



**Mental Health Advocacy Program for Kids**  
**Spring 2020 COVID-19 Remote Schooling Report**

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Prepared for

Health Law Advocates

by

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On March 17, 2020 schools in Massachusetts stopped in-person education due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Schools across the Commonwealth shifted to remote learning for the remaining weeks of the school year. MHAP for Kids made efforts to ask families each week about their experiences with remote learning and with their youth’s behavioral health symptoms. During the period from May 8, 2020 to June 24, 2020, 48 MHAP for Kids families filled out at least one weekly log to share their experiences. Many of these families also filled out some baseline information at the start of remote learning including reporting the youth’s average mental health just before the start of remote learning. Sixty percent of parents and guardians rated their youth’s mental health at or below a score of 5 on a scale of 0-10 where 0 is the worst and 10 is the best possible mental health. Only 7% of youth had mental health ratings above a score of 7. This characterizes the mental wellbeing of these youth even without the added stressors imposed by the pandemic.

Many of the youth involved with MHAP for Kids have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Of the families who filled out weekly logs, just over half of youth (54%) had an IEP. All of which reported receiving IEP services at some point during remote schooling in spring 2020, though some families expressed concerns that services were inadequate to fully meet their child’s needs. Quotes from parents to illustrate this include:

*“I continue to have concerns that her individual remote learning plan is generic and not catered to her individual needs. I’m also concerned that although it has been identified in her IEP that she requires specialized and individualized teaching...none of this has happened.”*

*“The harder the works gets the more unstable she’s being. It’s not fair they aren’t working with us to accommodate her.”*

When asked if youth completed their assigned work, 35% of families reported their child never completed their work for any of the weeks the log was filled out. The leading reasons families reported work was incomplete included: that the child was unwilling (33%) or did not understand (29%) and that there were technical difficulties (15%). Nearly half (48%) of families reported concerns that their youth may not receive credit for their work or would be held back. These concerns were held by parents (96%), youth (35%), or expressed by the school (25%).

The vast majority (96%) of parents reported observing social, emotional, and or behavioral challenges during this time, as summarized in table 1. The average family reported 3 challenges per week. The distress caused by these challenges is difficult to compare to family life before remote learning as we only started collecting weekly information during the pandemic. However, qualitative comments provided by families suggest that youth social, emotional, and behavioral challenges were made worse during COVID-19. Examples of family comments suggesting that challenges were increasing are reflected in table 2.

	%	n
Anxiety	66.7	(32)
Youth refused to do work	58.3	(28)
Verbal Aggression	50.0	(24)
Refused to get out of bed, sleep issues	45.8	(22)
Physical complaints	33.3	(16)
Physical aggression	29.2	(14)
Other	29.2	(14)
Property destruction	27.1	(13)
Left home without permission	14.6	(7)
None	6.3	(3)

**Table 2. Illustrative Parental Responses to Youth Challenges Faced During Remote Learning**

*"He is getting worse."*

*"Just deteriorating."*

*"Emotionally this is getting the best of him."*

*"Worried about these new/increased symptoms he's been having for a few weeks. Spells, disassociating, short term memory loss, irritability, anger, argumentative, and destructive behavior."*

*"[His] agitation that he might not pass because of the tablet not working now and on several other occasions which causes anxiety to peak which causes meltdowns with [him] because of his frustration level and inability to have control of his situation."*

*"...Homeschooling has been extremely challenging...He becomes frustrated when he doesn't understand the question or knows the answer in which then he begins to escalate and misbehave."*