



Massachusetts School District Plans for Keeping Students Learning

March 2021



Motivation

- The Covid-19 pandemic is the largest disruption to Massachusetts schooling in living memory.
- March 16, 2020 was the final day of in-person schooling in the 2020 school year for MA students.
- Many have still not returned to schools and are learning remotely either full- or part-time.
- Parents, teachers, students and the wider community are deeply concerned that this disruption will, among other effects, set our children's learning back substantially.

- The Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education, in partnership with Boston University's Wheelock College of Education & Human Development, therefore set out to ask:

“How well prepared are Massachusetts school districts to keep students learning during these unprecedented times?”

Methodology

- We measure such preparation through analysis of each district's publicly posted reopening plan.
- We identified a set of about 20 variables that indicate a district has a publicly posted plan for dealing with a particular challenge of schooling during a pandemic.
- These include plans to: distribute computers/internet access, give students regular feedback, deal with chronic absenteeism, focus on social/emotional learning, prioritize high needs students, etc.
- A team of BU Wheelock researchers collected the publicly posted reopening plans for 120 school districts, including many of the largest in the state.
- The 120 districts in the database collectively enrolled about 580,000 students, or 64% of all traditional and charter public school students in the state (as of the 2019-2020 school year).

Methodology

- The team developed rubrics with which to read reopening plans.
 - The team then read through each plan, coding each of the variables according to the rubric.
 - Variables were largely coded as “Yes, there’s a clear public-facing plan” vs. “No, there’s not.”
 - The plans were read once in the fall and then again scanned for updates in December.
- Importantly, school districts were contacted with the preliminary coding of the plans to check that the team had not missed or misinterpreted any public-facing documents.
- The resulting codes were then posted in [this publicly accessible database](#).
- It is also worth remembering that:
 - Having a public-facing plan does not imply the plan is being implemented as described.
 - Some districts are making efforts not captured in their public-facing plans.

Structure of the report

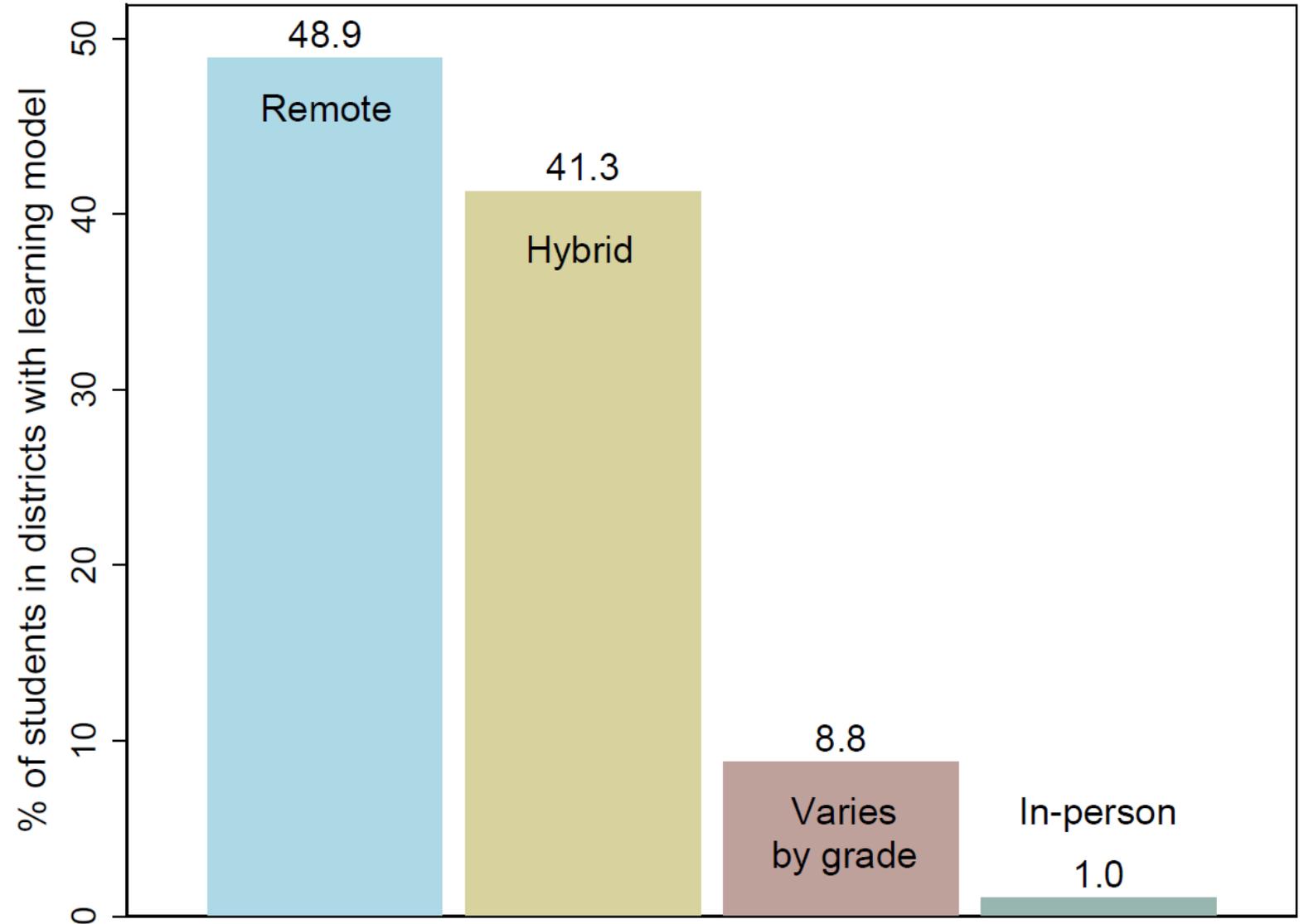
- Below we describe our main findings in the following sections:
 - A statewide summary of learning models being followed (remote / hybrid / in-person)
 - A statewide summary of individual plan details
 - Specific examples of districts with clear plans for assessment, absenteeism, synchronous learning time, and college and career readiness
 - Variation in learning models and plan details by school district characteristics, including:
 - Racial composition of student body
 - District spending levels
 - Peak Covid infection rates (as of April 2020)
- Note: All subsequent calculations are weighted by districts' student populations.

Summary of findings

- How extensive are districts' plans?
 - Most students are in school districts with extensive plans, but about one-sixth (16%) are in districts where plans lacked details on over a third of the recorded items.
 - Most districts have clear plans to deal with most learning challenges, though many lacked plans to support college and career readiness and to deal with chronic absenteeism.
- What learning model are districts using?
 - Nearly half of Massachusetts students are in school districts that are fully remote (as of this report).
 - Majority non-White districts are much more likely to be fully remote, as are districts with lower income students and high community Covid infection rates.
 - District per-pupil spending is unrelated to the probability that a district is fully remote.
- How do learning plans relate to district characteristics?
 - On average, majority non-White districts have more extensive learning plans, as do districts with lower income students and higher per-pupil spending.

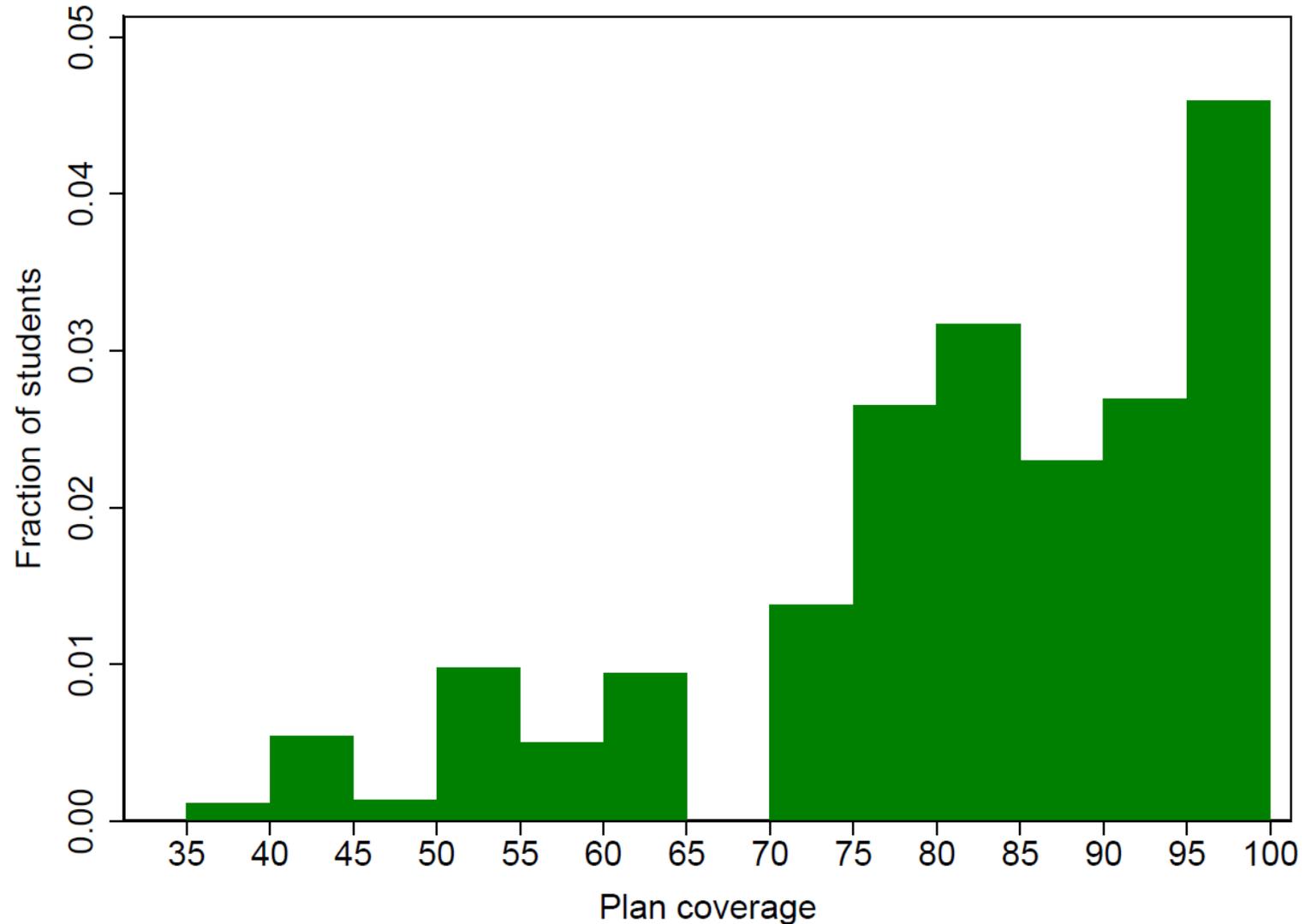
Statewide summary – Learning model

- Nearly half (48.9%) of students are in districts that offer only remote learning.
- Two-fifths (41.3%) of students are in districts that offer hybrid options to all grades.
- About one-tenth of students (8.8%) are in districts where learning model options vary by grade.
- Only 1% of students are in districts offering full in-person instruction to all grades.



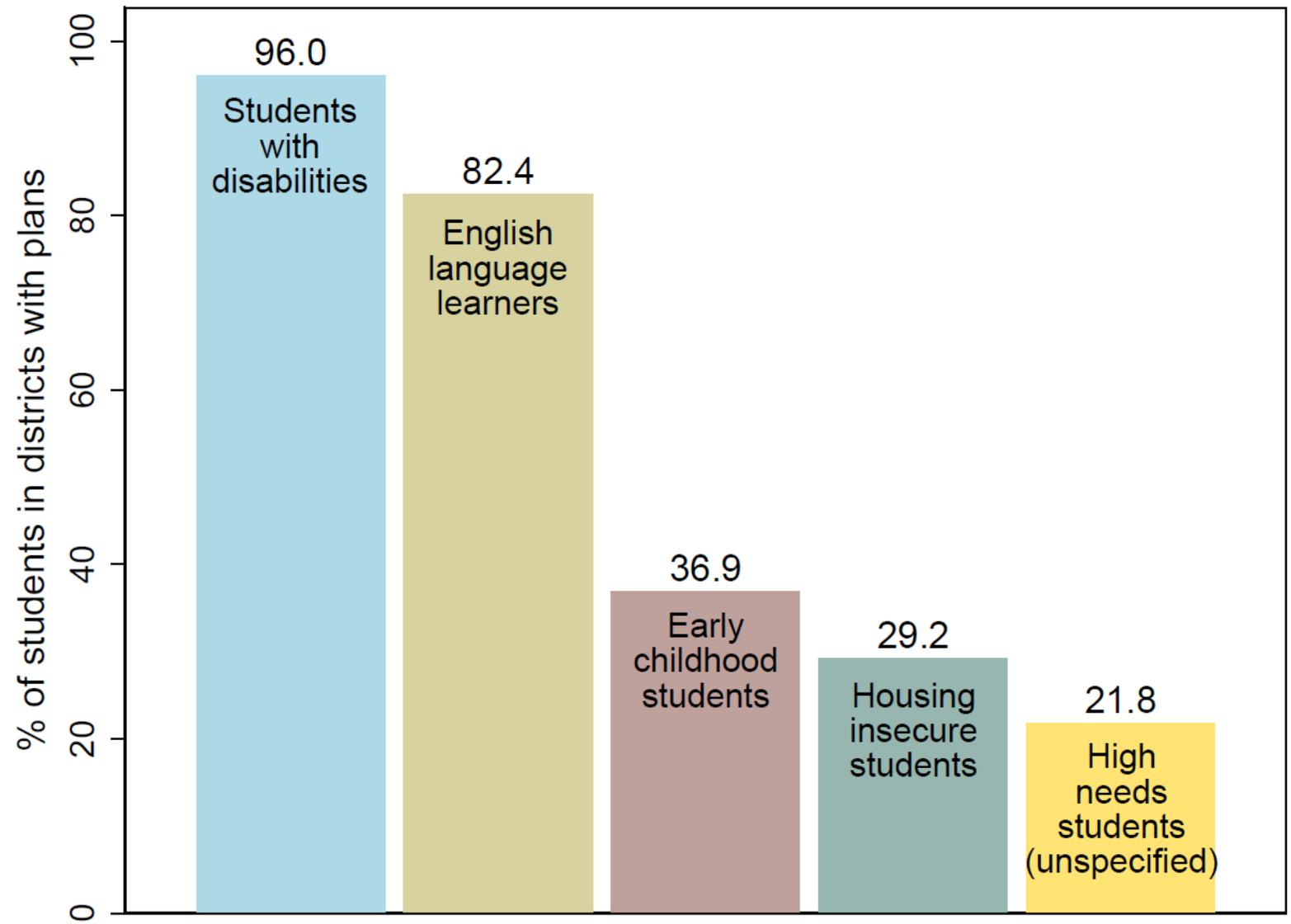
Statewide summary – Plan coverage

- We define “plan coverage” as the fraction of items we searched for that districts had a clear plan for.
- Most students are in school districts with high plan coverage (upwards of 80% of items planned for).
- A non-trivial fraction of students (16%) are, however, in districts where we found fewer than two-thirds of items in the reopening plans.



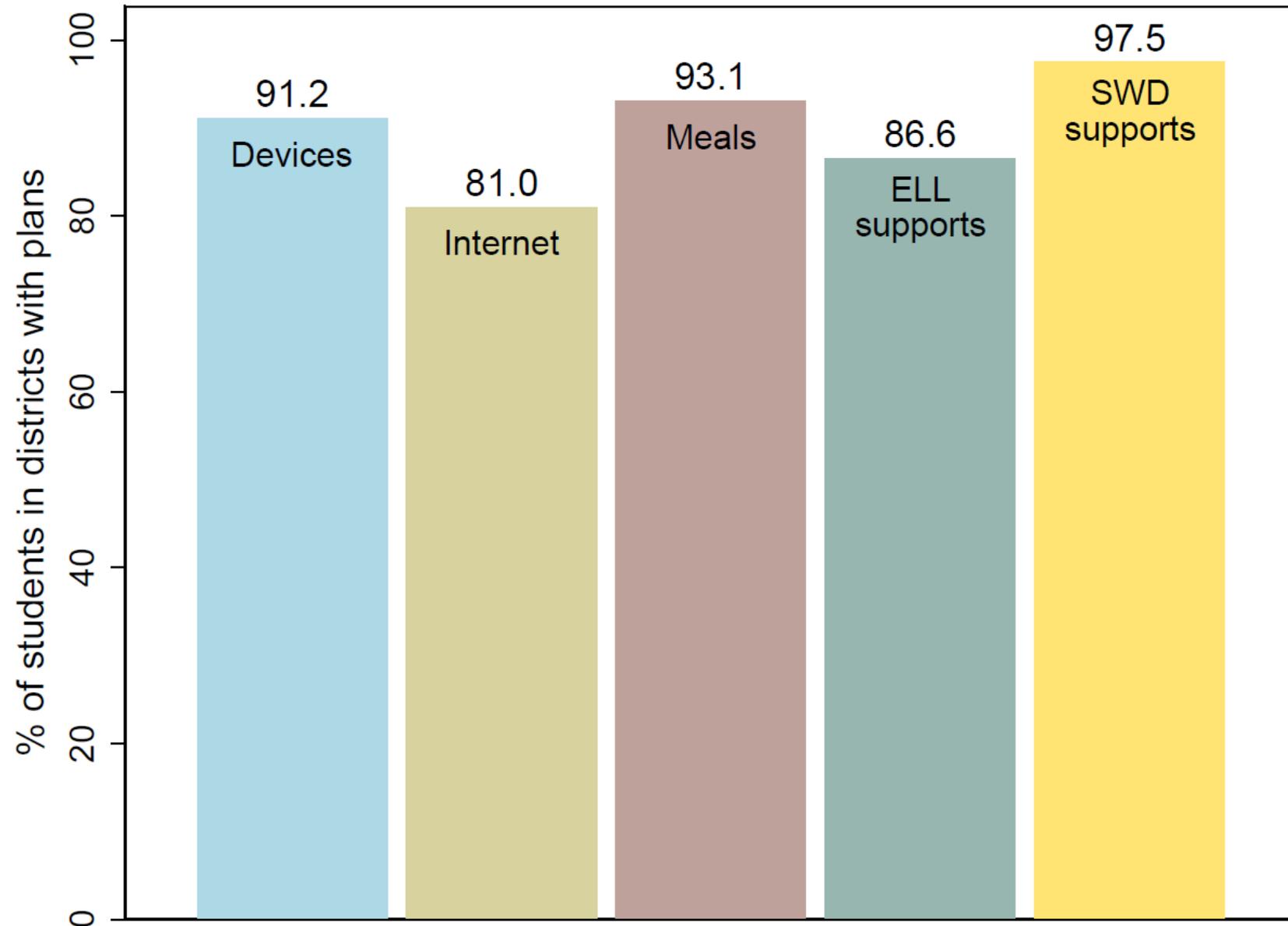
Statewide summary – Prioritized student groups

- 96% of students are in districts prioritizing students with disabilities.
- 82% are in districts prioritizing English language learners.
- Fewer students are in districts that prioritize early childhood students (37%), housing insecure students (29%), or other high needs students (22%), where “high needs” is not further specified.



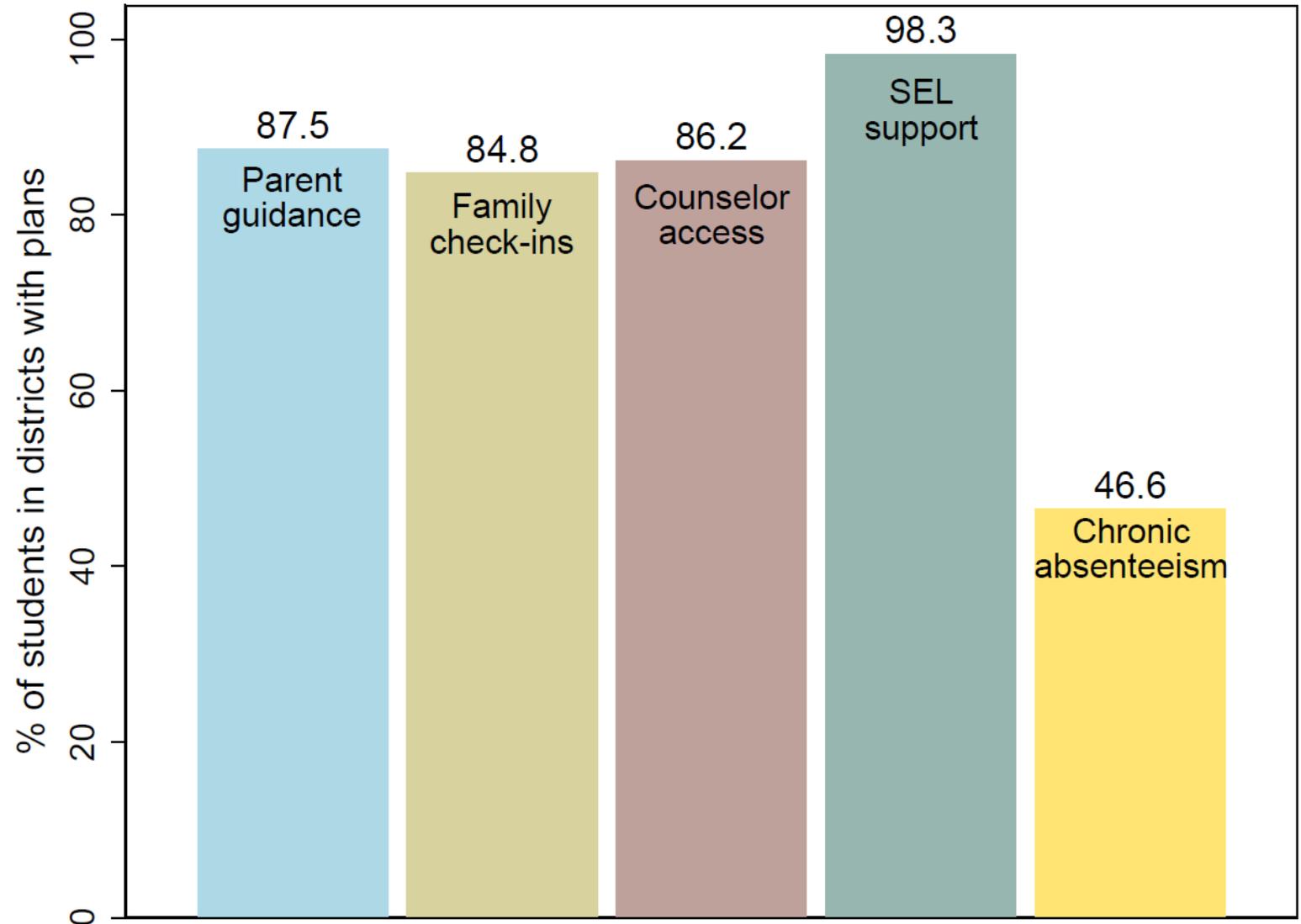
Statewide summary – Access to learning

- Most students are in districts with plans to make learning more accessible to students.
- 91% are in districts that provide learning devices (laptops, tablets) and 81% are in districts that provide internet access.
- 93% are in districts that continue to provide subsidized meals.
- 98% are in districts with specific plans to support students with disabilities, and 87% to support English language learners.



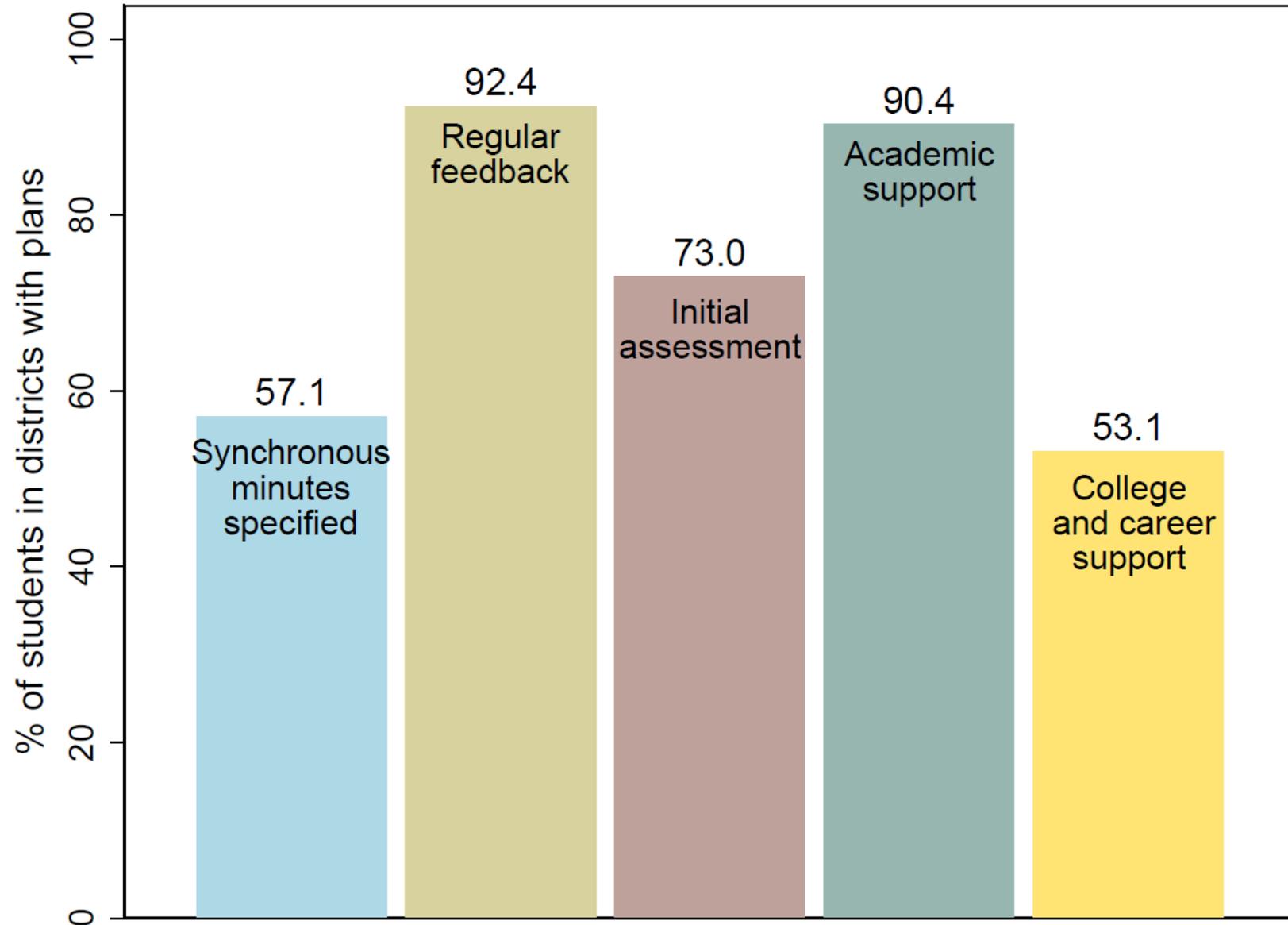
Statewide summary – Social and emotional learning

- Most students are in districts with plans to support social and emotional learning.
- 85-88% of students are in districts providing learning guidance to parents, regular family check-ins, and access to school counselors.
- Almost all students (98%) are in districts explicitly providing support for social and emotional learning.
- Fewer than half (47%) of students are in districts with a clear plan to address chronic absenteeism.



Statewide summary – Teaching and learning

- Only 57% of students are in districts specifying the amount of synchronous learning each day or week.
- Over 90% of students are in districts with plans to provide regular feedback to students and academic support more generally.
- 73% of students are in districts that initially assessed students' learning.
- Only 53% of students are in districts with a plan to support college and career readiness goals.



Focus on family outreach

- Coded with a binary “Yes” or “No” based on the expectation that teachers communicate with families/caregivers through individualized and synchronous means (e.g., Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, individual phone calls).
- Individualized communication with families is key to maintaining a strong home-to-school connection during virtual learning.
- Community Day Charter Public Schools (pictured at right) provides details on their plans for teachers to communicate weekly with families regarding student progress, participation, and assignments.

Parent Communication

Frequent parent/family communication will be coordinated from each student’s school. The network will also communicate with parents to ensure information is timely and helpful. For Early Learning Center (ELC) and Lower School (LS), staff will utilize Classroom Dojo as a platform to communicate with parents regarding online learning assignments as well as student progress. The Upper School (US) will utilize Google Classroom, email and phone calls to communicate with parents. Additionally, staff will reach out to parents regarding student participation as well as to answer questions at minimum on a weekly basis. We will continue to translate all parent communication into Spanish. Opportunities for families to engage in parent office hours/meetings to learn more about the curriculum and how they may be able to support their students in remote learning will begin with virtual open houses at the beginning of the school year. Throughout the year, we will hold periodic parent meetings for updates and communication on how to support students in the home setting.

Focus on feedback on student work (remote learners)

- We also looked for plans that outlined a commitment to providing feedback on student work during remote learning.
- While many districts stated that feedback on work would be provided, we found that some plans clearly articulated how they would provide feedback.

- At right, Chelsea Public Schools clearly outlines an advisory model for all students.

To support academic development, academic advising will be available for all students with a focus on monitoring student progress towards graduation. Student support staff will use data to identify gaps in achievement, needs, interventions, referral to programs for support, 504 planning, opportunities, and means for attainment. They will support the development of plans to address over- or under-representation of specific groups in programs such as Special Education, English Language Programs, Honors classes, Advanced Placement classes, Dual Enrollment and Early College, Pathways, etc.

Chelsea Public Schools
Reopening Plan 2020-2021

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Focus on assessment

- Coded “Yes,” “No,” or “Partial” based on a district’s mention of expectations to assess students at the beginning of the year. This may include the use of “benchmark” assessments.
- Assessment is critical to supporting continuity of learning because it provides teachers with essential information on students’ skill levels at key intervals. With this information, teachers can better design targeted instruction to support all students.

- Springfield Public Schools (plan pictured at right) provides a clear, easily read plan that specifies when each group of students will be scheduled to take formative, diagnostics, and state assessments.
- Similarly exemplary plans outlined when students would be taking particular assessments and, often, which specific assessments were planned.

Assessment Calendar for 2020-2021

Week of...	ANet Formative Assessments Grades 2-12 (date windows are tentative)	Diagnostics Assessments K-8: iReady 6-10: RI/PI 9-11: ANet Diagnostic (date windows are tentative)	State Assessments MCAS and ACCESS for ELLs (MCAS date windows are tentative)
14-Sep 21-Sep 28-Sep			
5-Oct 12-Oct 19-Oct 26-Oct	A1 (ELA & Math) Grades 2-11	K-8: iReady 9-11: Anet Diagnostic 6-10: RI/PI	
2-Nov 9-Nov 16-Nov 23-Nov 30-Nov		6-10: RI/PI	MCAS Retest - ELA and Math
7-Dec 14-Dec 21-Dec 28-Dec	Holiday Vacation		
4-Jan 11-Jan 18-Jan 25-Jan	A2 (ELA & Math) Grades 2-11	K-8: iReady 9-11: ANet Diagnostic 6-10: RI/PI	Access Testing (tentative): 1/6-2/10
1-Feb 8-Feb			

Focus on (synchronous) learning time

Considering the unfamiliar nature of the virtual learning environment for many students and families, we felt it was important to understand the ways in which school districts committed to support families in managing the at-home learning experience. This included indicating the minimum numbers of live, synchronous minutes for K-12 learners in a remote setting.

Elementary (K-3) Remote Learning *Sample* Schedule:

Elementary = asynchronous/independent work = synchronous

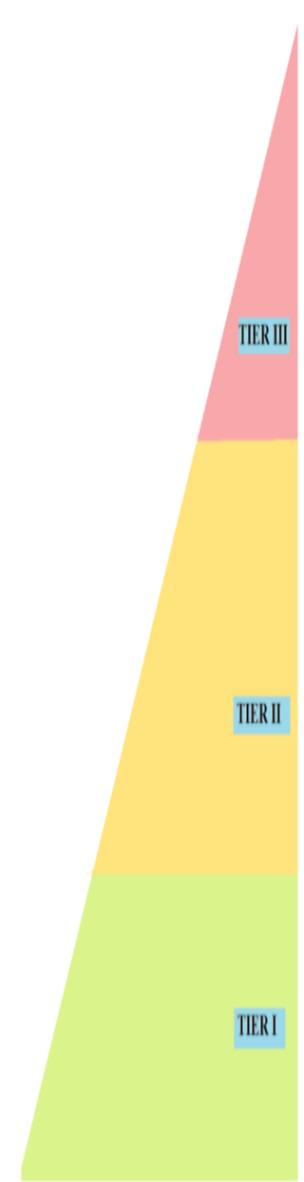
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Monday	Monday
9:00 – 9:30	Morning Meeting – 30 minutes (synchronous)	Morning Meeting – 30 minutes (synchronous)	Synchronous for All: 9:00-9:30 Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting – 30 minutes (synchronous)	Morning Meeting – 30 minutes (synchronous)
9:30 – 9:50	Break	Break	9:30-10:00 Second Step Lesson	Break	Break
9:50 – 10:50	ELA (60 min.) - 20 min. Direct instruction/ synchronous, taped for asynchronous - 40 min. 2 Small groups/ independent learning	ELA (60 min.) - 20 min. Direct instruction/ synchronous, taped for asynchronous - 40 min. 2 Small groups/ independent learning	10:00-10:10 Direct Instruction for Learning Plan (incorporates Science/Social Studies) *Enrichment/additional teachers/ counselors - partner with a homeroom for Wednesday (Morning Meeting and Second Step) and then hold drop in time.	ELA (60 min.) - 20 min. Direct instruction/ synchronous, taped for asynchronous - 40 min. 2 Small groups/ independent learning	ELA (60 min.) - 20 min. Direct instruction/ synchronous, taped for asynchronous - 40 min. 2 Small groups/ independent learning
11:00 – 12:00	Math (60 minutes) - 20 min. Direct instruction/ synchronous, taped for asynchronous - 40 min. 2 Small groups/ independent learning	Math (60 minutes) - 20 min. Direct instruction/ synchronous, taped for asynchronous - 40 min. 2 Small groups/ independent learning	10:10-12:00 Continue morning with drop in time for student support. .	Math (60 minutes) - 20 min. Direct instruction/ synchronous, taped for asynchronous - 40 min. 2 Small groups/ independent learning	Math (60 minutes) - 20 min. Direct instruction/ synchronous, taped for asynchronous - 40 min. 2 Small groups/ independent learning
12:00 – 1:00					
1:00 – 1:50	Enrichment (50 min) - 20 min. Direct instruction/ synchronous, taped for asynchronous - 30 min. Small groups/ independent learning	Enrichment (50 min) - 20 min. Direct instruction/ synchronous, taped for asynchronous - 30 min. Small groups/ independent learning	PD and Application of PD (1.5 hours) Collaboration (1 hour) Asynchronous Learning Time for students	Enrichment (50 min) - 20 min. Direct instruction/ synchronous, taped for asynchronous - 30 min. Small groups/ independent learning	Enrichment (50 min) - 20 min. Direct instruction/ synchronous, taped for asynchronous - 30 min. Small groups/ independent learning
2:00 – 3:00	Intervention/Targeted Support - synchronous small groups	Intervention/Targeted Support - synchronous small groups	*Students incorporate 30 min. Silent reading time on Wednesdays	Intervention/Targeted Support - synchronous small groups	Intervention/Targeted Support - synchronous small groups
3:10 – 3:30	Closing Circle	Closing Circle		Closing Circle	Closing Circle

Districts that did not publicly communicate a minimum number of live synchronous instructional minutes were coded with a **no**.

An exemplar from Barnstable Public Schools

Focus on absenteeism

- Coded with a binary “Yes” or “No” requiring a plan for addressing chronic absenteeism across *all* learning models.
- Given the nature of remote and hybrid learning, school staff are not necessarily able to maintain the use of their pre-COVID systems for managing chronic absenteeism given reduced “face time” with students and in-person interactions with families.
- Andover Public Schools provides a School Wellness Plan that outlines roles for a variety of staff members on the school-based Wellness Team. APS defines the tiered system of supports that they plan to implement to monitor and address student engagement and attendance.



Engagement Challenge	Example Problem Solving Approach
There are concerns about major psychosocial stressors and a lack of communication with a student and their family.	School and district administration may coordinate with the Andover police department/SRO for a well visit.
Student has significant, chronic challenges with remote engagement.	Meet virtually or over the phone for a walk through of academic challenges. May use in depth student interview to determine barriers (more so older students). May complete in depth needs assessment (i.e. the CANS offers a comprehensive template).
Student has an elongated pattern of variable attendance for synchronous learning plus variable success completing work and participating.	Apply relationship mapping information to leverage relationships to foster engagement. Brief child and/or parent interview(s) to document barriers, psychosocial factors, and stressors. Short-term, small group support for organization/planning, task initiation, time management, environmental management. Solution-focused parent support/coaching.
Student is passively present (i.e. camera or mic turned off, appearing inattentive or preoccupied)	Apply relationship mapping information; problem solving with trusted adult(s).
Student is present, but incomplete assignments or lack of work production.	Designate specific designated time with teacher/IA to review assignments and assess type of need (i.e. environmental factors, academic needs, emotional, etc.)
Student fully present, participatory, and successful completing assignments.	Explicit positive reinforcement for all students for high engagement.

Focus on college and career readiness

Given the unique constraints of remote learning, districts' college and career counseling materials needed to be explicitly aligned with the needs of virtual learners. While some districts included time to take the SAT or similar college preparatory exams, they were coded as a **no** unless they also provided explicit support and instruction related to students' college and career needs. **Partial** codes included districts that mention the continued provision of college and career supports, but only for specific groups of students, such as those in vocational and technical programs.

Grades 9-12 Schedule in Remote Learning Model

Students will experience daily direct and interactive instruction (synchronous) per week alternating between A-Day Schedule Period 1, 3, 5, 7 and B-Day Schedule Period 2, 4, 6, 8. Every period meets for 70 minutes. Students will attend a daily College and Career Planning (CCP) Advisory for 30-minutes daily.

Here is the student schedule for the remote learning model, Grades 9-12

	A - Day Schedule	B - Day Schedule
8:30am-9:40am	Period 1	Period 2
9:45am-10:55am	Period 3	Period 4
11:00am-12:10pm	Period 5	Period 6
12:10pm-12:40pm	Lunch	
12:45pm-1:55pm	Period 7	Period 8
2:00pm-2:30pm	CCP	

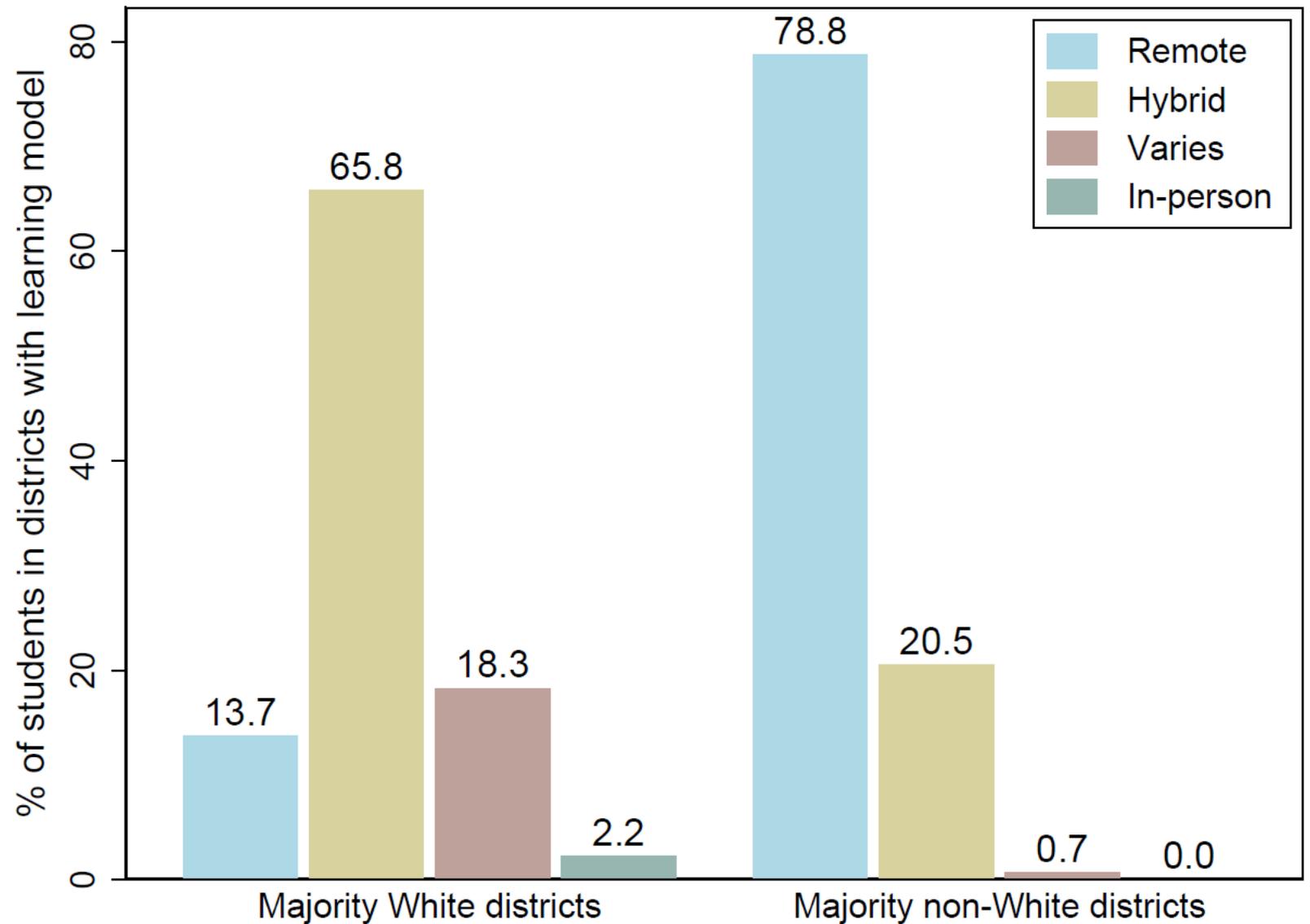
An exemplar from
Lawrence Public Schools

Differences by district characteristics

- The previous slides highlighted statistics about reopening plans across all 120 school districts in our data, which are roughly representative of Massachusetts as a whole.
- The next slides highlight differences in reopening plans by school district characteristics.
- We divide districts by:
 - Student body racial composition (as of 2019)
 - Per-pupil spending (as of 2019)
 - Covid infection rates (in April 2020)

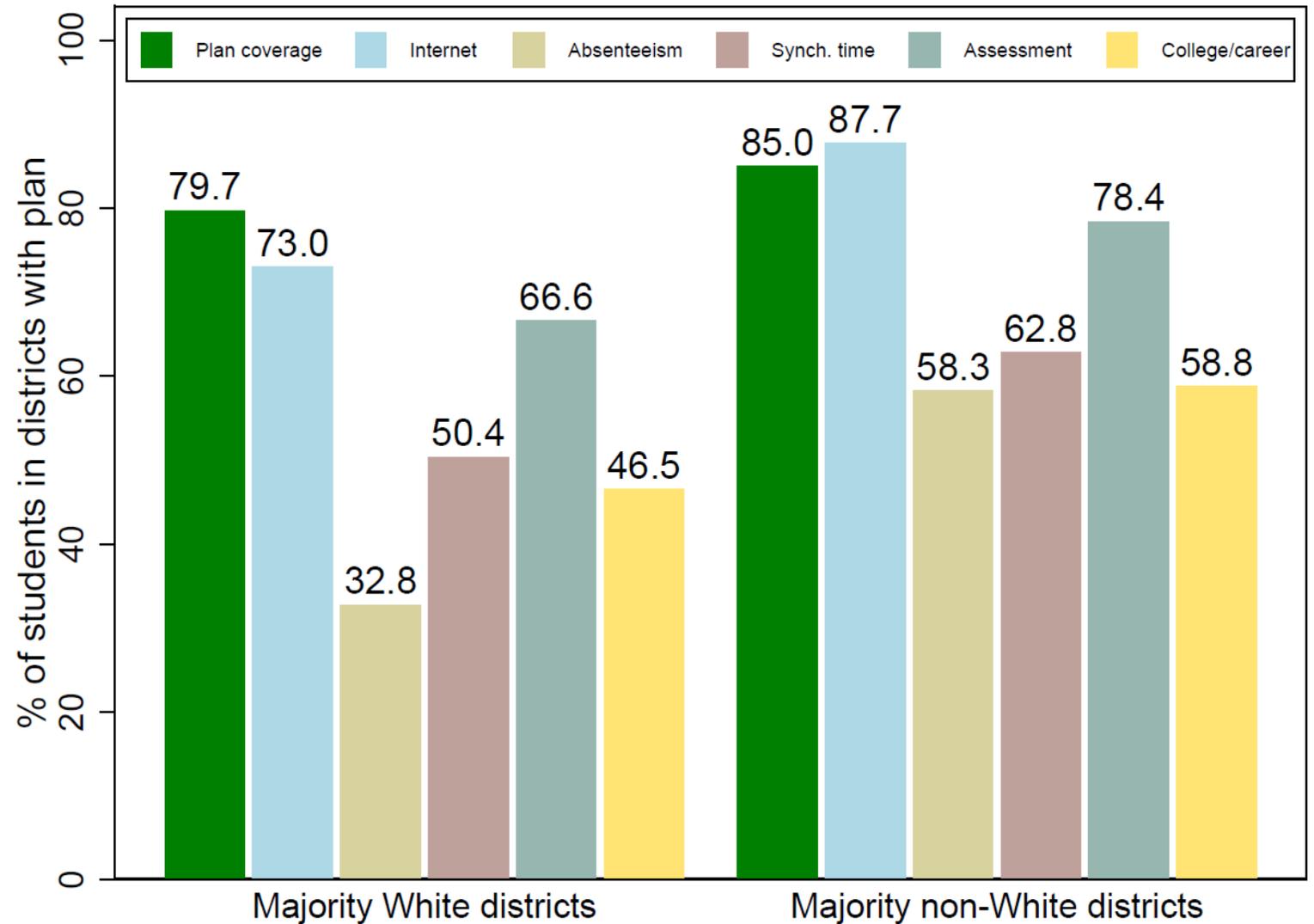
Differences by district racial makeup: Learning model

- When we divide school districts by racial makeup of the student body, we see huge differences in the learning models offered.
- In districts where most students are White, 66% of students have a hybrid option and only 14% are fully remote.
- In districts where most students are non-White, only 21% of students have a hybrid option and 79% are fully remote.
- Dividing districts by family income yields similar results.



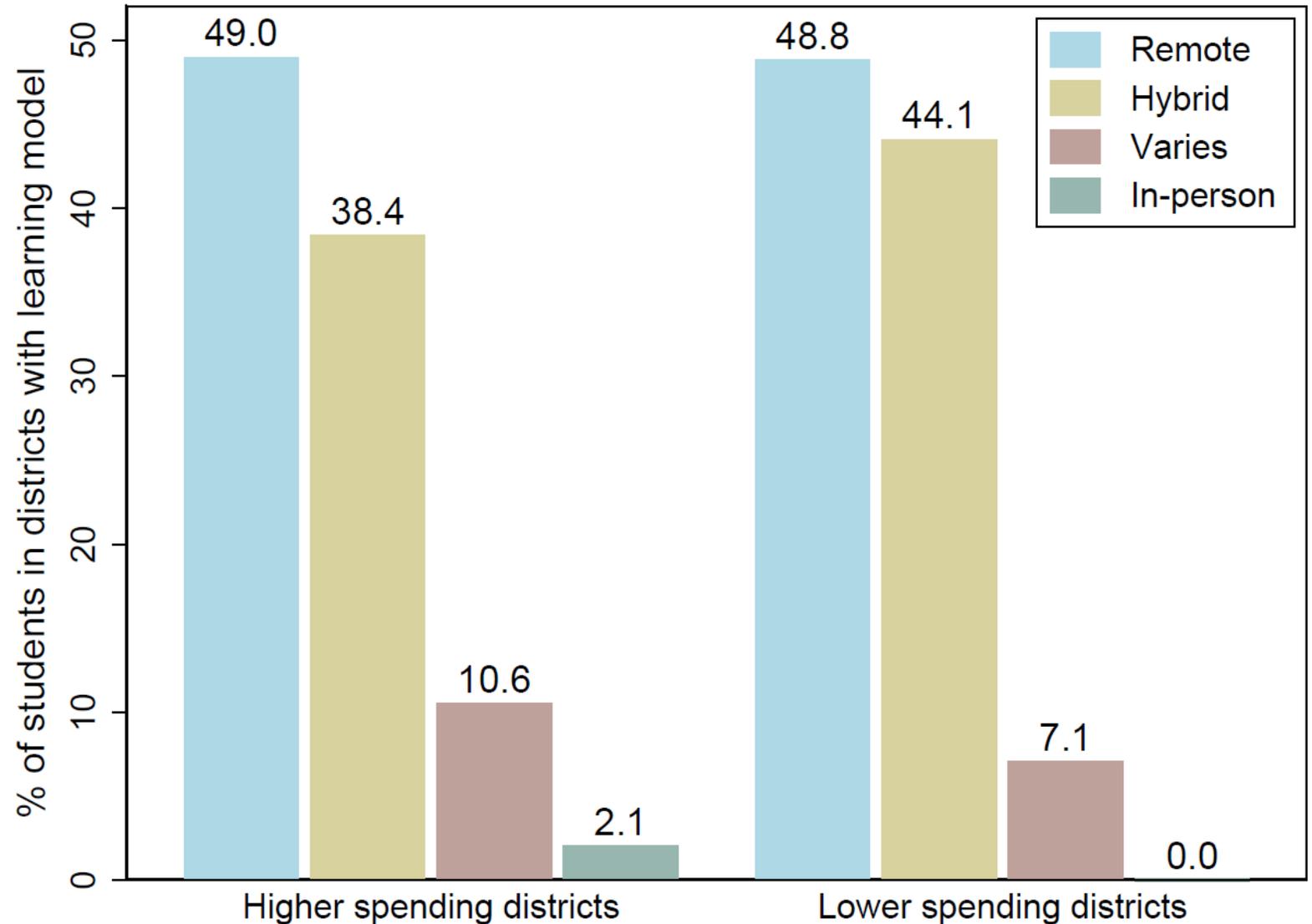
Differences by district racial makeup: Plan details

- Students in majority non-White districts have somewhat more complete plans to address learning (85%) than those in majority White districts (80%).
- For example, 58% of students in majority non-White districts have plans to deal with chronic absenteeism, compared to only 33% of those in majority White districts.



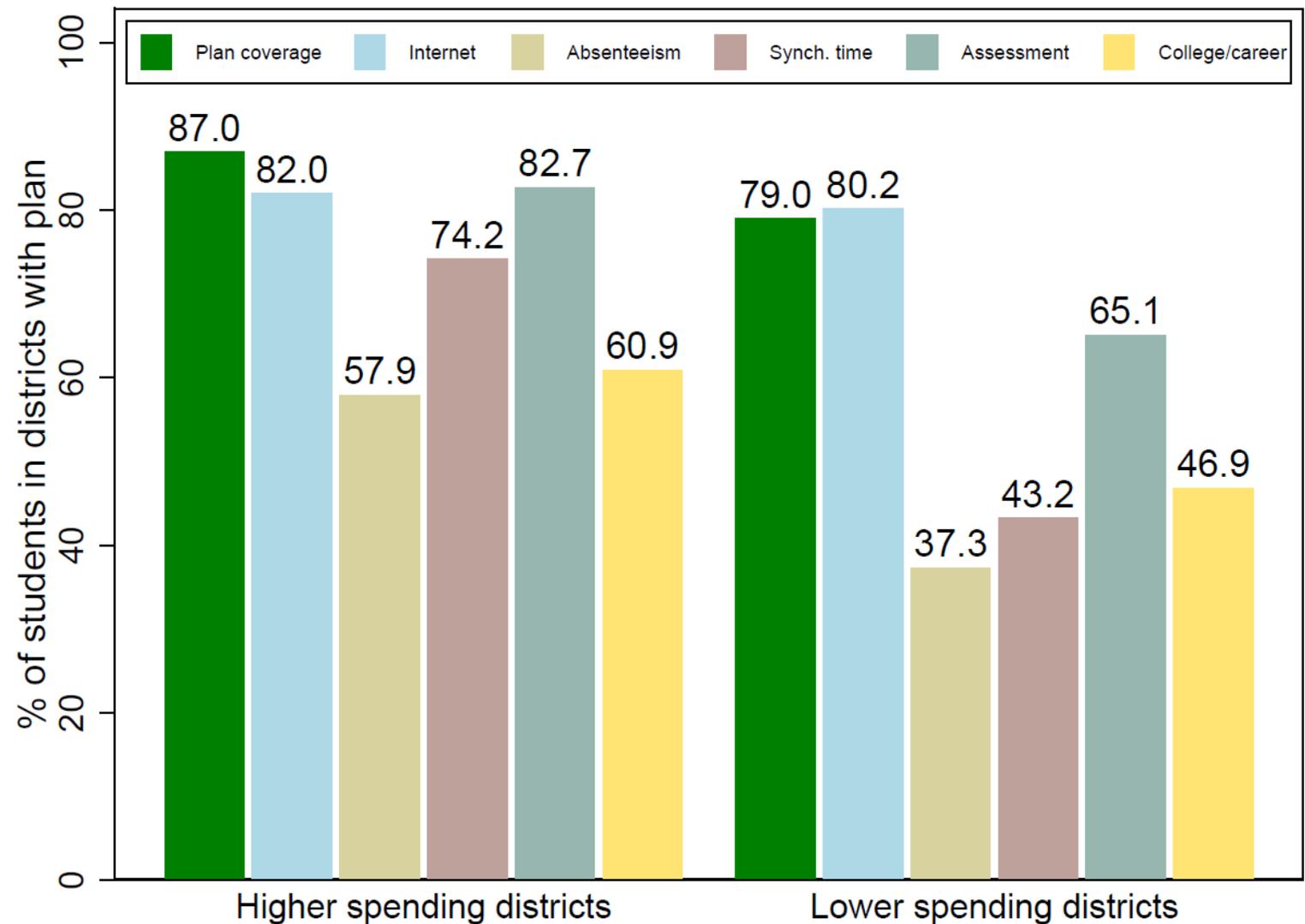
Differences by district spending: Learning model

- When we divide school districts by per student spending, we see few differences in the learning models offered.
- In districts with above average spending, 38% of students have a hybrid option and 49% are fully remote.
- In districts with below average spending, 44% of students have a hybrid option and 49% are fully remote.



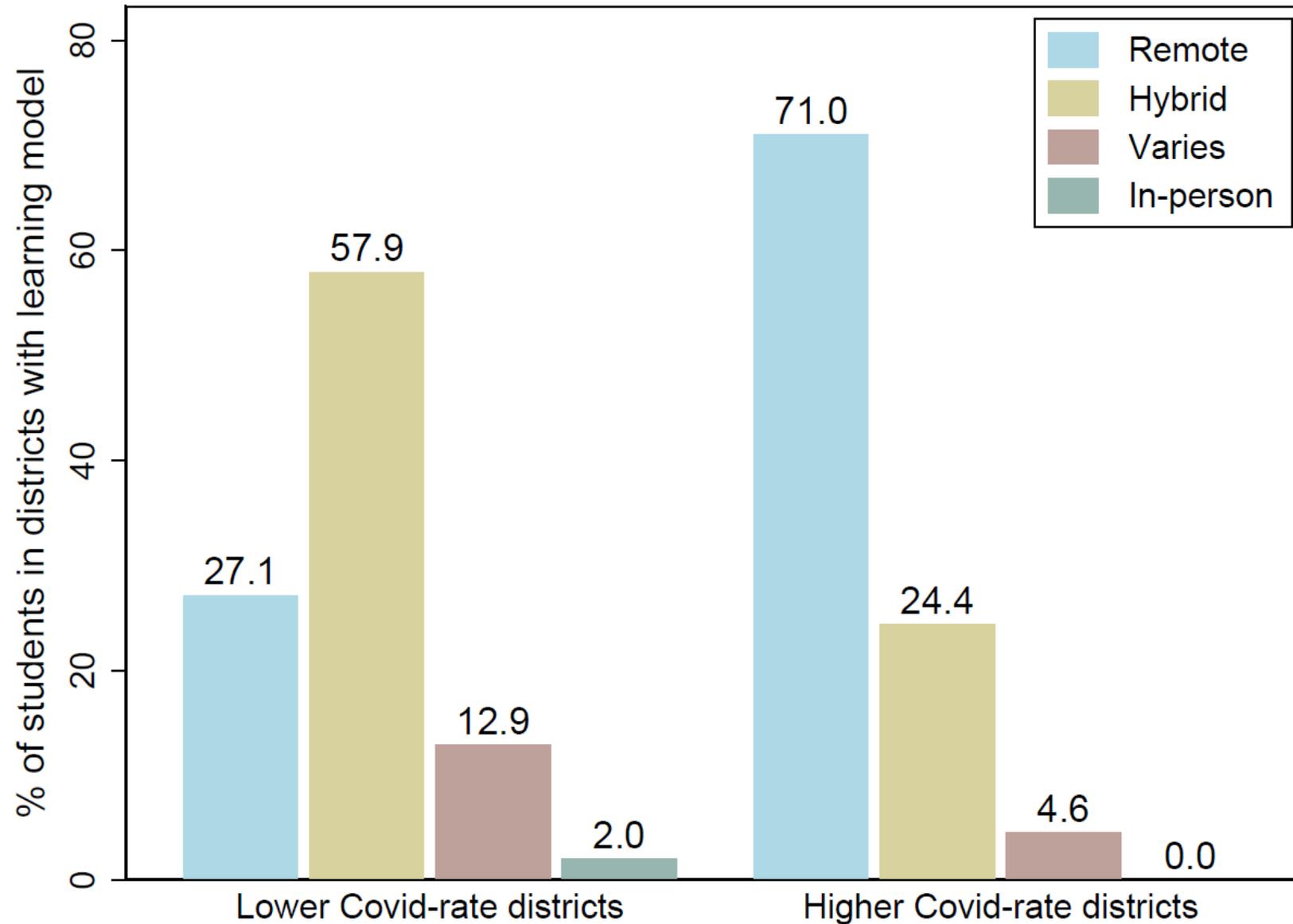
Differences by district spending: Plan details

- Students in higher spending districts have somewhat more complete plans to address learning (87%) than those in lower spending districts (79%).
- For example, 57% of students in higher spending districts have plans to deal with chronic absenteeism, compared to only 37% of those in lower spending districts.



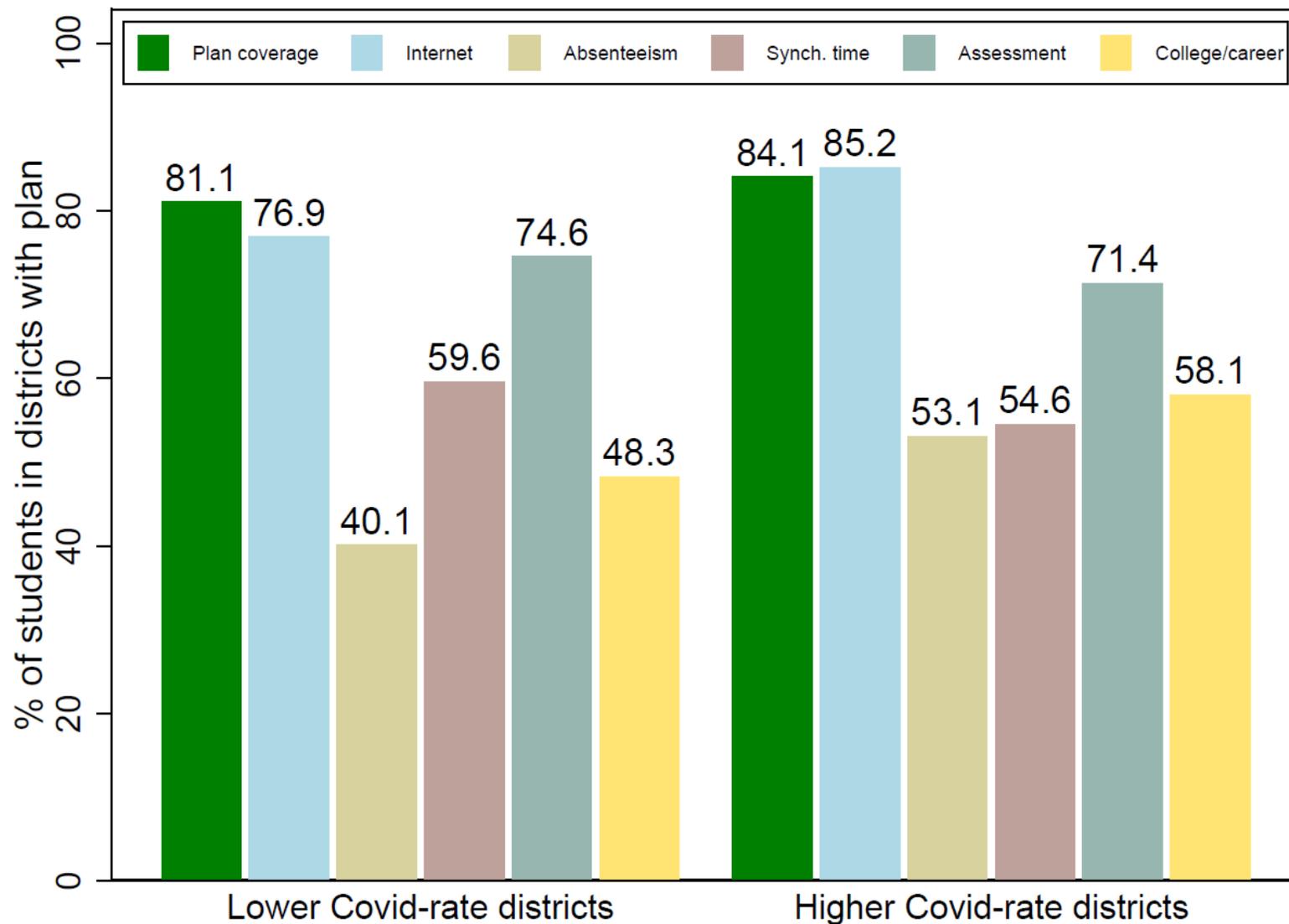
Differences by Covid infection rates: Learning model

- When we divide school districts by peak Covid infection rates (in April 2020), we see clear differences in the learning models offered.
- In districts with below average infection rates, 58% of students have a hybrid option and 27% are fully remote.
- In districts with above average infection rates, 24% of students have a hybrid option and 71% are fully remote.



Differences by Covid infection rates: Plan details

- Students in lower infection rate districts have similarly complete plans to address learning (81%) compared to those in higher infection rate districts (84%).
- In one example of a difference, 40% of students in lower infection rate districts have plans to deal with chronic absenteeism, compared to 53% of those in higher infection rate districts.



Summary of findings

- How extensive are districts' plans?
 - Most students are in school districts with extensive plans, but about one-sixth (16%) are in districts where plans lacked details on over a third of the recorded items.
 - Most districts have clear plans to deal with most learning challenges, though many lacked plans to support college and career readiness and to deal with chronic absenteeism.
- What learning model are districts using?
 - Nearly half of Massachusetts students are in school districts that are fully remote (as of this report).
 - Majority non-White districts are much more likely to be fully remote, as are districts with lower income students and high community Covid infection rates.
 - District per-pupil spending is unrelated to the probability that a district is fully remote.
- How do learning plans relate to district characteristics?
 - On average, majority non-White districts have more extensive learning plans, as do districts with lower income students and higher per-pupil spending.

Going forward

- Many districts have created extensive plans for keeping students learning through the pandemic.
- Districts can learn from each other's experiences to continue refining and improving their approaches to supporting students.
- Documenting these facts can help spur a conversation about how to make 2021 better for students than 2020 was.
- Concretely:
 - Given what we know about remote learning, state support may be best focused on those districts who have least been able to return students to in-person learning so far.
 - Within districts, in-person access and learning support should prioritize students identified as struggling (beyond those given legally-defined special supports such as English learners and students with disabilities).
 - Summer 2021 may be a critical opportunity to:
 - Use diagnostic assessment to identify students for summer learning supports.
 - Further engage students, particularly graduating and rising seniors, with college and career readiness services.

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