

Public health, schools and elected officials need timely, actionable and school-specific data to help prevent the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 in kindergarten-12th grade (K-12) school settings and to make sure schools can reopen and stay open, safely. In January 2021, the CDC Foundation, in partnership with Deloitte Consulting and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), launched the *Monitoring School COVID-19 Prevention Strategies Project* to assess school prevention strategies and impacts of COVID-19 on the social, mental and physical health of the school community.

This report provides takeaways from a convenience sample survey of **639 school principals and vice principals in K-12 schools in the U.S.**, conducted between May 24-June 7, 2021, through a partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National Association of Elementary School Principals. A similar survey was conducted between April 7-17, 2021, of 576 K-12 school principals and vice principals and this report also includes significant differences ($p < .05$) for questions that were asked in both surveys. **All data in this report is from the May/June survey, unless noted otherwise.** This rapid data collection method provides real-time information related to COVID-19 and the changing circumstances in schools, from the perspective of principals. The report focuses on job satisfaction, COVID-19-related decision making, policies and practices related to COVID-19 and impacts on students.

KEY FINDINGS



K-12 Principals

n = 639

N = 117,221 (weighted)*

- During May/June, 27% of principals were **considering retiring early or finding a different profession** more often now than before the pandemic. However, this number is **significantly lower than what principals reported in April 2021** (45%).
- Principals reported **fewer mental health challenges** (difficulty staying focused, work performance challenges, etc.) during May/June than they reported during April.
- Principals also reported **COVID-19 negatively impacted students' mental health well-being** (83%) and **educational progress** (79%). Principals also **felt less confident in their school's ability to identify students in need of mental health** services than before the pandemic
- Principals reported **negative "significant or moderate" impacts on implementing prevention strategies more often** in May/June than they did in April.
- Top reported **barriers to schools' ability to implement COVID-19 prevention strategies** in May/June relate to lack of guidance or collaboration with state or local education agencies, lack of broadband to support remote learning, lack of personal protective equipment and lack of cleaning supplies.
- During the 2020-2021 school year, 24% of principals in May/June observed a **decrease in student enrollment** and 39% observed an **increase in student absences**.
- The number one reason principals reported in May/June 2021 for low student attendance was **low parent/guardian involvement**.
- As of June 2021, **80%** of principals reported that **greater than half their staff have been vaccinated** against COVID-19.

IMPLICATIONS AND PUBLIC HEALTH ACTION

Based on key findings, there are opportunities to

- Better understand stressors in order to reduce principal turnover due to COVID-19.
- Investigate ways to best support principals in their efforts to manage their school's COVID-19 prevention strategies and other COVID-19 related responsibilities.
- Provide resources, tools and services to help families and the school community better support students, including overcoming challenges related to academic progress, attendance and mental health.
- Encourage more principals to participate in various professional development activities so they are better equipped to handle various student needs in a fast-paced and dynamic environment.
- Continue to address barriers and mitigate unintended consequences of implementation of COVID-19 prevention strategies in schools, as the number of principals who reported 'significant or moderate negative impacts' on implementing strategies has increased from April 2021 to May/June 2021.

PRINCIPAL DEMOGRAPHICS



Respondent Demographics

Role	Gender	Age	Tenure as Principal	Race and Ethnicity
56% Principals 44% Vice principal	46% Male 54% Female	5% Under 35 years 30% 35-44 years 65% 45+ years	11% 0-3 years 34% 4-5 years 13% 6-7 years 42% 8-34 years	80% Non-Hispanic White 9% Non-Hispanic Black 3% Non-Hispanic Other** 8% Hispanic



Characteristics of Schools Represented

School Types	Grades Represented	School Operation Model	Location	Region
75% Public School 21% Private/Parochial/Independent School 2% Charter/Magnet School 1% Boarding or Other School	1% Kindergarten 24% Elementary school (grades 1-5) 40% Middle school (grades 6-8) 35% High school (grades 9-12)	27% In-person 49% Hybrid 24% Remote/virtual	29% Urban 45% Suburban 25% Rural	19% Northeast 21% Midwest 40% South 19% West

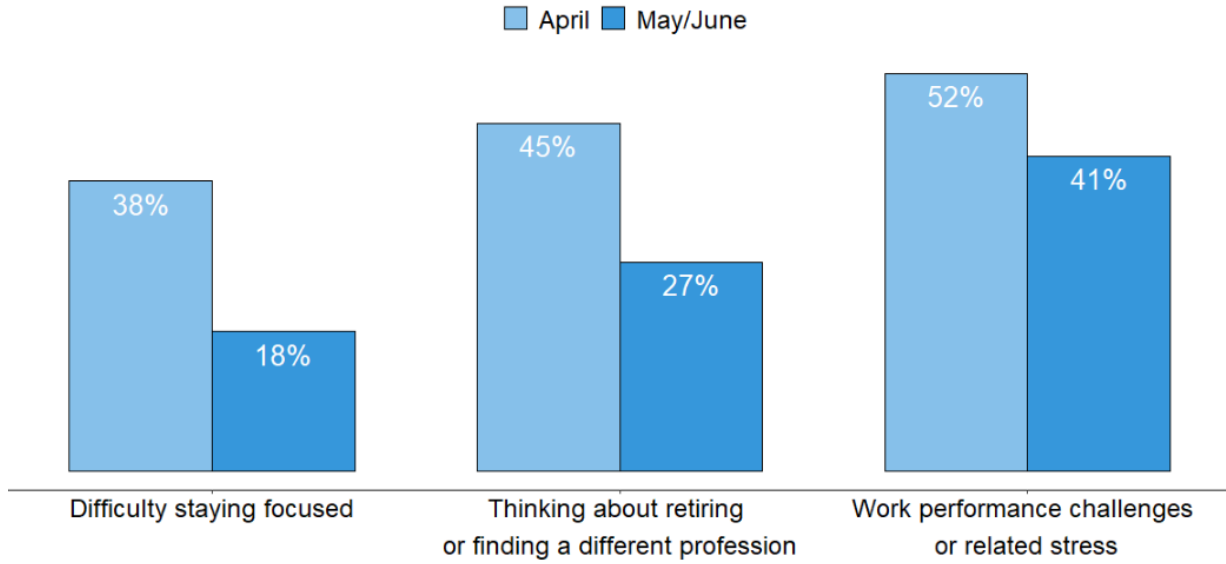
***Notes:** Results in this report are not generalizable since they are based off a convenience sample survey. The electronic survey was approved by the Independent Review Board (IRB). These data have not been published. Weights were applied using the 2017-2018 National Teacher Principal Survey by the National Center for Education Statistics, which only accounts for a portion of the full population of interest. While the regional sample data is not proportional to national representative data, the data was weighted using region to offset the disproportions. The weights allow valid inferences to be made from the sample data about this population. Some percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding. Additionally, the views expressed in this survey belong solely to the respondents and do not represent or reflect the view of the CDC Foundation.

****Non-Hispanic Other principals includes American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Asian American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, multiple races and other.**

JOB SATISFACTION, RETENTION AND MENTAL HEALTH

Compared to before the pandemic began (February 2020), how much are you experiencing each of the following? Shown below is the percent of principals who reported experiencing “more”

n = 639 | N = 117,221 (weighted)



All of these challenges significantly decreased between April 2021 and May/June 2021.*

In May/June 2021, principals reported that compared to before the pandemic:

- 50% are working more hours
- 27% are thinking about retiring or finding a different profession more now
- Experiencing the following more often:
 - Work performance challenges and related stress (41%)
 - Low work morale (31%)
 - Difficulty staying focused (18%)

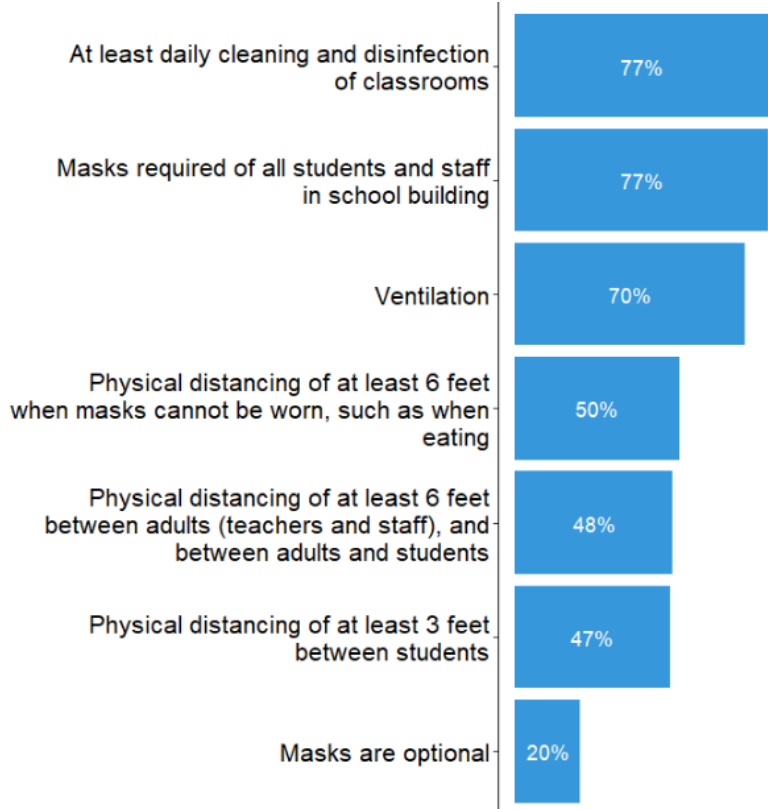
Principal mental health:

- 10% of principals noted they were frequently in a depressed mood and had little interest or pleasure in doing things in the past 2 weeks (suggesting signs of depression and further screening needed according to the Patient Health Questionnaire PHQ-2 score).

REOPENING DECISIONS AND OTHER PREVENTION POLICIES

Which of the following does your school or district policy currently contain?

n = 639 | N = 117,221 (weighted)



76%

of principals in May/June, reported that they **strengthened ventilation policies** in their school during spring 2021.

72%

of principals in May/June, reported that they **strengthened their policy of masks being required** in school during spring 2021.

The most commonly reported influence of strengthening or relaxing a school policy were

- Changes in community level transmission of COVID-19
- Updated Department of Education Guidance (e.g., ED COVID-19 HANDBOOK)

KEY CHALLENGES & CHANGES DUE TO COVID-19

To what extent has each of the following factors negatively impacted your school’s ability to implement COVID-19 prevention strategies?

Shown below is the percent of principals who reported a barrier had a ‘significant or moderate impact’

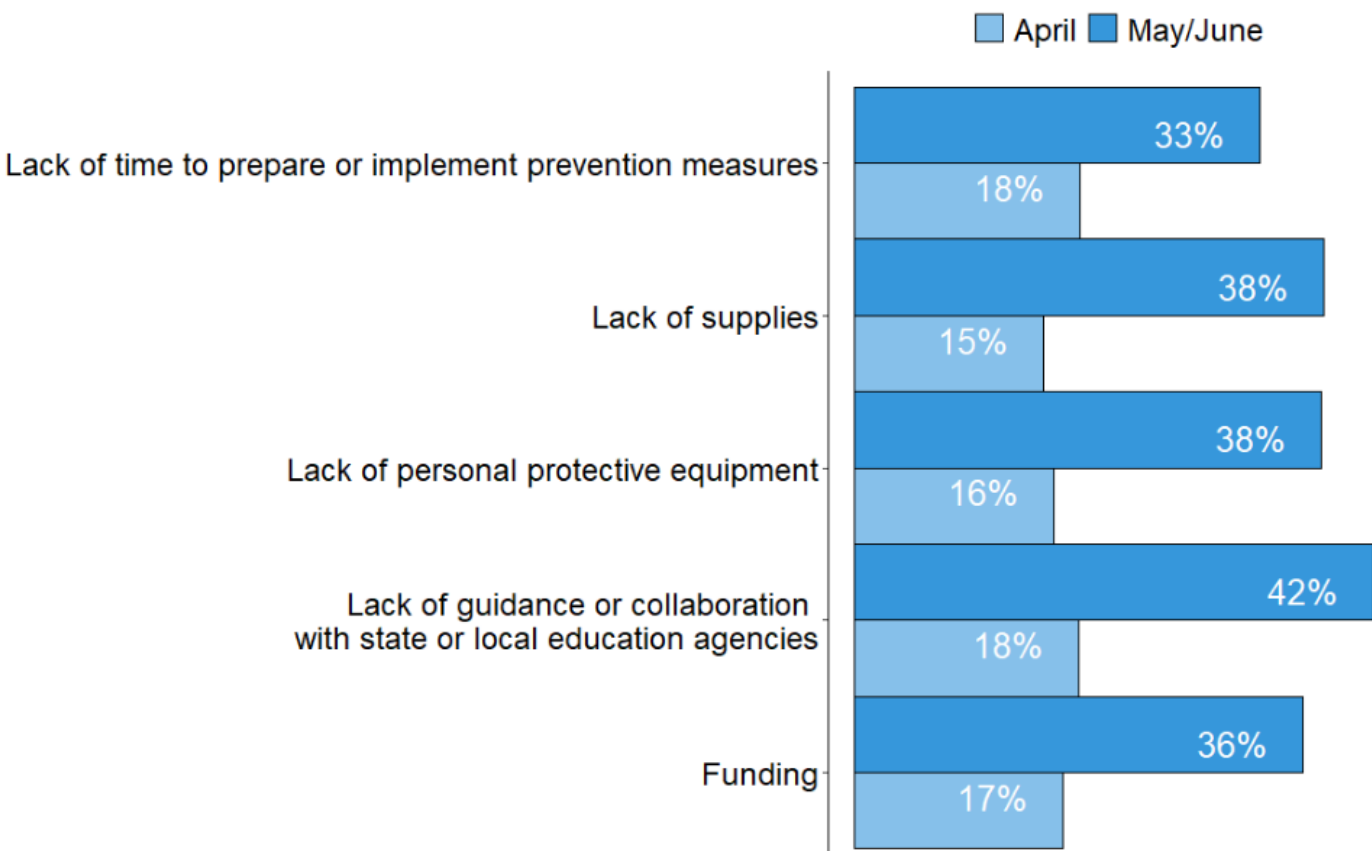
n = 639 | N = 117,221 (weighted)

38%

of principals in May/June 2021 experienced significant or moderate **issues with lack of supplies and personal protective equipment for staff and students.**

42%

of principals in May/June 2021 reported **lack of guidance or collaboration** with state or local education agencies.



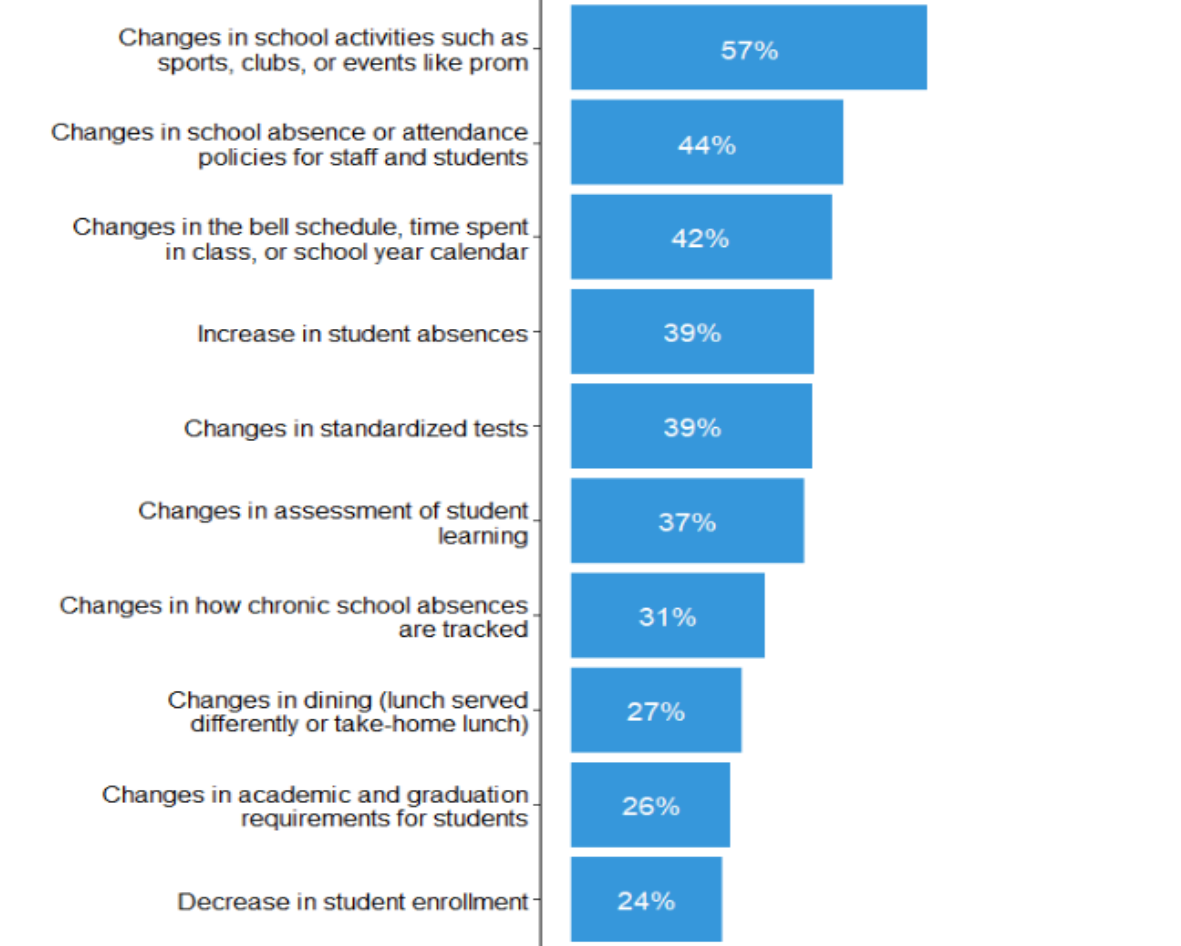
All of these barriers had significantly increased since April 2021.*

* Finding is statistically significant: T-test analyses were conducted to test for statistically significant ($p < .05$) associations between data collection periods.

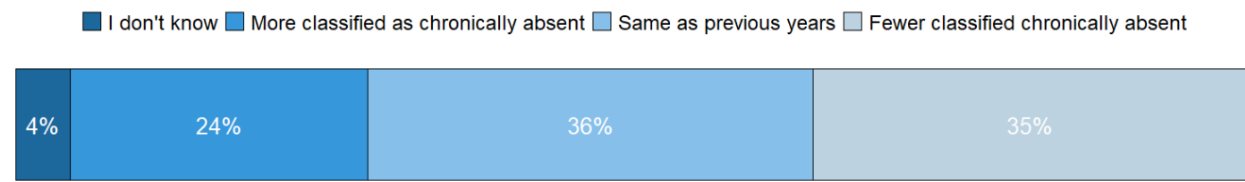
KEY CHALLENGES & CHANGES DUE TO COVID-19, cont.

Which of the following has changed during the current school year (2020-2021)? Check all that apply.

n = 639 | N = 117,221 (weighted)



Based on your school’s attendance policies, how does student’s attendance compliance status this school year (2020-2021) compared to previous years? n = 639 | N = 117,221 (weighted)



24% of principals observed a **decrease in student enrollment** this school year (2020-2021).

- Most principals reported that students were chronically absent due to low parent/guardian involvement (62%), low academic performance (38%), concerns about contracting COVID-19 (38%), COVID-19 symptoms or diagnosis (36%).
- Top three changes schools will retain for the next school year:
 - Changes in assessment of student learning (86%)
 - Changes in academic and graduation requirements for students (83%)
 - Changes in school absence or attendance policies for teachers, staff and students (67%)
- Summer related activities:
 - 74% of schools will offer cocurricular activities this summer.
 - 74% of schools will offer after-school activities other than sports this summer.
 - 73% of schools will offer school sports this summer.

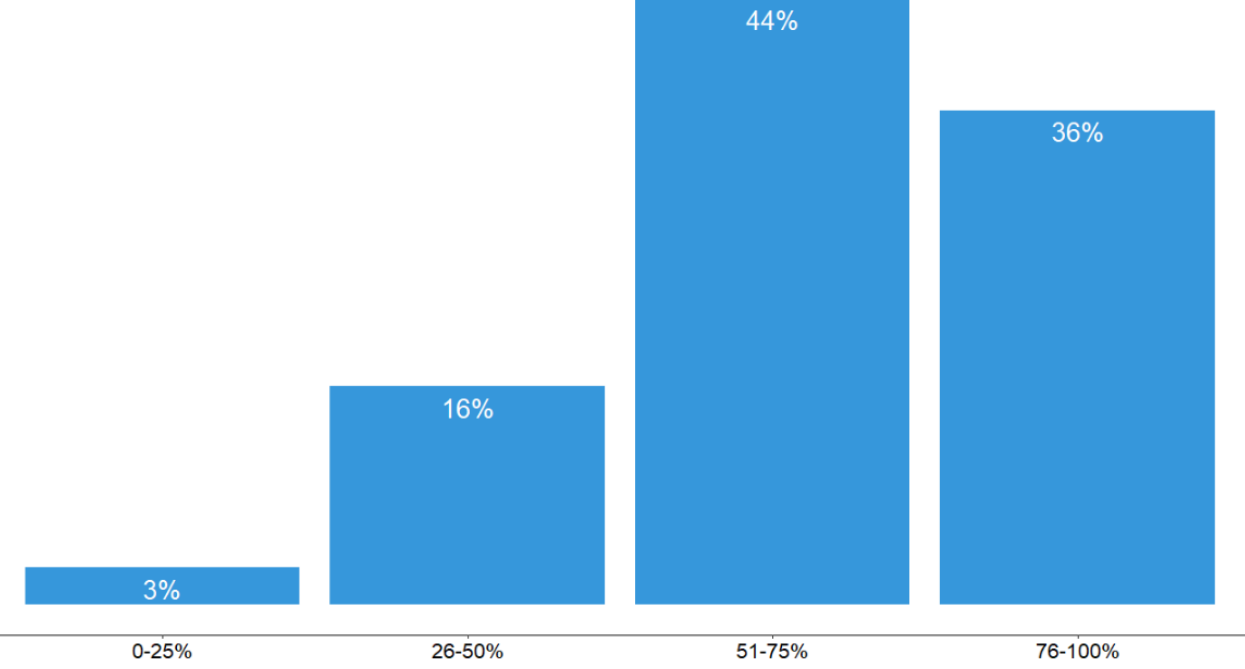
MONITORING COVID-19 CASES AT SCHOOL

74% of principals indicated their **district has a public tracker** noting all cases in a given school to date. Of those reporting a tracker, 72% reported the tracker is updated daily/as cases occur.

- Some principals reported that they plan on conducting screening testing for school community members who are not vaccinated against COVID-19 (18% teachers, 25% staff, 19% students).
- Most principals reported that “allowing in-person learning” informed their decision to conduct screening testing for teachers (82%), for staff (64%), and for students (66%).
- 75% of principals in May/June 2021 reported that they have conducted school-located vaccination events* for students since the summer of 2020. The top vaccines offered were the COVID-19 vaccine for age-eligible students, teachers and staff. The top two partners for these events were school-based health centers and state/local public health departments. Only 5% reported that they were unlikely to host school located vaccination events next year, and their major reason was that principals believe it is not appropriate for schools to conduct vaccination events.

What percent of your school staff has already received a COVID-19 vaccination?

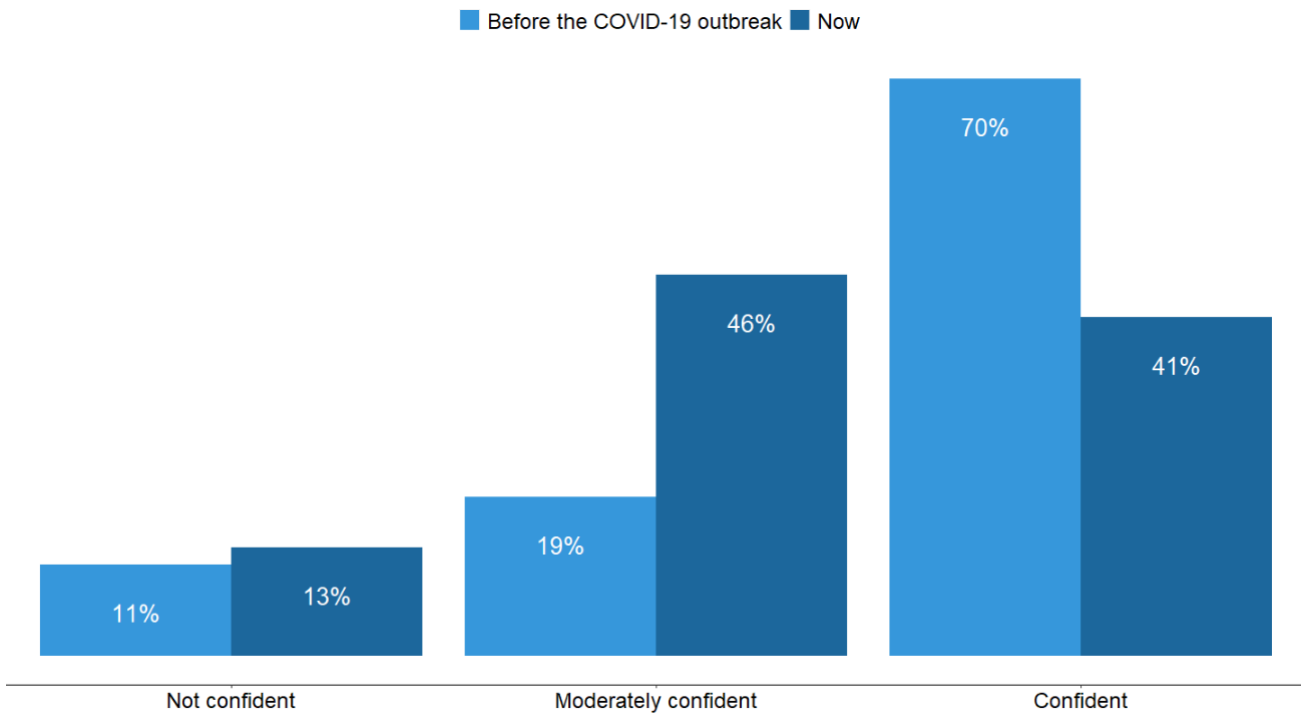
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PRINCIPALS’ ASSESSMENT ON IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON STUDENTS

How confident do you feel in your school’s ability to identify students in need of mental health services?

n = 639 | N = 117,221 (weighted)



83% of principals believed COVID-19 had a **negative impact on most of their students’ mental health.**

79% of principals believed COVID-19 had a **negative impact on their students’ educational progress.**

- Overall, principals feel less confident in their school’s ability to identify students in need of mental health services now than before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Less than half of principals reported they participated in the following professional development workshops this school year (2020-2021):
 - Best practices for building trusting and caring relationships with students (59%)
 - Warning signs of depression or other mental health challenges in students/youth (49%)
 - Trauma-informed instruction or practices (36%)

*School-located vaccination (SLV) is defined as vaccination administered to students on school grounds, either before, during or after school hours, usually during a prescheduled vaccination event. It often involves collaboration between school districts or schools and local public health departments or commercial entities.