MADISON METROPOLITAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

RPEO

2020 Virtual Learning Feedback Report

Key Findings

1. **MMSD staff implemented Virtual Learning in alignment with guidance provided by the district. Evidence indicates, however, that there was room for variation in how elements of Virtual Learning were implemented across schools and classrooms, leading to differing experiences for students, family members, and staff.**

2. **While many family members, students, and staff members responded positively to questions related to intermediary outcomes of Virtual Learning like satisfaction and feelings of support, their responses also revealed key challenges and opportunities for improvement.**

3. **Analysis of feedback from families, students, and staff indicates several promising "drivers" for improving Virtual Learning experiences: supporting frequent and meaningful connection, strengthening MMSD guidance, and creating robust learning experiences.**

In early 2020, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic heralded unprecedented challenges for the state of Wisconsin and the community of Madison. In order to ensure the safety of students, staff, and families, the Madison Metropolitan School District closed its school sites on March 15, 2020 - a decision later reaffirmed by the "Safer at Home" order by Governor Tony Evers that went into effect on March 25th. Given the likelihood that normal operations would be significantly disrupted for some time, MMSD moved quickly to shift toward a program of remote learning capable of "providing continuous instruction to our students [and] opportunities for students and teachers to remain connected and engaged with content while working from their homes". The resulting effort - titled Virtual Learning by the district - involved the initiation of a wide range of novel instructional and supporting services by members of the MMSD community. This report attempts to describe the implementation and outcomes of some of the key instructional elements of Virtual Learning, and to identify their successes and challenges. To do so, we first draw on policy documents and guidance produced by MMSD to define the principal elements of Virtual Learning. We then draw on several points of evidence to describe how those elements of Virtual Learning were implemented, and to describe how families, students, and staff perceived those efforts. We conclude by highlighting opportunities for improving Virtual Learning, rising from family, student, and staff feedback.

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Virtual Learning Feedback Report
(September 2020)
1

Virtual Learning Program Overview

MMSD's response to the COVID-19 pandemic involved a wide range of services, implemented to support the community even as school buildings closed and normal operations were significantly disrupted. While this report defines Virtual Learning as the set of policies, practices, and programs most closely centered on providing continuity of learning for students, staff also engaged in a number of supplementary activities necessary for the success of Virtual Learning's instructional mission. This included the continuation of supports like free and reduced-price meal services for children and families, the identification and fulfillment of families technological needs, and connecting members of the MMSD community to vital mental, emotional, and social health programs. These supports were critical for promoting the success of Virtual Learning and meeting the district's core values regarding equity - more detail regarding their implementation is discussed under our findings related to implementation and equity, below.

The core of MMSD's Virtual Learning program, however, centered on the work of providing instructional continuity for students during the period of disruption created by COVID-19. According to guidance distributed to staff, the district's intention was for that continuity to be maintained through the delivery of instruction to all grades (4K-12), facilitated "primarily [...] through online tools and district-issued devices at home". To support that goal, MMSD prefaced the initiation of Virtual Learning with five days of professional development and dedicated planning time for staff, with opportunities for training on topics related to remote learning platforms, the VOCAL framework for online learning, and other role-based topics. In addition, MMSD articulated broad guidance regarding three key elements of the Virtual Learning experience: guidelines regarding the amount of instruction staff should offer students, adaptations to MMSD's attendance and grading policies, and guidelines regarding the use of remote learning platforms.

The first key piece of guidance provided to staff centered on the *amount of instructional time* offered to students during Virtual Learning. MMSD's staff overview for Virtual Learning establishes maximum expectations for engagement by grade level: 1.5-2.0 hours of instruction per day for grades K-2, 2.0-2.5 hours per day for grades 3-5, and a maximum of 3.0 hours per day for grades 6-12. In each case, the district indicated that staff should provide an experience balanced between online and non-online activities, create a suggested schedule for students modeled on a normal school day (including "breaks, lunch, and playtime"), and include opportunities for social-emotional engagement and interaction with family members.

Second, MMSD offered guidance adapting *attendance and grading* policies in response to the extraordinary challenges faced by students and families during the onset of the pandemic. As part of its shift to Virtual Learning, for example, MMSD emphasized that policies related to attendance should focus on "ensur[ing]

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Prepared by Christopher Harrison, PhD; Grady Brown, MPA;
Brianne Monahan, MPA; and Oriana Eversole, PhD

Virtual Learning Feedback Report
(September 2020)
2

consistent communication and support for all [...] students". As such, staff were advised to count students in attendance each week upon any communication with a student or their family, or upon participation by the student in Virtual Learning activities (e.g., submission of an assignment). Similarly, grading policies also shifted in order to "ensure the well-being of [...] students and families" and provide flexibility for staff as they modified assignments and course expectations during Virtual Learning. In grades 4K-5, this entailed the adoption of weekly progress check-ins with families, along with an end-of-year report card providing "a narrative summary of progress in key areas such as literacy, mathematics and social/emotional development". In grades 6-12, adapted policies embraced a general effort to ensure that students were not harmed by the transition to Virtual Learning. In the case of grades 6-8, this included measures like eliminating "zeroes" for assignments and not allowing students' grades to fall below what they had earned prior to March 13th. Similarly, grades 9-12 shifted to a "pass or no pass" system, wherein student GPAs were frozen at their March 13th status, and students earning a "no pass" grade would have the opportunity to make up work at a later time.

Finally, MMSD offered guidance related to the *use of remote learning platforms* during Virtual Learning. Staff teaching grades 4K-4 were advised to deliver daily learning using SeeSaw or Google Classroom, depending on the comfort level of the staff member. In grades 5-12, staff were advised to use Google Classroom as the primary vehicle for daily learning. As discussed later, in the findings of this report, these guidelines did not bar staff from using other platforms in addition to those highlighted by the district.

Beyond these guidelines and the professional learning offered to staff, school leaders and teachers were given relatively broad latitude as they engaged the day-to-day work of Virtual Learning. One potential benefit of this approach is that it allowed school staff to be agile and adaptable as they worked to meet the needs of their communities - when surveyed, in fact, over 70% of responding principals and 80% of responding teachers indicated that they had the autonomy they needed to serve their students and families during Virtual Learning. This wide degree of autonomy also, however, may have created substantial room for variability in the implementation of Virtual Learning from school to school and classroom to classroom. In that context, understanding the breadth of experiences that students, families, and staff had with Virtual Learning is vital to learning what "worked" as the district shifted its ways of working in response to COVID-19, and how MMSD might improve on its framework moving forward.

Learning from Virtual Learning

In order to understand how its community experienced Virtual Learning, MMSD collected a variety of data throughout the spring of 2020. This report draws on a few key sources of evidence in order to describe the implementation of Virtual Learning and to begin to unpack its outcomes. Principally, we draw on a series of large-scale surveys administered to families, students, and staff to gather their feedback. In addition, we

MMSD Research & Program Evaluation Office
Prepared by Christopher Harrison, PhD; Grady Brown, MPA;
Brianne Monahan, MPA; and Oriana Eversole, PhD

Virtual Learning Feedback Report
*(September 2020)*
3

support our analysis of these surveys by drawing upon supplementary feedback and administrative data gathered by several central office and school teams. Each of these sources of evidence is described in greater detail, below.

Virtual Learning Feedback Surveys

In order to understand and learn from community members' experiences with Virtual Learning, MMSD launched several feedback surveys in spring 2020. Surveys were distributed to all MMSD students, families, teachers, principals, and instructional support staff members. Surveys were administered to staff through their MMSD email address. In order to ensure the greatest opportunity to participate possible, surveys for families and students were administered using both email as well as SMS text messaging. In addition, all respondents received periodic reminders throughout the survey administration period.
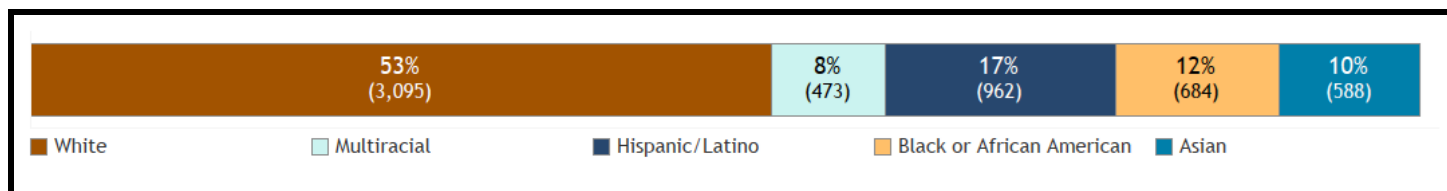
MMSD received 6,203 responses to its family survey. Figure 1, below, provides a demographic breakdown of respondents to the family survey. Overall, most respondents (59%) identified themselves as White, with those identifying as Hispanic/Latinx (19%) representing the second largest group of respondents. Black/African American and Multiracial respondents each accounted for 8% of responses, with 7% of respondents identifying as Asian. Finally, it should be noted that the large majority of respondents (73%) represented households that are not identified as lower-income.

Figure 1. Family Survey Respondent Demographics
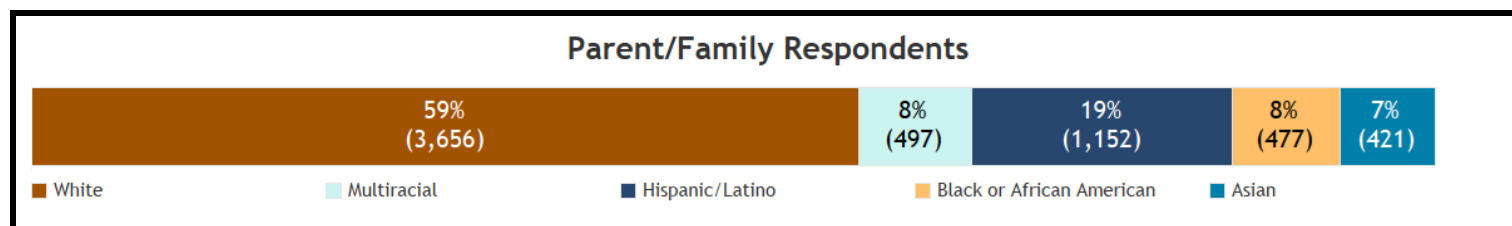
The demographic characteristics of respondents to the student survey were similar to those of family survey respondents. In total, 5,820 students responded to the survey. The majority of respondents (4,026) were in grades 6-12, with a smaller number (1,794) representing grades 3-5. As with family respondents, the majority (53%) of students participating in the survey identified as White, while fewer (17%) identified as Hispanic/Latinx and as Black (12%). Asian students accounted for 10% of overall survey responses, while 8% of students identified as Multiracial. In addition, as with the family responses, the majority of student respondents (65%) represented households that are not identified as lower-income.

MMSD Research & Program Evaluation Office
Prepared by Christopher Harrison, PhD; Grady Brown, MPA;
Brianne Monahan, MPA; and Oriana Eversole, PhD

Virtual Learning Feedback Report
(September 2020)
4

Figure 2. Student Respondent Demographics

53% (3,095)	8% (473)	17% (962)	12% (684)	10% (588)
White	Multiracial	Hispanic/Latino	Black or African American	Asian

In addition to families and students, a number of key instructional staff shared their perspectives on Virtual Learning through their survey responses. The district received 1,337 responses to its teacher survey, for example. Of those, 54% of responses were from elementary (4K-5) teachers, and 46% from secondary (6-12). Nearly 600 instructional support staff responded, as well. Among those responses, the five most commonly identified staff roles were special education assistants (159), speech/language clinicians (39), library/media tech specialists (35), social workers (34), and school-based administrative clerks (31). In addition, 38 principals responded to the MMSD's survey of school leaders.

Each respondent group - families, students, teachers, instructional support staff, and principals - received a survey with an array of questions tailored to their particular experience with Virtual Learning. In general, items aligned to a few broad categories. These included both defined-response and open-ended questions intended to understand the *outcomes* of Virtual Learning (e.g. satisfaction with the Virtual Learning experience, or degree to which participant needs were met), as well as the *implementation* of Virtual Learning (e.g. the nature of instructional practice, or frequency of communication between participants). Respondents' answers to these questions outline a number of successes, challenges, and opportunities for improvement, which form the basis of the findings shared below.

Supplementary Data Sources

While this report draws principally from the Virtual Learning surveys outlined above, MMSD staff collected a wide variety of other data that inform and contextualize its findings. These include surveys administered to families by school leadership teams throughout the course of Virtual Learning that informed their implementation of Virtual Learning throughout the spring. In addition, Central Office units like Family, Youth, and Community Engagement (FYCE), Student & Staff Support, and Communications contributed data from surveys and advisory groups conducted with several key stakeholders, community groups, and organizations. Finally, this report draws on administrative data gathered during Virtual Learning regarding key metrics like student attendance and academic performance. Each of these sources of evidence help to scaffold and shape the findings reported below.

MMSD Research & Program Evaluation Office
Prepared by Christopher Harrison, PhD; Grady Brown, MPA;
Brianne Monahan, MPA; and Oriana Eversole, PhD

Virtual Learning Feedback Report
(September 2020)
5

Findings

Overall, analysis of the evidence described above indicates that the story surrounding both the implementation of Virtual Learning, and its outcomes, is complex. Respondents shared, for example, that the implementation of Virtual Learning was largely aligned to MMSD guidance, as described above. Within that guidance, however, respondents supported the assertion that the instructional experiences of families and students varied both within and across schools. Similarly, while most participants expressed overall satisfaction with Virtual Learning, they also contextualized their responses within a sense of grace toward the unprecedented challenges faced by the district. Even as they recognized the extraordinary effort put forward by MMSD staff, they also raised a number of concerns regarding the ability of Virtual Learning to meet the needs of students and highlighted several opportunities for improvement. Each of these key findings is discussed in detail, below.

MMSD's Implementation of Virtual Learning

Analysis of survey responses indicates that most respondents were aware of and understood MMSD's guidance and expectations regarding Virtual Learning. Most teachers (59%) and principals (50%) agreed, for example, that there was a shared vision for implementing Virtual Learning in the district. Similarly, most family members (63%) shared that they understood what was expected of their family as they engaged in remote learning. In addition, survey responses indicate that participants' experiences with Virtual Learning generally aligned with MMSD's guidance regarding how the program should be implemented. Within that broad framework of guidance, however, there was substantial room for flexibility and adaptation within and between school sites. As such, survey participants' responses also indicate that there was substantial variation in the details of how Virtual Learning was implemented across the district. These differences included variation in the nature of instruction students received, the frequency with which teachers engaged in practices like synchronous learning, and the platforms with which students and family members were asked to engage.

In general, for example, most student respondents indicated that the amount of time they were expected to focus on Virtual Learning aligned with the guidance articulated by MMSD: 2-2.5 hours of daily instruction for grades 3-5, and 3 hours per day for grades 6-12. Most students in grades 3-5 (54%) estimated that they received 1-2 or 2-3 hours of Virtual Learning each day. Similarly, most middle school (52%) and high school (52%) students responded that they estimated their time at 2-3 or 3-4 hours per day. Only 7% of high school students, 6% of middle school students, and 11% of elementary students indicated that they were regularly expected to exceed those requirements. Finally, most students (68% of elementary students, 73% of middle students, and 75% of high students) indicated that the amount of schoolwork expected of them was either "just right" or "slightly too much", with few reporting that it was far too light or burdensome.

MMSD Research & Program Evaluation Office
Prepared by Christopher Harrison, PhD; Grady Brown, MPA;
Brianne Monahan, MPA; and Oriana Eversole, PhD

Virtual Learning Feedback Report
(September 2020)
6

While respondents indicate general consistency in the *amount* of instruction and schoolwork provided to students, they described relatively greater variation in the *nature* of those learning experiences. When asked about the frequency with which they drew on asynchronous or synchronous instructional methods, for example, teachers indicated that they used both to varying degrees. As Figure 3, below, indicates, a plurality of teachers indicated that they engaged in synchronous instruction with students a few times per week (31%), and asynchronous instruction daily (38%). There was a wide distribution of responses around these points, however. Family member comments reflected this variation. Some family respondents expressed how core synchronous instruction was to their experience - one, for example, shared that such experiences were "[...] excellent, because it keeps us more engaged, and keeps my child engaged in the class community." Other family members shared markedly different experiences, characterized by more infrequent instruction from teachers and a greater reliance on asynchronous assignments and activities.
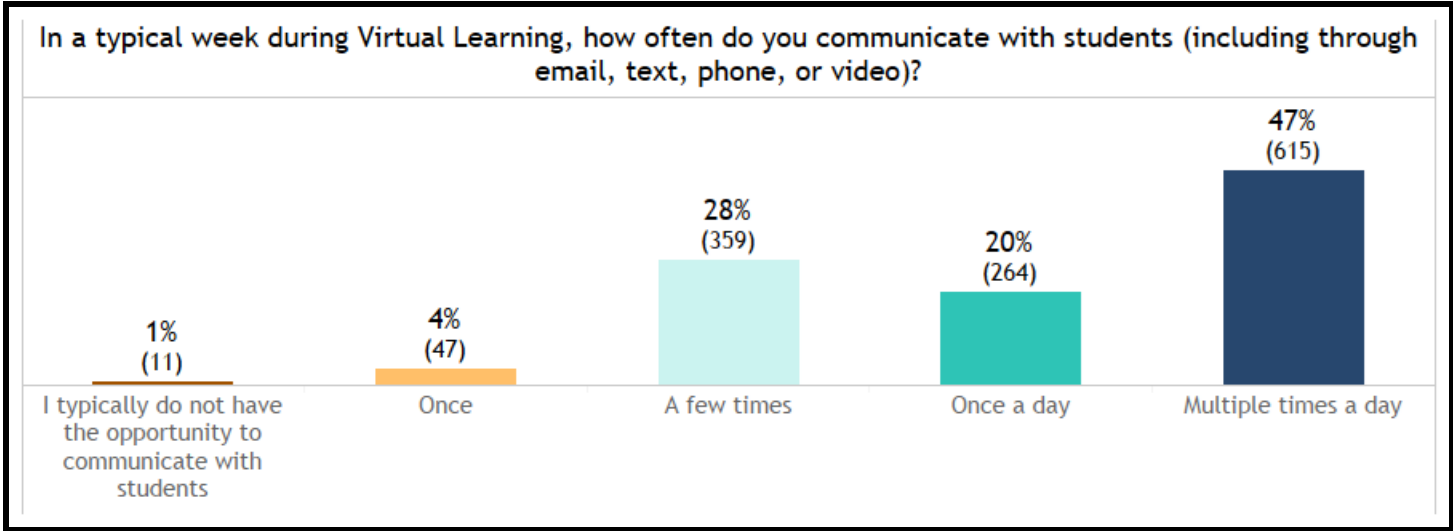
Figure 3. Frequency of Instructional Methods (Teacher Survey)
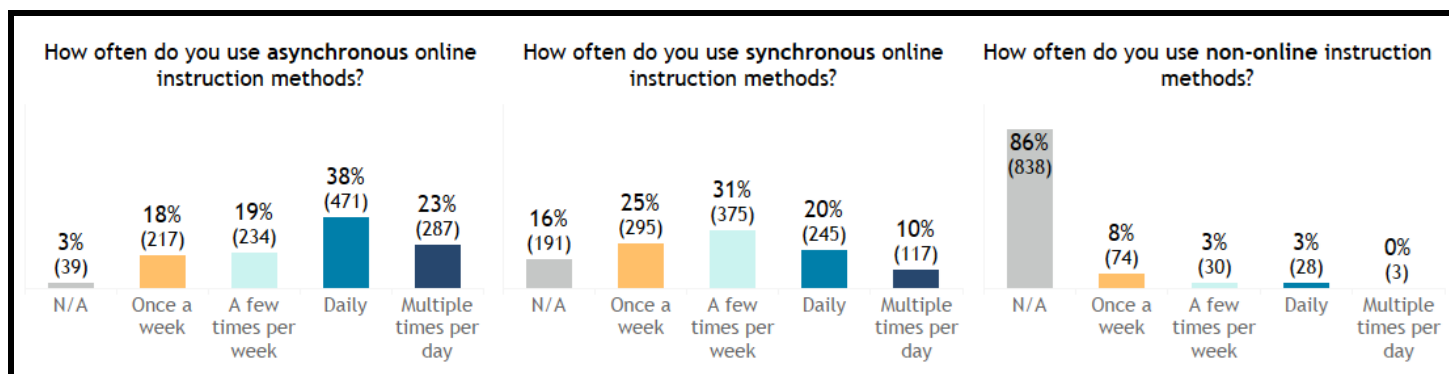
Similarly, survey responses and other data indicate that staff implemented MMSD's policies regarding student attendance and grading with integrity. As Figure 4 indicates, teacher responses regarding the frequency with which they communicated with students align with MMSD's guidance. Most teachers (67%) report communicating with students at least once a day, with many (47%) doing so even more frequently. Administrative data regarding student contacts during Virtual Learning support this, as well, with the large majority of students (83%) recorded as being in contact at least once a week for the entire duration of Virtual Learning. Qualitative feedback from students and family members indicates that staff contact with students and families aligned with the priorities outlined in district guidance regarding outreach, and was often centered on supporting and addressing social and emotional needs. One student, for example, shared that their interactions with teachers showed that they were "kind, and that [they] care." Another explained that "I like how the teachers all believe in us, and how they tell us not to give up [...] that tells me that they care a lot."

MMSD Research & Program Evaluation Office
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Brianne Monahan, MPA; and Oriana Eversole, PhD

Virtual Learning Feedback Report
(September 2020)
7

Figure 4. Frequency of Teacher Communication with Students (Teacher Survey)

In a typical week during Virtual Learning, how often do you communicate with students (including through email, text, phone, or video)?
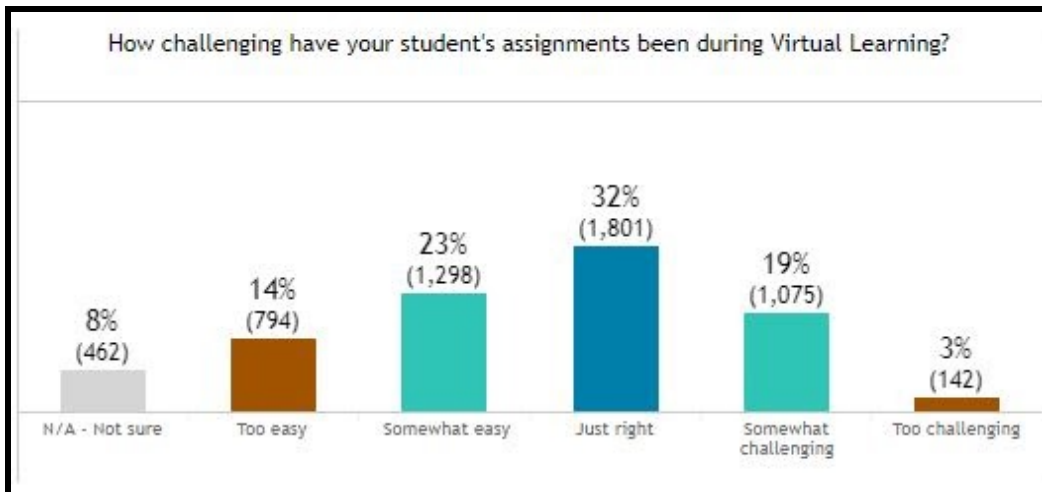
Analysis of administrative data regarding course pass-rates indicates a similar level of adherence to MMSD's altered grading policies, intended to ensure that students' academic records were not harmed by the district's transition to Virtual Learning. The vast majority of students (98%) passed all of their courses in the 2019-2020 academic year - a substantial increase over past years. Teachers' responses to open-ended survey items further evidenced adherence to the policy, with several acknowledging that they understood the importance of the underlying principle guiding the district's decision to adopt the "hold harmless" policy.
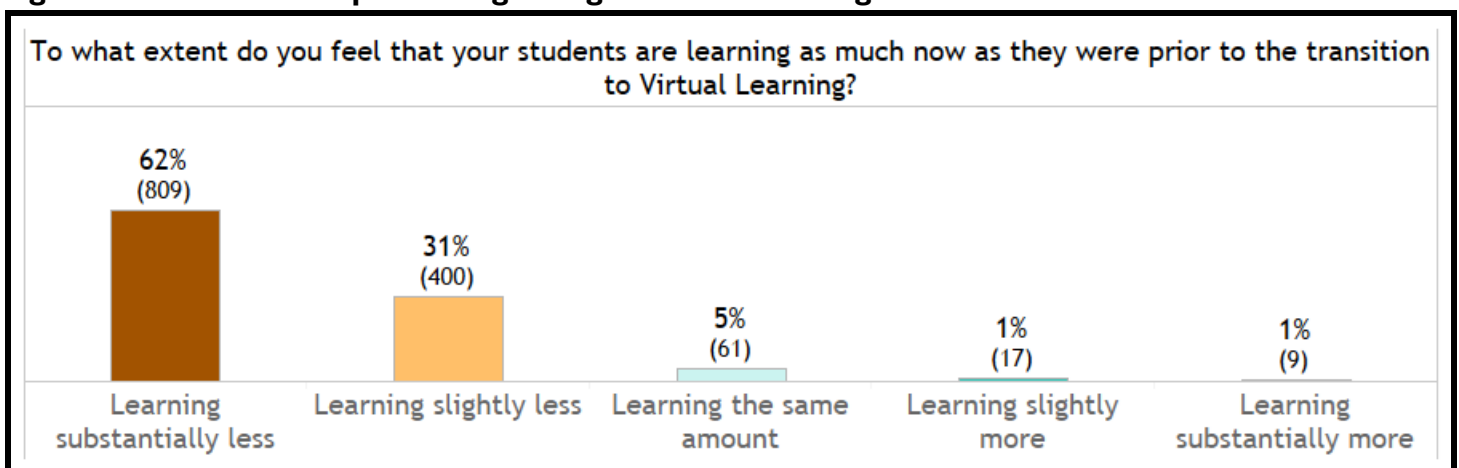
Survey responses also indicate, however, that the learning students experienced within their virtual classes varied. As Figure 5 shows, below, parent responses regarding the rigor of student experiences under Virtual Learning indicate a spread of experiences, with some (37%) indicating that they felt their child's school work was either too easy or somewhat easy, while others (32%) found it to be "just right". A relatively smaller number (22%) reported that their child's schoolwork was somewhat or too challenging. Similarly, Figure 6 shows that a significant majority of teachers (93%) indicated that their students were learning less than they were prior to the onset of Virtual Learning. While many teachers (45%) indicated that they were able to deliver a rigorous experience during Virtual Learning, many (37%) were less positive in their response.

MMSD Research & Program Evaluation Office
Prepared by Christopher Harrison, PhD; Grady Brown, MPA;
Brianne Monahan, MPA; and Oriana Eversole, PhD

Virtual Learning Feedback Report
(September 2020)
8

Figure 5. Perceptions Regarding Challenge (Family Survey)

How challenging have your student's assignments been during Virtual Learning?

8% (462) N/A - Not sure
14% (794) Too easy
23% (1,298) Somewhat easy
32% (1,801) Just right
19% (1,075) Somewhat challenging
3% (142) Too challenging

Figure 6. Teacher Perceptions Regarding Student Learning

To what extent do you feel that your students are learning as much now as they were prior to the transition to Virtual Learning?

62% (809) Learning substantially less
31% (400) Learning slightly less
5% (61) Learning the same amount
1% (17) Learning slightly more
1% (9) Learning substantially more

Finally, while precise data regarding which remote learning platforms were leveraged by teachers isn't available, survey responses indicate that - in alignment with MMSD's Virtual Learning Guidance - SeeSaw and Google Classroom were widely used. Responses also indicate, however, that teachers leveraged a wide variety of additional platforms and tools as they implemented Virtual Learning. Several teachers, for example, identified Screencastify and Flipgrid as useful tools that they used frequently. Across the board, teachers discussed the importance of Zoom in creating "face-to-face" opportunities for delivering instruction and creating vital opportunities for interpersonal connections for students with peers and teachers.

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Brianne Monahan, MPA; and Oriana Eversole, PhD

Virtual Learning Feedback Report
(September 2020)
9

Creating Equitable Virtual Learning Experiences

MMSD's Strategic Framework explicitly centers on the pursuit of equity, particularly for Black students and other students from marginalized communities. As such, understanding how MMSD staff worked to meet the needs of families and students most likely to be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and the transition to remote learning is key to describing the implementation of Virtual Learning. As noted above, MMSD enacted district-wide efforts to make the transition to Virtual Learning more equitable. Over the duration of time that school sites were closed in the spring (March 16 - June 10), for instance, MMSD Food Services distributed 223,264 breakfasts and lunches to students and families. In addition, MMSD staff worked to ensure that students were able to access remote learning despite disparities in the availability of devices and internet services. To do so, the district provided over 8,000 devices - including Wi-Fi hotspots and Chromebooks - to families in need of technology support. Evidence from both family and student surveys indicate that these efforts were largely successful, with over 95% of family members indicating that they had access to the technology necessary to access Virtual Learning, as Figure 7 shows. It is important to note, however, that technology may have remained a significant barrier to learning for at least some students, despite the district's efforts, as nearly 30% of teacher respondents indicated that students' lack of access to the internet remained a significant challenge in their work. In part, the time required to accurately identify students' needs and to distribute resources may have contributed to this gap, as it may have taken up to a month for some families to receive devices.

Figure 7. Family Reports - Access & Connectivity (Family Survey)

	Does your student have access to the devices they need to participate in school activities from home?	Does your student have access to the internet or Wi-Fi connectivity?
No	1% (62)	0% (26)
Yes, but not consistently	4% (229)	3% (179)
Yes, most of the time	95% (5,923)	97% (6,006)

In addition to these district-wide efforts to improve equity under Virtual Learning, a substantial proportion of direct support for students and families occurred at the school level. When asked to describe how their school teams centered equity under Virtual Learning, principals described a number of strategies - ranging from centering equity in school messaging to the creation of new partnerships with local organizations like churches and community groups. Common themes rising from principal responses included creating new infrastructure for focused and individualized support for students and families in need. At one school, this infrastructure included the creation of a "core support team" (including the principal, social worker, and family liaison) responsible for conducting family visits and identifying the supports or resources they might need. At

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Brianne Monahan, MPA; and Oriana Eversole, PhD

Virtual Learning Feedback Report
(September 2020)
10

another, the school team established a "virtual mentor" program to ensure that students who needed additional support were connected to staff.

Teachers' responses echoed the importance of personalized and individualized support for students in creating a more equitable Virtual Learning experience. The most common themes rising from teachers' responses regarding equity centered on their efforts to communicate extensively with families and students in need of support, to remain flexible and cognizant of the challenges facing students and families, and to prioritize both social-emotional and academic needs during Virtual Learning. One teacher described the intensive nature of this work, noting that ensuring equity for her students involved "[...] communication and support to my most impacted families. Helping to connect them with the resources they need. Providing comfort, reassurance and trying to problem solve with them. This is the hardest part of virtual learning". Another described how Virtual Learning required him to "[learn] to have more grace and judge less". Teachers emphasized that maintaining these connections during Virtual Learning required a significant investment of time and energy, with several sharing that they worked well beyond contract hours to do so. Survey responses from teachers indicate that, on average, they spent over 20% of their typical work week - or more than a full working day - following up with students and families about schoolwork or checking in with them about more basic needs.

Serving Students with Special Needs

A key challenge under Virtual Learning, highlighted by both family members and instructional staff, centered on ensuring that the district fully supported students with special needs. Family members, for example, raised concerns regarding whether or not their children could thrive in the remote learning environment. While these parents often expressed gratitude for the individual efforts of educators working with their children, they worried about the extent to which special needs "fit" within the broader framework of Virtual Learning. One parent, for example, shared that "my son has an IEP, so he has a ZOOM with his special needs teachers a few times a day. The communication is great with them. It's very helpful. What is not helpful is that he still has to keep up with the class stuff as well, so he has double if not triple the work of the other students." Another family member, similarly, questioned the "fit" of Virtual Learning for their child, explaining that "I don't think virtual learning is a possibility for my student. Children with [my child's] disorder need one on one time, community learning, and in person teaching. My child has not thrived in virtual learning."

Instructional support staff - particularly Special Education Assistants (SEAs) - raised related concerns regarding their ability to meet the needs of exceptional students. As Figure 8 indicates, while most instructional support staff reported having the resources they needed to meet the academic and social/emotional needs of students and families, others indicated that they needed additional resources to do so under Virtual Learning. For SEAs, this included access to needed technology (e.g. more fully-featured laptops) at home, and additional professional development regarding the use of remote learning platforms. In addition, feedback from SEAs

MMSD Research & Program Evaluation Office
Prepared by Christopher Harrison, PhD; Grady Brown, MPA;
Brianne Monahan, MPA; and Oriana Eversole, PhD

Virtual Learning Feedback Report
(September 2020)
11

indicated that clearer guidance regarding how their work fit into the broader instructional framework of Virtual Learning would have been helpful, including professional development opportunities and space for connection and collaboration. One SEA, for example, shared that their Virtual Learning experience might have been improved with "[more] consistency in expectations for teachers, support staff, etc. Some are part of classroom Zoom meetings and Google classrooms. Others have been told they cannot meet with students without the case manager present. Some are expected to create their own Google classroom and prepare assignments for their students. And others like me have been told to maintain a connection with the student if possible [...] how can we support some of our most vulnerable kids if the adults cannot create an organized approach?"

Figure 8. Instructional Support Staff Resources (Instructional Support Staff Survey)
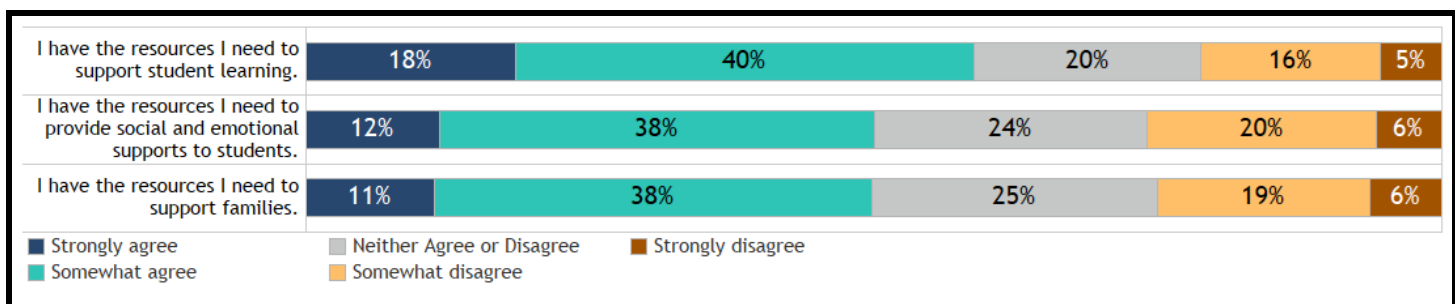
Evaluating the Preliminary Outcomes of Virtual Learning
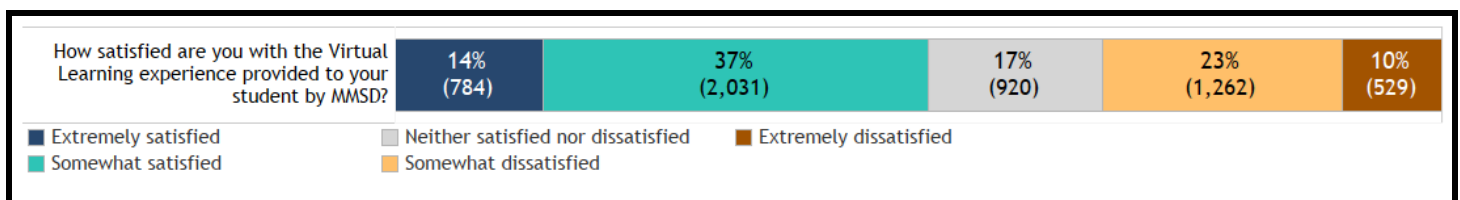
Understanding the true efficacy of any program is difficult, particularly in the complex environment of public schools. Virtual Learning compounds these traditional challenges by introducing a number of additional confounding variables, in addition to occurring outside of the purview of many traditional measures of achievement and academic performance. As such, the impact of Virtual Learning on critical outcomes like student achievement will require more time to fully understand. MMSD did, however, attempt to capture participants' perspectives regarding a number of potential intermediary outcomes related to Virtual Learning through its surveys and other data collection efforts. These included efforts to understand outcomes like family members' overall satisfaction with Virtual Learning and whether students felt well supported by their school as they learned remotely. Below, we begin by highlighting a few key intermediary outcomes revealed by our analysis to be useful in understanding the holistic experiences families and students had during Virtual Learning. We then leverage those outcomes - and a variety of additional data - to lay a foundation for identifying promising strategies for improving upon Virtual Learning in the future.

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Brianne Monahan, MPA; and Oriana Eversole, PhD

Virtual Learning Feedback Report
(September 2020)
12

Family Members' Satisfaction with Virtual Learning

Statistical analysis of family and student surveys regarding Virtual Learning revealed that responses to a few key items were systematically related to responses to several other questions related to intermediary outcomes of Virtual Learning. In the case of family respondents, for example, respondents' evaluation of their overall satisfaction with Virtual Learning was systematically related to their evaluation to other valued outcomes, including the extent to which they felt like a part of the school community, the extent to which they felt their students' needs were being met, and the extent to which they felt their students were academically prepared for next year. Simply put, if a family member indicated that they were satisfied with their Virtual Learning experience, then they were also likely to respond positively regarding each of those other outcomes. As Figure 9 indicates, a narrow majority of family members (51%) indicated that they were satisfied with their Virtual Learning experience, with a relatively smaller number indicating that they were either somewhat or extremely dissatisfied (33%), and 17% indicating that they were neither satisfied or dissatisfied. This finding remains relatively stable across communities - Black (59%), Hispanic/Latinx (58%), and Asian (59%) family members indicated that they were more satisfied, on average, with Virtual Learning than the overall pool of respondents, while Multiracial (48%) and White (48%) were somewhat less satisfied.

Qualitative analysis of open-ended responses from family members further contextualizes responses regarding their satisfaction with Virtual Learning. Numerous family members indicated that their perception of Virtual Learning was tempered by an understanding of the sudden and extreme conditions faced by the community. In essence, while many family members felt that there was substantial room for improvement in Virtual Learning, they also extended significant grace toward MMSD and felt *satisfied that the district was doing as well as it could, all things considered.* One family member evaluated the district's effort, for example, by asserting that "I think the district as a whole did the best they could do given the circumstances and time constraints". Another echoed the sentiment, simply noting that "I don't think anything could have been any better than what it was".

Figure 9. Family Member Satisfaction with Virtual Learning (Family Survey)

How satisfied are you with the Virtual Learning experience provided to your student by MMSD?

| 14% (784) | 37% (2,031) | 17% (920) | 23% (1,262) | 10% (529) |

■ Extremely satisfied ☐ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied ■ Extremely dissatisfied
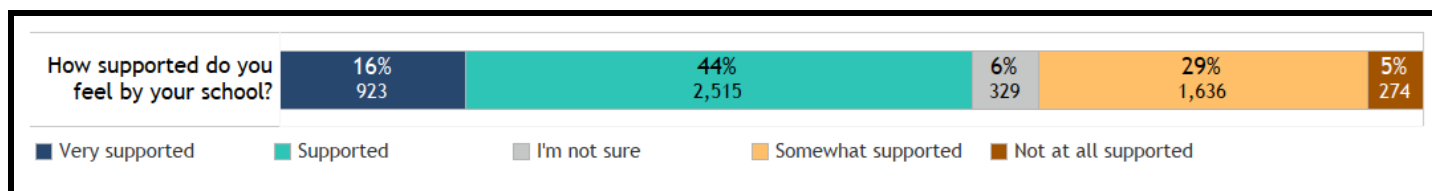■ Somewhat satisfied ☐ Somewhat dissatisfied

Students' Perception of Support from School

Similarly, statistical analysis of students' responses indicates that the degree to which students felt supported by their school during Virtual Learning was systematically related to several other intermediary outcomes.

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Brianne Monahan, MPA; and Oriana Eversole, PhD

Virtual Learning Feedback Report
(September 2020)
13

Again - when students indicated that they felt supported by their school, they also responded positively to questions regarding other valued outcomes, including the extent to which students felt valued by their school, the extent to which students felt that they belonged in their school, and the extent to which they reported feeling prepared for next academic year.

Overall, most student respondents (61%) indicated that they felt supported by their school during Virtual Learning, as Figure 10 shows, below. Unpacking that overarching response, however, does indicate some variability in students' perceptions of support across various student groups. When looking across grade levels, for example, more students in elementary grades (71%) reported feeling supported by their school than those in middle (58%) or high (53%). Moreover, more students indicated they felt *very supported* in elementary grades (27%) compared to middle (13%) or high (10%). Additional variability in students' sense of support emerges when looking across student communities - students identifying as Asian (66%) and White (61%) reported feeling as or more supported by their schools than the overall pool of respondents, while Multiracial (59%), Hispanic/Latinx (59%), and Black (57%) students reported feeling somewhat less supported.

Figure 10. Students' Perception of Support from School (Student Survey)

| How supported do you feel by your school? | Very supported 16% / 923 | Supported 44% / 2,515 | I'm not sure 6% / 329 | Somewhat supported 29% / 1,636 | Not at all supported 5% / 274 |

Instructional Staff's Satisfaction during Virtual Learning

Finally, like family members and students, staff members were also asked questions related to their experience during Virtual Learning. In particular, surveys asked teachers and other instructional staff members to share the degree to which they enjoyed their work during Virtual Learning - mirroring a question posed to staff in past climate evaluation instruments used by the district. While many teachers did indicate that they did enjoy their work during Virtual Learning (43%), slightly less respondents (39%) had less positive responses. Similarly, a minority of instructional support staff (49%) reported enjoying their work during Virtual Learning, with a less (33%) reporting less positively. These findings remain relatively consistent when looking across grade levels, with one exception - more instructional support staff in high schools (56%) reported that they enjoyed their work during Virtual Learning than in elementary or middle schools.

MMSD Research & Program Evaluation Office
Prepared by Christopher Harrison, PhD; Grady Brown, MPA;
Brianne Monahan, MPA; and Oriana Eversole, PhD

Virtual Learning Feedback Report
(September 2020)
14

Figure 11. Teachers' Response to "I Enjoy my Work"during Virtual Learning (Teacher Survey)

| I enjoy my work in the current Virtual Learning environment. | 10% (132) | 33% (431) | 18% (242) | 25% (334) | 14% (179) |

Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat disagree
Strongly disagree

Figure 12. Instructional Support Staff's Response to "I Enjoy my Work" during Virtual Learning (Instructional Support Staff Survey)

| I enjoy my work in the current Virtual Learning environment. | 15% (82) | 35% (190) | 20% (107) | 20% (106) | 11% (58) |
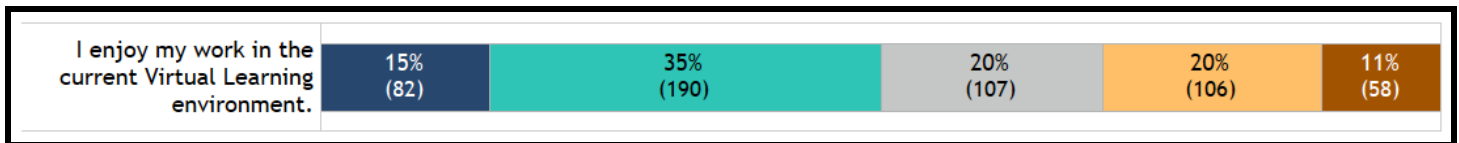
Identifying "Drivers" of Success

Analyses of the intermediary outcomes identified above indicate room for improving Virtual Learning, and increasing the extent to which families, students, and staff feel supported and satisfied by the program. Acting on that potential requires the identification of promising adaptations and levers for change. To do so, RPEO systematically analyzed qualitative and quantitative data related to participants' experiences, identifying a series of key "drivers" that appeared to be related to participants' responses related to their satisfaction and feelings of support. They include: **supporting frequent and meaningful connection**, **strengthening MMSD guidance**, and **creating robust learning experiences**. It is important to note that our analysis does not indicate that students, families, and staff did not experience these "drivers" during the spring. Rather, our findings indicate that they experienced them to varying degrees, and that efforts to enhance, build upon, and universalize their application may be promising avenues for improving the framework of Virtual Learning as it continues.

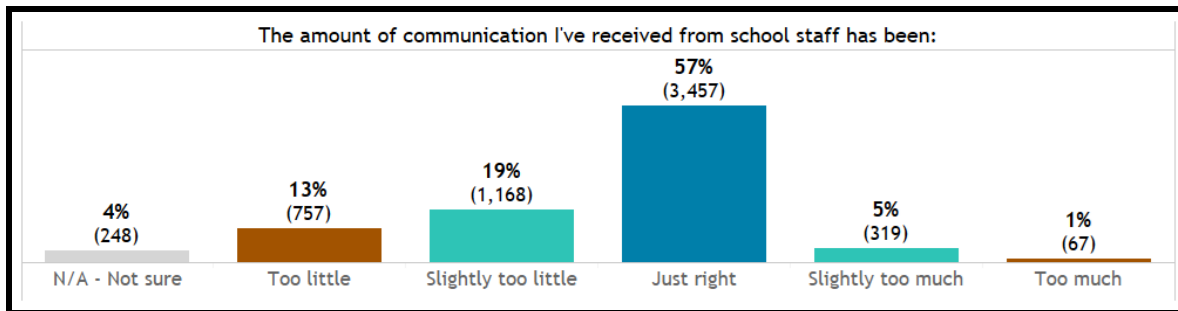### Supporting Frequent and Meaningful Connection

Across participant groups, respondents highlighted the importance of connection in their Virtual Learning experiences. This included connection between MMSD staff and families, students and teachers, and students and peers. In the case of family members, for example, statistical analysis of survey responses indicated that more frequent communication was systematically related to greater feelings of satisfaction with Virtual Learning. Family members also frequently reflected on how important it was for staff to make a concerted effort to connect in their responses to open-ended survey questions. One family member, for example, reflected on what "worked" during the Virtual Learning Experience by sharing that "[the] class zoom meetings

MMSD Research & Program Evaluation Office
Prepared by Christopher Harrison, PhD; Grady Brown, MPA;
Brianne Monahan, MPA; and Oriana Eversole, PhD

Virtual Learning Feedback Report
(September 2020)
15

are fun and my child looks forward to them. The weekly email from [my child's] teacher is helpful. [The] principal even called my daughter on her birthday!". Looking across family respondents, most (57%) indicated that the amount of communication they received from school staff was "just right". There was, however, a substantial number of family respondents (32%) who shared that they would have preferred more frequent communication from their child's school.

Figure 13. Family Members' Satisfaction with Amount of Communication (Family Survey)

The amount of communication I've received from school staff has been:

N/A - Not sure	Too little	Slightly too little	Just right	Slightly too much	Too much
4% (248)	13% (757)	19% (1,168)	57% (3,457)	5% (319)	1% (67)

A similar pattern emerged among students' survey responses - students indicating more frequent connection with both their teachers and their peers were more likely to report feeling supported by their school. A teacher reflected on the importance of interpersonal connection for her students, sharing that "I think what's working well is scheduling individual and small group ZOOM calls with students [...] students are really missing that engagement and connection piece so they are enjoying any type of interaction that they can get that is close to normalcy again." Examination of student responses that most (56%) reported connecting with their teachers a few times in an average week of virtual learning. While some (14%) reported more frequent connection, more (26%) indicated that they connected with teachers less frequently - once in a typical week, or not at all. Similarly, a plurality of students (36%) indicated that they had the opportunity to connect with their peers a few times in an average week, with a substantial number (29%) indicating that such opportunities occurred less frequently. In both cases, elementary students typically reported more frequent connections with both teachers and peers than middle or high students, although the differences were relatively small.

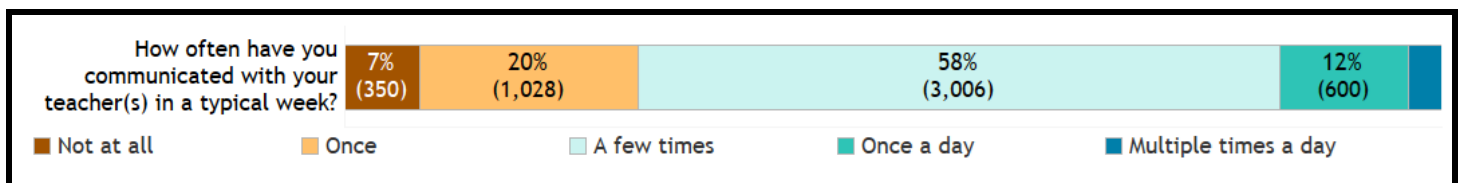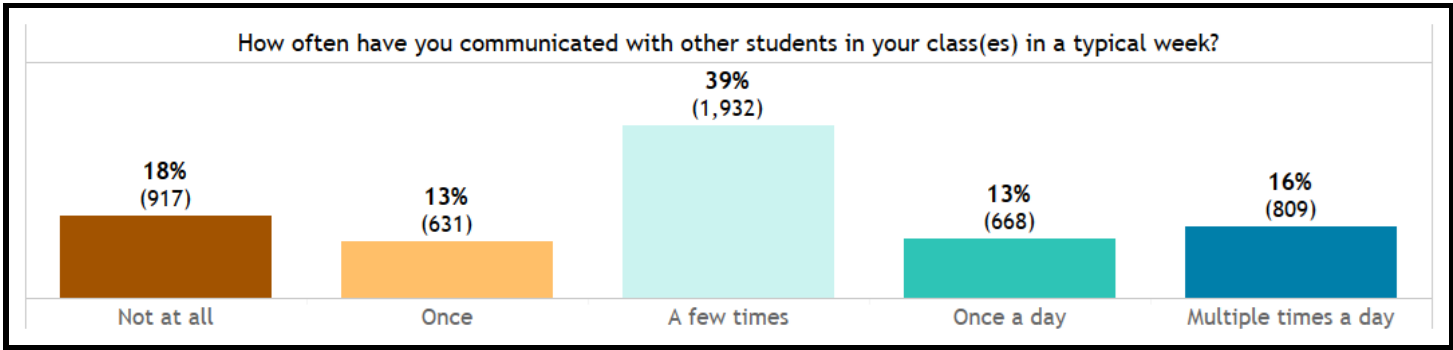**Figure 14. Students' Reported Frequency of Connection with Teachers (Student Survey)**

How often have you communicated with your teacher(s) in a typical week?

Not at all	Once	A few times	Once a day	Multiple times a day
7% (350)	20% (1,028)	58% (3,006)	12% (600)	

MMSD Research & Program Evaluation Office
Prepared by Christopher Harrison, PhD; Grady Brown, MPA;
Brianne Monahan, MPA; and Oriana Eversole, PhD

Virtual Learning Feedback Report
(September 2020)
16

Figure 15. Students' Reported Frequency of Connection with Peers (Student Survey)

How often have you communicated with other students in your class(es) in a typical week?

- Not at all: 18% (917)
- Once: 13% (631)
- A few times: 39% (1,932)
- Once a day: 13% (668)
- Multiple times a day: 16% (809)

Further, as respondents described the role that connection played in their experiences with Virtual Learning, they also underscored the idea that not all forms of connection were equivalent. Their responses indicated that *meaningful* connection - connection rooted in meeting social-emotional or academic needs of students and families - was particularly important. The extent to which students reported receiving feedback from teachers on their work, for example, was systematically related to the degree they felt supported by their school. Students also highlighted the importance of having opportunities to pose questions and receive feedback from teachers in their comments. One student, when asked how Virtual Learning might be improved, shared that "Sometimes, I do the assignments and I am not sure if my work is what the teachers want. More feedback is helpful for me." Another student shared that "I don't have my teacher's help like I used to. Some projects - like my final project - I wish I could have more of an explanation [...] maybe my teachers could help me more if we were at school." As Figure 16 shows, most students (57%) reported receiving such feedback a few times per week during an average week of Virtual Learning, with some (17%) reporting that they received feedback more frequently. Some students (25%), however, reported receiving feedback from teachers more infrequently - once in a typical week, or not at all.

Figure 16. Students' Reported Frequency of Feedback from Teachers (Student Survey)

In a typical week during Virtual Learning, how often do you receive feedback on your work from your teacher?

- Not at all: 7% (250)
- Once: 18% (656)
- A few times: 57% (2,043)
- Once a day: 11% (399)
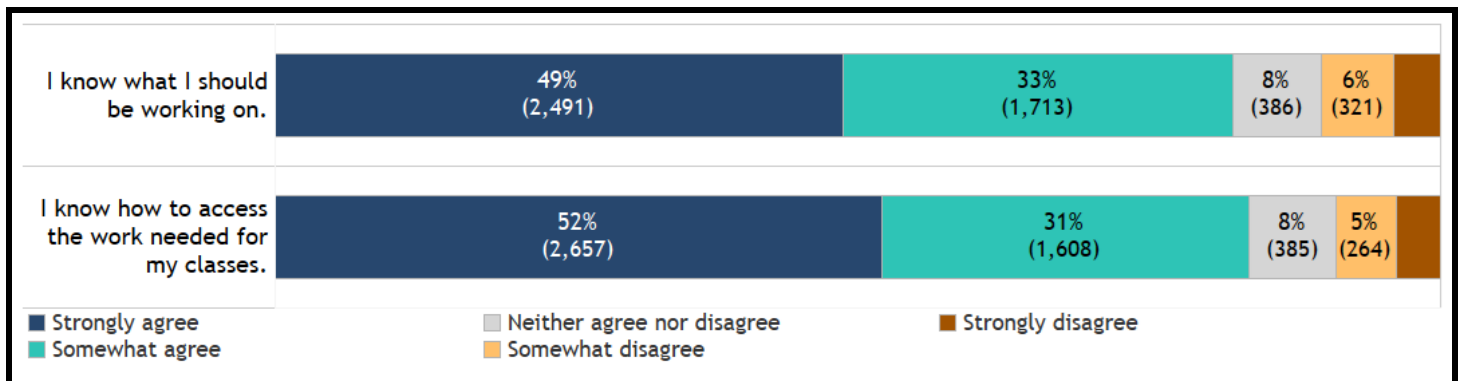- Multiple times a day: 6% (232)
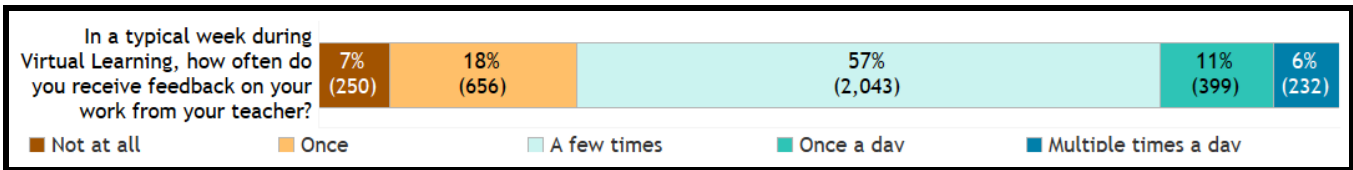
Strengthening MMSD Guidance

Another key "driver" linked by our analysis to key outcomes for families, students, and staff was the extent to which they felt that MMSD had provided them with sufficient guidance to succeed. As Figure 17 shows, for

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Prepared by Christopher Harrison, PhD; Grady Brown, MPA;
Brianne Monahan, MPA; and Oriana Eversole, PhD

Virtual Learning Feedback Report
(September 2020)
17

instance, most family members shared that they felt comfortable with supporting their child during Virtual Learning (64%) and supported by their child's school in doing so (68%). In each case, however, some family members indicated that they were less comfortable with supporting their child's learning. Feedback from family members suggested two key areas where additional guidance may have been useful. First, several family members expressed a desire for additional support in navigating the platforms and systems students were expected to use. One family member, for example, shared that "I feel just teaching the parents as well as the students how to get around the systems would be huge. We need to know how to help our kids navigate the systems as well so we can be better suited to give them guidance." In addition, several family members shared that Virtual Learning required them to adapt to a new role: co-teacher. While several family members indicated that they appreciated the opportunity to be more hands-on with their child's learning, they also shared that additional guidance in how best to support them would have been helpful, in addition to clear communication regarding what students should be learning, and when.

Figure 17. Family Members' Confidence in Supporting Students (Family Survey)
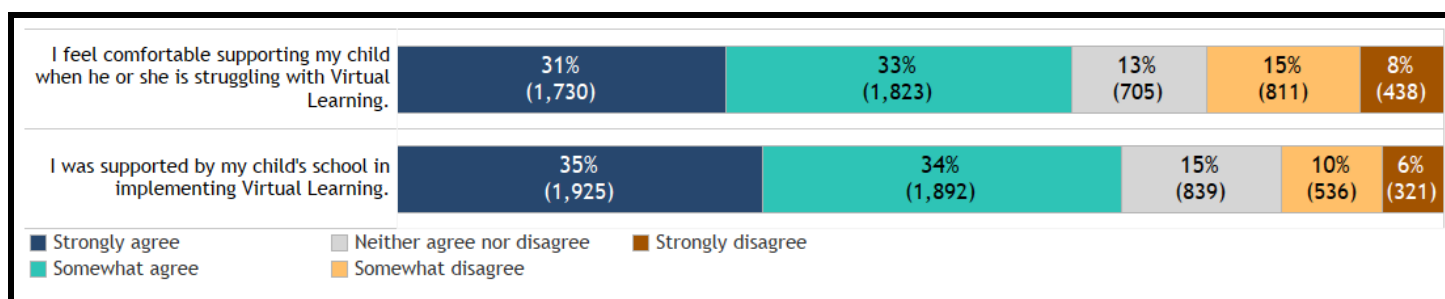
Students shared similar sentiments regarding the guidance they received from MMSD and school staff. As Figure 18 indicates, a large majority of students indicated that they knew what they were supposed to be working on during Virtual Learning (82%), and how to access assignments (83%). In both cases, however, some students were less confident, and analysis of survey results indicated a systematic relationship between the extent to which students felt that expectations and guidance were clear, and the degree to which they felt well supported by their school. Students comments indicated that, like family members, additional, intentional, guidance regarding how to navigate Virtual Learning platforms and resources may have been helpful. One student, for example, shared that "I think that one thing my school could improve for virtual learning is that they could give us more tutorials on how to do things and how to use the different websites and stuff like that." Similarly, students also highlighted clear guidance regarding what they should be working on and learning as being particularly helpful - examples included daily/weekly schedules and rubrics for assignments.

MMSD Research & Program Evaluation Office
Prepared by Christopher Harrison, PhD; Grady Brown, MPA;
Brianne Monahan, MPA; and Oriana Eversole, PhD

Virtual Learning Feedback Report
(September 2020)
18

Figure 18. Students' Perception Regarding Guidance (Student Survey)

Staff members - in particular, teachers - indicated that their Virtual Learning experiences might be improved through more intensive guidance regarding the practice of remote learning. When asked whether they understood how to support student learning in the remote environment, most teachers expressed confidence that they did (53%). Several (24%) indicated that they were less sure, however, or responded neutrally (23%). Analysis of teachers' feedback indicates that more robust guidance and training may have helped. One teacher, for example, shared that she would have appreciated "much, much, more professional learning and training around what it means to participate, lead and facilitate virtual learning". Another suggested that "the biggest thing that the district needs to do for the fall is to [look] at other entities that do virtual learning ALL the time [...] and then provide PD on best practices for virtual learning. I see a lot of teachers not using best practices, but that is because the COVID shutdown happened so suddenly, with no lead time to get ready or think through anything".
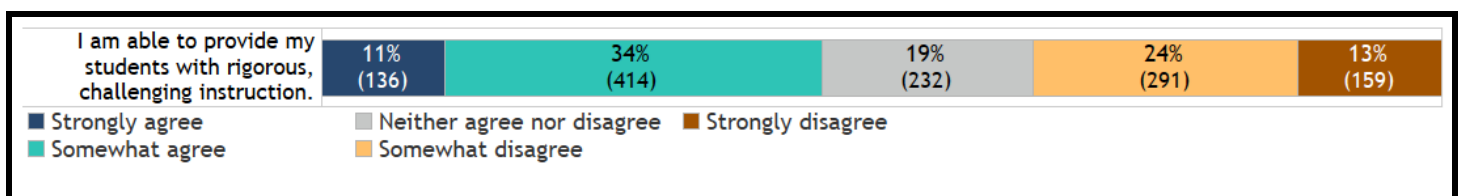
While students, families, and staff members did discuss the importance of strengthening guidance around key aspects of Virtual Learning, they also noted that learning remotely did offer a degree of flexibility that they found valuable. Family members and students, for example, emphasized that flexibility in when and how they were able to engage in Virtual Learning was beneficial. One family member, for example, shared that "in some regards, our son is doing better than in traditional classes because I am able to provide more individual attention and explanation. He is less stressed and overall happier because he can take breaks, exercise, or do manual projects to break up his classes." A student noted, similarly, that remote learning opened the door to greater agency over how they learned, sharing that "I like that I can do each assignment at my own pace so I can have time to think about things and not feel rushed." These perspectives, and others, indicate that strengthening guidance may need to occur in a careful balance with preserving beneficial flexibility for students, family members, and staff.

MMSD Research & Program Evaluation Office
Prepared by Christopher Harrison, PhD; Grady Brown, MPA;
Brianne Monahan, MPA; and Oriana Eversole, PhD

Virtual Learning Feedback Report
(September 2020)
19

Creating Robust Learning Experiences

Finally, analysis of feedback from students, family members, and staff indicates that working to create more robust learning experiences under Virtual Learning could "drive" improved experiences. One key element of doing so, based on student and family responses, may be increasing the frequency of synchronous teaching and learning. As noted above, there was a systematic relationship between the frequency of meaningful contact between staff and students and several key outcomes - including the degree to which students felt supported by their school. In addition, students and family members shared that some degree of face-to-face instruction was an important and valued part of their learning experience. One student, for example, shared that "I prefer an actual person teaching me. I feel like I understand better that way because they break things down and talk about it [...]" Similarly, a family member - reflecting on what could have improved their Virtual Learning experience - shared that "we would have liked to have more synchronous meetings [...] being able to see and interact with teachers and classmates makes a big difference [for our child]."

Teacher responses also indicated that creating more robust learning experiences might "drive" significant improvement in Virtual Learning outcomes. When asked whether or not they felt they were able to provide students with rigorous and challenging instruction, for example, many teachers (37%) did not respond positively, as Figure 19 indicates. In their feedback, teachers pointed to a few key issues. In elementary grades, for example, teachers highlighted the need for additional curricular resources tailored to the needs of students in the remote environment - defined by one teacher as being "student friendly and compatible with easy to use methods for getting work and feedback to students". Middle and high school teachers focused less on the need for curricula, and more on the need for greater uniformity in instructional practices across "classrooms". One teacher, for example, shared that "I think we need more expectations. Not more hoops to jump through, or more documents to "prove" our work, but [...] our students have suffered from receiving such a range of programming, just depending on which teacher they have." Another supported this assertion, noting that Virtual Learning might be improved by creating "a more uniform approach for instruction, so teachers have the same standards and use the same technologies. It is very hard to support students in other classes when they are all organized differently".

Figure 19. Teachers' Ability to Provide Rigorous Instruction (Teacher Survey)

| I am able to provide my students with rigorous, challenging instruction. | 11% (136) | 34% (414) | 19% (232) | 24% (291) | 13% (159) |

■ Strongly agree   ■ Neither agree nor disagree   ■ Strongly disagree
■ Somewhat agree   ■ Somewhat disagree

MMSD Research & Program Evaluation Office
Prepared by Christopher Harrison, PhD; Grady Brown, MPA;
Brianne Monahan, MPA; and Oriana Eversole, PhD

Virtual Learning Feedback Report
(September 2020)
20

A substantial number of teachers also indicated that the attendance and grading policies adopted by MMSD contributed to the challenges they faced in constructing robust learning experiences during Virtual Learning, and advocated for rethinking them. While they acknowledged the importance of ensuring that students' academic records were not harmed in the transition to Virtual Learning in the spring, they also noted that the district's policies did not incentivize engagement among students. One teacher, for example, shared that, if Virtual Learning were to continue "expectations need to be made that school is not optional. We have many kids that have opted out of learning [...] many of these kids are some of the same kids that were reluctant learners in the building [...] they are falling through the cracks." Another teacher, similarly reflecting on how Virtual Learning might be improved, asserted that "when we begin in the fall, we need to have a plan that allows for pushing students at the level they are at, and making them accountable for the work that they are able to do."

Summary and Conclusion

Ultimately, this report is a first step in understanding the full scope of MMSD's response to COVID-19, and the impact of Virtual Learning on our community. Our initial examination of feedback from students, families, staff, and other important stakeholders indicates a few key findings regarding Virtual Learning. First, we find evidence that MMSD staff implemented Virtual Learning in alignment with guidance provided by the district, intended to ensure that the social, emotional, and physical needs of students and families were met, instructional continuity was maintained, and that students were not harmed by the district's transition to remote learning. We also find, however, evidence that there was room for variation in how elements of Virtual Learning were implemented across schools and classrooms, leading to varying experiences on the part of students, family members, and staff. As a result, while many community members indicated that their experience with Virtual Learning was satisfactory, and that they felt supported by their schools, evidence also indicates room for improving on Virtual Learning as it continues. Finally, our analysis indicates a few promising levers for "driving" such improvement: supporting frequent and meaningful connection, strengthening MMSD guidance, and creating robust learning experiences.

MMSD has already begun to respond to the feedback described in this report, in addition to other points of data and evidence, as it iterates on Virtual Learning for fall 2020. The district's revised Instructional Continuity Plan, for example, features more robust guidance for staff related to several of the "key" drivers enumerated here. This includes more frequent synchronous learning experiences, revised policies regarding grading and attendance, and expanded guidance for staff regarding remote learning platforms and practices. In addition, the district has begun to implement its plan for continuing professional development, providing training and resources for staff as they return to Virtual Learning. These efforts will continue to be informed by feedback gathered from students, families, and staff in the coming academic year.

MMSD Research & Program Evaluation Office
Prepared by Christopher Harrison, PhD; Grady Brown, MPA;
Brianne Monahan, MPA; and Oriana Eversole, PhD

Virtual Learning Feedback Report
(September 2020)
21