

The 11th Annual Life in Hampton Roads Survey

The Social Science Research Center (SSRC) at Old Dominion University recently completed data collection for the 11th annual Life in Hampton Roads (LIHR) survey. The purpose of the survey is to gain insight into residents' perceptions of the quality of life in Hampton Roads and the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as other topics of local interest such as perceptions of police, employment and other issues. A total of 1,105 online surveys were completed between June 26 and July 13 (during Phase 2 and Phase 3 of Virginia's reopening plan). Of these, 1,100 were from residents of the seven Hampton Roads cities included in the Life in Hampton Roads survey and constituted the final dataset.

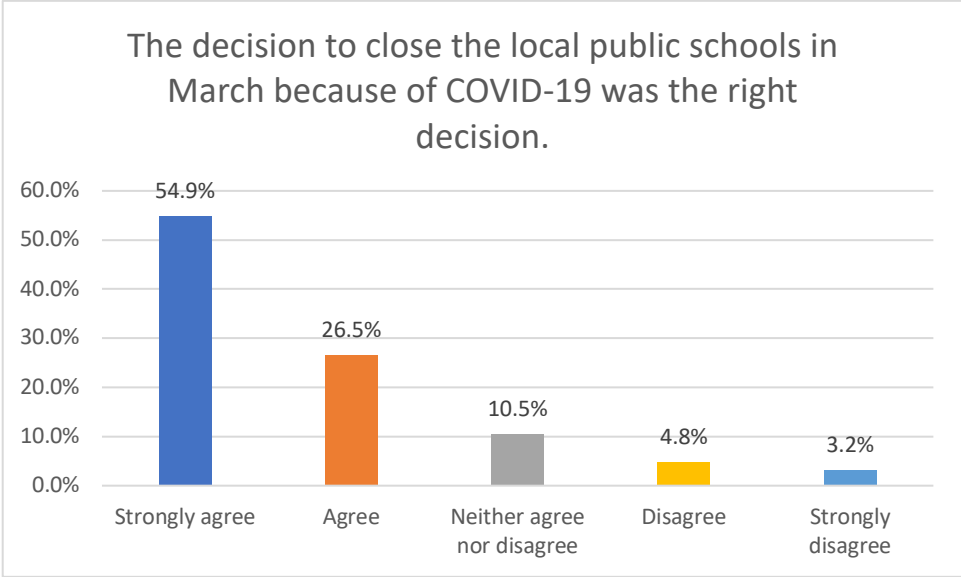
It is important to note that the methodology this year differs from previous Life in Hampton Roads surveys. For several reasons, including COVID-19 social distancing guidelines and telework directives, we moved from a telephone survey to a web-based design using two panels of respondents. This change limits to some degree the ability to compare this year's results with those from previous years or to as confidently generalize the results to the Hampton Roads population as a whole. Nonetheless, we note that an increasing number of surveys have moved online in recent years, and that in many instances useful data has been developed despite the challenges of online survey research. For more detailed information on the methodological changes and potential impacts please see the Methodology section in the pending full report, or please contact the SSRC directly.

Life in Hampton Roads: COVID-19 and Education

The 2020 Life in Hampton Roads survey included several questions concerning response by state officials and public schools to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as opinions for reopening plans in the fall. These questions provide insight into the experiences and concerns of Hampton Roads citizens.

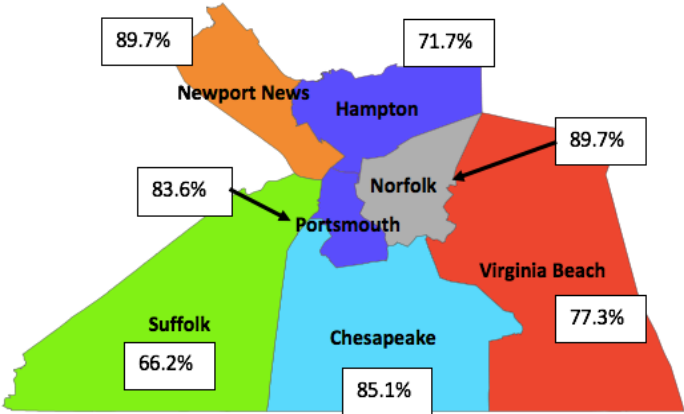
Perceptions of School Closures and Potential Reopening

All respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with a series of statements, including "The decision to close the local public schools in March because of COVID-19 was the right decision." More than 81% of respondents either strongly agreed (54.9%) or agreed (26.5%) with this statement. Only 8% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the March school closings.

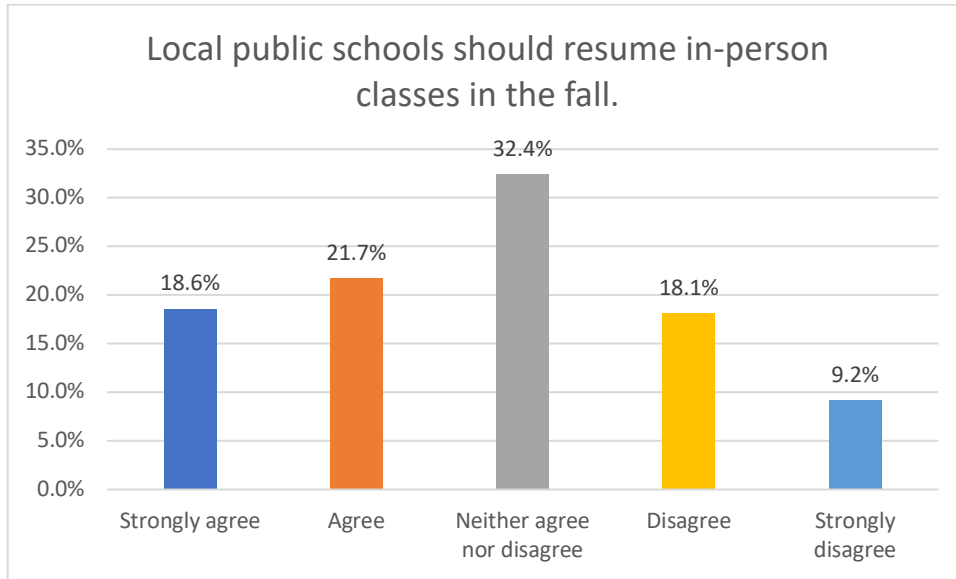


While a clear majority of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the decision to close the local public schools, and this was true across the cities of Hampton Roads, there were statistically significant differences ($p < .001$). Suffolk residents were least likely to agree or strongly agree (66.2%) followed by Hampton (71.7%) and Virginia Beach (77.3%). More than 80% of the residents in the other cities agreed or strongly agreed (Portsmouth 83.6%, Chesapeake 85.1% and 89.7% in both Norfolk and Newport News).

% Agreeing that Closing Local Public Schools in March 2020 was the Right Decision

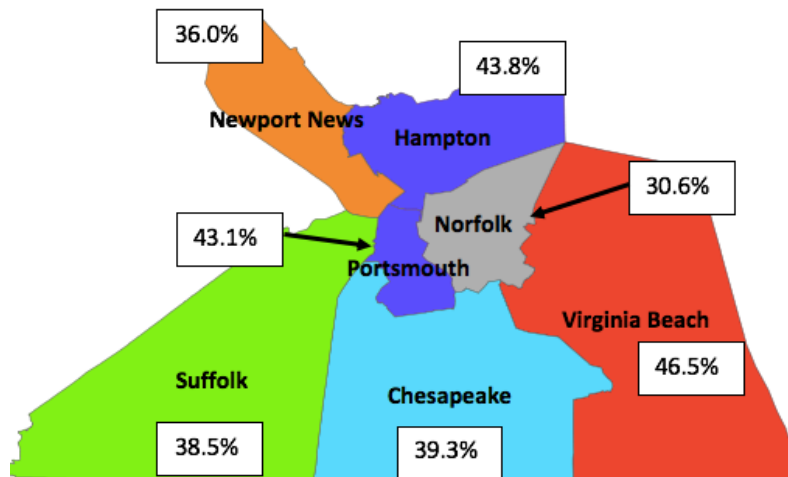


Survey respondents are less certain on whether public schools should resume in-person classes in the fall. Just over 40% agreed or strongly agreed that in-person classes should resume while more than one in four respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (27.3%). However, almost one-third (32.4%) neither agreed nor disagreed, which perhaps shows uncertainty about how the public schools should proceed.

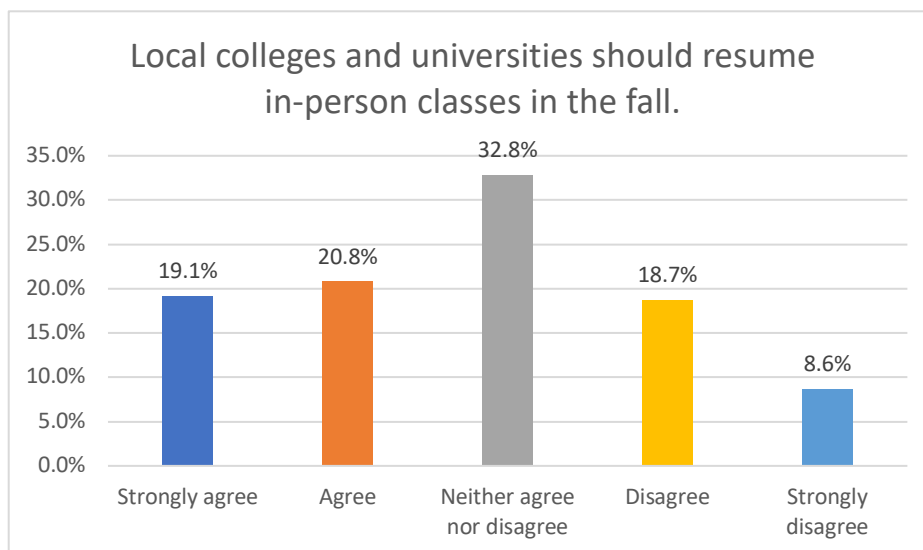


There was also significant variation among the cities in beliefs about resuming in-person classes in public schools ($p < .05$). More than 40% of residents in Portsmouth (43.1%), Hampton (43.8%) and Virginia Beach (46.5%) agree that in-person classes should resume, while fewer respondents in Norfolk (30.6%), Newport News (36.0%), Suffolk (38.5%) and Chesapeake (39.3%) agreed with resuming in-person classes in the fall.

% Agreeing that Local Public Schools Should Resume In-person Classes

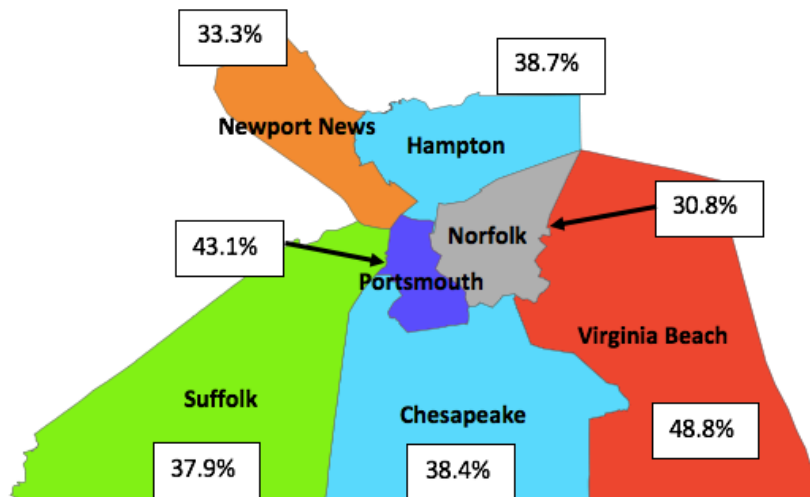


Responses were very similar regarding the how local colleges and universities should operate in the fall. Almost 40% agreed or strongly agreed that in-person classes should resume, while 27.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Again, almost one-third (32.8%) neither agreed nor disagreed with colleges resuming in-person classes.



There were also statistically significant differences among the cities of Hampton Roads in beliefs about colleges and universities opening for in-person classes in the fall ($p < .01$). Virginia Beach residents were by far the most likely to agree or strongly agree that colleges should resume in the fall (48.8%), followed by residents in Portsmouth (43.1%). Less than 40% of residents of Hampton (38.7%), Chesapeake (38.4%) and Suffolk (37.9%) agreed with resuming in-person classes, while residents of Norfolk and Newport News were least likely to favor reopening for in-person classes (30.8% and 33.3%, respectively).

% Agreeing that Local Colleges/Universities Should Resume In-person Classes

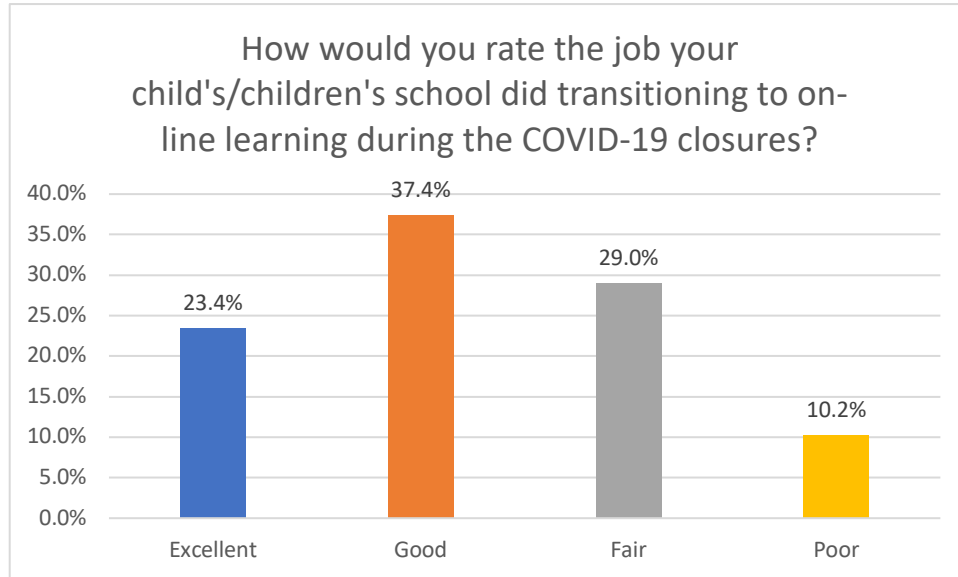


About 29% of respondents indicated that they or someone in their household were planning to take classes at a college or university in the fall prior to COVID-19. More than 17% indicated that those plans have changed, while 28.2% were unsure how their college plans may be affected. Open-ended responses for those who indicated that their plans had changed show that many are now planning to take classes online. Others expressed concerns about their health/safety with attending in-person classes. Some indicated that they are no longer going to college or have postponed starting classes. Others indicated that their classes had been canceled or were no longer offered. Finally, a few respondents indicated that other demands, like caring for children, made it such that they were not planning to take classes.

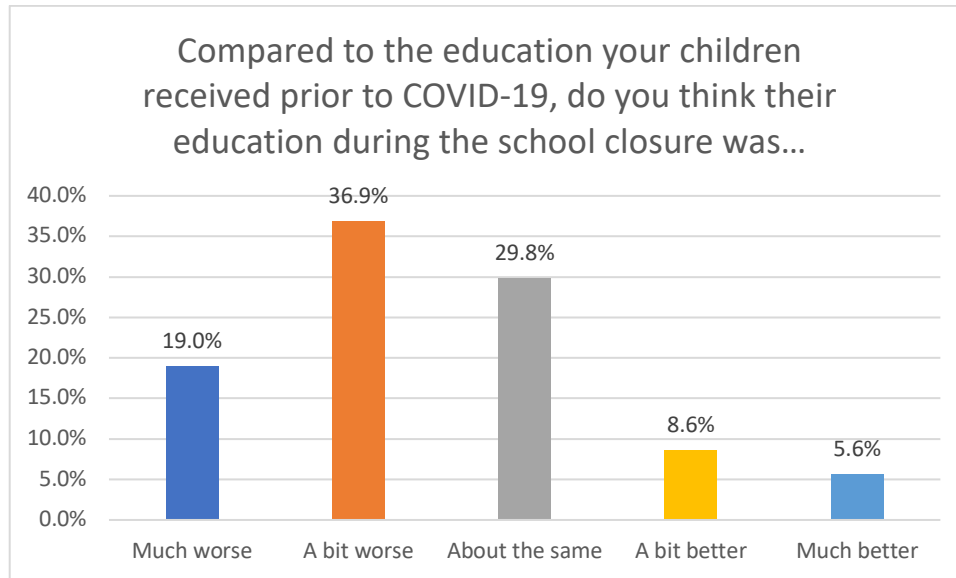
How Did the Public Schools Perform During the Closure?

About 29% of respondents had school-aged children ($n=319$) and about 79% of those had a child/children attending the public schools prior to the COVID closure ($n=253$). Respondents with

children who attended public school were asked to rate the job their child’s school did transitioning to online learning. Almost 61% rated the schools as doing either an excellent or good job. About 10% rated their child’s school as doing a “poor” job and 29% rated the school as doing a “fair” job.



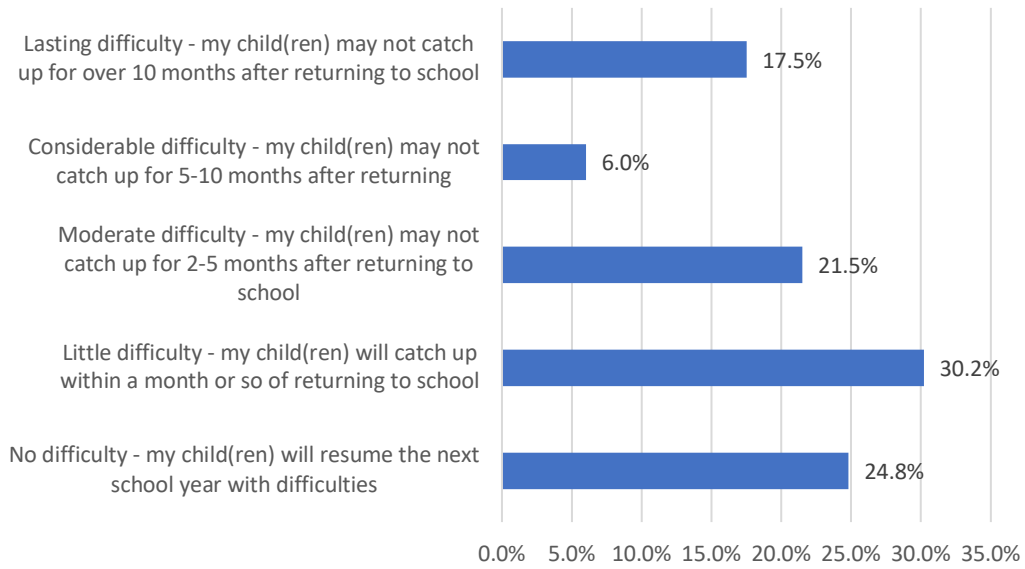
Even though the majority of parents felt the schools did a good or excellent job transitioning to online learning, the results show that many parents felt that the quality of their child’s education suffered. All respondents with school-aged children were asked to compare the quality of the education received during the school closure to the education received prior to the COVID pandemic. About 30% felt that the education their child received during the closure was about the same. More than half felt their child’s education was much worse (19%) or a bit worse (36.9%) during the closure. About 14% felt their child received education that was a bit better or much better than prior to the closure. The vast majority of respondents with school-aged children (95.7%) indicated that their child had a computer or tablet for schoolwork.



Potential Lasting Difficulties for Some Students

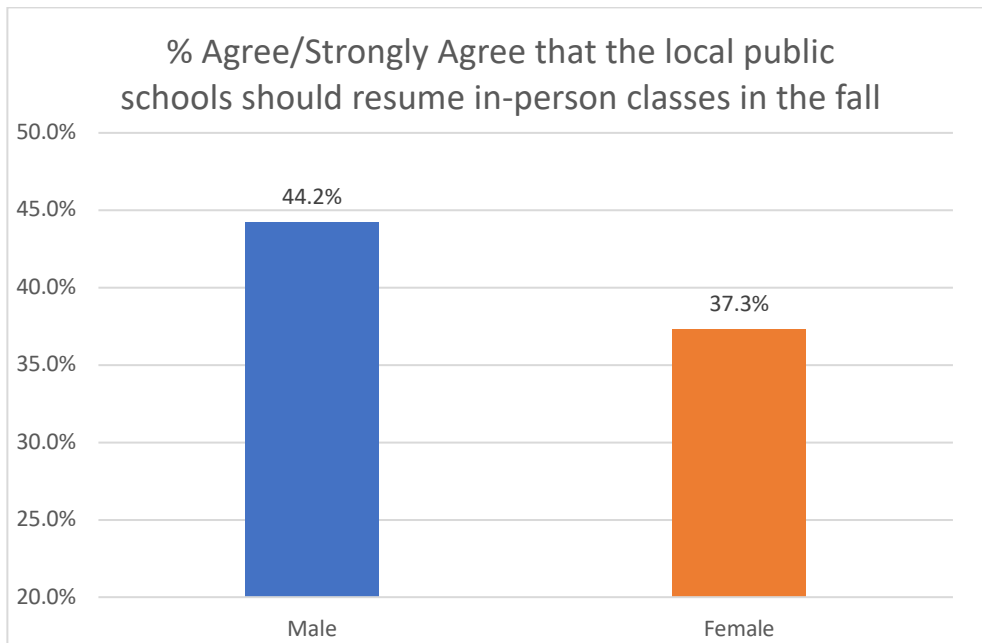
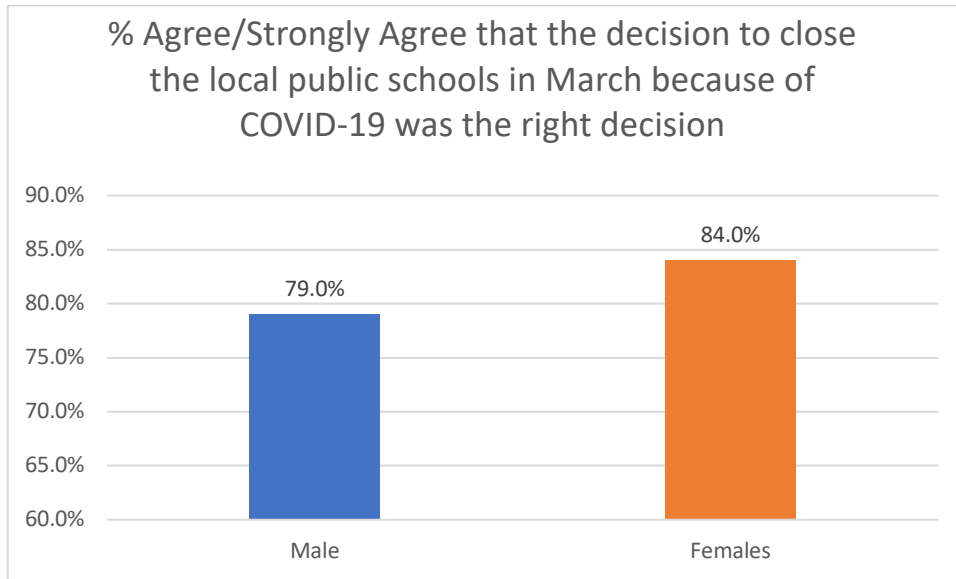
The closure of schools and transition to online learning raised concerns about the impacts on students with disabilities. About 17% of respondents with school-aged children indicated that they had a child with a disability. Those parents were asked how difficult it would be for their child to return to their previous levels of functioning when school reopens. More than one in five (23.5%) felt that their child would have “considerable” or “lasting” difficulty and that it may take 5-10 months or more for their child to catch up. Another 21.5% felt that their child would have “moderate” difficulty and would need 2-5 months to catch up. About 25% of parents with a child with a disability felt that their child would have no difficulties when restarting school.

How difficult will it be for your child/children to return to their previous levels of functioning when school re-opens?

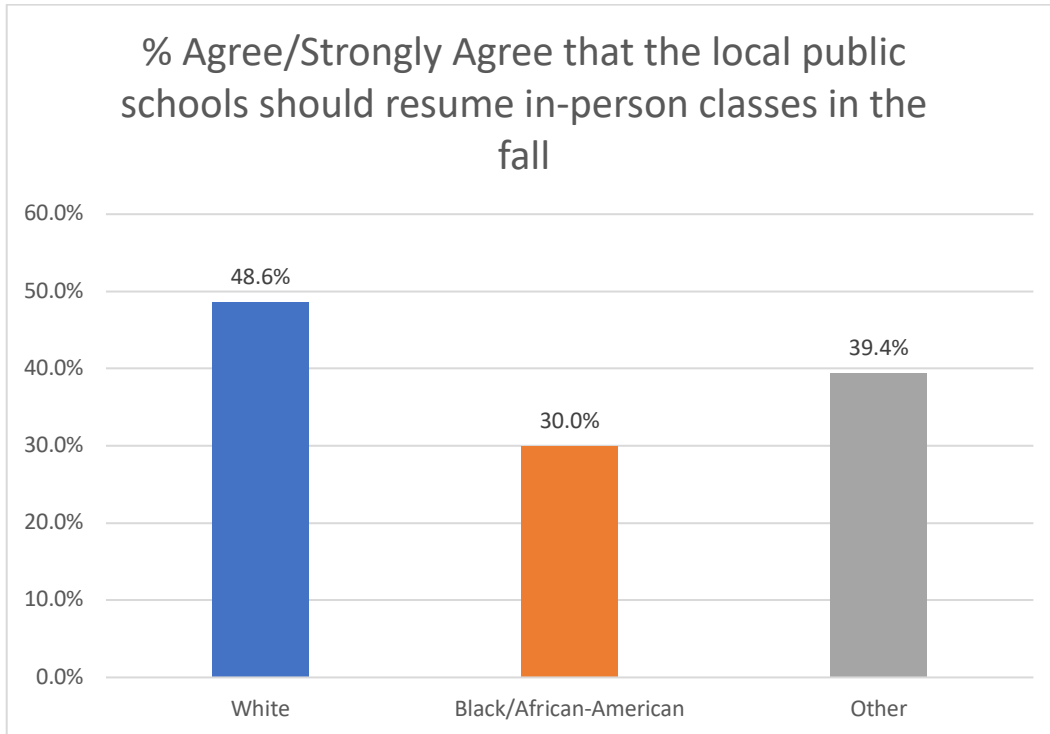


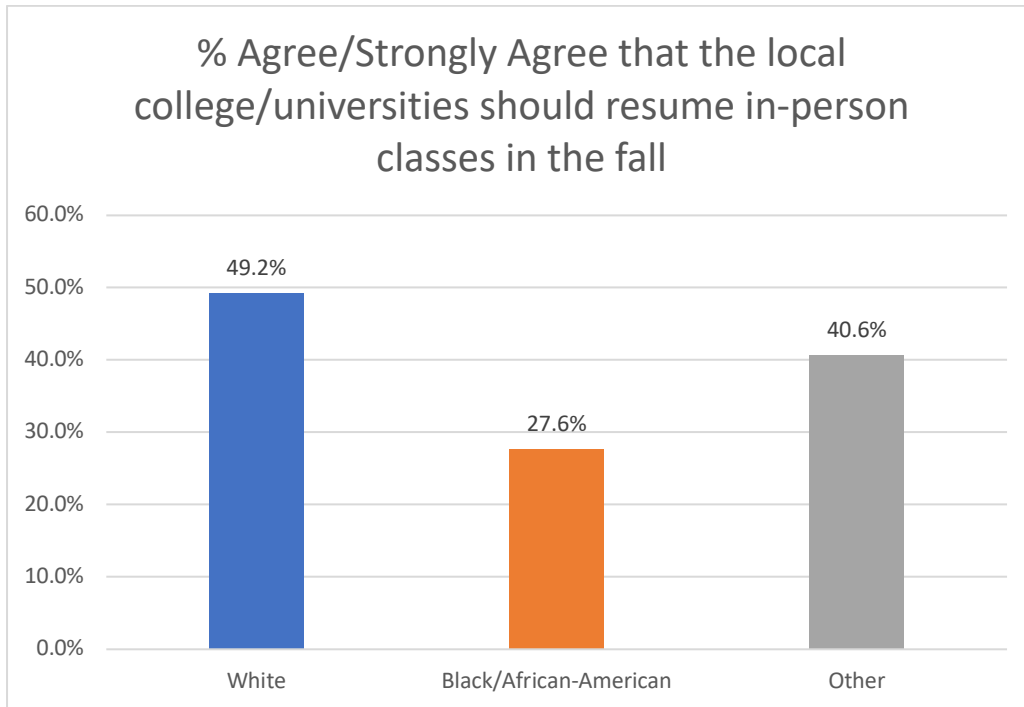
Additional Analyses of Attitudes Surrounding School Closures/Opening

Not only was there variation in attitudes toward closing public schools and resuming classes in person across cities of Hampton Roads, there were also significant differences across several demographic characteristics of the residents. For example, females (84%) were significantly more likely than males (79%) to agree or strongly agree with the decision to close public schools last spring, and they are less likely than males to agree or strongly agree with resuming in-person classes in the fall (37.3% versus 44.2%). There were no significant differences in support of reopening in-person classes in the local colleges and universities between males and females.



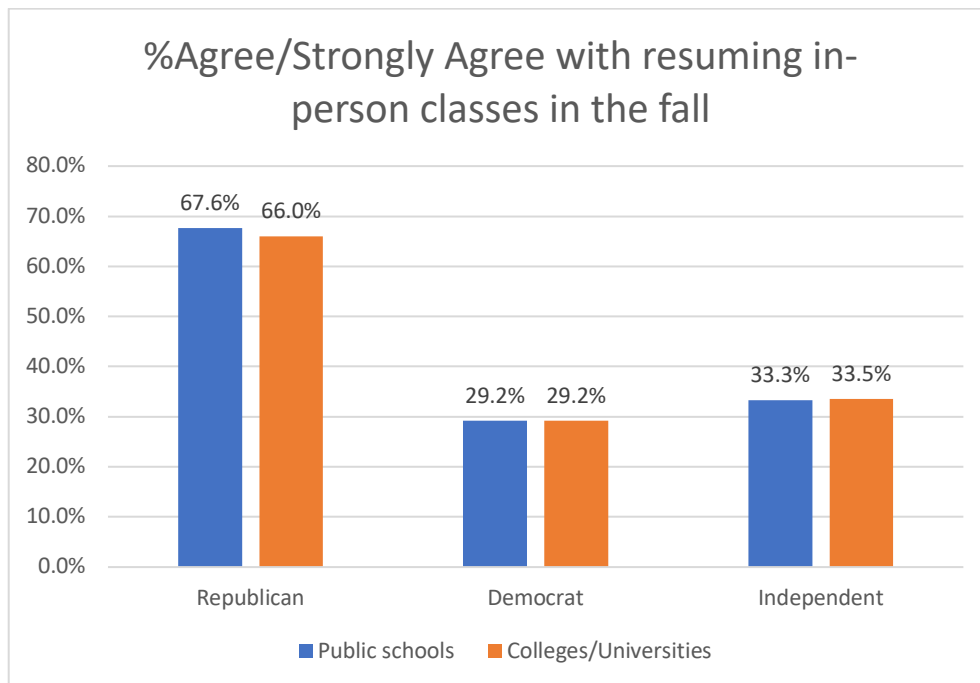
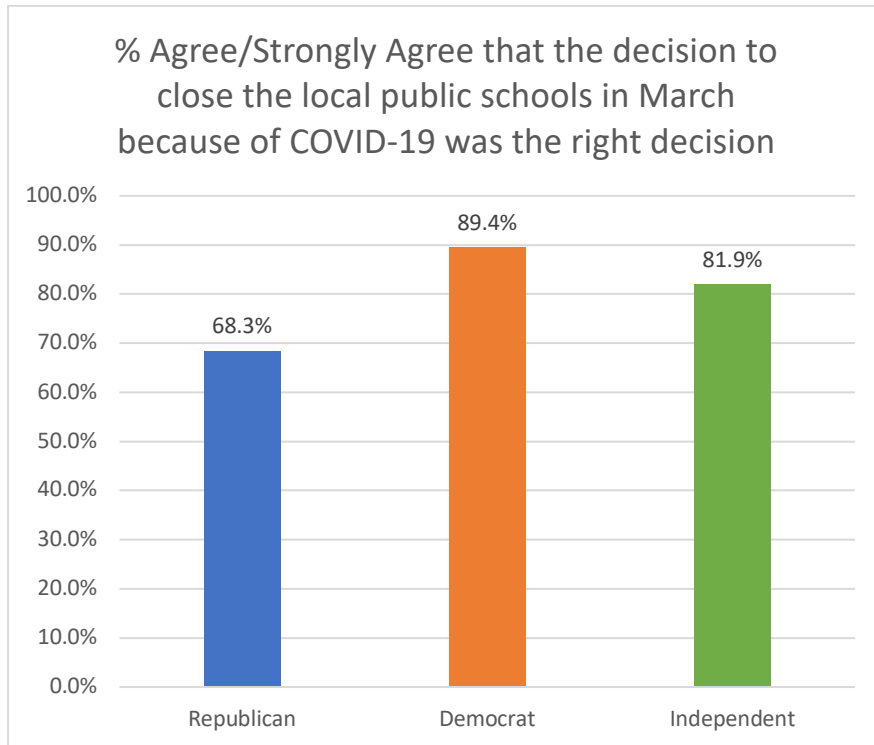
Although there were no racial/ethnic differences in attitudes toward closing public schools, there were differences in attitudes toward resuming in-person classes in both the local public schools as well as colleges and universities. Nearly half of white respondents (48.6%) agreed with resuming in-person classes in the public schools compared to only 30% of Black/African American respondents and 39.4% of those in other racial groups. There were also strong differences between white respondents and racial/ethnic minorities in favoring resuming in-person classes in the local colleges and universities (49.2% for whites, 40.6% for other racial groups and only 27.6% among African Americans).





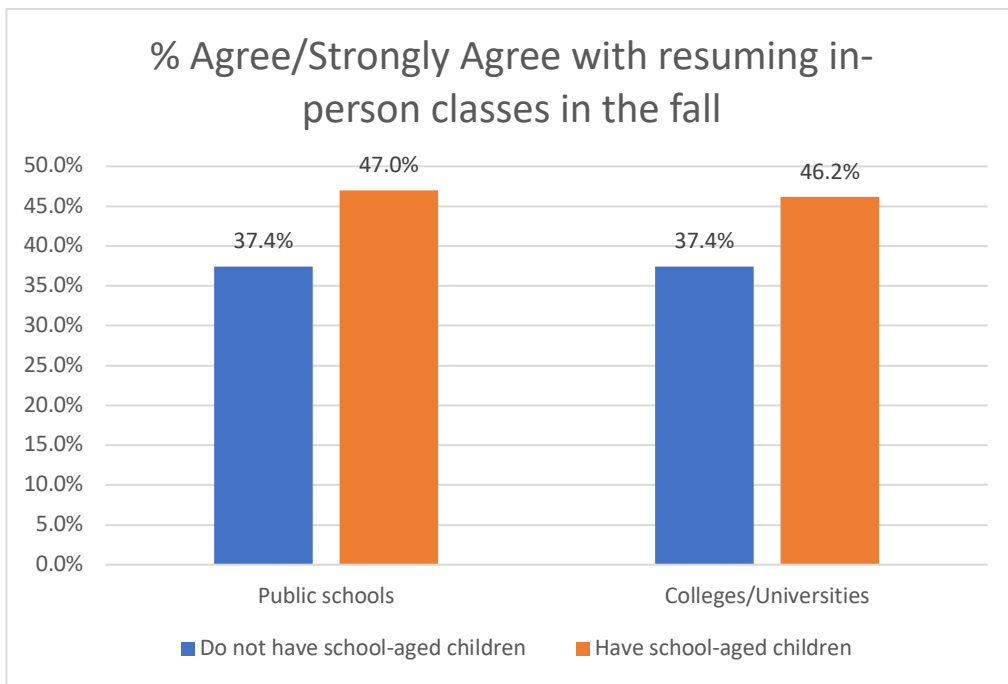
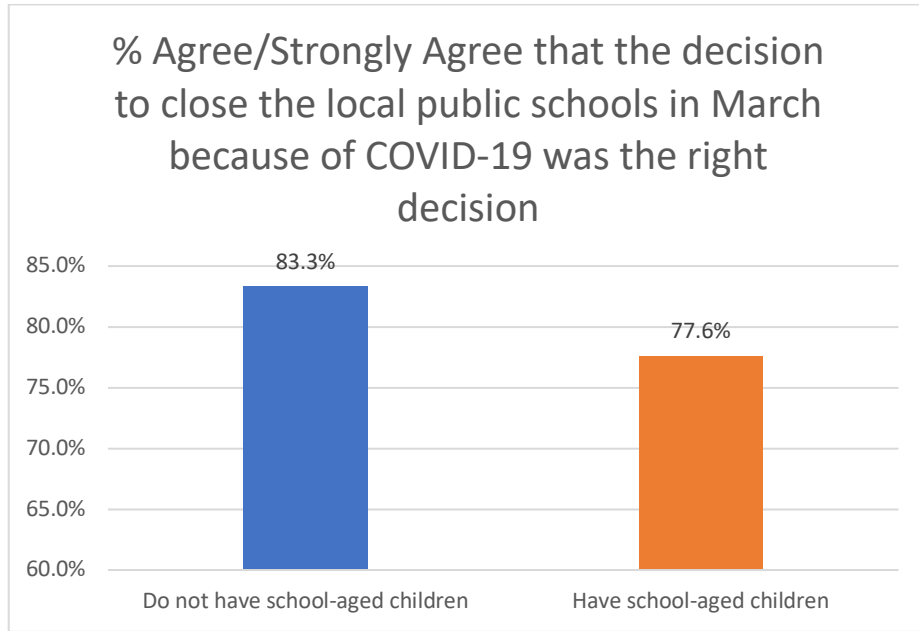
There was no evidence of significant differences across age and little evidence that they varied by levels of education. There was a linear effect suggesting that approval of resuming in-person classes in college and universities increased with levels of education. Among those with a high-school degree/GED or less education, 32.9% favored resuming in-person classes in local colleges and universities while 41.5% among those with some college and 42.1% of those with university degrees were in favor of resuming in-person classes in the fall.

Political affiliation and income were relatively strongly and consistently linked to these measures of school closure and reopening. Republicans were least likely to favor public school closure (68.3%) relative to independents (81.9%) and Democrats (89.4%) and were far more likely to favor resuming in-person classes in the local public schools (67.7%) and colleges/universities (66%) compared to independents (33.3% and 33.5%, respectively) and Democrats (29.2% for both public schools and colleges/universities).



A final comparison was made between Hampton Roads residents with school-age children and those without school-aged children. Parents with school-age children were slightly (6%) but significantly less likely to favor public school closure this past spring (77.6% versus 83.3%). In turn, they were more likely

to favor resuming in-person classes in public schools (47% versus 37.4%) and colleges/universities (46.2% versus 37.4%) – approximately a 9-10% difference.



For more information, please contact:
Tancy Vandecar-Burdin, PhD
Director, the Social Science Research Center
Old Dominion University
757-683-3802
tvandeca@odu.edu