The Educational Experiences of American Families During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Nationally Representative Panel Survey Evidence

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The Understanding America Study

- Since 2014, longitudinal, national probability-based panel of approximately 8,500 US residents, collecting information at multiple time points each year on economic, labor, attitudinal, and health measures, etc.
- Tracking pandemic effects starting March 10, 2020
- Every day ~500 respondents answer UAS questions, 7000 over a two-week period
We Conduct Surveys Online, and Provide Internet-Connected Tablets...

...to people who didn’t have Internet access before, permitting participation among older, lower income, lower education, rural, unemployed, and/or disabled participants, making the UAS truly representative of the US population.
## ~1,450 UAS Households With Minimum One K-12 Child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/ethnicity</th>
<th>UAS April 2020 (percent)</th>
<th>Current Population Survey (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>55.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>UAS April 2020 (percent)</th>
<th>Current Population Survey (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school or less</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baccalaureate or higher</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>36.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age category</th>
<th>UAS April 2020 (percent)</th>
<th>Current Population Survey (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-30</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-45</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>48.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-65</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66+</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nearly 20 Waves of Parent Survey Administration Data (and Counting)

Apr 1-29
Apr 15-May 12
Apr 29-May 26
Jun 24-Jul 21
Jun 24-Jul 21
Sep 30-Oct 28
Nov ‘20-June ‘21
Apr 14-May 11
Jun 9-Jul 22

Nearly all states close schools for the academic year
Students speak out: Distance learning has challenged me
Fading The Fall: School reopening mandate draws concerns, confusion from parents and school districts
Research Finds Few Links Between Schools And COVID
More non-white than white parents prefer remote learning for their children

USC Dornsife
Center for Economic and Social Research
At the beginning of the pandemic, we found large disparities in educational experiences
In April 2020, More than One-Third of Low-Income Families Lacked Access to Computers and Internet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household income</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $25K</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25K–$49K</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50K–$74K</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75K–$149K</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than $150K</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children have access to internet and laptop/desktop for learning
In the summer of 2020, parents shared their preferences for the fall
Remote-only Learning Had Parents’ Least *Overall* Support

Q: Schools are considering several policies in the wake of recent school closures. Do you oppose or support each of the following policies?
But More Parents of Color Wanted Remote Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73%</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
By October 2020, some parents reported improvements over the spring, though with a long way to go.
Overall Parents’ Grades for School Quality Improved, But Not So Much Among Remote

Parents' Grades for School's Overall Quality of Education

- Pre-COVID
- Spring
- Fall

Grade (GPA scale: A=4, F=0)

- In-person in fall
- Remote in fall
- Hybrid in fall
Same Pattern for Science Instruction Quality Grades

Parents' Grades for School's Science Instruction Quality

Grade (GPA scale: A=4, F=0)

Pre-COVID  | Spring  | Fall

In-person in fall  | Remote in fall  | Hybrid in fall
...And for Math

Parents' Grades for School's Math Instruction Quality

Grade (GPA scale: A=4, F=0)

Pre-COVID  Spring  Fall

In-person in fall  Remote in fall  Hybrid in fall
Schools Were Delivering More Services in October Than in April, But Not at Pre-COVID-19 Levels
Parents Support Cancelling Spring 2021 Standardized Tests

US Parents Show Relatively High, Uniform Support for Cancelling Standardized Tests in Spring 2021

Average = 64%

Data from October 2020 administration of the UAS

Race/Ethnicity
Black: 72, White: 63, Hispanic: 60, Asian: 58

Income
Less than $25k: 65, $25k-$49k: 70, $50k-$74k: 65, $75k-$149k: 63, $150k or more: 47

Political ID
Dem/Lean Dem: 67, Rep/Lean Rep: 58

Attendance Mode
Fully in Person: 55, Hybrid: 56, Fully Remote: 69
November 2020 through June 2021 we have been collecting data on child attendance mode, parent preferences, school mitigation strategies.
White Parents Increasingly Preferred In-Person Learning

Parent preference for how child attends school

Race–ethnicity = White – National sample; 7-day window; s race–ethnicity; probsl062a_note'
Black Parents Were Much More Ambivalent About In-Person
Hispanic Parents Have Been Less Enthusiastic About In-Person

Parent preference for how child attends school

Race–ethnicity = Hispanic – National sample; 7-day window; s race–ethnicity; probsl062a_note'
April-May 2021 we collected data about “school hesitancy,” and parents’ perspectives on policy interventions
Parents Have Multiple Reasons for Not Sending Their Children Back In-Person—But Mostly Safety and “Child Fit”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-person not substantially different from online</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School safety protocols uncomfortable for child</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults at school not vaccinated</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only option was hybrid</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistics/scheduling complications</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote allows greater family involvement</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No in person option</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reason</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing safety measures insufficient</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family likes remote learning schedule better</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child is same/happier</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child is doing same/better academically</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not trust school to keep child safe</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child wants to stay remote</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safer for child/family</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: USC Dornsife Center for Economic and Social Research’s Understanding America Survey.
Note: Data collected between April 14, 2021 - May 25, 2021 from a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults.
16% of Families are Hesitant to Send Their Children to School In-Person Next Year, 31% Black

Percentages of K-12 parents planning for their child to learn remotely at the beginning of the 2021-22 school year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Remote (%)</th>
<th>Unsure (%)</th>
<th>Remote plus unsure (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UAS data collected 5/12/2021-6/08/2021, ~90% sample (administration ends 6/22/2021)
Limited Parent Interest in “Popular” In-person Interventions

- **Summer School Offered**
  - Not Enrolled/Wouldn't Participate: 34%
  - Enrolled/Would Participate: 66%

- **Summer School Not Offered**
  - Not Enrolled/Wouldn't Participate: 66%
  - Enrolled/Would Participate: 34%

- **Tutoring Offered During School**
  - Not Enrolled/Wouldn't Participate: 27%
  - Enrolled/Would Participate: 73%

- **Tutoring Not Offered During School**
  - Not Enrolled/Wouldn't Participate: 73%
  - Enrolled/Would Participate: 27%

- **Tutoring Offered After School**
  - Not Enrolled/Wouldn't Participate: 27%
  - Enrolled/Would Participate: 73%

- **Tutoring Not Offered After School**
  - Not Enrolled/Wouldn't Participate: 73%
  - Enrolled/Would Participate: 27%

- **Pods Offered**
  - Not Enrolled/Wouldn't Participate: 17%
  - Enrolled/Would Participate: 83%

- **Pods Not Offered**
  - Not Enrolled/Wouldn't Participate: 83%
Press and Publications April 2020-June 2021

- Analysis: Tutoring, Summer School, Pods — Survey Finds Parents Aren’t So Thrilled About Most K-12 COVID Recovery Solutions on the Table (April 2021-May 2021 data)
- Why some parents are sticking with remote learning - even as schools reopen (April 2021-May 2021 data)
- American Enterprise Institute Report on what’s behind racial differences in attitudes toward school reopening (and what to do about them) (May 2020-March 2021 data)
- Brookings Brown Center Chalkboard article on how almost everyone is concerned about K-12 students’ academic progress (December 2020-February 2021 data)
- Economist article on how more non-white than white parents prefer remote learning for their children (January-February 2021 data)
- Los Angeles Times article on how parents struggle with a new dilemma: Is it safe to send kids back to school? (January-February 2021 data)
- Los Angeles Times article on how a high school reopened two months ago, with no COVID-19 outbreaks? (January-February 2021 data)
- Edsource article on how California parents continue to disagree on return to school as Covid-19 cases decline (January-February 2021 data)
- Economist article on why reopening schools in minority neighbourhoods is hard (January-February 2021 data)
- Chalkbeat article on whether parents are getting the type of instruction they want for their kids (January-February 2021 data)
- New Yorker article on what’s at stake in the fight over reopening schools (January-February 2021 data)
- New York Times article on how Rhode Island kept its schools open (January-February 2021 data)
- Los Angeles Times article on how schools in more affluent areas move faster to reopen than those in low-income communities (January-February 2021 data)
- Education Next blog on mask-wearing in schools (November 2020 data)
- Evidence Base article on evidence of COVID-19’s impact on K-12 education and critical areas of intervention (April-October 2020 data)
- Brookings piece on fall 2020 differences between in-person and remote learning experiences (September 30-October 28 2020 data)
- Evidence Project piece on needed supports for remote learners (September 30-October 28 2020 data)
- 74Million piece on decrease in parent support for standardized testing in spring 2021 (September 30-October 28 2020 data)
- Hechinger Op-Ed with recommendations for policy makers about school re-openings (September 30-October 28 2020 data)
- USC blog on parents’ concerns and perspectives on school reopening (June 22-July 24 2020 data)
- EdWeek (exclusive) article on K12 parents’ concerns and preferences (June 22-July 24 2020 data)
- FutureEd blog on parents’ conversations about race with their children (June 22-July 24 2020 data)
Ongoing Work

• Continuing to track children’s attendance mode, options their schools are offering, and school in-person safety precautions

• New surveys in June, October 2021

• Linking education data to the full UAS dataset and COVID case, hospitalization, death, vaccine rates

• Continuing to publish results in education and mainstream press, prepare papers for peer-reviewed publication

• Stay tuned!
UAS Data Available for Free Download: uasdata.usc.edu/education
Thank you!

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In collaboration with: Marshall Garland, Shira Korn Haderlein, Amie Rapaport, and Daniel Silver
Summary of Results
uasdata.usc.edu/education

• Remote learner needs have included one computer per child, acceptable internet service, meals and mental health support—as well as tutoring, parent homework support, child care

• Remote learning attendance varied considerably nationwide through the year, as did parent views on education quality

• Wide variation by race and household income in parents’ attendance mode preferences for their children—concerns of ongoing “school hesitancy”

• Parents have multiple reasons for keeping their children out of in-person school, but most come down to “safety” and “fit” reasons.

• Parent interest in many “popular” policies is limited

• Bipartisan support for civic education topics
Greater Proportions of Remote Parents Report Their Child is Unprepared in Science

Parents Reporting their Child is Academically Unprepared in Science, by Fall Attendance Mode

% of Parents

In person in fall  Remote in fall  Hybrid in fall

Summer 2020  Fall 2020
Greater Proportions of Remote Parents Report Their Child is Unprepared in Math

Parents Reporting their Child is Academically Unprepared in Math, by Fall Attendance Mode

- In person in fall
- Remote in fall
- Hybrid in fall

% of Parents

Greater Proportions of Remote Parents Report Their Child is Unprepared in Math
Greater Proportions of Remote Parents Report Their Child is Unprepared in ELA as well

Parents Reporting their Child is Academically Unprepared in ELA, by Fall Attendance Mode

- In person in fall
- Remote in fall
- Hybrid in fall

Greater proportions of remote parents report their child is unprepared in ELA as well.
Remote Learners Need Tutoring, More Supports for Parents, More Computers, Better Internet

- Nearly 40 percent of parents reporting their children need tutoring say their schools did not provide it.
- Roughly half of parents with a high school degree (or less) feel equipped to help their own children with homework, math 51%, science 58%.
- While computer/device provision has improved, 3.5% of remote learners do not have a device for learning—nearly one in ten share.
- While just over one percent of families do not have internet access, 22% report continuous internet interruptions, 40% for lowest income (<$25K).
- More than one in ten families with remote learners have formed “pods” where students learn together in-person with the help of a tutor or teacher, 15% among families with household income less than $50K.
Almost Everyone is Concerned about K-12 Students’ Academic Progress

Public concern about academic progress of low-income K-12 children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of respondents concerned</th>
<th>Less than $25K</th>
<th>$25K - $49K</th>
<th>$50K - $74K</th>
<th>$75K - $149K</th>
<th>$150K+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>74.30%</td>
<td>80.76%</td>
<td>82.84%</td>
<td>82.96%</td>
<td>88.45%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent’s Age</th>
<th>18 - 34</th>
<th>35 - 54</th>
<th>55 - 64</th>
<th>65+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>77.23%</td>
<td>80.27%</td>
<td>82.44%</td>
<td>85.52%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: USC Dornsife Center for Economic and Social Research’s Understanding America Survey.
Note: Data collected between Dec. 16-Feb. 7 from a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults.
Results and Policy Implications

- Remote learning attendance differs nationwide
  - Remote learning is inferior so we know which groups of students are most in need
- Remote learner needs include tutoring, parent homework support, one computer per child, acceptable internet service, child care
  - We know some areas to bolster supports
- Special service provision is not back to pre-COVID levels including for meals and mental health support
  - We know some more areas to bolster supports
- Parents’ support for mask-wearing in schools increased since summer
  - Physically opening schools is complicated but increased parent support for mask-wearing is promising
- Parents’ support for cancelling standardized tests increased since spring
  - Standardized testing will need to be targeted, with attention paid to messaging for parents
- In spring 2021, white and higher-income parents want to send children back to school in person, while families of color and lower-income families have been more cautious
  - Sharing these trends is critical to informing national reopening dialogues