

Parents and Schools During a Pandemic

Results of a National Survey



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Executive Summary

The coronavirus pandemic has altered schooling in unprecedented ways. As schools moved rapidly from in-person instruction to remote learning in early 2020, educators and policymakers faced a host of new challenges. They had to deliver online instruction, try to ensure students had access to the internet and devices, and address the social-emotional needs of young people amidst the disruption and isolation prompted by the pandemic. Education leaders ultimately had to also develop plans and protocols intended to keep students safe from the virus when their schools would reopen for in-person instruction.

As educators grappled with such dramatic changes and challenges, an important question emerged: How do parents view schools' response to the pandemic? To learn more, the EdWeek Research Center surveyed more than 2,000 parents whose children attended public and private K-12 schools. The nationally representative survey, which was conducted August 17-24 of 2020, sheds light on how parents thought about a range of key educational issues at a time when the pandemic stretched into the start of the 2020-21 school year.

Survey findings include:

- Only half of parents trusted their children's schools to safeguard their health if in-person instruction occurs during the pandemic. Just 50 percent described their level of trust as somewhat, very, or extremely high.
- Asian American and white parents reported higher confidence levels than their Black or Latinx peers. Fifty-seven percent of Asian American and 53 percent of white parents trusted schools to protect their children's health compared with about 4 in 10 Black and Latinx parents.
- Fifty-six percent of parents with a bachelor's degree or higher trusted schools compared with just 45 percent of parents with less education.
- Levels of trust varied along political lines as well. More than 6 in 10 respondents intending to vote for Donald Trump in the November 2020 presidential election said they trusted their children's schools to protect their health in an in-person setting but only 43 percent of respondents expecting to vote for Joe Biden expressed that degree of confidence.
- Only 16 percent of parents said that schools couldn't do (or fail to do) anything that would impact whether they trust them.
- Two-thirds of parents found help from their children's schools on using educational technology to be at least somewhat adequate. The share finding it extremely or very strong drops to 35 percent.
- The majority of parents (53%) saw their children's schools as providing at least somewhat adequate social-emotional support. But just over one-quarter (28%) described that support as extremely or very strong.

Those findings indicate that school policies and practices can make a difference in building parents' confidence in the ability of their children's schools to keep them safe during the pandemic. They also highlight areas in which parents believed schools could provide additional support to help student learning.

Introduction

The EdWeek Research Center has been examining the coronavirus pandemic's impact on schools and those they serve. Since the onset of the pandemic in early 2020, K-12 students have faced staggering disruptions in many aspects of their day-to-day lives, including significant changes in their educational experiences. With schools suddenly shutting down in-person instruction and classes shifting almost overnight to remote learning, it's no surprise that the upheaval has affected students and educators in myriad ways. But it has also had an impact on another group of vital stakeholders: the parents who have to adjust to and shepherd their children through this unprecedented educational environment. To learn more about their views, the research center — with support from the Walton Family Foundation — surveyed more than 2,000 parents whose children attended public and private K-12 schools.

The nationally representative survey, which was fielded August 17-24, 2020, revealed a mix of positive and negative views on key issues connected to schooling, with perspectives on some issues varying by race/ethnicity, educational attainment, and political orientation.

Perhaps, most strikingly, only half of parents trusted their children's schools to safeguard their health if in-person instruction occurs during the pandemic. Just 50 percent described their level of trust as somewhat, very, or extremely high. Asian American and white parents had higher levels of trust than their Black or Latinx peers. Fifty-seven percent of Asian American and 53 percent of white parents trusted schools to protect their children's health compared with roughly 4 in 10 Black and Latinx parents. Fifty-six percent of parents with a bachelor's degree or higher trusted schools compared with just 45 percent of parents with less education.

Levels of trust varied along political lines as well. A solid majority (61%) of respondents planning to vote for Donald Trump in the November 2020 presidential election said they trusted their children's schools to safeguard their health in an in-person setting but just 43 percent of respondents planning to vote for Joe Biden shared that confidence.

The large share of parents reporting a lack of trust suggests that schools will have to work to build families' confidence as schools reopen. When asked about the factors that impact whether they trust the ability of their children's schools to protect their health, the majority cited adequate social distancing (58%), approaches to cleaning (56%), mask requirements (53%), and requirements for sick students and staff to stay home (51%).

As the pandemic stretches through the 2020-21 school year, many Americans continue to debate whether schools should reopen, as well as the degree to which students will suffer academically and emotionally as a result of remote learning.

As of the August 2020 survey, 53 percent of parents said they believed their children's schools provided adequate social-emotional support and parents were split on how their children's academic progress during the pandemic compared to before the coronavirus emerged. Just over one-third reported their children made less progress than usual in reading or English/language arts during the pandemic, but slightly more than one-quarter cited more progress. Thirty-seven percent said their children's progress was the same as usual. Four in 10 pointed to less than typical progress in math. On the other hand, one-quarter saw more growth than before the pandemic in that subject and 36 percent found no change.

SURVEY DETAILS

Surveys Administered: August 17-24, 2020

Sample: Nationally-representative

Method: Online

Respondents: 2,092 parents of students attending public and private K-12 schools

Respondent Demographics

The EdWeek Research Center surveyed 2,092 parents of K-12 students in order to learn more about their views on schooling during the pandemic. The parents participating in the nationally representative survey varied by socioeconomic background and political orientation. They also had differing experiences with the coronavirus, itself.

To qualify as eligible for the survey, respondents had to report that back in January 2020 (before the coronavirus pandemic) they expected at least one of their children to enroll in an elementary, middle, or high school grade in the fall of that year. The majority (57%) had at least one child in elementary school.

Most parents participating in the survey are female (60%). The majority of the respondents identified as white (60%). Roughly one-quarter (24%) are Latinx and 16 percent are Black or African American.

Survey respondents by race/ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage
Alaska Native	0%
American Indian	3%
Asian	6%
Black/ African American	16%
Hispanic/Latinx	24%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1%
Other	1%
White	60%

Fifty-five percent of respondents said that a child had at some point qualified for free or reduced-price meals at school, a measure often used to indicate family poverty.

Fifty percent of parents had an associate's degree or less. About one-quarter (28%) earned a bachelor's degree, with the remaining respondents receiving a master's, doctoral, or professional degree.

When the survey was administered in August 2020, nearly half of respondents (49%) reported that they planned to vote for Joe Biden in the November 2020 presidential election. Just over one-third (34%) planned to vote for Donald Trump. Five percent intended to vote for a third-party candidate. Eleven percent did not expect to vote.

The majority of respondents did not know anyone who had died or gotten seriously ill due to the coronavirus. Fourteen percent indicated one or more family members who didn't live with them were ill or died. Only three percent said that's true of members of their own households. However, those experiences were more common for Black and Latinx parents than for their white or Asian American peers. Nearly 1 in 5 Black and Latinx parents reported one or more family members living outside their own households got sick or died compared to about 1 in 10 white or Asian American parents. Sixty-one percent of white parents said that no one they know had suffered health effects from the virus but that's the case for only 53 percent of Black and 49 percent of Latinx parents.

**Which of the following people died or got seriously ill due to the coronavirus?
Results by race/ethnicity**

	White	Latinx	Black	Asian	American Indian	Overall
No one I know has died or gotten seriously ill due to the coronavirus	61%	49%	53%	62%	53%	58%
One or more close friends who don't live with me	11%	18%	16%	11%	22%	13%
One or more family members who don't live with me	10%	19%	18%	9%	13%	14%
One or more members of my household	2%	5%	3%	0%	0%	3%

Following the survey questions about respondent demographics and the health impact of the coronavirus on people they knew, respondents were asked to answer the rest of the questions on the survey based on a child or children in grades K-12 in fall 2020 — not older or younger children.

Instructional Models

Parents most commonly reported their children would be attending a public school with remote-only learning in fall 2020. Nearly 4 in 10 expected their children to enroll in a public school using that instructional model compared to only 18 percent expecting enrollment in a public school where all instruction is in-person.

Roughly one-quarter of parents (23%) said their children would be participating in a hybrid model in which instruction is both remote and in-person in a public school.

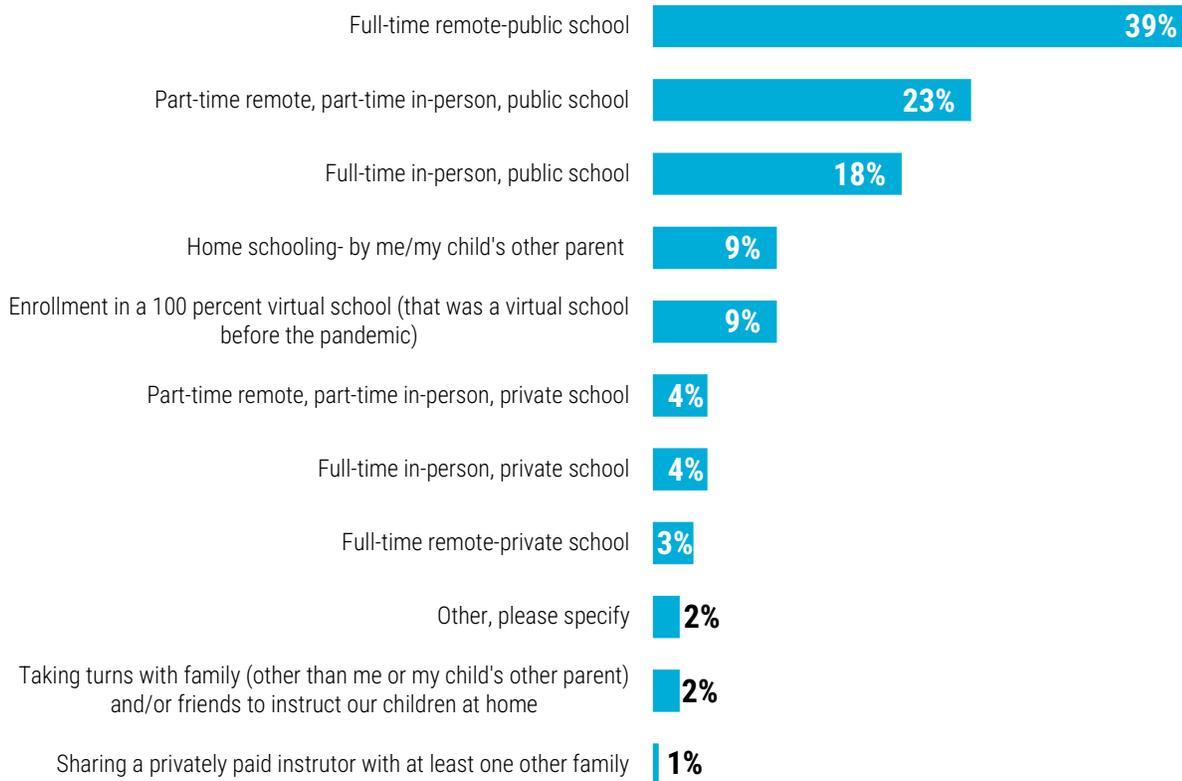
Nearly 1 in 10 parents indicated their children would be home schooled by a parent.

Roughly 1 in 10 said their children would be attending a fully virtual school that was already that type of institution before the pandemic started.

Eleven percent reported their children would be enrolled in some form of private school, which included full-time in-person instruction (4%), hybrid schooling (4%), and full-time remote learning (3%).

Relatively few parents reported they would be taking turns with extended family and/or friends to instruct children at home (2%) or sharing a privately paid instructor with at least one other family (1%).

Select all the ways in which your child or children will attend school this fall.



Parents with doctoral or professional degrees were more likely than parents with less education to say their children would be attending a full-time in-person private school. Parents with doctoral degrees reported sharing a privately paid instructor with at least one other family much more commonly than other parents.

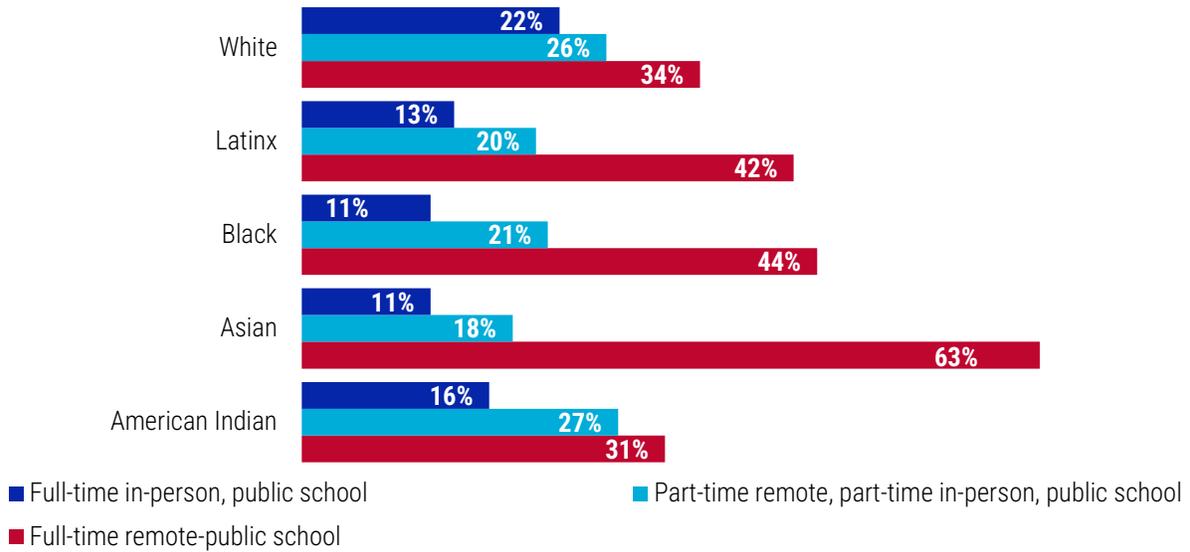
Parents with less than a high school diploma were more likely than their peers with higher levels of educational attainment to report they would be taking turns with family (other than themselves or their child's other parent) and/or friends to instruct their children at home. They were also more likely to report their children would be enrolled in a fully virtual school that used that type of model before the pandemic began.

White parents (22%) were two times more likely than Asian American (11%) and Black (11%) parents to say a child would be attending a public school full-time in-person. American Indian (16%) and Latinx (13%) parents were also less likely to indicate a child would enroll in a fully in-person public school.

Twenty-seven percent of parents planning to vote for Donald Trump in the November 2020 presidential election said their children would be attending a public school with fully in-person instruction, two times higher than parents intending to vote for Joe Biden (12%).

American Indian (31%) and white (34%) parents were less likely to say a child would be attending a public school with fully remote learning than their Asian American (63%), Black (44%), and Latinx (42%) peers.

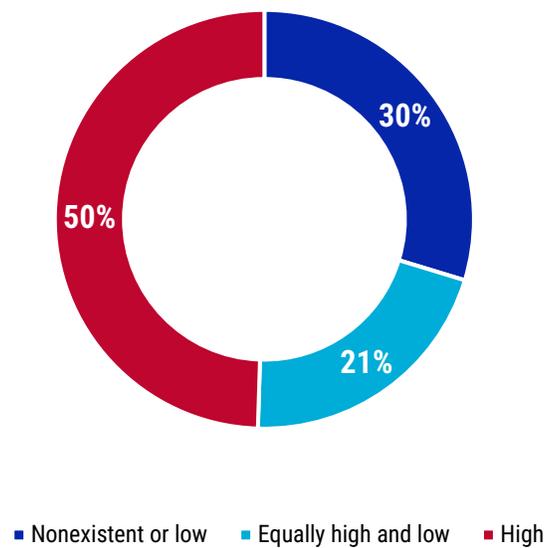
**Select all the ways in which your child or children will attend school this fall.
Results by race/ethnicity (public school)**



Overall Level of Trust in Schools to Keep Children Safe

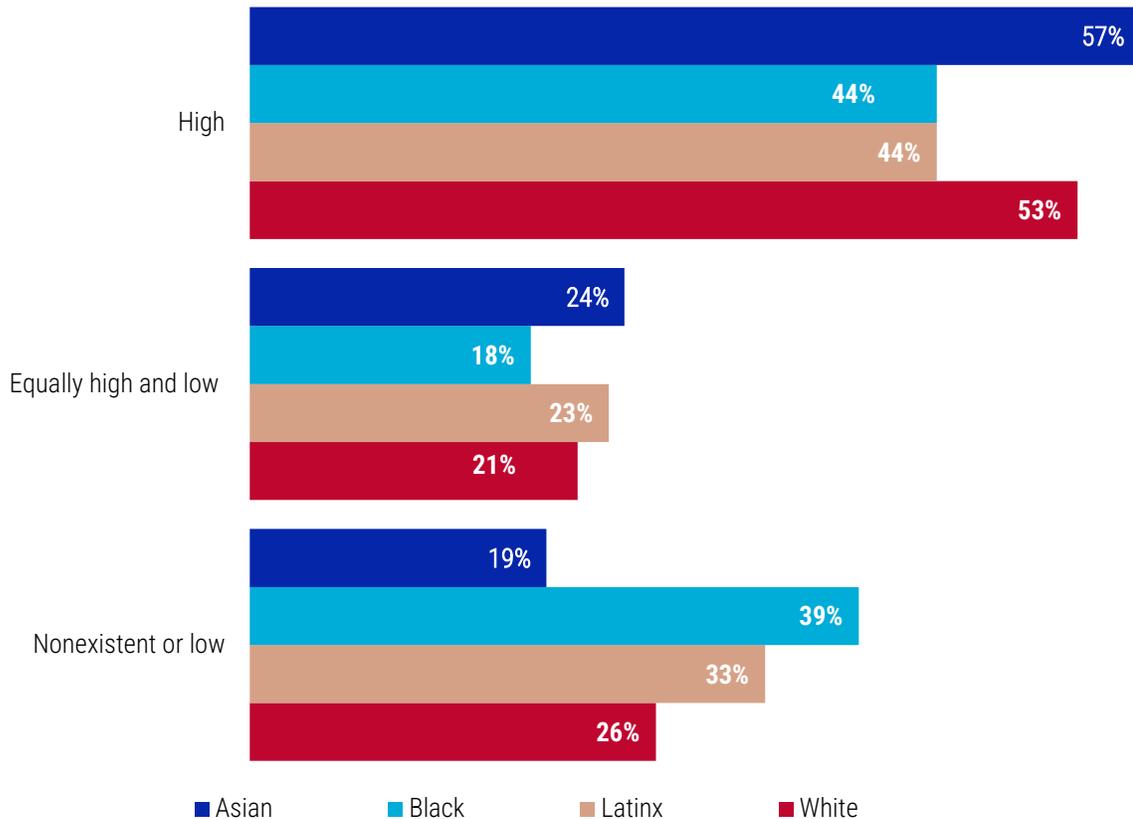
Only half of parents trusted their children’s schools to safeguard their health if in-person instruction occurs during the pandemic. Just 50 percent described their level of trust as somewhat, very, or extremely high.

How would you describe your overall level of trust that the school(s) your child(ren) attend(s) will safeguard their health if in-person instruction occurs during the coronavirus pandemic?



Levels of Trust Differed Along Demographic and Political Lines

How would you describe your overall level of trust that the school(s) your child(ren) attend(s) will safeguard their health if in-person instruction occurs during the coronavirus pandemic?
Results by race/ethnicity



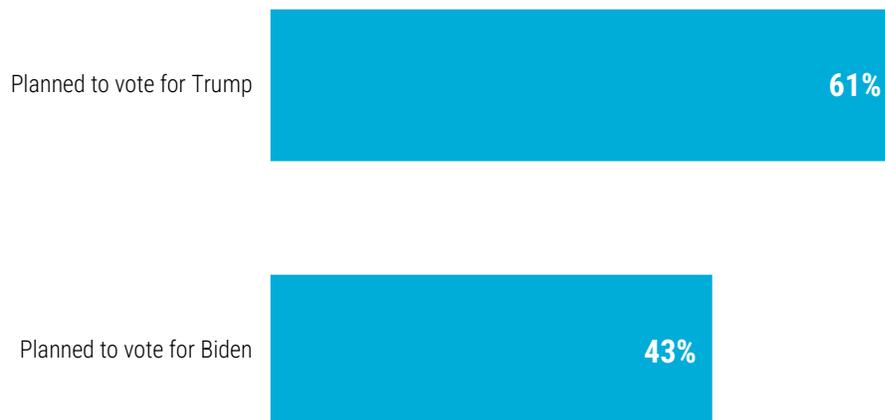
Asian American and white parents reported higher confidence levels than their Black or Latinx peers. Fifty-seven percent of Asian American and 53 percent of white parents trusted schools to protect their children’s health compared with about 4 in 10 Black and Latinx parents. Fifty-six percent of parents with a bachelor’s degree or higher trusted schools compared with just 45 percent of parents with less education.

Levels of trust varied along political lines as well. More than 6 in 10 respondents intending to vote for Donald Trump in the November 2020 presidential election said they trusted their children’s schools to protect their health in an in-person setting but only 43 percent of respondents expecting to vote for Joe Biden expressed that degree of confidence.

How would you describe your overall level of trust that the school(s) your child(ren) attend(s) will safeguard their health if in-person instruction occurs during the coronavirus pandemic?
Results by educational attainment

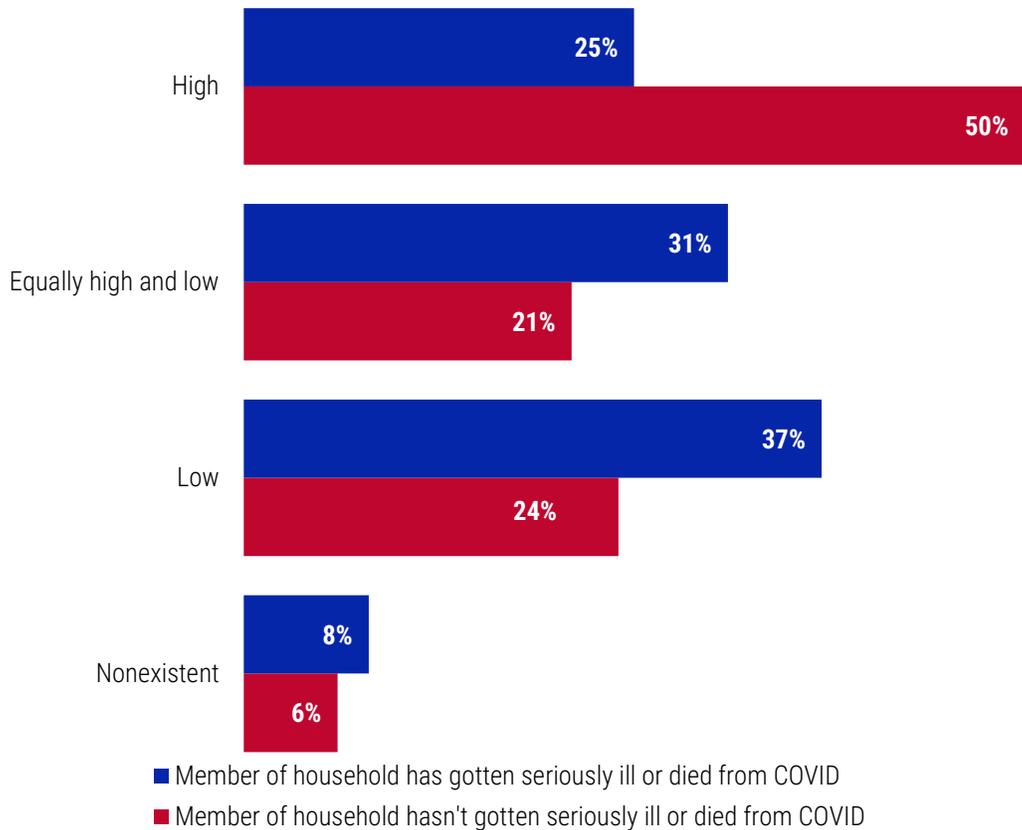


How would you describe your overall level of trust that the school(s) your child(ren) attend(s) will safeguard their health if in-person instruction occurs during the coronavirus pandemic?
Results by intended presidential vote



Those most impacted by the virus were less likely to trust their children's schools to keep them healthy and safe. Only one-quarter or parents in households where at least one member had been seriously ill or died from COVID-19 reported high levels of trust in schools compared with 50 percent of parents whose households had not faced those adverse health effects.

How would you describe your overall level of trust that the school(s) your child(ren) attend(s) will safeguard their health if in-person instruction occurs during the coronavirus pandemic?
Results by experience with coronavirus



School Policies and Practices Affect Trust

The majority of parents said adequate social distancing (58%), approaches to cleaning (56%), mask requirements (53%), and requirements for sick students and staff to stay home (51%) affect the degree to which they trust the ability of their children’s schools to protect their health.

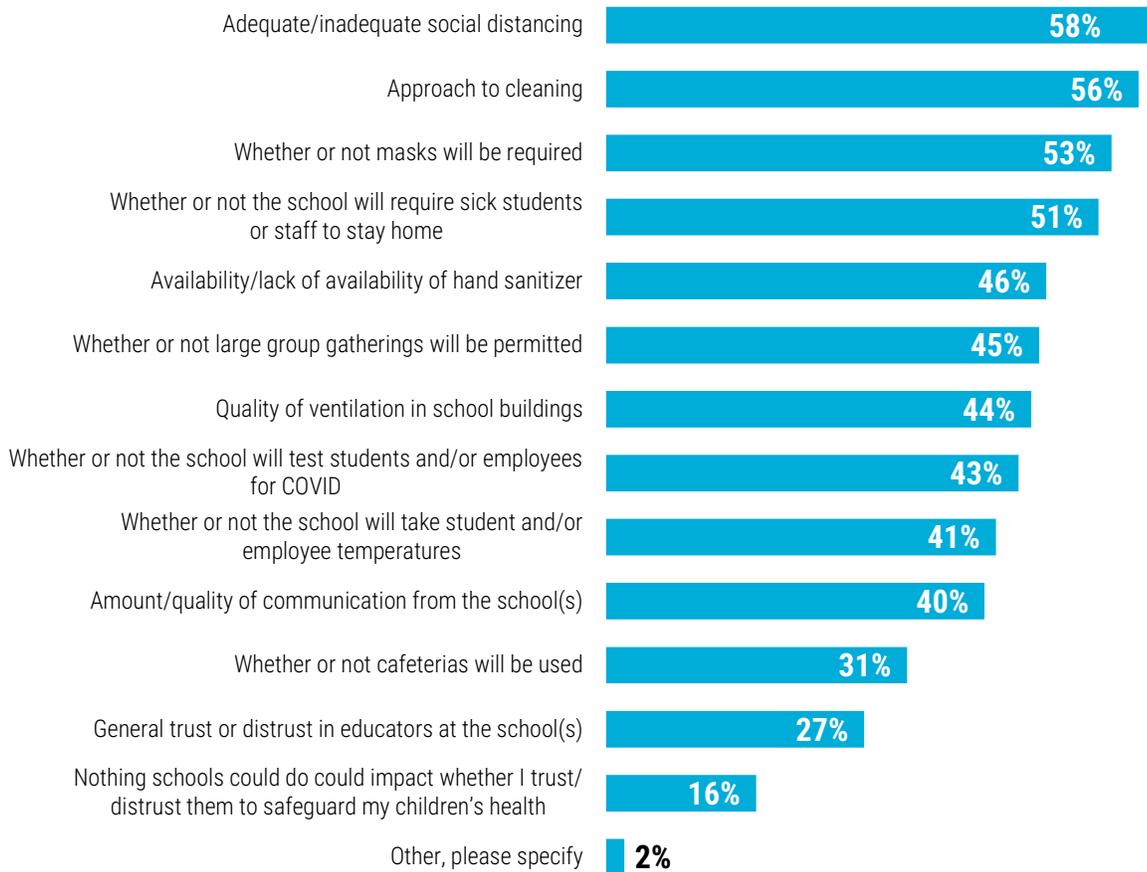
Only about one-quarter of respondents indicated general trust or distrust in educators at the schools would impact their views. Only 16 percent said that schools couldn’t do (or fail to do) anything that would impact whether they trust them.

Parents with different socioeconomic and political backgrounds saw policies and practices differently.

For instance, parents who have received a bachelor’s degree or higher were more likely to say that social distancing policies would affect the degree to which they trust schools. Sixty-one percent of parents with at least a bachelor’s degree indicated that social distancing rules would have an impact compared to 53 percent with less schooling.

Sixty-three percent of parents intending to vote for Joe Biden in the 2020 presidential election thought social distancing rules would change their level of trust in their children’s schools. Just half of parents planning to vote for Donald Trump felt such rules would have an effect.

Which of the following things impact whether you trust or distrust the ability of your children’s schools to safeguard their health if in-person instruction occurs during the coronavirus pandemic? Select all that apply.



Supporting Student Learning During the Pandemic

In the survey, parents were asked to provide their perspectives on their own level of preparation to support their children’s learning, as well as the support provided by their own employers and by their children’s schools. Most parents had at least somewhat positive views but were not very enthusiastic.

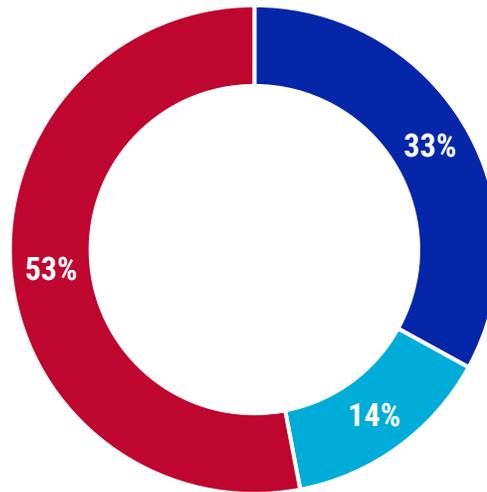
The majority of parents (53%) said they felt at least somewhat prepared to support their own children’s learning but only one-quarter felt extremely or very prepared. One-third believed they were at least somewhat unprepared.

Parents with higher levels of education felt more prepared to assist their children than their peers with less education.

Six in 10 parents with a bachelor’s degree or higher viewed themselves as ready to support their children’s learning but only 48 percent with less schooling shared that confidence.

Parents with a doctoral degree felt the most prepared and parents who did not have a high school diploma felt least ready. Seven in 10 parents with a doctoral degree said they saw themselves as prepared compared to just 28 percent of those with less than a high school diploma.

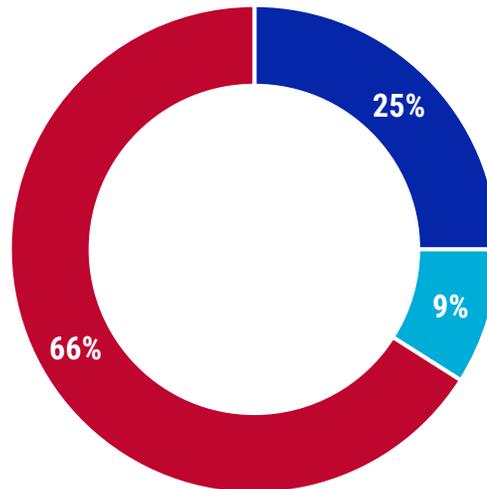
How well-prepared do you feel to support the learning this fall of your child/children?



- Somewhat, very, or extremely unprepared
- Equally prepared and unprepared
- Somewhat, very, or extremely prepared

Two-thirds of parents described their employers as at least somewhat accommodating with respect to their need to support their children’s home learning during the pandemic. Just 45 percent, however, viewed their employers as extremely or very accommodating.

How accommodating has your employer been when it comes to your need to support your child’s home learning during the coronavirus pandemic?



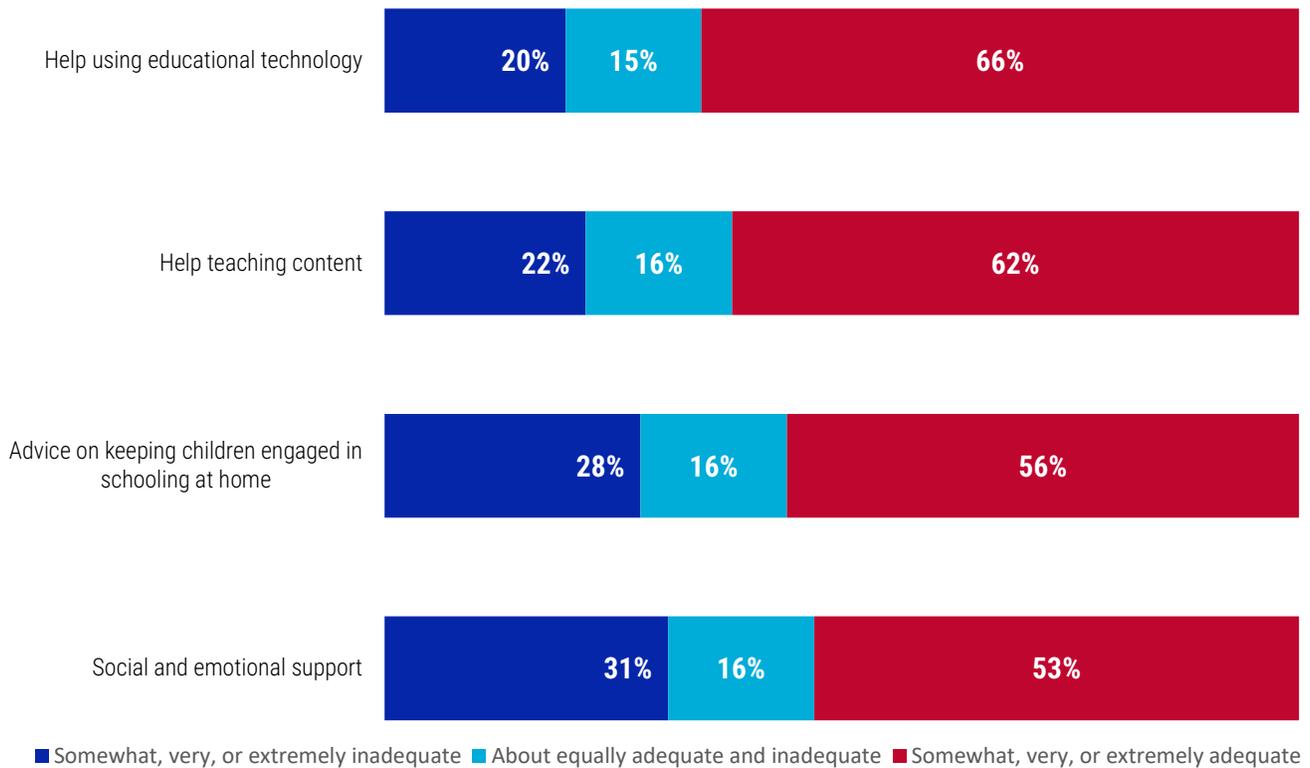
- Somewhat, very, or extremely unaccommodating
- Equally accommodating and unaccommodating
- Somewhat, very, or extremely accommodating

Two-thirds of parents found help from their children’s schools on using educational technology to be at least somewhat adequate. The share finding it extremely or very strong drops to 35 percent.

Six in 10 parents described help from their children’s schools on teaching content as at least somewhat adequate. Only 3 in 10 described it as extremely or very good.

Similarly, the majority of respondents (56%) said their children’s schools provided at least somewhat adequate advice on keeping students engaged in schooling at home with the percentage citing extremely or very helpful advice falling to 28 percent.

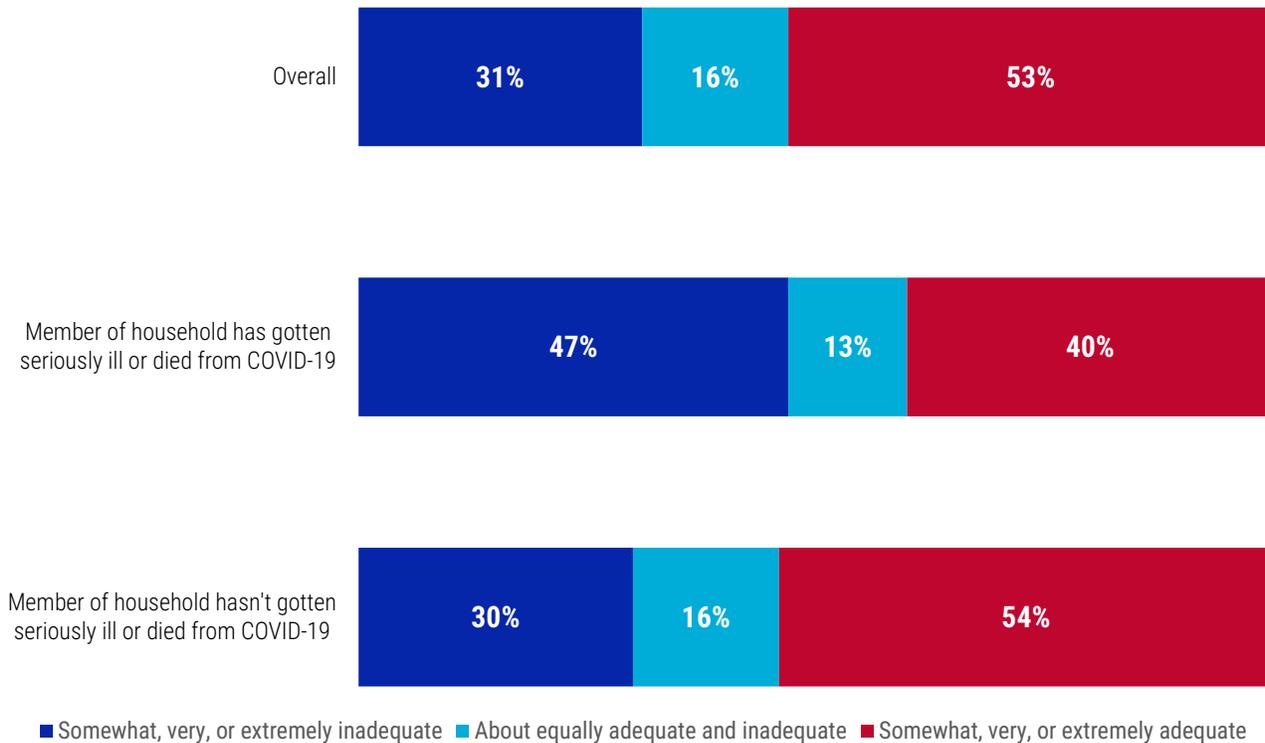
How would you describe the following types of support provided (or not provided) by your child(ren) ’s school(s)?



The majority of parents (53%) saw their children’s schools as providing at least somewhat adequate social-emotional support. But just over one-quarter (28%) described that support as extremely or very strong.

In households where members had gotten seriously ill or died from the coronavirus, parents were more critical of the social-emotional support provided by their children’s schools. Forty-seven percent of such parents said that social-emotional support was inadequate compared to just 30 percent in households that were not directly affected by health impacts of the virus.

How would you describe the following types of support provided (or not provided) by your child(ren) 's school(s)?
Results for social and emotional support



Academic Progress Since the Pandemic Began

When asked how their children’s academic progress during the pandemic compared to before the coronavirus emerged, parents differed. Slightly more than one-third felt their children have made less progress in reading or English/language arts since the pandemic started. On the other hand, just over one-quarter saw more progress. Thirty-seven percent reported their children made the same amount of progress before and after the pandemic occurred.

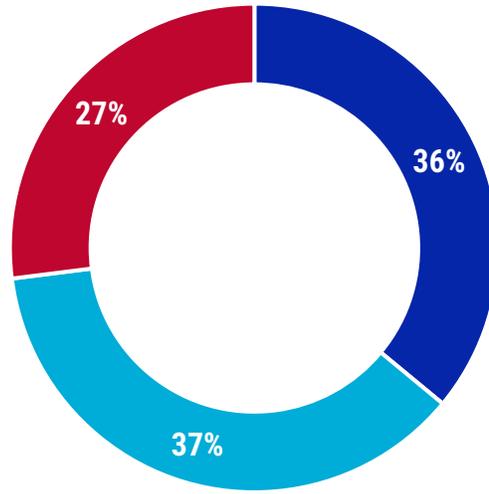
Twenty-two percent of parents with less than a high school diploma said their children made less progress in those subjects during the pandemic than before it, a lower share than parents with higher levels of educational attainment.

Fifty-six percent of parents with a professional degree saw academic declines in those subjects, more than parents with other types of degrees.

By contrast, 49 percent of parents with a doctoral degree thought their children made more progress in reading or English/language arts than prior to the pandemic, a higher share than parents with other degrees or education levels.

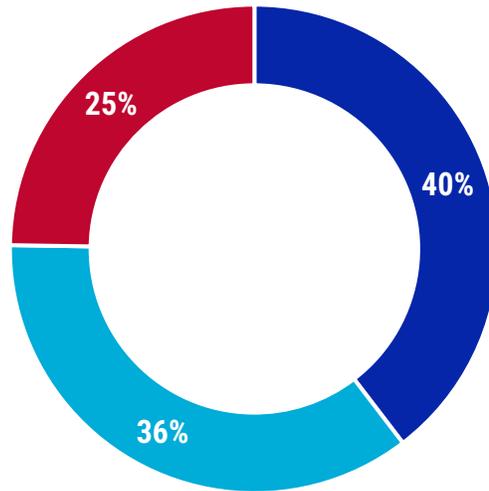
Four in 10 parents cited less progress in math. By contrast, one-quarter observed more gains than before the pandemic in that subject and 36 percent found no change.

Compared to the progress made before the coronavirus pandemic, how would you describe the academic progress your child(ren) have/has made since the pandemic began?
Results for reading and English/language arts



■ Less progress than usual ■ Same ■ More progress than usual

Compared to the progress made before the coronavirus pandemic, how would you describe the academic progress your child(ren) have/has made since the pandemic began?
Results for math



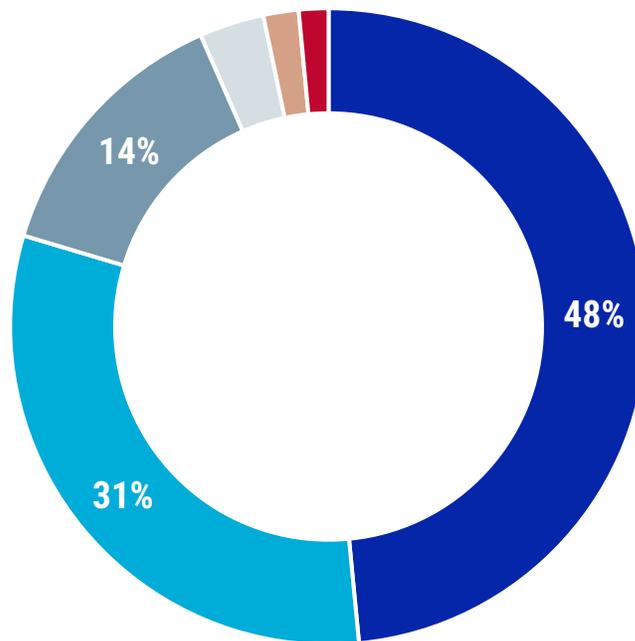
■ Less progress than usual ■ Same ■ More progress than usual

Views on Technology

If there have been changes in student achievement as a result of the pandemic, the use of technology for remote instruction might play a role in academic progress or declines. The role of home technology in education has been catapulted to center stage by the shift to remote learning during the pandemic. In schools with fully remote or hybrid instructional models, access to the internet and to devices is now a fundamental utility needed to participate in schooling.

Nearly half of parents (48%) said their home internet was adequate enough to do anything and everything required for their kids' schoolwork with zero problems. Only seven percent reported that the internet in their homes was only adequate enough to do less than half what needs to be done or worse.

■ When it comes to the tasks required for my children's schoolwork, the internet in my home is:



- Adequate to do anything and everything with zero problems
- With a few small exceptions, adequate to do anything and everything required for my children's schoolwork
- Adequate to do most things – we don't need to seek WiFi outside the home
- Adequate to do less than half of what needs to be done – but not so bad that we ever seek WiFi outside the home
- So inadequate that we sometimes or always seek out WiFi outside the home
- Nonexistent – if we want to use WiFi we have to go somewhere else

Nearly half of parents (45%) indicated each of their children had one device that was used at home for their schoolwork and never shared. Another 32 percent said each child had more than one device that was never shared.

Conclusion

The large share of parents reporting they didn't trust their children's schools to keep them safe if in-person instruction occurs during the pandemic suggests that educators and policymakers will have to continue to work to build families' confidence when their schools reopen.

But given that only about one-quarter of parents indicated that a general sense of trust or distrust in educators would impact their confidence in the ability of their children's schools to safeguard their health and just 16 percent said schools couldn't do anything to change trust levels, it's within the power of education leaders to affect attitudes through policy decisions and safety protocols.

Survey results also indicate that most parents believed schools were providing at least some of the supports they and their children needed during the pandemic. The majority of parents said that schools provided at least somewhat adequate support regarding use of educational technology, teaching content, keeping students engaged in schooling at home, and social-emotional development. But parents were much less likely to describe that support as extremely or very strong highlighting substantial room for improvement in programs and services.