ASSIOOM ENCOURAGE

HOW TO OVERCOME CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AND ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO SEND KIDS TO SCHOOL CONSISTENTLY

RESEARCH BY



WITH SUPPORT FROM



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INTRODUCTION

In the years since the COVID-19 pandemic, 1 in 4—or even more—students have been considered chronically absent from school, meaning they missed 10% or more of the year. The reasons? A number have been suspected: Remote options as a result of pandemic shutdowns. A "school optional" mindset. Increased fears over germs, colds, and viruses. A desire to avoid bullies. An increased need for mental health days. Increased and continued challenges with poor transportation, unstable housing, or needing to work to support the family, especially in low-income communities.

Whatever the reasons, the consequences are many. According to the <u>U.S. Department of</u> Education, chronic absenteeism:

- Can negatively affect student achievement, including by preventing children from reaching early learning milestones such as reading.
- May be a predictor of student dropout rates.
- Can negatively shape and impact adulthood.

The problem isn't new, but it is getting worse: Since the COVID-19 pandemic, chronic absences have skyrocketed, more than doubling in some cases since pre-pandemic years.

In some schools, initiatives and interventions have long been in place to combat frequent

absences: Schools notify parents of the number of times their child has missed school. Home visits try to get to the root cause of absences. Early warning systems work to identify and support students who show symptoms of risk for failing to achieve key milestones. Mentoring programs aim to develop deeper relationships. And nudges communicate directly to parents about the importance of attendance.

The issue is so widespread in the U.S. that the federal administration has keyed in on it, too. In September 2023, the White House called for an <u>"all-hands on deck" approach</u> to chronic absenteeism. And just this year, as part of a summit on the issue, the White House <u>announced</u> new actions and resources to aid bipartisan state and local education leaders in their efforts to increase student attendance and engagement.

The Ad Council itself has also previously examined and engaged in the issue. Prior to the pandemic, the Ad Council created a campaign to encourage parents to consistently send their children to school. The campaign's messaging was focused around the impact of in-person learning on a child's academic success, and specifically told parents the number of absences that were acceptable versus not. While the campaign was successful in years past, today's skyrocketing rates of chronic absenteeism suggest that this line of messaging is no longer enough to get kids back into the classroom.

As we're now learning, the years following the pandemic signaled a cultural shift in parents' views around education. Parents now see value in school developing their child more holistically and beyond academics, though many have also cultivated a mindset that <u>school is optional</u> (or, at least, that missing school is inconsequential).

Given this shift in perspective, what would help parents understand the importance of in-person learning and commit to sending their children to school every day, or nearly every day?

The Ad Council Research Institute (ACRI) set out to understand just that. In a mixed-methods research study, we sought to understand the

messaging and narrative(s) that would effectively communicate to parents why consistent inperson attendance is critical to a child's development, and encourage them to attend. To be clear, this study was *not* designed to examine the other initiatives and interventions previously and/or currently at work to combat chronic absenteeism. Instead, it was created to uncover the broader narrative change needed to work in complement with those initiatives and interventions in order to change parents' knowledge, awareness, and behaviors around attendance. This narrative change is a crucial first step toward addressing the rise in chronic absenteeism, helping to lay the groundwork for students' future success.

KEY FINDINGS

This study uncovered the following key findings:

- 1. Parents are significantly aware of and generally agree with the benefits of in-person learning, including collaboration, engagement, socializing, and personalized attention.
- 2. Parents view education holistically and as a balance of many elements, with academics only being a piece of their child's growth (in addition to social and emotional development, and more).
- **3.** Parents—especially those whose children are routinely absent—say they regularly track their children's grades, school performance, and attendance. They tend to believe most absences are acceptable.
- **4.** Messaging that chastises parents or communicates the consequences of missing school does not work in the post-COVID era. Messaging must have a positive tone and focus on the opportunities children receive by regularly attending school in person, including academic, social development, and emotional growth.
- **5.** Parents are most trusting of their child's teacher, and want to hear attendance-related messaging from them.

See additional data points from this survey by categories such as household income, type of school, and more on this study's <u>website</u>.

PURPOSE

To help policymakers and educators address the chronic absenteeism crisis, ACRI conducted research and developed an updated messaging toolkit aimed at highlighting the importance of children attending school in person. Overdeck Family Foundation provided funding for the work, and the nonprofit Attendance Works informed the design of the online discussions and surveys.

In this study, ACRI conducted qualitative and quantitative research to:

- **Understand parents' perceptions** about their roles, their views on education, acceptable absences, and more.
- **Identify any nuances** by grade level, household composition, household income, or current level of acceptable absences to optimize messaging.
- **Inform a back-to-school campaign** highlighting the benefits of children attending school in person.

The findings in this report and accompanying toolkit provide a deeper look into how parents view education and school absences, and how to best develop messaging that motivates them to send their children to school on a consistent basis.¹

^{1.} The research team and partners also recognize that some students and families face barriers that narrative change cannot fully address. In addition to developing messaging, school, district, and state leaders should also communicate and work with parents to identify if there are additional barriers to regular school attendance that might require direct services and support as part of their overall efforts.

METHODOLOGY

This study consisted of two research phases: a qualitative phase conducted June 5-7, 2024 and a quantitative phase conducted July 8-28, 2024.

Qualitative Phase

The qualitative phase consisted of a two-day online discussion with n=32 participants. All respondents met the following criteria in order to participate:

- Parent of 1+ child ages 5-17 who attend(s) public or private school (grades K-12)
 - Even mix across elementary, middle, and high school
- At least shared caregiving responsibility for the child(ren)
- 1+ child has been absent for 9+ days in the 2023-2024 school year (a third of participants' kids were absent 0-1 days per month; two-thirds of participants' kids were absent 2+ days per month)
 - If parents had multiple children qualify, individuals with more absences were prioritized
 - Child does not have ongoing medical issue that impacts their attendance

Respondents also represented a mix of political ideologies and other demographics, including gender, age, ethnicity, region/urbanicity, employment, education, and household income.

Qualitative fieldwork was offered in English only and was completed June 5-7, 2024.

Quantitative Phase

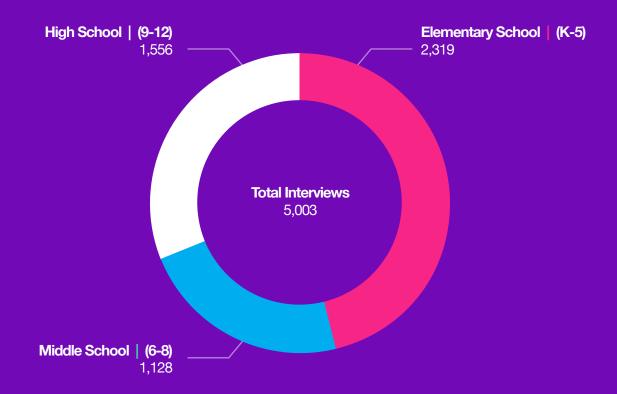
A 15-minute online survey, offered in English and Spanish, was conducted July 8-28, 2024 among U.S. parents/caregivers of children currently in school (kindergarten – 12th grade). The sample is representative to U.S. Census data of households with kids based on age, gender, race/ethnicity, region, and household income.

All parents had to have a qualifying child to complete the survey. This means the child must:

- Have attended school for kindergarten 12th grade in the recent school year
- Have attended a school in person (i.e., not homeschooled)
- Have at least some in-person learning at school
- Not have an ongoing medical issue that impacts their attendance

If parents had multiple children qualify, children with more absences were prioritized.

Throughout this report, the general population refers to the full sample surveyed. Grade level and number of monthly absences were also tracked as cohort groups, as were school type (public vs. private), household income (less than \$100k or \$100k+), and school performance ("A" student vs. "B" student or lower).



	Total	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Average Number of Absences Per Month				
0-1 per month	3,782	1,765	841	1,176
2-4 per month*	869	420	193	256
5+ per month*	352	134	94	124
School Type				
Public school	4,203	1,932	931	1,340
Private school	589	288	143	158
Household Income				
Less than \$100,000	2,576	1,248	568	760
\$100,000 or more	2,427	1,071	560	796

^{*}Chronically Absent

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM DEFINED

"Chronic absenteeism" has various definitions among institutions (e.g., 15+ days of the school year, 10% of the school year, etc.). For the purposes of this study, chronic absenteeism means students who miss two or more days of school per month.

This study looked at trends and insights by parents across three levels of absences:

- 0-1 absences per month
- 2-4 absences per month
- 5+ absences per month

While the latter two groups (2-4 absences, 5+ absences) are both considered chronically absent, children with 5+ absences per month are chronically absent to a degree considered severe.



The general population sample was recruited to also identify the incident rate of chronic absenteeism across the United States. With approximately 25% of parents reporting that their child is absent 2+ days per month, the sample in this study directly matches other outside reports of the incident rate of absenteeism, such as is referenced in this study's introduction.

A Profile of Parents of Chronically Absent Children

Parents of Children with 2+ Absences per Month

Demographically, parents of chronically absent children:

- Are slightly younger than average (79% under 45 vs. 67% of total parents under 45)
- Are located more in the West region of the U.S. (27% vs 21% of total parents) and in urban areas (45% vs 38% of total parents)
- Earn an average household income (49% make \$100k or more)
- Are employed and are more likely to be working from home (80% employed, of which 56% work from home [vs. 47% total parents])
- · Have a college education or higher (55%), although 24% have a high school education or less
- Are more likely to be the sole caregiver (58% vs. 42% of total parents)

Parents of chronically absent children also slightly skewed Hispanic.

30% VS 22% OF TOTAL PARENTS.

In addition, children in this cohort are more likely to attend a mix of in-person school and online/virtual learning.

32% VS. 15% OF TOTAL PARENTS.

FINDINGS

This study examined five key areas, with numerous findings and insights within each area—which is how this report is organized:

- 1. Views on Education
- 2. In-Person vs. Virtual Learning
- 3. Evaluating Absences
- 4. Messaging
- 5. Trusted Messengers

Throughout this report, any notable differences above or below a 5% differential among demographic or cohort groups (school type, student grade performance, absences, etc.) are reported. If there is no mention of such differences, any data points or findings did not meet that threshold.

SECTION 1 VIEWS ON EDUCATION

UNDERSTANDING PARENTS' VIEWS AND PERCEIVED ROLES IN EDUCATION, AND IF/HOW THEY TRACK SCHOOL PERFORMANCE.

PARENTS BELIEVE EDUCATION IS A BALANCE OF MANY ELEMENTS, WITH ACADEMICS ONLY BEING A PIECE OF THEIR CHILD'S GROWTH.

When asked how they'd describe their overall perspectives on and approaches to their children's education, the majority of parents and caregivers noted that academics are a part of overall growth.

"As a parent/caregiver, my overall perspective on and approach to my 17-year-old daughter's education is to **prioritize a balanced and holistic development**. I emphasize the importance of academic excellence while also encouraging her to pursue extracurricular activities and personal interests. I support her autonomy in making educational choices, provide resources and guidance when needed, and foster a positive and open communication environment to help her navigate academic challenges and future career decisions."

- Parent of a high school student, 2-4 absences per month

"As a parent, I prioritize a supportive, engaging learning environment, encouraging curiosity, fostering resilience, and balancing academics with creative activities to naturalize her overall growth."

— Parent of an elementary school student, 5+ absences per month

"Education is required, but schools put too much pressure on kids to have perfect attendance. People get sick and sometimes just need a mental health day."

- Parent of a middle school student, 2-4 absences per month

IN GENERAL, PARENTS VIEW THEMSELVES IN A SUPPORTING ROLE WHEN IT COMES TO THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION—THOUGH PARENTS WITH CHRONICALLY ABSENT KIDS ARE MORE LIKELY TO SEE THEMSELVES IN A LEADING ROLE.

Most parents (57% total parents) view themselves in more of a 'supporting' role when it comes to their child's education, meaning they're there to help the child plan and execute their schoolwork. However, parents with kids who are chronically absent are more likely to see themselves in a 'leading' role, meaning they plan and execute their child's schoolwork themselves.

- 0-1 absences: 17% see themselves in a leading role
- Chronically absent: **31**% (2-4 absences **23**%, 5+ absences **38**%)

This was seen across grade levels, more so for elementary and middle school-aged children.

Elementary school parents

- 0-1 absences: 22% see themselves in a leading role
- Chronically absent: **34**% (2-4 absences **27**%, 5+ absences **40**%)

Middle school parents

• 0-1 absences: 14%

• Chronically absent: **35**% (2-4 absences **25**%, 5+ absences **45**%)

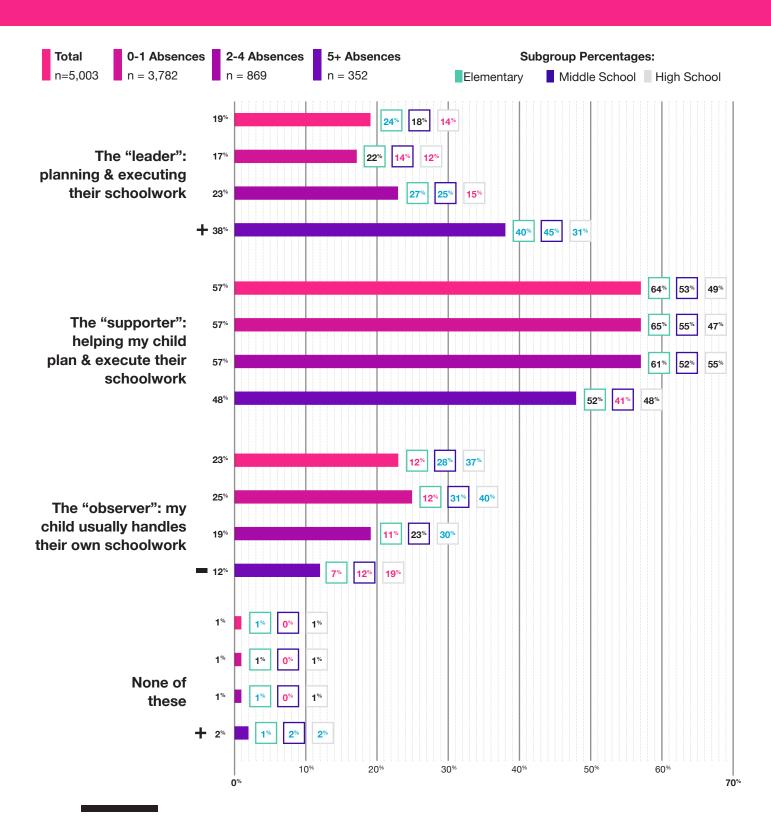
High school parents

• 0-1 absences: **12**%

• Chronically absent: 23% (2-4 absences 15%, 5+ absences 31%)

Parents of chronically absent students are also more likely to bring in additional help (such as a tutor/ classroom aide) as well, a sentiment expressed by many parents in an open-ended question.

PARENT ROLE IN EDUCATION



Base: Total Respondents

Q2. When it comes to your [KID]'s education/schooling, how would you define your current role as a parent/caregiver?

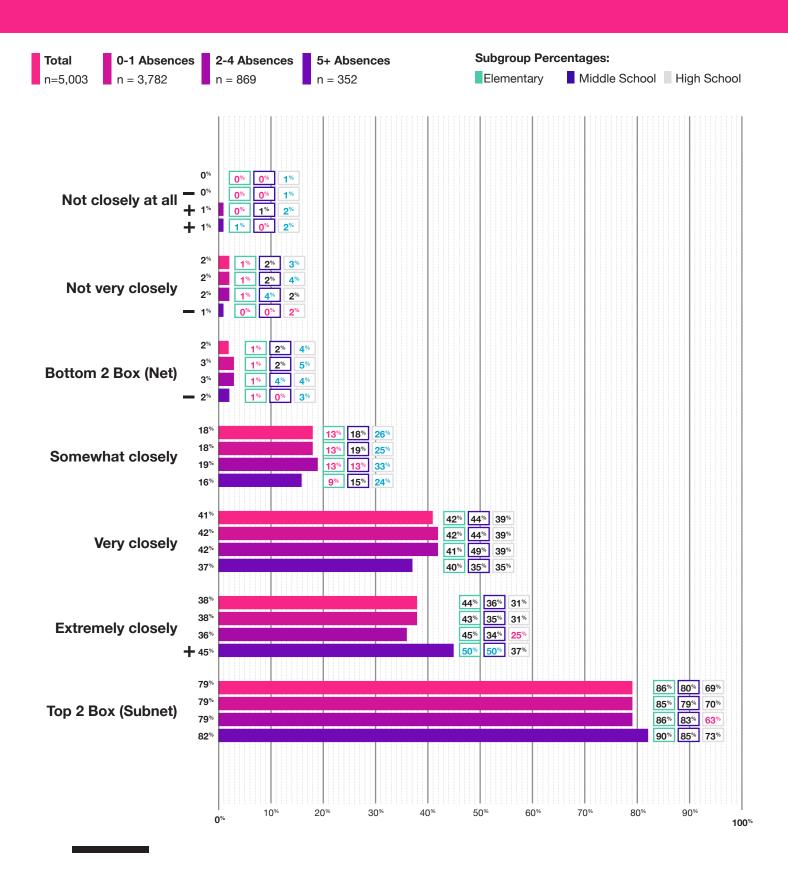
^{+/}Blue= over-index vs. Total (120 or above); -/Pink = under-index vs. Total (80 or below); Caution index results under 10% due to larger fluctuation

PARENTS TRACK THEIR
CHILD'S SCHOOL
PERFORMANCE
CLOSELY, THOUGH
PARENTS OF SEVERELY
CHRONICALLY ABSENT
CHILDREN SAY THEY
KEEP AN EXTREMELY
CLOSE EYE ON
PERFORMANCE,
ESPECIALLY AT
ELEMENTARY AND
MIDDLE SCHOOL
LEVELS.

More than three-fourths of total parents (79%) say they track their child's school performance very (41%) or extremely (38%) closely. Parents of severely chronically absent children (5+ absences per month) are more likely to say they monitor their child's performance extremely closely, more so for those of elementary school (50%) and middle school (50%) students.

Parents of children in private school, particularly those in elementary school (51%) or high school (47%) are also more likely to say they monitor absences extremely closely, as are parents of elementary school students who regularly make A's (52%).

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE TRACKING



Base: Total Respondents

Q3. How closely do you monitor or track your [KID]'s grades or school performance?

^{+/}Blue= over-index vs. Total (120 or above); -/Pink = under-index vs. Total (80 or below); Caution index results under 10% due to larger fluctuation

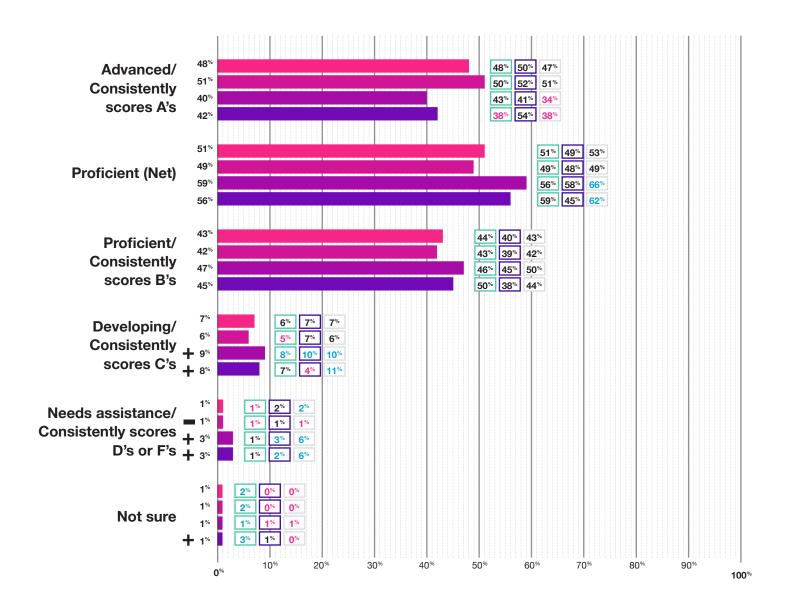
ALMOST ALL PARENTS CLAIM THEIR CHILD'S GRADES ARE EITHER ADVANCED OR PROFICIENT, WITH ONLY A HANDFUL OF CHILDREN PERFORMING BELOW AVERAGE.

Regardless of cohort group, the majority of parents describe their child's performance for the 2023-2024 school year as advanced (48% consistently making A's) or proficient (43% consistently making B's).

While most parents in this study believe their children are performing well in school, this belief could be inflated. A recent study from Gallup and Learning Heroes showed "nine in 10 parents believe their child is at or above grade level in reading and math" when looking at report cards. However, "when looking at other progress measures, including standardized test scores, a minority of students—roughly less than half—are performing at grade level."

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE





SECTION 2

IN-PERSON VS. VIRTUAL LEARNING

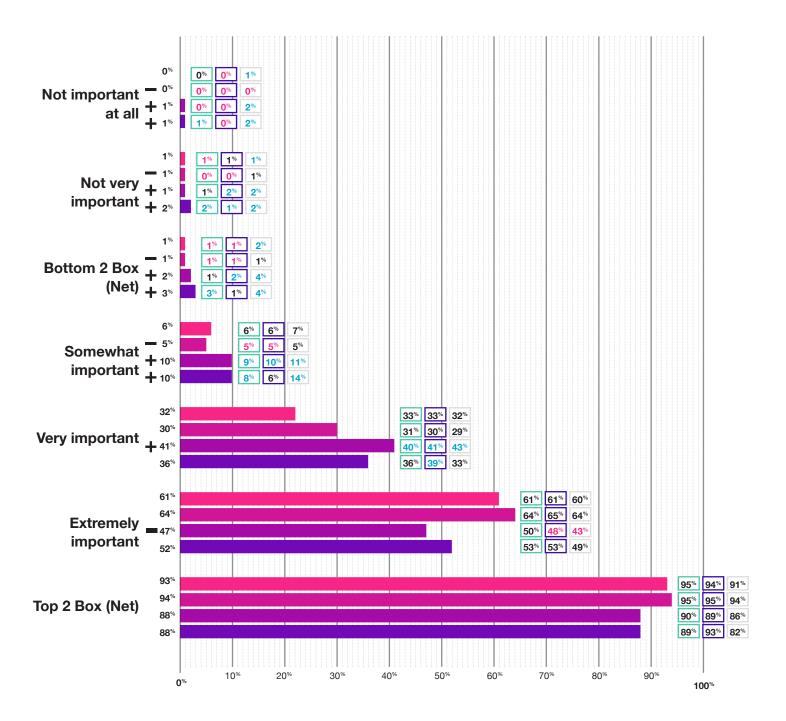
ASSESSING PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR CHILD'S LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.

THE MAJORITY OF PARENTS AGREE IN-PERSON LEARNING IS IMPORTANT, THOUGH LESS SO AMONG PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH MORE ABSENCES.

Nearly all (93%) parents agree in-person learning is important (32% very, 61% extremely). This perception is slightly softer among parents with chronically absent students, with just over half (51%) saying in-person learning is 'extremely' important.

IMPORTANCE OF IN-PERSON LEARNING





Base: Total Respondents

Q6. Thinking about your [KID], how important is it that they attend school in-person every day when school is in session?

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PARENTS UNDERSTAND AND AGREE THAT IN-PERSON LEARNING HAS UNDENIABLE BENEFITS.

Overall, parents recognize the benefits of in-person learning over a virtual environment, including collaboration, engagement, socializing, personalized attention, and more. Top benefits of in-person learning include:

- It's easier to collaborate with other children with in-person school/learning: 86%
- My child is more engaged with learning/the content when in person: 85%
- The social benefits of in-person school/learning are irreplaceable: 84%
- My child is more focused when learning in person: 83%
- My child is able to get more personalized attention with in-person school/learning: 81%
- The educational benefits of in-person school/learning are irreplaceable: 80%

To a lesser extent, parents of chronically absent children are more likely to also agree with the educational benefits of online or virtual learning—such as the ability to work independently. Additionally, many parents of chronically absent children agree online/virtual learning is better for their child's mental health, that it can be used as an alternative option if their child is anxious or overwhelmed with in-person learning/activities, and it can help avoid situations of bullying. (Note: Parents of children with 5+ absences per month are slightly more likely than parents of children with 2-4 absences per month to feel strongly about online/virtual learning, though parents of chronically absent children in general are more likely than the average parent to feel the same.)

About half of parents of chronically absent children reflect on their own experiences not being impacted by absences (i.e., "When I was their age, I missed in-person school, and it didn't impact my education or development." – **46**% chronically absent, **37**% total parents).

PERCEPTIONS OF IN-PERSON VS. ONLINE LEARNING % STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE

	Total	n=5,00	3	0-	1 Abs	ences	s n = 3	3,782	2-4	Abse	ences	n = 86	9	5+ Absences n = 3				
	Total Parents/ Caregivers				Total Elementary School				N		tal Scho	ol	Total High School					
It's easier to collaborate with other children with in person school/learning	86%	88%	85%	77%	87%	89%	86%	75%	85%	86%	85 [%]	78%	86%	87%	83%	79%		
My child is more engaged with learning/the content when in person	85%	87%	82%	75%	86%	87%	86%	75%	85%	86%	81%	80%	84%	87%	76%	73%		
The social benefits of in person school/learning are irreplaceable	84%	86%	80%	73%	84%	86%	81%	69%	83%	85%	80%	76%	84%	86%	79%	75%		
My child is more focused when learning in person	83%	84%	78%	74%	83%	84%	79%	72%	82%	84%	79%	76%	83%	85%	78%	76%		
My child is able to get more personalized attention with in-person school/learning	81%	82%	79%	72%	82%	83%	80%	69%	79%	80%	78 [%]	76%	81%	83%	78%	71%		
The educational benefits of in-person school/learning are irreplaceable	80%	82%	75%	74%	80%	81%	76%	72%	80%	81%	76 [%]	76%	80%	83%	72%	74%		
If my child misses in-person school, they miss out on social and academic opportunities	75%	77%	72%	67%	76%	77%	75%	71%	74%	76%	70%	64%	75%	77%	68 [%]	66%		
If my child misses in-person school, they can easily make up the schoolwork later	71%	71%	71%	68%	71%	72%	71%	66%	69%	70%	68%	67%	71%	70%	75%	73%		

PERCEPTIONS OF IN-PERSON VS. ONLINE LEARNING % STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE (CONTINUED)

352

	Total r	1=5,00	3	(0-1 Abs	2-4	Abse	ences	n = 86	9 5+ Absences n = 3								
	Total Parents/ Caregivers				Elei	Total Elementary School				Total Middle School				Total High School				
There are more distractions with online/virtual learning	66%	66%	66%	62%	68%	68%	68%	65%	66%	66%	68%	64%	63%	65%	61%	57%		
It's my child's responsibility to attend school in person every day	66%	66%	63%	68%	57%	57%	53%	60%	70%	70%	68%	69%	77%	77%	74%	77%		
Online/virtual learning is a great alternative if my child needs to miss a school day	64%	62%	69%	71%	63%	61%	69%	70%	64%	62%	68%	69%	66%	64%	69%	73%		
Online/virtual learning allows my child to learn at their own pace	45%	42%	51%	64 [%]	44%	42 [%]	49%	60 [%]	45%	40%	55 [%]	68 [%]	45%	41%	52%	66% +		
Online/virtual learning allows my child to be more independent	38%	34%	45%	57% +	35%	33%	42%	49 [%]	39%	35%	44%	59 [%]	40%	36%	49% +	63 [%]		
'When I was their age, I missed in- person school, and it didn't impact my education or development'	37%	34%	42%	49 [%]	38%	35%	45% +	53 [%]	37%	36%	37%	46% +	35%	32%	40%	48% +		
Online/virtual learning is just as effective as in-person learning	28%	23%	37 [%]	53 [%]	28%	24%	36 [%]	51 [%]	28%	23%	36% +	53 [%]	27%	22 [%]	39 [%]	56 [%]		
My child is anxious about going to school in person	25%	20%	36 [%]	49 [%]	25%	21%	36 [%]	50% +	27%	22%	39 [%]	50% +	23%	18 [%]	35% +	47% +		
My child gets overwhelmed with too many in-person activities	25%	20%	34 [%]	47% +	24%	21%	31 [%]	45 [%]	26%	20% —	39 [%]	51% +	24%	20 [%]	34 [%]	46% +		
Online/virtual learning is better for my child's mental health	20%	16 [%]	29 [%]	49 [%]	20%	16 [%]	29 [%]	47% +	23%	17%	31 [%]	54 [%]	19%	14 [%]	28 [%]	48% +		
My child is anxious about being in person due to bullying	19%	15% —	27 [%]	39 [%]	20%	16%	29 [%]	39 [%]	20%	16%	26 [%]	40% +	16%	13 [%]	23 [%]	37 [%]		
My child is anxious about being in person due to threats of violence at school	17%	14 [%]	25 [%]	39 [%]	17%	14 [%]	23 [%] +	38 [%]	19%	15%	30% +	40% +	17%	13%	25 [%]	40% +		

Base: Total Respondents

Q7. Thinking about your [KID], how much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? 5-pt. scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree)

^{+ =} over-index vs. Total (120 or above); = = under-index vs. Total (80 or below); Caution index results under 10% due to larger fluctuation

SECTION 3

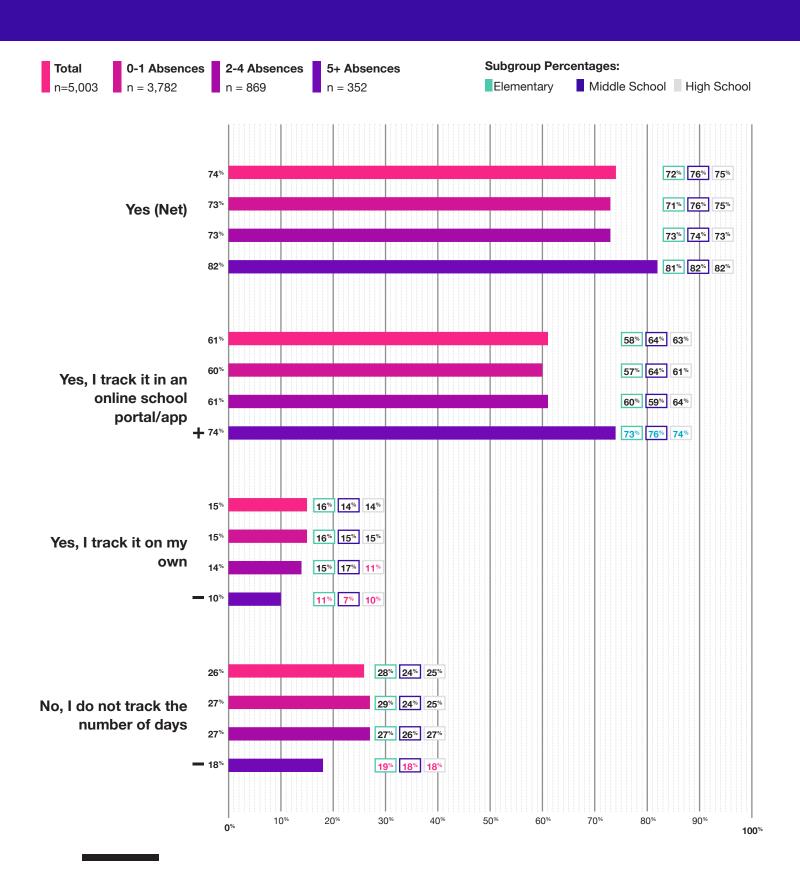
EVALUATINGABSENCES

UNDERSTANDING PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ACCEPTABLE AND UNACCEPTABLE ABSENCES, PLUS HOW THEIR KIDS' ABSENCES COMPARE TO OTHER CHILDREN.

THE MAJORITY OF PARENTS SAY THEY TRACK THEIR CHILD'S ABSENCES, MAINLY VIA A SCHOOL PORTAL OR APP—ESPECIALLY PARENTS OF SEVERELY CHRONICALLY ABSENT CHILDREN.

Around three-fourths of total parents (74%) indicate they keep track of their child's absences (mostly via a school portal or app, versus doing so manually). Even more parents with severely chronically absent children—82%—say they keep track. Parents under the age of 45 are more likely to use a portal/app (63%) than parents who skew 45 or older (58%).

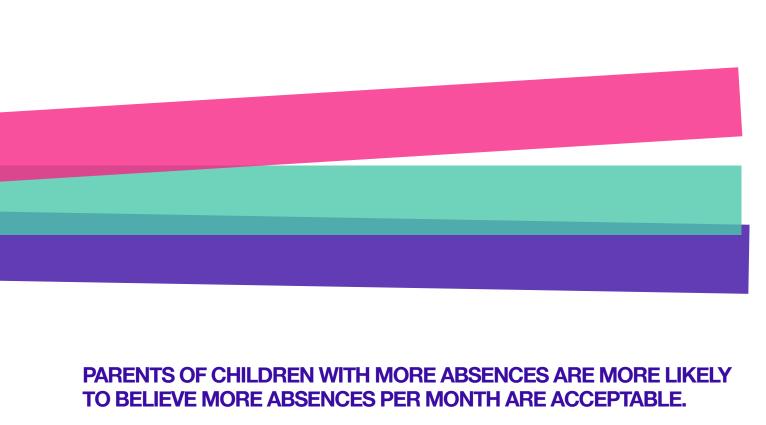
ABSENCE TRACKING



Base: Total Respondents

Q2. When it comes to your [KID]'s education/schooling, how would you define your current role as a parent/caregiver?

+ Blue= over-index vs. Total (120 or above); ■ Pink = under-index vs. Total (80 or below); Caution index results under 10% due to larger fluctuation

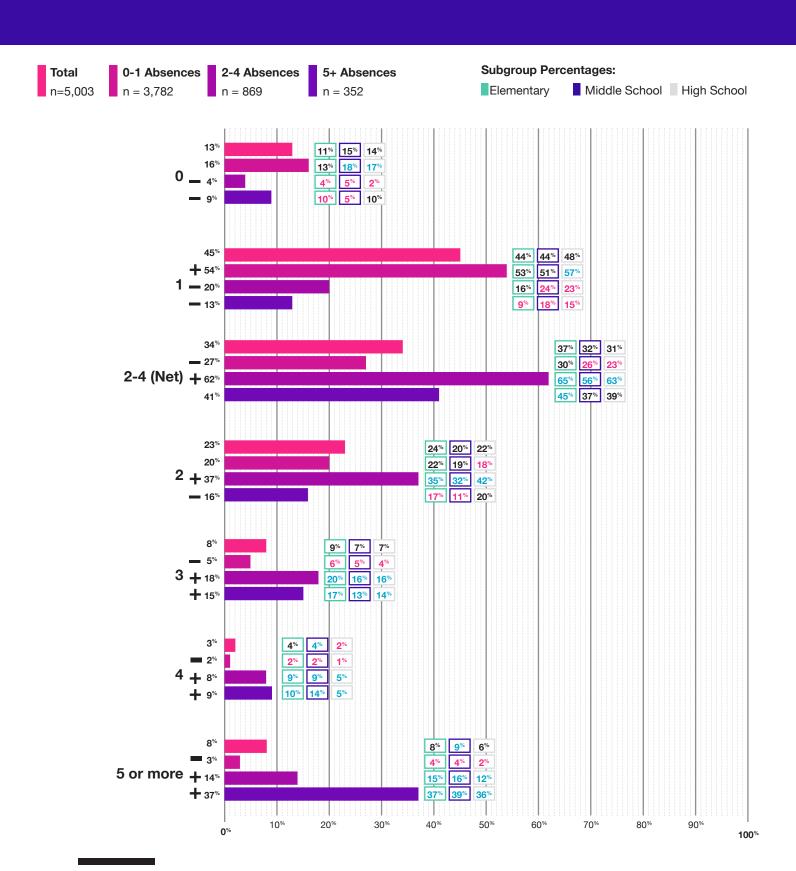


Over half of parents—primarily whose children regularly have absences per month—believe the same amount is acceptable. The more absences children regularly have, the more parents are likely to believe more absences are acceptable. For example, **54**% of parents of children with 0-1 absences believe 1 absence per month is acceptable; conversely, **62**% of parents with children who are absent 2-4 times per month say 2-4 absences are acceptable. Parents of severely chronically absent children

(5+ times per month) are most likely of all (37%) to say 5+ absences per month are acceptable.



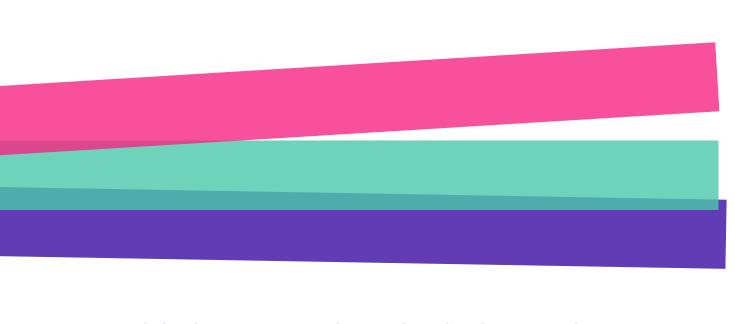
ACCEPTABLE ABSENCES PER MONTH



Base: Total Respondents

Q8. What would you consider to be an 'acceptable' number of absences per month for your [KID]? Range 0-10

+/Blue= over-index vs. Total (120 or above); -/Pink = under-index vs. Total (80 or below); Caution index results under 10% due to larger fluctuation

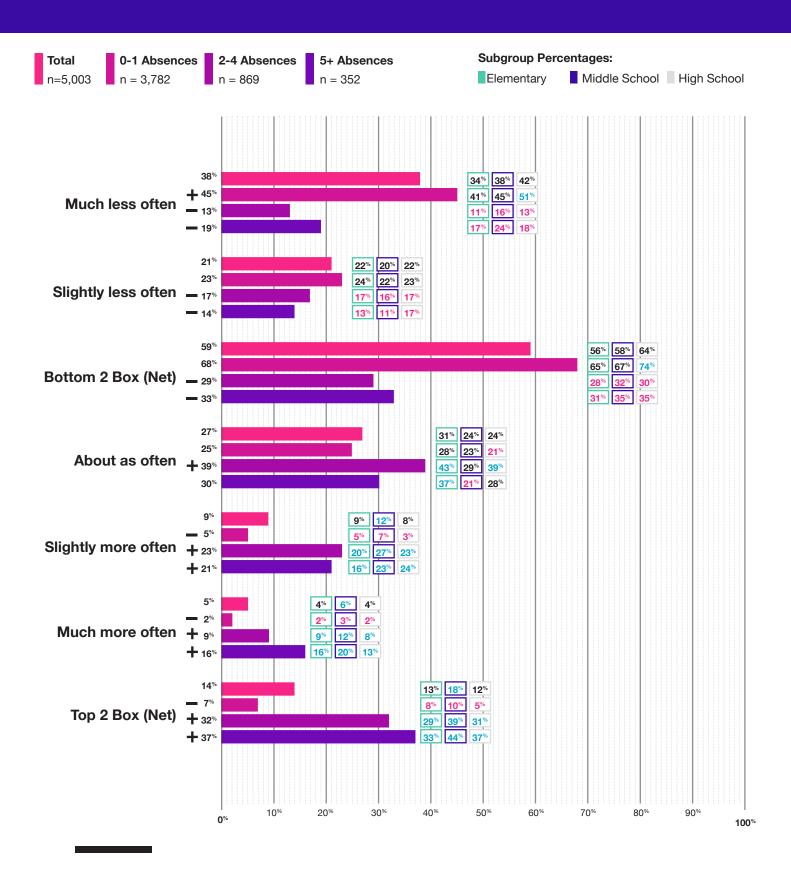


PARENTS OF CHILDREN WHO ARE CHRONICALLY ABSENT BELIEVE THEIR CHILD IS ABSENT ABOUT THE SAME OR MORE THAN OTHERS.

In general, parents across the board seem to view 2-4 absences per month as the average—even though this rate is considered chronically absent:

- 68% of parents of children with 0-1 absences per month believe their child misses school less often than other students in their grade.
- 39% of parents of children with 2-4 absences per month believe their child misses school about as often as other students in their grade.
- 37% of parents of children with 5+ absences per month believe their child misses school more often than other students in their grade.

PERCEPTION OF ABSENCES VS. OTHER KIDS



Base: Total Respondents

Q10. Does your [KID] miss in-person school more or less often than other students their age/grade?

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PARENTS AGREE ON MANY ACCEPTABLE ABSENCES, INCLUDING A DEATH IN THE FAMILY, PHYSICAL ILLNESS, FAMILY EMERGENCY, OR MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS.

Regardless of grade or number of absences, parents in general agree on four top acceptable absences:

· Death in the family: 92% total parents

· Physical illness: 92% total parents

• Family emergency: 91% total parents

• Doctor/dentist appointment: 88% total parents

Following those reasons, about half of parents or more find it acceptable to miss school for a religious holiday (61% total parents), if the child is in need of a mental health day or break (54% total parents), when visiting family overseas (51% total parents) or for family travel plans (51% total parents). Parents of chronically absent kids are more lenient on other types of absences, including if their child experiences bullying, is overtired, or if the parent has caregiving responsibilities, even more so for parents of children considered severely chronically absent.

Experiencing bullying:

0-1 absences: **38**% Chronically absent: **52**%

• Overtired:

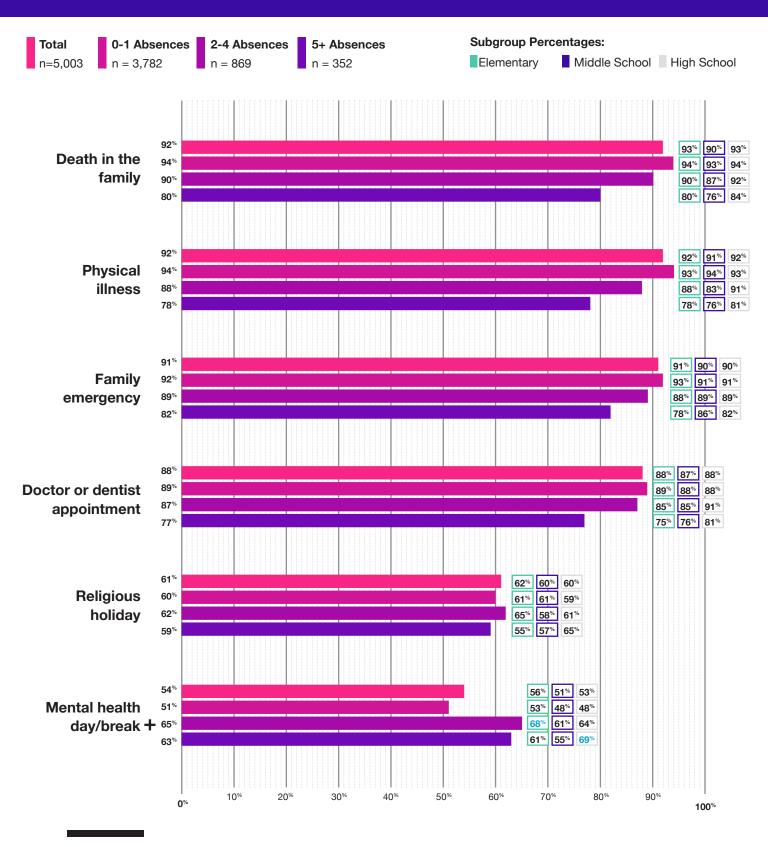
0-1 absences: 22%

Chronically absent: **39**% (**35**% 2-4 absences, **42**% 5+)

Caregiving responsibilities:
 0-1 absences: 20%

Chronically absent: **39**% (**31**% 2-4 absences, **46**% 5+)

TYPES OF ACCEPTABLE ABSENCES - % ALWAYS/USUALLY ACCEPTABLE (TOP RESULTS)



Base: Total Respondents

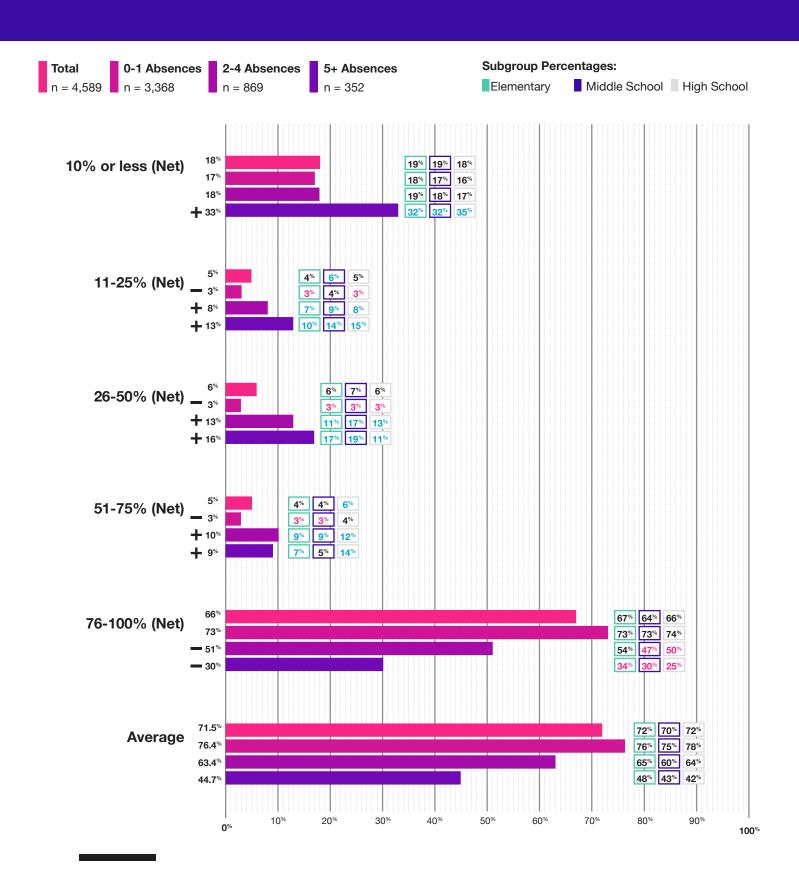
Q9. What would you consider a valid or acceptable reason for your [KID] to miss in-person school/learning? 5-pt. scale (always acceptable, usually acceptable, neutral/not sure, usually unacceptable, always unacceptable)

^{+/}Blue= over-index vs. Total (120 or above); =/Pink = under-index vs. Total (80 or below); Caution index results under 10% due to larger fluctuation

THE MAJORITY OF PARENTS BELIEVE THEIR CHILDREN'S ABSENCES ARE DUE TO VALID OR ACCEPTABLE REASONS, THOUGH PARENTS OF CHRONICALLY ABSENT KIDS RECOGNIZE THAT NOT ALL ARE COMPLETELY ACCEPTABLE.

When asked what proportion of their child's absences were for reasons the parent felt comfortable with them missing school, two-thirds (66%) of total parents said 76-100%. Parents of chronically absent students were more mixed in their responses, with a third (33%) of parents with severely chronically absent kids saying they were comfortable with only 10% or fewer of their child's absences.

PROPORTION OF ABSENCES THAT ARE VALID/ACCEPTABLE



Base: Total Respondents

Q12. What proportion of them were for reasons that you felt comfortable with them missing for?

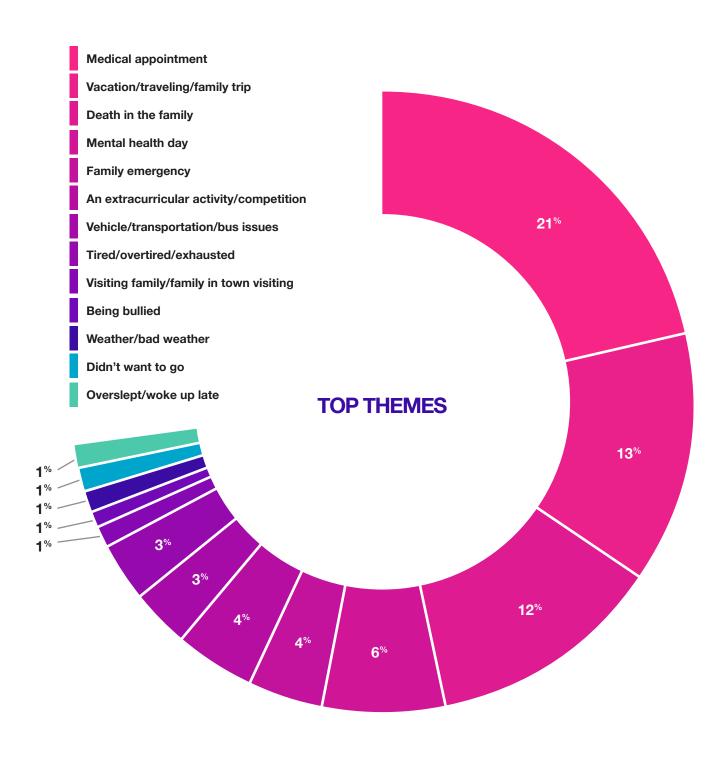
^{+/}Blue= over-index vs. Total (120 or above); -/Pink = under-index vs. Total (80 or below); Caution index results under 10% due to larger fluctuation

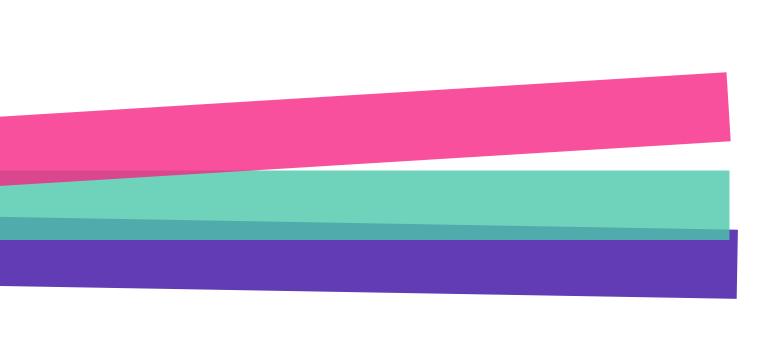
THE MOST RECENT NON-ILLNESS ABSENCES AMONG STUDENTS ALIGN WITH THE TYPES OF ABSENCES PARENTS AGREE ARE ACCEPTABLE: MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS, TRAVELING, OR A DEATH IN THE FAMILY.

In an open-ended question, parents noted the reason for their child's most recent non-illness absence. The top three themes were medical appointments (21%), vacation/traveling (13%), and a death in the family (12%). Fewer parents pointed to mental health days (6%), the child being tired/exhausted (3%), or being bullied (1%) compared to other reasons.

NOTE: As found in a study by McNeely et al., only **10%** of school districts in the study considered family travel to be an excused absence. While parents may believe such absences are excused, school/district policy may not consider family travel a valid reason for missing school.

REASON FOR LAST NON-ILLNESS ABSENCE

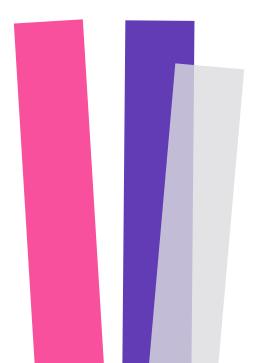




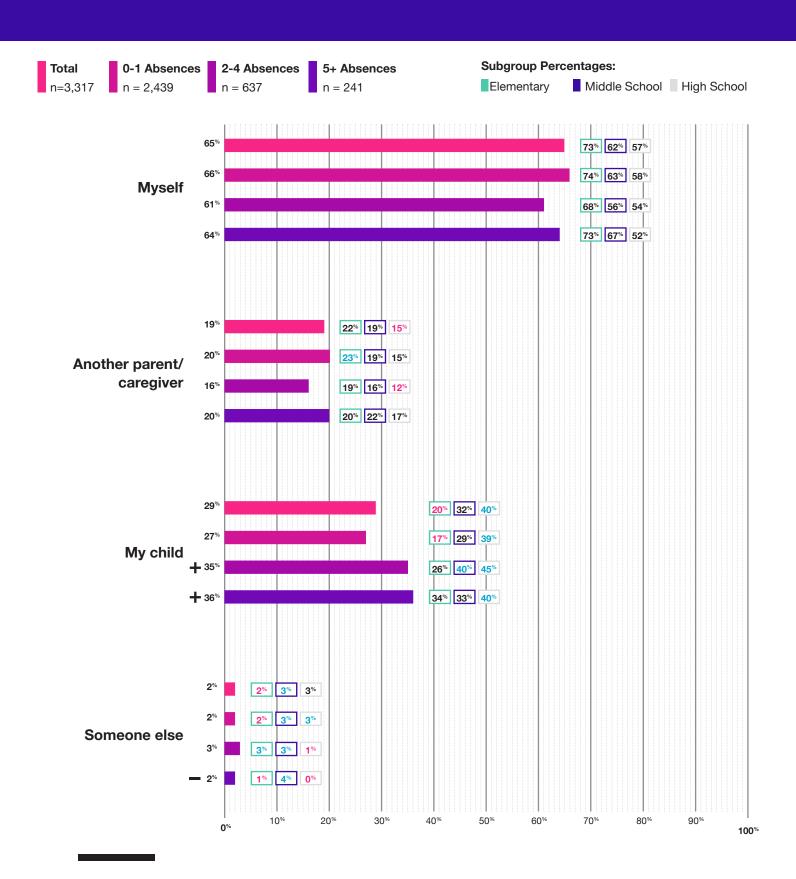
MOST CONVERSATIONS AND DECISIONS ABOUT ABSENCES ARE MADE BY THE ADULTS IN THE HOUSEHOLD.

Two-thirds (65%) of parents said they started the conversation about their child missing school, while only about a third (29%) of total parents said their child started the discussion. This increased slightly with age, as 40% of parents said their high school student started the discussion to miss school.

Parents are also primarily the final decision-maker about missing school, though it again skewed slightly more toward the child for older students and those with more absences.

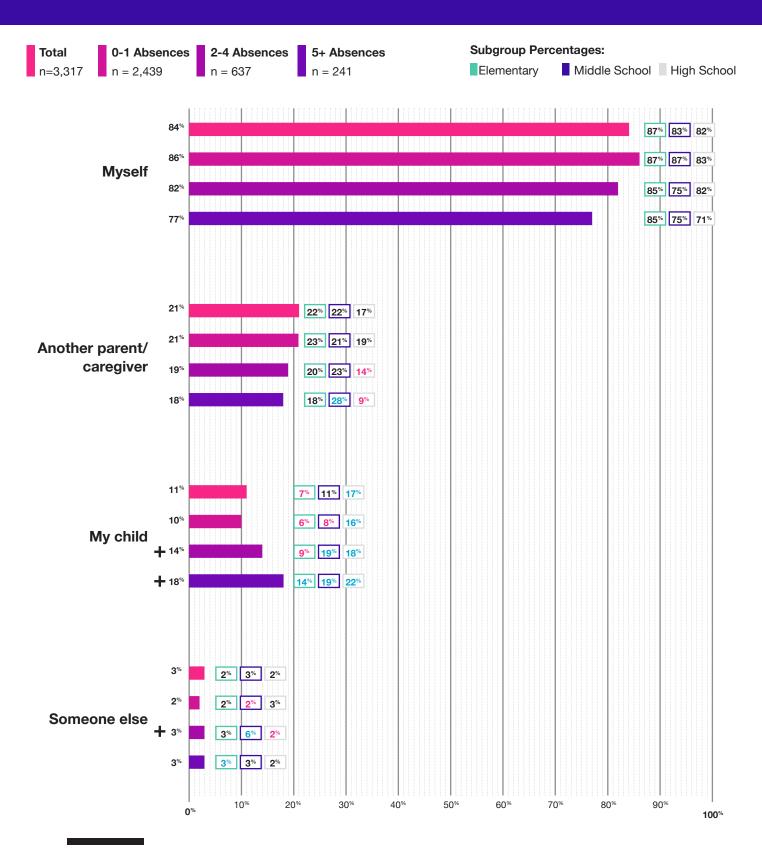


LAST NON-ILLNESS ABSENCE CONVERSATION - WHO STARTED THE CONVERSATION



Base: Total Respondents

LAST NON-ILLNESS ABSENCE CONVERSATION - WHO MADE FINAL DECISION TO STAY HOME



Base: Total Respondents

SECTION 4 MESSAGING

TESTING MESSAGE FRAMES TO PERSUADE PARENTS TO KEEP ABSENCES TO A MINIMUM.

MESSAGE FRAMES TESTED DURING QUALITATIVE & QUANTITATIVE PHASES

Throughout this study, the research team drafted, tested, revised, and optimized message frames based on parent feedback in order to determine the best messaging frame(s) that resonate with and motivate parents to send their children to school in person.

A message frame is a messaging/narrative concept used to test various language and phrasing. This study tested a **foundational message frame** designed to introduce a concept, as well as **conditional message frames** to further explain the foundational frame and address any potential biases among parents.

In the qualitative phase, the research team tested a foundational message frame with respondents, followed by two conditional themes. These messaging concepts were used to determine which frame or combination of frames parents found most relevant and motivating to send their child to school every day. In-depth feedback on the initial message frames during the qualitative phase informed strategic revisions, which were then tested in the quantitative survey.

Based on qualitative feedback, the quantitative survey tested an optimized foundational frame and two new conditional frames.

The testing of message frames was specifically intended to determine the key narratives and phrasing that most resonate with and motivate parents/caregivers to keep their children in school and keep absences to a minimum.

MESSAGE FRAMES TESTED | QUALITATIVE

The qualitative phase tested a foundational frame and two conditional frames to gauge respondent reactions and impressions. The foundational frame was shown to first inform parent respondents about the importance of sending children to school in person every day, while the conditional frames further explained the concept.

FOUNDATIONAL FRAME

Raising a child isn't easy by any stretch of the imagination. But there is one simple task, one daily habit, that can set your child up for success for years to come.

And it starts in the classroom.

When children and teens regularly attend school in person, they're more likely to develop personally, socially, emotionally, academically—

and, in the long term, be ready for college or work. They're routinely able to connect with friends and non-familial adults, collaborate and problem-solve, make decisions, think critically, experiment, and learn hands-on.

As parents and caregivers, we all want to give our children the best possible shot at a happy, healthy, successful future. But students can't benefit from opportunities at school to learn and thrive if they don't show up nearly every day. Commit to sending your child to school in person every day.

OVERALL IMPRESSION

Parents appreciated language that discussed how school helps set their child up for success and develop them in many ways. However, they didn't agree with or were confused by other phrases:

- The phrase "It starts in the classroom" was disliked among parents in the qualitative phase, as they felt education starts at home but is fostered or nurtured in the classroom.
- The word "opportunities" was polarizing, with parents feeling conflicted about situations outside their control (i.e., what if my kid is sick?).
- "Nearly every day" was confusing and parents weren't sure what it exactly meant.
- The word "commit" sounded aggressive and just not realistic.

CONDITIONAL FRAME 1: YOU CAN'T GET IT BACK

The thing about missing school is your child can't ever really make up for that lost time.

They may be able to hand in late assignments, or do extra homework, or tune in virtually, but that day—that moment—is irreplaceable.

Kids and teens need to be in school in person for the entire school year to make critical connections, build relationships, develop social and emotional skills, and compound knowledge—consistently.

Setting your kids up for success starts in the classroom and continues for the entire school year. Don't let your child miss out.

OVERALL IMPRESSION

Participants only liked a few phrases of this frame, mainly those that discussed the benefits students receive from attending school (making critical connections, building relationships, developing social and emotional skills, and compounding knowledge). Overall however, the tone was received as overly intense, dramatic, or even scolding. Even the title of the frame connotated a negative tone from the start. And like the foundational frame, parents disagreed that learning "starts in the classroom."

CONDITIONAL FRAME 2: MENTAL HEALTH

What if allowing time off from school actually makes your child's mental health worse?

When students are in school, their mental health is better. They have daily routines to follow. They can connect with friends, peers, teachers, and others outside their family circle. They're given opportunities to engage and interact, to use their brains and try new things. They can be part of a team. They have a purpose.

Regular school attendance helps your child develop their whole self. Help your child be their best self and ensure they attend school every day.

OVERALL IMPRESSION

This frame also did not resonate with many parents, except the final paragraph about developing the child's whole self. Specifically, the phrase "allowing time off" felt accusatory and made parents feel like their choices are negatively affecting their child's mental health. And without specific states or evidence, "their mental health is better" was viewed as an opinion versus a fact.

Conditional Frame Preference MOST MOTIVATIONAL (TO REDUCE ABSENCES)

When asked to choose which conditional frame would most motivate them to send their child to school, parents were evenly split between the two.



"I like the invocation of mental health, but the claim that mental health is better for students when they are in school is not fully honest—some kids really struggle when they attend school." "I think more parents are becoming more in tune to their child mental health and even the mental health problems that we saw during and post-COVID. This message is strong and a reminder of their purpose-to develop as a whole person."

MESSAGE FRAMES TESTED | QUANTITATIVE

Based on respondent feedback from the qualitative phase, the quantitative phase presented an optimized foundational frame and two new conditional frames.

In the survey, parent respondents were first shown the foundational frame and asked to highlight the words or phrases they liked and disliked. Then, parents were asked to rank how much they felt the frame communicated the importance of attending school in person, its relevance, and how motivating it was to encourage every day attendance. They were then shown the two conditional frames and were asked to rank them on the same factors, as well as how much (or how little) they helped improve the foundational frame when included.

FOUNDATIONAL FRAME

Raising a child isn't easy. But there's one daily habit that can set your child up for success for years to come.

It starts at home—and it's fostered in the classroom: Showing up at school every day.

When children and teens regularly attend school in person, they're more likely to develop personally, socially, academically, and emotionally. In the long term, regular school attendance helps students be ready for whatever comes next. They're routinely able to connect with friends and adults, collaborate and problem-solve, make decisions, think critically, be creative, and engage in hands-on learning.

As parents and caregivers, we all want to give our children the best possible chance at a happy, healthy, successful future. But students can't benefit from opportunities at school to learn and thrive if they aren't there.

Showing up matters. Be consistent—show up every day if possible.

OVERALL IMPRESSION

Overall, nearly half of parents (46%) said they disliked nothing about the foundational frame, while 16% said they liked nothing about it. This was higher among parents of severely chronically absent children, where 34% liked nothing.

In general, parents gravitated toward the messaging of holistic growth with in-person learning: "They're more likely to develop personally, socially, academically, and emotionally." Parents of elementary school children and parents of children with more absences (2+) also liked the phrase, "As parents and caregivers, we all want to give our children the best possible chance at a happy..."

However, parents overall were slightly hesitant about a number of other phrases, including:

- Raising a child isn't easy.
- It's fostered in the classroom: Showing up at school every day.
- In the long term, regular school attendance helps students be ready for whatever comes next.
- But students can't benefit from opportunities at school to learn and thrive if they aren't there.
- Be consistent—show up every day if possible.

Foundational Message HIGHLIGHTER EXERCISE TOTAL PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

Respondents were asked to evaluate the frame based on what they like/motivates them to learn more and what they dislike about the frame.

LIKES: Above average across all segments for this group

POLARIZING: Above average for LIKES & DISLIKES across all segments for this group

DISLIKES: Above average across all segments for this group

Raising a child isn't easy. | But there's one daily habit | that can set your child up for success for years to come. |

It starts at home | and it's fostered in the classroom: | Showing up at school every day. |

When children and teens regularly attend school in-person, | they're more likely to develop personally, | socially, | academically, | and emotionally. | In the long term, regular school attendance helps students be ready for whatever comes next. | They're routinely able to connect with friends | and adults, | collaborate | and problem solve, | make decisions, | think critically, | be creative, | and engage in hands-on learning. |

As parents and caregivers, we all want to give our children the best possible chance at a happy, | healthy, | successful future. | But students can't benefit from opportunities at school to learn and thrive if they aren't there. |

Showing up matters. | Be consistent—show up every day if possible. |

CONDITIONAL FRAME 1: FEAR OF MISSING OUT (FOMO)

When your child misses school, they miss out on so much more than just schoolwork: relationship building, personal and emotional development, teamwork, and hands-on learning.

Children and teens need to consistently be in school, in person, to make critical connections, build relationships, develop social and emotional skills, and build their knowledge over days, weeks, months, and even years.

Don't let your child miss out on critical growth and learning.

OVERALL IMPRESSION

The FOMO frame performed slightly better than the foundational frame, with over half (51%) of parents saying they disliked nothing about the frame, and 13% liking nothing. Results were consistent across grade level and number of absences.

Like the foundational message, parents gravitated toward the messaging of holistic growth with in-person learning in this frame: "Children and teens need to consistently be in school, to make critical connections, build relationships, develop social and emotional skills." However, while more parents were positive, some didn't like the wording of needing to be consistently in school.

- 17% of parents disliked: "Don't let your child miss out on critical growth and learning."
- 8-9% of parents disliked: "When your child misses school, they miss out on so much more than just schoolwork."

'FOMO' MessageHIGHLIGHTER EXERCISE TOTAL PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

Respondents were asked to evaluate the frame based on what they like/motivates them to learn more and what they dislike about the frame.

LIKES: Above average across all segments for this group

POLARIZING: Above average for LIKES & DISLIKES across all segments for this group

DISLIKES: Above average across all segments for this group

When your child misses school, | they miss out on so much more than just schoolwork: | relationship building, | personal | and emotional development, | teamwork, | and hands-on learning. |

Children and teens need to consistently be in school, | *in person,* | to make critical connections, | build relationships, | develop social | and emotional skills, | and build their knowledge | over days, | weeks, | months, | and even years. |

Don't let your child miss out on critical growth and learning.

CONDITIONAL FRAME 2: DEVELOPING THE WHOLE SELF

For children and teens, attending school isn't just about getting an education. It's about developing their whole selves—emotionally, socially, and personally.

Attending school regularly and in person gives students the ability to follow daily routines, as well as connect with friends, peers, teachers, and others outside their family circle. They're able to engage and interact, to use their brains and try new things. They can be part of a team. They have a purpose.

Help your child be their best self. Show up to school every day.

OVERALL IMPRESSION

Identical to conditional frame 1 (FOMO), **51%** of parents disliked nothing about this frame, and **13%** liked nothing.

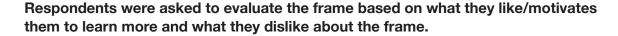
Again with this frame, parents like messaging about holistic growth: "It's about developing their whole selves—emotionally, socially, and personally." Parents of severely chronically absent children also liked the benefit about connecting with friends.

Disliked areas included:

- 8% of parents disliked: "For children and teens, attending school isn't just about getting an education."
- 8-9% of parents disliked: "They can be part of a team. They can have a purpose."
- 9-11% of parents disliked: "Help your child be their best self. Show up to school every day."

Likes/dislikes of specific words and phrases within message frames uses over- and under-indexing, meaning they had a greater than average response (from the total group of respondents) for either positive or negative sentiment.

'Developing the Whole Self' MessageHIGHLIGHTER EXERCISE TOTAL PARENTS/CAREGIVERS



LIKES: Above average across all segments for this group

POLARIZING: Above average for LIKES & DISLIKES across all segments for this group

DISLIKES: Above average across all segments for this group

For children and teens, attending school isn't just about getting an education. | It's about developing their whole selves | — emotionally, | socially, | and personally. |

Attending school regularly | and in person | gives students the ability to follow daily routines, | as well as connect with friends, | peers, | teachers, | and others outside their family circle. | They're able to engage and interact, | to use their brains | and try new things. | They can be part of a team. | They have a purpose. |

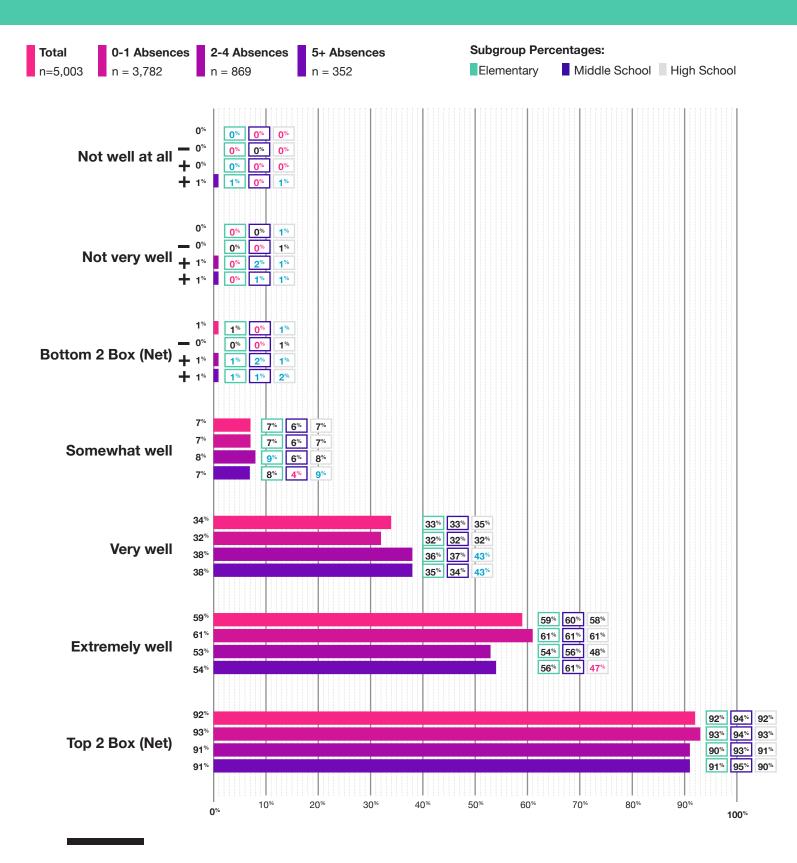
Help your child be their best self. | Show up to school every day. |

MESSAGING KEY FINDINGS

Nearly all parents said the foundational message communicates the importance of being in person, and found it motivating and relevant.

The majority of parents in the quantitative survey said they found the foundational message to be informative, motivating to send their child to attend in person every day—even more so among parents of severely chronically absent elementary and middle school level—and relevant to them as a parent or caregiver.

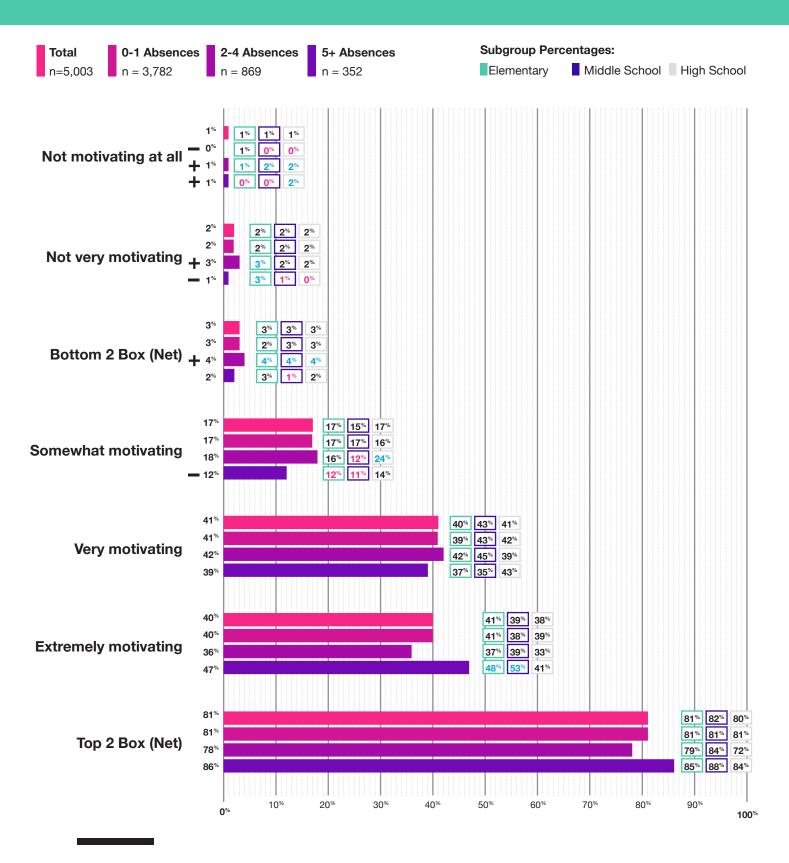
FOUNDATIONAL MESSAGE: COMMUNICATES IN-PERSON IMPORTANCE



B1. How well did this message communicate the importance of attending school in person every day?

^{+/}Blue= over-index vs. Total (120 or above); -/Pink = under-index vs. Total (80 or below); Caution index results under 10% due to larger fluctuation

MESSAGE MOTIVATION: ATTEND IN PERSON EVERY DAY

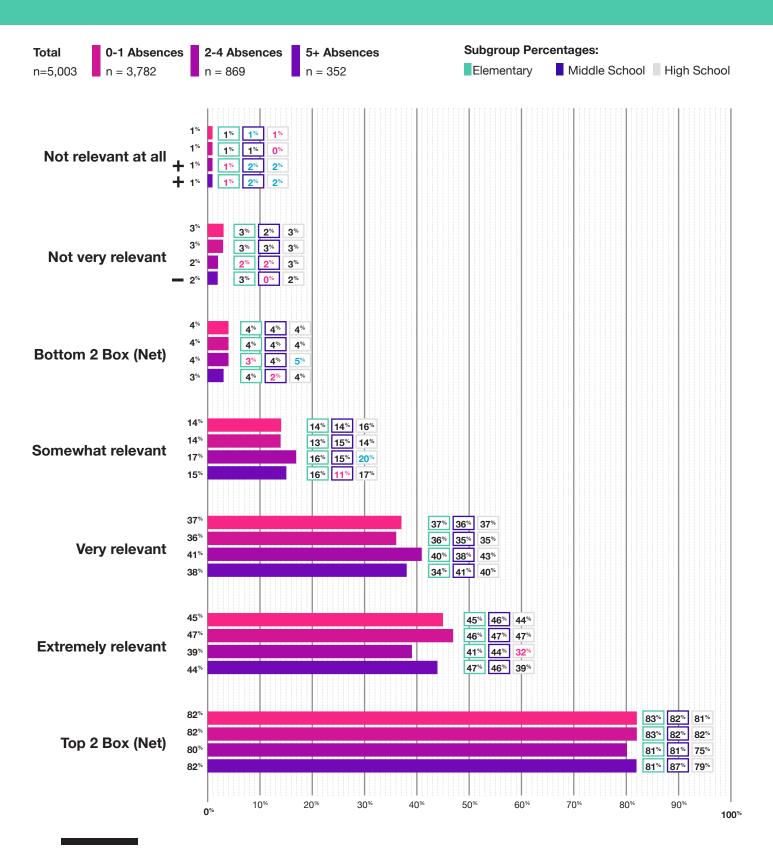


Base: Total Respondents

B2. How motivating is this message for parents/caregivers to encourage their child to attend school in person every day?

^{+/}Blue= over-index vs. Total (120 or above); =/Pink = under-index vs. Total (80 or below); Caution index results under 10% due to larger fluctuation

MESSAGE RELEVANCE TO PARENTS/CAREGIVERS



Base: Total Respondents

B3. How relevant was this message to you as a parent/caregiver?

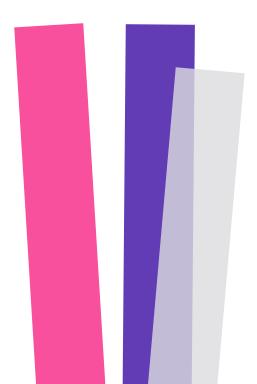
⁺ Blue= over-index vs. Total (120 or above); ■ Pink = under-index vs. Total (80 or below); Caution index results under 10% due to larger fluctuation

PARENTS FOUND A NUMBER OF CALL-TO-ACTION MESSAGES MOTIVATING.

In addition to message frames, parents were also asked to rate how motivating they found a number of call-to-action statements around school attendance. Of the options offered, across parent groups, respondents found many calls to action extremely/very motivating:

- Support your child's development—attend school every day: 76%
- · Showing up matters: 74%
- Be consistent. Attend school every day.: 71%

As previously noted, some parents said they disliked "attend school every day" messaging in the message frame highlighter exercises. However, when presented as a separate call-to-action, this phrase was ranked higher for motivation, leaving the research team to conclude that such a phrase should be softened when used with parents (e.g., "attend school" versus "attend school every day").



MESSAGE CALL-TO-ACTION - % EXTREMELY/VERY MOTIVATING

	Total r	=5,00	3	0-	-1 Abs	ences	s n = 3	3,782	2-4	Abse	ences	n = 86	9	5+ Absences n = 3				
		otal P Care			Eler		tal ry Sc	hool	N	To liddle	tal Scho	ol		Total High School				
Support your child's development—attend school every day.	76%	77%	72%	76%	77%	78%	73%	76%	76%	77%	73%	71%	75%	75%	72%	78%		
Showing up matters.	74%	75%	70%	74%	73%	74%	67%	76%	75%	76%	75%	76%	74%	75%	70%	71%		
Be consistent. Attend school every day.	71%	72%	66%	70%	70%	71%	64%	71%	73%	74%	72%	73%	71%	73%	66%	65%		
Missing more than 18 days of school per year at any grade level causes students to fall behind.	67%	68%	64%	65%	67%	68%	62%	67%	66%	65%	67%	69%	68%	69%	65%	60%		
Commit to school every day.	65%	66%	61%	69%	65%	66%	60%	69%	66%	65%	67%	73%	65%	67%	59%	66%		
Absences add up. Don't get left behind.	65%	66%	60%	65%	64%	65%	58%	65%	65%	66%	63%	66%	66%	67%	63%	65%		
Your child's best days happen when they're in school.	64%	64%	62%	72%	64%	64%	61%	70%	66%	66%	66%	73%	64%	64%	60%	73%		
Every absence-in any grade, excused or not-can impact a child's academic achievement.	63%	63%	60%	66%	61%	62%	57%	64%	63%	62%	64%	72%	64%	64%	62%	65%		
Every day they miss, no matter what grade level, can put their academic success at risk.	62%	62%	60%	65%	61%	61%	58%	63%	63%	62%	67%	64%	64%	65%	59%	69%		
Don't let your child miss out.	60%	60%	58%	62%	61%	61%	60%	65%	60%	60%	55%	68%	58%	59%	57%	54%		
Miss no more than two days per month.	53%	52%	55%	58%	54%	54%	53%	57%	51%	49%	56%	63%	53%	52%	55%	55%		

CONDITIONAL FRAME 2 (DEVELOPING THE WHOLE SELF) SLIGHTLY EDGED OUT CONDITIONAL FRAME 1 (FOMO) FOR MESSAGE IMPROVEMENT, MOTIVATION, AND RELEVANCE AMONG PARENTS.

While both conditional frames helped improve the foundational message, parents gravitated slightly more toward Frame 2 (66% Frame 1, 71% Frame 2). Parents of chronically absent children were more positive toward both conditional frames compared to the average parent, even more so for parents of kids considered severely chronically absent.

IMPROVING THE FOUNDATIONAL MESSAGE

Frame 1 (FOMO)

· Average parent: 66% very/extremely

• 0-1 absences: 64%

• Chronically absent: 76% (2-4 absences 72%, 5+ absences 80%)

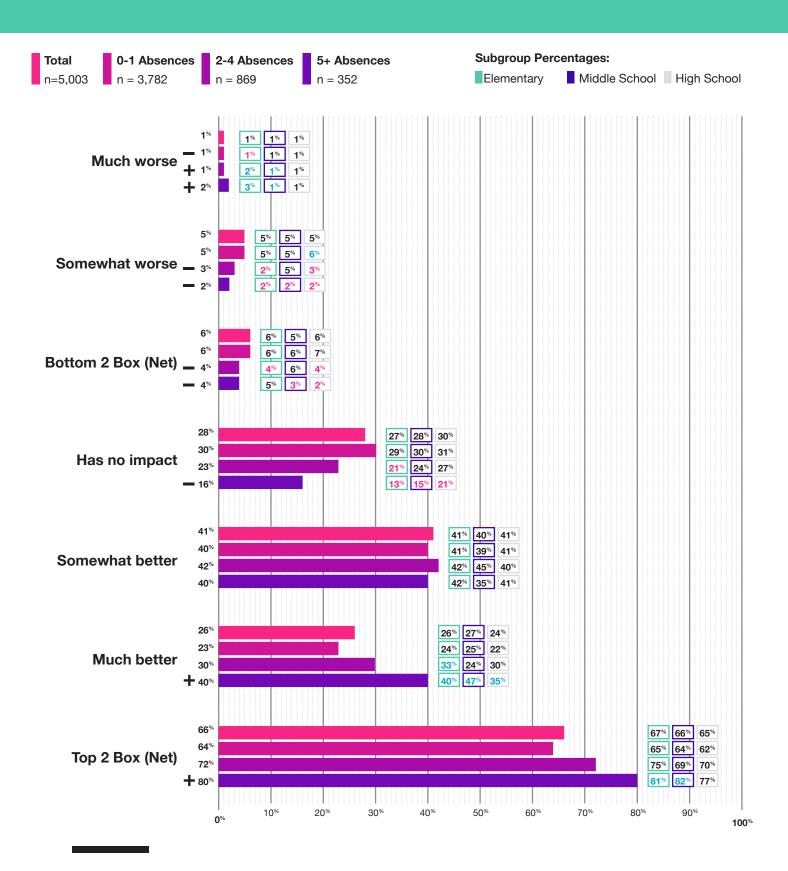
Frame 2 (Developing the Whole Self)

• Average parent: 71%

• 0-1 absences: 69%

• Chronically absent: **79**% (2-4 absences **75**%, 5+ absences **82**%)

CONDITIONAL IMPROVEMENT TO MESSAGE - FOMO CONDITIONAL MESSAGE

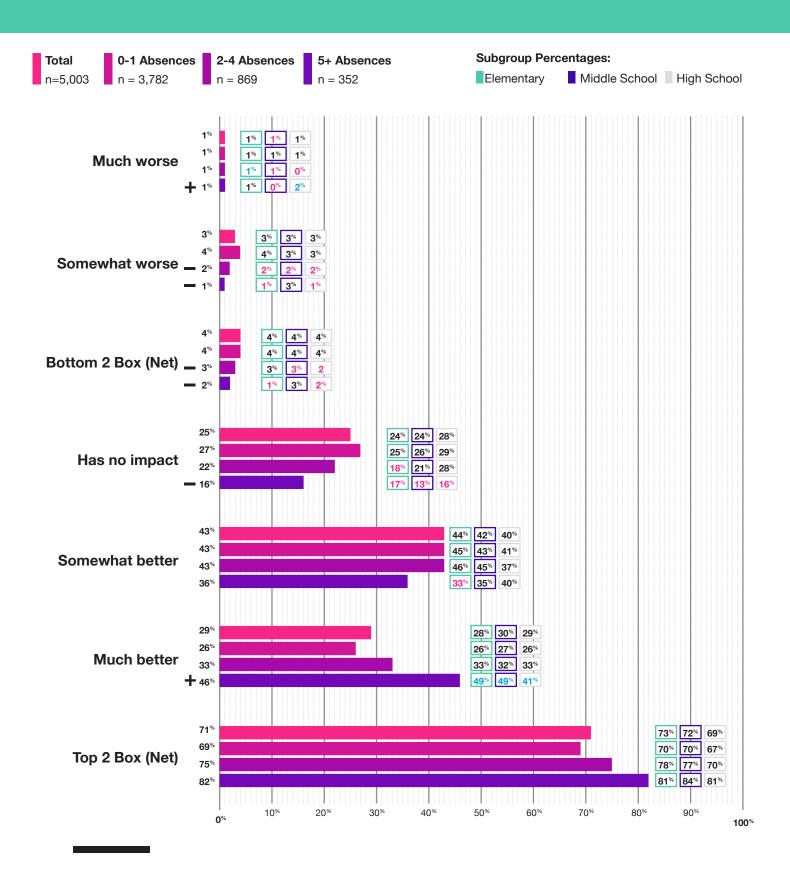


Base: Total Respondents

B8. If this option was added to the message, does it make the overall message...?

^{+/}Blue= over-index vs. Total (120 or above); -/Pink = under-index vs. Total (80 or below); Caution index results under 10% due to larger fluctuation

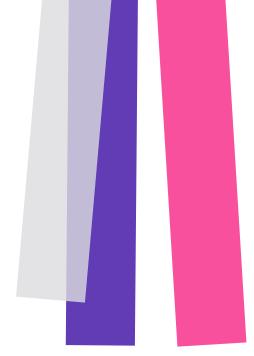
CONDITIONAL IMPROVEMENT TO MESSAGE - DEVELOPING THE WHOLE SELF CONDITIONAL MESSAGE



Base: Total Respondents

B8. If this option was added to the message, does it make the overall message...?

⁺ Blue= over-index vs. Total (120 or above); ■ Pink = under-index vs. Total (80 or below); Caution index results under 10% due to larger fluctuation



When asked how the conditional frames impacted the foundational message, both again performed well, though Frame 2 was again found to be slightly more motivating (67% Frame 1, 71% Frame 2). Parents of chronically absent children again rated both frames higher than total parents.

CONDITIONAL MESSAGE MOTIVATION

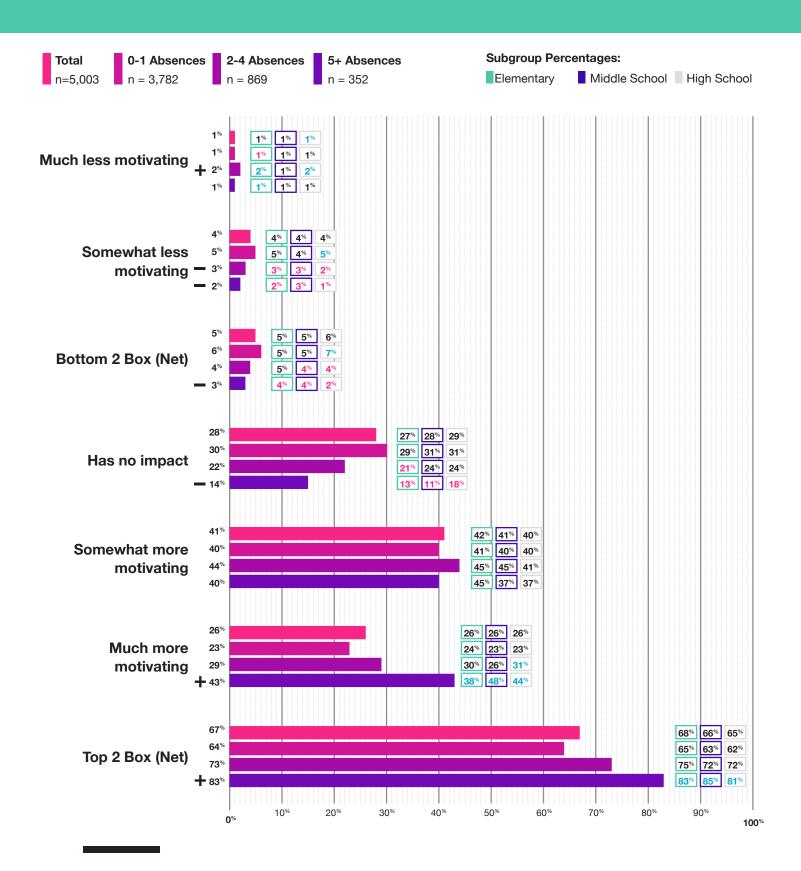
Frame 1 (FOMO)

- Average parent: 67% somewhat/much more motivating
- 0-1 absences: **64**%
- Chronically absent: 78% (2-4 absences 73%, 5+ absences 83%)

Frame 2 (Developing the Whole Self)

- Average parent: 71%0-1 absences: 69%
- Chronically absent: 79% (2-4 absences 74%, 5+ absences 84%)

CONDITIONAL MESSAGE MOTIVATION - FOMO CONDITIONAL MESSAGE

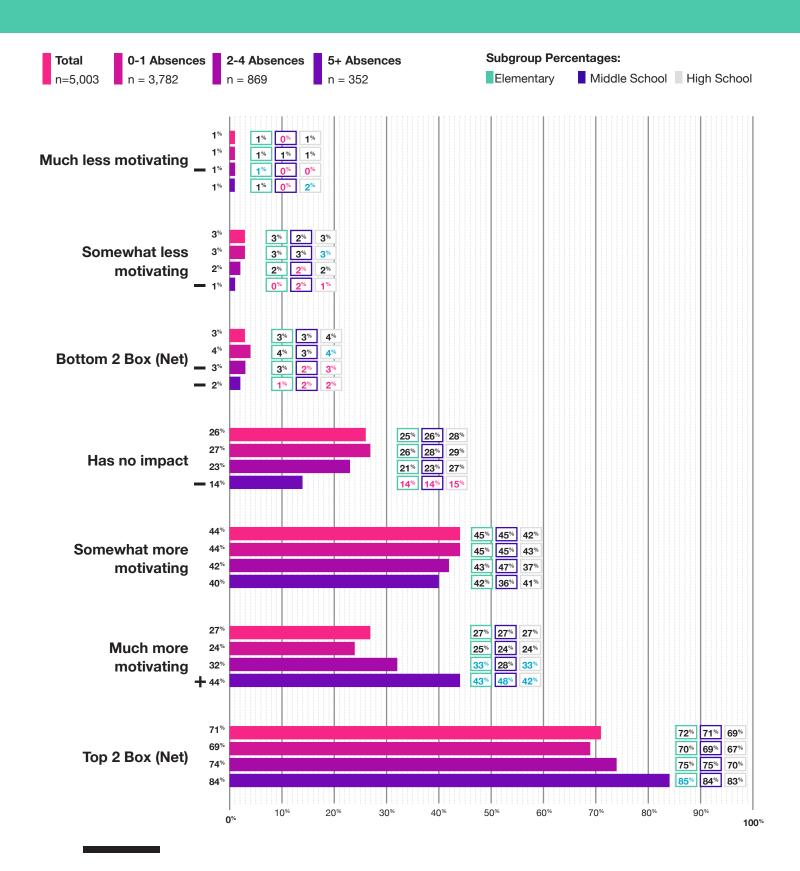


Base: Total Respondents

B9. And if this option was added to the message, how does it change how motivating it is for parents/caregivers to encourage their child to attend school in person every day?

^{+/}Blue= over-index vs. Total (120 or above); -/Pink = under-index vs. Total (80 or below); Caution index results under 10% due to larger fluctuation

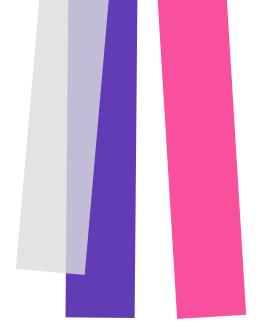
CONDITIONAL MESSAGE MOTIVATION - DEVELOPING THE WHOLE SELF CONDITIONAL MESSAGE



Base: Total Respondents

B9. And if this option was added to the message, how does it change how motivating it is for parents/caregivers to encourage their child to attend school in person every day?

^{+/}Blue= over-index vs. Total (120 or above); =/Pink = under-index vs. Total (80 or below); Caution index results under 10% due to larger fluctuation



In addition, most parents said that either conditional frame made the overall message more relevant to them—again with parents of chronically absent children saying this even more so than total parents and parents of children with fewer or no absences.

CONDITIONAL MESSAGE MOTIVATION

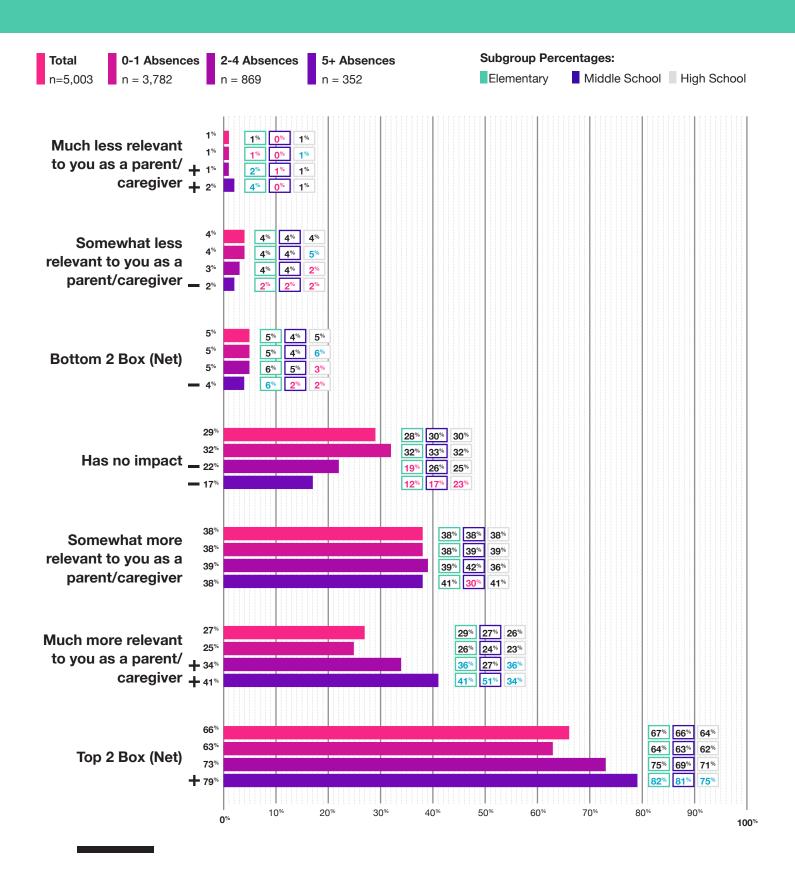
Frame 1 (FOMO)

- Average parent: 66% somewhat/much more relevant
- 0-1 absences: **63**%
- Chronically absent: **76**% (2-4 absences **73**%, 5+ absences **79**%)

Frame 2 (Developing the Whole Self)

- Average parent: 69% somewhat/much more relevant
- 0-1 absences: **67**%
- Chronically absent: 77% (2-4 absences 73%, 5+ absences 80%)

CONDITIONAL MESSAGE RELEVANCE - FOMO CONDITIONAL MESSAGE

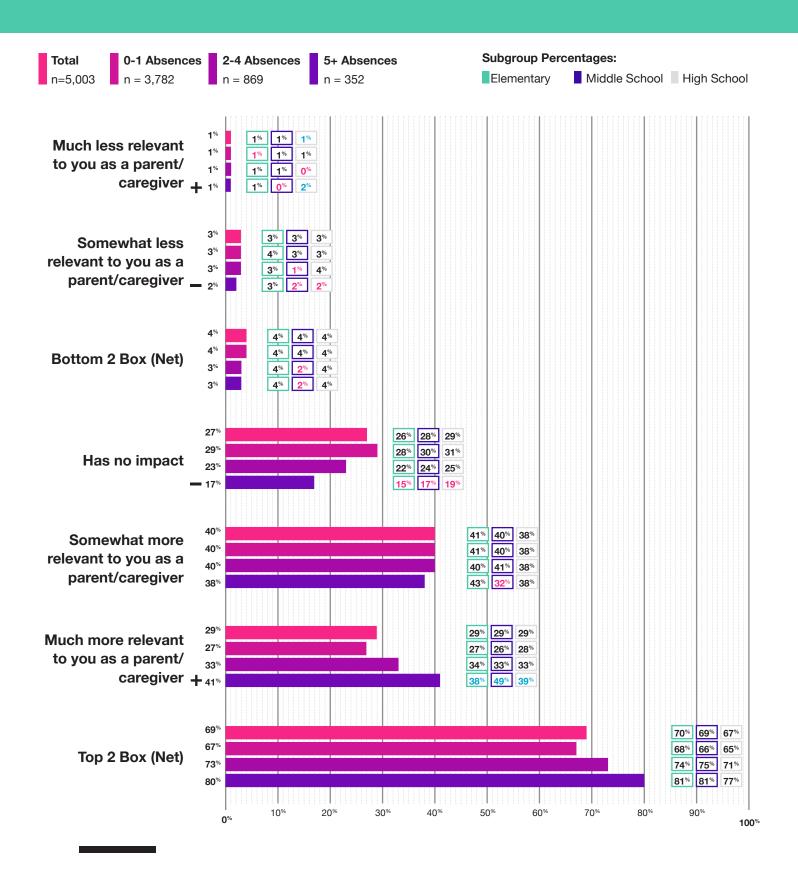


Base: Total Respondents

B10. And if this option was added to the message, does it make the overall message...?

⁺ Blue= over-index vs. Total (120 or above); ■ Pink = under-index vs. Total (80 or below); Caution index results under 10% due to larger fluctuation

CONDITIONAL MESSAGE RELEVANCE - DEVELOPING THE WHOLE SELF CONDITIONAL MESSAGE



Base: Total Respondents

B10. And if this option was added to the message, does it make the overall message...?

⁺ Blue= over-index vs. Total (120 or above); ■ Pink = under-index vs. Total (80 or below); Caution index results under 10% due to larger fluctuation

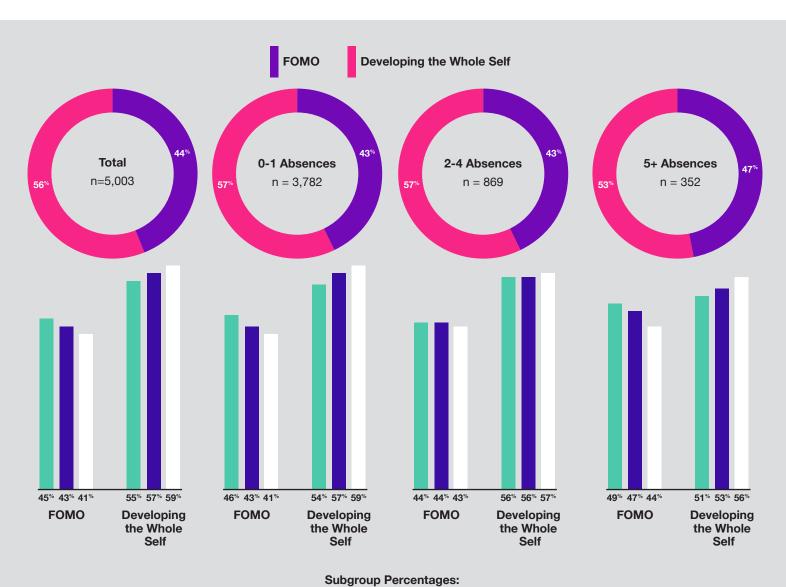
OVERALL, PARENTS PREFER DEVELOPING THE WHOLE SELF OVER FOMO.

When forced to choose which conditional frame is most motivating for parents/ caregivers to encourage their child to attend school in person, more than half (56%) of respondents chose Frame 2, Developing the Whole Self, over Frame 1, FOMO (44%). This preference was seen across grade levels and absences.

In general, parents preferred the more positive language in Developing the Whole Self, highlighting that it will help children reach their full potential and become the best version of themselves. This frame also aligned with their views on approaching education as discussed earlier in this report: that it's holistic and encompasses more than just academics.

CONDITIONAL MESSAGE PREFERENCE

More parents (56%) agree that 'Developing the Whole Self' is more motivational (significantly more than FOMO).



Middle School

High School

Elementary

REASON FOR MESSAGE PREFERENCE

FOMO

"It explains why in-person learning is more beneficial for my child. It also explains why showing up everyday is not only important for my child's education, but it's also important to better prepare my child for the future."

Parent of elementary school student,
 2-4 absences

"Being present is **helpful for learning**. It creates an atmosphere where kids can ask questions about anything they are learning. It's **better engagement being face-to-face rather than online**."

Parent of middle school student,
 0-1 absences

"Making critical social and emotional connections and relationships requires showing up in a group. Virtual/online relationships are difficult to develop in the long run. Intentional meeting requires way more work than meeting randomly at schools."

Parent of high school student,
 0-1 absences

DEVELOPING THE WHOLE SELF

"As a parent, it is important to me that my child reaches the potential within themselves and achieves success in everything they do. Learning how to be the best version of themselves is what we want for our children."

Parent of elementary school student,
 0-1 absences

"It speaks more about the mental aspect of the engagement of in-person school. Mental health is very important especially to young teenagers who are learning to become adults. And I feel that it is important for our children to always feel like they always have a purpose in life, and that they are important, and that everything that they do matters."

Parent of middle school student,
 0-1 absences

"This version uses positive language about the benefits of school instead of negative language about what your child could be missing out on. It helps avoid the folly of trying to use guilt because guilt-driven decisions do not help. Sometimes kids have to miss a day and it isn't the end of the world; the negative message would be really hard to see if a child was struggling with illness. It feels judgmental."

Parent of high school student,
 2-4 absences

SECTION 5

TRUSTED MESSENGERS

IDENTIFYING THE TRUSTED MESSENGERS PARENTS MOST WANT TO HEAR FROM ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF IN-PERSON LEARNING.

PARENTS WANT TO HEAR MESSAGING FROM THEIR CHILD'S TEACHER, FOLLOWED BY PRINCIPAL AND GUIDANCE/SCHOOL COUNSELORS—THOUGH PARENTS OF CHRONICALLY ABSENT STUDENTS ARE LESS TRUSTING OVERALL.

The child's teacher is the main messenger parents would trust with the foundational message about attending school regularly in person (61% total parents), followed next by the principal/assistant principal (47%), guidance/school counselors (47%), and mental health professionals (44% inside the school, 40% outside the school). For trusted messengers, more absences correlated with less trust: Fewer parents of children who are chronically absent are trusting of school employees compared to other parent cohorts.

My child's teacher(s)

• 0-1 absence: 64%

Chronically absent: 50% (2-4 absences 55%, 5+ absences 45%)

Principal/assistant principal

• 0-1 absence: 50%

• Chronically absent: 37% (2-4 absences 43%, 5+ absences 31%)

Guidance/school counselors

• 0-1 absence: 49%

Chronically absent: 38% (2-4 absences 43%, 5+ absences 32%)

Mental health professionals in the school

• 0-1 absence: 46%

• Chronically absent: 39% (2-4 absences 43%, 5+ absences 34%)

Mental health professionals outside the school

• 0-1 absence: 42%

• Chronically absent: **36**% (2-4 absences **39**%, 5+ absences **32**%)

For the two conditional frames, results were similar: Parents are most likely to trust hearing the messages from their child's teacher, principal, guidance/school counselor, or mental health professional, with parents of students with more absences per month again being less trusting overall.

TRUSTED MESSENGER FOR FOUNDATIONAL MESSAGE

То	otal n=5,003	0-1	Absences r	า = 3,782	2-4 Absences n = 869	5+ Absences n = 35				
	Total Parents Caregivers			tal ry School	Total Middle School	Total High School				
My child's teacher(s)	61% 64% 55%	45 [%]	63% 65%	56 [%] 48 [%]	62 [%] 65 [%] 57 [%] 44 [%]	58% 61% 52% 43% —				
Principal/assistant principal	47% 50% 43%	31%	48% 50%	44 [%] 29 [%]	48% 51% 41% 30% —	47% 49% 42% 35% —				
Guidance/school counselors	47% 49% 43%	32 [%]	45% 47%	42 [%] 24 [%]	48% 51% 41% 32% —	49% 50% 47% 40%				
Mental health professionals in the school (e.g., counselors, therapists, psychiatrists, psychologists)	44% 46% 43%	34 [%]	45% 46%	43% 37%	45% 46% 46% 32% —	43% 45% 40% 31%				
Mental health professionals outside of the school (e.g., counselors, therapists, psychiatrists, psychologists)	40% 42% 39%	29 [%]	41% 42%	40 [%] 28 [%]	39% 41% 36% 28% —	40% 41% 38% 31%				
Pediatrician/ doctor	36% 38% 33%	22 [%]	38% 40%	36 [%] 22 [%]	35 [%] 38 [%] 28 [%] 16 [%]	34 [%] 35 [%] 33 [%] 26 [%]				
Representatives from Department of Education	29% 30% 26%	19%	30% 31%	27 [%] 19 [%]	27% 28% 28% 14% —	28% 30% 21% 24% —				
Superintendent	26% 28% 24%	17% —	26% 27%	24 [%] 20 [%]	25% 27% 25% 13% —	28 [%] 30 [%] 24 [%] 18 [%]				
Representatives from Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)	23% 23% 23%	20%	23% 23%	24% 19%	22 [%] 22 [%] 25 [%] 15 [%]	24% 25% 22% 24%				
Other teachers	23% 24% 22%	16 [%]	24% 25%	22 [%] 17 [%]	22 [%] 22 [%] 24 [%] 16 [%]	22% 24% 19% 15% —				
Social workers	21% 22% 22%	20%	22% 23%	21% 21%	22% 22% 25% 18%	20% 20% 20% 20%				
Afterschool program providers	17% 16% 19%	20% +	18% 18%	21 [%] 16 [%]	18% 17% 21% 29% + +	14 [%] 14 [%] 13 [%] 19 [%]				

B7. Which, if any, of the following individuals or institutions would you trust this information coming from?

^{+ =} over-index vs. Total (120 or above); = = under-index vs. Total (80 or below); Caution index results under 10% due to larger fluctuation

TRUSTED MESSENGER FOR FOUNDATIONAL MESSAGE (CONTINUED)

То	tal n=	5,003		0-1	Abser	nces r	n = 3,7	782	2-4	Absen	ces n	= 869		5+ Ab	sence	es n = 3	
	Т	otal P Care			Total Elementary School				Total Middle School				ı	Total High School			
School nurse	17%	17%	17%	16%	18%	18%	19%	16%	17%	17%	17%	18%	15%	15%	14%	14%	
Other parents	14%	16%	11% —	8% —	15%	16%	11% —	8% —	13%	15%	11% —	6% —	14%	15%	10% —	8%	
Pastor/religious leader	13%	13%	12%	10% —	12%	12%	12%	10% —	12%	13%	10%	9% —	14%	15%	13%	11%	
Local community leaders/ city council members	12%	11%	12%	13%	12%	11%	13%	15 [%]	11%	11%	10%	13%	12%	12%	13%	11%	
Local government officials/ politicians	9%	9%	8%	9%	10%	10%	9%	11 [%] +	8%	8%	7 %	7%	8%	8%	8%	9%	
Athletes	8%	8%	9%	9%	8%	7%	8%	8%	8%	8%	11 [%]	5 [%]	10%	10%	7%	12 [%]	
Federal/national government politicians/ officials	8%	8%	8%	7%	8%	8%	9 [%]	6% —	8%	8%	8%	9%	6%	6%	6%	7%	
Town/city mayors	7%	7%	9%	8%	8%	7%	9%	10% +	6%	6%	9% +	2 [%]	7%	6%	8%	10 [%]	
Local representatives	7%	6%	9%	7%	7%	7%	7%	8% +	7%	6%	9% +	9% +	7%	6%	11 [%]	5%	
Celebrities (music, movies, TV)	6%	5%	8 [%] +	8 [%] +	5%	5% —	7% +	7%	6%	5%	9 [%]	10 [%]	7%	6%	7% +	9 [%]	
Other	1%	1%	1%	0% —	1%	1%	1%	0% —	1%	1%	0%	0% —	1%	1% +	1%	1%	
None of these	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	4%	6% +	4%	4%	6%	1% —	5%	5%	7% +	6 [%]	

B7. Which, if any, of the following individuals or institutions would you trust this information coming from?

⁺⁼ over-index vs. Total (120 or above); == under-index vs. Total (80 or below); Caution index results under 10% due to larger fluctuation

TRUSTED MESSENGER FOR CONDITIONAL MESSAGE FOMO CONDITIONAL MESSAGE

То	tal n=5,003	0-1	Absences r	n = 3,782	2-4 Absences n = 869	5+ Absences n = 35				
	Total Parents Caregivers	s/		tal ry School	Total Middle School	Total High School				
My child's teacher(s)	55% 58% 49%	38 [%]	56% 58%	50% 40%	55% 58% 55% 38%	53% 57% 45% 34%				
Principal/assistant principal	42% 45% 37%	26 [%]	42% 44%	36% 28%	43% 46% 38% 29% —	42% 45% 38% 23%				
Mental health professionals in the school (e.g., counselors, therapists, psychologists)	40% 42% 35%	31 [%]	40% 41%	36% 28%	41% 43% 35% <mark>30%</mark>	39% 41% 34% 34%				
Guidance/school counselors	38% 40% 35%	27 [%]	36% 37%	31% 28%	39% 41% 37% 24% —	41% 43% 40% 27%				
Mental health professionals outside of the school (e.g., counselors, therapists, psychiatrists, psychologists)	36% 38% 32%	24 [%]	37% 39%	33% 1 <u>9</u> %	37% 39% 31% 30%	35 [%] 37 [%] 32 [%] 25 [%]				
Pediatrician/doctor	28% 30% 24%	19 [%]	30% 33%	24% 20%	29 [%] 30 [%] 26 [%] 17 [%]	25 [%] 26 [%] 23 [%] 19 [%]				
Other teachers	26% 28% 25%	18 [%]	26% 27%	24% 17%	28% 29% 30% 1 <u>5</u> %	26 [%] 27 [%] 23 [%] 21 [%]				
Superintendent	25% 26% 23%	14 [%]	24% 25%	22% 16%	25% 26% 25% 1 <mark>4</mark> %	25 [%] 27 [%] 22 [%] 11 [%]				
Representatives from Department of Education	23% 24% 23%	17 [%]	23% 24%	22% 19%	23% 23% 24% 14%	23% 24% 23% 17%				
Representatives from Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)	20% 19% 21%	17%	20% 20%	23% 19%	19% 19% 22% 14% —	19% 19% 18% 18%				
Social workers	19% 20% 18%	1 <u>4</u> %	19% 20%	17% 13%	21% 21% 22% 19%	18% 19% 16% 1 <mark>2</mark> %				
School nurse	15% 16% 15%	11 [%]	17% 17%	16% 14%	16% 17% 15% 12% —	13% 13% 13% 6% —				

B13. Which, if any, of the following individuals or institutions would you trust this information coming from?

⁺⁼ over-index vs. Total (120 or above); == under-index vs. Total (80 or below); Caution index results under 10% due to larger fluctuation

TRUSTED MESSENGER FOR CONDITIONAL MESSAGE (CONTINUED) FOMO CONDITIONAL MESSAGE

То	tal n=	5,003		0-1	Absei	nces	n = 3,7	782	2-4 Absences n = 869					5+ Absences n = 35			
	T	otal P Care			Total Elementary School						tal Scho	ol		Total High School			
Afterschool program providers	14%	14%	15%	15%	14%	14%	13%	16%	15%	13%	21 [%]	17% +	13%	13%	14%	11%	
Other parents	11%	12%	10%	7% —	11%	12%	11%	7% —	11%	12%	11%	4 [%]	12%	13%	9%	10%	
Pastor/religious leader	10%	11%	11%	7 %	10%	10%	12%	9%	9%	10%	7 %	4 [%]	12%	12%	13 [%]	8%	
Local community leaders/city council members	9%	8%	10%	10%	9%	8%	10%	11 [%]	9%	8%	12 [%]	9%	9%	9%	10%	9%	
Local government officials/ politicians	7%	7%	7%	8%	7%	7%	9% +	7%	8%	8%	6%	6%	6%	6%	5 [%]	10 [%]	
Federal/national government politicians/ officials	7%	6%	9% +	10 [%]	7%	6%	9 [%]	9% +	8%	6%	11 [%]	15 [%]	6%	6%	7%	7%	
Local representatives	6%	6%	8% +	10 [%]	7%	6%	10% +	11 [%] +	6%	5 [%]	7%	11 [%]	6%	5%	7%	7%	
Athletes	6%	6%	6%	8% +	6%	5%	6%	8% +	6%	6%	7% +	3 [%]	7%	7%	5 [%]	11 [%]	
Town/city mayors	5%	5%	6%	6% +	5%	5%	7% +	6%	5%	5%	5%	7% +	5%	5%	5%	6%	
Celebrities (music, movies, TV)	5%	4%	6% +	8 [%]	4%	4 [%]	6 [%]	9% +	5%	5%	9% +	5%	6%	5%	5%	10 [%]	
Other	1%	1%	0% —	<u>0</u> %	0%	0%	0% —	1% +	1% +	1% +	0% —	0%	1% +	1% +	1% +	0%	

B13. Which, if any, of the following individuals or institutions would you trust this information coming from?

⁺⁼ over-index vs. Total (120 or above); == under-index vs. Total (80 or below); Caution index results under 10% due to larger fluctuation

TRUSTED MESSENGER FOR CONDITIONAL MESSAGE DEVELOPING THE WHOLE SELF CONDITIONAL MESSAGE

То	tal n=5,003	0-1	Absences r	n = 3,782	2-4 Absences n = 869	5+ Absences n = 35				
	Total Parents Caregivers	s/		tal ry School	Total Middle School	Total High School				
My child's teacher(s)	56% 58% 51%	37 [%]	58% 60%	53 [%] 42 [%]	56% 60% 52% 34%	52 [%] 55 [%] 47 [%] 33 [%]				
Principal/assistant principal	42% 44% 37%	30% —	40% 42%	34% 31%	43% 45% 41% 33%	42% 44% 39% 27%				
Mental health professionals in the school (e.g., counselors, therapists, psychiatrists, psychologists)	40% 42% 38%	28 [%]	40% 42%	37% 26%	42% 43% 43% 31% —	40% 42% 38% 29% —				
Guidance/school counselors	39% 41% 38%	26 [%]	38% 39%	35 [%] 25 [%]	40% 42% 37% 28% —	41% 43% 42% 27% —				
Mental health professionals outside of the school (e.g., counselors, therapists, psychiatrists, psychologists)	37% 39% 36%	27%	37% 38%	36% 20%	39% 40% 35% 38%	37 [%] 39 [%] 36 [%] 26 [%]				
Pediatrician/doctor	29% 30% 27%	17 [%]	31% 32%	29% 19%	29% 31% 28% 16%	25 [%] 27 [%] 22 [%] 16 [%]				
Other teachers	27% 29% 24%	16% —	27% 29%	23% 19%	28% 29% 30% <mark>15</mark> %	25% 27% 21% 14% — —				
Superintendent	24% 26% 22%	14 [%]	24% 25%	21% 15%	23% 24% 23% 13%	26 [%] 28 [%] 22 [%] 13 [%]				
Representatives from Department of Education	23% 24% 21%	17 [%]	23% 24%	20% 16%	23% 24% 23% 19%	24 [%] 26 [%] 21 [%] 18 [%]				
Representatives from Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)	19% 19% 22%	16%	19% 19%	22 [%] 14 [%]	18% 18% 24% 13% + –	19% 19% 19% 19%				
Social workers	19% 19% 18%	14 [%]	19% 19%	15% 17%	19% 19% 24% 15% + —	18% 19% 16% 1 <mark>1</mark> %				
School nurse	15% 16% 16%	11 [%]	16% 17%	17 [%] 12 [%]	16% 16% 17% 14%	14 [%] 14 [%] 13 [%] 9 [%]				

B13. Which, if any, of the following individuals or institutions would you trust this information coming from?

^{+ =} over-index vs. Total (120 or above); = = under-index vs. Total (80 or below); Caution index results under 10% due to larger fluctuation

TRUSTED MESSENGER FOR CONDITIONAL MESSAGE (CONTINUED) DEVELOPING THE WHOLE SELF CONDITIONAL MESSAGE

То	tal n=	5,003		0-1	Abse	nces	n = 3,7	782	2-4 A	2-4 Absences n = 869				5+ Absences n = 35				
			arent givers		Total Elementary School				Total Middle School				ı	Total High School				
Afterschool program providers	15%	14%	17%	17%	16%	15%	19 [%]	16%	14%	13%	19 [%]	20 [%]	12%	12%	11%	15%		
Other parents	12%	13%	10%	8% —	12%	13%	10%	7% —	11%	12%	10%	5 [%]	12%	13%	8%	11%		
Pastor/religious leader	11%	11%	11%	7% —	10%	10%	12%	8 [%]	10%	11%	9%	4 [%]	12%	12%	12%	9%		
Local community leaders/city council members	10%	9%	11%	12 [%]	10%	9%	12 [%]	15 [%]	10%	10%	10%	11%	9%	9%	9%	10%		
Local government officials/ politicians	7%	7%	7%	8%	7%	7%	7%	9 [%]	7%	7%	7%	7%	7%	6%	8%	6%		
Federal/national government politicians/ officials	7%	6%	9 [%]	8 [%]	7%	6%	9 [%]	7%	7%	5 [%]	11% +	10 [%]	6%	5%	9 [%]	8% +		
Athletes	7%	7%	6%	7%	6%	6%	5 [%]	6%	7%	6%	8%	6%	8%	8% +	6%	8 [%]		
Local representatives	6%	6%	7%	8% +	7%	6%	7%	9% +	6%	6%	7%	7%	6%	6%	6%	6%		
Town/city mayors	5%	5%	6%	7% +	5%	5%	6%	4%	5%	4 [%]	7% +	7% +	6%	6%	5%	8 [%]		
Celebrities (music, television, TV)	5%	5%	6%	9 [%] +	5%	4%	7% +	11 [%]	5%	6%	5%	5%	6%	5%	5%	10 [%]		
Other	1%	1 [%]	0% —	0% —	0% —	1%	0% —	0% —	1% +	1% +	0% —	0% —	1% +	1% +	1% +	0%		

B13. Which, if any, of the following individuals or institutions would you trust this information coming from?

^{+ =} over-index vs. Total (120 or above); = = under-index vs. Total (80 or below); Caution index results under 10% due to larger fluctuation

CONCLUSION

Throughout this study, it's clear parents are aware of the importance of inperson school. But it goes much deeper than just academics: In the post-COVID world, parents see the value of school in holistically developing their children. What's still needed, however, is a new narrative that complements this shift in perspective—both to combat other beliefs (such as the idea that missing school is inconsequential) and to accompany other intervention work already being done to mitigate chronic absenteeism across the country.

As we learned in this study, the messaging that is most effective:

- Is positive in tone.
- Communicates the opportunities associated with in-person learning, not the consequences of missing school.
- Focuses on how school develops their child holistically, beyond academic performance.
- Includes realistic goals for parents to work toward not being chronically absent, such as to attend as much as possible versus citing a specific number of days or saying "every day."
- Avoids chastising or shaming parents by telling them what's acceptable or not.
- Is delivered by a child's teacher, whom parents say they trust the most.

Our hope is that the findings of this study will help teachers and administrators reach parents where they are today by tapping into the things they most value from in-person school. We now have a unique opportunity to shift education messaging from a sole focus on academics to one that hones in on the benefits to the whole child, emphasizing holistic development and the opportunities parents associate with in-person learning. Let's use it to get back to the classroom.

For more campaign and messaging recommendations, view this study's accompanying toolkit.

See additional data points from this survey by categories such as household income, type of school, and more on this study's website.



