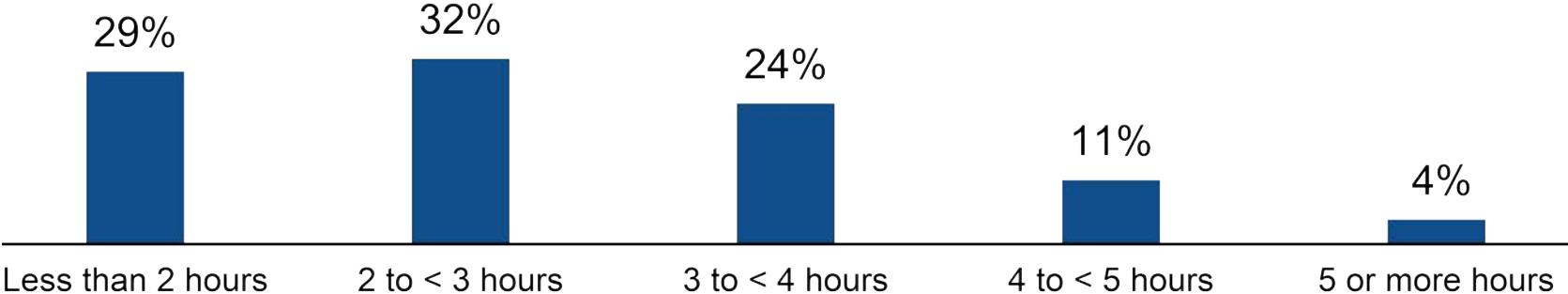
- Timing of school closures due to COVID-19;
- Distance learning approaches and challenges;
- Support for students with disabilities and English learners;
- District policies and requirements, such as grading and graduation;
- Staffing and human resources; and
- Health, well-being, and safety.

What are we learning?

- We are focusing not just on averages, but on the variation in responses across districts.
- We hope to provide information that states and districts can use in planning.
- We are seeking examples of innovative approaches that can be shared with other districts.
- In the long term, we plan to link survey results to student outcome data to examine associations between practices during the pandemic and subsequent trajectories.

Expectations for the time that students should spend on instructional activities differed across districts.

Percentage of districts by number of hours students were expected to spend on instructional activities per day (grades K–5)



The approach to remote instruction differed by district poverty.

Percentage of districts in which physical learning materials (e.g., paper packets) were a primary part of the distance learning strategy (grades K–5)

All districts 34%

High poverty 48%

Low poverty 16%

Rural 42%

Urban 26%

Small districts 40%

Large districts 29%

Low digital access 43%

High digital access 30%

Percentage of districts in which live virtual classes taught by the student's teacher were a primary part of the distance learning strategy (grades K–5)

All districts 46%

High poverty 39%

Low poverty 56%

Rural 43%

Urban 49%

Small districts 50%

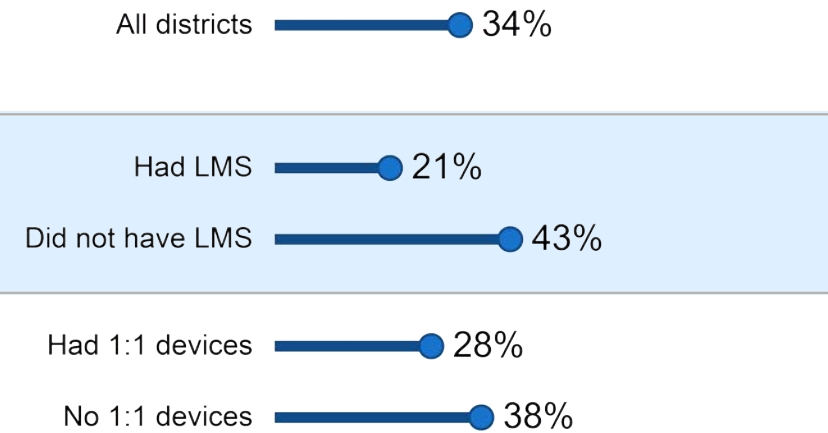
Large districts 58%

Low digital access 40%

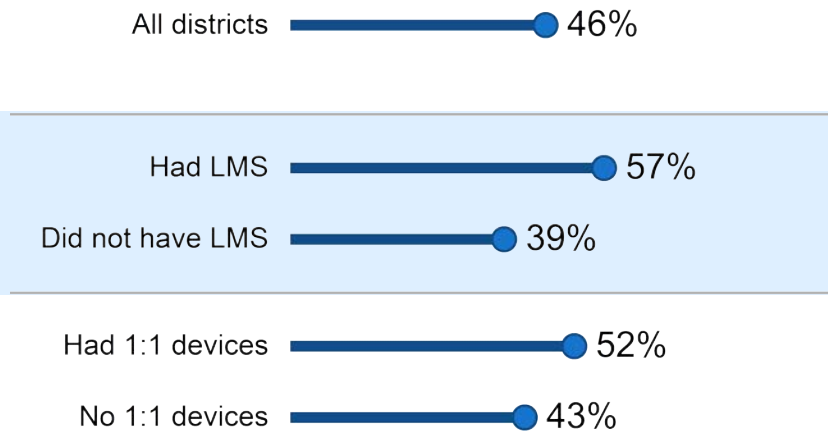
High digital access 49%

The approach to remote instruction differed by whether districts used a learning management system (LMS) prior to the pandemic.

Percentage of districts in which physical learning materials (e.g., paper packets) were a primary part of the distance learning strategy (grades K–5)



Percentage of districts in which live virtual classes taught by the student's teacher were a primary part of the distance learning strategy (grades K–5)



Findings: Students With Disabilities

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How did districts serve students with disabilities during the pandemic?

1. Most districts had difficulty providing services to students with disabilities and complying with federal IDEA requirements.
2. Some variation was found between high- and low-poverty areas and for districts in rural and urban locations.



Students with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education.

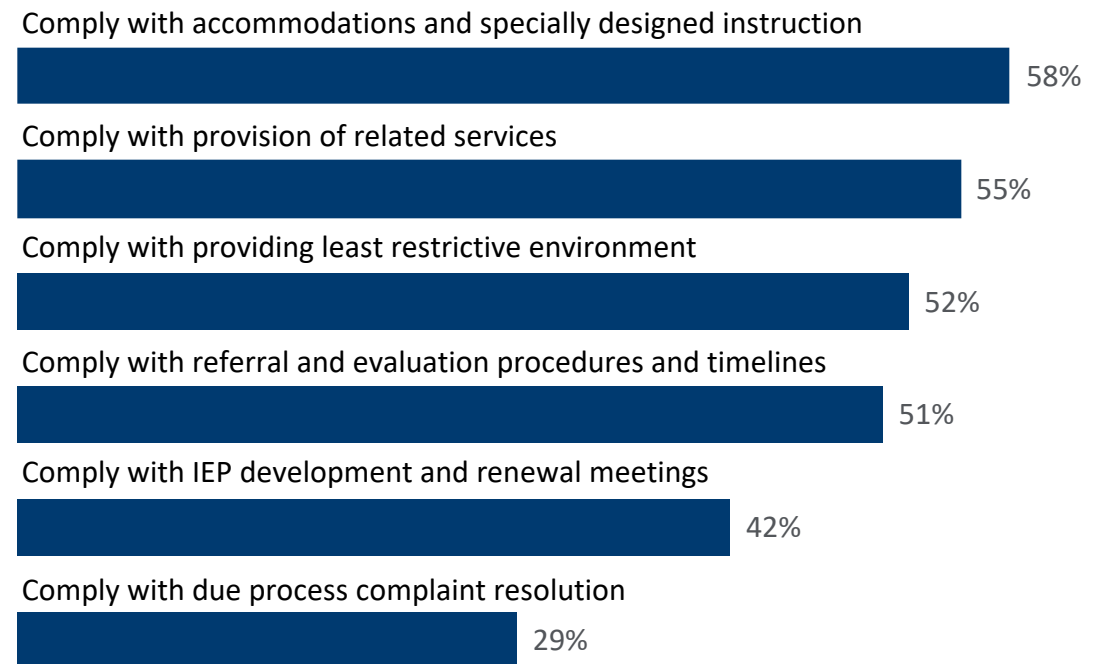
- Comply with IDEA 2004.
 - Free appropriate public education
 - Least restrictive environment
 - Identify and evaluate
 - Develop and conduct annual individualized education program (IEP) meetings
- Comply with Section 504 requirements.
- Use evidence-based practices.



Complying with IDEA was difficult for all districts.



Percentage of districts that reported complying was more or substantially more difficult



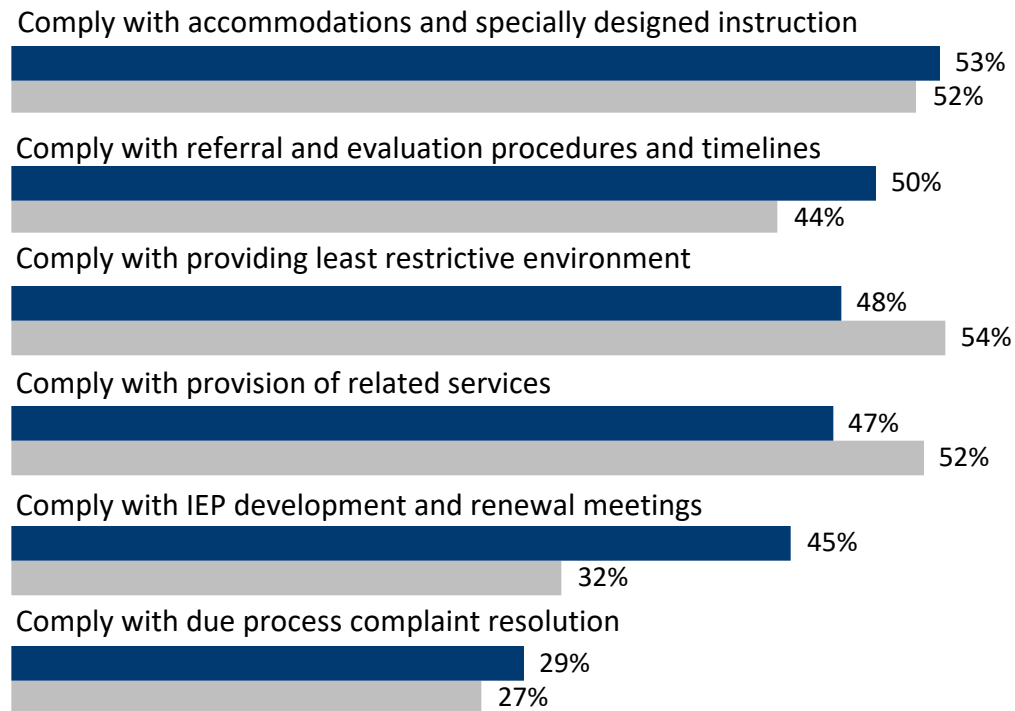
n = 744

Percentage of districts that reported that complying with key IDEA requirements was more or substantially more difficult during than before the pandemic

Challenges to compliance were similar across contexts.

Percentage of districts that reported complying was more or substantially more difficult

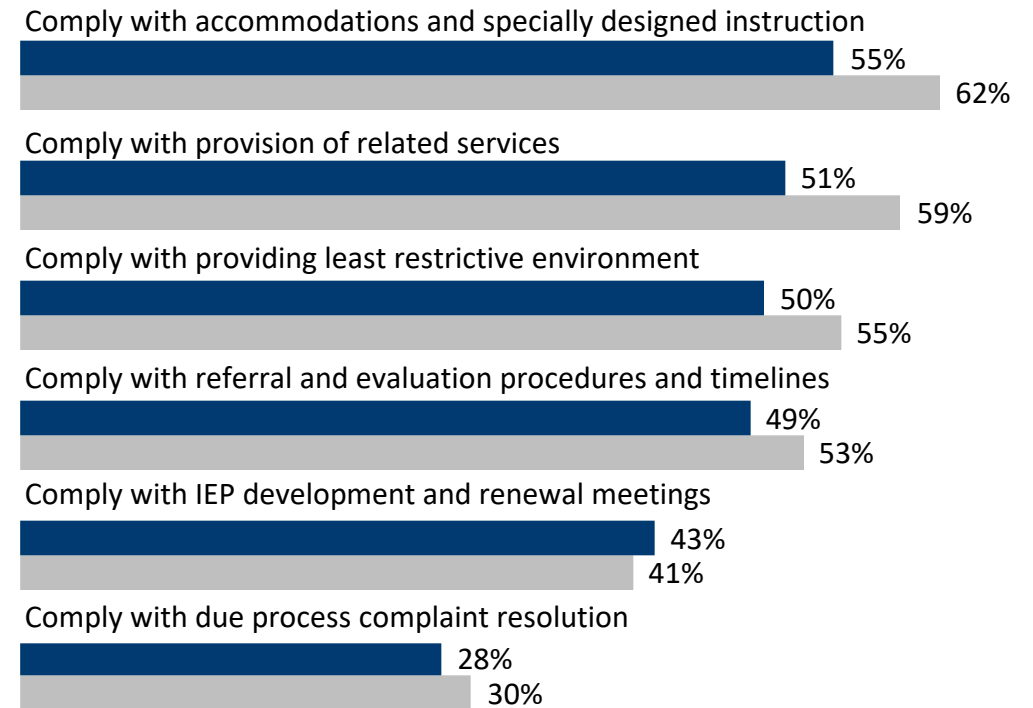
■ High Poverty ■ Low Poverty



n = 450 (268 high-poverty districts and 182 low-poverty districts)

Percentage of districts that reported complying was more or substantially more difficult

■ Rural ■ Urban

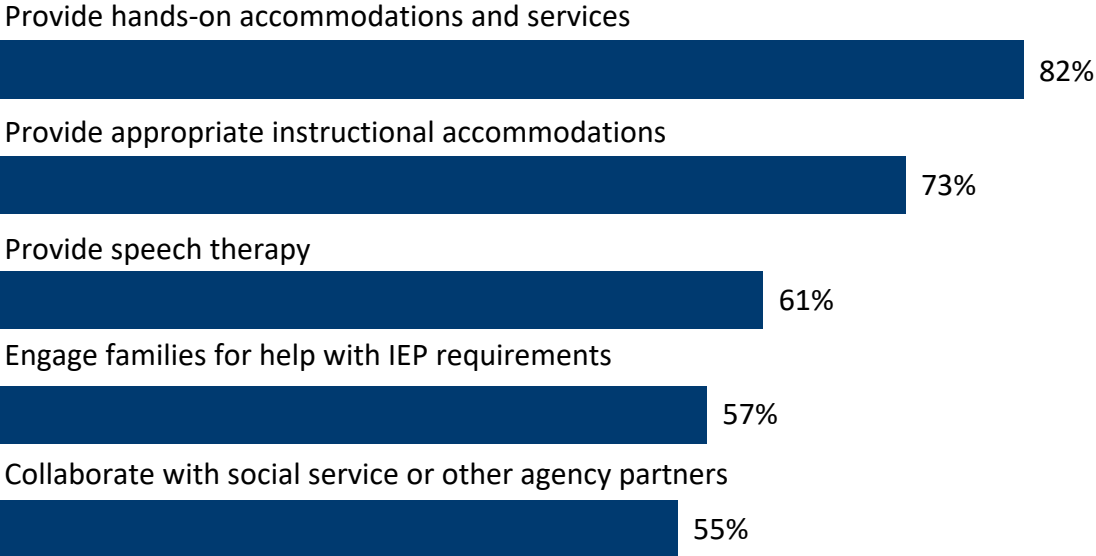


n = 744 (499 urban districts and 245 rural districts)

“This was the hardest part of remote instruction.”



Percentage of districts that reported providing supports was more or substantially more difficult



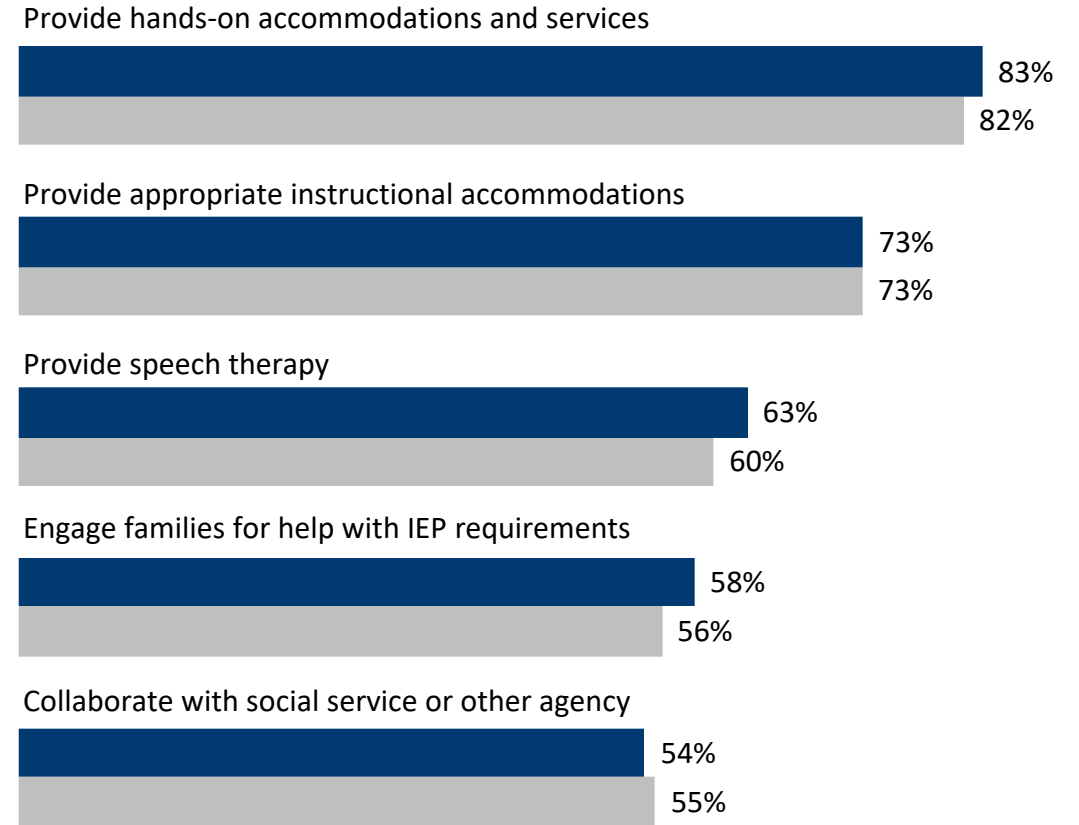
n = 744

Communicating with families was critical.

“Weekly contact with parents to review IEP goals and one-on-one instruction [was done] through Google Meets.”

Percentage of districts that reported providing supports was more or substantially more difficult

■ Rural ■ Urban



n = 744 (499 urban districts and 245 rural districts)

“[S]ome direct instruction was done with staff visiting homes and doing porch teaching.”

“Physical therapists, OTs [occupational therapists], and some speech therapists made videos for therapy showing kids [and parents] how to do certain activities and movements.”

“Our teachers called, texted, [and] FaceTimed students and parents to help support SWDs [students with disabilities]. The challenges were substantial, but our staff did everything that they could to meet the needs of our students. Our staff put in hours beyond normal hours to reach individual student needs.”

Promising practices

- Providing specially designed instruction through new mechanisms
- Implementing teletherapy or using asynchronous therapy
- Going above and beyond to support students with disabilities

Providing specially designed instruction through new mechanisms: Sustainable practices



- “Synchronous small-group lessons, digital manipulatives...”
- “Our special education teacher sent materials home, including toys, manipulatives that their students were used to using at school, to create familiarity with routines and learning [that] she was trying to get them to apply at home.”

Summary and implications

- Most districts had more or substantially more difficulty providing services to students with disabilities and complying with federal law when schools were closed in the spring of 2020 than before COVID-19.
- The similarity in responses across high- and low-poverty and rural and urban districts illustrates a widespread issue.
- Implementing evidence-based practices is a sustainable approach.

About Clark County School District

- Las Vegas, Nevada
- Approximately 316,000 students
- 362 schools
- 16.1% English learners
- 12.6% special education services



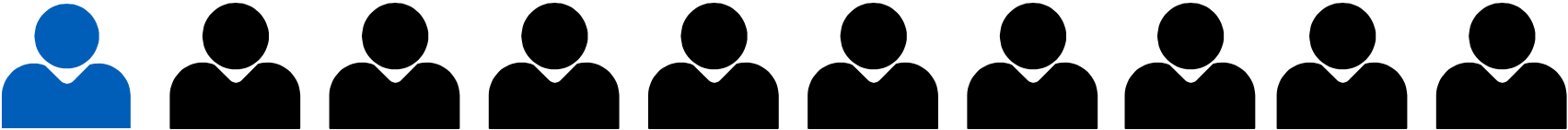
Findings: English Learners

District resources and instructional guidance

Follow the conversation on Twitter using #AIRCOVIDSurvey.

English learners in U.S. schools

In fall 2017, one of every 10 of public-school students was classified as an English learner in the United States.



Source: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgf.asp

National COVID-19 district survey: Spotlight on English learners

- **Focus:** District-provided resources and instructional requirements for teachers.
- **Questions:**
 - To what extent did districts provide resources to support English learners?
 - To what extent did districts provide instructional requirements for teachers?
 - Did this differ by district type?
- **District characteristics:**
 - High and low English learner enrollment
 - Rural versus urban

National COVID-19 district survey: Spotlight on English learners

Survey Questions Examined for Brief

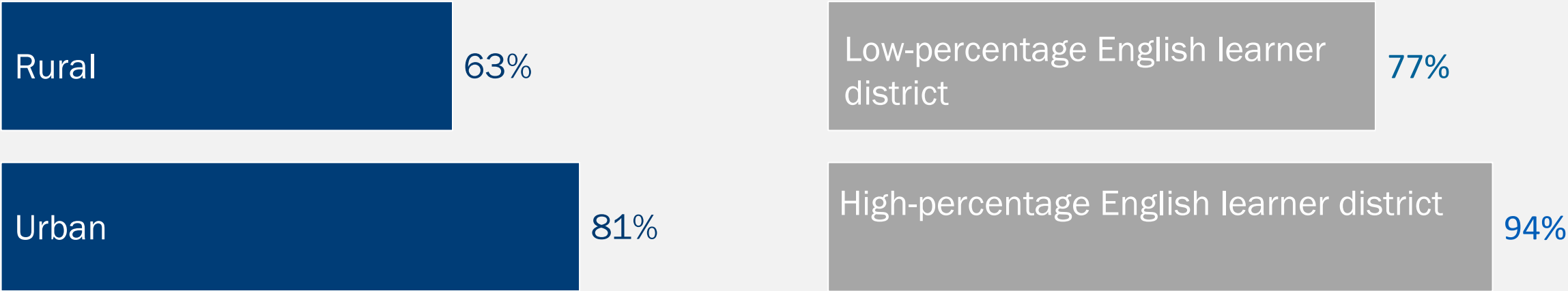
Resources Provided by Districts:

- English learner–specific distance learning resources for students
- Learning materials in Spanish
- Interpreters/family liaisons

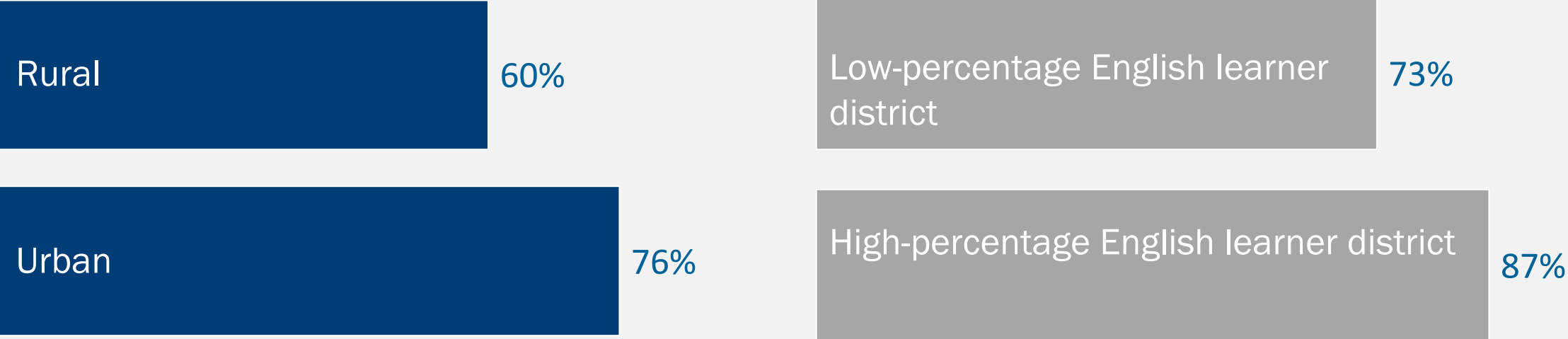
District Requirements:

- Require to meet virtually with English learners.
- Require teacher collaboration on planning instruction for English learners.

English learner–specific distance learning resources

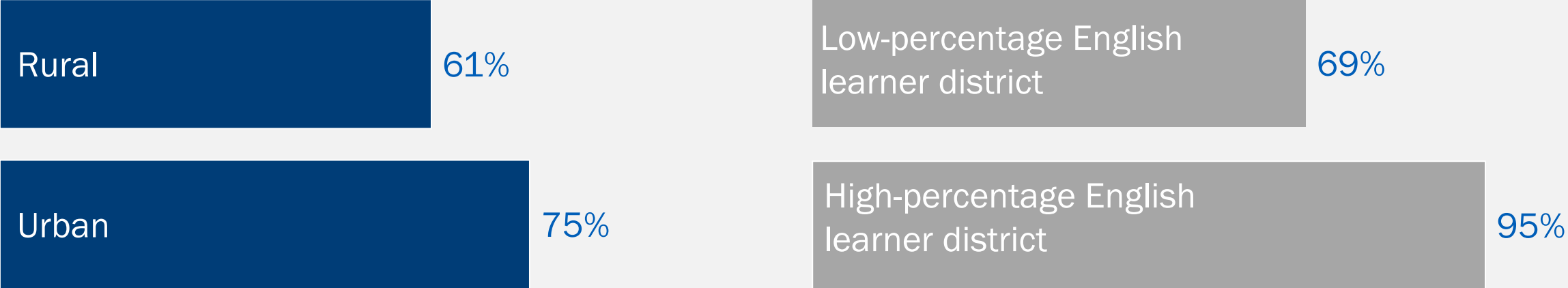


Learning materials in Spanish for English learners

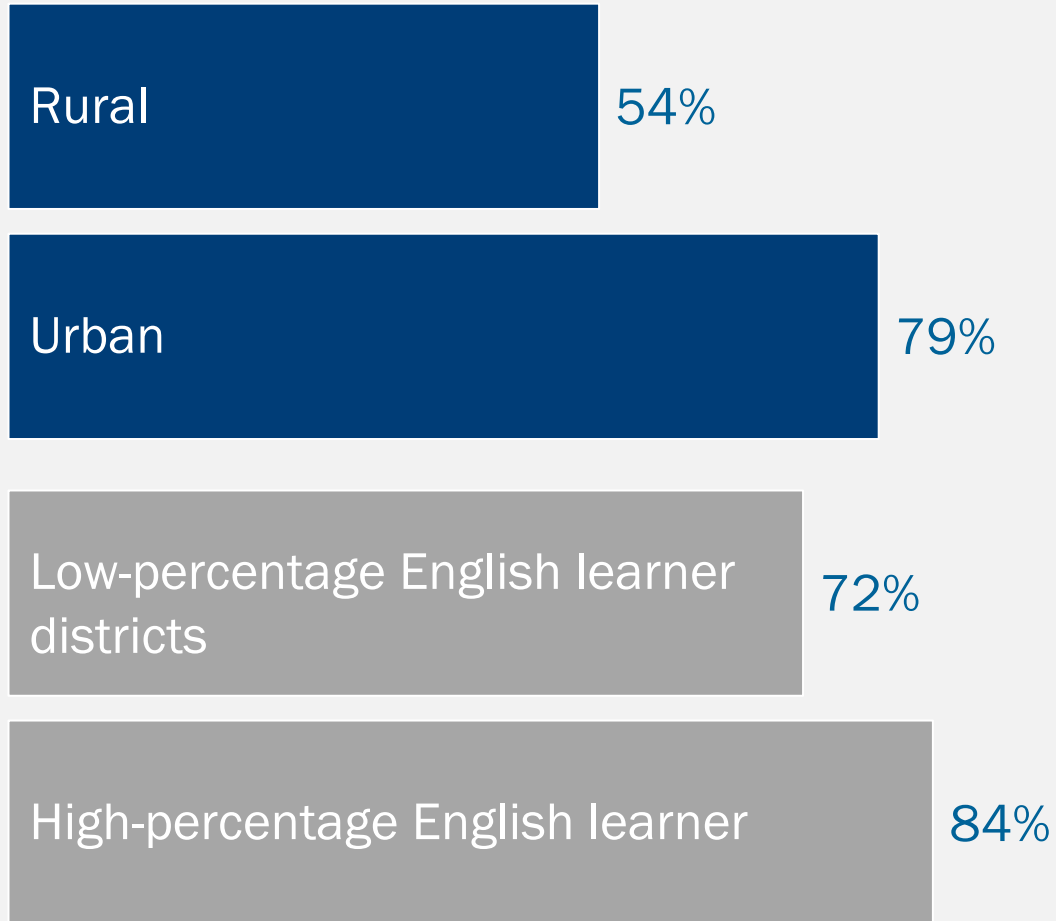


Sample sizes for Figure 3: 199 rural districts, 455 urban districts, 429 low-percentage English learner districts, 179 high-percentage English learner districts.

Interpreters or family liaisons



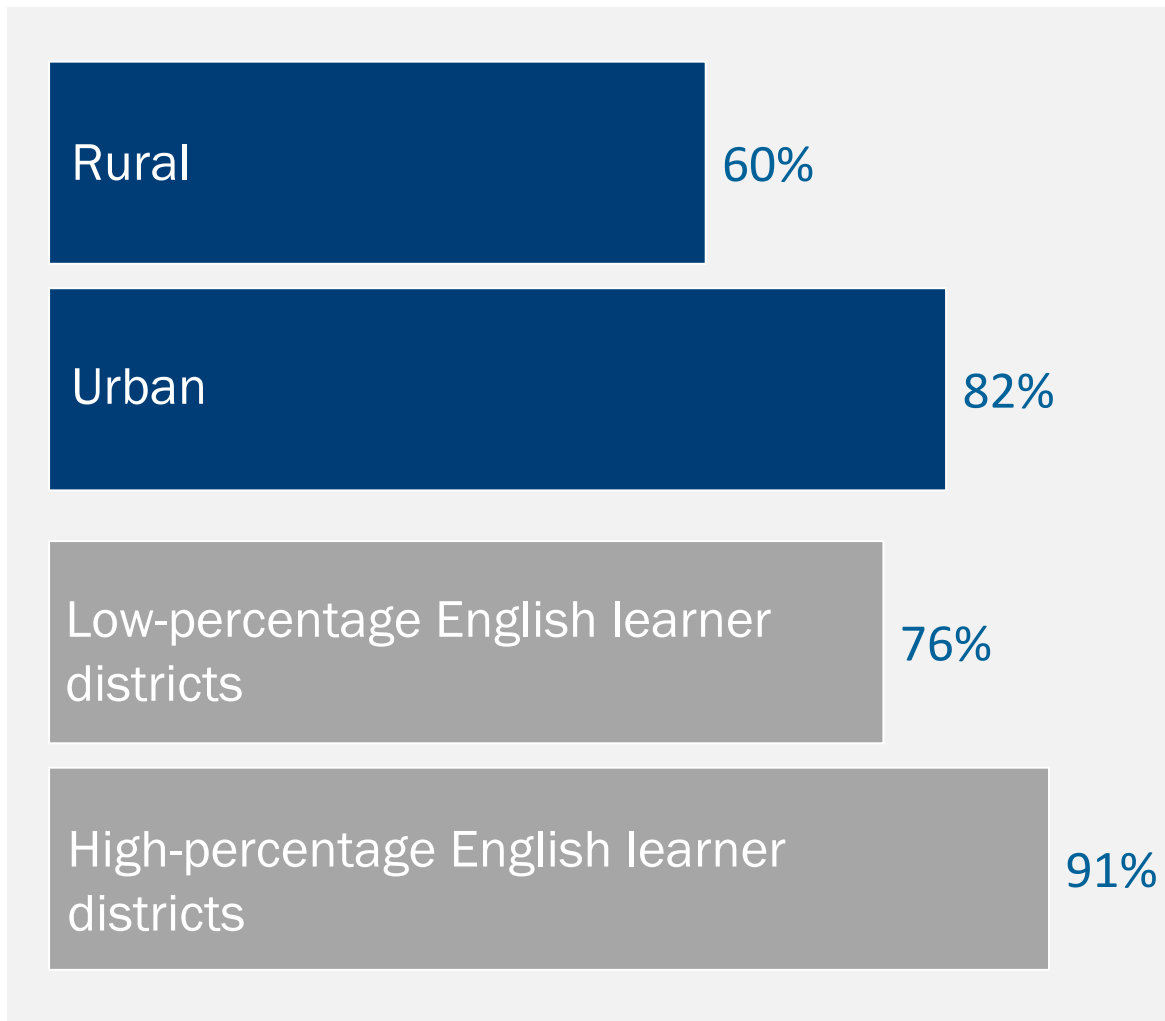
District requirements for teachers to meet virtually with English learners



- **Urban districts** were more likely to require teachers to meet virtually with English learners than rural districts.
- **High-percentage English learner districts** were more likely to require teachers to meet virtually than low-percentage English learner districts.

Sample sizes: 208 rural districts, 474 urban districts, 449 low-percentage English learner districts, 185 high-percentage English learner districts.

District requirements on instructional planning collaboration



- **Urban districts** were more likely to require collaboration between general education teachers and English learner specialists than rural districts.
- **High-percentage English learner districts** were more likely have such requirements than low-percentage English learner districts.

Sample sizes: 205 rural districts, 476 urban districts, 450 low-percentage English learner districts, 185 high-percentage English learner districts.

Summary and implications

1. Urban school districts were more likely to provide more resources to support English learners and instructional guidance to teachers.
2. High-percentage English learner districts provided more resources to support English learners and instructional guidance to teachers.



Dr. Jesus Jara

Questions and discussion

Follow the conversation on Twitter using #AIRCOVIDSurvey.

New briefs



NATIONAL SURVEY OF PUBLIC EDUCATION'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19



RESEARCH BRIEF

Spotlight on English Learners

Authors: Patricia Garcia-Arrea | Stephanie D'Souza

OCTOBER 2020

District Response to COVID-19

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) launched a nationally representative survey to better understand how school districts and charter management organizations (CMOs) responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. The *National Survey of Public Education's Response to COVID-19* was sent to leaders in 2,500 school districts and 260 CMOs in late May 2020. In spring 2020, the pandemic led schools across the country to close their buildings, requiring millions of students to continue learning from home and leading to sudden shifts in how educators provide instruction, leadership, and support. In this brief, we present some of the survey results focused on English learners (ELs). Our hope is that these results inform future practices of educators, policymakers, and researchers.


Serving English Learners During the Pandemic

As awareness of the pandemic increased across U.S. communities in March 2020, districts closed their school buildings and sought alternative ways to meet their students' needs, including providing meals, ensuring students' safety and well-being, and continuing instruction. The *First Look* brief previewed


About This Brief

- This brief presents survey results about districts' supports and resources for serving English learners (ELs) during the pandemic in spring 2020.¹
- These results are based on responses from 753 school districts. EL enrollment ranged from 1% to 79% in the responding districts.²
- Given the potential association between percentage of ELs and resources, we show results separately for districts with high and low percentages of ELs.³
- Because of the potential for different levels of resources in rural versus urban areas (e.g., internet access), we also present findings separately by district geography.⁴
- Findings indicate that urban districts were more likely to provide resources and instructional requirements than rural districts. In addition, high-percentage EL districts were more likely to provide these supports and requirements than low-percentage EL districts.

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NATIONAL SURVEY OF PUBLIC EDUCATION'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19



RESEARCH BRIEF

Spotlight on Students With Disabilities

Authors: Dia Jackson | Jill Bowdon

OCTOBER 2020

About This Brief

In the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused schools across the country to close their buildings, which resulted in millions of students continuing their learning from home and led to sudden shifts in how educators provided instruction, leadership, and support. While widespread school closures led to myriad logistical and pedagogical challenges for districts, serving students with disabilities during remote instruction was one of the most demanding aspects of educating during COVID-19.


In this brief, we report district responses to survey questions from the *National Survey of Public Education's Response to COVID-19* related to challenges in serving students with disabilities.¹ Specifically, we asked districts how closures during spring 2020 affected their ability to implement practices for students with disabilities. We report the percentage of districts that indicate that implementing practices was more difficult or substantially more difficult.² In addition to reporting results for all districts, we compare responses for high- and low-poverty districts, and rural and urban districts (See Box 2 for the survey items).³ On average, high- and low-poverty districts have different access to educational resources, including the one-to-one technology needed to provide remote instruction and services (Garet, Rickles, Bowdon, & Heppen, 2020). Rural districts, especially in remote locales, often

About This Brief


This brief discusses survey results about districts' perceptions of the ease with which they were able to provide services for students with disabilities and to comply with federal law governing the education of students with disabilities.

- These results are based on responses from 744 of the 753 school districts that responded to the survey between mid-May 2020 and September 1, 2020.
- We show results separately for districts in high- and low-poverty areas, given the potential association between poverty and educational resources, and for districts in rural and urban locations, given concerns about internet access in rural communities.
- Nearly three-quarters (73%) of districts reported that it was more or substantially more difficult to provide appropriate instructional accommodations.
- Districts reported providing specially designed instruction through new mechanisms, including a flipped curriculum, asynchronous therapies, and digital manipulatives.

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NATIONAL SURVEY OF PUBLIC EDUCATION'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19



RESEARCH BRIEF

Approaches to Remote Instruction: How District Responses to the Pandemic Differed Across Contexts

Authors: Jordan Rickles | Mike Garet | Samantha Neiman | Sarah Hoagman

OCTOBER 2020

◀ District Response to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic led schools across the country to close their buildings, requiring millions of students to continue learning from home and leading to sudden shifts in how educators provide instruction, leadership, and support.


The American Institutes for Research (AIR) launched a nationally representative survey to better understand how school districts and charter management organizations (CMOs) responded to the pandemic. The *National Survey of Public Education's Response to COVID-19* was sent to leaders in 2,500 school districts and 260 CMOs in late May 2020.¹

In this brief, we present survey responses that highlight how districts approached remote instruction during spring 2020. The brief updates and expands upon the *First Look* brief, which previewed survey results about districts' approaches to remote instruction during the pandemic. Our hope is that these results inform future practices of educators, policymakers, and researchers.


About This Brief

- This brief presents survey results about how districts approached remote instruction when the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close in spring 2020.
- The results are based on responses from 717 school districts that serve elementary grade students.
- Because districts face a variety of challenges, we report results separately across a range of community contexts and districts' pre-existing technology infrastructure.
- Survey responses indicate that districts varied in their approaches to distance learning, with important differences in how high-poverty districts and districts without a learning management system approached distance learning.
- The results highlight discrepancies in learning opportunities and a need for guidance, resources, and research to address any learning gaps these discrepancies may exacerbate.

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NATIONAL SURVEY OF PUBLIC EDUCATION'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19



METHODOLOGY BRIEF

Preliminary Technical Supplement

Authors: Cong Ye | Kirk Wolter (NORC) | Mike Garet | Jordan Rickles | Dean Resnick (NORC) | Samantha Neiman | Sarah Hodgman

OCTOBER 2020

Introduction

In an effort to better understand how public and charter school governing bodies responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in the 2019–20 school year, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and our partner NORC at the University of Chicago conducted the *National Survey of Public Education's Response to COVID-19*. This web survey of public school districts focused on a nationally representative sample of 2,536 public school districts across the United States. The data collection period was May 20, 2020, through September 1, 2020.

This methodology brief describes the sampling and weighting methods for this study, along with the final response rate.

Sample Design

The goal of the sampling strategy was to select a representative sample to enable unbiased estimates with reasonable precision within projected domains of analysis. Specifically, the sample was designed to enable state-level estimates for public school districts for 12 states: California, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Maryland, North Carolina, Oregon, Texas, Virginia, and Washington. For districts outside of these states, AIR strived to have adequate (for desired levels of precision) samples by U.S. Census region (Midwest, Northeast, South, and West). Additionally, we intended to enable estimation by urbanicity: city, suburban, town, and rural. Other targets of interest are districts with a high proportion of American Indian or Alaska Native (AIAN) students, and National Assessment of Educational Progress–Trial Urban District Assessment (NAEP-TUDA) districts.

Sampling frame. The sampling frame was constructed from the 2018–19 Common Core of Data (CCD) Local Education Agency Universe File, which contained the most recent public school district list available at the time of sampling. The 2018–19 CCD Universe File had 19,840 records with various characteristics about the districts. The final sampling frame consisted of 13,227 target school districts after the research team excluded nonregular districts, districts with no enrollment or no operational schools, districts labeled with closed, inactive, or future districts; and districts located outside of the 50 states and District of Columbia.

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Interactive data tool



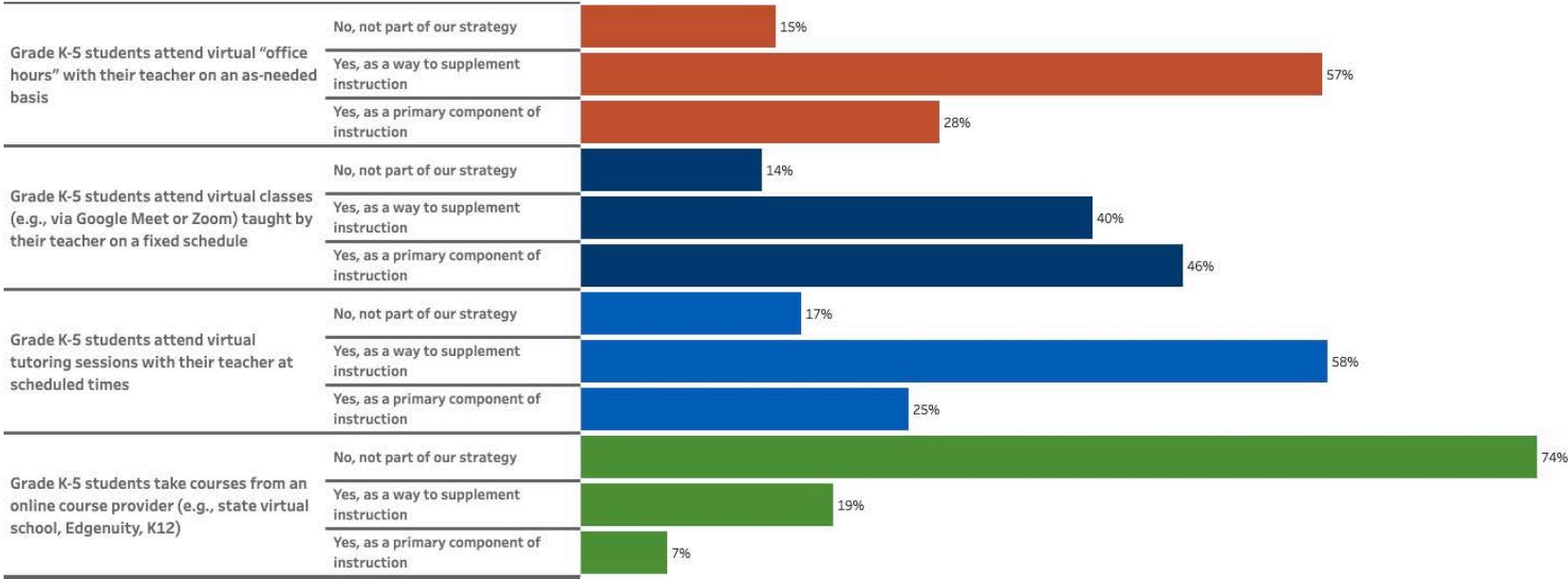
NATIONAL SURVEY OF PUBLIC EDUCATION'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Distance Learning

Select Item Group:
 Are the following activities part of your district's current strategy for delivering distance learning to elementary-grade students (Grades K-5)?

Select District Factor:
 All

Distance Learning: Which of the following statements best describes the instruction that your students have received since schools closed due to COVID-19?



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