



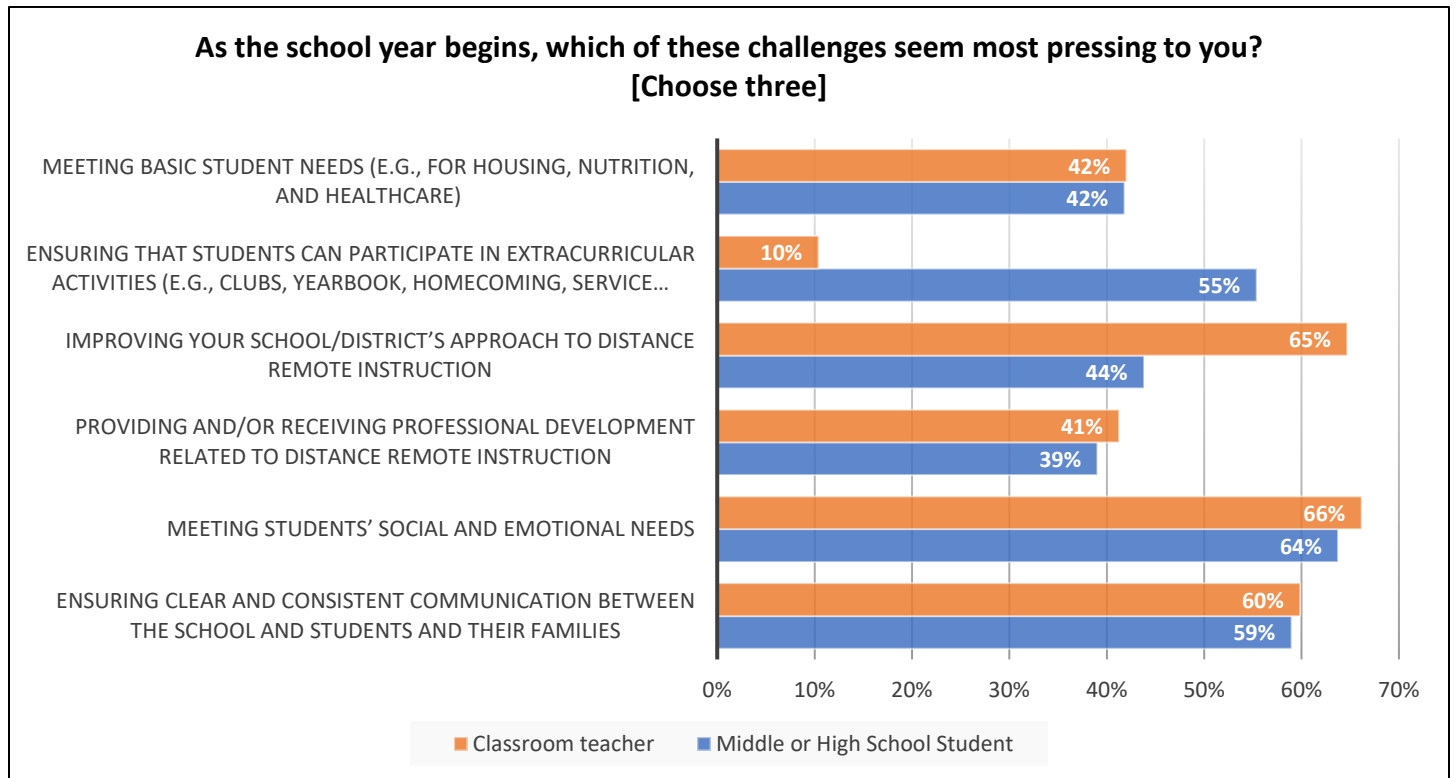
School has begun for students and teachers across America. While some have been back in virtual or physical classrooms for weeks, others are still preparing to re-enter. We wanted to find out how our students and our educators are feeling about re-entry in these unprecedented times. In the spring, as the impact of the COVID-19 crisis became apparent, policy makers, elected officials, and system and school leaders started considering multiple scenarios for school re-opening. Those plans will inevitably shift — if they haven't already — and we believe that the voices of those who are affected by leaders' decisions — students and teachers — are important to the public debate about how to best educate students in the midst of a pandemic.

This brief, our 5th in a series that started last spring, focuses on three areas: the feelings teachers and students have about returning, the conditions under which they'd return, and the professional learning teachers have engaged in to get ready. It's no surprise that perspectives of both groups are mixed about the issues, but just like in the spring, social-emotional learning (SEL) needs stood out. When asked about their level of comfort in returning to school, students were pretty evenly split in feeling ok about the return. Teachers, however, expressed more discomfort about returning.

Approximately 65% of students and 60% of teachers agree or strongly agree that their schools have given students the technology tools they need to succeed in a virtual environment. While that's encouraging, it still leaves about a third of students and teachers feeling skeptical about how well their most basic access needs are being met. When asked if schools have given teachers the tech tools they need to succeed with online instruction, 60% of teachers and 51.6% of students agree or strongly agree. This disconnect between students and teachers warrants further scrutiny; students may feel that teachers aren't as proficient as they need to be while teachers may think they're doing fine. Teachers may want to ask students for feedback and even advice how best to use technology to teach.

*Methodology notes: This survey was conducted over a week in late August 2020 to Educators Rising school students and PDK members (including higher ed and K12 members) with nearly 400 students, more than 300 classroom teachers, nearly 200 principals, and nearly 90 superintendents responding. Participants selected their responses from a list of options. Because the sample is drawn from PDK and Educators Rising membership, it is not necessarily representative of the broader education community, and the results may not be entirely consistent with other survey findings.

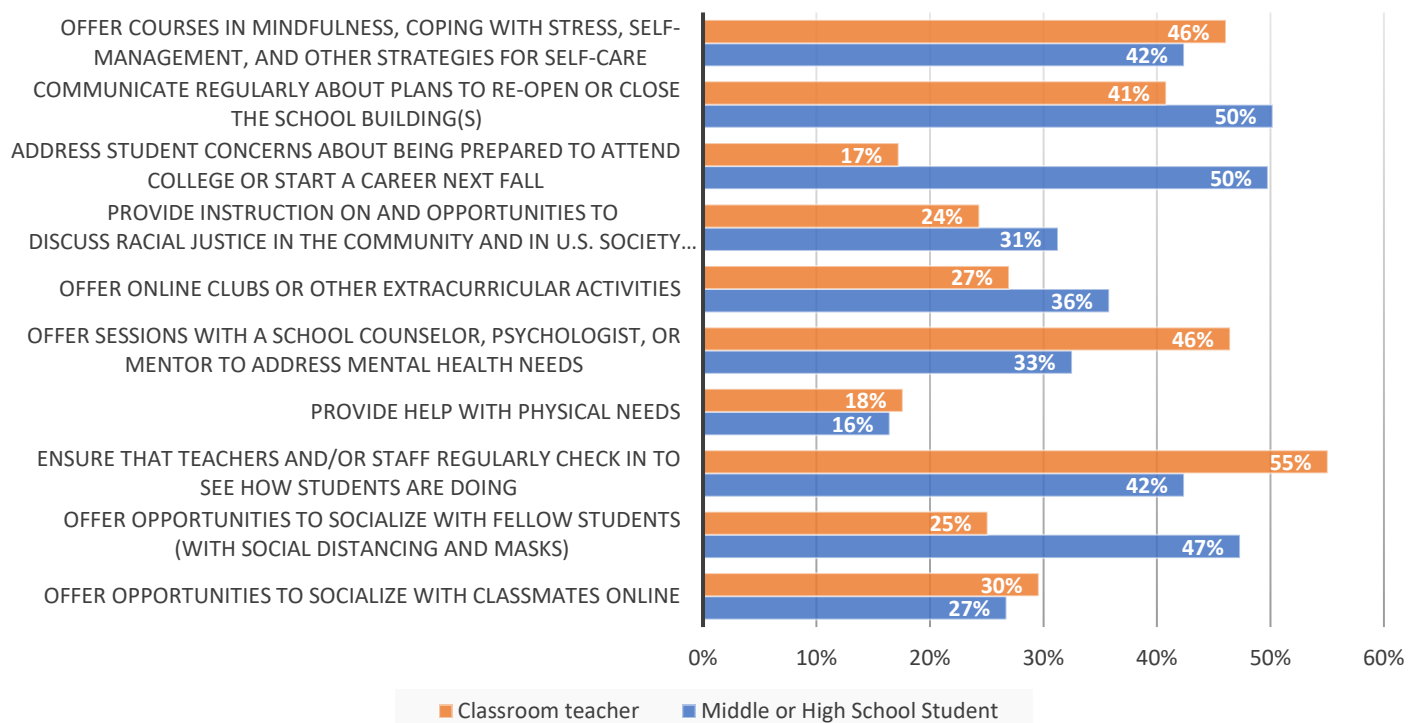
SOCIAL EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING



Social and emotional concerns continue to be top of mind for students and educators, as does the importance of clear and consistent communication. Teachers were more likely than students to select issues related to remote instruction than students as a major challenge, yet the need to improve in this area was clearly not absent from students' thoughts. And although meeting basic needs did not stand out as a top-three concern, around 40% of both teachers and students did identify it as a top challenges.

The most glaring difference among groups is that students were far more concerned than educators about extracurricular activities.

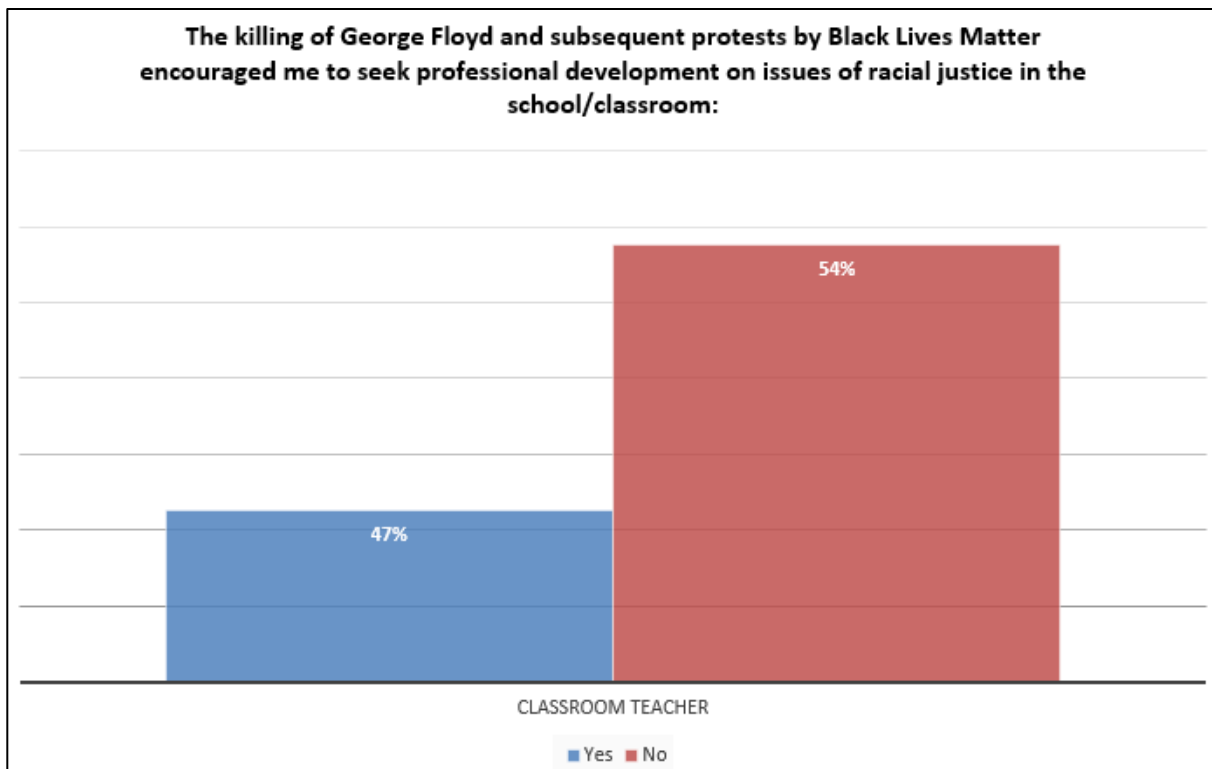
This fall, what are the most important things your school/district can do to help address student social and emotional needs? [Choose three]



When asked what their school and district can do to help address their social and emotional needs, students said they wanted schools to communicate regularly about re-opening plans, to address their concerns about starting college or a career next year, provide opportunities to socialize safely in person with friends, to have regular check-ins with teachers or staff.

Teachers, perhaps understandably, don't see the issues in the same way. Although they agreed with students that teachers or school staff should be regularly checking in with students, they wanted counselors and mental health professionals to offer sessions for social and emotional support. Social opportunities were further down on their lists of ways to help, as was the need to address student worries about college and career.

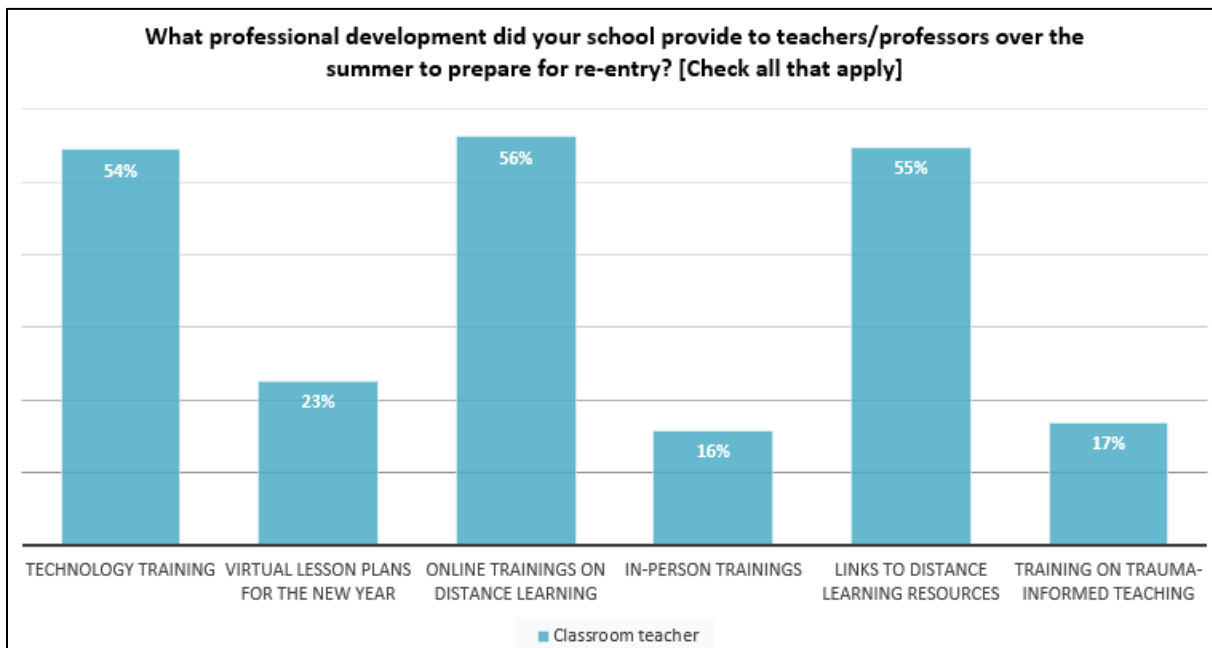
More than 40% of both teachers and students indicated that courses in self-care strategies would be beneficial. Schools' SEL programs may include instruction in these strategies and should not be neglected during these times.



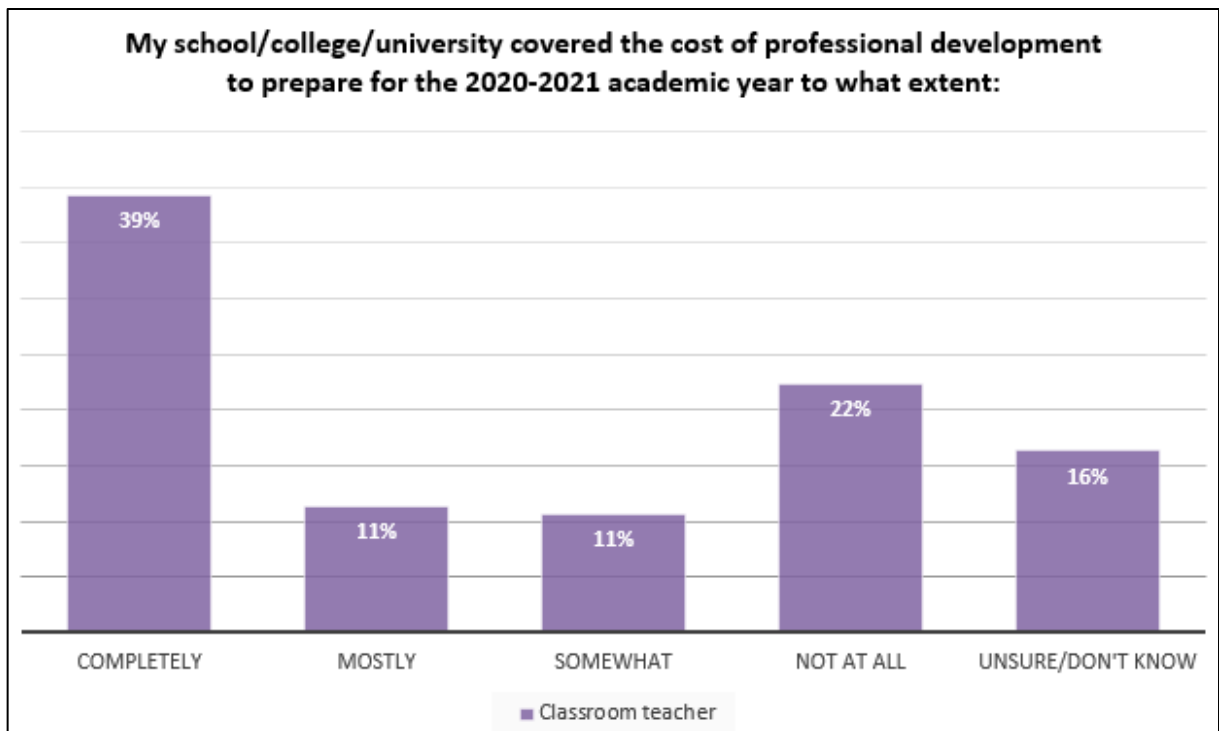
Another component of SEL that schools and teachers must be aware of is how the recent Black Lives Matters (BLM) protests may have affected our students. We know the overwhelming majority of our teachers are white while the majority of our students are of color. It's a safe assumption that our kids are very attuned to what's happening in the country and may want to see their schools address issues of race and social justice. And, indeed, our results show almost 2/3 of students seeking out information on these topics, and almost a third saw instruction in these issues as a way to provide social and emotional support. Yet, less than half of classroom teachers, and only a slight majority of school administrators, have sought out professional development related to these issues. This disconnect may be problematic for the necessary relationship building that is so essential to learning, especially as student anxiety has increased during the COVID-19 crisis.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

For teachers and students to succeed during this unique school year, adults need to learn new skills. Whether they are learning how to address social emotional issues remotely, embedding anti-racism into every content area, or mastering technology, many teachers face a steep learning curve. Therefore, we decided to ask them about what they're learning and who's paying for it.

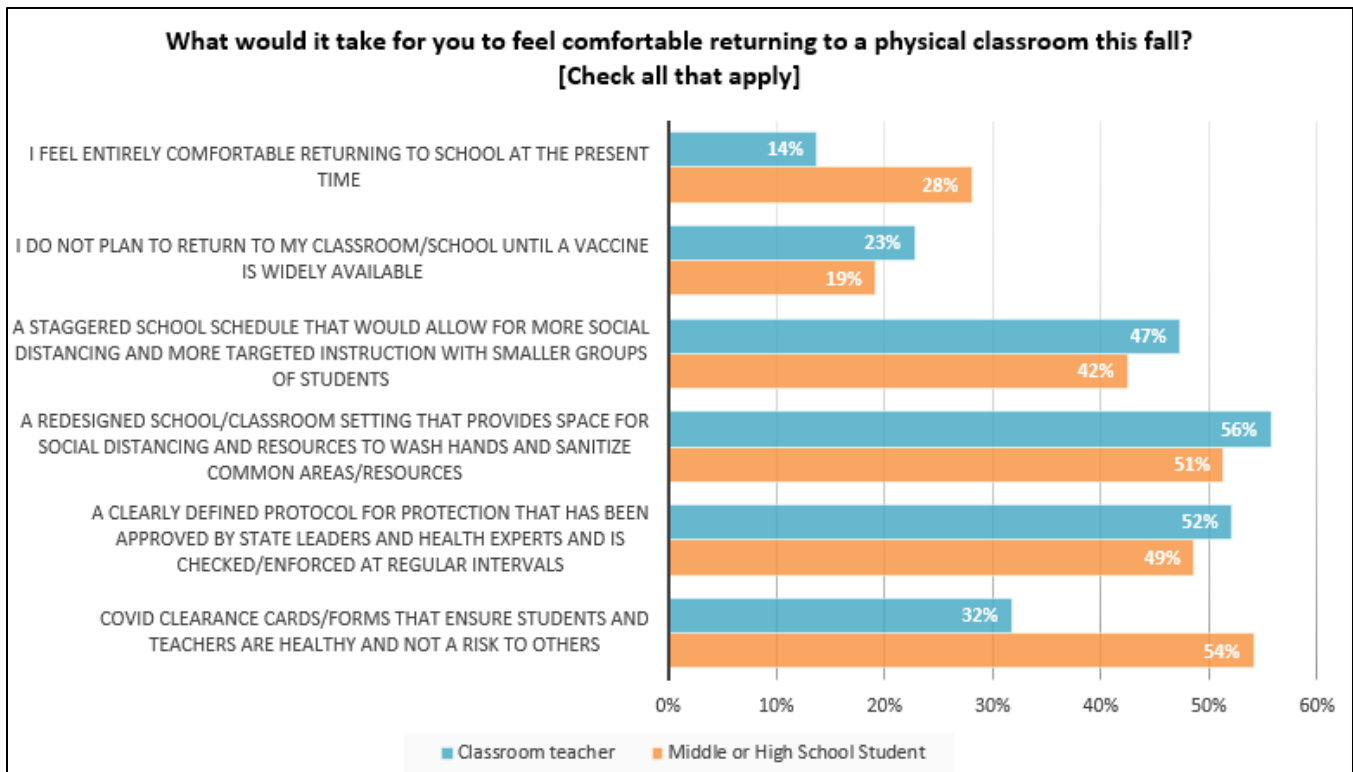


When asked in May what professional learning they most needed, a majority of wanted help developing and implementing online curricula. The training that schools provided did tend to focus on technology and distance learning, but it's not clear to what extent it covered the curricular and instructional issues educators expressed interest in, as opposed to how to use the technology. Although social and emotional needs were a concern for all groups surveyed, training on trauma-informed instruction was relatively rare.



Although professional development is clearly important, only about half of teachers reported that their district completely or mostly paid for their professional learning.

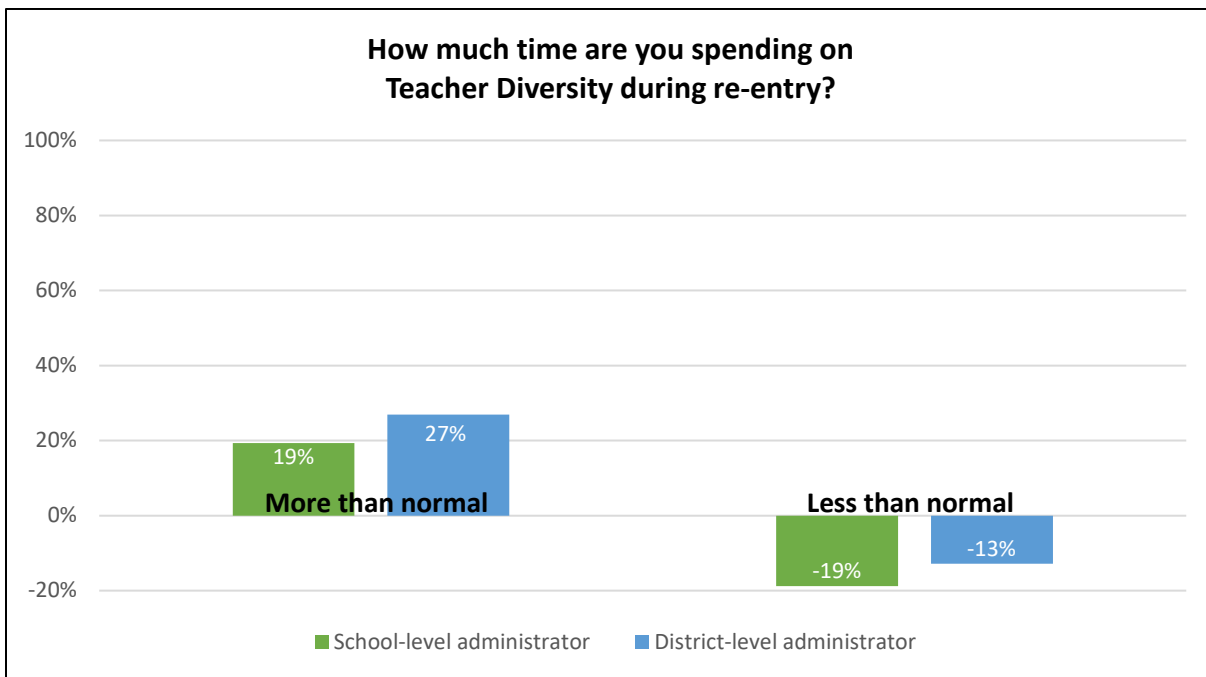
RETURN



While none of us know when school buildings will re-open in all districts throughout the country, 19% of students and 23% of teachers do not plan to return to school until there's a vaccine, raising the possibility that distance learning will be needed into the next year. Only 28% of students and 14% of teachers feel entirely comfortable returning now. Most respondents wanted some changes made at their schools before they would return.

The data do reveal what schools can do to increase students' and teachers' comfort levels. Students (55%) are much more comfortable than teachers (32%) with the idea of a clearance card indicating that teachers and students are COVID-free, and around half of each group feel comfortable returning if state health experts have delineated clear safety protocols that are regularly checked. The only option to receive majority support from both students and teachers was to redesign physical spaces to allow for social distancing. Another option receiving strong support was a staggered schedule that increases social distancing and opportunities for targeted, small-group instruction and a clear protocol from state leaders and health experts.

TEACHER DIVERSITY



Prior to the COVID 19 crisis teacher diversity was cited as a significant topic of importance for district and school leaders alike. In the [February 2019 issue of Kappan](#), researchers Dan Goldhaber, Roddy Theobald, and Christopher Tien explain that racial and ethnic matches between teachers and students lead to better outcomes for students, particularly those from high-poverty or at-risk backgrounds.

In our survey, we found that only 27% of district leaders and 19% of school leaders are devoting more time to the issue this year than in the past. More disturbing are the 13% of district leaders and 19% of school leaders who report devoting less time to teacher diversity. During crises like COVID 19, more urgent issues may take the foreground but they do not diminish the importance of other long-standing issues, like teacher diversity.

At PDK, we encourage system and school leaders to not let their efforts on these important issues fall to the wayside in the face of urgent issues. This pandemic is temporary, but the long-term concerns around institutional racism will persist if we allow ourselves to become distracted.

RAPID RESPONSE AND STUDENT VOICE – YOUR HELP NEEDED

Because how schools are responding to COVID 19 is changing so quickly, we want to continue to provide quick checks of students’ and educators’ reactions as new issues arise and schools make shifts in their approach.

Student voice is critical to understanding how district and school policies affect learners. The members of Educators Rising are our next generation of teachers, and seeking their opinions and experiences can help decision makers make better decisions. If you are a student, we need your help as [a rapid responder](#) who will commit to responding to a short 3-5 question survey within 24 hours of notification.

To support this work, we also seek [financial donations or donations in kind](#). We thank you in advance for your contribution.

SUMMARY

Our takeaway from these results is that, not surprisingly, the emotional well-being of our students and adults is a top area of concern during the COVID-19 crisis. We can't assume that just because communication has improved, technology is in place, and guidance is available that students and adults aren't feeling the effects of the last six months and continue to feel uncertainty of the future. Schools and districts need to focus on this, and policy makers and elected officials need to support and fund such efforts.

We know that teachers are feeling stressed and anxious about being able to meet their own high standards for themselves as they attempt to address the individual needs of their students and the expectations of parents and their communities. Vendors and partners are offering a myriad of professional learning opportunities claiming to help teachers meet the new demands. We encourage school and district administrators to learn from teachers what will be most useful, rather than relying on the marketplace to guide them. It may be that what teachers need most are opportunities to learn from and with each other — and maybe just to reflect on their experiences and even vent to each other.

It's natural that teachers, students, and families are anxious about what the return to school will look like, whether it's happening online, in person, or a combination of both. The fact is, with COVID still prevalent, there's no consensus on what will make most people comfortable with returning or what the optimal conditions are for doing so. It's incumbent upon those who are making decisions to engage deeply with both teachers and students (and parents) to not only share the plans for a return, but also to get their ideas about how to do so. Teachers and kids have proven themselves to be creative problem solvers — they just need to be asked.