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2019/20 Exclusion Tracker Final Report: July 22, 2020

Since September 3rd, 2019, BCEdAccess has been collecting data for the second consecutive year on the exclusion of students with disabilities from schools in BC.

This report is a combination of our Exclusion Tracker from the beginning of the year, and three respective “snapshots” (April 8, May 4, June 10) taken after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, to summarize the 2019/20 school year. It is important to note that the “total” number of incidents of exclusion is difficult to quantify due to the remote nature of education during this time. We note that all grades, from K-12, are represented by survey respondents with the majority responding from elementary school. All Districts are also represented.

This school year began very similarly to the last, with parents reporting many of the same concerns that had yet to be addressed. The pandemic further exposed those systemic issues. Schools were closed to in-person instruction under the direction of our Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry, from March 17th through to May 31st. There were limited exceptions provided for children of Essential Services Workers (ESW’s), vulnerable students, and disabled children. The Ministry of Education (MoE) made two statements regarding this:

On March 27, 2020, in the [Planning Framework](#), the MoE wrote, *“If operationally feasible, school districts and independent school authorities should also consider offering priority care to parents/caregivers of students with unique needs (e.g. students with disabilities) and low-income parents with no other child care options.”*

On April 17, 2020, on their Frequently Asked Questions ([FAQ](#)) page, the MoE wrote, *“School districts and independent school authorities have been asked to ensure students with disabilities and diverse abilities have access to the same level of on-going learning as all other students. As a part of planning for on-going instruction, schools should be proactively identifying supports or accommodations that need to be made to support learning for students with disabilities and diverse abilities.”*

Unfortunately this shift in language to clarify access for students with disabilities did not adequately shift the response by schools and Districts, according to the data collected. BCEdAccess has learned from a few survey responses and other correspondence, that several families were never informed about their right to have full time schooling. In May, of the letters provided to us from 14 different school Districts only 3 mentioned that full time, in person

attendance was an option for students with disabilities. The other 11 Districts did not include this information.

On June 1st, schools were re-opened on a part time basis in order to blend in-person and online instruction for all students. The Ministry of Education continued to expect that students with disabilities should have the option to access full-time, in-person instruction 5 days a week, and/or to be provided with adequate support remotely. We would like to acknowledge the hard work of our educators in transitioning to remote learning for the duration of this time.

This year, as part of broader outreach within our community, we are proud to have collaborated with InclusionBC, Family Support Institute of BC, and BC Parents of Complex Kids on a larger survey related to accessing Ministry of Children & Family Development (MCFD) supports during the pandemic. For context, the responsibility for school aged children and youth with disabilities is a shared one between MCFD and the Ministry of Education (MoE). That report can be found [here](#).

Major Findings:

5.8% of respondents said their child is waiting for assessment. This is an increase of .5% from last year. In November 2019, Global news [reported](#) that the waitlist average time to be assessed had jumped year-over-year from 55 weeks to 60 weeks. At the time of this writing, BC Autism Assessment Network (BCAAN) [posts](#) the current wait at 65.4 weeks for assessment. In a system where [funding](#) and support are so closely tied to diagnosis instead of need, this is a critical lapse.

Our survey shows that of our respondents, 27 students were physically restrained in BC last school year (10% of respondents). This is an **increase of 7%** over what was reported the previous year.

Equally concerning is that 27.1% of respondents communicated that they are 'not sure' if their child was restrained. With some children being nonverbal or having other communication deficits, parents should never be unsure if the school is providing information about the treatment of their child. This is an **increase of 11.1%** over what was reported from last year.

It is important to note that in October 2019, after feedback from [AdvoCon2019](#), we modified the tracker to include the definitions of restraint and seclusion as provided by the BC Ministry of Education. What is not clear is if more students were actually restrained and secluded at this time, or if more parents properly reported it after ambiguity was removed by providing the [definition](#).

As part of our June snapshot, we asked respondents to provide race-based data. Indigenous children and youth were the second largest group at 10.2%. This is significant because Indigenous people represent only [5%](#) of BC's total population.

As part of our June snapshot, we asked respondents what type of remote support was being offered. Worryingly, 10.1% of respondents stated that they received **no remote support** and that this question was “not applicable”.

In June, parents reported that of the children who were physically attending school, **only 11.9%** were attending on a full time basis. The vast majority, 69.4%, stated that their children were not attending on a full-time basis. The remaining respondents provided information regarding their part time schedule.

How many people reported Exclusion?

Over the course of the school year, between the pre-pandemic and the snapshots in April, May and June, we had a combined 883 reports of exclusion from families. Due to the remote nature of education at this time, it is difficult to quantify the exact number of exclusions.

However, we can note that this is an increase from 492 reports last year which documented [3,610](#) incidents of exclusion.

Does your child have a Ministry designation?

Only 1.5% of respondents said their child had no designation. 5.8% of respondents said their child is waiting for assessment, an increase as noted above in “Major Findings”.

The designations of the other 92.7% were highly varied and all categories of designation have been reported as excluded.

Category descriptions:

- (A) Physically Dependent
- (B) Deafblind
- (C) Moderate to Profound Intellectual Disability
- (D) Physical Disability or Chronic Health Impairment
- (E) Visual Impairment
- (F) Deaf or Hard of Hearing
- (G) Autism Spectrum Disorder
- (H) Intensive Behaviour Interventions or Serious Mental Illness
- (P) Gifted
- (Q) Learning Disabilities
- (R) Students Requiring Behaviour Support or Students with Mental Illness

The children excluded the most (by Designations)

As in the previous year, category G (Autism Spectrum Disorder) is consistently the designation with the most number of students excluded. Between September to March, this group represented 46.2% of our respondents. While distressing, this number is a decrease from the 71.1% of all respondents last year. We had hoped that this meant more considerations were available for these students. **However, in our June snapshot, “G” students increased once again to represent 61.6% of all exclusion respondents.**

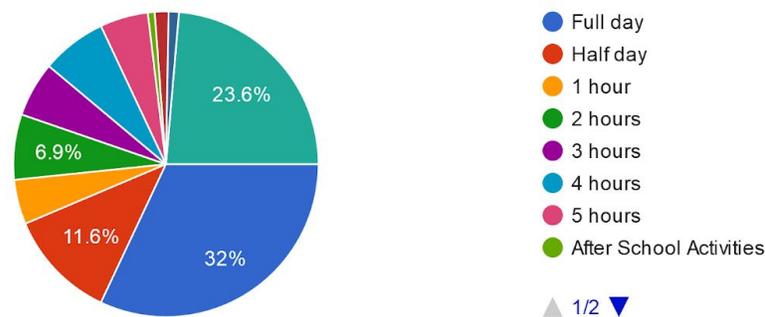
As in the previous year, category H (Students Requiring Intensive Behaviour Intervention) is the second most excluded designation with 31.3% reported. This is an increase of 14.3% from last year. This would include (but is not limited to) students with diagnoses such as Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), mental illness, or even students who are “disruptive” enough to warrant additional attention, but have not yet been assessed.

However, in our June snapshot, category Q (Learning Disabilities) has replaced category H as the second most excluded designation with 20.2% of our respondents. This would include (but is not limited to) students who have diagnoses such as Dyslexia.

How much time was missed?

The following chart shows what exclusion looks like according to our survey from September 2019 to March 2020:

How much time did your child miss from the school day?
275 responses



The largest category (at 32%) is full day. This is consistent with last year.

The "Other" category (at 23.6%) largely reflects multiple incidents and durations of exclusion. As parents of children with complex needs, one of our findings has been that it is difficult to consistently log in and record the incidents of exclusion. Many parents are “under water” and use this category to report what they can, when they can. While we did adapt our survey to try

to account for this in January 2018, the “other” category persists as a reflection of a larger problem.

Time missed was also very well covered by BCCPAC in their 2017 report. They surveyed over 800 parents and documented clearly just how much educational time has been missed by students not attending full days of school. Here is their [report](#).

Addressing whether it is still exclusion when parents “agree”?

School districts often claim that school exclusions are agreements with parents. Exclusion or “alternative schedules” may be written into the IEP. Also when asked, parents may pick their child up early from school or keep them home for the day.

What needs to be considered:

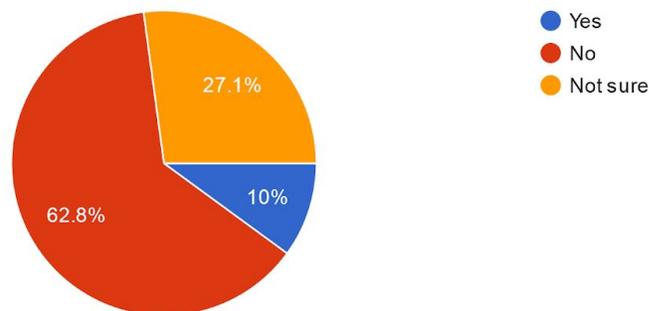
- a) Most parents don't know it's an option to refuse
- b) Many parents cite feeling 'forced' into agreeing to the exclusion
- c) Often parents are concerned about the safety of their children
- d) Only some parents are actually appealing the decision.

For the most part, families are more apt to try to work collaboratively with the school, even if it means disrupting their home and work life.

Was your child physically restrained?

In October 2019, after feedback at [AdvoCon2019](#), we modified the tracker to include [definitions](#) of restraint and seclusion as defined by the BC Ministry of Education.

Was your child physically restrained? (these definitions are from the Ministry of Education website)
269 responses



Our survey shows that of our respondents, 27 students were physically restrained in BC last school year (10% of respondents). This is an **increase of 7%** over what was reported from last year.

Equally concerning is that 27.1% of respondents communicated that they are 'not sure' if their child was restrained. With some children being nonverbal or having other communication deficits, parents should never be unsure if the school is providing information about the treatment of their child. This is an **increase of 11.1%** over what was reported last year. What is not clear is if more students were actually restrained and secluded at this time, or if more parents properly reported it after ambiguity was removed.

Inclusion BC has done 2 reports on this issue at this point - Stop Hurting Kids 1 and 2. Read them [here](#).

Their surveys indicate that not only does seclusion and restraint still happen in BC schools but that there has been no great change over a 6 year period. This requires urgent attention.

Expanding the type of information collected about families

We have begun to explore the intersectionalities of our communities. Information was requested (optionally) regarding IBPOC, 2SLGBTQQIA, Family Status, Immigration, Poverty, etc. These questions have been asked as a "soft start" so far, but we do hope to compile a more complete picture of our communities moving forward. Note that we are asking about the child's identity and not the parents.

Employment - Our April snapshot found that about 57% of (209) respondents are still working in some way. Of those, only 31.6% are able to work exclusively from home. Of particular note is that 35.9% of our respondents were neither employed nor in school. Family caregivers providing unpaid labor has long had an [understated economic impact](#).

Family Status - Our April snapshot found that over 3/4 of respondents have two or more children living at home with them. Nearly 27% of parents and guardians responding do not have a partner living with them.

Technology needs - Our April snapshot found that approximately 20% of respondents do not have reliable access to the internet/regular access to a device to connect to the internet. Other challenges cited include broken, incompatible and shared devices, different teachers using different platforms, high cost of internet service (including satellite only access), and students who cannot or will not use technology independently.

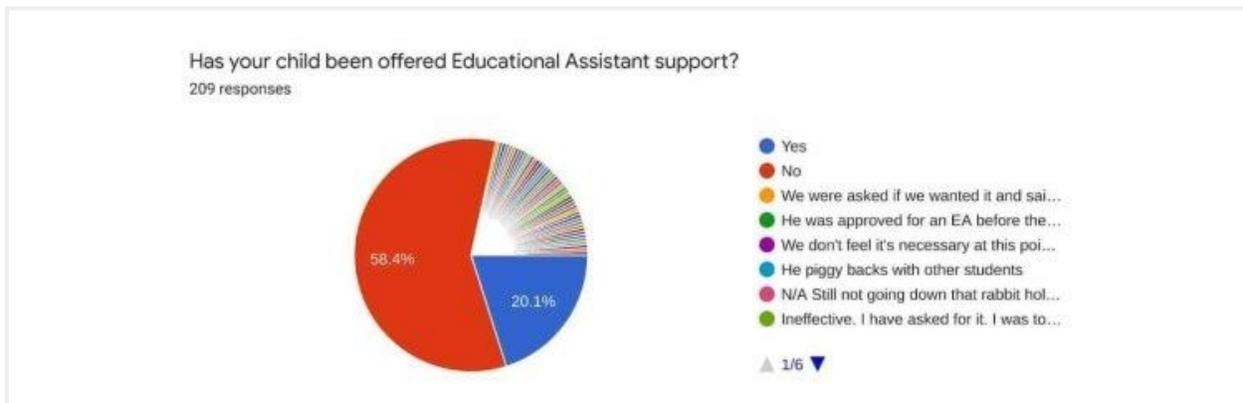
Race-based Data - Our June snapshot found that 81.2% of respondents identified as white or Caucasian. Indigenous children and youth were the second largest group at 10.2%. This is

significant because Indigenous people represent only 5% of BC's total population. Only 4.6% of respondents preferred not to answer, and 2.5% chose "other".

2SLGBTQQIA - This acronym has grown and evolved over many years. It currently refers to people who are "Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual". Our June snapshot found that 4.6% of students identified in this group. Only 3.1% preferred not to answer.

The Snapshots: April

By April 8th, our snapshot survey found that nearly 87% of respondents had heard from someone at their school, but only 27.8% had heard from their child's educational assistant (EA). This is significant because the EA is often the key connection the child has at school and the one who spends the most time with them. **Nearly 60% had not been offered educational support by April 8th.** Some of those who heard from someone only received a generic email.



Only 20% of respondents said they were offered educational assistant support. Several noted that their educational assistant had been offered work doing [childcare](#) for front line essential service workers, in some cases [before](#) the school or district checked in with the family. This was a top concern of families.

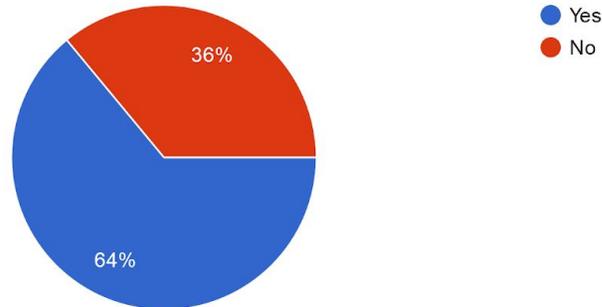
We asked whether families felt their child needed the support of an educational assistant, and how and why. This generated many responses. Families told us that educational assistants are needed by students for personal care, sign language, literacy and numeracy support, self-regulation, executive function support, and more.

Families said that the need for that consistency of connection between children and youth and their educational assistants during this traumatic time was greater than ever.

The Snapshots: May Results

Did you complete the first version of this survey on April 8th? (Please fill out this survey regardless - we want to hear from everyone!)

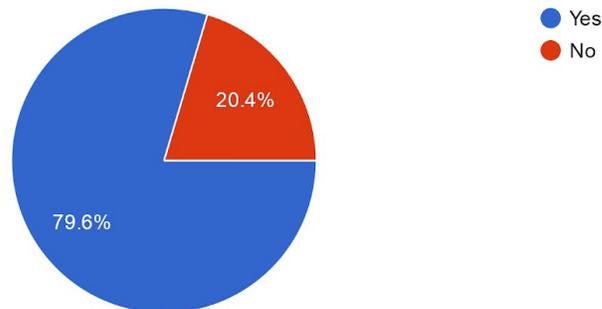
200 responses



We had expected more people to answer yes, that they had filled out the April survey, but 36% of our respondents for May were “new” respondents. This speaks to the growth of our community - our private parent forum now has approximately 2,700 members with an increase of 700 in the last ten months.

Is your child now regularly connecting with educational professionals?

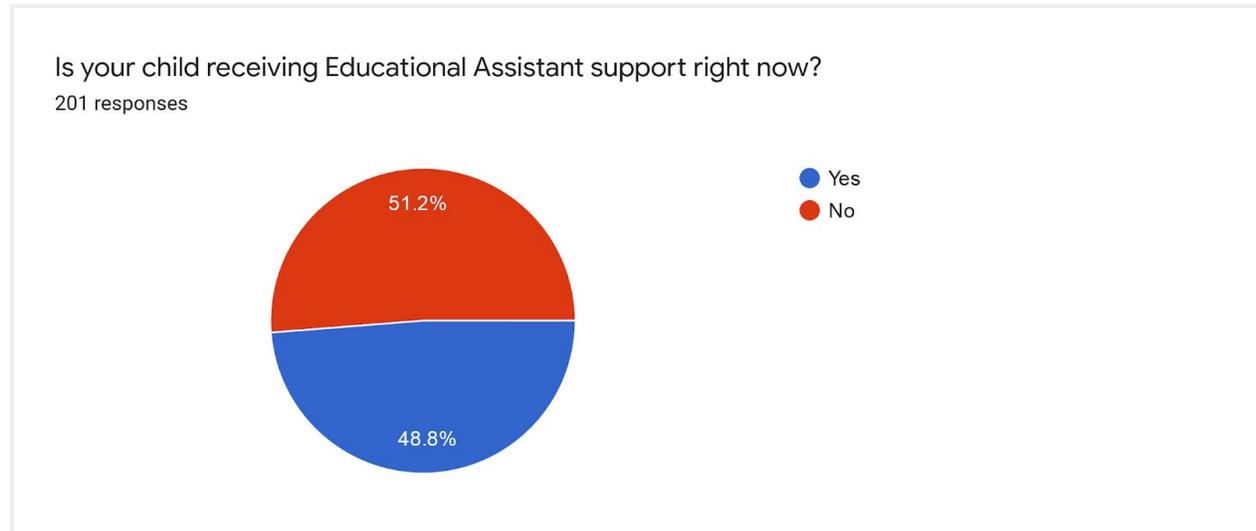
201 responses



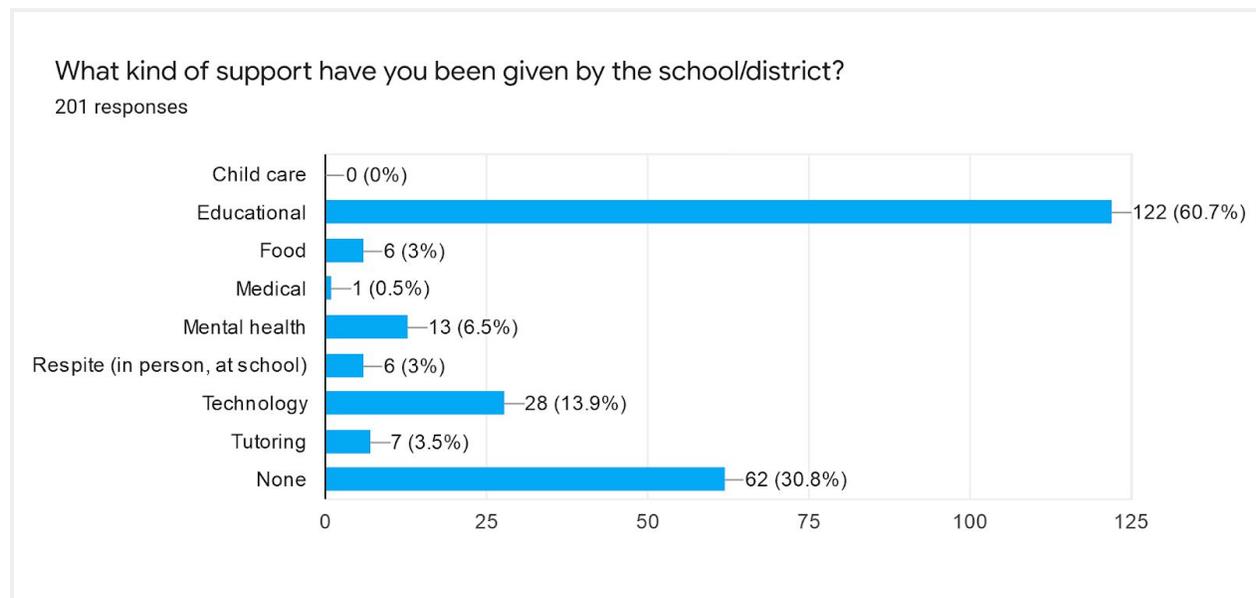
In our May snapshot, 20.4% of respondents reported that their child was **not** regularly connecting with their educational professionals.

Of the respondents who reported yes, they were connecting to their teachers (73.6%), EA's (53.7%), Learning Support Teachers (17.9%), Counselor (9.5%), Speech and Language Therapists (9%), Principal (6.5%), and Occupational Therapists (6%).

Only 28.9% of respondents believed that contact they were having with education professionals was enough time and connection for their child's needs.



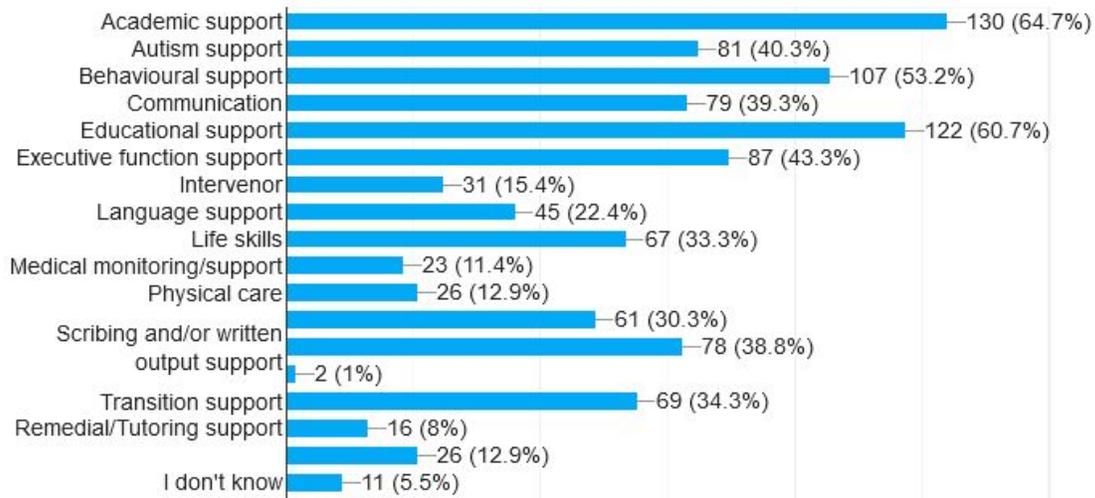
Of particular concern is that over 50% of respondents stated their child was not receiving EA support at this time. While this is an improvement from 60% in April, this still means half of these students did not receive their necessary supports.



We also asked what type of support had been provided. **30% of respondents stated “none”.**

What did your child's Educational Assistant do to support them before the pandemic? Please check all that apply.

201 responses

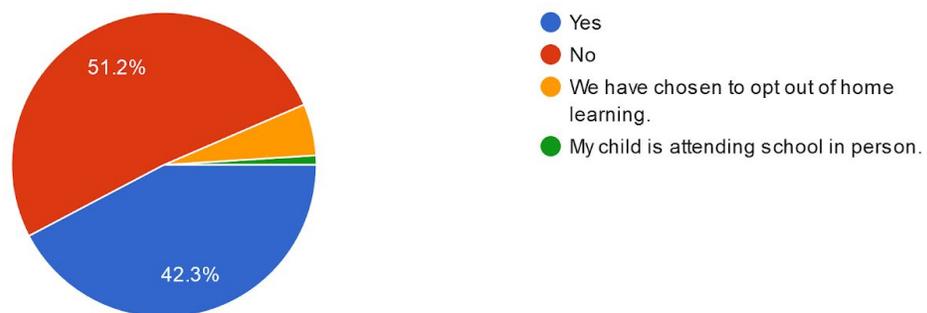


By comparison, these are the types of supports provided by EA's before the pandemic.

Ultimately, **51%** of respondents stated that home learning was **not effective** for their children, and 5.5% "opted out" due to the overwhelming demands of balancing their respective home learning, childcare and employment duties.

Is home learning working for your child?

201 responses



BCEdAccess also learned from a few survey responses and other correspondence, that several families were never informed about their right to have full time schooling. In May, of the letters provided to us from 14 different school Districts only 3 mentioned that full time, in person

attendance was an option for students with disabilities. The other 11 Districts did not include this information.

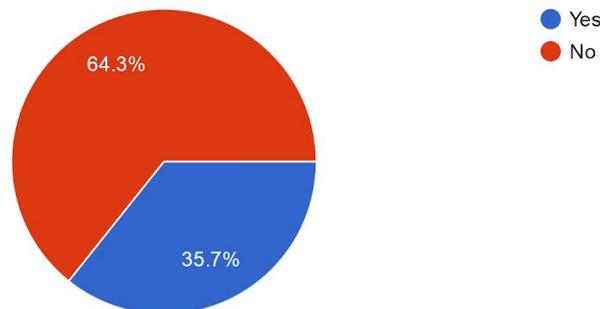
The Snapshots: June Results

Attending School - On June 1st, schools were opened again for blended remote and in-class instruction for all students. Students with disabilities, according to the Ministry of Education, had always been able to access 5 days a week, full time schooling along with the children of Essential Service Workers as well as other 'vulnerable' students. Our respondents were split 50/50 between attending or not at this time, with a few people noting that they had not been provided with the option. Of the 49.5% of respondents who were not currently attending, 35.7% said they **did** want their children to attend.

Because a few respondents noted that this option was not offered, we can infer that those parents were **not given sufficient information or confidence** that their child would be able to attend safely.

9. If you answered no, do you want them to attend in person?

112 responses



Of the children attending school in-person during the month of June, **only 11.9%** were attending on a full time basis. The vast majority, 69.4%, stated that their children were not there on a full-time basis. The remaining respondents provided information regarding their part time schedule.

Of the children not attending full time, 37.7% of respondents said they **did** want their children to attend full time. Once again, we can infer that these parents were not given sufficient information or confidence that their child would be able to attend safely.

EA Support - Our June snapshot found that 73.7% of students had EA support pre-pandemic. 50% of EA's were connected to their main students to support that child in some way by June. While this is a substantial increase from April, we can still infer that 23.7% of the students who had previously received EA support were not receiving it any longer.

Remote Support - We also asked how remote support was being offered to families for education. Respondents overwhelmingly chose Video Conferencing at 68.7%. Other supports were provided by phone call (15.2%); materials being delivered to the home (7.1%); and in-home sessions with staff (1%).

Worryingly, **10.1%** of respondents stated that they received **no remote support** and that this question was “not applicable”.

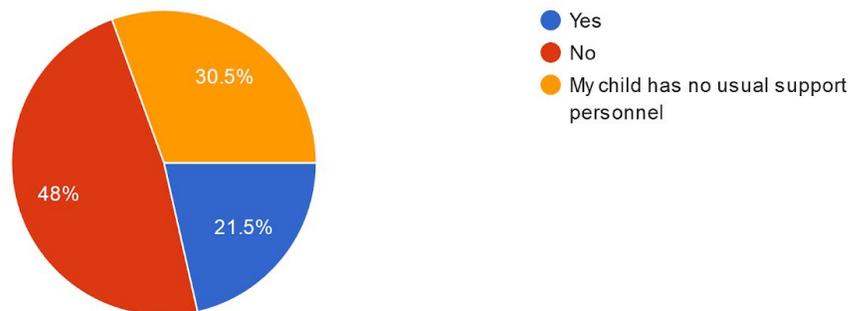
Other Information and Statistics:

92.7% of students were from public schools. This is a decrease from 96.3% last year.

Was the child's usual support personnel absent?

Was the child's usual support personnel absent?

275 responses



This question was asked as part of the Sept-March survey, before the school closure. We had expected the most common answer to be “yes”.

In fact, the two biggest answers were 'No', and "My child has no usual support personnel".

In trying to interpret the answer ‘no’ we infer:

1. That the usual support personnel requires more support and training in how best to work with students
2. That the usual support personnel do not have enough time to support the student
3. That the usual support personnel has an unsustainable workload so they cannot adequately support the student.

Further investigation into this data will provide insight into the cause and provide solutions to exclusions. It should also be noted that 30.5% percent of children being excluded have no usual support personnel.

Below are more specific examples of each type of exclusion reported to us:

- Being asked not to bring their child for the first one to four weeks of school
- Is only allowed to attend for 2 hours per day
- Is not allowed to attend until there is an EA in place
- Missing a half day weekly
- excluded because of bullying or other safety concerns
- If parent can attend, child can attend, but if not, child cannot attend as there are no supports
- can only attend a short part of the day; no plans to extend the time because there is no staff
- Not enough funds to support child full time
- Excluded from every field trip so far
- Excluded from all extra-curricular activities
- Excluded from course because the course materials are not adapted
- Excluded from elective high school courses
- Excluded by refusing to provide the child with electronic devices to to access online education

Is there anything else you would like to include?

Many respondents added more specific descriptions of the circumstances of their child's exclusions. Some took the time to say how important the relationship with the school team was to them, and expressed fear of jeopardizing that by "complaining". **Mental health concerns feature prominently in the comments as well as the financial strain caused by unreliable schooling.**

Of particular concern is that multiple parents indicated in this section that they had proceeded to their local School Board with Section 11 appeals, and their children are still facing exclusion at school. There were also multiple parents who indicated that 911 had been called by the school.

Conclusion

Finally, we asked our respondents, "How are you feeling about your child's access to education at this time?" These are just some of the responses we received. We feel they speak for themselves.

"disappointed that I had to raise issues with the team and remind them that he has a right to support and education. I am an ESW but wasn't offered support in person until June 1st. I wouldn't have sent him to the learning care center with no EA or familiarity of staff who know him."

"The school team did try. Online learning is not suitable for my child. There is nothing for him because I can't send him to school given his health vulnerabilities."

"Disappointed, my child goes 4 days a week because I am an essential worker, otherwise she would only get 2 days a week. We were denied in school support for April and May despite requesting it"

"Fantastic. He is doing very well with the small class size."

"Disappointed. The teachers don't know how to help him remotely because he received minimal assistance when school was in session before. They have no clue"

"The online material is reflective of how inaccessible material has been for my daughter this whole school year. The teacher and EA have no idea how to modify or choose material that she can do. They offer and are available for support but for what? Nothing has been offered with her in mind never mind anything with her strengths considered."

"Other than basic life skills at home, it is difficult to teach academics to a developmentally delayed child that is easily bored, with no training and no support."

"We are unwilling to put our child in an unsafe learning environment, so I'm not sure if this is classic exclusion or not. It's like the Principal knew that we wouldn't send our child to a portable and is hoping that we withdraw our child from the school to make their job easier."

"I have had to sacrifice everything (my business and my own studies) in order to become his EA fulltime and support his education over this pandemic. Because I made that 'choice' he has continued to grow confidence in his academics which was a big goal for him. This has nothing to do with the access he was provided by the school and everything to do with the burden of stress and responsibility placed on me as his mother."

"At first I thought it would be ok, now I know it's not. My son has stopped engaging in learning activities related to his school or classmates. His EA is absolutely willing to help but she is limited by her time caring for children in school & some worksheets. Meetings online are just chatting & while he appreciated it at first- he no longer sees value in this model. In fact all 3 of my children (grades <REDACTED>) have lost faith. All 3 are now enrolled in some kind of DL school for Fall. They don't want to go back to sub par or strange dystopian environments."