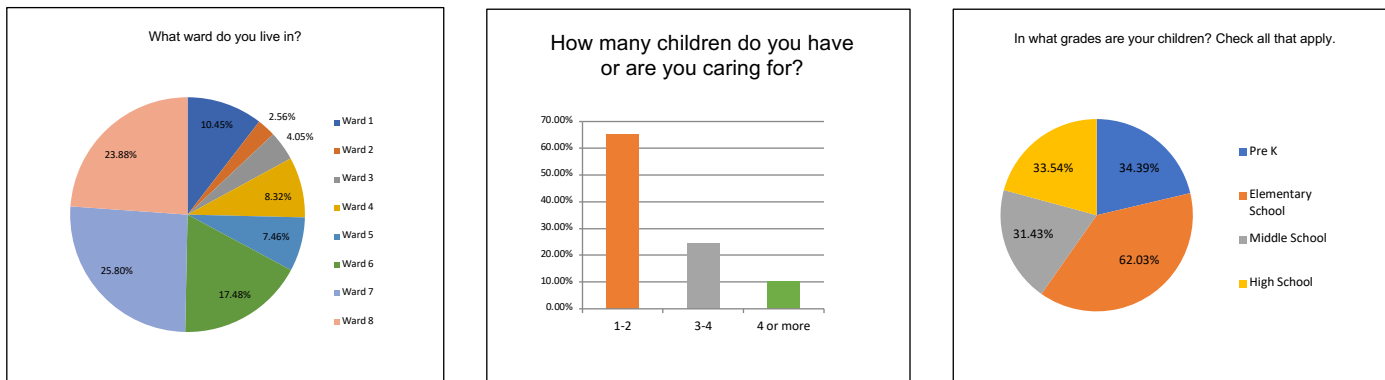


ConnectED Covid-19 Parent Survey Results

The impact of Covid-19 and the resulting anxieties about public health, the economy, and education are profound and increasingly concerning. The experience of parents in the District of Columbia is likely no different than in many other major metropolitan areas. We surveyed and interviewed parents, in particular low-income parents, to better understand how they are managing through this environment, their anxieties, their thoughts about how children are being served, and what supports parents want.

A Note About Data

We surveyed 2,234 families who we served through the High Quality Schools Campaign for the 2018/19 and 2019/20 school years. We had 540 (24%) responses of which 475 (21%) were valid based on survey completion and other errors. The survey was sent via text. We recognize that, as a result, only those with working mobile numbers were able to respond. In addition to the survey, we interviewed 14 parents to give texture to the data. As baseline demographics relevant for our purposes, we collected data on the wards they live in, number of children, and children's grade levels. Where there are small differences (less than 3%), we present the aggregate data, but where the difference is larger, we disaggregated the data — in most cases the differences are by ward. Here are the basics:



Overall Themes

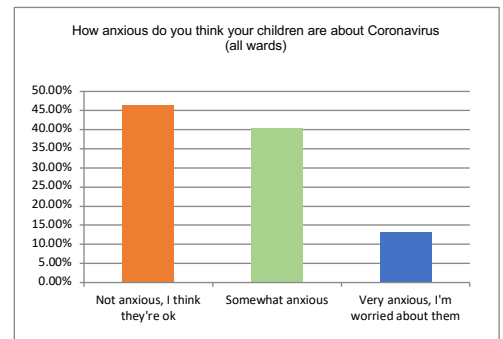
- Parents are struggling with all of the expected challenges of distance learning.** Parents are overwhelmed. This cannot be emphasized enough. Moving from being their children's first teacher to becoming their educator creates tremendous stress and insecurity for parents. As one parent plainly said, *"I don't know how to be his teacher."*
- Parents struggle, not only with being educators but also with managing day-to-day activities.** Specifically, setting a routine for the day, creating a place for home schooling, and keeping their children busy throughout the day. One parent said; *"We don't have a structure. I tried to keep the same routine at first, but when I got laid off, I stopped regular bedtime and wake up time. We were going for a walk every day to the playground but the playground [is] closed now. So now we're mainly home bound."* This is compounded for parents who are trying to work from home. For parents who are unable to work from home, child care is a particularly acute need. Trying to adhere to social distancing makes child care almost impossible.
- Parents experience a lack of distance learning consistency across schools.** This is most acute for parents who have children in different schools and thus have different degrees of support for each child. For example, one parent reported that she had been contacted just once for one of her children while for the other she described the interaction as *"too intense."* Specifically, *"...by 3pm I've received 10 emails from his school. How am I supposed to keep up with that?"* Clearly some calibration that meets parent needs is essential.

- **A startling 47% of families with children with IEPs think their children *will not* receive appropriate services.** In addition, 26% of families believe their children may receive some services but not all. Whether these beliefs are borne out, the fact that families feel this way is enough to spur immediate action to alleviate this stress. With that in mind, the reality that over 60% of these families have not been contacted to discuss services in a distance learning environment is concerning. This is slightly worse in Wards 7 & 8 where almost 64% of parents say they have not been contacted.
- **Parents remain concerned about the enrollment process.** Despite efforts to provide information, parents in Wards 7 & 8 remain concerned that they have not received enough information about the enrollment process and as a result are particularly concerned that they will lose their spots for the upcoming year. The difference between Wards 7 & 8 and others is a notable 10 percentage points.

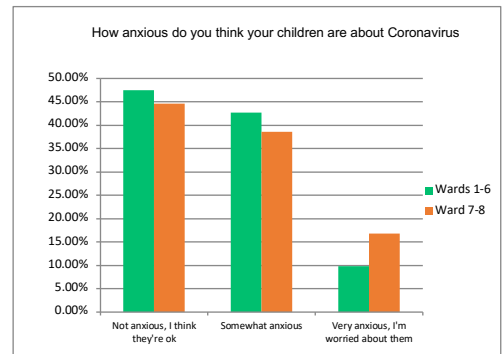
Covid-19 Anxieties and Needs

As a way to gauge the degree of anxiety experienced by families, we asked about their perceived level of their children’s anxiety, parent worries, as well as anticipated needs.

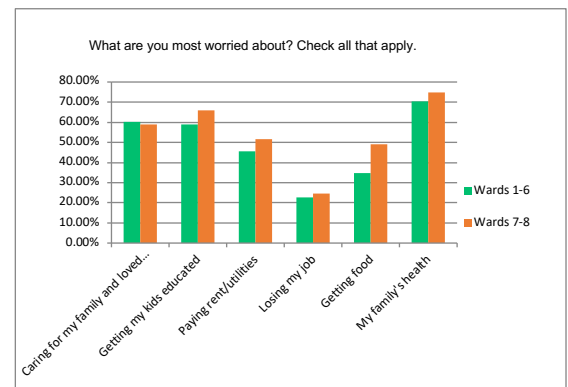
We found that 46% of parents stated that they think their children are not anxious, 41% are somewhat anxious. However slightly over 13% of parents reported that they think their children are very anxious. We did not ask what parent’s think their children are anxious about and opted rather to probe the sources of parent anxieties. However, when the data are disaggregated, parents in Wards 7 & 8 reflect a slightly higher level of anxiety, close to 17 percent.



As expected, when asked about the things about which they are most worried, a significant majority of parents (72%) report that their family’s health is the biggest area of concern. Of particular relevance for this survey is that 62% of parents report they are worried about getting their children educated. This is not surprising given that the survey was administered in the midst of the distance learning rollout. It may be that parents will feel more secure about this in the coming weeks. *In the next few weeks, we will issue a poll to get a better sense of parent concerns regarding their children’s education.*



In addition to parent concerns about their children’s education, the expected needs may not have ranked in the order we might expect. For example, when asked about needs in the next four weeks, toiletries and cleaning supplies ranked as the number one need at 68%, while food ranked as the third most important need (57%). This may be a reflection of the early stages of social distancing in which parents have not yet reached a critical food need. This may also be reflective of the degree of food insecurity pre-Covid and may thus not feel like a “new” need and the absence of basic household products may feel more acute. Activities for children also ranked high at number two (64%).

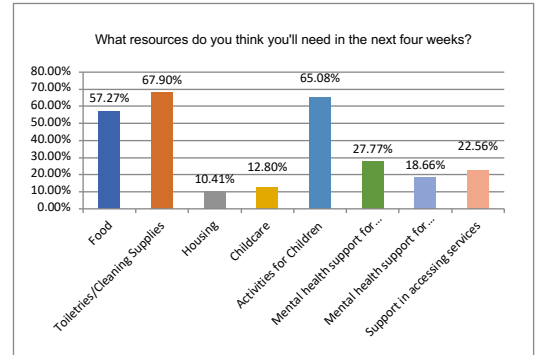


Two items to closely watch are the need for mental health services and support in accessing services. While it is unclear from this particular survey the degree of need pre-Covid, almost 28% of parents report needing mental health support for themselves and almost 19% report needing mental health support for their children.

As one parent told us, *“I’m not managing well. I’m very overwhelmed. I have taken them outside maybe twice, but I don’t feel comfortable, so we just stay inside now. But the anxiety is a lot. The anxiety won’t even let me take a nap.”*

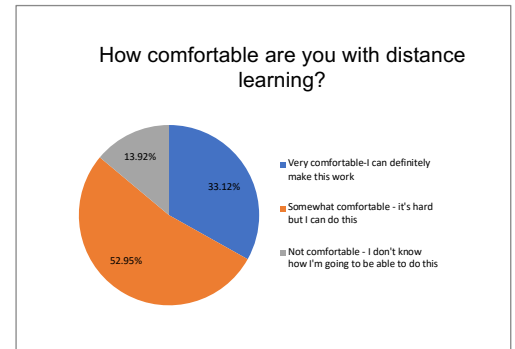
If slightly more than one in four adults and one in five children need mental health support in this period, we can assume that these numbers will rise the longer the Covid-19 situation persists. As a result, finding a vehicle to provide mental health support is critical.

Finally, while there have been many very good efforts to provide families with information and support in accessing services, over 22% of parents report needing more support.



Distance Learning

Distance learning had a rocky start in most jurisdictions; however, the numbers from our survey are encouraging. When asked about comfort with distance learning, 33% of families said they are very comfortable and 53% said they are somewhat comfortable. Having 86% of families with a moderate to high comfort level with distance learning is indeed a good start. We are, however, in the early stages of distance learning and this comfort may change over time. We will poll parents in the next couple of weeks to ask how well they are faring in this area. Of note is that 14% of families report that they are not comfortable with distance learning. It is essential that we learn more about who they are and how to build their capacity or provide additional resources.



With respect to the vehicle being used by students to learn, multiple options were available. Most parents (61%) report that laptops are the primary mode of learning followed by tablets (42%) and smartphones (36%). We can assume here that each family is using multiple devices as available.

“I move the kids around on different devices because they argue over who gets to use the laptop, and they also take my phone and use that too and then I can’t get my work done.”

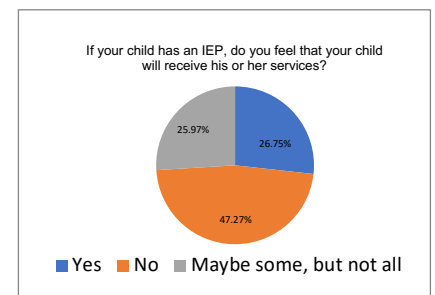
However, the disaggregated data show that 39% of students in Wards 7 & 8 are using smartphones for their distance learning — a much less than ideal situation and reflective of the lack of laptops and tablets available to these families. This may be mitigated by the city’s efforts to ensure that all families have laptops available to them.

One of the most important data points here is that 38% of families report that they are using printed packets only. This has a variety of impacts including the ability to get help from teachers, the ability of parents to support their children’s learning, the degree of difficulty in getting packets, and the ability to stay current on assignments.

Finally, 91% of families report having regular access to the internet and to WiFi and 9% say they do not. We don’t believe these data represent the depth of the digital divide but rather may be reflective of our sample.

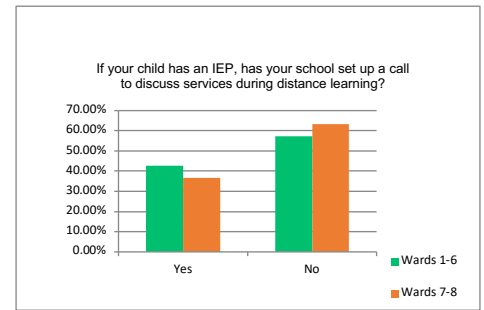
Special Education

As one might expect, parents of children with IEPs are likely to be some of the most concerned about how their children’s education will be affected by distance learning. This is borne out in our survey. In fact, of great concern is that 47% of families with IEPs report that they do not think their children will receive services through the distance learning process. Our parent interviews reflected the survey data with the added

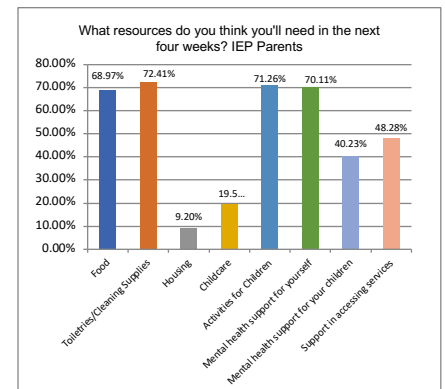


concern that parents are not confident they can serve as educators for their children. As a result, parents do not think they can help their children meet their IEP goals. While this may not be reflective of the degree of services that *will be* provided, parents who feel their children will not be served may approach distance learning with some apprehension. Additionally, roughly 26% of parents report that they think their children will receive partial services. This did not vary by ward in a significant way.

The fact that 60% of parents report they have not been contacted by their school or special education coordinator/teacher to discuss plans for distance learning is likely to have had an impact on how parents feel about the special education prospects for their children. In some cases, parents had been contacted by their general education teacher. This is slightly worse in Wards 7 & 8 where almost 64% of parents say they have not been contacted. The lack of contact from the special education teacher/coordinator creates anxiety for parents around their child’s success. Attention to this issue will be critical in alleviating parent and student stress while also building confidence in parents’ ability to manage the distance learning process.



Finally, while in general needed resources over the next four weeks remain the same, the most startling difference is in the need for mental health support. Of the parents with children with IEPs, 70% report needing mental health support for themselves and 40% report needing mental health support for their children. It is clear that these parents are struggling and part of our connection with them ought to focus on providing not only IEP services but also mental health services for children *and* their parents.



Next Steps

Parents told us that they want two things;

- First, they want people to know what they are experiencing and that they are not alone. In response, over the next several weeks, we will issue short polls to the same set of families while also returning to our interview families to gather more in-time information about their experience. We will also share our results with participating families.
- Second, parents report that they want tips on activities for their children and information about mental health and other services. In response we are initiating a *Text Tip Today (TTT)* communication approach in which we provide tips for managing stress, resource connections, and activities for children. Thus far, over 2,300 parents have elected to participate in our TTT initiative.