WHAT DID THE ABC SCIENCE COLLABORATIVE STUDY?
Researchers with the ABC Science Collaborative collected data from 100 school districts and 14 charter schools in North Carolina from March through June 2021. These schools represent more than 1.2 million students and 160,000 staff.

Researchers studied how many people caught COVID-19 in “Plan A” schools that offered full in-person instruction, and compared results with “Plan B” schools, which offered hybrid instruction to enable six feet of physical distance.

The data show that about 1 in 3,000 students who were in school buildings became infected with COVID-19 during school.

WHO FUNDED THIS RESEARCH?
The state of North Carolina funded the ABC Science Collaborative to collect this data from schools after legislation mandated that all districts open for in-person education.

WHAT DID RESEARCHERS LEARN?
Researchers found schools did a great job preventing COVID-19 spread, regardless of whether they used Plan A or B. Keeping students, teachers, and staff properly masked prevented spread. Even with this success, 40,000+ students and staff were quarantined, resulting in hundreds of thousands of missed school days.

WHAT ABOUT DISTANCING IN SCHOOLS?
When students, teachers, and staff are masked, how much distance is maintained between people does not matter. Whether schools required greater than 3 feet of distance between people or less than 3 feet, researchers found no difference in the number of positive COVID-19 cases.
WHAT ABOUT DISTANCING ON BUSES?
Data also showed no difference in transmission of COVID-19 between students in districts that offered 1, 2, or 3 masked students to a bus seat.

WHAT ABOUT EXTRACURRICULARS LIKE SPORTS?
Researchers found that the risk of COVID-19 spread in extracurricular activities, like sports, is low but higher than in the classroom. More research is needed to find out why. For sports, the research so far is not clear about whether transmission occurred during practice, games, or other team events where masking is difficult. Indoor sports can be safer with masking or vaccination. Outdoor and non-contact activities are likely to be lower risk.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS?

- Wearing masks correctly is the most effective strategy to prevent within-school transmission of COVID-19 when vaccination is unavailable or not enough people are vaccinated.
- Full in-person instruction (Plan A) is safe for all grades, in all schools, when masking is in place. Hybrid instruction (Plan B) can be eliminated.
- Full-capacity bus transportation can and should resume, with the seating of up to 3 masked students per bus seat.
- Schools should closely look at safety protocols around athletics and extracurricular activities to limit COVID-19 spread.
- Policy makers should consider changing school quarantine policies for people who were exposed to COVID-19 but are either vaccinated or were appropriately masked when exposed. In other words, if one student in a classroom tested positive for COVID-19 but was wearing a mask at school, other students in that student’s classroom who were also masked are at low risk for contracting the disease. Modified quarantine policies could keep more students from missing school without increasing COVID-19 spread.

The ABC Science Collaborative connects scientists and physicians with school and community leaders to help understand the most current and relevant information about COVID-19. To learn more and read the full report, visit https://abcsciencecollaborative.org/ View the video version of this summary at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_zYGm28xGk