

BCEdAccess Quick Covid-19 Inclusive Education Survey - Snapshot April 8th, 2020

Introduction

On March 30th, BC school and district staff went back to work in most districts. They began, in varying ways, to follow the guiding principles cited by the Ministry of Education in their [FAQ](#) :

1. Maintain a healthy and safe environment for all students and families and all employees.
2. Provide services to support children of essential workers.
3. Support vulnerable students who may need special assistance.
4. Provide continuity of educational opportunities for all students.

As the first 2 weeks progressed, both positive and challenging results began to emerge. On Thursday, April 8th, we ran a survey with the intention of measuring how parents and guardians of students with disabilities feel about how things are going so far. We received 209 responses.

We want to begin by recognizing the hard work by schools and districts and the Ministry of Education, the unique nature of this challenge which no one has ever had to deal with before, and the fact that the Minister of Education has asked that School districts and independent school authorities put in place learning opportunities for students as soon as practically possible, no later than mid-April - and we have yet to arrive at that date. We have watched educators put together crisis learning while still managing families of their own. Many teachers and educational assistants also have children with disabilities. It's a challenge unlike any we have ever faced before.

Who is represented by this survey?

This survey was shared in our Facebook community group which has over 2600 members. It was shared outside of the group by a few people so there was some limited response from families not part of the Facebook group. All responses are from families of children and youth with disabilities in BC.

The survey was open from noon until 9 pm and was completed for 209 individual students.

- All grades are represented.
- 35 districts - the Island, lower mainland, central, and the North are represented
- Independent schools and Independent Distributed Learning schools, registered homeschoolers, At Home Program and more are represented

13.5% asked to be contacted for additional advocacy support. In reading the details, several have urgent needs that have not yet been addressed by Education or the Ministry of Children & Family Development.

Some key findings:

About 57% of respondents are still working in some way. Some are essential services workers, from front line health care to grocery store managers. Some are teachers trying to teach from home with children of their own. Many parents and guardians are working from home.

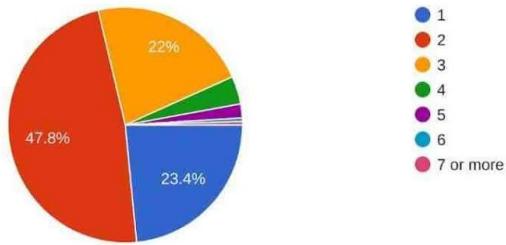
Are you currently working at a paid or volunteer position?
209 responses



▲ 1/3 ▼

Over 3/4 of respondents have two or more children living at home with them. Nearly 27% of parents and guardians do not have a partner living with them.

How many children do you have at home?
209 responses



Do you have a partner living with you?
209 responses



Schools and districts have reached many families since March 30th - nearly 87% of respondents had heard from someone by April 8th. Only 27.8% had heard from their child's educational assistant, who is often the key connection they have at school and the one who spends the most time with them. Additionally only 6.7% had heard from a counselor. Several families have heard from specialists: occupational therapists, speech and language pathologists, learning support teachers, gifted coordinator, vision teacher, deafblind consultant, and more.

Nearly 60% were offered educational support, while only 12.4% were offered mental health support. Some of those who have heard from someone have only received a generic email so far.

Only 20% of respondents said they have been offered educational assistant support. Several have noted that their educational assistant has been offered work doing childcare for front line essential service workers, unfortunately in some cases before the school or district has checked in with their family. This is one of the top concerns of families at this time.

Have you heard from anyone at the school or district about your child with disabilities since March 30th?
209 responses



▲ 1/3 ▼

Technology Needs:

Approximately 20 percent 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.

Does your child have reliable internet access and regular access to a device to connect to the internet?
209 responses



▲ 1/4 ▼

“He is not able to access online learning due to his needs. He has a device and has access to the internet but he can’t use it independently.”

“He gets overstimulated by technology (iPads, computers, TV) and not adequate for learning.”

“My three kids are sharing the iPad”

Communication:

So far, experience with communications from the school and/or district have been mixed. Many very positive experiences and many who are anxious because they have heard nothing so far, and everything in between. Those families who were already having challenges with advocacy are in some cases still having the same, while others have been pleasantly surprised.

"I am writing this because our school is amazing and has been in constant contact and offering support - I am picking up educational packages today for my two school aged kids (K and 2) and they are also putting together a package of specialized stuff that they are making right now even though I offered to do it. Our teachers have all called, we did a Zoom meeting before it was banned, we did FaceTime with our amazing EAs, and we are working on Microsoft Team. Our Grade 2 teacher is posting online class videos for the kids and also says do what you can and don't worry about it. I fully realize that our school is an abnormality and I hope other schools are able to see what is possible. We specifically chose this school (out of catchment) because of the amazing staff."

"We were having daily video communications with his EA and then it stopped, which resulted in an increase in anxiety and non-compliance and vocal protests. The teacher reached out via email the next day to ask us to set up MS Teams. The principal called a few days later stating that his EA was going to be doing childcare for essential workers' children so they assigned a different support person to my son who spent the last two years building the relationship with his current EA."

"The school is great but there's not relevant support being offered for my severely disabled child."

Educational Assistant Support:

We asked whether families felt their child needed the support of an educational assistant, and how and why. This generated many responses. The majority of respondents have not been offered this support. 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 is greater than ever.

Has your child been offered Educational Assistant support?

209 responses



"He is having a hard time adjusting to everything but his EA has been wonderful with him and we have been working with her since Monday. "

"ASD/Complex learner.. Has 1 to 1 support at school. I am unable to support as I am dealing with my own mental health issues and am on disability. The schools needs to guide him in whatever capacity, as I don't have the energy."

"Yes. He had a 1:1 EA while in school and needs to continue that relationship for continuing his learning. I am not an educational professional and he needs that support for certain learning activities."

"My son had bell to bell EA in school and cannot navigate instructions on his own. He has a big detailed support plan at school and several staff members who help through the day. I just cannot do it all myself while also working full time, I find it all overwhelming so I can only imagine how he feels."

"For all academic output - math, reading, scribing, planning, organizing, comprehension of material/breaking down complex information. Our child has challenges with executive functioning and emotional regulation."

"He has trouble reading & writing. His self esteem is low & he thinks he's stupid. Tutoring for funds to pay for an online program that works for him would absolutely make a marked difference in his successes next school year. His current EA has made such amazing progress & now he loses it. No support is available because he's not disabled enough."

"He wants to do what his peers are doing and is very aware he cannot right now."

"EA is available online. Child only works through physical connection. Can't deal with online connection. Too much of an adjustment."

"We use full body communication and the EA knows his learning needs best."

"My child resists me as his teacher. I am his parent. He needs prompting, direction, OT, reinforcement. I can't accomplish all these roles. A simple art exercise resulted in tears. My child needs his EA."

What do families need right now?

Finally, we asked the question, "What do your child and family need from schools during this pandemic?" We received too many responses to list. Here is a summary of just a few commonly cited needs:

- Counselling/mental health support
- Respite
- Curriculum, inclusion, community & connection
- Patience and LOW or NO expectations
- To not be forgotten about

In conclusion:

As an advocacy organization, we see one of our roles as checking in with our community members and providing data to stakeholders and the public as part of the ongoing conversation around the needs of families.

This report establishes that education has responded swiftly to the pandemic and has had some success in supporting families of students with disabilities and complex learners. The report also shows that there are ongoing large gaps in meeting the needs of families equitably within this crisis learning environment. We implore the government to look at this data in full and make necessary adjustments in line with the guidance already provided to Districts to ensure all families' needs are being met. The Ministry needs to communicate these gaps and the Ministry of Education's expectations around closing them clearly and directly with all Districts.

Essential service workers are vital and the support for their children are of equal importance to those students who are 'vulnerable and need special assistance'. It has been disconcerting for families to know their EAs have been taken away without notice to care for other children, in particular because of the need to keep their child connected to the familiar supports they would have access to in the classroom. While we understand the uniqueness of the circumstances, we must react swiftly under these same circumstances to advocate for these supports to continue before they are lost. The first and fourth guiding principles include "all students." BCEdAccess exists to continually remind that children and youth with disabilities and complex learners are part of the "all" in those statements.