A photograph of a classroom with rows of wooden desks and purple chairs. In the background, there is a chalkboard with some chemical structures and text written on it. A large teal graphic element, consisting of two overlapping triangles, is positioned on the right side of the image, partially covering the classroom scene.

# BC Family and Student Education Survey

August 17, 2020

“The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated the vulnerability of the least protected in society. It is highlighting deep economic and social inequalities and inadequate health and social protection systems that require urgent attention as part of the public health response. Women and men, children, youth and older persons, refugees and migrants, the poor, people with disabilities, persons in detention, minorities, LGBTI people, among others, are all being affected differently. We have an obligation to ensure everyone is protected and included in the response to this crisis.”

- COVID-19 AND HUMAN RIGHTS: WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER  
- United Nations report, April 2020

“We must understand and pay special attention to the specific needs and experiences of young people, people living with disabilities, minorities, Indigenous communities, refugees, migrants and other groups facing specific challenges. Moreover, special emphasis needs to be given to those goals that shape people's lives and future, such as the quest to eradicate poverty, provide education for all, in particular for girls, to provide universal healthcare and to ensure the rule of law.”

- THE HIGHEST ASPIRATION: A CALL TO ACTION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, 2020

In April, 2020, BCEdAccess, BC Parents of Complex Kids, Family Support Institute of BC and Inclusion BC collaborated to produce a survey to find out how families were coping with the extra pressures caused by COVID-19, and to hear about their experiences accessing emergency pandemic funding and/or services for their child or youth with disabilities through MCFD's CYSN program.

<https://bit.ly/2Q01o6b>

On July 29th, 2020, the government of BC announced their K-12 Education Restart Plan for September.

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020EDUC0040-001415>

All of our organizations began receiving an increase in advocacy calls related to the announcement, and decided to work together again to collect feedback from families and their children and youth with disabilities and who have extra support needs, to provide decision-makers with up to date information and evidence to inform actions and accountability.

This survey was distributed to our networks via email newsletter and across social media. It ran for 2 ½ days, from 12 pm on Thursday, August 6th to midnight on Saturday, August 8th, 2020.

- **1102** parents and guardians of children and youth with disabilities/extra support needs residing in BC responded to the survey during the short time that it was open.
- **192** students also chose to respond, as the option to do so was provided. Students were asked most of the same questions as parents and guardians.
- These parents/guardians and students are from 55 of 63 School Districts, Independent Schools and First Nations schools, and students are in every type of schooling available in British Columbia.

To support the Ministry of Education guidance on *ensuring students who require extra supports are prioritized and have the services they need*, we make the following recommendations:



Reach out proactively to find out what families are planning for their children and youth with disabilities/extra support needs.



Ensure this support is available to students with disabilities at the same time as supports for all other students attending in person.



Bring the students with disabilities who will attend in person into the school first, if their family identifies this as a need, if gradual entry is planned.



Give clear guidance around educational support that will be provided for students with a medical letter citing complex medical conditions that place them at heightened risk for COVID-19

Be prepared for the full-time attendance and full participation from day one of students with disabilities alongside all students.



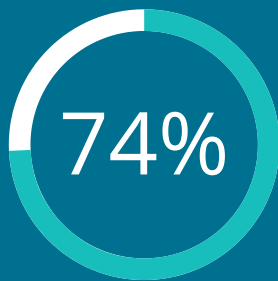
Have collaborative conversations with families who do not wish to have their student attend full time, to help them make a choice about the most equitable option



Include students in these conversations where possible and appropriate



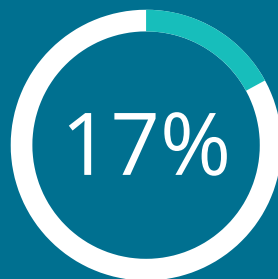
Make available flexible schooling options for students with disabilities, recognizing their specific human right to equitable access to education.



of respondents have 2 or more children and youth at home.



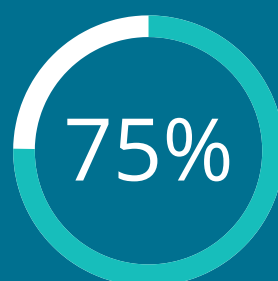
of children and youth addressed in this survey are Indigenous.



of respondents are from single adult households.



of students are in K-5.



are in public school, in person.

Some types of schooling in the "other" category:

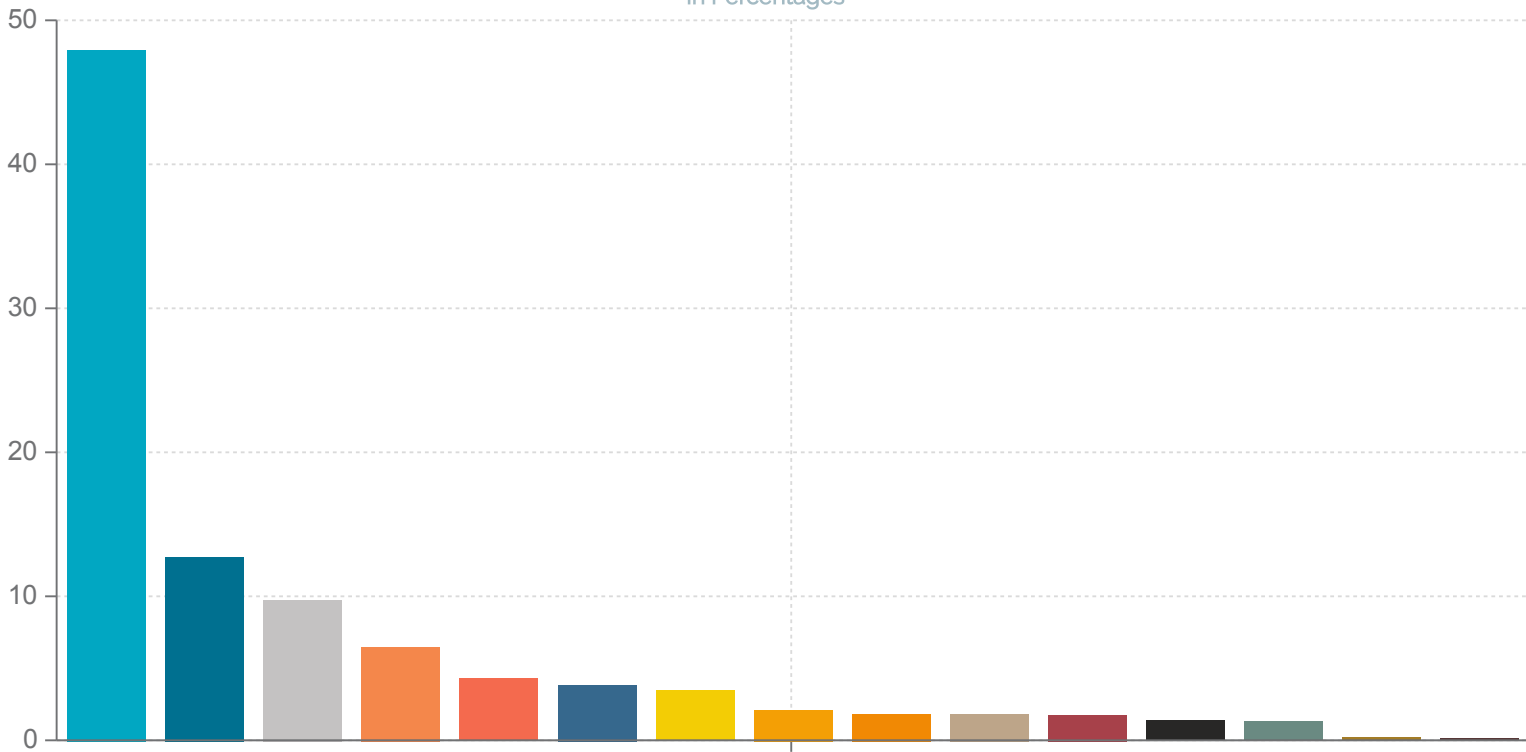
- Contract with public school district and private service provider
- Learning centres in partnership with a distributed learning school
- Many types of cross-enrollment in public in person, public distributed learning, independent distributed learning
- Not registered at all (these students were pulled from school at some point due to trauma and have not returned or registered as homeschoolers)
- Provincial public school BC School For The Deaf
- Public in person outdoor school
- Public school alternative programs (in person)

About 20% of respondents said their children are NOT in public, in person school.

About 15% of students in this survey do NOT have an IEP.

# IEP designations by percentage

In Percentages



- G: Autism Spectrum Disorder
- D: Physical Disability
- Q: Learning Disabilities
- No designation
- H: Intensive Behaviour Interventions
- Not sure
- C: Intellectual Disability (Moderate/Profound)
- A: Physically Dependent
- K: Mild Intellectual Disability
- R: Students Requiring Behaviour Support
- P: Gifted
- F: Deaf/Hard of Hearing
- Prefer not to answer
- B: Deafblind
- E: Visual Impairment



192 students with disabilities responded to this survey. We asked parents and guardians about their concerns, and we asked the same question of the students. Here's how they both responded with their top 5 concerns:

Parents/Guardians	Students
Health and safety of student - 76.2%	Health and safety of student - 67.05%
<b>Lack of support - 63.19%</b>	Health and safety of at-risk family member - 56.25%
Health and safety of at-risk family member - 54.02%	Lack of support - 36.36%
Delay in getting an IEP - 48.37%	Exclusion and segregation - 35.8%
No PPE guidelines - 47.71%	Masks not mandatory - 32.39%

## Health and safety of others:

- *My mom. She has health concerns already and she cannot get sick from Covid*
- *Concerned my teachers won't be safe. I want them to be given the chance to teach me remotely like they did in the spring.*
- *I'm scared to go back. Family members have health issues. This plan is not fair. I Want the choice to return to my school later. I want to be safe.*

## Masks, distancing and the rules:

- *Masks NEED to be mandatory in school buildings. I do not feel safe in my school without masks or social distancing. School is supposed to be a safe place. Not a place where kids fear the building. The government needs to do better. This is awful.*
- *I'm nervous about getting covid-19 and kids won't keep their distance or wear masks when we are all together.*
- *Everyone shud ware masks inside it's a pandemic. There's kids in my school who pick there nose and eat it. We're gonna get sick.*
- *I am deaf and with mask wearing it is impossible for me to lip read and I rely on lip reading so this is a challenge for me.*

## In person vs. online learning:

- *My teachers did not do any classes on line last year which made it hard for me to know what to do. I was always confused.*
- *I wish I could home school but I can't because my mom works.*
- *I don't want to go back to school with covid-19. I feel safer at home and I don't feel like anyone is going to help me at school when I'm feeling nervous.*
- *I miss my friends and playing with them. I hate learning at home. It's boring.*

## The future:

- *I want to be able to have my school on my highschool transcript. I don't want to leave to feel safe. I want to be able to do online learning with my local school. I don't want to be forced to go in. If they force me to go in, I want masks, but I will also be super stressed. Hope that doesn't happen.*
- *I am worried that if I stay home so that I don't get sick, that I can't go back to my school or French Immersion.*
- *I'm heading into grade 12, soon to go to college. I'm wondering what College may look like in September of 2021, assuming that the Vaccine arrives on schedule.*

## Positive feedback:

- *Our school did a great job with June's re-opening. I am not concerned about their abilities or capabilities. Just the regular stress and hope that my sons needs can be met and that he will thrive.*
- *We generally support the full-time return that we realize it's a complex issue and are supportive of your efforts to achieve it*
- *We found the school closure during April and May extremely difficult and are happy school is starting up September 8.*

## Choice and concerns about the plan:

- *I want distance learning options for if we decide not to attend in person or for when kids are home with any form of sickness, which I anticipate may be often*
- *We need her to go to school (the other child is in a DL). Online didn't work AT ALL for her. We cannot manage to work from home and support both kids in school, but we don't feel at all comfortable sending her back. Ideally, we'd like a hybrid option so other kids can stay home, and she can go and get in person support. June was perfect.*
- *I think there needs to be serious consideration to a hybrid model to allow for decreased numbers at school. The hybrid model helps kids go to school to help their mental health and also allows for distancing and decreasing length and number of days of exposure to others which is what we are told is ideal.*

## Mental Health:

- *Students with mental illness are poorly supported at the best of times. The pandemic amplifies their disabilities.*
- *We were left to fend for ourselves and it has taken a negative on our family, in particular mental health and social needs*
- *Being out of school this long has had a devastating effect on our son's mental health. The stress to the family has been unbelievable*

## Health and Safety:

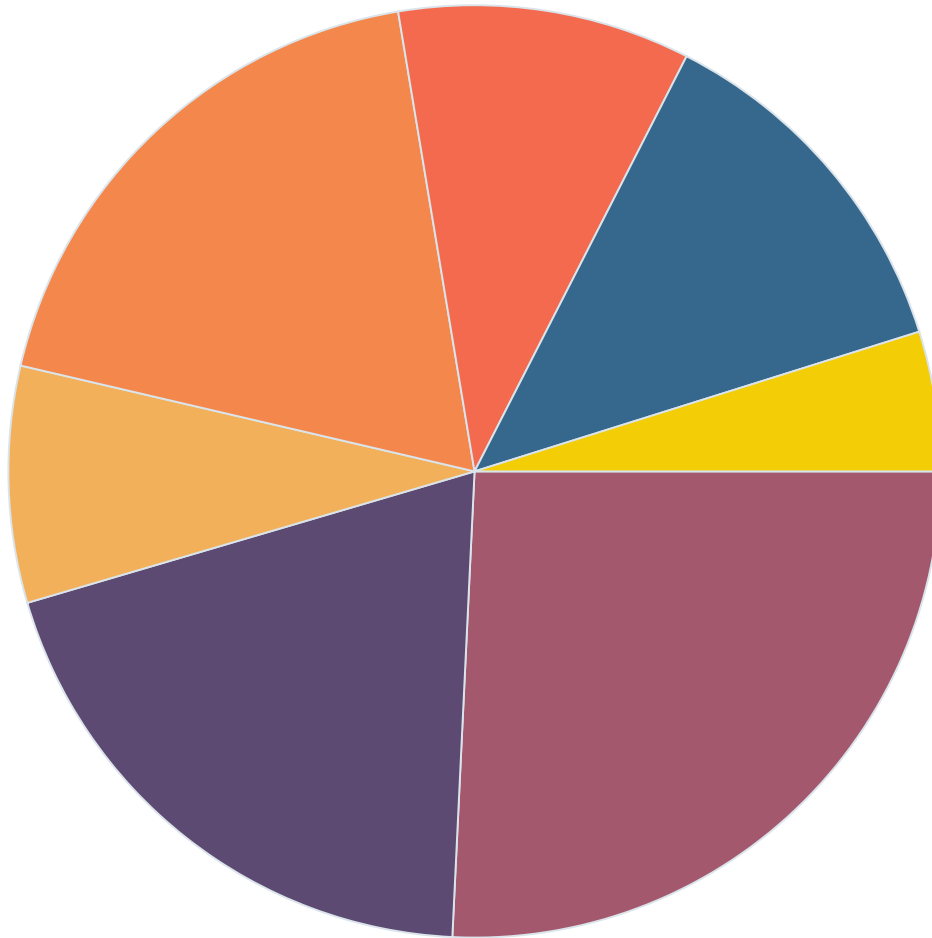
- *Sending our son to school is not an option. He had pneumonia when younger and is prone to chest infections and needs an inhaler at times. I am upset because our local Distributed Learning program has a waitlist and our only other option, if the school plan remains unchanged, is for me to cut back hours at work and homeschool with no support from the school district.*
- *Concerns with maintaining health and safety standards including cleaning and PPE as "pandemic fatigue" gets worse.*
- *We need some options! My son has cystic fibrosis and is high risk. I'm not at all comfortable sending him (or siblings) to school.*

## IEPs and Adequate Supports:

- *My son was not given educational assistant support last year and he suffered for it. Home schooling is not working, and the lack of routine and structure is killing us.*
- *EA support has been cut in our school, but demand has increased. Concern is with groups of 60 in school of 450 with 2 EAs. Either it means kids will get zero support or crossover between groups with EAs.*
- *We had Troubles with the principal taking away my daughters EA... when this happened... she would have meltdowns and be aggressive towards the family.*

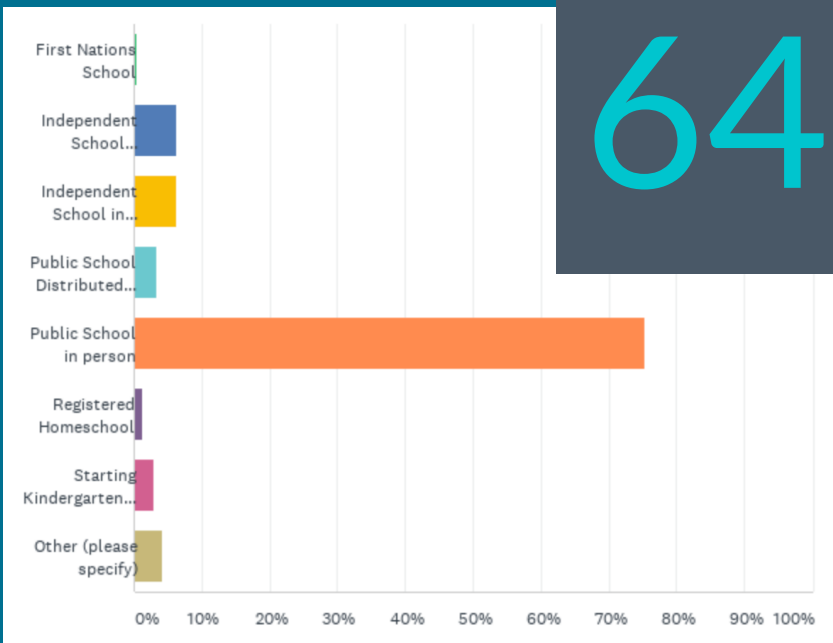
## Masks, distancing and rules:

- *Pls continue to provide hearing resources for my daughter worried how masks could affect her ability to lip read and fill in blanks with what she doesn't hear and how they could also work with FM systems.*
- *My child struggles with behaviours and will likely be sent home due to behaviours around not following rules related to COVID.*
- *Just unsure if my son with autism, anxiety etc. will be able to wear a mask all day,. He can for short periods*
- *Masks should be made mandatory in school buildings.*



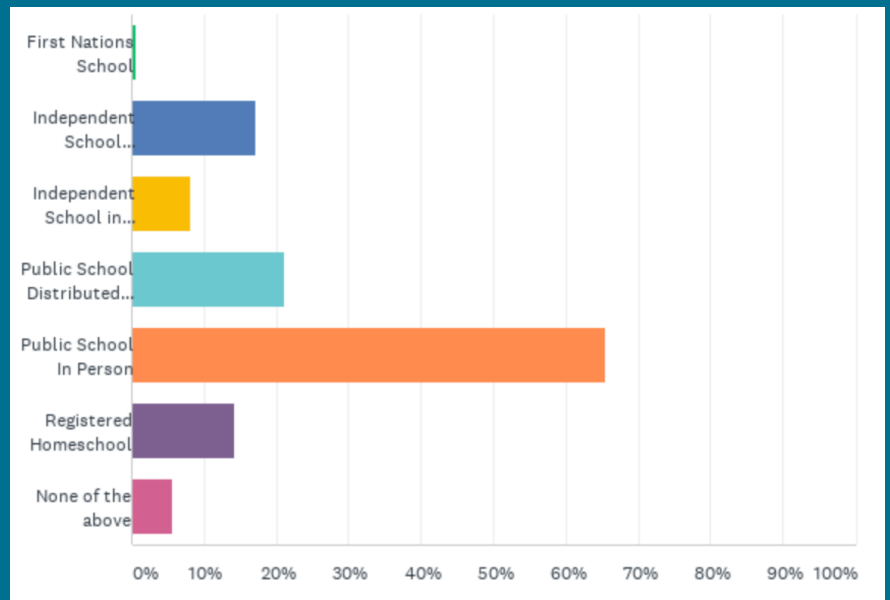
- Additional family stress 90
- Conflict with partner 28
- Loss of family connectedness 35
- Other 17
- Caregiver burnout 68
- Decreased mental wellness 65
- Loss of income 44

We compared type of schooling in 2019/20 (question 4) to the question 'What schooling option are you currently considering for the student in September 2020? Check all that apply.' (question 14).



**649** respondents are considering a move from Public in person schooling to some other type of schooling

**137** respondents whose children were in Public in person schooling in 2019/20 are not considering it for September 2020.





Type of School	Question 4	Question 14
First Nations school	5	6
<b>Independent Distributed Learning</b>	69	182
Independent in person	69	86
Public Distributed Learning	36	225
Public in person	831	694
Registered Homeschool	14	150

# 120

## respondents

have already moved their student from Public in person school to some form of distributed learning or registered homeschooling.

“ We moved to DL and so far it has been a great experience. If we were staying with the district I would have answered very differently. No trust in them at all.”

“ I have pulled three kids from your public system. You do not support the special needs as they need. More DLs are needed! ”

## What parents and guardians are saying...

We are once again struck by how huge the response to this survey was in just 2 ½ days. We are grateful to parents, guardians and students for taking the time and we recognize that this was not enough time for many. Things have already changed with regards to the Ministry of Education's return to school plan since we ran the survey, which is why running this survey quickly and briefly was important.

We are left to ask again, as we did regarding our previous joint survey, how many more families who do not have good access to technology and social media would have responded had they been able?

**There is no one size fits all solution.** What is critically important to one family creates huge challenges for another.

One example is the delay in school start. While many feel this is an important step, others are already at the breaking point and even a short delay has them very worried about their own mental health and that of their student, their employment and income, etc. Another example is that some families really need to see PPE in the schools to feel safe, while for others this creates concern that their child will be excluded if they can't wear a mask.

**649 families who responded are considering removing their children from public, in person schooling.** 120 have already made the move. This will have a negative impact on diversity in classrooms and will significantly impact inclusive education provincially. The hard work of families and educators over the past 40 years to make inclusive education a legal right in BC will be seriously eroded.

**Lack of choice is frustrating to families.** Returning to school with the usual choices for type of schooling is not adequate during a health crisis. Too many families are impacted by health for this to be an equitable solution.

Choice programs and schools that students with disabilities access are often the difference that makes them able to be successful at school. Losing access to their 'spot' because health concerns require them to remove their child from in-person schooling for the time being is inequitable.

**Some respondents commented they will not register their child anywhere else,** they will stay home and wait it out. The Public Health Office has said they want students in school, but the current plan and lack of choice is creating the opposite situation to what they hope to achieve.

Super disappointed with how the return to school plan was communicated. I had expected to receive an email communication from our school district but have received nothing to date. I am only aware because of the link provided in this survey.

The back to school plan should be flexible, not one size fits all, include outdoor options, and not directly contradict all the medical advice we've followed since March

Why do we have to fight for true support and inclusion? This is sad and traumatic.

We are all at higher risk and are concerned that the lack of provisions for safety in the return to school plan puts him and our family at much higher risk than necessary. We are being forced to choose between health and education. This is a form of exclusion.

**Students are highly concerned level about the health and safety of at-risk family members** when thinking about their return to school (56.25%). It is both heartwarming and heartbreaking to see this. That's a lot of responsibility on their shoulders and should be a flag for mental health in the coming weeks and months.

Families felt their children and youth were left out of the July 29th Ministry of Education announcement. They are already experiencing high burnout and resulting mental health concerns, and this unsurprisingly had a significant negative impact on mental health and trust.

Once again, our organizations received **requests for advocacy support through this survey, this time from 234 parents and guardians**. Families continue to need crisis support and help navigating an ever-changing education landscape from the unique lens of the needs of their student who has a disability and/or extra support needs.