

In the Voices of Parents:

Mothers Navigating the COVID-19 Pandemic

May 2021

Part 2

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

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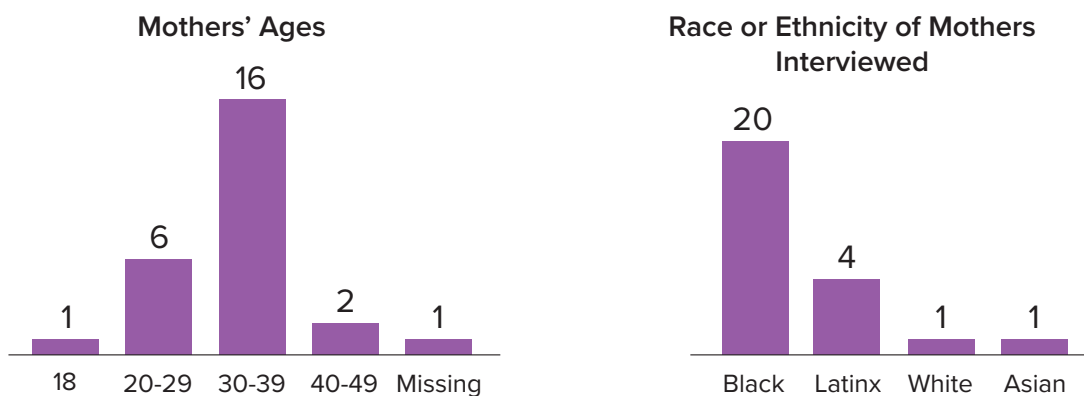
INTRODUCTION

This report is Part II of a three-part series on the impact of COVID-19 on Cook County families. It is based on interviews conducted by the referrals and outreach team at Illinois Action for Children (IAC). This team connects families to child care and community resources and hears firsthand how families have been affected by the pandemic. With the goal of formally documenting family experiences, the team began the project by surveying 144 parents in the summer of 2020 about their employment, child care, family well-being and children’s schooling under the pandemic. The results are captured in Part I of this report series.

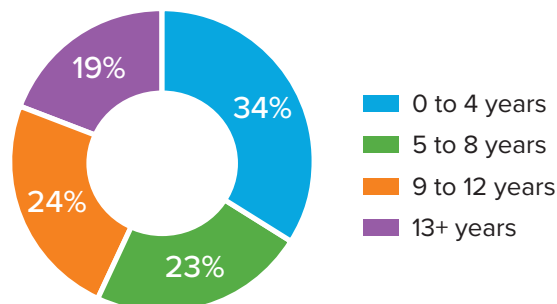
For this report, Part II, the IAC referrals and outreach team conducted more in-depth interviews with a subset of the parents – 26 mothers – to learn how they were faring four to five months later, in November 2020. The mothers’ experiences are summarized below. Looking ahead, Part III of the series will capture the experiences and perspectives of this same subset of mothers’ in the spring of 2021, a full year into the pandemic.

ABOUT THE MOTHERS

The 26 mothers interviewed in November 2020 are predominantly Black (77%) and Latinx (15%) and in their twenties and thirties. They reported having 62 children. Seven mothers had 1 child, fourteen had 2 or 3 children, and five had 4 or more children. Three quarters of the families had a child under age five and three quarters had a school-age child (half had both). Seventy percent of the families lived in Chicago and 30 percent in suburban Cook County.



Ages of Children (n=62)



I. FAMILIES' FINANCIAL WELL-BEING

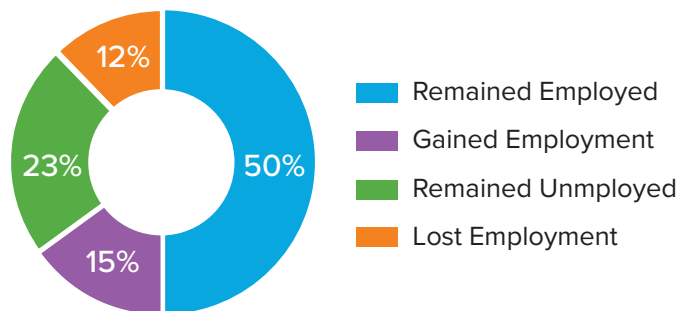
In the November interviews, we learned that mothers continued to experience instability in their employment status and income. Families with a working parent had less severe financial issues, and their main struggles involved juggling their many responsibilities. However, several working mothers felt they needed to work more hours or find a new job to earn the income needed to support their families. Mothers who were unemployed faced difficult decisions when searching for work because job opportunities often conflicted with their child care arrangements or children's remote learning. This kept some mothers from taking a new job. Both working and non-working parents struggled with paying their rent and utilities and other basic needs. Families had access to food because they participated in food assistance programs or visited their local pantries. Unfortunately, not all mothers were aware of food pantries in their communities or of other resources such as rent and utility assistance programs. More could be done to reach families who would benefit from financial and community resources.

Employment and Income

As was the case in the summer of 2020, lack of employment and income were the most common challenges facing the mothers. Each survey asked parents to name their biggest struggle at the time and, at both points in time, financial challenges were the most common response among the mothers. They said that having greater financial stability would improve many of the issues their families were facing. *"I feel like everything else would work in its place. As long as I'm working, everything will be fine.... Simple, a job, that's it."*

While employment and finances improved for some mothers, they worsened for others. Between July and November, four mothers were able to go back to work or find new work. One mother who had received a pay cut was now back to her original pay, and thirteen mothers remained employed.

Change in work status between June-July and November 2020

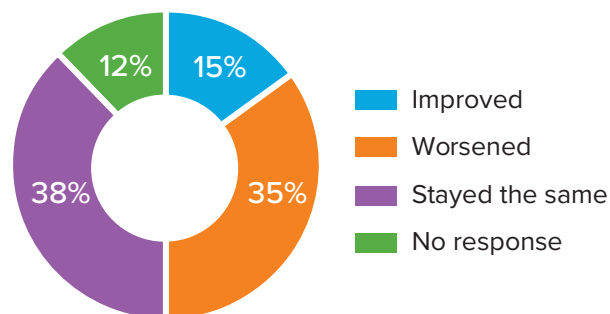


65% of the mothers were employed and 35% were unemployed.

However, layoffs continued for some. Three mothers were laid off or lost their jobs and six remained unemployed. *"I think I started working in July, but then I stopped again in August."* Approximately one-third (35%) of the mothers whom we spoke with in November were unemployed, similar to the rate in the summer.

Additionally, other mothers had their work hours and incomes reduced. One mother had a part-time business, but her clients could no longer afford her services. *"I understand it, but I had to cut back on some of my expenses... that's money I don't have anymore."* Another mother working for an airline feared that a layoff or pay cut was coming, *"They're fighting with the union to see if they're going to give us a pay cut. Because either that or I'm not sure if they're going to lay us off or not, but they haven't, thank God. Thank God."*

Family's financial situation in November compared to June/July 2020



Employed mothers did not always work enough hours to meet their families' needs, but parenting responsibilities and children being at home prevented some from increasing their work hours. A mother of a thirteen-year-old, for example, said she did not feel comfortable working during the day because her son was doing remote-learning. Another mom agreed: *"Because the kids are at home now. Like I can't just go get another job."* One mother whose work hours did increase found it difficult to keep up with more hours because she had to coordinate her schedule with her husband and her children's remote learning. The additional work hours were positive, yet the stress and struggle of the schedule was not: *"if I have to stay [late at work], then my husband, I mean, he has to be late for his job, for his work and because we don't have - it's hard to find a babysitter or somebody to watch your kids at the last minute."*

Difficulty finding child care kept some mothers from taking a job or increasing their hours. One mother, for example, could not take an overnight job at a hospital because she did not have overnight child care. A mother looking for pharmacy positions needed child care open past 6 PM but had not come across any with these hours. *"Most [employers] want you to be open and available and I'm not completely available because the child centers that I have close early."* A mother of school-age children left her job when she could not find a child care provider to support her children with their remote learning. *"A lot of them saying they needed extra assistance and extra teachers to help with remote learning...So they had put me in a hard spot."* This mom made the difficult decision that it was better to not work than to have her children miss school.

Unemployed mothers worried about losing ground with their career and financial growth and found few employment opportunities. One mother who was laid off worried about her job prospects and whether she would recover and be able to earn a similar salary as she had before. Meanwhile another mom's layoff forced her to deplete her savings and now, working paycheck to paycheck, she feels she has fallen behind: *"I've just got to find a better position, a better job to make the income that I want."*

Nine of the mothers were looking for work at the time of the interview, including two who were employed. Several said employers were not hiring. *"My biggest struggle is to keep a roof over our heads. I've been looking for work constantly and keep getting denied work."* One mother could only find jobs far from home: *"It's hard to find something in the city. It's like I get offers all the time but they're at least 20, 30, 40 miles."*

Lauren: "Are the opportunities still going to be there?"

Lauren has been spending time at home supporting her two children's learning. She helps her 13-year-old son with remote learning and has a 4-year-old daughter that she cares for and works on learning activities with. Lauren lost her job due to the pandemic and has been struggling to find work for at least 5 months. She is looking for positions in the pharmacy field, but the work hours conflict with her family's needs. The jobs she comes across require her to be able to work evenings, but she has not found a child care provider that is open after 6 PM. Additionally, Lauren is concerned about leaving her son by himself during the day, *"Because my son is schooled at home, it's not that simple to just leave and trust a kid to do the work if you're working fulltime and you're not there."*

When asked about her biggest struggle, Lauren said that it was being unemployed. She is worried about her job prospects and earning potential post-pandemic. She has been in the pharmacy field for over ten years. She expressed this concern about her career, *"I worry that when things have settled down are the opportunities still going to be there... and it is like I've been doing what I've been doing for a long time and I'm used to making 'X' amount of dollars and whatever. Will I be able to still do that?"* Lauren receives unemployment benefits and SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and participates in the school lunch program which have been helping her family. However, she is having troubling paying her bills. She explains, *"I was behind with utilities and I caught up a little and I'm still working towards that catching up. Hopefully, I'll get fulltime or find employment, so I can get back working."*

Meeting Basic Needs

Some employed mothers faced minimal or no financial issues. However, many mothers fell behind on bills, and this led one family to become homeless. The table below describes financial challenges that mothers faced, including paying for rent, utilities, child care and health care. As a result of not being able to pay her rent, one mother and her six school-age children were evicted from their home. The family was staying intermittently with various family members: *“We go from my cousin’s house to my other cousin, from my sister’s house, just so we can give everybody their room. So we’re not in like one set house.”* But she wondered how long her family would be willing to take them in before they tire of it. Without a stable home or internet access, her children were especially challenged by remote learning being the only school option.

Financial challenges of families

Housing and paying for rent	<p><i>“I have shortened expenses to pay my rent. I also have my heater on low to prevent a higher bill.”</i></p> <p><i>“Just making sure that we can pay our bills without fear of being evicted, or even if some of the rent was suspended for certain months without fear of saying, okay, you have to try to catch up from the three or four months you’re behind. If we were given at least a month or two waiver that would help.”</i></p>
Paying for utilities	<p><i>“I was behind with utilities and I caught up a little, and I’m still working towards that catching up.”</i></p> <p><i>“I’m going through public aid to help with the light bill and they told me I didn’t qualify.”</i></p> <p><i>“We have food with no problem because we’re on TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families). Food is not the issue. It’s the rent and the utilities that’s the issue.”</i></p>
Paying for child care	<p><i>“Just trying to make sure my mom has money too, because like I said, [my son’s] with her 12 hours a day, sometimes over the weekend and everything. Just trying to make sure that I have enough money to pay her.”</i></p> <p><i>“Yeah, we can’t afford it because by the time I pay my bills and then the money that’s left and I used to pay \$700 for my son for a month.”</i></p>
Health-related expenses	<p><i>“I had an emergency where I had to go to emergency, and they charged me \$8,000 for nothing. I was there and they didn’t give me anything, only a CT scan, \$8,000 during COVID and my insurance paid \$6,000 and I have \$2,000 debt.... The dental, I couldn’t afford it because it was too expensive.”</i></p>

Mothers said that they were running out of financial resources. Nine mothers who were not working relied on unemployment benefits or savings, but not all were eligible for unemployment or felt the amount they received was enough. One mother said, *“...the unemployment is only \$81 a week. They’re not giving me the extra \$300 boost because you have to be making at least \$100 a week or more.”* Another mother who was not receiving unemployment benefits said, *“So that’s my big struggle, now. I have no income coming in.”* Some mothers who sought out other benefits such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), utility assistance, and a job training program did not qualify.

Half of the mothers experienced issues paying rent and utilities, but only one mother said she received assistance through a program. This mother applied for a ComEd program for utilities and a rent program that her landlord told her about. Two mothers applied for assistance but did not qualify or had not heard back yet.

Food assistance programs, such as SNAP, have been critical supports for families. Only one mother who needed food assistance said she was unable to receive it. At least eight mothers were receiving SNAP benefits. A few of them mentioned that it has helped them feed their children, especially with children eating more meals at home. One mother stated, *“they gave me food stamps and I’ve been getting the pandemic food stamps too. So that’s been helping because you know, my kids are in the house now.”* Another mother had a similar experience and said, *“they put [additional SNAP benefits] on your card, and I was grateful because my 16-year-old, he is eating me out of the house right now.”* Additionally, some families were receiving food from their children’s schools or food pantries. Cash benefits from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program was helping one family pay for food.

Several mothers did not know of community resources. When asked about community resources one mother said, *“I just don’t know about them. At my daughter’s daycare, when they were opened, they were giving us some resources, some links, and stuff for things. But since they’ve been closed, obviously I haven’t gotten any information.”* Similarly, one mother said they did not have information about resources except for local food pantries, *“the only resources I know of is, like the food.”*

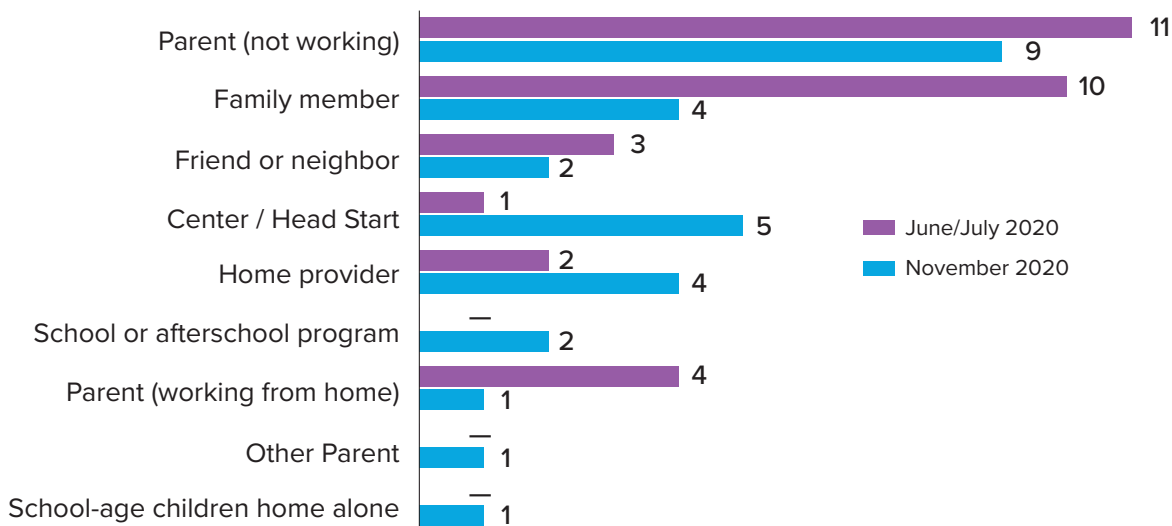
II. CHILD CARE IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

By fall, families began to return their children to formal child care arrangements and fewer relied on family members or provided care themselves while working from home. Not all child care programs re-opened, however, and some permanently shut down. Some mothers did not look for formal care because they assumed it was not available or worried about COVID. Also, child care providers often did not have the capacity to assist older children with remote learning, so care for school-age children was a challenge. Lack of child care or consistent child care continued to cause mothers to miss work, and, as discussed, prevented some from increasing their work hours, remaining at their job or finding new employment.

Child Care Arrangements

As formal child care programs reopened, parents began to enroll or return their children to child care centers, home-based child care and school-age programs. Compared to the arrangements they had in the summer, fewer parents relied on informal care such as family and friends. One mother said that prior to the center opening, *“I had to look and ask my friends and leave her here and there... There were days when I left her at home [with older siblings], but since she is still very young, I didn’t feel very comfortable doing that. So, I had to look around for a bit.”*

Child Care Arrangements, Summer vs November



Some mothers who preferred to use formal care could not. For some, their program closed for good or had not yet re-opened. As a mother of a preschooler said, *“They closed in March and then they opened back up for maybe like a week... and then they closed for good...So I haven’t had child care since the middle of March.”* For other mothers, formal care options did not align with their work hours or meet their family needs. This was the case for the mother who could not find a provider to help her four school-age children with remote learning: *“That’s the reason why I had to walk away from my job.”* Other parents were not ready to return due to COVID. *“Her school tries to call me to try to get her back in...but then, it doesn’t align with my work hours and I’m not at school right now. I don’t feel safe, like 100% ready to take her back in.”*

Parents relied on family members and friends but, as was the case in the summer, this care was not always ideal or consistent. As one mother said, *“Sometimes, you know, [family] are still busy having to go to work or do other stuff.Some of my family had to be in the hospital for a few days like my grandma and my mom and my aunt. They were all like the main ones to watch her.”* Also, it could be hard on the family members to watch the children, and mothers worried about exposing older family members to COVID. One mother’s place of employment had many cases of COVID19. She worried that by working she was endangering her son and her mother, who watched her son because her child care center shut down: *“The only person I have that’s able to watch him is my mother. So unfortunately, he is with her, and unfortunate because I’m still working full time and I may be exposing her to COVID.”*

Child care issues continued to cause mothers to miss work, with about a third of employed mothers missing work over the previous three months. One mother described the difficulty she had patching care together when her child care program closed: *“I had grandma, she was kind of helping me out at times, and then, my [16-year-old] son. It was really rough. It was really rough. I was calling off and it was bad.... Push come to shove, I was going to take a leave from work. My checks were short because I wasn’t going in and I didn’t have enough PTO.”* Another mom described how she and her husband juggle their schedules to be home for their two year-old and six year-old. *“It’s a lot, so what I end up doing sometimes is just either calling off work or just trying to get some extra days off.”* While some mothers have that flexibility, many felt they did not receive enough paid time off or did not always feel free to use it.

Fewer mothers had their children home with them as they worked or went to school. As of November one mother still worked from home with a young child, while two mothers attended school while home with their children. *“Having [my four-year-old] home makes it a little more difficult for me to work as efficiently, but with everything going on, I don’t know that it is safe to bring her to daycare.”*

Searching for Child Care

Some mothers have not looked for care because they assumed there was limited availability. *“I do have a few in mind, but I’m not sure if they are accepting. So I haven’t really tried to get them into another one just yet.”* One mother was turned off when she saw parents waiting outside a child care program in the cold to pick up their children. *“Am I going to have to stand outside for 20, 30 minutes before I can even pick up my kids? I mean, I get why, but at the same time, I don’t know if I want to do that.”*

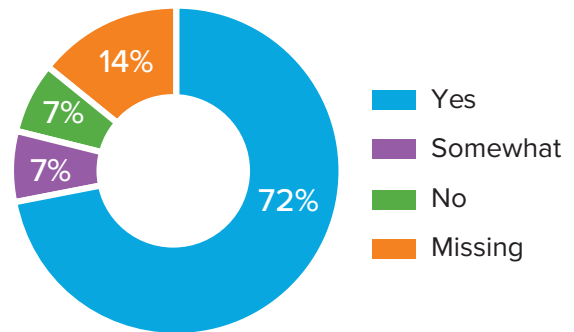
One mother needed new care but was nervous about using a new arrangement. She was comfortable with the safety and cleaning methods of her current provider. *“Now I have to get accustomed to a new place, and not to mention, I can’t even tour the place because of COVID. So, I don’t even know what anything is going to look like. I’m so nervous.”*

Other mothers faced typical challenges of finding child care, such as programs not open during the hours needed and the high cost. One mother had to wait until she had enough money for the child care copayment to enroll her three-year-old. *“It’s like they wanted \$250. That’s why she won’t start until next week because I won’t get paid until tomorrow.”* Another mother thinks it will be difficult to find a provider open in the evenings. *“Most child care close at 5:00 or 6:00, and my hours are sometimes until 7:00.”*

Satisfaction with Care

Mothers using child care were largely satisfied with the care and with the safety precautions taken by their child care providers, such as masks, temperature checks and travel restrictions. *“Initially, I was nervous about going to work and having to leave them in child care with other children, but the child care providers have done a good job of limiting the number of children.”* One mother viewed her child care provider as a resource: *“I love the daycare. They are really good. They take really good care of us and they’ve been helping me a lot with like food drives and stuff when I needed it.”* However, one mother’s child care center had a COVID case and this made her feel more nervous about her children’s safety in care.

Are parents using child care satisfied with the arrangement?



Martha One Week of Child Care

Martha has four school-age children in kindergarten, first, fourth and fifth grade. She had been working as a home caregiver, which made her an essential worker. Unfortunately, the child care center that she had used for almost four years closed. Martha trusted this program and hoped her children could return upon re-opening. In the meantime, her sister was working from home and helped Martha with child care. The care was not always consistent, though, which caused Martha to miss work.

When school started in the fall, Martha was able to find a new home child care provider. However, the children were in that care for only a week because the provider did not know how to use a computer. During that week, her children missed school because they did not have anyone to help them log in to their remote learning portal. *“They wasn’t logging on because she [the provider] didn’t know how to log on.”* Martha could not find another child care provider that accepted remote learners. She felt she had no choice but to leave her job. She reported struggling financially. She had applied for unemployment benefits but was waiting to be approved. In the meantime, the family’s SNAP benefits helped them pay for food. Martha hopes her children will go back to in-person learning soon as she needs to return to work.

III. MOTHER AND CHILD WELL-BEING

Some mothers were grateful that their families were doing as well as they were during the pandemic. However, many moms described the stress of meeting basic needs, balancing work with their extra caregiving responsibilities, and worrying about the well-being of their children and other family members. Among this group, the majority of mothers either welcomed information about counseling and therapy supports or had sought them out themselves.

We asked mothers about their family’s well-being and their biggest struggle. Some families were doing well. For example, one mother said her family’s financial needs were met and they were trying to help out others. Several said their children were doing well in school, including a mother who was happy that her son, who usually struggles with school, was getting good grades. Another mother said her children were glad to have more time with her now that she was home with them. *“I get to spend more time with my kids. So, they’re happy about that. I do miss breaks. They do miss their friends from their previous daycare and from school. Overall, we’re doing good. I’m blessed.”*

However, most mothers identified challenges for their families. In addition to financial, employment and child care challenges, mothers struggled with homelessness, fear of domestic violence, staying safe from COVID, and health issues among family members. They cited many sources of pressure.

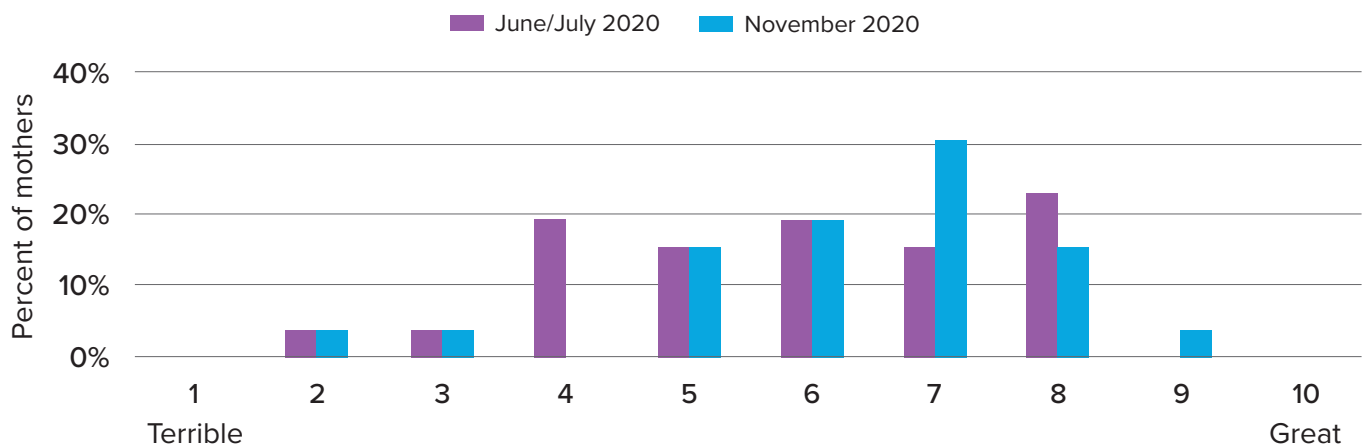
- *“I think it’s just being locked in with the kids and homeschooling and things like that. I think that’s the biggest part.”*

- *"I lived [with] domestic violence with my husband, and my biggest fear is that he will start physically abusing me again."*
- *"Not knowing what's going to happen tomorrow. Not knowing if me being at work, trying to make my money, is what's going to ultimately end up with either me being sick or, God forbid, my mother or my son being sick."*
- *"I've lost a couple of people from COVID. My*

godmother caught it and my godfather caught COVID. My best friend just called me from Florida and told me that her daughter has it. My other best friend had it in her, and all my god kids have it... My dad was laid off from work. My aunt is in the hospital. She has blood clots in her lungs. So this wasn't a good day to ask that question really."

- *"It's just finding more time for all of us just to sit down and relax together."*

On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you say you personally are doing overall?



On average parents rated their overall well-being somewhat higher in November (6.3) than in the summer (5.8).

A common challenge among mothers was balancing their various responsibilities. This includes balancing employment or school – sometimes both – with parenting, overseeing their children’s remote learning, and, for some, ensuring child care coverage from day to day with their spouse or other family members. As one mother said, *"Emotionally I'm holding on by a thread, but outwardly I'm holding it together."*

Given the degree of stress many families are under, we asked mothers who they turn to for emotional support. Mothers cited a family member most often, but also friends or a boyfriend. Some mothers said it was just them. *"For the most part, it's me and my kids."*

The majority of mothers were open to receiving information about therapy or counselling or had already participated in it. As one mother said, *"Yes, I need assistance finding places [that provide counseling], but I have not been out much because I've been at home constantly with my kids trying to maintain."* Another said,

"I'm not receiving any [counseling]. I should....I was on medication for a while then I stopped because I wasn't going to the appointments." Others felt they did not need any professional help because they were doing well or had good support systems, were not interested, or were too busy. *"I'm more focused on making sure that my son has what he needs and he's understanding what's going on in school."*

Children had varying levels of stress. Again, some parents felt their children were doing well. *"I feel like they're doing fine. They're both doing great at school."* One couple tries to avoid negative conversations around their children about "what's going on." Another mom was unsure if her child was internalizing stress. *"It's amazing that you think that your kids are not paying attention to stuff, but then you hear them in just random conversation. You know, even my four-year-old is like, 'man, mommy, everybody got to wear a mask because of the coronavirus. You get coronavirus you die.' And I'm like, what?"*

The impact of the pandemic on some children was more evident. Parents described their children as:

- Angry with being homeless and having to stay with family: *“Everybody’s just so frustrated because we in the situation we’re in, and it’s a lot.”*
- Missing friends from school or child care: *“They want to see their friends. They want to interact. They want to play. They don’t want to stay inside. They want to see the world. Then, they keep telling me when is COVID going to end?”*
- Having declining interest and motivation in school: *“A big part of it is socialization. And even with online school, they don’t get a whole lot of that because it’s not the same. So it’s a lack of motivation. It’s a lack of interest. So I see that declining, as time goes on, I see it going down more and more than I would expect at this point.”*
- Needing new clothes, shoes and coats: *“They’re getting bigger and they’re growing out of stuff.”*
- Lacking physical activity because programs are not available or open.
- Challenged with e-learning and keeping up with on-line schoolwork.
- Challenged by sharing a small space, having no room *“to get away from each other.”*

Children have limited time outside and social opportunities. Some parents try to take their children for a walk, to the park or for a short hike when they can. Other children are able to play outside in the yard or on the back porch. Children in child care socialize with the other children and go outside when the weather is nice. Family members such as cousins provide social opportunities for some children, while others still see their friends, or do so occasionally, or talk to them through video games or their phone. *“I just like to go out like once a week. I want to say like Friday or a Saturday [the kids on the block] hang out for a while and then go back home.”*

At the same time, parents try to minimize their children’s exposure to other people. *“We stay in the house. We just go as we need to unless I’m going to a family member’s house briefly. Other than that, I’m not doing too much unnecessary travel.”* Some cannot take their children out because they are busy with work or helping other children with school. *“Sometimes they get to go out, but it’s just so much going on during the day.”* Others are not able to get outside because the neighborhood isn’t safe, there is no yard, or the weather has been too cold. One mother said her children do not want to go out, they would rather play video games. Another said about her four children, *“they see each other.”*

Natalie “A Whole Lot of Nothing”

Natalie and her 10-year-old son live in suburban Cook County. She works 12-hour days in a factory that has had many COVID cases. With school being remote and her child care program permanently closed, Natalie’s mother is the only person available to care for her son. Natalie worries her work is endangering the health of her mother and son but she has bills to pay. She has been able to meet her family’s basic needs but struggles to pay her mother enough for the long days of care: *“He’s with her 12 hours a day, sometimes over the weekend and everything.... I may have enough for my bills, but just to make sure she’s got a little extra since she’s helping, it’s been kind of hard.”*

Her son has autism and Natalie feels that although they’re compensating the best they can, lack of face-to-face interaction with his teacher has compromised his learning. Before COVID, he was in the process of making friends through his therapy group, but now he doesn’t see anyone except his teachers and family.

When asked about her own emotional well-being she says it is hard as a single mom to do everything herself. *“I’m pretty much back in the fifth grade myself at this point, trying to help him. And COVID has been a lot. I’ve had to put a lot of plans on hold, and it’s just his needs come before mine.”* She adds: *“There were no vacations this year. There was no help. There was a whole lot of nothing for me this year.”* In fact she used all her sick and vacation time to manage her son’s school and IEP meetings. *“I have one day left, and that’s going to be used for his birthday.”*

IV. REMOTE LEARNING

Younger children and children with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or receiving Early Intervention (EI) were more likely to have issues focusing during remote school or therapy sessions. Mothers with children with an IEP or in EI felt that the remote services that their children were receiving were not as effective as the in-person services. Mothers who were working or had more than one child reported more frustration managing their own schedule with remote learning hours. In terms of the school supports, parents reported having limited technical support or training. Also very few had the option to enroll their children in afterschool programs.

Children's Challenges with Remote Learning

The majority of school age children were doing remote learning. Eighty-one percent (21) of the mothers reported having at least one child in school or receiving Early Intervention services. Of those, 20 families were doing remote learning or a hybrid model, and one was doing in-person learning. Two families with remote learning did not report any significant challenges and their children seemed to be adjusting to remote learning, *"He's passing all his grades. He's got A's and B's."* However, the rest of the families doing remote learning reported challenges from both the child and parent perspective.

It was difficult for children to focus during remote learning. One mother with a 16-year-old son said that because her son has attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), focusing during remote learning sessions has been an issue, so when she is not around her son falls behind with his assignments. A mother with children in kindergarten and first grade said that due to the limited attention span of younger children, focusing with a device was hard. Another mother felt that her two-year-old daughter did not seem motivated or interested in following directions during remote therapy sessions.

Not all children had the technical skills to successfully participate in remote learning. A mother with a fourth and fifth grader had to teach her children how to do work on a computer, *"So, they do a lot of slide presentations and I had to show them how to present and do their work on computers and they're not used to that, the typing and things of that nature."* Another mother felt that teachers were not always aware of the technical skills of each child, *"It's just too much for one kid to say they have five minutes to complete this work, when it takes some kids five minutes to find a page."*

Two mothers felt that their children were developing anxiety or stress due to remote learning. One mom with a child in preschool said that she thinks her child is waking up in the middle of the night and logging into the laptop. The other mother said that she is noticing some anxiety in her children due to remote learning.

Challenges for Children with Special Needs

Nine mothers reported having at least one child with an IEP through the school district or receiving Early Intervention for a developmental delay. When they were asked about the struggles of the child with remote learning, four parents said that their child or the parent did not always have the support they needed. Among the four, one mother said that her child was not getting any help at all. Another mom said that the school had stopped giving her daughter one-on-one aid when the school started remote learning. The third parent said that at one point her child was not getting any extra support because the teacher was not even aware he had an IEP. However, even after getting her son back to his IEP, the mother felt she still needed to be constantly monitoring him so he doesn't fall behind. Lastly, one mother with a child with autism said that before the pandemic her son was in the process of making friends through the school therapist and group support. However, with remote learning in place, he only communicates with his teachers which makes it harder to socialize. The mother also felt that face-face interactions were essential for her son's learning process, therefore, remote learning was compromising the learning of her child.

Two additional children who were receiving virtual therapy were struggling to stay engaged during their sessions. One mother said that her 2-year-old child was missing most of his speech therapy because of the struggle to get him to sit through the therapy session, *"He doesn't like being in front of the computer. So half the time he doesn't actually show up in the class because the whole struggle just to get him there. And I don't want to traumatize him, forcing him to sit there."* The other child was receiving speech and occupational therapy once per week. Although the child was attending her therapy sessions, her mother noticed that her daughter was more engaged when she was receiving home visits than during the virtual therapy sessions.

One mother with a 12-year-old child with ADHD said that although she wishes there was more support for her son, she feels that the special needs teachers are doing the best they can. The child was assigned to a therapist

and enrolled in a program where he can have access to a nutritionist. When the teacher feels her son is not understanding something, the teacher makes an effort to reach out to him, even during non-school hours. As a result of the support that the child has been receiving, the child has improved his grades. *“He’s usually like a C student, but this marking period, he just got like all A’s and B’s and maybe two Cs.”*

Parents’ Challenges with Remote Learning

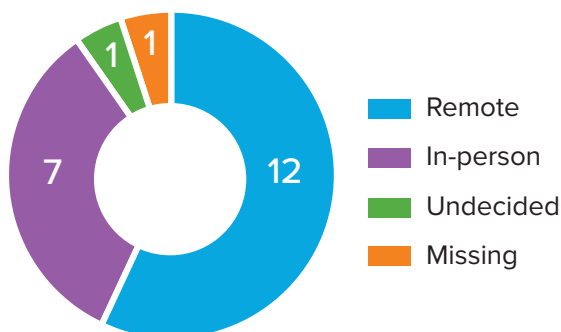
Having multiple e-learners complicated things for some parents. At least two mothers reported struggling to help multiple children with remote learning and to balance their time with other non-remote learning activities. *“So, at one point, when I’m talking to the kids about school, my two-year-old wants something done for him. I have to change his Pamper or whatever. Then, my four-year-old wants attention. So, it’s a lot of challenges with me.”*

Another three mothers found it challenging to coordinate their work schedule with remote learning. For example, one mother worked from home and struggled dividing her attention between work and assisting her daughter with remote learning. Another mom said that because she had to work during school hours, no one was able to help her 9- and 13-year-old children with remote learning.

Mothers also felt that remote learning hours were too long which made it time consuming and overwhelming for them. One disliked that her 6-year-old daughter’s remote learning began at 7:30 in the morning.

However, despite these challenges, more than half of the mothers (12) with school-age children said that for safety reasons they would prefer for their child(ren) to continue remote learning. One mom was undecided. The rest of the parents (7) said that they would prefer in-person school over remote learning, *“I’m no teacher. I would definitely send them to school. I’ll be honest with you.”*

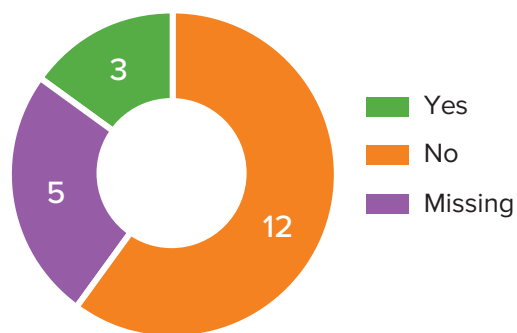
Parents’ Learning Preference



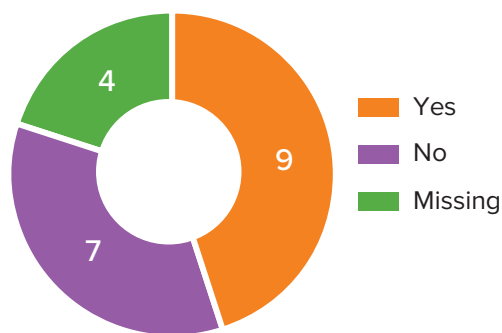
School Supports

In the summer, parents were challenged with not having access to devices for their children. By fall, almost all children had a device to use during remote learning or virtual therapy. The majority received a device from their children’s school. However, when mothers were asked about school technology support, only three said their children’s school offered parent trainings on virtual learning. Nine said schools offered technical support to use school devices. However, for some parents the technical support offered was not always the best, *“When I call the school and ask for their information, I get partial information, not all the information.”* One mother mentioned that not all teachers were supportive when students were having technical issues, *“So, we did have a couple of those issues and it’s kind of annoying because when that happens, they miss out. Some teachers are understanding but then, you have those that are not as understanding.”*

Parent trainings on virtual learning offered through the school



Are you receiving enough technical support from the school to use school devices?



As of November some parents were still struggling to get adequate Wi-Fi. Two mothers did not have internet at all and one mother was using the internet from her phone. Thirteen mothers said they did have adequate Wi-Fi. However, one parent was concerned with her internet service bill as it kept increasing. Two moms said that although they were getting free Wi-Fi, the capacity was not enough for multiple screens to function properly so they had to get their own. Another mother who was paying for her own internet service had just applied for a discounted Wi-Fi program and was waiting to find out if she was approved.

After school programs

Sixty percent (12) of the mothers with a school-age child reported that their child's school did not offer afterschool programs or tutoring for students, while 20 percent said their school did. One mother mentioned that although the school offers an afterschool program, her daughter was not interested because they were remote programs. *"They offer afterschool programs which my daughter says she has enough of computers."*

Afterschool programs or tutoring for students

