



Spring Ahead: K-12 Parents on the Future of School

Findings from a survey of K-12 parents in Massachusetts

May 3, 2022

Steve Koczela
President, The MassINC Polling Group

This project was sponsored by the Barr Foundation

info@massincpolling.com MassINCPolling.com [@MassINCPolling](https://twitter.com/MassINCPolling)

11 Beacon St Ste 500 | Boston, MA 02108 | Phone: (617) 224-1647



Survey Background

- Results based on a statewide survey of 1,469 parents of school-age children in Massachusetts, including oversamples of Black, Latino, and Asian parents.
- Sixth in a series of polls with waves in May/June 2020, October 2020, February/March 2021, April/May 2021, October/November 2021, and March/April 2022.
- Conducted March 17 – April 11, 2022 via live telephone and online interviewing in English and Spanish.
- Data was weighted to known population parameters by age, gender, race, education, and region.
- Sponsored by the Barr Foundation with major project input and assistance from the Education Trust.

Key Findings

- Parents expectations of the school year impacts have diminished since the optimistic days this fall when many parents thought more children would catch up.
- Now, 22% think their child is behind grade level, compared to 13% who thought the same pre-pandemic.
- Parents whose children have fallen behind question whether schools are doing enough to help them catch up. They are more likely to have accepted academic support and to be planning summer school, but think schools should be doing more.

Key Findings

- While case counts were relatively low during fielding, COVID concerns remain. Parents are divided on whether to prioritize safety or getting back to normal.
- Support for COVID interventions varies widely by demographic factors, including by race. The views the popular media tends to emphasize about moving past COVID are not fully representative of how parents feel.
- Future waves of COVID will hit some areas much harder than others given widely divergent vaccination rates and plans to vaccinate. Younger, lower income children, and people living in rural areas or Gateway Cities are less likely to be vaccinated.

Key Findings

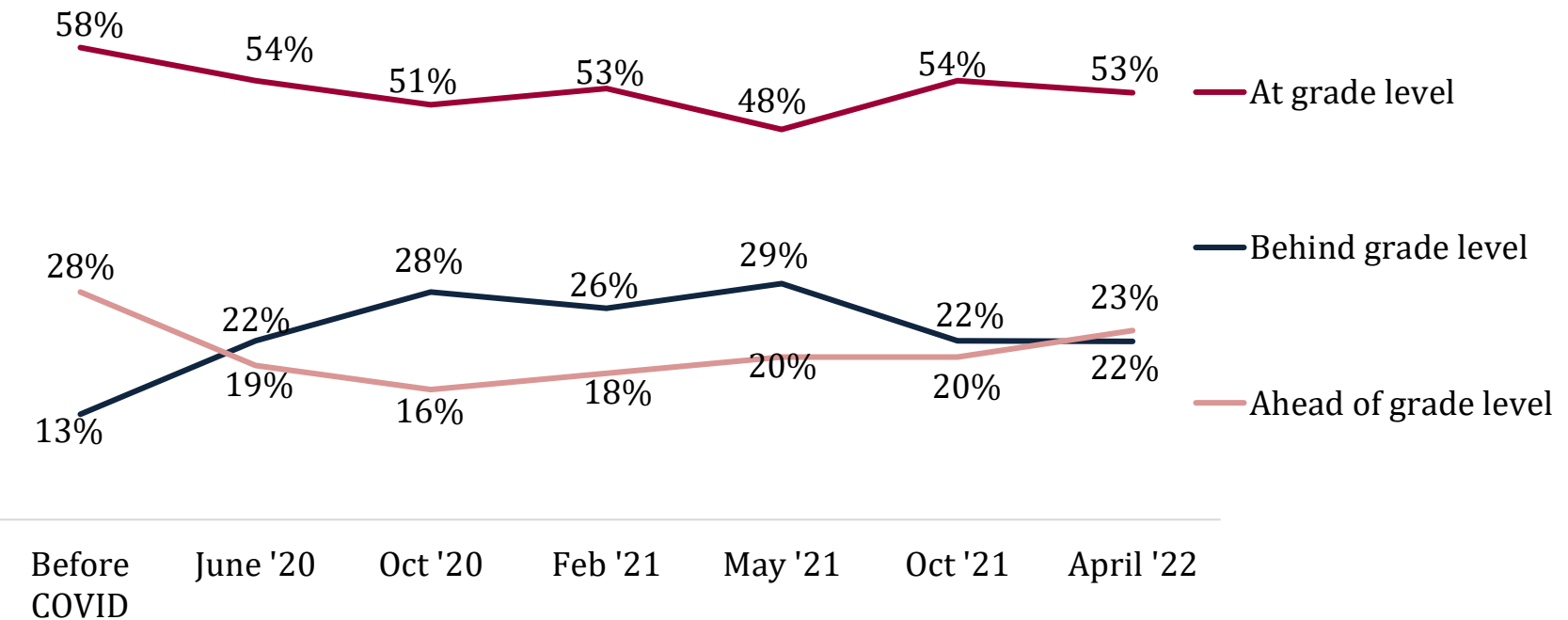
- Parental concerns suggest mental health challenges remain at crisis levels, with 48% saying they are very or somewhat concerned about their child.
- Mental health and academic achievement are closely linked. Parents who say their children have fallen behind academically are also far more likely to be concerned about their mental health.
- When it comes to performance, schools are seen doing best at making students feel welcome and least well at hiring and retaining a diverse workforce.

Parents report stable academic levels

- Parents perceive similar levels of academic achievement to what they reported in the fall 2021 survey.

Parents expect children to recover to pre-pandemic academic levels

% of parents who say their child is _____



Note: "Before COVID" figures are from the June 2020 wave of this series.

Q: Prior to the coronavirus crisis, do you think your child's academics were at / behind / ahead of grade level? How about now?

Adjusted academic expectations

- In the fall of 2021, parents expected more academic progress than they are now reporting.
- Now, 22% say their child is behind grade level, while just 9% expected that as of last fall.

Parents revise expectations of in-person school year

% of parents who think their child is / expected their child would be _____

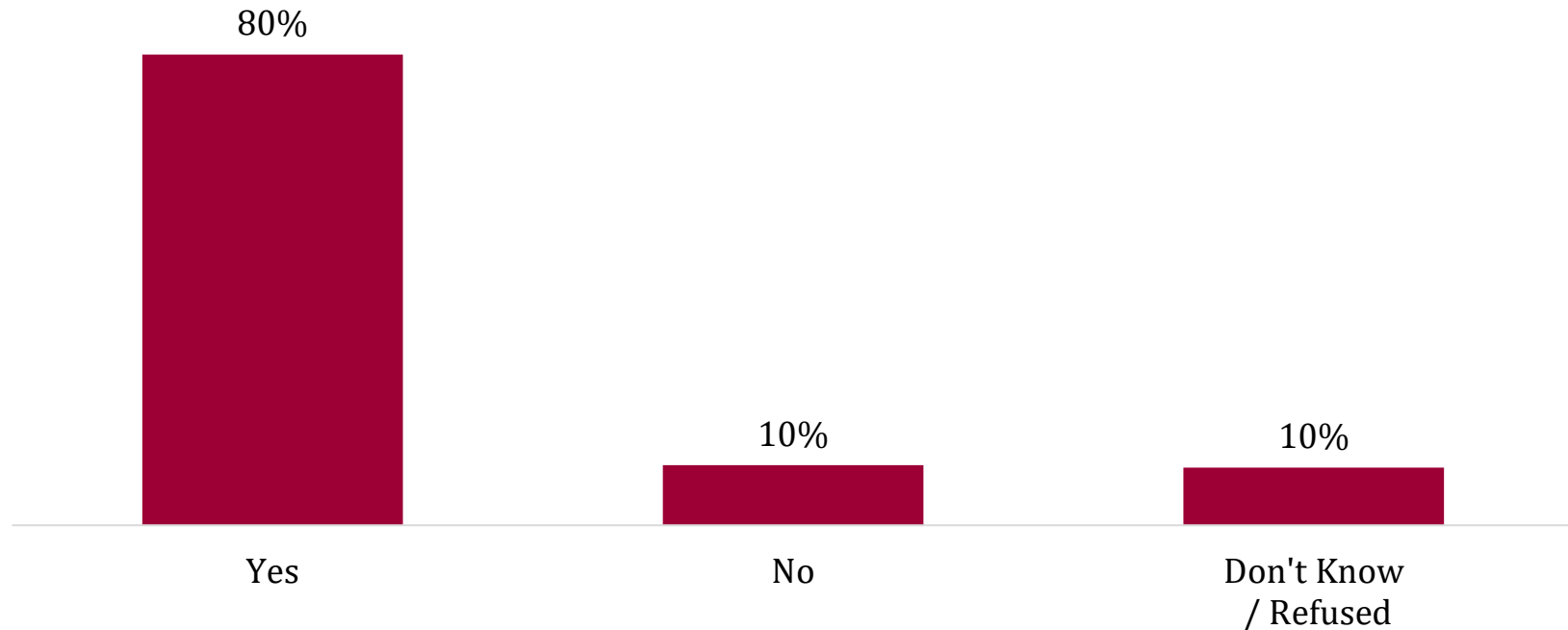
	Nov 2021: Expected by end of year	Now
At grade level	51%	53%
Behind grade level	9%	22%
Ahead of grade level	35%	23%
Don't Know / Refused	5%	2%

Ready for the next grade

- One in five think their child is not ready for the next grade or are unsure whether they are ready.

About one in five are not sure their child is ready for the next grade level

% of parents who think their child will be prepared for the next grade level



Info on progress

- Classroom grades are by far the most common information source for parents, followed by notes and conversations with teachers.

Parents rely most on grades, info from teachers

% of parents who report receiving each from the school

Source of info	%
Classroom grades	76%
Conversation or note from a teacher	56%
Results of diagnostic assessments, or tests that measure your child's learning progress	46%
Conversation or note from a guidance counselor	22%
MCAS results	21%
Other	6%
Don't Know / Refused	3%

Academic help and support

- Under half of parents (43%) say their child was offered additional academic supports.
- Those behind grade level were more likely to accept offers of academic support.

Those with children who are behind grade level are more likely to accept help
% of parents who say they were / were not offered additional academic support

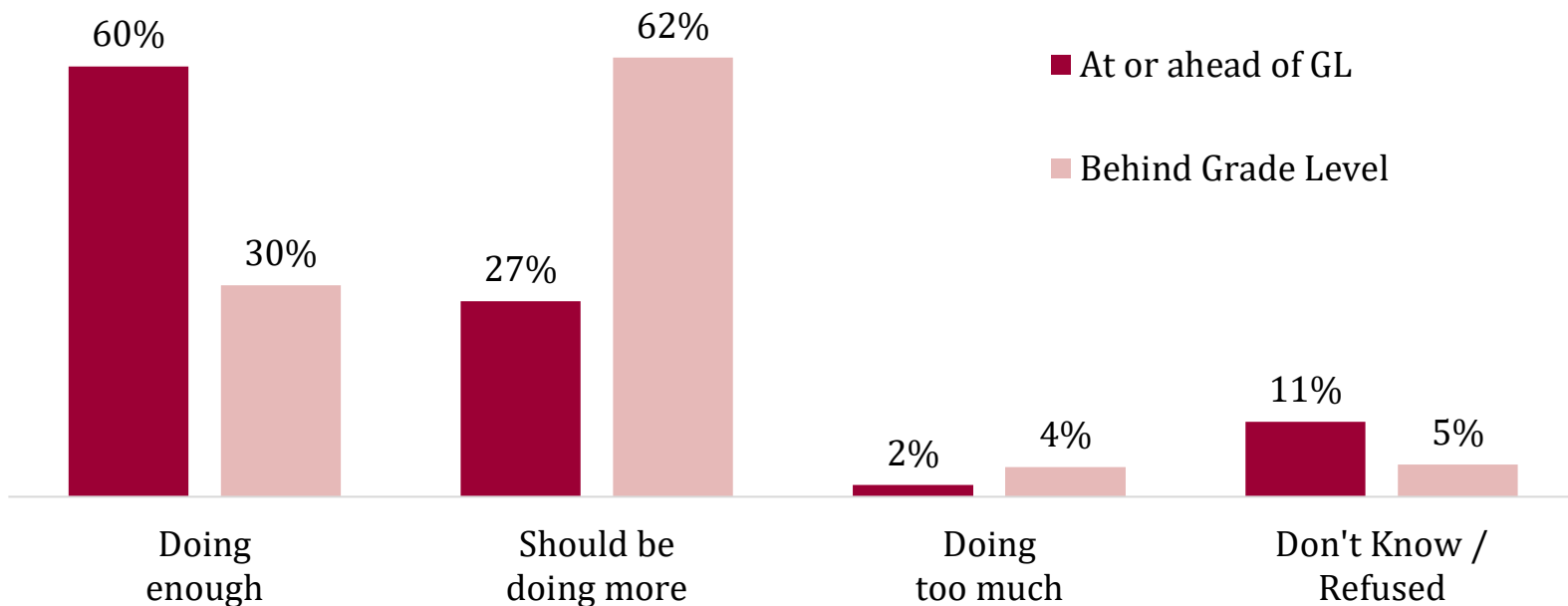
	Overall	Behind grade level	At grade level	Ahead of grade level
Offered, accepted help	31%	42%	32%	18%
Offered, but did not accept	12%	3%	13%	18%
No, not offered	53%	52%	51%	59%
Don't Know / Refused	5%	3%	4%	4%

Help needed for students falling behind

- Among parents who see their children as behind, most (62%) think the school is not doing enough to help them.

Parents whose children have fallen behind want schools to do more to help

% of parents who think their children's school is _____ to help students catch up.



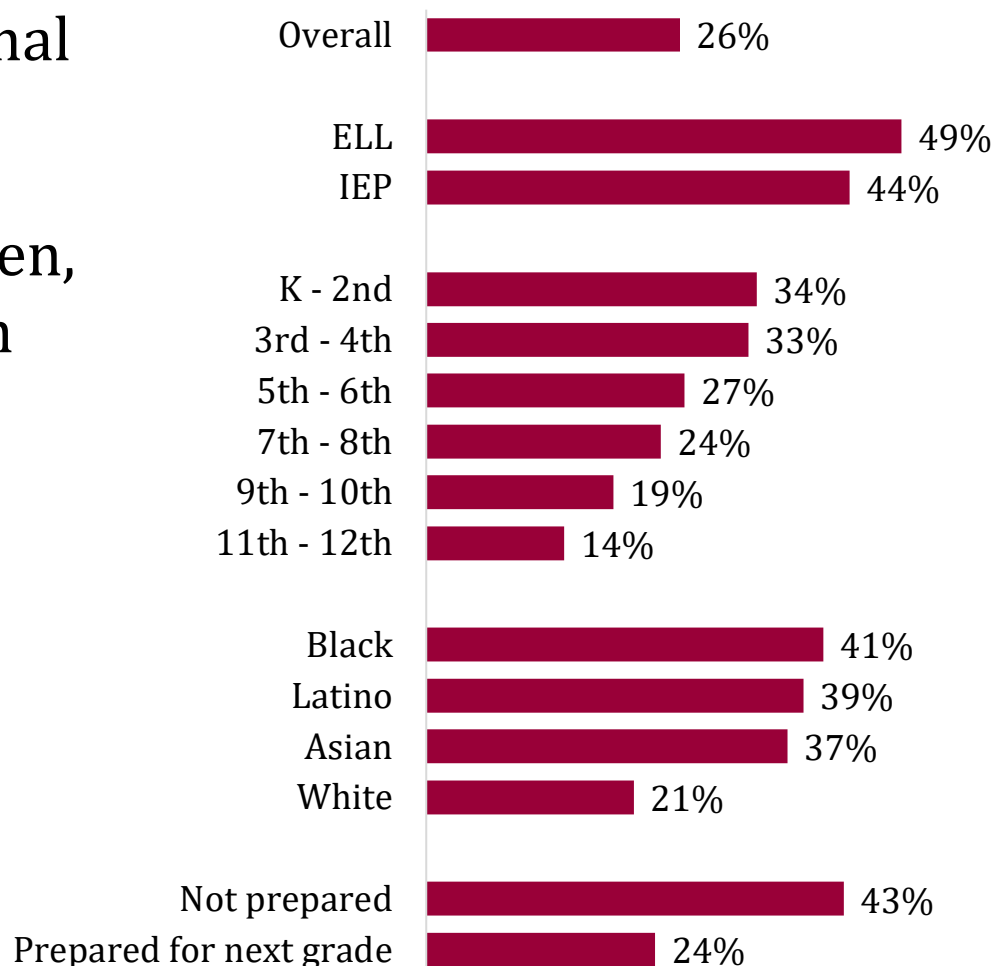
Summer programs

- Parents of color are far more likely to say they are planning for some sort of educational summer program.
- Parents of younger children, and those who have fallen behind are also more interested in summer programs.

Q: Do you plan to enroll your GRADE LEVEL child in a summer learning program, like summer school, summer camp with an educational component, or an acceleration academy, or not?

Who is planning for summer programs?

% of parents who say they plan to send their child to a summer educational program

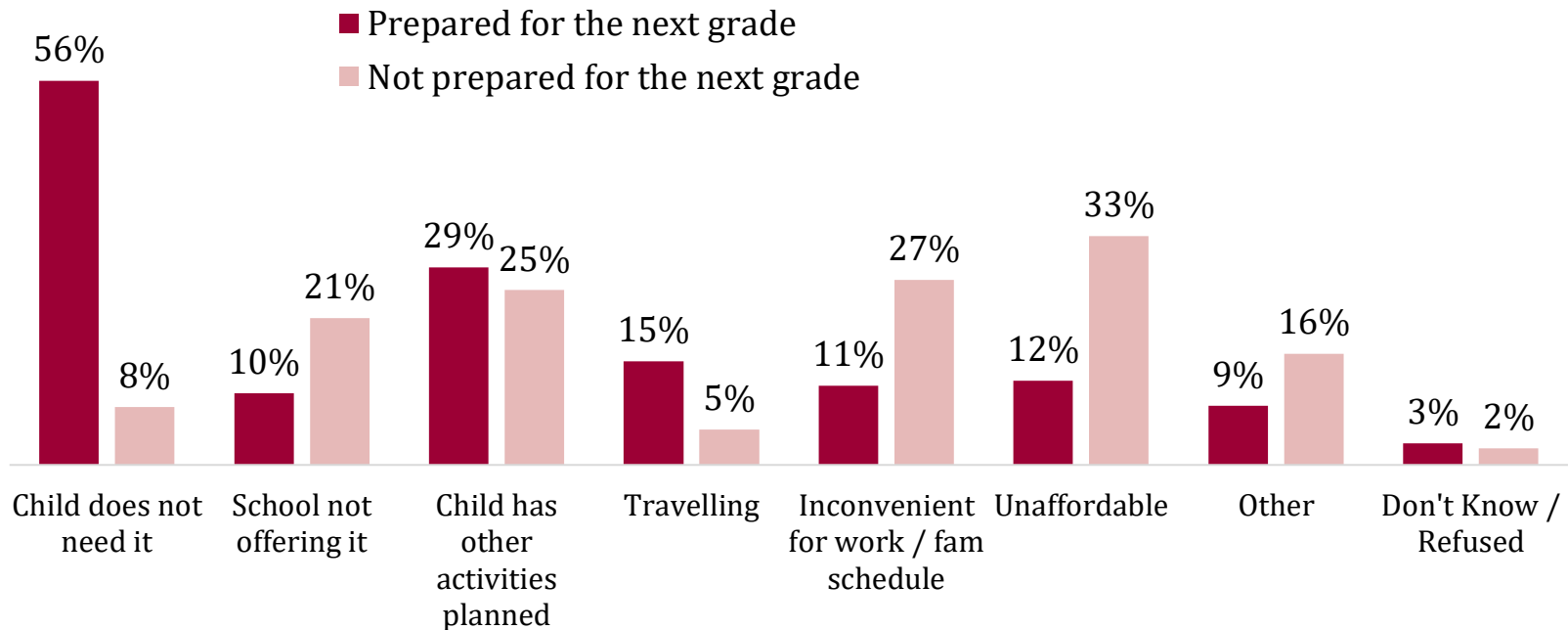


Why not planning summer school

- Scheduling and affordability are the most common reasons for avoiding summer school among parents whose children are not prepared for the next grade level.

Parents cite a range of reasons for not planning summer educational programs

% of parents not planning for summer school who cite each reason

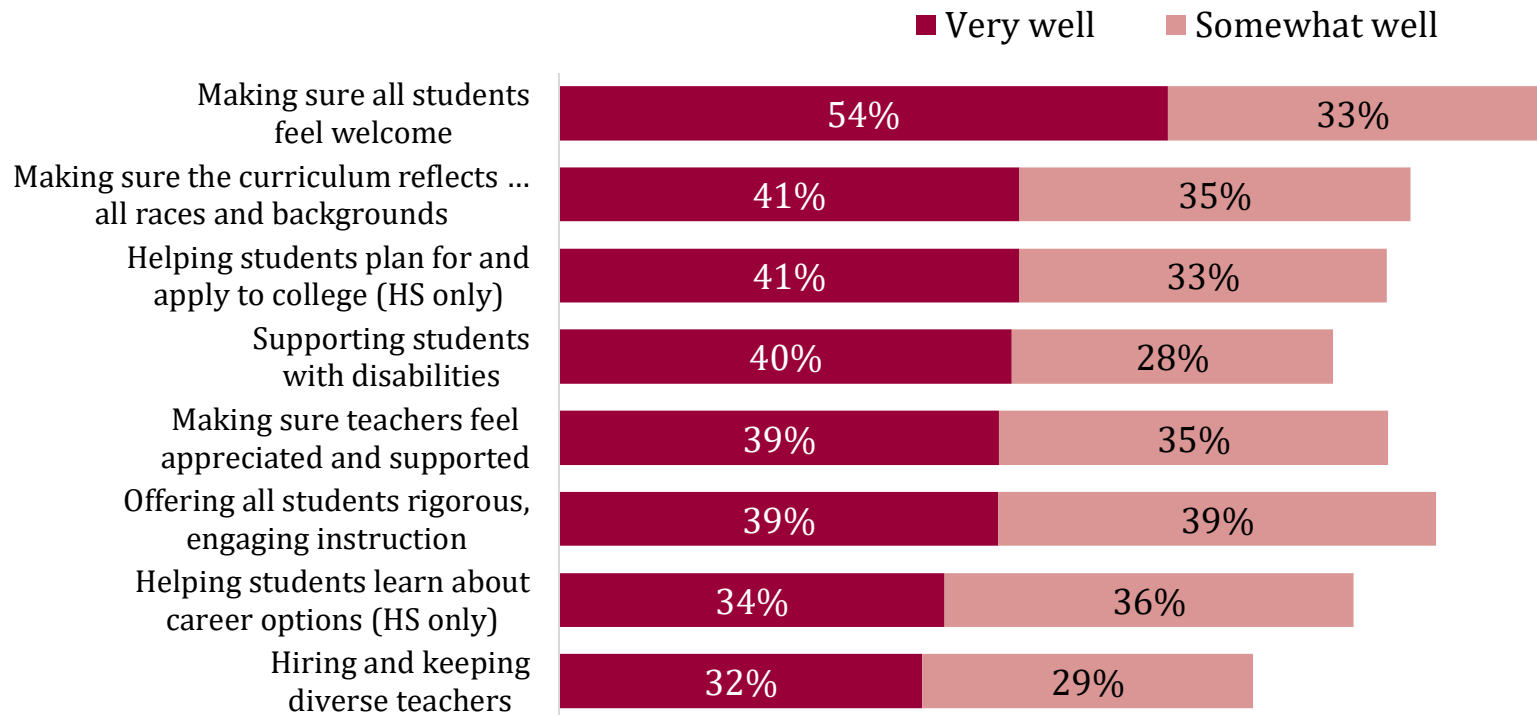


How are schools doing?

- Schools are doing the best at making students feel welcome, least well at teacher diversity, rigorous instruction. Under half say they are doing “very well” at most tasks.

Schools making students feel welcome, offering less rigorous instruction

% of parents who say their child's school is doing very / somewhat well at _____

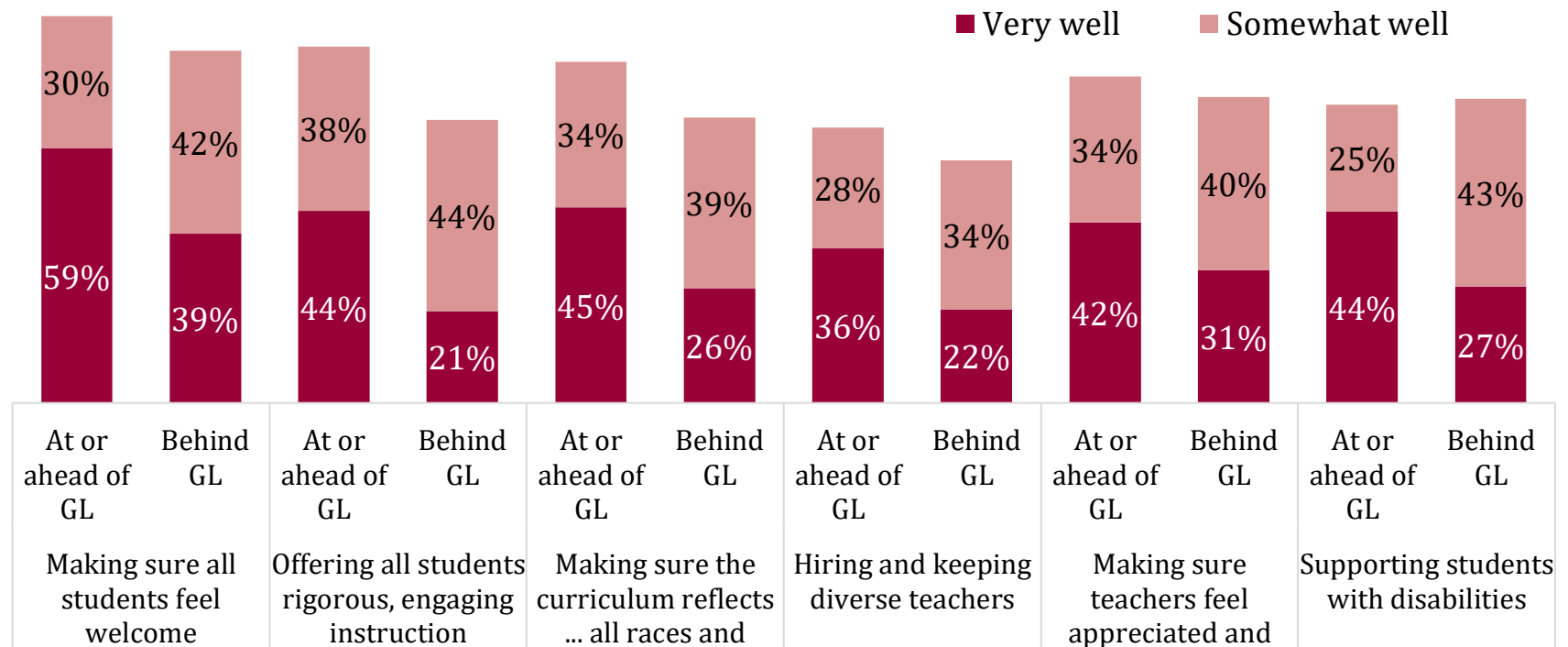


Less positive ratings from some

- Parents whose children are behind grade level are far less likely to offer positive ratings for their schools than are other parents.

Parents of children who are behind grade level offer less positive reviews

% of parents who say their child's school is doing very / somewhat well at ___



What parents want – open end

- Parents focus mostly on academic resources when asked what kinds of support would be most helpful.
- In open-end responses, suggestions for the classroom, affordable tutoring and more academic support are cited as top needs.

Q: What types of supports or resources would be especially helpful to your GRADE LEVEL child?

Parents seek academic supports for their children

% of parents who say ___ would be helpful to their child.

Academic issues total	46%
<i>Classroom suggestions (more/less homework, hands on, curriculum suggestions, attentive teachers)</i>	14%
<i>Affordable tutoring</i>	10%
<i>More academic support (1:1 help, catching up)</i>	10%
<i>Subject specific help (math, English, reading)</i>	10%
<i>Supplemental academic resources (online instruction, take home, college prep)</i>	6%
SEL & mental and emotional health supports (in school counselors, social skills, therapy in school)	9%
Support good as is / child doesn't need any	9%
Additional programming (before/after school, summer school, extracurriculars)	8%
Free / affordable resources (supplies, food, technology)	4%
Return to "normal" (just do school, no mask, no shutdowns)	3%
<i>Other</i>	11%
<i>None / Nothing</i>	20%

Note: Results may add to more than 100% as responses could be coded into multiple categories.

Quotes on supports

“We wanted to get her a tutor, unfortunately it’s very expensive.”

“Greater access to mental health/therapy. More public access to sports, clubs. More art in school.”

“I would say smaller classrooms so each student can have more attention focused on them, a more personalized curriculum so each student can learn based on where they are, and catch up in the easiest way for them to retain the information.”

“Sports and things to get acquainted with children outside of school.”

“Additional learning time, individualized attention with an educator, continuing learning through out summertime.”

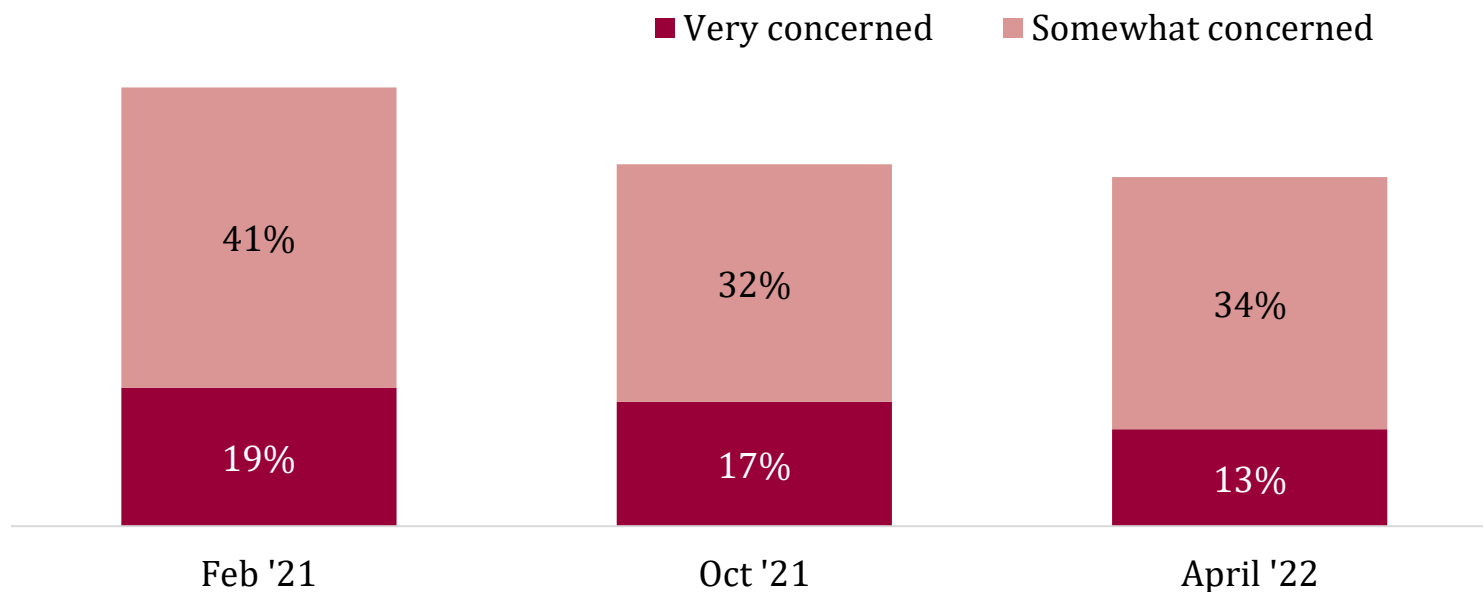
“Online access to educational materials.”

Concern over mental/emotional health

- Mental health concerns remain elevated, but continue to taper off since February 2021. Concerns are widespread, without clear demographic contours.

Mental health concerns decline somewhat, remain high overall

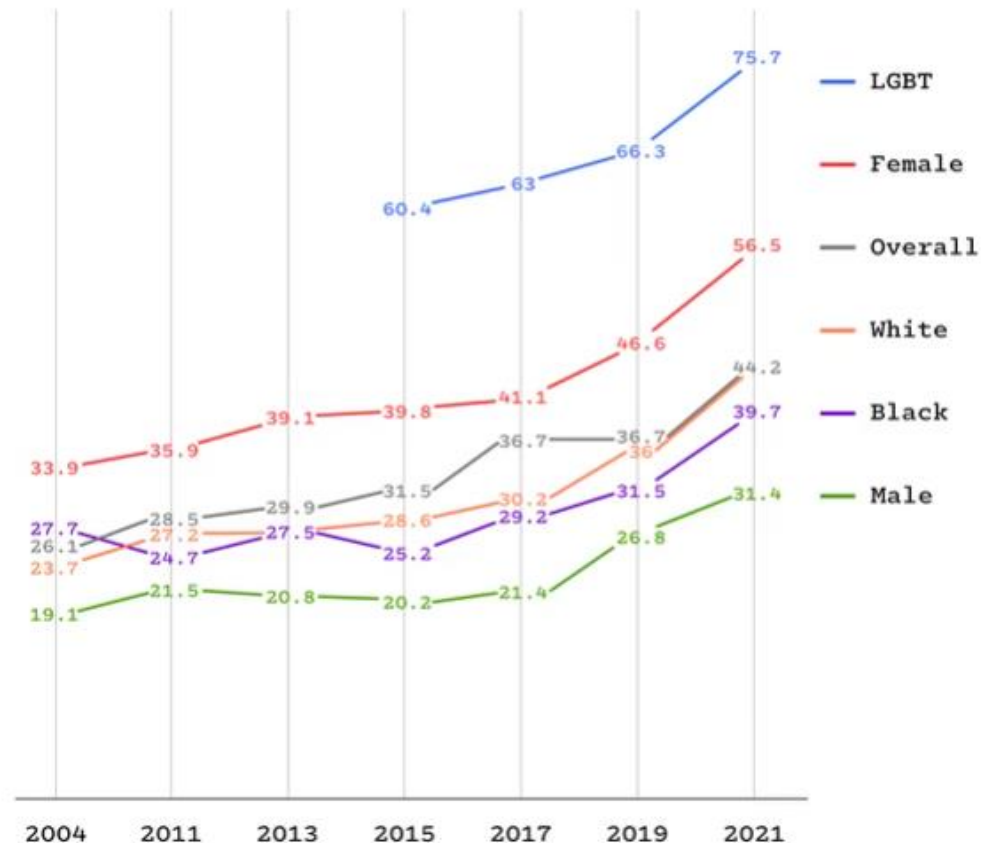
% of parents who say they are ____ about their child's mental/emotional health



Ongoing mental health crisis

- The current child mental health crisis began well before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- National data from the CDC illustrates this long-term trend.

Percent of High-School Students Feeling Persistently Sad or Hopeless



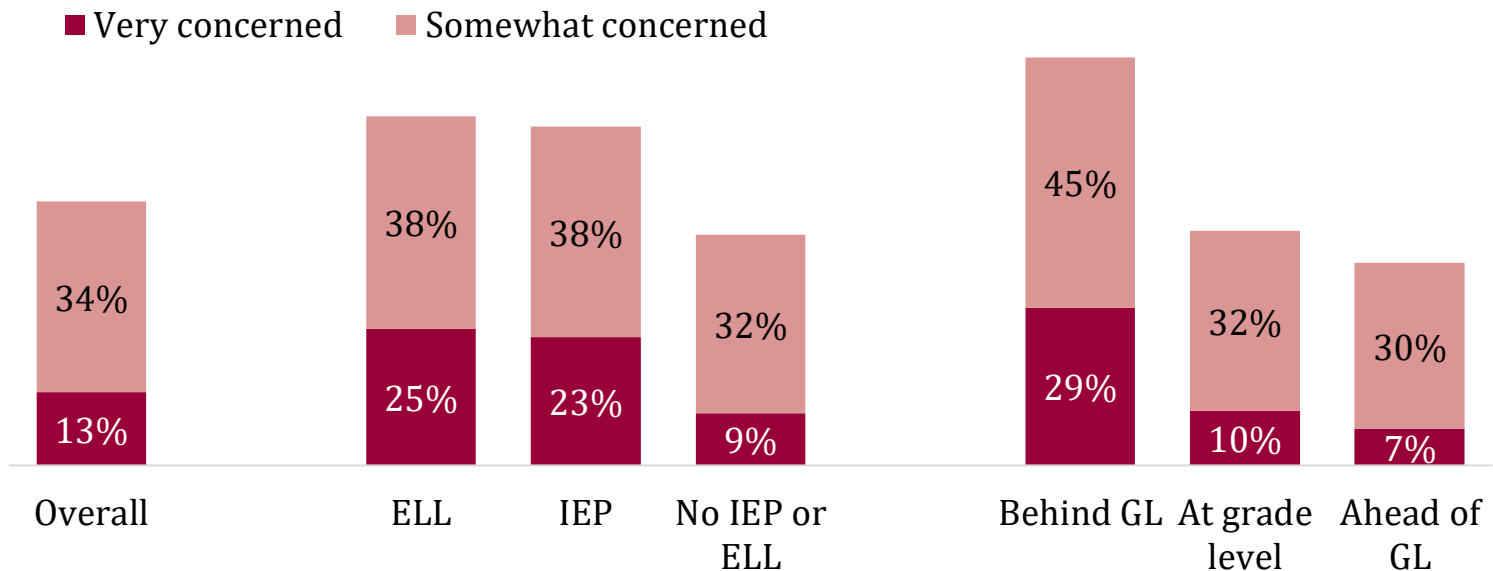
Credit: Derek Thompson, The Atlantic; data from the CDC.

Mental health and academics

- Among students who are behind grade level, or with IEP or ELL services, mental health concerns are at much higher levels.

Mental health concerns far higher for some groups of students

% of parents who say they are _____ about their child's mental/emotional health



Help for some, but gaps remain

- In all, 43% report being offered some sort of mental health support. Half of parents who were “very or somewhat concerned” about their child’s mental health say no counseling or assistance were offered.

Those with mental health concern for their children were offered more help
% of parents who say they were / were not offered mental health help

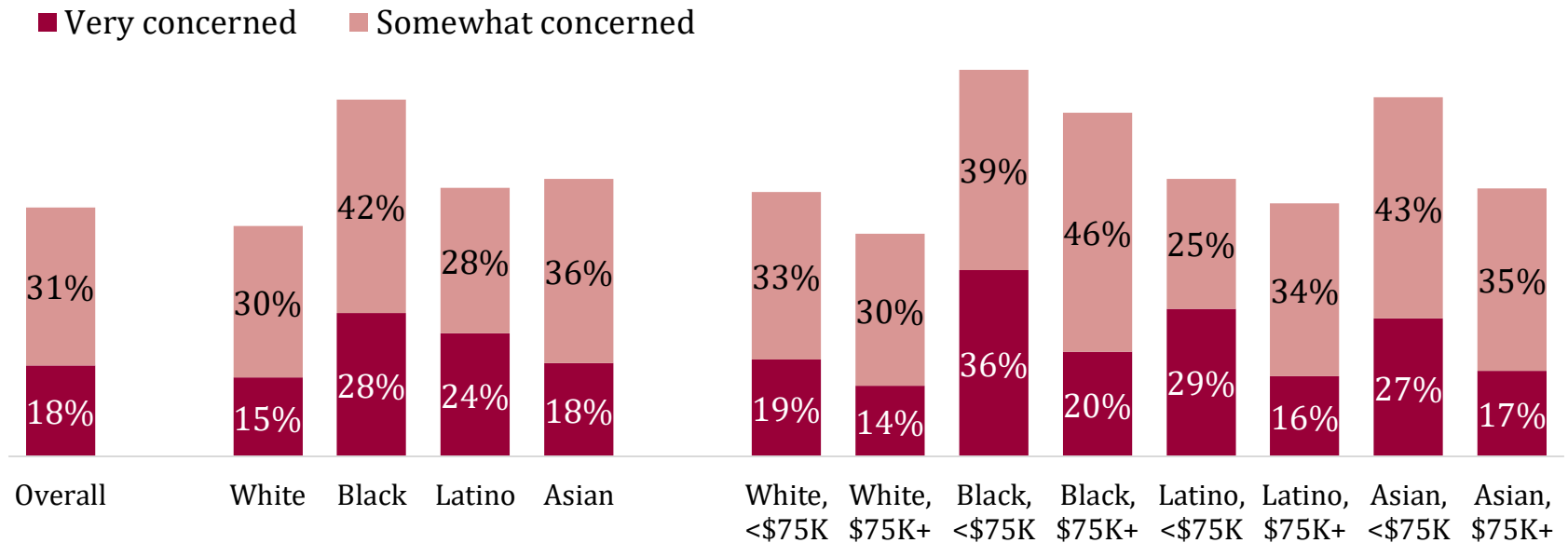
	Overall	Very / somewhat concerned	Not too / not at all concerned
Offered, accepted help	20%	28%	12%
Offered, but did not accept	23%	20%	25%
Total who were offered help	43%	48%	37%
No, not offered	49%	45%	54%
Don't Know / Refused	8%	7%	8%

COVID risk perception

- White parents are least concerned about their children’s risk of becoming infected at school.
- Higher income levels are also related to lower concerns.

Parents with lower incomes were more likely to express concern about infections

% of parents who say they are _____ that their child will be infected at school

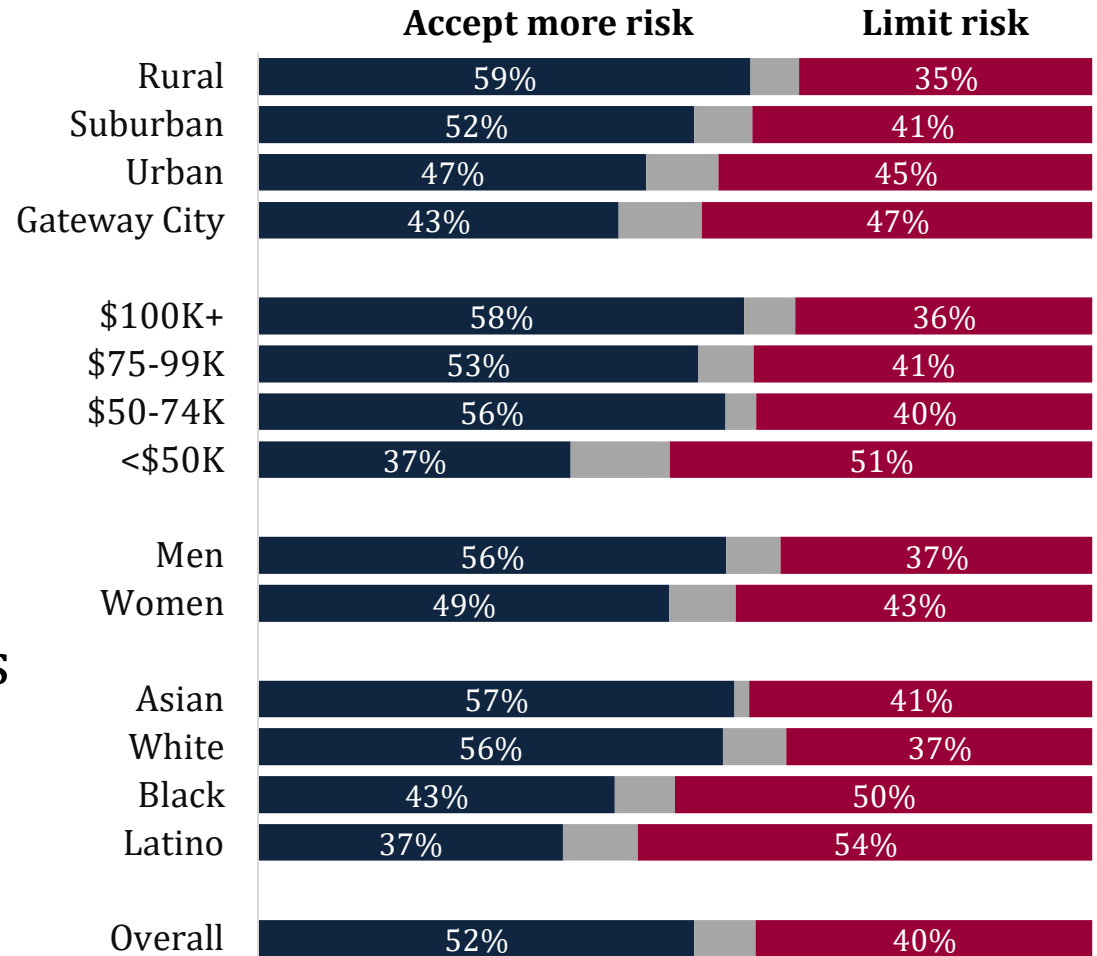


Accept risk for normal experiences?

- There are wide differences in how parents view the risk vs reward tradeoff.
- Black and Latino parents are especially likely to say we should continue to limit risk.
- This echoes differences in support for risk mitigation measures.

Parents diverge on COVID risk acceptance

% of parents who say we should ____ when it comes to COVID risk



Q: Which of the following comes closest to your view, even if neither is exactly right?

- We should accept more risk in general so our children can have full experiences in school and activities.

- We should generally limit risk so our children are better protected from infection

COVID mitigation strategies

- Free rapid tests, test and stay, and regular in-school testing are broadly popular, while other strategies have proponents and detractors.

Free rapid tests and regular in-school testing are broadly popular

% of parents who strongly / somewhat support each mitigation measure

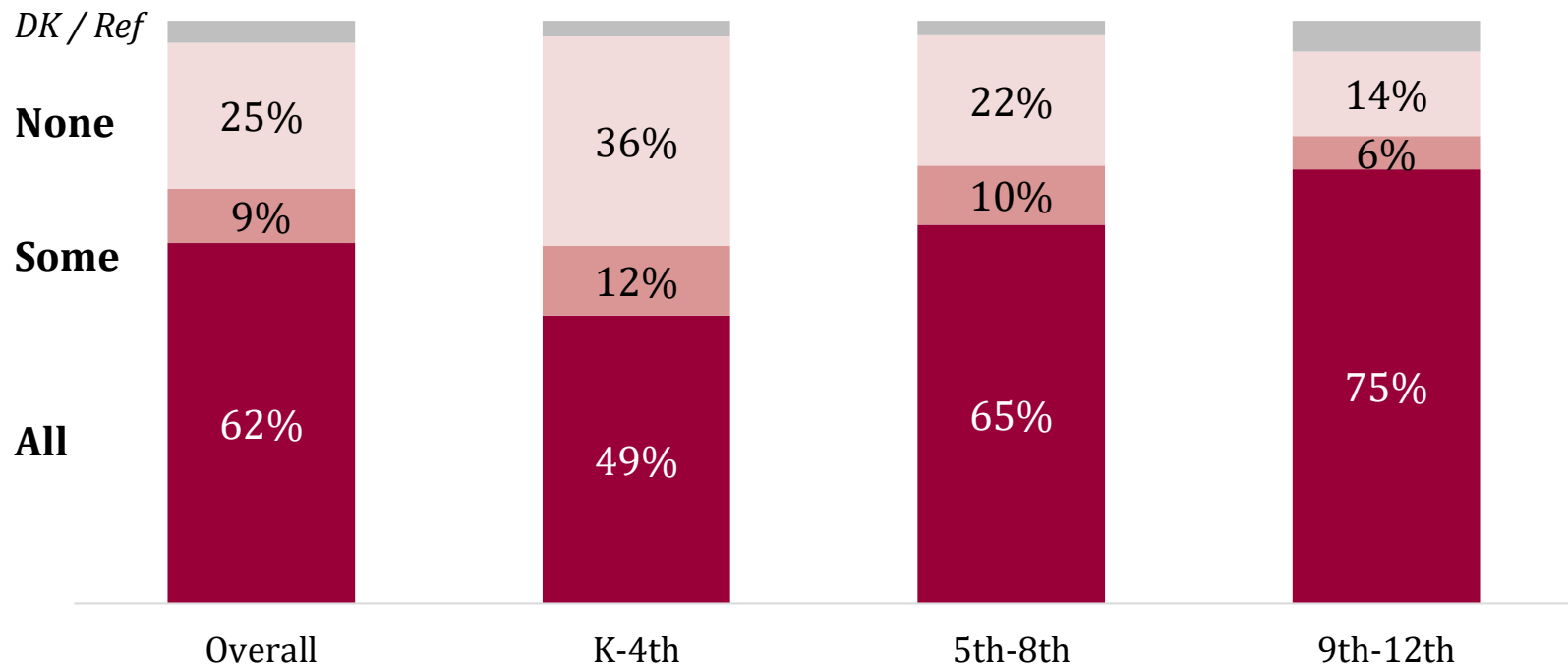
	Overall	White	Black	Latino	Asian
Providing rapid tests for families to take home	86%	85%	91%	89%	91%
Allowing students who may have been exposed to COVID to remain in class if they test negative	76%	79%	63%	69%	81%
Regularly testing all students at school	68%	64%	83%	77%	77%
A vaccine mandate for all teachers and staff	61%	58%	64%	67%	76%
Requiring all students and staff to wear masks	56%	50%	80%	67%	71%
A vaccine mandate for all students	54%	50%	60%	56%	74%

Vaccination rates, by child age

- This survey shows, and state data confirms that younger children are less likely to be vaccinated.

Parents of young children much less likely to say children are vaccinated

% of parents who say _____ of their children are vaccinated



Parent and child vaccine status

- Among vaccinated parents, there are many who have not taken the step of having their children vaccinated.
- In general though, vaccinated parents are more likely to also have their children vaccinated.

Parents who are vaccinated are more likely to get their children vaccinated too

% of parents in each vaccine status group who say _____ of their children are vaccinated

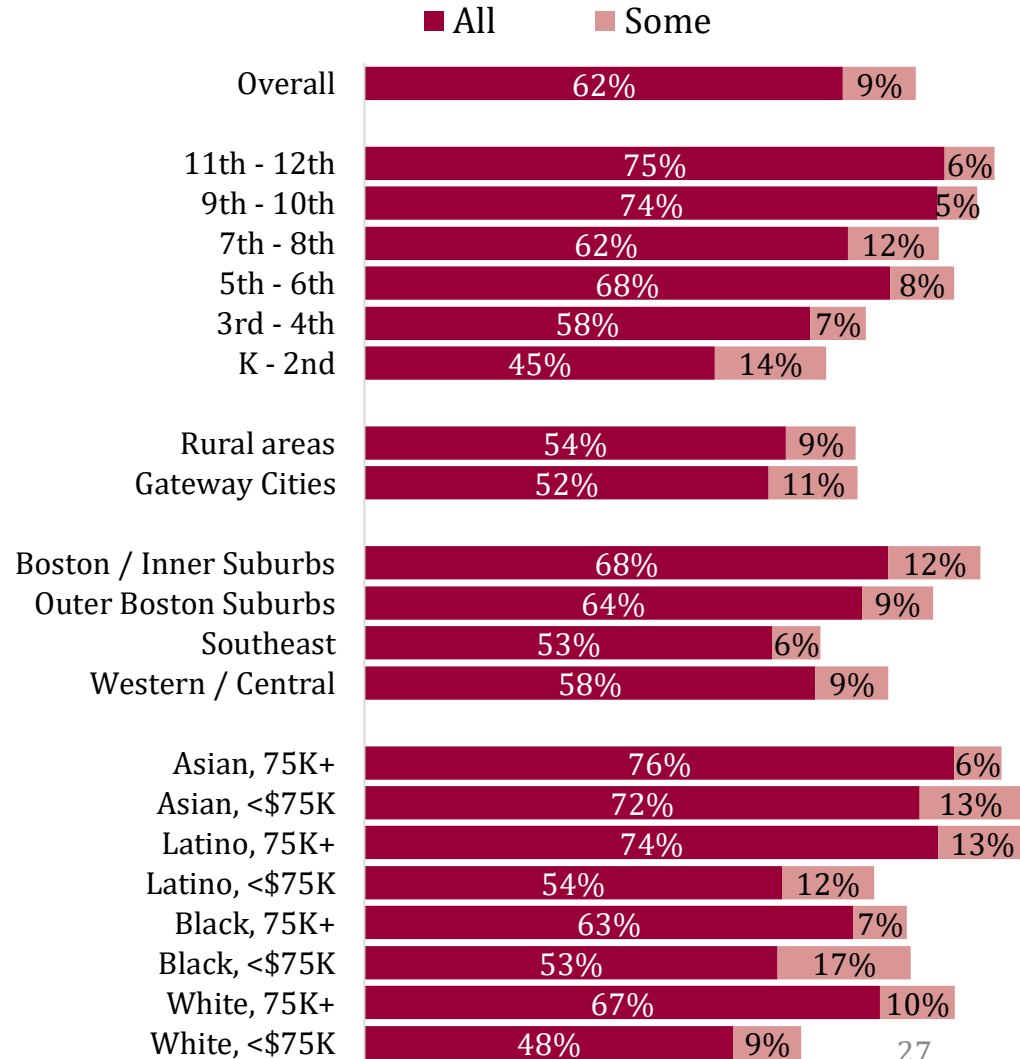
	Parent vaccine status			
	Vaccinated and boosted	Vaccinated, not boosted	Partially vaccinated	Not vaccinated
All of my children are vaccinated	83%	45%	38%	9%
Some of my children are vaccinated	8%	13%	33%	7%
None of my children are vaccinated	8%	39%	25%	81%
Don't Know / Refused	<1%	3%	4%	3%

Inequities in vaccination rates

- The % who say their children are vaccinated varies widely by income, age, and region.
- Partisanship was not included on this survey but is also often a factor.
- Some schools will be at far higher ongoing risk of future COVID outbreaks and disruption moving forward.

Who has gotten their children vaccinated

% of parents who say ___ of their children are vaccinated



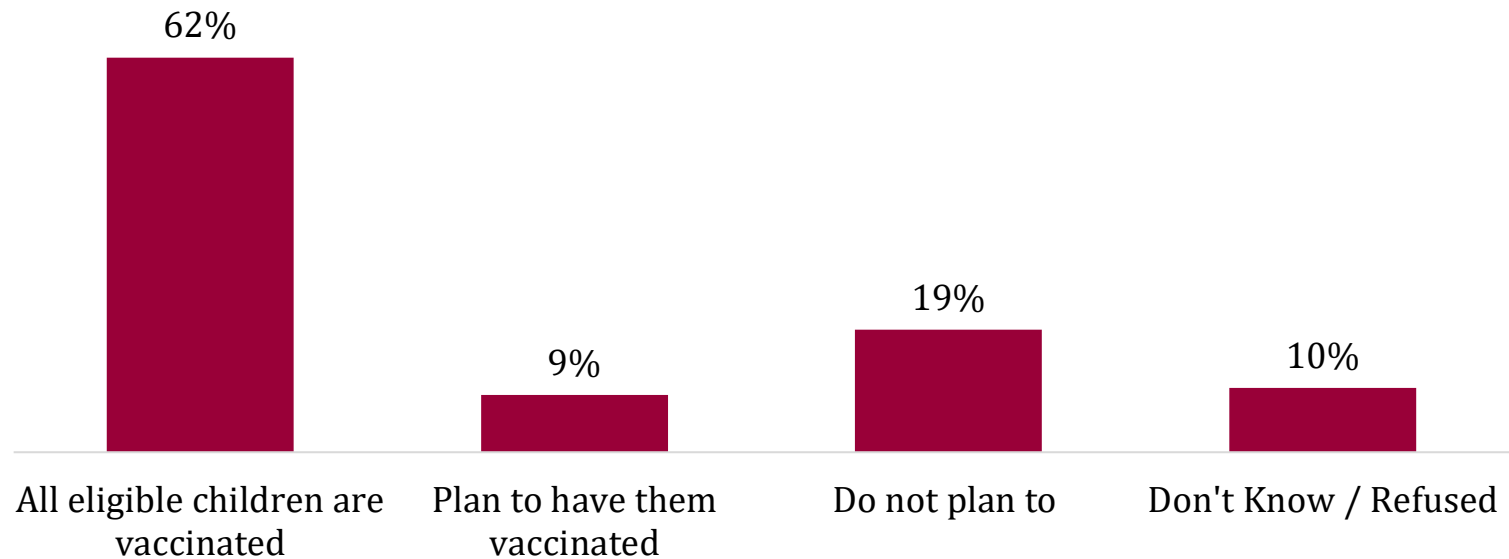
Q: Thinking about your children who are eligible for the COVID vaccine, which of the following best applies?

Future vaccination plans

- Most parents say their children are vaccinated.
- Among parents who say some or all of their children are not vaccinated, most have no plans to get them vaccinated.

Most parents with unvaccinated children do not have vaccination plans

% of parents of unvaccinated children who say they do/do not plan to get their children the shot



Why not vaccinate? – open ends

- Among those who do not plan to vaccinate their children, common reasons are safety concerns, the age of their children and lack of trust in the vaccine.

Vaccine safety was the topic cited most often

% of parents whose children are not vaccinated citing ____ as a reason for not vaccinating children

Safety concerns (side effects, long-term effects)	32%
Age (too young, not eligible, not at risk)	18%
Trust / risk (don't trust it, more risk getting vaccine)	17%
Want more research / information	16%
Unnecessary (don't need it, parents don't want them to have it)	11%
Choice (freedom of choice, their choice)	6%
Immunity / already had COVID	5%
Personal (medical, religious, personal reasons)	5%
Other	11%
Never / not interested / No	6%

Parent quotes on avoiding vaccination

“I don’t feel there is enough research yet to prove that the vaccine is safe in the long run.”

“Not needed, not enough research, and children do not pose a risk.”

“They’ve had it. Children only get mild symptoms.”

“I don't believe in subjecting my child to a loosely tested and experimental vaccine for a virus that has a 98% recovery rate and hasn't been affecting younger children to begin with.”



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