**Back to School Survey Analysis Dec 2020**

The Toronto Inter-LIP networks support newcomer access to services across the city. We understand that the <u>return to school</u> has been difficult for many newcomers and immigrants during COVID-19. We put together a survey for newcomer parents to let us know about their experiences accessing online or in-person schooling to try to understand the gaps and find ways to support them.

The survey was run in a two week period between November 3 and 17, 2020 and it was shared with newcomer serving organizations as well as organizations that lead the Settlement workers in Schools programs to assure that a large number of newcomer parents could be reached regardless of t heir ability to communicate in English.

Here is the analysis of the survey results:

**Question 1: Are you answering this survey yourself?**
- 122 survey respondents in total.
- 86% respondents filled out this survey themselves, and 14% not.

**Question 2: Please indicate who is answering for you?**
- 10 surveys were filled out with the assistance from others.
- Among them, 5 surveys were filled out by family or friends, 3 surveys by SWIS workers, 2 surveys by their children, and 1 survey by other service providers.

**Question 3: How was your overall experience in accessing our children's education? (1 being very poor-10 being very positive)**
- 93 responded and 29 skipped the question.
- Overall experience in accessing their children's education is 72 percent.
- Noticeably one fourth respondents rated very positive.
- One third of the respondents had positive experience in accessing their children's education.
- One third of the respondents had very poor experience in accessing their children's education.

**Question 4: Registration process: Tell us about your experience in registering your children for school (1 being very poor-10 being very positive)**
- 55 responded and 67 skipped the question.
- Overall experience in registering the children for school is 81 percent.
- Noticeably one third of the respondents rated very positive.
- Half of the respondents had positive experience in school registration process.
- One fifth had very poor experience in school registration process.

**Question 5: Access to information: Is your children's school keeping you up-to-date on changes regularly? (1 being NO, not at all, -10 being yes, very much)**
- 55 responded and 67 skipped the question.
- Overall experience in schools keeping parents informed of changes regularly is 83 percent feel they are well informed.
- Noticeably half of the respondents had very positive experience in being informed of up-to-date changes regularly by the school.
- Only 13 percent of the respondents had very poor experience.

**Question 6: Is the information you get from school easy to understand?**
- 55 answered and 67 skipped the question.
- 96 percent of respondents find the information they get from school easy to understand.
- Majority of people who responded said that the information they get from schools is easy to understand
- People that answered no sited ambiguity in Standard Operating Procedures and uncertainty by the concerned staff, in addition to the lack of language support

**Question 7: Language Barriers: If you are not fluent in English, what help do you have to understand the information you receive from your children's school?**

- Majority of people who answered and needed language support relied on Google Translate.
- Materials translated by the school and the language help from service providers/settlement workers accounted to almost 34.55% of answers – equivalent to those who relied on Google Translate.
- 20% of participants relied on help from family and friends to understand the information they are receiving from schools.

**Question 8: Access to Technologies (Internet/Devices): Do you have sufficient internet at your home to support your online needs?**

- Majority of people (67.27%) responded that they have sufficient and stable internet.
- About 27.27% of survey participants mentioned that they have internet connection but it's not sufficient.
- Only 5.45% of survey participants that they have limited access to internet.
- People commented on the high cost of internet connection
- Some participants are staying in shelters and indicated that their internet is weak.

**Questions 9: Do you have enough electronic devices at your home to support your online needs?**

- 36.36% of survey participants indicated that they don't have enough electronic devices for everyone. This seems like a common challenge with bigger families.
- 63.64% of survey participants indicated that they have enough electronic devices to support their online needs

**Question 10: Are you using any devices that you received through a tech/device loan program, such as from your child's school or an organization?**

- The majority of survey participants (80%) indicated that they aren't using any device received through a loan program from schools or organizations
- Out of the 20% of participants that are using a loaned device, almost half are using one loaned device and the other half is using two devices.

**Questions 11: Digital Literacy: Rate your comfort level in using technology in general (1 being Not comfortable at all, 10 being Very comfortable)**

- On average, the majority of participants are comfortable using technology in general.

- Participants mentioned that technology is saving them time but that they need help sometimes to navigate the tech tools. They think some guidance to use technology would be beneficial.
- Some participants are struggling to help their children navigate technology while they are also working. A comment from a participant indicated the following *" My children are in JK and Grade 1. If I use the digital literacy program I will have to monitor and help them with their work all day. It will be difficult to do this since I also have to work."*

**Question 12: How satisfied are you with your children's progress in their learning so far this school year? (1 being Not satisfied at all, 10 being Very satisfied)**

- The satisfaction rate among participants is only 68% which shows that most parents are somewhat satisfied. This tells us that something is missing.
- Many comments from participants focused on the quality of virtual education and that parents don't always believe that their children are getting the best learning experience.
- Participants had a lot of concerns around virtual schools and how difficult the transition was for them.
- Some comments touch on how difficult it is for parents working from home to also help their children navigate virtual education. A comment from a parent says: *"My son does not stay in front of the computer for long. He is 4 years old. It's very difficult to keep him occupied while we are working."*

**Q13. Do you feel you can support your children in their learning in the current model?**
- Average rating for this question was 71% which indicates that a significant number of participants feel capable functioning within the current learning model to support their children.
- Though few participants selected levels lower than five there is a gap where some parents feel more confident in their ability to support their children selecting levels 8, 9, 10 in their responses where others were less confident choosing levels 5 and 6.
- Reasons cited for lower scores are language barriers and potential difficulty in balancing work and supporting their child(ren) with their schoolwork.

**Q14. Has online learning at home affected your children's well-being or mental health?**
- The majority (62.5%) answered "no", that online learning has not affected their child's well-being or mental health.
- Though only 37.74% answered "yes", a common theme was the impact that social isolation is having on students.
- Examples provided by parents are that:
  o The lack of activities (particularly outdoor ones) is resulting in an increase in stress, anxiety, and feelings of depression.
  o For children who are newcomers, pandemic measures do not afford them the opportunity to make friends contributing to feelings of loneliness.
- Students who transitioned from online to in-person seem to be coping better with participants noting a positive change in their child(ren)'s mood once this transition occurred.

**Q15. Do you feel you can talk to your children's teacher or school when you have questions about your children's education?**
- 88.68% of participants responded "yes" to this indicating strong communication channels and positive rapport.

- For those who answered "no", language was once again cited as a barrier. Other factors stated are:
    - Communication lines not being accessible
    - Greater degree of comfort with in-person discussions
    - Availability to talk to teachers being limited to when they are dropping off, or picking up, their children

**Q16. If yes, how do you communicate with them?**
- The most preferred method of communication where more traditional forms such as email (78.26%) and phone (50%).
- Surprisingly, communicating via online platforms (30.43%) is more favoured than in-person (23.91%).

**Q17. Are your children:**
- A little over half of participants children (55.10%) are attending school in-person. 28.57% are virtual and 14.29% are enrolled in a hybrid model.

**Q18. Did your children switch from in person to online school or vice versa?**
- 77.55% of participants reported "no change" in the child(ren)'s schooling model
- For students who did switch, far more went from an in-person to online model (14.29%) than vice versa (8.16%).
    - One participant whose child went from an in-person to online model reported that their child was "much happier" when they were attending school in-person. The transition to online has also affected their ability to get their own schoolwork done now that their child is home all day.

**Q19. Is there anything else that you would like to tell us?**
- There were only 43 responses to this question
- Most of the answers pertain to personal difficulties that the particular family was having ranging from technology issues, to concern about the way the curriculum was being handled online.

**Note:** from questions 12 – 19, there was a decrease in the number of responses, which could skew data results.

**Summary:**

Overall most respondents have had a positive experience with their children's education during the pandemic, but a third seem to be having difficulty. Although most are satisfied the percentage of very negative responses is significant. The registration process proved to have better results as only one fifth of the respondents had a very poor experience although less had a very positive experience. 83% of the respondents believe that they are up to date with the communication from their child's school. These numbers may be due to the fact that a lot of the communication is coming electronically and only parents who have access to support or can handle electronic information on their own completed the survey – it is difficult to say how their responses generalize to the larger newcomer parent population.

It was encouraging to find that 96% of the respondents believe the information is accessible and they understand it, indicating good use of  accessible language by schools. This is due to the availability of tech resources like google translate which has become more accurate and accessible. Respondents

believe they have adequate internet but more than a quarter believe they could use more to have ideal learning conditions. With the risk of the high numbers of infections and the possibility of school closures and reverting to virtual learning this could create a huge disadvantage for newcomer parents. This is even more so for the newcomer families in precarious housing situations, like family shelters or multiple family dwellings.

Only 20% of the respondents rely on devices provided by the schools and of those half have more than one device in their household. Given that the survey was done online it was expected that most of the participants feel comfortable with technology. Although the virtual setting saves time, newcomer responded that there is a need to better explain how to navigate the technology as parents are expected to learn on the go and then pass on the information to their children. This creates a barrier to parents who are working and cannot support the child during class hours.

When it came to the progress of children during the school year there was a noticeable dip in the satisfaction. Parents' satisfaction was variable depending on teacher's involvement, parent's available time and other factors that clearly affect the progress of the child. Parents are conflicted about whether they are able to adequately support their child in this learning environment - though few participants selected levels lower than five there is a gap where some parents feel more confident in their ability to support their children selecting levels 8, 9, 10 in their responses where others were less confident choosing levels 5 and 6. Almost 40% of parents believe this learning situation has affected their child's mental health. This was due to the lack of interaction and activities available to them outside of the learning environment. Students who transitioned from online to in-person seem to be coping better, with participants noting a positive change in their child(ren)'s mood once this transition occurred.

In terms of communication, most parents feel like they can talk to teachers or the school about their child(ren). However, there are a number of participants who expressed that language barriers negatively affect their ability to communicate with them. For methods of communication, more traditional forms such as email and phone are preferred, with the remainder preferring online platforms over in-person. It was a surprise to note that most parents preferred electronic communication with their child's teachers, but this may once again reflect the particularities of the group of parents able to complete the survey online.

In conclusion, it seems that most newcomers are coping and navigating the system but the few that are not are struggling and there appears to be no easy fix to the situation.