

PARENT VOICES DURING COVID-19 SPRING 2020-22

SUMMARY REPORT



Alberta
School Councils' Association

Overview and Methods

This report prepared for the Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA) is a summary of key findings from four waves of surveys distributed to parents/caregivers from Spring 2020 to Spring 2022. The surveys sought to capture the experiences and perceptions of parents of K-12 students during the COVID-19 pandemic and as they began to look toward pandemic recovery.

Survey Timeline

SPRING 2020

1

School Re-Entry Plan Survey

66,833 Responses

Survey 1 focused on the 2020/21 school re-entry discussion points outlined by Alberta Education on May 6th, 2020. This was a time of uncertainty, and parents had many different beliefs, opinions, and perspectives about how the province should approach education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Parent Pandemic Pulse Survey

2

FALL 2020

26,773 Responses

Survey 2 sought to capture the experiences and perceptions of parents during the first few weeks of 'back to school in a pandemic' reality. Parents experienced issues with communication and clear messaging as well as rising concerns related to children's social and emotional development, educational gaps, and limited resources and support. Challenges related to mental health and wellbeing for students, school staff, and parents continued to emerge and amplify.

SPRING 2021

3

Parent Pandemic Pulse II Survey

631 Responses

Survey 3 asked about how the 2020/21 school 're-entry' went and was designed to compare responses with Survey 2. Parents faced many challenges related to COVID protocols and practices, government decision-making, and finding reliable information. Concerns and stress about students' social, emotional, and mental health, as well as learning gaps and rising inequities continued.

Education and the Impact of COVID-19 Survey

4

SPRING 2022

5,596 Responses

Survey 4 examined parent perspectives on the perceived impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their children's academic growth, learning progress, social/emotional/mental health, and potential losses or gaps resulting from learning disruptions.

Key Findings/Themes

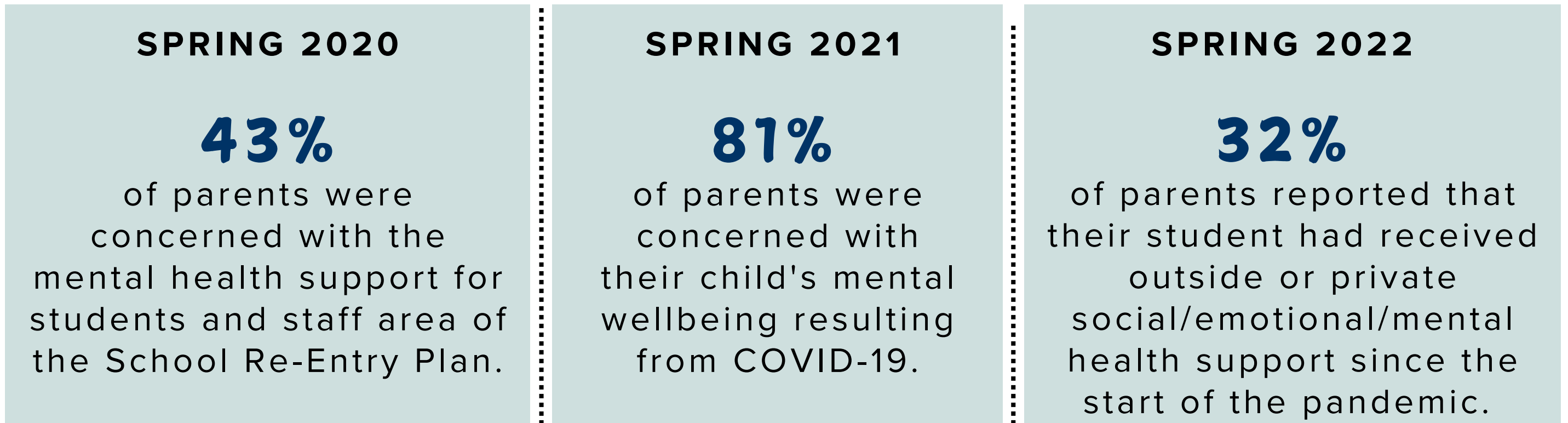
The key themes evident across the four surveys are discussed below.

Demographics

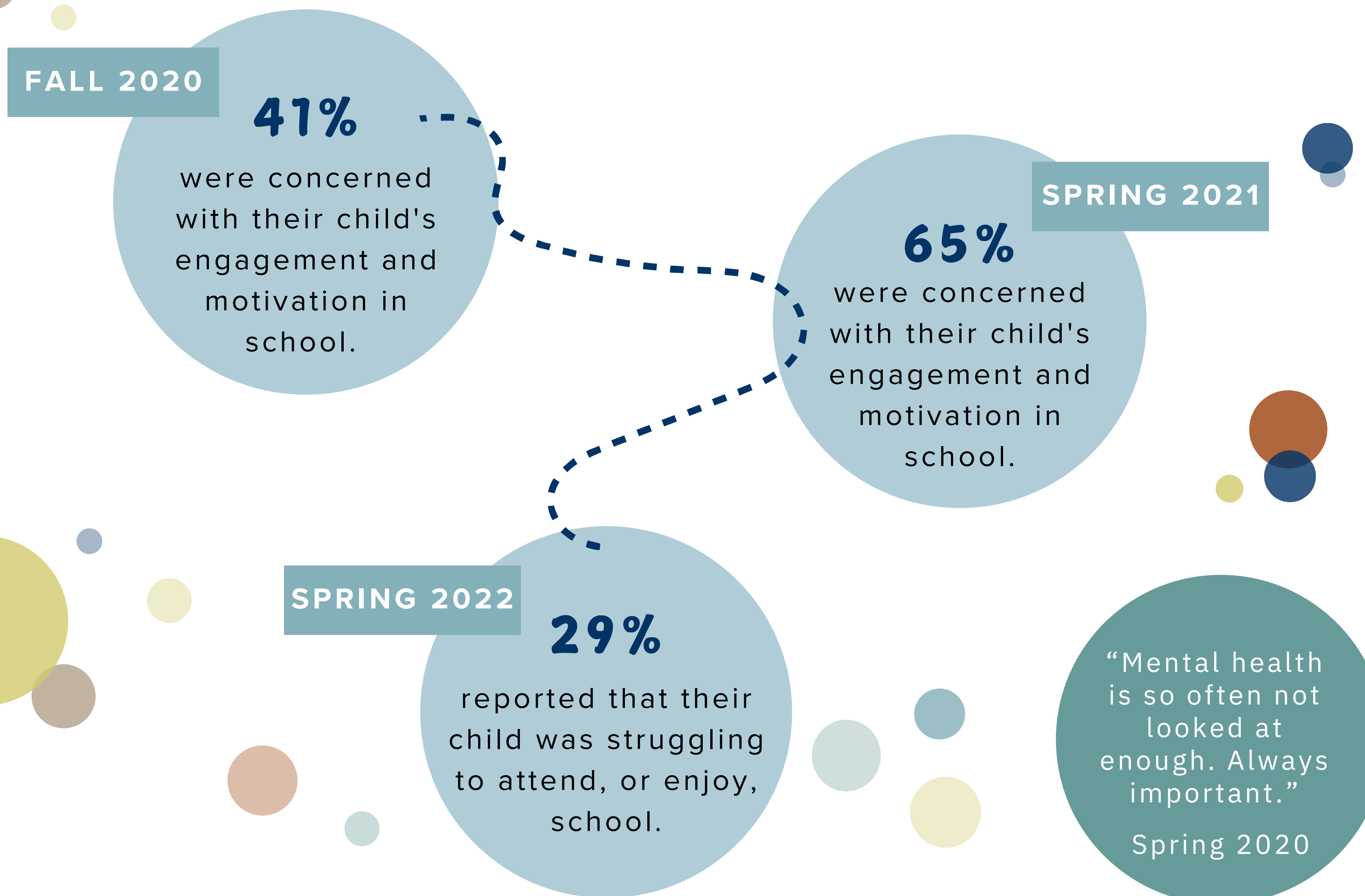
	FALL 2020	SPRING 2021	SPRING 2022
SCHOOL TYPE			
PUBLIC	88%	84%	76%
SEPARATE	7%	12%	18%
PRIVATE/ INDEPENDENT	3%	3%	2%
CHARTER	2%	1%	3%
FRANCOPHONE	1%	1%	1%
PARENT MEDIAN AGE	Between 41-45 Years Old	Between 41-45 Years Old	Between 35-44 Years Old
AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME	\$80,000-89,999	\$90,000-99,999	\$100,000-124,999
EMPLOYMENT STATUS			
FULL-TIME	56%	51%	55%
PART-TIME	19%	22%	23%
NOT EMPLOYED	18%	17%	13%
PREFER NOT TO SAY	7%	10%	8%
GENDER			
FEMALE	79%	85%	86%
MALE	18%	12%	11%
TRANSGENDER	0.1%	-	0.1%
PREFER NOT TO SAY	3%	3.4%	2.3%
CHILD'S GRADE LEVEL			
KINDERGARTEN	6%	6%	2%
GRADE 1-6	49%	52%	48%
GRADE 7-9	21%	25%	25%
GRADE 10-12	23%	18%	25%

Student Wellbeing

Wellbeing was a challenge prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and was only exasperated by the pandemic learning disruptions. Wellbeing continues to be a large conversation in pandemic recovery. Through the course of the surveys, we see the continued concern for student wellbeing.



Parents reported concern with their children's engagement, motivation, and enjoyment in school (online or face-to-face) throughout the pandemic.



As we looked toward pandemic recovery in Spring 2022, 63% of parents reported their student was missing skills, knowledge, or support related to their social, emotional, and mental health, with just over half of parents believing that social/emotional/mental health supports would help address some of their concerns (51%).

Parent Wellbeing

In Survey 2 and Survey 3, parents reported on their wellbeing and reported feeling...

FALL 2020

SPRING 2021

42%

STRESSED

71%

44%

ANXIOUS

56%

45%

EXHAUSTED

66%

43%

HELPLESS

54%

24%

felt isolated

35%

felt left out or uninformed

41%

felt appreciated

47%

felt engaged or included

55%

felt respected as a partner in their child's learning

"Both my husband and myself have continued to work full-time during this time. Working full time, supper, and homework is very stressful for us. By the time we get to homework at night, the kids are tired and all we do is fight about getting it done."

Spring 2020

Wellbeing and COVID-19

Parents were asked to identify their level of agreement with various statements. Below shows the percentage of parents who agreed or strongly agreed that COVID-19...

Fall 2020 Spring 2021

feels close to me

42%

51%

is stressful

81%

82%

is not fear-inducing

26%

39%

is media hyped

43%

65%

is something that makes me feel helpless

35%

44%

something I think about all the time

55%

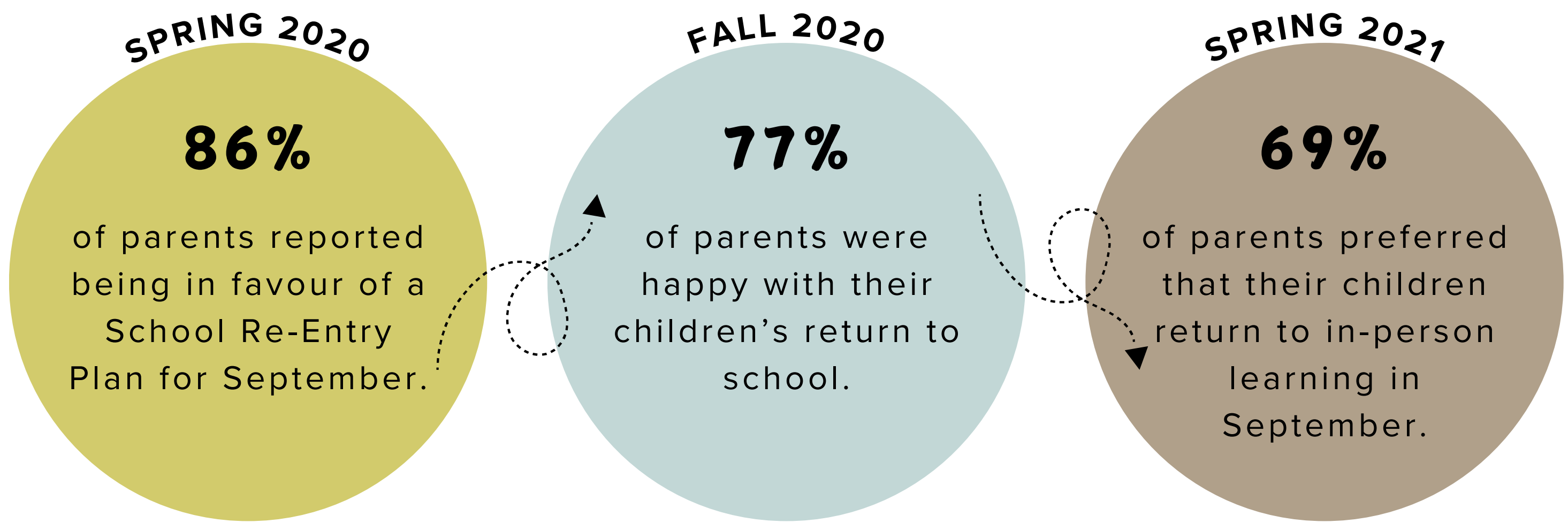
59%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

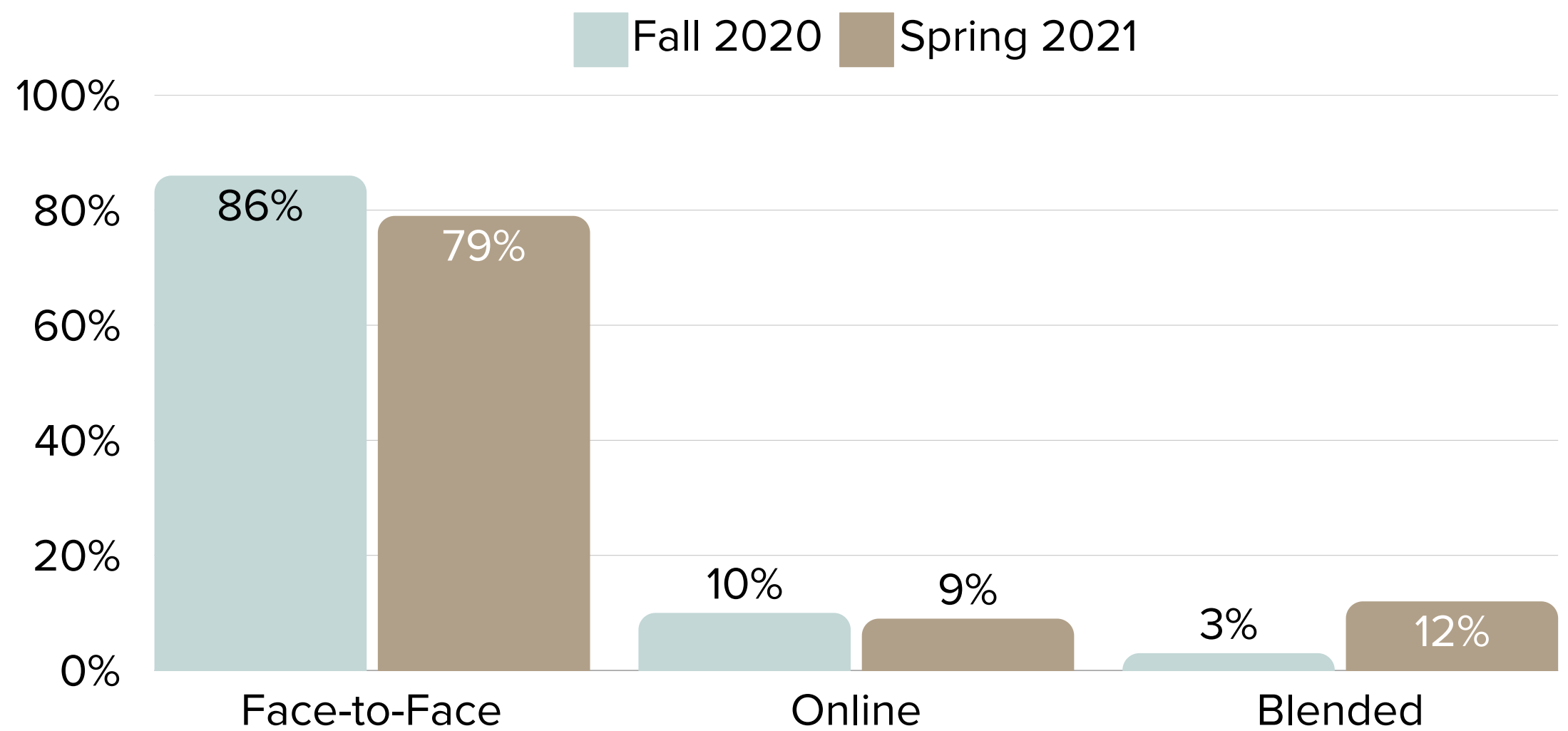
In Spring 2021, 63% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that looking forward, COVID-19 would become less stressful.

In-person and Online Learning Experiences

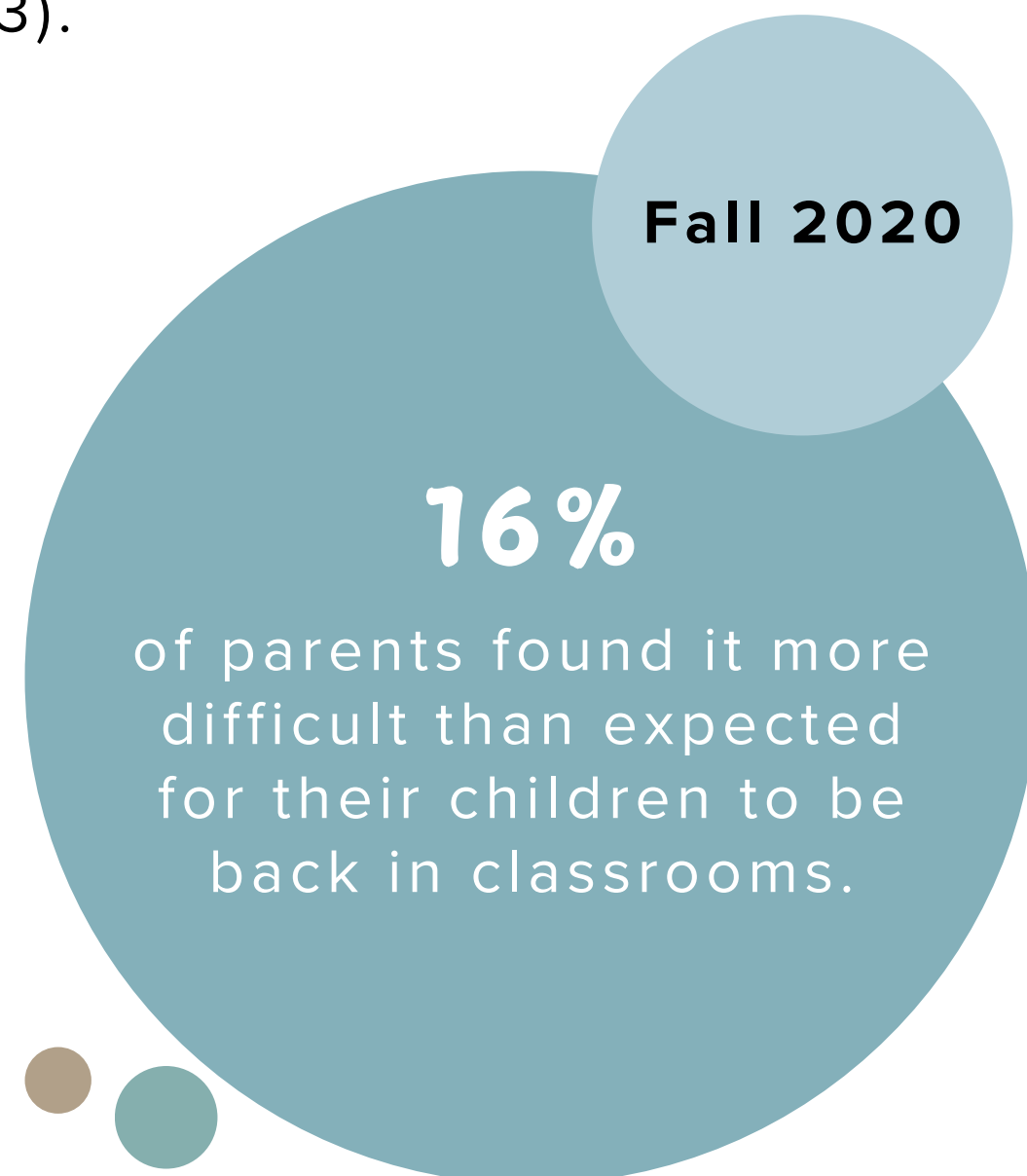
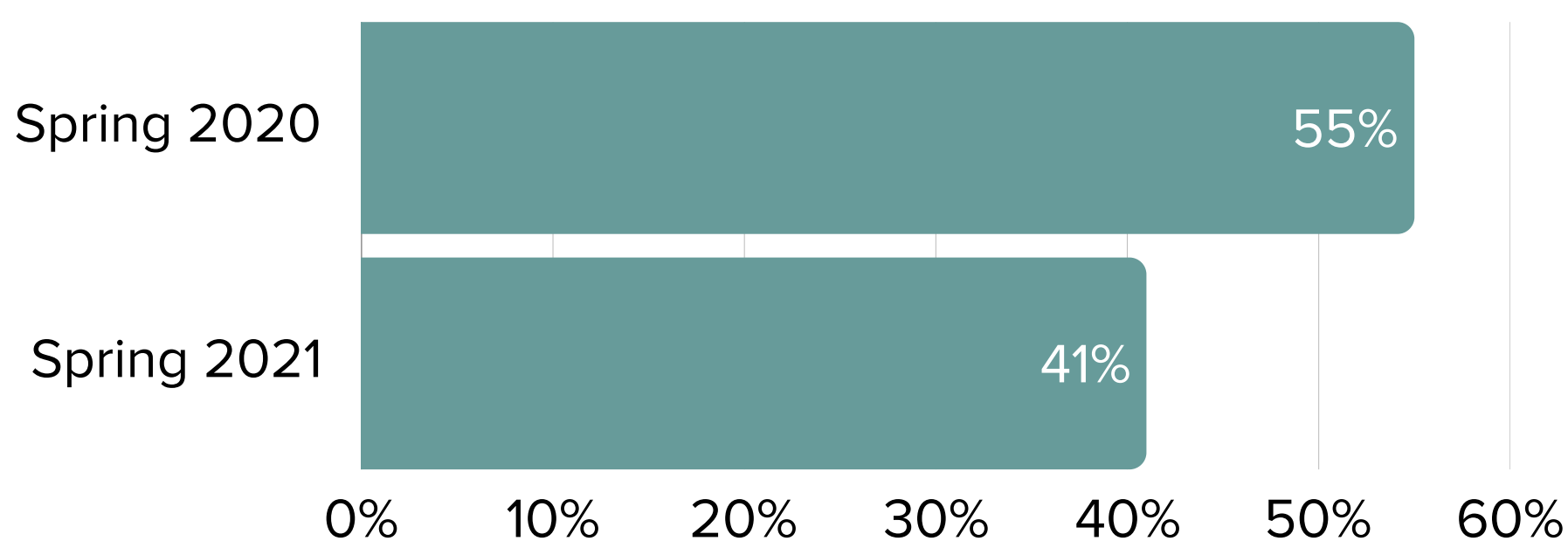
Reported interest in returning to in-person school during the pandemic.



How is your child learning in school at this time?



Percentage of parents reporting that online learning was more difficult than they expected (Spring 2020-Spring 2021 / Surveys 1-3).



Educational Assessments

SPRING 2020

64%

agreed that regular assessment should continue for the 2020-2021 school year.

FALL 2020

28%

agreed that the Minister of Education should maintain Grade 12 Diploma Exams for the 2020-2021 school year.

SPRING 2021

35%

agreed the Minister of Education should maintain Grade 12 Diploma Exams for the 2021-2022 school year.

37%

agreed that the Minister of Education should maintain Grade 6 and 9 Provincial Achievement Testing (PAT) for the 2020-2021 school year.

42%

agreed that the Minister of Education should maintain Grade 6 and 9 Provincial Achievement Testing (PAT) for the 2021-2022 school year.

“Too much pressure on students to have to do PAT/Diploma Exams. Teachers should be able to issue final exams they have created, like you see in other provinces.”

Spring 2022

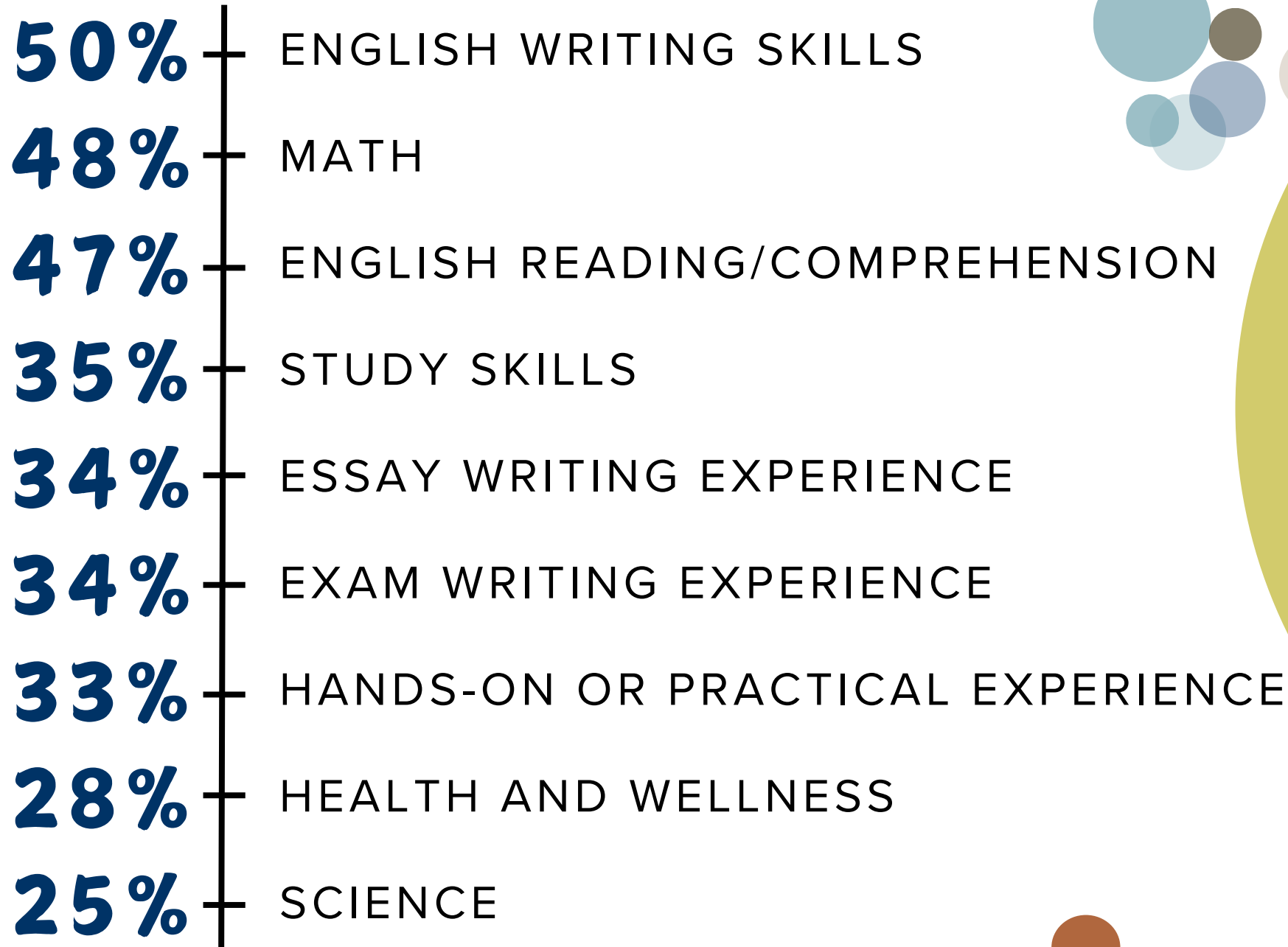
Educational Concerns

Survey 2 (Fall 2020) and Survey 3 (Spring 2021) asked parents about their concerns related to their child having received what they needed to be successful (equity). The percentage of parents that agreed or strongly agreed with the following areas of concern are outlined below. Within one school year, the concerns that increased the most were related to growing inequity, learning losses/curricular gaps, and cost burdens of online learning.

Area of Concern	Fall 2020	Spring 2021
Support for vulnerable populations, child poverty, and/or growing inequity	77%	82%
Learning losses and curricular gaps	63%	76%
Cost burdens created by online learning	49%	70%
Loss of support staff and educational assistants	48%	51%
Getting their child what they need to be successful with online instruction (equity)	47%	32%

Missing Skills, Knowledge, or Support

By Spring 2022, 63% of parents felt that their student was missing skills, knowledge, or support resulting from the learning disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (24% no, 13% maybe). The areas/subjects for these missing skills most reported by parents were....



Parents most often selected the following solutions that they believed could help address their areas/ subjects of concern:

- Additional teaching/support in classroom (64%)
- One-on-one support during school hours (55%)
- Smaller class sizes (54%)
- Resources/materials sent home with students (33%)

13% of parents believed that their school/school division could identify their students missing skills, knowledge, or support (44%, no, 43% unsure).

FALL 2020

19% of parents reported hiring a private tutor or outside educational services for their student since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

SPRING 2022

21% of parents reported hiring a private tutor or outside educational services for their student since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

SPRING 2021

16% of parents reported hiring a private tutor or outside educational services for their student since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

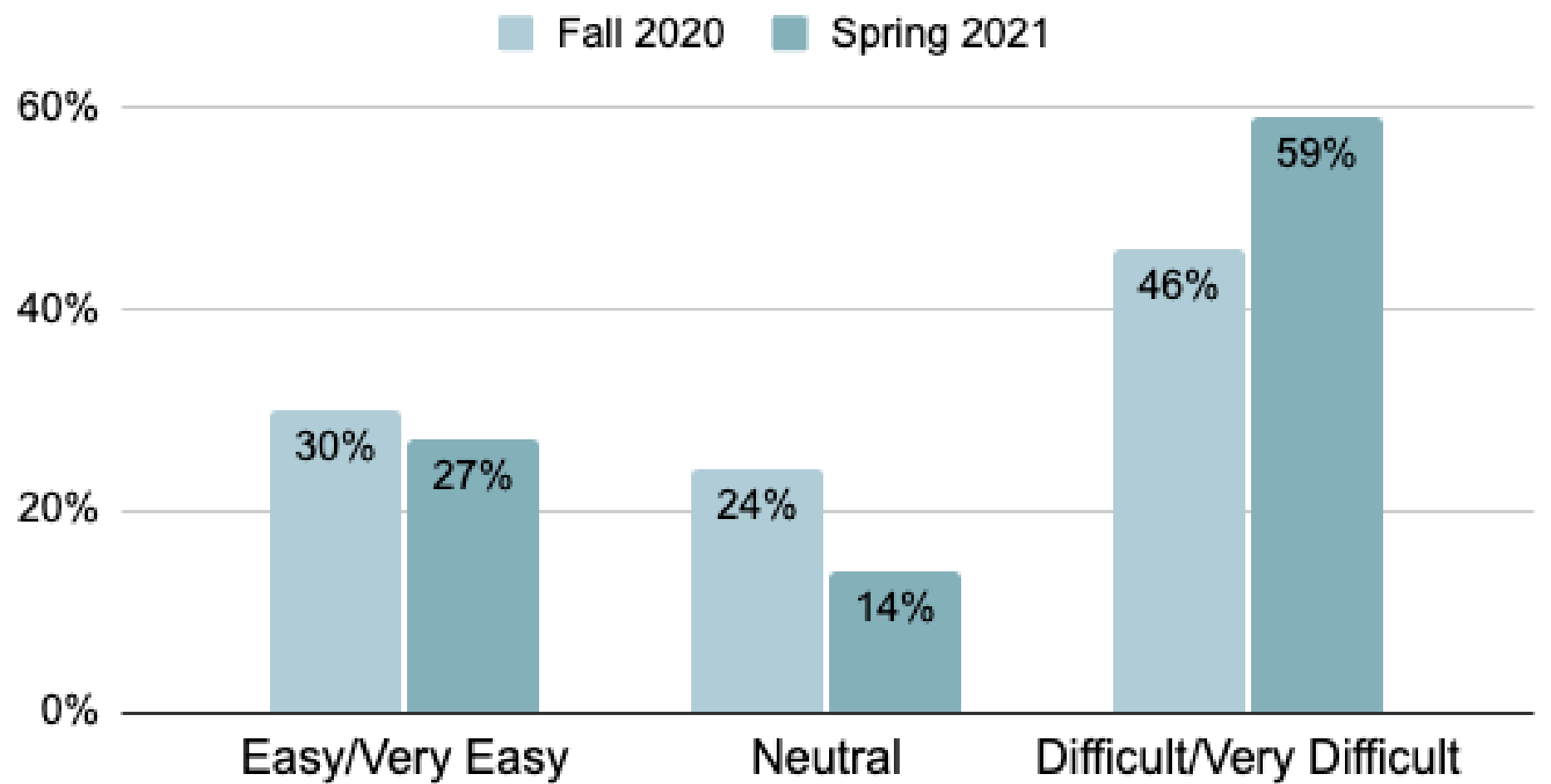
COVID-19 Information

Over time difficulty in judging information about COVID increased for parents. Parents require clear and consistent communication to make informed decisions for their family's health, well-being, and safety. As the pandemic progressed, it became harder for parents to parse through overwhelming amounts of information.

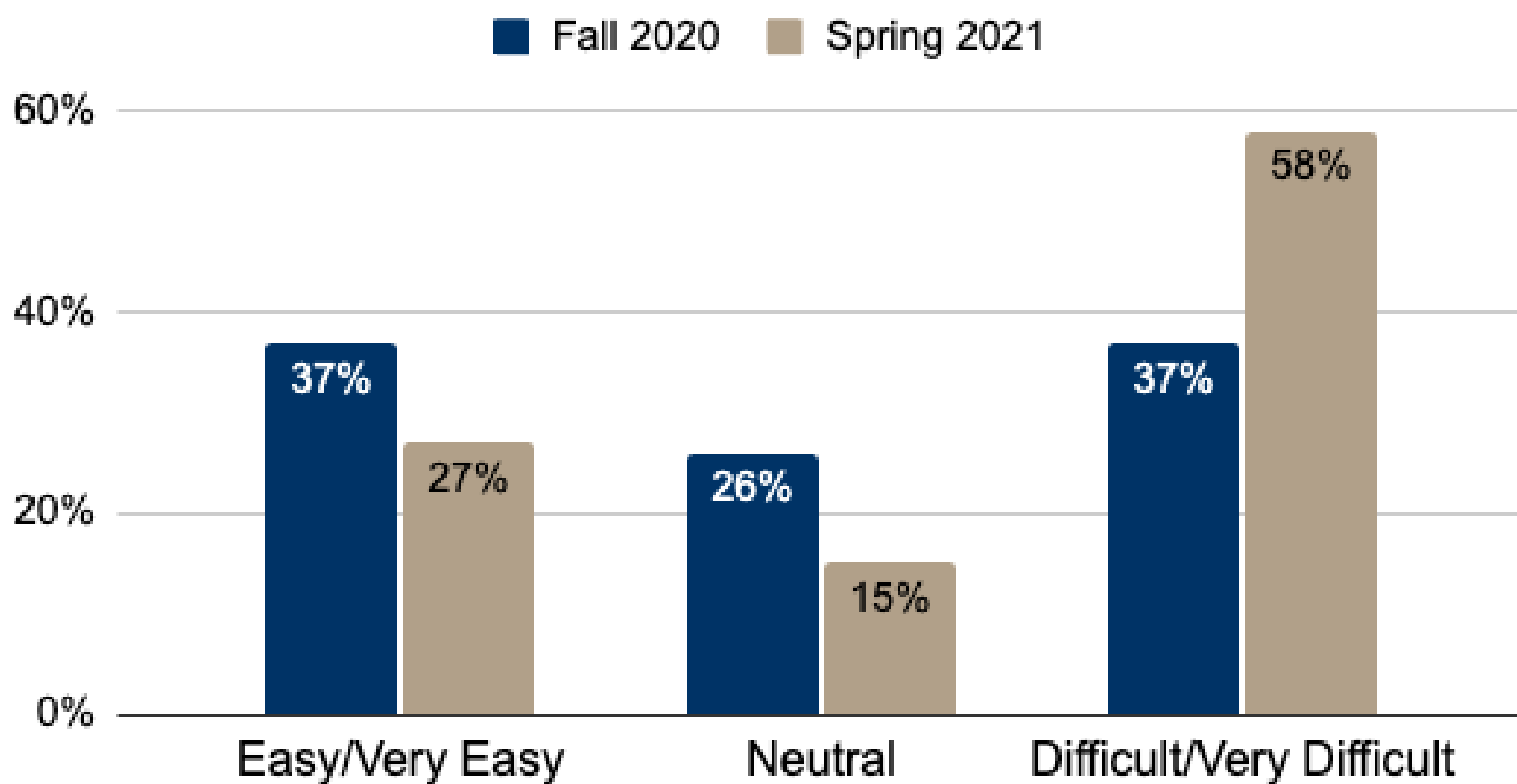
“...Parent attitudes are challenging when students arrive claiming "masks are stupid" and the "virus isn't real." This has been the most stressful part of re-entry into school, combating misinformation and trying to keep my child informed through the proper channels.”

Fall 2020

How easy would you say it is to judge if information is reliable in news media?



How easy would you say it is to judge if information is reliable in schools provided by the Government of Alberta?



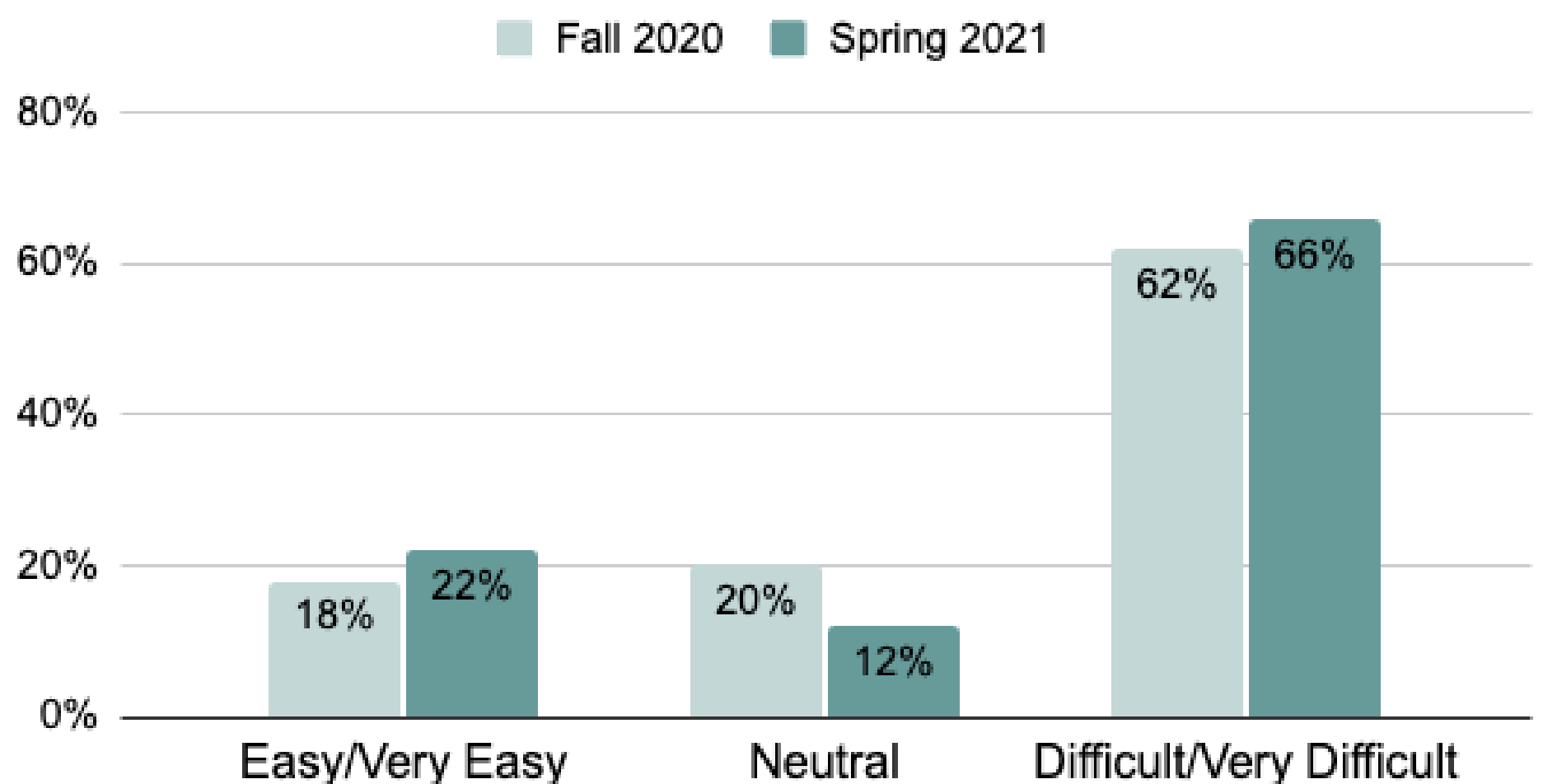
“To clarify, it is easy to judge whether the information coming from mainstream media is reliable in that it is easy to see it's not at all. The manipulation and fear tactics being used to create a society that considers fear to be virtuous is obvious...”

Fall 2020

“Information is always changing... Very inconsistent messaging throughout the system and hence why people are not following it seriously. Even with increased numbers, nothing is really being implemented safely. And I see staff and parents burning out constantly from all the extra changes!...”

Fall 2020

How easy would you say it is to judge if information is reliable in social media?



COVID-19 Protocols

The below comparison shows the changes over time in self-reported following of COVID-19 protocols.

FALL 2020

77% completed the daily COVID-19 screening checklist each day before their child entered their school.

29% agreed that the daily COVID-19 screening checklist was being completed by other parents each day before their children entered their school.

54% agreed that the daily COVID-19 screening checklist was being completed each day by staff before entering the school.

45% agreed that the daily COVID-19 screening checklist was an effective tool to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission among students/staff in Alberta schools.

SPRING 2021

52% completed the daily COVID-19 screening checklist each day before their child entered their school.

15% agreed that the daily COVID-19 screening checklist was being completed by other parents each day before their children entered their school.

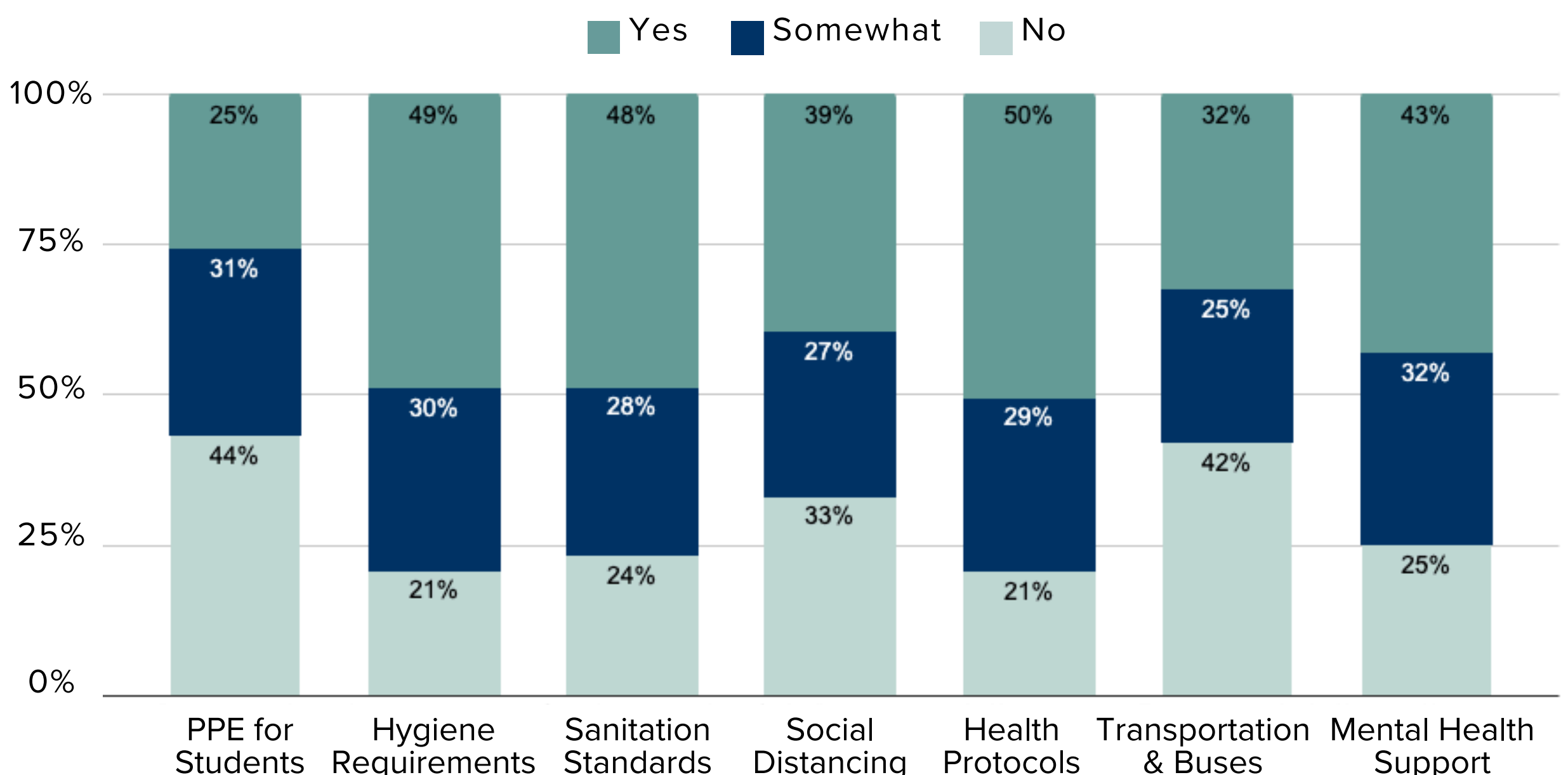
31% agreed that the daily COVID-19 screening checklist was being completed each day by staff before entering the school.

35% agreed that the daily COVID-19 screening checklist was an effective tool to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission among students/staff in Alberta schools.

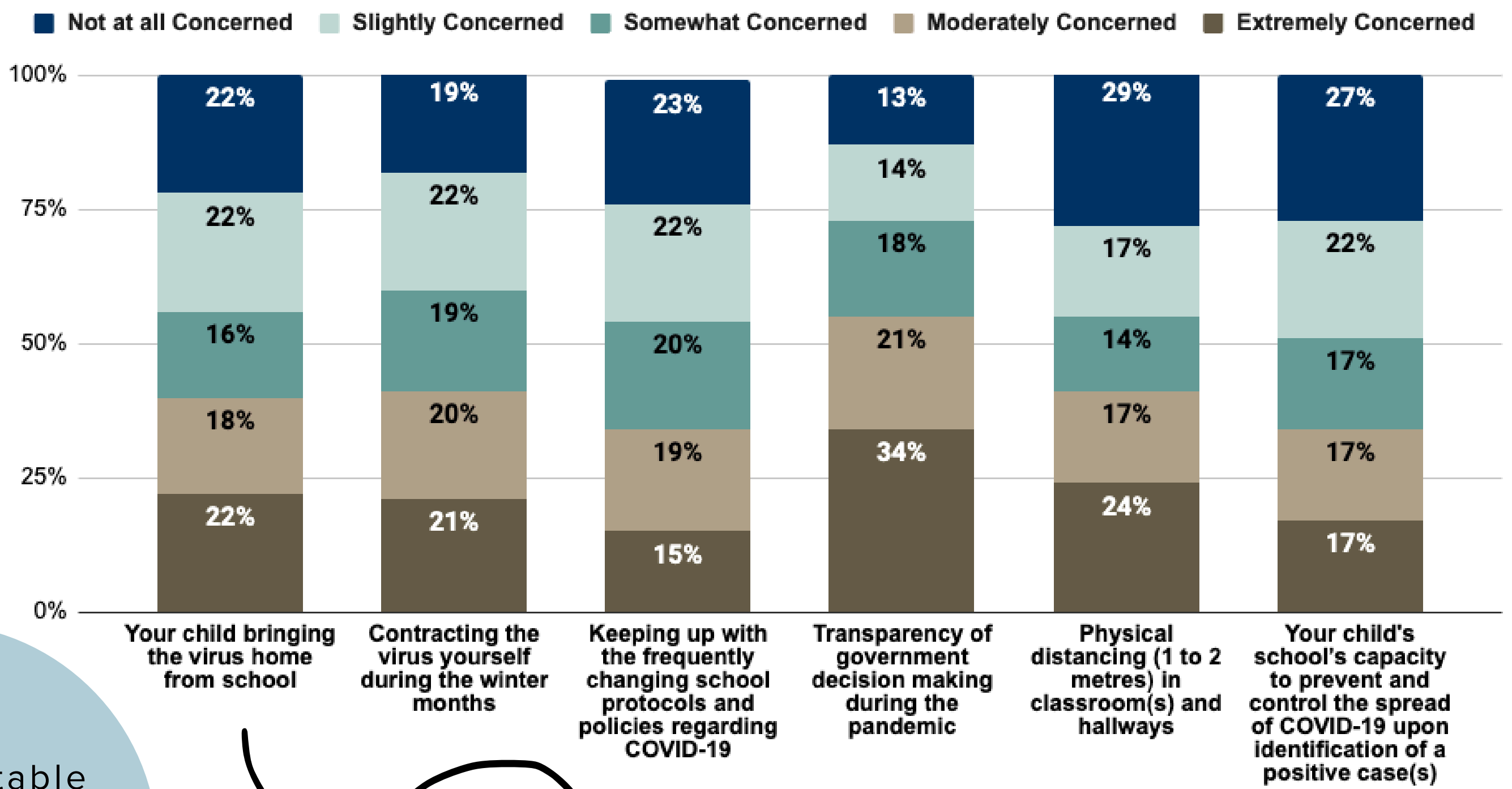
COVID-19 Perceptions

Level of concern indicated about the following areas in a back to school plan.

SPRING 2020



Please identify your level of concern with the following:



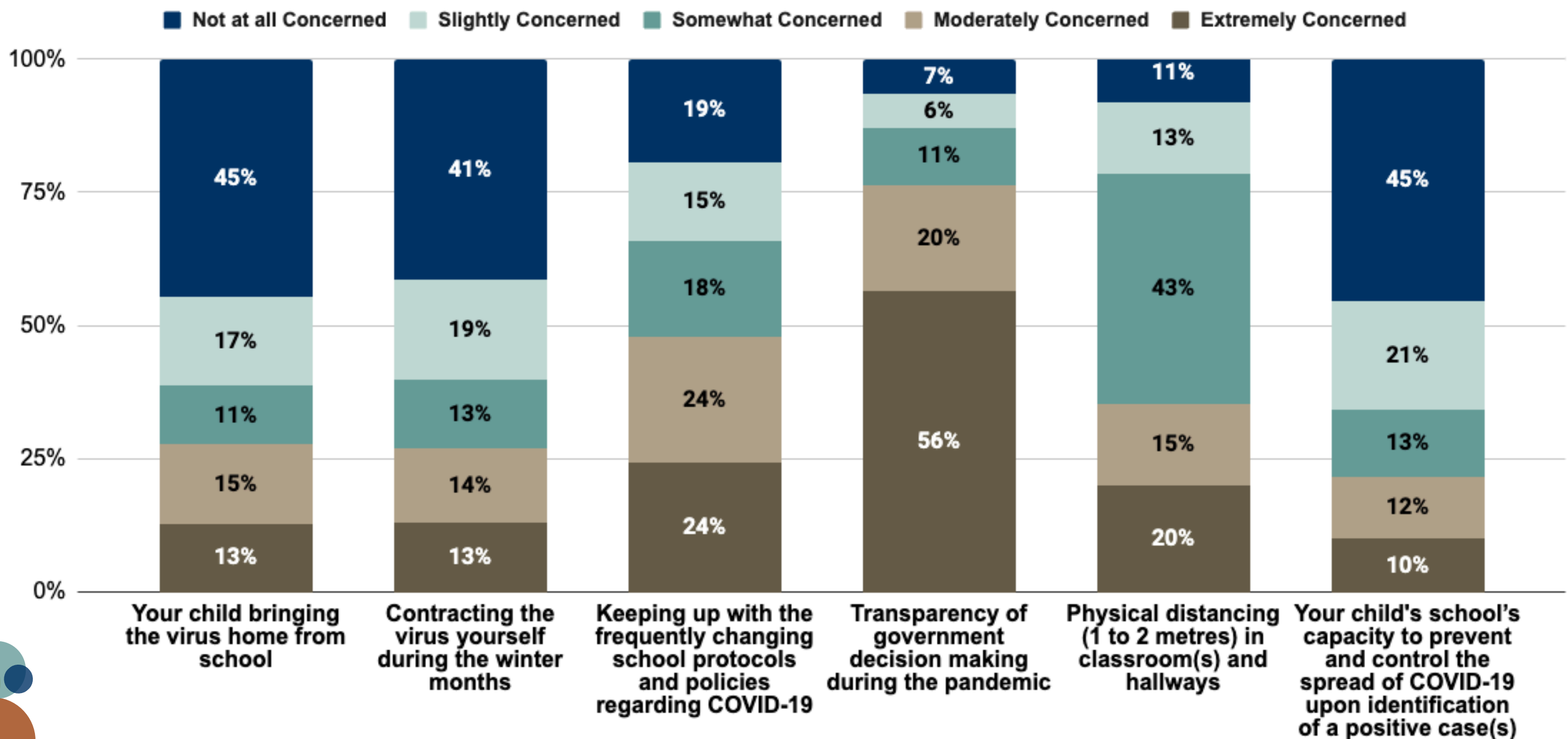
FALL 2020

45%

felt comfortable with new school routines related to COVID-19 prevention. (Fall 2020)

SPRING 2021

Please identify the level of concern you experienced this past year with the following:



In comparing COVID-19 perceptions over time, we see that parents level of concern with many COVID related risks decreased, however, concerns increased related to keeping up with the frequently changing protocols and policies regarding COVID-19 and the transparency of government decision making during the pandemic.

Moving Forward

The experiences of parents in the K-12 education system throughout the COVID-19 pandemic can inform educational stakeholders and provide opportunities for post-pandemic transformations. Subsequent changes based on this information can also help safeguard against future education disruptions. The findings outlined in the ASCA Survey reports highlight the importance of engaging parent and student voices in pandemic recovery efforts and provide unique insights into the challenges, concerns, and solutions that these stakeholders envision.

Throughout the surveys, parents described concerns with various aspects of their child(ren)'s educational experiences and distaste for the ways information was being disseminated. Parents also expressed many concerns related to children's, families, and school staff's wellbeing. At the beginning of the pandemic, parent concerns focused on the uncertainty of information and policies, the possibility of schools being a site of COVID-19 infection, and the loss of social and extracurricular opportunities. As the pandemic continued, their concerns shifted focus to learning gaps and missing skills and knowledge resulting from pandemic learning disruptions, as well as the lack of resources and support for educational and social/emotional/mental health concerns.

Parent Recommended Solutions:

Smaller class sizes

Social/emotional/mental health support

Learning resources and support

Greater communication and information

“Students need more mental health and social supports. There should be trained counsellors in every school and mental wellness should be part of the school day every day. We have gone through a collective trauma and everyone needs support. If we don't deal with it now we'll have bigger problems later.”

“Mental health is the most significant concern I have and there are basically no supports in place to help students. All of what I need to access comes out of pocket. The schools have no idea what students are dealing with in terms of their mental health, especially in high school.”

Findings have significant relevance for furthering understanding policies and practices related to...

Emergency response and navigation

Educational challenges and opportunities

Long term implications of learning disruptions and amplified inequities

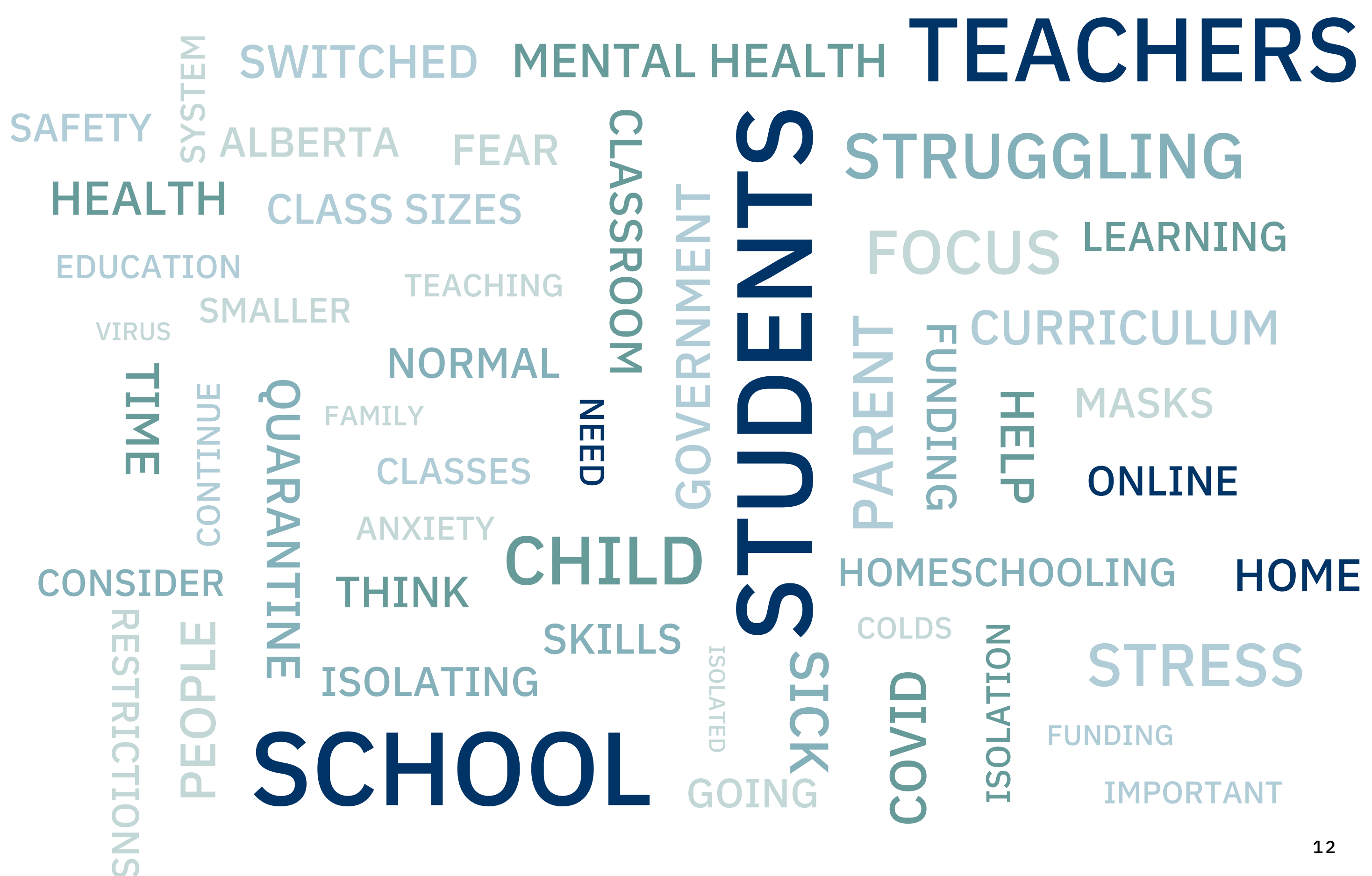
Post-pandemic education recovery

Online education approaches and tools

Concluding Thoughts

Parents' and caregivers' opinions changed throughout the pandemic as new information was presented and new realities became norms. They became increasingly concerned for their student's engagement and motivation in school and increasingly worried about the toll that the pandemic took on the mental health of everyone involved. Parents reported higher levels of stress, feeling anxious, exhausted, and helpless mid-pandemic in Spring of 2021. However, they also reported increased frustrations with media and information reporting. As the pandemic went on, parents hoped for more resources and support for their students to address gaps in knowledge and well-being that widened during the pandemic. Parent responses throughout the surveys focused on improving education and urging schools, school divisions, and the provincial government to learn from the issues that emerged and were amplified during the pandemic to inform post-pandemic recovery and how students need to be better supported moving forward.

This summary report is intended to provide a brief overview of the key learnings from the four surveys published during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is important to note the limitations of interpreting the results between surveys due to the varying response rates, and the inability to link participants across surveys. The survey samples were more than adequate for identifying common themes and key findings. However, because most of the respondents were self-selected, and there is some imbalance in regional participation, the results may not be representative of the larger population of parents and guardians with children in kindergarten to grade 12 in Alberta. Nonetheless, the results of these surveys will be useful for the historical record of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Alberta's educational experiences.



Prepared by Samantha Mullin and Erica Fae Thomson
for the Alberta School Councils' Association

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