

FROM PARENT TO TEACHER: FAMILIES' EXPERIENCES SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S LEARNING AT HOME

December 2020

Brief 5

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

Our survey of parents and guardians in Massachusetts illustrates the extent to which families quickly stepped up to the plate to support children's remote learning in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost all parents and guardians reported their child was engaged in remote learning (95%) and that they were staying in touch with their child's teachers and school (96%).

Beyond supporting more formal remote learning activities, nearly all parents and guardians also reported that they were doing math, science, language, or literacy activities with their child (95%). A large majority of parents and guardians also reported that they had created a learning or lesson plan for their child (81%).



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95% of parents and guardians reported that they were doing math, science, language, or literacy activities at home



81% of parents and guardians reported that they had created a learning or lesson plan for their child

Parents and guardians in our survey reported facing many challenges in supporting their child's learning at home. Some parents and guardians struggled to motivate and engage their children in remote learning, and some also felt uncertain about whether or not they were actually supporting their children's learning. In addition, many parents and guardians felt overwhelmed by the juggling act required to support their child's learning at home while balancing other responsibilities.



My daughter has ADHD. It is hard to teach things to her. I did not see progress. I did not know if I am doing okay.



We feel guilty when we aren't able to follow our daughter's classroom routine and have to choose which work is more important as we cannot manage working and teaching.



She fights me constantly because she doesn't want to do the work – which is not her typical behavior. She loves school and has never complained.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

As remote learning continues in many places, it is imperative to provide support for parents and guardians, and particularly for those with young children who rely intensively on adult help. Beyond broader efforts aimed at promoting families' financial well-being and making schools and communities safe for in-person instruction, there are a number of ways to support families engaged in remote learning:



Help families create remote learning routines that work for them.

Having a consistent schedule and procedure in place for remote learning can help families balance responsibilities by making days more predictable and efficient. These routines might involve having a set time for starting remote learning in the morning and clear activities to facilitate children's transition between school and home time. Structures and routines should be responsive to families' current realities, taking into account, for example, the types of activities children can successfully do on their own, parents' and guardians' work schedules, and the availability of designated spaces for learning in the home.



Connect families to alternatives to screen-based learning.

Although most formal remote learning must involve some use of screens, children's learning may continue in the home through a wide array of low-tech activities. Providing parents and guardians with concrete ideas for simple, low-cost learning activities to do in the home or community can extend the learning beyond the laptop. Doing so can also empower families to see the numerous ways they can and already do support children's learning through everyday activities, like cooking at home or playing outside.



Embrace gratitude, grace, and flexibility.

Facilitating learning at home for young children while balancing other responsibilities is a challenge. Acknowledging the increased load parents and guardians are managing as a result of the pandemic can help sustain families. This recognition could be as simple as a quick positive text or email expressing gratitude. It might also involve remembering that remote learning is unlikely to go as planned every day – the internet may cut out and little siblings may make occasional appearances in video calls. Expecting these sorts of unplanned moments, and responding to them with empathy and grace, will help strengthen relationships and ensure that learning stays on track.

Methodology: This brief is based on findings from a survey of 1,172 parents and guardians of five- to seven-year-old children across Massachusetts. These parents and guardians represent 1,209 young children participating in Early Learning Study at Harvard, a statewide study of early education and care. Most parents and guardians responded to the survey in April or May 2020.

For additional information, see the full report: [How are they faring? Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of families and young children in Massachusetts.](#)

Suggested Citation: Turco, R. G., Hanno, E. C., Wiklund Hayhurst, E., Jones, S. M., Lesaux, N. K., Hofer, K., Checkoway, A., Goodson, B. (2020). *From Parent to Teacher: Families' Experiences Supporting Children's Learning at Home* (Brief 5). Saul Zaentz Early Education Initiative, Harvard Graduate School of Education.