Understood conducted an online survey among parents of children ages 5 to 18 in the United States (referred to throughout as “parents”).

The study surveyed 1,500 parents about topics such as:

- Impact of pandemic-related schooling changes
- Challenges at home and with school
- Changes in behavior and attitude

For this survey, parents of “typical” children are defined as those whose children have not exhibited signs of learning differences or have not been diagnosed with ADHD or a learning disability such as dyslexia.

- This is in contrast to parents of children who are symptomatic or have been diagnosed with a learning disability or ADHD.
- The study is representative of the U.S. population and includes parents of children between the ages of 5 and 18, with 62% identifying as White/Caucasian, 25% as Black/African American, 5% as Asian, and 1% as Native-American. Twenty-five percent of the parents identified as Hispanic/Latino.

The survey was conducted between April 2021.

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Summary of Findings

Academic Challenges

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the shift to remote learning environments has presented parents with various challenges, concerns, and insights into their children’s learning and thinking differences.

- As a result of distance learning, 72% of parents have noticed or became aware of learning challenges or differences in their children.
- Nearly 60% of parents of children with learning and thinking differences say their children are a year behind and may never catch up, compared to just 33% of those with typical kids.
- About half of all parents (48%) have noticed behavioral changes in their child since the pandemic, including over-engagement with online activities and video games, lack of routine, difficulty managing emotions, and inability to focus.

Twice as many parents (49% vs. 25%) of children with learning and thinking differences are concerned about the “summer slide” compared to those of typical children.

- Almost all parents (86%) of children with learning and thinking differences are planning on summer academic supports compared to just half of parents of typical children.

Forty-four percent say that their child’s legal right to access an equitable education has been abandoned in the move to online learning.

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Summary of Findings

Emotional Impact

Children with learning and thinking differences have been particularly impacted emotionally by these schooling changes, which has driven high levels of concern and anxiety at home. Additionally, the parents of these children report feeling stressed and feel alone in their efforts to support their children.

- 48% of parents report that their children with learning and thinking differences have suffered high to extreme levels of school-based anxiety since the pandemic — more than double the rate among typical children.
- Children with learning and thinking differences are also about three times as likely to have experienced depression related to schooling changes.
- Parents commonly feel misaligned with how their school, and even how their spouse, views their child’s differences, with 57% saying they feel like they are the only one who sees their child’s challenges.
- They are much more worried about the near and long-term emotional impacts of schooling changes on their children, are more likely to report a negative impact on their own mental health, and express feelings of anxiety, fear, sadness, depression, anger, and even self-doubt.

Mental health findings

72%
During remote learning, 72% of parents became aware or noticed their children have learning challenges or differences.

57%
of parents whose children learn and think differently feel isolated in their concern for their child and aren’t sure how to help.

48%
of parents report that their neurodiverse children have suffered high levels of school-related anxiety since the pandemic — more than double the rate among typical children.

2X
Twice as many parents of neurodiverse children are concerned about the “summer slide” compared to parents of neurotypical kids.

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For resources to help, visit Understood.org

Summary of Findings

Financial Burden

Parents are investing a significant amount of time and money to support their kids in keeping up academically amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

- 43% of parents say they are facing a huge financial burden because of the pandemic and remote learning, spending $1,625, on average, for their child for the 2020-21 school year.

- Almost twice as many (56% vs. 30%) parents of kids with learning and thinking differences say they are facing these financial burdens, and spending almost $350 more this school year, compared to typical parents.

- Parents of kids with learning and thinking differences plan on spending about $240 more for supports this coming Summer on average.

Financial implications

43% of parents say they are facing a huge financial burden because of the pandemic and remote learning — with an average spending of $1,625 for the 2020-21 school year.

86% of parents whose children learn and think differently are planning to get extra academic support for their child this summer, compared to just half of parents of neurotypical children.

They also plan on spending about $240 more for this extra support.

3 most common steps parents have taken to support their child:  
- buying software/apps  
- hiring personal tutors  
- cutting back hours at work
In the environment of remote learning, 72% of parents have become aware or noticed their children have learning challenges or differences.

Spending more time at home because of the pandemic has made me more aware of my child’s learning challenges.

Note: Percentages shown represent the total of those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with this statement.
16% of typical parents believe their children are behind in their studies because of the pandemic, while nearly 60% of parents of those with learning and thinking differences say their children are a year behind and may never catch up.

Which of the following best describes the amount of academic progress that your child is making this school year?

I’m afraid my child has lost a year of studies and will never catch up.

Note: Percentages shown represent the total of those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with this statement.
Well over half of parents (57%) of children with learning and thinking differences feel isolated in their concern for their child and aren’t sure how to help them with their challenges.

They commonly feel misaligned with how their school, and even how their spouse, views their child’s differences.

*Note: Percentages shown represent the total of those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with each statement.*

- **I feel like I am the only one who sees my child’s learning challenges**
  - Typical: 34%
  - Symptomatic or diagnosed: 57%

- **My child’s school says my child is doing well academically, but I am not sure that is true**
  - Typical: 36%
  - Symptomatic or diagnosed: 58%

- **I’ve had difficulty convincing my spouse that our child has learning challenges**
  - Typical: 22%
  - Symptomatic or diagnosed: 48%

- **I am not sure how to help my child with their academic challenges**
  - Typical: 32%
  - Symptomatic or diagnosed: 57%

- **I don’t know who to reach out to for help with my child’s academic challenges**
  - Typical: 27%
  - Symptomatic or diagnosed: 54%
77% of parents say that they have invested a significant amount of time and money to help their children with learning and thinking differences to keep pace amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

I have invested a significant amount of time and money to help my child keep up with their schooling during the pandemic.

Note: Percentages shown represent the total of those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with this statement.
43% of parents say they are facing a huge financial burden because of the pandemic and remote learning, spending an average of $1,625, for their child for the 2020-21 school year.

Almost twice as many parents (56% vs. 30%) of children with learning and thinking differences say they are facing these financial burdens, and spending almost $350 more this school year, compared to parents of typical children.

Providing my child with the academic supports they need has put a major financial burden on my family.

Note: Percentages shown represent the total of those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with this statement.

And approximately how much do you expect to spend on these additional supports for your child for this school year (2020-21)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All parents</th>
<th>Typical</th>
<th>Symptomatic or diagnosed</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Spend</td>
<td>$1,625</td>
<td>$1,458</td>
<td>$1,803</td>
<td>$1,831</td>
<td>$1,785</td>
<td>$1,312</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For resources to help, visit Understood.org
Buying software/apps, hiring personal tutors, and cutting back hours at work are the most common steps that parents have taken to support their child during the pandemic.

Which, if any, of the following have you done to support your child either academically or emotionally as a result of schooling changes since the pandemic?

- Purchased educational software/apps: 17% Typical, 30% Symptomatic or diagnosed
- Cut back the number of hours I work: 14% Typical, 27% Symptomatic or diagnosed
- Hired a personal tutor: 7% Typical, 20% Symptomatic or diagnosed
- Saw a pediatrician: 8% Typical, 19% Symptomatic or diagnosed
- Hired a private therapist/psychiatrist: 4% Typical, 18% Symptomatic or diagnosed
- Conducted a professional reading evaluation: 4% Typical, 18% Symptomatic or diagnosed
- Left the workforce to focus on my child: 7% Typical, 18% Symptomatic or diagnosed
- Hired a learning specialist/educational therapist: 4% Typical, 15% Symptomatic or diagnosed
- Conducted a neuropsychological evaluation: 2% Typical, 12% Symptomatic or diagnosed

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About half of all parents (48%) have noticed behavioral changes in their child since the pandemic, with parents of children with learning and thinking differences more than twice as likely (66% vs. 31%) to report changes as compared to those of typical kids.

Have you noticed any behavioral changes in your child compared to before the pandemic?

Note: Percentages shown represent the total of those who said that they did notice behavioral changes.

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Hyper-engagement with online content and video games, difficulty regulating their emotions, lack of routine, lack of proper sleep, and inability to focus are the most common new behaviors that parents have observed in their children.

Which, if any, of the following behavioral changes have you noticed?

- Can’t stop watching YouTube videos, playing video games or scrolling through social media: 38%
- Has difficulty managing their emotions: 31%
- Has not been able to stick to a routine: 30%
- Is more comfortable with technology: 29%
- Refuses to do schoolwork: 28%
- Has been more tired than usual: 28%
- Can’t focus on a task for more than five minutes: 27%
- Is not getting proper sleep: 27%

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Outside of family and friends, and speaking with their child directly, teachers are the most common (38%) resource that parents have consulted with to discuss their behavioral concerns.

Who, if anyone, did you discuss these behavioral changes with?

- My spouse or partner: 43%
- My child: 39%
- Teacher: 38%
- Family member: 37%
- Friend: 22%
- Guidance counselor: 16%
- Private therapist: 16%
- Pediatrician: 15%
- School psychologist: 13%
- School administrator: 12%
- School nurse: 7%
48% of parents report that their kids with learning and thinking differences have suffered high to extreme levels of school-based anxiety since the pandemic — more than double the rate among typical kids.

Those with learning and thinking differences are also about three times as likely to have experienced depression related to schooling changes.

How would you describe your child’s level of anxiety related to schooling changes since the pandemic?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Anxiety</th>
<th>Typical</th>
<th>Symptomatic or Diagnosed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extreme</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Has your child suffered from depression as a result of schooling changes since the pandemic?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depression</th>
<th>Typical</th>
<th>Symptomatic or Diagnosed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The stress level related to distance learning has been much higher for those with learning and thinking differences, resulting in physical symptoms, avoidance of attending classes, and expressions of frustration, fear, sadness, anger, and self-doubt.

Thinking about the emotional and social impacts that changes in schooling have had on your child, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? My child has...

Note: Percentages shown represent the total of those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with each statement.

- Found distance learning to be extremely stressful: 44% Typical, 65% Symptomatic or diagnosed
- Suffered emotionally with distance learning: 36% Typical, 61% Symptomatic or diagnosed
- Frequently expressed not wanting to attend school: 36% Typical, 58% Symptomatic or diagnosed
- Had physical symptoms like headache etc. due to the stress of distance learning: 30% Typical, 57% Symptomatic or diagnosed
- Not attended classes due to stress/anxiety: 23% Typical, 47% Symptomatic or diagnosed

Which, if any, of the following emotions has your child displayed as a result of schooling changes since the pandemic?

- Frustration: 29% Typical, 40% Symptomatic or diagnosed
- Anxiety: 22% Typical, 37% Symptomatic or diagnosed
- Sadness: 18% Typical, 28% Symptomatic or diagnosed
- Self-doubt: 13% Typical, 25% Symptomatic or diagnosed
- Anger: 11% Typical, 22% Symptomatic or diagnosed
- Fear: 8% Typical, 20% Symptomatic or diagnosed

For resources to help, visit Understood.org
The struggles that kids with learning and thinking differences face in coping with schooling changes have driven stress and anxiety within their households.

Parents of kids with learning and thinking differences are almost twice as likely to report that their child’s distance learning challenges are impacting their household, and personally report a much greater level of anxiety compared to parents of typical kids.

*My child’s struggles with distance learning have caused a lot of stress in my household*

**Note:** Percentages shown represent the total of those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with this statement.

**How would you describe your personal level of anxiety related to schooling changes since the pandemic?**

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Parents of kids with learning and thinking differences are much more worried about the near and long-term emotional impacts of schooling changes on their kids, are more likely to report a negative impact on their own mental health, and express feelings of anxiety, fear, sadness, depression, anger, and even self-doubt.

Thinking about you, the parent, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Note: Percentages shown represent the total of those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with each statement.

- Trying to keep up with my child’s distance learning curriculum is a major challenge for me: 48% agree, 73% disagree.
- Balancing work and supporting my child with distance learning has been a serious challenge: 52% agree, 72% disagree.
- I worry that distance learning will have negative impacts that will affect my child into adulthood: 42% agree, 62% disagree.
- I fear that distance learning has had a more of a negative emotional impact on my child than other kids their age: 34% agree, 61% disagree.
- My child’s struggles have negatively impacted my mental health: 32% agree, 58% disagree.
- I worry that my child will never fully recover from the emotional impacts of the past school year: 32% agree, 55% disagree.

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Parents of children with learning and thinking differences are much more worried about the near and long-term emotional impacts of schooling changes on their kids, are more likely to report a negative impact on their own mental health, and express feelings of anxiety, fear, sadness, depression, anger, and even self-doubt.

Which, if any, of the following emotions have you personally felt as a result of schooling changes since the pandemic?

- Anxiety: Typical 29%, Symptomatic or diagnosed 39%
- Sadness: Typical 15%, Symptomatic or diagnosed 28%
- Depression: Typical 13%, Symptomatic or diagnosed 26%
- Anger: Typical 12%, Symptomatic or diagnosed 24%
- Fear: Typical 13%, Symptomatic or diagnosed 24%
- Self-doubt: Typical 11%, Symptomatic or diagnosed 23%
44% of parents of children with learning and thinking differences say their child’s legal right to access an equitable education has been abandoned in the move to online learning.

70% of all parents agree that when school curriculums don’t consider those with learning and thinking differences, they are limiting their access to an equitable education.

*Note: Percentages shown represent the total of those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with this statement.*
44% of parents of children with learning and thinking differences say their child’s legal right to access an equitable education has been abandoned in the move to online learning.

However, 44% of those parents who have an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) to ensure an equitable education for their child with learning and thinking differences, report that not all accommodations are being met this school year, even though school districts have a legal obligation to do so.

Thinking about your child’s IEP, what proportion of the accommodations listed in your child’s IEP do you believe are being delivered this school year (2020-21)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proportion</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very few</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None at all</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For resources to help, visit Understood.org
44% of parents of children with learning and thinking differences say their child’s legal right to access an equitable education has been abandoned in the move to online learning.

Many of these parents also indicate that their child’s school hasn’t made as much effort as they could have to provide the agreed upon supports for their child with learning and thinking differences.

What level of effort do you feel your child’s school COULD HAVE made to provide the accommodations listed in your child’s IEP this school year (2020-21)?

What level of effort do you feel your child’s school HAS made to provide the accommodations listed in your child’s IEP this school year (2020-21)?

For resources to help, visit Understood.org
Against the backdrop of vaccine deployment, 6 out of 10 parents are not confident about sending their kids back to school but also don’t feel like remote learning is the ideal learning environment.

This a serious tension point for the vast majority (72%) of parents of those with learning and thinking differences, compared to just 52% of parents of typical kids.

*While I worry about sending my child back to in-person school because of COVID, at the same time, I don’t feel like virtual/distance learning is working very well.*

**Note:** Percentages shown represent the total of those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with this statement.
Parents need to be confident that schools have several safety protocols in place, including hand-washing, temperature checks, and classroom sanitization, as students return for the 2021-22 school year.

Please rate how important each of the following considerations are when deciding whether or not to send your child to in-person school full time for the 2021-2022 academic year.

**Note:** Percentages shown represent the total of those who stated that this item is extremely or very important.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consideration</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students and teachers are encouraged to wash their hands frequently</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All teachers in the school receive the COVID vaccine</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperature checks for anyone entering the school (and admittance with a fever)</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disinfecting the school and classrooms daily</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular surveys to collect feedback from parents and students</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-person learning is halted as soon as someone in my child’s classroom tests positive for COVID</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-person learning is halted as soon as someone in the building tests positive for COVID</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size is limited</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Twice as many parents (49% vs. 25%) of children with learning and thinking differences are concerned about the “summer slide” compared to those of typical kids.

How concerned, if at all, are you about your child losing academic progress over this coming summer?

Note: Percentages shown represent the total of those who are extremely or very concerned.
Almost all parents (86%) of kids with learning and thinking differences are planning on summer academic supports compared to just half of parents of typical kids — they also plan on spending about $240 more on average for supports this coming summer.

Buying books/workbooks, summer learning programs, educational software/apps, and online classes are the most popular summer supports across both parent groups.

Which, if any, of the following do you plan on doing this summer to help prepare your child for the next school year (2021-22)?

Approximately how much do you expect to spend on these additional Summer supports for your child?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expected spend:</th>
<th>Typical $789</th>
<th>Symptomatic or diagnosed $1027</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purchase books/workbooks</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend summer learning program (in-person or virtual)</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase educational software/apps</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase online classes</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hire a personal tutor</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hire a private therapist/psychiatrist</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hire a learning specialist/educational therapist</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For resources to help, visit Understood.org
Thank you!

If any of the challenges reported in the survey are familiar to you or someone you know, visit Understood or to access additional resources please visit our Understood Update blog.