



Parent Voices: COVID-19 & Pre-K Through Elementary Education

December 2020



EARLY MILESTONES
COLORADO

Key Highlights

A summer 2020 survey of the impact of COVID-19 on families revealed widespread uncertainty about education and care plans and worries about young children's mental health. In November 2020 some of these same families spoke with Early Milestones Colorado about their education and care experiences. We focused on families with children between 4 and 12 years old who are English Language Learners or receive special education services. We highlight major challenges in parents' own words.

Educational Challenges

LEARNING LOSS.

Parents are worried their children are falling behind academically and are discouraged and frustrated. The mismatch between how young children learn best and how education is being delivered in response to the pandemic is made even worse by internet access issues.

"The hybrid classes aren't working. She went from a 4.0, and her grades dropped. Online school is very hard for her since she has ADHD."

"I feel like our kids are going to be robbed of their learning... I understand there is a health crisis, and I feel like more needs to be done."

"Internet service up here has never been the greatest [and] has really impacted my child's learning development."

"Remote learning. Good luck.' It's not good for young children to learn that way."

MORE CHALLENGES FOR SPECIAL POPULATIONS.

Remote and/or hybrid education is especially difficult for students learning English and/or receiving special education services. Parents don't feel they can fill the gaps caused by the current education services.

"I don't have the tools to work with him. I would like more instruction from physical therapists to give me things to work on at home."

"My son was struggling with online learning. It was really hard on my son, because he has a delay in speech. A lot of things that he knew he had to relearn again. Nothing was being solved, and he was falling more and more behind. We ended up moving him to a different school district so he could get in-school learning."

"When my two oldest children visit, they are able to help with my youngest child's schoolwork. I don't know much English, so I try my best to help my child with their schoolwork, but I am glad they are available to ease the virtual learning transition."

COORDINATING SCHOOL, WORK, AND CARE.

Parents are juggling care plans based on changing school schedules. Work demands and increased care costs are forcing some into an impossible choice: keep their children supervised or keep their job.

My 6- and 7-year-old moved to remote learning this past Wednesday... Before, they were being transported by the school bus to the recreation center for after-school care... I might have to take them out because I really don't have funds for gas to take them and pick them up... But with them at home, I don't know how I am going to work."

"Denver Public Schools are operating child care at select locations from 8:00 a.m. to noon, which is unrealistic. I have to be at work by 8:00 and my lunch break is at noon. That is not ideal, and we have to pay \$10."

"I work at Safeway, so I am considered an essential worker. It's terrifying to think that we might be looking at another lock down and I don't know what I'm going to do. I might have to quit my job and help with child care, but then again, we have to have money coming in to survive. I'm really worried about that."

CHALLENGES OF BEING A CO-TEACHER.

With the additional demands of remote and hybrid education, parents feel overburdened and under-supported. Parents need more help, especially for children who need extra services at school.

"It just doesn't work. It's stressful for everyone. The hardest part is being home but then my attention can't be fully there. It is a hard time with their learning."

"The responsibility is 100% on parents, 100% on moms. I'm not a teacher, especially with special ed kids."

"I am not the greatest with technology, so this transition has made it difficult to meet with teachers and see how my child is doing in their schoolwork."

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL CONCERNS.

COVID-19 is straining mental health for parents and children. Parents recognize the lack of interaction is impacting their child's learning progress.

“I wish we had access to mental health tips for parenting for different ages. The lack of social interaction and structure creates depression.”

“He knows his colors, shapes, and numbers. He knows his letters, but he needs the social aspect of [school]. The Zoom classes were not giving him that.”

“He is possibly autistic, and with kids like that he needs that schedule and that routine. When he was home, it was very, very hard. When he's not in his program, his social-emotional needs aren't met.”

“It's all kind of up in the air. I'm really fearful. I'm not quite sure how we're going to make that work.”

Policy Considerations

SUPPORT PARENTS.

Most parents aren't trained educators. The co-teacher role has been thrust upon them and they are seeking guidance and extra help.

Schools can increase office hours and family engagement services to support parents and lessen their burden. Teachers can offer consistent, dedicated time to talk with parents about upcoming assignments and share tips on building their child's knowledge. Parents also need additional adult support. Consider utilizing established tutor and home visitor models to share the teaching burden.

PRIORITIZE MENTAL HEALTH.

Mental health concerns are on the rise for children, parents, and educators. Young children in more isolated conditions may have less social-emotional development, impacting learning gains. The spotlight on learning loss must also encompass support for social-emotional health.

Learning is relationship-based and the mental health of any one party can impact the ability to learn. Enhanced mental health support to teachers and children should be ongoing. As children return to the classroom, assess social-emotional development and provide additional time for related curricula. Ignoring this to focus on core subjects may backfire, creating increased stress and not achieving desired academic gains.

RE-THINK SUMMER.

Parents want more opportunities to address learning loss. The coming summer may be a safer time to return to extensive in-person learning.

Begin planning now for extensive summer learning opportunities utilizing tutors, paraprofessionals, and afterschool partners. This is especially important for the youngest students for whom online learning is least appropriate or whose parents opted out of pre-kindergarten or kindergarten.