

## Parent Voices: Suggestions for Remote Learning during COVID Pandemic and Beyond

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**Abstract:** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ways in which teachers educated students drastically changed beginning in early 2020. Educators were challenged to provide synchronous classes, asynchronous instruction, and also teach students without the use of the internet. Limited research investigating parents' experiences and suggestions for remote learning has been conducted, yet they are a significant partner in providing remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study sought to gain insight from parents by asking the question: How would you like educators to support you with teaching your kids at home during COVID-19 school closures? Results from 122 online survey showed that educators could adapt how they provide assignments/tasks regarding differentiation, instructions, and modality; make additional considerations for how families, students, and teachers communicate and access materials; and indicated a variety of reactions to remote learning such as satisfaction, teacher mindsets of understanding and flexibility, and the format of school during COVID-19. Recommendations stemming from the data have the ability to impact future remote learning related to COVID-19 or additional school closures as a result of weather and professional development.  
**Keywords:** COVID-19, parents, pandemic, remote learning, school closures, suggestions.

The novel coronavirus, COVID-19, continues to spread across the world creating unprecedented changes to all aspects of life, but especially in families and the education of their children. Parents report this new and unexpected shift from normalcy as being overwhelming. For instance, over 90% of adults claim their lives have changed at least somewhat since the pandemic began, while nearly half, 44%, report life has changed in major ways (Pew Research Center, 2020). Clearly, parents have had to make many changes in their lives to support their child's access to successful learning opportunities throughout pandemic induced adaptations.

### Parents' Struggles

Education systems throughout the world have dealt with transitions to remote learning options as teachers, parents and learners struggle to work remotely. These remote learning transitions have placed additional responsibilities for providing a productive learning environment, an unbearable burden for some, squarely on the shoulders of parents (Garbe et al., 2020; Power, 2020). These same parents continue in their attempts to support their children and their children's teachers, yielding significant and additional stress and anxiety in their lives. In addition, parents are experiencing a collision of roles as they attempt to take on duties of being a parent, an employee,

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a caretaker, and/or a teacher (Coyne et al., 2020). While managing this plurality of functions parents continue to cope with unstable financial circumstances, school closures, suspended educational services for children, uncertainties about their children's education, and further exacerbating existing anxieties and worries (Fontanesi et al., 2020). Videlicet, the impact this pandemic has had on learning has become one of the biggest challenges to ever face parents and education systems alike.

COVID-19 has affected parents in several ways, as some in particular have needed to assume more responsibility for the remote learning of their children. The U.S Department of Education's (2001) National Center for Education Statistics reported that family make-up greatly impacts the level of school involvement associated with each parent. However, the statistics presented show that in all family variations (two biological parents, one biological father and one stepmother, etc.) the mother is more involved in the child's education (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The same level of maternal involvement, or more, would likely transfer to the home environment during remote learning. Notwithstanding the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (2021) recommendations for school closures under various conditions, parents report struggling to teach children at home while balancing responsibilities, motivating their children to participate in remote learning, access of technology, and monitoring their children's learning progress (Garbe et al., 2020). In alignment with this study, Adams and Todd (2020) emphasized three challenges for parents during COVID: ensuring familial financial support by going to work, keeping their children and family safe and healthy, and supporting their children's education and academic success.

The prolonged lockdown experienced by many school districts and communities along with a lack of support likely exacerbates existing struggles and hardships (Horesh & Brown, 2020). A recent study suggests the necessity of quarantining and isolation may indeed have negative impacts on the well-being of adults (Brooks et al., 2020). These struggles can possibly lead to parental burnout; a chronic condition caused by high levels of parenting-related stress (Griffith, 2020). Maternal burnout, specifically, has been well-documented across different bodies of research including effects on mothers' career ambitions (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018), mothers of preschooler and school-aged children (Sánchez-Rodríguez et al., 2019), and mothers of children with disabilities (Kwiatkowski & Sekulowicz, 2017), among other groups. In describing parental burnout, Griffith addressed this disparity between the demands of parenting and available resources for parents to meet those demands. In a national survey, Patrick et al., (2020) found more than a quarter (27%) of parents surveyed reported aggravated mental health in their own lives, while 14% described declining behavioral health for their children. Loss of childcare, delays in health care visits, and a decreased level of food security were common contributing factors found among parents experiencing worse mental and behavioral health attributes. Similarly, a recent study found that school closures during COVID led to an increase in parenting stress (Hiraoka & Tomoda, 2020). The impact of the pandemic on parental mental health is one of many unfortunate byproducts of the shift to remote learning in an attempt to minimize the spread of this virus.

In the U.S., many states have required educational institutions to switch to remote teaching also referred to as virtual education. However, institutions and educators report not having enough time to prepare for remote teaching (Hodges et al., 2020). Students face specific challenges, as well. Students may only have their parents, grandparents or siblings in close proximity, to provide support with their education (Wang et al., 2020). Completing their education in a normal, face to face learning environment, is not an option for some. New standards and requirements have been established by educators, schools, districts and states for their learning requiring rapid adjustments by all those involved. Social distancing, isolation and remote learning may make students feel distant from their social group, directly impacting their social and emotional development (García

& Weiss, 2020). Different and multi-faceted approaches to remote learning and teaching may include unfamiliar technological hardware, software or application expertise, diverse assignments and homework expectations, and assessments possibly contributing to learner stress levels and confusion about their future. A study in China found some psychological difficulties among students including fear, clinging, inattention, and irritability experienced during this COVID-19 pandemic (Jiao et al., 2020). Experiencing a recommended or forcible quarantine may have similar effects on children's behavioral and emotional health as well as that of adults. A study in Italy demonstrated quarantine's impact on children's behavioral and emotional problems is mediated by parent's stress both at the individual and the dyadic level (Spinelli et al., 2020). The researchers also found a positive link between stress among parents and children's emotional and behavioral problems. Parents reporting higher levels of struggles in supporting children's learning than before COVID were more stressed (Spinelli et al., 2020).

### **Parental Perspectives**

Schools and parents are significant stakeholders in the education of children. Parental involvement and parents' interest in children's education is a significant factor in children's academic success (DePlanty et al., 2007; Hill & Taylor, 2004) and this factor is mostly positive (Fan & Chen, 2001; Morrison et al., 2003). Educators need to recognize the central role of families in education. However, the lack of ability to understand the culture of students and families may result in a lack of a good school-home relationship (Howland et al., 2006). A consistent and cohesive school-home relationship has positive impacts on youth (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). In addition, ample correlations have been discovered between levels of parent support significantly contributing to the success of learners in virtual learning environments (Borup et al., 2014; Lee & Figueroa, 2012). Liu et al. (2010) argued that parental involvement gets more critical when the learning environment is online.

A recent study showed a positive correlation between parental involvement and children's school adaptation (Cook et al., 2018). However, Yoder and Lopez (2013) found parents were hopeful about engaging in education but often failed to get actively involved because they felt marginalized. Marginalization emerged when parents often felt powerless to make a change in their child's education. They identified some barriers to involvement such as lack of access to computers, lack of child-care, lack of transportation, language and cultural issues and work responsibilities. DePlanty et al. (2007) pointed that when parents felt they were not a positive resource in their children's education, they were unwilling to become involved in the learning process. On the other hand, the belief among parents that children's learning is manageable resulted in lower parental stress and higher parental involvement in their children's education (Tao et al., 2019). Parental involvement may play a critical role in promoting changes in education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Since parents are increasingly held accountable and responsible for their children's remote learning throughout this pandemic, parental input in the remote learning process appears to be more significant and critical than ever.

Furthermore, long withstanding barriers to involvement related to equity are documented in the literature. Research has provided mixed data related to the impact of family socioeconomic status and child academic achievement (Chen et al., 2018). Sirin (2005) did not find statistically significant results in a meta-analysis investigating the impact of socioeconomic status on school achievement; conversely, Kingston et al. (2013) found that family-level socioeconomic status had a high impact on school readiness skills. Additionally, according to Hung et al. (2020), the

achievement gap between certain demographic groups is further exacerbated by higher parental education levels. Equity in all aspects of education is a topic that merits a great amount of attention.

## **The Present Study**

As researchers, we sought to discover how we may provide meaningful and effective support for parents trying to teach their children at home. Educators are generally well equipped with educational intervention strategies; however, it may also be important to consider the perspectives of parents as the main stakeholders in the home learning environment. Researchers and policymakers will need more than their standard toolbox of educational strategies amidst this COVID-19 pandemic. Encouragingly, hard times and struggles often lead to creative opportunities. Hearing parent's voices about remote learning may help educators and policymakers facilitate and support more effective remote learning activities and strategies at home. For nearly a decade and apart from this pandemic, remote learning has been considered one of the fastest-growing educational trends (Watson et al., 2011).

This study attempted to shed light on some supportive learning and prevention strategies suggested by parents during the COVID-19 outbreak. It explores parents' ideas on how to elicit support from educators, specifically their children's teachers. Understanding parents' suggestions are crucial to addressing their needs when creating and implementing future remote learning programs. This study aimed to analyze parent's suggestions as to how educators could support them with teaching their kids at home during COVID-19 school closures.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

One hundred twenty-two self-identified parents of school-aged children engaged in remote learning were surveyed in the Spring of 2020. Traditional face-to-face schooling ceased approximately one month prior to the survey. Respondents were responsible for supporting a student who transitioned to virtual or remote learning due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Their experiences were mainly with one child who attended elementary or middle school. Table 1 depicts additional respondent demographic information.

### **Instruments**

To gain insight into parent perspectives of educating their children during the shift to remote learning, data was collected using an online survey. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. The questionnaire in the online survey contained questions asking for basic demographic information (Table 1) and open-ended questions, such as, how respondents would like educators to support them with teaching their kids at home during COVID-19 school closures.

### **Procedure**

Quantitative data is reported using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data was analyzed by means of descriptive and simultaneous first cycle open coding and second cycle pattern coding. In descriptive coding, researchers develop topics of similar data (Saldaña, 2015); within simultaneous coding, researchers assigned one or more codes to each data set. This was done with attention to

the exact wording of the data, as well as meaning researchers inferred. The researchers felt that a large amount of detail within the rich and complex responses would be missed if they only assigned one code to each data set. Researchers would not have done justice in representing the perspectives of the respondents if they took one of a three-part answer provided and arbitrarily decided which was the most salient.

**Table 1**  
*Demographic Information of the Sample*

Demographics	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Role</b>		
Mom	113	92
Dad	6	5
Other	3	2
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>		
High school and below	5	4
Associate's degree	17	14
Bachelor's degree and above	100	82
<b>Annual Income Level</b>		
\$60,000 and below	23	19
\$60,001-\$80,000	17	14
\$80,001-\$100,000	18	15
Over \$100,000	64	52
<b>Number of Children Who Attend School Per Household</b>		
1	37	30
2	58	48
3 and more	27	23
<b>Grade Levels of Children Who Attend School</b>		
PreK-Kindergarten	66	25
1 <sup>st</sup> -3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	70	26
4 <sup>th</sup> -6 <sup>th</sup> Grade	70	26
7 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	29	11
10 <sup>th</sup> – 12 <sup>th</sup> Grade	26	1
College	8	3

Data was coded manually and independently by two researchers in order to develop reliability. Utilizing an open coding approach, the first researcher read raw data and jotted down preliminary codes, after which she identified categories into which the codes fit. The goal of open coding, as described by Bryant and Charmaz (2007) is to develop descriptors, also known as codes. The same researcher then wrote a codebook with codes, categories, and definitions of each. A second researcher independently read through the same raw data and blindly assigned a code to each, using the preliminary codes and corresponding codebook definitions. The interrater reliability score was 81% at this point in the data analysis. After this phase was completed, the two researchers

jointly discussed codes that did not match and agreed upon a final code for each set of data. Throughout this final process, codes were recategorized, eliminated, relabeled, and subsumed and definitions were refined in a process called pattern coding (Elliot, 2018). The following section summarizes and discusses the results of these efforts.

**Results**

In analyzing participant responses to the following question: *How would you like educators to support you with teaching your kids at home during COVID-19 school closures?*, three predominant themes emerged in the survey responses: assignments/tasks, access, and reactions to remote learning (Table 2). These three themes reflect areas of support that were desired by the parent respondents.

**Table 2**  
*Themes of Parents’ Suggestions for Educators*

Themes	Frequency of Subtheme	Percentages of Respondents (out of 122)
<b>Assignment/Tasks</b>		
Differentiated Assignments	25	20%
Modality of Assignments.	18	15%
Instructions for Assignments	16	13%
<b>Access</b>		
Communication	25	20%
Materials	13	11%
<b>Reactions to Remote Learning</b>		
Satisfied Parents	32	26%
Didn’t Directly Answer Question	16	13%
Teacher Mindsets	8	7%
Format of School during COVID-19	5	4%

***Assignment/Tasks***

Within the Assignments/Tasks theme, twenty-five responses (20%) in the survey indicated a desire for educators to give *Differentiated Assignments* by either giving less work but making sure the work assigned is essential to student learning or assigning the same amount of work but providing additional time to complete it. Data suggested that parents felt this would help make remote learning manageable for the student and the family. Three parents suggested eliminating work from encore classes such as art, music, and so on. One response that captures this sentiment is the following:

*Eliminate activities from ‘specials’ teachers. We can hardly get through the academic minimum [assignments] and I feel less [successful] not getting to these other activities. It’s so hard to know what would be better/worse. Each child is different and each family’s stressors during this*

*time are so different. Part of me says the best support would be to be well, take care of your children and try to do some reading and math with them. But mostly, be well and keep them well.*

A second parent felt similarly, “Continue to focus on the most important and skip the rest. We don’t have time for the art and music, unfortunately.” One respondent wrote, “No assigning ‘extra’ work as we feel the need to do everything assigned.” Regardless, the difference between “busy work” as other parents wrote and optional enrichment (or ‘extra’ work) should be made clear.

The second biggest subtheme is the *Modality of Assignments*. Respondents made suggestions on assignment modality, such as including more variety and some assignments that are not internet/computer-based. Parents want their children to have “multiple ways to access learning material and turn in assignments” and for educators to “change the format throughout assignments, not all in front of a screen.” Data also suggested differences in preference with paper-based assignments, as noted in these two responses, “Simple paper assignments. Reading, writing, math.” and “less worksheets, more projects.”

The subtheme *Instructions for Assignments* within the Assignments/Tasks theme was noted in sixteen different responses. These parents shared a recommendation that teachers provide directions via video or teaching via video, in synchronous online meetings or through recordings. Directions and activities provided completely online and via written text do not meet the learning needs of all remote learners. Parents wanted “more videos/lectures of them teaching” and asked for teachers to “video themselves teaching how to do the problems.” Secondly, without directions and teaching provided via video, students also miss out on having a personal connection with their teacher and classmates, as this parent writes, “Continue providing videos explaining concepts- this has been most helpful not only academically, but emotionally for my son as he can see familiar faces.” Some parents communicated that they know how difficult it is for educators to “learn to make videos and post assignments online [however] it has been a big help!!” and are grateful they are doing so. In addition to academic learning and socio-emotional reasons, one parent wrote of how “It’s so much better having direction come from the teacher than just from the parent.” This final point of parents concerns regarding how much they are taking on the teacher role may alleviate some of that responsibility by means of directions and teaching via video.

## **Access**

Practices related to Access of the teacher, schedule, and materials were the second most commonly mentioned suggestion or request of educators during school closure. The two subthemes that permeated the survey with regards to access were *Communication* and *Materials*.

Within the *Communication* subtheme, survey participants shared feelings about the availability of teachers for questions and support and a need for communication with parents. Eight respondents made suggestions regarding the quantity, type, or purpose of *Communication*. The majority of respondents expressed a desire for increased communication during times of remote learning, and one respondent stated, “Constant communication is a must.” However, one respondent expressed the desire to “limit lengthy emails,”. Similarly, one respondent noted that parent availability to communicate during a teacher’s typical workday was limited and wrote, “Realize we cannot reply to emails and texts all day long. We are working a job.” Insights shared about the type of communication requested included “communicate my children’s progress to me” and “work not turned in.” One respondent articulated the desire to have clear direction on the role of a caregiver/learning coach during school closure and wrote, “The educators can be more

transparent with what they need from us parents.” This comment is a reminder that parents found themselves in a new role during school closures and the partnership between parents and teachers was largely undefined.

Another eight respondents desired increased availability of teachers for questions and support. Five of the eight respondents used the phrase “be available” in their response to how educators may support them with remote learning. One respondent specified “available for emails and phone calls.” Another respondent requested, “Just call and say hi and chat,” indicating a desire for more opportunity to build or sustain the teacher/student relationship. Yet another respondent says, “be more available to help kids be more independent,” suggesting that more teacher availability may decrease student reliance on caregiver support. Only one participant mentioned the desire for “quicker feedback on activities” as a means of supporting student remote learning. The comment “Be available as help is needed,” conveys the desire to have a mechanism to access the instructor at a point of need, or the desire for on-demand support.

Of the 122 participant responses, thirteen responses were coded into the subtheme *Materials*. This subtheme ultimately contained three main ideas: lack of access to internet, organization of materials, and online learning platforms. The majority of data in this subtheme was coded as online learning platforms. Online learning platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Schoology, Canvas, Google Classroom and so on have become a necessary part of remote learning, but one that has proven to confuse many families. Online learning platforms are an efficient means by which teachers can communicate with individual students, the whole class, and parents. They can assign work to the students, share videos, and have synchronous virtual classes via an online learning platform. Data from the study at hand demonstrates that parents noted a need for training and/or a desire for “a one stop shop educational platform.” Other respondents reiterated this by sharing that they are required to switch from one “video platform to another” and that “consistency” would help.

In addition to teachers providing instruction and communication via online learning platforms, they need to ensure students have opportunities for social interaction, are participating in the lessons, and also develop a means of assessing them. The following respondent laid out the “proof” they are required to submit:

*Sign in and read stories from this website; sign in to that math website to work on facts, but for timed tests you have to email me the result; for this assignment take a picture and upload; for that assignment record yourself reading; use google docs; use seesaw; use Epic. And then FOR FUN here are 25 other websites you should really check out as additional resources.*

This parent feels the evidence they are required to provide to the school is excessive, but also that there are too many online learning platforms they are required to use.

### ***Reactions to Remote Learning***

The three subthemes within the Reactions to Remote Learning theme are *Teacher Mindsets*, *Format of Schooling during COVID-19*, *Satisfied Parents*, and *Didn't Directly Answer Question*. During these unprecedented times, some parents requested that teachers display mindsets of understanding or flexibility, indicated they wanted a change to the format of schooling, or were satisfied with schooling. Eight respondents articulated a desire for teachers to be understanding (5 respondents) or flexible (3 respondents), necessitated by the increased demands on families, level of hardship, individual family differences, and lack of pedagogical training.

Responses painted various reasons why parents hoped for *Teacher Mindsets* of flexibility and understanding during remote learning. One parent articulated the responsibility of supporting remote education was in addition to usual work responsibilities and responded to the question by writing, “Understanding parents taking on this new role to guide their child’s remote learning while often continuing work responsibilities.” To summarize the intersection of additional responsibilities and hardship, another respondent wrote:

*Continue keeping in mind that many families are working from home and some have lost jobs and therefore incomes so continued balance with both time and expectations and check ins with socio-emotional pieces and non-academics at times is so important. Remembering that some families have multiple children spanning the educational system is also important to keep in mind when sending things home to families.*

The above comment also articulates the variation among families. To further illustrate the request to honor individual family differences, one respondent wrote, “Each child is different and each family’s stressors during this time are so different.” Underscoring the differences among families, a former teacher noted, “I just want to be left to do my own thing,” indicating her desire for flexibility with the curriculum and instructional delivery. Lastly, one respondent noted the need for understanding as a result of the lack of training for the role as educational guide and requested, “Continue to grant us flexibility. We’re doing the best we can and we don’t know how to teach, not like educators do.”

Thirty-two of the 122 respondents noted satisfaction with the support they were receiving during the Spring 2020 COVID-19 school closures. A handful of respondents provided data indicating a desired change to the Format of School during COVID-19. Two respondents suggested school should be discontinued during the crisis, only one suggested face to face instruction resume, and two noted a need for significant changes, albeit unspecified changes, on the part of educators in order to make remote learning more successful.

Finally, it is to be noted that seven respondents were unsure of how educators could support them with the remote learning during school closure and nine did not directly answer the question. Perhaps this represents a level of satisfaction (although not noted in the count of respondents that expressed satisfaction as it could not be clearly delineated) as respondents had not identified a need or alternatively a response of “not sure” or “don’t know” may signify a feeling of being overwhelmed.

## **Discussion**

With the rapid shift to remote learning during COVID-19, it would be helpful to receive suggestions and comments about remote learning from different viewpoints of various stakeholders to improve the capacity of remote learning. These days, all stakeholders are trying to adjust to remote learning and some students are satisfied with remote learning as is, while others are not satisfied with remote learning due to the lack of synchronous educational activity and lack of communication (Lall & Singh, 2020). Parents also reported some struggles during school closures due to the pandemic such as having difficulty balancing roles and responsibilities, motivating children to learn, accessing learning programs and assisting children in achieving targeted learning outcomes (Garbe et al., 2020). Thus, the study at hand aimed to examine parents’ suggestions for educators’ supports to teach their kids at home during COVID-19 school closures. Based on

responses parents shared about their struggles, researchers categorized suggestions into themes regarding Assignments/Tasks, Access, and Reactions to Remote Learning.

### **Assignments/Tasks**

In general, parents are willing to support their children's learning but do not always know how to help (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). Based on parents' suggestions, three ways educators can help are to aide parents in *Differentiating Assignments*, providing *Instructions for Assignments*, and adapting the *Modality of Assignments*. Parents' homework involvement has an influence on student achievement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001); it is critical that parents know how to help their children with learning at home, especially during times of remote learning. However, Clausen et al. (2020) found that parents were often unaware of assignments and that teachers' communication with their students were not satisfactory during COVID. In the current study, parents made various recommendations about differentiating assignments including giving less work or more time to complete the assignments. Suggestions from some parents revolved around prioritizing academics and removing assignments related to "specials" or encore classes such as physical education, music, and art. The arts, however, have been proven to improve reading and math skills, critical thinking capacity, social tolerance, and memory skills, among other benefits (Ruppert, 2006). Some might consider removing these types of classes as a step in the wrong direction for the students, doing more harm than good.

In addition to providing *Differentiated Assignments*, parents wanted to fully understand the directions given by teachers and the assigned activities to help their children. In order to do so, they stated they need clear and understandable instructions and teaching, preferably via video. These recommendations indicate that parents had difficulty comprehending the main idea of assignments, how to teach the content to their child(ren), and/or how to give directions for completing assignments to their child(ren). Given that parents have other responsibilities, the time they can spare to support children with their schoolwork is limited; therefore, they feel that the time needs to be dedicated to essential learning or more time needs to be given for learning and support to occur. Research has suggested that homework improves learning achievement and children whose families support them in completing homework experience an increase in grades (Toney et al., 2003). Providing differentiated assignments is a means that teachers could provide in order to give parents the tools necessary to help their child(ren) complete their assignments.

In addition, hands-on experiences have been shown to positively impact student achievement (Freeman et al., 2014); such experiences may be lacking in some forms of remote learning. For this reason, students could benefit from more assignment options. Educators may consider using various modalities throughout the remote learning time to meet students' and families' unique needs. Conversely, parents suggested more variety in assignments, not only computer-based ones. Children in today's time spend more time on technological devices than ever before and now society is seeing that the amount of time has increased due to remote learning (Parents Together Foundation, 2021). Naturally, parents are concerned about the amount of time children spend on tablets, phones, and laptops/computers, as increased screen time has been correlated with decreased grades (Mundy et al., 2020) and have a desire for them to complete some assignments without the use of technology, as the current study reveals.

## Access

Access to communication with educators and materials was a significant finding in the study. Several studies pointed out that home-school communication had a positive effect on improving student learning (Cowan et al., 2002; Muller, 1998; Sexton, 1990). Thompson et al. (2015) revealed an increase in parents' preferences for using email, text-messaging and social media to communicate teachers of their children. Because communication is so easy to receive by means of technology, parents can readily read updates on student progress, grades, and participation. The study indicated a desire for educators to be more available for questions and support, as well. Related to the first theme (Assignments/Tasks), in order to better understand assignment directions and content, parents would like to contact the teachers more often and would like increased availability of teachers for their questions, especially in this unprecedented time. A request for more and various forms of communication would indicate parents' eagerness to help their children with their learning, as well. Murray et al. (2015) showed that parents who were more engaged in education activities at home had more frequent communication with teachers. Educators walk a fine line between too much communication and too many materials and not enough; as survey respondents also shared suggestions for eliminating extra materials and work and not communicating in excess.

In a recent study on parents' biggest struggles during remote learning, Garbe et al. (2020) found that parents were concerned if children would meet the expected learning outcomes, specifically in relationship to curriculum. As demonstrated in the current study, a concern about Materials, specifically online learning platforms and being able to navigate and use them in an efficient, meaningful way to support students in meeting the learning outcomes, is a challenge. Online learning platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Schoology, Canvas, Google Classroom and ZOOM have become a necessary part of remote learning, but they can be confusing for families. Parents may be lacking technological literacy to use those online platforms effectively (Goodall, 2016). They have many functions that require some training or experience to navigate them effectively, or even to simply log on and participate with video and/or audio. While put in place to help families access materials, they can prove to be a barrier to access for some families.

## Reactions to Remote Learning

Parents requested that teachers display a mindset of understanding and flexibility. As a whole world, we are adjusting to the 'new normal.' This new normal could be a learning curve for parents. They have been struggling balancing roles and responsibilities, motivating children to learn, accessing learning programs and assisting children in achieving targeted learning outcomes (Garbe et al., 2020). Rapid changes and dealing with uncertainties also can contribute to parents' desire for more understanding and flexibility from educators. The pandemic has led to a rise in mental health issues (Li et al., 2020; Namli, 2020; Rehman et al., 2021). To alleviate these issues, parents would like to experience more understanding and flexibility from educators.

It is crucial to report that a large number of parents noted satisfaction with the support they were receiving during the Spring 2020 COVID-19 school closures. The researchers felt that the level of satisfaction was worth noting beyond that of the underlying reasons, especially since the question did not specifically request respondents to articulate a level of satisfaction. Rather, approximately a quarter of respondents spontaneously articulated their level of satisfaction. Upon further analysis of the responses that conveyed satisfaction, it was noted the feeling of satisfaction

could be contributed to some of the other subthemes, including Assignment/Tasks, Access to Communication and Materials and Teacher Mindsets.

## **Limitations**

The study at hand, as with any, has several limitations that have influenced the data and conclusions. Our survey methodology relied on volunteer sampling by means of social media. By nature, social media requires access to technology and the internet, thus our survey would not justly represent parent perspectives of those who do not have access to technological devices and the internet. In order to account for this, face-to-face sampling would be necessary for a future study to better represent this group of individuals. Secondly, parents in the sample self-disclosed middle-middle/upper class income levels and bachelor's degree or higher education levels. Because the population of the U.S. does not mirror these demographics, future studies would need to widen their sample size in order to account for other socioeconomic groups and education levels. Finally, most participants identified themselves as mothers. Future studies should take care to survey a variety of caregivers including grandparents, fathers, babysitters/nannies, and possibly even siblings. Families with various technology access, socioeconomic statuses, income levels, and parental roles support learning differently and the body of research related to parent voices of remote learning would benefit from a more representative sample size.

This study was conducted just after the decision was made to stop teaching face-to-face and instead teach remotely (Spring 2020). The lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education systems and on the nature of parental thoughts regarding suggestions for remote learning is yet to be realized. Additional, long term research must be conducted to better understand the overall impact of the pandemic on the role parents play in the learning process for their children. Follow up interviews with parents would allow a deeper understanding of their thoughts and suggestions for improving the online learning environment.

## **Recommendations**

The following list identified potential recommendations for school districts and teachers to consider, should continuing or additional remote learning need to occur.

- As parents sought differentiated assignments, developing and cultivating relationships with families will indicate unique desires for quantity, priorities, flexibility with due dates, and modality of assignments.
- Parents surveyed shared a desire for varying levels of communication with teachers. Some want more and others indicated a desire not to be overwhelmed with communication. Knowing each families' preferences or surveying families in each class could provide the teacher with a range of how often families would like communication.
- Many parents indicated they want teachers to be available to meet with themselves, their children, and the class as a whole to teach and conference synchronously. This may be one of the ways educators consider differentiating assignments and adapting the modality of assignments.
- The need for teachers to have a mindset of flexibility and understanding was also evident in the data. While there may be no informal questions to ask or survey to conduct, educators could take care to present these types of dispositions in emails or meetings with parents and students.

Recommendations resulting from the data should also call attention to the high level of satisfaction for how teachers are educating students during COVID-19 remote learning. Conversely, it should highlight parents' desires to change the format of school during this time to cancelling it, resuming face-to-face instruction, or simply a need for a significant change. All of the above recommendations require teachers to engage with individual parents to develop an understanding of their unique situation and individual preferences. While the responsibilities placed on teachers are at an all-time maximum, doing so may reduce some stressors, as teachers may find that parents want less communication or prefer prioritized assignments when possible, translating to less time planning, instructing, and grading. Notably, educators are working hard and doing their best to meet the diverse needs of families during this time.

With large scale pandemic-driven remote learning coming to an end, many of these recommendations can be followed during the return to face-to-face instruction. Differentiated instruction, individualized family communication, and flexibility and understanding are all best practices in education.

## Conclusion

During COVID school closures, the traditional roles and interactions between teachers, parents, and teachers changed. To increase the success of remote learning, a shared understanding of roles should be defined. At the same time, stakeholders need to be cognizant that the roles that parents and caregivers may take may look different from family to family as unique factors contribute to each; similarly, employers may need to provide additional flexibility to parents and caregivers who are supporting remote learners. As the pandemic continued, educators and families raised some concerns with suggestions related to assignments/tasks, access to communication and materials, and school and teacher reactions to remote learning.

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