Understanding Parent Expectations and Concerns about Their Children Returning to School

Findings from a Nationwide Survey of Public School Parents
August 2021

Research conducted by:

Back to Class VIRTUAL TOWN HALL
National Online Parent Survey:

- Nationwide sample of **1,448 parents and guardians** with children in public school, grades K-12, including:
  - 672 elementary school parents
  - 309 middle school parents
  - 467 high school parents
  - 414 Black parents
  - 422 Hispanic parents representing a mix of acculturation levels

- Fielded July 23–August 8, 2021
  (NOTE: CDC’s updated mask guidance released 7/27)
- Offered in both English and Spanish
- Data were weighted to be representative of public-school parents in the U.S.

Throughout this report, **green/red** indicates statistically **higher/lower** differences between audiences.
Parents are most concerned about children contracting COVID at school and future disruptions resulting in a return to remote learning.

- Concern about all measures increased after the new guidance was released by the CDC.
- Significantly more Black and Hispanic parents worry about their child contracting COVID at school than white parents.

![Worry A Lot and Worry A Lot + Some](chart)

- Child contracting COVID-19 at school and getting sick: 33%, 60%
- Child contracting COVID-19 at school and infecting family member: 34%, 58%
- Future disruptions so child has to go back to learning at home: 25%, 58%
- Child stress/anxiety about contracting COVID-19 at school: 26%, 52%
- Trusting school personnel to implement health safety measures: 24%, 52%
- Child stress/anxiety about following health safety measures: 24%, 51%
- Child not being academically ready for new grade level this fall: 22%, 49%
- Child being bullied at school: 25%, 49%
- Child experiencing violence at school: 24%, 46%
- Child having to follow health safety measures: 21%, 45%
- Child feeling comfortable around other kids again at school: 19%, 45%
• White parents (65%) are significantly more comfortable than Black (55%) or Hispanic (53%) parents having their child return to school in-person.

How comfortable do you feel having your child return to school in-person in the fall?

- Very Comfortable: 26%
- Somewhat Comfortable: 35%
- Neutral/Not Sure: 15%
- Somewhat Uncomfortable: 14%
- Very Uncomfortable: 10%

“If feels like [many don’t] understand the American school system. You can’t have 3 feet and have everyone in the school building.” - Black MD parent
Half of parents want their children to return to school in-person this fall

- Keep in mind, preference shifted slightly away from in-person after July 27
- White parents are more likely to prefer in-person learning than Hispanic and Black parents

Given the choice, how would you like your child to attend school this fall?

- **50%** In-Person
- **32%** Hybrid
- **16%** Remote/Virtual

"[I'm feeling] anxious and nervous and knowing there’s an unknown but seeing how happy [my daughter] is to be around other kids in a regular environment makes sending her back worth it." - White NC parent
The recommendations that rose to the top reflect consensus among all parents.

To keep children safe at school, parents rank highest recommendations that are not unique to COVID prevention.

**How important is it for schools to put each recommendation in place when students return in the fall?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Tier</th>
<th>Most Important</th>
<th>Most + Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stay Home When Sick</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning and Disinfecting</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handwashing</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ventilation</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Tracing &amp; Quarantine</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masking</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Distancing</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Tier</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:**

- Stay Home When Sick
- Cleaning and Disinfecting
- Handwashing
- Ventilation
- Contact Tracing & Quarantine
- Masking (regardless of vaccination status)
- Social Distancing
Parents are least supportive of recommendations that group or separate students by vaccination status.

How important is it for schools to put each recommendation in place when students return in the fall?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Most Important</th>
<th>Most + Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masking (only non-vaccinated)</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Precautions for Activities</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screen Testing</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouping (to limit interactions)</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaccinations (promote/offer)</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety Measures Based on Vaccination Status</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group by Vaccination Status</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Over half of parents are concerned about bullying based on their child’s vaccination status

How concerned are you that your child will face bullying or exclusion because of their vaccination status?

- Concerned: 36%
- Somewhat Concerned: 16%
- Not Concerned: 46%
- Not Sure: 2%

“If you ostracize unvaccinated kids in any way, that’s gonna be a big thing. That’s not gonna fly.”
- White TN parent
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