

TO: AASA Members

FROM: Chris Rogers, Policy Analyst
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RE: Report of Initial Findings: COVID-19 Impact on Public Schools

DATE: March 27, 2020

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing the shutdown of school districts nationwide, AASA launched a nationwide survey of superintendents earlier this month to gather real-time data on: How schools are responding to the crisis; the information and resources school district leaders are relying on; and, understand long-term potential implications for state and federal policymakers as superintendents consider how best to support the school districts they serve.

Indicating the relevance of this survey and the importance of sharing the information widely, our survey garnered more than 1,600 responses from 48 states between March 13-25. The initial findings are summarized here. This report represents the first in a series of studies that AASA will release about the impact of COVID-19 on school districts and only speaks to the preliminary effects of the pandemic on district operations.

COVID Response and Communications

- More than three-quarters (79%) of respondents indicated their districts have plans in place to respond to pandemic. (Q13)
- When asked to describe their district's status as it relates to COVID-19, 90% of respondents replied 'closed', compared to 'operating with normal schedule' (2%); 'considering closing our schools' (2%); and 'We do not plan to close our schools and will only do so under state mandate.' (2%). (Q8)
- When asked what types of communication they are using to relay information to their employees, students, parents and community, respondents replied 'website' (97%); 'social media' (91%); 'text message platform' (67%); 'robocalls' (67%); 'emailed/paper notes home' (50%); 'decentralized communication from principals/building leaders' (41%); 'local newspaper' (36%); 'school board meetings' (36%); 'district newsletter' (26%); 'local radio' (21%); 'local television' (14%); 'other' (5%); and 'town halls/forums' (2%). (Q10)
- When asked what types of information are being included in communications to staff, students, parents and community, respondents reported 'status of district decision-making process' (80%); 'Non-academic considerations related to school closure (transportation, student safety, access to food, etc.)' (80%); 'district scheduling' (79%); 'efforts to increase school and student sanitation and hygiene practices while in school' (78%); 'recommendations from state authorities' (73%); 'recommendations from federal authorities' (58%); 'status of COVID-19 exposure in your district/state' (52%); 'information on action by other school districts' (16%); 'timing/location of public meetings related to decision making' (15%); and 'other' (5%). (Q11)
- When asked if they are aware of any known cases in their state or community, 83% of respondents replied 'yes'; 17% replied 'no'. (Q12).
- When asked how a prolonged closure would impact their school calendar, respondents replied 'extend school year' (48%); 'other' (46%); 'revert unused snow days' (29%); 'cancel spring break' (21%); 'cancel teacher prep days' (18%); and 'run summer school programming for all' (17%). (Q14)
- When describing which factors influenced their decision whether to close schools or keep them open, respondents replied: 'recommendation from state health agency' (84%); 'recommendation from state education agency' (82%); 'state policy/declared emergency' (81%); 'recommendation from local health

agency' (75%); 'COVID-19 in my community' (69%); 'COVID-19 confirmed in one of my students' (66%); 'importance of isolation/quarantine to help prevent spread' (61%); 'staff absences' (59%); 'indication from state/federal policy makers re flexibility around significant/prolonged closure and impact on attendance' (43%); 'students rely on schools for meal access' (37%); 'not all parents will be able to stay home with kids' (31%); 'not all students will have a safe environment during the day if school is closed' (29%); 'compensating staff if closure exceeds allocated/available sick leave' (29%); 'ability of school calendar to adjust to prolonged closure' (19%); 'if students will end up in a separate communal setting like day care or day camp when school is closed, why not keep them in school so learning can happen?' (16%); and 'other' (7%). (Q15)

- Nearly all (96%) respondents indicated their districts have sent information materials related to COVID-19 to students, families and staff. (Q16).
- More than half of respondents (57%) agreed/strongly agreed with the statement 'COVID-19 has decreased student attendance in my district.' (Q17), compared to 42% who agreed/strongly agreed to the statement 'COVID-19 has decreased staff attendance in my district'. (Q18)

Remote/Distance Learning & Homework Gap

- When asked what percentage of their students have access to the internet at home, 25% of respondents replied '91-100%', compared to '81-90%' (23%); '71-80%' (17%); '61-70%' (11%); '51-60%' (8%); '41-50%' (4%); and 6% reporting '40% or less'. (Q7)
- When asked what percentage of students in their district have access to a device at home that can connect to the internet, respondents reported '91-100%' (26%); '81-90%' (23%); '71-80%' (16%); '61-70%' (11%); '51-60%' (9%); '41-50%' (6%); '31-40%' (4%); and '30% or less' (4%). (Q23)
- When asked how they will provide learning opportunities to students in homes without internet access or a device that can connect to the internet, respondents replied 'book/paper based learning' (73%); 'provide hotspots/WiFi devices' (40%); 'work with ISP to make affordable connectivity available' (30%); 'coordinate with community-based internet access to facilitate learning' (25%); 'work to close the homework gap/increase connectivity within homes' (20%); and 'other' (16%). (Q9)
- More than three quarters (82%) of respondents report their district networks are capable of carrying the heavy data load associated with all teachers, students and staff working remotely. (Q19)
- When asked to list which options their district would employ to offer students instruction and curriculum during an extended COVID-19 outbreak, respondents reported 'online courses and instruction' (85%); 'district owned laptops/tablets' (82%); 'online test and quizzes' (64%); 'video cast' (62%); 'digital textbooks' (59%); 'social media' (53%); 'classroom blogs and wikis' (47%); 'podcasts' (35%); 'instant grading and feedback' (30%); 'interactive whiteboards' (14%); and 'other' (9%). (Q20)
- When asked to identify which barriers would prohibit their district from transitioning to a fully online learning modality, respondents replied 'lack of internet access at home (homework gap)' (81%); 'lack of instructional capacity for online learning' (39%); 'we offer one-to-one device programs in only certain grade spans/student clusters' (35%); 'we do not offer any one-to-one device programs in our district' (25%); 'other' (15%); 'we do not have adequate bandwidth' (10%); we lack the internal infrastructure at the district level' (9%); and 'we lack the internal infrastructure at the school level' (9%). (Q22)
- More than three quarters (79%) of respondents intend to provide staff development related to delivering online learning. (Q24) Related to this, only 24% of respondents indicated that 91-100% of their instructional staff are currently equipped to deliver online learning, compared to '81-90%' (13%) '71-80%' (13%); '61-71%' (10%); '51-60%' (9%); '41-50%' (8%); '31-40%' (5%); '30% or less' (14%). (Q25)

COVID-19 Fiscal Impact & Policy Relief

- When asked how their districts will pay for/scale up existing education technology services to deliver curriculum and instruction, respondents replied 'repurposing existing state funding' (33%); 'repurposing existing local funding' (28%); 'realize efficiencies within existing school budget' (26%); 'federal e-rate program' (9%) 'public/private partnerships' (3%); and 'other' (1%). (Q21)

- When identifying the costs their districts will incur as part of this initial response to COVID-19 and transition to remote learning, respondents reported ‘costs associated with cleaning’ (86%); ‘costs related to providing food services to students off site’ (77%); ‘printing/disseminating paper learning materials’ (67%); ‘increased costs related to expanded online learning’ (59%); ‘costs related to teacher pay’ (53%); ‘costs related to professional training for staff’ (42%); ‘marginal costs with COVID (regularly occurring costs that exceed the annual average)’ (35%); ‘costs related to higher use of substitute teachers’ (15%); and ‘other’ (5%). (Q26)
- When asked to indicate which policy decision waivers/flexibility would be most helpful, respondents indicated a high level of support for multiple areas: ‘assessment flexibilities’ (90%); ‘accountability flexibilities’ (87%); ‘reporting requirement flexibilities’ (78%); ‘maintenance of effort flexibilities’ (71%); ‘chronic absenteeism’ (56%); and ‘other’ (9%). (Q27).

Demographics

- The survey response rate was well above average for AASA and is nationally representative. Data was not collected in a manner so as to support state-specific analysis. Responses were collected from 48 states (all except Hawaii and Florida).
- Job Title: Ninety-four percent (94%) of respondents indicated listed their job title as ‘superintendent’.
- Community Type: Nearly two-third (64%) of respondents described their community as rural, compared to 29% responding ‘suburban’ and 7% responding ‘urban’.
- District Enrollment:

Responses	Count	%
Fewer than 300	138	9%
300 to 999	408	25%
1,000 to 2,999	573	36%
3,000 to 4,999	202	13%
5,000 to 9,999	169	11%
10,000 to 24,999	86	5%
25,000 to 49,999	22	1%
50,000 to 99,999	5	0%
100,000 or more	3	0%
Total Responses	1,606	100%

This survey was administered early in the spread of COVID-19, before states had started doing statewide closures. AASA intends to re-issue elements of this survey again in three and six months along with additional relevant items, to benchmark the rolling impact of COVID-19 on schools, as well as the impact of the pending economic slowdown/recession. Direct any questions to Noelle Ellerson Ng (nellerson@aasa.org) and Chris Rogers (crogers@aasa.org).