

# Emergency Preparedness at School: Leveraging Parents' Perspectives on School Violence

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## Background

Casualties from school shootings have been increasing in recent years,<sup>1</sup> and parents are increasingly concerned about school violence.<sup>2,3</sup> Parental concern about school violence and school shootings generally increases after school shootings with greater media coverage. Recent levels of concern are higher than they have been in the past two decades.<sup>2</sup>

It is unknown how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted parents' concerns about school violence. Additionally, parents' perceptions of emergency preparedness in schools in general and lockdown drills specifically are understudied.

## Objectives

- To describe parental concerns about school violence and parental preferences for school emergency preparedness.
- To discuss potential modifications to school emergency preparedness protocols to improve parental satisfaction.

## Methodology

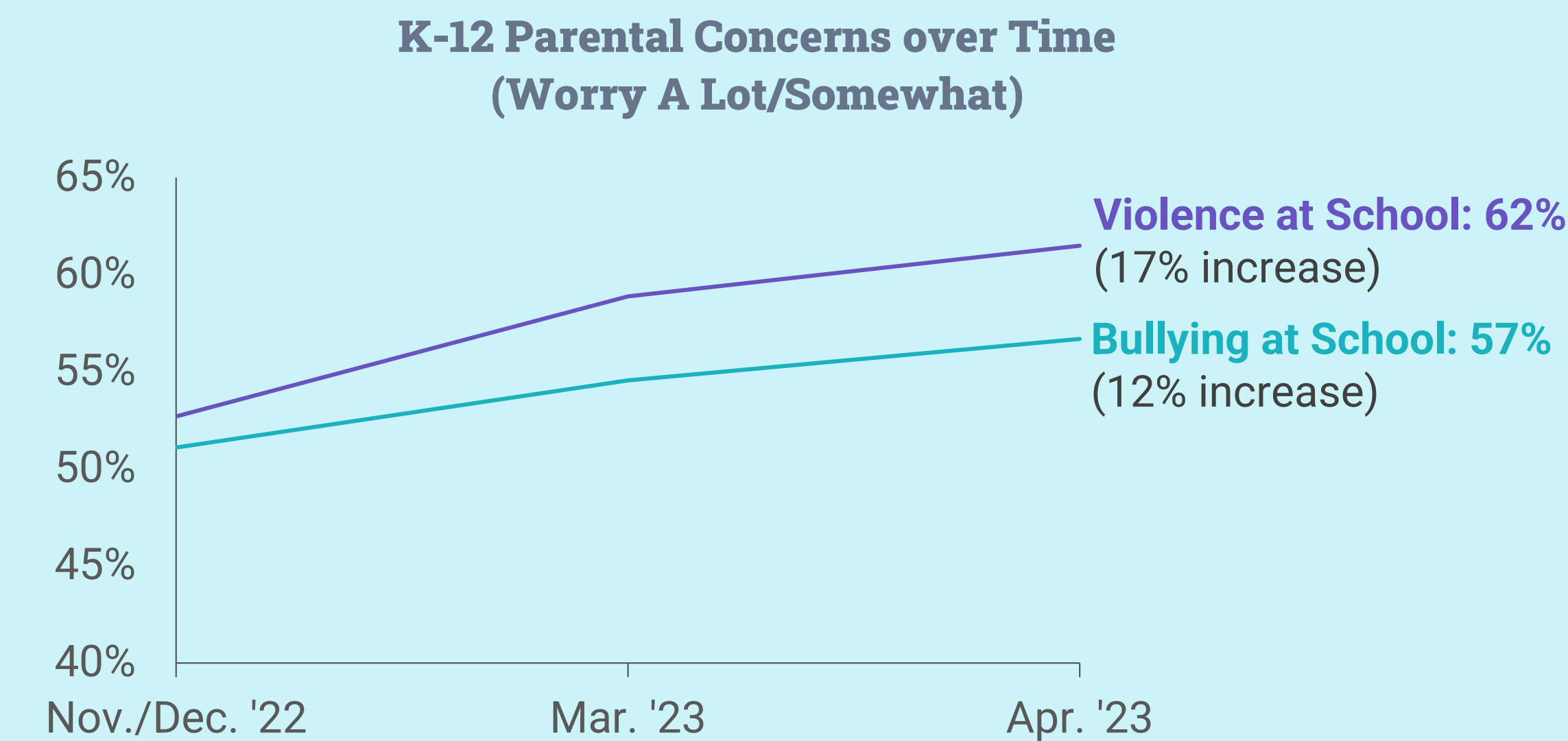
Seven focus groups with 37 parents were held in January 2023. An online survey was conducted in three waves in November/December 2022, March 2023, and April 2023 with a total of 4,219 parent respondents. The second wave of the survey focused more heavily on issues of school violence (N=1,387). Inductive thematic analysis was used for focus group analysis. Survey responses were weighted to represent US school parent population. Bivariate and regression analyses were used to analyze survey data.

## Key Findings

### General Concerns

Surveys:

- Increasing parental concern about school violence and bullying ( $\chi^2$  p-value<0.01)



Focus Groups:

- Many believe violence in schools has increased because of the pandemic's negative impact on mental health
- Many were concerned about limited school capacity to support mental health needs and aggressive behaviors

"My biggest concern right now is probably mental health. [...] I'm seeing a big difference in behavior. And there's a lot of aggression, there's a lot of fights, and just a lot of kids are not okay. And I can't help but think that, since I've never seen this happen to this degree, that it has to be attributed to the pandemic. I'm not 100% sure, but I mean, it just looks like it has to kind of relate to that. And I don't feel like there's enough counselors at the school to address all of those issues. A lot of times, teachers aren't trained to notice certain things like, oh, this child is not okay. And I feel like that's a really, really big concern for me right now."

- Non-Hispanic, White mother from Florida

## Active Shooter Drills

Focus Groups:

- Parents feel active shooter drills are important but are concerned about potential trauma

### Realism

- Some parents suggested that less realistic drills may be beneficial for younger children – others said their schools already adapted drills for younger children
- One parent suggested holding drills without students present

### Frequency

- Monthly or more frequent drills was perceived as too frequent
- Parents were satisfied with drills once or twice a year, or up to once a quarter

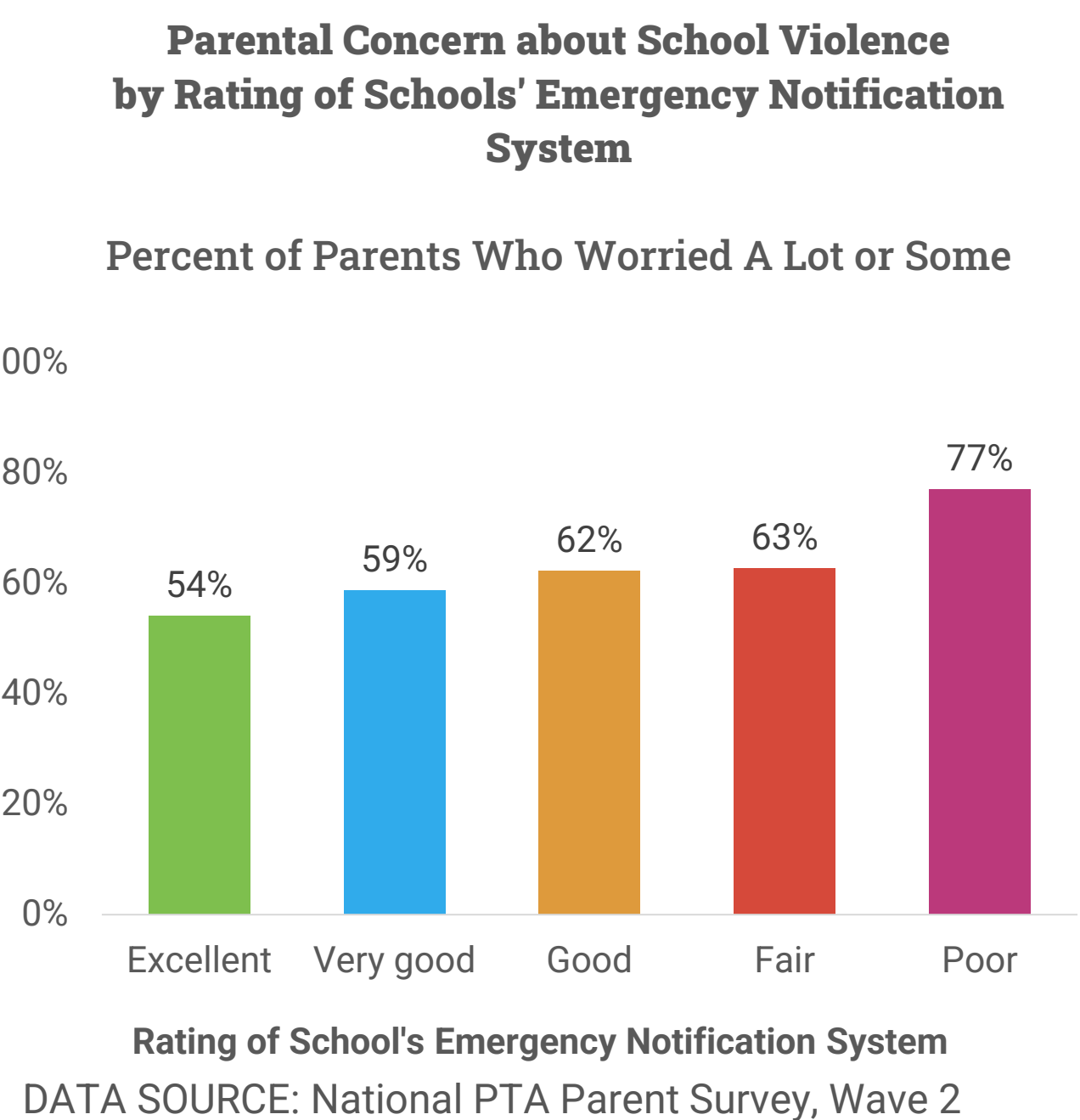


For additional details and analyses, please view our supplemental resource using the QR code or at [www.cdcfoundation.org/improving-supports-students-families](http://www.cdcfoundation.org/improving-supports-students-families)

## Emergency Notifications

Surveys:

- Satisfaction with emergency notification system marginally linked to concern about school violence (Somers' D p-value=0.063).
- 88% of parents received notification about emergencies directly on their phone (e.g., via text or phone call). Parents who reported receiving notifications via automated text, text/phone tree, or via email were significantly more likely to be satisfied with their schools' notification system (respective adjusted odds ratios: 1.9, p<0.01; 1.9, p<0.01; 1.5, p=0.03).



## Conclusions

- Mental health and school violence are serious concerns for parents, and their concerns have risen since the onset of the pandemic.
- Schools may need more supports for students who are at risk of aggressive or violent behaviors.
- Opportunities for parents to provide constructive feedback to schools to address school safety concerns and emergency preparedness (including active shooter drills) may help to improve parents' perception of their child's safety at school.

## Acknowledgements

References:

1. Riedman, David (2023). K-12 School Shooting Database.
2. Gallup Poll Social Series: Work and Education – Final Topline. 2023. Accessed September 22, 2023. <https://news.gallup.com/file/poll/510410/230831SchoolSafety.pdf>
3. Hurst K. About a third of K-12 parents are very or extremely worried a shooting could happen at their children's school. Pew Research Center. Published October 18, 2022. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/10/18/about-a-third-of-k-12-parents-are-very-or-extremely-worried-a-shooting-could-happen-at-their-childrens-school/>

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