

Executive Summary

On March 15, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz issued Executive Order 20-02 directing schools in Minnesota to close due to the Covid-19 Pandemic and the ensuing danger to the health and safety of all Minnesotans. From March 16-27, school personnel were directed to create distance learning plans to allow for continuing the education of all students. On March 30, 2020, schools began to implement their learning plans. With just days to plan, all Minnesota teachers were transforming their curriculum to fit a distance learning model. The effort of school leaders, teachers and all school personnel was deemed heroic as students are now learning from home and most teachers are teaching from home. On April 23, Governor Walz ordered all schools to remain closed for the remainder of the school year to limit the spread of the coronavirus.

The COVID-19 lengthy school closure and crisis is unprecedented. Minnesotans have had school closures due to blizzards, floods, fires, tornadoes and school shootings but these closures were always in specific geographic areas affecting limited numbers of students for limited time periods (Wong , Shi , Gao, Zheteyeva , Lane, Copeland, 2014). The Spanish flu of 1918-19 which killed over 10,000 Minnesotans resulted in school closures of several weeks but was not a state-wide closing. Schools closed to limit the spread of the virus but students did not have the opportunity to continue their studies. Teachers were often asked to volunteer to help bringing health and sanitation information to families and the community (Stern, Cetron, Markel, 2009). In 2009, the H1N1 influenza pandemic resulted in sporadic Minnesota school closures with outbreaks in certain school districts resulting in short term closures. However, hygiene emphasis, health monitoring and ill student quarantines were more often utilized (Como-Sabetti, Livingston, Gahr, 2010). The spring 2020 COVID-19 worldwide pandemic and resulting shutdown of schools and businesses and stay at home orders for all citizens is a first for Minnesota and the United States.

The Educational Leadership faculty at Minnesota State University Moorhead realized the stress and work load of all school staff was enormous and resulted in quick dramatic changes to all aspects of school life as the COVID-19 crisis unfolded. During the first 2 weeks of April 2020, over a thousand teachers from Minnesota submitted the *Swaggert Instructional Practice Under Crisis* (SIPUC) anonymous questionnaire to MSUM researchers via Qualtrics. Teachers responded to this survey during the first days of distance teaching. The MSUM research team is sharing an abbreviated data analysis with you in hopes of informing and supporting teachers and administrators as they continue the distance learning format and work to provide the best possible learning opportunities for students during the COVID-19 crisis.

We also hope the results and recommendations can add to schools' information gathering as planning continues on May 4th and May 7th for distance learning plans encompassing the remainder of the school year.

MSUM Educational Leadership Faculty:

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SIPUC Summary:

Sample composition

1067 Teachers took the survey during the first two weeks April 2020. This was the beginning of COVID-19 Distance Learning so teachers were new to this drastically different teaching and learning format.

Children living at home were reported by 57% of teachers with almost 60% of these children elementary age or younger.

Survey respondents were 77% female and 22.5% male representing school sizes from under 500 to over 2500 students. School districts from all corners of Minnesota were represented. Teachers with 11 or more years of experience made up almost 60% of respondents. All grade levels and teaching assignments were represented. Special education teachers made up 23% of all participants.

School related topics

Most teachers (77%) were satisfied with District Training prior to beginning distance teaching. **92% of responding teachers expressed great confidence or some confidence in District Leadership.**

Expectations for communication varied with 60% of teachers reporting daily communication with students as required and 57% noting communication with parents as also expected. Maintaining virtual office hours of some sort was reported as necessary by 76% of teachers.

Of concern was the response that **43% of participants reported students NOT having reliable internet at home.** Another concern was 46% of respondents indicating they had insufficient or no planning for reviewing student performance data.

Levels of disruption due to COVID-19 crisis

Teachers responded to the level of disruption of their teaching practice on a 0 -10 scaled (0 = lowest disruption) question. The mean score was 7.51 indicating **teaching is very disrupted by the COVID-19 crisis.** The same type of scaled question asked about disruption to the respondents personal lives. Here the mean score was a bit lower (M = 6.84) but **personal lives are also very disrupted.**

Further analysis of the above data yielded the following main points:

Disruption to respondents' personal life that results from the COVID-19 school closure crisis is positively correlated to the level of disruption to their teaching practice. The higher the disruption on their teaching practice, the higher the disruption to their personal life and vice versa.

Having kids living with respondents does not have an impact on the level of disruption to their teaching practice. However, **respondents with kids at home reported a higher level of disruption to their personal life** ($M=7.11$) than those without kids at home ($M=6.49$).

Female respondents reported a higher level of disruption to their teaching practice ($M=7.59$) than male respondents ($M=7.25$).

Grade level does affect the level of disruption to respondents' teaching practice. Among all, elementary grade teachers reported the highest level of disruption to their teaching practice ($M=7.88$).

Years of teaching experience does affect the level of disruption to respondents' teaching practice. Among all, those with less than 3 years of teaching reported a lower level of disruption ($M=6.21$) than respondents with 4 to 10 years of experience ($M=6.74$) and those with 11 or more years of teaching experience ($M=7.01$) **The more years of teaching experience a respondent has, the higher the level of disruption to their teaching practice.**

Years of teaching experience did affect the level of disruption to respondents' personal life as well. **Respondents with less than 3 years of experience, reported lower levels of personal disruption** ($M=6.21$) than those with 11 years of teaching experience or more ($M=7.01$).

Special Education teachers experience a higher level of disruption to their teaching and professional practice than do regular education teachers. Overall special educators disruption to teaching level ($M=7.8$) is higher than the reported regular education teachers ($M=7.36$). Pre-school Special education teachers reported the highest level of professional practice disruption at ($M=8.53$)

Open Ended Question Analysis:

Can you manage teaching from home during the COVID-19 crisis while addressing other responsibilities (e.g. household, children, spouse)

- Teachers overwhelmingly regard the situation as manageable but stressful and negative.
- Teachers report managing their own children's education while teaching at home is difficult.
- Teachers overwhelmingly report relying on support system (spouse, partner, daycare).
- Teachers report struggling to maintain work/life balance and daily life schedules.
- Technology at home is reported as an issue for some teachers and families.
- Teachers remain HOPEFUL!

What is your great concern about the COVID-19 school crisis? (distance learning)

- Mental health and well-being of students, parents and teachers.
- Many aspects of student learning associate negatively with the COVID-19 school crisis (student participation, student support, assessment).
- Distance teaching inhibits ability of teachers to perform some critical teaching functions (learning equity, lost learning, special needs, social interaction).
- Technology, internet access, family and work-life balance concerns are real and important.

What we learned and recommendations for practice:

We are all in this crisis together! Teachers have answered the call and are working hard to serve students but not without issues. **Students come first for teachers no matter what the delivery system!**

Concern: Teachers all over the state feel their teaching practice and personal lives are highly disrupted. The differences between size of school, age of teachers, experience, grade level, gender is slight when it comes to the disruption of life and teaching as all groups feel disrupted.

Recommendation: We need to honor these feelings, be kind to each other and realize connecting with each other on a personal level continues to be important every day in every situation. It is necessary to find intentional ways to show how much teachers and staff are valued as they work in uncertain times.

Concern: Teaching from home with children at home (both pre-school and school age) is difficult and causes extra stress and worry. Daycare may not be an option or daycares can close.

Recommendation: Schedules need to be flexible to accommodate families and teaching duties. The issue should be addressed in an open and caring manner while searching for viable solutions.

Bright spot: Teachers feel confident in school leadership to lead through the COVID-19 crisis...a good thing!

Recommendation: Keep communication and decisions focused on doing what's best for students, teachers, staff and the community as a whole.

Concern: Special education teachers feel more disrupted than any other group of teachers.

Recommendation: Make sure special education teachers are supported and their students' learning and well-being enhanced.

Concern: Overall, more experienced teachers feel more disrupted in their teaching than to younger teachers.

Recommendation: Take time to visit and encourage someone who is struggling be they young or old, staff, student or parent. It pays dividends.

Concern: Internet access for students and staff continues to be an issue.

Recommendation: Staff technology should be updated to the highest level - School districts must work with staff and technology providers to ensure that staff and students have access to high speed connectivity.

Concern: Training and support for teaching is a real concern for half of the teachers surveyed.

Recommendation: Ongoing training and support for staff should be part of the weekly routine for all teaching staff.

Weekly staff meetings should be held virtually to encourage staff communication and socialization. Include members of the support staff in meetings to facilitate the message that we are in this together.

Concern: Parent support is needed for student learning but is often lacking or parents have just given up. Students can be disengaged or unable to learn independently without parent support.

Recommendation: We need to continue to reach out and support discouraged or disinterested parents and students. Communication plans with students and parents must be clear and set-up in a two-way mode to ensure schools can adjust to the changing needs of families.

Concern: Mental, emotional and physical health (of students, parents, teachers and staff) continue as serious and often silent issues during this crisis.

Recommendation: Districts can have weekly mental health checks with students, families, and staff. If possible, provide employee assistance programs that also serve dependents. Make these programs visible to families so they are aware that the services are available in the region. Personal wellness of staff is a very important element of successful teaching. Active wellness committees are a very proactive approach to supporting positive staff climate.

Bright spot: Support systems exist and are valued and necessary.

Recommendation: Thank a caregiver, spouse, colleague, friend or community member!

Teachers are hopeful.....

Remember: We are all in this together!

Resources

- Ridenhour, B. J., Braun, A., Teyrasse, T., & Goldsman, D. (2011). Controlling the spread of disease in schools. *PLoS ONE* 6(12): e29640. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0029640>.
- Stern, A. M., Cetron, M. S., & Markel, H. (2009). Closing the schools: Lessons from the 1918-19 US influenza pandemic. *Health Affairs* 28: W1066-W1078.
- Wong, K. K., Shi, J., Gao, H., Zheteyeva, Y. A., Lane, K., Copeland, D., Hendricks, J., McMurray, L., Sliger, K., Rainey, J. J., & Uzicanin, A. (2014). Why is school closed today? Unplanned k-12 school closures in the United States, 2011-2013. *PLoS ONE* 9(12): e113755. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0113755>.