the Ups & Downs: schooling during a pandemic

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The Pearson and Connections Academy Parent Pulse Report: May 2020

The sudden shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic is causing a roller coaster of emotions for parents and students alike, but the recent Parent Pulse Report finds that parents are embracing the COVID era education experience with their children. Although facing a range of emotions—they are finding some silver linings amid the upheaval.

Parents were polled in February prior to the pandemic becoming widespread in the US to gain their general opinions about education. Questions related to the pandemic were added in a second wave of polling in April.

Among the top findings:

The reality of school interruptions and longer term online learning is setting in for parents

- Parents remain nearly unanimous in their support for closing schools—94% of parents say it was the right call
- 77% of Americans are concerned that Covid-19 will affect or delay the start of school in the fall*
- 91% believe schools need to be better prepared to switch to virtual learning programs

Both students and parents may be managing better than anticipated, with parents finding satisfaction by being involved in their child's learning

- 80% of parents say their child is handling the transition better than they are
- Of the 79% of parents who say they've taken a bigger role in helping their children, more than two-thirds (69%) say it's been a gratifying experience
- 83% of parents also say they feel increasingly confident helping their children with lessons

Still, parents are worried about mental health effects of the pandemic broadly

- 89% of parents say that school disruptions have added to overall stress and anxiety among young people
- 56% have said their own child has felt anxious or depressed
- 60% of parents say their child has friends or classmates who are struggling with mental health or anxiety right now

Families are coping by doing away with screen time

- In February, 77% of parents said they had household rules about the use of technology. Now, an equal amount (76%) say they have suspended those rules and have done away with limits on screen time.
- 81% of parents say the benefits of online learning outweigh concerns over screen time
- 84% say technology is helping their child to be more self-sufficient

Teachers are doing a good job, even without preparation

- 88% feel that their child's teacher has done a good job teaching and supporting students during this time
- While 81% of parents believe teachers need more training in online teaching

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With growing concern about a drop-off in learning, parents just want the basics from schools

- In March, 64% of Americans worried about children falling behind in school. That number has now climbed to 69%.*
- 65% of parents say they expect schools to provide a quality academic experience during the pandemic, even though only 53% think schools are doing that well right now.
- 68% of parents polled in February say they expected schools to prepare their child for college, now only 55% of parents are concerned about that.

Detailed Results (Green indicates new per April wave)

Looking at the following list, please indicate which of the following are things you expect your child's school to provide during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and which you believe they are currently providing well? Showing % Things I expect from my child's school during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak	Total Parents (April)	K–5 Parents (April)	6–12 Parents (April)	Total Parents (Feb.)	K–5 Parents (Feb.)	6–12 Parents (Feb.)
Base: Total Respondents	**1,049**	**376**	**673**	**976**	**350**	**626**
Provide a solid academic foundation	63%	65%	62%	69%	67%	70%
Prepare my child for college	55%	50%	59%	68%	67%	68%
Prepare my child for the future	63%	64%	63%	69%	69%	69%
Offer a quality academic experience	65%	65%	65%	68%	68%	68%
Provide an opportunity to develop good social skills	52%	54%	52%	70%	69%	70%
Offer a positive social experience	53%	54%	62%	69%	67%	70%
Teach the digital skills, like virtual collaboration and virtual communication, needed to live and work in a technology driven world	65%	63%	66%	67%	64%	68%
Teach soft skills like creativity, time management and critical thinking, needed for future of school and work	62%	62%	63%	69%	67%	69%
Teach my child how to interact with many different types of people	51%	49%	52%	66%	64%	66%
Provide caring and quality teachers	62%	60%	64%	68%	68%	68%
Provide my child a sense of confidence	62%	62%	61%	65%	64%	66%

Detailed Results

Looking at the following list, please indicate which of the following are things you expect your child's school to provide **during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak** and which you believe they are currently providing well? Showing % Things my child's school is currently doing well	Total Parents (April)	K–5 Parents (April)	6–12 Parents (April)	Total Parents (Feb.)	K–5 Parents (Feb.)	6–12 Parents (Feb.)
Base: Total Respondents	**1,049**	**376**	**673**	**976**	**350**	**626**
Provide a solid academic foundation	54%	52%	54%	56%	56%	55%
Prepare my child for college	45%	40%	48%	51%	50%	52%
Prepare my child for the future	51%	53%	51%	53%	55%	53%
Offer a quality academic experience	53%	51%	53%	58%	59%	57%
Provide an opportunity to develop good social skills	46%	47%	46%	55%	57%	53%
Offer a positive social experience	46%	49%	45%	52%	56%	50%
Teach the digital skills, like virtual collaboration and virtual communication, needed to live and work in a technology driven world	51%	50%	51%	55%	56%	54%
Teach soft skills like creativity, time management and critical thinking, needed for future of school and work	49%	50%	48%	51%	54%	49%
Teach my child how to interact with many different types of people	43%	45%	42%	53%	55%	51%
Provide caring and quality teachers	56%	59%	55%	57%	60%	56%
Provide my child a sense of confidence	51%	55%	49%	50%	55%	47%

Detailed Results

Thinking about your child's school experience during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: Showing % who agree (strongly + somewhat agree)	Total Parents (April)	K–5 Parents (April)	6–12 Parents (April)	Total Parents (Feb.)	K–5 Parents (Feb.)	6–12 Parents (Feb.)
Base: Total Respondents	**1,049**	**376**	**673**	**976**	**350**	**626**
I feel confident helping my child with lessons and classwork while they learn at home during Coronavirus (COVID-19) / I feel confident helping my child with homework (Feb.)	83%	87%	81%	79%	80%	79%
My child's generation faces more serious problems in school than I did	83%	80%	85%	85%	85%	85%
My child is more self-sufficient than I was at their age	72%	72%	73%	69%	67%	70%
I believe that schools should do more to teach digital skills, like virtual collaboration and virtual communication	86%	86%	86%	84%	79%	86%
The education system works well for the current generation	78%	78%	78%	71%	74%	69%
The education system is working to ensure all students have access to schoolwork and courses during Coronavirus (COVID-19)	89%	90%	88%	–	–	–
I believe that schools should do more to teach soft skills (e.g., teamwork, creativity, critical thinking) necessary for life and work	89%	89%	88%	91%	90%	92%

Detailed Results

Thinking about the use of technology **during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak** for your child's education, to what extent do you agree with the following statements? Showing % who agree (strongly + somewhat agree)	Total Parents (April)	K–5 Parents (April)	6–12 Parents (April)	Total Parents (Feb.)	K–5 Parents (Feb.)	6–12 Parents (Feb.)
Base: Total Respondents	**1,049**	**376**	**673**	**976**	**350**	**626**
My child's school is using technology and online resources well	87%	88%	86%	89%	88%	90%
Technology is helping my child be more self-sufficient	84%	84%	83%	80%	77%	82%
Social media is more of a distraction to learning than it previously was before / Social media distracts from learning (Feb.)	77%	76%	78%	79%	78%	80%
I'm worried that my child is on social media rather than completing their online assignments	57%	55%	59%	–	–	–
Students should have technology-enabled school options like online school	87%	88%	87%	79%	73%	82%
The benefits of online learning outweigh concerns over screen time	81%	79%	82%	70%	66%	72%
Technology is helping my child manage their schoolwork	87%	86%	87%	82%	75%	86%
We have altered or suspended rules in our household about the use of technology, such as limits on screen time, restrictions on social media sites or restrictions about when and where you can use devices / There are rules in our household about the use of technology, such as limits on screen time, restrictions on social media sites or restrictions about when and where you can use devices (Feb.)	76%	81%	74%	77%	77%	77%
My child is managing the transition to online learning better than I am	80%	78%	80%	–	–	–
Teachers need more training to effectively teach online	81%	80%	82%	–	–	–
My child's teacher has done a good job teaching and supporting students during this time	88%	90%	88%	–	–	–

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Detailed Results

Thinking about the future and the use of technology for your child's education, to what extent do you agree with the following statements? Showing % who agree (strongly + somewhat agree)	Total Parents (April)	K–5 Parents (April)	6–12 Parents (April)	Total Parents (Feb.)	K–5 Parents (Feb.)	6–12 Parents (Feb.)
Base: Total Respondents	**1,049**	**376**	**673**	**976**	**350**	**626**
More students will attend school virtually (e.g., online) instead of attending a traditional school within ten years	81%	81%	80%	78%	78%	78%
In the future, schools should be better prepared to switch to online education during emergencies	91%	93%	90%	–	–	–
In the future, schools should use on-line education instead of cancelling school for emergencies (snow, bad weather, etc.)	83%	85%	82%	–	–	–
Social media will be a part of education in the future	74%	71%	75%	70%	67%	72%
The use of technology for school right now will make my child more prepared for the demands of their future job, like teleworking or virtual collaboration	90%	88%	91%	87%	86%	87%

Due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, have you found yourself more or less involved in your child's education over the past few weeks?	Total Parents (April)	K–5 Parents (April)	6–12 Parents (April)	Total Parents (Feb.)	K–5 Parents (Feb.)	6–12 Parents (Feb.)
Base: Total Respondents	**1,049**	**376**	**673**	**–**	**–**	**–**
Top 2: More Involved (Much more involved + Somewhat more involved)	79%	88%	74%	–	–	–

Which of the following best describes how that involvement has made you feel?	Total Parents (April)	K–5 Parents (April)	6–12 Parents (April)	Total Parents (Feb.)	K–5 Parents (Feb.)	6–12 Parents (Feb.)
Base: Total Respondents	**825**	**326**	**499**	**–**	**–**	**–**
Gratifying (nice to be involved)	69%	71%	68%	–	–	–
Not prepared and/or stressed (another task I need to focus on)	31%	29%	32%	–	–	–

Detailed Results

How satisfied have you been with your child's education during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak?	Total Parents (April)	K–5 Parents (April)	6–12 Parents (April)	Total Parents (Feb.)	K–5 Parents (Feb.)	6–12 Parents (Feb.)
Base: Total Respondents	**1,049**	**376**	**673**	**–**	**–**	**–**
Top 2: Satisfied (Very satisfied + Somewhat satisfied)	82%	84%	81%	–	–	–
Bottom 2: Unsatisfied (Not very satisfied + Not at all satisfied)	18%	16%	19%	–	–	–

Why are you not satisfied with your child's education during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak?	Total Parents (April)	K–5 Parents (April)	6–12 Parents (April)	Total Parents (Feb.)	K–5 Parents (Feb.)	6–12 Parents (Feb.)
Base: Total Respondents	**189**	**61**	**129**	**–**	**–**	**–**
My child is not engaged	43%	42%	43%	–	–	–
The school system/teachers are not organized	33%	29%	36%	–	–	–
My child has too much free time	41%	37%	42%	–	–	–
My child is not getting enough attention	22%	22%	22%	–	–	–
My child is not getting enough social interaction with other students	40%	44%	38%	–	–	–
My child doesn't have the right setting to learn at home (i.e. a quiet workplace, desk, etc.)	25%	37%	19%	–	–	–
I don't feel like my child is learning what he/she should be	64%	71%	61%	–	–	–
Teachers are giving too much work, causing stress for my child	16%	13%	17%	–	–	–
Teachers are providing "busy work"	28%	18%	32%	–	–	–
Other	6%	5%	6%	–	–	–

Thinking about the current state of education and Coronavirus (COVID-19), to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following? Showing % who agree (strongly + somewhat agree)	Total Parents (April)	K–5 Parents (April)	6–12 Parents (April)	Total Parents (Feb.)	K–5 Parents (Feb.)	6–12 Parents (Feb.)
Base: Total Respondents	**1,049**	**376**	**673**	**–**	**–**	**–**
The closure of schools is the right response to Coronavirus (COVID-19)	94%	95%	93%	–	–	–
The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has added to the anxiety and mental health issues facing today's students	89%	91%	88%	–	–	–

Detailed Results

Thinking about the potential negative impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak on your child, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following? Showing % who agree (strongly + somewhat agree)	Total Parents (April)	K–5 Parents (April)	6–12 Parents (April)	Total Parents (Feb.)	K–5 Parents (Feb.)	6–12 Parents (Feb.)
Base: Total Respondents	1,049	376	673	976	350	626
The disruption of school has contributed to my child's stress, anxiety levels or mental health issues	58%	57%	59%	–	–	–
My child has friends or classmates who are struggling with mental health or anxiety issues right now	60%	56%	62%	61%	51%	66%
My child has felt anxious or depressed during this time	56%	55%	56%	59%	57%	61%
My child has missed a significant milestone or activity while schools have closed (graduation, award ceremony, prom, class trip/travel, etc.)	63%	59%	64%	–	–	–

Thinking about online learning generally, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following? Showing % who agree (strongly + somewhat agree)	Total Parents (April)	K–5 Parents (April)	6–12 Parents (April)	Total Parents (Feb.)	K–5 Parents (Feb.)	6–12 Parents (Feb.)
Base: Total Respondents	1,049	376	673	–	–	–
I like the flexibility that online learning provides	85%	86%	84%	–	–	–
Not everyone has access to the technology that they need to learn effectively online	89%	90%	89%	–	–	–
I think online learning will be a requirement for my child's education as the impacts of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak could be long-lasting	88%	89%	87%	–	–	–
Online learning is an effective learning alternative during crisis situations like the Coronavirus (COVID-19)	90%	90%	90%	–	–	–
I'm more open to my child learning online at home than I previously was	78%	81%	77%	–	–	–
I believe that this situation will make online learning more commonplace in the future	90%	90%	90%	–	–	–
Students who have had to finish the remainder of their education online or virtually due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) won't have retained as much information	72%	72%	72%	–	–	–

Methodology

Pearson conducted the study in partnership with Dynata to provide parents, teachers, and school systems across the US and UK with better insight into how online learning during the pandemic has shaped out thus far and where it's predicted to go next. 1,049 parents of K-12 students in the US participated in the poll, which was in the field from the evening of Friday, April 17, through Monday April 20, 2020. To ensure consistency with the data, the survey sample was designed and deployed to be consistent with the first wave of the survey launched February 23, 2020, through February 27, 2020, in partnership with Harris.

*Select data points are part of a separate online poll fielded in partnership with Dynata among 1012 US and 1010 UK adults to assess attitudes about education and work during the COVID-19 pandemic . The study was fielded from the evening of Friday, April 10 through Sunday, April 12 and was a follow up to a similar survey conducted in March.