School leaders and educators expended tremendous effort to reach families and meet students’ needs during an unprecedented school year.

**Mental health**
Schools hired additional staff, initiated partnerships, and integrated social-emotional learning and wellness checks into lessons.

**Technology access**
LEAs worked to ensure students had learning devices and internet at home and provided technological support.

**Virtual learning**
Schools used virtual platforms for real-time data about student performance to identify students who may need additional help.

**Communication**
Families appreciated being able to communicate with school administrators and teachers in a variety of modes, and the availability of virtual conferences.

Virtual learning was *prevalent* but often *inadequate* for students, teachers, and families.

- **79% of students** were still learning completely from home at the end of the school year, after almost all students began the year virtually.
- **54% of parents** said they were aware of mental health supports at their child’s school amidst increased stress due to COVID-19 and virtual learning.
- **46% of students** said that their internet was always good enough to participate in all school activities. Many students struggled with slow internet speeds and low bandwidth.
- **7% fewer students** enrolled in pre-kindergarten compared to the previous school year. Virtual learning was more challenging across the board for younger students.
- **7% of teachers** said that they had all the supports that they needed for virtual instruction, which was a challenge, given the quick pivot to virtual learning right before the school year started.
- **17% of teachers** said that students with disabilities and English learner students were receiving supports they need.
- **2/3 of teachers** said that students with disabilities and English learner students were receiving supports they need.

Education in context: D.C. during the 2020-21 school year

COVID-19 cases around the city
COVID-19 cases rose and fell throughout the school year, and spiked in January 2021 to 41 cases per 100,000 residents.

Perceptions of community safety
Violence in communities can lead to increased stress and anxiety which can have large impacts on student well-being. In school year 2020-21, the number of homicides increased by 21% citywide.

Black and Latino parents were four times more likely to report that they or their child felt physically unsafe out of their homes than white respondents.

Unemployment rates
The unemployment rate was 7.2% in June 2021–up 2.3 percentage points compared to February 2020.

Recovery
As schools continue to navigate the pandemic during the 2021-22 school year and beyond, it is important to ask the right questions about how students, families, teachers, and schools are recovering from its impacts. The D.C. Policy Center proposes tracking recovery progress for different student groups in three areas:

Students designated as at-risk,* English learners, and students with disabilities experienced disproportionate impacts:

Out of D.C.’s public school students:
- 45% of students are designated as at-risk
- 12% of students are English learners
- 16% of students are students with disabilities

Outcomes for school year 2020-21:

**Chronic absenteeism (missing 10% or more of the school year)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>At-risk</th>
<th>English learners</th>
<th>Students with disabilities</th>
<th>All students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reading on grade level for kindergarten through grade 2 students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>At-risk</th>
<th>English learners</th>
<th>Students with disabilities</th>
<th>All students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Four-year graduation rate**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>At-risk</th>
<th>English learners</th>
<th>Students with disabilities</th>
<th>All students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*At-risk is a category used for funding purposes which includes: students who receive certain public benefits, experience homelessness, are in the foster care system, or who are over-age in high school.

Broadband access
As of 2019, 82% of households in D.C. had access to a computer with broadband internet (lowest in Wards 7 and 8 at 66%).

COVID-19 cases around the city
COVID-19 cases rose and fell throughout the school year, and spiked in January 2021 to 41 cases per 100,000 residents.

Perceptions of community safety
Violence in communities can lead to increased stress and anxiety which can have large impacts on student well-being. In school year 2020-21, the number of homicides increased by 21% citywide.

Black and Latino parents were four times more likely to report that they or their child felt physically unsafe out of their homes than white respondents.

Unemployment rates
The unemployment rate was 7.2% in June 2021–up 2.3 percentage points compared to February 2020.

Recovery
As schools continue to navigate the pandemic during the 2021-22 school year and beyond, it is important to ask the right questions about how students, families, teachers, and schools are recovering from its impacts. The D.C. Policy Center proposes tracking recovery progress for different student groups in three areas:

**Student success**
- Chronic absenteeism
- Achievement levels and growth
- Transition to college, industry-recognized credentials, and earnings when available

**Student supports**
- Number of mental health professionals, and wellbeing measures, when available
- Goal attainment for students with disabilities
- Exit from English learner status
- Teacher retention and satisfaction rates

**Community factors**
- Perceptions of community safety
- Number of in-person school days, or live instructional time, when available
- Parent or caregiver satisfaction rates and enrollment levels, especially in early grades

FULL REPORT: dcpolicycenter.org/publications/state-of-dc-schools-20-21