

Back to School Blues:

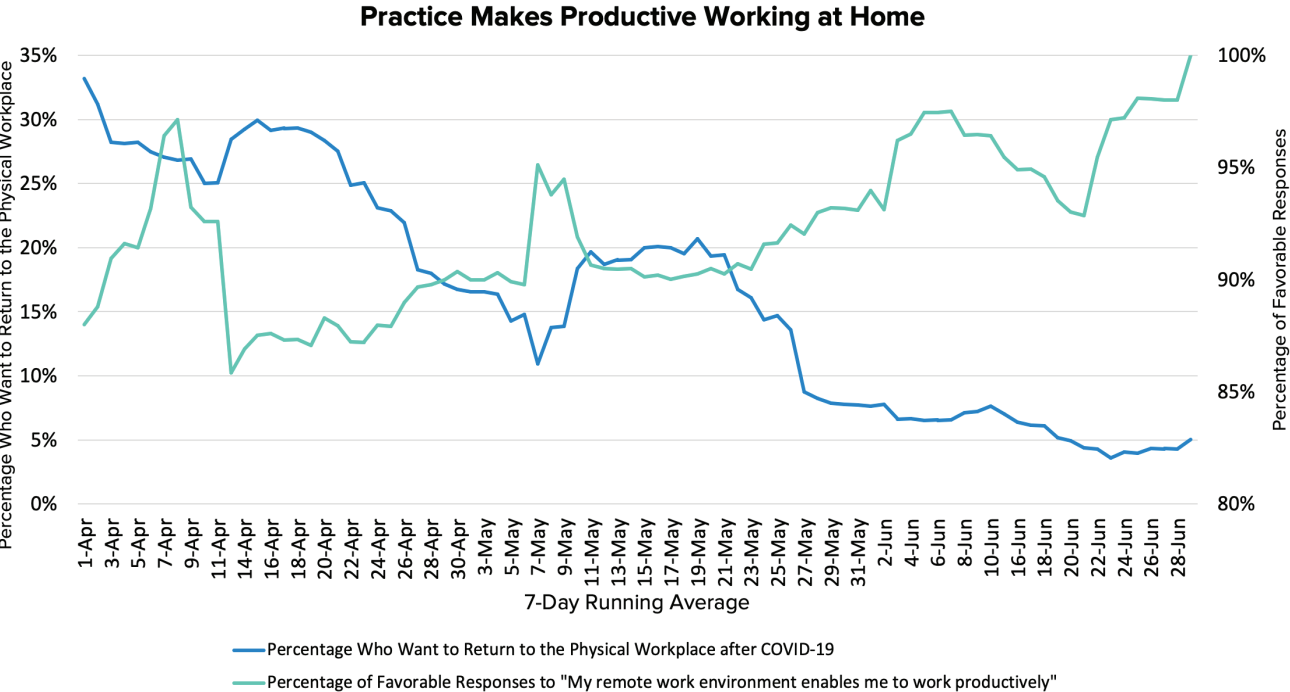
The Fall Outlook for Working Parents

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Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, many previously held assumptions in the world of work have been upended and we still have much to learn about how recent shifts in our workforce will play out in the long term. In many organizations, employees are working longer days and taking less time away from work than ever before, yet engagement continues to soar. Additionally, as employees have self-reported becoming more productive working from home, they have also self-reported being less likely to want to return to the physical workplace after COVID-19.

We saw a considerable increase in productivity and a decrease in the desire to return to the physical workplace near the end of May. This shift coincided with the end of the school year, a time when many working parents and caregivers were freed from home schooling responsibilities.



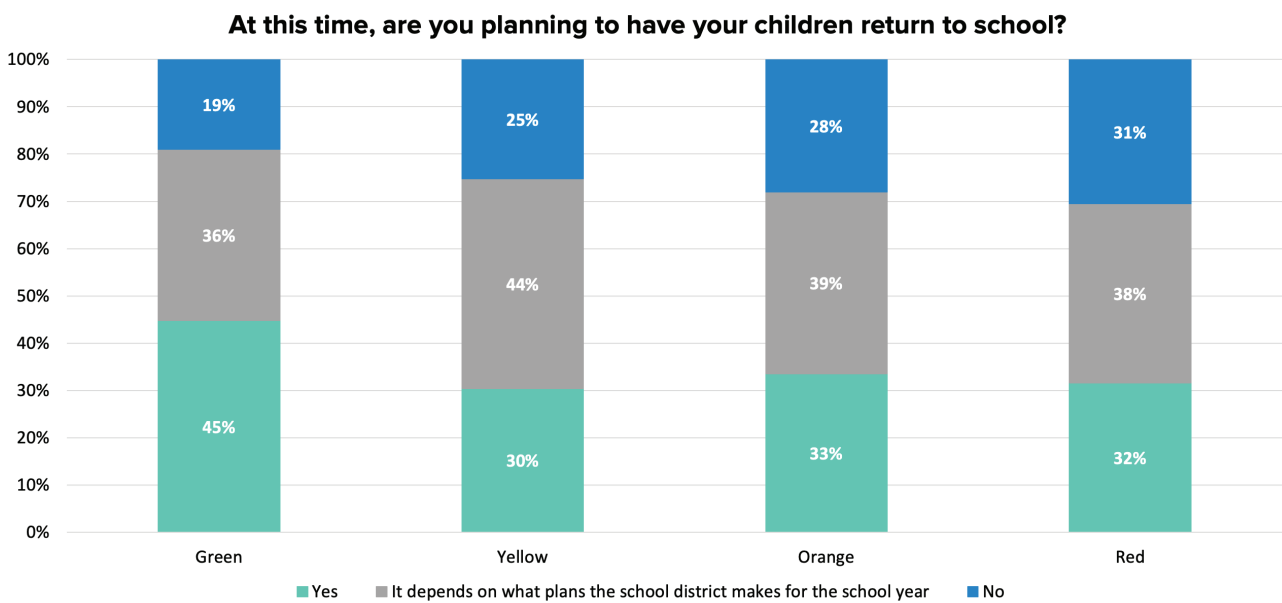
Now, with the recent surge in COVID-19 cases and the start of the new school year upon us, many schools are moving to complete or at least part-time distance learning. Undoubtedly, school decisions will impact parents' willingness and even ability to work in the physical workplace. As a result, productivity may decline as work-at-home parents are once again forced to play the roles of employee, parent, and teacher during the workday.

To better understand employee perceptions as we approach the new school year, we conducted a paid national survey with over 1,500 respondents.

Parents Remain Undecided

Even with school just a few weeks away, the largest portion of parents (40%) are still uncertain about sending their children to a traditional classroom. It doesn't help that 41% of parents say their school district has not communicated a clearly defined return to school strategy.

In counties where the COVID-19 risk level is “green” (i.e., less than one case per 100,000 people), parents are more likely to send their children back to school (45%) as compared to opt for distance learning (19%). By comparison, In counties where the COVID-19 risk level is “red” (i.e., 25 or more cases per 100,000 people), parents are 50% more likely to opt for distance learning (30%) than parents in “green” counties.



For many parents, there does not appear to be a choice: Parents who work in a physical workplace or who have a child with an individualized education plan (IEP) are more than twice as likely to have their children return to traditional school; and 16% of parents do not have the resources and technology needed for their children to learn from home; and 6% say their current financial/work situation will force them to send their children back to school.

Inevitable Disruption

Productivity for working parents is likely to decline at the start of the school year. More than 60% believe that carrying out distance learning from home will place an extremely difficult burden on their family.

Furthermore:

- 51% of working parents report they will be distracted to either a “moderate” or “great” extent on days when their children are learning from home.
- 46% of working parents report their work productivity will decline by either a “moderate” or “great” extent on days when their children are learning from home.
- 42% of working parents are worried to either a “moderate” or “great” extent about their job security because of their children learning from home.

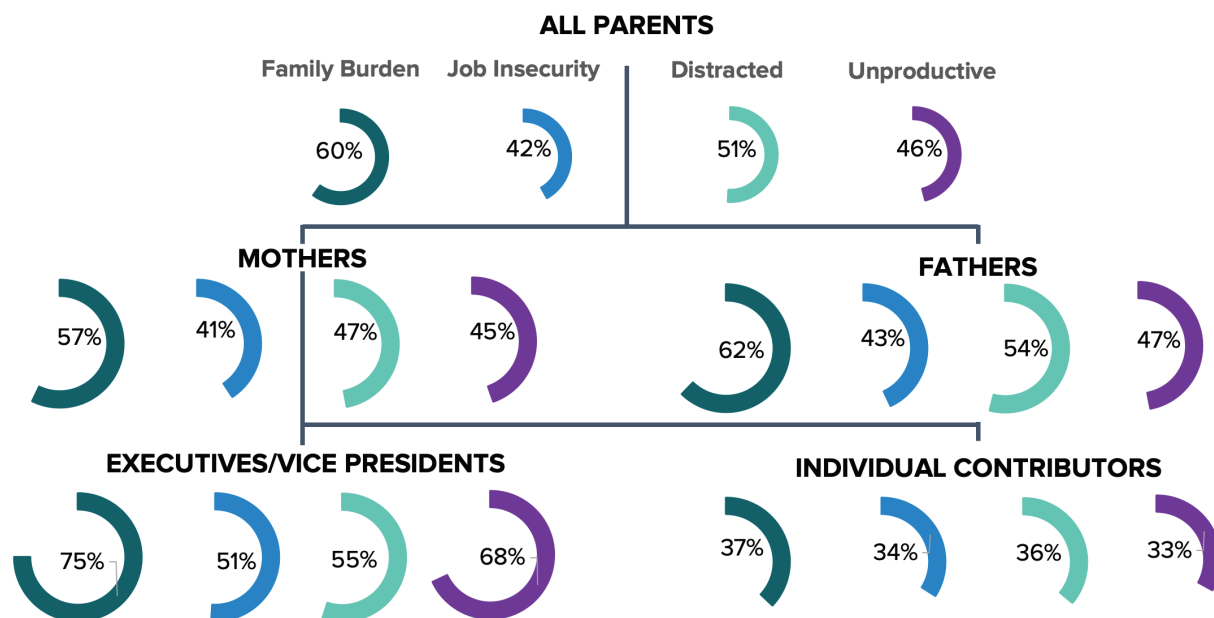


These perceptions about distraction and reduced productivity are not limited to only parents. Non-parent co-workers report that they are feeling the disruption even now before the return to school. It is likely these perceptions will only intensify after the return to school:

- 39% of non-parents believe their co-workers who are parents are more distracted.
- 29% of non-parents believe their co-workers who are parents are less productive.
- 25% of non-parents say their workload has both increased and become more difficult to manage because of their co-workers who are parents.

Sr. Leader Working Moms Most at Risk

In terms of parents' concerns about distance learning having a negative effect (i.e., family burden, job insecurity, and being distracted and unproductive), we were surprised to not find greater disparity between mothers and fathers, since working mothers are nearly twice as likely to carry 100% of the child care responsibilities during the work day as compared to working fathers.

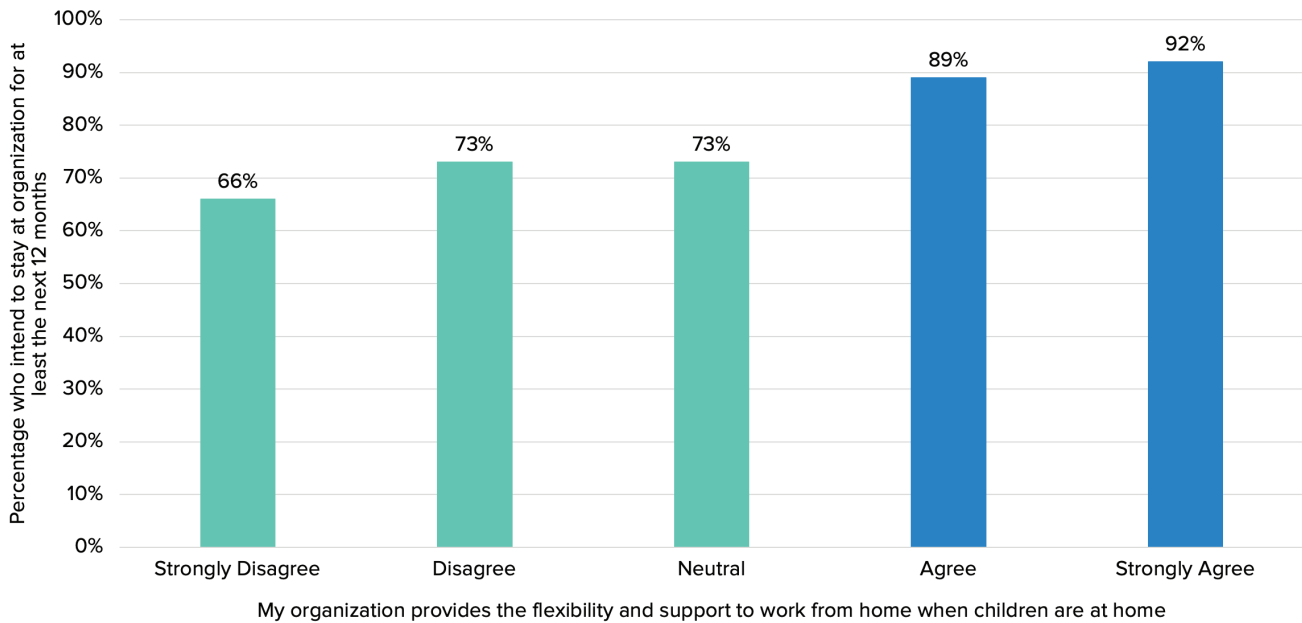


Working mothers who are in senior leadership positions (e.g., executives/vice presidents) are most at risk of feeling the extra burden, pressure, and challenges that distance learning brings to their workday. As Shakespeare wrote, “Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.” Among senior leaders who believe carrying out distance learning from home will place an extremely difficult burden on their family, mothers are more than 1.5 times more likely to report they do not intend to stay at their current employer for at least the next 12 months as compared to fathers. It is clear that for working mothers in senior leadership positions, we risk losing decades of progress towards breaking the “glass ceiling” because of the demands of distance learning.

Organizational Support Paramount

As more schools institute distance learning, some employees may consider taking leave or resigning. As the chart below depicts, 92% of employees who strongly agree their organization is providing the flexibility and support to work from home when children are at home intend to stay at the organization for at least the next 12 months. Contrast this with employees who strongly disagree their organization is providing the flexibility and support to work from home with children -- only 66% intend to stay.

Parent Support Drives Retention



To put this difference into perspective, for every 1,000 employees, an organization that provides the flexibility and support for parents to work at home while children are learning from home can expect to retain an additional 260 employees over 12 months, saving nearly \$4.6M annually .

To mitigate the potential exodus of working parents, employers should reevaluate their return to work strategies and leave policies, and should consider adding benefits to support employees during these challenging times. Google, for example, has delayed the return to the physical workplace until summer 2021 and Amazon has offered 10 days of subsidized child and adult care until October.

To adequately support working parents, organizations must be willing to consider cases at the individual level. Authentic conversations are paramount, and a well-crafted employee listening and action plan can enable organizations to identify support areas that employees will value the most. Through these discussions and discoveries, organizations can create new ways forward.



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