



# Impacts of the COVID pandemic on parents and young children in 2021, King County, WA

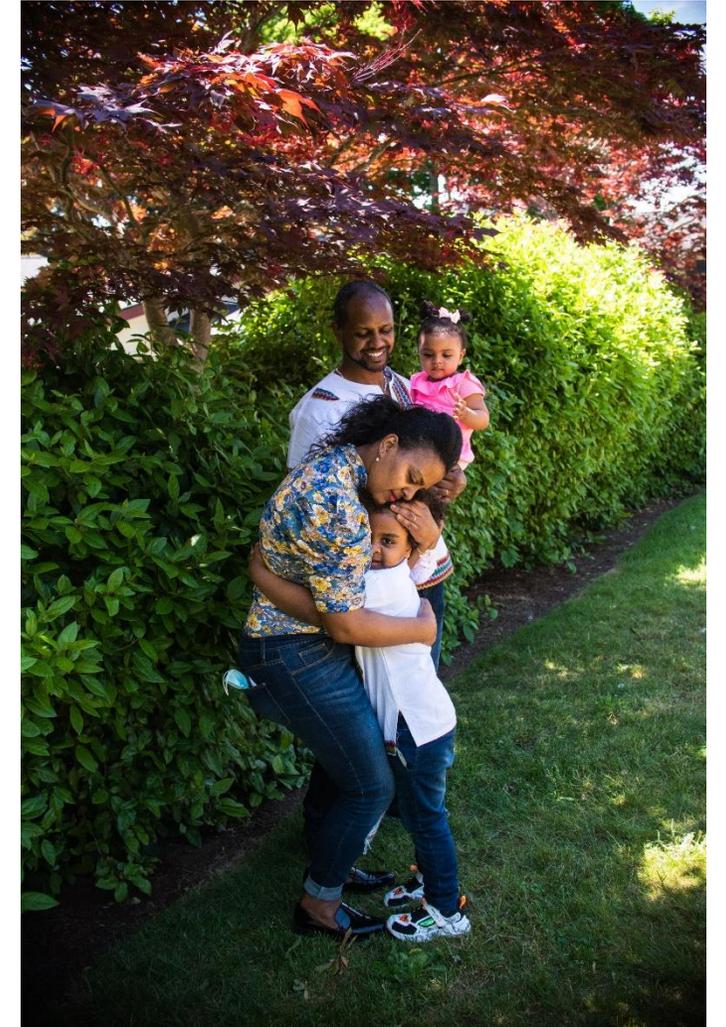
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Assessment, Policy Development, and Evaluation Unit; Public Health-Seattle & King County



## ABOUT THIS REPORT

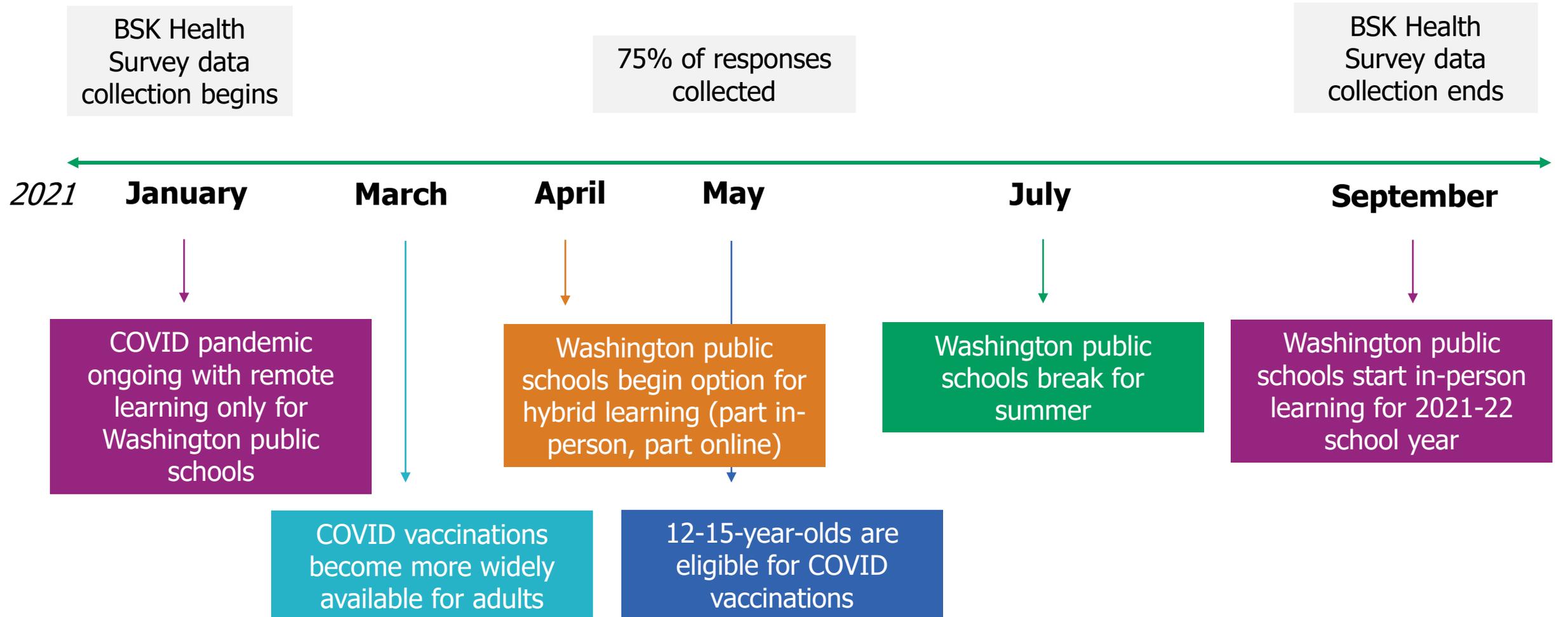
- This report provides relevant and timely information about the impacts of the COVID pandemic on young children and families in 2021 in King County, WA.
- The results come from the Best Starts for Kids Health Survey, a survey of over 7,000 parents and caregivers with young children in King County, WA. Families took the survey in seven languages online or by phone, and there was strong participation across demographic groups.



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# COVID EVENTS THAT IMPACTED FAMILIES IN 2021



# ● WHAT QUESTIONS DID WE ANSWER?

- In general, how did the COVID-19 pandemic impact King County families with young children?
- What were experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) families?
- What are impacts of the COVID pandemic on families of children living with disabilities, LGBTQ parents, and single parents?
- For moms and birthing people, how did the COVID pandemic impact their experiences as parents of newborns and infants?
- Do we see any changes due to increasing availability of adult vaccinations?

## BRIEF METHODS

- From January to September 2021, the Best Starts for Kids (BSK) Health Survey asked 7,033 parents and caregivers with children 5<sup>th</sup> grade and younger: “Please describe any changes, positive or negative, that the COVID pandemic has had on this child/your family.”
  - 90% of parents answered this question.
- Since this was qualitative data, our analysis process involved:
  - Translating Chinese, Korean, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese responses to English.
  - Identifying key topics related to known COVID impacts commonly shared by parents.
  - Randomly sorting responses, then reviewing and categorizing responses to identify themes until no new information was arising from the responses (reached saturation).
  - Identifying and reviewing responses for African American, Latina/x/o, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (NHPI), and Vietnamese families<sup>1</sup>, as well as low-income families<sup>2</sup>, single- and LGBTQ-parent families, and families with children living with disabilities to ensure that themes for these populations were appropriately represented in the overall sample, and specific themes based on the experiences of these communities were included in the analysis.
- Additional survey results are provided to add context to themes shared by parents.

<sup>1</sup>At the time this project started, these communities were experiencing higher rates of COVID outbreaks, deaths and/or hospitalizations. <sup>2</sup>\$50,000 year or less per year

## —● A FEW NOTES ABOUT THIS REPORT

- We use the term parents in this report because the majority (98%) of adults who took the survey identified as parents. We acknowledge that there are many caregivers for children, including grandparents, foster parents, and other relatives.
- The impacts of systemic racism and healthcare disparities continued to be felt throughout the COVID pandemic, and the pandemic disproportionately affected BIPOC families. We reviewed additional responses from BIPOC families to ensure their voices and experiences were reflected appropriately in this report.
- Some people prefer person-first (e.g., child living with a disability) and some prefer identity-first (e.g., disabled child) language when speaking about their and their child's identities and abilities<sup>1</sup>. We use both in this report to reflect the language that parents used and have edited lightly for clarity.
- Childcare providers, teachers, early education specialists, nurses, doctors and others need to be well and supported in order to care for our children well. This report only describes impacts of the COVID pandemic on children and families, and a limitation is our inability to describe the significant impacts on these providers.

<sup>1</sup> National Aging and Disability Transportation Center. "Person-first and Identity-first Language Choices." Available at: [nadtc.org/news/blog/person-first-and-identity-first-language-choices/](https://nadtc.org/news/blog/person-first-and-identity-first-language-choices/)



# Overall Experiences of Parents and Children During COVID

# SUMMARY: EXPERIENCES OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN DURING COVID

- Babies and toddlers missed out on important social development opportunities. Elementary-school children missed social interactions and felt isolated during remote schooling.
- Online schooling was a negative experience for many families, with children struggling to stay engaged and falling behind in classes. Some parents said their child or family preferred online schooling due their child's learning style or being removed from a racist or unsafe school environment.
- Parents were exhausted by the competing demands of work and schooling/childcare, with moms bearing the brunt of additional responsibilities.
- Many families had financial uncertainty in the face of a job loss, reduced hours, or the inability to meet basic needs.
- Yet, families were grateful for more time with their family, for the chance to see more about their child's schooling, and for the chance to get to reconnect and slow down.

*"...we saw huge academic leaps, but emotions worsened, and lack of confidence became [a] barrier to educational progress. [My child] has been the most adversely affected in terms of emotional, academic, and social growth by the pandemic. No way to explain what she has lost." – Parent of 0-5-year-old*

*"...having to teach the kids, having to be sometimes the teacher at home. I guess a positive one is that we have been able to learn some things from having to wear those different hats, being a teacher helper and I think we've grown closer together." – Parent of K-5<sup>th</sup> grader*

## IN ONE PARENT'S WORDS

*"She missed almost a third of her last year of developmentally specially designed instruction for her preschool. She started kindergarten in a remote setting which is the wrong situation for her. The first year of her academic school year was sub par.*

*I have not been able to set up mental health services for [child]... Because she was receiving the kind of services she needed for specially designed instruction and emotional support in her preschool but mental health services were closed as schools closed and we were unable to get a referral or any services for her. We are a high risk household, not able to go out.*

*When she went back to [in-person] school, we saw huge academic leaps but emotions worsened and lack of confidence became barrier to educational progress. **She has been the most adversely affected in terms of emotional, academic, and social growth by pandemic. No way to explain what she has lost. Missed out on socialization, strain on caregivers.***

*As a whole, we are changed for the good and the bad. Things that we weren't aware of that we needed to work on. As a whole, we have not been so adversely affected by it that our bonds are broken. As it stands, we haven't lost anybody to COVID. We lost wages, time, and sanity evidenced by change in dosage in my psych medications. It's definitely one of those "I could be a lot worse off" situations. **As a whole, we have managed to exist and function and while we didn't thrive, we survived and we did it with more than a little bit of grace.** Overall, for our older kids, they will probably be ok and will talk about it but if lucky they won't remember everything but enough to know that it was weird. **I'm hoping that any negative changes are survivable and positive changes are long lived.**" - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

## IMPLICATIONS OF WHAT PARENTS TOLD US

- Families and children need supports to address changes in children's social-emotional development and mental health.
- Parents appreciated more insight into what happens in the classroom, and some scholars did thrive with an online learning environment. Schools may want to consider how to continue these practices in the future.
- Access to in-person learning and support navigating referrals is important for children living with disabilities.
- Government programs and financial assistance were important sources of support.
- Access to open, affordable, and stable childcare were critical in supporting BIPOC families, moms, and children.
- The long-term implications of moms being disproportionately impacted by the trade-off between working and childcare and the stressors of COVID need to be addressed in policies.



**Health and Emotional Well-being**

# LACK OF SOCIALIZATION AND DELAYED MILESTONES FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS

- Many parents worried about limited opportunities for their infants and toddlers to socialize outside of their household, and children experienced heightened anxiety around new people and places.

*“Honestly the COVID pandemic has really affected [my child]. Since lockdown started when he was an infant, he still has had barely any exposure to the outside or other people/kids in general. It has made him act nervous and insecure in any other environment besides our house.” - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

*“He doesn’t know how to play with another kid. He doesn’t know how to behave with another people (teachers, strangers, family friends). He is scared to go into other buildings except his home. He doesn’t know how the store/ cafe/ playgrounds looks like.” - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

- Some parents shared that their child was behind in milestones or that their child had regressed in certain areas like managing big feelings.

*“He has regressed in his emotional development and ability to handle his emotions. His lack of social engagement has been detrimental to his mental health. We're currently looking for a counselor or therapist for him... Concerned about our kids not having the social engagement.” - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

# UNMET SOCIOEMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS FOR SCHOOL- AGED CHILDREN

- Parents said elementary school children missed their friends, teachers, and relatives, as well as connections from group activities (sports and clubs).

*"She's been doing online school this whole time, I think it has made her even more isolated than she already was socially." - Parent of K-5th grader*

*"It had a negative impact on her ability to be with peers, she has said that COVID has ruined her life, that she can't see her friends and can't go to school." - Parent of K-5th grader*

- Some parents shared concerns about declines in their children's mental and emotional well-being, including concerns about children experiencing sadness, loneliness, and anxiety.

*"[Child] has become more prone to crying outbursts. When she is disappointed, she doesn't bounce back as quickly." - Parent of K-5th grader*

*"[Child's] anxiety shot through the roof... and then later a period of depression and withdrawal. While he is adaptable, he is not as vibrant and fearless as he was before.... We have struggled to get appropriate mental health care for him; the waitlists are just too long." - Parent of K-5th grader*

# MANY PARENTS SHARED NEGATIVE IMPACTS ON THEIR EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

- Parents were exhausted and challenged by the competing demands of childcare and online school, all happening in the context of broader social isolation and disconnect from support networks. This was particularly true for moms, single parents, and families with children living with disabilities.

*“It was a challenge. At least 2 times we thought we could not make it, because we were so exhausted. It was hard to balance work and kids caring since [child] had to stay home with us. She needed our attention, and the online class was a challenge too.” - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

*“I have been working at home with 5 kids for a year. Trying to manage 5 online schedules alone is really hard. I miss friends. I am drinking more and have started therapy to deal with the new normal.” - Parent of K-5<sup>th</sup> grader*

- The pandemic heightened existing mental health concerns for some families, including anxiety, depression, and isolation. Many LGBTQ parents shared these concerns.
- Several parents who responded in Chinese described their child or family being afraid of going outside, with one parent directly mentioning anti-Asian hate crimes on top of the pandemic as the reason.

# MOMS EXPERIENCED INCREASED STRESS AND ANXIETY DURING THE PANDEMIC

- Moms noted that the increased time with children also meant less time for themselves.
- Moms reported job stress, parenting stress, and increased anxiety or mental health concerns as a result of balancing competing demands and the precautions during COVID. Several responses written in Chinese specifically mentioned additional pressures on moms.

*"It has introduced job stress and increased anxiety for me (her mother)." - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

*"I am a mother dealing, coping, and suffering with mental health and having my 5 children home inside 24/7 is extremely hard, rough, and tough..." - Parent of K-5th grader*

- A few moms noted additional struggles around lack of support from dads, while others noted that this created additional stressors on parents' relationship.

*"Well, lots of time spent together and so tension between myself and my partner. I expect more hands on help with the kids and the house but he seems unwilling to do so. We talk about it all the time, but not much has changed." - Female parent of K-5th grader*

# PREGNANCY AND BIRTH DURING COVID INCREASED STRESS AND ANXIETY

- Pregnancy and birth during COVID was a major hurdle. Moms and birthing people relayed experiences of being laid off while pregnant. Moms and birthing people who shared the experience of giving birth during COVID said it was stressful and anxiety-inducing.

*"I was laid off at 7 months pregnant due to COVID. It made life very stressful not having a job and bringing a new baby home." - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

*"The actual birth process was anxious, I had to wear mask even in labor, even the first time I had to breast feed. No help with baby when I came home. I was feeling lonely." - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

*"I delivered my second baby in June 2020 during pandemic. I couldn't find any help/daycare/nanny to take care of this 4 year-old baby while I was delivering & had postpartum issues going on." - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

- Families with newborns who had limited income or faced job losses found financial support from unemployment benefits, government programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and food banks to be vital sources of support during the pandemic.

# YOUNG CHILDREN LIVING WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES STRUGGLED TO GET CARE AND SUPPORT

- Parents struggled to get the care they needed for young children living with disabilities during the pandemic.
- Parents were concerned about the lack of in-person contact for their kids and the downstream impacts on speech development and socio-emotional learning.

*“My older children are exhibiting signs of depression from lack of natural contact with friends. I am exhibiting signs of depression from lack of contact with other adults that are not my husband. We all feel overwhelmed by everything.” - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

- Overall, parents expressed how limited access to childcare and elder care during the pandemic made it difficult to balance family and work obligations, but these difficulties were even more pronounced for children living with disabilities and working moms due to greater support needs.
- Remote medical and developmental services did not support children with disabilities well.

*“He just got diagnosed with Autism right before the Covid-19, but no therapy or medical attention. He is not able to pay attention to a zoom call.” - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

# BY THE NUMBERS: CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES

For children who needed mental health services, **1 in 3 parents said they were not able to get needed mental health services (30%).**



For parents who said they needed a referral for their child's health, **1 in 4 said they had a problem getting a referral (27%).**



Parents of children with developmental delays<sup>1</sup> (39%) and low-income families<sup>2</sup> (38%) had the hardest time getting referrals.<sup>3</sup>

We have included select 2021 BSK Health Survey numbers to provide additional context and support to the qualitative findings.

<sup>1</sup>Children with a developmental delay are defined as children whose parents indicated they had ever been told their child had a developmental delay. <sup>2</sup>Low-income defined as families earning \$50,000 or less a year. <sup>3</sup>Differences are statistically significant (p<0.05).

# COVID SICKNESS AND DEATHS INCREASED WORRY FOR PARENTS

- Some parents were distressed and anxious about the uncertainty of contracting COVID or after having family members fall ill and pass away.

*"My father passed away in June in Vietnam and because of COVID-19 we were not able to travel to be with him during his final days. My 3 year-old and I watched my father pass over the phone and it was extremely painful for both of us." - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

- This was especially true among low-income, African American, NHPI, or Latina/x/o parents.

*"We've lost several family members to COVID, 3 on my side, 2 on my husband's. Meanwhile, we have a few more family members from my side in Mexico fighting the virus currently. It's been a very sorrowful year." - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

- No parents commented on the availability of adult COVID vaccinations easing burdens at home, and no improvements in parents' well-being were observed as time went on.

## PARENTS SHARED EXAMPLES OF THEIR CHILD'S RESILIENCE

- Many parents reported deeper and more meaningful relationships between children and their siblings due to extra time together.

*"I have been pleased to see how our kids have bonded together, their friendship, we have seen their sibling relationships blossom." - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

- Parents of children in K-5th grade noticed how children became more self-sufficient and resilient during the pandemic.

*"She is more independent in doing homework and using a computer." - Parent of K-5th grader*

*"[My child] has stepped up well to keep engaged in school and with local neighborhood friends. He is emotionally, physically and developmentally healthy. However, COVID has taken a toll on his joy." - Parent of K-5th grader*

- Many families mentioned finding new activities to do together including playing games, movie nights, and spending time outdoors.



**Childcare**

# ACCESSING CHILDCARE WAS MORE DIFFICULT FOR MANY FAMILIES

- Many families reported disruptions or changes to existing childcare, or that childcare options became harder to access.

*“Have problems finding child sitters, even with family, when one or more parents have to work. Parents sometimes have to leave work to support watching children.” - Parent of K-5<sup>th</sup> grader*

*“Daycare got even more difficult to find.” - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

- Families also commonly reported an inability to rely on support from grandparents or other extended family members due to the COVID pandemic.

*“Impact on family relationships, especially with grandparents. Not having access to childcare supports is very stressful.” - Parent of K-5th grader*

*“I have struggled with finding a trusted nanny that is affordable while I work because my parents are unable to cross the border at this time to do help with this task.” - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

- Some families removed their child from childcare due to worries about COVID.

# CHILDCARE CREATED MAJOR CHALLENGES FOR FAMILIES

- Parents experienced significant stress trying to balance work demands (including while working from home), childcare, and supporting online schooling, particularly moms, single parents, and families who have children living with developmental disabilities.

*“He has had more screen time because of our trying to balance out lack of childcare/work/sibling schooling needs. Since the parents need to work more and in different ways and our access to in person school and childcare has been extremely limited, the children are getting less quality and more screen time and many daily household tasks are just too much and falling to the wayside.” - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

- Some families reported new childcare demands prevented them from working or attending to other needs.

*“One of us needs to take care of [child] at home instead of going to work.” - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

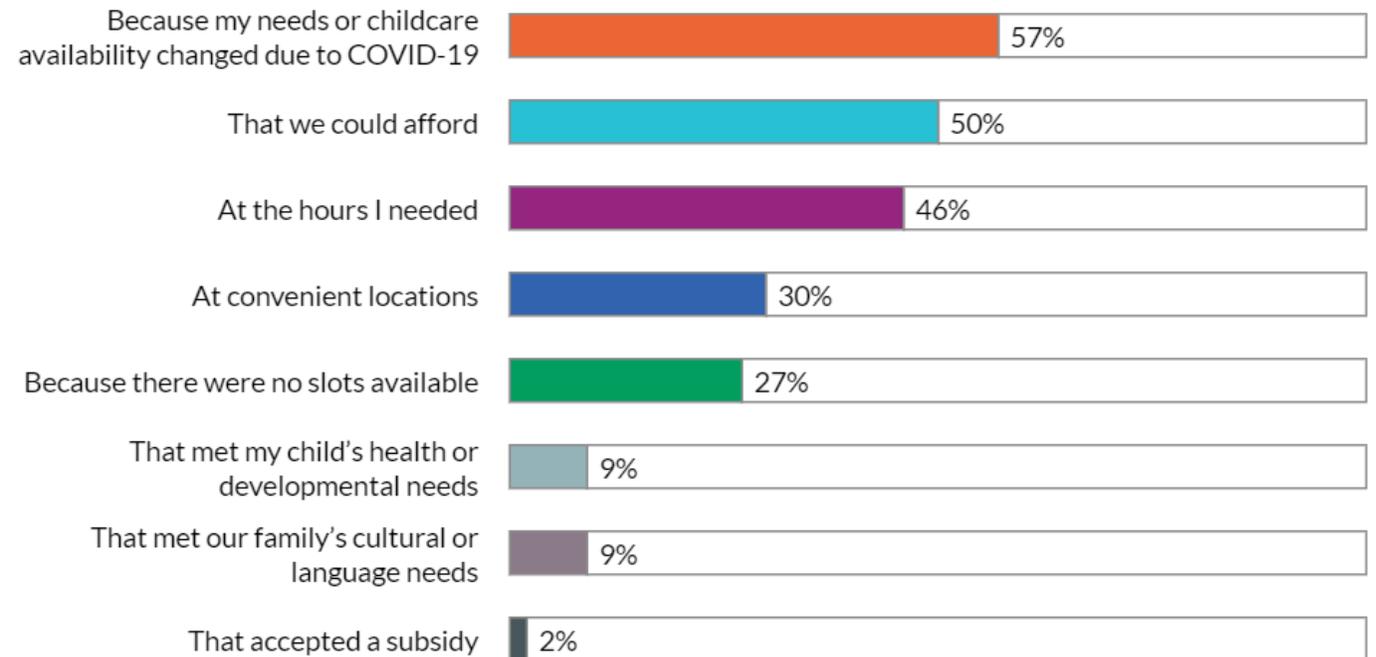
*“My health care is affected. I am not able to go my health appts, because no childcare.” - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

# BY THE NUMBERS: PARENTS HAD CHALLENGES FINDING CHILDCARE

**1 in 4 parents of children 0-5 years<sup>1</sup>** said they had challenges finding childcare in the last 12 months (26%)



Among parents who had challenges finding childcare,<sup>1</sup> reasons for these challenges included:



We have included select 2021 BSK Health Survey numbers to provide additional context and support to the qualitative findings.

<sup>1</sup>This question was asked of parents with children 0-5 years who were receiving childcare (e.g., daycare, preschool, in-home childcare, nanny), but parents who cared for children at home or parents who did not have regular care. Thus, this data describes challenges with childcare for children who had formal childcare, but excludes children who were at home with parents or had no regular care.



## Experiences with Schooling

# NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES WITH REMOTE SCHOOLING WERE SHARED

- Many parents said online learning was difficult for their child and was also difficult for them to support while juggling work and other childcare demands.
- Several parents mentioned their child fell behind or regressed during remote learning.

*“Child is behind in online school and is struggling to learn reading.” - Parent of K-5th grader*

- Some parents said their child’s relationship with school had changed since remote learning started, and their child no longer liked school.

*“Decreased love for school and learning.” - Parent of K-5th grader*

- Keeping young children engaged in online schooling was hard for many, particularly parents of preschoolers.

*“[My child] has been unable to attend a preschool program. The at home program that has been offered does not work for 4 year-olds.” - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

# POSITIVE EXPERIENCES WITH REMOTE SCHOOLING WERE SHARED

- Conversely, some parents reported that their child was thriving in the online learning environment, or that the parent preferred that educational experience.
- More BIPOC families reported negative experiences with online schooling than positive; however, those that did report positive experiences were often African American or NHPI.

*“Happier spending time with family and connecting with his culture and not experiencing racial bias at school.”* - Parent of African American K-5th grader

- A few parents mentioned that online schooling allowed their child to get away from bullying, racism, or other unsafe school environments.

*“Understanding of school work and ability to take more time with parents to practice new lessons. No concerns of school bullies and having ‘bad days at school.’”* - Parent of K-5th grader

- Some parents appreciated having more insight into their child’s schooling since they were able to “see” more about classes.

*“Got to know the teacher more, I am here so I get to know what they are doing in school more, school work has been better, the change is good.”* - Parent of African American K-5th grader

MANY PARENTS  
STRUGGLED TO MEET  
THE EXTRA  
DEMANDS OF  
REMOTE SCHOOLING

- Supporting online learning, particularly while also meeting demands for work and childcare for other kids, was challenging for many parents.

*“Our 2nd grader is not engaged with learning and we don't have time to fully commit to helping him. We do the minimum with assignments and zoom school but nothing extra. We don't have the energy or time. It has been extremely hard to balance work and zoom school and we worry about his education - mostly reading and his lack of attachment to his teachers and friends.” - Parent of K-5th grader*

*“We were at family shelter last year and school was online. That made our life very difficult.” - Parent of K-5th grader*

- A few parents mentioned difficulties supporting their child with learning since they did not know the information themselves or didn't speak English.

*“Has trouble understanding what to do for the homework and it's also sometimes difficult for me to help with non-math related homework since I don't know what's being taught.” - Parent of K-5th grader*

# CHILDREN LIVING WITH DISABILITIES STRUGGLED WITH REMOTE SCHOOLING

- A few parents mentioned that children with autism or who had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) were negatively impacted by remote schooling.
- Parents reported that students are falling behind in online school. Several students required 1:1 in-person support, which was lacking during the pandemic.

*“Because of the pandemic, my autistic son had to do online learning, this impacted his learning and we saw some regression on his skills.” - Parent of K-5th grader*

*“Child has an IEP and remote learning has really negatively impacted her progress with learning. She needs one on one assistance. With both of us being fulltime working parents, it has been difficult providing Child with the best learning support she needs.” - Parent of K-5th grader*

- Lack of social interaction via in-person schooling was particularly difficult for children with autism. Isolation caused disconnection with peers and led to emotional and behavioral regulation issues, increased aggressiveness, anxiety, irritability, worsened tics, and required additional counseling support.

# PARENTS OF CHILDREN LIVING WITH DISABILITIES HAD DIFFICULTIES SUPPORTING THEIR CHILD'S LEARNING

- Several parents mentioned that lack of access to care for children living with disabilities compounded parenting difficulties and work-life balance.

*“We don’t normally have help, so when she is not in school, I am with her at all times and since I am her acting Paraprofessional, I am with her every minute of the day. With this, her younger sister, pets and a husband who works more than 40 hrs a week, I am trying to take care of the household on top of teaching support.” - Parent of K-5th grader*

- However, some parents reported seeing improvements in creativity and imagination among kids. A few kids flourished with the increased attention and time from parents.
- Lack of access to schooling and lack of resource navigation support has prevented access to services like speech therapy.

*“[Child] has Tourette’s and in the beginning it triggered more tics and behavioral issues until her new routine of being remote was established. She has received more support after a second IEP evaluation and new goal plan. Additional support from tutoring also helped but she’s still having issues. Navigating through resources was difficult and had to rely on school or people to advocate for our daughter to get help with school.” - Parent of K-5th grader*

# CHILDREN WHO WERE LEARNING ENGLISH STRUGGLED WITH REMOTE SCHOOLING

- Children who were English language learners or who experienced speech difficulties struggled to participate remotely.
- Parents who responded in Vietnamese and Chinese particularly felt online learning negatively impacted their child's ability to learn English and socialize with friends, and increased irritability.

*“We just came to America not too long ago, he didn’t have friends. English language learning progress is slow. Individual learning is not good as learning with others together. Lack of after school activities, especially lack of activities that teach kids skills. Hope we can find some free activities to help our child to learn English.” - Parent of K-5th grader*

# MANY PARENTS AND CHILDREN WERE READY TO RETURN TO FULL-TIME, IN-PERSON SCHOOLING

- In general, most parents mentioned their child was ready to go back to in-person school, and many parents were also ready for in-person schooling to open.

*“She really misses going into the in class part of school. She can’t wait to get back to that.”* - Parent of K-5th grader

*“Kids going back to school will be a relief.”* - Parent of K-5th grader

*“Last year was shit show. Now 2 1/2 hrs school is bull shit.”* - Parent of K-5th grader

- A few parents mentioned worries about returning to in-person schooling, but few specified what their concerns were.
- Similarly, a few parents mentioned they would miss participating in their child’s learning when they returned to in-person schooling.

*“I love that I know so much about what she is doing in school. I am going to miss having that front-row seat to her learning each day.”* - Parent of K-5th grader

# FOR FAMILIES WHO OPTED IN, HYBRID LEARNING WAS A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE

- Some parents mentioned hybrid learning. Families could opt into hybrid learning in the Spring 2021, so there may be differences in which parents were able to opt into hybrid learning (part in-person, part online).
- Among parents who mentioned hybrid learning, there were only positive comments. Parents mentioned children enjoyed social interactions and were grateful for the routine of going to school.

*“Only when the school closed he was affected because he loves school and then online class but now it's better because he went back to school.” - Parent of K-5th grader*

- A few parents mentioned relief at burdens of online schooling easing.

*“Child stayed home for almost 6 months, taking online classes, due to Covid. From this Jan Child went to a new school in person. Now she is very happy. It was hard to balance work and kids since Child had to stay home with us. She needed our attention, and the online class was a challenge too. Things were getting better since Child was back at school.” - Parent of K-5th grader*

# TECHNOLOGY PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN ONLINE LEARNING

- A few low-income families mentioned having access to a laptop and internet was critical in supporting their child's education.

*“Well one thing that really helped, was that the district provided a laptop and that really helped with her staying on top of her studies. And also her teacher agreed to meet with her one-on-one once a week. So she's doing really well with school and a huge component was the laptop the district provided.” - Parent of K-5th grader*

- Lack of access to working technology made online learning difficult.

*“With limited funds, parents are borrowing computers for schooling and they don't always work right.” - Parent of K-5th grader*

# BY THE NUMBERS: ACCESS TO SUFFICIENT INTERNET

**1 in 10 families said they did not have sufficient internet<sup>1</sup> (11%)**



**Low-income<sup>2</sup> families had more limited access to sufficient internet.**

2.5 in 10 low-income families did not have sufficient internet (25%)<sup>3</sup>



We have included select 2021 BSK Health Survey numbers to provide additional context and support to the qualitative findings.

<sup>1</sup> Not having sufficient internet are defined as parents who said they did not have internet that was fast enough to do the tasks they need to do online or did not have internet.

<sup>2</sup> Low-income are defined as families earning \$50,000 or less a year. <sup>3</sup> Differences are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).



# Family Relationships

# MORE QUALITY TIME WITH FAMILY BUT LESS PERSONAL TIME

- Several families mentioned stronger relationships between siblings and with the family overall as a result of more time together. Many also mentioned that it was difficult to find personal time.

*"Positive family is more united we depend more on each other and speak with family more. Negative not enough space from each other, can get frustrated with each other"* - Parent of K-5th grader

- Almost all parents framed more time together positively, but some acknowledged accompanying challenges, such as siblings bickering and boredom.

# DISRUPTIONS TO FAMILY AND COMMUNITY TIES

- Family connections and bonding have been important sources of support in some communities, such as NHPI communities.
- It was particularly difficult to not be able to gather during the pandemic and families expressed a loss of cultural connection as a result.

*“In our culture we stay and get together and we don't have that luxury anymore we don't see our people anymore.” - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

- There were missed opportunities to build relationships with grandparents and family, especially among immigrant families.

*“Our parents in China could not come to visit, they have not seen their grandchild.” - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

# TECHNOLOGY CONTRIBUTED NEGATIVELY AND POSITIVELY FOR FAMILIES

- Several parents were unhappy with increased screen time for younger children due to remote schooling or entertainment needs while the parent worked.

*“Juggling work from home, so having to distract her so now increased tablet time to keep her distracted so Mom can work.” - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

- However, some parents mentioned that they were connecting more virtually with family and friends through Zoom/Facetime than they were before the pandemic.

*“We have spent much more time video chatting with grandparents who live on the east coast than we probably would have under normal circumstances so they now feel like a regular part of our son's life (albeit virtually).” - Parent of 0-5-year-old*



**Economic Challenges and Meeting Basic Needs**

# JOB LOSSES, FINANCIAL STRUGGLES, AND MEETING BASIC NEEDS WERE CHALLENGING

- Many families experienced financial uncertainty in the face of a job loss, reduced hours, or the inability to meet basic needs and relied on community or family support instead.

*“When COVID started I lost my job, I was scared to go to work, I missed a couple of days and I got fired, it was a hard time for me, I tried to apply for unemployment, me and my wife she was home too before the COVID, until May we had a difficult time paying rent, we had to use our savings, it was very hard for us, she applied for unemployment too and then after that we didn't have a choice, we had to go back to work, we got a lot of difficulties in this period.” - Parent of 0-5-year-old*

- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and other government programs were important sources of support for families.
- Low-income parents, single parents, LGBTQ parents, and BIPOC parents more often reported financial struggles, job losses, and limited work-life balance.

*“Difficult in the beginning- hard to pay bills. scary not to know if we will have lights on/food on the table for the kids. doing ok right now.” - Parent of K-5th grader*

# BY THE NUMBERS: HELP WITH COST OF BASIC NEEDS SINCE CHILD WAS BORN

## Needs were highest among low-income<sup>1</sup> families



2 in 3 low-income families needed help with housing costs (66%)

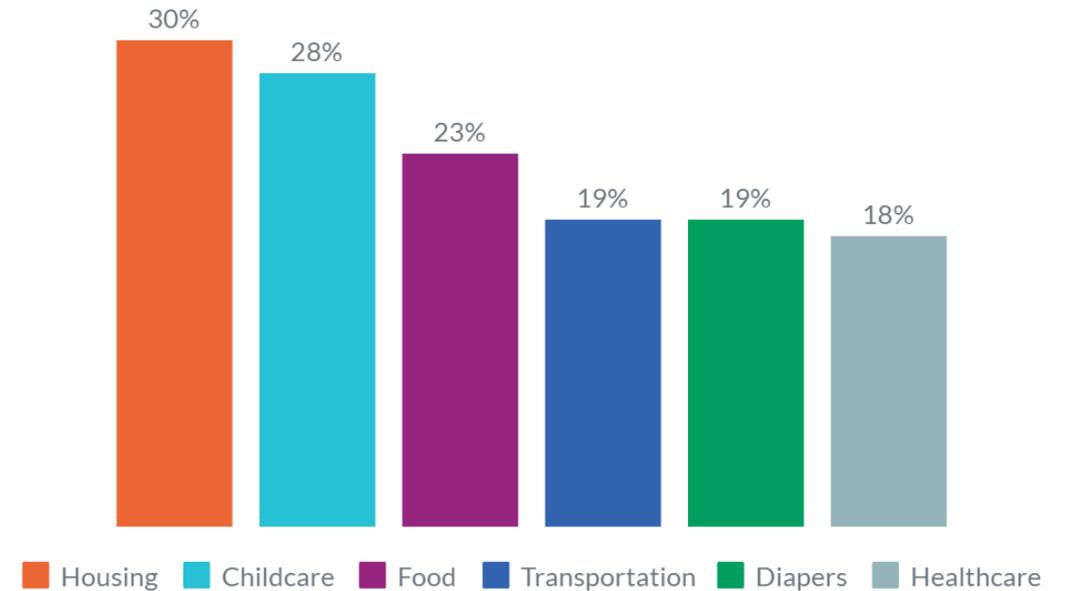


1 in 2 low-income families needed help with food costs (52%)



1 in 2 low-income families needed help with childcare costs (43%)

**Overall, many families needed help affording basic needs since their child was born. Almost 1 in 3 families needed help affording housing (30%).**



We have included select 2021 BSK Health Survey numbers to provide additional context and support to the qualitative findings.

<sup>1</sup> Low-income are defined as families earning \$50,000 or less a year. Differences are statistically significant (p<0.05).

# SOCIOECONOMIC PRIVILEGE PROVIDED SOME FAMILIES WITH STABILITY AND FLEXIBILITY DURING THE PANDEMIC

- Some families felt privileged to have a job, save time and money, and be able to work remotely.
- Unlike families with lower incomes, families reporting high incomes did not highlight financial stresses or mention using resources for basic needs (such as WIC, shelters, and food banks).
- Families across the income spectrum expressed gratitude for having basic needs met, but families with higher-incomes were more likely to describe themselves as having stability and flexibility.

*“We have one parent working, one parent not working and full time dedicated to in home teaching. Our friends are in the same category. All have jobs and stable housing. We understand that we are extremely fortunate in this crisis and are doing better than many at adjustments. Of course, there are very few social interactions for our son, but overall we are stable. I wish all members of society were able to be stable in this way or given the opportunity for stability in income, child care, and medical care. It would offer children and families less anxiety and trauma in events such as these.” - Parent of K-5th grader*



# THANK YOU!

Kristin Moore  
Mohit Nair  
Sara Jaye Sanford  
Eva Wong

Thank you to all the families  
who took the survey!

 King County

Best Starts for  
**KIDS**

# WHO TOOK THE BSK HEALTH SURVEY AND HOW?

- 7,033 **parents and caregivers in King County** with children 5<sup>th</sup> grade and younger participated in the Best Starts for Kids Health Survey.
- The survey was available in **7 languages** (Chinese, English, Korean, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese) online and by phone with an interviewer. A paper survey that arrived by mail was available in English.
- 26% had an income less than \$50,000 each year.
- 62% took the survey online, 31% by phone, and 7% by mail.
- 5,990 completed the survey in English (85%), 537 in Spanish (8%), 159 in Vietnamese (2%), 220 in Chinese (3%), 21 in Korean (<1%), 66 in Russian (<1%), and 40 in Somali (<1%).