



For Immediate Release: July 22, 2020

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Survival Coalition Releases Report Sharing Families' Struggles with Virtual Education for Children with Disabilities During COVID-19

(Madison) – The Survival Coalition of more than 30 disability organizations is releasing a report today sharing input from families of children with disabilities statewide who say education for their children must improve in the fall. Read the full [report](#) here.

This June the Survival Coalition held two virtual family focus groups (one with families in Milwaukee Public Schools and one statewide) to better understand the recent school closure experiences of families who have a student with disabilities. In addition to the challenges families with typical school age children faced, families who have children with disabilities experienced a myriad of additional issues that impacted both their child as well as their entire family.

“Families had to become teachers, paraprofessionals, therapists, technology specialists, solve internet access problems and support the mental health needs of each child and family member, often times while still trying to work from home,” says Lisa Pugh, Survival Co-chair. “Most families reported incredible stress and providing a level of support to their child that cannot be maintained in the fall.”

The focus group report outlines families' challenges, the assistance they received from school and experiences with virtual education.

“Although several schools made extraordinary attempts to get families the materials and technology they needed, many families said virtual learning was impossible for their child due to their disability, poor internet or little to no support from schools,” says Beth Swede

n, Survival Co-Chair. “Because these children require adult support in a typical classroom, they were not able to learn independently, if at all. This is of great concern as many districts plan to go 100% virtual in the fall.”

Families were also asked about their greatest concerns for school re-opening in the fall. All indicated they want to have input into final decisions and that they need to know what to expect as soon as possible so they have time to plan. 1 in 4 families had children who could not risk exposure to COVID due to their health conditions. They will not risk their children returning to school until there is a better solution to prevent contracting the virus.

“Districts must engage families in decisions about what happens in the fall and understand the impact of these decisions on families of children with disabilities,” says Kit Kerschensteiner, Survival Co-Chair, “Policies must include flexibilities for how and when instruction is provided.”

Survival Coalition is comprised of more than 30 statewide disability organizations that advocate and support policies and practices that lead to the full inclusion, participation, and contribution of people living with disability.