TEACHERS AND TEACHING IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC:
LESSONS FROM SOUTH CAROLINA

Technical Report on Survey Results

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Introduction

In late May 2020, a survey was administered to all teachers in South Carolina schools who were impacted by the physical closing of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the survey was to learn about teachers' experiences in the transition from classroom to remote instruction. The survey was designed to inform education policy leaders, administrators, and teacher associations as decisions are made about the reopening of school in the Fall. Insights from those who work most closely with children, teachers, are essential.

The development of the survey was led by a research team from the University of South Carolina's College of Education including ALL4SC, SC-TEACHER, and the Research, Evaluation, and Measurement (REM) Center. Support for the project was provided by The South Carolina Education Association (The SCEA), the Palmetto State Teachers Association, and the SC Department Education (SCDE) as well as substantial in-kind support from ALL4SC.[1]

The survey was administered to South Carolina teachers from May 18 to June 3, 2020. Initial email invitations were sent to 46,168 teachers between May 18-20, 2020, and two follow up reminders were sent to those who had not completed the survey by June 2, 2020. In addition, contact information was collected from 788 teachers who had not received email invitations. Email invitations were sent to these teachers between May 26-June 3, 2020 with one follow up reminder sent to those who had not responded by June 3, 2020.

A total of 13,081 respondents initiated the survey. Those who did not proceed past the third page of the ten-page survey or responded to very few items were not included in the analysis. The results in this report are from 12,150 teachers, and the number of respondents to individual survey items ranged from 9,863 to 12,140. The sample, approximately 26% of the state's teachers, was reflective generally of the overall teaching workforce and was reasonably representative of the highest and lowest poverty districts and of districts in rural and urban locations of the state. It is important to note that this voluntary sample of teachers who responded to the survey may differ from the population of all South Carolina teachers on aspects that were not measured.

This report provides a written summary of survey results both overall and by subgroups of six demographic variables. Appendices A-G present results from the survey questions in charts and tables. Appendix A summarizes results for the overall sample, and Appendices B-G provide results by subgroups of each of the six demographic variables. The demographic summaries include splits by teachers from the relatively highest and lowest poverty districts in the state, in rural and urban locations, with less or more teaching experience, who teach elementary or secondary grades, who teach core or other subjects, and who teach special or general education. Focus group interviews, led the staff and consultants of ALL4SC, were conducted in late June to better understand the survey findings.

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[1] ALL4SC, recently launched as part of the UofSC's Excellence Initiative, marshals the asset of the entire university to support high need school communities and prototype a coherent system of early childhood to postsecondary education.

Summary of Findings

Key findings from the survey on South Carolina teachers' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic are provided below. The overall findings are presented first followed by findings for each of the six demographic variables examined. The remaining sections of this report provide detailed results from the survey.

Overall

Teachers were able to reach most of their students and almost half interacted with students almost every day. Most teachers indicated that they created their own course content for remote instruction and many also indicated that they used other resources from their district or school. With the content gathered, teachers frequently used email correspondence with students and parents and online platforms adopted by their districts to deliver instruction during COVID-19 school closures. They general viewed these online platforms as one of the most effective in delivering instruction remotely and email correspondence as moderately effective. Fewer teachers generally used paper packets, which were perceived as the least effective tools.

While most teachers indicated that they have access at home to technology resources for online instruction, some indicated that they lacked comfort using digital tools to teach online. About two-thirds of teachers indicated that their students have access at home to hardware, devices, and software for online learning. However, fewer teachers indicated their students had internet access at home and were comfortable using digital tools for online learning.

Most teachers indicated that they had autonomy to make instructional decisions and that their school/district maintained ongoing communication during the pandemic. Relative to pre-COVID-19 school closures, teachers generally spent more time communicating with parents, being available for office hours, learning new technology, using e-learning tools to engage parents and families, and using e-learning software for skill building. They spent relatively less time on direct teaching/instruction, attending professional development. assessing students by means other than standardized tests, and engaging students in real-world problem-solving.

Most teachers indicated that they received the right level of guidance on expectations and generally received the most support from personnel within their school building. They indicated receiving the most support from other teachers in their school/district as well as from school-level administrators and school-level instructional support staff. Areas where teachers could use more support include providing support for students with disabilities and providing support for English Language Learners.

Teachers were most highly stressed about the well-being of their students, the reopening of schools, educating their own children, and taking care of someone in a high-risk category for COVID-19. While almost all teachers indicated their plan to return to teaching as of the end of the 2019-2020 school year, their main concerns for the 2020-2021 school year included student retention/loss of knowledge, changes to the school schedules, and their own health and safety.

Highest and Lowest Poverty Districts

Teachers in the highest poverty districts more frequently used strategies and tools that did not require much technology to deliver instruction (e.g., paper packets and individual phone/video calls), and teachers in the lowest poverty districts more frequently used technologically advanced methods to deliver instruction (e.g., online platforms adopted by their districts, emails, and live video instruction). Email correspondence was the most common form of instructional delivery during school closures for both groups, though this was reported less often by teachers in the highest poverty districts. Relative to

teachers from the lowest poverty districts, teachers from the highest poverty districts reported less comfort with using digital instructional tools to effectively deliver online instruction and that their students have substantially less access at home to internet, hardware, devices, and software for online instruction. Teachers from the highest poverty districts also indicated that their students were much less comfortable using digital tools to learn.

Teachers in the highest poverty districts were unable to contact a greater percentage of their students during school closures and interacted with their students on a daily basis less often than teachers in the lowest poverty districts. Teachers in the highest poverty districts were more stressed about the well-being of students than teachers from the lowest poverty districts. However, all teachers were similarly stressed about the reopening of schools. Regarding the next school year, teachers in the highest poverty districts expressed more concern about their own health/safety, teacher evaluation, and standardized testing than teachers in the lowest poverty districts. While differences were not observed in plans for the next school year, teachers from the highest poverty districts indicated that the pandemic influenced their decision more so than teachers from the lowest poverty districts.

Rural and Urban Locations

Teachers in rural districts more often used strategies and tools that did not require much technology to deliver instruction (e.g., paper packets prepare by themselves and by their district), and teachers in urban more often used technologically advanced methods to deliver instruction (e.g., online platforms adopted by their districts and live video instruction). Email correspondence was the most common form of instructional delivery during school closures for both groups, though this was reported less often by teachers in rural districts. Further, teachers in urban districts tended to spend more time using digital tools to engage students and their families compared to teachers in rural districts. Teachers from rural districts were much less likely than those from urban districts to indicate that their students had adequate access at home to internet, hardware, devices, and software for online instruction and are comfortable using digital instructional tools.

Teachers in rural districts were generally able to contact fewer students compared to teachers in urban districts. In terms of interactions, teachers in urban districts were more likely to interact with their students every day compared to teachers in rural districts. There were no major differences between teachers in rural and urban districts in stressors, the support and guidance received during the COVID-19 closures, or plans for the 2020-2021 school year.

Years of Teaching Experience

The difference on daily interaction with students by teaching experience level was small. Teachers with more years of teaching experience (15+ years) tended to spend more time learning how to use technology, completing paperwork, using curriculum resources outside from outside their school or district, and participating in informal professional development than less experienced teachers. More experienced teachers more often used emails to student and parents to deliver instruction and viewed the practice as more effective than less experienced teachers. They also spent more time engaging students in skill building using e-learning software and using e-tools to engage parents and families. Both groups of teachers reported similar levels of access at home to technology resources for online instruction for both themselves and their students, though reports of student access were lower. Teachers with 14 years or less experience reported greater personal comfort but less student comfort with using digital instructional tools than teachers with more experience.

Compared to teachers with more experience, teachers with 14 or less years of experience were less likely to indicate receiving the right level of guidance in expectations regarding providing support for students with disabilities, providing support for English Language Learners, evaluating student work, and

communicating with parents. Teachers with less experience also were more highly stressed about taking care of and educating their own child/children. There were no major differences by experience level in their concerns about and plans for the next school year.

Elementary and Secondary Grades

Teachers of elementary grades more often used strategies and tools that did not require much technology to deliver instruction (e.g., paper packets and individual phone/video calls), and teachers of secondary grades more often used technologically advanced methods to deliver instruction (e.g., online platforms adopted by their district and emails). While both groups reported similar access at home to resources for online instruction, fewer teachers of elementary grades were comfortable using digital instructional tools than those who taught secondary grades. Elementary teachers also reported less student access at home to hardware, devices, software and internet access, and lower student comfort with digital instructional tools than secondary teachers.

Teacher of all grades were able to contact most of their students and about half of them interacted with their students daily. Concerning changes in time spent on tasks during school closures, both groups reported spending more or much more time communicating with parents and holding office hours at relatively high rates. Elementary teachers tended to spend more time using e-tools to engage parents and families, learning how to use technology, and communicating with parents than secondary teachers. Secondary teachers tended to spend more time communicating with students, evaluating student work, and assessing students through means other than standardized tests than elementary teachers. Elementary grade teachers reported that they were less adjusted to remote teaching and experienced greater stress around the change in teaching modalities than secondary grade teachers.

Core and Other Subjects

Core-subjects teachers reported that they had daily interactions with their students and that their students completed assignments at high rates more often than teachers of other subjects. Among various strategies and tools to deliver instruction, both groups of teachers used online platforms adopted by their district and emails to students and parents most frequently. Core-subjects teachers used phone/video calls, email correspondence, and live video instruction more frequently and spent more time communicating with parents than those who teach other subjects. Both groups of teachers reported similar levels of access to and comfort with technology for online learning for both themselves and their students, though reports for student access and comfort were lower.

Both groups received support from school-level personnel at high rates. However, teachers of other subjects more frequently received support from teachers outside of their school/district and others than those who teach core subjects. Teachers of other subjects also reported greater autonomy to make instructional decisions and spending more time using curriculum resources available outside of their school or district during COVID-19 school closures than teachers of core subjects. Regarding the next school year, teachers of core subjects reported greater concern about standardized testing and student retention/loss of knowledge than teachers of other subjects. While differences were not observed in plans for the next school year, teachers of other subjects indicated that the pandemic influenced their decision more so than teachers of core subjects.

Special and General Education

General education teachers reported daily interactions with their students at a higher rate than special education teachers. Email correspondence and online platforms were the most often reported strategy for instructional delivery during COVID-19 school closures by both groups, though general education teachers used online platforms more often than special education teachers. Compared to general education

teachers, special education teachers more often used individual phone or video calls with students and self-prepared paper packets to deliver instruction. Special education teachers reported less student access at home to hardware, devices, software, and internet access, and lower student comfort with digital instructional tools than general education teachers.

Both general and special education teachers reported creating their own materials for remote instruction at a high rate. Special education teachers also tended to use resources from their school district and received support from district-level administrators more often than general education teachers. Compared to general education teachers, special education teachers indicated spending much more time relative to pre-COVID-19 providing support for students with disabilities and completing paperwork/documentation and less time evaluating student work. Special education teachers reported that they were less adjusted to remote teaching and experienced greater stress around the change in teaching modalities than general education teachers. For the next school year, general education teachers tended to have greater concern about standardized testing and teacher evaluation than special education teachers.

Overall Results

This section summarizes responses to the survey questions for the entire sample of teachers. The analysis sample included 12,150 teachers. Appendix A provides charts that display the results for the entire sample for all survey questions.

Interactions with Students

As COVID-19 prompted the closing of schools, forcing teachers and students to rely solely on remote teaching and learning, it also prompted possible changes in where teachers get resources to deliver course content and their interactions with students. When asked where they obtain the resources used to provide course content, a large majority of teachers (81%) indicated creating their own course content, with very few teachers obtaining resources from the SCDE (14%).

In terms of teachers' interactions with their students, most teachers reported being able to reach the majority of their students. The median percentage of students that teachers were able to contact was 95%. Further, 84% of teachers indicated that they attempted but were unable to contact 20% or fewer of their students, meaning they were able to contact at least 80% of their students. When asked about how often they interacted with their students, about half of all teachers (49%) reported almost every day of the school week and another 42% of teachers reported at least weekly interactions.

When asked about the percentage of students who have completed assignments, most teachers (37%) indicated that between 81-100% of their students completed assignments, while 27% indicated between 61-80%. Essentially, for most teachers, the majority of their students completed assignments.

Strategies and Tools for Remote Instruction

As instruction changed from predominantly face-to-face to remote instruction, teachers had to make many decisions as to how to best educate their students. One of those decisions was selecting tools that would allow them and their students to continue with teaching and learning. Of the array of different strategies and tools available for delivering instruction, the ones used most often were online platforms adopted by teachers' school districts (77%) and emails to students and parents (76%). When asked about the effectiveness of such strategies, the majority (66%) of teachers who used district-adopted online platforms perceived the strategy as effective or very effective, but slightly less than half (49%) of those who used emails to students and parents perceived the strategy that way. The tool used least often was visits to students' homes (1%); however, of the teachers who used home visits to deliver instruction, most of them (61%) perceived it as an effective or very effective strategy. Of the other strategies used by teachers, the ones deemed least effective were paper packets prepared by schools/districts (31% reporting effective or very effective) and paper packets prepared by teachers (35% reporting effective or very effective).

Access and Comfort for Online Instruction

In addition to inquiring about instructional tools and strategies used to teach remotely, teachers were asked about both their own and their students' access and comfort for online teaching and learning. Although not all teachers used online tools to deliver instruction, the vast majority agreed or strongly agreed that they had access to the hardware and device (89%), software (87%), and internet (89%) to effectively teach online. In addition, 79% indicated that they were comfortable using digital instructional tools to effectively deliver online instruction. While this was the case, teachers indicated students' access to and comfort with technology for online learning to a lesser extent. More specifically, fewer teachers agreed or strongly agreed that their students had access at home to the hardware and devices (68%), software (67%), and internet (58%) to effectively learn online. Fewer teachers also indicated that their students were comfortable using digital instructional tools to learn effectively online (56%).

Changes in How Time is Spent

As COVID-19 closures prompted changes in how teachers educate students, it also prompted changes in the amount of time teachers spent doing certain tasks compared to time spent pre-COVID-19. Teachers spent more or much more time communicating with parents (74%), holding office hours (65%), and learning how to use technology (55%), and spent less or much less time on direct teaching (78%) and attending required professional development (48%) compared to pre-COVID-19. The amount of time spent completing paperwork/documentation, preparing lessons, communicating with students, evaluating student work, attending staff meetings, providing support for students with disabilities, and providing support for English Language Learners was less or about the same as compared to time spent prior to COVID-19 for the majority of teachers.

Changes in Instructional Practices

Just as the switch to remote learning meant changes in the amount of time teachers spent doing certain tasks, it also prompted changes in various instructional practices. These changes may have been due to requirements of their schools/districts or teachers' own decision-making. When asked whether they had autonomy to make instructional decisions during school closures, 79% agreed or strongly agreed that they did.

In terms of specific practices that teachers used for instruction during school closures, teachers indicated that they spent more or much more time on e-tools for engaging parents and families (63%) and skill building using e-learning software (50%), but spent less or much less time on student assessments other than standardized tests (40%) and engaging students in real-world problem solving (39%) compared to pre-COVID-19.

Guidance and Support

With the multitude of and swiftness with which schools switched to remote learning, it was paramount for teachers to receive guidance and feel supported as they continued to educate their students. When asked about communication from their schools/districts, the majority of teachers (89%) agreed or strongly agreed that their schools/districts had maintained communication relative to the COVID-19 pandemic. We also asked teachers about the level of guidance they received on expectations related to different aspects of teaching. The aspects that teachers indicated receiving about the right amount of guidance at high rates include being available online (86%), communicating with students (83%), and communicating with parents (80%). However, more than a third of teachers reported receiving none or too little guidance providing support for students with disabilities (36%) and providing support for English Language Learners (40%). In addition, 27% of teachers reported receiving none or too little guidance on teaching remotely.

In addition to asking about the level of guidance received, we also inquired about who provided teachers with support during the transition to remote learning. Sources of support included district-level administrators, school-level administrators, school-level instructional support staff, teachers within their school/district, teachers outside of their school/district, and others. Most teachers tended to get support from colleagues closest to them in terms of access. More specifically, teachers received moderate or extensive support from teachers in their school/district (85%), school-level administrators (81%), and school-level instructional support staff (72%).

Adjustment and Sources of Stress

As teachers switched to remote teaching during pandemic-related school closures, it not only prompted changes in teaching practices and how teachers interact with students and families, it also had the potential to add stress to their lives both professionally and personally. When asked about their adjustment to online learning, slightly more than half of teachers (56%) indicated that they were adjusted or well adjusted to remote teaching and learning. In terms of sources of stress, the majority of teachers indicated being moderately or highly stressed due to their concern for the well-being of students (80%). A large percentage also reported being stressed about the reopening of schools (66%). In addition to those work-related sources of stress, most teachers indicated educating their own child/children (57%) and taking care of someone considered high-risk for COVID-19 (54%) as personal stressors that they were experiencing.

Next School Year

Not only were teachers stressed due to the circumstances of teaching during the pandemic, but they were also concerned about plans for the 2020-2021 school year. When asked about their level of concern regarding the new school year, teachers most often reported being moderately or very concerned about student retention/loss of knowledge (77%), potential changes in the school schedule (75%), and their own health/safety (63%). The majority of teachers were not or only somewhat concerned about standardized testing (52%) and teacher evaluation (54%).

Even with their concerns, almost all teachers (94%) indicated that they plan to return to school for the 2020-2021 school year, with only 2% indicating that they would leave the education profession and only 1% planning to retire. When asked how much of an influence the COVID-19 pandemic had on their plans for next year, most teachers indicated that it was not influential (55%). It is important to note that this information was reported at the end of the 2019-2020 school year. Responses may differ if teachers were asked during the summer when the state saw a rise in the number of COVID-19 cases.

Results by Highest and Lowest Poverty Districts

This section summarizes survey results by teachers from the highest and lowest poverty school districts. The data set was subset to teachers who were from districts with the highest quartile (percentage of pupils in poverty [PIP[2]] at or above Q3=80.0%) and lowest quartile (percentage of PIP at or below Q1=61.4%) of poverty in the state. Teachers who taught at districts between these poverty ranges (n=4,028) were not include in this analysis. Appendix B provides charts that display comparisons of results by teachers from the highest and lowest poverty school districts for all survey questions.

Interacting with Students

When asked where they obtained resources used to provide course content, teachers in the highest poverty districts were more likely to get resources from their school compared to teachers in the lowest poverty districts (57% vs. 45%). Alternatively, teachers in the lowest poverty districts were more likely to create their own resources (85% vs. 74%). In terms of obtaining resources from their school districts, the SCDE, and other places, there was not much of a difference between these teacher subgroups.

As most teachers were able to contact the majority of their students, the median percentage of students that teachers attempted but were unable to contact was greater in the highest than in the lowest poverty districts (10% vs. 4%). Furthermore, when asked how often they have interacted with their students, more teachers in the lowest poverty districts reported almost every day compared to teachers in the highest poverty districts (53% vs. 39%).

We also asked teachers what percentage of their students completed assignments since the school closings. There was little difference between teachers in the highest versus lowest poverty districts, except at the highest completion rate where teachers reported more students from the lowest poverty districts completing 91-100% of assignments than the highest poverty districts (19% vs, 11%).

Strategies and Tools for Remote Instruction

Teachers were asked about the frequency with which they used certain strategies and tools to deliver instruction as well as their perception of the effectiveness of each. Teachers in the highest poverty districts reported using methods that relied less on technology more frequently than teachers in the lowest poverty districts. Teachers in the highest poverty districts used paper packets prepared by themselves (55% vs. 17%), paper packets prepared by their school/district (33% vs. 13%), and individual phone or video calls (52% vs. 37%) more than teachers in the lowest poverty districts, while teachers in the lowest poverty districts used online platforms adopted by their districts (83% vs. 55%), emails to students and parents (79% vs. 65%), and live video instruction (32% vs. 20%) more often than teachers in the highest poverty districts.

We also asked about their perception of the effectiveness of the strategies or tools in delivering instruction. Teachers in the highest poverty districts reported paper packets prepared by themselves (46% vs. 31%) and paper packets prepared by their school/district (41% vs. 26%) as effective or very effective more than teachers in the lowest poverty districts. Teachers in the lowest poverty districts reported online platforms adopted by their districts as effective or very effective more than teachers in the highest poverty districts (69% vs. 51%).

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[2] Data source: Percentage of Pupils in Poverty (PIP) from SC 135-day headcount data for the 2019-20 school year: https://ed.sc.gov/data/other/student-counts/active-student-headcounts/

Access and Comfort for Online Instruction

Teachers were asked about both their own and their students' access and comfort for online teaching and learning. In regard to teachers' access to the necessary hardware, software, and internet to effectively teach online, there were differences between teachers who teach in the highest versus lowest poverty districts. Further, teachers in the highest poverty districts were less likely to agree or strongly agree that they were comfortable using digital instructional tools to teach online (71% vs. 80%).

Of all survey items, those related to students' access and comfort for online instruction showed the greatest differences between teachers from the lowest versus highest poverty districts. Teachers from the highest poverty districts agreed or strongly agreed much less that their students were comfortable using online tools for learning (42% vs. 60%) and substantially less that their students have access at home to software (38% vs. 74%), internet (30% vs. 66%), and hardware/devices (40% vs. 77%) to effectively learn online.

Changes in How Time is Spent

During the change to remote teaching and learning, teachers experienced changes in how their time was spent. Of the 12 tasks included on the survey, teachers in the lowest poverty districts were more likely to spend more or much more time attending staff meetings (25% vs. 18%) and preparing lessons (43% vs. 34%) during school closures than teachers in the highest poverty districts. In terms of attending required professional development, communicating with parents, communicating with students, completing paperwork/documentation, direct teaching/instruction, evaluating student work, learning how to use technology, holding office hours, preparing lessons, providing support for English Language Learners, and providing support for students with disabilities, differences were less than 5%.

Changes in Instructional Practices

When asked about the autonomy to make instructional decisions during school closures, teachers in the lowest poverty districts agreed or strongly agreed that they had autonomy to make instructional decisions slightly more than teachers in the highest poverty districts (82% vs. 75%). In terms of time spent completing certain tasks relative to pre-COVID-19, there were notable differences in the amount of time teachers spent engaging in skill building using e-learning software (52% vs. 44%) and e-tools to engage families and parents (66% vs. 54%) with more teachers in the lowest poverty districts spending more or much more time compared to teachers in the highest poverty districts.

Guidance and Support

When asked to indicate the extent to which they received support during the switch to remote learning from various people, there were not many differences in the percentage of teachers from the lowest versus highest poverty districts in whom they received moderate or extensive support. However, regarding the level of guidance teachers received about expectations about certain tasks, teachers from the lowest poverty districts reported they received the right amount of guidance about providing support for English Language Learners (60% vs. 50%), teaching remotely (70% vs. 63%), and providing support for students with disabilities (62% vs. 57%) more often than their colleagues in the highest poverty districts; while teachers from the highest poverty districts reported they received the right amount of guidance evaluating student work more often than teachers from the lowest poverty districts (76% vs. 71%).

Adjustment and Sources of Stress

When asked about their adjustment to online learning, teachers in the lowest poverty districts indicated that they were adjusted or well adjusted more than teachers in the highest poverty districts (57% vs. 47%). In terms of sources of stress, teachers in the highest poverty districts experienced high stress due to concern for the well-being of students (56% vs. 47%) and new remote teaching expenses (25% vs. 18%) more than teachers in the lowest poverty districts. However, teachers in the lowest poverty districts experienced high stress because of the change from in-person to remote teaching and learning (26% vs. 20%) more than teachers from the highest poverty districts. Among work related stressors, the most notable difference between teachers who teach in the highest versus lowest poverty districts was related to taking care of someone in a high-risk category regarding COVID-19, with teachers in the highest poverty districts more likely to be highly stressed than teachers in the lowest poverty districts (37% vs. 29%).

Next School Year

Teachers were asked about their concerns and plans for the 2020-2021 school year. Teachers in the highest poverty districts were more moderately to very concerned about their own health and safety (74% vs. 61%), teacher evaluation (56% vs. 44%) and standardized testing (58% vs. 46%) compared to teachers in the lowest poverty districts. While there were differences in concerns between the teachers, there were no major differences in teachers' plans to return, retire, or leave the field of education next school year. However, teachers from the highest poverty districts more often indicated the COVID-19 pandemic was moderately to very influential on their plans for next year than teachers from the lowest poverty districts (36% vs. 25%).

Results by Rural and Urban Location

This section summarizes survey results by teachers from school districts in rural and urban locations[3]. The data set was split between teachers who were from school districts classified as rural and urban locations. Appendix C provides charts that display comparisons of results by teachers from school districts in rural and urban locations for all survey questions.

Interacting with Students

When asked where they obtained resources used to provide course content, teachers from urban districts were more likely to get resources from their school district compared to teachers in the rural districts (57% vs. 45%). In terms of obtaining resources from their schools, the SCDE, themselves, and other places, there was not much of a difference between these teacher subgroups.

As most teachers were able to contact the majority of their students, the median percentage of students that teachers attempted but were able to contact was slightly greater for rural versus urban school districts (8% vs. 5%). When asked how often they have interacted with their students, more teachers in urban districts reported almost every day compared to teachers in rural districts (53% vs. 46%). We also asked teachers what percentage of their students completed assignments since the school closings and found little difference between teachers in rural versus urban districts.

Strategies and Tools for Remote Instruction

Teachers were asked about the frequency with which they used certain strategies and tools to deliver instruction as well as their perception of the effectiveness of each. Of the array of different strategies and tools available for delivering instruction, there were stark differences in how often teachers in rural versus urban districts used certain tools. Teachers in rural districts indicated often using paper packets prepared by themselves (37% vs. 19%) and by their school districts (26% vs. 16%) more often than teachers in urban districts. When asked about the effectiveness of such strategies, teachers in rural districts tended to perceive self-prepared paper packets as effective or very effective more than teachers in urban districts (41% vs. 32%). Teachers in urban districts indicated often using live video instruction (33% vs. 23%) and online platforms adopted by their districts (82% vs. 65%) much more than teachers in rural districts. Teachers in urban districts were also more likely than rural teachers to perceive online platforms adopted by their districts as effective or very effective compared to teachers in rural districts (68% vs. 58%).

Access and Comfort for Online Instruction

Teachers were asked about both their own and their students' access and comfort for online teaching and learning. In regard to teachers' comfort using digital tools to teach online and their access to the necessary hardware, software, and internet to effectively teach online, there were small differences (between 4% to 6%) between teachers who teach in rural versus urban school districts. However, there were stark differences when teachers referenced their students. Teachers from rural districts agreed or strongly agreed much less that their students were comfortable using online tools for learning (49% vs. 59%) and substantially less that their students have access at home to software (52% vs. 71%), internet (41% vs. 63%), and hardware/devices (55% vs. 74%) to effectively learn online.

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[3] Data source: E-rate data from the 2017-18 school year (most recent available as of July 2020) for free/reduced lunch eligibility: https://ed.sc.gov/districts-schools/nutrition/meal-programs/national-school-lunch-program/e-rate-free-and-reduced-meal-eligibility-data/

Changes in How Time is Spent

COVID-19 closures prompted changes in the amount of time teachers spent doing certain tasks compared to time spent pre-COVID-19. Of the 12 tasks included on the survey, teachers in urban districts were more likely to spend more or much more time attending staff meetings (25% vs. 16%), completing paperwork/documentation (48% vs. 38%), and providing support for English Language Learners (22% vs. 14%) compared to teachers in rural districts. In terms of attending required professional development, communicating with parents, communicating with students, direct teaching/instruction, evaluating student work, learning how to use technology, holding office hours, preparing lessons, and providing support for students with disabilities, differences were relatively small.

Changes in Instructional Practices

When asked about the autonomy to make instructional decisions during school closures, there was not a notable difference between teachers in rural versus urban districts in the percentage who agreed or strongly agreed that they had such autonomy. In terms of time spent completing certain tasks relative to pre-COVID-19, there were notable differences in the amount of time teachers spent engaging in skill building using e-learning software (52% vs. 44%), e-tools to engage families and parents (65% vs. 59%), and engaging in informal professional learning (37% vs. 31%) with more teachers in urban districts spending more or much more time compared to teachers in rural districts.

Guidance and Support

When asked to indicate the extent to which they received support during the switch to remote learning from people such as district-level administrators, school-level-administrators, school-level instructional support staff, teachers within their school/district, teachers outside their school/district, and others, differences in the percentage of teachers from rural versus urban districts in whom they received moderate or extensive support was 5% or less. Likewise, there were small differences in the level of guidance teachers received about expectations regarding certain tasks related to teaching. The largest difference was for teaching remotely, where the percentage of teachers who reported they received the right amount of support from rural districts was less than that of urban districts (64% vs. 70%).

Adjustment and Sources of Stress

When asked about their adjustment to online learning, teachers in urban districts indicated that they were adjusted or well adjusted more than teachers in rural districts (58% vs. 48%). In terms of sources of stress, there were no notable differences in the percentage of rural versus urban teachers who indicated being moderately to highly stressed about work-related and personal stressors.

Next School Year

When asked about their level of concern about different topics pertaining to the 2020-2021 school year, teachers in rural districts reported they were moderately to very concerned about standardized testing (54% vs. 47%) more often than teachers in urban districts. Differences between teachers from rural and urban schools in their plans to return, retire, or leave the field of education next school year were negligible. Further, the difference in the influence that the COVID-19 had on plans for next year between teachers from rural and urban schools was small.

Results by Years of Teaching Experience

This section summarizes survey results by teachers' years of teaching experience. The data set was split between teachers who had relatively less experience (14 or less years of experience) and those who had relatively more experience (15 or more years of experience). Appendix D provides charts that display comparisons of results by teachers with relatively less (14 or fewer) and more (15 or more) years of teaching experience for all survey questions.

Interacting with Students

When asked where they obtained resources used to provide course content, there were small differences (less than 5%) between the percentage of teachers with 14 or less years of experience and those with 15 or more years for all source listed.

As most teachers were able to contact the majority of their students, there was not much difference in the median percentage of students teachers attempted but were able to contact between teachers with 14 or less years versus teachers with 15 or more years (6% vs. 5%). In addition, difference between those with relatively less or more experience were relatively low (less than 5%) for how often they interacted with their students and the percentage of students who completed assignments.

Strategies and Tools for Remote Instruction

Of the array of different strategies and tools available for delivering instruction, there was a slight difference in how often teachers with 14 or less versus teachers with 15 or more years of teaching experience used certain tools. Teachers with 15 or more years of experience indicated often using emails to students and parents more often compared to teachers with 14 years of less of teaching experience (79% vs. 73%). When asked about the effectiveness of the strategy, teachers with 15 or more years of experience tended to perceive this tool as effective or very effective more than teachers with fewer years of experience (53% vs. 46%). In terms of the effectiveness of other strategies, teachers with the most years of experience were more likely to perceive paper packets prepared by their school districts (34% vs. 28%) and paper packets prepared by themselves (38% vs. 31%) as effective or very effective compared to teachers with 14 or less years of experience.

Access and Comfort for Online Instruction

We asked teachers about both their own and their students' access and comfort for online teaching and learning. Regarding teachers' access to the necessary hardware, software, and internet to effectively teach online, there were only slight differences between teachers in these subgroups. However, in terms of teachers' comfort in using digital tools to deliver instruction, teachers with 15 or more years of experience were slightly less likely to agree or strongly agree that they were comfortable compare to their less experienced colleagues (76% vs. 81%). In reference to their students, teachers with 15 or more years of experience tended to agree or strongly agree more than teachers with less experience that their students had adequate internet access at home (61% vs. 55%) and that their students were comfortable using digital instructional tools (61% vs. 52%) to effectively learn online.

Changes in How Time is Spent

COVID-19 closures prompted changes in the amount of time teachers spent doing certain tasks compared to time spent pre-COVID-19. Of the 12 tasks included on the survey, teachers with 15 or more years of teaching experience were more likely to spend more or much more time learning how to use technology (60% vs. 51%), completing paperwork/documentation (48% vs. 43%), and preparing lessons (43% vs. 38%) compared to their less experienced colleagues. In terms of attending required professional development, attending staff meetings, communicating with parents, communicating with students, direct teaching/instruction, evaluating student work, holding office hours, providing support for English Language Learners, and providing support for students with disabilities, differences were minimal.

Changes in Instructional Practices

When asked about the autonomy to make instructional decisions during school closures, the percentage who agreed or strongly agreed that they had such autonomy was about the same for teachers in these subgroups. In terms of time spent completing certain tasks relative to pre-COVID-19, there were notable differences in the amount of time teachers spent engaging in curriculum resources available outside teachers' districts (43% vs. 37%), informal professional learning (38% vs. 32%), skill building using e-learning software (52% vs. 48%), and e-tools to engage families and parents (66% vs. 61%), where teachers with 15 or more years of experience had a greater increase in the amount of time on these tasks than teachers with 14 or less years of experience.

Guidance and Support

When asked to indicate the extent to which they received support during the switch to remote learning from people such as district-level administrators, school-level-administrators, school-level instructional support staff, teachers within their school/district, teachers outside their school/district, and others, the most notable difference was in the percentage who received moderate or extensive support from district-level administrators, with teachers with 15 or more years of experiences providing such indication more than teachers with 14 or less years (60% vs. 54%). There were also notable differences in the level of guidance teachers received about expectations regarding certain tasks related to teaching. Teachers with 15 or more years of experience were more likely to report receiving the right amount of guidance compared to teachers with 14 or less years of experience in providing support for students with disabilities (68% vs. 57%), providing support for English Language Learners (64% vs. 54%), evaluating student work (75% vs. 68%), and communicating with parents (83% vs. 77%).

Adjustment and Sources of Stress

When asked about their adjustment to online learning, the difference in the percentage who districts indicated that they were adjusted or well adjusted to remote teaching and learning between the teacher years of experience subgroups was negligible. In terms of sources of stress, teachers with 14 or less years of experienced were more likely to report high levels of stress related to taking care of their own child/children (31% vs. 18%) and educating their own child/children (33% vs. 27%) compared to teachers with 15 or more years of experience.

Next School Year

When asked about their level of concern about different topics pertaining to the 2020-2021 school year, differences between the subgroups of teachers with relatively less or more experience were fairly small (less than 5%). In addition, there were no notable differences related teachers' plans to return, retire, or leave the field of education next school year, and the difference in the extent to which the COVID-19 influenced their plans was small.

Results by Elementary and Secondary Grades

This section summarizes results by teachers of different grade levels. The data set was subset to teachers who taught only elementary grades (pre-K to 5) and those who taught only secondary grades (6-12). Teachers who reported they taught both elementary and secondary grades (N=315) were not included in this analysis. Appendix E provides charts that display comparisons of results by teachers of elementary and secondary grades for all survey questions.

Interacting with Students

In terms of sources for resources to provide course content to students for remote instruction, teachers of secondary grades more often created their own compared to teachers of elementary grades (85% vs. 77%), while teachers of elementary grades more often used resources from their school districts or school (61% vs. 44% and 49% vs. 40%, respectively) compare to teachers of secondary grades. No notable differences were observed in the median percentage of students they attempted to and were unable to contact or in the frequency of daily interactions with students.

Very few teachers indicated not requiring students to complete assignments since school closing due to COVID-19, but teachers of elementary grades indicated that students were not required to complete assignments more often than secondary teachers (5% vs. 1%). There were small differences between teachers of elementary and secondary grades in the percentage of students who completed assignments across the completion rate ranges. The largest difference was for students completing 91-100% of assignments where elementary grade teachers reported this completion rate more often than secondary grade teachers (23% vs. 16%).

Strategies and Tools for Remote Instruction

Teachers were asked about the frequency with which they used certain strategies and tools to deliver instruction as well as their perception of the effectiveness of each. When viewing results by subgroups, teachers of elementary grades were less likely to use online platforms (71% vs. 83%) but were more likely to use paper packets either prepared by the district (29% vs. 9%) or themselves (29% vs. 18%) than teachers of secondary grades. Teachers of elementary grades also used phone calls or video calls with students more often than teachers of secondary grades (47% vs. 33%). Teachers from both categories viewed the strategies they often used as more effective than others.

Access and Comfort for Online Instruction

Teachers of both elementary and secondary grades indicated they had access to the resources needed to effectively teach online at similar rates. However, teachers of elementary grades were less likely to be comfortable using digital instructional tools for online instruction (71% vs. 84% reporting agree or strongly agree) than teachers of secondary grades. In addition, elementary grade teachers less often agreed or strongly agreed that their students had access to hardware (59% vs. 78%), software (56% vs. 75%), and internet (51% vs. 65%) and were comfortable using digital tools (59% vs. 78%) compared to their secondary grade counterparts.

Changes in How Time is Spent

During the change to remote instruction and learning, teachers experienced changes in how their time was spent. Teachers of elementary grades were more likely than teachers of secondary grades to indicate spending more time learning how to use technology (63% vs. 49%) and communicating with parents (80% vs. 69%) relative to pre-COVID-19. Further, teachers of secondary grades were more likely to indicate spending more time on evaluating student work (38% vs. 24%) and communicating with students (42% vs. 27%) during the school closures.

Changes in Instructional Practices

Regrading autonomy given by their school/district, no major difference was found between teachers of elementary grades and teachers of secondary grades. In terms of relative amount of time educators spent engaging in the teaching practices compared to before COVID-19 school closures, differences were found in for some practices. Teachers of elementary grades more often indicated spending more time using e-tools to engage parents and families (72% vs. 56%), skill building using e-learning software (54% vs. 46%), and informal professional learning (38% vs. 33%) than their secondary counterparts. Further, teachers of secondary grades spent more time than teachers of elementary grades on student assessments other than standardized tests (33% vs. 22%).

Guidance and Support

Both teachers of elementary and secondary agreed or agreed at similar rates that their school/district had maintained ongoing communication with teachers relative to the COVID-19 pandemic. Regarding the people from whom educators received moderate or extensive support during the switch to remote learning, no major differences were found between teachers of elementary grades and teachers of secondary grades. Teachers of elementary grades less frequently indicated receiving about right guidance on evaluating student work (69% vs. 74%), providing support for students with disabilities (59% vs. 65%), and providing support for English Language Learners(57% vs. 62%) than teachers of secondary grades, but they more frequently indicated receiving about right guidance on teaching remotely (65% vs. 71%).

Adjustment and Sources of Stress

Educators' adjustment to remote teaching and learning varied greatly between grade levels, with a much larger proportion of teachers of secondary grades reporting adjusted or well adjusted than teachers of elementary grades (63% vs. 47%). For potential sources of work-related stress, teachers of elementary grades more frequently reported high stress in concern for the well-being of students (54% vs. 45%) and the change from in-person to remote teaching and learning (31% vs. 20%) than their secondary counterparts. For potential sources of personal stress, teachers of elementary grades more often reported high stress in educating their child/children (33% vs. 27%) and taking care of their own children (28% vs. 22%) than teachers of secondary grades.

Next School Year

Regarding current level of concern for the 2020-2021 school year, teachers of elementary grades more often indicated they were moderately or very concerned about student retention/loss of knowledge (82% vs. 72%) and standardized testing (53% vs. 45%) than teachers of secondary grades. With over 96% of teachers planning to return to teaching or another position in education, no notable differences were found in teachers' plans for next year or about the influence that COVID-19 pandemic had on their plans between teachers of elementary and secondary grades.

Results by Core and Other Subjects

This section summarizes results between teachers who taught different subjects. The data set was subset to teachers who taught only core subjects (ELA, math, science, and/or social studies) and those who taught only other subjects (career technology, English language learners, fine arts, physical education/health/wellness, special education, and/or world languages). Teachers who reported they taught both core and other subjects (N=1,136) were not included in this analysis. Appendix F provides charts that display comparisons of results by teachers of core and other subjects for all survey questions.

Interacting with Students

During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers used different resources for remote instruction. Those who taught core subjects more frequently indicated getting resources from their school (47% vs. 30%) or school district (53% vs. 36%) than those who teach other subjects The median percentage of students that teachers attempted but were unable to contact was slightly less for teachers of core versus other subjects (5% vs. 7%). A larger percentage of core-subject teachers interacted with their students almost every day (53% vs. 36%), and they also more often indicated that between 81% and 100% of their students completed assignments than those who teach other subjects (42% vs. 25%).

Strategies and Tools for Remote Instruction

Teachers relied on a variety of strategies and tools to deliver remote instruction during school closures. Core-subjects teachers more frequently used individual phone calls or video calls with students (40% vs. 25%), emails to students and parents (78% vs. 67%), and live video instruction (32% vs. 22%) than teachers of other subjects. Core-subjects teachers more frequently reported emails to students, self-prepared paper packets, and individual phone or video call with student as effective or very effective than those who teach other subjects (differences between 8% and 11%).

Access and Comfort for Online Instruction

We asked teachers about both their own and their students' access and comfort for online teaching and learning. Differences in teachers' reported access to resources and comfort to conduct online teaching between teachers of core and other subjects were small (3% or less). In addition, differences between teachers of core and other subjects were also small (5% or less) concerning their students' access to resources and comfort with using digital instructional tools for online learning.

Changes in How Time is Spent

Change to remote instruction prompted changes in the way teachers spent their time in different tasks involved in daily instruction. The majority of teachers in both categories indicated spending more time communicating with parents than pre-COVID-19, and teachers of core subjects more often indicated spending more time on this task than those who teach other subjects (75% vs. 62%). Differences between teachers of core and other subjects on changes in the amount of time spent on other tasks were relatively small.

Changes in Instructional Practices

Those who teach other subjects more frequently agreed that their school/district allowed autonomy for them to make instructional decisions during COVID-19 school closures than teaches of core subjects (84% vs. 79%). In terms of relative amount of time educators spend engaging in the teaching practices compared to before COVID-19 school closures, those who teach other subjects more often indicated spending more time than core-subjects teachers on curriculum resources available outside of their school or district (46% vs. 37%) and engaging students in real-world problem solving (23% vs. 18%).

Guidance and Support

Most of the teachers agreed that their school/district has maintained ongoing communication with teachers relative to the COVID-19 pandemic with no major difference between teachers of core and other subjects. Differences between teachers of core and other subjects were also small concerning the level of guidance received on various aspects their job during the switch to remote learning. However, there were a couple notable differences in the support they received from different people. Those who teach other subjects more frequently received support from teachers outside of their school/district (47% vs. 29%) and others (42% vs. 29%) compared to teachers of core subjects.

Adjustment and Sources of Stress

Over half of the respondents reported adjusted or well-adjusted to remote teaching and learning with no notable difference between teachers of core and other subjects. Further, differences in their reports of high stress on sources of work-related stress and personal stress between teachers of core and other subjects were small (differences were within 4%).

Next School Year

Regarding current level of concern for the 2020-2021 school year, core-subjects teachers more frequently indicated concern about student retention/loss of knowledge (78% vs. 69%) and standardized testing (54% vs. 33%) than teachers of other subjects. No notable difference was found regarding their plans for next year, but core-subjects teachers less frequently indicated their plans were influenced by the pandemic than those who teach other subjects (25% vs. 32%).

Results by Special Education and General Education

This section summarizes survey results by special education teachers and general education teachers. The data set was split between teachers who reported they taught special education and those who did not (coded as general education). Appendix G provides charts that display comparisons of results by special and general education teachers of for all survey questions.

Interacting with Students

When asked where they got resources for remote instruction, special education teachers indicated their school district more often than general education teachers (60% vs. 50%). The median percentage of students that teachers attempted and were unable to contact was similar for special and general education teachers. However, general education teachers reported daily interactions with their students more than special education teachers (51% vs. 42%). General education teachers also more often indicated that between 81% and 100% of their students completed assignments compared to special education teachers (39% vs. 28%).

Strategies and Tools for Remote Instruction

Teachers have used a variety of different strategies in their remote instruction. When viewing results by subgroups, special education teachers more frequently indicated using individual phone calls or video calls (57% vs. 36%) and self-prepared paper packets (36% vs. 21%), and they less frequently used online platforms adopted by their district (68% vs. 79%) than general education teachers. Both types of teachers viewed strategies they used often as generally effective.

Access and Comfort for Online Instruction

The majority of teachers in both categories indicated that they had access to the resources needed to effectively teach online. However, general education teachers expressed greater comfort with using digital instructional tools to deliver online instruction than special education teachers (80% vs. 73%). Regarding their students' access and comfort for online learning, general education teachers more often agreed that their students have adequate internet access (60% vs. 51%), hardware/devices (71% vs. 59%), and software (68% vs. 56%) at home needed to effectively learn online than special education teachers. General education teachers also agreed that their students were comfortable using digital instructional tools more than special education teachers (59% vs. 43%).

Changes in How Time is Spent

The pandemic has changed the way teachers spent their time in different tasks in their job. Special education teachers indicated spending more compared to before COVID-19 than general education teachers on several tasks, with the largest differences for providing support for students with disabilities (45% vs. 20%) and completing paperwork/documentation (65% vs. 42%). General education teachers indicated spending substantially more time than special education teachers on evaluating student work (34% vs. 18%).

Changes in Instructional Practices

A larger percentage of special education teachers than general education teachers agreed that their school/district allowed autonomy for them to make instructional decisions during COVID-19 school closures (84% vs. 79%). In terms of relative amount of time educators spend engaging in various teaching practices compared to before COVID-19 school closures, special education teachers more frequently indicated spending more time than general education teachers in informal professional learning (44% vs. 34%) and using e-tools to engage parents and families (72% vs. 62%).

Guidance and Support

Both special and general education teachers agreed that their school/district has maintained ongoing communication with teachers relative to the COVID-19 pandemic at comparable rates. In terms of guidance they receive from their school/district about expectations for different aspects of their job for their job, the largest difference was providing support for students with disabilities, with special education teachers more often indicating receiving about right guidance compared to general education teachers (68% vs. 62%). Special and general education teachers indicated receiving similar levels of support from people such as teachers in their school/district, school-level administrators, school-level instructional support staff, and district-level administrators. However, a larger percentage of special education teachers indicated receiving moderate or extensive support from district-level administrators than general education teachers (64% vs. 55%).

Adjustment and Sources of Stress

Special education teachers reported being less adjusted to remote teaching and learning than general education teachers (47% vs. 57%). Of potential sources of work-related stress, special education teachers more often reported experiencing high stress than general education teachers for the change from in-person to remote teaching and learning (32% vs. 23%), new remote teaching and learning expenses (26% vs. 19%), and concern for the well-being of students (54% vs. 48%). Of potential sources of personal stress, special education teachers more frequently reported experiencing high stress than general education teachers in taking care of their own children (31% vs. 24%) and educating their children (34% vs. 29%).

Next School Year

Regarding current level of concern for the 2020-2021 school year, over half of both special and general education teachers expressed concern in potential changes in school schedule, student retention/loss of knowledge, their health and safety, and personal finance, with no major differences in these concerns. General education teachers more frequently expressed concern than special education teachers about standardized testing (50% vs. 42%) and teacher evaluation (48% vs. 43%). There were negligible differences in teachers' plans to return to an education position and the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic had on those plans between special and general education teachers.