Students with Disabilities and COVID-19: Parents’ Perspective

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Issue

The COVID-19 pandemic forced most schools in the United States to an online learning format. This study aims to investigate how COVID-19 has impacted students with disabilities and their families.

“There are just so many children who are just invisible. It makes me so angry that our school that talks about equity in the way that they do, has been making children with disabilities and special needs as invisible as they have.”
Problem

Limited Services

Teacher Support

Parent Support

Time

IEP

Quality of Virtual Learning

School

IEP Goals

Parent

Having

Social

Therapy

Very

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So What?

Many students are not receiving the educational and supportive services they need to succeed.

The lack of services may have broad and lasting impacts on students, parents, and educators.

Parents can provide an often-overlooked perspective on this issue.

Providing support to parents may offer a more comprehensive approach to aid the next generation.
Mental health professionals have to rely more on what families are seeing and listening to that and take that into account, which is how it should always be, we know our kids the best.

Solutions

- Improve communication between parents and school providers
- Parent support groups through schools
- Local or state level advocacy
- Improve online resource platforms with mental health and supportive services

“Mental health professionals have to rely more on what families are seeing and listening to that and take that into account, which is how it should always be, we know our kids the best.”
Benefits

Immediate
Empower parents to seek support and advocate for their students

Short Term
Provide parents with support and resources
Supported parents = supported students!

Long Term
Advocate for funding for future parent and student services
Study Objectives

Collect **daily and weekly data** about student services, activities, and mental health from parents of students with disabilities.

Conduct **qualitative interviews** to gather parent perspectives on the changes to student services and unmet needs.

Evaluate the impacts of supportive services on student mental health outcomes during COVID-19.
Study Design and Methods

Part 1: Parent Surveys

- Parents recruited through community organizations (i.e. SEPTA, CHADD, NAMI)
- 10 consented, 7 completed
- Correlational analyses
Study Design and Methods

Part 2: Parent Interviews

● Recruited from study survey sample and community
● 8 interviews: 4 from survey participants
● Example question: In what ways do you wish your child's support and services were different than they were provided during this school year?
● Qualitative thematic analysis
Study Sample

![Bar charts and graphs showing data on parents, student disability categories, and geographical data.]
Student Services

- Services were received on 26 of 156 surveyed days

“Our services were cut in half. It’s been a little moot since we have not been able to get the school to use an appropriate, research-based curriculum for his goals.”
"It wasn't really people's fault, there was just no way to deliver those services virtually the same way, they would have been done in person, you know it's not like I think the school or the teachers did a terrible job."
“I joined it was kind of like a six week parenting seminar called impact parents...it helped a lot just kind of getting through my son's depression and trying to motivate him in a way that was motivating to him.”
“It was difficult for me. Difficult to the point that, you know, I got someone to talk to ... I think that talking with someone just helped me to separate out the things that I could handle and the things that I couldn't handle.”
Parent stress, anxiety, and depression are associated with student emotional and behavioral problems.
Student mental health was consistent across time
“I think the loss of skills in the realm of his mental health and his anxiety and his independence are not being captured at all, because the schools aren't being judged on it.”
Because everything is virtual, she didn't have her friend groups. During the entire year, she had one friend over. She was just disconnected from her social network that she was beginning to build.
Student activities and mental health

More social activity was associated with fewer emotional and behavioral concerns
Qualitative Themes

“The special ED teacher who provides us specialized instruction... She's just good. She would be our Shining Star and she has actually been one of the main reasons that they're going back in hybrid.”
Takeaways

- Parent Stress
- Limited Services
- Student Mental Health
- Support

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Implications and Limitations

**Implications**

01 Increased parental support
02 Improved communication between parents and schools
03 Increased awareness of and access to resources

**Limitations**

01 Recruitment Difficulties
02 Small sample size
03 Fairly homogeneous group of participants
Thank you!

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