



Suggestions from Wisconsin Families for Improving Home/Remote Learning



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In March of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the closing of Wisconsin schools and education to move online. In April of 2020, as part of the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness Research Partnership (WEERP), the Office of Socially Responsible Evaluation in Education (SREED) at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee worked with the Wisconsin-Minnesota Comprehensive Center for Region 10 (WMCC) and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to develop anonymous Family, Teacher, and Student Home/Remote Learning surveys. Districts can use these surveys to inform the development and monitoring of their Home/Remote Learning system.

Both the Family and Student Home/Remote Learning surveys are available in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Hmong. The surveys are available to districts for no charge through links on our website at <https://uwm.edu/sreed/distance-learning/>. The website also includes a sign up form that allows districts to identify a person to receive updated survey results each week.

Districts may sign up to use these brief surveys as long the pandemic continues to impact education in Wisconsin.

As of July 2020, sixteen school districts had signed up to use the Family Home/Remote Learning Survey, which is the focus of this report. A small number of families from other districts also completed surveys. Across all districts, 3,227 families completed a survey.

Wisconsin families mostly agree that home/remote learning is not ideal and that students learn better in the physical classroom. There is also a common understanding that a move to home/remote learning was necessary this spring and schools did the best they could, considering the difficult circumstances. Families expressed a number of challenges regarding home/remote learning and ideas for improvements to their local system. We summarize these in this report. It is our hope that the perspectives of Wisconsin families described will prove useful to schools while the COVID-19 pandemic continues to necessitate instruction through home/remote learning.

Survey Participation

As of July 2020, 16 Wisconsin school districts had signed up to use the Family Home/Remote Learning Survey. A small number of families from a variety of other districts also completed surveys. Across all districts, 3,227 families completed a survey.

These included:

- 66 families who identified as African American, 56 as Asian, 168 as Native American, 113 as Hispanic/Latinx, 2,957 as White, and 50 as “Other”,
- 102 families who indicated their student was in PreK, 591 in K – 2nd grade, 710 in 3rd to 5th, 849 in middle school, and 965 in high school,
- 460 families who indicated their student receives services for special education or has an IEP,
- 124 families who indicated their student receives services for English language learning, and
- 234 families who indicated their student receives gifted and talented services.

The survey asks families closed-ended questions about their perceptions of the home/remote learning provided by their student’s school. Families also answer one open-ended question, “What else could your student's school do to help or support you with home/remote learning during the COVID-19 crisis?” 1,841 families answered this question. Responses to this question were thematically coded.

Survey Results

Most schools required between 2 to 4 hours of online or online and print work each day.

Regarding the amount of work assigned to students, most families indicated their student was expected to spend between two to four hours each day on home/remote learning (Figure 1).

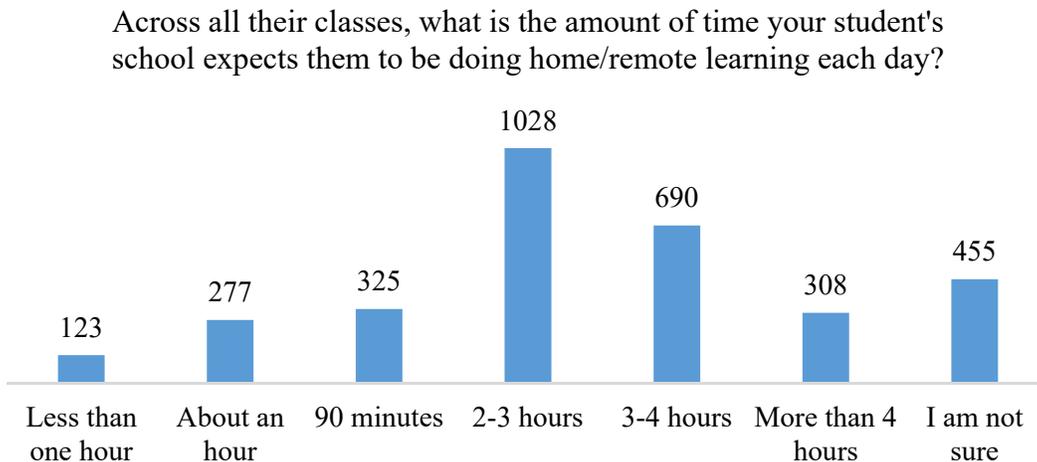


Figure 1: Across all their classes, what is the amount of time your student's school expects them to be doing home/remote learning each day?

Most families indicated their student’s school was delivering instruction either online (50%) or through both online and print materials (40%) (Figure 2).

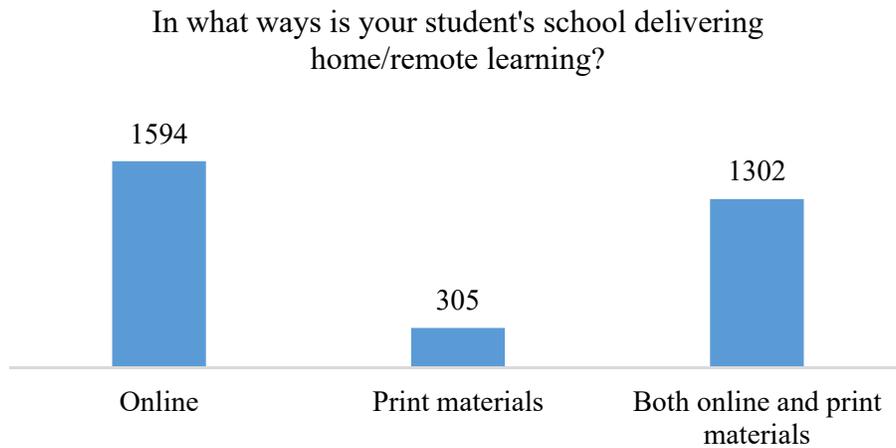


Figure 2: In what ways is your student's school delivering home/remote learning?

Even though many parents were critical of the quality of education their student received in the spring, they were also appreciative of the efforts made by their school.

Only about 33% of families indicated they were satisfied with the home/remote learning education provided to their student (Figure 3). The rest were either not satisfied or somewhat satisfied.

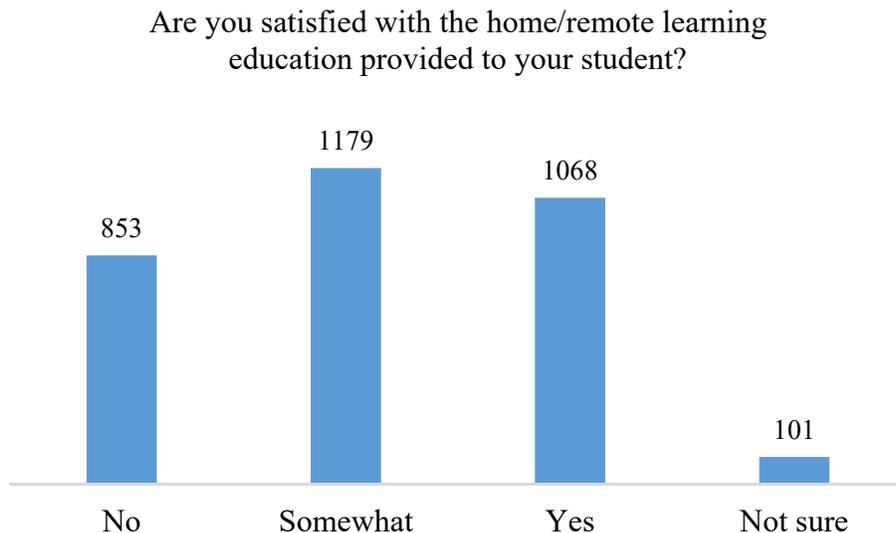


Figure 3: Are you satisfied with the home/remote learning education provided to your student?

When asked “What else could your student's school do to help or support you with home/remote learning during the COVID-19 crisis?”, 392 families complimented their school, district, or teachers regarding their

efforts to provide home/remote learning. Their complements were often qualified though by an acknowledgment of the lack of preparation time provided to schools and teachers, and a perception that home/remote is not as effective as in-person education.

“In all honesty I cannot think of anything else they could be doing. They did an excellent job of making distance learning a reality at an incredibly fast rate. The fact that my child is not learning as much is not a reflection on the amount of support we get from our district. Some students just struggle more with online learning and need the classroom setting to learn fully.”

“There was a great balance for my elementary student. The teacher was extremely supportive and went above and beyond to get age-appropriate materials to my student or provide help, enrichment, or just express care and concern for my child. I don't know that there was MORE the teacher and school could have done to support the learning of my student during this time.”

“I think HS has done a great job communicating with parents and putting together the online learning in a short amount of time. It was a tough situation but I feel they made the best of it.”

Schools should work with families to ensure they have adequate internet access and access to devices needed to access home/remote learning resources and instruction.

Figure 4 and 5 present the number of families who indicated their household had adequate or inadequate access to the internet and devices needed for students to engage in home/remote learning. Roughly 13% indicated their internet was insufficient and 18% indicated their access to devices was insufficient. Together, 803 families (25%) reported challenges with engaging in home/remote learning because of internet access OR access to devices. It is important to consider these numbers reflect the number of families experiencing difficulties AFTER many schools had already distributed devices and worked with families to acquire internet.

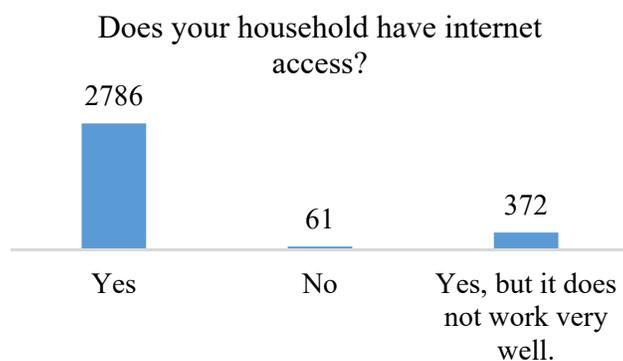


Figure 4: Does your household have internet access?

Does your student have access to a computer or device (other than a smartphone) they can use to complete their school work?

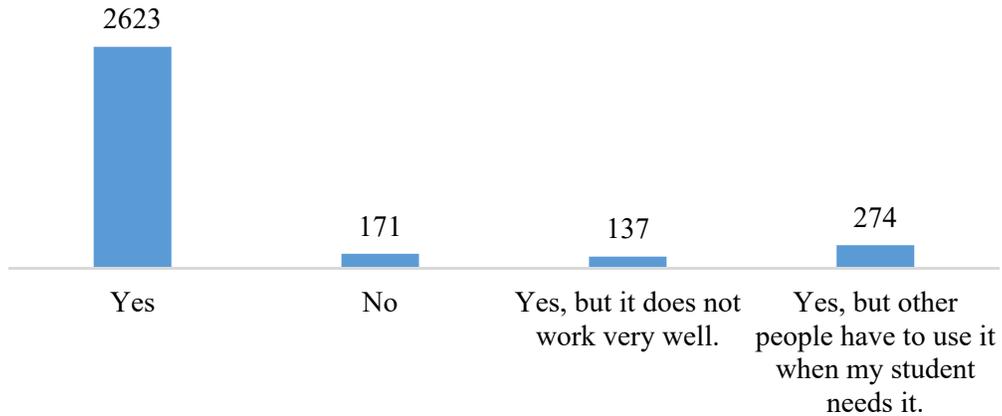


Figure 5: Does your student have access to a computer or device (other than a smartphone) they can use to complete their schoolwork?

Relatedly, 19% of families indicated their student was either not able or only somewhat able to access the instructional materials provided by their school (Figure 6).

Is your student able to access the instructional materials provided by their school?

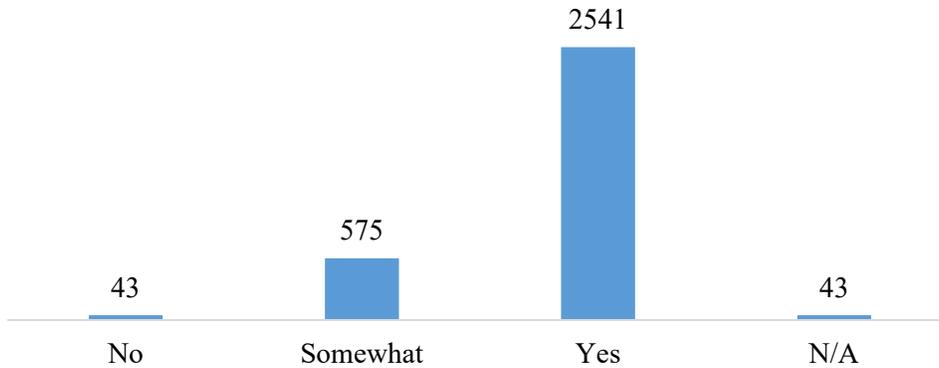


Figure 6: Is your student able to access the instructional materials provided by their school?

When asked “What else could your student's school do to help or support you with home/remote learning during the COVID-19 crisis?”, 106 families identified internet access or lack of a device to access the internet as a barrier to accessing home/remote learning education. Internet access was often an identified problem for students living in rural Wisconsin and children living on the Menominee reservation. Devices needed included Chromebooks, IPADs, computers, and printers.

“The high school does not provide printed materials for the students. We live in a very rural area with horrible internet access. It is not an issue of cost, it is an issue of availability. We have tried every

internet service available to us, and it just isn't adequate for online learning. Things are complicated further, but having multiple children that all need to be online basically, at the same time. We have tried one in the morning, one in the evening, but that schedule does not work for the teachers to respond (understandably). We live three miles from town. Not far at all. My children have fallen behind during all of this, over what - internet accessibility?! It's awful. I have already begged with service providers for better service, but I'm out of options. I'm not selling my house and moving, over the INTERNET."

"They gave us Wi-Fi and a Chromebook but where we live the internet doesn't work very well. If it goes virtual for the fall semester I am not sure how my student will keep up with that."

"Provide hotspots to families that have no or poor internet access. Otherwise have less videos that students are expected to watch. It took a long time to get videos to play and sometimes we had our daughter leave it and try again later because it just took too long. Also, with 4 people (2 parents and 2 students) all trying to use the internet it was very difficult for all of us to do our work during the day."

"Provide internet resources at certain times at the school. My son spent quite a bit of time at McDonald's using their internet connection - and consequently purchasing food and drinks. I would like to see the school provide limited internet access, perhaps in the library or cafeteria, or even in the parking lot for those students without internet."

"We do not have internet access at our house and barely have cell phone service in our very rural location. We have been using the public library for our internet access and are VERY disappointed with the state's ridiculous assumption that sitting in a car in the cold for 4 hours 14 miles from home to do homework with a developmentally disabled 16 year old is a viable learning situation."

Home/Remote learning must be flexible to meet the needs of families with working parents.

About 40% of families indicated that someone was either not available or only somewhat available to help their student with their home/remote education (Figure 7). This was often due to the challenges of parents needing to work.

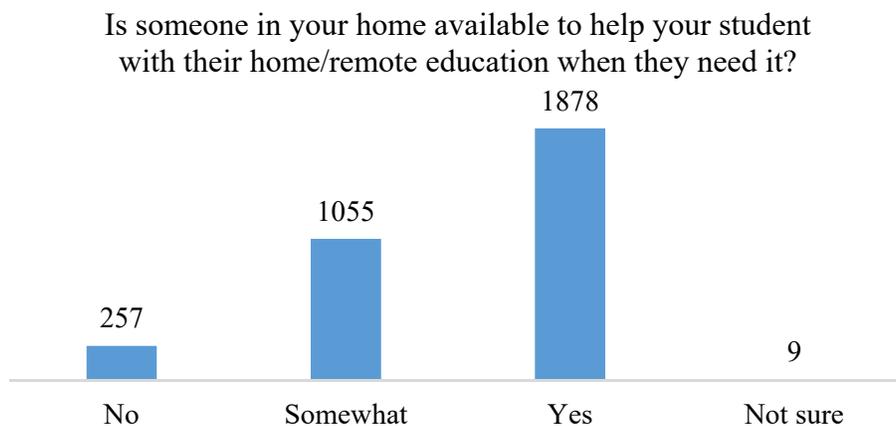


Figure 7: Is someone in your home available to help your student with their home/remote education when they need it?

When asked “What else could your student's school do to help or support you with home/remote learning during the COVID-19 crisis?”, 177 families mentioned that having parents working made supporting their student’s home/remote learning difficult, if not overwhelming.

“Packets of the homework...actual worksheets. Only online does not work for the full time essential parents that work and cannot help their child until evening hours.”

“The amount of paper work sent home and the expectation to also use online resources is too much for their age and the amount of time they say we should be spending each day. It may be possible for kids with parents at home to complete much of the work, but not for working parents.”

“Parents working full time from home cannot dedicate the time needed during the day for the students’ education. Makes work and personal life balance extremely difficult. My child is young k-2 so there was little instruction just worksheets and apps given. The app used by the teacher becomes overwhelming, with the parents receiving upwards of 8 messages and posts from the teacher of things to do daily.”

“Email through Google Classroom was the primary source of communication which was incredibly overwhelming for 7 classes for a middle school student as well as working parents.”

“One of the biggest issues that families are facing is that parents are going back to work full time. They work an 8 hour day to come home to 2-3 hours of assisting or having to actually teach the information provided. That doesn't include the other responsibilities that are just a part of home life. If the schools then factor in extracurricular activities like sports or classes that would require face to face time like music, which would have to be done after work hours, it is becoming an impossible task for families to maintain a healthy environment for the children to receive a positive education.”

Schools should provide more online instruction.

The most common suggestion provided for improving home/remote learning was for teachers to provide more online, synchronous virtual instruction. Instruction could also be recorded and posted online to make it more accessible to families. 560 parent responses were consistent with this sentiment.

“There have been no face to face to meetings either online or in person if needed. Each class should at least have an online class once a week for the teacher to instruct then individual help sessions if needed.”

“Teacher could tape instructional videos with the lessons.”

“Provide online instruction, such as Zoom lectures or YouTube pre-recorded lectures. Our school had NO lectures at all. That is NO way to learn!!”

“I think it would have been nice for each teacher to at least once during the at home learning, have a one on one video meeting with each student, even for just 10 minutes to personally check in. When there were classroom video meetings, many kids were talking at the same time and not muting, etc...so my kids didn't get any personal attention from their teacher. I think my kids felt a bit disconnected from their teacher.”

“Why aren't the teachers teaching the classes live or at least taping videos that the students can watch later? I feel like my child is basically teaching himself. We (child's parents) are essential workers and are not home to help.”

“If schooling is going to continue online, I would like to see teachers check in with students weekly, as well video themselves teaching the lessons.”

Schools should better organize their home/remote learning systems and teachers should coordinate better.

216 families suggested home/remote learning needed to be better organized. Different teachers, within the same school or district, often used different online technologies and had different expectations. The system was often experienced by families as unwieldy and confusing. Families and students received several emails every day from different teachers, which was very difficult to manage for working parents and parents with multiple students in school.

“I believe moving forward it would be beneficial if all teachers were expected to communicate with their students through the same platform.”

“We have 3+ kids. All have somewhat different processes, apps, etc. Some work ok, others not. Things need to be better standardized, concise and worthwhile. It's frustrating to help a kids do an assignment, struggle some with the technology and then see the content was fairly pointless or certainly not very valuable.”

“If we have to do a mix of online or all online next year I would just hope for a consistent set of expectations and schedule. I believe with more time to plan the teachers will be better equipped if that happens.”

“More organized approach. Improve communication. Less places to visit on the internet to get the schooling done. Trying to see if work was completed or not easy chore for the parent. Zoom classroom would have been nice option. At least so the parents and students could all get on the same page from the start.”

As home/remote learning continues, schools need to challenge their students.

Very few families (15%) indicated their student was learning as much as they were before the COVID-19 crisis (Figure 8).

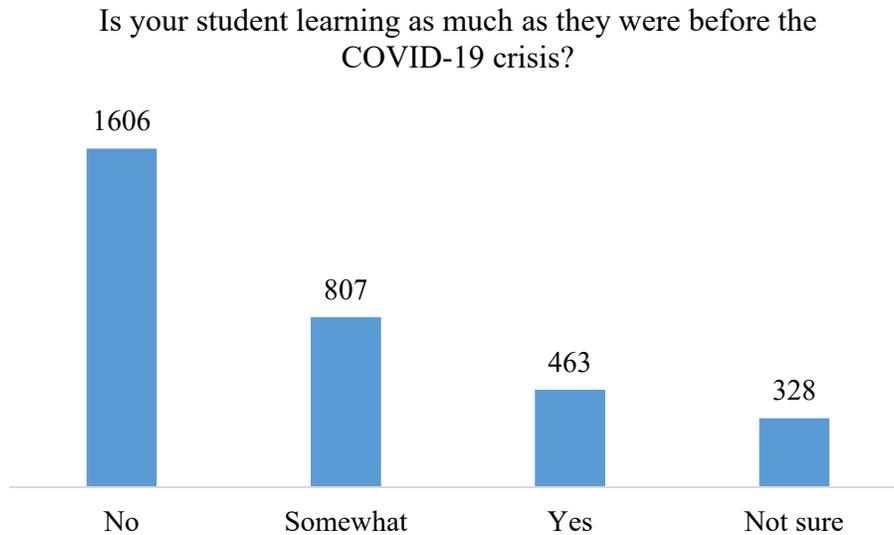


Figure 8: Is your student learning as much as they were before the COVID-19 crisis?

When asked “What else could your student's school do to help or support you with home/remote learning during the COVID-19 crisis?”, 145 families indicated that their student was not learning as much as they were before home/remote learning. Many felt their student was mostly receiving “busy work” and was not engaged in new learning. Many reported their student was bored and not as motivated to learn as a result.

“Provide true learning and new learning. A lot of what he is given is just busy work, and does not challenge him to learn or access new knowledge. Also hold him accountable for his work. His work isn't being graded, and he knows it. So it is a struggle to get him to do the work, and put in an honest effort.”

“Schools need to continue to differentiate so that the work is challenging, engaging, and appropriate for different levels of learning.”

“My child is academically advanced, so the amount of time it takes him per day to do his schoolwork is less than 1 hour. It's frankly a joke and i feel like the last 10 weeks has been an absolute waste of time.”

“More individualized learning and actually teaching them something new. I get that it needs to be equal for all, but now my students are being held back because not everyone has access!”

“More educational structures to advance more learning/material. Not enough as my daughter only spends maybe one hour on what is expected of her watch day. Her leaning is not advancing like it would if it was in class room.”

“I would like to see new material taught. Reviewing for almost three months is ridiculous. It is not enough to keep my student engaged or enough to continue his education.”

Schools should hold students accountable for their work.

47% of families indicated their student was not keeping up with their schoolwork (Figure 9). That many students did not complete their work seems to be at least partially due to schools not holding students accountable for doing the work. It is also partially due to younger students who have working parents and are not as available to help them.

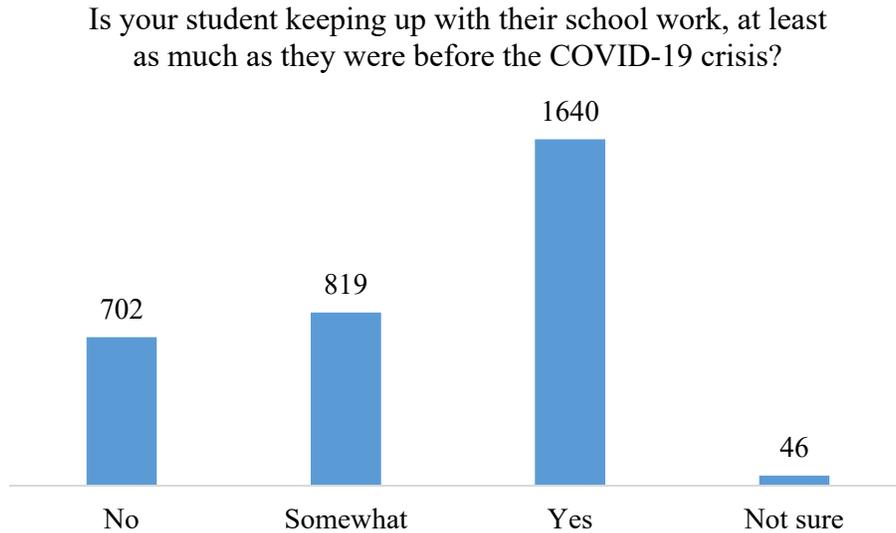


Figure 9: Is your student keeping up with their schoolwork, at least as much as they were before the COVID-19 crisis?

When asked “What else could your student's school do to help or support you with home/remote learning during the COVID-19 crisis?”, 137 families suggested their student’s school did not hold students accountable for their work, which made students less motivated to complete it. As part of this, many schools switched to a pass/fail grading system. Other schools did not grade homework. Many parents expressed frustration that they could not motivate their student to do their work without incentives or accountability.

“My son’s teacher made the mistake of telling the kids that they were going to pass either way, so he didn’t care if he turned his assignments in, which made it very tough for me to discipline him to get his homework turned in.”

“Higher expectations so they actually do the work.”

“Pass/fail took all the incentive away. Couldn’t get our child to do work. Need to stay with ABCDF grades if staying schooling from home.”

“Make homework matter, and count for something.”

“Seniors lost interest fast doing online work, once the fail/pass was in place, it didn't even pay for seniors to continue.”

Schools and teachers need to communicate more with, and be more accessible to, students and families.

About 36% of families indicated their schools had either not communicated, or had only somewhat communicated, regarding how to get help with home/remote learning (Figure 10).

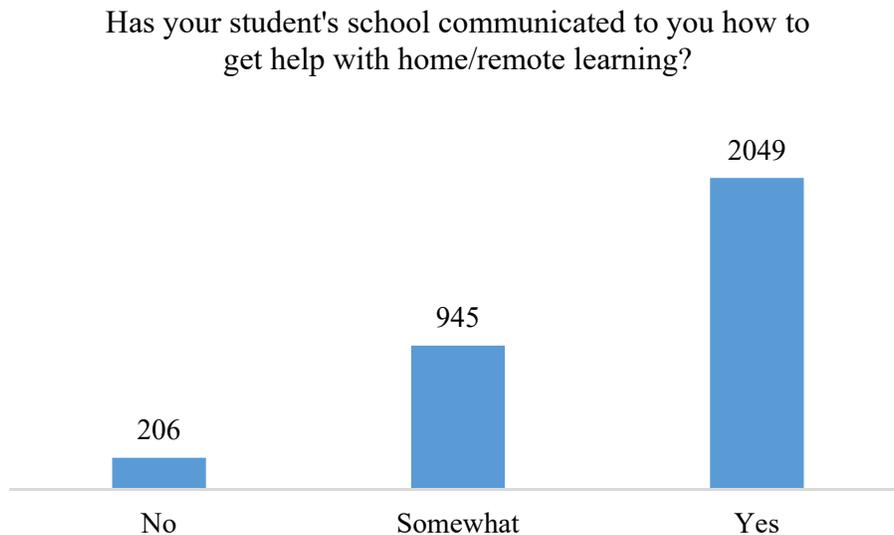


Figure 10: Has your student's school communicated to you how to get help with home/remote learning?

When asked “What else could your student's school do to help or support you with home/remote learning during the COVID-19 crisis?”, 404 families indicated it was important for their school and teacher to communicate more with students and families. This could involve a number of different activities including: emails to parents that help them monitor their student’s assignments and work, feedback to students, providing opportunities for support and clarification, being consistently responsive to emails, and providing emotional support.

“There is not structure to the learning, there needs to be set times that kids are checking in everyday and meeting with teachers, if teachers are not hearing from kids they need to be contacting parents.”

“Better communication!!! Both with parents and students.”

“My son is a high school student who also works, and had a hard time communicating with his teachers.”

“Better communication to students & parents on what is expected and feedback if all is going well.”

“Improve communication between special education teachers and the students they serve.”

“Weekly communications home from the grade level teachers were also reduced to one or two sentences. Pre COVID, these emails were a great place for parents to go to understand what the students were

learning, when assignments were do or tests were scheduled. We needed those emails more than ever, but they were not sent.”

“I believe the teachers did an amazing job and checked in on my child with work and was there to ask questions we would have no issues with continuing this form.”

“We have called the school & left messages for certain teachers in their individual extensions in order to ask questions about work and some have called back and some haven't.”

“My son has multiple teachers in High School & he receives services for special education/has an IEP. The ONLY teacher that reached out was his Special education teacher. The other 5 or 6 teachers just sent assignments online with no explanations or help.”

“I'm very happy with how our high school teachers are still interacting with their students every day and taking time to communicate with the parents.”

“We have called the school & left messages for certain teachers in their individual extensions in order to ask questions about work and some have called back and some haven't.”

“It is confusing at times when items are due. Information wasn't clear at the beginning so items were turned in with the packet that was needed for later weeks. Assignments/ Expectations not always clear to the student. Grading not always up to date because of the large turn in of assignments for teachers to go through, so students don't know where they truly stand with grades. Worrisome for at the end of the semester.....does my child have everything in needed or not? Will it be too late if not? Communication between teachers and students not always in a timely manner. Office hours from 9-11 AM only and even then there is often no teacher response during that time.”

Schools should support the emotional health of students and families.

Home/remote learning and the COVID-19 crisis was mentioned by 81 families as stressful and even impacting their child's emotional health, which interferes with their learning.

“More personal intact from teachers and counselors. My daughter struggled with the amount of work but she wouldn't reach out to her teachers. If a teacher or counselor had called or emailed her directly I think she would have discussed her stress level and anxiety. She isn't the type to ask for help.”

”My husband and I both work full time and it is extremely stressful and challenging to also try to help our 3 kids with their school work.”

“Keep the social-emotional focus especially with the stress created by changes in the lives of children during the pandemic or any other crisis that disrupts their lives.”

“I'm tired of arguing with my son and listening to him cry because he is feeling hopeless. I don't know what the school can do to help with this situation.”

Schools should help students socialize and stay connected with their friends.

Relatedly, 77 families also expressed concern about the impact home/remote learning was having on their child's social development or connectedness to their friends.

"Get back to school. They need their teachers and friends!"

"Kids need the social interaction outside the home."

"They miss seeing and being around their friends and people in general. Socialization is critical, especially for reserved children."

"Socializing is truly important for children and our district has continued to ensure that students still have that even when it cannot be face to face direct contact."

"Things have been going well, but lack of interaction with peers/teachers has me concerned about social development with kids in this age group, in all age groups. When "safer at home" and social distancing has become standard, I can see the effects of students not being able to "interact" like school age kids should be doing. A person gets concerned that it could have adverse effects later in development."

Acknowledgments

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The logo for WEERP consists of the letters W, E, E, R, and P in a large, bold, sans-serif font. Each letter is a different color: W is red, E is black, E is yellow, R is green, and P is blue.

Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness Research Partnership

WEERP conducts rigorous and relevant research to inform the efforts of Wisconsin Educators to improve educator effectiveness and achievement for all students.



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The Wisconsin-Minnesota Comprehensive Center (WMCC10) aims to improve the academic achievement of elementary and secondary school students in the two-state region by advancing the use of evidence-based practices.

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