



Continuing to Learn During a Pandemic:

Lessons from Michigan school districts and educators for 2020-21

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BACKGROUND ON EPIC



- The **Education Policy Innovation Collaborative (EPIC)** at Michigan State University is an independent, non-partisan research center that operates as the strategic research partner to the Michigan Department of Education (MDE).
- EPIC is devoted to **research with consequence** and the idea that rigorous evidence can improve education policy and practice and, ultimately, students' lives.
- EPIC conducts **original research** using a variety of methods to **produce new insights** that decision-makers can use to create and implement policy.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY AS RESEARCHERS

Research with Consequence

- As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to disrupt education across the country, educators in every school, district, and state have been working tirelessly to **provide students with high quality learning experiences** and plan for the upcoming school year in the midst of great uncertainty.
- We believe it critical for those of us engaged in research to throw our efforts behind helping educators with this daunting task. At EPIC, that means doing what we can in Michigan to help policymakers and practitioners use the **best available evidence to make the most informed choices possible.**

LEARNING CONCERNS

Policy and research conversations have surfaced several concerns with pandemic learning

- The pandemic is likely to widen disparities in K-12 education.
- Technology is a key educational resource for families learning from a distance. If students lack access to internet or electronic devices, distance learning can be restricted.
- All educators, but in particular teachers of students with disabilities, homeless students, and English Learners need guidance to support their students.
- As educators work to teach their students during the pandemic, it will be critical to also address their nutritional, socio-emotional, and mental health needs.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

EPIC focused on three main research questions related to K-12 education during the COVID-19 pandemic

1. What plans did school districts put in place for finishing the 2019-2020 school year after the suspension of face-to-face instruction?
2. How did educators respond to the transition to distance learning?
3. How might the pandemic and associated suspension of face-to-face instruction have differential impacts on groups of students?

DATA SOURCES

EPIC used a combination of public and collected data

New Data Collected by EPIC Researchers

Continuity of Learning (COL) Plans

- All LEAs and PSAs submitted COL plans to their ISDs and then MDE.
- E.O. 2020-35 & 65 required plans to describe 14 elements of operation including: mode of instruction; monitoring student learning; maintaining relationships with students; and ensuring access to learning for all students.
- EPIC coded and then constructed a database of the content of all 813 COL plans

Educator Surveys

- EPIC surveyed K-8 teachers & principals in May-June 2020

District Characteristics from Outside Sources

State Education Data

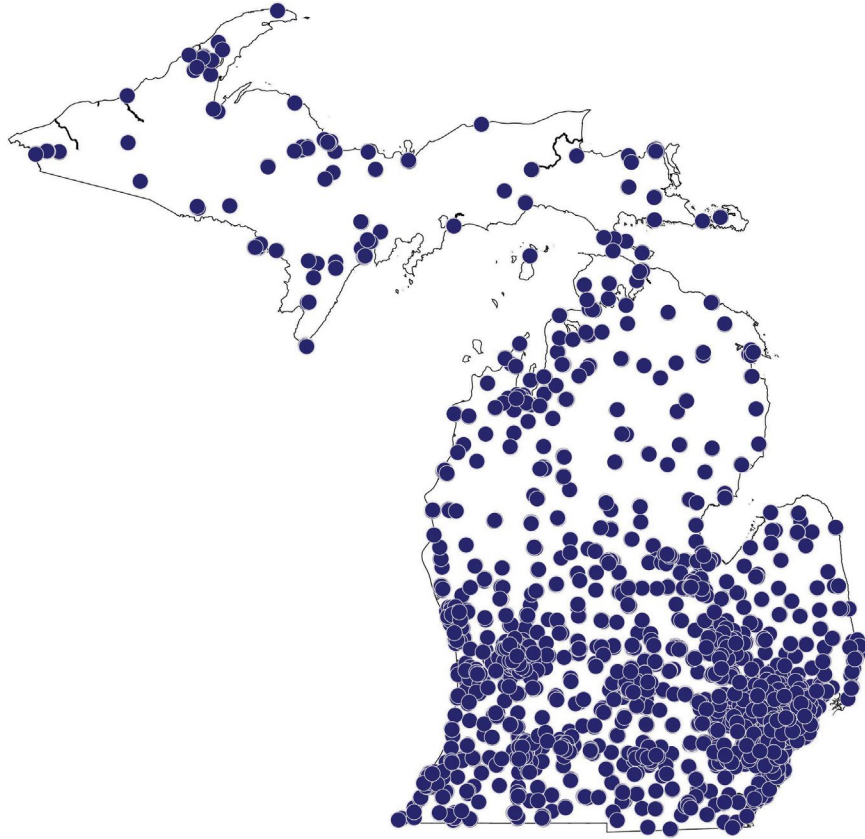
- Sector & Locale of District
- Student demographic composition (percent economically disadvantaged, underrepresented minority)
- Average student achievement (M-STEP ELA)

U.S. Census Data

- Percent of households with broadband internet subscriptions

EDUCATOR SURVEY SAMPLE

The survey sample was generally representative of Michigan teachers and principals



SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

8,881 K-8 educators from 752
(**90%**) Michigan school districts

- **16%** of all eligible teachers
- **12%** of all eligible principals

The survey sample is representative of MI educators; slightly higher proportions of educators who are...

- Female;
- Hired within the last 5 years;
- Elementary-certified; or
- Endorsed in ELA

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

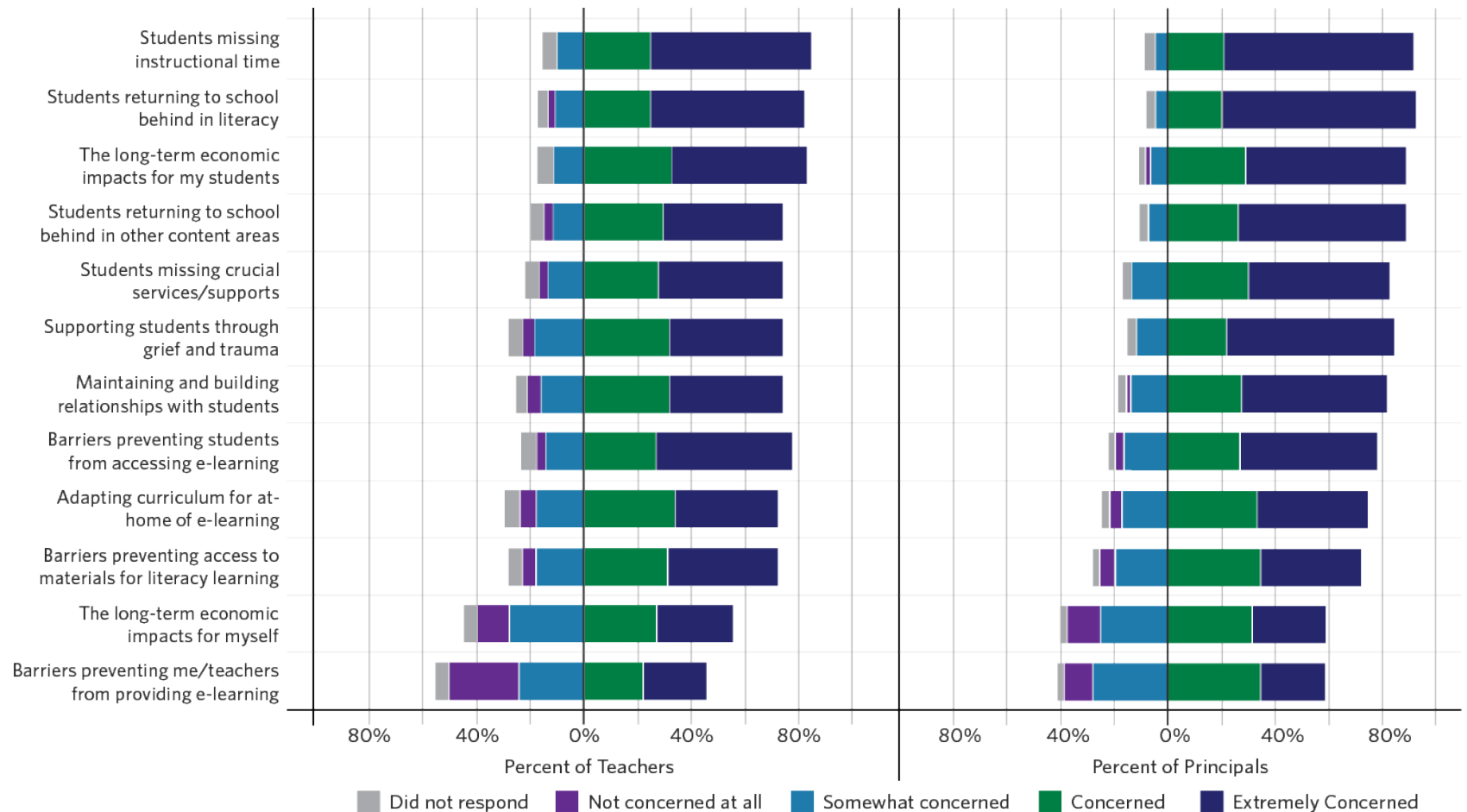
- Educators' overarching concerns
- Districts' use of virtual and physical learning modalities
- Student engagement and attendance
- Continuation of learning for students with IEPs/504 Plans and English Learners
- Teacher professional development
- Student health and well-being
- Implications for the 2020-21 school year

CAVEATS

- We coded district's **initial** Continuity of Learning plans. Not their final plans, nor the actual implementation of those plans.
- Districts **learned and evolved** as the semester unfolded.
- Survey responses are **limited** by the questions asked and who answered them and when.
- We will **continue to work** with MDE and districts to understand instruction and learning during the pandemic.

EDUCATORS' CONCERNS ABOUT THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

Educators expressed deep concern about the ways in which the suspension of face-to-face instruction would impact students' learning and well-being

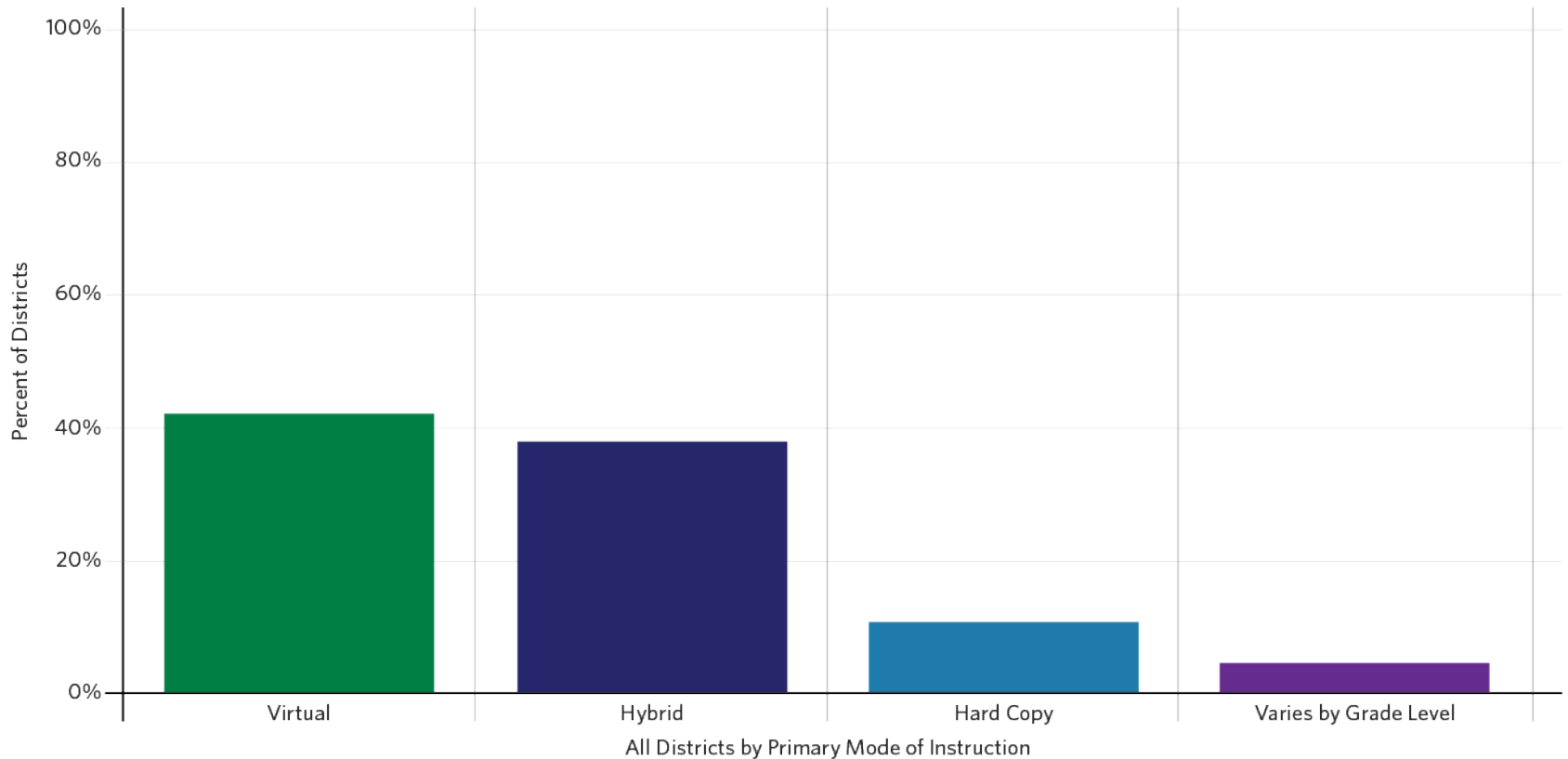


TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

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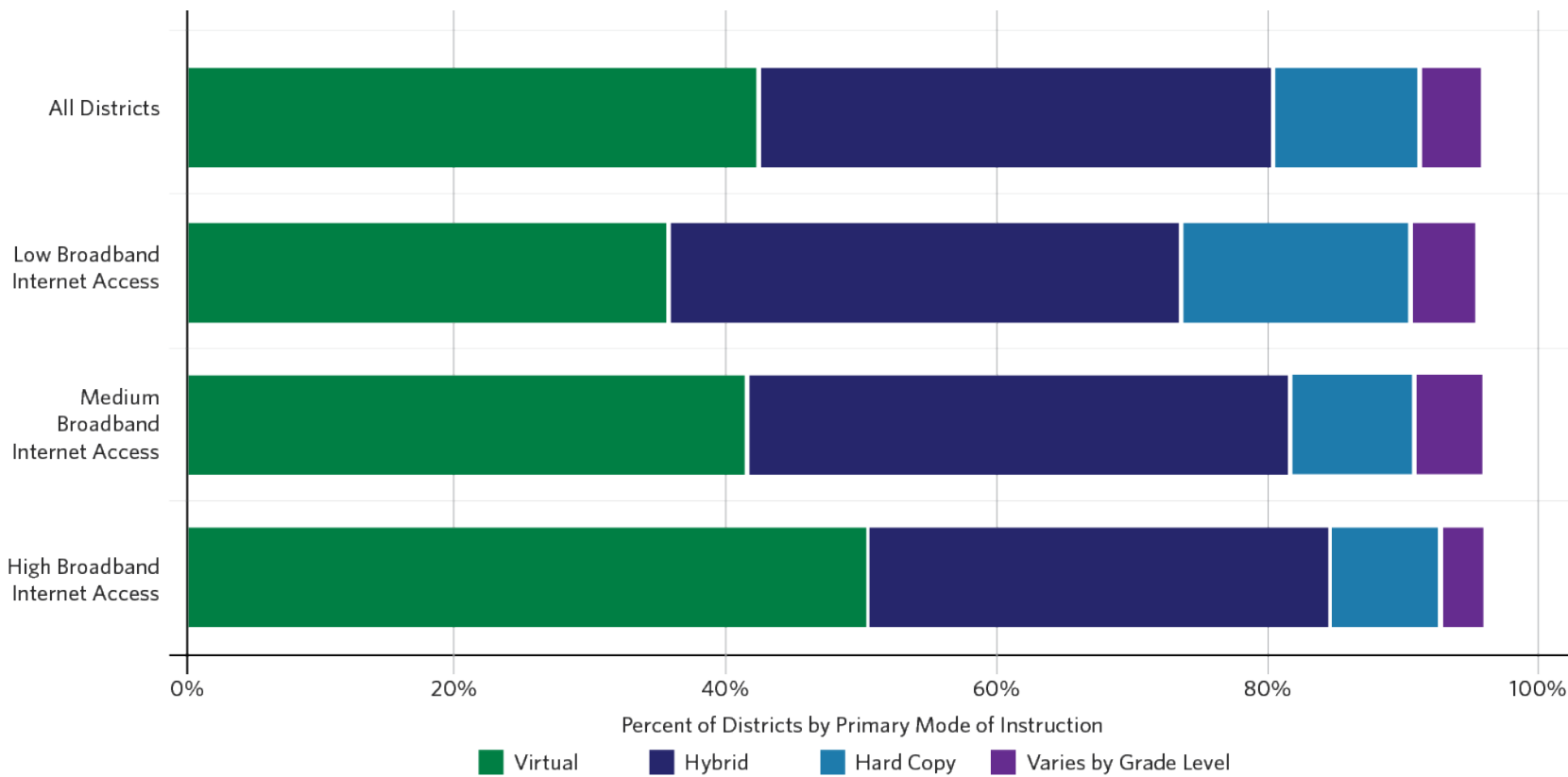
PRIMARY MODE OF INSTRUCTION

Most districts planned on using virtual instruction entirely or in part to educate students in spring 2020



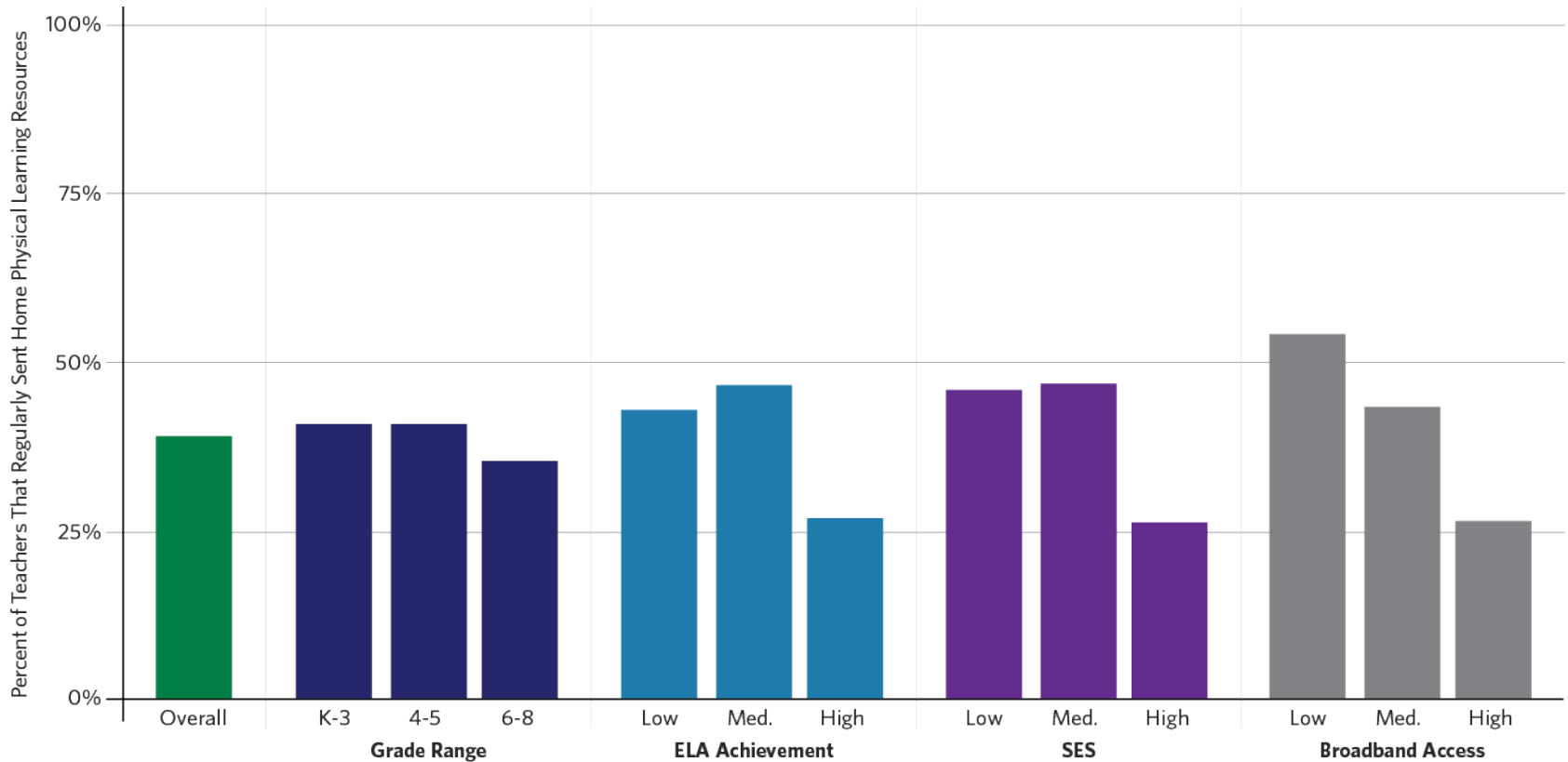
PRIMARY MODE OF INSTRUCTION

The planned use of virtual instruction varied by broadband internet access



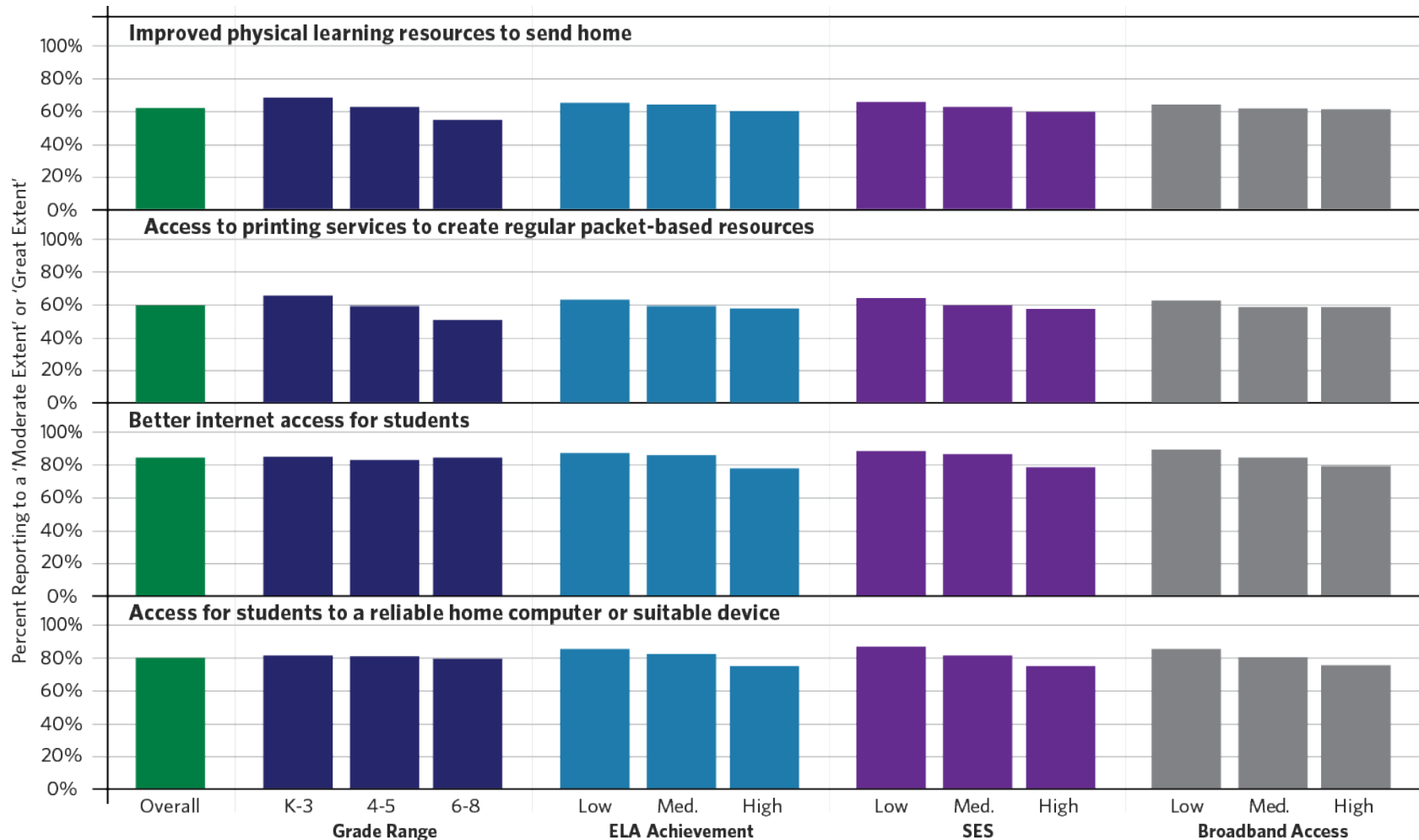
PHYSICAL LEARNING RESOURCES

The use of physical learning resources varied across districts



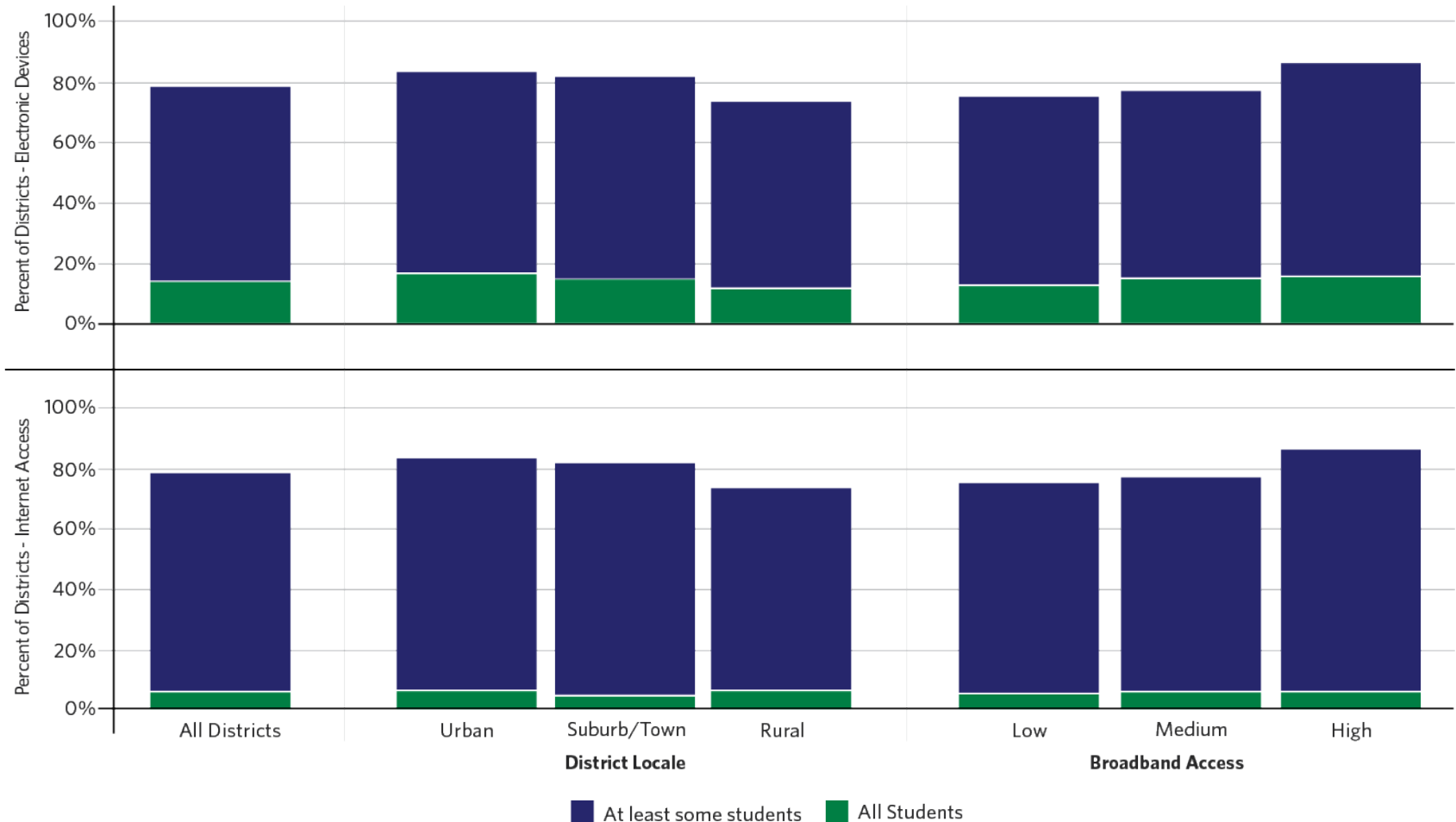
BETTER ACCESS TO INTERNET AND DEVICES

Educators believed that better internet access and access to devices would help to improve distance learning



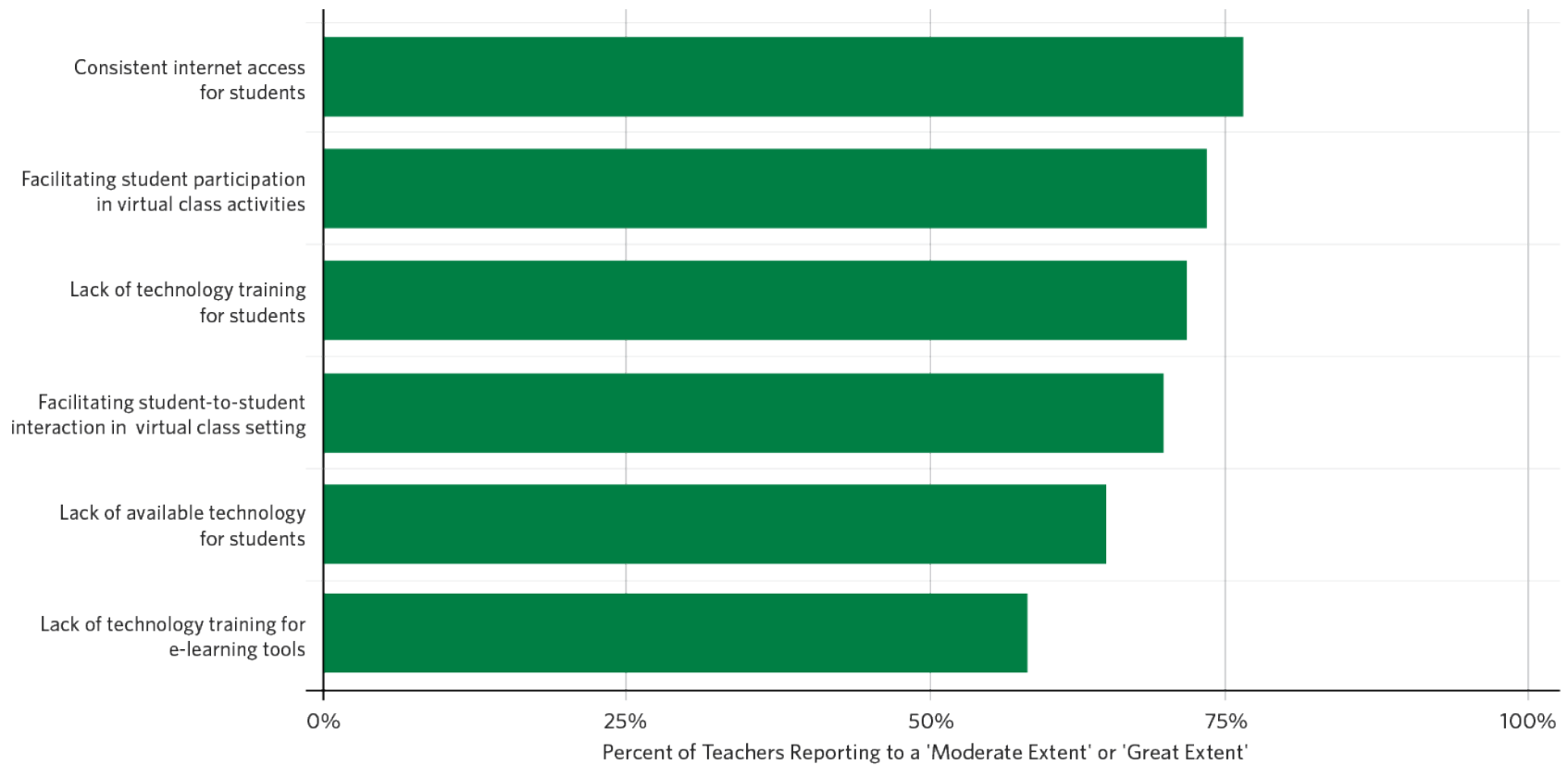
DISTRICT-PROVIDED ELECTRONIC DEVICES AND INTERNET ACCESS

Most districts provided students with devices and internet access, although this varied by broadband access and locale



CHALLENGES FACED BY TEACHERS

Teachers reported substantial challenges with technology and virtual instruction when transitioning to remote learning

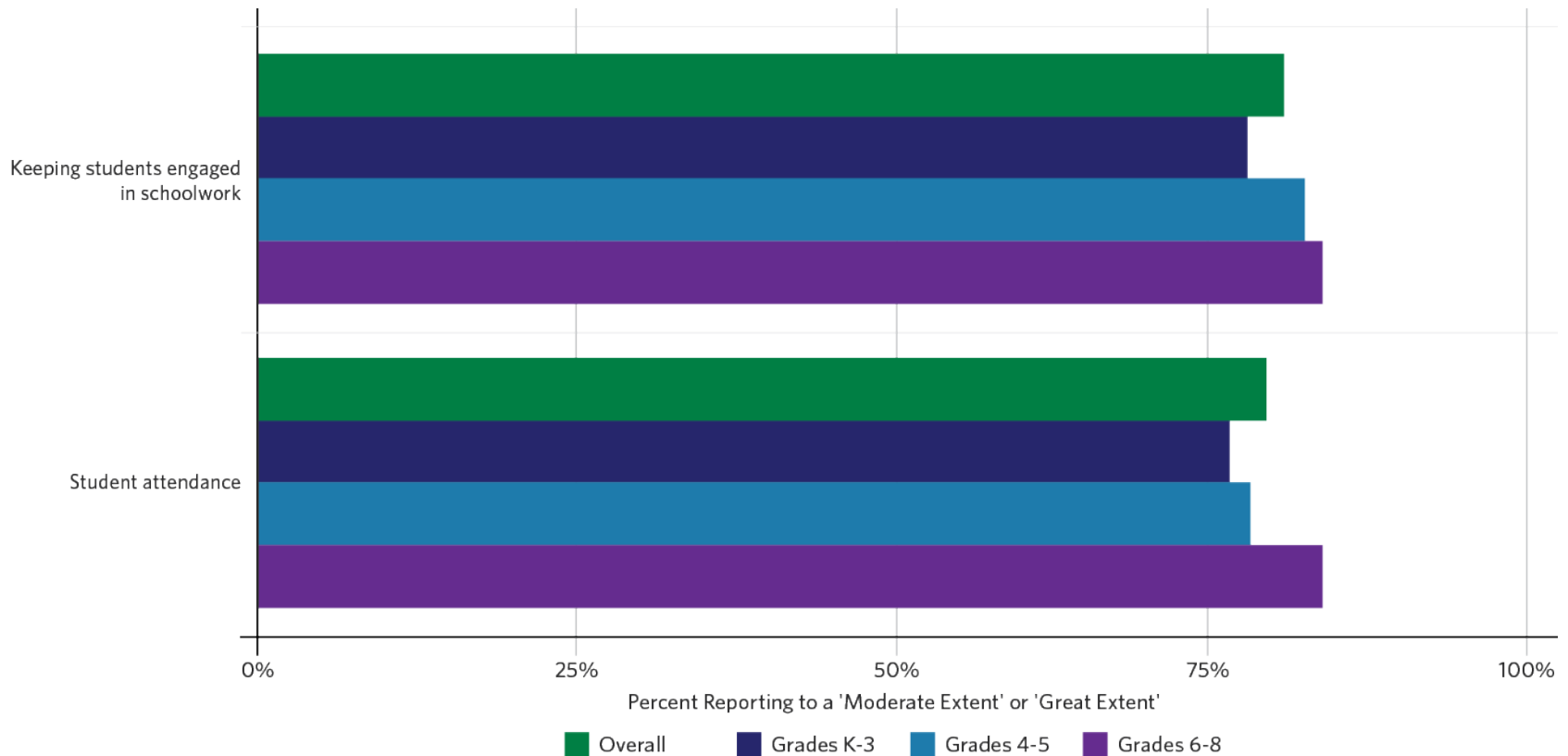


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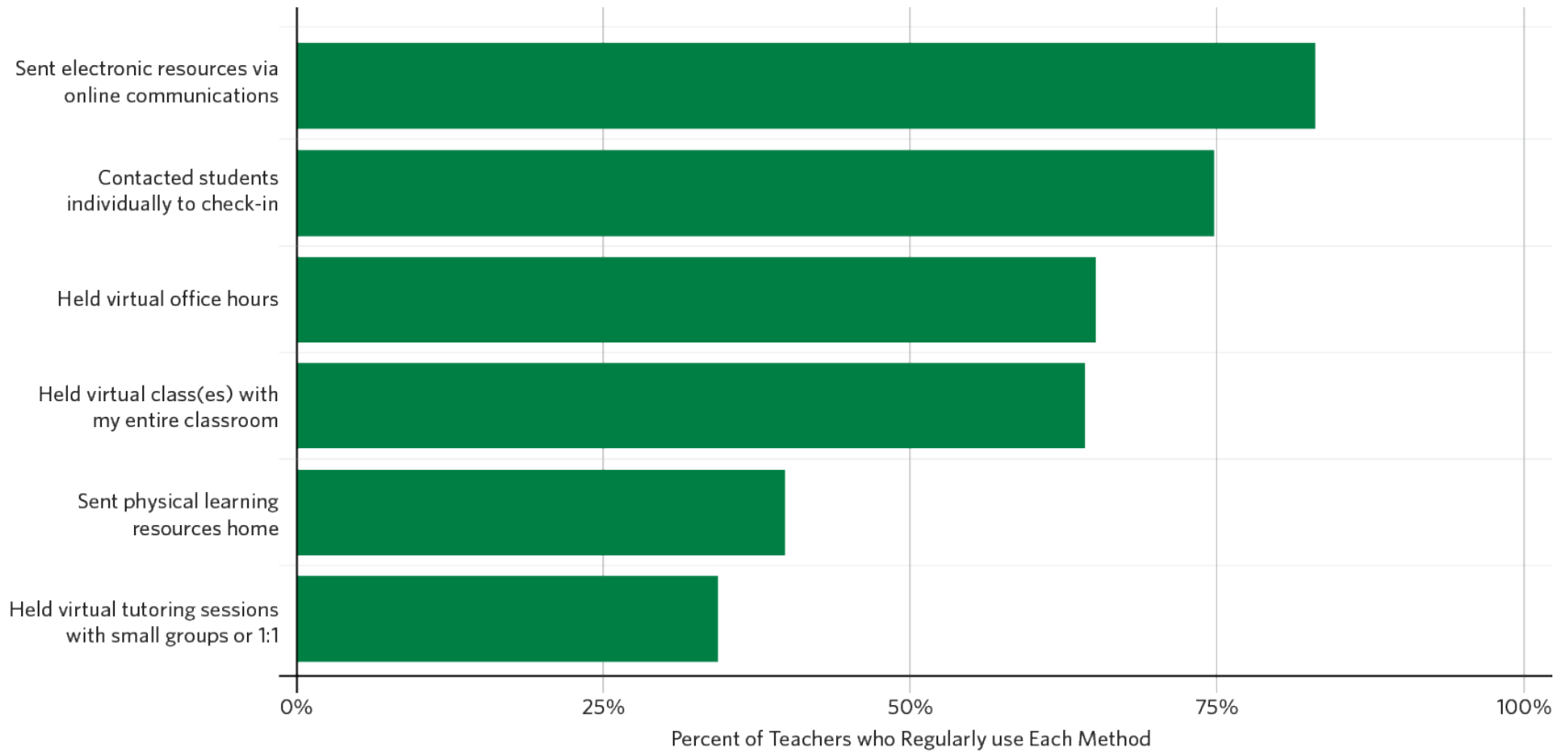
CHALLENGES FACED BY TEACHERS

Teachers were particularly concerned with student engagement and attendance, especially for older grades



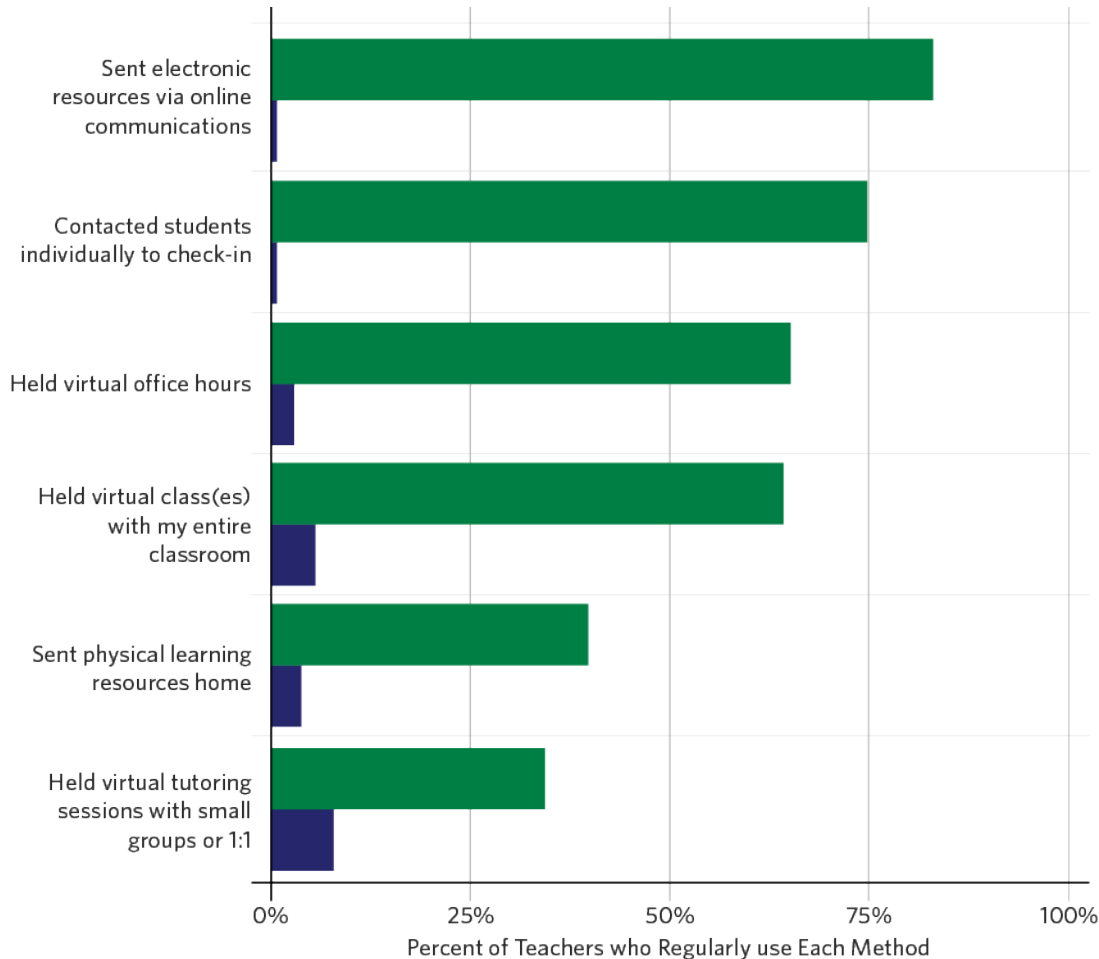
METHODS OF ENGAGING WITH STUDENTS

Most teachers reported using online and virtual instruction; fewer sent physical learning resources home



BARRIERS TO ENGAGING WITH STUDENTS

Relatively few teachers cited barriers, but those who did noted issues with virtual instruction



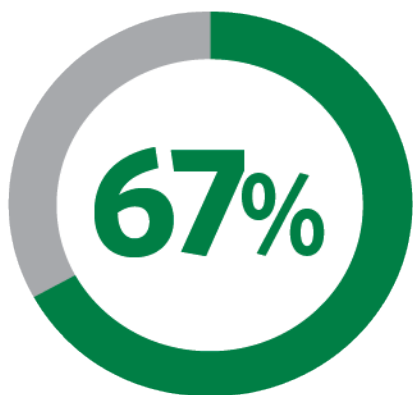
COMMON CONCERNS

The most common barriers were students' access to **internet and electronic devices** and families' lack of **time or ability to assist** with assignments.

78% of educators report being concerned or extremely concerned that students would face barriers that would **prevent them from accessing virtual instruction.**

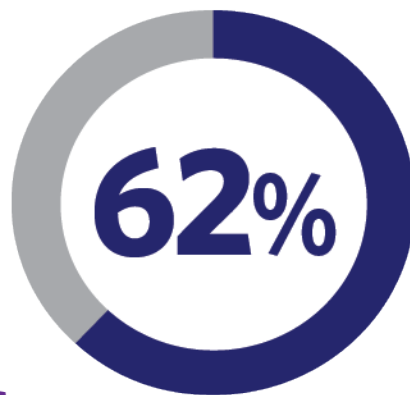
MONITORING ENGAGEMENT AND ATTENDANCE

Many districts planned to monitor engagement; fewer had plans to track attendance



■ VS ■

67% of districts planned to monitor student participation in hard copy instructional activities



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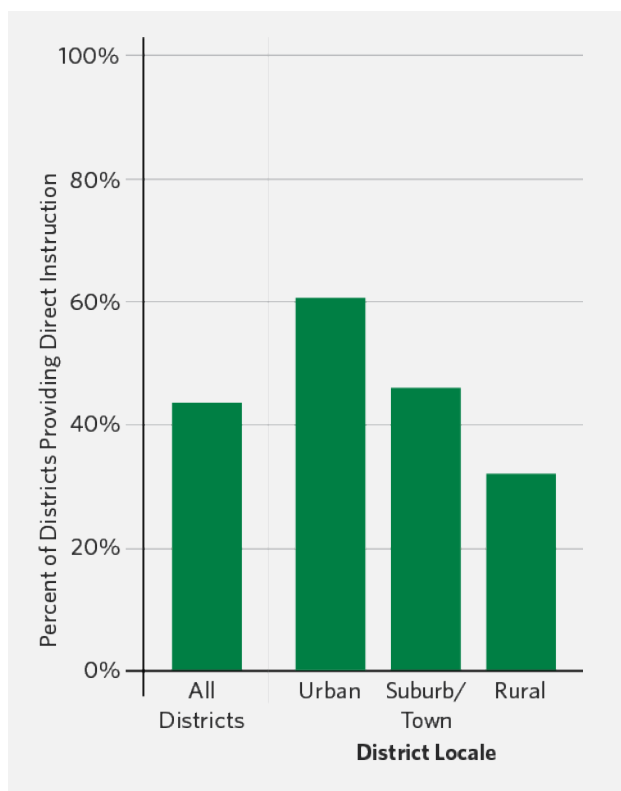
62% of districts planned to monitor student engagement in virtual learning



Less than 10% of districts planned to monitor attendance during virtual instruction or meetings

DISTRICTS PROVIDE DIRECT INSTRUCTION

Districts' plans for providing student instruction suggest less direct engagement than usual



9% of plans specified hours or lessons of direct instruction

- Average time: **11.3 hours** / week
- Average number: **5-6 lessons/week**

16% of plans specified expected time on independent learning and school work

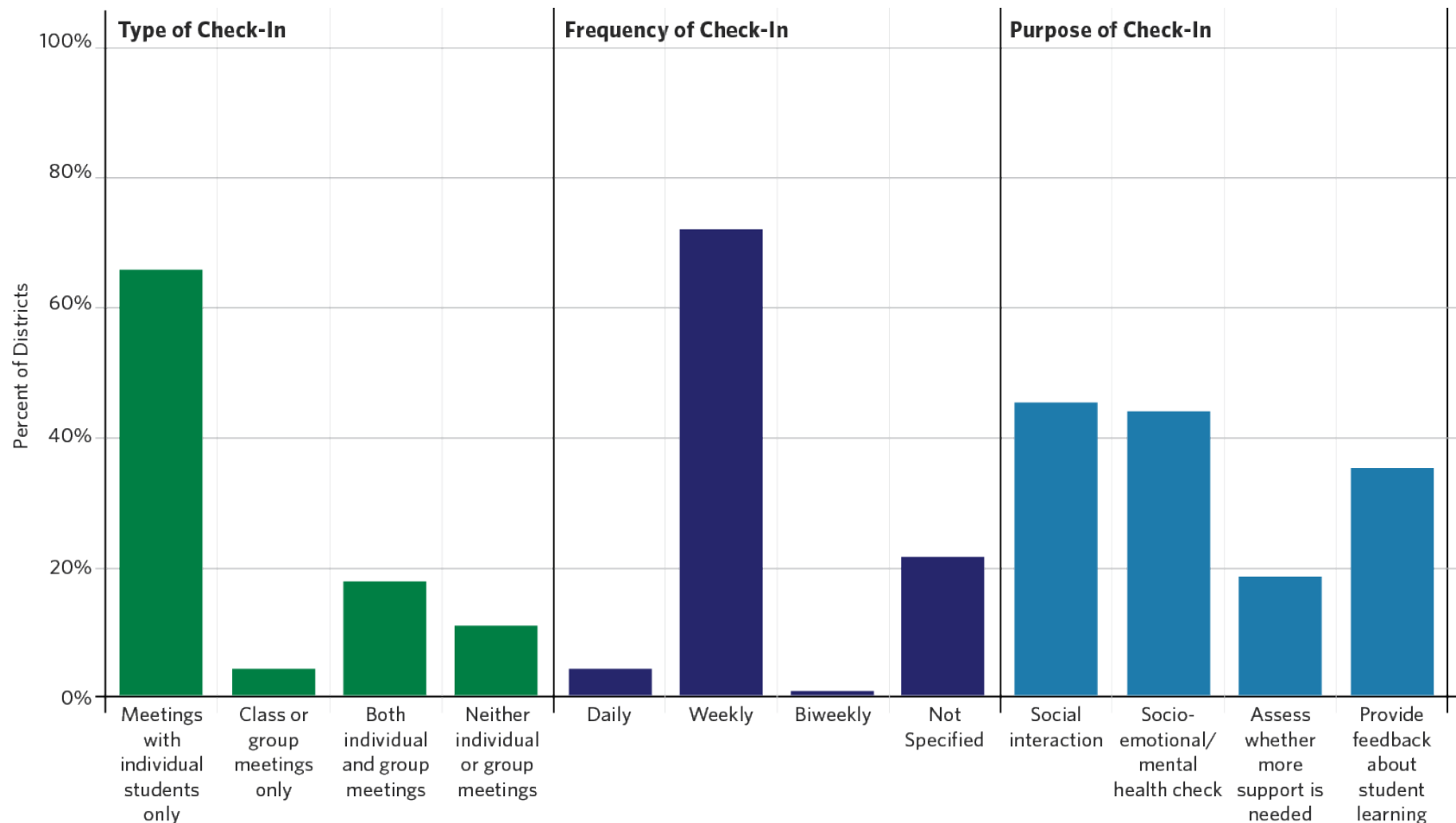
- Average time: **12.2 hours/week**

Younger students were provided with less instructional time/lessons

Rural districts planned for fewer hours/lessons

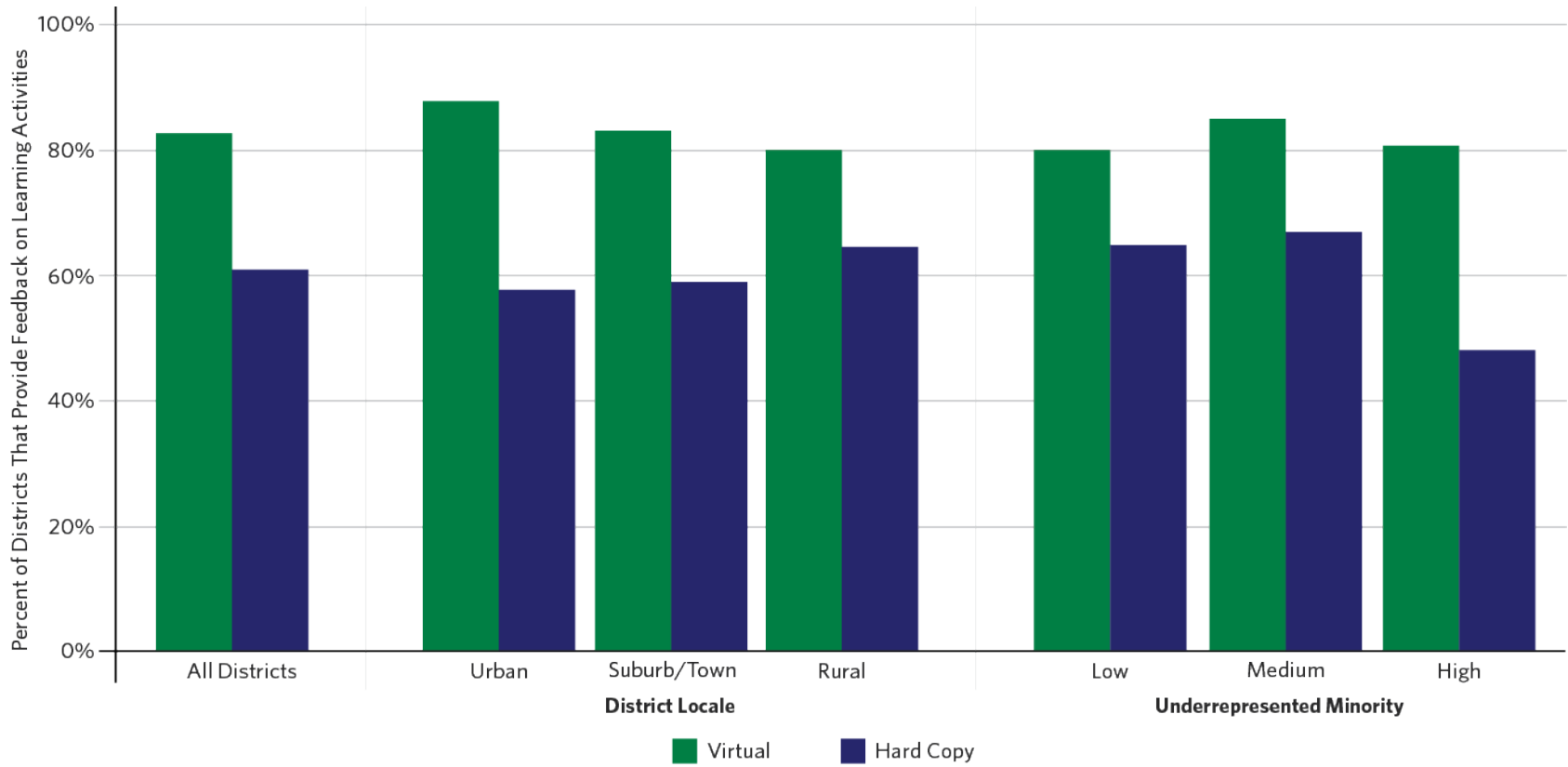
TEACHERS' MEETINGS WITH STUDENTS

Districts intended for teachers to have frequent contact with and provide feedback to students even when buildings were closed

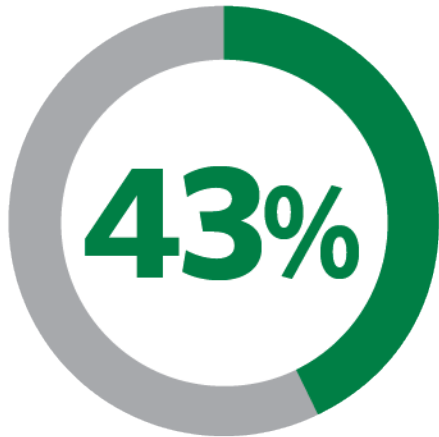


FEEDBACK ON LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Districts planned to provide differing levels of teacher feedback on student work depending on instructional modality



DISTRICTS WERE FLEXIBLE WITH FINAL GRADING POLICIES



43% of district plans explicitly indicated that at least some students would receive a **final grade** for the year

OF THOSE DISTRICTS:

71% of these districts chose to adopt a **binary or categorical** grading system

34% of these districts used a **"no harm"** grading policy

6% of these districts indicated students **could be retained** if they did not earn a passing grade

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

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CONCERNS WITH THE CONTINUATION OF LEARNING FOR SPECIAL POPULATIONS OF STUDENTS

TEACHERS' Reported Challenges

64% reported challenges with continuing to provide supports and services to students with IEPs/504 plans

39% reported challenges with continuing to provide supports and services to English Learners

69% reported challenges with continuing to provide access to literacy intervention services

■ VS ■

DISTRICT Plans Reported

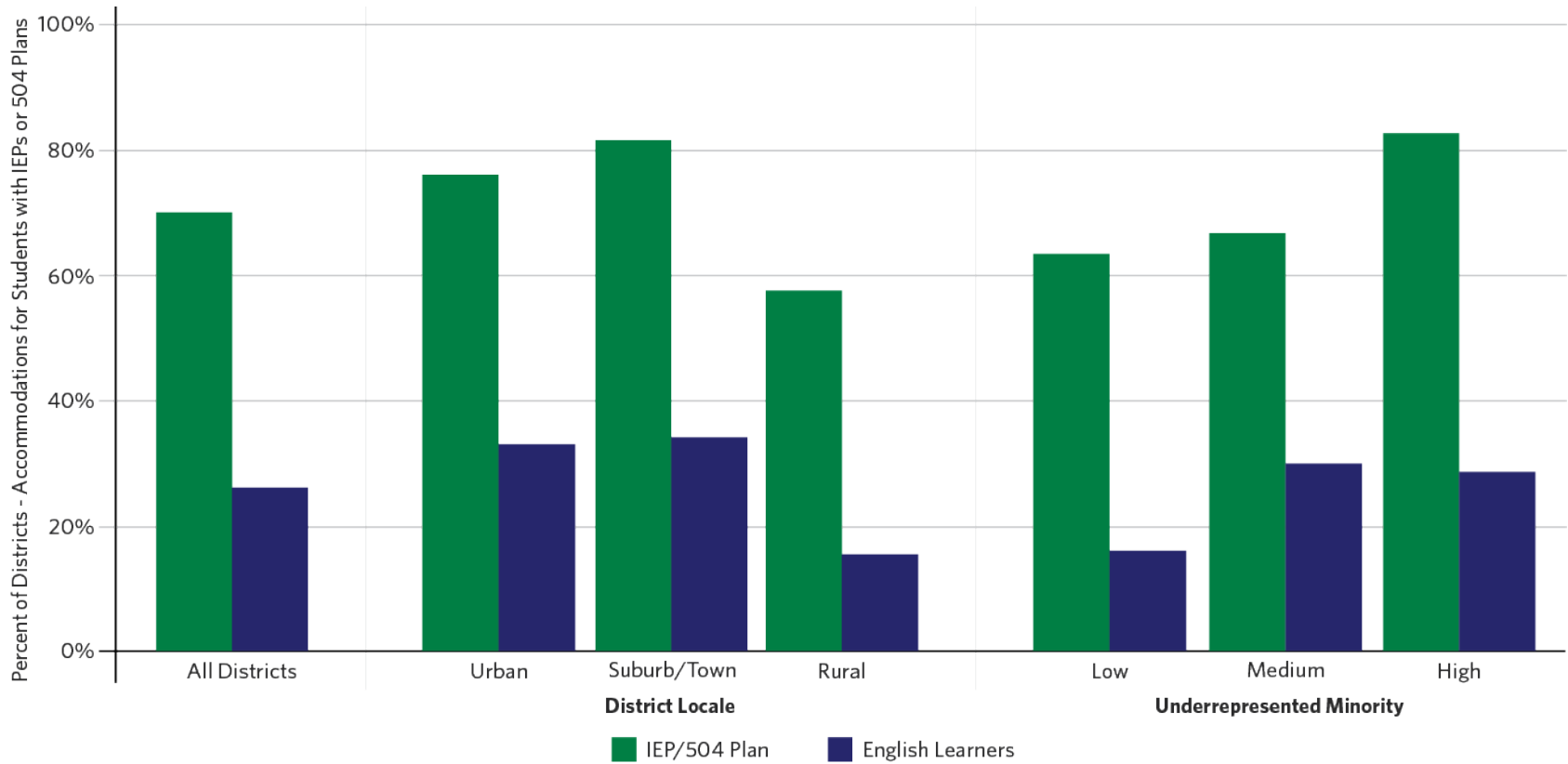
70% noted accommodations for students with IEPs/504 plans

26% discussed accommodations for English Learners

4% addressed accommodations for students with "reading deficiencies" or IRIPs

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH IEPs AND 504 PLANS

Urban districts and districts with high proportions of minority students are more likely to provide accommodations



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SUPPORT TO FACILITATE REMOTE INSTRUCTION

Teachers wanted more support to facilitate their delivery of remote instruction



27% of DISTRICTS included educator training and PD as part of their COL plans.

Rural districts were least likely to provide this type of support to teachers.

■ VS ■

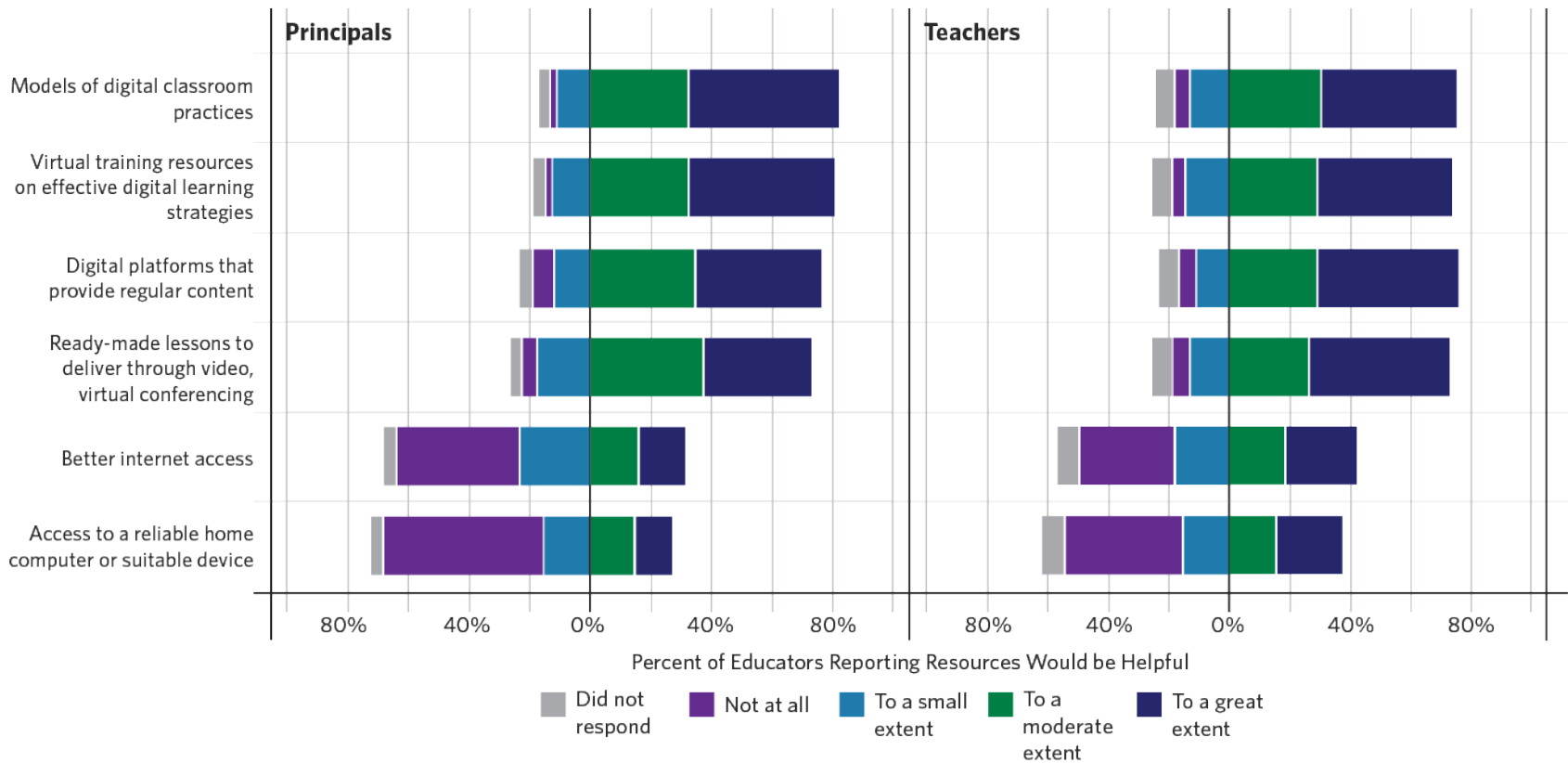


74% of TEACHERS wanted more virtual training resources.

Teachers relied mostly on colleagues and resources they sought themselves.

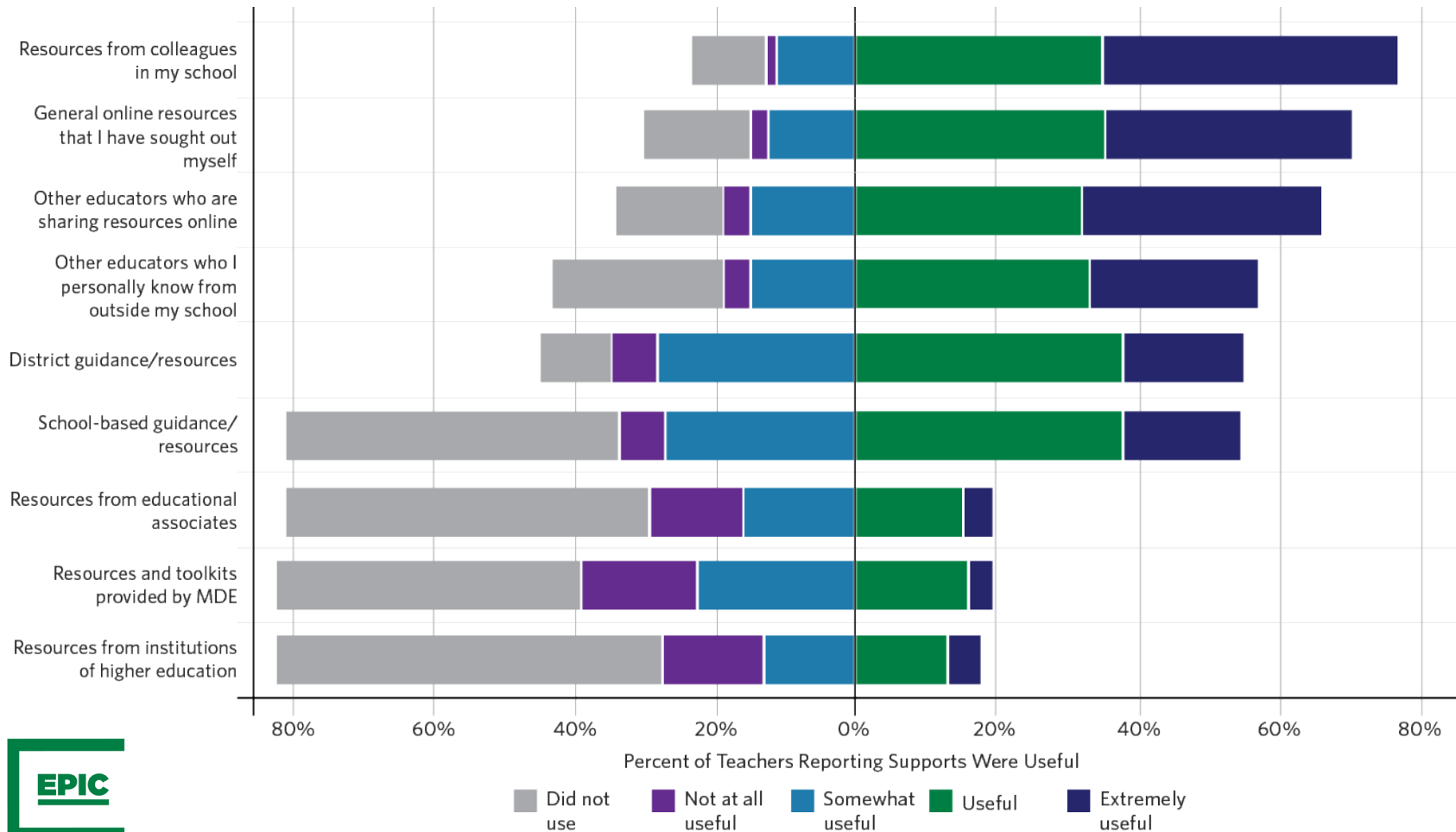
RESOURCES TO HELP EDUCATORS PROVIDE REMOTE INSTRUCTION

Educators wanted virtual resources that provide content, training, strategies, and ready-made virtual lessons



USEFULNESS OF SUPPORT/RESOURCES IN IMPLEMENTING COL PLAN

Resources from colleagues or that teachers found themselves were most useful for teachers



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TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS WERE CONCERNED ABOUT STUDENT WELL-BEING

79% and **83%**
of teachers of principals

were concerned about students **missing crucial services/supports** while school buildings are closed

79% and **85%**
of teachers of principals

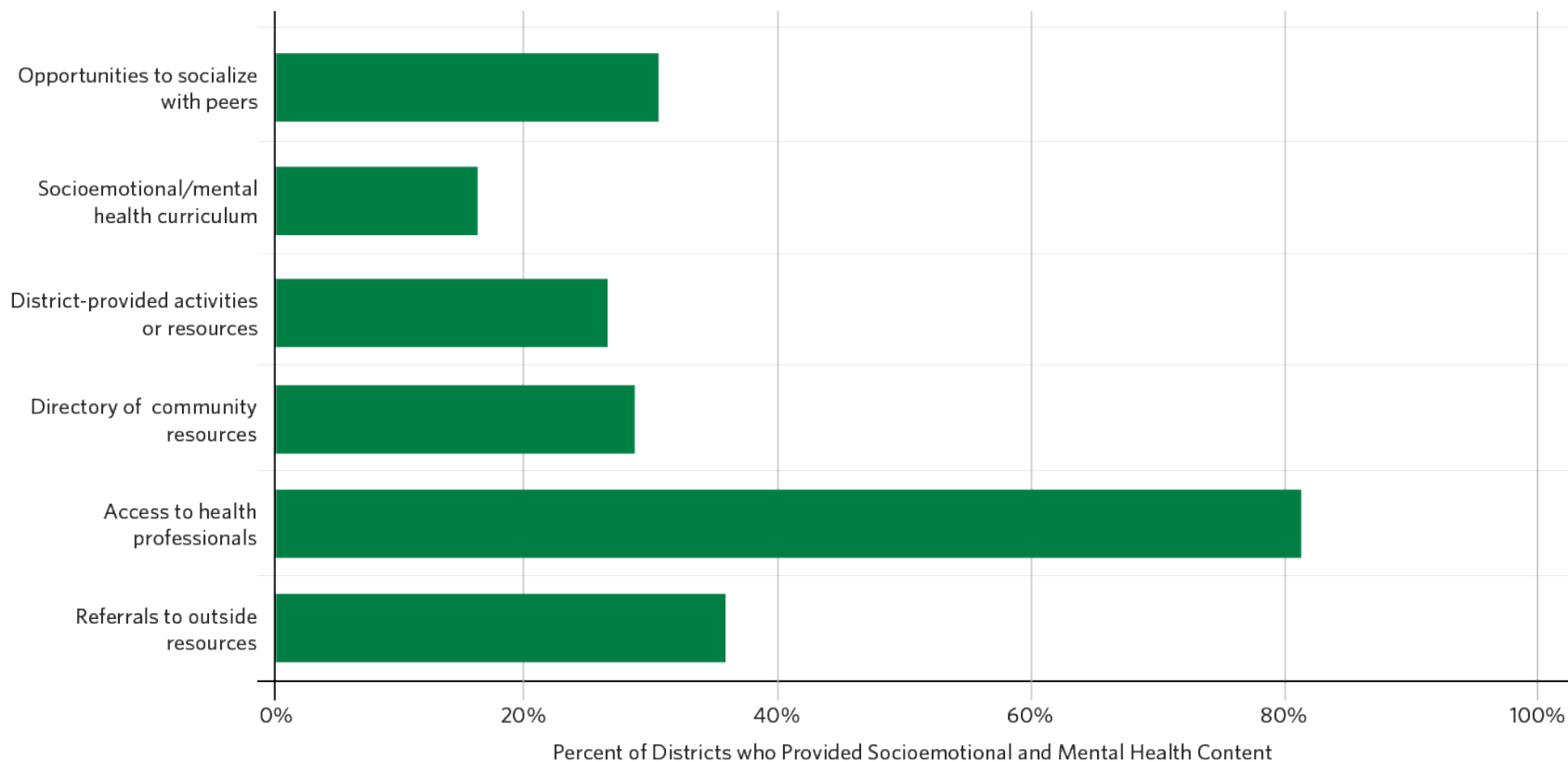
were concerned about **supporting students through grief and trauma** related to COVID-19

83% and **89%**
of teachers of principals

were concerned about **long-term economic impacts** of the pandemic on their students

SOCIOEMOTIONAL LEARNING AND STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

Most districts planned to provide students opportunities to socialize and access mental health supports



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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Important lessons can be learned from educators' perspectives and districts' COL plans to inform the upcoming school year

- Keep equity of opportunity at the forefront when planning for high-quality instruction.
- Equip all students with the necessary learning materials to allow them to fully engage in remote instruction.
- Continue to focus efforts on both instruction and student support services, particularly in lower-achieving, economically disadvantaged districts.
- Build on current efforts to provide direct instruction and frequent contact between students and teachers.
- Expand access to virtual training and distance learning resources for educators.

Education Policy Innovation Collaborative **QUESTIONS and FEEDBACK:**



**Thank you, we welcome all
questions & feedback!**



<https://epicedpolicy.org/covid-19-education-policy/>



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