Behind the screen

Schooling, stress, and resilience in the Covid-19 crisis

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The American Voices Project (AVP) relies on immersive interviews to deliver a comprehensive portrait of life across the country. The interview protocol blends qualitative, survey, administrative, and experimental approaches to collecting data on such topics as family, living situations, community, health, emotional well-being, living costs, and income. The AVP is a nationally representative sample of hundreds of communities in the United States. Within each of these sites, a representative sample of addresses is selected. In March 2020, recruitment and interviewing began to be carried out remotely (instead of face-to-face), and questions were added on the pandemic, health and health care, race and systemic racism, employment and earnings, schooling and childcare, and safety net usage (including new stimulus programs).

The "Monitoring the Crisis" series—which is co-sponsored by the Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality, the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, and the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston—uses AVP interviews conducted during recent months to provide timely reports on what's happening throughout the country as the pandemic and recession play out. To protect respondents' anonymity, quotations presented in this series are altered slightly by changing inconsequential details. To learn more about the American Voices Project and its methodology, please visit inequality.stanford.edu/avp/methodology.

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Hard, real hard. Jobs are scarce to none. … 'Cause we can't go to work and with the kids they can't go to school, babysitters are not really taking no jobs… . There is just a lot of stuff.

—Black man in Ohio with elementary school children

The Covid-19 pandemic abruptly halted in-person schooling

and sent parents scrambling to manage their children's education from home. Teachers had to figure out how to deliver their curriculum virtually and parents had to manage both work and schooling responsibilities and troubleshoot technical problems. Although this disruption affected all families with children, it imposed particular trauma and stress on families with limited resources, and magnified the educational inequities that existed before the pandemic. Without in-person schooling, many children lost access to an important support system that included regular meals, health services, and interaction with teachers, social workers, and learning specialists.

In this report we use immersive interviews from the American Voices Project to hear directly from families who had to cope with the uncertainties of the new era. Because our interviews embed a discussion of schooling in a larger conversation about family, religion, and work, we have an unusually rich backdrop with which to understand how pandemic schooling interacted with pandemic lives. This allows us to cast new light on a wide range of questions that have become part of the pandemic discourse about schooling: What is schooling like behind the screen? How did parents adapt to their new roles as teachers? What was the impact of social isolation on students? How did students with different learning needs fare when trying to learn online? How did parents evaluate the risk of returning to in-person schooling? What was the impact of the disruption on women who perform the majority of caregiving work? What should schools and school districts do in the future to mitigate the uncertainty and stress caused when schools close their doors for unforeseen reasons?

We begin with an overview of inequities in the U.S. education system and then describe our

KEY FINDINGS

Schooling during the pandemic exacerbated many of the pre-pandemic disparities in the U.S. educational system. School shutdowns imposed particular trauma and stress on families of color, low-income families, and high-need students.

Schooling during the pandemic was stress-inducing. Parents described online learning as a frustrating experience, fretted about the quality of remote school, and worried about the emotional impact on their children.

Schooling during the pandemic was fraught with hard decisions. At the start of the 2020 school year, some parents had a choice of whether to send their children to school in person. They often felt torn between safety concerns and the knowledge that their children clearly wanted to go back.

Schooling during the pandemic was burdensome. Having kids at home created an immense burden for mothers, both those in and out of the workforce. Mothers interviewed reported intensive involvement in their kids' schooling during the pandemic.

data and analysis strategy. We next examine the challenge of teaching and learning from home and the difficult decision whether to return to the classroom. We then turn to the disparate impact of school closures on women and conclude with policy recommendations for dealing with school closures and digital learning.

Reproduction of inequality

Education is often seen as an opportunity for learning, personal growth, and economic success. Investments in education represent an enduring commitment by parents, taxpayers, and governments to making equality of educational opportunity available to all students. There is much to be proud of in these efforts, but there is also the need to recognize that access to educational opportunity still reflects in many ways the very inequities the society at-large hopes to minimize and even eliminate through education. For many families of color and families living below or at the poverty line, high-quality educational experiences are often unavailable due to lack of funding, residential segregation, and inadequate housing. Ten million children in the United States—or nearly 1 out of 7—lived in poverty in 2018.[1] A significant majority of these children—71 percent—were children of color. Despite the best efforts of teachers and school leaders, schools can contribute to the reproduction of long-term inequalities. Although this reproductive effect is well known, it is important to review a few key aspects of it, as doing so helps to explain why pandemic schooling was such an unequal experience.

The first key point is that schools are highly segregated by income and increasingly so. From 1991 to 2012, between-school income segregation in large school districts increased by over 40 percent.[2] Even when they are not poor, Black and Hispanic students are more likely to attend high-poverty schools than white students.[3] In 2017, 72 percent of Black students attended high-poverty schools, compared with 31 percent of white students. Additionally, Black children were five times as likely as white children to attend schools that are highly

segregated by race and ethnicity.[4] Recent research has provided convincing evidence that school integration is beneficial for all students in terms of academic achievement.[5] Any challenges engendered by school segregation are often compounded by symptoms of community-level poverty, including high rates of violence, scarcity of food, and high environmental pollution.[6]

A second key point is that differential access to education comes with consequences. Low-income students are not just more likely to be taught by inexperienced teachers; they also have less access to academic supports and critical classes for college readiness, fewer college counselors, and less rigor and expectation for student growth.[7] These effects are especially detrimental for students of color. According to the U.S. Department of Education, "[Being a student of color living in poverty is] the equivalent of a permanent economic recession. Unfortunately, the past decade has seen little progress in narrowing these disparities. The average black or Hispanic student remains roughly two years behind the average white one."[8]

When schools close, an already tilted playing field is likely to become even more tilted in favor of families that are in a position to provide valuable resources to their children. The well-known gap in internet availability is a case in point: In fall 2020 data from the Household Pulse survey, only 61 percent of households with income less than $25,000 reported that the internet was "always available" for their children to use for educational purposes; this share was 86 percent among households with incomes above $75,000.[9] Although this gap has long been consequential, it became especially so during a pandemic in which opportunities for schooling came to depend on internet availability.

In some instances, the AVP data reflect the complex interactions of race, gender, and socioeconomic status in public education. Unpacking these findings requires us to look at data contextually. Parents and children experience the world through the totality of their lives. That is why we rely on direct quotes to tell the stories of our respondents. Through them we begin to understand the conse-

quences of structural inequities in a nuanced and authentic way, which is the most reliable method of developing policy solutions that are likely to arc in the direction of fairness and equity.

The American Voices Project is uniquely positioned to give voice to a range of parent, caregiver, and educator perspectives and experiences. In a society characterized by many inequities, we need to know more about how poverty, race, and gender intersect with the multiple stressors associated with schooling during the pandemic. Such stressors were disruptive and difficult for families. When they are experienced simultaneously, they have a cumulative and devastating impact.

Data and analysis strategy

The American Voices Project interviews household members aged 18 and older. Given our interest in early childhood and K–12 education, we use two strategies to obtain our sample. First, we select households with young people aged 0–19. We analyze interviews where the respondent, usually a parent or other caregiver, discusses the impact of current educational issues on themselves or their family members. Some households contain more than one school-aged young person. Second, we select all people working in pre-K through 12th grade education who directly discuss their experiences in those roles. Examples are teachers, school nurses, and school social workers.

The interviews in our sample were conducted between September 25 and December 10, 2020. The final sample includes 65 interviews. These interviews report on the educational experiences of 123 individuals aged 0–19 and 10 individuals working in pre-K through 12th grade education. Our respondents are racially, socioeconomically, and geographically diverse (see Table 1).

We seek to understand how parents, teachers, and children experienced schooling during the pandemic. To conduct our analyses, we devised a coding framework that captured the quality, quantity, and type of schooling, familial involvement

in education, childcare needs, emotional impact of schooling disruptions, and material hardship related to school closures. After the interview transcripts had been coded, we identified the main themes emerging across these categories.

Although the sample size means that we must be cautious in discussing variability across groups, the differences in experiences, perspectives, and needs were nonetheless striking. These experiences are racialized, gender-specific, and income-level specific.

Table 1. Distribution of socioeconomic characteristics.

Gender of respondent (n=65)	
Female	69%
Male	31%
Household income (n=65)	
Low (up to $30,000)	40%
Middle ($30,001-85,000)	34%
High (above $85,000)	15%
Missing	11%
Race/ethnicity of respondent (n=65)	
Non-Hispanic white	37%
Non-Hispanic Black	29%
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish (of any race)	23%
Non-Hispanic other race	---*
Missing	---*
Age of student (n=123)	
Early childhood (0–5)	20%
Elementary/middle (6–13)	42%
High school (14–19)	33%
Missing	5%

* Indicates the cell is too small to provide data while maintaining confidentiality.

Managing challenging circumstances: teaching and learning from home

The stress of home education is reflected in many of our interviews. Over and over, parents described online learning as a frustrating experience. They talked about their own frustration and the frustration of their children.

Getting (my daughter) to stay on the computer for kindergarten, dealing with all of the other kindergarteners that they have to deal with, whose parents are at work and can't help them right now. It's really frustrating because as soon as they get going, it's like they have to stop because then they have to help another kid. It's not me being frustrated with the kids. They're kids. It's just being frustrated with the situation.

—White woman in Washington with elementary and middle school children, and a toddler

He's had a lot of frustration... I heard him yelling at his English teacher yesterday and I thought to myself "Oh, my God." He was like, "[Zoom] wasn't on. I wasn't yelling at her. I was just yelling because I was annoyed at her."

—White woman in Delaware with high school child

Across the interviews analyzed for this report, several themes came up repeatedly when discussing educational experiences during the pandemic. Parents often fretted about the quality of remote education. They worried about the mechanics of where and how their children would be taught. Parents of children with special needs spoke at length about their children's struggles. And many parents worried about their children's broader emotional well-being. We examine each of these topics below, and also include perspectives from teachers who reported being overwhelmed by the changed educational landscape.

Quality of schooling

Although some school districts offered in-person schooling for the 2020–21 year, many districts with students who stand to benefit most from the structure and resources provided by in-person schooling remained in a distance-learning setting.[10] School closures from September to December 2020 were more common in schools with lower third-grade math scores, a higher share of students experiencing homelessness, more students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch, and more racial/ethnic minorities.[11] The gap in access to in-person schooling reflects deeper structural inequities across income, race, ethnicity, and geography—many of which were exacerbated by the economic fallout and health risks of the pandemic.

Many of the parents interviewed worried about their children's academic achievement during virtual learning, and early data confirm their concerns. Digital learning was, in particular, less successful for children of color, children in low-income families, and high-need students.[12] According to one estimate, students overall were about three months behind in math at the start of the year, with white students about one to three months behind and students of color three to five months behind.[13] Students scored better on the reading assessment than math. The parents in our sample had to come to terms with these problems.

In the academic aspect—and we also explain this to them, because they get desperate—this is something atypical. School won't always be like this. We have to let this pass. We know this year will not be a year to acquire much knowledge.

—Hispanic man in Texas with high school children

I feel like they're setting our kids back. Especially because my daughter was so on a roll here. We were just talking about Stanford. We were just talking about—'cause I told her, I know you can. ... I will do anything in this world to get you to

where you want to. ... It's gonna be a problem for her later on because of this, because now it's like they're not learning.

—Hispanic woman in California with elementary and middle school children

Survey data show that some students in low-income households had fewer hours of live virtual contact with teachers relative to high-income students, with 21 percent of households with incomes under $25,000 reporting that their children had no live contact with teachers in the past week. In 29 percent of high-poverty districts, K–5 teachers primarily reviewed content rather than teaching new content in spring 2020. By comparison, in low-poverty districts, only 8 percent of teachers focused on reviewing old material.[14] This lack of engagement required students to direct their own learning and increased the burden on the parents and caregivers to fill the gap.

We download different learning apps 'cause they have their phones and tablets and stuff like that. We do little worksheets that we go on internet to get, for their age group. We download mathematical worksheets, and we make sure that we read at least a book a day.

—Black man in Ohio with elementary school children

The way the school is right now, they're so far behind. ... His reading has gotten better since we started working with him. We just kept working with him as much as we could throughout the summer. Whenever school was out, me and my wife read him books every night.

—White man in West Virginia with elementary school child and a toddler

In many AVP interviews, the story was the same: Parents worked hard to compensate for inadequate schooling. However, parents also faced various barriers in their attempts to compensate, a point to which we turn next.

Technological hurdles

The shift to digital learning required parents and caregivers to provide learning support and to troubleshoot technical problems with virtual classes. As one interviewee noted, *"I'm not tech savvy at all and if I were in charge of keeping my kids involved in classes on the computer....I would throw my hands up."*

One mother describes the difficulty of not having enough computers for her three children and the frustration of not being able to assist with schoolwork[15]:

I did get too stressed out, because at school they only gave them two computers and there were three of them. And one had to wait for the other one of the twins to finish, and there were things that she didn't understand, I didn't know how to explain them. They didn't understand and they said, mom, they didn't teach me this at school, I don't know what to do. And so the teachers, at least for the twins, they only gave them math games and stuff like that, but it wasn't a class in itself. It wasn't. It was different with the older girl, the teacher always called her on Zoom, she gave her homework, assignments. If she didn't understand anything, she could call the teacher. The teacher was always looking out for her.

—Hispanic woman with elementary and middle school children

Students with special needs

Students with special needs often lag behind their classmates academically in normal times. They frequently benefit from a focus on individualized learning and interventions that help them progress. Assistive technology can be an asset for students with special needs to augment learning. However, online engagement for their entire learning experience proved difficult, as many have challenges with independent learning. Individualized education plans (IEPs) for those who learn differently—devised to close the achievement gap—often require high-intensity teacher or tutor engagement either one-on-one or in small groups, which is often lost with remote schooling.

Since kindergarten, we've noticed that he just was behind. We didn't know the extent, but we knew that he was behind academically ... When school finally shut down, that's when he was supposed to get tested and, because school stopped, they just pushed it off to the following school year ... He does get special education now, which is really good, but it's still very, very difficult for him. He needs one-on-one in-person versus a computer ... It's very difficult when you have a child who has a disability, to sit behind a computer for X number of hours a day to try to learn. We see his frustration with that, his anxiety.

—White woman responsible for elementary school relative's schooling[16]

One woman is raising her two grandsons, who both have IEPs. She described how they've been handling online schooling[17]:

The younger one is pretty consistent, and he sticks with it. The older one that has more of a learning disability and the ADHD issue and everything, it's very hard for him to stay on task. So, I have requested that he needs one-on-one. He goes twice a week, but it's only for two hours a day. ... But the teacher has told me it's difficult for him to stay on task.

—White woman with high school children

Emotional impact

Findings published by the CDC suggest that virtual instruction might pose more of a risk to the mental and emotional health of both children and parents, as compared with attending school in-person during the pandemic.[18] Parents in the CDC survey reported that their children in online school spent less time outdoors, with friends, and doing physical activity, and that their children's mental or emotional health worsened (see the "Having to stay still" report in this series for more on how youth and young adults fared during the pandemic). Indeed, the emotional impact of school closures was one of the concerns most frequently cited by parents of elementary and middle school children. There was

a recognition that time away from friends, physical and social activities, and family and other loved ones breeds social isolation.

I just don't like that he doesn't get all that social interaction. Honestly, I feel like the most important thing for kids is to play with other kids.

—White woman in Florida with elementary school children

They really don't have friends and other kids they can play with and normal stuff and they can't do it. So, it's very hard for them.

—Hispanic man in California (children's ages not disclosed)

Several parents pointed out that the response to online schooling depended somewhat on the personality and disposition of their particular kid. In some families, one child was handling online education well, while another child was struggling mightily. As one parent noted:

My son really loves online [schooling]. My daughter hates it. She likes to be around people but she just don't want to be obedient and do what they ask her to do. She's not meeting their expectations all the time. She doesn't want to face the camera. She's got to sit up, she wants to stay in bed, because she's at home.

—Black woman in Mississippi with high school children

This result is consistent with other AVP research (see "Having to stay still") showing that some children are better equipped to handle the reduction in social contact that online schooling entails.

Teaching remotely

On the other side of the screen, many teachers faced an increased burden due to remote or hybrid instruction. Several teachers commented on the overwhelming workload:

Instead of teaching five classes this year, I am teaching six classes. My weekends have been very tight. My husband has been doing grocery shopping, been doing a lot of food prepping, so that he can give me some hours so that I can try to get ahead of the curve so that I am not always buried under my work. … I feel really tight timewise even though this is over 20 years of teaching, I feel like I really have to work around the clock just to float.

—High school teacher in New Jersey

I had to start doing Zoom meetings and professional development with the teachers trying to teach them this virtually. It was a difficult time. I was working harder than I've ever worked in my life, I think, because the day didn't end at 4 o'clock. I was still up at 2 in the morning making lessons and tweaking this and having my teacher file and my student file and trying to get stuff for the next day. It was easily an 18-hour day sometimes, if not more.

—Elementary school teacher in Iowa

Several teachers spoke about trying to reach kids without the benefit of in-person connection. A band teacher talked about the challenge of teaching kids to connect to music when they can't feed off a classmate's energy or read a teacher's physical response. Teachers tried to find new ways to connect with their students:

Our kids had their material pickup today or yesterday, in their bags we included a stuffed animal for every kid in our grade with a note that it was their reading buddy and they had to read to it 20 minutes a day.

—Elementary school teacher in North Carolina

Difficult decisions: return to the classroom or not

By the start of the 2020–21 school year—roughly six months into the pandemic—some schools were attempting to re-open. Re-opening procedures var-

Parents emphasized their children's eagerness to return to the classroom, and those who decided to send their children back often cited their children's desire to return as a factor in their decision.

ied greatly by geography, with the decision about whether to reopen left largely to school districts and local officials. A few states—including Florida, Texas, Arkansas, and Iowa—mandated that schools offer part-time or full-time in-person instruction, while most large urban districts remained entirely remote.[19] Covid-19 rates had fallen somewhat from the summer surge, with about 40,000 new cases reported on average per day in September. Case counts steadily increased over the months included in our interview data, exceeding 200,000 new cases per day on average in December.[20]

For some parents, remote school was the only option. But other parents faced the difficult decision of whether to send their children back to school in-person. The CDC offered guidance and a *Household Risk Checklist* to parents and caregivers to help guide their decision. Acknowledging the important role of school in students' lives, the CDC indicated that decisions should take into account a range of factors, including "individual child and household level of risk of severe illness, the number of Covid-19 cases in a community, and a child's social emotional and academic needs."

Many of the parents who were considering sending their kids back were put off by the virtual learning their children had received in spring 2020, but unsure whether sending them back was worth the health risk.

The kids are not paying attention on the screen because the teacher can mute them anytime... I look at my son, they're dancing on the screen. I was like, "What are you guys doing?" ... They were supposed to open the school. But I'm fearful because my son has asthma. I fear, what if he gets—but at the same time, but what if everyone's gonna get it eventually, so who cares. I guess it's just I'm over it.

—Hispanic woman in California with elementary and middle school children

Throughout the interviews, parents emphasized their children's eagerness to return to the classroom, and those who decided to send their children back often cited their children's desire to return as a factor in their decision.

Online schooling that didn't work so you don't have no option but to take them to school, just hope they are in safe hands while they at school and don't come back [home with] Covid-19. ... [My daughter] wanted to see the students, she wanted to see her teacher, she wanted to be in the classroom.

—Black man in Florida with elementary and middle school children

One mother explained that her children were eager to go back to the classroom. She spoke at length about how she had made the decision to send them back:

It was a hard decision. I swear it was every day I was, "Am I doing the right thing?" I had a whole bunch of friends who were not sending their kids to school. ... I was happy to support [my kids'] decision to go to school because I didn't want to have to worry about the computer, but at the same time, I was hesitant because I'm, "Is this unwise? Am I sending them into a cesspool of Covid? Are we all just going to get sick?" ... What really changed my mind to really feel good about sending them to school was I ran into a friend at Target. Her kids are really smart and they're really involved and she's got a good head on her shoulders and I really trusted her opinion.

She was, "Yeah, I'm totally sending my kids to school" and I was, "Thank goodness."

—White woman in Texas with elementary, middle, and high school children

Parents also had to contend with the uncertainty created by shifting plans, as school districts sometimes changed course with little notice.

I hadn't really wrapped my head around, "Okay, she's going in person. How are we going to do this? This is going to be okay." ... Then when we got here, they were like "Oh, we're going to start online for the first six weeks." So, I was like, "Okay." So, that was a whole shift. I had to have a conversation with her.

—Black woman in Delaware with elementary school children

Many parents noted that academic and behavioral issues improved when their children were able to return to in-person school, even part time. One mother described being pleased that her son was now attending in-person school two days a week:

In the spring, he struggled with staying on top of activities and being able to self-pace himself. His grades definitely dropped at the end of junior year there with all the online. He just went back to school a few weeks ago and he's doing better. He's pretty motivated because he wants to be in school and he knows this is crunch time with his senior year, but I would say he does better in school than he does being at home.

—White woman with high school child

Disparate impacts: experiences of women

Much of the responsibility for educating children at home falls to women, often resulting in additional stress and frustration. Women were already performing most family caregiving responsibilities prior to the pandemic, and took on additional parenting and household responsibilities during the lockdowns.[21] Working mothers frequently reduced their hours or left their jobs entirely during the pandemic.[22] Between August and September 2020,

over 1.1 million workers over age 20 dropped out of the workforce, and 80 percent of those workers were women.[23]

From our data, it's clear that women have been acutely impacted by school closures and uneven school openings. As table 1 showed, 69 percent of the respondents who discussed schooling during the pandemic were women. Also, 85 percent of the respondents who discussed the emotional impact of the pandemic were women, and 90 percent of the respondents who discussed the struggles of special needs students were women. Low-income and female respondents frequently mentioned the importance of school-provided services such as healthcare services, daily meals, and after school programs.

About 25 percent of women with school-age children who are out of work cite the need to provide childcare for children out of school as the reason for their unemployment, compared with about 10 percent of men.[24] One mother in our sample—who had driven for Lyft and Uber and tried to start a lawn service business in recent years—said that her husband and adult children are the ones working outside the home and "holding the household down" during the pandemic. She said her school-aged children are her "whole world" right now:

> *The contract is that a parent has to be home at least the first four hours of school. So, I literally can't leave the house until like after 1:00. … We do everything together now. They're like sewed to me almost. I hate to have to leave them because I don't know how long it's going to be before one of them says I don't feel good, or my head hurts.*
>
> —*Black woman in Maryland with high school children*

Many women have long worked a "second shift"—a full-time job followed by caring for their children and completing household chores—and that burden has only multiplied with the disappearance of school and childcare during the pandemic.[25] One mother who works a full-time retail job explained that she had switched her hours so that she works some 10-hour shifts and some 5-hour

shifts and can homeschool her daughter during the day.[26]

> *I can sit in with my kid, we can go to our classes, we can do schooling a little bit, because honestly, she is only six years old and with how smart she is, I try not to push it so much because I notice she doesn't learn as well, whenever she's stressed out, or she's upset or if it's a subject that she's not really interested in.*
>
> —*White woman with elementary school children*

In many ways the story of the pandemic's impact on families is the story of how women, particularly women of color, have held their families together so often under challenging circumstances.

One woman who cleans houses described the impossibility of keeping up her work and overseeing her kids' schoolwork. She said that her children have missed a lot of school. Some days she brings her children with her to work to make sure they go to class; other days she has to leave work to check that they're in class.

> *I really would want the school staff to be more understanding. I'm like, you know what, this is very horrible what's happening to us, to everyone…. How am I supposed to do everything perfect by my children? I'm trying to guess that. I even tell the teachers well, if I was getting paid, like to make sure my child is in school, then I don't have to work, I could just concentrate on them. But I'm not getting paid, I need to go to work.*
>
> —*Hispanic woman in California with middle and high school children*

Another mother had been out of the workforce for years due to depression and anxiety, and her husband receives disability benefits. Although she wasn't juggling work, the pandemic had added to her caregiving responsibilities.[27]

> *He's not in school, he's with me 24 hours a day. So, that takes a lot of my time, it takes all of my time. I don't have a break. … Having a son with autism, it's harder to just do whatever I want to do at whatever time because I have to really keep on schedule. With the Covid thing and him being home from school, like I said, it takes up all of my time.*
>
> *—Hispanic woman with high school child*

In many ways the story of the pandemic's impact on families is the story of how women, particularly women of color, have held their families together so often under challenging circumstances.

Looking ahead

Parents and caregivers have been under tremendous pressure and stress during the pandemic. School systems across the country have been in constant adjustment to the conditions of the pandemic. We have documented a range of parent and caregiver perspectives and experiences. A few have praised their schools for their ability to provide "quality" educational experiences quickly (whether virtually or in-school). Other parents and caregivers have expressed sheer frustration about their experiences.

How can schools and school districts design the delivery of teaching and learning now and in the future? Many educational leaders have declared this pandemic an opportunity to reimagine public education, but there are few indications that we've leveraged this opportunity to do so. Based on the interviews we examined, here are five policy perspectives that schools and school districts might consider implementing, especially as new variants of the virus continue to spread (and as we consider new ways of schooling in the future):

- Ensure all families have access to high-speed internet and a quality home computer that enables students' full access to online learning.

- Consistently provide non-academic services such as meals and health check-ups to students.

- Design communication strategies that are online but also reach families through the mail and in person (conditions permitting).

- Establish a "hotline" for families to use for technical, emotional, and academic support.

- Support school leaders, teachers, and staff to avoid burn-out by providing relevant professional development and ongoing support.

As students return to the classroom for a third year of pandemic schooling—amid still-high case counts and ongoing disagreements over mask mandates and vaccinations—the effects of the school shutdowns and the stress related to homeschooling and distance learning will become more evident. As we have seen in the experiences of the families interviewed by the American Voices Project, the Covid-19 crisis is not just a story of struggle, but also a story of resilience behind the screen.

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Notes

1. Children's Defense Fund. 2021. "The State of America's Children." The poverty line for a family of four was $26,172 in 2019.

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