

# DETROIT PARENTS' ATTITUDES ON COVID-19 PREVENTION STRATEGIES IN SCHOOLS

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As we enter our third full school year of the COVID-19 pandemic, Detroit school district leaders face decisions regarding their use of COVID-19 prevention strategies. How do Detroit parents<sup>1</sup> feel about these health and safety measures? Although national research has explored parents' attitudes on the use of COVID-19 measures in schools (e.g., Morning Consult and The New York Times, 2022; APR Research Lab and The McCourtney Institute for Democracy, 2022), there are limited data available to education leaders in Detroit that situates these opinions within the context of the communities they serve. This report summarizes key findings from a representative survey of Detroit parents of K-12 students fielded in January 2022. By examining Detroit parents' support for quarantine, masking, vaccine mandates, and remote learning policies in schools alongside specific pandemic-related hardships, we were able to identify the degree to which these barriers shaped a given household's support for each policy. We hope this research informs the development of school health measures that will ensure equitable educational access as the pandemic continues into this school year.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

- Detroit parents reported strong support for most COVID-19 prevention and containment strategies in schools, with quarantining and masking measures receiving the highest levels of strong support from parents (about 80%).
- Detroit parents expressed lower levels of support for vaccine mandates both compared to other measures and national averages, especially for student vaccine mandates (Morning Consult and The New York Times, 2022).
- Challenges during the times of remote learning were pervasive. Over 50% of parents experienced problems with childcare, technology, and food security.
- Families with more severe childcare challenges were less likely to support measures that involved remote learning than those who did not experience childcare challenges.

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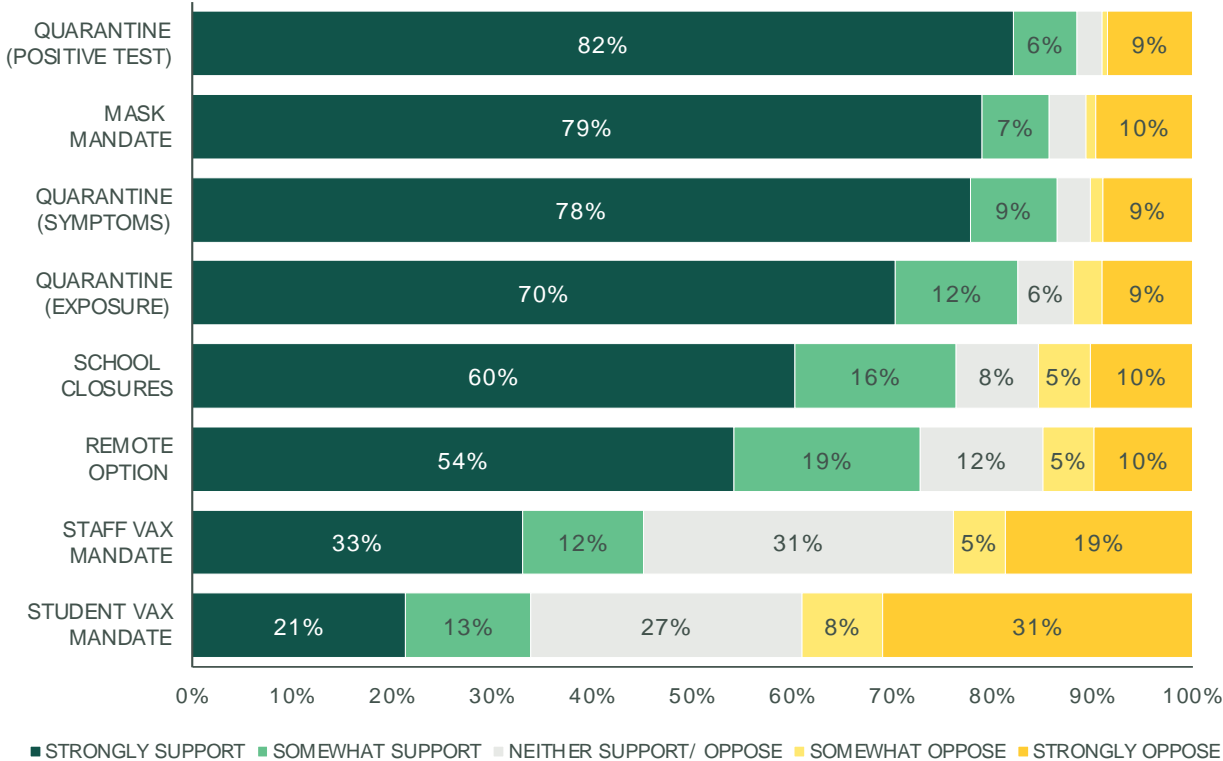
<sup>1</sup> We use the term "parent" throughout this report to refer to any adult residing in a household with children.

# DETROIT PARENTS’ SUPPORT FOR COVID-19 MEASURES IN SCHOOLS

Detroit parents exhibited strong support for six of the eight policies in the survey (see Figure 1). Support levels remained consistent after controlling for a variety of demographic factors. Given these strong levels of support, school leaders should feel empowered to reinstate health measures should COVID-19 spike again.

Detroit parents’ support was strongest for quarantine and masking measures. For example, 79% of Detroit parents reported strong support for staff and student mask requirements, far exceeding findings from a similar national poll conducted for the New York Times in January 2022 (Morning Consult and The New York Times, 2022). Notably, the policies with the greatest levels of support impose the fewest restrictions on in-person learning. However, more than half of parents still expressed strong support for a remote learning option (54%) and closing schools when COVID-19 cases are high (60%).

**FIGURE 1: DETROIT PARENTS’ SUPPORT FOR COVID-19 CONTAINMENT AND PREVENTION MEASURES IN SCHOOLS (JANUARY 2022)**



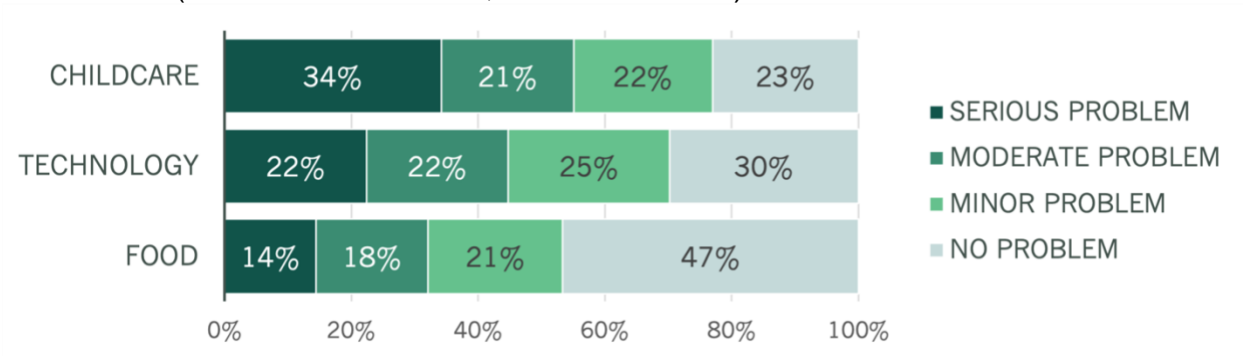
Staff and student vaccine mandates were the only prevention and containment measures examined that did not receive majority support from Detroit parents, with 45% of respondents indicating support for staff vaccines and only 34% supporting student vaccines. Detroit parents' support for vaccine requirements was not only lower than all other measures included in our survey, but it was also significantly lower than support for these mandates at the national level (Morning Consult and The New York Times, 2022). However, compared to the same sample of national respondents, Detroit parents were equally or less likely to oppose vaccine mandates and around four times more likely to report neither supporting nor opposing these mandates (Morning Consult and The New York Times, 2022).

This ambivalence toward vaccine requirements may be reflective of the relatively low vaccination rate among Detroit parents compared to Detroiters without children (Detroit Metro Area Communities Study, 2021). While there is some evidence suggesting that Detroiters who expressed uncertainty toward vaccines may be persuaded to become vaccinated, there is also evidence that staunch opposition has remained relatively unchanged (Wileden, 2022). Other preventative strategies beyond vaccines may therefore be critical in preventing and containing the spread of COVID-19. Given that most Detroit parents reported favorable attitudes toward policies such as these, school district leaders can anticipate support for the use of them when necessary.

# PANDEMIC HARDSHIPS EXPERIENCED DURING THE 2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR

To better understand Detroit parents' support for the use of COVID-19 responses in schools, we asked parents to report the degree to which they experienced specific challenges when schools operated remotely during the 2021-2022 school year. Specifically, we surveyed parents on the impact of the following challenges on their families during times of remote learning: work schedule, supervision, childcare, internet, computer, and food. After identifying strong correlations between several of the factors, these hardships were aggregated into three groups: childcare (work schedule, supervision, childcare), technology (computer, internet) and food.

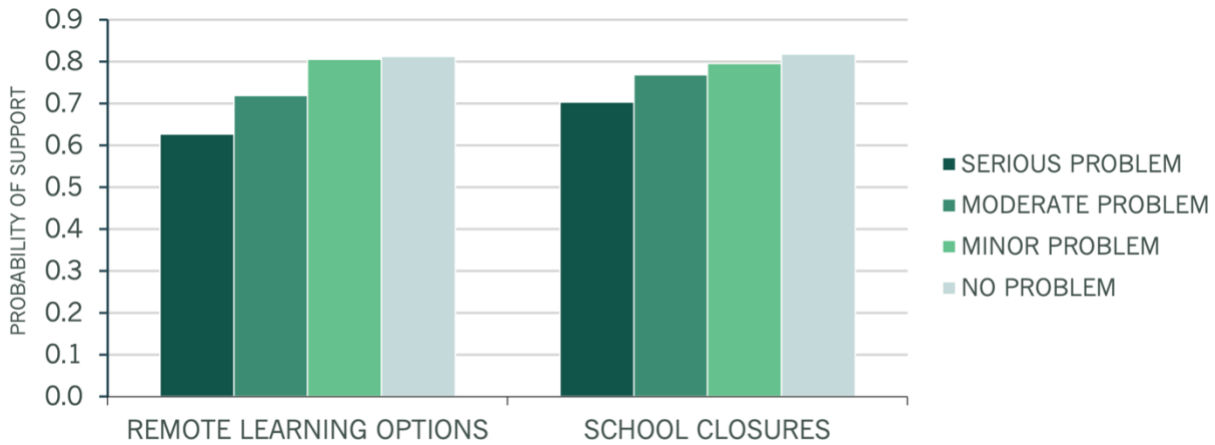
**FIGURE 2:** FREQUENCY OF HARDSHIPS EXPERIENCED DURING REMOTE LEARNING (DETROIT PARENTS, JANUARY 2022)



## IMPACT OF CHILDCARE-RELATED HARDSHIPS ON SUPPORT FOR REMOTE LEARNING

Across all severity levels, families reporting a greater degree of childcare hardship were less likely to support remote learning and school closures compared to those experiencing a lesser degree of hardship (see Figure 3). Parents with moderate childcare issues were 9 percentage points less likely to support a remote learning option than those with no childcare problems. Parents with severe childcare issues were 19 percentage points less likely to support a remote learning option and 11 percentage points less likely to support school closures when COVID-19 case rates are high.

**FIGURE 3:** PROBABILITY OF PARENT SUPPORT FOR REMOTE LEARNING AND SCHOOL CLOSURE POLICIES BASED ON CHILDCARE HARDSHIPS (DETROIT PARENTS, JANUARY 2022)



## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Persuasive policy measures such as vaccine mandates may convince a percentage of holdouts to pursue vaccination but will likely receive relatively lower support than other health measures.
- District administrators should feel empowered to reimplement quarantine and masking policies if necessary to protect student welfare and can anticipate broad support from Detroit parents.
- When families experience barriers to access, they tend to be less supportive of remote learning and school closure policies. Remote learning policies must address the requisite needs of every Detroit household with children to ensure equitable education access.

## CONCLUSION

These findings underscore the impact of socioeconomic hardship on Detroit families' public health sentiments and participation. While these data are from January and may not fully reflect current opinions, they suggest broad support for measures with the strongest evidence of effectiveness, such as masking and quarantining when necessary. As cases continue to fluctuate throughout the 2022-2023 school year, we hope these findings will inform collaborative efforts between districts, policymakers, and community organizations that address the supports households with children need to ensure policy adherence and equitable education access for all Detroit students.

## **Appendix A: SURVEY METHODOLOGY**

In January 2022, Detroit PEER at Wayne State University conducted a representative survey of students in three types of schools: Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) neighborhood schools, DPSCD selective schools (i.e., application/exam schools), and charter schools. The survey itself, and the partnerships with participating districts, were part of a larger Detroit PEER study of absenteeism, enrollment, and mobility. The study included all neighborhood and application/exam schools, and about 40% of the city's charter schools.

The population for the survey was all K-12 students enrolled in DPSCD neighborhood schools, DPSCD application/exam schools and Detroit charter schools that participated in the study during the 2021-22 school year. This excluded students in alternative schools, attending school outside of the city, and in Detroit charter schools that declined to participate. Of the students enrolled in participating schools, the team only included students if their records included a valid phone number or email address for a parent or guardian.

To randomly select students for recruitment, the team used a replicate sampling approach. The team recruited participants and collected data between January 18 and January 24, 2022 (working with DPSCD and one charter school to recruit parents of their students, and directly reaching out to parents of students in the other charter schools). Participants were offered a \$15 gift card for completing the survey. The team released thirteen replicates for neighborhood school students, six replicates for the application/exam students, and six replicates for the charter students.

This brief focuses on responses to the COVID-19 questions asked on the survey. Appendix B shows those questions.

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# APPENDIX B

## COVID-19 Survey Questions

Please share whether you would support or oppose the following responses to COVID-19 at \${e://Field/SchoolName}.

	Strongly oppose	Somewhat oppose	Neither support nor oppose	Somewhat support	Strongly support
Offering a remote learning option for students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Closing schools and providing online instruction when COVID-19 rates increase.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Requiring all students and staff to wear masks in the school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Requiring all staff to be vaccinated for COVID-19.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Requiring all students to be vaccinated for COVID-19.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Requiring students or staff to quarantine if they test positive for COVID-19.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Requiring students or staff to quarantine if they have COVID-19 symptoms.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Requiring students or staff to quarantine if there is a COVID-19 case in their class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How much were the following a problem for your family when \${e://Field/SchoolName} had remote/online learning days this school year?

	Not at all a problem	Minor problem	Moderate problem	Serious problem
Childcare	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Work schedule	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Supervising remote/online learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Computer issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Internet issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adequate food for your family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

# APPENDIX C

## Predicted Changes in Parent Support for COVID-19 Policies in Schools Based on Degree of Remote Hardships

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	Remote Learning	School Closures	Mask Mandate	Staff Vax	Student Vax	Quarantine Test	Quarantine Symptoms	Quarantine Exposure
Childcare								
Minor Problem	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)	0.02 (0.03)	0.03 (0.05)	0.01 (0.04)	0.05 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)
Moderate Problem	-0.09* (0.04)	-0.05 (0.04)	0.02 (0.03)	0.03 (0.05)	0.00 (0.05)	0.05 (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)	0.00 (0.04)
Serious Problem	-0.19*** (0.04)	-0.11** (0.04)	0.00 (0.03)	-0.00 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.04)	0.04 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.04)
Technology								
Minor Problem	0.02 (0.04)	0.01 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	0.01 (0.04)	0.02 (0.04)	0.01 (0.03)	0.00 (0.03)	0.00 (0.03)
Moderate Problem	0.00 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)	-0.00 (0.03)	-0.06 (0.05)	-0.04 (0.04)	0.02 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.04)
Serious Problem	0.01 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.04)	0.03 (0.04)	0.02 (0.05)	0.04 (0.05)	0.01 (0.03)	0.00 (0.03)	0.01 (0.04)
Food								
Minor Problem	0.03 (0.03)	0.08** (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	0.05 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)	0.04 (0.02)	0.01 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)
Moderate Problem	0.01 (0.04)	0.00 (0.04)	0.02 (0.03)	0.05 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.00 (0.03)
Serious Problem	-0.01 (0.05)	0.00 (0.04)	-0.04 (0.04)	0.07 (0.05)	0.04 (0.05)	0.01 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)
SES Index Score	0.05** (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	0.04** (0.01)	0.06*** (0.02)	0.08*** (0.02)	0.04*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.02 (0.02)
Constant	0.77*** (0.05)	0.70*** (0.05)	0.81*** (0.04)	0.32*** (0.06)	0.20*** (0.05)	0.85*** (0.04)	0.86*** (0.04)	0.83*** (0.04)
Observations	1,444	1,444	1,444	1,444	1,444	1,444	1,444	1,444
F-Statistics	2.597	4.887	1.391	26.536	5.850	2.855	4.048	0.778
R-Squared	0.053	0.050	0.037	0.064	0.091	0.034	0.031	0.020

\* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001

**Note:** Reference for all factor hardship variables is set to "No Problem." Robust standard errors reported in parentheses. Analytic weights and demographics controls applied to all models (i.e., student race/ethnicity, special education status, chronic health status, gender, grade level, and school type). SES index was created by summing standardized values from the following variables: parent income-to-poverty ratio, employment type, single parent status, and highest level of ed (binary bachelor's or higher).



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