SPS Remote Learning
A Report on the Results of the Remote Learning Survey by Shrewsbury Families

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Overview

Peter Senge is a Senior Lecturer at the Sloan School of Management at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), co-founder of the Academy for Systems Change, and a local scholar of note. In his role as consultant, Senge stresses that collaboration matters more than competence, especially during times of rapid change. Further, he describes a learning organization as"a group of people who are continually enhancing their capabilities to create in the face of changing needs and conditions." His work has never been more relevant. Indeed, his words describe well the conditions under which Shrewsbury educators are striving right now to craft and deliver remote learning plans.

In any organization, the key to continuous improvement is soliciting feedback from the people served by the system. This report is the first of two summary documents designed to assess and collect input from key stakeholder groups. The focus for this communication is the data collected from Shrewsbury families, namely the people best able to describe the impact of school closure on our students. Please refer to the reports shared with you earlier for specific details by school.

Results from this recent survey provide the district with timely information. In some ways the data confirms our approach to remote learning. The data also highlight areas where implementation was at odds with intention. Importantly, we'll need to reflect together with our educators before making significant adjustments to our plans. It should be noted that most of our educators have already adjusted their practice to serve students better. Any action we take should follow a thoughtful and collaborative

discussion with educators, stakeholders best able to assess the impact of remote learning on families.

Survey Structure

In an email on April 30th, Dr. Sawyer sent a message to all members of the parent community in the hope of encouraging wide participation. At all grades, the survey used followed a similar structure. Primarily respondents selected from a continuum of descriptors to answer ten questions, with the option to share insights, questions and concerns in Comment boxes. In this way, the survey elicited both quantitative and qualitative data. However, survey questions differed by grade span and level. For example, the survey designed for families with students in Grades Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 4 asked questions about technology platforms. This is because it's helpful to know which platforms families are finding most useful to connect home and school for our youngest learners. As you know, in grades 5-12, technology platforms were already in use at the time of closure. However, questions on the survey designed for parents with older learners were helpful in evaluating the effectiveness of these tools when deployed remotely. For this reason an analysis of the survey results is best done by level.

Participation Rates

Online survey response rates vary in response to a number of considerations. In general, survey response rates in the 5% to 30% range are expected, with responses for school surveys being higher typically. In both the private and public sector, response rates are driven by high levels of motivation to participate and/or strong feelings in general.

Here are the response rates for the Parent Survey on Remote Learning in Shrewsbury:

School	Total Enrollment	Number of Respondents*	Response Rate
Parker Road	246	88	36%
Beal Early Childhood Center	313	89	28%
Coolidge Elementary	413	162	39%
Floral Street Elementary	719	288	40%
Paton Elementary	371	177	48%
Spring Street Elementary	350	156	45%

School	Total Enrollment	Number of Respondents*	Response Rate
Sherwood Middle	1,007	366	36%
Oak Middle	995	360	36%
Shrewsbury High School	1,907	566	30%

*Includes responses for multiple children in the same family

In reviewing the survey results, it's important to keep in mind that families of essential personnel, families suffering the effects of COVID-19 and/or families that are struggling in general during this time are least likely to have their thoughts and opinions represented in the findings. On the other hand, across the board there is ample data to consider as we prepare for the last six weeks of remote learning. This document is organized so that readers can look for general themes.

Each section will include:
- Key findings - both successes and opportunities,
- Common themes, and
- Recommended areas for further study

Parent Survey Findings from Preschool to Grade 4

Successes
One of the strengths of Shrewsbury's Remote Learning Plan at the Elementary level has to do with communication. On average, 86% of families described communication from the school as "just right." This is significant given the number of anecdotes district leaders heard about families feeling overwhelmed at the onset of the closure. The data also suggests that our educators are also communicating well with families.

Although remote learning is particularly hard for young children, most families felt that submitting assignments and receiving feedback from teachers is going well. On average, 82% of families surveyed described the process of submitting and receiving student work in positive terms. Related comments suggest that this is due to several factors, including:
- The quality of remote lessons

- A regularly scheduled release of lesson plans that enables families to organize ahead for the coming week,
- Consistent content across grade spans, and
- Clarity of expectations within the remote learning plans themselves.

Elementary principals, curriculum coordinators and most importantly, our content teams, should be justifiably proud of how well their collaboration is serving the district. Moreover, the plans created by these cross-school teams highlight a range of teaching content and delivery. In effect, students at this level have unique opportunities to learn from many different teachers within the current structure.

Opportunities
Despite the aforementioned positives, on average only slightly more than half of parents described remote learning plans as working 'well' or 'very well' for their child(ren). A closer look at data from other questions, together with individual comments, suggests that one reason remote learning isn't going well is because students and families are missing in-person interactions, and that is to be expected. However, survey results also suggest we should attend to time parameters. Both the overall amount of time children spend on remote learning lessons and the amount of "live" interactions with the teacher are factors that resonate with the majority of respondents.

Specifically, on average only 53% of families surveyed chose 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' when asked whether remote learning plans featured a sufficient amount of interaction on a weekly basis. This finding seems linked to the results depicting how connected students feel to their classroom at this time. Sadly, despite teachers' best efforts to mitigate the distance, on average only 52% of parents selected 'Agree' and ' Strongly Agree' when asked whether their child felt connected. District leaders and teachers alike feel that this data warrants a closer look at the building level.
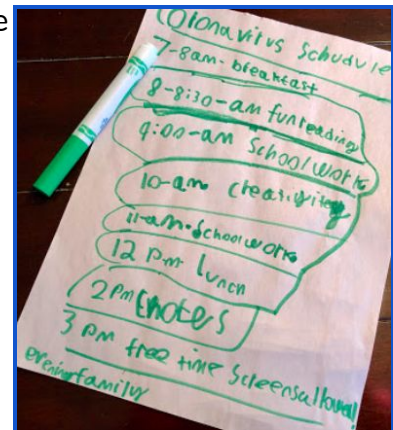
Common Themes
Surveys are like snapshots: they capture a moment in time. With teachers empowered to make small changes, parent feedback should be seen on a continuum. Although the results indicate consistency, it's also clear that the individual experiences students and families are having vary significantly.

Comments from parents raised concerns about the amount of time children are spending on their lessons, the amount of assistance children require to complete assignments, and the individual difficulties experienced by Shrewsbury families.

District leaders have identified these key findings for consideration:

- As mentioned previously, most parents surveyed at the Elementary level agree that remote learning plans feature the right amount of teacher interaction weekly. Between 10-15% of parents want 1-2 more interactive experiences a week, although respondents are split on whether the interaction should be "live" or taped.
- Families value teacher feedback, and one theme that emerged from the Comments section is that parents greatly value any opportunities their children have had to experience small group and/or individualized instruction.
- According to their parents, most children in Grades 1-4 are spending about two hours each day on remote learning, with smaller amounts of time reported for younger children. Comments reveal that the amount of time children need to complete their work varies however, and some parents are struggling to engage and/or motivate their child in a remote learning environment. Suggestions for the district included sharing resources with families on managing behavior at home as well as an appeal to include more project based lessons in future remote learning plans.

Parent Survey Findings from Grades 5-12

Successes
A review of the data from parents in higher grade spans reveals that like their Elementary neighbors, parents of older children are grateful for, and understanding of, the time educators invest in crafting remote learning plans. On average, 83% of parents

of children in Grades 5-12 stated that they were aware of and able to access their child's learning plans. Not surprisingly, ratings for access increase by level, with 89% of parents of Shrewsbury High School students affirming that their children can easily access their schedules and assignments.

Most parents also acknowledged the importance of teacher communication in sharing lessons. At the middle level, for example, the majority of families relied on a combination of teacher emails and checking in with the child on their ipad to see weekly assignments. Most importantly, on average, 83% of families surveyed selected 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' when asked if their child was easily able to access their remote lesson plans.


This finding suggests that older children are well able to navigate Schoology and/or the process of receiving and submitting work online. Indeed, the percentage rate for access increases from the middle to the high school level.

This graphic was created by Chinese teacher ChinHuei Yeh. This replica allows her students to practice speaking Mandarin online in a familiar setting.

Another positive revealed by the data has to do with student interactions with educators. Most respondents agreed that their child(ren)'s teachers are available to answer questions. This finding seems related to data on another question having to do with how regularly parents report their children are handing in assignments. On average, 82% of parents surveyed report that their child regularly completes and submits remote learning assignments.

Opportunities
Although survey results suggest that getting and submitting the work is not an issue, sometimes understanding the task is a challenge. Fewer respondents agreed that their children understood the expectations for remote learning assignments than were able to access their lessons, for example. On average 77% of parents surveyed at the middle level selected 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' when asked whether students understood the expectations for their assignments.
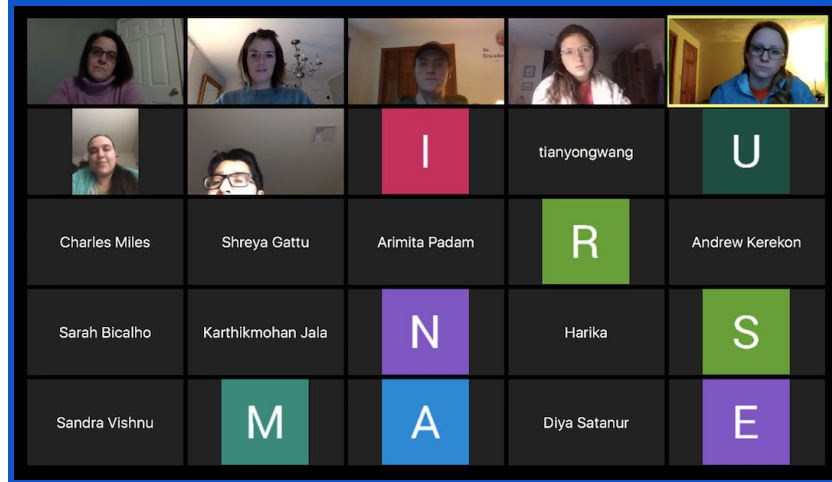
Similarly, parents questioned the effectiveness of the tools currently being used to facilitate "live" connections between students and teachers. In contrast to the high averages shared earlier, 66% of parents at the middle level found their teacher's platform to be effective for live interactions. Given the wide availability of Schoology in Grades 5 and up, this finding suggests that parents are seeking technology tools that support "live" interactions with educators. At the same time, in the Comments section, some families expressed frustration about having to learn new technology skills to support their children from home.

As we consider various options, it's affirming to see such a positive response to Zoom across levels, especially because this platform was new to most users at the onset of the pandemic. Our experience so far suggests that, with time and training, the platforms that we have put in place will support the needs of students and teachers. Going forward, evaluating the technology tools we are using and checking in with parents will be important.

Another surprising finding has to do with respondents' answers to the question about the amount of time in the weekly schedule for interactive "live" opportunities for child(ren) to connect with their teacher(s).

Answers on this survey item depict a continuum of hopes, with about 30% of parents feeling that the current weekly schedule is not enough, about 20% feeling it's between not enough and just right, and about 50% feeling that it is 'just right.' A similar split is found when analyzing parent opinions about their child's workload. As noted in the Common Themes section

below, about 30% of parents at the middle and high school level are seeking more assignments, and about 20% are seeking tasks with an increased level of difficulty. It is also true that most parents in each grade span feel that the load is appropriate for their child. Not surprisingly, reports of the amount of stress students are experiencing also varies within and across grades spans.

As part of the survey families of high school students were asked to rate how their child(ren) found the remote learning workload to be:

SHS	*Not Stressful At All*				*Very Stressful*
Gr 9	34%	23%	21%	13%	10%
Gr 10	36%	20%	24%	11%	8%
Gr 11	23%	18%	37%	16%	7%
Gr 12	27%	15%	31%	15%	12%
Overall	30%	19%	28%	14%	9%

Of concern is that parents are reporting high rates of stress for a significant portion of students at every grade level at the high school.

Common Themes
Parents of children in more than one grade span are in a unique position to offer feedback. Their comments highlight both "bright spots" of effective practice and areas of inconsistency across teams and/or levels. Across the board responses indicate a clear preference for streamlined, scheduled communication. In addition, numerous comments reflected a desire for adjustments to the timing of communications and the schedule for sending learning plans, and for staggering due dates for assigned work. Finally, parents with children at multiple levels used the Comments section to compare the components of Shrewsbury's remote learning plan, noting different approaches to content delivery by grade span and/or team.

Several other common themes at the upper level are notable:

- As noted, nearly 30% of parents would like their child to experience more time online with educators. Survey comments suggest that opinions vary on what this

interaction should look like, with some parents finding posts helpful and others preferring remote meetings online.

- More than 60% of parents of children in Grades 5-12 agree that the difficulty of assignments is "just right." However, it's worth noting that approximately 30% of families are seeking more remote schoolwork for their children, and approximately 20% feel that their child's work is "too easy."
- Parents are also split regarding teacher feedback and/or support. Comments suggest that some parents are seeking more support, and that an equal number of families are feeling overwhelmed by the expectations that are already in place, especially for children with special needs.
- In the Comments section, parents reported that keeping children engaged and motivated with remote learning plans can be a challenge at the upper levels, too. Our children are missing all of the aspects of a school experience, including social interactions with classmates, sports and activities.

Summary

Overall, results for the survey suggest that our educators are doing a good job of remote teaching. Of course, the data depicts critical feedback as well. Some suggestions are spot on, and can even be seen to support the small changes educators have made in an effort to connect with more students and families. It should also be said that some comments advocate for action steps that are just not feasible or that convey unrealistic expectations.

Curiously, as we seek to use technology to empower learning from a distance, some parent statements reflect an outdated vision of teaching. Educators rarely lecture all day when school is in session, for example. For that reason merely replicating lectures online doesn't square with what we know to be engaging learning. Finally, some statements strongly suggest that teachers should do more, and/or in rare cases, that not all educators consistently follow the established district guidelines. Many more comments express gratitude for educators that exceed expectations, including teachers that make the effort to contact students individually, specialists working to make remote

Tweet

SHS_Unified @SHS_Unified · 19h
Matt has been missing his pal, Finn while he's been home. He can't wait to see Finn when we get back to school. @ShrewsEnglish @SHSColonials #shrewsburylearns #apartbutunited #Finneganthedoodle 🐶

learning more accessible and service learning providers that structure meetings flexibly as needed.

A staff survey on remote learning is currently underway. Although results are still coming in, it's clear that our educators are seeking a more effective partnership with students and families, too. For example, although the vast majority of teachers feel supported, significant numbers of our educators are looking for increased student participation in the "live" interactions they schedule. Further, they echo parent comments about children that are seemingly unmotivated or unable to complete assigned work. Finally, across stakeholder groups it should be noted that some comments speak to feelings about the pandemic itself rather than the district's response to it. For example, Parker Road families state a clear preference for returning to school. Seniors and subject area teachers alike pine for the traditional celebrations May typically brings. Although we will look thoughtfully at survey results for guidance, we must rely on direction elsewhere for the things that are not in our control to change, much as we would like to address them.

Some questions worthy of further exploration include:

- How can we better support students with a range of learning needs?
- What is the right balance between synchronous ("live") learning experiences and independent asynchronous learning experiences, and what is the most effective mix for promoting learning?
- What tools best support working parents as they strive to support their children with remote learning, and how can we help children develop greater independence and focus?
- What amount of 'screen time' is appropriate for our youngest students and which alternatives will engage our students well?
- What models of professional development best support teachers in utilizing technology to further learning?
- How can we better support families with multiple children?

I look forward to discussing these findings in greater detail and hearing your thoughts on these questions in the upcoming presentation.
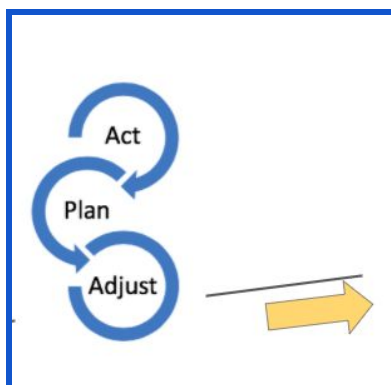
In closing, it's fitting to acknowledge that the crisis has presented opportunities as well as challenges. W. Edwards Deming, American engineer and statistician, developed a continuous quality improvement model

consisting of a sequence of four key stages: Plan, Do, Study, and Act. As we figure out what translates best in this new remote environment, every educator in the nation is experiencing what feels like several cycles. Much like other districts across the commonwealth, we will emerge from this stronger for having collaborated so well within and outside our school communities. No doubt there are some aspects of remote learning that we have not gotten right- yet. For example, we will have to address how to better engage with families whose first language is not English, and provide better access to learning supports for those in need. We are a learning organization, and we are poised to do that work well.

Our mission statement reads, *The Shrewsbury Public Schools, in partnership with the community, will provide students with the skills and knowledge for the 21st century, an appreciation of our democratic tradition, and the desire to continue to learn throughout life.* Our community is being tested in myriad ways by the pandemic. Remote learning is just one part of a larger story. We are fortunate to have sufficient time and talent to address any challenges we may encounter. We must also thoughtfully consider feedback from all parts of the organization in order to gain a complete perspective of how well the partnership is working, and how much more the system can bear in these last weeks of school.

A school is a complex system in the best of times. A school system under stress looks and acts differently, and it's important to acknowledge that. While we could consider any number of recommendations suggested on the survey, we would be wise to consider our core values as we contemplate decisions. As we anticipate the end of this extraordinary year and focus on the next, time invested in thoughtful engagement with all stakeholders is time well spent.