Parents are eager to return to work but need kids in school full time

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Is there a labor shortage? We may debate the question, but our research makes one thing clear: Full-time school can allow more parents to return to work.

The 2020-2021 school year has been unpredictable for children and parents, with only 34 percent of students attending full-time in-person learning as of April 2021.¹ Needing to assist children with hybrid and virtual schooling, many parents put work on the back burner.

The pandemic illustrated how much the economy depends on schools (and daycare for younger children) to allow parents the ability to work. The labor force participation rate of people with children under 18 fell by one percent in 2020, representing about 1 million potential workers.² Although schools primarily provide education and not childcare, the pandemic demonstrated that the availability and productivity of many workers depends on children being in school.

In a recent Deloitte survey, 75 percent of parents said they were willing to send their kids to full-time in-person schooling if it were offered this spring. Although the main reasons cited for sending children back into classrooms were for better learning and emotional support, four in 10 parents signaled it would allow them to return to work.³

Luckily, there are jobs to be had. A recent Deloitte analysis of job postings shows that April 2021 levels were 53 percent higher than April 2019.⁴ The good news for parents is that most school districts are planning to completely reopen for in-person classes in fall 2021.⁵

In addition, summer camps and daycare centers will likely be open this summer as vaccination rates increase and COVID-19 infections fall.⁶ Parents are indicating that they will be relying on those openings this summer, with one-third planning to send their kids to summer school, and 40 percent sending their children to summer camps.⁷ These trends suggest that most, if not all, of these parents will be able to return to the labor force at some point this year.

In April 2021, labor participation rate was at 61.7 percent, 1.6 percentage points lower than in February 2020. School openings might get back some parents into the job market.
Endnotes

5. North, Anna. “5 reasons experts think kids will be in school full time this year,” Vox, April 8, 2021, https://www.vox.com/22368320/schools-covid-fall-reopening-cdc-2021-vaccine
6. Ibid.

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