

Teaching Amid COVID-19 School Closures: Key Findings from the Spring 2020 GVSU Educator Survey

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Using teacher survey data across K-12 schools authorized by Grand Valley State University, this study examines teachers' perceptions of schools' implementation of continuity of learning plans during COVID-19 school closures.

Key findings include:

- Schools gave teachers clear expectations and guidance but did not provide sufficient professional learning around delivering distance learning.
- Most teachers struggled to complete the curriculum and maintain student participation.
- The greatest challenge for teachers was engaging with students and families around assignments and learning.
- Teachers reported more curriculum coverage and better student participation throughout distance learning when they were involved in comprehensive preparation.
- Comprehensive preparation also increased students' access to instructional opportunities during distance learning.
- Student and staff well-being will be an elevated priority for 2020-21.

Introduction

Executive Order (EO 2020-35) mandated all Michigan districts and schools provide distance learning opportunities amid COVID-19 school closures. As part of EO 2020-35, school districts submitted Continuity of Learning Plans (CLP) to continue receiving state aid for school operations. Districts' completed applications – including assurances documents, CLPs, and budget outlines – were submitted to intermediate school districts and authorizing bodies for approval.

In April 2020, the Grand Valley State University (GVSU) Charter School Office (CSO) partnered with Basis Policy Research (Basis) to analyze CLPs and describe how districts would support students' learning and well-being. The present study extends prior work by leveraging GVSU teacher survey data to examine stakeholders' perceptions of CLP implementation during COVID-19 school closures.

Research Questions

This study examines the following research questions:

1. What do teachers report, on average, about their experiences implementing schools' continuity of learning plans?
2. What predicts teachers' implementation of schools' continuity of learning plans? Do certain pre-implementation experiences increase the likelihood teachers report increased coverage of curriculum? Student participation?
3. To what extent have teachers' priorities changed due to COVID-19 school closures?

Results

Drawing on data from the summer 2020 administration of the GVSU CSO CLP Implementation Survey, Basis researchers conducted a series of descriptive and inferential analyses. Results are organized by research question below and a full description of methods is provided in Appendix A.

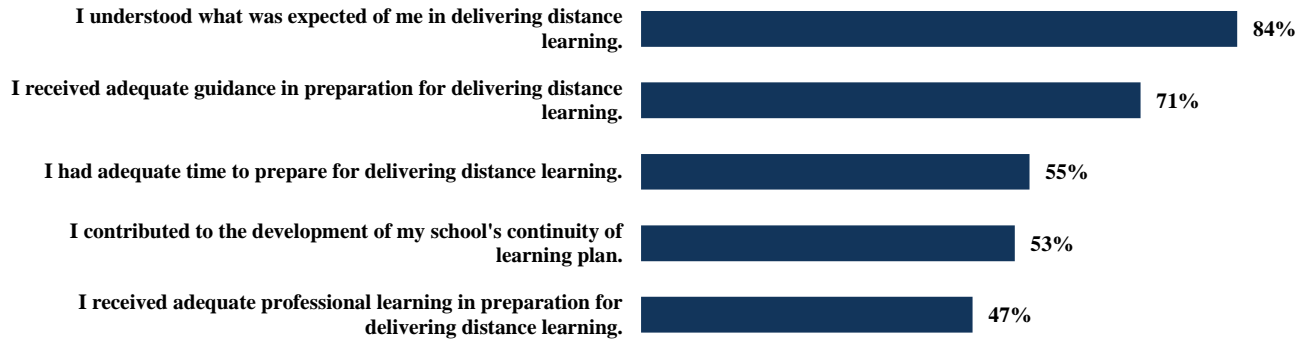
1| What do teachers report, on average, about their experiences implementing schools' continuity of learning plans?

The Basis research team used participants' (n=665) survey responses about pre-implementation experiences, frequency of instructional activities used, and barriers impeding implementation to answer this research question. Most analyses explore descriptive trends in the percentage of participants responding to different response options.

Schools provided teachers with clear expectations and guidance but did not provide sufficient professional learning around delivering distance learning.

Figure 1 displays the percentage of teachers selecting “agree” or “strongly agree” to questions about teachers' preparation prior to implementing schools' CLPs. Most teachers, on average, reported understanding what was expected of them (84 percent) and receiving adequate guidance in preparation for delivering distance learning (71 percent). In contrast, teachers were less likely to report receiving adequate time to prepare for delivering distance learning (55 percent), contributing to the development of the CLP (53 percent), or receiving adequate professional learning around delivering distance learning (47 percent). One way to interpret these results is teachers were aware of what schools expected from them but might not have been provided the necessary support (e.g., time and professional learning) to carry out implementation. Moreover, the quick transition from in-person to distance learning likely impeded schools' ability to provide teachers with sufficient preparation time or professional learning.

Figure 1: Percent of teachers “agreeing” or “strongly agreeing” to questions about pre-CLP implementation experiences

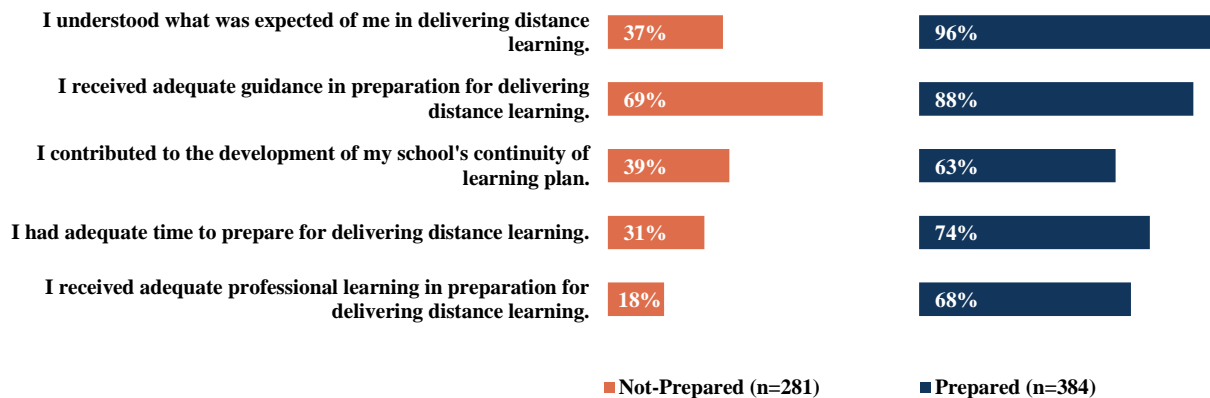


Source: GVSU CSO Continuity of Learning Plan Implementation Survey; authors' analysis.

Teachers who engaged in a variety of pre-implementation experiences felt better prepared to deliver distance learning.

Approximately 57 percent of teachers reported feeling prepared to deliver distance learning¹. As Figure 2 suggests, teachers who felt prepared to implement CLPs were more likely to report participating in different pre-implementation experiences. Specifically, prepared teachers were more likely to report receiving adequate professional learning (70 percent difference), understanding what is expected of them (63 percent), having adequate time to prepare (43 percent), and contributing to the development of the service plan (24 percent). Opportunities schools provided teachers prior to delivering distance learning likely contributed to teachers' sense of preparedness at the onset on implementing schools' CLPs.

Figure 2: Percentage of teachers “agreeing” or “strongly agreeing” to questions about pre-CLP implementation experiences by level of preparedness



Source: GVSU CSO Continuity of Learning Plan Implementation Survey; authors' analysis.

¹ Basis researchers coded teachers “agreeing” or “strongly agreeing” to the question “I felt prepared to deliver distance learning” as prepared; teachers “strongly disagreeing” or “disagreeing” to the same question were labeled not prepared.

The most common instructional activities included communicating with students, providing feedback on students’ work, and delivering asynchronous content.

The survey inquired about the frequency with which teachers used different instructional activities throughout CLP implementation. Figure 3 examines the percentage of teachers selecting “on a daily basis” or “a few times per week”. Results suggest teachers provided a variety of instructional activities on a more regular basis – a few times per week, daily – during CLP implementation. Specifically, teachers reported communicating with students (68 percent), delivering asynchronous content (55 percent), and providing feedback on students’ work (54 percent) multiple times per week. Holding live synchronous instruction (47 percent) and communicating with students’ families (46 percent) also occurred on a regular basis. Finally, filming and uploading videos of instruction occurred less frequently, with almost 30 percent of teachers reporting that this activity never occurred.

Figure 3: Percent of teachers selecting “on a daily basis” or “a few times per week” to questions about use of different instructional activities



Source: GVSU CSO Continuity of Learning Plan Implementation Survey; authors’ analysis.

Teachers were largely unable to complete the curriculum during distance learning.

The survey asked teachers to report on the percentage of remaining curriculum covered through distance learning. Despite the variety of instructional activities teachers regularly provided, results in Figure 4 indicate approximately 70 percent of teachers reported covering half or less of the remaining curriculum they would have covered had schools remained open. In contrast, only nine percent of teachers reported covering nearly all or all remaining curriculum. Results in Figure 4 are mostly consistent with similar studies assessing the extent teachers covered remaining curriculum (Hamilton et al., 2020).

Figure 4: Percentage of remaining curriculum covered throughout distance learning



Note: does not add up to 100 due to seven percent of teachers selecting “I do not know”

Source: GVSU CSO Continuity of Learning Plan Implementation Survey; authors’ analysis.

Few students completed all or nearly all distance learning activities.

The survey also asked teachers to report the percentage of students who completed most distance learning activities during a typical week. On average, seven percent of students completed all or nearly all of distance learning activities. This result is about eight percent less than results from a nationally representative survey on teaching and learning amid COVID-19 school closures (Hamilton et al., 2020). Moreover, Figure 5 suggests approximately 70 percent of students completed half or less of distance learning activities.

Figure 5: Percentage of students completing distance learning activities on a weekly basis

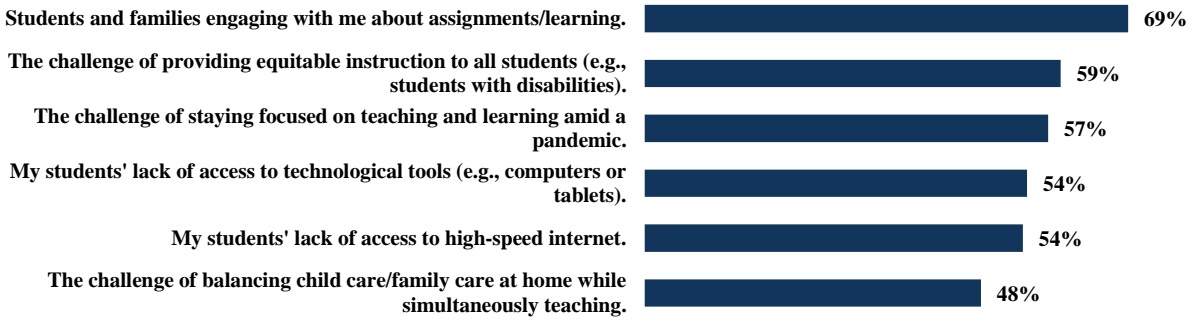


Note: does not add up to 100 due to two percent of teachers selecting “I do not know”
Source: GVSU CSO Continuity of Learning Plan Implementation Survey; authors’ analysis.

Engaging with students and families about assignments and learning posed the greatest challenge for teachers.

Given the circumstances of teaching amid a global pandemic, we suspected myriad challenges might impede curriculum coverage and student participation in distance learning activities. Thus, the survey asked teachers to report on the extent different challenges affected implementation of distance learning. Figure 6 displays the percentage of teachers who reported select scenarios as posing a moderate or major challenge to implementation. Results suggest engaging with students and families about assignments and learning posed the greatest challenge for teachers (69 percent). Other challenges included providing equitable instruction to all students (59 percent), staying focused on teaching and learning amid a pandemic (57 percent), and students’ lack of access to technological tools or reliable high-speed internet access (54 percent).

Figure 6: Percent of teachers reporting select scenarios posed a “moderate” or “major” challenge to implementing distance learning



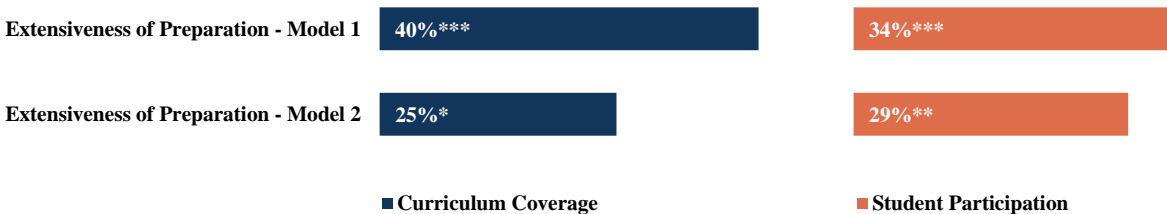
Source: GVSU CSO Continuity of Learning Plan Implementation Survey; authors' analysis.

2| What predicts teachers' implementation of schools' continuity of learning plans? Do certain pre-implementation experiences increase the likelihood teachers report increased coverage of curriculum? Student participation?

Involvement in comprehensive preparation increased the odds teachers reported more curriculum coverage and student participation.

The Basis research team ran a series of logistic regressions to determine whether the comprehensiveness of CLP preparation is predictive of teachers reporting more curriculum coverage and student participation. We coded any teacher selecting 75 percent or greater as “more” curriculum coverage and student participation. Moreover, results from an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) indicates comprehensive CLP preparation comprises teachers participating in CLP development, receiving guidance and professional learning for delivering distance learning, and having adequate time to prepare for distance learning (description of measure development can be found in Appendix A). In Model 1, we enter teachers' comprehensiveness of preparation factor score with no other covariates; in Model 2 we include the comprehensiveness of preparation factor score and add CLP challenge covariates. Across models we cluster standard errors at the school-level.

Figure 7: Probability of substantial curriculum coverage and student participation



Note: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, ~ $p < 0.1$

Source: GVSU CSO Continuity of Learning Plan Implementation Survey; authors' analysis.

Results in Figure 7 suggest involving teachers in comprehensive preparation prior to implementation increased the odds teachers reported more curriculum coverage and student participation throughout distance learning. Specifically, involvement in more comprehensive preparation increased the odds a teacher reported more curriculum coverage by 25 to 40 percent; involvement in comprehensive preparation increased the odds a teacher reported more student participation by 29 to 34 percent.

More comprehensive preparation increased students’ access to instructional opportunities.

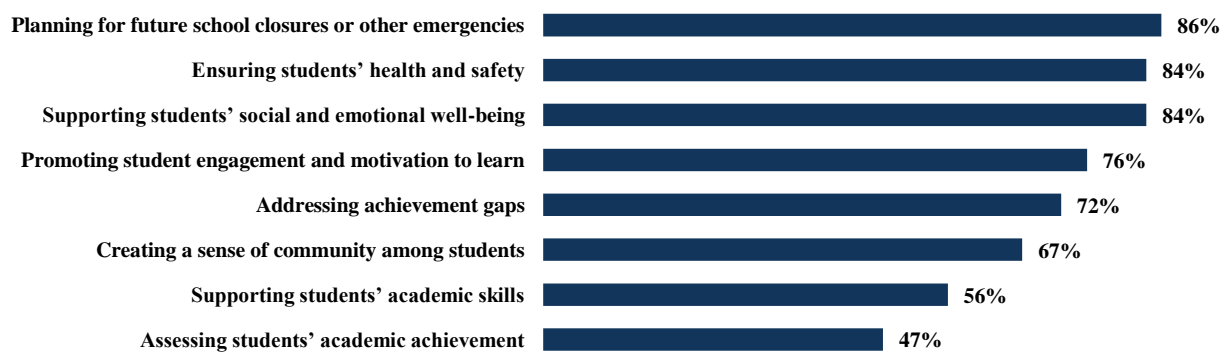
Basis researchers also employed linear regression models to understand the relationship between the comprehensiveness of preparation and students’ access to instructional opportunities; we employed the same model progression previously discussed. Results suggest teachers involved in more comprehensive preparation provided more extensive instructional opportunities. Specifically, more comprehensive preparation increased students’ access to instructional opportunities by 12 to 14 percent of a standard deviation; results are significant at the $p < 0.01$ level. Further, teachers with more comprehensive preparation provided more regular synchronous and asynchronous instruction opportunities, student feedback, and student and family communication.

3| To what extent have teachers’ priorities changed due to COVID-19 school closures?

Student and staff well-being will be more of a priority in 2020-21.

Finally, the survey asked teachers to indicate whether different goals will become a higher or lower priority when schools reopen relative to what they were prior to schools closing. While most goals listed in Figure 8 were marked as being a “somewhat higher” or “much higher” priority for teachers, goals focused on student and staff well-being will be more of a priority this year. Specifically, planning for future school closures or other emergencies (86 percent), ensuring students’ health and safety (84 percent), and supporting students’ social and emotional well-being (84 percent) will be elevated for schools in 2020-21. In contrast, about half of teachers reported goals focused on academic skills – assessing students’ academic skills and supporting students’ academic skills – were somewhat lower or the same level of importance this school year.

Figure 8: Percent of teachers selecting “somewhat higher” or “much higher” to questions about priorities upon schools reopening



Source: GVSU CSO Continuity of Learning Plan Implementation Survey; authors’ analysis.

Discussion and Implications

This study sought to understand teachers' perspectives on CLP implementation amid COVID-19 school closures. More than half of teachers (57 percent) felt prepared to implement schools' CLPs, but most also reported incomplete curriculum coverage and limited student participation. Teachers involved in more comprehensive preparation prior to implementing schools' CLPs were better equipped to complete the curriculum and engage students. Finally, prioritizing students' health and safety and planning for future school closures will be critical considerations in 2020-21. Considering these findings, we suggest the GVSU CSO and its stakeholders consider the following three recommendations to improve future responses to local, statewide, or national emergencies prompting school closures.

1 | Involve teachers in comprehensive preparation prior to transitioning to different delivery models or implementing new programs and policies.

Involvement in more comprehensive preparation increased the odds teachers reported more curriculum coverage and student participation. Comprehensive preparation included teachers contributing to CLP development, receiving guidance and professional learning for delivering distance learning, understanding expectations for distance learning, and having adequate time to prepare for implementation. Thus, it will be important for network schools and the CSO to consider the following when transitioning to different delivery models or implementing new programs and policies in the future:

- Have we engaged all stakeholders (e.g., teachers, caregivers, etc.) in the planning process?
- Have we built in time for teachers to participate in foundational professional learning?
- Have we built in time for teachers to prepare for the transition or implementation?
- Have we communicated expectations for all stakeholders?

Moreover, the CSO might consult prior research on program or policy implementation to develop and publish guidelines for pre-transition or pre-implementation preparation. For instance, guidelines might recommend the amount and type of professional learning teachers need to effectively transition to new delivery models (e.g., distance learning) or implement new programs or policies. Finally, the CSO might consider monitoring network schools' pre-transition or pre-implementation preparation and allocate additional support or resources to schools as needed.

2 | Tailor CSO support and professional learning to meet schools' priorities.

Survey results suggests student and staff well-being will be more of a priority in 2020-21 compared to the prior school year. While aggregate survey results suggest student and staff well-being is more of a priority this year, results across survey items will differ by schools. Thus, it is important for the CSO to review school-level results to understand what priorities look like across their network. In doing so, the CSO can align support and professional learning to schools' individual needs.

3 | Identify reasons behind limited student and family engagement amid school closures.

The greatest challenge teachers cited during school closures involved engaging with students and families about assignments and learning. Given this, it will be important for the GVSU CSO and network schools to research *why* stakeholder engagement was problematic. Understanding factors impeding student and

family engagement presents will be critical for the CSO and network schools to proactively address these impediments and develop the requisite infrastructure to effectively engage with stakeholders in the future.

References

Cook, Colleen, Fred Heath, and Russel L. Thompson, “A Meta-Analysis of Response Rates in Web- or Internet-Based Surveys,” *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, Vol. 60, No. 6, 2000, pp. 821–836.

Hamilton, Laura S., Julia H. Kaufman, and Melissa Diliberti, Teaching and Leading Through a Pandemic: Key Findings from the American Educator Panels Spring 2020 COVID-19 Surveys. Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Public License, 2020.
https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA168-2.html.

Appendices

Appendix A: Methods

Data Sources. This study draws on data from the Summer 2020 administration of the Grand Valley State University (GVSU) Charter School Office (CSO) Continuity of Learning Plan Implementation Survey. Basis Policy Research (Basis) developed the survey in consultation with GVSU CSO leadership. Basis researchers designed the survey to solicit teachers’ perspectives on the implementation of activities and services listed in network schools’ continuity of learning plans (CLP). See Appendix B for a copy of the survey instrument. Basis researchers administered the survey through Qualtrics.

Sample. Basis researchers distributed survey invitations to 1,719 full-time teachers working in K-12 schools authorized by the GVSU CSO. At the conclusion of the survey window, 681 participants (40 percent) completed at least two-thirds of the survey. We restricted our analytic sample to the 665 teachers who completed all survey items. While the response rate may be on the lower end, it is important to note that 40 percent exceeds the average response rate for large-scale teacher surveys by approximately 1 percentage point (Cook et al., 2000).

GVSU CSO School Representation. Basis distributed survey invitations to teachers working across 78 schools in the GVSU CSO network. We received responses from teachers in all network schools. The percentage of teachers responding by school ranged from six to 100 percent. See Table A1 for an overview of response rates by school.

School Name	Invitations	Responses	% Responses
Achieve Charter Academy	36	8	22%
Arbor Academy	7	5	71%
Augusta Academy	2	1	50%
Black River Public School Elementary	18	6	33%
Black River Public School Middle/High	48	26	54%
Byron Center Charter	20	10	50%
Canton Preparatory High School	18	8	44%
Chandler Woods Charter Academy	35	13	37%
Cornerstone Health and Technology School	21	7	33%
Cornerstone Jefferson-Douglass Academy	24	6	25%
Covenant House Academy Detroit - Central Site	6	6	100%
Covenant House Academy Detroit - East Site	4	1	25%
Covenant House Academy Detroit - Southwest Site	5	1	20%
Covenant House Academy Grand Rapids	12	7	58%
Crossroads Charter Academy (7-12)	18	7	39%
Crossroads Charter Academy (K-6)	19	11	58%
Detroit Achievement Academy	12	5	42%
Detroit Collegiate High School	7	2	29%
Detroit Enterprise Academy	34	13	38%
Detroit Merit Charter Academy	32	9	28%
Detroit Premier Academy	33	13	39%
Detroit Prep	14	5	36%
Eagle's Nest Academy	7	4	57%
East Arbor Charter Academy	33	13	39%
Endeavor Charter Academy	36	8	22%
Evergreen Academy	2	1	50%
Excel Charter Academy	41	17	41%
Flint Cultural Center Academy	18	6	33%

Forest Academy	7	4	57%
Francis Street Primary School	4	2	50%
Global Heights Academy	15	7	47%
Grand River Academy	35	11	31%
Grand River Preparatory High School	31	15	48%
Hanley International Academy	31	2	6%
Hillsdale Preparatory School	9	5	56%
Kalamazoo Covenant Academy	5	4	80%
Knapp Charter Academy	37	15	41%
Legacy Charter Academy	34	9	26%
Light of the World Academy	12	3	25%
Lincoln-King Academy	25	12	48%
Madison-Carver Academy	29	14	48%
Martin Luther King, Jr. Education Center Academy	16	4	25%
Metro Charter Academy	37	16	43%
Michigan Mathematics and Science Academy Dequindre	47	20	43%
Michigan Mathematics and Science Academy Lorraine	22	4	18%
Muskegon Covenant Academy	7	4	57%
New Paradigm College Prep	9	3	33%
New Paradigm Loving Academy	11	4	36%
Oakland Academy	8	4	50%
Old Mission Peninsula School	18	7	39%
Paragon Charter Academy	32	7	22%
Reach Charter Academy	31	9	29%
Saginaw Covenant Academy	3	2	67%
South Canton Scholars Charter Academy	36	15	42%
Taylor Preparatory High School	18	7	39%
The Greenspire School	8	2	25%
Timberland Academy	36	8	22%
University Preparatory Academy (PSAD) - Ellen Thompson Elementary	20	9	45%
University Preparatory Academy (PSAD) - High School	32	20	63%
University Preparatory Academy (PSAD) - Mark Murray Elementary	24	19	79%
University Preparatory Academy (PSAD) - Middle	23	15	65%
University Preparatory Art & Design Elementary	23	6	26%
University Preparatory Art & Design Middle/High	40	18	45%
University Preparatory Science and Math (PSAD) High School	23	13	57%
University Preparatory Science and Math (PSAD) Middle School	28	21	75%
University Preparatory Science and Math - Elementary	18	11	61%
Vanderbilt Charter Academy	28	11	39%
Vanguard Charter Academy	41	9	22%
Walker Charter Academy	40	12	30%
Warrendale Charter Academy	42	11	26%
Washington-Parks Academy	35	23	66%
West MI Academy of Arts and Academics	34	14	41%
Westfield Charter Academy	27	11	41%
Westfield Preparatory High School	14	4	29%
William C. Abney Academy Elementary	18	3	17%
Windemere Park Charter Academy	32	13	41%
Total	1719	681	40%

Measures. In this section, we describe focal predictor and outcome measures. We applied separate factor analyses to survey questions about CLP development, CLP implementation, and school priorities for 2020-21. Results suggest we could extract four factors – comprehensiveness of preparation, extensiveness of instructional opportunities, focus on academics, and focus on well-being – to include in our analytic models. We discuss each measure below.

Comprehensiveness of Preparation. Survey items address contributing to CLP development, receiving guidance and professional learning for delivering distance learning, understanding expectations for distance learning, and having adequate time to prepare for distance learning. Questions used in this measure are included in Q1, A-G in Appendix B.

Extensiveness of Instructional Opportunities. This measure includes survey items addressing frequency of holding synchronous instruction, providing asynchronous activities, providing feedback on students' work, and communicating with students and families. Questions used in this measure are included in Q2, A-F in Appendix B.

Focus on Academics. Survey items address schools prioritizing assessing students' academic achievement, supporting students' academic skills, promoting student engagement and motivation to learn, and addressing achievement gaps. Questions used in this measure are included in Q7, C, D, F, and G in Appendix B.

Focus on Well-Being. This measure includes survey items addressing schools' prioritization of students' health and safety, creating a sense of community, supporting students' social and emotional well-being, and planning for future school closures or other emergencies. Questions used in this measure are included in Q7, A, B, E, and H in Appendix B.

Analytic Strategy. Basis researchers conducted a series of descriptive and inferential analyses to answer the research questions. We mostly explore descriptive statistics to report on respondents' experiences preparing for and implementing schools' continuity of learning plans. We also used linear and logistic regression to determine what might predict teachers' implementation of continuity of learning plans. This analysis also determined a subset of measures or indicators that were the strongest predictors of implementation.

Appendix B: Survey Instrument

Q1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the time period prior to implementing distance learning.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
A. I contributed to the development of my school's continuity of learning plan.	1	2	3	4
B. I received adequate guidance in preparation for delivering distance learning.	1	2	3	4
C. I understood what was expected of me in delivering distance learning.	1	2	3	4
D. I had adequate time to prepare for delivering distance learning.	1	2	3	4
E. I received adequate professional learning in preparation for delivering distance learning.	1	2	3	4
F. I felt supported in preparation for delivering distance learning.	1	2	3	4
G. I felt prepared to deliver distance learning.	1	2	3	4

Q2. Please estimate the approximate frequency with which you have done each of the following with all or most of your students while delivering distance learning.

	Not At All	Monthly	Weekly	A few times per week	Daily
A. I held live (i.e., synchronous) meetings with students via video or phone	1	2	3	4	5
B. I provided videos of my instruction to students.	1	2	3	4	5
C. I provided other types of asynchronous content (e.g., emails, worksheets, packets)	1	2	3	4	5
D. I provided feedback on students' work	1	2	3	4	5
E. I communicated with students.	1	2	3	4	5
F. I communicated with students' families.	1	2	3	4	5

Q3. Thinking about the formal curriculum you would have covered if your school building had not closed, approximately what percentage is being covered through the distance learning?

- A. None or almost none
- B. About 25 percent
- C. About 50 percent
- D. About 75 percent
- E. Nearly all or all
- F. I do not know

Q4. In a typical week, approximately what percentage of your students completed the distance learning activities you are providing?

- A. None or almost none
- B. About 25 percent

- C. About 50 percent
- D. About 75 percent
- E. Nearly all or all
- F. I do not know

Q5. To what extent have the following challenges affected your implementation of distance learning while your school building has been closed.

	No affect	Minor affect	Moderate affect	Major affect
A. My students' lack of access to high-speed internet	1	2	3	4
B. My students' lack of access to technological tools (e.g., computers or tablets)	1	2	3	4
C. My lack of access to high-speed internet	1	2	3	4
D. My lack of access to technological tools (e.g., computers or tablets)	1	2	3	4
E. The challenge of communicating with students and families	1	2	3	4
F. The challenge of providing equitable instruction to all students (e.g., students with disabilities)	1	2	3	4
G. The challenge of balancing child care/family care at home while teaching simultaneously	1	2	3	4
H. The challenge of staying focused of teaching and learning amid a pandemic	1	2	3	4

Q6. What additional resources do you need to feel more supported and to better support your students when schools re-open?

Q7. Please indicate whether you expect each of the following goals to become a higher or lower priority for you when your school building reopens relative to what it was before your school building closed.

	Much lower priority	Somewhat lower priority	Same level of priority	Somewhat higher priority	Much higher priority
A. Ensuring students' health and safety	1	2	3	4	5
B. Creating a sense of community among students	1	2	3	4	5
C. Assessing students' academic achievement	1	2	3	4	5
D. Supporting students' academic skills	1	2	3	4	5
E. Supporting students' social and emotional well-being	1	2	3	4	5
F. Promoting student engagement and motivation to learn	1	2	3	4	5

G. Addressing achievement gaps	1	2	3	4	5
H. Planning for future school closures or other emergencies	1	2	3	4	5

About This Report

This research was conducted by Basis Policy Research. Basis conducts applied public policy research, primarily in the field of education; provides technical assistance to state departments of education, districts, and schools; and supports policymakers by providing the data they need to make sound decisions.