

In the Voices of Parents:

Mothers Navigating the COVID-19 Pandemic

November 2020

Part 1

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude and appreciation for all of the hard work and dedication provided by Marquinta Thomas and the Outreach and Referrals Team:

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INTRODUCTION

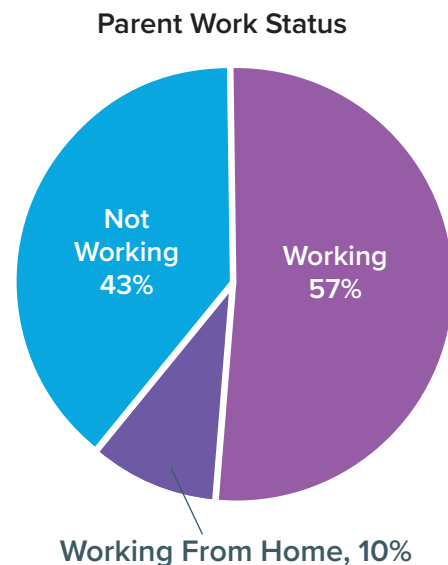
The COVID-19 pandemic has placed a great deal of stress on families with children and their communities. At Illinois Action for Children, the child care referral teams who help parents find child care wanted a systematic way to collect and communicate some of the stories they had been hearing regarding the effect of the pandemic on families and their child care. Working with Illinois Action for Children’s research team, they developed a survey questionnaire and called Cook County parents who had used their referral services over the past year. Calls were made in June and July 2020, collecting 144 surveys. These parent surveys are intended to be Part 1 of an on-going series of conversations with the parents. In future months, the referral teams will complete in-depth interviews with a subset of the parents to follow up on how the families are faring over time.

What follows is a summary of the survey results. We note that this is not a random sample of parents and is not necessarily representative of the experience of all Cook County parents. It does, however, reflect the thoughtful responses of a large group of parents who had challenges with employment and child care during and just after the emergency period.

ABOUT THE PARENTS

One hundred and forty-four parents with at least 312 children completed the survey. Among parents who gave their age, most (72 percent) were in their 20s or 30s. (See the tables below). Two-thirds (66 percent) identified as Black or African-American, almost one-quarter (23 percent) identified as Hispanic or Latinx, with the remaining 11 percent being Caucasian or white, Asian, mixed race, other or unknown.

More than half (57 percent) of the parents were working at the time of the interview. Thirty percent of the working parents were working from home – 17 percent of all parents interviewed. The Latinx parents were more likely to be working – 67 percent to 54 percent for the others. No age group or racial or ethnic group had a particularly greater likelihood of working from home.



Parent Age	
Age Group	% of parents
20s	31%
30s	41%
40s	8%
50s	1%
No Answer	19%

Number of Children Parent Has	
# Children	% of parents
1	33%
2	35%
3	20%
4 or more	12%

Parents with Children in Age Group	
Age Group	% of parents
Age 0 - 2	41%
Age 3 - 5	49%
Age 6 & over	63%

Note: Some parents have children in multiple age groups.

Parent Race / Ethnicity	
Race/Ethnicity	% of parents
Black/AA	66%
Latinx	23%
White	4%
Other	4%
No Answer	3%

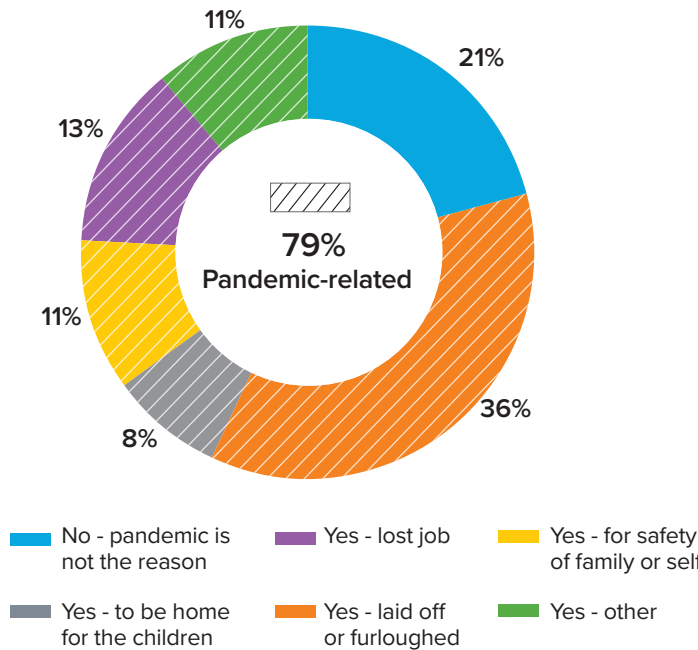
FINDINGS

We divide the findings into three sections: findings on parents who were not working, on parents who were working and what all parents reported.

PARENTS WHO WERE NOT WORKING

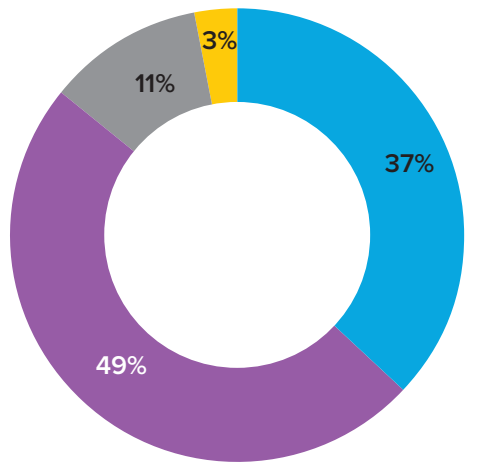
Sixty-two of the parents interviewed were not working at the time. Four-in-five of these parents (79 percent) reported that they were not working for a reason related to the pandemic. Almost half (49 percent) either were laid off from work or furloughed (36 percent) or lost their job entirely (13 percent) due to the pandemic. About one-fifth (19 percent) were not working for more personal pandemic-related reasons: They said they were home out of concern for the safety of a family member or themselves (11 percent) or home to be with their children (8 percent), apparently due to school closings or child care issues. Other reasons (11 percent) included two parents getting sick with COVID-19, a mother recently giving birth (though she said the pandemic is the reason she is not working), and a parent's culinary school was closed.

Not working because of the pandemic?



About half (49 percent) of those who were not working indicated they were looking for work, while more than one-third (37 percent) were waiting to be called back. Other responses included two parents waiting for child care arrangements so they could start working.

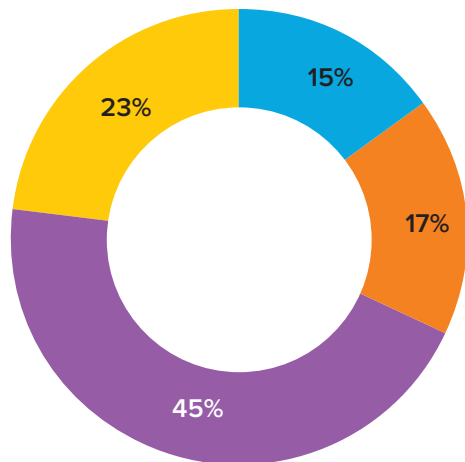
What are parents doing while not working?



- Waiting to return to work
- Not looking
- Looking for work
- Other

Parents waiting to return to work or looking for work reported who would care for their children when they returned. Almost half indicated that their children would attend a center-based program, mainly a child care center or Head Start, though a few expected to use school-based preschool. About as many planned to use a family member (15 percent) as said they would use a home-based child care provider (17 percent). Almost one-quarter did not know. It is relatively unusual that no parent mentioned the other parent, a friend or a neighbor.

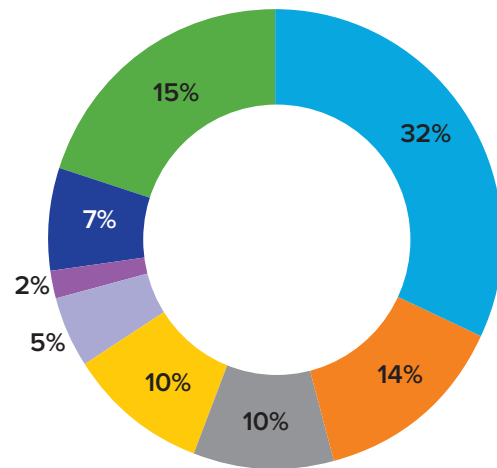
Who will care for your children when you return to work?



- Family member
- Center / Head Start / School / Preschool
- Home provider
- Don't know

When asked about their fears or concerns in returning their children to child care, providers gave a range of answers. The two greatest concerns were the child/ family's and the provider's health and safety: "Kids touching each other, coughing and sneezing without covering their mouths. Providers that don't cover their mouths. How is DCFS going to monitor the programs." Of those parents who were concerned about their child's health and safety, four parents stated that they were concerned because they have a child with asthma. Twenty percent of parents reported that they had no concerns.

Do you have any fears or concerns about your child being in child care?

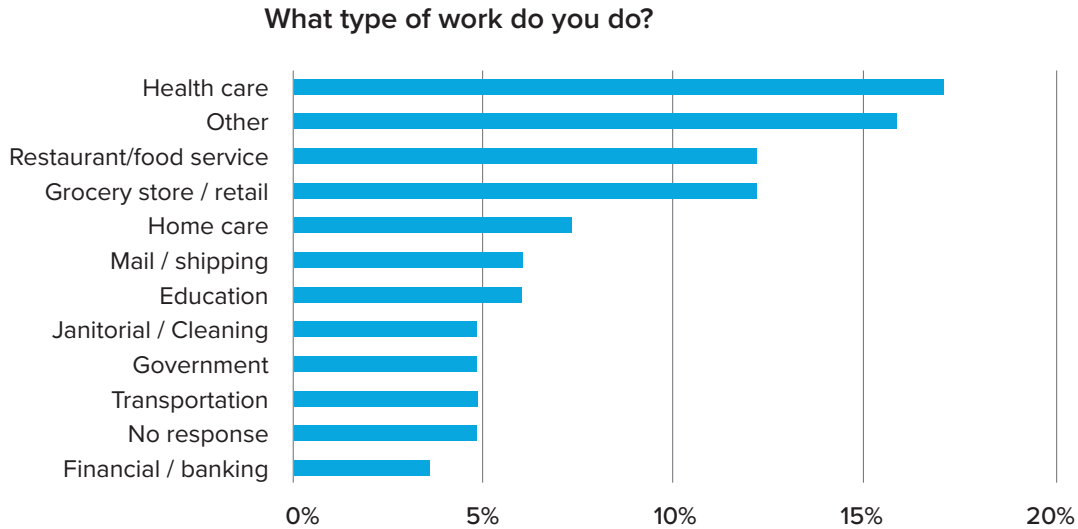


- Child or family member's health/safety
- Cost of care
- Provider's health/safety
- Finding child care
- Schedule of care
- Transportation
- Other
- None

PARENTS WHO WERE WORKING

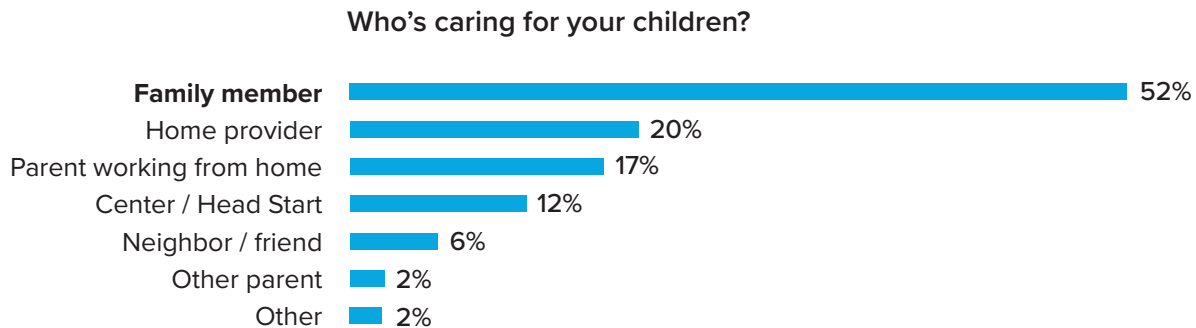
Of the 82 parents who were working at the time of the interview, almost three-quarters (72 percent) said they were essential workers and just 17 percent were not. The rest did not know or did not respond.

Forty-one percent of the working parents worked in health care, food services, or grocery and retail stores. (“Other” jobs include factory work, physical trainer, and security and corrections.)



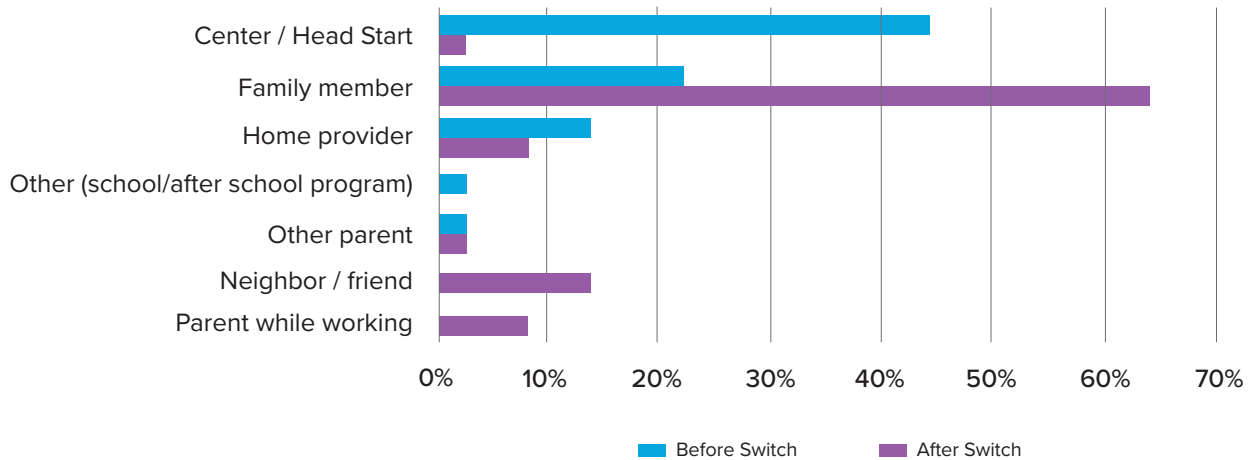
Child care has been a challenge for many of these parents. When asked whether they recently had to miss work because they lacked child care, 40 percent responded that they had missed work. When asked whether they were using the same child care they used before the pandemic, 44 percent indicated that they had switched their provider after the pandemic began. At least 10 parents described the switching process as hard or stressful because they could not find care or find consistent care.

About half of the working parents were using family members for child care while they worked. Twenty percent used a home-based provider. Another 19 percent either took care of their children themselves while working from home or used the other parent.



Parents who switched providers were most likely to *switch from* a child care center or Head Start program (probably because the program closed or reduced enrollment). They were more likely to switch to a family member, friend or neighbor for care during the pandemic. This confirms what we already know about family, friend and neighbor child care: It is the most flexible and trusted care for many parents. As one parent reported, care by family members “*is and has always been the safest way to protect her children.*”

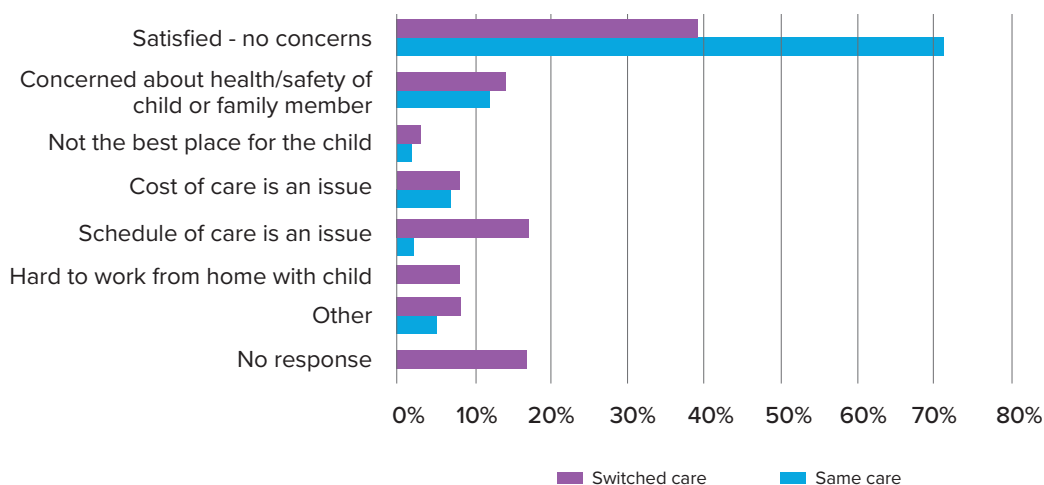
For parents who switched provider after pandemic hit, who cared for children before & after switch?



At the same time, care from family members or friends was not always consistent enough for parents. One parent worried “*what will happen if her aunt is busy or starts back working...She would prefer her child to be in child care.*” Several parents described having to work around family members’ schedules, which as one parent said, can change regularly and at the last minute. Another relied on her elderly mother to care for her children and worried about the stress it put on her.

Parents who kept the same care were more likely to be satisfied with their care (71 percent) than those who switched care (39 percent). The schedule or availability of care was the most common concern for parents who switched care. Working from home with a child was also difficult. Parents who switched care and those who kept the same care both reported concerns about health and safety and the cost of care. Some from both groups also felt their care lacked enough activities for the children, specifically learning, social or outdoor activities.

Are you satisfied with your care arrangement?



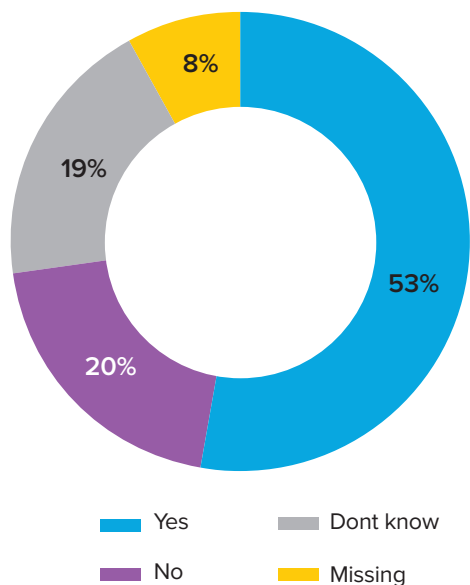
About half of the parents (53 percent) who switched their care said they will return to the child care program if the program re-opens. The rest said they would not return or that they were unsure. Again, parents expressed health and safety concerns with switching back to the previous child care: *“Will the safety policies and procedures of the program be enforced to staff, families and other people?”* Two parents were concerned with having young children wear a mask. Others had no concerns with switching back.

Some parents knew when their program planned to re-open, while others did not know whether or when their program would re-open and if the program would have a spot for their child.

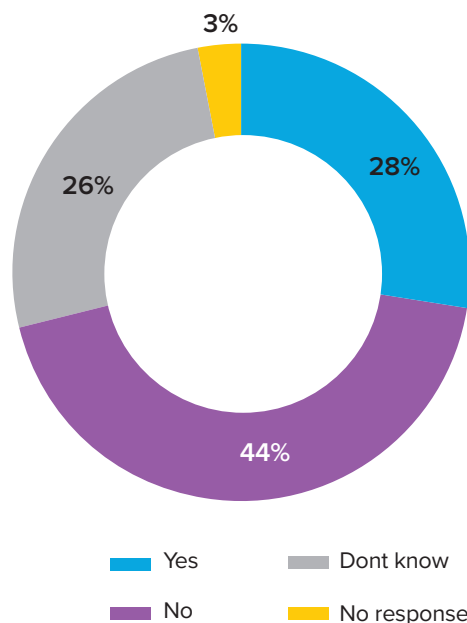
ALL PARENTS

Community Resources: When parents were asked if they felt their community had enough resources during this pandemic, only 28 percent felt they did. Business closings due to looting during protests of police violence, no access to nearby grocery stores or pantries, and lack of masks were some of the reasons parents felt their community did not have what it needed during the pandemic. In terms of children, parents said that child care and activities for children (including teens) were limited in their community.

Are you planning to return to your previous care if they re-open?

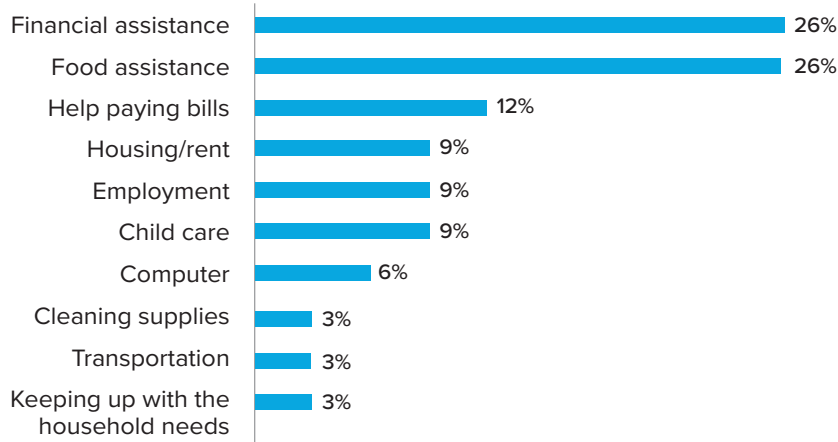


Do you think there are enough resources for families in your community during this crisis?



Despite the limited resources in the community, 62 percent felt that their own family has what they need. Thirty-five percent said they do not have what their family needs and 3 percent did not respond. Of those who felt their family did not have what they need, financial assistance and food assistance (26 percent) were the two biggest needs followed by help paying bills (12 percent).

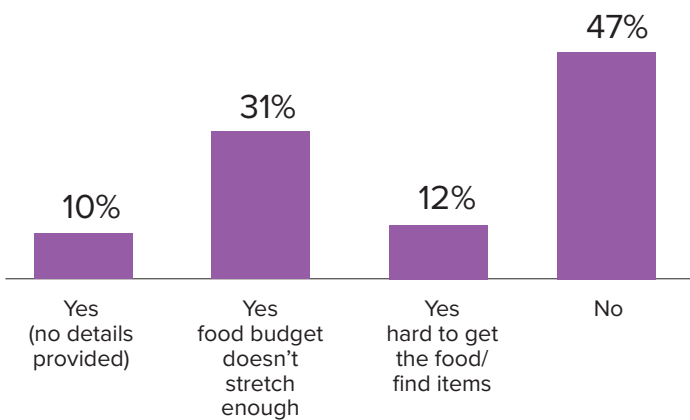
What does your family need during this time?



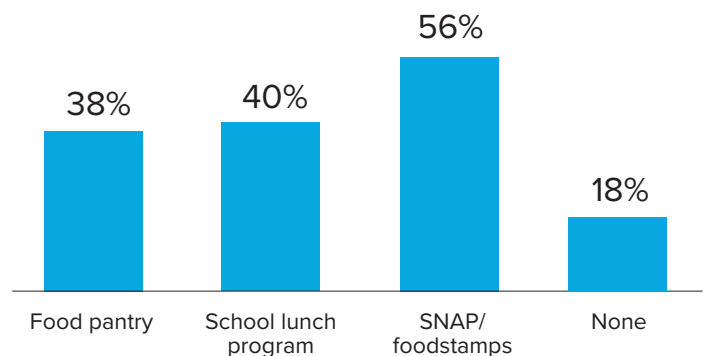
We also directly asked parents if their family had issues with having enough food. About half (53 percent) did experience difficulty feeding their family, with budget issues as the main reason (31 percent). A couple of parents added that they were affected by the looting that caused the shutdown of stores or needed transportation to travel to stores.

The interviewer asked if the parent has tried to access food resources. This question was only asked if the interviewer felt it was relevant. Fifty-six percent (80) said they were using or have applied to get SNAP (food stamps). One parent added that although she applied for SNAP, her application was declined and she has not been able to talk to a representative.

Has your family had issues with having enough food?

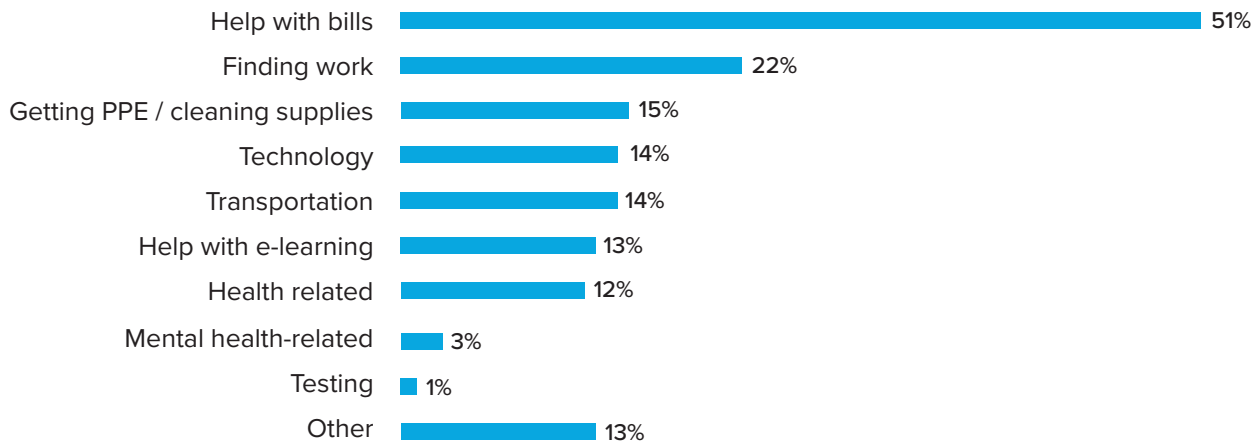


Have you tried to access any food banks, school lunch program, SNAP or other resources?



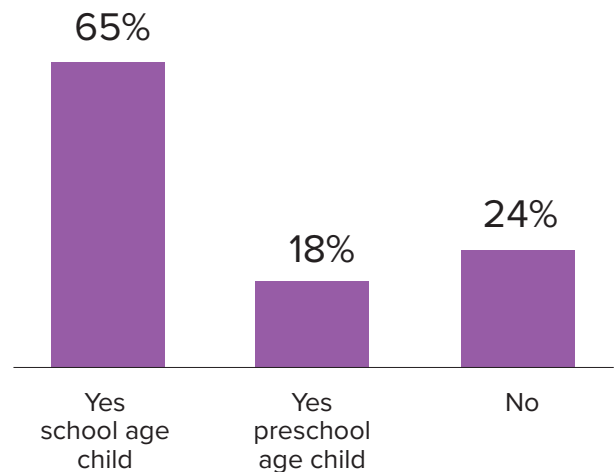
When parents were asked about other resources they need, half of the parents (51 percent) said they need help with bills. Twenty-two said finding work and 15 percent stated access to personal protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies. “Other” responses include child care, clothing, diapers and housing. One parent with housing needs said that the landlord was trying to evict her and she has already received an eviction letter.

Are there other resources that you need?



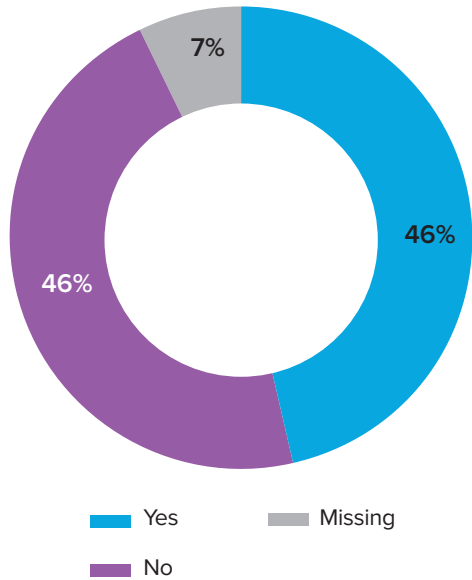
Remote Learning: Parents with children ages 3 to 12 were asked if during the spring shut down their children were part of virtual learning activities through their school or early learning program. Seventy-six percent reported having at least one child doing virtual learning activities. The majority of the parents did not report any barriers to their child’s participation in virtual learning. For those who did have barriers, access to devices for all of their children was the main barrier. Some parents said that only some of their children received a device. In households with multiple children, that meant children had to share the device. Cost was another barrier, as some parents had to pay out of pocket for a device and/or Wi-Fi access.

Is your child participating in virtual learning activities through their school or early learning program?

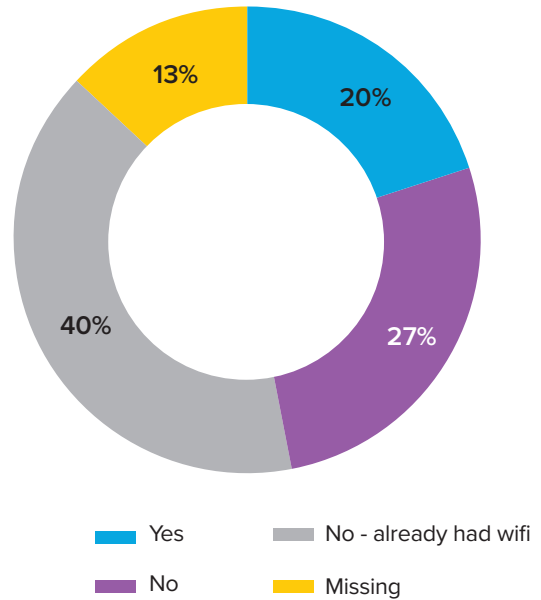


When we asked for more details on the virtual learning experience, 46 percent (52) reported receiving a computer or technology through their child’s educational program but also another 46 percent said they did not receive a computer or technology. Only 20 percent (23) said they applied for and received free Wi-Fi support. However, 46 percent of respondents did not apply for free Wi-Fi because they already had it at home.

Did you receive a computer or technology through your child’s educational program?

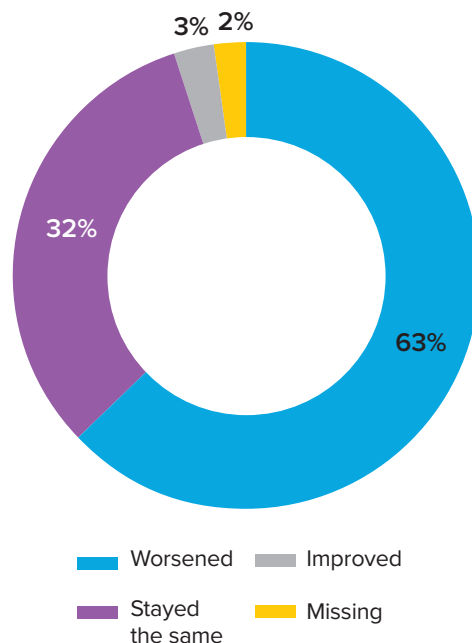


Have you applied for and received free wifi supports?



Overall Well-Being: More than half of the parents reported that their financial situation had worsened since the pandemic. Some of the reasons were that parents were working fewer hours or were furloughed/laid off. Those whose financial situation stayed the same reported that they were students, kept working as normal or were getting government aid.

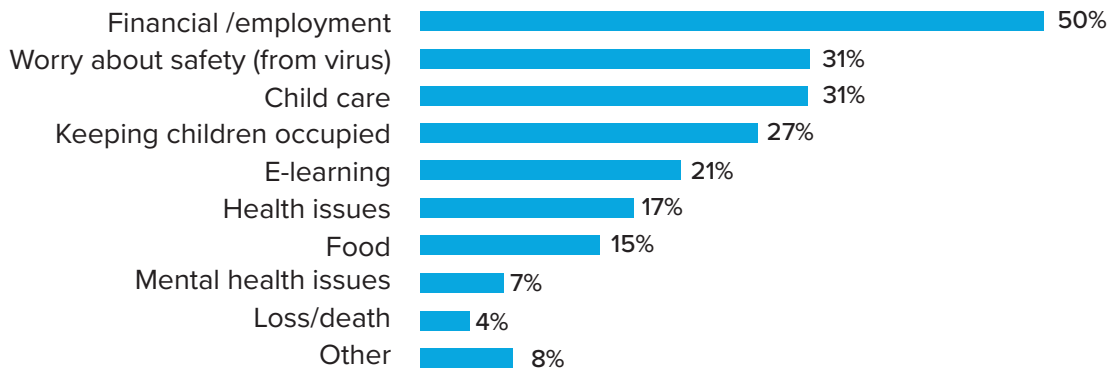
Would you say your financial situation has improved, worsened or stayed the same?



Parents were asked what their biggest struggle was during this time. Half of the parents reported financial or employment issues, as reflected in earlier questions. Parents were struggling equally with staying safe from COVID19 and with child care *"I do not know if I will have the same child care arrangements when the children go back to school."* Keeping their children occupied and helping them with e-learning were also common struggles. But parents had a variety of worries as reflected in their comments:

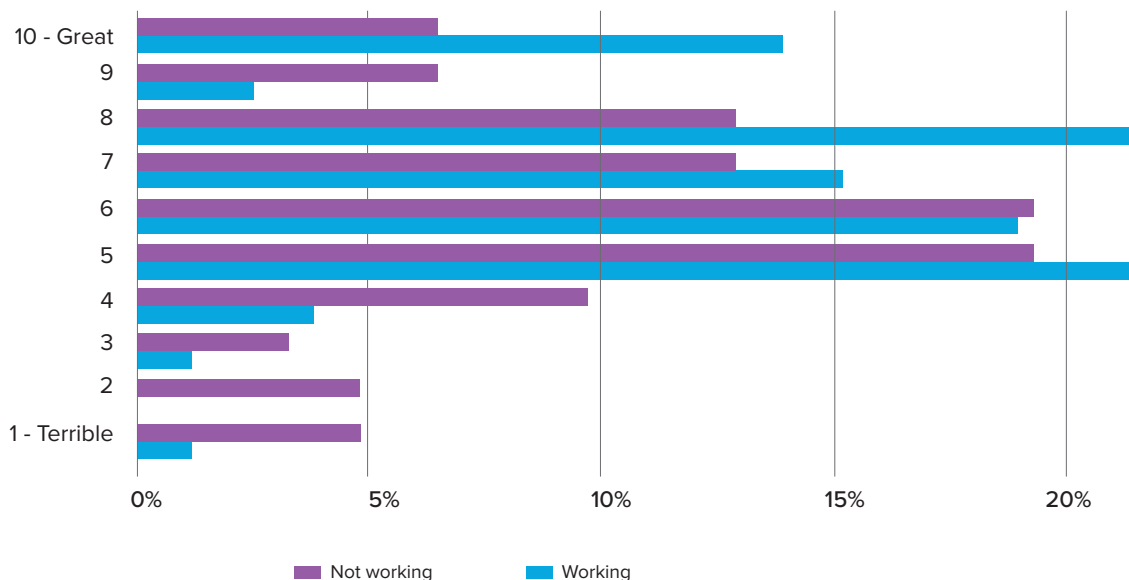
- *"It was hard focusing on children's needs while working from home and dealing with stress."*
- *"Being at home with a new baby while part of the world is on lock down is stressful and confusing."*
- *"This is a struggle mentally... She has been doing more praying but fear is creeping."*
- *"The community in which she lives is dangerous. Someone is always shooting and or dying."*
- *"[She's] very concerned about her 3-year-old enrolling in early learning program."*
- *"The airline industry where I work for will let us know in September if I have job or not."*
- *"Had family members sick from Covid-19 which left her with a feeling of being all alone. Not knowing what tomorrow would bring."*
- *"Complaints about child watching tv and playing all day."*

What has been your biggest struggle during this time?



The financial struggle was also reflected in how parents rated their wellbeing. Overall, 73 percent of the *working* parents rated their well-being higher than five on a scale of one to ten, while only 57 percent of parents without a job rated their well-being that high. Fourteen percent of working parents said they were doing great, but only 6 percent of non-working parents felt great.

How would you say you personally are doing overall?



Comments from parents or interviewer related to how they were doing overall:

"I feel terrible for the unknown. I don't know when will my children's child care center will open, and my children's IEP needs."

"The financial situation has been bad. My employer did not pay me for two months."

"Found partial employment. Feels she has been able to provide for her family although it has not had an easy time."

"Being in the home with her kids drives her nuts but she is blessed to be with them. She is able to provide nutrition to her children."

"Happy to have recovered from Covid19."

"Has borrowed to make ends meet."

"Says his situation is much better than people near him. He has a support system."

"Has continued to work through the pandemic. Initially took a pay cut although pay rate has since been restored."

"Financial situation has taken a toll."

"Things are getting back to normal."

