



Parents for Public Schools of Hawai'i
An Online Survey of Families Experiencing Social Distancing in Hawai'i Public Schools
May 2020

Executive Summary

Using an online survey, Parents for Public Schools of Hawai'i (PPSH) surveyed parents and families about how their children were faring at home during COVID-19. Responses were received from April 2 until May 11, 2020 and contained 216 parent records disaggregated into eight school districts (Honolulu, Central, Leeward, Windward, Hawaii island, Maui, Kauai, and charter schools). Subsets were created by elementary, middle, high school grade levels. Findings indicated while the majority of respondents did have computers and Internet access, there were concerns about variability in teaching and learning from home, children needing more socioemotional support, problems with motivation, and more support for those students with special needs. Five themes were identified in the respondent comments.

Overview

Parents for Public Schools of Hawai'i (PPSH) created a parent/family survey to learn about how our public school students were faring during this COVID-19 pandemic, having to be shelter at home. What was happening to their student learning during this time? Did they have access to computers or digital devices? How often were they in touch with their teachers and schools? What supports were they receiving from the school and were these adequate?

Our online parent survey consisted of 9 closed end questions (e.g., yes-no responses, specific options) and 2 open-ended questions to solicit confidence levels and other comments. These responses were solicited from April 2 until May 11, 2020 through our PPSH website via online newsletter, blog and Facebook. It should be noted that, as the survey was exclusively done online, a parent respondent needed computer access to submit a response.

With schools identified by respondents, data were coded to indicate the children's schools in one of seven districts (e.g., Windward district as different from Hawaii island) and clustered by the student's grade level (i.e., elementary – PreK-5, middle – Gr 6-8, high school – Gr 9-12). A separate grouping was created for charter schools (e.g., University Laboratory School). This coding enabled disaggregating parent responses in order to contrast what was occurring in different districts (e.g., urban Honolulu schools with neighbor island ones) and to examine more closely the data by student grade levels. In some cases, this was difficult to parse if respondents had several children in different schools. For example, having two children, one at the elementary school and another at the high school, the parent might write comments that could

not necessarily be distinguished by their specific child's needs and requirements unless so noted.

Findings

The dataset contained 216 parent records which represented the eight school districts that included four on Oahu (Honolulu, Central, Leeward, Windward), one each for Hawaii island, Maui and Kauai, and one for charter schools. Table 1. The five records for private school children were eliminated from the dataset. Of all parent records, there were 188 elementary grade students (51%), 87 middle schoolers (24%) and 94 high schoolers (25%). See Table 2 for the distributions by district.

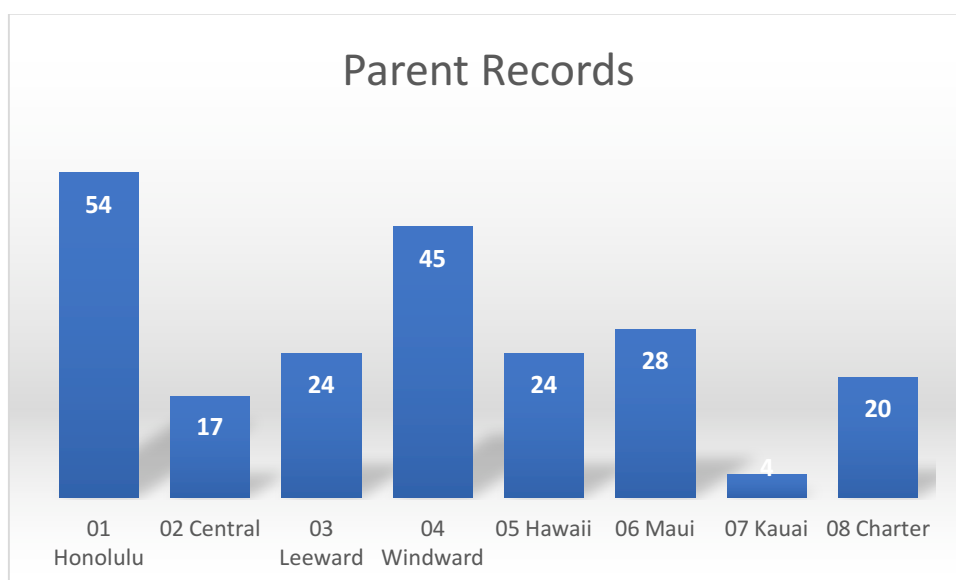


Table 1. Parent Responses by District

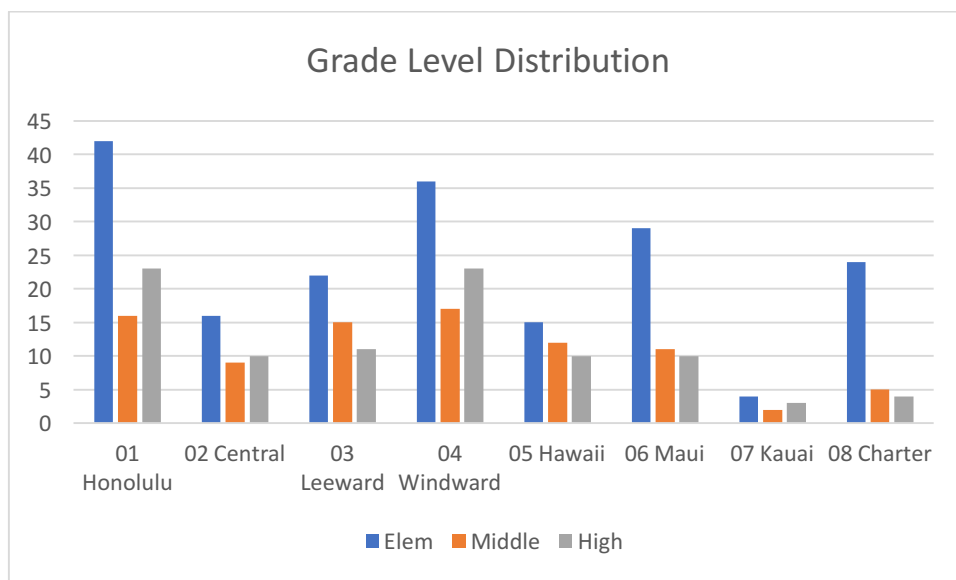


Table 2. Student Grade Levels by District

Quantitative Responses

1. **My children have access to a computer or tablet:** 95% (n=204) responded YES to having computer or digital tablet for their children. This was consistent across all school districts and across grade levels.
2. **Our school has distributed computers or tablets to all students who need them.** While 34% (n=74) reported that schools distributed equipment, nearly half of the respondents (46%, n=99) did not know whether their school actually did so. Notably Hawaii (63%) and Maui districts (39%) reported that schools distributed computers or tablets, which was different than the indication given by Oahu districts.
3. **We would like to borrow a computer for online learning at home.** Of the 216 reporting, 16% (n=35) indicated they would like to borrow a device. The request was highest in Honolulu district where 19% (n=10 out of 54) voiced this request. The need was also greatest among elementary grade students (20%, n=27 of 138) than middle (17%, n=13 of 75) or high school (11%, n=9 of 82). Several respondents expressed concern about taking responsibility for the loaned devices.
4. **Our home has access to Internet/wifi that can be used for online learning.** 98% (n=211) indicated their homes had access, which was consistent statewide.
5. **We have received free Internet/wifi service for this pandemic time period from the provider listed:** 96% (n=207) reported not receiving free Internet service while five noted having free access via Spectrum and four noted unsure or no response. This was consistent statewide.
6. **How have your children's teachers and school been communicating with you and your children?** Basically respondents noted a variety of mechanisms for communicating, including email, text, phone and other types of communications. See this reflected in Tables 3a and 3b.

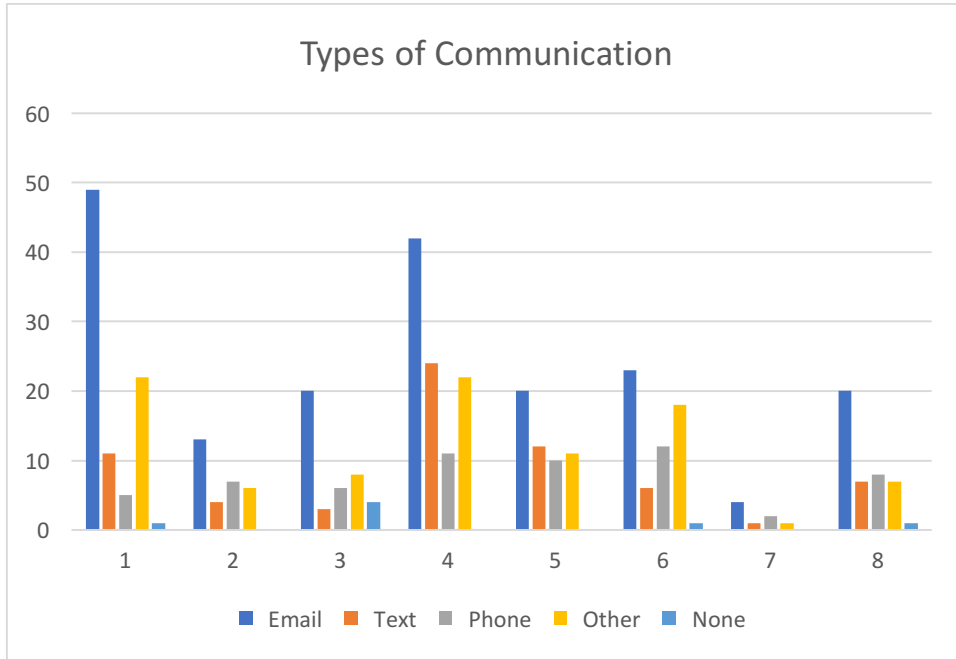


Table 3a. Types by District

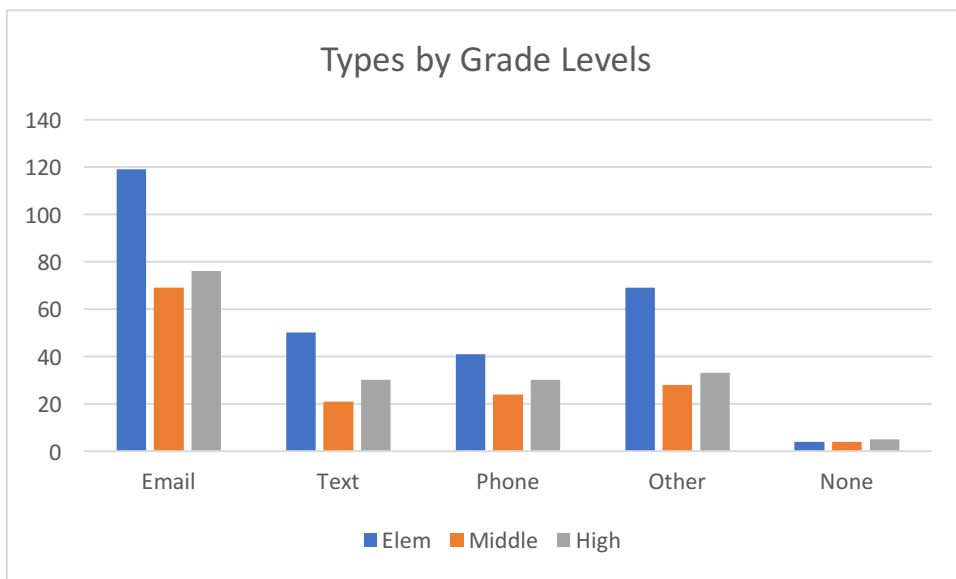


Table 3b. Types by Student Grade Levels

7. **On average, how many times each week do you hear from each teacher and school? (individually or in groups).** While there was a range in terms of frequency of communication (from none to daily each week), the majority reported hearing from the teacher or school at least three times in a week with some variations among the school districts in Table 4a and among grade levels in Table 4b.

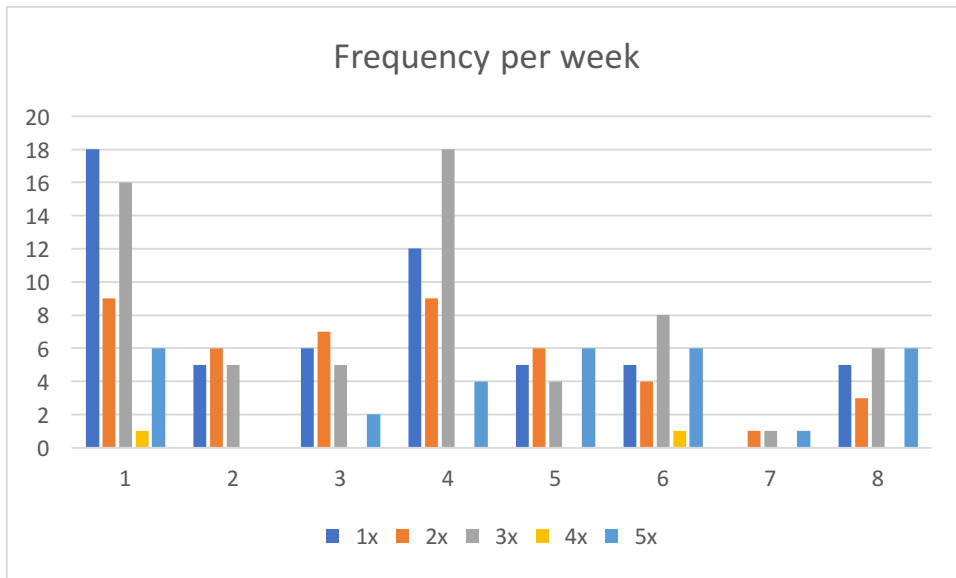


Table 4a. Frequency in school districts

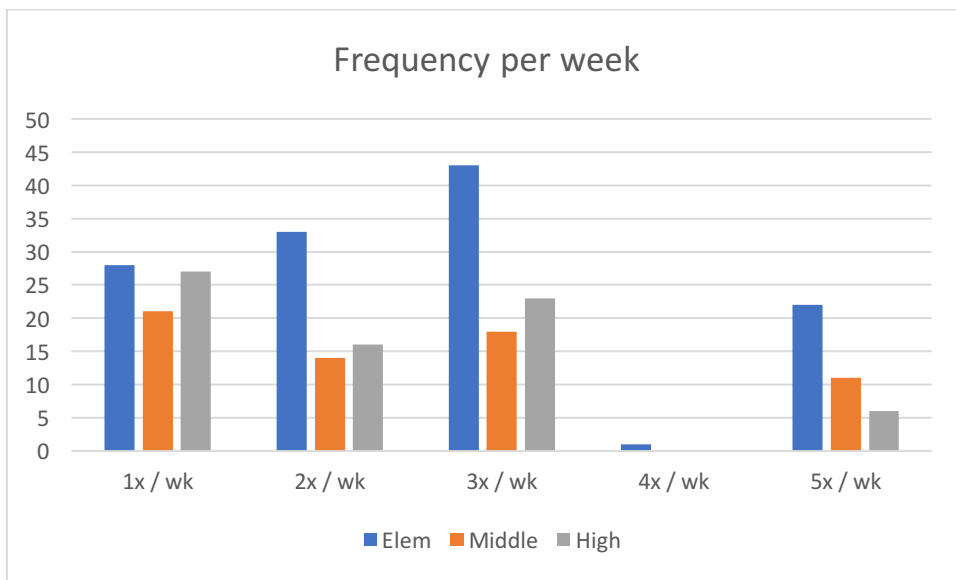


Table 4b. Frequency per week for grade levels

8. **What kinds of activities and assignments have your children received from school: (check any that apply):** Statewide these included Online (40%, n=201), video conference (25%, n=124), projects (15%, n=75), paper packets (15%, n=73) and other (4%, n=20). The kinds of activities and assignments were found in the same order in all the school districts. Similar percentages were found among the elementary and secondary schools.
9. **Do you feel that the activities and assignments your children have received are adequate for their learning?** For the most part, school districts and statewide parent responses followed bell curve patterning ranging from most adequate to less than

adequate/ unsure. Notable differences among respondents could be seen in Honolulu, Leeward and Windward districts where there was less satisfaction expressed. See Table 5a. In terms of differences by grade levels (elementary, middle and high school), parents with elementary school students ranked adequate or more than adequate as noted in Table 5b.

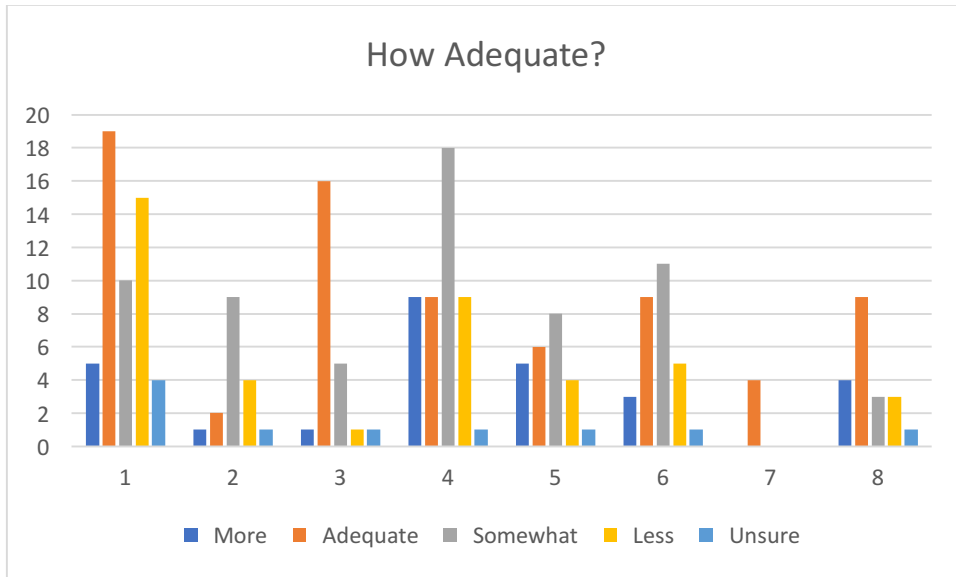


Table 5a. Adequacy of Communication by District

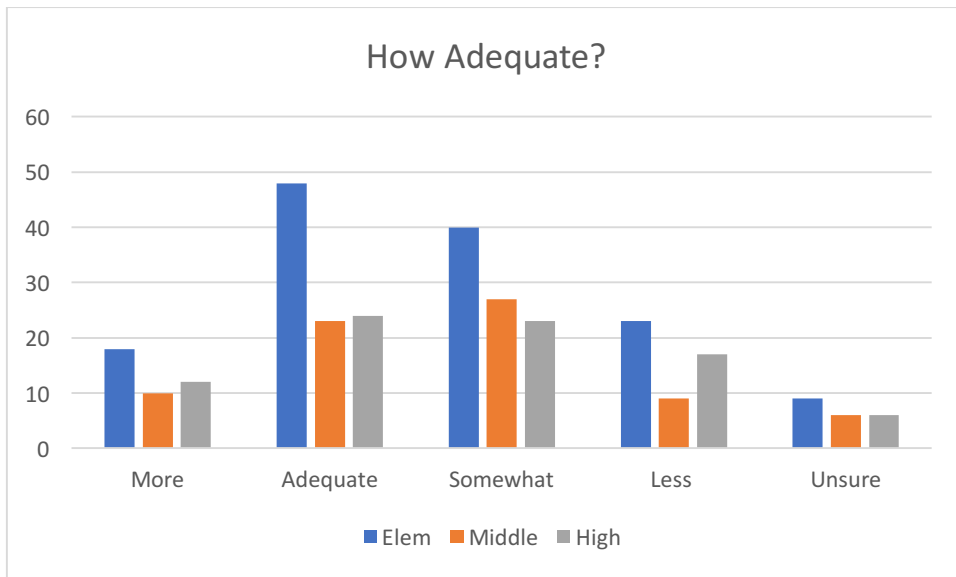


Table 5b. Adequacy of Communication by Grade Levels

Describing the range of adequacy, Leeward District parents commented as follows: Ranking the contact as *Adequate*, a parent agreed with the multiple choice options: "Since school across the nation are closed, we are not concerned that our child is falling behind. Online learning is working for us." Ranking the contact as *Somewhat Adequate*, the respondent stated; "I'm not

educated enough to help my children with some of their homework. The methods they are teaching at the schools are different from the methods that were taught to us during my school days. So, it's hard to assist my children because although my older methods provide the same answer, the teachers don't recognize or credit it because it's not their method." One respondent who ranked *Less than Adequate* stated: "I have an education background and I'm able to work from home right now, so I'm basically homeschooling to supplement the complete lack of any curriculum information being providing by the schools." The parent felt other teachers in neighboring schools were providing more while "I'm over here with one email in two weeks and it's about how to fold a paper star. Are teachers getting paid their full salary for that?!"

Qualitative responses

As Questions 10 and 11 (**"What are your confidence levels and concerns?"**) were open-ended, allowing respondents to provide general comments, these data were examined for more nuanced reflections about what was occurring for the parents/families and their children. The following themes emerged:

1. Devices and Connectivity

As noted, most respondents throughout the school districts had access to devices and Internet services. At the middle and high schools, computers might have been provided by the school but this was not the case for elementary school students. Several respondents did comment about not having enough devices for all children or having inadequate ones (e.g. having tablets when laptops were needed for upper grades). With families having more than one child and needing to work from home, respondents expressed difficulty with online connections. For example, a Honolulu parent of a third grader noted, "Although we have access to a computer, with 2 working parents, and a fulltime school schedule online, it makes it difficult to rotate devices around the house based on priority and need." Likewise a charter school parent with three children in middle school commented "One of the biggest problems we have is having numerous children on wifi at the same time sometimes is too much for the system. One child's computer will start lagging or get dropped, which is extremely frustrating, more so for my keiki that is on the autism spectrum if it happens to him."

2. Teaching as delivered by parents

Having to teach their children at home, parents commented about the quality of instruction that they could provide. One "very concerned parent" with three children, two in elementary and one in high school, spoke of teaching not providing busy work. "I am teaching my children, educating them in their areas of what their teachers have assigned. It's not just continued busy work, I am helping them to understand what they

are working on and marking their work and all. Adding in some other fun education learning for them in Science, History writing, etc.”

Several parents voiced concern about having little or no teaching experience or using different methods to assist their children with their assignments. “As a parent with no teaching experience, it was difficult to navigate using the packet, and also following up on my children’s assignments. I currently work from home and sometimes I feel like I am barely keeping my head above water.” Another respondent commented “I’m not educated enough to help my children with some of their homework. The methods they are teaching at the schools are different from the methods that were taught to us during my school days. A Maui district parent with both a fifth grader and a high school student wrote that “As a parent I admit that sometimes I do not know how to do my child’s assignments and that frustrates me because I’m unable to help. My kids need their teachers.”

Respondents also commented about variability in teacher contact and support as they made comparisons with neighboring schools and between the elementary and secondary levels. A Honolulu district respondent said “Other parents and I have compared notes and some schools and teachers have daily WebEx meetings with their class. They do demonstrations and read stories and articles. Have discussions with the students. Other schools are doing the very minimal required of them. DOE said meet with students at least once a week for 30 minutes well that's all the teachers at our school does. There are no paper packets or daily check in.” Even in the same school, a parent felt that the contact was “very uneven” with one teacher offering daily contact and the other teacher once a week.

Parents expressed reservations about distance learning, preferring in class instruction. A Maui parent wrote, “(My children have) been doing great doing what they can with distance learning but I believe class learning is best for school age kids. I believe online learning is best for college students.” With a high schooler, another parent stated that “Teachers were given the technical tools to go online, but no pedagogical training.” A charter school parent with a 4th grader felt that online is adequate, expressed concerns “Nothing can replace in-person traditional teaching for elementary students. My child is only partially engaged with remote learning, which seems to be quite slow-paced. That’s to be expected, but still not great.”

3. Children need socioemotional support

In Honolulu district, sixteen respondents mentioned that it has been emotionally difficult for their children to not see their peers or teachers in person. Children missed their peers and teachers. Children with special needs appeared to be particularly vulnerable. One respondent suggested that the schools should provide activities for socioemotional support, in addition to learning activities. Another respondent noted that relationships were important, “Maintaining a relationship with students should be a priority — and would go a long ways towards being able to engage students in learning once schools open again.”

Similar comments were made by parents in other districts and at all grade levels. A Central district parent respondent has a middle school 8th grader, who had computer access. Despite the variety of mechanisms used to connect with the student, the parent was concerned about the connections. Likewise, a parent of a kindergartener with adequate contact and instruction noted. “Not seeing other children in person is a serious problem for my child emotionally.” A Windward district parent wrote, “I am concerned for the families whose mental health is being tested right now. I hope the needs for the mental health for the children and families are being met and addressed.”

4. Children with special needs require more support

Seven families in Honolulu District with children in SPED were concerned that they needed more assistance regarding what their children should be doing. They noted concerns regarding socioemotional “regression,” as well as more academic issues. One family wrote that their child met online with his special education teacher once a week, but other people did not seem to get any special instructions for their children with special needs. One person noted that the materials they received were not appropriate for their child with special needs. A parent of a fourth grader felt that “My special needs student benefits from professionals with specialized training. This cannot be done over a computer or through parents. “

Similarly, families with children with special needs require more or were not receiving appropriate services during this time. The parent of a 7th grader with special needs reported that contact with the teacher has been only once a week. The respondent wrote “My child insists he has been doing his work, however we got notice that nothing has been turned in. My child’s response is that he doesn’t know what to do.”

5. Motivation is a problem

Numerous parents among the respondents commented on the difficulties they found motivating their children to complete their assignments. A parent of a Honolulu high school student said that motivation was a problem because her son said, “It doesn't count for a grade, I can't get my grades up even if I do the work, so it means nothing, and I'm not going to do it because it's worthless.” Another parent reported that after her high school son was told that the work he did this quarter would only count to improve third quarter grades, so he was not motivated to do it.

A similar comment was made by a Windward district parent regarding the academics and grading. “Because grades have become optional, my child is not participating.” “The administration and teachers should never have told the kids directly that their grades do not count towards the final grade. It destroyed their willingness to keep going and pay attention to the distance learning because it's “not graded”

The parent of a fifth grader noted that her child was doing an excellent job when school was in session but his motivation decreased when they transitioned to once-a-week online sessions. Another parent of an elementary school student noted that the transition to distance instruction has meant that there was no longer any art, music, physical education or hand-on projects - all things that her child loves.

A parent from the Leeward district reported on how her son was getting side tracked with other sites on the computer. “The online portion is good but due to the fact that we can't be monitoring our child to the fullest extent while doing online studies, we've notice that he has been getting very side tract with other sites instead of the task at hand. I prefer the paper pack.”

In summary, there were five themes highlighted. **1. Devices and connectivity** – that while the majority did have devices and connectivity, there were those who did not and thus were concerned about their child falling behind. Difficulties also occurred for families with more than one child or a parent working from home, all using the same Internet connections and in some cases, sharing devices ; **2. Teaching delivered by parents at home** – many felt that they were not equipped to home school their youngsters; further, parents commented about how teaching instruction appeared to vary by grade level, by school and even from teacher to teacher; **3. Children need socioemotional support** – beyond the classroom instruction, respondents felt the loss of their child's social interactions among classmates and teachers; **4. Children with special needs require more support** – Those with special needs were not receiving adequate support and services in the school at home environment and might be regressing as a result; **5. Motivation is a problem** – With assignments not graded or for enrichment only, several respondents found their children not motivated to do the work.

Further Reflections

Having examined the findings from the PPSH survey, we had additional questions and concerns:

1. Devices and connectivity – As our survey was conducted online, how about the families who do not have computers or Internet access and connections? Those families probably did not respond to the PPSH survey. To what extent are computers and/or tablets being provided by the schools, especially for elementary grade levels? Also, the cost of computer devices and Internet service will need to be factored into expenses. Has the DOE considered this? What changes in technology service and support might be projected for the next school year? With different technology platforms, parents might need technology assistance going forward.

2. Teaching delivered by parents at home – How can educators help families to support their children's learning, particularly when parents are also working from home? What considerations have been given to families with more than one child at different grade levels? What supports were being provided to parents as surrogate teachers during this time and in the future? To what extent could the school ensure there was consistent communication with home and family, not variability as noted in the findings?

3. Children need socioemotional support –To what extent have educators (schools, teachers, counselors and staff) considered these socioemotional needs of children and their parents/families? Is there a way to promote the students staying in touch with peers and teachers?

4. Children with special needs require more support –How have educators considered supporting SPED students and their families especially if this continues into next school year? It is likely that they will need more than those in regular education.

5. Motivation is a problem – How can home learning activities be more engaging? What guidance and rewards can be offered to urge and incentivize student work? Can we capitalize on the time and no testing, to allow for student-centered project-based learning? If school starts up with distance learning in late summer, will the first quarter be enrichment only or will parents be expected to deliver the curriculum?

Concluding thoughts

Parents for Public Schools of Hawai'i would like to thank the family members who responded to this survey. We suggest that the Hawai'i public school leaders apply these findings and questions to preparations for the next school year. We also hope that school leaders will maintain open and two-way communication with public school families so that we can all work toward equitable and excellent education for the children of our State.