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Parent Mindsets Related to COVID-19 Safety Guidance and Protocols

Findings from a Tracking Survey of Public School Parents of
K-12 Students

January 2022

Research
conducted by:



National Online Parent Survey:

- Nationwide sample of **1,427 parents and guardians** with children in public school, grades K-12, including
 - 642 elementary school parents
 - 345 middle school parents
 - 440 high school parents
 - 409 Black parents
 - 403 Hispanic parents representing a mix of acculturation levels
- Fielded November 9–24, 2021
 - The CDC endorsed use of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine in children aged 5–11 on November 2, 2021
 - The survey finished fielding before Omicron was classified as a variant of concern on November 26, 2021
- Offered in both English and Spanish
- Data were weighted to be representative of public-school parents in the U.S.
- This survey is the second wave of a tracking study. Wave 1 was conducted between July 23–August 8, 2021

***NOTE:** This project was supported by the CDC Foundation by way of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$447,531 with more than 99% funded by CDC/HHS and \$2,400, less than 1%, funded by non- government source(s). The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CDC/HHS, or the U.S. Government.*

Statistical significance indicators:

- Throughout this report, **green/red** indicates statistically **higher/lower** differences between audiences
- Up/down arrows (▲/▼) indicate that wave 2 data is statistically higher/lower than wave 1 data

1

As of the end of November 2021, parents report an increased level of comfort associated with in-person schooling and how schools handled the return to the classroom.

Parent preferences for in-person learning increased. They and their children feel more positive emotions than at the start of the school year, even in the wake of half of parents indicating they received a notice that their child may have been exposed to COVID-19 at school.

2

Parents remain wary of how school officials manage safety measures.

This item remains a top-tier concern among parents, even with the uptick in optimism. Masking represents the largest disconnect between what parents view as an important safety precaution and the percentage of schools who implement this policy.

3

Mental health supports represent a key opportunity for schools—parents indicate they want schools to provide more support for children and parents.

But, data reveal parents have mixed familiarity of the resources/services schools provide, and uptake is low. No resources/services included in the survey garner majority usage, with most under one-third utilization.

Key Findings

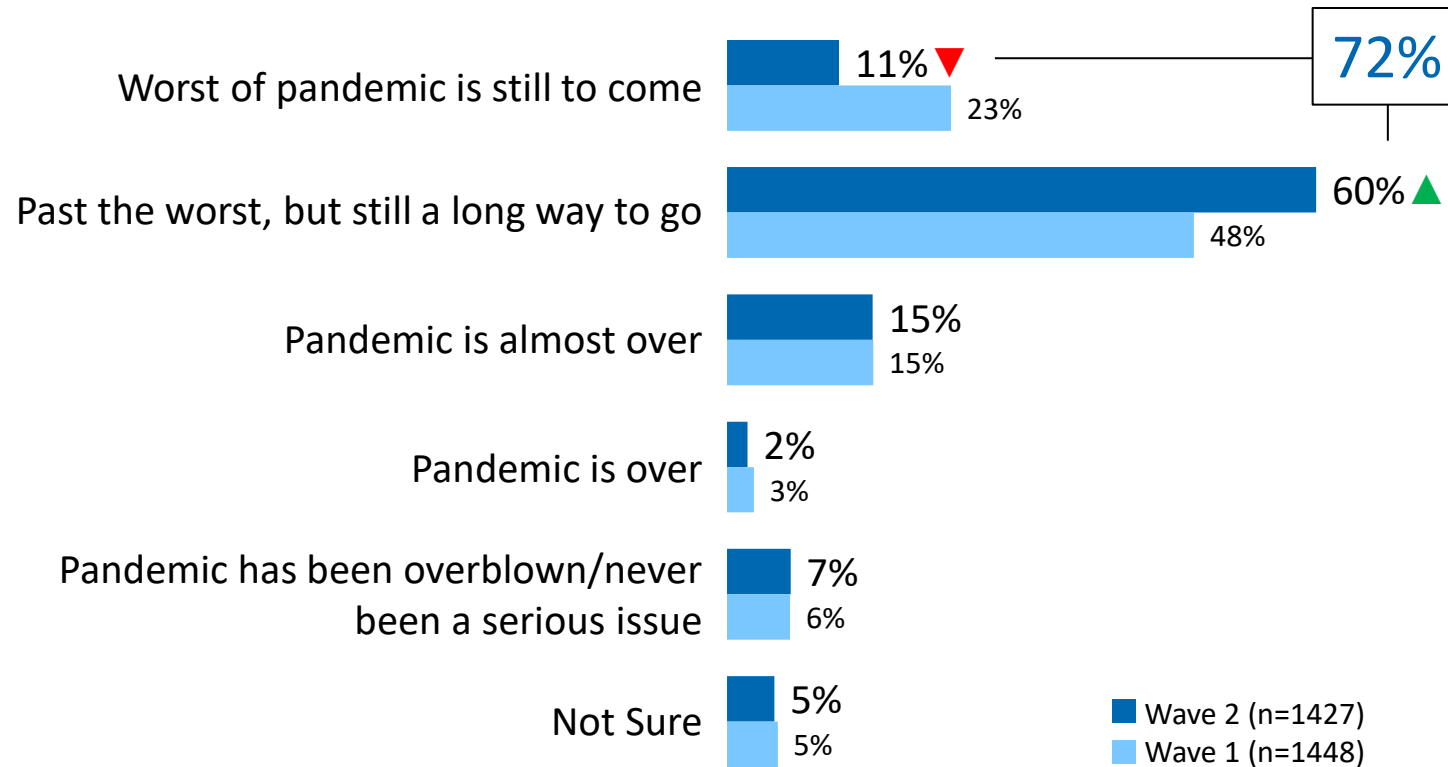
- Before the recent Omicron wave, data reveal slight optimism. Seven-in-ten parents note they are very or somewhat comfortable having their child at school *in-person*.
- Despite this positive movement, worries remain relatively unchanged. Top tier worries include impacts from children contracting COVID-19 at school, followed by trusting school personnel to implement health/safety measures, and their child falling behind academically.
- Masking represents the largest disconnect between safety measures schools implement and what parents deem important. White parents are significantly less likely than Black or Hispanic parents to identify masking as the most or a very important recommendation for schools to put in place.
- Parents report their children have been adapting well, but even so, majorities of parents want their child's school to provide support for their child's (and their) social and emotional well-being.
- Parents believe it is at least somewhat easy to access resources to support their or their child's social and emotional well-being; however, data reveal mixed familiarity with services, programs, or resources available at their child's school, and reported use of these resources is low.
- Trust of the school, school district, CDC, US DOE, and National PTA for information/resources is soft. Less than 4-in-10 completely trust these entities in this area; more parents "somewhat" trust them.

Parent Mindsets about Schools and the Pandemic

7-in-10 parents believe we face a long road before reaching the end of the pandemic, about the same as in August

- However, parents are now *less likely* to believe the worst of the pandemic is still to come.
- While trends are generally consistent across race and ethnicity, the belief that the pandemic is far from over is stronger among Black and Hispanic parents than White parents.

Where do you think we are in the pandemic as a country?



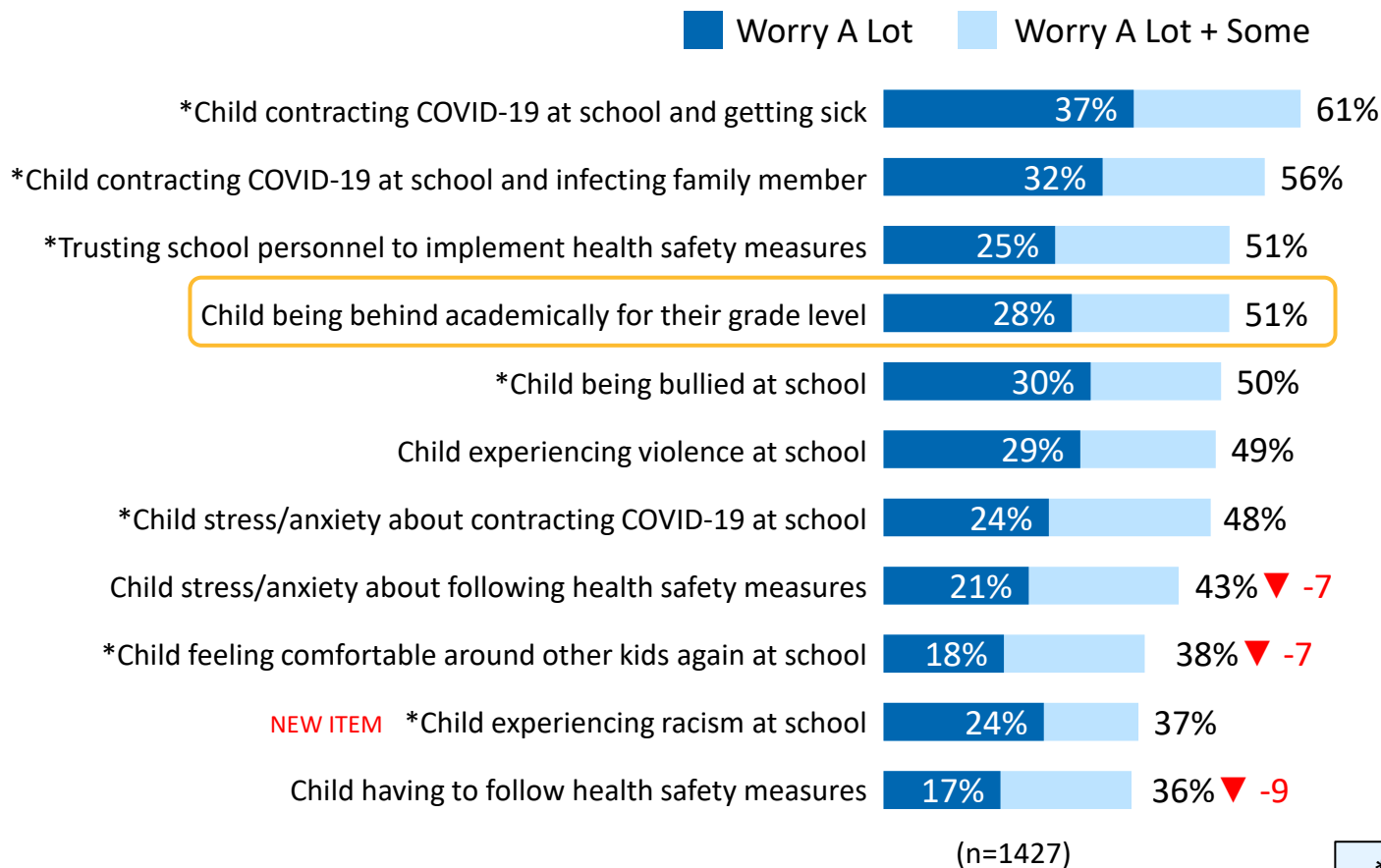
	Black (n=409)	Hispanic (n=403)	White (n=584)
Worst of pandemic is still to come	21%	11%	9%
Past the worst, but still a long way to go	55%	66%	59%
Pandemic is almost over	13%	14%	16%
Pandemic is over	2%	1%	3%
Pandemic has been overblown/never been a serious issue	4%	4%	8%
Not Sure	5%	5%	5%

Results are consistent across grade band (ES,MS,HS), region, and locality.

Parent worries about following safety measures and perceived child anxiety about them have decreased since the beginning of the school year

- Their child contracting COVID-19 at school remains the top worry, especially among vaccinated parents, parents of color, and parents who live in urban areas.
- Approximately half of parents remain concerned about their child being behind academically.

Now that your child is back in school, how much do you worry about...?



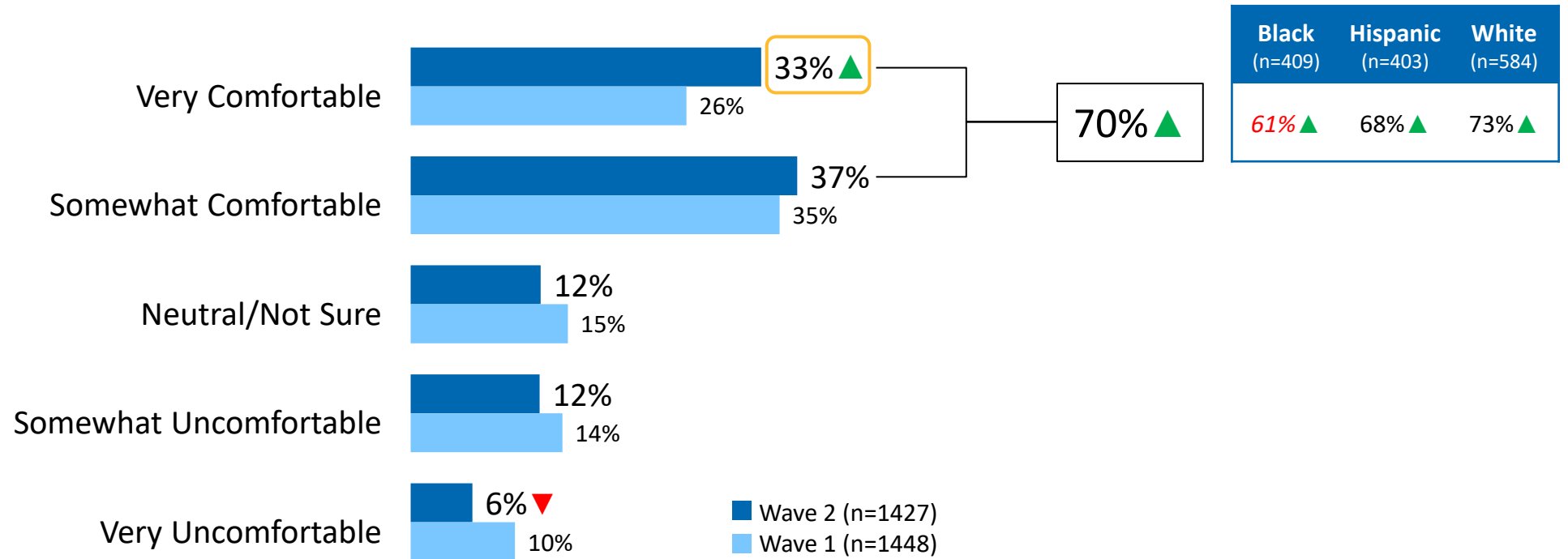
	Parent Vaccinated (n=971)	Parent Not Vaccinated (n=420)	Black (n=409)	Hispanic (n=403)	White (n=584)
*Child contracting COVID-19 at school and getting sick	66%	51%	66%	75%	54%
*Child contracting COVID-19 at school and infecting family member	60%	47%	62%	71%	49%
*Trusting school personnel to implement health safety measures	53%	47%	56%	64%	44%
Child being behind academically for their grade level	51%	49%	50%	67%	45%
*Child being bullied at school	50%	50%	48%	67%	44%
Child experiencing violence at school	50%	45%	52%	65%	42%
*Child stress/anxiety about contracting COVID-19 at school	52%	39%	53%	61%	42%
Child stress/anxiety about following health safety measures	44%	40%	44%	58%	39%
*Child feeling comfortable around other kids again at school	41%	31%	42%	55%	32%
NEW ITEM *Child experiencing racism at school	38%	36%	52%	56%	26%
Child having to follow health safety measures	38%	33%	36%	49%	32%

*Parents in urban areas are more likely to say they worry a lot or some about these items than parents in suburban or small town/rural areas.

More parents feel comfortable having their children in school *in-person*, than at the beginning of the year

- 7-in-10 parents feel at least somewhat comfortable, compared to 6-in-10 in August.
- This level of comfort increased across the board, but particularly among Hispanic parents (+15), compared to Black parents (+7) and White parents (+8).

How comfortable do you feel having your child at school in-person?



Results are consistent across grade band (ES,MS,HS), region, and locality.

A majority of parents now prefer in-person learning

- This number is up from 50% in August.

How would you like your child to attend school right now?

	Parent Preference (n=1427)	Black (n=409)	Hispanic (n=403)	White (n=584)	Urban (n=56)	Suburban (n=530)	Small/ Rural (n=337)	School Situation (n=1427)
In-Person 	56% ▲ +6	48%	57%	58%	48%	62%	60%	74% (Urban 67%)
Hybrid 	28%	35%	29%	27%	34%	26%	25%	20%
Remote/Virtual 	14%	15%	14%	13%	18%	11%	13%	6% (Urban 9%)

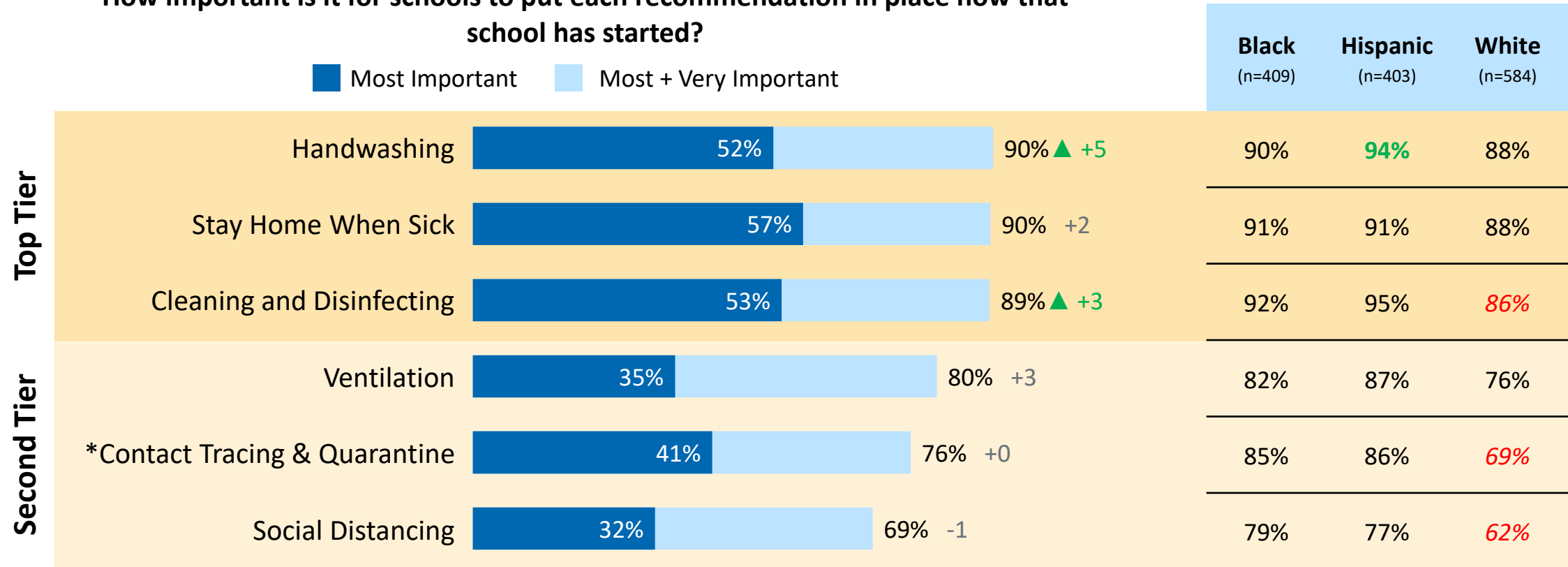
66% of parents say their child is attending school in their preferred way

Results are consistent across grade band (ES,MS,HS) and region.

Parents still deem provisions with limited “personal impact” as most important for schools to implement

- The importance of all top tier items increased since August.

How important is it for schools to put each recommendation in place now that school has started?



Non-statistically significant changes shown in gray
(n=1427)

*K-8 parents more likely to say this item is important (78% vs 71% HS).

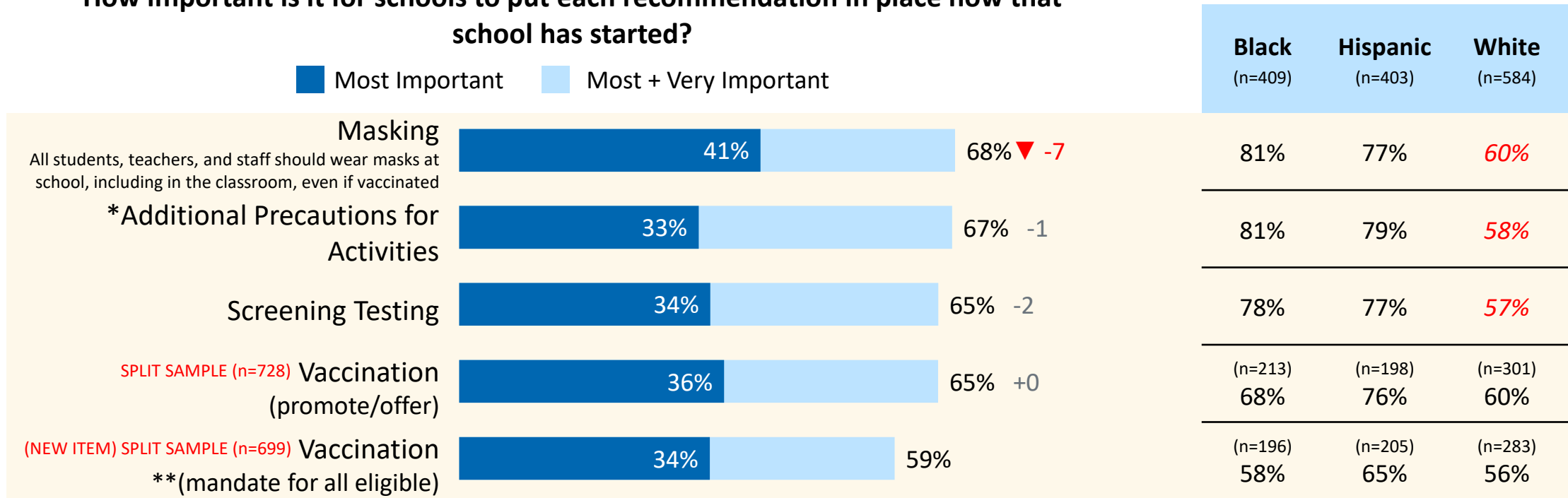
Parents in urban areas more likely than suburban or small town/rural to say all second-tier recommendations are important.

Of all recommendations included in the survey, masking garners the most significant drop in importance among parents

How important is it for schools to put each recommendation in place now that school has started?

■ Most Important
 ■ Most + Very Important

Third Tier



Non-statistically significant changes shown in gray
(n=1427)

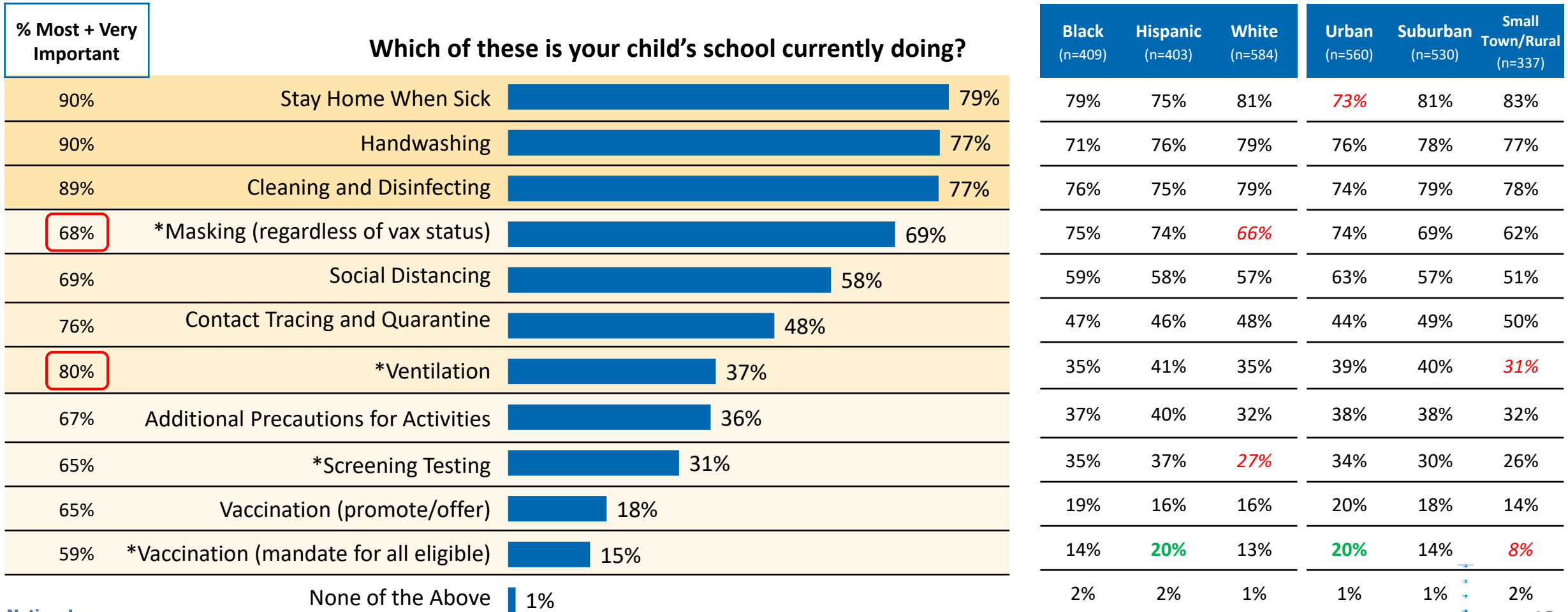
*K-8 parents more likely to say this item is important (70% vs 61% HS).

**Parents of kids age 12+ more likely to say this item is important (66% vs 53% ≤age 12).

Parents in urban areas more likely than suburban or small town/rural to deem these recommendations important.

Parent priorities align with what schools are implementing, except for masking and ventilation

- Parents reports of school practices are relatively consistent across race/ethnicity and locality.



*Parents in the Northeast and West more likely to say schools are currently implementing these items than parents in the South and Midwest.

Masking (regardless of vaccination status) has the greatest misalignment between perceived importance and implementation

- Beyond masking and social distancing, implementation tends to increase with importance to parents.

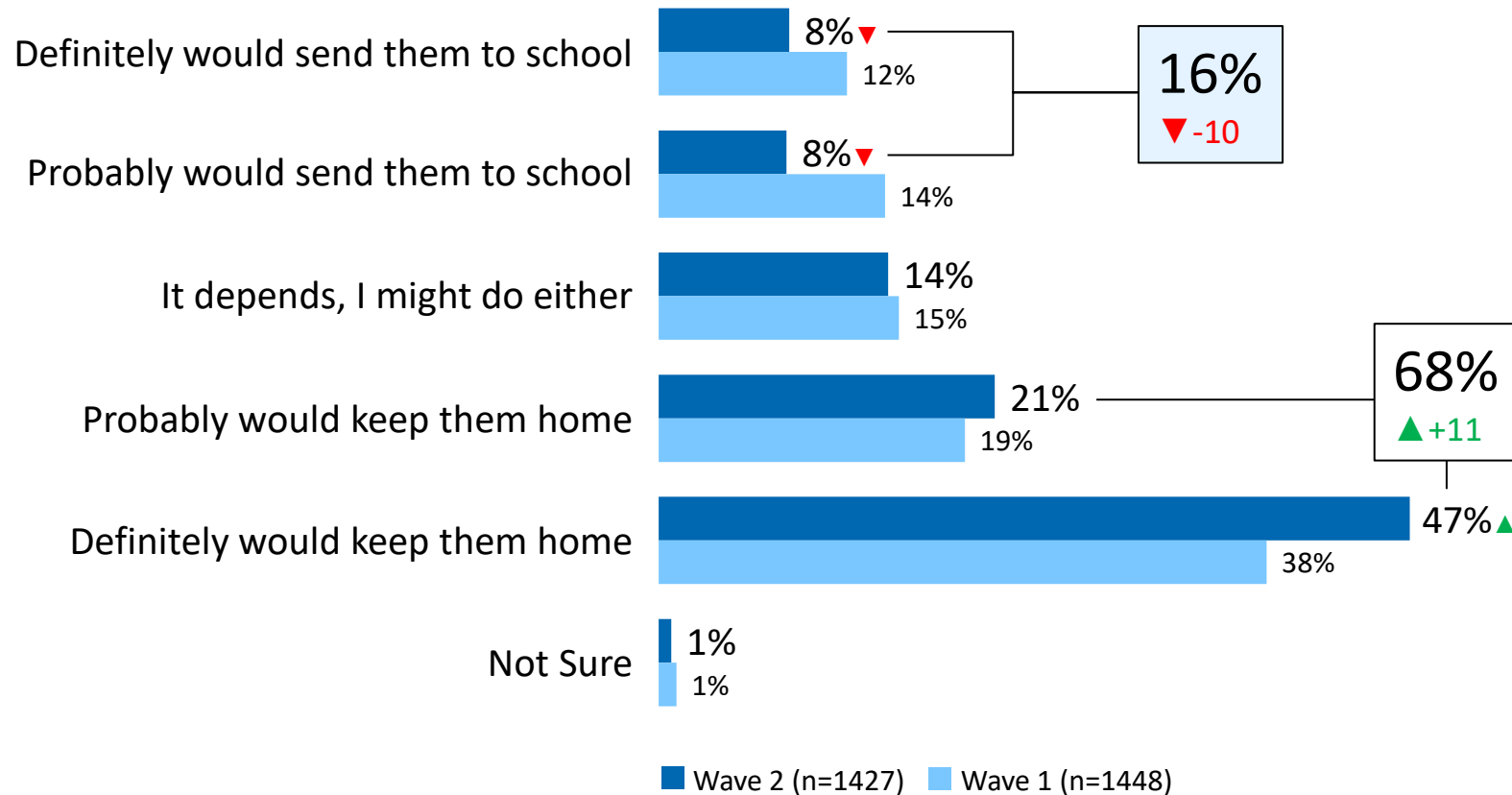


- Top Tier Importance
- Second Tier Importance
- Third Tier Importance

Parents in this wave indicate they are less likely to send their child to school if they have mild symptoms that could be COVID-19

- This pattern holds true across grade bands and race/ethnicity.

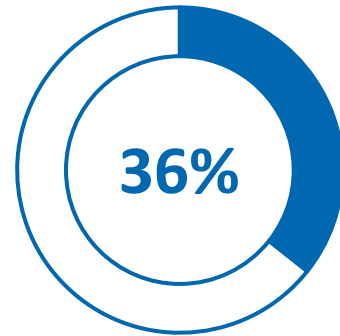
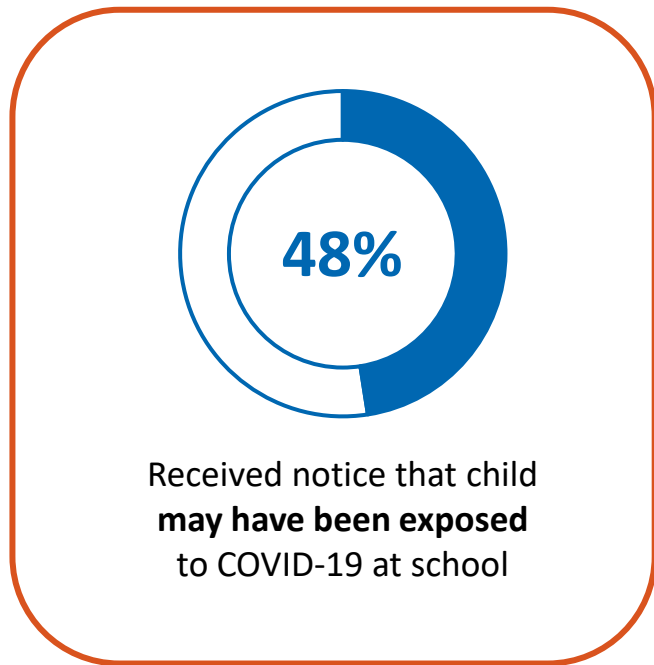
If your child had mild symptoms that could be COVID-19 but felt well enough to go to school, what do you think you would decide about sending them to school?



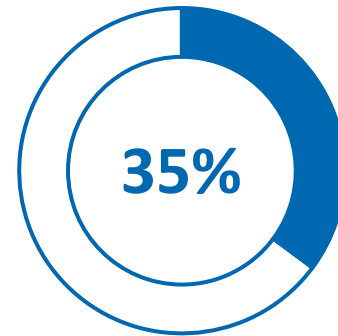
Pre-Omicron, nearly half of parents have received notice that their child may have been exposed to COVID at school

- Just over one-in-three indicate their child had to quarantine, with a similar percentage noting a return to remote learning.

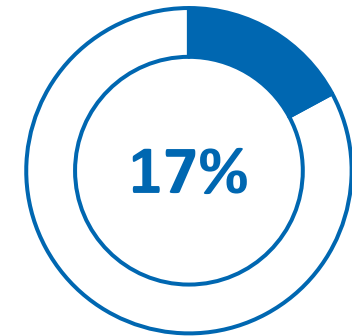
Have Experienced Each So Far This School Year (n=1427)



School indicated child had to **quarantine** because of COVID-19



Class and/or school closed/**returned to remote learning** because of COVID-19 infections



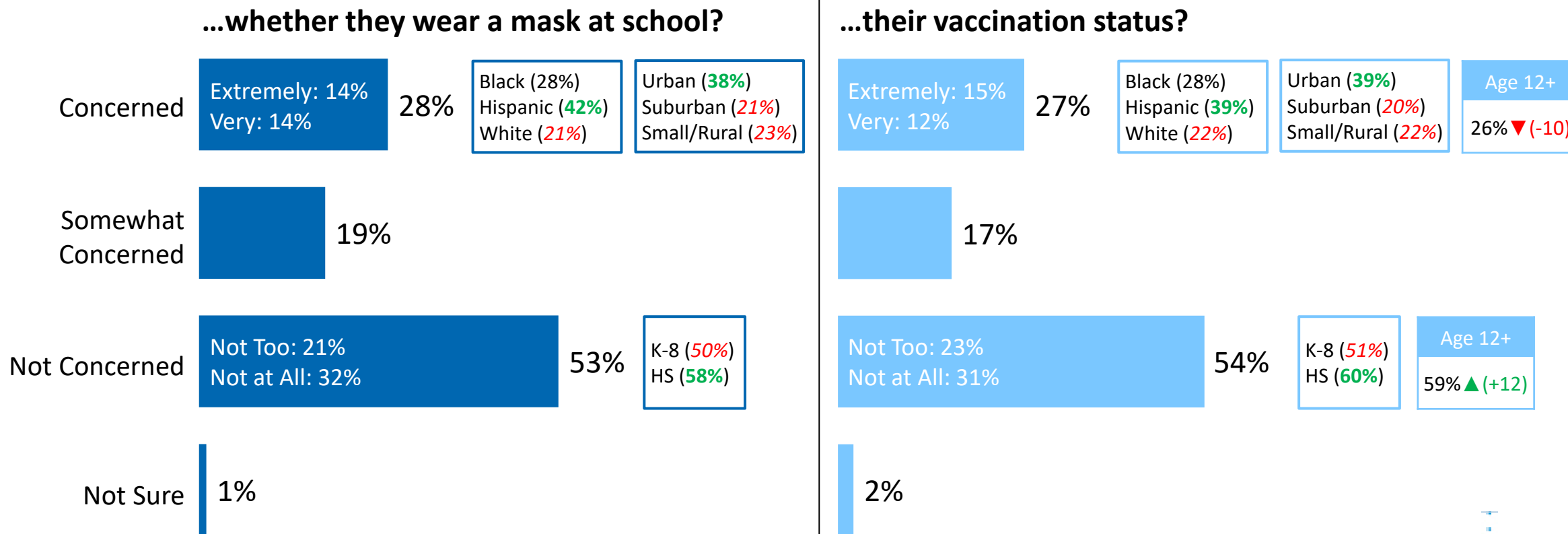
Child **tested positive** for COVID-19

Results are consistent across grade band (ES,MS,HS), race/ethnicity, region, and locality.

Most parents are not worried about bullying based on vaccination or mask wearing

- This concern based on vaccine status (among parents of children age 12+) has lessened since August.

How concerned are you that your child will face bullying or exclusion because of...

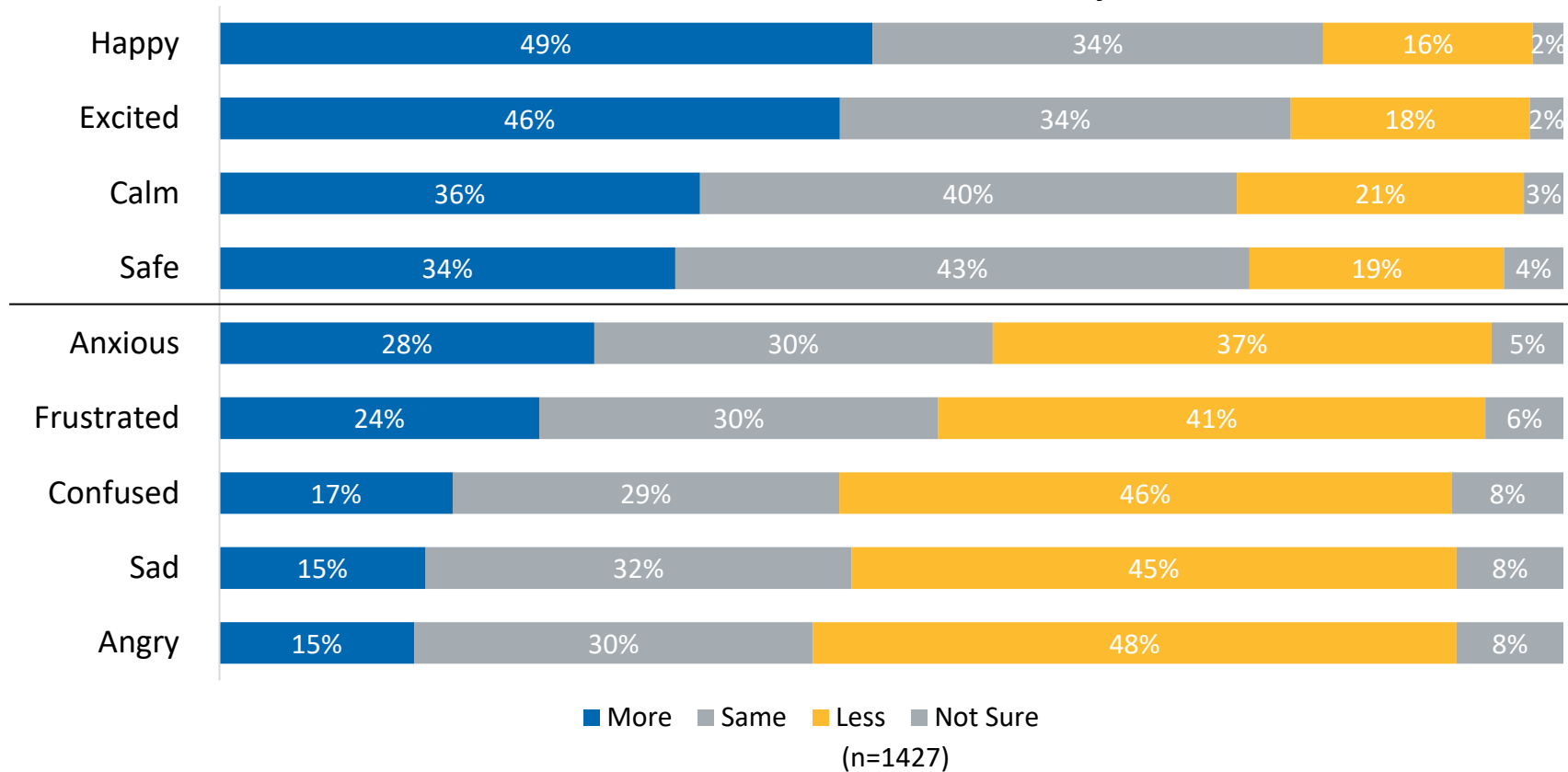


(n=1427)

Mental Health

Overall, parents report an increase in their child's positive emotions and a decrease in negative ones since August

Has your child been feeling these emotions more, less, or the same since the start of the school year?



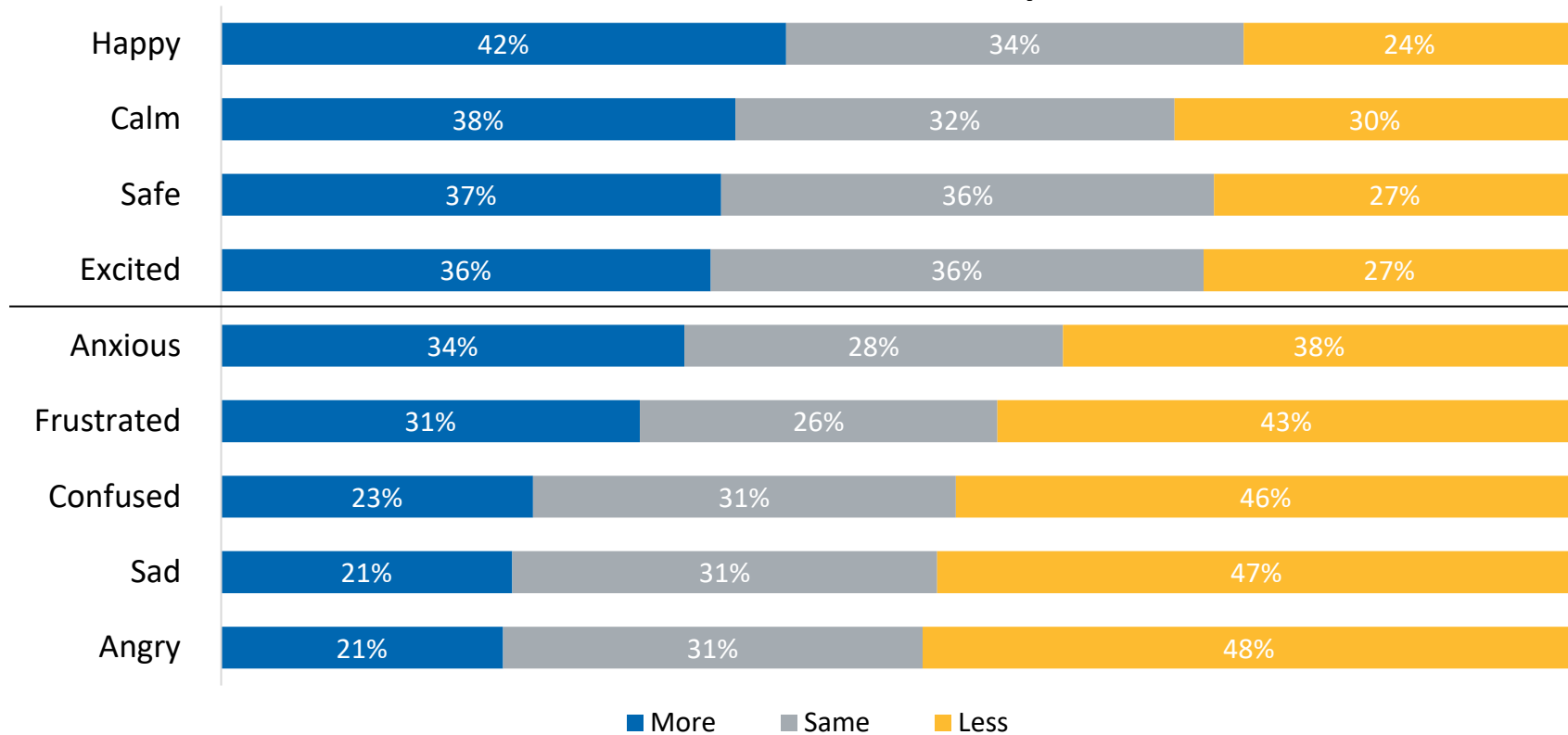
Feeling More

	Black (n=409)	Hispanic (n=403)	White (n=584)
Happy	46%	60%	44%
Excited	44%	55%	43%
Calm	39%	43%	32%
Safe	36%	45%	30%
Anxious	29%	25%	30%
Frustrated	23%	19%	27%
Confused	19%	13%	19%
Sad	13%	11%	17%
Angry	15%	12%	16%

Parents in urban areas more likely than suburban or small town/rural parents to indicate their child is happier and calmer than at the start of the school year.

Parents report a similar pattern in their own emotions

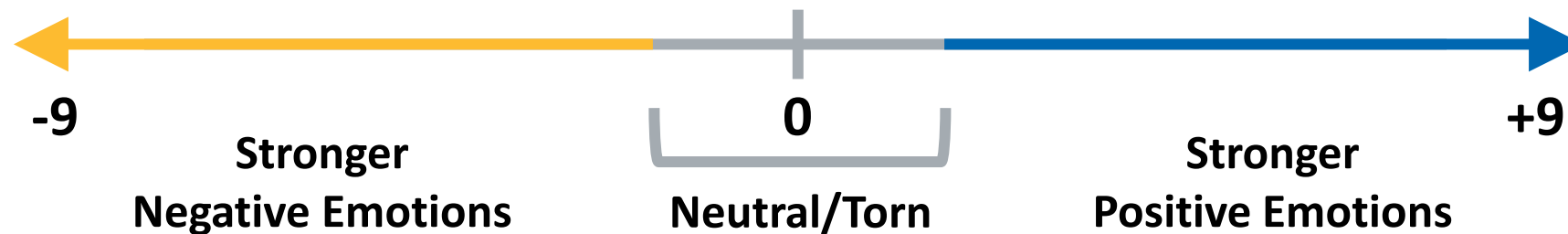
Have you been feeling these emotions more, less, or the same since the start of the school year?



Feeling More

	Black (n=409)	Hispanic (n=403)	White (n=584)
Happy	38%	50%	40%
Calm	38%	45%	34%
Safe	35%	43%	34%
Excited	33%	45%	34%
Anxious	37%	31%	35%
Frustrated	29%	27%	34%
Confused	20%	19%	25%
Sad	19%	17%	23%
Angry	22%	16%	22%

To further dig into parent and child emotions, we created an “Emotions Index”

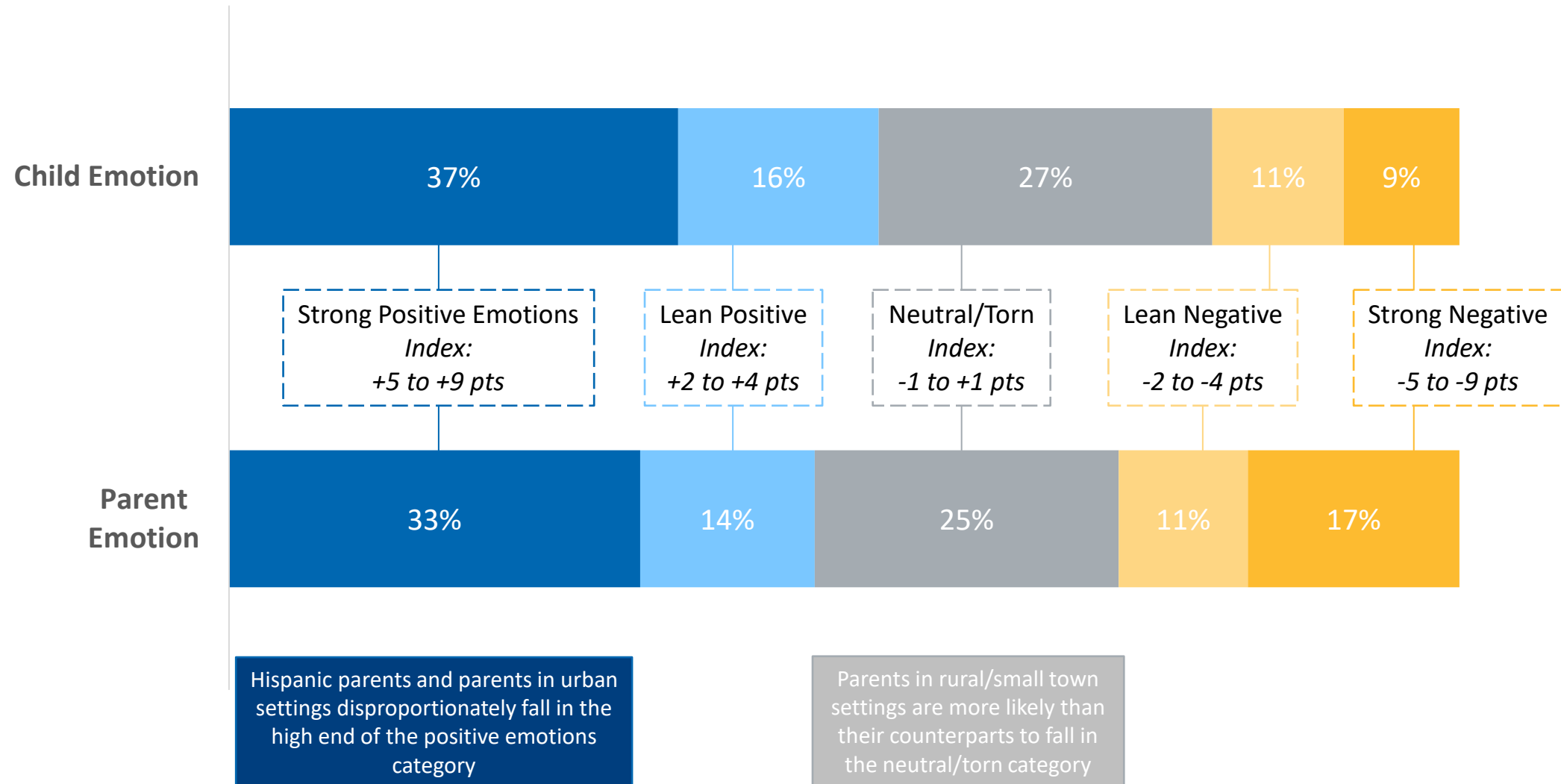


<u>Index calculation:</u>	
-1 for...	+1 for...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feeling more of a negative emotion• Feeling less of a positive emotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feeling more of a positive emotion• Feeling less of a negative emotion
0 for stayed the same or *not sure responses	

* Child emotion scale gave options for “not sure” in addition to “same.” Parent emotion scale did not.

Over one-third of parents clearly note more positive emotions for themselves and their children compared to August

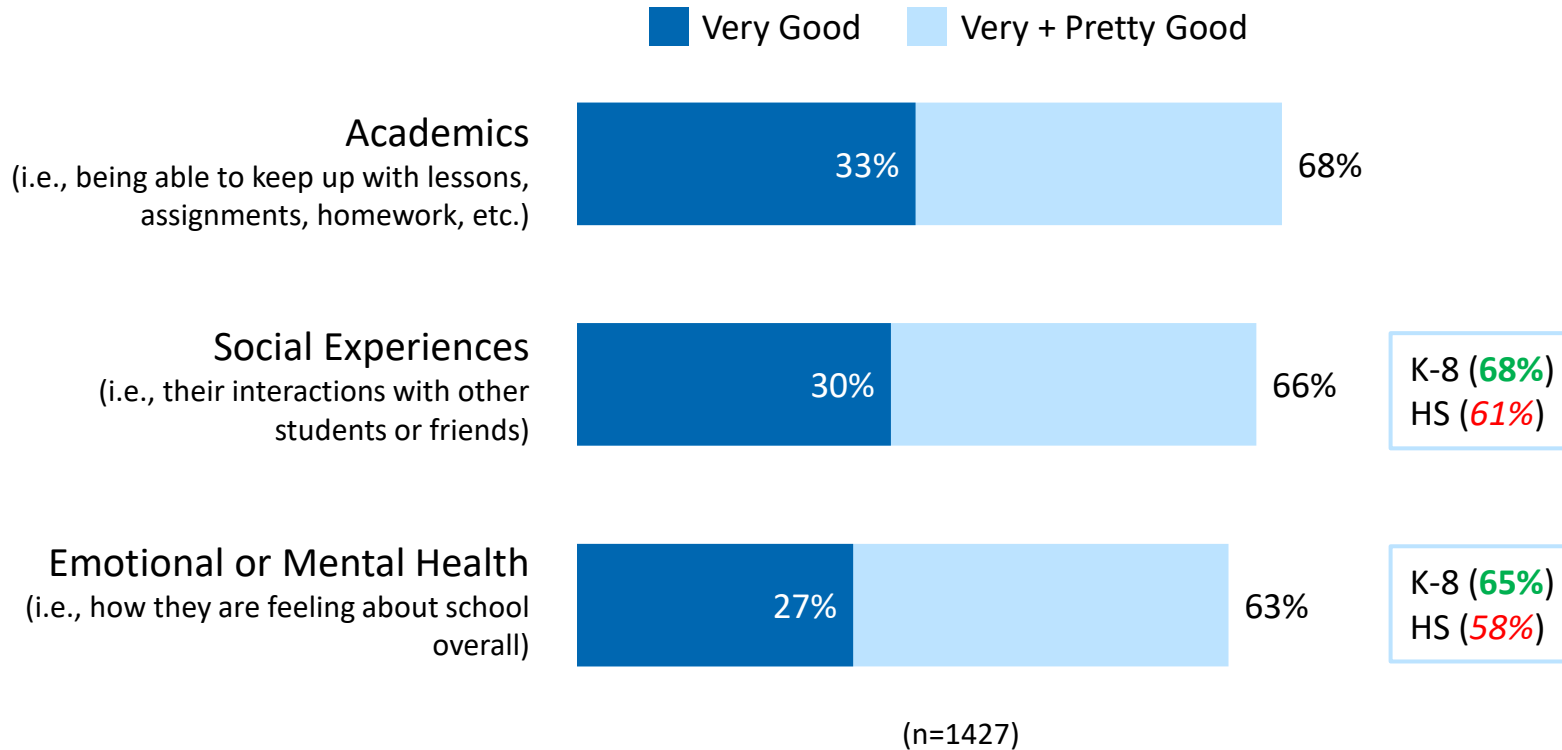
- One-quarter fall in the “neutral” or “torn” area.



About two-thirds of parents report their children's academics, social experiences, and mental health at school have been at least 'pretty good' so far

- Parents of K-8 students offer more positive results regarding social experiences and mental health.

How has each of the following aspects of school been for your child so far this year?

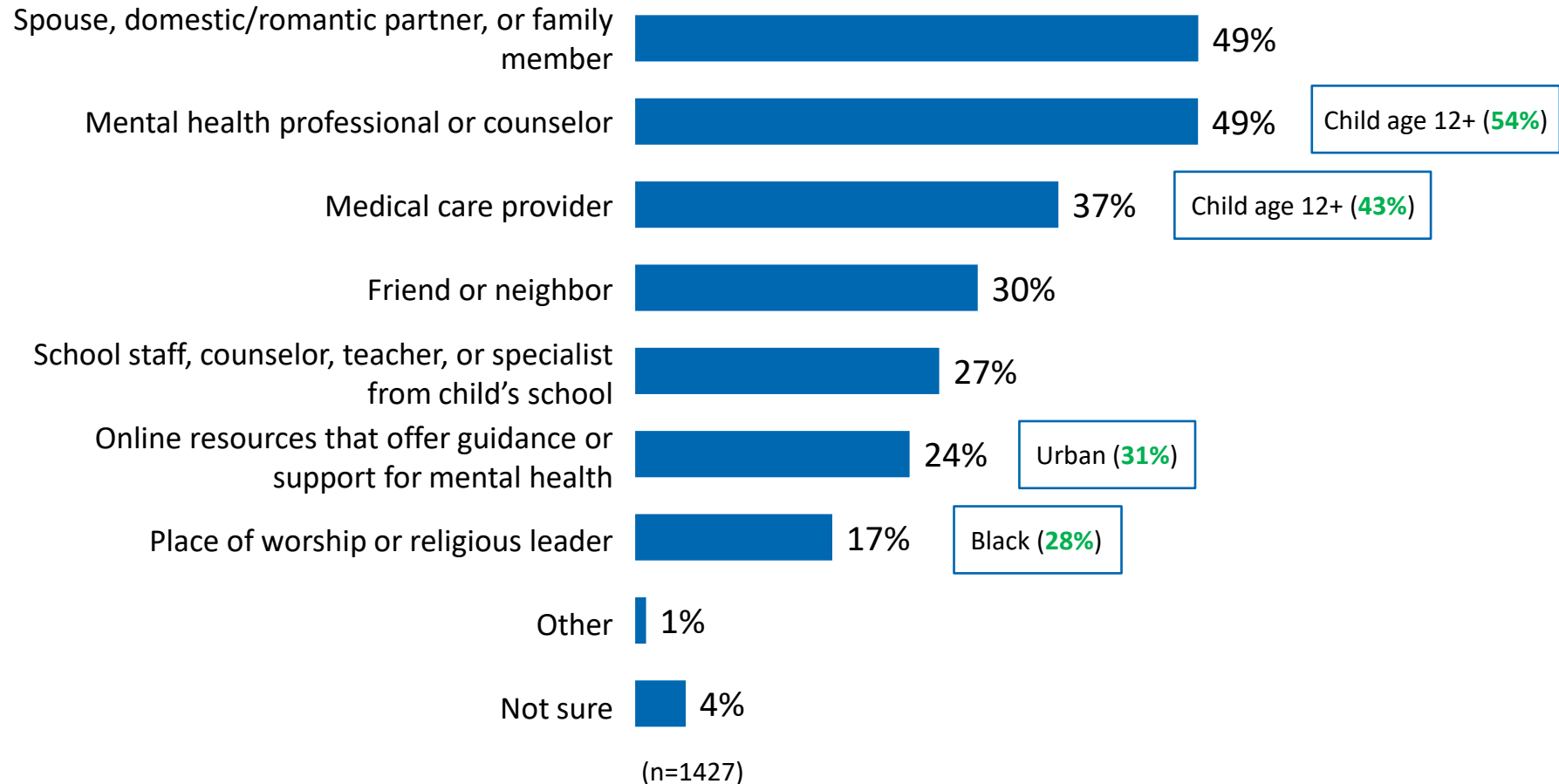


Results are consistent across race/ethnicity, region, and locality.

Parents are most likely to turn to a significant other, family member, or mental health professional for emotional support

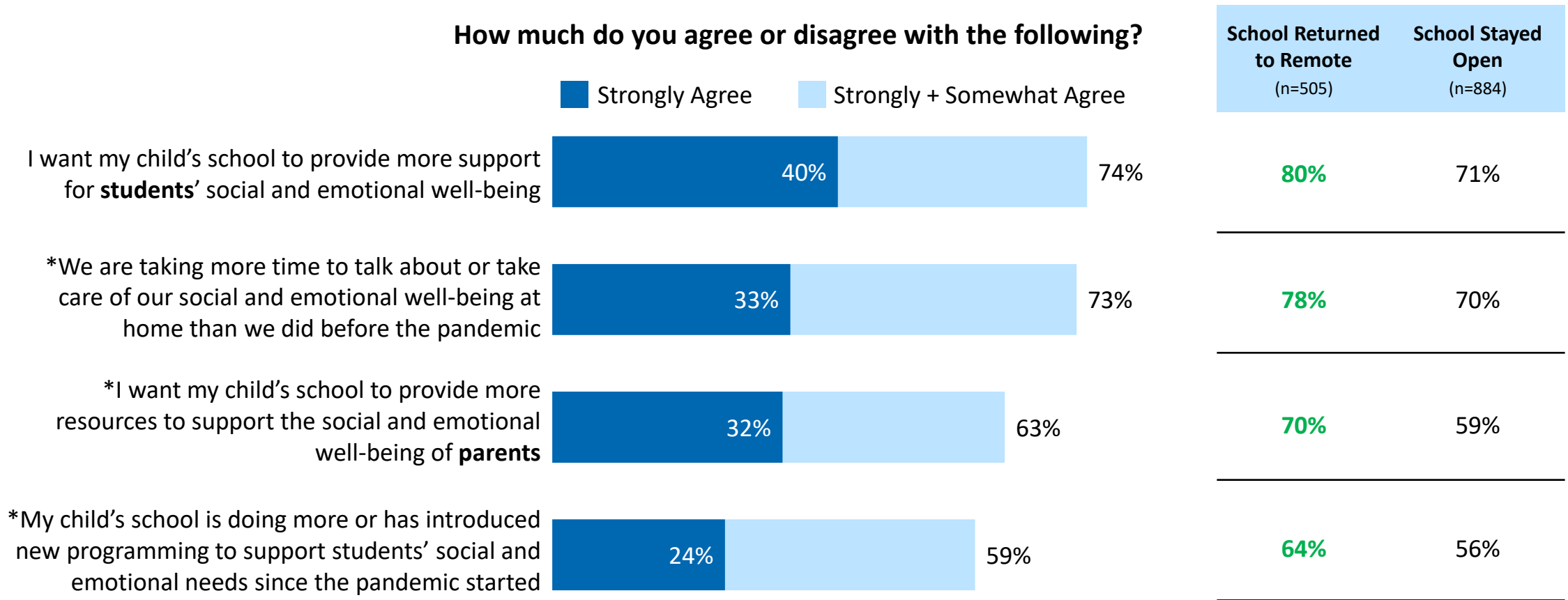
- Parents with older children are more likely to turn to healthcare providers than those with younger children.
- Over 1-in-4 Black parents would reach out to a religious leader for such support.

Which would you turn to for support for your social and emotional well-being?



Many parents are looking to support their children's social and emotional well-being at home **and** at school

- The desire for social and emotional support is higher among parents whose schools returned to remote learning at some point during the school year due to COVID-19.



(n=1427) *White parents less likely than Black or Hispanic to agree with these statements.

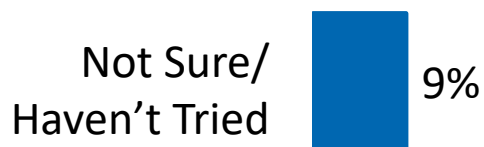
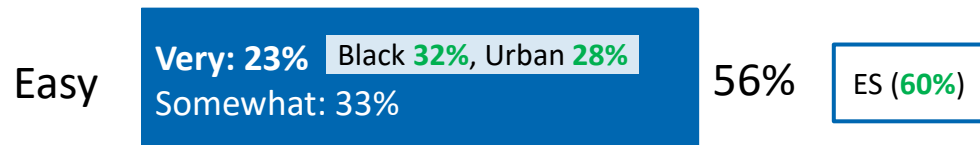
Parents in urban areas more likely than suburban or small town/rural to agree with all statements.

A majority of parents say it is easy to access resources to support both their own and their child's social and emotional well-being

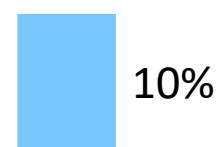
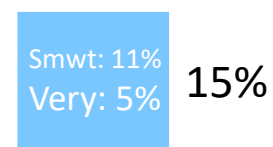
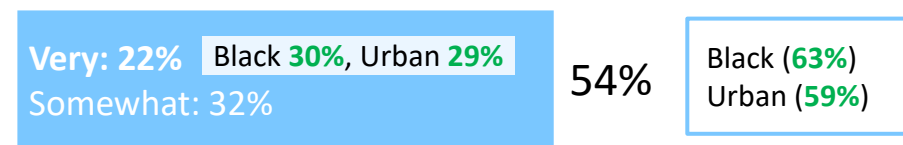
- That being said, less than 1-in-4 indicate it is *very* easy to do so, though this number is higher among Black parents and parents in urban areas.

How easy or difficult is it to access resources, services, or programs to support...

...your child's social and emotional well-being?



...your own social and emotional well-being?



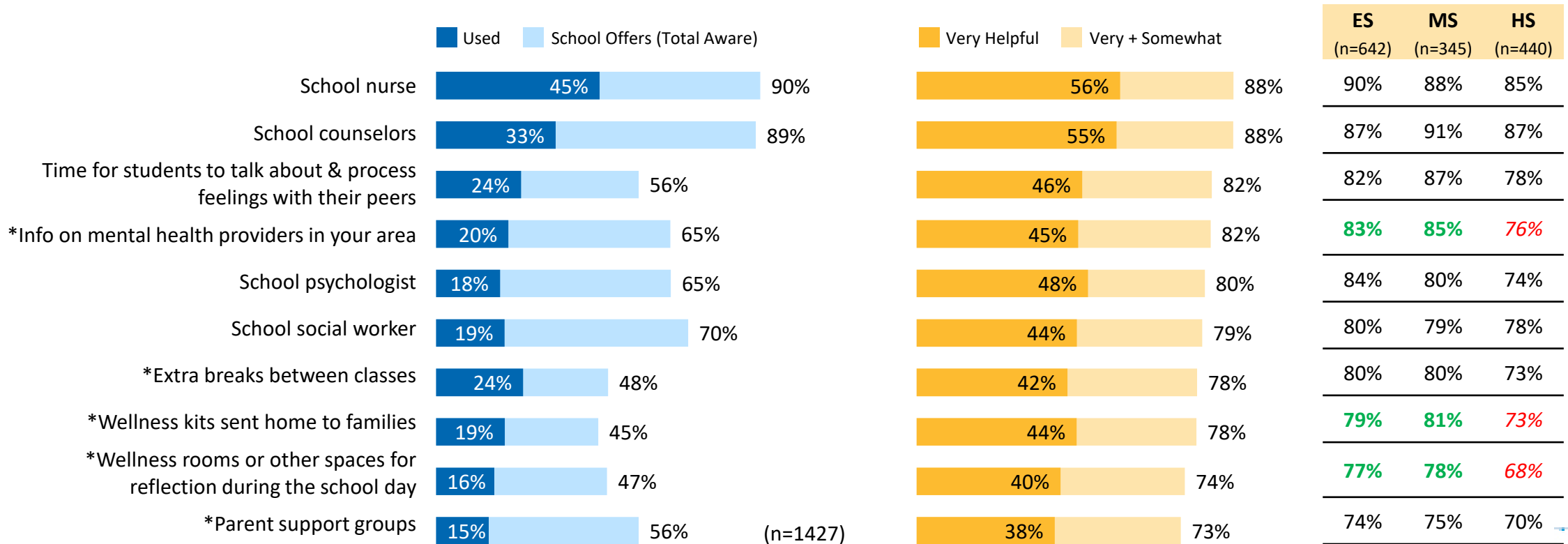
(n=1427)

Aside from school nurses and counselors, parents report uneven familiarity of school resources to support student and parent social and emotional well-being

- While parents deem the helpfulness of these resources consistently high, resource use is low.

Does your child’s school offer these services/ programs/resources, and have you used them?

How helpful are/would these services/programs/resources be?

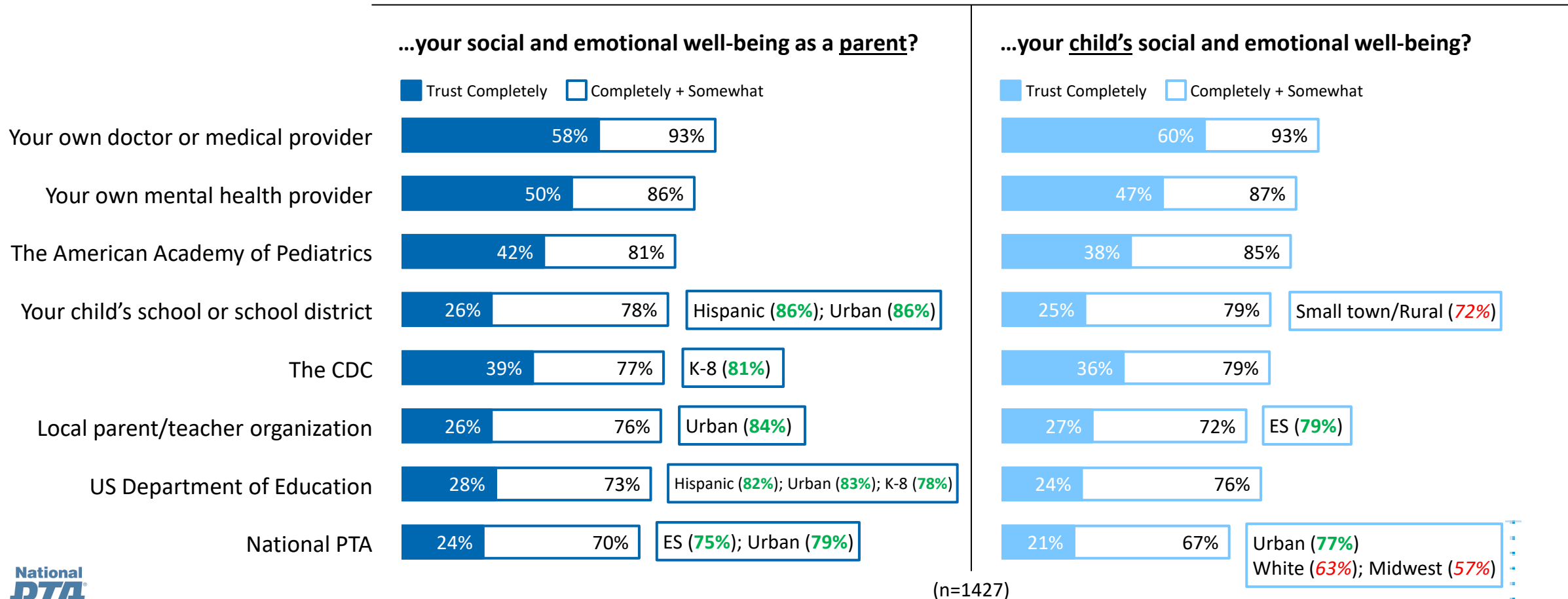


*White parents are less likely than Black or Hispanic parents to say these items are very/somewhat helpful.

Parents most trust doctors and mental health providers for information on social and emotional well-being

- Hispanic parents have more trust than their counterparts in schools/school districts and the Department of Education.
- Parents of younger children are generally more trusting of school and government organizations than their counterparts.

How much would you trust each of the following organizations, people, or entities to provide information or resources to support...



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