



National Parents Council Primary
Opening Statement to the Special Committee
on
Covid-19 Response
Reopening of Primary and Secondary Schools.



Supporting Parents
Supporting Children

July 2nd 2020

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Introduction

National Parents Council Primary (NPC) is the representative organisation for parents of children in primary or early education. NPC was established as a charitable organisation in 1985, under the programme for Government, as the representative organisation for parents of children attending primary school. It received statutory recognition in the Education Act 1998.

NPC Vision

NPC want to see an Ireland where **every** child has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

NPC Mission

NPC exists to ensure that all parents are supported and empowered to become effective partners in their children's education. NPC will work to increase the capacity and capability of the primary education sector, to achieve true partnership and deliver better outcomes for all children.

NPC's Key Activities are:

Representing the parents' voice in primary education
Advocacy
Building participation
Service delivery

NPC Service Delivery

NPC services are aimed at empowering parents so that they can support their children in all aspects of education.

Helpline

The NPC helpline is a national confidential service for parents. The helpline staff listen, and gives information and support to parents to help them make the best possible decisions for and with their children.

Training and Development

The NPC Training and Development programme is a national programme of training, development and support for parents. The purpose is to empower parents to play an active part in their child's education at every level.

Website

The NPC's website www.npc.ie aims to provide parents with information regarding primary education. The site also allows parents an opportunity to give NPC their views regarding primary education issue

NPC Opening Statement

NPC welcomes the opportunity to make its submission to the Special Committee on COVID-19 Response regarding the reopening and operation of primary schools. Whilst NPC believes there are many considerations in the reopening of schools, this submission will focus on what we believe are the top four key issues that need to be considered. To support this submission to the Special Committee on COVID-19 Response NPC conducted a snap 24hour survey last Thursday 25th June to which 28,744 people responded.

1. **Partnership** - Planning for the reopening and operation at national policy level and at local school level must be done in partnership with all stakeholders. Whilst this has started at national level it is vital that the reopening of schools at a local level also takes place in partnership. For the whole school community to feel safe in the return to school, children, parents, school staff and the Board of Management need to have an input in the local arrangements that will be made in that individual school's context. Better outcomes will be arrived at when all voices are taken into consideration regarding the challenges and solution in the local setting. This may include:
 - a. The establishment of stakeholder partnership team of students, parents (representatives from the parents' association where one exists), school staff and Board of Management representatives.
 - b. Survey of parents, children and school staff
 - c. Agreed local procedures for behaviour particularly relating to COVID 19 and adherence to public health advice. This should be within the context of the existing schools code of behaviour.

There were a number of areas that the survey looked at in terms of local and national planning. At a national level parents were asked how important it was that their children returned to school fully at the beginning of the new school year. Ninety-one percent of parents said that this was important (20%) or very important (71%). Eight percent felt that it was slightly or not important.

At a local level when asked what was the best way to involve parents in the planning of the reopening of their schools sixty-seven percent believed the school should conduct a parent survey and thirty-five percent said that the planning should involve the parents association.

2. **Prioritisation of meeting the needs of children that the long school closure has impacted more severely than other children –** All schools should be resourced and supported to identify and support those children that the long school closure may have had a greater impact on than others. This may include learning, social or emotional impacts. Whilst schools may already

know of children who may fit in to this category before the school closure, lives may have been impacted in ways that schools are unaware of during the six months since they will have seen their pupils and their families. In the normal course of life, negative events happen however under the current circumstances and restrictions families will have had an increased possibility of being affected by serious illness, bereavement and family relationship issues that due to school closure the school may be unaware of.

The survey again addressed some specific areas in relation to this area. Specifically, parents were asked what the impact of a blended learning return to school might have on their child with a special education need or a child who was transitioning from primary to post primary school. Eighty-four percent of parents who have a child with special education need feel that it would be somewhat or extremely difficult if their child were to return to school with blended learning in place. Eighty-three percent of parents felt that it would be somewhat or extremely difficult for their child to settle into their new school if blended learning was in place.

3. **Prioritisation of Social and Emotional needs of the school**

community – Social and emotional needs of the school community need to be addressed in the first instance of schools re-opening. Whilst curriculum learning is usually the core business of the school, this will not be successful if the social and emotional needs are not addressed first. The whole school community will need support in this area; parents needs reassurance that their children will be safe, children will need to know they are safe, will need to reconnect with school life and routine and need support in the changed environment and school staff will also need to know they are safe and supported; this to name but a few areas that will need attention. In the initial stages of the school reopening schools will need support and resources to support them through this work. This should include the NEPS existing supports for schools in relation to wellbeing with adaptations and enhancements where needed.

Meeting the needs of students informed several questions in the survey. Firstly, parents were asked to rate the importance of a number of statements. Whilst parents felt all were important there was some deemed more important to them regarding their child's return to school:

1. Your child feeling safe
2. Socialising and reconnecting with friends
3. Your child's emotional needs being met
4. School staff feeling safe
5. Parents feeling safe
6. Your child catching up with academic work

When asked about their child's anxiety levels regarding their return to school, the majority (62%) of parents on a scale of 1-10 rated their child's anxiety below 5 (with 10 being the most anxious). However worryingly 13% (3,528 responses), rated their child's anxiety at 8 or above.

The survey also asked if parents felt their child would need additional support from outside of the family to help with their anxiety on their return to school and 11% (3,085) felt that their child would. Of this 11%, the majority (64%) felt their child would need individual support from their teacher however 45% of respondents felt their child would need professional therapeutic supports to help them cope with their anxiety. Parents also raised concerns that when their children return to school their class teacher will have changed and this may have a negative impact on their child's ability to seek support from what may be an unfamiliar person.

4. **Structure** - Children and parents need certainty about the structure of the school day and school week. Parents have raised concerns with NPC regarding the possibilities of shorter days/weeks and blended learning. The logistical minefield such arrangements would bring for families in some cases would make it impossible for some children to return to school however much the child and parents wanted this to happen. Particular concerns raised have been:
 - a. Motivation for home learning in a blended learning model
 - b. Concerns regarding transition from primary to post-primary if a child moved from home schooling in their primary school to a blended learning model in their new secondary school.
 - c. Logistical considerations particularly in the instance of more than one child in different class levels or different schools.
 - d. Logistical considerations in relation to parents working arrangements with an uncertain school timetable.

The survey looked at specific issues for parents regarding blended learning and how they feel this might impact their child's motivation regarding their learning at home. Seventy-two percent of parents felt that their children would be only slightly motivated or not at all motivated to learn at home, with 28% reporting that their children would be very motivated or motivated to learn at home. This raises concerns whether there would be blended learning actually taking place or in effect a shortened school week.

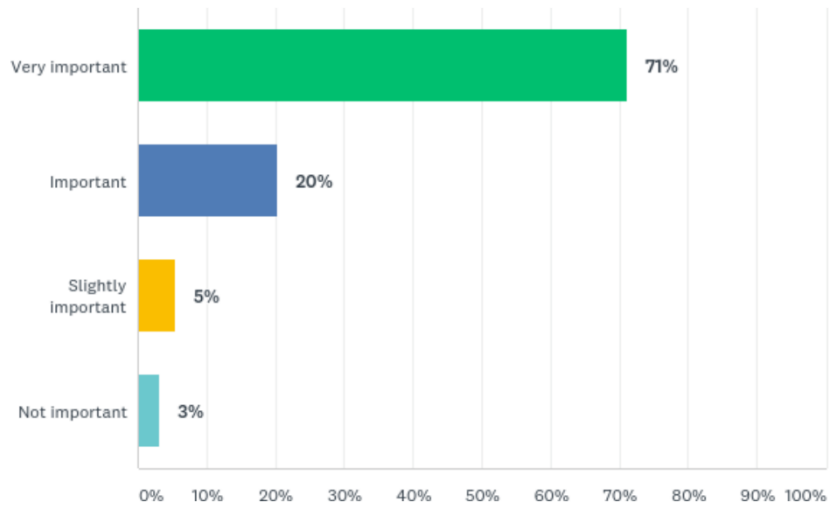
The NPC are grateful for the opportunity to submit these views and would like to draw attention to the fact that this is not an exhaustive list but the main key issues.

Appendix

NPC Your Child Returning to School Survey

Q1 How important is it that your child has a full return to school at the beginning of the next school year?

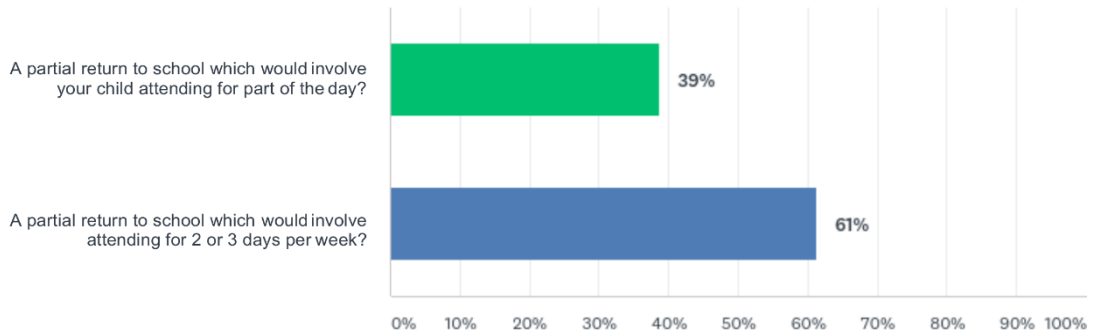
Answered: 28,696 Skipped: 46



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very important	71%	20,424
Important	20%	5,800
Slightly important	5%	1,570
Not important	3%	902
TOTAL		28,696

Q2 If schools don't open fully in the new school year the structure of the school day or week may look very different. Which of these would do you think would best support your child's needs?

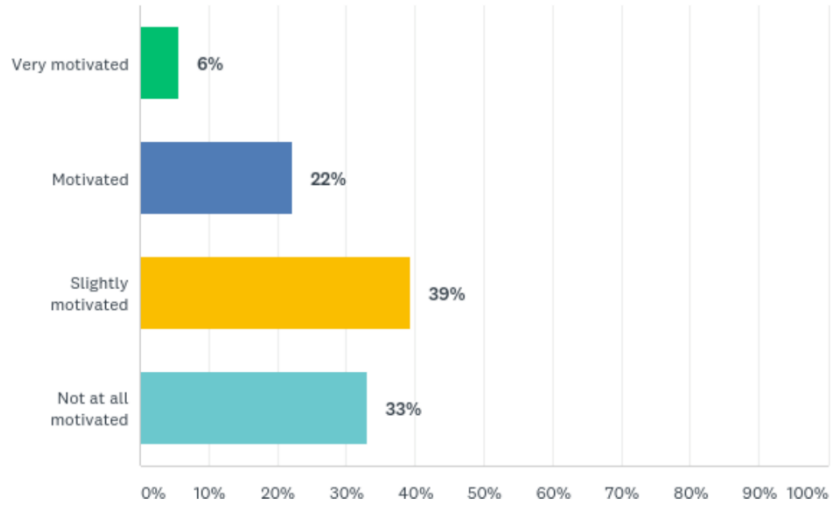
Answered: 28,358 Skipped: 384



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
A partial return to school which would involve your child attending for part of the day?	39%	10,954
A partial return to school which would involve attending for 2 or 3 days per week?	61%	17,404
TOTAL		28,358

Q3 In a possible blended learning situation (some learning from home and some school attendance in the week) how motivated do you believe your child would be regarding their learning at home?

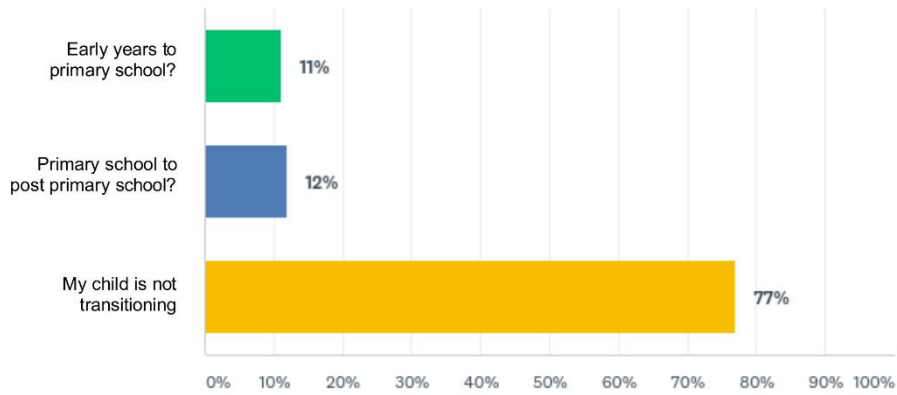
Answered: 28,668 Skipped: 74



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very motivated	6%	1,591
Motivated	22%	6,337
Slightly motivated	39%	11,279
Not at all motivated	33%	9,461
TOTAL		28,668

Q4 Is your child transitioning from

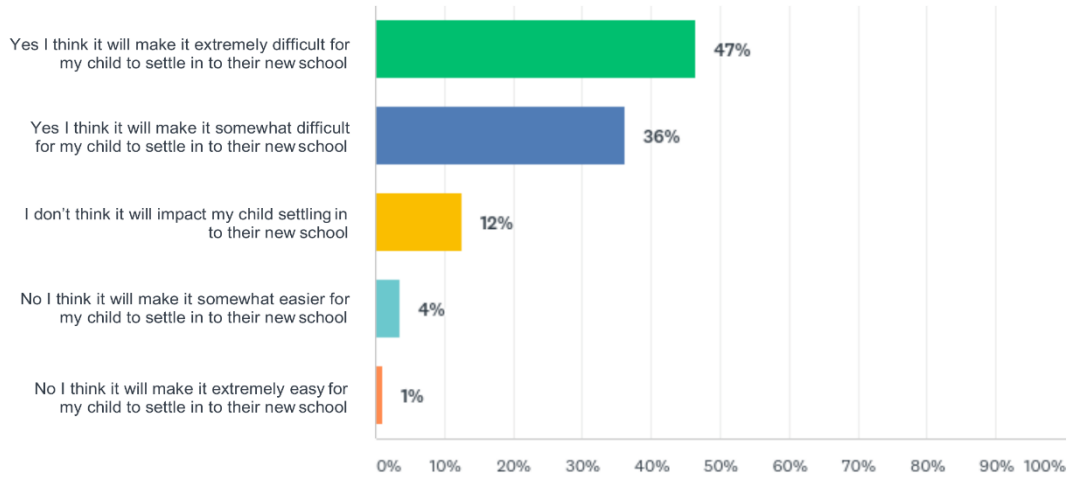
Answered: 28,564 Skipped: 178



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Early years to primary school?	11%	3,180
Primary school to post primary school?	12%	3,381
My child is not transitioning	77%	22,003
TOTAL		28,564

Q5 Do you think this transition will be affected if blended learning is in place when they start their new school?

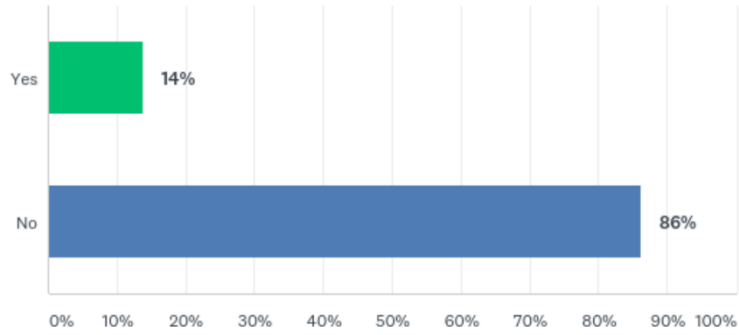
Answered: 6,245 Skipped: 22,497



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes I think it will make it extremely difficult for my child to settle in to their new school	47%	2,905
Yes I think it will make it somewhat difficult for my child to settle in to their new school	36%	2,266
I don't think it will impact my child settling in to their new school	12%	780
No I think it will make it somewhat easier for my child to settle in to their new school	4%	226
No I think it will make it extremely easy for my child to settle in to their new school	1%	68
TOTAL		6,245

Q6 Does your child have a special educational need?

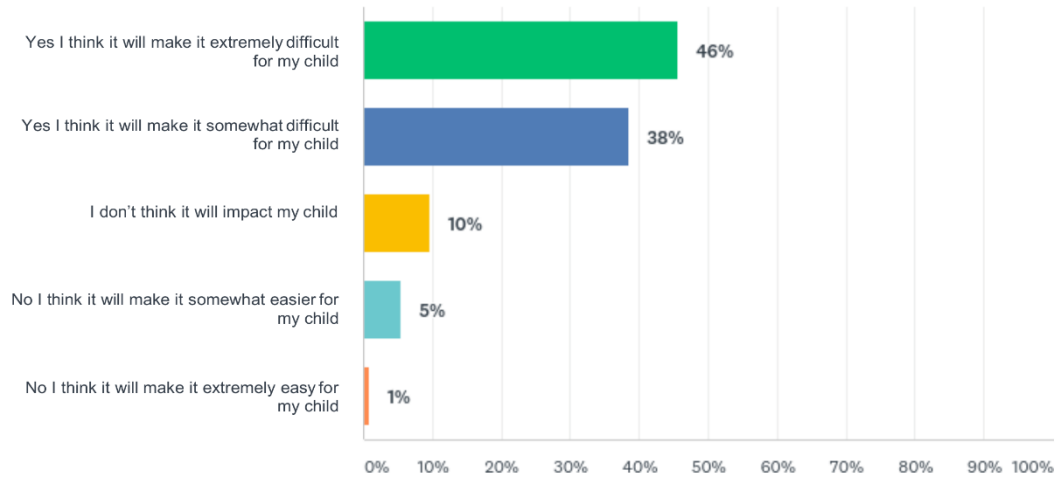
Answered: 28,180 Skipped: 562



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	14%	3,919
No	86%	24,261
TOTAL		28,180

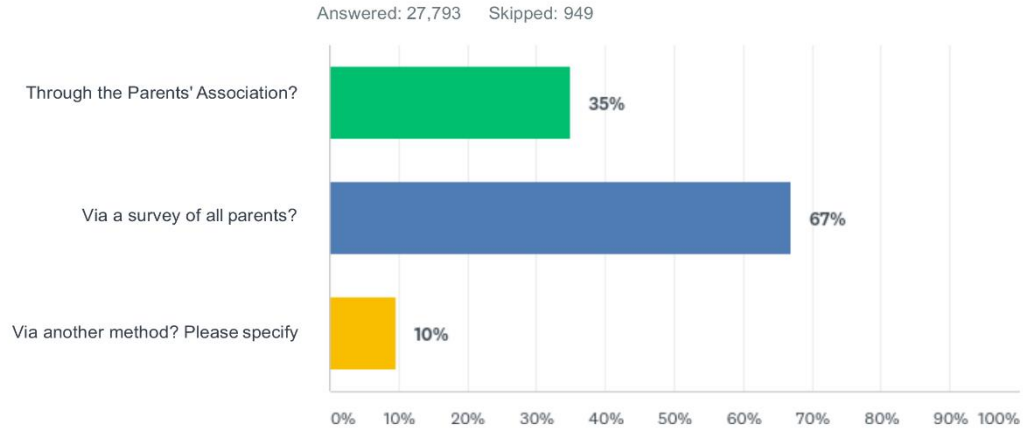
Q7 Do you think your child’s additional learning need will impact your child differently to other children if blended learning is in place when they go back to school?

Answered: 3,905 Skipped: 24,837



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes I think it will make it extremely difficult for my child	46%	1,779
Yes I think it will make it somewhat difficult for my child	38%	1,503
I don't think it will impact my child	10%	376
No I think it will make it somewhat easier for my child	5%	211
No I think it will make it extremely easy for my child	1%	36
TOTAL		3,905

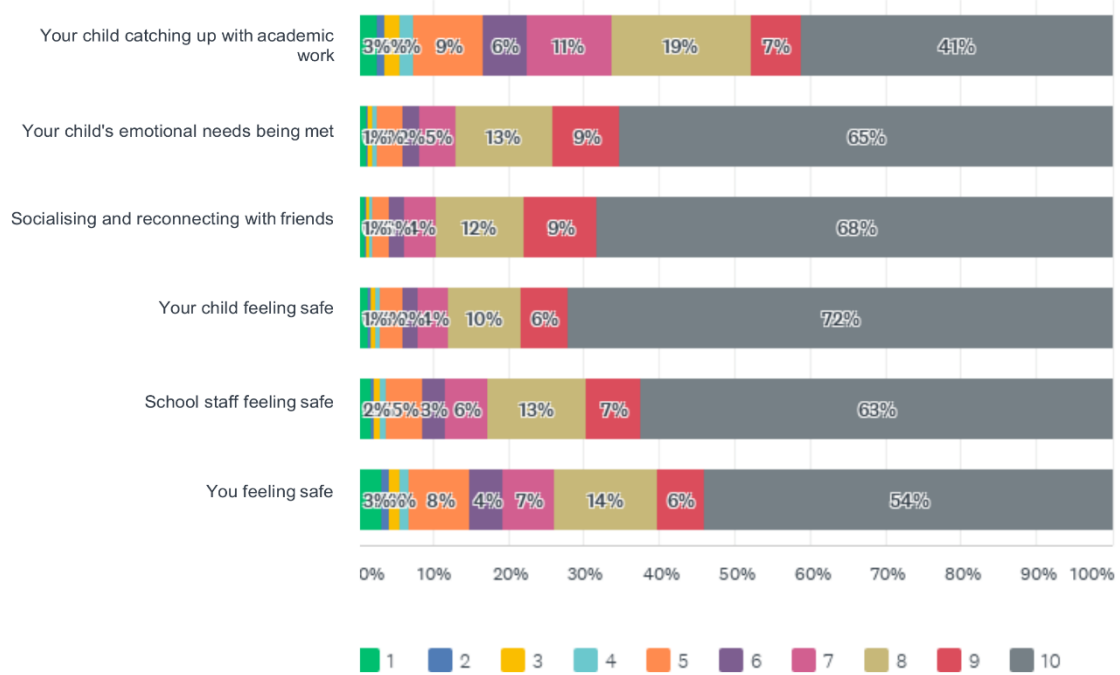
Q8 What would be the best way to involve parents in the planning to reopen your child’s school? For example, discussions regarding arriving and leaving school, safety procedures, hygiene etc.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Through the Parents' Association?	35%	9,700
Via a survey of all parents?	67%	18,599
Via another method? Please specify	10%	2,673
Total Respondents: 27,793		

Q9 When your child returns to school please rate each of the following from 1 - 10, with 1 meaning it's not important and 10 it's extremely important.

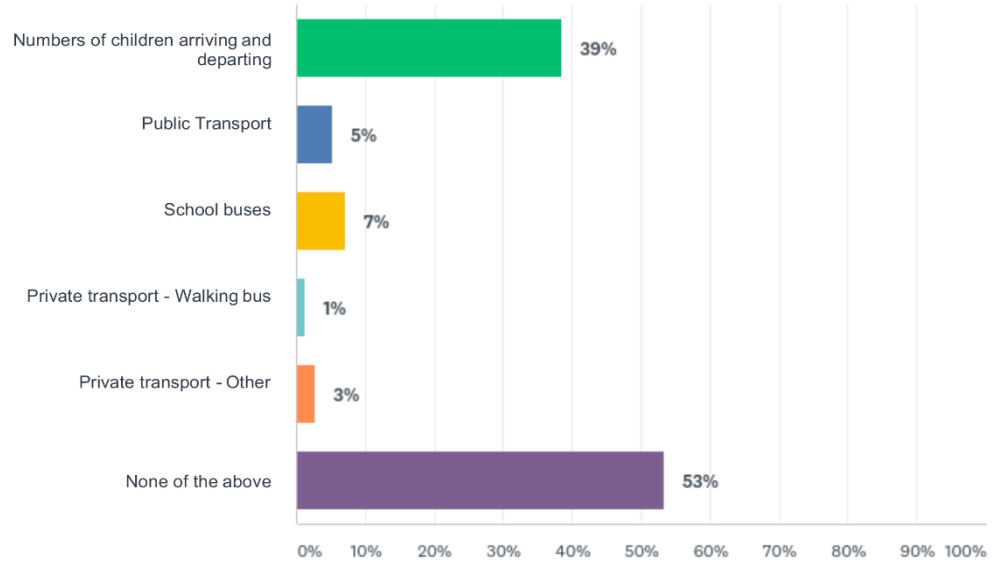
Answered: 27,351 Skipped: 1,391



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Your child catching up with academic work	3%	1%	2%	2%	9%	6%	11%	19%	7%	41%	27,309	5.75
Your child's emotional needs being met	1%	0%	1%	1%	3%	2%	5%	13%	9%	65%	27,321	5.92
Socialising and reconnecting with friends	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%	2%	4%	12%	9%	68%	27,322	5.94
Your child feeling safe	1%	0%	1%	1%	3%	2%	4%	10%	6%	72%	27,293	5.89
School staff feeling safe	2%	0%	1%	1%	5%	3%	6%	13%	7%	63%	27,290	5.87
You feeling safe	3%	1%	1%	1%	8%	4%	7%	14%	6%	54%	27,298	5.72

Q10 Are you concerned about any of the following areas regarding your child's journey to and from school when they return?

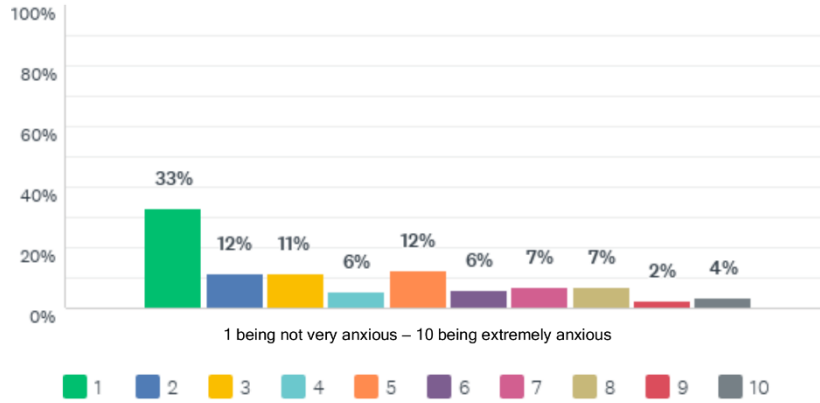
Answered: 27,041 Skipped: 1,701



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Numbers of children arriving and departing	39%	10,419
Public Transport	5%	1,423
School buses	7%	1,950
Private transport - Walking bus	1%	334
Private transport - Other	3%	708
None of the above	53%	14,441
Total Respondents: 27,041		

Q11 On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate your child’s anxiety levels in relation to returning to school? With 1 being not very anxious to 10 being extremely anxious

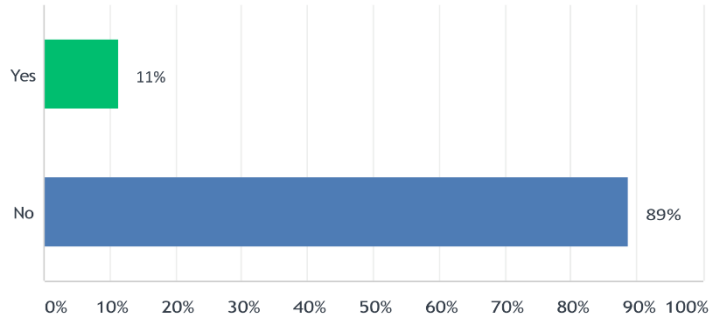
Answered: 27,315 Skipped: 1,427



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
(no label)	33%	12%	11%	6%	12%	6%	7%	7%	2%	4%	27,315	3.72
	9,054	3,172	3,119	1,561	3,377	1,584	1,920	1,941	620	967		

Q12 Do you feel your child will need additional support from someone outside of the family when returning to school to help with their anxiety?

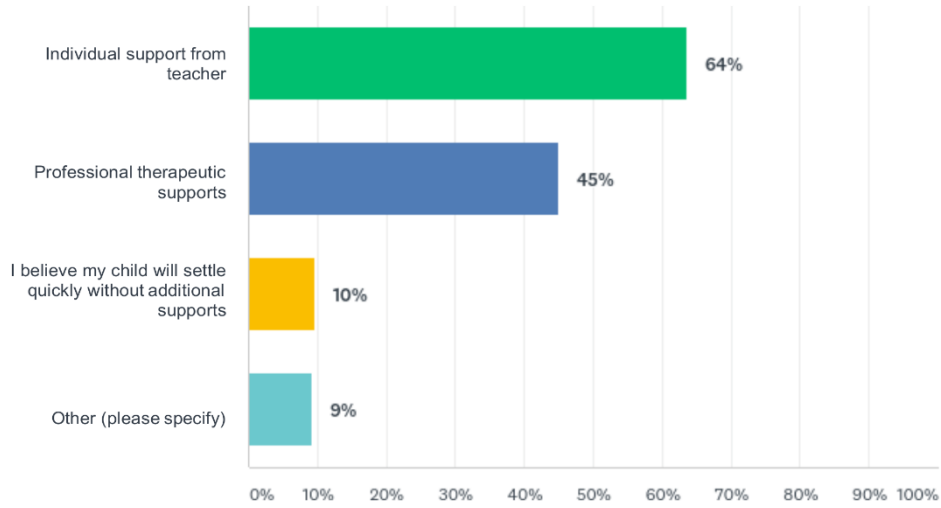
Answered: 27,291 Skipped: 1,451



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	11%	3,085
No	89%	24,206
TOTAL		27,291

Q13 What supports would you feel might help your child?

Answered: 3,128 Skipped: 25,614



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Individual support from teacher	64%	1,990
Professional therapeutic supports	45%	1,409
I believe my child will settle quickly without additional supports	10%	300
Other (please specify)	9%	289
Total Respondents: 3,128		