

# TEACH + PLUS



## LESSONS FROM THE REMOTE CLASSROOM: RESULTS OF THE TEACH PLUS MASSACHUSETTS COVID-19 TEACHER ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

### INTRODUCTION

Massachusetts public schools were initially closed on March 15, 2020 through May 4 before Governor Baker ordered them closed for the remainder of the school year on April 21 to mitigate the risk of community spread of COVID-19. Commissioner Jeff Riley and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) put forward [initial remote learning guidance](#) on March 26 and followed with [updated guidance for remote learning](#) on April 24.

This is an unprecedented situation for our public education system, which required educators to make immediate and profound changes to their normal instructional practices and how they connect with students and families.

The purpose of the survey was to provide the Commissioner, Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and other education stakeholders with direct feedback from educators in our network about how things are going in our current environment and what needs to be put in place as we move forward through the summer and into the new school year. We hope that these results are helpful to the Commissioner and local district leaders in developing plans for moving our public education system forward.

### METHODOLOGY

Teach Plus Massachusetts polled its network of teachers regarding their experience with remote learning and student and family engagement during the COVID-19 school closures between May 4-22, 2020. The survey was open to all Massachusetts teachers in district and charter schools. We received 1,398 responses from educators from 167 school districts and charter schools from across Massachusetts.<sup>1</sup> The majority of teachers work in Title I Schools.<sup>2</sup> All grade levels Pre-K through 12 and subject areas were well represented by respondents.<sup>3</sup> Our

Teach Plus Policy Fellows and staff reviewed and analyzed all individual responses in developing these findings and recommendations.

## SURVEY FINDINGS

### A. Feedback on Initial and Updated Guidance and Expectations from Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Districts

Based on the educator responses to our questions, state and local leaders can take some satisfaction in knowing that a significant majority of teachers expressed appreciation and support for the guidance provided by DESE and their school district and school leadership.

#### Finding #1:

*Teachers generally agree with the initial decisions DESE made regarding its guidance for remote learning and MCAS Competency Determination alternative pathway. There is, however, a division in opinion among teachers regarding how much to prioritize social emotional well-being and how much to emphasize academic learning.*

Eighty-three percent of teachers believe DESE took the right approach in its guidance on March 26 to focus on reinforcing standards already taught this school year “instead of teaching new material” and to focus on students' safety and well-being (see Figure 1).

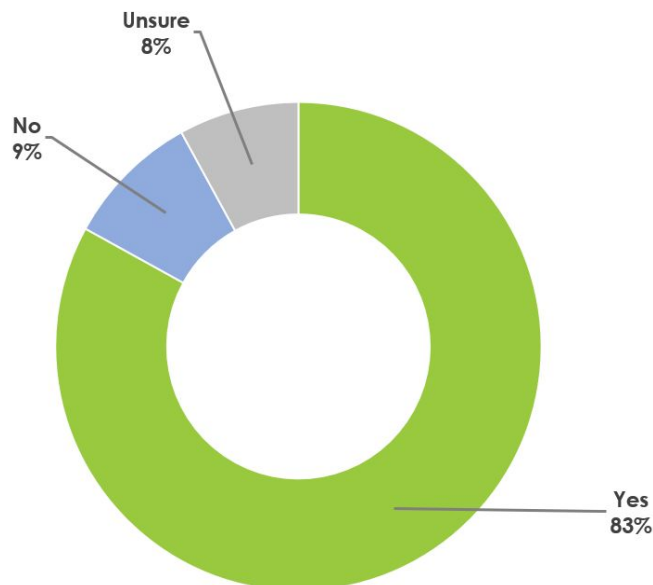
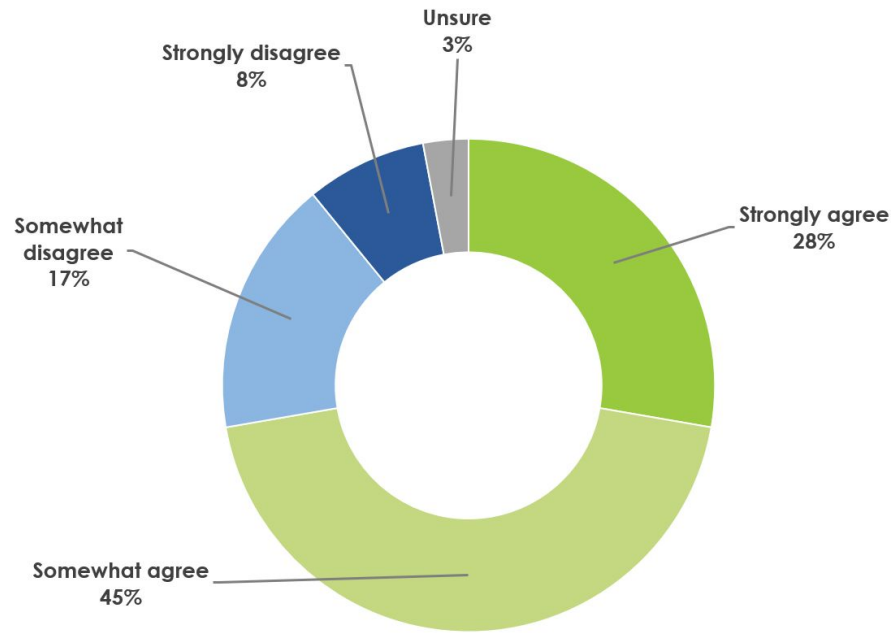


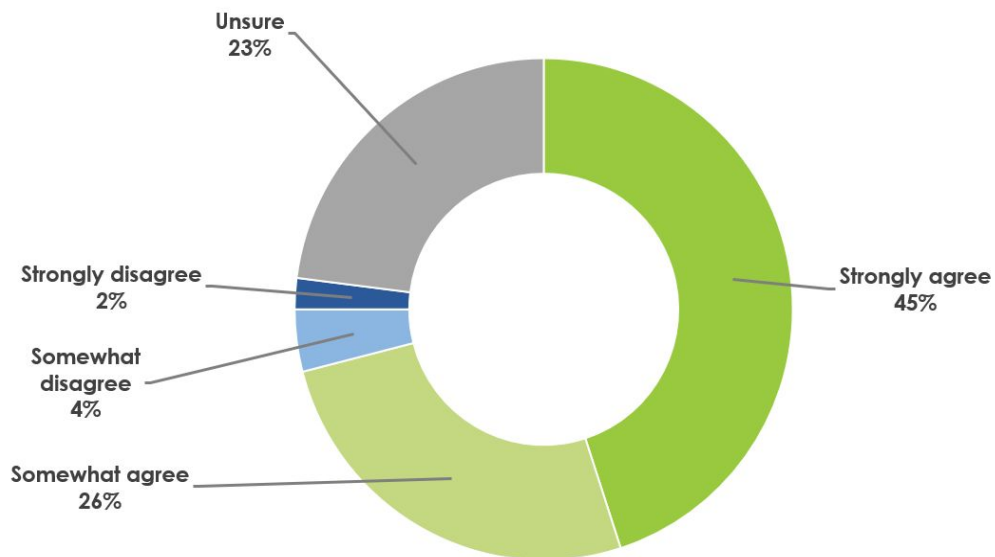
Figure 1

Seventy-three percent of teachers somewhat (45 percent) or strongly agree (28 percent) with DESE’s updated guidance issued on April 24 asking teachers to focus on “critical prerequisites for student success.” Twenty-five percent of teachers somewhat (17 percent) or strongly disagree (8 percent) (see Figure 2).



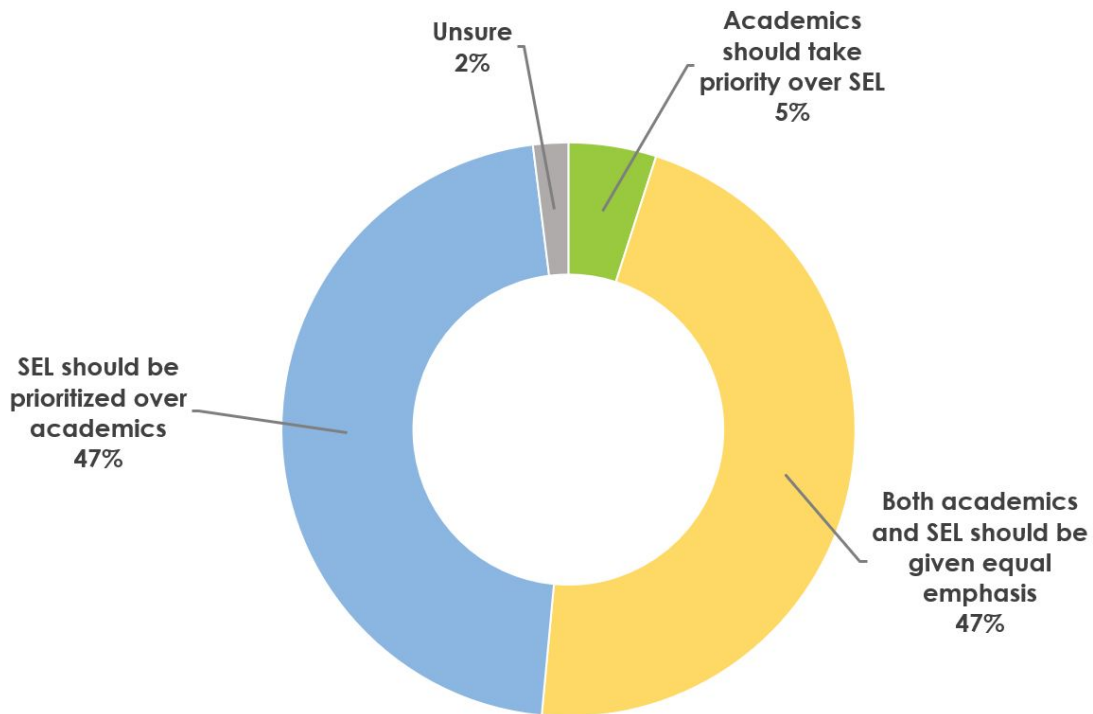
**Figure 2**

Seventy-one percent of educators somewhat or strongly agree with the decision to allow an alternative path for students to earn their competency determination in this crisis, 6 percent disagreed and 23 percent were unsure. (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3**

Interestingly, there is almost an even split in opinion regarding the balance of priorities between advancing academic learning (AL) and social emotional learning (SEL). Forty-seven percent of educators believe SEL should be prioritized but 47 percent believe both SEL and AL should be given equal emphasis while 5 percent believe AL should be prioritized. (see Figure 4).

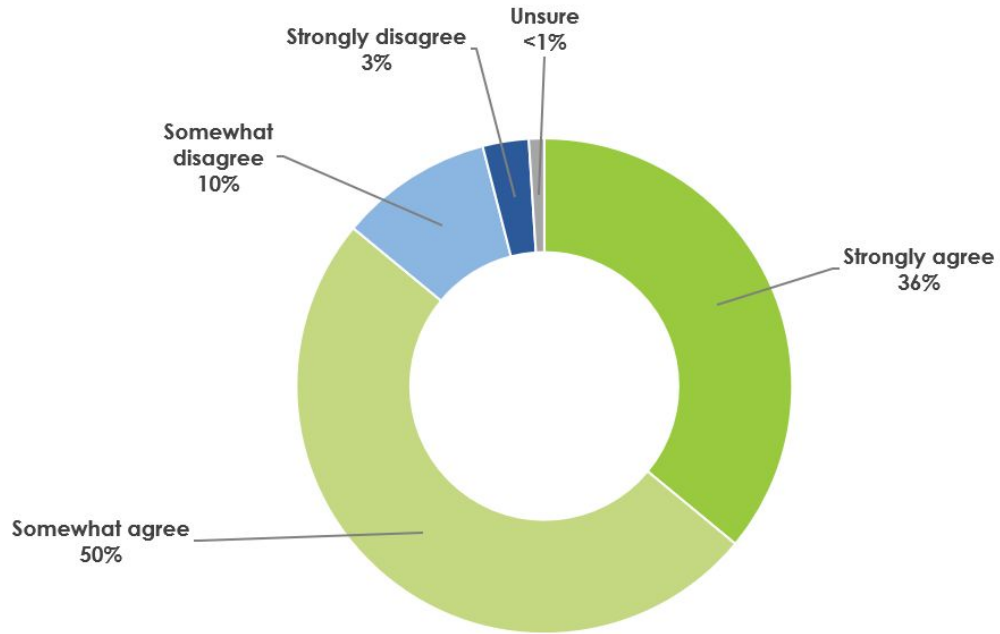


**Figure 4**

Many educators commented that they appreciate DESE’s new guidance to focus on power standards but wish this had been set forth earlier. It has proven to be challenging to move from simply monitoring student well-being and reviewing past material to changing the expectations to moving ahead with new material.

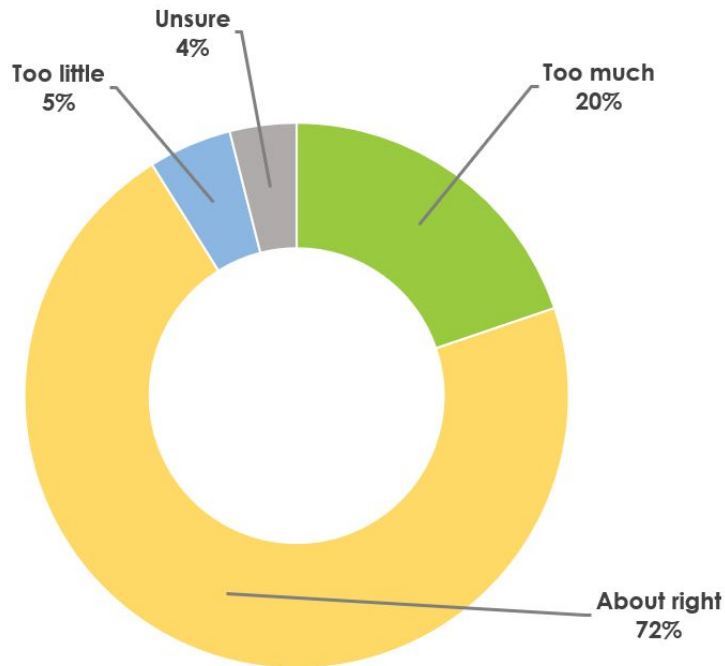
**Finding #2:**

*Teachers overwhelmingly agree that they understand what is expected of them and that their district and school leaders expectations of them are “about right.” Just over half of teachers believe they have been provided with the necessary tools and resources to meet these expectations.*



**Figure 5**

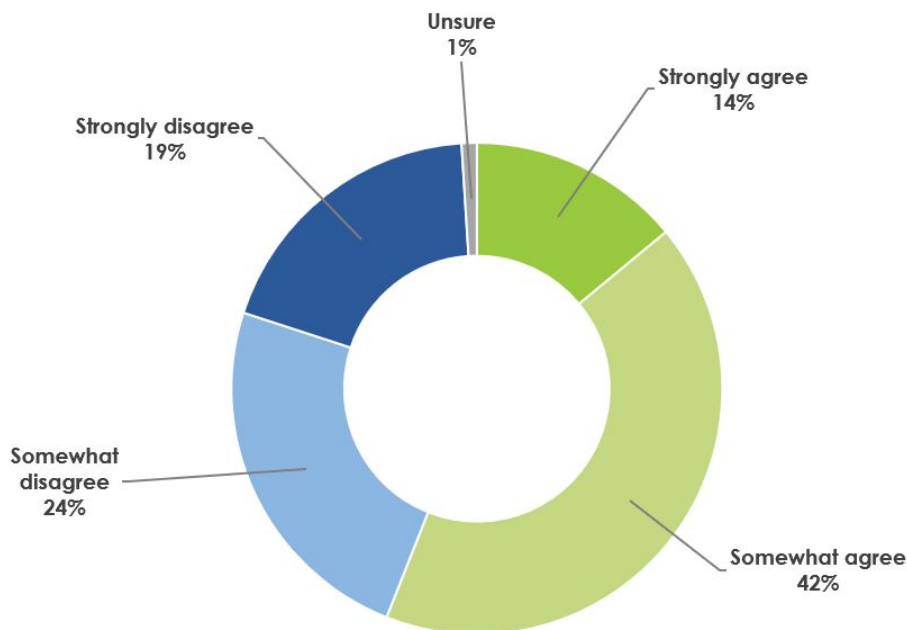
At the district and school level, 86 percent somewhat (50 percent) or strongly (36 percent) agree that they understood what was expected of them related to work duties. (see Figure 5).



**Figure 6**

Seventy-two percent responded that they felt their school and district's expectations of them “were about right” while 5 percent felt they were too little and 20 percent felt they were “too much.” (see Figure 6).

While educators may feel that the initial guidance and expectations set out for them during the remainder of the school year were appropriate, only a slight majority feel that they have the tools and resources necessary to do the job while schools are closed.



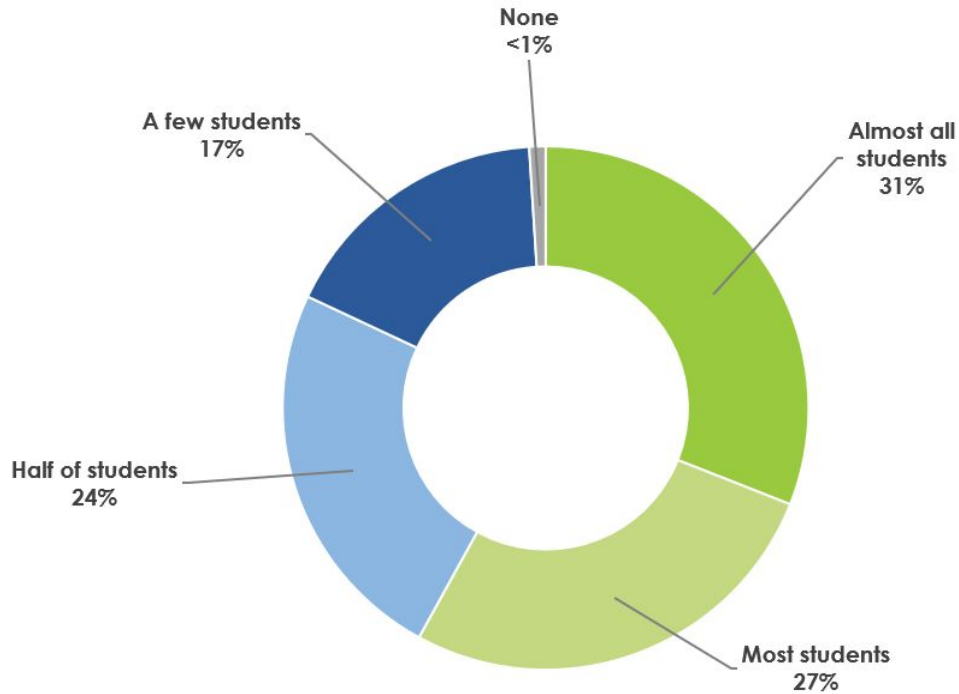
**Figure 7**

Fifty-six percent somewhat (42 percent) or strongly (14 percent) agreed that they had the tools and resources they needed while 43 percent somewhat (24 percent) or strongly (19 percent) disagreed. Many educators commented that they haven’t had access to their classrooms or teaching materials since the beginning of the school closure and have felt they would have been helpful in preparing lessons for their students. (see Figure 7).

## **B. Student and Family Engagement**

### **Finding #3:**

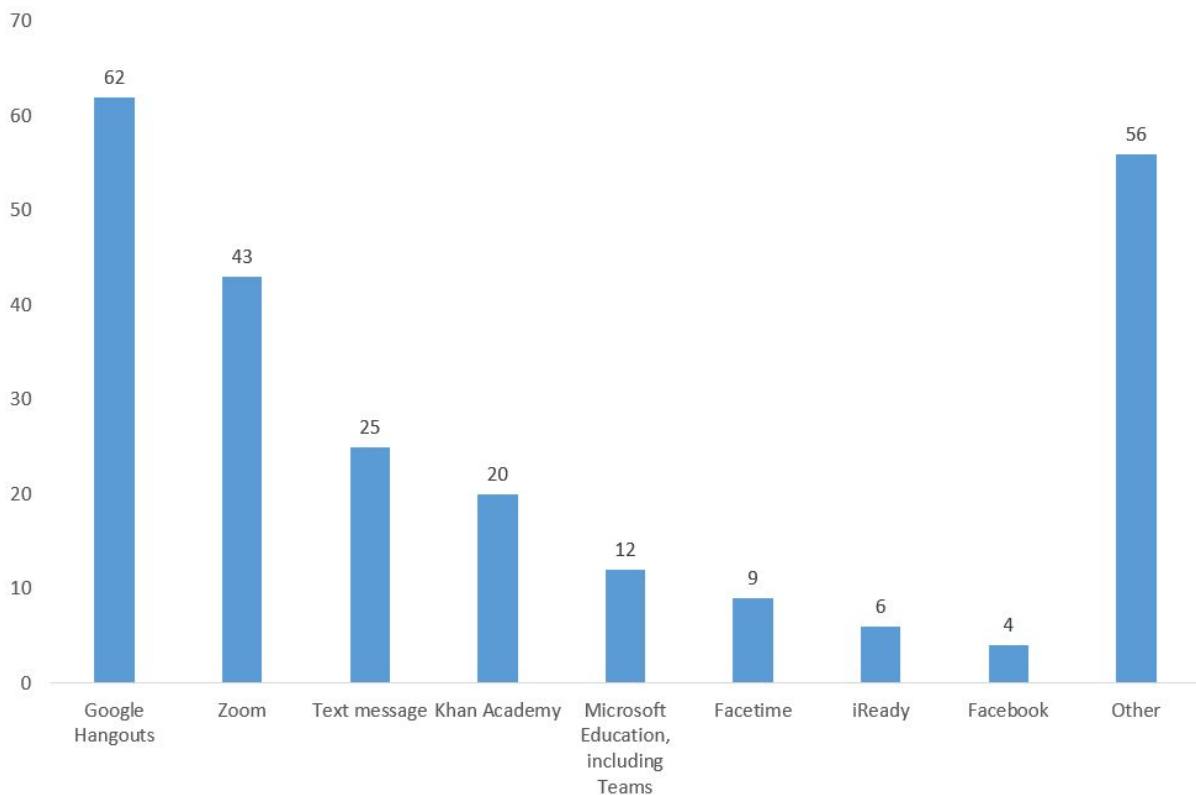
*The majority of teachers report being able to communicate with more than half of their students and families but a significant number of educators report being unable to connect due to a number of challenges, including both technology and non-technology related issues.*



**Figure 8**

Eighty-two percent of teachers report that they have communicated with half (24 percent), most (27 percent) or almost all (31 percent) students in the past week. Seventeen percent report only reaching a few students and less than 1 percent report being unable to reach any students. (see Figure 8).

Teachers are successfully using a variety of online platforms and technology to communicate with students and families. In some cases they report developing stronger student and family relationships as a result of regularly scheduled check-ins during this process. (see Figure 9).



**Figure 9**

Most teachers reference using Google Hangouts (62 percent), Zoom (43 percent), text messaging (25 percent), Khan Academy (20 percent), Microsoft Education, including Teams (12 percent), Facetime (9 percent), Facebook (4 percent). Fifty-six percent report using an assortment of other methods including standard text, email, phone calls, Class DOJO, WhatsApp and more.

When we asked teachers about effective family communication strategies and approaches, they offered a variety of examples and insights. <sup>4</sup>

*"At our school we divide up families among my grade level team with the expectation that we each contact the families on our list once a week. Lots of flexibility on how to connect - email, chat, text, etc. Asking families what kind of check-in they want and honoring that."*

*"Texting or calling and starting with, 'How are you doing?' and 'What do you need?' I also include 'How can I help?' and instead of the 'You should be on Zoom daily' party line, I listen and do what the parent is asking if possible."*



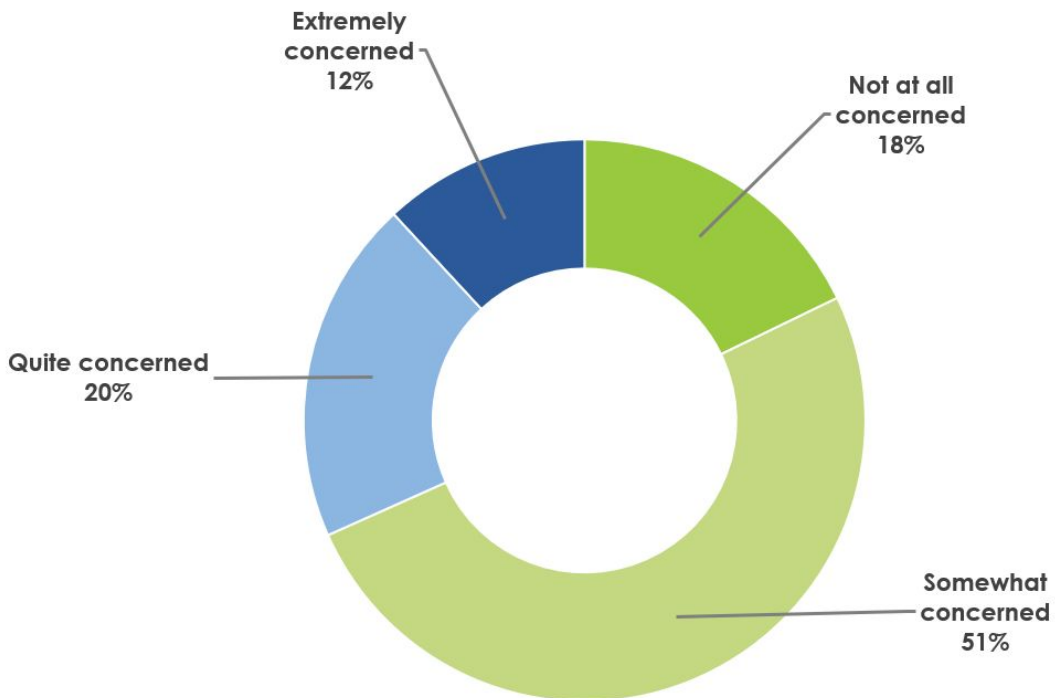
*"Weekly Sunday night email from all team teachers- one place, all teachers, update for week, consistency."*

Unfortunately, some teachers have yet to find an effective way to connect despite attempting multiple times through a variety of methods. They report challenges such as not having access to students' and families' current phone number and email addresses. Differences in language have also hindered successful communication with families without access to district translation services. In addition, the many different approaches and technologies available for connecting with different families is stressful for some teachers. Many teachers fear that a large number of students were completely checked out after school closures.

### **C. Educators are concerns about their students and their own personal Social Emotional well-being**

#### **Finding #4:**

*An overwhelming majority of teachers report the current remote learning situation is taking a toll on their own social and emotional well being.*



**Figure 10**

While educator responses to guidance and direction from DESE, district and school leaders are generally positive and feel expectations are “about right,” the nature of remote learning is impacting teachers in a negative manner. When asked “to what extent are you concerned about your social and emotional well-being?” only 18 percent are not concerned while 83 percent are somewhat concerned (51 percent), quite concerned (20 percent) or extremely concerned (12 percent). (see Figure 10).

*“Remote learning is much more intense than traditional teaching, there is no downtime. The boundary lines between work and home have been blurred. People now have expectations for 24/7 connectivity and response.”*

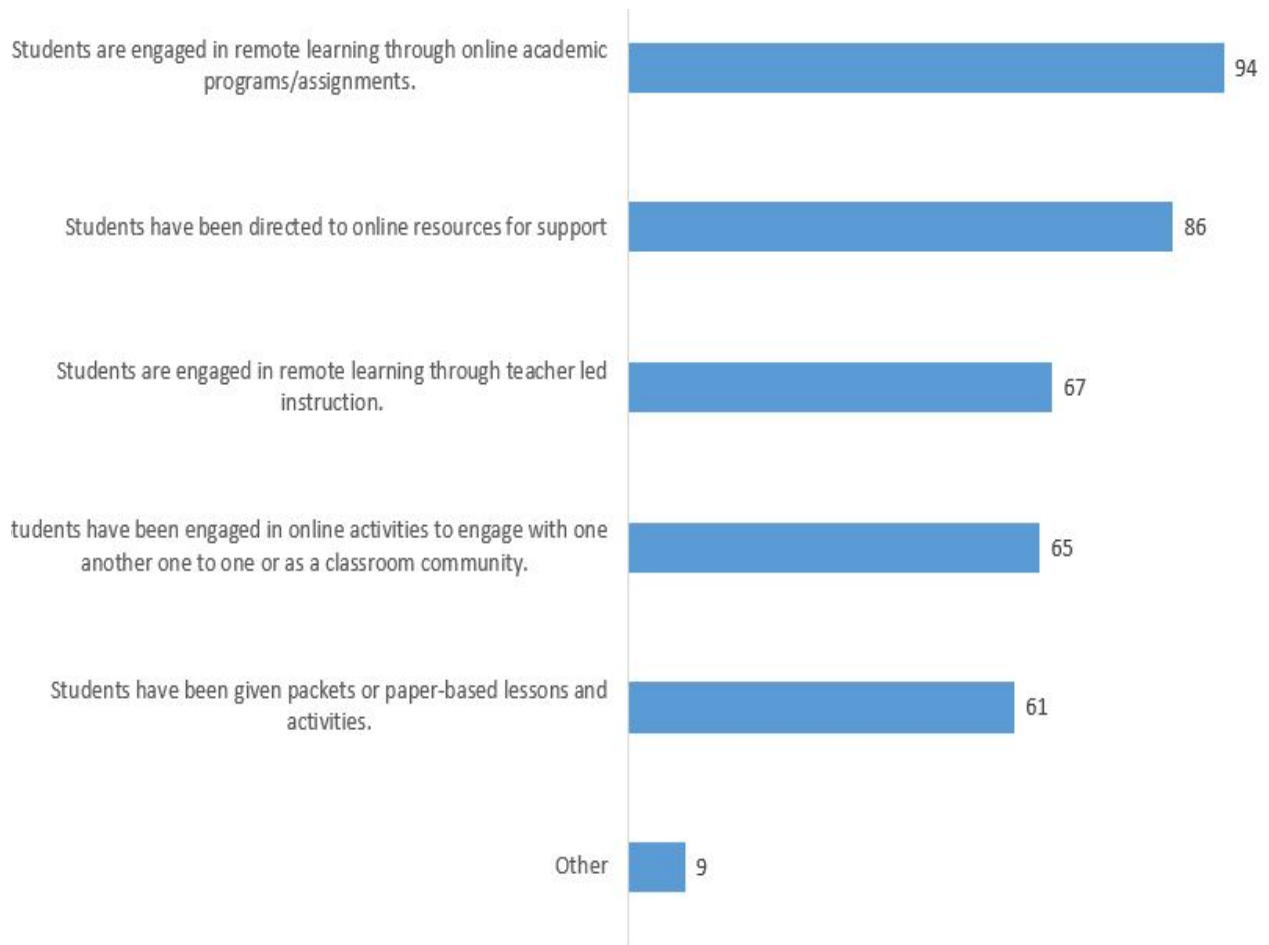
In addition to the concern for their students and students’ families, they have the added burden of managing the needs of their own families, teaching their own children, managing their own health, etc. Teachers are feeling overwhelmed balancing their home life with the task of teaching virtually while unable to control other factors such as their students’ home environment, access to technology, family support. Teachers feel responsible for teaching and reaching all of their students, but are finding it challenging to do this remotely.

## D. Learning and Instruction

### Finding # 5

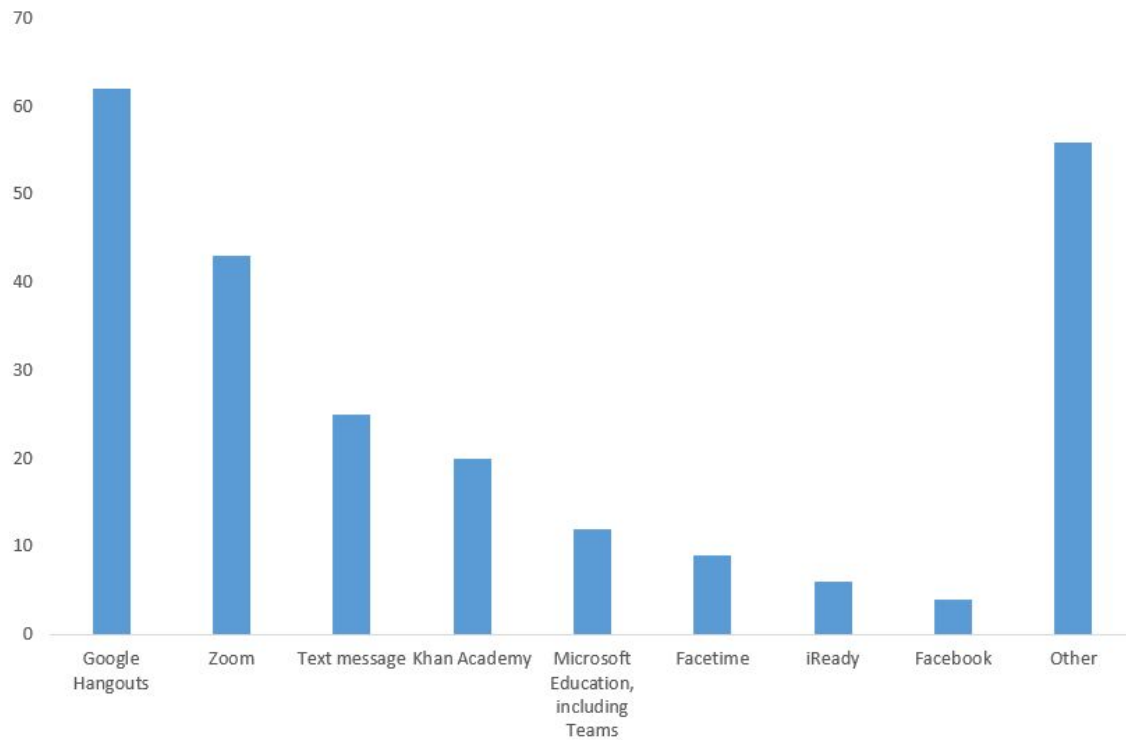
*Teachers are using a variety of instructional strategies, tools, and technology, however, only a slight majority of teachers believe that they are able to meaningfully engage students through remote learning and cited many barriers to effectively reaching vulnerable populations.*

Educators have been using a variety of strategies, methods, online education platforms, and resources to deliver instruction and report doing “whatever it takes” to connect and engage with students. Ninety-three percent are using online academic programs and assignments. Eighty-six percent are directing students to online resources. Sixty-eight percent report engaging in teacher-led remote instruction and 66 percent report engaging students as a community or in creating opportunities to connect one to one. Sixty-one percent have used packets or paper-based lessons. (See Figure 11)



**Figure 11**

Teachers are using a variety of technology platforms to reach and teach students. Most mention the importance of communication with students through platforms like school email or Google classroom.



**Figure 12**

In addition to the platforms and apps identified in Figure 12, they also recommended the following in their open responses.

- Screencastify
- Class Dojo
- Flip Grid
- Calendly.com
- Khan Academy
- Edpuzzle
- Book Creator
- Lexia
- Nearpod
- NewsEla
- Youtube
- Readworks
- Schoology
- BrainPop
- Kahoot
- PBS learning media
- TED Talks
- Scholastic Science World
- iCivics
- Storyworks
- Zearn
- SeeSaw
- Padlet
- National Geographic
- Microsoft Teams
- Epic
- Remind

Many are offering online informal meet-ups, zoom calls, virtual talent shows and field trips, pre-recorded lessons, and 1-to-1 support. Teachers also reported using pre-recorded lessons, guest speakers, teacher-created videos, student blogs, digital art portfolios, project-based learning, and engaging parents more in the learning process.

Many teachers offered ideas for specific lessons and engagement strategies in their new remote-learning environment which were often a twist on traditional methods but supported by new technology.<sup>5</sup>

*“The most important thing is making the work we are doing right now meaningful. I teach seventh-grade social studies (part of the ancient civ sequence), but right now we are focusing on challenges that pandemics present to societies and how they can be solved. We are then working to write letters to elected officials advocating for some kind of change. I also have students engaged in journaling. These are the activities that have engaged students most, and I haven't had too much trouble getting students to buy in because it is relevant to them.”*

*“I have been using online platforms that are adaptive and/or provide immediate feedback such as code.org, iReady, Reflex Math, coupled with teacher check in and discussion of progress, strengths, and needs. Google Hangout Meets for discussing work and doing social/emotional check-ins. Also good for getting feedback from students on assignments and processes. Videos, both by teachers or selected by teachers.”*

*“Students have also been encouraged to engage in other forms of learning through outdoor play and chores at home.”*

Teachers are utilizing online platforms to reinforce content learning standards. In order to support and scaffold instruction, teachers suggest providing students and families with simple, clear instructions and schedules with all the necessary information upfront to participate in learning. Mix classroom sessions with small group instruction (i.e. Zoom breakout rooms). Many are also utilizing less traditional formats for teacher-led instruction including teacher-created videos for asynchronous learning, holding office hours and one-on-one check-ins with students and families. Some teachers are directing students to resources on social media and class websites. Others mentioned sending out weekly checklists, newsletters, and calendars for students and their families. Many teachers use video-conferencing platforms as spaces for students to socialize with one another.<sup>6</sup>

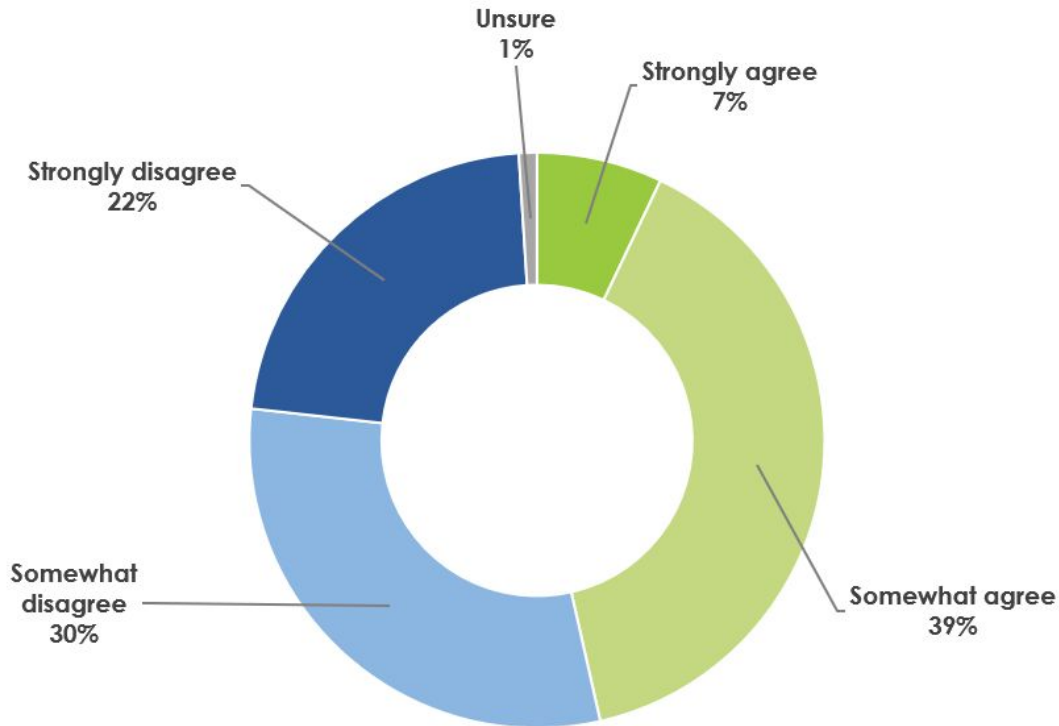
*“I think the most valuable resource that I have used so far is the screencastify piece of Google classroom. I am able to create slideshows with the material that I need to present to my students and add my voice over them. It is a little bit of a one-sided lesson as there isn't any interaction but it gives my students the opportunity to have the material explained to them. This is especially helpful for*

*my ELL students who tend to struggle with academic language. We have also used Google meet on a regular basis to interact with our students. This is where we provide them the opportunity to ask questions and get clarification on the assignments that we present to them. I also find that it is helpful to share the workload with other Teachers that teach that subject. We have begun to each take a section and create the materials necessary to post for students. This is especially helpful for teachers who are teaching more than one subject.”*

*“When I meet with small groups for math, I often make a slideshow with 2-3 slides for each student, and I put students' names on their slides. That way, they can each work on a problem on their own slide and I can see what progress they are making in real time.”*

*“Google Classroom is amazing for students of any age to submit assignments, communicate with the teacher, and access the curriculum. Zoom is great for small group instruction with students going in and out of the meeting. Facebook has been wonderful to join teachers around the country to find ideas and conquer the struggles we are going through.”*

Not all teachers are having success with technology and remote learning. With regard to meaningful student engagement, only a slight majority of 52 percent of educators somewhat (30 percent) or strongly (22 percent) disagree with the statement “I am able to meaningfully engage my students in learning activities while school buildings are closed.” Forty-six percent somewhat (39 percent) or strongly (7 percent) agree they are able to meaningfully engage students. (see Figure 13).



**Figure 13**

*“I don't find remote learning to be effective. I work with students who come from low-income families and have emotional and behavioral disabilities. This is not at all good or effective for them.”*

*“I still don't really know what the hell I'm doing in terms of technology. I just pray that it works.”*

*“I feel as though I cannot connect or instruct all my children equitably. Not all my children have access to technology or the internet.”*

**Finding #6:**

***Teachers also report a number of challenges and barriers to learning that their students are experiencing beyond just concerns about technology.***

Approximately 70 percent of educators report that their students lack access to reliable high speed internet (72 percent), lack access to appropriate technology and devices (69 percent), have parents or guardians who are first responders or other frontline workers (72 percent ) or have been laid off from work (65 percent ). Roughly more than 50 percent report that their

students are experiencing depression (56 percent), lack food and/or are experiencing hunger (51 percent) or have a family member who has died or become ill (48 percent ). (see Figure 14).

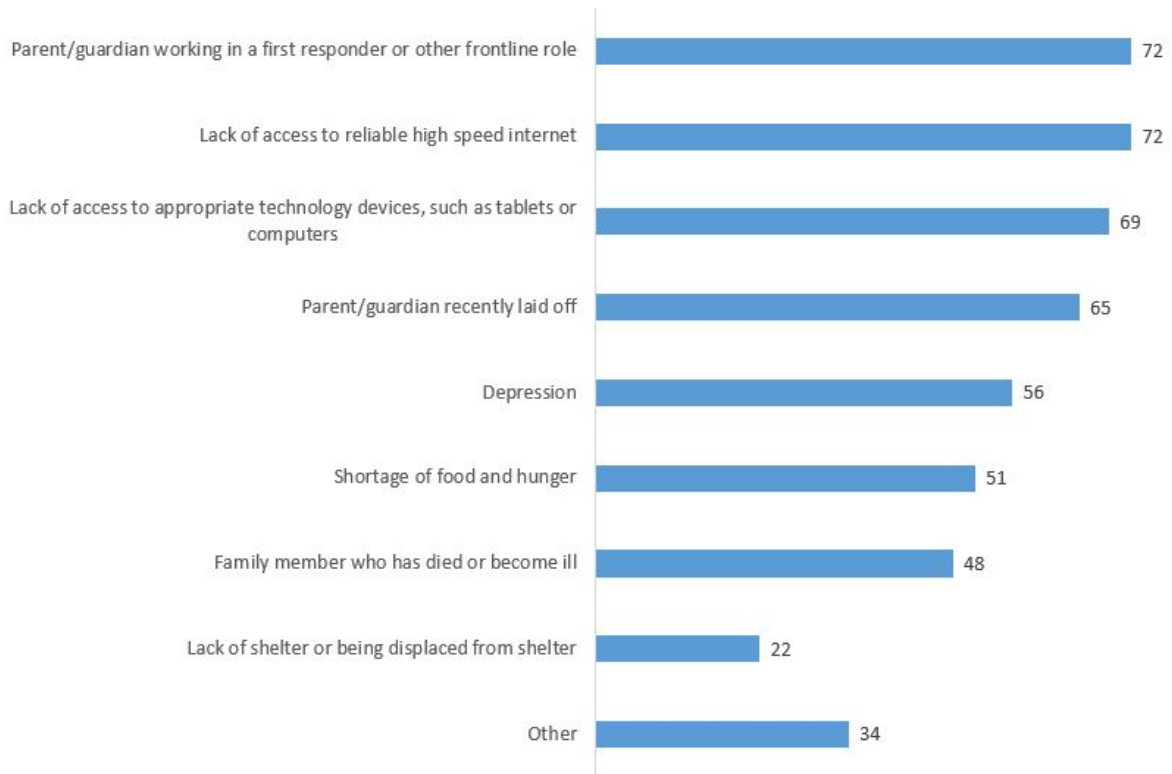


Figure 14

A number of teachers report having difficulty obtaining accurate phone numbers and email addresses for their students families. In addition, Language barriers, students working longer hours and taking on other family responsibilities, lack of a regular schedule, home environments that are not conducive to learning, inconsistent expectations and lack of sleep are all having a negative impact.

*"Anxiety, lack of organizational skills necessary to be successful in an online environment. They did not sign up for this, they have not been taught how to manage online learning."*

*"Taking care of younger siblings or sick family members while their parents work leaving no time for their own work; lack of soft skills around tech/executive functioning that enable them to stick to a routine; lack of structure at home so they're completing work at 3 a.m. when no adult help is available."*



*"Families are together in small spaces and the students do not have the proper room to concentrate on their schoolwork."*

## **E. Recommendations for Moving Forward**

Educators generally feel that state and district leaders up to this point have done the best they can in the current environment. There is, however, a level of frustration and tension evidenced in the open responses to questions in which educators were asked for their feedback and advice for state and district leaders moving forward. Many teachers appreciated the initial guidance but they want to see more classroom teacher input at the state and local level and would like as much guidance as possible for the near and long term in order to better plan and prepare. Educators are open to new technology, new ways of teaching and flexibility but they are looking for a common understanding regarding what remote learning looks like and what standards and expectations they are being held to. <sup>7</sup>

In forthcoming guidance, teachers recommend that the Commissioner, DESE, EOE, the Return to School Working Group, local district leaders and other decision makers address following areas:

1. *Safety measures and protocols to protect the health of students, staff and families.*
2. *Clarity, consistency, and communication regarding expectations for teachers, students, and families with more decisive guidance from the commissioner, DESE, and districts.*
3. *Social emotional learning support for students and self care for adults*
4. *Internet connectivity and technology support for all - teachers included*
5. *Supports for quality teaching and learning in COVID-19 environment*
  - a. *Professional Development*
  - b. *Identifying and access to high quality online curriculum, materials, technology and resources*

### **1. Safety measures to protect the health of students, staff and families.**

At the top of the list for teachers is safety. If we are to return to a physical school site they want all precautions taken to guarantee the health and safety of staff and students. Older educators and others who are more susceptible expressed concerns about returning to school at all. Many more expressed some concern for themselves but were most concerned about how best to protect their family members. They want to see clear plans for social distancing, addressing the needs of highly susceptible teachers and students, building cleaning regimens, temperature

checks and other protocols. These plans need to be communicated in a transparent manner and they must provide flexibility for staff and families with health concerns, childcare issues and other factors that may prevent their physical return to school.

## 2. Clarity, consistency, and communications with regard to expectations for teachers, students, and families with more decisive guidance from the commissioner, DESE, and districts.

Teachers are grateful for the initial guidance and the later introduction of power standards. It is yet to be seen, however, how many students actually grasped the learning and will be prepared when the school year begins. They are concerned about how to sustain forward progress and close achievement gaps for our most challenged and under-resourced communities, especially those who do not have consistent access to devices and WiFi, while meeting the needs of all students at every ability level.

Moving forward teachers want clarity and consistency regarding expectations for teachers and students. Teachers by far express the most concern over what they viewed as constantly changing guidelines and expectations. They appreciate the unique factors that led to shifting priorities but were also sharing how those shifts affected teacher, student, and family engagement and interactions throughout the process. They ask that leaders avoid making frequent changes and stay the course. Teachers want to see longer-term planning for the next school year in order to plan appropriately and even guidance for the next 2-3 years if possible.

Many teachers feel too many decisions are being left to the local level creating greater disparities between districts, schools, and even within schools based on individual educator expertise with technology and expectations of students. Teachers live and work across districts and the disparities are even more evident in this remote learning environment. Teachers want the state to be more directive and provide less autonomy. They would like to see the state and districts develop clear and consistent communications up and down the line from DESE to district office to principal to teachers to students and parents. Teachers suggested DESE should seek ways to communicate more directly with educators and families to create common expectations.

*“It is fairly vague and I understand DESE would like each district to develop their own solution, but more specific guidance would aid the districts.”*

In addition, teachers expressed concerns about setting clear and appropriate expectations for students and reaching a common understanding with parents. They would like to see clarity of

expectations regarding grading, attendance, amount of direct instruction, and recommended workload across disciplines, subject areas, and grade levels. There needs to be a common understanding between teachers and parents regarding workload and homework expectations for their students. These expectations must be clearly transmitted to parents and students. Teachers need parents to partner with them even more closely in this environment.

*“Expectations need to be more clear and streamlined. Departments within my school are approaching remote learning in different ways, which makes it difficult for parents and students to follow along. Unclear expectations also add to teachers’ anxiety because we don’t know exactly what we should be doing.”*

Another common and concerning theme that emerged are real or perceived differences in expectations placed upon subsets of teachers. There appears to be a growing division between core academic classroom teachers & special subject (phys ed, art, music, etc.) teachers regarding perceptions of workload. Classroom teachers feel that they are taking on the bulk of the burden. They feel they are working very long days and responsible for all student and family engagement and the perception is that specialists are not. Special Education teachers, in turn, indicated that they feel like they have a much higher workload in trying to meet student IEP requirements and administer services. If allowed to continue, this may fracture the camaraderie normally found among school and grade-level teams.

*“The time commitment necessary from core content teachers to accomplish expectations is extreme when compared to what is required from specialists, related service providers and paraprofessionals. For staff whose academic responsibilities are less onerous, have those staff pitch in with individual student contacts and follow-up.”*

Finally, many expressed concerns regarding the use of MCAS results over the next few years and are seeking a clear message from DESE and district leaders regarding MCAS, assessments and district level academic expectations and accountability measures in coming years.

*“The plan should focus not just on this year but also consider using these standards for 20-21, and possibly even 21-22 so that some districts with more disadvantaged students will have a chance to catch up, especially when concerned with testing, if not also put a moratorium on next year’s test to take the pressure off of students and teachers so that they can focus on well-being and learning.”*

Most of the teachers wanted some form of data or assessments to determine where their students were academically upon return to school but those who referenced MCAS suggest it not be used for any school or district accountability purposes for the year.

### 3. Social-emotional learning support for students and self care for adults

Teachers reported they have an abundance of concern that their students' current SEL needs are not being met and that upon return to school in the fall there will be an enormous amount of work to do to support and assist students who have been traumatized by the last six months of isolation and disconnection from friends and their school-based support networks. The boundary lines between work and home have been blurred. People now have expectations for 24/7 connectivity and response. Many teachers are concerned about balancing the needs of students and their own personal family needs, especially teachers with young children and/or elderly parents.

*"Teachers, too, are suffering from PTSD. Helping us figure out ways to cope would be good."*

*"I need trauma-informed and SEL training. We are teaching young, anxious brains while we are anxious ourselves. We need help!"*

They are feeling overwhelmed. Teachers indicated a need for resources around social-emotional learning and well-being. Teachers are seeking out SEL strategies and trauma resources for students and their families as well as strategies to maintain their own social emotional well-being during the pandemic.

### 4. Internet connectivity and technology support for all

Virtually all educators raised concerns regarding prior inequities and disparate resources for students that were already inherent in our system prior to COVID-19. Many are concerned that remote learning may only exacerbate the gaps due to the lack of access to technology and internet connectivity experienced by many students. A top priority going forward must be to provide every student with access to technology and connectivity to assure that we close the digital divide.

*"There are many students in our district that still do not have access to computers or to WiFi. There are also students where their families are working*

*during the day so there is no encouragement or supervision to complete school work.”*

In addition, students and families need training and time to use their new devices and education platforms in order to use them effectively.

## **5. Supports for quality teaching and learning in COVID-19 environment**

In order to deliver a quality teaching and learning experience in our new environment, two topics came to the forefront. They need professional development and access to high-quality online curriculum, materials, technology, and resources.

### **A. Professional Development**

The majority of educators report that they, or their colleagues and students, need more training and time to practice using all the technology they have been exposed to during this period in order to be more effective. They are seeking the most effective tools to engage and connect with students and families. They need training in developing engaging, asynchronous lessons and employing deeper learning strategies for independent, project-based learning. Teachers highlighted a need for training to effectively meet the needs of students who require special services — specifically special education students and English language learners.

From the responses, it is clear that teachers’ familiarity with ed-tech varies widely. Some are very adept and proficient while others are struggling. Many are seeking comprehensive lists of resources categorized by content or grade level. They need information on and consistency around what platforms to use for what purposes. They want help becoming familiar with the options around ed-tech and how to navigate and troubleshoot those platforms. Many are looking for training on specific platforms while others indicated they are already receiving adequate PD from their schools and districts. Some have independently sought out PD and resources to help them transition to remote instruction.

Another theme was needing more time. Time to adjust to the new platforms and strategies, time to practice and learn the software, time to pursue and complete professional development at their own pace. Some indicated a need for tools to help them, and their students, manage their time effectively as well.

Educators asked for a more personalized and differentiated approach to professional development. Some districts are currently requiring all staff to attend all PD sessions and it is

not a good use of their time. In the classroom, teachers are encouraged to create opportunities for student voice and choice, to collect data on what students need and adjust and respond accordingly. Teachers want a variety of options based on individual needs and skill levels that are accessible asynchronously to provide them with the flexibility to select the tools, resources, and learning opportunities that will elevate their practice without wasting their time. For instance, training in the use of the most common technology platforms such as Google, Microsoft, Zoom could be developed at the state level to provide a common set of professional development resources available to teachers, parents and students. Students need explicit instruction regarding use of technology and proper tech etiquette. DESE could develop a technology resource bank with teacher-curated tools and apps in partnership with MassCUE, MAPLE, Learn Launch and other organizations bringing tech and teachers together.

*“More training on using technology to make a user-friendly experience for kids that is engaging.”*

*“Supports that show how to “teach” to a wide variety of learners. I have students on IEPs and new content is making their parents anxious.”*

*“We are continually given ‘new or found’ websites, apps, and ideas but I have no time to figure them out.”*

*“We need a uniform approach at the district or school level about the distance learning model, platform, and apps to be used and customized training on how to use.”*

Going forward, DESE should develop clear state guidelines on what teachers should be doing in terms of professional development in the effective use of technology. Some suggest that training in education technology become a required element of teacher preparation and the licensure recertification process.

*“All Massachusetts teachers need to have an effective distance learning training that is mandatory. There needs to be follow-through by the state so that teachers have no excuse for providing subpar experiences in class as well as out of class. It makes no sense that a public professional is struggling with providing education in 2020 when most of what we do involves technology. We desperately need a high-quality training series that focuses on delivering high-quality remote learning.”*

## B. Identifying and accessing high quality online curriculum, materials, technology and resources

Some educators suggested the state create or curate a set of high quality curricula materials, resources and recommended tech platforms that schools and districts could opt into rather than having each district creating materials and systems from scratch (See [VLACS](#) in New Hampshire for one example). They do not see the need to individually create and identify curriculum and reinvent the wheel in over 400 LEAs and thousands of schools across the Commonwealth if others have already developed excellent tools and resources. This would save time and energy and provide a level of quality control rather than individual educators having to search for or invent new materials. A statewide approach would also allow for coordinated professional development and support across districts and better communication with parents regarding grade-level and subject-matter expectations.

Teachers feel there are too many people using too many tools and apps. Districts should identify the best platforms and apps to use for connecting with families and students and provide training. It is confusing and difficult for students, parents, teachers to use multiple technology platforms (ie. going from Zoom, to Google Hangouts, to Microsoft Teams). It was also challenging and time consuming for teachers to spend time teaching students and families how to set up various apps and create accounts. They suggest that districts consider establishing one or two universal tech platforms to use.

Many teachers reported that not only their students, but they also need access to better technology and internet connectivity. They need newer computers that can run all of the software they've been asked to use. They need additional monitors, computer stands, tablets or touchscreens, and document cameras to be able to scan documents, create high-quality instructional videos, and lead virtual classrooms. They need WiFi that can handle hosting video conferences and upload videos. Many reported having to pour more money into supplies, getting their own computers, investing in better WiFi routers, or creating home-office spaces to be able to conduct lessons.

*"We are asked to teach with technology and platforms we have never used. We are struggling to learn them while still teaching, communicating with families, and dealing with our own family responsibilities. It's building the boat while sitting in it during a hurricane."*

*"I need a working computer. I have to park at the library for strong enough WiFi and I am borrowing my partner's computer to work all night."*

*“The parents need PD too. They don't know how to navigate this. Not only have I played teacher and therapist, but I've also been an IT department trying my best to answer questions ranging from WiFi to Chromebooks not working to website issues. Way too much. Either DESE should have a call center to help parents with tech issues or each school district should.”*

## CONCLUSION

### Opportunity to Reimagine Schooling

Teachers emphasized they want a return to face to face interaction with their students and fellow teachers. At the heart of teaching are the relationships developed with students, families and colleagues. They also want to make sure we capture lessons learned from this period. As schools move toward reopening, teachers suggested using this as an opportunity to reimagine what schooling can be rather than trying to go back to “normal”. “Normal” was not working for all students. The pandemic has only further exposed the enormous disparities in our system. Knowing that we are at risk of potential closures due to COVID-19, we need to have a backup system in place at all times like an emergency generator in a storm. We can also make better use of the technology and tools we have at our disposal even when schools are open.

Teachers have seen that the traditional school day is not the only way to structure schooling. In order for students to make up for lost learning time we need to consider different forms of scheduling, extending the school year and making quality learning opportunities accessible 24/7 to address the achievement gaps that have only grown during this period. In addition, we will need to provide flexibility for teachers, students and families dealing with health-related and other issues if there are future closures.

Many suggested moving toward a competency-based system in order to better identify students’ current academic status and then create individual student support plans for their specific needs and growth. Teachers will continue to connect one on one with students and give more regular feedback. They will continue to use more ed technology, video, and multimedia resources to more effectively engage students and scaffold learning. This experience has required them to be more conscious of the need for better structure and planning of lessons and recording for access by students asynchronously. They will certainly continue to use virtual field trips, project based and independent student learning tasks employing online virtual tools and resources. Finally, they said they will continue to build upon the stronger connection with students and families they have developed through use of technology and more consciously



reaching out. Students, teachers, and parents, however, need explicit instruction regarding the use of technology, confidentiality and proper tech etiquette.

*“Reconsider school calendar (ie. 6 weeks on 2 weeks off/full year calendar). Bring students back to lower grades and hybrid live and remote learning with staggered schedule and days for middle and high school students.”*

*“Rethink and redeploy staff assignments to assist with family engagement and tracking student progress (i.e. special subject teachers, ESPs, counselors) not just classroom teachers assigned to families.”*

*“Teachers need to learn about & start implementing self-directed learning strategies. Help kids understand they do not need to go to school to learn. They are 100 percent capable of learning whatever they want to learn & teachers should be helping them do it. Throw the curriculum out. Schools have to change the way we THINK about learning.”*

Massachusetts and every other state was caught off guard by the pandemic, but the tools for providing remote learning have been with us for many years, we just had not used or embraced them. As a sector, we were forced by the pandemic to move the education technology and innovation needle forward by at least 10 years in two months. This situation demonstrates how reactive public education has been, how resilient and resourceful teachers and students are, and the need for us to be much more proactive and prepared going forward.

## TEACH PLUS MASSACHUSETTS TEACHING POLICY FELLOWS

April Brunelle, Boston Tech Academy, Boston Public Schools  
Kevin Cormier, Nissitissit Middle School, Northern Middlesex Regional  
Stephen Guerriero, Needham High Schools, Needham Public Schools  
Lisa Hanifan, Linden Steam Academy, Malden Public Schools  
Abbagail Herwing, Thorpe Elementary, Danvers Public Schools  
Caroline Jones, Up Academy Boston, Boston Public Schools  
Kayla Scholl, Sumner G. Whittier School, Everett Public Schools  
Cristina Stanojevich, Boston Tech Academy, Boston Public Schools

# TEACH PLUS MASSACHUSETTS STAFF

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## ENDNOTES

1. Question: “Which of the following best describes your status?” Responses: (n = 1,398) “I am a teacher in a public district school in Massachusetts” (96 percent), “I am a teacher in a public charter school in Massachusetts” (4 percent). Question: “What is the name of your school district or charter school?” Responses: 167 different districts and charters identified ranging from large urban to suburban and rural from across the state.
2. Question: “Do you teach in a Title I School?” Responses: (n = 1,390) “Yes” (57 percent), “No” (32 percent), “Unsure” (11 percent).
3. Question: “Which of the following best describes your school setting?” Responses: (n = 1,396) “Elementary school” (44 percent), “K-8 school” (4 percent), “Middle school” (21 percent), “High school” (27 percent), and “Other” (3 percent). Question: “If you are a teacher, please tell us what grade level?” Responses: (n = 1,388 ) “Prek-2 (26 percent), “Grades 3-5” (25 percent), “Grades 6-8” (22 percent), and “Grades 9-12” (27 percent). Question: “If you are a teacher, please tell us your subject area.” Responses: (n = 1,398) “Math” (37 percent), “Science” (34 percent), “ELA” (40 percent), “Social Studies/History” (33 percent), “Visual Arts” (2 percent), “Performing Arts” (3 percent), “Physical Education” (1 percent), “Special Education Support” (16 percent), “ELL” (11 percent), “World Language” (3 percent), “Counselor” (1 percent) and “Other” (15 percent).
4. Question: “What have you found to be the most effective approach to communicating with families while schools are closed?” Open-ended response question.
5. Question: “Please check all activities that your school is providing for students while school buildings are closed.” Open-ended response question.
6. Question: “What have you found to be some of the more effective remote learning instruction strategies, tools, or resources that you would recommend to other teachers?” Open-ended response question.
7. Questions: “What feedback do you have for DESE on their guidance?”, “What would you suggest changing when it comes to your school or district’s expectations of you while school buildings are closed?”, “What recommendations do you have for state and district leaders as they prepare for students' return?”, and “From all the lessons learned during this crisis, what will you want to do more of or incorporate into your teaching going forward when you return to school?” Open-ended response questions.