

# Feedback from Spring 2020 about Online Learning

Survey findings from school-based staff,  
parents/guardians, and students.

# Overview of Surveys

- The Office of Evaluation, Research & Accountability (ERA) administered surveys to gather feedback from school-based staff, parents/guardians, and students.
- Links to complete the surveys were posted on SDP's website, and the surveys were open from June 15 to June 22.
- The questions asked for feedback around the communication received during school closures as well as experiences with online learning.
- The online learning practices included in the survey are aligned to those found in the [Best Practices for Online Learning Brief](#).



# How many people completed the surveys?

- **Teachers/Instructional Staff** - 7,144
- **School Administrators** - 656
- **Parents/guardians** - 14,001
- **Students** - 7,120

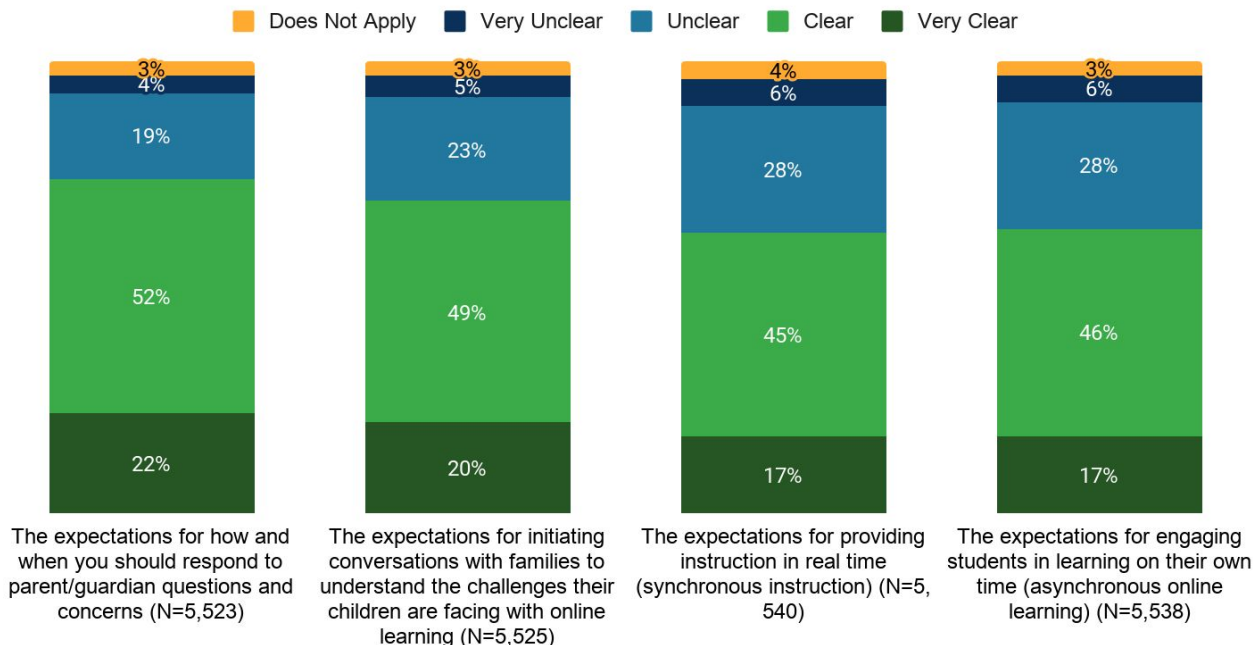


# Feedback on Communication



About two thirds of **instructional staff** were *clear* or *very clear* on the expectations for online learning.

Thinking about the communication that you received from the District since March 16 (first day of full district closure for COVID-19), how clear was communication about the following topics?



# Themes from open-ended responses: Clarity of communication

Instructional staff and administrators expressed a desire for more concise, streamlined, and consistent communication from the District:

- “All communication could have come in 1 document with hyperlinks so that all information was housed in 1 place. Since this is a new practice an exemplar or scenarios could have clarified specific nuances in the online programming. In addition, guidelines seemed very rough and not concrete. Simplified expectations and procedures.”
- “...Clear, concise communication. NOT multiple, overlaying communications from a multitude of individuals. CLEAR information in ‘subject’ line of emails. For example, emails with subject lines reading ‘tips and tricks’ should not also contain important guidelines...this is very misleading.”
- “A lot of times guidance was overly wordy, complicated, or contradictory. Without Meredith's daily ‘unpacking’ emails, a lot of info would have remained unclear.”
- “Streamline the communications. Too many emails from too many sources often saying different things...[an] inundation of emails.”
- “The messaging on schedules, attendance, and grading were unclear and often seemed vague and ever-changing. Messaging expectations for this required a great deal of legwork and interpretation on behalf of the building administration.”

# Themes from open-ended responses: Clarity of communication

Instructional staff voiced their frustration at the conflicting messaging they received from different sources:

- “Administrators were initiating instructions that often conflicted with PhilaSD and even the PDE. There was an obvious disconnect between what was expected of me by 440 and what was expected by my administrator. By the time expectations were communicated to students, many had already disengaged.”
- “All mandates should be singular. The district gave us instructions and the principal gave us contradictory mandates adding to the stress of which to follow. The principal’s mandates were more demanding and time-consuming and caused confusion amongst staff on what exactly we were supposed to do.”
- “All communication coming from central office has to be clear, consistent, uniformed, and timely. The communication was disjointed because different offices were sending out information without coordinating with each other. At times, the communication was contradictory.”
- “Communication from central office to school staff should have been better verified before sending out - too many emails with conflicting info or being asked to ‘ignore previous instructions’. Understandable that this was a learning curve but some of it felt very unnecessary and ‘sloppy’.”
- “While the union made it clear that we didn’t have to do google meets, principals were requiring it and wanting a schedule of when google meets were done. Again the school district and the union are on two different pages.”

# Themes from open-ended responses: Clarity of communication

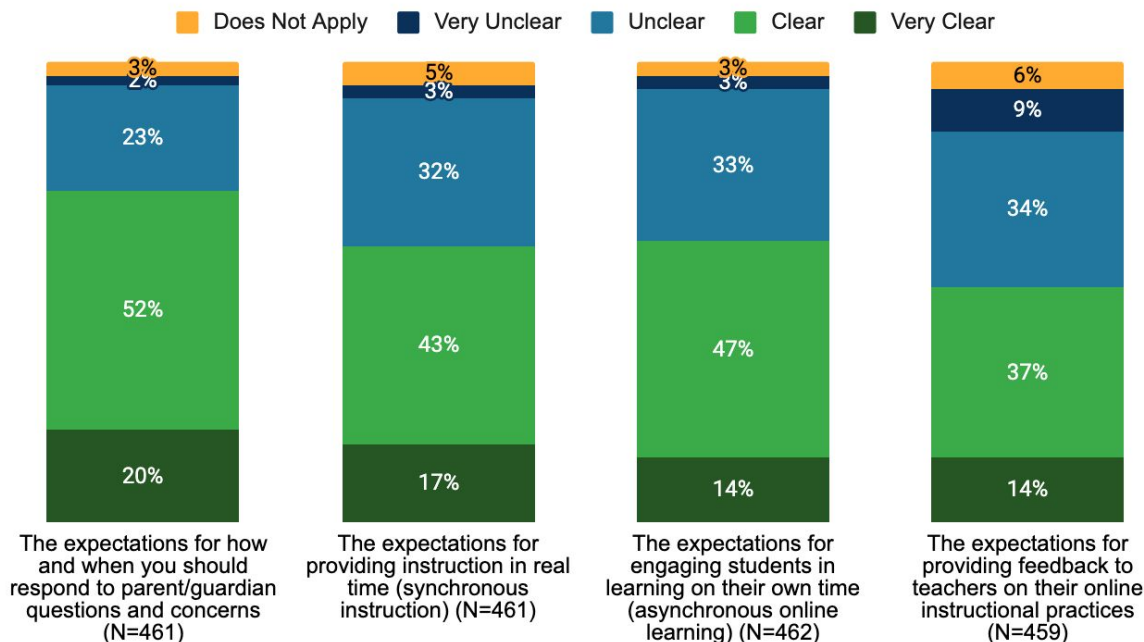
Instructional staff and administrators also expressed frustration about the timing of important messaging about online learning, particularly that they were not informed about District plans before information was shared with the general public:

- “Allow time for principals to receive the information before communication went to teachers/school staff. It was hard as an admin to be prepared for any anticipated question.”
- “A plan of action overview should have been sent to administrators prior to public announcement. Most if not all communication was announced during Dr. Hites weekly address.”
- “I did not appreciate how I received information from the media before I would receive an official statement from a verified philasd.org email address.”
- “A lot of information I found out about from Dr. Hite’s facebook sessions before it was communicated to teachers.”
- “Learning about the the district initiatives before the media and news outlets would be helpful.”
- “Once the students heard on the news from Dr. Hite that they couldn’t fail for not turning in work, my weekly participation dropped to 20% or less from my 240 students...He should’ve told the teachers first before the announcement was made on the news.”



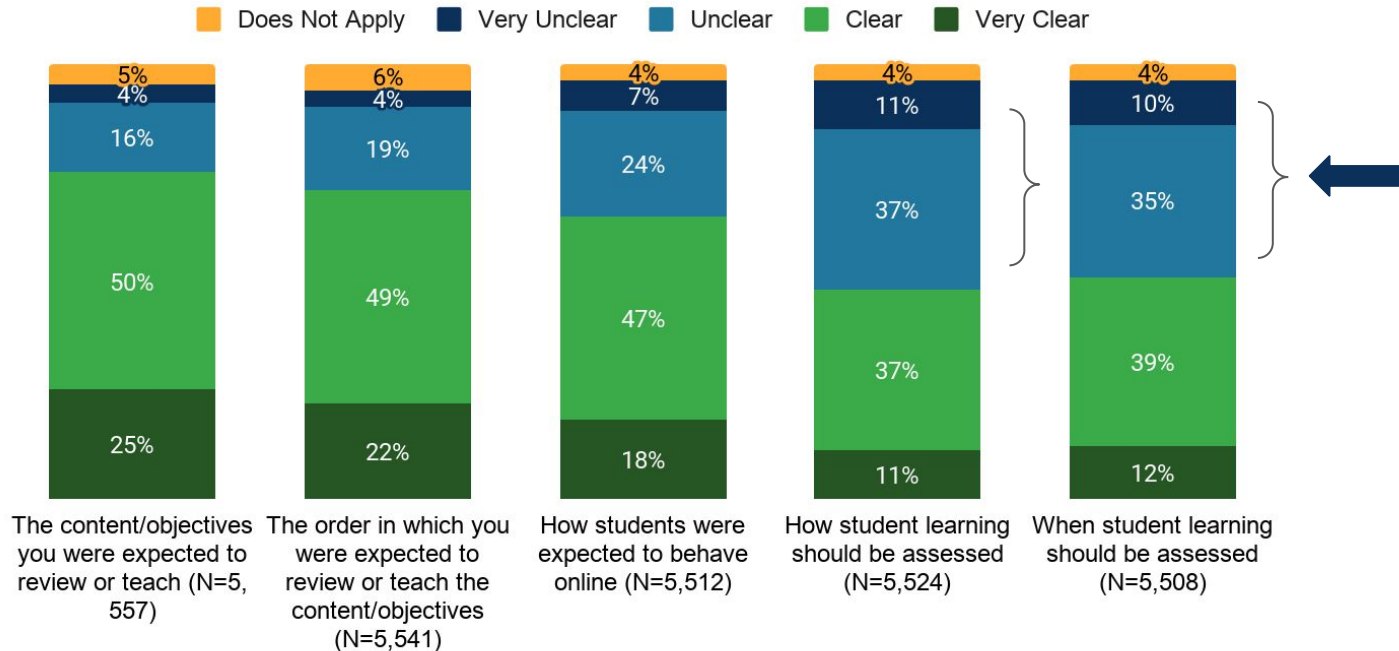
# At least half of **school administrators** were *clear* or *very clear* on the expectations for online learning and teacher support.

Thinking about the communication that you received from the District since March 16 (first day of full district closure for COVID-19), how clear was communication about the following topics?



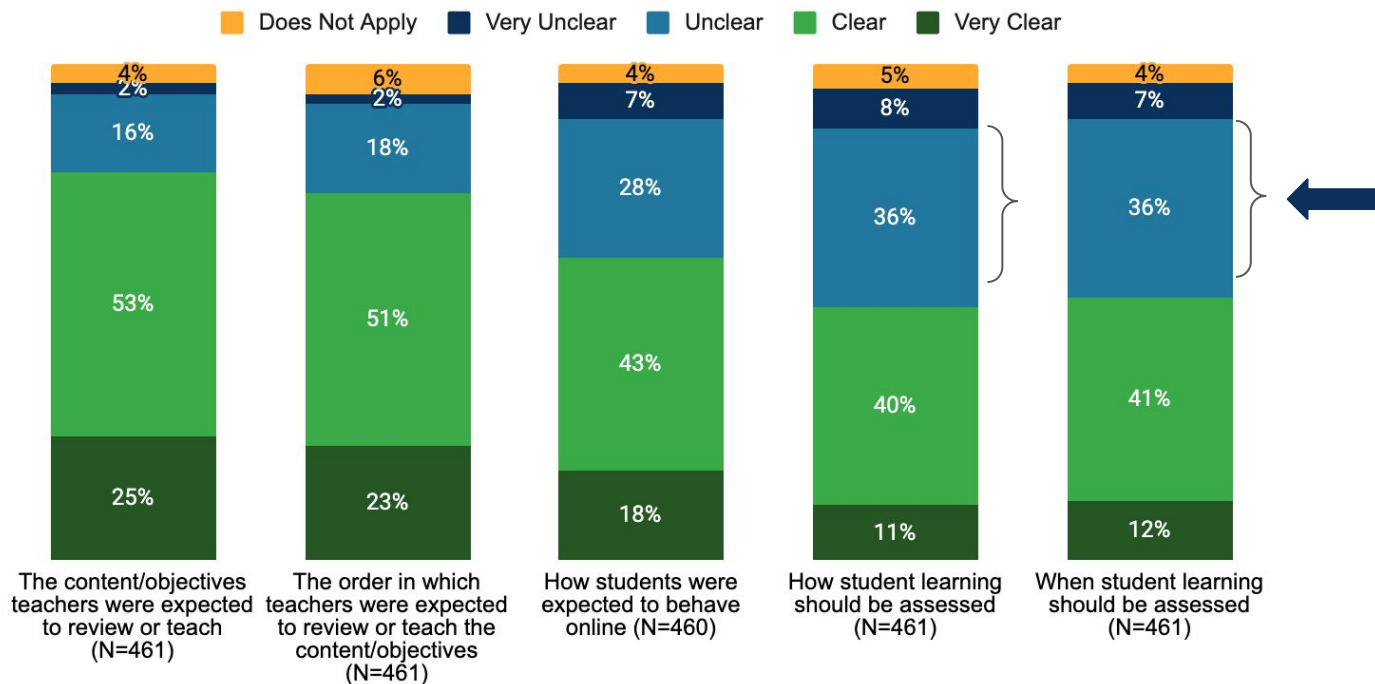
# Almost half of **instructional staff** were *unclear* or *very unclear* about how and/or when student learning should be assessed.

Thinking about the communication that you received from the District since March 16 (first day of full district closure for COVID-19), how clear was communication about the following topics?



# Almost half of **school administrators** were *unclear* or *very unclear* about how and/or when student learning should be assessed.

Thinking about the communication that you received from the District since March 16 (first day of full district closure for COVID-19), how clear was communication about the following topics?



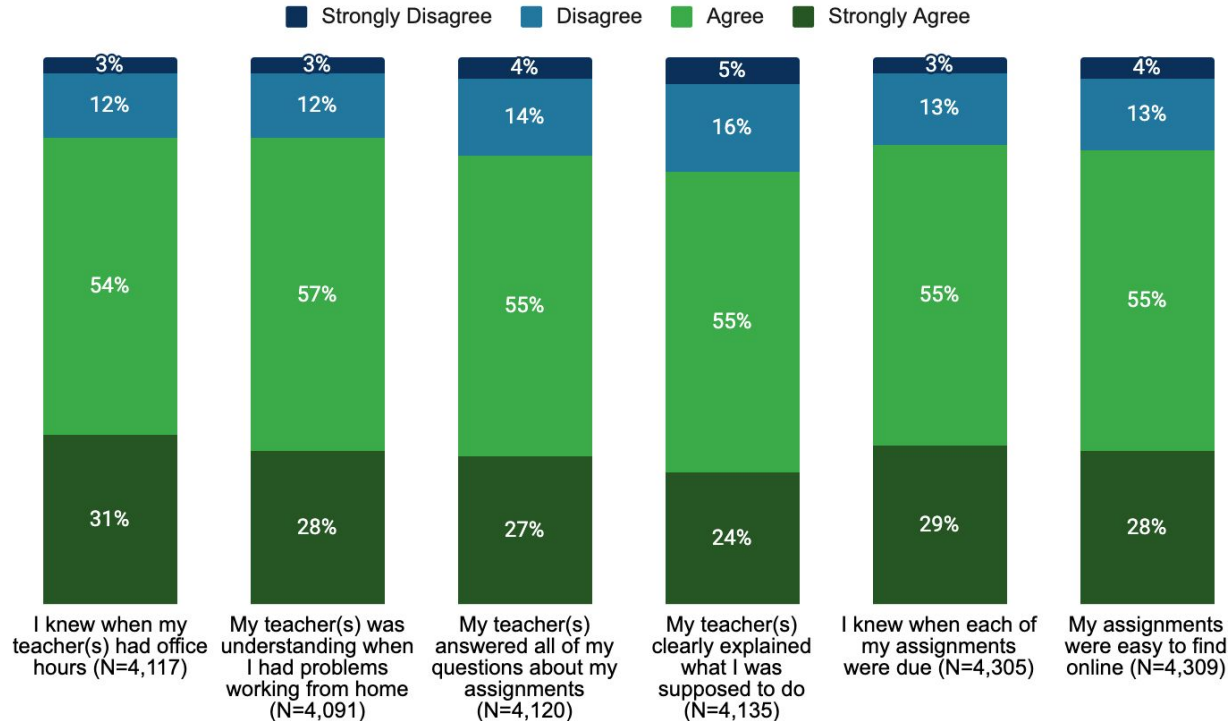
# Themes from open-ended responses: Communication about assessments

Instructional staff and administrators highlighted the need for more clarity around assessing student learning:

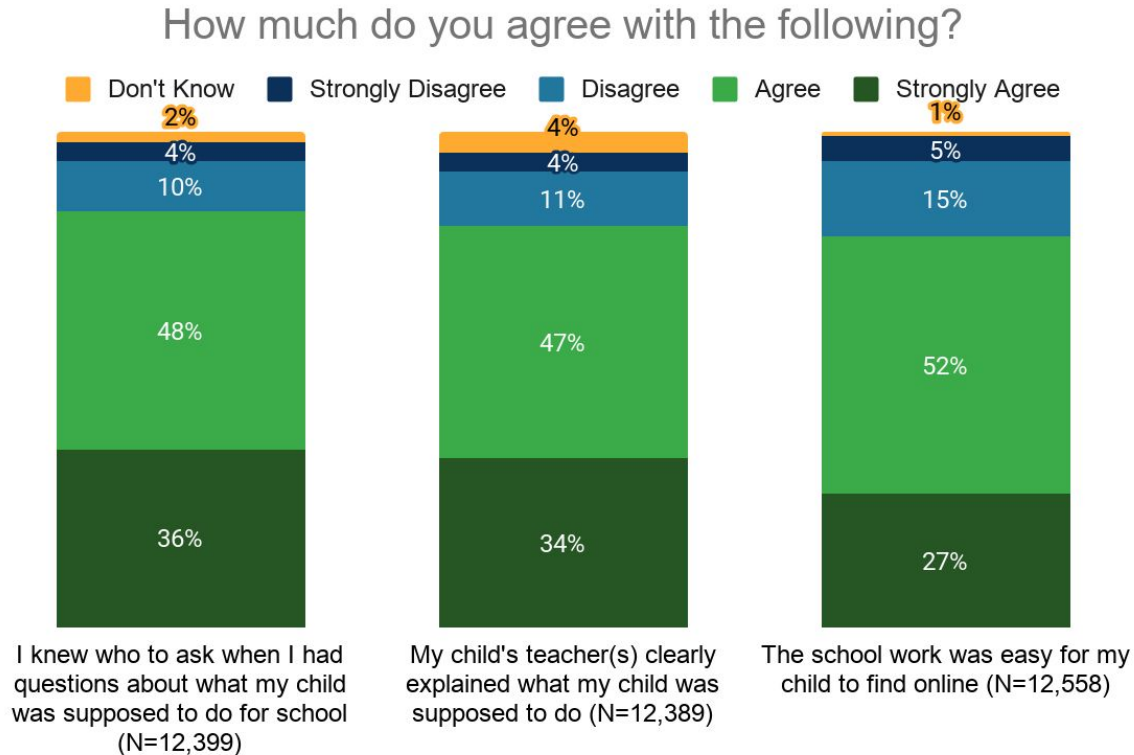
- “The part I was most concerned about was how to grade and assess students’ online work. This should be made clearer if we move to online learning this fall.”
- “I didn’t notice any particular guidelines with regards to communication expectations [or] assessment (maybe because grades were not to be lowered). The instructional expectations, however, were very clear.”
- “Learning assessment expectations were not clear at all. I hope this will be remedied by more concise online programs and expectations.”
- “Finally, the assessment/lack of accountability by only improving the grade, may have lowered expectations for students and families. We need clear communication on what the assessments (variety and non traditional) look like/sound like in an online setting.”
- “We were told to grade work but then told no child could fail so that graded work altered their averages and made it tough to have an accurate assessment of what they did during our remote learning.”
- “While I understood the need for the lack of assessing students, I believe that we weren’t able to truly engage all of our students in online learning since many were satisfied with their grades and decided not to participate.”

# The majority of **students** *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the following statements about communication during online learning:

How much do you agree with the following statements?



The majority of **parents/guardians** *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the following statements about communication during online learning:



# Themes from open-ended responses: Parents/guardian and student experiences

Some parents/guardians and students had negative experiences due to the lack of consistent and clear communication and guidance about online learning:

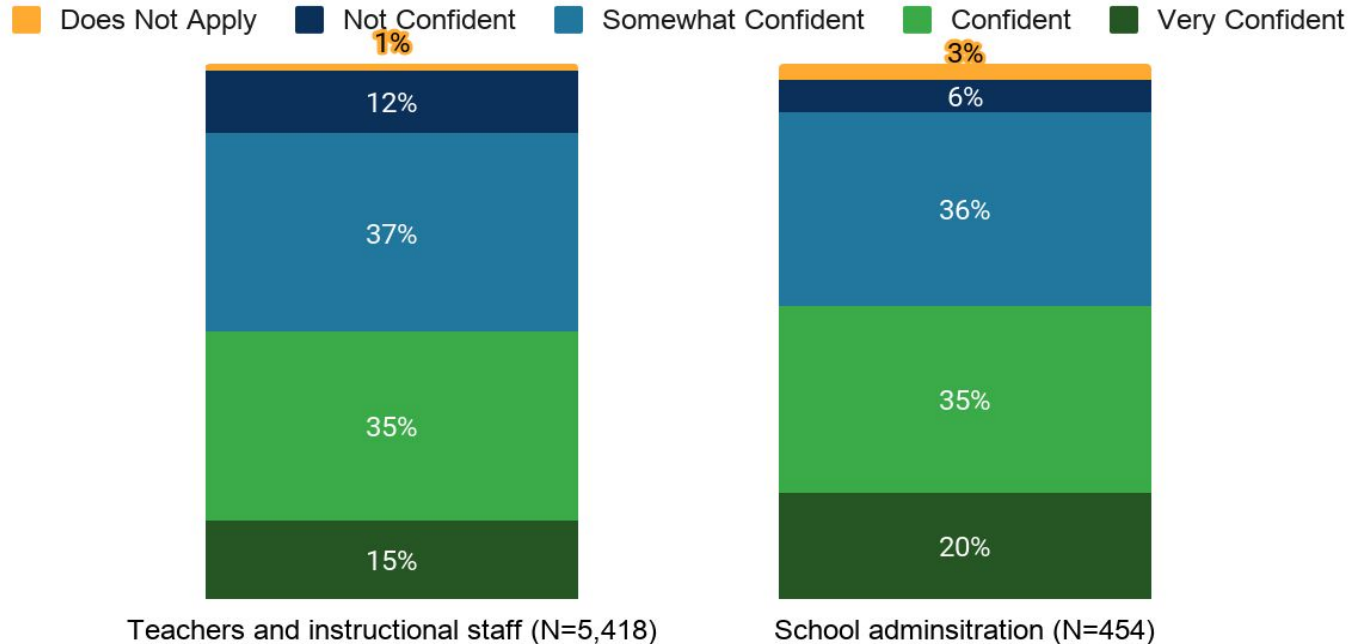
- “Online classes were a mess. Unstructured. Hard to find material, too many links once in google classroom. Not enough teacher students interaction. I can’t help my child because I’m also working from home.” (Parent/guardian)
- “The online Google meets schedule was very unorganized. For example, the school website would say one time while the Google class page said something else.” (Student)
- “Please take measures to make sure teachers use a uniform method to distributing school work and tracking it. All school work should be posted in the ‘to do’ list in Google classroom. All school work should be found or linked to in Google classroom. All communication between teachers, students, and parents should be done via Google classroom. There are way too many methods to keep track of, and it shouldn’t require a thirty-minute search to find assignments.” (Parent/guardian)
- “The assignments that relied on students editing slideshows were unreasonably cumbersome, and virtually impossible to accomplish using a tablet or phone. The online Meet times were changed frequently, and often with little notice.” (Parent/guardian)

# Feedback on Online Learning



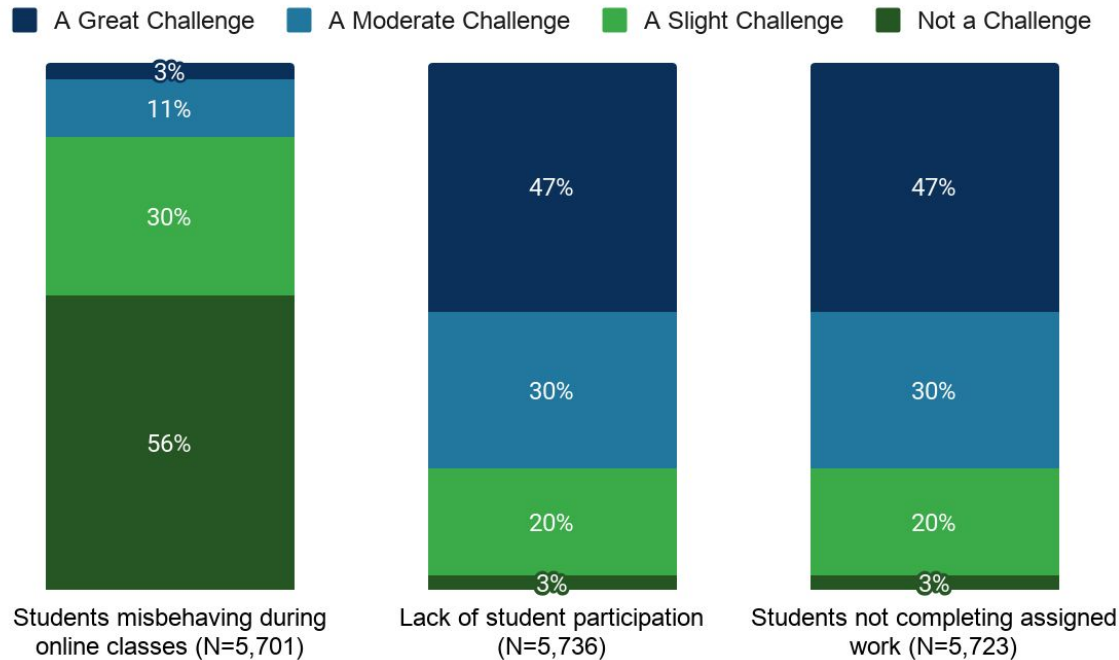
About half of **instructional staff** (50%) and **administrators** (42%) reported being *somewhat confident* or *not confident* in their ability to motivate students to participate in virtual learning.

How confident are you in your ability to motivate students to participate in virtual learning?



About half of **instructional staff** and **administrators** said that lack of student participation and students not completing assigned work were greatly challenging.

Since the planned instruction phase of online learning began on May 4, how much of a challenge were the following?



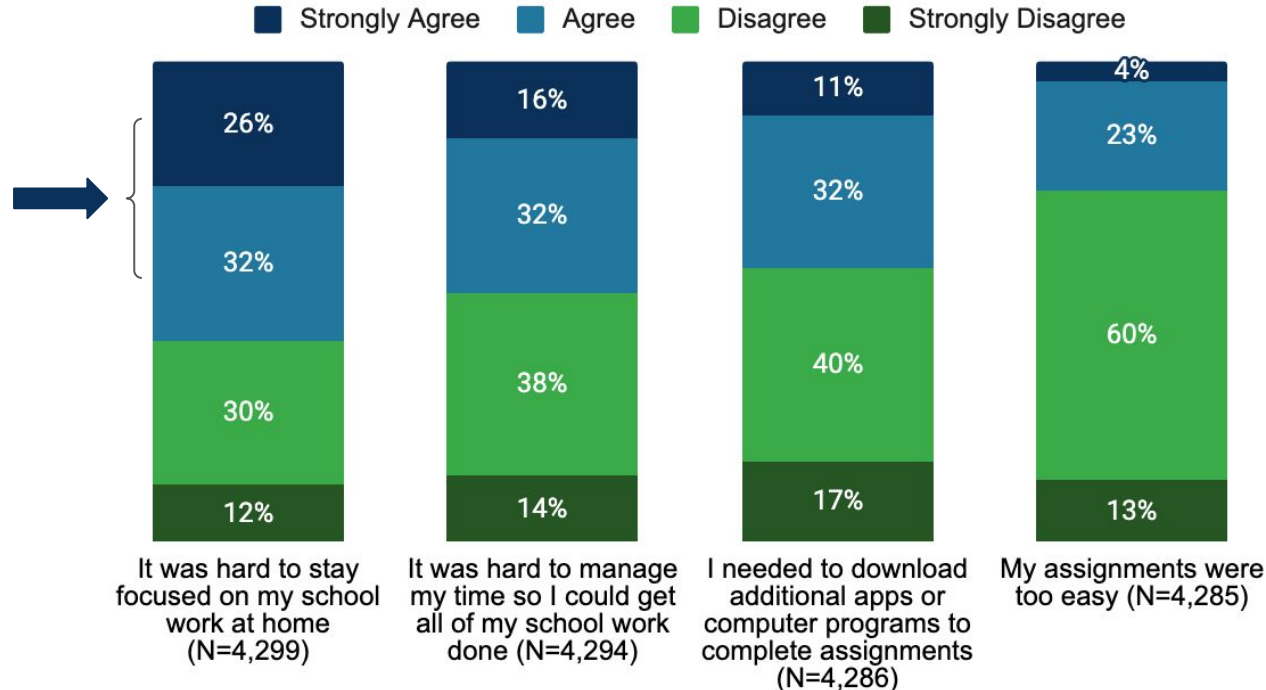
# Themes from open-ended responses: Student participation

Instructional staff and administrators noted that after students learned that their grades would not be negatively impacted, they were less motivated to participate and complete assignments:

- “Communication of expectations of students and families was VERY confusing. Many families heard that ‘grades don’t count’ and so attendance was low.”
- “Advising students that they were not expected to do assignments and that they would not fail, was misconstrued by students and parents. Giving the expectation that students were expected to complete assignments should have been the only communication.”
- “While the expectations for grading were clear it was put on tv that it didn’t count against students anyway. Even if that was true, it should not have been common knowledge to students/parents.”
- “Students needed to have clear accountability and consequences for their attendance, behavior, and learning. I absolutely believe that we need to be flexible to student need in an awful time like this, but letting everyone go with inflated grades had a devastating impact on how we were expected to teach and the extent that our students achieved. Most of them checked out while teachers were expected to work miracles.”
- “Your staff gave out the laptop and put out to the media that school was optional and the students will get the same grade they received in the 2nd quarter. You wasted our time with online learning. You undermined education in the way that it was supposed to be platformed. You blasted this on the news. This was not teaching.”

Over half (58%) of **students** *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that it was hard to stay focused on their schoolwork at home.

How much do you agree with the following statements?



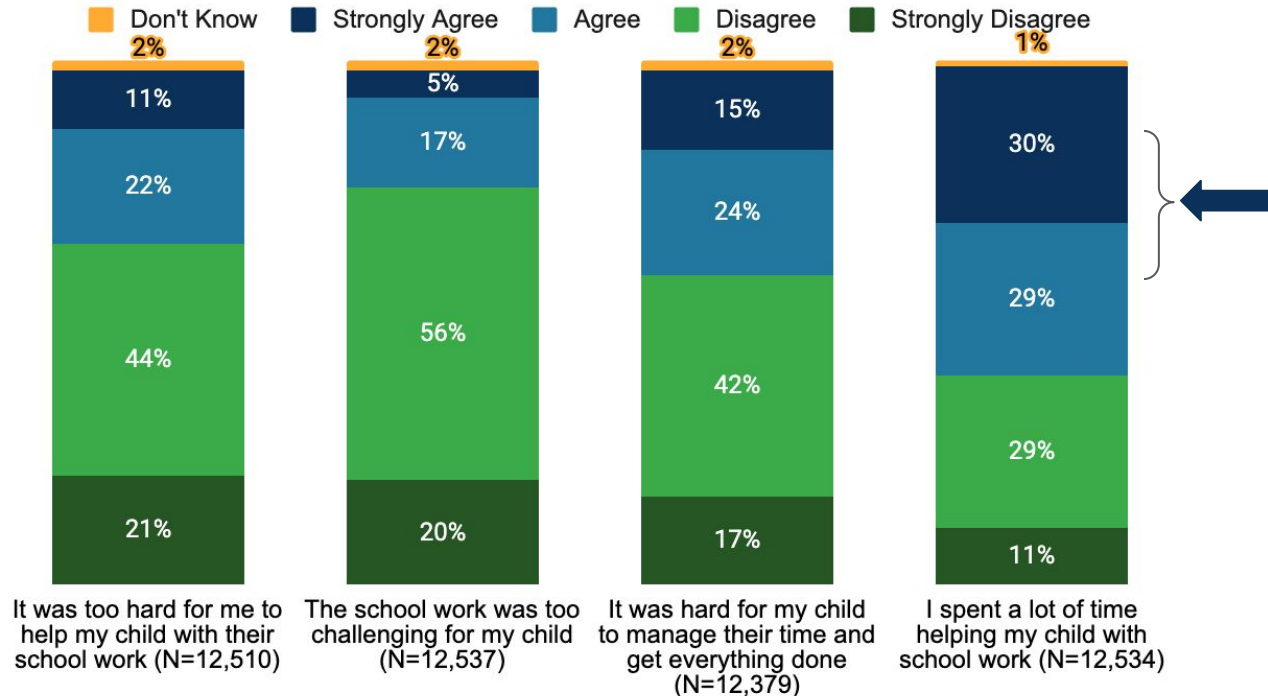
# Themes from open-ended responses: Student experiences

Students explained having trouble feeling focused and motivated without the presence of teachers during online learning:

- “I can barely do school while at school so doing school at home and online is impossible for me. I have no motivation.”
- “Online classes do not help me learn and are ineffective. If we are expected to learn I think the best way is in person.”
- “I fell behind in school during the online session. I need a teacher helping me in person. I am worried that I am not going to do good and that everybody will be ahead of me in learning. I need to be in school.”
- “I had trouble staying focused, adhering to deadlines, and retaining any information given from the Online assignments and can't imagine doing virtual learning long-term.”
- “In-person classroom learning is extremely important. To me anyway. I feel more focused and feel more motivated. I hope that a plan that doesn't interrupt my learning process can be implemented before September.”
- “Please let us come back to school in person, online school is very difficult and it's hard to learn. It makes you lazy, ruins sleep schedule. I just feel more motivated and happy when I'm in school. Not all of us have a great home, and school is our escape.”

Over half (59%) of **parents/guardians** *agreed or strongly agreed* that they spent a lot of time helping their child with schoolwork.

How much do you agree with the following?



# Themes from open-ended responses: Parent/guardian experiences

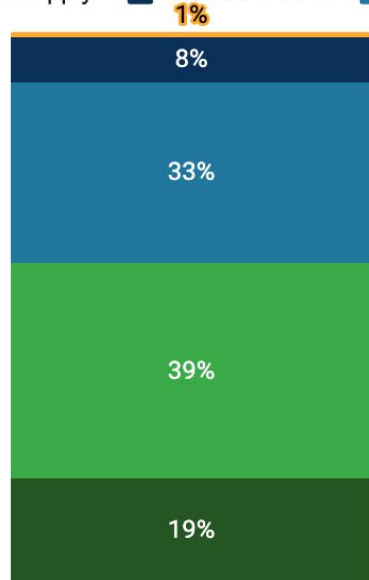
Parents/guardians with younger students (K-2) relayed their challenging experiences with online learning:

- “K-1 student learning online is IMPOSSIBLE. Our experience this year proved that children this age need to be learning off screen. Any other kind of learning would be better. I sincerely hope the district can manage assignments on paper for lower grades for the days or times students cannot be in school. Google meetings and Google assignments were worse than no school. I never thought I'd ask for worksheets, but they would be better on paper than the online version. I hope the district is able to take this perspective into account. We know this is hard on everyone. The online portion of learning is hardest on the youngest kids. Thank you.”
- “This has been so hard. My 2nd grader was a solid student but without his teachers and classmates: it has been terrible. My husband and I are working full-time to keep our jobs in this crazy new set-up, and for a 2nd-grader the online schooling was a disaster. He liked the face-to-face meetings, but I couldn't keep up with motivating him or teaching him Power Point to complete his assignments.”
- “Distance-learning has been very difficult for our family. It was very difficult to get our first-grader to focus and interact with the format. Very simple assessments that he could easily do on paper were almost impossible because of computer interaction. He spent about 90% of his time trying to physically put the answer into the machine and only about 10% of the time learning.”

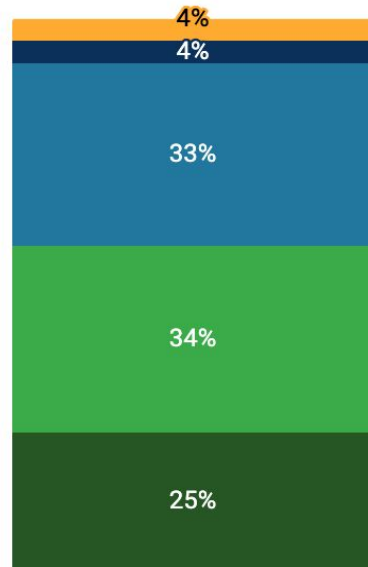
Just under 60% of **instructional staff** and **administrators** reported being *confident* or *very confident* in their ability to engage students in a virtual environment.

How confident are you in your ability to engage students in a virtual environment?

Does Not Apply Not Confident Somewhat Confident Confident Very Confident



Teachers and instructional staff (N=5,395)

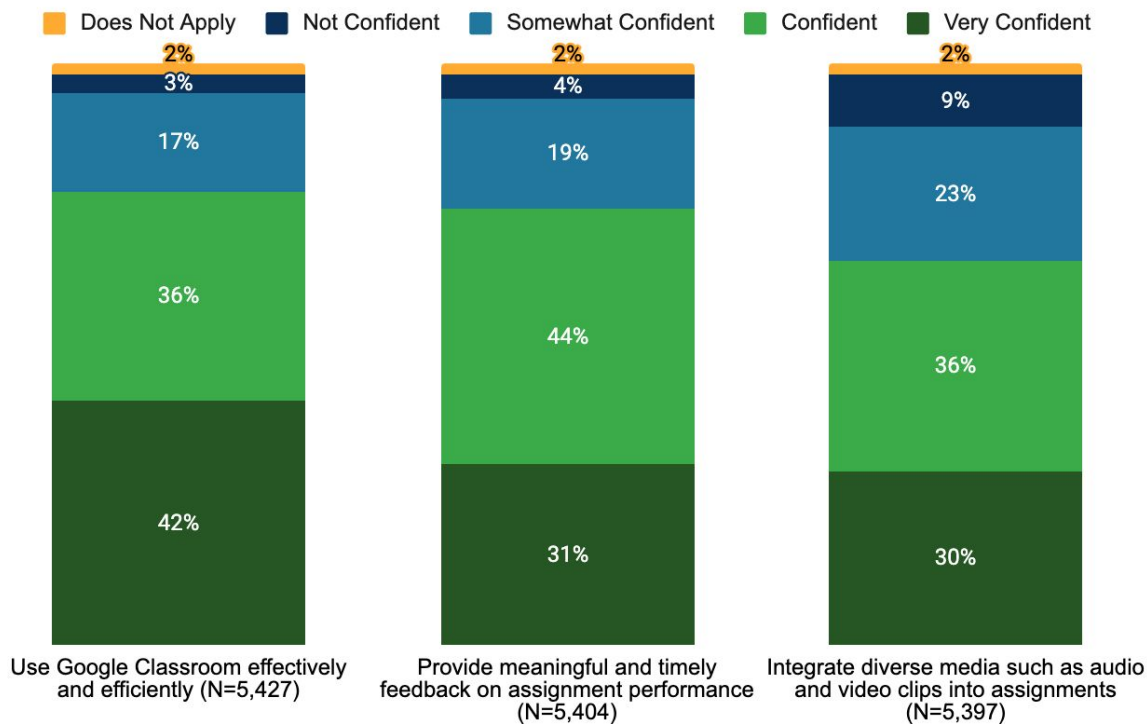


School administration (N=453)



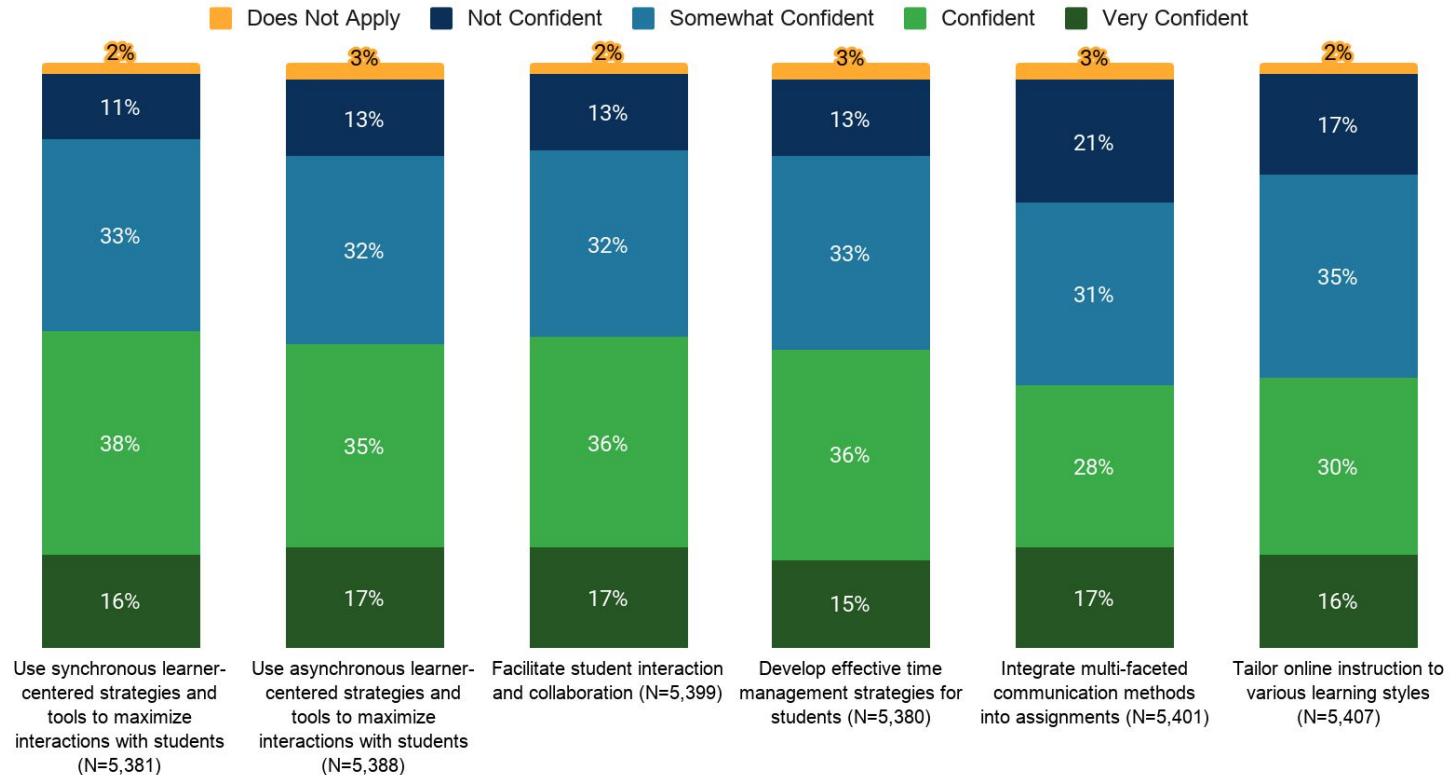
# Over two thirds of **instructional staff** were *confident* or *very confident* in their ability to implement three online learning best practices

Currently, how confident do you feel in your ability to do the following?



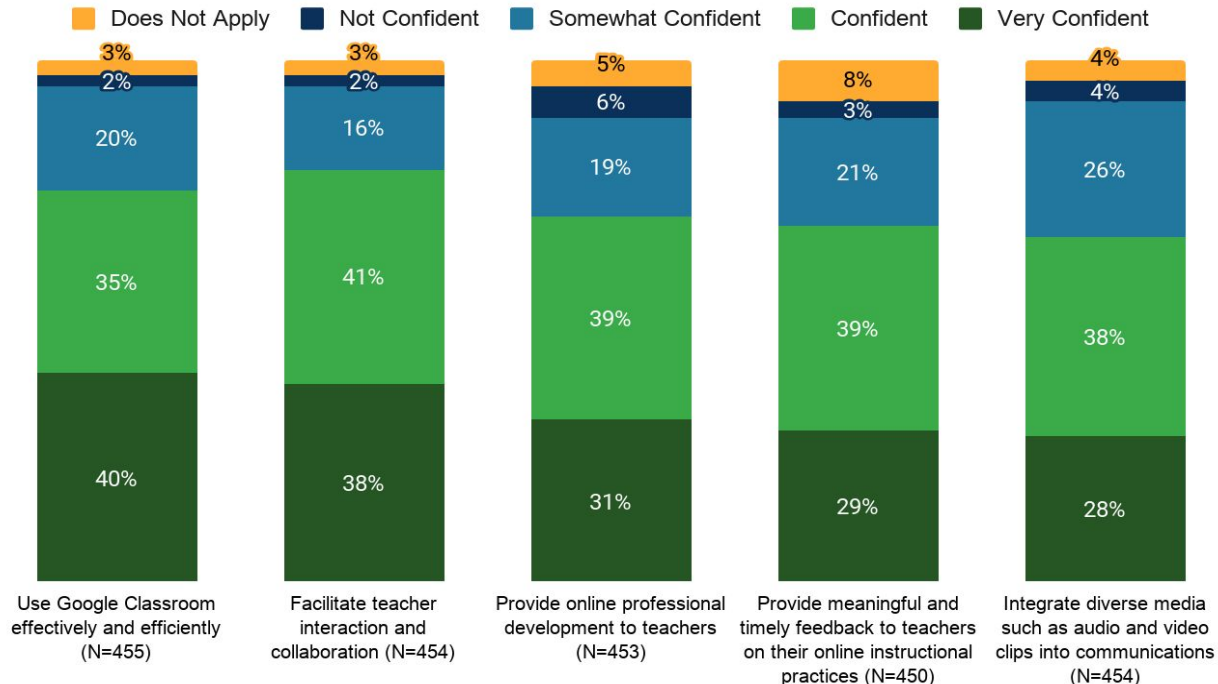
# About half of **instructional staff** felt *confident* or *very confident* in their ability to implement the following best practices:

Currently, how confident do you feel in your ability to do the following?



# Administrators reported high levels of confidence with the following best practices:

Currently, how confident do you feel in your ability to do the following?



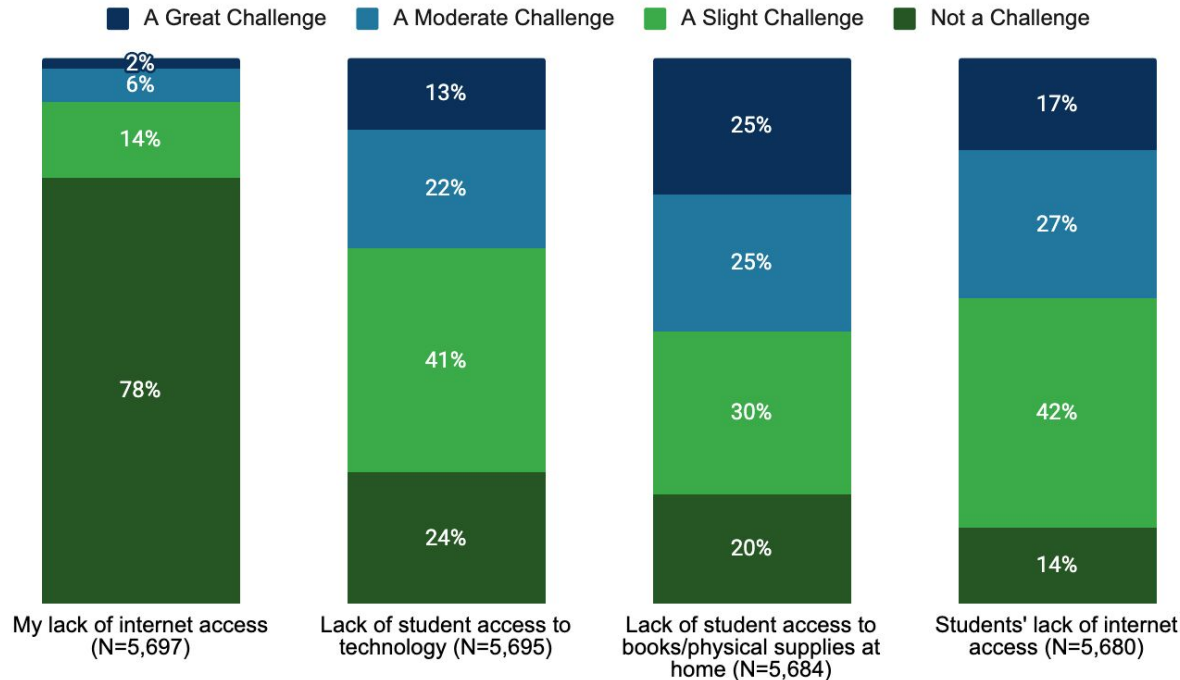
# Themes from open-ended responses: Professional development

Many instructional staff and administrators expressed that additional professional development (PD) would have helped with the transition to online learning:

- “A professional development should have been set up guiding us through the expectations that were needed for virtual learning with more than 5 minutes at the end for a Q and A session. There were so many misunderstandings of what was expected.”
- “More teacher PD's on using technology & virtual teaching skills.”
- “The training or programs did not match what was needed and no one seemed to know who had access to what program or if that program was compatible with Google classroom.”
- “A PD on expectations at the beginning of remote learning. Also, a PD to go over ELA and Math materials would have been helpful at the start of remote learning instead of at the close of the year.”
- “Direct and specific professional development provided to address issues in communicating through the virtual platform--how to address student behavior, what to do when encountering social issues that extend beyond instruction (child abuse, perceived poverty, extensive support from parents (parents doing the work for their children)).”
- “To increase clarity, there should be additional training that provides a more balanced approach of synchronous and asynchronous learning.”

More **instructional staff** and **administrators** reported that *students' lack of internet access* was a great challenge (17%) than reported *students' lack of access to technology* was a great challenge (13%)

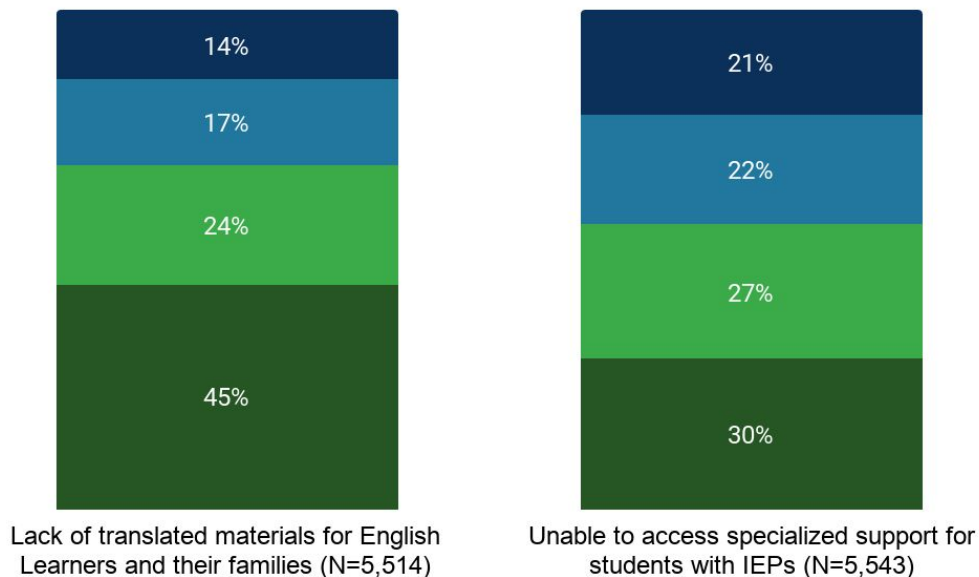
Since the planned instruction phase of online learning began on May 4, how much of a challenge were the following?



# Instructional staff and administrators said not being able to access SPED support (42%) and lack of translated materials for ELs (31%) were moderate or great challenges

Since the planned instruction phase of online learning began on May 4, how much of a challenge were the following?

■ A Great Challenge   ■ A Moderate Challenge   ■ A Slight Challenge   ■ Not a Challenge



# Themes from open-ended responses: SPED and EL supports

School-based staff raised the need for more and better supports for staff who work with students in Special Education and students who are English Learners:

- “Special education programs such as Reading Mastery and Connecting Math Concepts were not easily accessible. I felt that the special education teachers and students, including ELL, were left out with no real resources.”
- “Special Education, particularly low incidence, was not given resources or materials to use. All assignments were created on my own, which took a significant amount of time on top of writing IEPs, helping families, helping students, etc. (particularly since my students are not independent and required support from someone at home). There were two attempts at holding a training for utilizing our research intervention programs, both of which did not end up working, and there was no follow-up afterwards (none that I was aware of). I was able to eventually create systems, routines, and assignments for my students that worked well for them, although it was a significant time commitment.”
- “A translator being available to parents 24/7 would have been helpful.”
- “The tech support for families that was advertised to me regularly failed to help my Spanish-speaking families, and I spent hours troubleshooting with parents.”
- “Almost all communication from the district was related to general education/preps. There was no information for Special Educators, professionals dealing with the most needy students, the students who are prone to regression and become involved in lawsuits frequently. The district leaves SpEd out of the conversation too often.”

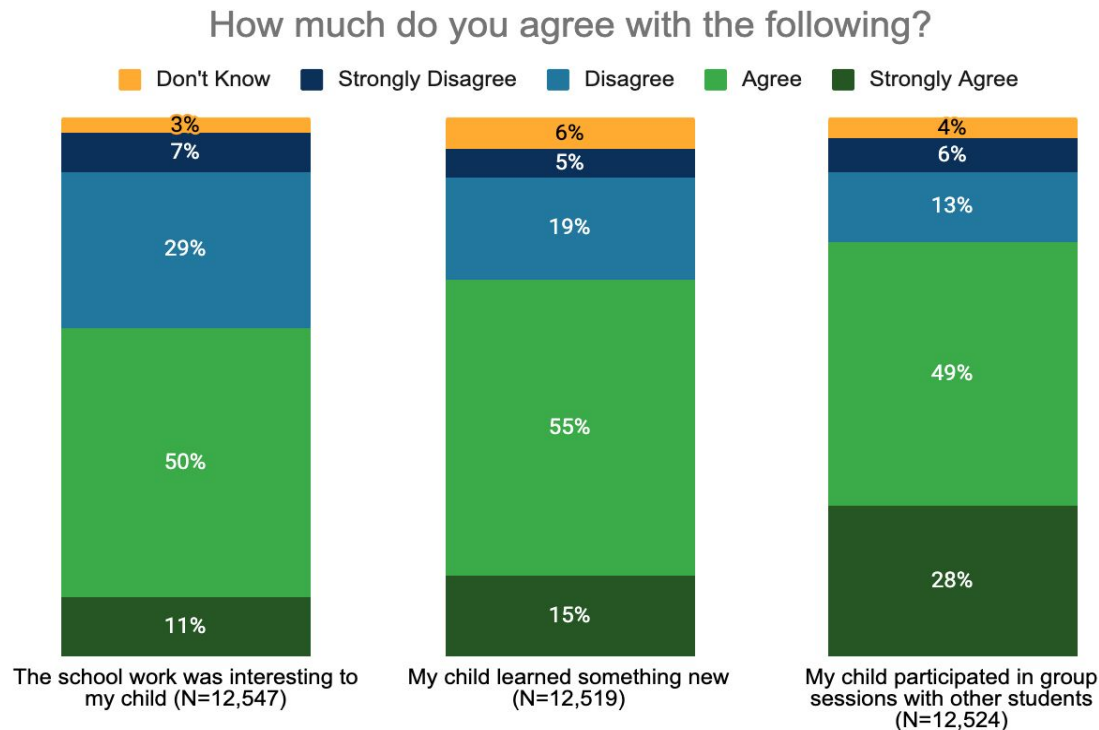
# Themes from open-ended responses: SPED and EL supports

Parents/guardians and students also expressed a need for more and better accommodations for students in Special Education:

- “My son has a one-on-one aide as part of his IEP, it's been very difficult to do distance learning with him, if it continues we'll need some kind of one-on-one assistance for him to connect with at home.” (Parent/guardian)
- “As a mother with a child with Autism, my child needs to be in an classroom setting with children his age. With him being isolated @ home with virtual learning, he's learning how to use the computer better but it's taking away from his daily social interaction. I'm all for the district safely opening back up in the Fall.” (Parent/guardian)
- “Virtual learning is not ideal for special education students like my child who has autism & ADHD and [who] need[s] consistency and social interaction and engagement in addition to learning to prepare for adulthood and some level of independence.” (Parent/guardian)
- “I am a special education student and it was not easy to complete assignments online. Because of my disability I am not comfortable on Google Meets with too many students. My teachers were accommodating but it was not easy to do all my work online.” (Student)



Most **parents/guardians** reported that their child had interesting school work, learned something new, and participated in group online sessions during distance learning.



# Themes from open-ended responses: Parents/guardian and student experiences

Some parents/guardians noted that a lack of teacher-led learning and support characterized their children's' experiences with online learning:

- “Also even though my school is excellent, the virtual learning was poor. Way too little learning happened, and the teachers spent way too little time with the kids, maybe ~30 mins a day. If you plan virtual education, there needs to be a substantial effort to generate materials and a commitment for teachers to interact/give lessons.”
- “I would like teachers to hold regularly scheduled classroom sessions. I was not happy with just assigning work to do on their own.”
- “My child would spend more than an hour [and a] half completing the classwork with little support from the teachers. Also, teachers must be more available for questions and support. It was beyond ridiculous that they only had an hour of office time every other day.”
- “It is hard for students to do their work correctly if the teacher doesn't explain everything to them over the computer. Some will just post assignments and not really explain it.”
- “Please ensure all teachers have adequate training for online learning. Our student never received online instruction or opportunities to see his peers. This left the entire responsibility of teaching our first grader to us.”

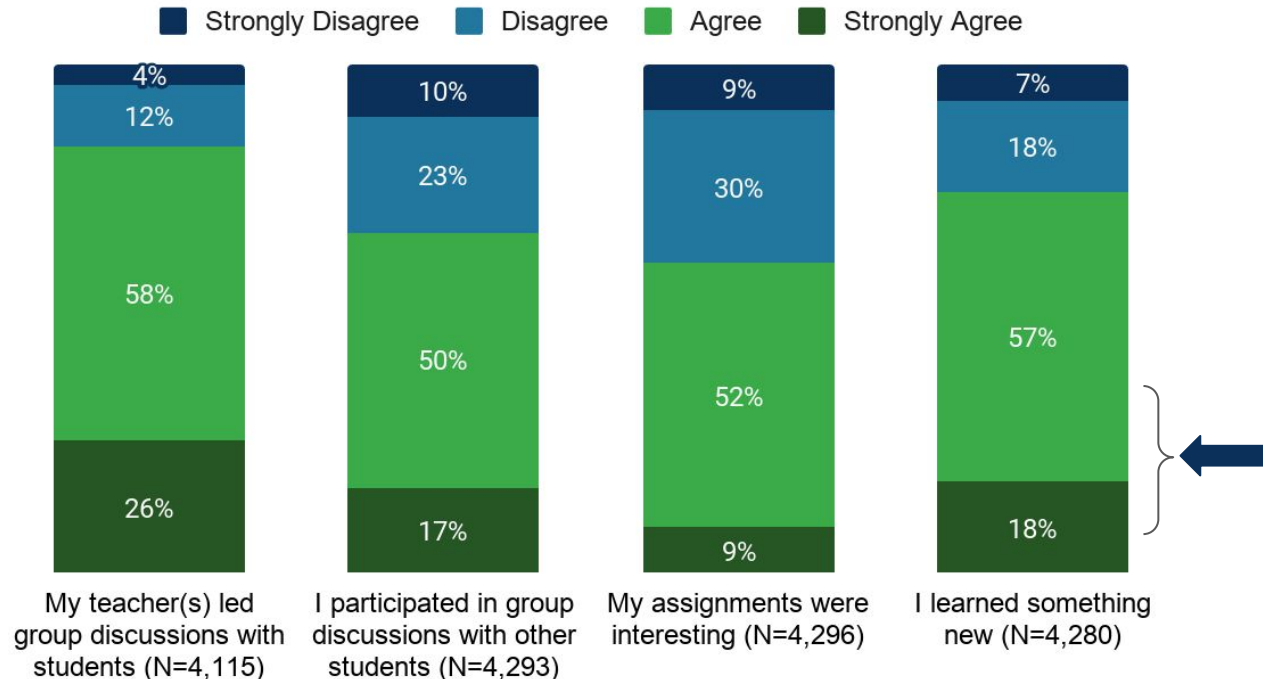
# Themes from open-ended responses: Student experiences

Parents/guardians explained why online learning was a positive experience for their children:

- “The only reason virtual learning worked for us this year was because our teacher was amazing about consistent daily lessons that served as the basis for the learning. If it was all online assignments, it would never have worked for us.”
- “This year we had an excellent kindergarten teacher who really went above and beyond to make distance learning work. Similarly, I would say we went above and beyond to make distance learning work on our end, often times forsaking our own professional obligations. I think any changes must seriously consider what can reasonably be accommodated for working parents.”
- “My child was fine working from home and we actually appreciated the time we spent together and he was still able to keep his schedule. He enjoyed being able to see his friends via Google and work independently.”
- “Our children's teachers have done great job during this difficult and first time with online learning. It was difficult at the beginning but at the end it was ok. We thank them ALL.”
- “Online learning worked for us although our daughter is also of an age and disposition that she is pretty self-motivated and self-directed. With both parents working and limited interest in directing her work, we're fortunate she's able to do this.”

Three quarters (75%) of **students** reported that they learned something new during distance learning.

How much do you agree with the following statements?



# Themes from open-ended responses: Student experiences

Students explained why online learning was a positive experience for them:

- “I liked online learning because it was easy for me to understand. The assignments were up at Monday and show when it's due. I think that made it easy for me because I like to see what I have to do and I can be organized.”
- “I liked the remote learning it stopped the bulllys and had a lot of one-on-one action with my teacher[.] Some teachers were not great with contact but one teacher was awesome!!!”
- “I am not ready mentally or physically to go back to school, but the teachers have been very helpful during the online schooling.”
- “I was fine learning on my own laptop and it taught me to work hard and be responsible. I felt responsible and I liked seeing my teachers and friends online. My teacher was always available on ClassDojo too.”

# Summary of Findings



# Communication

- With the exception of how to assess student learning, most school-based staff agreed that they were clear about the expectations for online learning.
- In the open-ended feedback, instructional staff and administrators expressed frustration with the timing of important messaging, particularly the fact that they often received important information after it was shared with the general public.
- In open-ended feedback, instructional staff and administrators shared that the information they received was often contradictory and inconsistent.
- In open-ended feedback, parents and guardians shared that communication from teachers about online learning was unclear or insufficient.



# Experiences with Online Learning

- Some areas for improvement that emerged from parent/guardian and student open-ended responses were:
  - Lack of organization and structure to online learning
  - Most assignments being independent work rather than led by a teacher
  - Lack of appropriate and accessible materials/content for students receiving SPED services
- When parents/guardians shared the positive experiences they had with online learning, they often referred to a specific teacher who “went above and beyond.”
- Most students agreed that they learned something new and that their schoolwork was interesting.
- Students also expressed that they felt unmotivated and distracted, which negatively impacted their ability to engage in online learning.

