

Most Teachers Say They're Worried About Getting COVID-19 at Work

By [Madeline Will](#) on [September 15, 2020 3:37 PM](#)



Teachers and parents have a long list of health precautions they feel are essential to reopening schools, ranging from mandating face coverings to ensuring ventilation systems work properly, a new survey sponsored by the American Federation of Teachers shows. But teachers are somewhat less confident that their school districts will put those measures in place.

Thirty-seven percent of teachers say they are dissatisfied with how their district has communicated plans for reopening schools. Almost a third of teachers said they are not confident their district will take the necessary steps to keep staff safe. And some have taken their safety into their own hands: 86 percent of teachers said they have purchased their own personal protective equipment, with 11 percent saying they purchased PPE for their students.

"The lack of transparency, the lack of communication about what's really going on creates great uncertainty and creates real distrust," said Randi Weingarten, president of AFT, which is the nation's second-largest teachers' union, on a press call. She added that districts should be disclosing COVID-19 cases, as well as the precautions they're planning to implement.

See also: [Worried Teachers Want to Know: What Happens If I Get Sick?](#)

The nationally representative surveys, conducted by Hart Research Associates, were administered to about 1,000 public school parents, including an oversampling of Black and Latino parents, between Aug. 26 and Sept. 6, and about 800 teachers between Aug. 26 and Sept. 1.

The results come as most schools across the country have started classes. According to Education Week's **database of district reopening plans**, 27 of the 100 largest school districts have resumed at least some in-person instruction.

The surveys found that 76 percent of teachers are worried they might get infected with the coronavirus at work, and 77 percent of parents are worried their children might get infected at school. For Black and Latino parents, the proportion was slightly higher—81 percent of both groups said they were worried about their children's health. Federal data show that Black and Latino communities have been especially hard-hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

Even so, 57 percent of parents say schools should start the school year with at least some in-person instruction. Just 44 percent of teachers said the same.

"We all want to get back to in-person learning," Weingarten said. But "we have to follow the science."

While teachers and parents largely agreed about the safety precautions that should be put in place, teachers were somewhat less confident about their districts' ability to implement them. For example, just over half of teachers said they are confident their school will allow high-risk staff to stay home from work, compared to 72 percent of parents.

Districts have had to decide **which health conditions to prioritize and how to accommodate as many teachers as they can** while still maintaining staffing levels for the students who are on campus. In some cases, some district leaders have had to find alternate ways to accommodate teachers without keeping them home.

Only 47 percent of teachers think schools will ensure ventilation systems work correctly or increase outdoor air by opening windows, compared to 69 percent of parents. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends schools take these measures, especially as **a federal watchdog report has estimated that 36,000 schools have air-system problems**. Meanwhile, some teachers have complained that their classroom windows do not open.

Across the country, teachers **have protested returning to school buildings**. And in at least two districts in Massachusetts, teachers initially refused to return to what they felt were unsafe working conditions.

The local teachers' unions in the Andover and Sharon school districts organized a boycott on professional development days, saying that the districts must demonstrate that school buildings

are safe to reopen. The Massachusetts Labor Relations Board **ruled that the Andover teachers were participating** in an unlawful strike, and the Sharon teachers' union **also acknowledged that it was violating state law**, according to NBC Boston. In both districts, teachers eventually went back to work.