

## Installment #1: A First Look at Results from the Access and Engagement Survey, June 8, 2020

Twenty organizations, companies, and universities concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on the education of US and Canadian children with visual impairments, including those with multiple disabilities and deafblindness, developed the *Access and Engagement to Education Survey*. The survey was open for 3 weeks from April 22 to May 13, 2020.

### Target Audience

The target audience for the survey was family members/guardians (referred to as family members) and professionals. Family members either had a child(ren) who were:

- Receiving early intervention services from birth to age 3
- In preschool, but not yet 7 years old
- In kindergarten through exiting school (Many children with visual impairments have multiple disabilities and/or deafblindness and remain in special education until age 21 or 22 depending on regulations in their school system.)

Professionals targeted through the survey had to be employed in their role for the 2019-2020 school year. They included:

- Teachers of students with visual impairments (TSVIs)
- Orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists
- Dually certified TSVIs and O&M specialists

### Survey Composition

The family portion of the survey was prepared in both English and Spanish. Below is a brief description of the types of information that participants were given the opportunity to share.

- Early Intervention: What amount of service is being provided; where are services located; what is the method of delivering service; what level of communication is happening between the family member/guardian and professionals; what are the perceived levels of

support; what impact has COVID-19 had on the child's transition to preschool?

- Preschool and school age: When and how did the family member/guardian learn of the decision to close school; who is providing services to the child; how are services being delivered; does the child have the equipment at home that was being used at school; is there communication between the family member/guardian and different members of the educational team; are family members/guardians being asked to carry out lesson plans or direct special education instruction at home?
- Professionals: Are they currently providing educational services; how much time/training were they given to provide educational services in virtual settings; do they have the materials they need to provide educational services; how are they communicating with families, students, and other professionals; how accessible are the online platforms for their students; how are they teaching skills that require "hands-on learning" in a virtual environment; are they responsible for educating their own children while working?

At the end of the survey, participants were asked to complete a demographic section based on the country (US or Canada) in which they lived and/or worked.

### A First Look at the Findings

It will take the data analysis team time to "dig in" to the data. We know you are anxious for what we're learning, so here are a few things we can tell you now.

Out of 1,961 surveys we received we have 1,764 with enough data to analyze (seven were completed in Spanish). Of our responders: 50 individuals identified as both a family member and a professional by completing at least one section for their child and one section for themselves as a TSVI, O&M specialist, or TSVI-O&M specialist. Additionally, there were 34 family members who completed child information for more than one child with a visual impairment.

#### United States

There were 1,644 surveys completed by those either living and/or working in the United States or its territories.

- All 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands were represented. One family member on an overseas military base also completed the survey.
- The states with the highest number of participants, in order from highest to lowest, were Texas, California, New York, Pennsylvania, Washington, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Florida, Georgia, and Kentucky.
- Prior to COVID-19 school closures:
  - 66 children were receiving early intervention services
  - 63 children were enrolled in preschool
  - 319 children were enrolled in school age programs
  - 666 individuals were employed as TSVIs for the 2019-2020 school year
  - 134 individuals were employed as O&M specialists for the 2019-2020 school year
  - 171 individuals were employed as dual-certified (working as both a TSVI and an O&M specialist) for the 2019-2020 school year

## Canada

There were 120 surveys completed by those either living and/or working in Canada.

- Eight provinces and no territories were represented.
- The provinces with the highest number of participants, in order from highest to lowest, were Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta.
- Prior to COVID-19 school closures:
  - 6 children were receiving early intervention
  - 4 children were enrolled in preschool
  - 37 children were enrolled in school age programs
  - 45 individuals were employed as TSVIs for the 2019-2020 school year
  - 4 individuals were employed as O&M specialists for the 2019-2020 school year
  - 10 individuals were employed as TSVIs and O&M specialists for the 2019-2020 school year

## Receiving Services in a “Building”

COVID-19 has caused school districts and schools for the blind, both in the United States and Canada, to close. Not surprisingly, there was no student

who was receiving hands-on instruction from a professional in a “building.” This includes professionals coming into the home and/or daycare to serve a child in early intervention. Children who were in preschool or school age were not receiving services at the school site.

In the coming weeks we will post additional updates about the study findings. Check back regularly!