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# Policy Memo

## Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty

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### Poll: Education During Coronavirus

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#### *Executive Summary*

With Wisconsin schools shuttered for the rest of the school year and families learning to educate their children from home, WILL surveyed more than 400 Wisconsin parents in April to determine a range of views on education during the shutdown. Below are some of the key takeaways from the survey.

#### **Current State of Education**

67% report receiving materials online, 22% report a mix of online materials and handouts.

- 4% report receiving no material at all.

40% report that their children are learning new material, and 44% report a mix of new and old.

- 16% report their students are learning no new material.

96% report adequate internet access and 93% adequate computers and tablets.

- Low-income parents were more likely to report inadequate internet and not enough computers.

42% report that their students are spending 10-20 hours per week on school work. 41% report 1-10 hours.

- 14% report 20-40 hours and 2% report no time spent.

30% of respondents report spending their own money on education materials.

- 65% of those report spending more than \$50 and 43% report spending more than \$100. Almost 10% report spending more than \$500.
- Low-income families were more likely to spend money on home education.

#### **Satisfaction**

80% of respondents indicated some level of satisfaction with the education their children are receiving during the shutdown.

- Just 12% indicated they were dissatisfied.

### **Education After Coronavirus**

70% report that they expect their child will be prepared for the next grade.

- 20% do not and 10% are unsure.

Most parents don't want to see the school year extended into the summer (78%), while 22% think it's a good idea.

- 54% think students should only be promoted if they complete some distance learning, while 20% are willing to promote students to the next grade level no matter what.
- 30% report being more interested in future online learning opportunities offered by other schools. 48% report no change in the level of interest and 23% are less interested now.

### **Introduction**

The coronavirus has altered many aspects of American life, from the workplace to professional sports. One of the most important shifts has been many families having to learn to teach their children from home. In Wisconsin, the extension of Governor Evers' "Safer at Home" order means that most schools will be shuttered for the remainder of the year. Many are wondering how families are coping with this.

WILL conducted a survey to paint a picture of how K-12 education is going in the Badger State under coronavirus and "Safer at Home." In general, we find that parents are satisfied with how districts, charters and private schools are serving students under the conditions, but a number of concerns surfaced which policymakers will have to reconcile in both the short and long term.

### **Methods**

We conducted a statewide survey of Wisconsin adults with children between the ages of 5 and 17. The survey was administered by Dynata using a sample of respondents online. The survey went into the field on Friday, April 25th, 2020 and 404 responses were collected by Monday, April 27th. Given that the population of interest is Wisconsin parents, this gives us a margin of error of approximately 4.89%.

### **The Sample**

Of those who responded to the survey, 87% were white, while 7% were African American, 2% were Hispanic, and approximately 3% were Asian. The majority of respondents had household incomes of less than \$75,000 per year. 56% of respondents had at least one child in grades K-5, while about 35% of respondents had at least one child in high school. 26% of respondents reported having at least one child with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). 75% of

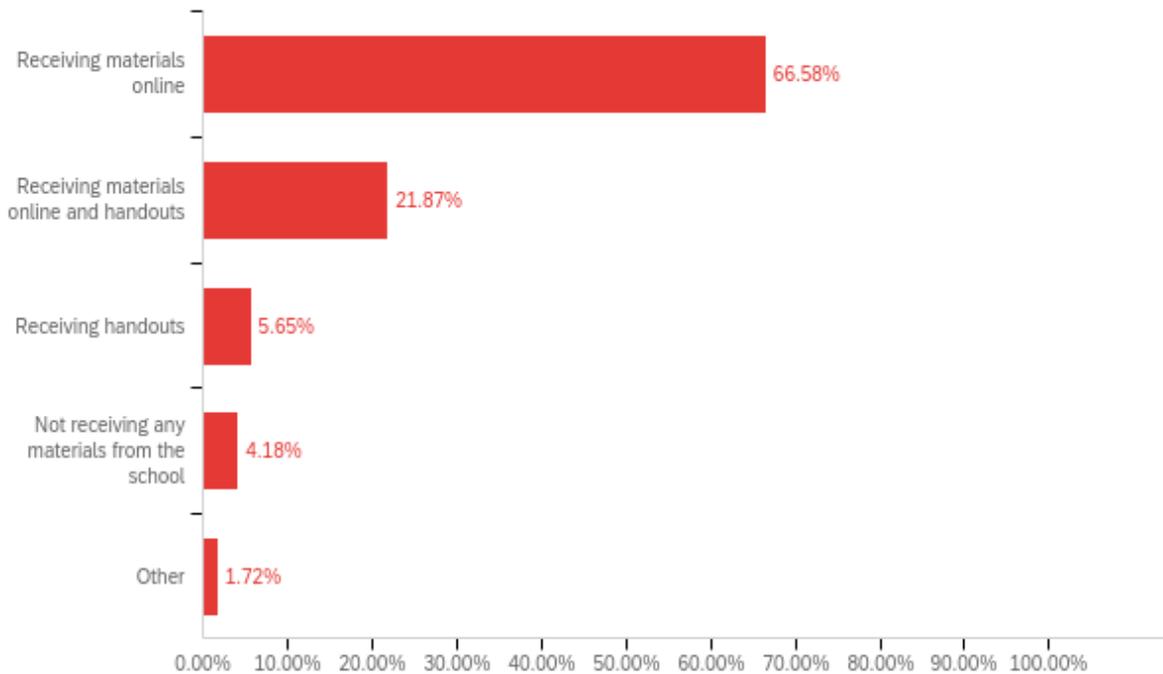
respondents had students in public schools before the outbreak, 13% in private schools, and 4% in charter schools. The remainder had students in virtual schools, homeschooled, or had students in a mixture of school types.

**Results**

*Content*

About 67% of respondents said that their primary means of receiving materials since the outbreak has been online. About 22% report a combination of handouts and online material, while about 6% report handouts as the primary means. About 4% of respondents said that they had not received any materials from school since the outbreak.

**How have you been primarily receiving materials?**



Respondents were asked to include the name of their home district. The table on the following page lists the district for those respondents who reported getting no material. Note that further investigation is needed to confirm that no material is being provided by these districts.

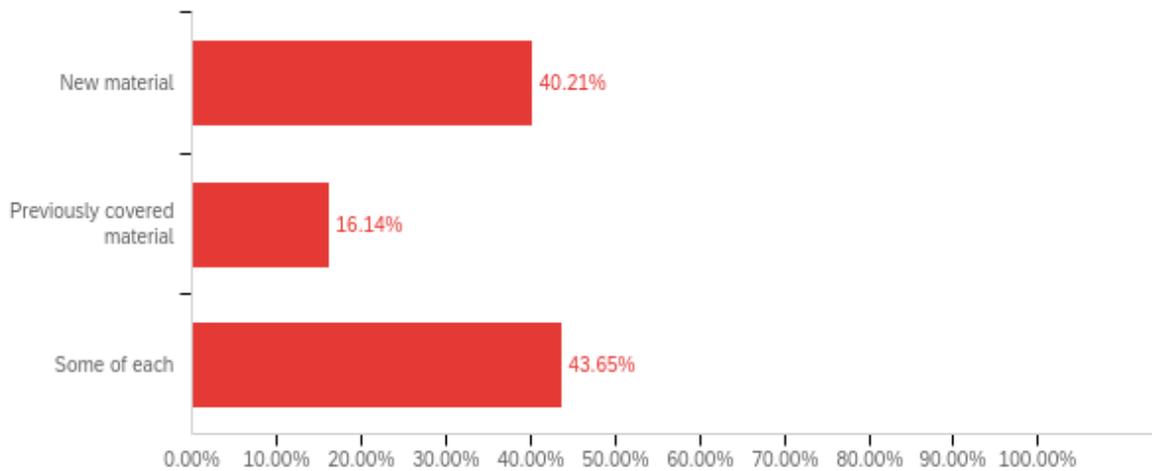
**Table 1. Respondents Receiving No Materials by District**

|             |             |
|-------------|-------------|
| Milwaukee   | Sun Prairie |
| River Falls | Oconomowoc  |
| Rhineland   | Brown       |

The vast majority of respondents said that they had sufficient computers and tablets for their children to complete school work. Only about 8% of respondents said they did not. An even lower percentage of respondents--about 4% said that they did not have sufficient internet access. On these two questions, the caveat of an online sample may be more important as respondents had to have at least *some* internet capability to complete the survey. However, we once again did see income lead to differentiation of responses on these questions. Among those in the lowest income category, 21% said they did not have sufficient computers, three times as high as the overall average. About 9% said they did not have sufficient internet access, about twice the overall average.

It appears that the type of material being covered varies extensively by. 40% of respondents say that their children are covering new material, while 43% say it is a mix of new and old material. More concerning, about 16% of respondents say that their child’s schools are only reviewing old material, potentially leaving students unprepared for a return to school next year.

Type of Material Being Covered

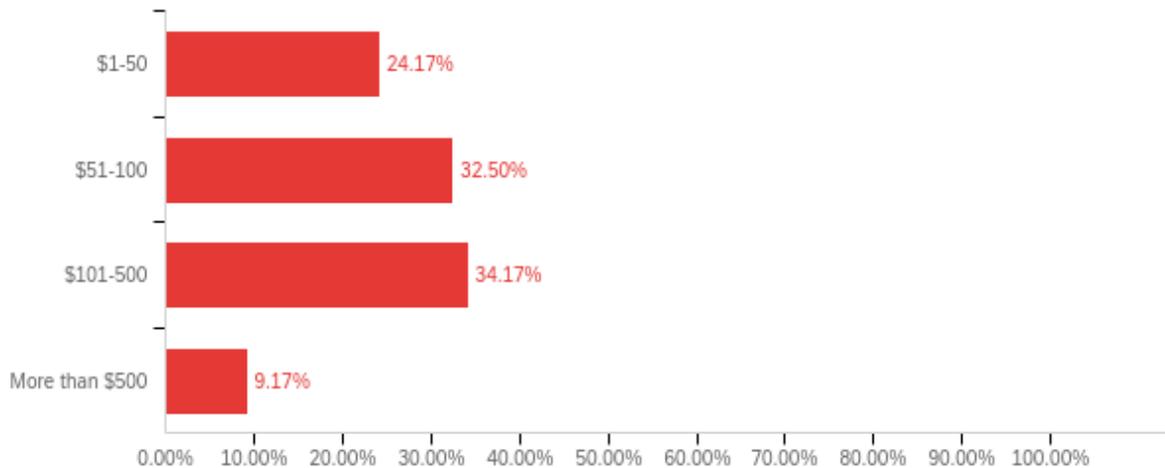


*Expenses*

A sizable percentage of respondents have had to spend some of their own money on educational materials since the outbreak of the virus. About 30% of respondents reported that they had spent at least some money towards their child’s education. Those in the lowest income group—making up to \$20,000 per year—were more likely to say that they have had to spend money than any other group of respondents. 38.3% of respondents in this income category reported expenditures.

We also asked that subset of respondents to tell us how much they had spent. About 65% of respondents reported spending between \$50 and \$500. About 9% of respondents had spent even more, surpassing the \$500 figure that was the highest category we asked about.

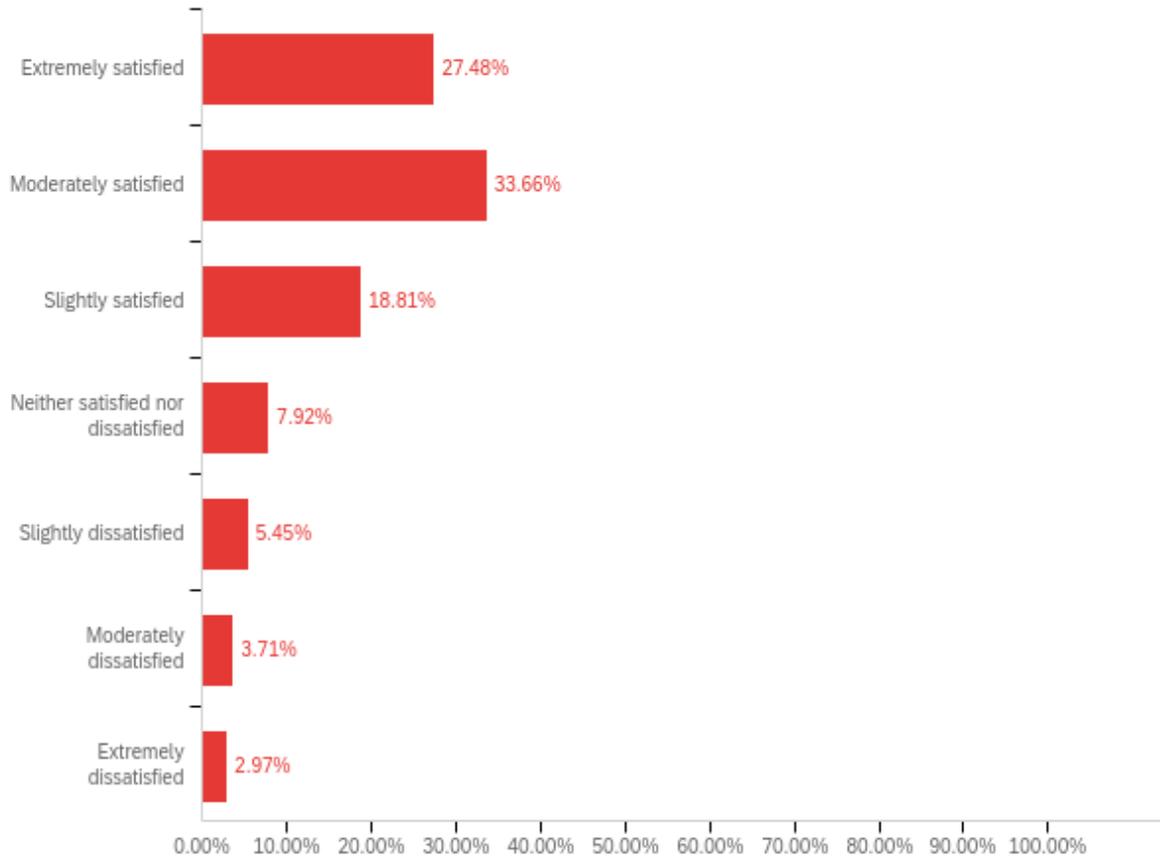
### Spending on Education Since Outbreak



### Satisfaction

Respondents were asked “How satisfied are you with the education your schools are providing your child/children during the outbreak?” The majority of respondents reported that they were satisfied to some level on a 7-point scale. About 80% of respondents reported that they were “slightly,” “moderately,” or “extremely” satisfied. About 12% of respondents chose some level of dissatisfaction. “Moderate” satisfaction was the modal response of about 34% participants.

### Satisfaction with Education Since Outbreak



What factors affected dissatisfaction? To answer that question, we turn to a regression analysis. Responses to this question were compared to a number of other responses in the survey. Table 2 below shows the results of this analysis. Respondent race, household income, and whether the respondent’s job had been affected by the coronavirus did not impact dissatisfaction. What appears to have mattered are whether the respondent has had to spend money, and whether their children attend a private school. Those who spent money were significantly more dissatisfied, while those whose children attended a private school were significantly more satisfied.

**Table 2. Predictors of Dissatisfaction with School Response to Coronavirus**

| VARIABLES        | Dissatisfaction      |
|------------------|----------------------|
| Non-white        | -0.134<br>(0.239)    |
| Household Income | 0.0885<br>(0.0597)   |
| Job Cuts         | 0.0876<br>(0.163)    |
| Spent Money      | 0.425**<br>(0.176)   |
| Private School   | -0.480**<br>(0.237)  |
| IEP              | 0.105<br>(0.105)     |
| Constant         | 1.8884***<br>(0.378) |
| Observations     | 386                  |
| R-squared        | 0.031                |

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

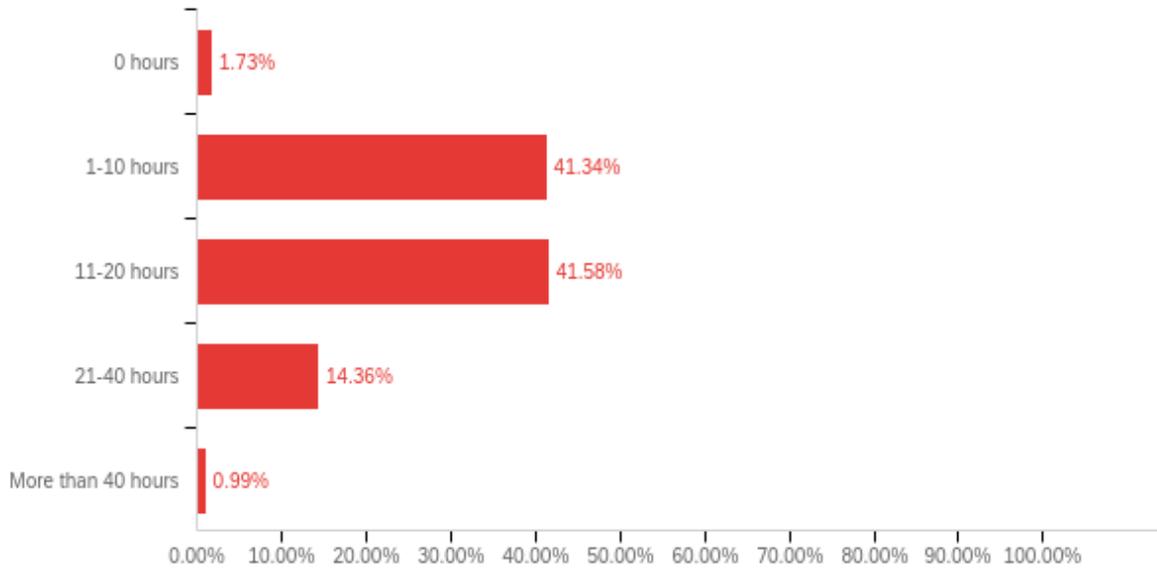
The fact that spending money has a negative impact on satisfaction supports the notion that states should find a way to reimburse these expenses, potentially through an ESA or by allowing withdrawals from 529 plans for homeschooling expenses.

Parents also found their child’s teachers to be accessible overall. 89% of respondents said that their child’s teachers were “accessible” or “very accessible,” while only about 4% of respondents said they were “inaccessible” or “very inaccessible.”

#### *Time on Education & Preparedness*

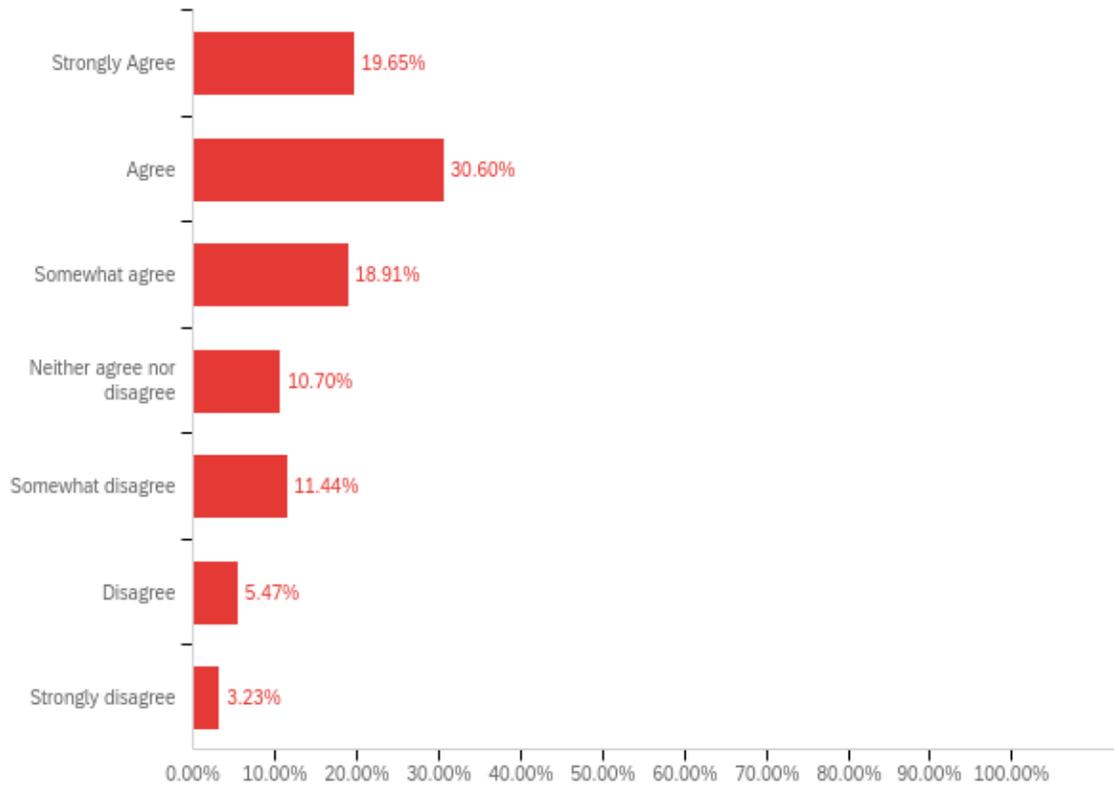
Perhaps one of the more discouraging trends to emerge in our survey was the small amount of time that students are spending on school work. We asked respondents how many hours per week on average their child was spending on school work. The plurality of respondents reported that their child was spending only between 1-10 hours per week. This is significantly less than the amount of time that students would spend attending class in person, and may call into question the extent to which students will be prepared to move on to the next grade.

### Hours Spent on Work Since Outbreak



Has the reduced time spent on school work affected the extent to which parents believe their child is prepared for the next grade? The graph on the following page depicts answers to our question: “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “My child will be adequately prepared for the next grade when school they return to school after the coronavirus.” Despite the reduced time that students are spending on work, respondents seem to believe that their students will be ready to move on. Nearly 70% of respondents agreed that their students would be prepared for the next grade. Only about 28% of respondents disagreed to some extent with their child’s preparedness.

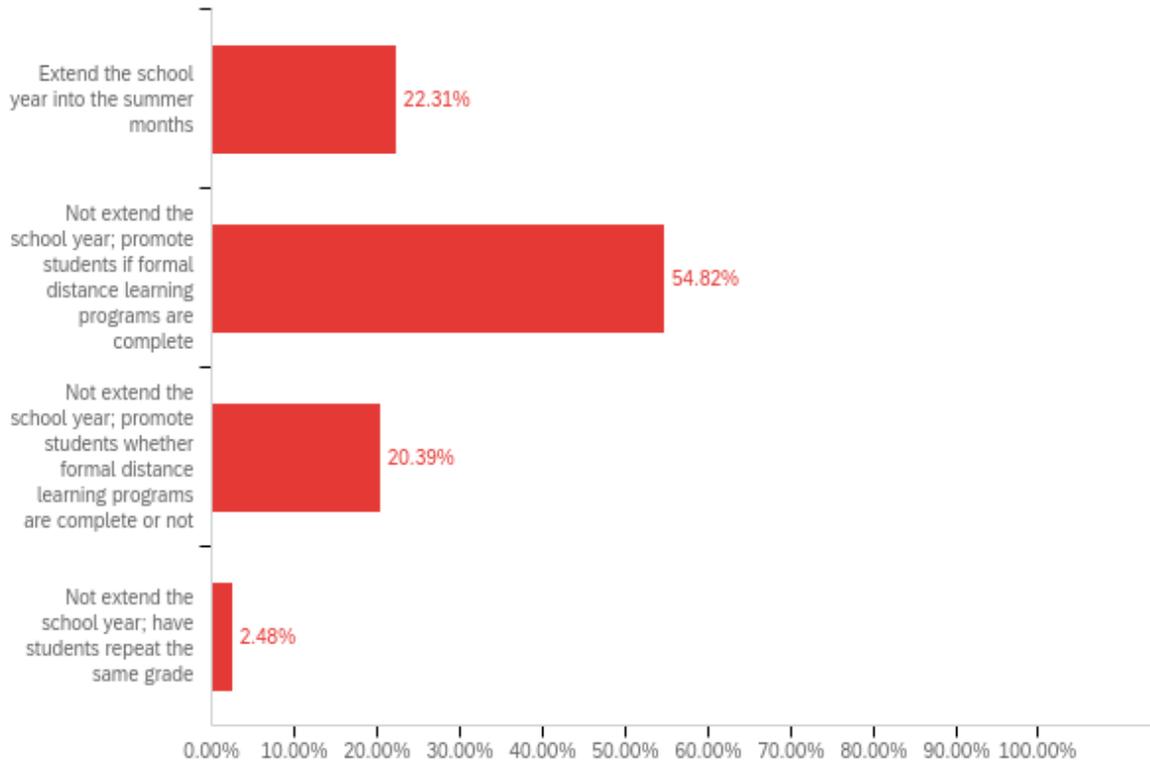
### Preparedness for Next Grade



### *Coronavirus Policies*

Given the loss of instructional time that students are currently experiencing, we also asked respondents their opinion about what should happen when students return to school. The most popular choice among a majority of respondents was that students should be promoted next year if distance learning activities were successfully completed. About 22% of respondents supported extending the school year into the summer (if possible) to make up instructional time, while 20% supported promotion regardless of what happens with distance learning. By far the least popular option, selected by only about 2.5% of respondents, was holding students back to repeat the same grade.

## Policy When Schools Reopen



Given the increased exposure that families have had to online education, we asked parents whether they would be more or less likely than they would have been before the virus to have their children take up to two classes online next school year. About 30% of respondents said they would be more interested while 22% said they would be less interested. The plurality of respondents have not changed their opinion based on current circumstances. That said, the gap between those expressing increased and decreased interest is outside the margin of error, and may suggest moderate growth in favor of using course choice in the near future.

### Conclusion

The results of this survey point to a number of important considerations for policymakers, both in the near term and in the future. The fact that many parents are struggling to pay for extra resources needed for their child's education suggests a window for the creation of Education Savings Accounts (ESA). ESAs provide funding to families to pay for educational needs--from supplemental coursework to computers and tablets. Full ESAs take money that would originally go to the school district and send it directly to parents instead. In the short term, a mini-ESA from funding currently being allocated to districts could be sent to families. At the federal level, other alternatives could include allowing homeschooling expenses to be paid for with withdrawals from 529 plans, or a one-time tax credit for accrued costs.



Given the extremely limited amount of time children are spending on school work, it is likely that many students will be behind when they return to school. Policymakers should consider what means are available to identify struggling students and ensure that they are provided with the help they need.

Table A1. Crosstabs by Income

|   |   | Total | <20K  | 20K-50K | 50K-75K | 70K-100K | >100K |
|---|---|-------|-------|---------|---------|----------|-------|
| Satisfaction w/ education provided since outbreak | Extremely satisfied                     | 27.2% | 36.2% | 18.2%   | 28.4%   | 27.4%    | 28.6% |
|   | Moderately satisfied                    | 33.3% | 29.8% | 36.4%   | 37.0%   | 34.5%    | 29.4% |
|   | Slightly satisfied                      | 18.4% | 12.8% | 24.7%   | 16.0%   | 17.9%    | 18.5% |
|   | Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied      | 7.8%  | 12.8% | 7.8%    | 3.7%    | 8.3%     | 8.4%  |
|   | Slightly dissatisfied                   | 5.4%  | 4.3%  | 6.5%    | 7.4%    | 3.6%     | 5.0%  |
|   | Moderately dissatisfied                 | 3.7%  | 2.1%  | 2.6%    | 1.2%    | 3.6%     | 6.7%  |
|   | Extremely dissatisfied                  | 2.9%  | 0.0%  | 2.6%    | 4.9%    | 2.4%     | 3.4%  |
| School type                                       | A mixture of school types               | 2.0%  | 4.3%  | 1.3%    | 1.2%    | 0.0%     | 3.4%  |
|   | Charter School                          | 4.2%  | 6.4%  | 1.3%    | 4.9%    | 6.0%     | 3.4%  |
|   | Home School                             | 3.9%  | 4.3%  | 5.2%    | 3.7%    | 1.2%     | 5.0%  |
|   | Private School                          | 12.7% | 10.6% | 5.2%    | 14.8%   | 10.7%    | 18.5% |
|   | Public School                           | 74.8% | 66.0% | 84.4%   | 71.6%   | 81.0%    | 69.7% |
|   | Virtual School                          | 1.7%  | 4.3%  | 2.6%    | 3.7%    | 0.0%     | 0.0%  |
| Sufficient Computers/Tablets?                     | No                                      | 7.1%  | 21.3% | 6.5%    | 9.9%    | 3.6%     | 2.5%  |
|   | Yes                                     | 92.2% | 76.6% | 92.2%   | 90.1%   | 95.2%    | 97.5% |
| Sufficient Internet Access?                       | No                                      | 4.2%  | 8.5%  | 3.9%    | 6.2%    | 3.6%     | 1.7%  |
|   | Yes                                     | 95.1% | 89.4% | 94.8%   | 93.8%   | 95.2%    | 98.3% |
| Hours of school work per week                     | 0 hours                                 | 1.7%  | 4.3%  | 1.3%    | 3.7%    | 0.0%     | 0.8%  |
|   | 1-10 hours                              | 40.9% | 51.1% | 54.5%   | 38.3%   | 35.7%    | 33.6% |
|   | 11-20 hours                             | 40.9% | 29.8% | 31.2%   | 38.3%   | 44.0%    | 51.3% |
|   | 21-40 hours                             | 14.2% | 8.5%  | 11.7%   | 17.3%   | 16.7%    | 14.3% |
|   | More than 40 hours                      | 1.0%  | 4.3%  | 0.0%    | 1.2%    | 1.2%     | 0.0%  |
| Spent money on education?                         | No                                      | 69.6% | 59.6% | 68.8%   | 69.1%   | 73.8%    | 71.4% |
|   | Yes                                     | 29.2% | 38.3% | 29.9%   | 29.6%   | 23.8%    | 28.6% |
| Teacher Accessibility                             | Very accessible                         | 40.4% | 44.7% | 40.3%   | 38.3%   | 40.5%    | 40.3% |
|   | Accessible                              | 48.3% | 36.2% | 46.8%   | 48.1%   | 53.6%    | 50.4% |
|   | Inaccessible                            | 2.2%  | 4.3%  | 2.6%    | 3.7%    | 1.2%     | 0.8%  |
|   | Very inaccessible                       | 1.7%  | 2.1%  | 2.6%    | 2.5%    | 1.2%     | 0.8%  |
|   | Not Applicable/Haven't had to reach out | 6.1%  | 10.6% | 6.5%    | 6.2%    | 1.2%     | 7.6%  |

Table A2. Crosstabs by Region

|   |                                    | Total | SE    | NE    | N     | S     | W     |
|---|------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Satisfaction w/ education provided since outbreak | Extremely satisfied                | 27.2% | 26.7% | 30.1% | 44.8% | 24.3% | 15.0% |
|   | Moderately satisfied               | 33.3% | 31.5% | 34.4% | 34.5% | 31.1% | 45.0% |
|   | Slightly satisfied                 | 18.4% | 17.6% | 15.0% | 6.9%  | 28.4% | 25.0% |
|   | Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied | 7.8%  | 9.1%  | 10.8% | 6.9%  | 6.8%  | 2.5%  |
|   | Slightly dissatisfied              | 5.4%  | 4.9%  | 5.4%  | 0.0%  | 5.4%  | 5.0%  |
|   | Moderately dissatisfied            | 3.7%  | 5.5%  | 2.2%  | 0.0%  | 2.7%  | 5.0%  |
|   | Extremely dissatisfied             | 2.9%  | 4.9%  | 2.2%  | 0.0%  | 1.4%  | 2.5%  |
| School type                                       | A mixture of school types          | 1.2%  | 4.3%  | 4.3%  | 3.5%  | 1.4%  | 0.0%  |
|   | Charter School                     | 3.6%  | 6.4%  | 7.5%  | 0.0%  | 4.05% | 0.0%  |
|   | Home School                        | 5.4%  | 4.3%  | 1.0%  | 10.3% | 4.05% | 2.4%  |
|   | Private School                     | 18.7% | 10.6% | 9.7%  | 6.9%  | 8.11% | 4.9%  |
|   | Public School                      | 68.0% | 66.0% | 77.4% | 75.9% | 82.0% | 92.7% |
|   | Virtual School                     | 3.01% | 4.3%  | 0.0%  | 3.5%  | 1.35% | 0.0%  |
| Sufficient Computers/Tablets?                     | No                                 | 4.2%  | 9.0%  | 5.4%  | 6.9%  | 5.4%  | 7.5%  |
|   | Yes                                | 95.1% | 91.0% | 94.6% | 93.1% | 94.6% | 92.5% |
| Sufficient Internet Access?                       | No                                 | 4.2%  | 4.2%  | 1.0%  | 3.4%  | 6.8%  | 7.5%  |
|   | Yes                                | 95.1% | 95.8% | 99.0% | 96.6% | 93.2% | 92.5% |
| Hours of school work per week                     | 0 hours                            | 3.64% | 3.6%  | 0.0%  | 0.0%  | 1.3%  | 0.0%  |
|   | 1-10 hours                         | 40.9% | 40.0% | 40.9% | 27.6% | 47.3% | 47.5% |
|   | 11-20 hours                        | 40.9% | 40.0% | 36.6% | 65.5% | 43.2% | 37.5% |
|   | 21-40 hours                        | 14.2% | 14.6% | 21.5% | 6.9%  | 8.1%  | 15.0% |
|   | More than 40 hours                 | 1.0%  | 1.8%  | 1.1%  | 0.0%  | 0.0%  | 0.0%  |
| Spent money on education?                         | No                                 | 69.6% | 68.1% | 77.2% | 72.4% | 70.2% | 65.0% |
|   | Yes                                | 29.2% | 31.9% | 22.8% | 27.6% | 29.8% | 35.0% |
| Teacher Accessibility                             | Very accessible                    | 40.4% | 40.1% | 43.1% | 34.5% | 37.8% | 45.0% |
|   | Accessible                         | 48.3% | 46.7% | 49.5% | 51.8% | 52.7% | 45.0% |
|   | Inaccessible                       | 2.2%  | 3.0%  | 2.2%  | 0.0%  | 2.7%  | 2.5%  |
|   | Very inaccessible                  | 1.7%  | 1.2%  | 0.0%  | 0.0%  | 1.3%  | 5.0%  |



|  |   |      |      |      |       |      |      |
|--|---|------|------|------|-------|------|------|
|  | Not Applicable/Haven't had to reach out | 6.1% | 9.0% | 3.2% | 13.8% | 5.4% | 2.5% |
|--|---|------|------|------|-------|------|------|