

Groundhog Day:

Homeschooling in the Time of COVID19

MOSAIC Data Brief

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MOSAIC Data Brief Series

MOSAIC (Measuring Online Social Attitudes and Information Collaborative) is a collaboration between SSRS, Georgetown University, and the University of Michigan. This collaboration will focus on understanding how to leverage survey data and social media data to better capture public opinion in reliable, valid, and scientifically rigorous ways. This data brief series is intended to share public opinion results to inform researchers and decision makers with information about attitudes in the United States related to different aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Data briefs will utilize open-ended survey responses, social media posts, and/or both in order to gain different perspectives on public attitudes.



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The 2020-21 academic year for children in the K-12th grade age range was marked with online and hybrid schooling. The dream of universal vaccines and flattening lines of cases and hospitalizations gave us hope that 2021-22 would be a recovery year from a very intense year of children being primarily in the home environment for education. Unfortunately, as the academic year begins, vaccines are only available for children 12 and older, and cases in the United States continue to increase because of the Delta variant of SARS-CoV-2, we may be dealing with more online schooling.

Even though we continue to confront a public health crisis, it is clear that we are also dealing with an acute and likely chronic education crisis. Schools, often overnight, moved from in-person instruction to remote, online education. Because there were no strategies in place for moving education into the home, the onus for structuring and delivering learning fell completely on caregivers. The only other time that this occurs population-wide is during summer breaks, which last about 2 months in most states. It is well-documented that summer breaks increase [educational inequalities](#); the current concern is that the inequalities have expanded even more and we are now facing the 2021-22 academic year with what has been termed the "[COVID achievement gap](#)."

To prevent and address this potential gap, we need to understand the process by which these inequalities may emerge. We know that parents of higher socioeconomic status (SES) have greater access to and information about educational resources than lower SES parents, and that these differences partially explain [SES-based gaps in achievement](#). These resource differences will likely play a key role in the COVID-19 gap. In this data brief, we are interested in identifying the major concerns of caregivers who were homeschooling children and determining if they varied by SES indicators like income and education.

In the spring of 2021, we surveyed the population of those who reported homeschooling their child during the 2020-21 school year, to get a deeper understanding of the frustration and fears that caregivers were feeling regarding a year of interrupted and online schooling. Respondents were asked the following question, "Do you live with at least one child who is between Kindergarten and 12th grade and who has attended school virtually or from home due to the coronavirus pandemic for any period of time?" Those who answered yes were asked the following open-ended survey question, "What are some of the challenges your child has faced in a virtual environment that differs from the typical in-person school experience?"

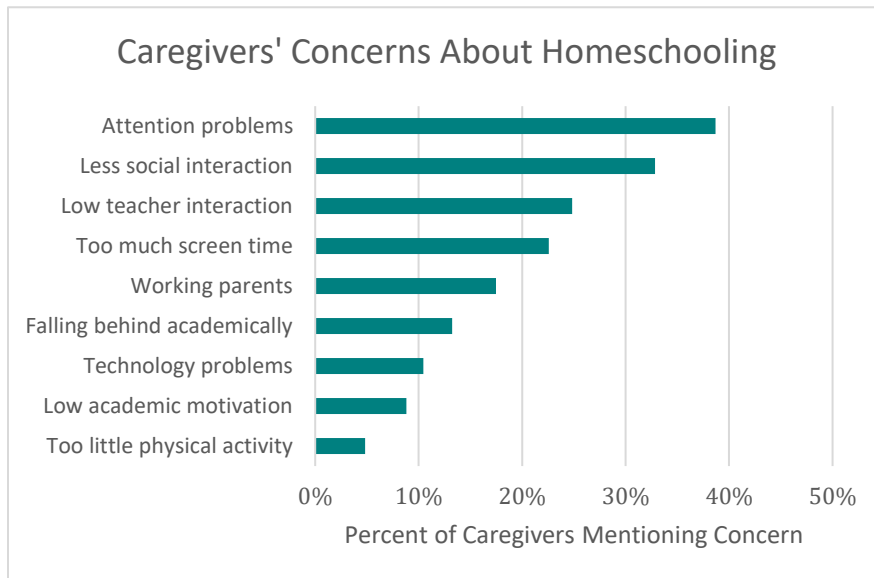


Figure 1. Caregivers' concerns about homeschooling

When caregivers were asked about their primary concerns with homeschooling, 39% noted attention problems and 33% noted low social interaction as major concerns. Too little physical activity and low academic motivation were of the lowest concerns with less than 10% of caregivers mentioning those issues.

As Figure 1 shows, caregivers were most concerned about their children's attention problems and social interactions with more than 30% of the comments noting these as concerns. Screen time and lack of interaction were the next most noted concerns with over 20% of the caregivers' comments mentioning these issues. Surprisingly, issues related to academics received some of the lowest mentions in the open-ended responses.

In order to see if the concerns differed by socioeconomic status, we examined each category of concern by income and education categories. In general, caregivers did not differ in their concerns regarding homeschooling children by SES differences. However, there was a larger proportion of the caregivers in the 150K and above category noting lack of social interaction (41%) as a primary concern for children than those making less than 150K (see Figure 2).

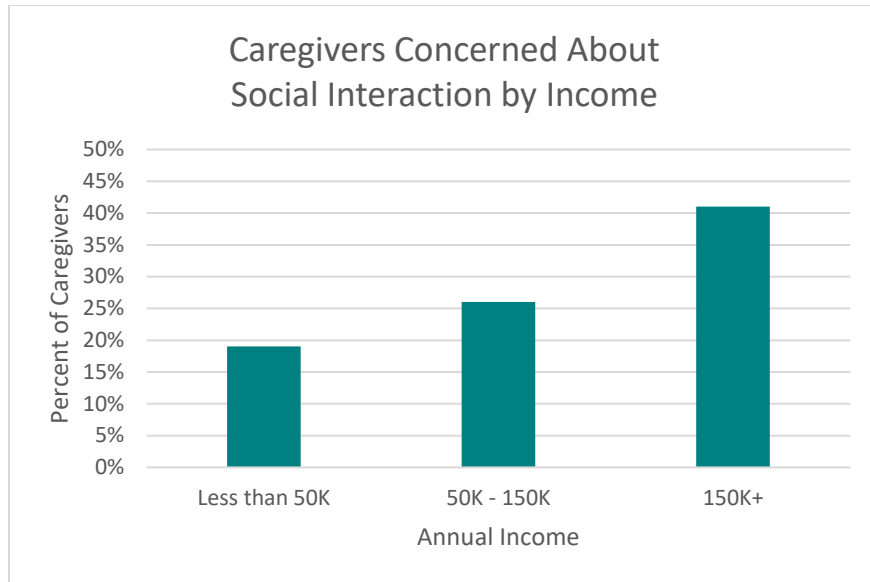


Figure 2. Caregivers’ concern about social interaction by income

We see a similar trend with caregivers’ education level, with caregivers with bachelor degree and above showing a higher proportion of concern regarding the lack of social interaction with peers (31%).

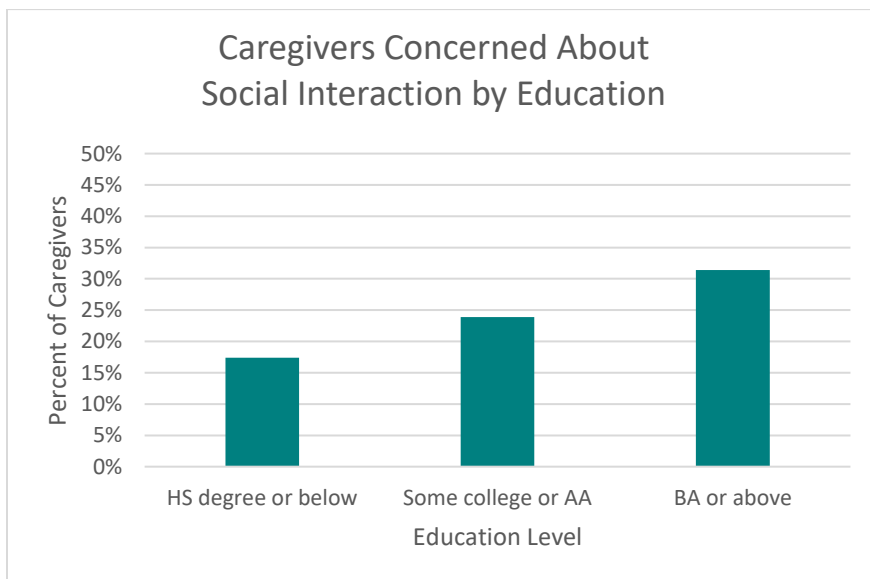


Figure 3. Caregivers’ concern about social interaction by education.¹

¹ HS degree or below=high school degree or equivalent or below, with no college education; Some college or AA=Associates degree or some college education, but no Bachelor’s degree; BA or above=At least Bachelor’s degree earned

We were also interested in whether parents were concerned about the amount of screen time that children were being exposed to during online schooling and as was seen with the overall results, this was not a strongly noted concern. There was a small difference in the proportions of mentions by educational level (See Figure 4) with 20% of the caregiver with a bachelor's degree mentioning this as an issue but only 12% of those with a high school degree or below mentioning it as a concern. There were no major differences in mentions by income levels.

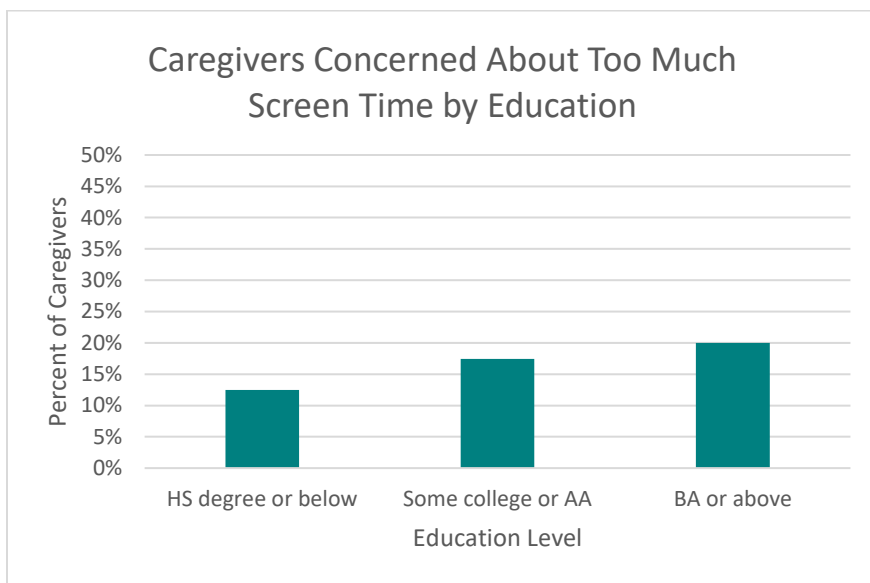


Figure 4. Caregivers' concerns regarding too much screen time by educational level

As we transition back to an uncertain schooling situation for the Fall of 2021, we will continue to learn from caregivers about the issues they are now facing with the potential of having to go back to remote learning as case levels of COVID-19 rise due to the Delta variant and low vaccination rates in some parts of the U.S.

Our current data has given us a snapshot of the concerns that parents had regarding remote and online learning in 2020-21. Somewhat surprisingly the major concerns from caregivers was the lack of social interactions that their children were getting with the highest income and education groups mentioning this in higher proportions as a concern. Though caregivers mentioned concerns about attending online schooling as a primary issue, concerns about academic motivation and falling behind in schooling appear to be less of a concern. The amount of screen time was also not considered a major concern, but was mentioned more often as an issue by those with higher education. Taken together, these findings suggest parents across the socioeconomic spectrum were most concerned about the effect online schooling had on their

children’s ability to pay attention while learning and that higher SES parents are somewhat more concerned than lower SES parents about socialization with peers.

Methodology

Survey & Social Media Data Collection. The MOSAIC recruitment survey was conducted via the SSRS Opinion Panel and invited U.S. adults aged 18 and older who use the internet to participate. The SSRS Opinion Panel is a probability-based web panel of U.S. adults (including Hawaii and Alaska) and is recruited randomly based on a nationally representative ABS (Address Based Sample) probability design. Data collection was conducted via the web from March 11 – June 13, 2021, among a sample of 9,544 panelists in English (9,468) and Spanish (76). Data were weighted to represent the target U.S. adult population.

Topic Coding of Open-ended Responses. The exact responses to open-ended questions were transcribed by interviewers and coded using semi-supervised topic modeling. Preprocessing steps included capitalization standardization, punctuation removal, and stopword removal. Frequently occurring words and phrases were identified by identifying the frequency with which respondents used different unigrams, bigrams, and trigrams. Experts looked through the list of frequently occurring words and phrases, identifying ones that could be used to represent seed topics. These seed topics were inputs into a generative topic model and used to generate more complete topics and possibly new topics. This topic list was manually adjusted by experts.

Acknowledgments

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