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Title

Release #2022-04 Covid and the K-12 schools

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0669t7s7>

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Publication Date

2022-02-24



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Release #2022-04

Thursday, February 24, 2022

Voter Views about Covid and California's K-12 Schools.

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In its latest survey, the *Berkeley IGS Poll* examined a range of issues relating to how the k-12 schools are dealing with the coronavirus. Below are some of the poll's main findings.

- There is strong bipartisan agreement among the overall electorate that the coronavirus has had a negative impact on the educational quality of the public schools in their own local area. Nearly three in four voters statewide (72%) take this view, including large majorities across nearly all major segments of the voting population.
- By a greater than two-to-one margin voters believe schools should be given the flexibility to decide when to continue in-person instruction rather than adopting a policy of requiring that in-person instruction be canceled when Covid cases rise above a certain threshold.
- Parents of school-age children display broad support for allowing in-person instruction to proceed at their child's own school, with 79% in favor. Yet, a significant fraction of parents (37%) report that they are not confident that their child is safe from the virus while in school, with Latino and Black parents expressing less confidence than white and Asian parents.
- Similar two-to-one majorities of the state's voters approve of two policies aimed at containing the spread of the virus in the schools -- adding coronavirus to the list of required vaccinations for k-12 students, and requiring students, teachers, and staff to wear masks while in school this year. Yet, there are large partisan and ideological differences in views about both policies. Greater than eight in ten of the state's Democrats and liberal voters are supportive, while among Republicans and strong conservatives only about one in four approve.
- When parents are asked about the importance of having their own school-age child vaccinated against the virus, 64% feel this is essential or important, but 26% do not. Asian parents are more likely than other parents to feel that it is essential to have their child vaccinated.

"These results suggest that while concerns about the impact of Covid on education span all major voter subgroups, big partisan differences remain when voters are asked how schools should respond to the pandemic," said IGS co-director Eric Schickler.

Broad agreement that educational quality has declined because of the pandemic

Large majorities of Californians of all political stripes and across all regions and demographic subgroups agree that the overall quality of education in the local public schools has gotten worse since the outbreak of the pandemic.

Table 1
Perceived change in the overall quality of education in the public schools
in your own local district since the outbreak of the coronavirus
(among California registered voters)

	Gotten worse	No change	Gotten better	No opinion
Total registered voters	72	10	5	13
Parent of a school-age child				
No	72	8	4	16
Yes	73	15	9	3
Type of school of oldest child				
Traditional public school	70	18	9	3
Other type of school	79	9	7	5
Gender				
Male	73	10	4	13
Female	71	9	6	14
Race/ethnicity				
White	77	7	2	14
Latino	68	12	10	10
Asian/Pacific Islander	64	11	6	19
Black	61	14	9	16
Party registration				
Democrat	64	11	7	18
Republican	87	6	1	6
No Party Preference/other	72	10	5	13
Political ideology				
Strongly conservative	83	6	6	5
Somewhat conservative	82	7	5	6
Moderate	70	12	5	13
Somewhat liberal	67	9	5	19
Strongly liberal	66	9	3	22
Region				
Los Angeles County	69	11	6	14
San Diego County	72	10	4	14
Orange County	69	10	5	16
Inland Empire	75	9	6	10
Central Coast	74	7	5	14
Central Valley	77	9	5	9
San Francisco Bay Area	70	9	4	17
North Coast/Sierras	81	8	3	8

Mixed views of how well their own local public schools have handled the pandemic

There is no consensus among voters as to how the public schools in their own local area have handled issues relating to the coronavirus. Statewide, 37% say they generally approve of the actions taken by their own local school district in dealing with the virus, but 44% disapprove. Parents with children in the schools are similarly divided, although parents with kids in traditional public schools offer more positive assessments than those with kids in private, religious, or charter schools. Republicans and

strong conservatives are also more critical of the schools’ responses to Covid than Democrats and liberals.

Table 2
Opinions of the way the public schools in your own local district
have handled issues relating to the coronavirus
(among California registered voters)

	Approve %	Disapprove %	No opinion %
Total registered voters	37	44	19
Parent of a school-age child			
No	34	41	25
Yes	<u>46</u>	<u>51</u>	3
<u>Type of school of oldest child</u>			
Traditional public school	51	47	2
Other type of school	31	62	7
Gender			
Male	35	45	20
Female	39	42	19
Race/ethnicity			
White	34	45	21
Latino	40	45	15
Asian/Pacific Islander	38	33	29
Black	46	34	20
Party registration			
Democrat	47	29	24
Republican	19	69	12
No Party Preference/other	35	45	20
Political ideology			
Strongly conservative	21	72	7
Somewhat conservative	29	59	12
Moderate	38	42	20
Somewhat liberal	47	27	26
Strongly liberal	43	29	28
Region			
Los Angeles County	40	40	20
San Diego County	39	41	20
Orange County	35	45	20
Inland Empire	33	51	16
Central Coast	40	39	21
Central Valley	33	53	14
San Francisco Bay Area	38	35	27
North Coast/Sierras	34	52	14

Parents’ views about the virus in relation to their own school-age children

The parents of school-age children were asked to offer their opinions about the virus as it relates to their oldest child. The results reveal broad support for a return to in-person instruction but they also show worries among parents about the safety of their child from the virus while in school.

- Nearly eight in ten (79%) parents favor in-person instruction at the school that their oldest child is attending, while just 13% are opposed.
- However, a substantial proportion of parents (37%) are not confident that their child is safe from the virus while in school. This compares to 26% who are very confident and 31% who are somewhat confident.
- When parents are asked how important it is for their oldest school-age child to be vaccinated against the coronavirus, about half (48%) feel this is essential, and another 16% say it is important. On the other hand, about a quarter of the state’s parents of school-age children (26%) feel having their child vaccinated against the virus is not too or not at all important.

Opinions on these matters differ somewhat in relation to the race and ethnicity of the parent. For example . . .

- While large majorities of parents of all racial and ethnic backgrounds favor allowing in-person instruction at their child’s school right now, somewhat larger proportions of Latino and Black parents than white or Asian parents are opposed.
- Latino and Black parents also express less confidence than white and Asian parents that their child is safe from the virus while in school. Among Latino parents half (50%) say they are not confident that their child is safe from the virus while in school, while among Black parents 43% are not confident. By contrast, just 24% of white parents say they do not have confidence that their child is safe from the virus while in school. Among Asian parents, 38% are not confident.
- Asian parents are more likely than other parents to feel it is essential for their school-age child to be vaccinated against the coronavirus, with 71% reporting this. The proportions that say this decline to 51% among Latino parents, 43% among Black parents, and 42% among white parents. In addition, white parents are more likely than other parents to believe it is “not at all important” for their child to get vaccinated against the virus, with nearly one in three (31%) feeling this way.

Table 3
Views of parents about allowing in-person school instruction, their child's safety from the coronavirus while in school, and the importance of vaccinating their child
(among California registered voters who are parents of school-age children)

	Total parents %	White non-Hispani c parents %	Latino parents %	Asian parents %	Black parents %
<u>Allowing in-person instruction at your child's school at this time</u>					
<u>Favor</u>	79	85	71	88	69
Favor strongly	61	73	52	59	35
Favor somewhat	18	12	19	29	34
<u>Oppose</u>	13	8	18	9	24
Oppose somewhat	7	5	10	7	14
Oppose strongly	6	3	8	2	10
No opinion/other	8	7	11	3	7
<u>Confidence that your child is safe from the virus while in school</u>					
<u>Confident</u>	57	68	46	59	54
Very confident	26	38	19	13	15
Somewhat confident	31	30	27	46	39
<u>Not confident</u>	37	24	50	38	43
Not too confident	21	15	26	28	23
Not at all confident	16	9	24	10	20
No opinion/other	6	8	4	3	3
<u>Importance of having your child vaccinated against the coronavirus</u>					
Essential	48	42	51	71	43
Important	16	14	16	15	32
Not too important	5	5	5	3	4
Not at all important	21	31	17	7	7
No opinion	10	8	11	4	14

Note: All questions were asked in relation to the parent's oldest school-age child.

Majority support for two policies aimed at reducing the spread of coronavirus in the schools, but opinions are highly partisan and ideological

By two-to-one margins voters support two policies aimed at reducing the threat of the coronavirus in the k-12 schools -- first, they support adding vaccinations against the coronavirus to the list of required vaccinations for students attending the state's k-12 schools once vaccines for children have been fully approved as safe and effective by the U.S. Food and Drug administration and second, requiring that students, teachers, and staff in the k-12 schools wear masks while in school this year.

However, opinions on both policies are highly partisan and tied to the political ideology of voters. Democrats and liberals broadly endorse both measures, with greater than eight in ten approving. This compares to only about one in four of the state's Republicans and strong conservatives backing each measure.

While majorities of the parents of school-age children endorse both requirements, opinions are more divided among parents with kids in private, religious, or charter schools than among those attending traditional public schools, who largely support each policy.

	Adding COVID to the list of required vaccinations for students in the k-12 schools		Requiring k-12 students, teachers, and staff to wear masks while in school this year	
	Approve %	Disapprove %	Approve %	Disapprove %
Total registered voters	64	32	65	32
Parent of a school-age child				
No	66	29	66	30
Yes	<u>55</u>	<u>42</u>	<u>61</u>	<u>37</u>
<u>Type of school of oldest child</u>				
Traditional public school	58	40	65	33
Other type of school	47	49	50	48
Gender				
Male	61	34	59	37
Female	66	30	70	26
Race/ethnicity				
White	61	36	56	41
Latino	64	31	74	22
Asian/Pacific Islander	74	19	76	17
Black	69	20	82	12
Party registration				
Democrat	85	11	87	9
Republican	29	69	26	71
No Party Preference/other	59	35	61	34
Political ideology				
Strongly conservative	24	73	23	75
Somewhat conservative	38	58	37	60
Moderate	63	31	68	27
Somewhat liberal	87	9	85	11
Strongly liberal	92	5	92	6
Region				
Los Angeles County	68	26	71	24
San Diego County	63	33	62	34
Orange County	58	39	57	39
Inland Empire	55	42	59	36
Central Coast	66	30	67	30
Central Valley	53	44	54	42
San Francisco Bay Area	76	19	74	22
North Coast/Sierras	47	50	41	59

* Differences between 100% and the sum of percentages for each item equal proportion with no opinion.

Voter opinions about other Covid-related policies in the state's k-12 schools include these:

- By a 62% to 28% margin, voters believe schools should be given the flexibility to decide when to continue in-person instruction, rather than being required to cancel in-person instruction when Covid cases rise above a certain threshold.
- With reports that an increasing number of young people are experiencing increased levels of stress and emotional problems, 66% of voters favor the k-12 schools hiring more counselors and providing better training to teachers to deal with the problem, while 26% feel these types of problems should be dealt with mainly by students' parents and other non-school health professionals.

About the Survey

The findings in this report are based on a *Berkeley IGS Poll* completed by the Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) at the University of California, Berkeley. The poll was administered online in English and Spanish from February 3-10, 2022, among 8,937 California registered voters. Funding for the poll was provided in part by the *Los Angeles Times*.

The *Berkeley IGS Poll* is administered by distributing email invitations to stratified random samples of the state's registered voters. The latest poll also included an oversampling of registered voters in the City of Los Angeles, administered using the same methods, to enable the poll to examine specific issues of interest to voters in that City and to the *Times*. After the completion of data collection, the results were weighted to realign the Los Angeles City sample to its actual share of the statewide voter population.

Each email invited voters to participate in a non-partisan survey conducted by the University and provided a link to the IGS website where the survey was housed. Reminder emails were distributed to non-responding voters and an opt-out link was provided for voters not wishing to receive further email invitations.

Samples of registered voters with email addresses were provided to IGS by Political Data, Inc., a leading supplier of registered voter lists in California, and were derived from information contained on the voter registration rolls. Prior to the distribution of emails, the overall sample was stratified by age and gender to obtain a proper balance of survey respondents across major segments of the registered voter population.

To protect the anonymity of respondents, email addresses and all other personally identifiable information derived from the voter listing were purged from the data file and replaced with a unique and anonymous identification number during data processing. In addition, post-stratification weights were applied to align the sample of registered voters responding to the survey to the population characteristics of the state's registered voters.

The sampling error associated with the survey results is difficult to calculate precisely because of sample stratification and the post-stratification weighting. Nevertheless, it is likely that findings based on the overall sample of registered voters are subject to a sampling error of approximately +/-2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Detailed tabulations reporting the results to each question can be found at the *Berkeley IGS Poll* website at <https://www.igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.

Question wording

California currently requires students who attend k-12 schools to be vaccinated against a number of diseases, such as measles, mumps, and rubella. The state now plans to add vaccination against the coronavirus to the list once vaccines for children have been fully approved as safe and effective by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Do you approve or disapprove of the plan to require students attending the state’s k-12 schools to be vaccinated against the coronavirus?

The state is also requiring that students, teachers, and staff in k-12 public schools wear masks while in school this year. Do you approve or disapprove of this requirement?

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus, what impact do you feel it has had on the overall quality of education of the public schools in your own local school district?

Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way the public schools in your own local school district have handled issues relating to the coronavirus?

IF PARENT/LEGAL GUARDIAN OF SCHOOL-AGE CHILD:

How confident are you that your oldest school-age child is safe from the virus while in school?
How important is it to you that your oldest child is vaccinated against the coronavirus?
Do you favor or oppose your oldest child’s school offering in-person instruction to its students at this time?

Which of the following two statements about the coronavirus pandemic and the schools do you agree with more?

- (1) Schools should be required to cancel in-person instruction and begin remote teaching online when Covid cases rise above a certain level.
- (2) Schools should have the flexibility to decide when to continue with in-person instruction and when to begin remote teaching online.

Since the pandemic began, many young people have reported experiencing increased levels of stress and/or emotional problems, such as anxiety, depression, or difficulty concentrating. In your opinion, what role should the k-12 schools play in trying to deal with this situation?

- (1) Schools should greatly expand their efforts to deal with this problem by hiring more counselors and providing better training to teachers and staff in how to deal with these types of problems.
- (2) These types of problems should be dealt with mainly by students’ parents and other non-school health professionals.

About the Institute of Governmental Studies

The Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) is an interdisciplinary organized research unit that pursues a vigorous program of research, education, publication, and public service. A component of the University of California system’s flagship Berkeley campus, IGS is the oldest organized research unit in the UC system and the oldest public policy research center in the state. IGS’s co-directors are Professor Eric Schickler and Associate Professor Cristina Mora.

IGS conducts periodic surveys of public opinion in California on matters of politics and public policy through its *Berkeley IGS Poll*. The poll, which is disseminated widely, seeks to provide a broad measure of contemporary public opinion, and to generate data for subsequent scholarly analysis. The director of the *Berkeley IGS Poll* is Mark DiCamillo. For a copy of the detailed tabulations to this report or a listing of past reports issued by the poll, please visit <https://www.igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.