

# Tulsa SEED Study

STUDY OF SCHOOL EXPERIENCES AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT  
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY & UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA-TULSA

The Tulsa SEED Study is led by Principal Investigators Dr. Anna Johnson and Dr. Deborah Phillips at Georgetown University; Dr. Diane Horn at University of Oklahoma - Tulsa; and Dr. Gigi Luk at McGill University.

## Distance Learning & Child Wellbeing During the COVID-19 Pandemic

### *A Snapshot from Tulsa, OK*

September 2021

This brief reports on the Tulsa SEED Study, which is following a diverse group of children from age 3 through 4<sup>th</sup> grade to understand the effects of attending Tulsa pre-K on their learning and development. The Tulsa SEED Study surveyed parents in the summer of 2020 about their experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic during the 2019-2020 school year, when their children were in 1<sup>st</sup> grade (N=586). The Study surveyed parents again in the summer of 2021 about their experiences of the pandemic during the 2020-2021 school year, when the children were in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade (N=579).

Note that in the Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) district, distance learning was in place from March 2020-March 2021.

### Children's Experiences with Distance Learning

In the 2021 survey, 77% of parents reported feeling that their child was prepared to start 3<sup>rd</sup> grade; 23% did not.

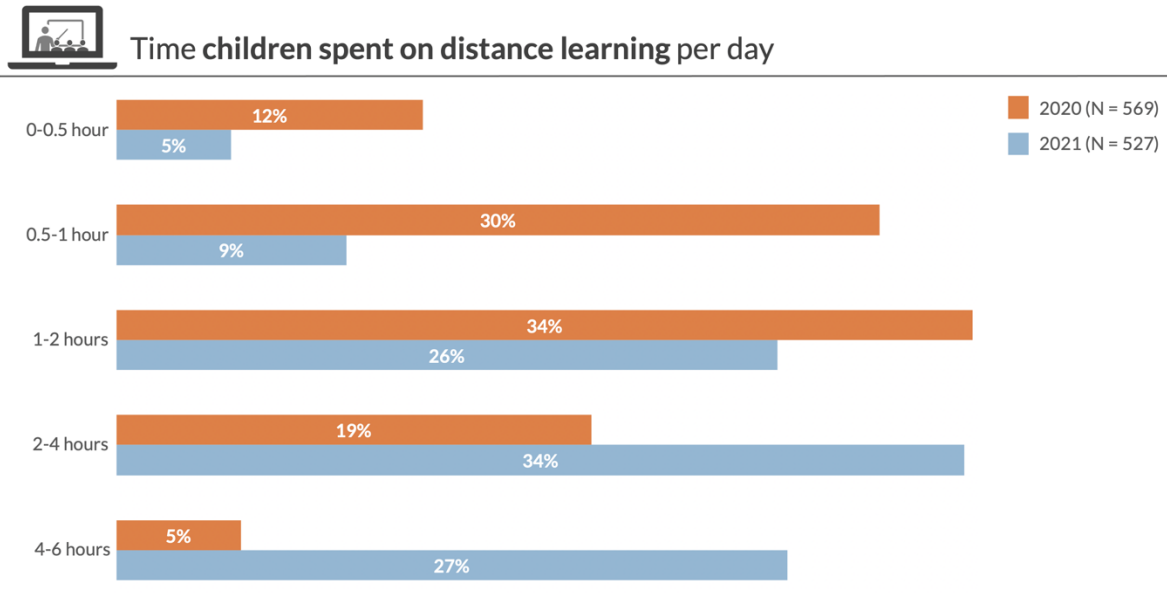


3 in 4 parents feel their child is prepared for this  
upcoming school year.

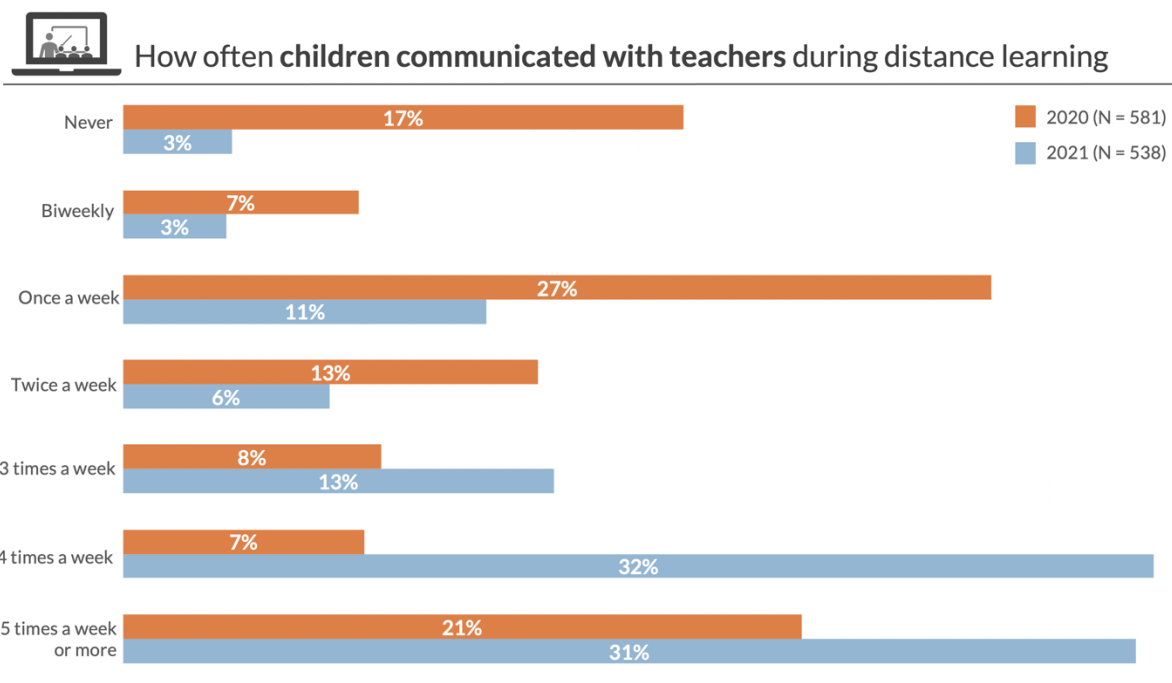
N = 543

When asked about how much their child participated in distance learning activities, a majority of parents reported that their child participated as much or more than the teacher asked at both timepoints (74% in 2020, 78% in 2021). Yet the number of hours spent on distance learning activities varied across families and increased from 2020 to 2021, as supports and expectations grew for both families and teachers. During the first few months of distance

learning in 2020, 42% of children spent an hour or less on distance learning activities per day: in 2021, this rate was down to 14% and more than half (61%) spent more than two hours a day on average.



Children’s communication with their teachers also increased. In 2020, about half (51%) of children communicated with their teachers once a week or less, whereas in 2021, just 17% communicated with their teachers once a week or less. Rather, most children (63%) communicated with their teachers 4 times a week or more.

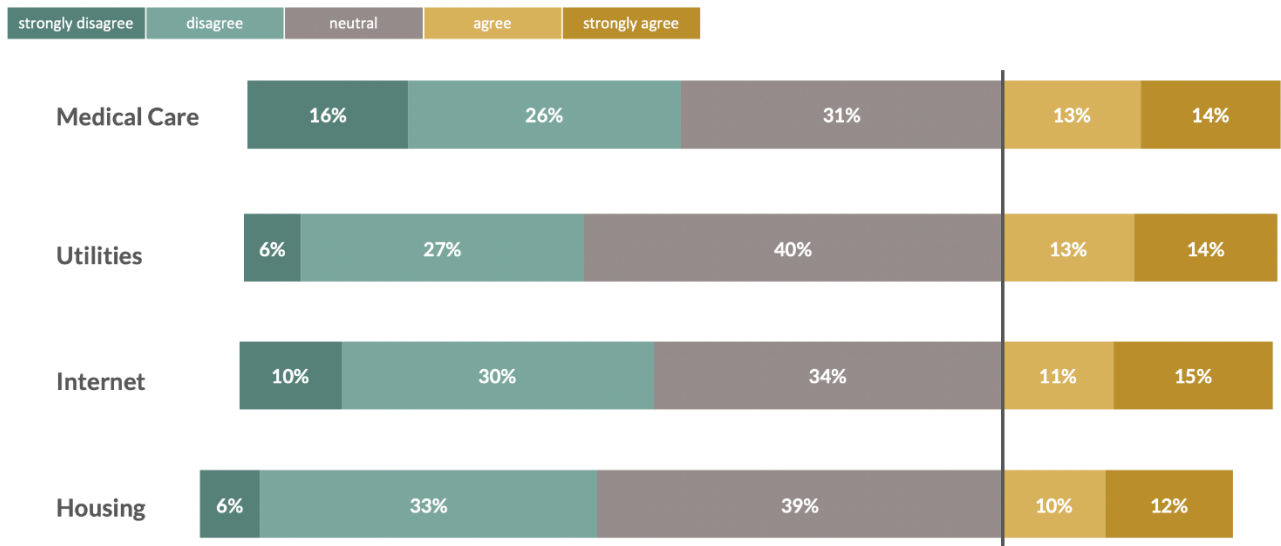


## Children's Wellbeing

In the 2021 survey, parents were asked to report on their household and child's wellbeing during 2<sup>nd</sup> grade distance learning. Many parents reported financial challenges. Only about a quarter of parents reported that they had enough money to cover the cost of medical care (27%), utilities (27%), internet (26%), and housing (22%).



There was enough money in the household to cover the cost of...



N = 551

In addition to financial challenges, many parents reported challenges accessing care for their child, including medical care and specialized or therapeutic care (e.g., speech or physical therapy).



Of those whose children require it, 50% had difficulty accessing specialized care.

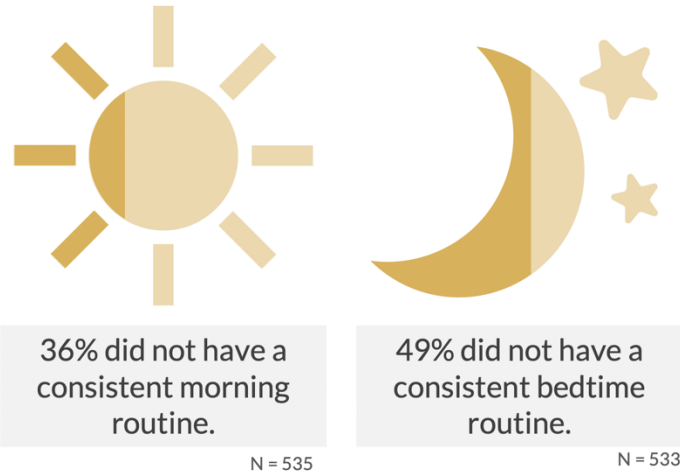
N = 292



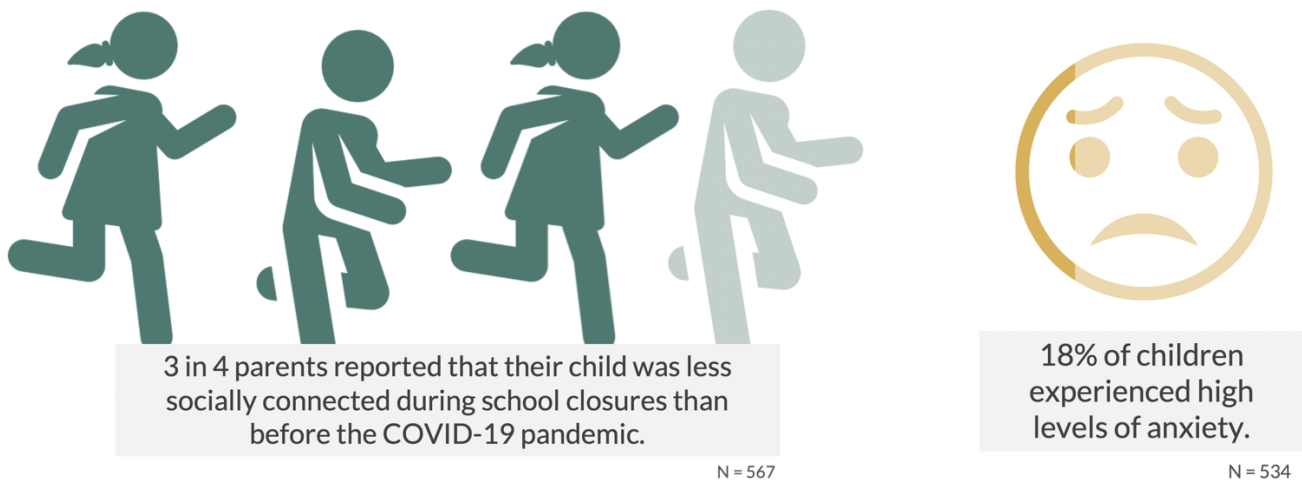
33% of parents delayed their child's medical care.

N = 438

Many families also reported inconsistent routines during distance learning. For instance, 36% of parents reported that their child did not have a consistent morning routine and 49% reported inconsistent bedtime routines.



Finally, most parents (76%) reported that their child was *less* socially connected when schools were closed than they were before the pandemic, and nearly 1 in 5 parents reported that their child experienced high levels of anxiety during this time.



## Conclusion

Children are starting their in-person school year having experienced numerous challenges to both their learning and wellbeing during the last year and a half of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the initial barriers to engagement in distance learning subsided for many (as seen in notably greater contact time between children and their teachers), some children will be entering the school year having experienced little engagement in distance learning. Additionally, children have experienced financial instability, disruptions to routines and services, anxiety, and limited social connections throughout the pandemic. For teachers, acknowledging the continued challenges students face, as well as their resilience developed over the past year, is important for understanding how to best support students' learning and wellbeing as they return to classrooms this fall.

## OUR SAMPLE

Participants in this pair of COVID-19 surveys were the parents (90% mothers) of the SEED study children. These children have been followed since ages 3-4, when they experienced a range of public preschool arrangements in the Tulsa Public School (TPS) district. Of the families still enrolled in the study, 43% responded to the 2020 COVID-19 survey (85% of whom were still enrolled in the TPS district), and 49% responded to the 2021 COVID-19 survey (90% of whom are still enrolled in the TPS district). Over two-thirds (67%) of parents who responded to the 2020 survey also completed the 2021 survey (N = 395). Across both COVID-19 surveys, respondents resembled the TPS population with respect to family income, child race/ethnicity, and child special needs status, but were more likely to be dual language learners.

## WHAT IS TULSA SEED?

Tulsa SEED is led by Principal Investigators Drs. Anna Johnson and Deborah Phillips at Georgetown University, Dr. Diane Horm at University of Oklahoma – Tulsa, and Dr. Gigi Luk at McGill University. The full SEED study team includes Drs. Sherri Castle and Anne Martin, April Dericks, Jane Hutchison, Anne Partika, and Owen Schochet.

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