

Rep. Cheryl Youakim, Chair, House Education Policy Committee

Rep. Jim Davnie, Chair, House Education Finance Division

Members: House Education Policy Committee

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Greetings!

I am Marc Johnson, parent, educator and current director of a public school cooperative in East Central MN and I welcome the opportunity to share with you some relevant information from a statistically valid parent/family survey completed between April 15th, 2020 and May 8th, 2020 involving ten of our member public school districts. The statistics I point out below and include on the survey summary are those of parents/families from the following districts: Braham, Chisago Lakes, East Central, Hinckley-Finlayson, Isle, Milaca, Mora, North Branch, Ogilvie, Pine City, Princeton, and Rush City.

We had 2,130 families complete the survey that was intended to identify how many families struggled with technology related issues during distance learning. We certainly discovered that there is an issue with poor broadband access and affordability in our area. For example, nearly 26% of respondents indicated that they were generally dissatisfied with their current broadband situation representing over **4,840 students** throughout our region. Most of these families have Internet service, but the quality was so poor that they struggled with distance learning.

Nearly 16% of respondents indicated that some kind of cellular service is their only Internet Access at home. This could be through phone sharing or a hotspot tied to a cellular service provider. This includes most of those who reported they have NO Internet Access and represents **2,932 students** across the region. Over half (51.5%) of these families were moderately or highly dissatisfied with their service relative to distance learning and many of those provided comments expressing their frustrations with participation in distance learning with only cell phones or hot spots as Internet access devices. This indicates that cellular hotspots may not be adequate for distance learning in many cases.

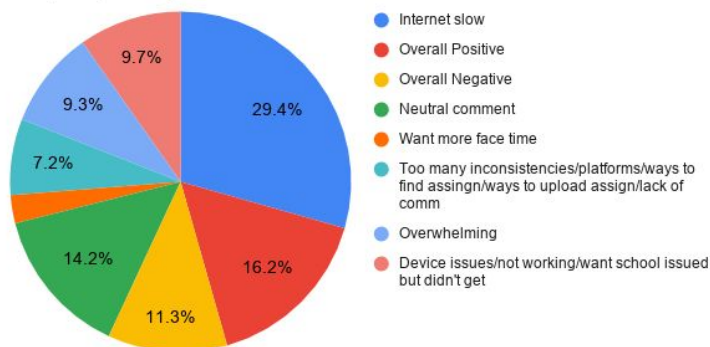
I am also attaching the summary of our survey and I hope you find the information valuable as you consider the many facets of our grand experiment with distance learning and plan for the future of education in the state both short and long term.

My biggest concern as a parent (who also has a background as a teacher) is how we can ensure that we are reaching ALL students with quality education experiences. I don't think we did that during this "experiment" but we were in survival mode. Now, we need to make sure we address ALL students more effectively. This is a daunting task!

We also found the free response comments very insightful and I want to share some of them with you since they represent real comments from real parents who worked hand in hand with educators during this crisis.

Free Response Comments

Grouped by similarity



We categorized the responses we received and, as can be seen from the graph to the left, the largest set of comments dealt with slow or poor Internet service. At the same time, the next largest set of comments were those categorized as “overall positive.” Some sample comments are included below. Additional comments are included in the summary.

I have also attached/included a document with ALL 633 comments that were received. It is a lot to read, but I think you will find them very interesting!

Sample comments:

- Both of our kids hate working on their school issued Chromebooks as they are SO slow to process anything. If they work on our personal computer, it is much faster to do the same work so we know it is the Chromebooks themselves, not the internet.
- Distance learning (instruction the teachers are providing) is going well except for our internet speed. It is VERY frustrating when we are trying to work and things don't load, etc. I can't just blame it on Frontier though, our Verizon hotspot and jetpack do not work well either. Frontier is our only choice for home internet.
- I want my child to have more contact with his teachers whether via technology or phone. Thus far, my child has had very minimal contact with teachers and I'm overwhelmed with trying to teach my child concepts with which I'm not familiar. I'm working from home, full time. It shouldn't be on me, the parent, to reach out to the school to ask questions, ask for help etc. They should be checking in, bare minimum- weekly. That's my opinion. Thank you.
- I can't express enough gratitude and appreciation to the teachers and administrators of the [my school district]. You all have made this uncertain time so much easier. We love and miss you all! Stay safe and healthy

I welcome the opportunity to further discuss these survey results and related issues with any of you in the future. Please feel free to contact me at any time.

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ECMECC is 39,000 students, 2800 faculty/administrators and 2200 educational support staff from 14 member school districts and Pine Technical and Community College. ECMECC utilizes technology, information and communication tools to expand educational opportunities for students, staff and community members in East Central Minnesota and beyond. ECMECC was founded in 1983 to make great things happen for students. We still do.