School District Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Round 3, Plans for a Remote Finish

By Nat Malkus and Cody Christensen

April 2020

Key Points

- This is the third report in the "School District Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic" series, covering changes that occurred in public school districts between April 7 and April 14, 2020.
- By mid-April, more than four in five schools offered some type of remote instruction, roughly double the share of schools that offered remote instruction 18 days earlier. More than half of all public schools began offering remote instruction within two weeks after building closures took effect.
- Strong majorities of schools provide meal services (94 percent), devices to students at home (57 percent), and help accessing the internet (62 percent).
- Sixteen percent of schools are in districts that have plans to tentatively reopen buildings during the current school year.

The majority of the nation's schools closed in mid-March, creating unprecedented scenarios for educators, families, and students. Despite the spread of COVID-19, teachers and schools across the country adapted to continue offering educational services. Just three weeks after most closures took effect, more than half of schools had already transitioned to provide instruction remotely—and that number has continued to increase in the weeks since.

Now that students are entering the final quarter of the school year, many doubt that school buildings will be able to reopen in the current academic year. Indeed, most state governments have already ruled out this possibility, issuing statewide orders for their schools to stay closed for the remainder of the school year. Yet a small minority of schools in other states remain optimistic that they can safely reopen sometime in the coming weeks, before students are dismissed for the summer.

In the days and weeks ahead, schools will grapple with many complex questions regarding students' grades, end-of-year assessments, the length of the academic year, and the possibility of reopening buildings. On the top of everyone's mind is how schools will make up for lost instructional time between March and April. Some schools have already decided on these questions, providing an early view of what is likely to come in the weeks ahead at other schools.

This report, which is the third in AEI's "School District Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic"

series, provides an update on the state of the nation's schools using the newest wave of COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS) data. We describe how the nation's public school system has changed from late March to mid-April, when COVID-19 brought much of the country to a screeching halt.

Findings

This report documents how public school districts responded during the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis through April 14, the date of the most recent C-ERLS data collection (hereafter referred to as "Wave 3," with the prior data collections referred to as "Wave 1" and "Wave 2"[6]). Like previous reports in the series, we document several basic services that schools provide, including meals, devices and technology, and internet access. We also examine the types and variety of remote educational services that schools offer, including worksheets, virtual supplemental content (such as Khan Academy), and directed online curriculum via synchronous and asynchronous platforms.

Table 1. C-ERLS Data Collection Dates

Wave	Date of Data Collection
1	March 26–27, 2020
2	April 6–7, 2020
3	April 13–14, 2020

Source: Authors.

In this report, we provide new insights on *how long* remote instruction is planned to last. By the time the academic year ends, a handful of schools will have offered just a month of remote instruction. This is because some districts took several weeks to develop and implement distance-learning plans or, alternatively, have an earlier end to their academic year. Other schools were much faster to implement remote instruction, and thus, some students will receive 12 or more weeks of online instruction by their last day of school. Still, by mid-April, a small percentage of districts had tentative plans to reopen—suggesting that they remain hopeful about salvaging a few weeks of in-person instruction before students are dismissed for the summer.

In terms of school-based services, 94 percent of schools are providing meals to students, 57 percent

AEI's COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey

C-ERLS was developed quickly amid the pandemic with the intention of being rapid, reliable, representative, and repetitive. The design allows us to gather data that paint a current picture of school and district efforts.

Data for this report were collected on April 13 and 14, and Table 1 lists the dates that previous rounds of data were collected. Information was gathered exclusively from school district websites (and pages linked to them) on the assumption that these sites are the centralized communication hub for most districts and that they yield current information with an assuredly high response rate.

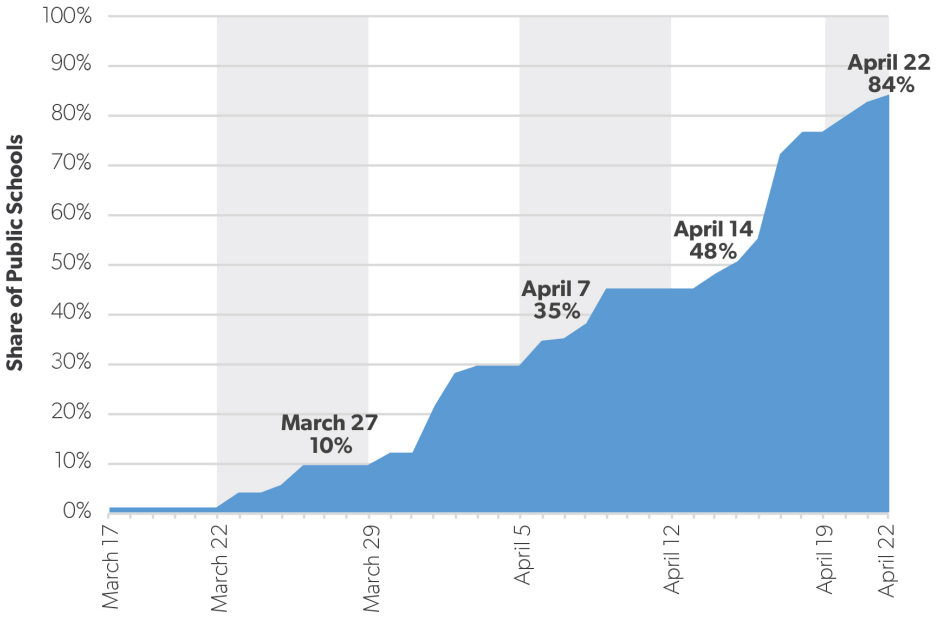
We selected a nationally representative sample of 250 public school districts so the data would reflect the broader population of districts.[1] In total, this is just under 2 percent of all regular school districts in the country, providing information for 10,289 schools (roughly 11 percent of all public schools).[2]

Although the C-ERLS sample is at the district level, we gathered information about what those districts are offering across all their schools. Thus, we present results as percentages of all schools, which can be interpreted as the proportion of public schools[3] whose districts are offering a given program, platform, or service.

Some districts we sampled contain charter schools, many of which will not extend the programs and platforms presented on district websites. Our survey method does not account for these charter schools, which may bias the school-level estimates by small amounts. However, district-level estimates are presented in Appendix C.

Note the variance for this survey, with a margin of error of 6.1 percent, is relatively large, and even modest differences in estimates may not be statistically significant. Each wave of C-ERLS data will be publicly available on the AEI website in a modified spreadsheet that masks the identity of small districts (those with six schools or fewer), and the entire dataset is available upon request.[4] Additional details about the survey instrument, sampling design, and variable definitions are available on the AEI website.[5]

Figure 1. Percentage of Public Schools Closed for the 2019–20 School Year, by Date of State Announcement



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 14, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

are providing (or have plans to provide) devices, and 62 percent have stated plans to provide internet access. These percentages represent noticeable increases since early April, when 52 percent of schools had plans to offer devices and 53 percent were providing internet access.

The share of schools offering remote instruction continues to increase. By mid-April, 81 percent of schools were in districts with a remote instructional program in place. Remarkably, that is roughly double the share of schools that offered remote instruction in late March. Schools currently use asynchronous platforms and worksheets at relatively equal rates—71 percent and 72 percent, respectively. More schools than ever—33 percent—are using synchronous platforms, such as Zoom or Google Hangouts, to engage with students. Only 8 percent of schools have not yet made plans to provide any type of remote instruction. We discuss each area in more detail in the following subsections.

Closures. All schools in the sample were closed by late March, and they remained closed through April 14. The majority of closures occurred between March 16 and 18, either through districts' own initiative or by statewide orders.

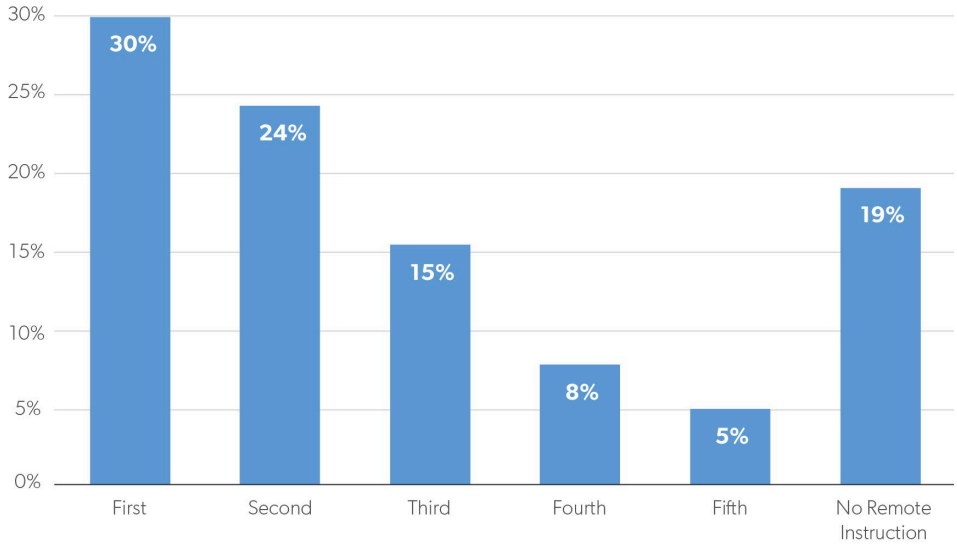
At the time of the Wave 3 data collection, just 47 percent of schools had a date on their district website indicating plans to reopen buildings later in the 2019–20 school year. This is a dramatic decline from previous rounds of data collection. For comparison, on March 27, 82 percent of schools had listed such plans on their district website, and by April 7, 68 percent had a tentative date to reopen. After April 14, when 47 percent had plans to reopen, the decline continued—and by April 23, just 16 percent of public schools had viable plans to reopen.

Many state governments have issued statewide orders requiring schools to remain closed, which triggered changes to schools' reopening plans. Kansas was the first state to close schools for the rest of the academic year, and by April 14, 22 additional states had issued similar orders or recommendations. Those orders covered nearly half (48 percent) of all public schools.

An additional 13 states have issued closure orders since we collected our most recent round of data. In total, 37 states have now issued orders or recommendations for schools to close for the remainder of the 2019–20 academic year, affecting 84 percent of public schools.[7] Figure 1 shows the share of schools affected by statewide orders and closure recommendations over time.

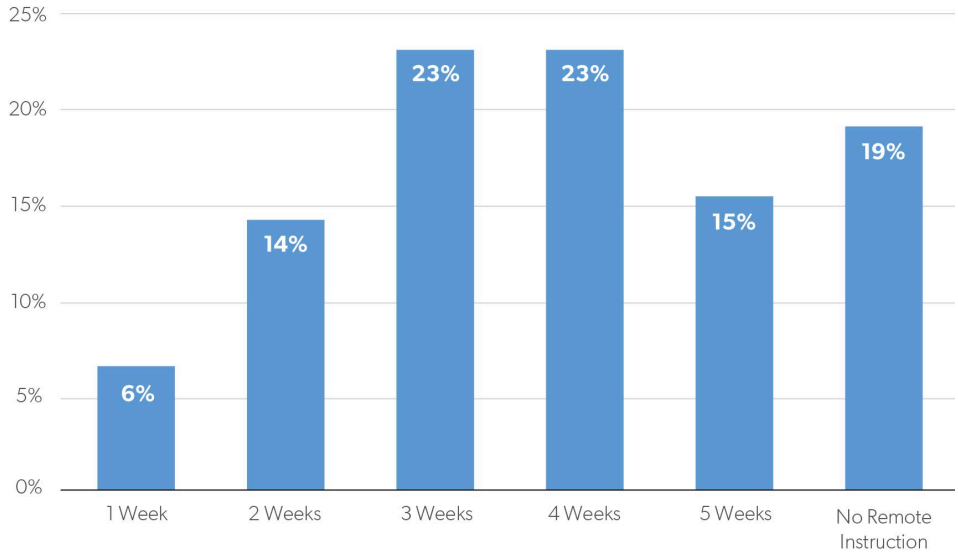
Time Intervals During the Pandemic. Now that many schools are well into their closure period, we measure the length of time it took between when school buildings initially closed and when remote instruction began. We also report the total length of time that schools have offered remote instruction thus far (as of April 14), and lastly, we report how long districts plan to offer remote instruction going forward (assuming that districts continue offering

Figure 2. Week That Remote Instruction Started After Building Closures



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 14, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

Figure 3. Weeks of Remote Instruction as of April 14, 2020



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 14, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

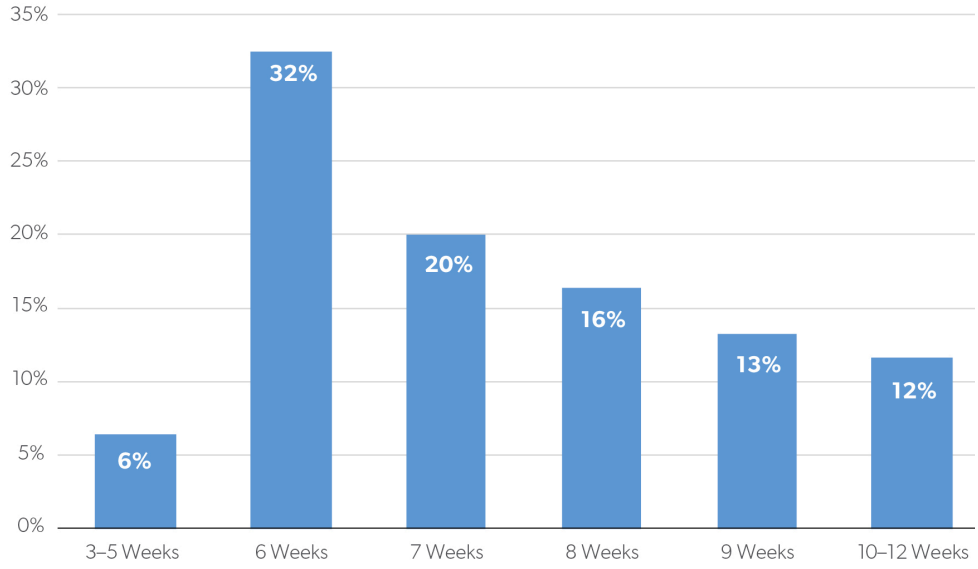
remote instruction until the last date of their school year).

Districts closed across many different dates, making it difficult to track intervals on a calendar. Therefore, we instead count the number of calendar days that elapse between key dates and express them as weeks (with fewer than six days indicating the interval being within one week, seven to 13 days indicating within two weeks, and so on).

The time between the first day that schools closed in a given district and the first day that remote instruction started varied across districts (Figure 2). Thirty percent of all schools began offering remote instruction within the first week (seven calendar days) after closures took effect, and another 24 percent of schools started remote instruction within two weeks. However, some districts took longer to plan and implement remote instruction. Fifteen percent of schools started offering remote instruction three weeks after they closed buildings, and another 13 percent of schools started within four or five weeks after closures. The remaining 19 percent of schools did not have operational remote instruction plans on district websites by April 14.

The next interval we measure is the length of time that districts have offered remote instruction so far (Figure 3). As of April 14, 6 percent of schools were in districts that had offered remote instruction for a week or less. (Granted, some of these schools might have had instructional programs in place that predated district plans.) The majority of schools had offered remote instruction for between two and four weeks. By mid-April, 13 percent of schools had offered remote instruction for two weeks, 22 percent of schools had offered remote instruction for three weeks, and another 22 percent of schools had offered remote instruction for four

Figure 4. Remaining Weeks of Instruction as of April 14, 2020



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 14, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

weeks. Only 15 percent of schools had offered five weeks of remote instruction. Nineteen percent of schools were in districts without currently operational instructional plans.

The final interval of interest is the length of time that districts plan to offer remote instruction going forward. On April 14, 6 percent of schools had five or fewer weeks remaining in the academic year, while 32 percent had six weeks remaining. (This analysis assumes that districts have not changed their last day of school since April 14, which was the most recent date we collected data.) Twenty percent had seven weeks remaining, 16 percent had eight weeks remaining, and 13 percent had nine weeks of the school year remaining. The remaining 12 percent of schools had between 10 and 12 weeks of school left (Figure 4). A handful of additional time intervals are described in Appendix B.

Food Service. When building closures first took effect, a top priority for many districts was to maintain meal services for students (many of whom qualify for and rely on free or reduced-priced school meals). By April 14, 94 percent of schools had plans on district websites for providing food to students, up from 91 percent in Wave 2 and 82 percent in Wave 1.

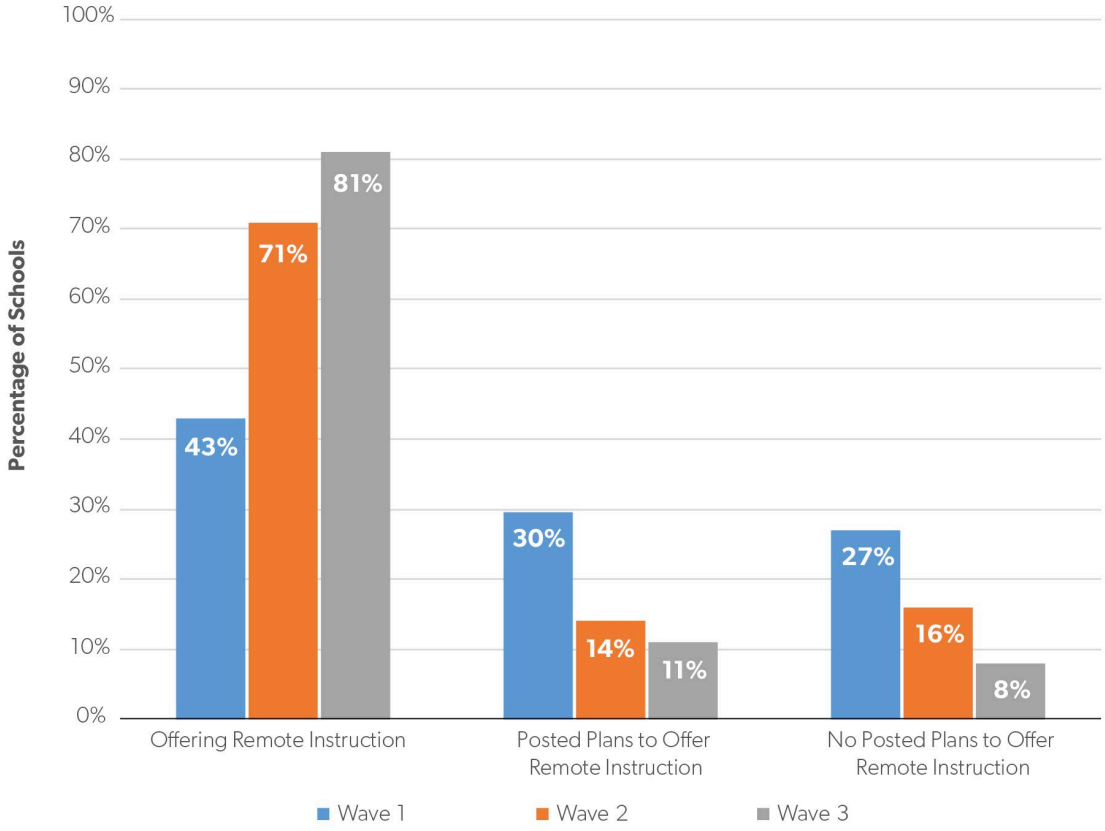
A majority of schools—65 percent—provide meals through daily pickup at school sites, about the same rate as we observed in earlier waves. Fifty-five percent of schools allow students to pick up multiple days of food at once, which is a slight increase from our previous two waves of data collection, in which about half of schools provided multi-day meal pickup. Thirty-three percent of schools deliver meals to students' homes or at school bus stops, also a slight increase from prior waves of data collection.[8]

Technology Assistance. Ensuring that students have access to technology is a precursor to effective online instruction. Accordingly, many schools and districts have stepped up to help students without access to these technologies at home.

By April 14, nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of schools were in districts that offered some kind of technology assistance to families. About 16 percent of schools were fielding a technology survey to determine students' needs.[10] Fifty-seven percent of schools were in districts whose websites mentioned a program to provide devices to students who did not already have them at home.[9] Additionally, 62 percent of schools provided assistance for students to access the internet. Twenty-seven percent of schools were in districts that had established a "help desk" that families could call for help solving problems accessing instructional platforms. Additional details on technology provisions are in Appendix A.

Educational Programs. By mid-April, a small share of districts in our sample still had not posted concrete plans for providing any remote education for students. Specifically, 8 percent of schools had no articulated plans on district websites by April 14. Granted, this percentage is half the size it was a week prior and is well below the 27 percent we observed in late March. The percentage of schools still in a planning phase—those that had information

Figure 5. Current Remote Instruction Offerings, as of April 14, 2020



Note: Schools in districts that offer only virtual supplemental content are not included in the "Offering Remote Instruction" category.
Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 14, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

on district websites about instructional plans that were not yet in place—decreased to 11 percent, down from 14 and 30 percent in the previous two waves of data collection. (See Figure 5.)

By April 14, 81 percent of schools were in districts that had some sort of education program or offering available, 10 percentage points above the percentage a week prior and nearly double the 43 percent offering educational programs on March 27. (As we have previously noted, individual schools or teachers may have offered educational resources through school websites, email, direct contact, or an open-access asynchronous platform, and our data collection might not have captured these efforts.[10])

There was a wide spectrum of educational provisions in districts offering remote instruction, ranging from basic materials to programs with more directed instruction. We classified instructional plans into five categories, defined by the increasing level of directed instruction they entail. From least to most directed instructional plans, these include virtual supplemental content, instructional packets, asynchronous directed instruction, synchronous directed instruction, and virtual schools.

When examining districts' educational provisions, we also looked for indications of whether students are broadly expected to participate or whether participation is recommended but essentially optional.[13] By Wave 3, 13 percent of schools were in districts that expressed no expectation of student participation—similar to the level observed in Wave 2. By mid-April, 58 percent of schools had some expectation for participation, which was above the 46 percent from a week earlier and well above the 18 percent that had expectations of participation in Wave 1.

Taking attendance is a more formal and less frequent means of expressing expectations for student participation. As of April 14, 74 percent of schools were in districts whose websites made no mention of plans to take attendance during remote

Categories of Districts' Remote Educational Provisions

We classified instructional plans into five categories, defined by the increasing level of directed instruction they entail. The first and most basic is virtual supplemental content, in which districts provide web links to outside educational content providers (such as Khan Academy) without clear direction for students using them. In this report, we do not count virtual supplemental content as remote instruction because of this lack of direction. The second is instructional packets, in which districts or schools provide static, grade-appropriate worksheets or bundles of materials that students can complete at home.[11]

The third and fourth categories include programs that use web-based platforms to enable asynchronous or synchronous directed instruction. Asynchronous directed instruction uses web-based platforms that allow schools or teachers to push out updated resources and assignments to students who are logged in to the platform and allow students to return completed work. These could include sites by outside providers, such as Google Classroom, and district and school websites.[12] Synchronous directed instruction includes platforms that allow "live" (but not in-person) instruction to occur, in which students and teachers participate at the same time using conferencing systems such as Zoom or Google Hangouts.

The fifth category is the possibility that schooling is transferred to a separate independent virtual school, with its own independent and preexisting curriculum.

instruction, and 6 percent of schools were in districts that expressly said attendance would not be taken. Just 20 percent had established a means of taking attendance.

We also collected data on the grading policies mentioned on district websites. Less than half of schools (44 percent) were in districts with no mention of grades. Sixteen percent of schools were in districts that expressly stated that, at least as of April 14, work would not be graded. The remaining 41 percent of schools were evenly split between those that were grading work based on only its completion (21 percent) and those that were grading based on the quality of the work or the students' performance (20 percent).

Figure 6 displays nonexclusive percentages of different educational program offerings in place at the time of data collection. About 57 percent of schools are in districts that offer virtual supplemental content for students to access, up slightly from Wave 2 (51 percent). Few districts, including just 3 percent of schools, offer only virtual supplemental content and no more directed instruction.[14] (These data are not shown in Figure 3.)

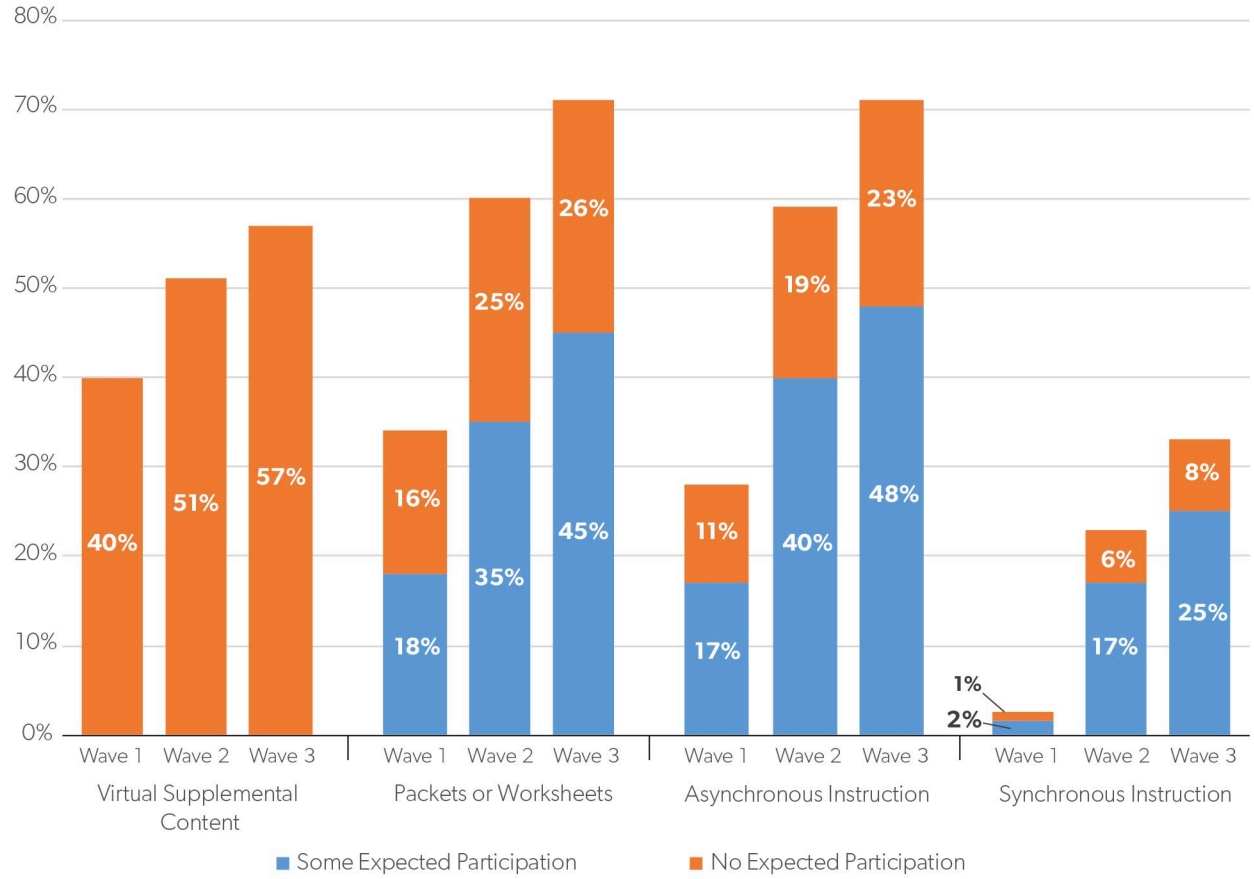
As of Wave 3, packets of resources were offered in 72 percent of schools, up from 60 percent in Wave 2 and 34 percent in Wave 1. Nearly all the growth in packets since Wave 2 came from schools with some expectation of student participation, a trend also present between the first two waves. Specifically, 26 percent of all schools offered packets without a clear expectation for or requirement of participation, compared to 25 percent in Wave 2, while another 45 percent of schools offered packets and expressed some expectation for student participation, up from 35 percent in Wave 2.

More than seven in 10 schools are in districts that established asynchronous web-based platforms for more directed instruction. Asynchronous platforms, which allow students to engage with teacher-posted material at their own pace, were offered by 71 percent of schools on April 14, up from 59 percent on April 7 and 28 percent on March 27. Twenty-three percent of all schools offered asynchronous platforms without expecting participation from all students, and twice as many, about 48 percent of all schools, offered asynchronous platforms with expectations for student participation.

Synchronous instructional platforms, which allow students to engage directly with educators in real time, remained much less common than packets or asynchronous platforms did, but that category again saw the largest growth. In Wave 3, 33 percent of schools offered synchronous education platforms, up from 23 percent in Wave 2 and just 3 percent in Wave 1. Of these, the majority, 25 percent of all schools, had an expectation of instruction, and a minority, 8 percent, had expressed no expectations.

As in Waves 1 and 2, none of the districts in our survey explicitly offer an independent online virtual school as an educational platform for students.

Figure 6. Current Remote Instruction Offerings by Participation Requirements, as of April 14, 2020



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 14, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

One-on-One Contact with Students. Many districts explicitly encouraged teachers to make direct contact with their students. On April 14, 60 percent of schools were in such districts, up from 45 percent a week before. The most common method of direct content, encouraged in 44 percent of schools, was email communication between teachers and students.

Twenty-nine percent of schools encouraged teachers to use asynchronous web-based platforms as a means for direct communication, and in 23 percent of schools, teachers are expected to schedule virtual office hours for students to contact them. In 19 percent of schools, phone calls were encouraged for direct contact. More than a third of schools (36 percent) encouraged teachers to contact students through multiple means, up from 23 percent of schools that encouraged multiple means in the prior week.

In addition to these methods of direct contact, students with access to synchronous education platforms are in direct contact with teachers. These platforms are available in 33 percent of schools, and when added to the schools in districts that expressly encouraged one-on-one contact, the percentage of schools providing one-on-one contact between teachers and students totaled 64 percent, an increase from the 51 percent that did so a week earlier.

Instructional Programs Planned for After Our Data Collection. Some districts were still in a planning phase, with stated intentions to offer remote instruction, although it was not yet in place by April 14. Eight percent of schools are in districts planning to offer packets of material for students, but they were not offering them as of mid-April. About 6 percent of schools are planning to offer asynchronous platforms, and just 1 percent are planning to offer synchronous platforms. All three of these percentages are smaller than what we observed in our previous report, in part because the percentage of schools without any remote instruction programs was also smaller.

Conclusion

Dramatic shifts have taken place in our nation's schools in a relatively short period. Once school leaders realized the extent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of public schools began working at a remarkable pace to transition curriculum, instruction, and other educational services into remote formats.

By mid-April, the time of our most recent data collection, more than four in five public schools were offering some type of remote instruction—including packets, asynchronous content, and synchronous content. That share is practically double the percentage of schools offering such forms of instruction in late March, just 18 days prior. The majority of schools—54 percent—began offering remote instruction within the first two weeks after their district closed. Long-term questions about the quality of instruction remain, but these data provide a clearer picture of the educational opportunities students had during this time.

For many students and teachers, the 2019–20 academic year will end in a virtual setting. As of April 23, 84 percent of public schools are in states where state leaders have issued recommendations or orders for them to remain closed for the rest of the academic year. The tiny remainder—just 16 percent of public schools—have dates on their district websites indicating tentative plans to reopen.

More than half of schools have already provided three or more weeks of remote instruction, and based on districts' last days of school, 52 percent of them will continue offering remote instruction through the end of May.

Now, the question on everyone's mind is how schools will make up for lost instruction time. Some may choose to extend their academic year into the summer; others might begin school earlier in the fall. As America's education system continues to adapt to the unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, we will continue to provide the public with up-to-date snapshots of the nation's schools.

Acknowledgments

We are tremendously grateful to AEI's education and domestic policy teams, who supported this research at a rapid pace while working remotely. Aleida Baumgartner, Brendan Bell, Cade Grady, Abby Guidera, RJ Martin, Matt Rice, Peyton Roth, Jess Schurz, Olivia Shaw, Sidney Sonck, Valerie Truong, Hannah Warren, Lexi West, and David Wilde provided outstanding research assistance in gathering and processing data for this report. In addition, this report would not exist without the tireless efforts of Lexi West, who has provided invaluable analytic support, and Jess Schurz, who has skillfully managed the project from start to finish. Of course, the views expressed in this report are the authors' alone, and we take full responsibility for any errors that remain.

About the Authors

Nat Malkus is a resident scholar and deputy director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute.

Cody Christensen is a research associate at the American Enterprise Institute.

Appendix A. Additional Questions and Data Collection

The following sections describe additional information that we gathered during the third wave of C-ERLS data collection. Specifically, we present findings by school level and district size. In addition, we provide more details about specific technologies and internet accommodations used in schools. Lastly, we describe how schools are approaching their responsibilities to serve specific student populations, such as English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities.

Do School Districts' Efforts Differ Across School Levels? Districts could differentiate the educational platforms they offer to elementary, middle, and high schools. For instance, middle and high schools may adopt synchronous or asynchronous platforms more easily than elementary schools do because older students are better able to log in to and negotiate more complex systems with less supervision at home. Therefore, C-ERLS disaggregates several data elements to capture districts whose programs differed across school level (elementary, middle, and high school).

As in Wave 2, the percentage of high schools in districts offering packets, 69 percent, was just 2 percentage points lower than in elementary and middle schools, well within the margin of error for our survey. Differences for asynchronous instruction were also similar to Wave 2, with 5 percent more middle schools and 6 percent more high schools than elementary schools offering asynchronous platforms. Percentages for synchronous platforms were nearly identical. (For reference, 64 percent of elementary schools offered asynchronous instruction.) We want to be explicit that the practice offered at different levels is likely different but that district offerings across levels are not.

What Online Platforms Are Districts Using for Asynchronous and Synchronous Instruction? We gathered data on the specific types of asynchronous and synchronous platforms that schools are adopting to identify if certain platforms, programs, and methods are more common than others. This might be helpful for other educators and school leaders who are still determining the types of remote instruction they plan to offer.

Of schools offering asynchronous instruction, about 36 percent of schools offered more than one platform, with about 15 percent using three or more. Google Classroom is, by far, the most common platform, and just over half of all schools are in districts whose websites mentioned Google Classroom; this is double the 24 percent reported in Wave 1 (and 44 percent in Wave 2). The next most common platforms were schools' or districts' own websites, in use in 27 percent of schools, the same percentage as in Wave 2. Canvas was again the third most common platform, in use in 13 percent of schools.

Of districts offering synchronous instruction on April 14 (33 percent of all schools), Zoom was the most common platform offered on district websites. Zoom was offered in about 19 percent of schools in Wave 3, and Google Hangouts/Google Meet was the second most common, mentioned for 14 percent of schools. About 8 percent of schools offered other synchronous platforms.

Do Districts' Responses Vary by District Size? Districts of different sizes may have different capacities to employ specific educational services in response to COVID-19 closures. For instance, small districts might have limited resources or infrastructure to rapidly adjust to the pandemic. Similarly, large districts might be challenged to develop unified or piecemeal plans that provide services across all their schools. Therefore, we sorted the responses of the 250 districts in our sample into three groups by size, measured by their number of schools.

We defined small districts as those with six or fewer operational schools. Medium districts have between seven and 24 operational schools. Lastly, large districts are defined as having 25 or more operational schools. This divides our sample into three groups that are roughly equal in size: 35 percent of schools are in small districts, 35 percent of schools are in medium districts, and 30 percent of schools are in large districts.

Meals. The estimated percentage of schools in small districts offering meals was again lower than the rate of medium and large districts. An estimated 83 percent of schools in small districts offered meals by April 14, up

from 78 percent by April 7. Comparatively, 99 percent of medium and 100 percent of large districts offered meal services by April 14.

Daily and multiday meal pickup were the most common distribution mechanisms, available in 65 and 55 percent of schools, respectively. Schools in smaller districts offered both kinds of meal pickup less frequently, with 52 percent offering daily pickup, compared to 72 percent in both medium and large districts. In Wave 3, 45 percent of small districts offered multiday pickup, compared to 64 and 55 percent in medium and large districts, respectively.

Districts of different sizes provided meal delivery services—which included delivery via busses or drop-offs at students' homes—in similar percentages. Specifically, meal delivery was available in 36, 30, and 32 percent of schools in small, medium, and large districts, respectively.

Participation. The percentage of schools in large districts that expected participation was higher than percentages for small and medium districts. The share increased to 65 percent in Wave 3, up from 57 percent in Wave 2. In Wave 2, 43 and 41 percent of schools in small and medium districts, respectively, expected participation. By Wave 3, the percentages for small and medium districts increased substantially, to 60 and 51 percent, respectively.

Attendance. Large districts were more likely than small and medium-sized districts to mention attendance, take attendance, and explicitly not take attendance during remote instruction. Forty-three percent of schools in large districts mentioned attendance, with 32 percent taking attendance and another 11 percent explicitly not taking attendance. Percentages for medium-sized districts were lower, with 20 percent mentioning attendance, consisting of 17 percent taking attendance and 3 percent explicitly not taking attendance. Just 17 percent of schools in small districts mentioned attendance, with just 11 percent taking attendance and 6 percent explicitly not taking attendance.

Grades. Large districts are more likely to mention grading policies on their websites, which includes if and how schools will handle scoring homework assignments for the remainder of the school year. About 54 percent of schools in large districts have posted plans for grading in Wave 3, while only 38 percent and 33 percent, respectively, of small and medium districts have done so.

The 54 percent of schools in large districts that were grading work consisted of 31 percent grading remote work based on performance—up from 23 percent in Wave 2—and 23 percent grading based on completion. Of the schools in small and medium districts, 15 and 16 percent, respectively, were grading work based on performance (each 6 percentage points higher than Wave 2), while 23 percent of schools in small districts and 17 percent in medium districts were grading based on completion (an increase of 5 percentage points from Wave 2).

Instruction, Overall and by Type. We found that higher percentages of schools in large districts had offered remote instruction plans by April 14. The percentage of schools in large districts offering remote instruction was 91 percent, higher than in both small and medium districts, at 75 and 80 percent, respectively. The biggest jump was for medium-sized districts, up 16 percentage points from Wave 2. Few schools in large districts had no plans to offer instruction, just 1 percent, and the remaining 8 percent were planning to offer instruction after April 14.

Higher percentages of schools in small and medium districts had no posted plans for instruction, at 13 and 9 percent, respectively, while the percentages preparing to offer plans in coming weeks were similar at 16 and 12 percent, respectively. Here again, the largest change was in medium districts, where the percentage of schools with no plans dropped from 24 to 9 percent between Waves 2 and 3. Note that district websites in small districts—and perhaps even medium districts—may not be the means to communicate remote instruction plans, but we have no mechanism to assess this possibility.

Again, we found more schools in large districts listed virtual supplemental content on their district websites. By April 14, 77 percent of schools in large districts listed virtual supplemental content on their district websites, up from 61 percent in Wave 1. For schools in medium and small districts, the percentages were 45 and 52 percent, compared to 28 percent and 35 percent of small and medium districts, respectively, in Wave 1. The percentage of schools in districts offering only virtual supplementary content and no other plans was just 3 percent. However, this percentage was highest in medium districts, where 4 percent of schools provided only virtual supplementary content to students in Wave 3.

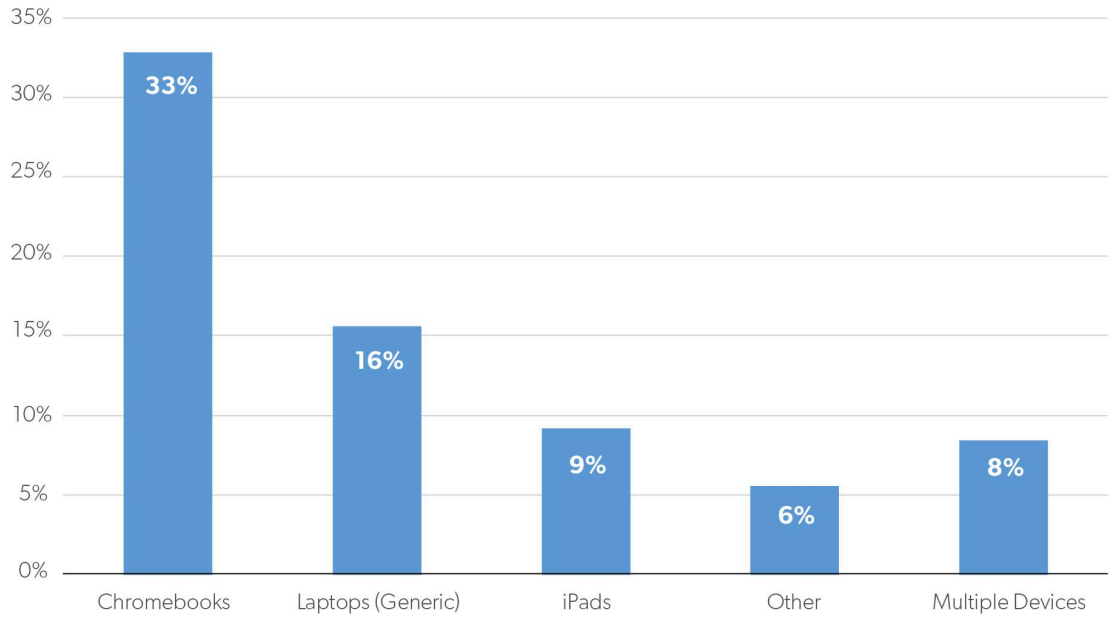
We find that schools in small, medium, and large districts offer more directed methods of instruction at relatively equal rates. Seventy percent of schools in large districts provided students with packets, compared to 72 percent in both small and medium districts.

Of districts that provide asynchronous instruction, we found roughly equal increases across small, medium, and large districts. Sixty-two percent of schools offered asynchronous platforms in small districts, up from 23 percent in Wave 1 and 53 percent in Wave 2. Larger increases occurred in medium districts, which jumped from 25 to 56 to 73 percent in Waves 1, 2, and 3, respectively. Over the same three waves, large districts grew from 39 to 70 and then 78 percent. Synchronous platforms were offered in 43 percent of schools in large districts, significantly more than the 28 percent in medium districts and 30 percent in small districts.

Technology and Internet Accommodations. Schools are finding new and creative ways to provide remote instruction to students, but they also have to ensure all students have devices and internet access. As of 2016, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 89 percent of US households had a computer and 82 percent had internet access.[15]

We find that 74 percent of schools are in districts that mentioned plans to offer any type of technological assistance, including help with devices and internet access, up from 66 percent in Wave 2. Fifty-seven percent of districts mentioned plans to provide devices to students who are otherwise unable to access online instruction. Of these, the three most common specific devices were Chromebooks (in 57 percent of schools offering devices, 33 percent of all schools), generic laptops (27 percent of schools offering devices, 16 percent of all schools), and iPads (16 percent of schools offering devices, 9 percent of all schools). Additionally, some districts listed that they would provide more than one type of device, such as Chromebooks *or* iPads, which included 8 percent of schools (15 percent of those offering devices). The findings are expressed in Figure A1.

Figure A1. Types of Devices Offered in All Schools



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 14, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

Similarly, many districts recognize that students may not have internet access at home and thus are discussing and implementing plans to address this challenge. By April 14, approximately 62 percent of schools were in districts that mentioned on their website the challenge of unequal access to internet, more than in Wave 2 (53 percent). The majority of these, including 34 percent of all schools, offered corporate plans for discounted or free internet access, while some provided Wi-Fi hot spots to families (including 21 percent of schools).

Special Education and ELL Students. Even in the middle of a pandemic, schools continue to have a responsibility to serve all students, including ELLs and those who participate in special education programs. Accordingly, we are interested in documenting how and if schools design plans to serve these specific types of students.

By April 14, 42 percent of schools were in districts that had mentioned the specific needs of students in special education programs, up from 20 percent in Wave 1. The majority of these—35 percent of all schools—were in districts that did not mention limiting special education services, while just 7 percent of schools were in districts that discussed limitations on the special education services they could provide.

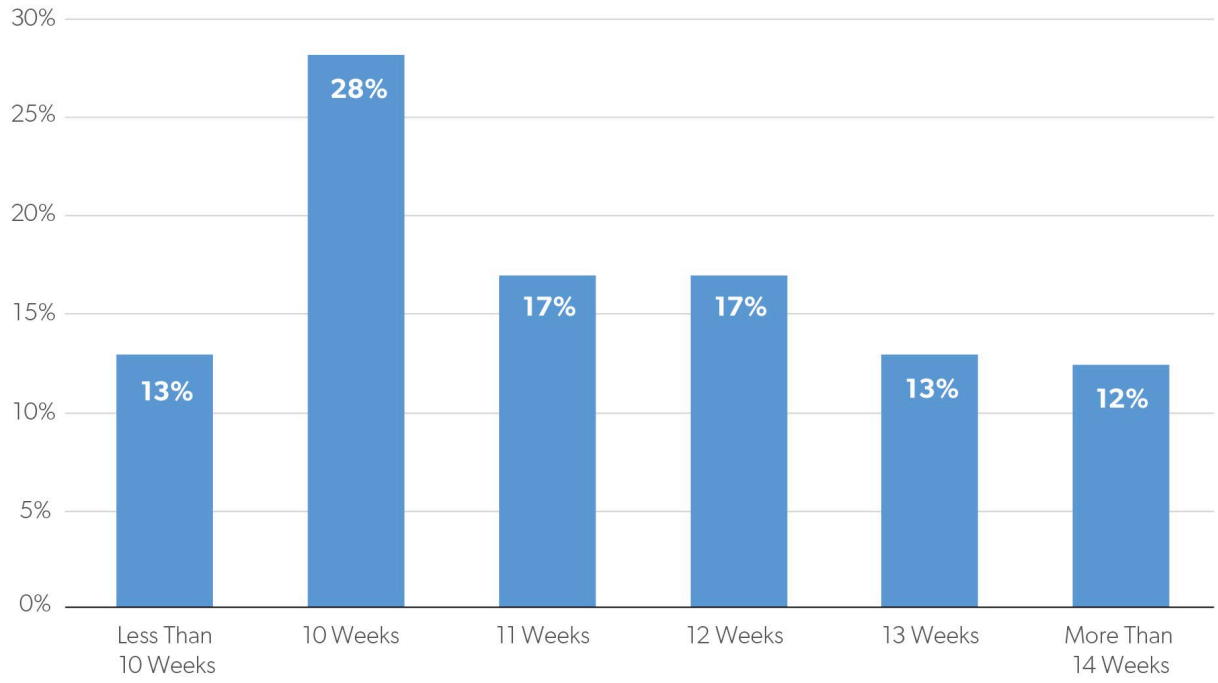
Smaller percentages of schools were in districts whose websites mentioned services for ELLs. ELL service limitations were mentioned in districts containing 2 percent of all schools, while 22 percent discussed ELL services without mentioning limitations.

Appendix B. Additional Intervals Between Key Dates in the Pandemic

The following section describes additional time intervals for schools during the pandemic. Figures B1 and B2 show the length of time between school closures, the start of remote instruction, and districts' last days of school. Figures B3 and B4 show how much remote instruction would occur in districts with tentative plans to reopen and how much in-person instruction time those districts would expect to have if their reopening plans proceeded as scheduled.

Weeks Until the Last Day of School. The time between school closures and the end of the academic year varied considerably across schools. Thirteen percent of schools had fewer than 10 weeks of school scheduled after they closed buildings to students. Twenty-eight percent had 10 weeks, and 11 and 12 weeks were expected in 34 percent of schools (17 percent each). Thirteen percent of schools had 13 more weeks of school after closure, and another 12 percent had 14–16 weeks remaining in the school year (Figure B1).

Figure B1. Weeks from Closure to Last Day of School

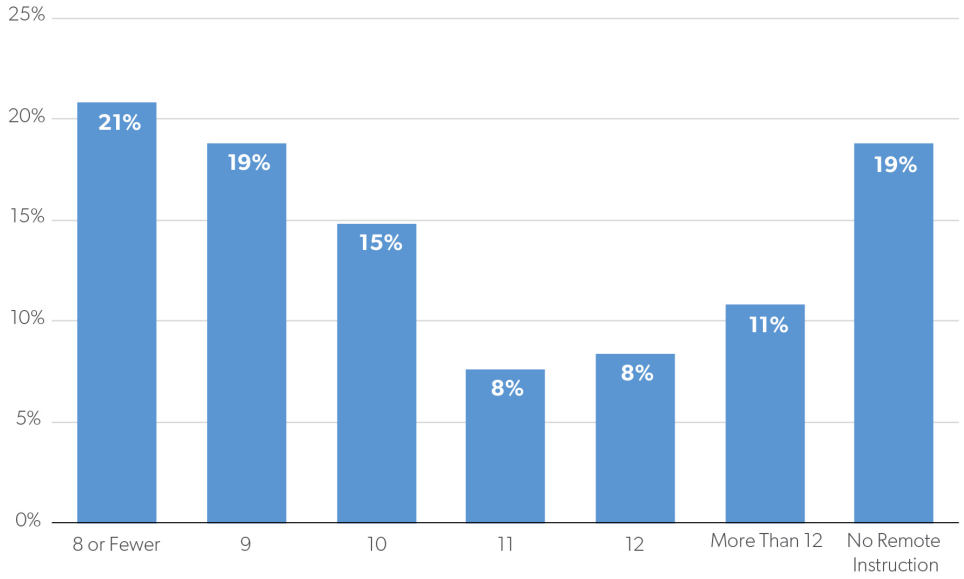


Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 14, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

The total amount of time for remote learning, measured from the time districts began offering remote instruction to the last scheduled day of school, ranged from four to 15 weeks. Granted, these estimates assume that districts do not extend their school years into the summer or, alternatively, that they do not announce early ends to the current academic year.

Specifically, 9 percent of schools were in districts with seven or fewer weeks of potential remote learning, and another 12 percent had eight weeks. Nineteen percent of schools had nine weeks of potential remote instruction time, making it the modal category. Fifteen percent of schools had 10 weeks of potential remote learning, 8 percent of schools had 11 and 12 weeks (each), and 11 percent of schools had the potential of having 13 or more weeks of remote instruction (Figure B2). Nineteen percent of schools were in districts with no plan for remote instruction.

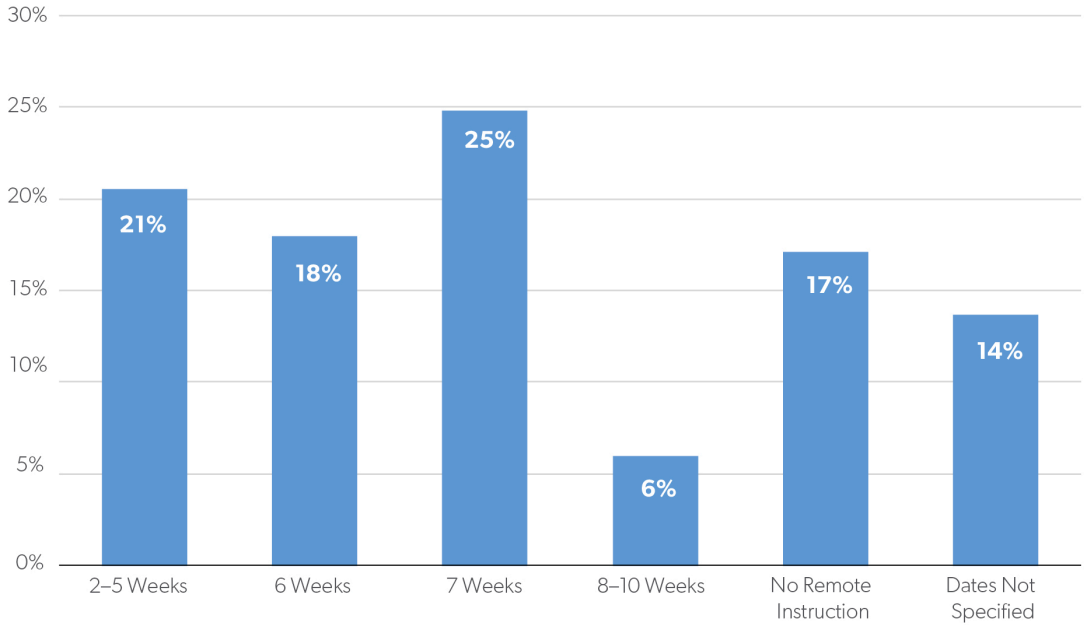
Figure B2. Total Weeks of Remote Instruction in the School Year



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 14, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

Weeks of Remote Instruction Before and After Scheduled Reopening. At the time we collected Wave 3 data, half of schools were in districts that had plans to reopen. Of these schools, 16 percent did not have remote instructional plans on district websites, and another 15 percent did not list a clear date that remote instruction began. Nineteen percent of schools that were in districts with plans to reopen had fewer than five weeks of remote instruction left before their tentative reopening date. Another 19 percent had five weeks of expected remote instruction, and 25 percent had six expected weeks. Seven percent expected eight to 10 weeks of remote instruction before their tentative reopening (Figure B3). Given the rapid number of states that closed schools for the academic year in the days after data collection, many of these expectations will turn into longer periods of remote instruction.

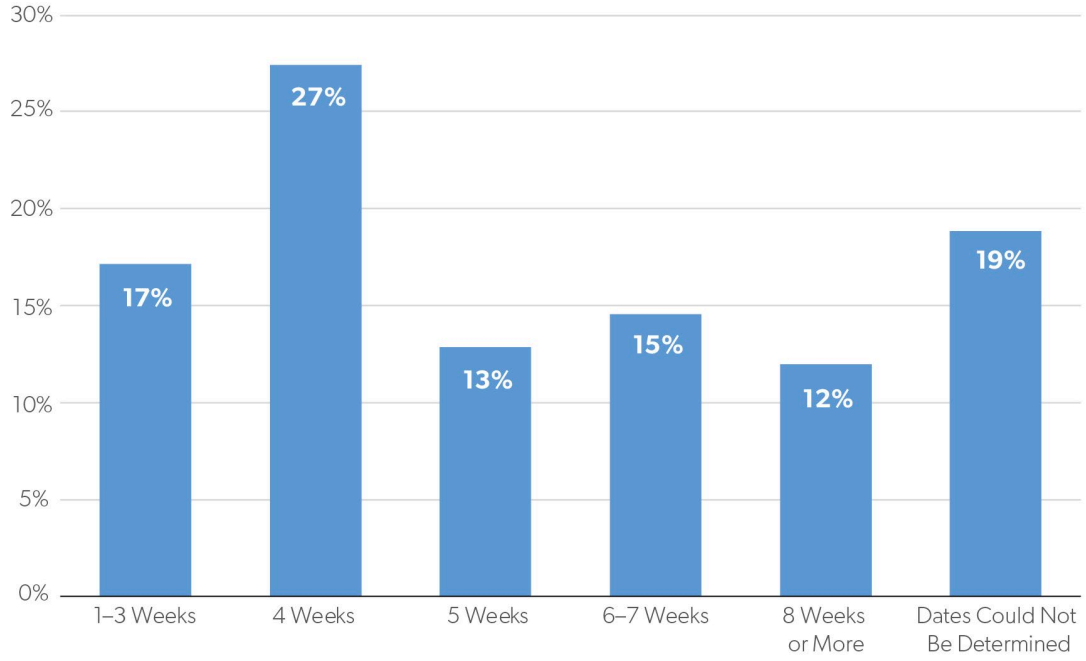
Figure B3. Weeks of Remote Instruction Before Scheduled Reopening, as of April 14, 2020



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 14, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

Of the half of schools in districts that, at data collection, retained tentative plans to reopen, 17 percent expected fewer than three weeks of school between the time they reopen and the last day of their academic year. More than a quarter of schools (26 percent) are in districts that, if they reopen as planned, would have four weeks between the time they reopen and the last day of school. Fourteen percent of schools would have five weeks remaining, 15 percent would have six to eight weeks of school in their buildings after reopening, and another 9 percent would have eight weeks (Figure B4). The remaining 20 percent of these schools did not have clear reopening dates on their districts websites, although their website clearly provide information that schools are not yet closed for the remainder of the academic year.

Figure B4. Weeks of Instruction After Scheduled Reopening, as of April 14, 2020



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 14, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

Appendix C. Comparing School- and District-Level Estimates

Table C1 presents the school- and district-weighted percentages for the main findings described in the report. Visit the AEI website for a detailed description of the methodology and weighting process.

Table C1. School- and District-Weighted Percentages

	School-Weighted Estimates	District-Weighted Estimates
Closures		
% Closed	100%	100%
% District Closed First	42%	43%
% Tentative Plans to Reopen, as of April 14	47%	36%
% Closed for Remainder of School Year	48%	53%
Food Services		
% with Plan for Offering Meals on District Website	94%	81%
% Offering Daily Meal Pickup	65%	56%
% Offering Multiday Meal Pickup	55%	48%
% Offering Meal Delivery	33%	35%
Technology Assistance		
% Mentioning Device Support	57%	44%
% Mentioning Internet Support	62%	44%
Educational Programs		
% Offering Virtual Supplemental Content	57%	45%
% Currently Offering Packets	72%	70%
% Currently Offering Asynchronous Instruction	71%	60%
% Currently Offering Synchronous Instruction	33%	23%
Expectations		
% Expected Participation	58%	53%
% Taking Attendance Remotely	20%	12%
% Grading Student Work	41%	37%
% Grading for Performance	20%	13%
% Grading for Completion	21%	24%

Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 14, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

Notes

1. We selected 250 school districts randomly and proportional to size, with size defined as the number of operational schools in the district. The sampling frame consisted of regular school districts in all 50 states and DC with at least one operational school, as listed in the universe district file from the National Center for Education Statistics' Common Core of Data from the 2017–18 school year.
2. Percentages for school districts can be calculated with the weights available on the complete dataset, but not from the single-wave spreadsheets. Raw percentages computed from the single-wave spreadsheet do yield estimates on the percentage for schools. Variance estimates require additional analysis using the complete dataset, which is available upon request.
3. Even more specifically, public schools in the sample reflect all schools in regular school districts in all 50 states and DC that had operational schools as reported in the 2017–18 district universe data file from the Common Core of Data, collected by the National Center for Education Statistics.
4. To request the latest data, contact Jessica Schurz at Jessica.Schurz@aei.org.
5. American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 14, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.
6. Nat Malkus, Cody Christensen, and Lexi West, "School District Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Round 1, Districts' Initial Responses," American Enterprise Institute, April 7, 2020, https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/school-district-responses-to-the-covid-19-pandemic-round-1-districts-initial-responses/.
7. As of April 14, 19 states—Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington—had announced statewide closures for the year, while four—California, Idaho, Maine, and South Dakota—had recommended closure for the year. However, between the close of our data collection and the time of publication, another 13 states closed for the academic year—Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin. See *Education Week*, "Map: Coronavirus and School Closures," April 20, 2020, https://www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/map-coronavirus-and-school-closures.html.
8. Note that each of these changes is within the margin of error. However, since Waves 1, 2, and 3 capture data on the same sample of 250 public school districts, these changes reflect real changes in the sample.
9. Districts with existing one-to-one device programs may not be included in this percentage.
10. For instance, in a national survey of teachers, *Education Week* found that far higher percentages of teachers were participating in synchronous platforms than our survey captured from districts' offerings on their websites. Holly Kurtz, "National Survey Tracks Impact of Coronavirus on Schools: 10 Key Findings," *Education Week*, April 10, 2020, https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/04/10/national-survey-tracks-impact-of-coronavirus-on.html.
11. Packets include worksheets or bundles of work that are provided electronically or via hard copy.
12. The distinction between packets and asynchronous platforms is that packets are single compilations of materials to be completed over time, whereas asynchronous platforms allow for continual updating and the transfer of work to and from students.
13. By "expected to participate," we do not mean schools would not accept common extenuating circumstances but that they communicated a general expectation for participation. Those without an expressed participation issued the platform as an option, with the hope of participation and the possibility of expected participation in the future.
14. By "more directed," we mean asynchronous and synchronous platforms, which are more directed than virtual supplemental content or packets are.
15. US Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, "Table 702.60. Number and Percentage of Households with Computer and Internet Access, by State: 2016," https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_702.60.asp.