

# The Home Learning Environment During Year 2 of COVID-19

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## Introduction

- Most research about home practices during COVID-19 was collected during the beginning of the pandemic and showed that children engaged in more literacy and digital activities at home than before the pandemic (Sonnenschein et al., 2020)
- We know far less about whether the frequency of these activities continued. Barnett and Jung’s (2021) findings with a national sample of 992 U.S. families of young children suggest home reading activities decreased from March to December 2020.
- It is critical to understand home practices during the pandemic given the decrease in academic performances as noted by the recent special administration of the NAEP long-term trend reading and math assessments.

### Research Questions:

- Are parents and their children spending more, less, or the same amount of time in May 2021 engaged in literacy and digital activities compared to March 2020?
- Do these changes differ for pre-school aged children (two to four years old) versus school aged children (five to eight years old), given differences in their schooling and development?
- What reasons are there for changes in home behaviors specific to literacy and digital activities?

## Methods

### Participants:

- N= 151 parents (although number varied by question)
- This study uses U.S. only data from a larger international study on parents’ behaviors and activities with their children ages two through eight years.
- Data were collected in May 2021.
- Participants were recruited via social media sites and list-serves

Table 1. Demographics

Outcome	M or %	SD
% of Female Children	56.6%	
Child’s Grade		
Younger (Not Yet Attending School - Preschool)	61.6%	
Older (Kindergarten - 3rd Grade)	38.4%	
% Mother Respondents	93.2%	
Parent Age	39.2	5.4
% Parents Employed	74.3%	
% Parents Married/Partnered	95.0%	
Parent Highest Education Level		
Some College	11.1%	
At Least Bachelor’s Degree	88.9%	
% Parents Race/Ethnicity: White	81.0%	

## Methods

### Procedure and Measures:

- Participants responded to an online Qualtrics survey consisting of 123 questions, a few of which were selected for the present study:

To what extent has the following changed from March 2020 to now (use the below scale):				
5	4	3	2	1
increased a lot	increased	stayed the same	decreased	decreased a lot
•The amount of time your child uses digital devices. •The level of your involvement in selecting digital content for your child •The amount of time you spend shared printed book reading with your child •The amount of time you spend shared digital book reading with your child				
Why has the amount of time you and your child engaged in home literacy activities changed? •Requests from school to do literacy activities •My child initiates these activities •I initiate these activities •Other: please specify				
Why has the amount of time you and your child engaged in digital literacy activities changed? •Requests from school to do digital activities •My child initiates these activities •I initiate these activities •Other: please specify				

## Results

**Research Question 1: Are parents and their children spending more, less, or the same amount of time engaged in literacy and digital activities compared to March 2020?**

Table 2. Change in Home Activities for Overall Sample

Has there been a change over the past year in the ...	% increased	% decreased	% stayed same
Amount of time child uses digital devices	81.6%	3.4%	14.9%
Level of parent involvement in selecting digital content for child	33.0%	21.6%	45.5%
Amount of time parent spent shared print book reading with child	35.2%	15.9%	48.9%
Amount of time parent spent shared digital book reading with child	14.8%	7.9%	77.3%

- Most parents noted an increase in the amount of time their children used digital devices since March 2020.
- Parent involvement in selecting digital content was variable across parents, as was the amount of time parents spent shared print book reading with their children.
- In contrast, most parents said the amount of time they read digital books with their children remained the same.

## Results

**Research Question 2: Do these changes differ for pre-school aged children (two to four years old) versus school aged children (five to eight years old), given differences in their schooling?**

Table 3. Change in Home Activities by Age Group

	Younger Children		Older Children		t
	M	SD	M	SD	
Has there been a change over the past year in the ...					
Amount of time child uses digital devices	3.94	1.03	4.63	.55	-3.6**
Level of parent involvement in selecting digital content for child	3.24	.94	3.14	1.19	.42
Amount of time parent spent shared print book reading with child	3.40	.70	2.89	.99	2.8*
Amount of time parent spent shared digital book reading with child	3.10	.36	3.06	.77	.35

Note. \*\* =  $p \leq .001$ ; \* =  $p \leq .01$ .  
Scale: 1- Decreased a lot; 3- Stayed the same; 5 - Increased a lot.

- Parents of older children reported significantly greater increases in the amount of time their children used digital devices compared to parents of younger children.
- Parents of older children reported significantly greater decreases in shared print book reading compared to parents of younger children.

**Research Question 3: What reasons are there for changes in home behaviors specific to literacy and digital activities?**

Table 4. Reasons for Changes in Digital Activities by Age Group

Reason for change in the amount of time children engaged in...	Digital Activities			
	% School-Initiated	% Child-Initiated	% Parent-Initiated	% Other Reasons
Younger Children	12.5%	54.2%	25.0%	8.3%
Older Children	36.4%	45.5%	13.6%	4.5%

Table 5. Reasons for Changes in Literacy Activities by Age Group

Reason for change in the amount of time children engaged in...	Home Literacy Activities			
	% School-Initiated	% Child-Initiated	% Parent-Initiated	% Other Reasons
Younger Children	0.0%	25.0%	62.0%	12.5%
Older Children	12.0%	8.0%	64.0%	16.0%

## Results

**Research Question 3 Cont.**

- A sizable percentage of parents of both groups reported that the changes in digital activities were child-initiated whereas a sizable percentage of parents in both groups reported that the changes in literacy activities were parent-initiated.
- Many of the changes in digital activities were child-initiated for both groups. However, with older children, schools also initiated over a third of the changes being reported.
- School-initiated changes were noted more by parents of both groups in digital activities versus literacy activities.

Table 6. Additional Selected “Other” Reasons Parents Provided for Changes in Home Activities

Digital Activities	
“Libraries reopened, so we have print books...also lots of time on iPad”	“Don’t do a lot of digital books”
“All of the above. We would read paper books everyday, but since discovering online programs, we do a lot more digital literacy activities.”	
Home Literacy Activities	
“He’s in daycare school now so I’m not at home reading to him as often but we still read every night”	“It’s a battle to get him to want to do it. I also work more than I did before at home at night.”
“We do not engage in literacy activities as much because my daughter is exhausted after a full day on the computer. Bedtime also used to be special time, but now that we are together all the time, we’ve abandoned our reading routine. My child’s reading progress has stalled because she hasn’t been able to go to school in person.”	

## Conclusions

- Parents of children ages two to eight years old reported significant changes in the nature of their educational home environment between March 2020 and May 2021.
  - More specifically, there were both age-related changes and activity-related changes (see above tables).
- There were greater increases noted in use of digital devices by parents of older children compared to parents of younger children. This may reflect increased school demands as well as an increased level of proficiency with digital platforms. On the other hand, such results may reflect children’s interests given that the changes in reported digital usage was more due to child-initiated efforts than school- or parent-initiated efforts.

### Limitations:

- This was a predominantly White, educated, U.S. sample. Future research should expand the diversity of the respondents.

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