



**STRATEGIC ALLIANCE FOR ALBERTA
STUDENTS WITH LEARNING
CHALLENGES**

**COVID-19 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
SURVEY REPORT
APRIL 2020**

COVID-19 Inclusive Education Survey April 2020

Introduction

On March 15, 2020, the Alberta Government made the decision to close all schools in Alberta in response to the spread of the Coronavirus (Covid-19). Their decision has led to a new education delivery model. After one month from the province-wide shut-down of schools, Strategic Alliance for Alberta Students with Learning Challenges conducted an education survey to see how Alberta parents, caregivers, and students were managing with this change in learning environment and supports.

The following information in this report provides a brief summary of the data collected and key statistical findings of the survey. Please contact Strategic Alliance for Alberta Students with Learning Challenges for further information at info@strategicalliance4abkids.ca.

WHO RESPONDED?

The survey was posted on our Facebook page and open to the public from April 17, 2020 to April 30, 2020. Of the 240 respondents to the survey, 66 different school divisions were represented. Most students reflected in the survey are from pre-kindergarten to grade six, comprising 67% of the group. Also, about 86% of students are currently attending public school.

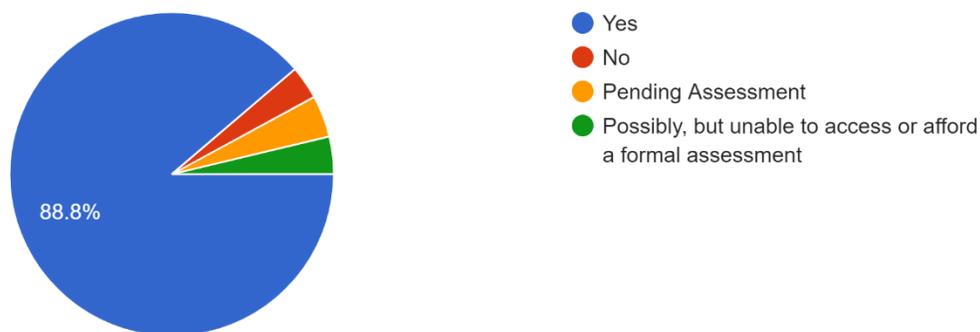
COMPLEXITY OF LEARNING CHALLENGES

Respondents to the survey were asked whether their child (or children) had a learning challenge and whether they had a special needs designation. Of those students with a designation, respondents were to specifically indicate their child's coding according to the Alberta Government's special education coding criteria.

The results of the survey show that most families have at least one child with a learning challenge. Of these students, an overwhelming 89% have a special needs designation. The top categories for coding are learning disabilities (24.3%), severe physical or medical disability (18.3%), and emotional/behavioral disability (18%). About 3.7% of respondents are unable to access or afford an assessment, and 11.7% are unsure of what their child's coding is.

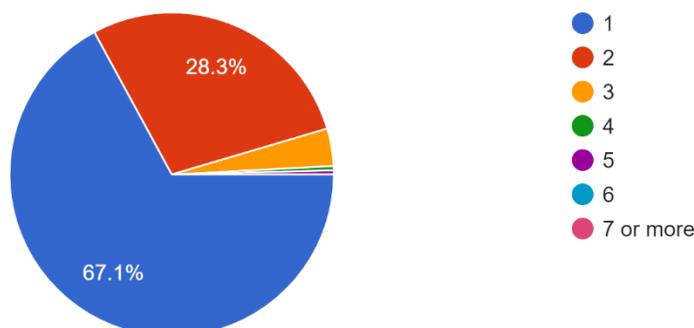
Does your child(ren) have a special needs designation?

240 responses



How many children do you have at home with learning challenges?

240 responses



COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT FROM SCHOOLS

The new education delivery model has significantly changed communication for Alberta students. Respondents were asked about their challenges in school communication and current education support. In terms of Alberta schools reaching out to students, an overwhelming 84% of responses indicate that teachers have reached out to their child (or children) since the school shutdown. Additionally, 38% of educational assistants, 22% of school principals, and 22% of inclusive learning teachers/facilitators have also connected to families.

Parents and caregivers have reached out to schools as well. The top requests these families have indicated to their school is support for educational assistants (32%), technology (22%), speech language pathologists (18%), occupational therapists (14%), and mental health (14%). Regarding the types of support parents have received from the school, they were technology (30%), educational assistants (28%), mental health (16%), and speech language pathologists (10%). About 10% indicated that they did not receive any assistance to support their child's learning challenge.

Please note that while the survey questions were clear and objective, it did not deter respondents from describing how effective the educational resources were. The survey received 140 responses expressing various issues with their child's learning and lack of resources. Here are some of their responses:

"Focus and effort better with others, not parents. We don't have skills or often the time to teach the way she needs to learn."

"My son is 4 years old. I work from home full time during covid, he is not getting the hands on help he needs. I need professional help to help him. His speech is at the level of a 2-year-old. His comprehension isn't there, no social skills."

"I don't know how to do the math they are doing right now so if they don't understand, I can't help. They require more time and help to learn concepts."

"I am trying to work full time, parent full time, and now teach full time. It's a completely unreal expectation. I am unable to meet all of my daughter's school needs at home."

“They have been very good at communicating with me and trying to modify the lessons, but I really haven't had much success. They are going to try a Zoom reading session with him to try reading with him and had him try to participate in a class zoom session. His language comprehension is low.”

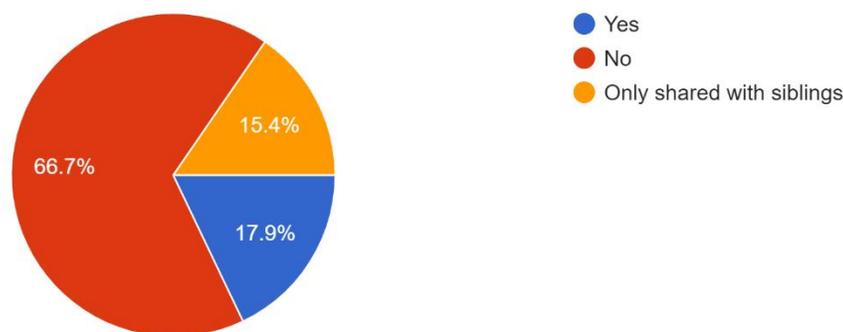
“The staff at school have been great checking in and answering any concerns that I have. Teachers have tried very hard to not apply pressure to the learning experiences at home. There has been a learning curve figuring out the google classroom piece, due to things not always being user friendly.”

“My children are crying almost every day. It is extremely challenging to complete even 1 task per day.”

TECHNOLOGY AND INTERNET ACCESS

The latter part of the survey focused on technology and internet access since this factor is vital to school communication. A large majority of responses show that about 90% of students have reliable internet access *and* regular access to a device connected to the internet. About 53% of children had a dedicated device they were currently using, and 40% had a device they shared.

If your child has access to a shared device, are adults also using that device for their job?
240 responses



When we asked if there was anything else the respondents wanted us to know about technology, we had 90 comments. Some of those comments were:

“Screens and adhd do not mix well or make for productive time.”

“My son is tech savvy. However, many teachers are not and have had to learn in a very short period of time.”

“My son has a borrowed Chromebook from his school which is working well for us. It would be better to have his own as I am worried he will damage the school one.”

“My son was given his AAC device the day I picked up all his stuff from the school. I have almost zero idea on how to get him to use it and zero direction from SLP, because according to the VP, he doesn't have access to SLP anymore.”

“Internet often can't handle if we're all using it at once, I've had work meetings dropped.”

“My son had access to visual devices/programs and apps at school that he doesn't have at home. Zoom text is a 600 dollar program. He also had gym equipment to use.”

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The final piece to the survey focused on the general financial situation parents and caregivers are facing. Respondents reported that 29% are working from home, 10% are working a combination of at home and out of the home, and 16% are completely working outside of the home. There were 38% of parents not working at all.

As for access to respite, only 20% of respondents have clearly indicated they have access, and 61% have indicated they do not. The other 19% have varying circumstances that limit their need or access to respite.

SUMMARY

We asked parents one final question. “What do your child and your family need from schools during this pandemic?” 195 responses were given. Some responses given:

“More 1on1 videocall from teachers and EAs”

“Support from school with accommodated programming.”

“A low-pressure environment. Also, each family has different abilities to participate in home learning. Our school is doing a great job of supporting without pressure and it’s greatly appreciated.”

“Ideas, connection and strategies to support her growth.”

“Less workload expectation. Upstanding parents are juggling multiple children at multiple levels and have huge responsibilities in their roles.”

“For us with special needs kiddos we need the people who they are familiar with, comfortable with and their continued work with our children to ensure their success on top of their regular home room/grade teachers. Their goals need to be addressed and ensured they can still be achieved or adjusted to meet the new home learning needs of our kiddos.”

“Our one child needs one on one help. He can’t have it. I feel like we have exhausted the resources and he has given up.”

“Honestly, I don't know. We are an overwhelmed family. There are a lot of expectations on me as a parent and an employee and now a teacher, a ball is going to drop. I will not ever consider taking a layoff, as it pays the bills, I am doing the best that I can.”

Overall, the respondents felt they can’t access adequate supports for their child or children at home. Many parents feel ill-equipped to deal with the complexity of their child’s needs. With the added challenge of self-isolation, many parents are struggling to balance work and support learning at home.

*Thank you to BcEdAccess for their assistance with the creation of the survey