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Spring 2020 Remote Learning District Plans

Landscape Scan of Illinois District Plans

6.24.2020

Context

Little is known about remote learning practice across Illinois' 852 districts in spring of 2020

- COVID-19 unexpectedly and suddenly forced districts to transition to remote learning in March 2020

- 66% of districts that responded to ISBE's remote learning need survey reported lacking key resources needed for quality e-learning

- ISBE published remote learning guidance on March 27, 2020 – however, we know little regarding implementation of best practices across Illinois' 852 districts

- All Illinois districts were required to adopt a Remote Learning Day Plan approved by the school's or district's superintendent or chief administrator*

*ISBE Emergency Rule Part 5: https://www.isbe.net/Documents/23-5RG-E.pdf

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ISBE and other states' guidance provide perspective on commonly-recognized best practices

- Like ISBE, many states' education departments published remote learning guidelines in Spring 2020

- Guidance and resources across states provide perspective on some commonly-recognized best practices for remote learning

Examining IL district guidance can help shed light on adherence to best practice

- Many Illinois districts provided recommendations to schools and teachers to help guide practice during school building closures

- Examining Illinois districts' remote learning plans can help us understand to what extent best practices were implemented in schools

Best Practices

To identify commonly-recognized best practices in remote learning, we examined nationally-recognized guidance from several states and districts

We examined ISBE guidance and remote learning recommendations that were highlighted by national scans; our final list included:

- ISBE Remote Learning Recommendations
- Indiana's eLearning Day Best Practice Considerations and Checklist
- Minnesota's Distance Learning Plans checklist
- Delaware's Distance Learning Plan Review
- Florida's Best Practice for Distance Learning
- Colorado's Instructional Guidance
- Riverside County's Remote Learning Guidance
- Miami-Dade County Public School's Instructional Continuity Plan 2.0
- Chicago's Remote Learning Grading Guide for Parents and Families

Across nationally-recognized remote learning guidance, we found 16 common best practices addressing 3 main topics

Accessibility	Instruction	Social & Emotional Supports
• Internet accessibility • Device accessibility • Alternatives for students without internet and device access at home • Support mechanisms to help families transition to remote learning • General technical assistance/support • Translations of plans/ materials into language other than English • Accommodations for ELs and Students with Disabilities	• Access to live or recorded teacher-led instruction • Alignment of remote learning content to grade-level learning standards • Teachers offer virtual "office hours" for students and parents • Attendance protocols and reporting system • Non-punitive assessment/feedback system in place • Professional supports for educators	• Engagement with parents and families • Consistent check-in with families to understand how the health crisis is impacting them • Access to counselors and/or mental health services

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Best practices for remote learning accessibility: support for student access to instruction and other school supports

- **Internet & device accessibility** | Internet and devices for students lacking these resources

- **Alternatives for students without internet/device access at home** | Non-digital instructional options

- **Support mechanisms to help families transition to remote learning** | Supports like FAQs, checklist, videos, or direct connections with families to communicate remote learning plans and expectations

- **General technical assistance/support** | Technological support for both educators and families and communication of how to access this tech support

- **Translations of plans/materials into language other than English** | Translations of district communications to parents into commonly-spoken home languages

- **Instructional accommodations for students with disabilities**| Continuing accommodations per ILP/IEP/504 plans, holding case conference committees, providing assistive technologies and strategies per remote learning

Best practices for remote learning instruction: key tactics for student engagement and learning

- **Access to live or recorded teacher-led instruction** | Some face-to-face instructional interactions

- **Alignment of remote learning content to grade-level learning standards** | Expectations that instruction during remote learning covers grade-level learning

- **Teachers offer virtual "office hours" for students and parents** | Open channels and space for communication

- **Attendance protocols and reporting system** | Basic tracking of student attendance and engagement with school

- **Non-punitive assessment/feedback system in place** | Use of assessments and timely, effective feedback to continue helping students grow – without punitive measures for non-completion

- **Professional supports for educators** | Training and resources for teachers to build capacity in remote learning instructional environment

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Best practices for social and emotional supports during remote learning

- **Engagement with parents and families** | Consistent communication and involvement of parents, including engagement for family input/feedback

- **Consistent check-ins with families to understand how the health crisis is impacting them** | Outreach to ensure schools are apprised of COVID-19 related challenges that children are facing

- **Access to counselors and/or mental health services** | Key services to ensuring the mental health of students

Illinois District Sampling

To examine district plans, we took a weighted sample of 100 of Illinois' 852 districts

We attempted to reflect the overall composition of Illinois districts in our sample of 100 districts, by:

- Household income of students (% low-income)
- Race/Ethnicity (% students of color)
- Size
- Urbanity

Our sample is reflective of Illinois districts in student population demographics; we did include the 20 largest districts in Illinois in our sample in order to ensure significant n-size, thus somewhat over-sampling large districts and urban districts.

We examined districts' remote learning guidance published between March 17th-May 11th, 2020

- We examined district's remote learning plans over the course of 3 weeks (May 11th to June 8th, 2020)

- Our remote learning scan included all information published from the beginning of school building closures (March 17th, 2020) through the beginning date of our scan (May 11th, 2020)

- Scan included both remote learning plans and all other relevant communications about remote learning published on district webpages

Findings

#1: While most districts clearly communicated remote learning plans, most did not provide detailed guidance around best practices

- 89/100 districts provided remote learning plans that were clearly communicated on their websites or other easily accessible webpage

- However, most districts detailed fewer than half of the commonly-recognized best practices in their plans

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#2: The percentage of students from low-income households in a district was not associated with district remote learning plan quality

- The percentage of low-income students in the district was generally not associated with a higher or lower number of best practices

- Districts with very large proportions of students from low-income households, were an exception, and actually had, on average, higher ratings

#3: Larger districts located in cities and suburbs tended to detail more best practices in their remote learning plans

This finding could speak to the particular challenges of rural districts in the face of COVID-19, including:

- Less district staff

- Disproportionately poorer internet access

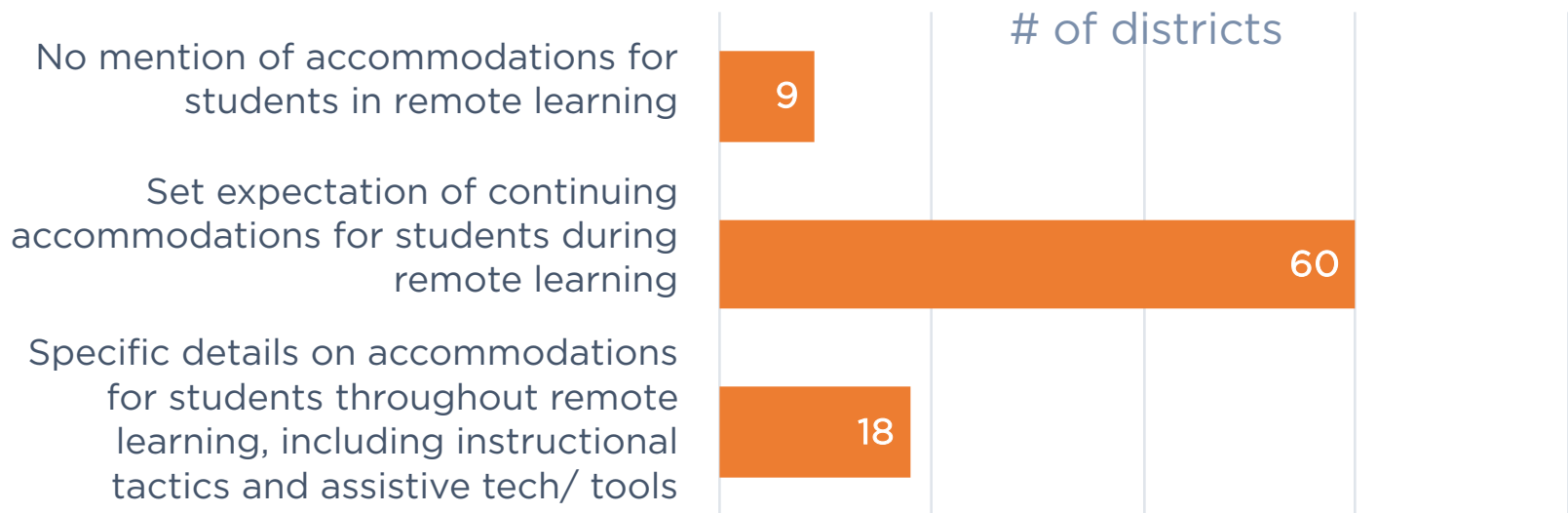- Higher likelihood of less digital instruction prior to COVID-19

Average Score of Best Practices Identified in Remote Learning Plan

Category	Score
Rural	8.9
Town	10.8
Suburb	14.8
City	14.7
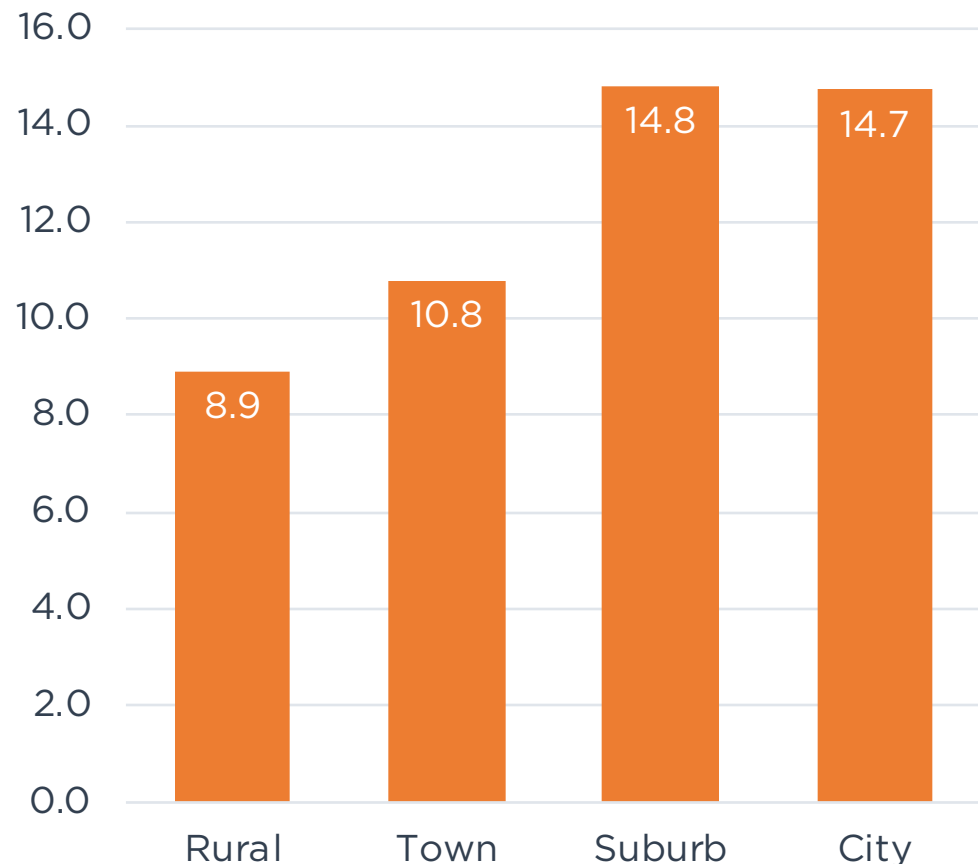
Spotlights

Accessibility | Data Spotlight

- English Learner, ILP, IEP, & 504 plan accommodations
  - 78/100 districts noted that all students that typically receive EL, ILP, IEP, or 504 plans would continue to receive accommodations
  - However, just 18/100 districts provided specific details on remote learning tactics and assistive technologies

# of districts

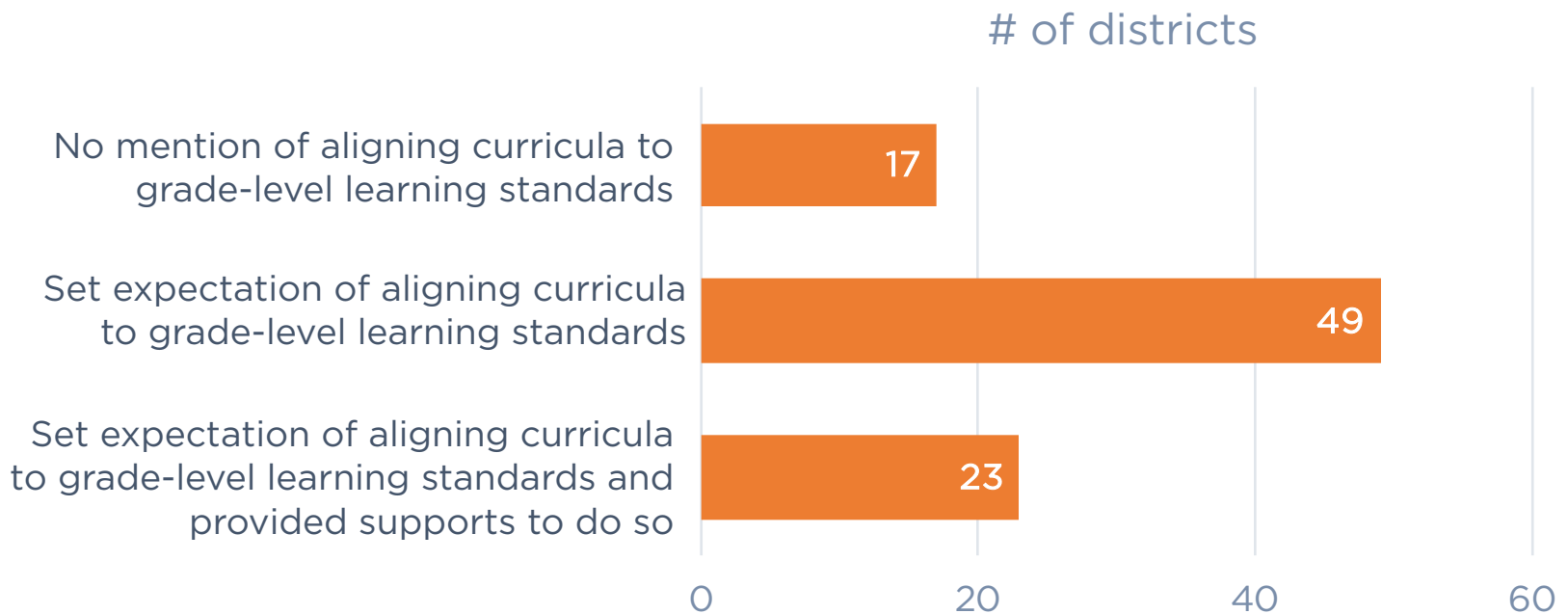| Category	# of districts
No mention of accommodations for students in remote learning	9
Set expectation of continuing accommodations for students during remote learning	60
Specific details on accommodations for students throughout remote learning, including instructional tactics and assistive tech/ tools	18

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Accessibility | District spotlight (Champaign Unit 4)

- In addition to providing a plan for device and Wi-Fi accessibility, Unit 4 implemented a rollout plan in several phases to ensure that every family would get covered.

- Additionally, Unit 4 created Bilingual Parent Liaisons to ensure that the technology would be accessible to the families of English Language Learners.

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Instruction | Data spotlights

- Grade level learning standards
  - 72/100 districts noted that remote curricula should be aligned with state learning standards. However, just 23/100 provided additional curricular support.

# of districts

	# of districts
No mention of aligning curricula to grade-level learning standards	17
Set expectation of aligning curricula to grade-level learning standards	49
Set expectation of aligning curricula to grade-level learning standards and provided supports to do so	23

Instruction | Data spotlights

- Attendance protocols and tracking
  - 60/100 districts detailed attendance-taking and tracking plans

- Feedback/assessment of knowledge
  - All but 8 districts required that students be provided some feedback on assignments
  - 52 districts encouraged students to turn in assignments, required that feedback be provided, and did not punish students for non-completion

Instruction | District spotlight (Bloom Township 206)

- Bloom Township demonstrated a lot of forethought in their content selection by encouraging Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to create district-wide content that teachers can select from.

- Bloom Township's Content Delivery reinforces "active learning," which California's Department of Education has identified as a critical component of success online learning, and teacher collaboration.

- Additionally, Bloom Township stood out for creating thoughtful and standards-based non-electronic material.

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SEL supports | Data spotlight

Engagement with families

- 61/100 districts noted that they would continue communication with families
- 40/100 districts provided details on consistent communication with families throughout school building closures, including expectations for communication with both teachers and school/district leadership

SEL supports | District Spotlight (Iroquois CUSD #9)

- Iroquois County Schools stood out in its explicit focus on addressing students' social and emotional needs, which then is reinforced throughout the remote learning plan.

- Additionally, they made contact information for their school counselors easy to find.

- Finally, Iroquois Schools emphasizes communication, stakeholder feedback, and providing social and emotional supports its Responsibilities section.

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Looking Ahead

Plans are a proxy for implementation – we must understand and support best practices in both to best serve students in the upcoming year

- While district remote learning plans provide some insight into expectations for educators in Spring of 2020, they are far from a perfect proxy for actual practice

- Understanding schools' resources, supports, and instructional practice will require additional thoughtful data collection in 2020-21