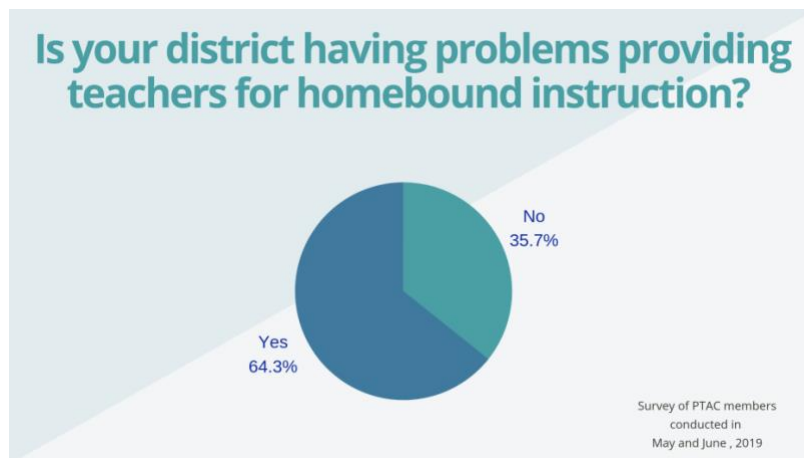




PENNSYLVANIA TEACHERS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEMORANDUM ON SB 144

We asked our membership if they had provided homebound instruction. The majority of the teachers that responded had worked with homebound students. We then asked that cohort to share a brief overview of their experience. The following are a few comments from PTAC members about their experiences with homebound instruction:



- I often struggled with finding time to do homebound instruction within my own schedule. We do not have many homebound instructors that are certified to teach my content area, Foreign Language. I *have* had the opportunity to use a robot in my classroom for a homebound student and it did work very well (pending some network conditions). We organized this through our Intermediate Unit. It was especially helpful for my content area to have the robot because communication is such an important skill!
- I have taught many students that are homebound. I found it to be a beneficial experience for the students who have needed one-on-one attention.
- I acted as the homebound instructor for a student who was in my class in school. Midway through his junior year, he was no longer able to attend school regularly due to a debilitating medical condition. In addition to his studies in my content area, I was also responsible for working with the student in his other subject areas including math and science. I would travel to the student's house at least twice a week after school to work with him face-to-face at the family's kitchen table. We would communicate regularly over email if he had any questions outside of the time that I was scheduled to be at his house. I found it difficult to teach the material outside of my content area due to the lack of available face-to-face time to work with the student to ensure that he was able to learn the material. I found the homebound regulations somewhat restrictive. Also, the math

and science teachers were not as willing to work with me to best meet this student's needs. It seemed almost as if they were more concerned about their students that they met with face to face each day in the school building. At the end of the experience, I did not feel as though the homebound experience was as meaningful as it could have been despite my best efforts.

- I agree that there are isolation issues. Students are “out of sight”, and therefore, “out of mind.”
- I worked with an elementary student to ensure that he was able to stay up with his class while he was in Philadelphia for medical purposes. We held online sessions through Skype and emailed materials back and forth.
- I provided instruction to a fifth-grade student, who suffered from anxiety issues. The instruction took place in the student’s home, and course load was reduced to allow the student to demonstrate attainment of concepts, with a reduced assignment load.
- I was requested as a special educator to complete home bound for a student who had a 504 agreement. Material was delivered from teachers and I was to instruct the student in the area of History, Chemistry and Algebra I. The situation in the home was not an ideal learning environment and the student struggled to retain the information.
- It was much easier to teach within my content area, but the time allotted is never enough. When students miss out on labs or activities they can participate in class, it is very difficult. Teaching homebound outside of my area of expertise was essentially just handing over work and attempting to support the student to complete the work. This was unfair, yet at the time, we had no other teachers willing to provide homebound instruction.
- I've gone to the homes of students and provided tutoring, and I've also provided online support utilizing an LMS (learning management system.)
- It was difficult for the students I taught to learn effectively due to their illnesses, difficulty focusing fully on the materials and lack of social interaction with their peers. There are significant difficulties in providing the rich learning experience created for in classrooms for children in homebound situations.



Concerns

We also asked our members if they had any concerns about SB 144. Their responses fell into two categories: the quality of experience for the homebound, and issues with technology and the impact that would have on the classroom.

Student Learning

- It is important that the use of telepresence technology be used only in cases where it is not possible for students to be in attendance due to medical or other significant barriers to physical attendance in school. My concern is that this could begin a precedent for students to be removed from the school setting and “attend” school digitally for a widening variety of reasons which may include interpersonal or social justifications. This technology provides powerful support when no other option is possible, but it cannot be a widespread substitute for school attendance.
- The policy assumes all instruction is didactic. In addition, it also assumes the student has materials in front of them or at least the technology to access them at home (which in our rural community, isn't always the case). How does the "robot" get from class to class? Further, I can think of parents who would quickly remove their child under some pretext to receive homebound instruction given this perceived advantageous technology - thus overwhelming the ability to provide each and every student that needs this, with the ability to receive.
- For students who struggle with significant stress and anxiety-related school attendance issues, this may provide a path forward. For students who are recovering from injury or are seeking treatment for disease and exhibit the ability to still participate in the academic environment, this equipment may provide the necessary bridge back to school. The student using the equipment may not be used for any evaluative purpose either in the specific or aggregated form, during teacher evaluation(s). The equipment should not have a recording capability, in order to protect the anonymity of other students in the class, who participate, ask questions, or reveal their own level of understanding/need to people outside the school environment. Parents of other students in the classroom must be made aware of the capability of the equipment and be given the ability to opt-out their child from potentially being broadcast beyond the classroom. The funding for such a program must have a sustainable funding source, so that students and families can have security in knowing the technology will be available beyond a single fiscal year.
- For students who are isolated, like children receiving homebound instruction, human relationships and interactions are vital to their health and ability to learn. Instead of focusing money toward technological solutions that perpetuate this isolation, I would rather see funding go to providing human solutions to the homebound teacher shortage. If there were financial compensation that matched the lack in supply and difficulty of the task, homebound instruction teachers would likely increase.

- The technology needs to be paired with real human check ins to allow for accurate processing and discussion of content material. It should be used as supportive technology to assist the homebound instructor, not to replace the homebound instructor.
- Even though I support this bill, I am concerned about the student need for face-to-face interaction with a teacher. A solution would be to blend the technology and a live teacher. These kids also have emotional stress to tackle. They would benefit from a sympathetic ear who knows the current school system well. Especially in these cases, there is far more than academics at play. Lastly, we should ask students who have experienced homebound instruction what their opinion is.

Technical Concerns

- I have concerns about ensuring equitable access across the state, protecting student information in class if people other than the student are operating the device, and teacher training for these devices.
- Consideration should be made for the issue of privacy of the other students in the classroom when being video recorded via the expressed "robots." How do we ensure the privacy of the students in the classroom via a live stream through the service to the homebound student?
- Who is going to be able to view my classroom besides the student? We do not video classrooms. My only concern would be the privacy of my other students. This would definitely be a step in the right direction for homebound instruction.
- Not every household has internet access. Are we going to provide that also?
- I think that it would put added pressure on the classroom teacher. It seems like a good idea in theory but in practice, it could be a nightmare. Technology issues could impact the learning of the entire classroom (not just the homebound student), and I feel as though the classroom teacher would be expected to much more than just what is normally expected, especially with younger children who need more guidance. Simply being present isn't enough.
- Please ensure that teachers who participate in instruction using telepresence technologies receive proper training. This type of teaching requires careful planning, delivery of instruction and assessment of student knowledge different form that of a regular classroom.