



POLICY BRIEF

A Look Inside Michigan Classrooms: Educators' Perceptions of COVID-19 and K-12 Schooling in the Fall of 2020

Bryant Hopkins

Meg Turner

Melissa Lovitz

Tara Kilbride

Katharine O. Strunk

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EPIC

**Education Policy
Innovation Collaborative**
RESEARCH WITH CONSEQUENCE

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By Bryant Hopkins, Meg Turner, Melissa Lovitz, Tara Kilbride, Katharine O. Strunk

INTRODUCTION

Educators have dealt with unprecedented challenges since school buildings closed in early spring 2020. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, state and national surveys of K-12 educators exposed concerns about low levels of student engagement, limited access to technology (e.g., electronic devices, internet), and insufficient services for students, including meals, counseling, and programs for students with disabilities (SWDs). At the same time, educators expressed the need for more supports and resources, specifically related to teacher training, materials to support instruction or minimize loss of “hands-on learning,” and strategies to engage and support students, especially English learners (ELs), SWDs, and students experiencing homelessness.¹

Educators and other education stakeholders have also expressed substantial concerns about students' academic progress. Early estimates of learning growth during COVID-19 suggested that students would return to school in the fall of 2020 with only 70% of typical learning gains in reading and nearly a year behind in math.² Local and national assessments of student progress in the fall of 2020 confirmed fears of slower learning growth associated with COVID-19, especially in school buildings that remained closed.³ Equally concerning, in one

national study of student learning using the popular Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) assessment, approximately one quarter of students were “missing” from the data (i.e., these students participated in the assessment in 2019 but not in 2020)—highlighting concerns about how to locate students to supply necessary instruction and support services.⁴

Educators have raised concerns about the likely differential and inequitable effects of the pandemic. The students missing from the NWEA study were more likely to be economically disadvantaged and from minority populations, complicating efforts to understand how COVID-19 might disproportionately affect these groups of students.⁵ Moreover, substantial differences in student access to broadband internet and technology by race, socioeconomic status, and geography have raised alarms about the ways in which various groups of students do and do not have opportunities to learn during the pandemic.⁶ Perhaps as a result, perceptions of student engagement vary greatly across racial and socioeconomic subgroups; in spring 2020, teachers in high-poverty schools and schools where a majority of students are Black reported their students were less engaged in schoolwork.⁷ Unsurprisingly, pandemic learning gains are predicted to be unequal across race, where those who entered the pandemic with the fewest academic resources—often underrepresented minorities—will fall further behind their peers who have greater access to educational opportunities.⁸

To better understand how Michigan educators are responding to this shifting environment at the beginning of the 2020-21 academic year, the Education Policy Innovation Collaborative (EPIC) conducted a survey of K-12 teachers, principals, and superintendents in traditional public schools (TPSS) and charter schools (in Michigan called public school academies, or PSAs) across the state.

DATA AND METHODS

Data

EPIC’s fall 2020 survey expands on EPIC’s earlier survey administered in the spring of 2020 and adds questions based on shifting contexts, new guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Michigan’s reopening plans.⁹ The survey was administered over four weeks in October and November 2020. Survey respondents include 6,915 teachers, 221 principals, and 64 district superintendents. Table 1 provides teacher and principal response rates. Given the small sample of superintendents who responded to the survey,¹⁰ we use district superintendent responses sparingly.

We linked survey responses to administrative data from the 2019-20 school year, allowing us to compare characteristics of the survey sample to the full universe of Michigan educators. Overall, the sample of teachers that responded to the survey is generally representative of the larger population of Michigan public school educators (see Table 1). Responding teachers are slightly more likely to be female, more experienced, white, certified to teach in secondary schools, and work in Partnership districts, rural districts, or districts with high proportions of economically disadvantaged students.

TABLE 1. Sample Size, Response Rate, and Characteristics for the Fall COVID-19 Survey

	Teachers		Principals	
	Sample	Difference from target population	Sample	Difference from target population
Number of survey respondents	6,915		221	
Percent of target population	8.3%		7.9%	
Individual characteristics				
Female	79.3%	2.8%	66.5%	15.6%
Hired within past 5 years	28.4%	-4.0%	33.2%	4.9%
Black	4.2%	-1.7%	10.9%	-2.5%
Latinx	1.2%	-0.3%	1.8%	0.3%
Asian	0.8%	-0.1%	1.4%	1.0%
Other non-White ethnicity	1.5%	0.0%	0.5%	-0.8%
Elementary certified	52.7%	-2.5%	47.8%	-3.2%
Secondary certified	42.3%	5.0%	45.4%	6.1%
District characteristics				
PSA/charter	8.4%	-1.1%	18.6%	8.7%
Partnership district	10.1%	1.1%	12.7%	2.3%
Urban	25.4%	0.0%	27.1%	2.1%
Suburb/town	55.4%	-1.5%	52.9%	-0.7%
Rural	19.2%	1.6%	19.9%	-1.1%
Low broadband access	19.1%	0.2%	27.6%	4.5%
High broadband access	50.0%	-1.8%	38.5%	-6.9%
Low SES	24.9%	1.2%	37.6%	11.3%
High SES	48.0%	-2.3%	40.7%	-4.7%

Note: High and low district categories are defined on the distribution of districts and not teachers.

Differences between the group of principals who completed the survey and the full population of Michigan administrators are more significant. Responding principals are more likely to be female, novice, Asian, certified to teach in secondary schools, and work in a charter school district. The sample of principals is also more likely to be Latinx and work in Partnership districts, urban districts, and districts with high proportions of economically disadvantaged students, while a higher share of responding superintendents work in suburban school districts or are certified to teach in elementary schools.

We weight responses based on educators' demographic characteristics, duration and location of employment, and teaching credentials to enable the results from our analyses to be representative of K-12 educators across the state.¹¹

Survey Administration		
Who?	When?	How?
K-12 teachers, principals, and district superintendents in traditional public and charter schools	From October 19, 2020 through November 13, 2020	Survey link shared via emails and social media as well as by our partners

Note: Our partners include Michigan Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, Michigan Association of Public School Academies, Michigan Association of School Administrators, and Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association.

We also link survey responses to three publicly available reports issued by Michigan’s Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI) to examine how subgroups of educators from different types of districts responded to the survey.¹² We consider differences in district enrollment, the percentage of district students classified as economically disadvantaged, the percentage of district students who are Black or Latinx, and urbanicity (i.e., urban, suburb/town, or rural). Finally, using estimates from the 2014-2018 American Community Survey, we consider the proportion of district households with a broadband internet subscription.¹³

Methodology

We asked teachers and principals how they engaged with students, the additional supports they need, the safety precautions in place inside their schools and districts, their perceived changes in the quality of special education identification and services, the factors affecting their willingness to return to in-person instruction, and the concerns and challenges they experienced while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We first examine patterns in the share of respondents that chose each item response, including the percentage that elected to leave the question blank. In some cases, we also calculate percentages among item respondents, meaning that educators who left the item blank are not counted towards the total number of respondents.

Survey results are reported after splitting Likert scale responses into high and low categories and grouping percentages within each category. For example, educators were asked if specific supports would aid in providing effective instruction this school year and could respond “not at all,” “to a small extent,” “to a moderate extent,” or “to a great extent.” For this question, the percentages presented in the main text or accompanying figures group the top two responses into the high category (i.e. “to a moderate extent” or “to a great extent”).

We then compare responses across subgroups of teachers. Districts are classified into “low,” “medium,” and “high” categories based on whether their total enrollment, share of students belonging to a particular demographic subgroup, or share of households with broadband internet fall in the bottom, middle, or top tercile of districts across each measure. In addition to these “low,” “medium,” and “high” categories, we examine responses across urbanicity and district instructional modality. We also use teachers’ responses to certain survey questions to identify

teacher-specific instructional modality and school-level subgroups.¹⁴ Since many districts offer more than one mode of instruction, teachers' self-reported instructional modalities are considered separately from their districts' modalities.¹⁵

Caveat

While we received over 7,000 responses to our survey, this represents only 8% of Michigan teachers and 8% of principals. This relatively low response rate is in part due to the many constraints on educators' time during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, we do not have a complete set of teacher or principal email addresses, and relied on a partial set of emails and communications via social media and through our partner organizations. The actual response rate from teachers and principals who received notification of the survey is likely much greater. We weight our responses to make our results more generalizable to all K-12 teachers and principals in Michigan. Additionally, and also likely due to educators' time constraints, educators were more likely to skip questions in the second half of the survey.¹⁶ Results should be interpreted in light of these response rates.

KEY FINDINGS

We identify seven key findings that emerge from our analyses of educators' responses to the fall 2020 COVID-19 survey:

1. Educators faced challenges providing remote instruction.
2. Teachers wanted additional resources to improve remote instruction.
3. Student engagement in instruction is both a challenge for educators and an equity concern.
4. Educators expressed significant concerns about missed instruction and student well-being.
5. The pandemic negatively affected the delivery of special education services.
6. COVID-19 safety precautions and student well-being influenced educators' willingness to return to in-person instruction.
7. Many Michigan teachers and principals considered leaving the profession due to challenges presented by COVID-19.

Finding 1: Educators Faced Challenges Providing Remote Instruction

In spring 2020, all Michigan school districts transitioned to fully remote instruction as COVID-19 spread across the state and the nation. Approximately 12% of Michigan public school districts began the 2020-21 school year fully remote, with nearly all remaining districts offering students an option to learn remotely. With this option, an estimated 47% to 64% of Michigan students were educated in a remote format at the beginning of the school year.¹⁷

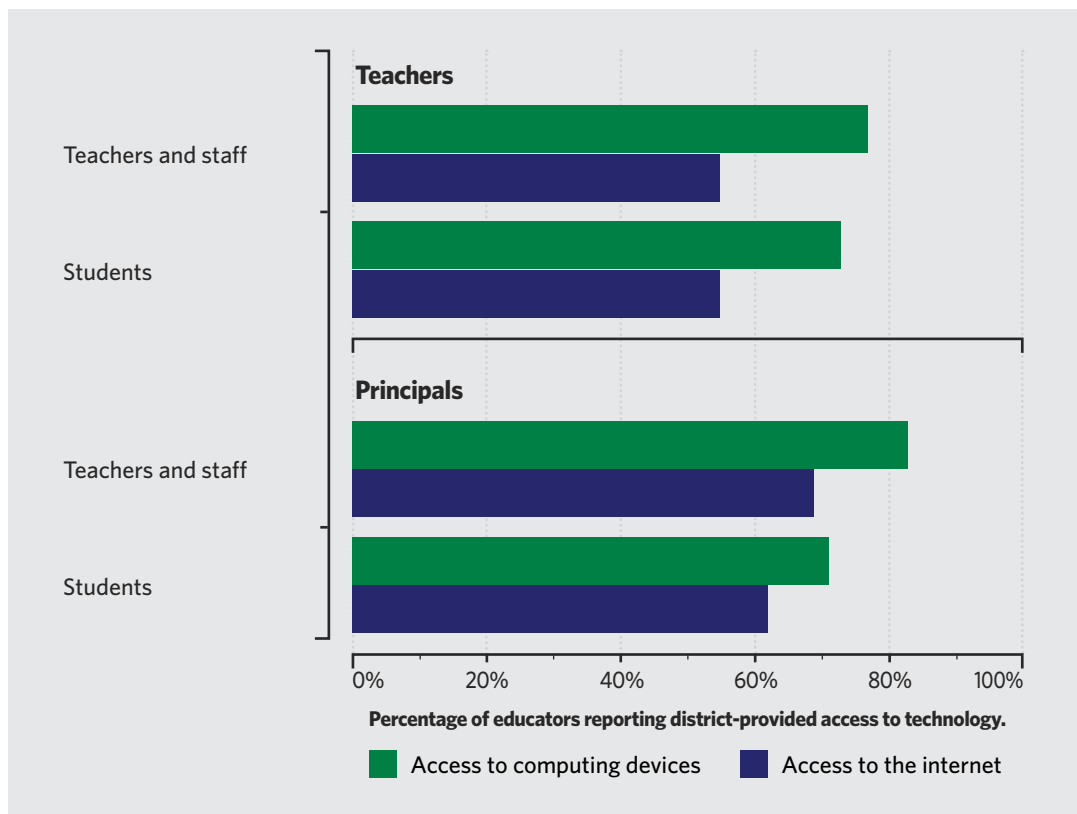
In the spring 2020 survey, educators reported that remote instruction was challenging, a difficulty that extended into the fall semester. In particular, educators faced difficulties due to inadequate student access to technology, diminished student engagement, and a perceived lack of support for learning at home.

Despite Attempts to Address It, Student Access to Technology Continued to be a Barrier to Instruction and a Potential Equity Concern

Since transitioning to remote learning in spring 2020, both teachers and administrators voiced concerns regarding access to technology. In the spring, over 80% of teachers and principals reported that better student access to the internet or a reliable home computer would improve distance learning.¹⁸

Survey results from fall 2020 show that districts are working to meet this need. Figure 1 shows educators’ reports of their schools’ or districts’ efforts to provide students and staff with access to technology in fall 2020. Roughly three-quarters of teachers and principals reported that their schools or districts provided access to devices for both staff and students. Both were less likely to report their schools or districts had also ensured access to the internet.

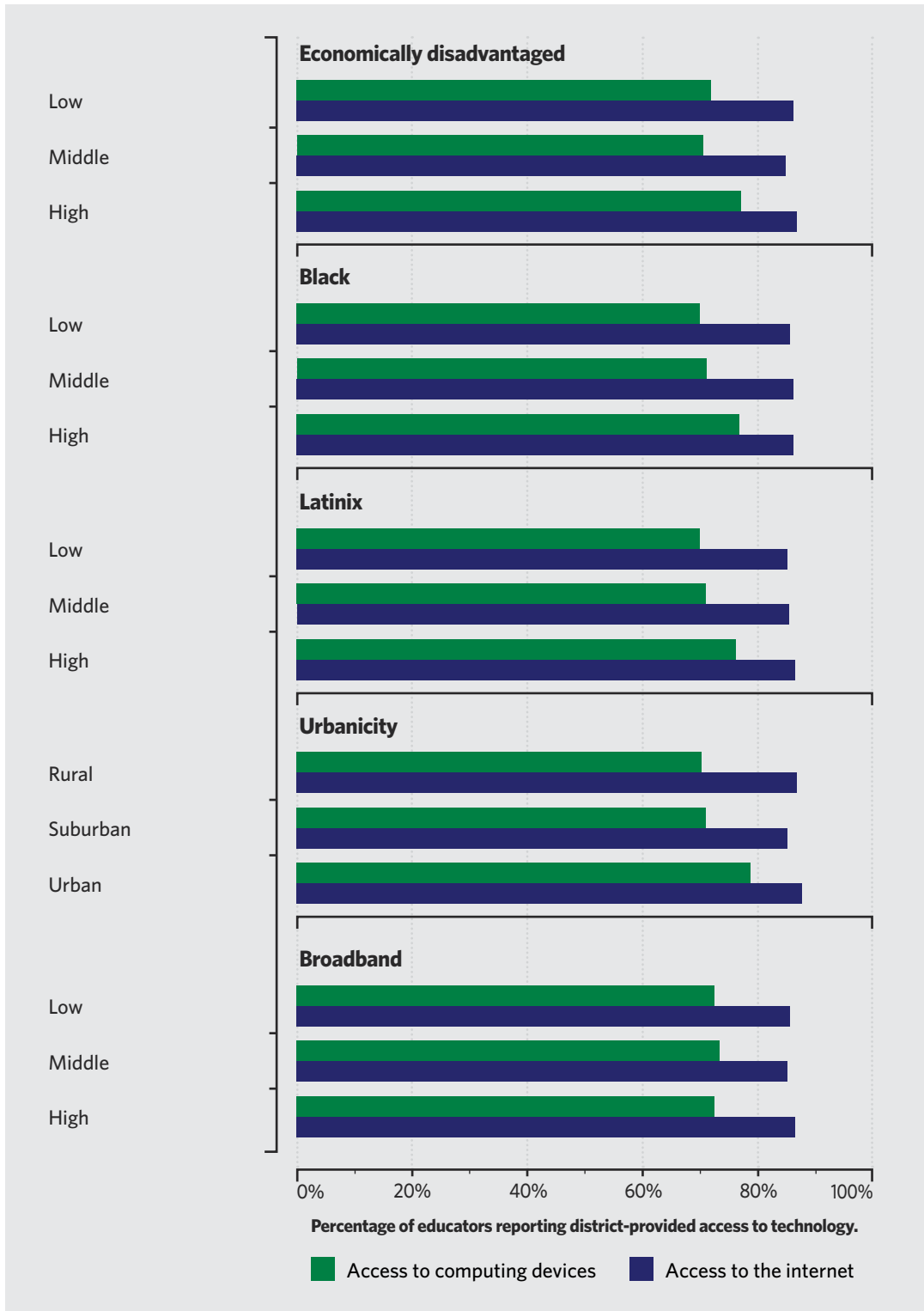
FIGURE 1. Educator Reports of District-Provided Access to Technology



Note: In the fall 2020 survey, teachers and principals were asked, “Has your school or district engaged in any of the following activities related to technology since the beginning of this school year?” The activities shown above include “ensured access to an electronic device needed for teaching/learning” and “ensured access to the internet connectivity needed for teaching/learning.” Teachers and principals were asked to indicate if districts had done these activities for “teachers and staff” and “students” separately.

Figure 2 shows differences across districts in teachers’ reports of the district or school providing electronic devices. While these differences are very minor, teachers assigned to districts with greater proportions of economically disadvantaged, Black, or Latinx students or to urban districts were more likely to report their school or district had ensured internet access for students. However, this did not differ across districts with varying levels of broadband access. These findings add to existing evidence documenting inequitable access to technology by race, socioeconomic status, and geography.¹⁹

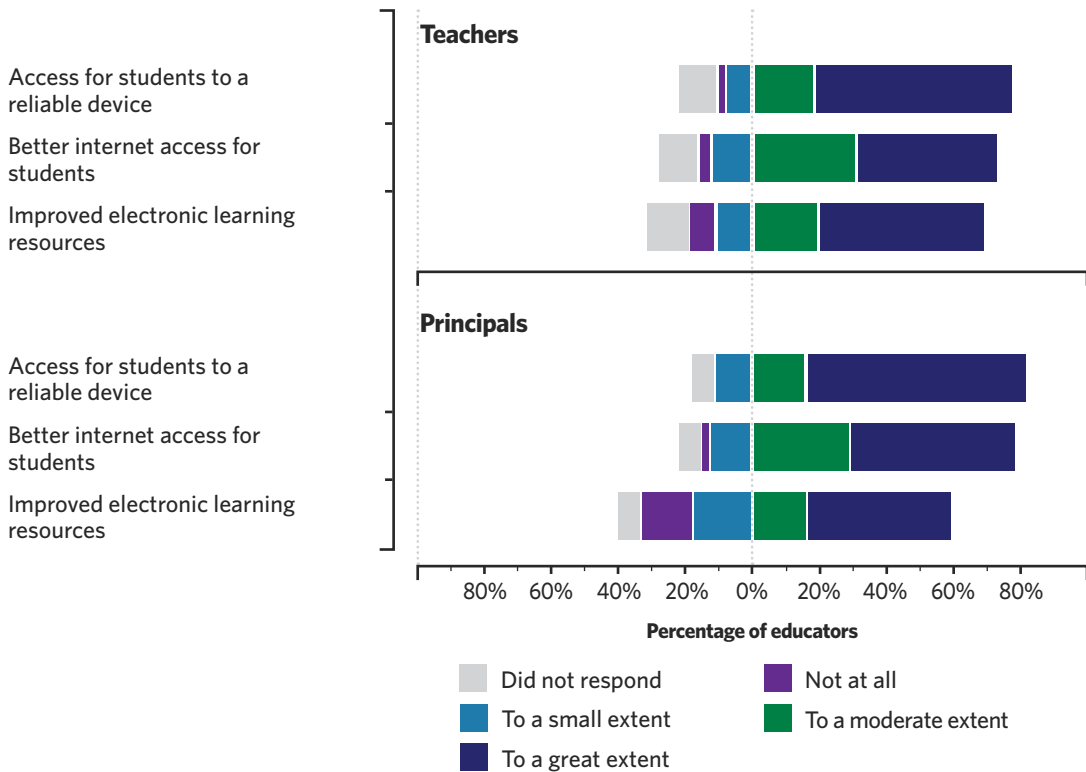
FIGURE 2. Educators' Reported Access to Technology



Note: Teachers and principals were asked, "Has your school or district engaged in any of the following activities related to technology since the beginning of this school year?" The activities shown above include "ensured access to an electronic device needed for teaching/learning" and "ensured access to the internet connectivity needed for teaching/learning." Teachers and principals were asked to indicate if districts had done these activities for "teachers and staff" and "students" separately.

Even with these efforts by schools and districts, educators still highlighted the need for enhanced technology and access, regardless of instructional modality. Seventy-seven percent of teachers and 82% of principals reported that better internet access for students would help to a moderate or great extent in providing effective instruction (shown in Figure 3). This was even more pronounced for teachers in districts with low broadband access. In addition to improved internet access, teachers and principals reported that student access to a reliable device (e.g., laptop, Chromebook, tablet) would help in providing effective instruction (68% and 59%, respectively). This was particularly true of teachers in districts with high proportions of economically disadvantaged students. This is especially concerning considering that 70% of teachers said they regularly send electronic learning resources to students, which suggests that students who do not have adequate access to technology might have difficulties engaging or participating in schoolwork.

FIGURE 3. Resources to Help Educators Provide Instruction



Note: Teachers and principals were asked, "To what extent would each of the following supports be helpful to assist you in providing effective instruction this school year?"

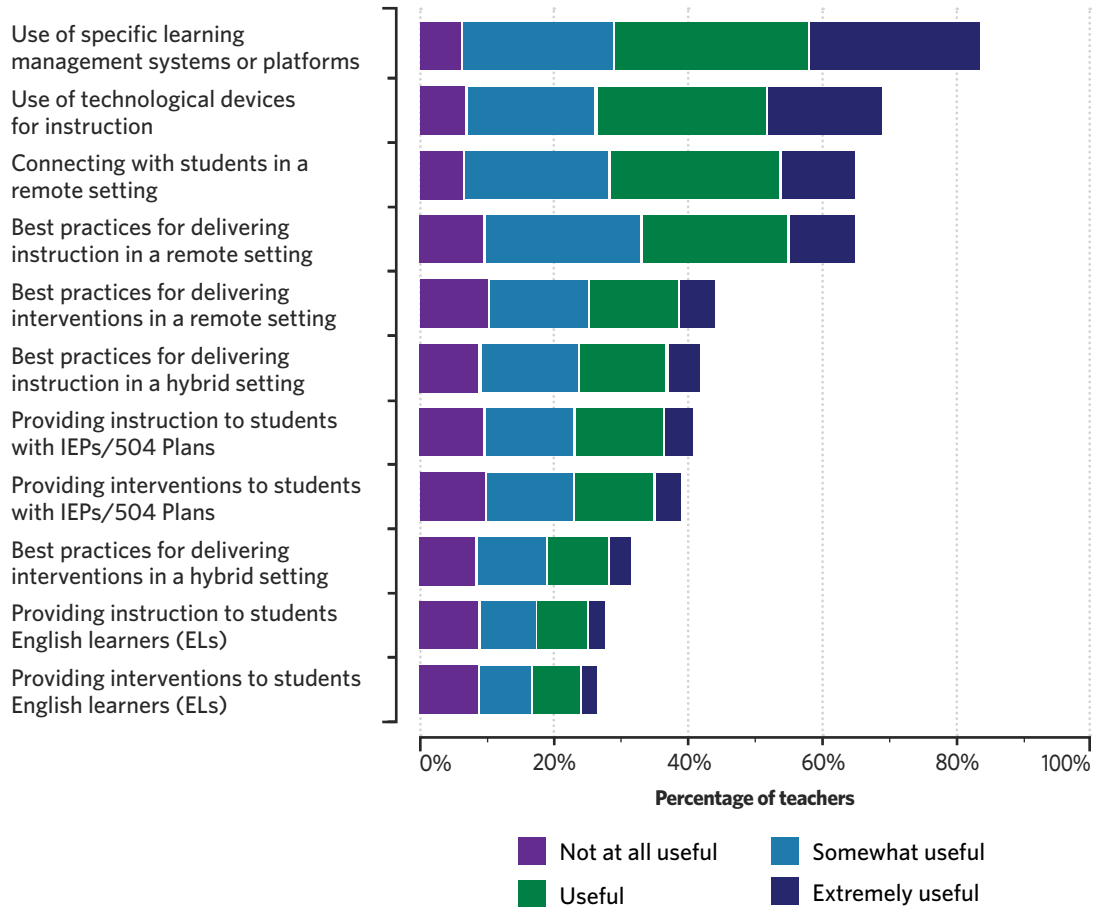
Finding 2: Teachers Wanted Additional Resources to Improve Remote Instruction

Professional Development Focused on Supports for Remote Instruction

Most teachers reported that they received professional development on topics that supported their ability to provide remote instruction. As seen in Figure 4, 84% of teachers reported that they received professional development on the use of learning management systems or platforms

(e.g., Google Classroom, Zoom, Seesaw). Among respondents who received this professional development, 65% found it to be useful or extremely useful. Almost 70% of teachers indicated that they had received professional development on the use of technological devices for instruction, connecting with students in a remote setting, and the best practices for effectively delivering instruction in a remote environment. However, between 10% and 15% of responding teachers who received these three types of professional development did not find them useful.

FIGURE 4. Receipt and Usefulness of Professional Development Offerings



Note: Teachers were asked, "Consider any professional development (PD) you have received since March 2020. Please rate how useful PD on each of the following topics was in helping to improve your instruction this school year. Please mark one option for each row. The PD I received on ____ was..."

Fewer than half of the teachers in our sample received professional development on best practices for delivering instruction or interventions in a hybrid setting (42% and 31%, respectively). Approximately 40% of teachers received professional development on how to provide instruction and interventions to SWDs, but fewer reported receiving professional development on how to provide instruction and interventions to ELs (28% and 27%, respectively). Between 25% and 34% of responding teachers who received professional development on providing instruction and interventions to SWDs or ELs did not find it useful. Although there are several competing priorities

during this unprecedented time, offering limited professional development to support both SWDs and ELs echoes earlier concerns surrounding equity and inclusion for these populations of students.

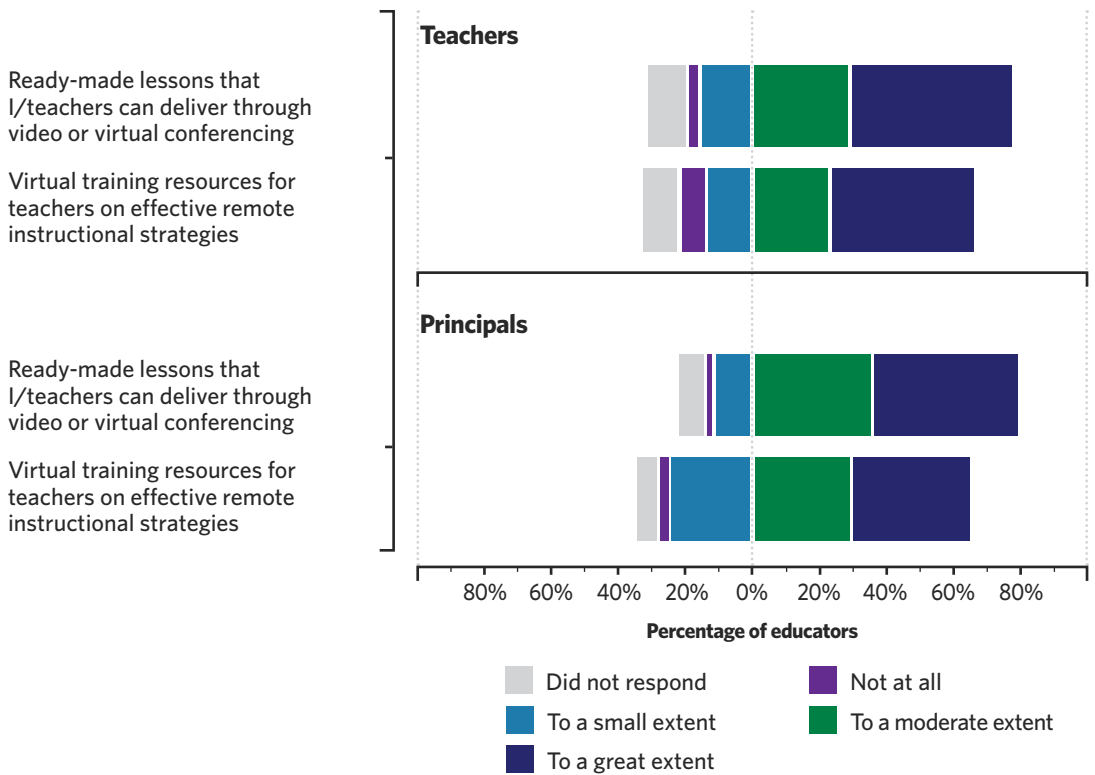
Educators Want More Supports to Improve Their Delivery of Remote Instruction

Even with the professional development provided to them, educators in both the spring and fall 2020 surveys expressed the need for additional professional development and resources to help them improve remote learning.

In fall 2020, roughly two-thirds of teachers reported that virtual training resources (e.g., YouTube videos, step-by-step instructions) and ready-made lessons that they can deliver through video or virtual conferencing (shown in Figure 5). While most teachers stated these needs, it was more prevalent in responses from elementary teachers. Similarly, 79% of principals reported that virtual training resources for teachers would help teachers to deliver instruction and 65% reported the same for ready-made lessons. Seventy percent of teachers and principals reported that improved electronic learning resources (e.g., learning management systems, online curricula, online exams, or assignments) would improve their ability to provide effective instruction.

Such resources might help address additional non-technical challenges facing educators. For example, approximately half of teachers and principals reported experiencing challenges with finding instructional plans and materials that work well in a remote classroom.

FIGURE 5. Non-Technical Resources to Help Educators Provide Instruction



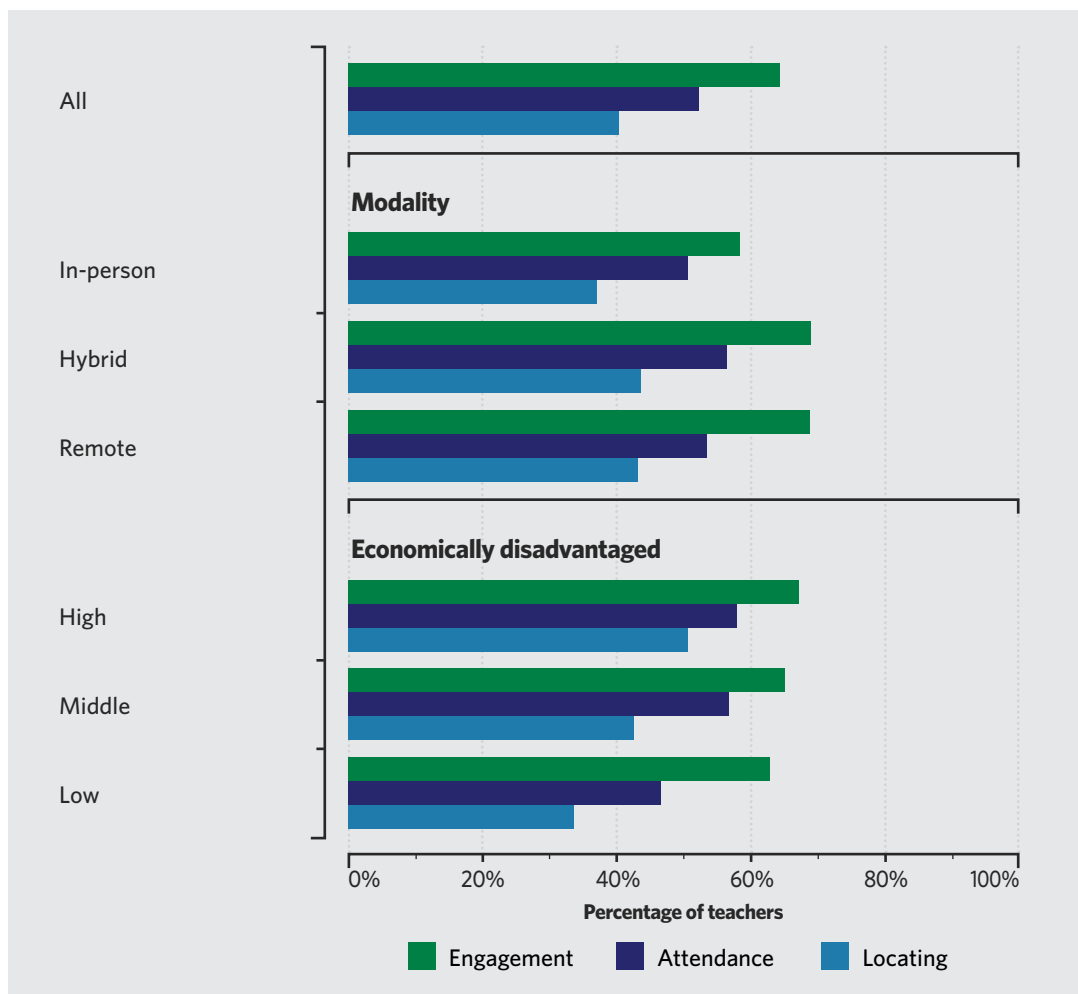
Note: Teachers and principals were asked, “To what extent would each of the following supports be helpful to assist you in providing effective instruction this school year?”

Finding 3: Student Engagement in Instruction is Both a Challenge for Educators and an Equity Concern

Educators Reported Difficulties Locating and Engaging Students

Engaging students during COVID-19 is a continuing challenge for educators across the country, especially when working with students remotely.²⁰ As seen in Figure 6, 65% of Michigan teachers reported that they faced challenges keeping students engaged in schoolwork. This was especially a challenge for educators providing hybrid or remote instruction. Seventy-two percent of principals noted difficulty with keeping students engaged in schoolwork.

FIGURE 6. Teacher Concerns About Student Engagement



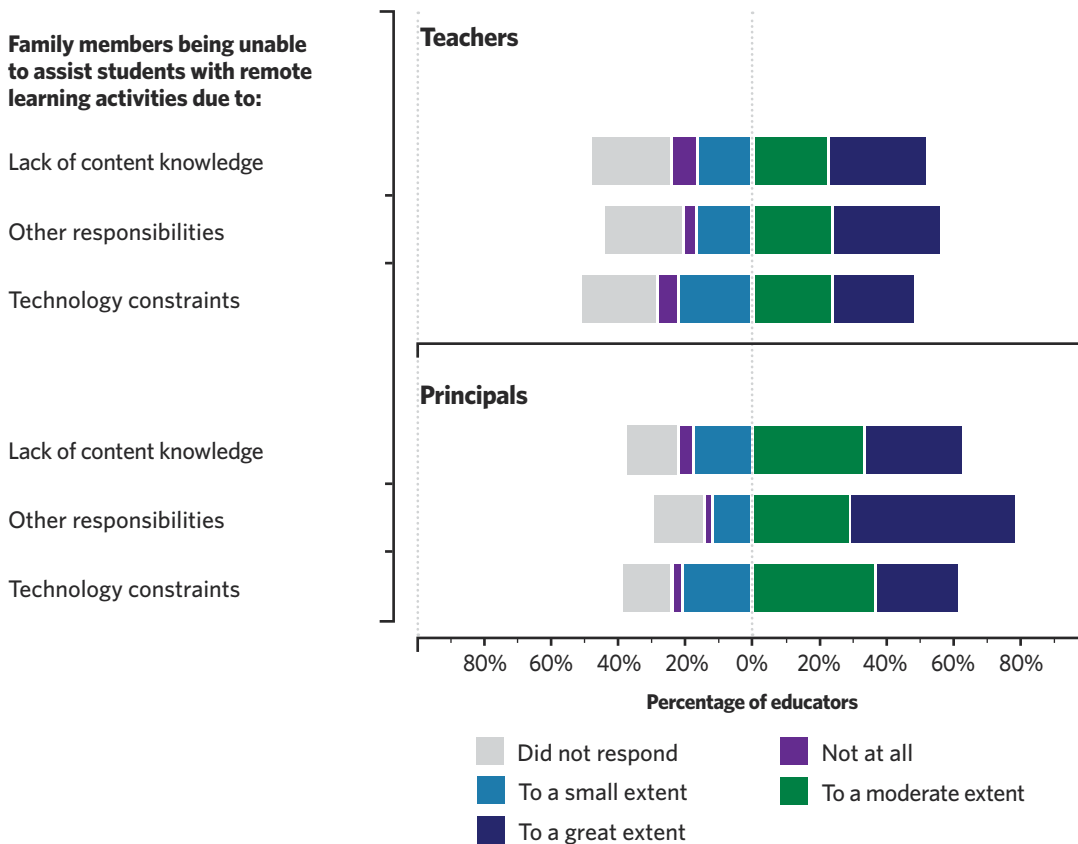
Note: Teachers and principals were asked, "To what extent have you experienced challenges with any of the following this school year?"

Educators also struggled to get and keep students in the classroom. Forty percent of teachers and 55% of principals reported that they experienced challenges locating students. Even more teachers (52%) and principals (70%) reported difficulties maintaining student attendance. These concerns were for the most part consistent for educators regardless of instructional modality, although in-person teachers expressed slightly less concern in this area.

Teachers working in districts with high proportions of economically disadvantaged students or high proportions of Black students reported greater challenges with both finding students and maintaining student attendance. These challenges reinforce concerns about potential learning loss, especially for students in Michigan districts that have been traditionally underserved.

Additionally, Michigan House Bill 5912 mandates that two-way interaction between students and their teacher must occur at least twice a month to receive state funding.²¹ In the fall of 2020, 62% of teachers reported that they regularly engaged in two-way interactions with their students. Conversely, 14% of teachers reported engaging with their students only once or a few times since the beginning of the school year. This absence of regular engagement may contribute to the challenges that educators are experiencing with maintaining attendance and exacerbate educators’ concerns about student well-being.

FIGURE 7. Educator Challenges with Parent and Guardian Support of Remote Instruction



Note: Teachers and principals were asked, “To what extent have you experienced challenges with any of the following this school year?”

Educators Found it Difficult to Rely on Family Members and Guardians to Aid in Remote Learning

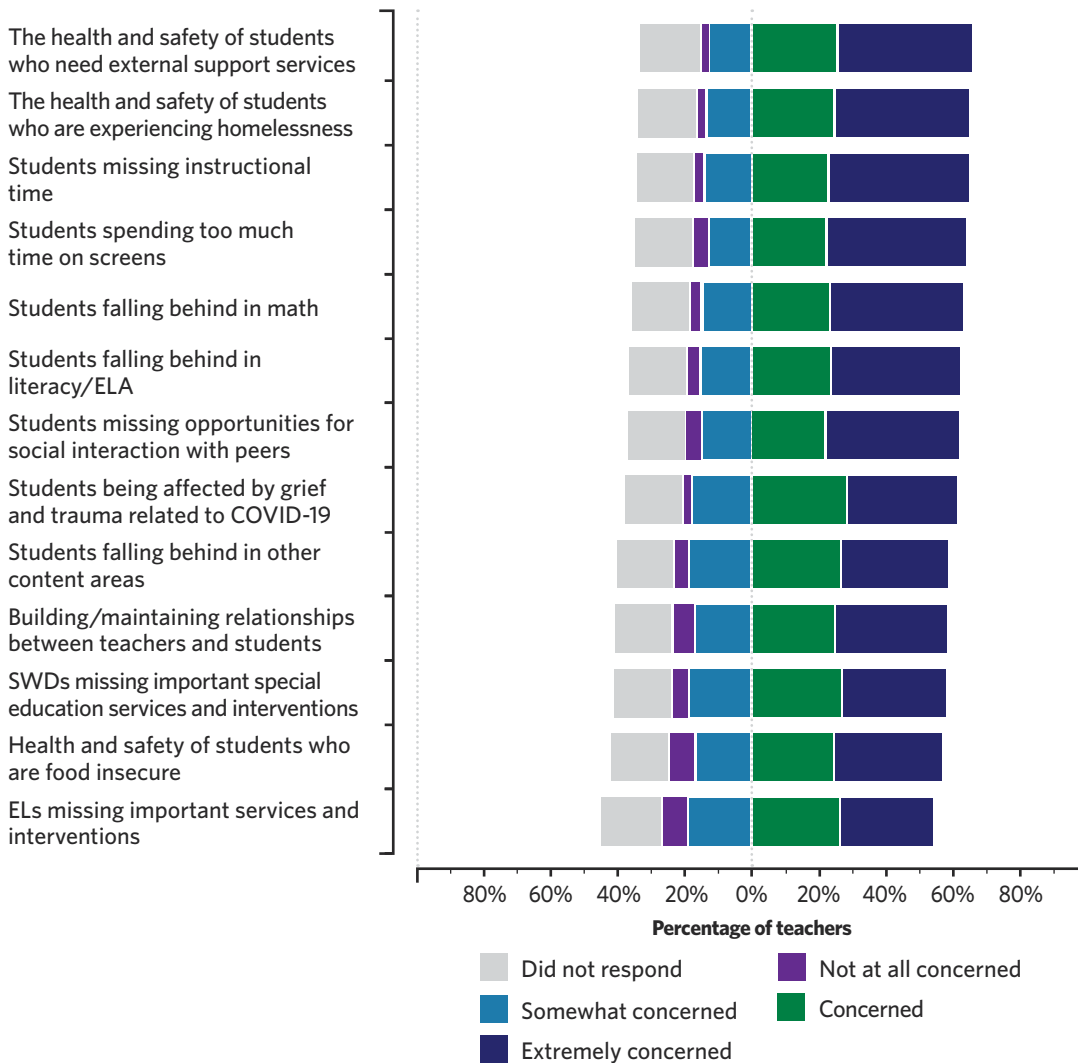
Remote and hybrid instruction uniquely relies on family members and guardians to support learning. However, family members vary in their capacity to assist students with their learning. Figure 7 shows that educators reported several challenges when partnering with family members and guardians during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, 48% of teachers reported that they experienced challenges because family members or guardians were unable to assist students

with remote learning activities due to technology constraints. Teachers also reported challenges given that family members and guardians were unable to assist students due to a lack of content knowledge (52%) or other responsibilities (56%). Over 60% of principals reported similar challenges across all three areas.

Finding 4: Educators Expressed Significant Concerns About Missed Instruction and Student Well-being

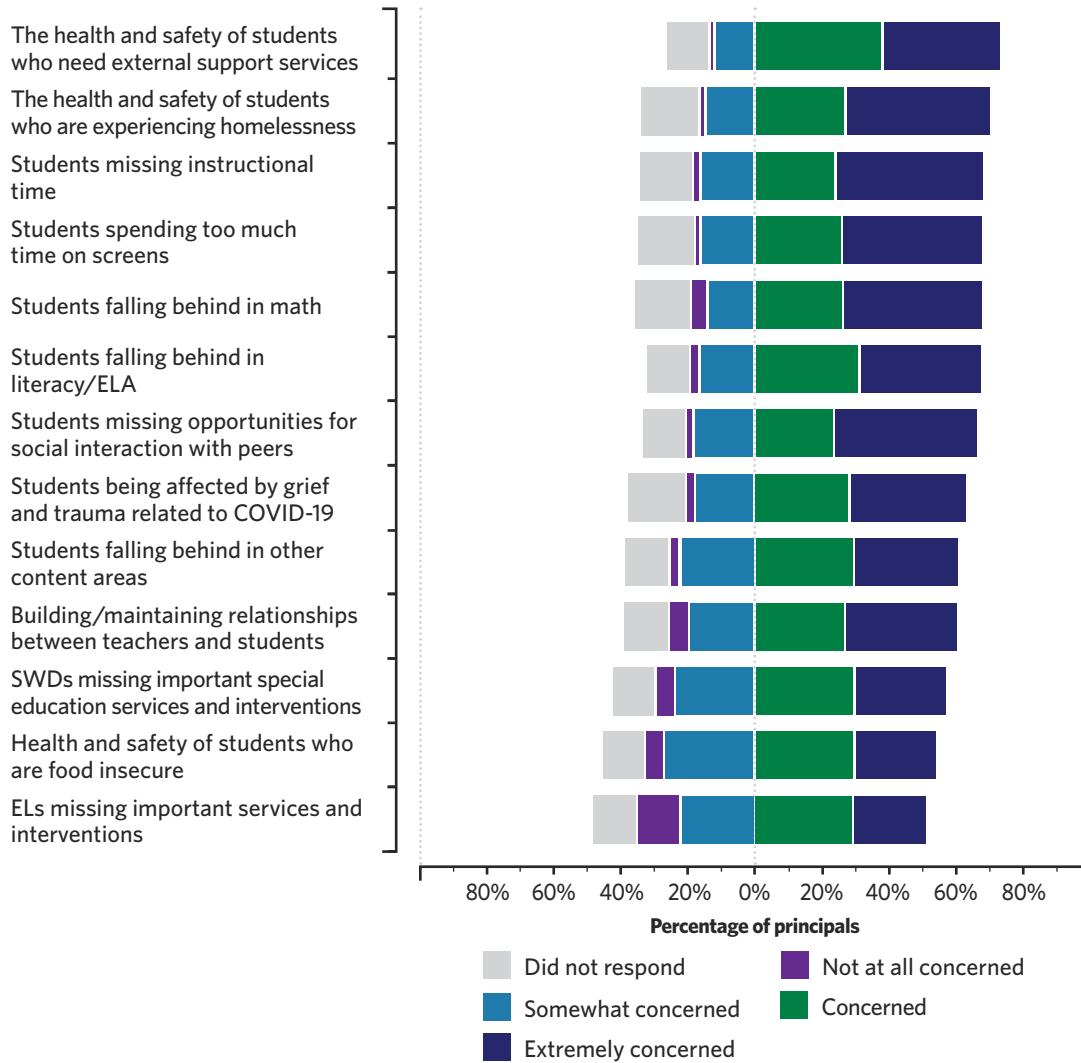
Figures 8.1 and 8.2 show educators’ concerns regarding various implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. Approximately two-thirds of teachers and principals reported they were concerned about students missing instructional time (65% and 71%, respectively) and students falling behind in math (64% and 69%) and ELA (63% and 68%). A slightly smaller share of teachers and principals reported similar concerns that SWDs (59% and 54%) and ELs (55% and 51%) were missing important services and interventions.

FIGURE 8.1. Teachers’ Reported Concerns about the Effect of COVID-19



Note: Teachers were asked, “COVID-19 has changed the way many students receive instruction and engage in schooling. How concerned are you about the following ways in which these changes may impact your students?”

FIGURE 8.2. Principals’ Reported Concerns about the Effect of COVID-19



Note: Principals were asked, “COVID-19 has changed the way many students receive instruction and engage in schooling. How concerned are you about the following ways in which these changes may impact your students?”

Approximately two-thirds of teachers indicated they were also concerned with the health and safety of students who need external support services (67%), as well as students experiencing homelessness (66%) or food insecurity (58%). Additionally, approximately three-quarters of principals reported similar levels of concern for students affected by grief and trauma related to COVID-19 (73%).

Although not shown here, teacher concerns varied slightly by instructional modality, district locale, and district student composition. For example, compared to those providing in-person or hybrid instruction, remote teachers expressed slightly higher levels of concern on most items

except those related to instruction. Teachers in rural districts reported slightly higher levels of concern about students missing instructional time. Finally, teachers in urban districts, districts with high proportions of economically disadvantaged students, and districts with high proportions of minority students reported higher levels of concern about student well-being.

Finding 5: The Pandemic Negatively Affected the Delivery of Special Education Services

Teachers and principals expressed concerns that COVID-19 is negatively affecting the delivery of special education to students across Michigan. Figures 9.1 and 9.2 show that educators believe COVID-19 has negatively affected the classification process for SWDs as well as the overall quality of many critical services. For example, roughly 60% of teachers and 51% of principals indicated that the pandemic had a negative effect on their ability to refer students for evaluation for special education services. Similarly, a large share of responding teachers and principals reported that COVID-19 slowed down the development of the initial Individualized Education Program (IEP; 56% and 55%, respectively) and reevaluation processes (53% and 44%).

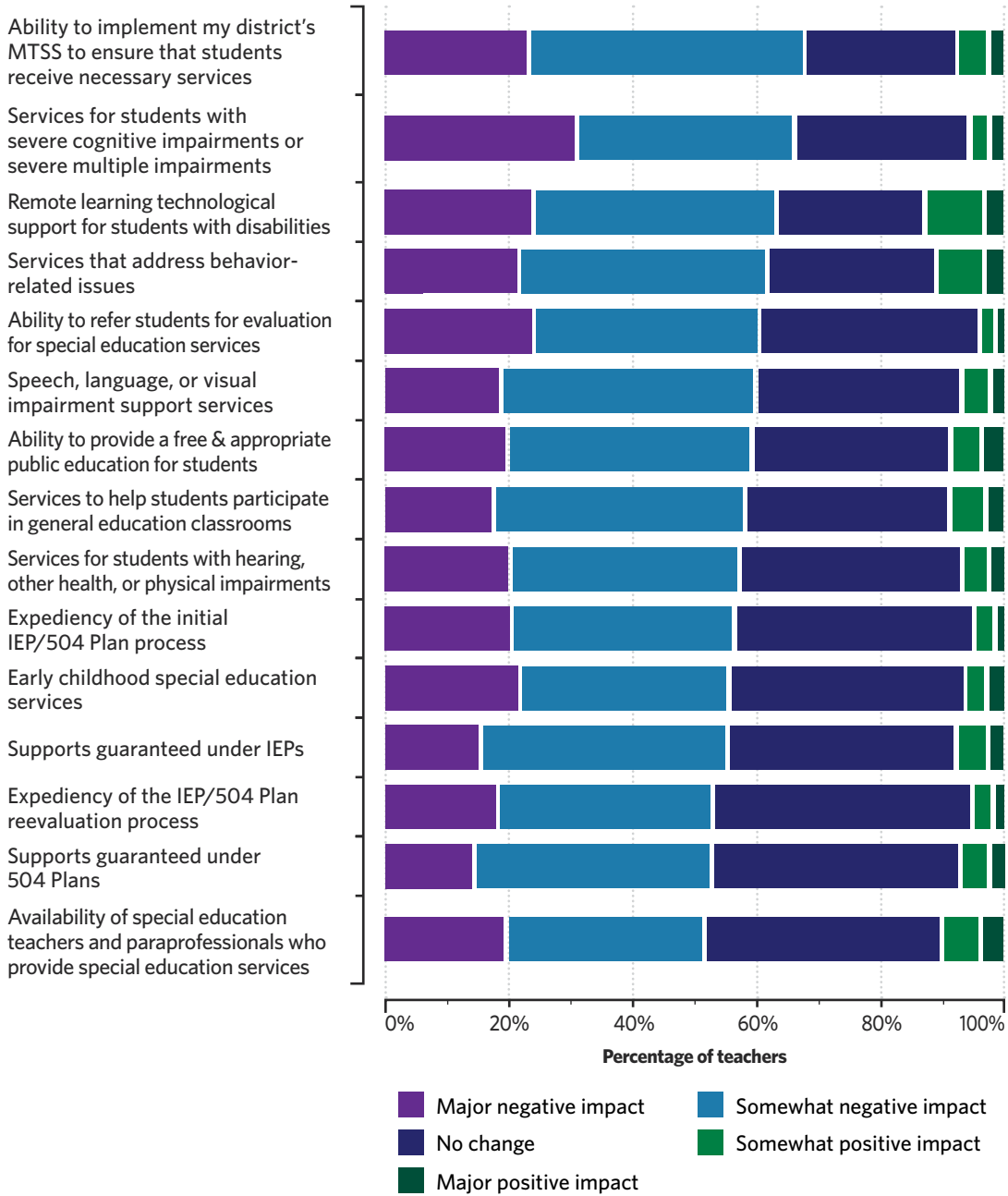
Teachers were worried about providing specific services for students with high incidence disabilities. Sixty-two percent of teachers reported that the quality of services provided to students with behavior-related issues was negatively affected. Similarly, almost 61% of teachers reported an adverse effect on the quality of services for students with speech, language, or visual impairments.

Teachers and principals reported that the quality of services for students with low-incidence disabilities decreased due to COVID-19. Fifty-six percent of teachers and 49% of principals expressed concern about special education services for their youngest learners, and even more educators noted that the pandemic had negatively affected services for students with hearing or other physical impairments (56% and 55%, respectively), and students with severe cognitive impairments (65% and 67%).

Teachers in urban districts or in districts with higher proportions of economically disadvantaged, Black, or Latinx students reported these concerns more frequently. Moreover, teachers providing hybrid or remote instruction were more likely than their in-person colleagues to report that special education procedures and services had been negatively affected by COVID-19.

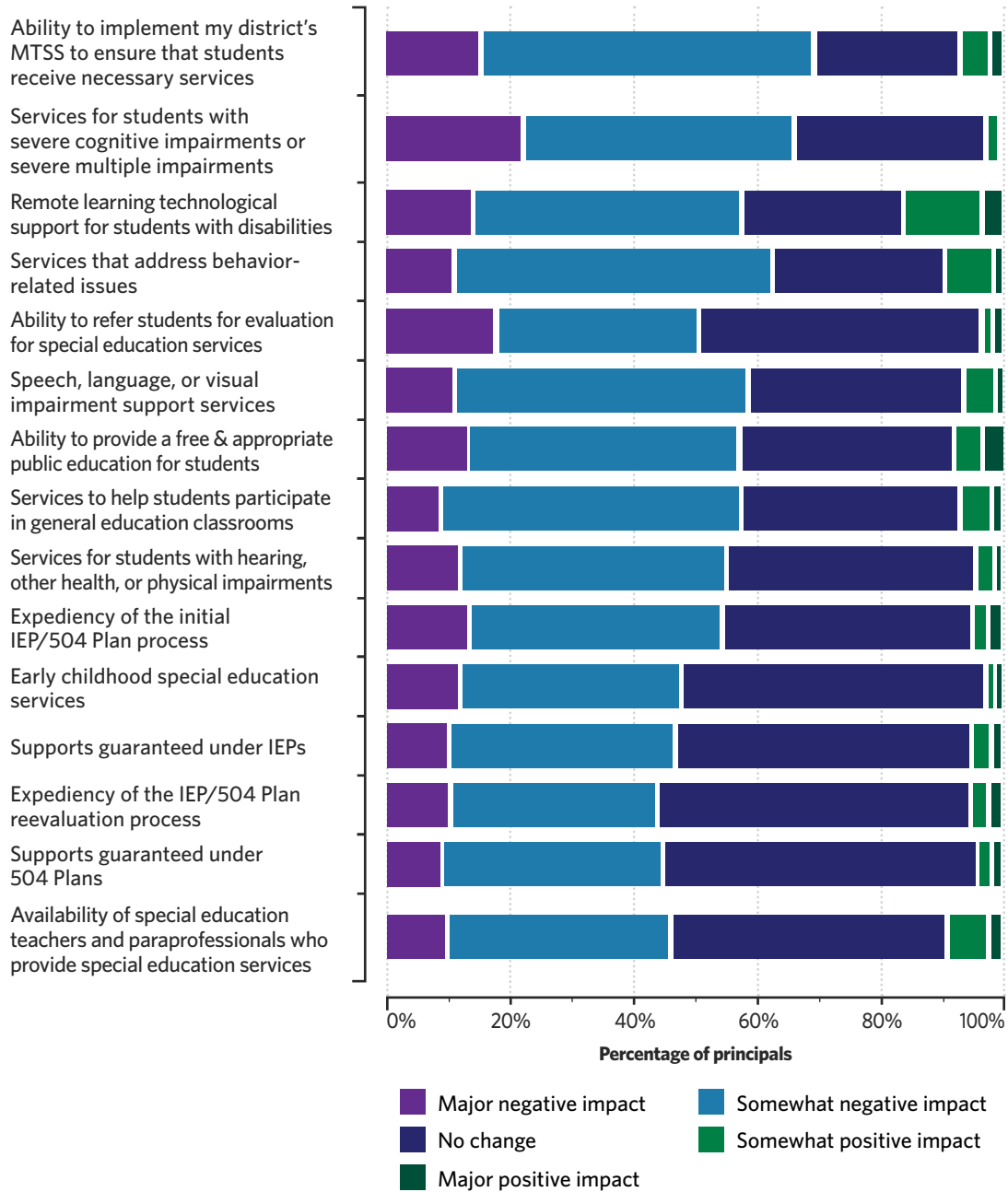
Compared to those providing in-person or hybrid instruction, remote teachers expressed slightly higher levels of concern on most items except those related to instruction.

FIGURE 9.1. Teacher Concerns About the Effect of COVID-19 on Special Education Services



Note: Teachers were asked, "To what extent have COVID-19-related changes this school year impacted the quality of any of the following special education procedures or services?" Across all of the response options, between 13% and 18% of teachers and principals did not respond. The percentages shown above represent shares of responding teachers.

FIGURE 9.2. Principal Concerns About the Effect of COVID-19 on Special Education Services



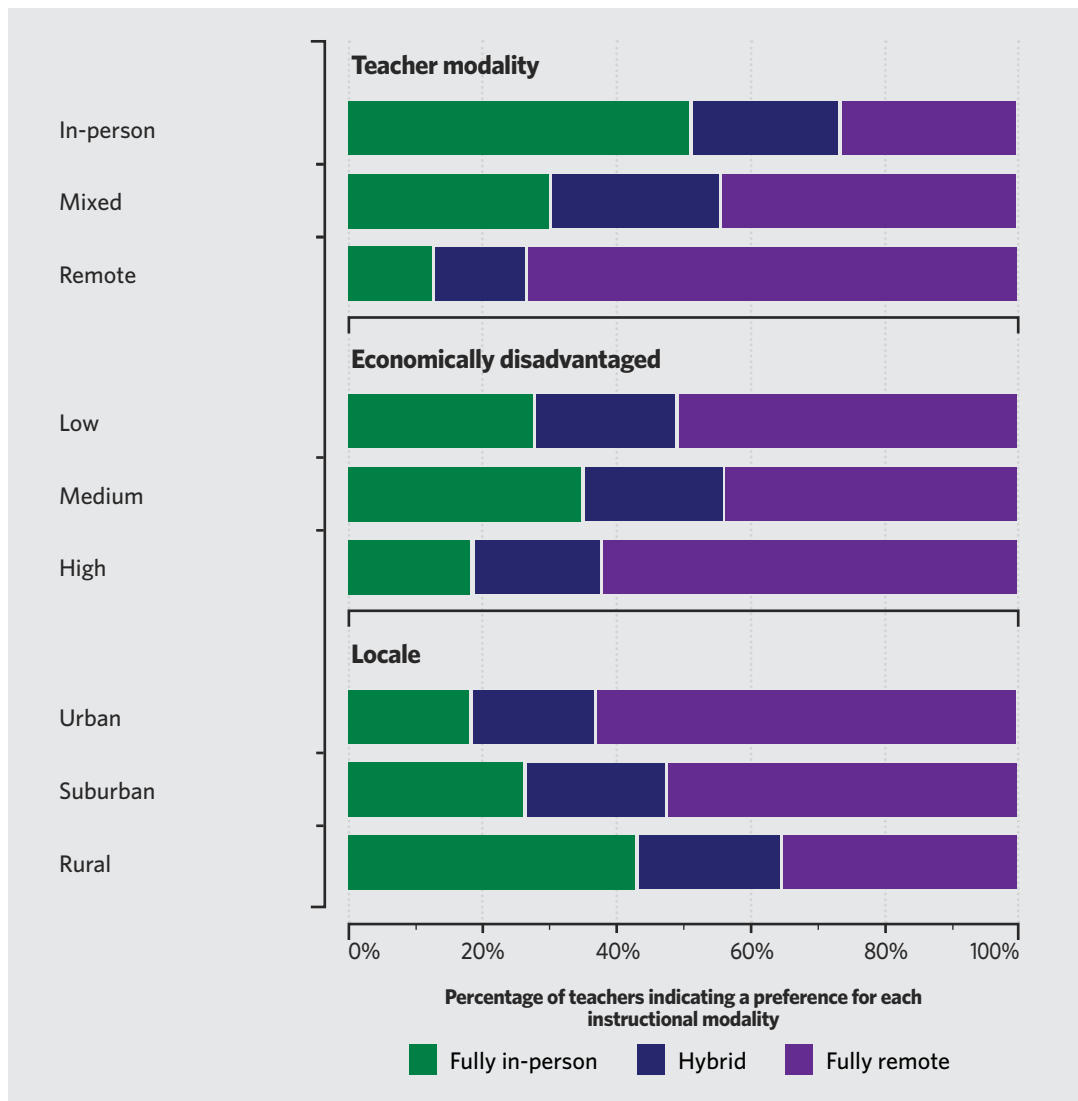
Note: Principals were asked, "To what extent have COVID-19-related changes this school year impacted the quality of any of the following special education procedures or services?" Across all of the response options, between 13% and 18% of teachers and principals did not respond. The percentages shown above represent shares of responding teachers.

Finding 6: COVID-19 Safety Precautions and Student Well-Being Influenced Educators’ Willingness to Return to In-Person Instruction

Teachers Preferred the Instructional Modality to Which They Were Assigned

Teachers and principals were both asked to specify their preferred instructional modality. Overall, 52% of teachers and 41% of principals reported they would rather educate students remotely if given the option. Preferences, however, differed across instructional modality. As seen in Figure 10, half of the teachers who indicated they were providing in-person instruction preferred to continue doing so (51% of item respondents). Conversely, nearly three-quarters of teachers providing remote instruction preferred to work remotely (73%). However, only a quarter of teachers providing hybrid instruction preferred to do so. Rather, 44% of teachers working in hybrid settings expressed a preference for remote instruction, while 30% preferred in-person.

FIGURE 10. Teachers’ Preferences for Instructional Modality



Note: Teachers were asked, “If I had the option to make a decision today, I would choose to teach ____.” Across all response options, approximately 20% of teachers did not respond. The percentages shown above represent shares of responding teachers.

Teachers assigned to districts with a high proportion of economically disadvantaged students (62%), a high proportion of Black (65%) or Latinx students (56%), as well as those in urban districts (63%) were also more likely to prefer teaching in a remote setting.

Teachers, and to a Lesser Extent, Principals, Were Concerned with the Adequacy of COVID-19 Precautions

At the time of the survey, only one-third of teachers agreed that safety precautions at their school or district during the fall of 2020 were sufficient to protect staff and students from COVID-19 exposure. Principals were less concerned; 64% of principals agreed that the safety precautions at their school or district were sufficient. Teachers and principals both agreed that staff were adequately screened for COVID-19 symptoms (42% and 58%, respectively). However, a much smaller share of both groups reported adequate screening for students (24% and 37%) and guests (23% and 43%). Additionally, teachers providing hybrid instruction were consistently more likely to agree with statements about safety precautions at their school or district, while teachers providing remote instruction were the least likely to agree with such statements.

Concerns about the Effect of COVID-19 on Student Learning and Challenges Associated with Remote Learning Influenced Educators' Willingness to Return to In-Person Instruction

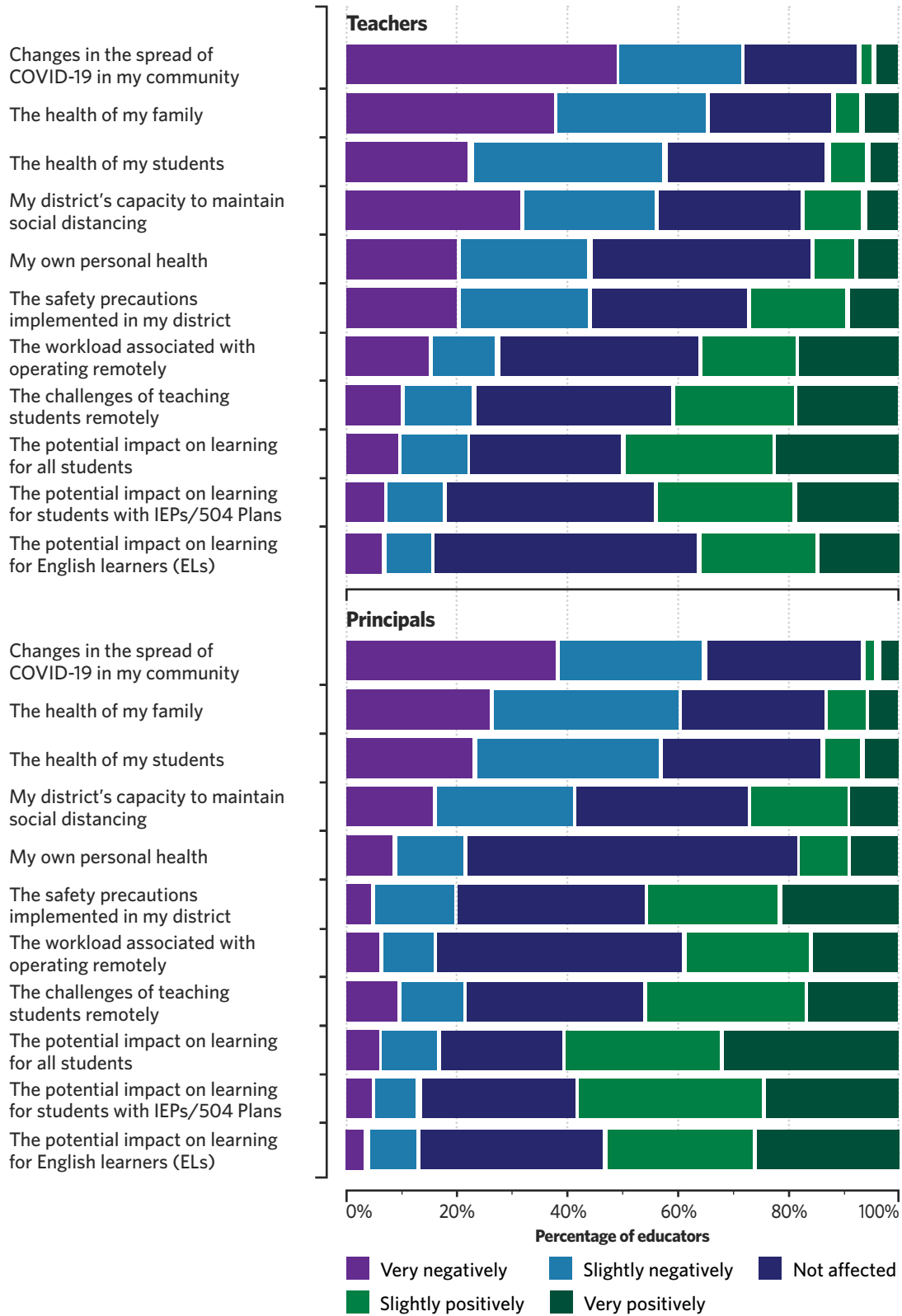
Figure 11 describes factors that influenced teachers' and principals' willingness to return to in-person instruction. Fifty percent of teachers reported that the pandemic's potential effect on overall student learning made them more willing to return to the classroom. Additionally, more than a third of teachers indicated that they felt the same way about the specific effect on learning for SWDs (44%) and ELs (36%). In other words, many Michigan teachers were motivated to return to fully in-person instruction due to concerns about their students' learning, especially SWDs and ELs. Across all three of these factors, a higher share of principals reported that the potential effect of COVID-19 on learning for all students (60%), SWDs (58%), and ELs (53%) positively affected their willingness to return to in-person instruction. Responses were generally consistent across teachers in all three instructional modalities and across district characteristics.

Among the remaining factors addressed in the survey, concerns about remote instruction also positively affected teachers' and principals' willingness to return to the classroom; 41% of teachers and 46% of principals felt that the challenges of teaching students remotely positively influenced their willingness to return to in-person instruction, with 36% of teachers and 39% of principals feeling the same way about the workload associated with operating remotely.

Equally important, many factors made educators less willing to return to in-person instruction. Seventy-two percent of teachers and 65% of principals reported that community spread of COVID-19 was a significant deterrent to returning to in-person instruction in the fall of 2020. Similarly, teachers and principals were both concerned about the effect of providing in-person instruction on their family's health (65% and 51%, respectively), as well as the health of their students (57% for both).

Teachers (56%) and principals (41%) both reported that their district's capacity to maintain social distancing dissuaded them from wanting to return to in-person instruction, and a much higher share of teachers (44%) compared to principals (20%) reported that the safety precautions implemented in their district had negatively affected their willingness to return to the classroom. These results reinforce previous findings that administrators had greater confidence in the safety precautions designed to limit COVID-19 exposure in their school or district.

FIGURE 11. Factors Affecting Educators' Willingness to Return to In-Person Instruction



Note: Educators were asked, "Regardless of your current mode of instruction, to what extent have each of the following affected your willingness to return to in-person instruction, if at all?" For each option shown here, between 20% and 22% of both teachers and principals did not respond. The percentages shown above represent shares of responding teachers and principals, respectively.

Finding 7: Many Michigan Teachers and Principals Considered Leaving the Profession Due to Challenges Presented by COVID-19

For months prior to the start of the fall semester, news outlets across the U.S. discussed concerns about educator burnout and increased teacher shortages due to COVID-19.²² A survey conducted by the Michigan Education Association, the state's largest teachers' union, found that 32% of 15,000 respondents considered leaving public education or retiring earlier than planned due to COVID-19, while 8% had already decided to leave.²³

Results from our fall 2020 survey support these concerns. Over half of teacher and principal respondents reported experiencing challenges when it came to balancing their teaching or leadership responsibilities with other responsibilities (e.g., supervising their own child's remote instruction, helping sick family members, working a second job). Accordingly, 11% of responding teachers reported actively seeking options to leave their school, district, or the profession and approximately another 16% seriously considered leaving but did not actively pursue other options. This finding is consistent across teachers' instructional modality. However, although many teachers reported considering leaving their jobs, principals reported that, on average, only approximately one teacher voluntarily left their school due to COVID-19.

Principals appeared to be less likely to consider exiting as a result of the pandemic; 6% of responding principals actively sought alternative employment opportunities outside of their school, district, and profession and another 5% seriously considered leaving but did not actively pursue other options.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect how students are educated, both for the remainder of the 2020-21 school year and into the 2021-22 school year, it is important for Michigan policymakers to recognize and address the concerns and challenges faced by educators.

- 1. Equip all students with the necessary technology to fully engage in any instructional modality.** In a normal school year, technology and internet access are integral to the learning process and many students rely on schools for these resources. COVID-19 has only highlighted this dependence. Unfortunately, Michigan ranks in the bottom half of states for access to a broadband internet connection or home computer, potentially leaving nearly 420,000 students without access to online instructional materials.²⁴ Since the start of COVID-19, educators have consistently reported that student access to electronic devices and the internet was lacking. Improving student access to technology for schooling will make remote or hybrid instruction more equitable and should be a priority both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2. Provide high-quality professional development and resources that meet educators' needs.** In the fall survey, teachers reported that a considerable proportion of the professional development they received was focused on improving the provision of remote instruction, yet not all of it was useful. Educators wanted additional supports, especially virtual training resources and ready-made lessons that are suitable for a remote setting. Meeting the needs of educators may help improve the quality of remote instruction.

- 3. Support efforts to locate students and promote engagement.** Educators, especially those working in districts with high proportions of Black, Latinx, and economically disadvantaged students, expressed concerns about students' access to instruction, supports and their overall well-being. Educators have focused this year on maintaining and rebuilding student academic performance and socioemotional health, but this depends on knowing where students are and being able to keep them engaged in schoolwork. Bolstering student attendance and engagement should remain a top priority both to monitor and address student well-being and to promote learning.
- 4. Administrators should collaborate with classroom teachers to prioritize the IEP/504 Plan process and services for students with disabilities.** The COVID-19 pandemic has not only affected how teachers deliver instruction, but also how they identify students for special education services and fulfill requirements in IEPs. Compared to traditional in-person instruction, educating students remotely makes it difficult to observe students and identify characteristics that impede learning, as well as provide targeted instruction that ensures a free and appropriate education for students already classified with a disability. Teachers' negative reports about service delivery for special education students suggests the need to improve current special education procedures while school operations remain affected by the pandemic, as well as to consider how special education services and identification will need to be adjusted in the coming school years. Policymakers and educators must continue to advocate for special education services to ensure that all students receive proper and adequate instruction as schools and districts transition back to face-to-face learning.
- 5. Strengthen COVID-19 safety precautions in schools and districts.** There is widespread agreement among parents, educators, and policymakers that all students should return to school buildings, but only when it is safe to do so. As nearly all Michigan districts return to in-person learning, it will be critical to address teachers' expressed lack of confidence in the effectiveness of safety precautions being implemented in their schools or districts. Strengthening guidance and providing additional resources to ensure a safe learning environment will help to alleviate safety concerns and make in-person instruction for all students and educators a more tenable option.

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- 10 The charter school equivalent of a district superintendent is otherwise known as the superintendent/director of a charter school district, educational services provider, charter management organization, or educational management organization that operates a public school academy. We group these in with district superintendents hereafter.
- 11 We derive analytic weights of educators' gender, ethnicity, longevity in their current districts, sector of employment (TPS or charter school), and type of teaching license (elementary or secondary).
- 12 Educators are assigned to subgroups based on the district where they were employed at the end of the 2019-20 academic year, as this was the most recent data available at the time of analysis. As a result, educators who moved to a new district for 2020-2021 may be assigned to subgroups based on their old districts, and educators who were not employed in the state public school system at all in 2019-2020 cannot be assigned to subgroups.

- 13 Aggregate student enrollment and demographic composition data are from the Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), Student Count Report (<https://www.mischooldata.org>). District locale data are from CEPI's Educational Entity Master database (<https://cepi.state.mi.us/eem/>). School district-level ACS data were obtained from IPUMS NHGIS (www.nhgis.org). For PSA districts, we use ACS broadband access data from the TPS district within the boundaries of which the PSA is physically located. On average, in Michigan school districts, approximately three-quarters of households have broadband internet subscriptions.
- 14 "Small" districts enroll no more than 492 students, "medium" districts educate between 493 and 1,344 students, and "large" districts have at least 1,345 students. Black student enrollment for districts in the "low" grouping is at most 1.16%, between 1.2% and 11.4% for "medium" districts, and at least 11.4% for "high" districts. Similarly, Latinx student enrollment for districts in the "low" grouping is at most 2.9%, between 2.9% and 6.5% for "medium" districts, and at least 6.5% for "high" districts. Finally, economically disadvantaged student enrollment for districts in the "low" grouping is at most 51.7%, between 51.7% and 71.6% for "medium" districts, and at least 71.6% for "high" districts. The share of households with broadband internet access in the "low" grouping is at most 71.8%, between 71.8% and 80.6% for "medium" districts, and at least 80.6% for "high" districts. We only include subgroup analyses for teachers because the sample sizes for many of the principal subgroups were not sufficiently large to make meaningful comparisons. School-level subgroups are assigned based on the grade level(s) of students with whom a teacher works (elementary, middle, and/or high school grades); because some teachers have students in multiple grade ranges, these categories are not mutually exclusive.
- 15 Teachers are classified as either "in-person" or "remote" if they are delivering all instruction in one of those two formats and classified as "hybrid" if they are providing both in-person and remote instruction. For a more thorough discussion of Michigan's districts and their instructional modality, we refer readers to "Instructional Delivery Under Michigan District's Extended COVID-19 Learning Plans," which can be found online at <https://epicedpolicy.org/ecol-reports/>.
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Education Policy Innovation Collaborative

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
236 Erickson Hall | 620 Farm Lane
East Lansing, MI 48824

(517) 884-0377
EPICedpolicy@msu.edu
www.EPICedpolicy.org