

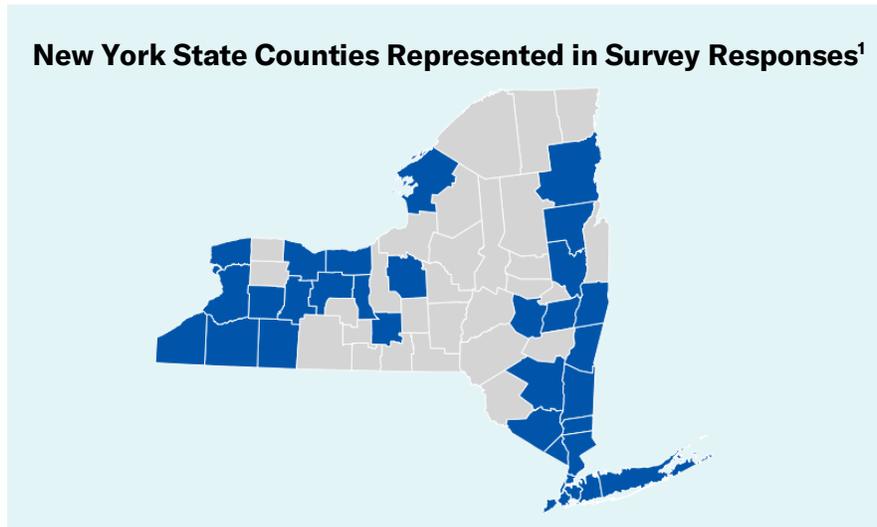
Education and School Services in New York During COVID-19

On March 15 Mayor de Blasio [announced](#) the shutdown of New York City schools, effective Monday March 16. On March 16, Governor Cuomo [announced](#) the shutdown of schools statewide, effective Wednesday March 18. Students, teachers, and families were immediately swept into one of the most significant and challenging experiments in education in generations. City, state, and district administrators and educators have made tremendous efforts to support the transition, but many families and school employees report that remote learning has been immensely difficult. Families lack adequate internet access, laptops or tablets for each child, predictable access to teachers, and information about grading and accountability. Students with disabilities and those who are learning English have struggled to get the support services they need.

This resource contains topline results from an anonymous [survey](#) created by the New York Civil Liberties Union (ACLU of New York) to gather information on how schools and districts across New York State are handling education and providing services during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY & RESPONDENTS

The web-based survey includes 30 multiple choice and open-ended questions about education and school services, as well as geographic and respondent information. The survey was made publicly available in English and Spanish on April 1st, and in its first month has garnered more than 500 responses. Respondents provided information on schools of all levels from more than 100 school districts in 35 counties, which account for 90% of New York State's population. Half of the survey respondents self-identified as a family member or guardian of a student, 30% self-identified as a student, and 20% self-identified as a teacher or other school district employee, including counselors and principals.

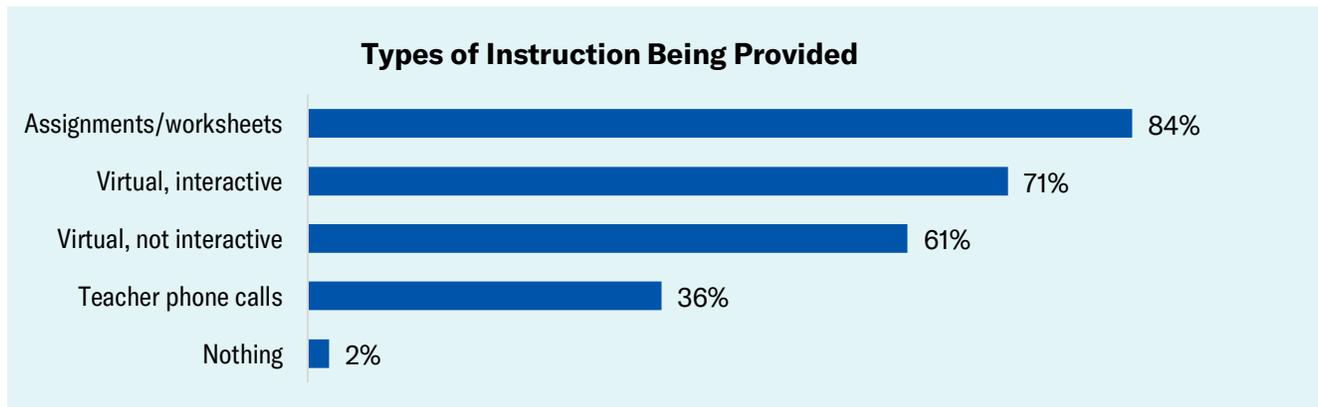


¹ The NYCLU received at least one survey response from the following counties: Albany; Allegany; Bronx; Cattaraugus; Chautauqua; Columbia; Dutchess; Erie; Essex; Jefferson; Kings; Livingston; Monroe; Nassau; New York; Niagara; Onondaga; Ontario; Orange; Orleans; Putnam; Queens; Rensselaer; Richmond; Rockland; Saratoga; Schoharie; Seneca; Suffolk; Tompkins; Ulster; Warren; Wayne; Westchester; Wyoming.

KEY FINDINGS

How are Students Learning While Schools are Closed?

While the majority of survey respondents indicated that at least some remote instruction was being provided, the quality and feasibility of this instruction was of great concern to everyone involved. Although teachers are doing the best they can, the survey revealed that the system is simply not equipped for successful remote learning. Common themes among responses included that plenty of work was being assigned, but very little teaching was taking place, leaving students and parents to work out problems alone. Many students reported that they were having to teach themselves, and some were given lessons that referenced textbooks they left at school. Additionally, parents complained that their children did not have adequate face-to-face time with their teachers, and that video calls were largely “check-ins” or social spaces, rather than lessons.



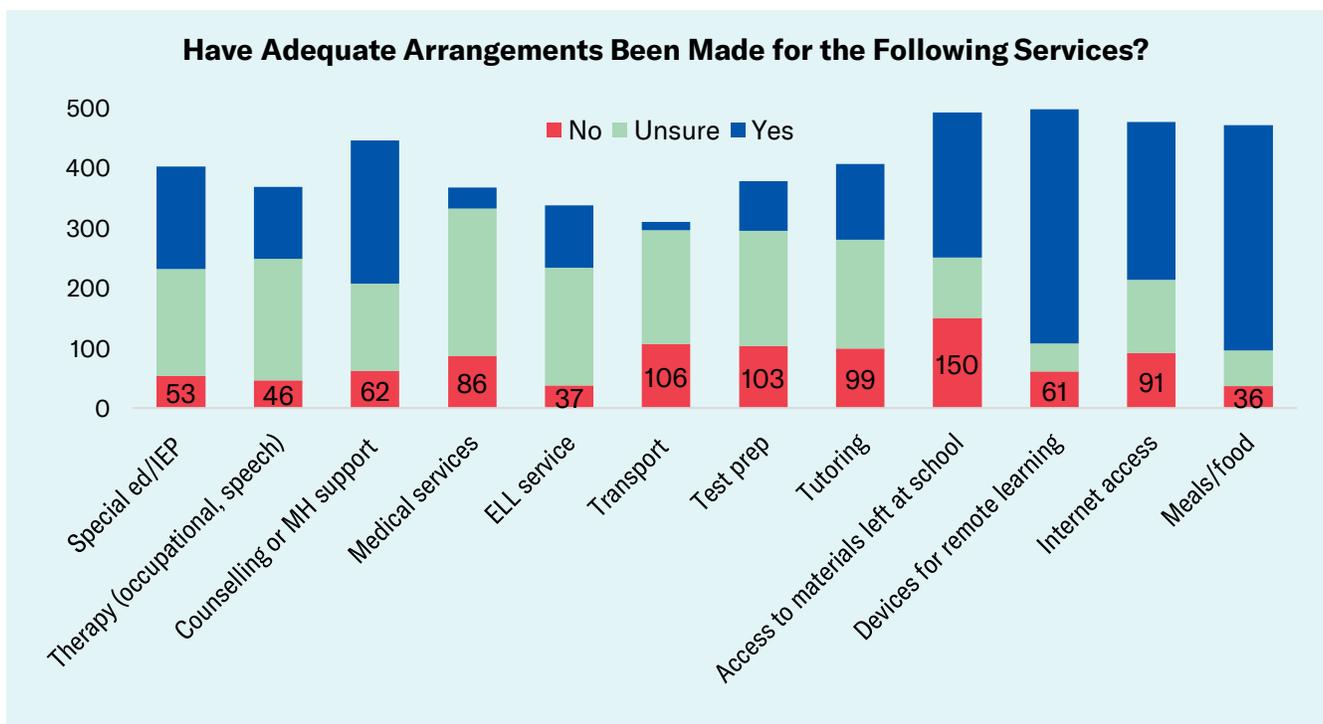
- While the majority of schools are now offering some type of remote instruction, many students do not have adequate access to the tools and technology required for virtual learning. Twelve percent of survey respondents reported that schools had not made adequate arrangements to provide remote learning devices like laptops or tablets, and 18% reported inadequate internet access. Many respondents reported not owning enough devices to provide each child in their household equal access to their lessons, forcing some parents to prioritize one child over another based on grade level or upcoming exams. (NOTE: Our survey was available primarily online, but some respondents without internet access were able to participate by answering questions over the phone.)
- Thirty percent of survey respondents indicated that no interactive learning was taking place. Sixty respondents reported receiving only written assignments or calls from teachers, and 10 respondents reported receiving no instruction at all. Of those who do have interactive learning, many reported that this was only for a few hours each week.
- While schools across the state are using dozens of different web platforms to teach remotely, by far the two most commonly reported were Google tools such as Google Classroom and Google Meet (73% of respondents), and Zoom (47% of respondents), although many reported a move away from Zoom in recent weeks due to privacy concerns. Other platforms being used include Microsoft Teams, Clever, and Blackboard. Families cited the need to create accounts on multiple platforms as a barrier to access.

- While 95% of respondents reported receiving some portion of educational material online or via email, 28% also reported receiving material via mail or required pickup. Of the 72 respondents who reported in-person pickup of materials, the most common frequencies of pickups were either one-time or weekly, suggesting that some schools are supplementing paper work with online work. Students and parents reported additional complications with in-person pickups, including lack of transportation, and requirements that both the student and parent be present, which for many students is not possible.

The survey also revealed that districts need to move more quickly to create fair grading policies and communicate them to families. Sixty percent of survey respondents reported that attendance was being tracked and that work completed while remote would be graded and count towards credits. The remainder of respondents either said this was not the case (10%), or were unsure (30%). Nearly half of respondents were concerned about how remote learning would impact transcripts and applications to the next level of schooling.

How are Schools Providing Education-Related Services?

Academic and support services varied drastically from school to school and between regions. While many respondents reported that they did have adequate access to educational services, we are alarmed by the number of respondents who reported inadequate access, or were unsure about how to access these essential services.

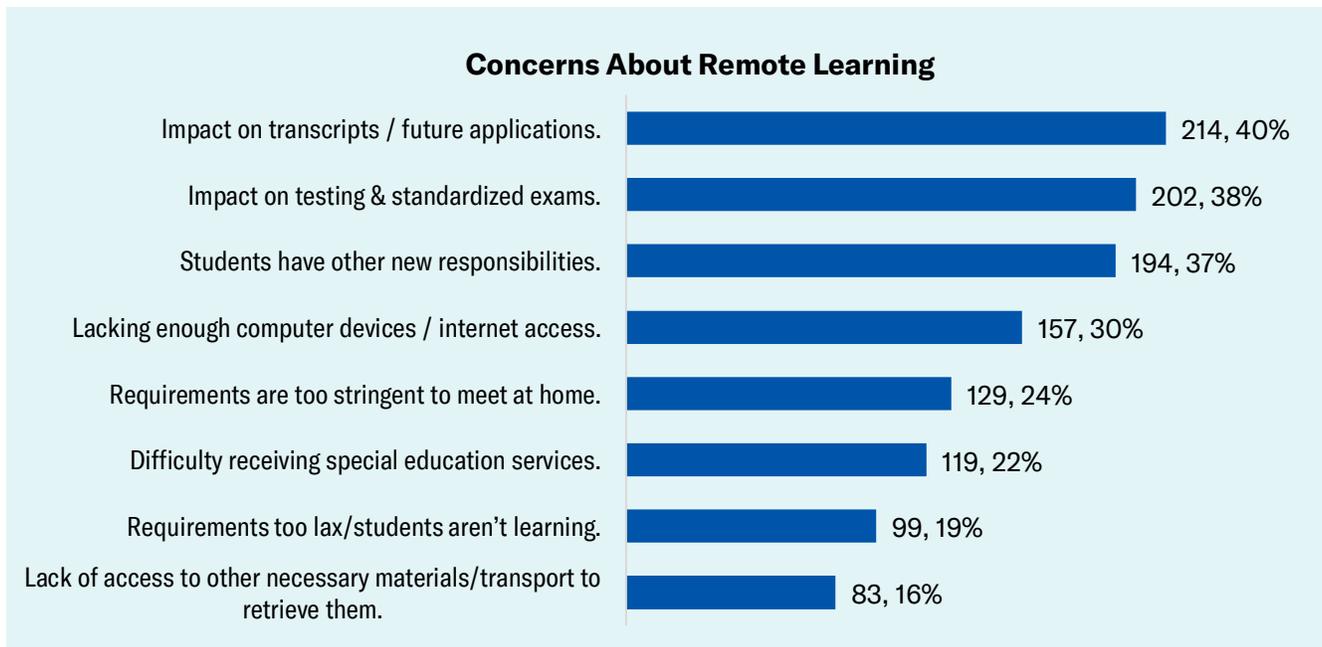


- While not all students require all services, 10% of respondents indicated that special education, occupational or speech therapy, and mental health (MH) services were no longer available. And 20% of respondents indicated that they could not access extra help like test prep or tutoring.

- Even where schools are doing their best to maintain special education services, 22% of respondents indicated that students requiring special education were not having their needs met. One particular area where many schools are falling short is in identifying and supporting students with special needs who had previously not required an individualized education plan (IEP) in an in-person classroom setting.
- The majority of respondents were unsure if adequate arrangements had been made for students who require English Language Learner services (ELL), and 37 people indicated that these services were not accessible. Some parents also reported not receiving communication from schools in a language they understood.

Other Reported Concerns

Survey respondents’ primary concerns were that schools and districts were not providing enough teaching and support, and that teachers were assigning too much work and holding students and parents to standards they felt were impossible to meet. More than one-third of respondents indicated that new responsibilities, such as taking care of younger siblings, are impacting students’ abilities to participate in remote learning, and one-quarter of respondents felt that the new remote learning requirements were simply not attainable from home.



A central theme of the open-ended responses from parents were feelings of being overwhelmed and ill-equipped to use the various online learning platforms. Many were struggling with either keeping up with a constant flow of emails from some teachers, “digital badgering” as one parent put it, or a complete lack of communication by other teachers, leaving assignments and expectations unclear.

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