



Caregiver Perspectives Regarding Special Education Services Changes Amid COVID-19



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Introduction

- COVID-19 forced public schools closures, which led to significant challenges for families of youth with special educational needs.
- It is unclear how schools adhered to individualized educational plans (IEPs) outlined under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- Distance learning plans highlighted disparities in access to technology, reduced/ lack of access to school-based resources, and increased burden and burnout for both school personnel and caregivers.
- The approach to addressing these challenges was not uniform and early studies highlighted reduced/eliminated services, lack of engagement among school staff and students, new responsibilities for school personnel and caregivers, and varying student outcomes with the virtual format.

Objective

To evaluate caregiver perspectives regarding changes in special education service provision caused by COVID-19 and to examine caregiver satisfaction and feedback regarding changes.

Method

Participants: Caregivers of children in grades 2-12 with special education services at public school

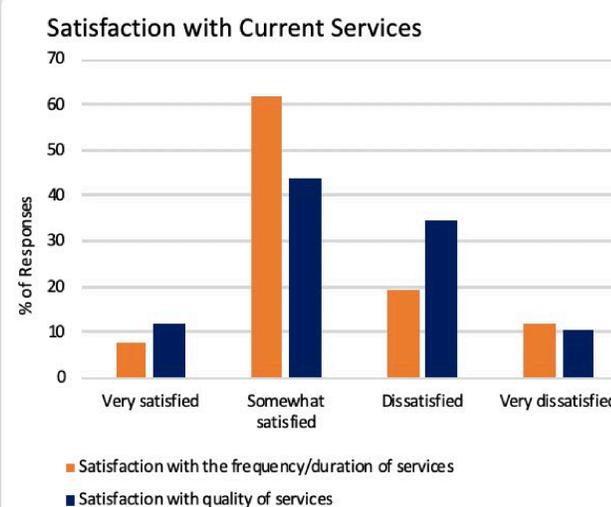
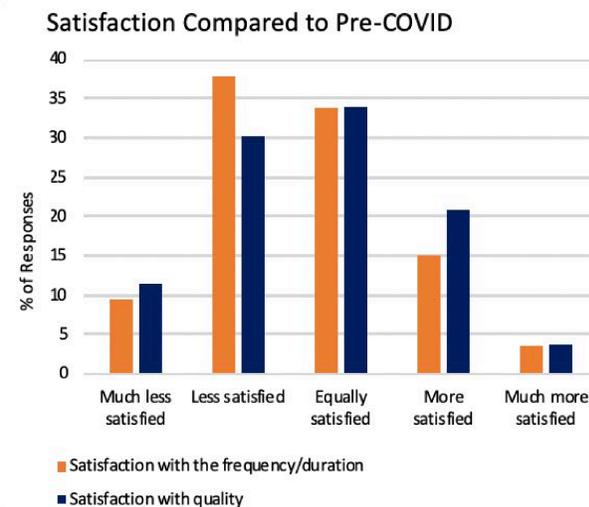
Measure: Survey designed for this study

- Demographic questions
- Family questions
- Educational placement, eligibility, services, location of services
- Frequency & duration of direct special education services
- Changes in services due to COVID-19
- Satisfaction with the quantity and quality of services during COVID-19

Analysis: Descriptive statistics; inductive thematic analysis of qualitative data

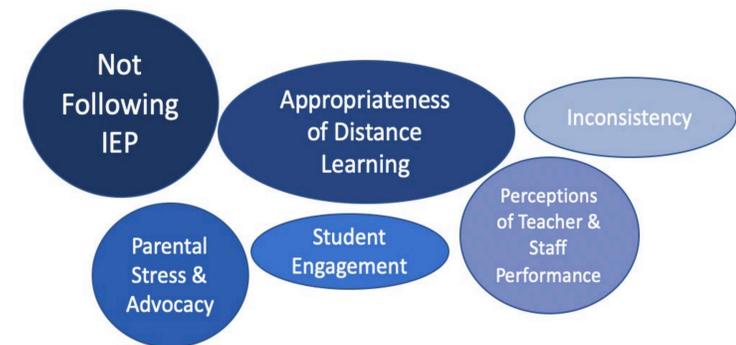
Results

- 78 caregivers from 21 states participated who were diverse in education level, income, and urbanicity. Most had one child and two caregivers in the home, and provided childcare during the pandemic. Most frequently only one caregiver was employed and the majority (44.9%) indicated moderate family stress.
- Children were 6 to 18 ($M = 10.55$, $SD = 2.87$) and 57.69% were female and 26.9% were Hispanic and ELL. All SPED categories represented; most frequent were autism, orthopedic impairment, emotional disturbance, and developmental delay. Roughly 60% received itinerant teacher services and over 35% received academic/instructional services. Over half received instruction virtually and a third were in-person, and the remaining children were hybrid. Average of 7.23 hours of direct intervention services per week ($SD = 4.51$ hours; range 1-20).



Results

- Qualitative analysis of 98 open-ended responses regarding changes in special education services and general comments revealed six themes:



Conclusions

- About half of caregivers were satisfied with COVID-related changes and half were not. This highlights diversity in how schools responded to COVID-19. Participants were primarily from two-caregiver, single-child households with one employed caregiver so responses may not represent experiences of all caregivers.
- Future research using larger and more diverse samples is needed to understand what individual, family, and school factors contribute to response to services changes.
- This research may inform policymakers and the educational system to make more proactive efforts to address the educational needs of students amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Acknowledgements

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