



Mott Poll Report

August 23, 2021
Volume 39
Issue 2

How a Year of COVID Influences Views on Start of School

As a new school year begins, the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked parents of children age 7-18 about their experiences of last school year and their expectations for the year ahead.

About one-third of parents (36%) rate at least one aspect of 2020-21 as better for their child than the prior year: 24% for academic performance, 19% for connections with teachers, 14% for relationships with other students, and 17% for general attitude about school. Over half of parents (56%) rate at least one aspect of 2020-21 as worse for their child than the prior year: 25% for academic performance, 36% for connections with teachers, 40% for relationships with other students, and 32% for general attitude. Parents note several factors that made it difficult to help their child in the 2020-21 school year, including their own stress level (27%), their child's stress level (20%) and uncertainty about virtual learning (22%).

More parents of high school students report their child had virtual learning for more than half of the 2020-21 school year (64% high school, 53% middle school, 49% elementary school). Parents whose child had mostly virtual school rate more aspects of 2020-21 as worse for their child, compared to parents whose child spent less than half the year in virtual learning.

Looking ahead, 41% of parents say their child is more enthusiastic about the 2021-22 school year, 16% less enthusiastic, and 43% about the same as the prior year. Parents report their child's worries for the new school year are having to do virtual school again (26%), feeling comfortable around larger groups of children (24%), being behind on academics (22%), and getting along with friends (22%). Many parents feel very confident that for the upcoming year they know how to help their child be successful with school (51%), bounce back when things don't go well (47%), and deal with peer problems (44%).

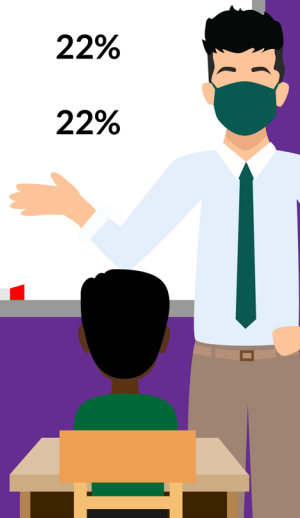
Among parents of middle- and high-school students, 62% say their child would feel safer if most students and teachers were vaccinated against COVID. Although most parents want to know how many students (59%) and teachers (61%) are not vaccinated, only 19% say that information would affect their decision about having their child attend in-person school.

Student worries for 2021-22 school year

Percent of parents reporting their child is worried about the following

Virtual school again	26%
Being around large groups of kids	24%
Being behind on academics	22%
Getting along with friends	22%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital
National Poll on Children's Health, 2021



Report Highlights

Over half of parents say at least one aspect of the 2020-21 school year was worse for their child than the prior year, while 1 in 3 say at least one aspect was better.

4 in 10 parents say their child is more enthusiastic about the 2021-22 school year than last year.

3 in 5 parents say their child would feel safer if most students and teachers were vaccinated against COVID.

Data Source & Methods

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Ipsos Public Affairs, LLC (Ipsos) for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The survey was administered in June 2021 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults who were parents of at least one child age 3-18 years living in their household (n=2,019). Adults were selected from Ipsos's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 56% among panel members contacted to participate. This report is based on responses from 1,669 parents with at least one child age 7-18. The margin of error for results presented in this report is ±2 to 6 percentage points.

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics, and the University of Michigan Susan B. Meister Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Center.

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C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

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Implications

The 2020-21 school year was unprecedented, as schools modified the learning environment to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Parent views from this Mott Poll demonstrate that COVID-19 modifications during the 2020-21 school year affected children differently.

One in three parents felt that at least one aspect of the modified 2020-21 school year was better for their child than the prior year, academically or for relationships with teachers and peers. In contrast, over half of parents cited at least one area in which 2020-21 was worse for their child. This was particularly true when the child spent most of the 2020-21 school year in virtual learning.

For many families, establishing a successful virtual learning environment was a challenge. Some faced technical barriers to ensuring their child had a dedicated device, adequate internet access, and a quiet and comfortable space for schoolwork. For some children, the decreased level of interaction with teachers meant that parents needed to offer supervision or assistance throughout the school day. Parents noted that the challenges of the 2020-21 school year were more difficult due to increased stress – their own and their child's – as well as uncertainty about how to implement virtual learning.

Though most parents reported that their child is enthusiastic about the upcoming school year, they noted certain areas of concern that likely stem from last year's COVID-related modifications. One-quarter of parents noted their child's worry about a return to virtual learning. With increased numbers of COVID cases in many parts of the country, this concern is warranted. Parents may want to work with their child to feel prepared, emotionally and logistically, for a sudden return to virtual learning, perhaps drawing on their experiences from last school year to create a positive home learning environment.

Children who look forward to returning to school and being around peers may still have worries about being around larger groups of children, as noted by parents in this Mott Poll. For children with this concern, parents will want to learn about school policies related to masks and social distancing, and then review this information with their child. For middle- and high-school students, the discussion should include how to navigate lunchtime and class changes where children often crowd together. If their child's school has no mask requirement, parents and children can talk with the teacher or principal to ensure that students are encouraged to wear masks throughout the day.

Other parents reported their child worried about being behind on academics after a year of modified learning. About half of parents were very confident that they know how to help their child be successful academically. Still, it is likely that many children may need time and additional support to catch up in some academic areas that they did not fully grasp in the last school year. Parents may ask their child's teachers for suggestions on supplementary work or have their child work with a tutor on specific subjects.

Parents of middle- and high-school students, most of whom are eligible to get a COVID vaccine, expressed interest in receiving information about the COVID vaccination rates for students and teachers at their child's school. Still, only 1 in 5 parents felt the information would influence their decision about having their child attend school in-person. Some parents may feel that for their child, the risk from unvaccinated individuals is less important than undoing the negative impact of having virtual learning for most of the 2020-21 school year. Parents also may believe that they can minimize that risk by having their child get a COVID vaccine.