

Will Students Come Back?

A July 2021 Parent Survey About
School Hesitancy and Parental Preferences
for COVID-19 Safety Practices in Schools—
Survey Methods Appendix

HEATHER L. SCHWARTZ, MELISSA KAY DILIBERTI, DAVID GRANT

Sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation



For more information on this publication, visit www.rand.org/t/RR1393-2.

About RAND

The RAND Corporation is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest. To learn more about RAND, visit www.rand.org.

Research Integrity

Our mission to help improve policy and decisionmaking through research and analysis is enabled through our core values of quality and objectivity and our unwavering commitment to the highest level of integrity and ethical behavior. To help ensure our research and analysis are rigorous, objective, and nonpartisan, we subject our research publications to a robust and exacting quality-assurance process; avoid both the appearance and reality of financial and other conflicts of interest through staff training, project screening, and a policy of mandatory disclosure; and pursue transparency in our research engagements through our commitment to the open publication of our research findings and recommendations, disclosure of the source of funding of published research, and policies to ensure intellectual independence. For more information, visit www.rand.org/about/principles.

RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors.

Published by the RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif.

© 2021 RAND Corporation

RAND® is a registered trademark.

Limited Print and Electronic Distribution Rights

This document and trademark(s) contained herein are protected by law. This representation of RAND intellectual property is provided for noncommercial use only. Unauthorized posting of this publication online is prohibited. Permission is given to duplicate this document for personal use only, as long as it is unaltered and complete. Permission is required from RAND to reproduce, or reuse in another form, any of its research documents for commercial use. For information on reprint and linking permissions, please visit www.rand.org/pubs/permissions.

About This Report

This report provides information about the sample, survey instrument, and resultant data associated with a July 2021 survey of parents concerning school hesitancy and preferences for COVID-19 safety practices in schools in the United States. The results are intended to inform school districts' and health officials' planning for operating schools in fall 2021.

The main report is available at www.rand.org/t/RRA1393-2. Results of a similar survey fielded in May 2021 are available at www.rand.org/t/RRA1393-1.

RAND Education and Labor

This research was undertaken by RAND Education and Labor, a division of the RAND Corporation that conducts research on early childhood through postsecondary education programs, workforce development, and programs and policies affecting workers, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy and decisionmaking. This report is based on research funded by The Rockefeller Foundation.

The authors are grateful to the staff of The Rockefeller Foundation and to the members of the State & Territory Alliance for Testing (<https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/covid-19-response/stat>) for their collaboration and feedback on our surveys. The findings presented are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of The Rockefeller Foundation. For more information and research on these and other related topics, please visit rockefellerfoundation.org.

More information about RAND can be found at www.rand.org. Questions about this report should be directed to hschwart@rand.org, and questions about RAND Education and Labor should be directed to educationandlabor@rand.org.

Survey Methods

Our survey of parents of school-age children (ages 5–18) was conducted using the Ipsos Knowledge Panel (KP). KP is a high-quality online panel that employs probability-based sampling to recruit members, is representative of the adult population in the United States, and has been in operation since 1999. The size of KP allowed us to complete the survey with a large and relatively diverse sample of English- and Spanish-speaking parents of school-age children.

To complete the desired 3,000 surveys, Ipsos invited 7,397 KP members to participate. These members were invited based on the expectation that their household included children who were 5–18 years of age. Among invited panelists, 3,854 (52 percent) completed at least the first part of the survey. The survey first asked several items to determine survey eligibility, including that (1) the respondent consented to take the survey, (2) the respondent was the parent of a child 5–18 years of age living in the household, and (3) the respondent’s youngest school-age child was enrolled in a kindergarten through grade 12 (K–12) school (a charter school, a private school, or a traditional public school that is not a charter school). We excluded parents whose children were exclusively enrolled in permanent home schooling. Among those who completed the first part of the survey, 3,146 (43 percent) were deemed eligible and completed the survey. Among the completed surveys, 237 (8 percent) were completed in Spanish. Respondents took the survey between July 16 and July 29, 2021.

We posed a total of 21 questions to parents in the July 2021 survey. For questions where respondents could select all that apply, we randomly ordered response items to prevent order bias.

Ipsos weighted the completed surveys to match the national distribution of demographic characteristics among parents of children 5–18 years of age. Ipsos’s weighting method started by calculating design weights for survey completers based on their selection probabilities (selection from KP to be invited to participate in this survey). The design weights were then calibrated along multiple demographic indicators from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) data from 2019, including gender by age, race/ethnicity, Census region by metropolitan status,¹ educational attainment, household income, and language proficiency. The final weights were trimmed to eliminate extreme values.

Table 1 presents information about the parents who participated in the survey.

¹ Census region by metropolitan status is from the March supplement to the 2020 Current Population Survey.

Table 1. Profile of Parents in the Survey

	Number	Unweighted Percentage	Weighted Percentage	ACS Estimate of Parents with Children Ages 5–18 in the United States
Total, all parents	3,146	100%	100%	53,398,798
Gender				
Male	1,381	44%	45%	45%
Female	1,765	56%	55%	55%
Race/ethnicity				
White	2,124	68%	57%	57%
Black	213	7%	11%	11%
Hispanic	600	19%	23%	22%
Asian	121	4%	7%	n/a
Other ^a	88	3%	3%	10%
Vaccination status (as of survey fielding)				
Received COVID-19 vaccine	2,219	71%	68%	n/a
Did not receive COVID-19 vaccine	905	29%	32%	n/a
Educational attainment				
High school diploma (or equivalent) or less	535	17%	33%	35%
Some college or associate's degree	841	27%	29%	29%
Bachelor's degree or higher	1,770	56%	37%	36%
Household income				
Less than \$50,000	729	23%	23%	24%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	1,062	34%	30%	31%
\$100,000 or more	1,355	43%	46%	45%
Urbanicity				
Urban	948	30%	30%	n/a
Suburban	1,659	53%	54%	n/a
Rural	539	17%	17%	n/a
Region^b				
Northeast	452	14%	16%	16%
Midwest	838	27%	21%	21%
South	1,072	34%	38%	38%
West	784	25%	25%	24%
Child's school type				
Traditional public school that is not a charter school	2,647	84%	86%	n/a
Charter school	199	6%	6%	n/a
Private school	300	10%	8%	n/a

	Number	Unweighted Percentage	Weighted Percentage	ACS Estimate of Parents with Children Ages 5–18 in the United States
Age of youngest child				
Under 12	1,829	58%	62%	n/a
12 or older	1,317	42%	38%	n/a
Youngest child's health status				
A compromised immune system	73	2%	3%	n/a
A disability for which they receive special education services or other therapies at school (i.e., have an IEP or 504 plan)	414	13%	12%	n/a
Neither	2,668	85%	85%	n/a

NOTES: IEP = individualized educational plan. Totals may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

^a Includes parents who are American Indian or Alaska Native, who are Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, or who are of two or more races.

^b Corresponds to the definition used by the U.S. Census Bureau. For more information, see U.S. Census Bureau, "Census Regions and Divisions of the United States," webpage, undated. As of September 29, 2021: https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/maps-data/maps/reference/us_regdiv.pdf

How We Analyzed the Survey Data

We calculated the percentages of parents who selected each survey response and compared their responses by category, yielding 27 subgroups:

- gender (male, female)
- race/ethnicity (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, other)
- vaccination status (received COVID-19 vaccine, did not receive COVID-19 vaccine)
- educational attainment (high school diploma [or equivalent] or less, some college or associate's degree, bachelor's degree or higher)
- household income (less than \$50,000; \$50,000 to \$99,999; \$100,000 or more)
- urbanicity (urban, suburban, rural)
- region (Northeast, Midwest, South, West)
- age of youngest child (under 12, 12 or older)
- youngest child's health status (a compromised immune system, a disability for which they receive special education services or other therapies at school [i.e., have an IEP or 504 plan], neither).

We conducted significance testing to assess whether subgroups were statistically different at the $p < 0.05$ level. Specifically, we tested whether the percentage of parents in one subgroup reporting a response was statistically different from the balance of parents who took the survey (e.g., White parents versus the rest of the parents who took the survey who are not White). In the figures in the main report, we use asterisks or bold font to indicate when a subgroup was statistically different from the total. Because of the exploratory nature of this study, we did not apply multiple hypothesis test corrections.

Our survey included the following open-ended question: “What is your youngest school-age child’s biggest concern about returning to school in-person?” To analyze the responses, we performed open coding of emergent themes, such as anxiety about starting in a new school or fear of wearing masks for a full school day. Single survey responses could be coded into multiple themes. Once we coded the open responses, we applied survey weights to present the prominence of each emergent theme.

Abbreviations

ACS	American Community Survey
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
IEP	individualized educational plan
K–12	kindergarten through grade 12
KP	Knowledge Panel

About the Authors

Heather L. Schwartz is the director of the Pre-K to 12 Educational Systems program within the Education and Labor division of RAND. She researches education and housing policies intended to reduce the negative effects of poverty on children and families. She holds a Ph.D. in education policy.

Melissa Kay Diliberti is an assistant policy researcher at RAND and a doctoral fellow at the Pardee RAND Graduate School. Her research interests include survey design and methodology and educational equity. She holds a master of public policy degree.

David Grant is a senior social/behavioral scientist at RAND. Grant has extensive survey research experience, including telephone-based surveys, random digit-dial sampling, address-based sampling, noncoverage, and nonresponse bias. Grant holds a Ph.D. in sociology.