

# Effects of Remote Learning in South Carolina During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Influence of the Epidemic on Our State's Educators, Students and Families

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## Executive Summary

- A total of 847 educators and 263 parents responded to the Remote Learning Experience survey. The samples included persons from a variety of locales, varied amounts of work experience for educators, and encompassed experiences for children from PK through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Both parents and educators recognized the difficulties faced by schools and school districts in Spring 2020. A variety of modes were used deliver content, with asynchronous lessons or distributing physical packets of materials as most popular options. Physical packets of materials were an option for students in lower grades as well as for families without reliable Internet access.
- Educators recognized that they had to scramble when schools closed abruptly in March 2020 to provide lessons and, educators recognized that the information was at a lower level of rigor as was delivered in-person. Parents, however, reported conflicting information as to the level of the lessons, in some places noting the lessons were “busy work” and in other responses, noting that the rigor level was approximately equal to in-person learning. Student grades, however, were reported by parents as largely the same at the end of 2019-20 as in previous quarters of the school year.
- Related to remote learning in Spring 2020, there were benefits and challenges noted across the two sets of respondents. Unexpected benefits of the remote learning experience included educator pride to show that they could meet the needs of their communities and to work together as a team. Educators also felt that districts/schools were concerned for their personal health in Spring 2020. Parents noted similar themes, stating that they were pleased at the ability of their child(ren) to complete schoolwork remotely and also with the district’s concerns for children’s health.
- Challenges noted by educators in Spring 2020 were largely related to student issues and lesson content. Educators noted that the tasks were less rigorous than in-person learning and also took a long time to prepare. Student Internet capability was noted as problematic as well. However, the biggest complaint for educators was the amount of missing work turned in by students.
- During the 2020 summer break, educators tried to solve problems related to student connectivity (e.g., Hot Spots, lack of technical support, access to Internet, and device shortages for students.) Many school districts spent time and money during Summer 2020 to provide additional materials and support to students. Schools/districts did request feedback from parents as the 2020-21 school year was planned. Teachers/educators were upset that parent feedback was solicited and considered, yet teachers mentioned feeling “left out” of many of the decision making-processes.

- In Fall 2020, schools and families were provided more options for remote learning. Use of paper packets was greatly reduced, due to connectivity work and securing devices for students. Educators noted a big increase in the ability to hold synchronized class meetings. While parents elected one (or few) ways for their child(ren) would attend school, educators were faced with providing service through multiple modes, often simultaneously. Most parents elected to continue with virtual learning or participated in a hybrid mix (some in-person, some online). Teachers noted frustrations with having to accommodate so many different learning modes simultaneously.
- There were different challenges noted by parents and teachers in Fall 2020 than were present in Spring 2020. In the fall, educators recognized that there was still high levels of stress on teachers/administrators, that students still had a lot of missing work, and online courses were very time consuming. Parents were concerned with the lack of social interaction for students, monitoring children's schoolwork with family and work duties, and increased stress on children and families. However, providing free meals for all students, effective computing devices, rigorous activities, and safety measures were beneficial.
- Most parents and teachers did not see drawbacks related to the decision to remove standardized testing in Spring 2020 (as well as the potential for Spring 2021 waiver). Both parents and educators noted that there would be lower stress, anxiety, and pressure – on both students and teachers. Teachers would have greater freedom to engage in meaningful lessons without pressure to “teach to the test.”

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# Effects of Remote Learning in South Carolina During the COVID-19 Pandemic

## INTRODUCTION

The start of 2020 brought about the most serious world-wide event in recent history. In the United States, most citizens learned about the virus shortly after a cluster of severe pneumonia cases was reported on New Year's Eve 2019 in the city of Wuhan, China. From January to the present, coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) evolved from an isolated disease to a global pandemic. The virus has brought countries to a standstill, pushed hospital systems to the brink, and dragged the global economy into a recession.

In the U.S., the pandemic spread rapidly in the early months of 2020. As the number of people who became sickened with COVID-19 increased, the U.S. government declared a public health emergency on February 3, 2020. Roughly one month later, state governments began issuing stay-at-home orders, mandating that all residents stay at home except to go to an essential job or shop for essential needs. South Carolina followed similar procedures.

To help curb the rapid spread of COVID-19, Governor Henry McMaster ordered all public schools in South Carolina to close on March 15, 2020 for two weeks (<https://governor.sc.gov/executive-branch/executive-orders>). Instead, of attending typical “brick-and-mortar” schooling, distance learning was ordered to take place. School closures were thought to be a temporary solution; however, on April 22, 2020, Governor McMaster announced that all South Carolina schools would remain closed for the remainder of the 2019-20 academic year.

While citizens knew the reason to close schools was to protect people from illness during a serious public health emergency, the repercussion was a major disruption in the lives of educators, children, and families across the state. Educators scrambled to provide instruction and lessons which could be completed via remote learning using alternative teaching methods, such as distributing physical packets of materials to children/families or holding virtual class meetings. Where available, schools implementing 1:1 technology instruction sent computers (e.g., Chromebooks, iPads) home with children.

While citizens across the country hoped for the virus to abate during the summer of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic did not slow. In South Carolina (and across the U.S.) school districts realized that safety precautions to protect children and educators from becoming ill would part of the 2020-21 academic year planning. However, instead of solely providing instruction through remote learning, Gov. McMaster announced on July 15, 2020 that all South Carolina school districts were required to offer families options for face-to-face learning. Now, midway into the 2020-21 academic year, educators, families, and children are attending schooling through multiple modes as districts across the state continue to deal with the virus.

The sudden rise of COVID-19, and its continued presence, has affected education in South Carolina in many ways. These effects have imposed additional stressors on school administrators, teachers, students, and their families. This unprecedented experience may reveal unintended benefits along with challenges. To

gain a greater understanding of the effects of remote education due to COVID-19, this report summarizes feedback from educators and families regarding their experiences. Lessons learned can help inform policy makers, educators, and stakeholders interested in education. Feedback from educators and parents can be used to improve a variety of areas related to education in South Carolina such as remote learning, technology infrastructure, computing needs, curriculum, and modes of instruction.

## **SURVEY DEVELOPMENT**

Two separate surveys were constructed to capture feedback from stakeholders. The first survey was developed for educators to gauge experiences of administrators, teachers, and other school personnel related to remote learning. The survey solicited educator feedback regarding experiences at three time periods: 1) spring of the 2019-20 academic year, 2) summer 2020 when planning for the new school year, and 3) at the start of the 2020-21 academic year. A second (separate) survey was developed for parents/guardians of children attending South Carolina schools. The parent survey asked guardians to provide their perspectives of remote learning and other educational activities in the spring of the 2019-20 academic year and at the start of the 2020-21 academic year.

Both surveys included a mix of closed-ended items and open-ended items. Closed-ended items included formats of Likert scaling, ranking, and checklists, were included to facilitate ease of data collection. These questions were summarized by providing frequency information, percentages, and item averages. To allow more detailed reflections, open-ended items were also included; responses were summarized by grouping similar statements and reactions to identify underlying themes. Descriptive information, such as school location, school size, and district name, were requested; however, surveys were purposefully created to be anonymous to allow respondents to provide candid feedback. In this summary, information will largely be aggregated; however, select statements from open-ended questions were included as exemplars of themes.

To develop the surveys, the evaluator drafted items for the surveys to address the objectives of the study. After drafting, the evaluator collaborated with members of the Education Oversight Committee (EOC) for editing, ensuring that surveys included item content was clear, easy to read, relevant for the appropriate audience, and could be easily understood. After finalization, surveys were input into the online platform SurveyMonkey for distribution. An Internet link was emailed to prospective respondents for completion on a variety of devices (computer, tablet, phone). A copy of the Educator Survey and the Parent Survey are included in Supplemental Materials.

In early November 2020, surveys were sent to interested participants or websites with email banks (e.g., LinkedIn, Constant Contact) through email. Survey links were also forwarded or posted on school/communication websites by various organizations (e.g., school Parent-Teacher Organizations, District Offices, Palmetto State Teachers Association) to increase the number of respondents. The survey website captured responses for approximately three weeks, closing on November 29, 2020. Given that the links were forwarded, the response rate cannot be estimated. In addition, use of an email link may limit the ability to capture information from stakeholders, especially families from lower income backgrounds and/or more rural parts of the state, that may not have adequate access or needed technology.

A total of 847 educators and 263 parents across South Carolina participated in the survey. As respondents could exit the survey at any time without penalty, the sample size per item may vary from the total because all data were available per item were summarized. The sample is one of convenience and self-selection, yet, demographic information showed a distribution of parent/teacher responses from across the state. Table 1 lists districts with at least 10 educators responding, Appendix C provides the frequency and percentages of respondents for all districts in the samples.

Table1. Remote Learning in South Carolina, Participants by District

District	Educator Responses		Parent Responses	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Aiken	18	2.1	8	3.0
Beaufort	24	2.8	6	2.3
Berkeley	70	8.3	46	17.5
Charleston	38	4.5	21	8.0
Darlington	16	1.9	2	.8
Dorchester 2	24	2.8	8	3.0
Florence 1	29	3.4	2	.8
Greenville	48	5.7	45	17.1
Horry	23	2.7	5	1.9
Kershaw	14	1.7	1	.4
Lancaster	10	1.2	3	1.1
Lexington 1	21	2.5	9	3.4
Lexington 4	93	11.0	--	--
Lexington-Richland 5	18	2.1	7	2.7
Pickens	12	1.4	3	1.1
Richland 1	25	3.0	6	2.3
Richland 2	54	6.4	14	5.3
SC Public Charter School District	34	4.0	2	.8
York 1	16	1.9	2	.8
York 3 (Rock Hill)	32	3.8	14	5.3
York 4 (Fort Mill)	20	2.4	1	.4

The school locales of respondents are provided in Table 2. As expected, parents were largely from suburban locations. Educators places of work were roughly equally distributed between rural and suburban locations. A few educators wrote in that their district encompassed a mixture of locations. While rural educators and parents are in the minority of the survey respondents, people working/living in these environments comprise are at least 10% of each sample.

Table 2. Remote Learning in South Carolina, School Locations

	Educator Responses		Parent Responses	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Rural	354	41.8	53	20.2
Suburban	372	43.9	178	67.7
Urban	92	10.9	27	10.3
Other (specified)	22	2.6	--	--
No Response	7	.8	5	1.9
Total	847	100.0	263	100.0

Roughly half of the educators in the sample reported working at schools serving over 600 students. Thirty-seven percent of the sample worked at mid-size schools, and roughly 8 percent of the educators were at small schools. Open-ended responses largely referred to the size of the entire district; the size of the districts noted were between 10,000 to 77,000 students. Figure 1 reports workplace/school size reported by educators.

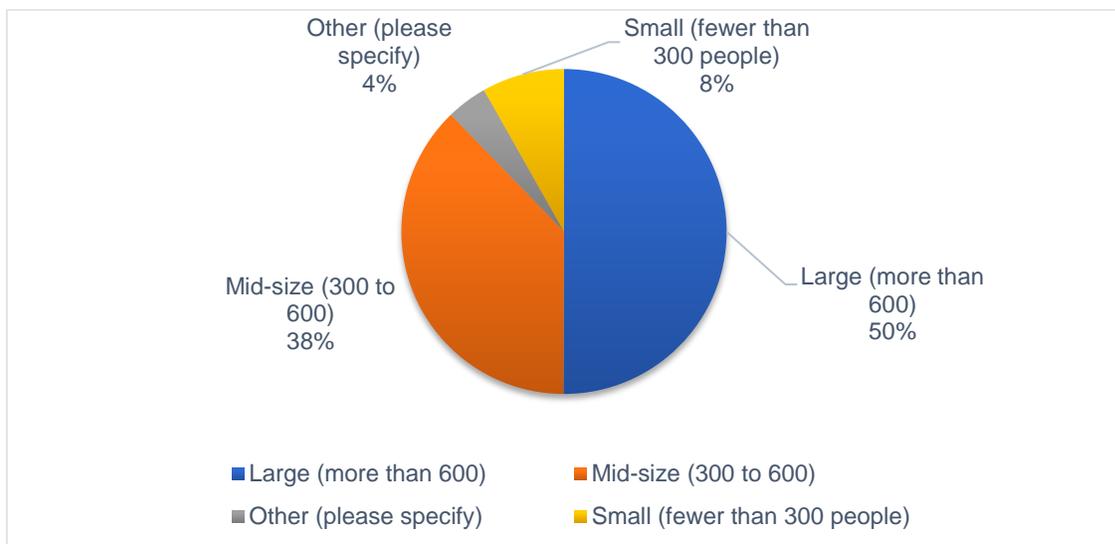


Figure 1. School Sizes of Sample Respondents

Although the sample is a sample of convenience, the samples are large, dispersed across the state, and representing various locations. While there are some limitations with the sample, the responses are thought to be adequate to provide a snapshot of educator and parent views to show how South Carolinians dealt with remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## EDUCATOR SURVEY RESULTS

In mid-March 2021, the rising COVID-19 health pandemic resulted in an order from the Governor to close schools across South Carolina. Teachers were asked to meet the needs of students by shifting to five-day remote learning with little time for preparation or planning. As the health crisis had not diminished at the start of the 2020-21 academic year, school districts balanced increased safety and health precautions as well as how to deliver academic content (i.e., remote, five day “in person” learning, or a hybrid approach). The new modes for education delivery presented unique challenges for school personnel, administrators, and teachers.

To better understand the influence remote learning situations have had on teachers and school administrators, an online questionnaire was administered. The survey, presented in the supplemental materials, consisted of 26 questions (many with additional sub-parts). After demographic information, respondents provided feedback on four areas related to remote learning due to COVID-19: 1) spring 2020, 2) planning during summer break 2020, 3) start of the 2020-21 school year, and 4) the impact on academic learning. Respondents were asked to provide candid responses to all questions. Response diagnostics reported that the average time to complete the educator survey was 11 minutes.

### EDUCATOR DEMOGRAPHICS

The sample of 847 educators hold a variety of positions in the education field; these data are detailed in Table 3. Roughly 80% of survey respondents held a teaching position, with content area teachers (e.g., mathematics, social studies) comprising the majority of the sample. Other types of teachers, such as special areas (e.g., physical education, art, music), special education, and English as a Second Language (ESOL) encompassed 2% to 9% of the sample. Administrators (e.g., superintendents, principals, curriculum coordinators), were present at 11.5% of the sample. If respondents did not see their position listed, a description could be written in. Responses in this category consisted of a variety of positions, such as: counselors, school psychologists, teachers assistants, secretaries, adult educators, and attendance coordinators/data clerks. The sample is diverse, allowing for a variety of perspectives regarding remote learning due to COVID-19 from educators and related professionals. For simplicity, all respondents are referred to as educators in this evaluation report.

Table 3. Positions Held by Educators, Remote Learning Sample

Position	Frequency	Percentage
Administrator	97	11.5
Teacher - Content Areas	497	58.7
Teacher - Special Areas	77	9.1
Teacher - Special Education	72	8.5
Teacher -ESOL	18	2.1
No Response Provided	18	2.1
Other (please specify)	68	8.0
Total	847	100.0

Table 4 reports on the number of years an educator has been in their current position. Responses were spread across the categories. Over half of the sample had been in their current position for 10 or fewer years; roughly 34% of the sample reported time in their current position between 0-5 years and 20% between 6-10 years. Approximately 18% of educators had 20 or more years of experience in their current position.

Table 4. Number of Years Educators Employment, Remote Learning Sample

Number of Years	Frequency	Percentage
0-5 years	287	33.9
6-10 years	173	20.4
11-15 years	122	14.4
16-20 years	106	12.5
More than 20 years	154	18.2
No response	5	0.6
Total	847	100.0

Figure 2 displays the grade levels of students that educators serve. As shown, there were fewer respondents reported involvement with preschool (PK) level students. Slightly higher numbers of educators reported working with high school grades (9<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup>); this may be related to teachers teaching classes which serve a variety of grade levels in the same course.

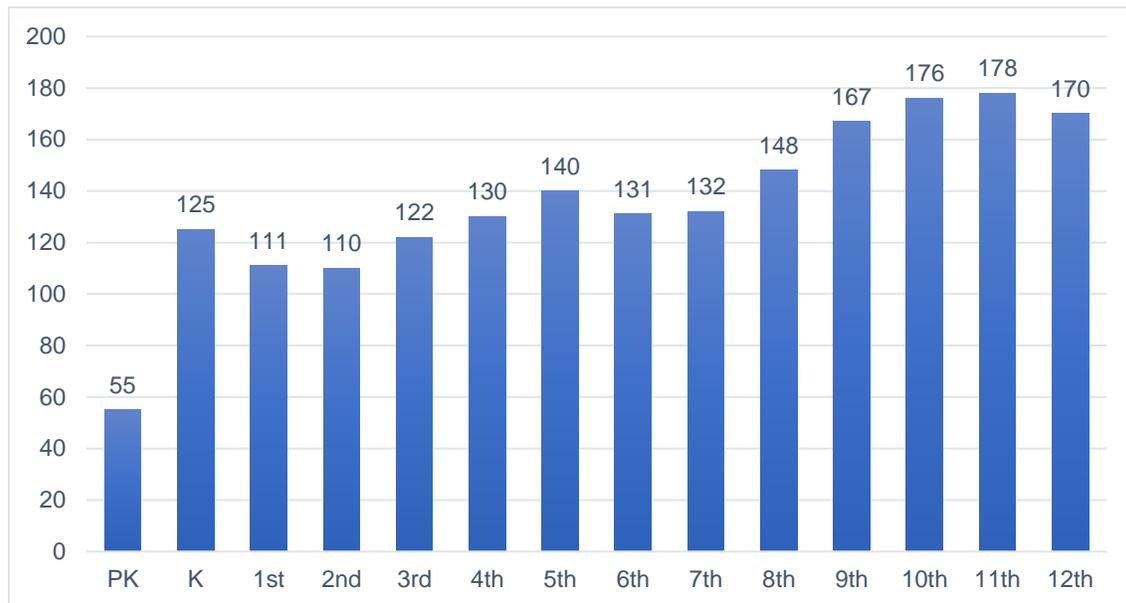


Figure 2. Grade Levels Taught by Educators, Remote Learning Sample

## REFLECTIONS ON REMOTE LEARNING IN SPRING 2020, EDUCATOR RESPONSES

In the first section of the survey, respondents noted how lessons were provided to students learning when schools were abruptly closed to in-person learning (March 2020 through the remainder of the 2019-20 school year). Table 5 reports modes which schools and teachers delivered lessons, where respondents could select as many options as applicable. The percentage reported was computed using the total number of respondents (N = 847) and will not sum to 100%. In addition, educators could state supplementary comments/information. Where appropriate, comments are included to supplement tabled information.

As shown, 44% of respondents stated that paper packets were prepared for students to pick-up and return to the school to document learning. The “in-person” option to turn in work was retained through the end of the 2019-20 school year. Asynchronous lessons, where assignments are provided and completed work is turned in online, was used by roughly 36% of the respondents. Roughly 29% of the respondents used a mix of online content meetings at a set time (synchronous delivery) and asynchronous learning (activities delivered via Internet to complete off-line) was a popular method for delivering content.

Table 5. Spring 2020 Educator’s Lesson Delivery Mode, Remote Learning Sample

Lesson Delivery Mode	Frequency	Percentage
Prepared (paper) work packets turned in in-person	373	44.0
Online lessons where students completed work online, but there was no online meeting at a set time (asynchronous)	304	35.9
Mix of asynchronous lessons and synchronous meetings at least 1 time a week	241	28.5
Paper packets but work was turned in online (i.e., pictures of work, artifacts)	146	17.2
Online lessons where students met 2 or more times a week at a set time (synchronous)	133	15.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>847</b>	

Note: Percentage will not total to 100% due to “select all that apply” option.

Write-in responses provided additional comments concerning how lessons were provided to students. Many schools using paper packets stated that the same information was provided online (asynchronous learning) and paper packets were distributed to students without reliable Internet access.

*(We had..) A mix of 2 options. Paper packets of 10 days’ worth of lessons at a time (were distributed). Students also had the option to turn in very similar assignments online as in the paper packets.*

Online packets or activities were also utilized more throughout spring 2020 for students in lower grades (PK-5<sup>th</sup>) or were an option for students if parents preferred.

*Packets were made at the district level for all elementary students.*

Educators reported implementing additional virtual options after the initial two-week period, with many districts experimenting use of both asynchronous and synchronous activities. School districts used a mixture of all methods in Spring 2020: synchronous learning, asynchronous; distribution of physical lesson packets was still an option, largely for younger grade levels (PK-1<sup>st</sup>) and for students without Internet services.

*Off-line lessons were completed via Chromebook, but all work did not require Internet access to complete. Students with no Internet access came to the schools at the beginning of April and again at the beginning of May to download assignments from Google Classroom and at the end of each month to submit work.*

*Students met at a specified class time for 30 minutes during this time [Spring 2020]. Students completed work online and submitted assignments online. Packets were distributed to students for pick up at the school but was also provided digitally to students.*

Fewer respondents in Table 5 (roughly 16%) reported that synchronous lessons were used. This mode of content delivery was primarily used with older students (middle school and high school levels).

*Our classes continued with only one day missed as teachers just moved to zoom and continued teaching on regular teaching schedule and we completed the year at the regular time on May 28.*

Educators reflected on the level of rigor for Spring 2020 assigned activities as compared to rigor of in-person lessons. Responses are detailed in Figure 3. As shown in the chart, a majority of educators stated remote learning lessons were at a lower level of rigor (56%) as compared to lessons conducted in-person. Very few educators noted that the lessons were at a higher level (2%) and a moderate number of noted that lessons were at the same level of rigor as would have been presented in-person (32%).

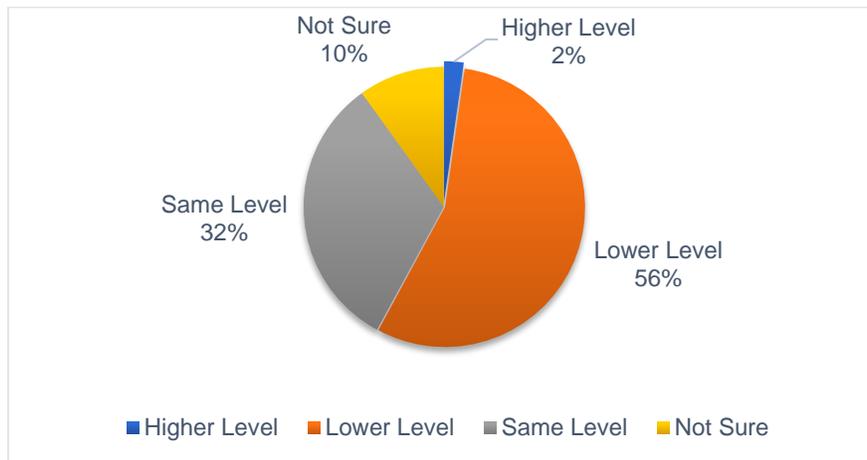


Figure 3. Rigor Level of Academic Lessons Delivered in Spring 2020, Educator Remote Learning Sample

To gain greater understanding of the Spring 2020 remote learning experience, educators were asked to report level of agreement with a series of statements. These questions concerned a variety of aspects: communication with school personnel, families, and students; stress experienced by educators and/or students and families, and ability to conduct learning and (if applicable) online learning and feedback. Responses are summarized in Figure 4.

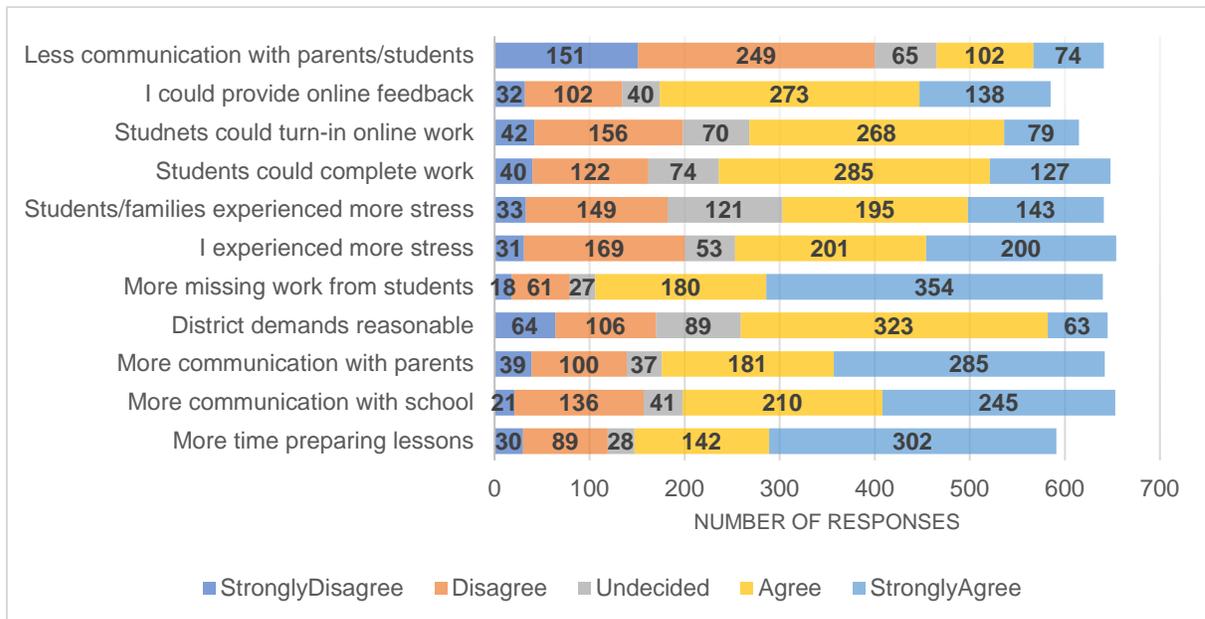


Figure 4. Educator Agreement with Aspects of Remote Learning, Spring 2020.

As shown in the figure, educators generally agreed or strongly agreed with most statements. A few aspects yielding particularly high levels of agreement (over 300 responses) are noteworthy. Educators strongly agreed that more time was spent preparing lessons during the end of the 2019-20 school year and also strongly agreed

that there was a lot of missing work from students during Spring 2020. However, educators largely agreed that students could complete the lessons (and turn in assignments online, if applicable) and that teachers were able to provide feedback online (if applicable). There was also agreement with increased communication with parents and with the school district. While educators agreed Spring 2020 was a time in which more stress was felt personally and that students/families were also experiencing more stress than usual, school district remote learning demands were reasonable.

Remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic brought with it (unexpected) positive aspects as well as challenges. Educators were asked to select beneficial areas arising from the spring 2020 remote learning situation. Table 6 displays the percentages of selected responses, where the percentage is computed from the total number of surveys returned (N = 847). As educators could check as many positive aspects as applied, we recognize that the percentage will not compute to 100%.

Three aspects were selected by approximately 40% of educators in the sample. These areas reflected pride related to the ability to meet the needs of their communities and to work together as a team. Educators also felt that districts/schools were concerned for their personal health. Two areas received notably lower ratings than others. Educators did not state that parents were more supportive during Spring 2020. Further, only 4.5% of educators noted that students were motivated to learn online/remotely during this experience.

**Table 6. Positive Aspects of Spring 202 Remote Learning Noted by Educators**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
I was proud that we were able to meet this challenge	375	44.3
We worked as a team at my school	343	40.5
Felt like the school/district was concerned for my health	325	38.4
I was able to keep in touch with my students through email/online meetings	306	36.1
Increased communication with families/students	273	32.2
Students were able to complete necessary work remotely	191	22.6
Students became more independent learners (took ownership of own learning more)	171	20.2
Increased support from parents	142	16.8
Students were more motivated to learn/achieve online	38	4.5

Note: Percentage will not total to 100% due to “select all that apply” option.

Fifty-seven educators wrote in comments related to positive benefits of the Spring 2020 remote learning experience. The majority of the benefits (31.7% or 18

comments) described areas of growth related to learning more technology skills, new ways of approaching teaching, and professional growth. For example:

*Some of my thinking was shaped differently. Certain principles that I thought were important were reordered in a way that I am now seeing myself use as a reordered practice in the classroom.*

*I learned a lot of technology-related skills for delivering instruction that I have been able to carry over to this year.*

Another theme emerging related teacher's ability to positively affect student learning (19.3% or 11 responses). Responses described benefits related to the remote learning environment, instruction, and classroom support.

*My students got much more quality instruction without disruption of behavioral outbursts in the classroom.*

*I felt I was able to help more people faster and communicate with students and families better.*

The third theme reflected support and pride for the impact that the school districts were having on communities and students through distribution of materials and services (24.5% or 14 responses).

*Our district was able to issue Chromebook to all students in grades 3-12*

*I am proud that, with almost no notice, we were able to set up services to students including classwork, food services, technology and tech support, mental health counseling and family outreach.*

A number of responses however, reflected frustrations of educators (24.5% or 14 responses). This set echoed personal stressors such as losses of income, additional duties at home, and worries about students and the community.

*There was not anything positive about this experience. As an ESOL teacher my students were lost in the shuffle. Many have quit school or have just given up. The language barrier and the lack of experience in technology for parents and some students made online learning difficult and discouraging. Even now, many of my students have quit school or simply disappeared.*

*It was overwhelming to teach online and manage online with my own children.*

Educators were asked to select the three main difficulties encountered in Spring of 2020. Similarly, the number of times that an obstacle was chosen as one of the top three reasons was tallied and converted to a percentage using the total number of respondents (N = 847). Figure 5 lists the barriers encountered by educators and the percentage of responses associated with hurdle.

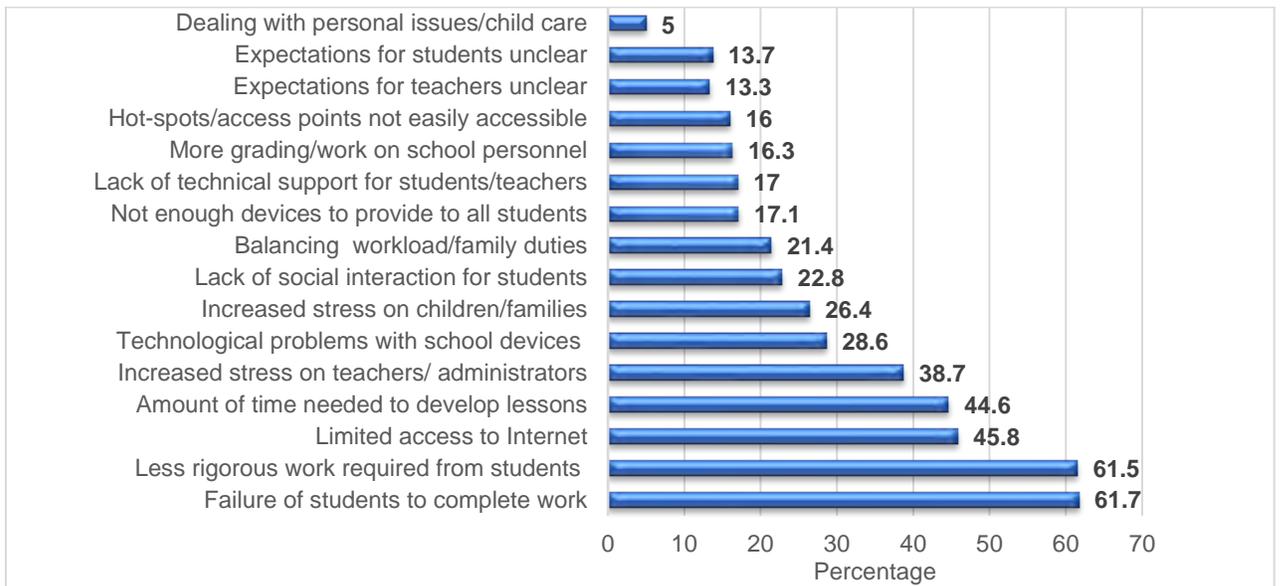


Figure 5. Barriers Encountered During the Spring 2020 Remote Learning Experience

As shown in Figure 5, the primary barriers encountered in Spring 2020 were student-related issues. Approximately 61% of the respondents noted less rigorous tasks and failure of students to complete activities as the main barriers. Amount of time needed to construct lessons as well as student Internet problems were endorsed by over 40% of the educators. Few respondents noted unclear expectations of students' responsibilities or teachers' duties as a limitation of remote learning (roughly 14% each) and only 5% of educators noted personal problems/childcare issues as a hindrance to Spring 2020 remote learning.

### **SUMMER 2020, PLANNING FOR THE UPCOMING SCHOOL YEAR: EDUCATOR FEEDBACK**

As COVID-19 cases continued to spread in the U.S. during the summer months, lessons learned at the end of 2019-20 may have been useful to assist schools and families prepare for the 2020-21 academic year. To determine effects of the spring remote learning experiences on planning, educators reflected on procedures and policies the end of the 2019-20 school year to find potential solutions.

Figure 6 below contrasts the main barriers noted at the end of the 2019-20 academic year (blue bars) with those that were discussed during summer 2020 (orange).

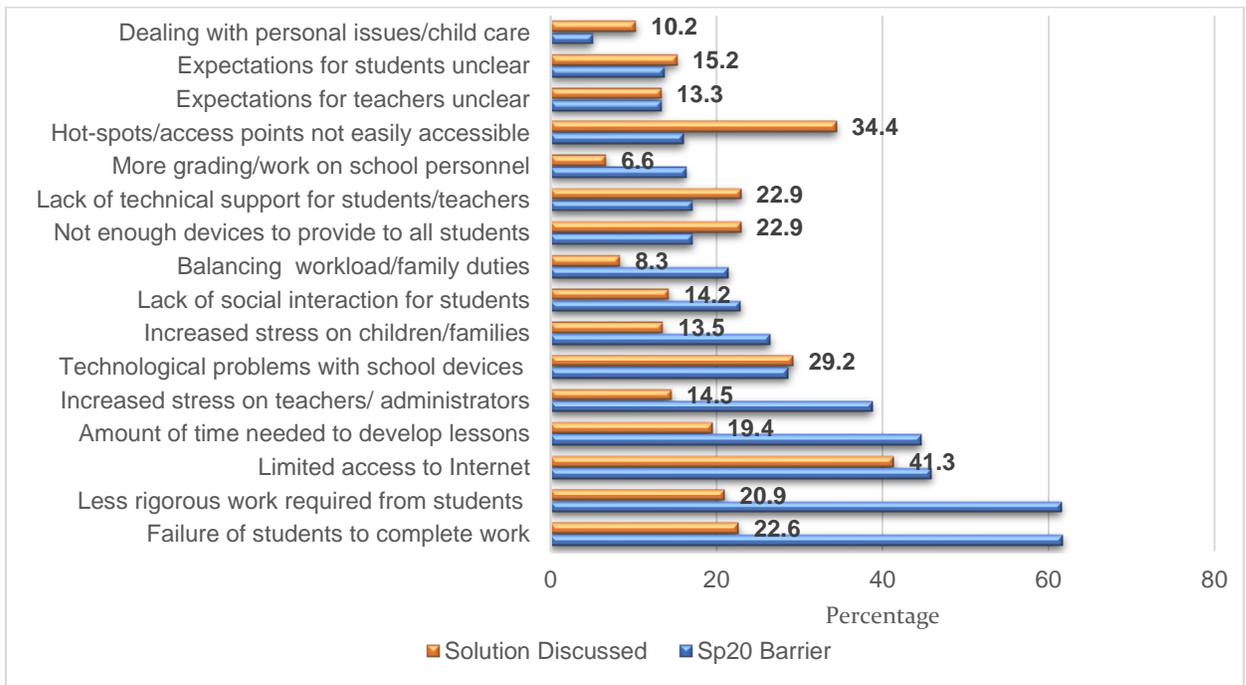


Figure 6. Barriers to Remote Learning Discussed in Summer 2020.

The figure shows summer discussions discussed dealt primarily with issues of student access and technology. During the 2020 summer break, educators tried to solve problems related to Hot Spots, lack of technical support, access to Internet, and device shortages for students. The two main barriers, lack of rigorous work and failure of students to complete assigned work, were not discussed as much as technical issues.

Educators were able to write in responses noting how barriers were addressed. Twenty-nine educators provided responses. While five of the responses noted differences in selected areas such as due dates of assignments being adhered to, increased preparation for teachers over the summer, and discussions to clarify expectations for teachers were noted as sample responses. The remaining responses noted frustrations that the summer 2020 planning time did not address the main barriers. These educators noted feelings of little progress in the way of planning for the 2020-21 academic year, with limited opportunities for teachers to provide input.

*Very little thought seemed to go into planning and teachers were not given a voice!*

*I don't feel any of the above were addressed in planning for the 20-21 school year. Devices were not an issue in my district, as we've be one-to-one for a few years. All other items listed are MAJOR issues for this school year.*

*I do not believe that planning effort were made to make this time, a pandemic and international crisis, less stressful for any stakeholders.*

Educators noted parent concerns brought to the attention of teachers/schools/district during the Summer 2020 break. There were 160 responses provided. Responses were grouped into four overarching categories: 1) Technology/Device related

concerns, 2) Academic Concerns, 3) Health and Safety Concerns, and 4) Scheduling Problems. Each of them is discussed below and sample responses are provided in some places to provide additional detail.

Many concerns parents brought to schools were related to issues of technology (52 responses or 32%). The main worry relayed by parents was the lack of devices and/or the lack of Internet access. As noted with Figure 6, providing device access and Hot Spot/WiFi access to students was a focal issue for schools to address. Other concerns noted by parents were lack of technology support for fixing broken devices and increased technology support for families/parents to understand how to use school-issued devices and software packages.

Table 7. Technology/Device Related Concerns Noted by Families, Summer 2020 (52 Comments)

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Sample Comments</b>
Devices/Internet – No computer or device at home for students to conduct virtual work, no access to Internet to be able to attend virtually (37 responses)	<i>Students were unable to use technology due to lack of devices and internet access. The district provided technology including devices and hotspots in the fall</i>
Software support – Need for support for parents to know how to access devices, use GoogleClassroom, and use software specific to schools or districts (e.g., PowerSchool), (8 responses)	<i>Parents complained about the new program our district threw in to help with virtual learning.</i>
Technology support – How will families get timely help for addressing problems with devices, troubleshooting, getting device repaired (7 responses)	<i>Timely student device repair.</i>

A second area relayed to educators by families concerned academic/instructional learning. This category of 56 responses (35%) included concerns with work for virtual work, such as too much work for students to complete before due dates or students unable (or unwilling) to complete work independently. Also noted by parents was the lack of challenging and rigorous work for students. Other areas included the need for alternate activities to be available for families/students, ability to communicate with non-English speaking families, and need for increased clarity academic expectations between school and home; two related comments concerning working high school students are noted. Table 8 summarizes the emergent subcategories.

Table 8. Academic Concerns Noted to Educators by Families, Summer 2020 (56 Comments)

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Sample Comments</b>
Work Load - Too much work was assigned and concerns that children are	<i>The students had too much work in their core classes and the parents were</i>

not able to learn independently due to age, attention, or not wanting to listen to parents (19 responses)	<i>struggling to get their child to do everything in the time allotted.</i>  <i>That they [parent] were having a hard time getting their child to actually sit in front of a computer and work.</i>
Rigor – Academic work was not challenging at the end of spring 2020; little accountability for students, children will be unprepared for the next grade level (18 responses)	<i>Providing higher level work for students and holding them accountable for their learning.</i>  <i>That their student would have a severe learning gap going into the next class</i>
Alternate activities – need for alternative activities and/or modes of delivery (6 responses)	<i>Providing alternative assignments for students who cannot log in at specific times (sitter doesn't have internet, alternating when siblings use streaming, etc.)</i>
Expectations – Parent need for more clarity in teacher expectations for work, poor communication between school and home (6 responses)	<i>Parents were concerned about unclear directions by some teachers and accommodations were made to meet that concern at my school.</i>
Communication – ESOL, only communicate with younger students through parents (5 responses)	<i>Ways that my non-English speaking parents could effectively communicate with teachers on a regular basis.</i>
Working Students – High school students needing to work and missing class (responses)	

A third area of comments discussed parents' health and safety concerns (33 responses or 21% of comments); these are presented in Table 9. Comments elucidated families' debating over whether or not to return to school for face-to-face classes in the 2020-21 school year as well concerns with how school will adhere toward recommended safety precautions (e.g., mask wearing, social distancing, physical set up of classrooms). Parents mentioned concerns for students' social well-being and mental health if children were socially isolated in 2020-21. One comment related to health and safety was provided by a teacher, stating: *Students were given an option for remote learning, but teachers with health issues or concerns were not.* While this is not a concern stated by a parent, it is related to health and safety concerns when considering planning for the 2020-21 school year.

Table 9. Health and Safety Concerns Noted to Educators by Families, Summer 2020 (32 Comments)

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Sample Comments</b>
COVID Safety at School – How will schools ensure that recommended guidelines are followed, what safety	<i>Parents have asked what precautions the school is practicing, such as: masks, separation during meals, not using</i>

precautions will be in place, how will rooms and layouts of desks be organized, how will scheduling be staggered or altered to keep students apart? (37.5% or 12 responses)	<i>lockers, longer transition periods, no mass meetings in the cafeteria or gym.</i>
Student Mental Health – recognizing students’ need for social interaction, issues of social/emotional well being, fears of social isolation (37.5% or 12 responses)	<i>Student mental health - I think that the effort to bring students back addressed this for some students but not for the ones remaining at home to learn virtually.</i>
Return to school – difficulty selecting between face-to-face or virtual learning (25% or 8 responses)	<i>Uncertainty about whether or not to return to school due to Covid-19 fears</i>

The last area which parents discussed with school personnel consisted of scheduling issues during 2020-21(12% or 19 responses). Descriptions are provided in Table 10. Issues included concerns with working from home and providing child care and wanting to know what face-to-face learning options schools would have available at the start of the new school year.

Table 10. Scheduling Concerns Noted to Educators by Families, Summer 2020 (19 Comments)

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Sample Comments</b>
Work/Child care – Child care concerns, how to help children with school work after working, how to manage children’s work while working at home too (58% or 11 responses)	<i>Parents needed to work during the day and did not have the time to teach their children at night.</i>
Face-to-face-- parent/family desires for in-person learning options (12% or 8 responses)	<i>Those (parents) who wanted face to face instruction were back in school upon request. This solved a lot of issues regarding lack of engagement, but we still have students at home, zooming in, but not completing assignments.</i>

### START OF THE 2020-21 ACADEMIC YEAR, EDUCATOR RESPONSES

The COVID-19 pandemic continued into fall, coinciding with reopening for the 2020-21 academic year. In the survey, educators reflected upon the start of the school year and the challenges, new and existing, were present. This section discusses how educators adapted to the new academic year, while dealing with the pandemic.

At the start of the 2020-21 academic year, Gov. McMaster ordered school districts to include face-to-face learning options for parents; totally remote format as a mandatory format (as with Spring 2020) was not permitted. Districts provided multiple options to stakeholders, allowing greater choice for attendance. Most educators stated that Fall 2020 was most likely to include hybrid format of delivery –a mix of face-to-face options and virtual delivery—was used most frequently (approximately 46% of respondents). Virtual learning only was noted as the delivery method for by approximately 30% of respondents. Fewer educators reported in-person 5-day learning schedules or mandatory virtual learning for all students in the district. Table 11 reports school delivery formats in Fall 2020.

Table 11. Fall 2020 School Delivery Format, Educator Remote Learning Sample

<b>Format</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
In-person, 5-day delivery	111	13.1
Hybrid (mix of in-person and virtual learning)	392	46.3
Mandatory virtual delivery	105	12.4
Virtual learning as an elective (in place of hybrid or in-person)	248	29.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>847</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note: Percentage will not total to 100% due to “select all that apply” option.

Educators stated how lessons were delivered to students at the start of the 2020-21 academic year. Of the respondents, 76% of the educators noted that Fall 2020 lesson delivery was different from the method(s) used in Spring 2020. Only 16% of educators stated that same lesson delivery method was in use at the start of the academic year (8% were undecided). Responses are provided in Table 12. As seen in the table, there are notable differences between selected categories. Paper packets, which had been utilized by many districts in Spring 2020 were mentioned as in use by only 8.7% of the educators in Fall 2020. Lesson delivery through asynchronized meetings showed a large jump in use, noted by approximately 40% of educators, as compared to roughly 16% use in Spring 2020. Very few respondents reported that their school delivered paper packets for lessons to be turned in online or in-person.

Table 12. Fall 2020 Lesson Delivery Mode, Educator Remote Learning Sample

<b>Lesson Delivery Mode</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent. Fall 2021</b>	<b>Percent. Spring 2020</b>
Prepared (paper) work packets turned in in-person	74	8.7	44.0
Online lessons where students completed work online, but there was no online meeting at a set time (asynchronous)	159	18.8	35.9
Mix of asynchronous lessons and synchronous meetings at least 1 time a week	204	24.1	28.5
Paper packets but work was turned in online (i.e., pictures of work, artifacts)	32	3.8	17.2
Online lessons where students met 2 or more times a week at a set time (synchronous)	341	40.3	15.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>847</b>		

Note: Percentage will not total to 100% due to a “select all that apply” option.

For educators responding that the delivery mode was different in Fall 2020 than Spring 2020, many wrote in reasons explaining why the methods differed. Responses largely mentioned district activities toward new software options, summer opportunities for professional development, and training. For example:

*We had more time to prepare and communicate expectations with faculty, parents and students as well as make online learning more engaging and meaningful.*

*We continue to use Google Meet; however, numerous hours of professional development were completed by every teacher to ensure all students are provided engaging and rigorous learning opportunities.*

*Platforms were consolidated across the district and lesson formatting was in a pre-determined structure district wide. All students were provided with devices. Both parents and students were provided tutorials on tech Platforms and devices.*

Other educators noted that differences in delivery format were due to providing internet access and/or devices made available to all students. The increased support allowed for virtual learning.

*Spring, our students did not have school issued devices. In fall, all kindergartners have Chromebooks.*

*The district provided computers and Hotspots for fall that were not available in spring.*

Relatedly, educators noted that synchronous lessons could now be required, given increased student access to devices and internet access.

*We felt that students needed to have more synchronous learning with the classroom teacher. Synchronous learning is a vital component incorporated into all eLearning or virtual learning platforms.*

*The paper packets sent home last year were unsuccessful. Very few were returned. Instead we switched to google classroom and handed out packets with instructions.*

The majority of written-in responses, however, discussed that differences were present, not only with the mode of delivery, but also the rigor and expectations accompanying the delivered lessons.

*I could actually teach children rather than being told to lay low on having expectations for students.*

*Last year it was some lessons that met standards and some fun work. This year is as similar to a real classroom as possible. We have live lessons set up, videos, we do guided practice, meet our children for small groups. We give our children everything they need to be successful and are adapting every day to make our virtual platform better.*

Educators reflected on the same barriers which impacted the Spring 2020 remote learning experience and discussed which barriers were still present at the start of the 2020-21 academic year. Educators could select as many of the barriers that they felt were still an issue in Fall 2020. These percentages are shown in Figure 7 in blue and are contrasted with the same barriers graphed earlier, shown in orange (percentages reported in Figure 5).

The top three Fall 2020 challenges noted by educators were: 1) Increased stress on teachers/administrators (selected by 50.4% of the respondents), 2) failure of students to turn in work (48.4%), and 3) the amount of time needed to prepare lesson (39.4%). Some challenges noted in Spring 2020 were not as problematic by Fall 2020. For example, less rigorous work was noted as a barrier to learning in Spring 2020 by 61.7% of educators dropping to 10.3% by Fall 2020. Similarly, the percentage of educators noting student access to Internet as a major challenge was 46% Spring 2020, dropping to 31% in Fall 2020. A few areas not noted as a challenge in Spring 2020 were problematic in Fall 2020. For example, increased time grading student work was noted

in Spring 2020 as a challenge by 16% of educators, increasing to 33% by Fall 2020. The percentage of educators reporting stress level as a problem also increased from 39% in Spring 2020 to 50% in Fall 2020.

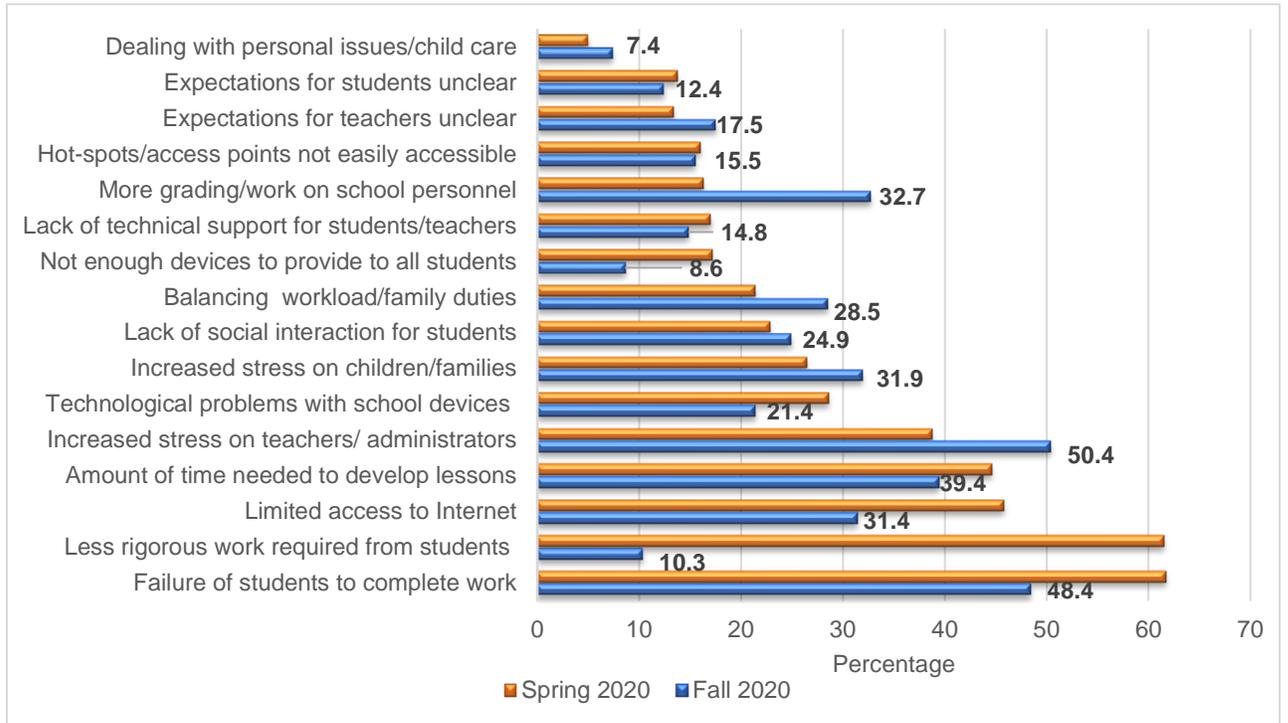


Figure 7. Barriers Present in Fall 2020, contrasted with Spring 2020, Remote

Educators wrote in additional barriers present in Fall 2020 which were not present in Spring 2020. While many respondents did not provide an answer, 214 comments were provided. These comments were categorized into three different themes of concerns: 1) health, 2) virtual delivery, and 3) school and administration.

In Fall 202, health was the area most often noted by educators as concerning. Comments reflected worry and concern for their health and the health of their families and other teachers. The majority of the write-in responses mentioned educators not feeling valued or supported by administration due to what was interpreted as lapses in following COVID-19 procedures, reporting of COVID-19, and resulting in stress on teachers' physical and mental well-being.

Table 13. Educator Concerns in Fall 2020, Health Concerns (76 Comments, 36%)

<p>Safety concerns – Worries about getting sick or exposing family members to disease, high rates of COVID, and how to teach through it all (58 responses)</p>	<p><i>We still have so many cases. I am very nervous about being at school. We closed in March with much less deaths and positive tests. We put ourselves on the front line every day and the people making the decisions are still having</i></p>
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	<p><i>zoom and google meets and never step in the classrooms or lunch rooms with the students.</i></p> <p><i>Forcing the physical return to the buildings, with limited testing and enforcement of quarantines</i></p> <p><i>Teaching through a mask. Fear of getting sick. Fear of using all sick days. Fear of getting my husband sick.</i></p>
<p>Stress concerns – increased stress due to situation (mixed modes, increased responsibilities, health concerns) (18 responses)</p>	<p><i>The stress of the pandemic has taken a real toll on families and students. The sustained emotional and financial strain of an ongoing pandemic has left many teachers and students emotionally fragile and anxious.</i></p> <p><i>The stress (level) is higher and no attempt is being made to help teachers deal with it.</i></p> <p><i>Pressure from outside forces-politicians, etc. to do things in ways that were unsafe or caused increase in our stress/mental health issues.</i></p>

At the start of the academic year, educators noted academic concerns as problematic. Challenges in Fall 2020 included delivering lessons with multiple modes -- requiring teachers to conduct both virtual and in-person learning concurrently, more work and reduced teacher planning time. Also in this category were problems due to virtual delivery. Many educators mentioned the lack of support from both parents and children, reporting parents unwilling to assist children and children being apathetic, unmotivated, or not showing up for classes. Still, problems remained with technology including parents not well versed in the technology/platforms used or school-provided devices breaking.

Table 14. Educator Concerns in Fall 2020, Virtual Delivery Concerns (68 Comments, 33%)

<p>Grading – Concerns associated with grading and expectations for work, students not turning in work, problems with students handling the increased rigor of content (24 responses)</p>	<p><i>The past was a barrier to student and parent expectations. Many students and families remembered that in the spring, there were fewer expectations for attendance and grading, so they expected the same for 2020-2021. We worked hard to clarify and communicate that last</i></p>
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	<p><i>spring was an emergency situation that had to be put into place very quickly.</i></p> <p><i>Students were conditioned last year to not believe they could fail, and now many will NOT do anything.</i></p>
Lack of student support – Students online or disengaged from learning when virtual; not attending school/turning on computer and leaving (18 responses)	<i>Students are so far behind academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally that I am doing way more than “teaching”.</i>
Lack of parent support – Parents not assisting children, not understanding the amount of work needed to support virtual learning (13 responses)	<i>Parents are less willing to help their children. They are angry that they are fully responsible for their children and are bullying teachers.</i>
Technology Concerns– Problems with sufficient bandwidth to complete virtual lessons, lack of parent skills to assist with technology, devices breaking (13 responses)	<p><i>Some families needed more than one Hot Spot due to multiple children learning online.</i></p> <p><i>Now that we have distributed district devices to students, families are having some technical issues with the devices.</i></p>

A third broad theme of concerns dealt with the school environment. A majority of these comments dealt with teachers having to teach using both remote and in-person modes, leading to increased workloads. Educators were concerned with the perception that 2020-21 was a “normal” academic year, requiring benchmarks and accountability measures to be in place. Issues of miscommunication and changing expectations were noted by educators as well. Finally, teachers mentioned personal childcare needs, concerns regarding the lack social interaction for children, and extra responsibilities due to COVID-19 as new challenges for Fall 2020.

Table 14. Educator Concerns in Fall 2020, School and Administration Concerns (70 Comments, 33%)

Teaching Modality – problems associated with conducting competing models of delivery at the same time (29 responses)	<p><i>I am teaching in-person and remotely via Zoom at the same time. My student load is huge. For example: I have 37 students enrolled in my last period class. Only 24 are in person, but I still have to grade and assess 37 students. The workload has increased significantly as has the stress level on teachers! I fear there will be vacancies in the future in my profession as a result.</i></p> <p><i>With the focus on synchronous learning, many students just walk away from their</i></p>
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	<p><i>computers and there is little accountability with distance learning outside of grades.</i></p> <p><i>Our asynchronous kids are able to turn in all work for the week on Friday. This wasn't thought out very well because that means teachers have to wait to see what they mastered or didn't in order to plan correctly. It also means we HAVE to grade over the weekend in order to plan accordingly. WE. ARE. TIRED.</i></p>
<p>Communication issues – miscommunications, inconsistent expectations, lack of communication between teachers and administrators (14 responses)</p>	<p><i>Still a miscommunication of expectations from district to school admin to teachers; constant micromanaging and lack of teacher autonomy; changes being made midstream with little to no input from teachers; new curriculum being expected to be used by certain content areas.</i></p> <p><i>Total lack of communication from those making the decisions. Teacher's voices have not been heard or asked.</i></p>
<p>Testing Concerns – Concerns with treating 2020-21 as a “normal” school year, with standardized testing, following pacing guides, and meeting SLOs (8 responses)</p>	<p><i>We still have to prepare for standardized tests, which were designed for in-person learning, and there is no slack being cut for the differences in virtual learning. Also, no one seems to give attention to the fact that too much screen time is bad for students and teachers.</i></p> <p><i>Students are being assessed on grade level even though there is a huge learning gap from being out of school for so long in the spring.</i></p>
<p>Extra Duties- extra duties required by in-person teaching (8 responses)</p>	<p><i>In person means we're dealing with masks, hand sanitizer, and distancing all day. I teach music and I can't sing or teach in my room so I'm traveling from room to room on a cart or teaching outside with limited resources.</i></p>
<p>Child Care for Teachers (7 responses)</p>	<p><i>Childcare became an issue because my district was very inflexible about allowing virtual teachers to work from home.</i></p>
<p>Social Interaction – lack of social interaction for children (at school and in-person; 4 responses)</p>	<p><i>Students are quiet and not bonding or responding like a class socially usually does. Not just my classes but other teachers and classes as well. Quiet zombies going through the motions.</i></p>

## REMOTE LEARNING AND ACADEMIC IMPACT: EDUCATOR FEEDBACK

Due to COVID-19, standardized testing was waived at the end of 2019-20 and there is the potential for a waiver of standardized testing for the 2020-21 school year. Educators were asked their thoughts on the decisions to remove standardized testing and how the removal of testing may affect student learning and school ratings.

Educators identified potential negative aspects related to the decision to remove standardized testing in Spring 2020 (as well as the potential for Spring 2021 waiver). While respondents could check all aspects which applied, the number of responses was suggesting that educators did not see a detriment to the removal of standardized tests. At most, roughly 10% of the sample responded, with issues related to students' not focusing on testing and lack of accountability for student learning as (potential) negative impacts of removing standardized tests. Table 15 summarizes the percentage of educators selecting an area.

Table 15. Potential Negative Aspects of Removing Standardized Testing, Educator Remote Learning Sample

<b>Negative Aspects</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Lack of emphasis/students will not take the testing seriously	82	9.7
Lack of accountability for student learning	80	9.4
Lack of information for accountability ratings	77	9.1
Inadequate student preparedness for the next grade level	76	9.0
Concerns from parents regarding testing (EOC, PSAT/SAT, ACT, SCREADY)	59	7.0
Limited feedback to help prepare students	54	6.4
Less emphasis on rigor for classroom activities and tests	52	6.1
Lack of formative information to guide student learning	51	6.0
Lower performance on formative tests (e.g., MAP, STAR)	45	5.3
Less emphasis on standards/alignment of activities to standards	35	4.1
Lack of accountability at teacher /school level	25	3.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>847</b>	

Note: Percentage will not total to 100% due to "select all that apply" option.

Open-ended comments related to removal of standardized testing were input by 183 educators. The statements suggested educators did not perceive the decision to remove standardized testing as detrimental to students in any way.

*There is absolutely no negative effect. In fact, the uncertainty of the decision is the only negative effect because we are wasting our precious instructional time on preparing for standardized tests that may not happen. Schools can function and teachers can do their jobs without any of the arbitrary "concerns" listed above.*

*There are no negative impacts of the removal of standardized testing. Removing the standardized testing actually improves student learning, because teachers can focus on what the student needs and have more focused and creative lessons.*

A few comments reiterated that standardized testing was still present for the 2020-21 year. Results from testing were to be used for accountability. Educators also noted that test validity, security, preparation, and test administration was very difficult to do through online delivery.

*We have not removed EOC's [End of Course Examinations]*

*We ARE doing standardized testing and at a much-increased rigor this year!*

Many educators, however, did note (potential) positive aspects related to decisions to remove standardized testing. Over 50% of the sample selected aspect related to lower stress and pressure – on both students and teachers. The most often cited benefit was that there would be less stress/anxiety on students if standardized tests were removed, followed closely by less stress on teachers and less pressure on teachers to “teach to the test.” Responses are summarized in Table 16.

Table 16. Potential Positive Aspects of Removing Standardized Testing

<b>Positive Aspect</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Less stress/anxiety on students	490	57.9
Less stress on teachers	470	55.5
Less pressure to “teach to the test”	444	52.4
More freedom to create lessons that are engaging	375	44.3
More creative lessons can be created	331	39.1
Reduced pressure from school/district on high student performance	294	34.7
More students/parent focus on learning	270	31.9
School performance will not be affected	234	27.6
Less worry about technology malfunction	222	26.2
Positive feedback from parents and/or students	213	25.1
Test performance will not be affected	189	22.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>847</b>	

Note: Percentage will not total to 100% due to “select all that apply” option.

Thirty-two educators included additional comments. Most of the comments related to positive aspects related to the decision to remove testing in spring of 2020, and many hoped for the potential of a waiver in spring 2021.

*Many days I struggle to get some students just to feel as "normal" as possible throughout the day. The last thing they need is to stress over a high stakes test.*

*Everyone needs grace this year from testing. We need the ability to catch these children up and move them forward. We are professionals and can do this if we are not micromanaged and are allowed to teach and not have to teach to the tests. We need ALL of the allotted days to teach—not a mad dash to the testing dates.*

*Ability to truly address student deficits. I can focus on deep teaching, not the broad and superficial teaching required by pacing calendars created with the “get to this before testing” mentality.*

The final question asked educators to state any other thoughts concerning remote learning. Of the sample of 847, 252 educators (30%), left a comment. These are broadly divided into three sections, 1) positive comments, 2) comments concerning parents/students, and 3) comments concerning teaching, school procedures, and the field of education. Summary comments are provided to illustrate major themes demonstrated in category.

The smallest category (34 responses) were positive comments regarding remote learning. In this set of comments, educators were proud that they were able to meet the needs of the state and our children, doing whatever was needed in the face of the pandemic.

*Teachers performed phenomenally under intense pressure.*

*Teachers are working so hard to meet the needs of students and families. Many of us are doing more professional growth than we have ever done before out of necessity. Overall, it has been a positive experience, but it is tough work! Most teachers are doing what is best for kids no matter what.*

*I think our school district has done a fantastic job of trying to meet an overwhelming challenge to continue educating students. Things are not perfect; there are many problems and pitfalls, but we are truly working hard in our district to do the job. The administrators at my school are excellent, and our superintendent and others at the district level have been making good decisions based on the guidelines given by the state.*

Responses also noted benefits to remote learning, including investments of software and professional development. Many comments stated desires to continue remote learning in the future.

*Our district's remote learning framework has evolved significantly. I am hopeful we keep much of it in place beyond COVID-19.*

*I'm a 3rd grade virtual teacher, and I love it. I want to stay virtual.*

The second largest category (75 responses or 30%) concerned of children and families. Many of the responses dealt with issues of student and parent accountability.

As noted earlier, educators felt that a problem with remote learning has been the lack of student engagement and motivation. Educators were concerned that students were not achieving and parents were not aware or were apathetic to the situation.

*This is not a good situation for the majority of our students in general. Students do not take it seriously, believe they can turn assignments in at their own leisure, and refuse to take any responsibility for their own non-active learning. Parents, for the most part, are supporting their children in their lack of effort.*

*There must be some way to make parents and students accountable. If a student does nothing in a class and then expects to be given a grade, that is something that has been instilled in him from somewhere. Since when did we become such an entitled society? There is little work ethic in expecting something for nothing.*

Other responses mentioned inequities in technology and infrastructure which made it difficult for the state to move to remote learning. Comments also discussed ways in which to support remote learning after the pandemic.

*The state should have provided platform subscriptions to create equitable learning opportunities for all SC students.*

*The state must consider how to continue to support district's technology purchases. Once you have the device it is difficult for small, rural districts to upkeep them and develop a replacement plan.*

The largest category dealt with issues relating to teaching and the decision to move to remote learning and the impact that this had on the teaching workforce. There were 143 comments (57%) in this area. These comments were negative, reflecting frustrations and stress with the situation –and what this has done to the decision to remain in or pursue a teaching career.

*I feel like this year has really made me question whether or not I want to teach in the future. The overall feeling that I have is that there isn't enough credit given to teachers. Likewise, I feel like this year has really exposed how much teachers are ignored when big decisions are made. We are tired and this year has really pushed a lot of teachers over their thresholds.*

*I feel like the state leaders did not recognize how hard teachers were working in an impossible situation. I cried after the press conference stating how lazy and selfish teachers were.*

*I am exhausted and working harder than I think I even have in my life. I have heard very experienced and wonderful teachers say if they make it through this year this will be their last! I am heartbroken over what this has done to the profession.*

A subset of the responses noted that move to the remote format put more work on teachers to teach in multiple modes at the same time. Besides the extra work, many

responses reflected disappointment with decisions to remove a step increase/pay raise for teachers during this tie.

*I am concerned that teachers are held to high standards such as possible high stakes testing as well as SLOs when we are expected to provide grace to our students, yet no grace has been provided to us. I am concerned that the safety of teachers has not been placed at the forefront and that we have been looked at as mere babysitters to keep the workforce going. I am concerned that despite our hard work and efforts we have been belittled and have not received the raise that we were promised. I am concerned that no one sat and talked with the teachers during this process.*

*District is treating this with a “customer service” mentality without regard to the teachers.*

*I am a 22-year veteran teacher. This year I taught remotely from home virtually to fourth graders. I have worked harder this year than I have in the past 10 or 15 years. I would say that it's akin to my first and second year in the classroom. I have struggled with finding balance. Dealing with a huge learning curve, including the learning management system. Daily lesson plans that were required not only required but also that had to be uploaded learning new programs that were specific to online learning. Revamping my classroom management. To meet the needs of the virtual environment. Struggling with students cheating and turning in blank assignments. I have struggled with parents upset because I can't do more to help their children if their children are unable to do the work independently. And this has caused stress and has been taxing emotionally.*

*We need to be compensated. The least the state can do is pay us our step increases. Of all the years for it not to be given, it is really a slap in the face.*

Even in the face of the pandemic, educators felt as the health considerations of teachers were not considered.

*There is too much expected of teachers in hybrid learning. It is not safe for anyone to be in person right now and those in power to make changes do not care that teachers, staff, and students are getting sick and dying. These past 3 months alone has shown how little care and value the government and parents have for education. There's going to be a massive exodus of teachers and America is not prepared for it.*

Responses showed the frustration of teachers in their personal and professional lives, feelings of being ignored and devalued.

## SUMMARY OF EDUCATOR FEEDBACK

- A total of 847 educators across South Carolina participated in the survey. Educators' work places were roughly equally distributed between rural and suburban locations.
- Roughly 80% of survey respondents held a teaching position, with content area teachers (e.g., mathematics, social studies) comprising the majority. Other teachers, such as special areas teachers (e.g., PE, music), special education, and English as a Second Language encompassed 2% to 9% of the sample. Administrators comprised 11.5% of the sample; the remaining portion were other personnel such as teaching assistants, media specialists, school psychologists, counselors, etc.
- Over half of the sample of educators had been in their current position for 10 or fewer years; roughly 34% of the sample reported time in their current position between 0-5 years and 20% between 6-10 years. Approximately 18% of educators had 20 or more years of experience in their current position.
- In Spring 2020, schools used a variety of modes to deliver content, with asynchronous lessons or distributing physical packets of materials as most popular. However, educators thought that lessons demonstrated a lower level of rigor as was delivered in-person.
- Educators largely agreed that the time devoted to preparing lessons was increased, yet there was a great deal of missing work from students at the end of the 2019-20 school year. Increases in communication with parents and with the school district were observed. District demands during this time were thought of as reasonable.
- Unexpected benefits of the remote learning experience included educator pride due to e ability to meet the needs of their communities and to work together as a team. Educators also felt that districts/schools were concerned for their personal health in Spring 2020.
- Primary barriers encountered in Spring 2020 were largely related to student issues. Approximately 61% of the respondents noted less rigorous tasks and failure of students to complete activities as the main barriers. Also, the time needed to construct lessons as well as dealing with student Internet problems were endorsed by over 40% of the educators.
- During the 2020 summer break, educators tried to solve problems related to Hot Spots, lack of technical support, access to Internet, and device shortages for students. The two main barriers, lack of rigorous work and failure of students to complete assigned work, were not discussed much; educators responses reflected frustrations that summer 2020 planning time did not address these issues and teachers felt there were few opportunities to provide input.

- In summer 2020, parents brought to the attention of teachers/ schools/district issues four areas of concern: 1) Technology/Device related concerns, 2) Academic Concerns, 3) Health and Safety Concerns, and 4) Scheduling Problems.
- Most educators stated that Fall 2020 was most likely to include hybrid format of delivery –a mix of face-to-face options and virtual delivery—was used by 46% of respondents. Virtual learning only was noted as the delivery method for 30% of respondents. Fewer educators reported in-person 5-day learning schedules or mandatory virtual learning for all students in the district (13% and % respectively).
- In Fall 2020, 76% of the educators noted lesson delivery was different from the method(s) used in Spring 2020. Paper packets, which had been utilized by many districts in Spring 2020 were mentioned as in use by only 8.7% of the educators in Fall 2020. Lesson delivery through asynchronized meetings showed a large jump in use, noted by approximately 40% of educators. Very few respondents reported that their school delivered paper packets for lessons to be turned in online or in-person.
- The top three Fall 2020 challenges noted by educators were: 1) Increased stress on teachers/administrators (selected by 50.4% of the respondents), 2) failure of students to turn in work (48.4%), and 3) the amount of time needed to prepare lesson (39.4%). Some challenges noted in Spring 2020 were not as problematic by Fall 2020. For example, less rigorous work was noted as a barrier to learning in Spring 2020 by 61.7% of educators dropping to 10.3% by Fall 2020. A few areas not noted as a challenge in Spring 2020 were problematic in Fall 2020. For example, increased time grading student work was noted in Spring 2020 as a challenge by 16% of educators, increasing to 33% by Fall 2020. The percentage of educators reporting stress level as a problem also increased from 39% in Spring 2020 to 50% in Fall 2020. Write-in comments showed additional areas of concern around themes related to: 1) health, 2) virtual delivery, and 3) school and administration.
- Educators identified potential positive and negative aspects related to the decision to remove standardized testing in Spring 2020 (as well as the potential for Spring 2021 waiver). Most educators did not see a detriment to the removal of standardized tests. Roughly 10% of the sample responded, with issues related to students’ not focusing on testing and lack of accountability for student learning as (potential) negative impacts of removing standardized tests. Educators, however, did note (potential) positive aspects related to decisions to remove standardized testing. Over 50% of the sample selected aspect related to lower stress and pressure – on both students and teachers. The most often cited benefit was that there would be less stress/anxiety on students if standardized tests were removed, followed closely by less stress on teachers and less pressure on teachers to “teach to the test.”
- Considering remote learning, open-ended comments displayed a wide variety of educator reflections. Many comments showed affinity for online learning, especially with the ability to provide this service and continue teaching during the pandemic. The majority of comments, however, were negative. Reflections centered on problems related to parents/students, the workload on teachers, and related to school procedures. Educators were concerned on the lasting impact of this experience on the teaching profession.

## PARENT SURVEY RESULTS

During the same time frame, parent/guardians were surveyed to determine the effects of the remote learning experience on children and families in South Carolina. The same online platform (SurveyMonkey) was used to collect information from parents/guardians (hereafter termed parents for simplicity). A total of 263 parents responded to the survey during November 2020.

The parent survey consisted of 24 questions (many with subparts), with an average completion time of 6 minutes. After providing demographic information, respondents provided feedback on three areas related to remote learning due to COVID-19: 1) spring 2020 and planning during summer break 2020, 2) start of the 2020-21 school year, and 3) impact on academics. To encourage more responses from parents, the questionnaire was shorter than the educator survey and included more closed ended questions. Respondents were asked to provide candid responses to all questions.

### PARENT DEMOGRAPHICS

The sample of parents provided opinions about remote education for children; grade levels of the children spanned the preschool (PK) to 12<sup>th</sup> grade levels. With the exception of preschool (PK), there were at least 20 children in each grade level; parents reported slightly higher numbers of 4<sup>th</sup> graders (39 students) and 7<sup>th</sup> graders (37 students) as compared to other student grade levels.

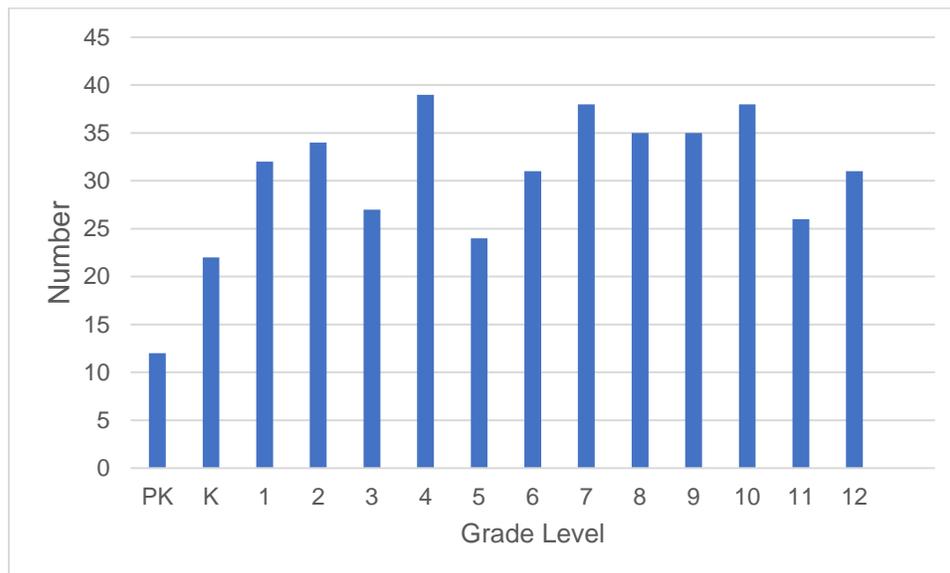


Figure 8. Grade Levels of Children Involved in Remote Learning, Parent Respondents

Parents respondents noted between one and four children attending in various South Carolina school settings, with most parents having one or two children at school. Figure 9 details the number of children within a family attending school.

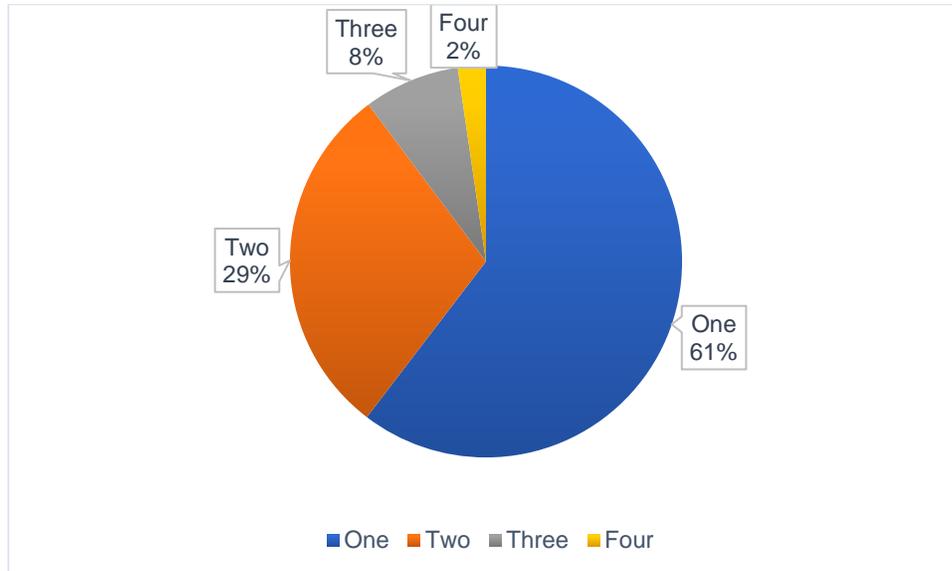


Figure 9. Number of Children Attending School, Parent Remote Learning Sample

In addition, most children were not receiving special services. The most common services mentioned was by parents included a 504 accommodation (roughly 14% of responses) or that a child was following an IEP plan (roughly 14%). Fewer students in the sample were reported as having a BIP (less than 1%) or involvement with ESOL services (approximately 1%). Table 17 reports special services as noted by parents.

Table 17. Special Services Received, Parent Remote Learning Sample

Service	Frequency	Percent
504 Plan	38	14.4
IEP (Individualized Education Program)	36	13.7
Speech/Language assistance	18	6.8
Gifted Education	17	6.5
English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)	3	1.1
BIP (Behavioral Intervention Plan)	2	0.1
Total	263	100.0

Note: Percentage will not total to 100% due to “select all that apply” option.

## REFLECTIONS ON REMOTE LEARNING IN SPRING 2020, PARENT RESPONSES

Parents discussed how lessons were provided to students learning when schools were ordered to close in-person learning (March 2020 through the remainder of the 2019-20 school year). Table 18 reports modes which schools and teachers delivered academic content. Educator data were included (far right column) to compare parent and educator perceptions of lesson delivery during Spring 2020. Respondents could select as many options applied to their situation; thus, percentages in the table will not total to 100%.

Parents noted that online lessons with two or more meetings at set times (synchronous learning) were the most common mode of lesson delivery during Spring 2020 (36.5%); however, educators noted this as the least frequent option for lesson delivery. Five additional comments were written in from parents, these comments largely stated that teachers were available for online lessons or tutoring sessions through Zoom meetings or GoogleChat availability. These activities may have been interpreted by parents as online meetings at a set time, leading to selection of synchronous classes. Conversely, options noted by educators (prepared paper packets, 44% and asynchronous learning, roughly 36%) as popular lesson delivery options were selected by roughly a quarter of the parent respondents.

Table 18. Spring 2020 Lesson Delivery Mode, Parent Remote Learning Sample

Lesson Delivery Mode	Frequency	Parent Percentage	Educator Percentage
Prepared (paper) work packets turned in in-person	65	24.7	44.0
Online lessons where students completed work online, but there was no online meeting at a set time (asynchronous)	64	24.3	35.9
Mix of asynchronous lessons and synchronous meetings at least 1 time a week	41	15.6	28.5
Paper packets but work was turned in online (i.e., pictures of work, artifacts)	35	13.3	17.2
Online lessons where students met 2 or more times a week at a set time (synchronous)	96	36.5	15.7
Total	263		

Note: Percentage will not total to 100% due to "select all that apply" option

Parents reflected upon the level of rigor associate with remote learning activities conducted during Spring 2020. Figure 10 displays the reflections of parents regarding academic rigor of the lessons. While the majority of educators perceived lessons were at a lower level of rigor as compared to in-person delivery (56%), most parents perceived

the lessons at the same level of rigor (42%). Only 32% of parents felt that the lessons were at a lower level of rigor; however, lower rigor of the Spring 2020 assignments was a major complaint of educators. Where 2% of educators noted Spring 2020 activities at a higher level of rigor, 15% of parents perceived remote learning lessons at a higher level.

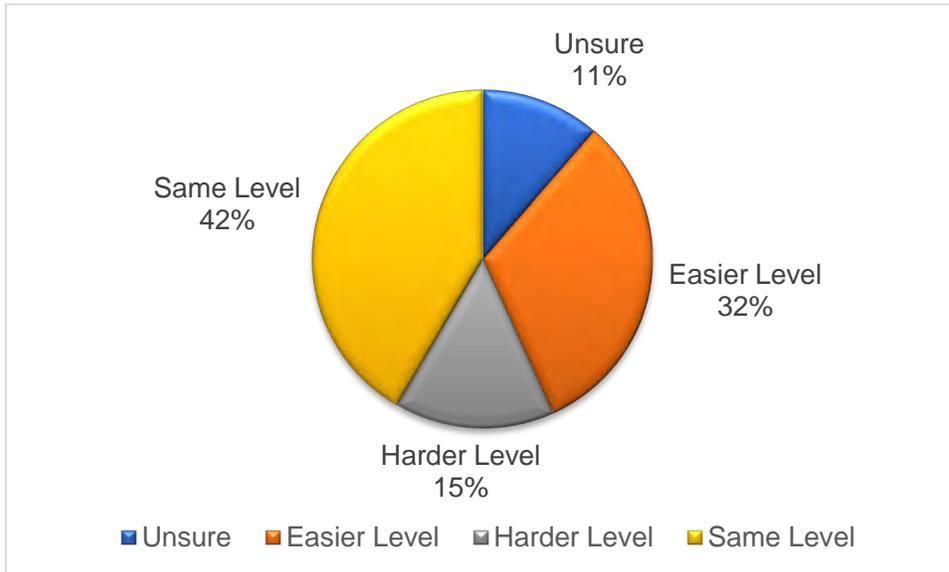


Figure 10. Rigor Level of Academic Lessons Delivered in Spring 2020, Parent Remote Learning Sample

In terms of impact of Spring 2020 activities on grades, parents could write-in reflections of their child(ren)'s performance for their child(ren)'s Spring 4<sup>th</sup> quarter report card. Of the 173 parents who provided information about their child's report card, the majority (126 or 73%) reported that report card grades were at the same level as in previous quarters. Thirty-three (19%) reported higher grades and only 8% reported lower grades than in previous quarters.

Parents were asked the extent to which they agreed with various aspects of the Spring 2020 remote learning experience. Questions presented various aspects, such as amount of communication with school personnel, stress experienced by students and families, the ease of conducting activities, and (if applicable) online learning Responses are summarized in Figure 11.

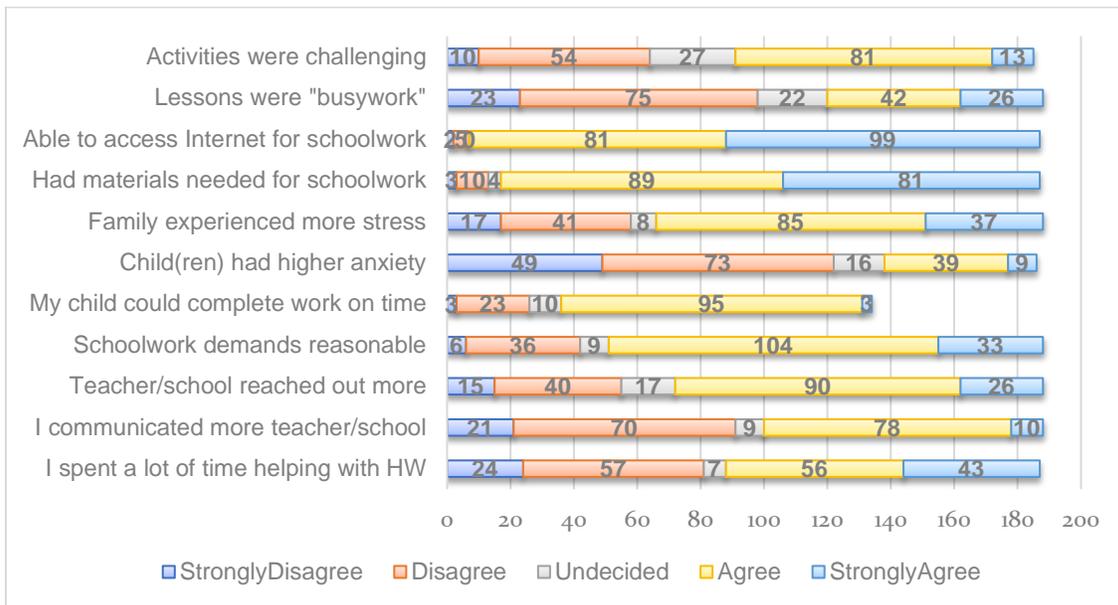


Figure 11. Parent Agreement with Aspects of Remote Learning, Spring 2020.

As shown in the figure, parent responses were typically in agreement with most statements. Parents typically agreed that Spring 2020 activities were challenging and that the schoolwork demands were reasonable. More communication was noted between home and school, whether that was initiated by the teacher/school or the parent. While teachers mentioned that there was a lot of missing work, parents largely agreed that their child(ren) could complete the work on time. Almost all parents in the sample agreed or strongly agreed that they had materials needed to complete schoolwork and also had Internet access. This may be largely due to the sample at hand, and not fully representative of families across South Carolina.

Parents were asked to reflect upon positive aspects of the Spring 2020 remote learning experience. Areas evaluated are provided in Figure 12. As shown, parents viewed the ability of their child(ren) to complete schoolwork remotely and the district's concerns for health as the most positive aspects of the Spring 2020 remote learning experience. Approximately 40% of the parent sample stated remote learning helped children become more independent learners, that school provided materials were helpful, and devices exhibited few technical problems. While materials were helpful and communication increased, relatively few parents stated that their child(ren) were motivated to learn (roughly 8%) during Spring 2020. Also, very few parents in this sample used Hot Spots or Internet access provided by schools/districts (1.9%).

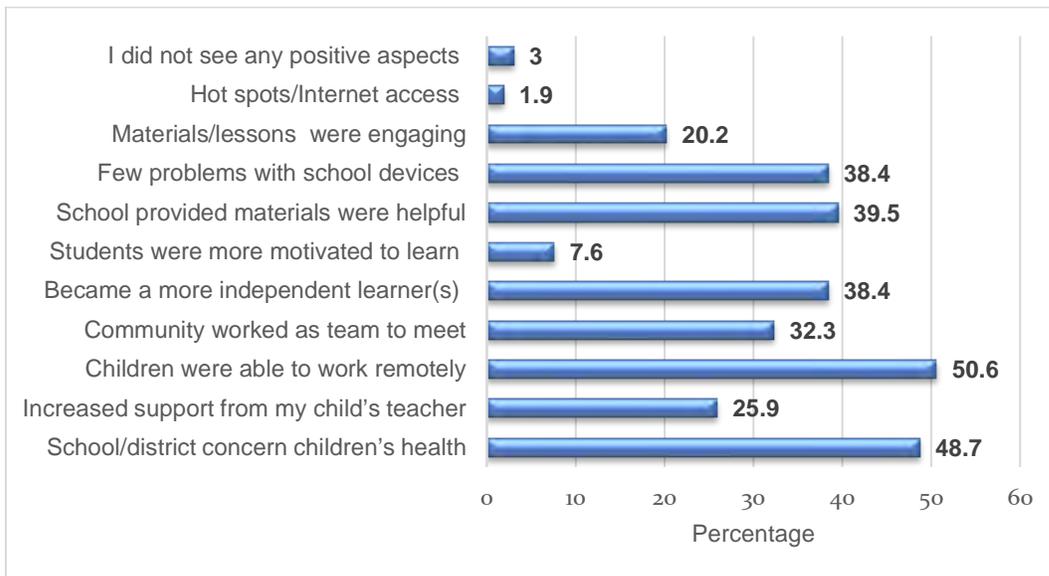


Figure 12. Positive aspects remote learning in Spring 2020.

While only 10 parents wrote in additional comments, the comments reflected additional positive aspects such as the ability for a child to learn at his/her own pace and benefits of a more flexible schedule. Parents were appreciative of the opportunity to have remote learning.

*They were given the assignment and a due date. It was a lot of "busy" work, but most of the material was new and it was a good way to learn the material. They could work at their own pace and in our home, this was a great experience. It was one of the reasons we elected to do virtual in the fall. Much different now though.*

*My children were able to complete assignments on their own time schedules. The younger three were done early in the morning or by noon, but the oldest was in eighth grade and worked a full day almost every day.*

*An attempt to continue learning was made and that also helped provide some reassuring structure to the experience of the pandemic*

Parents were asked to choose the top three challenges experienced with remote learning observed during Spring 2020. The number of times that a challenge was noted as one of the top three choices was tallied and converted to a percentage from the total number of parent respondents. Challenges are presented in Figure 13.

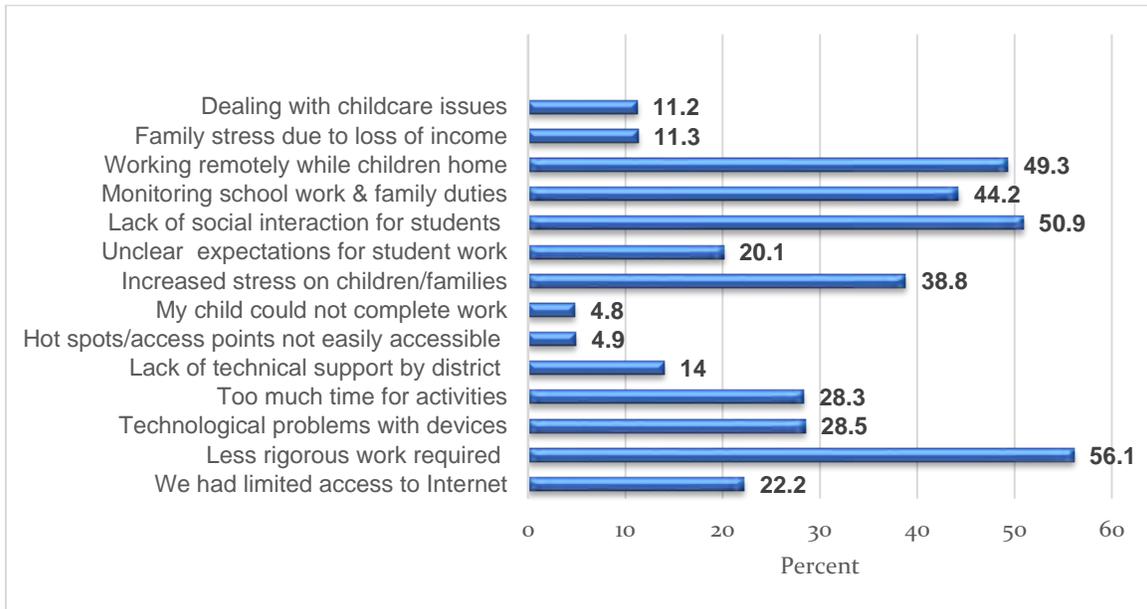


Figure 13. Challenges to Spring 2022 Remote Learning, Parent Respondents

As shown, 56% of parents noted as a challenge that classwork required in Spring 2020 was less rigorous than in-person work; this may be confusing as many parents stated previously that lessons were at the same level of rigor. In addition, parents mentioned that lack of social interaction for children was a major challenge of the Spring 2020 remote learning experience. Two other highly rated challenges dealt with parents working remotely while children were home (49.1%) and the difficulties of parents to monitor schoolwork and family duties (44.3%). Very few parents; however, stated that their child(ren) could not complete the remote learning activities (4.8%) or problems with Internet access were noted (4.8%).

Parents could write in additional challenges noted in Spring 2020. Forty parents provided information about additional barriers faced by children/families. These were generally related to two major areas: unbalanced workloads across children in different grades and problems encountered with receiving special services. Other responses noted by parents represented a mix of issues such as: busywork or too challenging assignments, needs to monitor children to keep them on task, and problems with learning platforms (e.g., ClassDojo).

Parents with more than one child in the house noted that workloads and expectations were often unbalanced across grade levels. As noted, this varied more by teacher than across grade level.

*My then 5th grader had so much work that it was difficult to get it done while my then 1st grader finished quickly.*

*My children had uneven workloads given to them by their teachers. My high school student was given about two hours of work each day. My two middle school students had 4 to 6 hours of work daily.*

Another area noted was the lack of assistance which special education students received due to remote learning.

*The only school problem I had was receiving special needs services were almost impossible. The school provided a program for him to use, and being high-functioning (autistic), he could do it-- but nothing can replace the impact of face to face instruction*

*For the seventh grader with the IEP, there were major issues with teachers and the literacy coach implementing universal design in a virtual environment. With the junior, it was disappointing to see a teacher completely give up on teaching.*

Parents were asked if schools/districts solicited information in summer 2020 to assist with planning for the 2020-21 school year. Parents respond to the three questions noted below in Figure 14. As shown, it was largely reported that schools asked for feedback about the online learning experience from parents/families. Schools/districts largely reported on the problems that were mentioned and actively tried to find solutions to these barriers.

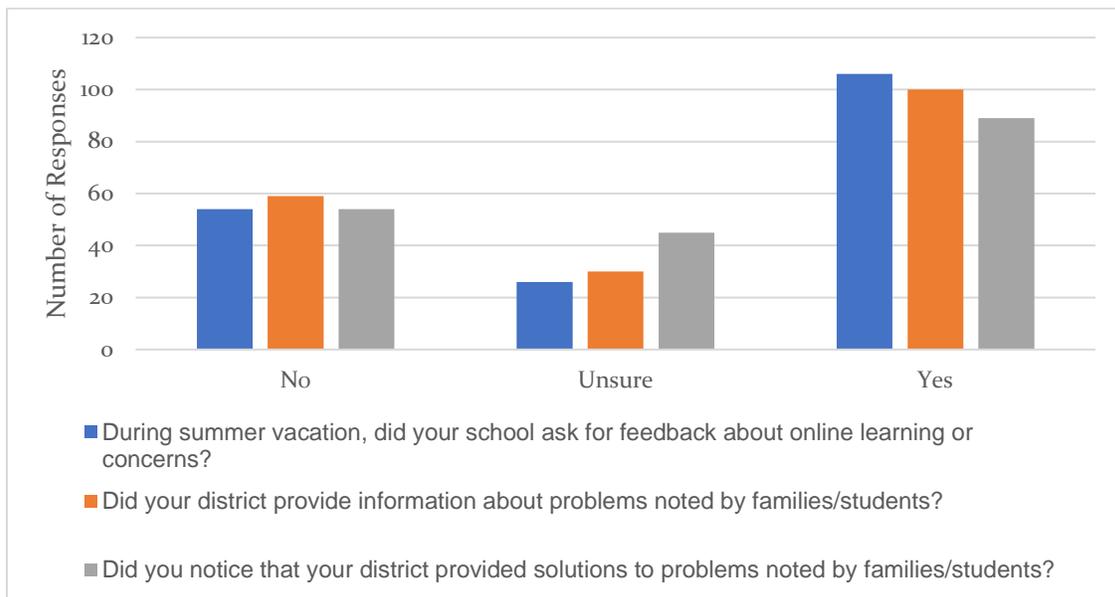


Figure 14. District/school input when planning for 2020-21, Parent Responses

## START OF 2020-21 ACADEMIC YEAR, PARENT RESPONSES

Given the pandemic, schools followed different conventions than in past years. Parents reflected on the start of the 2020-21 academic year and relayed their opinions regarding fall 2020 learning. Parents were asked how their child(ren) began the new academic year by selecting all delivery mode options that applicable to their child(ren)'s situation. Responses are summarized in Table 19.

As shown in the table, most parents stated that elected virtual learning was selected (roughly 27%) by most parents in the sample; the next popular option was a hybrid option (mix of in-person and virtual learning) selected by almost 22% of the parent responders. Approximately 11% of the sample noted that students began the school year with five-day in-person learning. We recognize that many parents did not respond to this question.

Table 19. 2020-21 School Delivery Mode, Parent Remote Learning Sample

<b>Delivery Mode</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
In-person 5-day learning	30	11.4
Hybrid (mix of in-person and virtual learning)	57	21.7
Mandatory virtual learning	23	8.7
Elected Virtual Learning	70	26.6
Decided to homeschool	3	1.1
Missing/No Response	78	29.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>263</b>	

Note: Percentage will not total to 100% due to "select all that apply" option

Parents reflected upon differences between academic delivery mode in Spring 2020 compared to Fall 2020. The item allowed parents to select all options that applied, allowing a response for children at different grade levels and schools with the same household. Of the sample, the majority of parents (126 responses or 49.0% of the sample) stated that Fall 2020 mode of delivery was different than in Spring 2020. Table 20 provides the summary of parent response. As shown below, most parents elected for children to have synchronous classes (held two or more times per week at a set time) or a mix of asynchronous (work provided but no online meeting at a set time) and one or more synchronous meetings per week.

Table 20. Fall 2020, Lesson Delivery Mode, Parent Remote Learning Sample

<b>Lesson Delivery Mode</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Prepared (paper) work packets turned in in-person	8	3.0
Online lessons where students completed work online, but there was no online meeting at a set time (asynchronous)	33	12.5
Mix of asynchronous lessons and synchronous meetings at least 1 time a week	66	25.1
Paper packets but work was turned in online (i.e., pictures of work, artifacts)	3	1.1
Online lessons where students met 2 or more times a week at a set time (synchronous)	73	27.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note: Percentage will not total to 100% due to “select all that apply” option

Parents could write in different responses or additional information regarding the Fall 2020 model of delivery; 28 parents provided additional comments concerning delivery mode. With these responses, 20 comments mentioned that students met at a set time via an online platform (e.g., Zoom). Many comments specifically mentioned that remote instruction was daily, five-days a week.

*Online with teacher 5 days a week as though it is a normal school day all day.*

Five comments mentioned specific software (e.g., Schoology) or discussed additional information concerning additional teacher materials and support provide.

*Most work done online, teachers at school provide video lessons, teacher available daily during her only planning to provide support.*

Three comments mentioned complaints. One with the overall setup of remote learning and two comments regarding problems with children and/or parents navigating software platforms in place at school.

*It's been horribly inconsistent. No set schedule, classes meet at the same time, teachers schedule online classes with no notice. No one place for communication. Child has to check several places for work.*

Parents were asked which barriers present in Spring 2020 were still an issue in Fall 2020. From the same list included in the Spring, parents could check all options that were present in Fall 2020. Figure 15 compares the two sets of information.

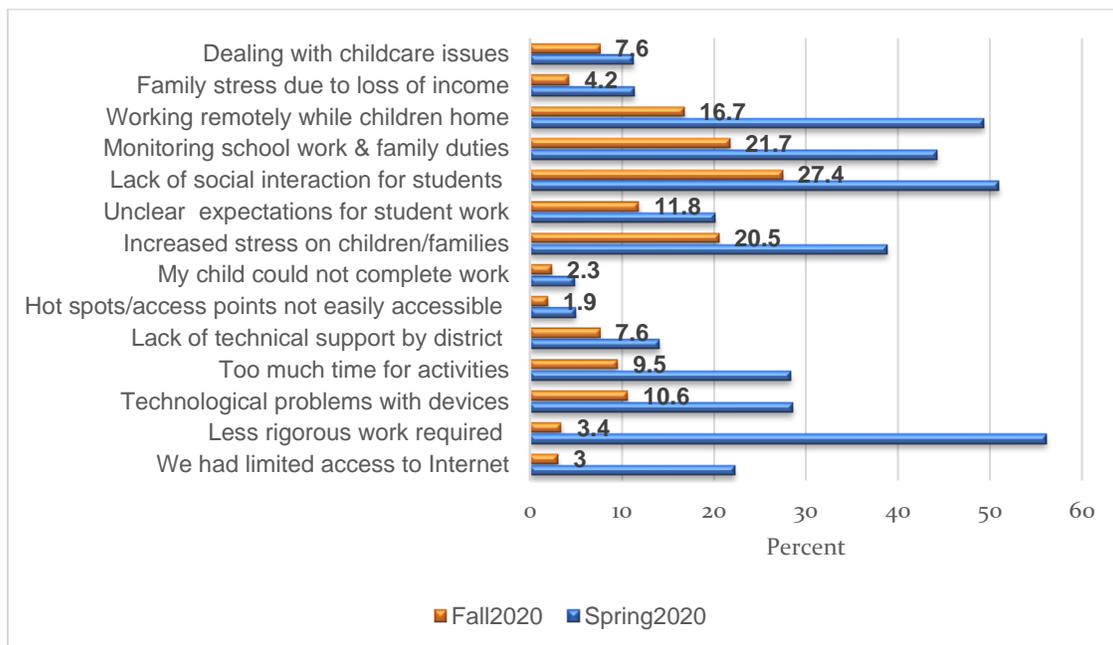


Figure 15. Challenges with Remote Learning Spring to Fall 2020, Parent Respondents

As noted in Figure 15, the percent of parents citing barriers dropped for all aspects by Fall 2020 (orange bars) as compared to Spring 2020 (blue bars). In Fall 2020, only three areas were noted as a challenge by over 20% of parent respondents: lack of social interaction for students, monitoring children’s school work with family and work duties, and increased stress on children and families. The largest drops were noted for rigorous work, with Fall 2020 representing more rigorous work than in Spring 2020.

An option was provided for parents to note any new challenges which families were encountering in Fall 2020. Parents wrote in 53 responses provided related to new concerns which arose at the start of the 2020-21 academic year. The responses were grouped into two categories, academic (26 responses, 49%) and personal (27 responses or 51%) comments, with percentage in each category approximately evenly split.

Under the academic learning category, there were two issues mentioned by parents. The first area, Virtual Schooling Problems, noted concerns about using the school provided devices, various e-learning platforms, or access problems. Also noted by parents were problems related to children’s workloads. Sample responses are provided in Table 21.

Table 21. Academic Concerns New in Fall 2020, Parent Respondents (26 Comments)

<p>Virtual schooling problems –Work expectations, platform/software problems, problems with Internet access or devices (17 responses)</p>	<p><i>Unrealistic length of assignments on e-learning days (9+ hours if work for a 4th grade student)</i></p> <p><i>It's horrible. Lack of communication, frustration with child having to log into multiple websites and create log ins across multiple platforms. No feedback on assignments. She doesn't know what she got wrong on quizzes or classwork to be able to correct it and learn from it. The software doesnt always work right and the district only deals with hardware. Stress levels are off the chart. Anxiety and depression are things we never had to deal with before. She has a good support network but the school work is the biggest problem</i></p> <p><i>Our 7th grader is having a difficult time keeping up with what is due when which has never been a problem for her in the past, but has resulted in late assignments and lower grades.</i></p>
<p>Lack of support – lacking services (e.g., guidance, mental health), food, inconsistent schedules in districts (9 responses)</p>	<p><i>The district keeps switching its plan and expectations to bring more students back into the classroom. Even though cases are rising and percent positive is staying high, they are still pressuring people to come back in school. We were told this would not happen and that they would offer the virtual option all year.</i></p> <p><i>Free meals aren't offered for pick-up in mornings like previously... not as easily accessible.</i></p>

The second broad category was related to personal concerns. This included 27 responses in two categories- health concerns (16 responses) and family/life concerns (11 responses). Health concerns focused on parent’s concerns with a child or parent contracting COVID. The responses mentioned feeling unsafe for going back to schools five days a week, concerns with parents working, and concerns about other children in schools being sick and transmitting COVID-19. The second area was related to home life issues (11 responses). These comments noted families’ struggles with loss of income, child care expenses, worry with leaving children home alone while parents work outside the home. Table 22 provides illustrative comments for each subcategory.

Table 21. Academic Concerns New in Fall 2020, Parent Respondents (26 Comments)

<p>Health concerns – worries about children contracting COVID, children anxious, stress and feeling as if districts/schools are not concerned (16 responses)</p>	<p><i>We are worried about the current push for face to face for all students. Plexiglass only protects the desk space, as students sit outside of this space in their chair. Hybrid is working well and pushing more interaction is pushing for more illnesses.</i></p> <p><i>We are very concerned about safety, should we go back 5 days a week. Cases are on the rise, and we know several kids who are infected.</i></p> <p><i>They want all students to return to traditional learning, but we are not comfortable with the safety measures from the district (no mandatory mask policy, students tell my son that they are not socially distancing in the building)</i></p>
<p>Home/life concerns – costs associated with childcare, leaving kids at home alone while working, loss of income (11 responses)</p>	<p><i>I teach elementary school and we are now back to school five days a week. That means my middle and high schooler are home alone completing work. They only go to school two days a week. Therefore, if they have a question there is no one here to help them.</i></p>

Parents were asked which positive aspects were noted (to date) at the start of the 2020-21 academic year. Aspects are listed in Table 22 below. Respondents could select as many options as applied to their school/district. Percentages are computed from the total sample.

Parents identified free meals for all students was the most positive aspect of the start of the 2020 school year, as selected by 43% of respondents. Other areas rated highly were the effectiveness of school-provided computing devices (36%), increased rigor of school work (32%), and safety measures in place at schools (31%).

Table 22. Fall 2020 Positive Aspects Related to Schools/Districts, Parent Remote Learning Sample

	Frequency	Percent
Free meals for all students	112	42.6
Devices (e.g., iPads, Chromebooks, etc.) provided by the school are functioning adequately	94	35.7
Improved rigor of assignments	84	31.9
Safety measures in place (masks, increased cleaning, etc.) at school	81	30.8
Students/families are engaged in online learning	68	25.9
Students are completing remote work in a timely manner	61	23.2
Hybrid schedule is more relaxed for students/families	48	18.3
Connectivity issues for families have been solved (e.g., free/reduced price Internet)	37	14.1
Increased Hot Spot/Internet access availability	29	11.0
Total	263	

Thirteen parents elected to write in an additional positive aspect noted in Fall 2020. Seven statements relayed positive comments regarding virtual schooling and its impact. Parents applauded efforts by teachers and schools, noting that teachers were managing well with the situation at hand. Comments suggested that children were happy to be in school a few days a week, leading to feelings of “normalcy.”

*We have been impressed overall with the virtual school and what we have seen our 3rd grader able to do with a computer. He is definitely learning new skills to manage his schoolwork. His teacher is extremely engaged with the students. Also, we have been impressed with how our child's teacher has made efforts to encourage social interactions remotely.*

*The teachers are doing great with what little they were given.*

The other six responses did not state positive aspects noted at the start of the 2020-21 year, but reiterated concerns of the potential for COVID infection of children and families in South Carolina.

*The lack of adequate safety measures and the fact that the districts returned to face to face without using the DHEC data. Both are still opening face to face even though the percent positive is so high. I am extremely worried for teachers and families. The virus is out of control.*

*It has been a horrible experiment that will cost the students and state much more than politicians understand.*

## IMPACT ON ACADEMIC LEARNING, PARENT RESPONSES

As no standardized tests were administered at the end of the 2019-20 school year (and the potential for no standardized testing in the 2020-21), parents were asked about the decision to remove standardized testing and how this decision may affect academics. A list of potential challenges was provided, where parents could select all options that were relevant.

Similar to educator responses, parents did not identify many negatives regarding the decision to remove standardized testing in Spring 2020. The number of parents selecting any positives regarding testing was low, with only one category noting approximately 10% of respondents. For this item, parents were concerned that there would not be feedback available to schools/parents to know how much learning was lost. All other areas had below 10% endorsement. Percentages for aspects to select are noted in Table 23.

Table 23. Potential Negative Aspects Related to Standardized Test Removal, Parent Remote Learning Sample

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
There won't be feedback available to schools and parents to know how much learning was lost	25	9.5
My child will have lower performance on formative tests when testing returns	12	4.6
My child won't know what is needed to progress to the next grade	10	3.8
I won't be able to compare my child's school performance to other schools	8	3.0
Students will become lazy if there are not tests at the end of the year	8	3.0
There won't be information for me to see in the school/district report card	7	2.7
Easier classroom activities and tests	2	.8
State standards won't be followed	4	1.5
My child's teacher won't be held accountable for learning	4	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>263</b>	

Parents could also write in additional potential negative aspects regarding the decision to remove standardized testing. Only 24 responses were written in; of these, the majority of responses were in support of removing standardized tests.

*Children are resilient. We have been pushing them to grow up and learn to fast anyway. The students will scaffold up to the correct levels for reading and math after this pandemic is over. Look at the kids of Katrina.*

*If state standardized testing ceased, more instructional time is given to the students and teachers. Plus anxiety levels for all students are decreased.*

Only four responses discussed any potential weaknesses related to removing standardized testing. Issues noted by parents were concerned with the lack of comparative data to use for assessing student growth, measuring literacy, and using data to drive decision making.

*Literacy scores in South Carolina are considerably low. My fear is that by losing that data, the state's literacy rates are going to sink even lower.*

*Decision-makers are lacking an important data source for measuring student achievement*

Parents could select positive aspects regarding the decision to remove standardized testing. These items were much higher endorsed. For each element, the frequency and percent of sample were computed; these values are noted in Table 24. The most frequently cited positive reasons for removing standardized testing revolve around reduced pressure for teachers to “teach to the test” (55.5%) and less stress and anxiety noted for teachers (54.8) and for children (54.8). In addition, parents felt that teacher freedom to engage in meaningful lessons (49.4%) and that learning would not have to pause for test review (51.3%) would be beneficial to teachers and students.

Table 24. Potential Positive Aspects Related to Standardized Test Removal, Parent Remote Learning Sample

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
My child's teacher will have less pressure to "teach to the test"	146	55.5
Less stress noted on teachers	145	55.1
Less stress/anxiety noted for my child	144	54.8
Teachers will have more freedom to create engaging lessons	130	49.4
My child doesn't have to stop learning to review for the test	135	51.3
My child's school rating/report card score will not be affected	89	33.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Eighteen parents wrote in additional positive aspects regarding the decision to remove standardized testing in 2019-20 and the potential to remove testing for 2020-21. Five of the responses reiterated positive aspects related to the removal of standardized testing including: lower teacher/student, stress, the opportunity for teachers to teach content and prepare more engaging lessons, and noting that the amount of testing was excessive pre-COVID.

Thirteen responses provided positive viewpoints for removing/the potential to remove standardized testing. Three responses noted benefits for saving money at the state and district level:

*More money will be saved by the state since state standardized testing costs at least \$15 million a year. Also, districts will save money from purchasing other benchmarks to prepare for those state tests.*

Other responses noted that removing testing provided stakeholders an opportunity to rethink standardized testing and the information it provided.

*(This is a ) Chance to see the relevance/importance of standard tests*

The remaining responses noted how the virtual environment may influence testing, including the potential for children to receive help on the test or have to go in-person into a school to take the test (and risk exposure to COVID).

*I was concerned about the potential for unauthorized assistance if standardized testing was done remotely.*

## SUMMARY OF PARENT FEEDBACK

- 263 parents across South Carolina provided feedback about the remote learning experience; respondents were largely from suburban locales. Parents were able to reflect upon schooling experiences for children across preschool (PK) -12<sup>th</sup> grade. With the exception of preschool (PK), there were at least 20 children in each grade level. Parents in the sample had between one and four children attending South Carolina public schools, with most parents reporting one or two children attending school.
- Most children were not receiving special services. The most common services mentioned were: involvement with a 504 accommodation (roughly 14% of responses) or Individualized Education Program (IEP) (roughly 14%).
- Online lessons with two or more meetings at set times (synchronous learning) were noted by parents the most common mode of lesson delivery during Spring 2020 (36.5%); however, educators noted this as the least frequent option for lesson delivery. Conversely, options noted by educators (prepared paper packets, 44% and asynchronous learning, roughly 36%) as popular lesson delivery options were selected by roughly a quarter of the parent respondents.
- Most parents perceived the Spring 2020 academic lessons at the same level of rigor (42%) as the in-person work and only 32% of parents felt that the lessons were at a lower level of rigor. The majority of parents (126 or 73% of parent sample) reported that report card grades were at the same level as in previous quarters; 33 parents (19% of parent sample) reported higher grades and only 21 parents (8% of parent sample) reported lower 4<sup>th</sup> quarter grades.
- Parents typically agreed that Spring 2020 activities were challenging and that the schoolwork demands were reasonable. More communication was noted between home and school, whether that was initiated by the teacher/school or the parent.
- The ability of their child(ren) to complete schoolwork remotely and the district's concerns for health was mentioned by parents as the two most positive aspects of the remote learning experience. Approximately 40% of the parent sample stated remote learning helped children become more independent learners, that school provided materials were helpful, and devices exhibited few technical problems.
- In terms of challenges, 56% of parent respondents noted that classwork required in Spring 2020 was less rigorous than in-person work and a lack of social interaction for children was a major challenge of the Spring 2020 remote learning experience. Two other highly rated challenges dealt with parents working remotely while children were home (49.1%) and the difficulties of parents to monitor schoolwork and family duties (44.3%).
- In Fall 2020, most parents stated that their child(ren) would attend school through (elected) virtual learning (roughly 27%) and 22% of respondents began the 2020-21 school year with a hybrid option (mix of in-person and virtual learning). Approximately

11% of the sample stated that children began the school year with five-day in-person learning.

- Parents reflected upon differences between academic delivery mode in Spring 2020 compared to Fall 2020. The majority of parents (49.0% of the sample) stated that Fall 2020 mode of delivery was different than in Spring 2020.
- Parents reported fewer barriers to remote learning in Fall 2020. At this time, only three areas were noted as a challenge by over 20% of parent respondents: lack of social interaction for students, monitoring children's schoolwork with family and work duties, and increased stress on children and families. Parents identified free meals for all students as the most positive aspect of the start of the 2020 school year (43% of respondents). Other areas noted favorably by many parents were the effectiveness of school-provided computing devices (36%), increased rigor of schoolwork (32%), and safety measures in place at schools (31%).
- Parents did not identify many negatives regarding the decision to remove standardized testing in Spring 2020. The number of parents selecting any positives associated with standardized testing was low. Only one item was endorsed by 10% of respondents, with parents noting concerned that there would not be feedback available to schools/parents to know how much learning was lost.
- Positive aspects regarding the decision were more highly endorsed by parents. The most frequently cited positive reasons for removing standardized testing revolve around reduced pressure for teachers to "teach to the test" (55.5%) and less stress and anxiety noted for teachers (54.8) and for children (54.8). In addition, parents felt that teacher freedom to engage in meaningful lessons (49.4%) and that learning would not have to pause teaching new content for test review activities (51.3%).

## LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE REMOTE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

In total, over 1,000 educators and parents from across South Carolina provided feedback about remote learning experiences during the period from March 2020 through November 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This time period covered the sudden closing of schools due to COVID-19, planning for the 2020-21 school year, and starting the new academic year while the virus was still present. This section summarizes key points noted by educators and parents.

Both parents and educators recognized the difficulties faced by schools and school districts in Spring 2020. A variety of modes were used deliver content, with asynchronous lessons or distributing physical packets of materials as most popular options. Physical packets of materials were an option for students in lower grades as well as for families without reliable Internet access.

Educators recognized that they had to scramble when schools closed abruptly in March 2020 to provide lessons and, educators recognized that the information was at a lower level of rigor as was delivered in-person. Parents, however, reported conflicting information as to the level of the lessons, in some places noting the lessons were “busy work” and in other responses, noting that the rigor level was approximately equal to in-person learning. Student grades, however, were reported by parents as largely the same at the end of 2019-20 as in previous quarters of the school year.

Related to remote learning in Spring 2020, there were benefits and challenges noted across the two sets of respondents. Unexpected benefits of the remote learning experience included educator pride to show that they could meet the needs of their communities and to work together as a team. Educators also felt that districts/schools were concerned for their personal health in Spring 2020. Parents noted similar themes, stating that they were pleased at the ability of their child(ren) to complete schoolwork remotely and also with the district’s concerns for children’s health.

Challenges were noted in Spring 2020. For educators, these challenges were largely related to student issues and lesson content. Educators noted that the tasks were less rigorous than in-person learning and also took a long time to prepare. Student Internet capability was noted as problematic as well. However, the biggest complaint for educators was the amount of missing work turned in by students.

### Lessons Learned:

1. Schools and communities were able to provide lessons when schools were abruptly closed schools due to COVID-19.
2. To help serve all students, physical packets of lessons allowed students/families to participate in school without the need for Internet access and with the ability to provide materials to the largest numbers of children. While the lessons may not have been as rigorous as in-person schooling, they provided a way to keep children engaged and learning.

3. During Spring 2020, there was a high percentage of missing student assignments. However, parents found academic demands reasonable and were engaged with more communication with schools/teachers. Additional ways to encourage student engagement are needed to continue remote learning.

During the 2020 summer break, educators tried to solve problems related to student connectivity (e.g., Hot Spots, lack of technical support, access to Internet, and device shortages for students.) Many school districts spent time and money during Summer 2020 to provide additional materials and support to students. Schools/districts did request feedback from parents as the 2020-21 school year was planned. Teachers/educators were upset that parent feedback was solicited and considered, yet teachers mentioned feeling “left out” of many of the decision making-processes.

4. Ensure solicitation from all stakeholders on a broad level to give educators as well as parents additional voice in decision making processes.
5. School districts were able to provide additional materials and devices to increase connectivity. This could be used for other purposes and/or a continuation of remote learning after the threat of COVID-19 infections diminish.

In Fall 2020, schools and families were provided more options for remote learning. Use of paper packets was greatly reduced, due to connectivity work and securing devices for students. Educators noted a big increase in the ability to hold synchronized class meetings. While parents elected one (or few) ways for their child(ren) would attend school, educators were faced with providing service through multiple modes, often simultaneously. Most parents elected to continue with virtual learning or participated in a hybrid mix (some in-person, some online). Teachers noted frustrations with having to accommodate so many different learning modes simultaneously

There were different challenges noted by parents and teachers in Fall 2020 than were present in Spring 2020. In the fall, educators recognized that there was still high levels of stress on teachers/administrators, that students still had a lot of missing work, and online courses were very time consuming. Parents were concerned with the lack of social interaction for students, monitoring children’s schoolwork with family and work duties, and increased stress on children and families. However, providing free meals for all students, effective computing devices, rigorous activities, and safety measures were beneficial.

6. Given the high levels of stress and anxiety noted by teachers/administrators, ways to deal with stress and to support positive mental health could be very beneficial. Suggestions include sharing online materials, providing online speaking engagements from mental health professionals, and creating a safe place for educators to express frustrations.
7. To combat a lack of social-interaction fro (virtual) students, online clubs and activities can help children feel connected.

Most parents and teachers did not see drawbacks related to the decision to remove standardized testing in Spring 2020 (as well as the potential for Spring 2021 waiver). Both parents and educators noted that there would be lower stress, anxiety, and pressure – on both students and teachers. Teachers would have greater freedom to engage in meaningful lessons without pressure to “teach to the test.”

8. Given the negative view of standardized testing from parents and educators, greater emphasis on usefulness of results may be communicated to the public as well as greater information concerning how the information is used to support student learning and school success.

Appendix A. Remote Learning in South Carolina, Participants by District

District	Teacher Responses		Parent Responses	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Abbeville	5	.6	1	.4
Aiken	18	2.1	8	3.0
Allendale	1	.1		5.2
Anderson 1	1	.1	1	.4
Anderson 2	5	.6	2	.8
Anderson 5	7	.8		
Bamberg 1	1	.1		
Bamberg 2	1	.1		
Barnwell 19	2	.2	1	.4
Beaufort	24	2.8	6	2.3
Berkeley	70	8.3	46	17.5
Calhoun	9	1.1		
Charleston	38	4.5	21	8.0
Cherokee	7	.8	2	.8
Chester	5	.6		25.1
Chesterfield	9	1.1	2	.8
Clarendon 2	2	.2	1	.4
Clarendon 3	1	.1		
Clarendon 4	1	.1		
Darlington	16	1.9	2	.8
Dillon 4	3	.4		
Diocese of Charleston	1	.1		29.0
Dorchester 2	24	2.8	8	3.0
Dorchester 4	1	.1		
Edgefield	1	.1	2	.8
Erskine Institute	4	.5		
Fairfield	4	.5		
Florence 1	29	3.4	2	.8
Florence 2	1	.1		
Florence 3	1	.1		
Florence 5	4	.5	1	.4
Georgetown	5	.6	2	.8
Greenville	48	5.7	45	17.1

District	Teacher Responses		Parent Responses	
	Frequency	Percent	District	Frequency
Greenwood 50	7	.8		
Greenwood 52	2	.2		
Greenwood 95	1	.1		
Hampton 1	2	.2		
Horry	23	2.7	5	1.9
Kershaw	14	1.7	1	.4
Lancaster	10	1.2	3	1.1
Laurens 55	3	.4		
Laurens 56	2	.2	1	.4
Lee	2	.2		
Lexington 1	21	2.5	9	3.4
Lexington 2	6	.7	4	1.5
Lexington 3	3	.4		
Lexington 4	93	11.0		
Lexington-Richland 5	18	2.1	7	2.7
Marion	4	.5		
Marlboro	4	.5		
Multi-District CTE Center	1	.1		
Newberry	8	.9		
Oconee	4	.5	6	2.3
Orangeburg	5	.6	1	.4
Pickens	12	1.4	3	1.1
Piedmont Technical College	1	.1		
Richland 1	25	3.0	6	2.3
Richland 2	54	6.4	14	5.3
Richland 3	1	.1		
Saluda	4	.5		
SC Governors School for Science and Math	1	.1		
SC Public Charter School District	34	4.0	2	.8
SCDJJ	1	.1		
Spartanburg 1	2	.2		
Spartanburg 2	2	.2	2	.8

District	Teacher Responses		Parent Responses	
	Frequency	Percent	District	Frequency
Spartanburg 3			1	.4
Spartanburg 4	2	.2		
Spartanburg 5	5	.6	5	1.9
Spartanburg 6	9	1.1	5	1.9
Spartanburg 7	4	.5		
Sumter	7	.8	4	1.5
Union	3	.4	1	.4
Williamsburg	3	.4	1	.4
York 1	16	1.9	2	.8
York 2 (Clover)	7	.8	3	1.1
York 3 (Rock Hill)	32	3.8	14	5.3
York 4 (Fort Mill)	20	2.4	1	.4
No Response	20	2.4	10	3.8
Total	847	100.0	263	100.0