credo

CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON EDUCATION OUTCOMES

New York Charter Schools: Remote Instruction During COVID Crisis (Spring 2020) – Results for All Authorizers

Overview

Survey of New York Charter Schools

These slides present key results from a survey of charter schools in New York State conducted in May 2020, which aimed to better understand schools' responses to Executive Order 202.4 that closed school buildings across the state in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While nearly all New York charter schools transitioned to some form of distance learning during this period, their strategies and methods varied. These findings capture those differences to guide future school decisions about this ongoing crisis.

Outline of Topics

Survey: Descriptive Characteristics

- Survey Responses
- Survey Sample

Initial Reactions and Preparations

- Areas of Attention and Urgency
- Planning
- Technology Capacities

Curriculum and Instruction

- Pivot to New Modes of Instruction
- Changes to Academic Programs
- Learning Time
- Student Support (IEPs and ELL/MLL)
- Final Grades

Non-Academic Programs and Services

- Challenges Faced by School Community
- Meal Programs
- Changes to Programs and Services

Student Engagement

- Attendance
- Maintaining Connection

School Management and Future Planning

- Teachers' Duties and Dedication of Time
- Staffing
- Monitoring of Instruction
- Planning for Reentry
- Building on Success

credo

Survey: Descriptive Characteristics

Survey Responses

- Response rates were high, with over 93% of schools responding.
- The high response rate assured that the results were reliable and representative of the sector.
- Primary-grade schools made up by far the largest portion of the sample, and middle schools the smallest.

Survey: Descriptive Characteristics

Survey Sample

	All Authorizers	
	Total	Respondents
Total schools	316	295
Total students (2018-19)	146793	133236
Average enrollment (2018-19)	508	497
New schools*	8.23%	8.81%
% Primary grade span	54.11%	55.25%
% Middle grade span	8.54%	7.80%
% High grade span	10.76%	11.19%
% Mixed grade span	18.35%	17.29%
% Schools in Large City locale (2018-19)	79.75%	79.32%
% Schools in Midsize City locale (2018-19)	4.75%	4.75%
% Schools in Small City locale (2018-19)	3.48%	3.39%
% Schools in Suburban locale (2018-19)	3.48%	3.73%
% Schools in Rural-Fringe locale (2018-19)	0.32%	0.34%

* New schools are not included in grade-span statistics below.

credo

Survey: Descriptive Characteristics

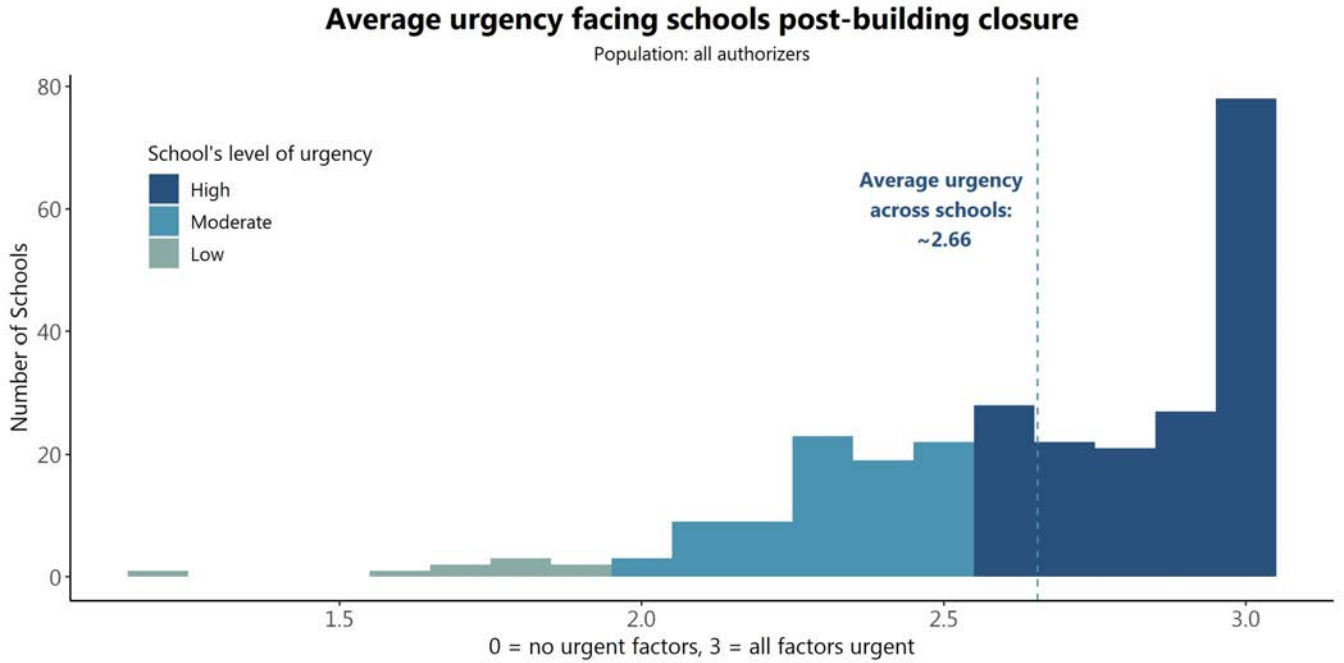
Survey Sample

	All Authorizers	
	Total	Respondents
Average % proficient in reading (2018-19)	57.76%	58.18%
Average % proficient in math (2018-19)	58.47%	58.34%
Average % students in poverty (2018-19)	80.90%	80.83%
Average % ELL students (2018-19)	7.44%	7.60%
Average % SPED students (2018-19)	17.92%	18.06%
% Asian / Pacific Islander students (2018-19)	2.77%	2.91%
% Black students (2018-19)	52.74%	50.86%
% Hispanic students (2018-19)	35.76%	37.27%
% Multi-racial students (2018-19)	1.57%	1.59%
% Native American students (2018-19)	1.02%	0.94%
% White students (2018-19)	6.13%	6.42%

Initial Reactions and Preparations

Areas of Attention and Urgency

- As building closure approached, the general sense of urgency was high for nearly all schools.



credo

Initial Reactions and Preparations

Areas of Attention and Urgency

- Although there was limited variation in specific areas of focus, as the sense of urgency was high across the board, four themes emerged from schools' ranking of priorities:
  - Sustaining student learning and engagement was a top priority;
  - Perhaps surprisingly, factors related to student well-being were at the bottom of the rankings, although still elicited serious concern from schools.

Factor	Average Urgency Per School	Theme
Transitioning instructional model and continuing student learning	2.97	Sustaining student growth
Maintaining student attendance and engagement	2.87	
Establishing communication channels with families and students	2.87	Keeping the community connected
Establishing communication channels with school administration staff and faculty	2.82	
Providing students with social-emotional support	2.78	
Providing internet access to students	2.55	Providing infrastructure and logistics
Providing IT support to students and parents	2.55	
Ensuring students were safe in their homes	2.54	Ensuring student well-being
Providing meals to students	2.44	
Ensuring students had housing and shelter	2.17	

Initial Reactions and Preparations

Planning

- Nearly all schools started planning for building closure in March.
  - Just 10% of schools started planning before March 1;
  - Over three quarters of schools did their planning in the two weeks prior to the ordered closure date of March 16.
- There was not a significant relationship between planning time and time to instruction; schools that started planning early were no more likely to begin instruction immediately upon building closure.
- The average time between building closure and start of instruction was 3 school days.

Initial Reactions and Preparations

Planning

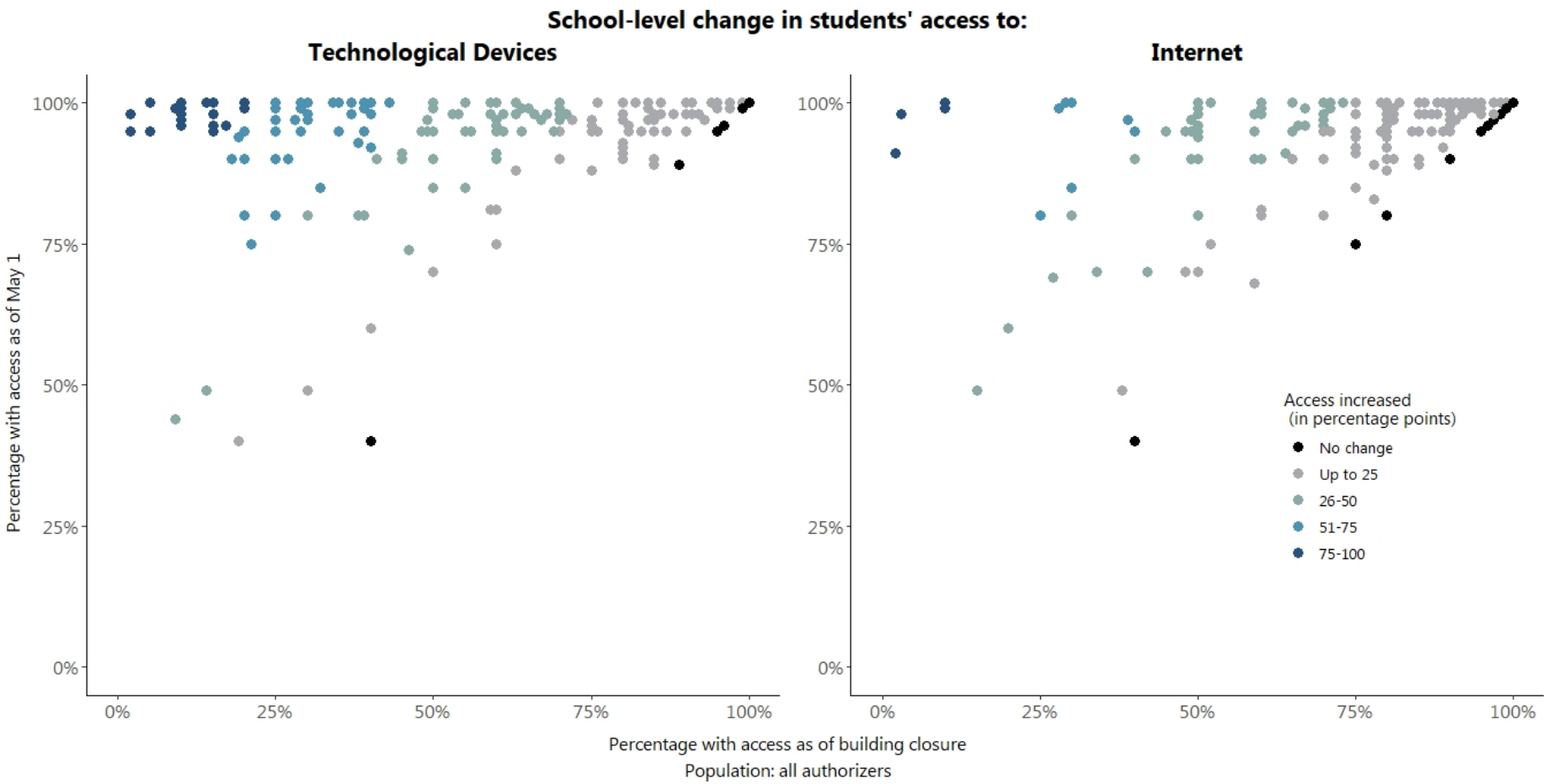
- About half (49.2%) of schools kept their original plans for remote instruction in place.
- For schools that altered their plans, the two most commonly cited reasons were:
  - To improve effectiveness (81.8%);
  - To update plans that were designed as short-term stopgaps (32.4%).
- Additionally, some schools changed their original plans as capacities ramped up, for example as they distributed computers to students (8.9% of schools listing this as ‘Other reason’).

Initial Reactions and Preparations

Technology Capacities

- Upgrading and distributing technology was a major focus for schools in the early phases of building closure.
- Schools expended considerable energy and time on technology, but ultimately reported positive outcomes from their efforts:
  - When asked in an open-ended format about successes with remote instruction generally, many schools (42.2% of all respondents) specifically mentioned their use of technology.

Initial Reactions and Preparations



Initial Reactions and Preparations

Technology Capacities

- Students' access to the internet was less of a concern than was access to a device:
  - Immediately following closure, an average of 44.4% of students lacked adequate devices and 27.0% lacked adequate internet access.*
- Teachers were well equipped with the technological resources to do their jobs remotely:
  - Nearly all schools reported that teachers had the devices (on average, 97.8%) and internet access (on average, 97.8%) needed for their jobs.

* For comparison, Common Sense Media reports that nationally ~30% of public-school students lack access to either a device or an internet connection adequate for learning (https://www.commonsensemedia.org/sites/default/files/uploads/pdfs/common_sense_media_report_infographicfinal.pdf).

Initial Reactions and Preparations

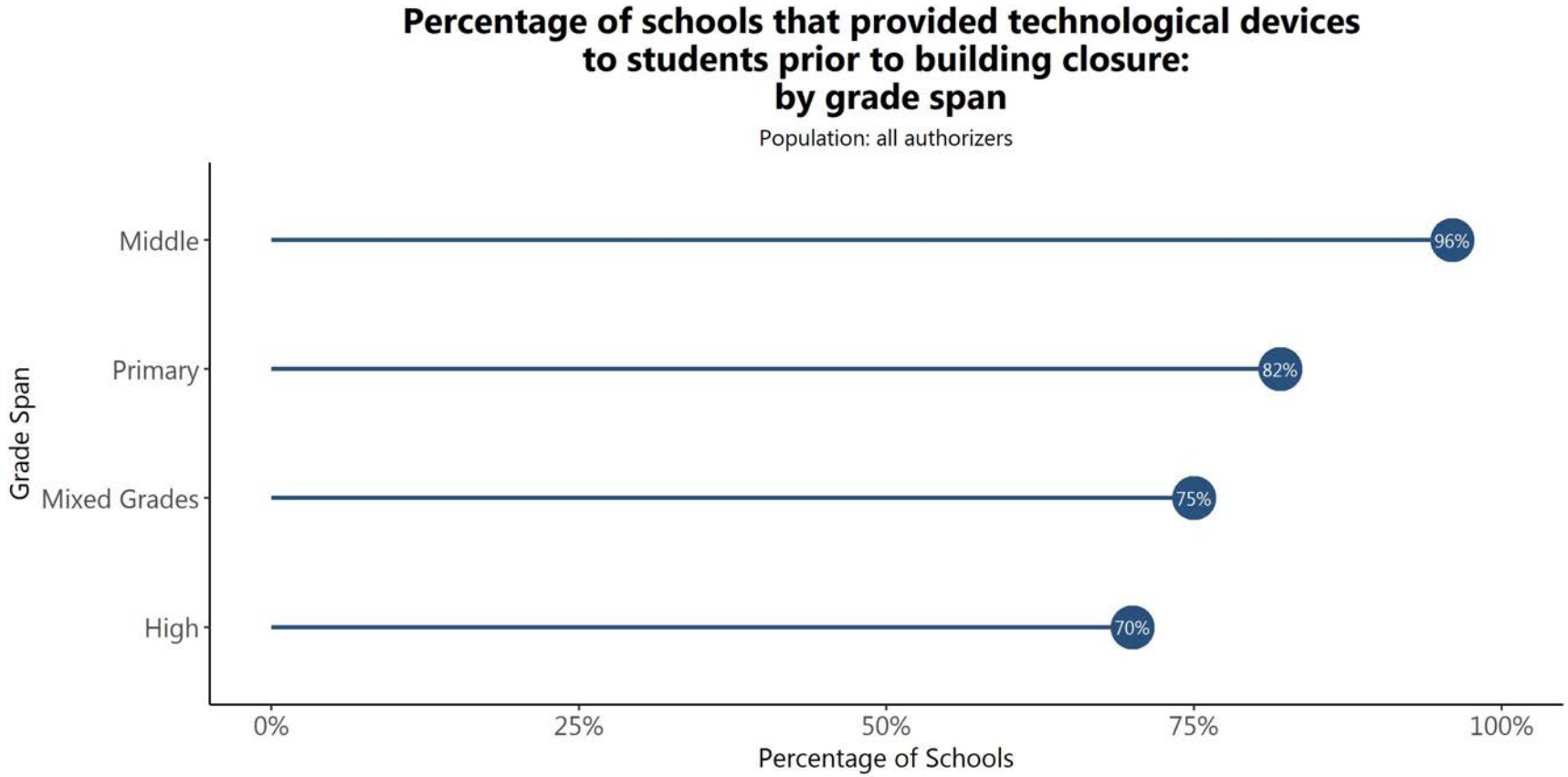
Technology Capacities

- Most schools (80.0% of sample) had provided devices to students prior to building closure.
  - Middle schools were especially active in distributing devices.
- The 20.0% of sample schools that had not provided devices were largely concentrated in:
  - Primary-grade schools;
  - **High-poverty schools**.*

* Students at these schools are less likely to have access to their own personal learning devices. A survey from Parents Together reports: “Kids from low-income homes are three times more likely not to have consistent access to a device (32% vs 10%) and five times more likely to go to a school not offering distance learning materials or activities at all (11% vs 2%)” (https://parents-together.org/parentstogether-survey-reveals-remote-learning-is-failing-our-most-vulnerable-students/).

Initial Reactions and Preparations

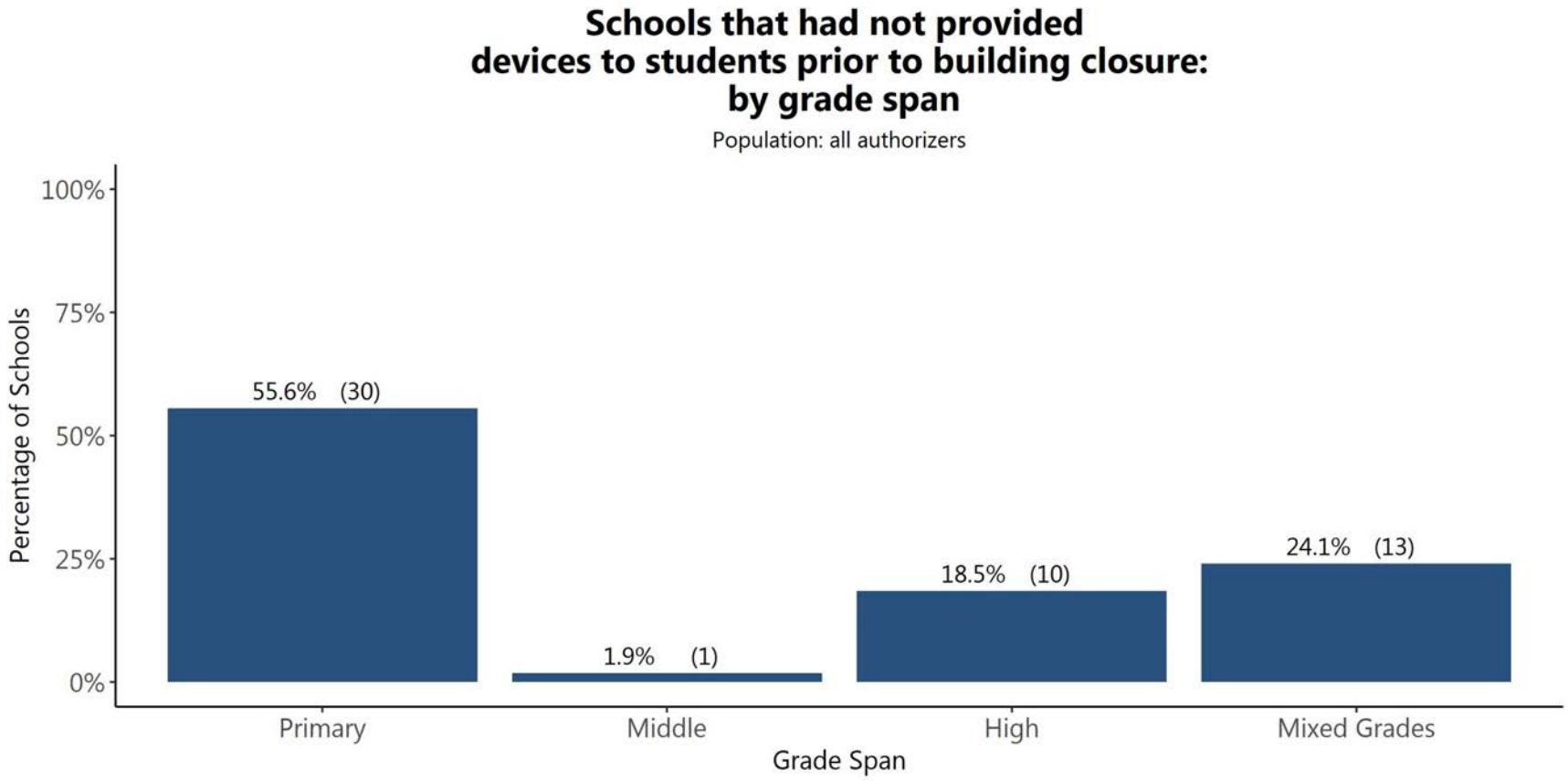
Technology Capacities



credo

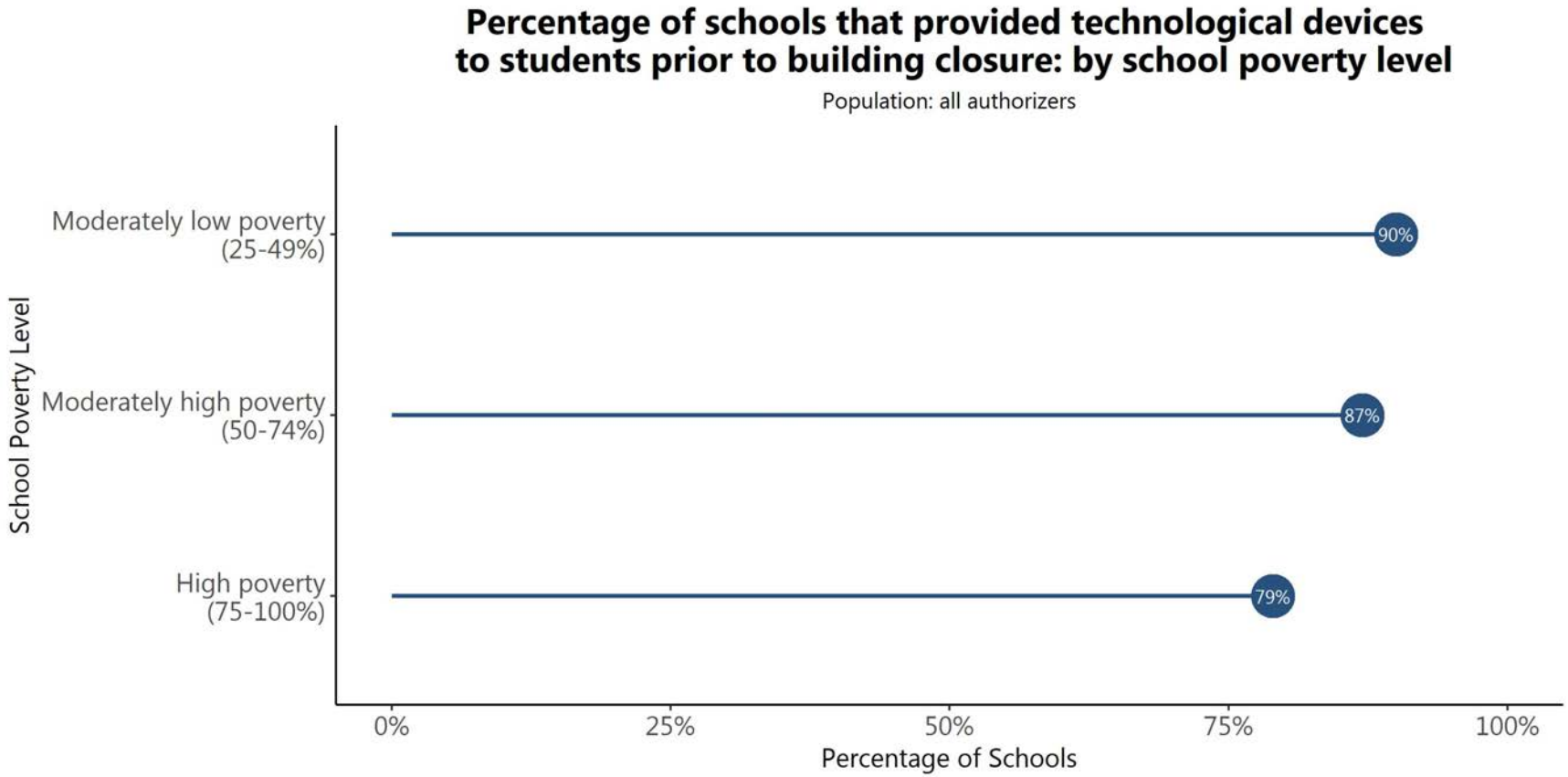
Initial Reactions and Preparations

Technology Capacities



Initial Reactions and Preparations

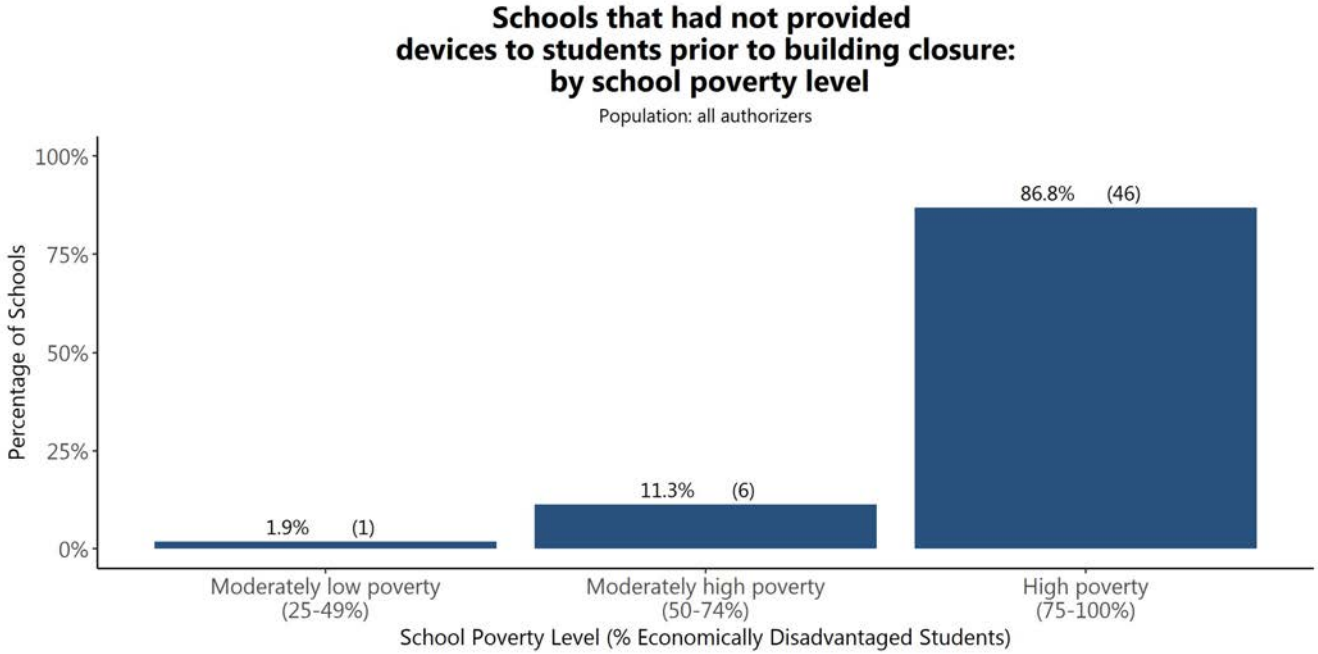
Technology Capacities



Initial Reactions and Preparations

Technology Capacities

- Although high-poverty schools represented 79.3% of the total sample, they represented 86.8% of the schools that had not provided devices to students prior to building closure.



Initial Reactions and Preparations

Technology Capacities

- A majority of schools engaged in at least one strategy for increasing students' access to technology, but many (65.7%) also distributed hard-copy materials to students.
- Strategies did not vary significantly between high- and not-high-poverty schools.

Resource Strategy to Support Students	Percentage of Schools
Purchased new equipment	74.59%
Provided printed learning materials	65.68%
Provided technology training to students	59.74%
Provided internet access to students	56.77%
Purchased new software	39.6%
Other: Provided information and support for families to increase their access to technology or the internet	16.5%
Other: Loaned out devices or extended an existing loan program	8.91%

credo

Initial Reactions and Preparations

Technology Capacities

- Strategies to distribute resources to students varied somewhat by school grade level.

Strategy	All Schools	Primary Schools	Middle Schools	High Schools	Mixed-grade Schools
Purchased new equipment	74.59%	77.38%	78.26%	63.64%	69.81%
Provided printed learning materials	65.68%	67.26%	56.52%	51.52%	66.04%
Provided technology training to students	59.74%	54.76%	69.57%	54.55%	67.92%
Provided internet access to students	56.77%	44.64%	95.65%	54.55%	73.58%
Purchased new software	39.6%	38.69%	39.13%	27.27%	47.17%
Other: Provided information and support for families to increase their access to technology or the internet	16.5%	26.79%	4.35%	3.03%	3.77%
Other: Loaned out devices or extended an existing loan program	8.91%	5.36%	13.04%	30.3%	5.66%

Initial Reactions and Preparations

Technology Capacities

- Schools in which most students had access to technology at time of building closure were more likely to purchase new software, but not significantly more likely to provide other resources.

		Percentage of students with technology access at building closure			
Strategy	All Schools	< 25%	25-49%	50-74%	75-100%
Purchased new equipment	74.59%	79.41%	84.04%	78.16%	59.04%
Provided printed learning materials	65.68%	85.29%	47.87%	71.26%	72.29%
Provided technology training to students	59.74%	67.65%	50%	63.22%	63.86%
Provided internet access to students	56.77%	76.47%	44.68%	60.92%	56.63%
Purchased new software	39.6%	35.29%	29.79%	47.13%	44.58%
Other: Provided information and support for families to increase their access to technology or the internet	16.5%	8.82%	38.3%	3.45%	9.64%
Other: Loaned out devices or extended an existing loan program	8.91%	5.88%	4.26%	17.24%	7.23%

Initial Reactions and Preparations

Technology Capacities

- For teachers, schools mainly emphasized training and professional development.
- Similar to strategies used to support students, efforts to bolster teachers' technology resources did not vary greatly between high- and not-high-poverty schools.

Resource Strategy to Support Teachers	Percentage of Schools
Provided technology training to teachers:	79.54%
Purchased new software:	42.57%
Provided internet access to teachers:	30.69%
Allowed printed learning materials:	28.38%
Purchased new equipment:	27.72%
Other: Teachers already had the technology and equipment they needed for remote instruction prior to building closure:	4.62%

credo

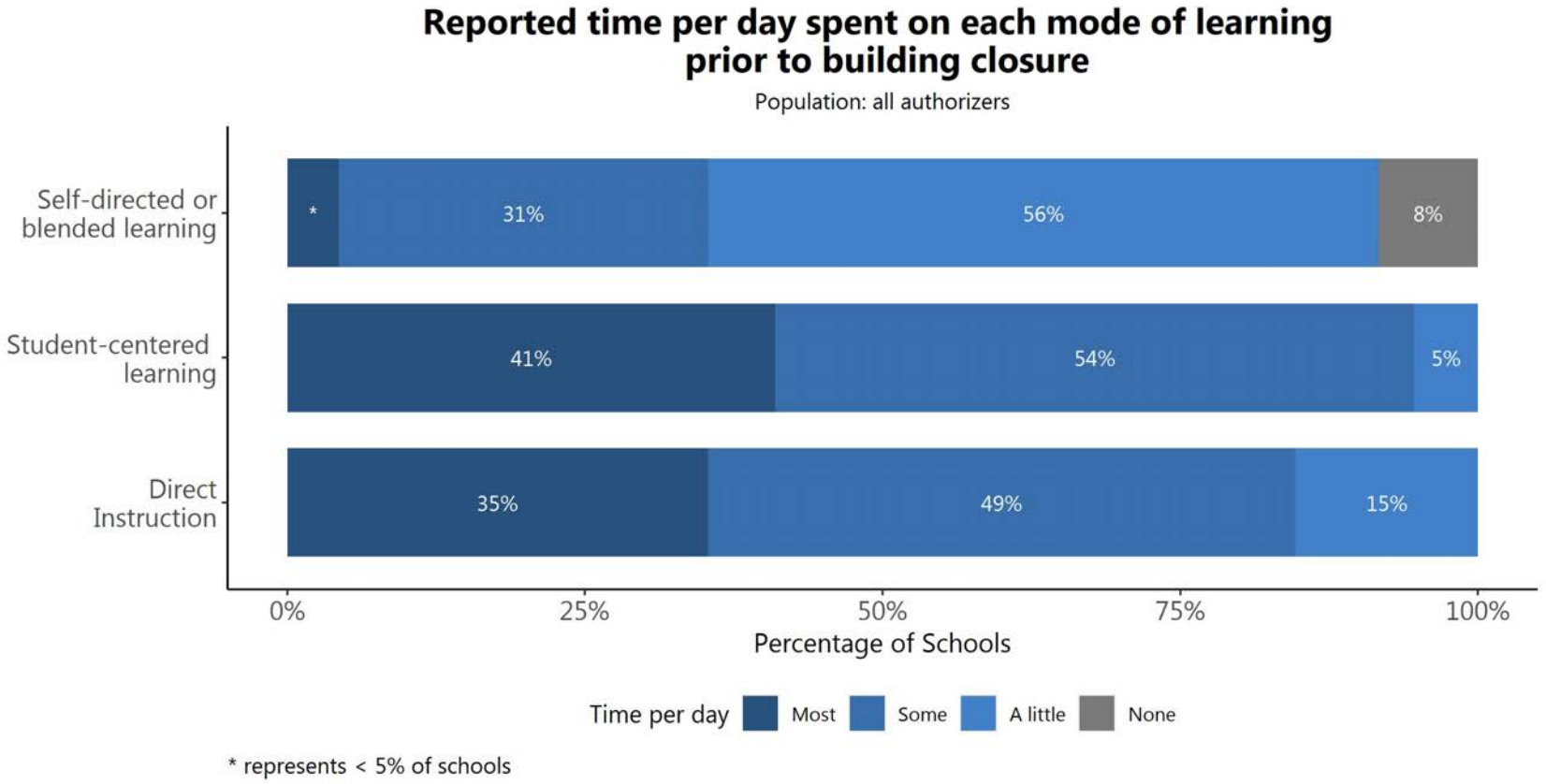
Curriculum and Instruction

Pivot to New Modes of Instruction

- In the first phase of the crisis, a primary focus of schools was transitioning their existing learning models to a remote environment.
- Those models, though, were largely rooted in modes of instruction that did not easily adapt to distance learning.
  - The most popular modes of learning prior to building closure were student-centered learning and direct instruction, with at least 84% of schools saying they spent “most” or “some” of the day on those activities.
  - Less than 5% of schools said they spent more than “some” time on self-directed or blended learning prior to building closure.

Curriculum and Instruction

Pivot to New Modes of Instruction

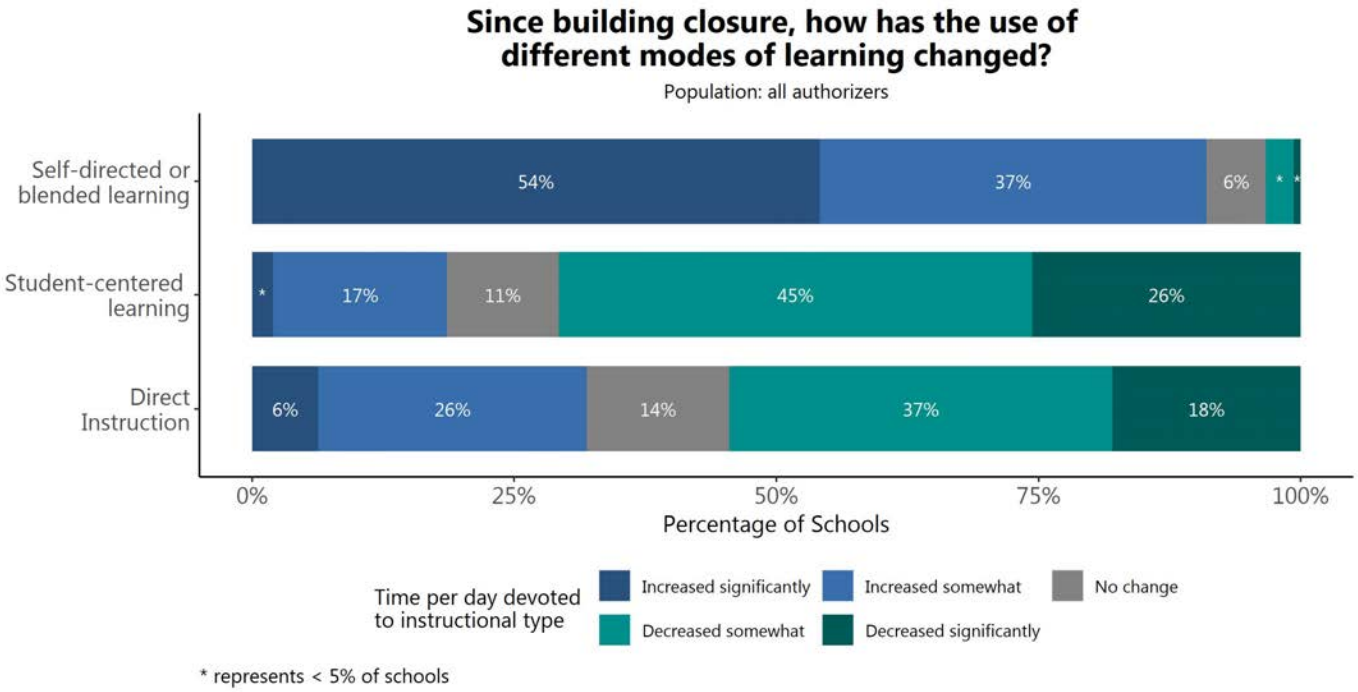


credo

Curriculum and Instruction

Pivot to New Modes of Instruction

- Not surprisingly, time devoted to self-directed and blended learning increased for nearly all schools during remote instruction.



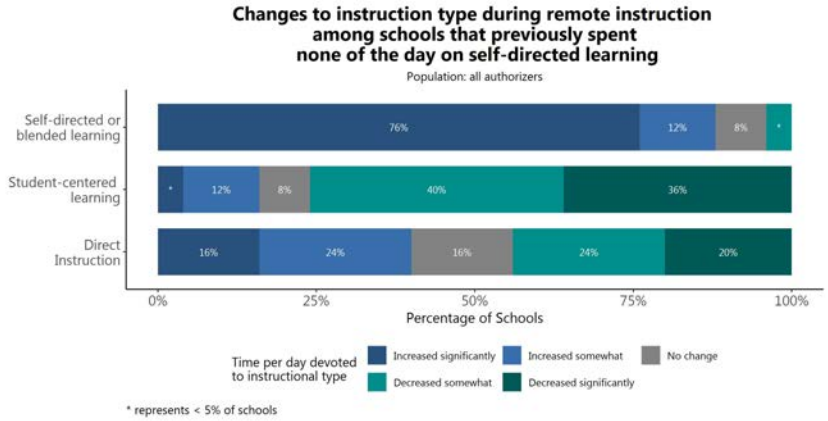
Curriculum and Instruction

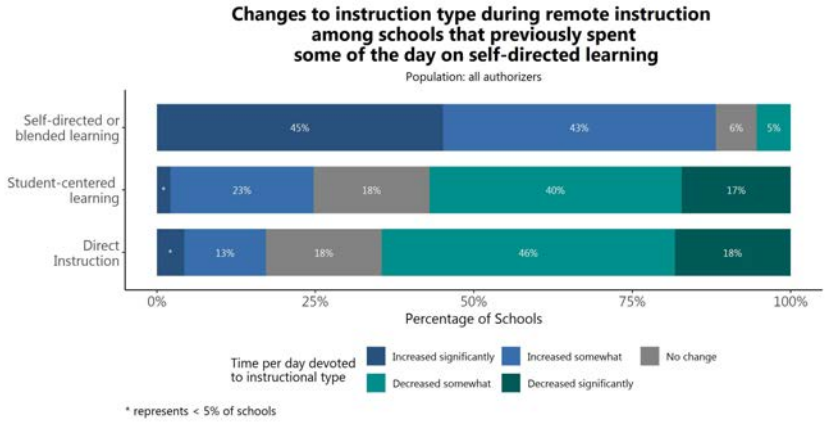
Pivot to New Modes of Instruction

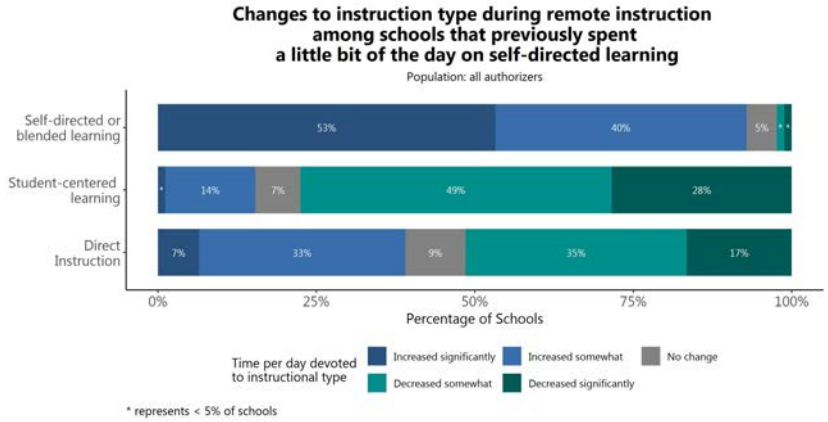
- The shift to self-directed learning did not depend on whether it was part of schools' prior learning models:
  - Of the schools describing themselves as engaging in self-directed learning "most of the day" before building closure, 92.3% of them reported even more self-directed learning post-closure;
  - Similarly, 88% of schools that were conducting self-directed learning "none of the day" in the prior period reported increases in self-directed learning after closure, with over three quarters (76%) of them labeling the increases "significant".

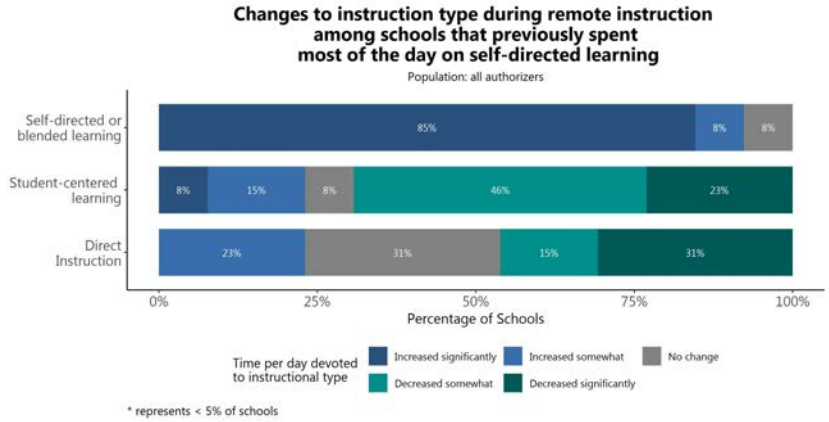
Curriculum and Instruction

Pivot to New Modes of Instruction









credo

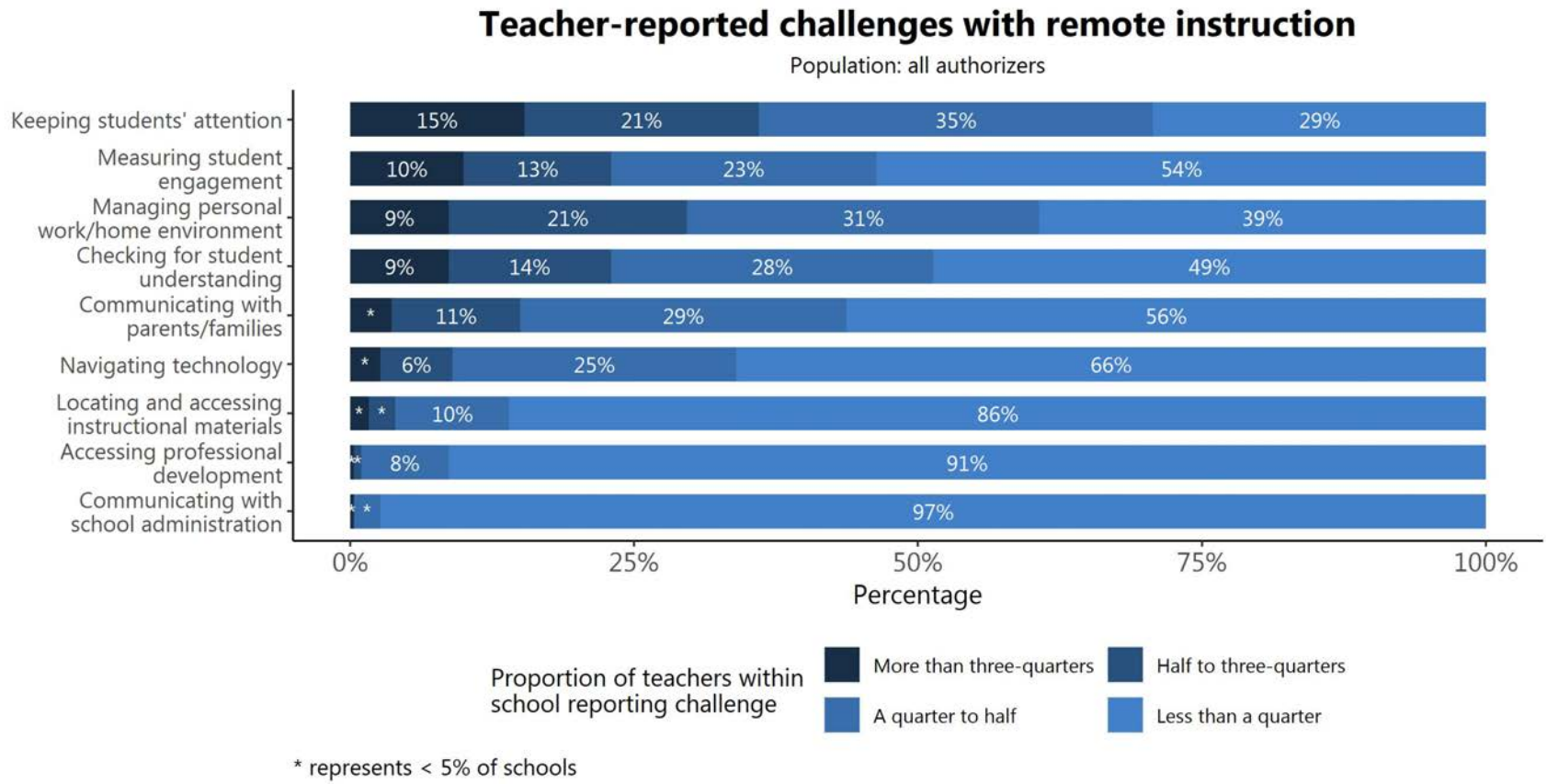
Curriculum and Instruction

Pivot to New Modes of Instruction

- Teachers encountered understandable challenges with this transition. Their three most frequently reported issues with online instruction were:
  - Keeping students' attention;
  - Monitoring student engagement;
  - Managing their own home/personal lives during the crisis.
- Navigating technology was not a frequently cited issue:
  - 66% of schools said that less than a quarter of their teachers reported challenges with technology.

Curriculum and Instruction

Pivot to New Modes of Instruction



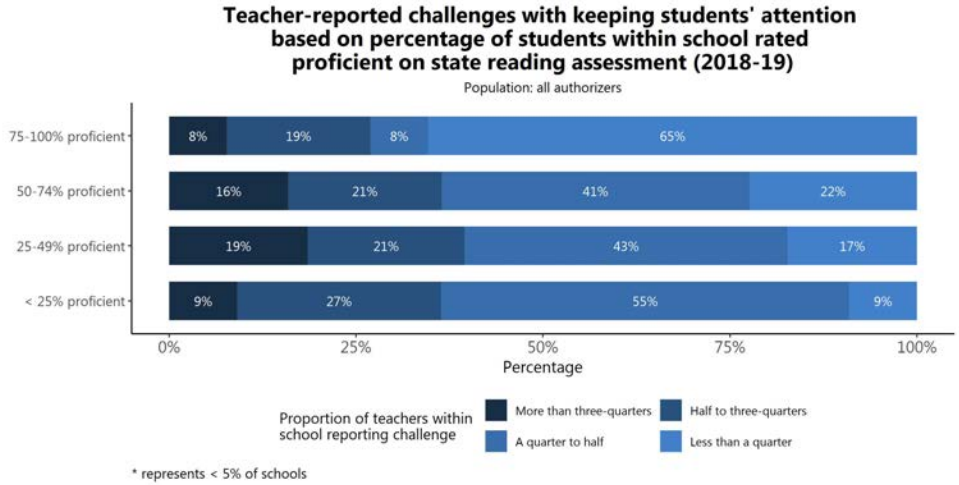
* represents < 5% of schools

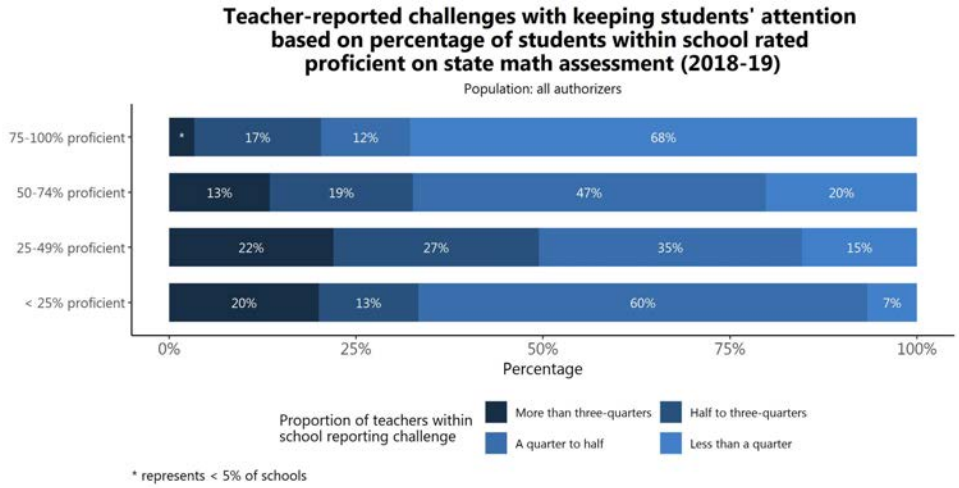
credo

Curriculum and Instruction

Pivot to New Modes of Instruction

- Challenges with keeping students' attention were not highly correlated with levels of reading proficiency but somewhat related to levels of math proficiency.





Curriculum and Instruction

Changes to Academic Programs

- Schools were willing to drop interim testing and adjust learning targets within courses, but for the most part aimed to keep students positioned for advancement in the upcoming year*:
  - A small majority (58.2%) of schools adjusted grade-promotion standards;
  - 84.8% of schools continued to introduce new content to students;
  - Only 13.1% dropped or prematurely ended courses;
  - Over a quarter (26%) of high schools altered graduation requirements.

* A newly-published research brief from Annenberg notes, “Even with large predicted learning losses, most students will remain within the typical grade range and be able to engage with typical class content next year,” and the brief recommends against both content compression and grade retention (https://annenberg.brown.edu/sites/default/files/EdResearch_for_Recovery_Brief_1.pdf).

Curriculum and Instruction

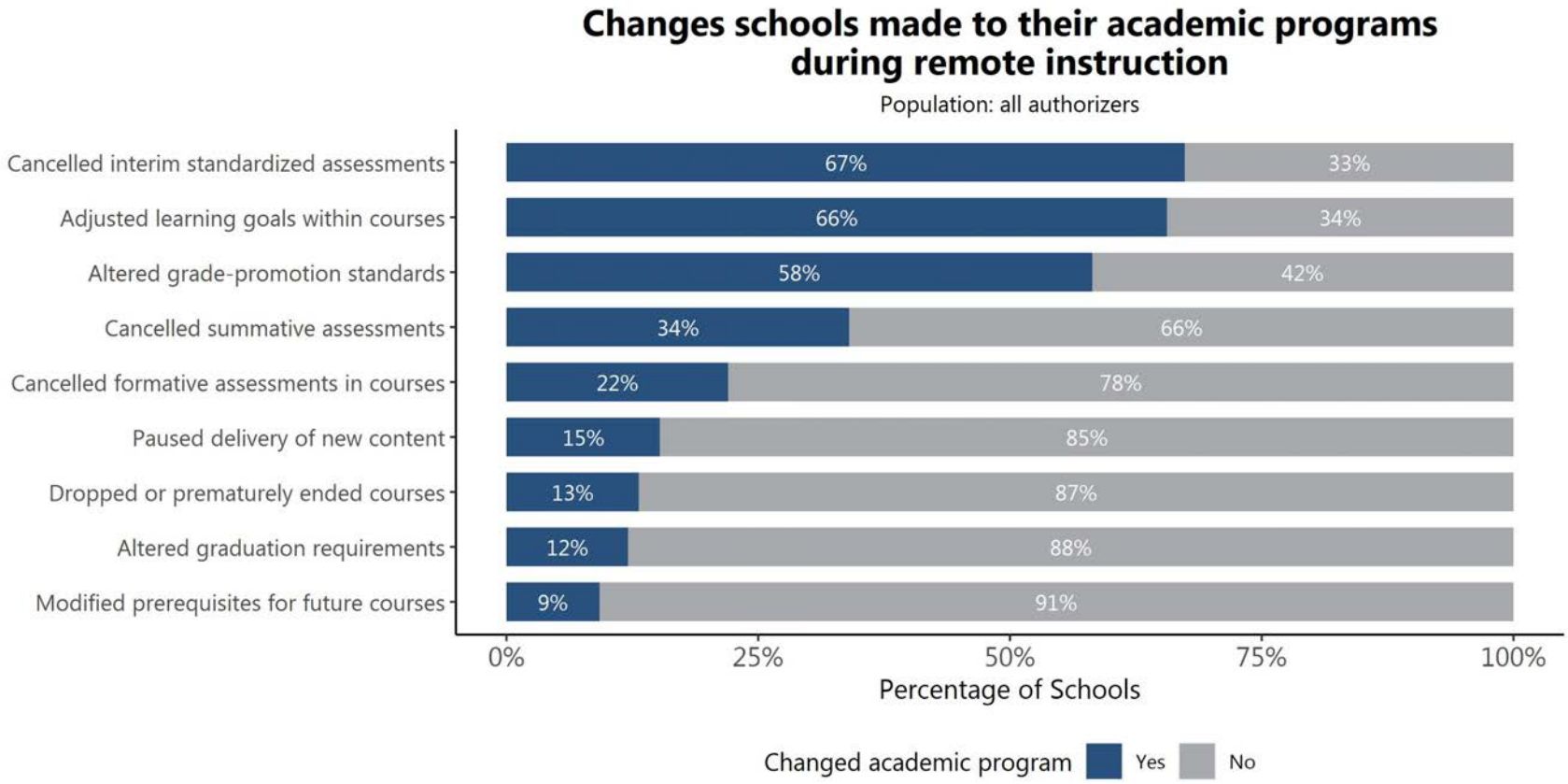
Changes to Academic Programs

- The likelihood that a school had made one of the nine adjustments to academic programs about which it was surveyed did not correlate with its achievement levels in previous years; **previously high- or low- performing schools were no more or less likely to make structural changes to their academic programs during building closure**.*

* Note that these results do not reflect schools that were new in 2019-20 or served only K-2 students, as achievement data for those schools were not available.

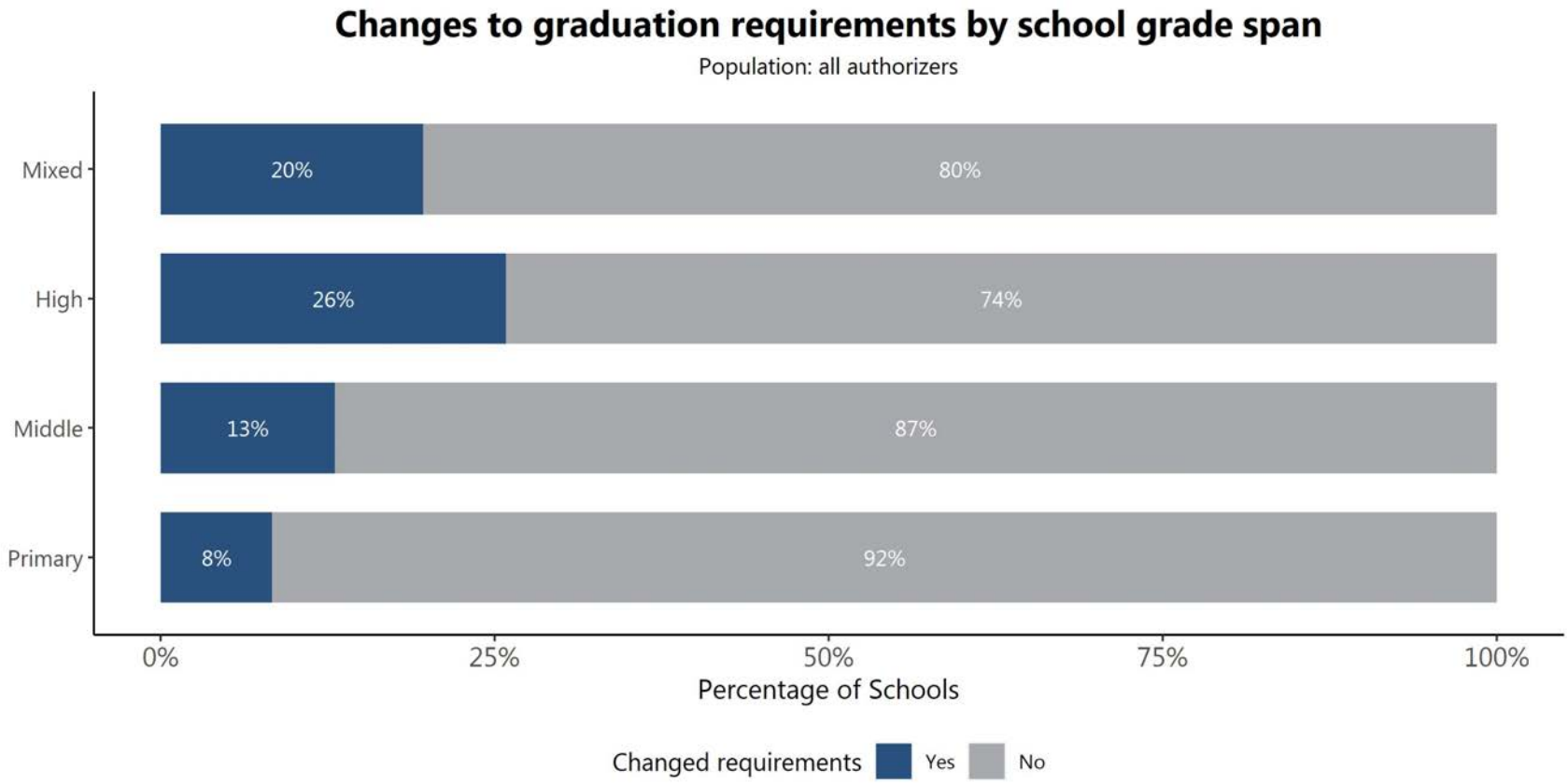
Curriculum and Instruction

Changes to Academic Programs



Curriculum and Instruction

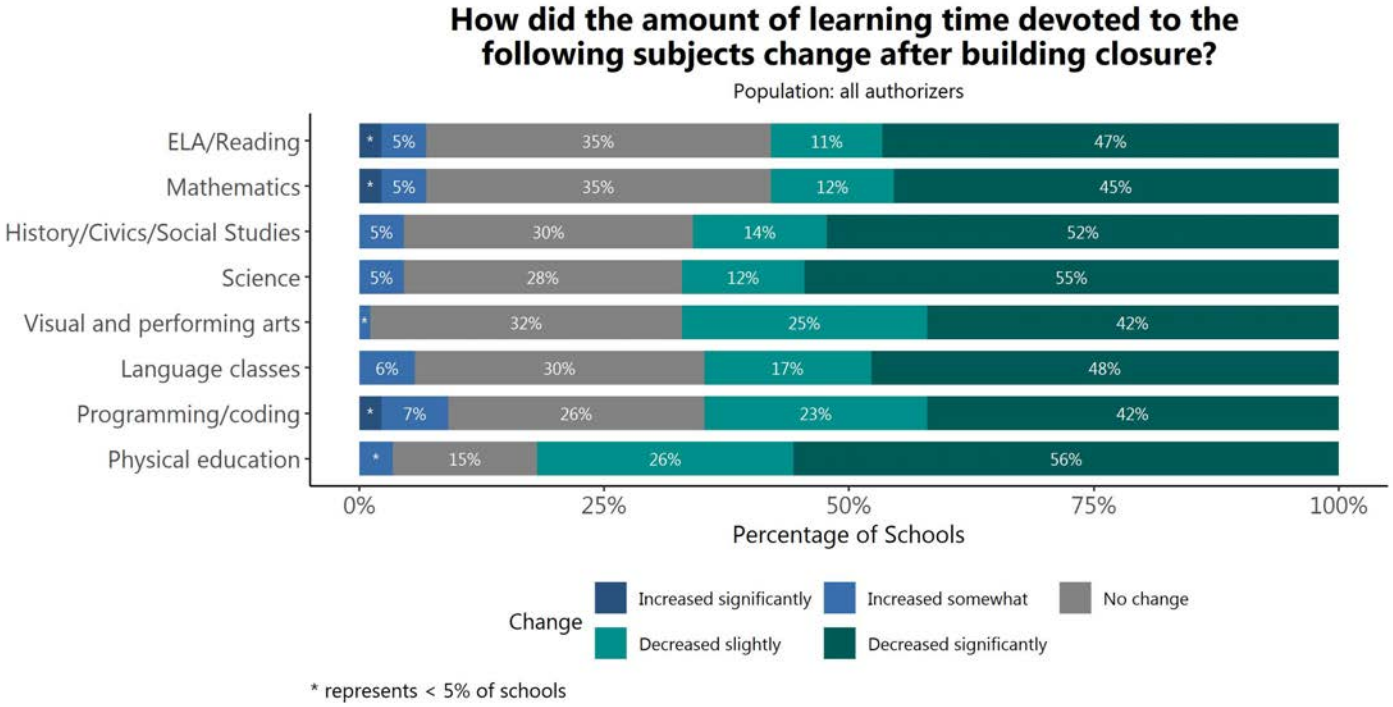
Changes to Academic Programs



Curriculum and Instruction

Learning Time

- Most schools reported decreases in learning time across subjects.**

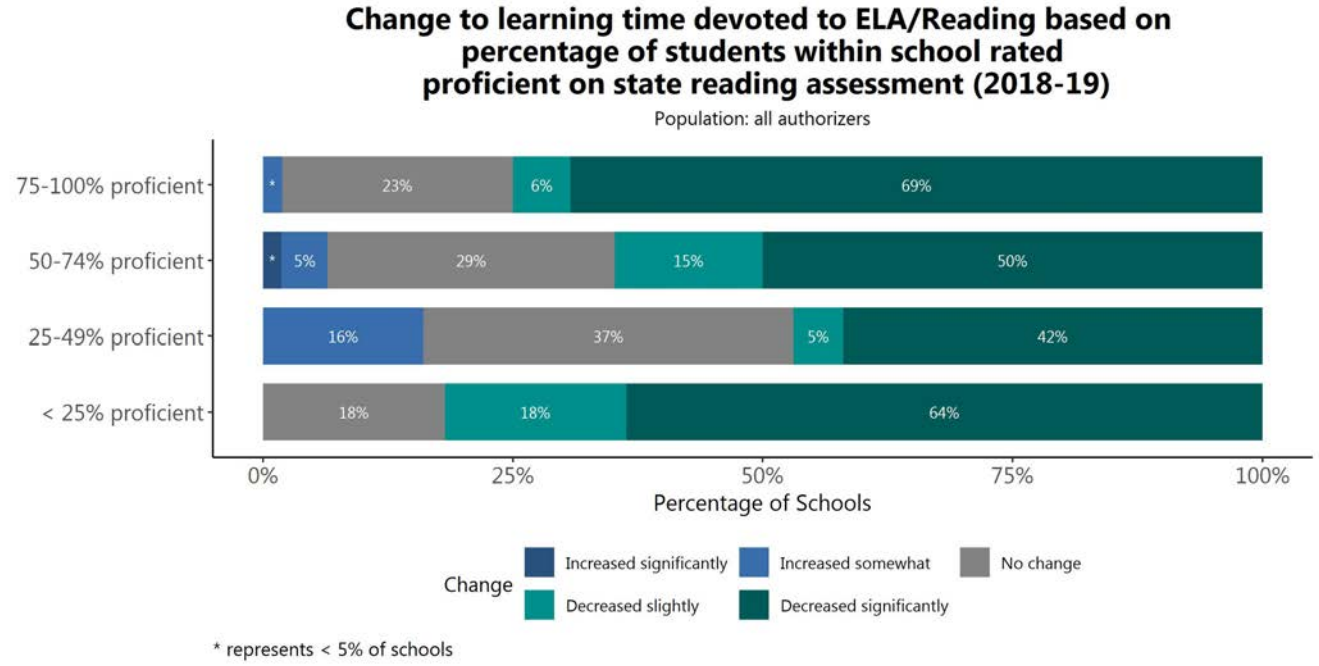


** Learning time included both time spent with a teacher and time engaging with subject material independently.

Curriculum and Instruction

Learning Time

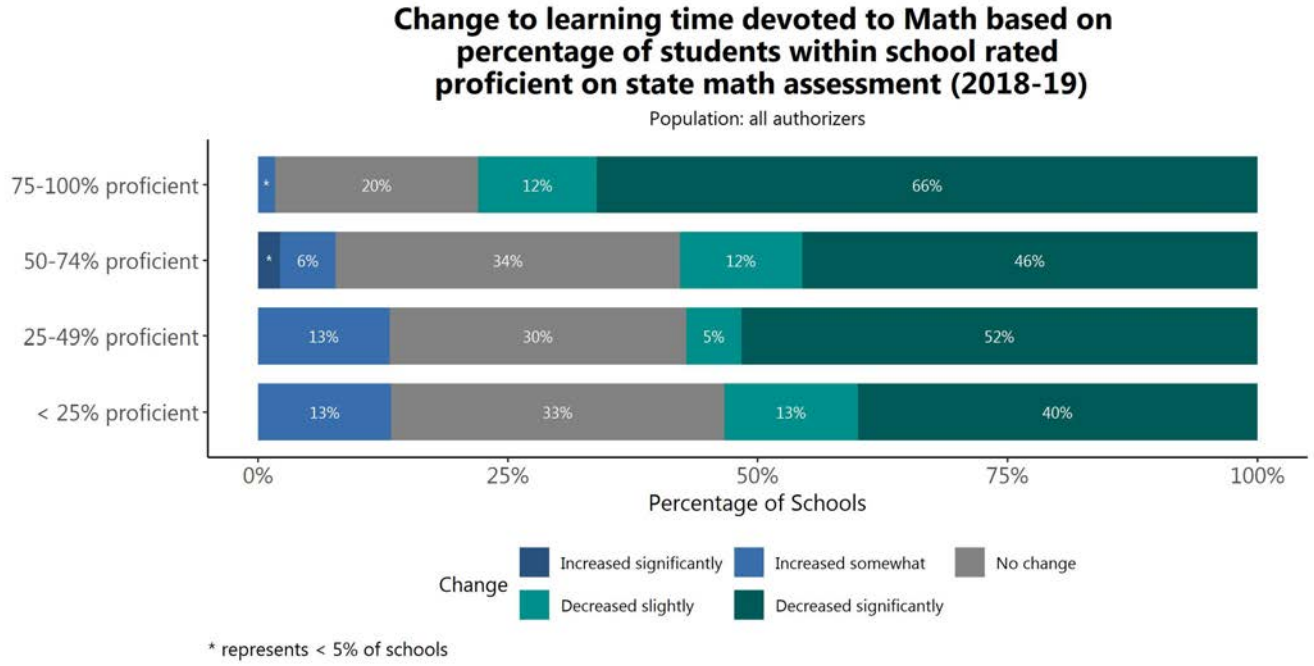
- Schools that had less than 25% of students at reading proficiency in the previous year were more likely than others to report slight or significant **decreases** in ELA/Reading time during closure.



Curriculum and Instruction

Learning Time

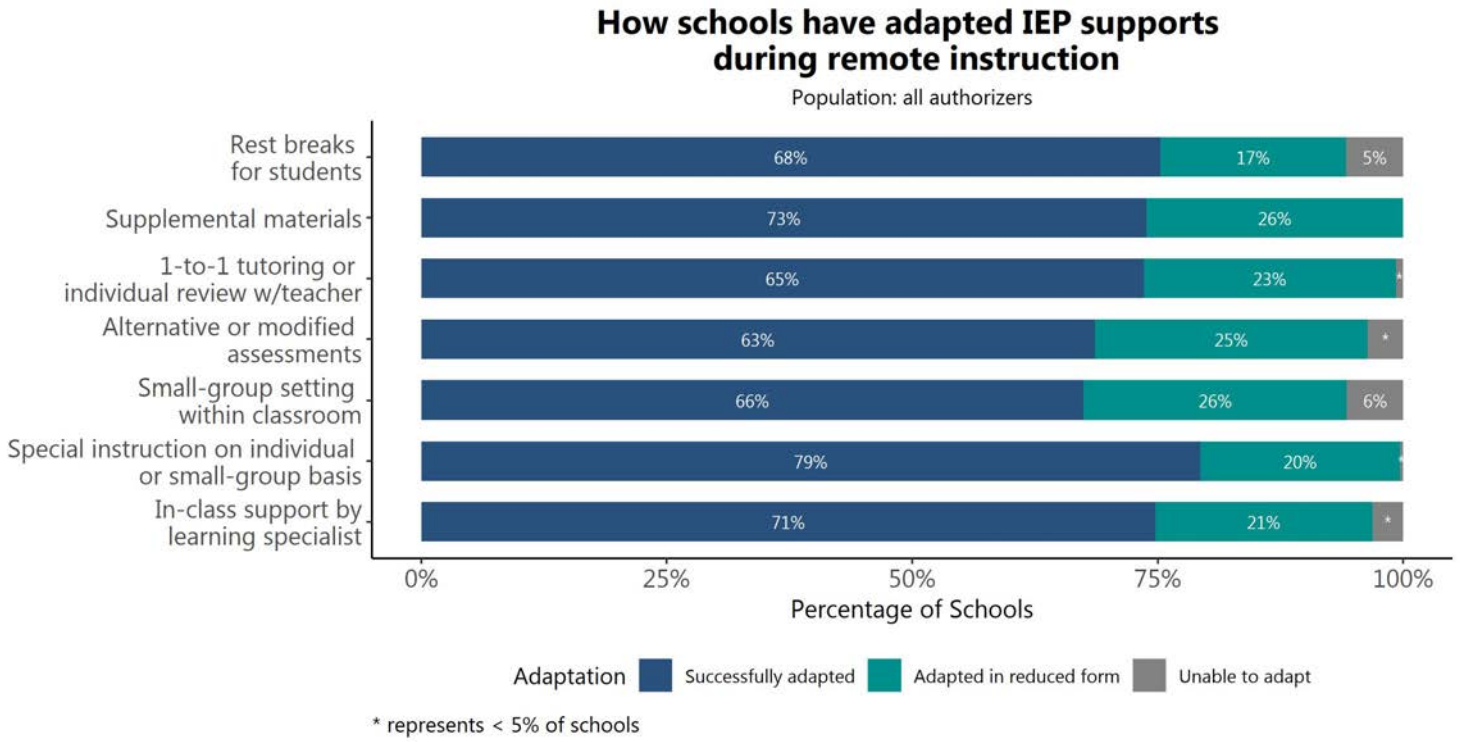
- Schools with fewer students at proficiency in math in the previous year were less likely to have loss of math learning time during closure than were other schools.



Curriculum and Instruction

Student Support - IEPs

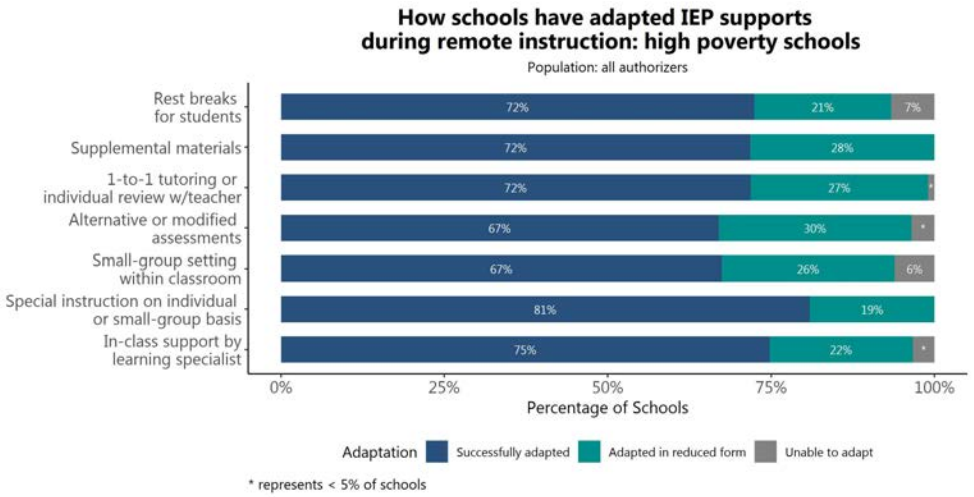
- Schools were mainly successful at adapting IEP supports to a remote-learning environment.

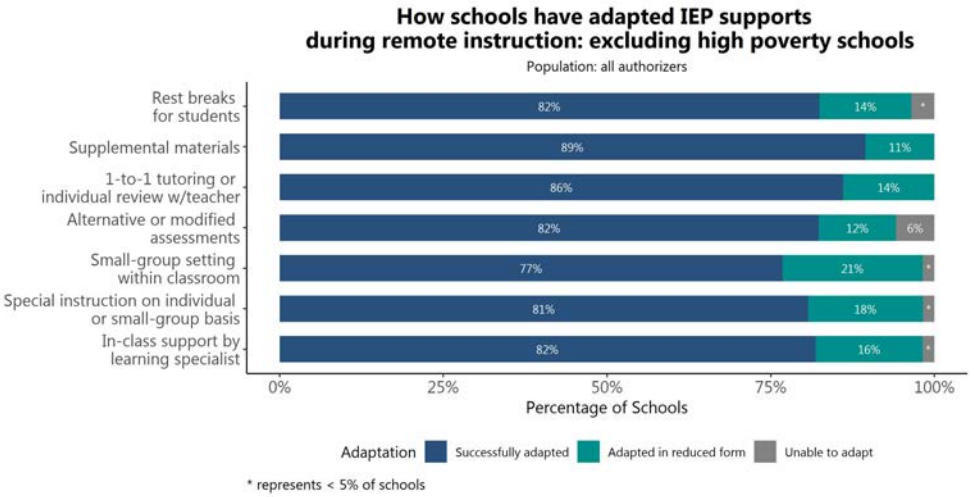


Curriculum and Instruction

Student Support - IEPs

- High-poverty schools were largely able to adapt IEP supports, although they reported slightly different levels of success than did other schools.*





* According to a Parents Together survey, students from low-income families are less likely to receive supports during this time than are other students. For a summary, see: https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/05/27/862705225/survey-shows-big-remote-learning-gaps-for-low-income-and-special-needs-children

credo

Curriculum and Instruction

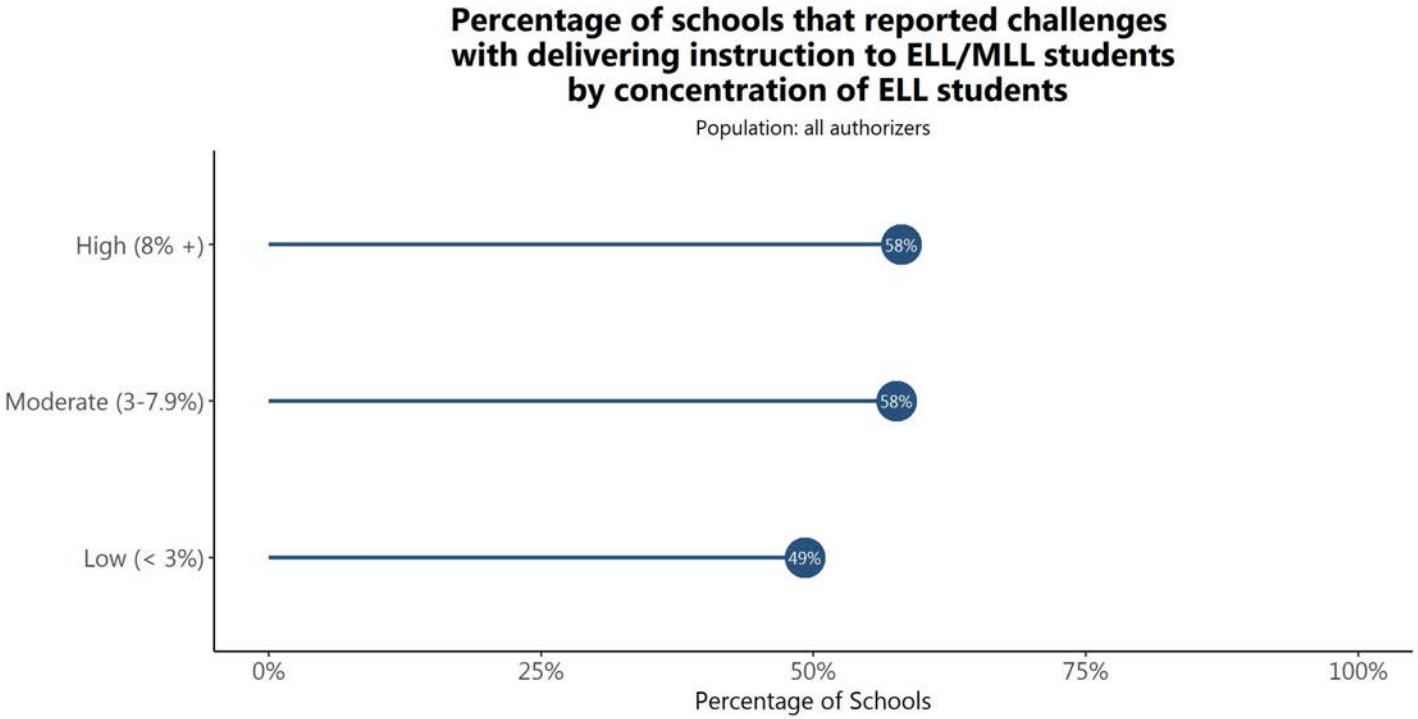
Student Support – ELL/MLL

- Just under half (45.8%) of schools reported no challenges in supporting ELL/MLL students during this period.
- For other schools, the two most commonly cited challenges were:
  - Communicating with families of ELL/MLL students (34%);
  - Locating effective educational materials for the online instruction of ELL/MLL students (20%).

Curriculum and Instruction

Student Support – ELL/MLL

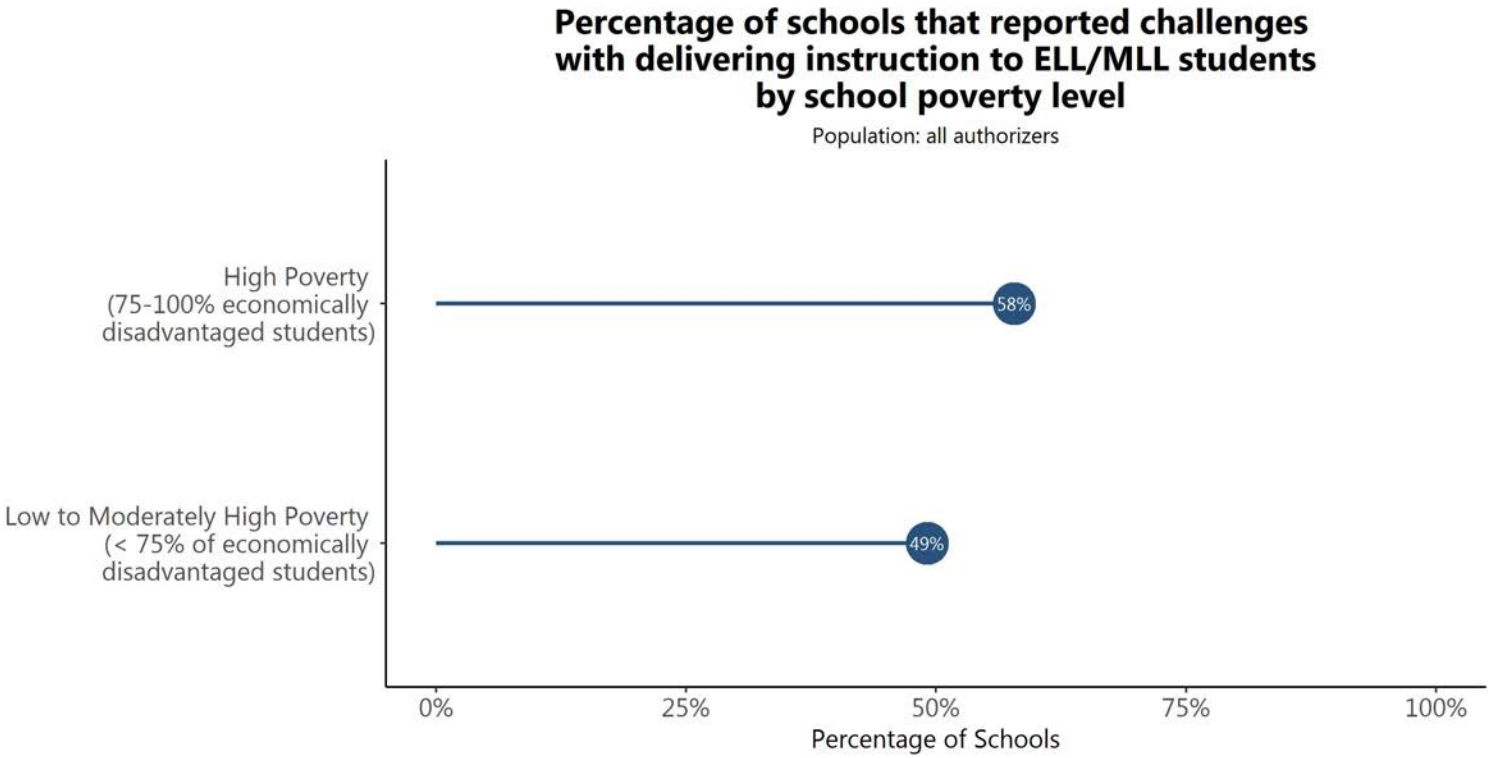
- Schools with low concentrations of ELL/MLL students were somewhat less likely to report challenges in providing support.



Curriculum and Instruction

Student Support – ELL/MLL

- High-poverty schools were more likely to report challenges.



Curriculum and Instruction

Final Grades

- 74.1% of schools changed how they were reporting final grades.
- How they did so varied greatly; there was no dominant method for deciding on and reporting final grades. The most popular included:
  - Using a relaxed grading system (41.6%);
  - Giving pass/fail grades (17.8%);*
  - Granting all students the same grade (7.4%).

* This is slightly lower than the 22% of district schools from a national sample that report using a pass/fail method during this period of building closures. See: Malkus, N., & Christensen, C. (2020). School District Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Round 5, Plans for a Remote Finish. AEI Paper & Studies, 1E.

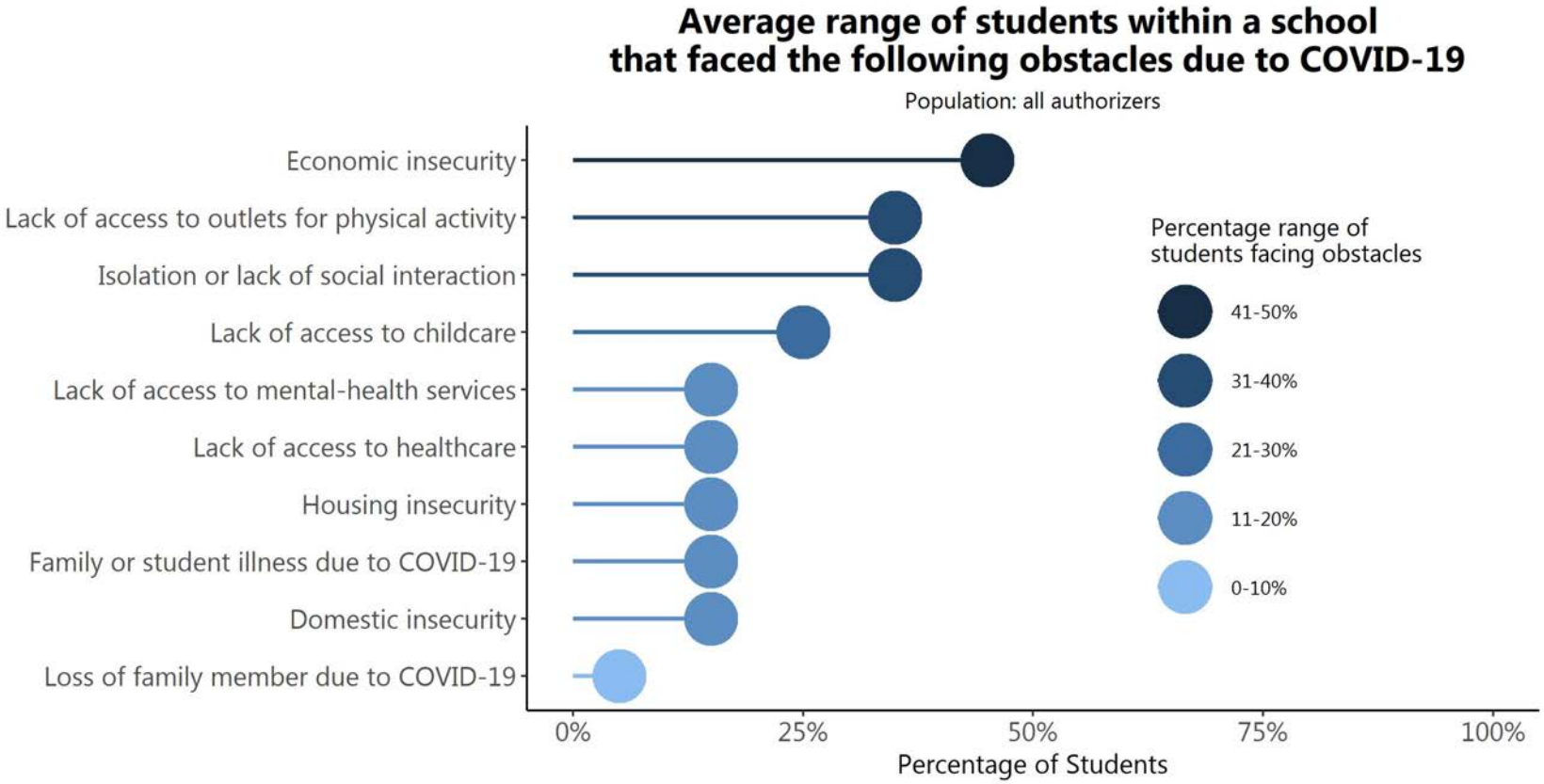
Non-Academic Programs and Services

Challenges Faced by School Community

- Open-ended responses indicated that schools recognized the need to care for the whole child and that this need had grown larger as a result of the current crisis.
  - Schools perceived that roughly half of their students faced economic insecurity during this period.
  - Social isolation and lack of outlets for physical activity were thought to affect about one third of students.
- In some cases, for example with the provision of meals, many schools were unable to offer services despite recognizing the need for them.

Non-Academic Programs and Services

Challenges Faced by School Community



Non-Academic Programs and Services

Meal Programs

- Many schools curtailed their meal program, even as most (84.1%) saw the provision of meals as either “urgent” or “very urgent” at the outset of building closure.

Change to Meal Program	# Schools*	Did Not Pivot to City/Community-wide Program	Pivoted to City/Community-wide Program	No City/Community-wide Program Available
Created new program	2	1	1	0
Expanded existing program	37	0	35	2
Continued existing program	61	10	49	2
Reduced existing program	81	6	73	2
Eliminated existing program	**111**	**31**	**71**	**9**
No program prior to nor after closure	6	1	5	0

* Note: Some multi-site schools provided separate responses, which led to an N > 295 for this question.

credo

Non-Academic Programs and Services

Changes to Programs and Services

- Although a majority of schools reduced or eliminated clubs and student activities, physical education and athletics, or meal programs during this period, many other school functions were maintained or even expanded.
- Social-emotional counseling was the most likely to be continued or expanded.*

* This is in line with the widespread consensus that SEL and social-emotional support are particularly important during the COVID crisis. For one of many posts on this topic, see: https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/leveraging-social-emotional-learning-support-students-families-covid-19.

Non-Academic Programs and Services

Changes to Programs and Services

	Created		Expanded or Continued		Reduced or Eliminated	
Program or Service	# Schools*	% Schools	# Schools*	% Schools	# Schools*	% Schools
Advisory	2	0.66%	119	39.27%	119	39.27%
Social or emotional counseling	0	0%	213	70.3%	86	28.38%
College or career counseling	3	0.99%	126	41.58%	36	11.88%
Meal program	2	0.66%	98	32.34%	192	63.37%
Physical-wellness or athletics programs	0	0%	67	22.11%	233	76.9%
Clubs and activities	2	0.66%	31	10.23%	224	73.93%
Tutoring	2	0.66%	110	36.3%	126	41.58%
Social-emotional learning (SEL) program	2	0.66%	137	45.21%	133	43.89%
On-site childcare	5	1.65%	0	0%	22	7.26%
Other: After school programs	0	0%	1	0.33%	12	3.96%

highlight = largest % in category

* Note: Some multi-site schools provided separate responses, which led to an N > 295 for this question.

Student Engagement

Attendance

- Nearly all (99%) of schools reported taking attendance.
  - This compares favorably with one national sample of district schools in which only 30% of schools were in districts that had established a means of taking attendance by May 8.*
  - A second national study found that only 27% of school districts required schools to track attendance during remote instruction.**
- Because methods used to take attendance varied considerably between schools, average daily attendance is not a reliable metric for student engagement during this period.

* Malkus, N., & Christensen, C. (2020). School District Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Round 5, Plans for a Remote Finish. AEI Paper & Studies, 1E.
** Gross, B. & Opalka, A. (2020). Too Many Schools Leave Learning to Chance During Pandemic. Center for Reinventing Public Education.

Student Engagement

Attendance

Attendance Method	# Schools*	% Schools
One log-in per day	101	33.3%
Other (see below)	73	24.1%
Some threshold of (online) interactions per day	66	21.8%
Completion of assigned work	35	11.6%
Log-in to at least half of classes during the day	18	5.9%
Some minimum number of weekly log-ins	10	3.3%
Other: Combination of the above required	43	14.2%
Other: Multiple ways for students to be counted present	25	8.3%

* Note: Some multi-site schools provided separate responses, which led to an N > 295 for this question.

credo

Student Engagement

Maintaining Connection

- A wide variety of strategies were used to keep students involved in school. The three most commonly cited were:
  - Community events, such as town halls or ”Spirit Days” (184 schools reporting);
  - Regular communication through multiple means (174 schools reporting);
  - Use of existing structures, such as advisory, SEL programs, or student government (128 schools reporting).
- For students who were not regularly active in school, about two-thirds of schools took ‘above and beyond’ steps, such as conducting home visits, providing wifi hotspots, or reaching out to individual students’ extended networks of friends/family.

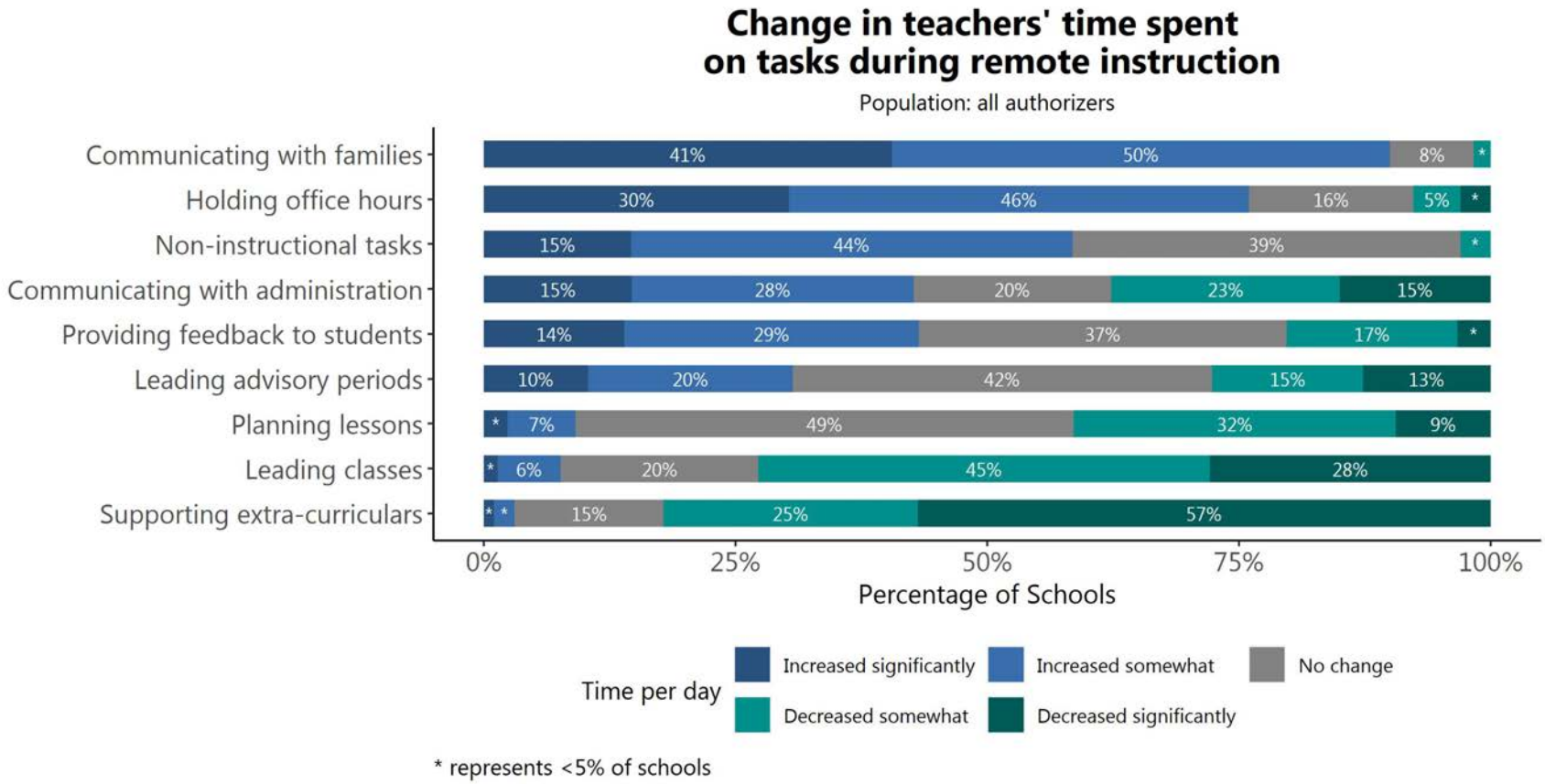
School Management and Future Planning

Teachers' Duties and Dedication of Time

- How teachers expended their energy changed considerably during the period of building closure:
  - For each of the nine job functions asked about in the survey, a majority of schools reported at least some change to teachers' use of time.
  - The least changed job function was lesson planning, with 49% of schools reporting "no change" in time dedicated to it.
  - The most common increase in time spent by teachers was in communicating with families.

School Management and Future Planning

Teachers' Duties and Dedication of Time



School Management and Future Planning

Staffing

- There were few changes to school staff during building closure.

Staff Type	% of schools with no changes to staff	% of schools with any changes to staff
Administration	95.5%	4.5%
Teaching Faculty	89.8%	10.2%
Student support specialists	94.7%	5.3%
Facilities and operations staff	86.9%	13.1%

Note: Percentages based on schools that responded to survey item, not on entire sample.

School Management and Future Planning

Staffing

- For the changes that did occur, there was no dominant impetus across schools; the most popular reason given was “Some teachers or staff underutilized” (8.6%).
- Changes to staffing were low regardless of staff type.

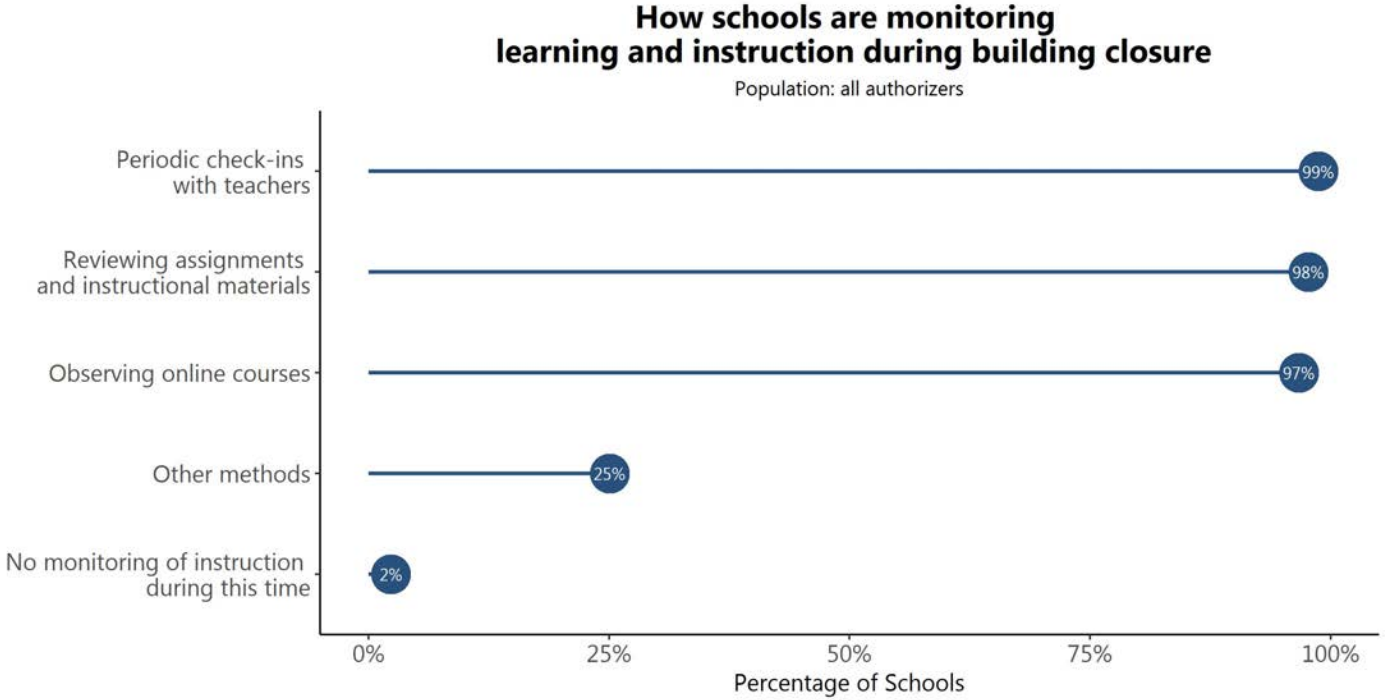
	Resignations		Releases		Reassignments	
Staff Type	% Schools without	% Schools with	% Schools without	% Schools with	% Schools without	% Schools with
Administration	99.62%	0.38%	97.74%	2.26%	98.12%	1.88%
Teaching faculty	96.59%	3.41%	96.60%	3.40%	95.85%	4.15%
Student support specialists	99.19%	0.81%	99.19%	0.81%	96.75%	3.25%
Facilities and operations staff	98.80%	1.20%	94.33%	5.67%	96.33%	3.67%

Note: Percentages based on schools that responded to survey item, not on entire sample.

School Management and Future Planning

Monitoring of Instruction

- Schools expressed confidence in their ability to monitor instruction, and they reported using a variety of monitoring methods.



School Management and Future Planning

Planning for Reentry

- Nearly all schools had started planning for 2020-21 by the start of May.
- Size of school had no effect on reported stage of planning.

Stage of Reentry Planning at Time of Survey	Number of Schools*
Have not yet started planning	8
Have started discussing re-entry but do not yet have a plan in development	75
Are developing a plan	216
Have a finished plan	4

* Note: Some multi-site schools provided separate responses, which led to an N > 295 for this question.

School Management and Future Planning

Building on Success

- When asked about success with remote instruction, schools cited several positives. In addition to the use of technology (referenced above), schools touted their achievements with, among other things:
  - Employing various learning modalities (103 schools);
  - Supporting teachers (87 schools);
  - Connecting and communicating with families (82 schools);
  - Differentiating instruction and assessment (65 schools).
- Schools struck a largely hopeful tone in their open-ended responses.

Key Findings

Schools responded quickly to the crisis and focused on building the conditions for remote learning, not just remote instruction.

Cooperation and teamwork were high within schools, even when adaptations and in-the-moment adjustments were necessary.

Technology posed less of a challenge than first thought.

Schools were able to support SPED students throughout the period of remote instruction, but found greater challenges with ELL/MLL students.

Key Findings

There were large reductions in learning time across all subjects, which will have a future impact on students.

The learning curve for remote instruction and distance learning remain steep.

Schools' efforts during this period were laudable, but they may not be sustainable for teachers and staff over the long run.

Schools' policies for remote instruction (e.g., attendance, grading) varied widely, and may have to be reconciled in the future.

Summary Finding

New York charter schools mounted heroic and exhausting responses to the closure of school buildings due to the coronavirus. Despite these efforts, instruction and other programs were substantially reduced, with likely impacts on student academic progress. There is an inherent tension moving forward: the steps needed to fill in the existing gaps in schooling and supports may exceed the capacity of school teams to develop and sustain them.

Acknowledgement

School information and contacts were provided by New York State Authorizers, including New York Board of Regents, New York City Chancellor of Education, and SUNY Board of Trustees.

credo