

# Teachers' Experiences Working from Home During the COVID-19 Pandemic

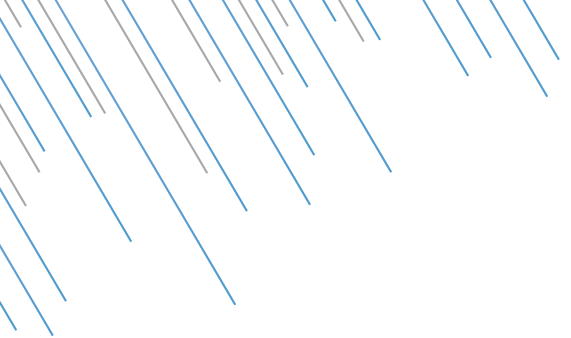
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*The transition to remote teaching has been a major challenge and is likely to widen existing achievement gaps. Supportive working conditions matter more than ever.*

**By Matthew A. Kraft & Nicole S. Simon**

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The COVID-19 pandemic has shuttered schools across the United States, upending traditional approaches to education. The health threats posed by the Coronavirus, sudden shift to remote teaching, and added caretaking responsibilities at home have created a uniquely stressful and demanding context for teachers' work. Major concerns exist about teachers' wellbeing during the pandemic and their ability to successfully deliver instruction remotely. Teachers have also expressed apprehension about their willingness to return to the classroom when schools are able to reopen. Even more troubling are projections of substantial student learning loss and the likelihood that differential access to technology and learning supports at home are exacerbating longstanding achievement gaps along racial and socio-economic lines.

We developed the *Teaching From Home Survey* for Upbeat to support districts in better understanding and responding to teachers' experience working remotely. Between April 27th and May 26th, a diverse sample of 7,195 teachers working across nine southern, midwestern and eastern states (GA, IL, LA, MI, NY, SC, TX, VA, VT) answered the survey. Our analyses complement and extend recent findings by smaller, nationally representative surveys by USA Today, Educators for Excellence, Ed Week, and RAND. The large and diverse sample of respondents allow us to explore how teachers' experiences working remotely differ across both individual and school characteristics.

Our findings suggest that the sudden move to remote teaching has created substantial challenges for teachers' work and limited the degree to which students can engage in learning. We find that mid-career teachers—those most likely to have children at home—have particularly struggled to balance their work responsibilities with their home lives during the pandemic. And veteran teachers are over three times more likely than early-career teachers to report being uncomfortable using the technological tools required for teaching at home. Importantly, schools with more supportive working conditions have been far more successful at helping their teachers maintain a sense of success during the pandemic.

Teachers estimate that, on average, only 60% of students are engaged in remote learning on a regular basis, with wide gaps in perceived engagement along racial and socio-economic lines. Teachers working in high-poverty schools and in schools that serve a majority of Black students report that their students are facing dramatically more challenging experiences engaging in school. Their students are less likely to have the technology they need to access online resources and, consequently, are less likely to engage in remote learning activities regularly.

#### Spring 2020 Survey Data

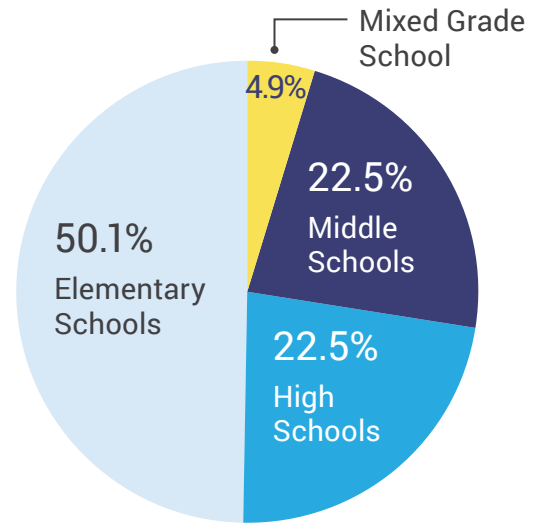
**7,195 Teachers Surveyed**

**194 Schools**

**78% Response Rate**

## Sample Characteristics

78% of teachers responded to the *Teaching from Home Survey* administered by Upbeat. Respondents included teachers working in 194 schools across 8 districts and 3 charter school networks in rural, suburban and urban contexts. Below, we describe the characteristics of the teachers who responded and the schools where they work. Overall, the respondents represent teachers in traditional and charter public schools working across a wide range of student populations.<sup>1</sup>



Teacher Characteristics	
	Average
Experience	13 years
Female	83%
Asian	1%
Black	13%
Hispanic	2%
White	82%
Multi-racial	1%

Student Characteristics			
	Average	25th Percentile	75th Percentile
Asian Students	1%	0%	1%
Black Students	28%	14%	35%
Hispanic Students	16%	7%	18%
White Students	48%	26%	66%
Multi-racial Students	1%	0%	2%
Low-income Students	52%	34%	63%
Special Education Students	13%	5%	18%

## Teachers credit their districts with working to supporting them

When asked about their experiences working from home during the pandemic, most teachers report that their district, school leadership, and peers are communicating effectively, providing support, and recognizing their efforts.

- + 88% of teachers agree that their district communicated clear guidelines about remote teaching.
- + 94% of teachers agree that their school administrators have communicated in a clear and timely way.
- + 93% of teachers say their school administrators have fair expectations about remote teaching.
- + 92% of teachers agree that teachers at their school are collaborating regularly.
- + 91% of teachers feel appreciated by their school administration.
- + 87% of teachers agree that their district has provided helpful PD for teaching remotely.
- + 74% of teachers agree that their district has provided helpful PD for supporting their students' social-emotional well-being.

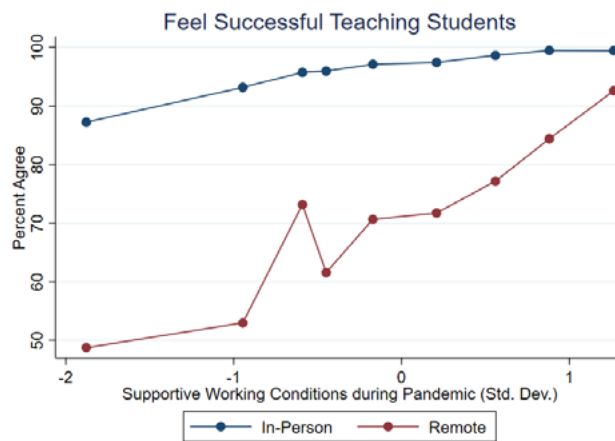
These high perceptions of support among our sample are encouraging, if not surprising, given the sudden and complex task school systems faced in coordinating the transition to remote teaching.

<sup>1</sup> We collected data on teacher characteristics directly from participating districts. We collected data on school characteristics from state, district and school websites.

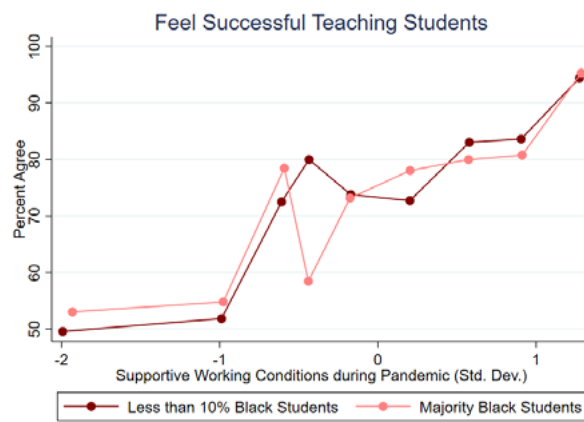
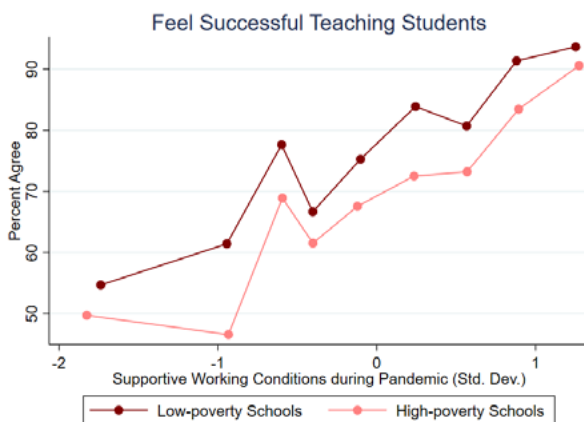
## Supportive working conditions are critical for teachers' sense of success during the pandemic

We asked teachers to report on whether they felt successful at their job when they were teaching in person, prior to the pandemic, and now, during the pandemic while teaching from home. We then constructed an overall measure of working conditions during the pandemic by combining teachers' responses to the seven working condition questions described above. We find that teachers' sense of success teaching during the pandemic is closely linked to their perceptions about the degree to which their district, school administrators, and peers are supportive.

- ✦ In schools with highly-supportive working conditions, the percent of teachers who feel successful declined slightly by 6 percentage points from 99% to 93%.<sup>2</sup>
- ✦ In schools with unsupportive working conditions, the percent of teachers who feel successful plummeted by 42 percentage points from 90% to 48%.



Supportive working conditions during the pandemic are also strongly related to teachers' sense of success teaching remotely in all types of school settings.<sup>3</sup>



2 We define highly-supportive working conditions as those more than 1 standard deviation above the mean and unsupportive working conditions as those more than 1 standard deviation below the mean.

3 Consistent with federal guidelines, we define low-poverty as schools where less than 25% of students are eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) and high-poverty as schools where over 75% of students are eligible for FRPL.

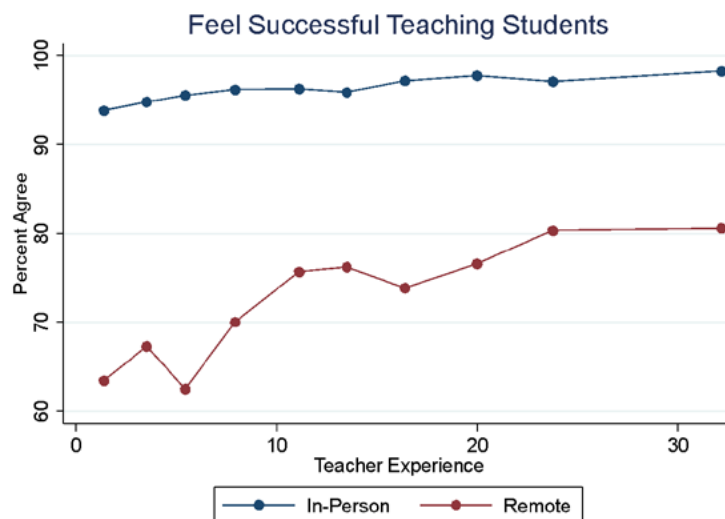
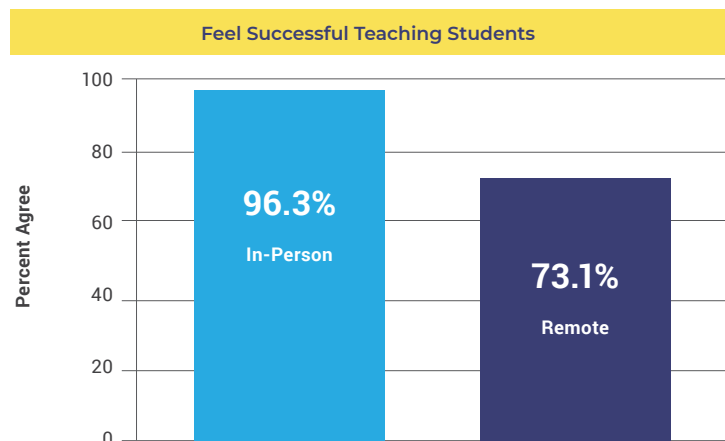
## Even with district support, teaching remotely during the pandemic has been a major challenge

Teachers' sense of success dropped substantially after the transition to remote teaching.

- Overall, the percentage of teachers who feel successful dropped from 96% to 73%.

We also find that early-career teachers' sense of success dropped most relative to their more experienced peers.

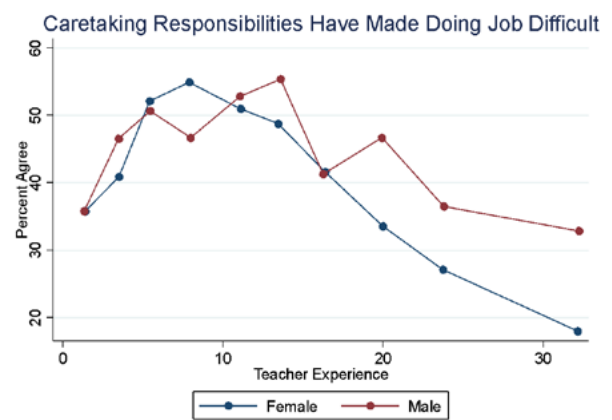
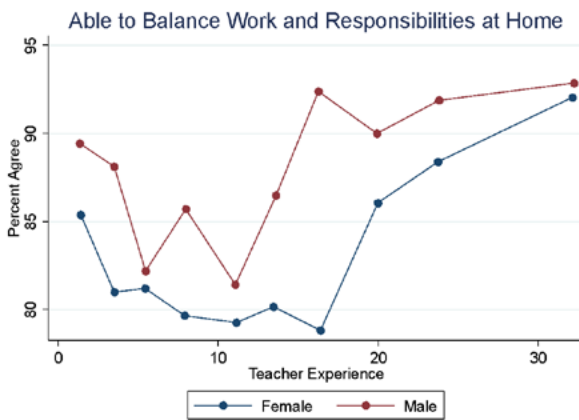
- The number of early-career teachers (those with less than five years of experience) that feel successful dropped by 29 percentage points, compared to a 25 percentage point drop for mid-career teachers (those with between 5 and 15 years of experience) and a 19 percentage point drop for veteran teachers with more than 15 years of experience.



Teachers, particularly mid-career teachers, are struggling to balance their work with the demands of their personal lives during the pandemic.

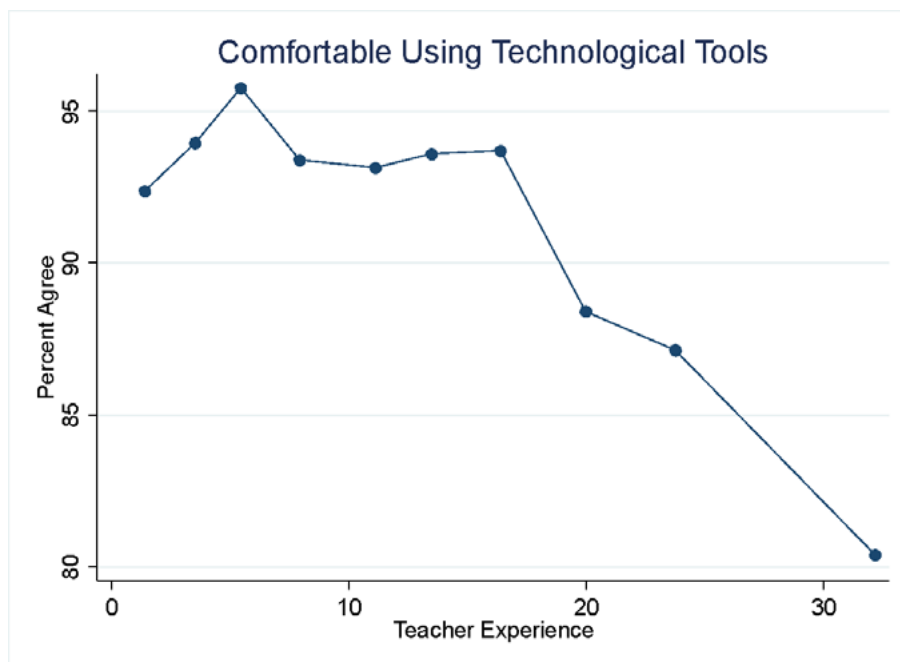
- Overall, 16% of teachers report that they have struggled to balance their work with other responsibilities, with higher rates for female teachers (17%) than male teachers (12%).
- Overall, 41% of teachers report that caretaking responsibilities for children or dependent adults have made it difficult to do their job, with slightly lower rates for female teachers (40%) compared to male teachers (43%).

- + These overall averages mask substantial variation where mid-career teachers (those with between 5 and 15 years of experience) report substantially greater challenges than their early- and late-career peers. For example, 51% of mid-career teachers report that caretaking responsibilities make their job difficult, while 39% of early-career teachers and 30% of veteran teachers report these same concerns. These patterns likely reflect the greater likelihood that mid-career teachers have school-age children at home with them.



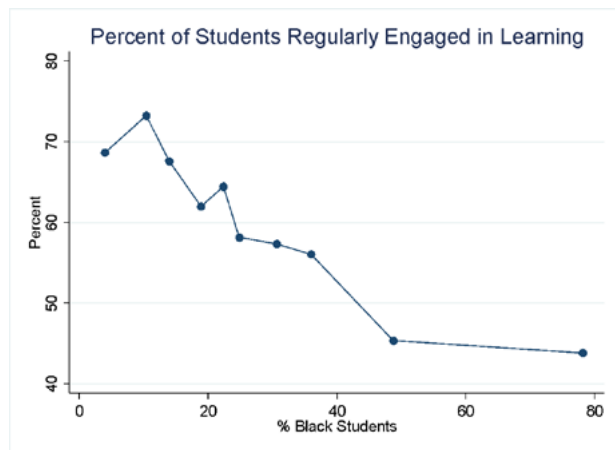
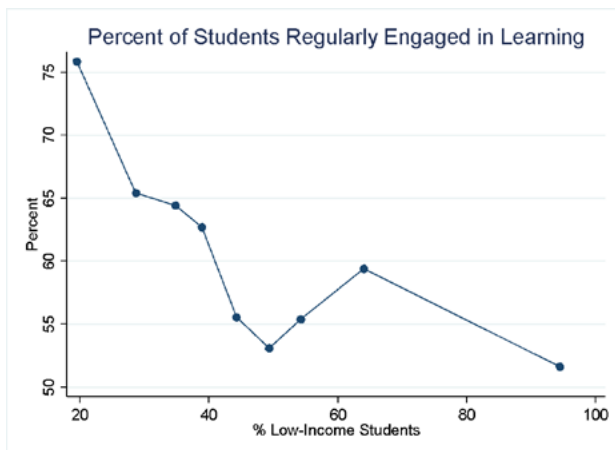
Late-career teachers also report being less comfortable teaching online.

- + Overall, 9% of teachers felt uncomfortable using the technological tools required for remote teaching.
- + However, 13% of teachers with 20-29 years of experience and 22% of teachers with 30 years of experience or more were not comfortable using online teaching tools, compared to only 6% of teachers with less than 10 years of experience and 7% of teachers with 10-19 years of experience.



## Teachers report concerning levels of student engagement with remote learning overall, and stark differences along racial and socio-economic lines.

- ✦ On average, teachers report that only 60% of students regularly engage in remote learning activities.
- ✦ Teachers in high-poverty schools report that only 50% of students regularly engage in remote learning, whereas their counterparts at low-poverty schools engage at a much higher rate—75%.
- ✦ In schools where a majority of students are Black, teachers report that 45% of students regularly engage in remote learning; at schools that enroll fewer than 10% of Black students, teachers report that 72% of students regularly engage in remote learning.<sup>4</sup>



- ✦ The differential patterns of perceived student engagement in remote learning by race and socio-economic status likely reflect systemic disparities across communities in education, economic, and health conditions. For example, both low-income and Black communities have been disproportionately affected by the coronavirus, face greater job losses due to the pandemic, and are more likely to lack resources for remote learning. School funding models that rely primarily on property taxes further this inequity by creating a twenty-three billion dollar funding gap between predominantly White and predominantly Black school districts.<sup>5</sup> Research has also shown that schools serving these communities have systematically less supportive working environments for teachers.<sup>6</sup>

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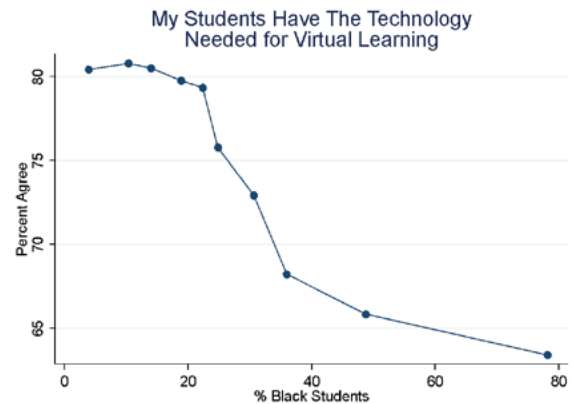
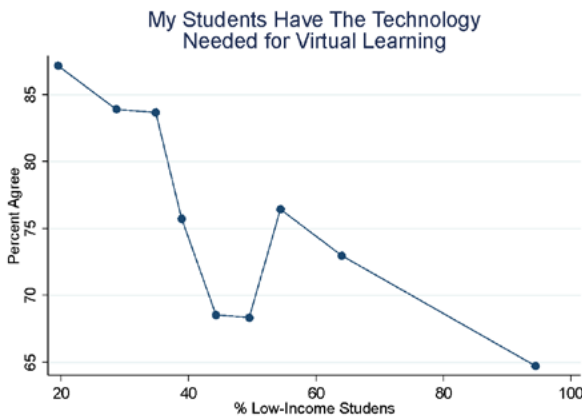
4 These results are quite similar even when we limit our sample to only include Black teachers.

5 EdBuild. (2019). Nonwhite school districts get \$23 billion less than White districts despite serving the same number of students. Retrieved from <https://edbuild.org/content/23-billion/full-report.pdf>

6 Johnson, S.M., Kraft, M.A., & Papay, J.P. (2012). How context matters in high-need schools: The effects of teachers' working conditions on their professional satisfaction and their students' achievement. *Teachers College Record*, 114(10), 1-39.

Teachers also report that student access to technological tools is a major challenge for remote learning.

- ✦ Overall, only 75% of teachers report that their students have the technological tools necessary for remote learning.
- ✦ Among teachers in high-poverty schools, only 64% agree their students have the necessary technology for remote learning relative to 87% in low-poverty schools.
- ✦ In schools where the majority of students are Black, teachers report that only 66% of students have the necessary technology to engage in remote learning. In schools where less than 10% of the students are Black, 81% of teachers agree their students have the necessary technology for remote learning.



## Conclusion

Our findings highlight important differences in the challenges posed by the transition to remote teaching and learning. Early-career teachers, teachers with school-aged children, and very experienced teachers have all struggled in different ways. Teachers' understanding of the challenges their students have faced also vary considerably along racial and socio-economic lines. Schools can play a key role in helping teachers to address these challenges by providing supportive working conditions during a time when they need them most. This is particularly true in schools serving low-income and Black communities that have been hardest hit by the pandemic.





### **About Upbeat**

*Upbeat works with K-12 districts across the country to administer a research-grounded survey to elevate teacher engagement and retention by fostering strong school environments. Founded and led by former educators, we bring together data scientists, technologists, and experienced former school leaders to deliver a research-backed solution. Our surveys paired with tailored toolkits and intervention strategies, surface real-time insights so that principals and district leaders are able to better understand and uncover the conditions affecting employee morale and establish actionable plans to improve teacher and staff retention.*