

September 2021

Education/Economic Mobility Survey Summary

Produced by [Langer Research Associates](#)

The following is a summary of random-sample U.S. survey research on K-12 and post-secondary education and economic mobility released from late August to late September 2021. This project is supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Key Takeaways

Education

Newly released surveys on education extend evidence of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on K-12 schooling, with a majority of parents saying their child's learning has suffered. Still, most grade their community's public schools positively for their pandemic response and express confidence in their ability to address learning loss and social-emotional impacts.

Studies in the past month also tackle other key issues in secondary and post-secondary education alike, ranging from public views on pandemic-related policies to standardized testing, college admissions, enrollment and transfer levels and tuition policies.

About three-quarters of Americans or more see institutions ranging from community colleges to postgraduate schools as effective in fostering success, but very few see four-year college as affordable. Majorities support free tuition and student debt forgiveness. At the start of the education journey, two-thirds support government funding for universal pre-kindergarten, rising to 77 percent among K-12 parents and 85 percent of teachers.

Economic Mobility

Separately, on economic mobility, a pandemic low of 12 percent of adults reported significantly lower household incomes in August than a year previous. At the same time, inflation worries are high, with 63 percent very concerned about rising food and consumer prices. Nearly a quarter report food challenges; 36 percent, dissatisfaction with out-of-pocket healthcare costs. One in seven renters is in arrears, at risk with the federal eviction moratorium now ended. And expectations for economic improvement sustained their biggest monthly drop in nearly 13 years.

One study finds that government-provided tax credits and stimulus payments in 2020 turned what would have been a decline in median incomes into a gain, holding poverty at bay for millions of Americans. In another, 88 percent call it important for the federal government to make a significant investment in improving infrastructure, but support for the infrastructure bills in Congress is lower, from half to 56 percent, depending on how asked.

Detailed results of these and other new surveys on education and economic mobility follow.

K-12 Education

Pandemic Effects on Learning

In data collected at the end of the 2020-21 school year, 57 percent of K-12 parents thought their child was learning less than they would have had there not been a pandemic, little changed from 60 percent in November 2020. Half said school measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 were having an adverse effect on their child's social relationships; about four in 10 said the same about their child's physical fitness, emotional well-being and academic knowledge and skills.

Still, 78 percent were very or somewhat satisfied with the instruction and activities provided by their child's school last year.

Private school parents were more apt than traditional public school parents to express satisfaction with their school and less likely to report learning losses or other negative impacts of the pandemic. Charter school parents fell between private and traditional public school parents on these measures. ([Education Next 5/28-6/21](#))

In an open-ended question fielded last spring, caregivers' concerns about K-12 schooling online (as opposed to in person) were most apt to relate to attention problems (39 percent) and low social interaction (33 percent). Fewer mentioned falling behind academically or low academic motivation. ([MOSAIC 3/11-6/13](#))

In recently released data from April, nearly all K-12 parents reported at least some online instruction since February 2020. Most rated the overall experience positively, though about four in 10 said it had not gone well and three in 10 reported having a difficult time helping their child use technology or the internet for classes – a sentiment more common among women and those with lower incomes than among men and those with higher incomes.

Parents who more frequently experienced problems with their internet connection were more likely to have trouble helping their child with online learning. Home internet problems were more common among lower-income, Black and Hispanic adults. ([Pew Research Center 4/12-4/18](#))

Adding to findings of declining enrollment at public schools overall reported in [July](#) and [August](#), an analysis of data from 42 states by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools found that enrollment specifically at charter schools instead increased by 237,000, or 7 percent, from 2019-2020 to 2020-2021. ([NAPCS 9/22](#))

In another measure, 88 percent of parents with school-aged children in late August said they either were sending their children to school or daycare or were ready to do so. ([NPR-PBS NewsHour-Marist 8/26-8/31](#))

In mid-September data, 23 percent of parents with a child attending school in person say their child has had to quarantine at home because of a possible COVID-19 exposure since the school year began ([KFF 9/13-9/22](#)). In another study, 13 percent of all adults report school closings in their district because of a COVID-19 outbreak in the past few weeks ([Axios-Ipsos 9/24-9/27](#)).

More than half of parents with a child younger than 18 see sending their child to school as at least a moderate risk to their own health and well-being, with two in 10 calling it a large risk. Three in 10 think there's a small risk; 14 percent, none. ([Axios-Ipsos 9/24-9/27](#))

Among parents with a child attending school in person, two-thirds think the school is doing about the right amount to limit the spread of COVID-19. Twenty-one percent think it's not doing enough; just 11 percent, too much.

At the same time, very few – 6 percent – report that their child's school district is offering routine COVID-19 testing for students not eligible to get vaccinated. Twenty percent say they're offering optional testing; half, no testing at all. Twenty-two percent don't know. ([KFF 9/13-9/22](#))

Next Steps for Schools

Looking ahead, 69 percent of adults last month said schools offering remote learning should continue to do so even after coronavirus cases have dropped to a manageable level ([CNN 8/3-9/7](#)).

Framed another way, in May-June data, 51 percent of all adults, rising to 64 percent of K-12 parents, said high school students should have the option to continue to learn fully remotely after schools reopen in person. Forty-one percent overall, and 48 percent of parents, said the same for elementary school students. ([Education Next 5/28-6/21](#))

In June results – also before the Delta surge – 14 percent of public school districts reported plans to offer some form of temporary remote or hybrid learning this fall. That included 31 percent of urban districts, 13 percent of rural districts and 10 percent of suburban districts – even though suburban district leaders were most apt to say parents in their district strongly demanded a fully remote option, at 35 percent. (It was 14 percent in rural districts, with urban districts falling in between.) Nearly all districts, 97 percent, intended to offer fully in-person instruction.

Long-term (rather than temporary) remote instruction, via a “virtual school,” was planned by 26 percent of districts, up from just 3 percent pre-pandemic. That included about half of urban districts, vs. roughly a quarter of suburban and rural districts alike. ([RAND 6/1-7/2](#))

More recently, in late August, adults split, 48-51 percent, on whether it was necessary or unnecessary to close K-12 schools for in-person learning to address the pandemic. That was essentially the same as in mid-February. ([Pew Research Center 8/23-8/29](#))

A plurality of adults (47 percent) this summer picked catching up academically as the biggest challenge for their local public students in the year ahead. Three in 10 selected readjusting to regular school schedules and routines; two in 10, dealing with social-emotional impacts of the

pandemic. Parents whose schools were mainly remote or hybrid in 2020-21 were more apt than those whose schools met in person to see catching up academically as the top challenge.

About eight in adults and parents alike were confident their community's public schools would be prepared to reopen fully this fall; as many were confident it would be safe for students, teachers and staff to return to school in person – albeit, again, in pre-Delta data. Fewer adults, but still 67 percent, were confident in their community's public schools being prepared to help students catch up on academics; it was 74 percent among public school parents. Sixty-three percent of adults and 69 percent of public school parents were confident their schools would be prepared to help students deal with social-emotional impacts. ([PDK 6/25-7/5](#))

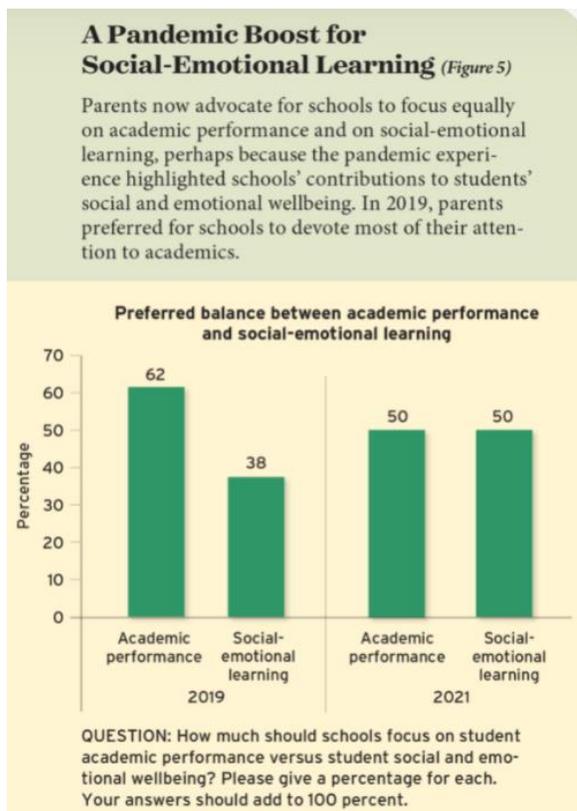
In pre-pandemic 2019, parents thought schools on average should focus on academic performance rather than social-emotional learning, 62-38 percent. Last spring, it was 50-50. ([Education Next 5/28-6/21](#))

Seven in 10 parents supported the federal government continuing to require that all students be tested in math and reading each year in grades 3-8 and once in high school. Fifty-nine percent supported using the same standards reading and math across the states “to hold public schools accountable for their performance.” When the term “Common Core” was used (in a split-sample test), support dropped 16 percentage points, to 43 percent.

More said teacher unions made it harder (35 percent) than easier (15 percent) for local schools to reopen, while a plurality (50 percent) said they made it neither easier nor harder. Among teachers themselves, 43 percent said unions made it harder, 18 percent easier, 39 percent no difference. ([Education Next 5/28-6/21](#))

Masks in Schools

Across eight surveys (with slightly different wording), school mask mandates receive broad support, ranging from 63 to 69 percent ([ABC News/Washington Post 8/29-9/1](#); [Axios-Ipsos 9/24-9/27](#); [CNN 8/3-9/7](#); [Fox News 9/12-9/15](#) among registered voters; [Marquette University Law School 9/7-9/16](#); [Monmouth 9/9-9/13](#); [NPR-PBS NewsHour-Marist 8/26-8/31](#); [Quinnipiac 9/10-9/13](#)).



That support ranges from 93 percent of Democrats to 64 percent of independents and down to 35 percent of Republicans. There's also a gender gap, with mask mandates backed by 73 percent of women compared with 58 percent of men. ([Monmouth 9/9-9/13](#))

In another question, 56 percent overall think K-12 schools should require all students and staff to wear masks when they're at school; 10 percent think they should only require unvaccinated students and staff to do so. Thirty-one percent think they should not have any mask requirements at all. ([KFF 9/13-9/22](#))

A third approach found 47 percent of K-12 parents saying all students should be required to wear face masks while attending school in the fall; 12 percent say only unvaccinated students and 40 percent say no students. Similarly, 49 percent say all teachers and staff should have to wear masks, 14 percent only unvaccinated teachers and staff and 38 percent none. There's been essentially no change in opinion on these items since mid-August. ([Gallup 9/13-9/19](#); [Gallup 8/16-8/22](#))

Seventy-four percent oppose state governments withholding funding from school districts or local governments that implement mask requirements, similar to the 77 percent who opposed it in mid-August. Twenty-four percent support withholding funding. ([Axios-Ipsos 9/24-9/27](#))

In practice, 69 percent of parents who have a child attending school in person say the school requires all students and staff to wear masks. One percent report a mask mandate only for those who are unvaccinated. Twenty-eight percent say there's no mask requirement. ([KFF 9/13-9/22](#))

In another survey, 63 percent of K-12 parents say their child's school requires all students to wear masks; 2 percent, only unvaccinated students and 35 percent, no students. Results among teachers are about the same. ([Gallup 9/13-9/19](#))

Vaccination

Support for school coronavirus vaccine mandates is a bit lower than for mask mandates, around six in 10 for teachers and ranging from 48 to 55 percent for children ([ABC News/Washington Post 8/29-9/1](#); [CNN 8/3-9/7](#); [Fox New 9/12-9/15](#) among registered voters; [KFF 9/13-9/22](#); [Monmouth 9/9-9/13](#); [Quinnipiac 9/10-9/13](#)).

Two studies suggest less hesitation to having a child age 12 and older vaccinated. From July to September, the share of parents of children age 12-17 who plan to wait a while to see how the vaccine is working dropped from 23 to 15 percent. Forty-eight percent report that their child has been vaccinated; an additional 4 percent plan to get them vaccinated right away. Four percent will only have them vaccinated if their school requires it and 21 percent say they definitely will not get them vaccinated. ([KFF 9/13-9/22](#))

From June/July to mid-August, the share of K-12 parents not planning to vaccinate their 16- to 18-year-old child dropped from 41 to 33 percent; for 12- to 15-year-olds, from 47 to 42 percent. Seven percent planned to vaccinate their 16- to 18-year-old and 11 percent planned to vaccinate

their 12- to 15-year-old. The rest reported that their child already was vaccinated. ([Gallup 8/16-8/22](#))

Fifty-six percent of parents with a child younger than 12 in one poll, and 55 percent in another, say they're likely to have their child vaccinated when it's available for their age group. The latter result is essentially the same as in July and August. Vaccination intention is 90 percent among those very worried about their child getting COVID-19 and 72 percent among those somewhat worried, dropping to 45 percent among those not too worried and 7 percent among those not worried at all. ([ABC News-Ipsos 9/24-9/28](#), [Gallup 9/13-9/19](#))

In a survey with a "wait and see" option, 34 percent of parents with a child 5-11 plan to get them vaccinated right away once authorized and available. About as many, 32 percent, say they'll wait a while to see how it's working. Seven percent say they'll get their child vaccinated only if their school requires it; 24 percent say they definitely will not have them vaccinated. (This survey was conducted largely before Pfizer's news that clinical trials showed its vaccine was safe and effective for this age group.)

For younger children, 23 percent of parents with a child younger than 5 say they'll have them vaccinated right away once a vaccine is authorized and available. A third are inclined to wait and see. Seven percent say they'll act only if the school requires it; 35 percent rule it out. ([KFF 9/13-9/22](#))

The Broader K-12 Picture

Majorities of adults and public school parents alike rated their community's public schools and public school teachers positively for their handling of the pandemic during the 2020-21 school year. Fifty-four percent of adults and 63 percent of public school parents gave A or B ratings to their local public schools' pandemic response efforts; 64 and 67 percent, respectively, gave As or Bs to their public school teachers' handling of the pandemic. Public schools nationally received weaker ratings, as customarily is the case; they received an A or B from 39 percent of adults and 43 percent of public school parents. ([PDK 6/25-7/5](#))

Scores for local public schools generally (not specifically on their pandemic response) were similar, with As or Bs from 55 percent of adults this spring, vs. 23 percent for public schools nationally.

Results were mixed as to whether teachers unions have a positive or negative effect on schools, 35-37 percent, with the rest unsure.

The public overall, parents and teachers estimated the average yearly salary of a public school teacher in their state about \$20,000 lower, on average, than actual pay. Sixty-seven percent of adults said salaries should increase (greatly, 23 percent; not greatly, 44 percent).

When told what teachers in their state make on average (in a split-sample test), 53 percent said salaries should increase (13 percent greatly, 39 percent not greatly). Teachers were much more apt to think salaries should greatly increase. Separately, 23 percent of teachers supported basing

salaries in part on how much students learn; it was 46 percent among all adults and parents alike. ([Education Next 5/28-6/21](#))

State Results

California. Seventy-three percent of Californians in late August supported requiring all teachers and staff to get a COVID-19 vaccine before returning to school in person. Eighty-one percent supported mask requirements in K-12 schools, including 63 percent strongly. (In exit poll results from the gubernatorial recall election Sept. 14, 73 percent of voters supported a mask mandate for students.) ([Spectrum News-Ipsos 8/26-8/31](#); [ABC News 9/14](#))

Among parents of children younger than 18, 26 percent had their child vaccinated, half said they likely will do so as soon as it's available for their age group and a quarter said it's unlikely. ([Spectrum News-Ipsos 8/26-8/31](#))

Ohio. Third-graders in Ohio are estimated to have learned roughly 20 percent less in English language arts from November 2020 to April 2021 than in prior years, per ELA exam scores. Learning declines were larger for districts that spent the majority of the year in fully remote instruction. Ohio State Tests (administered in grades 5-8 and high school) also reflect declines compared with previous years: Average achievement was lower in every grade and subject. Declines were larger in math than in ELA and for those who were mainly in hybrid or remote instruction. ([Kogan & Lavertu 8/28](#))

Texas. Six in 10 Texans support requiring students, teachers and staff to wear masks in schools. Support is similar, 62 percent, among public school parents. Reminded that “Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton is suing school districts that are requiring masks for students,” twice as many call that a bad idea as a good one, 63 vs. 29 percent.

Fifty-four percent of Texans support requiring teachers to receive a COVID-19 vaccine while four in 10 oppose. ([Quinnipiac 9/24-9/27](#))

Early Learning

Two-thirds in June supported the government paying for all 4-year-old children to attend a preschool program, with four in 10 strongly supporting this. Support rose to 76 percent among parents of school-age children (48 percent strong support) and 85 percent among teachers (67 percent strong support). ([Education Next 5/28-6/21](#))

Post-secondary Success

The pandemic continues to impact post-secondary education as well. In households with an adult who'd planned to take post-secondary classes this term, 15 percent have canceled their plans and 12 percent are taking fewer classes than planned. ([U.S. Census Bureau 9/1-9/13](#))

Views on college vaccine mandates depend on the question. In one survey, the public divides about evenly, 50-48 percent, on universities requiring their students to receive a COVID-19

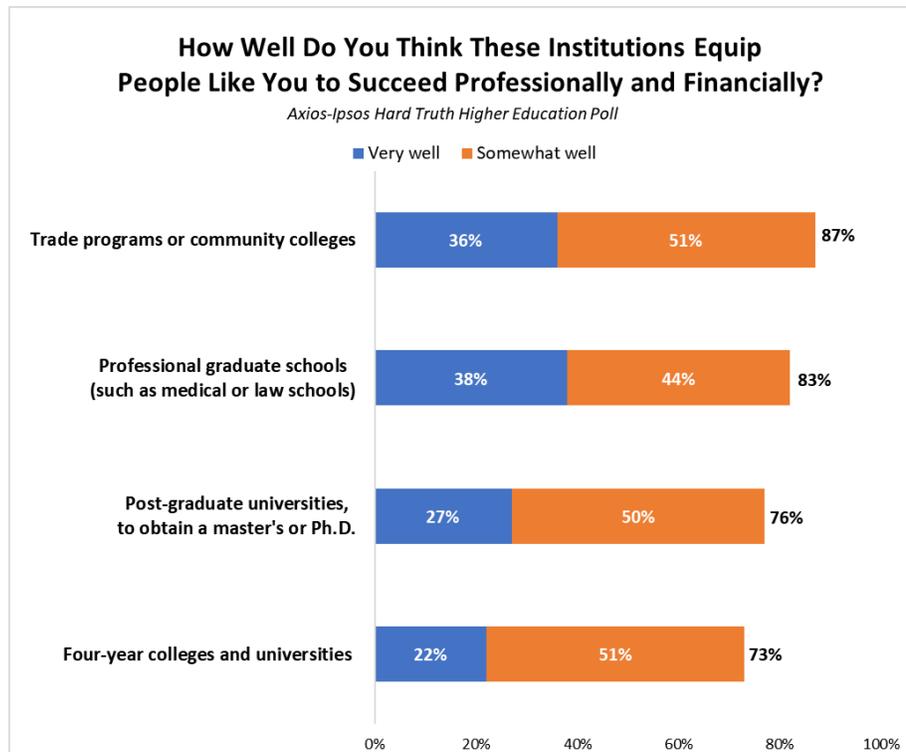
vaccine, essentially unchanged since mid-April ([Quinnipiac 9/10-9/13](#)). Asked another way, more, 57 percent in late August, supported requiring adults to show proof of COVID-19 vaccination before being allowed to attend public colleges and universities in person “as part of efforts to slow the spread of the coronavirus.” ([Pew Research Center 8/23-8/29](#))

In a more recent poll that included the caveat “unless they have a medical exemption,” 55 percent say colleges and universities should require students to get vaccinated for COVID-19. ([KFF 9/13-9/22](#)) When specifying “public universities” and “exceptions for religious objections or medical reasons,” support for a vaccine mandate rises to 64 percent ([Marquette University Law School 9/7-9/16](#)).

Views of Colleges and Universities

More broadly, seven in 10 adults overall had a positive view of their state’s public colleges and universities this spring, giving them an A or B grade; a similar 74 percent gave As or Bs to their state’s private post-secondary institutions. It was 57 percent for public colleges and universities nationally and 65 percent for private ones. ([Education Next 5/28-6/21](#))

Majorities in August said a variety of higher education institutions equip people like them to succeed professionally and financially. Eighty-seven percent said this about trade programs or community colleges, 83 percent for professional graduate schools (such as medical or law schools), 76 percent for post-graduate universities (to obtain a master’s or Ph.D.) and 73 percent for four-year colleges and universities.



Seventy-nine percent thought they’d be comfortable in trade programs or community colleges, dropping to two-thirds for four-year colleges and universities, 59 percent for post-graduate universities and 58 percent for professional graduate schools.

Fifty-five percent saw trade programs or community colleges as affordable. That dropped sharply to just 9 percent for four-year colleges and universities, 6 percent for post-graduate universities and 4 percent for professional graduate schools. ([Axios-Ipsos 8/11-8/18](#))

Post-secondary Tuition

Respondents divided 37-34 percent on whether they agreed or disagreed that “a four-year college education is worth the tuition.” (The rest neither agreed nor disagreed.) Many more, 73 percent, agreed that a trade school or community college education is worth the tuition. Forty-three percent agreed that colleges and universities with large endowments should not charge tuition; 23 percent disagreed.

Seventy-three percent supported making trade programs or community colleges free to any U.S. citizen, 59 percent supported this for four-year colleges and 55 percent supported forgiving or erasing all federal student loan debt. ([Axios-Ipsos 8/11-8/18](#))

In data from the spring, six in 10 supported making all public two-year colleges in the U.S. free to attend, 38 percent strongly. It was a split, 43-43 percent, for public four-year colleges. ([Education Next 5/28-6/21](#))

College Admissions

Seventy-one percent in August agreed that an educated workforce should be a priority for the United States. Forty-seven percent agreed that anyone can work hard and get into a good college; 38 percent agreed that all people in the United States have an equal opportunity to get a college degree.

In a half-sampled question, support was 16 points lower (60 vs. 76 percent) for admissions policies that include whether or not “the applicant comes from a disadvantaged community.”

Fifty-three percent supported a single national test system to determine admission to elite universities; 51 percent supported abolishing standardized tests such as the SAT or ACT.

Fifty-one percent of Black adults said their race was a disadvantage when it comes to access and opportunity for higher education, compared with 25 percent of Hispanics and Asian/Pacific Islanders alike and 9 percent of whites. Twenty-nine percent of whites, 15 percent of Asian/Pacific Islanders, 13 percent of Hispanics and 5 percent of Black adults said their race was an advantage in that context; the rest saw neither an advantage nor disadvantage or were unsure.

Fifty-three percent of adults overall thought higher education needs to continue making changes to give Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander and Native Americans equal opportunities with white Americans; 44 percent thought higher education already has made the changes needed. Black adults, 81 percent, were especially apt to think higher education needs to continue making changes. ([Axios-Ipsos 8/11-8/18](#))

Asked about a “possible future Supreme Court decision” finding “that colleges cannot use race as one of several factors in deciding which applicants to admit,” 53 percent say they favor this, with 13 percent opposed. Fourteen percent have heard of this but not enough to have an opinion;

19 percent say they've heard nothing at all on the matter. ([Marquette University Law School 9/7-9/16](#))

College Enrollment and Transfers

College enrollment among continuing and returning students fell 3.7 percent in 2020-2021 vs. a year earlier, while transfers fell 8.4 percent. "Upward" transfers from two-year to four-year institutions largely were preserved, down 1.3 percent, compared with double-digit declines in lateral (11.9 percent) and reverse transfers (16.2 percent). Upward transfers into highly selective institutions grew 9.4 percent, offsetting declines at less-competitive institutions. Existing disparities in upward transfers were exacerbated: while more Asians and Hispanics transferred up than in the previous year, fewer Blacks and Native Americans did so. ([NSCRC 8/31](#))

Pathways

In June data, half of adults said they would like the federal government to devote a great deal or quite a bit of effort in the next 10 years on "adapting workforce education to meet a changing economy." One-third favored a moderate amount of attention to that; the rest, a little or none. Still, many more said they trust the private sector to do a better job handling the adaptation of workforce education, 64 percent, than the federal government, 34 percent.

Seven in 10 supported higher funding for education and workforce training "to improve the country's ability to compete globally," including four in 10 strongly. Twenty-one percent neither supported nor opposed this, with 8 percent opposed. ([AP-NORC-MeriTalk 6/24-6/28](#))

State Results

California. A newly released analysis of 2017-2018 data assesses disparities in the share of California high school students who enrolled in college within 12 months of graduation. College enrollment was highest among Asian graduates (91 percent), followed by Filipino (77 percent), white (76 percent), Black (65 percent), Pacific Islander (64 percent), Hispanic (63 percent) and Native American (54 percent) graduates. Twenty-six percent of Asian high school graduates enrolled at a UC campus within a year, vs. 10 percent of Filipino graduates, 7 percent of white graduates and 4 percent of Black, Pacific Islander, Hispanic and Native American graduates alike. ([PPIC 9/15](#))

Economic Mobility

Financial Situation

Prospectively, 18 percent of adults in August expected their personal financial situation to get worse in the next year, a pandemic high in ongoing monthly data and up 8 points from its low in September 2020. Many more, 41 percent, expected it to get better, down 6 points since March ([Fannie Mae National Housing Survey 8/1-8/23](#)). Results in another study this month are similar; 14 percent expect that their financial situation will be worse a year from now, 36 percent better, 49 percent the same ([Pew Research Center 9/13-9/19](#)).

Sixty-nine percent of Americans rate their personal finances positively; 49 percent say that about the buying climate. Both are about the same as a month ago. But the share who say the economy overall is improving dropped from 38 to 27 percent in a month, its steepest fall since October 2008. ([Consumer Comfort Index 8/24-9/19](#))

Prices in August grew 0.3 percent over July, the lowest one-month increase since January (on a seasonally adjusted basis). That left prices up 5.3 percent the last 12 months; a touch lower than 5.4 percent for the year ending in July ([U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 9/14](#)). Inflation/higher prices again tops a list of potential concerns among registered voters, with 82 percent extremely or very concerned ([Fox News 9/12-9/15](#)).

Sixty-three percent in another study are very concerned about rising prices for food and consumer goods, with an additional three in 10 somewhat concerned. Fewer are very concerned about other financial matters: employers being unable to find workers to hire (42 percent), people facing eviction or foreclosure (35 percent) or people who want to work being unable to find jobs (29 percent).

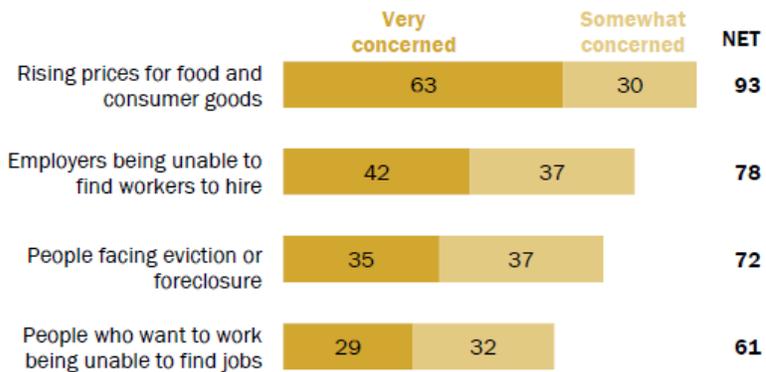
At least half across income levels are very concerned about rising prices. Those with lower household incomes are more likely than others to be highly concerned about people facing eviction or foreclosure and about people who want jobs being unable to find work. ([Pew Research Center 9/13-9/19](#))

Fifteen percent of renters are behind on their rent, little changed from a month ago – an at-risk population given the end of the federal eviction moratorium. Black (22 percent), Asian (19 percent) and Hispanic (19 percent) renters remain more apt than white renters (11 percent) to be behind on rent. It’s also higher in households with children (21 percent) vs. those without (12 percent), up from a 6-point difference a month ago.

Two in 10 adults report that someone in their household received a Child Tax Credit payment in the last four weeks, steady since mid-August. ([U.S. Census Bureau 9/1-9/13](#))

Majority of Americans are very concerned about rising prices; less concern over other economic issues

% who say they are very/somewhat concerned about ...



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 13-19, 2021.

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Figure 4.

Poverty Rates Using the Official and Supplemental Poverty Measures: 2009 to 2020



¹ Includes unrelated individuals under the age of 15.

Notes: The Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) estimates for 2019 and 2020 reflect the implementation of revised SPM methodology. More information is available in the report appendix. The data for 2017 and beyond reflect the implementation of an updated processing system. The data for 2013 and beyond reflect the implementation of the redesigned income questions. More information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions is available at <<https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/cpsmar21.pdf>>. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2010 to 2021 Annual Social and Economic Supplements (CPS ASEC).

Not accounting for government aid, median household incomes decreased 2.9 percent from 2019 to 2020, the first significant drop since 2011. The official poverty rate increased by 1.0 point to 11.4 percent, after five years of declines. Poverty remains far higher among Black and Hispanic people, at 19.5 and 17.0

percent, than among white and Asian people, at 8.2 and 8.1 percent. (In these data, Black and Asian people include Black Hispanics and Asian Hispanics.)

When factoring in tax credits and stimulus payments, however, median household incomes increased by 4.0 percent. The Supplemental Poverty Measure, an alternative measure of poverty that includes stimulus payments and other forms of government aid, decreased by 2.6 points to 9.1 percent. Social Security had the largest antipoverty impact, moving 26.5 million individuals out of poverty, followed by stimulus payments (11.7 million) and unemployment insurance benefits (5.5 million). The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that all government aid combined prevented 53 million people from falling into poverty in 2020, compared with 35 million in 2019. ([U.S. Census Bureau 9/14](#); [CBPP 9/14](#))

A new USDA report finds that food insecurity held steady in 2020, with 10.5 percent of households having trouble meeting basic food needs. That said, households with children were particularly impacted by the pandemic, with food insecurity rising from 13.6 percent in 2019 to 14.8 percent in 2020. In about half of those households, 7.6 percent, parents and guardians were unable to shield children from food insecurity, up from 6.5 percent in 2019. ([USDA 2020](#))

An August poll found that nearly a quarter of Americans experienced food challenges within the past 12 months, including 4 percent who said they didn't have enough to eat at least some of the time and 19 percent who had enough, but not always the kind of food they wanted. Among them, half said they needed extra money to help pay for food or bills. Thirty-seven percent of adults said they received food assistance from a nonprofit or government program in the past year and 17 percent tried to access such services but didn't know if they were eligible or experienced some other difficulty. ([Impact Genome-AP-NORC 8/5-8/23](#))

Thirty-six percent in June said they were dissatisfied with their out-of-pocket costs for medical care. A quarter were dissatisfied with their access to affordable health insurance coverage. Four and five in 10, respectively, were satisfied, with two in 10 alike neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. ([AP-NORC-MeriTalk 6/24-6/28](#))

Also related to economic opportunity, some Medicare beneficiaries in a newly released analysis of 2019 data reported being unable to get dental (12 percent), vision (6 percent) or hearing (3 percent) care. Inability to get vision care was higher, 11 percent, among those who reported difficulty seeing. Sixteen percent overall were unable to get at least one type of care; in this group, seven in 10 cited cost as the reason. ([KFF 9/21](#))

Coronavirus and the Economy

A plurality in August and early September said the economy still is in a downturn caused by the pandemic and conditions are continuing to worsen, 41 percent. Twenty-three percent thought recovery has not started but conditions have stabilized; a third said the economy is starting to recover. ([CNN 8/3-9/7](#))

In late August, 29 percent saw the pandemic as a major threat to their personal financial situation, compared with 72 percent who said the same about the U.S. economy. Forty-six percent said it was a minor threat to their personal finances; a quarter, not a threat ([Pew Research Center 8/23-8/29](#)). In data from this spring, 21 percent saw a major threat to their finances, higher among the temporarily unemployed, members of racial or ethnic minority groups, renters and those with a no more than a high school education, compared with their counterparts. ([MOSAIC 3/11-6/13](#))

Employment

Seventeen percent of adults report that their household experienced a loss of employment income in the last four weeks, inching up 2 points in a month ([U.S. Census Bureau 9/1-9/13](#)). Still, while 12 percent reported significantly lower household incomes in August than a year previous, that's the fewest since March 2020. Twenty-six percent had significantly higher incomes, near its pandemic high in May, 29 percent ([Fannie Mae National Housing Survey 8/1-8/23](#)).

Monthly job growth this year has averaged 586,000, and the unemployment rate declined 0.2 points to 5.2 percent in August ([U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 9/3](#)).

In a forward-looking measure, 15 percent of employed adults in August were concerned about losing their job in the next year, up 4 points from June's pandemic low to the most since April ([Fannie Mae National Housing Survey 8/1-8/23](#)). Among registered voters, 72 percent express concern about unemployment across the country ([Fox News 9/12-9/15](#)).

Sixty-three percent of Americans in August were concerned about national economic threats negatively impacting their job or income in the next six months. Though worry was widespread, strong concern was more common among Black and Hispanic people than among whites. ([Bankrate 8/24-8/29](#))

A recent analysis found an increase in the share of mothers of children younger than 18 saying it would be best for them personally not to work for pay, 27 percent in October 2020, up from 19 percent in summer 2019. Forty-four percent in October 2020 said it would be best for them to

work full-time, a 7-point drop from summer 2019. There were no significant changes among fathers. ([Pew Research Center 8/31](#))

State Results

California. About half of Californians in August said the state is in a recession. This view was more prevalent among lower-income residents.

Two-thirds rated homelessness in their part of California as a big problem, and six in 10 said the presence of homeless people in their community has increased in the last 12 months; just 5 percent said it’s decreased. ([PPIC 8/20-8/29](#))

Homelessness and affordable housing were among the most-cited problems facing the state in a late August poll, in addition to climate change/natural disasters and COVID-19. Among economic-related issues, 39 percent identified homelessness, 36 percent affordable housing, 17 percent taxes, 11 percent the economy, 9 percent economic inequality and 6 percent unemployment. (Respondents could select up to three problems from a list of 16.) The share citing affordable housing as a main problem was up 10 points since October 2020, while citing unemployment was down 16 points. ([Spectrum News-Ipsos 8/26-8/31](#))

In exit poll results from California’s recall election, a majority of voters, 59 percent, called the cost of living in their part of California “unmanageable” ([ABC News 9/14](#)).

Government Action

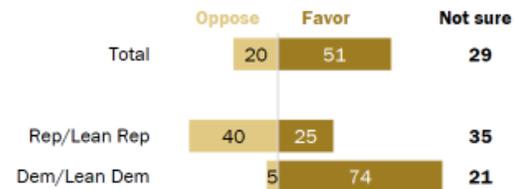
Eighty-eight percent call it very or somewhat important for the federal government to make a significant investment in improving infrastructure, including 49 percent very important. ([CNN 8/3-9/7](#))

Fifty-one percent support the Senate-passed infrastructure bill, in a question noting that “about half of the \$1.2 trillion bill is new funding over the next 10 years for improvements to the country’s infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, public transit and internet access.” Two in 10 are opposed, 29 percent unsure.

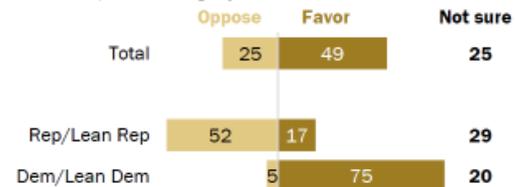
About half also support “about \$3.5 trillion in funding over the next 10 years for universal pre-K education, expanding Medicare, reducing carbon emissions, and other projects.” One in four is opposed, as many unsure. ([Pew Research Center 9/13-9/19](#))

More favor than oppose infrastructure bills, but many say they are unsure

% who ___ a \$1.2 trillion bill passed by the Senate last month that would provide new funding over the next 10 years for improvements to the country’s infrastructure



% who ___ a proposed \$3.5 trillion reconciliation package in funding over the next 10 years for universal pre-K education, expanding Medicare, reducing carbon emissions, and other projects



Notes: See topline for full question wording. No answer responses not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 13-19, 2021.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

In another poll, 56 percent of registered voters favor “the bill being considered by the U.S. House that would allocate an additional \$3.5 trillion toward infrastructure, including spending to address climate change, health care and child care.” Thirty-nine percent are opposed. Support reaches 87 percent among Democrats, compared with 54 percent of independents and 23 percent of Republicans. ([Fox News 9/12-9/15](#))

In June data, 68 percent supported the federal government expanding access to broadband internet across the United States “to improve the country’s ability to compete globally” ([AP-NORC-MeriTalk 6/24-6/28](#)). According to the FCC, more than five million households have enrolled in the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program since its inception in mid-May ([FCC 8/27](#)).

Also in June, 48 percent said they would like the federal government to devote a great deal or quite a bit of effort to “making it easier for the public to find and participate in federal programs that deliver services such as Social Security, student financial aid and natural disaster assistance.” Adults trusted the federal government over the private sector on this, 63-35 percent.

A quarter said the federal government has been extremely or very effective at connecting people with government services such as unemployment and food assistance during the pandemic. Fifty-four percent said it’s been somewhat effective, the rest less so.

Half said the federal government’s increasing advance notice about out-of-pocket costs for medical care would make a major impact on them personally; an additional third see a minor impact, 14 percent none. ([AP-NORC-MeriTalk 6/24-6/28](#))