

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.

Parents, Teachers, and Distance Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

A Snapshot from Tulsa, OK

August 2020

This brief describes the experiences of parents and teachers of 1st graders in Tulsa, OK since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Tulsa SEED Study, initiated in 2016, is following a diverse sample of children from low-income families from age 3 through 4th grade to understand the effects of attending pre-k programs on children's learning and development. The Tulsa SEED Study surveyed both parents (N=586) and teachers (N=118) in a 6-week period between May and July 2020.

Key findings:

- The effects of the pandemic cascade into the financial, physical, and mental health of parents, children, and teachers.
- Families of color, who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, reported relatively higher levels of income loss and food insecurity.
- Pervasive experiences of food insecurity were linked to feelings of depression; schools provided a life-line to food.
- Opportunities for learning shrunk dramatically with the shift to remote instruction, especially for children with special needs.
- Teachers struggled to motivate their young learners while parents struggled to find the time to help them.

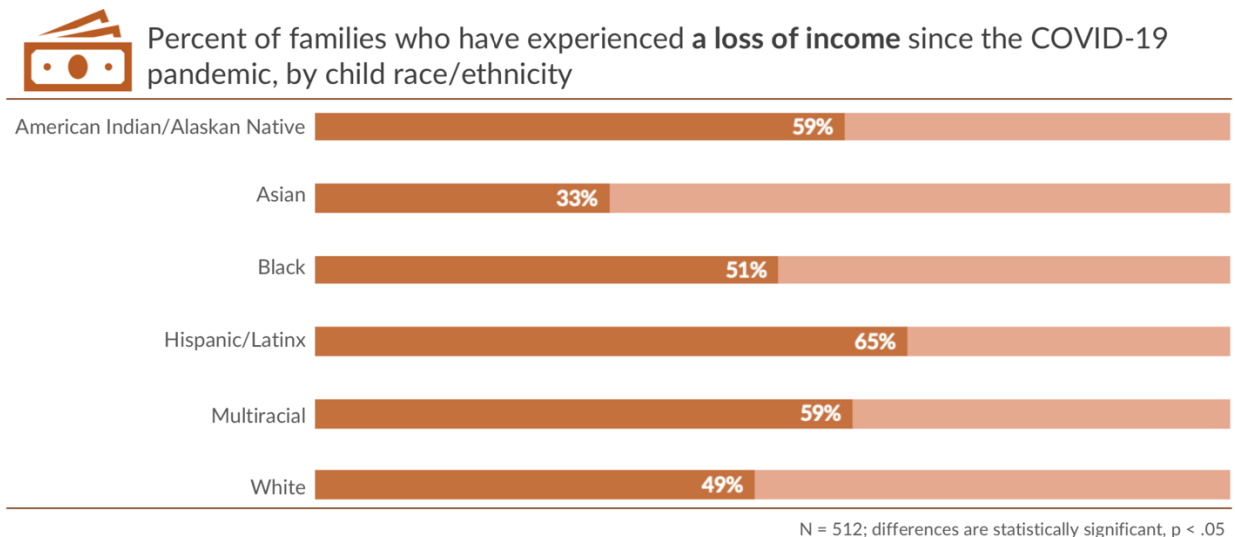
How Have Families Fared During the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Families have faced loss of work, loss of income, and food insecurity since the pandemic began.



Nearly half of responding parents lost their job or had work hours decreased since COVID-19 hit. 6 in 10 parents reported that their household income decreased during the pandemic. Additionally, nearly half of parents reported that since COVID-19 hit, they worried that their food would run out before they had money to buy more.

Notably, the prevalence of income loss and food insecurity differed by race and ethnicity. Families of Hispanic/Latinx, American Indian/Alaskan Native, multiracial, and Black children reported income loss more often than families of White and Asian children. This was especially true of Hispanic/Latinx families, 65% of whom reported income loss, compared to 49% of White families.¹



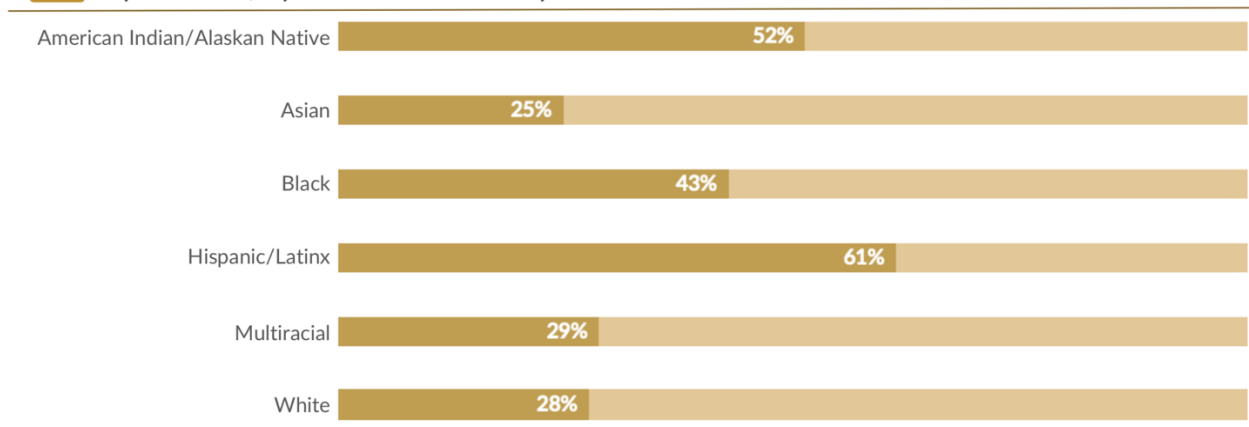
¹ The sample size for Asian families was too small ($n=4$) to make valid pairwise comparisons.



Additionally, families of Hispanic/Latinx, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Black children experienced food insecurity more often than families of multiracial, White, and Asian children. Families of Hispanic/Latinx children reported particularly high rates of food insecurity (61%) relative to multiracial families (29%) and White families (28%).



Percent of families who have experienced **food insecurity** since the COVID-19 pandemic, by child race/ethnicity



N = 530; differences are statistically significant, $p < .05$

In addition to financial and material hardships, many parents have also struggled with mental health since the pandemic began.

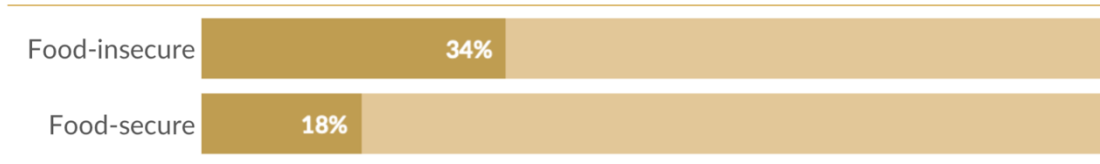


1 in 4 parents have experienced depressive symptoms since the start of the pandemic.

N = 574



Depressive symptoms were tied to food insecurity: Parents who were food-insecure were twice as likely to report feeling depressed as parents who were food-secure.



N = 533; difference is statistically significant, $p < .05$

Similarly, many children have experienced changes in social-emotional wellbeing.



47% of parents said their child has experienced **increased emotional or behavioral problems** since the pandemic began.

N = 584

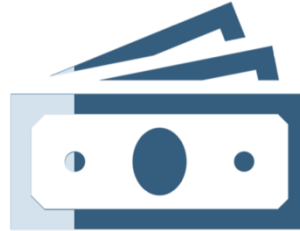
How Have Teachers Fared During the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Teachers have also faced hardships during the pandemic.



20% have experienced food insecurity.

N = 110



25% have experienced a decrease in household income.

N = 110

1 in 4 teachers reported that their household income had decreased since the outbreak of COVID-19, and 1 in 5 teachers reported that they worried that their food would run out before they had money to buy more.

Additionally, many teachers have faced mental health challenges, including high rates of depressive symptoms and increased job stress.



1 in 3 teachers experienced depressive symptoms since the start of the pandemic.

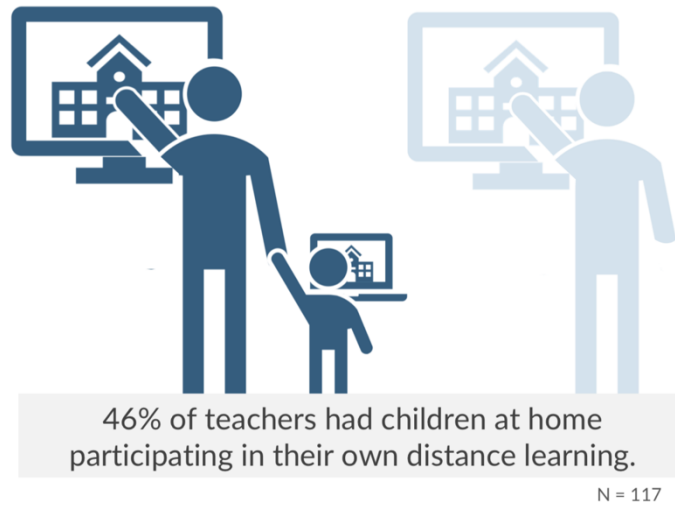
N = 117

Half of teachers who were food-insecure reported feeling depressed compared to one-third who were not.



N = 110; difference is statistically significant, $p < .05$

Another potential stressor was the challenge of teaching while also managing their own children's distance learning.



Most teachers reported that their job was more stressful during distance learning than before.



How Did Distance Learning Go?

Only 29% of teachers reported that “nearly all” their students participated in distance learning activities.



Proportion of students participating in distance learning, according to teachers

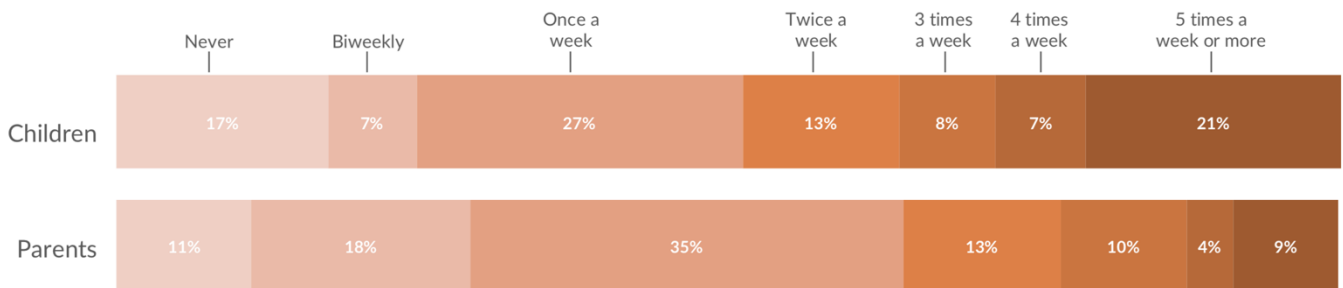


*Less than 1% of teachers reported that no students participated in distance learning
N = 118

Nearly 1 in 5 parents reported that their child never communicated with their teacher during distance learning. 1 in 10 parents reported that they themselves never communicated with their child's teacher during distance learning.



How often **families communicated with teachers** during distance learning, according to parents



N = 581

2 in 5 children spent an hour per day or less on distance learning, as reported by their parents.



Hours **children spent on distance learning** per day, according to parents



N = 569

While about half of teachers reported that they spent an hour or less per day on live instruction, they spent substantial additional time daily on planning for remote teaching and responding to student and parent questions.



Time teachers spent daily on distance learning responsibilities

Live instruction*



Responding to student/parent questions



Planning for remote teaching



*3% of teachers reported never doing live instruction.
N = 118

Most parents (65%) reported having difficulty with distance learning. They reported a range of challenges.



Distance Learning Challenges for Parents

1. Child needs more support than the parent has time to provide 30%
2. Lack of or inconsistent internet access 16%
3. Lessons/instructions too hard to understand 14%
4. No dedicated quiet space for schoolwork 13%
5. Lack of device to connect to distance learning 10%

N = 565

For some children with unique learning needs, distance learning was especially challenging.



Parents of **children with special needs** were far more likely to report challenges with distance learning than parents of children without special needs (83% vs. 63%, respectively). N = 549

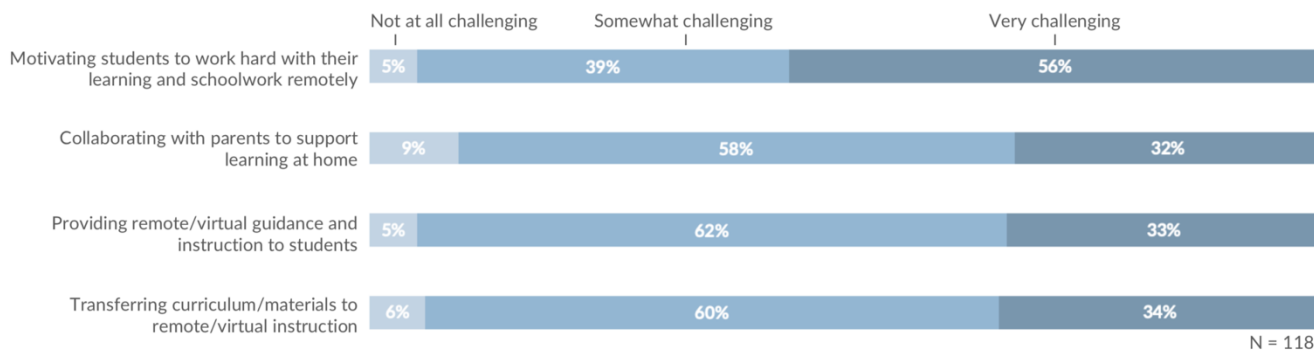
In contrast, parents of **dual language learners** were no more likely than other parents to report challenges with distance learning. N = 561

Difference is statistically significant, $p < .05$

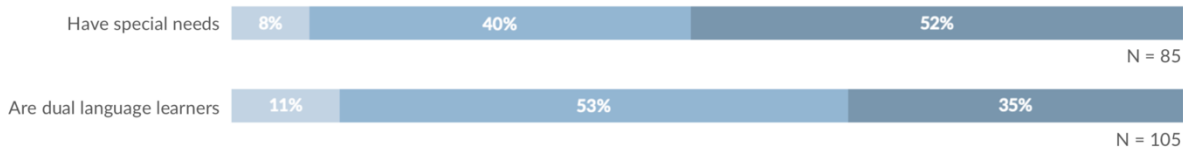
Teachers also faced challenges with distance learning. Over half reported that motivating students to work hard was very challenging. Additionally, of teachers who taught children with special needs, about half reported that adapting instruction for them was very challenging.



Distance Learning Challenges for Teachers



Adapting remote/virtual instruction and assignments to students who...



How Did Schools Support Families and Teachers?

The most commonly reported support that families received from their child's school when it was closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic was free meals, food, or groceries.



Supports families received from their child's school when it was closed due to the pandemic

1. Free meals/food/groceries 53%
 2. Technology supports 19%
 3. Access to educational activities, videos, and materials not created by school district 16%
 4. Access to internet 7%
 5. Social and emotional supports (e.g., counseling) 6%
-

N = 564

Most teachers reported that they received common planning time with their teaching team and support from their principal or other school leadership.



Supports teachers received during the pandemic

1. Common planning time with teaching team 72%
 2. Guidance/support from principal/school leadership 60%
 3. Guidance/support from district 53%
 4. Guidance/support from teachers' union 28%
 5. Paid in-service days to prepare materials 21%
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N = 118



Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the essential and multiple roles played by schools and teachers into stark relief. The voices of parents and teachers of young children heard through these surveys tell a shared story of lost household income, food insecurity and, for food insecurity, links to feelings of depression. The life-line that schools provided to meals and groceries during the early months of the pandemic is clear. The challenges in replacing classroom instruction with distance learning are also illuminated as are the heroic efforts teachers made to support their students' learning.

At this pivotal moment, when school districts across the nation are confronting the high stakes question of whether and how to re-open, the lesson from our findings is clear: open or not, the resources that schools and teachers provide in the form not only of instruction, but also of food, social and emotional support, and access to the internet will have a profound effect on the academic growth, health, and well-being of young children and their families. This constellation of findings must be top-of-mind as we develop policies to weather and emerge from the pandemic with strong families and schools.



OUR SAMPLE

Participants in this pair of COVID-19 surveys were the parents (90% mothers) and the first-grade teachers 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 by 1st grade, 43% responded to this special COVID-19 survey (85% of whom are still enrolled in the TPS district). COVID-19 survey respondents resembled the TPS population with respect to family income, child race/ethnicity, and child special needs status, but were slightly more likely to be dual language learners. 80% of the first-grade teachers for SEED study children responded to the survey.

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.

Tulsa SEED is made possible through funding from the Heising-Simons Foundation, the George Kaiser Family Foundation, the University Strategic Organization Initiative at the University of Oklahoma, the Foundation for Child Development, the Spencer Foundation, and the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Suggested citation:

Tulsa SEED Study Team. (2020). *Parents, teachers, and distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic: A snapshot from Tulsa, OK.*

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