

# Who Benefits from Remote Schooling?

## Self-Selection and Match Effects

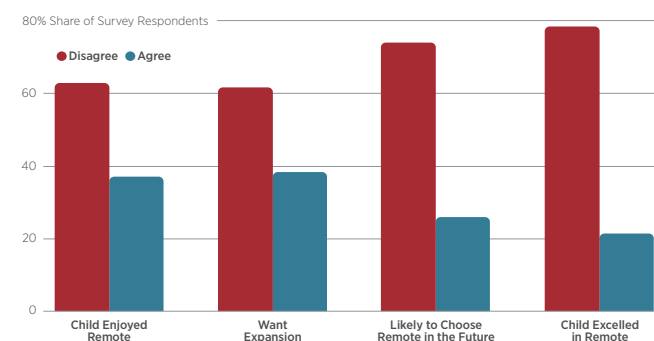
Based on BFI Working Paper 2023-88, ["Who Benefits from Remote Schooling? Self-Selection and Match Effects,"](#)  
by Jesse Bruhn, Brown University; Christopher Campos, University of Chicago; and Eric Chyn, University of Texas-Austin

*While remote learning has a negative average effect on reading and math skills, positive learning effects accrue to children whose parents have the strongest demand for remote learning, with an important subset of students benefitting from expanded choice.*

Mounting evidence shows that remote learning contributed to sizable learning losses, including on reading and math skills, during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, not all students responded in kind. The radical restructuring of class time during the pandemic also revealed that some students performed better with remote learning, prompting school districts across the United States to offer permanent, expanded remote options to satisfy ongoing parental demand.

Just as the pandemic upended the idea of workplace, leading to work-from-home and hybrid options for many jobs, COVID-19 has led educators to reconsider how best to teach students. Is a one-size-fits-all approach to learning the best option for all students? Post pandemic, what evidence do we have for how parents and students choose among various instructional options? To answer these and related questions, the authors focus on the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD),

**Figure 1 • Parents' Experiences and Demand for Remote Learning**



Note: This figure reveals that most respondents had negative experiences with remote learning during the 2021 academic year when LAUSD was fully remote; for example, 62% disagreed with the statement that their child enjoyed remote learning. However, a substantial fraction of respondents reported having positive experiences with remote learning, including 22% who reported that their child excelled in remote learning relative to in person.

the second-largest school district in the United States. After a year of 100% virtual learning at the onset of the pandemic, the district moved to a cycle of in-person and remote periods, allowing families to assess how their students performed in each case. When in-person learning restarted

in 2022, 14,000 LAUSD students stayed home. This phenomenon also occurred in school districts throughout the country.

To understand why those Los Angeles families made that decision, the authors designed a novel survey on family experiences and learning preferences that employed hypothetical choices that allowed parents and students to draw on their experiences with remote learning and their understanding of its costs and benefits. In doing so, the survey allowed the authors to go beyond the observed choices of families, or *what they did*, to study the nature of their selection, or *what influenced their decision*, to find the following:

- The authors corroborate growing evidence that remote learning contributes to learning losses *for the average student* in reading and math.
- The average family has a strong distaste for remote learning: it would take a 40-percentage point increase in academic standards before they would consider remote learning.
- That said, while most respondents report a negative experience with remote learning during the pandemic, one-third want expanded remote offerings, and a quarter expect to enroll their children in remote learning in the future. Moreover, 20 percent feel their children excelled in remote learning relative

to traditional, in-person instruction. These findings suggest there is substantial scope for permanent, post-pandemic remote offerings to generate improvements in match quality.

- Combining information on preferences with a model of achievement, the authors show that the subset of students with the highest demand for remote learning experience achievement gains relative to in-person instruction.
- Finally, students with high demand for remote learning perform poorly regardless of the school wherein they enroll. In contrast, when families choose remote learning based on their understanding of the child's suitability for remote instruction, students perform better.

**Bottom Line:** Matching students to their optimal learning experience matters. This work provides the first rigorous evidence about families' varying tastes for remote learning in the post-pandemic landscape, and the evidence is clear: Continued and expanded remote schooling options *for some students* can potentially improve K-12 learning outcomes. For policymakers, prior estimates of the impact of remote learning during the pandemic should not necessarily lead to a blanket return to in-school instruction, as such average effects mask benefits of remote learning for those students who opt for remote instruction.

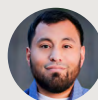
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