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# **Distance Learning & Special Education Parent Survey**



**August 6, 2020**

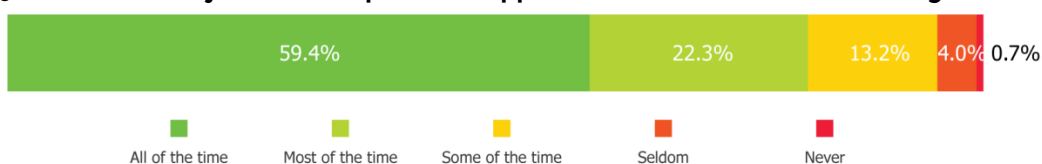
## Executive Summary

Between July 6<sup>th</sup> and July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020, RIPIN conducted an online survey of 427 parents of children with disabilities who attend school in Rhode Island and receive special education. The survey, available in English and Spanish, sought feedback from parents of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) regarding their experience during distance learning in the spring of 2020 and their preferences for the upcoming fall.

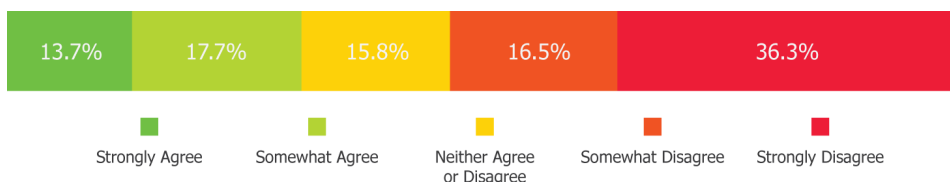
### Key Findings

Students with disabilities and their families faced unique challenges during distance learning. Most students required substantial support from an adult in the home, and many parents are not confident their child made sufficient progress.

#### Q. How much did your child require the support of an adult in the home during distance learning?



#### Q. Please rate your agreement with the following statement: I am confident that my child made sufficient progress during distance learning.



A substantial majority of respondents expressed a preference for all or some in-person school in the fall, assuming appropriate safety measures are in place. A notable minority preferred all distance learning in the fall.

#### Q. Assuming appropriate safety measures are in place, what is your preference for how your child returns to school in the fall?



### Conclusions & Policy Recommendations

1. School reopening plans should include targeted solutions and options for parents that address the diverse needs of students with disabilities.
2. On distance learning days, schools should consider enhanced in-person support for students with disabilities who are able to participate, whether in the home, in school buildings, or elsewhere in the community.
3. On in-person school days, schools should make high-quality distance learning options available for students with disabilities who need it.

## Survey Results

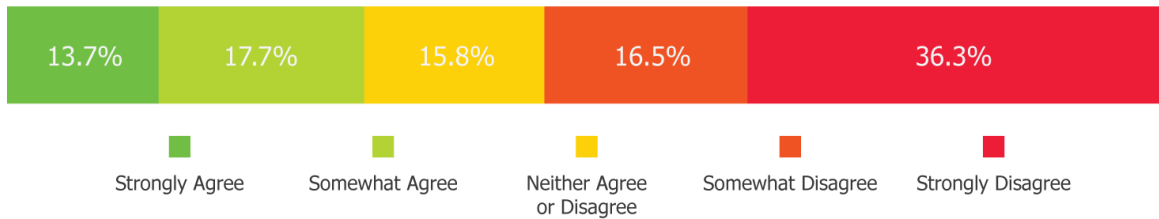
These results are presented in two parts. Part one describes parents' responses regarding their experiences with distance learning in the spring. Part two describes parents' responses regarding their preferences for the fall.

### Part One – Spring Distance Learning Experiences

#### 1. Parents don't feel their child made sufficient progress and are concerned about their child's social and emotional well-being.

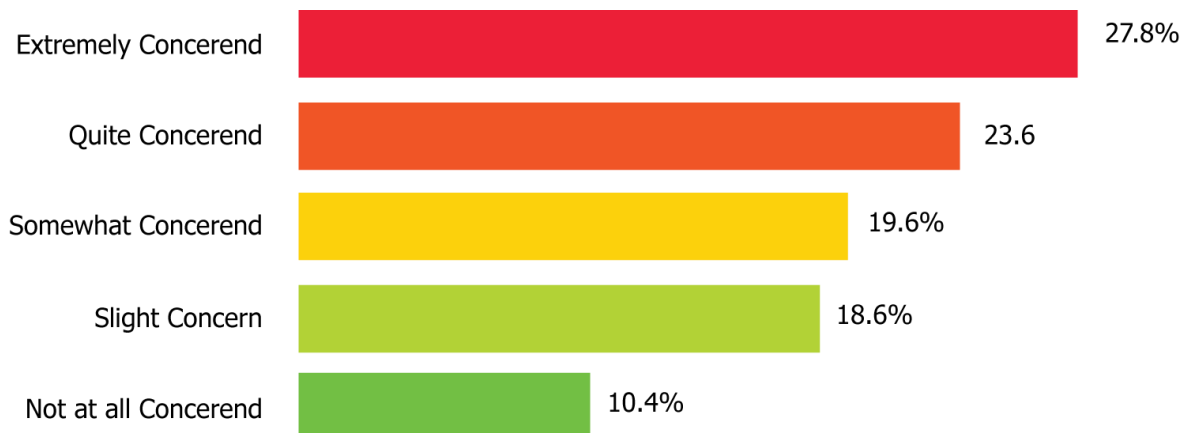
More than half of parents (52.8%) surveyed disagreed that their child made sufficient progress under distance learning, with more than one-third (36.3%) "strongly" disagreeing.

**Q. Please rate your agreement with the following statement: I am confident that my child made sufficient progress during distance learning.**



Parents expressed concern about their child's social and emotional development. More than one-fourth (27.8%) said they were "extremely concerned" about their child's social-emotional well-being.

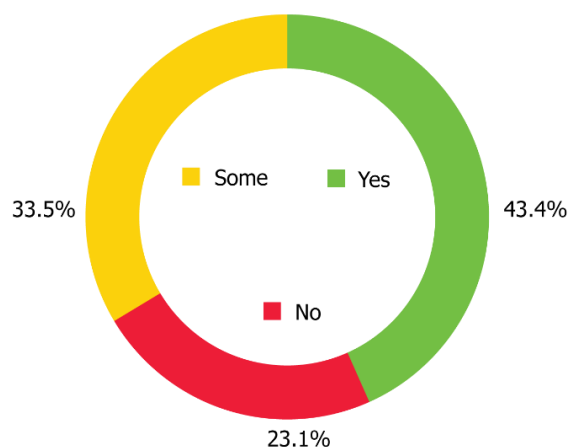
**Q. How concerned are you about your child's social-emotional well-being?**



## 2. Most students had access to some or all of the related services outlined in their IEP, but a substantial number of students did not receive any related services.

Asked about their child's access to related services like speech therapy, occupational therapy, behavioral and other supports, just over one-third (33.5%) of parents said they received "some" of these services. Nearly one-quarter (23.1%) said they did not receive any of the related services and supports outlined in their child's IEP.

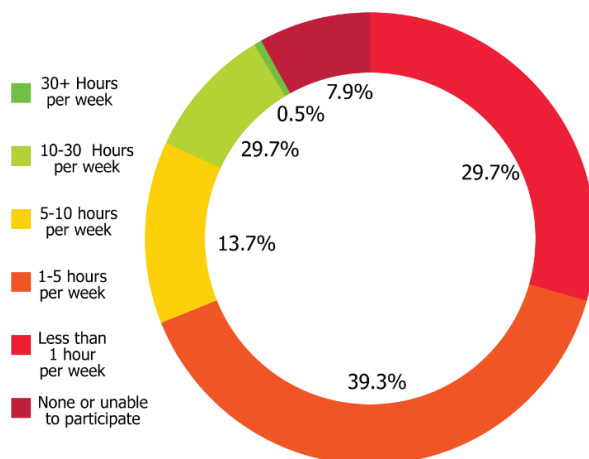
**Q. Did your child receive access to the related services and supports outlined in their IEP?**



## 3. Parents reported little time spent on real-time instruction.

Asked how much time their child received direct live instruction, more than two-thirds (69%) of parents surveyed said their child received five hours per week or less on average, including almost 30% who said their child received less than one hour per week.

**Q. How much time, on average, did your child receive real-time, direct instruction from an educator or other professional?**

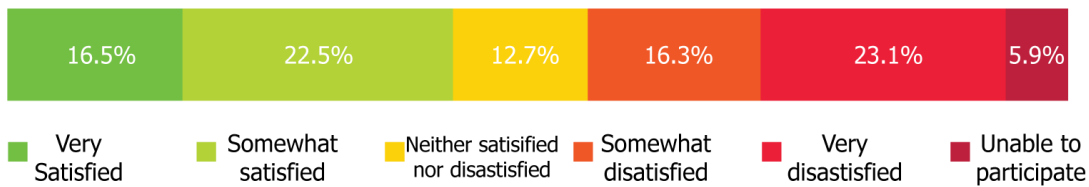


## 4. Overall satisfaction with distance learning was mixed.

Parents responding to our survey were closely divided in their overall satisfaction with distance learning, with 39% of parents saying they were either "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" versus 39.4% who

said they were “very dissatisfied” or “somewhat dissatisfied.” Notably, almost 6% of parents who responded said their child was unable to participate in distance learning.

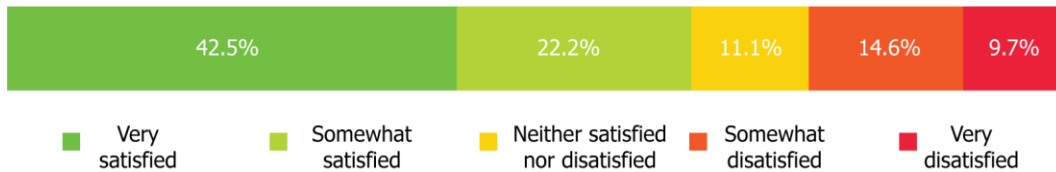
**Q. Overall, how satisfied were you with your child’s distance learning experience?**



**5. Most parents were satisfied with the communication they received related to their child’s IEP.**

Just under two-thirds (64.7%) of parents said they were either “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” when asked to rate the communication they received from their child’s teacher regarding their child’s IEP.

**Q. How would you rate the communication you received from your child’s teacher related to your child’s IEP during distance learning?**



**Q. What worked well with distance learning?**

“Regular check-ins with comments from teachers. Everything was graded within 24 hours.”

“I was happy to see the level of instruction that occurred.”

“She had amazing, devoted special education and traditional education teachers.”

“Que el pudo descansar mas, y tenia menos estreses y eso le ayudo a su estado físico y emocional.”  
 (“That he could rest more and had less stress and this helped his physical and emotional state.”)

“Keeping the students home kept them safe.”

**Q. What did not work well with distance learning?**

“The isolation for a child with autism is devastating to them socially.”

“My son’s mental ability did not allow for this form of learning.”

“Me acting as educator. I’m working fulltime, I’m not trained as a teacher or therapist, and he has a hard time working with mom!”

“Distance learning does not help a disabled child at all.”

## Part Two – Fall School Preferences

### Many parents of students with disabilities want them to return to school in the Fall.

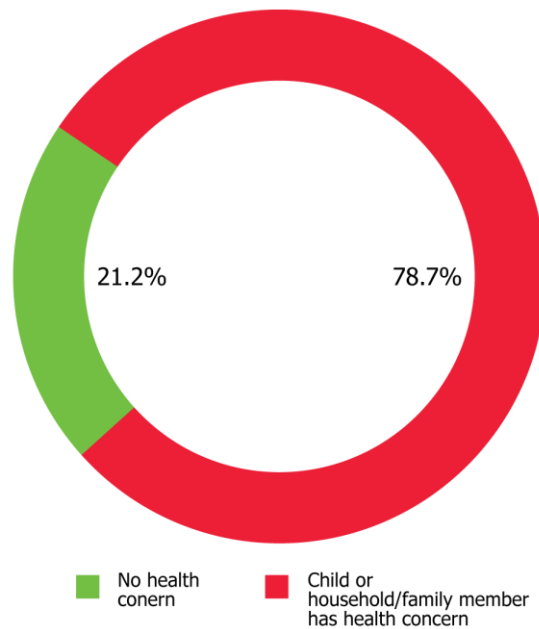
Almost half of parents who responded to our survey (49.6%) said they would prefer their child return to all in-person learning in the fall, assuming appropriate safety measures are in place. Just over one-third (34.3%) said they preferred a mix of in-person instruction and distance learning, while 16.1% said they preferred all distance learning.

#### Q. Assuming appropriate safety measures are in place, what is your preference for how your child returns to school in the fall?



Among the parents who preferred all distance learning, 78.7% indicated that their child and/or someone else in the household had a health concern that would prevent the child from returning to school in person.

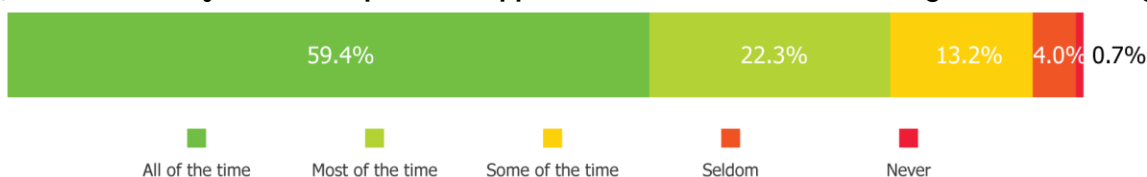
#### At-risk members of household among parents who reported a preference for all distance learning



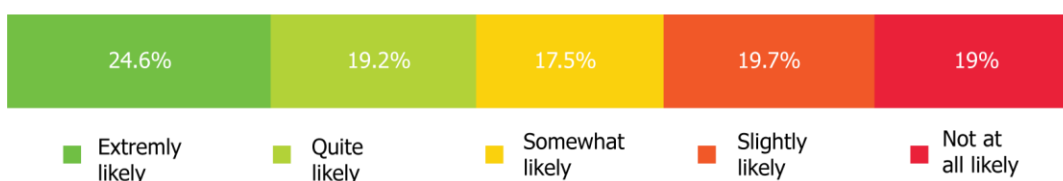
## Parents said their child required a lot of adult help while learning at home last spring, and that help might not be available this fall.

Nearly sixty percent (59.4%) of parents said their child required an adult's support "all of the time" during distance learning. Another 22.3% said their child required support "most of the time."

### Q. How much did your child require the support of an adult in the home during distance learning?



### Q. How likely is it that someone in your household will be able to provide learning support to your child if a form of distance learning continues in the fall?



## Conclusion

The results of this survey highlight the **unique challenges associated with distance learning for students with disabilities and their families**. They also show how important it is that districts **keep these students in mind when planning** for this fall and when revising those plans as conditions change over time.

Parents of students with disabilities reported overwhelmingly that they were **not confident in the progress their child made** during distance learning and that they **were concerned about their child's social-emotional well-being**. They also reported that their children needed **extensive support from an adult** in the home during distance learning, and that that support may not be available in the fall.

Given these findings, school reopening plans should include **targeted solutions and options for parents that address the diverse needs of students with disabilities**. On distance learning days, accommodations should be strongly considered to allow **enhanced in-person learning opportunities for students with disabilities** who prefer that modality and fared poorly with distance learning last year. Thinking creatively and using resources already available, **this in-person learning can potentially happen safely in homes, in school buildings, or elsewhere in the community**. At the same time, **schools should ensure that high-quality distance learning and other appropriate support remains available for students with disabilities who need it**.

## Survey Methods

RIPIN's survey was conducted online from July 6 through July 20, 2020. The evolution of the Covid-19 situation in the community since that time may mean some responses, especially with regard to fall preferences, would be different today (or in September) than they were in July.

The survey was distributed to RIPIN's email list serve and our social media audiences. Responses were requested only from households with a child with a disability receiving services through an IEP who participated in distance learning in the spring. RIPIN staff also contacted clients who have children with IEPs with information on how to access the survey. The survey was distributed as widely as possible by electronic means. However, the online-only nature of the survey and its distribution methods inherently limited the pool of potential respondents, and it was not a random sample of the whole population of families with children with disabilities.

Respondents included parents of children attending public schools (including charter schools), private schools, and special education schools (e.g. Meeting Street, Groden Center, etc.). Over 78% of total respondents were parents of a child enrolled at a non-charter public school. Responses were distributed relatively evenly across student grade level, with 8% in pre-school or kindergarten, 36% in elementary school, 23% in middle school, 28% in high school, and 5% in adult transition programs.

Potentially due to the online nature of the survey, more than 85% of respondents reported agreeing (somewhat or strongly) that they had access to the technology they needed, and 72% reported agreeing (somewhat or strongly) that they felt confident using that technology. About 15% of respondents reported a Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, and 5% reported that the child's parents or caretakers speak a language other than English at home. Just under 90% of respondents reported their child with a disability was white. RIPIN would welcome follow-up surveys better able to capture the sentiments of more non-white and English Language Learner families with children with disabilities.

### About RIPIN

The Rhode Island Parent Information Network (RIPIN) serves families using a **peer professional** support model. More than three-fourths of our staff are caregivers of a loved one with special education or special healthcare needs. Our team of experts combines their lived experiences with high-quality training and professional development to help families across Rhode Island access and navigate special education, healthcare and health insurance, and services and supports for individuals with disabilities.

Since our founding by a group of parent peers in 1991, RIPIN has been officially designated by the US Department of Education as Rhode Island's Parent Training and Information Center (PTIC) for special education. Each year, RIPIN helps thousands of families of students who receive special education through self-advocacy training, educational workshops, direct support, and more.

Learn more at [www.RIPIN.org](http://www.RIPIN.org).

Rhode Islanders with questions about special education can call us at 401-270-0101.