

How schools can reduce parents' anxiety during the pandemic

November 3 2020, by Lucy (Kathleen) McGoron and Julie Wargo Aikins



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Our recent survey found that schools can affect the mental health and well-being of not just students but their parents, too.

From April through June 2020, we surveyed 152 [parents](#)—primarily mothers—in Detroit, Michigan, who were managing the new demands of

remote schooling for their children. Not surprisingly, [they reported](#) high levels of anxiety (34%) and depression (27%) during this stressful period, but some indicated that support from their child's [school](#) played an important role in reducing their [mental health](#) difficulties. Generally speaking, the more school support parents in our survey felt they had received, the less anxiety and depression they reported. However, this finding did not extend to families that were highly affected by COVID-19 due to lost income, [food insecurity](#) or lost access to health care. Our results have not yet been peer-reviewed.

Typically, about 8% of adults experience anxiety, whereas 7% of adults experience depression, according to [census surveys](#).

To understand the amount of school support parents received during this transition, we asked about the ease and frequency of contact from their child's school and whether they felt overwhelmed by their responsibilities to help with their child's schoolwork. Interestingly, parents who reported high levels of school support also reported having more routines and feeling less chaos in their homes. It may be that [school systems](#), even when students are learning remotely, can help create structure for families, and this has a [positive impact](#) on parents' well-being.

However, schools can do only so much. For parents dealing with significant stress associated with the [pandemic](#), school support might not be a sufficient buffer from anxiety and depression.

Sixty-five percent of parents who completed our questionnaire were Black, 11% were white, 3% Middle Eastern, and others reported another race. Thirty percent of parents had shifted to working from home, and another 22% were dealing with the added stress of job loss due to the pandemic.

As the pandemic continues, schools will continue to affect children's and parents' well-being. When schools communicate clearly, provide adequate educational resources and help parents feel prepared to support their children's remote learning, our research shows parents are better able to structure their home and their child's learning experience.

These results have policy implications: Schools need resources to best support families during the pandemic. Moreover, schools in areas where families are hardest hit by the pandemic may need additional support. Community assistance like [food banks](#) and health centers in concert with school support may be necessary to meet the needs of the parents and children who are most vulnerable during this global crisis.

Reported results come from one point in time. It may be that parents who are less depressed and anxious are prone to more positive perceptions generally, which also influenced their perceptions of school support. Some parents who participated in our spring study completed a second survey at the end of the summer. Analyzing this data will help us determine if school support continues to relate to parents' mental health over time.

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