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Key Findings

- Parents of in-person students are satisfied with re-entry into the schools and feel that schools have been adhering to the District's health and safety protocols.
- Most parents believe that teachers are adequately able to split their time between in-person and virtual students, though virtual parents agree more often.
- Almost 60% of virtual parents believe that their child can learn effectively online, while just over 25% of in-person parents agreed.
- Compared to virtual parents, a higher percentage of in-person parents are more concerned this year than previously about their child's social and emotional well-being.
- Most parents (71%) feel their child is prepared for next school year.
- A majority of parents feel that the communications they received from their school about COVID-19 protocols were clear, and 50% of in-person parents "strongly agree."
- Virtual parents are overwhelmingly concerned with their child being exposed to the coronavirus at school, while in-person parents share the concern but to a lower extent.
- Virtual parents weighed concerns about the District's health and safety protocols and having a high-risk student or family member most heavily when making their decision to remain virtual. In-person parents on the other hand considered their child's need for social interaction with peers and learning better in-person most when making their decision to return to school buildings.

Background

Shelby County Schools gradually reopened for in-person learning at the beginning of March. Pre-K through 5th grade students returned first, and a week later middle and high school students were welcomed back to school buildings. Parents previously selected if they wanted their child to finish out the school year virtually or in-person. Most students selected to remain virtual (63.6%[1]), while the rest of the students (36.4%) returned to the school buildings. All teachers and staff returned to their school buildings for in-person instruction.

Shelby County Schools released an updated S.A.F.E. Re-entry Plan and held numerous parent and teacher community sessions prior to returning to the buildings. The health and safety protocols outlined required all students, teachers, and staff to wear masks while indoors, temperature checks be completed prior to entering the building, and additional time allocated in the school day for increased personal hygiene. In addition, schools increased cleaning protocols for common spaces and bathrooms. Schools staggered lunch schedules and use classrooms and outdoor spaces for eating to increase physical distance while masks would be off.

Teachers taught a hybrid class with a portion of their students on-line and a portion of them in the classroom. All students learned the same curriculum through the Teams platform

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[1] Enrollment is for SCS managed schools. Pulled on 6/1/21.

regardless of the learning setting. In-person students had recess and classroom breaks, while those learning virtually took corresponding breaks at home.

Parent Survey Overview

Parents were surveyed in the middle of May to determine how re-entry and virtual learning were progressing for their students. Parents were able to complete the survey up to four times for additional children. Both a Spanish and English version of the survey were administered. A total of 4,384 individual responses were collected for 5,407 students (English[2] n = 4,183; Spanish n = 201). Most responses were for virtual learners, see Figure 2.

Parents answered a series of questions about their experience with in-person learning (if applicable), virtual learning, re-entry protocols, communication, technology, social and emotional well-being, COVID-19, and academic preparedness along with reasons for selecting their child's learning format. Some demographic information was also collected on students. Overall, parents of in-person students completed 20 questions and virtual parents completed 14 items. Some parents skipped some items, so the sample size for each question will vary[3].

Demographic Information

The responses were split relatively evenly by grade band with high school representing the largest response group (26.5%). Responses by grade band are shown in Figure 1 and a full breakdown by grade level can be found in Appendix A. Additionally, 96.2% were from students attending SCS managed schools and 3.0% from charters. Students with an IEP or 504-plan represented 17.9% of survey responses, 14.5% were English learners, and 18.1% were gifted[4] (see Appendix A). The majority of responses were from virtual learners (73.1%), Figure 2.
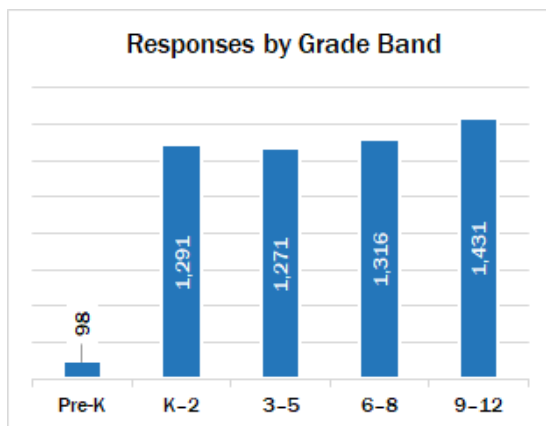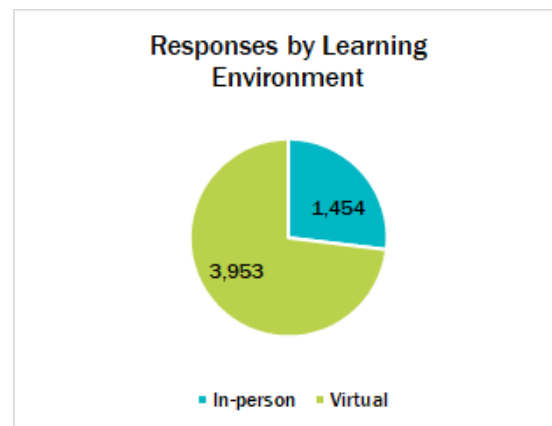

Figure 1. Responses by Grade Band

Figure 2. Survey by Learning Environment

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[2] Unique responses.
[3] Sample sizes for each question can be found in Appendix A.
[4] All unique student groups were overrepresented in the responses compared to the percentage of students in each group in the SCS population.

Re-entry Feedback

Parents of in-person students were asked a series of questions about their experience with re-entry and in-person learning so far. As shown in Figure 3, the responses to the survey indicated that the majority of in-person parents (84.0%) were satisfied with their students' experience in returning to schools.

Satisfaction With Return to In-Person Learning

Strongly agree	51.4%
Agree	33.6%
Neither agree nor disagree	6.9%
Disagree	4.8%
Strongly disagree	2.6%
Not sure	0.7%

Legend: Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree, Not sure
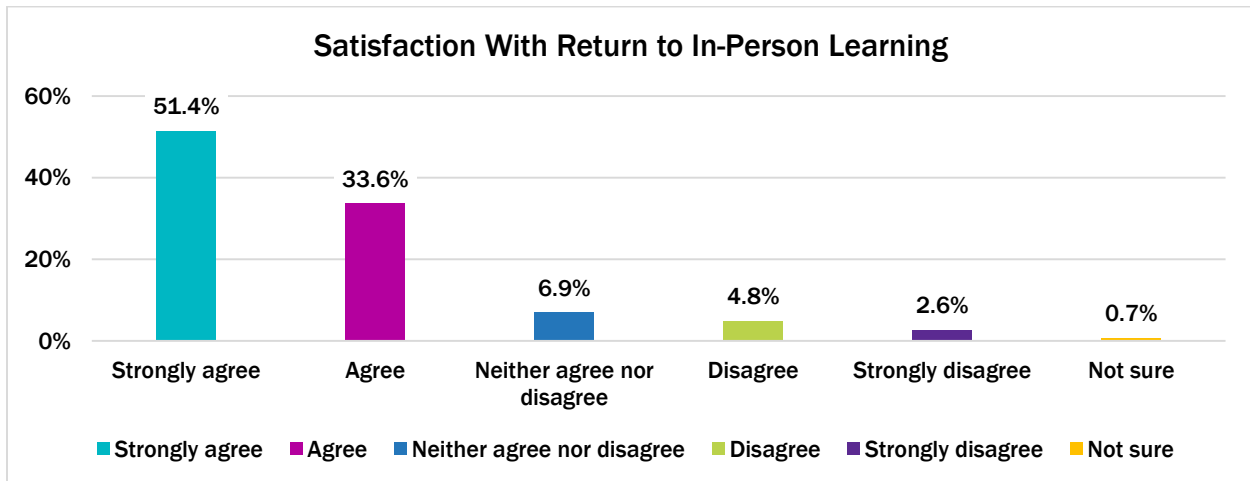
Figure 3. Satisfaction with Return to In-person Learning

The in-person parents overwhelmingly believe that <u>classrooms</u> are adhering to health and safety protocols, see Figure 4. Almost all of the parents indicated that they "strongly agree" or "agree" with the statement (87.3%). Only 23 parents felt that classrooms were not adhering to the outlined protocols (1.8%).

Adherence to Health and Safety Protocols

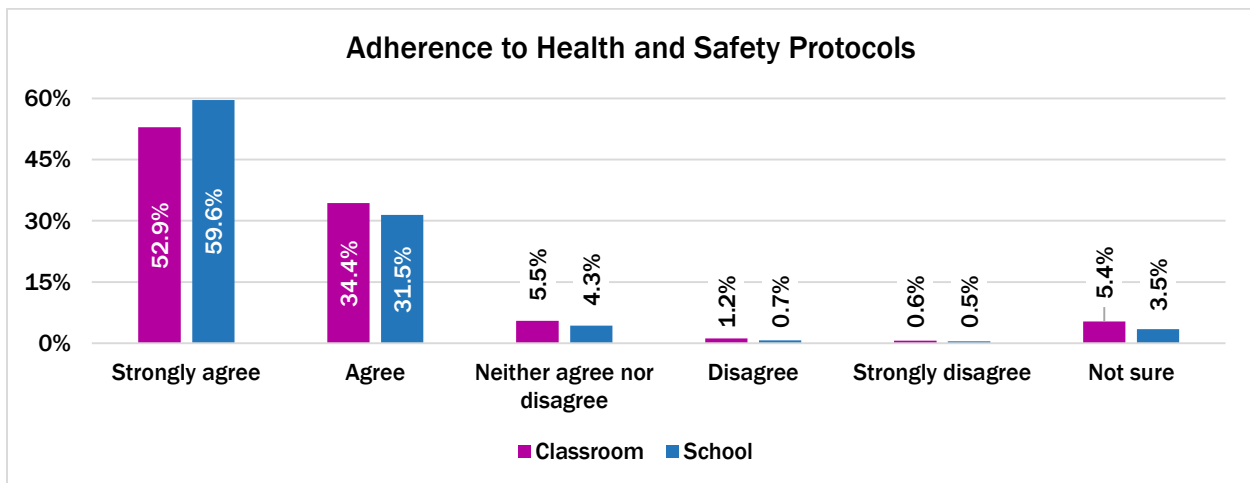|	Classroom	School
Strongly agree	52.9%	59.6%
Agree	34.4%	31.5%
Neither agree nor disagree	5.5%	4.3%
Disagree	1.2%	0.7%
Strongly disagree	0.6%	0.5%
Not sure	5.4%	3.5%

Figure 4. School and Classroom Adherence to Health and Safety Protocols

The responses were largely positive regarding <u>school</u> adherence to the health and safety protocols as well. Figure 4 demonstrates that 90.1% agree or strongly agree that their students' school was adhering to established protocols (*n* = 1,293). There was only a slight difference between the school and classroom response. Though parents mostly agreed that both the school and classroom were adhering to protocols, a larger number of parents

thought that *schools* were doing the best job according to the "agree" and "neutral" responses.

The survey contained several items gauging parents' perceptions of health and safety protocols in their students' schools and classrooms. When asked if parents believed that schools were requiring masks, only 1.9% of respondents disagreed with the statement while 93.8% of respondents agreed. Figure 5 shows a full breakdown of responses.
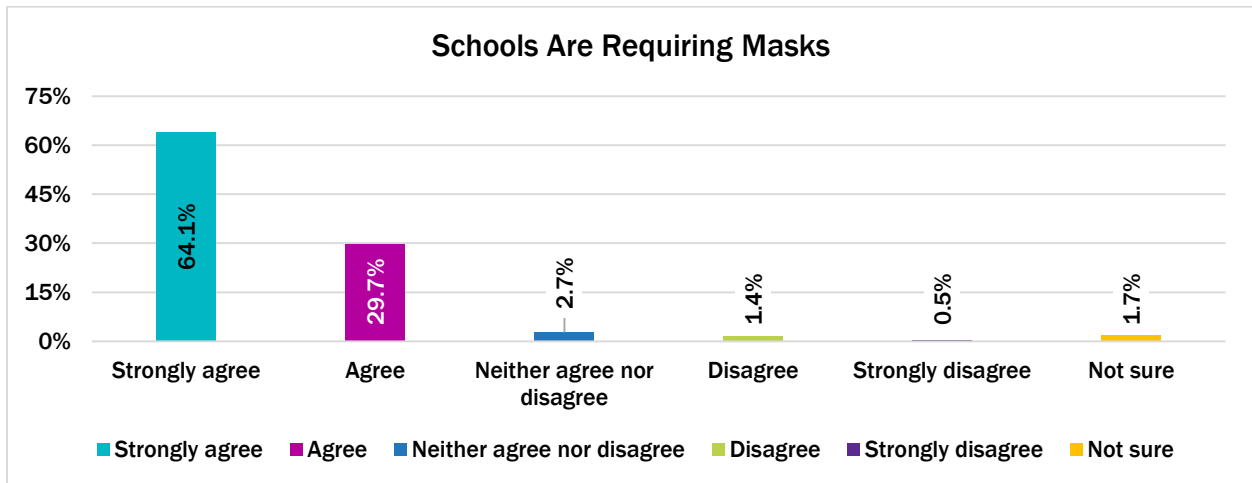

Figure 5. Level of Agreement that Schools are Requirement Masks

Virtual Feedback

All parents regardless of learning format responded to a series of questions about their experience with virtual learning. Since teachers are teaching both in-person and remote students simultaneously, all parents were asked if they felt teachers were adequately able to split their time between the two groups of students. The responses were similar for both groups, see Figure 6. Overall, 60.6% of parents agreed that teachers could effectively split their time. It is interesting to note though, virtual parents agreed more often (62.4%) compared to in-person parents (55.5%).
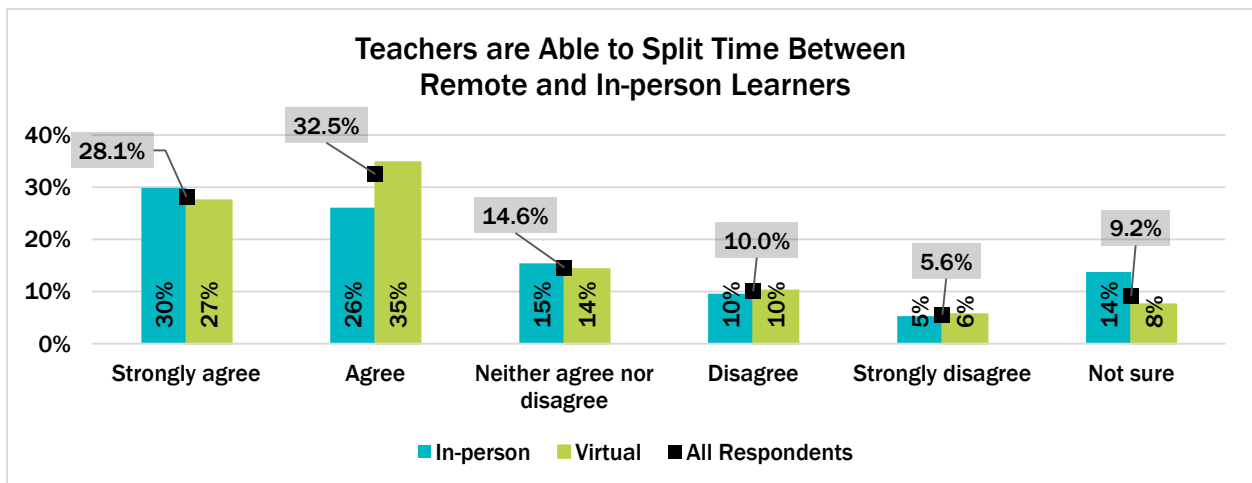

Figure 6. Teachers can Effectively Split Time between In-person and Virtual Learners

Parents reported the frequency of technical problems their child experienced. In-person parents answered items about the frequency of problems at school (n = 1,248) and reflected on when they learned virtually. In-person students reported issues least when at the school building while this group had the most frequent issues when at home. Seventeen percent (16.5%) of virtual parents cited "almost daily" or more frequent issues while in-person parents reported the same frequency 29.4% while at home, yet only 7.9% while at the school buildings. Figure 7 depicts the full results of technical issues by learning environment.
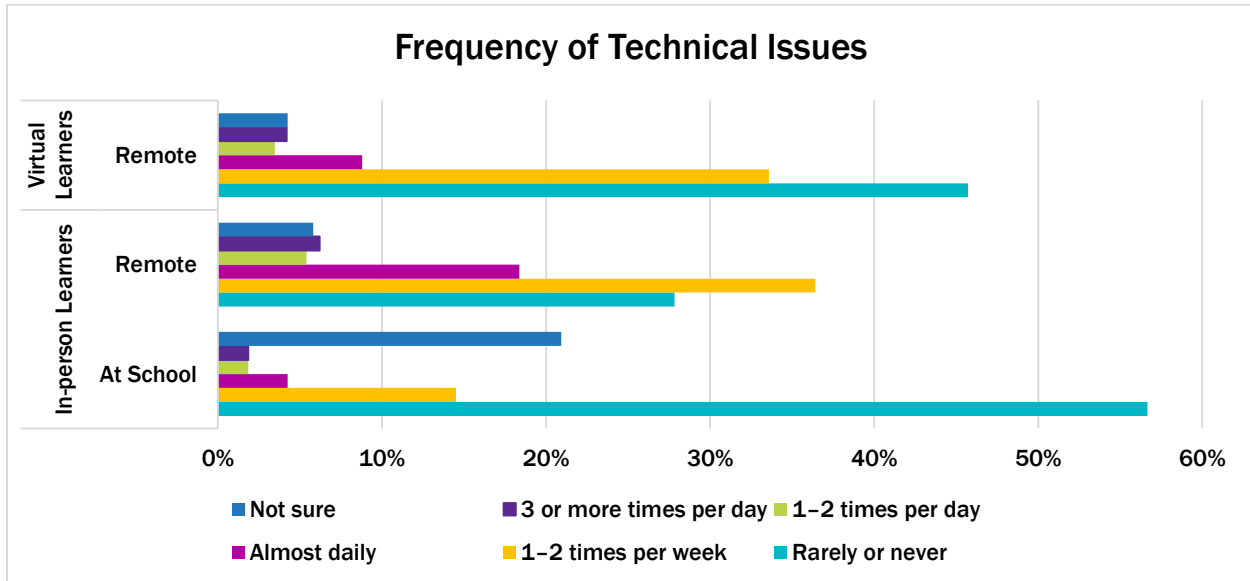

Figure 7. Frequency of Technical Issues by Learning Environment

Parents also rated their confidence in their child's ability to learn effectively online. Overall, in-person parents were skeptical of their children's ability to learn in a remote environment. However, parents whose children were still learning online reported high levels of confidence. Almost sixty percent of virtual parents (59.1%) were "very" or "extremely" confident while only 26.8% of in-person parents held the same conviction. See Figure 8 for a full breakdown.
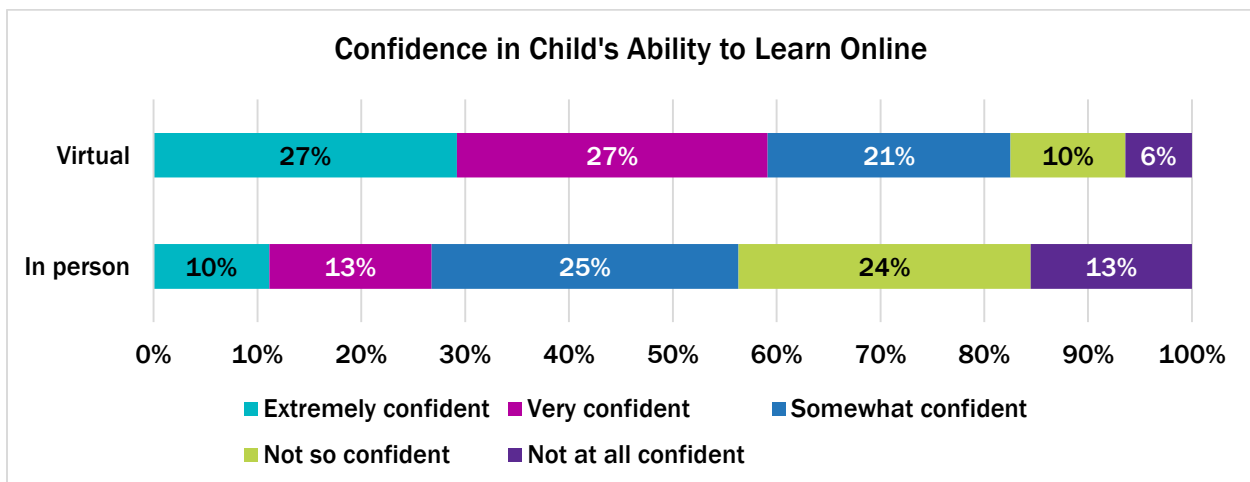

Figure 8. Parents' Confidence in Their Child to Learn Online

Parents also rated the quality of education that their child received during virtual learning. For in-person parents this would be the quality of education from August until early March, though for virtual learners it encompassed the entire year to date. Very few parents rated their child's education as low or very low quality (14.7% of all respondents), but virtual parents were more likely to rate it as high or very high (59.1%) compared to in-person parents (41.4%). The full breakdown is shown below in Figure 9.

Quality of Education During Virtual Learning

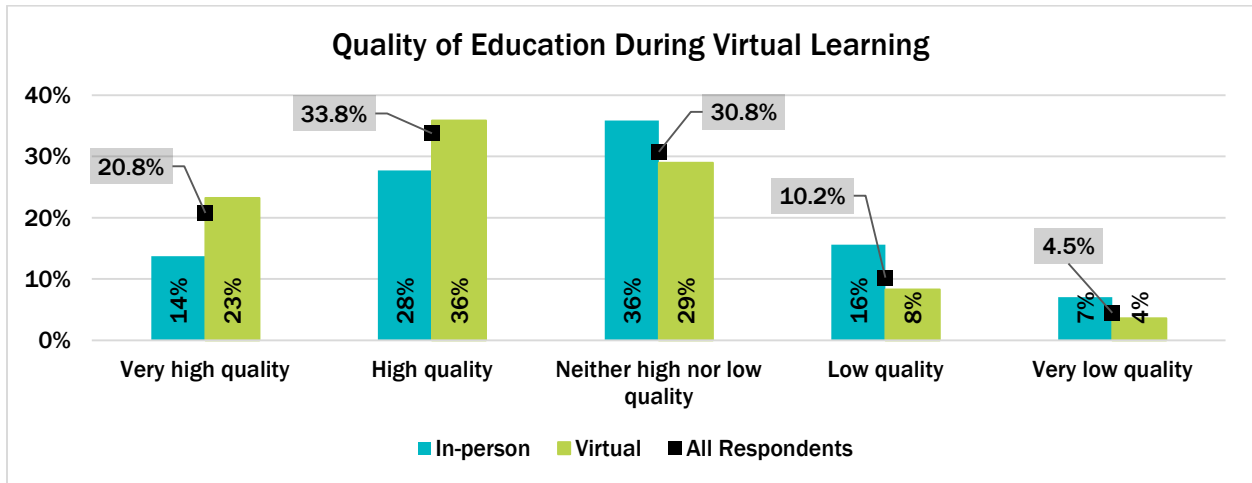|	Very high quality	High quality	Neither high nor low quality	Low quality	Very low quality
In-person	14%	28%	36%	16%	7%
Virtual	23%	36%	29%	8%	4%
All Respondents	20.8%	33.8%	30.8%	10.2%	4.5%

Figure 9. Perceived Quality of Education During Virtual Learning

One common struggle among parents across the nation during virtual learning was keeping their child on-track and motivated during virtual learning. Parents who later transitioned to in-person learning found this extremely difficult. Fifty-nine percent (59.4%) of in-person parents found it very difficult to keep their children motivated and on-track. While still high, fewer virtual parents shared this same struggle (30.4%).

Difficulty Keeping Child On-Track & Motivated

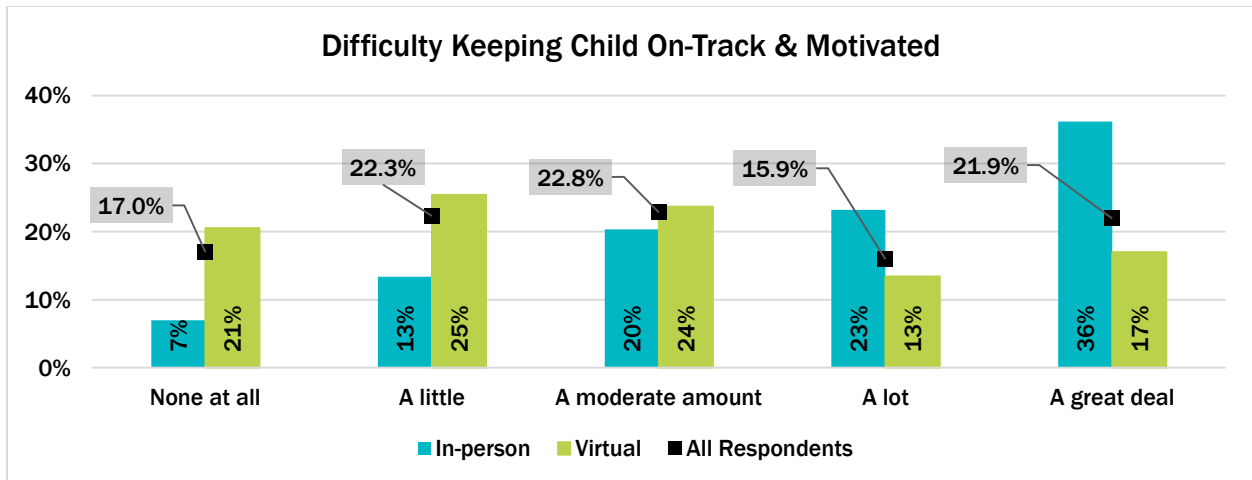|	None at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
In-person	7%	13%	20%	23%	36%
Virtual	21%	25%	24%	13%	17%
All Respondents	17.0%	22.3%	22.8%	15.9%	21.9%

Figure 10. Perception of Difficulty Keeping Child On-track & Motivated

General Feedback

Students and parents overcame many challenges throughout the pandemic. School closures and transitions in learning environments to family issues such as illnesses and job losses,

have plagued our community and impacted our children during the pandemic. Parents rated their concern about their child's social and emotional well-being now compared to in previous years. As Figure 11 shows, two-thirds of in-person parents were more concerned about their child's social and emotional well-being than in prior years, while just under half of virtual parents held a similar concern. Appendix A shows a more granular breakdown by level of concern.
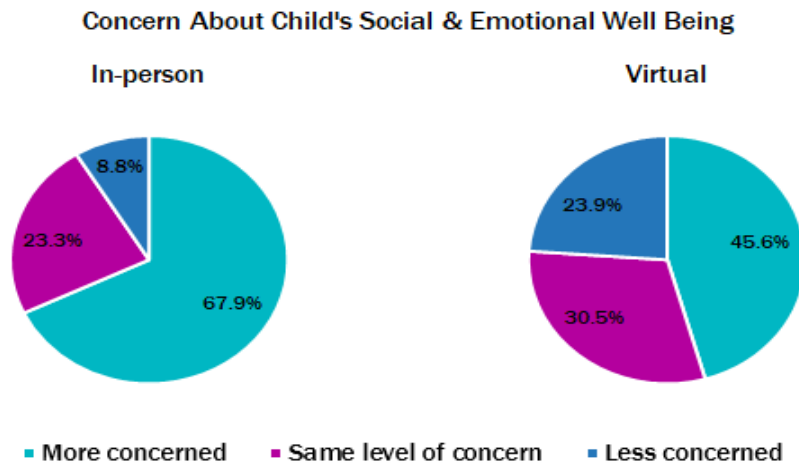
Concern About Child's Social & Emotional Well Being

Figure 11. Concern About Child's Social & Emotional Well Being Compared to Prior Years

Parents also indicated if they believed their child would be prepared for next school year. Most parents felt that their child was "prepared" or "very prepared" (71.7%). Those who felt their child was underprepared or neutral were evenly split between the two learning environments.

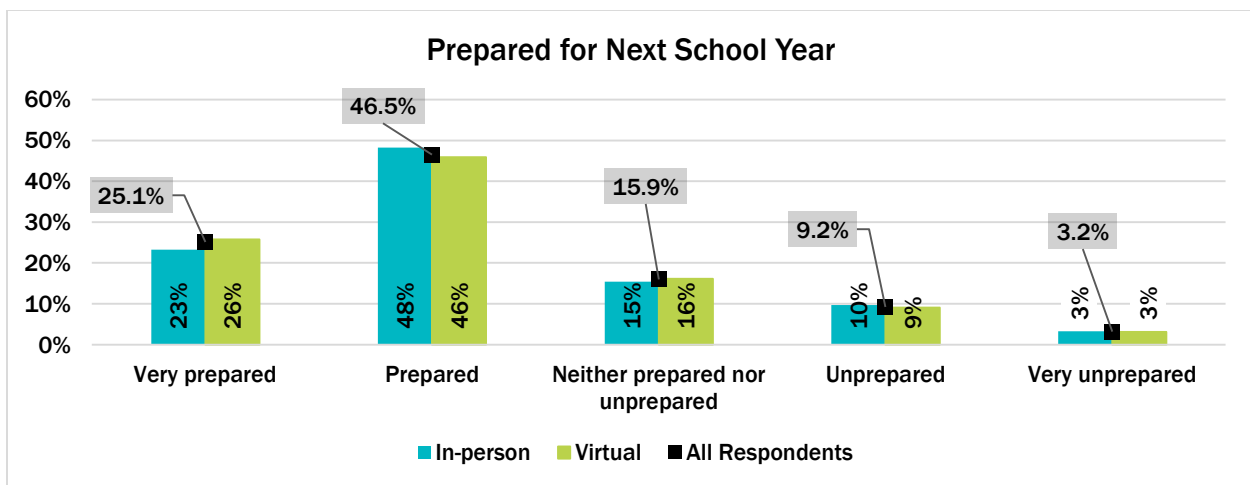Figure 12. Perceived Preparedness for Next School Year

A major concern among parents of both in-person and virtual students proved to be the general threat of exposure to the coronavirus. According to Figure 13, 61.5% of in-person respondents were concerned while 89% of virtual respondents were concerned. Though the majority of in-person respondents did express concern, only 25% were "very concerned"

compared to 67% of virtual parents. See Appendix A for a more detailed breakdown of responses.

Concerned About Child Being Exposed to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) at School
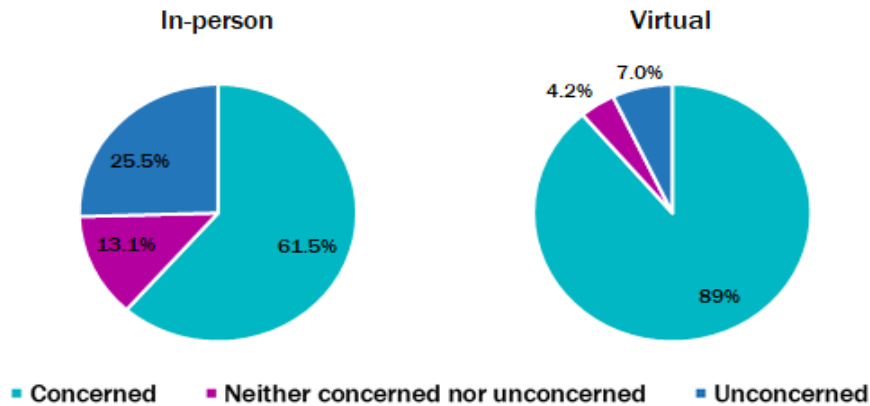

Figure 13. Concerns about Exposure at School

Because the overwhelming majority of parents expressed concern about COVID-19 exposure, it was important that they were informed and understood the conditions of returning to school buildings. In total, 89.7% of in-person respondents agreed that they received clear communication from their students' schools regarding COVID-19 protocols. In fact, 52.9% of in-person parents strongly agreed – almost double that of virtual parents. Although virtual respondents did not necessarily have to worry about COVID-19 protocols in the building, 64.6% of respondents also agreed that they received clear communication.
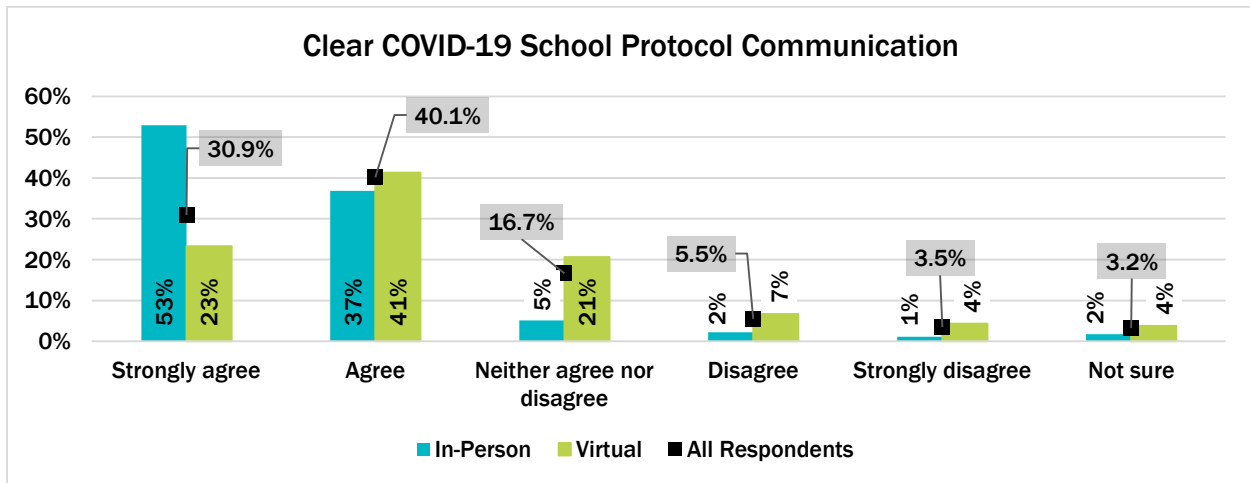

Figure 14. Clarity of School Communication about COVID-19 Protocols

Factors Impacting Learning Options

Both sets of parents were asked to select factors that impacted their choice to either continue with virtual learning or transition to in-person instruction. Based on the student's learning format they were given different choices and had the option to write in additional

considerations. Parents could select as many choices as they wished, so the percentages across all categories will exceed 100%.

Factors Impacting Virtual Choice

Virtual parents were given ten options and an open-ended response option to the question. Parents primarily cited the District's health & safety protocols as a reason for keeping their child at home. Some open-ended responses shed light on why parents considered this as a factor in their decision. Parents were concerned that students would not be able to follow the masking and distancing mandates, that their child would not be rotating to the subject teacher, or that schools could not effectively adhere to the protocols. Requiring students to wear masks for the full day (aside from lunchtime and outdoors) was also a strong consideration for parents. A little over a fifth of parents though said their child learned better in the virtual environment. Over a third of parents said that since in-person students would continue learning primarily through Teams they would keep their child virtual.

Many parents felt that issues related to the pandemic were important in their decision. Specifically, 40% of parents have a student or family member that is high-risk for contracting or becoming seriously ill from COVID-19. Community transmission rates were cited by almost a third of virtual parents, and over ten percent considered the availability of the vaccine in their decisions. Although ranked lower, parents still juggled transportation issues and the availability of before and after care in their choice.

Factors Impacting Decision to Stay Virtual	
District's health and safety protocols	58.8%
High-risk student or family members	40.0%
In-person students learning through Teams	34.4%
Mandatory masking all day	30.7%
Community transmission rates	30.2%
Student learns better remotely	22.1%
Vaccine availability	13.9%
Transportation logistics	11.6%
Availability of before & after care	10.1%
Other concerns	8.3%

Three hundred twenty-eight parents left open ended responses which were then reviewed and coded for themes. A representative sample of open-ended responses can be found in Appendix B. A common theme was concern for their child's safety and school-level protocols and transmission rates. Parents stated that, "too many covid positives have been reported at the school and it is continuing to grow" and " the schools are not clean enough and there is not enough staff on call to make sure the schools stay clean and sanitized during the day." Parents were also concerned about other households and if they adhered to health and safety protocols. One parent wrote, "you can't be sure of other households' decisions on how they treat this Pandemic" and another listed "concerns about other families opting not to vaccinate."

Another theme was that the parents let their student make the choice. Some parents also preferred the virtual schedule for its flexibility. Parents listed the schedule of return as a reason for staying virtual. Since it was close to the end of the year it made more sense for their child to remain virtual and start back in-person in the fall, with one parent saying, "just felt it wouldn't benefit him for a month and a half." Requiring uniforms was also a cause for parents to keep their child virtual. One parent pointed out, "at the beginning, uniforms wouldn't be required, but by the time in-person learning became available uniforms were indeed required."

Factors Impacting In-person Choice

In-person parents were also given ten options and an open-ended response option to their question. The majority of parents attributed their decision to their belief that their student learns better in-person. More than half of respondents indicated that their decision to return was based on their student's need for social interaction with peers. Just over a third of parents cited the need for supervision during school hours as a factor in their decision. Another third of parents felt that their concerns about COVID-19 were lessened or lowered.

Factors Impacting Decision to Transition to In-person	
Student learns better in-person.	71.5%
Need for social interaction with peers.	58.9%
Need supervision during the school day.	34.4%
Lessened/lower concerns about COVID-19 transmission.	30.7%
Vaccine availability	14.4%
Technology or internet access/issues at home	13.7%
Availability of before & after care	10.7%
Community transmission rates	7.8%
Transportation logistics	1.9%
Other concerns	6.9%

One hundred one parents left open-ended responses. The themes of these responses ranged from emphasizing the need for student supervision during the day to athletics. Several responses expressed that virtual learning was inadequate and their student would be better served in-person. One parent wrote, "virtual learning was not effective for my kindergartner." Another theme present was the students' needs for social interaction. Parents shared that their student needed one-on-one interaction from both their teachers as well as their peers. "My child learns better with one-on-one interactions. Additionally, she needs social contacts with peers," expressed one parent. Parents also noted that they loved their school's staff and their student's teachers, so they wanted their child to be in the building with them. Some parents with a student with special needs stated that their child's needs were not being met virtually. Like with virtual parents, some allowed their students to choose their learning format. If the student wanted to return, the parent supported their student's decision. A sample of open-ended responses can be found in Appendix C.

Conclusion

Overall, SCS parents each individually made the best decision for their child and their family when selecting to either return to the building or remain virtual through the end of the year. In-person parents felt that schools and classrooms have done a good job adhering to the District's health and safety protocols, yet this remains a vital concern for parents whose children are still at home. Most feel that teachers are able to effectively split their time between both groups of students, though a third of parents are neutral or disagree. Virtual parents felt confident in their child's ability to learn effectively online and had little concern over the quality of education during virtual learning. In-person parents on the other hand, were less confident in their child's ability learning online and in the quality of online education. Both groups of parents felt that their child is prepared for next school year and the school communication about COVID-19 protocols was clear. Most virtual parents are concerned about their child being exposed to the coronavirus at school, and in-person parents echo the concern but to a less extent.

As plans are made for the coming year, it is important for the District to assuage the concerns many parents have about health and safety as all schools move fully in-person in the fall. Additionally, the District needs to focus on the social and emotional well-being of its students in the years following the Pandemic and its aftermath. Parents appear confident in the level of preparedness for next school year, though the District's planned recovery programs may raise the confidence level of the other third of parents.

APPENDIX A

Table 1. Survey Responses by Grade Level

Survey Responses by Grade	
Grade Level	*N*
Pre-K	98
Kindergarten	398
1st Grade	429
2nd Grade	464
3rd Grade	417
4th Grade	468
5th Grade	386
6th Grade	430
7th Grade	442
8th Grade	444
9th Grade	466
10th Grade	441
11th Grade	402
12th Grade	122

Table 2. Sample Size by Item

Sample Size			
Item	Figure	In-person	Virtual
Satisfaction with re-entry	3	1,291	—
Classroom adhering to protocols	4	1,283	—
Schools adhering to protocols	4	1,293	—
Masking	5	1,288	—
Splitting Time	6	1,292	3,677
Technical Issues	7	1,258	3,671
Confidence in Child's Ability	8	1,248	3,602
Quality of Education	9	1,248	3,595
Keeping Child On-track	10	1,250	3,604
Social & Emotional Well-being	11, 16	1,219	3,525
Preparedness	12	1,224	3,528
Exposure	13, 17	1,222	3,532
Communication	14	1,224	3,531

Figure 15. Percent of Survey Responses by Unique Student Group

Percentage of Responses from Unique Student Groups

Group	Percentage
IEP or 504	17.9%
EL	14.5%
Gifted	18.1%
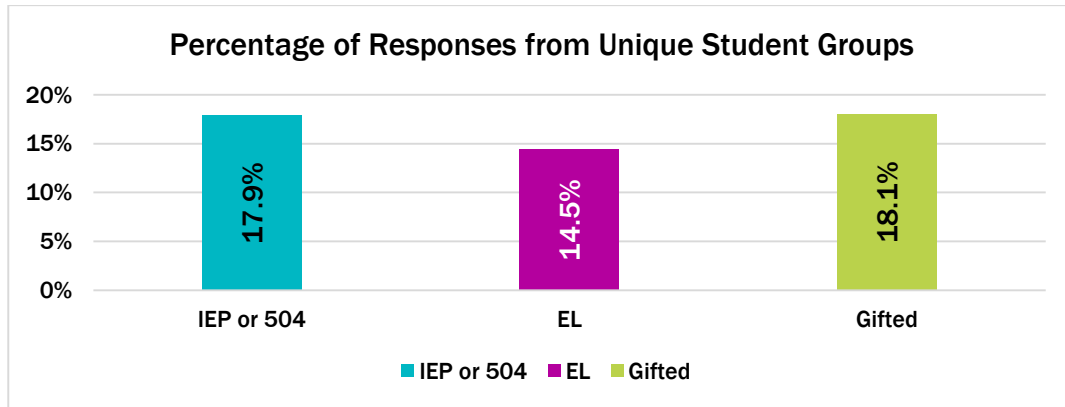
Figure 16. Concern About Child's Social & Emotional Well Being Compared to Prior Years

Concern About Child's Social & Emotional Well Being

	In-person	Virtual	All Respondents
A lot less concerned	4%	14%	11.4%
A little less concerned	5%	10%	8.6%
The same level of concern	23%	31%	28.7%
A little more concerned	32%	24%	25.6%
A lot more concerned	36%	22%	25.7%
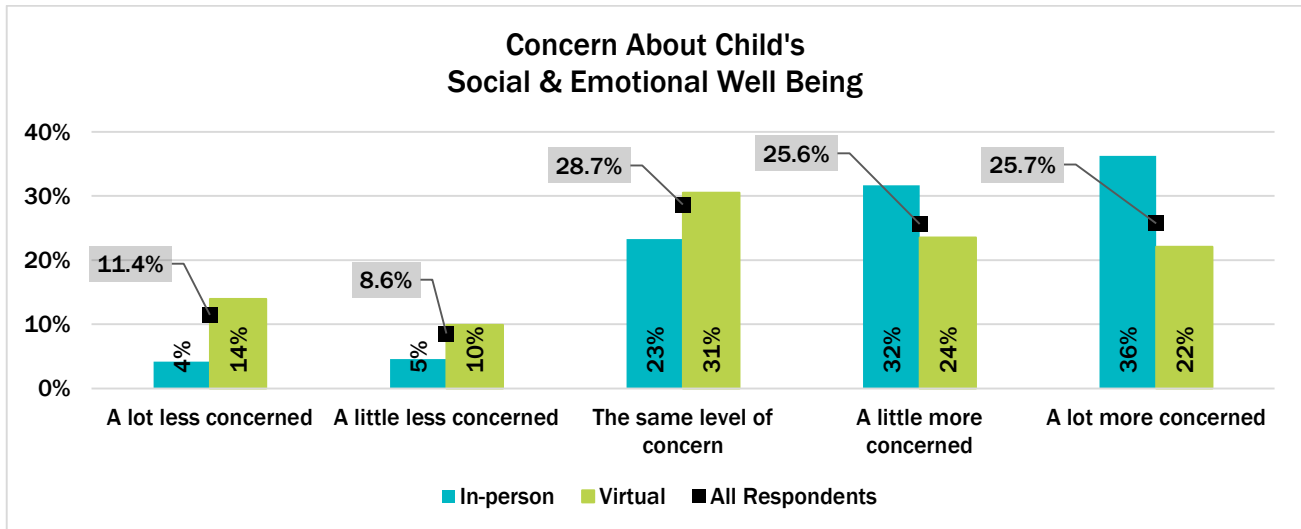
Figure 17. Percent of Survey Responses by Unique Student Group
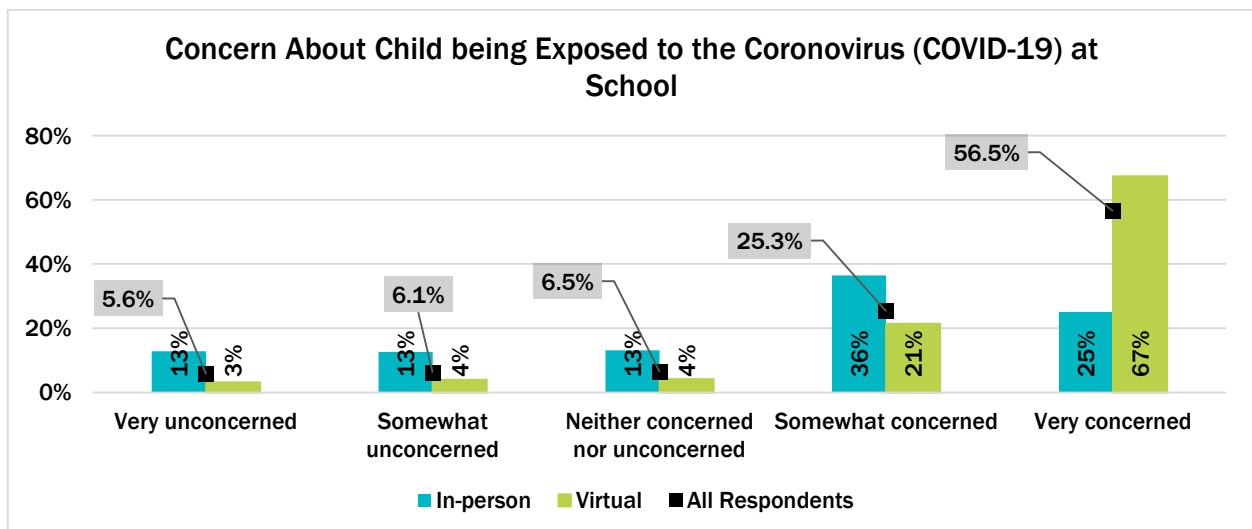
Concern About Child being Exposed to the Coronovirus (COVID-19) at School

	In-person	Virtual	All Respondents
Very unconcerned	13%	3%	5.6%
Somewhat unconcerned	13%	4%	6.1%
Neither concerned nor unconcerned	13%	4%	6.5%
Somewhat concerned	36%	21%	25.3%
Very concerned	25%	67%	56.5%

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APPENDIX B

Sample of Open-ended Responses (Virtual Choice)
Ability to effectively follow guidelines in current facility
At the beginning uniforms wouldn't be required, but by the time in person learning became available uniforms were indeed required.
Been doing virtual all year and just wanted to continue rather than start him in school in the middle of the year
Child's anxiety about covid 19
Children and adults don't social distance or sanitize regularly
Classroom teacher availability. Didn't want child to be in room without her actual teachers due to class size
Covid is still contractable, vaccine or not!
COVID-19 is still real and I personally feel things are moving too fast
Do not feel it is safe enough for my child to attend school in person yet
I don't believe that SCS is able to sanitize in a manner that will keep Covid-19 transmission from happening.
I don't know where other have been or around. It's about safety for me.
I feel safe with her at home
I just don't feel safe with my child attending in-person learning.
In school option stated too late in school year
Just felt it wouldn't benefit him for a month and a half
Just scared of the whole school thing
Kids just will not leave there masks on.
Lack of space at my child's crowded school
Learning is better when the are no disruptive students
My child wanted to stay virtually
My child was successfully learning virtual and the in person option seemed to be same style just student wouldn't be in class still online. She will return in person on the fall.
My daughter has autism and has extreme anxiety about returning due to the pandemic
My daughter is a junior so there was only 2 1/2 month left for the entire school year. So, she will start fresh in-person her Senior year.
My son loves the virtual learning
My son wishes to attend virtually he's doing better.
Newborn baby in the house and I don't want my school age kids getting the baby sick.
No other choice. In-person is still online just with a babysitter
None of his friends were returning. He could spend time with friends while doing school virtually
Other students/teachers not following proper precautions, living with sick high risk individuals
Porque tenia qué comprar uniforme para ella y 2 hermanos más y ya muy poco tiempo para terminar el año escolar. (Translation- Because she had to buy a uniform for her and 2 more siblings and it was very little time to finish the school year.)
Possibility of COVID transmission in the class
Safety protocols not being implemented consistently
Schools do not have the staff to keep schools clean and sanitized during the day nor do they have the space to socially distance.
Sibling without access to vaccine because of age.
Spending time with family and concerns about other families choosing not to vaccinate
Students and teachers not wearing masks, my child has life threatening disease and would not be safe
The safety of my child and her ability to wear a mask all day as a kindergartner.
The schools are not clean enough and there is not enough staff on call to make sure the schools stay clean and sanitized during the day.
There has already been 3 children cases of Covid reported by the school..
Too many covid positives have been reported at the school and it is continuing to grow
Uniforms begin required for in person learning.
We gave her the choice because there was so little time left in school by the time SCS allowed students to return
We tried returning but it was still virtual but just in a classroom. The teacher was still remote. I was frustrated that I drove there everyday for 30 minutes one way for her to open her laptop. Very disappointing.

Appendix C

Sample of Open-Ended Responses (In-Person Choice)
Amazing teachers
Athletics
Changes at work and my child's initial desire to return to normalcy. The new environment is still virtual; some classmates are simply gathering in the same space.
Child wanted to be able to attend graduation
Children learn better in the classroom
Children need to be around peers at a young age to learn more than academics — social responses, conversation, play, and so much more.
Counseling
Educators have a wider range of tools to teach better in person
Fewer people returned in person
First school year and I wanted her to experience at least what real school was like w
Having attention of teachers to keep my student on task
her preference (driven by social primarily)
His emotional and physical health.
I am teacher in SCS and I had to return to work.
I am not a teacher
My child learns better with one on one interactions. Additionally, she needs social contacts with peers
She loves her school principal and staff and wants to be there.
Special needs student.
TN Ready Testing
Virtual learning was extremely difficult for a child with special needs
Virtual learning was not effective for my kindergartner