

## Sherri Wheeler

Journal

# Windsor-Essex 2020 Back To School Parent Survey

August 11, 2020 No Comments

On August 10, 2020 most Ontario school boards sent to parents their intended plans for the upcoming school year during the Covid-19 pandemic. Parents are expected to make a decision between sending their students to school, keeping them home to use school board provided teacher-led learning resources or to homeschool their children without board support. A local radio station held a phone-in poll with a yes or no choice to see what parents were planning to do. I felt this was overly simplistic and wanted to gather detailed information about what parents like myself are planning to do, and what their concerns are. Sometimes it helps to know what your peers are planning and worrying about. **These are my survey results.**

I launched the survey early on Monday August 10, and closed it the next day on Tuesday at mid-day. I shared the survey with my family and friends and on a couple very popular groups for area mothers on Facebook.

*I am not affiliated with the government or school boards in any way.* My husband is a highschool teacher, but was not involved in this initiative.

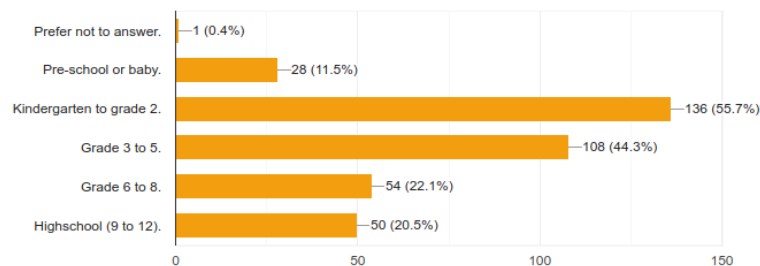
I received **244 responses**.

## Survey Demographics

- The main avenue for sharing the survey was on groups for mothers, so there is likely to be a high **majority of responses from women**. It would be interesting to know if men would have provided different answers – perhaps about making career sacrifices or about stress levels.
- I also shared among my friends and family who are skewed to **white and middle class**.
- The **majority of respondents have elementary aged children**. Only 20% reported having a child in highschool.
- I received **244 responses**. Almost everyone answered every question.

How old is/are your child/children? (check all that apply)

244 responses



## To School Or To Stay Home

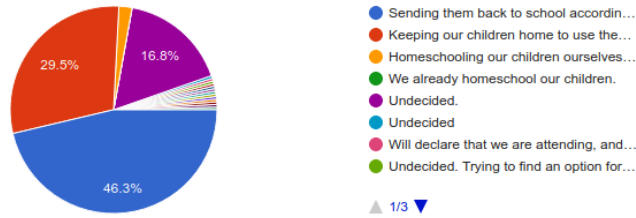
The key question on the survey was whether parents were planning to send their kids to school or not. School boards have committed to providing a virtual learning option for students who opt to remain home. So how did parents respond? The answers surprised me. Almost **30% are keeping their children home** to use the online-learning option. Many more parents are still undecided even with the deadline for making an official decision looming in a few days. The original format of this question didn't have an 'Undecided' option and many parents used the 'Other' option to write in that they are undecided. I then added an official 'Undecided' option which quickly gained almost 16% of the responses. If I add the people who wrote in their own 'undecided/unsure/still thinking' responses, to the Undecided category, and add the one or two results who are partially sending their kids to school to the 'Sending' category... the results work out like this:

- **47% Sending back to school.**
- **30% Keeping child home to use online learning.**

- **21% Undecided.**
- **2% Homeschooling.**

Regarding whether to send your children back to school are you:

244 responses



## School Buses

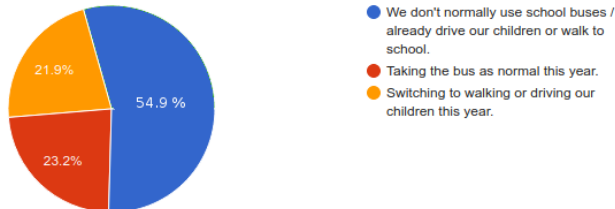
When this survey was released, school bus companies had not yet released a detailed plan for busing this year. We have heard that buses will assign seats to students one per seat, and sanitize between school pickups, but details are scarce.

I fixed a typo in this question midway through the survey and as a result it created two pie sections for both versions of the same answer. In my graphic I have combined them into one blue pie piece.

The most interesting statistic from this question is that 22% are switching away from using bus services when they normally would use the bus. If I eliminate the 125 responses who don't typically use busing, this becomes **49% of parents who normally would bus, are now choosing to drive or walk**. At least it will help the bus companies figure out their logistics if they have fewer students who need to be bused. As of this writing, I have not been asked by the bus company about whether I will be using the bus or not this year. This also brings up a concern that school will need to prepare for a **major increase in cars coming to drop off children**. How will this comply with social distancing? Hopefully schools will have staggered drop-off times, maybe by last initial.

Regarding school buses:

228 responses

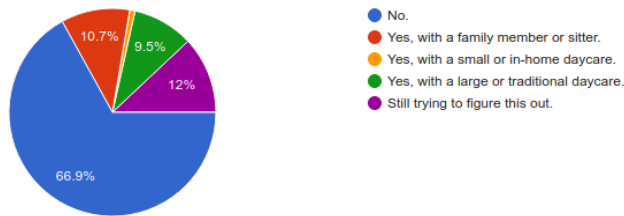


## Use Of Daycare

Many parents have expressed concern about whether efforts to keep children contained to cohorts at school will be rendered moot by the fact that they will be using daycare before or after school. The survey revealed that **67% won't be using daycare at all**. About **10% will be using a large / traditional daycare**. It concerns me that **12% of parents say they still haven't figured this out**, and it's now almost mid August. What do these numbers mean for efforts to cohort or limit contact among children at schools, if many of their peers will be linking these cohorts and even linking different schools together by interacting at daycare?

Will your children need daycare this year?

242 responses

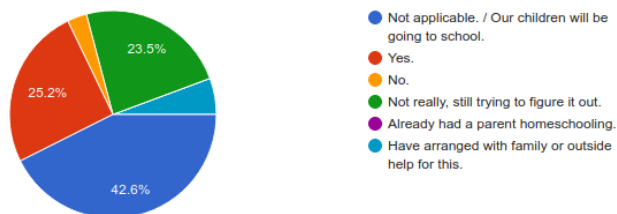


## Disruptions And Risks To Family Life

A striking theme among responses was in regard to disruptions that this process will have to family life. Of the applicable responses, only **44% have a parent who can support their child learning from home**. The rest are either trying to figure it out, using outside help like a family member, or just say no, they aren't able to help their child learn at home. This makes me wonder if more parents would have wanted to keep their child home, but are just unable to.

If you opted to keep your children home, do you have a parent who has the capacity to take on the role of teaching/aiding your children's learning at home during the day?

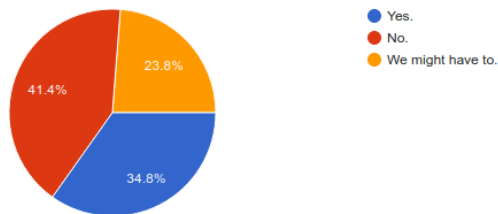
230 responses



A related question asked if parents have had to make changes to their career or work hours to accommodate this situation. **35% say yes they have, and another 24% say they might have to**. Given that this survey is skewed to female respondents, I personally wonder how disproportionately this is affecting the careers of women. This combines with job losses across the spectrum due to the pandemic.

Have one or more parents in your family had to make career changes or adjustments to work hours, to accommodate your back to school plans?

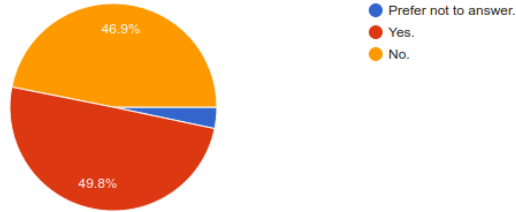
244 responses



I also wanted to know how many respondents had a family member at home who is at high-risk of complications from Covid-19. For example a senior living in the home, or a pre-existing condition, or a compromised immune system. **A full half of respondents have a high-risk family member**. Some of the comments in the open feedback section expressed concern about their children being treated like guinea pigs. With half of responding families having a high-risk member, no wonder people are concerned.

Does your family have members who have an extra level of risk for Covid-19 (i.e. seniors in the home, members with pre-existing conditions, immune compromised, etc)?

241 responses

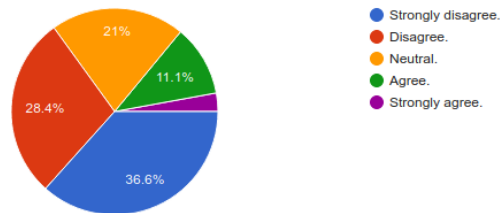


## Satisfaction With The Response

People definitely are not happy with the response of the authorities on this issue. Anecdotally I have chatted with many fellow moms who feel that the school plans are light on details, and we aren't being given enough time to make our decision. It also seems like the official plan from the government has changed several times over the summer. **65% are not satisfied with the government and ministry of education response to the issue. And 57% are not satisfied with the school boards' response.** I didn't break this down by individual school board. Officials should take note of these stats.

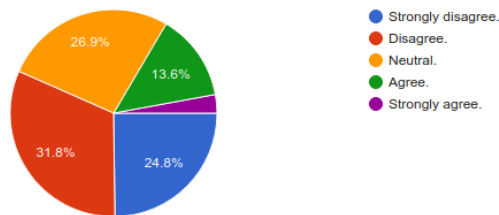
I am satisfied with the ministry and government response to this issue.

243 responses



I am satisfied with our school boards' response to this issue.

242 responses



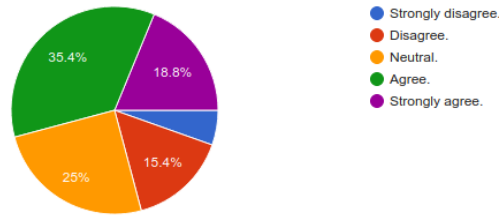
## Strain On Families

I wanted parents to be able to speak out about something that seems to be an invisible issue – the hardship and feelings of stress and anxiety that parents are experiencing.

Hardship can mean different things for different people. For some it might mean difficulty with the logistics of this situation. Difficulty even making a decision, or memories from the end of the last school year and how hard it was to manage children who were stuck at home when schools closed. There might also be challenges getting the technology and internet access needed for online learning. **54% say that back to school plans have put inconvenience or hardship on their families.** This needs to be acknowledged and addressed.

The back to school plans have put inconvenience or hardship on my family.

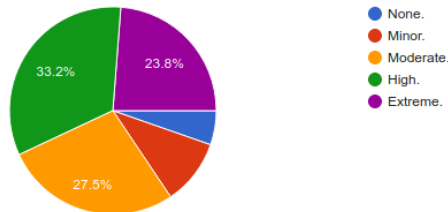
240 responses



The mental load carried by parents during this pandemic has been very high. Changes to the government plans, lack of information, concern for the safety of their children and their social and emotional well-being are all on people's minds. **84% of respondents say they have moderate or worse levels of stress or anxiety about the back to school plans.** A distressing **24% report 'extreme' levels of stress or anxiety.** This is a heavy burden on parents already dealing with the typical stresses of life, and on top of any stress from economic factors like job losses. One of the main ways to help alleviate this stress, is clear, consistent, prompt and detailed information from leadership – which I personally feel we haven't received.

How much stress or anxiety do you have about sending your children back to school (or not)?

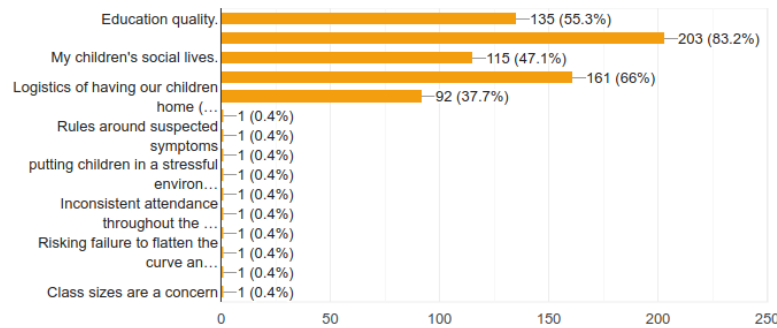
244 responses



Parents indicated a number of specific things they are concerned about regarding the back to school plans. **Risk of Covid-19 infection and their children's emotional health were the top two answers.** Concerns about their education quality and social lives were not far behind.

What are your main areas of concern regarding your back to school plans? (check all that apply)

244 responses



## Open Comments

I provided an open comment box where parents could share their thoughts. I removed the names of specific schools because I don't want there to be criticism toward specific people or schools. A consistent theme of these comments was confusion and fear. Even someone who seemed angry at me personally – though maybe they thought I was with the school board? I wish I could give a virtual hug to these parents. I share many of their concerns and confusion. Though hopefully if we all do our best to send our kids with masks, keep them home at the very first sign of symptoms, and continue to press our government and school boards to take responsible action, we will have a successful

school year. Good luck to all my fellow parents, and thank you to all those who took time to respond to my survey. ~Sherrri

**Respondent Comments (21):**

I worry about busing and what they plan on doing for cleaning and social distancing.

Thorough survey. We are very much ready to send our daughter back to school – for socialization, in-class instruction, routine. But we are not confident in the plan shared by the Ford government and haven't received any direct communication from our school regarding what the return will look like there. We are exploring options for keeping her home – if even for a month or two – to see how things unfold. This option will likely involve my husband taking a leave of absence. Not ideal – but we are willing to consider it temporarily.

They need multiple re-entry times. So parents can have some flexibility with moving their children from school to online and back to school.

School should not go back until there is a reliable vaccine. With the option of it being open some parents are forced back to work and feel they have no choice but to send their kids back to school and cross their fingers that everything goes well. It is too soon and our kids should not be Guinea pigs.

I'm upset that the French school board high schools don't get the hybrid model to reduce class sizes.

I think you should correlate the availability of a parent to help with online or home schooling with the number of people who have lost jobs due to covid safety measures.

My child's mental health has been strongly affected. He needs routine, teachers, EA and to be social with friends.

When school went online the education quality was a joke. I know my son goes to [Redacted] but it doesn't mean assignments should be the level of kindergarten.

[Redacted] should be consider a part of the "special schools" and they should be in school full time (classes are small enough) kids with academic and behavioural challenges need consistent learning to be able to be successful in school and switching to every other day is not supportive to their learning styles.

Some of the teens my son hangs out with I know do not have the supportive parent environment at home. We might as well consider them forgotten during this time because they need the classroom for any chance at being someone in life.

My son has never had a class Bigger then 15. Why can't he go to school full time?

My major concern with the back-to-school plan is that the class sizes are larger than what we have even been able to have as group settings. If churches are only allowed to function at 30% capacity with social distancing, why are schools able to run at full capacity with no social distancing? I have no option but to send my children back because I cannot afford to only work two days a week any longer. I cannot afford to lose my home. It's a heart-wrenching decision to have to choose between keeping a roof over your family's head and putting your Children at Risk by sending them back with enormous class sizes and optional masking for my little one!

Reduce class sizes, hire more people and communicate with parents, parent advisory committees and surrounding neighbourhoods.

The School Board, Teacher's Unions, Municipal and Provincial Governments have failed to work together in this emergency situation to adequately ensure a reasonably manageable risk load for schools. If education taxes need to increase so that the School Board can rent/alter/improve local facilities in town centers, the exposure from bussing is greatly reduced. Implement mandatory temp checks for every student and develop protocol to implement it. Again, another major intervention that is cheap and easy to implement! What are we paying these people for, if not to create these policies and protocols for the good of the people?

The local school board has made its plans by zoom meeting. If 12 healthy adults can't share a conference room, why am I expected to stuff my kid in a tiny room with no AC and 20+ kids and a teacher...there is a disconnect there. My kid is not going to be part of this experiment.

We have to send our SK back to school and commit to it before we know about the latchkey and bussing situation. If there are any deviations from the norm for either of those two things, it could put our household in a bad position with two working parents and zero flexibility in our careers.

It is irresponsible to be sending children back to school when government houses aren't able to sit, education administrators can only meet virtually and adults are encouraged to work from home when possible. The existing plans are not practical and they will not protect our children, our

teachers or other staff.

Elementary students need to be 2 meters apart. There are no classroom in all of Essex County that can accommodate proper social distancing.. they are using our children as a science experiment.

Should have a few days/evenings parents can come to the school before hand to see what their children will be walking into. It's a very uneasy feeling sending them in blind. If we could have parent night before we can help our children, and those that don't talk to us about their feelings and struggles.

Opening the schools is a bad idea. Take a look at the USA. Have we not learned by seeing what others have or have not done?

We as parents deserve more specific information before being asked to make such a difficult choice. The plans were to vague and did not paint a clear picture for kindergarten. More funding is needed from the Ministry to support safer schools.

I dont even know how to adress you, but this whole plan is ludacris,you are using our children as projects then opening windsor to stage 3 when we shouldn't be. You're caving to public pressure and you shouldn't be. This is your job! Protect the most vulnerable! You're not. I hope you can live with the people you are going to kill...

If I do choose to keep my child home, does the cost of the technology needed come out of my pocket? What if my child has difficulty with the online, can she choose in person schooling before the end of term one or is she forced to struggle and fall even further behind until that time?

The class sizes need to be smaller. Parents need to be given more details about policies. Also I would like to see how the classrooms will run.

## Data

[2020-School-Survey-Responses.csv](#) Download

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