

Heather L. Schwartz, Melissa Kay Diliberti, David Grant

# Will Students Come Back?

A July 2021 Parent Survey About School Hesitancy and Parental Preferences for COVID-19 Safety Practices in Schools

For more information on this publication, visit [www.rand.org/t/RR1393-2](http://www.rand.org/t/RR1393-2).

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# About this report

This report provides the survey questions and weighted responses from a July 2021 survey of parents concerning school hesitancy and preferences for COVID-19 safety practices in schools in the United States. The results are intended to inform school districts' and health officials' planning for operating schools in fall 2021.

A technical appendix describing the survey methods is available at [www.rand.org/t/RR1393-2](http://www.rand.org/t/RR1393-2). Results of a similar survey fielded in May 2021 are available at [www.rand.org/t/RR1393-1](http://www.rand.org/t/RR1393-1).

In the interest of rapid release, this report was not edited or proofread. It will be superseded by a final version.

## RAND Education and Labor

This research was undertaken by RAND Education and Labor, a division of the RAND Corporation that conducts research on early childhood through postsecondary education programs, workforce development, and programs and policies affecting workers, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy and decisionmaking. This report is based on research funded by The Rockefeller Foundation.

The authors are grateful to the staff of The Rockefeller Foundation and to the members of the State & Territory Alliance for Testing (<https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/covid-19-response/stat>) for their collaboration and feedback on our surveys. The findings presented are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of The Rockefeller Foundation. For more information and research on these and other related topics, please visit [rockefellerfoundation.org](http://rockefellerfoundation.org).

More information about RAND can be found at [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org). Questions about this report should be directed to [hschwart@rand.org](mailto:hschwart@rand.org), and questions about RAND Education and Labor should be directed to [educationandlabor@rand.org](mailto:educationandlabor@rand.org).

## About the Authors

**Heather L. Schwartz** is the director of the Pre-K to 12 Educational Systems program within the Education and Labor division of RAND. She researches education and housing policies intended to reduce the negative effects of poverty on children and families. She holds a Ph.D. in education policy.

**Melissa Kay Diliberti** is an assistant policy researcher at RAND and a doctoral fellow at the Pardee RAND Graduate School. Her research interests include survey design and methodology and educational equity. She holds a master of public policy degree.

**David Grant** is a senior social/behavioral scientist at RAND. Grant has extensive survey research experience, including telephone-based surveys, random digit-dial sampling, address-based sampling, noncoverage, and nonresponse bias. Grant holds a Ph.D. in sociology.

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# Key findings

1. Eighty-nine percent of parents planned to send their children to school in person in fall 2021 as of July, which was an increase from 84 percent in May. Parents took the second survey between July 16 and 29, by which time the number of COVID-19 cases nationally had increased since May 2021, due to the delta variant.
2. As of July 2021, 82 percent of Black and 83 percent of Hispanic parents planned to send their children to school in person in fall 2021, compared with 94 percent of White and 88 percent of Asian parents. Although this racial gap was substantial, it was smaller than in May 2021.
3. Parents with children under 12—who are too young to be eligible for COVID-19 vaccines—were just as likely to plan to send their kids back fully in person as parents with children 12 years and older.
4. COVID-19-related health concerns remained the top reasons for parents not sending their children to school in person in fall 2021, as opposed to concerns about academics, racial discrimination, bullying, or critical race theory.
5. About two-thirds or more of Black, Hispanic, and Asian parents needed each of the following practices in place to feel safe sending their children to school in person: ventilation in classrooms, teachers being vaccinated, social distancing, mandatory masking, and regular COVID-19 testing. Substantially fewer White parents needed these practices in place to feel safe. As in May 2021, parents who were unsure about sending their children to school in person especially wanted all of these safety practices, and more.
6. Only 27 percent of parents said that they already knew in detail which specific COVID-19 safety measures their child's school will have in place. Sixty percent of parents wished to know more about which COVID-19 safety measures their child's school is enacting for fall 2021. Sixty-one percent of parents selected a school staff member—most commonly, the principal—as the source from which they most trust information about school safety measures.
7. Fifty-one percent of parents supported voluntary, free weekly COVID-19 testing at school in July 2021, which was similar to the percentage in May 2021. Seventy-five percent supported COVID-19 testing if their child showed COVID-19 symptoms. The most common reason parents did not support COVID-19 testing at schools was a concern that the test was physically uncomfortable for children.
8. Fifty-seven percent of parents overall planned to get their child vaccinated for COVID-19 as of July 2021. This was true for 79 percent of vaccinated parents but only 10 percent of unvaccinated parents.

# Overview of the July 2021 parent survey

- The State & Territory Alliance for Testing (representatives from more than 40 states and territories) and The Rockefeller Foundation worked with RAND to develop a survey of parents of school-age children
- 3,146 parents of children ages 5-18 took the survey. The survey was open from July 16 to July 29, 2021.
- The results are nationally representative of U.S. parents of children ages 5-18
- The completion rate was 52 percent
- The July 2021 survey included three similarly worded survey questions from the May 2021 survey to gauge change in parent attitudes over time
- Results of the May 2021 survey can be found at [www.rand.org/t/RRA1393-1](http://www.rand.org/t/RRA1393-1)
- Because children under 12 were not eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine at the time of this survey, we focused some questions on the youngest school-age child to understand parents' willingness to send their unvaccinated children to school. Overall, 62 percent of parents who took the survey had one or more child under age 12.
- Survey methods and a description of the parent sample are available in the technical appendix at [www.rand.org/t/RRA1393-2](http://www.rand.org/t/RRA1393-2)
- Information about the State & Territory Alliance for Testing is available at <https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/covid-19-response/stat>

**Questions about parents' plans as of July 2021 for sending their children to school in person in fall 2021**

# Will you send your child(ren) to school in person at least one day per week this fall 2021? [Comparison of May and July]

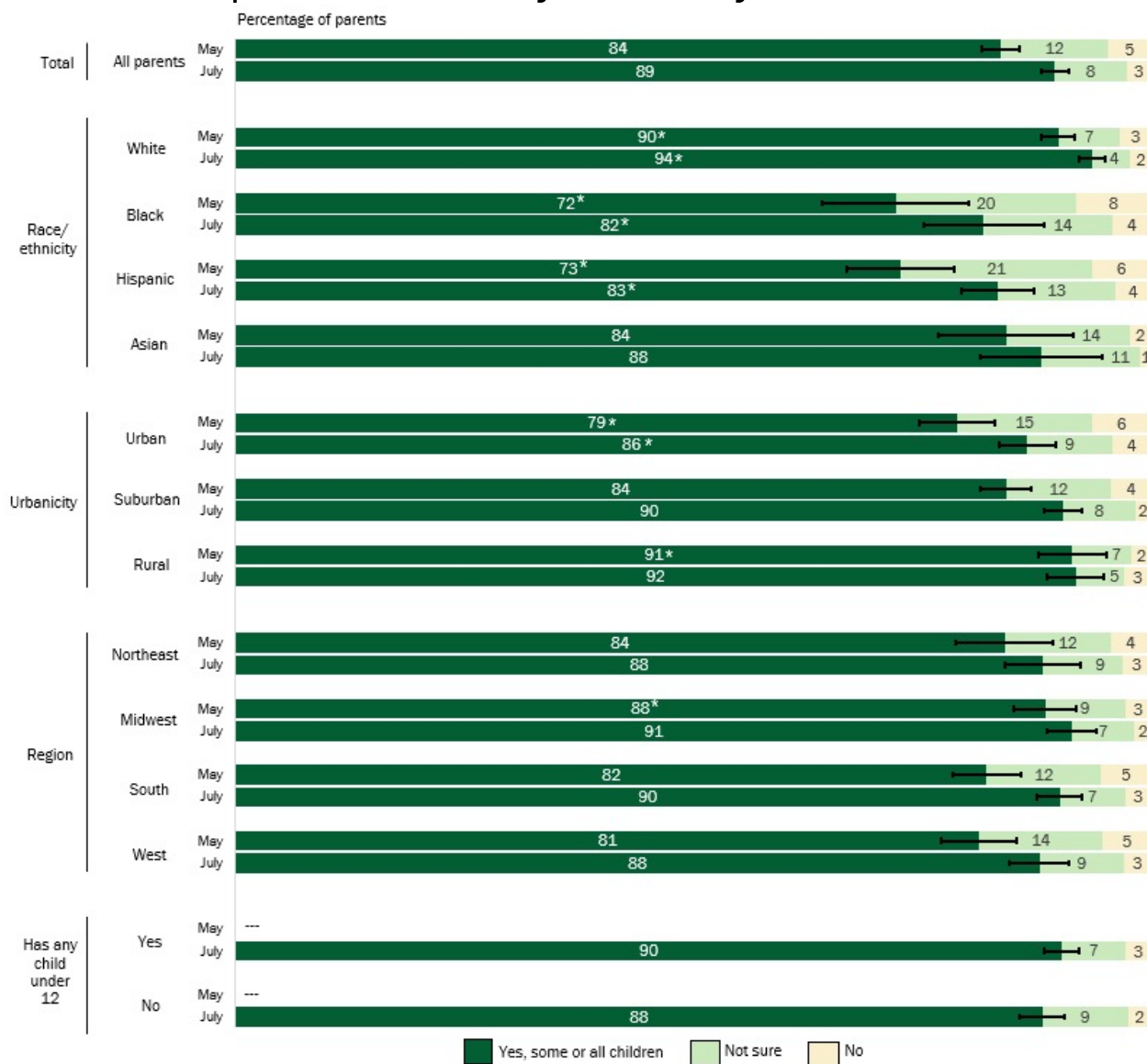


Figure notes: An \* indicates that the percentage of a given parent subgroup (e.g., urban, Midwest) who selected a response is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from the balance of all parents at the same time point. Black bars represent 95% confidence intervals. When May and July confidence intervals for a parent subgroup do not overlap, parents' responses in May are statistically different from July. Percentages might not sum to 100 due to rounding.



# Are you sending your youngest school-age child to school in person this fall 2021?

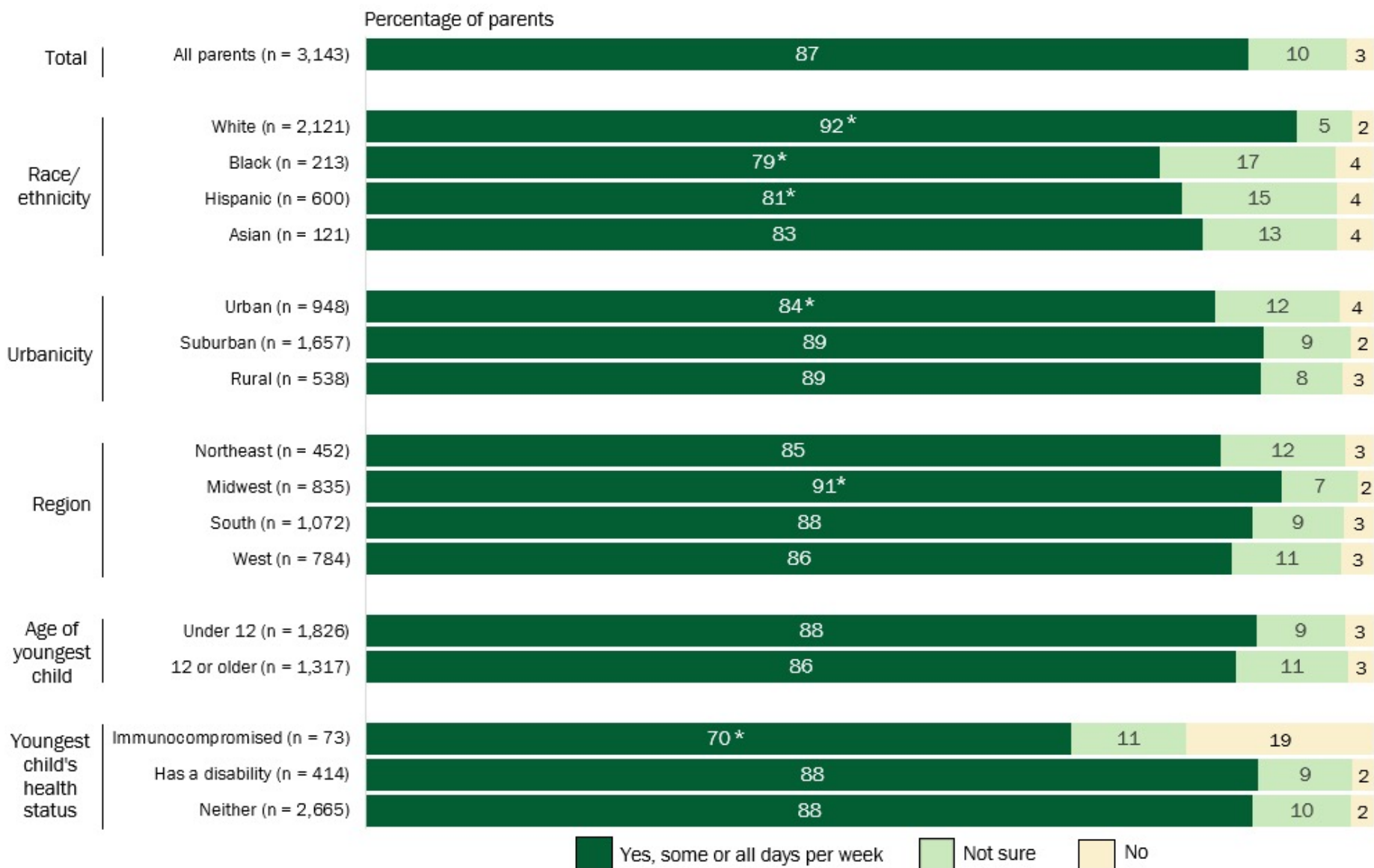


Figure notes: An \* indicates that the percentage of a given parent subgroup (e.g., urban, Midwest) who selected a response is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from the balance of all parents. Parents could select only one response to this question. Percentages might not sum to 100 due to rounding.

# Why do you plan to send your youngest school-age child to school in person?

Only parents who responded yes to "Are you sending your youngest school-age child to school in person this fall 2021?" (n = 2,801) answered this question.

	All parents n = 2801	Race/ethnicity				Urbanicity			Region				Age of child	
		White n = 1955	Black n = 170	Hispanic n = 493	Asian n = 102	Urban n = 822	Suburban n = 1495	Rural n = 484	Northeast n = 395	Midwest n = 762	South n = 955	West n = 689	Under 12 n = 1646	12 or older n = 1155
My child does better academically at in-person school	60	<b>63</b>	<b>44</b>	58	54	57	61	62	63	61	<b>56</b>	62	60	59
My child wants to go to school in-person	59	<b>65</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>47</b>	57	60	61	62	62	<b>56</b>	62	59	60
My child does better socially at in-person school	54	<b>60</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>45</b>	58	51	55	58	52	56	<b>49</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>48</b>
The school has made adequate efforts to reduce COVID-19 risks	42	44	<b>32</b>	40	52	41	44	41	<b>49</b>	42	<b>38</b>	45	43	41
I am not concerned that COVID-19 is a significant risk for my child	28	<b>39</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>	29	<b>41</b>	28	<b>33</b>	<b>25</b>	29	28	28
In-person school is easier for the adults in my house to manage	27	<b>31</b>	23	<b>17</b>	30	29	26	28	26	<b>32</b>	26	27	<b>36</b>	<b>14</b>
I am not concerned others in our family will get COVID-19 from my child if child goes in-person	25	<b>33</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>19</b>	25	<b>31</b>	24	<b>29</b>	<b>22</b>	25	25	24
Enough school staff will be vaccinated to make in-person school safe	22	21	17	21	<b>38</b>	24	23	<b>17</b>	24	19	<b>19</b>	<b>28</b>	23	21
My school is not offering fully remote learning	21	21	22	20	24	21	23	<b>16</b>	20	21	<b>25</b>	<b>15</b>	22	20
Enough children will be vaccinated to make in-person school safe	9	8	7	9	13	9	9	6	<b>13</b>	7	<b>7</b>	9	<b>3</b>	<b>18</b>
To access school-delivered programs and services	8	<b>7</b>	14	8	9	10	<b>7</b>	10	7	9	8	9	8	9
To access specialized instruction or therapy for my child's disability	5	5	<b>2</b>	3	4	5	4	6	4	<b>7</b>	4	3	5	4
Our home internet access isn't good enough for remote schooling	4	3	<b>0</b>	6	2	3	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>	4	4	4	4	3

Percentage

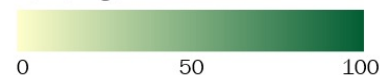


Figure notes: The numbers in the shaded cells correspond to the percentage of parents who selected the response. Parents could select multiple response options. Bold font indicates the percentage of a parent subgroup selecting a response is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from the balance of parents' responses.

# Why are you not sending (or unsure about sending) your youngest school-age child to school in person in fall 2021?

Only parents who responded no or unsure to "Are you sending your youngest-school age child to school in person this fall 2021?" (n = 315) answered this question.

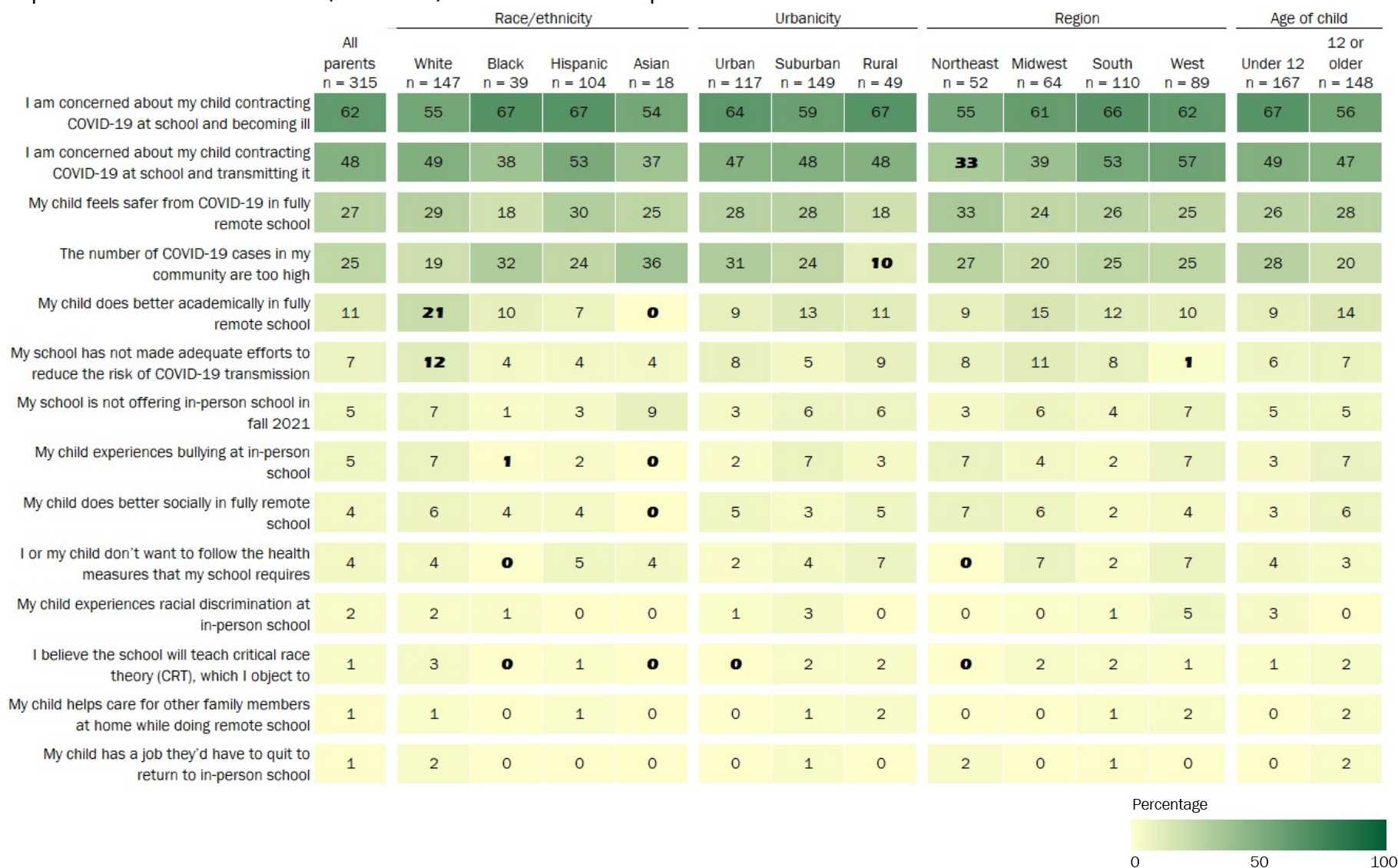


Figure notes: The numbers in the shaded cells correspond to the percentage of parents who selected the response. Parents could select multiple response options. Bold font indicates the percentage of a parent subgroup selecting a response is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from the balance of parents' responses.

# If the pandemic were over and you had the choice, what would you PREFER your youngest school-age child do this fall 2021?

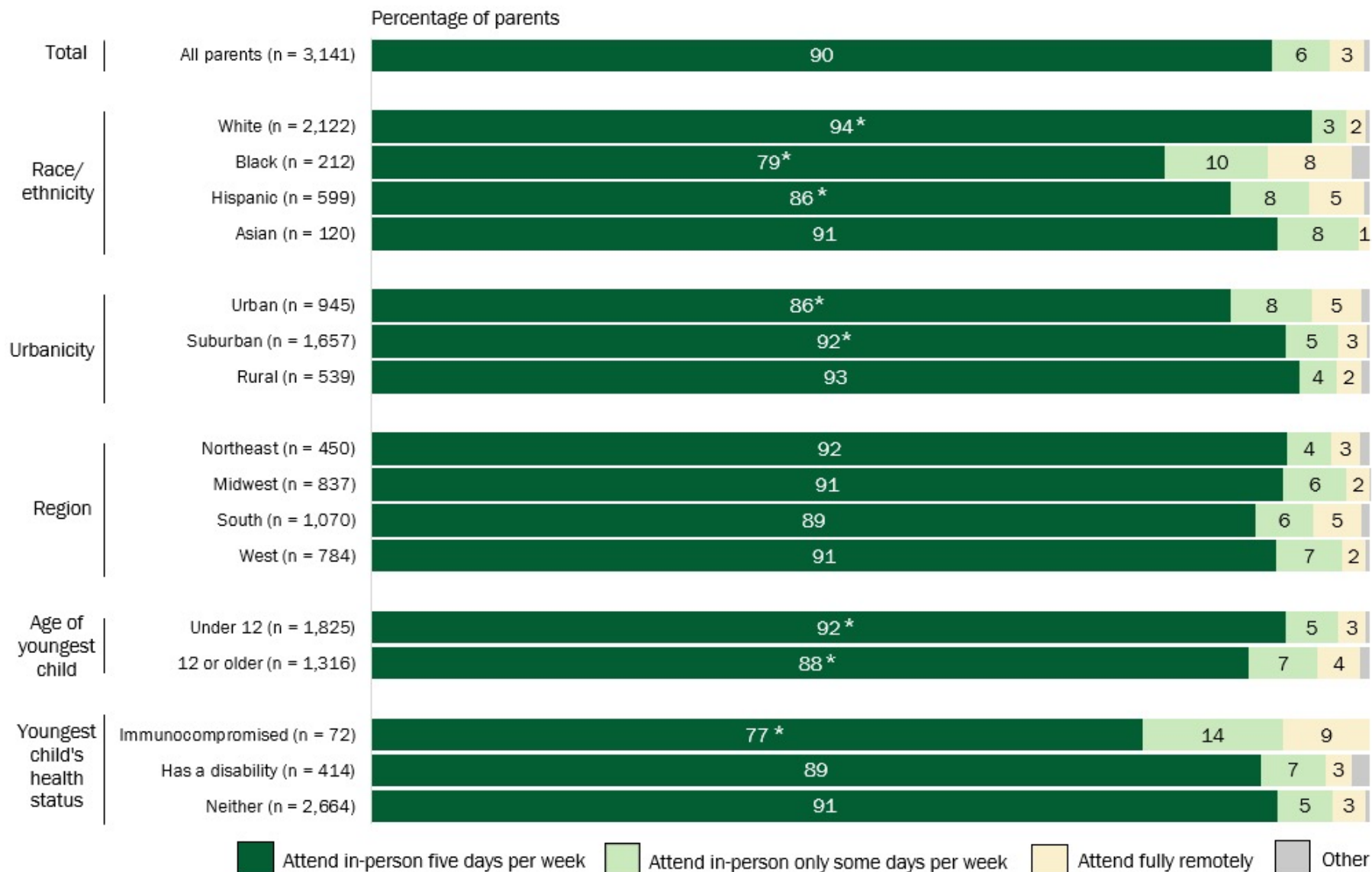


Figure notes: An \* indicates that the percentage of a given parent subgroup (e.g., urban, Midwest) who selected a response is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from the balance of all parents. Parents could select only one response to this question. Percentages might not sum to 100 due to rounding.



# What is your youngest school-age child's biggest concern about returning to school in-person? [Open response question]

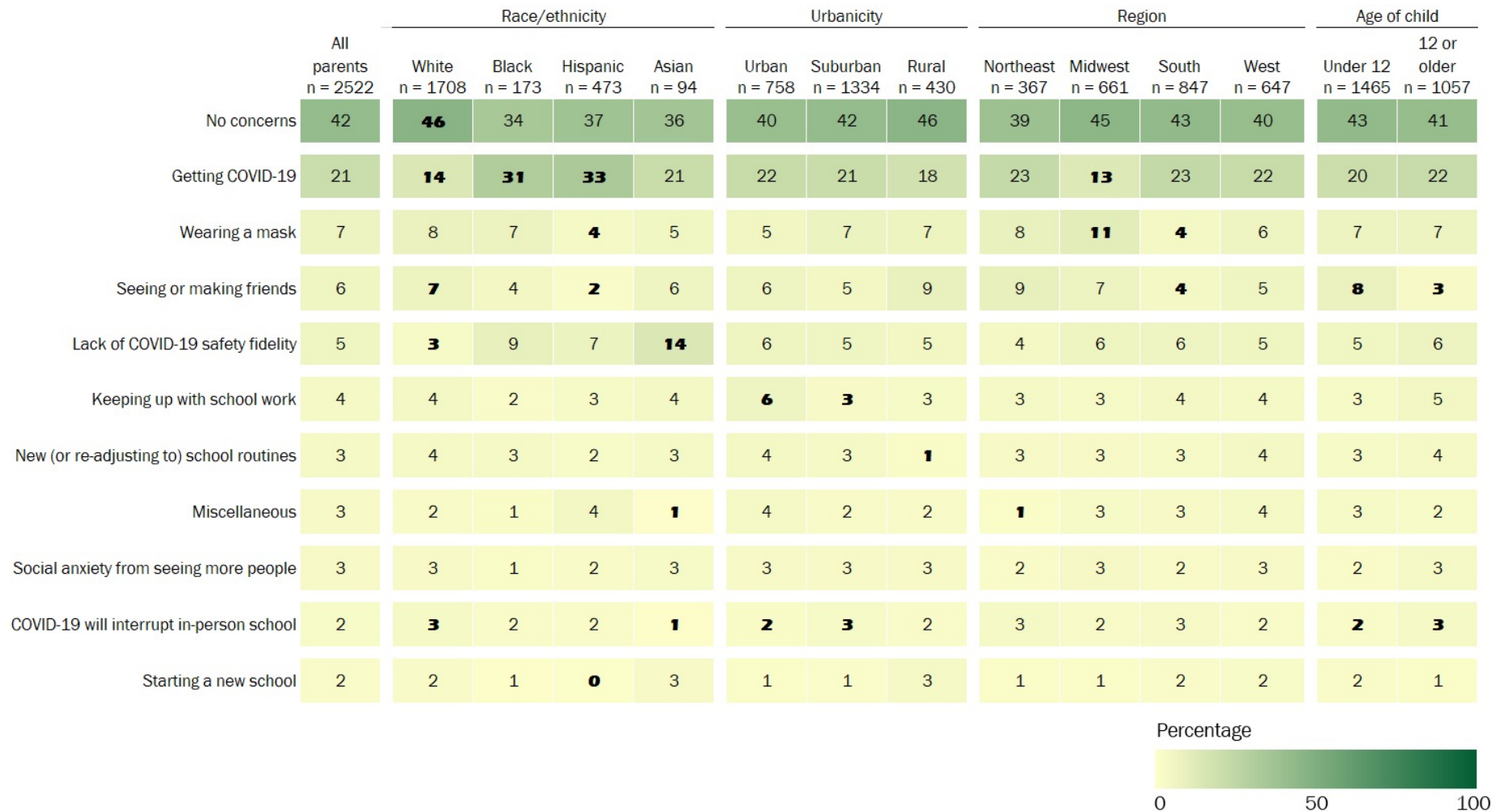


Figure notes: The numbers in the shaded cells are percentage of parents that wrote in a response relating to each theme, which RAND then coded. Parents could write in as many concerns as they wished. One percent or fewer of parents overall (and no more than 2 percent of any single parent subgroup) wrote in concerns about the following list in descending order of frequency (categories not shown): bullying; missing the parent or home; not liking school; uncertain lunch and snack routines; getting a good teacher; not enough recess; COVID-19 bullying including mask wearing when others aren't or not being vaccinated when others are; length of school day; school not being fun; following COVID-19 safety rules; and quality of learning. Bold font indicates the percentage of a parent subgroup selecting a response is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from the balance of parents' responses.

# **Questions about parents' preferred school safety measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19**

# Which of the following need to be in place for you to feel your youngest school-age child will be safe at school in person?

		Race/ethnicity				Urbanicity			Region				Age of child	
	All parents n = 3145	White n = 2124	Black n = 213	Hispanic n = 599	Asian n = 121	Urban n = 948	Suburban n = 1658	Rural n = 539	Northeast n = 452	Midwest n = 838	South n = 1071	West n = 784	Under 12 n = 1829	12 or older n = 1316
Ventilation in each classroom at school	71	<b>64</b>	77	<b>80</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>76</b>	72	<b>60</b>	74	<b>62</b>	71	<b>77</b>	72	70
Most teachers being vaccinated	61	<b>53</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>67</b>	62	<b>47</b>	63	<b>55</b>	60	<b>66</b>	62	58
A minimum of 3 feet between people at school	53	<b>40</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>57</b>	53	<b>44</b>	57	<b>44</b>	56	53	53	52
All adults in my household being vaccinated	52	<b>46</b>	57	55	<b>81</b>	<b>58</b>	53	<b>37</b>	54	49	53	52	51	53
Regular COVID-19 testing of staff and students with reporting	47	<b>35</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>54</b>	49	<b>32</b>	49	<b>38</b>	50	51	47	48
Required mask wearing for students and adults	47	<b>32</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>55</b>	46	<b>34</b>	47	<b>35</b>	<b>50</b>	50	<b>49</b>	<b>43</b>
No group gathering at meal times when masks are off	36	<b>24</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>44</b>	34	<b>28</b>	35	<b>29</b>	<b>41</b>	35	37	34
My own child being vaccinated	35	<b>27</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>39</b>	35	<b>26</b>	37	<b>30</b>	36	35	<b>23</b>	<b>53</b>
Sneeze guards around each student's desk	33	<b>16</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>23</b>	32	<b>22</b>	<b>39</b>	36	34	33
Most children at the school being vaccinated	33	<b>24</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>40</b>	32	<b>23</b>	33	<b>27</b>	<b>36</b>	32	<b>25</b>	<b>46</b>
Hybrid schooling to limit the number of people at school each day	24	<b>12</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>21</b>	20	22	<b>16</b>	<b>29</b>	24	23	25
No team sports	13	<b>7</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>21</b>	16	<b>18</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	12	<b>7</b>	<b>17</b>	13	13	14

Percentage

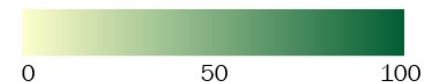


Figure notes: The numbers in the shaded cells correspond to the percentage of parents who selected the response. Parents could select multiple response options. Bold font indicates the percentage of a parent subgroup selecting a response is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from the balance of parents' responses.

# Which of the following need to be in place for you to feel your youngest school-age child will be safe at school in person?

This graph includes only parents who were unsure if they would send their youngest child to school in-person in fall 2021 (n = 254).



Percentage

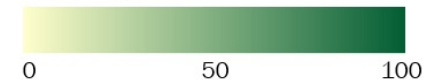


Figure notes: The numbers in the shaded cells correspond to the percentage of parents who selected the response. Parents could select multiple response options. Bold font indicates the percentage of a parent subgroup selecting a response is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from the balance of parents' responses.



Do you know what specific COVID-19 safety measures (e.g., masking, ventilation, social distancing, etc.) your youngest school-age child's school is enacting this fall 2021?

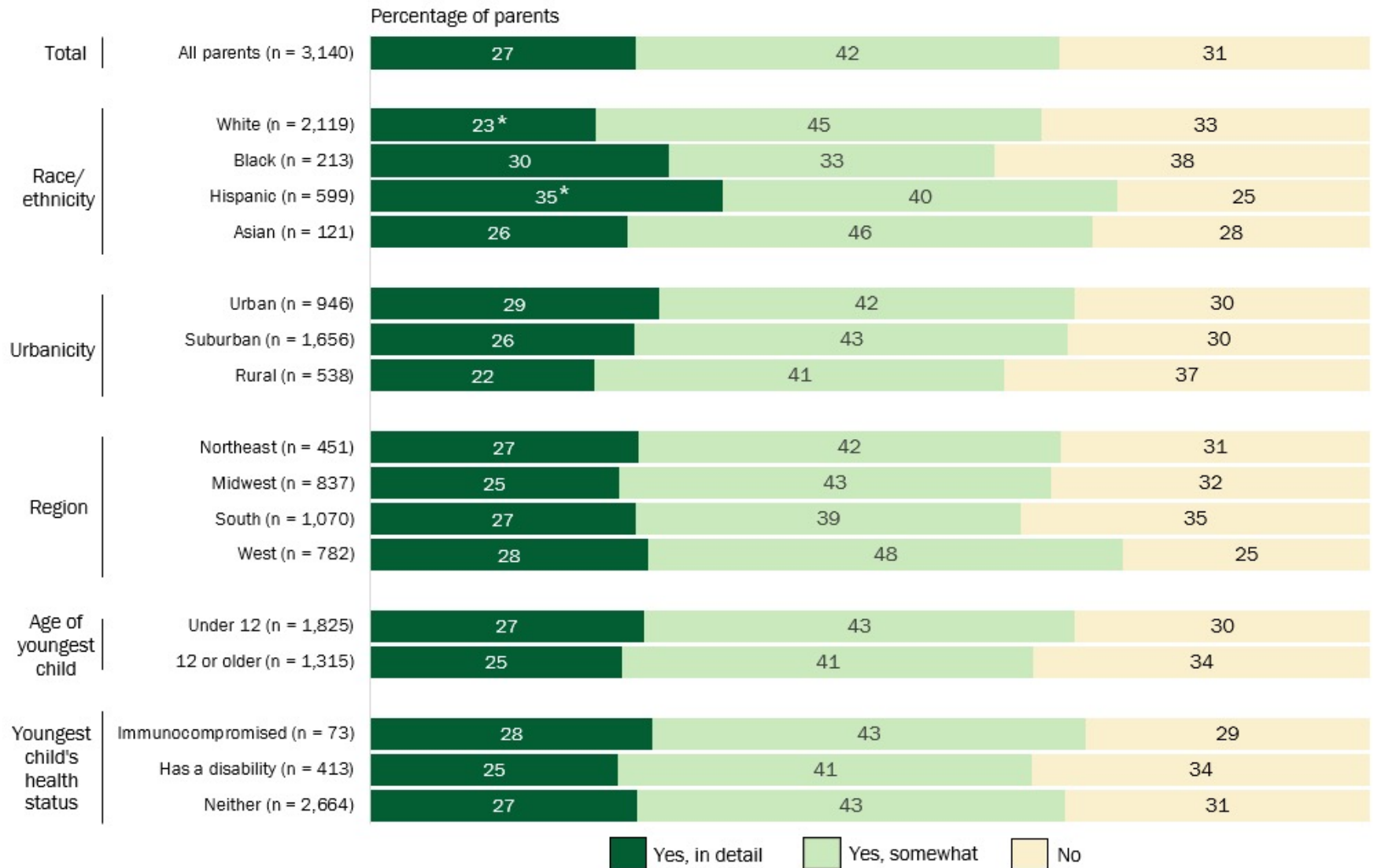


Figure notes: An \* indicates that the percentage of a given parent subgroup (e.g., urban, Midwest) who selected a response is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from the balance of all parents. Parents could select only one response to this question. Percentages might not sum to 100 due to rounding.

# Do you wish to know more about what COVID-19 safety measures your youngest school-age child's school is enacting this fall 2021?

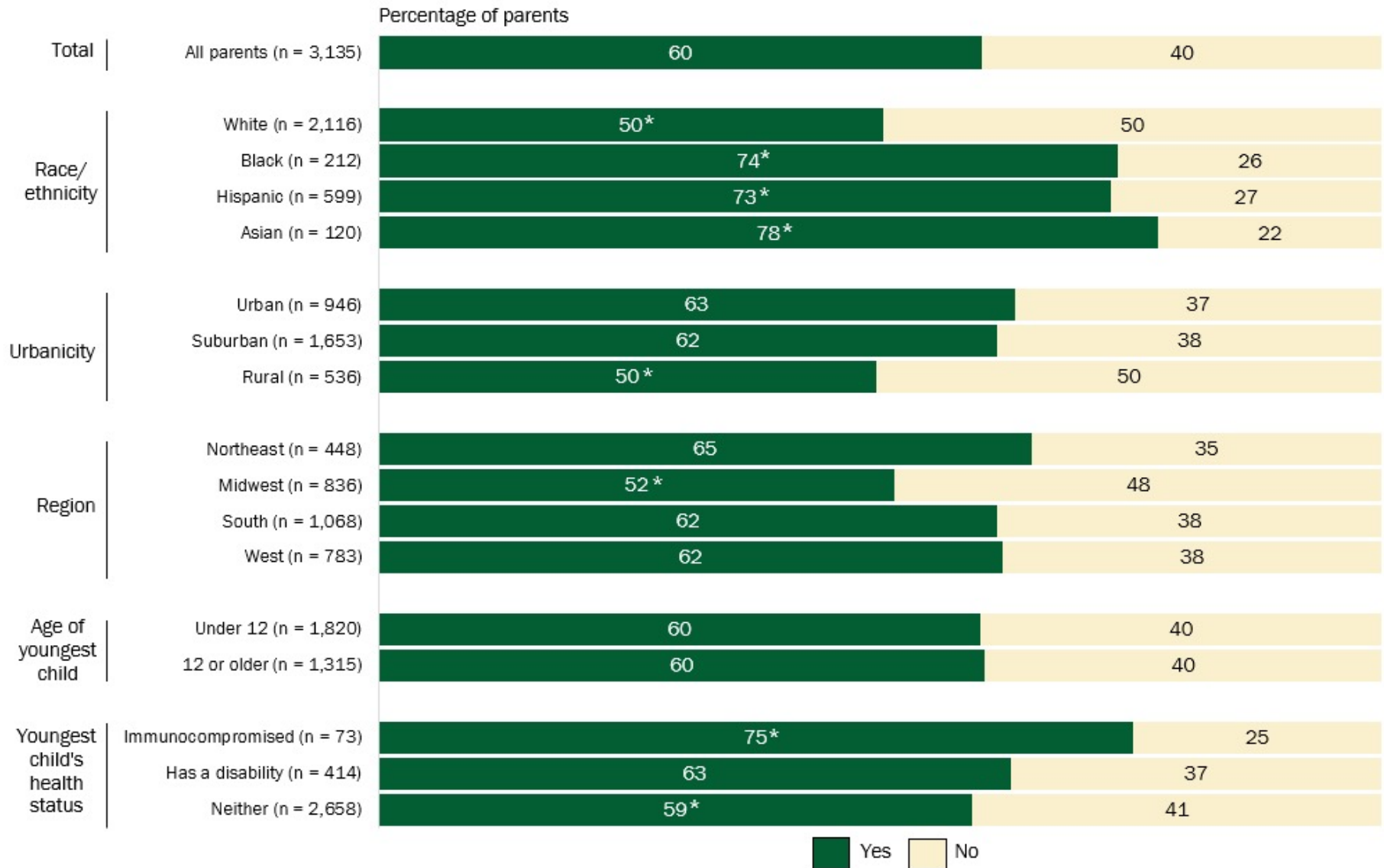


Figure notes: An \* indicates that the percentage of a given parent subgroup (e.g., urban, Midwest) who selected a response is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from the balance of all parents. Parents could select only one response to this question. Percentages might not sum to 100 due to rounding.

# From which source do you most trust information about your youngest school-age child's school safety measures for COVID-19?

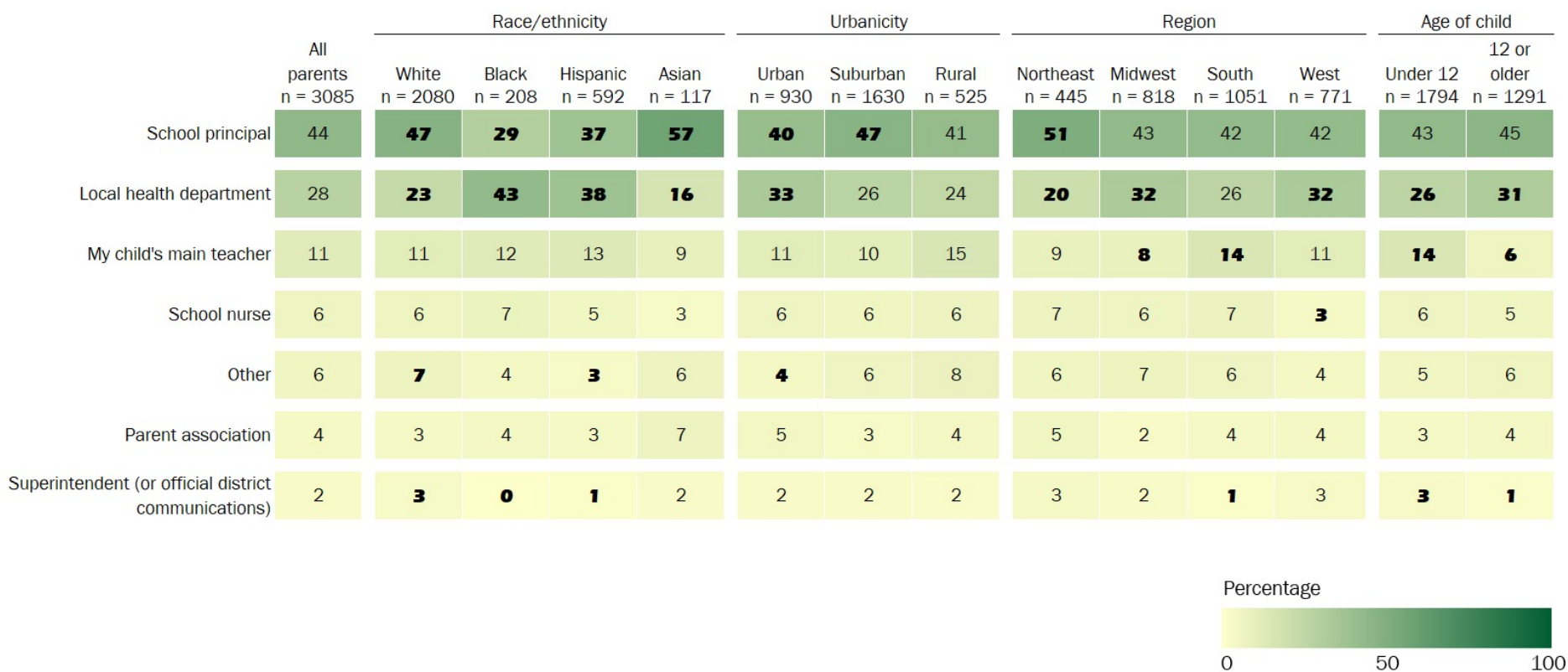


Figure notes: The numbers in the shaded cells correspond to the percentage of parents who selected the response. Parents could select multiple response options, including an "other" option. RAND coded the "other" responses, but did not list them in the figure as each had one percent or fewer parents who wrote them in. The most common "other" option not listed in the figure was the school board, family doctor, CDC, teacher's union, and research the parent does themselves. Bold font indicates the percentage of a parent subgroup selecting a response is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from the balance of parents' responses.

# **Questions about COVID-19 testing of children at schools**

# If there was voluntary, free, weekly COVID-19 testing of students at your child(ren)'s school(s), would you support your children getting tested? [Comparison of May and July]

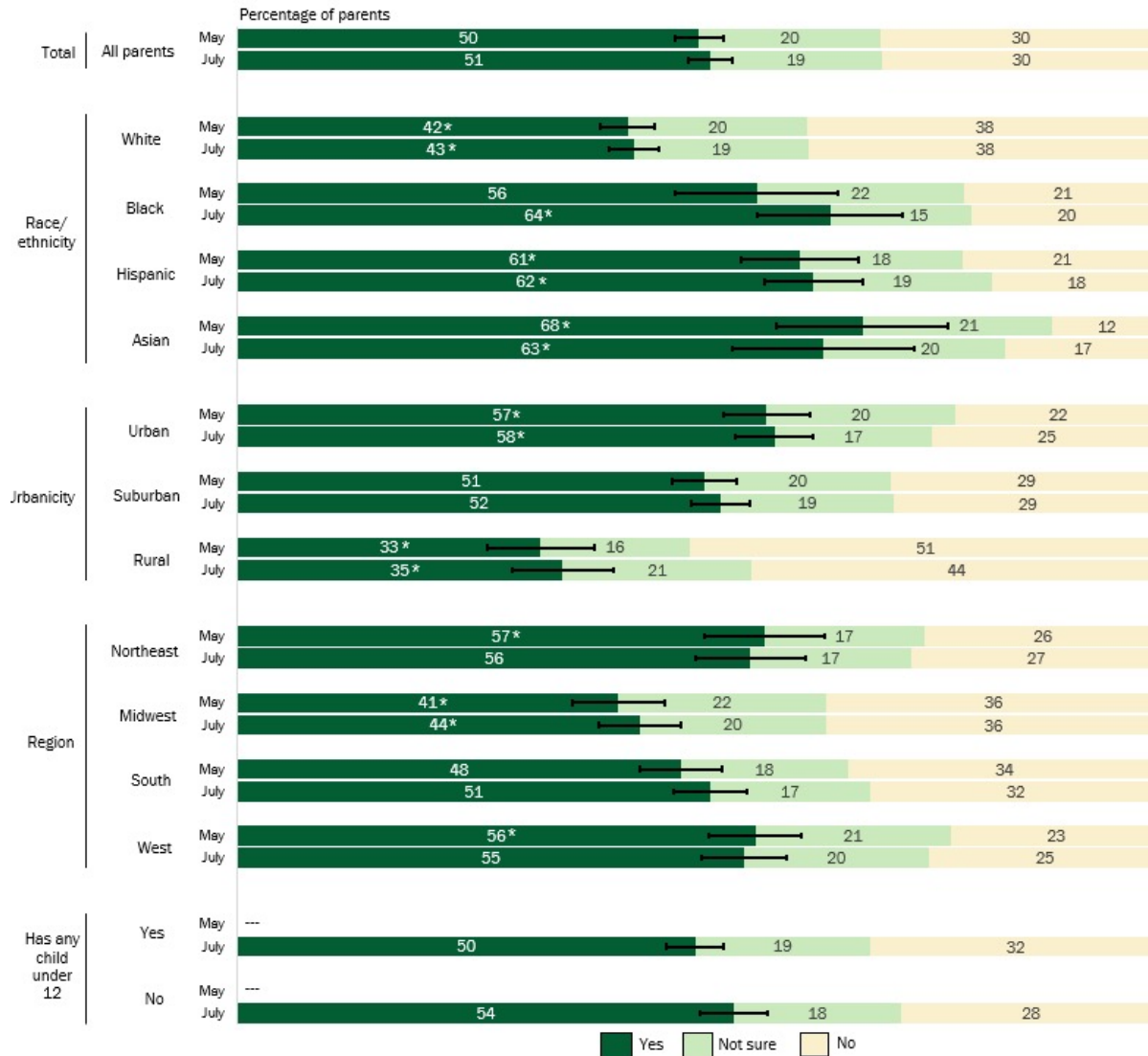


Figure notes: An \* indicates that the percentage of a given parent subgroup (e.g., urban, Midwest) who selected a response is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from the balance of all parents at the same time point. Black bars represent 95% confidence intervals. When May and July confidence intervals for a parent subgroup do not overlap, parents' responses in May are statistically different from July. Percentages might not sum to 100 due to rounding.

# For which of the following reasons would you not support or are not sure if you would support your child(ren) getting tested weekly for COVID-19?

Only parents who responded no or not sure to the question about voluntary, free, weekly COVID-19 testing (n = 1,509) answered this question.

	Race/ethnicity					Urbanicity			Region				Any child under 12	
	All parents n = 1509	White n = 1148	Black n = 76	Hispanic n = 203	Asian n = 40	Urban n = 404	Suburban n = 772	Rural n = 333	Northeast n = 195	Midwest n = 450	South n = 513	West n = 351	Yes n = 898	No n = 611
The COVID-19 test is physically uncomfortable for children	43	42	36	42	59	44	43	43	37	40	45	46	<b>50</b>	<b>30</b>
Only students with COVID-19 symptoms should be tested	39	40	31	43	44	35	41	41	42	36	40	39	40	39
The COVID-19 test gives too many false positives	33	<b>38</b>	33	<b>20</b>	<b>17</b>	31	31	37	34	34	33	30	33	32
COVID-19 tests shouldn't be administered at schools	30	<b>36</b>	23	<b>18</b>	18	26	30	35	31	33	31	<b>25</b>	31	29
I do not trust the COVID-19 test is accurate	30	<b>33</b>	33	<b>20</b>	<b>15</b>	29	27	<b>38</b>	25	31	<b>35</b>	<b>24</b>	31	29
Weekly testing is too frequent; less frequent testing is better	25	23	<b>14</b>	<b>33</b>	35	25	25	24	19	23	24	<b>30</b>	24	26
Testing is not necessary; our schools are safe	25	<b>34</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	22	22	<b>33</b>	31	<b>32</b>	<b>19</b>	21	25	24
The government has too much information or say	23	<b>28</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>12</b>	21	23	27	23	26	22	23	24	23
Weekly testing will result in too many school shutdowns	20	21	24	<b>13</b>	13	18	20	20	19	21	18	21	20	19
I do not trust that my child(ren)'s results will be kept confidential	19	19	23	16	15	19	20	17	15	20	20	19	19	18
My child(ren) might be stigmatized if they get a positive test result	14	13	19	13	20	15	16	<b>10</b>	12	15	15	15	15	13
My child(ren) will have to quarantine if they get a positive test result	13	12	15	11	14	12	14	11	14	16	11	12	13	11
Other	6	7	7	5	4	6	7	4	7	7	6	6	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>

Percentage

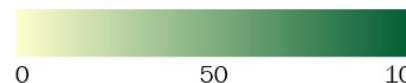


Figure notes: The numbers in the shaded cells correspond to the percentage of parents who selected the response. Parents could select multiple response options. Bold font indicates the percentage of a parent subgroup selecting a response is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from the balance of parents' responses.

# If your child(ren) had COVID-19 symptoms, would you support getting your child(ren) tested for COVID-19 at school?

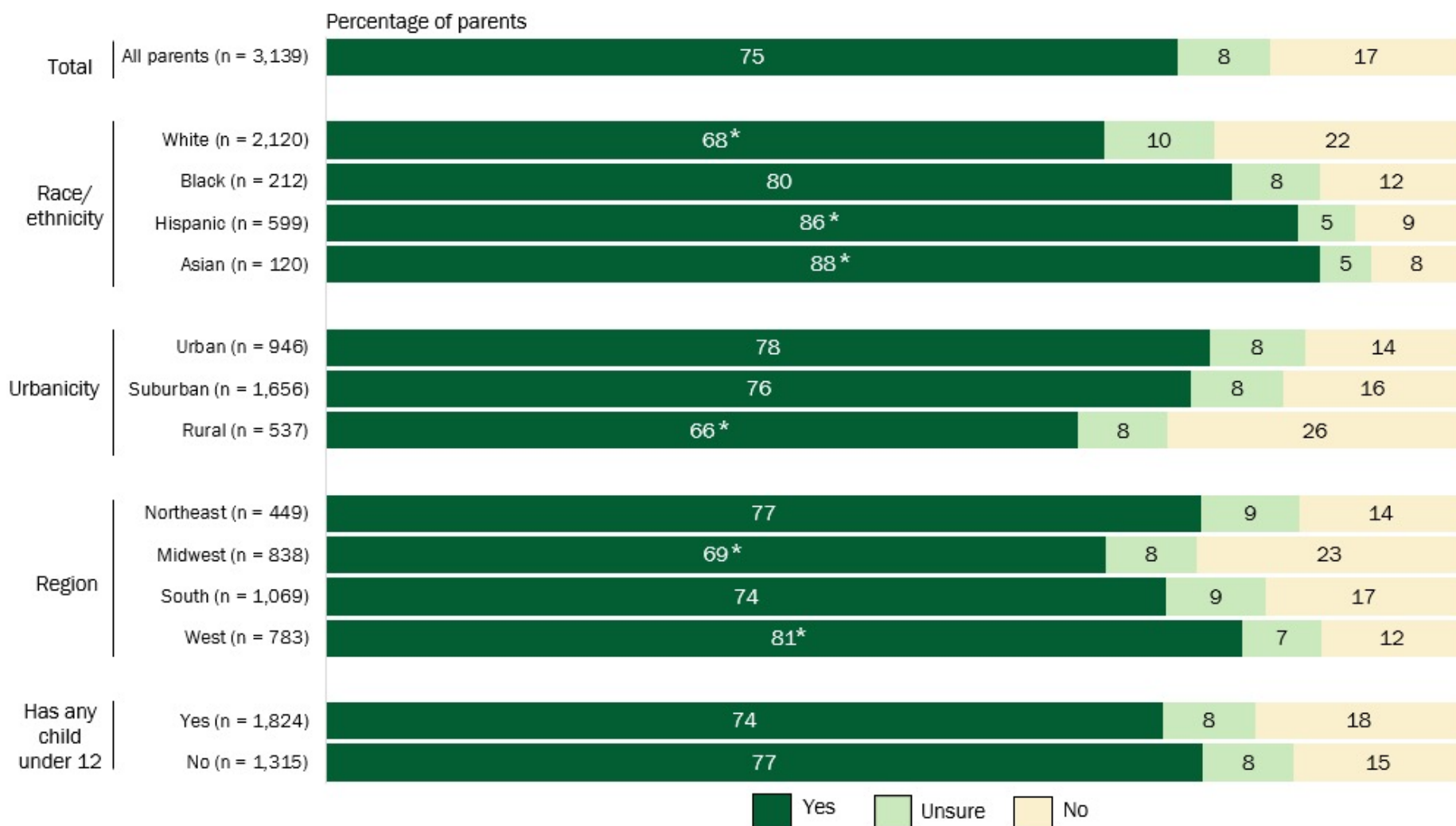


Figure notes: An \* indicates that the percentage of a given parent subgroup (e.g., urban, Midwest) who selected a response is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from the balance of all parents. Parents could select only one response to this question. Percentages might not sum to 100 due to rounding.



# How comfortable are you with your child(ren) taking the following kinds of COVID-19 tests?



Figure notes: The numbers in the shaded cells correspond to the percentage of parents that are “comfortable” with the listed kind of COVID-19 test. Respondents provided separate answers for each of the four listed kinds of COVID-19 tests. Bold font indicates the percentage of a parent subgroup selecting a response is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from the balance of parents’ responses.



## **Questions about COVID-19 vaccination**

"I will get my child(ren) vaccinated for COVID-19 when a vaccine is authorized and available for their age." [1 of 2 slides; Comparison of May and July]

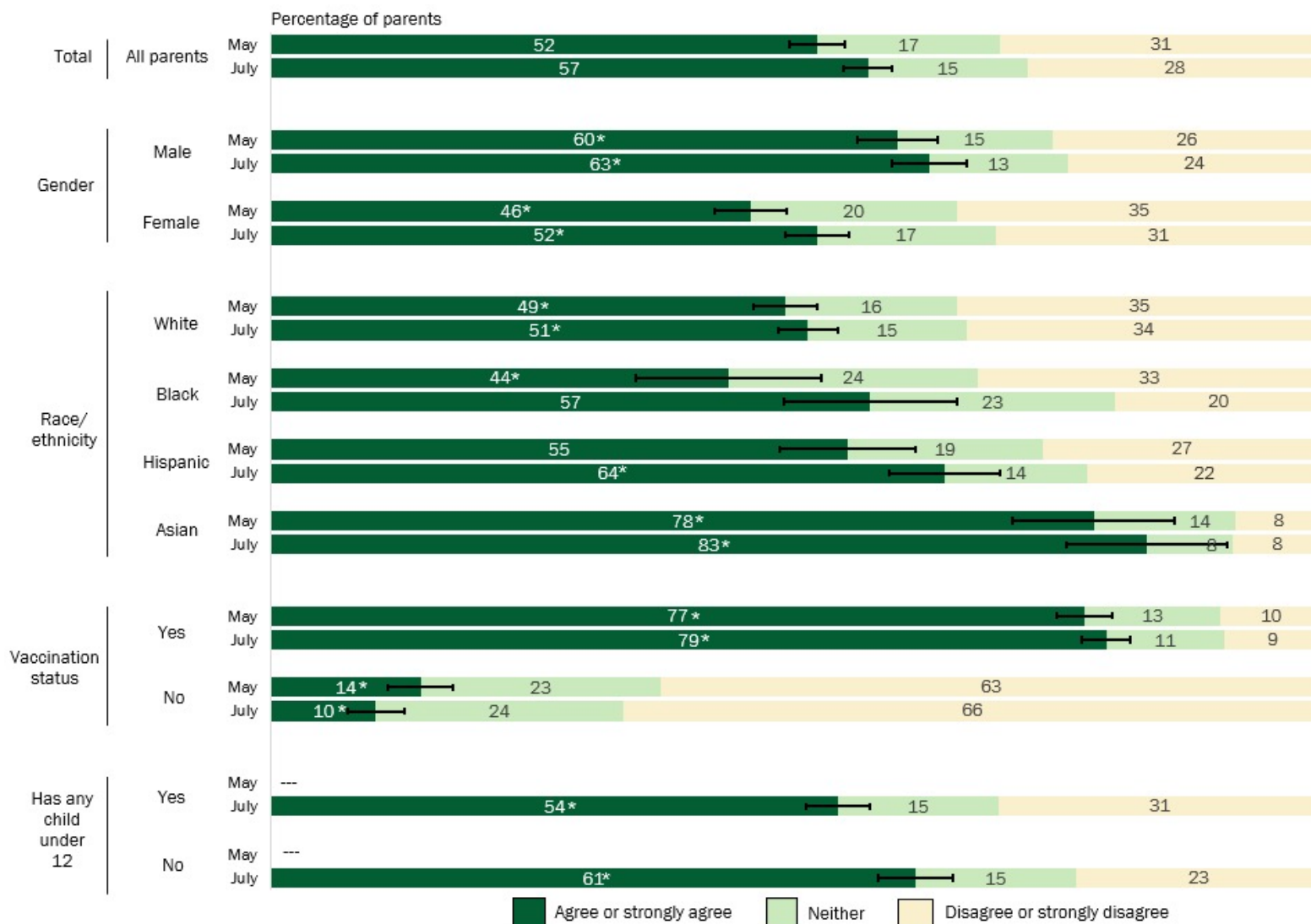


Figure notes: An \* indicates that the percentage of a given parent subgroup (e.g., urban, Midwest) who selected a response is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from the balance of all parents at the same time point. Black bars represent 95% confidence intervals. When May and July confidence intervals for a parent subgroup do not overlap, parents' responses in May are statistically different from July. Percentages might not sum to 100 due to rounding.

"I will get my child(ren) vaccinated for COVID-19 when a vaccine is authorized and available for their age." [2 of 2 slides; Comparison of May and July]

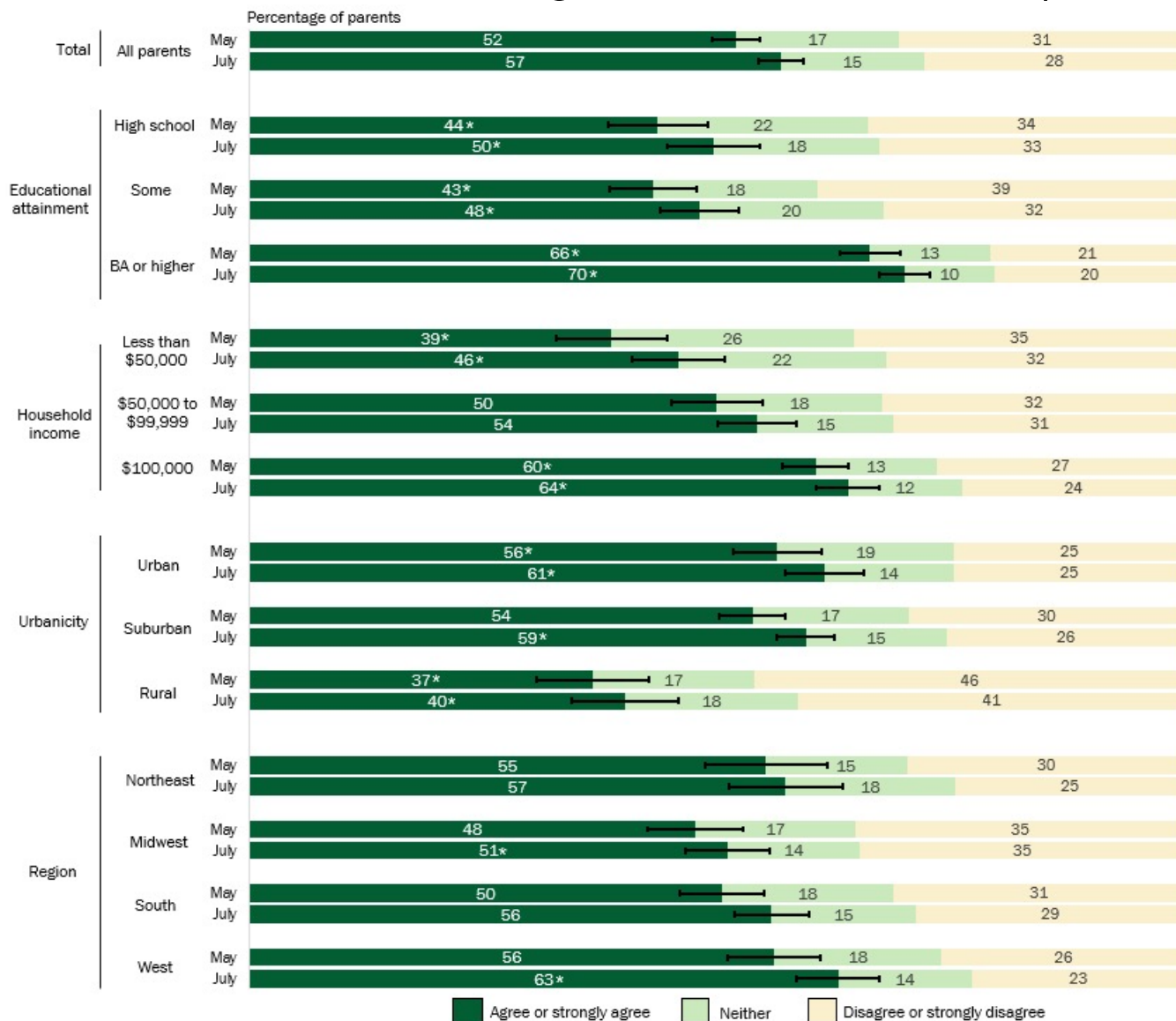
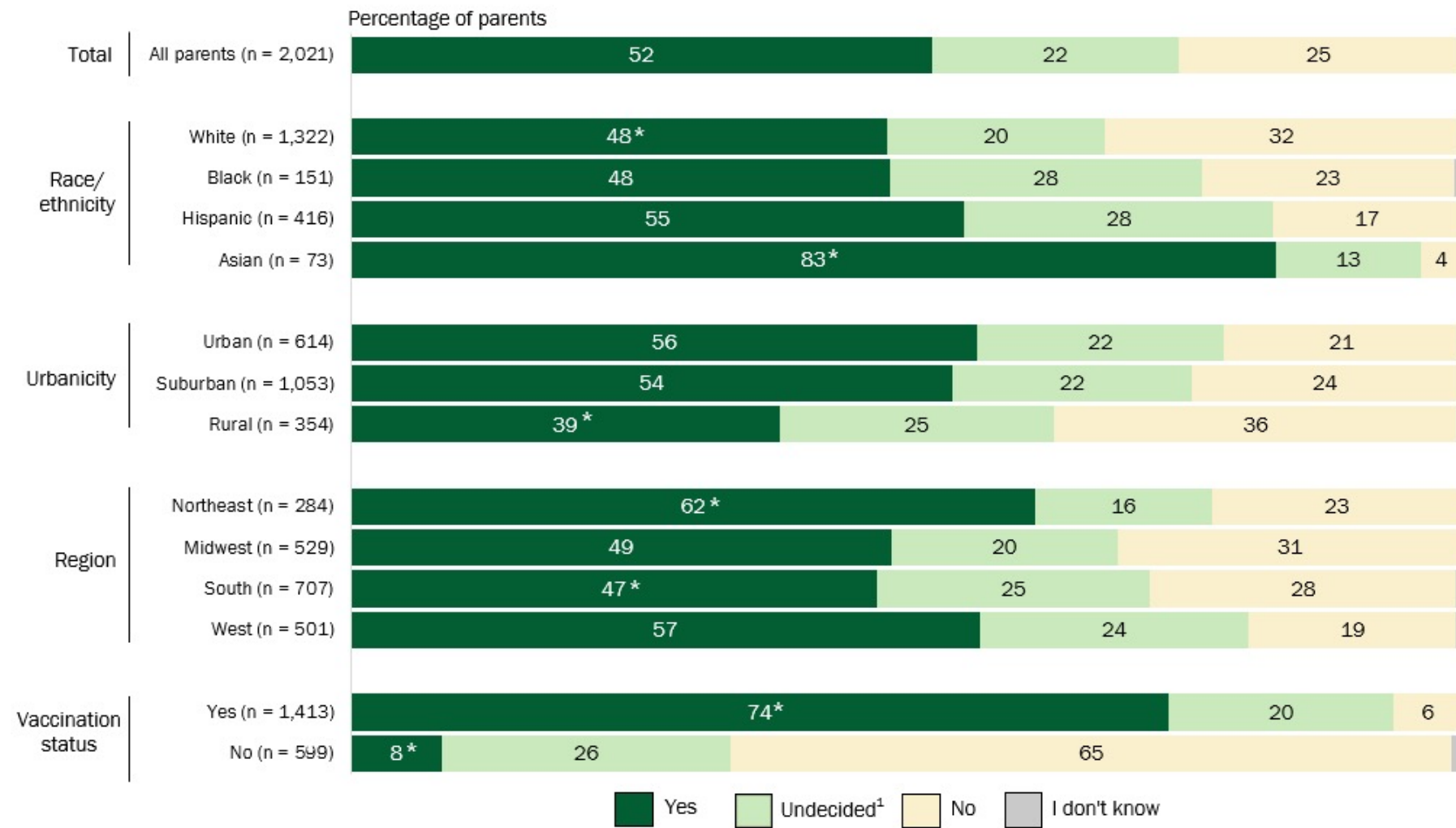


Figure notes: An \* indicates that the percentage of a given parent subgroup (e.g., urban, Midwest) who selected a response is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from the balance of all parents at the same time point. Black bars represent 95% confidence intervals. When May and July confidence intervals for a parent subgroup do not overlap, parents' responses in May are statistically different from July. Percentages might not sum to 100 due to rounding.

# Have your child(ren) who are age 12 and over gotten vaccinated for COVID-19?

Only parents with children age 12 and over (n = 2,021) answered this question.



<sup>1</sup> The undecided category includes three responses: (1) "Undecided; they or I want to wait a while to see how it's working", (2) "Some have, and some haven't," and (3) "Not yet, but they are planning to."

Figure notes: An \* indicates that the percentage of a given parent subgroup (e.g., urban, Midwest) who selected a response is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from the balance of all parents. Parents could select only one response to this question. Percentages might not sum to 100 due to rounding.

# Have you personally received the COVID-19 vaccine?

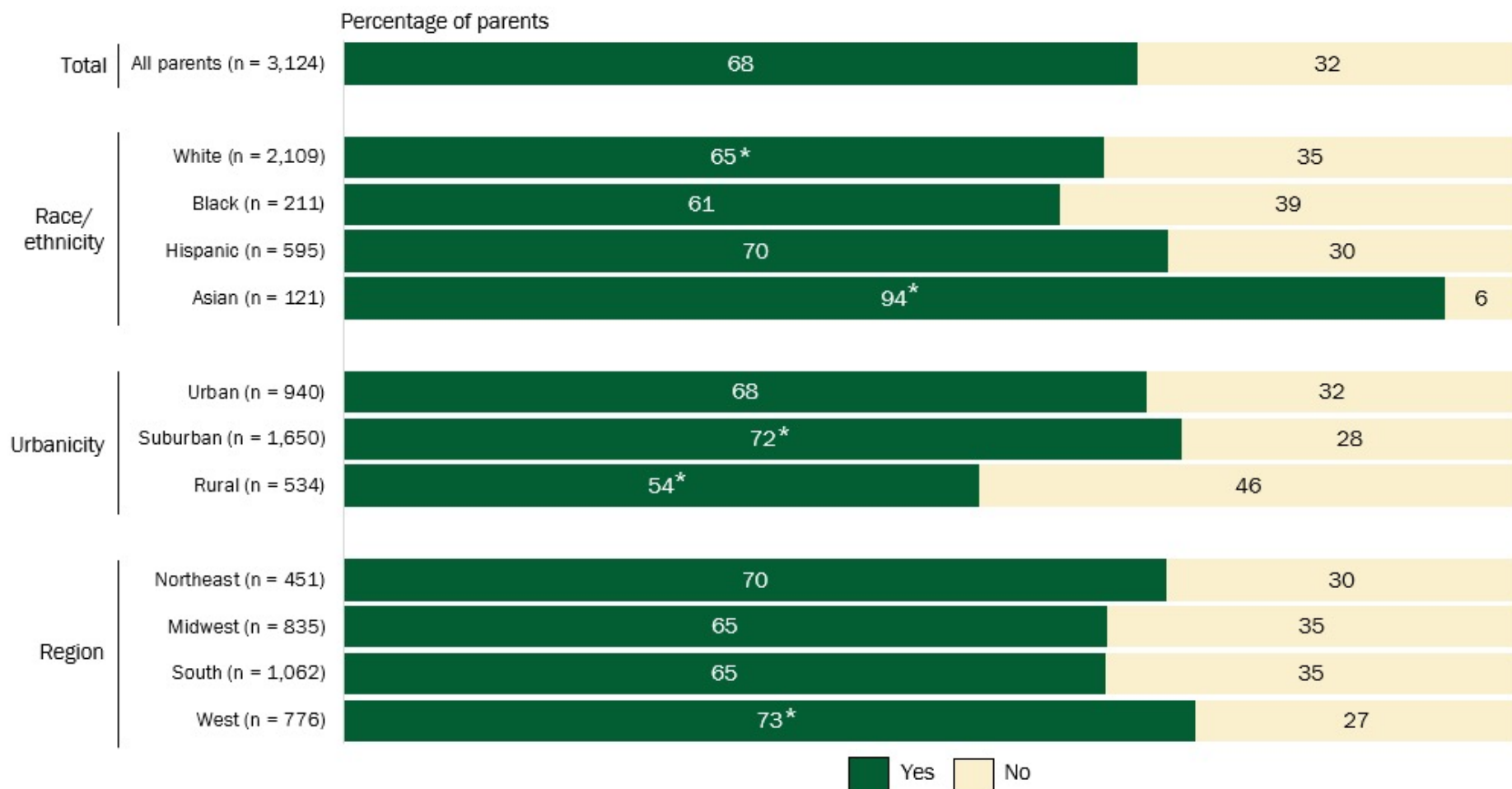


Figure notes: An \* indicates that the percentage of a given parent subgroup (e.g., urban, Midwest) who selected a response is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from the balance of all parents. Parents could select only one response to this question. Percentages might not sum to 100 due to rounding.

“Being offered a \$25 gift card in fall 2021 would make me more likely to allow my child(ren) to participate in voluntary, free, weekly COVID-19 testing at school.”

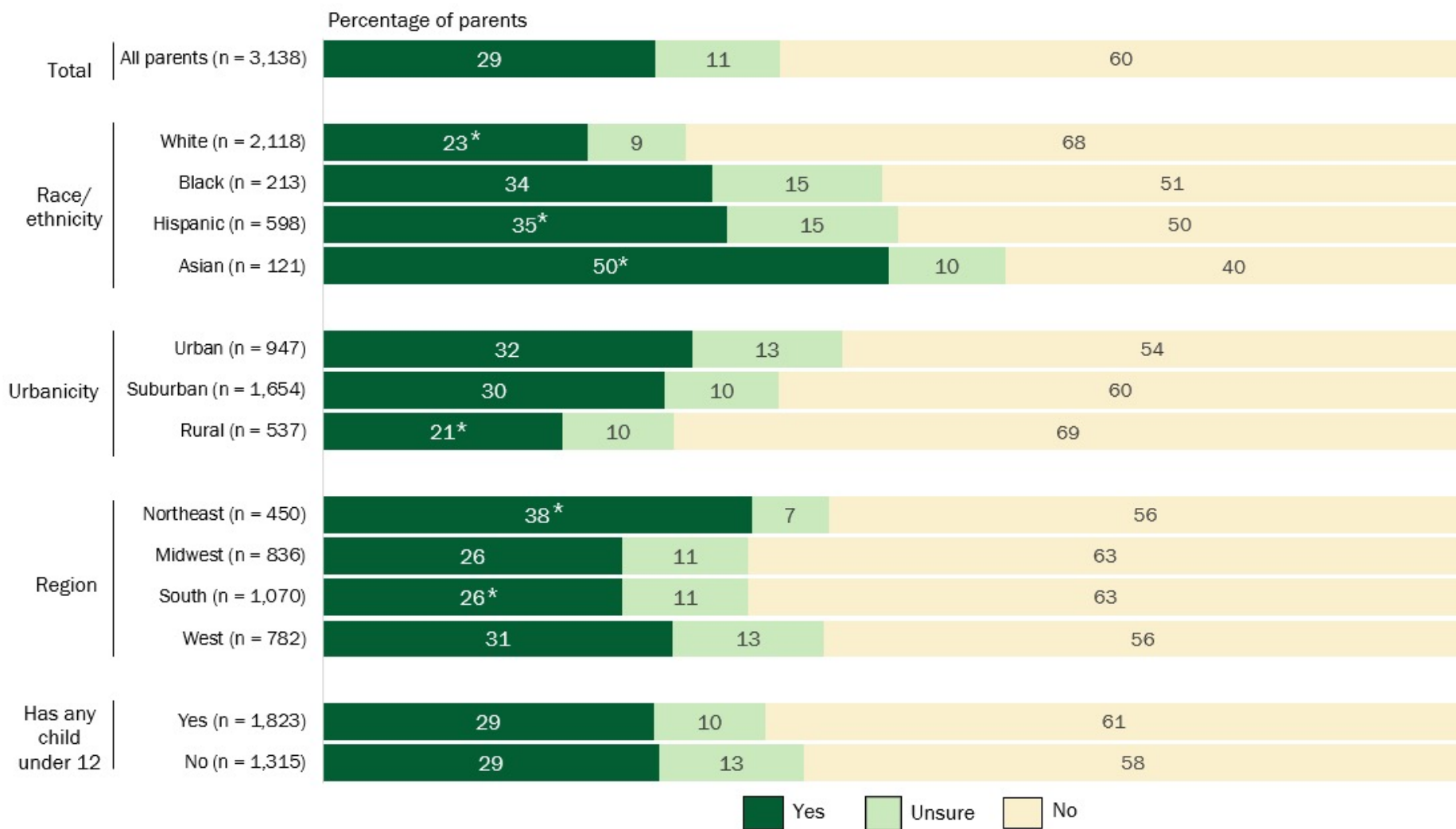
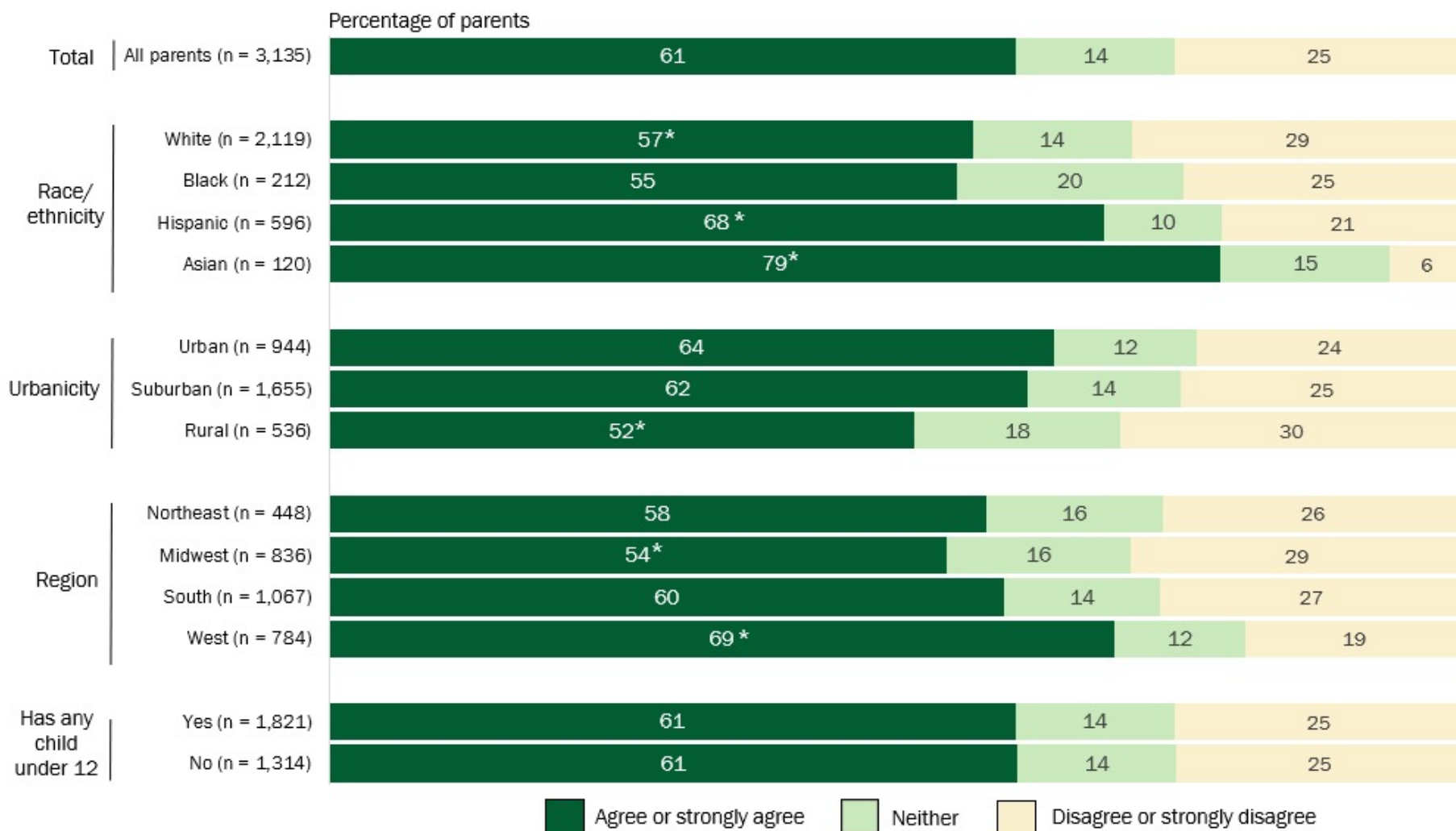


Figure notes: An \* indicates that the percentage of a given parent subgroup (e.g., urban, Midwest) who selected a response is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from the balance of all parents. Parents could select only one response to this question. Percentages might not sum to 100 due to rounding.

“I would support getting my child(ren) vaccinated at school for routine vaccines such as polio, TdaP, and/or MMR if they lacked the immunizations.”<sup>a</sup>



<sup>a</sup> The survey question went on to read: “(TdaP is the diphtheria and tetanus toxoids and acellular pertussis vaccine. MMR is the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine.)”

Figure notes: An \* indicates that the percentage of a given parent subgroup (e.g., urban, Midwest) who selected a response is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from the balance of all parents. Parents could select only one response to this question. Percentages might not sum to 100 due to rounding.