School District Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Round 5, Plateauing Services in America's Schools

By Nat Malkus and Cody Christensen

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Key Points

- This is the fifth report in the "School District Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic" series, covering changes that occurred in public school districts between April 24 and May 8, 2020.
- For the first time since we began collecting data for AEI's COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey, many education-related services offered in schools have plateaued, meaning they were offered by similar percentages of schools two weeks earlier.
- Only 6 percent of schools in districts we surveyed changed the date of their last day of school—most of which moved up the last day of school by one or two weeks.
- To determine students' final report card grades, 22 percent of schools implemented a pass/fail policy to replace traditional letter grades. Similarly, policies in more than a fifth of schools ensure student grades "can only go up" from when the pandemic started.

Schools across the country are approaching the final weeks of the academic year. For many students and teachers, this will mark the end of one of the most unusual semesters in recent memory. The majority of the nation's school buildings closed in mid-March due to COVID-19, and by late March, all school buildings closed.

These rapid and unplanned building closures left school leaders no choice but to create ways to offer educational services remotely. Most schools sprung into actions, developing and implementing remote learning plans by the end of March or early April. Some school districts took longer, waiting to develop plans until late April.

Now that schools are so close to the end of their academic year (indeed, the school year in some districts has already ended), few are implementing new educational services. Almost 70 percent of schools will have ended the academic year by June, and thus, attention will quickly shift to developing new operations for the coming fall. Many unanswered questions remain on how schools and teachers will rectify the lost instruction time during the pandemic—a challenge that educators will grapple with in the months ahead.

AEI's COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey

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 May 7 and 8, 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 B.

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]

Findings

This report documents how public school districts responded during the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis through May 8, the date of the most recent C-ERLS data collection (hereafter referred to as "Wave 5"[6]). We document many services that schools and districts provide through the pandemic, including meals, technological devices, internet access, and remote instruction.

In previous reports, we observed steady increases in the share of schools offering educational services and remote instruction, with the largest increases occurring between earlier waves. In Wave 5, however, many education services offered in schools have plateaued—meaning that levels are approximately equivalent to what we reported in the previous wave.

This should not come as a surprise given that many schools are now approaching the end of their academic year. (Indeed, 3 percent of schools had already finished their school year by the Wave 5 data collection period—a percentage that will grow dramatically in the weeks ahead.) With such limited time left, many schools are simply carrying out the educational plans they established in prior weeks, rather than designing and implementing new services.

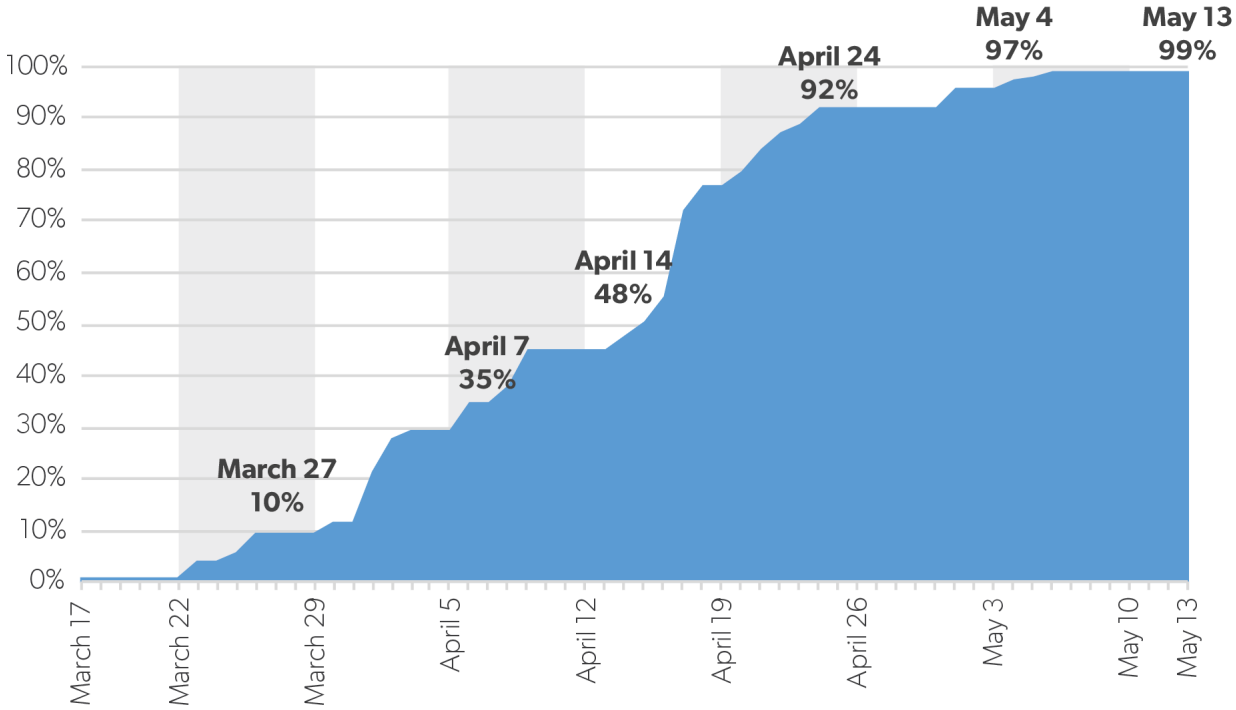
Table 1. C-ERLS Data Collection Dates

Wave	Date of Data Collection
1	March 26–27, 2020
2	April 6–7, 2020
3	April 13–14, 2020
4	April 23–24, 2020
5	May 7–8, 2020

Source: Authors.

By May 8, 95 percent of schools were providing meals to students, 65 percent were providing devices, and 68 percent had plans to help provide internet access to students at home. Nearly all schools (97 percent) are currently providing some form of remote instruction, with the most common format being asynchronous web-based platforms, followed by packets of worksheets, and then synchronous web-based platforms. We discuss each area in more detail in the following subsections.

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)," May 8, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

Closures. All schools in the sample were closed by late March, and all remained closed through May 8. Over half of building closures occurred between March 16 and 18, either through districts' own initiative or statewide orders. None of the schools in districts we sampled had plans to reopen buildings in the current 2019–20 school year—marking the first time that all schools had removed tentative plans to reopen from district websites.

Decisions to keep buildings closed were primarily driven by state orders and recommendations. Such mandates have been enacted in 48 states that now cover 99 percent of all public schools in the country. At the time of this writing, only Montana and Wyoming had yet to issue orders requiring schools to remain closed. (However, the districts we sampled in Montana and Wyoming had proactively decided to remain closed for the remainder of the school year.) Figure 1 shows the share of schools affected by statewide orders and closure recommendations between March 17 and May 13.

Ending the Academic Year. Many districts are now approaching the end of their academic year. Indeed, by May 8, 3 percent of schools in districts we surveyed had already reached the end of their academic year. An additional 24 percent of schools will reach the end of the year by May 22. By the first week of June, 69 percent of schools will have reached the end of their academic year (Figure 2).

Only 6 percent of schools made announcements about changing the date of their last day of school. In districts we surveyed, these announcements were made sporadically between April 3 and May 7. Of districts that changed the last day of their academic year, all but one shortened the length of the school year. Districts that shortened the length of their academic year typically did so by about one to two weeks, on average.

We calculated the total length of time (in weeks) that districts offered remote instruction, based on the dates that districts first began offering remote instruction and their last scheduled day of school—both of which vary across districts. A majority of schools (56 percent) will have offered remote instruction between two and three months by the time the academic year ends. Twenty-two percent of schools will have offered remote instruction for three or more months, and just 20 percent

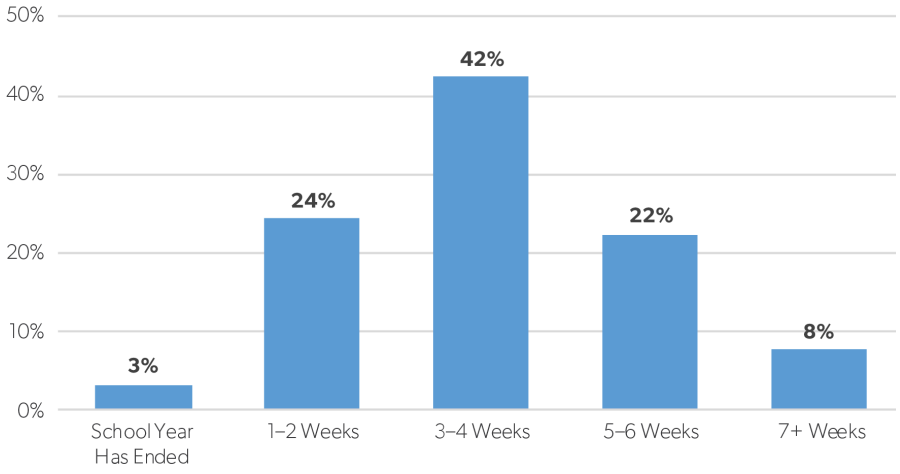
of schools will have offered it for two or fewer months (Figure 3).

Food Service. When school buildings first closed, many districts established mechanisms to provide meals to students. In late March, 82 percent of schools were in districts whose websites describe programs to provide meals to students, and by May 8, that share had grown to 95 percent.

The number of schools offering meal services—through daily pickup, multiday pickup, or meal delivery—reached a plateau by early May. In mid-April, 94 percent of schools in districts were offering meal services, and that percentage has fluctuated by less than a single percentage point since then.

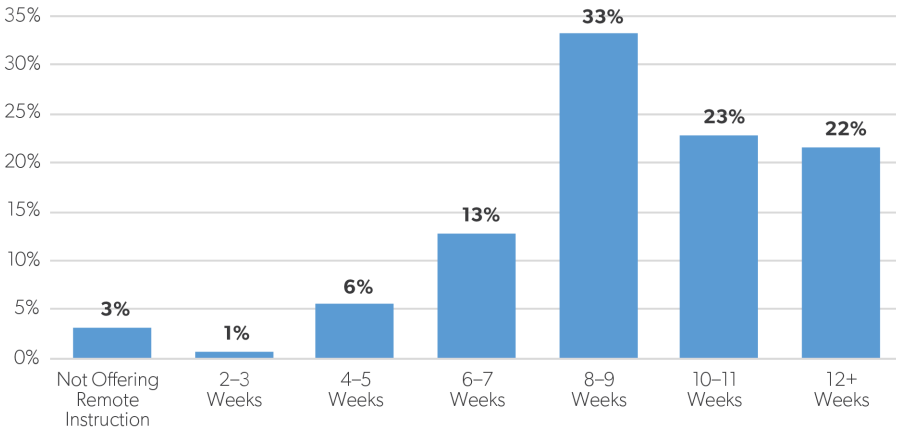
The mechanisms of meal delivery have changed in ways consistent with efforts to promote social distancing safeguards—although these, too, have now plateaued. On May 8, 61 percent of schools were in districts providing daily meal pickup services, and 57 percent were allowing students to pick up food for multiple days (up to one week) at once—roughly equivalent to levels observed two weeks earlier (Figure 4).[7]

Figure 2. Weeks Remaining in the Academic Year, as of May 8



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," May 8, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

Figure 3. Weeks of Remote Instruction to the Scheduled End of the Academic Year, as of May 8



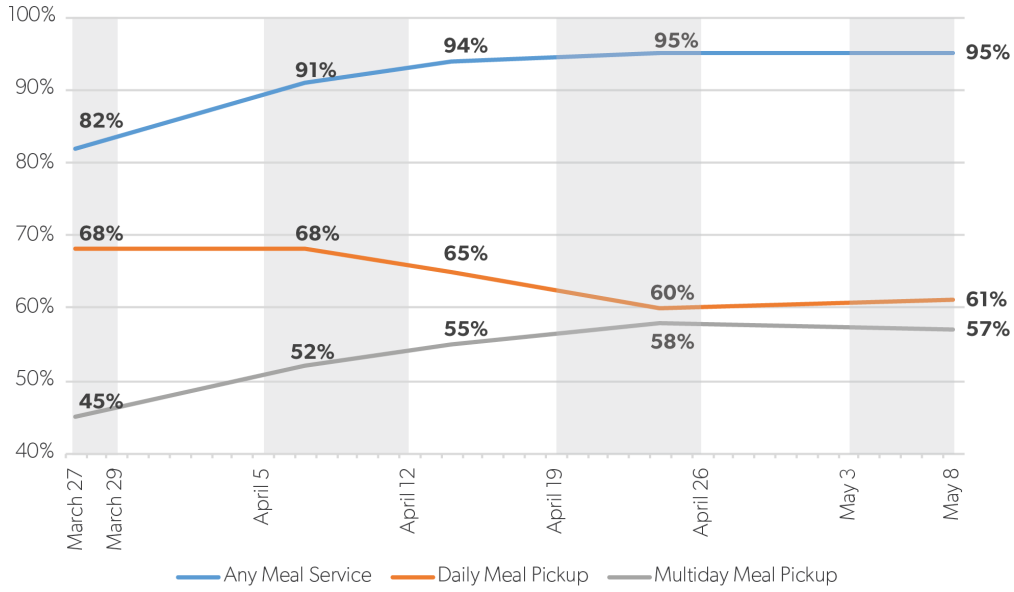
Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," May 8, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

Technology Assistance. Ensuring that students have access to technology is a precursor to effective online instruction. As a recent *New York Times* op-ed put it, the school year "effectively ended in March" for students without sufficient technologies.[8] Accordingly, many schools made efforts to provide students with devices and internet—albeit, the implementation and effectiveness of these programs vary.[9]

By May 8, 80 percent of schools were in districts that offered some kind of technology assistance to families. Specifically, 68 percent of schools provided some form of assistance for students to access the internet, and 65 percent of schools had a program to provide devices to students at home. Fifty-three percent of schools offered help for both internet access and devices (Figure 5).[10]

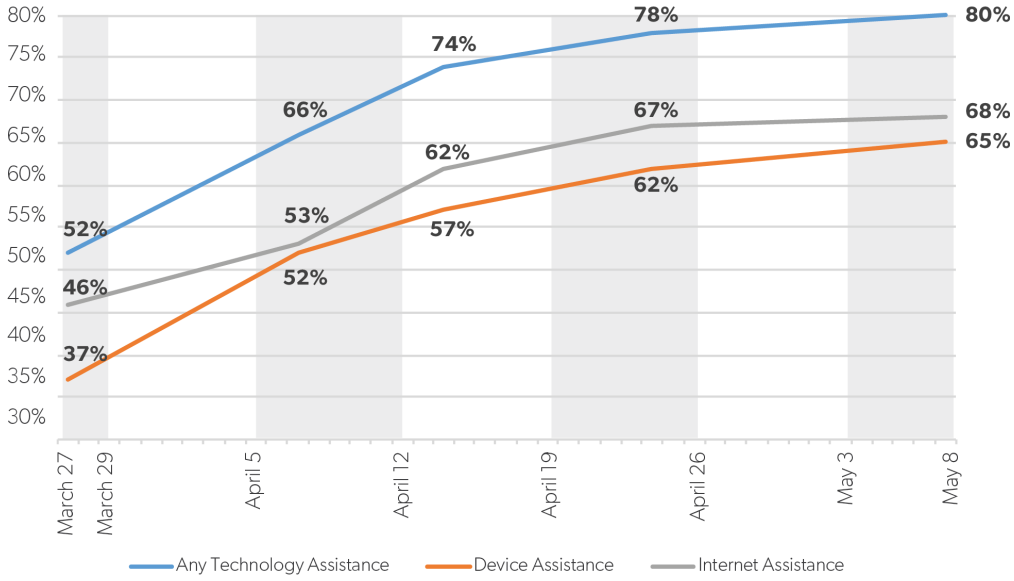
These numbers, too, have plateaued in recent weeks. For example, on April 24, 78 percent of schools provided any form of technology assistance, and that share increased by only 2 percentage points by May 8. Additional details on technology provisions are in Appendix A.

Figure 4. Share of Schools Providing Meal Services to Students, March–May 2020



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data from Waves 1, 2 , 3, and 4. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," May 8, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

Figure 5. Share of Schools Providing Technology Assistance, March–May 2020



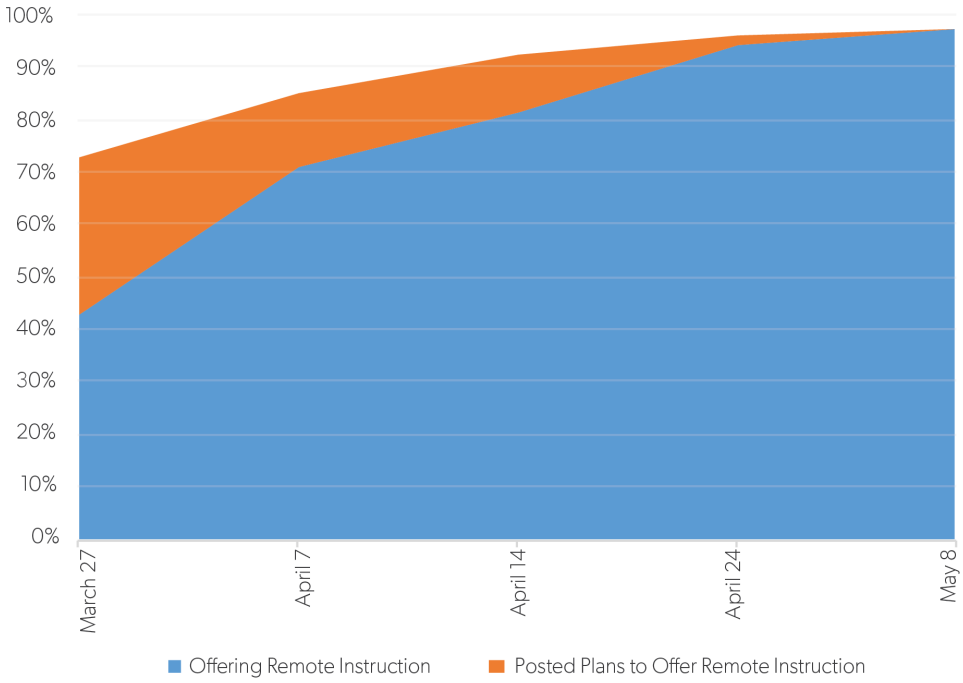
Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data from Waves 1, 2 , 3, and 4. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," May 8, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

Educational Programs. By early May, 97 percent of schools were in districts that had some sort of education program or offering available, a slight increase from the 94 percent observed in Wave 4 (Figure 6).[11] Individual schools or teachers may have offered educational resources through school websites, email, direct contact, or an open-access asynchronous platform, which might not be captured in our data collection.[12]

There was a wide spectrum of educational provisions in districts offering remote instruction, ranging from grade-level packets of printed instructional 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. See the textbox on the next page for additional details.

When examining districts' educational provisions, we also track whether students are broadly expected to participate or whether participation is recommended but essentially optional.[15] By May 8, 62 percent of schools were in districts whose websites expressed some expectation for student participation. Just 9 percent of schools expressly stated that participation is not required, and the remaining districts did not clearly state expectations for participation.

Figure 6. Share of Schools Offering (and Planning to Offer) Remote Instruction, as of May 8



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data from Waves 1, 2 , 3, and 4. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," May 8, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

We also tracked if schools are taking attendance, which is a more formal means of expressing expectations for student participation. As of May 8, 30 percent of schools were in districts that had established a means of taking attendance—the same level we observed in late April. Of the remainder, 9 percent of schools explicitly stated that attendance would not be taken, and 61 percent of schools were in districts whose websites made no mention of plans to take attendance.

Figure 7 displays non-exclusive percentages of different educational program offerings in place at the time of data collection. In general, we find that all forms of remote instruction have largely plateaued. Between April 24 and May 8, the dates of the Wave 4 and Wave 5 C-ERLS data collection, the share of schools offering virtual supplemental content, packets, asynchronous web-based platforms, and synchronous web-based platforms fluctuated by less than a few percentage points.

Specifically, 62 percent of schools are in districts that offer virtual supplemental content on May 8, a small increase from the 60 percent of schools offering virtual supplemental content on April 24. Just 2 percent of schools offer only virtual supplemental content and no other form of more directed instruction.[16]

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.[13]

The third and fourth categories include programs that use web-based platforms to enable asynchronous or synchronous directed instruction. Asynchronous 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.[14] Synchronous 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.

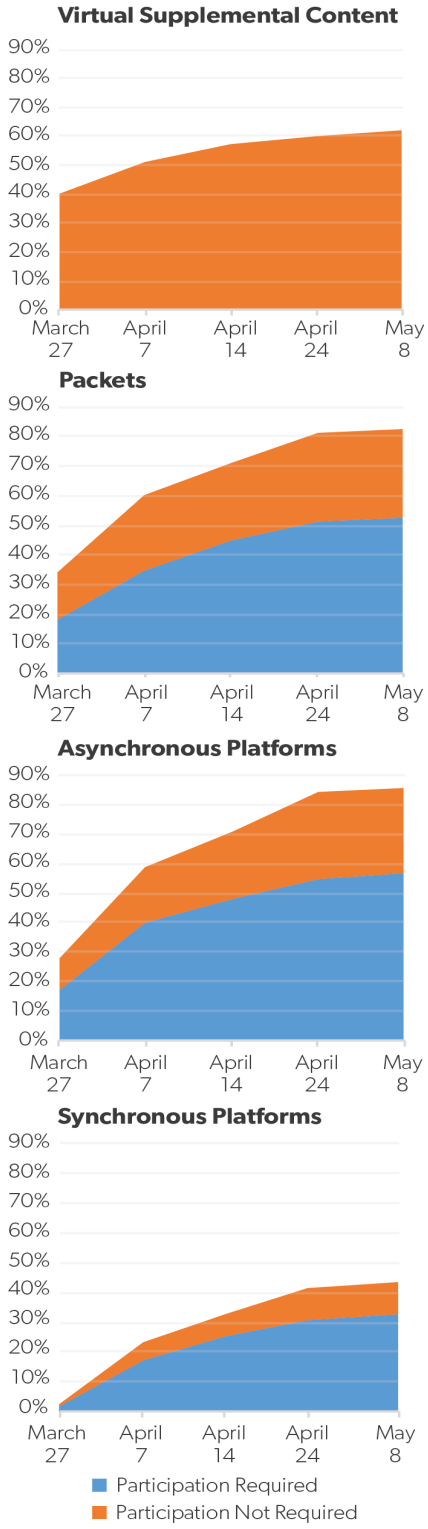
By May 8, packets of resources were offered in 83 percent of schools, representing a 2 percentage point increase from the level observed on April 24. Thirty-one percent of all schools offered packets without a clear expectation for participation, and 52 percent offered packets with stated expectations of participation, mirroring the proportion from the previous wave. Many of these schools offered packets for students who might not have access to the internet or devices at home, but the district may not have used packets as their primary format of remote instruction.

Asynchronous web-based platforms continue to be the most common form of remote instruction in schools, a trend that we first observed in Wave 4 when the usage of asynchronous platforms overtook packets. Eighty-five percent of schools are in districts using asynchronous platforms, which was a 1 percentage point increase since April 24. (However, since the start of the pandemic, the share of schools in districts using asynchronous platforms has nearly tripled.) Twenty-nine percent of all schools offered asynchronous platforms without expecting participation, and 56 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 less common, at roughly half the frequency of packets and asynchronous platforms. By May 8, 44 percent of schools offered synchronous education platforms. This is just a small increase from the level observed on April 24, but it is a substantial increase from late March, when only 3 percent of schools listed plans for using synchronous platforms. By May 8, the majority of schools with synchronous instruction, roughly 32 percent of all schools, expected student participation, and just 11 percent expressed no expectations of participation.

Determining Student Grades. Throughout the pandemic, we collected data on grading policies described on district websites. On May 8, 62 percent of schools were in districts whose websites mentioned that student assignments were being graded, up substantially from the 50 percent of schools doing so on April 24. Exactly half of these

Figure 7. Share of Schools Providing Remote Instruction and Expectations to Participate, by Type of Instruction



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data from Waves 1, 2, 3, and 4. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," May 8, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

schools were grading student work based on completion (i.e., simply turning in assignments), and the other half were grading performance (i.e., grading work for accuracy).[17] Eleven percent of all schools were in districts that expressly stated that, as of May 8, work would not be graded, and the remaining 27 percent of schools were in districts whose websites did not discuss policies around student grades during school closure.

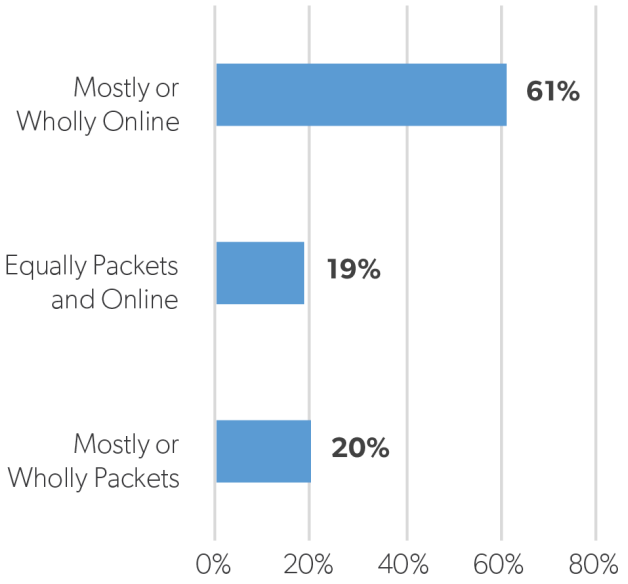
To determine students' final report card grades, at least 22 percent of schools implemented a pass/fail policy to replace traditional letter grades. Additionally, at least 22 percent of schools included disclaimers on district websites that student grades "can only go up" from when school buildings closed—meaning that, if work is graded, completing assignments will only improve a student's final grade.[18] Just 14 percent of schools expressly stated that final report card grades would be determined normally, and the majority did not provide information about how final grades would be tallied.

Reliance on Online Technologies. Some districts rely entirely on hard-copy packets to provide remote instruction, while others exclusively use online platforms. Many fall somewhere between these extremes. While not a perfect proxy for educational quality, districts that more heavily rely on online instruction—provided via synchronous or asynchronous platforms—allow for teaching and learning that is somewhat more similar to what students would receive in a typical classroom.

Accordingly, we collected information to gauge how heavily (or how minimally) districts appear to rely on online platforms compared to how much they rely on providing packets of worksheets or other hard-copy materials.[19] To limit the degree of subjectivity, we created three broad buckets to classify a district's remote instruction plans: those relying mostly or entirely on online platforms, those relying mostly or entirely on packets (or hard-copy materials), and those in between, relying on online platforms and packets (or hard-copy materials) in relatively equal proportions (Figure 8).[20]

A large majority of schools (61 percent) were in districts that relied mostly or wholly on online platforms, about three times the share that relied wholly or mostly on packets (20 percent) or equally on online platforms and packets (19 percent). These

Figure 8. Share of Schools Relying on Packets Compared to Online Platforms, as of May 8



Note: Categories are mutually exclusive. The eight districts that do not yet offer remote instruction (or offer only virtual supplemental content) are excluded from this figure. These percentages are out of 242 districts, rather than the entire set of 250.
Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," May 8, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

levels are roughly equivalent to what we observed in Wave 4, in which 58 percent of schools relied mostly or wholly on online platforms and just over 20 percent relied mostly or wholly on packets.

One-on-One Contact with Students. Many districts explicitly encouraged teachers to make direct contact with their students. These check-ins, which are not always for education-related activities, allow teachers to ensure that students are safe and healthy during the pandemic. On May 8, 73 percent of schools were in such districts—roughly the same level recorded in mid and late April.

The most common method of direct contact, encouraged in over half of schools, was email communication between teachers and students. Other common forms of direct contact include using web-based platforms (36 percent), scheduled office hours (30 percent), phone calls (24 percent), and homework hotlines (5 percent). Almost half of schools (47 percent) encouraged more than one method for contacting students. Again, these levels

are roughly equivalent to the shares recorded in Waves 3 and 4.

In addition to these methods, students also had direct contact with teachers through synchronous education platforms, available in 44 percent of schools. Whether through synchronous platforms or the means of one-on-one contact listed above, by May 8, 77 percent of schools were in districts that encourage personal contact between students and teachers.

Conclusion

Many districts are approaching the end of the academic year, but schools will continue to grapple with the ramifications of closures in the years ahead. An untold number of instructional hours have been lost due to building closures and the lack of adequate technologies. Students affected by such disruptions will start the next school year behind where their peers in the grades ahead of them started the current year.

Teachers will be hard-pressed to teach students the content they missed from the prior year while introducing new content. Schools may have to continue innovating to find ways to catch these students up. This could take the form of tutoring, weekend or summer school, or beginning the next academic year early. Granted, these assumptions are predicated on the belief that schools will be reopened in the fall—which is not yet a guarantee.

AEI's final C-ERLS data collection for the 2019–20 school year will take place in late May, corresponding with the dates that the majority of schools will officially end their academic years. At that point, we will be able to track how most of the nation's schools made it through the pandemic, and attention will begin to shift to the 2020–21 academic year.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix A. Additional Questions and Data Collection

The following sections describe additional information that we gathered during the fifth 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? Remote instruction plans differ not only across districts but also within individual districts based on school level (e.g., elementary, middle, and high schools). We observe small differences across school levels in providing remote instruction, as has been seen in earlier waves of data collection. By May 8, 83 percent of elementary schools provided packets, compared to 81 percent of middle schools and 78 percent of high schools. We observe the opposite trend in providing asynchronous platforms, with 82 percent of middle schools and high schools offering asynchronous platforms, compared to 76 percent of elementary schools. An identical proportion (42 percent) of elementary, middle, and high schools offered synchronous platforms.

Do Districts' Responses Vary by District Size? Differences in educational services also vary by the size of school districts. This is not surprising, given that small and large districts face different challenges. For instance, small districts might have limited resources or infrastructure to adjust to the pandemic, while large districts might struggle to develop unified or piecemeal plans across all their schools.

Accordingly, 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 87 percent of schools in small districts offered meals by May 8. Comparatively, 99 percent of medium and 100 percent of large districts offered meal services.

Schools in smaller districts offered daily and multiday meal pickup less frequently, with 51 percent offering daily pickup and 48 percent offering multiday meal pickup. Medium and large districts, on the other hand, provided these services more frequently. For comparison, 67 percent of medium districts and 66 percent of large districts provided daily meal pickup. Similarly, 64 percent of medium districts and 58 percent of large districts provided multiday meal pickup.

Participation and Attendance. Schools in large districts had higher levels of expected participation compared to medium and small districts. By May 8, 72 percent of large districts had clearly expressed expectations for participation in remote learning, compared to 54 percent and 62 percent in medium and small districts, respectively.

Large districts were also more likely than small and medium-sized districts to describe an attendance policy, making it possible for them to have higher estimated percentages that were affirmatively taking attendance and higher percentages expressly not taking attendance. Specifically, 57 percent of schools in large districts mentioned attendance, with 43 percent taking attendance and 14 percent explicitly not taking attendance. Percentages for medium-sized districts were relatively lower, with 34 percent mentioning some type of attendance policy (consisting of 26 percent taking attendance and 8 percent explicitly not taking attendance).

Just 30 percent of schools in small districts mentioned attendance, with 23 percent taking attendance and just 7 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. Seventy-seven percent of schools in large districts have posted plans for grading student assignments, while only 58 percent and 53 percent, respectively, of medium and small districts have done so. Forty-six percent of large districts were grading remote work based on performance, and 31 percent were grading remote work based on completion. Of the schools in medium and small districts, 29 and 21 percent, respectively, were grading work based on performance, while 29 percent of schools in medium districts and 32 percent of schools in small districts were grading remote work based on completion.

Instruction, Overall and by Type. We found that schools in large districts offered remote instruction at slightly higher rates compared to schools in medium and small districts. Specifically, 99 percent of schools in large districts were offering remote instruction by May 8, compared to 98 percent and 94 percent of schools in medium and small districts, respectively.

We also found that the specific type of remote instruction offered by schools varied by district size. Indeed, large districts were far more likely than medium and small districts to offer virtual supplemental content. By May 8, 78 percent of schools in large districts had these resources available on their district websites, compared to 62 percent and 48 percent of medium and small districts, respectively. Similarly, 91 percent of schools in large districts offered asynchronous platforms, which was close to the 88 percent in medium districts doing so, but much more than the 78 percent of small districts offering them. In addition, 54 percent of schools in large districts provided remote instruction with synchronous platforms, well above the 39 percent of schools doing so in medium and small districts. In contrast, a smaller estimated percentage of schools in large districts offered students instructional packets, 77 percent, compared to 85 and 86 percent, respectively, in medium and small districts.

What Online Platforms Are Districts Using for Asynchronous and Synchronous Instruction? We gathered information on the specific types of asynchronous and synchronous platforms used in schools and find that some platforms are much more common than others. By far, the most common asynchronous platform is Google Classroom, used in 58 percent of all schools. Other common asynchronous platforms used in schools include Canvas (16 percent), SeeSaw (12 percent), Class Dojo (11 percent), Schoology (8 percent), and iReady (6 percent). Forty-five percent of schools in districts we surveyed listed more than one asynchronous platform that would be used.

Of districts offering synchronous instruction (44 percent of all schools), Zoom was the most common platform, used in 26 percent of schools. Google Hangouts/Google Meet was the second most common, used in 20 percent of schools. Ten percent of schools listed other synchronous platforms, and 13 percent of schools stated that more than one synchronous platform would be used.

Technology and Internet Accommodations. Schools are finding new and creative ways to provide students with technological devices and internet access so they can access online remote instruction from home. 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.[21]

Eighty percent of schools are in districts that mentioned plans to offer any type of technological assistance, including help with devices and internet access. Sixty-five percent of schools mentioned programs to provide devices to students who are otherwise unable to access online instruction. The most common device offered is Chromebooks (available in 40 percent of all schools), generic laptops (available in 20 percent of all schools), and iPads (11 percent of all schools). Additionally, 10 percent of schools in districts we surveyed listed that they would provide more than one type of device, such as allowing students to borrow Chromebooks or iPads.

Many districts also created plans to help students access the internet at home; by May 8, 68 percent of schools were in districts that mentioned some type of plan to address this need. The most common form of internet assistance was general troubleshooting services (e.g., consulting with an IT specialist), which was available in 55 percent of schools. Other common plans for addressing internet needs include partnerships with corporations to offer internet discounts (available in 39 percent of all schools), free Wi-Fi services (available in 25 percent of all schools), and Wi-Fi-equipped buses (available in 5 percent of all schools). Twelve percent of schools in districts we surveyed offered more than one method of assistance in accessing the internet.

Special Education and ELL Students. Even in the middle of a pandemic, schools have a responsibility to serve all students, including ELLs and those who participate in special education programs.

By May 8, most schools (52 percent) were in districts that mentioned the specific needs of students in special education programs on their websites. The vast majority of these—45 percent of all schools—did not list any indication that special education services would be limited or suspended. Just 7 percent of schools were in districts that discussed limitations on the special education services they could provide during the pandemic.

A much smaller share of schools were in districts whose websites mentioned services for ELL students. Thirty percent of schools mentioned ELL services, and only a small fraction of those (2 percent of all schools) mentioned that ELL services would be limited during the pandemic.

Appendix B. Comparing School- and District-Level Estimates

Table B1 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 B1. School- and District-Weighted Percentages

	School-Weighted Estimates	District-Weighted Estimates
Closures		
% Closed	100%	100%
% District Closed First	45%	46%
% Tentative Plans to Reopen, as of May 8	0%	0%
% Closed for Remainder of School Year	99%	99%
Food Services		
% with Plan for Offering Meals on District Website	95%	86%
% Offering Daily Meal Pickup	61%	57%
% Offering Multiday Meal Pickup	57%	52%
% Offering Meal Delivery	32%	36%
Technology Assistance		
% Mentioning Any Technology Support	80%	67%
% Mentioning Device Support	65%	52%
% Mentioning Internet Support	68%	48%
Educational Programs		
% Offering Virtual Supplemental Content	62%	47%
% Currently Offering Packets	83%	83%
% Currently Offering Asynchronous Instruction	85%	75%
% Currently Offering Synchronous Instruction	44%	36%
% Relying Mostly or Wholly on Packets	20%	28%
% Relying on Both Online Platforms and Packets	19%	16%
% Relying Mostly or Wholly on Online Platforms	61%	56%
Expectations		
% Expected Participation	62%	56%
% Taking Attendance Remotely	30%	22%
% Grading Student Work	62%	48%
% Grading for Performance	31%	19%
% Grading for Completion	31%	29%

Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," May 8, 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)," May 8, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.
6. "Wave 1" refers to the C-ERLS data collection that took place on March 26 and 27. "Wave 2" refers to the C-ERLS data collection that took place on April 6 and 7. "Wave 3" refers to the C-ERLS data collection that took place on April 13 and 14. "Wave 4" refers to C-ERLS data collection that occurred on April 23 and 24. For more information, see 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-districtresponses-to-the-covid-19-pandemic-round-1-districts-initial-responses/.
7. 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.
8. Susan Dynarski, "The School Year Really Ended in March," *New York Times*, May 7, 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/05/07/business/school-education-online-money.html.
9. Stefanie Sanford, "What Coronavirus Has Taught Us About the Digital Divide," *Education Week*, May 18, 2020, https://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rick_hess_straight_up/2020/05/what_coronavirus_has_taught_us_about_the_digital_divide.html.
10. Districts with existing one-to-one device programs may not be included in this percentage.
11. In Wave 4, districts that had no clear date for the start of remote instruction on their websites and were categorized as planning to provide remote instruction were rechecked to confirm remote instruction was provided as of April 24. We confirmed remote instruction was in place for 14 districts and, without specific start dates, recorded each district's remote start date as of April 24.
12. 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.
13. Packets include worksheets or bundles of work that are provided electronically or via hard copy.
14. 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.
15. 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 expectation of participation issued the platform as an option, with the hope of participation and the possibility of expected participation in the future.
16. By "more directed," we mean asynchronous and synchronous platforms, which are more directed than virtual supplemental content or packets are.
17. Specifically, 31 percent of all schools were grading work based on completion, and another 31 percent of all schools were grading work based on performance. The remaining 38 percent of schools were not grading student work or did not specify how work would be graded.
18. Ten percent of schools implemented pass/fail policies and included disclaimers that "grades can only go up."
19. Packets and worksheets that are provided electronically are still counted as hard-copy packets. Many schools that provide digital packets also provide hard-copy alternatives, which are either mailed, delivered, or available for pickup at school sites. Only assignments that are included in synchronous or asynchronous platforms are included for relying on online platforms.
20. Remote learning plans are divided into one of these three mutually exclusive categories based on the way that the district describes its remote instruction.

21. 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.