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Report Released on Massachusetts Working Families and Their Experiences on School
during the Covid-19 Pandemic

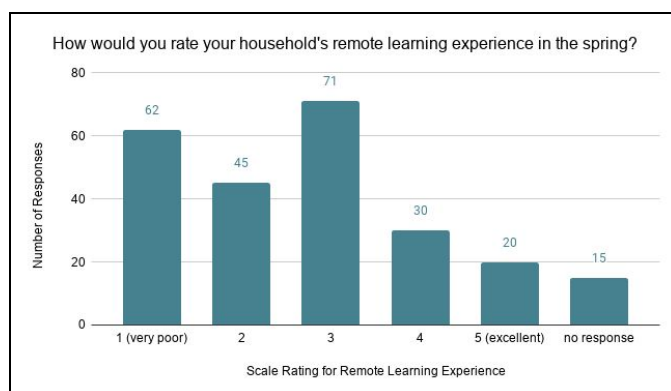
Boston-- During the first week of school for many Massachusetts families, statewide advocacy and organizing group Massachusetts Jobs With Justice (Mass JwJ) alongside its Parent organizing project the Parents Union of Massachusetts (PUMA) published a report of its survey results from working parents, guardians, caregivers, and families. The confidential survey was filled out by more than 275 families to share experiences on this past Spring's emergency shift to remote learning and the closure of physical school sites, to inform plans for fall teaching and learning to ensure that any and all plans are shaped by families' experiences and protect the health of school safe, educators, and students.

This survey was available in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. Respondents identified 116 different school districts (including private, charter, and religious) in Massachusetts and 233 different schools where their children attend school. More than 50% of respondents have children between the ages of 6-13 years old, and more than 92% reported having between 1-3 children in their household. Residents from 114 different Massachusetts cities/towns or Boston neighborhoods responded to the survey. Cambridge and Worcester had the most responses, followed by Chicopee and Springfield. Respondents identified 132 different work types/job fields, and most frequently identified social work (15.5%), education (11.0%), healthcare (6.5%), and early education and care (5.4%) as their/their spouse's field of work. Additionally, respondents self-identified affiliations with at least 17 different unions and 39 different organizations/employers.

Lily Huang, Co-Executive Director at Massachusetts Jobs with Justice and mother to a one-year old baby, said,

“The extreme arguments we see coming from some— that educators only care about their own health and not the needs of students and their working caregivers, and conversely that working caregivers only want in-school learning to resume so they can begin to work again— is divisive and unhelpful. The real argument and more nuanced issue at hand is that decision-makers are not listening to working people, especially working mothers, caregivers and womxn educators, who are underpaid and often perform additional unpaid domestic labor at home.”

In this survey, participants were asked questions about their families' remote learning experience in the spring, and their thoughts and concerns regarding school reopening plans this fall. Overall, more than 70% of respondents rated their household's remote learning experience this spring from 1 (very poor) to 3 (moderate), with respondents most frequently rating it a 3 (29.2%) or a 1 (25.5%). When asked about their preferences for learning in the fall, the majority of respondents (70.6%) reported preferring either remote learning (40.9%) or a hybrid model of learning (29.7%), and 26% of respondents reported preferring in-person instruction.



Families reported many challenges to a successful remote learning experience that can be addressed in the fall opening plans in Massachusetts. Very few respondents rated their experience with remote learning this spring as excellent (8.23%) or good (12.35%). The most frequently reported obstacles are the absence of social interaction (24.1%), juggling working from home with managing online learning (22.1%), too much flexibility in structure and schedule (16%), and lack of flexibility for various learning styles (13.5%). One respondent reported their challenges that were echoed by several others: “[I was] unable to work at home and simultaneously supervise [my child’s school] work. Infrequent [sic] communication from teachers to parents about student work.” Another parent who is also a teacher reported their challenges: “teaching my own students and having virtual meetings with them while trying to supervise and help my own kids with their school work.”

Lastly, each respondent had an open-ended opportunity to share what questions they would have for their elected officials about the school reopening plans. The responses were varied and personal and were grouped into 23 themed categories. The five most frequently reported question themes that respondents have for their elected officials are:

- How are you planning to support families financially, emotionally, with resources, etc.? (15.3%)
- How are you planning for safety in our schools? (13.1%)
- Can you mandate all schools to go online for the fall/until a vaccine is available? (10.2%)

- Have you explored all alternative options to traditional classrooms? (9.5%)
- How do you plan to support students with special needs or IEPs in their learning? (8.0%)

Alicia Fleming, Co-Executive Director at Massachusetts Jobs with Justice and mother to 8-year old in the Chicopee Public Schools said,

“We also know that those making reopening decisions are not listening to working families of color, the very people at the center of not one, but two public health crises— COVID-19, and the deep racial inequity that exists in our school systems and society at large. Going back to inadequately funded, unsafe schools should not be the only option for anyone, especially for Black and Latino/a/x students whom society fails at oppressively high rates, both in education and in COVID health outcomes.”

Nelly Medina, Parent organizer for PUMA Parents Union of Massachusetts and mother to 4-year old in Worcester said,

“The reality is, in less than a month, students, educators, and school staff are expected to return to schools, despite the fact that there has been almost no call for input from or communication with families on what their district plan will be. Working families, including educators and school staff, are exhausted and overworked, and have no idea what September and beyond will look like. They are tired of living in uncertainty. **We all want the stability of school schedules and before- and after-school programs back, and we know many families rely on schools for food, shelter, and health care, but again— forcing workers and children into a dangerous situation should not be the only option.**”

Survey report: https://issuu.com/activist-scholar/docs/working_families__2b_school_survey

MASSACHUSETTS JOBS WITH JUSTICE (JWJ) &
PARENTS UNION OF MASSACHUSETTS (PUMA)

WORKING FAMILIES ON SCHOOL & LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



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Massachusetts Jobs with Justice is a coalition of over 160 community, faith, and labor groups in Massachusetts organizing working people and allies to fight for the rights of all workers: locally, nationally, and internationally.