



Start of School Teacher Survey Results, 2020

Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management

Authors: Shelby G. Roberts
Hannah Pallotta

Key Findings

- 77% of teachers are confident they can teach effectively online, but they are less confident in their students' ability to learn effectively in a virtual environment.
- Over half of teachers experience some type of technical issue almost daily, but student technology issues are far more frequent with 82% of teachers reporting that students normally have some issue each day.
- Overall teachers found the District-provided trainings helpful with Teams training and content area profession development receiving the highest ratings.
- Teachers expressed a desire to adjust the daily school schedule to allow for less screen time, more planning, and additional asynchronous learning opportunities for students.
- Moving forward teachers would like to see improved access to additional technology and upgrades to their current technology, more trainings for teachers on Teams and other platform functionality, and student engagement and classroom management strategies, as well as trainings for students and their parents and families.

Overview

On August 31, 2020 SCS began the year virtually with over 6,400¹ teachers and 89,900 students learning online during the first two weeks in District-managed schools. Over the summer and during in-service week teachers completed professional development (PD) to learn how to use Microsoft Teams and other learning platforms to conduct class virtually. After a week and a half of virtual learning, the Department of Research & Performance Management solicited feedback from teachers on their views of teaching and learning virtually, technology issues they were experiencing, their experience with District-provided trainings, and recommendations for future professional development. Almost 3,000 teachers completed the survey ($n = 2,966$; 46.3% response rate) during the two weeks it was open. Some items were skipped by teachers, so the n changes slightly based on the item. The seven-item survey took an average of less than five minutes for teachers to complete.

Teacher Survey Results

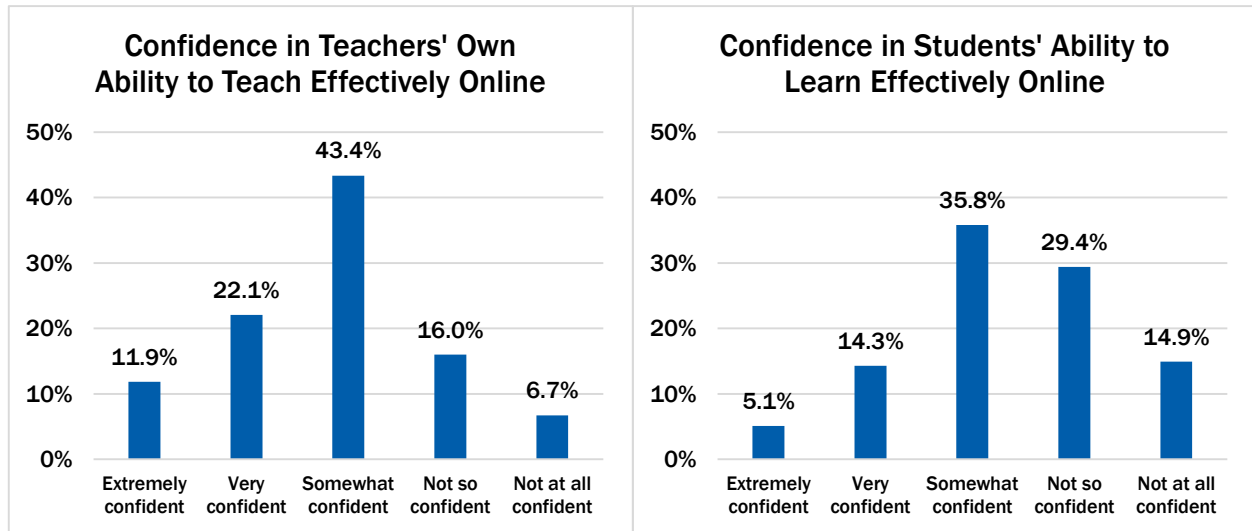
Confidence in Teaching and Learning Virtually

Teachers were asked to rate their confidence in their ability to teach and their students' ability to learn effectively online. Most teachers felt confident in their own abilities, and 33.9% of teachers felt very confident or extremely confident in their ability to teach effectively in a virtual environment (see Figure 1). Only 22.7% were not confident in their own abilities during the second and third week of school. However, teachers showed more skepticism when it came to students' ability to learn successfully online. 44.5% of teachers were not confident in their students' capacity to learn effectively online (see Figure 2).

¹Number of teachers working during first two weeks of instruction, not including the PD week. Data provided by the Department of Human Resources.



Start of School Teacher Survey Results, 2020
Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management



Technical Issues During Virtual Learning

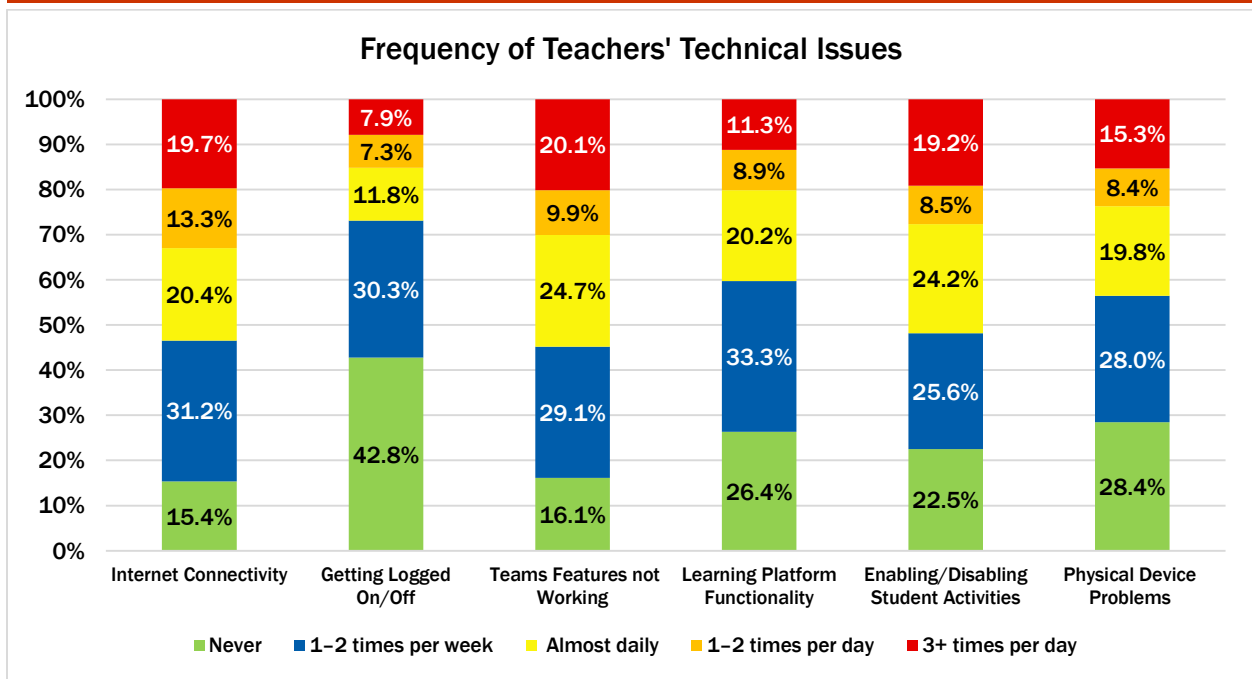
Teachers were asked to report how often technical issues occurred, for themselves and for the students, based on the following scale: never, one to two times per week, almost daily, one to two times per day, and three or more times per day. Teachers rated common issues like connectivity, Teams functionality, and physical device issues. The percentage breakdowns are shown for teachers in Figure 3 and for students in Figure 4.

Of the teachers' technical issues that were listed, getting logged on and off was the least common issue with 42.8% of teachers ($n = 1,154$) indicating that this was "never" an issue. On the other hand, teachers commonly had issues with Teams' functionality, internet connectivity, and enabling and disabling student activities. 895 teachers (33.0%) indicated that they experience internet issues at least once a day. Issues involving Teams and enabling and disabling student activities found similar results, with 1,482 teachers indicating almost daily or more frequent issues with Teams and 1,280 teachers having issues with enabling/disabling student activities. Almost 60% of teachers ($n = 1,352$) indicated that they "never" or only "one to two times a week" run into issues with navigating learning platforms other than Teams. However, 1,169 teachers (43.5%) said issues with their physical device(s) occur almost daily or more frequently.

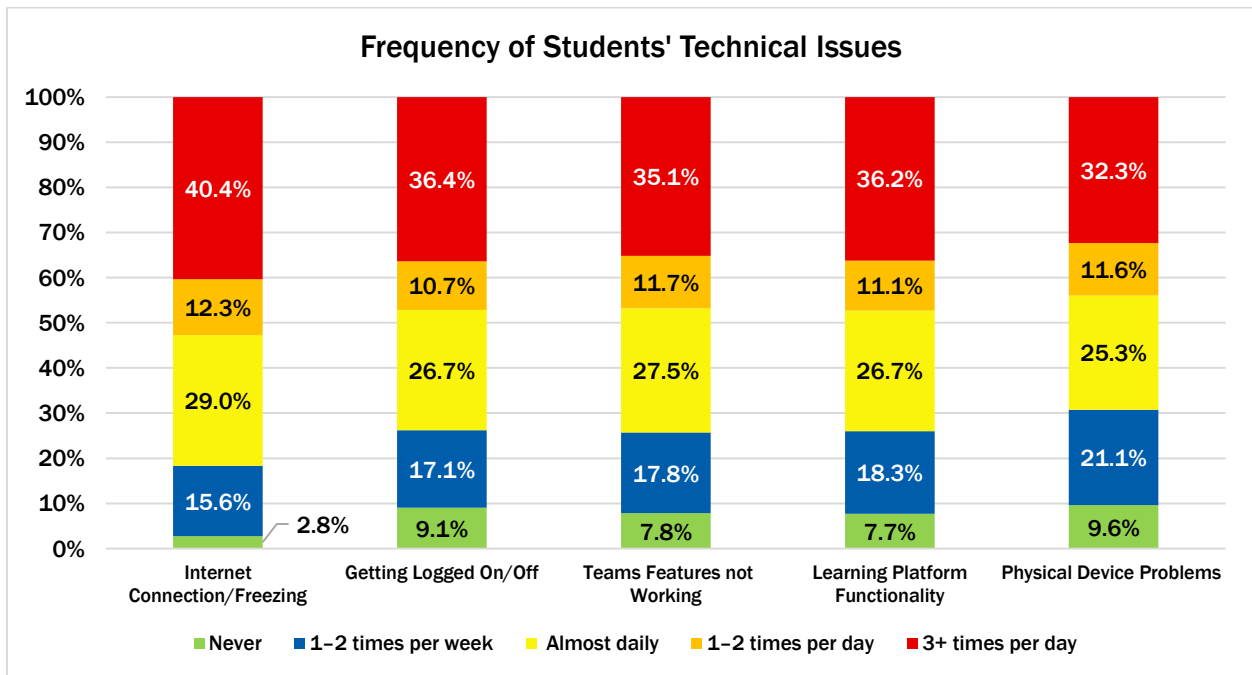


Start of School Teacher Survey Results, 2020

Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management



The most reported issue among students was poor internet connection or internet freezing. More than 80% of the teachers surveyed mentioned that students' internet connections are an issue "almost daily" or even multiple times in a single day. The least cited issue was physical device problems. Nearly 10% of teachers surveyed said they 'never' experienced this issue with their students. More than 45% of teachers dealt with student issues with Teams, getting logged on or off, and struggling to navigate the other learning platforms multiple times each day.





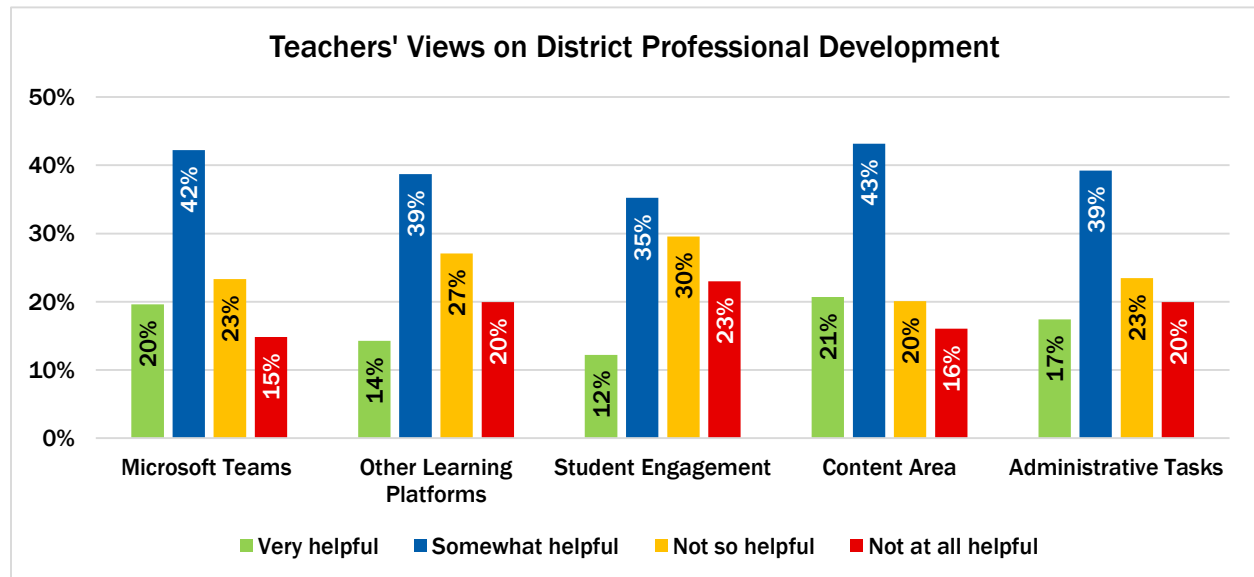
Start of School Teacher Survey Results, 2020

Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management

While teachers themselves may not be dealing with their own technical issues daily, it seems that they are dealing with their students' technical issues multiple times throughout the school day. The higher frequency of issues for students compared to teachers echoes the findings from the Online Superintendents Summer Learning Academy report.² Troubleshooting technology issues can take time away from instruction and is compounded by the fact that each teacher has multiple students who could be experiencing technology issues throughout the day.

Professional Development to Support Virtual Learning

The Department of Professional Development provided teacher training on Microsoft Teams, content areas, and other learning platforms during the summer and in-service week. Teachers were required to complete three Teams trainings³ prior to the start of virtual instruction and additional trainings throughout the fall semester. As of the beginning of the fourth week of school, 86% of teachers ($n = 5,263$) had completed the first three trainings and 80% ($n = 4,874$) had completed the five available courses.⁴



Overall, teachers found the District-provided trainings more helpful than not in all categories except student engagement. The Microsoft Teams and content area PD had the highest helpfulness ratings, 62% and 64% respectively. The administrative tasks category referenced tasks like taking attendance, which looks different this year due to the virtual environment, and 57% of teachers viewed that training as helpful. Student engagement was viewed less favorably than the other categories, with only 47% of teachers finding it helpful.

Teachers were additionally queried as to areas where they would like future District supports. They could select up to seven items focusing on various types of teacher training, resources, and supports as well as student and family trainings. Figure 6 below shows the frequency of selection for each of the types of training teachers would like to see. Teachers ($n = 1,876$) overwhelmingly asked for improved access to tools and technology, which represents 63.3% of teacher taking the survey and

² Lotz, J. (2020) SSLA Digital Learning Survey Results, 2020.

³ Some Teams modules were updated over the summer after a handful of teachers had completed the trainings.

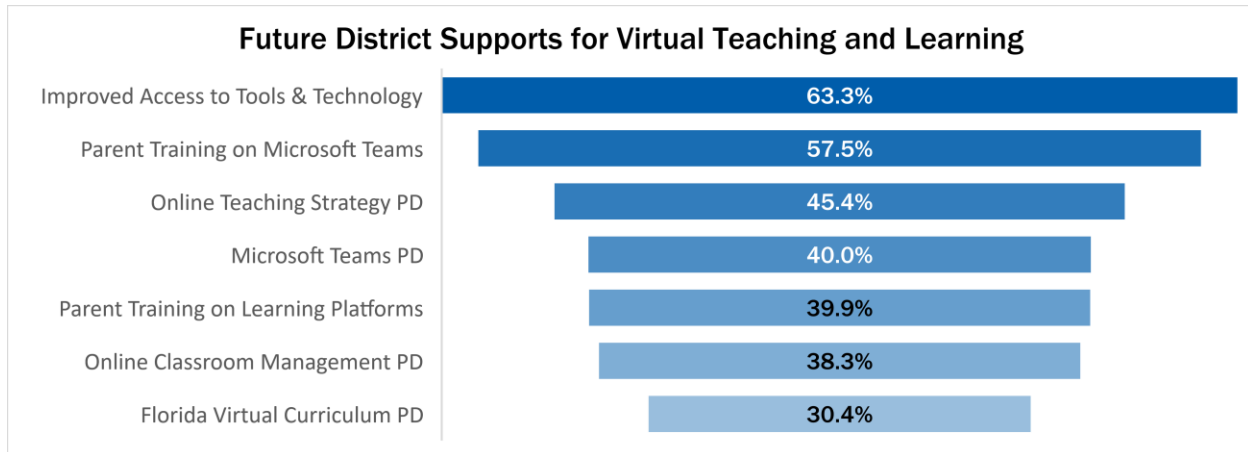
⁴ Microsoft TEAMS Course Completion Profession Development Dashboard, created by DAIM, refreshed 9/21/20 at 9:07am.



Start of School Teacher Survey Results, 2020

Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management

29.3% of all SCS teachers. After that, 57.5% of surveyed teachers hoped that additional parent/family trainings would be available focusing on Teams functionality and 39.9% on other learning platforms. This sentiment echoes feedback from teacher focus groups and surveys conducted after the 2020 online summer school program.⁵ Just under half of the teachers surveyed ($n = 1,346$) requested training and examples of effective online teaching strategies. Teachers also cited a need to additional trainings on Teams (40.0%), virtual classroom management (38.3%), and lastly the Florida Virtual Curriculum (30.4%).



Open-ended Response Themes and Findings

Teachers were also given a space at the end of the survey to leave additional feedback for other types of support the District could provide to enhance their online teaching. 1,615 teachers (54.5%) left feedback and provided examples of ideas and suggestions for how online learning and student success could be improved in the virtual environment. The various comments were coded and then placed into themes that capture overarching teacher views. These themes include changes to the school day schedule, more training for teachers, students, and parents, enhanced IT/Call Center support, upgrades and new technology, curriculum supports including physical materials, and pivoting to in-person instruction. Each theme is summarized followed by a few examples of statements made by teachers.

Teacher Trainings and Guides for Using Online Resources and Platforms

Teachers frequently cited a need for more training including training in different formats as an area for future District support. Teachers asked for training on features and functionality of Teams, virtual teaching practices, Canvas training, and using the various online platforms and apps. Many different platforms were mentioned in requests for additional training, but Teams was most often mentioned. Additionally, teachers felt that training either one-on-one or in a small group could allow them to practice what they learned and ask questions right then if anything was unclear. Teachers also requested videos of lessons being taught using the different features and functionalities of the platforms and integrating those into their daily lessons.

⁵ Garrison, A. W., Thompson, A., Clewley, D., Lotz, J., Anderson, J., & Sell, M. (2020), Virtual Summer School 2020 Final Report, <http://www.scsk12.org/rpm/files/2020/Virtual%20Summer%20School%202020%20Final%20Report.pdf>



Start of School Teacher Survey Results, 2020

Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management

- “More training on Class Notebook and OneNote. I'm so confused using them... Help, I'm drowning.”
- “Review of Teams more advanced features now that we're using it. How to use Canvas from a teacher's perspective.”
- “Although I feel comfortable, [there needs] to be some small in person TEAMS training to help teachers who learn in the many different ways; we are expected to differentiate our lessons for our students in class.”
- “Classes with steps on how to use these programs along with a printable resource for future reference. Instructions that are step by step for people who are not as tech savvy as others.”
- “Given our circumstances, I think the District has done an excellent job of preparation for this school year. Still, I am confused about the Microsoft Teams platform even after spending hours working through the required PD courses as well as others. It is almost overwhelming.”
- “A real time exemplar of teaching students in the platform.”
- “I would like to see an upper elementary lesson taught using the Teams platforms and applicable resources within Teams.”

Changes to Current School Day Schedule

Teachers have a deluge of new responsibilities and worry that their students do not have the mental stamina to sit in front of a computer for hours a day. Over 26% of the open-ended responses communicated a need for a change to the current schedule whether that requires shortening the school day, adjusting schedules to allow more planning time, having less screen time and more asynchronous learning opportunities, or being creative with types of schedules used at different grade levels. Of the 420+ responses on this topic, over half requested an abbreviated school day. K–2 teachers specifically are concerned about the long day in front of a computer for the District's youngest learners. Teachers are seeing a decline in student engagement between morning and afternoon sessions. Teachers want a schedule that has more student breaks, more asynchronous learning opportunities, and less screen time for all students. Half-day Kindergarten schedules were also mentioned numerous times throughout the comments.

Additionally, due to the new virtual environment, teachers are working longer hours to prepare online lessons and communicate with parents. Many have requested that additional planning time be built into the daily or weekly schedule. Teacher office hours were a popular solution proposed which would allow time to contact parents, meet one-on-one or in small groups with students, and address individual learning loss. In addition to time for planning lessons, teachers are feeling overwhelmed with the administrative duties required in this new learning environment.

- “I believe an addendum needs to be made to that length of the school day. Our students are really struggling with being on the computer for 6 hours a day. Near the end of the day they seem so defeated.”
- “Please consider the younger students and students with special needs. The school day is too long to hold their attention.”
- “Adjusted schedules for elementary students. K–5 is struggling with amount of time tasked on being on camera.”
- “I have almost 170 students and I am so overwhelmed with not enough time to call parents to help each individual child 1:1 when they need it and most of all to get my papers graded and have any help in leveling classes... Every teacher I speak to across the district is saying this is so, so, so, so hard and we are working 10 or 12 or 15 hours a day and teachers are feeling so frustrated and discouraged.”
- “I need time to plan. I am at school from 7am to after 5pm daily. I'm never caught up.”
- “½ day synchronous, ½ day asynchronous.”



Start of School Teacher Survey Results, 2020

Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management

- “I would like to see more planning time. I believe the students would benefit from a shorter school day. Teachers and students alike are exhausted from staring at a computer for 6.5 hours a day.”
- “Look for alternative schedules that incorporate asynchronous learning in an effort to give students, parents, and teachers more flexibility in their education.”
- “Implement asynchronous learning and shorter class periods/school days. Additionally, one day where teachers and students can use to catch up on planning and finishing assignments. I feel like the experience would be more effective if it would not attempt to mirror the exact in-person school day.”
- “Less screen time for students, specifically younger children. They become increasingly restless as the day progresses.”

Additional Technology and Upgrades

Teachers stated that they needed updated devices, technology, student-specific hardware, and working student devices to teach their classes. Teachers were frustrated that their District-provided devices were not able to support Teams and multiple applications like Canvas simultaneously. Some teachers turned to their personal devices to teach their students effectively. Teachers, specifically K-2 teachers, requested styluses for students who are learning to write or need to show their work in math. Other technology that was frequently requested were docu-cams (a web-camera mounted on an arm so that the presenter can project live footage of three dimensional objects. These would be most commonly used for showing documents, textbooks, math problems being worked out by hand, etc.), additional monitors, hotspots for teachers, headsets, keyboards, and better Wi-Fi for their students.

- “I really am in desperate need of one good teacher laptop. Most teachers have old student laptops, and it is hard when students have better devices and your computer is the one freezing.”
- “Better internet access within the school building. Technology tools that I don’t have to pay for with my own money- monitor, doc camera. A new computer that can handle Teams and other learning platforms...”
- “I’ve spent tons of money buying cords, hooking up screens, monitors, and finally paid \$1,000 out of my already broke pocket to purchase a MacBook Air because the laptop provided for me was about to make me have a heart attack.”
- “Headphones and stylus pens for the students to write on the tablets, especially to show math work.”
- “Kids need keyboards and a stylus. Teachers need working computers and document cameras.”

Curriculum and Books

More than 10% of teacher comments focused on the need for curriculum support or physical resources. Elementary teachers are clamoring for physical materials for the new *Wonders* ELA curriculum including teacher edition textbooks and student workbooks. The need for physical *Wonders* resources was the most cited curriculum support teachers asked for. They find it difficult to have the online textbook pulled up while also trying to see their class in Teams. Other teachers like CTE and Library Specialists need online modules to be effective. Math has been difficult without Eureka curriculum resources and workbooks in students’ hands.

- “Provide teachers with physical copy of *Wonders* Teacher’s Editions. The online platforms are difficult to follow.”
- “We should have hard copies of teacher editions for *Wonders* and the students should have hard copies of the textbooks. They cannot view the screen share or me at the same time as the text online. It should be physically in front of them. Our students do not have what they need.”
- “Access for CTE teachers for student online modules.”



Start of School Teacher Survey Results, 2020

Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management

- “Dependable online resources would be great. Wonders, Studies Weekly, and science are only available through demo accounts. Very disappointing.”
- “Children do not have the supplies at home to successfully learn math.”

Technology Support and Platform Functionality

Technology issues and IT/Call Center support were a prominent topic in the open-ended comments. Frequent issues with devices, internet connectivity, and platform malfunctions caused lost instructional time for students and teachers. Teachers expressed frustrations with not being able to have technical issues resolved in a timely manner for themselves and their students. Some proposed having IT in their building to answer questions and fix issues when they arise.

Teachers commented that they would like to be trained on the student devices or have a physical student device to “see what students are seeing.” Teachers are troubleshooting issues that their students have, but they do not have the same device as the students nor know what the students are dealing with. “Cheat sheets” and providing physical student devices to teachers were suggested as solutions to this issue.

Issues with Teams and integration of platforms were causing issues for teachers as well. It was mentioned several times that the platforms being used do not sync up well. Teachers would like a “hard mute” for all students as well as breakout session features like other learning platforms have or a different learning platform all together. The Teams interface is proving difficult for the youngest grades to navigate effectively. Students across the board consistently have issues with the chat and hand-raise function, although different students are affected daily. Teachers also cited the integration of many applications as a primary issue. One of note was that in Teams the students’ names are entered alphabetically based on first name and in PowerSchool students’ names are alphabetical based on last name. This means a simple task of taking roll each day/class becomes a cumbersome, time-consuming chore. Additionally, some of the curriculum resources take five or more steps for students to access.

Teachers have asked for more technical support and trainings, however, some of these requests are already available. The “hard mute” and breakout sessions, are newly added features on Teams, but teachers may not be aware of them. The Department of Professional Development has also provided additional PD for teachers and will continue to throughout the semester. It is important that these supports be communicated to teachers so that they can be trained on new features and where to find updates that could help improve their online classroom.

- “At this point I feel that everyone is doing the best they can. I wish the platforms could run more smoothly and the internet connections were better. I spend the majority of class time troubleshooting, trying to get my students logged in, checking the chat to see who got kicked out, doesn’t have sound, can’t see, etc. it’s honestly overwhelming and exhausting.”
- “It would be helpful to have a device like what the students have. Often I can’t direct them to where they need to go since I am unfamiliar with their tablet and how features of it work.”
- “Better response for students with technical issues with their devices and hotspots. Students are falling behind due to the amount of time lost with inaccessibility.”
- “It would help if we had a direct line to tech support per school/zone. Some troubleshooting can be done by [the] troubleshooters! Teachers are trying to TEACH CLASSES; we need Direct help troubleshooting for parents and teachers. It would help teachers to focus on more instruction.”



Start of School Teacher Survey Results, 2020

Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management

Parent and Student Trainings

A little under six percent of teachers mentioned wanting to see more training for the parents and students. Most of the trainings asked for were technology or Teams related, although some were requesting training on appropriate learning environments and expectations for students. It would be helpful for teachers if parents had a better understanding of how to help their students at home navigate the different platforms, including how to access and submit assignments. Teachers noted that having a basic understanding of how the devices work would be beneficial. Many expressed taking time away from instruction to troubleshoot technical issues. Giving parents and students more technical training could assist with lessening that burden on teachers and giving more time back to instruction.

- “I would like to see more navigation guides on Teams, Clever, and Canvas for students in multiple languages. Students are having issues getting around because they are unfamiliar with the device, with Windows, and with all the platforms.”
- “More support for parents. I feel like I am more of a tech support than teacher. Especially since many of my parents are not very tech savvy and they have young students, it is mainly the parents having to set everything up. (Some of my parents don’t even know how to open the internet and I don’t know how to teach them the amount of digital skills they need to participate) I would really like some help or somewhere parents can go to learn these things.”
- “It’s difficult teaching content while also trying to teach students how to navigate on a platform that I’m unfamiliar with and was never given the opportunity to explore, and from their perspective. They still need training. It’s NOT too late.”
- “Please invest in PD for the students to learn how to use the laptops and TEAMS. People think children are ‘tech savvy’ because they use digital devices. However, students are clueless on how to open apps and download information. It’s a tedious task having to teach them to do this, as well as try to stay on track with the curriculum.”
- “I would like the district to inform the parents about online/distance learning etiquette. Parents are not taking the distance learning school year seriously and it is reflected on the students’ behavior.”

Classroom Culture and the Learning Environment

The virtual classroom comes with new challenges and issues that teachers must navigate daily. Teachers are struggling to keep students engaged during online learning for the full day. Training on effective student engagement strategies and best practices was requested frequently. Teachers also would benefit from clarity around expectation for students and the appropriate way to manage classroom behavior such as when students “check-in” and then turn off the camera and do not comment or interact the rest of the class time.

Students are facing challenges with their learning environment and teachers are expressing their concern over the issue. Students are learning in rooms where other virtual classes are taking place with siblings or day-care peers. Distractions in the home are also prevalent. Teachers are often unsure of how to cope with the distractions and how to best handle situations of inappropriate learning environments. Parental assistance on tests or assignments is a concern for teachers as well. Because students may have to rely on their parent to help with navigating platforms, it seems unclear if students themselves are doing the tasks or if parents are essentially completing the assignments. Clear expectations or recommendations for learning environment and parental assistance could be beneficial to teachers, parents, and students.

- “I would love support with keeping students engaged all day while on a device.”



Start of School Teacher Survey Results, 2020

Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management

- “As of now, my main concern is the fact that the majority of students are getting help from caregivers. This is not a true picture of what students are capable of doing independently. Also, most of the households are so noisy in the background, this makes it difficult for students to concentrate and teachers to effectively teach.”
- “Support for parents about how important a positive learning environment is to a child. Families need help, especially when there are several siblings in the home. We can come up with real help on how they make this happen.”
- “The District’s partnership with the YMCA should include guidelines for the students’ learning environments.”

In-Person Learning

A handful of teachers requested to return to in-person learning. Some believed that the risk to students’ educational progress was greater than the health risk posed by contracting the coronavirus. Others specifically wanted the youngest students, who often have unique learning needs (e.g., like how to hold a pencil or manipulate physical math object), back in the classroom. Special education teachers cited the need for students with IEPs and 504 plans to have hands on, in-person services.

- “Acknowledge the fact that the risks associated with virtual learning are far greater for our students than the risk of contracting COVID. The district is protecting itself from liabilities associated with COVID spread, BUT putting liability of academic regression, social isolation, emotional distress, physical decline, and SO MUCH MORE, in the laps of teachers...”
- “Allow kindergarten back in school. They cannot learn anything online.”
- “Allow teachers and students K-2 or K-1 to go back face to face. Start at this level and slowly add additional grades. Children at the K-1 level have extreme difficulty focusing, manipulating the computer/tablet, are being watched by older siblings and not an adult, therefore getting off task... In education, we are taught to provide developmentally appropriate practice and having students ages 5-7 online for 6 ½ hours goes against everything teachers are taught in our profession...”
- “They need to be in the classroom like other school districts! At least K-2 should be in person...”
- “Please send students with IEP’S and 504 plans back to the building. They’re not meant to learn online, and we cannot effectively provide needed services to some students without a parent standing over their kid’s heads...”

Additional Areas for Support

A handful of comments addressed each of the various topics below. Teachers expressed that they would like:

- More ESL resources and to have all resources available in multiple languages,
- Support for SPED teachers and students along with training on accommodations in online learning,
- Options to use other learning applications including some that are subscription based,
- Acknowledgement of teacher overtime through financial incentives or removal of administrative duties,
- Clarity around observations and administrative expectations and feedback,
- Guidance on managing Kindergarten portfolios in a virtual setting,
- Educational assistants to help manage the chat and small group sessions,
- Pre-recorded lessons that students can access on their own,
- Focus to solely be given to the “core” subjects, and



Start of School Teacher Survey Results, 2020

Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management

- Decreased class sizes.

SCS teachers have overcome many obstacles in the short amount of time and have done outstanding in converting their physical teaching practices to this new online learning environment. Overall, teachers feel confident in their ability to teach virtually but have reservations about their students' ability to learn online effectively. They agree that the District-provided trainings on technology were more helpful than not. Technological challenges continue to be a daily part of their classroom, especially on the students' end. In the open-ended responses, teachers commonly cited the need for more District-provided trainings in the areas of Teams, student engagement, platform functionality, and teaching practices as well as a large demand for a change or flexibility inside the daily school schedule. Teachers asked for a shortened day, built-in time for planning, more asynchronous learning, upgrades to technology, physical curriculum resources, IT/Call Center and platform support, family and student trainings, and a return to in-person learning specifically for our youngest learners. As Shelby County Schools continues to deliver instruction virtually, teachers' feedback on the above items must be incorporated into the District's plan to support teachers and their students.