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Race and the Rush to Reopen Schools During COVID-19

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While the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted student learning in the spring of 2020 and impacted nearly all of the 55 million students in kindergarten to 12th grade nationwide, it also magnified significant racial inequities in schools and society. Generations of systemic racism left communities of color and their neighborhood schools more at risk during the crisis. Over the summer of 2020, school leaders and communities considered whether to reopen school campuses or keep buildings closed for the 2020-2021 academic school year, and media began to highlight racial and ethnic difference in attitudes about those plans. Consistent with popular accounts, we find significant differences in attitudes between white and non-white respondents in our analysis of survey data from two national public opinion polls conducted over the summer of 2020. We suggest that these differences are rooted in long-standing inequities due to structural racism and its effects on health, schools, and society, and associated gaps in political trust, as well as the disproportionate burden that communities of color have borne during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: race and ethnicity, schools, education, public opinion, COVID-19

*T*he discovery of COVID-19, the contagious disease caused by the recent coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, forced schools to shut down campuses across the United States in the spring of 2020 to try to "flatten the curve" and slow the spread of the virus to avoid overburdening healthcare systems. While the pandemic's mass disruption to schools impacted nearly all of the 55 million students in kindergarten to 12th grade nationwide, it also magnified significant racial inequities in schools and society. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated enduring economic and racial disparities, creating an alarming crisis within a crisis for communities of color in the United States. These disparities materialized in multiple ways (Cotto and Woulfin 2021), and as the start of the 2020-21 school year approached, media highlighted racial and ethnic differences in opinions about school campus reopening policies (Toness 2020; Balingit et al. 2021). We examine the ways the twin pandemics of racism and COVID-19 are associated with racial and ethnic differences in attitudes about school reopening plans during the summer of 2020.

By many measures, the COVID-19 pandemic compounded the ongoing public health crisis of structural racism in the United States (Pirtle 2020). Long-standing and deeply embedded inequities, resulting from structural racism present in a wide range of the country's institutions and policies, from schools to housing to employment, continue to devastate the health and life experiences of communities of color (Paradies et al. 2015; Phelan and Link 2015; Bonilla-Silva 1997). These societal injustices have put communities of color more at risk of being harmed by the COVID-19 virus itself and more vulnerable to its adverse societal impacts (Gaynor and Wilson 2020; Wright and Merritt 2020). As of July 2020, Black and Latino residents of the United States were three times more likely to contract COVID-19 than white residents, and nearly twice as likely to die from the virus (Oppel et al. 2020). Economically, Black and Latino frontline workers remained overrepresented in occupations with greater risk for exposure to COVID-19, with fewer protections such as paid leave, placing them at greater risk of contracting the virus (Goldman et al. 2020).

In schools, generations of structural racism and unequal distribution of resources meant that low-income students of color disproportionately lacked the resources necessary to quickly pivot for virtual learning (Friedman et al. 2021). And the racially disparate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic intersected in the summer of 2020 with renewed attention to the harms of police violence against Black communities, as thousands of Americans called for reform following the deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd by the police (Leitch et al. 2020). At the same time, Asian communities in the United States experienced a surge in physical violence and harassment as a result of racism and xenophobia amid the COVID-19 outbreak (Dionne and Turkmen 2020; Reny and Barreto 2020), and former President Trump cast blame for the pandemic on Asian American communities, Mexican immigrants, and Latin American immigrants more generally (Louie and Viladrich 2021). These crises of racism and entrenched, deepening structural inequalities converged in the summer of 2020 as parents and guardians of color considered options for their children for the upcoming school year.

In this article, we explore the dual, overlapping pandemics of COVID-19 and racism in terms of schools and public opinion towards policies for reopening school campuses over the summer of 2020. As school districts debated options for the 2020-2021 school year, Black, Latino, and Asian American parents and guardians expressed concern over in-person learning because of deep-rooted social and economic inequalities (Collins and Nuamah 2020; Gilbert et al. 2020; Grossmann et al. 2021). Across the country, some caregivers of color resisted calls for reopening school campuses, citing health concerns, lack of trust, and fear of putting their children and multigenerational households in danger (Anderson 2020; Shapiro et al. 2021; Kim 2020). Drawing on survey data from two national public opinion polls conducted over the summer of 2020, we examine differences in opinions towards school reopening during the COVID-19 pandemic. Consistent with popular accounts, we find significant differences in attitudes between respondents of color and white respondents. We suggest that these differences are rooted in long-standing inequities due to structural racism and its effects on health, schools, and society, and associated gaps in political trust, as well as the disproportionate burden borne by communities of color at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Schools and COVID Challenges during 2020
Fearful that schools might become sources of large COVID-19 outbreaks, many districts abruptly closed campuses and switched to distance learning in the middle of spring 2020.

Schools scrambled to quickly shift online and develop remote learning opportunities in response to the emergency and uncertainty of the pandemic (Carver 2020). After a tumultuous spring semester of mostly virtual instruction, school leaders and communities across the country debated over the summer whether it would be possible to safely reopen school campuses in fall 2020 amid the ongoing disruption and threat of COVID-19 (Lambert et al. 2020). Over the summer, as a result of federalism and decentralized decision-making (Wong and Farris 2017), many school districts were left to make their own decisions about whether and how to reopen in the fall. Consequently, schools began the 2020-2021 school year with a wide array of policy approaches both across and within states, including full reopening, fully virtual instruction, and a range of hybrid district plans that fell somewhere in between ("Map: Where Are Schools Closed?" 2020). While most schools were closed in spring 2020, as of mid-August, the majority of states varied campus opening plans by school or district. The reopening plans were often dependent on the nature of community spread and expertise of local health authorities, and some, including the majority of large urban districts, delayed the start of the school year or opted to begin the school year virtually.

In considering plans for fall 2020, school districts weighed how to balance health risks from the virus against the consequences of continued disruptions to students' in-person education. COVID-19 cases were rising in the majority of states by the end of July, and many teachers, school staff, and guardians worried about the potential for outbreaks with a return to in-person instruction (Page 2020). Despite the challenges of virtual learning in the spring of 2020, many teachers and teachers' unions were reluctant or opposed to returning to the classroom, and questioned whether and how schools would operate safely, even with planned mitigation strategies. Often with little guidance from states (Grossmann et al. 2021), local school leaders tried to devise ways to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission for students and school staff through health and safety protocols, including precautions of masking, social distancing, testing, cleaning, and/or air ventilation. However, the significant financial and logistical challenges of reopening with public health protocols led many to question the ability of school leaders to reopen campuses safely (Mulvihill 2020). To adhere to these mitigation strategies, such as the recommended six-foot distancing constraint between students, most school districts would need an increase in staffing and budget, along with additional space, which they largely lacked. The challenge of COVID-19 also amplified racialized inequities in school funding and resources. Better resourced schools in predominantly white neighborhoods were more equipped to handle the new challenges of the pandemic, while schools serving mostly Black and Latino and low-income students already lacked resources, such as school building windows that did not open or bathrooms missing basic sanitation products (King and Gaudiano 2020; Darville 2020).

The conversations involving reopening school campuses also occurred within renewed demands during the summer of 2020 for a reckoning with the foundational and ongoing structural racism of the United States. The killings of unarmed Black people, including George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbrey, sparked a massive wave of Black Lives Matter protests that placed issues of structural racism and police violence front and center in the minds of many Americans, especially Black Americans (Jefferson et al. 2020; Tesler 2020). Simultaneously, under former President Trump, Republicans shifted further toward a position of white protectionism, in a broader national context of a shifting racial order (Smith and King 2021). The policy decisions concerning safety and equity in classrooms and beyond occurred amidst this larger political moment, as these racialized experiences, including experiences with the police, shape the attitudes and trust in government of people of color (Mangum 2016; Silva et al. 2020).

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Many school district leaders also faced pressure to reopen from state and national leaders, despite the lack of clear guidance or additional resources necessary to do so safely. Views on COVID-19 quickly became politicized (Gadarian et al. 2021) and state and local governments responded differently to the pandemic, often based on the partisanship and ideology of elected officials (Holman et al. 2020; Grossman et al. 2020). President Trump pushed to reopen school campuses in the fall of 2020, amidst his administration's disastrous response to the pandemic, and contradicting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's optional guidance for reopening (Leary and Lucey 2020). In response to the plans of some districts, like the Los Angeles School District, to teach remotely for the start of the school year, Trump described the plans to be "a terrible decision" and insisted that "we have to open our schools" (Segers 2020). Trump threatened to withhold schools' funding if their campuses did not reopen (despite lacking the power to do so). While Congress passed the CARES Act, an economic stimulus bill including $13.5 billion for K-12 schools, in March 2020, school districts warned costs to implement public health guidelines would far exceed the available funding (Modan 2020). These choices quickly became political and heated debates, with partisanship and union strength influencing school campus reopening plans (Hartney and Finger 2020; Grossmann et al. 2021).

School leaders pondered a path to reopening campuses with nascent data and conflicting ideas, along with pressures on how to assess risk during the early months of the pandemic (Gonser 2020). Trump's Education Secretary Betsy Devos refused to systematically track cases, which meant that by the summer and into the fall of 2020 (Camera 2020), there was a serious lack of comprehensive data about the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in classroom settings. Meanwhile, others expressed concern about the risks of children not returning to schools. Some researchers estimated the potential impact of school campus closures to be disastrous on student academic achievement, exacerbating longstanding inequities in education (Kuhfeld et al. 2020). The American Academy of Pediatrics and national teacher unions called for better investment in schools and campuses to allow schools to safely reopen for in person learning, noting the critical roles schools play beyond academics in the access to essential services for children ("Pediatricians, Educators and Superintendents Urge a Safe Return to School This Fall" 2020).

Planning for the 2020-2021 academic year tasked school leaders to assess and balance the lack of scientific consensus and uncertainty of the risk of transmission of COVID-19 with the more known costs of keeping students out of the classroom (Honein et al. 2021). In addition to the costs to academics due to school campus closures, prolonging remote learning would deprive important social support to children, particularly vulnerable students (Levinson et al. 2020). Many worried over the negative impacts of closure for parents, caregivers, and students, including issues such as food insecurity, social isolation, mental/physical health issues, and unidentified cases of child abuse (Van Lancker and Parolin 2020; Liu et al. 2020). The burden of these effects of school campus closures was predicted to disproportionately fall on those already marginalized, including lower income families and people of color. School leaders, especially those in underfunded districts and with marginalized students in insecure environments, faced tough decisions about whether and how to reopen school doors, considering insufficient resources and information to address COVID-19 challenges.

COVID-19 Exacerbates Racialized Inequalities in Schools
Before the disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic, a crisis was already occurring in schools

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for students of color, particularly lower-income Black and Latino students. For Black and Latino parents, education is frequently viewed as the path to the American dream (Molina and Pedraza 2017, Fraga et al. 2010, Martinez-Ebers et al. 2000; Hochschild and Scovronick 2004); among immigrant parents, providing educational opportunities for their children is frequently cited as a reason for coming to the United States (Reese 2002). Yet, race, though socially constructed, remains a central axis of social relations (Omi and Winant 2014) and continues to shape educational experiences in the U.S., as educational institutions reproduce and maintain racial inequality (Anyon 2014). Like other pervasive racial and ethnic disparities, such as socioeconomic status and health, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and worsened existing racial inequalities in education (Poteat et al. 2020; Pirtle 2020).

While racial and ethnic diversity is increasing in U.S. public schools, integration efforts still face sustained resistance, and schools remain highly segregated by race and class (Orfield et al. 2012; Reardon 2016). In comparison to their white student counterparts, Black and Latino students are more likely to attend high-poverty schools, with fewer financial resources to provide programming and teachers of equal quality (Murnane and Steele 2007; Owens 2020; Gandara and Contreras 2009). Even in privileged school environments, such as affluent suburban school districts, Black and Latino parents and students remain at a disadvantage in comparison to their white counterparts (Lewis-McCoy 2014, Lewis and Diamond 2015). Educational experiences for the majority of Black, Latino, and other marginally situated students in the United States remain substantially separate and unequal (Shedd 2015).

Beyond their academic function, schools play a central community role in the United States' weak social safety net. Schools frequently help students meet their nutritional needs, connect families with other social services, and provide critical childcare for parents not just during school hours, but also before and after the regular school day (Dryfoos 2000). The shift to virtual schooling thus marked not only an important potential disruption to academics, but also the temporary closure of institutions that provide a range of social and educational needs for families (Van Lancker and Parolin 2020; Liu et al. 2020). Prior to the pandemic, when school districts previously decided to permanently close specific schools as part of a "turnaround" effort targeting low-performing public schools, these closures disproportionately impacted places with Black and Brown communities and low-income communities (Nuamah 2020a; Morel 2018).

Underscoring the critical and expansive role schools play particularly in marginalized communities (Orr et al. 2016), there is significant racial variation in attitudes towards these previous closures, with a majority of Black and Latino respondents opposing such closures, and a majority of white respondents supporting them (Nuamah 2020c). These efforts to keep schools open can both empower and mobilize Black and Brown communities, but also fatigue them, as Black and Brown residents become disillusioned and lose trust with elected officials (Nuamah 2020b). At the start of the pandemic, some feared pandemic budget cuts may close more schools permanently (Nuamah et al. 2020). This prospect presented a tense dilemma for Black and Brown low-income communities, in which many parents were acutely aware of the potential negative consequences of school closures and loss of a portal for social services but were also most at risk for negative ramifications of the COVID-19 virus and its impacts.

When schools moved online in the spring of 2020, students of color and low-income students were less likely to have the necessary resources and support needed for remote learning. For instance, Black and Latino households were 1.3 to 1.4 times as likely as white households to experience limited accessibility to technology, including home computers and the internet (Ong 2020). Some guardians of color were less able to work flexibly from home

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to supervise children's online learning, and particularly in immigrant families where English is not the first language, guardians were more likely to have linguistic challenges in providing additional support for virtual learning. Experts feared that some solutions would worsen racial and economic segregation, through things such as pandemic pods (where small groups of families with children joined together for learning and/or socializing), leaving many to fear significant disruption would have long-term impacts for marginalized students of color learning under the constraints of COVID-19 (Kuhfeld et al. 2020).

At the same time, racial disparities in students' learning environments compounded with the racial inequities of increased exposure and greater mortality rates of COVID-19. By summer 2020, across all age categories, both death and hospitalization rates from the coronavirus among Black, Latino, Asian, and indigenous people remained much higher than for white people (Keating et al. 2020). In a June 2020 poll, in comparison to white Americans, more Black and Latino Americans were likely to say that they knew someone who has died of COVID-19 (Goldstein and Guskin 2020), and in our own analysis of data from Nationscape, Black and Latino respondents were also significantly more likely to say that they or someone they knew had been sick with COVID-19. Moreover, although children have been largely spared from the COVID-19 pandemic, children of color were more likely to develop severe and life-threatening complications (Tai et al. 2020; Greenhalgh and Neighmond 2020). Asian Americans increasingly became the subject of discrimination, sometimes verbal and other times violent, making parents fear for their children's safety outside of the home (Wakabayashi et al. 2020). In considering the 2020 academic year, many parents of color were thus balancing the disproportionate challenges of remote schooling with heightened concerns about their children's health and safety.

Attitudes Towards COVID-19 and Schools
The dual, overlapping pandemics of COVID-19 and racism converged in the summer of 2020 as school districts were considering plans for the 2020-2021 school year. Despite the fact that Black and Latino parents were more likely to oppose school closures in pre-pandemic times (Nuamah 2020c), many parents and guardians of color expressed hesitation around schools reopening campuses and sending their children back for in-person instruction in the midst of a pandemic that disproportionately impacted marginalized communities. For instance, in New York City, where schools reopened only partially, nearly half of all students who were eligible to return to the classroom, many of which were low-income children of color, chose to learn at home in September 2020, and Asian Americans opted out at the highest rates (Balingit 2020; Kim 2020). A poll by Education Next found Black and Latino students were more likely to be fully remote: their descriptive results indicate that parents of Black and Latino students were respectively 19 percentage points and 8 percentage points less likely to choose the fully in-person model than parents of white students (Henderson et al. 2020).

Despite the struggles of distance learning and existing racial disparities in educational institutions, caregivers of color expressed uncertainty about the virus and feared the safety of opening campuses up for instruction. The popular press and think tanks highlighted parents' hesitancy to send students back to school campuses, noting the deteriorating buildings and unsafe conditions in which students of color were disproportionately learning (Harris 2020). Vicky Martinez, a Los Angeles parent of four school-aged children, told a CNBC reporter about her choice to keep her children at home regardless: "They are going to be alive, that's all I care about," she said. "It doesn't really matter if they are going to fall behind if people are dying" (Fox 2020). These back-to-school conversations were also taking place in the

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midst of the massive Black Lives Matter protests spanning the United States, which shined a spotlight on police brutality as well as other aspects of structural racism faced by Black and Brown communities. Some media accounts emphasized that families of color, and Black families in particular, lacked trust in school systems, as a result of decades of institutionalized racism, mistreatment, and segregation (Shapiro et al. 2021; Mangum 2016).

Given the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color, we expect to find differences by race and ethnicity in terms of attitudes toward reopening schools' for in person instruction. We hypothesize that, consistent with accounts from the popular press, Black, Latino, and Asian American respondents will be more supportive of temporary pandemic-related school closures, and less eager to reopen schools. We anticipate that these differences will persist even when factoring in other control variables, such as partisanship and socioeconomic status, that we would otherwise expect to significantly influence attitudes about school campus closures.

Methods and Data

We test our hypothesis that, in comparison to non-Hispanic white parents and guardians, parents and guardians of color will be more supportive of school closures in response to COVID-19 using two national surveys conducted during the summer of 2020. The first survey, Nationscape, presents a broad view of attitudes about reopening academic settings across a large and diverse sample, while the second survey, the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) Health Tracking Poll, has more specific questions about school campus reopening with a smaller sample of respondents, including a small parent sub-sample. When viewed together, these surveys provide the opportunity to examine a range of questions exploring attitudes about the reopening of school buildings in both June and July 2020, including variation in attitudes by race and ethnicity.

We begin by looking at data from Democracy Fund + UCLA Nationscape survey, funded by Democracy Fund Voter Study Group and UCLA (Tausanovitch and Vavreck 2020). Nationscape is a 16-month election study, which ran from July 2019 to January 2021 and added questions regarding COVID-19 in its weekly waves during the pandemic. To capture attitudes as close as possible to the start of the school year, we examine the last two waves of the Nationscape survey to be publicly available at the time of this writing (Wave 49 and 50). These waves of the survey were fielded by LUCID between June 18 and July 1, 2020. The survey includes a broad, national sample of 13,011 respondents, including large samples of non-Hispanic white (n=8,755), Black (n=1,498), and Hispanic/Latino (n=1,945) respondents, as well as a smaller sample of Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI, n=673) and combined other race category (n=1,064).

Our dependent variable of interest in Nationscape focuses on attitudes about the closure of school buildings. Specifically, respondents were asked, "As you may know, some state and local governments have taken certain actions in response to the coronavirus and are considering other actions. Do you support or oppose the following actions: close schools and universities?" with responses ranging from 1 (strongly support) to 4 (strongly oppose). Given the diverse sample and the timing of the survey, this question provides useful insight as a starting point to understanding racial/ethnic differences in attitudes about reopening academic settings, capturing universities in addition to K-12 schools.

In response to this question, a majority of respondents across all racial and ethnic groups expressed some support for school closures. Consistent with our theoretical expectations, and with accounts from the popular press, descriptive statistics point to greater support for closures among non-white respondents. Specifically, an estimated 69.8% of non-

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Hispanic white respondents indicated that the strongly support or somewhat support school closures, compared to 75.7% of Hispanic or Latino respondents, 78.9% of Black respondents, and 81.9% of AAPI respondents.

Because the survey question about school closures presents four categories of responses, but these categories are not equally distanced, we use ordered logistic regression to test whether these differences persist in multivariate analysis. Our analysis incorporates standard survey weights included in the dataset, with targets derived from the 2017 American Community Survey. The model includes dummy variables for self-reported race and ethnicity, including non-Hispanic white, Black, Latino/Hispanic, Asian American and Pacific Islander, or other race, with non-Hispanic white respondents excluded as the reference group. We also include other key demographic variables: a dummy variable for gender, with the expectation that women will be more supportive of school closures than men (Calarco 2021, Collins 2021); continuous variables for household income, level of education, age, party identification (7-point scale), and ideology (5-point scale); and a series of dummy variables to capture employment status (see Appendix for full description of measures). We expect that respondents who identify as Republican and those who are ideologically conservative will be more likely to oppose school closures (Grossman 2021), as will respondents with higher incomes (Collins 2021).

Additionally, we include three variables reflecting different aspects of a respondent's experiences with coronavirus. The first is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent or anyone they know has had COVID-19, with the expectation that knowing someone who has been sick with COVID-19 will be associated with more restrictive attitudes. As noted above, in the Nationscape survey, we see racialized differences in the percentage of respondents who has either had COVID-19 or knows someone who has had COVID-19, with an estimated 51% of Black respondents and 53.2% of Latino respondents saying yes, in comparison to just 43.3% of white respondents and 39.2% of Asian American and Pacific Islanders. We anticipate that an individual's attitudes about COVID-19 restrictions are also likely to be shaped by the prevalence of the virus in their community. Nationscape provides data about a respondent's state of residence, and we combine this information with COVID-19 data from The New York Times, based on reports from state and local health agencies (*New York Times* 2021), to create two variables that capture the amount of COVID-19 in a respondent's statewide context. The first of these variables represents the number of cumulative statewide COVID-19 cases as of June 9-15, 2020, while the second measures the percent change in COVID-19 cases over a 7-day period prior to data collection (June 9-15). We expect that individuals living in states that were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic prior to July 2020 will be more likely to support the closure of school buildings, instead preferring virtual learning. Unfortunately, the publicly available survey does not include specific information about where a respondent lives (for instance, urban vs. rural environment or specific city), so we are unable to include more fine-grained measures of residential context.

The results of our analysis appear in the first column of table 1. Because the values of the dependent variable range from strongly supporting school closures (1) to strongly opposing school closures (4), a negative coefficient indicates greater support for keeping schools closed.

Consistent with our hypothesis, in comparison to non-Hispanic whites, respondents who describe themselves as Black, Latino, and Asian American or Pacific Islander are all significantly more likely to support school closures in response to coronavirus. In addition to

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race/ethnicity, unsurprisingly, support for school closures is strongly associated with other political attitudes. Moving from Democrat to Republican on the seven-point party identification scale, and from liberal to conservative on the five-point scale of ideology, is associated with greater opposition to school closures. Given the partisan response to coronavirus in the U.S., these relationships are consistent with expectations (Grossmann et al. 2021). Respondents who have a higher level of formal education are also more likely to support school closures, as is either having been sick or knowing someone who has been sick with COVID-19. Compared to men, women are also significantly more likely to support school closures. In contrast to our expectations, however, no other variables in the model reach statistical significance, including our measures reflecting the level of outbreak in the respondent's state.

While our measure of household income does not reach statistical significance, the variable for self-described homemakers is marginally significant, with those respondents more supportive of keeping school buildings closed, in comparison to respondents who work full time or are self-employed.

The Nationscape dataset also includes a similar question asking about support for closing businesses in response to COVID-19. To better understand whether the relationships identified in the first model reflect a more general attitude about caution toward reopening in the wake of the pandemic, we also ran a similar model to analyze attitudes about business closures. The results for this analysis are presented in column 2 of Table 1.

The results for closing businesses are consistent with the results for schools. Once again, in comparison to non-Hispanic whites, Black, Latino, and AAPI respondents express greater caution about the prospect of reopening, as do women. Opinions about COVID-19-related closures are also strongly correlated with political views, with respondents on the Democratic end of the party identification scale and the more liberal end of the ideology scale more likely to support business closures. And, having personal experience with COVID-19 is associated once more with support for business closures, while there is no relationship between attitudes about reopening and either of the state-level COVID-19 variables.

Our analysis of the Nationscape data demonstrates support for our hypothesis that in the summer of 2020, respondents of color are more likely to support academic closures, along with business closures, than white respondents. Yet, this data has two limitations. First, the measure of the dependent variable includes attitudes about reopening both schools and colleges and universities. It is possible that respondents may have different views about opening K-12 schools as compared to institutes of higher education. Additionally, the Nationscape data in these two waves does not include a question asking whether or not a respondent has children in school. Thus, while this survey provides a baseline measure for broad public attitudes about school reopening, and reopening in general, and reflects support for our hypothesis, to further evaluate some of the relationships outlined above, we analyze a second national survey sponsored by the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), the KFF Health Tracking Poll from July 2020.

The interviews for the KFF Health Tracking Poll were conducted between July 14 and 19, 2020. This smaller survey (n=1313) includes an oversample of respondents with prepaid cellular phones in order to yield a more diverse sample both economically and with respect to race/ethnicity. Despite the small sample, the KFF data addresses both limitations of the Nationscape survey: KFF asks specifically about K-12 education, rather than including colleges and universities, *and* the survey asks whether the respondent is the parent or guardian

Table 1: Attitudes toward Closing Schools and Business Due to COVID-19

	Supports Closing Schools (1)	*Supports Closing Businesses* (2)
Black	**-0.33****	**-0.22***
	(0.11)	**(0.11)**
Latino	**-0.40*****	**-0.33****
	(0.10)	**(0.11)**
Asian American/ Pacific Islander	**-0.45*****	**-0.48*****
	(0.12)	**(0.13)**
Other Race	-0.05	-0.11
	(0.13)	(0.13)
Woman	**-0.14***	**-0.31*****
	(0.06)	**(0.06)**
Household Income	0.00	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Education	**-0.04***	**-0.05*****
	(.01)	**(0.01)**
Age	-0.00	**-0.01*****
	(0.00)	**(0.00)**
Partisanship	**0.13*****	**0.14*****
	(0.02)	**(0.02)**
Ideology	**0.30*****	**0.30*****
	(0.03)	**(0.03)**
Percent change in state Covid-19 cases	-0.01	0.10
	(0.19)	(0.21)
Average state cumulative Covid-19 cases	-0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Homemaker	**-0.25**^	-0.16
	(0.13)	(0.14)
Employed part time	0.03	-0.08
	(0.11)	(0.11)
Student	0.22	**-0.35***
	(0.15)	**(0.15)**
Not employed	-0.14	**-0.18***
	(0.08)	**(0.08)**
Know someone who has had Covid-19	**-0.23*****	**-0.26*****
	(0.06)	**(0.06)**
Cut 1	.0.14	-0.30
	(0.24)	(0.24)
Cut 2	1.46	1.05
	(0.25)	(0.25)
Cut 3	2.49	2.19
	(0.25)	(0.25)
N	10,210	10,226

Note: Ordered logit calculated with recommended survey weights. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Significance levels: ^.10, * <.05, **<.01, ***<.001. (Nationscape Wave 49 and 50)

of a child under 18 that is living in their household, with additional questions for parents that provide the opportunity to better understand parental attitudes about school reopening. Again, multivariate analysis uses the recommended survey weights designed to match the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (2018).

To capture our dependent variables, the KFF data includes two key measures of attitudes about schools. The first question asks respondents to choose which statement comes closer to their views on *school reopening*: "It is better to open schools sooner so parents can work and students won't miss out on learning and other services schools provide, even if there is some risk of students, teachers, and staff getting coronavirus," or, "It is better to open schools later to make sure the risk of getting coronavirus is as low as possible, even if this means some students will fall behind academically or miss out on other services that schools provide and some parents will not be able to return to work," with a higher value (1) indicating support for reopening sooner. The phrasing of this question evokes the complexity of the debates surrounding school reopening, which presents a potential tradeoff between education during a pandemic and a respondent's appetite for risk to the health and safety of children and school employees. A look at the bivariate data suggests substantial racial/ethnic differences in attitudes: 41.9% of non-Hispanic white respondents preferred opening sooner, in comparison to just 11.5% of Black respondents and 25.3% of Latino respondents as well as those who identify as another race.[1]

The second question focuses specifically on *school resources*, asking, "Do you think the public schools in your area have enough resources to safely reopen in a way that complies with public health recommendations about how to minimize spread of coronavirus, or do they need more resources in order to safely reopen?" Here, a higher value (1) reflects the belief that schools have adequate resources. Attitudes also varied dramatically on racial/ethnic lines in response to this question: 30.3% of non-Hispanic white respondents thought local schools had adequate resources, in comparison to just 8.3% of Black respondents, 18.6% of Latino respondents, and 17.4% of respondents identifying with a different race/ ethnicity.

Interestingly, across the sample, there is virtually no difference in the views of parents versus non-parents: 27% of parents with children under 18 thought local schools needed more resources, compared to 25% of non-parents; 38.6% of parents would prefer schools to reopen sooner, in comparison to 34.3% of non-parents. In chi-square analysis, these differences were not statistically significant, unlike the work of Grossmann et al. (2021) who found status as a parent to be associated with support for an in-person school option in their poll of Michigan residents.

Given the small sample size (n < 200) for each racial/ethnic group, in the multivariate analysis below, we present results comparing white and non-white respondents. Consistent with the Nationscape data, models include a dummy variable for gender; continuous measures of household income, level of education, age, partisanship (5-point scale, ranging from Democrat to Republican), and ideology (3-point scale, ranging from liberal to conservative); and a series of dummy variables for employment status. We also include the two state-level personal experience with COVID-19 variables described above, updated to match the

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[1] Given that the sample includes only 37 respondents who identify as Asian American, we have included these respondents in the "other race" category. We recommend future surveys include oversampling Asian American and Pacific Islander and Indigenous respondents to be more representative.

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Table 2: Attitudes toward Opening Schools and More Resources for COVID-19 (KFF Health Tracking Poll, July)

	Open Schools Sooner (1)	*Local Schools Need More Resources* (2)
Non-White Respondents	-0.52*	-0.50*
	(.21)	(.24)
Woman	-0.33^	-.50*
	(.19)	(.20)
Household Income	0.01**	0.01**
	(.00)	(.00)
Education	-0.04	-0.04
	(.04)	(.04)
Age	0.00	0.01^
	(.01)	(0.01)
Partisanship	0.47***	0.52***
	(.07)	(.07)
Ideology	0.89**	0.80***
	(.16)	(.18)
Percent change in state COVID-19 cases	-0.37	-0.50
	(.39)	(.40)
Average state cumulative COVID-19 cases	0.00	-0.00
	(.00)	(.00)
Homemaker	0.03	0.24
	(.43)	(.46)
Employed part time	0.20	0.05
	(.35)	(.42)
Student	-2.25*	0.49
	(1.11)	(.69)
Not employed	-0.08	0.03
	(.24)	(.26)
Parent	0.07	0.10
	(.22)	(.69)
Constant	-3.92***	-4.89***
	(.81)	(.86)
Pseudo R2	0.27	0.26
N	1,044	1018

Note: Logistic regression calculated with recommended survey weights. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Non-white respondents include respondents who identify as both white and Hispanic. Significance levels: ^<0.10, * <.05, **<.01, ***<.001.

timeframe of the KFF data collection, as well as a dummy variable for whether the respondent is a parent. Unfortunately, unlike in Nationscape, there is no question in KFF asking whether the respondent has had personal experience with COVID-19.

Because both of our dependent variables are dummy variables, we conducted logistic regression analysis, with the results reported in Table 2. Again, a negative coefficient indicates greater support for school closures. Column 1 analyzes the first dependent variable, asking whether the respondent agrees that schools should reopen sooner despite potential risks, while Column 2 focuses on the question of whether local schools need more resources

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to reopen safely. Consistent with our hypothesis, and with the Nationscape results, we find that in comparison to non-Hispanic white respondents, respondents of color are significantly less likely to want to open schools sooner and are also significantly less likely to think that local schools have adequate resources to reopen safely. Women are also less likely to think that schools have sufficient resources, though gender is only marginally significant for the specific question about school reopening. Again, we find that partisanship and ideology are also significantly associated with attitudes about reopening schools, with respondents who identify as Republican and conservative being more likely to support school reopening and more likely to think schools have sufficient resources to operate safely. The income variable is also statistically significant, while the state-level COVID-19 measures remain insignificant. These results suggest that in the months before the start of the 2020-2021 school year, in comparison to white respondents, respondents of color had greater concerns about health and safety risks due to COVID-19. Moreover, speaking to the broader racial disparities that characterize the U.S. education system, these concerns were coupled with lower levels of confidence that schools would be able to enact and enforce appropriate mitigation efforts to reduce the risk of disease spread.

We also re-ran the analysis including specific variables for Black and Latino respondents, as well as those who identify as some other race. We began with a base model including all the control variables described above, except for variables for partisanship and ideology. In this model, we find that in comparison to non-Hispanic whites, respondents who identify as Black, Latino, or some other race are more supportive of keeping school campuses closed, and are also more likely to believe local schools need more resources. When adding in the variables for partisanship and ideology, however, some of these results shift. Black respondents and those who identify as another race remain significantly less supportive of opening schools sooner, though for Latinos, the difference becomes marginally significant (see Appendix B). In the second model, examining attitudes about whether local schools need more resources to reopen safely, the only significant difference on racial/ethnic lines is among respondents who identify as another race, with this group being more likely than non-Hispanic whites to say that local schools need more funding. Given the relatively small sample size for each of these groups, and the distribution of these respondents across the categories for ideology and partisanship, these results should be interpreted with caution. Future research should continue to explore these differences.

The parent subset of respondents (n=377) also answered additional questions about the prospect of their own children returning to school in the fall of 2020 – which, given that the survey was conducted in late July, was increasingly imminent. While these numbers are small, particularly when further subdivided by race/ethnicity, the answers are nevertheless informative, as they show stark differences between white and non-white parents. For instance, in response to the question, "If your children were to return to school in-person in the fall, how worried, if at all, would you be about your children getting sick from coronavirus?," just 36.1% of white respondents said they would be very worried, compared to 77.1% of Black respondents and 72.1% of Latino respondents. When asked about fear of "your children's school not being able to comply with public health recommendations for sanitizing and social distancing," 36.9% of white respondents said they were very worried, compared to 71.4% and 70.5% of Black and Latino respondents, respectively. While this subsurvey of parents is instructive, the sample is not large enough to systematically evaluate the factors underlying the racial/ethnic variation in attitudes described above.

Unfortunately, neither Nationscape nor KFF includes questions that allow us to incorporate local-level characteristics of a respondent's school community, including whether their district *planned* to reopen schools, which is also likely to contribute to popular opinion about when and how schools should open. Moreover, elite leadership can also influence preferences about school reopening (Green et al., 2020, Collins 2021), and our models are unable to capture any public messaging that a respondent may be receiving on this topic from local leaders. Future research should better explore the ways in which local contextual factors also influence reopening decisions.

Conclusion

During the summer of 2020, the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and racism collided as parents and guardians considered options for the 2020-2021 school year, amidst highly debated school plans to remain virtual or return to school in person, or some hybrid plan between. Using data from two nationally representative surveys conducted during June and July of 2020, our results demonstrate that people of color, including parents and guardians of color, were more resistant to campus reopening plans in general, and to returning to school campuses specifically, during the pandemic, which they felt schools were not adequately equipped to handle.

In communities of color, the COVID-19 pandemic combined with existing racial inequities to lay bare the brutality of structural racism in multiple ways. Centuries of intentional neglect and underinvestment in schools in Black and Brown communities and low-income communities, and lack of trust in the school system and local government, may have made parents less confident in their district's ability to safely reopen (Anderson 2021). And, the pandemic itself, particularly as it coincided with the renewed attention to racialized violence across the country, exposed very real threats to the health and safety of Black, Latino, Indigenous, and Asian American communities. Remote learning also offered parents greater insight into their children's' learning: for some Black parents, COVID-19 and the move to online instruction allowed them to protect their children from racial hostility and bias in the classroom (Anderson 2020), and Black and Latino households spent more time helping their children with learning (Domina et al. 2021).

Our results highlight the ways in which the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and racism were associated with distinct attitudes about school campus closures and reopening plans in the summer of 2020. Notably, while our results capture attitudes prior to the 2020-2021 school year, Collins (2021) demonstrates that while some differences in attitudes shifted once the school year was underway, racial/ethnic differences in attitudes about reopening persisted through at least the first half of the school year. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, school leaders and other politicians should pay care to the nuances of public opinion and race in their communities and join efforts for more equitable investments in public schools to address the inequities shown in the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and racism.

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Appendix A. Variables and Measures
Nationscape Wave 50 Data (June 25 – July 1, 2020)

Dependent Variables
"As you may know, some state and local governments have taken certain actions in response to the coronavirus and are considering other actions. Do you support or oppose the following actions?"
- Close schools and universities
-Close businesses
1 = strongly support; 2 = somewhat support; 3 = somewhat oppose; 4 = strongly oppose

Independent variables
-Latino: "Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?" Respondents were asked to specify national origin. Responses recoded such that 1 = any Latino/ Hispanic national origin; 0 = Not Hispanic

 -Racial identity dummy variables: "What is your race?"

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- Non-Hispanic white: 1 = white, limited only to respondents who said "not Hispanic" in the previous question; 0 = all other respondents, including respondents who identify as white and Latino/ Hispanic
- Black: 1= Black, or African America; 0 =all other respondents
- Asian: Respondents were asked to specify national origin. Responses recoded such that 1 = any Asian or Pacific Islander national origin; 0 = all other respondents
- Other race: 1 = some other race; 0 = all other respondents

-Woman: "What is your gender?" 1 = female; 0 = male

-Household income: "What is your current annual household income before taxes?" Recoded continuously such that 14 = less than \$14,999; 17 = \$15,000 -19,999; 22 = \$20,000-24,999; 27 = \$25,000-29,999; 32 = \$30,000-34,999; 37 = \$35,000-39,999; 42 = \$40,000-44,999; 47 = \$45,000-49,999; 52 = \$50,000-54,999; 57 = \$55,000-\$59,999; 62 = \$60,000-64,999; 67 = \$65,000- 69,999; 72 = \$70,000-74,999; 77 = \$75,000 -79,999; 82 = \$80,000 = 84,999; 87 = \$85,000 = 89,999; 92 = \$90,000 – 94,999; 97 = \$95,000-99,999; 112 = \$100,000=124,999; 137 = \$125,999 – 149,999; 167 = \$150,000-174,999; 187 = \$175,000-199,999; 225 = \$200,000 = 249,999; 274 = \$250,000 and above

-Education: "What is the highest level of education that you have completed?" Recoded to capture years of schooling, coded continuously such that 4 = 3rd grade or less; 7 = grades 4-8/ middle school; 10 = completed some high school; 12 = high school graduate; 14 = other post-high school vocational training/ completed some college, but no degree/ associate degree; 16 = college degree (such as B.A. or B.S.); 17 = completed some graduate, but no degree; 18 = Masters degree; 21 = doctorate degree

-Partisanship (7-point scale): 1 = strong Democrat; 2 = weak Democrat; 3 = lean Democrat; 4 = independent; 5 = lean Republican; 6 = weak Republican; 7 = strong Republican

-Ideology (5=point scale): "In general, how would you describe your own political viewpoint?" 1 = very liberal; 2 = liberal; 3 = moderate; 4 = conservative; 5 = very conservative

-Percent: Percent change in the respondent's state-level covid cases over the 14-day period spanning June 1 – June 15, 2020 (source: *New York Times*)

-Average: Average cumulative covid cases for the respondent's state as of June 9-15, 2020 (source: *New York Times*)

-Employment dummy variables: "Which of the following best describes your current employment status?"
- 1 = Full-time employed or self-employed; 0 = all other respondents
- 1 = Part-time employed; 0 = all other respondents
- 1 = Homemaker; 0 = all other respondents
- 1 = Student; 0 = all other respondents
- Not working: 1 = retired; unemployed or temporarily on layoff; permanently disabled; other

-Personal experience with covid: "Have any of the following people been sick with

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coronavirus?" Responses recoded such that 1 = you, someone in your immediate family, someone at work, or someone you know outside your immediate family or work; 0 = no for all of these groups

<u>Kaiser Family Foundation Data (July 2020)</u>
Dependent Variables
"Which comes closer to your view?" 1= It is better to open schools sooner so parents can work and students won't miss out on learning and other services schools provide, even if there is some risk of students, teachers, and staff getting coronavirus; 0 = It is better to open schools later to make sure the risk of getting coronavirus is as low as possible, even if this means some students will fall behind academically or miss out on other services that schools provide and some parents will not be able to return to work

"Do you think the public schools in your area have enough resources to safely re-open in a way that complies with public health recommendations about how to minimize spread of coronavirus, or do they need more resources in order to safely re-open?" 1= Have enough resources to safely re-open; 0 = Need more resources in order to safely re-open

Independent Variables
-Latino/ Hispanic: "Are you, yourself, of Hispanic or Latino background, such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or some other Spanish background?" 1 = yes; 0 = all other respondents
-Creating race dummy variables: "What is your race? Are you white, black, Asian or some other race?

- Non-Hispanic white: 1 = white, limited only to respondents who said they were not Hispanic/ Latino; 0 = all other respondents, including respondents who identify as white and Latino/ Hispanic
- Black: 1= Black or African America; 0 =all other respondents
- Other race: given the small sample of Asian respondents (n=37), 1 = Asian, other, or mixed race; 0 = all other respondents

-Woman: Record respondent's sex. 1 = female; 0 = male

-Household income: "Last year – that is, in 2019 – what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes? Just stop me when I get to the right category." Recoded continuously such that 20 = less than \$20,000; 25 = \$20,000 – 30,000; 35 = \$30,000-40,000; 45 = \$40,000-50,000; 62 = \$50,000-75,000; 82 = \$75,000- 90,000; 95 = \$90,000-100,000; 110 = \$100,000 or more

-Education: "What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?" Recoded to capture years of schooling, coded continuously such that 4 = Grades 1-8 or no formal schooling; 10 = high school incomplete; 12 = high school graduate; 14 = some college, no degree/ two-year associate degree; 16 = four-year college or university degree/ Bachelor's degree (eg., B.A. or B.S.); 17 = some graduate or professional school, no postgraduate degree; 18 = post-graduate or professional degree, including master's, doctorate, medical, or law degree

-Party identification (5-point scale): "In politics today, do you consider yourself a:

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(Republican), (Democrat), an Independent, or what? (randomize Republican/Democrat)" 1= Democrat; 2= Independent Lean Democrat; 3 = Independent; 4 = Independent Lean Republican; 5 = Republican

-Ideology (3-point scale): "Would you say your views in most political matters are liberal, moderate, or conservative?" 1= liberal; 2 = moderate; 3 = conservative

-Percent: Percent change in the respondent's state-level covid cases over the 14-day period spanning July 1 – July 15, 2020 (source: *New York Times*)

-Average: Average cumulative covid cases for the respondent's state as of July 9-15, 2020 (source: *New York Times*)

-Employment dummy variables: "Which of the following best describes your current employment status?"
- 1 = Employed full-time; 0 = all other respondents
- 1 = Employed part-time; 0 = all other respondents
- 1 = Homemaker or stay at home parent; 0 = all other respondents
- 1 = Student; 0 = all other respondents
- Not working: 1 = retired; unemployed and currently seeking employment; unemployed and not seeking employment; on disability and can't work; 0 = all other respondents

-Parent: "Are you the parent or guardian of any child under the age of 18 living in your household?" 1 = Yes; 0 = No

Appendix B. White and non-white attitudes, Kaiser

Table 1B. Attitudes about School Reopening with Partisan and Ideology Dummy Variables (KFF 2020)

	Open Schools Sooner (1)	*Local Schools Need More Resources* (2)
Black	**-1.11****	-0.80
	(.37)	(0.49)
Latino	**-0.57^**	-0.49
	(.31)	(.31)
Other Race/ Ethnicity	**-0.63***	**-0.89***
	(.32)	**(.36)**
Woman	**-0.35^**	**-.48***
	(.19)	**(.19)**
Household Income	**0.01****	**0.01****
	(.00)	**(.00)**
Education	-0.03	-0.02
	(.04)	(.04)
Age	0.00	**0.01^**
	(.01)	**(0.01)**

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Table 1B Continued

Democrat	**-0.75****	**-1.66*****
	(0.25)	**(.34)**
Republican	**0.71****	0.34
	(0.22)	(.22)
Liberal	**-0.86****	-0.45
	(0.28)	(.30)
Conservative	**1.20*****	**1.14*****
	(.20)	**(.23)**
Percent change in state covid cases	-0.26	-0.21
	(.37)	(.38)
Average state cumulative covid cases	0.00	-0.00
	(.00)	(.00)
Homemaker	0.07	0.21
	(.43)	(.47)
Employed part time	0.19	0.02
	(.34)	(.40)
Student	**-2.22***	0.58
	(1.06)	(.65)
Not employed	-0.06	0.21
	(.22)	(.24)
Parent	0.06	0.18
	(.21)	(.22)
Constant	-1.00	**-2.01****
	(.69)	**(0.71)**
Pseudo R2	0.25	0.23
N	1100	1079

Note: Logistic regression calculated with recommended survey weights. Robust standard errors in parentheses. For partisanship, independent is excluded as the reference category; for ideology, moderate is excluded as the reference category. Significance levels: ^<0.10, * <.05, **<.01, ***<.001.

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