



Distance Learning Expectations vs Reality: Families Demand Quality Distance Learning

When COVID-19 first hit Oakland, the district worked with the teachers' union to outline expectations for distance learning during the pandemic. As learning moved from the classroom to the living room, families increasingly became experts on how distance learning should improve. Here's an analysis of the last agreement with survey data to show what parents think.

Spring Agreement

Family Voices

Methods of distance learning

"Teachers will be given the choice to use their professional judgment in the best method of delivering instruction that is developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive to the needs of their students."

Families indicate that "small-group instruction" and "1:1 check-ins" are the most helpful but, fewer than half of families received these supports.

Every child should have access to small group instruction, at least every week.

Instructional minutes

"Daily engagement varies by grade level, see graph below to see minimum.

PreK-K: 1 hour and 30 min
Grades 1-3: 2 hours 15 min
Grades 4-5: 2 hours 30 min
Grades 6-12: 3 hours 15 min"

One third of families said it was not enough. Five times as many families wanted more instruction, rather than less.

Increase instructional minutes with a focus on the methods of instruction that families said were most helpful (small group and 1:1 check-ins).

Student assessment

"Teachers are encouraged to use online assessments to inform teaching and learning, to keep students and parents informed of student progress or areas for improvement."

Less than half families received progress feedback and 67% want the district to administer a formative assessment at the beginning of the year to measure learning status.

Schools should administer an assessment to learn about student needs and communicate ongoing progress to families.

Communication about student progress

"Teachers should be available for: virtual office hours, sharing progress with students and families, and providing feedback to students."

Only 44% of families reported that they received any updates about student progress. Words like "should be available" are not enough.

All families must receive updates about student progress every week.



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Communication with high schoolers

"Teachers shall have weekly contact with students and secondary may opt for bi-weekly contact due to their caseload of students."

High school families were half as likely to receive regular communication than elementary families. As a result, they reported lower levels of engagement and learning.

All middle and high schoolers should have one caring adult that communicates with a small cohort of students through "advisory models."

Communication in home language

"The district should develop a plan to ensure that all communication with students and parents is in their home language."

Non-english speaking families reported less communication with schools, less distance learning participation, and less access to helpful instructional methods.

Every family should have access to information about their student in their home language.

Students with IEPs

"Your child should receive adapted lessons/work to meet their needs collaboratively designed between special education teachers and core content teachers.

You should also expect continued partnership with case managers and IEP teams via virtual IEP meetings."

Only 38% of families believe they received adequate special education services during distance learning.

Every child with an IEP should have access to an adequate distance learning experiences

Mental Health

"School psychologists, counselors and speech teachers shall provide services as described by Federal and State guidelines during the Covid-19 context. These services may be conducted via email, telephone, or other virtual tools, as appropriate."

Only 1/3 of families reported receiving mental health services. Non-English speakers had even less access.

Every student should have access to mental health support. The district should identify the barriers to ensure increase in access.