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Defending the Early Years Survey Explores COVID's Impact on Schooling

Finds most young children, parents and teachers had difficulty adjusting to remote learning; Many families found some benefits; Safe return to schools is concern

BOSTON, September 22, 2020 – Leading early education advocacy group, [Defending the Early Years \(DEY\)](#), today released results of its new survey that explores the impact of COVID-19 on education among young children and their families and teachers. Results reflect the lack of preparations for the sudden shift to remote schooling/online learning, with a significant percentage of children, parents and teachers reporting difficulty adjusting. Most families ultimately found benefits, but overarching concerns about the children missing social interaction, increase in stress, and a safe return to school were significant for adults. Full results/graphs are reported in [The Impact of COVID-19 on Young Children, Families and Teachers](#).

"We hope that the survey's insights can help bring some important issues forward and ultimately lead to solutions," said Nancy Carlsson-Paige, co-founder and senior advisor of Defending the Early Years. "We are constructing this new reality each day, and information like this helps us understand and respond to the issues facing young children, their families and teachers."

The DEY survey sought to hear from early childhood (infant through 2nd grade) parents and teachers, and amplify the voices of this often-overlooked demographic, about their experiences with online learning/remote schooling thus far, including their level of participation, expectations, ease of adjustment, benefits they discovered, challenges they faced, and broader concerns, many of which remain as the new school year has begun.

"Some families have sent their children back to socially distant schooling while others are keeping them home with tutors or teachers, replacing traditional schooling with 'pandemic pods,'" said Denisha Jones, co-director, Defending the Early Years, and author of the Impact report. "Children and families spent their summer trying to regain a sense of normalcy and now face the reality that a return to schooling as we knew it might not happen for quite some time."

From June to August, 559 responses were received from 37 states and the District of Columbia, ([Impact Report](#) – Table 2) and included 122 parents of young children, 153 early childhood teachers and 39 who were both parents and ECC/ECE teachers. (Table 1)

Among the Findings

- Parents reported 17 percent of children did not participate in online learning/remote schooling at all. (Table 6)
- The variety of expectations reflect the lack of time to adequately prepare children, parents and teachers. (Table 7)

- Parents reported 66 percent of children had a difficult (47 percent) or very difficult (19 percent) adjustment to online learning/remote schooling. (Table 8)
- Challenges shared by parents were consistent regardless of their self-reported adjustment to online learning/ remote schooling. Balancing working from home and supporting children was number one.
- Increase in stress of children was the number one concern of teachers (95 percent). (Table 14)
- Increase in their own stress was the top concern of parents (95 percent). (Table 13)
- 90 percent of teachers reported being somewhat, and very concerned about being able to establish relationships with children through remote learning. (Figure 1)
- Learning new technology and improving their technological skills was the most significant benefit identified by teachers. Being at home and an increase in time with their family were also high on the list.
- Preschool teachers found it difficult to connect with students and keep them engaged.
- Pre-K, Kindergarten, First and Second grade teachers all identified increase in screen time as problematic. Also, that it was difficult to keep students engaged, and that they often felt disconnected from their students.

Recommendations

In response to the findings, DEY compiled [recommendations](#) in the report to help families and teachers enhance benefits and mitigate the challenges. Among them, is guidance on:

Screen time and usage...

“We should not expect young children to spend more than 30 minutes a day, a few days a week on technology,” says Jones. “Reading stories, sharing items from home, singing songs, watching a puppet show, and playing are good examples of beneficial ways technology can bring young learners and their teachers together. However, we must keep these sessions brief and optional.”

Self-directed learning...

“Instead of expecting children to receive hours of online teaching passively, we must reconceptualize the curriculum to allow for children to learn on their own at home. When teachers work closely with parents, project learning can be a great way to support children’s learning and engagement with others,” says Jones.

Taking advantage of the time to play and be outdoors...

“Freedom from school must result in more freedom to play and to be outside safely,” says Jones. “The benefits of play are endless, and we can best mitigate the challenges from this global pandemic by providing an increase in opportunities to play. Imagine how great it would be if the best memory children had from COVID-19 was there was more time for play!”

“If we remain committed to education as a pillar of democracy, protecting children and childhood, and ensuring all children receive a just and equitable start in the early years, there is a chance we can create a new normal that is better than what we had before,” said Jones.

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About Defending the Early Years

Defending the Early Years (DEY) is a nonprofit organization advocating for developmentally appropriate learning in early childhood and elementary school years. Founded by respected experts in early childhood education, Nancy Carlsson-Paige, Ed.D. and Diane Levin, Ph.D., and steered by a National Advisory Board, DEY aims to educate parents, teachers and administrators on the evidence-based approaches to how young children learn best; to embolden a return to a model of active, play-based and experiential learning and ongoing observations and formative assessments over time; and to make these

opportunities available to every young child. For information, visit dey.org, Facebook: [@DefendingtheEarlyYears](https://www.facebook.com/DefendingtheEarlyYears), Twitter: [@DEY_Project](https://twitter.com/DEY_Project), and [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/).

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