Montana Office of Public Instruction COVID-19 Survey Report
August 18, 2020

Overview

At the beginning of August, the Montana Office of Public Instruction surveyed a sample of parents and teachers in the state, in order to better understand their questions, needs, and concerns as the 2020-2021 school year begins. The survey was distributed to a purposive sample of respondents in order to collect responses that were approximately representative of the geographic dispersion and urban/rural variability of the state. In total, there were 58 responses- 28 teachers, 26 parents, and 4 who indicated they held another role.

The survey consisted of 6 questions, with findings and discussion provided below. Overall, main findings indicated that most respondents felt supported or very supported by their schools. The majority (83%) also felt they were able to provide input into their district's decision-making process regarding return to school. Mental and emotional health was of significant concern to both parents and teachers.

To better support their students, parents and teachers requested communication, consistency, and in-person learning when possible. In the case where online learning was necessary, the greatest need for parents was consistency in communication and scheduling. The greatest need for teachers was technology support and support from administration.

Findings

Question 1

The first question asked: How supported do you feel by your school? Results indicate that nearly half of respondents felt 'very supported' and that overall, 83 percent of respondents felt either 'supported' or 'very supported'. These results were evenly dispersed across parents and teachers, with parents feeling slightly more supported than teachers, but not by a large margin. Figure 1 illustrates the responses.

Figure 1: Support

How supported do you feel by your school?
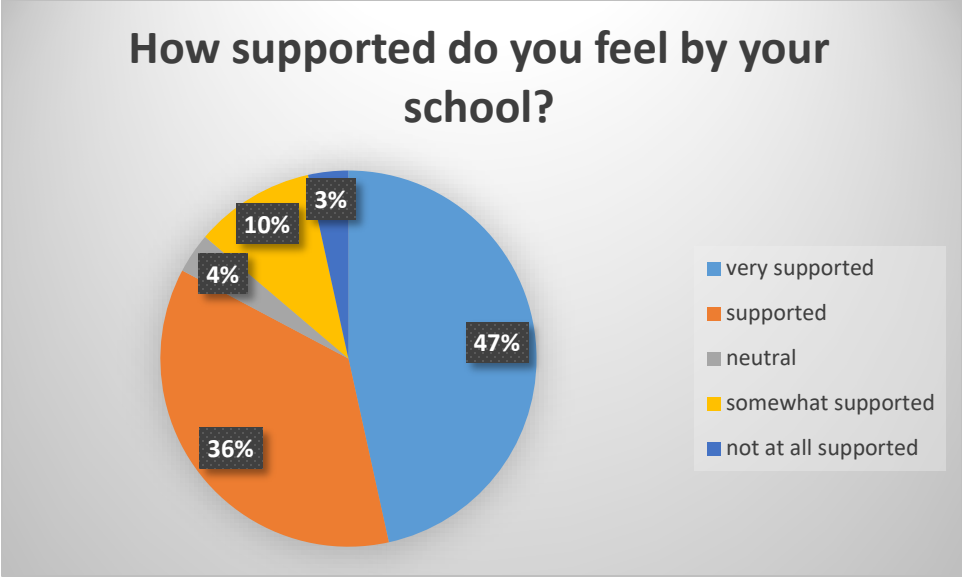
Question 2

This question provided a list of 8 common challenges related to COVID-19. Respondents were asked to rank these in terms of areas where they needed the most information and support to the least information and support. Results are summarized below:

Figure 2: Ranked needs

Ranked needs from most important to least imortant
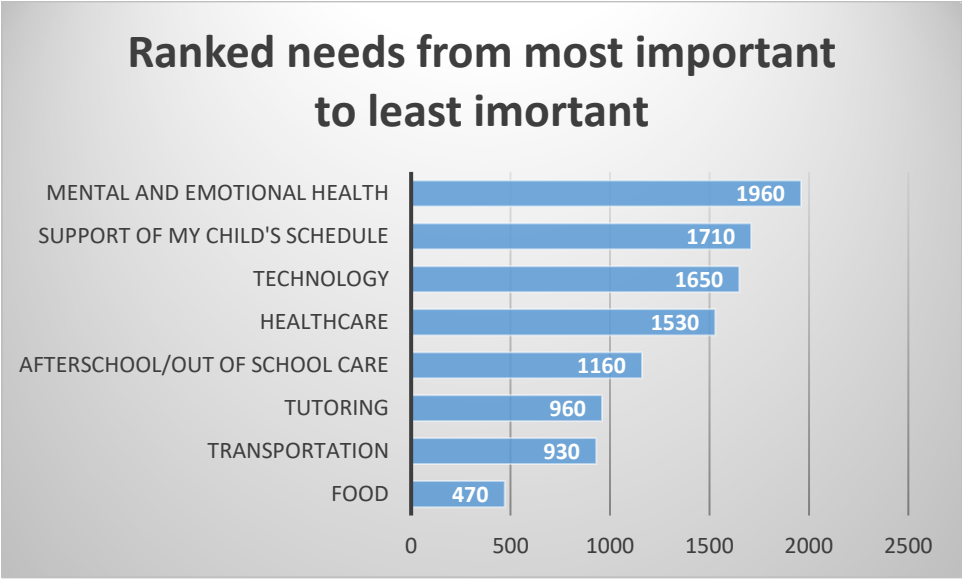
The above chart is weighted based on the number of rankings each category received and can be interpreted based on the total score. For example, the category 'food' received a score of 470 and mental/emotional health received a score of 1960. This means mental health was approximately 4 times more important as food to the respondents. Overall, the data indicates that mental and emotional health, support for children's schedules, and technology were areas of highest need.

Question 3

Question three asked about precautions schools could take in order to provide the safest learning environment and experience. Respondents were asked: Given what we know currently about the COVID-19 pandemic, for each of the following, please indicate how this precaution would affect your willingness to send your child to school.
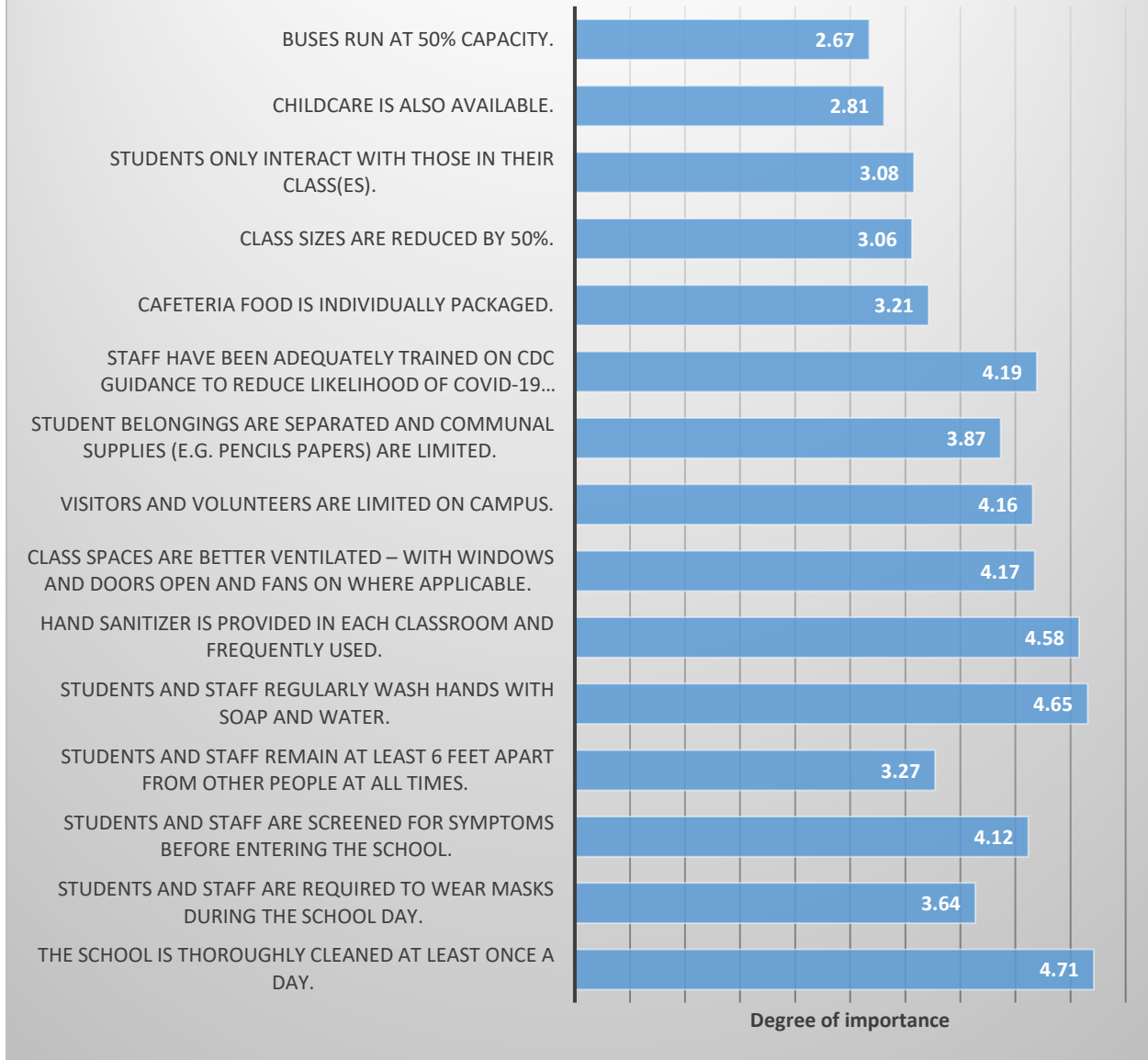
The types of precautions included physical precautions for buildings such as the cleaning of buildings, ventilation, or the availability of items such as hand sanitizer. They also included distancing measures such as buses running at reduced capacity and 6 foot distance mandates. Finally, there were precautions regarding the actions for staff and students such as limited visitation, required hand washing, and required masks. All responses were assigned a number based on their scale, with 1 being not at all important and 5 being very important.

The factors that respondents identified as most important (on average) were:

- The school is thoroughly cleaned at least once a day. (4.71)
- Students and staff regularly wash hands with soap and water. (4.65)
- Hand sanitizer is provided in each classroom and frequently used. (4.58)

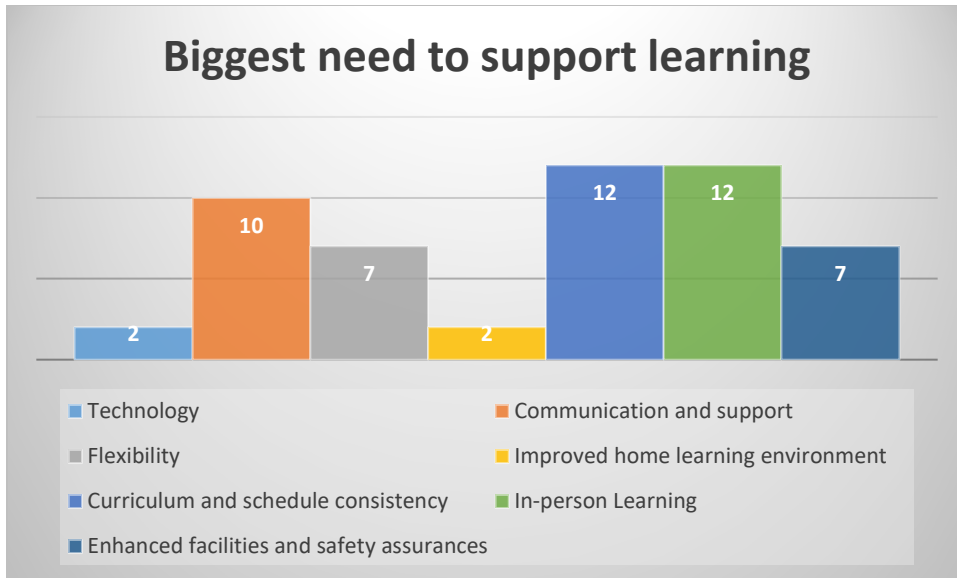**Figure 3: Importance of precautions**

Importance of precautions

Precaution	Degree of importance
BUSES RUN AT 50% CAPACITY.	2.67
CHILDCARE IS ALSO AVAILABLE.	2.81
STUDENTS ONLY INTERACT WITH THOSE IN THEIR CLASS(ES).	3.08
CLASS SIZES ARE REDUCED BY 50%.	3.06
CAFETERIA FOOD IS INDIVIDUALLY PACKAGED.	3.21
STAFF HAVE BEEN ADEQUATELY TRAINED ON CDC GUIDANCE TO REDUCE LIKELIHOOD OF COVID-19…	4.19
STUDENT BELONGINGS ARE SEPARATED AND COMMUNAL SUPPLIES (E.G. PENCILS PAPERS) ARE LIMITED.	3.87
VISITORS AND VOLUNTEERS ARE LIMITED ON CAMPUS.	4.16
CLASS SPACES ARE BETTER VENTILATED – WITH WINDOWS AND DOORS OPEN AND FANS ON WHERE APPLICABLE.	4.17
HAND SANITIZER IS PROVIDED IN EACH CLASSROOM AND FREQUENTLY USED.	4.58
STUDENTS AND STAFF REGULARLY WASH HANDS WITH SOAP AND WATER.	4.65
STUDENTS AND STAFF REMAIN AT LEAST 6 FEET APART FROM OTHER PEOPLE AT ALL TIMES.	3.27
STUDENTS AND STAFF ARE SCREENED FOR SYMPTOMS BEFORE ENTERING THE SCHOOL.	4.12
STUDENTS AND STAFF ARE REQUIRED TO WEAR MASKS DURING THE SCHOOL DAY.	3.64
THE SCHOOL IS THOROUGHLY CLEANED AT LEAST ONCE A DAY.	4.71

Degree of importance

Question 4

The survey also asked open-ended questions. In question four, respondents were asked: What is the biggest need you have to support your child(ren) in their academic learning? These responses were categorized into common themes and the themes are represented in the chart below. The top three areas where parents and teachers expressed needs were curriculum and schedule consistency, an option for in-person learning, and open communication and support.

Figure 4: Parent and teacher needs to support learning

Biggest need to support learning

Bar chart titled "Biggest need to support learning" with values:
- Technology: 2
- Communication and support: 10
- Flexibility: 7
- Improved home learning environment: 2
- Curriculum and schedule consistency: 12
- In-person Learning: 12
- Enhanced facilities and safety assurances: 7

Example responses have been included for clarity of each category:

Technology: "Better technology: headphones; microphones; high quality devices. Universal digital equity for families."

Communication and support: "Personal communication between teacher/student."

Flexibility: "Flexible timelines", "We need to have some leeway when it comes to schedule"

Improved home learning environment: "Parental support and reinforcement of values."

Curriculum and schedule consistency: "Uniform delivery of instruction and expectations." "Structured schedule and clear due dates"
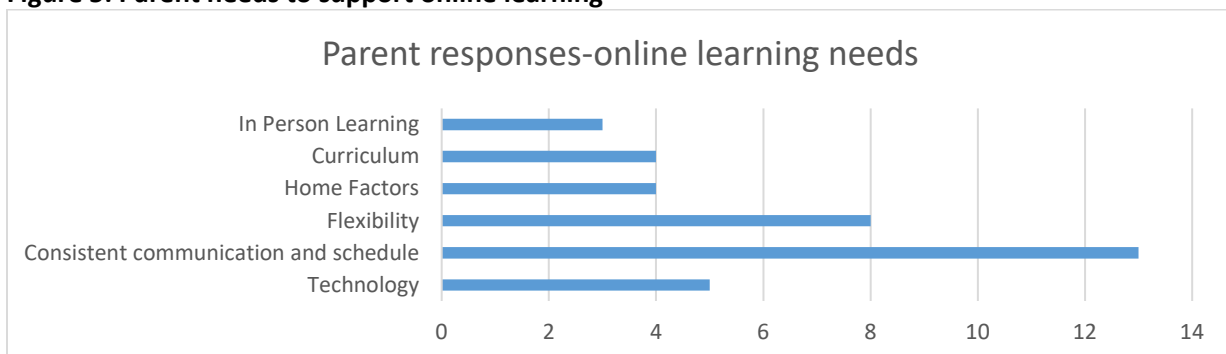
In-person learning: "For them to stay open and my kid to attend school in person"

Enhanced facilities and safety assurances: "A clean environment.", "Adequate masks/fans/sanitizer."

Question 5

The other open-ended question asked respondents about their needs in relation to online learning specifically. The question asked: What do you need from your school to provide the best support for your child(ren) in remote learning? Findings for this question varied between parents and teachers to a much higher degree than all other questions so responses were separated.

Figure 5: Parent needs to support online learning

Horizontal bar chart titled "Parent responses-online learning needs" with values:
- In Person Learning: 3
- Curriculum: 4
- Home Factors: 4
- Flexibility: 8
- Consistent communication and schedule: 13
- Technology: 5

For parents, consistent communication from their schools and teachers was the most important issue. They also expressed a need for flexibility with timing and assignments. These two do contradict

each other to a degree, but this serves to highlight the complexity of the challenges schools face in addressing the varied needs of students and families.

Teachers expressed different needs. For them, technology support and support from their leadership were most important. Flexibility and communication were also mentioned, but teachers overwhelmingly expressed a need to feel supported in their evolving roles.

Figure 6: Teacher needs to support online learning

Teacher responses- online learning needs
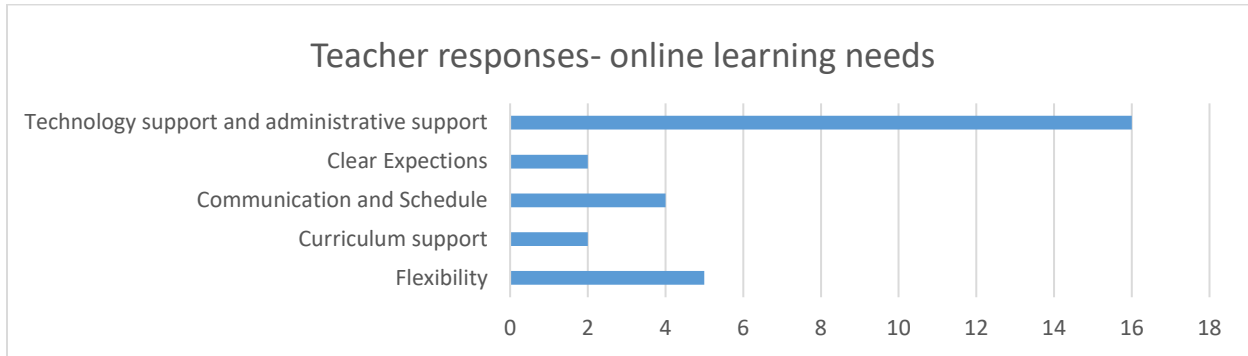
Question 6

The final question asked: Were you able to provide input into your district's decision making process regarding schools reopening? (Yes/No) If no, please indicate why not. A large majority (83%) of respondents indicated that they were able to give input into their district's plans for returning to school. 3% of respondents indicated they felt like they were able to give some feedback, and 14% of respondents did not have the opportunity to give input.

Conclusions

Overall, there was a fair degree of variation in responses across all questions. This indicates that the range of concerns is broad, and that across the state, the issues for communities, parents, and teachers cannot be summed up neatly. This is unsurprising given the variable impact of COVID across the state. Some communities have been hit hard and others have seen only a handful of cases.

There were some trends that remained consistent across the survey though. Communication, support, and mental and emotional health were areas of concern or need in nearly every question, across geographic regions, and by both parents and teachers. Safety, technology, and flexibility were important, but across all findings, parents and teachers expressed a common need to continue to build communication and support into all facets of the teaching and learning experience.