

US parents are deeply divided about sending kids back to school – wary of risks, but anxious to get back to careers

New GfK research also shows that, while all US adults prefer a hybrid schooling model, more parents prefer full re-opening

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, August 4, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The COVID-19 virus is forcing US adults to confront a variety of no-win choices – with no population more profoundly affected than parents. As many schools nationwide are gearing up to re-open in the Fall, parents find themselves deeply ambivalent – knowing they need to get back to the workplace but worried about the infection risks their kids will face in classrooms or on playgrounds.

In [GfK research](#) conducted last week, 68% of US parents with children under age 18 said they agree strongly or somewhat that it would be too risky to re-open schools this Fall – compared to

62% of the general population. (See Table 1.) The same proportion of parents – and 60% of all US adults – also said that re-opening would be unfair to teachers.

But parents were also more likely than all US adults to say that schools need to re-open so that parents can get back to their workplaces (60% parents vs. 51% total population) so the economy can recover (57% parents vs. 47% total).

When asked to make a stark choice between sending their kids back to school or ignoring mandates and keeping them home, parents favored a return to in-person schooling – 56%

**Table 1. Attitudes toward school re-opening:
Parents with children under 18 vs. total US population**

	Too risky to re-open	Re-opening would be unfair to teachers	Re-opening needed for parents' work	Re-opening needed for econ. recovery
Parents with children < 18	68%*	68%	60%	57%
All US adults (age 16 to 65)	62%	60%	51%	47%

* Parents who agree strongly or somewhat. Source: GfK Consumer Pulse

Table 2. Support for different models of school re-opening

	General population	Parents
Hybrid	29%	19%
Fully remote	21%	16%
Fully re-open	20%	25%
Attending in shifts	12%	15%

Source: GfK Consumer Pulse research

**Table 3. Attitudes toward school re-opening:
Parents of college students vs. total US population**

	Too risky to re-open	Re-opening prioritizes financial gain	Re-opening necessary for universities	Re-opening necessary for college towns
Parents with college students	72%	76%	70%	66%
All US adults (age 16 to 65)	60%	59%	53%	54%

* Parents who agree strongly or somewhat. Source: GfK Consumer Pulse

versus 44%.

In addition, while all US respondents were more likely to favor a hybrid (in-person plus online) model of reopening, parents preferred a full return to on-site schooling. (See Table 2.)

GfK found similar mixed feelings among the parents of college students. Three-quarters (72%) of these parents said that re-opening universities in the fall would be too risky – 12 percentage points higher than the general population. (See Table 3.) And 76% felt that colleges re-opening for residential learning were prioritizing “financial gain” ahead of the well-being of students and staff; this compares to 59% in the general population.

But these same parents also were more likely to recognize that re-opening is critical to the financial well-being of universities (70%, versus 53% of the general population) and college towns (66%, versus 54%).

Parents’ mixed feelings mirror the overall concerns of the general population. More than four in ten (43%) US adults said they are worried about the health of those around them, and essentially the same proportion (42%) reported being concerned about their own health. But 26% also expressed anxiety about the virus’s impact on their household’s economy, and another 26% were bothered by limitations placed on their personal freedoms, such as the ability to travel.

“From the beginning of the pandemic, we have seen the twin concerns of health and economic well-being fighting for dominance in consumers’ minds,” said Stacy Bereck, Managing Director of Consumer Insights at GfK. “This nearly impossible choice is clearly playing out among parents as the school year approaches. Depending on how the virus progresses, and the evolution of school plans for the coming session, we may see these attitudes shift again. This is another sign that marketers and researchers in a variety of categories – from technology to clothing to snack food -- need to keep a close watch on consumer attitudes as the virus crisis continues to unfold.”

GfK’s Consumer Pulse research covers 30 countries, allowing brands and marketers to #MasterTheCrisis by understanding consumer attitudes, behavior, purchase intent, media consumption, and more – both now and in the future. The research reveals changes in demand for goods and services, as well as which sectors and channels present risks or opportunities, so that companies can respond with confidence and come out of the crisis stronger, better positioned, and closer to consumers than before.

As part of this research, GfK interviewed a representative sample of 1,001 US consumers (ages 16 to 65) during July 21 through 23, 2020.

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David Stanton

GfK

+1 908-875-9844

[email us here](#)

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