

Australian Family Survey on Schooling during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Duration and responses

The survey opened Monday 27 April and closed Wednesday 6 May (collectors closed 8 May). Collectors were created for a range of media, including ACSSO email campaigns and social media. Of the **3335** total responses, nearly two-thirds (**1917**) were collected via links shared on Facebook organisation and personal accounts. **3030** respondents passed the main qualifiers and completed all (or most) of the survey. The survey allowed several possible paths to completion. For example, Family A answers questions relating to additional needs students + home-based learning + adults working from home while supervising learning, while Family B skips the additional needs section and completed questions on children still attending school in person.

Limitations

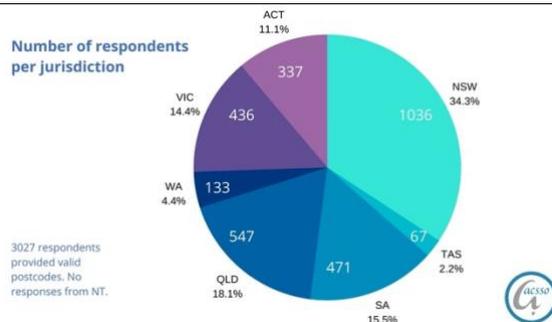
- Due to time and financial constraints, the survey could not be translated into languages other than English and so potentially excluded many families who may be facing even greater difficulties in schooling during isolation conditions.
- The brief testing period resulted in some limitations not being exposed before release. In particular, a subset of parents who are leaving home to work while their children study alone at home were unable to answer certain questions in the survey, but were still able to submit their comments.
- Respondents without personal experience of children’s learning during the pandemic were not excluded from participation, but they were skipped from initial qualifying questions to the final page where they were invited to contribute more general comments.
- The survey focus is on individual family experiences not systemic responses. The complexity of family schooling choices makes it impossible to extract complete data sets exclusively for any one school system. Collections of individual responses can be prepared for all families who nominated a child attending, for example, a Catholic school, but these families may also be answering for children in government or independent schools.

Jurisdiction

State and territory of origin were tracked for the 3027 respondents who recorded a valid postcode. About one-third were from NSW (**1036**), followed by Queensland (**547**), South Australia (**471**) and Victoria (**436**), ACT (**337**), Western Australia (**133**), and Tasmania (**67**).

No responses were recorded from the Northern Territory, which is unsurprising given NT’s uninterrupted school arrangements and small population.

While not fully explored, ACT respondents have reported unhappiness about the ‘hub’ school supervision. Sentiments include ‘disappointing’, ‘a joke’, ‘harmful’ and ‘better off at home’.



Currently ACT public schools have the most appalling arrangements for children in the entire country. They have clearly not considered the experience of children in the arrangements where they have closed all schools except for a few hubs. It has been a total mess – ACT parent, govt primary

Relationship to children, living arrangements

More than **90%** of respondents were parents and about **75%** live with a partner and the children full time. Grandparents (**3.45%**) and other carers and guardians (**2.8%**) were also identified. About **13%** were sole carers and more than **6%** lived with extended family (with or without partners). Comments on additional family stressors appear in many different parts of the survey:

- I’ve had to borrow my son’s father’s iPad but that is stressful because he uses it to hold over me and put me down
- Our family has split up to care for elderly relatives.

Relationship to school-aged children (3027 responses)

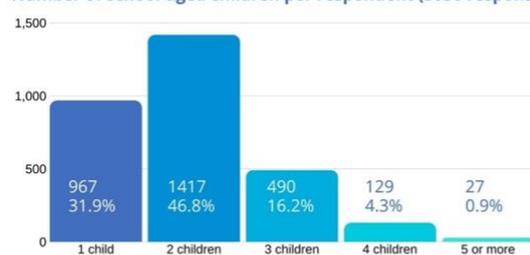


‘Other’ relationships included sibling, aunt, family friend, carer, teacher, homestay or host parent, community worker, mentor.

Number of children in family

The survey responses cover families with a total of **4015** school-aged children and **674** younger children/infants (chart, right). Nearly half the respondents (**46.8%**) had two school-aged children, **32%** had one child and **16%** had three. Only **5%** cared for four or more children. Of the **16%** of respondents who also had younger children, most (**81%**) had one preschool-aged child or infant and **15%** had two.

Number of school-aged children per respondent (3030 responses)



In addition, 16.2% of respondents were caring for one or more preschool-aged children or infants.

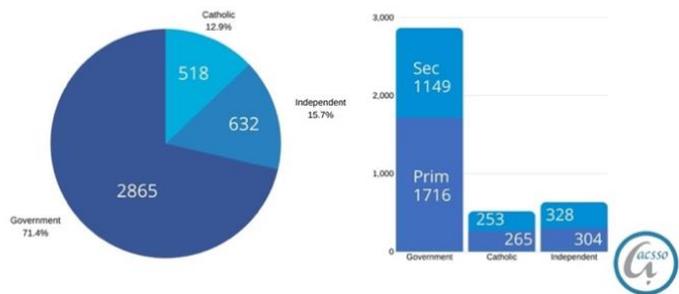
School years and systems

Respondents reported caring for **2285** primary and **1730** secondary students. About a third of respondents had children in both primary and secondary schools. As primary and secondary school contexts are often distinctive, many questions allowed different responses for each.

More than **70%** of respondents had children in government schools, **15.7%** in independent schools, and **12.9%** in Catholic schools. It can be assumed that many families take up more than one school system for their children.

Type of schooling

Around one third of respondents had children in both primary and secondary schools.



Children attending school

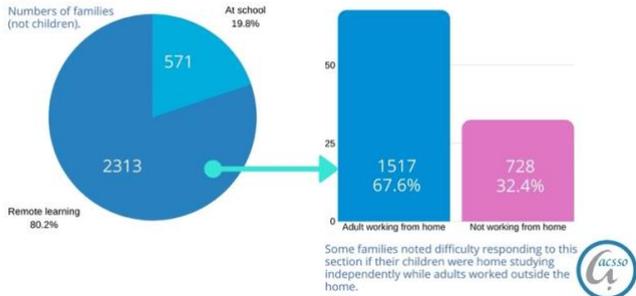
571 families said their children were still attending a school in person (see chart, right).

Families could choose more than one reason for children being in school. The most common reasons:

- **51%** child needs structure to study
- **49%** adult/s in 'essential' work
- **36%** school encouraging attendance
- **31%** virus poses little danger to children

Notably, many school staff complained of being 'forced' to take children to school.

Learning arrangements April/May 2020



Children requiring additional support

More than **22%** of respondents (**683**) completed questions about children who normally received additional support at school. To allow for the complexity of individual needs, respondents were able to choose multiple responses to best describe the child/ren they cared for. The largest single response group was for 'mainly required learning support' (**75%**) while nearly one-third of respondents said their child/ren required 'psychological support'.

Nearly half the respondents (**49%**) said their child/ren could manage social distancing independently, while **22%** said they could manage if accompanied and **15%** said they could not comply.

Remote learning with additional needs

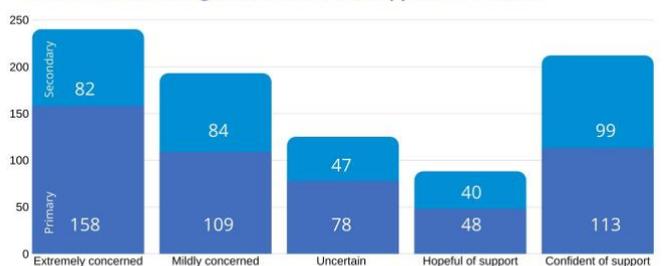
The lack of consistency and changes in routines have impacted my ASD children significantly... focus is lost extremely quickly – NSW Catholic primary and secondary schools.

Learn at home content ... confusing and very time consuming for working parents to work through – QLD govt primary.

Doing well following the provided schedule and without the distraction of physical school – NSW govt primary.

It's a hands-on day with me going from each side of the table until we finish. If you have trouble [with] reading and comprehension it's tough but ... all 3 are happy with what they are achieving and communication from school – VIC govt primary, Catholic secondary

Concern about losing additional needs support in isolation



683 families of additional needs students responded to this question. 56% were 'extremely' or 'mildly' concerned they would lose school support in isolation, while 41% were 'hopeful' or 'confident' of continued support. Families were somewhat less confident (22%) that primary schools would continue to support students during isolation and somewhat more confident of secondary school support (28%).

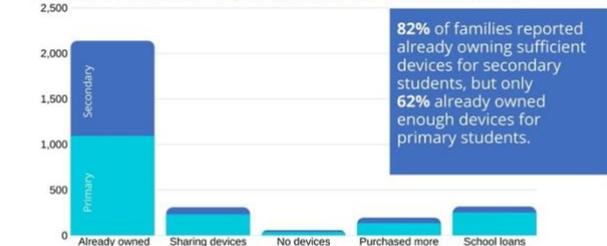
Access to devices, internet

95% of remote learning families reported reliable access to the internet.

77% of families also said their school's servers were reliable, although this varied considerably between primary (**73%** reliable) and secondary (**51%**).

This may relate to the much higher dependence on 'live' online classes reported as the main form of educational delivery for secondary schools (**58%**) compared to primary schools (**18%**).

Access to sufficient computing devices for remote learning



82% of families reported already owning sufficient devices for secondary students, but only 62% already owned enough devices for primary students.

Many comments related to existing, older devices not coping with the new demands of remote learning - in particular the streaming of live classes or recorded videos. Some families of children with additional needs reported losing access to vital IT equipment at school, such as C-Pens for dyslexia.

Family wellbeing during isolation

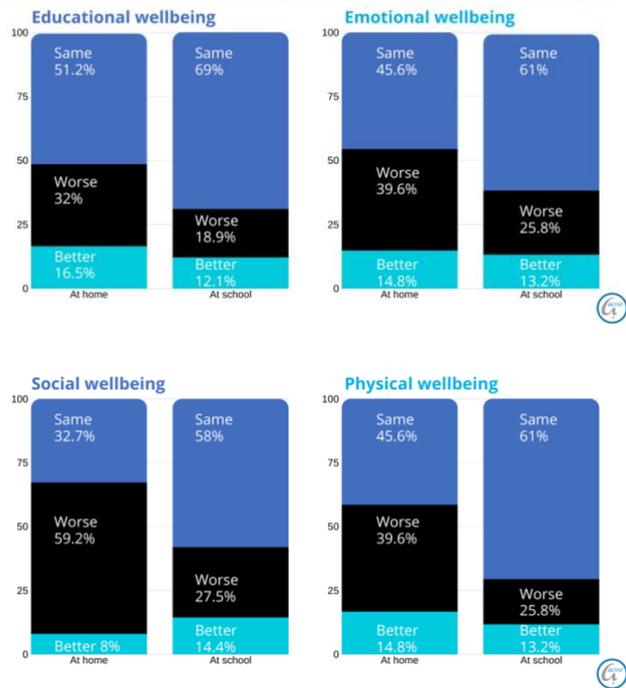
A number of the survey’s questions addressed family wellbeing and the responses will be explored more in the final report.

- **72%** of remote learning families felt ‘supported’ by schools, but many comments referred to complex systems, poor communication, and unrealistic school expectations
- **40%** of remote learning families were unhappy their children’s learning days had either too much or too little structure
- **56%** of families of children with additional needs were concerned they would lose school support through remote learning
- At-home families were much more likely to report ‘worse than usual’ wellbeing than at-school families (charts, right).

[Feeling] stressed, anxious. Schools should ... have better systems in place to teach by now. Every workplace has had to adapt not just them – VIC parent, govt primary

We have coped remarkably well, lots of online social interactions have helped – NSW parent, govt secondary

Family wellbeing since isolation, comparing at-home and at-school contexts



Reasons to return to school

Families in home-based learning were asked to rank reasons to return to school from ‘most convincing’ to least.

The chart to the right combines the top three votes for each popular reason, separating those which fall more clearly in the educational domain.

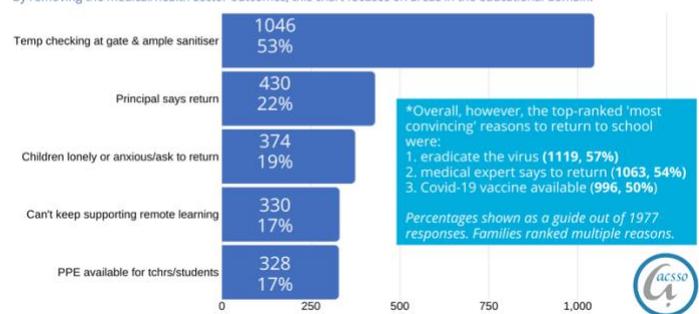
I would be sending them now but have no option as in ACT they can't attend their own school – ACT parent, govt secondary

I think that if students and teachers get to the point where masks need to be worn that is ridiculous and schools must be closed – NSW parent, govt secondary

Without vaccine sending kids back to school is too dangerous to be considered – QLD parent Catholic primary, govt secondary

Sentiment ranking of non-medical* reasons to return to school

Families ranked reasons to return children to school by ‘most convincing’ to least. Results show top three votes combined for each reason. By removing the medical/health sector outcomes, this chart focuses on areas in the educational domain.



Comment snapshots

My son is struggling to focus when normally he’s fine. Missing the interpersonal contact. My daughter is quite happy but falling behind in a lot of work! She normally keeps up – VIC parent, govt and Catholic secondary

Not racing around to attend extracurricular activities has been beneficial for my mental and emotional health as a parent, and reduced the stress and time pressure on my child – QLD parent, independent primary

We use the hub schools in ACT and they are terrible. Staff are lovely, the process is a joke. The supervision of learning is a joke and don't even get me started on before/after school care – ACT parent, govt primary

It's been really hard on the kids and I think they are the group in community who is having the most asked of them at the moment – VIC parent, govt primary

I believe children should be back at school now. It is not feasible for parents to work from home, supervise children, and after 8 weeks kids need to get back to school and our economy needs to be restarted – NSW parent, Catholic primary

Struggling to get children to focus on school at home & manage full time workload. Made the decision to send children back to school two days a week. Our school will not take any child who has a parent working from home so I'm forced to go into the office. When we're at home, I'm only doing supervision with education apps. I simply don't have the time for the lesson plans the school sent home – QLD parent, govt primary.

I would very much like to see a staggered return to school with lower numbers of students 1 - 2 days a week. With fewer students more ability to keep safe distance but kids still get some interaction with peers. Best of both worlds. Not happy to have 30 in a classroom at any 1 time – NSW parent, govt primary

If I didn't have to work I would happily home school the kids. Access to technology devices is also an issue. I take my computer to work. Some work they send home is links to websites but they don't have access to technology until I'm home – NSW parent, govt primary and secondary

My ex-husband has extreme health anxiety and a history of being very intimidating when he chooses to communicate with me. The SA education union is against on-site schooling and his fear of COVID-19 means the union reinforces his justification to refuse to allow our son to school on site – SA parent, govt primary