

SHORT SUMMARY OF HIGHLIGHTS:**IMPACT YOUR WORK SURVEY OF YOUTH CCS AND CLTS AFFILIATED STAFF****08/2020***Impact Your Work* Survey Results for Wisconsin Youth CCS and CLTS Affiliated Staff

Supporting Children with Mental Health Challenges During the Pandemic

Sponsored by Wisconsin Family Ties

Robyn F. Hardt Schultz, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

The *Impact Your Work* survey, sponsored by Wisconsin Family Ties and proctored by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS), sought to identify the means by which Wisconsin Youth Comprehensive Community Services (CCS) and Children's Long Term Support Waiver (CLTS) affiliated staff could be supported in their work, if at all, to assist children with mental health challenges and their parents during the pandemic. Specifically, affiliated staff were asked to indicate if work demands had or had not increased with the pandemic. Respondents indicating that demands had increased described the nature of that increase and then selected three of 12 support options that would be most helpful to them in meeting job demands. Finally, respondents from more than 24 counties and one tribe identified and described additional helpful supports. Results indicate that more than 99% (N=280) of survey participants believe that their work demands increased with the pandemic. Frequency analysis and the related samples Cochran's Q Test along with pairwise comparisons in which

alpha was adjusted using the Bonferroni method to control for the overall experiment-wise error rate indicated that of the 12 support options provided, the most frequently selected supports included A) Assist the parent and child to adjust to the demands of school, B) Work with parent and child to create at home plans for supporting child goals during the pandemic, C) Help identify pandemic-friendly alternatives to already approved services, and D) Identify new sources of support and funding to meet the changing needs of the family during the pandemic. Qualitative analysis was deductive, reiterative, and thematic. More than 40 additional staff-generated ideas for assistance encompassed five themes of support: administrative, resources, affiliated staff training and support, task supports for families, and technology. Interpretation and assessment of responses are limited, instead allowing for individuals and organizations with interest in supporting affiliated staff to evaluate options through the lens of their own expertise. In so doing, these entities can determine the appropriateness or inappropriateness of offering specific affiliated staff identified supports. Although this study did not assess the feasibility nor cost effectiveness of respondent suggestions, most ideas appear reasonable, supportive of identified issues, and worthy of consideration.

SUMMARY OF HIGHLIGHTS

The arrival of the global pandemic often brought with it an influx in job demands. Particularly vulnerable to changes in demands are the Wisconsin county frontline professionals engaged in supporting the Youth Comprehensive Community Service (CCS) Program- or the Children's Long Term Support Waiver (CLTS) Program-enrolled youth and children with mental health challenges (hereafter referred to as children.) Both Youth CCS and CLTS affiliated staff fill an important role in the health and wellbeing of this vulnerable population; it is important that affiliated staff continue to function well during the pandemic. This study sought to ascertain if the work demands of affiliated staff (defined as Youth CCS and CLTS staff supporting children with mental health challenges and their parents and identified in the Department of Health Services (DHS) confidential email list) increased during the pandemic, or not. Respondents indicating that the demands had increased then described the nature of that increase and selected three supports that would be most helpful to them in meeting the job demands of assisting children with mental health challenges and their parents/guardians (hereafter referred to as parents.) Respondents provided additional support ideas through open-ended questions. Results indicate that job demands increased, both child- and parent-focused issues contributed to that increase, and that a variety of supports could help affiliated staff.

Brief Methodology

An eleven-question mixed methods survey distributed by Wisconsin DHS to 592 affiliated staff from July 28th to August 5th, 2020 resulted in a 69% return rate. Respondents meeting selection criteria numbered 280, with 20% of the sample population representing at least 24 counties and 1 tribe. (N=280.) Quantitative analysis utilized the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

(SPSS) specifically calculating multiple response frequencies and Cochran's Q Test along with a pairwise comparison in which alpha was adjusted using the Bonferroni method to control for the overall experiment-wise error rate. (Data available upon request.) More than 99% of respondents noted an increase in job demands since the beginning of the pandemic.

Child-focused Issues

Figure 1 identifies the frequency of respondents' selection of three of the most significant child-related issues impacting the increase in job demands. The most statistically significantly selected issue, at 82% frequency, was *lack or decrease of programs outside of the home including social activities, recreational activities, mentoring, or other*. This issue surfaced in open-ended responses and often had an overtone of desperation. For example:

Respondent 4.15 "I get a lot of parents telling me that ['] I just don't know what to do with my child their behaviors are just becoming a challenge [.] and they [the parents] don't know what to do because their child is home with them every day.

Respondent 4.22 "Many of my families struggle to find ways to get kids out of the house to work on self-care. Many of my families... struggle with their kids being cooped up together and then experiencing more negative behaviors towards each other."

Respondent 4:24 "Many mental health concerns could be greatly alleviated if children... had further access to basic needs and ability to engage in healthy supportive programs outside of their home."

Respondent 4:111 "These are difficult times for children and families and continued virtual services can not be the only answer. We have to do better, to come up with a better plan to serve families during the pandemic."

Additionally, a majority of respondents (52%) noted that *deterioration in child's behavior including self-isolation, aggression, disruptive behavior, or use of illegal controlled substances*, was in their list of three most important issues that impacted their job demands. Statistically similar (Cochran's Q Test and adjusted pairwise comparisons available upon request) with a frequency of selection rate of 38% was *deterioration of child's mental health including life-impacting increases in anxiety*. A link between child behavior and mental health is not surprising. The implication is that both are equally important and any support strategies offered to help affiliated staff with either of these demands may be most appropriate if the assistance includes both behavioral and mental health components. Specific support options are reviewed in the section *Affiliated Staff Selected Supports*.

Of note is the relatively low frequency of selection of *child maltreatment* (1%). Initially it may appear that the survey data indicate that the mainstream media contention that child maltreatment increased with the start of the pandemic is false. However, closer inspection of the survey does not support nor refute the assertion of increased maltreatment. The survey enquires about changes that most significantly increase the work demands of affiliated staff. It is possible that a significant increase in child maltreatment may have minimal impact on the work of affiliated staff. Thus, the frequency of selection of child maltreatment is not a reflection of an increase nor decrease of the core issue.

Parent-focused Issues

Figure 2 affords a visualization of the three most important parent-related issues relevant to the increase in work demands of affiliated staff during the pandemic. A majority of respondents, 68%, noted the need for additional emotional support of the parent. Statements from affiliated staff indicate that parents are struggling.

Respondent 4.120 “Parents are struggling by far more than children. Many of my consumers/participants are affected by multi-generational mental health diagnoses and substance abuse disorders. When schools transitioned to online learning, the most difficult part of my position was talking parents off the ledges.”

Respondent 5.1 “The most difficult challenge has been watching the hopelessness wash over my client’s parents.”

Respondent 5.192 The most difficult challenge is “trying to support parents that are burned [sic] out.”

Respondent 5.43 “The lack of hope is pervasive and conditions are worsening.”

Respondents 7.82 and 7.130 noted that in some instances parents were receiving less support than they did pre-pandemic simply because the parents had disengaged. It was asserted that parents have too much on their plates to do emails and check ins with affiliated staff. This does not necessarily indicate a decrease in parental need for support, and may indicate just the opposite.

Slightly under ½ of respondents (48%) noted that *Parent need for coaching regarding parenting tasks impacted by the pandemic such as changes in at-home rules, parenting strategies, etc.* impacted the job demands. As the parenting requirements change during the pandemic, parent skills and strategies must adapt. This is particularly relevant when addressing the virtual school demands of both child and parent, a topic reviewed in the section *Affiliated Staff Selected Supports*.

Respondent 4.17 indicates “Families have really struggled with having to become educators to their children with special needs, while also working and caring for other children.”

Affiliated Staff Selected Supports

Affiliated staff identified supports that would assist in meeting their increased work demands, choosing three supports from a list of 12 and then describing their own ideas for assistance. See Figure 3 for a visual representation of multiple response data. No one category of support was selected by at least 50% of the respondents. *Assist the parent and child to adjust to the demands of school during the pandemic, work with the parent and child to create at-home plans for supporting child goals during the pandemic, help identify pandemic-friendly alternatives to already approved services, and identify new sources of support and funding to meet the changing needs of the family during the pandemic* were not statistically significantly different in the frequency of selection, ranging from 38-46%. The first two listed items reference direct contact with the family regarding changes to the family situation since the pandemic began. The next two selections focus on the procurement of appropriate resources/programs. The last two support selections align with the most frequently selected child-focused issue: lack/decrease of programs. Less clear is the link between the top ranked parent-focused issues (need for additional emotional support of the parent) and the most frequently selected support options mentioned above. (Cochran's Q Test and adjusted pairwise comparisons available upon request.) The parent-focused support for affiliated staff, *coaching about parenting tasks*, and the proposed solution of *assisting with demands of school and creating at-home support* appear well-aligned, indicating a consistency between at least some of the identified parent-issues and some of the affiliated staff selected supports. Affiliated staff could have selected *offer additional emotional supports to the family after business hours and on weekends and provide additional check-ins during the pandemic*. Instead the frequency of affiliated staffs' selection of this support option totaled 26%. An increase in the selection of this option in particular would have better aligned with the

identified parent-focused issues. Thus, it raises important questions not addressed by the survey. Are parent-focused needs less demanding on affiliated staff than child-focused needs? Are affiliated staff open to job support that includes providing emotional support to the family? What is affiliated staff perception of an individual's or organization's capacity to offer emotional support in a manner that would impact staff work demands?

In an apparent disconnect, when asked if the impact of challenges related to child's academic and behavioral school performance was one of the three most important factors in increased work demands, relatively few respondents indicated that it was; at the same time, *assist[ing] the parent and child to adjust to the demands of school during the pandemic* was the most frequently selected support option. The implication of this dichotomy is that the time-consuming or intense school challenges addressed by affiliated staff are related to factors outside of child behavior/performance. Qualitative responses hint at this.

Respondent 4:17 "Families have really struggled with having to become educators to their children."

Respondent 4: 25 "Families do not have the resources provided at school."

Perhaps even more telling than the frequency of selection of the 12 survey provided support items is the generation of ideas from affiliated staff. The generated ideas were diverse and often fell outside of the parameters of supports listed in the multiple response question. An analysis uncovered more than 40 options. These actionable items reveal five themes: administrative, affiliated staff training and support, resources, task supports for family, and technology. (For easy reference the chart, *Affiliated Staff Defined Supports*, lists both the themes and the actionable ideas.) Examples include the education of staff about best practices in virtual therapy,

temporary changes in paperwork requirements to allow for program flexibility, and modifications of billable services to include technology support.

In some cases the suggested support already exists. For instance, some affiliated staff requested opportunities to engage in peer-to-peer support groups in order to share ideas that work and to provide support to each other. According to DHS (<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/partners.htm>) this option already exists for CCS staff. Still, it is important to gain an understanding of the reason that affiliated staff are unaware of resources. Insight may provide no-cost low-cost options for assistance.

Though not assessed for feasibility nor cost effectiveness, the 40 support ideas appear reasonable and worthy of consideration. A feasibility assessment remains important and is perhaps best performed by administrators and organizations committed to supporting affiliated staff. Because the lens for each entity is unique, the possibility exists that one activity will appear simultaneously feasible and unfeasible to different organizations. The chart of support options, *Affiliated Staff Defined Supports*, affords a check list of sorts to assist in the evaluation process. The itemization allows for easy reference.

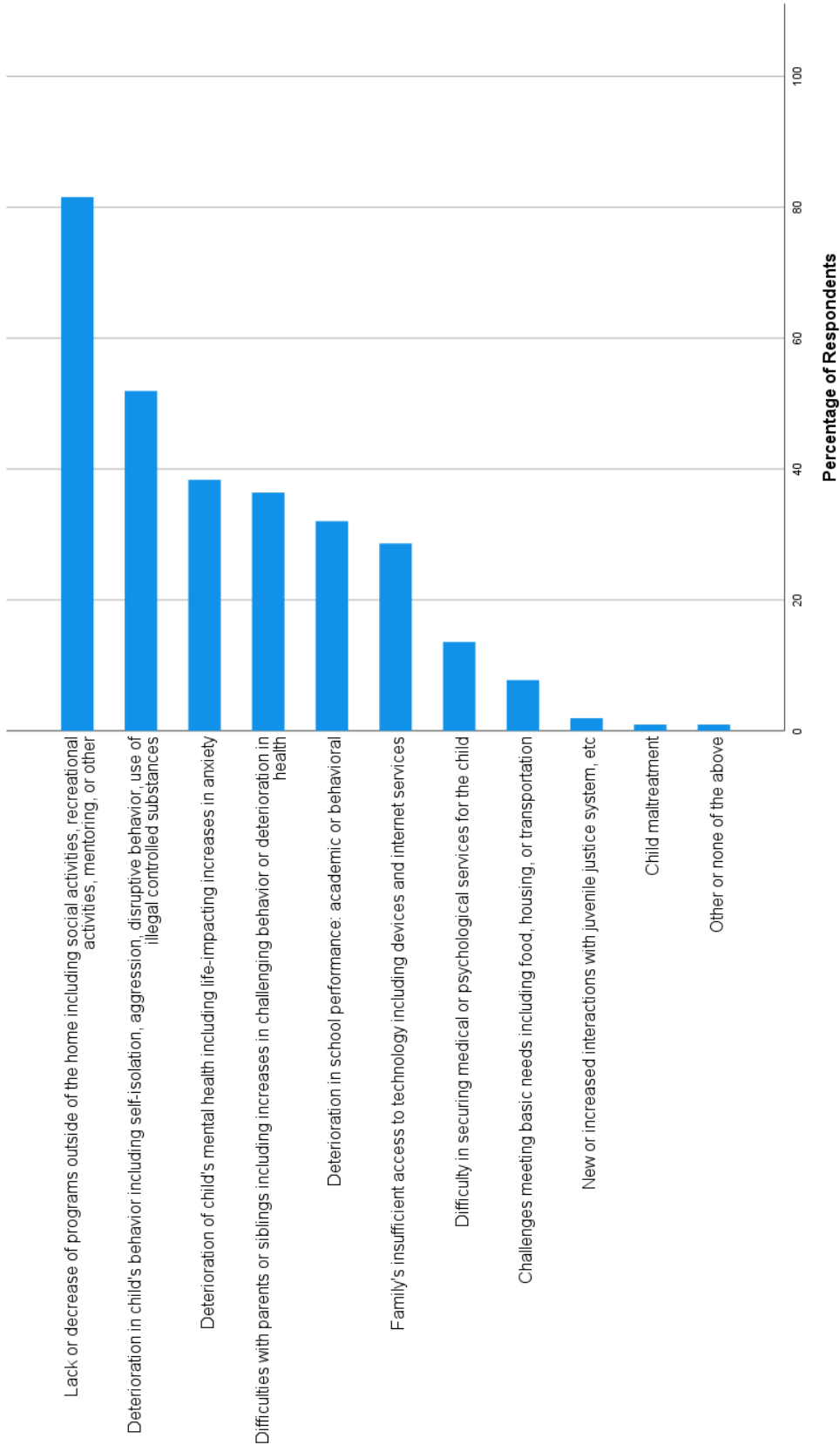
A summary of affiliated staff selected supports arguably provides the most important information from the study. In utilizing this list, administrators and organizations can move beyond a review of issues and instead address practical solutions for the pandemic reality that work demands of affiliated staff increased. Through the mobilization of supports the real beneficiaries will be the vulnerable children with mental health challenges and their parents.

Conclusion

Affiliated staff, frontline workers for the county, invest time and talent in the care and wellbeing of Wisconsin children with mental health challenges and their parents. These professionals note

that their work demands have increased during the pandemic. Now they have offered more than 40 means by which others can assist them in their charge to make a difference. The next step in the process of supporting affiliated staff is the selection and implementation of appropriate support suggestions. A sense of urgency would be well-placed given the immediacy of the pandemic.

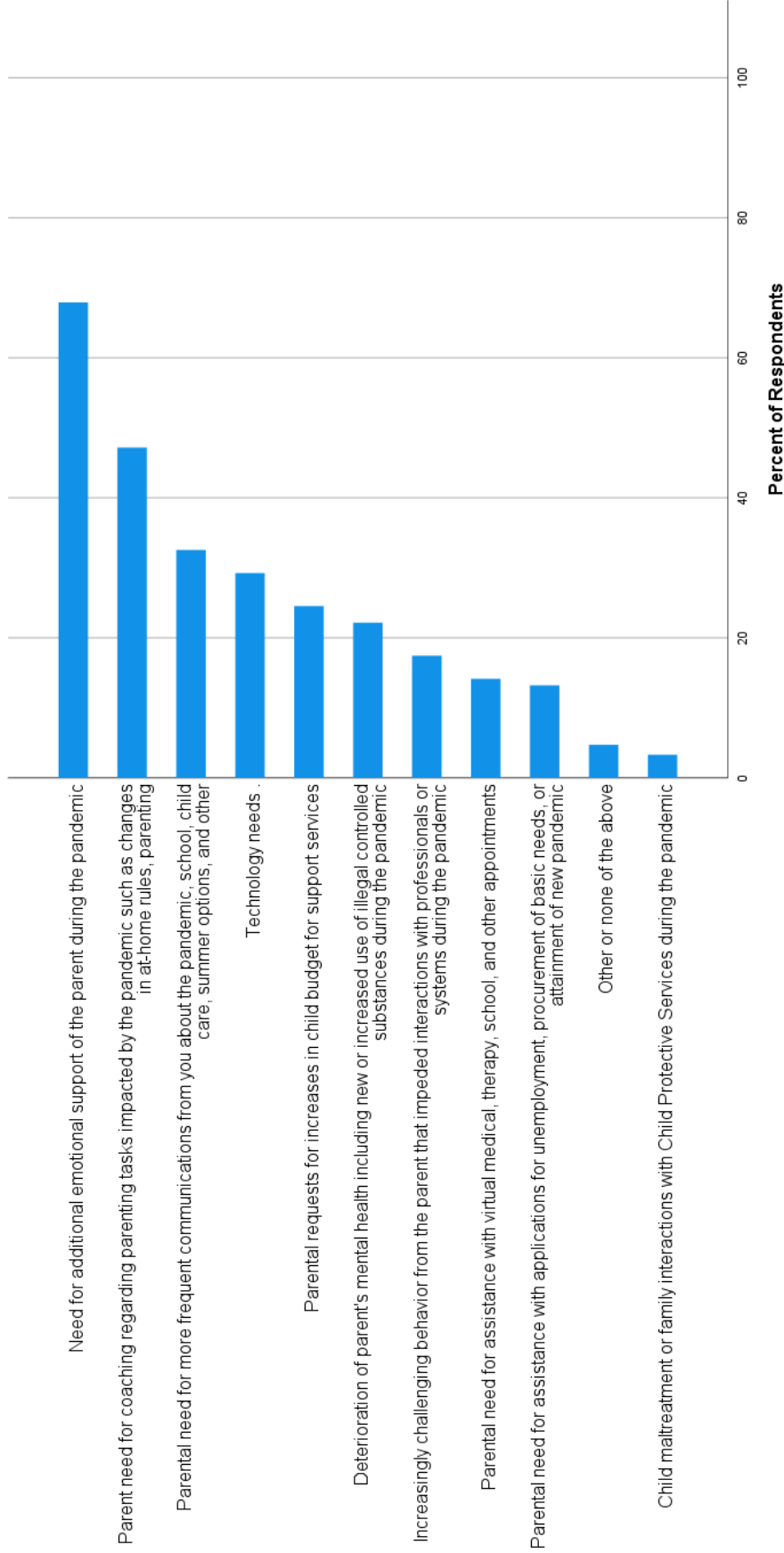
Figure 1
Child-related Issues Most Significantly Impacting Work During the Pandemic



Note: Respondents were asked to identify the three child-related issues that most significantly increased demands of their work during the pandemic. Because each issue was assessed individually, the sum of the percentages does not total one hundred. (valid n=206, N=264)

Figure 2

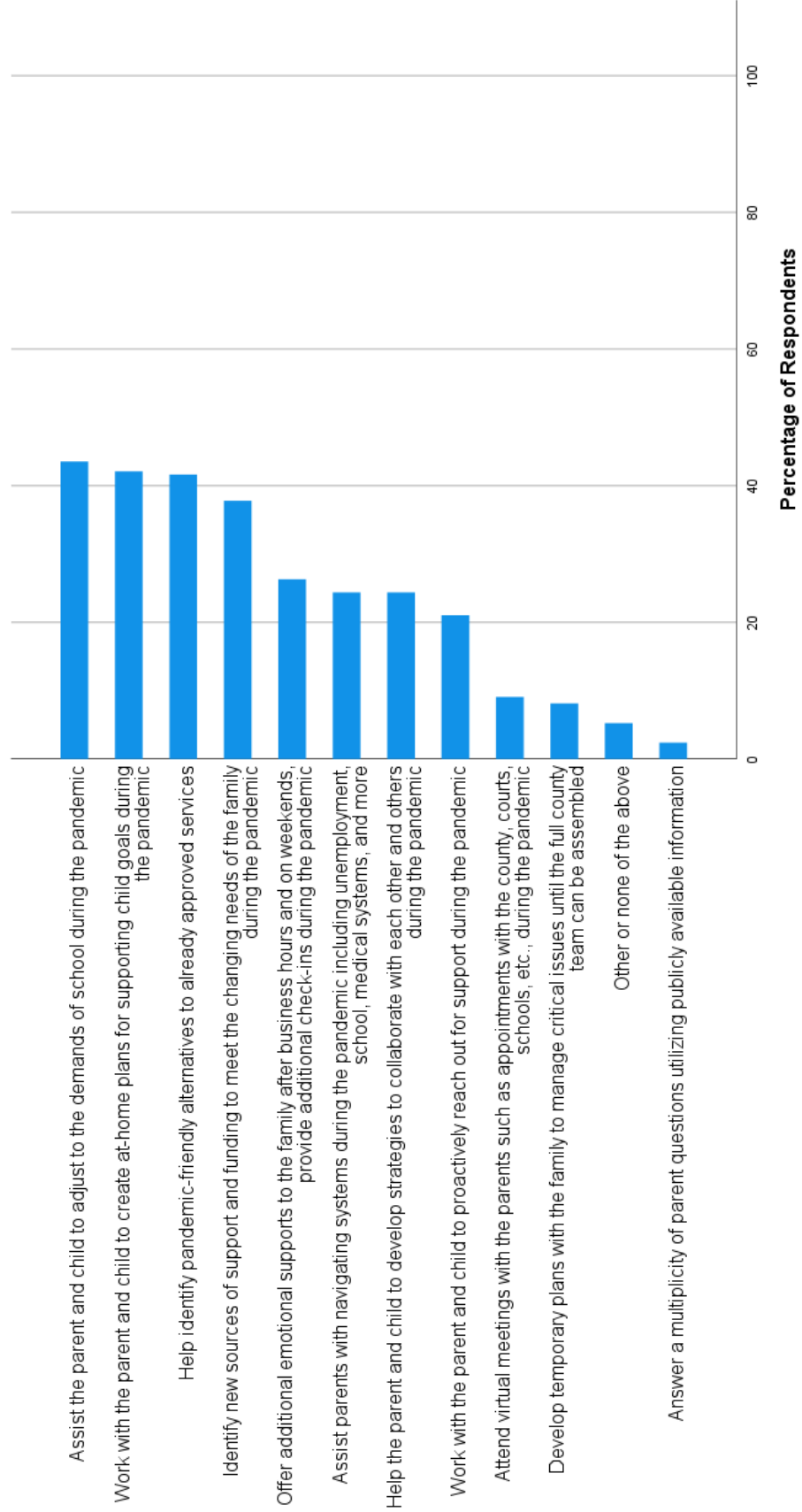
Parent-related Issues Most Significantly Impacting Work During the Pandemic



Note: Respondents were asked to identify the three parent-related issues that most significantly increased the demands of their work during the pandemic. As is standard for frequency analysis of multiple response questions, each option was assessed autonomously; therefore the sum of the percentages does not total 100. (valid n=212, N=271)

Figure 3

Affiliated Staff Selected Supports



Note: Respondents identified three supports that would most significantly assist them in meeting the increased demands of work. As is standard for frequency analysis of multiple response questions, each option was assessed autonomously; therefore the totals do not equal 100. (valid n=209, N=270)

Chart: Affiliated Staff Defined Supports

| Themes | Specific Opportunities for Others to Help Affiliated Staff |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Administrative Matters | <p><u>Billing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that billable activities reflect the change in services due to the pandemic. (Texting, technology training for families, all uses of screen time, etc.) • Locate more options/services that function during the pandemic. Consider insurance as possible funders, especially Badger Care. • Define <i>virtual school support at home</i> as a need of the parent so that CLTS can fund care for children, especially children under 12 years old. • Create a slush fund so that staff can take children out for lunch and provide a short respite for parents. <p><u>Paperwork</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplify and streamline paperwork so that staff has more flexibility to meet family needs. • Consider ISP amendments (versus a full updated document) with verbal approval for those parents who cannot sign electronically. • Temporarily waive ISP requirements for supervisors to approve all changes. Expedite changes during the pandemic. <p><u>Policy</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporarily relax standards on the annual review by the state in order to allow staff to stay focused on families. • Do not force mask-wearing by staff. • Provide masks and personal protective equipment for families and staff <p><u>Other</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide childcare to staff so that staff can focus on families. • Continue to have administrators provide exceptional emotional support to staff. |
| Resources | <p><u>Resources</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer additional equipment for at-home offices. • Brainstorm creative ways to use Youth CCS and CLTS during the pandemic. • Locating support for critical situations that occur outside of traditional business hours, especially now that most in-person options are limited. • Offer tangible resources to staff including funding of specific resources now available during the pandemic. • A place for kids to go so parents can get a break. <p><u>Facilities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more equipment and materials to staff for their home offices. • Locate large rooms for meetings that allow for social distancing. • Identify outdoor spaces for therapy. |
| Affiliated Staff Training and Support | <p><u>Peer-to-Peer Meetings for Staff</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional support of staff. • Idea exchanges about what works for families. • Sharing of resources that are active during the pandemic. • Brainstorming for new means to support families. (Creative uses of Youth CCS and CLTS supports.) <p><u>Specialized Professional Education for Staff</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best practices for virtual therapy and child redirection while online. • Parental selfcare strategies that are appropriate during the pandemic. • Managing families who do not believe that the pandemic is legitimate. • Virtual school expectations for the child and family. • Identify specific tangible resources for staff to utilize to assist families during the pandemic. |
| Task Support For Families | <p><u>Family Supports</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop pandemic-appropriate home schedules with families. • Create quiet/private home spaces for therapy and school activities with families. • Navigate new systems with families including unemployment and basic needs support. • Assist families to access and utilize technology. |

| | |
|------------|--|
| | <p><u>County-parent Liaison</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more frequent communications and check-ins with families to supplement county communications. • Follow-up and procure county paperwork and signatures. • Coach parent and child on virtual school expectations. • Be available after traditional business hours and on weekends to provide emotional support. • Offer a creative form of respite to families when the pandemic prohibits traditional forms. • Work closely with the family and school to ensure meaningful academic and occupational services securing this coming year. |
| Technology | <p><u>Secure technology resources for families</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that all families have a phone, at least. Consider funding through CCS or CLTS. • Develop a bank of computers available during and after traditional business hours; encourage families to visit the bank for telehealth and medication management needs. • Provide a laptop to every child and decent internet for every family; work with the school for funding. <p><u>Teach families:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To utilize hardware and software • To participate in virtual meetings • Basic skills and techniques: create a curriculum with a skills checklist. <p><u>Other:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify alternatives to telehealth and zoom. |