



**Teacher2Teacher** is a community of **1.7 million educators** across digital channels. It is dedicated to building connections between educators to provide support and share best practices.

**Now:** Its orientation is being re-balanced to provide emotional support to teachers experiencing disruption and resources to help with virtual and distance teaching.



**#PrincipalProject** is a community of **45,000 school leaders**, including principals and assistant principals. It is focused within 6-12 and primarily made up of school leaders in Title 1 schools. It prioritizes building relationships with school leaders, providing the resources and tools principals need most, and the dissemination of evidence-based practices.

**Now:** As school leaders find themselves responsible for guiding schools and communities through virtual transformations, suspensions and closures, #PrincipalProject is focusing on elevating instructional leadership resources for principals while supporting emotional and community needs.

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# Assessments Insights Study



Insights and Perspectives from  
School Leaders and Teachers

**April 30, 2021**

# Purpose of Assessment Insights Study

This study was intended to gain understanding where various constituencies are in terms of their thinking around assessments - their value, and generally how constituencies think about measuring success for schools, teachers, and students. The results of this study are intended to aid organizations in the education sector in making ever more impactful assessment investments.

We sought to learn the following through this study:

- How do caregivers, teachers, and principals believe success is currently defined within the school system?
- How do caregivers, teachers, principals define success for students?
- What types of learning environments are needed to allow students to thrive?

# Purpose of Assessment Insights Study

This study was intended to provide space for teachers and school leaders to connect and process their feelings around school and district reopening plans in the coming year, and in doing so, to ensure organizations in the education sector were readily aware of sentiments in the field to better identify potential supports and resources.

We sought to learn the following through this study:

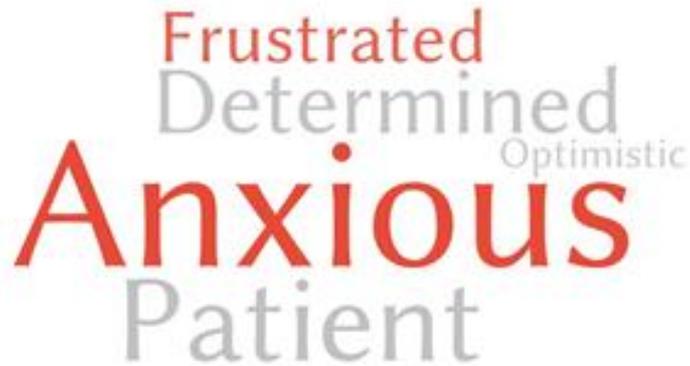
- How do teachers and school leaders feel about their school and district plans for returning to school?
  - What are the most pressing concerns about returning to school?
  - What are potential points of excitement about returning to school?
- How are schools and districts preparing teachers, staff, families for returning to school?

# Key Insights

- Overall, teachers felt **anxious, frustrated, determined, and optimistic**.
- Overall, school leaders felt **anxious, tired, overwhelmed, uncertain, excited, and optimistic**.
- Teachers and school leaders expressed greatest **concerns about health and safety, widening the equity gap, and the social-emotional needs** of students.
- School leaders and teachers most commonly reported **excitement about reconnecting with students, colleagues, and families** in the coming school year.
- Teachers and school leaders **expressed mixed levels of preparedness** for instruction.

# How do teachers and school leaders feel about school and district plans for returning to school?

Teacher sentiments



A word cloud representing teacher sentiments. The most prominent word is 'Anxious' in large red font. Other words include 'Frustrated' (red), 'Determined' (grey), 'Patient' (grey), and 'Optimistic' (grey).

Frustrated  
Determined  
Anxious  
Patient  
Optimistic

School leader sentiments



A word cloud representing school leader sentiments. The most prominent word is 'Anxious' in large teal font. Other words include 'Excited' (yellow-green), 'Unknowing' (teal), 'Tired' (teal), 'Overwhelmed' (teal), 'Better' (yellow-green), 'Perplexed' (teal), and 'Optimistic' (yellow-green).

Excited  
Unknowing  
Anxious  
Overwhelmed  
Tired  
Better  
Perplexed  
Optimistic

**Teachers and school leaders expressed greatest concerns about health and safety, widening the equity gap, and the social-emotional needs of students.**

# Teachers and school leaders expressed feelings of uncertainty, skepticism, worry, fear, and distrust around the **personal health and safety** of educators, their families, and students.

## Key drivers of health and safety concerns:

- Lack of clear plans and protocols to address health and safety
- Mistrust of plans developed by school or district.
- Difficulty in complying with and monitoring safety plans.
- Overcrowding in schools, poor infrastructure.
- Inequitable access to healthcare.

## Examples of how schools/districts have eased concerns:

- *Input, voice, and communication*: school or district provided ample opportunity to contribute to or provide feedback on plans.
- *Deliberate teacher preparation*: delayed starts offered them more time to participate in critical training for both instruction and public health protocols. At least 18 teachers indicated that their schools or districts provided professional development opportunities for instruction in a virtual environment

“I am most worried for my staff, especially those with underlying health conditions as well as my students. I just can't imagine losing anyone to this virus and I am worried that even with all the layers of protection that we have in place that it simply won't be enough and our community could suffer a great loss.” - School leader

“My biggest concern is that I won't be able to visit my elderly, sick mother once school starts because I will be put into a risky environment.” - Teacher

# Teachers and school leaders discussed fears of a **widening equity gap** in the fall, pointing to disparities in access to technology, availability of parental support, and added home responsibilities

“I worry about the same equity issues (access to technology, students who aren't able to get help from working parents, students who have to provide childcare, etc.) that we saw in the spring.” - Teacher

“Schools provide so much more beyond academics (socialization, mental health supports, food security, athletics and activities). Public school helps level the playing field, and I worry about our most struggling students.” - School leader

## Key drivers of concerns about equity:

- Students experiencing poverty often have additional **home requirements** that keep them from prioritizing school, especially when offered remotely
- **Internet connectivity and access to technology**
- Growing interest among higher-income families to opt into virtual academies, homeschooling, or learning pods

Teachers and school leaders shared concerns about students' **social-emotional needs**, noting that experiences of trauma will be widespread in the coming year and relationship building could become strained in virtual environments.

**Key drivers of student social-emotional concerns:**

- Challenges inherent in a virtual learning environment, including a lack of motivation to attend, to participate, and to connect with others
- In-person connection could suffer due to the barriers, constraints, and stress of safety regulations
- School serves as an essential source of supportive relationships and social-emotional development
- Some youth lack social-emotional support at home and rely on school and peers as family.

**Examples of how schools and districts have addressed SEL concerns:**

- Building intentional time for connection and SEL development
- Providing fun and interactive ways for students to reflect and connect
- Conducting social-emotional outreach to students
- Dedicated SEL needs assessments with families

“What gives me anxiety is that we will be “trauma teaching”...kids and adults alike are in fight, flight or freeze mode and we need to have patience, grace, humility, and kindness for every person that is part of school.” - Teacher

“When covid first hit, we had the benefit of already having relationships with students...we won't have that now it's going to be difficult especially without established relationships.” - School leader

## Additional concerns noted by teachers and school leaders

- School leaders were **concerned that some teachers lack the capacity or ability to make the shifts required** to provide successful online and in-person learning.
- Concerns that **teachers may be stretched too thin given competing demands.** Both teachers and school leaders highlighted their concerns about the **quantity of healthy and available teachers and substitutes.**

"I am concerned also that our district is trying to launch a virtual academy during this time, which could create an even greater divide among our children and burden on our teacher responsibilities." - School leader

"When teachers become sick and are unable to write sub plans (and there aren't any subs willing to come in) it will be impossible to reach the children with good instruction." - Teacher

**Educators were most excited about reconnecting with students, fellow teachers, and families; supporting social-emotional needs; embedding new digital learning strategies; and reimagining key aspects of the education system.**

# School leaders and teachers most commonly reported **excitement about reconnecting** with students, colleagues, and families in the coming year.

## Key drivers of this excitement:

- Connection with the school community truly fuels them
- Simply returning to the 'classroom' for regular connection and structure.

"I desperately want to see my students, as they are the batteries to my energizer bunny. Without them, I do not have the stamina to go through the situation we did in the spring." - Teacher

"I am most excited to see my students and my team of teachers. I can picture so many faces that I know need the structure of school and all that our building has to offer that online learning simply cannot offer." - School leader

# School leaders and teachers were enthusiastic about the opportunity to provide social-emotional support to student.

## Key drivers of this excitement:

- Ability to provide a safe and supportive space that students may have lacked during months of COVID
- Increased investment and prioritization of social emotional learning within their schedule and structure

"I am also excited that there is a district-wide expectation that students will have 30 minutes of SEL and relationship building every day." - School leader

"I am excited to see my students and staff and work with our staff to help our students with their SEL that they have been missing out on and providing our students with a safe place to be in case they have and or are experiencing trauma." - School leader

# Educators were increasingly excited about the growing access to technology and the **opportunity to apply new digital learning strategies.**

## Key drivers of this excitement:

- Some realized that this unprecedented time offers an opportunity to remove misconceptions of digital and online learning and to strengthen digital literacy for students and educators.
- Ability to shift to a more student-led approach in the virtual space.
- Stronger investment in technology in some schools/districts.
- Better and more streamlined online platforms as compared to the Spring

“I am excited about the digitalizing of our curriculum for future usage. I am excited to have our students & teachers delve more into the digital world, even though it is forced. Utilizing digital tools in an effective manner has been one of our areas of improvement and I am excited to explore this with them.” -School Leader

“I am most excited about the opportunity to experiment and implement various digital platforms, such as Peardeck and Padlet, with my students. I am also excited about experimenting with audio and video recordings as a way to deliver content and assess students.” -Teacher

# School leaders and teachers saw this time of change as an exciting opportunity to **reinvent the educational experience.**

## Key drivers of this excitement:

- Opportune time to develop more culturally responsive materials and texts.
- Ability to make school more accessible, especially for at-risk students, through asynchronous tools and more flexible schedules.
- Opportunity to strengthen partnership with parents and families for greater impact.
- Teachers moving outside of their comfort zone to update instructional delivery.
- Focus on student-led learning through greater autonomy.

“I am excited that we are reinventing school. Our traditional model has been in need of review and overhaul for a very long time.” -School Leader

“I'm most excited about the focus to prepare teachers for personalized learning, universal design of learning, and blended learning. All of these are excellent pedagogy either F2F (face to face) or remote, and I believe they will move teacher practice in a positive way.” -Instructional Coach

**School leaders and teachers expressed mixed levels of preparedness for the coming year due to a range of concerns.**

# Teachers and leaders expressed **mixed levels of preparedness for instruction.**

## Key drivers of feeling ill-prepared for instruction

- Poor or nonexistent training to drive instruction and student support
- Absence of clear instructional plan and planning time
- Need to plan for myriad scenarios due to constantly changing decisions from local, regional, state leaders

## Key drivers of feeling well prepared for instruction

- Collaborative efforts to develop guidelines and lesson plans for multiple scenarios, including virtual and hybrid models
- School/district investment in teacher professional development

## Examples of how schools and districts have prepared educators for instruction:

- Delayed start dates to allow for additional planning time
- Investments in technology and software for teachers and families
- Increased amount of time for training to allow for focus on online and in-person training
- In-service training virtually to model what it will look like virtually

“With the opening of school being within 21 days, there are no communicated plans to prepare/equip teachers and staff with tools and skills needed to ensure that high quality teaching and learning happens when they are back in front of students.” - Teacher

“Teacher task forces are being formed to map out guidelines and ideas for teaching totally virtually and teaching in the hybrid model. Plus, various professional learning opportunities already are being offered so that we improve our Google Classroom skills and learn even more ways to use technology effectively and efficiently.” -Teacher

# Teachers and leaders felt mostly **unprepared to manage health and safety requirements.**

“I am extremely concerned because my school district has given us minimal information. All summer. It is very insulting that we can't be trusted with minimal information.” -Teacher

“Even prior to all of this, there was a lack of soap in the bathrooms. How are you going to ensure kids wash their hands? And then the budget cuts, coupled with new things to implement, does not add up.” - Teacher

## **Key drivers of feeling unprepared for health and safety requirement**

- Absence of clear guidance on implementation
- Unclear roles and responsibilities for sanitization and cleaning protocols
- Insufficient planning time
- Planning removed from perspective of school leaders, teachers, and families
- Mistrust of structural and political influences
- Concerns about having insufficient personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect themselves and adhere to health and safety protocols.
- Simply not having the experience in implementing new protocols

## **Examples of how schools and districts have prepared for health and safety requirements:**

- Detailed protocols and training on safety protocols, including clearly defined roles and responsibilities
- Adequate safety materials distributed to teachers (hand sanitizer, masks, face shields)
- Classroom mockups to prepare teachers for proper spacing



# Assessments Insights Study



Insights and Perspectives from  
School Leaders and Teachers

**April 30, 2021**

# ASSESSMENT INSIGHTS REPORT SUMMARY: Insights and perspectives from teachers, principals, and caregivers

This study was intended to understanding where various constituencies are in terms of their thinking around assessments, their value, and generally how constituencies think about measuring success for schools, teachers, and students. This report summarizes teacher, principal, and caregiver sentiments about measures of success for both students and schools, with a particular focus on standardized assessments. It illustrates the divergence between conventional definitions of success for students and the more holistic representations of success that practitioners have conceptualized.

Findings are a result of written thoughts and facilitated group discussions with teachers, principals, and caregivers which were intended to provide them a space to connect and reflect.

## **We sought to learn the following through this study:**

- How do caregivers, teachers, and principals believe success is currently defined within the school system?
- How do caregivers, teachers, principals define success for students?
- What types of learning environments are needed to allow students to thrive?

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This study was conducted via virtual educator panels, as part of the Teacher2Teacher and #PrincipalProject communities.

# SCHOOL SUCCESS: Current state

**Teachers and principals had major concerns with the current approach to assessing success.**

## **Success is defined at the district level and above**

- Teachers and principals believe that success is defined in a top-down manner
- Standardized tests and other traditional performance metrics (e.g., on-time graduation rates, college acceptance rates, attendance records, AP/honors class participation, or low failure rates) are regarded as gold standards

## **Success is focused on performance, not growth**

- Measures of success must be individualized, tailored, and culturally inclusive for multiple scenarios, including virtual and hybrid models
- The focus on point-in-time academic performance assessments makes it challenging to celebrate students' individual growth and progress

## **Non-inclusive definition that negates important social & institutional context**

- Current success measures do not reflect the lived experiences of *all* student groups or account for opportunity gaps & institutional barriers to success

“We have more and more formative assessments [that track how] the individual grows, but as far as how we are graded and measured as a district and as a school and as the teachers, it's all on the standardized tests.”  
(Elementary School Principal)

“Society is focused on grades and test scores. Grades and test scores are just one indicator of success. Many of our Black, Latinx and students experiencing poverty have to overcome a great deal and using those as the only indicator of success is not right.” (Middle School Principal)

# SCHOOL SUCCESS: What's needed

Teachers and principals spoke to the future vision of school systems.

## Applied learning that is relevant to students' lives

- Applied learning techniques keep students engaged and motivated; will require paradigm shifts in education towards the applied context of learning
- Encourages holistic student growth & development because lessons in SEL competencies, tolerance, belonging, inclusion are integrated

## Strong school culture

- Principals emphasized that school culture is central to ensuring healthy, high-quality learning environments
- Caregivers too valued schools that built a strong culture with characteristics that fostered their students' overall growth

## Family & Community Engagement

- Vital to creating healthy, vibrant schools and a strong sense of belonging for school community members
- Schools are uniquely poised to monitor community needs & deliver wrap-around services

## Social connectedness

- Caregivers, teachers, and principles all stressed the importance of relationships and driving student success

"I've seen him flourish as he's figured out more and more of who he is and figuring out what that looks like creatively for him and just kind of owning that and owning the opportunities that come along for him to be able to express that." (Public High School Caregiver)

"I believe all students have their own extraordinary potential and talent. Some of them are more focused and show excellence in their academic skills and some of them are good in both academic and nonacademic performances. We should motivate them to show their excellence in either fields." (Middle School Teacher)

# STUDENT SUCCESS: How it's defined

“My school uses both qualitative data and quantitative data to measure both student and school success. For example, students survey, parent survey, formative assessments, project-based learning.” (Middle School Teacher)

“The Whole Child and the child developing ownership - it is such a simple concept, yet our state educational systems rely on test driven strategies to measure success.” (Elementary School Principal)

**Teachers and principals voiced concerns at the one-dimensional nature of assessing student success using standardized metrics. Instead, the majority of respondents advocated for a holistic, strengths-based approach to assessing individual student growth in academics and non-academic competencies (e.g., SEL).**

## **Academic success**

- Teachers & principals largely regarded traditional success metrics like grades, attendance, and graduation as useful for identifying early warning signs of decreased student engagement
- Caregivers tended to focus on long-term outcomes such as graduation and college acceptance as key academic indicators of student success

## **Non-academic success**

- Teachers and principals focused on developing students' SEL competencies that can help them self-regulate, communicate their needs, and advocate for their own best interests
- Caregiver's descriptions of successful students similarly centered on social-emotional well-being

## **Perpetuating inequity**

- Black, Latinx and low-income students may face more challenges in trying to attain standard definitions of success; they also have fewer opportunities to explore what success may look like for them

# LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS: What's needed

Principals and teachers had a high level of clarity around what is needed to create healthy, strong learning environments. Importantly though, we heard that the aspirational vision for learning environments doesn't align with the current lived experience and that teachers, in particular, perceive many obstacles in the way of realizing their visions. The prevailing themes that emerged were:

- **Adult-student relationships** - Students benefit from strong supportive relationships with trusted adults that can model successful behaviors, elevate students' voices, and provide a sense of stability for their students
- **Strong school culture** - As a foundation for learning, schools must foster positive and inclusive school cultures.
- **Applied learning** - Two major areas of interest arose here allowing students to (1) drive the process of academic exploration and (2) inform classroom pace

"When you're in an environment where you are able to bond with your teacher, you work harder, you want to do better." (Charter Middle School Caregiver)

"...SEL should be an integral part of learning for all students. How can we expect students to gain these skills for success if educators don't give them guidance and opportunities to learn and practice these skills regularly? As an educator, I feel all students should be provided the structure and support to learn and practice SEL skills within the classroom." (Teacher)

# LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS: Positive indicators

**Principals and teachers identified indicators - both current and aspirational - that would help to track school and student growth more holistically. Many principals expressed that they would like a more comprehensive approach to assessing success but did not have concrete recommendations or ideas for what that might be.**

- Prioritizing **measurement of student SEL competencies** - Using either existing rubrics and frameworks or by creating an entirely new and student-informed approach to measurement
- Tracking **individual student growth** (rather than academic performance) - Many teachers and principals stressed the need for this approach despite not having a clearly defined or existing set of methods/rubrics/frameworks to reference; Principals and teachers at alternative schools had more concrete examples at the ready than did their counterparts at traditional schools

“As an educator, I feel all students should be provided the structure and support to learn and practice SEL skills within the classroom.”  
(Teacher)

“A successful student cannot be defined by academic grades in coursework or standardized test scores. A successful student must practice and learn skills to be a critical thinker, thoughtful communicator, and a person of high character. These skills or traits are not easily measure or reported, but will lead young adults to be successful after high school.” (High School Principal)