

Diverse attitudes and disparate impacts

Education Minnesota survey of members on options for safe learning in fall 2020

A new survey of the members of Education Minnesota found distance learning was the most popular choice for delivering education during the fall of 2020, at least until more disease-prevention measures are put in place to protect the members of their school communities and the educators' own families. However, 46 percent of educators preferred some level of in-person instruction, although they too felt heightened levels of cleanliness, student supports and infection protections were important.

The survey also found educators of color are even more concerned about the dangers of delivering in-person education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results reinforce Education Minnesota's demand that racial equity be part of any decision about how learning will happen this fall.

The union asked its members to take an online survey from July 16-20. Nearly 24 percent, or 20,524, of the union's membership responded. The demographics of the respondents closely matched the demographics of the state's educators as a whole, with 95 percent of survey takers identifying themselves as white and 5 percent identifying as educators of color.

The preferred method of teaching in the fall of 2020 for the more than 20,000 educators who took the survey was the continuation of the distance learning that began in the spring.

Preferred style of learning	Percentage
Distance learning	49%
Hybrid classes	29%
In-person instruction	17%
Other	5%

The most common reasons given for the preference for distance learning were concerns about the physical health of the school community and their families. Among all survey takers, 8,200 said they were in a high-risk category for COVID-19. Another 9,579 are the primary caretaker for someone at high risk.

Among educators who identified themselves as people of color, the preference for distance learning was even greater than the group as a whole, an indication of the disproportionate risks of serious illness and death the virus that causes COVID-19 poses for Black, brown, Indigenous and other communities of color in Minnesota. Only 13 percent of educators of color preferred to reopen classes in the fall. Nearly 60 percent of educators of color preferred distance learning.

Race	Percentage who support distance learning
Native American/Indigenous	74%
Asian American	66%
Black/African American	63%
Latinx	61%
White	49%
Hawaiian/ Pacific islander	44%

When asked what might prevent their return to work, 37 percent of Black/African American respondents said they were in an “at risk” category while only 19 percent of white respondents said the same. Further, 34 percent of Black/African American respondents said they were the primary caretaker for an individual in the “at-risk” category, as compared to only 7 percent of white respondents. There is likely a correlation between a preference for distance learning among educators of color and a fear of contracting COVID-19 and infecting an at-risk family member.

The finding suggests policymakers should carefully consider other risks families of color face during the pandemic. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows people of color are more likely than white individuals to live in multi-generational homes, which have three or more generations under a roof. This may have added to the concerns of educators of color who prefer distance learning over in-person instruction.

One area of consensus among respondents was the need for schools to spend millions of dollars to meet the guidelines of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the recommendations of the Minnesota Department of Health. These include extra care for the physical layout, air circulation and cleaning of the building. Educators also want additional supports for the members of the school community.

How important are the following?

Safety protocol	Very important	Somewhat important	Total
Daily deep cleaning	85%	13%	98%
Additional precautions	86%	11%	97%
PPE and training, staff/students	80%	14%	94%
Mental health staff/students	78%	18%	96%
Staff and student distancing	74%	18%	92%

Altruism was the most common reason for educators to say they prefer in-person learning this fall. Of the educators who preferred in-person instruction, 66 percent listed concern for “at-risk” students as their driving factor, even if the choice puts the educators’ own health at risk. Twenty-five percent of respondents listed “need to reopen economy” as a reason to resume in-person classes.

Conclusion

No matter what we look like or where we come from, Education Minnesota believes most educators and parents want to get back to in-person education, but only if the whole school community can learn, teach and work in safety during this pandemic. Unfortunately, instead of coming together to get schools the equipment and support they need, certain politicians are pushing the risky policy of returning students to school buildings too soon, just as leaders in Texas and Florida re-opened too soon and sickened and killed hundreds of people, with the burden falling heaviest on communities of color. We can do better in Minnesota, but only if we can come together and find the resources and make the policies — based on the latest data and best science — to reopen school buildings when in-person learning is safe and sustainable for everyone, from everywhere, with no exceptions



**THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS**

41 Sherburne Ave., St. Paul, MN 55103
651-227-9541 800-652-9073 Fax 651-292-4802
www.educationminnesota.org

*Education Minnesota is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers,
the National Education Association and AFL-CIO.*

7/2020

