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Autism Ontario Survey Recommends Increased School-Based Supports for Children with Autism Ahead of Return to School

Autism Ontario has released the [results](#) of a survey of 2,400 Ontario parents and caregivers of children on the spectrum regarding their experiences during the school closure period and their concerns regarding a return to school in the fall.

Primary among the report's recommendations was a call for increased school-based supports and services, including increased access to Educational Assistants, Applied Behavior Analysis, and mental health supports, with individualized transition plans for each child, as well as external supports for learning, skill development, behaviour, and mental health, as students transition back to school. Reopening scenarios should respect the unique needs of families of children on the autism spectrum, such as having all children in the family on the same schedule in order to minimize stress.

"We've actively listened to parents and caregivers," said Margaret Spoelstra, Executive Director, Autism Ontario. "They've told us loud and clear that school-based supports and services need to be accompanied by individualized transition plans."

Key findings include:

- Addressing COVID-19 safety will be important for both caregiver and child anxieties about returning to school. **Parents and caregivers reported that 32% of children on the spectrum expressed anxiety over the risk of contracting COVID-19 or physical restrictions such as wearing masks.**
- Technology-related barriers, including limited internet bandwidth, are substantially higher in Northern Ontario, need to be accommodated in plans to support remote learning. **Northern Ontario residents were over eight times as likely as those in the Greater Toronto Area to report that internet bandwidth was a barrier to online learning.**

The complete report is available for [download from Autism Ontario's website](#).



For more information call Michael Cnudde, Communications and Resource Development Specialist, Autism Ontario. (416) 571-7888. michael@autismontario.com

About Autism Ontario: Autism Ontario has an over 47 year history of representing thousands of families and people on the autism spectrum across Ontario. We are the only organization in Ontario that has elected volunteer parent representation in all areas of the province through our 25 Chapters. We advocate with and on behalf of all people on the autism spectrum and their families – at all ages and stages of life, reflecting a wide range of expression and abilities. To connect with us, visit www.autismontario.com