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# Instructional Tech

## EDITOR'S NOTE

As a new administration begins and a pandemic continues, instructional technology has become a vital resource for educators. In this Spotlight, discover key information on what to expect the next four-years in the education sphere; evaluate if current usage of EdTech is working; and begin to understand where the gaps are for students and teachers alike.

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—Courtesy of Elevate K-12

Published on January 7, 2021

## ‘No Going Back’ From Remote and Hybrid Learning, Districts Say

By Benjamin Herold

**M**any teachers hate it. Millions of parents find it exhausting. A growing body of evidence suggests it has contributed to students falling significantly behind.

Regardless, livestreamed remote instruction is set to remain a significant part of K-12 education, long after the coronavirus pandemic is finally under control.

“There’s no going back now,” said Pedro Martinez, superintendent of the 49,000-student public school system in San Antonio, Texas, where voters recently approved a \$90 million bond to pay for new technology—including cameras and microphones that will be used to broadcast teachers working from their classrooms into the homes of thousands of students learning remotely across the city.

That’s just one of the models for live (“synchronous”) instruction-by-videoconference that has taken hold in the nation’s schools. Districts have distributed tens of millions of digital devices while making massive investments in at-home connectivity, creating almost overnight the infrastructure necessary to support widespread experimentation.

As a result, teachers and students in many

communities now spend hours each day interacting via Zoom, Google Meet, or Microsoft Teams. In Guilford County, N.C., local education leaders took just six weeks to stand up two new full-time virtual academies, which at one point this fall served nearly 10 percent of the district’s 73,000 students. In Dougherty County, Ga., a company that bills itself as the “Peloton of Education” provides the short-staffed local school district with certified teachers who livestream their lessons onto students’ laptops from hundreds of miles away.

“We really like the flexibility,” said Superintendent Kenneth Dyer.

For America’s schools, COVID-19 isn’t just a public health crisis. It’s also a budget crisis and a mental health crisis, an academic crisis and a racial-justice crisis. No one yet knows the full severity and duration of the resulting challenges. But a dozen experts consulted by Education Week—district leaders and pediatricians, economists and parents, ed-tech entrepreneurs and policy researchers—see a confluence of forces that will likely fuel continued demand for remote teaching.

For starters, clinical COVID-19 vaccine trials are just now beginning for younger children, meaning there’s little reason to believe that most of America’s 51 million public school

students will be vaccinated by the start of the 2021-22 school year. The nation’s stagnant economy has also drained state coffers, leading many experts to predict that the nation’s school districts will continue to slash personnel. Even before the pandemic, many schools were facing a severe shortage of highly qualified teachers, especially in rural areas.

And perhaps the biggest wildcard is a surge in interest in remote schooling from a small but significant subset of families. Tired of the constant microaggressions and racial discrimination that sapped their children’s spirit in traditional school, some parents of color report feeling empowered by remote learning, which has given them new visibility into classroom instruction, curricular materials, and how the adults in public schools are behaving.

“They’re not likely to give that up,” said Annette Anderson, an assistant education professor at Johns Hopkins University, where she also serves as the deputy director of the Center for Safe & Healthy Schools.

Add it all up, and it’s easy to see why players in the nation’s multi-billion dollar ed-tech industry sense opportunity.

Back in 1997, for example, Michael Chasen helped create the popular learning-management system Blackboard. Fifteen years later, a private equity group bought his company for \$1.7 billion. Now, Chasen is back in the game, launching last summer a new company that aims to make Zoom more suitable for education, by adding functions such as assignments, interactive quizzes, and an attention-tracking feature that allows teachers to monitor what students are viewing on their screens. ClassEDU has already raised \$16 million in venture capital.

Remote instruction has “passed the acceptance barrier,” said Chasen, who described the past eight months as hands-on training in online education for millions of students and teachers.

For some observers, though, that’s cause for concern. The push to make permanent a temporary “solution” intended as an emergency stopgap fits a long tradition of schools throwing good money after bad when it comes to ed tech, said researcher Audrey Watters, author of the forthcoming book *Teaching Machines*.

“I don’t think making Zoom more quiz-friendly is particularly interesting,” Watters said. “I wish we would just make a commitment to fund schools and prioritize the safety of students and teachers.”

And for Jenny Radesky, an assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of Michigan

who studies the ways mobile technology affects child development, the sooner most children can step outside the current “flattened, two-dimensional, technology-mediated” version of school, the better.

“We’ve all been through this traumatic experience together,” Radesky said. “Kids are going to have to heal. The way that happens is through positive relationships.”

Following are inside looks at how three school districts are seeking to pursue remote and hybrid instruction next school year and beyond.

### Making ‘Hybrid’ Instruction Permanent (San Antonio, Texas)

Before shutting its physical doors to help slow the spread of COVID-19, the San Antonio Independent School District offered “pretty close to zero” live remote instruction, according to Superintendent Pedro Martinez.

Over the ensuing months, however, the district purchased 30,000 Chromebooks,

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#### JENNY RADESKY

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF PEDIATRICS,  
THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

distributed thousands of mobile hotspots, adopted a new learning management system, and worked with city and state officials to help build fiber-optic networks in neighborhoods around the city. And after the district lost touch with one-fourth of its elementary students last spring, when most of the city’s elementary schools could offer only an hour or so per day of live instruction, officials decided to change their approach.

During the first half of this school year, almost all of San Antonio ISD’s 3,200 teachers

provided live “hybrid” instruction from their schools. About 30 percent of their students were physically present in the classroom, while the remaining 70 percent followed along remotely from home.

Still, there were problems. For teachers, trying to keep in-person students engaged while also remaining visible on-camera for remote students proved particularly challenging.

“Our best teachers are very energetic,” Martinez said. “They asked for additional equipment, so they can move around.”

That’s why the district decided at the last minute to include in its \$90 million bond proposal money for 1,600 camera-and-microphone rigs from a company called Swivl. The gear automatically follows teachers as they circulate in their classrooms, with the aim of creating a more dynamic livestreaming experience for remote students.

Martinez said the purchase is a long-term investment that can help his district maintain hybrid instruction, even after coronavirus-related restrictions eventually end.

“I think the right mix is the reverse of what we have now,” the superintendent said. “My ideal is when we can have 70 percent of students in-person and 30 percent remote.”

San Antonio isn’t alone. Ten percent of district leaders surveyed by the RAND Corporation last fall said they had adopted or were considering a similar hybrid instructional model. Another 19 percent said they were at least considering offering ongoing remote instruction, perhaps to specific subsets of students or to keep all children learning during weather emergencies.

To make that vision more feasible, some education leaders are already pushing for state-level policy changes. Since the coronavirus hit, for example, the Texas Education Agency has allowed schools to include remote instruction when calculating student attendance. Martinez is advocating that state officials make that change permanent.

“I want that flexibility,” he said, “as long as we can show children are still learning.”

### ‘Peloton,’ But for Classroom Teachers (Dougherty County, Ga.)

Ed-tech entrepreneur Shaily Baranwal believes the nation is weary of remote learning because it too often amounts to little more than kids watching online videos.

To rectify that, Elevate K-12 offers districts certified teachers who live all over the country, but run synchronous classes that can be lives-

treamed anywhere.

“Like Peloton,” Baranwal said, referencing the fitness-equipment juggernaut whose exercise instructors livestream workout classes via the tablets mounted on riders’ stationary cycles.

So far, Elevate K-12’s footprint is relatively small, with about 700 live classes delivered

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If everyone could have an effective teacher physically in the classroom at all times, we would certainly prefer that. But that’s not possible in every school system in the country.”

#### KENNETH DYER

SUPERINTENDENT, DOUGHERTY COUNTY,  
GA., PUBLIC SCHOOLS

to roughly 200 schools per day. Baranwal said that figure is up 93 percent. A little over half the company’s current clients are fully remote, while the rest are mostly hybrid.

Among Elevate K-12’s power users is the 14,000-student Dougherty County, Ga., public schools, which serves the small city of Albany and its poor, mostly rural surroundings. The district first contracted with Elevate K-12 during the 2017-18 school year, using live certified teachers instead of paraprofessionals or software programs to provide remedial math and reading help to small groups of struggling students.

Superintendent Kenneth Dyer was so happy with the results he turned to Elevate K-12 to help solve an even bigger problem. His district employs about 1,000 teachers across 21 schools. But it often started the school year with as many as 50 vacancies.

In a country that is short an estimated 100,000 teachers or more, that’s a common problem, said Emma García, an economist with the Economic Policy Institute. And while clear data on COVID-19-related teacher retirements, resignations, and layoffs remain

difficult to come by, cratering state budgets offer plenty of reason to believe that shortage is about to get worse.

“We know from plenty of previous recessions that after a crisis, there’s a cut in the number education jobs,” García said.

Dyer cautioned against hiring third-party instructors as a cost-saving measure. His district now pays Elevate K-12 for 15 remote teachers, most of whom are live-streamed onto large-screen televisions in physical classrooms that students attend in person. The district saves some money, because it doesn’t have to provide benefits to the teachers. But there are also added costs, Dyer said, such as paying paraprofessionals to help with classroom management when a physical teacher isn’t present.

That fits with advice from García and other experts, who stressed that no matter what schooling looks like in 2021 and beyond, the combination of learning loss and trauma that children and families have experienced will require more educators, not less.

The real value of live remote instruction, according to Dyer, is flexibility. If there’s an Advanced Placement course that 10 students at one high school and 10 students at a separate high school hope to take, Dougherty County can now contract with Elevate K-12 for a single remote teacher who can be livestreamed into both schools simultaneously. There are also options to hire Elevate K-12 teachers to provide synchronous instruction for just three or four days a week, or just a few periods a day.

Some may worry about converting teaching into “gig work,” with educators going from being professional unionized employees to becoming independent contractors along the lines of Uber drivers. (Baranwal responded by saying that Elevate K-12 teachers, 83 percent of whom are women, “want the flexibility to work at the hours that work best for them.”)

And an even more fundamental concern is that even the best live remote instruction is a poor substitute for face-to-face teaching.

On that, the Dougherty County superintendent agreed—to a point.

“If everyone could have an effective teacher physically in the classroom at all times, we would certainly prefer that,” Dyer said. “But that’s not possible in every school system in the country.”

### A New Choice for Parents (Guilford County, N.C.)

Officials in the 73,000-student Guilford County, N.C., school system learned something surprising from their COVID-driven

foray into remote learning.

Many parents weren’t happy. So this summer, the district decided to triple the amount of live remote instruction schools offered.

“Expectations changed dramatically,” said Chief Academic Officer Whitney Oakley.

She and Contreras wanted to avoid hybrid instruction as much as possible, believing it’s not realistic to ask teachers to teach in two fundamentally different ways at the same time. They also wanted to provide certainty to parents who knew last summer they wouldn’t send their children back to physical

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Parent choice is going to drive much of this conversation. Districts would be wise to think about how they’re building out these new options.”

**ANNETTE ANDERSON**  
EDUCATION PROFESSOR, JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

school at all during the 2020-21 school year. And the biggest challenge they faced was funding: There wasn’t enough money to allow teachers to be all-remote or all-in person and to allow for appropriate social distancing inside classrooms.

“It offers parents a unique opportunity to be much more deeply involved in their children’s education,” Superintendent Sharon Contreras said. “They actually get to observe instruction regularly. That hasn’t happened before.”

Prior to last school year, online offerings in Guilford County consisted mostly of asynchronous supplemental and credit-recovery courses for high school students. The district was still recovering from an ill-fated experiment with 1-to-1 computing several years earlier, and schools still had to contend with a significant digital divide in the surrounding community. As a result, teachers’ live instruction availability was limited to an hour or so

per day in the weeks immediately after the coronavirus hit.

The district decided to create two of its own full-time virtual schools: The Guilford eLearning Virtual Academy, serving grades K-5, and Guilford eLearning University Prep, for grades 6-8. By mid-Fall, more than 7,000 students were enrolled in the two fully remote schools, which offered several hours of live remote instruction each day, as well as alternative scheduling options (such as evening hours) for families who needed flexibility.

Such new models of schooling have been a godsend for many parents, especially those raising Black children, said Johns Hopkins education professor Annette Anderson. The opportunity to virtually invite educators into their homes, observe how the adults in school interact with students, and protect the emotional well-being of their children has totally shifted many parents’ relationships with public schools, she said.

“Parent choice is going to drive much of this conversation,” Anderson advised. “Districts would be wise to think about how they’re building out these new options.”

According to the recent RAND Corp. survey, that process has already begun. Across the country, roughly 2 in 10 district leaders have adopted or are considering their own virtual schools for the long haul.

In Guilford County, for example, Superintendent Contreras is already planning for how to make the district’s new virtual academies permanent, as well as possibly continuing the remote instruction that is now happening from traditional schools.

There are funding and equity challenges to consider: If students move out of their home schools and into the new remote schools, for example, funding and staff will follow, a shift that some principals and parents will surely resist. As COVID-19 recedes, as is hoped, there will also likely be a closer look at exactly how remote learning has been for the nation’s students, especially those who are most vulnerable.

But Contreras said she hears the voices of parents who believe their [children are thriving](#) under the new model. She also believes there are real opportunities to better serve thousands of students who currently slip through the cracks of physical schools, often because they are homeless or raising children of their own.

“We intend to ensure that pre-K through grade 12, we continue to have some remote options for students in the future,” she said. ■



## Devices and data: the strategy Murrieta Valley Unified School District powers its commitment to student learning

### Customer

[Murrieta Valley Unified School District](#)

### Products and Services

[Microsoft 365](#)  
[Microsoft Teams](#)  
[Power BI](#)  
[Windows 10](#)

### Industry

[K-12](#)

### Organization Size

[Corporate \(10,000+ employees\)](#)

### Country

[United States](#)

October 29, 2020

During the spring semester of 2020, in a slice of southern California known as the Murrieta Valley, eleven elementary schools, four middle schools, and three high schools shuttered their doors in response to the growing pandemic, just as countless others had done across the globe. The Murrieta Valley Unified School District (MVUSD), already well on the way to modernizing its education technology, found itself quickly accelerating to help engage students who were spread out and isolated from each other, learning remotely.

MVUSD's concerns had less to do with access and connectivity—though some access issues persisted—and more to do with student engagement. To stay true to its mission—to inspire every student to think, to learn, to achieve, and to care—MVUSD chose Microsoft for Education solutions, from Windows to Microsoft Teams and beyond, including the use of Microsoft Power BI to identify students who needed help the most.

## Device selection by design

Over the last few years, MVUSD has embarked upon a quiet transformation in their approach to devices, focusing specifically on increasing the availability of devices that could be moved around and satisfy different educational needs in the classrooms. Previously, the district had relied on a computer lab model, where students would be given dedicated and discrete time on devices twice a week or so—a model that limited how technology could be used in the classroom.

After a successful local bond, MVUSD was able to make some investments in new devices. Ken Balliger, Director of Technology for the district, notes that “when you have a finite amount of cash, it goes very quickly, especially when you're buying devices. We looked for a device that would meet the needs of students, but at the same time maximize our ability to buy as many as possible. We went with a smaller form factor, and we did do some tweaking to fit our budget.”

The choice was driven by their own internal research about device needs and classroom use. “We wanted not only give the students the best experience as possible,” Ken recalls, but “we also found in our support groups with teachers that longevity of the device was at a premium. They needed that device to work all day, especially for secondary schools, because they have three to six periods.” MVUSD carefully selected the Dell Latitude 3190 devices that used Windows 10, and featured more than eight hours of battery life, so the district found a strong mix of performance and an improved educational experience.

As Jon Pratt, who serves as Director of Educational Technology for the district, put it, “What we find in this circumstance, and what we have found in the past, is the kind of Swiss Army Knife that is a Windows 10 machine just tends to offer better adaptability. Almost everyone is getting sick of hearing the word pivot, but it is, for better or worse, something that we all have to do. And what we find with our Windows 10 based devices is they can pivot quickly—with a capacity for applications, policies, and settings to be added more easily, as well as just broader support for educational software.”

Part of this investment included software applications like Microsoft Teams, which had been in heavy use across the district for a few years before COVID-19. The district faculty and staff had been using it for communications and had set up student data sync to help facilitate Teams for classroom instruction.

These efforts paid off, then, in unexpected ways when the schools shuttered their doors in March. While many students had devices they could use at home, more than a third of students in the district are on free and reduced lunch, and many of those students benefited from having access to these devices and Microsoft Teams during the months of remote learning.

MVUSD has as one of its core beliefs the idea that education works best when done with equality in mind—ensuring device access is a big part of that. As Bill Olien, Deputy Superintendent for Business and Operations for the district put it, “when we say one-to-one, we're trying to get this concept where when a student needs something, they don't have to go far to get it, or don't have to share to do the thing.” And yet, devices are only part of MVUSD's transformation.

## Using cloud analytics to maximize remote learning outcomes

Perhaps one of the most interesting additional chapters comes from their use of Azure and Power BI to provide larger and more actionable insights about education efficacy in the student cohort across the district. MVUSD

previously used a variety of vendors for data and storage, but after learning how to leverage cloud-based Azure and Power BI infrastructure they realized that “Microsoft has done a great job in lowering the barrier to entry,” comments Jon. “We no longer needed highly technical personnel to work on our infrastructure. We did not need a programmer. It is very low code, low tech. It really helped us solidify our decision to move in that direction.”

Part of that move involved a sincere interest in keeping up with the mission and values of the district, and to know if student learning was really happening. At the time, Brent Coley, who serves as Principal of Alta Murrieta Elementary noted, “We were trying to find out if students were actually engaging with their teachers in the classroom on any given day.” That impulse paid out increasing dividends after the abrupt switch to remote learning. They could assess what engagement looked like now that students were no longer in the classroom proper. Were they still participating? Were they logging into the system? Were they doing the work? It also allowed them to simplify the process of taking attendance. Scott Palmer, Director of Student Data Services, explains, “At the end of last year we switched over to taking attendance through Microsoft Forms and compiled using Power Automate.” Digitizing and automating the process gave them quick access to attendance data.

Bill summarizes the value of a data-driven approach this way, “The idea is that the more targeted information we can aggregate and share with our staff, the more it allows them to target specific students that need that extra assistance.” Think of it. In an educational context in which physical proximity and direct interactions were more limited in both time and space, data helps to recuperate a level of visibility that educators lose when students are no longer physically present.

Brent reports on how useful this has been for his school and its students. “Having the data that shows that Billy's logged in for one minute in the last week, or that Billy has never logged in. We see that and from there we can deep dive. Is it because he does not have a device? Is it because the internet is not working in his house? Is it because mom's working a second shift, or his dad's working a third? We finally have a starting point to gather a list of students who are not engaging.”

This made it possible to engage with the parents of students in novel and more direct ways. When a counselor makes student call-downs they use Power BI engagement data as a starting point for the conversation. Brent continues, “We can now say ‘I noticed that...’ and cite real figures. Then you can ask: ‘Are you having challenges? How can we help?’ Having that data is amazing because it's objective and when we share with parents it doesn't come off as wagging the finger or judging them.”

This approach matters because there are always variables that a school cannot control—variables that can negatively impact an already difficult remote learning endeavor. For some parents, “just knowing we are paying attention was enough for some parents to get involved. Sometimes their response was, ‘We have a computer, but it's 10 years old...’ and they were giving up. Now we could say, ‘let us send a preconfigured Windows 10 device your student can use’,” comments Brent. “Did this strategy help? Yes. It absolutely helped with engagement. We are trending towards 98 percent engagement in the district.”

“It's our job.”

That first experiment in remote learning has come and gone, and now the district is well into its next academic calendar year. MVUSD is looking to continue to use data to improve reporting on scores, engage students, and satisfy the new requirements laid out by the state of California regarding what remote and hybrid learning should

look like in terms of educational outcomes and overall availability. The combination of devices and data continues to serve the district well.

If the last year has shown anything, it is that schools need to invest in technologies and systems that can power educational experiences in the face of structural disruptions, even as those systems improve education in more traditional classroom environments. The simple reality, "is that you have myriad situations: foster kids, homeless students, situations where there is no parental involvement, and the effort to engage these kids falls to us," says Bill. "It is our task to reach those students and support them because no one else is going to. If you don't know who those kids are and don't have the information, how can you help? That's the beacon that Microsoft for Education and Power BI gives us."

It is a question that many schools will likely struggle to answer, as remote and hybrid education continues to alter how our children learn and engage. Fortunately, Murrieta Valley Unified School District provides strong evidence of the value that comes from getting that answer right.

View the story online at:

[Devices and data: the strategy Murrieta Valley Unified School District powers its commitment to student learning](#)

Published on January 25, 2021

# Here's What Educators Should Expect From the Biden Administration on Education Technology

By Alyson Klein

**P**resident Joe Biden and his team are taking the reins of the federal government at a critical point for education technology. Millions of students are still learning from home, bringing an urgency to longstanding problems like the “homework gap” and the continuing need for effective online teaching strategies. At the same time, schools and districts are still trying to prepare students for jobs in an increasingly digital world in which artificial intelligence is likely to play an outsized role.

So where should educators expect the Biden administration, and in particular, Miguel Cardona, the Connecticut state chief, who Biden has tapped to lead the U.S. Department of Education, to start? Expanding internet access, ed-tech experts say.

“There’s a short-term and a long-term homework gap problem,” said Jon Bernstein, founder of the government relations and consulting firm Bernstein Strategy Group, which represents a number of education groups, including the International Society for Technology in Education, or ISTE. Many districts are still all-virtual, he said, and are “likely to remain that way for the rest of the year. We need immediate resources to ensure every kid has a connection through a device or hot-spot.”

In his Coronavirus response plan, released Jan. 21, Biden called for \$130 billion to help schools reopen, plus another \$350 billion to help states make up for budget cuts brought on by the pandemic’s economic impact. Some of that could be used to help students and teachers get connected at home, through hot-spots, internet service provider packages, and satellites, Bernstein suggested.

He is hoping the administration will choose to work through the E-rate program, which helps fund connectivity at schools and libraries, since educators know about it and are already comfortable with it.

But more action will be needed to solve the so-called homework-gap problem for good, Bernstein said. The homework gap is basically the struggles students face completing homework when they do not have reliable home internet access.



—bamaar/iStock/Getty

“There’s a longer-term solution that’s needed here that might involve infrastructure,” Bernstein said. “Hot-spots are not a final solution. What we really need is some moonshot effort to make sure that every American household, or at least households with kids, have a broadband connection.” Eighteen percent of students do not have access to broadband internet at home, according to a 2019 Associated Press analysis of census data.

Biden took the first step at expanding internet access when he signed an executive order encouraging the Federal Communications Commission to take steps to “increase connectivity options for students lacking reliable home broadband, so that they can continue to learn if their schools are operating remotely.” He also appointed a new acting FCC commissioner, Jessica Rosenworcel, who has advocated for expanding broadband access and is a champion of the E-rate.

## Professional development could get more resources

Ed-tech advocates also have their eyes on the office of education technology at the U.S. Department of Education. The office had a robust role during the Obama administration,

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Hot-spots are not a final solution. What we really need is some moonshot effort to make sure that every American household, or at least households with kids, have a broadband connection.”

**JON BERNSTEIN**  
FOUNDER,  
BERNSTEIN STRATEGY GROUP

but wasn’t given the same level of resources or staffing under the Trump administration.

In particular, the new administration will have a chance to shape the national education technology plan, which provides a playbook on best practices for just about everything related to education technology. The plan was last updated in 2017. What’s more, both Cardona and Cindy Marten, the superintendent of the San Diego Unified schools who has been nominated to serve as deputy secretary, have first-hand experience in the COVID-19 era.

“We have a deputy secretary and a secretary who have had to make digital learning work for their kids. That could have an impact on policy,” said Reg Leichty, the founder of Foresight Law + Policy, which advocates for the Consortium for School Networking, a group of school district technology leaders.

The Trump administration proposed eliminating Title II, the \$2.1 billion federal program funding teacher training. Advocates are hoping Biden and company will head in the opposite direction, providing more money for professional development.

The workforce isn’t “going to go back to being technology free,” said Melinda George, the chief policy officer for Learning Forward, an organization that represents educators

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We’ve actually found some good, important solutions because we’ve been forced to. The worst thing that could possibly happen after COVID is if we went back and forgot about the elements that we’ve learned during this time.”

**RICHARD CULATTA**  
CEO OF ISTE

who offer professional learning to other educators. She is hoping that the administration will help more districts connect teachers with one another and make sure educators can use technology for their own learning.

Richard Culatta, the CEO of ISTE, seconded that suggestion. “Whenever we see an imbalance where there’s significantly more money spent on software” than on teaching teachers to use it effectively, “it almost always ends badly.”

### A look at Cardona’s record in Connecticut

Culatta, who led the Education Department’s technology office during the Obama administration, is also hoping the Biden team will help districts preserve some of the problem-solving they have done during the pandemic, when nearly every school in the country offered some form of online learning.

“We’ve actually found some good, important solutions because we’ve been forced to,” Culatta said. “The worst thing that could possibly happen after COVID is if we went back and forgot about the elements that we’ve learned during this time.” The department has a role to play, he said, in helping states and districts hold on to that progress.

Meanwhile, he said, districts and schools could use some additional resources for an issue that’s become critical: Digital citizenship. Instruction in this area has

to move beyond simply teaching kids to be courteous online, he said, and the federal government can help provide leadership there.

“We have been thrust into this world where many of our most important life moments happen in digital spaces not physical ones,” he said. Schools need to be helping to develop digital citizens who know how to “fact check, be inclusive online and how to find solutions to problems through technology.”

Culatta is optimistic about the choice of Cardona, who became Connecticut’s commissioner of education in August of 2019.

During Cardona’s tenure, the Nutmeg State undertook a major task: Providing every child with access to the internet and digital devices. Though there had been a push for expanding internet access for years, policymakers began to feel a real urgency when COVID-19 hit and most students were required to learn virtually. The state is using money provided by Congress for coronavirus relief to cover the cost of the program.

The work is just getting underway, but the commitment the state is taking on is a big deal in itself, Culatta said.

“Nobody else has made that statement” of pushing to expand connectivity to every household, he said. “Just that alone is a big move.”

Cardona’s office did not lead the effort, but he was supportive of it, said Doug Casey, the executive director for the Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology, which works on technology initiatives for preschools, K-12, higher education, and adult education.

Cardona, who grew up in a housing project, has a “passion for equity,” Casey said, and saw the push for digital access as part of that mission.

And when COVID-19 forced schools to pivot to remote learning, Cardona was a “big proponent of encouraging districts to share their best practices,” rather than “sending the message that the department knows everything about remote learning.”

His team also did a good job curating resources from around the state that districts could use to improve the experience for their students and teachers, Casey said.

What’s more, Cardona “sees technology as a really important lever to break down barriers of opportunity,” Casey said. “He understands what these challenges look like at a really personal level.” ■



—E+/Getty

Published on January 6, 2021

## Digital Games: Powerful Motivation Tool or Not So Much?

By Mark Lieberman

**R**emote and hybrid learning are fueling the use of digital games in K-12 instruction more than ever before. But, strangely enough, the students who have grown up in a digital gaming culture are not particularly impressed.

In an exclusive survey conducted by the EdWeek Research Center, 60 percent of middle and high school students said they’re playing digital games for instructional purposes more than they did before the pandemic. About the same percentage of teachers who responded to a separate survey said they are incorporating more digital games into lessons than before COVID-19.

But educators and students do not necessarily agree on the impact of using those games.

More than 60 percent of teachers who are using games more often said the games are making learning more interesting for students, while only a quarter of the students playing more games said they make learning more interesting.

Those findings bring an interesting twist to questions about the role of digital games in instruction, especially since one of the biggest arguments in favor of using games is that they are one of the best tools teachers have to motivate and engage students.

One reason students might not value the games they are playing at school could be that educators are haphazardly integrating games into learning without strategizing first, suggested Richard Van Eck, a researcher who

has studied educational games and currently serves as associate dean for teaching and learning at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences.

Van Eck said children value games not necessarily because they're flashy and entertaining, but because they're "hard fun"—in other words, it is the thrill of the game's challenge that keeps students coming back.

Incorporating digital games as a tool for engaging students is okay, Van Eck said, but "if you do so on a superficial level, you're not tapping into the benefits, like promoting problem solving and critical thinking."

That could be a huge missed opportunity: 90 percent of U.S. teenagers say they play games on a cellphone, computer, or game console, according to a 2018 Pew Research Center survey.

### How Games Can Help Teaching

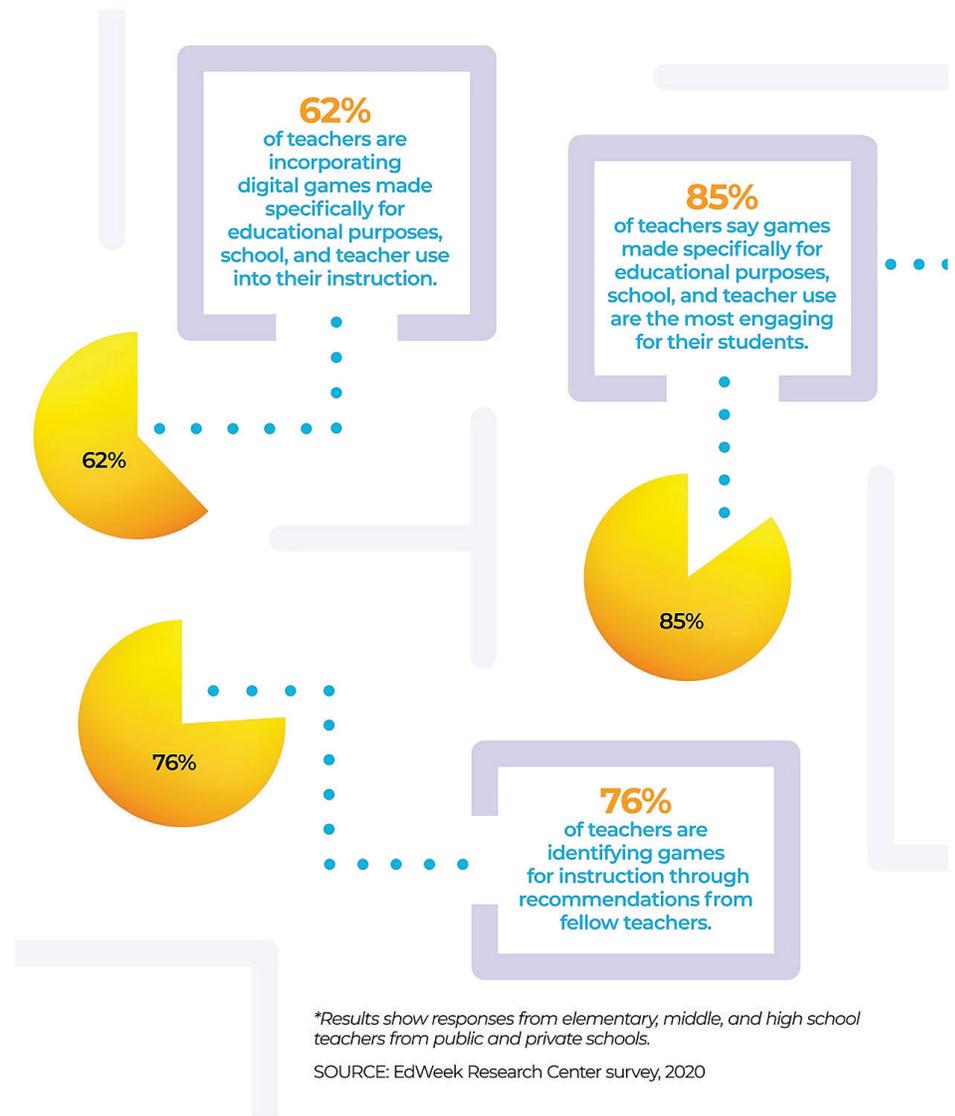
Laura Steinbrink had been using digital games as a teaching tool before the pandemic. Students used online quiz games from platforms like Quizizz and Kahoot and competed against other classes for high scores. They even set weekly goals for improving their scores.

Plato High School in Plato, Mo., where Steinbrink teaches Spanish, English, and other subjects, has been open this fall for full-time in-person learning. But some students and teachers have had to stay home for two-week stretches to quarantine after potentially being exposed to COVID-19. The games have helped Steinbrink keep instruction going for those students who were at home, and to track students' progress during a two-week period when she had to stay home and appear virtually before her in-person students.

She's even helped spread the gospel of digital games to her colleagues with training sessions over the summer. "Kahoot and Quizizz are a lot more used now throughout the district than they were before," she said. Seventy-six percent of teachers in the EdWeek Research Center survey said they're getting ideas from their fellow teachers for using games as teaching tools.

Teachers at Plato High have been using games much more frequently since the pandemic started, as an alternative to handing out paper worksheets and potentially spreading germs, said Kelsey Todd, a junior in Steinbrink's homeroom class.

Cecilia Groves, a junior in Steinbrink's Spanish 2, mythology, and yearbook classes, said games help with memorization and per-



forming better on tests, especially for students who otherwise struggle to memorize. "It really helps them understand what we are learning rather than just seeing it one time and being expected to know it," she said.

Students also get excited by the competitive element, according to Todd and Groves. "We fake get mad at each other, but we're obviously kidding and it's all fun and games," Groves said.

Even so, the pandemic has revealed some of the limitations of digital games as teaching tools. During the spring, when students were learning exclusively at home, Steinbrink had to pull out old copies of her paper vocabulary exercises to send to students who couldn't connect to online games.

Plus, Groves said some of her peers who

“As people are starting to develop an understanding of that healthy balance, I think they’re starting to dabble in digital gaming.”

**REBECCA GIBBONEY**  
 CURRICULUM SPECIALIST,  
 BLAST INTERMEDIATE UNIT 17

generally have a negative attitude about school do not seem more interested in learning simply because they are playing more games for class.

Students' home connectivity issues have also made it harder for teacher Rachelle Dene Poth to assess whether a student scored low on an online quiz game or simply ran into a glitch and couldn't finish it on time.

What's more, Poth worries that the use of games for learning contributes to the already record levels of screen time students are experiencing. "I do want the kids to get a break from the screen," said Poth, who teaches foreign languages and STEAM at Riverview Junior/Senior High in Oakmont, Pa.

### 'Dabble in Digital Gaming'

Digital games have been an effective learning tool during the pandemic for Michael Matera, who teaches 6th grade history at the University School of Milwaukee, a private K-12 school. He's long used board games to get students excited about learning, but that wasn't possible when all his students were at home, so he had to get creative.

He's now regularly streaming live on YouTube with interactive "roll and write" games (like Yahtzee) which involve rolling dice and writing results down and can be played by an infinitely large group of people at the same time.

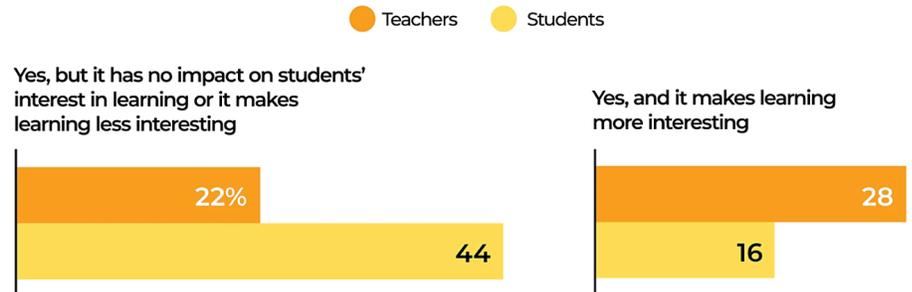
And on Zoom, he came up with his own game activity called "Image Battle Royale," in which students scramble to search the internet for a single image that illustrates a concept, like a gift box to represent the gift of the Nile for Egypt's economy.

These activities have helped Matera construct the friendly, engaged atmosphere that he likes to use in his physical classroom. He said they also help teach valuable skills such as strategic thinking, resource management, and information literacy.

"I could lecture as a history teacher talking about generals being flexible in their strategy," Matera said. "But the concept of information literacy just becomes apparent when you play a game."

Some teachers use games to help overcome flaws or gaps in other teaching materials. In one section of Poth's Spanish textbook, for example, "you learn 'I dance' and 'you dance', but you don't learn how to say anybody else dances until three chapters later," she said. Quizlet games show her students those additional vocabulary words before they appear in their textbook.

## Compared to before the pandemic, are online or digital games incorporated more now into your classes?



\*Results show responses from middle and high school students and teachers from public and private schools.

SOURCE: EdWeek Research Center survey, 2020

Rebecca Gibboney has been urging teachers to think about gamification in her role as a curriculum specialist for BLaST Intermediate Unit 17, which provides support and training for teachers in four northern Pennsylvania counties. She believes games can be crucial tools to motivate students, particularly during a pandemic.

In the spring, many teachers were overinvesting their time in lengthy videoconference meetings and live instruction with students, Gibboney said. "As people are starting to develop an understanding of that healthy balance, I think they're starting to dabble in digital gaming," tapping into online game repositories like BreakoutEDU, she said.

### 'Renaissance of the Physical'

None of the pandemic-related growth in digital game use in schools comes as a surprise to the nonprofit Games for Change, which creates and distributes games for social impact goals.

"It's accelerated the process of acceptance" that digital games are useful in schools, said Susanna Pollack, the organization's president. Teachers "are so challenged with finding activities and learning opportunities to engage with remotely that having a program that taps into an interest area like video games gives them that extra edge."

Van Eck said he's hopeful that parents and schools alike will now demand higher-quality, more sophisticated educational games from the market, especially after parents saw students' learning experience up close during extended remote learning.

Those games should feature more built-

in tools for assessing students' performance and more integrations with other technology platforms schools are already using, said David Birchfield, founder and CEO of SMALLab Learning, a company that specializes in 3D learning environments.

He cautions against the use of standalone commercial online games that are not directly linked to instructional priorities. Those games can lead students down the wrong path, he said.

Experts predict digital games will likely continue to be a big part of the learning landscape this school year and beyond. More than two-thirds of students learning entirely in person this fall said they're playing more digital games than they did previously, a slightly larger share than that of students experiencing full-time remote learning and hybrid learning, according to the EdWeek Research Center survey.

Brooklyn Atterberry, a junior in Steinbrink's Spanish 2 and yearbook classes, generally doesn't like school but has recently enjoyed games on Gimkit, a popular set of online educational games created by a 2019 high school graduate. "It does add in more of the effect of actually playing a game while you are still learning," Atterberry said. "It makes you want to learn more often."

Still, some educators suggest the novelty appeal of digital game use may wear off a bit when schools can ease pandemic restrictions and the emphasis on online learning drops off, compared with now.

"My guess is when it's all said and done, we're going to see a renaissance of the physical," Matera said. "I think you're going to see more people doing cardboard challenges." ■



—Getty

Published on September 29, 2020

# Teaching Reading During COVID-19: Frustrated Students, Tech Challenges

By Alyson Klein

**C**laudia Margaroli teaches 1st grade English, reading, and social studies to a mix of English-language learners and native speakers at Charlotte East Language Academy, a public bilingual school in Charlotte, N.C. In a typical school year, she will have one group of students one day, and another the next.

But this is not a typical school year. All of Margaroli’s classes have moved online, due to COVID-19. Education Week talked to Margaroli about what it is like to teach reading to early-elementary students in a virtual environment.

## How have you adjusted your teaching to a digital environment?

“Every day, we start with a morning meeting” to encourage social and emotional learning, Margaroli said. But she acknowledges that the morning meetings are “a little difficult through a screen. It is a lot of clicking. It’s on an iPad. There’s a lot of [tech access] issues.” And she wonders whether parents are giving their children a hand. “If parents are helping, is that work authentic?” Only about half of her students complete the assignments she gives them

outside of class, so she doesn’t rely on those assignments to inform her lesson planning.

## What is it like working with English-language learners in a digital environment?

Margaroli said her English-language learners are more frustrated than usual. “There’s this feeling of being rushed and that when you’re rushed you tend to speak quickly,” and may not get all the words or sounds correct, Margaroli said. That can lead to hurt feelings. “It’s hard when you are virtual, and I see a child upset with their microphone off. They have to choose to ask me for help.” She has reminded children that they need to let her know if they are struggling, telling her students: “I do not expect perfection.”

## What’s your biggest worry about kids learning to read in remote learning environments?

“I’m a young teacher so you’d think I’d be more into tech,” Margaroli said. But she wants her students to have experience with tangible books. “I still deeply believe that children need books in their hands every day, multiple times a day, and that has been a gap or deficiency” of online learning.

## What has been the impact of online teaching on grouping?

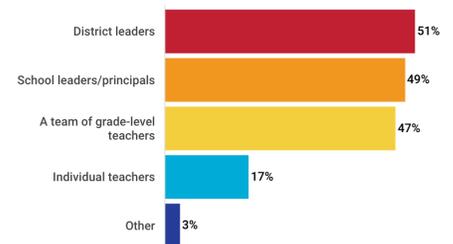
“In person, I have the flexibility to change my leveled groups on a whim whenever I want,” said Margaroli. She’d move a student if they gained a particular skill or seemed not to be grasping a concept. But now, it’s harder to make those shifts. “Every time I change groups virtually that means sending out a new schedule and a link,” she explained.

So, she said, “I’m becoming a bigger risk-taker with the groups.” If Margaroli feels students will move on to the next challenge even if that was not her original plan. “I feel like there’s a lot of trust with the kids and me. We are risk-takers and we’re flexible and we’re all in this together.”

## Do you feel like your students are mastering the material?

“I think the reading foundational skills” are developing nicely, said Margaroli, whose students returned to school in mid-August. The majority of my kids knew very, very few letter sounds [at the beginning of the year]

Who selects the primary digital/online reading programs and materials that teachers in your district or school use to teach students how to read during remote learning? Select all that apply.



Download data

\*Results show responses from teachers, principals and district leaders who reported involvement with early reading instruction.

SOURCE: EdWeek Research Center

and are almost at 100 percent at letter sounds [now]. Phonics. Decoding. Spelling. I feel like my kids are learning at the exact same pace we would in a classroom.”

But she’s less sure about writing. “I have found it hard with my [computer] camera to model a writing piece... It’s not an authentic



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writing experience. I can't see what they are writing unless they hold it up themselves."

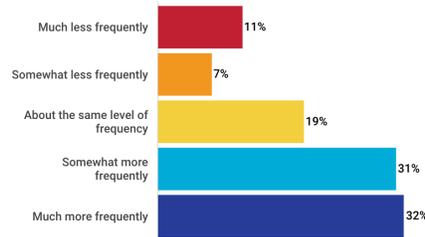
**Has there been anything positive about teaching during COVID-19?**

"I have really loved the online resources with phonics."

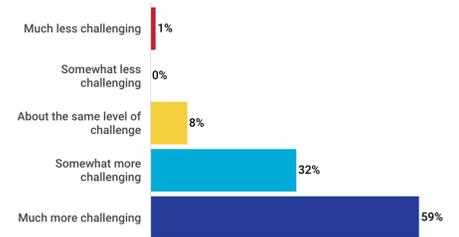
**Any other advice for teachers who are struggling with teaching reading during COVID-19?**

"I feel like it's so important for teachers, even if you are only having five kids log on, to not become complacent. Just like in the classroom where we say every kid can learn, we need to remember that every single child can learn virtually, too." ■

Compared to prior to the pandemic, how frequently have you, or the teachers you work with, been using digital/online reading programs to teach students to read?



Compared to teaching students to read in person with print materials, teaching students to read with remote instruction and digital materials is:



\*Results show responses from teachers, principals and district leaders who reported involvement with early reading instruction.

SOURCE: EdWeek Research Center

Published on February 12, 2021

# Low-Income Children Less Likely to Experience 'Live' Contact With Teachers, Analysis Finds

By Alyson Klein

**M**any students may be learning virtually, but children from lower-income families are less likely to have live contact with their teachers than kids from wealthier families, according to an analysis of census data published Feb. 11, 2021 by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

Twenty-one percent of children from families making less than \$25,000 a year reported having had no "live contact" with a teacher in the past week, whether in-person, by phone, or virtually. That's compared with 11 percent for kids whose families make at least \$200,000 a year.

In fact, the greater the family income, the more likely it is that a child has had recent live contact with a teacher, the analysis found. For instance, 16 percent of students from households earning between \$50,000 and \$74,999 annually said they had no live contact with a teacher in the past week, while 14 percent of students whose families make \$75,000 to \$99,999 a year said the same.

One big reason children from lower-in-



come families may have had less teacher contact: Kids who live in poverty are less likely to have access to the internet for learning than wealthier children. Ninety percent of kids from households earning at least \$200,000 annually indicated that they always had online access for educational purposes, compared with 55 percent of students from households

earning less than \$25,000 a year.

Indeed, children from all income levels are more likely to have access to a computer than to the internet, although here too, lower-income children lag behind their wealthier peers. Ninety-two percent of students from households earning \$200,000 or more indicated there was always a computer available

for educational purposes, compared with 61 percent of those from households earning less than \$25,000.

That could be partly because schools have invested more in providing students with devices to learn from home online than in providing them with internet access. At the start of the pandemic, in late April, 39 percent of students reported that their school or district had given them a computer to learn from home. Just 2 percent said the same about internet access.

In late November 2020, 65 percent of students said their school or district had provided them with a computer, compared with 4 percent who said the same about internet access.

Educators and experts have long pointed to the impact of the so-called “homework gap”, which, they argue, puts students whose families don’t have internet access at a serious learning disadvantage. But the problem has been especially noticeable during the pandemic.

It’s unclear just what impact the switch from in-person to virtual learning will have

on kids over the long term, wrote Anthony Carnevale, the Center’s director, and Megan Fasules, a research economist at Georgetown, in a Medium post.

But, they added, “What is clear, though, is that gaps in access to the technologies necessary for virtual learning are exacerbating the challenges already faced by students in lower-income households. The effects of these gaps will be felt widely in the wake of COVID-19 and may affect current K-12 students for many years.” ■



—Christopher Milette/Erie Times-News via AP

Mary Euell helps her sons, Michael Henry, left, and Mario Henry, work through math lessons remotely in their Erie, Pa., home.

Published on January 11, 2021

## How Online Teaching Needs to Improve—Even After the Pandemic

By Mark Lieberman

**D**espite all the frustrations and struggles to make remote and hybrid learning work during COVID-19, many teachers have evolved their practices to an approach more tailored to individual students’ needs, and the vast majority say they’ve gained skills that they’ll continue to use after the pandemic ends, concludes a new report.

These are among the findings in surveys of teachers and administrators in a new report from the Clayton Christensen Institute, a non-profit research organization that promotes innovation in education and other fields.

The data reinforce what many online learning advocates and experts have been saying since the pandemic started: the online learning that’s taken place doesn’t represent the best that it can be; most teachers were underprepared for abruptly switching to a new instructional model; and there are reasons to be hopeful that more robust online learning will remain viable for schools to offer in the long term.

“When people are frustrated with what’s happening in distance learning right now, it’s in some ways not surprising given the way that they’ve had to throw things together,” said Tom Arnett, the report’s author.

The report cites evidence that many teachers have tried to re-create the physical classroom experience for students by hosting long

whole-group videoconference calls and sharing documents in the learning management system, approaches that are contrary to the advice of online learning experts. Slightly more than 40 percent of educators said their synchronous remote instruction, in which they’re “face to face” virtually with students, lasts as long as a regular school day.

At the same time, teachers’ workloads appear to have increased dramatically. Eighty-five percent of teachers said they spend more time than they used to on planning and preparation for the school day. That additional time might include navigating and troubleshooting technology platforms, tracking down remote students who have been absent or behind on their assignments, and developing new social-emotional learning activities to help students cope with the effects of an unfolding public health crisis.

The heavier workload also likely includes the time and energy required to create new instructional materials for these unprecedented circumstances. Survey data from the Christensen Institute shows nearly half of educators said their primary source for curriculum materials was their own efforts, and 87 percent of administrators said they expect teachers to use materials of their own making.

Hybrid teaching has emerged as the most popular approach to restore some classroom instruction while also allowing for some students to continue learning from home part- or full-time. But that mode isn’t substantially easier for teachers than offering instruction remotely full-time, according to the report. Asked to rate their ability to serve their students effectively

on a scale from 0 to 100, in-person teachers said an average of 77, hybrid teachers said an average of 64, and teachers of fully remote students said an average of 59.

### Identifying Possible Solutions

The status quo for remote teaching isn't fixed in stone. The Christensen Institute offers several ideas for easing some of the biggest burdens teachers are experiencing.

State education departments should review curriculum materials specifically to determine which ones work best for online instruction, the report says. Teachers who are comfortable with online and student-centered teaching should be empowered to lead training sessions and coach their struggling colleagues.

The report also recommends that schools establish virtual programs with autonomous staff and leadership that tap into the resources and expertise of their conventional school partners to "give students benefits that neither conventional schools nor virtual schools alone can offer."

Arnett acknowledges that might be difficult to do in the near future given the K-12 system's current budget woes and staffing challenges. But he believes virtual schools should follow the model of the Appleton eSchool, run by the Appleton district in Wisconsin.

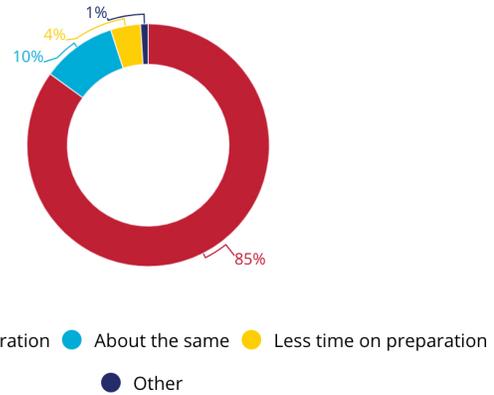
"We've seen the organizations that survive disruption and reinvent themselves, they start with an independent team building from a fresh slate, as opposed to a team that's trying to build on a bunch of work they're already doing," Arnett said.

The institute's survey found 69 percent of administrators say their schools currently offer their own full-time virtual programs, compared with only 27 percent prior to COVID-19. Teachers are rapidly gaining new experience as well: 83 percent surveyed said they regularly teach online now, while only 16 percent said they regularly taught online before the pandemic.

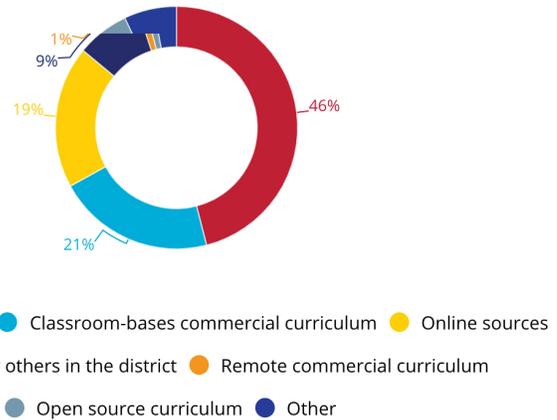
Arnett, like many education observers, believes schools will return to full-time in-person instruction for most students when it's safe to do so. But refining online instruction and offering it as an option going forward presents an opportunity to reach students who weren't served well by the K-12 system even pre-pandemic, he said.

"For some students, the conventional classroom works a lot better. For some, they're seeing some real benefits to online learning. Some online learning models are better than others," Arnett said. "For me, the takeaway from all that is not to force people into models." ■

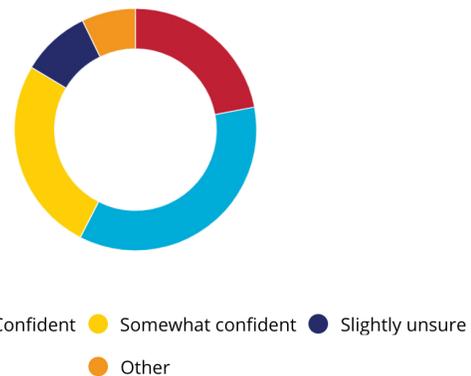
### Change in proportion of time teachers spent on preparation since last year



### Primary source of the curriculum materials



### Teachers' confidence in using online tools



SOURCE: Christensen Institute, 2020 survey of teachers



—iStock/Getty

## OPINION

Published on June 19, 2020

# English-Language Learners Need More Support During Remote Learning

By Leslie M. Babinski, Steven J. Amendum, Steven E. Knotek & Marta Sanchez

**Y**oung children who are learning English require special consideration during virtual instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Approximately 1 in 6 children in kindergarten and 1st grade in the United States are learning English as a second (or third) language. As teachers grapple with the monumental task of providing remote instruction to English-language learners, it's important that state and district leaders provide extensive support and clear guidelines for engaging their ELLs.

Virtual learning for elementary school students, particularly those in the early grades, has been provided in a wide range of formats, including live online sessions with teachers, videos, internet links, and printed packets. The responsibility of connecting young children to these resources often falls to parents. In many ELL communities, internet access may be limited to a cellphone, making it difficult for parents and children to navigate learn-

ing activities, especially if multiple children are in the home.

This spring, 48 states suspended school for the remainder of the school year, resulting in millions of students who will miss over 20 weeks of in-person learning. Given what we know about learning loss during the traditional summer months, it is critical to support families and teachers to ensure that children are able to engage in learning activities during this unprecedented time.

Under federal Title VI requirements, school districts are required to ensure that English-language learners can meaningfully participate in instruction. Although the types of in-person instructional services vary both across and within states, ELLs typically spend most of their school day in the general classroom with English-only peers and receive specialized instruction from English-as-a-second-language (ESL) teachers for a specified number of hours a week. In the current climate, it is critical that ELLs continue to make academic progress and receive social-emotional support from their teachers along with their English-only peers.

As state and district leaders consider out-

reach through email, phone calls, and physical copies of instructional resources for providing equitable access to possible remote instruction when schools reopen, we offer the following evidence-informed suggestions for consideration.

**1. Support students' emotional and mental health by maintaining relationships with schools and teachers.** During the abrupt end to in-person schooling because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to virtual instruction, it was important for school leaders to pay special attention to their districts' outreach efforts to families who do not speak English as their first language. Many families with English-language learners may also face significant challenges during this time from loss of work, separation from extended families, and concerns about their health. Information to help parents support their children allows for continuity of the central place of the school in the lives of many families. Additional resources from schools and districts for interpretation and translation with clear two-way communication may be necessary to support both teachers and families during remote instruction for ELLs.

**2. Encourage and support families to use their best language.** As parents have moved into a home schooling role, it is important to provide a clear message to families that by using their home language, they can continue to support their children's progress in literacy. In fact, recent research shows that young ELLs with strong early-literacy skills in their native Spanish at kindergarten entry made greater growth in English reading from kindergarten through 4th grade. In this study, the effect of early Spanish reading ability was more influential than students' ability to understand and speak English. Given the results of this study, the message for virtual learning is clear: Support and encourage families to use their best language. Skills learned from reading in native languages support learning in that language and can also transfer to learning to read in English.

**3. Build on the considerable strengths of bilingual families.** Families of English-language learners have considerable strengths that can be leveraged by schools and teachers to help them through this difficult time. By building on families' cultural wealth when planning virtual learning activities, ESL and classroom teachers can collaborate to tap into their students' cultural and family backgrounds through instructional activities that originate from a strengths-based viewpoint and can engage and sustain connections with

families. Such a model can be used to recognize and build on family strengths and cultural knowledge. For example, teachers can offer learning activities that include the entire family, such as taking turns in storytelling or having older siblings read to younger ones. In the Latino community, for instance, parents may engage their children by using “cuentos” (stories) or giving “consejos” (advice in the form of a proverb).

**4. Provide opportunities for enhanced teacher collaboration.** Imagine kindergarten and 1st grade students and their parents trying to navigate virtual instruction from multiple teachers with different content, web portals, and instructional strategies. From our research in elementary schools, there are clear benefits for students when ESL and classroom teachers collaborate to provide aligned instruction with coordinated scaffolding for their ELLs. For example, after briefly planning together, ESL teachers can provide direct instruction to preteach specific academic vocabulary to support ELLs’ comprehension during literacy lessons pro-

“

Given what we know about learning loss during the traditional summer months, it is critical to support families and teachers.”

vided by their classroom teachers. Or ESL and classroom teachers can align instruction by using the same instructional strategies to teach phonics or reading-comprehension strategies across settings. Meaningful access to remote instruction for ELLs requires intentional collaboration between classroom and ESL teachers. As this type of collaboration is all the more difficult as the teachers themselves work remotely, it will require support for teachers from education agencies at the

school, district, state, and national levels.

Focusing on supporting English-language learners and their families during virtual instruction will help teachers provide access to the curriculum and keep lines of communication open. While this is critical as families, teachers, schools, and communities adjust to life during various phases of stay-at-home orders in many states, these principles can also support families in the transition back to in-person schooling. ■

*Leslie Babinski is an associate research professor in the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University and the director of the Center for Child and Family Policy. Steven Amendum is an associate professor of literacy education in the School of Education at the University of Delaware. Steven Knotek is an associate professor in learning sciences and psychological studies and the coordinator of the School Psychology Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Marta Sánchez is an assistant professor in the College of Education at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington and a faculty affiliate at Duke University.*

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