TO: Members, Board of Education  
Austen Beutner, Superintendent  

FROM: Glenn Daley, Director, Independent Analysis Unit  
Analysts: Megan Besecker and Andrew Thomas, Ph.D.  

SUBJECT: ACCESS TO LEARNING DURING COVID-19: Schoology Usage by Secondary School Students at the Start of School Closures  

At the request of Board Members, the Independent Analysis Unit (IAU) is conducting a series of analyses of the distance learning opportunities provided by L.A. Unified during the Covid-19 crisis. We are focusing on patterns of access to and usage of electronic learning platforms by students, especially how this varies geographically and by other student indicators (e.g., whether a student is an English learner).

The attached brief, “Access to Learning During Covid-19: Schoology Usage by Secondary School Students at the Start of School Closures,” provides the first results of this work. This report is a partial picture, focusing only on secondary school students using Schoology. Later reports will incorporate other platforms as we are able to obtain data.

This report complements other statistics provided by the District. Earlier this week, the District announced that about 15,000 high school students were absent online since schools closed. We found 19,000 high school students (16%) – 4,000 more – did not complete any ‘actions’ in Schoology. Our number is different because we looked at students who completed at least one action in Schoology (e.g., read, create, or submit), which entails more than logging in, and we only have data for one platform. Some of the additional 4,000 students may not have taken any action after logging into Schoology or may have used other platforms.

Looking at data from different angles is useful. To help guide the District’s efforts to make distance learning opportunities accessible and engaging for all students, the IAU will continue to monitor actions in Schoology and other platforms as the data become available. By monitoring actions overall and the types of actions students take online, we can help the District identify students who may lack sufficient Internet access or need more supports to participate and engage in distance learning.

The attached brief does more than report total numbers completing actions in Schoology. It shows that a smaller proportion of students in major hard-to-reach categories—English Learners, students in poverty, and students with disabilities—used Schoology during this first period. These results show where the District needs to concentrate greater efforts to bring all students into successful distance learning.

We look forward to working with you on further investigations of student distance learning.

Very respectfully,

Glenn Daley, Director  
Independent Analysis Unit  
Board of Education  
Los Angeles Unified School District
Access to Learning During COVID-19:
Schoology Usage by Secondary School Students at the Start of School Building Closures

Independent Analysis Unit
April 1, 2020

LA Unified closed its school buildings March 16, but it did not stop providing educational services. Under the name, “@Home Continuity of Learning,” the District launched an ambitious effort to provide high-quality educational opportunities to students to the extent feasible given current circumstances in part through distance learning.

After ensuring that students were fed, continuity of learning was the District’s next priority when the Covid-19 crisis forced schools to close. This effort required the District to put Internet-capable devices in the hands of every student and to ensure every student had access to broadband. To accomplish this goal, the District focused first on high school students.

After receiving devices and being able to access the Internet, students next need to engage with their coursework. Teachers in L.A. Unified use various software tools to provide educational opportunities to students working remotely. These tools range from basic e-mail, to videoconferencing platforms, to packaged online courses, to Learning Management Systems (LMS). One such LMS, which is integrated with the District’s Student Information System (MiSIS) and used widely in middle and high schools is Schoology.

In this brief, we report total students who have completed at least one action in Schoology since schools closed on March 16, 2020. After students log in to Schoology, students can perform actions which we can track, and which indicate a student’s ability to connect to distance learning material.

Though Schoology is only one way students access distance learning curriculum, and therefore is an incomplete picture, Schoology use by students can still provide a useful—but partial—picture of what secondary school students are currently “going to school” and which students may not be able to access class.

Students not completing actions in Schoology may face one or more challenges. They may lack sufficient Internet access (i.e., they may have enough bandwidth to log on but not to complete actions), they may not have received their device yet, or their instructor may use a different platform (this data is forthcoming). For some groups of students, like English Learners, students living in poverty, and students with disabilities, low usage could also indicate additional barriers to distance learning opportunities.

As of March 25, 84% of high school and 71% of middle school students had accessed Schoology and completed at least one action. This number means access to learning for high school students is high, but not yet universal, according to District data tracking. Usage varied between local districts.

We also know the District is working actively to address two major barriers to complete usage—making sure students have
Schoology-capable computer devices, and making sure students have Internet access. A third barrier—lack of teacher use—is also being addressed in the coming week as professional development for teachers begins. As these three barriers lower, we expect usage to climb.

In this brief, the IAU presents current data on Schoology use at the secondary level and broken down by school level and local District. Here, usage refers to students completing at least one action after logging onto Schoology. Actions include creating, writing, reading, modifying, and submitting content.

ABOUT THE DATA

Schoology usage and student demographic data were obtained from IAU generated reports from District data (FOCUS) pulled March 27. Currently, the District is in the process of incorporating usage data from other LMS platforms. During this process, Schoology data has not been updated. Our report reflects usage from March 16 through March 25, a period of 9 days.

In interpreting these data, the reader should keep two points in mind.

First, Schoology is just one of many ways that teachers have been maintaining their connections to students since the school closure. For this reason, Schoology usage is a metric that captures only one part of the District’s efforts to maintain continuity of learning. The IAU will continue to try to understand and report on the various efforts underway as part of @Home Continuity of Learning.

Second, devices continue to go out, broadband continues to become accessible to additional students, and more teachers are finding ways to use the tools to provide instruction to their students. It is too early to draw summative conclusions about the District’s implementation of distance learning. However, the data can help the District understand and manage the Covid-19 response in the coming weeks.

The IAU intends to continue to monitor Schoology usage and other metrics related to the District’s ongoing efforts to provide educational services during the school closure.

### SCHOOLELOGY USAGE BY SECONDARY STUDENTS

1. As of March 25, 78% of L.A. Unified secondary students had accessed and completed at least one action in Schoology.

The percent of students who have used Schoology is higher in high school, compared to middle school (Figure 1). The District deployed devices to high schools first, which may partially explain higher usage in high schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Level</th>
<th>At least one action</th>
<th>No action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent of Enrollment

Schoology usage since school closure
- At least one action
- No action

Figure 1. Percent of secondary students who used Schoology during school closure as of March 27, by school level
2. Schoology usage varied across local districts (LDs).

High schools in LDs Northwest and East had the highest usage (Table 1). However, in LD Central and LD South, only 63% and 54% of secondary students completed at least one action in Schoology. Again, however, this is just one platform, and middle schools will be getting devices after high schools.

**Table 1.** Percent of secondary students who used Schoology during school closure as of March 27, by Local District and school level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local District</th>
<th>School Level</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Most students (59%) completed actions in Schoology using web-only or a mobile/web combination.

Most students used web or a combination of mobile and web to access Schoology. This pattern holds true across all school levels (Figure 2). Since using the web implies access to a web browser, and not simply a mobile app, this usage pattern indicates that most students who accessed Schoology have laptop devices.

**MONITORING THE HARD TO-REACH POPULATIONS**

1. Fewer students who are English Learners completed at least one action in Schoology, compared to their English proficient peers.

Students who are English Learners may face additional barriers to accessing distance learning material beyond connectivity and device barriers.

Only 61% of English Learners who are in middle and high school logged into Schoology and completed at least one action, compared to 81% of English Proficient students (Figure 3).

2. Fewer students living in poverty were able to complete at least one action in Schoology, compared to their non-FRPM-eligible peers.

Like English Learners, students living in poverty—approximated by whether the student receives free and reduced-price meals (FRPM)—may face barriers to distance learning beyond lacking connectivity and devices, such as having a quiet space to work.

As of March 25, the difference in Schoology usage between students with FRPM and their peers was greater in middle school than in high school. While only 67% of middle school students receiving FRPM completed at least one action in Schoology, 84% of their peers completed at least one action (Figure 4).
Figure 3. English Leaners - Percent of secondary students who used Schoology during school closure as of March 27, by school level and English Learner status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English Proficient</th>
<th>English Learner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>73% 27%</td>
<td>52% 48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>86% 14%</td>
<td>69% 31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>81% 19%</td>
<td>61% 39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schoology usage since school closure
- At least one action
- No action

Note: English proficient includes all students not classified as English learners.

As the District deploys devices to middle schools, we expect the percent of middle school students living in poverty who are completing actions in Schoology to increase.

3. Compared to students without disabilities, students with disabilities used Schoology less.

Students with disabilities represent a population of students with a variety of needs, some of which impose substantial challenges to effective delivery of distance learning curricula. Students with disabilities who participate in general education classes (e.g., students in the resource specialist program (RSP)) may face different and possibly fewer barriers to accessing distance learning curricula, compared to their peers with disabilities.

All students with disabilities used Schoology less (Figure 5), compared to their peers without disabilities. However, RSP-student use was closer to the general education population, compared to the usage of students who were not in RSP.

Figure 4. Students receiving Free and Reduced-Price Meals (FRPM) - Percent of secondary students who used Schoology during school closure as of March 27, by school level and meal plan (FRPM) status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Students not in FRPM Program</th>
<th>Students in FRPM Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>84% 16%</td>
<td>67% 33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>89% 11%</td>
<td>83% 17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>87% 13%</td>
<td>77% 23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schoology usage since school closure
- At least one action
- No action
Figure 5. Students with Disabilities - Percent of secondary students who used Schoology during school closure as of March 27, by school level and disability status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Students without Disabilities</th>
<th>Students with Disabilities</th>
<th>RSP Program</th>
<th>Not in RSP Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent of Students

Schoology usage since school closure
- At least one action
- No action

Note: RSP stands for Resource Specialist Program.

LOOKING AHEAD

L.A. Unified closed its school buildings beginning March 16, but it did not stop providing educational services. Teachers in L.A. Unified use various software tools to provide educational opportunities to students working remotely. One of many such tools is the District’s Learning Management System (LMS) called Schoology.

Schoology use by secondary school students provides a useful—but partial—indicator of who is currently “going to school.”

As of March 25, 84% of high school and 71% of middle school students had accessed Schoology and completed at least one action. This usage varied between local districts. It also varied according to whether students were English learners or English proficient, with English learners showing lower usage. Students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches also used Schoology less than their non-eligible peers, particularly in middle school. Students with disabilities—particularly non-RSP students—also used Schoology less compared to students without disabilities.

We expect the number of students using Schoology and other LMS platforms to increase among all secondary students as devices are deployed to all high school and middle school students in the coming weeks and as data to other LMS platforms becomes available.

Recognizing that continuity of learning during the school shutdown is an important matter of interest to the Board, and that Schoology is an important part of the District’s distance learning toolkit, the IAU will continue to monitor and evaluate how Schoology use increases and varies between schools and groups of students. We will also gather data and report on teachers’ use of other online tools as they become available and how the District supports students and their teachers through professional development.