

Survey: Majority of Parents Believe Online Learning Is Going Well

A teacher friend of mine was secretly pleased when she heard that schools were going to finish out the year with online classes. Curious, I asked for her reasoning. The answer was simple: she has a mute button while teaching online.

Because of that mute button, this teacher doesn't have to spend time dealing with distractions such as goofing off or bad attitudes. Instead, she is able to spend more time teaching and working with students one on one. Sounds like a winner to me!

What about the kids themselves? Or their parents? From news headlines, one would guess that things are going terribly. But a [recent survey](#) in the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* suggests that things might not be as bad as we've been told. In fact, many parents and students may be discovering, like my friend, that this new form of education isn't all that bad.

According to the *Star Tribune*, over 500 parents, whose children are in both private and public schools, responded to the survey. When asked to rate their children's experience with online learning, over half gave a positive rating, with 17 percent saying that their child was thriving. An additional 27 percent gave a middling rating, which really isn't all that bad considering how unprepared teachers were to make this switch. Only 23 percent gave a rating of one or two.

Overall, how would you rate your child's experience with online learning?

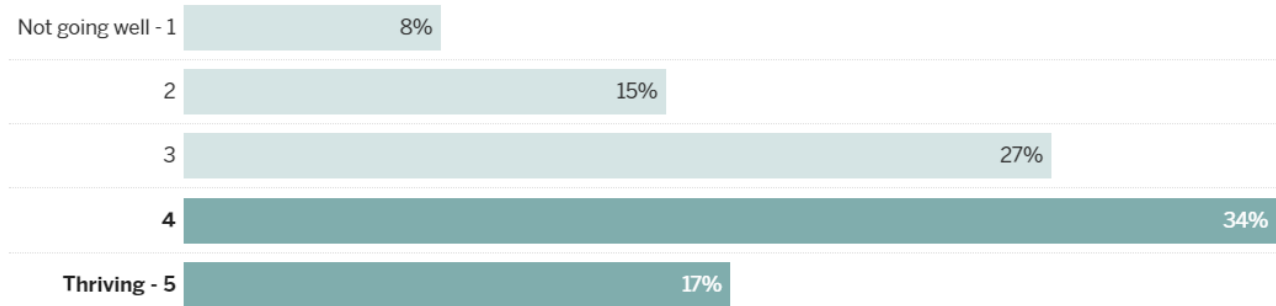


Chart: MaryJo Webster • Source: Star Tribune online survey, April 17-24

But then, this is just one state out of 50. Perhaps, as it is often said, the children of Minnesota really are “above average” and the transition to online learning was easily conquered here, even while children from other states are having a much more difficult time. If this is the case in your family – or if your children, too, are thriving with online education – take the time to fill out [this three-minute national survey](#) from “For Kids & Country” to give a true picture of what is happening in education during this uncertain time.

Regardless, this *Star Tribune* survey of students and parents living with the daily realities of COVID-19 education raises an important question. If over half of these children are doing just fine with this alternative form of education – even when it was cobbled together at the last minute – then why is it that traditional institutional schooling is always framed as the be-all, end-all of education?

For years we’ve been told that traditional schools are the only way to acquire a satisfactory education – that education won’t be as effective if we try other “alternative” options, such as online education, or tutoring, or homeschooling. This survey seems to suggest otherwise.

But just because a majority of parents say online education works for their child, does that mean all students should hop online? Of course not! It would be a crime to shoehorn every

child into online education because it works well for a majority of students, just as it is also a crime to impose institutional schooling on every student.

Unfortunately, the latter approach is the way we've dealt with schooling in recent decades.

This time of uncertainty is a good time to take a step back and do some self-examination. Are we going about education the wrong way? Have we accepted a theory of education that can't fit every size and shape of student?

Albert J. Nock might say something along those lines. Our system of education, writes Nock in [*The Theory of Education in the United States*](#), is like a machine:

"Any machine has some kind of theory behind it; and when you have a machine that has had every possible resource of mechanical ingenuity and care expended on it, and yet will not work satisfactorily, the situation at once suggests that something may be amiss with its theory. Perhaps its theory is all wrong, hopelessly wrong; the perpetual-motion devices that we occasionally hear of are instances of this. They are, let us say, mechanically perfect, and as far as mechanics go, they should work perfectly, but they do not work; so we examine their theory, and we at once discover not only why they do not work but also why no machine of the kind can possibly work. ... My point is that a complete and clear idea of the theory behind a machine, is valuable; and that as far as I am aware, with all the attention that has been bestowed on the mechanics of our educational system, no one has looked critically into its theory. Perhaps the time for that has only now come."

Whether purposeful or not, our educational system advances the idea that one size fits all. It doesn't. Perhaps COVID-19 is giving us a chance at a fresh start. Once we emerge from the lockdown, perhaps it's time we embrace more varied forms of education – charter, public, private, homeschool, virtual

education, tutors, and so on – and try to find the best educational match for each child, instead of trying to fit many students into a theory and system of education that simply does not work for them.

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[Image Credit: Department of Defense]