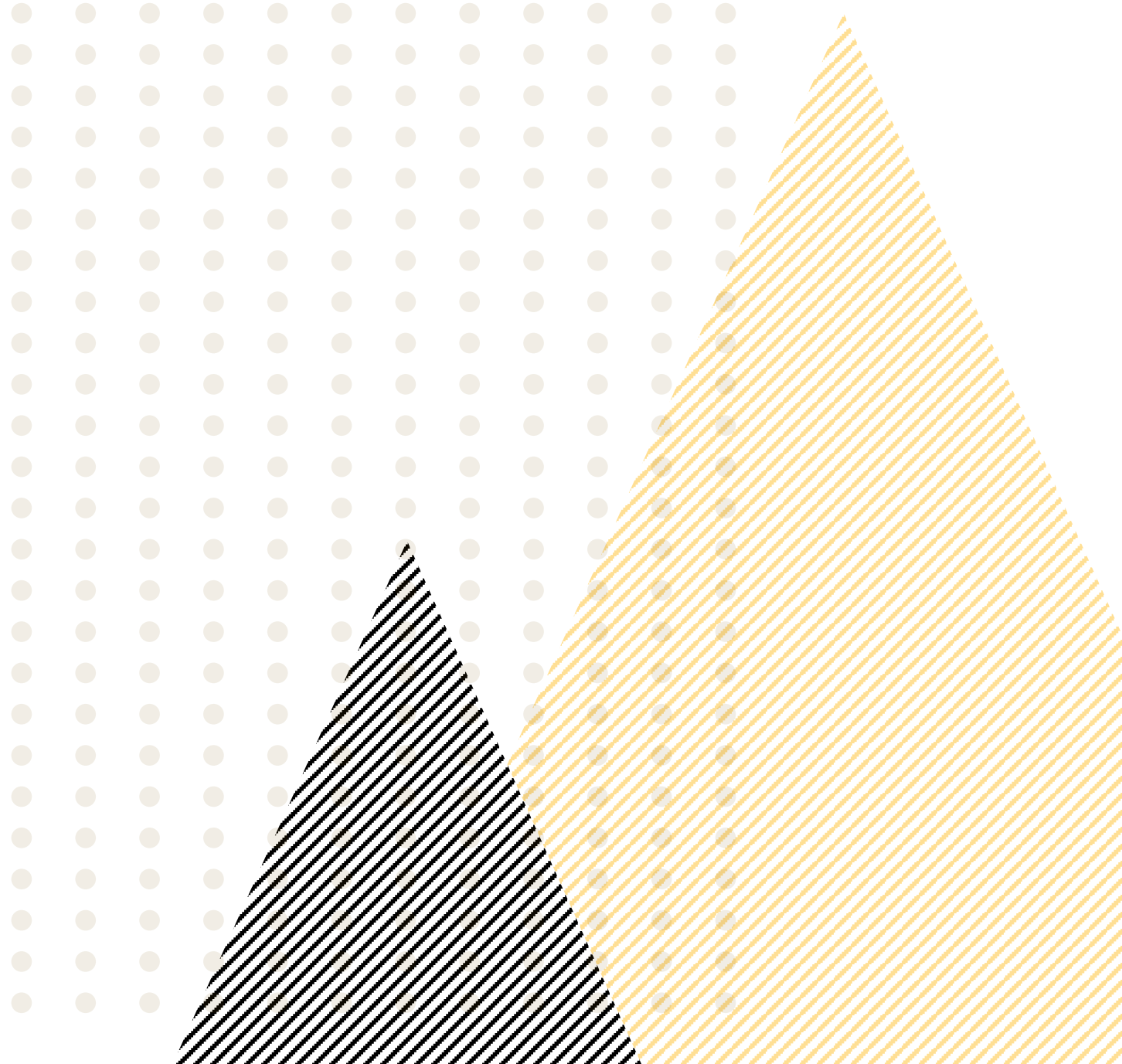# 2020
# Educator Confidence Report

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. The Learning Company® | **YouGov**®

# Message from Jack Lynch

Welcome to the **Sixth Annual Educator Confidence Report.**

For the past five years, the Educator Confidence Report (ECR) has given voice to our nation's educators—bringing to the forefront their views on the state of K–12 education, their profession, and what their students need.

With the ongoing disruption to teaching and learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic this year, we knew that voice was more important than ever for educators on the front lines in schools across the country.

While much of the narrative we hear is about the many challenges educators are facing, the results of this year's survey told a different story. The **Teacher Confidence Index** is a unique measure of teachers' overarching sentiment regarding the profession drawn from key survey indicators. This year, the average score **increased from 43 to 48, a marked increase from last year**. Teachers recognize the challenges and believe there is still work to be done to ensure the nation is able to effectively instruct students, yet they also identified many bright spots, and 75% said they felt prepared to take on the challenges to come.

In 2020, educators have been forced to quickly adapt to remote learning environments, in many cases leveraging EdTech in new ways. While the challenges have been deeply felt, this period has also created a meaningful shift.

This year's ECR shows that **the majority of teachers (71%) agree that the COVID-19 distance learning experience has moved education closer to fully realizing the potential of technology for teaching and learning.** Teachers worked hard to make the transition to distance learning and embraced digital tools and resources.

If there is one thing that stands out to us from this year's ECR, it is the resilience of educators and their unwavering commitment to the profession and their students. Educators are even more likely to say that they are staying in the field than they were in 2019. They are meeting this challenge head on, and even amidst the uncertainties tied to the pandemic, they are doing everything they can to get their essential job done.

This year's ECR highlights the work ahead for all of us in supporting teachers during this critical time. We know that technology cannot and should not replace teachers, but it can extend their ability to serve each student—something they need now more than ever, given the challenges of this unusual year.

To make our teachers and their students successful, it is time to enable a new digital-first, connected era of learning, where technology can engage students and personalize learning—and teachers are the architects of this multifaceted experience.

Jack Lynch
President and Chief Executive Officer
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

**"If there is one thing that stands out to us from this year's ECR, it is the resilience of educators and their unwavering commitment to the profession and their students."**

# Table of Contents

# Executive Summary

Fielded in June, the year's report was, of course, dominated by educators' experiences this spring with COVID-19 closures and the nearly overnight shift to remote learning. It is divided into three main sections. The first is **COVID-19: Impact and Bright Spots**, followed by **Looking Forward: Concerns and Challenges**. The report concludes with **Spotlight: Impacts of Equity**, an analysis of the findings through an equity lens.

While not unexpected, teachers were wholly unprepared, both professionally and personally, for the abrupt switch to distance learning and remote teaching. Still, teachers reported learning a great deal from this experience. As they looked forward to the current school year, teachers expressed increased optimism in their ability to teach students using these new digital tools and modalities. In fact, overall educator confidence increased from 2019 to 2020. We suspect that this is due, in part, to teachers experimenting with new digital technologies that, in the past, they were not comfortable using for teaching.

## 75%
### OF TEACHERS
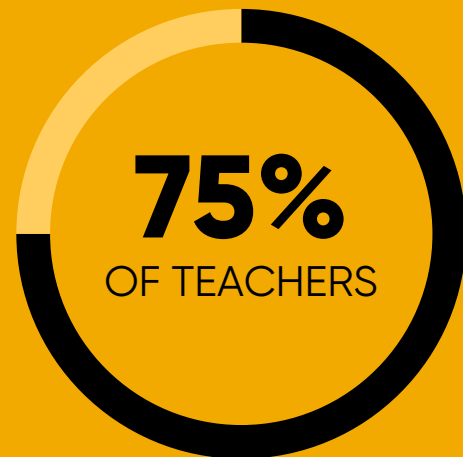
**WERE CONFIDENT THAT THEY WOULD BE PREPARED FOR THE START OF THE SCHOOL YEAR**

**43** 2019

**48** 2020
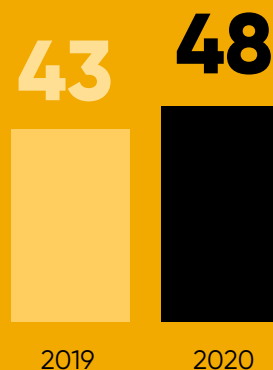
**TEACHER CONFIDENCE INDEX INCREASED TO 48 (OUT OF 100), UP FROM 43 IN 2019.**

# Executive Summary (continued)

When compared to previous years, we saw a shift in the technologies educators used during remote learning, and educators reported that certain technologies were more effective with the switch to a completely remote classroom. As teachers reflected on the disruption to teaching, they also reported that the change to remote learning could have some positive impact on their profession. Among the bright spots were the adoption of new online/virtual instructional methodologies and increased student engagement thanks to the use of digital platforms.

Most educators expect significant change to teaching and learning over the 2020–2021 school year and have a number of ongoing concerns. Nearly all teachers (94%) agreed that their students increasingly need more social and emotional support, and only 1 in 10 teachers indicated social-emotional learning (SEL) was significantly incorporated in their remote learning this past spring. The switch to a completely virtual space also increased teachers' concerns about the availability of devices, and the ability of teachers to differentiate lessons for subgroups, including English language learners and students that require intensive intervention.

The survey found that inequity in the education system remains persistent and was even intensified by the COVID-19 experience. Like 2019, the number one barrier in high-poverty schools, at 88 percent, is access to devices/connectivity for students. High-poverty schools were far more challenged to make the transition to distance learning, and overall, educators in high-poverty schools have greater concerns and less optimism about the teaching profession. It is worth pointing out that although teachers in high-poverty schools were less optimistic overall, these teachers were just as likely to report wanting to remain in the profession as those in low-poverty schools.

Even though the future of the educational landscape is uncertain, teachers reported a steadfast commitment to supporting their students and seeing them through these difficult times.

2020 **49%**

2019 **34%**
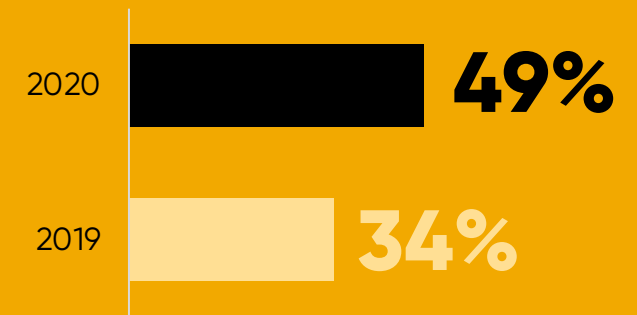
**PERCENT OF TEACHERS WHO FEEL SOMEWHAT OR VERY POSITIVE TOWARD THE STATE OF THE PROFESSION**
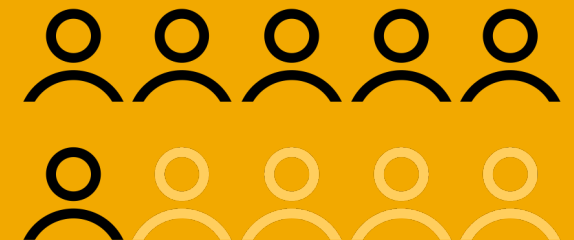
**ABOUT 6 IN 10 TEACHERS (62%) CITED AN INCREASE IN RESPECT FOR THE ROLE OF TEACHERS.**

# The Survey

Methodology:

- A total of 1,435 educators, including 1,228 teachers and 207 administrators, participated in the study.

- Educators were sourced from MDR's (Market Data Retrieval®) educator database.

- Data were collected between June 9 and June 16, 2020. The survey was carried out online.

- Average survey length was 15 minutes.

- Data were weighted to be nationally representative, in line with past waves of study.

- When charts and text reference "teachers," the data refer to teachers only. When the word "educators" is used, the data refer to both teachers and administrators.

## 2020 ECR BY THE NUMBERS

**1,435**
TOTAL EDUCATORS

**30%**
HIGH-POVERTY SCHOOL

**20%**
LOW-POVERTY SCHOOL

## YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

| 10 OR LESS | 11 TO 20 | MORE THAN 20 |
|---|---|---|
| **35%** | **36%** | **29%** |
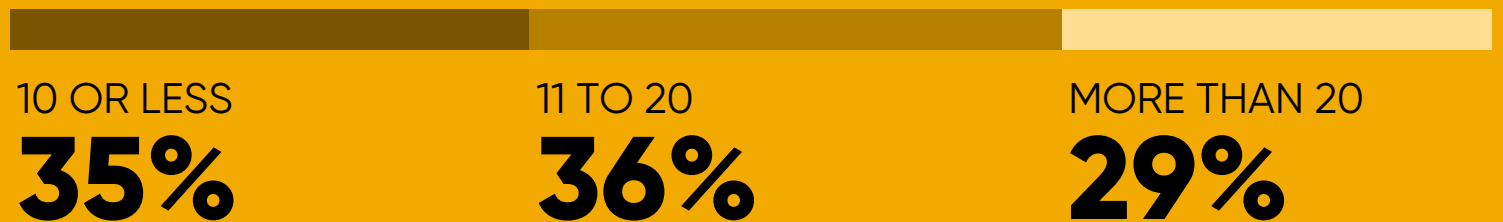
# Confidence Index up Five Points

Surprisingly, the Educator Confidence Index increased by five points from 2019 (the first year the score was calculated) to 2020. At first, we found the uptick startling. But digging into the data, we found that educators reported a number of positive outcomes from remote teaching during the pandemic and remained optimistic about the future of education. This result was remarkably consistent, regardless of student or educator demographics.

**CONFIDENCE INDEX**

| All Educators | High-Poverty | Medium-Poverty | Low-Poverty | Northeast | South | Midwest | West |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 49% | 48% | 49% | 50% | 50% | 50% | 48% | 48% |
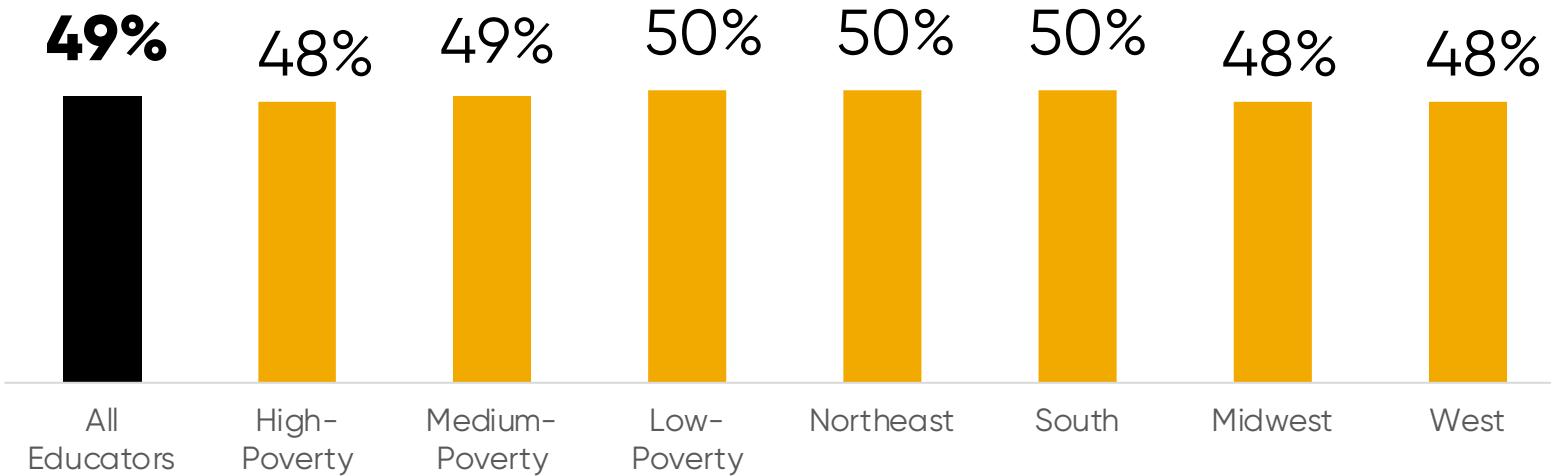
COVID-19 | Impact and Bright Spots

# Educators Felt Unprepared for Distance Learning

This spring, the majority of educators had doubts about their districts' ability to transition successfully to distance or virtual learning. Only 17% of teachers and 19% of administrators said their school district was extremely or very prepared, while 26% of teachers and 28% of administrators say they felt extremely or very personally prepared.

**TEACHER RESULTS:**

**SCHOOL OR DISTRICT'S PREPAREDNESS TO TRANSITION TO DISTANCE/VIRTUAL TEACHING**

**17%**
EXTREMELY OR
VERY PREPARED

**44%**
SOMEWHAT
PREPARED

**27%**
VERY
UNPREPARED

**11%**
EXTREMELY
UNPREPARED

**PERSONAL PREPAREDNESS TO TRANSITION TO DISTANCE/VIRTUAL TEACHING**

**26%**
EXTREMELY OR
VERY PREPARED

**48%**
SOMEWHAT
PREPARED

**21%**
VERY
UNPREPARED

**5%**
EXTREMELY
UNPREPARED

# More Support Needed to Address Students' Social-Emotional Learning Needs

Just 7% of educators felt extremely or very prepared to address the social-emotional needs of students during the COVID-19 disruption, and only 10% reported that social-emotional learning (SEL) was incorporated to a significant degree in distance learning programs.

**PERSONAL PREPAREDNESS TO ADDRESS THE STUDENTS' SEL NEEDS DURING DISRUPTIONS DUE TO COVID-19**

**7%**
EXTREMELY OR VERY PREPARED

**46%**
SOMEWHAT PREPARED

**36%**
VERY UNPREPARED

**11%**
EXTREMELY UNPREPARED
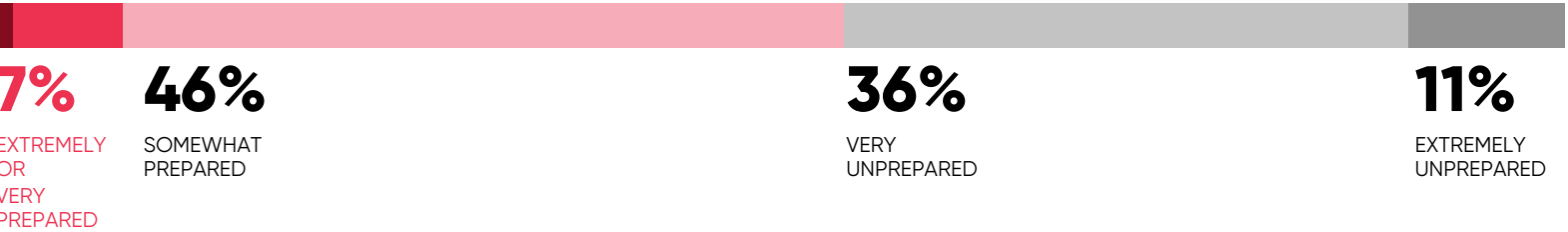
**DEGREE TO WHICH SEL WAS INCORPORATED INTO DISTANCE LEARNING**

**10%**
VERY SIGNIFICANT OR SIGNIFICANT EXTENT

**26%**
MODERATE EXTENT

**42%**
SMALL EXTENT

**16%**
NOT AT ALL

**6%**
DON'T KNOW
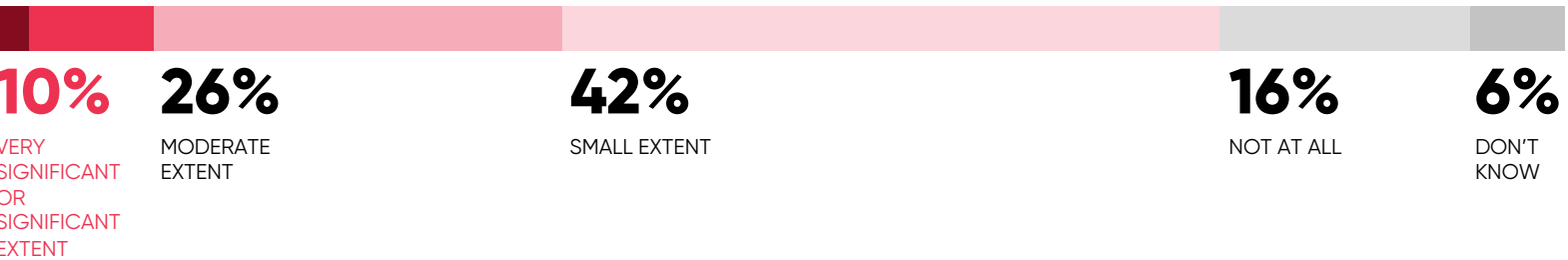
# Teachers Feel Confident Heading into the 2020–2021 School Year

This confidence is due, in no small part, to most teachers' commitment to lifelong learning and professional improvement, a fact that remains unchanged since 2019, even amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly all teachers (98%) agree that they need to be lifelong learners, essentially unchanged from 97% in 2019. The same trend can be seen in the statement, "I am always looking for ways to improve my teaching practice," with 98% of teachers in agreement, unchanged from 98% in 2019. Our key takeaway: teachers' confidence is resilient in the face of unforeseen challenges.

WHEN IT COMES TO INSTRUCTION AND STUDENT LEARNING, I AM CONFIDENT I WILL BE PREPARED FOR THE START OF THE 2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR

**75%** AGREE

TEACHERS NEED TO BE LIFELONG LEARNERS

**98%** AGREE

I AM ALWAYS LOOKING FOR WAYS TO IMPROVE MY TEACHING PRACTICE
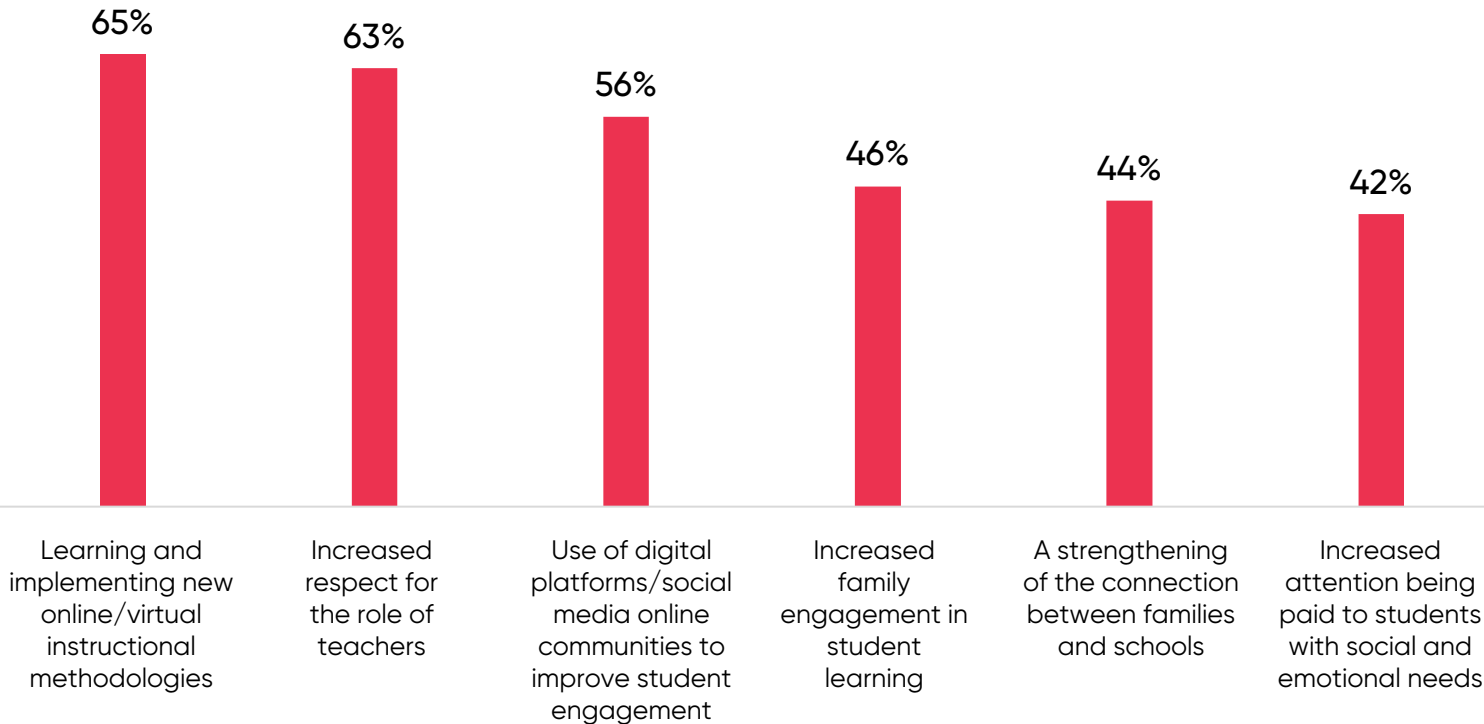
**98%** AGREE

■ STRONGLY AGREE
■ AGREE

# Nearly All Educators Find Bright Spots amid Disruptions

The overwhelming majority of educators (97%) identified one or more of 12 potential positive outcomes from the COVID-19 school disruption. The most common positive outcomes cited were using new online/virtual instructional methodologies, increased respect for the role of teachers, and increased student engagement due to the use of digital platforms.

**POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR EDUCATION AS A RESULT OF COVID-19**

| 65% | 63% | 56% | 46% | 44% | 42% |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Learning and implementing new online/virtual instructional methodologies | Increased respect for the role of teachers | Use of digital platforms/social media online communities to improve student engagement | Increased family engagement in student learning | A strengthening of the connection between families and schools | Increased attention being paid to students with social and emotional needs |

# More Tech in EdTech

A majority of educators (73%) agree that the COVID-19 distance learning experience has moved education closer to fully realizing the potential of technology for teaching and learning. At the same time, about 6 in 10 educators (61%) say they are worried that, as a result of the distance learning experience, policy makers will see EdTech as a replacement for teachers.

**THE COVID-19 DISTANCE LEARNING EXPERIENCE HAS MOVED EDUCATION CLOSER TO FULLY REALIZING THE POTENTIAL OF TECHNOLOGY IN TEACHING AND LEARNING.**

**73%**
AGREE

**I WORRY THAT AS A RESULT OF THE COVID-19 DISTANCE LEARNING EXPERIENCE, POLICY MAKERS WILL INCREASINGLY SEE EDTECH AS A REPLACEMENT FOR TEACHERS.**

**61%**
AGREE
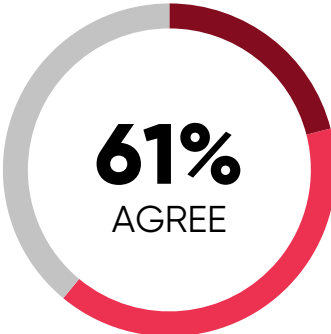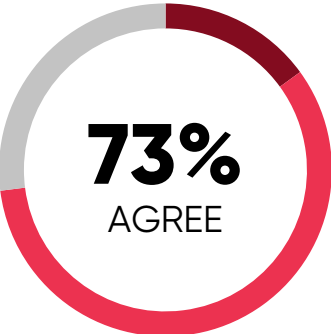
■ STRONGLY AGREE
■ AGREE

# Frequent Use of EdTech Does Not Translate into Confidence in Its Effectiveness

Over 6 in 10 teachers (61%) feel more confident in their ability to use EdTech resources as a result of distance learning. But at the same time, only 50% of teachers—down a full 16 points from 2019—are confident in their ability to use EdTech in instructionally effective ways.

Teachers have likely not had the time or data needed to fully reflect on what worked and what didn't from an instructional perspective. More than three in four teachers are concerned about how to keep students engaged during distance learning.

**CONFIDENCE IN ABILITY TO USE EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY RESOURCES AS A RESULT OF DISTANCE LEARNING EXPERIENCE**

## 61%

say their confidence has increased.

**CONFIDENCE IN ABILITY TO USE EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY RESOURCES IN INSTRUCTIONALLY EFFECTIVE WAYS**

## 50%

feel extremely or very confident.

# Despite Challenges, More Teachers Say They Have "No Interest" in Leaving Education

Plans to stay in the education field are up this year across all levels of experience. Of teachers with 10 years of experience or less, 37% say they have "no interest" in leaving education, up from 27% in 2019. Only 6% say they will "definitely be out of the education field" in the next five years, and 11% say this sentiment is close to how they feel.

For teachers with more than 20 years of experience, most who expect to leave the field are likely driven by planned retirements.

**INTEREST IN LEAVING THE EDUCATION PROFESSION**



10 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE OR LESS

| | 2019 | 2020 |
|---|---|---|
| | 9% | 6% |
| | 16% | 11% |
| | 36% | 35% |
| | 12% | 12% |
| | 27% | 37% |

11–20 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

| | 2019 | 2020 |
|---|---|---|
| | 8% | 7% |
| | 17% | 9% |
| | 38% | 33% |
| | 12% | 13% |
| | 25% | 38% |

MORE THAN 20 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

| | 2019 | 2020 |
|---|---|---|
| | 29% | 21% |
| | 13% | 12% |
| | 24% | 24% |
| | 7% | 9% |
| | 27% | 34% |

- I will definitely be out of the education field in the next five years.
- I do not have plans to leave education but haven't ruled it out as a possibility.
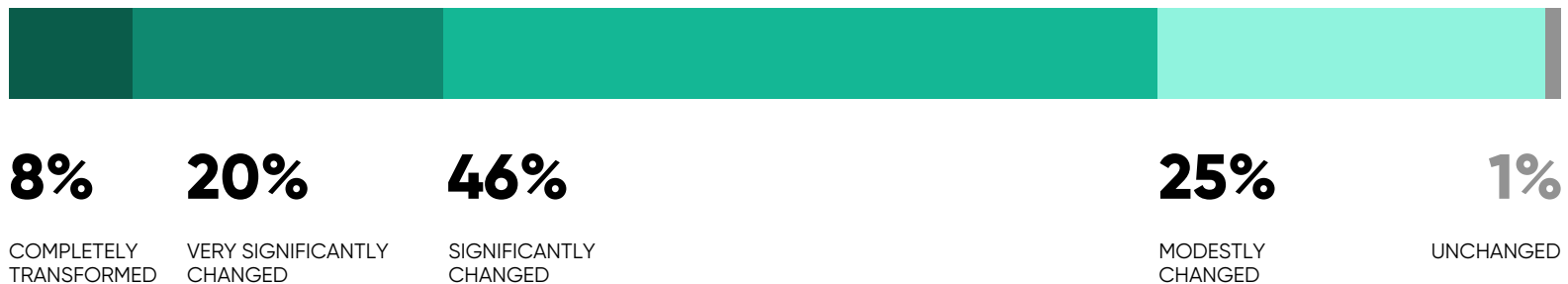- I have no interest in leaving the education field.
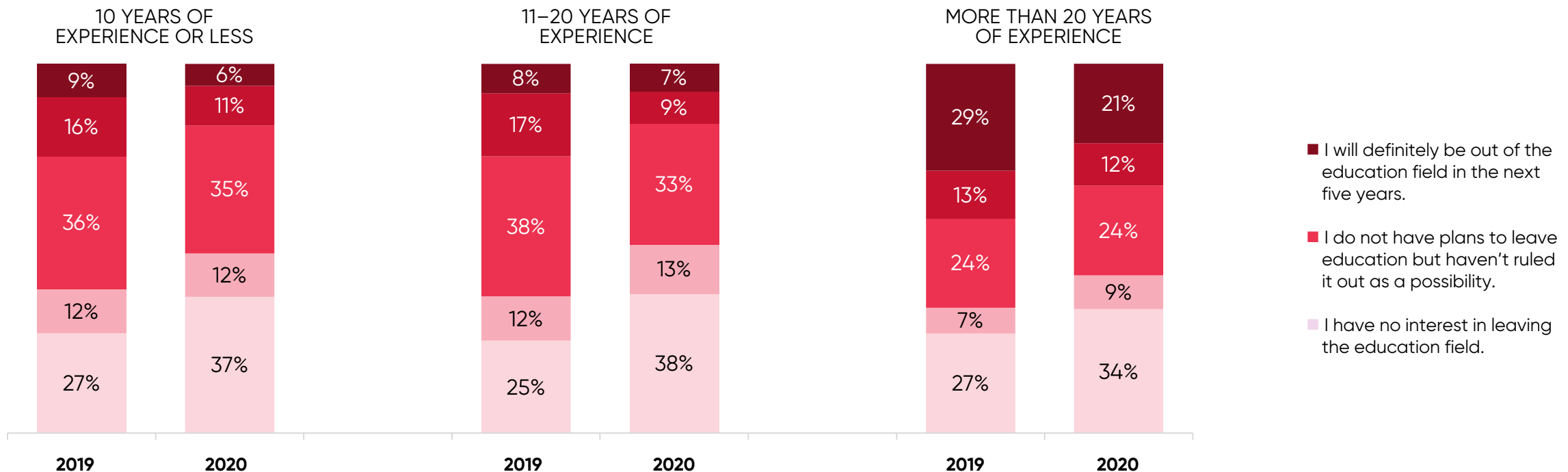
# Looking Forward | Concerns and Challenges

# Educators Expect Significant Changes This School Year

Most educators expect the teaching and learning landscape to be significantly different this school year.

**EXPECTED CHANGE TO TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE 2020–2021 SCHOOL YEAR**

| **8%** | **20%** | **46%** | **25%** | **1%** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| COMPLETELY TRANSFORMED | VERY SIGNIFICANTLY CHANGED | SIGNIFICANTLY CHANGED | MODESTLY CHANGED | UNCHANGED |

# Shifts in Digital Materials Used with Distance Learning

In the context of distance learning, a new item was added to this year's list of what digital materials teachers are using: "A digital-based core curriculum resource for one or more core subjects." About 4 in 10 teachers (41%) said they used a digital-based core curriculum resource.

There were notable changes in the digital materials teachers used during distance learning this year compared to 2019. Some materials were used far less frequently than in 2019, namely resources shared via a professional learning company, along with videos, online assessments, and social media or online community tools.

**DIGITAL MATERIALS TEACHERS USED DURING DISTANCE LEARNING**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Digital versions of print instructional materials | 66% | ⬆ 6 pts |
| Videos from an instructional program or open source | 60% | ⬇ 9 pts |
| ANY free / open-source digital content | 59% | |
| Practice work apps / websites / digital games | 58% | |
| Online assessments | 49% | ⬇ 8 pts |
| Resources shared (free or paid) via a PLC | 44% | ⬇ 21 pts |
| Adaptive learning games / content / activities | 41% | |
| A digital-based core curriculum resource for one or more core subjects* | 41% | |
| ANY paid / publisher-provided digital content | 32% | ⬇ 7 pts |
| Social media / online community tools for student learning | 15% | ⬇ 8 pts |
| Virtual labs | 12% | |

\* Item is new to 2020

# With Distance Learning, Not All Digital Tools Are Equal

Educators are most likely to cite videos from an instructional program or open source as one of the top three most effective resources during COVID-19 distance learning. Additional top-ranked items include digital versions of print instructional materials and practice work apps, websites, and digital games.

## MOST EFFECTIVE DIGITAL EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS DURING DISTANCE LEARNING

**1** Videos from an instructional program or open source (e.g., TeacherTube®, TED Talks®, Khan Academy®)

**2** Digital versions of print instructional materials (e.g. PDF or EPUB files)

**3** Practice work apps / websites / digital games

**4** ANY free / open-source digital content (of any type)

**5** A digital-based core curriculum resource for one or more core subjects

# Significant Increases in Educators' Concerns

Educators' top concerns focus on the upcoming school year and meeting their students' needs, both with distance learning instruction and social-emotional learning.

There are also some very significant increases, all likely driven by the difficulties and challenges revealed by the switch to an exclusive distance learning model. Compared to 2019, more educators this year are concerned with:

- Differentiating lessons for special education and students who require intervention (49%, up 20 points)

- Inequity (48%, up 9 points)

- A lack of technology devices (44%, up 17 points)

- Differentiating for English language learners (32%, up 9 points)

In addition to rising inequity concerns, a new item was added this year—44% of educators are concerned about supporting the needs of students of color. Inequity and related topics are more fully explored in the next section of this report.

**TOP 3 CONCERNS IN EDUCATION TODAY**

**1** Ensuring there is a plan for learning moving forward in the event schools can't reopen and/or the severity of COVID-19 necessitates school closings in the 2020–2021 school year*

**2** Ensuring that all of my students engage with distance learning*

**3** The social and emotional needs of students

**RESPONSES WITH SIGNIFICANT INCREASE THIS YEAR:**

Differentiating lessons for special education and students who require intervention

Inequity in our K–12 educational system

A lack of technology devices (desktops, laptops, tablets, etc.)

* Item is new to 2020

# More SEL Support Is Needed

With 77% of educators concerned about students' social-emotional well-being, it's no surprise that the vast majority (94%) agree that students increasingly need more social and emotional support.

**STUDENTS INCREASINGLY NEED MORE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT**

**94%**
AGREE

- ■ STRONGLY AGREE
- ■ AGREE
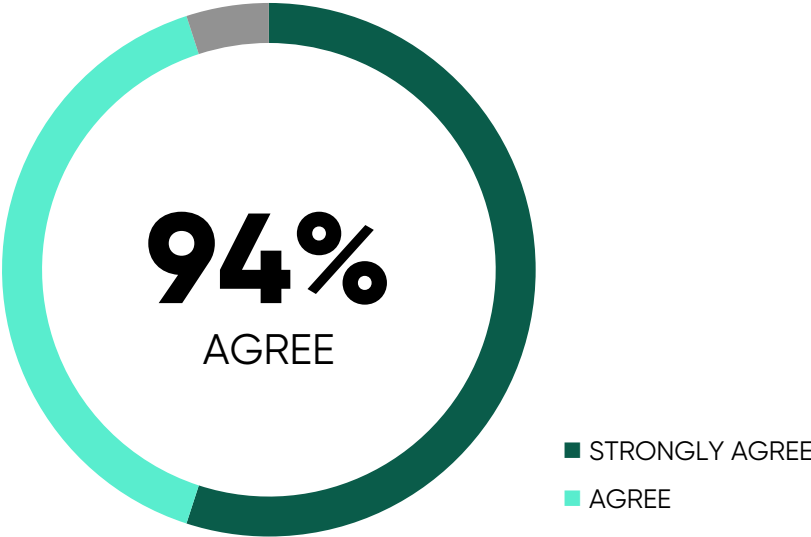
# Connections Among Educators, Students, and Families Valued More Strongly

In a time of distance learning, connections between students and educators have become more valued. Across grade levels, the strength of agreement intensified since 2019 that the human connection a teacher makes with a student is the most important part of learning. Another sentiment that has increased in the strength of agreement since last year: nearly all educators believe that the support and engagement of students' families are critical to ensuring student success.

**THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THE LEARNING LANDSCAPE IS THE HUMAN CONNECTION A TEACHER MAKES WITH A STUDENT.**

## 96%
AGREE

**AS EDUCATORS, WE NEED THE SUPPORT AND ENGAGEMENT OF STUDENTS' FAMILIES TO HELP ENSURE STUDENT SUCCESS.**

## 97%
AGREE

■ STRONGLY AGREE

■ AGREE

"Teaching is about personal relationships, social-emotional connections, and routines. A computer cannot . . . console [children] when they are upset."

– ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL, TEXAS

# Family Engagement Activities: Common Does Not Mean Effective

Educators say that family engagement activities that involve personal connections—phone calls, story time, read-alouds, and video conferencing—tended to be the most effective.

The most common family engagement activities were not always seen as most effective. Of the three most common activities that occurred, only phone calls were also among the three most effective activities.
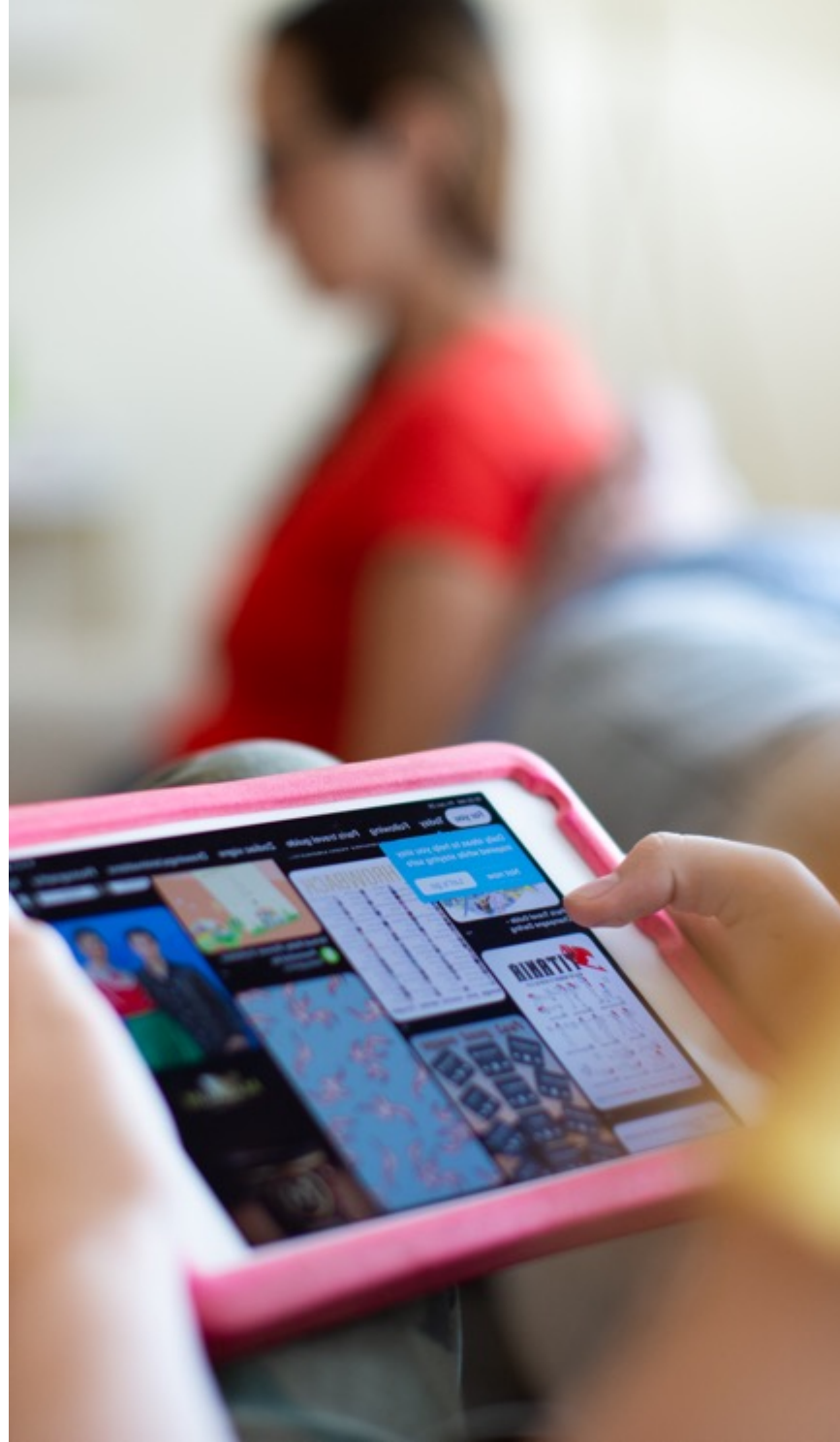
## ENGAGING WITH FAMILIES: WHAT WORKED AND WHAT DIDN'T

### TOP 3 MOST COMMON ACTIVITIES

**1** My school or district provided families with links to resources to help them navigate distance learning.

**2** I provided families with links to resources to help them navigate distance learning.

**3** I made phone calls to families.

### TOP 3 MOST EFFECTIVE ACTIVITIES

**1** I made phone calls to families.

**2** I did a live or recorded story time / read-alouds (*elementary only*).

**3** I video conferenced with families.

# Spotlight | Perspectives on Equity

# Inequity, Race, and Ethnicity Top of Mind for Educators

Many educators have hopes and concerns relating to inequity, race, and ethnicity. All measures are higher among educators who work in high-poverty schools.

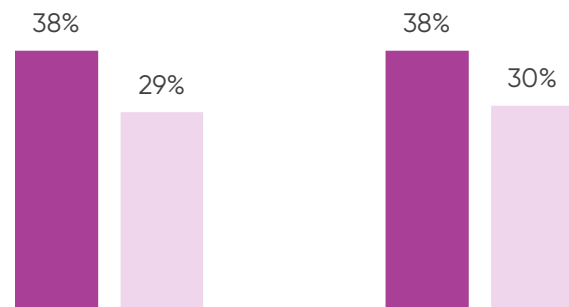**WHAT ARE YOU MOST CONCERNED AND MOST OPTIMISTIC ABOUT?**

■ HIGH POVERTY
■ LOW POVERTY

### MOST CONCERNED

**56%** **41%**
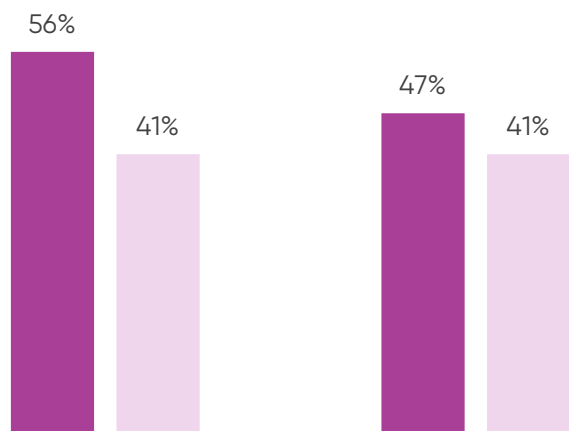
**Concerned about:**
Inequity in our K–12 educational system

**47%** **41%**

**Concerned about:**
Supporting students of color

### MOST OPTIMISTIC

**38%** **29%**

**Optimistic about:**
More attention and resources dedicated to solving instructional inequity

**38%** **30%**

**Optimistic about:**
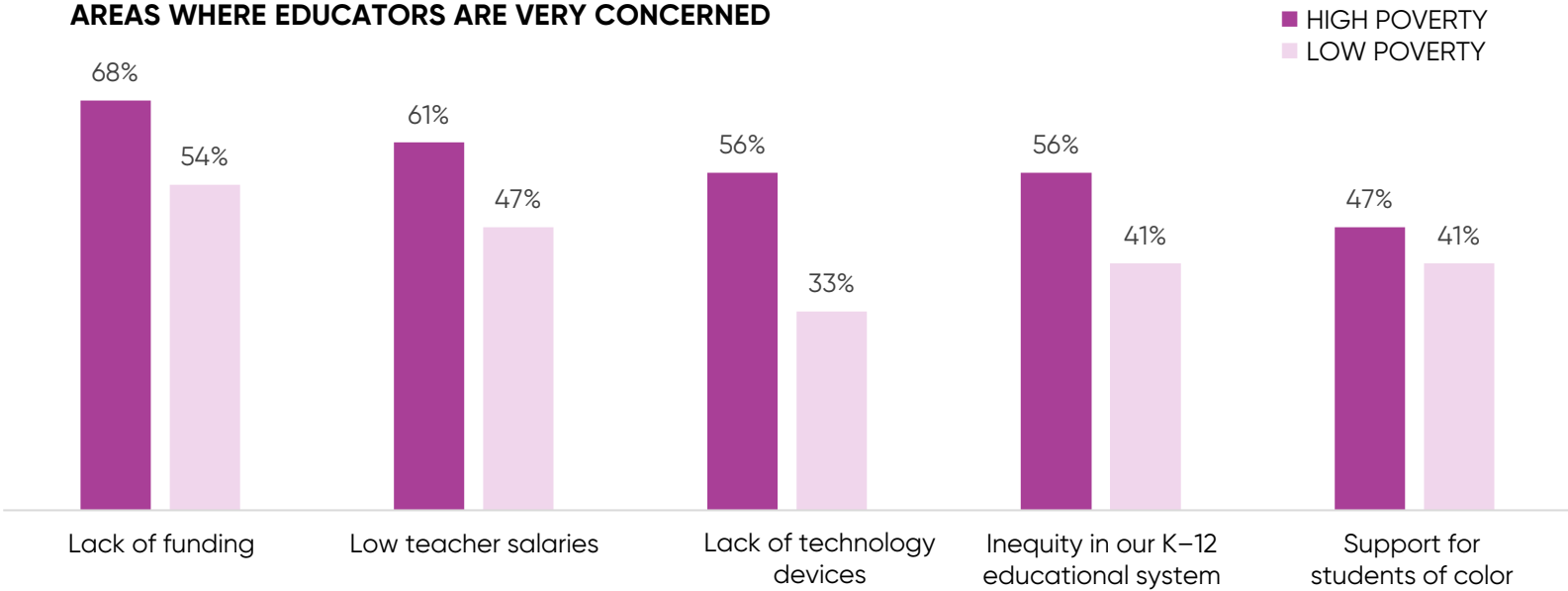A narrowing of the digital divide

# Educators at High-Poverty Schools Report Higher Levels of Concerns

Compared to their counterparts in low-poverty schools, educators at high-poverty schools were more likely to indicate concerns in the following areas.

**AREAS WHERE EDUCATORS ARE VERY CONCERNED**

■ HIGH POVERTY
■ LOW POVERTY

| | High Poverty | Low Poverty |
|---|---|---|
| Lack of funding | 68% | 54% |
| Low teacher salaries | 61% | 47% |
| Lack of technology devices | 56% | 33% |
| Inequity in our K–12 educational system | 56% | 41% |
| Support for students of color | 47% | 41% |

# Distance Learning Highlighted Barriers to EdTech

As in 2019, the number one barrier, regardless of school poverty level, is lack of access to devices and internet for students. Not only is this a much larger barrier in high-poverty schools, but COVID-19 served to widen the gap that existed in 2019 across all top barriers to the use of EdTech. During distance learning, discomfort with unfamiliar tools also grew more among high-poverty schools compared to low-poverty schools.

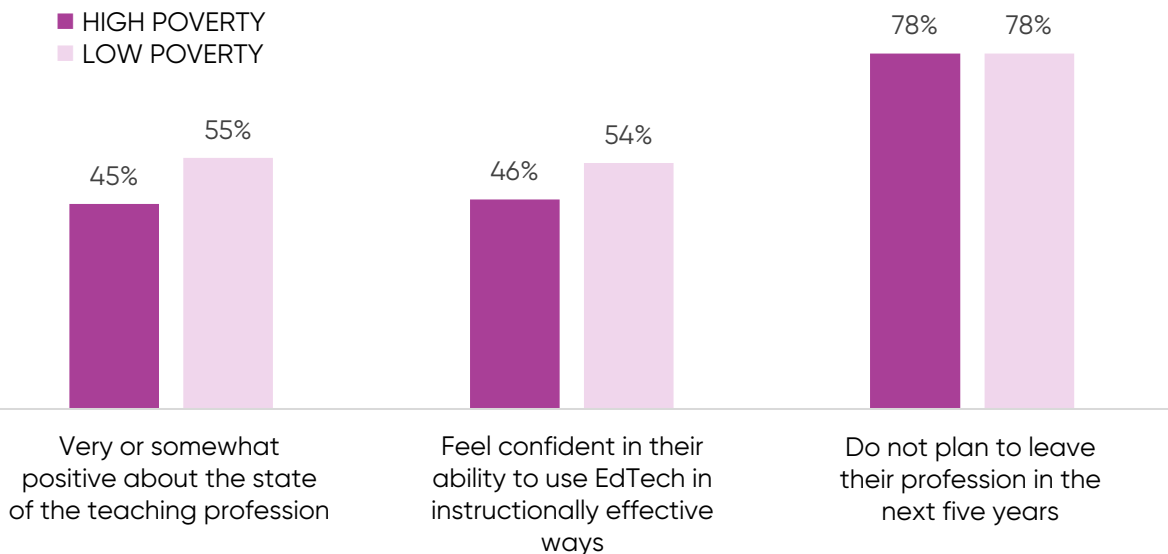| BARRIERS AMONG EDUCATORS | HIGH POVERTY | | LOW POVERTY | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lack of devices/connectivity for students | 88% | ⬆ 9 pts | 63% | ⬆ 3 pts |
| Lack of time to plan for integration of digital resources into instruction | 48% | ⬆ 4 pts | 57% | ⬆ 2 pts |
| Discomfort with using unfamiliar technology tools and resources | 37% | ⬆ 19 pts | 34% | ⬆ 10 pts |
| Lack of digital curriculum-focused professional development | 34% | ⬆ 10 pts | 36% | ⬆ 8 pts |
| Lack of technology-focused professional development | 34% | ⬆ 8 pts | 27% | No change |
| Lack of high-quality digital instructional content/resources | 25% | ⬆ 2 pts | 30% | ⬆ 5 pts |

# Despite Concerns and Barriers, Educators Remain Dedicated

With strong concerns and more significant barriers to using EdTech, it's not surprising that educators in high-poverty schools feel less positively towards the teaching profession than their low-poverty counterparts and have less confidence in the use of EdTech for effective instruction. Despite these reservations, nearly 8 in 10 (78%) educators at high-poverty schools have no plans to leave the profession.

## EDUCATORS' DEDICATION TO THE PROFESSION

■ HIGH POVERTY
■ LOW POVERTY

| Category | High Poverty | Low Poverty |
|---|---|---|
| Very or somewhat positive about the state of the teaching profession | 45% | 55% |
| Feel confident in their ability to use EdTech in instructionally effective ways | 46% | 54% |
| Do not plan to leave their profession in the next five years | 78% | 78% |

# Conclusion

**While the 2020–2021 school year looks different across the country, educators remain committed to meeting the needs of their students and are optimistic about the future of education, and in particular, teaching and learning under new models.**

HMH will continue to listen to educators about their needs as the school year progresses and is here to support teachers as they navigate this new landscape.

Now, more than ever, HMH is committed to ushering in the new connected era that is so urgently needed for teachers. This is partly because of the scale and force of the changes that COVID-19 has brought about in their everyday lives. But it is also because of the promise that technology holds in helping teachers fully meet the learning and social-emotional needs of every student.

**To learn more about HMH's work in creating a deeply connected learning community, visit https://www.hmhco.com/connected.**

**Get more information about the Educator Confidence Report**