Survey Data on Student Engagement
September 25, 2020

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Introduction

This report provides an overview of recent OSSTF/FEESO polling data supplemented by some publicly available surveys, specifically related to student engagement during the initial lockdown and subsequent emergency remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Four surveys constitute the backbone of the analysis and available data.

1. **The Canadian Teachers' Federation**. Canadian Teachers Responding to Coronavirus (COVID-19) — Pandemic Research Study. Survey of teachers and education workers represented by unions affiliated to CTF/FTC across Canada. Data collected from June 1 – 18, 2020 in both official languages.

2. **Environics Research**. Parent Assessment of Remote Learning. Survey of parents with at least one child in the Ontario public school system. Data collected from June 6 – 16, 2020 in English.

3. **Vector Research and Development Inc**. The Union Project, May 2020. National Survey, with Ontario Data relied upon for analysis here. Data collected April 17 – 25, 2020 in English.

4. **Sussex Strategy.** Here for Students, Distance Learning Survey. Data collected to July 31, 2020 in English through the *Here for Students* website (https://www.hereforstudents.ca/action/survey). Note that while informative, this is the least-scientific of the surveys. Instead of random sampling, respondents choose to participate after having visited the *Here for Students* website. This introduces a significant potential for selection bias.

Each of the four surveys probed issues beyond those represented here. The focus of this report is on questions and findings as directly related to student engagement as possible. The analysis has been organized under seven broad categories:

- Students' readiness to learn
- Access to learning infrastructure
- Equity and remote learning
- Student mental health and wellbeing
- Communicating with students and families

- Synchronous and asynchronous learning
- Parental support during emergency remote learning

It is important to note that there are methodological shortcomings involved in the project. The surveys used different collection methods, sampled different populations, gathered data at different times during a rapidly evolving context and asked somewhat different questions. As a result, some of the findings may be inconsistent. This overview should be read as one part of a larger story, in conjunction with findings from the policies and best practices overview and in the context of what OSSTF/FEESO is hearing directly from members.

Students' readiness to learn

According to parents who participated in OSSTF/FEESO's Environics survey, nearly all families (94%) participated in online learning.

Figure 1. Participation in remote learning
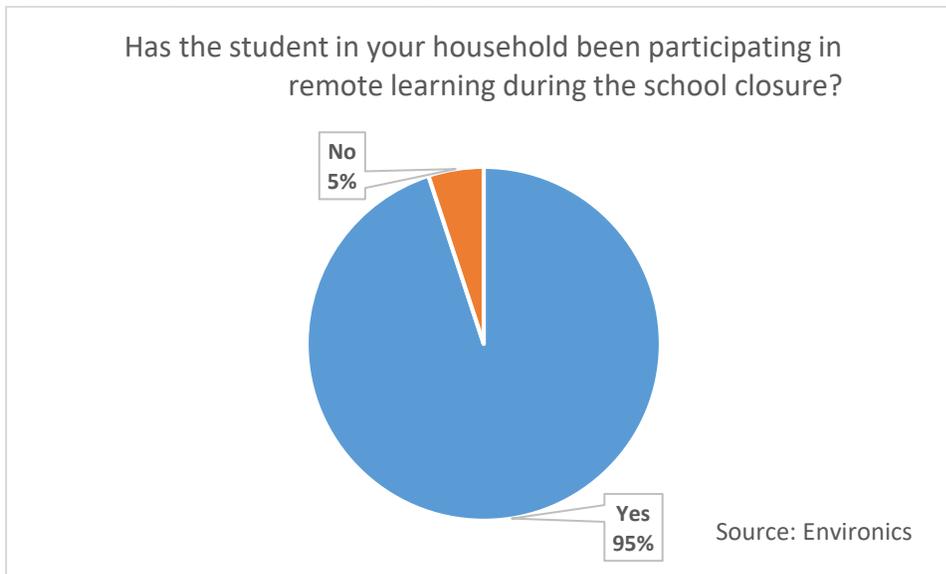
An Angus Reid survey of children and youth aged 10 to 17 found that, while a majority of students felt like they were keeping up with online learning (75% of all participants), 57% reported that they disliked online learning and 60% reported feeling unmotivated.[1]

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[1] Angus Reid. "Kids & COVID-19: Canadian children are done with school from home, fear falling behind, and miss their friends." *Angus Reid Institute*, vol. 2020, Angus Reid Institute, 2020. http://angusreid.org/covid19-kids-opening-schools/, September 21, 2020.

Figure 2. Angus Reid, Kids & COVID-19

How has your online schooling been going so far? (Only those doing online school asked)				
	Kids "attending" school online total (n=536)	Age of Child		
		10 – 12 (n=187)	13 – 15 (n=192)	16 – 17 (n=158)
Keeping up or Falling behind?				
Keeping up	75%	79%	70%	75%
Falling behind	25%	21%	30%	25%
Enjoying it or Disliking it?				
Enjoying it	43%	51%	35%	43%
Disliking it	57%	49%	65%	57%
Are you Motivated or Unmotivated				
Motivated	40%	46%	34%	41%
Unmotivated	60%	54%	66%	59%
Are you Busy or Not that busy?				
Busy	37%	29%	37%	46%
Not that busy	63%	70%	63%	54%

Given significant difficulties with motivation, it is not surprising that OSSTF/FEESO's Sussex survey respondents indicated that the primary challenge families faced in relation to emergency remote learning was ensuring student engagement. Just under half of respondents (46%) indicated that "Ensuring my child stays engaged in the school process" represented the greatest challenge.

Figure 3. The most challenging aspects of remote learning

For the last 3 months, students and families across Ontario have been coping with the realities of emergency distance learning. What have you found to be the most challenging aspect of the process?

- Ensuring my child stays engaged in the school process
- Managing family schedules vs. real-time learning expectations
- Access to the technology/internet
- Other

Source: Sussex

There are myriad reasons why students would have difficulty remaining focused on learning during the lockdown. In an open-ended question following up on the above challenges, respondents cited the difficulty of encouraging their children to learn without textbooks, lack of incentives to learn following the announcement that grades would not change, difficulties in learning how to use technology, supervising learning while working from home and challenges related to students' wellbeing.

Data from the CTF survey echoes these sentiments. In terms of overall readiness to learn, teachers and education workers reported that students' readiness to learn had somewhat or significantly worsened. Combined, 83% nationally, 84% provincially, and 92% of OSSTF/FEESO respondents reported that students' readiness to learn had worsened or significantly worsened. Respondents reported slightly lower, but still very high rates of students having a worsened ability to focus on educational tasks and likelihood of checking in every day. Nationally, provincially, and among OSSTF/FEESO members, about half of respondents reported that students were more likely to come to the online environment tired.

Figure 4. Readiness to learn

Based on your observations of students in your classes during the pandemic, to what extent have the following changed?

	CTF	OTF	OSSTF
Students' overall readiness to learn	83% (Somewhat 44.6%, Significantly 38.1%)	84% (Somewhat 42.1%, Significantly 42.3%)	92% (Somewhat 34.6%, Significantly 57.3%)
Students' ability to focus on educational tasks	80% (Somewhat 42.0%, Significantly 38.2%)	81% (Somewhat 39.2%, Significantly 41.3%)	90% (Somewhat 35.2%, Significantly 54.3%)
Students checking in online each day	76% (Somewhat 34.8%, Significantly 40.8%)	81% (Somewhat 34.4%, Significantly 46.7%)	88% (Somewhat 25.1%, Significantly 62.6%)
Students coming to the online environment tired	49% (Somewhat 30.1%, Significantly 19.2%)	47% (Somewhat 27.3%, Significantly 19.8%)	52% (Somewhat 23.1%, Significantly 28.5%)

■ Significantly worsened ■ Somewhat worsened

Source: CTF/FTC

These data suggest that although students and families were generally committed to participating in emergency remote learning, the realities of learning during a pandemic significantly and negatively impacted students' actual readiness to learn and their ability to concentrate on learning.

Access to Learning Infrastructure

Generally, emergency remote learning required access to reliable internet and a computer or other device with which students can participate in online activities.[2] According to the Vector survey, slightly less than half of all Ontarians were confident or very confident that every student would have access to reliable internet. For public school parents, that level of confidence rose to 64%.

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[2] While OSSTF/FEESO consistently held the position that non-online options should also be made available to students, the polling data reflects the assumption that the majority of emergency remote learning was online.

Figure 5. Confidence re: access to reliable internet

How confident are you that every student will have internet access at home that is reliable, meaning it works every day without interruption?

All Ontarians: Very and Somewhat Confident 49.8%, Not and Not At All Confident 50.2%

Public School Parents: Very and Somewhat Confident 64.3%, Not and Not At All Confident 35.7%

Very and Somewhat Confident — Not and Not At All Confident

Source: Vector

When asked about access to a computer or other device, respondents in the Vector survey showed slightly more confidence. Among all Ontarians, 55% were confident or very confident that all students have such access. Parents of children in public school were more confident, with 71% reporting that they are either very confident or somewhat confident that every student would have access to a computer or other electronic device.

Figure 6. Confidence re: student access to computer or electronic device

How confident are you that every student will have access to a computer or other electronic device they can use for successful online learning?

All Ontarians: Very and Somewhat Confident 54.5%, Not and Not At All Confident 45.5%

Public School Parents: Very and Somewhat Confident 71.2%, Not and Not At All Confident 28.8%

Very and Somewhat Confident — Not and Not At All Confident

Source: Vector

It should be emphasized, that this question measures respondents' confidence in relation to internet access. It should not be taken to be a measure of actual access. Put another way, this

question measures the extent to which Ontarians generally and public school parents specifically are likely to be concerned about access to the internet.

The CTF/FTC survey asked members about how students are accessing the internet for learning. The results are somewhat mixed. About one-third of respondents did not think that the majority of their students had access to a device and a reliable internet connection.

Figure 7. CTF/FTC access to internet and a device

Thinking about COVID-19, to what extent do you agree with the following statement related to equity:

The majority of my students have access to a reliable internet connection and a computer/device to complete their assignments

■ Disagree or Strongly Disagree ■ Agree or Strongly Agree

Source: CTF/FTC
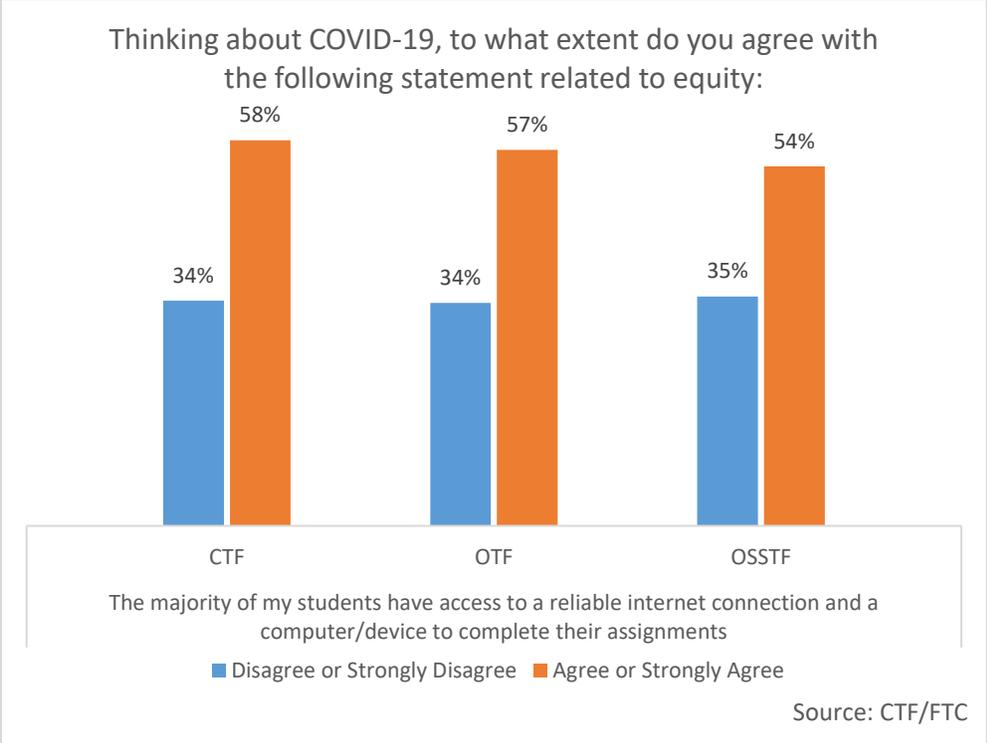
Looking at these results together, we see that OSSTF/FEESO members are relatively close to Ontarians generally in terms of confidence that students have access to the technology they need. Public school parents are, overall, more confident.

Figure 8. Confidence that the majority of students have access to:

	Internet	**Computer or Device**
OSSTF/FEESO	54%	54%
All Ontario	50.2%	54.5%
Public School Parents	64.3%	73.2%

Interestingly, when asked to provide specifics about how their students were participating in on-line learning (see below), only 1.4% of OSSTF/FEESO respondents indicated that most of their students lacked access to the internet. That result is perhaps a product of the question's focus on technology rather than equity.

Also notable about this question is the significant number of unsure responses: 21% of all OSSTF/FEESO respondents were unsure about how their students were accessing the internet for learning. When unsure responses were removed, OSSTF/FEESO members reported that 43% of their students use a laptop for learning. 36% use a mobile device such as a phone or tablet. Just under one-fifth of students used a desktop computer, with 16% of all students relying on a shared desktop computer and only 2.6% having access to their own computer.

Figure 9. CTF/FTC Pan-National Survey

When learning at home, how are your students most likely to access the internet for learning? (OSSTF/FEESO)

- Laptop
- Mobile device
- Shared desktop computer
- Personal desktop computer
- Other internet capable devices
- Most of my students don't have access to the internet

0.5% 1.4% 2.6% 16.2% 43.2% 36.1%

Source: CTF/FTC
Note: Results: exclude 'Unsure' responses.
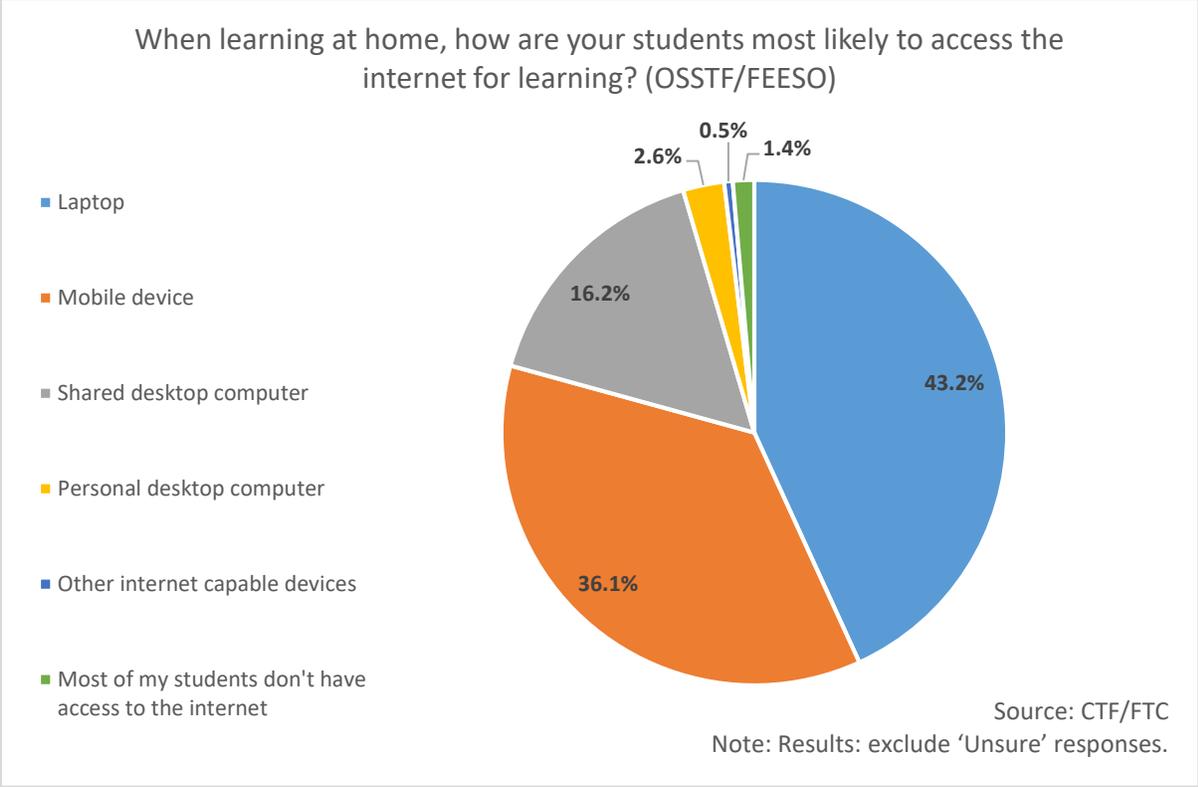
Nationally and provincially, respondents reported their students to be using mobile devices in higher proportions than OSSTF/FEESO respondents, who were more likely to report the use of laptops. However, rates of sharing desktop computers, access to personal desktop computers, reliance on other devices and lack of access to the internet were roughly comparable across samples.

When learning at home, how are your students most likely to access the internet for learning?

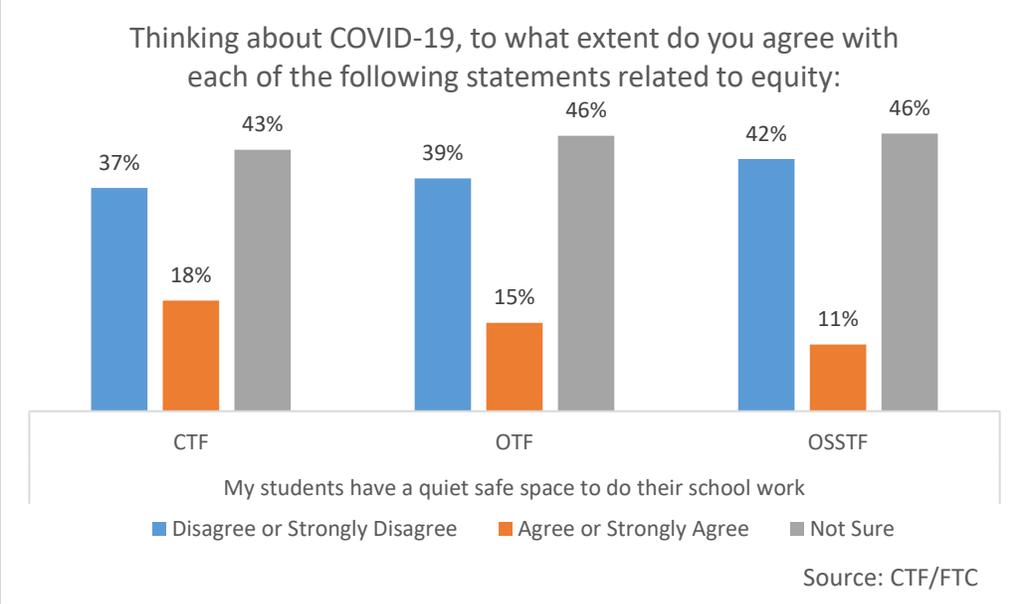|	Mobile device (tablet, smart phone, etc.)			Laptop			Shared desktop computer			Personal desktop computer			Other internet capable devices			Most of my students don't have access to the internet		
	CTF	OTF	OSSTF	CTF	OTF	OSSTF	CTF	OTF	OSSTF	CTF	OTF	OSSTF	CTF	OTF	OSSTF	CTF	OTF	OSSTF
	47.2%	40.9%	36.1%	29.0%	36.3%	43.2%	18.0%	18.8%	16.2%	2.0%	2.0%	2.6%	0.5%	0.6%	0.5%	3.3%	1.4%	1.1%

Source: CTF/FTC Pan-National Survey

As important as internet and a device are, students also need a quiet place where they can concentrate and work undisturbed. OSSTF/FEESO members were more likely to disagree or strongly disagree (42%) that their students had access to such spaces, when compared to national (37%) and provincial (39%) responses. Here again, however, respondents indicated a high degree of uncertainty. In every case, more respondents were 'Not Sure' about access to quiet spaces than the combined responses for 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree.'

Figure 10. Access to a quiet safe space

Thinking about COVID-19, to what extent do you agree with each of the following statements related to equity:

	CTF			OTF			OSSTF		
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	37%			39%			42%		
Agree or Strongly Agree		18%			15%			11%	
Not Sure			43%			46%			46%

My students have a quiet safe space to do their school work
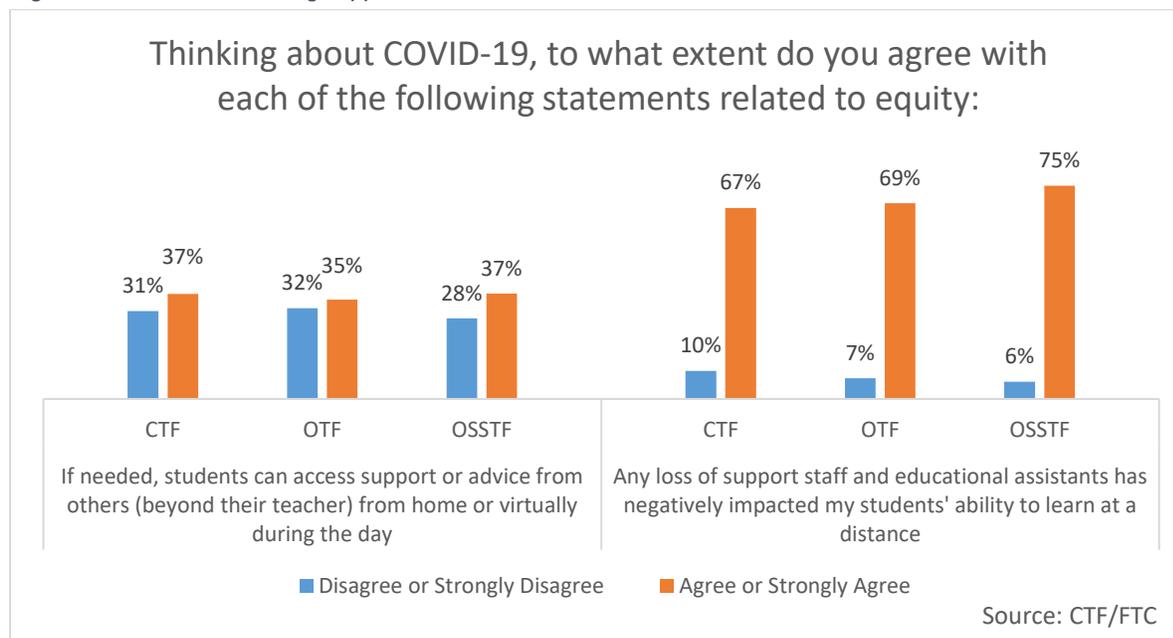
■ Disagree or Strongly Disagree   ■ Agree or Strongly Agree   ■ Not Sure

Source: CTF/FTC

These numbers are somewhat higher than those reported in the Environics survey. While OSSTF/FEESO respondents estimated that 42% of their students had a quiet, safe space to do their work, 94% of respondents to the Environics study indicated that students had a quiet space for learning.

Finally, proper learning infrastructure must also include access to support from education workers and other adults when needed. Just over one-third of respondents nationally (37%), provincially (35%), and among OSSTF/FEESO members (37%) agreed that their students had access to support or advice from adults other than teachers during the lockdown. A sizeable 75% of OSST/FEESO members also somewhat or strongly agreed with the claim that loss of support from Education Assistants and Early Childhood Educators had negatively impacted students' ability to learn.

Figure 11. Access to learning supports

Thinking about COVID-19, to what extent do you agree with each of the following statements related to equity:

Source: CTF/FTC

Loss of access to educational workers is particularly challenging for students with disabilities. About one-third (32%) of parents in OSSTF/FEESO's Environics survey reported having at least one child with an Individualized Education Plan.

Figure 12. Students with Individualized Education Plan

Does your child have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or other special needs that are supported at their school?

Don't Know
8%

Yes
32%

No
60%

Source: Environics
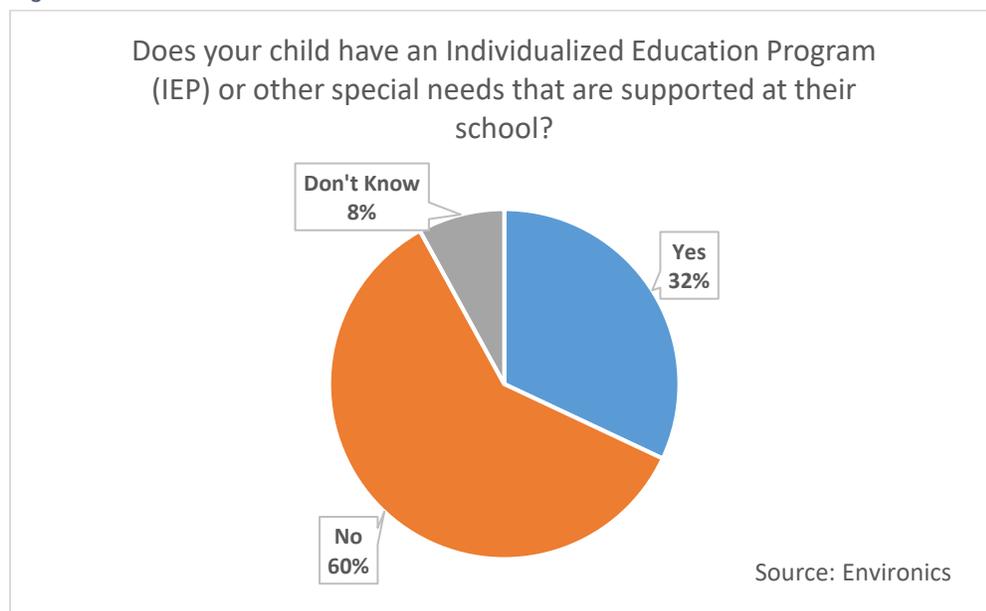
Among public school parents, a majority in the Vector survey reported confidence that students with special needs could be successful in online learning. 54% of public school parents were very or somewhat confident that students with special needs can learn what they need to know to pass their courses, compared to only 41% of Ontarians in general.

Figure 13. Confidence re: whether students with special needs can learn what they need to know online

How confident are you that students with special needs can learn what they need to know to pass their courses through online education?

All Ontarians	Public School Parents
41.3% / 58.7%	54.1% / 45.9%

■ Very and Somewhat Confident ■ Not and Not At All Confident

Source: Vector
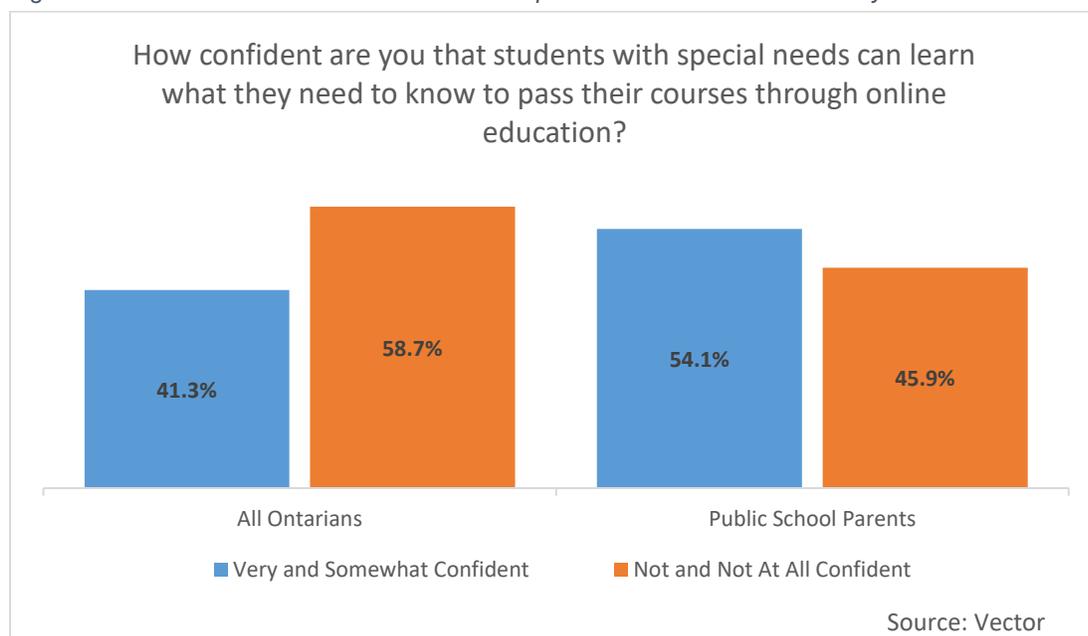
Equity and remote learning

OSSTF/FEESO's review of policy advice and best practices from other education unions and their allies highlighted broadly shared concerns that emergency remote learning would exacerbate existing inequalities. Barriers to equitable access to public education during emergency remote learning appear along multiple axes, such as disability, race, geography, and income. A significant shortcoming of relying on the data such presented here is that they are unable to capture instances where students and their families face multiple barriers to access. Nonetheless, equity is clearly a core concern for respondents across surveys.

In OSSTF/FEESO's Environics survey, 75% of respondents either somewhat or strongly agreed that remote learning would "deepen the cracks" for students who struggle with learning in traditional environments. Not surprisingly, only 36% somewhat or strongly agreed with the claim that remote online learning is as inclusive for all Ontario's students as in-person classroom learning.

Figure 14. Agreement re: inequality and inclusion
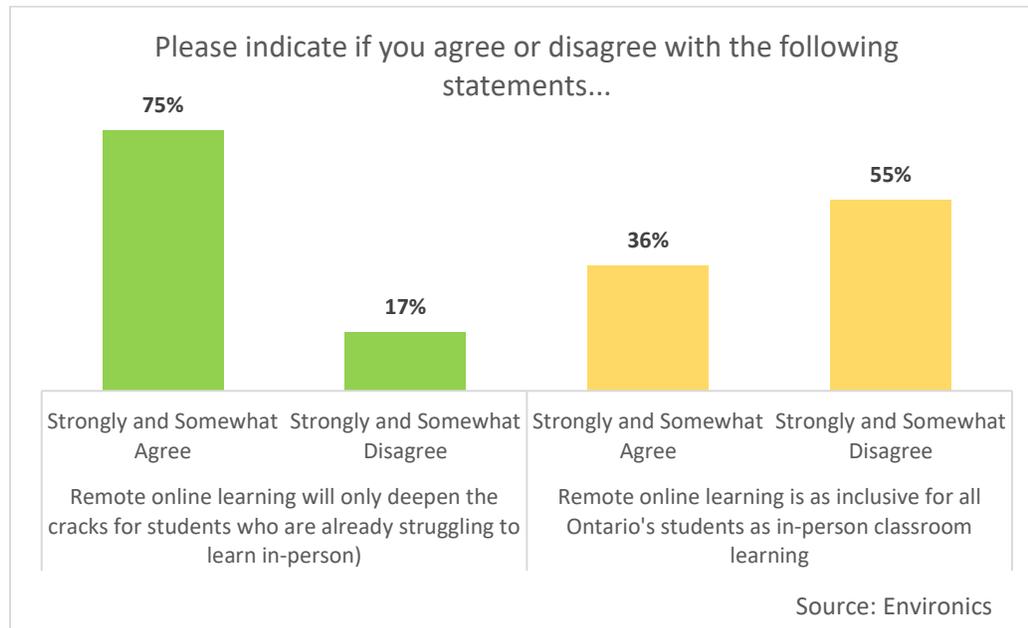
This perspective was reflected in the CTF/FTC results. 74% of respondents nationally and 76% of OSSTF/FEESO respondents expressed concern about being able to get students what they need to be successful with online instruction, from an equity-based perspective.

Figure 15. Concern re: getting students what they need

Do you have any concerns or questions about getting your students what they need to be successful (equity) with online instruction?

CTF: Yes 74%, No 26%
OTF: Yes 73%, No 27%
OSSTF: Yes 76%, No 24%

Yes (%) No (%)

Source: CTF/FTC
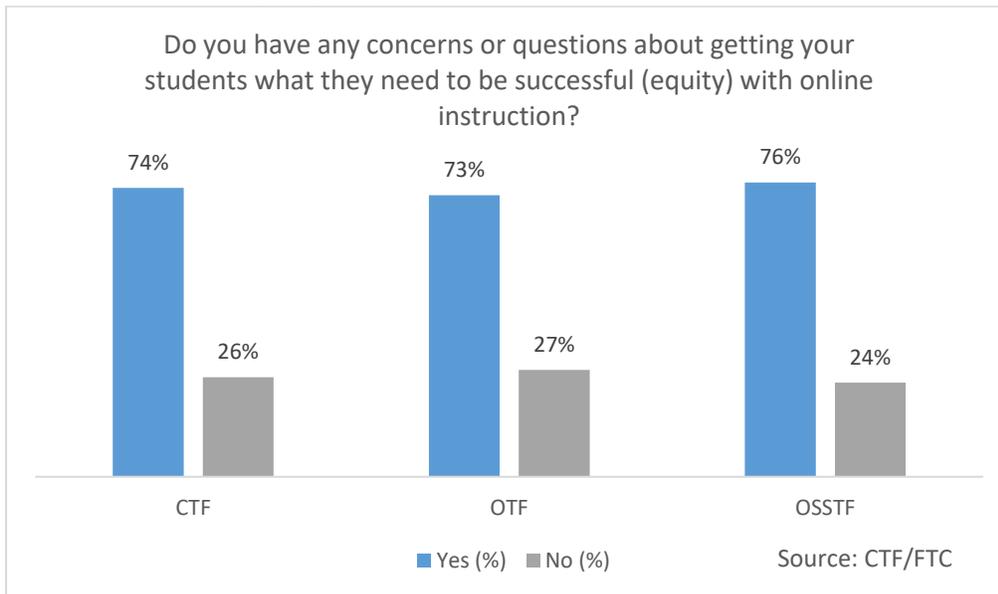
Consistent with findings reported above, CTF/FTC respondents were most concerned about students with special needs. 88% of OSSTF/FEESO respondents indicated that online instruction was having a negative or very negative impact on students with exceptionalities. They were next most concerned with students living in poverty (87%), students in single parent homes (76%) and English language learners (70%).

Figure 16. Impact of remote learning by group (Part 1)

Rate how you think the following groups of students in your classes are handling online instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Very Negative to Very Positive)
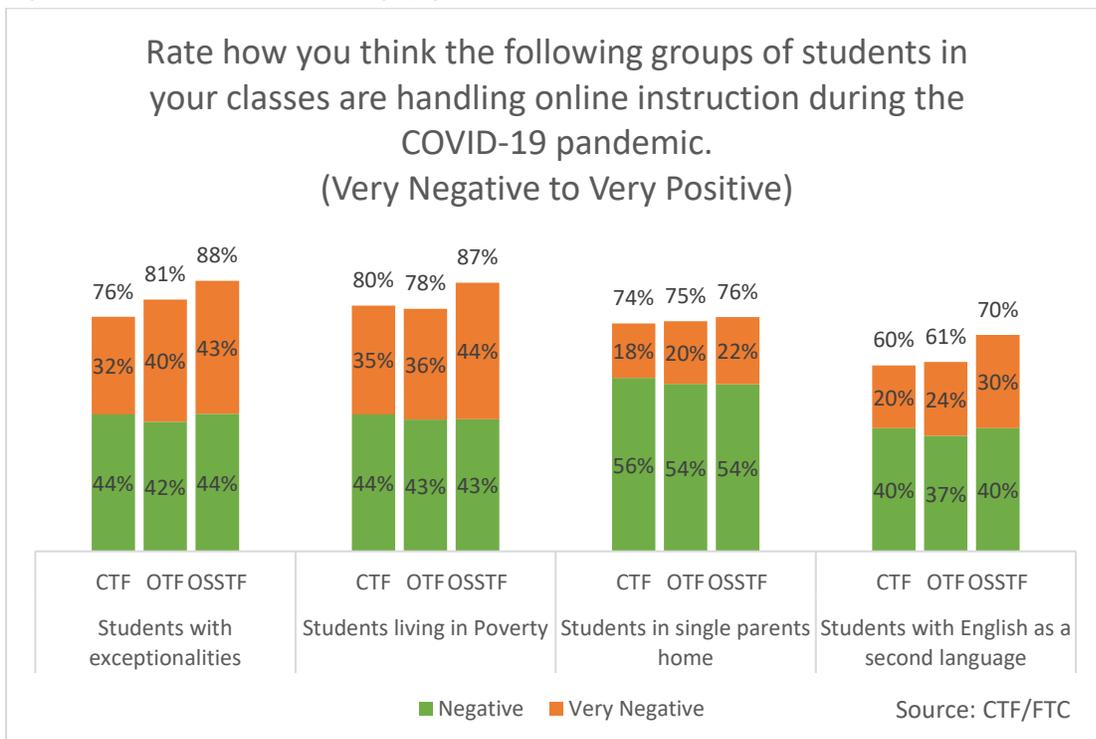
Students with exceptionalities:
CTF 76% (Negative 44%, Very Negative 32%)
OTF 81% (Negative 42%, Very Negative 40%)
OSSTF 88% (Negative 44%, Very Negative 43%)

Students living in Poverty:
CTF 80% (Negative 44%, Very Negative 35%)
OTF 78% (Negative 43%, Very Negative 36%)
OSSTF 87% (Negative 43%, Very Negative 44%)

Students in single parents home:
CTF 74% (Negative 56%, Very Negative 18%)
OTF 75% (Negative 54%, Very Negative 20%)
OSSTF 76% (Negative 54%, Very Negative 22%)

Students with English as a second language:
CTF 60% (Negative 40%, Very Negative 20%)
OTF 61% (Negative 37%, Very Negative 24%)
OSSTF 70% (Negative 40%, Very Negative 30%)

Negative Very Negative

Source: CTF/FTC

A majority of OSSTF/FEESO members indicated that they thought online learning was having a negative or very negative impact on racialized and refugee students (51% each) with 46% and 45% respectively indicating a negative impact for LGBTQ+ and First Nations, Métis and Inuit students.

Figure 17. Impact of remote learning by group (Part 2)

Rate how you think the following groups of students in your classes are handling online instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic.
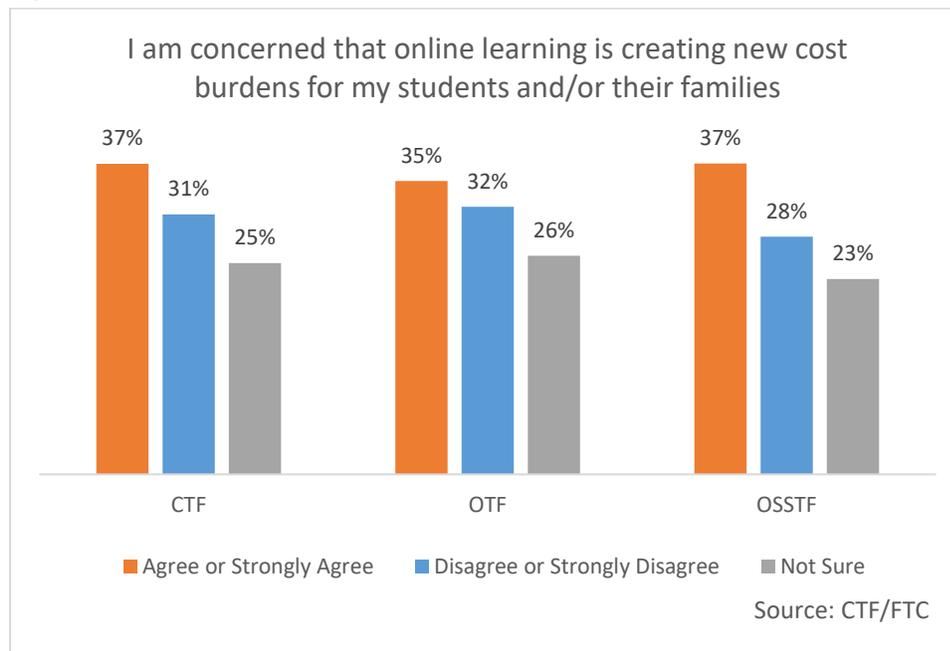**(Very Negative to Very Positive)**

	Racialized students			Refugee students			LGBTQ+ students			First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students		
	CTF	OTF	OSSTF	CTF	OTF	OSSTF	CTF	OTF	OSSTF	CTF	OTF	OSSTF
Total	41%	42%	51%	41%	40%	51%	27%	26%	46%	43%	32%	45%
Very Negative	7%	8%	10%	15%	17%	22%	6%	7%	11%	14%	12%	18%
Negative	34%	34%	41%	26%	23%	29%	21%	20%	35%	29%	20%	27%

Legend: ■ Negative ■ Very Negative   Source: CTF/FTC

Notably, the combined "Negative" and "Very Negative" impact was higher for OSSTF/FEESO members than OTF and nation-wide across each of these categories.
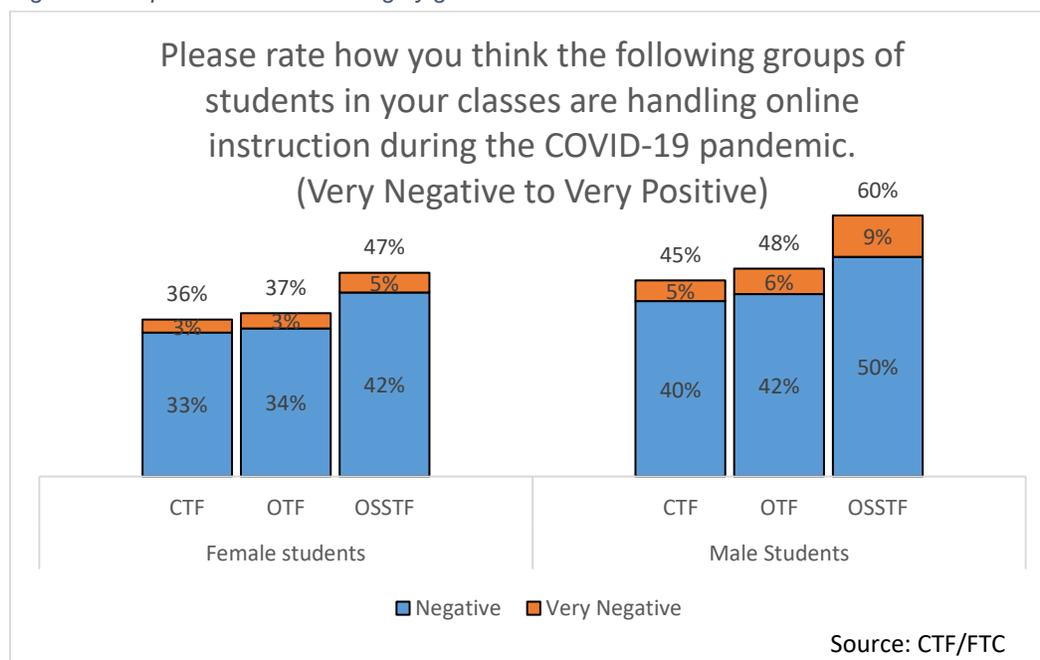
Looking more specifically at poverty, we also see that just over one-third of respondents at the national (35%), provincial (35%), and OSSTF/FEESO levels (37%) agreed or strongly agreed that they were concerned about the additional financial burdens that online learning created for students and/or their families.

Figure 18. Concern about new cost burdens

I am concerned that online learning is creating new cost burdens for my students and/or their families

CTF: Agree or Strongly Agree 37%, Disagree or Strongly Disagree 31%, Not Sure 25%
OTF: Agree or Strongly Agree 35%, Disagree or Strongly Disagree 32%, Not Sure 26%
OSSTF: Agree or Strongly Agree 37%, Disagree or Strongly Disagree 28%, Not Sure 23%

Legend: ■ Agree or Strongly Agree ■ Disagree or Strongly Disagree ■ Not Sure

Source: CTF/FTC

Broken down by gender, we see that CTF/FTC respondents were more concerned about male students than female. With 60% of OSSTF/FEESO members indicating that online instruction was having a negative or very negative impact on male students, compared to 46% for female students.

Figure 19. Impact of remote learning by gender

Please rate how you think the following groups of students in your classes are handling online instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Very Negative to Very Positive)

Female students:
- CTF: Negative 33%, Very Negative 3%, total 36%
- OTF: Negative 34%, Very Negative 3%, total 37%
- OSSTF: Negative 42%, Very Negative 5%, total 47%

Male Students:
- CTF: Negative 40%, Very Negative 5%, total 45%
- OTF: Negative 42%, Very Negative 6%, total 48%
- OSSTF: Negative 50%, Very Negative 9%, total 60%

Legend: ■ Negative ■ Very Negative

Source: CTF/FTC

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Student mental health and wellbeing

Considerable attention has been paid to the mental of both the lockdown specifically and adjusting to life during a pandemic more generally. Generalized uncertainty, traumatic separation from and/or loss of loved ones, economic stress and isolation are all commonly identified risk factors for poor mental health outcomes. A recent Morneau-Shepell study found that Canadians' mental health as a whole has declined from pre-2020 levels. In fact, the decrease is large enough that it "reflects a population whose mental health is similar to the most-distressed one percent of the [pre-COVID-19] benchmark population."[3]

Students are no less exposed to these risks than the general public.[4] At the national, provincial and OSSTF/FEESO levels, approximately two-thirds of respondents to the CTF/FTC survey indicated that they had concerns about the mental health and wellbeing of their students in relation to the pandemic.[5]

Figure 20. Concerns or questions about student mental health and wellbeing
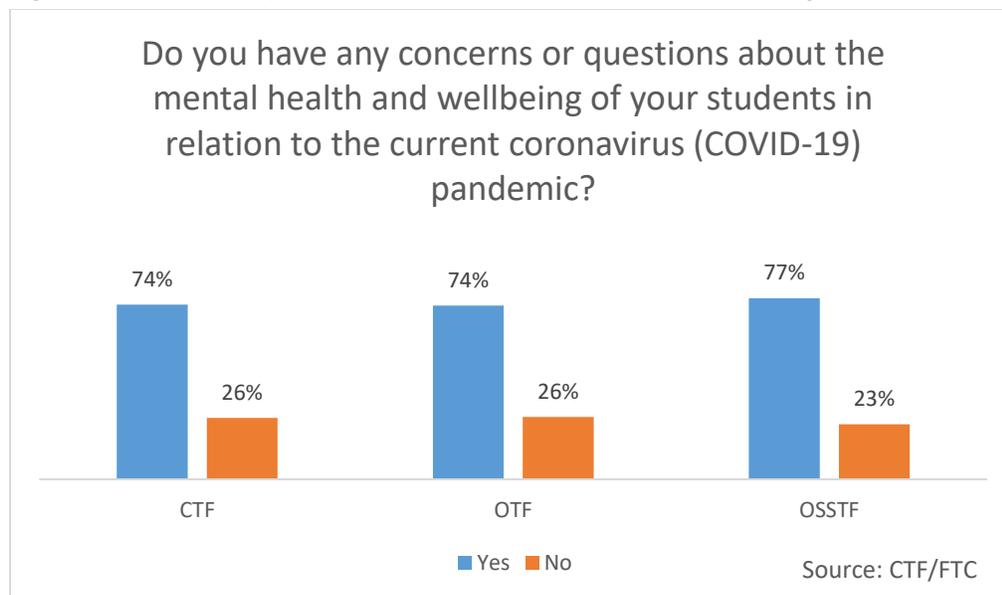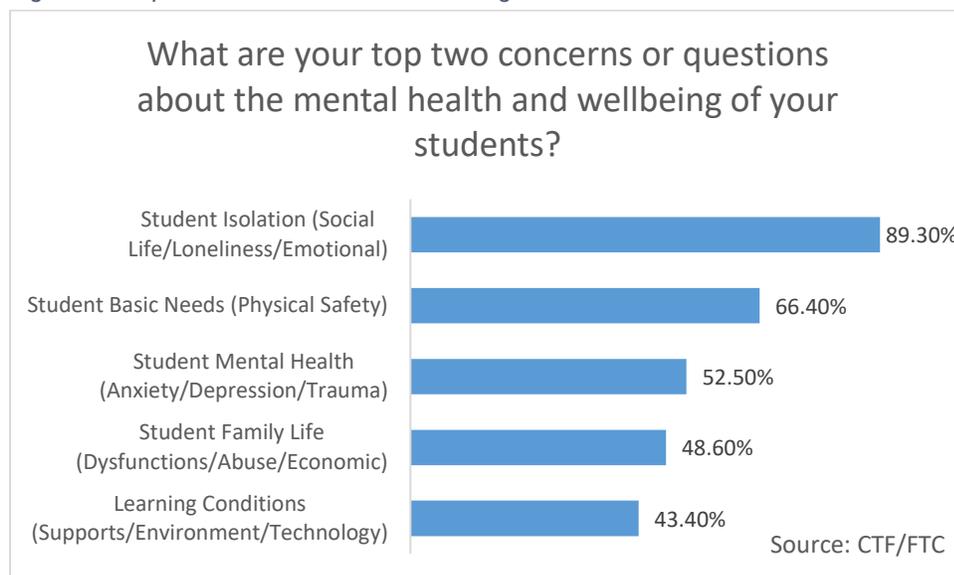

CTF/FTC's analysis of an open-ended question probing mental health concerns found that respondents were concerned about a range of issues relating to wellbeing, including basic physical needs, isolation and vulnerability to anxiety, depression and trauma. Just over 50% of respondents expressed concern about mental health, but almost 90% flagged social isolation as a major concern.

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[3] Shepell, Morneau. "The Mental Health Index Report: Canada, August 2020." 2020. Morneau Shepell.
[4] Canada, Statistics. "Canadians' mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic." May 27 2020. Statistics Canada, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/200527/dq200527b-eng.pdf?st=AR_HXZcj, Science, Michelle and Ari (Sean) Bitnun. "COVID 19: Recommendations for School Reopening." June 17 2020. https://www.sickkids.ca/PDFs/About-SickKids/81407-COVID19-Recommendations-for-School-Reopening-SickKids.pdf, June 22, 2020.
[5] Note that OSSTF/FEESO and Ontario qualitative data from the CTF/FTC survey and described in this section is available but has not been analyzed to draw out comparisons to the national data.

Figure 21. Top two mental health and wellbeing concerns

What are your top two concerns or questions about the mental health and wellbeing of your students?

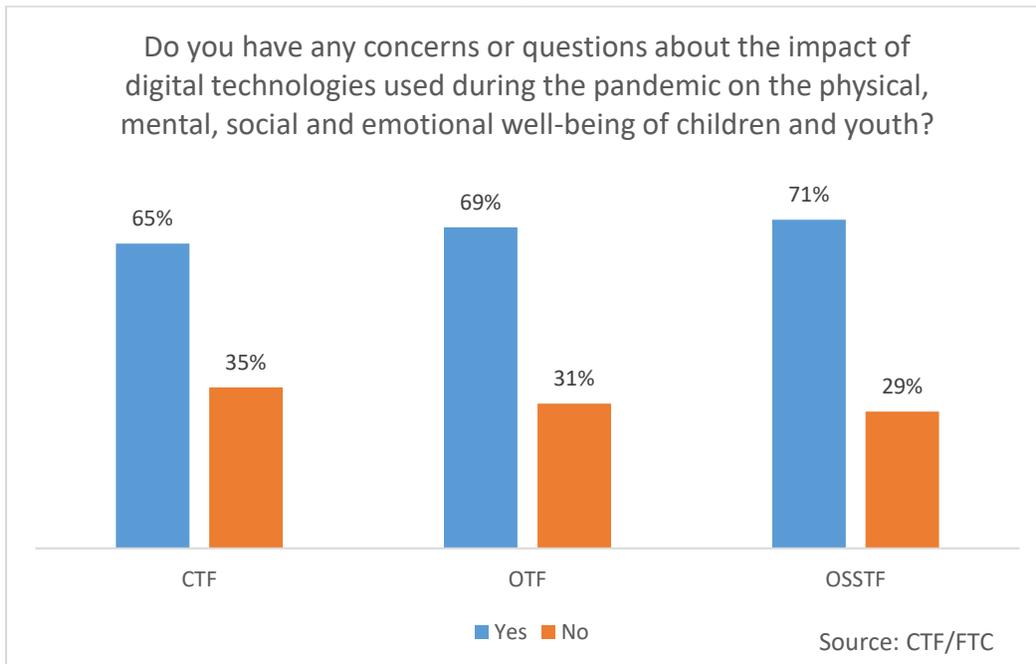| Concern	Percentage
Student Isolation (Social Life/Loneliness/Emotional)	89.30%
Student Basic Needs (Physical Safety)	66.40%
Student Mental Health (Anxiety/Depression/Trauma)	52.50%
Student Family Life (Dysfunctions/Abuse/Economic)	48.60%
Learning Conditions (Supports/Environment/Technology)	43.40%

Source: CTF/FTC

In August, Children's Mental Health Ontario recently released a report providing guidance to child and youth community health providers in the context of schools reopening. The report cites academic and grey literature warnings about the impact of pandemics and quarantines on children and youth from both a short-term mental health perspective as well as a longer-term developmental perspective. The report cites a forthcoming study of 1300 youth and young adults. 60% of respondents to that study reported feeling a combination of "worried, upset, sad and angry" about the school closures and COVID-19 lockdown, with almost 30% reporting that they "felt sad nearly every day in the two weeks prior to completing the survey." 25% reported feeling lonely every day.[6]

Although negative mental health impacts from COVID-19 have multiple potential sources, the health impacts of screen time specifically deserve to be given particular consideration. Even before the COVID-19 outbreak, education researchers were expressing concern about the long-term impact of increased screen time on children and youth.[7] It is no surprise, then, that the CTF/FTC study found considerable concern specifically in relation to the impact of increased use of digital technology on the mental, physical and social health of students. OSSTF/FEESO members were most concerned (71%), followed by provincial respondents at 69%.

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[6] Brown, J. et al. "Return to school during COVID-19: Considerations for Ontario's child and youth community mental health service providers." 2020. Ontario Centre for Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health, https://cmho.org/wp-content/uploads/Return-to-school-during-COVID19-Evidence-summary-for-community-service-providers.pdf, September 21, 2020.
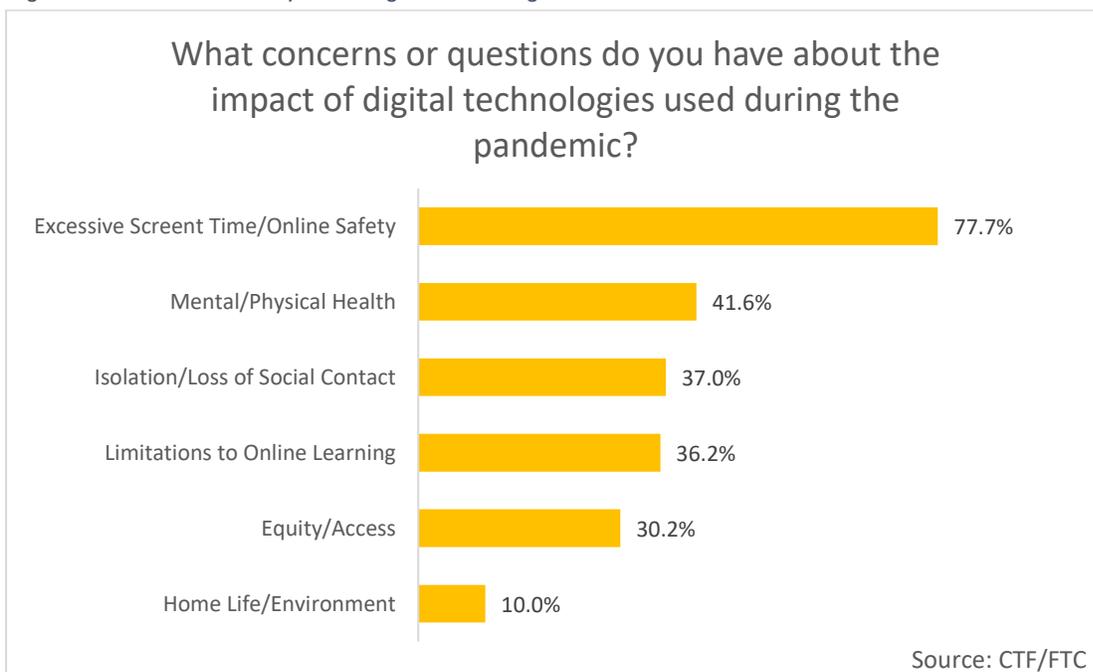
[7] Learning with Screens in Schools Work Group. "Report of the MAC 238-18 Learning with Screens in Schools Work Group." 2019. Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Lissak, G. "Adverse physiological and psychological effects of screen time on children and adolescents: Literature review and case study." *Environ Res*, vol. 164, 2018, pp. 149-157, doi:10.1016/j.envres.2018.01.015.

Figure 22. Concern re: impact of digital technologies during the pandemic

Do you have any concerns or questions about the impact of digital technologies used during the pandemic on the physical, mental, social and emotional well-being of children and youth?

CTF: Yes 65%, No 35%
OTF: Yes 69%, No 31%
OSSTF: Yes 71%, No 29%

Yes ■ No

Source: CTF/FTC

Concerns provided through open-ended prompting ranged from general worry about excessive screen time and online safety (77.7%) to the impact of digital technology on home life (10%). Mental health was the second most-often expressed concern at 41.6%, with isolation making up another 37% of responses.

Figure 23. Concerns re: impact of digital technologies

What concerns or questions do you have about the impact of digital technologies used during the pandemic?

Excessive Screent Time/Online Safety — 77.7%
Mental/Physical Health — 41.6%
Isolation/Loss of Social Contact — 37.0%
Limitations to Online Learning — 36.2%
Equity/Access — 30.2%
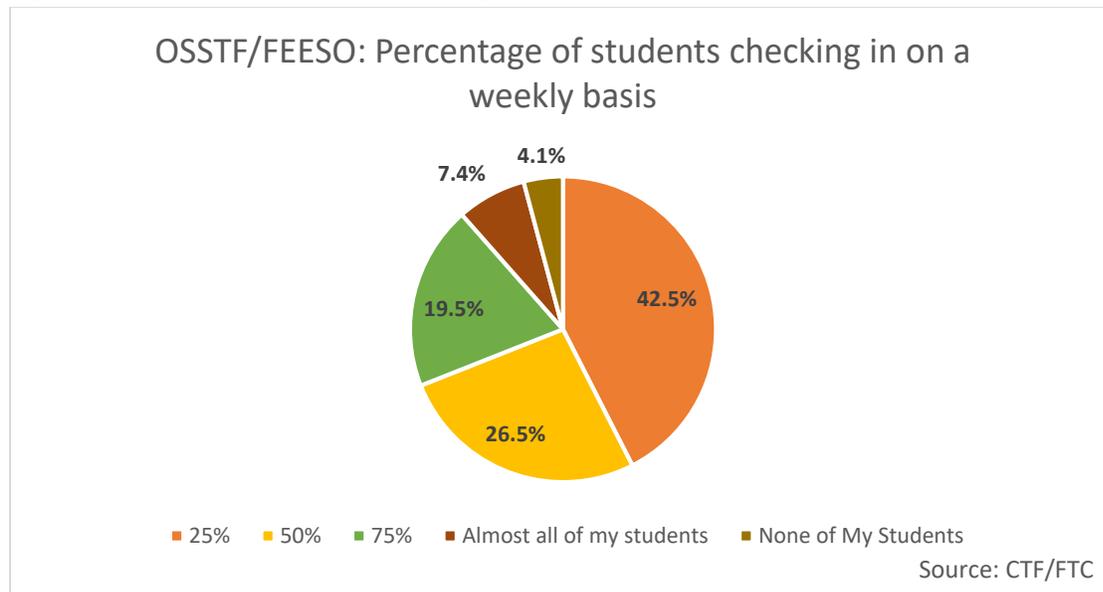Home Life/Environment — 10.0%

Source: CTF/FTC

Concerns about excessive screen time are also supported by the Angus Reid survey cited earlier. The survey of young people aged 10 to 17 asked how children were spending their time during the lock down. 88% reported watching TV/streaming media content and 74% reported playing video games[8].

Increased screen time during emergency remote learning is likely unavoidable, but teachers, education workers, students and families alike ought to be cognizant of the potential negative impacts on physical and mental health that increased screen time will likely have.

Communicating with students and families

Communication between students, teachers, education workers and families was an essential part of emergency remote learning. 42.5% of OSSTF/FEESO members reported that their students were checking in on a weekly basis about 25% of the time.
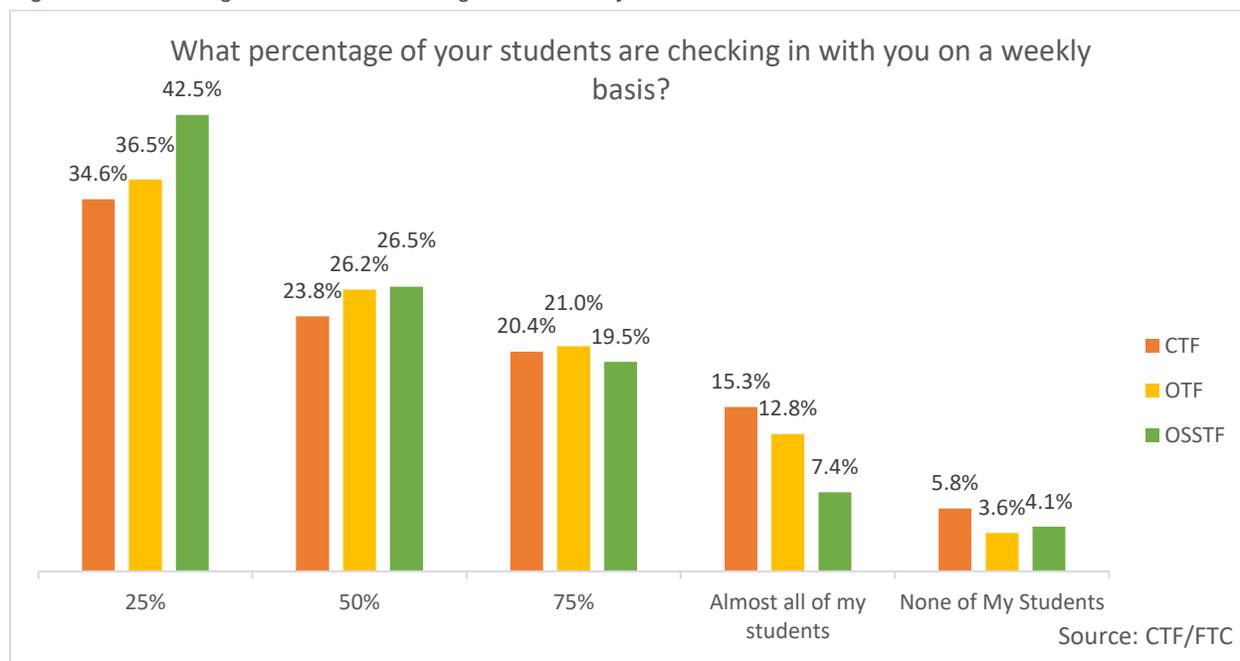
Figure 24. OSSTF/FEESO students checking in on a weekly basis

OSSTF/FEESO: Percentage of students checking in on a weekly basis

- 25%
- 50%
- 75%
- Almost all of my students
- None of My Students

Source: CTF/FTC

OSSTF/FEESO members were slightly below the national rate at which no students were checking in on a weekly basis (5.8%), but higher than the provincial rate (3.6%). At the same time, they were half as likely as their national colleagues to report that almost all students were checking in on a weekly basis (7.4% and 15.3% respectively).
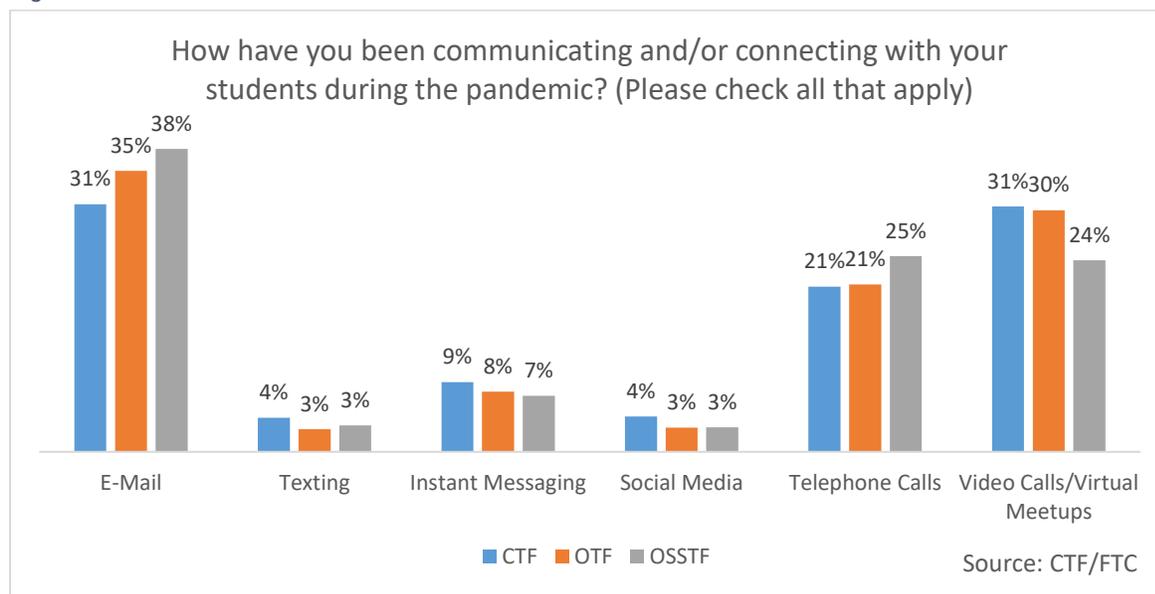
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[8] Angus Reid. "Kids & COVID-19: Canadian children are done with school from home, fear falling behind, and miss their friends." *Angus Reid Institute*, vol. 2020, Angus Reid Institute, 2020. http://angusreid.org/covid19-kids-opening-schools/, September 21, 2020.

Figure 25. Percentage of students checking in on a weekly basis

What percentage of your students are checking in with you on a weekly basis?

- 25%: CTF 34.6%, OTF 36.5%, OSSTF 42.5%
- 50%: CTF 23.8%, OTF 26.2%, OSSTF 26.5%
- 75%: CTF 20.4%, OTF 21.0%, OSSTF 19.5%
- Almost all of my students: CTF 15.3%, OTF 12.8%, OSSTF 7.4%
- None of My Students: CTF 5.8%, OTF 3.6%, OSSTF 4.1%
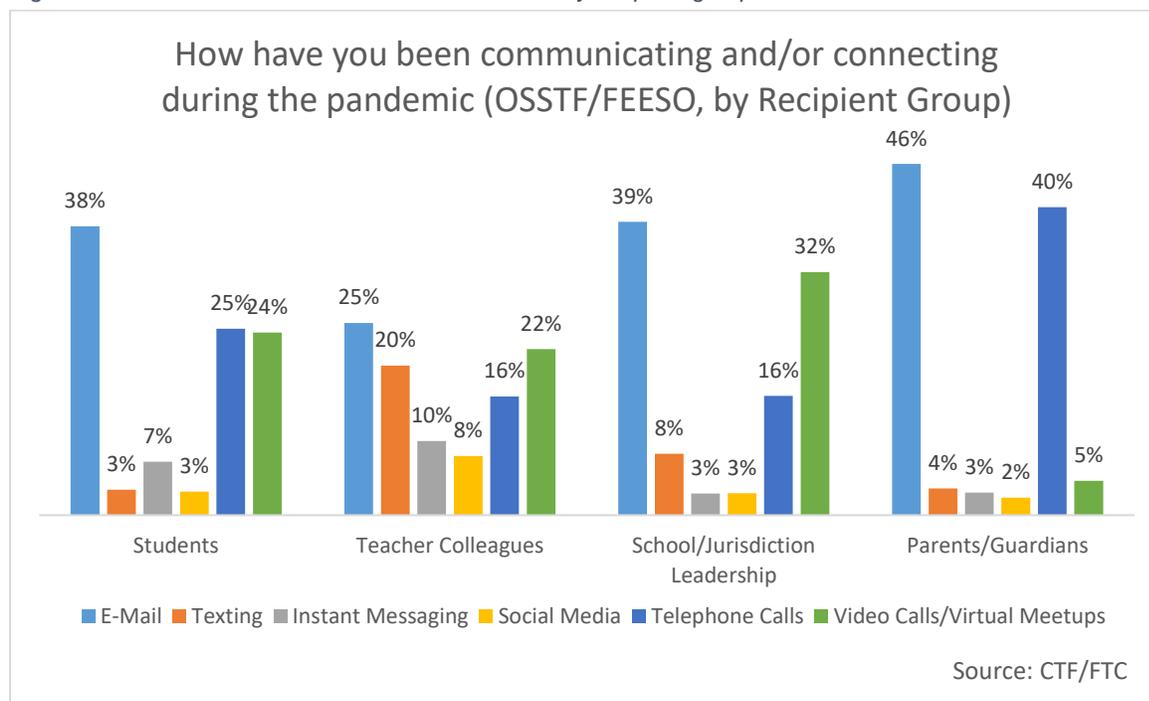
Legend: CTF, OTF, OSSTF

Source: CTF/FTC

At the national, provincial and OSSTF/FEESO level, email and video calls were the primary methods teachers and education workers used to communicate with students. OSSTF/FEESO members were slightly more likely to rely on email than provincial and national colleagues were, and slightly less likely to use video calls.

Figure 26. Methods of communication with students

How have you been communicating and/or connecting with your students during the pandemic? (Please check all that apply)

- E-Mail: CTF 31%, OTF 35%, OSSTF 38%
- Texting: CTF 4%, OTF 3%, OSSTF 3%
- Instant Messaging: CTF 9%, OTF 8%, OSSTF 7%
- Social Media: CTF 4%, OTF 3%, OSSTF 3%
- Telephone Calls: CTF 21%, OTF 21%, OSSTF 25%
- Video Calls/Virtual Meetups: CTF 31%, OTF 30%, OSSTF 24%

Legend: CTF, OTF, OSSTF

Source: CTF/FTC

Regardless of recipient group, OSSTF/FEESO members preferred email as their method of communication.

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Figure 27. OSSTF/FEESO communication methods by recipient group

How have you been communicating and/or connecting during the pandemic (OSSTF/FEESO, by Recipient Group)

Legend: E-Mail, Texting, Instant Messaging, Social Media, Telephone Calls, Video Calls/Virtual Meetups

Students: E-Mail 38%, Texting 3%, Instant Messaging 7%, Social Media 3%, Telephone Calls 25%, Video Calls/Virtual Meetups 24%

Teacher Colleagues: E-Mail 25%, Texting 20%, Instant Messaging 10%, Social Media 8%, Telephone Calls 16%, Video Calls/Virtual Meetups 22%

School/Jurisdiction Leadership: E-Mail 39%, Texting 8%, Instant Messaging 3%, Social Media 3%, Telephone Calls 16%, Video Calls/Virtual Meetups 32%

Parents/Guardians: E-Mail 46%, Texting 4%, Instant Messaging 3%, Social Media 2%, Telephone Calls 40%, Video Calls/Virtual Meetups 5%

Source: CTF/FTC

To probe more deeply about social media, CTF/FTC asked respondents to ask which platform they relied on most often. For this question, they did not specify which recipient group was the target, so it is not clear whether they were using social media to communicate with students, parents or colleagues. It is also important to note that this question had a relatively high skip rate. Only 40% nationally, 38% provincially and 32% of OSSTF/FEESO respondents answered this question. This might indicate discomfort answering the question given union recommendations against the use of social media, but other reasons for skipping the question might also apply.

That said, in terms of social media, Facebook is the most frequently cited platform for communicating, though OSSTF/FEESO members are slightly less likely to use Facebook than their colleagues across Canada and Ontario.

Figure 28. Social media platforms

Which social media platforms are you using most frequently to communicate/connect? (list of social media)
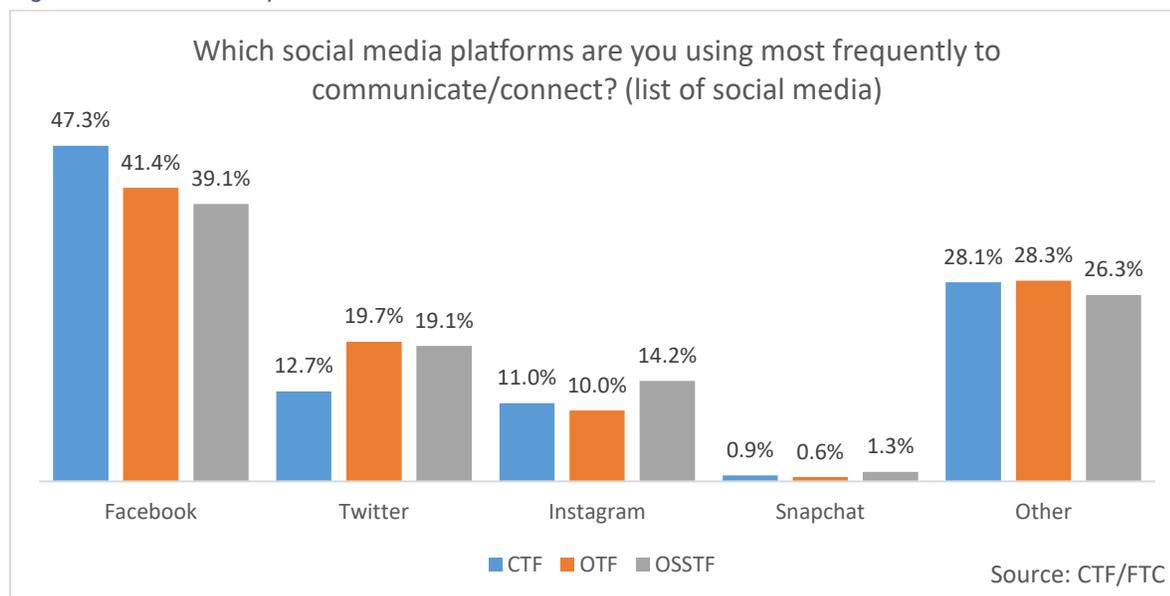
Following Facebook, the next two most popular named platforms are Twitter (19.1%) and Instagram (14.2%), although a significant number (39.1%) answered "Other."
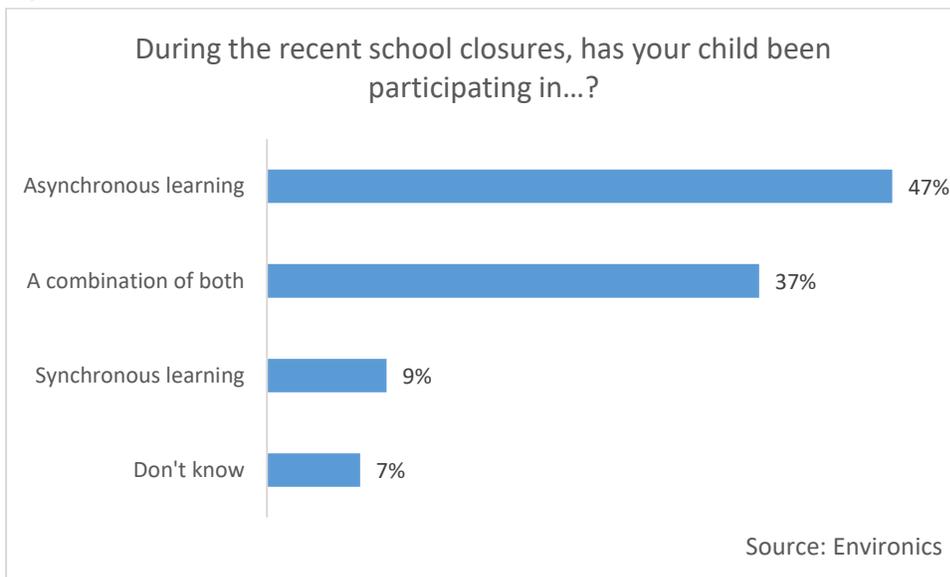
Figure 29. OSSTF/FEESO Social media platforms

OSSTF/FEESO: Social Media Most Frequently Used to Communicate
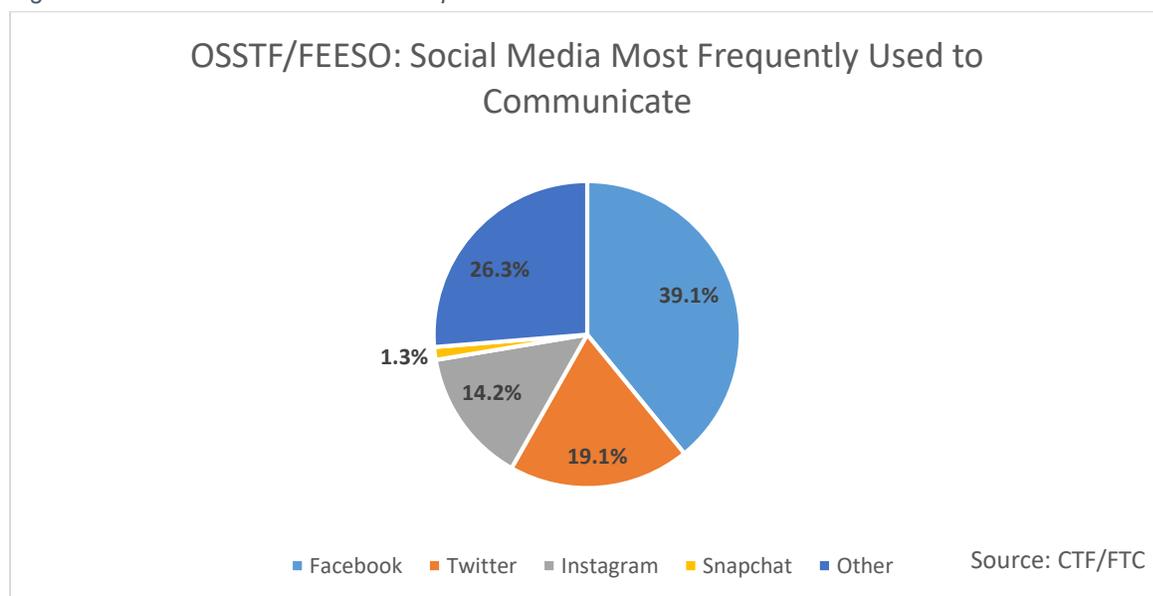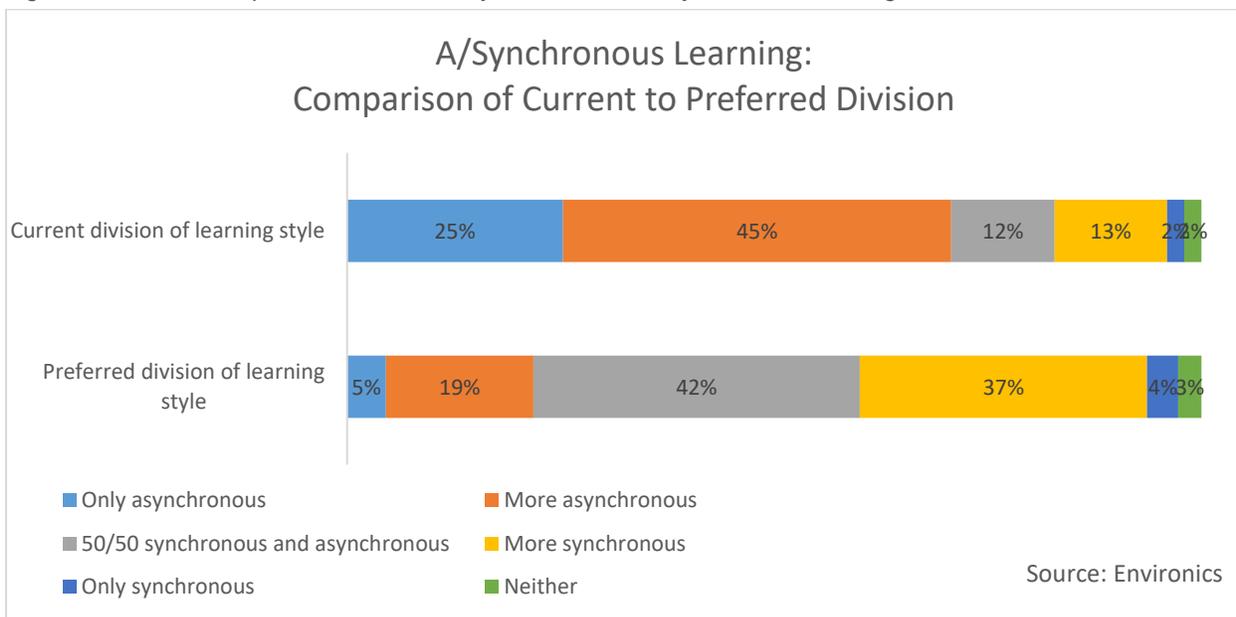
Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning

The data we have available regarding synchronous and asynchronous learning during the school closures comes entirely from OSSTF/FEESO's Environics survey of parents. According to Environics, nearly half of students participated in asynchronous learning as their primary delivery method. This pattern was slightly higher among secondary students (48%) than elementary students (42%).

Figure 30. Prevalence of synchronous and asynchronous

During the recent school closures, has your child been participating in…?

- Asynchronous learning — 47%
- A combination of both — 37%
- Synchronous learning — 9%
- Don't know — 7%

Source: Environics

The Environics survey allows a comparison of the division between synchronous and asynchronous families were experiencing during the school closures with the division they would prefer to see.

Figure 31. Current and preferred division of synchronous and asynchronous learning
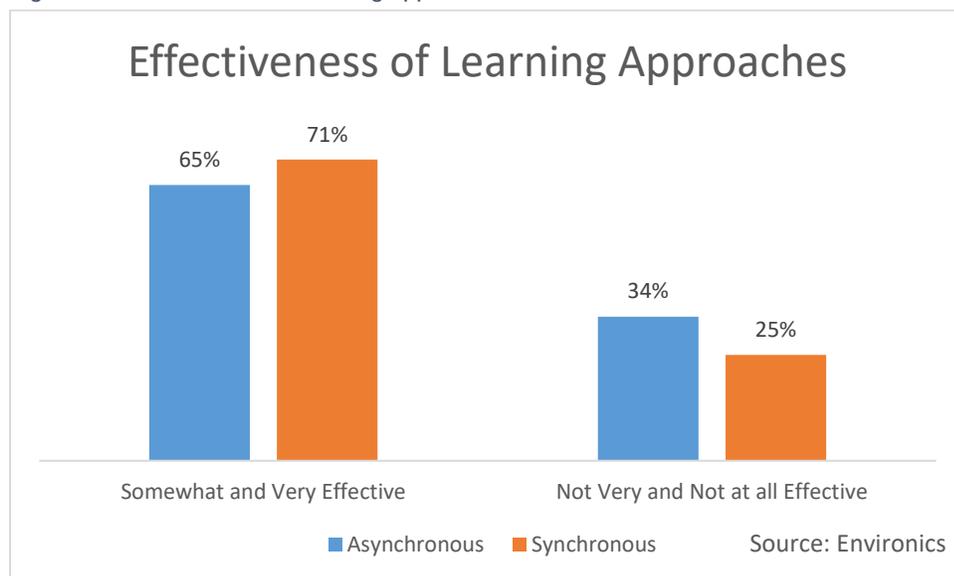

A/Synchronous Learning:
Comparison of Current to Preferred Division

Current division of learning style: 25% | 45% | 12% | 13% | 2% 1%

Preferred division of learning style: 5% | 19% | 42% | 37% | 4% 3%

- ■ Only asynchronous
- ■ More asynchronous
- ■ 50/50 synchronous and asynchronous
- ■ More synchronous
- ■ Only synchronous
- ■ Neither

Source: Environics

During the lockdown, 70% of families reported "Only" and "More" learning asynchronously. By contrast, only 24% of respondents expressed a preference for "Only" and "More" asynchronous learning – a difference of 46%.

At the other end of the spectrum, 15% of respondents reported that their children were learning "Only" or "More" synchronously during the lockdown, but 31% indicated that this was their preferred style – a difference of 16%.

42% of respondents indicated a preference for an even split between synchronous and asynchronous learning, while only 12% reported that as the actual practice during the closures (a difference of 30%).

Overall, parents were slightly more likely to consider synchronous learning to be somewhat or very effective (71%) compared to asynchronous learning (65%).
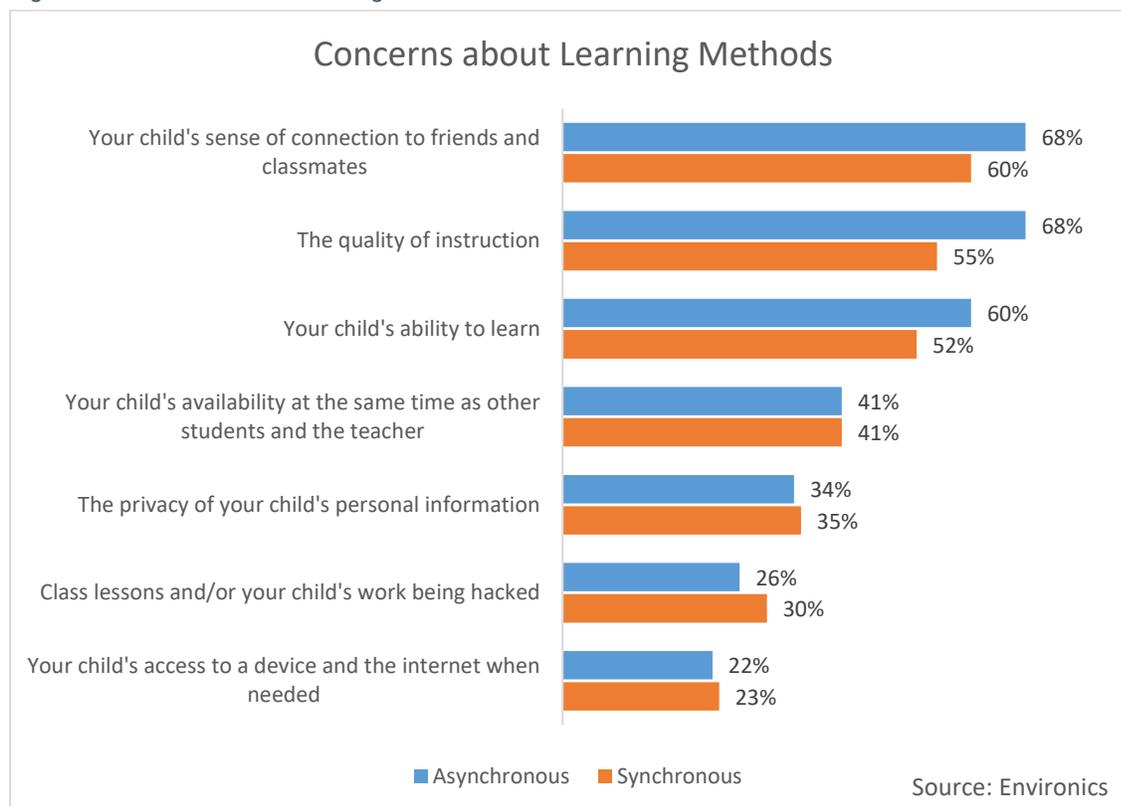
Figure 32. Effectiveness of learning approaches

Environics notes that about the same proportion of respondents in the secondary and elementary panels found synchronous learning to be effective (71% and 72%), parents of secondary students were more likely to find asynchronous learning to be effective, compared to parents of elementary students (67% and 57%).

Reflecting themes identified in the mental health and wellbeing section above, parents' primary concern with both synchronous and asynchronous learning is the loss of connection with friends and classmates.

Figure 33. Concerns about learning methods

Concerns about Learning Methods

- Your child's sense of connection to friends and classmates: Asynchronous 68%, Synchronous 60%
- The quality of instruction: Asynchronous 68%, Synchronous 55%
- Your child's ability to learn: Asynchronous 60%, Synchronous 52%
- Your child's availability at the same time as other students and the teacher: Asynchronous 41%, Synchronous 41%
- The privacy of your child's personal information: Asynchronous 34%, Synchronous 35%
- Class lessons and/or your child's work being hacked: Asynchronous 26%, Synchronous 30%
- Your child's access to a device and the internet when needed: Asynchronous 22%, Synchronous 23%

■ Asynchronous ■ Synchronous

Source: Environics

## Parental Support during Emergency Remote Learning

In OSSTF/FEESO's Environics survey, 77% of respondents indicated that they were either familiar (50%) or very familiar (27%) with their child's learning and curriculum during the school closures. At the secondary level, 41% said that it was about the same whether in-school or online, while approximately one third said they were more familiar with their child's learning online (30%) or in school (29%). There was a larger difference reported by parents of elementary students, 41% of whom said they were more familiar with their child's learning when it was online compared to only 21% who reported being more familiar when learning happened in school.

Familiarity with your child's learning
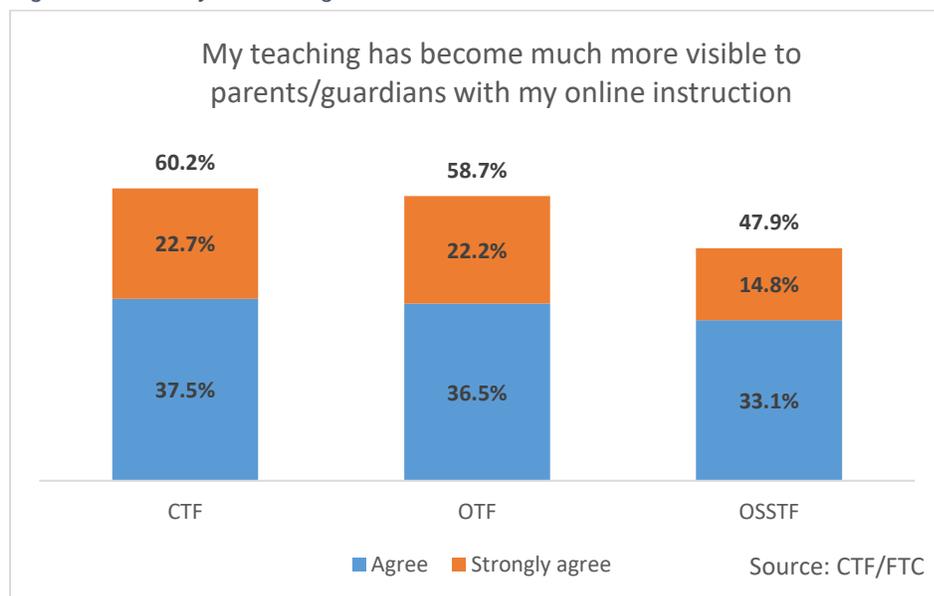

Source: Environics
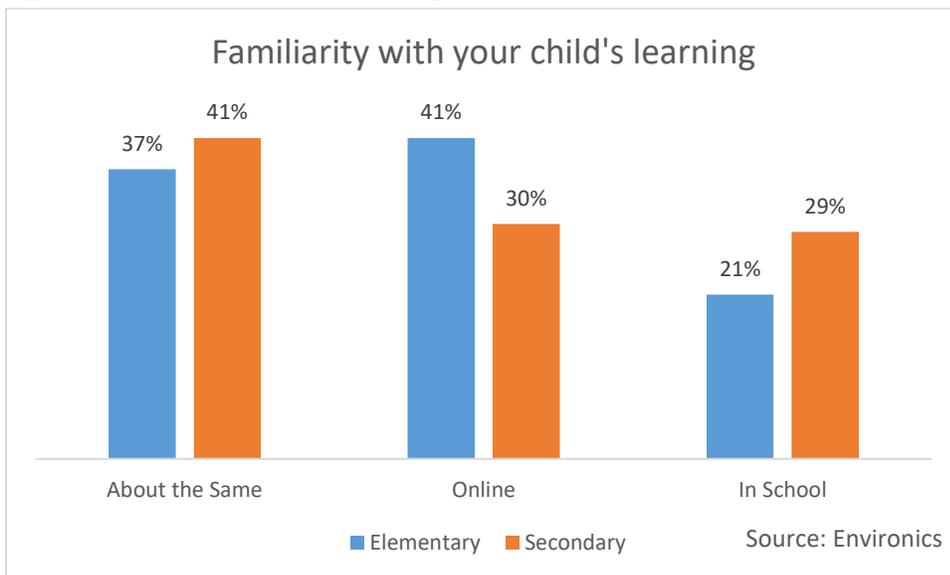
Just over half of respondents (57%) indicated that they are spending either a little more or much more time monitoring, reviewing, and supporting their child's education when compared to time spent before the school closures.

Time Spent monitoring, reviewing and supporting education

Source: Environics
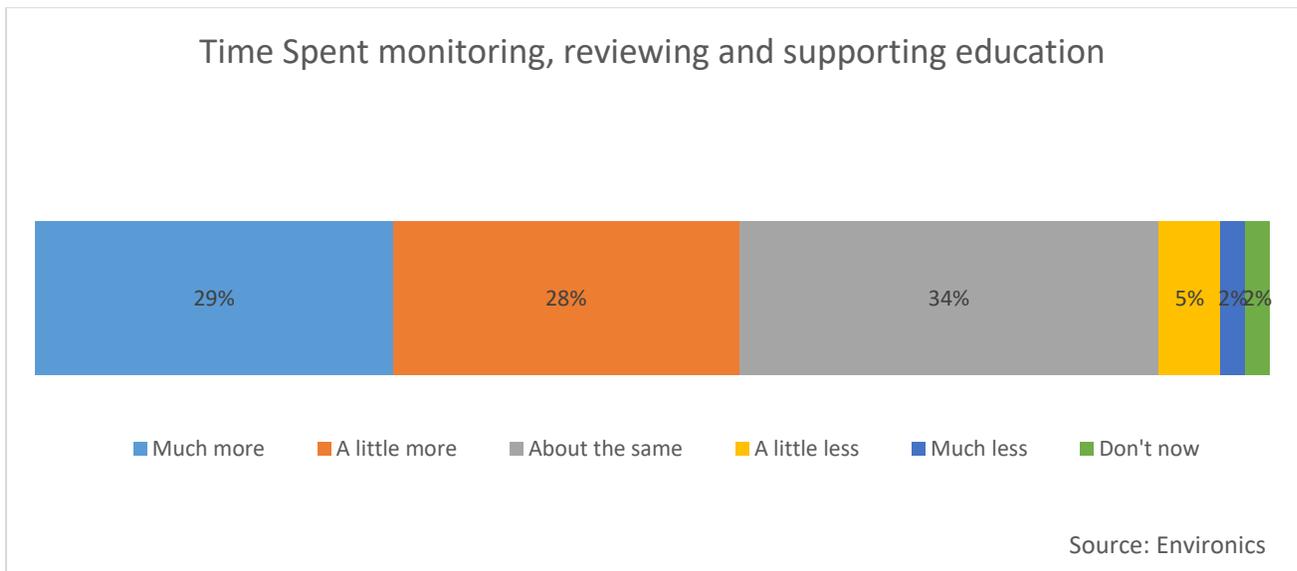
According to the CTF/FTC survey, just under half of OSSTF/FEESO members agreed or strongly agreed that their teaching had become more visible to parents and guardians during school closures.

Figure 36. Visibility of teaching

My teaching has become much more visible to parents/guardians with my online instruction

	CTF	OTF	OSSTF
Total	60.2%	58.7%	47.9%
Strongly agree	22.7%	22.2%	14.8%
Agree	37.5%	36.5%	33.1%

■ Agree ■ Strongly agree

Source: CTF/FTC

Conclusions

According to the surveys available to us, most students participated in emergency remote learning, with approximately a third of parents in the secondary panel thereby becoming more familiar with their children's learning and actively facilitating that learning. Most teaching was delivered either asynchronously or through a combination of synchronous and asynchronous methods. How participation in learning translated into actual learning, though, is somewhat difficult to parse out.

Teachers and education workers were concerned that students were less prepared to learn than before the pandemic. Further, both OSSTF/FEESO's own surveys and external research raise concerns about the mental health and overall wellbeing of students during the pandemic lockdown. For teachers and educators, this often showed up as students being more likely to be tired and less able to focus. Parents flagged concerns about lack of motivation and willingness to stay engaged in learning. Some concern was expressed that these problems may be exacerbated not just by the need to learn online, but the expanded screen-time this implies for students.

Finally, although intersectional data about various potential barriers to learning, equity remains an important concern. Students living in poverty, students with disabilities, and students living in single-parent homes were seen as particularly vulnerable.

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