

**Distance Learning and its Impact  
on Latino Students  
May 2020**

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***Executive Summary***

Over the course of mere weeks, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the delivery of educational programming has been dramatically altered. During the time period of distance learning, the Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs (MCLA) has been engaged in numerous conversations with a broad range of educational stakeholders. Per the recommendation of the Minnesota Department of Education's Commissioner Mary Catheryn Ricker, MCLA surveyed Latino parents to enhance our understanding of their experience with distance learning and expand our outreach on the issue. An additional intent of the survey was to share the findings with MDE to continue informing policy makers about the ongoing experiences of our families, and guide the Council's legislative and policy priorities moving forward.

Moreover, As we enter the next phase of COVID-19 response and schools are allowed a hybrid model of seat-based and distance learning educational programming over the summer, it is imperative that the health and safety of our students remain paramount in planning.

***Key findings***

- The Latino community is disproportionately experiencing the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. All districts and schools must be grounded with this understanding as educators may be serving the children of parents who have suddenly lost their employment and means to support their family.
- Parents continue to express need in more effective and intentional outreach from school staff. While there is a general sentiment that schools are supporting students and families, respondents expressed frustration with a lack of clear information and expectation as to how to support their child.
- Increased support for students and families who need access to help with English must be prioritized by districts and schools.
- Parents note that the social and emotional well-being of students is of concern and current limited access to mental health services makes it critical to emphasize social and emotional learning beyond the distance learning period.
- There is a clear difference in the experience with respect to distance learning amongst Latino parents preferring to complete the survey in English compared to parents preferring the Spanish version, particularly with employment, student success and general experience with distance learning.

***Methodology***

MCLA outreach efforts to disseminate the survey included partnership with organizations that are led by or serve Latinos, state agencies, and community leaders. The survey was conducted between May 4 and May 11, 2020. Knowing that there are more than 80 thousand Latino students in the system, this survey represents a small fraction but an indicative reference in time of families coping with the pandemic and

the remote educational experience of their children. From those efforts, a total of 219 individual responded to the survey, with 79% taking part in the Spanish version of the survey and 21% in English. Additionally, it is important to note that that MCLA did not have sufficient time to largely reach out to parents who do not have access to technology, smartphones or the internet needed to complete the fully online survey. The survey also did not explicitly ask the number of devices in a household, which could have also not been reflected in the data.

The need for more extensive outreach to Latino families and leveraging community leadership, particularly in greater Minnesota, is evident through 60% of all respondents reside in the Twin Cities/Metropolitan area. Nevertheless, the results of this survey, developed by Anjuli Cameron from the Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans and translated into Spanish by MCLA, helps provide greater insight into the Latino experience with distance learning.

## **Results**

### *Background Demographics*

*Ethnicity.* The Latino survey respondents were predominantly Mexican, making up 70% of all respondents; Ecuadorians followed at 8%. Salvadorans made up 5% of respondents and 4% of respondents identified as Puerto Rican. *Other* ethnicities totaled 4%, while both Hondurans and Guatemalans represented 3%;; Venezuelans made up 1%; and Peruvians made up 1%. Cubans made up less than one percent of respondents along with Nicaraguans, Costa Ricans, and Panamanians.

*Region.* Regional aggregated responses show that almost two thirds (60%) of all survey respondents live in the Twin Cities Metro Area. Of the remaining respondents, 18% live in Southeast Minnesota; 7.5% live in Southwest Minnesota; 7% live in Northeast Minnesota; 5.5% live in Northwest Minnesota; and 2% live in Central Minnesota.

*Number of Children.* It is important to consider the number of children in the home as the more children one has participating in distance learning, greater difficulties arise for a parent to assist each child in their learning – whether that be with homework, attentiveness in class, or resource distribution. Overall, 45% of all respondents had two children. An additional 15% of all respondents had three children in the home.

*Child Grade Number.* Respondents were asked to note their child's grade level, and if they had more than one child, to note the grade level of the child they believe to be struggling the most with distance learning. 11% of parents indicated that their child is in 6<sup>th</sup> grade (this was the largest percentage of students) and 10% of parents indicated that their child is in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Much of the aggregated data shows little variation among child grade level. However, disaggregated data shows the large difference between Kindergarteners in the home: 19% of respondents who completed the survey in English had a Kindergartener while 7% of respondents who completed the survey in Spanish had a Kindergartener.

*Type of School.* Of all respondents 89% indicated their child is enrolled in either a traditional school district or public charter school. An additional 14% have their child enrolled in a private school, while 5% have their child enrolled in a Magnet school or a STEM/STEAM school.

*Parent/Guardian Educational Attainment.* Certain disaggregated data by schooling level, emphasizes the different starting points of Latino families and need for equitable support across the state. For example, 73% of respondents who completed the survey in Spanish indicated their highest level of educational attainment was a high school/GED or less, with 4% of these respondents having no formal schooling. This is in comparison to the 69% of respondents who completed the English survey having reported to obtaining a bachelor's degree or higher, with none of the respondents having no formal schooling.

*Child Using Assistive Educational Program(s).* Considering the educational environments cultivated within Latino students' homes, we must consider their language needs/barriers. Of all respondents, 28% indicated that their child is enrolled in English Language Learner courses. Additionally, 23% of all respondents indicated that their child is a part of their schools Individualized Education Program (IEP).

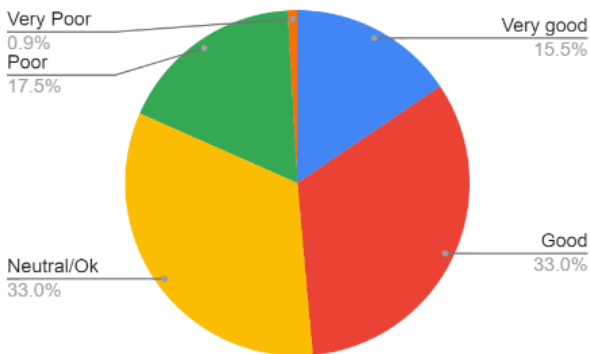
It is also important to consider the socioeconomic position of our families, prior to the impacts of the pandemic. Overall, 54% of all respondents indicated they have a child/children needing Free/Reduced Price Lunch (FRL), with 60% of respondents of the Spanish survey indicating the need for FRL. According to Census Data, about 1 in 4 Latinos live in poverty, more than double the poverty rate for all Minnesotans.

*Employment Status.* Furthermore, it has been widely reported that the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been disproportionate on communities of color and indigenous communities, particularly Latinos. In this specific survey, 32% of all respondents indicated they are unemployed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Results from the Spanish version of the survey show even deeper impact as 37% of respondents indicated they are currently unemployed because of the pandemic. Overall, 24% of respondents indicated that they are currently working from home, 22% indicated that they go into their place of work, 23% indicated that they do not work.

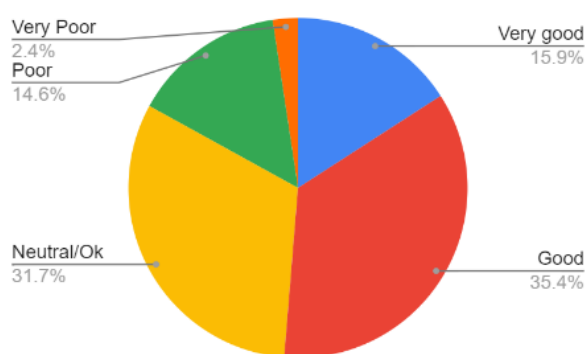
#### *Experiences with Distance Learning*

*Rated Experiences With Distance Learning.* Less than half of the total respondents rated their experience with distance learning as very good, or good at approximately 48%. An additional 33% of respondents rated their experience with distance learning as neutral/okay, while 18% rated their experience with distance learning as poor or very poor. Charts below show results disaggregated by preferred language.

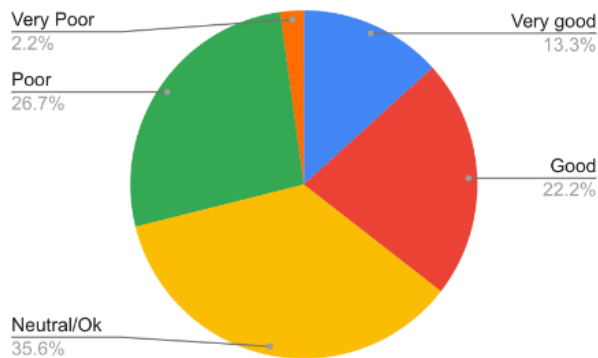
**Experience with Distance Learning**



\*Aggregated Data



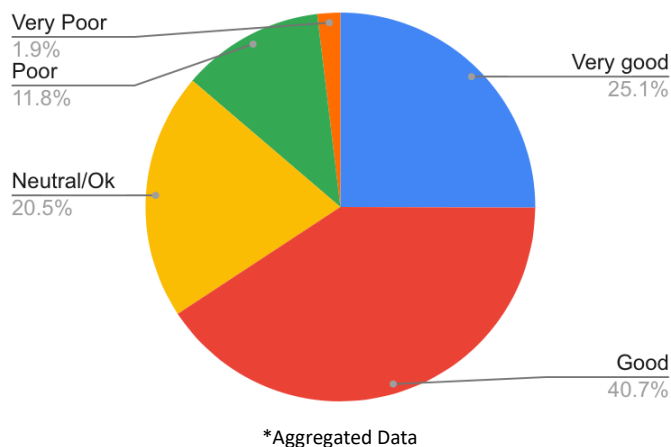
\*Spanish Survey Data



\*English Survey Data

*Rated Support Receiving From Child's School.* Nearly 66% of all respondents indicated that their school is supporting parents with distance learning very good (very well) or good (well). Another 20% indicated that their school is supporting parents with distance learning neutrally/okay, while approximately 14% indicated that their school is supporting parents with distance learning poorly or very poorly. The chart below shows the aggregated percentages for rated school support.

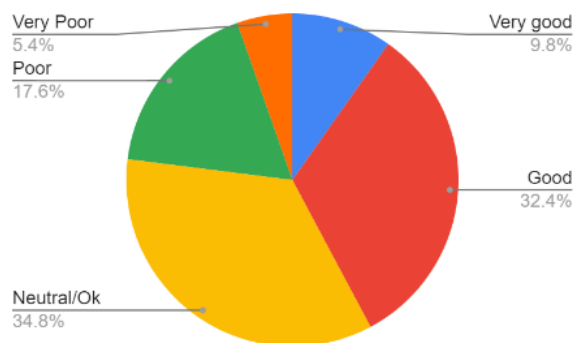
**Support Receiving From School**



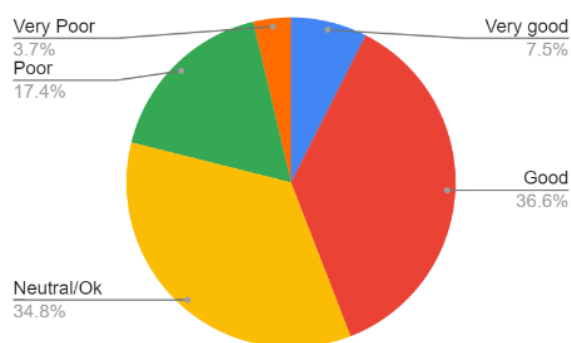
**Student Success**

*Rated Child's Success With Distance Learning.* Student success is of particular concern as identified by parents with only 42% of all respondents indicating their child was having very good or good success with distance learning. Of the total respondents, 35% rated their child's success with distance learning as neutral/okay, 18% rated their child's success with distance learning as poor, and 5% rated their child's success as very poor. Even with this group of respondents who had access to complete this survey, a neutral or okay sentiment about their child's success is clearly not good enough when we are considering the education of our children. See charts below.

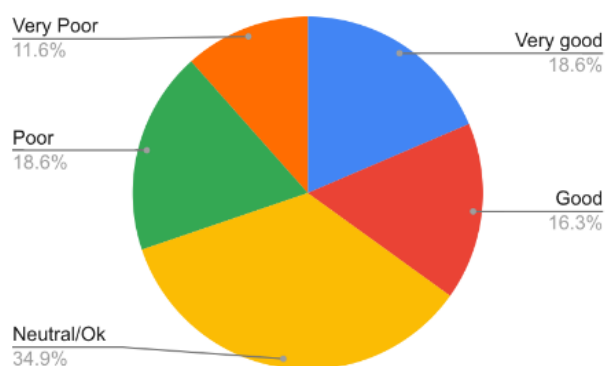
### Student Success with Distance Learning



\*Aggregated Data



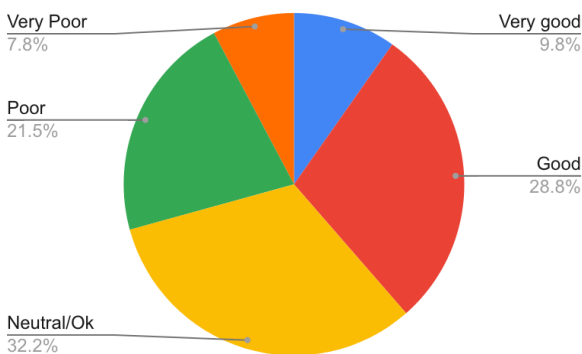
\*Spanish Survey Data



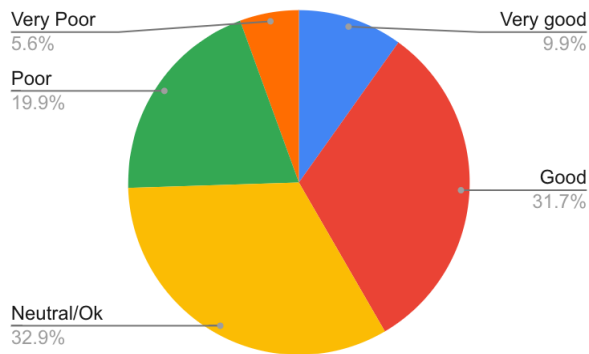
\*English Survey Data

*Rated Child's Motivation for School Work During Distance Learning.* Adapting to the changed curriculum and environment as a result from the shift to distance learning, we asked parents to rate their child's [academic] motivation to complete schoolwork. Approximately 39% of all respondents believed that their child had very good or good motivation to work on schoolwork during distance learning. However, a large portion of respondents, at 32%, consider their child to have neutral/okay motivation to work on schoolwork during distance learning. Further, 29% of respondents consider their child to have poor or very poor motivation to work on schoolwork during distance learning. Such high percentages of neutral/okay and poor motivation are present challenges toward a child's success during distance learning reinforcing the need for a focus on SEL. See charts below for disaggregated results by preferred language.

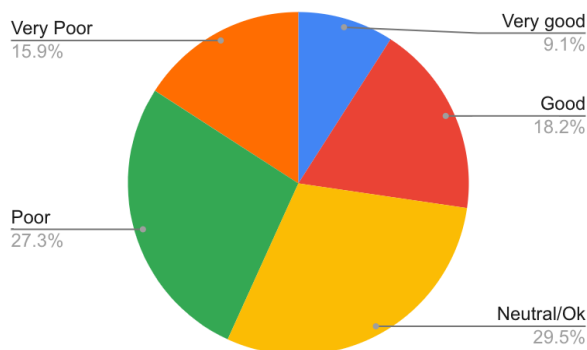
### Child's Motivation for School Work



\*Aggregated Data



\*Spanish Survey Data

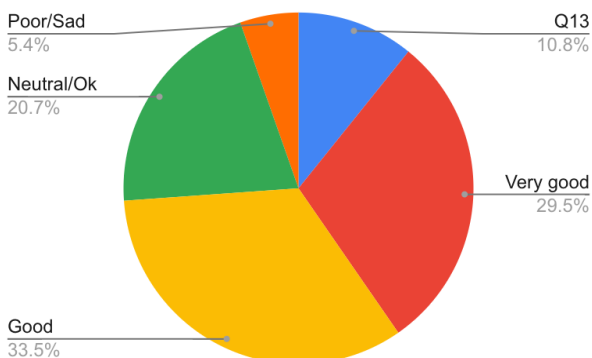


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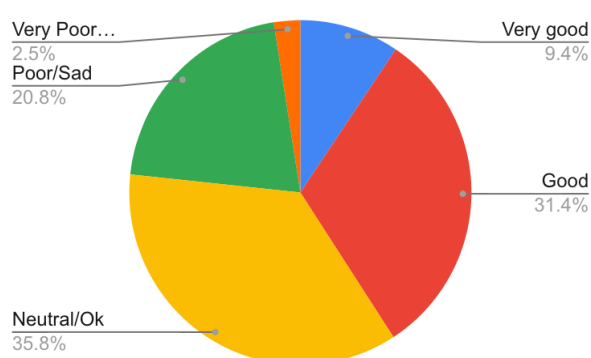
### Support and Social and Emotional Wellbeing

**Rated Child's Social/Emotional Health.** Student motivation and social and emotional wellbeing responses shed perspective on the heightened need to focus on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) moving forward. Approximately 40% of respondents consider their child to be very good/happy during distance learning or good/content. However, there is a large portion of the respondents, at 33% who consider their child to be only neutral/okay during distance learning. Additionally, approximately 25% of respondents consider their child to be poor/sad during distance learning, 5.4% consider their child to be very poor/sad during distance learning. See charts below for disaggregated results by preferred language.

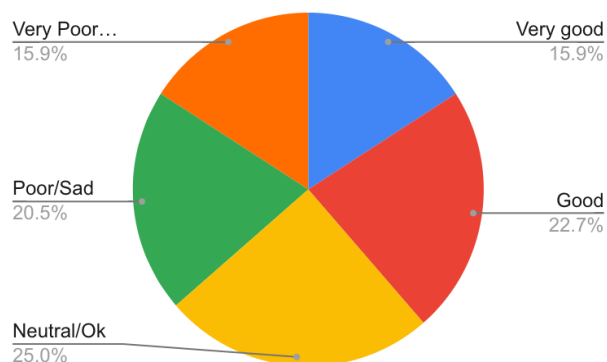
### Child's Social/Emotional Health



\*Aggregated Data



\*Spanish Survey Data



\*English Survey Data

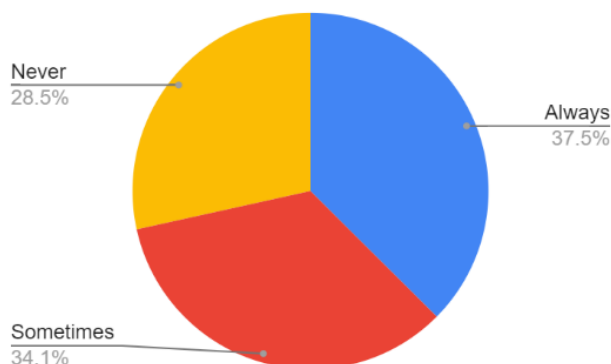
#### *Child's Ability to Succeed: At Home Resources and Support*

**Child's Attendance.** In measuring a critical indicator leading to student success, generally, attendance has not been a large factor as 79% of all respondents indicated their child has not missed more than five distance learning days. However, of the respondents who completed the Spanish survey that had students missing five or more days, 15% indicated this was explicitly as a result of internet and computer problems, another 8% indicated that their child's absences were as a result of problems/distractions at home. Other anecdotal responses included problems with webpages and issues with communication via the internet.

**Access to the Necessary Tools, Electronics, and Technical Assistance to Succeed.** With respect to access to technology and assistance with the systems, it is evident there is need for greater support for parents and students. Overall, 38% of respondents indicated that their child always has access to computer/technical help, while 36% and 29% of respondents indicated that their child sometimes or never has access, respectively. However, it's important to indicate that this survey did not explicitly ask whether the access to technology was provided by the district or school.



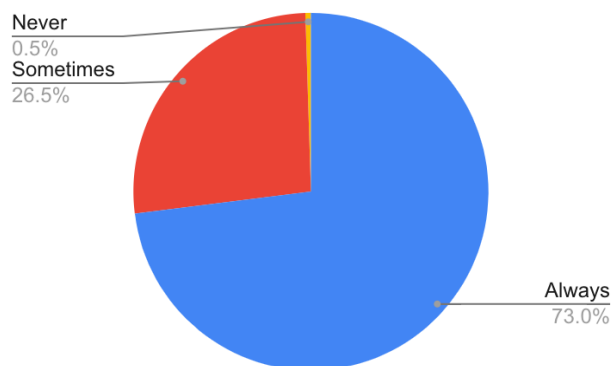
**Access to Computer/Technical Assistance**



\*Aggregated Data

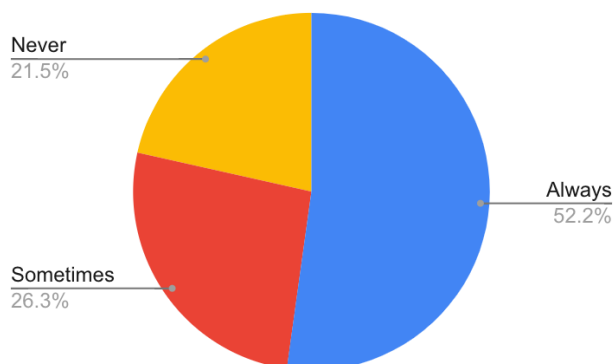
We must also consider student’s access to a good/reliable internet connection – as it is needed to fully participate in online distance learning. Overall, 73% of respondents indicated that their child always has access to good internet connection, while 27% indicated that their child sometimes has access to good internet connection. If a student does not have access to good internet connection, one would suggest that they use offline study/course materials. Of all respondents, 52% indicated that their child always has access to offline study/course materials, while 48% indicated that their child sometimes or never has access to offline study materials.

**Access to Good Internet Connection**



\*Aggregated Data

### Access to Offline Study/Course Materials



\*Aggregated Data

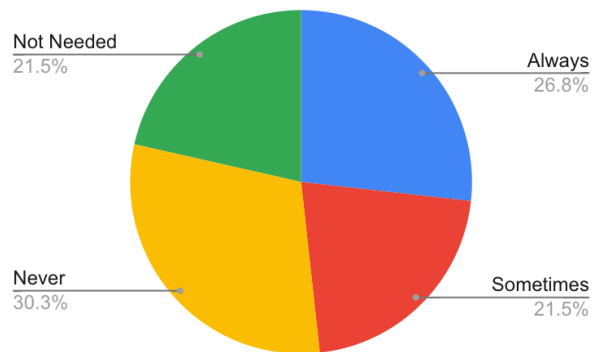
In terms of devices available in the household, of all respondents, 52% indicated that their child always has access to a smartphone, while 28% of respondents indicated that their child sometimes has access to a smartphone, and 20% of respondents indicated that their child does not/never has access to a smartphone. Furthermore, 77% indicated their child always has access to a computer, iPad, or tablet, while 17% of respondents indicated that their child sometimes has access to these items, and 6% of respondents indicated their child never has access to these items.

*Access to the Teacher, Family Guidance, and Proper Understanding of Homework to Succeed.* Parent responses to student access to teacher and teacher’s aides for homework help and/or questions affirm more effective communication with our parents is needed. Overall, only 49% of respondents indicated their child always has access to teacher support, while the other 49% sometimes or never had access to teacher support. Only 29% of all respondents indicated students always have access to a teacher’s aide, while 29% of all respondents indicated students never have access to a teacher’s aide, additionally, 9% of respondents claimed there was no need for such support.

Respondents indicated that 54% of students always have access to a parent, guardian, or family friend to help with homework, while 43% sometimes or never had access to a parent, guardian, or family friend to help with homework. With distance learning, not all children are receiving the same support, additionally, not all children have access to the same at home resources. This data indicates districts and schools must improve its efforts in how they are connecting and communicating with families in Spanish in order to better serve them.

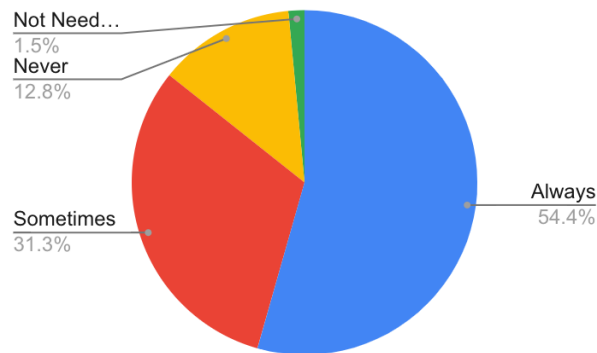
For students needing access to English language help, totaling 80% of all respondents, only 39% of parents indicated their student always has access to that help. Moreover, respondents (parents/guardians) who presumably have limited language proficiency, also totaling 80%, only 25% indicated they always have access to that help. Such language barriers for parents/guardians also affects their ability to effectively help their child with school-work.

**English Language Help for Parent/Guardian**



\*Aggregated Data

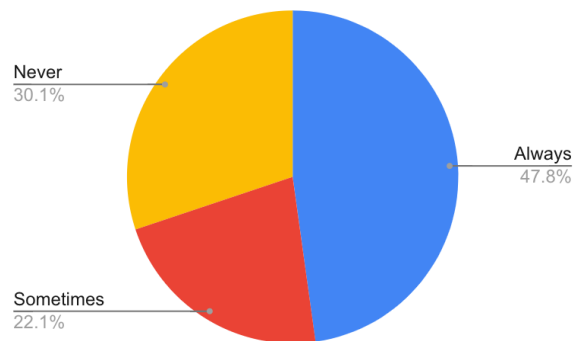
**Access to Parent/Guardian/Family Friend for Homework Help**



\*Aggregated Data

*Access to Proper Physical and Mental Health Needs.* The toll of the COVID-19 pandemic on physical and mental health of students cannot be understated and emphasizing SEL will be critical to engagement and success. Of the total respondents, less than half (48%) indicated that their child always has access to the behavioral/mental health services they need/might need, while 30% of respondents indicated that their child never has access to the behavioral/mental health services they need/might need.

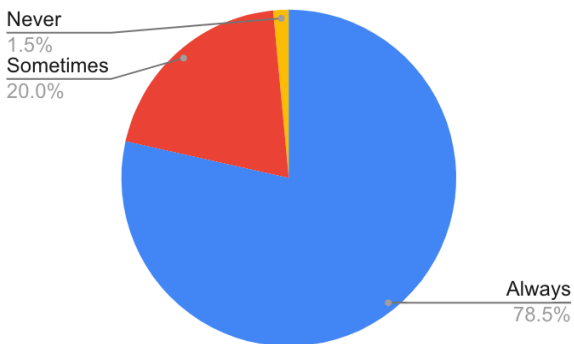
**Access to Behavioral/Mental Health Services**



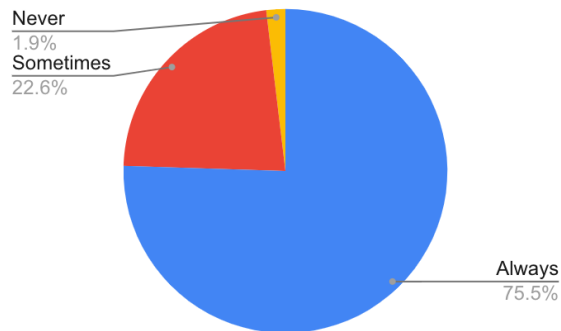
\*Aggregated Data

An additional concern in assessing proper physical health was raised in the Spanish survey data as nearly 25% of families indicated that their child only sometimes has enough food to eat or never has enough food to eat. Furthermore, in the Spanish survey, 23% of respondents indicated that their child sometimes has a safe place for physical exercise/play outside, while 15% of respondents indicated that their child never has a safe place for physical exercise/play outside.

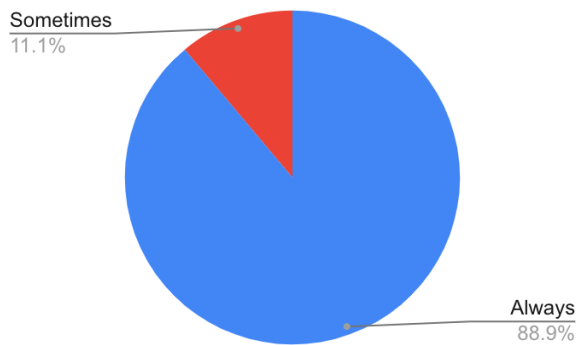
**Enough Food to Eat**



\*Aggregated Data

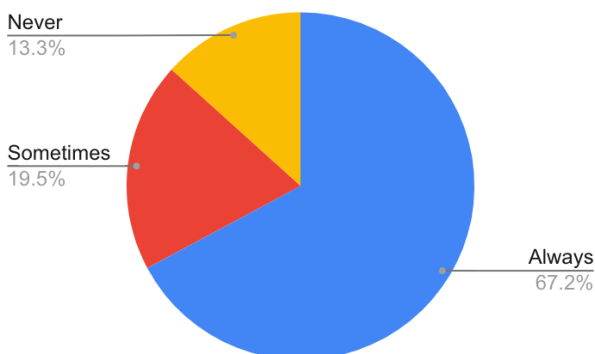


\*Spanish Survey Data

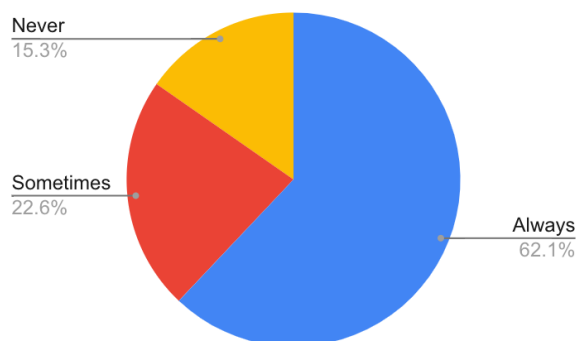


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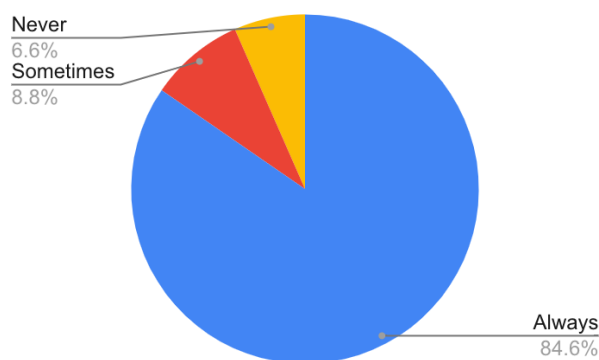
### Safe Place for Physical Exercise/Play Outside



\*Aggregated Data



\*Spanish Survey Data



\*English Survey Data

### Open-Ended Responses

The open-ended responses included common themes in both English and Spanish as parents expressed a need for greater interactions with teachers and time to complete assignments. The need for improved communication between teachers was also evident throughout the responses from parents. Additionally, parents who responded in the Spanish survey expressed frustration in not having been effectively oriented or provided sufficient guidance on how to support their child during the distant learning period. It is also apparent that parents are seeking more support and ways to help keep their students motivated during this distance learning period.

While most of the open-ended responses highlight the significant challenges for students and families as they navigate through distance learning, there were a few bright spots. Specifically, a parent highlighted the efforts being made by teachers are appreciated and a respondent from with the child in indicated isd77 the district has been “amazing”. It would be important for districts and students to track the students that appear to be excelling during this period as distance learning continues for the rest of the school year.

### ***Recommendations***

- While MCLA received a strong response to the survey in collaboration with community partners, there remains a need for greater outreach by school districts and charter schools to continue to assess parent and student experience, in addition to their peculiar needs as they navigate through distance learning. School district and charter schools should have the capacity to continue such assessments.
- It remains clear that our parents want to be engaged and helpful in their student's learning. However, districts and charter schools must be intentional and culturally competent in how it is communicating expectations with parents.
- Schools and districts must be cognizant of and have the ability to help address students' social and emotional needs moving forward. Additionally, districts and schools must continue to improve their ability to connect students and families to available resources and programs. In considering what the economic impact could look like to scale, the added stresses of homelife could serve as significant challenges to student engagement and motivation.
- Districts also need to offer more support to teachers as they are also navigating and implementing new teaching technologies.
- Referencing district and school data that indicates the number of laptops/chromebooks/tablets provided to students would be helpful to have a greater understanding as to how broad the challenge is for Latino families to access technology.
- Leverage existing resources from some districts (like Minneapolis Public Schools and Osseo Public School District) that created informational videos in different languages, and adapting similar formats in other schools would help mitigate these difficulties
- Partnering with ethnic media (radio, social media, and television) to disseminate resources and videos, and how to access proven successful practices are other strategies to consider.
- As parents of color and indigenous parents begin sending their children back to school, they should be provided communication as to the safety precautions a respective school is taking to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Additionally, consistent health alerts are necessary to ensure they are properly informed on any issues that could potentially affect their child's health.
- CARES ACT relief funding must equitably prioritize for students who have been most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, whether directly to the districts or charter schools, or culturally relevant organizations that serve students of color or indigenous students.

### ***Conclusion***

It is critical to restate the need for more outreach to check in on families who may not be consistently heard from. The widespread challenge in said access had been shared in numerous conversations between MCLA and school leaders, teachers, cultural liaisons, and parents. Given the limitations of this survey, it is important to not dismiss or misunderstand that need.

Minnesota's Latino community is reeling economically and emotionally as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted and exacerbated the gaps that have persisted in our state. Districts and charter schools then have a vital role to play in ensuring that families have the resources and information available to help their child through distance learning.

Lastly, not captured by the survey is the concern and growing level of uncertainty of what to expect over the summer and early fall that has been expressed by educators, parents, and students. Given the challenges that were reflected in the survey and that have been expressed over the course of the distance learning period, equitable resources and intentional communications will be crucial to mitigate further exacerbation of the chronic achievement and opportunity gaps.