

# The “New” Normal for Schooling

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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After a challenging 2021 beginning of the school year with teacher shortages, changing rules on mask mandates, and the arrival of the Omicron variant in the United States, we surveyed parents across the country in late January and early February 2022 to see how the school year was progressing and what issues, if any, they were continuing to deal with during the “back to school year” with the COVID virus still progressing through the population.

In November of 2021, the CDC recommended that 5-12 year olds be vaccinated and so this survey represents opinions of parents about schooling a few months after the vaccine was available for school-age children. Even with all the challenges of starting school in the Fall of 2021, 83% of the parents and guardians surveyed in early 2022 said their children were back to school fully in person. Only about 8% reported being fully virtual with another 8% reporting having a hybrid classroom, which is contrast to the fall of 2021 when 10% were still mostly in virtual classrooms and 7% were in hybrid classrooms.

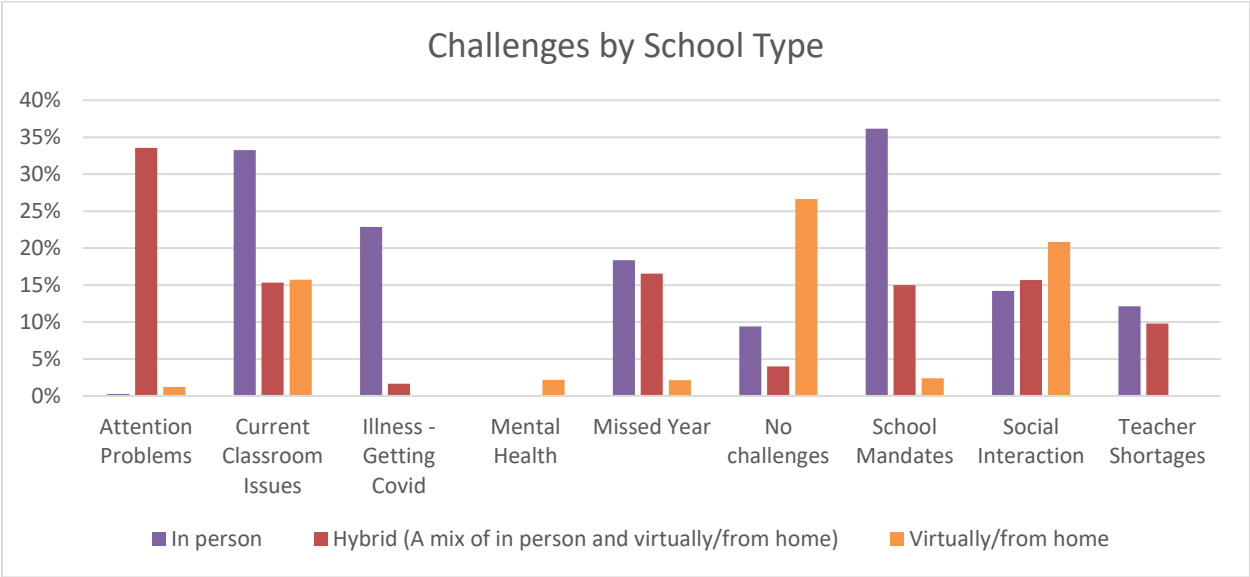


Figure 1: Reported Challenges by Type of Schooling in January 2022

As Figure 1 shows, even though there were parents reporting “No Challenges” as the school year progressed (9.4% in person attendance, 4.0% hybrid attendance, and 26.6% virtual attendance), the majority of the parents were continuing to report challenges that they felt they and their children were facing in schooling. For those who used virtual schooling, the primary challenges were social interaction (20.8%) and current classroom issues that included students being sent home and school closures (“Current Classroom issues” – 15.7%).

Those whose children were in-person also reported that current classroom issues as one of their main challenges (33.3%) but reported “School Mandates” most frequently. This topic included mask and quarantine mandates with mask mandates noted more often (36.1%). Those

who reported being in hybrid formats (a combination of virtual and in-person classrooms) reported more challenges associated with attention problems (33.6%) than any of the other classroom types.

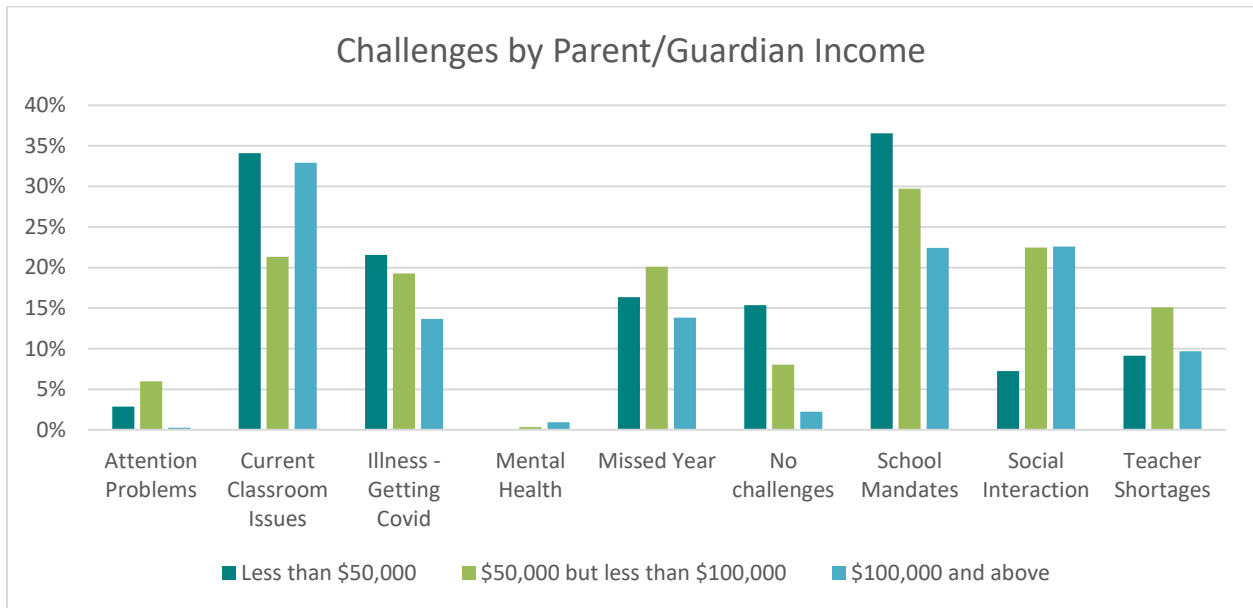


Figure 2: Reported Challenges by Parent/Guardian Income

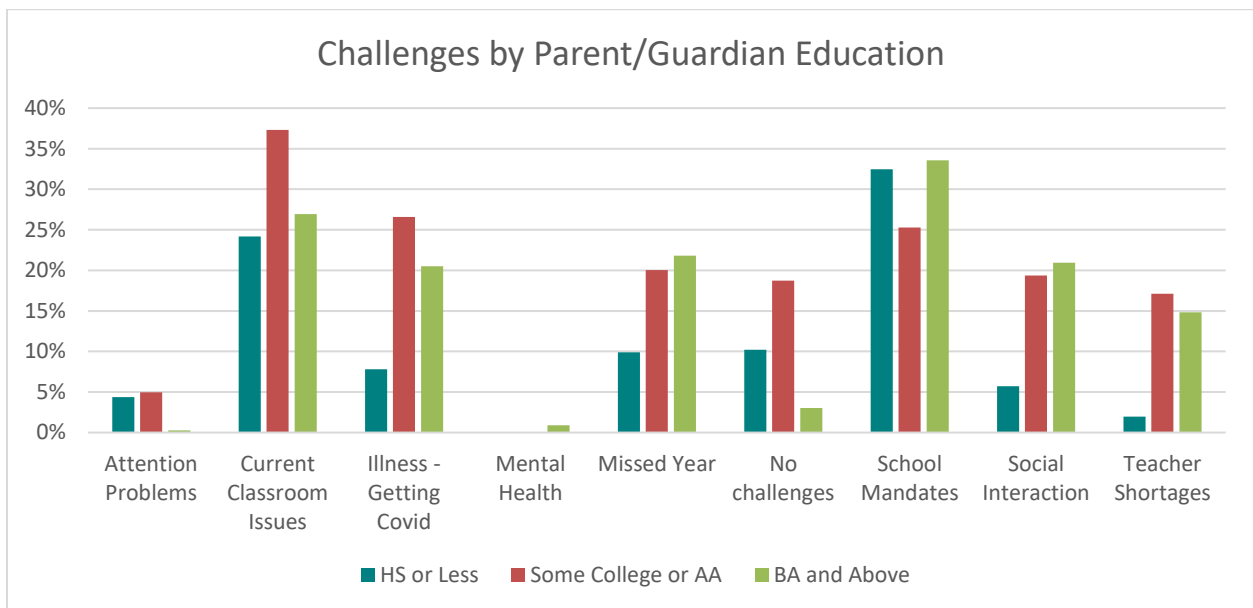


Figure 3: Reported Challenges by Parent/Guardian Education

Because schools reflect the communities in which they are situated, it was of interest to understand whether there would be differences in experiences of parents and children by socioeconomic status. Some interesting differences emerged. For parents with a 4-year college

degree or more, the primary concerns were school mandates, the “missed” in- person schooling year of 2020, and current classroom issues. Parents with less than a 4-year college degree were primarily concerned with current classroom issues, while those with some training past high school uniquely noted “getting COVID” as a concern. Parents with a high school education or less noted school mandates most often as being challenging.

Overall, parents continued to report challenges with schooling during the COVID times. The “new normal” appears to involve lots of flexibility on the parts of the parents, children, and schools. The issues of achievement losses due to the “missed year” as well as issues related to the social isolation due to shut downs and quarantines continue to be a concern.

## 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. Full Panel data collection was conducted via the web from March 11 – June 13, 2021, resulting in a sample of 9,544 panelists in English (9,468) and Spanish (76). Data were weighted to represent the target U.S. adult population. A subset of the panel participated in new data collection via the web from January 27- February 9, 2022, resulting in a sample of 1,000 participants. 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. For some of the smaller subsamples, the full set of open-ended responses was double hand-coded.

## Suggested Citation

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