

Common Sense Media | SurveyMonkey Poll: Teens Don't Like Online Learning but Still Prefer to Play It Safe

Key Findings

- 1. Teens definitively think online learning is worse than in-person learning.** A majority of teens (59%) say that online learning is worse than in-person schooling, with 19% characterizing it as "much worse." However, Black teens are less likely than teens of other races/ethnicities to think online learning is worse. Only 45% of Black teens consider online learning to be worse than in-person schooling, compared to 60% of White teens, 64% of Hispanic teens, and 62% of Asian teens or teens of other races/ethnicities.
- 2. Learning drives the desire for in-person schooling.** Among those who want to return to school in person, almost half (46%) say it's because they learn better in person, with fewer teens (30%) saying it's because they miss the social interaction they have with friends and other students.
- 3. But only a small percentage of teens think school should be fully in person.** If the choice were up to them, only 19% of teenagers say they think their school should take place fully in person this fall, while 42% would prefer to be fully remote and 37% would choose a hybrid model. Fully two-thirds (66%) of those who want their instruction to take place fully remotely say it's because they think the coronavirus is too big of a threat.
- 4. A majority of teens are worried about falling behind because of the pandemic.** More than six in 10 teens (61%) say they are worried about falling behind academically because of the pandemic, with Hispanic and Asian teens or teens of other races/ethnicities particularly likely to say they are worried about falling behind (79% and 67%, respectively) compared to White teens (55%).
- 5. Access to teachers and unreliable internet are big challenges for many students.** Almost a third of teens (32%) cite lack of access to teachers as a major academic challenge. More than a quarter (27%) say unreliable internet will be a major challenge in their schooling.
- 6. Most teens have little confidence that their schools will be safe.** About 70% of teens say that they trust their school only "a little" or "not at all" to take enough precautions to keep them safe during the pandemic. Only three in 10 teens (30%) say they trust their school "a

lot." Black and Hispanic teens are more distrustful of their schools' capabilities to keep them safe compared to White teens (74% each vs. 67%).

- 7. Teens of color are more concerned about getting sick from in-person schooling.** Teens of color are more likely to be worried that they or someone they know will get sick as a result of going to school in person: 62% of White teens vs. 78% of teens of color, a difference of 16 percentage points. Overall, 69% of teens are worried that they or someone they know would get sick because of in-person schooling.

Summary

Teens say online learning is worse than in-person learning.

Despite the fact that middle school and high school students have "grown up online," their negative impressions of online learning indicate a strong preference for academics to take place face-to-face rather than virtually.

A majority of teens (59%) say that online learning is worse than in-person schooling, with 19% characterizing it as "much worse." The rest of teens are nearly evenly split between those who say online learning is better than in-person schooling (19%) and those who say they are about the same (21%).

Girls and boys have nearly identical views on the effectiveness of online learning, and the findings are mostly consistent by race/ethnicity as well. One exception is Black teenagers, only 45% of whom consider online learning to be worse than in-person schooling, and 30% of whom consider it to be better.

Teens select "learning remotely" as the biggest academic challenge they expect to face this year (42%), followed by the "uncertainty of the pandemic" (37%), "emotional upheaval" (32%), "being able to access their teachers" (32%), "unreliable internet" (27%), "access to books and school supplies" (17%), and "access to devices" (11%).

More than six in 10 teens (61%) say they are worried about falling behind academically because of the pandemic, with Hispanic and Asian teens or teens of other races/ethnicities particularly likely to say they are worried about falling behind (79% and 67%, respectively). Teens of color are more likely to say they are "very worried" (35%) than White teens (18%). More specifically, 26% of Black teens, 42% of Hispanic teens, and 33% of Asian teens or teens of other races/ethnicities report being "very worried."

How worried are you that you will fall behind academically because of the pandemic?					
	Total (N = 890)	White (n = 368)	Black (n = 231)	Hispanic (n = 150)	Asian/Other (n = 141)
NET worried	61%	55%	51%	79%	67%
Very worried	26%	18%	26%	42%	33%
Somewhat worried	35%	37%	25%	36%	34%
NET not worried	38%	45%	47%	17%	33%
Not so worried	24%	29%	27%	10%	23%
Not worried at all	14%	16%	20%	7%	10%

Fewer than one in 10 teenagers say they are attending school in person this fall, and almost one in five still don't know whether their school is planning to reopen fully in person, fully remotely, or by taking a hybrid approach (as of August 27). About as many teens say their school is moving to fully remote instruction (35%) this fall as say their school is adopting a hybrid model, mixing remote and in-person instruction (40%).

If the choice were up to them, only 19% of teenagers say they think their school should take place fully in person this fall, while 42% would prefer to be fully remote and 37% would choose a hybrid model. Three in 10 teens say they trust their school "a lot" to take enough precautions to keep them safe during the pandemic; fifty-two percent trust their school "a little," and 17% trust their school "not at all."

Fully two-thirds (66%) of those who want their instruction to take place fully remotely say it's because they think the coronavirus is too big of a threat. Almost seven in 10 teens (69%) are worried ("very worried" or "somewhat worried") that they or someone they know would get sick because of in-person schooling. This concern is higher for teens of color (78%) than White teens (62%). More specifically, 71% of Black teens, 82% of Hispanic teens, and 79% of Asian teens or teens of other races/ethnicities are worried about this.

Only 15% say they prefer remote instruction because they learn better remotely, only 11% say they prefer it because they don't like the social environment at school, and only 6% say they prefer it because they have more technology resources at home than they do at school.

Among those who want to return to school in person, almost half (46%) say it is because they learn better in person, with fewer teens (30%) saying it is because they miss the social interaction they have with friends and other students. Only 12% of those who prefer to return to school in person

say their main reason for feeling this way is because they don't think the coronavirus is much of a threat. Very few (7%) say they prefer to return to in-person instruction because their school has more technology resources than they do at home, and even fewer (2%) say it's because they participate in a free breakfast or lunch program at school.

Teens worry about missing opportunities school offers.

Half or more of teens say they are "very" or "somewhat" worried that they will lose connections with friends (56%), miss out on extracurricular, non-sports activities (53%), and lose opportunities for scholarships (52%). Scholarships are even more of a concern for teens of color (57%) compared to White teens (48%), with 49% of Black teens, 60% of Hispanic teens, and 60% of Asian teens or teens of other races/ethnicities reporting this worry. Additionally, teens are worried that the pandemic will hurt their future job or college aspirations (50%). This is a heightened concern for teens of color, who are more likely to report being "very worried" (26%) compared to White teens (14%). More specifically, 34% of Hispanic, 20% of Black, and 19% of Asian teens or teens of other races/ethnicities report being "very worried." Fewer (38%) are worried about missing out on after-school sports.

How worried are you ...						
		Total (N = 890)	White (n = 368)	Black (n = 231)	Hispanic (n = 150)	Asian/ Other (n = 141)
Losing connections with friends	Worried	56%	57%	52%	58%	52%
	Not Worried	35%	35%	35%	32%	37%
Missing out on extracurricular activities (non-sports activities)	Worried	53%	56%	42%	51%	57%
	Not Worried	37%	36%	41%	39%	34%
Losing opportunities for scholarships	Worried	52%	48%	49%	60%	60%
	Not Worried	35%	39%	35%	27%	31%
The pandemic will hurt my future job or college aspirations	Worried	50%	47%	48%	58%	57%
	Not Worried	41%	46%	41%	32%	36%
Missing out on after-school sports	Worried	38%	38%	36%	38%	38%
	Not Worried	42%	41%	46%	41%	46%

About half of teens (48%) continue to say they feel less connected to their friends than usual—exactly the same percentage as in March, when social-distancing practices were first mandated.

Similarly, 40% of teens say they feel more lonely than usual, 41% feel about as lonely as usual, and 18% feel less lonely than usual, nearly identical to the responses in March.

One change since March: Slightly fewer teens now say they feel "more connected than usual" to their family, down to 33% from 40% in March.

How strong are teens' social connections during the COVID-19 pandemic?			
		March 2020 (N = 849)	August 2020 (N = 890)
How connected would you say you feel to your friends right now?	More connected than usual	16%	16%
	About as connected as usual	36%	34%
	Less connected than usual	48%	48%
How connected would you say you feel to your family right now?	More connected than usual	40%	33%
	About as connected as usual	52%	51%
	Less connected than usual	8%	14%
How lonely would you say you feel right now?	More lonely than usual	42%	40%
	About as lonely as usual	43%	41%
	Less lonely than usual	15%	18%

Many teens feel less academically prepared, and some are seeking extra help.

A plurality (43%) of teens say they feel less academically prepared for this school year, while 38% feel about as prepared as last year and 17% feel more prepared than last year.

More than half of teens say they would turn to a teacher (53%) or their friends/classmates (53%) if they have challenges with learning this year. Nearly as many (46%) say they would get support from their family as say they would use websites or apps for support (45%). Just 10% say they would use community services or after-school programs for extra academic help, and very few (7%) say they most likely would not seek extra support for learning challenges.

If they have challenges with emotional or social problems, however, equal numbers of teens say they would seek support from their friends and classmates (47%) as would seek help from their family (47%). Significantly fewer would turn to a teacher (20%), therapist/counselor (20%), or websites or apps (18%). In these circumstances, 16% say they most likely would not seek extra support, and just 6% would turn to community services or after-school programs.

Some 31% of teenagers say they are signing up for extra online classes this year, while 10% are hiring a tutor and 13% are joining a school "pod" with other families. Black teens are more likely to say they will join a "pod" (22%) than teens of other races/ethnicities (10% of White, 12% of Hispanic, and 16% of Asian teens or teens of other races/ethnicities).

The vast majority (88%) say they have the technology they need to be able to do their schoolwork remotely, though Black teens and Hispanic teens are slightly less likely to say they have everything they need (85% and 81%, respectively) compared to White teens (93%).

Methodology

This SurveyMonkey poll was conducted August 20 to 27, 2020, among 890 teens age 13 to 17 in the United States. Respondents for this survey were selected from more than 2 million people who take surveys on the SurveyMonkey platform each day. The modeled error estimate for the full sample is plus or minus 5.5 percentage points. Data has been weighted for age and sex using the Census Bureau's American Community Survey to reflect the demographic composition of the United States age 13 to 17.

Toplines

Is your school currently operating or planning to begin the school year operating:

Total: N = 890

Fully remote	35%
"Hybrid" (partly remote and partly in person)	40%
Fully in person	7%
I don't know yet.	18%
No answer	0%

Do you think your school should be:

Total: N = 890

Fully remote	42%
"Hybrid" (partly remote and partly in person)	37%
Fully in person	19%
No answer	2%

What is the main reason you want your school to be fully remote?

Total: n = 379
(Base = Teens who want school to be fully remote)

I don't like the social environment at school.	11%
I learn better remotely.	15%
I have more technology resources at home than I do at school.	6%
I think the coronavirus is too big of a threat.	66%
No answer	3%

What is the main reason you want your school to be fully in person?

Total: n = 144
(Base = Teens who want school to be fully in person)

I miss social interaction with friends and other students.	30%
I learn better in person.	46%
My school has more technology resources than I do at home.	7%
I participate in a free breakfast or lunch program at school.	2%
I don't think the coronavirus is much of a threat.	12%
No answer	3%

How much do you trust your school to take enough precautions to keep you safe during the pandemic?

Total: N = 890

A lot	30%
A little	52%
Not at all	17%
No answer	0%

How worried are you that you or someone you know will get sick as a result of going to school in person?

Total: N = 890

NET worried	69%
Very worried	32%
Somewhat worried	37%
NET not worried	30%
Not so worried	19%
Not worried at all	11%
No answer	1%

Do you have the technology you need (computer, reliable internet access, etc.) to be able to do your schoolwork remotely?

	Total: N = 890
Yes	88%
No	11%
No answer	0%

Compared to last year, how academically prepared do you feel for this school year?

	Total: N = 890
More prepared than last year	17%
About as prepared as last year	38%
Less prepared than last year	43%
No answer	1%

How effective do you think online learning is compared to in-person schooling?

	Total: N = 890
Online learning is much worse	19%
Online learning is worse	40%
They're about the same	21%
Online learning is better	10%
Online learning is much better	9%
No answer	0%

How worried are you that you will fall behind academically because of the pandemic?

	Total: N = 890
NET worried	61%
Very worried	26%
Somewhat worried	35%
NET not worried	38%
Not so worried	24%
Not worried at all	14%
No answer	1%

Are you doing any of the following this year? (Select all that apply.)

	Total: N = 890
Hiring a tutor	10%
Joining a school "pod" with other families	13%
Signing up for extra online classes	31%
No answer	49%

What will be the biggest challenges for you academically? (Select all that apply.)

	Total: N = 890
Learning remotely	42%
Uncertainty of pandemic	37%
Emotional upheaval	32%
Being able to access my teacher(s)	32%
Unreliable internet	27%
Access to books and school supplies	17%
I don't feel this year will be any different academically compared to past years.	12%
Access to devices	11%
No answer	3%

If you have challenges with learning this year, where would you look to get support?

	Total: N = 890
Teacher	53%
Friends/classmates	53%
Family	46%
Websites/apps/YouTube	45%
Community services or after-school programs	10%
Most likely will not seek extra support	7%
No answer	3%

If you have needs for social or emotional support this year, where would you look to get support?

	Total: N = 890
Teacher	53%
Friends/classmates	53%
Family	46%
Websites/apps/YouTube	45%
Community services or after-school programs	10%
Therapist/counselor	7%
Most likely will not seek extra support	3%
No answer	2%

How would you best describe your feelings about the future?

Total: N = 890

Very negative	5%
Negative	13%
Neither negative nor positive	47%
Positive	24%
Very positive	10%
No answer	1%

**How worried are you about each of the following:
Losing connections with friends**

Total: N = 890

NET worried	56%
Very worried	28%
Somewhat worried	27%
NET not worried	35%
Not so worried	19%
Not worried at all	15%
Not applicable	8%
No answer	2%

**How worried are you about each of the following:
Losing opportunities for scholarships**

Total: N = 890

NET worried	52%
Very worried	24%
Somewhat worried	28%
NET not worried	35%
Not so worried	21%
Not worried at all	14%
Not applicable	11%
No answer	2%

**How worried are you about each of the following:
Missing out on after-school sports**

Total: N = 890

NET worried	38%
Very worried	20%
Somewhat worried	17%
NET not worried	42%
Not so worried	20%
Not worried at all	22%
Not applicable	18%
No answer	2%

**How worried are you about each of the following:
Missing out on extracurricular activities (non-sports activities)**

Total: N = 890

NET worried	53%
Very worried	21%
Somewhat worried	32%
NET not worried	37%
Not so worried	22%
Not worried at all	16%
Not applicable	8%
No answer	2%

**How worried are you about each of the following:
The pandemic will hurt my future job or college aspirations**

Total: N = 890

NET worried	50%
Very worried	19%
Somewhat worried	31%
NET not worried	41%
Not so worried	28%
Not worried at all	13%
Not applicable	7%
No answer	2%

How connected would you say you feel to your friends right now?

Total: N = 890

More connected than usual	16%
About as connected as usual	34%
Less connected than usual	48%
No answer	1%

How connected would you say you feel to your family right now?

Total: N = 890

More connected than usual	33%
About as connected as usual	51%
Less connected than usual	14%
No answer	1%

How lonely would you say you feel right now?

Total: N = 890

More lonely than usual	40%
About as lonely as usual	41%
Less lonely than usual	14%
No answer	1%

Which of the following best characterizes the type of school you attend?

Total: N = 890

Public school	71%
Private school	9%
Charter or magnet school	8%
Homeschool	6%
Other (please specify)	4%
No answer	1%