

SARS-CoV-2 Testing in Schools:

Perspectives of Parents/Caregivers and School Personnel in Durham County, North Carolina

Formative Research Rapid Analysis Report #1

July 30, 2021

BACKGROUND

The ABC Science Collaborative (<https://abcsciencecollaborative.org/about/>), led by the Duke University School of Medicine and the Duke Clinical Research Institute, is conducting a NIH-funded study called “SARS-CoV-2 Screening and Diagnostic Testing for Return to K-12 Schools” (Principal Investigators: Kanecia Zimmerman, MD, and Danny Benjamin, MD, PhD; <https://abcsciencecollaborative.org/covid-19-testing-in-schools/>; OTA-21-004; FAIN#: OT2HD107559).

Aims 1 and 2 of the study focus on assessing the effectiveness of rapid, school-based SARS-CoV-2 screening and exposure testing in reducing within-school transmission and restoring trust among Black and Latinx families, and assessing the uptake of school-based testing and time to safe return to school after exposure.

The ABC Science Collaborative is partnering with the QualCore of Duke University (<https://populationhealth.duke.edu/research/qualcore>) to conduct Aim 3 of the study. Aim 3 focuses on identifying the perceived benefits, concerns, and barriers to school-based SARS-CoV-2 testing and in-person learning among Black and Latinx families.



This report focuses on Aim 3 findings from Phase 1—Rapid formative research conducted with parents and caregivers of Black students and with school personnel

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AIM 3 OVERVIEW

Purpose: To foster positive aspects and mitigate negative impacts from COVID-19 testing in schools—including any stigma associated with race and ethnicity—by gathering the perspectives of parents and caregivers of Black and Latino/a/x students and school personnel on the social, ethical, and behavioral considerations of COVID-19 testing in schools and sharing this information with key health and education stakeholders.

Location: Durham County, North Carolina.

Guiding Frameworks: Aim 3 is guided by several principles, theories, and frameworks:

- CDC’s Guiding Principles of the COVID-19 Response Health Equity Strategy¹
- The Equity-Focused Implementation Research for Health Programs (EquIR)²
- Theory of Care-Seeking Behavior³
- The Health Equity Implementation Framework⁴

Overall study design: Aim 3 activities are divided into two tracks—a **research track** and a **community engagement track** (Figure 1).

Research Track→ Aim 3 uses a qualitative descriptive study design consisting of in-depth interviews and focus groups, and includes three phases:

- **Phase 1**—Rapid formative research with a small group of stakeholders to gather perspectives on SARS-CoV-2 testing in schools for Fall 2021:
 - Interviews with parents/caregivers of Black and Latino/a/x students
 - Focus groups with school personnel

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/cdc-strategy.html#print>

² Eslava-Schmalbach J, Garzón-Orjuela N, Elías V, Reveiz L, Tran N, Langlois EV. Conceptual framework of equity-focused implementation research for health programs (EquIR). *Int J Equity Health*. 2019;18(1):80.

³ Lauver D. A theory of care-seeking behavior. *Image J Nurs Sch*. 1992 Winter;24(4):281-7. doi: 10.1111/j.1547-5069.1992.tb00734.x. Erratum in: *Image J Nurs Sch*. 1993;25(1):4.

⁴ Woodward EN, Matthieu MM, Uchendu US, Rogal S, Kirchner JE. The health equity implementation framework: proposal and preliminary study of hepatitis C virus treatment. *Implement Sci*. 2019;14(1):26.

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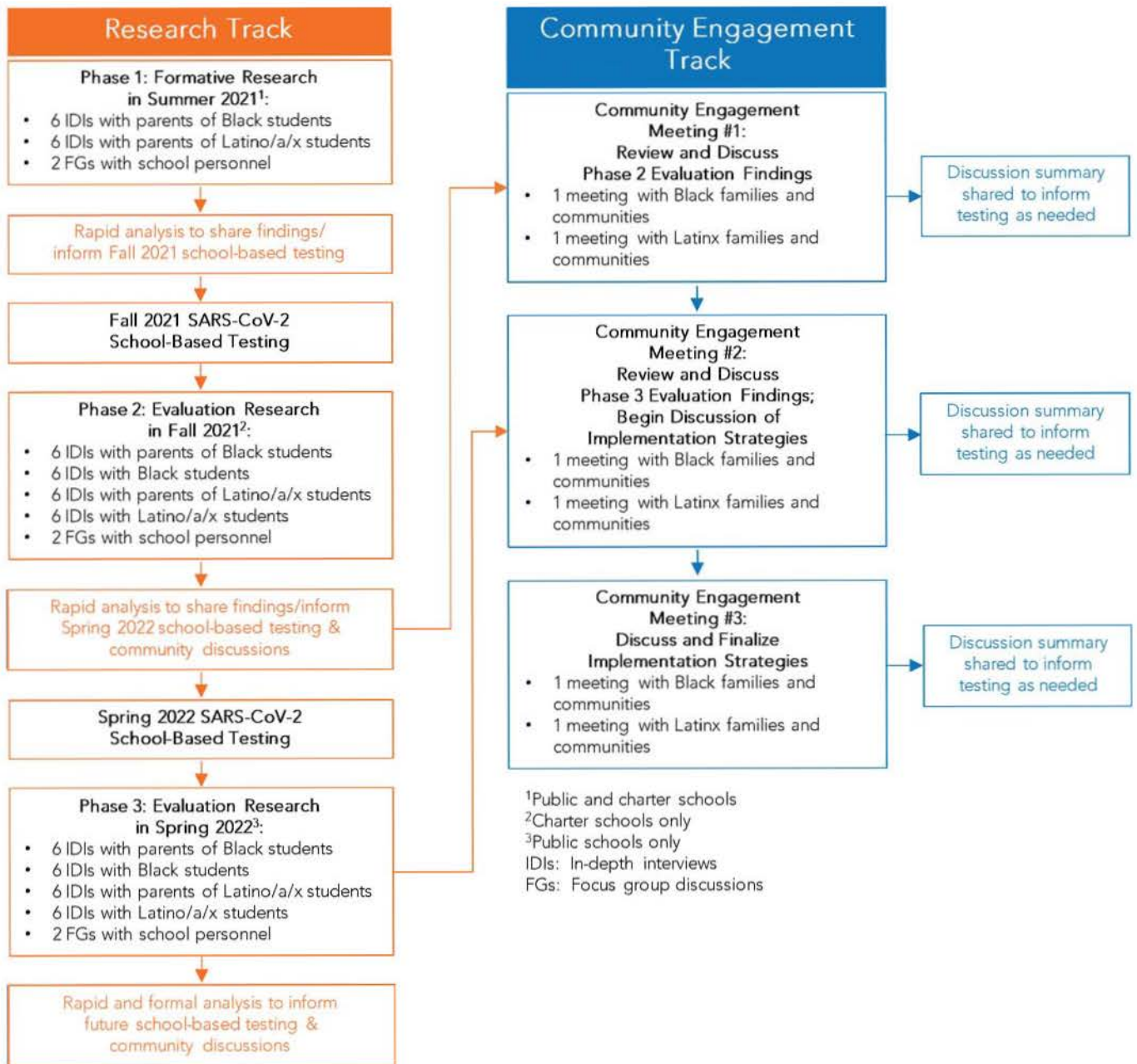
Qualitative Research Partners

flexible approach • rigorous design

- **Phase 2 & 3**—Evaluation research to assess the impact of SARS-CoV-2 testing in schools on Black and Latino/a/x students and their families—among charter schools in Fall 2021 (Phase 2) and among public schools in Spring 2022 (Phase 3):
 - Interviews with Black and Latino/a/x students
 - Interviews with parents/caregivers of Black and Latino/a/x students
 - Focus groups with school personnel

Community Track→ After research Phases 2 and 3, Black and Latinx families and communities will be invited to discuss the research findings and identify implementation strategies for fostering the positive aspects and mitigating negative effects of SARS-CoV-2 testing among Black and Latino/a/x students, their families, and their communities.

Figure 1: Aim 3 Study Design



Reporting: Numerous reports will be released:

- After Phases 1, 2, and 3:
 - Health and education stakeholders will receive a **rapid analysis report** that summarizes key points, so that the main overall findings can be utilized as soon as possible, if useful.
 - This analysis process includes summarizing interviewers'/moderator's structured debriefing forms that were completed by the interviewer and moderator after each data collection event.
 - Participants will receive a brief summary of the research findings, immediately prior to the release of the rapid analysis report (See Appendix A).
- Following the rapid analysis for Phases 1, 2, and 3, health and education stakeholders will receive a **detailed report** after the formal analyses using applied thematic analysis are completed.
 - This analysis process includes (1) analyzing interview and focus group data separately, (2) professionally transcribing each interview and focus group verbatim, (3) using NVivo 12 to apply structural codes to segment participants' narratives into conceptual categories followed by applying content-driven, emergent codes to the text in each of the conceptual categories, (4) conducting inter-coder reliability assessments throughout the coding process, (5) reviewing content codes for overarching themes and organizing data organized into emergent thematic groups, (6) describing the main themes and sub-themes, and (7) identifying illustrative quotes.
- **Community meeting summaries** will also be available.

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THE RAPID FORMATIVE RESEARCH STUDY

Objectives

- Identify the preferences for and perceived outcomes of school-based SARS-CoV-2 testing among parents and caregivers of Black and Latino/a/x students and school personnel.
- Describe factors influencing decisions to return to school among parents and caregivers of Black and Latino/a/x students.

Methods

Data Collection

In-depth interviews

- Parents and caregivers who are the regular caretaker of a Black or Latino/a/x student in elementary, middle, or high school at a charter or public school in Durham County, NC, were invited to participate through their connection with the African American COVID Taskforce Plus (AACT+) or Latinx Advocacy Team & Interdisciplinary Network for COVID-19 (LATIN-19). These community partners are engaged with the study population through other activities.
- A trained interviewer conducted the interviews on the telephone, speaking with one parent or caregiver for each interview.
- All interviews were audio-recorded with the participant's permission.
- Interviews with parents and caregivers of Latino/a/x students were conducted in Spanish or English per the parent's or caregiver's preference.
- Parents and caregivers were asked to share their thoughts on the:
 - Perceived benefits, facilitators, concerns, and barriers related to school-based SARS-CoV-2 testing, including concerns about confidentiality, privacy issues, and stigma and discrimination associated with SARS-CoV-2 testing.
 - Preferences for how SARS-CoV-2 testing should be offered and conducted in schools, including suggestions on mitigating any negative impact from school-based SARS-CoV-2 testing, such as appropriate ways to communicate SARS-CoV-2 test results, and mechanisms that prevent or reduce stigma and discrimination from testing and/or from positive results.
 - Impact of institutionalized SARS-CoV-2 testing in schools on family trust toward schools and comfort level in returning their children to school in the Fall of 2021.
- Following each interview, the interviewer documented key findings in structured debriefing forms for the rapid analysis.

Focus groups

- School personnel from charter and public schools in Durham County, NC were invited to participate in one of two online focus groups through outreach from ABC Science Collaborative community and school partners and via school communication networks. School personnel could include administrators, principals, assistant principals, school nurses, counselors, teachers, and support staff.
- A trained moderator conducted the audio-recorded focus groups using the on-line platform, Zoom, with a note taker present.
- School personnel were asked to share their:
 - Thoughts about how school-based SARS-CoV-2 testing may impact students, their families, school functioning, student performance, and teachers' instruction quality, as well as how it may affect school personnel.
 - Suggestions on how best to implement SARS-CoV-2 testing in their school.
- After each focus group, the moderator and note taker documented key findings in structured debriefing forms for the rapid analysis.

During the interviews and focus groups, special focus was placed on identifying any disproportionate impact on Black and Latino/a/x students compared with other students, and other factors related to health equity.

Data Analysis

Analysts summarized the interviewers'/moderator's structured debriefing forms that were completed by the interviewer and moderator after each data collection event.

Note: This report includes findings from interviews with parents and caregivers of Black students and focus groups with school personnel. Findings from interviews with parents and caregivers of Latino/a/x students are forthcoming.

Results

This report provides findings from the rapid analysis of the interviews and focus groups. Findings from the full formal analysis will follow in Fall 2021.

Interviews

Study Population—Six parents and caregivers of Black students in Durham County schools were interviewed. All parents and caregivers self-identified as cisgender female and Black or African American, with one participant identifying as Latina. A range of parent/caregiver ages and highest level of education was reported (Table 1).

The children of the parents and caregivers interviewed attended public schools in Durham. Their ages ranged from 8 to 17, although almost all were ages 12 to 17. All parents/caregivers chose to have their children learn remotely for the full 2020-2021 school year.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of parents and caregivers of Black students

Characteristic	No. (%) n=6
Age	
30-39	1 (16.7)
40-49	3 (50.0)
50-59	1 (16.7)
60-69	0 (0.0)
70-79	1 (16.7)
Gender	
Cisgender female	6 (100.0)
Race	
Black or African American	6 (100.0)
Hispanic/Latino/a/x ethnicity	1 (16.7)
Highest Level of Education	
High school graduate/GED	2 (33.3)
Technical/Vocational/Associate's degree	1 (16.7)
Master's degree	3 (50.0)

The rapid analysis interview findings are described in 4 areas—

1. Perspectives on SARS-CoV-2 Testing in Schools
2. Perspectives on SARS-CoV-2 Testing at Home
3. Experiences with Stigma and Discrimination
4. Preferences on Returning Children to School

Main Findings from the Parents and Caregivers Interviews

- Possible benefits of school-based SARS-CoV-2 testing were providing a safe school environment, providing families with peace of mind, and reducing community spread.
- Concerns about school-based SARS-CoV-2 testing were mostly about wanting to know more information about logistics of the testing procedures, who is administering the test, and how students' privacy will be maintained.
- Suggestions for administering school-based SARS-CoV-2 testing were made, such as how to select students to reduce the possibility of stigma.
- School personnel should be notified of students' test results because of the exposure risk. However, hesitancy with sharing results was expressed.
- Teachers should prepare take-home materials and care packages for students who are diagnosed with SARS-CoV-2 infection.
- Concerns about home-based SARS-CoV-2 testing mostly focused on the accuracy of testing at home.
- Some children of parents/caregivers interviewed had experiences with school-based stigma or discrimination due to race prior to the pandemic but others had not; experiences may differ by the type of school.
- Anticipated stigma with school-based SARS-CoV-2 testing was limited. Concerns, however, exist about stigma toward those who are diagnosed with SARS-CoV-2 infection.
- Decision-making about returning to in-school learning in Fall 2021 was rarely impacted by experiences with stigma or discrimination prior to the pandemic. Decisions were mostly influenced by:
 - Concern or hesitation about adherence to safety procedures by parents/caregivers, students, and schools.
 - The potential for exposure for children and their families.
- Providing school-based SARS-CoV-2 testing influences some parental/caregiver decisions about returning to in-school learning.
- All but one parent/caregiver were willing for their children to participate in school-based SARS-CoV-2 testing.

1. Perspectives on SARS-CoV-2 Testing in Schools

a. Benefits of testing students for SARS-CoV-2 in schools

- Parents'/caregivers' perceptions of benefits toward *students* varied, with some parents/caregivers believing that school-based SARS-CoV-2 testing would benefit their children while others thought there were no direct benefits.
 - Testing would be beneficial because it would:
 - Keep children safe and provide a safe school environment for students to be with their peers.
 - Provide access to testing for students who do not have access to a primary care provider.
 - Let students know if they were exposed at school.
 - Testing is less beneficial to students who have been vaccinated, as stated by one parent/caregiver who explained that because her child and most family members were vaccinated, she saw no benefit of school-based SARS-CoV-2 testing; however, the parent/caregiver acknowledged that the risk of contracting SARS-CoV-2 is not eliminated after vaccination.
- All parents/caregivers, however, perceived that SARS-CoV-2 testing in schools would lead to benefits for *families and communities*. Parents/caregivers explained that testing would give families and communities peace of mind because it would:
 - Help parents/caregivers feel better about sending their children back to school given that they will be around people outside of their own household.
 - Protect students' family members who may be at greater risk due to age (e.g. grandparents) or health factors (e.g., individuals with underlying health conditions and individuals ineligible for vaccination).
 - Identify students with SARS-CoV-2 infection earlier than without school-based testing, which could then allow for earlier treatment, if needed, and help parents plan for care.
 - Reduce community spread by conducting contact tracing when students test positive.
 - Identify when additional resources might be needed in a community if there are a high number of students testing positive.
- One parent/caregiver expressed that the solution to reducing the number of cases is vaccination rather than testing.

b. Concerns about testing students for SARS-CoV-2 in schools

- Many of the concerns mentioned by parents/caregivers centered on wanting more information about the testing process. Questions primarily focused on logistics, the qualification of personnel administering the SARS-CoV-2 testing, and privacy. (A brief description of surveillance testing with random selection and exposure testing with close contacts of a case was provided before the discussion about in-school testing). Parents/caregivers asked, for example:
 - Who is doing the testing? The school nurse? An outside group?
 - Where is testing done in the school? Who will be with the student when they are tested?
 - How will students be chosen?
 - How often will the students be tested?
 - How will results be communicated to students and parents/caregivers?
 - Who sees the results?
 - What will the school do to prevent any stigma toward children who test positive?
- Other concerns mentioned by parents/caregivers included:
 - Accuracy of the tests used.
 - Testing students individually (e.g., through random selection) versus testing an entire classroom or grade; parents/caregivers felt that stigma could result with individual versus group testing.
 - Preventing internalized stigma among students when selected for testing, ensuring that students know they were not selected because of who they are.
- When speaking about the accuracy of the test, one parent/caregiver expressed concern that sending students home might trigger pre-existing mental health conditions, and that students might not have the appropriate support and reinforcement at home to meet their needs.

c. Recommendations for operationalizing SARS-CoV-2 testing in schools

- Some parents/caregivers expressed concern that random selection of students for SARS-CoV-2 testing might make the selected students feel singled out. As alternative approaches, parents/caregivers suggested:
 - Selecting groups of students (e.g., testing an entire classroom or grade).
 - Randomizing students by the first letter of their last name.
- Parents/caregivers also stated that they would want a healthcare professional to administer SARS-CoV-2 testing rather than school personnel.
- Parents/caregivers made numerous suggestions on how to inform students and their families of the test result. Most commonly mentioned were to:
 - Inform parents/caregivers first of a positive result, and allow parents/caregivers to inform the child of the result.
 - Inform parents through a letter, text, email, app, or phone call; one parent/caregiver stressed that a positive result warrants a phone call rather than other forms of communication.
- Most parents/caregivers felt that school personnel should be notified of a student's positive result because staff would also be exposed to students who tested positive; however, some parents/caregivers still expressed hesitancy with school personnel learning their child's test result.
- Parents/caregivers suggested that schools prepare for helping students who test positive by:
 - Providing resources to students and their families, including food, health department contacts, and schoolwork that can be done at home if able, and how to connect via online sources.
 - Creating care packages for students who test positive.
- One parent/caregiver stressed that counselors should be ready to meet with students at the beginning of the school year, separately from the provision of SARS-CoV-2 testing and results, given the challenging nature of the past year.

d. Parental/caregiver willingness for children to be tested for SARS-CoV-2 in school

- All but one parent/caregiver said they would be willing to have their children tested for SARS-CoV-2 during the Fall 2021 school year.
 - While some parents, as described above, were ambivalent about the benefits to students from school-based testing, they still would allow their children to be tested at school.
 - One parent/caregiver said she would seek a confirmatory test if her child tested positive through school-based testing.
- The parent/caregiver who did not want her child tested at school explained that she wants to be with her children when tested. She explained that her child's school can notify her if her child was selected to be tested, and she would arrange testing herself.

e. Impact of SARS-CoV-2 testing in schools on parental/caregiver decisions to send children to in-person school

- Half of parents/caregivers said the availability of school-based testing would have no impact on their decisions for their children to return to school in Fall 2021. Some reasons given were because:
 - The child was vaccinated.
 - The parent/caregiver had limited trust in the school's ability to keep children safe (based on the observed difficulty of student adherence to safety guidelines during the previous school year).
- The remaining parents/caregivers explained that the availability of school-based testing has some impact on their decision about returning to school because it provides reassurances or peace of mind that their children will be safe.
 - For one parent, however, their child being fully vaccinated was much more influential in making decisions about returning to school than the availability of school-based testing.

2. *Perspectives on Home-Based SARS-CoV-2 Testing*

a. Benefits of SARS-CoV-2 testing at home

- Parent/caregiver perspectives on home-based SARS-CoV-2 testing were mixed.
- Some parents described benefits of home-based testing, such as:
 - Administering the test in a familiar place.
 - Reducing stigma because the test results would be learned at home instead of at school.
 - Allowing for students to know their test result prior to going to school.

b. Concerns about SARS-CoV-2 testing at home

- Half of parents/caregivers did not want their children to be tested for SARS-CoV-2 at home. Concerns included:
 - Having parents/caregivers and students conduct the test, as they are not trained to administer the test and may contaminate the testing materials.
 - Needing to get the buy-in and cooperation of parents/caregivers.
 - Processing the test to ensure accurate results.

c. Suggestions for operationalizing SARS-CoV-2 testing at home

- Parents/caregivers also had suggestions about how home-based testing could work. These included:
 - Conducting the home tests over Zoom so they can be monitored for compliance and accuracy.
 - Determining a process for students and their parents/caregivers to inform their school of a home-based positive test.

3. *Experiences with Stigma and Discrimination*

a. Perceived or enacted stigma and discrimination toward children at school prior to the COVID-19 pandemic

- Half of parents/caregivers described situations in which their children had experienced stigma and/or discrimination at school.
 - Two of these parents/caregivers described experiences that their children faced with discrimination, which they attributed to their child's race.
 - One parent/caregiver described that her children told her about witnessing acts of racism and discrimination by both students and teachers toward other children, but they were not the direct recipients.
- One parent explained that she believed her child has not experienced racial discrimination at school was because she purposefully enrolled in her child in a school with predominantly Black and Brown students.

b. Anticipated stigma and discrimination with SARS-CoV-2 testing in schools

- Generally, parents/caregivers were not concerned about widespread race-based stigma or discrimination resulting from school-based SARS-CoV-2 testing.
- However, parents/caregivers described the following concerns that could potentially lead to stigma or discrimination:
 - Students could speculate about who might have tested positive after students are tested at school and find reasons to bully them.
 - Mishandling of test results could lead to students being treated poorly.
 - Students being selected multiple times for testing might cause other students to speculate on the reasons why.
- One parent/caregiver expressed concern that, because of the current and historical unfair treatment toward African and Black Americans, some school personnel could use SARS-CoV-2 testing as a way to remove Black students from school by falsifying positive results.

4. *Preferences on Returning Children to School*

a. Preferred location for learning in Fall 2021

- If given a choice, four parents/caregivers said they would want their children to return to in-school learning in Fall 2021.
 - However, one of these parents/caregivers expressed that she prefers for her children to stay at home to continue bonding with family and to avoid typical school-based peer drama.
- Two parents/caregivers shared their reluctance with having their children return to in-person school. Their concerns were grounded in the uncertainty of:
 - Other parents'/caregivers' and students' adherence to safety procedures, such as masking and social distancing.
 - Schools' safety protocols (including the lack of information on what safety procedures schools are enforcing in Fall 2021).

b. Reasons for choosing full remote learning in Spring 2021

- One parent/caregiver said that she chose remote learning for the entire 2020-2021 school year so her son could avoid previous bullying experiences that she believes were related to race.
- The other reasons given for keeping children fully remote included:
 - Protecting other children or family members with underlying health conditions.
 - Keeping children safe from SARS-CoV-2 transmission.
 - Logistical reasons, such as not having to drive their children to school.
 - Children were doing well academically while learning remotely.
 - Parents/caregivers enjoying having their children at home.

Focus groups

Study Population—Seven school personnel participated in two focus groups (4 personnel in group 1 and 3 personnel in group 2). All participants except one identified as cisgender female, two participants identified as Black, and one participant identified as Hispanic/Latina. All participants were employed at Durham charter schools (6 of the 7 participants were from the same school), and all were teachers. School personnel represented a range of grade levels, with almost equal distribution across lower, middle, and upper grades (Table 2).

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of school personnel

Characteristic	No. (%) n=7
Age	
30-39	1 (14.3)
40-49	6 (85.7)
Gender	
Cisgender female	6 (85.7)
Cisgender male	1 (14.3)
Race	
Black or African American	2 (28.6)
White	5 (71.4)
Hispanic/Latino/a/x ethnicity	1 (14.3)
Highest Level of Education	
Bachelor's degree	2 (28.6)
Master's degree	5 (71.4)
Position	
Teacher	7 (100.0)
Grade levels taught	
Kindergarten-3	2 (28.6)
4-8	3 (42.9)
9-12	2 (28.6)

The rapid analysis focus group findings are described in 4 areas—

1. Perspectives on SARS-CoV-2 Testing in Schools
2. Perspectives on Home-Based SARS-CoV-2 Testing
3. Perceptions of Stigma and Discrimination: Experiences with differential treatment and disadvantageous policies in schools based on race and ethnicity
4. Additional considerations

Key Points from School Personnel

- Schools should establish clear SARS-CoV-2 protocols (e.g., masking, distancing, communication of test results, quarantine policies) and follow them consistently
- Framing and presentation of the SARS-CoV-2 testing program to the school community is critically important for acceptance among parents and the wider community, as is communication of clear expectations
- Parental involvement and consent is needed for the SARS-CoV-2 testing program
- Communications with parents about SARS-CoV-2 testing in schools should be science- and data-based
- Teachers should be involved in designing the SARS-CoV-2 testing program, to provide input on how best to minimize teacher burden and classroom disruptions and to be able to express any concerns they may have
- Healthcare professionals should make contact with affected families
- Schools should develop plans for keeping students who are diagnosed with SARS-CoV-2 infection engaged with the school community during the quarantine period

1. *Perspectives on SARS-CoV-2 Testing in Schools*

a. Benefits of testing students (and teachers) for SARS-CoV-2 in schools

- School personnel in both focus groups viewed preventing, tracking, and containing an outbreak as the main benefits of SARS-CoV-2 testing in schools, particularly when those testing positive were asymptomatic.
- School personnel in both focus groups also described that SARS-CoV-2 testing in schools would serve as a source of reassurance and increase confidence for a variety of stakeholders:
 - Schools/teachers—that they are doing their best to provide a safe environment for students and using a data-driven approach to generate action plans.
 - Teachers—that their health is protected, particularly for those with underlying medical conditions; testing may also help teachers feel more comfortable taking mask breaks to eat.
 - Parents and caregivers—that the school is taking steps to keep their children safe.
 - Students—that their health is protected, particularly for those with underlying medical conditions, and that they will not be responsible for bringing the virus home to vulnerable family members.
- School personnel perceived that providing SARS-CoV-2 testing at school would also have practical benefits for parents and caregivers—testing would be:
 - Convenient.
 - Helpful for parents with busy schedules.
 - Minimize the need for parents and caregivers to engage with the healthcare system, particularly for families that may not have insurance.
- School personnel also perceived community-oriented benefits:
 - The optics of testing students (and teachers) at school might help to increase parental buy-in and trust.
 - Teacher testing might set a good example for students.
 - Students might feel a sense of pride and an increased sense of community by doing their part to keep others safe.

b. Concerns about testing students for SARS-CoV-2 in schools

- School personnel in both focus groups voiced concern about the strong differences of opinion that exist around COVID-19, pointing out that parents and teachers have a variety of opinions about the existence and severity of COVID-19, the benefits of vaccination, and SARS-CoV-2 testing. These concerns included:
 - Parents who are anti-testing, even with respect to a voluntary program, being sufficiently vocal about their opinions in a public setting that it makes other parents and students uncomfortable; children of these families may also repeat their parents' opinions at school and make their classmates uncomfortable about being tested.
 - Parents viewing testing as invasive and unnecessary.
 - Mandatory testing leading some families to leave the school.
- School personnel perceived that parents and students might also have concerns about the process of SARS-CoV-2 testing, including:
 - Privacy in testing and reporting results.
 - Parents' anxiety about not being present for the testing of their children..
 - Students' anxiety about undergoing a nasal swab and (primarily for younger children) being tested without a parent there to provide reassurance.
- From a logistical perspective, school personnel concerns included:
 - Students missing instructional time for testing.
 - Teachers needing to be absent from the classroom to take students to the testing location.
 - General classroom disruption both before (due to anticipatory anxiety) and after testing (due to the time it takes students to settle down upon returning to the classroom).
- School personnel noted potential concerns related to the extent of teachers' involvement in testing, including:
 - The possibility that teacher involvement could be time-consuming (e.g., the need to obtain parental consent; the need to identify students needing testing).
 - The possibility that teachers might need to administer the test, which several participants would strongly prefer not to do.
 - The potential for parents to be upset with teachers, if teachers are the ones relaying information about positive test results.

- A few school personnel also expressed concerns related to the logistics of students testing positive for SARS-CoV-2, including:
 - How to handle suspected cases of SARS-CoV-2.
 - The process and timeline for removing students from school who test positive
 - How a quarantine period would be managed (e.g., would students be permitted to participate with their class via a personal Zoom link for the duration of their quarantine, or would they be sent home with classroom materials and have no further contact with the school until they returned from quarantine).
- No school personnel expressed concerns about stigma related to SARS-CoV-2 testing, as COVID-19 has the potential to impact everyone.
 - Participants in both focus groups stated that concerns about stigma can be alleviated based on how testing is framed, and schools/teachers have the ability to frame testing as a positive event; proper framing may also help to alleviate student/parent anxiety around testing.
- One teacher, with underlying health issues, noted personal concerns about an excess of confidentiality preventing her from knowing if she had been exposed to a student diagnosed with SARS-CoV-2 infection.

c. Recommendations for operationalizing SARS-CoV-2 testing in schools

- School personnel stated that an ideal school SARS-CoV-2 testing program would be structured so as to:
 - Provide teachers with 24 hours' notice of testing for their classroom, so they have sufficient time to prepare for student and/or teacher absence by compiling lesson materials for students to complete later and arranging for classroom coverage.
 - Group the students to be tested by classroom and/or grade level, to reduce the possibility that students might talk amongst themselves about others whom they observe at the testing site.
 - Bring testing to the students, rather than having students travel to the testing location (particularly important for multi-school campuses, in which different grades are taught in different buildings), to minimize student/teacher time away from class.
 - Consider providing testing before/after school or at the beginning/end of the class period.
- School personnel made the following suggestions for protecting student privacy during SARS-CoV-2 testing:
 - Conduct testing in a private space.
 - Treat testing like the other services for which students are routinely pulled out of class (e.g., AIG, IEP, tutoring).
 - Encourage students who are being tested to not discuss their results with other students
 - Have designated times for testing specific classrooms/grades.

d. Communicating SARS-CoV-2 test results

- Almost all school personnel had experience from the previous school year with school policies on communicating SARS-CoV-2 test results to students testing positive and liked how this had been operationalized at their school. Positive features of the notification program included:
 - The school community (teachers, parents, students) was notified that there had been a case in a certain building/grade, with no other details provided.
 - Members of the school community were informed that they would be contacted if they had been determined to be a close contact of the individual who tested SARS-CoV-2 positive; otherwise, they could assume they were not impacted.
 - The teacher of the impacted class was asked to provide a seating chart and a description of how students had moved around during the day, so that close contacts could be identified, but was not told which individual was affected.
- School personnel suggestions for communicating SARS-CoV-2 positive test results included:
 - Communicate positive test results directly to parents, not students.
 - Communication should come from a health care worker or the health department
 - Ideally, communication of positive results should occur by telephone, so that parents can ask questions.
 - If telephone communication is not possible, results should be mailed in a sealed envelope.

e. Provision of services for students testing SARS-CoV-2 positive

- School personnel suggested several ways in which schools might continue to support students and families following a positive SARS-CoV-2 test result:
 - Provide parents with a schedule listing the dates on which follow-up testing needs to occur, given the date of the positive result, and the date after which the student may return to school if testing negative.
 - Provide parents with a list of testing locations.
 - Provide parents with contacts for medical support/social services/options for insurance sign-up (particularly helpful for families that may not have health insurance).
 - Provide students with a personalized Zoom link so that they may continue participating in classroom activities during the quarantine period.
 - Confirm family will be able to access basic supplies (e.g., food, Tylenol) during the quarantine period, if the entire family has to quarantine; provide help with obtaining supplies, if family has difficulty.
 - Consider providing help for families that are economically disadvantaged (e.g., meals, grocery store gift cards) if parents and caregivers are unable to work due to the need to quarantine.

- f. Perceived impact of SARS-CoV-2 testing in schools on families' decisions to send children back to in-person school
- School personnel opinions were mixed about the impact that SARS-CoV-2 testing might have on families' decisions to have their children attend in-person school in Fall 2021:
 - Some viewed testing as a means of providing parents and students with peace of mind, since Durham schools are unlikely to have a virtual option for the 2021-2022 school year.
 - However, others thought that testing might highlight negative concerns about whether school is safe, particularly for high-risk families, and that mandatory testing would induce some families to remove their children from school.
 - Alternative options, in the event that parents elected not to send their children back to school because of testing, included switching children to another school or home-schooling.

2. Perspectives on Home-Based SARS-CoV-2 Testing

a. Benefits of SARS-CoV-2 testing at home

- School personnel cited several benefits of students conducting their own SARS-CoV-2 testing at home:
 - Privacy.
 - Reduced student anxiety levels, given the ability to have parents present.
 - No missed instructional time.

b. Concerns about SARS-CoV-2 testing at home

- For all school personnel, the potential drawbacks of SARS-CoV-2 testing at home outweighed the potential benefits. Drawbacks included:
 - Honesty of testing and reporting.
 - Understanding of collection method instructions.
 - Accuracy in self-administration.
 - Possibility of others (e.g., siblings) tampering with the test.

3. Perceptions of Stigma and Discrimination: Experiences with differential treatment and disadvantageous policies in schools based on race and ethnicity

- School personnel in both groups described being aware of or having witnessed differential treatment of students due to skin color, prior to the pandemic.
- A few school personnel further described being aware of differential treatment related to students or families of color who had been exposed to COVID-19, versus White families.
- Language barriers and not translating COVID-19-related (and other) school materials into languages other than English could be disadvantageous for families for whom English is not the primary language, including Spanish-speaking, Asian, and West African families.
- Other suggestions related to language included:
 - Making sure that language is clear and understandable in all materials distributed by the school.
 - Recognizing that some parents are unable to read, in any language.
 - To the extent possible, having staff members who are able to translate for non-English-speaking parents.

4. *Additional Considerations*

a. Community considerations

- School personnel listed both benefits and concerns that students' communities might perceive about SARS-CoV-2 testing in schools:
 - Testing students is one way to reduce community spread and keep students' communities safe, even those with high levels of skepticism about COVID-19.
 - Student testing may serve as a positive role model for communities without robust testing programs.
 - However, communities may have concerns about privacy or perceive that schools are trying to keep people scared about COVID.

b. School district considerations

- School personnel from one charter school noted that their school board sets its own policies and does not have contact with the Durham County Schools board. However, general considerations about school board policies included:
 - Data and facts should be presented to the board when discussing potential policy changes.
 - A universal masking policy for Durham schools would eliminate the perception that schools are in competition with one another and might keep parents from changing schools.
 - Universal masking for the upcoming school year, in addition to testing, would serve as an extra layer of protection for students who are too young to be vaccinated
 - A mask mandate might be easier for both parents and teachers to accept than a testing mandate.
 - There is a high likelihood that schools would see push-back, as well as students being pulled out of school, if testing were mandated; some parents and communities may view this as an infringement of their rights.
 - Mandating testing may do more harm than good if it engenders significant push-back from parents and communities, serving as a distraction from education and corroding trust.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT SUMMARIES

Participant Summary

School Personnel Perspectives on COVID-19 Testing in Schools

We appreciate you sharing your perspectives about COVID-19 testing in schools with us. This document shares the main findings from the focus groups with school personnel.

BACKGROUND

We conducted rapid formative research with a small group of stakeholders—*parents/caregivers of Black and Latino/a/x students and school personnel*—to inform COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) testing in schools for the Fall 2021 school year.

The formative research was conducted as part of a larger NIH-funded study called, “SARS-CoV-2 Screening and Diagnostic Testing for Return to K-12 Schools,”

<https://abcsciencecollaborative.org/covid-19-testing-in-schools>

led by The ABC Science Collaborative (<https://abcsciencecollaborative.org/about/>) in partnership with QualCore (<https://populationhealth.duke.edu/research/qualcore>) at Duke University.

PURPOSE

To foster positive aspects and mitigate negative impacts from COVID-19 testing in schools—including any stigma associated with race and ethnicity—by gathering the perspectives of parents and caregivers of Black and Latino/a/x students and school personnel on the social, ethical, and behavioral considerations of COVID-19 testing in schools and sharing this information with key health and education stakeholders.

MAIN FINDINGS

- Schools should establish clear COVID-19 protocols (e.g., masking, distancing, communication of test results, quarantine policies) and follow them consistently
- Framing and presentation of the COVID-19 testing program to the school community is critically important for acceptance among parents and the wider community, as is communication of clear expectations
- Parental involvement and consent is needed for the COVID-19 testing program
- Communications with parents about COVID-19 testing in schools should be science- and data-based
- Teachers should be involved in designing the COVID-19 testing program, to provide input on how best to minimize teacher burden and classroom disruptions and to be able to express any concerns they may have
- Healthcare professionals should make contact with affected families
- Schools should develop plans for keeping students who are diagnosed with COVID-19 engaged with the school community during the quarantine period



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Participant Summary

Perspectives of Parents & Caregivers of Black Students on COVID-19 Testing in Schools

We appreciate you sharing your perspectives about COVID-19 testing in schools with us. This document shares the main findings from the interviews with parents & caregivers of Black students.

BACKGROUND

We conducted rapid formative research with a small group of stakeholders—*parents and caregivers of Black and Latino/a/x students and school personnel*—to inform COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) testing in schools for the Fall 2021 school year.

The formative research was conducted as part of a larger NIH-funded study called, “SARS-CoV-2 Screening and Diagnostic Testing for Return to K-12 Schools,”

<https://abcsciencecollaborative.org/covid-19-testing-in-schools>

led by The ABC Science Collaborative (<https://abcsciencecollaborative.org/about/>)

PURPOSE

To foster positive aspects and mitigate negative impacts from COVID-19 testing in schools—including any stigma associated with race and ethnicity—by gathering the perspectives of parents and caregivers of Black and Latino/a/x students and school personnel on the social, ethical, and behavioral considerations of COVID-19 testing in schools

MAIN FINDINGS

- Possible benefits of school-based COVID-19 testing were providing a safe school environment, providing families with peace of mind, and reducing community spread.
- Concerns about school-based COVID-19 testing were mostly about wanting to know more information about logistics of the testing procedures, who is administering the test, and how students’ privacy will be maintained.
- Suggestions for administering school-based COVID-19 testing were made, such as how to select students to reduce the possibility of stigma.
- School personnel should be notified of students’ test results because of the exposure risk. However, hesitancy with sharing results was expressed.
- Teachers should prepare take-home materials and care packages for students who are diagnosed with COVID-19.
- Concerns about home-based COVID-19 testing mostly focused on the accuracy of testing at home.
- Some children of parents/caregivers interviewed had experiences with school-based stigma or discrimination due to race prior to the pandemic but others had not; experiences may differ by the type of school.

- Anticipated stigma with school-based COVID-19 testing was limited. Concerns, however, exist about stigma toward those who are diagnosed with COVID-19.
- Decision-making about returning to in-school learning in Fall 2021 was rarely impacted by experiences with stigma or discrimination prior to the pandemic. Decisions were mostly influenced by:
 - Concern or hesitation about adherence to safety procedures by parents/caregivers, students, and schools.
 - The potential for exposure for children and their families.
- Providing school-based COVID-19 testing influences some parental/caregiver decisions about returning to in-school learning.
- All but one parent/caregiver were willing for their children to participate in school-based COVID-19 testing.



Want the detailed findings? Visit The ABC Science Collaborative website to download the full report: <https://abcsciencecollaborative.org/reportssummaries/>