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The Rise of Virtual Schools

Selected Findings from the Third American School District Panel Survey

Will remote K–12 instruction outlast the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic? The latest results from the June 2021 American School District Panel (ASDP) survey of district leaders indicate once again that the answer to that question is yes.

Our survey asked about three forms of remote instruction: a temporary option for remote instruction in fall 2021, fully online courses, and stand-alone virtual schools. Of the three, virtual schools have had the most marked growth since pandemic-related school closures began in March 2020. New virtual schools represent an increasingly prevalent form of

Key Findings

- Districts' interest in virtual schools is high across all district types.
 - One-quarter of surveyed districts plan to run a virtual school in 2021–2022, which is a ninefold increase from the pre-pandemic level.
 - Almost half of urban districts plan to run a virtual school in 2021–2022, and most of these virtual schools started only after the pandemic began.
 - Among the subset of districts not running a virtual school in 2021–2022, nearly one-quarter are interested in running a virtual school.
- One in five district leaders said parental demand for a fully remote schooling option in 2021–2022 is strong. The largest proportions of leaders in suburban districts and districts that serve a majority of students of color perceived this demand.
- As of June 2021—before the delta variant significantly increased the number of COVID-19 cases nationally—district leaders expected low participation in temporary partial or fully remote instructional options in fall 2021.
 - Virtually all districts in our sample (97 percent) planned to offer a fully in-person option in fall 2021. The other 3 percent will offer exclusively hybrid instruction.
 - Only 14 percent of districts planned to offer some type of temporary partial or fully remote option to at least some students in fall 2021. No district planned to exclusively offer remote instruction in fall 2021.
 - Among the subset of districts offering fully in-person instruction plus a fully remote option in fall 2021, leaders estimated only 6 percent of students would enroll in the remote option.
- Only 10 percent of surveyed districts are newly offering fully online courses in 2021–2022. This is in addition to the 26 percent that already did so prior to the pandemic and will continue to do so in 2021–2022. These online courses are most often provided for credit recovery.

remote instruction that will outlast the COVID-19 pandemic.

By *virtual school*, we refer to the U.S. Department of Education’s definition of “a public school that offers only [virtual] instruction in which students and teachers are separated by time and/or location, and interaction occurs via computers and/or telecommunications technologies. A virtual school generally does not have a physical facility that allows students to attend classes on site” (Keaton, 2021). Virtual schools as an institution pre-date the pandemic, although only 0.6 percent of public school students attended a virtual school in 2019–2020 before the pandemic began (Keaton, 2021).

To assess districts’ plans for temporary and more-lasting remote instruction options starting in fall 2021, we surveyed 292 district leaders from June 1 through July 2, 2021. We then weighted their responses to make them nationally representative. These district leaders are members of the ASDP, which is a partnership among the RAND Corporation, the Center on Reinventing Public Education, Chiefs for Change, the Council of the Great City Schools, and Kitamba.

We use the terms *districts* and *district leaders* in this report to refer to both the 277 traditional public school district leaders who took the survey as well as leaders from 15 charter management organizations (CMOs).

This is the final of three reports about district leaders’ views at the end of the 2020–2021 school year. Our first report examined districts’ fiscal outlook, staff turnover, and hiring plans, concluding that the much-feared budgetary and staffing crises have not yet come to pass (Diliberti and Schwartz, 2021). Our second report examined the large growth in districts’ nonacademic services compared with relatively smaller growth in their academic offerings for the 2021–2022 school year (Schwartz and Diliberti, 2021).

Because districts’ experiences vary, we examined differences in district leaders’ responses in the following four categories that yield nine subgroups:

1. district type (traditional public school district versus CMO)¹
2. locale (urban, suburban, and rural)

3. student racial and ethnic composition (districts in which more than half of the student population are students of color are categorized as *majority students of color* with the remaining districts categorized as *majority white*)
4. district poverty level (districts in which half or more of the student population qualifies for a free or reduced-price meal are categorized as *high poverty* whereas the remainder are categorized as *low poverty*).²

In this report, we describe only those differences among district subgroups that are statistically significant. Because only 15 CMO leaders completed our survey, we do not present any differences between CMOs and traditional public school districts in this report. However, we do present results for both categories as well as the seven other subgroups in our Interactive Survey Results Tool at www.americanschooldistrictpanel.org/survey-results. Accompanying technical documentation (Grant et al., 2021) provides information about the survey methodology and weighting procedures.

Nearly All Districts Planned to Offer In-Person Instruction in Fall 2021—Only 14 Percent Planned to Offer Some Form of Temporary Remote Option

Our first survey question asked district leaders which of the following learning modes they planned to offer students in fall 2021: in-person instruction five full days per school week, remote instruction five full days per school week, or hybrid instruction (i.e., some combination of in-person and remote instruction each school week).³ District leaders could select multiple learning modes.

As of June 2021, virtually all of our nationally representative sample of districts (97 percent) planned to offer fully in-person instruction in fall 2021. This is a marked increase from the end of 2020–2021 school year when federal data indicated about seven in ten districts were offering an

Understanding Remote Instruction Responses from the ASDP Survey

We asked district leaders a series of questions about whether they will offer any of the following three different forms of remote instruction in the 2021–2022 school year:

1. remote instruction in fall 2021
2. virtual schools
3. fully online courses.

After analyzing district leaders' survey responses to our question about remote instruction in fall 2021, we believe district leaders interpreted that to mean a temporary option in contrast to a more-lasting remote option, such as a stand-alone virtual school. We conclude this because several district leaders provided text responses to open-ended questions in which they distinguished between their virtual school offerings and offering remote instruction five full days per week in fall 2021. Also, 14 percent of district leaders indicated that they would provide a hybrid or remote instruction option in fall 2021, even though in a later question, 26 percent of district leaders said their districts would run a virtual school in 2021–2022. Thus, throughout this report, we use the term *temporary remote option* to describe districts' responses about remote instruction in fall 2021.

We believe district leaders used the standard definition for *fully online courses*, referring to students who are enrolled in a brick-and-mortar school taking one or more courses in which instruction occurs online. This is in contrast to virtual schools that typically have no physical location and offer only virtual instruction.

in-person option to some or all students (Institute of Education Sciences, undated). The few districts in our sample (3 percent) that did not plan to offer a fully in-person instruction option in fall 2021 instead planned to provide exclusively hybrid instruction. None of the surveyed district leaders indicated their districts would offer just fully remote instruction in fall 2021.

However, 14 percent of surveyed districts planned to offer some type of temporary partial or fully remote option to at least some students in fall 2021 (see Figure 1). Note that district leaders took this survey in June 2021, before COVID-19 transmission rates rose in the United States as a result of the delta variant; thus, it is possible that more districts are now planning to offer a temporary remote option in fall 2021 than are shown in Figure 1.

The low percentage of districts planning to offer temporary remote instruction in fall 2021 reflects the growing concerns throughout the 2020–2021 school year that remote-learning students were falling behind their peers who received in-person instruction. It also reflects state mandates for districts to provide in-person instruction. As of the writing of this report, 25 states require in-person instruction in fall 2021, and eight states have restricted some types of remote learning options (Pitts and Jochim, 2021). On the other hand, numerous school districts are now scrambling to mount temporary remote options for students in quarantine and for parents increasingly hesitant to send their children for in-person instruction as the delta variant has caused large increases in COVID-19 cases in some regions of the United States (Erblat, 2021; Goldberg, Perez Jr., and Payne, 2021).

The majority of these 14 percent of districts planned to offer both fully in-person instruction and a temporary fully remote option to students. A few districts planned to offer solely hybrid instruction to all students or hybrid plus fully in-person instruction options or hybrid plus fully in-person and fully remote instruction options. We have included all of these district types in Figure 1.

For reasons that we explain previously in the “Understanding Remote Instruction Responses from the ASDP Survey” box, we believe these districts are offering some form of temporary remote option to students in fall 2021 that is separate from, and in some districts in addition to, operating one or more virtual schools in 2021–2022.

As shown in Figure 1, about one-third of urban districts compared with one-tenth of suburban and rural districts plan to offer some type of temporary

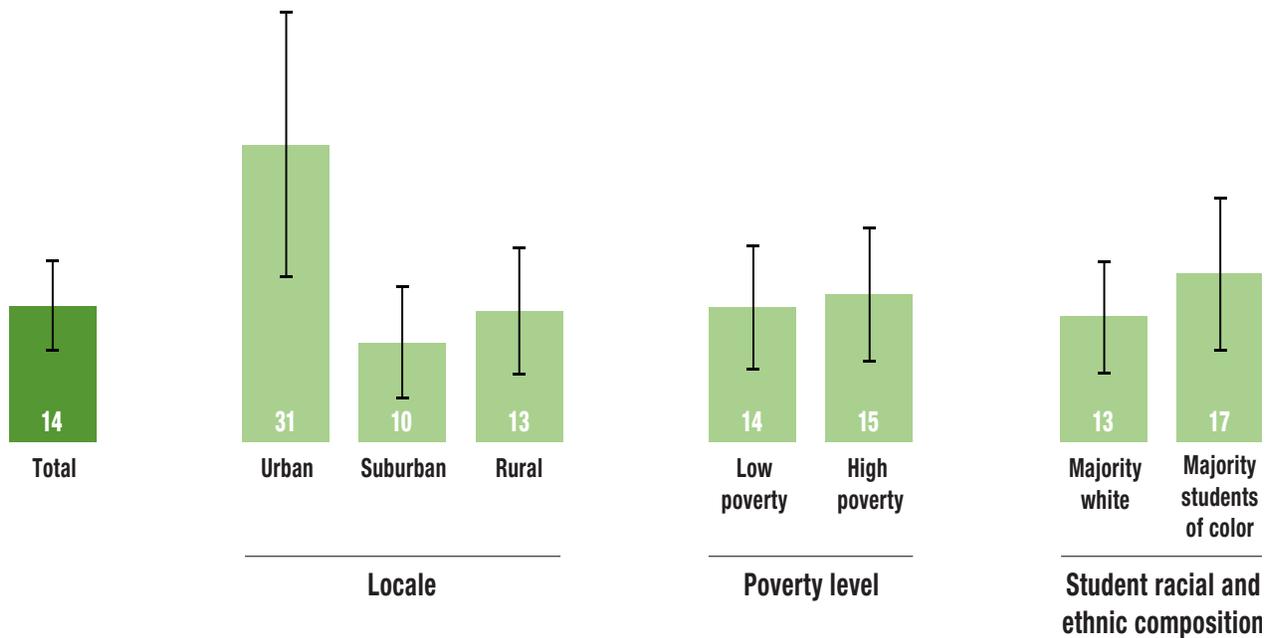
remote option in fall 2021. Urban districts were also more likely than their suburban and rural counterparts to provide fully remote instruction during the 2020–2021 school year (Institute of Education Sciences, undated; Schwartz et al., 2021).

Among the Few Districts Planning to Offer Both Fully In-Person and Remote Schooling in Fall 2021, District Leaders Estimated Only 6 Percent of Their Students Would Elect the Fully Remote Option

We asked district leaders who plan to offer multiple instructional modes in fall 2021 what proportion of their students they expect to elect each option.

FIGURE 1

Percentage of Districts Planning to Offer a Temporary Remote Option in Fall 2021



NOTES: This figure depicts response data from the survey question: “What learning mode(s) do you plan to offer to students in your [district/CMO] in fall 2021?” (n = 291). We define temporary remote instruction in fall 2021 to include districts offering solely hybrid instruction, in-person plus remote instruction, in-person plus hybrid instruction, or all three instructional modes. The vertical black bars represent the 95-percent confidence interval for each estimate.

For the discussion in this section, we focus on the subset of 39 districts in our sample that plan to offer both fully remote and fully in-person instruction options in fall 2021. Overall, leaders of these districts expected a small minority of students (6 percent, on average) to elect the fully remote option and the remainder to elect the in-person option.

District leaders' estimates varied, however. As of June 2021, about 40 percent of district leaders in this subset estimated that less than 5 percent of their students would enroll in the fully remote instruction option. Another one-third of this subset estimated that 10 percent or more of their students would elect the fully remote instruction option. District leaders indicated that, at most, 25 percent of their students would elect fully remote schooling in fall 2021.

While the small sample size prevents us from formally assessing whether there are statistically significant differences in the percentage of students selecting the fully remote option across district types, most of the respondents who predicted 10 percent or more of their students would elect the fully remote option were leaders of high-poverty districts and leaders of districts with a majority of students of color. There was no clear pattern by district locale.

The 6 percent of students that district leaders estimated would elect fully remote instruction is slightly higher than the 3 percent of parents who reported in a separate July 2021 survey that they plan to enroll their children in fully remote schooling in fall 2021 (Schwartz, Diliberti, and Grant, 2021). However, another 8 percent of parents remained unsure as of July 2021 whether they would enroll their children in remote or in-person schooling in fall 2021. Furthermore, parents of color were less likely than white parents to plan to send their children to in-person schools in fall 2021. This finding is consistent with the predictions of leaders from majority-students of color districts who estimated relatively high enrollment rates in remote schooling in fall 2021.

As Many as One-Third of Leaders of Suburban Districts and Majority-Students of Color Districts Perceived Strong Parental Demand for a Fully Remote Option in 2021–2022

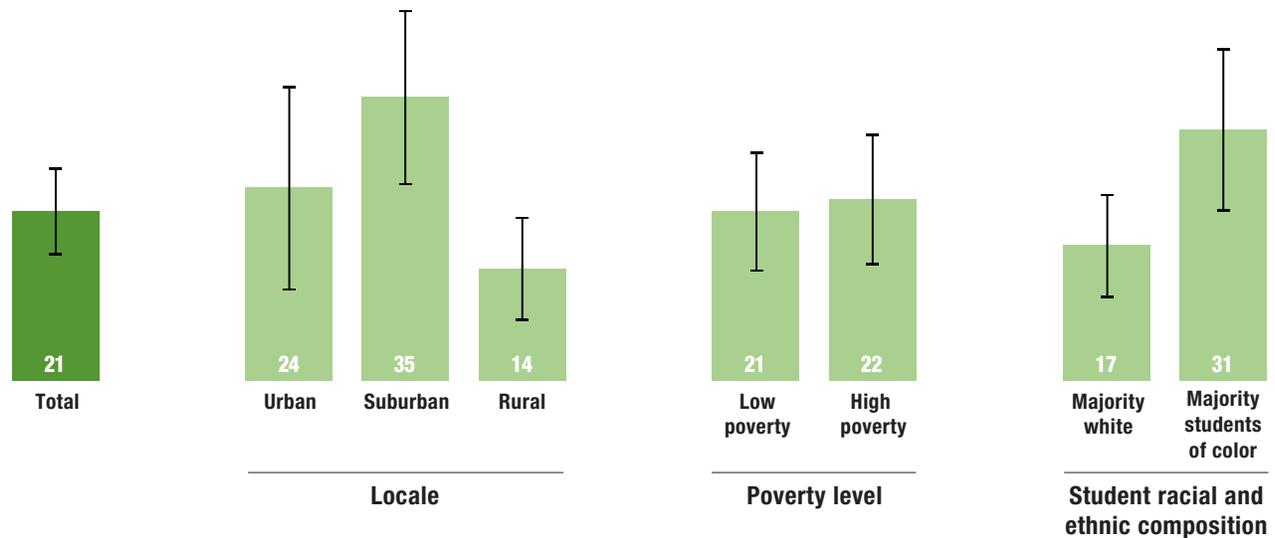
We asked district leaders, “Which of the following services or policies for students, if any, have parents strongly demanded for the 2021–2022 school year?” and provided “a fully remote schooling option” among the response choices. Twenty-one percent of surveyed district leaders said parents “strongly demanded” a remote schooling option for 2021–2022 (see Figure 2).

Perceived parent demand for remote schooling options was greater in some types of districts than in others. Surprisingly, perceived parental demand was not strongest in urban districts—which have been and remain the most likely to offer remote schooling options during the pandemic—perhaps because urban districts had already decided to offer remote schooling options (Institute of Education Sciences, undated; Schwartz et al., 2021). Instead, a greater percentage of suburban district leaders (35 percent) than urban and rural district leaders (24 percent and 14 percent, respectively) indicated that parents “strongly demanded” a fully remote schooling option. Additionally, a larger share of leaders of majority-students of color districts indicated there was strong parental demand for a remote schooling option than their counterparts in majority-white districts (31 percent versus 17 percent, respectively).

We found no relationship between perceived parental demand for and planned district provision of fully remote instruction in fall 2021. Among district leaders who said there was strong parental demand for a remote schooling option, only 10 percent indicated that they would offer a fully remote option in fall 2021. Their districts were no more likely to offer fully remote instruction in fall 2021 than districts whose leaders did not report strong

FIGURE 2

Percentage of District Leaders Who Indicated Parents Have “Strongly Demanded” a Fully Remote Schooling Option in 2021–2022



NOTES: This figure depicts response data from the survey question: “Which of the following services or policies for students, if any, have parents strongly demanded for the 2021–2022 school year?” We focus on respondents who selected a “fully remote schooling option” ($n = 286$). The vertical black bars represent the 95-percent confidence interval for each estimate.

parental demand for remote instruction. This could be because of any number of factors, including the extra cost of offering a fully remote option, availability of staff to implement fully remote instruction, prevailing COVID-19 positivity rates, and political partisanship in their local communities (Harris and Oliver, 2021; Schwartz et al., 2021).

One-Quarter of Surveyed Districts Plan to Run Virtual Schools in 2021–2022, Almost All of Which Began After the Start of the Pandemic

To assess whether districts would run a virtual school in 2021–2022, we first asked, “Is your district/CMO allowed to run one or more virtual schools if you wished to do so?” To those who answered yes, we then asked, “Does your district/CMO plan to run one or more virtual schools in 2021–2022?” There were six response choices for this question: (1) “No, we do

not want to run a virtual school;” (2) “No. While we would like to run a virtual school, we’ve determined it is not feasible (e.g., student funding is insufficient to make it viable);” (3) “No. However, we are planning to run at least one virtual school sometime after 2021–2022;” (4) “Maybe. We would like to do so, but are still investigating how;” (5) “Yes. We already had one or more virtual schools in place pre-pandemic and will continue to run them;” and (6) “Yes, we will run one or more new virtual schools.”

According to the district leaders in our sample, only 3 percent of their districts ran a virtual school before the pandemic began, which is consistent with federal statistics.⁴ Since the pandemic began, however, the number of districts running virtual schools has grown ninefold, as shown in Figure 3. Specifically, 26 percent of district leaders reported that their districts plan to run one or more virtual schools in the 2021–2022 school year.

Growth in virtual schools is greatest among urban districts, where almost half reported plans to run a virtual school in the 2021–2022 school

year. This continues the pandemic pattern of urban districts providing remote instruction at much higher rates than rural and suburban districts in the 2020–2021 school year (Institute of Education Sciences, undated; Schwartz et al., 2021). Beyond urban districts, there is tremendous growth in virtual schools since the start of the pandemic in every district subgroup that we examined, as shown in Figure 3.

However, we suspect the numbers in Figure 3 might overestimate the true growth in districts running new virtual schools since the pandemic began. It is possible that some district leaders responded yes to our survey question even if their districts do not directly operate a virtual school but instead contract with a third party or must allow students to enroll in a statewide virtual school, as is the case in Florida. We conclude this because some district leaders provided seemingly conflicting information in their survey responses (e.g., they mentioned their districts ran

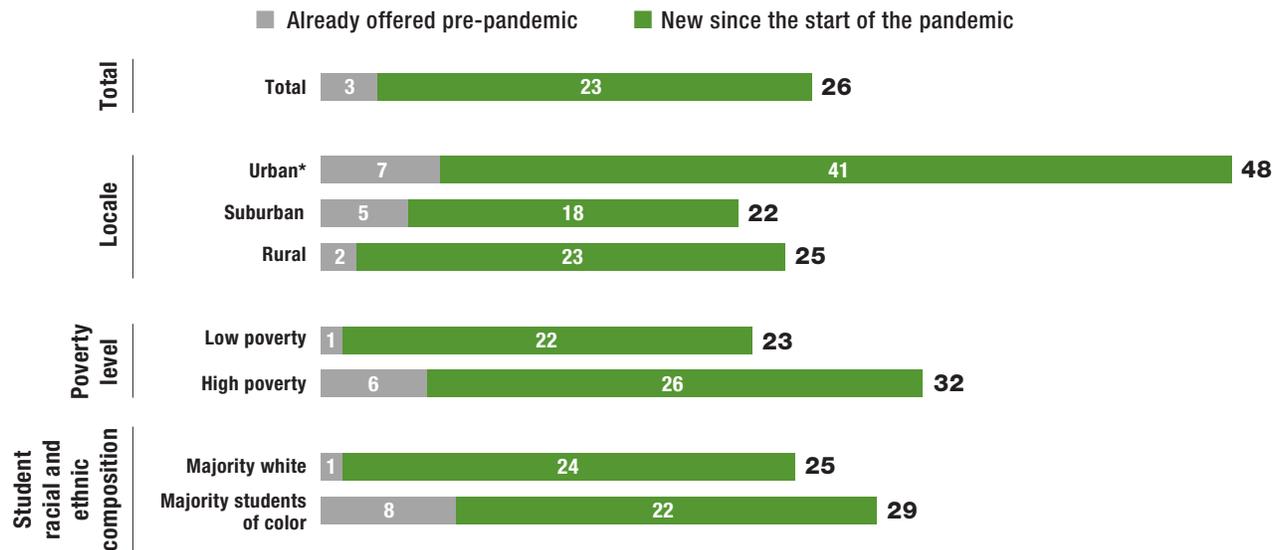
virtual schools in open-ended text responses but also indicated their districts are not allowed to operate virtual schools). Also, survey data often conflicted with federal administrative data on whether districts were operating virtual schools before the COVID-19 pandemic. A third reason for the discrepancy in their answers is that district leaders could have conflated operating a virtual school with offering a temporary remote option in fall 2021. And finally, state guidance and requirements for fall 2021 have been rapidly changing, potentially leading to confusion about what options districts can and will provide (Pitts and Jochim, 2021).

Thus, while we believe the percentage of districts offering students a virtual school option has grown to the degree shown in Figure 3, that rate of growth likely overcounts the unique number of districts directly operating a virtual school.

Despite this possibility of overcounting the number of new district-run virtual schools, it is clear that

FIGURE 3

Percentage of Districts Planning to Run a Virtual School in 2021–2022 and Whether This Practice Is New Since the Pandemic Began



NOTES: This figure depicts response data from the survey question: “Does your [district/CMO] plan to run one or more virtual schools in 2021–2022?” Respondents’ answers to this survey item were supplemented with data from the 2019–2020 Common Core of Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2021) ($n = 291$). An asterisk (*) indicates that the percentage of district leaders in that subgroup who indicated that they would run a virtual school in 2021–2022 (regardless of whether it is new since the start of the pandemic) is statistically significantly different ($p < 0.05$) from the overall percentage of district leaders. Bars may not sum to total because of rounding.

students in many more districts will have access to virtual schools in 2021–2022 than before the pandemic began. This level of growth in the percentage of districts either directly running virtual schools or offering students access to third-party virtual schools does generally align with findings from our survey of superintendents in October 2020. In that survey, two in ten district leaders said they were planning or considering adopting a virtual school that would outlast the COVID-19 pandemic (Schwartz et al., 2020).

Almost One-Quarter of Surveyed Districts That Were Not Planning to Run Virtual Schools in 2021–2022 Had Some Interest in Doing So

In addition to asking districts whether they were allowed to run a virtual school in 2021–2022 and, among districts that were allowed, whether they intended to do so, we asked those district respondents who indicated that their districts were not allowed to run a virtual school: “Would your district/CMO be interested in running one or more virtual schools at some point in the future if you were allowed to do so?” We drew from district responses to all three of these survey questions to assemble the data as shown in Figure 4.

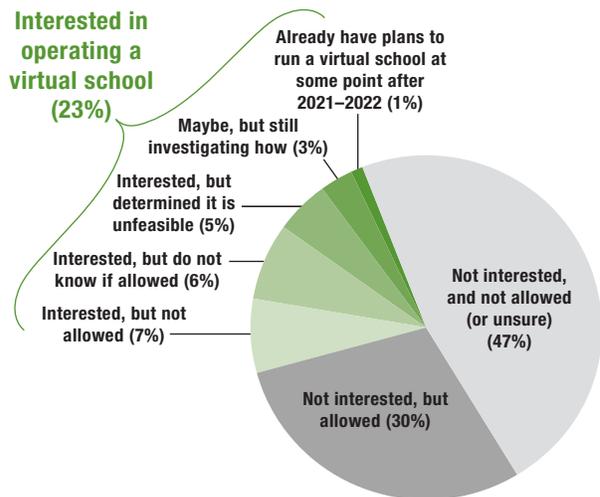
Three-quarters of district leaders were not planning to run a virtual school during the 2021–2022 school year. Of these, most (77 percent) were not interested in doing so. However, nearly one-quarter of surveyed districts that had no plans to operate a virtual school in the 2021–2022 school year had at least some interest in operating a virtual school. As shown in Figure 4, these interested district leaders had several reasons for not yet operating a virtual school. Seven percent of district leaders indicated that they were not allowed to run a virtual school, while 6 percent were unsure whether they could. Five percent of interested district leaders had explored the possibility of a virtual school but had determined it was not yet feasible; 3 percent were still investigating how. The remaining 1 percent of interested district

leaders already had plans to open a virtual school sometime after the 2021–2022 school year.

About One-Third of Districts Are Planning to Offer Fully Online Courses in 2021–2022; Most of These Districts Already Offered Them Pre-Pandemic

In contrast to the large pandemic-related growth we observed in virtual schools, there has been relatively less growth since the start of the pandemic in the percentage of districts that plan to newly offer online courses. Nationally, 36 percent of districts were planning to offer one or more fully online courses in 2021–2022 (Figure 5). Twenty-six percent of districts

FIGURE 4
Percentage of District Leaders Who Are Interested in Operating Virtual Schools Among Surveyed Districts That Are Not Operating Virtual Schools in 2021–2022



NOTES: This figure depicts response data from the survey questions: “Is your district/CMO allowed to run one or more virtual schools if you wished to do so?” “Does your district/CMO plan to run one or more virtual schools in 2021–2022?” and “Would your district/CMO be interested in running one or more virtual schools at some point in the future if you were allowed to do so (n = 190). Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

offered fully online courses prior to the pandemic, while another 10 percent had added them since the outset of the pandemic.

There were no differences in the percentages of districts offering one or more fully online courses in 2021–2022 across district subgroups with one exception: More majority-white districts (41 percent) planned to offer fully online courses in 2021–2022 than their majority–students of color counterparts (27 percent of districts). However, because growth in fully online courses was similar in majority-white and majority–students of color districts during the pandemic era, this finding is likely driven by pre-pandemic differences in districts’ offerings.

These percentages of districts newly offering online courses is similar to the percentage of districts newly offering tutoring and the percentage reducing class sizes in the 2021–2022 school year. (Our second report in this series about June 2021 survey results

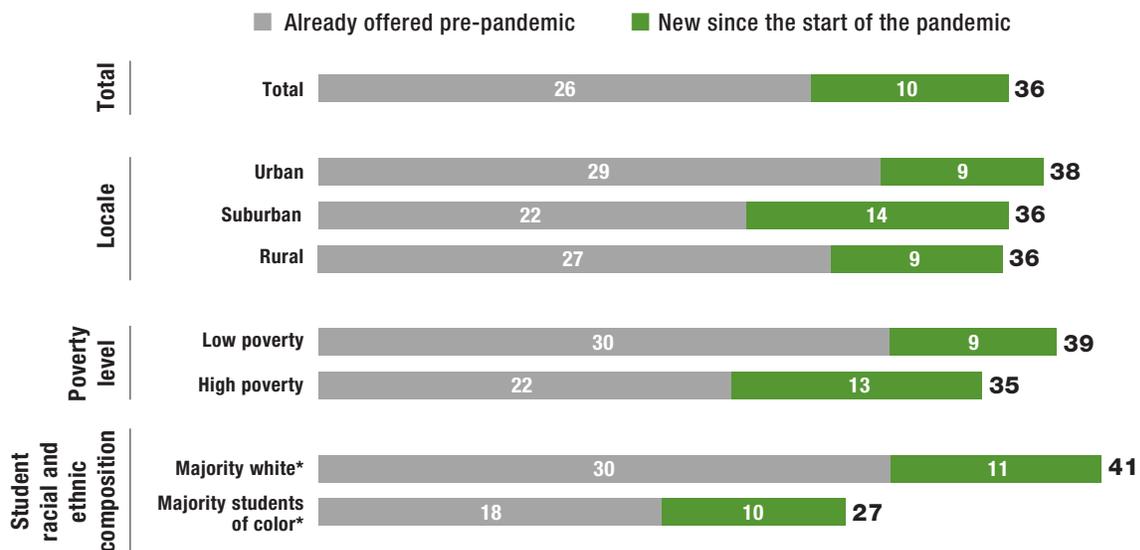
covers the nonacademic and academic changes districts have adopted for 2021–2022 in more detail [see Schwartz and Diliberti, 2021]).

Districts Plan to Offer Fully Online Courses Most Commonly for Credit Recovery

To learn more about these fully online courses, we asked the leaders of districts that plan to offer them in 2021–2022 whether they will provide any of seven different types of courses. Most commonly, district leaders that planned to offer fully online courses said their districts would provide them for credit recovery: Eight in ten district leaders said they will provide fully online courses for this purpose (see Figure 6). More than half of district leaders said their districts would provide dual-credit courses and courses in

FIGURE 5

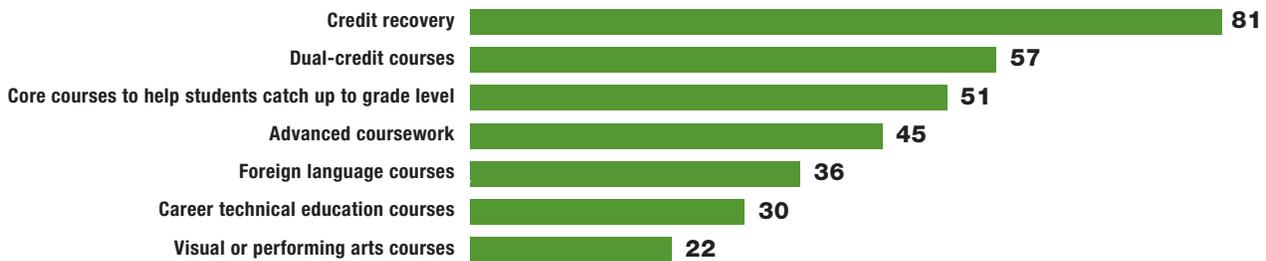
Percentage of Districts Planning to Offer One or More Fully Online Courses in 2021–2022 and Whether This Practice Is New Since the Pandemic Began



NOTES: This figure depicts response data from the survey questions: “Which of the following school services or policies, if any, will your [district/CMO] offer in 2021–2022? Please include both [district/CMO]-run and contracted services” and “Which of these school services or policies are new since the start of the pandemic (i.e., that your [district/CMO] did not offer in 2019–2020 before the pandemic began)?” (n = 291). An asterisk (*) indicates that the percentage of district leaders in that subgroup who indicated that they would offer one or more fully online courses in 2021–2022 (regardless of whether or not it is a new practice since the pandemic began) is statistically significantly different ($p < 0.05$) from the overall percentage of district leaders. Bars may not sum to total because of rounding.

FIGURE 6

Among Districts Providing Fully Online Courses in 2021–2022, Percentage of Leaders Reporting Their District Will Provide Various Types of Online Courses



NOTES: This figure depicts response data from the survey question: “What subjects or types of fully online courses do you plan to offer in 2021–2022?” (n = 109). Only district leaders who indicated their district plans to offer one or more classes fully online in 2021–2022 saw this question.

core academic subjects designed to help students catch up their learning to grade level. District leaders least commonly reported that they would offer fully online courses in the visual or performing arts or for career technical education.

Implications

Perhaps surprisingly, given the flare of delta variant cases in the United States over the summer, relatively few districts, as of June 2021, planned to offer a temporary remote option to students during only fall 2021—in some cases, likely because of state mandates requiring in-person instruction. Yet districts have also documented a large uptick in long-term remote instruction in the form of virtual schools.

Results from several of our surveys of educators administered throughout the COVID-19 pandemic indicate that remote instruction, in some form, is here to stay. In October 2020, two in ten district leaders said that their districts had adopted or were considering adopting the practice of running a virtual school that would remain in operation beyond the pandemic (Schwartz et al., 2020). Subsequently, in March 2021, one-third of school principals said that their schools planned to offer remote schooling options to any families that wanted them, even after the pandemic has passed (Kaufman and Diliberti, 2021).

Now, from this June 2021 survey of district leaders, we found that the provision of remote schooling is poised to grow tremendously: One-quarter of surveyed districts plan to offer virtual schools in 2021–2022. And among those districts that are not, one-quarter of them are interested in doing so in the future. As many as half of the urban districts surveyed plan to offer a virtual school in 2021–2022.

While it is clear that virtual schools are growing, it is far from clear how many unique virtual schools there will be, which entities (district, state, third-party contractor, or otherwise) will run them, how they will be regulated, and the number of students who will enroll in them in 2021–2022 and beyond. Even with the tremendous growth in the number of districts offering virtual schools that we have documented in this report, virtual schools could still possibly enroll fewer than 10 percent of all public school students in 2021–2022. Nevertheless, even small growth in the share of students enrolling in virtual schools might translate to a few million student enrollments.

This anticipated rise in virtual school enrollment underlines the need for states to develop regulatory policies to ensure that various forms of remote instruction—ranging from fully online courses to stand-alone virtual schools—are of acceptable quality. As we have noted in previous publications (e.g., Schwartz et al., 2020), numerous studies document

subpar academic results for children who attended virtual schools before the start of the pandemic. Our recommendation for virtual schools to use high-quality open-source curriculum that is aligned across grade levels to help boost the quality of online instruction and student engagement is particularly pertinent here.

Across this three-report series, using results from the June 2021 ASDP survey of district leaders, we have documented the potential for new disparities among school districts to arise as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. These new disparities

could relate to which districts face a fiscal cliff after COVID-19 federal aid expires or which districts provide nonacademic services, such as mental health care, social and emotional learning, and meals.

With the rise of virtual schools as a more common remote schooling option for public school students, it is even more important to ensure the high quality of virtual school offerings and provide responsible oversight to avoid making existing disparities worse.

How This Analysis Was Conducted

- RAND Corporation researchers fielded the third survey of the ASDP from June 1 through July 2, 2021.
- This report is based on survey responses from 292 district leaders that are weighted to be nationally representative. Surveys were completed by district superintendents, charter management CEOs, or their designees.
- Data on district demographics were obtained by linking survey data files to the 2019–2020 Common Core of Data issued by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Our locale definition aligns with the four-category locale definition used by NCES, with the exception that we collapsed the districts located in towns into the rural category for sample-size reasons. We classified districts as *majority white* if they had a student enrollment that was 50 percent or more white. All other districts were classified as *majority students of color*. Similarly, we classified districts as *high poverty* if 50 percent or more of their student population were eligible for free or reduced-price meals as part of the National School Lunch Program. All other districts were classified as *low poverty*.
- We conducted significance testing to assess whether subgroups were statistically different at the $p < 0.05$ level. Specifically, we tested whether the percentage of district leaders in one subgroup reporting a response was statistically different from the balance of district leaders that took the survey (e.g., leaders of urban districts versus other respondents who did not lead an urban district). Because of the exploratory nature of this study, we did not apply multiple hypothesis test corrections.

Endnotes

¹ Note that all 15 CMOs in our sample are members of the Charter School Growth Fund (an organization that funds charter school expansion) and therefore are likely not representative of all CMOs nationally.

² We do not separately analyze differences by district size. However, district size and locale are correlated. Among the districts in our sample, urban districts have an average enrollment size of 36,800 students, suburban districts have an average enrollment size of 15,600 students, and rural districts have an average enrollment size of 1,800 students.

³ Our survey question about districts' planned instructional modes for fall 2021 included an "other" option that was selected by 27 respondents (i.e., 7 percent of district leaders). We reviewed these district leaders' "other" text responses to categorize them as providing only in-person instruction or some other combination of instructional modes. Although there was some ambiguity in districts' text responses, we generally categorized districts as providing exclusively in-person instruction if they mentioned that they had a four-day school week with in-person instruction, offered independent study options, had an existing virtual school, or allowed students to attend a statewide virtual school. We categorized districts as providing some form of temporary partial or fully remote instruction if they mentioned offering an option for remote or fully online instruction other than a virtual school.

⁴ Some district leaders' survey responses conflicted with federal administrative data from the 2019–2020 Common Core of Data (CCD) published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Therefore, we used the CCD, district leaders' "other" text responses about their instructional modes for the 2021–2022 school year, and district leaders' responses to the survey items on virtual schools to triangulate whether districts were operating a virtual school pre-pandemic or whether they were newly doing so since the start of the pandemic (or neither). After reconciling districts' survey responses, we obtained a weighted survey average of 3 percent of surveyed districts operating a virtual school before the pandemic began. This comports with data from the CCD, which show that 3 percent of districts nationally were operating a virtual school in the 2019–2020 school year just before the pandemic began. (Per guidance from NCES [Keaton, 2021], we used the count of "full virtual" schools.)

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About This Report

The American Educator Panels (AEP) are nationally representative samples of teachers, school leaders, and district leaders across the country. The American School District Panel (ASDP) is a partnership among the RAND Corporation, the Center on Reinventing Public Education, Chiefs for Change, the Council of the Great City Schools, and Kitamba. For more information, please visit the ASDP website at www.americanschooldistrictpanel.org.

We are extremely grateful to the U.S. public school teachers and leaders who have agreed to participate in the panels. Their time and willingness to share their experiences are invaluable for this effort and for helping us understand how to better support their hard work in schools. We also thank Adam Edgerton and Elizabeth Steiner for helpful feedback that greatly improved this report. We also thank Stephanie Lonsinger for her editorial expertise and Monette Velasco for overseeing the publication process for this report.

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More information about RAND can be found at www.rand.org. Questions about this report or about the AEP COVID-19 surveys should be directed to hschwartz@rand.org, and questions about RAND Education and Labor should be directed to educationandlabor@rand.org.

About the Data Note Series

This Data Note series is intended to provide brief analyses of educator survey results of immediate interest to policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. If you would like to know more about the dataset, please visit *Technical Documentation for the Third American School District Panel Survey* (RR-A956-6, www.rand.org/t/RR-A956-6) for more information on survey recruitment, administration, and sample weighting. If you are interested in using AEP data for your own surveys or analysis or in reading other AEP-related publications, please email aep@rand.org or visit www.rand.org/aep.

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