

Nothing is Normal: Schooling During COVID-19

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. More information can be found at <https://mosaic.mdi.georgetown.edu>.



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In August, schools began reopening and welcoming parents and children back into the classroom after over a year of remote schooling. Based on our previous survey (spring 2021) on the issues that parents noted as being most problematic –learning loss and social interaction – we wanted to learn if these parental fears had subsided as schooling moved back to primarily in-person and children were able to interact with peers and teachers again. These two areas were still on the minds of our parents with over 30% of parents noting that social interaction was important to the return to schooling. However, new concerns also emerged.

Unfortunately, even though schools and classrooms were open again in the fall, nothing about the first few months of the 2021-2022 school year appeared to be normal. While teachers and adolescents were more likely to be vaccinated, young children were not approved for vaccinations until November of 2021. This meant that many schools started back with varying types of mandates regarding mask-wearing and physical distancing. Some schools had no mandates and others had relatively strict mandates¹. As can be seen in Figure 1, this led to over 40% of our respondents noting school mandates (compliance issues) as one of the primary areas of frustration in the return to schooling. Concerns ranged from mask wearing and social distancing challenges to lunch and COVID testing protocols.

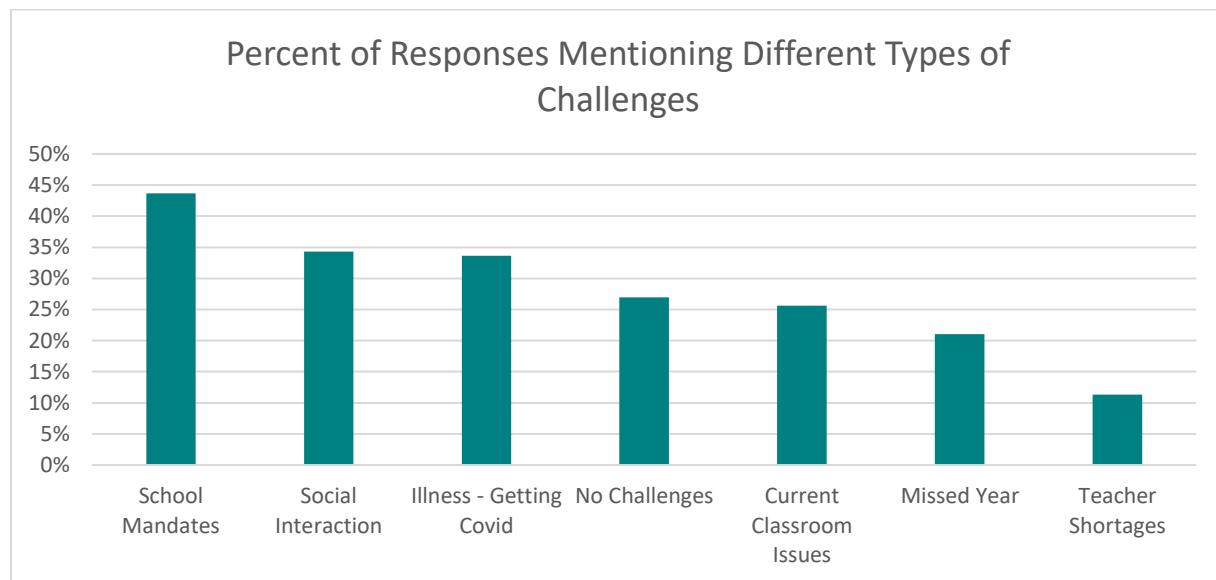


Figure 1.

The issues surrounding compliance with school mandates seem to be particularly acute for parents who had finished a 4-year college degree. As seen in Figure 2, almost 60% of those in the highest education category noted that the school mandates and compliance with these

¹NASHP. (2021, December 10). States address school vaccine mandates and mask mandates. *COVID-19 State Action Center*. <https://www.nashp.org/states-enact-policies-to-support-students-transition-back-to-school/>

mandates was an issue. This was the largest discrepancy seen across education levels (a 24% difference). The next largest issue was related to missing a year of learning with a little over 35% of parents with a 4-year college degree noting that was a concern as students returned to in person schooling (a 24% difference from parents with a high school degree or less).

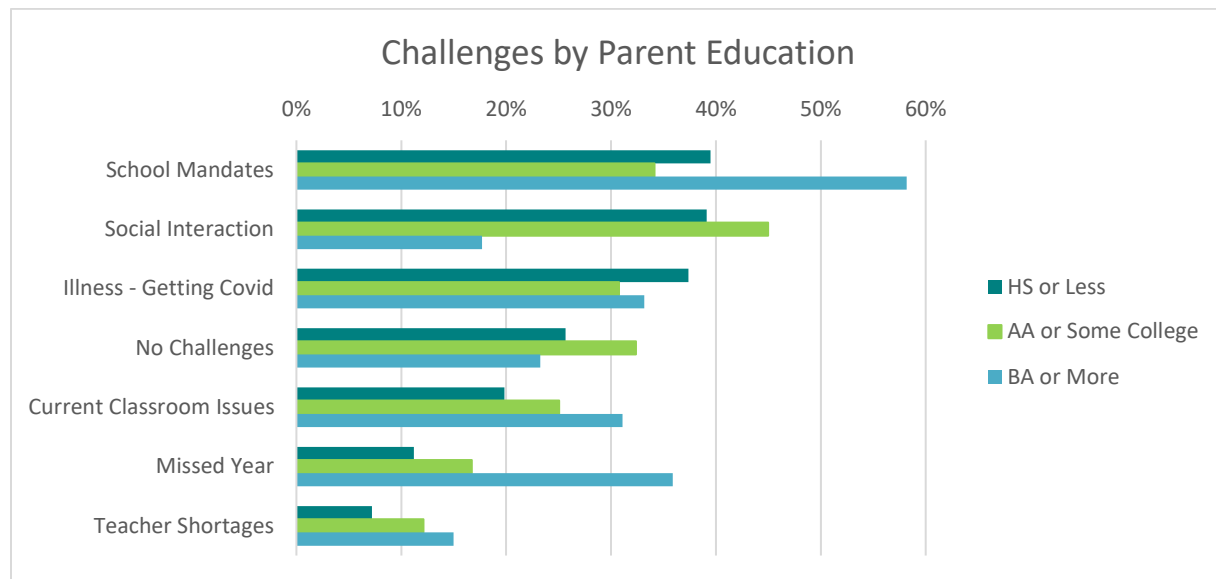


Figure 2.

We will continue to follow how parents and children are coping with the constantly changing landscape of education during COVID-times. As was the case previously, parents and their children are struggling with how COVID has changed the learning environment as well as the peer interactions. Figuring out how to manage the constant shifts to remote learning and school mandates continues to be problematic with only approximately 25% of the parents noting no challenges at all on the return to school. Like many in the world right now, parents are wondering whether there will ever be a return to “normal” in the education setting.

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 October 11 – October 20, 2021, resulting

in a sample of 1,003 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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