



Parents concerned about rush to reopen schools

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July 20, 2020

A trio of polls is showing parents are concerned about the rush to reopen schools in the fall, with majority saying the focus should be on limiting the spread of coronavirus, not getting kids back into class.

According to a Yahoo! News/YouGov poll of 1,504 adults, only 39% said they would send their children back to school for in-person classes in the fall with just 17% saying schools have the resources necessary to keep students and staff safe.

The YouGov poll mirrors similar results from a Navigator poll and a Ipsos/Axios poll released recently.

In June, a Navigator survey found support for opening K-12 schools at 49%, by early July, that number had fallen to 39%. Meanwhile an Ipsos/Axios poll found 43% of parents considered sending their children to school in the fall to be a “large risk” with only 8% saying there was “no risk”.

“It is not surprising that parents are apprehensive, we have a difficult decision not only for teachers and school officials and our state and local leaders, but for parents and care-givers as well,” says Thomas Bryer, an associate professor at the University of Central Florida’s School of Public Administration. “We have a safety concern, we have an education concern, and we have an equity concern, with many different public policy issues being thrown into a jumble here.”

Complicating matters is the perception, according to the YouGov poll, that schools are being forced to reopen, with 63% of those polled saying the President should not be pressuring schools to reopen.

“When you have something like the coronavirus that affects different communities at different times and different severity, the worst thing you can do is say that everybody has to do the exact same thing,” says Neal McCluskey of the Cato Institute’s Center for Educational Freedom. “Policy-makers often want to appear to be the ones in charge, that they have the knowledge and power to make decisions for other people, especially if they think that there is one right decision.”

McCluskey says devolving back-to-school decisions to the lowest level possible would give schools and parents more flexibility while encouraging innovation in education that could be replicated in other areas.

“We don’t have uniform people, so it makes no sense to have uniform delivery of education,” says McCluskey. “We really have to tailor education to the unique needs of different kids, communities, and families.”