



# Research Brief: Responding & Growing Through COVID-19 with Online Learning

## PURPOSE

In this study we hoped to learn how different groups of 4-6th Grade students/families and teachers experienced remote learning in Fresno Unified School District in the 2020-21 school year; and what bright spots and/or growth opportunities could be gleaned from their experiences relevant to teaching and learning, the school district, and the field.

## Context

In 2020-2021, Fresno Unified School District:

- Had 15,135 students in grades 4-6 (the focus of this study)
- Broadly scaled a 4-year Personalized Learning Initiative (PLI) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Moved from a fully remote learning environment (August 2020) to simultaneous remote & in-person learning (April 2021) to in-person learning (May 2020)
- Had access to and support for numerous digital learning tools, several provided through Microsoft’s Open Education Analytics (e.g., MS Teams, Teams Assignments, Digital Insights) and through a learning analytics project called “Project Constellation”



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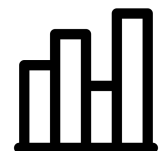
## Quality Assurance via Learning Analytics

This study aligned with the following National Standards for Quality Online Programs (<https://www.nsqol.org/the-standards/quality-online-programs/>)

- **I4** Courses offered through the program utilize regularly evaluated technology that supports the learning goals and enhances the learning experience.
- **J3** Teachers incorporate a process of continual self-assessment, using learning analytics to inform changes in pedagogy and instructional practices.
- **K (1-4)** A quality online learning program values positive learner outcomes and takes a comprehensive, integrated approach to measuring and monitoring progress toward defined learning objectives.

## What We Learned

- We defined the outcome of “learning experience” as a combination of students’ performance on iReady ELA and Math Diagnostic Assessments throughout the year (data from Project Constellation) and students’ and teachers’ descriptions and perceptions of learning (we listened to them).
- There emerged four patterns of learning over the year: Accelerating, Decelerating, Languishing, and Thriving
- These patterns were different for different groups of students, and across types of learning environment (remote, simultaneous remote + in-person).
- Families from a variety of groups, along with teachers, welcomed the opportunity to reflect upon the pandemic learning experience
- Some parents understood the reflection experience as a therapeutic opportunity
- Students identified specific feedback regarding experience, tools and engagement



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**FIGURE 1: The Four Patterns of Learning During the 2020-2021 School Year in Grades 4-6 of Fresno Unified School District**



## TAKEAWAYS

- Quality online instruction at scale is a **process**, not a **product** - the same instruction is experienced differently by different communities
- Centering communities in research and measurement leads to nuanced understanding of how to provide quality online learning experiences to all on an ongoing basis
- Communities include educators and administrators - who are all experiencing the learning environment - this work requires a paradigm shift and changes to adults' perceived roles and responsibilities
- Rich, deep, quantitative and qualitative data are crucial for understanding quality and effectiveness
- **You can do this too** - many of the tools Fresno used are being made available through MS Teams Digital Insights

## RESOURCES

- National Standards for Quality Online Programs: <https://www.nsqol.org/the-standards/quality-online-programs/>
- Fresno Unified School District: <https://www.fresnounified.org/>
- Open Education Analytics: <https://openeducationanalytics.org/>
- Saro Mohammed, PhD: [saro@edresearchworks.com](mailto:saro@edresearchworks.com), [@EdResearchWorks](https://twitter.com/EdResearchWorks)

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