School District Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Round 6, Ending the Year of School Closures

By Nat Malkus, Cody Christensen, and Jessica Schurz

June 2020

Key Points

- This is the sixth report in the "School District Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic" series, covering changes that occurred in public school districts between May 8 and May 29, 2020.
- On average, schools canceled eight days of instructional time due to the pandemic, because of either an extended spring break, a shortened academic year, or a lag between closing buildings and starting remote learning.
- One in five schools were in districts that offered rigorous remote instruction most closely resembling in-classroom learning, while two in five offered perfunctory instructional programs.
- Forty-three percent of schools were in districts that planned for an in-person graduation ceremony—with 26 percent delaying the ceremony and 16 percent on schedule—and 28 percent of schools planned to conduct graduation ceremonies virtually.

After what may be the most tumultuous semester America's K–12 education system has ever faced, schools are coming to the end of the academic year. Since closures began in mid-March, all schools across the country remained closed for the rest of the semester. Now, they are ending this school year's instruction, long after the halls first emptied and buildings initially shuttered.

The rapid spread of COVID-19 left many educators unprepared. Schools hastily implemented remote learning plans, often from scratch or for the first time. In March, we described these efforts as "trying to build a plane as it is going down the runway."[1] As closures stretched on, schools faced additional challenges of retooling and improving their original strategies, which were often designed under the belief that remote learning would be a short-term change.

Our final data show where schools settled after a semester of dramatic change. How quickly schools were able to shift to online instruction, the degree to which online learning mirrored classroom settings, and the type of instruction provided were just some of the factors that varied across districts. These variations indicate that not all students were similarly affected by the COVID-19 closures.

Now, as the semester comes to a close and the pandemic persists, district leaders, teachers, and

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 27 and 29, 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.[2] 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).[3]

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[4] 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.[5] Additional details about the survey instrument, sampling design, and variable definitions are available on the AEI website.[6]

parents are casting their attention to what schools might look like in the fall. They will need a clear account of what districts offered this spring as important context for the looming challenges districts and schools will face as the fall quickly approaches.

Findings

This report documents how public school districts responded across the duration of the COVID-19 crisis, beginning with closures in March through May 29, the date of the most recent and final C-ERLS data collection (hereafter referred to as "Wave 6"[7]). We document many services that schools and districts provide through the pandemic, including meals, technological devices, internet access, remote instruction, and plans for their graduating seniors.

In previous reports, we observed steady increases in the share of schools offering educational services and remote instruction, with the largest occurring between March and April. Following this dramatic growth, education services began to plateau. By late May, most schools (59 percent) had reached the end of their academic year, and those that were still opened were simply carrying out the educational plans they established in prior weeks.

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
6	May 27–29, 2020

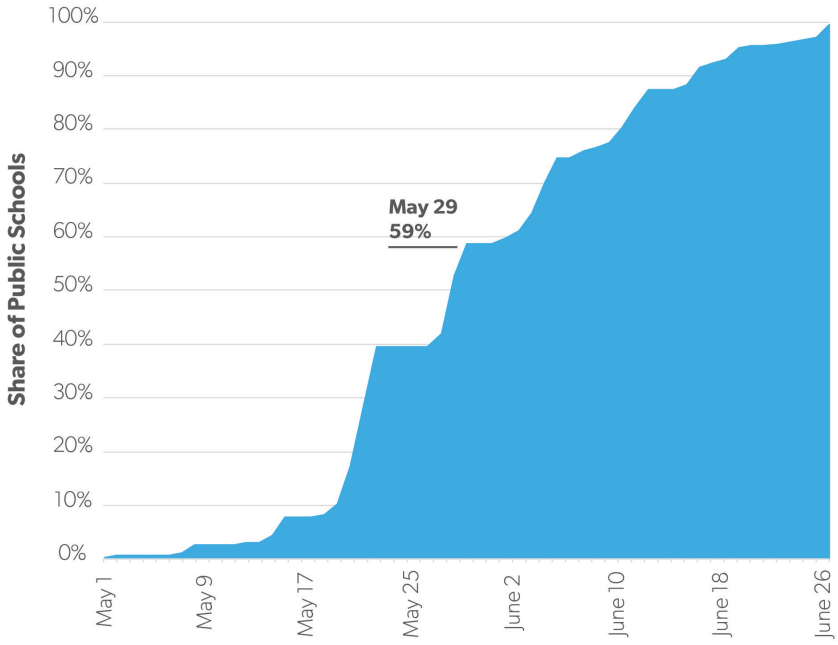
Source: Authors.

As such, our findings describe the landscape of services offered by schools that were still open as of May 29. For schools that had reached the end of the academic year by this date, we count the services that they offered before closing in the share of the total. This allows us to capture the full landscape of what schools offered at the end of their 2019–20 school year.

Across most measures, schools are ending the year by providing educational services they established in previous weeks. Ninety-five percent of

schools were providing meals to students, 66 percent were providing devices, and 70 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 instructional packets for students to complete, and then synchronous web-based platforms. We discuss each area in more detail in the following subsections.

Figure 1. Percentage of Public Schools Reaching the End of the 2019–20 Academic Year

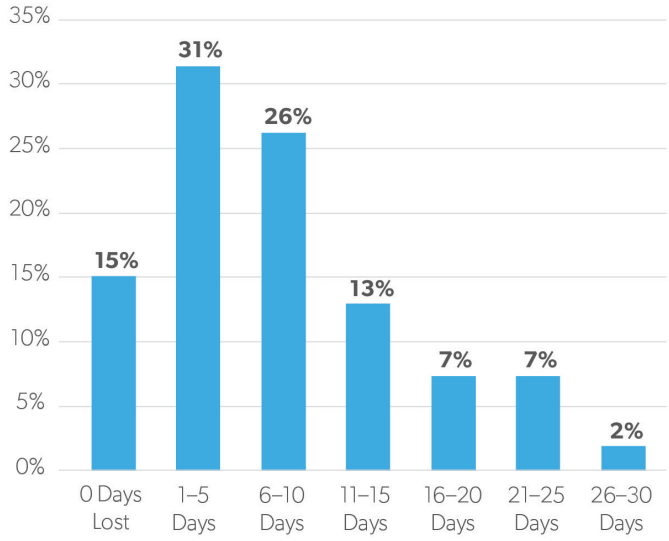


Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," May 29, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

Ending the Academic Year. All schools in our sample were closed by late March, and all remained closed through the end of the academic year. Most districts (59 percent) had already reached the end of their academic year by May 29. An additional 16 percent of schools reached the end of the year by the first week of June, and the remaining quarter of schools will be closed by the third week of June. (See Figure 1.)

Not all schools maintained the originally scheduled academic year, with 10 percent of schools in districts that changed their last day of school. The districts we surveyed made these announcements sporadically, most in April, but with the latest announced on May 28. All but one district we surveyed shortened the length of the school year, and the year was typically shortened by one to two weeks on average.

Figure 2. Number of Instructional Days Lost Due to Closures



Note: The four districts that do not yet offer remote instruction are excluded from this figure. These percentages are out of 246 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 29, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

Number of Lost Instructional Days. Now that most schools are closed for the academic year, we calculate the total number of instructional days that were lost due to the pandemic (Figure 2). The number of lost instructional days differed across districts for several reasons. The most common reason was due to the unequal length

of time that it took districts to develop remote learning plans. For example, 30 percent of schools shifted to remote instruction the week after building closures, while 28 percent of schools took three weeks or more.[8] Other factors to include were whether spring breaks were scheduled before or after closures and whether districts changed the end of the academic year.

To determine the total number of instructional days lost in each district, we measured the lag between initial building closures and the first date that remote instruction began. We then subtracted the number of days in a district's spring break if the break occurred after buildings were closed. If a district announced plans to extend spring break due to COVID-19, we counted those dates as lost days since instruction would have otherwise been offered. We also included lost days for districts that shortened their academic year and added days for extension. Our total count includes lost instructional days that stemmed from both district and state-led decisions.[9] While these counts are not exhaustive, they are reasonable estimates of lost instructional time.[10]

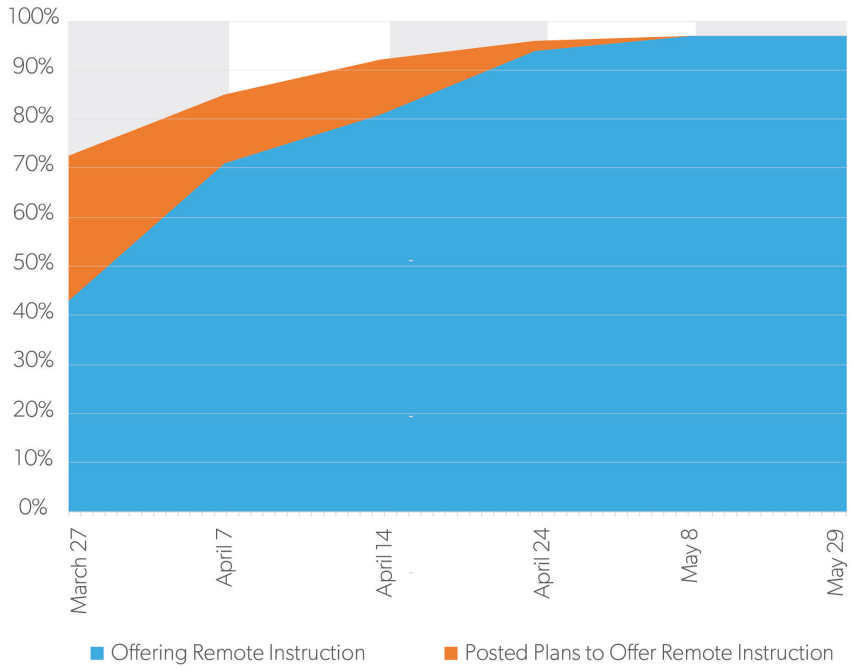
On average, students lost eight days of classroom instruction due to closures. Fifteen percent of schools were in districts where students did not lose classroom learning days, where schools offered remote instruction immediately after closures and had no fewer days due to an extended spring break or shortened school year (Figure 3). Twenty-five percent of schools lost three or fewer days of instruction. The middle 50 percent of schools lost between three and 13 days, and 25 percent of schools with the biggest losses missed 13–30 planned instructional days. Lost instructional days is just one of many factors contributing to loss in academic gains that schools will have to consider when looking to the fall.

Educational Programs. By the end of May, 97 percent of schools were in districts that had some sort of education program or offering available, which is the same as was observed in Wave 5.[11] We should note that 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

Figure 3. Share of Schools Offering (and Planning to Offer) Remote Instruction, as of May 29



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data from Waves 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," May 29, 2020, https://www.aei.org/ covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

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.

also track whether students are broadly expected to participate or whether participation is recommended but essentially optional.[15] By May 29, 63 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. We also tracked if schools are taking attendance, which is a more formal means of expressing expectations for student participation. As of May 29, 31 percent of schools were in districts that had established a means of taking attendance. Of the remainder, 10 percent of schools explicitly stated that attendance would not be taken, and 60 percent of schools were in districts whose websites made no mention of plans to take attendance.

Between May 8 and May 29, the dates of the Wave 5 and Wave 6 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, and just 2 percent of schools offer only virtual supplemental content, which is the same level we observed in late April. By May 29, packets of resources were offered in 83 percent of schools, with 30 percent of all schools offering packets without a clear expectation for participation and 53 percent offering packets with stated expectations of participation. This mirrors the proportion from the previous wave.

Online instructional platforms had also leveled out by May 29. Schools offering asynchronous web-based platforms changed by 1 percentage point, with 86 percent of schools in districts using asynchronous platforms. Fifty-eight percent of all schools offered asynchronous platforms with expectations for student participation, and 28 percent of all schools offered asynchronous platforms without expecting participation.

Finally, the percentage of districts offering synchronous platforms remained the same at roughly half the frequency of packets and asynchronous platforms. By May 29, 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 29, 33 percent of all schools had an expectation of student participation, and just 11 percent expressed no expectations of participation.

Categories of Remote Instruction. In previous C-ERLS reports, we have presented only basic survey findings without attempting to gauge the quality of remote instruction. Now that districts' instructional plans have reached their final form, we combine several individual measures to capture a rough proxy of instructional quality.

This measure categorizes districts by the degree to which remote instructional platforms might approximate the in-person classroom instruction students enjoyed before the pandemic. While a given district's categorization may not clearly indicate its instructional quality, across these entire categories, we believe the relatively more ambitious instructional platforms are more effective than the relatively less ambitious platforms are.

To construct categories of instructional quality, we looked at the following three aspects of remote instruction:

1. Reliance on online technologies,
2. Expectations for participation, and
3. Grading requirements.

Based on these criteria, we divided districts into three categories: rigorous, perfunctory, and moderate.

Rigorous. Rigorous remote instructional offerings were those in districts that (1) relied primarily on online platforms, (2) provided some synchronous platform, (3) expected all students to participate by either explicit statements or formally taking attendance, (4) required that teachers grade students' work based on either completion or performance, and (5) expected some form of one-on-one contact between teachers and students.

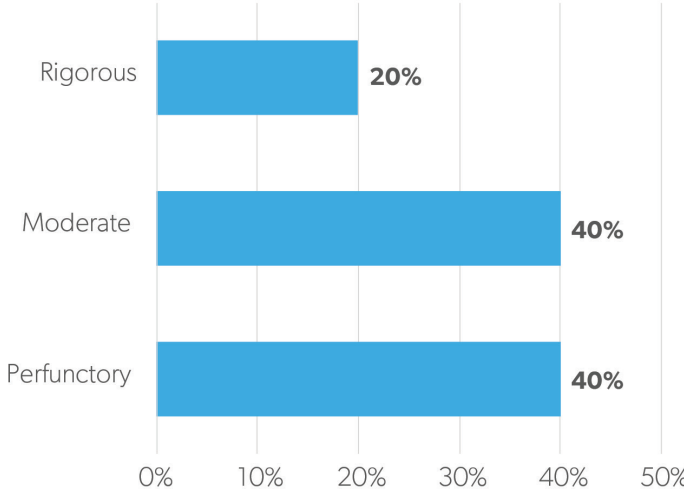
Perfunctory. Perfunctory packages of remote instruction are categorized as districts that (1) relied primarily on instructional packets, (2) explicitly stated that students' participation is not required, (3) explicitly stated that attendance would not be taken, or (4) explicitly stated that student work would not be graded. Districts were also classified as perfunctory if their websites did not communicate any information on remote instructional offerings.

Moderate. Moderate instructional offerings occurred in districts that were less ambitious than their rigorous counterparts but more ambitious than perfunctory ones.

As shown in Figure 4, one in five schools were in districts that offered rigorous remote instruction. Perfunctory remote instruction was more common, with 40 percent of schools falling into this category. The remaining schools offered moderate packages of remote instruction. While these categories may not necessarily align to instructional quality, it appears that perfunctory programs include elements that, on average, keep instructional quality lower than in schools that communicate higher expectations for students and greater involvement from teachers. Similarly, rigorous programs contain multiple means of maximizing student and teacher engagement that are easily lost in less-ambitious remote instructional programs.

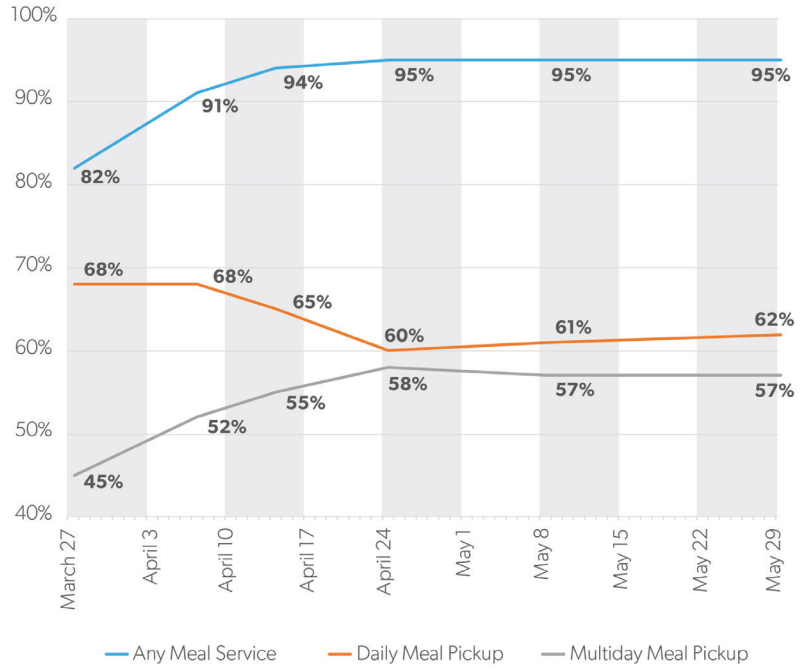
More concerning still are differences in the percentage of schools with rigorous and perfunctory instructional platforms by student composition. As detailed in a recent report in *Education Next* using Wave 6 data, we document how low-poverty and high-achieving districts had higher percentages of schools with rigorous platforms—and lower percentages with perfunctory platforms—compared to poorer and lower-achieving districts. These gaps will likely mean the negative effects of pandemic closures will be greater for less-advantaged students.[16]

Figure 4. Categories of Remote Instruction, as of May 29



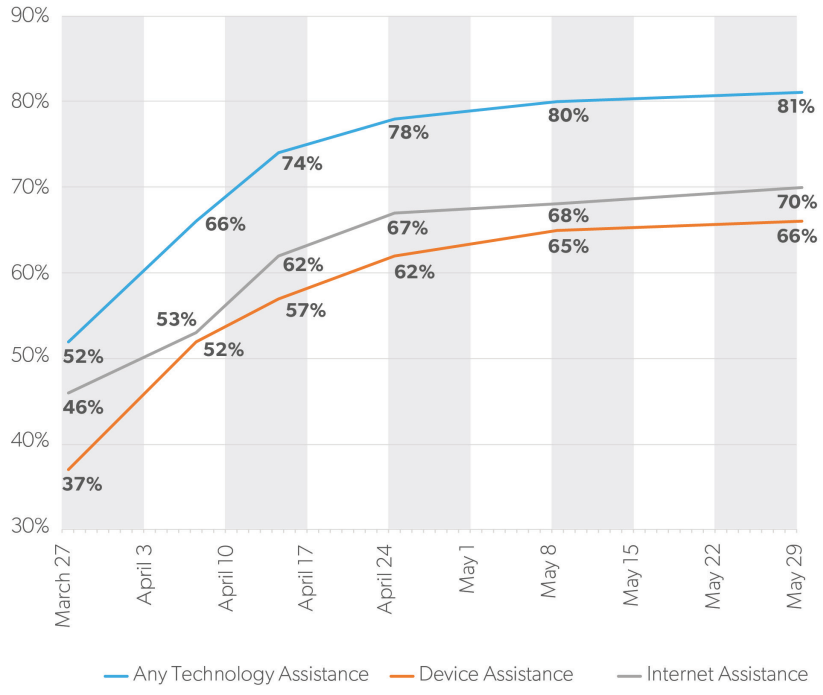
Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," May 29, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

Figure 5. Share of Schools Providing Meal Services to Students, March–May 2020



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data from Waves 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," May 29, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

Figure 6. Share of Schools Providing Technology Assistance, March–May 2020



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data from Waves 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," May 29, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

Determining Student Grades. Throughout the pandemic, we collected data on grading policies described on district websites. On May 29, 67 percent of schools were in districts whose websites mentioned that student assignments were being graded, up from the 62 percent of schools doing so on May 8. The way in which these schools graded students was almost evenly split, composed of 35 percent of all schools grading based on completion (i.e., simply turning in assignments) and 32 percent grading performance (i.e., grading work for accuracy). Twelve percent of all schools were in districts that expressly stated that, as of May 29, work would not be graded, and the remaining 21 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 28 percent of schools included disclaimers on district websites that student grades "can only go up" from the point when school buildings closed—meaning that, if work is graded, completing assignments will only improve a student's final grade from where it was at the beginning of the school's closure.[17] Just 14 percent of schools expressly stated that final report card grades would be determined normally, and the majority did not provide information on changes to how final grades would be tallied.

One-on-One Contact with Students. Many districts explicitly encouraged or expected 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 29, 74 percent of schools were in such districts—roughly the same level recorded mid-April.

The most common method of direct contact, encouraged in over half of schools, was email communication (52 percent) between teachers and students. Other common forms of direct contact include using web-based platforms (38 percent), scheduled office hours (31 percent), phone calls (25 percent), and homework hotlines (5 percent). Almost half of schools (48 percent) encouraged more than one method for contacting students. Again, these levels are roughly equivalent to the shares recorded in Waves 4 and 5.

In addition to these methods, students 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 29, 78 percent of schools were in districts that encouraged personal contact between students and teachers.

Food Service. In the initial wake of school closures, the senior vice president of the No Kid Hungry campaign told NPR, "This is unprecedented. We're making up the playbook as we go along."[18] Looking at the data across March and May, however, reveals that schools were quick to set up and sustain meal services for the nearly 30 million children across the country dependent on free or low-cost meals.[19]

Providing meals to students remained one of the most consistent efforts by school districts throughout the pandemic. Shortly after school buildings first closed, on March 27, 82 percent of schools were in districts whose websites describe programs to provide meals to students, and by late April, that share had grown to 95 percent. Schools continued to distribute meals at that rate through the end of May.

Similarly, the mechanisms of meal delivery remained consistent through the rest of the semester. While daily meal pickup was more common than weekly or multiday meal pickup in late March, that gap closed through April. By the end of the month, 62 percent of schools in districts were providing daily meal pickup services, and 57 percent were allowing students to pick up food for multiple days (up to one week) at once. Those percentages fluctuated less than 2 percentage points through May.[20] (See Figure 5.)

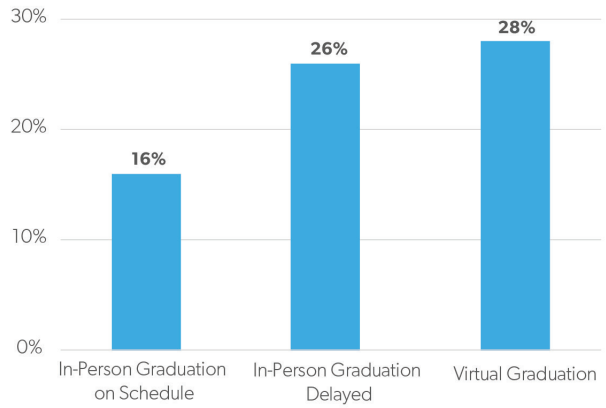
Technology Assistance. When schools shifted to online learning in response to closures, access to technology quickly became imperative to effective instruction. Indeed, in the wake of the pandemic, "a lack of technology suddenly meant a lack of schooling," a member of College Board noted.[21] As such, many schools made concerted efforts to ensure that students had access to devices and internet. The implementation and effectiveness of these efforts, however, vary district to district.

By May 29, 81 percent of schools were in districts that offered some kind of technology assistance to families. Specifically, 70 percent of schools provided some form of assistance for students to access the internet, and 66 percent of schools had a program to provide devices to students at home. Fifty-five percent of schools offered help for both internet access and devices.[22] (See Figure 6.)

Note that technology assistance, access to devices, and internet assistance all continued to grow throughout the pandemic, albeit by 1 to 2 percentage points since the beginning of May. Technology assistance is the only measure observed by C-ERLS that continued to increase even through the end of May. The data we gathered from district websites reflect lower percentages of device assistance than have been reported in other surveys.[23] Additional details on technology provisions are in Appendix A.

Graduation. With 3.7 million high school seniors expected to graduate, schools have had to rethink traditional graduation ceremonies to abide by health and safety guidelines.[24] Indeed, graduation for the class of 2020 was recently called a "marooned milestone."[25] The most common alternative to graduation was to conduct the cap and gown ceremony online. As displayed in Figure 7, 28 percent conducted graduation ceremonies virtually. More than two in five schools, however, opted to conduct the ceremony in-person, with 26 percent planning to delay the ceremony and 16 percent proceeding with in-person ceremonies as originally scheduled.

Figure 7. How Schools Will Conduct Graduation



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," May 29, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

Conclusion

No school or student was left untouched by the turmoil of the pandemic. The ways in which schools offered remote instruction, however, varied from district to district. Some schools offered remote instruction and distributed devices the first day school buildings were shuttered, while others left students without remote learning for several more weeks.

Even for the schools that quickly scrambled in the shift to online learning, many students still bore the consequences of less-effective instruction. This is not a surprise, given that teachers spent less time presenting new material than before the pandemic and students were less engaged in remote learning.[26]

Indeed, it may be a long, hot summer for learning loss. Researchers at NWEA predict that students could arrive between 50 and 100 percent of a school year behind where they would have been without these closures.[27] Even more devastating than these potential losses, however, are the reasons to expect that some students will fall further behind than others will. Just as researchers have argued that summer learning loss has been more pronounced for students who are poor or low performing, so may losses during pandemic-related closures.

Educational losses during the pandemic will likely be large. While C-ERLS data do not capture instructional quality directly, these analyses suggest that districts' instructional platforms were too often insufficient to support adequate student learning. Only a small percentage of schools were in districts with rigorous instructional programs, compared to double that percentage that had perfunctory programs.

Certainly, future studies using larger sets of data or student test scores will provide a more precise estimate of student losses. In the interim, this and other complementary emerging research can help provide a snapshot of how students fared this semester.[28] District and school leaders should prepare for the fall by expecting students to be far behind. Despite the continuing and uncertain threats COVID-19 poses, schools need to build ambitious instructional programs to help students catch up.

Acknowledgments

We are tremendously grateful to AEI's education and domestic policy teams, who supported this research at a rapid pace while working remotely. Brendan Bell, Cade Grady, Abby Guidera, RJ Martin, Matt Rice, Peyton Roth, Olivia Shaw, Sidney Sonck, Valerie Truong, Hannah Warren, Hunter West, and David Wilde provided outstanding research assistance in gathering and processing data for this report. 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.

Jessica Schurz is a research assistant at the American Enterprise Institute.

Appendix A. Additional Questions and Data Collection

The following sections describe additional information that we gathered during the sixth 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 29, 82 percent of elementary schools provided packets, compared to 80 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 districts 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 had information on the websites on May 29 about offering meals. 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 68 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 29, 72 percent of large districts had clearly expressed expectations for participation in remote learning, compared to 55 percent and 63 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 36 percent mentioning some type of attendance policy (consisting of 27 percent taking attendance and 9 percent explicitly not taking attendance). Just 31 percent of schools in small districts mentioned attendance, with 24 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. Eighty-one percent of schools in large districts have posted plans for grading student assignments, while only 65 percent and 56 percent, respectively, of medium and small districts have done so. Forty-six percent of large districts were grading remote work based on performance, and 35 percent were grading remote work based on completion. Of the schools in medium and small districts, 30 and 21 percent, respectively, were grading work based on performance, while 35 percent of schools in medium districts and 36 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 29, compared to 98 percent and 94 percent of schools in medium and small districts, respectively.

We also examined the specific type of remote instruction offered by schools varied by district size. Indeed, we find that large districts were far more likely than medium and small districts to offer virtual supplemental content. By May 29, 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 89 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 and 40 percent of schools in medium and small districts, respectively. By 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 59 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 synchronous platforms other than Zoom or Google Hangouts/Google Meet, and 13 percent of schools listed 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 that 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.[29]

Eighty-one percent of schools are in districts that mentioned plans to offer any type of technological assistance, including help with devices and internet access. Sixty-six percent of schools mentioned programs to provide devices to students who are otherwise unable to access online instruction. The most common devices offered are Chromebooks (available in 40 percent of all schools), generic laptops (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 29, 70 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 54 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 26 percent of all schools), and Wi-Fi-equipped buses (available in 5 percent of all schools). Twelve percent of schools in districts we surveyed listed more than one method of providing assistance in accessing the internet.

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. By May 29, most schools (52 percent) were in districts that had mentioned the specific needs of students in special education programs on information webpages linked to COVID-19 resources. 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-two percent of schools mentioned ELL services, and only a small fraction of those (3 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 29	0%	0%
Food Services		
% with Plan for Offering Meals on District Website	95%	86%
% Offering Daily Meal Pickup	62%	57%
% Offering Multiday Meal Pickup	57%	52%
% Offering Meal Delivery	32%	36%
Technology Assistance		
% Mentioning Any Technology Support	81%	67%
% Mentioning Device Support	66%	52%
% Mentioning Internet Support	70%	49%
Educational Programs		
% Offering Virtual Supplemental Content	62%	47%
% Currently Offering Packets	83%	83%
% Currently Offering Asynchronous Instruction	86%	75%
% Currently Offering Synchronous Instruction	44%	37%
% Relying Mostly or Wholly on Packets	21%	28%
% Relying on Both Online Platforms and Packets	18%	16%
% Relying Mostly or Wholly on Online Platforms	61%	56%
Expectations		
% Expected Participation	63%	57%
% Taking Attendance Remotely	31%	22%
% Grading Student Work	67%	54%
% Grading for Performance	32%	20%
% Grading for Completion	35%	34%

Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," May 29, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.

Notes

1. 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/.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. To request the latest data, contact Jessica Schurz at Jessica.Schurz@aei.org.
6. American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," May 29, 2020, https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/.
7. "Wave 1" refers to the C-ERLS data collection that took place on March 26 and 27. "Wave 2" refers to the C-ERLS collection that took place on April 6 and 7. "Wave 3" refers to the C-ERLS collection that took place on April 13 and 14. "Wave 4" refers to C-ERLS data collection that occurred on April 23 and 24. "Wave 5" refers to C-ERLS data collection that occurred on May 7 and 8. For more information, see Malkus, Christensen, and West, "School District Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Round 1, Districts' Initial Responses."
8. Nat Malkus and Cody Christensen, "School District Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Round 3, Plans for a Remote Finish," American Enterprise Institute, April 27, 2020, https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/school-district-responses-to-the-covid-19-pandemic-round-3-plans-for-a-remote-finish/.
9. The Illinois State Board of Education, for example, required all public and nonpublic schools to close March 17–30. These were considered "act of God" days that did not need to be made up at the end of the school year. See Illinois State Board of Education, "Mandatory Statewide School Closure Guidance for Illinois Schools and School Districts," March 18, 2020, https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Statewide-School-Closure-Guidance-3-18-20.pdf.
10. We did not count days as lost if districts canceled instruction for teacher trainings, because our ability to capture those closures was inconsistent. While this might lead to an undercount, we could not include scheduled holidays outside of spring breaks and Memorial Day, which could lead to a slight overcount. Neither did we count days as lost if remote learning plans used a weekly schedule that included four days (or three) of instruction with a remaining day (or two) of the week as student work days. Such schedules assumed students would do school work on the days without instruction and were intended to have educational value.
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 dates as 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 participation issued the platform as an option, with the hope of participation and the possibility of expected participation in the future.
16. Nat Malkus, "School Districts' Remote-Learning Plans May Widen Student Achievement Gap, *Education Next*, June 16, 2020, https://www.educationnext.org/school-districts-remote-learning-plans-may-widen-student-achievement-gap-only-20-percent-meet-standards/.
17. In districts that implemented pass/fail policies *and* included disclaimers that "grades can only go up," districts' multiple arrangements could allow both policies, including instances in which low grades that preceded building closures could be brought up to passing or letter grades could be requested by specific students for particular subjects.
18. Cory Turner and Anya Kamenetz, "Schools Race to Feed Students amid Coronavirus Closures," NPR, March 20, 2020, https://www.npr.org/2020/03/20/818300504/schools-race-to-feed-students-amid-coronavirus-closures.

19. US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, "National School Lunch Program," August 20, 2019, https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/child-nutrition-programs/national-school-lunch-program/.
20. Note that each change is within the margin of error. However, since Waves 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 capture data on the same sample of 250 public school districts, these changes reflect real changes in the sample.
21. 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.
22. Districts with existing one-to-one device programs may not be included in this percentage.
23. For instance, in a recent survey of members of the School Superintendents Association, 92 percent of districts reported offering district laptops. A much lower percentage of districts we examined had information on their websites about such programs. See School Superintendents Association, "AASA Survey: No Timetable Yet Regarding When Schools Will Reopen; More Than Half of Districts Lack Adequate Internet Access," press release, June 16, 2020, https://aasa.org/content.aspx?id=44803.
24. US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Back to School Statistics," https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372#:~:text=About%203.7%20million%20students%20are,from%20pripriv%20schools%20.
25. Ronda Kaysen, "Graduation Ceremonies in Quarantine," *New York Times*, May 15, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/15/style/graduation-parties-2020.html.
26. Kurtz, "National Survey Tracks Impact of Coronavirus on Schools."
27. Megan Kuhfeld and Beth Tarasawa, "The COVID-19 Slide: What Summer Learning Loss Can Tell Us About the Potential Impact of School Closures on Student Academic Achievement," NWEA, April 2020, https://www.nwea.org/content/uploads/2020/05/Collaborative-Brief_Covid19-Slide-APR20.pdf.
28. Betheny Gross and Alice Opalka, "Too Many Schools Leave Learning to Chance During the Pandemic," Lens, June 10, 2020, https://www.crpe.org/thelens/too-many-schools-leave-learning-chance-during-pandemic; and Emily Oster, "COVID-19, Learning Loss and Inequality," ParentData, June 15, 2020, https://emilyoster.substack.com/p/covid-19-learning-loss-and-inequality.
29. US Department of Education, 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.