

Livingston Public Schools Remote Learning Research

July 21, 2020

The objective of the research was to gain insight from an array of teachers and parents in grades (K-12) to optimize the remote learning experience at Livingston Public Schools. Specifically, the plan was to uncover:

- a) Their experiences/anticipated experiences (positive and negative) with remote learning
- b) Their needs and desires for tools, resources and policies that will be of most value in the coming school year if the district needs to return to remote learning

METHODOLOGY & PARTICIPATION

Qualitative research in the form of audio focus groups were conducted. The decision was made to conduct the groups by phone instead of online (via Zoom) to protect anonymity of participants and promote openness to share feedback.

A total of eight focus groups (90 minutes each) were conducted by MarketVision Research on July 13-15, 2020. The groups were separated according to role (staff and parent) and grade level. The staff groups included the grade/subject teachers, as well as special teachers and guidance counselors. A total of 57 participated in the research with representation of staff and parents from all public schools within the Livingston district. The following is a breakdown of the number of participants by group.

	K – 2 nd Grade	3 rd – 5 th Grade	6 th – 8 th Grade	9 th – 12 th Grade	Total
Staff	8	8	8	8	32
Parents	8	7	5	5	25
Total	16	15	13	13	57

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Appreciation for prior efforts with remote learning but hold higher expectations for the future
 - Recognition and appreciation among parents and staff for district leadership’s efforts to quickly pull together an “emergency” remote learning plan last spring during a time filled with uncertainty and stress given the Covid-19 situation
 - Many realize that remote learning was thrust upon them and everyone was simply doing their best to navigate through it, but were frustrated by the inconsistencies across teachers, grades, and schools
 - If remote learning should be required again, there are higher expectations given that time has passed for the district to develop a more clear and well defined plan

- Strong concern about upcoming school year if it kicks off with remote learning
 - Major fear expressed by both staff and parents is the school year starting with remote learning, citing the inability to establish a meaningful student – teacher relationship online as in person
 - Concern also for students having to ‘enter’ new schools and ‘meet’ new classmates online vs. in-person

- The most pressing challenges voiced by both teachers and parents centered on the lack of clarity and consistency in expectations. They also recognize the challenge for engaging students within an online format and the difficulty in assessing progress and providing feedback. This is underscored by a lack of student accountability and hindered by technology limitations. From a parents' perspective (particularly those of elementary and middle aged children) many are concerned that their child is not truly learning and that they are not able to provide the added support needed at home. Teachers are faced with a heavier workload and are bogged down by administrative tasks and all of this is intensified in the context of their own lives and being parents as well.

CHALLENGES	<u>Parents and Teachers</u>	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of consistency and clarity in expectations and process 2. Challenge for engaging students via an online format (online fatigue) 3. Difficulty with assessment and providing feedback 4. Lack of student accountability and inefficient system for tracking 5. Technology limitations and lack of training hinder learning 6. Negative impact on emotional and social health and well-being 	
	<u>Specific to Staff</u>	<u>Specific to Parents</u>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work life balance pressures 2. Bogged down with administrative tasks 3. Limited means to directly connect with elementary students 4. Lack of time/forum to collaborate 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Belief for many that remote learning is not effective due to the lack of live teaching <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ More prevalent with elementary and middle schools 2. Not available or equipped to provide the additional at-home support required

- Efforts that helped remote learning to work well focused on the moments of connection whether teacher to the whole class, 1:1 or students with each other in small breakout sessions. Parents appreciated their students having an outlet to express their emotions and forums that helped them feel a part of the school community. Efforts made for students to be accountable to participate and engage were also perceived positively.

WORKED WELL	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Moments of connection matter (morning messages, etc.) 2. Activities that engaged students and enabled meaningful learning 3. Methods that enabled efficient management/tracking of assignments 4. Forums for enabling small group collaboration and student socialization 5. Direct teacher interaction and feedback via 1:1 contact 6. Tools and resources provided to help supplement learning 7. Outlets to express emotions 8. Student accountability requirements for live learning sessions
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- Moving forward what will help to optimize remote learning is to ensure clear and consistent expectations and standards. For most, there is a wish to add structure and closely mimic real life instruction with allowances that teachers need for planning. There is a wish to streamline administrative activities for teachers so that they can focus on teaching and allow for the opportunity to measure progress and provide feedback. There is an expectation that technology will be improved and more broadly available supported by training.

MOVING FORWARD	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set clear and consistent expectations and standards for the district 2. Add structure and closely mimic real life instruction while allowing teachers time to plan 3. Streamline administrative tasks so that teachers can focus on the core of teaching 4. Provide more feedback on student performance and progress 5. Offer more opportunities for students to connect on a personal level with teachers and friends 6. Enhance/expand technology and training to ensure a more seamless delivery of remote learning 7. Continue to provide resources to supplement learning and promote socialization
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KEY CHALLENGES SHARED BY STAFF AND PARENTS

1. Lack of consistency and clarity in expectations and process
 - Complaints voiced about the shorter school hours with remote learning for the elementary and middle school grades (compared to high school), particularly by working parents
 - Lack of set schedule in elementary school with staff constantly having to schedule things in coordination with other teachers/specials poses uncertainty
 - Parents question how things handled (e.g., scheduling, teaching method, curriculum covered) after talking to parents of students at other schools within the district
“From what I have been told by others in the grade and at other schools, there was no consistency between classes within the school and no consistency between schools.” (Parent, Grade 3-5)
2. Challenge for engaging students via an online format (online fatigue)
 - Limited time to see and interact live with students (especially if camera turned off) hindered feelings of connection
 - Distractions from home and having to “stare at a computer screen” disengaged some students
 - Teachers required extra time and energy to determine resources to infuse creativity and improve engagement
“The list of resources provided was overwhelming but it tends to be counterproductive to spend hours combing through to find the best options.” (Teacher, Grade K-2)
3. Difficulty with assessment and providing feedback
 - Teachers suspect more cheating with remote learning (e.g., parents/siblings doing work, googling answers)
“Difficult to get true assessments because I knew parents were doing the work... never seen so many perfect homework assignments! But, we were told not to put too much pressure on parents.” (Teacher, Grade K-2)
 - Continuous feedback and validation of performance/progress important for students/parents particularly in younger grades, but difficult and time-consuming for teachers
 - Student hesitancy on reaching out to teachers for help; parent expectation for teacher to be more proactive
4. Lack of student accountability and inefficient system for tracking
 - Lack of guidelines on how to take attendance (different platforms used, use of attendance quiz or not, etc.) and how to handle missing assignments
 - Lots of time and effort on teachers to track down assignments, often requiring parental involvement for the students in elementary and middle school
“Kid’s don’t do assignments and then I’m tracking them down. I don’t have their email so then have to email their parent and/or call them... such a time waster.” (Teacher, Grade 3-5)
 - Uncertainty among some students/parents on where to find and track assignments given inconsistent assignment locations on different platforms used by teachers
5. Technology limitations and lack of training hinder learning
 - Efforts to connect and problems with devices caused disruptions and delays, especially early on in the remote learning experience
 - Teachers were often expected to resolve connection issues despite their limited knowledge/training on technology; delays in getting a response via the tech help line/email were a cause of frustration. They were also frustrated by the small screens.
“Our teacher had to figure out the technology and applications as the weeks went on. It was not her area of strength or comfort.” (Parent, Grade 6-8)
 - Parents/students appreciate Chromebooks provided (grades 2-12) but often had to use other personal devices (e.g., laptop, home computer) given connectivity limitations/issues experienced with Chromebooks

6. Negative impact on emotional and social health and well-being

- Seeing and experiencing the presence of others is hard to duplicate online; personal touch and interactions (e.g., teacher hug for a young student) help build/maintain a connection
- Some students felt isolated without the presence of their teachers/friends; some experience anxiety over seeing themselves on camera given doubts about their appearance
“Kids at this age are self-conscious and don’t feel comfortable staring into a camera, seeing themselves online and asking questions.” (Parent, Grade 6-8)
- Teachers also miss the live, personal interaction and collaboration they experience with their colleagues

KEY CHALLENGES SPECIFIC TO STAFF

1. Time constraints with work/life balance of staff, particularly those with young children
“I’m trying my absolute best to excel at both being a teacher and parent and feel overwhelmed that I’m not measuring up.” (Teacher, Grade 3-5)
2. Bugged down with administrative tasks (e.g., taking attendance, tracking down assignments)
“Taking attendance is a big hassle. If I’m sick or take a day off, others aren’t able to take attendance for me.” (Teacher, Grade 6-8)
3. Lack of student emails in elementary school to contact students directly about scheduling meeting times
“If I see a student struggling and want to schedule time to meet, I have to send her parent an email which may not get returned for days. I’d prefer to email students directly.” (Teacher, Grade K-2)
4. Lack of time/forum to collaborate with other teachers
“We as teachers need emotional support of each other. There is no time to spend with my colleagues collaborating and learning better ways to teach in this environment.” (Teacher, Grade 9-12)

KEY CHALLENGES SPECIFIC TO PARENTS

1. Belief for many that remote learning is not effective due to the lack of live teaching (more prevalent with elementary and middle schools)
“It was a waste of time because so little actual teaching was done. My child got live instruction for only 10 minutes, twice a week. They need more live interaction versus video.” (Parent, Grade K-2)
2. Not available or equipped to provide the additional at-home support required
“I’m a working parent. I want to support my child but don’t simply don’t have the time. Plus, I don’t even understand the new Math they teach so don’t feel equipped to help her.” (Parent, Grade 6-8)

WHAT WORKED WELL

1. Moments of connection matter
 - Morning messages set a positive tone for the day
"I thought the morning announcements were great. This was our way to start each day and it was a good way to feel connected to the school." (Parent, Grade K-2)
 - Principal weekly Zoom keeps parents and students informed and updated
 - School assemblies and pep rallies
2. Activities that engaged students and enabled meaningful learning
 - Teacher reading to the class
 - Cooking lessons for Math
 - Book clubs
 - Mystery guests
3. Methods that enabled efficient management/tracking of assignments
"I liked using Schoology to lay out everything for the students including zoom code, attendance quiz, assignments for the day." (Teacher, Grade 9-12)
4. Forums for enabling small group collaboration and student socialization
 - Breakout sessions
"Mixing in breakout sessions with the live teaching definitely made it more interesting and gave them the chance to connect more than just staring at the screen when the teacher lectured." (Parent, Grade 9-12)
 - Team projects
"Helps them stay off computers like robots and socialize and learn in a meaningful hands on way. They were craving this interaction and so many aspects of remote learning they had to sit and be quiet. Team projects gave them an outlet." (Parent, Grade 3-5)
5. Direct teacher interaction and feedback via 1:1 contact
"My son's teacher called him and me just to connect and that meant a lot to him." (Parent, Grade 3-5)
"I sent a teacher an email at midnight and got an immediate response." (Parent, Grade 3-5)
6. Tools and resources provided to help supplement learning
 - Video apps (FlipGrid, Sceencast-O-Matic)
 - Educational platforms (SeeSaw, Schoology)
 - Subject specific tools, software, videos
7. Outlets to express emotions
"I used my office hours for students to sign up just to chat, which some students really seemed to appreciate." (Teacher, Grade 3-5)
8. Student accountability requirements for live learning sessions
"Teachers who required students to be on camera worked well. This should be the standard." (Parent, Grade 6-8)

MOVING FORWARD

1. Set clear and consistent expectations and standards for the district
 - Desire for better goal setting and clear expectations (parents, students and teachers)
 - Consistent approaches and protocols for teaching remotely across schools within the district
 - Training for teachers to help them maximize the remote learning experience
 - Establish a parent-student contract that includes moral obligation with clear consequences for actions
 - Incorporate rules for Zoom (camera on, student sitting up, dressed properly, not eating, etc.)
 - Reinforce strict standards and consequences for cheating
 - Tap into the wisdom of other schools experienced with remote learning to identify best in class principles
2. Add structure and closely mimic real life instruction while allowing teachers time to plan
 - Extend school hours (e.g., 9 am to 3 pm or 9 am – 3 pm 4 days a week and one day of planning)
 - Provide more live, guided instruction by teachers particularly for the elementary and middle school grades
 - Incorporate break-out sessions with the live instructions to keep students engaged and provide socialization opportunities
 - Caveat: Teachers see the value of this approach but those who have children of their own at home are concerned for how they can manage
3. Provide more feedback on student performance and progress
 - Provide feedback on assignments so that students (particularly elementary) know their work counts
 - Encourage teachers and counselors to proactively reach out to struggling students (academically and emotionally) in need of more 1:1 assistance
4. Streamline administrative tasks so that teachers can focus on the core of teaching
 - Develop a more streamlined way for teachers to track missing assignments
 - Leverage teacher aids to reduce the burden for the grade based teachers with attendance and assignment tracking
 - Share the agenda earlier (e.g., weekly agenda shared on Monday or daily agenda shared the night before a school day) to inform and improve preparedness
 - Record teacher's live instruction sessions for future reference
5. Offer more opportunities for students to connect on a personal level with teachers and friends
 - Schedule regular teacher-student check-ins to assess progress and provide support to students academically and personally; provide elementary grade teachers access to student emails for direct communication
 - Organize and implement more clubs for students to meet/share common interests outside of school hours
 - Continue to infuse fun into school days with opportunities to socialize and show support of school and build comradery (e.g., assemblies, rallies, virtual games)
6. Enhance/expand technology and training to ensure a more seamless delivery of remote learning
 - Continue to provide reliable tools and accessibility to intuitive platforms; consider standardizing platform used (Google Meet vs. Zoom) to minimize confusion
 - Expand the offering of Chromebooks to students in grades K – 1 (if budget allows)
 - Provide adequate technology training to teachers/parents/students to address problems as they arise
 - Strengthen tech support offered across schools to improve responsiveness to all users (teachers, students and parents)
7. Continue to provide resources to supplement learning and promote socialization
 - Offer full subscriptions to the subject specific apps deemed most useful to teachers and students in supplementing live instruction
 - Explore additional resources that offer more ways to engage students, infuse fun and creativity and provide socialization opportunities

ADDENDUM

GRADES K-2 FINDINGS

CHALLENGES WITH REMOTE LEARNING

STAFF	PARENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Balance of work/life as a teacher and parent ▪ Lack of student accountability of their work ▪ Technology issues with devices/platforms used ▪ Resources thrown at staff with little guidance on usage ▪ Assessments difficult to measure because some parents doing work ▪ Instructions not meeting the needs for learners who need more 1:1 ▪ Specials inconsistent across schools; viewed as optional ▪ Loss of connection with children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Balance of work/life for parents working from home ▪ Lack of live instruction (only 2x/week) ▪ Limited access to teachers; lack of 1:1 interaction with teachers ▪ Technology issues with devices/platforms used ▪ Lack of feedback on performance and progress of students ▪ Mixed reaction on need for specials; if optional then won't do ▪ Lack of social connection with teachers and peers

WORKED WELL WITH REMOTE LEARNING

STAFF	PARENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resources for teaching lessons/subjects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Screencast-o-matic (video) ○ Instructional Math videos ○ Digital Science activities ▪ Efforts to infuse fun and creativity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Activities together on Zoom ○ Sharing videos of child performing activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Morning messages to start day, set positive tone ▪ Agenda organized, links to websites/videos, grid format, color coded ▪ Video modeling in Math ▪ Teachers reading books to class ▪ FlipGrid used for presenting written assignments to fellow students (improves public speaking)

MOVING FORWARD/ADVICE

STAFF	PARENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Set expectations of remote learning vs. in-person ▪ More consistency across schools related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Type of instruction (full class vs. small group calls) ○ Policies for missing assignments ○ Specials – schedule and expectations ▪ Time/forum for teacher collaboration ▪ Code of conduct for Zoom (e.g., sit up just like classroom) ▪ More Chromebooks for younger grades (some kids using parent's phone) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More/better feedback teachers to assess individual progress, assignments ▪ More consistency across schools related to schedule/timing ▪ More breakouts and smaller zoom sessions ▪ More facetime interaction with peers (lunch or snack with discussion) ▪ More teacher availability (same as upper grades) ▪ Use/pay aids to provide more socialization activities (e.g., talk with, read to students) ▪ Maintain fun school events (e.g., pajama day, trivia games, scavenger hunt)

GRADES 3-5 FINDINGS

CHALLENGES WITH REMOTE LEARNING

STAFF	PARENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of student accountability of their work ▪ Balance of work/life as a teacher and parent ▪ Inability to email students directly ▪ Lack of structure/consistent scheduling ▪ Lack of student engagement ▪ Managing parent expectations/desire for more live instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Less than desired live teaching and guided structure ▪ Busy work but not true learning and little engagement ▪ Not enough/inconsistent levels of feedback from teachers ▪ Major challenge for working parents ▪ Frustrations with how daily attendance handled (not streamlined, 1 hour to respond)

WORKED WELL WITH REMOTE LEARNING

STAFF	PARENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Efforts to infuse fun and creativity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lively Jeopardy sessions, STEM style projects, projects on FlipGrid ○ Book Club with breakout sessions ○ Baking show that students put on ▪ Efforts made for students to express their emotions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Office hours to sign up and chat with students ○ Morning meeting (therapy session in ways) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Engaging activities that make students feel a part of something <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cooking lessons, book clubs, trivia games ○ Use of video to share work/experiences with teacher and class ▪ Structured team projects that promote interaction ▪ Direct teacher interaction and feedback (1:1 teacher class, timely responses)

MOVING FORWARD/ADVICE

STAFF	PARENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More consistency across schools with resources, scheduling, teaching approach ▪ Clear expectations for responsibilities of teachers, parents and students ▪ Consider regular grading scale instead of S and U ▪ Access to student email for communication and tracking work ▪ Centralize place for all information – parents download Google classroom/Schoolology app for tracking ▪ Simplified and centralized way to handle attendance ▪ Engaging tools that support curriculum and are fun/easy to access (full subscription) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More structured agenda with guided instruction by teacher (closer to class like instructions) ▪ Clear and consistent expectations centered around a “best in class” approach with training for teachers and consistent protocols across schools within district ▪ Leverage teacher’s aids and special’s teachers to reduce burden for grade based teachers ▪ Share agenda earlier (night before) ▪ More clear and on-going feedback to track progress ▪ Simplified communication tools (e.g. WhatsApp used for student to ask question and everyone receive the answer)

GRADES 6-8 (MIDDLE SCHOOL) FINDINGS

CHALLENGES WITH REMOTE LEARNING

STAFF	PARENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of connection with students (e.g., cameras off, unresponsive to calls/emails) ▪ Incompletion of assignments, tracking down missing work ▪ Assessing performance with missing assignments, suspecting students of cheating (older siblings/parents doing work, googling answers) ▪ Tech issues and anxiety for some students to be onscreen (self-conscious of appearance) ▪ Lack of parental support (allow videos games and absences) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of live instruction and engagement with teachers; reliance on resources (especially hard with IEP students) ▪ Lack of self-discipline of students; haven't been taught how to break down assignments ▪ Tech issues; students and teachers not knowing how to use, students turning camera off ▪ Limited teacher availability and lack of responsiveness ▪ Reliance on parents; challenging if working parents ▪ Lack of socialization

WORKED WELL WITH REMOTE LEARNING

STAFF	PARENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Schedule of shorter days helpful given amount of work and need for flexibility ▪ Use of video for student assignments; allowed for creativity ▪ Opportunity for students to take ownership in getting work completed ▪ Some excel online given more autonomy, reduced social pressure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teachers who taught live, present for students (e.g., Math) ▪ Teachers who required students to be on camera and encouraged participation ▪ Students collaborating with each other to get tech issues resolved

MOVING FORWARD/ADVICE

STAFF	PARENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parent-Student Contract – include moral obligation (e.g., no cheating) with clear consequences for actions ▪ Clear policies about missing/late assignments and impact on grading ▪ Standardized procedures for attendance ▪ Professional development around remote learning ▪ Improvements on co-teaching and dealing with IEP students ▪ Timely communication from administration that impacts teachers to plan family life accordingly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Replicate the classroom experience as much as possible, including longer school days (8 am – 3 pm) ▪ Focus on core subjects as the priority (over specials) ▪ Get more creative on how to better engage students and offer socialization opportunities (e.g., breakout sessions on Zoom to discuss random topics) ▪ Teachers record and post their live sessions for future reference and parent assistance (e.g., new Math) ▪ Provide more flexibility for working parents ▪ More streamlined communications ▪ Rules for Zoom (e.g., camera on)

GRADES 9-12 (HIGH SCHOOL) FINDINGS

CHALLENGES WITH REMOTE LEARNING

STAFF	PARENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of connection with students; difficulty creating culture similar to face to face ▪ Lack of feedback and responsiveness of students ▪ Assessing performance, suspect cheating, uncertainty how to give support via technology ▪ Anxiety for some students to be onscreen (self-conscious about appearance) ▪ Rigidity of schedule creates anxiety for some; less flexibility compared to younger grades 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inconsistencies in teaching across classes (live vs. video) and homework accountability ▪ Lack of engagement; lectures monotonous on zoom, long days with limited breaks, not enough interaction for some, videos turned off ▪ Inconsistencies on assignment location across classes ▪ Miss school/friends, use social media to connect but lack of personal contact ▪ Tech issues (e.g., kicked out of Zoom)

WORKED WELL WITH REMOTE LEARNING

STAFF	PARENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Schedule was best given the covid situation ▪ Use of breakout rooms for students to connect ▪ Some students showed maturity, took ownership on individually paced assignments ▪ Mix of synchronous and asynchronous learning ▪ Use of Schoology to provide relevant information (Zoom code, attendance quiz, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accessibility of teachers (but some students are shy about reaching out) ▪ Use of breakout sessions and collaboration time to help with socialization ▪ Use of video to share work and promote engagement

MOVING FORWARD/ADVICE

STAFF	PARENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Flex Day (e.g., Wednesday) to allow teachers time to plan lessons and collaborate, connect 1:1 with students, offer small group socialization ▪ Clearly define student responsibilities in remote learning environment ▪ Attendance handled by admin staff and not teachers ▪ Standardized policies for appearance/behavior (e.g., on camera, dressed appropriately, sitting up, etc.) ▪ Clear rules on deadlines ▪ Full subscriptions for subject specific tools/software ▪ Focus on emotional/social health of staff and students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus on more ways to engage students (cameras on, more break outs and interactive group projects, more check-ins with teachers) ▪ Ensure technology is working; provide headphones and bigger screens (if funding) ▪ Record lectures to view later ▪ Consider longer hours (8 am-3 pm) with more breaks ▪ More training for teachers on remote teaching ▪ Additional aids in classroom to facilitate and support teachers ▪ Teachers teach from school classrooms