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Where Are My Child's Special Education Services During COVID-19?



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Introduction

- Since the onset of COVID-19, students, parents, and educators have been impacted by school closures (Song et al., 2020).
- Challenges brought on by school closure may be exacerbated for students with disabilities who are reliant on special education and related services provided by the school (Hill, 2020).
- 14% of U.S. public school students receive special education services (IES, 2020).
- Few studies have explored the effects of COVID-19 on students receiving special education services.
- The present study explored how students receiving special education services and their families have been impacted by the delivery of services via distance learning.

Research Questions

1. How has the delivery of services changed since the onset of COVID-19? Do they differ by child's grade?
2. What concerns do parents of children with special needs face with distance learning?

Method

Participants: N = 152 parents

| | | |
|-----------|------------|------------------------|
| 86% White | 95% Female | 81% Had At Least BA/BS |
|-----------|------------|------------------------|

Parents answered questions about their children who...

| | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| • were enrolled in... | Preschool (7%) | Elementary School (43%) |
| | Middle School (24%) | High School 26%) |

- Receiving IEP/IFSP/504 plan services for a primary educational disability of...

| | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Autism Spectrum Disorder (25%) | Multiple Disability (25%) | Other Health Impairment (15%) |
| Specific Learning Disability (12%) | Developmental Delay (7%) | Speech or Language Impairment (7%) |
| Intellectual Disability (6%) | Emotional Disability (4%) | Orthopedic Disability (2%) |
| Hearing Impairment (1%) | Deaf/Hard of Hearing (1%) | |

Method (Cont.)

Measures and Procedures. An online Qualtrics survey was distributed to parents across the U.S. via social media sites between October and November 2020. Questions inquired about the quantity, quality, and mode of delivery of special education services and included parent demographic information.

Table 1. Sample Survey Items

| Sample Item | Response Type |
|--|-----------------|
| What are your biggest concerns if distance learning continues? | Multiple Choice |
| What are the biggest challenges your child faces with distance learning as it relates to special education services? | Multiple Choice |
| What do you expect teachers/schools to do in order for distance learning to be successful for children receiving special education services? | Open-ended |
| Is there anything else you'd like to share about distance learning for children receiving special education services? | Open-ended |

Results

RQ1: How has the delivery of services changed since the onset of COVID-19? Do they differ by child's grade?

- Children received significantly fewer related services during the 20-21 school year ($M = 1.69, SD = 0.87$) than the number required by their IEP/IFSP/504 plan ($M = 2.08, SD = 1.14$), $t(117) = 6.00, p < .001$.
 - 60% of students did not receive their mandated number of special education hours
- Students in elementary school were significantly more likely to receive their mandated number of special education hours [$X^2(2, N = 120) = 9.68, p = .008$; 43%] than middle (25%) or high (20%) school students.
- Students in elementary school were significantly more likely to receive their mandated number of related services [$X^2(2, N = 119) = 9.12, p = .01$; 39%] than middle (20%) or high (14%) school students.

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Results (Cont.)

RQ2: What concerns do parents of children with special needs face with distance learning?

- Across grades, parents reported significant concerns about ...
 - The constant need for parental support during distance learning in both general education (62% of parents) and special education (67% of parents) settings

"It is up to the parent to modify, teach and, let's be honest, do the work."

- The amount of time required to complete assignments (23% of parents)
- Lack of flexibility regarding completion of assignments/tasks

Children need "More time to turn assignments in and more written assignments not requiring a computer."

One parent reported "no accommodation being made."

- When referring to distance learning, parents said...

"[it's] impossible without sending a teacher or para [professional] to assist in the home"

"Distance learning does not work."

- Parents noted their children's lack of progress in school and some referred to it as children losing skills

"All progress made is lost," and "This has been a horrible experience for my child. He is basically going to have to repeat this grade. He needs in person learning."

Conclusions

- Consistent with some of Warner-Richter and Lloyd's (2020) findings, parents in the present study reported that children's special education and related service hours have decreased significantly during distance learning.
- The amount of parental support required for children receiving special education services has understandably increased during COVID-19. However, parents report they are unable to handle this and their children are not making progress and, in fact, many are losing skills.
- If distance learning continues or is used in the future, schools will need to reconsider how they support and offer services to special populations. Parents requested in-home academic and behavior support, more modifications to assignments, flexible due dates, and clarity with instructions.