

Speak UP Survey for Parents of Kids with Disabilities in LAUSD

This report analyzes data from over 125 Special Education (SpEd) parents to identify challenges they faced with receiving services and support for their children via distance learning in the spring of 2020 during school closures.



By analyzing experiences from the last three months of this past school year, this report seeks to understand how SpEd students from across the district experienced distance learning and highlight changes needed to prevent similar challenges from continuing to disrupt their education in the fall.

The survey was hosted on Speak UP's website and available to any parents visiting the link. The link was sent via email to all SpEd parents in Speak UP's database, posted to multiple SpEd parent Facebook groups, and shared with other parent and SpEd advocacy organizations. Responses were collected in May and June, during the last six weeks of the school year and the two weeks after school ended.

Parents from every board district were represented in the responses. Approximately 80% of the SpEd students whose parents responded attend traditional district schools, while 20% attend charter and non-public schools.

Executive Summary

Based on the data from the Survey for Parents of Kids with Disabilities in LAUSD, the district should consider the following when making plans for the new school year:

- 1) **LAUSD must guarantee that SpEd services, accommodations, and modifications for all students with IEPs will be delivered in a format appropriate for the intended therapy and aligned with established practices in that area of specialty.** More than half of the SpEd students whose parents responded to our survey received minimal or no services this spring, and almost 70% of these students did not receive services in a suitable format. SpEd services are not just a legal requirement of an IEP. Services, accommodations, and modifications are the methods for providing students with disabilities equitable access to an education. Failing to deliver services in a suitable and effective format is equivalent to denying SpEd students access to classes. There were many cases where students' parents received an emailed worksheet from the service provider to review with their child in lieu of actual delivery of services by the provider. Worksheets are not an adequate substitute for live, synchronous services.
- 2) **LAUSD must mandate continuously collaborative and timely communication from teachers and IEP team members concerning a student's services and academic goals.** Over 70% of SpEd families received insufficient communication from their children's IEP team members this spring. About 20% of these same families received little to no communication from teachers. Many parents also reported disrupted services, unreturned calls, and only the occasional voicemail from service providers. Consistent communication must be established through channels that push messages to platforms that parents actually check to keep them updated on schedules and options for their children's services.
- 3) **LAUSD must provide training and support for teachers and parents of children with IEPs to successfully manage their in-home learning.** Parents need to be trained in the technology and platforms their children will be using for classes and services. This training needs to be offered to all parents in accessible formats, including instructional videos and other audiovisual channels. Teachers and service providers must also receive similar training to deliver virtual services through synchronous online channels.

SpEd Services and Communication

Key Takeaways:

- Less than half of the SpEd students whose parents responded to our survey received services during the three-month school closure this spring.
- Over 60% of these SpEd students did not receive their services in a format suitable to their specific needs.
- One in five SpEd families surveyed received little or no communication from their teacher, and 70% received insufficient communication from their child's IEP team.
- The majority of these families do not feel fully supported by their schools to manage in-home learning for their child with an IEP.

Services During Distance Learning

We heard from many SpEd parents who were struggling to ensure their children received IEP services. Here are a few examples of comments we received from parents:

- **“My child is in need of speech services.** I've reached out to the therapist and she said she can't offer direct speech like the IEP indicates but can do the assignments she posts with him, which is about 15 minutes.”
- “My child's Speech and Occupational therapists are not providing Zoom therapies. **They only send worksheets via email and expect me, the parent, to be the therapist.** I am not qualified to treat my child. My child needs online Zoom lessons to learn and connect. This is unacceptable.”
- “Inconsistent services between schools. **My daughter isn't getting services, but my nephew in another school, same district, is.**”
- “My child is supposed to receive an hour of Resource daily, either push-in or pull-out. **She is getting nothing.** And just 45 minutes of Gen Ed twice weekly, with little instruction. No speech except 'office hours,' whatever that means. Supposed to be 60 mins. 20 mins of Recreation Therapy occurred just once. Supposed to be three times per month. No Adapted Physical Education [APE] except emails from APE provider.”

SpEd students not receiving services is unacceptable. The IEP is a federally mandated legal document, and the services outlined in an IEP must be provided to ensure that all students have equitable access to schools and education. Every delay or denial of services due to a labor agreement or failure to adapt means one more student locked out of opportunities for growth.

Unfortunately, this issue was not isolated to a handful of families. Less than half of the SpEd students whose parents answered the survey received the services they are entitled to during the three months of virtual learning in the spring.

Has your child received any special education services via distance learning during the school closure?

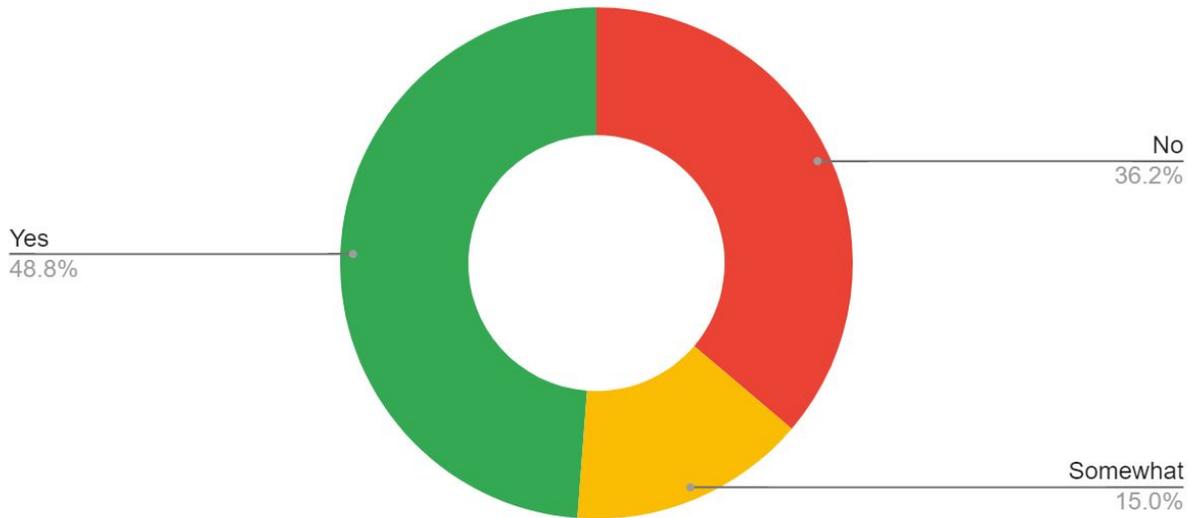


Figure 1. Less than half of SpEd parents indicated that their student fully received services in the spring.

Even when students do receive their services, they are often delivered in a format not suitable for the intended therapy. A common complaint reported via this survey was speech services that were delivered—if at all—solely via paper documents, such as worksheets or lists of ideas for parents to implement on their own.

Have your child's services been delivered in a format that is well-suited to his or her learning needs (ex: live video, recorded video, phone, packet)?



Figure 2. Over 60% of the SpEd students whose parents answered the survey were not receiving their services in a format suitable to their specific needs.

Services that are not delivered in a format that fits the student's needs place more of a burden on the parent to rework and redeliver these services in an alternative way. Parents are not trained service providers, and parents should not be expected to do the work of a teacher, therapist, or inclusion facilitator.

Communication with Schools

Many SpEd parents were also frustrated with the lack of communication they received from their children's schools. Here are a few examples of comments we received from parents:

- **"I needed any type of support from the school and teachers but nothing was provided for my child.** In fact, in mid-quarantine the teacher notified us that there would be no more communication since she no longer was going to be teaching, very disappointing. The speech therapist only communicated about 3 times simply uploading a mediocre pdf but was no help. I tried contacting services but have had no success."
- "It wasn't until today when I contacted the **Assistant Principal** and asked her when we'd be getting services that I actually got info. She **seemed surprised that our service providers haven't been in touch. Someone had totally dropped the ball.**"
- "My elementary school is doing very little to support my daughter. No Interaction from resource specialist program, only worksheets that stress my daughter out, she needs direct instruction. [...] I called our local district two weeks ago to talk to someone and have never received a call back. **Where is the oversight and accountability with these service providers?** And lastly I was pretty much forced to waive my annual IEP? The assistant principal said the teacher couldn't attend because of their contract. How can that be legal?"

We asked parents about communication with their teachers. This included any kind of communication, whether interactive conversations or one-sided emails. We found that one in every five families who responded to our survey received little or no communication from their children's teachers.

Have you received any communication from your child's teacher?

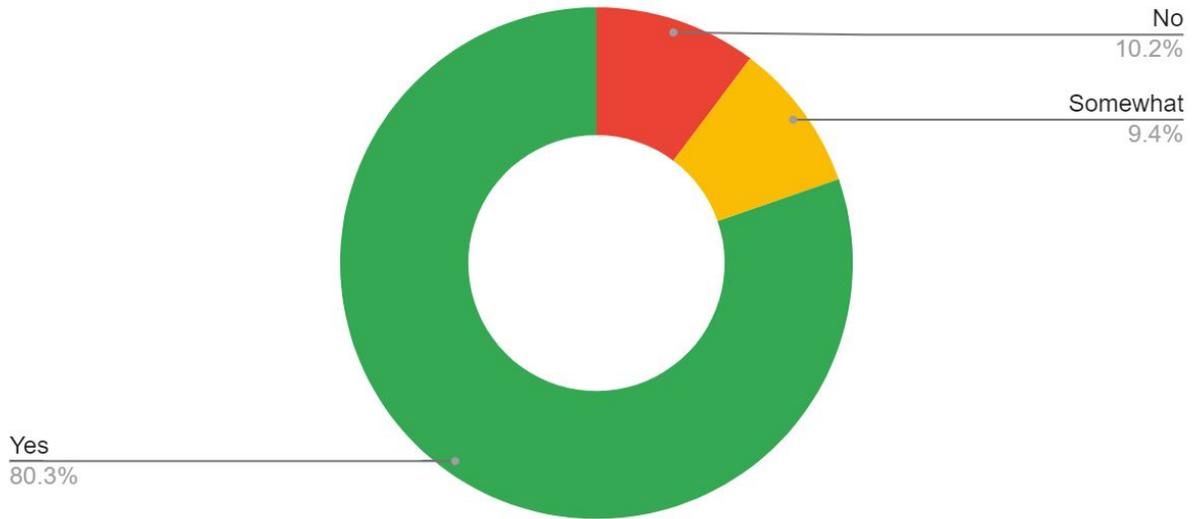


Figure 3. About 20% of parents received little to no communication from teachers this spring.

Even more concerning is the lack of communication from students' IEP team. More than half of the families we heard from received insufficient communication from the SpEd educators responsible for their children's services.

Have you received sufficient communications from IEP team members addressing your child's IEP services?

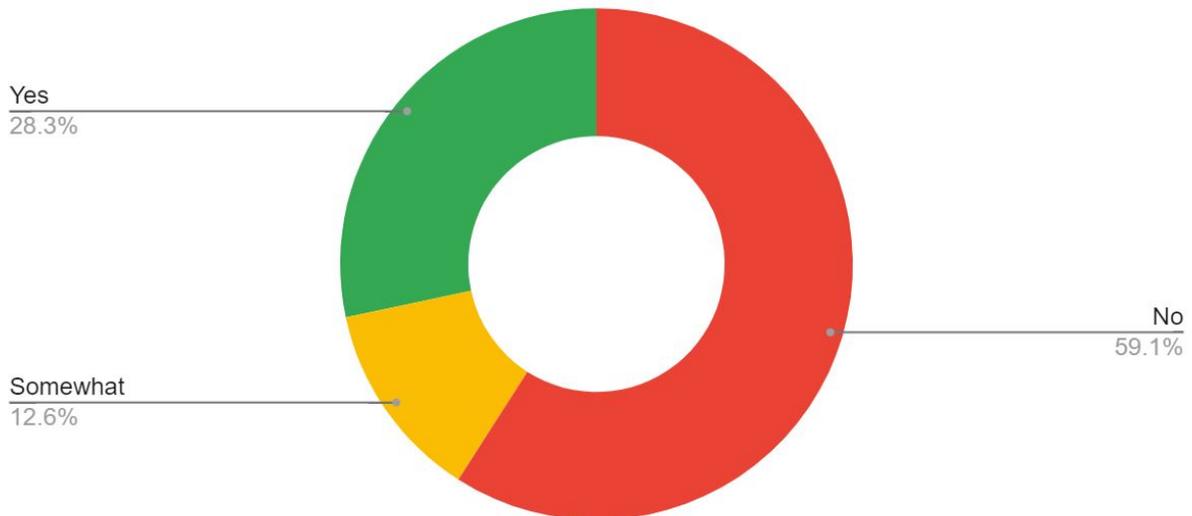


Figure 4. Over 70% of families reported insufficient communications from their children's IEP teams.

It is clear that SpEd parents are struggling to help their children access an equitable education. The lack of training provided for parents coupled with the disruption in services and

communication from schools translates into a huge percentage of parents feeling unsupported by their schools.

Do you feel well-supported by your school in implementing learning for your child at home?

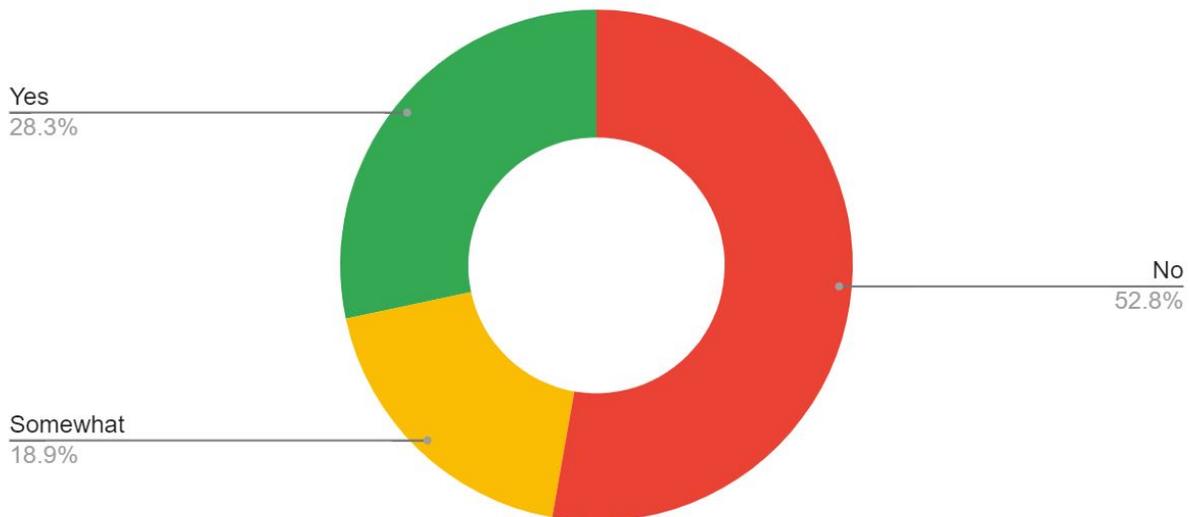


Figure 5. The majority of our families do not feel fully supported by their schools to manage in-home learning for their child with an IEP.

The data makes it apparent that students with disabilities have been short-changed during school closures and have not been offered a Free and Appropriate Public Education. Moreover, the district has left outreach and support solely in the hands of teachers, schools, and local administrators, a system that creates a complete lack of accountability. As one parent put it: “Someone dropped the ball.”

The problems that we are seeing with the lack of supports for students with disabilities during school closures are only a magnified version of systemic issues that have plagued this population for decades. Parents of students with disabilities need to be directly involved in the district’s efforts to improve these systemic failures. Going forward:

LAUSD must **include parents of students with disabilities in the negotiations** with their labor partners.

LAUSD must **guarantee that students with IEPs will be provided with live, synchronous services**, as well as the accommodations, modifications, and supports they need to meaningfully access the live, synchronous instruction.

LAUSD must **mandate fluid, collaborative, consistent, and timely communication from teachers and IEP team members** that is concurrent with communication that families of nondisabled students receive.

LAUSD must **survey parents of students with IEPs directly and on an ongoing basis** (four times a school year) to be sure that their children are receiving services. Establishing a means of connecting directly with parents of students with disabilities to hear what their experiences are on the ground is crucial to improving systemic issues.

LAUSD must **create a robust system of accountability** that ensures that students with disabilities are always served, that their parents are supported, and that communication between all stakeholders—parents, students, service providers, teachers, and administrators—is fluid, collaborative, and productive.

Access to Technology

Key Takeaways:

- The vast majority of SpEd families surveyed have access to digital devices and Wi-Fi.
- Many parents still need training from LAUSD to use this technology effectively.

Over 90% of SpEd families surveyed have access to essential technology, including digital devices and Wi-Fi.

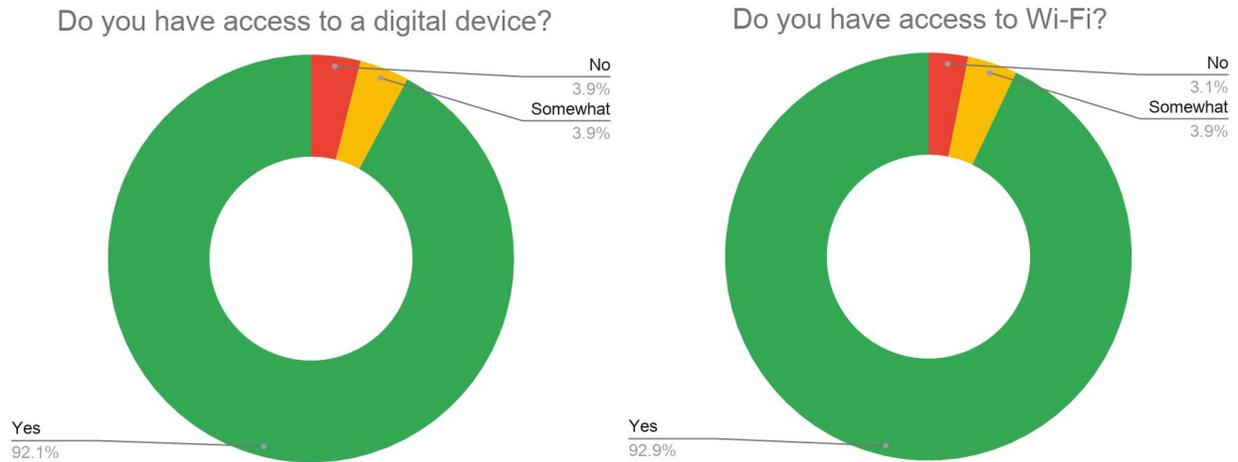


Figure 6. Access to digital devices (left) and internet connections (right) across SpEd households.

However, many parents still need training to use technology effectively.

Do you need support in learning how to use the devices and video conferencing platforms such as Zoom?



Figure 7. Almost half of our respondents are asking for more technology training from the district.

Providing resources is not effective unless parents know how to use those resources. Parents need to be offered training on everything from basic computer skills to the nuances of various digital platforms used by their schools, and SpEd parents in particular should be offered training on how to access digital accommodations and services during virtual learning. Many parents are interested in receiving training via instructional videos or other accessible formats.

Do you feel that parent trainings via video or television would help to further support your student with a disability at home?

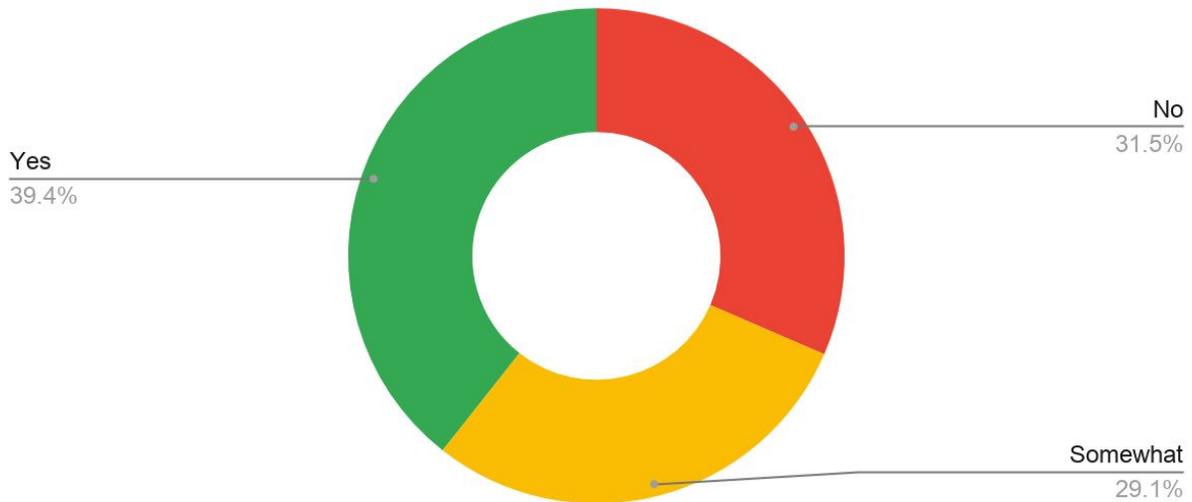


Figure 8. Two-thirds of parents are interested in parent training via video or television from LAUSD.

Speak UP is a grassroots organization of parents who want a more powerful voice in education policy. Kids don't have lobbyists, and kids don't have a union. Kids have parents, and parents are the only people whose sole interest is the success of kids. Learn more or become a member at speakupparents.org

Do you need free technology training for software such as Zoom? Does your child need a volunteer tutor to assist them during distance learning? Check out our iFamily program [here!](#)