The past three months have been difficult for everyone—especially children and families. California State PTA has been asking parents throughout the state how things are going and what they need. In such a large diverse state the answers are varied.

But there are few universal concerns about the health & safety.

These seem to fall into three main categories:

1. Concerns about the social emotional wellbeing of children, their families and teachers.
2. Concerns about communication—Parents want to know what is going on and what the school plans to do. They would also like to be part of the process.
3. Concerns for our most venerable children –students with special needs, socioeconomically disadvantaged families and other vulnerable students. All kids need to be considered.

California State PTA was a part of the State Superintendent’s Reopening Schools Task Force and we were glad to share the parent perspective in those discussions. We support the recommendations in the “Stronger Together” report and we support those decisions being made at local school districts. We appreciate all who worked on these guidelines.

PTA hears from parents across the state. In May We held a listening session to ask families how things are going?

These are some of the comments:

Kate a mother of one son said: “I have good days and bad days. But the social emotional aspect is the hardest --my son is missing his friends and he has to stay home with me all day.”

A mom of three said: it’s hard to hear my kids crying. They miss their teachers and friends. They are afraid and don’t know what is going on. They want to know what to expect and I don’t know what to tell them.

Rebecca a mom of two said: personally, I’m great but I’m completely disconnected from school community. The school is not telling us anything and we hear different things on the news. Is it safe, not safe, will schools open, change the schedule, require masks? Just tell us what is going on.

Michelle a mom of a high schooler said: I’m Nervous about what the future of education looks like with cuts to education funding.

Erin said: I wish there was more support for parents through this.

Javier said: I’m really concerned about health, with things opening up, but also concerned about how parents, including myself, are going to be able to work. I wish I knew what was going on.

Shauna: My kids don’t want to leave the house. This could be because of concerns around the virus and not being allowed into places or just getting used to being home. This will be an especially tough issue when kids need to go back to school.

Parents talked about tantrums and meltdowns, concerns about too much screen time and no way to turn off the news—all seem concerned about mental health especially as their children return to school.

When talking about returning to school parents mentioned: their kids were afraid, concerns about COVID-19 and about kids wearing masks, touching, hugging, being alone, being in groups, and bullying.

And the other major concern parents had was getting accurate information. They said they felt disconnected, were hearing conflicting messages and didn’t know what to believe or how to get accurate information.

PTA strongly recommends schools engage families early in the reopening process, include them in the discussion and decision-making. As schools share best practices and protocols parents can express concerns and offer suggestions early. When families will have a better understanding of what is going and why actions are being taken; they can help support the health and safety efforts. Clear accurate information is very important.

We suggest engaging families in activities to help them feel more comfortable returning to school.

Parents want to make sure everyone has access to appropriate equipment-- schools should have extra thermometers, wipes, masks and whatever else might be needed. Parents are concerned about social distancing, proper handwashing, making sure there are basic things like soap and paper towels in bathrooms.

They would like to know if there will there be extra councilors, nurses, or other staff to address the social emotional and health needs of students?

They are concerned about how they will balance their work schedules—with proposed school flex schedules. Please keep in mind families with multiple children when considering schedule changes.

Families want to know their children are safe and healthy in our schools, they want to know what is going on and to be part of the solution if possible.