



RESEARCH BRIEF

Research Services

Vol. 1907
June 2020

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Reopening of Schools in the 2020-2021 School Year: Parent Survey Results

Results at a Glance

As the state and city begin to reopen following the COVID-19 pandemic, Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) conducted an online Districtwide survey of parents of students who currently attend and who plan to attend M-DCPS during the 2020-2021 school year. The Reopening of Schools Parent Survey gathered information from parents regarding their preferences and attitudes toward the reopening of schools. Over 100,000 respondents completed the survey, representing over 155,000 students who will be attending M-DCPS in 2020-2021.

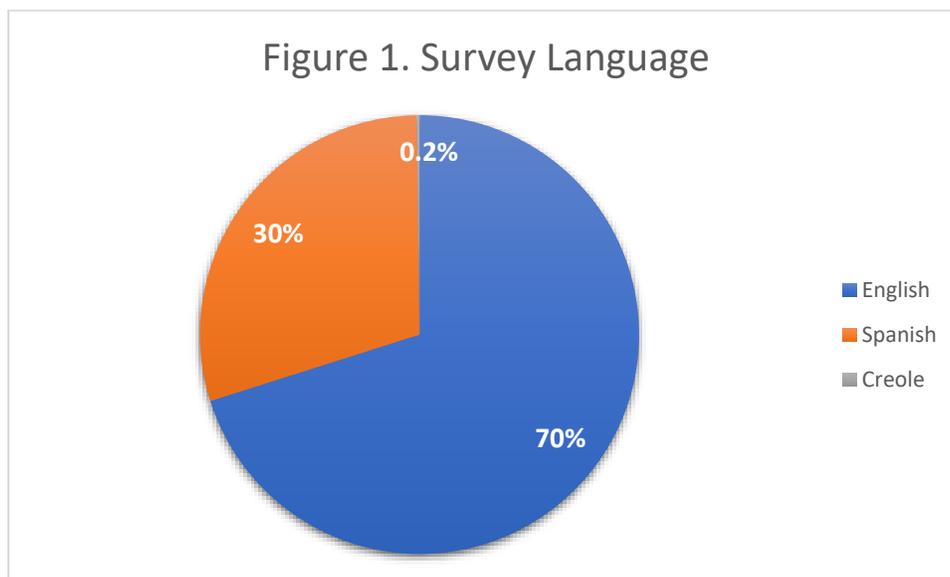
Results from the survey indicate a nearly equal preference for the three attendance options presented to the parents (physical, distance learning, or combination). The strongest contributor to attendance preference was anticipated parental work arrangement. Moreover, parents indicated a clear preference for their children attending school all days of the week in shifts or on alternate days. These results continue to hold even when considering grade level and other students characteristics such as ESE, ELL, and gifted. Most parents agreed with a series of preventative measures M-DCPS is considering for physical attendance including temperature checks, washing hands, wearing face masks, eating meals in classrooms, and one-way movement in school buildings; less support was found for the elimination of outdoor recess.

While attitudes and preferences might change as more sectors of the country begin to reopen and other developments with COVID-19 occur, the overwhelming response to this survey provided a large representative sample that is similar to the District as a whole. Survey results revealed an understanding of parent choices, including their desire to have the same option for all children in the household regardless of grade level and having their options closely tied to their work arrangement.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) announced the closing of all schools at the end of the school day on March 13, 2020, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and the State of Florida in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the state and county began planning a phased reopening of businesses in May of 2020, senior leadership at the District began looking at the 2020-2021 school year ahead and commenced the development and planning of several models for reopening. As such, M-DCPS wanted to garner the opinion of its stakeholders, starting with parents of students who currently attend and who plan to attend in the new school year. Thus, the Reopening of Schools Parent Survey was deployed online on Friday, May 15th, 2020, with an extended due date of May 27th, 2020. Parents from all

M-DCPS schools were invited to complete the survey using the link placed on the Parent page of the District website. Emails notifying parents was sent from their school principals and advertised on District social media.

The survey was divided into two main parts: questions asked solely of the parents once per survey, and questions asked about each child in their household that would be a student at M-DCPS in 2020-2021. The survey questions asked parents about access to computers, their work arrangements, their agreement with various proposed disease prevention methods, and their attitudes toward various issues related to the reopening of schools. Student-focused questions pertained to their grade level, their student type (for example, attending magnet school/program or participating in the gifted program), their attendance and school day modification preference, and transportation use. At the conclusion of the survey on May 27th, 2020, a total of 100,707 surveys were completed for 155,545 students. In each survey parents were able to respond for up to 3 students; therefore, some parents repeated the survey if they had more than 3 students (N=1,015). Of the 100,707 respondents, 70,588 took the survey in English, 29,932 took it in Spanish, and 187 in Haitian-Creole as seen in Figure 1.



Survey Respondents as compared to M-DCPS Districtwide

Of the 155,545 students represented in the survey, 92,095 provided a valid student ID number. Using this information, we looked at key demographic variables and how they compared to the District as a whole. As seen in Table 1, survey respondents closely resembled the District on gender, ESOL, and ESE. However, there was a higher percentage of gifted students and a lower percentage of FRL and Black students in the survey respondent's group.

Table 1. Comparison of survey respondents and M-DCPS on select demographics.

Demographics	% Female	% Male	% ESOL	% ESE	% Gifted	% FRL
Survey Respondents	50	50	16	12	21	64
M-DCPS	49	51	18	12	12	72
Ethnicity	% Black	% Hispanic	% White	% Other		
Survey Respondents	12	77	9	2		
M-DCPS	20	72	7	2		

Survey Respondents – Household Demographics

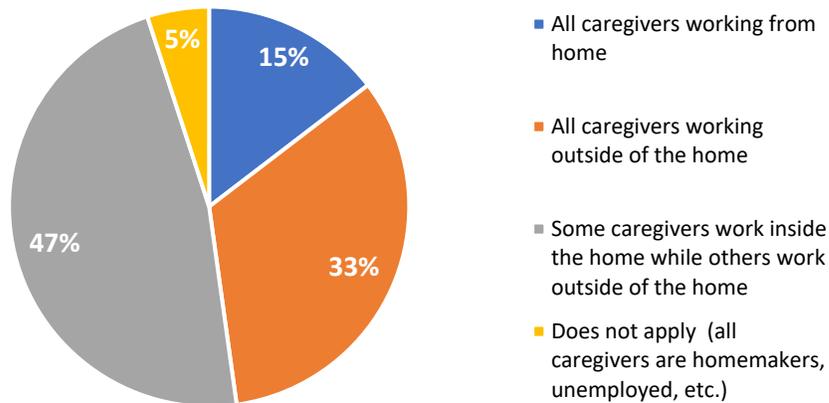
Since its closure, M-DCPS has distributed over 119,000 devices to students and teachers in need. In addition, internet access was granted to families in need through community partnerships. To ensure all students in the household have what they need as they progress from one grade level to the next, we asked parents questions on their access to computers at home. Table 2 below provides a parental report on their child’s access to computers and need to borrow a computer from the District. Although only 6% of respondents indicated their children did not have access to a computer, nearly a quarter of respondents indicated they would like to check out a district-issued mobile device.

Table 2. Student access to computers and the need for district-issued devices.

Does every child in your household who is an M-DCPS student have access to one or more computers at home to complete assignments? (Select only one)		
	Frequency	Percent
Access to Personal Computer	73,806	73.3
Access to District Computer	21,095	20.9
No Access	5,806	5.8
Total	100,707	100
Do any of your children need to check out a district-issued mobile device for use at home? (Select only one)		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes, I would like my child to check out a district-issued mobile device to complete assignments at home.	25,089	24.9
No, I would not like my child to check out a district-issued mobile device to complete assignments at home.	75,616	75.1
Total	100,707	100

As businesses begin to reopen, many parents will be required to physically return to work in the foreseeable future. Thus, we asked parents what they anticipated their work arrangement will be in the Fall of 2020. Figure 2 indicates that the plurality of parents (47%) anticipated that they will be working both from home and outside of the home in the Fall of 2020. Another third of parents indicated that they anticipated all caregivers will be working outside of the home, with only 15% indicating all caregivers would be working from home and 5% who do not have a current work arrangement.

Figure 2. Parental Work Arrangement in the Fall of 2020



Half of our respondents reported they only had one student that will be attending M-DCPS in 2020-2021. The remaining breakdown of the number of children can be seen in Table 3. The distribution by grade level can be seen in Figure 3, which shows nearly equal representation from grades PK-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12. This breakdown is very similar to that seen in the District as a whole, where the proportion of students in grades PK-2 is 24%, 3-5 is 23%, 6-8 is 23%, and 9-12 is 30% of the District. When provided, student ID was used to access additional demographic information. Of the 92,095 students with a valid student ID, 6,052 (6.6%) students were from charter schools.

Table 3. Number of children that will attend M-DPCS in 2020-2021.

Number of Children	Frequency	Percent
1	50,837	50
2	37,775	38
3	8,618	9
4	1,884	2
5	490	0
6	155	0
Unknown	948	1
Total	100707	100

Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of various student types from parent report, where 8% participated in Exceptional Student Education (ESE), 11% participated in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), 22% were magnet school/program students, and 21% participated in the gifted program. Figure 4 includes all students represented in the survey, and therefore percentages may vary slightly as compared to Table 1, which only includes students whose parents provided a valid student ID.

Figure 3. What grade level will your child enter in the 2020-2021 school year?

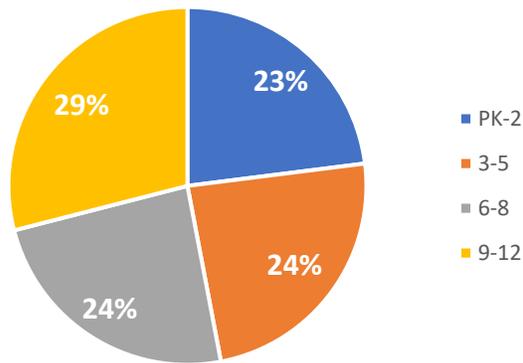
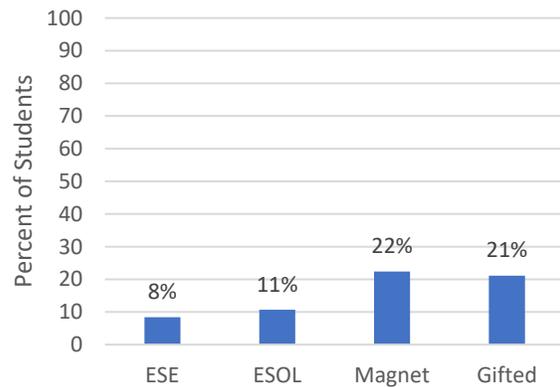
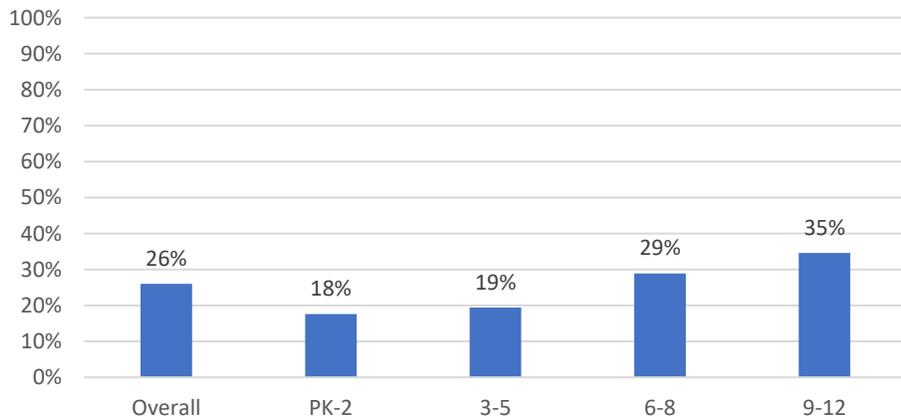


Figure 4. Does your child participate in the following programs?

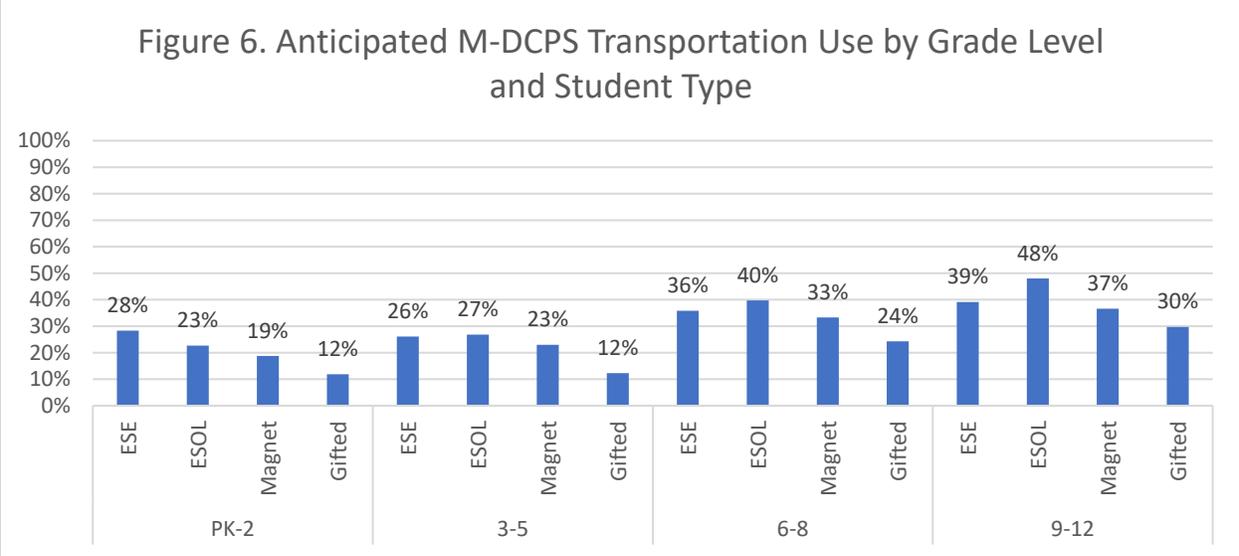


Overall, parents indicated that 26% of students would need transportation in the Fall. When we examined this question by grade level span, we saw that as the grade levels increase, so does their anticipated use of District transportation. The highest anticipated transportation use was found for students in grades 9-12 (35%), where the lowest was found for students in PK-2 (18%) as seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Anticipated M-DCPS Transportation Use by Grade Level

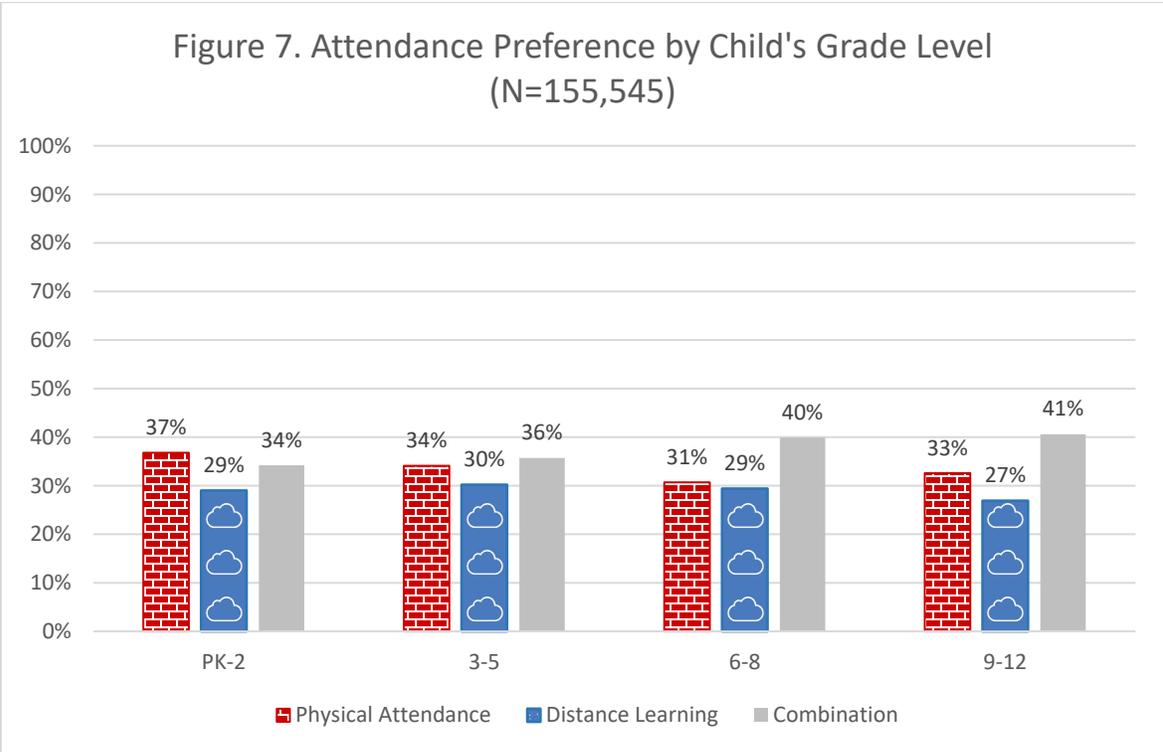


Going one step further, we examined transportation use by student grade level span and student type and found the highest anticipated transportation use for ESOL students in middle and high school grades (40% and 48%) and the lowest anticipated use for gifted students in elementary grades (12%) as seen in Figure 6.



Student-Level Responses

Parents were asked a series of questions per child in their household that was going to attend M-DCPS in the Fall of 2020-2021. The first question asked parents to assume all guidelines had been met for schools to reopen and to choose their child’s attendance preference: physical attendance, distance learning, or a combination of the two. In Figure 7 we can see that preference for the three attendance options was relatively equal across all grade level spans, with the exception of middle and high school grades, where the respondents preferred a combination of distance learning and physical attendance.



Attendance preference was analyzed using a variety of parent and student characteristics. As seen in Table 1, 64% of survey respondents that provided a valid student ID qualified for FRL. Figure 8 indicates that

Non-FRL respondents were slightly less likely to prefer Distance Learning as compared to their FRL counterparts (21% vs. 30%). In addition to FRL, we examined student ethnicity as compared to attendance preference.

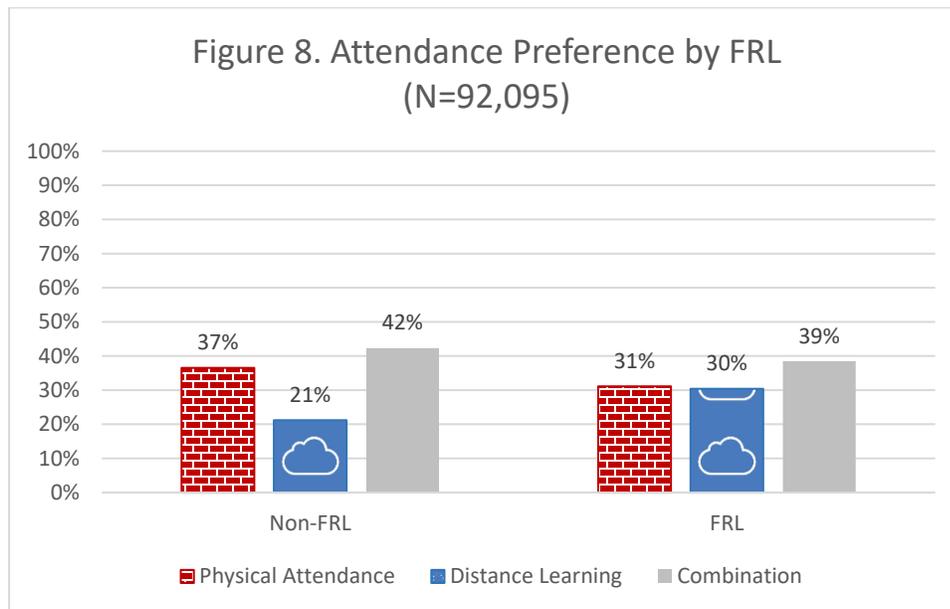
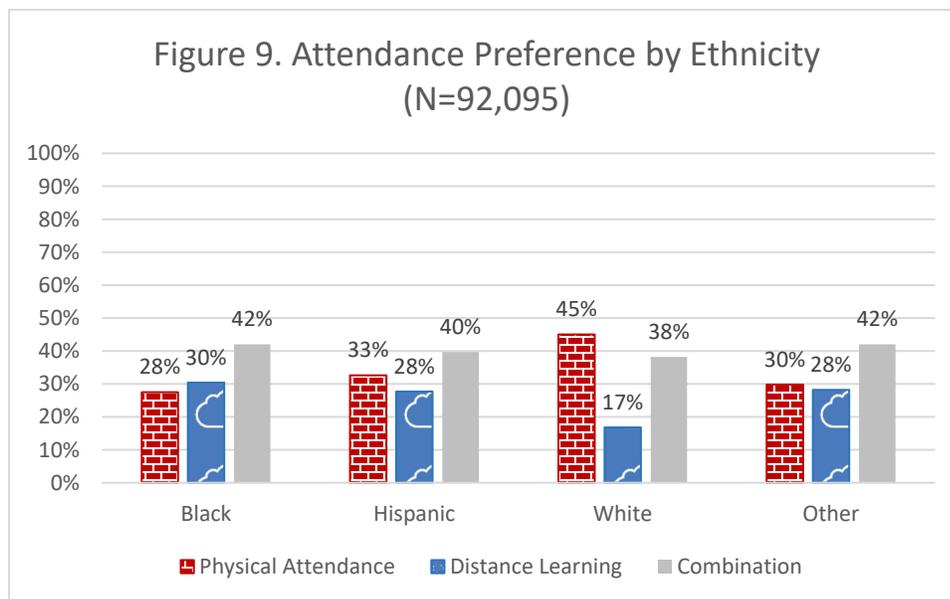
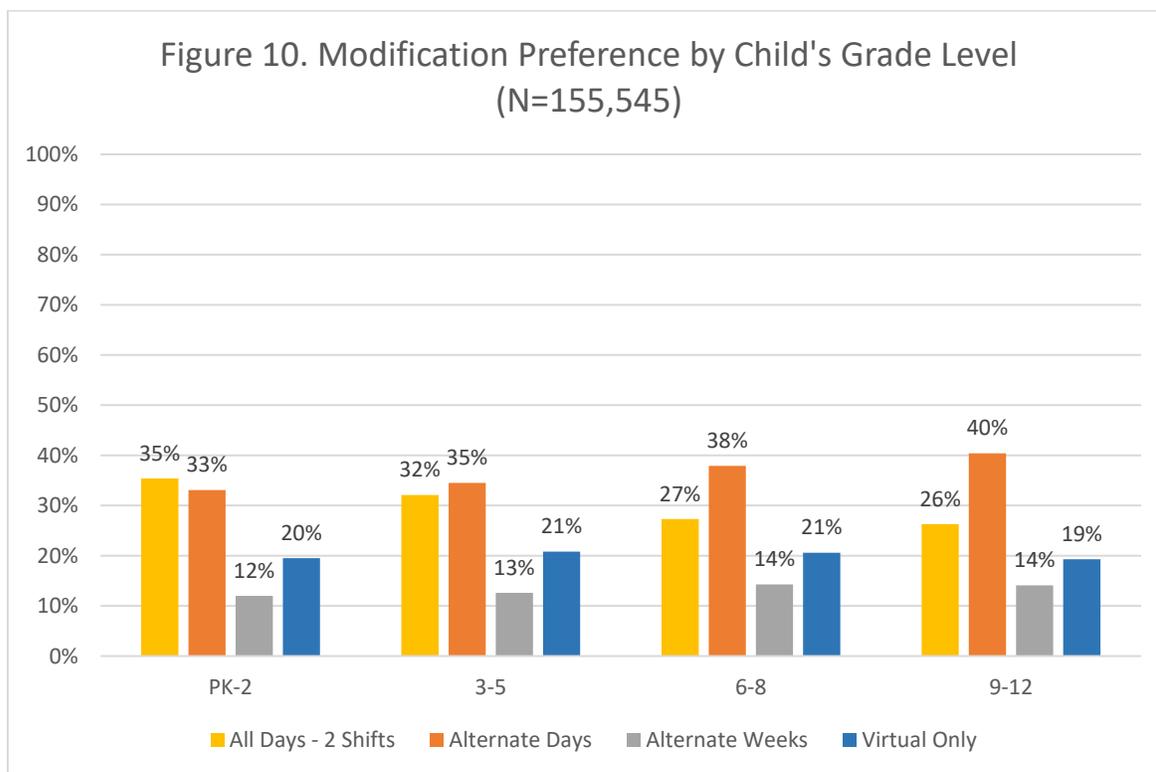


Figure 9 demonstrates that Black, Hispanic, and students with Other ethnicities had nearly identical attendance preferences across the three options, with the digital and combination method being slightly preferred to the others by all three groups. However, parents of White students had the highest proportion of preference for physical attendance (45%) and only half the proportion of preference for distance learning (17%), as compared to the other ethnicities. As previously seen in Table 1, White students only make up 7% of the students in the District as a whole. It is important to note that the distribution of the number of children per family by FRL and non-FRL families and by ethnicity were comparable.

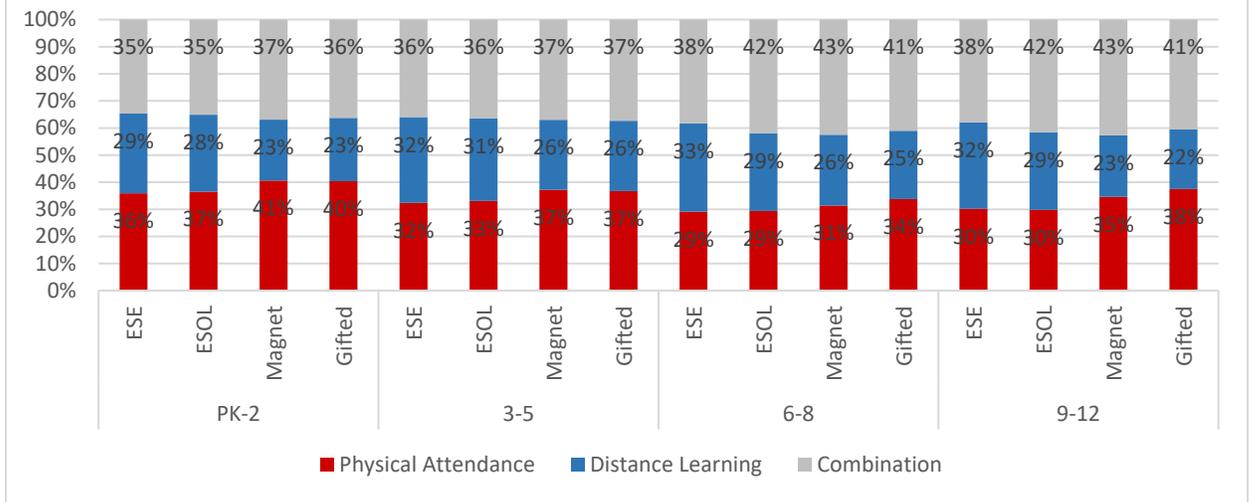


Next, we asked parents what type of attendance modification they would prefer if school buildings did reopen. Figure 10 illustrates that in almost all grade level spans, with the exception of PK-2, most parents preferred that their children attend schools on alternate days physically, while participating in distance learning on the other days. The second most preferred by these grade level spans was attending all days of the week with two shifts to maintain smaller class sizes. In grades PK-2, 35% of parents preferred this option that their children attend all days of the week in shifts. Up to 21% of students represented in the survey, depending on grade level span, chose to attend virtually only even if schools reopen with modifications.



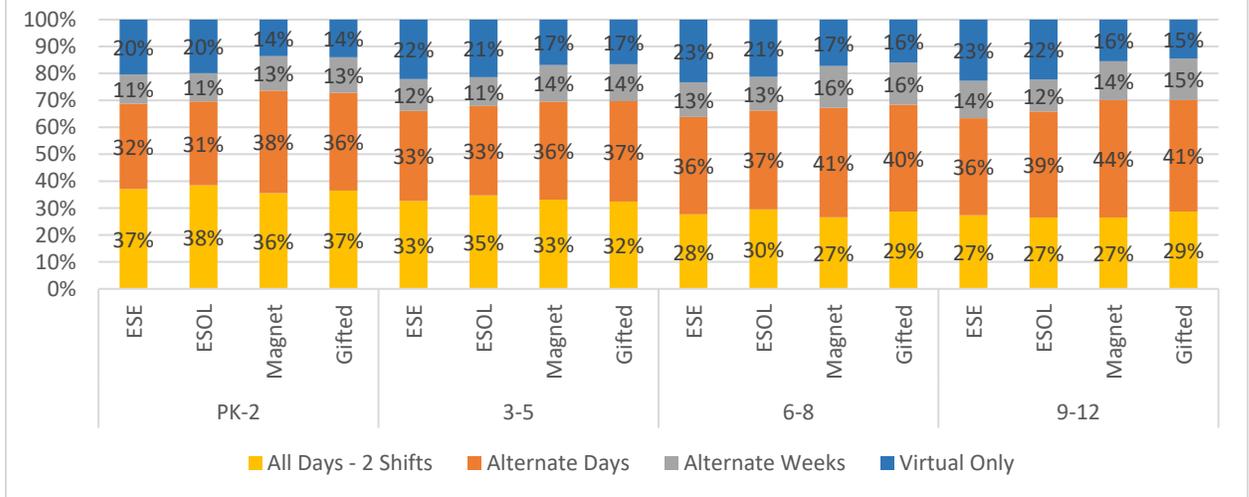
To ensure that the preferences for all types of students were analyzed, we examined attendance and modification preference by grade level and student type. As seen in Figures 11 and 12, small differences are seen depending on student types or grade levels. Nearly equal preference for the three attendance options was seen across grade levels and student types, with a slight increase in the combination method in the middle and high school grades for all student types and a slight preference for physical attendance for magnet and gifted students in grades PK-2.

Figure 11. Attendance Preference by Grade Level and Student Type

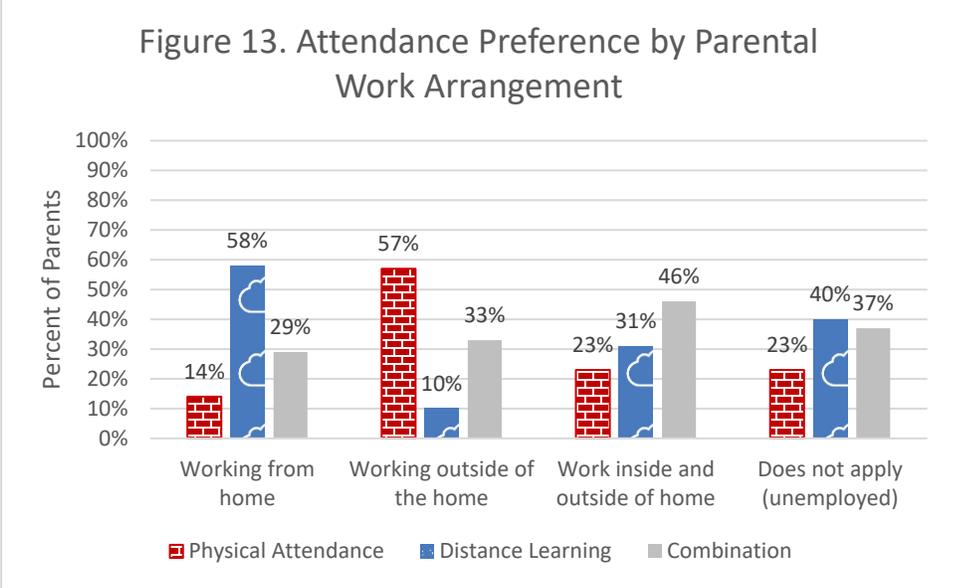


We found the same pattern in modification preference, where little difference was found by grade level or student type. Alternate days attendance was slightly more preferred in middle and high school grades across student types.

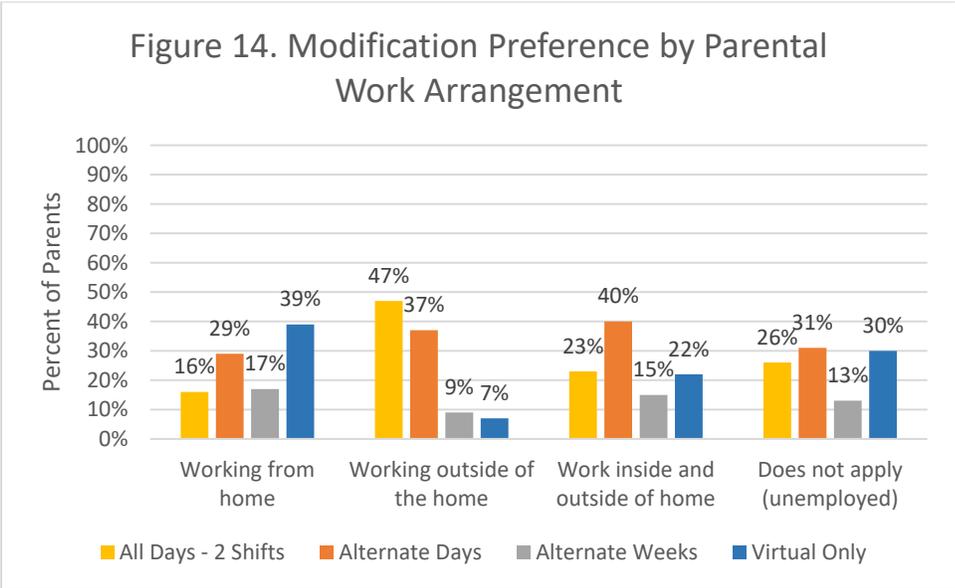
Figure 12. Modification Preference by Grade Level and Student Type



Next, we examined attendance and modification preference by anticipated parental work arrangement in the fall. Figure 13 illustrates, as expected, that parents who anticipated working from home strongly preferred distance learning (58%) as opposed to those working outside of the home exclusively, who preferred that their child attend school physically (57%). Households where parents are working both inside and outside of the home or maybe unemployed, favored distance learning (31% and 40%), or a combination method (46% and 37%) to physical attendance (23%).

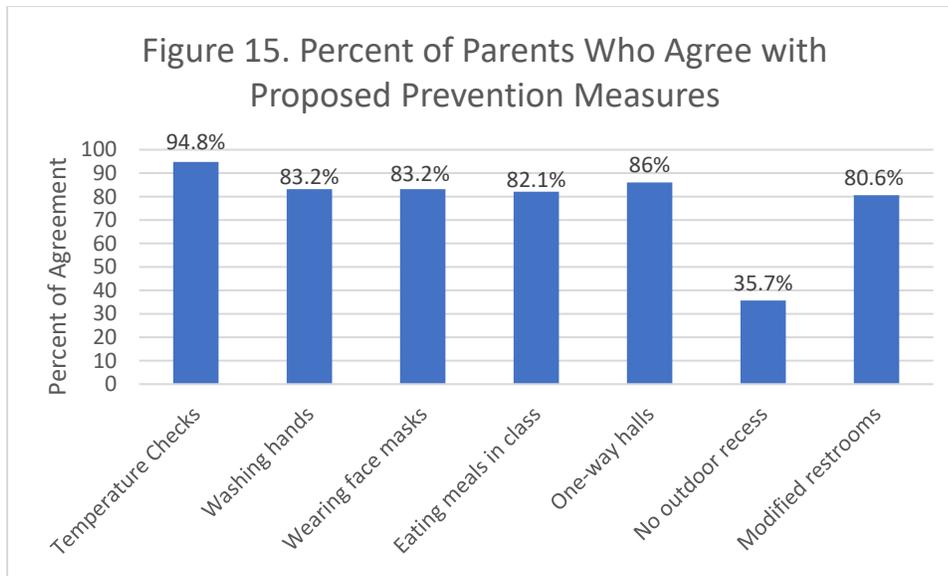


Furthermore, Figure 14 shows that parents working outside of the home strongly preferred attending school all days of the week in shifts (47%) while parents working from home preferred the virtual only option (39%). The plurality (40%) of parents working both inside and outside of the home preferred attending school on alternate days while unemployed parents preferred a virtual only option (30%).



Parent-Level Responses

Parents were asked additional questions as it pertains to disease prevention measures in the schools and their attitudes regarding the reopening of schools. Parents were asked if they agreed with a variety of preventative measures the District is considering including, temperature checks, washing hands, wearing face masks, eating meals in class instead of in the cafeteria, one-way movement in the school hallways, no outdoor recess or gym, and modified restroom access. As seen in Figure 15, at least 81% of parents agreed with all prevention measures with the exception of the elimination of outdoor recess or gym.



Parent Attitudes on Reopening of Schools

Since the global pandemic of COVID-19 started in other parts of the world before reaching the United States, it is important to look globally when considering the timing and manner in which to reopen schools. Denmark was the first European country to reopen its schools on April 15th, 2020. Their reopening began with only children under 12 years of age who returned to schools. The reasoning associated with this decision was that younger children face lower health risks, benefit less from distance learning, and might require more supervision from family members that might be back at work. The United Kingdom began a staged reopening of their grade schools on June 1st, 2020; schools were asked to open for children in daycare, year 1 and year 6, which is the equivalent of Kindergarten and grade 5 in the US. Starting on June 15th, secondary schools will begin reopening. The first stage of reopening on June 1, included those grades because the UK government believed that those were key transition years for the students. The UK government prioritized younger children because of their less severe symptoms if infected with COVID-19. Several other countries including Norway, Austria, France, and Israel have also reopened schools with a variety of preventative measures in place, typically targeting the younger population first.

Based on reports of the reopening of schools worldwide, McKinsey & Company (2020, April) observed a spectrum of attitudes on four different topics and their relation to reopening as seen in Figure 16. The four topics include public health risk, economic activity, student learning and development, and school safety. McKinsey & Company observed that when individuals favor option A on any of these topics, they are likely to feel that schools should reopen, but when choosing option C, they feel that schools should remain closed, with option B somewhere in the middle. This spectrum was used as the basis for attitudinal questions for parents regarding the opening of schools in M-DCPS.

Figure 16. A spectrum of attitude options and how they relate to the reopening of schools.

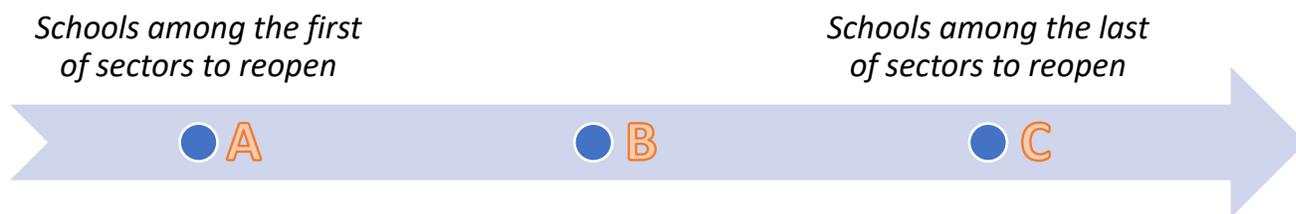


Table 4 lists the four questions on attitudes regarding the reopening of schools included in the Parent Survey. On two of the four attitude questions relating to the economy and student learning and development, parents preferred option B (48% and 49%), which would align with the middle of the road attitude as it pertains to reopening. On the other two questions relating to public health risk and school safety, the majority of parents chose option C (46% and 53%). Parents felt that it is very difficult to make schools safe because children can be careless, by not covering their mouth or social distancing adequately.

Table 4. Questions on attitudes and beliefs concerning the reopening of schools: frequency and percent of parents.

Which of the following statements do you believe the most about the public health risk of COVID-19?			
		Frequency	Percent
A	Risks for children and teachers to get the virus (even when not showing symptoms) is low	166,44	16.5
B	Risks for children to get the virus is moderate; reopening of schools still is seen as a risk because the virus can be spread without having symptoms	37,363	37.1
C	Reopening of the schools can put children and others at high risk of getting the virus	46,699	46.4
Total		100,707	100

Which of the following statements do you believe the most about the importance of reopening schools for the economy?			
		Frequency	Percent
A	Opening of schools as soon as possible is necessary to allow parents to return to work; many workers rely on childcare	25,010	24.8
B	Economic activity can return through the slow and phased reopening of schools	47,936	47.6
C	Most parents can continue to work from home, or most households can arrange for caregivers (including through government-provided care)	27,761	27.6
Total		100,707	100

Which of the following statements do you believe the most about how reopening schools can impact student learning and development?			
		Frequency	Percent
A	Students can have serious learning loss because of online learning especially for at-risk students; students staying home all day can experience other problems, such as lack of nutrition, or domestic violence in the home	30,274	30.1
B	Online learning works for some subjects and grade levels; in-person lessons required for others	48,825	48.5
C	Online learning allows students to continue learning at their grade level	21,608	21.5
Total		100,707	100

Which of the following statements do you believe the most about the ability to make schools safe?

	Frequency	Percent
A Health & Safety measures (such as cleaning and social distancing) can lower the risk of getting the virus in schools	38,079	37.8
B Health & Safety measures (such as cleaning and social distancing) are not enough to prevent the spread of the virus in schools	9,457	9.4
C It is very difficult to make schools safe because children can be careless (not covering mouth or social distancing)	53,171	52.8
Total	100,707	100

We examined parental attitudes and how they related to attendance preferences for their children. As seen in Figures 17a-d, preference for physical attendance was highest (63%-78%) for parents choosing option A on all four questions, and lowest (4%-12%) for those choosing option C. Conversely, preference for distance learning was highest (46%-78%) for parents choosing option C, and lowest (3%-7%) for those choosing option A.

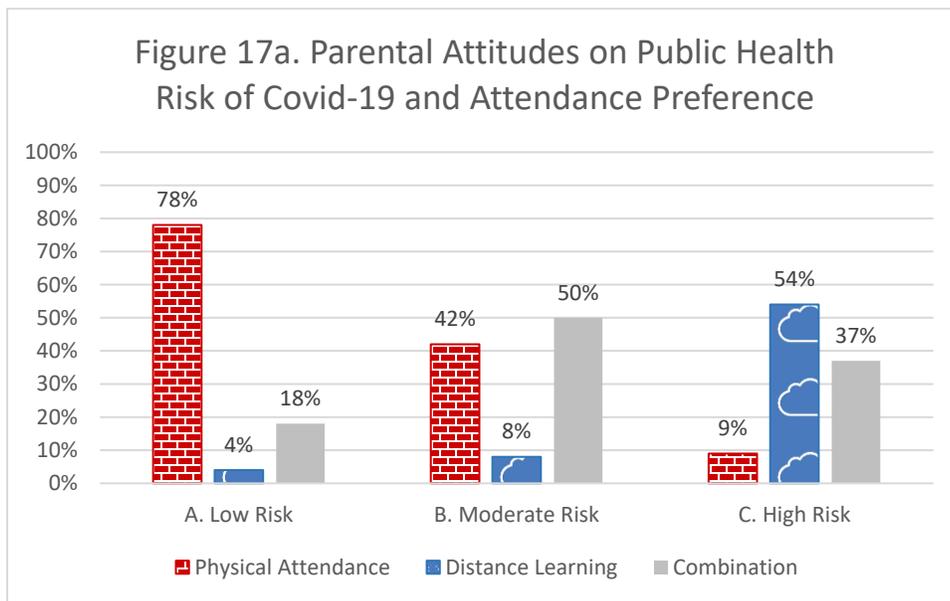


Figure 17b. Parental Attitudes on the Effect of Reopening on the Economy and Attendance Preference

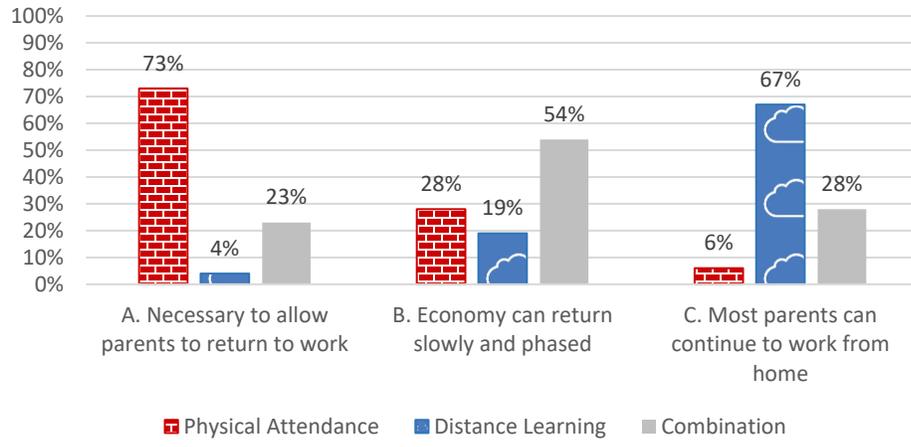


Figure 17c. Parental Attitudes on Student Learning and Attendance Preference

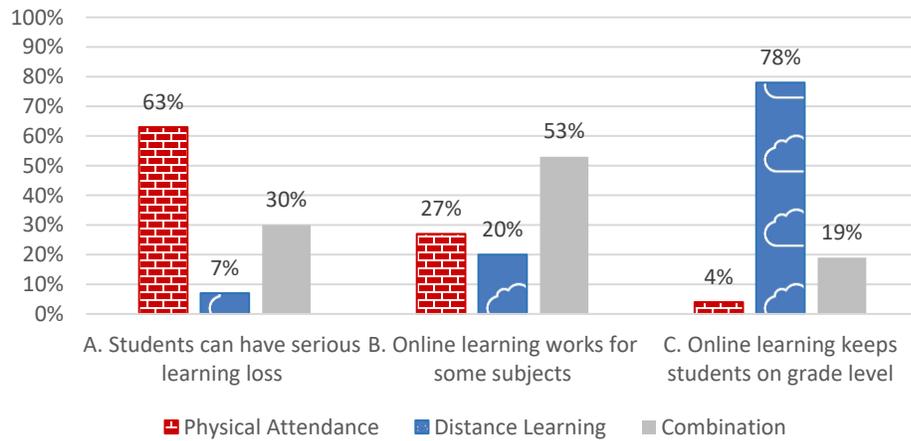
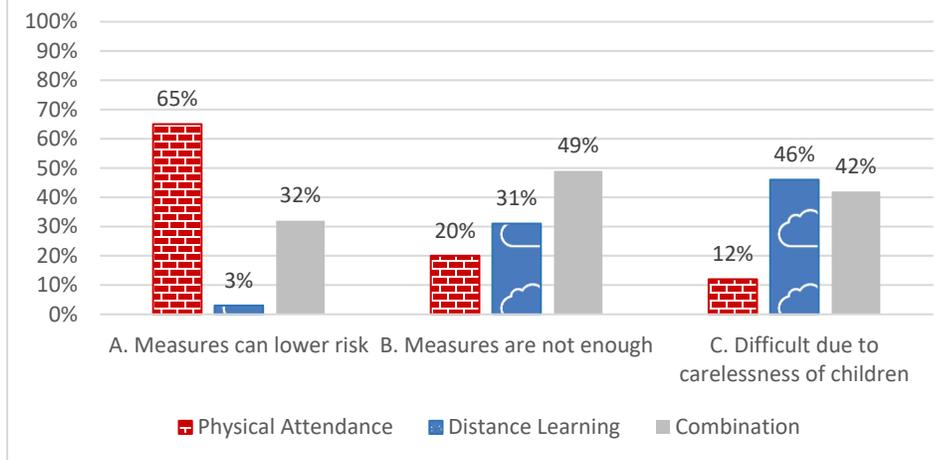


Figure 17d. Parental Attitudes on School Safety and Attendance Preference



Summary

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) conducted a Districtwide survey in English, Spanish, and Haitian-Creole of over 100,000 respondents reporting on over 155,000 students who will be attending the District’s schools in the upcoming school year in all grade levels. This represented nearly half of the entire M-DCPS population of 346,427 students, as of February 2020. Survey respondents closely resembled the District on a variety of demographic variables, including grade level, and gender. The majority (94%) of respondents indicated that their children had access to computers to complete assignments. Half of the respondents had only one child attending school in their household and anticipated working both from home and outside of the home in the fall.

Parents were asked about their attendance preference for the upcoming school year, and what kind of modification they will prefer if schools reopen physically. Parents endorsed the three attendance options (physical attendance, distance learning, or combination method) nearly equally. This indicates that parents preferred the same mode of attendance for their entire household, regardless of their child’s age or level. Some differences were found upon further investigation. Parents of White students and Non-FRL students had the highest proportion of preference for physical attendance and only half the proportion of preference for distance learning, as compared to their counterparts. The strongest contributor to attendance preference was anticipated parental work arrangement, where parents who anticipated working from home strongly preferred distance learning as opposed to those working outside of the home exclusively, who preferred that their child attend school physically. Households where parents are working both inside and outside of the home or maybe unemployed favored distance learning, or a combination method to physical attendance.

With regard to modified attendance options, parents had a clear preference for their children to attend school all days of the week in shifts or on alternate days, regardless of grade level or student type. There was a slight preference for attending on alternating days for students in middle and high school grades. Up to 21% of students represented in the survey, depending on grade level span, chose to attend only virtually even if schools reopen with modifications. The greatest differences were again found for parents working outside of the home, who preferred for their children to attend all days of the week.

At least 81% of parents agreed with a variety of preventative measures the District is considering for physical attendance in school including temperature checks, washing hands, wearing face masks, eating meals in class instead of in the cafeteria, one-way movement in the school hallways, and modified restroom access. Only a little over a third of parents agreed with the elimination of outdoor recess or gym. The authors think that this option required further description to clarify that it was the elimination of “traditional” recess or gym, where in the future this activity would be modified to ensure social distancing and reduction of multi-use equipment. Perhaps if this question had been worded differently, this prevention method would have garnered more support from parents. Additionally, the survey did not offer a third option (outside of yes or no) on all of the in-school prevention method questions; therefore, parents who only wanted a distance learning option for their student until the pandemic is over may have disagreed with the various methods altogether.

As schools begin to reopen worldwide, decisions are based heavily on prevalent attitudes regarding the pandemic, the economy, student wellbeing, and disease prevention. Parents in our sample agreed with a middle of the road attitude pertaining to the criticality of the economy and student learning and development. On the other hand, parents agreed with a more stringent attitude as it pertains to the public health risk for children and teachers and the ability of schools to adequately prevent further spread of the disease. Parents felt that it is very difficult to make schools safe because children can be careless, by not covering their mouth or social distancing adequately, and that their risk is high.

Preference for physical attendance was highest for parents who felt that public health risk was low for children and that schools can adequately keep schools safe, the impact on the economy was high, and that student learning suffered in a virtual format. Preference for physical attendance was lowest for those parents choosing the opposite. Conversely, preference for distance learning was highest for parents who felt that their child’s public health risk was high, schools could not adequately prevent disease, workers can continue to work from home and that distance learning would keep their children thriving on grade level. Preference for distance learning was lowest for parents choosing the inverse of those attitudes. It is important to note that some attitudes may change substantially after more and more businesses reopen and other developments occur with COVID-19.

The overwhelming response to this parent survey resulted in a large representative sample that is similar to the District as a whole. While a clear attendance preference was not expressed by the survey’s respondents, an understanding of parent choices was revealed, including their desire to have the same option for all children in the household and having their options closely tied to their work arrangement. It is possible that, as the phased reopening of the city continues and more and more families return to a new normal, responses on this survey may change along with their attitudes, revealing a clear preference.

References

McKinsey & Company (2020, April). *Coronavirus COVID-19: Perspectives for school systems*. Presentation at Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Miami, FL.

Melnick, H., & Darling-Hammond, L. (with Leung, M., Yun, C., Schachner, A., Plasencia, S., & Ondrasek, N.). (2020). Reopening schools in the context of COVID-19: Health and safety guidelines from other countries (policy brief). Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.