



# Who Benefits from Remote Schooling?

## Self-Selection and Match Effects

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### POLICY ISSUE

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, school districts around the country quickly transitioned to providing full- or part-time remote learning options for students who had otherwise been attending school completely in person. These unusual and unprecedented circumstances meant that families suddenly had an opportunity to assess the suitability of remote learning for their children over an extended time. Although there is growing evidence that remote learning contributed to substantial learning losses during the pandemic,<sup>1</sup> many districts are now planning to offer permanent, expanded remote options to satisfy ongoing parental demand. For example, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) returned to in-person learning as the dominant mode of instruction in 2022 but continued to offer a remote learning option that was chosen by 14,000 students. Why do so many families continue to prefer remote schooling, and which students are best suited for it? This study begins to address these important questions within the context of LAUSD, providing relevant insights for parents, educators, and policymakers as they consider the ongoing effects of remote learning on students.

### STUDY DATA AND FINDINGS

In April 2022, LAUSD administered a survey to a random sample of parents with children enrolled in grades 3-8 and 11. The survey asked questions about their experiences with and perceptions of remote learning (with about 3,600 respondents), as well as a series of hypothetical choice experiments about their relative preferences for academic quality, distance, and remote learning (with about 1,200 respondents). The authors of this study were able to link these survey responses to student-level administrative data from LAUSD, including test scores and demographic characteristics. Their analyses revealed the following findings:

- Most parents had negative experiences with remote learning during the 2020-21 academic year, when LAUSD was fully remote. For example, 62% of survey respondents disagreed with the statement that their child enjoyed remote learning.
  - However, a sizable group of parents reported having positive experiences with remote learning. Most notably, 22% of survey respondents reported that their child excelled in remote learning.

### KEY FINDINGS

- Most LAUSD parents had negative experiences with remote learning during the 2020-21 academic year, but a sizable group of parents had positive experiences.
- On average, LAUSD students experienced learning losses in math and reading under remote schooling during the pandemic, but students whose families expressed high demand for remote schooling experienced learning gains.

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- Consistent with evidence from other contexts, LAUSD students on average experienced negative effects of remote learning during the pandemic on 2022 math and reading test scores.
  - However, students whose families expressed strong preferences in favor of remote learning had positive test score gains during this period. This means that, at the very least, they performed no worse in remote schooling than they would have in person, and some actually performed better remotely than they would have in person.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

During the COVID-19 pandemic, students who normally attended school in person were compelled to experience remote learning, perhaps for the first time, giving their families new firsthand insight into their preferences for different schooling modes. Survey results from this study show that although remote instruction—at least under pandemic conditions—is unpopular among most LAUSD families, a sizable share of parents want expanded remote offerings moving forward and believe that their children excel in

remote schooling. Furthermore, although LAUSD students on average experienced learning losses under remote instruction during the pandemic, those whose families expressed the highest demand for remote schooling actually experienced test score gains. Together, these findings emphasize that remote learning may not be appropriate for all students, but it could be the best option for some. Providing more opportunities for families to experience and assess the “fit” of different instructional modes for their students, including remote options, likely enables them to make better decisions about which forms of schooling are best suited for their children. One question that this study doesn’t answer is why some students appear to benefit from remote learning while others do not—this question presents an important avenue for future research that will continue to inform policy as well as parental decision-making around remote schooling.

## FULL REPORT

For the complete working paper, visit [wheelockpolicycenter.org](https://wheelockpolicycenter.org).

## Endnotes

1 Goldhaber et al., 2022; Jack et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2022

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