Parent 1:

(silence) Hello.

Administrator:

Hi there, how are you?

Parent 1:

I'm doing well. Do you want my camera on?

Administrator:

So you can leave it off for right now and then once everybody joins on, then you can turn on your camera.

Parent 1:

Okay, no problem.

Administrator:

I'm going to mute my mic as well, but once everybody comes on, then I'll reintroduce myself.

Parent 1:

Okay, sounds good, thanks (silence).

Moderator 2:

Hi (silence).

Hi. [Administrator 00:11:45], I know you are on. Who else is on?

Administrator:

So, we have Parent 1. I am getting a call from another parent, give me...

Moderator 2:

Parent 1?

Parent 1:

Yes, hi.

Moderator 2:

Hi. I'm going to give it one more minute and then we might have to reschedule if the other parents aren't showing up.

Parent 1:

Oh, okay.

Moderator 2:

I am so sorry (silence).

Administrator?

Administrator:

Hi Moderator 2.

Moderator 2:

I think we're going to wrap. Oh. Is anyone else going to join?

Administrator:

Yeah, I was just on the phone with a parent. Another parent is supposed to be joining, she said she got the link and she was signing on. I'll call her again right now just to see if she's still able to sign on if you want.

Moderator 2:

I guess, okay. But we're going to get started and we'll do this quickly. It won't take as long because there's not as many people. So, hi everyone. Hold on a second, trying to load something. Thank you for agreeing to participate today. I am sorry that we are starting late, but as you know, there were not people on earlier. This is a short-ish focus group. I have a couple of questions that I want to talk to you about, but before we get started, why don't you tell me your name and about your child who participated in this study?

Parent 2:

Me?

Moderator 2:

Sure.

Parent 2:

Oh, okay. My name is Parent 2 and my eight-year-old daughter, Parent 2, Child 1, participated in the Healthy Brain Study because I wanted to participate in the study because I felt my daughter has ADHD. And once she went through the whole process and everything, it was diagnosed, she was diagnosed with ADHD and they suggested that I put her on medication and try different methods when it comes to her attention deficit, right? Because that's what it is, it's attention deficit. And she's hyper, so it's both. I have not put her on medication as of yet because at the time when all this was going on, the pandemic started and kind of put a hold on a lot of things.

Moderator 2:

Parent 1?

Parent 1:

Hi, my name is Parent 1. I had actually two of my children participate in the study. Parent 1, Child 1, she was nine at the time, and Parent 1, Child 2, who was eight at the time. Parent 1, Child 1 was diagnosed with ADHD. We actually already saw a neurologist and we kept the medication the same. With Parent 1, Child 2, we had a diagnosis of ADHD and anxiety, which explained a lot, it helped us deal more with her behavioral problems because it was very different than Parent 1, Child 1's. But we didn't put Parent 1, Child 2 on any medication. Honestly, because with COVID, it was hard. Both of the kids were at home studying remotely and they both have paras in school, so they have a lot of support in their school environment currently.

Moderator 2:

Okay. So I just want to learn a little bit about what the experience of using technology before and during COVID was like for you. If you each can just tell me more about how your children used technology for educational purposes prior to the pandemic. Was it beneficial? Did you have problems with it? This is before quarantine started. If we can remember that far back.

Parent 1:

Yeah, I know, it was a long time. It was, well, nearly 18 months now, right?

Moderator 2:

Yeah.

Parent 1:

Well, before COVID, obviously they were going to school in the day instead of being home all day, so technology use was very limited. It was more our school uses a system called i-Ready for reading and math, so a lot of the homework was done through that. It's more like extra support, it's a diagnostic tool as well, and they used it this year as well. But it's basically, in school, they would do the diagnostic to see what level the kids are in math and reading, and then after that, at home, they basically, on their own pace, they had to do a certain amount of i-Ready a day, a week, it depended on the teacher, but it was between 30 minutes, or 40 minutes, or it could have been an hour a week in total. Each teacher did it differently. But that was really the only technological usage at home.

Moderator 2:

Okay. Parent 2, you're muted.

Parent 2:

Oh, sorry about that. I'm going to say the same for my daughter. Prior to the pandemic, technology wasn't used that much unless it was to play games on the tablet or, I don't know, watch YouTube Kids or something like that. But throughout the pandemic and the remote learning, it was a lot of technology usage this year. I don't want to say that it helped. I think that in-person is much better than any technology offered, honestly, for so many different reasons. But I feel like the kids, they tend to get sucked into the tablets and the technology and then they forget about everything else going on around them.

Parent 1:

Yeah.

Moderator 2:

And what were they using technology for during the pandemic?

Parent 2:

School, school. And school and other activities, like I said, whether it was to play games or watch-

Moderator 2:

[crosstalk 00:20:23] trouble with it?

Parent 2:

No. I wouldn't say it was... It was hard to get her to stay focused during the class time, even though it was a short amount of time. She was in class from about 8:00 to 11:30 every day and it was a little hard to keep her focused. Just to sit in front of a iPad for that amount of time, it was a bit hard to keep her focused on that.

Moderator 2:

What about you Parent 1?

Parent 1:

Yeah, our kids were full remote, so they were on technology from 8:00, about 8:30 in the morning, to about 2:00 every day, it depended on the school schedule. So they had things throughout the day, so I think they had about, on average, two and a half hours of live meetings on Zoom or Google Meets with the teacher or in small groups. And some time was given for i-Ready, which they kept using remotely. Some time was also asynchronous work, so to complete some worksheet or some kind of like... They also used, I think Pearson owns it, Savvas for their math. So they did that. The only real issue we had with technology was some of the apps didn't always work. So initially, we had the kids on the iPad and we noticed that the iPad wasn't as compatible with some of the programs, so it was very frustrating, so we switched them to a computer, a PC, each.

Moderator 2:

Okay.

Parent 1:

And also the parental controls on the PC because I've noticed that my daughters kept flipping back and forth because we had to have things like YouTube open because the teachers would use it in school and the kids would just watch YouTube for hours and hours and hours or they would play games like Minecraft and flip through it. So once we were onto it, we could ban or block certain things, but it wasn't easy because they were on technology all the time and it was six hours of that or seven hours of that. I felt like my older daughter did better, she's a little bit more self-reliant in her personality, so people distract her, so compared to school, she was really advanced and she finished really early and she did a lot more enrichment. My younger daughter, she struggled a lot more keeping focused, she needed almost like that physical school environment because she was distracted by the technology, all the apps that were on the computer.

Moderator 2:

Okay. And have your children returned to school full-time yet?

Parent 1:

Not yet, they will in September. The school announced that it's going to be physical now, schooling.

Moderator 2:

What challenges do you think will come up as they go back to school full-time?

Parent 2:

I personally think it's going to be hard, it's going to be a transition. They have to get back adapted to the structure and the rules and the being in the class for so many hours. Just waking up in the morning, getting dressed, leaving. I think they're going to have to get used to all that all over again, so. And as far as the teachers, I don't know, I don't know what to tell them, I commend them though because I know it's going to be hard, you know.

Parent 1:

That's funny because I'm actually a teacher, I teach high school, so it's been hard, the remote. So there's certain things I liked being a teacher remote versus in the classroom. But my older daughter, she's moving into middle school, so the transition shouldn't be too... She's already transitioning, so I feel like, for her, it will be easier. But my younger daughter, because she's continuing elementary school, I think she's going to have more of an issue with that structure. You need the bathroom at home, you just get up and go.

Parent 2:

Right, mm-hmm (affirmative).

Parent 1:

Food is better at home, those little things. She also got annoyed with other students when students would act inappropriately on the chat or call out. And I noticed that was the one frustration with the remote because she's like, "I can't believe [inaudible 00:25:25] is talking over the teacher." So I'm wondering if that's going to be a frustration more in the environment because that's something that's even... You have a lot of controls online, you can turn off chat, you can silence students, mute everybody.

But she does have a para physically, so I think that's going to also help her because this year, because the para was also remote, it was all phone conversations. And I think she almost needed that physical organization. And I also think handwriting, everything was typed, everything was recorded, Flipgrid or anything else. But the kids didn't really write for 14 months, they didn't hold a pen for 14 months, so that's another transition. There's certain things, like the state tests, unless you have an accommodation where you have that writing accommodation, which we might really go for, but the idea that you don't even think about these things or the remote situation hinders it.

Parent 2:

Well, my kids, they did some writing. I would have to go to the school, pick up books for them, and things like that, so. I mean, because I have a kindergartner, he was in kindergarten, and then I have my daughter who participated in the program. My son didn't participate in the program, my daughter's the one who participated. But dealing with them both doing this remote thing, my son didn't even get to start at the big school, as we call it, yet, so.

But my daughter, she had all her IEP, she had speech therapy, she had extra special ed, I guess, it's special classes, special, extra alone time with a specific teacher that just works with her individually because of the ADHD. And if they had been in school for this school year, she would have got a lot of in-person time with whoever she needed to. But because it was remote, I feel like she probably didn't get as much time with everybody as she should have. So I'm excited that they'll be going back in September so that they can get the hours that they need, that they really need, or that they should have gotten this year but they didn't.

Moderator 2:

Do you have any other concerns or comments you want to make about what your children's technology use was like during quarantine?

Parent 3:

For me, I think the challenge and the thing that is more concerning is the emotional and psychological and self-esteem. I'm a single mom, I only have one child, but what I notice in general, and he's going on fifth grade, and he can't wait to go in person. But I think the curriculum and many other things, we can support them, but there's a part of them emotionally that I hope they have enough understanding and empathy around them to make them feel safe enough to express how they feel. That, to me, it's been one of my biggest concern.

Parent 1:

Oh, I agree. It was very isolating for the kids. I mean, I'm lucky that the girls are so close together because they have each other to talk to, but they're still siblings, so they miss their friends. They were very isolated from other kids. So just even that interaction, even talking to other people. And I don't know about the long-term health effects too because I noticed that Parent 1, Child 2 did this weird blinking thing by the end of the school year with her eyes. And I'm like, "Is that anxiety? Is that eye strain?" But I cut them off technology after the school year was over and it seemed to go away, so I'm wondering if it's just that intense... When they're staring on the computer screen, they don't take breaks like adults. Adults might say, "All right, I'm doing this, I'm writing this email, I'm going to take a 15-minute break." The kids are just on it for seven hours straight, they're eating lunch in front of the screen.

Moderator 2:

Yeah.

Parent 1:

Yeah, that regulation wasn't there. So definitely, that's that problem too. It was more like, "We did school, now we want to go and watch YouTube or play Minecraft." But it's like, "You were on technology for six hours, you're on it for two more hours, are you kidding me?"

Moderator 2:

What are your kids doing for this summer?

Parent 1:

Oh, we're actually traveling across the country. We're in Minnesota right now, we've been doing a road trip. So we left the tablets home. I only have my laptop and my phone to take pictures and the computer to book hotels and watch Netflix, but that's it. It is complete cold turkey and they haven't asked for it. The only technology they have is, I got them Kindles, so they're reading a lot, which is [crosstalk 00:31:10]. So we're going to keep that, that form of technology, but the Kindle is like a book, you can't do anything else on it.

Moderator 2:

Yeah.

Moderator 2:

That's great.

Parent 3:

So, I have a question and I don't know if this is part of the conversation, there's an incognizance for how our childrens are going to deal when the new year starts and how all this emotions and stress and anxiety may hit. And a lot of families don't have sometimes the opportunities, for example, to travel like that. And they still at home, they still in the city. How can we support childrens as we sort of moving into "our new normality," but the childrens under 12 are the most at risk right now, not only for this new virus and all of this, but also the emotional?

And I think we've been all living in a certain bubble, and yesterday, I got on the subway for the first time, and the subway got stuck in one part, and I literally, for the first time, I thought I was going to have a panic attack. So I'm thinking, I'm an adult and I'm able to control because I am a Buddhist, I meditate, I have tools. But I just got on the subway not even thinking how it's going to hit me. And I kept thinking about how childrens are going to feel and act when they go back to school and how can we support them without putting too much our own anxiety into them? I feel like childrens in many way have been my second heroes after nurses and doctors because they've been more resilient and more empathetic with this than sometimes the adults. But my concern is how we moving forward and how can we support them and catch little things to give them the tools or at least support?

Moderator 2:

Well, I don't have answers for you.

Parent 3:

No, maybe somebody has an idea or maybe somebody else has been thinking the same thing as me, I'm just sharing.

Moderator 2:

I mean, I certainly would recommend you come to the town hall where we talk about the results of this and maybe some suggestions there will be helpful for you. I think supporting your kids is doing the best you can do, right? So-

Parent 3:

Because during this year, for example, I put my kid in this acting classes on Zoom because he's a fan of [Dogman 00:33:57] and I found this remote acting class and it was great. We go on the bike, we take walks, we read every day, a real book, for 20 minutes, I sit with him, one page him, one page me. I try to do anything that I can, but we've been in this bubble that we all have build the best that we can. It's like, what's going to happen in September?

Parent 1:

I think those-

Moderator 2:

Well, I think-

Parent 1:

Oh, I'm sorry. Oh, I was going to say because I also have a teacher's perspective and I think that's why I left the city because we're avoiding cities, we're in the country, the kids are complaining about bugs. We're like, "We haven't seen so many moths come out." But it's part of the fun. But I think with kids being resilient in these [inaudible 00:34:53] September, it has to be a community working with the school and having a plan because I know they were pushing the social, emotional piece within my school and within the kids' school, so that has to continue. And it has to be a community effort because that's the bubble we're in, that's the pod we're in with those people, and how can we support each other.

And I think also tone down the fear, I know the variant... I mean, I follow the news. The variant is scary, but just seeing life in the Midwest, people here are completely different than the city. I know it's a smaller population, the town we're in right now, it's like 1,500 people, but people are just living their lives, the kids are just running around. So it's interesting to see the different perspectives. And I think part of it is because we're from New York and we have so many people that live around us, so any outbreak is a lot more serious than in the Midwest. But it's just like, has this also consumed our lives to the point that we're not even living?

Moderator 2:

I also think it's important to remind children that they are safe, that even if they are not vaccinated and under 12, that the overwhelming likelihood of what we know about the virus is that it will impact them very minimally. So reducing fear, having open conversations, is going to help your children adapt to going back to school and being in an open environment.

Parent 2:

I agree with that.

Moderator 2:

But if you want more suggestions, I would definitely recommend coming to the town hall when we're done so that you can hear... All the study information. Does anyone else have anything they want to add? All right, well, we will wrap up then. Administrator, do you want to go over compensation?

Administrator:

Yes. So first, thank you all so much for participating in the focus group today. Once this is over, I will be sending over your emails to our administrator. You should receive compensation no later than Friday, so if by Friday you don't receive any compensation, please do not hesitate to either email me or give me a call and we'll get that sorted out. And just to reiterate what Moderator 2 said, we are compiling all of this information to host a town hall meeting before September. So once we have that finalized, I'll be reaching out to you guys for that information. We will be sharing some resources and some tips just based on the information that we collected from the focus groups and from the surveys that you guys completed, some different strategies and tools that might be helpful for both you and your children to navigate just this COVID lifestyle and education and all the things that you guys have raised concerns about.

Parent 1:

Great, thank you.

Parent 2:

Thank you very much.

Parent 3:

Thank you.

Administrator:

Thank you all so much.

Moderator 2:

Thank you very much everybody.

Parent 3:

It was very nice to hear the concerns, it makes also I think parents feel like we're not alone, so thank you for sharing.

Moderator 2:

Thank you.

Parent 3:

Bye.

Parent 1:

Thank you.