



ECE LAB



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Research Informing Policy, Practice,  
& Leadership in Education

# Examining the implementation and impact of the COVID-19 remote teaching initiative in Ontario early primary education contexts

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Summary Report, August 2020

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## Introduction

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic public schools across Ontario were closed in March 2020 and remained closed to in-person learning for the remainder of the school year. In response, the Ontario Government put forth a strategy entitled the “Learn at Home” initiative that shifted teaching and learning online from March-June 2020. The Ontario Government outlined the minimum expectations for student worktime in a given week based on learning materials and work assigned by educators. For early primary students, these expectations included five hours of work per student per week, with a focus on math and literacy (Ministry of Education, 2020). In the letter introducing the “Learn at Home” initiative to parents, Education Minister Stephen Lecce wrote, *“While these are unprecedented times, I encourage you to support and enable your children to fully commit to the strong learning program we have created for this period of school closure. Your support, inspiration, and motivation will continue to prepare your children to succeed in their learning journey”* (Ministry of Education, 2020). In acknowledging that early primary students will likely not be able to access the resources without support of their families, parents in K-2 were required to take a leadership role in supporting the learning of their young children. Furthermore, given that learning in kindergarten and early primary grades is largely play- and inquiry- based and focuses primarily on social, emotional, and cognitive aspects of learning there was a need to investigate the impacts of this move for educators, parents, and children. As such, the purpose of this research was twofold:

1. to investigate how early primary educators (kindergarten- grade 2) planned, taught, and assessed learning during the Learn at Home initiative; and,
2. to examine the impact of the move to remote teaching and learning on early primary children and their parents.

Given the current context and the uncertainty regarding the safety of in-person learning and the increasing possibility that social distancing will need to be prolonged or possibly resumed in the future, it is important to understand how educators moved their instruction online and how best to support educators and parents with these efforts if remote learning continues in the future.

### Participants



25 educators



11 parents

### Interviews

- 30-45 minute semi-structured interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams or Zoom

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## Educator Interview

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Interviews with educators focused on the following topics/questions:

- School/school board resources and supports
- Perspectives on impact (on students, parents, and educators- short- and long-term)
- Planning: How are educators planning for remote learning? How is this different from the ways in which educators planned previously?
- Teaching and Learning: Describe what remote learning looks like. Weekly schedule.
- What does play and play-based learning look like in remote instruction?
- Assessment: How do you assess learning that takes place remotely? Assessment examples.
- Transition back to in-person learning (and what the fall will look like)
- Recommendations

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## Parent Interview

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Interviews with parents focused on the following topics/questions:

- Described what remote learning looks like for their child (week plan)
- Engagement
- Impact (short- and long-term/ successes and challenges)
- Supports they need now and what they will need when child goes back to in person learning
- Their role in the learn at home initiative
- Parenting (best/hardest things)
- Transition back to in-person learning (and what the fall will look like)
- Recommendations

## Data Analysis

Educator and parent interviews were analyzed using a general inductive qualitative approach. Data were thematically analyzed based on data-driven codes (Patton, 2002; Thomas, 2006). From these data, narrative descriptions of themes were generated. Thomas (2006) discusses the purposes of an inductive approach as threefold: 1) to condense raw text data into a summary format, 2) to establish clear links between research objectives and findings derived from the raw data while ensuring transparency, and 3) to develop a framework of the underlying structure as evident in the raw data. This approach provides a systematic procedure for analyzing qualitative data that produces reliable and valid findings (Thomas, 2006) and provides the structure and simplicity required in interpreting educators' and parents' perspectives.

*\*Please contact the Principal Investigator Dr. Kristy Timmons for additional information about the study design, reliability procedures, findings, and forthcoming publications.*

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# Educator Interview Results

## Overview of Themes

From the teacher data, a total of 10 themes emerged. Each theme is summarized in the table below. Definitions and frequencies are provided for each of the 10 themes.

THEME	DEFINITION	FREQUENCY
ACADEMIC IMPACTS	Discussions surrounding quality of work completed by students and academic impacts.	21
FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT FOCUS	Assessment included formative but not summative.	19
COLLABORATIVE DECISION-MAKING	Decisions around planning and resources were often made collaboratively with other teachers and staff.	11
EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS	Discussions related to accessing technology, missing essential resources, training to use technology, accommodating for lack of access, and challenges at home.	23
IMPACT ON PARENTS/FAMILIES	Positive and negative impacts on parents/families.	23
SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL IMPACTS ON STUDENTS	Negative social and emotional impacts on students.	23
IMPACT ON EDUCATORS	Multiple impacts on educators.	23
CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY	Educators had to modify their implementation of curriculum and pedagogical approaches.	11
SYNCHRONOUS VS. ASYNCHRONOUS	Educators discussed the benefits and challenges of asynchronous and synchronous learning.	17
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT	According to educators, there were varied degrees of parental involvement.	19

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# Narrative Descriptions of Educator Themes

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## Theme 1: Academic impacts

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Educators discussed how the transition to remote teaching and learning impacted students academically in multiple ways. The first being the quality of work that students were submitting. Almost half of the educators reported concern regarding some students submitting work that might have been completed by parents/guardians. Some educators discussed how they looked for indicators that the work might not have been completed independently such as perfect grammar. This educator explained, "It's like, some of my kids have been handing in work at like 2 in the morning. And they're seven and eight, like I know it's not them, and it comes back with proper grammar, and they're never forgetting periods...so, you can tell it's the parents" (P7). A few educators discussed how they compared student work submitted during COVID-19 with previous work in an effort to identify whether or not the student had completed the work independently. This educator reiterated "so yes, we are still assessing because we, we are asked to. But I find that my assessment is not true. Simply because I don't know if the kid is doing it on their own. Sometimes you can tell, that the children's work is their work. But a lot of times you get assignments turned back and it's very clear that the child, that's not the child's work. Because you've seen how that child works at home, sorry at school, previously" (P12). Another educator discussed a similar concern around completion of work despite understanding that some students may need help from their parents/guardians, "They can submit photos, we are getting photographs of things that the children have clearly not done on their own, which is okay to have help, but it is more like the parents are doing it" (P10).

Some educators also discussed how students who were struggling prior to the transition to remote learning continued to struggle academically as mentioned by this educator "So I'm finding the really strong students, the strong linguistic students are thriving in this environment, and those that were struggling before are struggling more so now" (P11). Another educator noted similar concerns with academics and suggested that it could be as a result of anxiety and lack of support. They explained further, "Academically a lot of the children have slowed down especially those children who may not be able to get the support they need to do the activities. I think that there is a high degree of anxiety in the community at large and doing your "school" work is not necessarily a priority for some" (P13). Many educators acknowledged that there would likely be academic gaps however, they suggested that there would not necessarily be long-term impacts as reported by this educator, "I don't really worry about gaps in learning for a lot of students, because I think they'll be okay" (P19). However, it was recognized that not all students may experience the same academic impacts, and some may have greater impacts. This educator described their concern for students with exceptionalities and those in French immersion, "However Grade 1 and 2 students in French Immersion and special needs students will mostly suffer long term effects because many are not getting the French language exposure that they need to thrive" (P13). Multiple educators described how the academic gap will likely be wider for certain groups of students.

Lastly, another area of concern was the lack of differentiation academically for students as described by this educator, "I have an SK student who was doing addition worksheets during free play

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like it was his job, he loved them. He hasn't been on or submitted anything. I worry he is not getting the challenge he needs to keep him interested. He really needed and thrived with these challenges" (P16). Similarly, a different educator discussed the struggle with differentiating learning and providing accommodations, "Yes, and also I'm having a hard time with differentiated learning, like providing accommodations to students. And how can I, you know, how can students learn differently online. You know in the classroom it's easier.. but I'm not sure how to do this online, especially if there's no collaboration among students" (P3). Another teacher reported the teaching approaches that they typically used in the classroom before the transition to remote learning. They explained further, "you know it's very inquiry based, my classroom is very much based on a student-centered approach where we, our learning is guided by what interests them, and you know, how we can move learning forward through their interests... that's been very difficult because you know it's not a one stop shop, right? As opposed to being able to differentiate the learning for every, for all the students in the class" (P17).

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## Theme 2: Focus on formative assessment

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When educators were asked about summative assessment, educators were clear on the purpose of assessment since the transition to remote learning. Many of them agreed that any assessment that was taking place during this remote period of teaching and learning was formative in nature and that no summative assessment occurred since the transition to remote learning. One educator explained the focus on formative assessment, "Yeah, we're waiting for that. We just know we have to do a report card, or a communication of learning, and it's going to be up to the March break... I think our focus has been the assessment for learning to help parents help their children" (P24). Further, some educators talked about the reporting period and how that had changed. For example, "Most of our assessment, if we were to write final reports for example would be from September to March" (P1). Therefore, educators were not formally reporting on student learning since the transition to remote teaching and learning in March.

Part of formative assessment is the provision of feedback to further student learning. Some educators discussed how they were mindful of their tone when providing feedback to students. This educator described the tone of their feedback, "Which is positive, caring, and compassionate feedback, in order to praise them for participating, at all, and very very very small, slight nudges in the right direction, should they be missing the mark" (P18). A few educators also talked about how they provided students with descriptive feedback. For example, "One piece of feedback was to use all lower case when they write the words as they had submitted a jumble of lower and upper case letter. Then one student that received this feedback, he [sent] something else and with all the lower-case letters, and I was able to say great job all your letters are lower case" (P16). Multiple educators also discussed the importance of using pictures and videos to inform their formative assessment as described here "What works is when the parents are taking videos and photos and sending it in. That way we can be more aware of what is happening. Without photos and videos being sent back it is very difficult to assess. Last week we had them write down everything in their house that starts with the sound "M"" (P16). The educators in this study reported that receiving photos and videos from parents provided them with a much greater understanding of student learning.

Multiple educators in this study reported conceptualizing assessment as informal and a means of checking in with students. One educator succinctly explained, "I would say it's definitely not formal,

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it's more just a way for me to kind of check in, see how things are going" (P8). Similarly, this educator also used assessment to check in and further student learning. "I do daily assessment with my kids, I take my responsibility to teach them to read very seriously. I'm doing daily check-ins with all of my children, like individually one-on-one. And then doing small guided individual one-on-one lessons with them in order to move them forward" (P18). In summary, the educators in this study worked to support students and document learning through informal assessments.

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### Theme 3: Collaborative decision-making

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Educators described how at times decisions were made in collaboration with their colleagues. This was especially true when they were planning their instruction or sharing resources. Sometimes the collaboration was as simple as asking how things were working in the transition to remote learning. This educator shared, "I think because our profession is generally a nurturing and caring profession, we're all really helping each other and reaching across, across to each other and saying, you know "this is working, how are you doing?" [be]cause I really appreciate that very much." (P17). Similarly, the collaboration was related to instruction and adapting the instruction as described here, "you know that's one of the things we've been talking about you know, "do we do something that's more live where they can write on the screen or say hi or something?" (P23). However, one educator reported the challenge with collaborative planning, "Planning for distance has been better from a team approach but it has already exacerbated existing dissension amongst our team members" (P13). Generally, it seemed that a team-based approach and collaboration was more common than not. This educator described how they collaborated, "As a team we are coming up with ideas throughout the week, brainstorm in a document-and sharing with a slide doc that goes out to students and families each week. Everything is contained in one spot" (P4). One educator emphasized the importance of collaborating in order to support students. They described here, "But really, to be honest, we're all collaborating and working together, getting ideas off each other to support our students. There is, no right or wrong way at this point, we just do our best to provide the accommodations and supports that students need. There's been a lot of resources also online...my students have been loving RazKids" (P21). The transition to remote teaching and learning has helped to facilitate collaborative decision-making for planning for many of the educators in this study.

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### Theme 4: Equity considerations

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The majority of educators discussed ongoing equity considerations. This included identifying students with limited access to resources, technology and internet and needing to train students and parents on how to use technology. Educators also provided examples of how they modified their teaching practices to accommodate for lack of access and resources. For example, this educator discussed how they managed a lack of access, "I'll talk about kind of the two groups. So, the first group that kind of said "we did not have the technology" it was really interesting. So, the first thing we had to do was send out... try to gather information of those that did not have technology. Once we got that information, then trying to follow-up with the parents, trying to get them access to the technology. The problem was we had already started the train rolling, and the board wasn't giving out technology I think 2 to 3 weeks after we had already started. So, once you started then you had a

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second wave of people who kind of joined, and then you had to give it to them” (P25). One educator discussed needing family packages if remote learning continued into next year, “If it is still remote learning, we will need go get supplies and ask our admin to order supplies for families: glue sticks, and scissors, and markers, and playdough and boxes of counters, and make sure every family has them. This way we can plan for the children knowing the materials they have. A family package will be needed” (P16). Sometimes the challenge was not just access but the division of technology across family members as mentioned by this educator, “Yeah, one of my kids has 5 siblings and two of them are in high school, so my little guy is in grade 2 and his sister is in grade 1 and they never get on. Like they haven’t been on yet. It’s those times, like they just say like “my brother he’s using the Chromebook” (P7). Therefore, even when families were provided with technology there were still challenges at times.

Educators described how they worked to accommodate lack of access by posting everything for the week at the beginning of the week (i.e., Sunday evenings or Monday mornings). This educator described further, “Anything that we do that is live, is sort of above and beyond because we do have a number of students who do not have access to the computer during the day due to parents working, due to older siblings who have more pressing needs. So, you really could log-in at 8am on Monday, download everything for the week, and just do it on your own if that’s the best fit. So, we try to make everything available asynchronous, do it at your own pace” (P9). Trying to make learning equitable was on the minds of many educators. This educator discussed “But we also send out, when we do our weekly plan of activities, we send out a weekly plan to all parents as well. So, they do have the access of getting, they’re able to get like a PDF in their email, or log onto the classroom and see the videos and see the planning as well. So just trying to make it equitable cause we do have some families that have limited internet access or can only access on the phone and stuff like that” (P14). For another educator, this included limiting the required use of devices, “A lot of my families, although the school board has given devices, a lot of them are still waiting or haven’t accessed them yet, so I’m trying to make it as device-free as possible” (P8). It was clear that many educators thought about how to meet the needs of families with limited resources. One recommendation included training families on how to use technology. This educator elaborated, “It’s made me think that maybe, if I were to return this role again... I’m thinking like maybe a workshop for my English Language Learners, like their families on, “how to use technology”, I know that sounds so simple, but so many of them don’t know, they’re not aware of certain things and to help them gain those skills I think would be so beneficial” (P21). A few educators discussed equity concerns such as this specifically for students who are English Language Learners and their families.

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## Theme 5: Impact on parents/families

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According to educators, there have been a variety of impacts on parents/families. Many impacts were overwhelmingly negative such as the perception of parents/families feeling stressed and overwhelmed about how to support their children. One educator put this simply, “And so, I know that some parents are stressed by it” (P2). Sometimes the stress was in relation to completing the ‘required’ work. This educator explained, “But some are fine with that, you know if it’s cooking or going on a walk, or in patterns, but some find it’s like a checklist, a to-do list. And they’re very stressed by that. And so I try to explain “this is meant to be like exploratory, like you can do one or two...I don’t

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know what your situation is” (P11). Multiple educators discussed how parents/families had to take on the role of being the educator. For example, “I feel like, because parents are now having to take on that role as the teacher, and not really understanding that development of children in that sense, it’s causing a lot of frustration in the home...” (P12). Another educator reported that multiple parents had even apologized for not being able to support their children fully. This educator explained “But there are a large number of parents who are juggling far too many roles and being very, I’ve had a lot of apologies: “I’m really sorry I’m terrible at this” “I’m really sorry I can’t help my kid”. And I feel badly for them because they never signed up to be the teacher, they signed up to be the parent, and they’re trying to fit themselves into a role and expecting themselves to be really good from day one” (P9). Similarly, a different educator discussed varying support depending upon the home environment, “Yeah their other routines, and I know their parents are stressed, their co-regulators may not be able to offer the same support” (P1). It was clear that educators were aware of the stress placed on parents and families as a result of the transition to learning from home. Multiple educators also discussed the stress that parents and families experience by having to balance the needs of multiple children in one household. Specifically, “I think they’re, possibly because they’re having to work as well, they’re having to share the technology, there’s some families that have 4 kids, and if they only have 1 computer, and mom has to use it during the day and kids can only use it at night, not the best time for them, it’s a lot of that. So, parents get ... stressed by that” (P11). Similarly, a different educator discussed the potential impact of having two young children at home in the same family. “There’s one girl I’m thinking of who’s in SK and she’s very strong, very strong student so we’re not too concerned about her. And she has a brother in JK, and we know that her brother is not a strong student. So, her brother is not in our class he’s in one of the others so we’re wondering if that’s part of it, that mom is dealing with the brother more” (P15). It is clear that balancing the needs of multiple children and shifting the learning to the home environment may impact the mental health and well-being of some parents as described by the majority of educators. One educator simply stated, “I think they’re very overwhelmed” (P11). Whereas a different educator mentioned mixed emotions, “I’ve heard a lot of parents are very stressed, and, I’ve also heard a lot of parents are very thankful, right?” (P22). One educator discussed the need to prioritize the well-being of families, “We have to remember that we are communicating to families that their well-being is number one” (P10). Another educator reported feeling concerned for parents and families, “I have mental health concerns. The ones who the parents are struggling themselves and kids are picking up on the feelings from families. This is happening and the children are impacted” (P16). Further, one educator even reported being concerned about burnout, “they need so much support that, there’s only so long I think it’s going to be sustainable for parents to keep it up without getting burnt out, for sure” (P8). These findings suggest a need to consider how to best support parents and families in order to protect their well-being, especially if there is a need to return to remote teaching and learning in the future.

On a more positive note, some educators mentioned how this experience may shift parent’s perspectives on education. For example, “However, I think for most parents they may see schools in a slightly different way. Hopefully, they will understand that at the end of the day teachers are human beings and we learn alongside their children much of the time and most teaching staff work with the best of intentions for our students” (P13). Further, a few educators discussed how parents and families had a newfound appreciation for the role that educators play in their children’s lives. More specifically, “There has been a massive impact on parents. I had one mom say he just comes to school

and eats and plays all day, stereotype comments about teachers being lazy. Now I have comments appreciating what we are doing. "There may be more going on than what I thought" that is what the mom says now. They are valuing teachers more now" (P10). Another educator had a similar response, "...I think parents value educators a lot more" (P14). A greater appreciation for educators and how they support children is one positive impact that has resulted from the transition to learning from home.

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## Theme 6: Social and emotional impacts on students

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Educators discussed how the transition to learning from home has impacted students in K-2. One area of concern for the majority of educators was that of social impacts. More specifically, many educators emphasized the negative social impacts that this transition is having on their students. One educator discussed how students missed their peers and the teacher, "They miss, they miss their friends. They miss me. I miss them" (P11). A different educator agreed with missing friends, "that's another thing we've been hearing from families, they're really missing seeing their friends" (P15). This educator reported the same concern, "Many parents have expressed that their child/ren miss school and their friends. I think it has provided a break for those youngsters who have a hard time in larger groups but even those children are missing their peers" (P13). Sometimes this concern was greater for a certain group of students such as those from low SES households, "Some haven't logged, and I worry about the low SES friends and not being able to interact" (P16). A few educators discussed the lack of social interaction as part of the necessary process for building a sense of community. This educator explained, "They miss human interaction and seeing their friends and their teachers and building that community" (P21). One educator discussed the impact for children who don't have siblings, "Some of the kids you can see are lonely. Especially children who don't have siblings. Some of the children you can see, they look... they're just, they're shy when they're not normally shy, they're quiet when they're not normally quiet, a couple that are loud when they're not normally loud" (P9). Generally, this concern for the social impact was described across K-2. Another educator discussed the importance of socializing in the early years, "The social piece is also big, interaction with other children is so important in kindergarten. The playdates aren't happening- they are needed for well-being and overall development at this age." (P16). This concern for lack of interaction with peers was triangulated across many educators.

The social impact was also discussed in relation to the home environment. More specifically, about a quarter of the educators identified concerns about the social and emotional support that students have in their home environment. This educator recognized the extent to which certain students benefit from school if they lack the social and emotional support at home, "I know there are many children who unfortunately do not have the same loving and caring home environment as I am able to provide and it is those children who benefit from school and childcare the most" (P5). A few educators were even concerned about how this experience may have long-term impacts on students as described here, "Socially, though for children that come to school for food and for social interactions, this is another issue. We are more consistent parents for some children and therefore their experiences are drastically impacted, and this will have long-term implications socially and emotionally and academically. Also remember that many siblings are now taking care of their young siblings" (P10). Another long-term impact that was a concern identified by a few educators were

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increases in mental health issues as mentioned here “I also think about the long-term exposure of social distancing—what will that look like when kids return to school and how will that impact kids with anxiety around this experience. We may have an increase of mental health issues” (P13). One educator was concerned about students who were already struggling socially prior to COVID-19 and that plans and strategies were in place to support these students with improving their social skills. They elaborated, “This is huge in my opinion so many of the children who have an IEP, the IEP was specifically for social aspects and the classroom observation focused on social pieces and really making sure we were planning for and supporting social skills. In my class 20% have IEPs, and the social goals was the largest accommodation. We can plan opportunities for it, but we have no idea what is actually happening at home, this is what makes it so difficult, not just for social but for all pieces actually. We can plan and plan and plan, but we have no idea what is actually happening” (P4). Some educators even mentioned how sad they were when they thought about the lack of social and emotional support some children have in their home environments. This educator commented further “You know some kids don’t get hugs from their parents? Like they don’t, they don’t get any love at home, and when they come to school, as a primary teacher, you know we are mostly very hands on. Like we are just hugging and like rubbing backs and like holding hands and doing that kind of thing all day long. So, it’s really sad when I think about what home life must be like for some of my most vulnerable kids” (P18). It was clear that educators had definite concerns surrounding the support at home.

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## Theme 7: Impact on educators

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Similar to students and parents, educators also reported multiple impacts for themselves given the transition to their roles as educators. Sometimes the impact on educators was discussed in relation to their relationship with parents and families. A few educators reported that their relationship with parents and families had changed. For one educator, this included needing to provide ongoing technical support, “And then of course they think I’m IT, right? So, I’m becoming IT, I’m not sure, you do what you can” (P11). Another change that educators have experienced has included learning new technology. One educator said that they will consider using Google classrooms once they transition back, “Yeah! I do love google classroom, and I can definitely see myself in future classrooms, maybe more so with kids that are a little bit older, using it as a resource to add on to my teaching in the classroom” (P2). Similarly, a different educator reported that computer skills have likely increased for educators as a result of the shift to online teaching, “Teachers computer skills will definitely go up, I know mine will” (P13). One educator talked about having a deeper appreciation for the time with their students, “I even think just my personal attitude, I’m never going to complain again about, slipping on bananas, banana peels in the classroom. I think everyone’s going to come through on the other side, or at least most people will, with an appreciation for getting to have that time with students” (P2).

Educators reported negative impacts on their well-being due to the transition to remote teaching and learning. For example, multiple educators talked about how much they missed their students. This educator explained, “Not actually connecting with the children. I really do miss them” (P5). A different educator expressed their worry about a few students in their class, “I teach in a very middle class school, and a very middle class neighborhood, so, when I talk about my vulnerable

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kids, you know out of my 20 kids, I would say that there are 4 that I really wish I was having more interaction with and that I'm really worried about" (P18). Other educators discussed how stressed they were and the uncertainty that everyone was experiencing, "Yeah...I'm stressed right now... (P23). Another educator reported similar feelings, "I think right now there's a lot of stress amongst educators about what exactly they're being asked to do" (P8). Stress was a common emotion expressed by educators and also discussed in relation to families.

A few educators also discussed challenges associated with the upcoming school year. For example, "you know, that's going to be a challenge for all teachers, having new students that they have not built any relationships with that they don't know the families, nothing! I mean, even us as kindergarten teachers in a dual aged program, we're going to have a whole new slew of JK children that we have never met, so you know I think that, there's going to need to be some sort of whether it is a one-on-one google meet with these families to say "I am your new teacher", something right" (P15). All educators were able to identify multiple ways that they have been impacted both positively and negatively.

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## Theme 8: Curriculum and pedagogy

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Educators discussed different ways that they have had to modify their curricular implementation and pedagogical approaches. One thing that some Kindergarten educators did was use the four frames to guide their planning and implementation. This educator elaborated "my partner and I looked at the four frames and decided that what we could do weekly and what we could do daily to incorporate and have that incorporated all four frames of our kindergarten program" (P17). A different educator also used the four frames, "So what I did is I created a website for my class. And I broke the website down into the four frames of the kindergarten document" (P15). For the subject domains, it seems that most educators were focused on literacy and mathematics. For example, "Lots of literacy focus, especially phonemic awareness types of activities" (P16). Some of the activities were play-based as described here, "A lot of activities are play based, like "go outside and play this game with your family" or "in the house play this game" and we give them a specific game to play that is focused on literacy or math, yea" (P15). A couple of educators discussed how they used themes to organize the learning activities, "kind of themes for the week. This week it's 'community helpers' uhhh 'plants' like 'spring time' right? So, we'll send home that type of lesson. We like to have a theme week, and if we can't, if we're not able to do anything according to the theme than we'll just, we'll give them a lesson anyway, it really doesn't matter, but we like to stick to a theme" (P22). Overall, the educators in this study used a variety of strategies to organize and plan for remote teaching and learning.

A few educators discussed not introducing any new content as mentioned here "We're very conscious that there's not, we're not introducing anything new or anything that the children are not used to seeing or have been exposed to on a regular basis in our program. This is not the time for new stuff" (P17). A different educator also emphasized that they weren't introducing anything new, "we're not asking anything new, like it's all stuff that they would know from routine, from in class" (P6). Similarly, this educator also reiterated the importance of providing familiar activities, "looking at activities and things, like, directed drawing, the kids know how to do that with me, so you just give them a pencil and piece of paper and whatever device and they could do it independently for however

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long they want to do it. Sometimes giving them something familiar, now, again I don't teach the "here's a piece of paper and a worksheet kind of work" so for the most part I think a lot of the kids, there's some, I don't know, something about that that's familiar to them, and especially through all of this" (P23). In summary, the educators used familiar activities to try and support students.

A few Kindergarten educators discussed the challenges with adapting their curricular content given that it is normally hands on. This educator explained in detail "Well, in Kindergarten many of the things that we do are hands on and based on the interests of the children. Now we put together activities that we hope will be engaging to the children and their families. There are many things that we alter and/or change because we do not want to tax the parents too much. Some activities that are sent home are limited and seem on the surface to be quite superficial compared to what we might have done in class" (P13). Educators seemed to steer away from content that was new or could overwhelm students and families.

Different prompts were used to encourage play-based learning, "And what we do is we provide a prompt or an invitation. And then, again it's really a lot on the families or the children to see where it goes, right? But so far we do find this is kind of helping, giving them ideas and stuff" (P14). Similarly, a different educator reported using provocations, "A lot of provocations rather than "do this and return to us" activities" (P13). One educator said that their play-based learning was daily, "I share a daily math play-based activity" (P10). Educators discussed different ways that they integrated play following the transition to learning from home.

Many educators also described when they released information for students and families. A Kindergarten educator reported releasing information on a weekly basis, "so at my school we have 5 kindergarten classes and we decided right at the beginning that we would do a single, weekly calendar, that would go out to all 5 classes." (P15). Similarly, a different educator also released information on a weekly basis, "So the stuff that I'm putting out is for a whole week's worth of activity" (P15). However, not all educators released information at the beginning of the week or for a whole week at a time. For example, this educator released information daily, "however, we release one to two activities per day to complete with both active and passive activities" (P13). Therefore, educators were also considering the timing of information release.

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## Theme 9: Synchronous vs. asynchronous teaching and learning

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Educators described both benefits and challenges related to asynchronous and synchronous learning. One educator discussed using asynchronous learning to ease the burden, "Anything that we do that is live, is sort of above and beyond because we do have a number of students who do not have access to the computer during the day due to parents working, due to older siblings who have more pressing needs. So, you really could log-in at 8am on Monday, download everything for the week, and just do it on your own if that's the best fit. We try to make everything available asynchronous, do it at your own pace" (P9). There was a mix of synchronous and asynchronous learning across educator participants. A few educators discussed how they used synchronous learning to stay connected to their students. For example, "You know, the "I can see your, your house and look there's your window and" you know it was just so cute. And they just clapped and clapped and I played you know, half a song and then they said "keep going, keep going!" they just want that human connection, and they just want to have fun with you and see you as a person and, if you can't, you know, rub their little

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cheekiest, and you know, rub their back and give them hugs then you have to do it in whatever way you can, and, last Friday it was playing piano for them” (P18). However, even the educators who utilized synchronous learning understood that it could be demanding for parents. More specifically, “Synchronous learning though, I just don’t, that’s a huge demand on parents, because they would have to check in for maybe 5 or 10 minutes, they would have to do, but for kindergarten level, at our level, for the kids to do something, I don’t think that’s going to work very well. I think it’ll be too taxing on the parent. I’m going to try next week or the week after, a little, like a reading group with 2 or 3 children and see how that works, it’s going to take, like a lot of organization to get them all at the same time, the thing that might be able to happen though, is that I think might be more reasonable for everyone, is using that vocal route to have them record their reading, and me to listen to it. And then talk to the families. Right to the parents. I’m, maybe teaching the family, how to teach reading. I again, I don’t know. I mean part of it is just trying to stay connected with them and calming them” (P24). The educators who conducted synchronous teaching did seem to think it was worth the effort.

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## Theme 10: Parental involvement

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Educators in this study described varied parental/familial involvement. A few educators discussed the need to provide parents and families with as much flexibility as possible. This educator explained, “In regard to parent involvement, we say to the parents that they can print some of the information off if they can, but if not we have other activities like blanket forts with children” (P16). Another educator discussed using a similar flexible approach. “None of it is mandatory, it’s really important to know that because primary kids need so much support, that they really do need an adult next to them, like one on one to do any kind of remote learning, I have been really clear with parents saying “you know it’s here for you to use, if you would like to, you know best what the energy level is like in your house, and what the child can manage. And what I really don’t want is for anything like this to cause friction in your home. So, if anyone is starting to get frustrated, just stop, and snuggle up and read a book together. Reading is also enough. Go for a walk and talk about the things that you see, like the, those are the most important things.” So, these things are posted, and then parents decide, you know, how much their kids can get done” (P18). It is clear that some educators provided a spectrum of activities allowing the parents and families to identify which ones their child would complete.

A few educators also discussed the varied involvement from parents and families. Some parents were very involved, and others far less. An educator also related academic impact to parent involvement, “[in] terms of academic, like I kind of said it already, it really depends on the parent involvement. Some of our kids are doing every activity we send every day, and some of them I haven’t received one piece of work from them since we were in class in March. So, it’s based on parent involvement in our case. And then also, how much they feel like they want to engage with. Like some of them will join our zoom, but then not do the online activities we’ve given. So, like it’s, it’s parent choice” (P6). One educator talked about the difficulty with not being able to connect with one parent, “You have to tread very lightly in that regard. But then also you’ll have, like I have a parent that I have not been able to reach. So, the child had not even set up a classroom yet and then I had to tell the principal and then the secretary and then they try to make contact, yet they still haven’t been able to make contact with them. And then that goes to the board cause then some sort of like process needs

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to be put in place to make sure that the kid is safe" (P12). Multiple educators discussed the struggle of trying to communicate with some parents and families. A different educator confirmed the challenge, "Right? And so, before they could send notes with their child or just come to school and talk to me but now that option is out of the, off the table. So that's why I've been able to, that's why I opened that communication piece there. And so just communicating with families and reaching out to families has been challenging" (P21). One educator identified communicating with parents as the biggest challenge. They elaborated, "The absolute biggest challenge has been staying in touch with families and staying connected to them and to our students in order to maintain and foster these relationships. There is no learning without relationships" (P24).

More positively, one educator discussed how they would continue to keep the lines of communication open once face-to-face learning resumes given that they have had success with a website. They explained, "I think that if/when we return I will maintain a website, just because I have parents give comments about knowing about the songs and videos we are doing at school. I will continue this when they go back in" (P16). Another educator talked about how "terrific" the parents have been and said, "we get a lot of positive support from the parents, and, I think if it works both ways it's vice versa" (P22). One educator also talked about the importance of having parents understand play as a pedagogical approach, "And then I think the other piece that's important is, getting that connection with the parents and response, so when they send us stuff back, actually having like a personal conversation, like we do it within a private chat not within the stream that's in our classrooms, that they can see, you know, you actually know about their specific child. So, I think some of those would make that personal connection, a piece of it, as well as us, you know, really ensure that we get some of that basics of play across to parents" (P23). Educators in this study clearly tried to build relationships with families to support parents' needs and the needs of their child.

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# Parent Interview Results

## Overview of Themes

From the parent data, a total of 9 themes emerged. Each theme is summarized in the table below. Definitions and frequencies are provided for each of the 9 themes.

<b>THEME</b>	<b>DEFINITION</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
EQUITY CONCERNS	Trends of access and outcomes; parents discuss concerns for other families.	9
SYNCHRONOUS VS. ASYNCHRONOUS	Discussion around delivery of remote teaching and learning; benefits and challenges.	11
PARENT AS EDUCATOR	Challenges and duties related to the role of parents in delivering remote teaching and learning.	11
EDUCATOR AND ADMIN SUPPORT	Discussions focused on educator and administrative support in developing and delivering remote teaching and learning.	11
CONCERN FOR SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT	Concern for social and emotional development and well-being both short- and long-term.	11
ACADEMICS	Perceived short term and long term impacts on academic outcomes; student engagement with learning.	11
IMPACT ON FAMILIES	Multiple impacts on families (both positive and negative).	11
CONTINUATION OF REMOTE LEARNING	Suggestions for improving effectiveness of remote teaching and learning.	10
TRANSITION TO IN-PERSON LEARNING	Suggestions for transitioning students back to in-person learning as well as associated concerns related to this transition.	7

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# Narrative Descriptions of Parent Themes

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## Theme 1: Equity concerns

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Parents in the study recognized their own privilege regarding the accessibility of remote teaching and learning, as well as the barriers that may prevent families from accessing remote learning. For instance, some parents had the ability to take time off from work to be home with their children and support them in the learning process and acknowledged that remote learning would be extremely challenging if this were not possible. One parent explained “if I was working full time there is, like I really don’t know that I would be able to do it like this. Like I, I either would have had to take a leave of absence, or I, I don’t think that I would have been able to get done as much as I’m doing now” (P4). Simply accessing the learning is a key component to the remote learning experience. Many families noted that internet was a barrier that they faced or that other families might encounter, “it definitely puts a lot of things into perspective when you start looking at you know the inequities when it comes to access to stable internet, things like that” (P6). By proxy of these equity concerns, some families were unable to engage in certain elements of remote learning, such as the synchronous teaching; this will be discussed in the second theme.

Parents have noted that educators are aware of this equity concern and are attempting to be flexible in their teaching and learning. One parent explained that “this week there’s going to be an art activity, where she’s asked us who has paint and who doesn’t have paint, and she’s getting paint to the families that don’t have paint at home” (P2). While another parent noted that “we’ve been encouraged to work at it, at our own pace, when it works for us, recognizing that some parents are still working, some parents are working at home” (P7). In addition to the flexibility educators are providing for their families, some parents have also been thoughtful in the engagement with remote teaching and learning, hoping to enable equity for all families. For example, when parents were offered technology for their children, one parent said “we opted not to ask for devices from the school when they were offered, because being in a school that is a performance plus school, that has some socioeconomic disparities, we wanted to make sure that the kids who really needed access to them” (P6). Parents made such decisions in hopes of enabling other families opportunities for engagement.

Some families are better equipped to deliver the learning than other families, leaving the outcomes of remote teaching and learning extremely variable. For instance, most parents are not professional educators, thus lacking the training and skills required to effectively deliver remote teaching and learning. A parent explained that “I haven’t taught kindergarten before but you know I know enough to know the questions to ask and how to navigate through tasks, whereas, I’m assuming for parents that have no educ- like no background in teaching that it would be really challenging to try and navigate but I can’t obviously speak for them” (P11). Some parents also recognized that demographic factors, such as belonging to a higher socioeconomic status (SES), provided them additional stability in delivering remote teaching and learning. One parent expressed that “my impression is those from higher SES fully adapt well, there’s the, the lower SES are going to, it’s going to- I’m afraid of the outcomes down the road for them” (P1). Equity concerns was a key theme among the parents. Several barriers permitted families from engaging in the learning, and parents anticipate

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that there will be variable outcomes in student learning due to these equity concerns.

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## Theme 2: Synchronous vs. asynchronous teaching and learning

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The delivery method of remote teaching and learning in Kindergarten to Grade 2 classrooms varied between synchronous and asynchronous. Asynchronous teaching and learning involved providing all material via video and written methods and offered no real-time connection between students and teachers, whereas synchronous teaching and learning involved providing material both via video and written methods, and also offering real time connection between students and teachers. Strictly asynchronous methods were experienced by five of the eleven families (parents 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9), four of whom wanted the opportunity for synchronous learning. Synchronous methods were experienced by three of the eleven families (parents 1, 2, 10). The three remaining families experienced a transition in delivery method (due to policy change), wherein two families (parents 8, 11) started asynchronous and moved to synchronous, while the other family (P4) started synchronous and moved to asynchronous.

The delivery of instruction as either synchronous or asynchronous was interpreted to be policy/board mandated. One parent stated that they were informed by the educator that “the board had encouraged, had told them they are not allowed to do synchronous” (P7). Due to the varying classroom and family situations, one parent expressed that “I really wish that boards and Ministry would let the teacher decide what is best” (P8). Several parents agreed with the sentiment that educators should be given the flexibility to decide their methods, one parent feeling that “there’s no interest even at the board level to start setting some expectations, unless it’s directly demanded of them by the Ministry. Which is very far removed from the individual student” (P9). The decision for some boards to make synchronous instruction mandatory or required is not appealing to some families, with one parent highlighting that “personally, I have an issue with synchronous learning because I feel that it there’s a big equity and access issue that comes with that” (P6). Conversely, the decision to not allow for synchronous instruction is also of concern, because “to claim it’s an issue for some and therefore we do it for none, yeah, I’m struggling with that, cause if that’s the case then nobody should be remote learning online, because there are people who have barriers with having internet connection” (P9). With student success in mind, parents hold differing opinions regarding the practice of synchronous instruction.

In contrasting the two methods of delivery, parents highlighted the social value of synchronous teaching and learning. One parent shared that at the end of a synchronous lesson when leaving “they straggle. Like they, some stay on for a long time and just chat with each other, and then others will leave” (P2). Those families who are strictly doing asynchronous instruction would value the social opportunity for synchronous learning, stating that “even if it’s for community building, I mean the kids miss their [friends]” (P5), and “that it would be so wonderful if even there were like a zoom meeting and the children could all see each other. My son would love that!” (P3). As parents emphasized, synchronous elements of remote teaching and learning have been, and would be, extremely valuable for students social wellbeing.

One parent preferred asynchronous delivery due to the challenges of synchronous instruction. Namely, they emphasized that it’s not realistic for children this age (Kindergarten to Grade 2) to sustain attention for a long period of time, stating “I don’t understand how I could be expected to have

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my 4 year old sit down and participate in a larger group setting” (P6). They further explained that “ I’m finding that the idea of recorded videos, or recorded audio that I can play later, or play at a time when it works best for my kids, uhm is the better route” (P6). Similarly, other families mentioned that the flexibility of asynchronous learning was extremely appealing, with one parent mentioning that after transitioning from asynchronous to synchronous “all of a sudden school went from 8:00 to 9:00 in the morning, to 8:00 to 1:30, and it just eats up half of our day.... again when it’s streamlined like the way that we were doing it before, I feel like the kids were just, they were thriving better in that kind of environment” (P8). Although beneficial socially, synchronous elements also prevent families from being flexible in their engagement with remote teaching and learning.

### Theme 3: Parent as educator

With the format of remote teaching and learning involving either (or both) synchronous and asynchronous elements, the parents’ roles in delivery remain undefined. Due to the evolving skills and abilities of early primary learners, parents noted that remote teaching and learning requires considerable parent involvement. Parents outlined two ways in which primary learners require ongoing support. First, they required assistance in initiating and maintaining learning; one parent stating that “he can get into his google classroom, and he can read the instructions and he can read what his friends are posting as comments and he can post back, but actually to navigate, like, from the class stream, to the class work ... he requires me for that (P2); and another parent outlined that “because at this age, at her age, you know, at the beginning even navigating what google classroom ... like ultimately we’re still recording and taking pictures and uploading files, so, you know, it can’t, this remote learning cannot exist without support from parents and families ... at the end of the day, especially with the early years, you’re in partnership with parents as an educator in a regular circumstance, but here you’re really, you’re really putting trust in parents and hoping that they will support their child through it, because it just won’t happen without them” (P11). In addition to navigating the technology of learning, parents added that simply staying engaged and on track requires parent support, one parent stating that “in order to stay on track ... so my wife says that in between her sessions she checks in on them, and, she suspects that like 5 minutes as soon as she’s out of the room that ... they’re doing something different ... they have short attention spans” (P1). Thus, parental presence is required in order to keep children engaged in the learning. The second way that primary learners require ongoing support is in regard to the content of the learning. More specifically, certain subject areas require additional guidance in learning, where “maybe some art she can do on her own, but when it comes to math and French, she needs my help” (P5). Some parents made particular mention of children in French Immersion programs, one parent stating that “they teach them both in French and English and it’s hard for me to help her because I don’t speak French” (P10), and another parent shared that “the whole thing is that you’re not, you don’t necessarily have to speak French for your kids to go through French immersion, but now when you have to teach them then what do you do, right?” (P4). Although parental support was necessary in supporting their children with certain subject areas, they too were limited by their own knowledge and skills.

When asked what their role in remote teaching and learning was, parents overwhelmingly expressed their role as being the key facilitators of learning. Parents mentioned that the material

provided by educators (handouts, videos) is all helpful and they are grateful, but they feel the actual process of teaching and learning is up to them; one parent stating that their role is “huge. I think my role is to organize the timing of the learning, to, actually sit down and go through the work with him, make sure he understands the expectations... my role is to motivate him, my role is to keep him engaged, my role is to turn the work in, my role is basically everything except actually writing things down” (P2). Student wellbeing is of primary importance to families and balancing this with learning has proven challenging, one parent emphasizing that “it’s kind of a struggle cause ... I fight with them to do it, so I don’t want to make it negative, but I don’t want them to fall really far behind either, so it’s a really difficult balancing act, I find, you know I don’t want the teachers to think I don’t care” (P10), adding that “, I feel like I’m on a tight rope” (P10). Many parents agree that wellbeing is of primary importance, one parent stating that “ I think that my role as parent is to protect my child’s health, and I think right now physical health, or sorry mental health is the most important thing because this is a crisis. And so, when it comes to anything, and that’s including the online learning, I, think that it is my responsibility, so if I find that, that the online learning is beneficial for his mental health” (P3). And so although parents were the primary facilitator of education, they saw their role more importantly as protecting their children’s wellbeing.

Parents expressed that engaging their children in learning was challenging. One parent noted that in their experience, “they’re often more willing to work with and engage with their teachers than their parents. And not that she doesn’t engage and work with me, but it just, there’s something about, maybe trying to please your teacher, it’s, it’s just different” (P11). Parents made a variety of attempts to engage their children but were hesitant to push learning so as not to cause their children to hate it. Many parents said that their attempts to teach were met with a fight, one parent saying that “So the challenge is like any time, even just saying like ‘let’s look at some of the activities your teachers have posted for you’ immediately he complains. And he refuses to do it, or he- there will be some kind of a deal in order for him to do it” (P3), and another added that “the actual schoolwork, it’s a fight ... And then they’re mostly happy, you know, we try and get them to do a bit of schoolwork everyday but we’re not pressing it too hard because I don’t want the fight and I don’t want to stress them out and make them hate it.” (P10). In discussing what they would need to continue remote teaching and learning, parents expressed that more opportunities and methods for student engagement would be extremely helpful.

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## Theme 4: Educator and admin support

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Educators (teachers and Early Childhood Educators) and educational administration play a key role in the delivery of remote teaching and learning. Educators provided the specific day-to-day content, and direct contact with students and families, while admin provided guidance to educators in the delivery of remote instruction. Due to the nature of Ontario’s remote teaching and learning practices, the guidelines, policies, and best practices are ever evolving and will continue to evolve into the 2020/2021 school year.

Flexibility has been an emphasis in remote teaching and learning; many parents have received contact from educators with reassurance about the flexible nature of remote teaching and learning. One parent said that the educator emphasized the current work isn’t mandatory, “they’re trying to be flexible, ... you know, if they like, they kind of said like “it’s not mandatory, you know like it’s, if people

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can't do it"" (P4), and another stating that flexibility has been a theme from the very beginning "she was super clear that, like from the beginning that parents should only uhm like, uhm that it's very flexible and everyone should just do what they're able to do" (P3). Educators' clear communication around the flexibility of remote teaching and learning helped establish the expectations of parents.

Regular communication from educators was comforting to parents, one parent mentioning "yeah so I email back and forth with my sons teacher and my daughters teacher I text with ... she's answering right away and helping us work through it and stuff so that's good." (P10). Another parent mentioned that they receive bi-weekly communication with their educators, "The teacher or the ECE has called us once every two weeks, just to kind of check in on things. And in terms of feedback on the actual submissions, uhm, basically any time we submit something we get a response" (P7). These families have expressed satisfaction with the regular communication, however, not all families are receiving this, "the communication is missing unfortunately, as in what they do at school. So, I actually don't know what they do at school" (P5). One parent noted that the communication regarding the remote learning format was missing and this created disconnect between the student and their learning "I was actually completely unaware that she had a second classroom, ahh until last week. Because that teacher had always posted everything as 'never due/no, no due date', uhm so my daughter continued to say that she had done everything that was assigned to her and nothing else was due. So she didn't actually start that class work until last week" (P9). This parent explained that communication with the educator is strictly through the student, as parents do not have direct access to the technology being used. Upon bringing this concern to the attention of administration, the parent was directed to use the students' profile to access the technology in order to communicate with the educator, however this brings about another concern: security, "that's a bit of a struggle for me, because the classrooms are supposed to be for students only for security, safety, privacy, all that. So now you're saying every adult, should just pretend that they are their child and be able to be in an environment where they're interacting with other minors, vulnerable sector minors." (P9). Communication via technology must be consolidated with educators, parents, and students in a safe manner in order for parents to best support their children. Due to the young age of these students, communication around the learning piece (methods, tools, technology platforms) with parents is essential for student success.

Throughout remote teaching and learning, educators recognized the stress and uncertainty that parents and students were feeling and made attempts to remediate these feelings. Many parents received messages of reassurance from their educators, one parent stating that the educator "tried to make sure parents were, you know feeling at ease. Like this is not going to be the end of the, the world if the work doesn't get done." (P11). One parent received a message from their educator, "and it said "I know a lot of you are feeling frustrated with the, like, that you can't print or are being asked to print ... this is not a requirement, like, please don't feel like you have to do this, I don't want to stress you out", like she was very, the tone was very, very friendly and accommodating, and just saying "you do what works for you" so she, she was really trying to, uhm make everybody feel more comfortable" (P2). This contact with educators proved to be comforting to parents. Educators also made clear to parents that there should be a focus on student wellbeing and mental health. One parent shared that "there's a lot encouragement coming from both teachers about making sure that we're providing stable and supportive environments for the kids." (P6), furthermore, this parent had reached out to the teachers because their child was having a rough week, and said "I got little videos from both ... our



ECE and then her teacher, and then a little picture that said “we love you, \*Lily” to show her if she’s still having a rough time during the week. So, there’s a lot of supportive communication” (P6). This communication helped to set the tone for an emphasis on student social and emotional wellbeing, as opposed to an emphasis on academics.

Although support directly from educators has been extremely valuable, the current program is not without its flaws. Parents have outlined their frustrations for the lack of long term planning. Parents acknowledged the possible continuation of remote teaching and learning into the 2020/2021 school year. Despite best efforts parents reported concern for a lack of long-term planning from educators, admin, boards, and most notably the ministry. One parent noted “our Director of Education adores calling this “Emergency Remote Learning”, however, we are going to hit a point where I’m going to stop thinking it’s reasonable to call it an emergency ... Other provinces, other boards have got their act together. I’m not understanding why we cannot do the same, because this is a major barrier, it’s a major barrier for me. If I didn’t care, then it wouldn’t matter” (P9). This concern expressed from parents speaks to the sustainability of our current program as well as the quality of education being delivered, and it will be further discussed in Theme 8.

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## Theme 5: Concern for social and emotional development

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Parents continuously highlighted the need for their children to have social interactions with others and the unique challenges of supporting social and emotional development during this time of social distancing and remote teaching and learning. Children need socialization specifically with peers, and especially at this age, as “socially it’s important at 6 years old to be with kids your own age.” (P3). One parent stated that the social piece of remote education is much different from in-person learning, stating “I guarantee when they’re sitting and doing things in groups it looks very different than when he’s just sitting by himself trying to do something” (P4). Furthermore, parents emphasized that children learn and develop from engaging with each other, this is an essential piece of early childhood education; one parent expressed that “I wish that he had somebody to play with physically. Like run around with, and he’s benefit from, like he needs to practice losing, and having, he needs to practice he needs experiences not succeeding. So, he can develop a growth mindset because he doesn’t have one” (P2). According to most parents, children’s social needs were not being met, and further social opportunities were desired; parents emphasized that children desire socialization with both educators and peers, “lack of social interaction. Not just with students and their, their friends, but also with their teachers” (P6), and similarly another parent said “I think it would be really good for my child to still interact with their teachers and their peers, I think that’s a piece that’s really missing for them, for him specifically” (P7). Due to these missing social experiences “she’s really struggled socially for sure” (P8). Children miss their friends; this was a trend that emerged with every parent interviewed. Without the daily socialization with peers, parents have noticed that their children are feeling isolated and emotionally, they are struggling (Parents 2, 7, 10). Additionally, one parent said their child “is showing signs of distress in his emotional wellness, so I’m concerned about him that way” (P2). This concern for children’s emotional wellbeing was common among parents.

In terms of short-term impacts of social distancing, parents were concerned that their children may experience additional challenges in transitioning between grades. One parent said their child

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struggled socially in school this year in developing social skills, pointing out that “the change from kindergarten, where it feels like play, and then all of a sudden it’s not all play, and there are people who are bigger than me in the class, and most of them are bigger than me and, so the social component has been a struggle” (P5). This parent worried that due to the missed time in-person, their child may fall further behind socially. Similarly, another parent noted that “I think that it would be a big detriment to not have these last few months of the year to, just with the learning and what takes place socially” (P4), adding that “for a kid that’s going from SK to grade 1 there’s so much change” (P4). Thus, this specific transition from a play-based program in Kindergarten to Grade 1 will be a challenge socially. Parents were also concerned about the ability to develop relationships upon the return to in-person learning, or perhaps in the new school year with a new educator, one parent stating that “going back to a new teacher who he doesn’t have a rapport with, so I’m a little bit nervous about, kind of the emotional side of things” (P7). Parents concerns for their students socialization thus extended beyond peer relationships into those student-educator relationships.

Parents have also presented concerns about the worry about the long term social and emotional impact that remote teaching and learning will have on their children. Some parents believe that children will “lose the social benefits of being amongst their peers” (P1). Conversely, another parent said that the children are too young to remember, and thus this will not have a long-term impact, “I mean will she be able to look back at this? I don’t even know if I remember things that clearly from when I was 5 years old” (P11). The long-term social-emotional impact for children in Kindergarten to Grade 2 is unpredictable, and according to parents the expectations vary.

Several parents noted they were concerned for how COVID-19 will impact their children and how they navigate the world. One parent said that “it’s clearly bothering her on a subconscious level, but it’s not necessarily remote, just remote learning, it’s the whole environment of, you know everybody being at home and “there’s danger outside, and it’s not safe”, and you know, everything that that means” (P9). Some parents expressed their struggles with explaining the pandemic to their children, “kids regularly ask about when they’ll get to see their friends, when they’ll get to play again at their school, and they don’t quite understand why they can’t go to the park at their school, you know? Things like that” (P6), and parents worry about how this will impact the way children interact with the environment in the future. The concerns regarding the impact of COVID-19 on children socially/emotionally are further discussed within Theme 8.

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## Theme 6: Academics

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With the social-emotional wellbeing of students being at the forefront of the remote teaching and learning initiative there has been much less emphasis on academic progress and development. During the interview with parents, they rated their child’s engagement with remote teaching and learning (see Table 2). Those parents whose children were either engaged or very engaged expressed that activities that peaked their child’s interest were engaging, for instance one parent described their child’s engagement by saying “I would say she’s engaged when she selected the items she’s interested in, and if it was, like a selected time, like there was a time restriction” (P11). Students who were somewhat engaged tended to lack challenges in their learning and the external motivation of an educator; one parent whose child is a very capable student said “I would say he is working at least 2

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grade levels above. And so, this is very challenging for us in terms of engagement. Because what's coming out from the teacher is grade 2 work, but that's not what he would be getting from her if he were at school. She would be diverse- like she would be able to engage him differently if she saw him in person" (P2). Another parent illustrated that having an educator present would make the activities more engaging, "I found that once I can get him to do some of the activities, he is super engaged and loving them. And, but, the other activities I think they would be engaging if done with an educator, but he won't do them with me as his parent." (P3). Those parents who have children not engaged explain that the content is lacking, "Based upon the content coming in, I would say zero engagement, it's not engaging content at all" (P9); this parent expanded on child engagement, explaining that their child's engagement was simply a product of the child's personality, saying she's "engaged for 2 reasons, first of all she wants positive feedback, because that's how she's motivated. And secondly, she wants to learn, she loves to learn. So, she's taking the little scraps she's given and going above and beyond. But because of her own reasons, not because of the specific content" (P9). Many parents who have children who aren't at all engaged expressed that getting their children to do "the actual schoolwork, it's a fight" (P10). With the majority of parents saying their children were 'somewhat engaged', increasing child engagement was a priority for parents.

**Table 2**

*Parent Reported Student Engagement with Remote Teaching and Learning*

Engagement Rating	Frequency
Very Engaged	1
Engaged	3
Somewhat Engaged	5
Not Engaged	2

Parents reported that the lack of engagement is in part due to the lack of quality of remote teaching and learning. Parents cited two overarching reasons for a lack of quality. First, children are not learning according to their needs (lack of differentiation). For instance, one parent whose child is in a grade 1-2 split has a child who excels in math, and "she's bored out of her mind watching it. And so, watching that lesson for 30 minutes and then trying to do the worksheet, we've actually pulled out of the math days, and she just, I have her signed up on IXL because she can get way more math in way less time" (P8). The lessons provided were meant to be applicable to all students in the classroom, and students abilities and needs are extremely variable, so ideally their education should be meeting them where they are at. In referring to the Vision statement of the School Board, one parent expressed that "there's something in there that says "for each child to meet their best potential" (P9), highlighting that it is the School Boards priority to address the needs and enrich learning for all students. This parent elaborated, expressing that "my concern is that's not going to happen for my student ... and there's something we can do about it. We're not victims of circumstance here" (P9). With a lesser quality of education children are not engaging or learning, and this is concerning to parents, as they believe that more initiative should be taken in improving the remote learning program. The second reason for reduced quality of education, as reported by parents is that the students are not being taught by a professional who has the skills and abilities to provide ongoing instruction, guidance, and

feedback. One parent explained that they “worry about the quality of the teaching that [children are] getting from the parents and the frustration level I think is there so I think teachers obviously have the skill set to navigate difficult behaviours and just from experience and training and the parents ... Where you’re not the teacher, so they don’t see you as the teacher so it’s hard to get them to think of doing things differently” (P1).

Parents were concerned that the remote teaching and learning system cannot be sustained, particularly in early primary, as student engagement may become more challenging. One parent worried “that we’re going to plateau in how much I’m going to be able to get him to do with me” (P4). Parents are hesitant to push too hard with teaching, as they worry about their children resenting learning, with one parent expressing that the negative impacts of this situation would arise “if I force him to do the work. I would set him up to hate learning” (P3), and another parent expressing that “I’m not going to push her ... I want her to have that love of learning without being forced to ... do the task” (P11). Furthermore, parents are concerned that this current program of remote teaching and learning is not an acceptable solution for education. One parent suggests that “if this continues and we continue to pretend that it’s an ‘emergency’, that nobody should possibly be expected to provide anything quality” (P9). This concern brings about the question of the purpose of education, as parents wonder why the current system is acceptable given the importance education plays in society “if it wasn’t important for kids to be in school, for 10 months of the year... then why have we been doing it all this time? If it was important, then let’s make sure that the outcomes are what we need them to be, which is kids learning” (P9). Although remote teaching and learning was delivered under emergency circumstances, its’ quality must be improved given the value of education.

Parents were concerned that their children will have troubles academically as they transition back to in-person teaching and learning. One parent noted that this time away from in-person learning will effect their progress, stating that “I do have to say that I am afraid of him being, like losing a lot of the progress that he’s made this year” (P3). It was discussed in Theme 6 that parents were concerned for their children’s’ social and emotional transition into a new grade, as they may not have developed the social skills necessary for the new setting. In addition to social concerns, parents worried academic transitions between grades. Of particular concern that was reported was the transition from Kindergarten to Grade 1, one parent stated that “I do worry a little bit about him being able to sit at a desk, and, you know write and complete an assignment as with the expectation- not an assignment that sounds very dramatic, but you know? Like work on a worksheet or something like that” (P7). Further, another parent stated that “even for a kid that’s going from SK to grade 1 there’s so much change in that, even in the way that the structure of the classes. And I think that it would be a big detriment to not have these last few months of the year ... I would really be concerned, and like I wouldn’t think that he’d be ready for the shift in how they learn” (P4), highlighting that the shift from a play-based program to Grade 1 would be concerning. Parents worry about specific academic transitions their children will be experiencing, one parent explaining that their child will likely not be prepared to transition into the French Immersion program as planned, “but now I’m like “oh he’s already missed so much of the year, and he’s young, and all these other things” so I don’t think I’m going to try and get him in French immersion I think I’m going to keep him in English, so long term I feel guilty about that, but I’m just worried that if he’s thrown into a French class after missing so much he’s going to struggle and I don’t want that to happen” (P10). This parent further explained that the children will likely require additional support in certain subject areas, “I’m a little bit concerned. Just

because, those early, foundational stuff is so important right? .... But like they're starting in on fractions and stuff like that and, like if you don't get that that can be problematic" (P10), outlining that it is important that children develop those foundational skills.

Although there's anticipated challenges with the initial transition, parents aren't concerned that there will be long-term academic impacts for their children, in part due to their age. Among others, one parent stated that "I think he'll be okay academically and I'm sure that he'll be able to catch up for this little blip in his academic career" (P7). Parents have also found some academic positives that have arisen from remote teaching and learning. One parent explained that their child is developing those necessary life-skills, "I think it's going to give us the opportunity to show them independent learning and having questions and how to go about finding the answers on their own. So, I guess self-directed learning would be the big improvement" (P1). Other parents explained that this one-on-one time is beneficial for their children, and one parent was pleased that their child has learned computer skills they wouldn't have otherwise learned, "she's learning, like all kinds of technical skills that are what really should have been always the goal in technology for kids ... And, you know none of those things have actually been part of digital literacy and this has forced that ... So that's been a super huge positive thing ... and that would never have happened in, in a traditional classroom" (P9). As P9 highlighted, there were unanticipated benefits of remote teaching and learning for some children.

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## Theme 7: Impact on families

As parents have taken on the role of key facilitators in remote teaching and learning, the home environment has changed, and this unprecedented shift has impacted families for better and for worse. Parents have spoken about this period as a transition in which they are gradually learning to accept the circumstances, with one parent stating that "it's easy to, I guess get frustrated with everything and the teachers, when, but my wife and I's philosophy is "ultimately your child's education is your responsibility"" (P1). Another parent explained the process of acceptance, saying that "with our experience ... we just kind of had to take a perspective like "we're going to do what we can, and we're not going to stress that things aren't getting done completely" and I think at the beginning we were ... you know "we're going to try and get this done, maybe we'll have to do a couple things on the weekend to finish up" and then I think as uhm things progressed and you know every few weeks or a month there was a new announcement saying "it was extended" I kind of realized that this is, this is, we're in this for the long haul and we need to make this practical and sustainable" (P11). This process of acceptance is ongoing and not without it's challenges, as one parent said "I'm in a better place now, the whole learning from home ... But initially it was way too overwhelming" (P5).

Families learned to balance work and their new role as educators for their children. Whether working from home or outside of the home, parents were taking on a new challenge of scheduling their children's schooling and their careers, with one parent expressing that "we're all taking time away from our work to make sure that our kids are looked after" (P9), and further stating that "my day is constantly broken up with these kinds of things" (P9). Thus, developing and maintaining a schedule is very challenging. Parents attempted to maintain some sort of schedule for their children in order to continue the school experience, but many parents expressed that it is a "challenge to ensure that all the learning is happening during school hours" (P6). Scheduling and routine are increasingly

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challenging with more children to care for; one parent explained that it “has been the great struggle with 4 kids, because, all 4 have a synchronous class, ... so basically from 8:30 – 1:30 I’m juggling the kids in getting them on” (P8). This parent expanded by explaining that in this time, the parents are not only organizing that synchronous learning piece, but they are also attending to random issues that arise, like interpreting an assignment or fixing internet issues, and this parent stressed that it “makes it really difficult, obviously, for me to do any work at all during that time” (P8). Parents duties in delivering the remote teaching and learning extended beyond the time in class and involved continuous troubleshooting.

An overwhelming trend among parents was the feeling that they were not doing enough, and not doing anything well. Among many statements, parents expressed this concern with statements like: “the challenge is just doing it all, and not doing any of it” (P7), and “I’m constantly saying “oh my gosh, I’m not doing enough for my child” (P3). Parents felt pressure to excel in these circumstances, only leading additional stress and guilt; one parent stated that “I think we all feel it .. like we should be using this time to do something profound or amazing with our children. Like why aren’t we playing more board games? Why aren’t we, you know? Why aren’t we doing these things? But, we’re, we’re not exceeding our expectations we’re not even meeting them. Like this is an exercise in how to fail, gracefully I guess” (P2). Striking a balance between being a parent, an educator, and a professional (maintaining a full-time job) led parents to feel that they were failing in all their duties. One parent explained, “the challenges of course are time ... working from home, and trying to be professionals, and parents, and teachers at home, all three roles” (P5), and similarly another parent saying, “I feel like I’m only half doing my job as a parent and half doing my job as, as an employee so, you know?” (P7). Additional pressure comes from the need to please educators; parents did not want to push their children too hard to work in fear of their children hating learning, but then they also worried about the academic expectations of their educator. One parent said “I fight with them to do it, so I don’t want to make it negative, but I don’t want them to fall really far behind either, so it’s a really difficult balancing act ... you know I don’t want the teachers to think I don’t care if I don’t get the stuff done, and I don’t want the kids to think it’s not important, or they can just forget about it, because it will become an issue at some point” (P10). This parent said that they “feel like I’m on a tight rope” (P10). Parents were overwhelmed with the new demands of remote teaching and learning and felt that there was no break, leading to exhaustion. Parents describe the lack of breaks as a major challenge of this experience, with one parent saying, “there’s absolutely no reprieve” (P3), and further stating that “there’s no break at all from the children. And the children probably need a break from us too” (P3). Both parents and children felt this exhaustion in having no break from each other or the environment.

These many stressors made remote teaching and learning exhausting for families; however, parents expressed that there have been several positives that have arisen from this experience. In describing the best things about parenting right now, most parents said that the increased family time is extremely valuable. One parent shared that “the best thing for sure would be just the time that we have together .... just the opportunity to spend more time doing fun family things together” (P4), and in contrasting to life before remote teaching and learning, this parent explained that “we would have only had on the weekends, so you know it’s like our time together is rushed when he gets home at 5:00 after daycare- after hours care, you know?” (P4). Other parents shared similar sentiments, one parent saying that “certainly we’re having a lot more quality time together and being able to, you know just try some things around the house that we haven’t had the chance to do” (P7). And so, this

time has allowed for families to explore experiences they may not have had time for in the past.

Parents were pleasantly surprised that remote teaching and learning led them to learn more about (1) the educational experience in general, and (2) their children as learners. First, regarding the new awareness of education, parents have been learning more about curriculum and expectations; one parent said that before remote teaching and learning “I wasn’t sure how aligned [their] homework was with what they were doing at school. And now I can see that “okay this is what she should be, she should know” that these are the milestones, and it’s helping me understand the milestones in a different way” (P5). As parents became more involved, they learned more about the goals of education, one parent saying, “I found that it helped include myself more in the education goals, what was to be expected and more of like be involved in what, being aware of what needs to be done” (P1). From this deeper understanding of the classroom and the education experience, parents have developed a new understanding for their children as learners. One parent shared that prior to remote learning, their child often came home from school upset with the educators, and this experience made the parent think “oh, I’m kind of I guess, giving me a little bit of a glimpse into what might be happening in some parts of the classroom experience” (P3). Second, regarding the new insight about their children, parents now have the opportunity to see them function as student. Upon trying to deliver the French program, one parent said, “I realize my child barely doesn’t understand a word of French ... and I don’t think I’d have known that otherwise” (P5). With other subjects, this parent also learned that their children had troubles understanding instructions and said that “so even to read what is being asked she needs my support as well. Which makes me wonder how were her days at school honestly? If she needs this kind of guidance and one on one support with me at home” (P5). This experience is informative as parents begin to learn about their children as students, and perhaps also gain a deeper understanding about the educational challenges they face at school. Another parent shared that the educators had previously recommend the child get tested for ADHD and ASD, however the parent did not understand why, “but having her home has really sort of made me go ‘oh wow, how did I miss these things’ you know because we’re given the, in the sort of insight into you know what, what our teachers are dealing with regularly. So, it’s really sort of been, we’re now on the path to getting some assessments done and all this other stuff” (P6). A positive from this remote teaching and learning initiative that parents have expressed is their new understanding of their children “I feel like I know my kids better” (P11), and also a new understanding and appreciation for the educator “teachers and early childhood educators have the hardest jobs, I’ve always thought it and always appreciated it and I appreciate it now more than ever” (P3).

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## Theme 8: Continuation of remote learning

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Parents shared their feedback on remote teaching and learning, and their thoughts on what the transition back to in-person learning would look like. Remote teaching and learning was implemented under emergency circumstances, and so the recommendations from parents are made under the understanding that the program is continually evolving.

To better support their children, a clear set of expectations would be extremely beneficial for families. Parents are seeking clarity and guidance in two areas: (1) long-term curriculum guidelines – this would support parents in being more flexible with their schedules in delivering their child’s education over an undetermined period of time, and (2) parents would also like guidance in terms of

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the teaching practice and pedagogy – this would enable them to understand how to deliver the content and identify success or areas that the child may need further practice. Regarding long-term curriculum guidelines, parents shared “I would need more formal, like more formal explanation of the curriculum and what’s to be expected and ... like what is expected of him from the beginning of SK and what is expected of him at the end” (P4), and “we’ll need to know as parents right from the get go, what the curriculum will be for the year – what are the textbooks? What are the exercises? what are the assignments? And have the collections so we can chunk it out our own way and what makes sense for our family every week” (P5). An overarching understanding of the year-long expectations and goals would enable parents’ control over their children’s learning, especially in a time when the learning process is unpredictable. Regarding teaching practice and pedagogy, parents explained that they lack the teaching skills and instincts for what their child might need, “but I don’t have that innate knowledge or desire to pull it together” (P7). Parents need guidance in terms of actually delivering the learning; one parent said that it’s “unclear what expectations really looked like, it was very unclear as to what learning looks like ... unclear what play-based learning looks like, ... if this was to go on, I just think parents need to understand more clearly” (P8). Parents would like more guidance around understanding curriculum and instructional practices to improve their ability to deliver remote teaching and learning.

Parents identified needing more information about the development and delivery of remote teaching and learning. In reviewing what’s being provided to their children, one parent noted “I’m not seeing any version of oversight into what’s being provided, I’m not seeing anything that is looking at outcomes or efficacy” (P9). This lack of information was concerning for parents, as they felt the education provided to their children is not adequate for supporting their children’s development. This parent further recommended that communication needs to be more of a priority moving forward in remote teaching and learning, “can we not find some way of keeping the communication excellent? Between staff and parents and between staff and students” (P9), and this may ease the feeling of not being provided quality education. Another parent reporting needed more information on how to utilize the resources and tools, as at this point “it felt as if it was left to the parents’ device to do their own ... every single tool, uhm” (P5). One parent recommended that boards should work on “curating some of those resources, that are being uploaded in terms of, “if your child likes duh duh duh, then they should be using this tool, this is good for X Y and Z” (P5). Providing resources that allow parents to make educational decisions for their children would be very empowering to parents and families.

If remote teaching were to continue, parents encouraged that stronger leadership be taken in establishing a quality remote teaching program. With an action-oriented approach, one parent expressed “So can we not take a leadership role here, as a board? Can we not set some expectations for outcomes? Can we not set up some kind of learning that actually can be grades? Can we not have some oversight? Can we not div- have some division of duties that’s, that’s more wise? Instead of letting this happen to us, can we not be the ones to say “okay, we have the summer, let’s not waste a minute of it” (P9). This parents’ concern highlights the general notion that we should not simply react to the pandemic, but also use our time to plan for the future of education. Furthermore, this parent suggests that any time or money put into the development of a quality remote learning program will not be wasted, “even if all that happens and then our kids are back in the school full time 5 days a week, I guarantee you that platform is not lost ... it can be used on snow days, and it can be used ... having that platform developed in 2020, it’s not too soon” (P9), we should look at this situation as an

opportunity to enrich our program and plan for the long-term, we should be investing in a quality long-term program that will be necessary beyond this pandemic. Alternatively, another parent suggests that it is not possible to create a long-term program for remote learning, “I think that when we talk about e-learning and distance education and stuff like that, a model for grade 3 and other, I think at this point it would be almost impossible to come up with anything that would be, you know long term or sustainable” (P6), and perhaps education will not be of quality until we return to in-person learning.

Aiming for efficiency, parents recommend that remote teaching and learning programs become somewhat standardized. This would enable educators to share successes and failures, and educators will also have more time to support the needs of each student instead of developing programming. One parent explained that with a standardized program “every student is doing the same stuff, cause then you could sort of share ideas of what worked for you and didn’t work for you. [Be]cause right now every grade 2 class is different, every school is different, so you can’t really figure things out as a collective, you sort of have to do it all on your own” (P10). Likewise, another parent shared that “I mean there’s a lot of really really great stuff already out there. I think it’s a lot of work to expect teachers to have to prepare new things ... and this poor teacher is spending all her time and it’s just not effective, in my estimation it doesn’t seem very effective” (P8). Another parent suggested that if learning is somewhat standardized, then teaching skills can be better utilized to support student learning, as opposed to developing lessons; they recommended that if “you take all the grade 4 teachers teaching grade 4 math in English, and instead of 80 lesson plans coming out of Ontario\* Schoolboard for Grade 4 math on the 21st of May, you have one person who’s really good at creating engaging content, every one of those classrooms gets the lesson, every individual Teacher is responsible for doing feedback of their own students, cause they know their own IEPs and they know their kids, you know they do their own feedback on those, on what comes back, and you let those teachers who are not recreating the same content as everybody else who’s doing grade 4 math right now, you have those teachers instead do things like facilitate google meets or google hangouts or you know provide content on digital literacy, or any number of additional things that our kids are missing out on” (P9). A benefit for this approach would be that more students are reached at their individual levels, as teachers would be more able to engage with the additional time.

If remote teaching were to continue, parents shared three major needs for their children to be successful: (1) additional educational support, (2) more engagement opportunities, and (3) technology support and clarity. One method for additional educational support would be tutoring. One parent recommended, “having, a volunteer basis tutoring system where the older grades support and volunteer the younger grades” (P5), while another parent explained that “honestly I would need somebody to help with that. Whether that be a grandparent, or a babysitter, or what. But I think we wouldn’t have to get them help to just manage the day-to-day” (P7). In regard to more opportunities for engagement, parents explained that they don’t know how, but they know that their children would need to be more engaged in learning. With one parent stating they need “some way of keeping the kids engaged with one another on a very personal level. They may or may not get to see each other in person, but we need to provide that because everybody’s missing it. And I say everybody because that’s literally everybody that I’ve hear talk about this has said the same thing – their kids feel disconnected and they need that connection” (P9). Although further engagement is desperately needed, parents worried that it may not be possible; one parent said “we need to be able to just see



other people. I don't know, I, I don't know that there are any supports that you could give us that would make it any better" (P2). Finally, regarding the need for technological clarity and supports, parents need clear access to the tools for supporting their children's learning; one parent explained "some of the tools ... will need to be made really accessible ... having those freely available, not getting expired in June or July or doing the trial method ... I won't be able to pay the subscription or willing to" (P5). There are many technological tools available, however accessing them is a challenge and should be facilitated by the schools, boards, and ministry. Technological consistency is also very important for parents, as they need to understand how to navigate the tool no matter the device being used; one parent had an issue with using an iPad while the teacher used a Chromebook, explaining "so the things that she sees in google classrooms is slightly different than what I see, because it's a different platform, or a different technology I guess" (P10). Communication became increasingly challenging for those parents who could not get the necessary technological support they needed.

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## Theme 9: Transition to in-person learning

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Parents reflected on what the transition to in-person learning might look like and noted that early primary children would likely have challenges practicing social distancing. One parent shared "the idea of physically distancing kids is not going to work really well, I don't think it's going to be super effective" (P8), and this parent further mentioned that in France where schools have already opened back up "they have all these cases and all the schools closed again" (P8). Parents are especially worried about their children because of their age, "I mean kids are, like impulsive right? Like they forget and there's no way they're going to be able to keep them apart" (P10), but also in regard to their gender "maybe in my daughters class it wouldn't be too bad, but in my sons class, no way. Especially little boys, they're just too, all over the place" (P10). One parent expressed concern for the logistics of opening schools safely, wondering whether there would be plans in place and how they would be executed, saying that "as a parent I hope that schools are vigilant with their illness policies, and making sure that kids are, are safe and you know there are cleanliness guidelines and I'm sure that they'll all be in place but whether they actually get executed in practice" (P11). And so, parents need confidence in the education system to care for their children and to safely reopen.

Due to overwhelming concerns about the transition, many parents were hesitant to send their children back to school at all, should in-person learning resume. For instance, parents shared that they have already decided not to send their children back to school, saying "we've sort of decided that even if schools do go back in June ... we're probably not going to, to send them" (P6) and "technically we've decided not to send them back until September" (P11). These decisions were made in the Spring of 2020, at which time the possibility of re-opening in the Spring still remained. With the potential of a shifting attendance schedules, in which perhaps children attend for half-days or only some days each week, parents worried about juggling their schedules and maintaining consistency with their children; one parent shared that "if we know anything about children is that they, they need structure, they need to know what's going on. So if there's, if it's going to be half days or every other day, or "we might open or we might close" or "you can get on the bus today ... but not tomorrow" I would just, I would probably just keep them home" (P8). The inconsistency in attendance is also potentially damaging for children's development, and this parent went on to explain, adding "I'm not very

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comfortable with what I think might amount to a traumatic experience of needing to go to this, a school that they're really used to and saying "okay now you can't go near your friends" and "no you can't use that ball" and "no, we're not pulling out the art supplies" or "you know it's part time, do I go today or do I not go today?" so all anything like that I think would make me as a parent I think really hesitant to send them back" (P8).

Once in person teaching and learning resumes, parents anticipate that the logistics will be extremely challenging, as teachers will need to teach (perhaps both remotely and in-person simultaneously), while also catering to the social-emotional needs of their students, and ensuring social-distancing, "I think teachers are going to be most concerned about that. How are they going to navigate having a class in front of them and having a class online." (P11). One parent recommended that because this time is unpredictable and the shut-down guidelines might come in waves, we need to use all of the time spent in person intentionally, saying "let's be really judicious about how we spend that time. Very targeted. Very intentional spending of that time. [Be]cause it may be for a short period of time too. They may get those kids back for 3 weeks and there's another wave and everybody's at home again. So I wouldn't want that time wasted" (P 9). Furthermore, in order to provide a smooth transition and re-establish classroom norms, teachers should create a routine classroom environment, setting clear expectations for their students immediately. Parents anticipated that settling into this routine would be difficult for both educators and children, sharing "I think that's going to be difficult for them to get back into the, a structured school-day ... Not impossible, but it will be difficult in the beginning" (P1). One parent recommended that teachers immediately set the standard for learning, suggesting that "anything teachers can do when they do have that in person time to connect the kids to themselves, to each other, and then to follow that through with the remote days, in terms of staying connected and allowing that to continue, I think that creates the environment for kids to be able to learn well" (P 9). With the possibility that in-person and remote learning will be integrated with each other, it is important that the time used in class is used well. Parents anticipated that "kids are going to feel very disconnected still, they're going to feel disconnected even if they're in class every other day or every other week, they're going to feel very disconnected" (P9), so creating this connection is essential to promote learning.

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## Conclusion: Key Findings

This research captured the voices of teachers and parents as they navigated uncharted territory and transitioned to remote teaching and learning. Ten overarching findings highlight the impact of remote teaching and learning initiatives in early primary contexts from the perspectives of educators and parents:

1. Educators and parents rose to the challenge during unprecedented times
2. Educators experienced unique challenges associated with moving early primary education (that primarily focuses on play- and inquiry-based methods of teaching and learning and supports social and emotional development) to a remote learning program
3. Student experiences (as reported by parents) were highly variable, some parents were 100% satisfied with the learning that was provided to their children and others had many suggestions for improvement
4. There was much debate about the benefits and challenges of synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning from educators and parents
5. Equitable access to quality education was an overarching theme and concern for all participants
6. Parents expressed concern for a lack of differentiated instruction
7. Educators and parents reported several concerns for the 2020/2021 school year
8. Parents reported a newfound appreciation for educators
9. Educators worked in partnership with other teachers and admin to support children and families
10. Unanticipated benefits included: students gaining independent learning skills, more time with families, improved parent-teacher relationships, and increased technological knowledge

Findings from this research are being used to provide explicit recommendations for future planning for remote learning as well as strategies to improve in-person learning during the context of COVID-19 specifically for early primary education.

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