

Wave 11 Research Brief

Parents Voice Concerns About Pandemic's Impact on School-Age Children

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all segments of the U.S. population, but the negative impact on school-age children may last for years to come. To gauge parents' concerns about that impact, as well as how the rules and regulations of the pandemic are affecting their children, the Consumer Finance Institute (CFI) included a series of student-related questions in recent editions of its *COVID-19 Survey of Consumers*.¹ CFI presented five statements to parents of school-age students (those attending kindergarten through grade 12) and asked them whether they agreed, disagreed, or were neutral on each statement. About one-third of all respondents indicated they had school-age children.

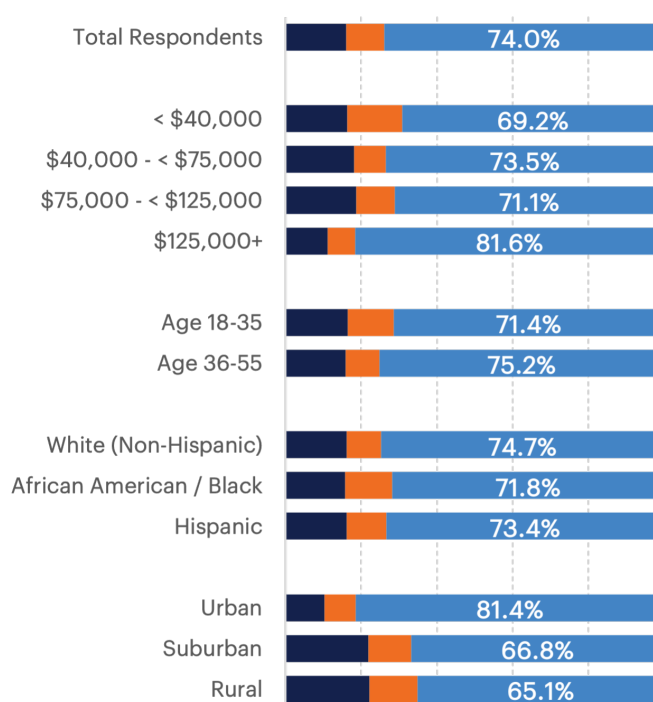
A wide majority (74 percent) agreed with the sentence: "I am concerned about my student(s) contracting COVID-19 while in school" (**Figure 1**).² Agreement rates were the highest among high earners, urban dwellers, and those aged 36–55 years (due to the small volume of responders aged 56 and older with school-age children, data for that group are not shown). But all demographic groups had agreement rates well above 60 percent.

Given the concerns about risk, it is not surprising that a large majority (77.4 percent) was also in favor of masks being required in school buildings and on school transportation (**Figure 2**). In fact, a majority rate (agreement rates above 50 percent) was recorded in all age, income, racial, and geographic groups.

Although a large majority of respondents expressed concerns about the risk of their children contracting the virus, 56.6 percent also agreed with the statement: "Concerns about COVID-19 risks among school-age children are overblown" (**Figure 3**). Agreement rose as income increased but declined the older the respondent was. Among ethnic groups, 64.7 percent of Hispanic respondents thought concerns were overblown, while a majority (56.0 percent) of Whites agreed

Figure 1

I am concerned about my student(s) contracting COVID-19 while in school



Source: Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia CFI COVID-19 Survey of Consumers

and 49.1 percent of Blacks did. Geographically, urban respondents agreed the most (69.9 percent), followed by rural (43.1 percent) and suburban (42.8 percent).

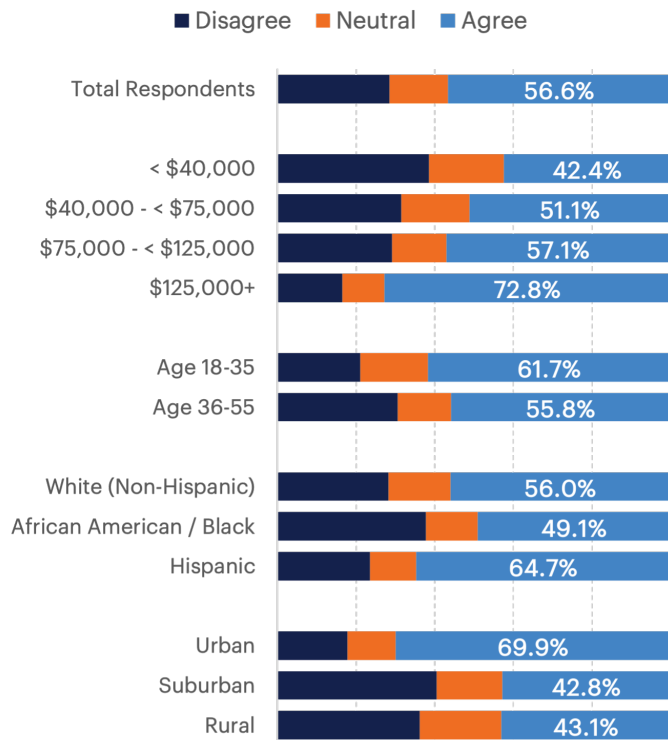
Another key takeaway from the survey was that most parents (59.6 percent) felt COVID-19 rules and practices were negatively

¹ The questions were included in the 10th CFI survey conducted on October 4–12, 2021, and the 11th survey conducted on January 5–17, 2022. Note: The October survey was conducted before the World Health Organization had identified the Omicron variant of COVID-19. That news was not released until late November 2021. Unless otherwise noted, results described in this brief are from the Wave 11 (January 2022) survey.

² The concerns about contraction risks dovetail with parents' openness for getting their children vaccinated. At the time of the October survey, vaccinations had not yet been approved for children aged 5–11 years. But a majority of parents (62.2 percent in October and 69.0 percent in January) with children in that age range said they were receptive to getting their children vaccinated.

Figure 2

Concerns about COVID-19 risks among school-age children are overblown



Source: Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia CFI COVID-19 Survey of Consumers

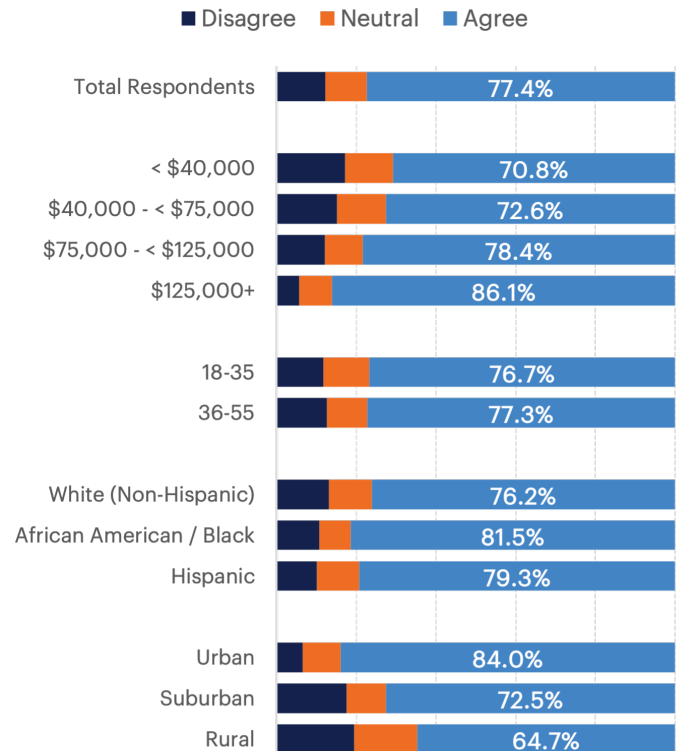
affecting their students' education (**Figure 4**). This attitude had increased across almost all segments compared with the responses in October. The biggest agreement rates were among younger, high-earning, Hispanic, and urban respondents.

Despite concerns about education disruptions, a majority of parents expressed satisfaction with how their local school districts are facing the COVID-19 challenge (**Figure 5**). Nearly three out of four (74.4 percent) parents agreed with the statement: "Our school district has implemented appropriate safety measures to minimize COVID-19 risks." All the demographic segments recorded agreement rates above 60 percent.

When comparing the latest results from January 2022 with the October 2021 responses, there were significant shifts in attitudes among Hispanic and rural consumers. In January compared with October, a greater share of rural respondents said they were concerned about their children contracting COVID-19 while in school (65.1 percent in January versus 55.1 percent in October, respectively), were in favor of masks (64.7 percent versus 55.9 percent), and thought that appropriate school measures were in place (61.8 percent versus 48.2 percent). Among Hispanic respondents, a greater share

Figure 3

Masks should be required for anyone in the school building and on school transportation



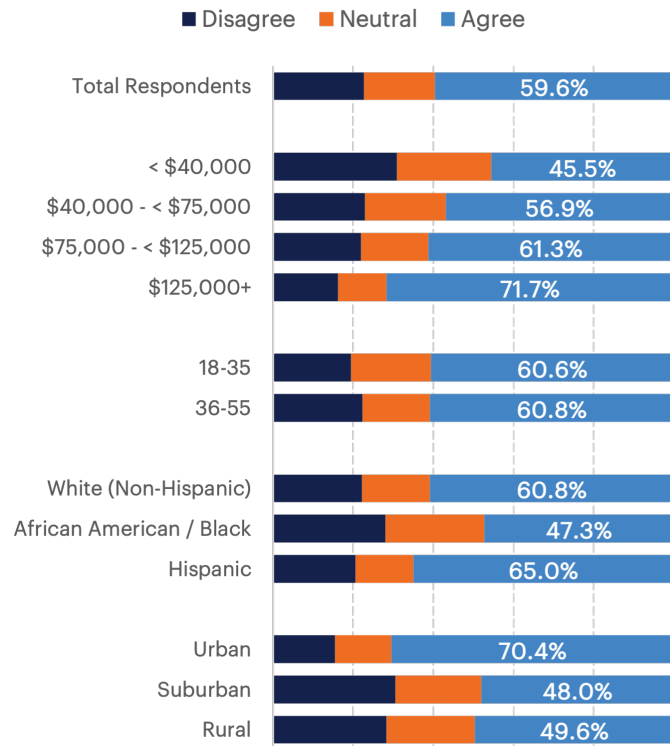
Source: Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia CFI COVID-19 Survey of Consumers

of respondents in January compared with October said concerns were overblown (64.7 percent versus 46.7 percent, respectively), thought COVID-19 rules were negatively affecting their children's education (65.0 percent versus 47.8 percent), but also thought their districts had taken appropriate measures (76.6 percent versus 59.7 percent).

It might seem contradictory that most respondents think their districts are doing all they can to minimize COVID-19 risks while a similar majority also reported worrying about their children contracting the virus while in school. It is important to note that the question did not specify the types or levels of precaution being taken by the respondents' schools, only whether or not the respondent agreed with them. In other words, districts are likely taking precautions that generally reflect the attitudes of their communities, leading to a high (but certainly not unanimous) level of agreement with the policies. But the fear of infection may also reflect the perception that, despite all the precautions and with vaccines now available for school-age children, the new Omicron variant was driving infection rates to record levels in January in various states across the U.S. and was a cause of concern for parents.

Figure 4

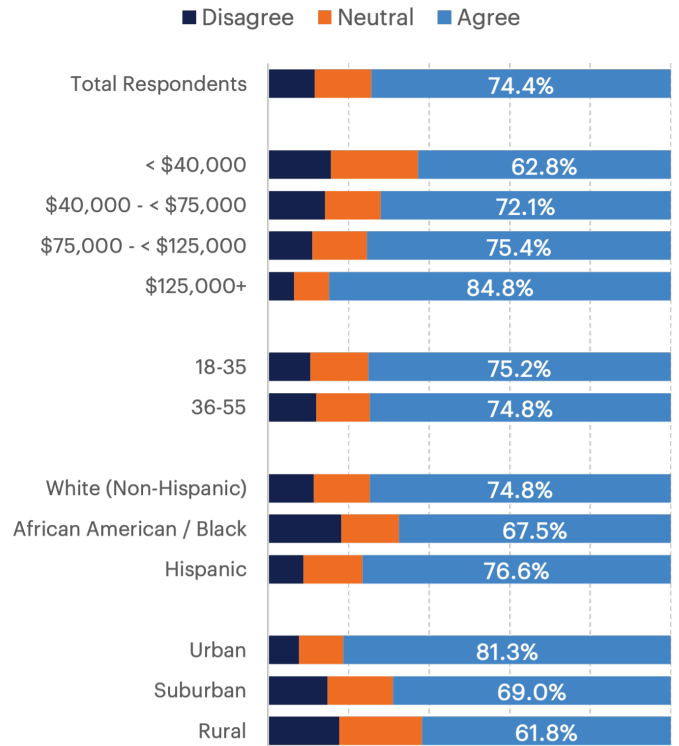
COVID-19 rules and practices in the school are negatively impacting students' education



Source: Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia CFI COVID-19 Survey of Consumers

Figure 5

Our school district has implemented appropriate safety measures to minimize COVID-19 risks



Source: Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia CFI COVID-19 Survey of Consumers