

Survey Report

CONSIDERING LEAVING THE SYSTEM

MARCH 2021

This report offers an overview of the data we received in our recent survey, *Considering Leaving the System*. It acts as a follow-up to our 2015 survey, *Forced Out*.

We also host an online Exclusion Tracker which is in its third consecutive year of collecting data, review the year-end reports for the [2018-19](#) school year and [2019-20](#) school year. In August of 2020 we were proud to contribute to a provincial education survey of families with our community partners, InclusionBC, BC Parents of Complex Kids, and Family Support Institute. The outcomes of that report can be found [here](#).

We recognize that the circumstances of the ongoing COVID-19 health crisis exacerbated many existing concerns for in-person public school and other forms of schooling. Our most recent survey, *Considering Leaving the System*, was shared with our members over our social media platforms in March. We received a total of 453 responses over a 9-day period, nearly doubling our responses from 2015. We believe that this report provides a well-rounded view of ongoing concerns, and provides contextual data reporting through the wide-spread demographic.



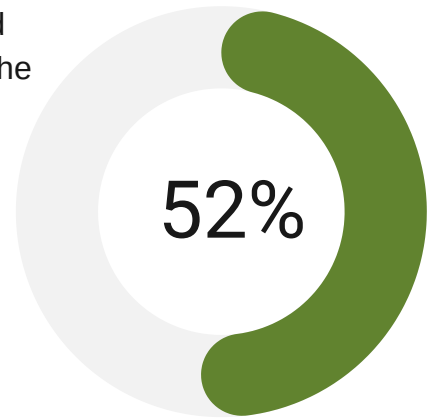
The results of our parent survey are in and they clearly confirm what families and advocates have recognized for the past decade – the fiscal restraint in British Columbia public education has resulted in the loss of programs and services for students with special needs in public schools. This ongoing austerity has had a significant impact on the mental health of children with special needs. Many parents express a desire to remain in public schools, but fear the current system of ‘inclusion’ is so broken and underfunded that their child will end up damaged as a result. Fundamentally, many children with special needs are prevented from exercising their human right to equitably access an education in public schools.

from *Forced Out* (2015)

This excerpt was originally published alongside the *Forced Out* survey conducted in 2015. We are revisiting this issue because parents and guardians indicated that things have not changed since then.

Out of a total of 453 responses, over half (**52%**) have removed their child from in-person public education, and **6.7%** were in the process of removing their child in March of 2021.

Lack of consistent support was the number one cited reason for removal, the second being COVID-related concerns of high risk family environments and the third being restraint/seclusion of the student. Parents reported that the school administrators were generally apathetic about removing their children from public schools.

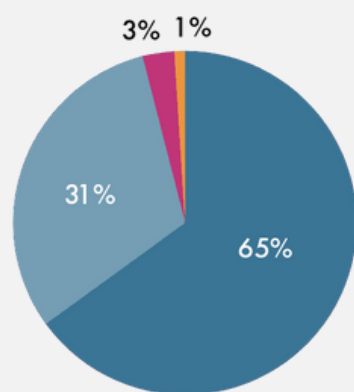


Approximately one-third of our respondents stated that the decision to remove their child from public schooling took them “over a year” or “several years”.

For those who remained a part of the public school system, we asked how the pandemic has impacted the support their child or youth is receiving. Parents reported fewer resources available (**45.6%**), no change (**34.7%**), meaning almost half felt fewer resources were available. This was of particular interest to us in relationship to our Exclusion Tracker. The most common response we receive to the Exclusion Tracker is that schools are underfunded and understaffed. Even with a significant number of students not attending in-person the remaining students fared no better according to respondents.

Graph demonstrating responses to *Question 20*, “Have you removed your child or youth from in-person public education?”

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS



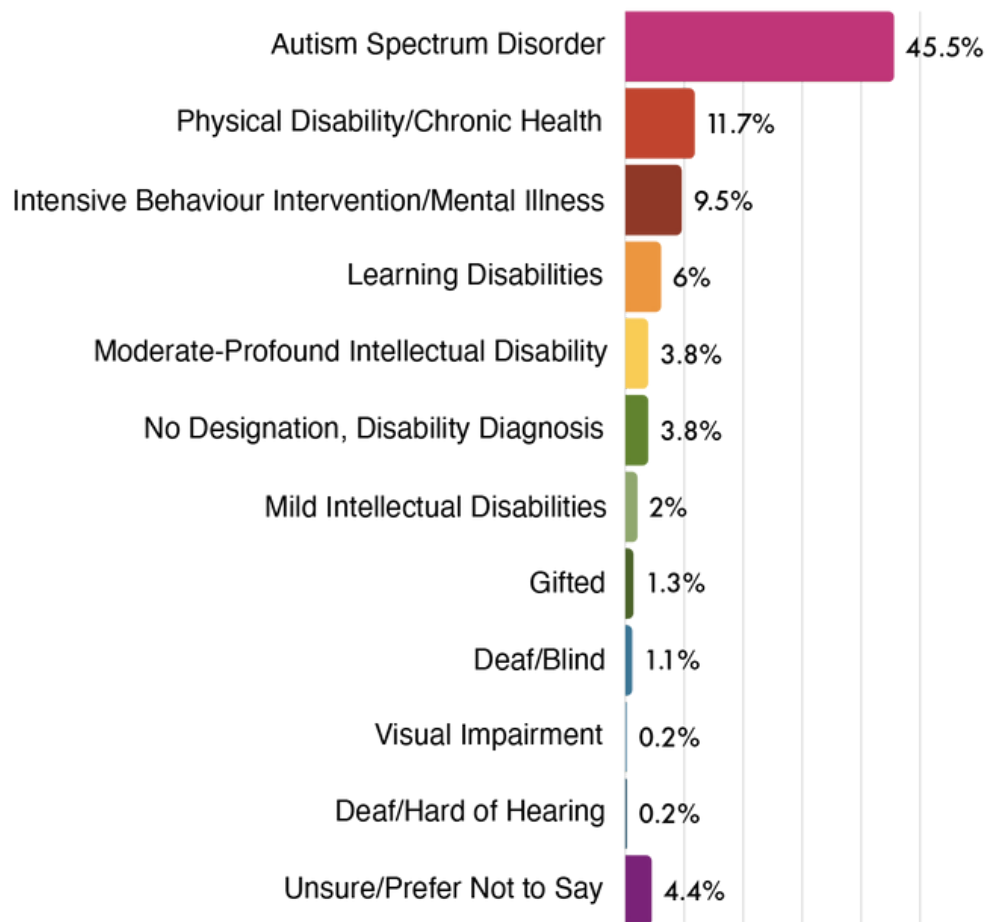
All grades and school districts were represented in our survey.

65% of the respondents’ children or youth are male, **31%** are female and **1%** are non-binary. The remaining **3%** preferred not to answer.

97.6% of the students represented in this survey speak English as their primary language, **1.7%** use American Sign Language (ASL), Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), or are otherwise non-verbal. The remaining **0.7%** speak Mandarin Cantonese or preferred not to answer.

Graph demonstrating responses to *Question 3*, “What is your child or youth’s gender?”

Ministry of Education Designations:



7.3% of respondents reported their child/youth has no designation or diagnosis.

The "no designation, but disability diagnosis" category may include students who have ADHD, which is not yet recognized as a Designation category by the Ministry of Education. Read more [here](#).

Our data regarding ethnicity was flawed, we had originally intended this question to be a "check all that apply"; instead the survey setup required people to choose only one category. The respondents' children or youth were listed as European (**65.6%**), Indigenous (**6.4%**), and many selected Other (**13.3%**) and wrote-in "mixed race" or listed ethnicities.

Last year, **67.5%** of our respondents' children or youth attended in-person public school. This year, that number has dropped to **43.9%**.

*This is a staggering **23.6%** drop in a single school year.*

During the same period, enrolment increased in other schooling alternatives:

Independent Distributed Learning increased by **12.1%**

Public Distributed Learning increased by **7.1%**

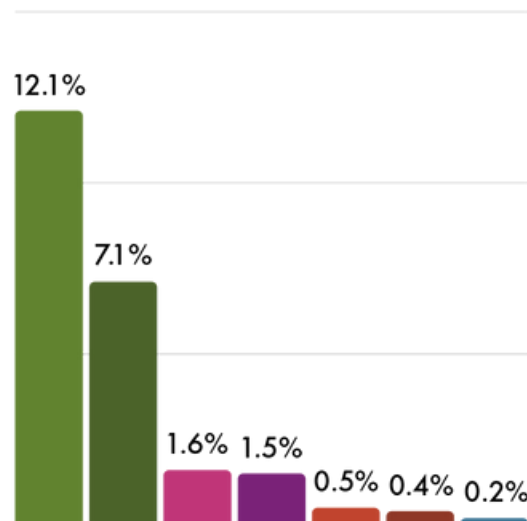
Registered homeschoolers increased by **1.6%**

Hybrid & Remote learning increased by **1.5%**

Independent in-person School increased by **0.5%**

Hospital & Homebound learning increased by **0.4%**

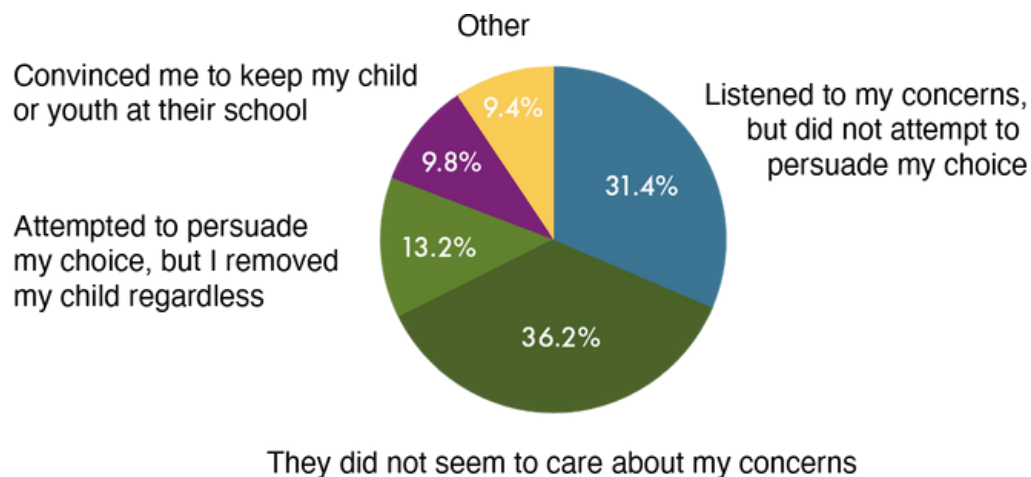
First Nations on reserve increased by **0.2%**



Some parents reported that while they had not officially changed their child or youth's enrollment status, they were at home without educational support. Many indicated that they were waiting for a plan from their school administrators, or that they would rather go without support for the time it would take to get off of an Independent Distributed Learning waitlist than risk what they deemed ineffective COVID-19 safety measures in public schools.

When asked about how the school administration reacted to parents when they disclosed plans to remove their children, the top three responses we received were “Admin did not seem to care” (**25.4%**), “Asked for reasoning, but did not try to correct their mistakes” (**14.2%**), and “Wanted to help support my child or youth, and were apologetic” (**12.2%**).

In spite of that, only **23%** of administrations attempted to persuade the parent to keep their children enrolled in their school. Our respondents reported that **31.4%** “listened to my concerns, but did not attempt to persuade my choice” and **36.2%** “did not seem to care about my concerns”.



When we asked what currently keeps families from removing their child from public schools the overwhelming response was financial considerations. Many families cannot afford to quit their jobs to have their children learn from home or to pay for independent school. Social isolation was also a prominent concern.

Making the transition from public school to an alternative schooling type is not a decision to be made lightly. It will have a significant impact on the entire family regarding social opportunities, employment opportunities, and expenses related to home learning. As such, we asked how long it took parents to make their decision to remove their child from public school. Those who responded with “Less than a month” (**28.2%**) and “A few months” (**38.8%**) are most likely reacting to pandemic-related concerns. “About a year” (**17.5%**) and “several years” (**15.5%**) - totalled to a third of the responses, this demonstrates a much larger issue.

We asked if parents were considering removing their children from public schools prior to the pandemic; **37.7%** said yes, **60.3%** said no.

For those who remained in public school, we asked how the pandemic impacted their support. Parents reported fewer resources available (**45.6%**), no change (**34.7%**), more resources available (**6.8%**). Due to COVID-19 safety protocols, parents are not allowed in the building and communication with the school team is more limited. Lack of information, especially with children who may struggle with communication, is particularly scary for parents.

FROM OUR RESPONDENTS

"I would love to get my son up to grade level reading and writing level and have him return to public school to be with his peers. I am torn however as once I put him back in public school the funding available to him due to his designation got pooled by the district and he no longer gets the same level of support as he does with a DL. With the DL he gets daily OG tutoring, weekly private SLP sessions and Social thinking Group sessions. He attended adapted lessons for physical education and with such coaching he participates and excels. I feel going back to school would be detrimental to his education but better for his friendships and sense of belonging to his school community which he loved. It will be a difficult decision to be made but we have opted for another year of DL."

"I wish he was identified earlier. A lot of exclusion happened before he started diagnosis. Early childhood educators should address [their] concerns with parents."

"There just seems to be a lack of understanding of the importance of consistency, well done meaningful IEPs, kindness and compassion. I want my child in school but my biggest regret is not taking her out when she was in elementary when most of the damage was done - PTSD started, lack of self esteem, lack of awareness of ASD and support."

"The school has made it very difficult to be guaranteed any resources, even though my child has two diagnoses. Requests to have accommodations put in the IEP have been refused. I can't get a straight answer about how much CEA time he gets and when, and it keeps being reduced even though he still needs it and is struggling in many areas. Too many undiagnosed kids with no funding are also using the CEA's time. I've been refused school counselling for my child even though his anxiety was so severe that it was disruptive to the class and they kept phoning me about it. They asked me what to do about his anxiety but refused to refer me to the school counsellor because my child wasn't "throwing chairs". The resource teacher told me only kids with behavioural issues were allowed to see the school counsellor. Support has been absolutely terrible."

"More options for homeschooling needs to happen, more teacher training for anxiety and needs of autism and less judgment. I'm a special Ed teacher and feel for families. We have never been offered lunch time support until this year. My son has an extreme eating disorder. I feel his funds are not spent well. I imagine we will go online as soon as we can or part time."

"If I had it all to do again based on my current knowledge of the rigidity and power/control issues in the in-person school administration I would never have stepped foot inside a typical public school. Some excellent teachers but insufficient to compensate for the manner students are treated by counsellors and administrators."

"My son goes through 2-3 teachers a year. He rotates EA's so they never get to know him well and then they are taken away. He has never had an EA for more than an hour sporadically through the day and the EA is shared with the whole class in that time. He never has access to SLP, OT, Psych Ed. I am so tired of paying for everything myself. During the pandemic school shut down last March I took over his schooling and he did amazingly well. With the one on one he produced more quality work and accomplished much more in the day. The decrease in distractions and noise also helped."

"The amount of support a child receives is incredibly dependent not only upon the District in which they attend, but also the school they attend. A skilled administrator or support staff make all the difference. I speak from experience as someone who has worked in multiple districts and multiple schools. Unfortunately, the school my son attends has had a principal at the head who is very old school, inflexible, and determined that students behave 'just so'. My child is a trauma survivor, so they have repeatedly clashed and the principal escalates the situation. My kid has been sent home more times, with no concrete support plan in place. My child went from telling me that school was "awesome" (even on his hard days) to refusing to go to school, hating it, and saying he was scared of the principal. It has been a nightmare."

““As a mom I am thrilled to see my son is blossoming with at home learning. However, I am overwhelmed with the task of being the mom, teacher, OT, SLP, BI, EA and every other support person that just wasn't available to us due to covid. I have become extremely overwhelmed and am already on medication for depression. I had defer courses [at the university] I am in as I am making a career change and decide to put my son first. At first I tried to work, homeschool and keep up with my course load but I found I was doing this from 10 pm to 4pm and that was affecting my health.”

FROM OUR RESPONDENTS; COVID-SPECIFIC

"I had to pull my 3 children due to two of them being very medically vulnerable to illness. All three had doctor's notes, only one provided with a remote learning class of [immune-compromised] kids."

"We loved our school and had no complaints with them, it just wasn't safe for us to remain during the pandemic. It turns out our daughter learns well with a less distracted environment so we are doing fairly well at the moment with our choice."

"The return to school plan did not take into account children with medical conditions that made them vulnerable to the virus - lung and heart issues. It opened fully before the studies were out on down syndrome people being 10 [times] more likely to die. Yes, the pandemic has not been severe with children, but it is still a risk for medically fragile/complex children and their schools had no plan for them when they reopened. Very disappointed with this government and it's Covid response in schools."

"My son has gotten more help in six months of homeschool than he had in six years in public in-person school."

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