

Installment #3: Experiences of Families of Children in Kindergarten through Transition Who Participated in the *Access and Engagement Survey*, June 15, 2020

The *Access and Engagement to Education Survey* collected information from families and professionals who have been impacted by changes in school and social-service delivery due to COVID-19. In this third installment we want to tell you a little about how educational services and supports have changed for school-age children and youth with visual impairments.

Demographic Information

As we noted in our first installment, out of 1,961 surveys we received 1,764 provided us with enough data to analyze. Now we want to give you some more information to help you understand the experiences of the children and youth in kindergarten through high-school and transition (referred to as school age students for the remainder of this report).

This is the first time we see responses from family members/guardians (referred to as families for the rest of this report) who completed the Spanish-language version of the survey (n=5). We also have family members who are also vision-education professionals working as teachers of students with visual impairments (TSVIs; n=19); orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists (n=1), and dual-certified professionals who are working as both a TSVI and O&M specialist (n=2).

We received 351 surveys from family members reporting on the experiences of 369 individual children (9 families completed surveys for both a school age student and either an early-intervention age child (n=6) or a preschool age child (n=4) with one family completed a survey that included a child in all three age groups.

There were 313 surveys from families in the United States and 38 from families in Canada.

For those families who indicated the state or province in which they lived, we had surveys from 42 individual U.S. states including:

- 26 responses from Texas
- 17 responses from Florida
- 14 responses from New York
- 12 responses from California
- 11 responses each from Virginia and Washington
- 10 responses from Missouri

- 9 responses each from Georgia and Minnesota
- 8 responses each from Michigan and Pennsylvania
- 7 responses each from Colorado, Massachusetts, and New Jersey
- 5 responses from Kansas
- 4 responses each from Arizona, Illinois, Maryland, Montana, Ohio, South Carolina, and Wisconsin
- 3 responses each from Hawaii, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Utah
- 2 responses each from Arkansas, Iowa, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, and Vermont
- 1 response each from Alabama, Connecticut, Indiana, Maine, Mississippi, North Dakota, New Mexico, and New Hampshire

For those families who included their Canadian province we had:

- 9 responses from Ontario
- 5 responses from Alberta
- 3 responses from British Columbia
- 1 response each from Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan

In Installment #3 we wanted to give you a snapshot of these families' experiences. Not every family answered every question so our reporting is limited to trends (in terms of percentages) for those families who answered specific questions.

For the 331 school age students whose families provided their age range, we found:

- 42 (12.0%) were 5-7 years old
- 88 (25.1%) were 8-10 years old
- 49 (14.0%) were 11-12 years old
- 69 (19.7%) were 13-15 years old
- 66 (18.8%) were 16-18 years old
- 17 (4.8%) were 19-22 years or older

More families with a child under age 12 answered the survey than did families with a child 13 years or older.

When asked to describe their child, families told us the following:

- 122 (34.8%) described their child as having low vision (some usable vision) and/or medical or other learning challenges (e.g., a hearing impairment, motor delays).
- 98 (27.9%) described their child as having low vision (some usable vision) and having no other learning and/or medical challenges.

- 56 (16.0%) described their child as blind (cannot see more than light and large objects) and having no other learning and/or medical challenges
- 55 (15.7%) described their child as blind (cannot see more than light and large objects) and having other learning and/or medical challenges (e.g., a hearing impairment, motor delays).

How COVID is Impacting Educational Services

Echoing our findings for early-childhood and preschool age children reported in Installment #2, the COVID-19 pandemic is having a measurable and negative impact on school-age children's access to educational services. At the time of this survey all public schools were closed in both the United States and Canada. Closures included those at specialized (residential) schools for the blind.

Prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Families reported that 242 (68.9%) of the school age students attended school five-days per week. Two (n=2; 0.6%) families reported their child attended school 6 days per week, and two families (n=2; 0.6%) reported their child attended a private residential school or boarding school and was at school 7 days per week. One (n=1; 0.3%) family reported a mix of home schooling and therapies at their neighborhood school.

Families who reported their child attended school were also asked for information about the educational setting.

- 86 (24.5%) reported their child attended a public-school classroom with nondisabled peers for the entire school day.
- 81 (23.1%) reported their child attended a public-school classroom with nondisabled peers with 1-2 periods of resource or pull-out special education services.
- 62 (17.7%) reported their child attended a public-school special education class with 1-2 periods, lunch and/or recess in a classroom with nondisabled peers.
- 47 (13.4%) reported their child attended a school for the blind/residential school.
- 23 (6.6%) reported their child attended a charter or private school.
- 21 (6%) reported their child was home schooled.
- 11 (3.1%) reported their child attended a center-based school for children with varying disabilities.
- 20 Families (5.7%) did not report where their child attended school.

Families' Communication with TSVIs and O&M Specialists

The *Access and Engagement Survey* opened on April 22, 2020. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 205 (58.4%) of families reported that their child was being served by a TSVI. During April and May of 2020 only 172 (49%) of families reported that a TSVI had been in contact with their family regarding plans for service during the COVID-19 pandemic. Only 123 (35%) of families reported that their child was currently working with a TSVI.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 201 (57.5%) of families reported their child received O&M services. Between April and May of 2020 only 140 (39.9%) of families reported having been in contact with their child's O&M instructor about plans for services during the COVID-19 pandemic and only 78 (22.2%) reported that their child was currently working with an O&M instructor.

School Age Students' Access to Specialized Equipment

Children with visual impairments rely on a wide variety of specialized equipment to access community and school environments. These tools range from braille to optical devices like hand-held magnifiers or electronic magnification devices, to technology such as iPads, tablets, and braille notetakers. Access to this equipment is critical for leveling the playing field of learning and ensuring children have access to the same curriculum as their fully-sighted peers.

When asked about their child's access to specialized equipment at home during the COVID-19 pandemic only 86 (24.5%) of families of school age children said "My child has all the tools at home they need to continue learning at home." With 75.5% of families reporting their child did not have all the tools they need, this is a concern that we'll need to delve into further.