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EDUCATION AND MENTAL HEALTH DURING COVID-19

How are Children and Caregivers Doing, Really?

Part 1: Identifying Challenges from a Family Perspective

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SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

Disclaimer Slide

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The Face of American Families



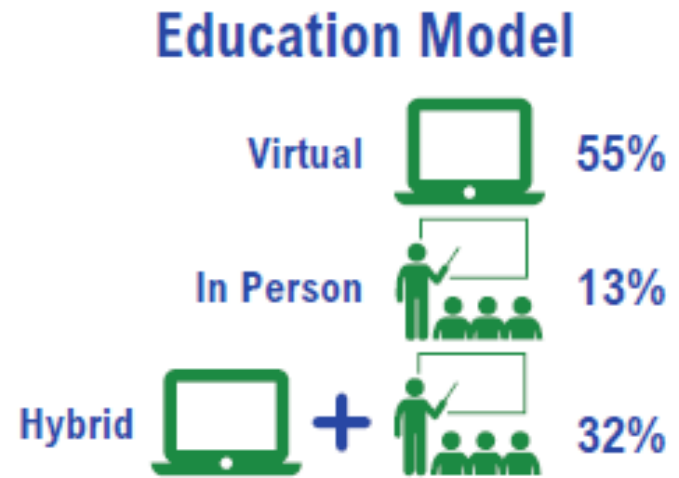
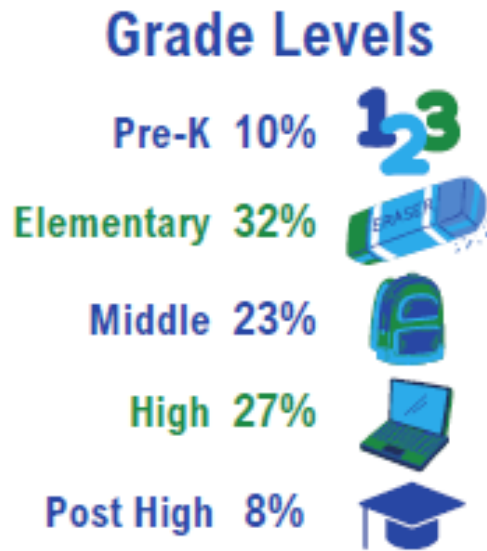
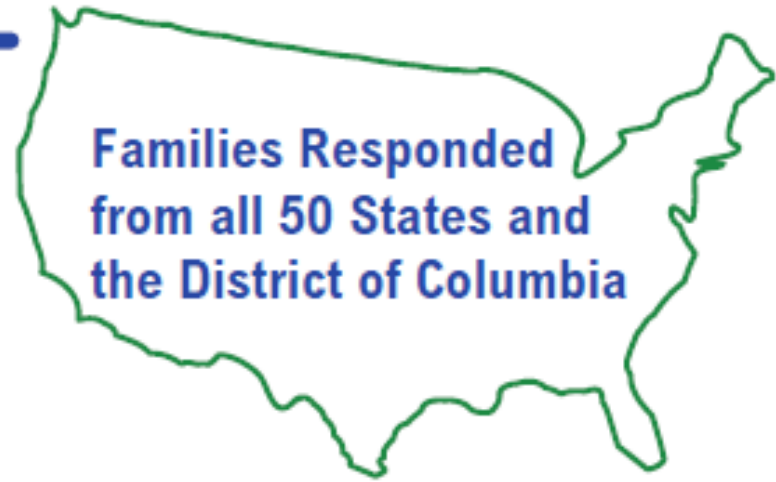
SAMHSA
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1,100

Families Responded

2,300+

Children Represented



How Do Caregivers Feel School is Going for Their Children?



“

I am a working mother and feel constantly like I am being asked to choose between my child and my career. There is no choice because without my income we lose our home. I am a strong person, but I am begging for help. (West Virginia)

Students receiving special education services are being left behind. (New Jersey)

The teachers are and have been amazing. I just wish there were two of me. (Massachusetts)

”

What Do Caregivers Say is Most Challenging?

#1



Balancing School and Work (Time)

One of my kids is fine academically, but is extremely challenged by the lack of social interaction. Another one of my kids is requiring all of my time during the day to stay on task. And a third child is suffering because she has nothing to do because school hasn't started for her, so she is watching way too much TV because I can't do everything. (Oregon)



#2



Meeting Special Education Needs

My son is nonverbal and this has not been taken into consideration at all and he is not receiving his speech and occupational therapy. (Texas)

There is no substitute for in-person instruction when it comes to special education. (New Jersey)

#3



Navigating Platforms

I have to take pictures of school work on my phone, send it to a school email, upload the images and then send them to the teacher. I waste lots of time waiting on the computer to load videos. I just don't feel like my child is learning much despite the best efforts of teachers. She learns better in person with a variety of teachers for motivation. (West Virginia)



#4



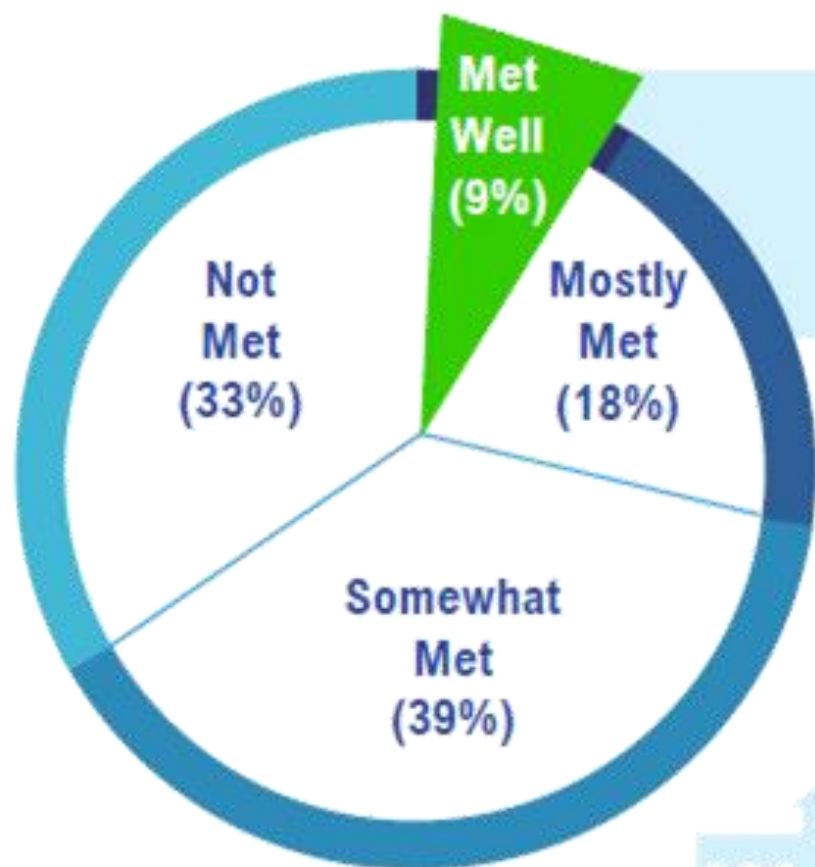
Support from School/Teachers

The teachers and supports are stretched so thin between virtual and in-person classrooms. I don't see the same level of support and communication as pre-covid. (Texas)

Hours Caregivers Spend Managing School at Home Daily



Are Your Child's I.E.P. / 504 Plans Being Met?



Of the 1,100 caregivers who responded, 649 have a child(ren) with an I.E.P. or 504 Plan. **Only 9% feel their child's needs are being met well.**

“ Our special needs child needs access to services and to socialization. She has regressed by years over the last few months. (Massachusetts)

I have 2 children with severe autism and 4 in total. This has been a horrific experience for my family. (Illinois)



Impact on Caregiver and Child Mental Health



Increased Behavioral Health Symptoms



Accessing Mental Health Services

Caregivers report that both they and their children are experiencing an increase in behavioral health symptoms (anxiety, depression, substance use, negative thoughts) at equivalent rates (~70%). However, adults are accessing mental health services and supports more frequently than their children (56% vs. 39%).

This may be due to the limited number of mental health professionals serving children and youth. Engaging in telehealth services may also be more difficult for youth.



My grandson now has a negative self image due to his low grade in math. He says he's dumb because he doesn't understand the concepts. He has always been a very good student. At home, his mother is unable to help because she doesn't understand the math, struggles with substance abuse and is depressed. (West Virginia)

I have become depressed and anxious. I can't manage my work on top of helping my 6-year-old manage his school schedule and learn new material. It's absolutely exhausting. (Indiana)



FAMILY VOICES

on Education and Mental Health during COVID-19



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"Everyone is trying their best in very uncertain times."


I have no concerns with the school or his teachers - everyone is trying their best in very uncertain times, but I feel that this year is going to be a wash for both my son and daughter. I dread next school year when everyone is going to be playing catch-up. (Illinois)



Right now, the most helpful thing is the support, help, encouragement, and empathy that we are getting from our teachers. They have been wonderful! (Illinois)

"Children are resilient, but they don't have the life experience to adapt so quickly and well."

I don't feel like the school systems have adapted their expectations of students to the current environment. They are the same as when students were in the classroom; however, the classroom has drastically changed for students. Children and youth are resilient, but they don't have the life experience to adapt so quickly and well given the circumstances. I feel that the school system's expectations have changed for teachers, but not for students.
(South Carolina)



Our kids are suffering horribly without social interaction in person. My son's best friend committed suicide a month and a half ago due to being down about no school or sports. Oregon is suffering greatly. (Oregon)

"This is not beneficial to anyone's mental health."

My son is acting out more. I have been suffering with anxiety and depression because I spend 5 to 6 hours with my son doing his work 3 days a week. He has ADHD and it's taking a toll on both of us doing his work at home. Both of his teachers (IEP) and homeroom have been amazing with helping when needed. It's just hard to teach him when I don't understand the way he is being taught in school. (West Virginia)



This is not beneficial to anyone's mental health. I feel like everyone is looking at the rise of COVID-19 cases but no one is looking at the rise of depression, substance abuse, medication, suicide, etc. It is more than past the time when we need to take mental health seriously. My children and my entire household are struggling emotionally and socially. It's bad. (New Jersey)



"I am very concerned about inequality."

Expecting an 11 year old with special needs to be on the computer from early morning until 3:30 in the afternoon and then having hours of homework over the weekends and in the evenings is ridiculous. The level of stress for both my daughter and myself was unbearable. Even with accommodations, which were minimal, virtual school was a nightmare for both of us. After completing the first semester I withdrew her from public school to homeschool her. Her anxiety and depression virtually vanished overnight. It was the best choice I could have possibly made. (Texas)



I am very concerned about the inequality in what different families are able to provide their children. The most vulnerable (special needs, non-English speaking families, poor) are likely going to fall further behind while the wealthier, more privileged ride this out with fewer impacts. (Georgia)

"We really need a voice."

It would help if teachers and staff understood the impact these changes have on families, especially in my situation. I have more than one child - one with an I.E.P. and each with multiple classes. Balancing and ensuring the stability of my household and managing virtual learning is extremely challenging. My mental health takes a hit. Instead of judgment and mistreatment, work with parents to find help and be versatile and creative to ensure the support and success of every student. (D.C.)



Working parents really need help. I cannot bear the weight of this pandemic much longer. I'm sick with worry every day because I can't even plan for tomorrow. I don't know if my child will be at school, daycare, or back up daycare. If my children have school, I have to report to work. Although I am fortunate my place of employment extended EFMLA, the twelve weeks are almost gone. My mental health is greatly affected. My son has asthma and if he isn't in school, he will be at an overcrowded daycare soon. Please help the working mother. We really need a voice. (West Virginia)

"It has been extremely stressful and emotionally draining."

Not having consistent learning in-person and last-minute cancellations of school have been extremely stressful and emotionally draining for both my children and myself. Having to juggle my job as well as the needs of my nonverbal son who requires care at all times is impossible. My son learns best when he is in his school program with structure and is interacting with staff. Virtual learning is not meeting his needs on the days that it is necessary. (New York)



My teenage daughters have both started on antidepressants in the last month. I was able to take 12 weeks of leave beginning in August via the CARES Act, but now that leave is up and I am having to balance full-time work from home and 2 students with special needs. It is really taxing on me. (North Carolina)

"This generation will most likely have long-term mental health struggles for years to come."

I believe most teachers and administrators are doing the best they can with what they have been given. I know they are trying to maintain quality education while dealing with both remote and in-person learning - along with the stress of putting themselves at risk of exposure. My high school-aged child has struggled immensely, to the point where we have had to pull her out of school. We were looking at in-patient programs, but were lucky to get her into a partial hospitalization program. She is still struggling and I am very concerned about her transition back to school. The anxiety and pressure these children are feeling is immense and this generation will most likely have long term mental health struggles for years to come. (New York)

I truly believe the suicidality of children and families, from the impact of isolation, the absence of normalcy, and extra stresses caused by school hardships (financial difficulties, etc.) is going to claim more lives than the virus itself. I honestly wish we had pushed "pause" on school at the start of COVID-19 to focus on our kids' mental health and wellness. At least then, they would all be behind equally and we could put together a plan for everyone to catch up. Instead, we have many kids who are behind academically and emotionally, and parents who are exhausted and at their wits end. I'm shifting my focus from trying to be a teacher of math, English and history (because I'm not one), and working instead to teach my kids resiliency so that they can recover emotionally from all of this. I am legitimately thinking of withdrawing my children from public school, toward this end. (Washington)



The selected quotes shared here offer a glimpse into the worry and desperation caregivers expressed. And, while their experiences have been as diverse as our nation's families are, many were complimentary and appreciative of educators.

Nine parents in different states described the current situation as a "nightmare."

Dozens of parents stated that they and/or their children are experiencing anxiety.

Countless parents said their children need to be back in school in-person, full-time.

A 2021 survey conducted by the National Federation of Families | www.ffcmh.org

Contact Information

Interested in sharing these survey results with others in your network?

Have follow up questions for today's presenters?

Feel free to contact us.

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