Moderator 1:

(silence). Hi, Parent 1. Welcome to the webinar.

Parent 1:

Thank you.

Moderator 1:

Thanks so much for joining. We'll wait for the other members to sign on.

Parent 1:

Yeah, I was just having technical difficulties, so I thought I'd try early.

Moderator 1:

I appreciate that.

Parent 1:

You know how [inaudible 00:01:26], and it's very...

Moderator 1:

I appreciate that. No, that's definitely appreciated, to try a few minutes before. So, we'll just wait for everyone else to sign on.

Parent 1:

Okay. Great. Thank you.

Moderator 1:

Sure.

Parent 1:

I guess there's some CP. Let me come and support. The other person is on a speaker. The other person may tell us about how we can explain that chance. I thought you add up to 100, with what you had earlier.. And to have them in large, yeah. Let's finish this out here. Oh, damn. Oops, it's the chance in Spanish. Just put it there. Yes. Oh. Yeah, it's there. Let me just disappear.

Moderator 1:

Hi, Parent 2. Welcome.

Parent 2:

Hi, thanks. I'm just looking for my-

Moderator 1:

Thanks for signing on. And we'll all just wait for another few minutes for the rest of the group.

Parent 2:

All right. I'm going to just grab a notebook in the other room.

Moderator 1:

Yeah, take your time.

Parent 1:

Welcome to chat. (silence). This is the elders.

Moderator 1:

Hi, Parent 2. Welcome.

Parent 2:

Hi. Thanks

Moderator 1:

Were just going to wait another few minutes for the rest of the group, but we should get started soon.

Parent 2:

No problem.

Parent 1:

It's still the same. Let's finish. Finish. Okay. (silence).

Moderator 1:

So, you're all welcome. Thanks for joining. We'll get started in a few minutes. Hi, Administrator?

Administrator:

Hi. So sorry I'm running late. I'm just going to check one quick thing. I think everybody is here. So, we're just missing one person.

Moderator 1:

Okay. I guess lets just wait one minute, and then we could get started, because we're going to do some introductions, first, anyway.

Administrator:

Definitely

Moderator 1:

Okay. Okay, we can get started. First of all, thank you everyone for joining us today. We really appreciate you setting aside some time to do this focus group. The purpose of this focus group is just to learn a little bit more about specific aspects of your experience during COVID. I know you all had filled out our questionnaire, so we wanted this to just be a little bit more of an open-ended discussion.

There's one important point I want to emphasize at the outset, is that we really do want to try to understand each person's individual experience. And I think from what we've seen, there's a lot of aspects of the experiences that overlap, but then also everyone's having their own unique experience. So, please feel free to say, "Yes, that's exactly what I've been experiencing." Or tell us your unique experience, and how that might a bit differ from something that someone else said.

Before we get started, I was hoping we could just go around and introduce ourselves, and do a fun ice breaker. So, what I was thinking is maybe we could all just say our names, the ages of your kid or kids. And then say the best movie or TV show you've seen over the past year. And then maybe we can also walk away with some recommendations of things to watch.

So, I'll go first. My name is Moderator 1. I am a psychologist and a neuropsychologist. I'm the clinical training and assessment manager of the Harlem team of the Healthy Brain Network. I do not have any kids. And the best thing I've probably watched over the past year... I know I'm late to this, but I started watching the show Ozark, and I thought it was excellent. If you like intense thriller suspense drama, then I highly recommend.

Hi, Parent 3. Thank you so much for joining.

Parent 3:

Sure.

Moderator 1:

We were just going around and doing some introductions and a quick ice breaker. We were just saying we would go around say our names, the ages of your kids. And if you have something to recommend to watch on TV or a movie that you've seen over the past year. Who wants to go next? Parent 2? Okay. You can take yourself off mute.

Parent 2:

Hi. My name is Parent 2. I have three girls. I have a 12 year old, and twins that are nine. Which show did I like? I finished watching Breaking Bad early. I guess I'm probably late to the game on that one, but I love that. That was great. Also, The Americans, which was on FX, I binge watched that in the beginning. I love that one too.

Moderator 1:

Okay. Yeah, I'm a big Americans fan also. Thanks, Parent 2. Who's next? Parent 4? Oh yeah.

Parent 4:

Did you say Parent 4?

Moderator 1:

Yeah, Parent 4, go ahead.

Parent 4:

Okay. I'm Parent 4. I have two daughters, Child 1, who is almost 12, and she did a study with the Healthy Brain Network, and my daughter, Parent 4, Child 2, who is seven. And let me see, the best... Well, unlike some of you, these incredibly intense shows, I have not been able to watch in the past year. I can't handle that much stress. And so, what I really enjoyed was Ted Lasso, on Apple Plus TV, because it's friendly. It's warm, it's easy, it's funny. And I said, "Thank you, that's what I need." And I'm really enjoying that now.

Moderator 1:

I hear that. I hear that. I hear not being in the mood for something intense. Now I've added some Ted Lasso. Okay, Parent 1, you want to go next?

Parent 1:

Sure. I'm Parent 1. We have a only son, who just turned 15 on Friday. And we've instituted, during this time, a Saturday family movie night, which is hard to hit all of our things, but my son's into music, so we watched A Hard Day's Night, and enjoyed that. The Beetles.

Moderator 1:

Cara, do you want to go next?

Parent 1:

Oh, oh, just that she probably lost sound for a second.

Parent 5:

Hi, I'm Parent 5. I have eight year old boy/girl twins. I've been stuck on the question as I teach film studies classes, so I'm always watching stuff. I stuck in this whirlpool of like, "What was the best thing I watched?" It probably doesn't matter, but I really enjoyed watching Kim's Convenience, which was not for work, on some TV show. So...

Moderator 1:

That's so funny. I just started that show last week. I'm loving it. It's so endearing. It's adorable. It's a good one if you're in the mood for something lighter, Parent 4.

Parent 4:

Thank you.

Moderator 1:

Parent 3?

Parent 3:

Hi. I have two kids, a 12 year old and a nine year old. Nine year old that studied with you guys. The shows that I recently watched, yeah, I stayed away from any intense, stressful stuff, but the only intense, stressful stuff I might watch, still, because I follow it, are NCIS and FBI. Other than that, we stick to the really stupid stuff like adults; cartoons, and things like that.

But my kids actually got hooked on the NCIS and the FBI, and now they walk around throwing around acronyms that are used there, and they found lots of tough stuff, but opportune there. It's a good... You know? Then, we do, just like someone else mentioned, I think Parent 1, we do, also, movie nights.

And so, we'll pick something from the good old days, of like '80s, or early '90s, which tend to be a little bit more easygoing. They like Mr. Bean, so we'll do some of those. We've revisited goodies, all these bad goodies, and that's been working for us.

Moderator 1:

Sorry. That sounds fun. Thank you, Parent 3. Then, I see there's someone else on the call. Administrator, I don't know if that's you also just calling in from your phone?

Administrator:

That's my phone.

Moderator 1:

Oh, that's your phone? Okay.

Administrator:

That's my phone, because it might-

Moderator 1:

So you're that extra voice that's coming through? Okay.

Administrator:

Yeah. Yeah.

Moderator 1:

Then, maybe let's see-

Administrator:

My computer won't play the sound so I have to call in.

Moderator 1:

Got you. Okay, that works. I was wondering how we were hearing you with the mute on, so that totally makes sense now. Okay. All right.

In order to just start the discussion, what I'd like to do for the next couple minutes is, if everyone has a paper and pencil handy, try to write down the two or three best ways that technology has impacted you since COVID started.

Then, also, two or three negative ways that technology has impacted you since COVID started. So, let's take a couple of minutes to do that, just to put our thoughts together. (silence). Okay, let's take one more minute and then we'll talk about it. (silence).

If you've finished writing down two or three ways, the best ways that technology has impacted you, and two or three negative ways that technology has impacted you, I'd like you to think which side has had the more significant net impact.

Would you say that the good group has had the biggest overall impact, or the bad group has had the biggest overall impact? And just circle whichever one that is, whether it's the good group or the bad group, that's had a bigger impact. (silence).

Okay. So, by a show of hands, how many people felt that the positive parts of technology have had a bigger impact over the past year and a half? Parent 2, you feel like the positive outweighs. How many of you guys felt that the negative outweighed the positive over the past... Okay. And then Parent 4, you're in the middle, is it breaking even for you?

Parent 4:

Well, the thing is, for me, the positives were a necessity. I didn't lose my job because I was able to use technology. My kids still had learning, because we have technology. But the screen addiction that has occurred because of this is such an overwhelming emotional burden that has so crippled me and my family, that I can't say that it's better. So, I don't know how you weigh the two, so that is why I couldn't really respond.

Moderator 1:

I hear that, because the positives are so necessary and have enabled the function, so you can underplay them. Bit it sounds like it's had a real overall negative crippling impact.

Parent 4:

I think so. I think so.

Moderator 1:

Okay. So-

Parent 4:

My kids have forgotten how to do anything without the computer. It's just absurd.

Moderator 1:

Yeah. One question that I want to put out to the group, and we're going to touch on some of the positives and negatives that you wrote down, I'd like to hear a little bit about how everyone used technology for school before the pandemic. So, how did people feel about technology for educational purposes before? Was it beneficial? Did you have concerns before the pandemic? So, I'll let anyone answer.

Parent 5:

I can go.

Moderator 1:

Yeah, Parent 5.

Parent 5:

Before the pandemic, I didn't use technology for education at home with my kids. I left it up to the school. I mean, I trusted the school. I knew that they had computer class, and I do think that's important, but I left it up to them. And for me, we used it almost exclusively for entertainment. Like when I needed to get something done, like make dinner, or something, and I just needed them occupied, that was it.

I mean, some of that context, I think, matters, because I'm a single parent and we lived in an apartment in Brooklyn. So, the option of saying, "Go outside and play," isn't there. If I have to be inside doing something, they have to be inside with me. And that's changed too, because we've moved since then. I mean, very rarely I would use maybe YouTube, or something, to show them something that they asked about, that I couldn't just answer in words. But I didn't use it much for education, so...

Moderator 1:

Okay. That's interesting. So it didn't play such a big role educationally. Anyone else, what have your experiences been with technology before... Yeah, Parent 3?

Parent 3:

For us, similar to Parent 5's situation, we really, before the pandemic, we were very strict about screen time. The kids only used the computers at school. I mean, if they had to, they'd use them at home, but it was mostly unnecessary. They didn't really have phones. Again, it was unnecessary. They knew how to use them, but it was just an arbitrary thing, because they would use them in school and it was sufficient.

And so, obviously, during the pandemic, they had a steep learning curve, and they went from like 10% of knowledge to 200% of knowledge. I've tried blocking some apps from them and websites, and they actually figure out a way around. So, even though it's blocked, they can still somehow manage to get around it. Yeah, it's become from none relevant education to solely relying on it for education, entertainment, and keeping them quiet. Yeah. That's it.

Moderator 1:

All right. So, for both of you, Parent 3 and Parent 5, it sounds like it's been a very big switch, because they didn't really use technology so much before?

Parent 5:

Mine came because I can't keep them out of the parts I really don't want them in. The school gives them Chromebooks that I have no administrative control over, so I can't. Even if I did have control, there's still problems. It's difficult. But if I wanted them to only use educational programs, I'd have to sit next to them the whole time to make sure they didn't leave and do something else.

Moderator 1:

Yeah. Parent 4, Parent 2, Parent 1, what were your experiences with technology for educational purposes before the pandemic?

Parent 2:

Okay... Oh, go ahead.

Parent 4:

Beforehand, my seven year old didn't use a computer at all. And I was delighted, because I read that the American Academy of Pediatrics said no screen time for children under the age of 10. And so, I stood by that. She had zero screen time. For my then 11 year old... 10 year old, oh god, when she had to, she would use the computer for typing and handing in assignments sometimes, because they did start using Google Classroom, I think, at least to print things out, I think. So she had started using computer.

And for research, I will say it was nice. Because I remember, when I was in school, having like a 15 year old encyclopedia, and it just didn't have half the things I needed. And suddenly having the internet meant they could really get the information they needed. So that, actually, was very nice for that. However, it opens such a can of worms, that it's a struggle. But it's still, as with the other ladies, the difference has just been like getting hit by a tsunami. Suddenly, everything is on the computer. So...

Moderator 1:

Yeah. Parent 2, what have your experiences been?

Parent 2:

Yeah. Similar to Parent 5 and Parent 3, I mean, my kids would borrow my phone. They didn't have a Chromebook or iPad before this all happened. They got the Chromebooks from school. I mean, I'm working from home. I have three kids to juggle. I have conference calls, keep them quiet. So I got them all iPads and roadblocks happened, and that's how they communicate with friends. And it went all downhill, and now it's this huge thing that I can't... They're so addicted.

They run home from school, "Where's my iPad? I want to play." And now it's, I'm still working. And then you give it to them for a little bit, and they just don't want to get off. I mean, we really... They would play games or... For school, it was very minimal to start. Then, once we were home and they had these Chromebooks, they knew, like Parent 3 said, they knew how to get around things. They can get into games, and things you don't want them on. Yeah, it's like a lost battle.

I wanted to clarify, when I said that the technology, I felt it was better, I guess I was referring to me, for my job. Like, "Oh, man, I've always wanted to work from home." So, it's been a great thing that I can be at home. And it's a lot better now that they're back in school. But for the kids, I mean, it's just, it's too much for them. Way too much.

Moderator 1:

All right. You were referring to a net positive for your family, and for you. Which is, we're trying to understand that also. The good comes with the bad, it sounds like. Parent 1, what was your family's experience with using technology for educational purposes before?

Parent 1:

Before the pandemic, he was in the beginning of eighth grade, and then pandemic started second semester, or whatever, eighth grade. We used to just rarely, rarely, at home... He would be on the computer at school, definitely. They did group projects and research, so he was learning how to research on the computer.

I mean, we would mostly look up like, what is that math concept? And what do we know it as? Or something to help him figure out what is this, something like that. But that was about the size of it. He already was on games, and talking to his friends through the games, video games, before the pandemic. And now it's 24/7, you know?

Moderator 1:

Okay. So, yeah, there is also-

Parent 1:

And a distraction during school, and you never know what he's on. He's just in front of a screen. Yeah.

Moderator 1:

Yeah. It seems like I'm hearing a little bit of a difference between younger and older kids, and how exposed they were to technology before. Let's shift, now, into now that technology was being used more for school purposes, during the pandemic, did you find it beneficial for educational purposes? I know, Parent 4, you mentioned for the research part. Concerns, problems, as it relates to using it for educational purposes.

Parent 3:

I can answer that-

Moderator 1:

Yeah, go ahead.

Parent 3:

... if it's fine. For us, it's actually, as much as it has become a headache, because my son is dyslexic and has ADHD, it has been easier for him to do schoolwork. Because now he can speak and it types for him, or he can just type. He's gotten much better at spelling, because he sees the words pop up, it does auto correct. He remembers how they're spelled. So, he has improved in that sense. It has been really, really helpful. When he wants to read something, it reads it to him. So, that's been a great improvement, in that sense. Having said-

Moderator 1:

It sounds like for that assistive technology piece, it's been really helpful. Can you just go back and speak a little bit more? You said that because of the ADHD, that it's been helpful in terms of that. Can you expand on that a little?

Parent 3:

Oh, well, with the HD, no, I don't know as much as it's been helpful with ADHD. I feel like that's actually been worse, because he's not able to focus as much, because he's removed from the classroom. He's currently still 100% remote. So, I think it's harder for him to relate to his peers and teachers, because they're just a face on the screen.

ADHD, I feel like has gotten worse, but dyslexia has gotten better. Not that it's gotten better, but he's able to manage it better, having those access to that technology. It's been sort of a trade off and, and we're still figuring out how to manage that. Because when he wants help, then he's like, it's hard to pull him away from the computer. So, he tends to be now overstimulated, dysregulated.

And so, we're talking about, that's great, he moved up three reading levels, but he's bouncing off the wall. So, how do you manage that? It's a trade-off, but it's still, I feel like it's been helpful for his self-esteem, to be able to keep up with the class. It's still hard for him, but at least, in the dyslexia realm, he's at least able to do things faster. And so, I think he feels better about himself.

Moderator 1:

That's really interesting. Yeah, Parent 5, do you have something here?

Parent 5:

I just wanted to respond off of Parent 3's comment, because my son also has ADHD, but differently, he has anxiety and ODD as well. So, the online learning was a complete disaster for him. I've actually done it with two separate schools, because we were in Brooklyn, in the spring, and we've moved to North Carolina. So, it's not even just one school, it's the computer, that's the big issue, or the tablet.

But he can't focus on live or asynchronous activities on the computer because of the other options available. I mean, I do think, in theory, if you had a single... Or you had some kind of computer device that the teacher controlled, that did not have any freedom for the student to change what you could look at, it could work, maybe, but it doesn't. It doesn't have that. He just clicks around and does anything except what he's supposed to be looking at. Parent 5, Child 2, I need you to leave right now, because you're making too much noise. Out.

Parent 5, Child 2:

Can I have a pencil?

Parent 5:

No, out. Out. Find a pencil out there. But he also would get up and walk away in the middle of things. He had no problem lying to me. He'd tell me, "Oh yeah, class is done. I signed out of the meeting because it was over."

In one school, they had a pair of call to try to work with him one-on-one on the phone. Which was terrible because she had a cell phone with a bad connection, so it was difficult, but he would hang up on her constantly. It was so rude, but she would call me and say, "He hung up on me."

And then the second school, they did nothing, absolutely nothing to take his IEP and translate it to online. They just said, "We can't. There's nothing we can do." And it's been extremely frustrating. So, he's falling behind, way behind, in terms of where he was. I don't know that he's lost learning, but he hasn't been making progress. And it is, he needs to be in-person.

Now, they returned to in-person four days a week, but they have not stopped using those computers. They sit at their desk, six feet apart, and every activity is computer-based, except recess and lunch. Surprise, those are his favorite subjects now. I mean, I think there's a tendency that they always would be. So, maybe it's not the technology part.

And it is a shame, because the computer, a screen can be a great learning tool. Like Parent 4 was saying, at their old school, before the pandemic, the kindergarten has had a research project, which the parents helped out with. And I was one of them. The kids were going to get a fish tank, and each kid chose a fish they wanted to research. So, that's what I did.

I sat next to them at the computer and said, "What's your fish?" And we found a picture of it together on the computer, to print it out. And then we looked up information. Then they had to find out how big is the fish. And we cut a string, and then they click it over to the fish tank to see if it would fit in their fish tank. And that was an amazing use of the computer with adult assistance. And that's not what we're getting though, at this point. So, I'll stop.

Moderator 1:

You brought up two interesting points that I'm interested to hear other people's thoughts on. One, just that the kids need to be able to manage some of this on their own. There's, likely, you have to rely on them reporting if they're actually online, and they can just walk away. And then, also, some of the specialized support, or supportive services, in terms of an IEP, and that not getting adapted. So, I'm curious to hear, Parent 1, Parent 4, Parent 5, and whoever wants to chime in on those. Parent 1, do you want to...

Parent 1:

Yeah. I mean, online learning has been a disaster at the end of eighth grade, and in ninth grade now, first year in high school, because he does better with people in the presence, in the classroom, that's more motivating, it's more engaging, does the same thing, just lying. You're just constantly monitoring, trying to find out what the, "Hey?" Teachers acting like, "You should be doing this. Or you should be letting them know." And it's just a nightmare. It's a nightmare.

Also, with burgeoning independence, he used to walk to school from our house in Brooklyn, like it's five blocks. But he'd go there and come home by himself, in eighth grade. And then this term, under the same roof with us 24/7, I mean, it's horrible. He's just started back two days and every other Friday a week. So, he's taking the subway to Astoria, to high school. So that's been helpful. But the same thing, they're in the room with their laptop.

Whether you're at home or you're in the school, you're being taught... There's Roomies and Zoomies, and you're all in the same class through the screen, through the screen, through the screen. So, it's problematic. It's very problematic. He is an IEP. He has ADD. He has counselors who call him up, but then they've offered other help and he just blows off this, or doesn't return any email. Or you keep trying to positively engage him and reminding him of this, that and the other. It's too much. He doesn't follow through. I think he would get a lot more help at school, and be motivated and... You know?

Moderator 1:

Right. I never heard that term, Roomies and Zoomies.

Parent 4:

We'll use it here, too.

Moderator 1:

Parent 4, anything to add-

Parent 1:

And he's barely passing. He's just barely passing.

Moderator 1:

Sorry, what did you say, Parent 1?

Parent 1:

He's just barely passing. That's what he needs, fronting it in, and, "Oh, I got a 66." Great.

Moderator 1:

Right. The engagement isn't really there?

Parent 1:

No.

Moderator 1:

Parent 2 or Parent 4, anything to add on that point? I mean-

Parent 2:

My daughter, my oldest has ODD, she has some anxiety. So, yeah, learning at home, disaster. She went from fifth grade with one teacher for every subject, really smart kid. It was so easy. She put in the minimum, she got Bs. She did just fine. Now, terrible transition into middle school. Terrible. I mean, there's like six different teachers. She's got executive functioning. Disaster, with that.

She's no longer organized. It's been a real challenge. We were able to... In September, they went back to school every other day. It was twice a week. And in March, we got her to start going to school every day, which has helped her get more into a routine. I have an IEP meeting set up for her on Friday, to gather extra help.

I mean, it's still been a battle even with her back in school. She's not getting the extra attention that she needs. It just, it's been an awful transition. Maybe if your kid's just like... How do you say it? Is normal, doesn't have any extra needs, maybe it went okay. But I know for my daughter, it did not transition well.

And I do want to say for one of my younger daughter, she's very anxious. She likes to stay close to me, always wants to know where I am, if I leave the house, where I'm going. So, being at home and doing school, she actually, she was my best one. She was not doing that great in school, but at home, she actually, she was on time for every meeting. She knew when to sign in and log in. I think she was just so much more comfortable being at home and I was there all the time. So, that was nice, see that in her.

Moderator 1:

Yeah. No, and that's interesting to see how it affects different kids, different ways. And that it could have a positive impact, even though it seems like that's not the norm.

Parent 4:

Well, I would say that, yes, Thea is the same way. She would... And she does, and that's my problem, but for her, she likes being at home. She's an introvert. She's perfectly happy to be here on her own, just looking at the computer. And so, last semester was difficult, but in the one trimester, but the one that just finished, she actually had the grades, were the best they've ever been.

She doesn't have the social issues. She just, she is dyslexic. So, for her to just be focused on this computer, it actually works well for her. And, of course, what I did, because of the whole roadblocks and all the other issues, I put so many restrictions on that computer. I used a springtime from the Apple. I bought Custodio, for her phone.

I bought so many restrictions that if she was going to be on the computer, what she wanted to do wasn't a whole lot to do except schoolwork. So, what actually helped her in that sense. She actually did better. It makes me insane because she doesn't get out of that chair. But in terms of the ocular work, I think it worked okay for her super. Some kids, it can work, I still don't think it's good for them. Even though she's doing better, I still don't think it's good.

Moderator 1:

Yeah. All right. So, let's move on to a different question. Now, it sounds like some people are still at home, some people have returned to being in person. But as we are in the future, going to return to being in person, I'd like to hear what parts of technology for school would you like to see continue? And what parts do you hope will end? If anyone want to take that one on first?

Parent 4:

I will. I want it all to end.

Moderator 1:

Yeah, go for it, Shelley. Yeah. But you hope it will all end? Okay.

Parent 4:

We just close those computers and be done with it. The research for homework, okay, but everything else, I just want all on paper. I want it all written out. I mean, just the idea, they can't even write their names anymore. I can't write my name anymore because of computers. But I would just love to set it out the window.

Moderator 1:

I hear you, Parent 4.

Parent 4:

It can't be good for your brains.

Moderator 1:

Anyone else, are there any parts that you would like to see continue, or specific parts that you would hope would end?

Parent 3:

I mean, I would say for us, like I mentioned before, as long as they can swipe up their homework, that's definitely been helpful. But other than that, I agree there's really no need, because they can take care of everything at school. So, for neatness' sake, they can type it up and print it out. That's fine. Reports to research, I'm okay with that, but anything else I feel like it's unnecessary.

And to speak to what Parent 5 and Parent 2 has said, my son also has ODD, and it has gotten worse as we've been home. Like I said, it's been a weird thing with dyslexia improving with some of the things he's managing, but all the other stuff is falling apart. So, if he were more attentive, I would send him to school. But he forgets, he loses his mask, puts his hand in his mouth. If he gets bored, he just starts jumping, rolling around. It's not feasible for me to send him in now, as much as I would love him to have that in-person experience.

But yeah, I definitely agree that the computers must go, at least at home. I don't care what they do in school. They sometimes behave better in school. They're more compliant, when they come home, they want to relax. So, it's a little bit different. I would be perfectly happy to just keep it for bare, and then they can always catch up, because there's computers everywhere. So, I don't fear they'll be falling behind in their knowledge and experience.

Moderator 1:

Anyone have any different feelings about things they'd like to see stay or go? Parent 5?

Parent 5:

I absolutely want these things out of my house, especially the school issued ones that I can't institute control over. That really bugged me. I understood, in the sense that they didn't want me also messing up their machine, but if I can't keep my kid off inappropriate YouTube sites, then it's not an appropriate tool.

However, I'm trying here to think about, how could you do it in a positive way? Because I feel obligated. Media studies is my thing. I'm not anti media studies, but I teach college students, I do not teach ignorance. There's a big difference. But I think some of the problems with the online reading programs and mass problems, for me, well, there's two things.

One, I don't think the kids get real feedback. Yes, the game tells you if you got the question right or wrong, but I don't think it's the same effect as a person that you haven't had a relationship with, the teacher, expressing that, "Wow, I've noticed that you've been improving." Or, "I noticed you're not doing as well today. Are you sleeping?" Whatever it is, that kind of response feedback is really crucial, especially the younger they are, not just an instant little... The game fanfare and stuff is fine.

But two is, as a parent, I have no idea what they're doing when it's online. You don't get a print here. It's not like getting the papers. And I got too much paper before this, then I would get home like, "Oh my child wrote all these sentences." Or, "These are their math worksheets. I can see what they're doing, and what they're struggling with. I can see their handwriting improving." I can't see anything. And the teachers on the report cards, they don't say much. Just, it's like, "Meet standards. Approaching standards." But what does that mean? I can't see the material.

I mean, unless I don't work and sit next to them all day and watch them doing it, which is incredibly boring on top of everything, on top of just not being possible. So, in theory, if there were some programs or a way of using that involved, both things, like some practice of the math online, but also some way of a parent viewing results quickly, like getting, I don't know, a weekly snapshot of like, "What did your child do? How many problems did they miss? Does it look like they're walking away maybe because they're not doing any of it?" I mean, different way to get contact.

Moderator 1:

It sounds like it would be helpful to have some tangible feedback of progress, so you're missing that. And then also maybe doing things through technology is just, people are giving more limited feedback and you're missing that personalized touch.

I have one more question about the education piece, and then I want to just move in more into the gaming. Because I know I'm hearing a lot that gaming has been an issue for a bunch of you.

I know some of your kids are already back in school, but what challenges have you seen for returning to in-person school, or what challenges do you anticipate in returning to in-person school after whatever amount of time?

Parent 5:

Keep it short, but since we go back, we went back in January, in person, being backslide in social and emotional competence, and I saw it coming. Well, it didn't take me by surprise, but returning to behaviors that we'd spent two years working on building a support system in school to prevent it from happening, and just that had eroded.

What I didn't anticipate is that back in school that they're really not still meeting their friends. We need to meet new friends, because it's a new school. Even with recess, it's still very slow. Maybe it's because we were just separate from people for so long, but it's a lot more difficult than it usually is for them to make friendship connections.

Moderator 1:

Okay. Thanks, Parent 5.

Parent 1:

I'm just surprised that my son started at a new school, different burrow, the kids talk on Instagram, and these are boys. I don't know. And they would share information about a positive COVID test in school, or whatever. So, he felt he knew kids. And then he met some of them. March 22nd, we opted into cohort one, which is Monday and Tuesday, and every other Friday.

But it's a problem also, you have to carry your laptop into school. I just wonder, in New York City, so everyone knows that every kid out on the street has a laptop in their backpack. I'm just waiting for... Not to mention their phone. But it's been positive for him, even going in and having the onscreen class, because he's getting to know the building. It's a new high school, I mean, for him, and he has met some kids. So, just finding his way around the building is the thing, and meeting kids in the flesh. So, it's been a plus.

Moderator 1:

Yeah. And that's the unique circumstance of actually going to a new school, when you're returning. Anyone else have anything they want to add about you anticipating difficulty integrating back? Yeah.

Parent 2:

For my middle schooler, when we were home, we were doing every other day. So, every other day she had to be at the school, at 7:15, but on her home days, there was no live instruction. So, she could sleep till whenever. And she's getting to the point, like on the weekends, she loves to sleep later. She's going to bed the same time, I'd let her sleep in. That was hard. It's hard. It's been hard to get her up every day, to be on a schedule. But other than that, I'm very happy that they're back. Sorry.

Moderator 1:

Yeah. No, it's okay. So returning to a schedule was an adjustment, but-

Parent 2:

Yeah.

Moderator 1:

Any other challenges people anticipate in returning back, or that they see, and if you've already returned back?

Parent 3:

I foresee that being an issue as well. Because, right now, they can wake up five minutes before their class. They can brush their teeth in between breaks, or between classes rather. Like they can eat in front of the screen. They don't have to worry so much about their outfit, and being comfortable. They can lay in bed when they're in class, it's fine.

Once they start school, they can't do any of that. And my oldest actually expressed that to me. She said, "I'm concerned." Because she started sixth grade this year, and it's a new group of kids. So, she will not know anyone when she goes in for seventh grade in school, because we started talking about it. I said, "Well, most likely you'll be going in, because you guys can't stay remote forever."

And she, herself expressed that, she said, "I don't know if I would feel comfortable with the schedule, with the noise again, and people I don't know." So, I foresee that being an issue. And the schedule, they'd have to get up earlier. They can't just leave the class because they're bored, or walk around with their laptop into a different room because they want to get comfortable. They got to sit at their desk all the time. It's a lot more rigid, there's limitations with that.

But on the other hand, I think having that schedule and having that set routine will be helpful. It's just, I foresee the adjustment period being difficult. And from my youngest, he actually had a lot of anxiety going to school, because of all the issues he was having. He found school being completely overwhelming, and the noise, and the concentration, and the duration of classes was really horrible for him. We would deal with crying spells and meltdowns every single morning.

I'm not looking forward to that, and I anticipate that happening. But at the same time, being ADHD and ODD, being remote is not working for him. So, obviously, he would have to go back to school. Again, I may need some hardcore liquor just to get me through those mornings, because that used to be grueling for us every single morning.

So, for us, parting with the comfort and the informality, but at the same time, looking forward to in-person interactions, social interactions, because that's getting shunted right now. I feel like they're missing out on that and their development is sliding backwards. Because on the screen friends are not the same as in real life friends.

Administrator:

You're muted.

Moderator 1:

I'm still muted. Yeah, sorry. It's noisy outside my window, so I'm trying to mute myself whenever I can. Thank you, Parent 3. That's a good transition into just, for the next 10 or 15 minutes, I'd like to just focus a little bit on talking about gaming, specifically.

I'd like to hear from you a little bit about what was your kids' exposure or experience with gaming before the pandemic? Did you have concerns before the pandemic? Were there benefits before the pandemic? And how has that changed? And what are your concerns, or do you see benefits with gaming? Parent 4, you want to lead us off, because...

Parent 4:

Sure. Sure. Yeah. Well, for Parent 4, Child 2, of course, as I said, the seven-year-old, she just wasn't allowed to do it, so it didn't change. And right now, I don't think she really has the time or facilities to get involved in it, because I won't let her when I'm around, and then in school, people are monitoring. So, it's not an issue for her.

For Parent 4, Child 1, she had started doing that, playing the games and all, but it was just because she didn't have full access to a computer all the time, except just when she was doing homework. It was just, "Here's your time. Now your time's over. Now you're done." I didn't really mind. I would have preferred it was something other than computer game, but if that's what she wanted to do, I didn't really have an issue with that.

But it's just that, now, it just seems like it's always available. And even, sometimes with certain restrictions, she could find a way around it. Instead of using Safari, which was restricted by the computer, she found a way to use Chrome, and I had to work around that. I called Apple and spent hours on the phone to try to figure out how to block that too. And so, it became a real struggle.

I think we've got it under control, but it just does seem that it's just much more focus on the screen. For us, I don't think it's so much that gaming has taken over, because I do have restrictions, but it's just the focus on the computer. And certainly in the time she has, she would go to that. And it's definitely become a social aspect at this point.

It's like, "Oh, can I have a come over?" And then they want to sit and play computer games together. So, "Dude, you just spent all day on the computer, you could have done that at a come over? She's finally in front of you and you're going to sit in front of the computer together?" It's just crazy to me. So...

Moderator 1:

Has she met new people through the game, or it's just the type of thing now that with the friends she's going to-

Parent 4:

No. No. She's focused so much on just making friends with people she knows in the game. And she's mentioned a couple other people, but I have always made it real... We've been very strong for the fact that, "I don't want you be with people you don't know." And as far as I know, she's been respectful of that. Maybe she doesn't let me know, but I think that she's pretty respectful of that. And it's, for her, it's more fun if there are people she already knows. She already has a relationship with them, so that makes it more interpersonal, somehow.

Moderator 1:

Thanks, Parent 4.

Parent 4:

Sure.

Moderator 1:

Anyone else, gaming before or now, and benefits, concerns? Yes, Parent 5.

Parent 5:

It took me a minute to remember before. Well, I mean, one reason is, one of the things I study, and I'm teaching a class on video games now, it's complicated in my house because I am a video gamer. And I knew that, going, before I had kids, that this would be part of our lives. It doesn't mean that they can play whenever and whatever they want.

My kids played some games before the pandemic. I had a lot of control though, because they were not, at that point, technologically able to turn on or unlock any real game by themselves, completely by themselves. They could ask for it and I could give it to them or not. I think that they did have more TV access, typical stuff, but not so much with video games, but they did play. I liked that, but then again, I was curating the game, so I was comfortable with that.

Now, it is, I think I'm still maintaining better control over games than just YouTube access. For me, YouTube is the thing that is everywhere and you can't block it out well enough. Also, it's just, an eight year old shouldn't be watching, 20 year olds, to eight hours a day, just, even if they're not swearing, or something. It's just things that he's learning, that he shouldn't be learning yet.

But he does come home, and that's what all he wants. He wants to play Minecraft, Minecraft, Minecraft. It's not a bad game, but he doesn't have any control. I can't set an hour long limit for him that he would respect. Like I said, I do set limits, but I have to be active in a way that's hard when I'm working full-time, and not getting... We're not out of the house enough, still, I guess, to make it easier, because he can't think of anything else to do. That's the real problem.

If I take it away, I have to take it away for like a whole weekend and he'll start remembering, "Oh yeah, I can think of, we can come up with these other games." But as soon as they get a day of playing games, like I sleep in and they manage to turn it on, then it's just moping and, "I can't play. I can't think of anything. I'm bored." I guess it's a skill that they're going to have to learn though. The ability to respect limits, but also recognize, make choices.

"I have this much gaming time, and I'm going to actively choose what I want to play." He'll do something like, "But I didn't get to do this thing I wanted to do." I was like, "Well, you should have done it before your time right now." I don't know when an eight year old with ADHD is really going to develop that. I definitely had to give in for a while, when they were home all the time. I had to give into it just to get my work done. And that's what I didn't like about the pandemic stuff.

Moderator 1:

Yeah. I see Parent 2 nodding, I know that's something that you mentioned before also, just the need to give in to it.

Parent 2:

Yeah, definitely. I mean, we weren't seeing anyone also, right? This was the only way they could communicate with their friends. I mean, they had each other, but then that was always going to be okay for a little bit, but then they get in fights, and they need their space. Yeah, I'm trying to have the house quiet so I can be on a call, and that would be the only thing I could do for them to not bother me while I'm trying to work.

Parent 5:

Or not start a screaming match in the background, that you can hear.

Parent 2:

Right. Yeah. Now, yeah, it's just snowballed into this... I didn't have an iPad for them. It would be like, "Okay, you can borrow my phone here and there, to play the game." But then it became like, "Oh my God, I got to keep them busy when school wasn't keeping them busy." Because they just had to do it on their own, and they're too young to really... I was the teacher, and working, and trying to do my job and keep them happy. And not enough time and energy for all of that to work.

Moderator 1:

Any other concerns or problems that any of you experienced, regarding gaming?

Parent 3:

If I can go?

Moderator 1:

Yeah.

Parent 3:

One of my main concerns is, as mentioned before, by many of us, kids having access to games and being able to talk to people in the game, I don't know who these people are. They may not be who they say they are. And I've tried to talk to my kids about stranger danger and online safety.

But again, when they feel like they've connected with someone, it's hard for them to not... They could give away certain information without meaning to, or realizing to. And so, then they open themselves up and, potentially, the family up for whatever dangs there are.

I remember I have to constantly remind them, like, "If someone's asking you how old you are, if you're a boy or a girl, it doesn't matter. You joke around with them, you don't have to be rude. You could say, 'I'm a dog, and I'm seven in dog years, or something.' Like, 'Well, I'm 40 in dog years.' Make it a joke. Say, 'I'm an alien. I'm a monster.' So they think that you're just goofing around.'''"

I want them to understand that people may not what they are, but they have this image in their head, of who they're playing with. And it's hard, because we're talking about seven year olds and 60 year olds playing in the same platform. They're all different frames of mind, and different psychological stability, you know? So, I have that concern.

It's been hard for me to explain it to the younger one. The older one seems to get it, but even so, there's still issues. That's been the biggest thing for me with the games. Aside all the horrible things, in terms of addiction, isolation, ignoring me when I ask for something, and having tantrums when I take it away, but the safety. And understanding that you have to keep in mind that you don't know who's on the other end.

Moderator 1:

Yeah. That's really an important point, especially-

Parent 5:

I would not say that accounts for my kids. That's the one thing I have managed to keep control of, because they needed... So far, everything needed me to okay it. It would be great if they could play with their friends, and they let them play one game like that, which was among us.

Because the chat time was so short that... It wasn't as bad as some of the others. But there are still problematic things that happened, because I played it, like friends that play, it is adults and children.

And I tried to talk to them about the same thing. About, "You shouldn't ever give out your age." And like, "But why?" "It doesn't matter." I was like, "Well, because sometimes people can use that information to locate children and kidnap them." Was like, "I wouldn't go with them."

And I'm just like, "Just stop giving away information about yourself." That's one area I'm very hesitant to give them access to, but the pressure is mounting as more of their friends are doing it. And it is a social... I like the social part if it's all eight year olds, or something, but the mixed group thing was very difficult.

Moderator 1:

Right. I guess last question... I feel like I know the answer to this, based on some of the things you said. And so, thinking about the changes that have happened in gaming use, is there anything with gaming that you would like to see continue as we return back to school? What do you hope for about gaming, as we go back?

Parent 4:

Well, I think you already know my answer to that.

Moderator 1:

Yeah, I feel like this has come up. I mean, Parent 5, you did bring up that there can be a nice social aspect, but it also seems like there's a pressure, because everybody is using it. So, restrict their use of it, then you're leaving them out of something that everybody else is doing.

Parent 3:

I mean, there's also positive things. Granted, I hate the darn thing. It's driving me mad. And yes, they are in it way too much. But it forced my son to start doing math, because when he's in Minecraft and he has to calculate his resources, even though he says he hates math, somehow, he's able to quickly pick up on how many more resources he needs, what he has, and how much of it he needs. It just becomes second nature to him.

And I tried to explain to him before, when he said, "I hate math. It's useless." I said, "But you use math in Minecraft." He says, "No, but that doesn't count, because that's fun." You know? It has its positive aspect. Also, my husband is a gamer, and this gives them an opportunity to bond, and they can play the games together. Also, on the days when they can see their friends, they could play the games together among us. When they do a private game and they'll do it together, that's fine.

If there could be some way to ensure that we're not having such different range of ages play, and we could ensure, in some way, the safety of them playing on, and maybe have more control in limitations, in terms of how much time they can spend on there, I don't mind it. Because, like I said, it has some uses. It forced him to read, also, because he has to read the instructions, you know? Whereas before, he would just walk away. It does, but if it's uncontrolled, unmonitored, it's just free for all, and definitely, yeah. That's my five cents out there.

Moderator 1:

Well said, Parent 3.

Parent 5:

And one-

Moderator 1:

Yes. Yeah, Parent 5?

Parent 5:

One positive was... And it was among us again. Just, I don't know why that one game, but my kids have a same-age cousin, who, they've always lived on opposite sides of the country. So they've met her a few times, but they've actually formed a closer relationship with her than they ever did before.

Because my brother and I were just more motivated, because they weren't each seeing their separate friends, so we connected them on the phone so they could talk and play this game together at the same time. But yeah, that was in a private room with, with, I'm trying to keep an eye on who else is joining. And these games, if all on the developers' side, they absolutely could make it safer.

First of all, as long as it's definitely not made with kids in mind, and YouTube made YouTube Kids, but you can't block out... I don't know. Maybe there needs to be more pressure. I just feel like YouTube shouldn't be something that you can't say, "Look, I don't want it on this computer." You can't block it, because if you block it on Safari, you can get to it through-

Parent 3:

Also Chrome.

Parent 5:

... Google searches. It shouldn't be that difficult to say, "I'm the parent, I don't want this."

Moderator 1:

Right. But I guess the developer-

Parent 5:

And I usually do it all the time.

Moderator 1:

It sounds like the developer-

Parent 5:

There's nothing that they can do. Yeah. But they have no motivation to do it right now-

Moderator 1:

Exactly.

Parent 5:

... because they're making money. That could be done, I don't know how to make them do it, though.

Moderator 1:

Right. And we just still have to operate in this world where it's not done. So, okay. Any last thoughts on gaming before we end it for today?

Parent 1:

I think it'll be a hard road to introduce balance into his life on, and after times, whatever the hell that is. Because, to pry him away from the screen, when that's been his lifeblood over more than a year, it's going to be very hard to get him biking, and hanging out with friends, and whatever. I think it's going to be hard.

Just because they do talk over games with his specific friends, it's going to be step-by-step and two steps backwards, several times. I mean, you really have to gird yourself for... When you want to just burst free into this other thing, it doesn't work that way. Usually, you got to keep these incremental little things. That's frustrating.

Moderator 1:

Yeah. Okay. Well, I know that's not the happiest time to end up on. But I just want to say I really appreciate everyone taking time, and really going in depth on technology with that. This is really helpful for our research, to hear the qualitative side of exactly how it's impacting everyone. Administrator, are you available? Are you there? Do you want to just tell them about the town hall, or the compensation?

Administrator:

Sorry. I'm doing multiple things in one time.

Moderator 1:

Sorry. I know. I should have texted you on phone, first.

Administrator:

No. So sorry, Moderator 1. Yeah, so I'm on the call. I just want to reiterate what Moderator 1 said. Just, thank you guys so much for just participating in today's group, and all the information that you gave us. It's really useful, all the information that you gave us.

Because, as we're seeing just with our families, we're just seeing a lot of commonalities in the ways in which technology and the pandemic have just been beneficial and not beneficial. We just thank you guys for your time today.

In regards to the compensation, you should receive compensation no later than tomorrow evening. If not, by Friday, but it should come in tomorrow. And if you have any questions or concerns, you guys can just email me back at the emails.

I know some of you guys had multiple emails, but you guys can just respond to any of those emails, or you can give me a call at my number. It's going to be at the bottom of the emails.

Moderator 1:

Okay. It was really nice to meet you all. And thank you, again. Have a good rest of the afternoon.

Parent 1:

All right, thank you.

Parent 2:

Okay. All right. You too.

Moderator 1:

Bye.

Parent 2:

Bye. (silence).