

# Pandemic Learning Impact Study

April 2021



# Background



**Understood conducted an online survey among parents of children ages 5 to 18 in the United States (referred to throughout as “parents”).**

The study surveyed 1,500 parents about topics such as:

- Impact of pandemic-related schooling changes
- Challenges at home and with school
- Changes in behavior and attitude

For this survey, parents of “typical” children are defined as those whose children have not exhibited signs of learning differences or have not been diagnosed with ADHD or a learning disability such as dyslexia.

- This is in contrast to parents of children who are symptomatic or have been diagnosed with a learning disability or ADHD.
- The study is representative of the U.S. population and includes parents of children between the ages of 5 and 18, with 62% identifying as White/Caucasian, 25% as Black/African American, 5% as Asian, and 1% as Native-American. Twenty-five percent of the parents identified as Hispanic/Latino.

The survey was conducted between April 2021.

For resources to help, visit [Understood.org](https://www.understood.org)

# Summary of Findings

## Academic Challenges

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the shift to remote learning environments has presented parents with various challenges, concerns, and insights into their children's learning and thinking differences.

- As a result of distance learning, 72% of parents have noticed or became aware of learning challenges or differences in their children.
- Nearly 60% of parents of children with learning and thinking differences say their children are a year behind and may never catch up, compared to just 33% of those with typical kids.
- About half of all parents (48%) have noticed behavioral changes in their child since the pandemic, including over-engagement with online activities and video games, lack of routine, difficulty managing emotions, and inability to focus.

Twice as many parents (49% vs. 25%) of children with learning and thinking differences are concerned about the “summer slide” compared to those of typical children.

- Almost all parents (86%) of children with learning and thinking differences are planning on summer academic supports compared to just half of parents of typical children.

Forty-four percent say that their child's legal right to access an equitable education has been abandoned in the move to online learning.

## Key findings

72%

During remote learning, 72% of parents became aware or noticed their children have learning challenges or differences.

3X

Children with learning and thinking differences are three times as likely to experience depression due to changes in schooling.

43%

of parents report facing financial burden because of remote learning. Nearly twice as many parents of children with learning and thinking differences said that vs. parents of typical learners.

60%

Nearly 60% of parents with a child who learns and thinks differently say their child is a year behind academically and may never catch up, vs. just 16% of parents of typical learners.

# Summary of Findings

## Emotional Impact

Children with learning and thinking differences have been particularly impacted emotionally by these schooling changes, which has driven high levels of concern and anxiety at home. Additionally, the parents of these children report feeling stressed and feel alone in their efforts to support their children.

- 48% of parents report that their children with learning and thinking differences have suffered high to extreme levels of school-based anxiety since the pandemic — more than double the rate among typical children.
- Children with learning and thinking differences are also about three times as likely to have experienced depression related to schooling changes.
- Parents commonly feel misaligned with how their school, and even how their spouse, views their child's differences, with 57% saying they feel like they are the only one who sees their child's challenges.
- They are much more worried about the near and long-term emotional impacts of schooling changes on their children, are more likely to report a negative impact on their own mental health, and express feelings of anxiety, fear, sadness, depression, anger, and even self-doubt.

## Mental health findings

72%

During remote learning, 72% of parents became aware or noticed their children have learning challenges or differences.



57%

of parents whose children learn and think differently feel isolated in their concern for their child and aren't sure how to help.



48%

of parents report that their neurodiverse children have suffered high levels of school-related anxiety since the pandemic — more than double the rate among typical children.



2X

Twice as many parents of neurodiverse children are concerned about the "summer slide" compared to parents of neurotypical kids.

# Summary of Findings

## Financial Burden

Parents are investing a significant amount of time and money to support their kids in keeping up academically amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

- 43% of parents say they are facing a huge financial burden because of the pandemic and remote learning, spending \$1,625, on average, for their child for the 2020-21 school year.
- Almost twice as many (56% vs. 30%) parents of kids with learning and thinking differences say they are facing these financial burdens, and spending almost \$350 more this school year, compared to typical parents.
- Parents of kids with learning and thinking differences plan on spending about \$240 more for supports this coming Summer on average.

## Financial implications

**43%**

of parents say they are facing a huge financial burden because of the pandemic and remote learning – with an average spending of \$1,625 for the 2020-21 school year.



**3** most common steps parents have taken to support their child:

- ▶ buying software/apps
- ▶ hiring personal tutors
- ▶ cutting back hours at work

**86%**

of parents whose children learn and think differently are planning to get extra academic support for their child this summer, compared to just half of parents of neurotypical children.

They also plan on spending about

**\$240**

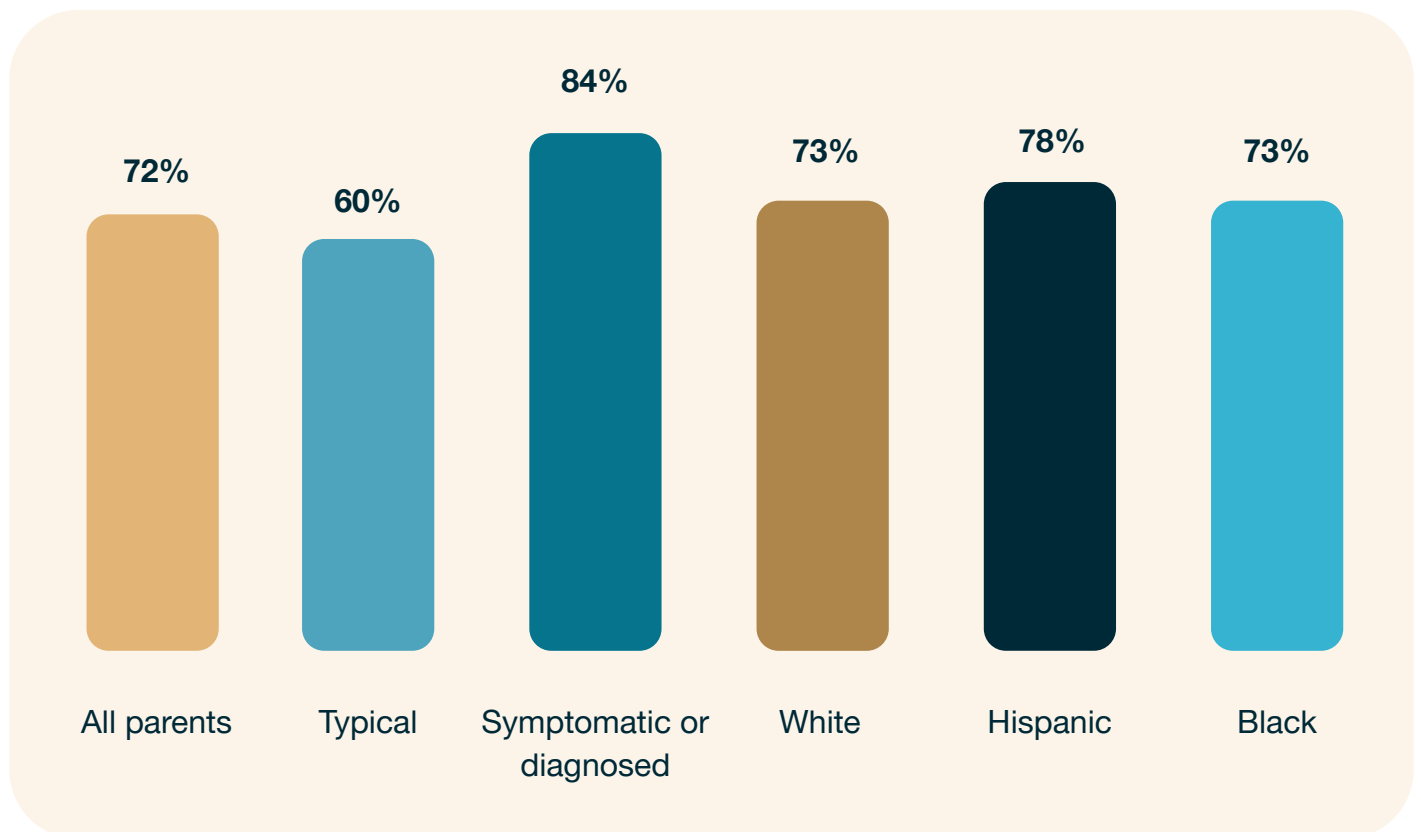
more for this extra support.

# Key Findings from the Pandemic Learning Impact Study

**In the environment of remote learning, 72% of parents have become aware or noticed their children have learning challenges or differences.**

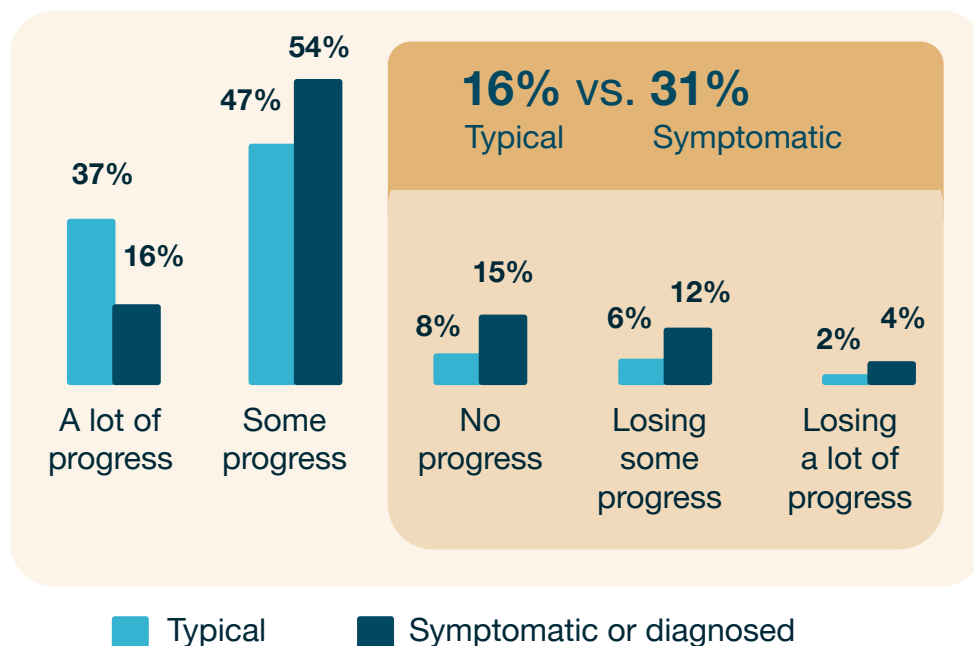
*Spending more time at home because of the pandemic has made me more aware of my child's learning challenges.*

**Note:** Percentages shown represent the total of those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with this statement.



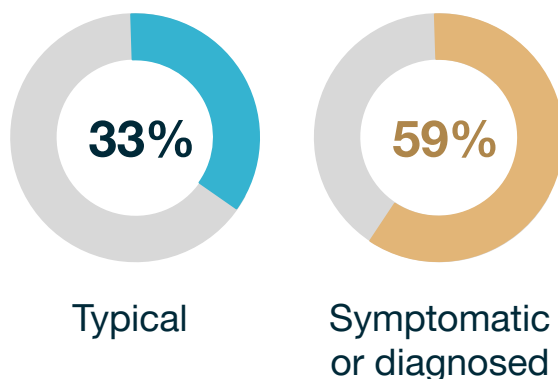
**16% of typical parents believe their children are behind in their studies because of the pandemic, while nearly 60% of parents of those with learning and thinking differences say their children are a year behind and may never catch up.**

*Which of the following best describes the amount of academic progress that your child is making this school year?*



*I'm afraid my child has lost a year of studies and will never catch up.*

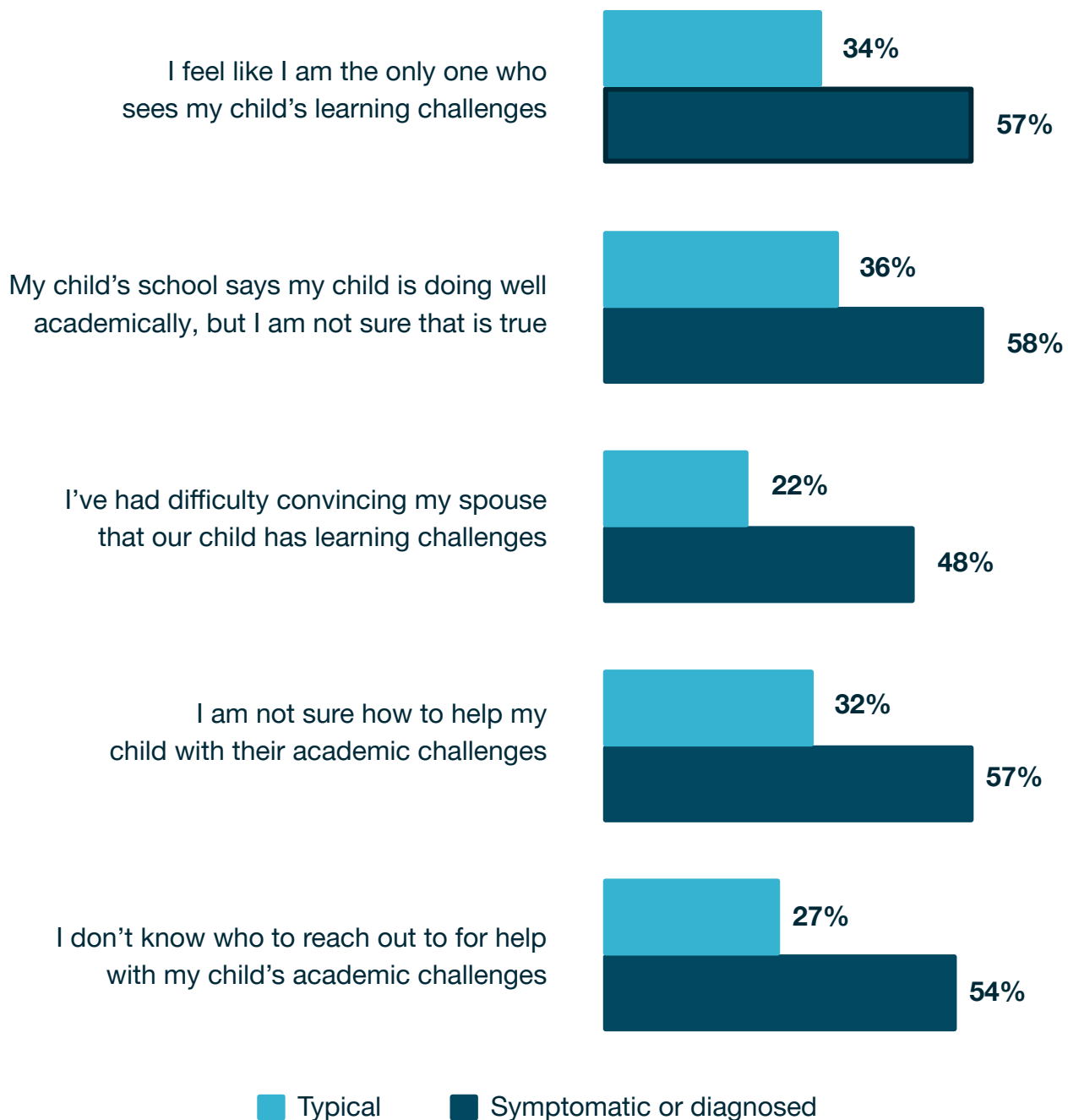
**Note:** Percentages shown represent the total of those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with this statement.



# Well over half of parents (57%) of children with learning and thinking differences feel isolated in their concern for their child and aren't sure how to help them with their challenges.

They commonly feel misaligned with how their school, and even how their spouse, views their child's differences.

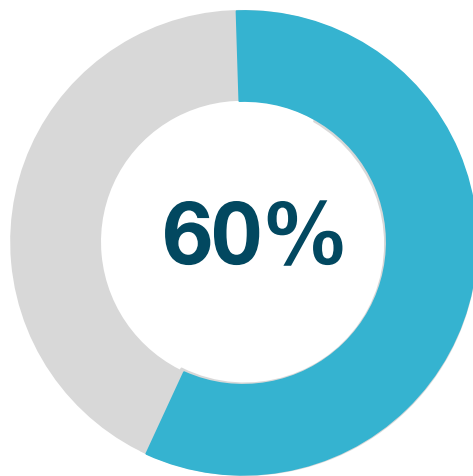
**Note:** Percentages shown represent the total of those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with each statement.



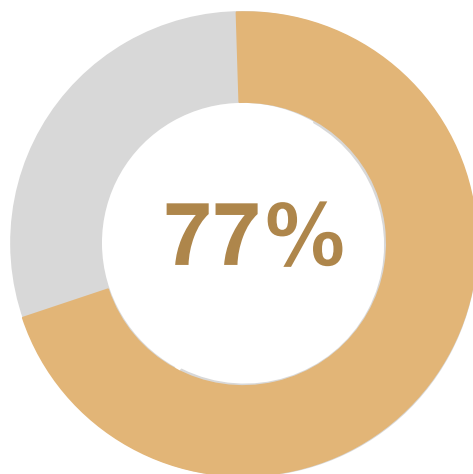
**77% of parents say that they have invested a significant amount of time and money to help their children with learning and thinking differences to keep pace amid the COVID-19 pandemic.**

*I have invested a significant amount of time and money to help my child keep up with their schooling during the pandemic.*

**Note:** Percentages shown represent the total of those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with this statement.



Typical



Symptomatic  
or diagnosed

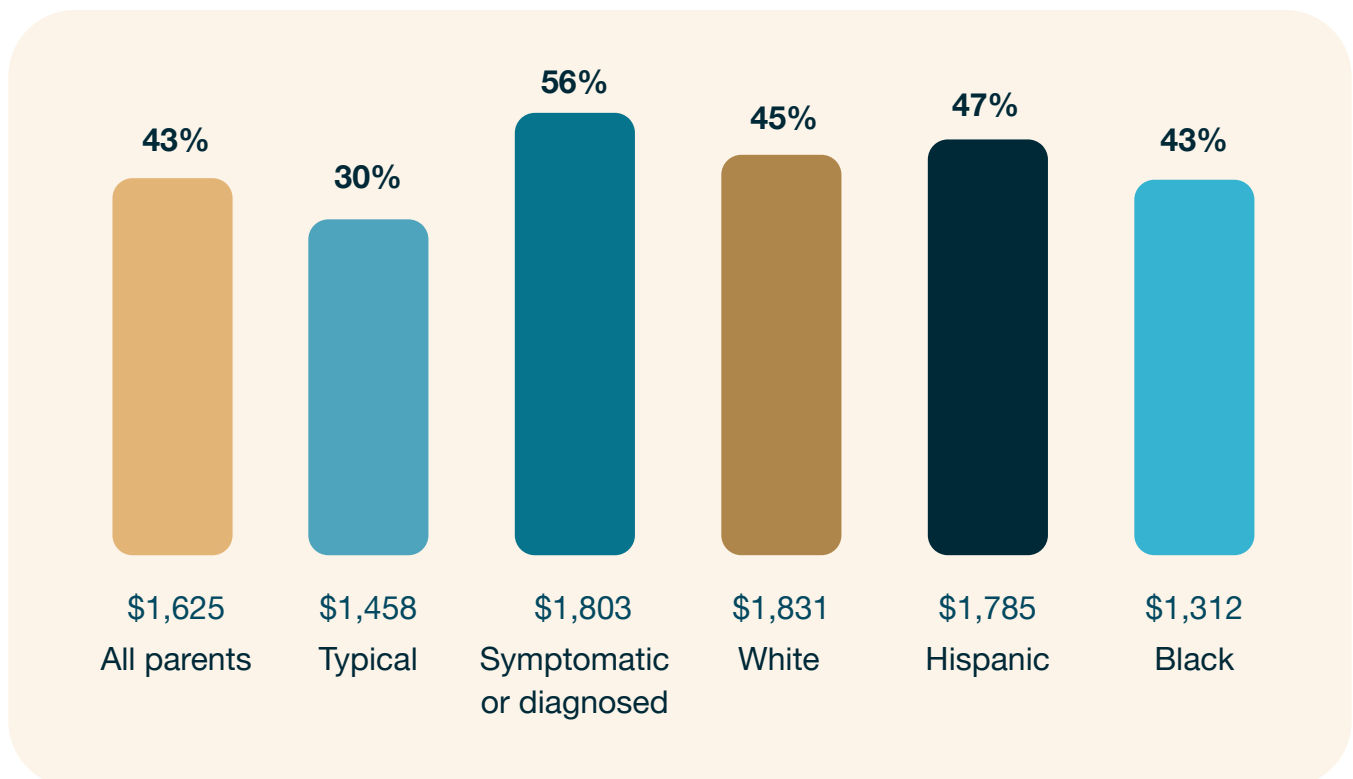
## 43% of parents say they are facing a huge financial burden because of the pandemic and remote learning, spending an average of \$1,625, for their child for the 2020-21 school year.

Almost twice as many parents (56% vs. 30%) of children with learning and thinking differences say they are facing these financial burdens, and spending almost \$350 more this school year, compared to parents of typical children.

*Providing my child with the academic supports they need has put a major financial burden on my family.*

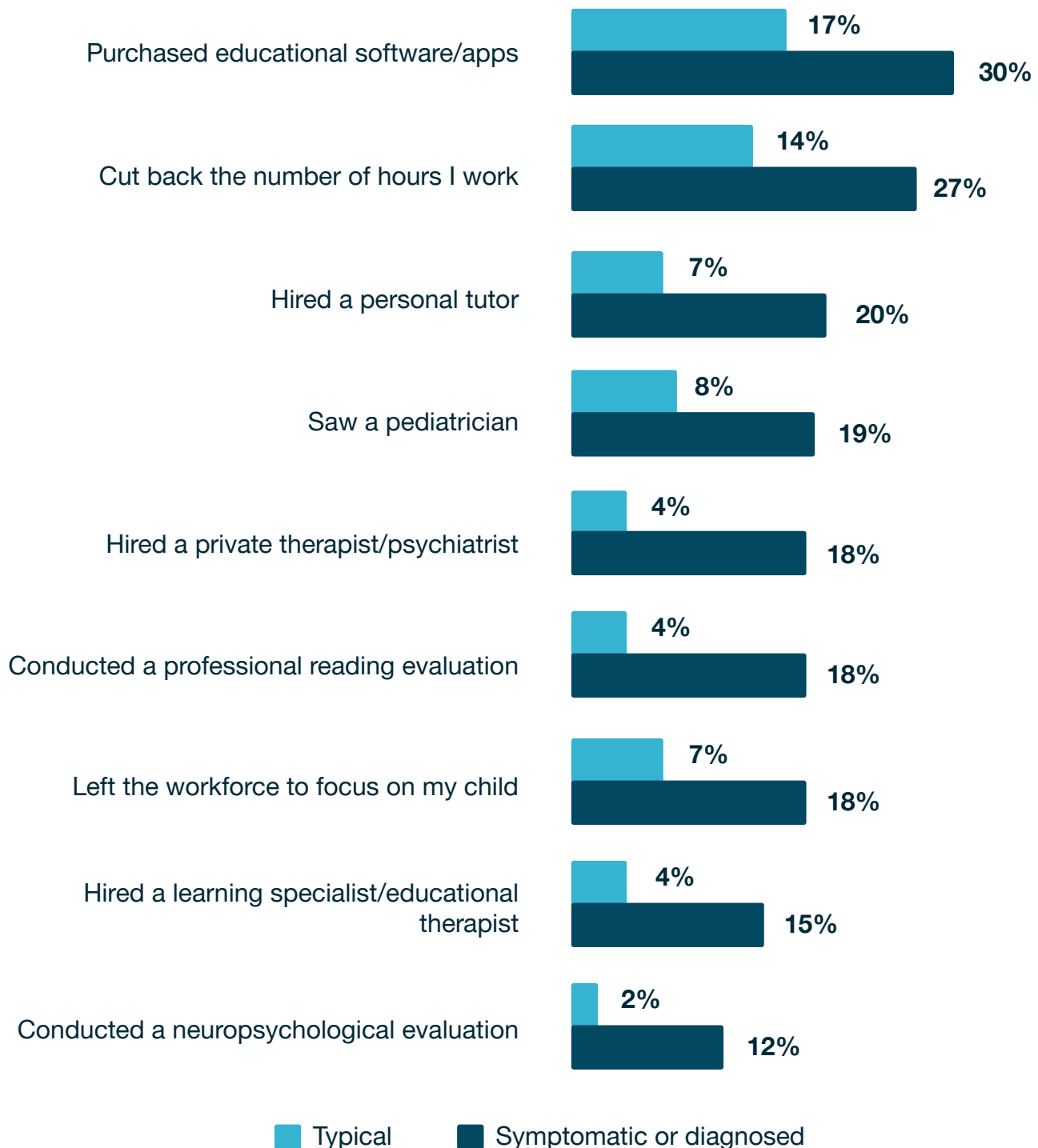
**Note:** Percentages shown represent the total of those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with this statement.

*And approximately how much do you expect to spend on these additional supports for your child for this school year (2020-21)?*



# Buying software/apps, hiring personal tutors, and cutting back hours at work are the most common steps that parents have taken to support their child during the pandemic.

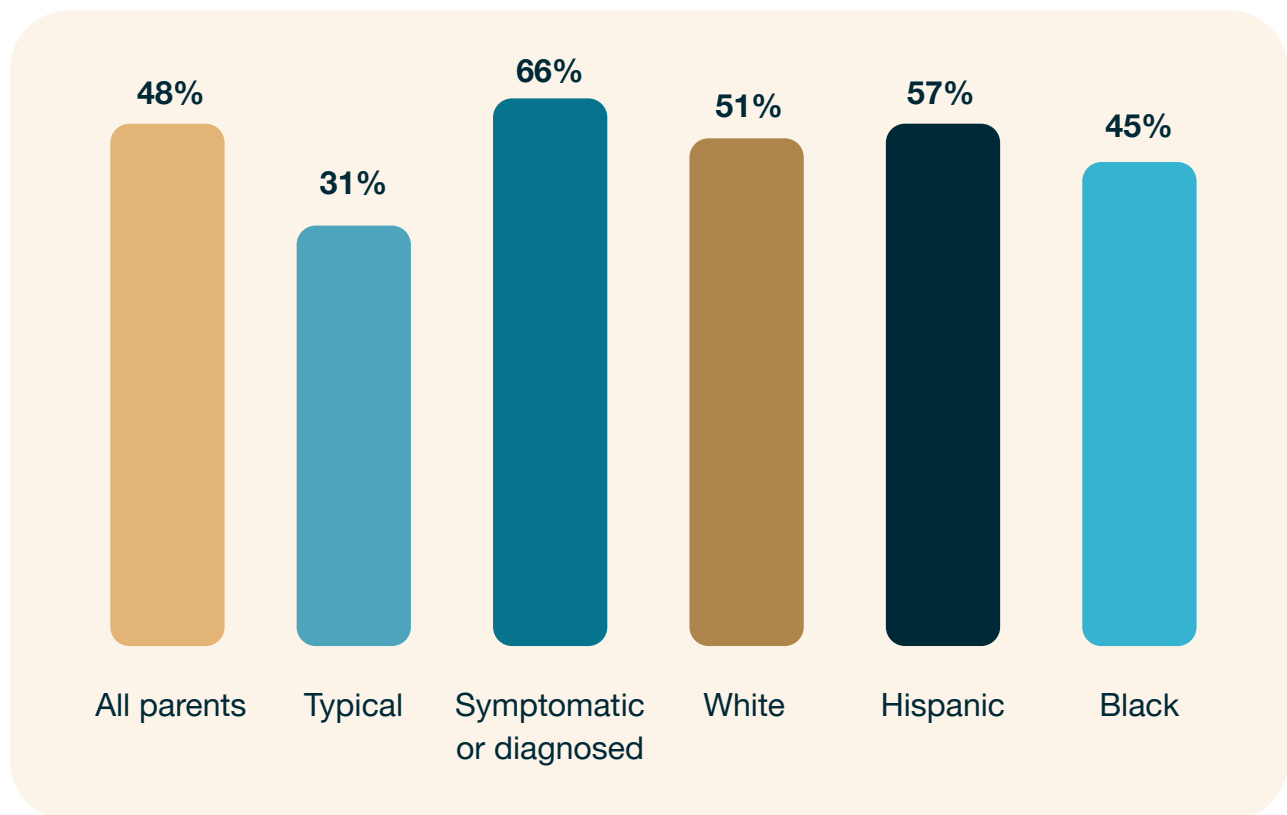
*Which, if any, of the following have you done to support your child either academically or emotionally as a result of schooling changes since the pandemic?*



**About half of all parents (48%) have noticed behavioral changes in their child since the pandemic, with parents of children with learning and thinking differences more than twice as likely (66% vs. 31%) to report changes as compared to those of typical kids.**

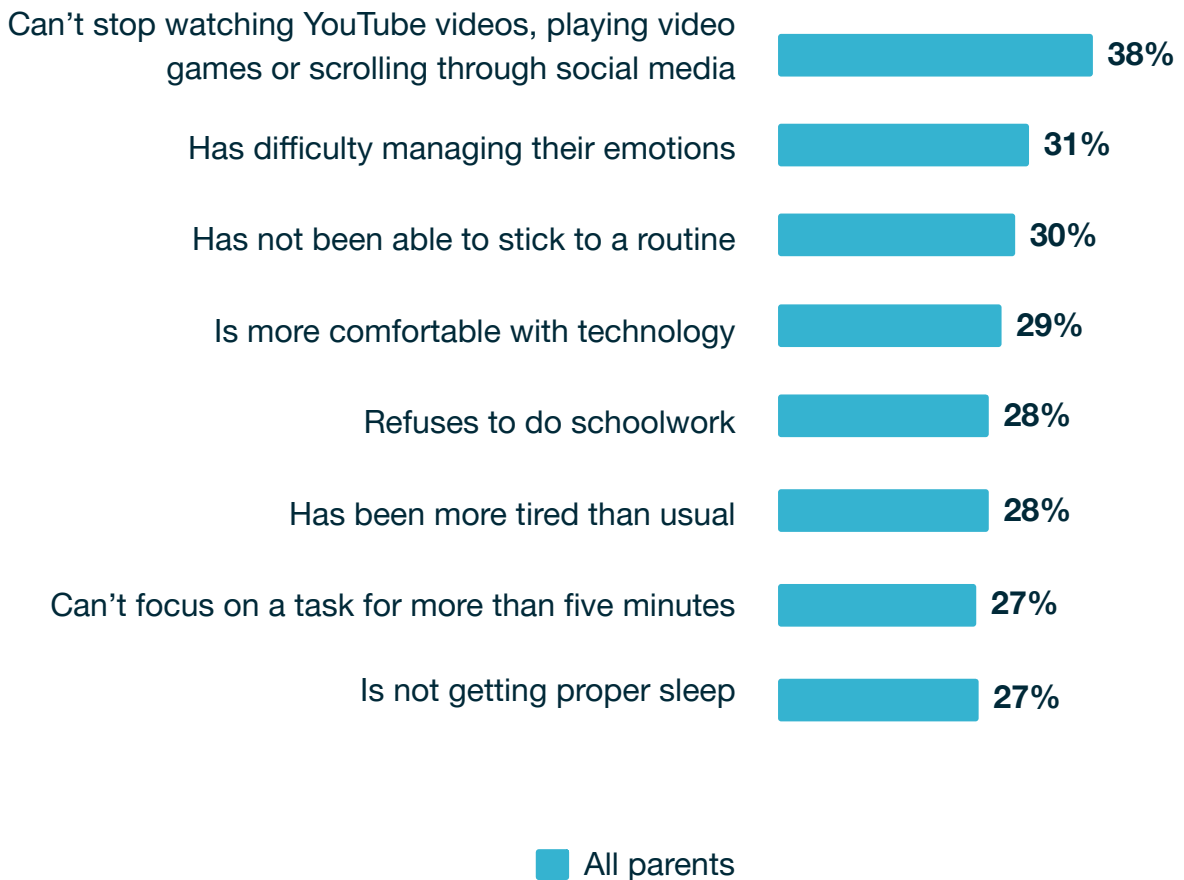
*Have you noticed any behavioral changes in your child compared to before the pandemic?*

**Note:** Percentages shown represent the total of those who said that they did notice behavioral changes.



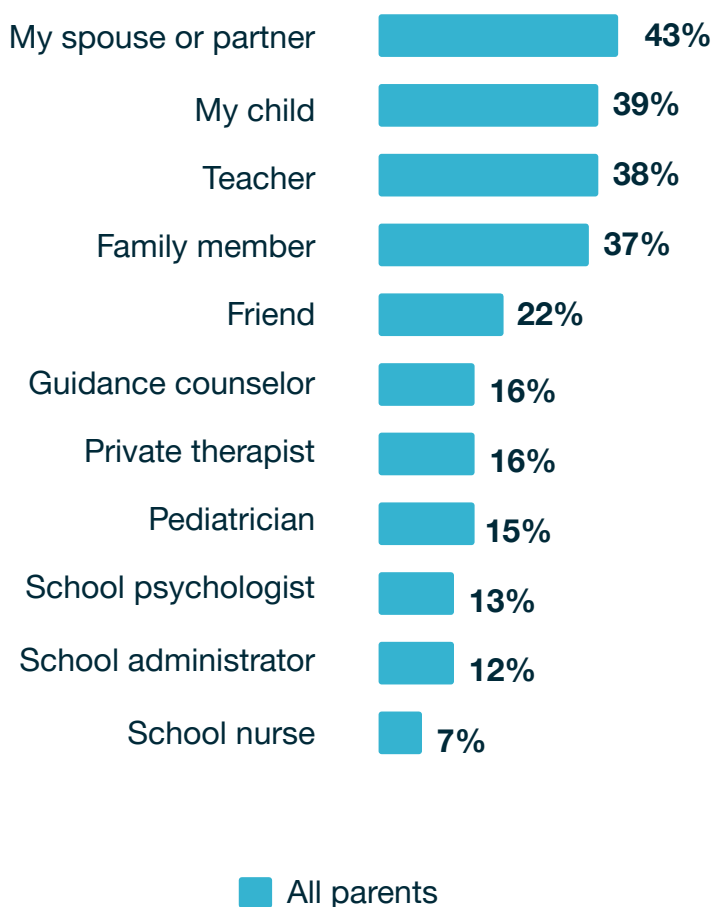
# Hyper-engagement with online content and video games, difficulty regulating their emotions, lack of routine, lack of proper sleep, and inability to focus are the most common new behaviors that parents have observed in their children.

*Which, if any, of the following behavioral changes have you noticed?*



## Outside of family and friends, and speaking with their child directly, teachers are the most common (38%) resource that parents have consulted with to discuss their behavioral concerns.

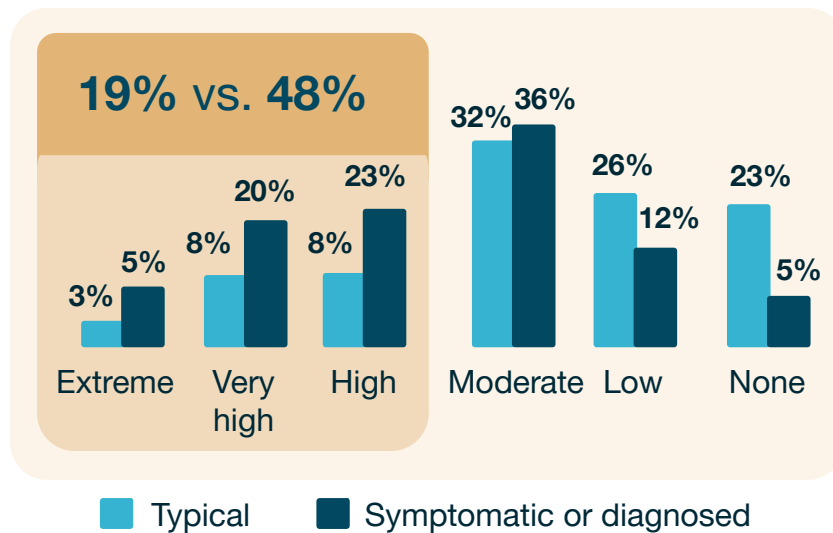
*Who, if anyone, did you discuss these behavioral changes with?*



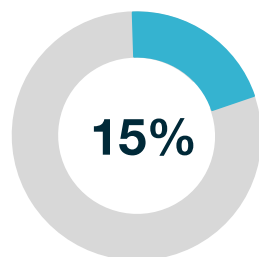
**48% of parents report that their kids with learning and thinking differences have suffered high to extreme levels of school-based anxiety since the pandemic – more than double the rate among typical kids.**

Those with learning and thinking differences are also about three times as likely to have experienced depression related to schooling changes.

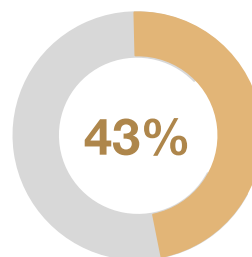
*How would you describe your child's level of anxiety related to schooling changes since the pandemic?*



*Has your child suffered from depression as a result of schooling changes since the pandemic?*



Typical

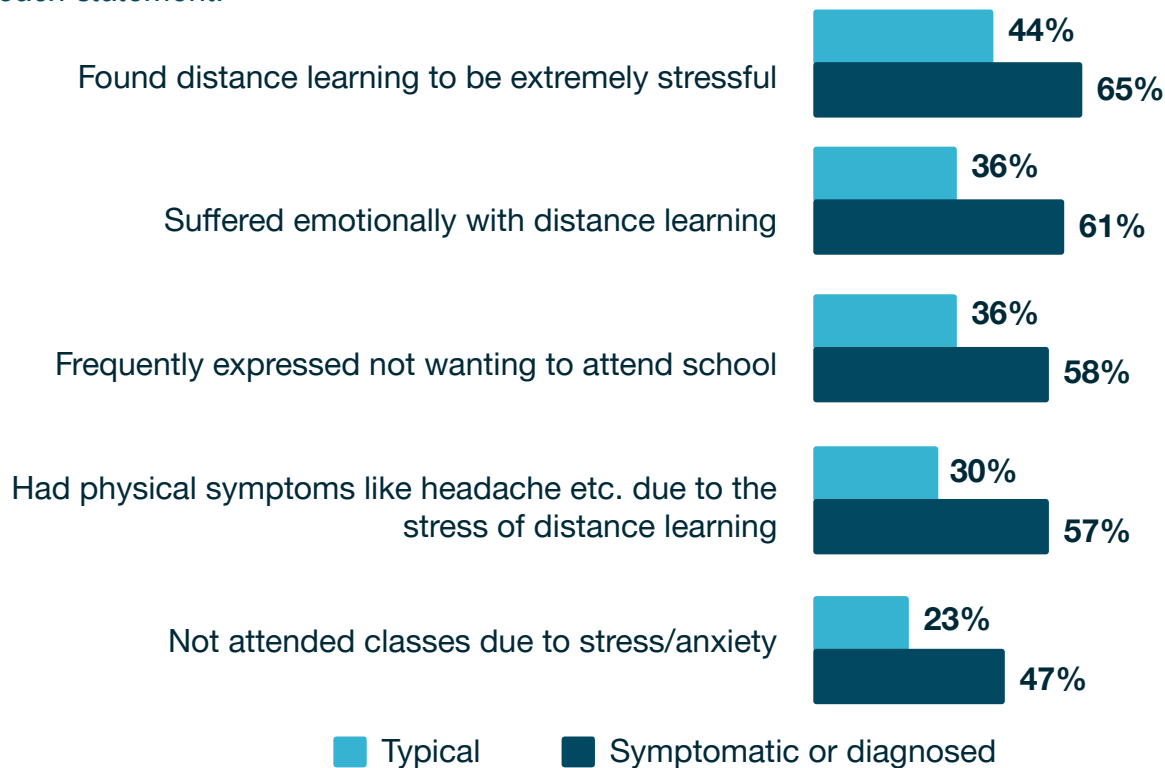


Symptomatic or diagnosed

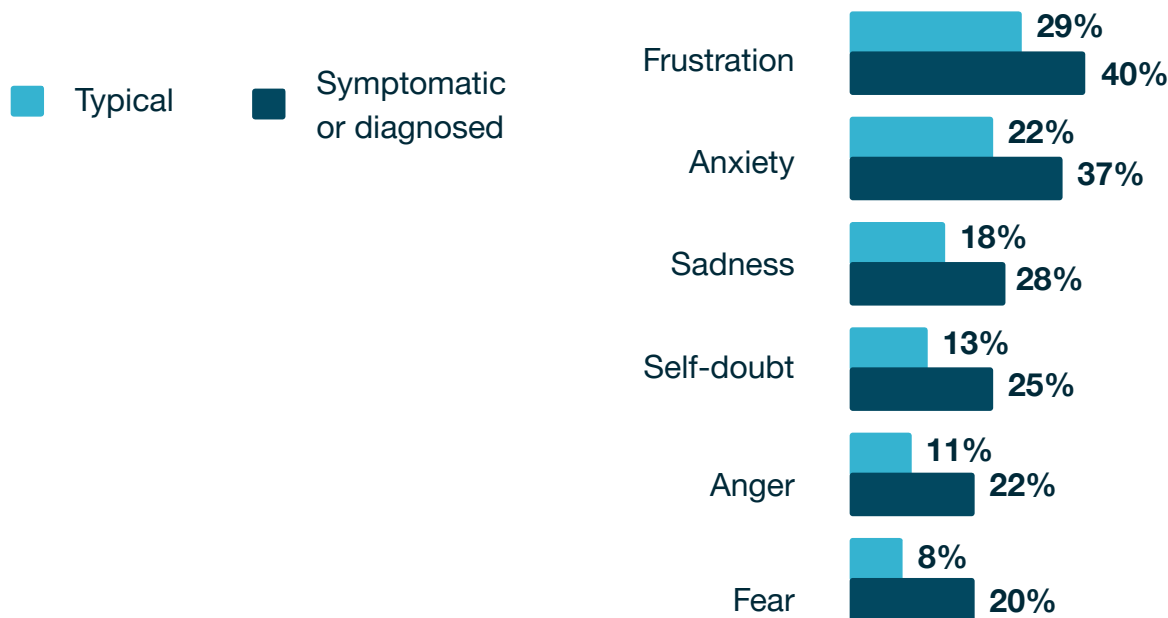
**The stress level related to distance learning has been much higher for those with learning and thinking differences, resulting in physical symptoms, avoidance of attending classes, and expressions of frustration, fear, sadness, anger, and self-doubt.**

*Thinking about the emotional and social impacts that changes in schooling have had on your child, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? My child has...*

**Note:** Percentages shown represent the total of those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with each statement.



*Which, if any, of the following emotions has your child displayed as a result of schooling changes since the pandemic?*

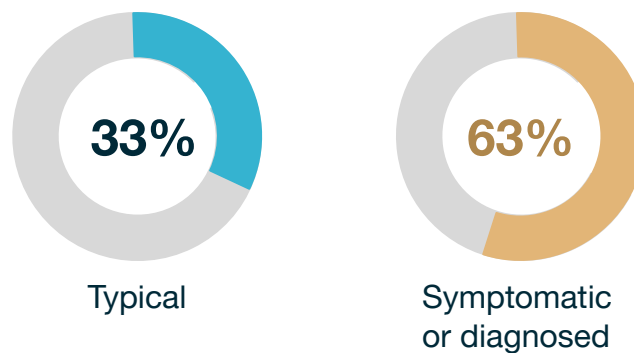


# The struggles that kids with learning and thinking differences face in coping with schooling changes have driven stress and anxiety within their households.

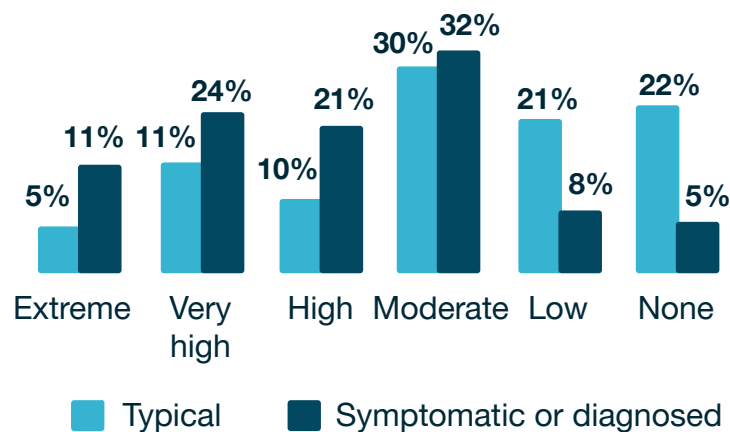
Parents of kids with learning and thinking differences are almost twice as likely to report that their child's distance learning challenges are impacting their household, and personally report a much greater level of anxiety compared to parents of typical kids.

*My child's struggles with distance learning have caused a lot of stress in my household*

**Note:** Percentages shown represent the total of those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with this statement.



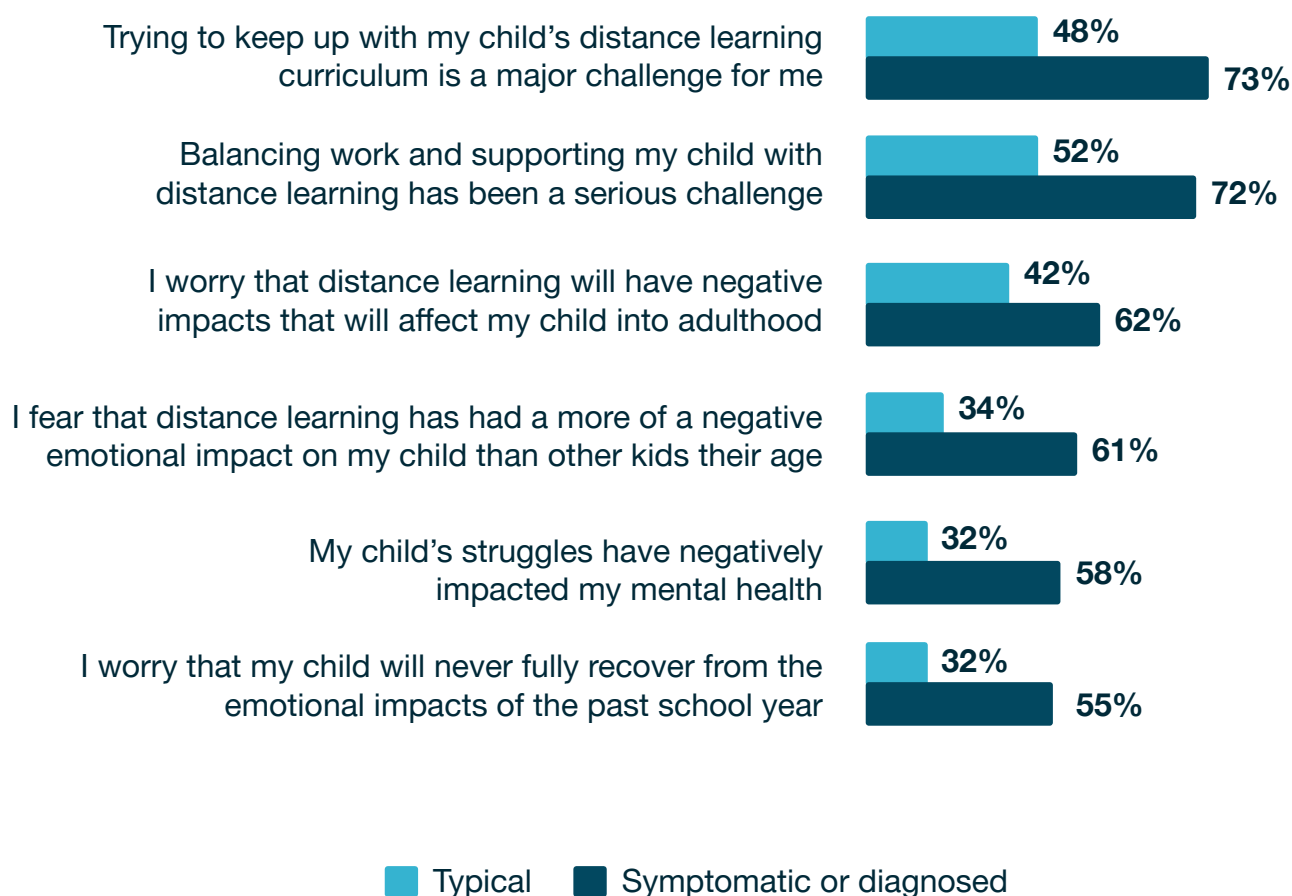
*How would you describe your personal level of anxiety related to schooling changes since the pandemic?*



# Parents of kids with learning and thinking differences are much more worried about the near and long-term emotional impacts of schooling changes on their kids, are more likely to report a negative impact on their own mental health, and express feelings of anxiety, fear, sadness, depression, anger, and even self-doubt.

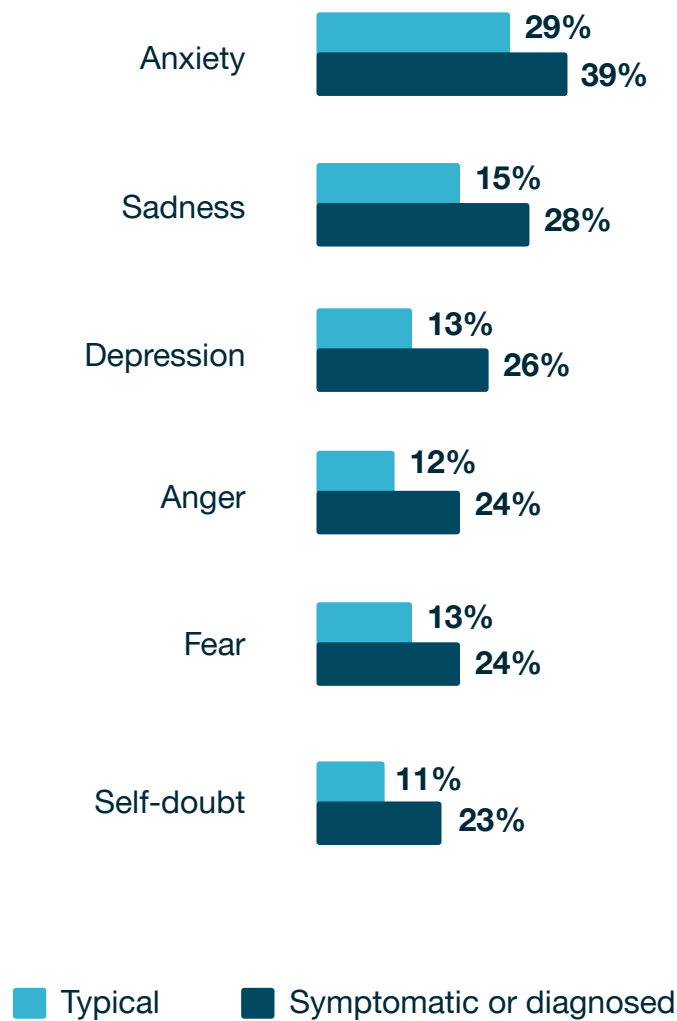
*Thinking about you, the parent, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?*

**Note:** Percentages shown represent the total of those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with each statement.



**Parents of children with learning and thinking differences are much more worried about the near and long-term emotional impacts of schooling changes on their kids, are more likely to report a negative impact on their own mental health, and express feelings of anxiety, fear, sadness, depression, anger, and even self-doubt.**

*Which, if any, of the following emotions have you personally felt as a result of schooling changes since the pandemic?*

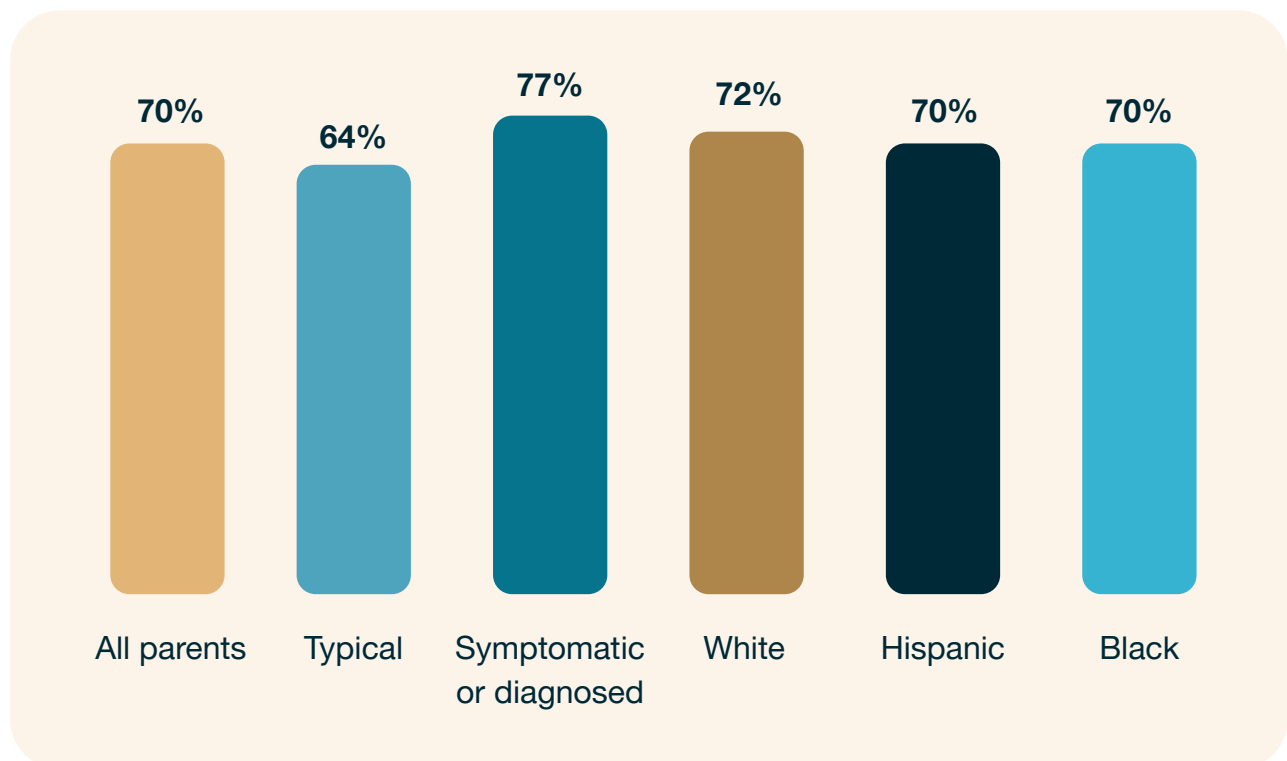


## 44% of parents of children with learning and thinking differences say their child's legal right to access an equitable education has been abandoned in the move to online learning.

70% of all parents agree that when school curriculums don't consider those with learning and thinking differences, they are limiting their access to an equitable education.

*When schools do not consider students with learning and thinking differences in their curriculum designs, they are limiting access to equitable education for entire classes of people.*

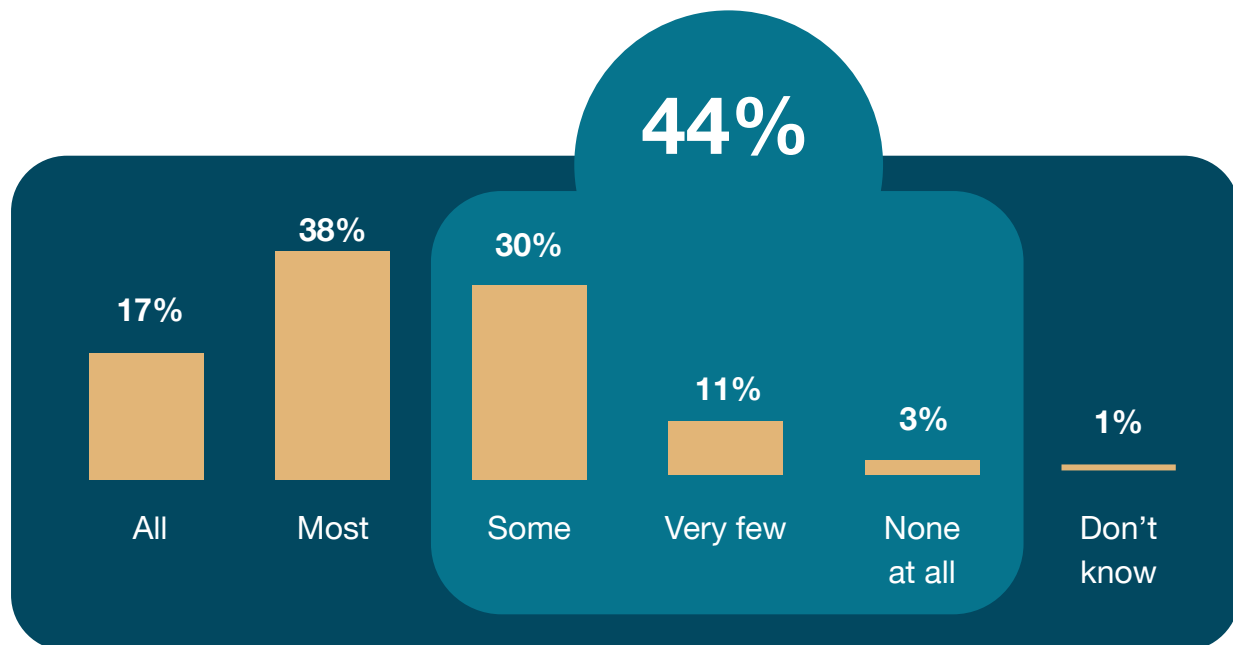
**Note:** Percentages shown represent the total of those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with this statement.



**44% of parents of children with learning and thinking differences say their child’s legal right to access an equitable education has been abandoned in the move to online learning.**

However, 44% of those parents who have an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) to ensure an equitable education for their child with learning and thinking differences, report that not all accommodations are being met this school year, even though school districts have a legal obligation to do so.

*Thinking about your child’s IEP, what proportion of the accommodations listed in your child’s IEP do you believe are being delivered this school year (2020-21)?*

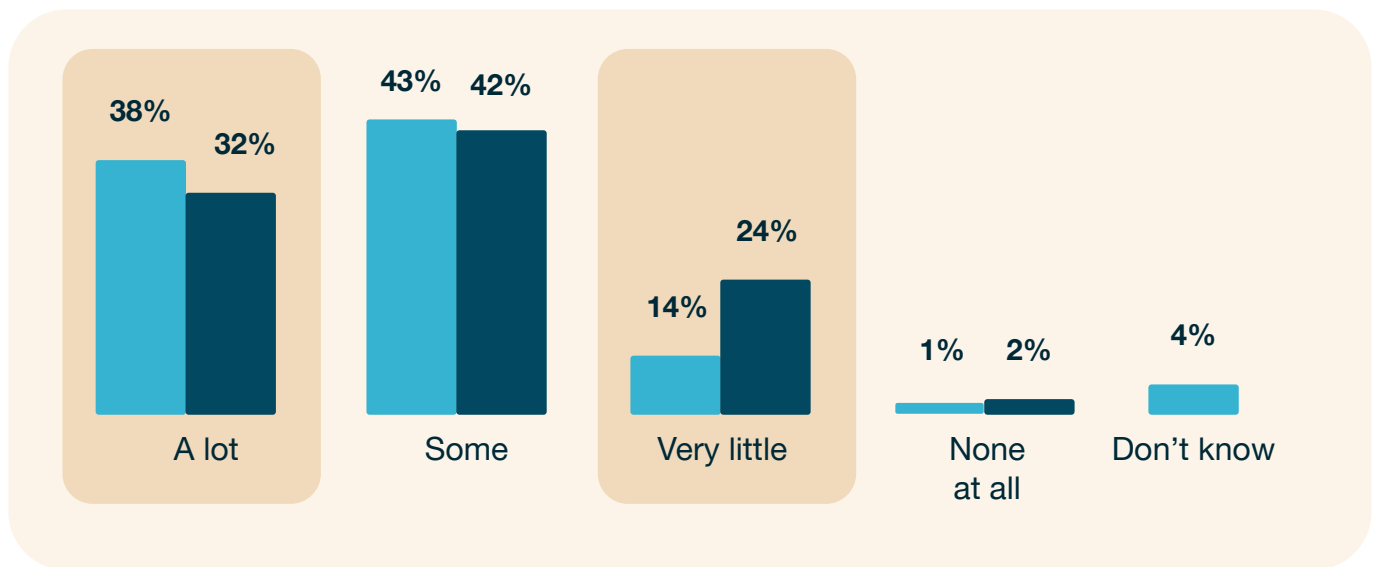


# 44% of parents of children with learning and thinking differences say their child's legal right to access an equitable education has been abandoned in the move to online learning.

Many of these parents also indicate that their child's school hasn't made as much effort as they could have to provide the agreed upon supports for their child with learning and thinking differences.

*What level of effort do you feel your child's school COULD HAVE made to provide the accommodations listed in your child's IEP this school year (2020-21)?*

*What level of effort do you feel your child's school HAS made to provide the accommodations listed in your child's IEP this school year (2020-21)?*



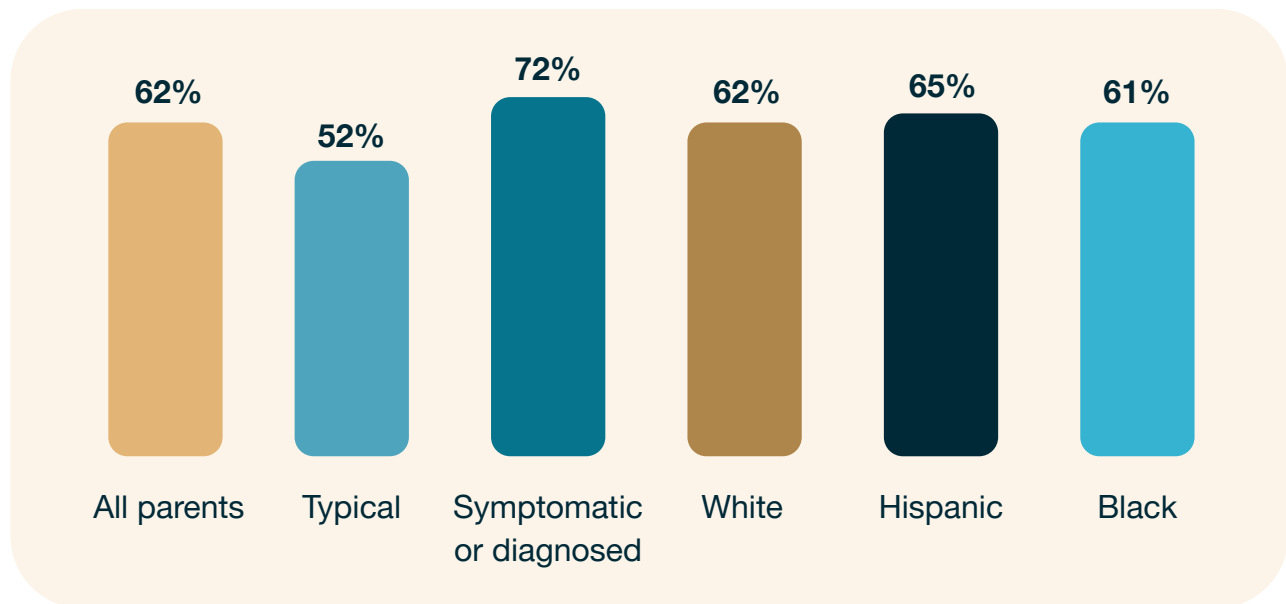
■ Could have made    ■ Has made

## Against the backdrop of vaccine deployment, 6 out of 10 parents are not confident about sending their kids back to school but also don't feel like remote learning is the ideal learning environment.

This a serious tension point for the vast majority (72%) of parents of those with learning and thinking differences, compared to just 52% of parents of typical kids.

*While I worry about sending my child back to in-person school because of COVID, at the same time, I don't feel like virtual/distance learning is working very well.*

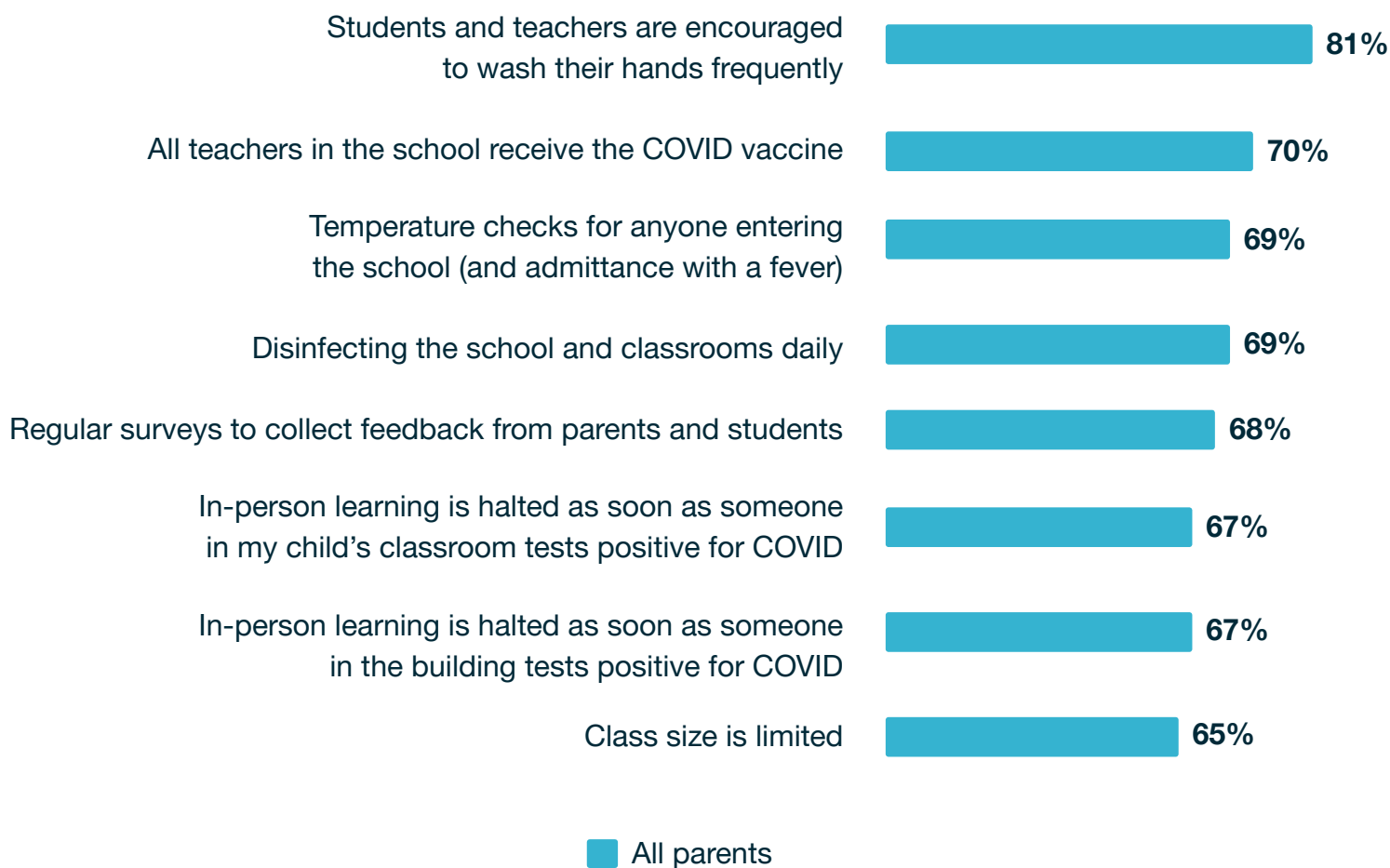
**Note:** Percentages shown represent the total of those who strongly agree or somewhat agree with this statement.



## Parents need to be confident that schools have several safety protocols in place, including hand-washing, temperature checks, and classroom sanitization, as students return for the 2021-22 school year.

*Please rate how important each of the following considerations are when deciding whether or not to send your child to in-person school full time for the 2021-2022 academic year.*

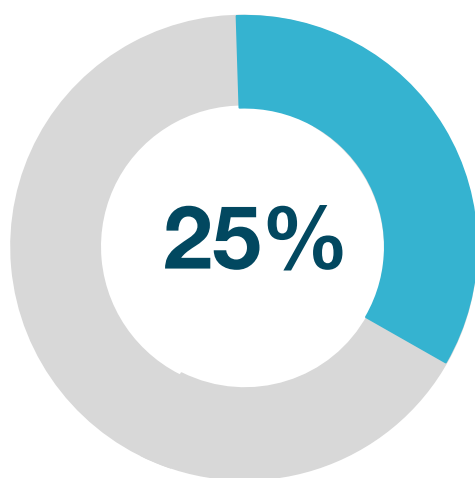
**Note:** Percentages shown represent the total of those who stated that this item is extremely or very important.



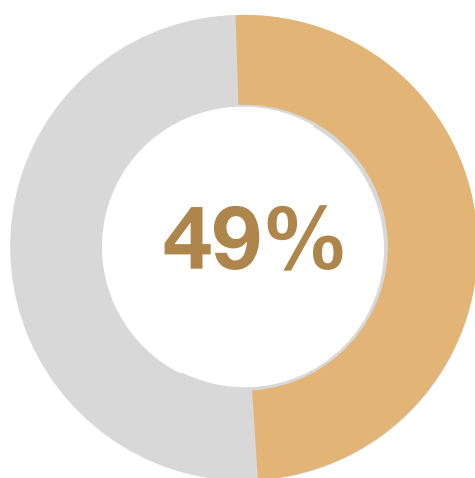
## Twice as many parents (49% vs. 25%) of children with learning and thinking differences are concerned about the “summer slide” compared to those of typical kids.

*How concerned, if at all, are you about your child losing academic progress over this coming summer?*

**Note:** Percentages shown represent the total of those who are extremely or very concerned.



Typical



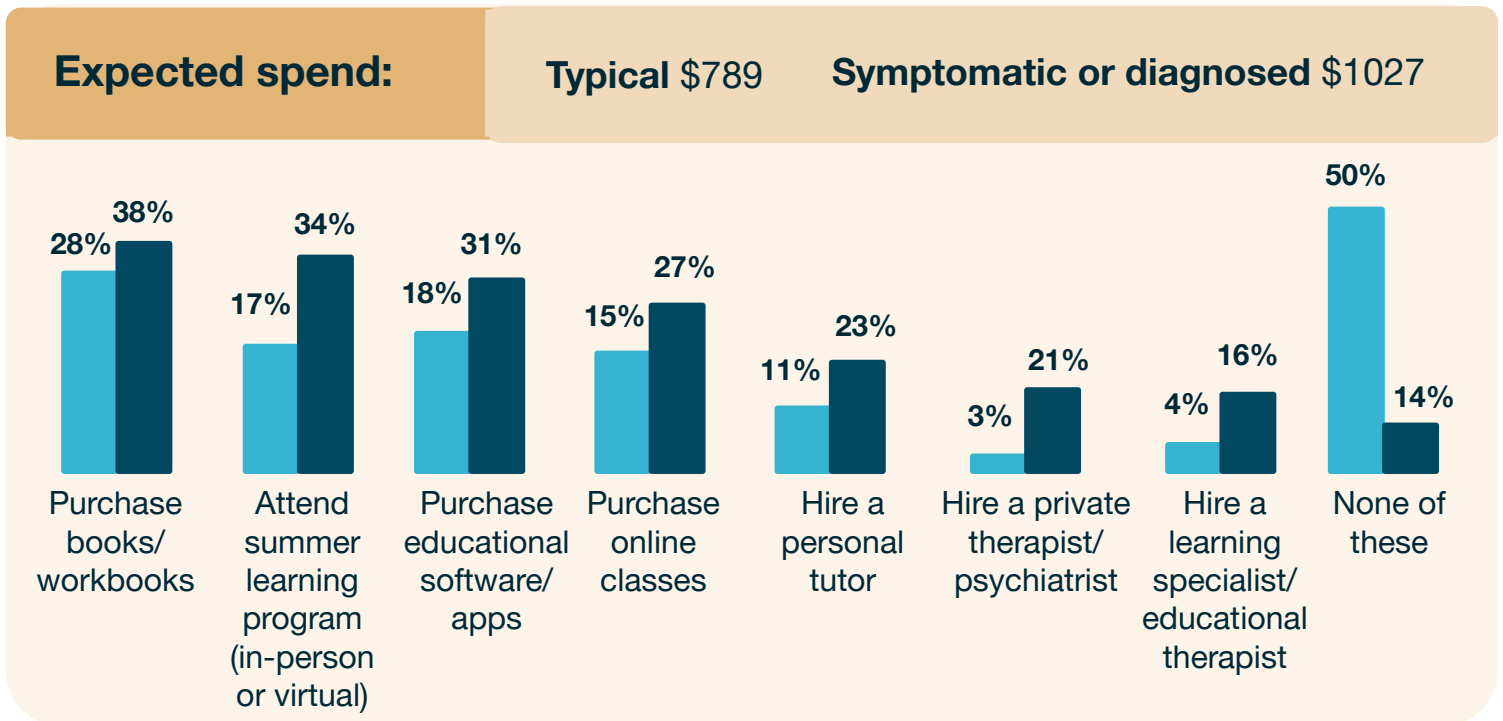
Symptomatic  
or diagnosed

**Almost all parents (86%) of kids with learning and thinking differences are planning on summer academic supports compared to just half of parents of typical kids – they also plan on spending about \$240 more on average for supports this coming summer.**

Buying books/workbooks, summer learning programs, educational software/apps, and online classes are the most popular summer supports across both parent groups.

*Which, if any, of the following do you plan on doing this summer to help prepare your child for the next school year (2021-22)?*

*Approximately how much do you expect to spend on these additional Summer supports for your child?*



■ Typical    ■ Symptomatic or diagnosed



# Thank you!

If any of the challenges reported in the survey are familiar to you or someone you know, visit [Understood](#) or to access additional resources please visit our Understood Update [blog](#).