

July 2024

Special Education Family Survey

2022-2023
Statewide Report



Prepared by The Equity, Engagement, and Evaluation Team
at The Ohio State University
Center on Education and Training for Employment



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Executive Summary

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 requires state education agencies and local school districts to provide various data and information to the U.S. Department of Education. To meet these requirements, the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (ODEW), Office of Accountability, conducts the annual **Special Education Family Survey**. This survey aims to understand parents' and caregivers' perceptions of family engagement elements, including communication, school climate, partnership with the school, and graduation requirements.

Objectives:

- 1. Understand Family Engagement:** Explore parents' and caregivers' views on school communication, school climate, partnerships, and understanding of graduation requirements and options for students with disabilities.
- 2. Highlight Perceptions:** Present credible data reflecting diverse perspectives of parents and caregivers of students with disabilities, acknowledging potential limitations in data representation.
- 3. Inform Policy and Practice:** Provide data-informed insights to guide local and state educational policies and practices.

In 2023, data were collected from parents and caregivers representing 140 Ohio school districts and community schools. All of Ohio's school districts and community schools were randomly assigned to one of six cohorts. Cohort 4 administered surveys in the spring of 2023. Future survey administrations will include parents and caregivers from the remaining districts and community schools.

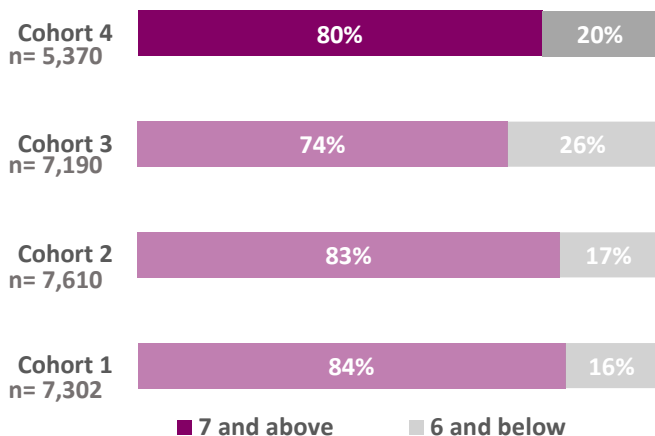
Consumers of these survey data should proceed with caution. Probability samples were not used to collect data from the Cohort 4 schools. A probability sample would allow for generalizing results to the broader population and calculating confidence levels associated with survey results. Despite this limitation, the data provide valuable insights and, along with other information, can inform trends and strategies to enhance local schools' responsiveness to students' and families' needs.

This report offers a brief review of the findings from the 2023 survey participants.

Key Findings

- **5,370 parents and caregivers** provided their perspectives regarding key issues directly related to engagement with their local schools.
- In Ohio, 20.5% of students with disabilities are Black Non-Hispanic. **Only 9%** of the survey respondents identified their student as Black, indicating a significant underrepresentation of the Black Non-Hispanic population in this year’s survey.
- There were notable instances of underrepresentation among students with different disability categories. Specifically, **19% of respondents** identified their child as having a **Specific Learning Disability**, compared to the statewide enrollment of 34%. Additionally, Ohio’s enrollment for Other Health Impairments is 19%, while the response rate in this category was only **10%**.
- For **Developmental Delay**, Ohio’s enrollment is 2.5% compared to the **response rate of 10.6%** in this category, suggesting a potential overrepresentation.
- **80% of all respondents** indicated that schools facilitated parent involvement to improve services and results for children with disabilities. While the percentage of respondents rating this question a 7 or above (max 10) is higher than that of the previous cohort, it still falls short of the set target of 86%.

- **Fewer than 80%** of parents/caregivers who identified their child as Black, Hispanic/Latinx, or Pacific Islander felt that schools actively encouraged their participation to improve services and outcomes for children with disabilities. In contrast, **83% of parents/caregivers** of White children agreed with this statement.
- Survey participants generally expressed favorable opinions about their communication experiences with schools. **Between 71% and 77%** of respondents either **strongly agreed or agreed** with the statements related to communication. However, unless responses are 100% positive, there is always room for improvement.
- **77% of respondents** expressed a positive perception of their school's welcoming atmosphere and the sense of parents/caregivers being actively involved in their child's educational journey. However, when it came to the inclusivity of all cultures, the level of agreement **dropped to 70%**.
- In general, survey participants were favorable **(72% to 77%)** about the questions regarding partnering with their schools. However, **only 67%** felt that the school viewed them as the expert about how to best meet their child's needs.



- Parental/caregiver understanding of graduation prerequisites and the various choices accessible to students with disabilities remains an area for improvement. **Between 56% and 69%** of participants agreed with the three questions concerning graduation requirements and options.



Data Collection

The survey collection period was from March 8 through May 5, 2023.

User Friendly and Multilingual

The survey was made accessible online and on mobile devices. It was available in English, Spanish, Nepali, Somali, Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese to ensure accessibility.

Enhancing Black Family Participation

To enhance the inclusion of Black families, the research team implemented a cultural broker. This involved creating a personalized video message from an individual within the Black community. Districts and Community Schools were encouraged to share this video with families to build trust and reduce the likelihood of underrepresentation in the survey.

Invitation to Participate

Emails were sent to superintendents, special education directors, and other school district personnel. These emails included an invitation for families to participate in the survey.

Dissemination Methods

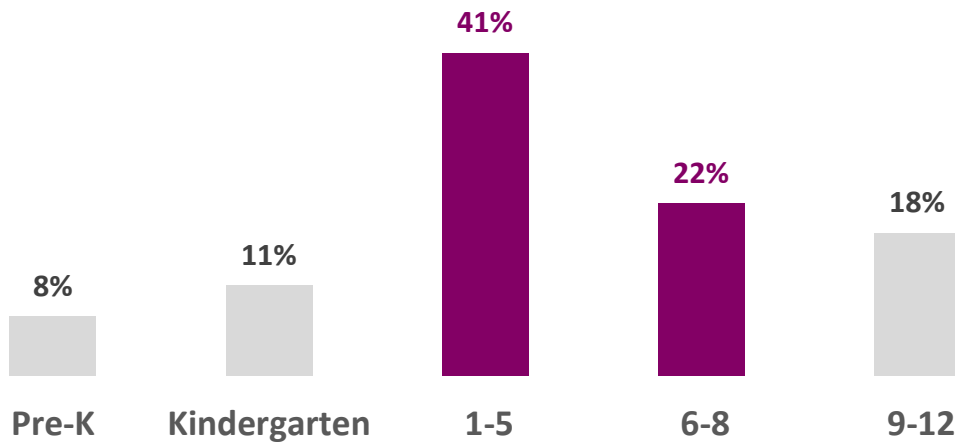
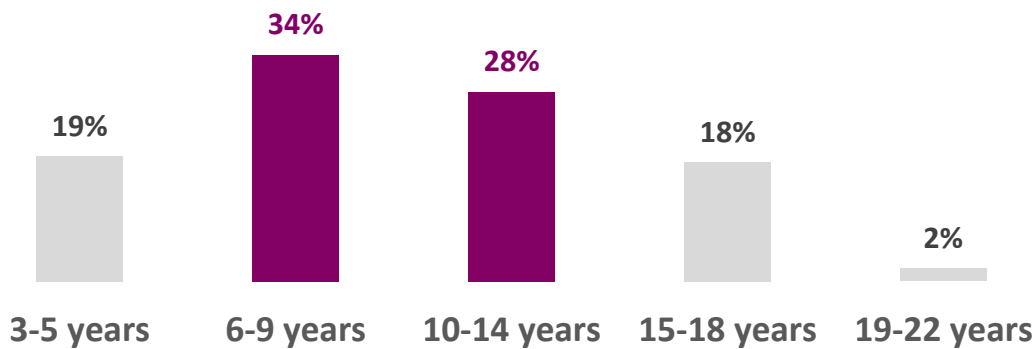
Districts and Community Schools employed multiple channels to invite families to participate in the survey. These channels included school and district websites, social media platforms, direct emails, paper invitations sent home with students, recorded voice messages, and shared Google Docs. This multi-faceted approach aimed to ensure that all families received the invitation through their preferred communication method.

Response Rate and Demographics

The table below outlines information about the number of participating school districts/community schools for each cohort as well as the total number of responses received. There were two basic criteria that qualified a parent or caregiver for participation: their student was aged 3-22 and their student had an official Individualized Education Program (IEP).

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4
# participating districts/community schools	155	155	156	140
# responses included	7,302	7,743	7,190	5,370

The charts below shows the distribution of responses based on the age and grade of the families' oldest child with an IEP. The **highest response rate** came from families who had a child **ages 6-9** followed by families who had a child **ages 10-14**. **More than 60%** of the responses were from families who had a child in **elementary** or **middle school**.

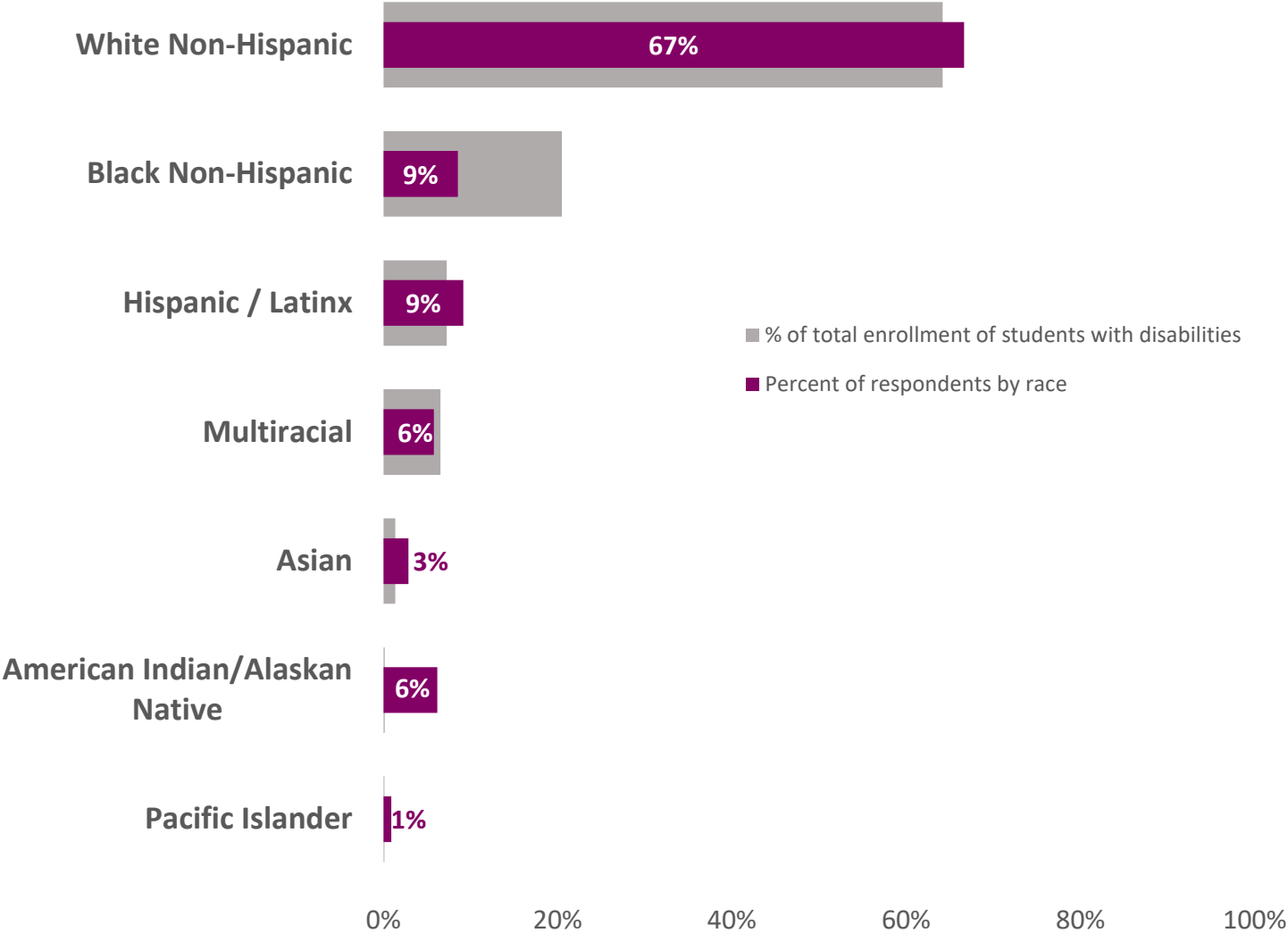


Demographics: Race Categories

One survey goal was to have a respondent population whose race and disability type reflect the current enrollment data for students with disabilities in Ohio. The graph below shows the percentage of respondents from various racial and disability categories compared to Ohio's enrollment data.

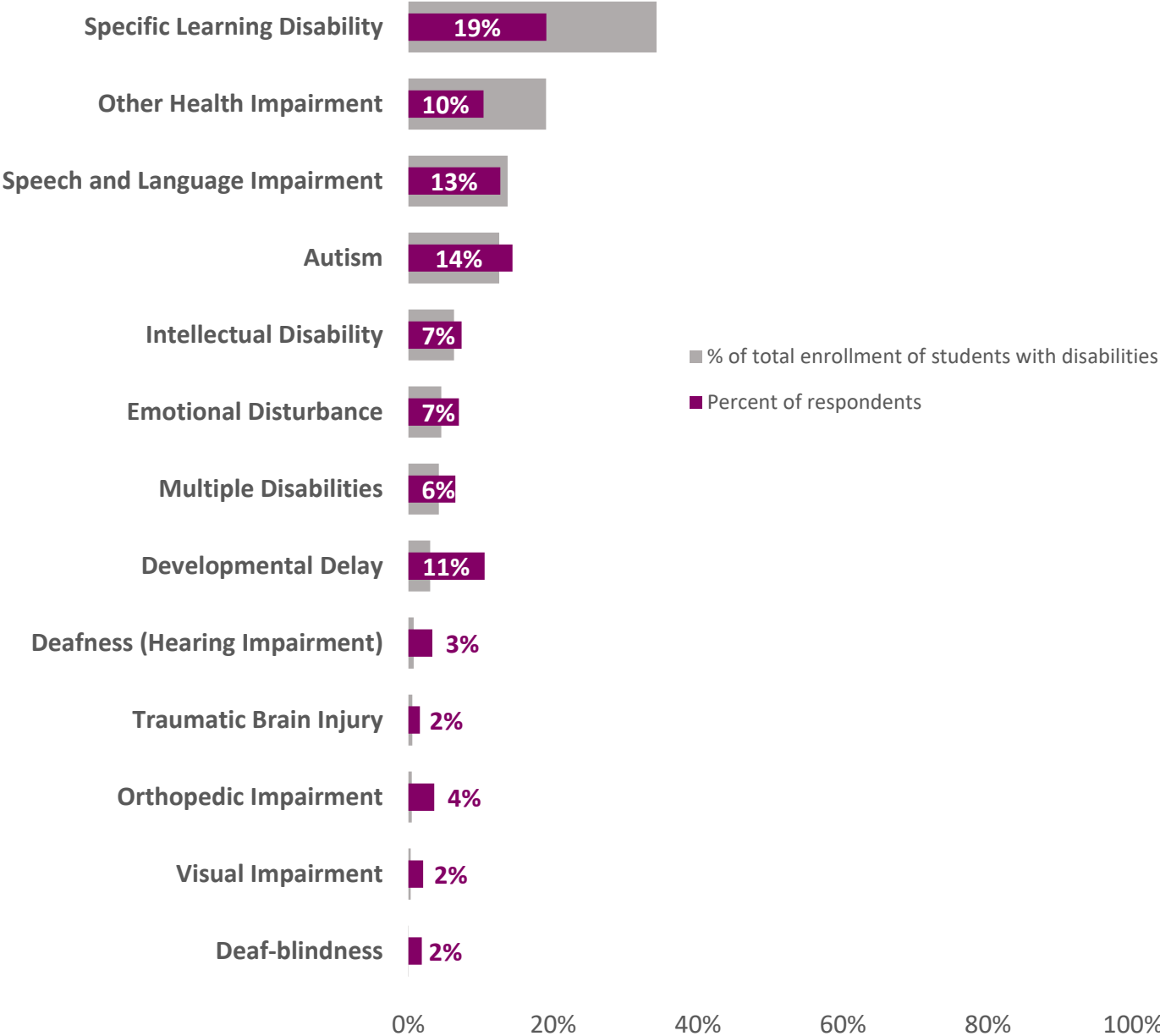
The purple bars represent the percentage of survey respondents by race, while the gray bars indicate the percentage of each race category enrolled in Ohio schools. In Ohio, 64% of students with disabilities are White Non-Hispanic, and **21% are Black Non-Hispanic**. However, only **9% of the survey respondents** identified their student as Black, indicating a significant underrepresentation of the Black Non-Hispanic population in this year's survey.

The percentage of total enrollment for American Indian/Alaskan Native is less than 1% and the response rate was 6%. This suggests an overrepresentation. All other racial categories fell within the acceptable range of +/- 3%.



Demographics: Disability Categories

The purple bars indicate the percentage of respondents with a child in a specific disability category. The percentage of total enrollment for **Specific Learning Disability** is **34%** compared to a **19% response rate**, indicating a significant underrepresentation in that category. Total enrollment for **Other Health Impairments** is **19% in Ohio** compared to a **response rate of 10%**, indicative of another area of underrepresentation. Conversely, the total enrollment in Ohio for Developmental Delay is 3%, while the response rate for this category was 11%, indicating overrepresentation in this category. All other disability categories fell within the acceptable range of +/-3%.

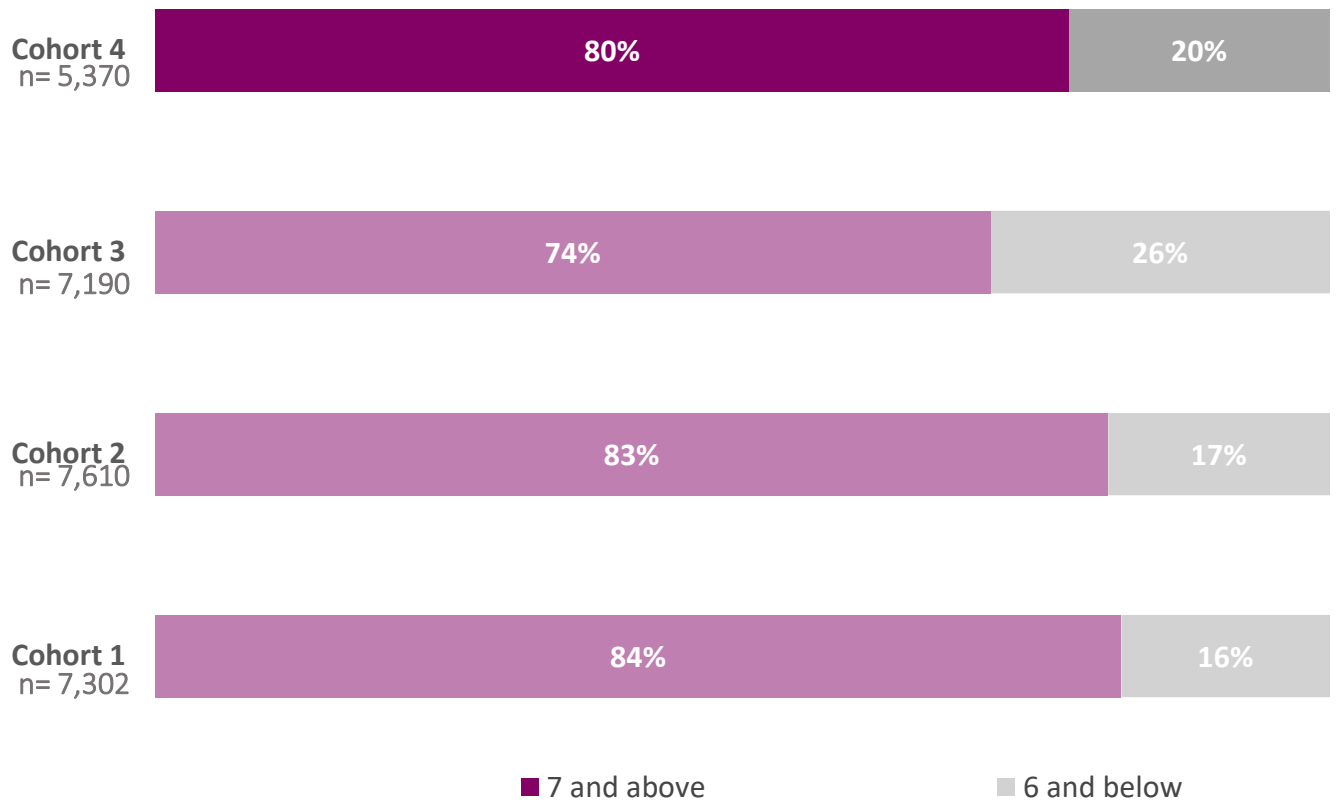


Quality of Services: Indicator 8

The primary aim of conducting the annual **Special Education Family Survey** is to ascertain the extent to which parents/caregivers felt that schools collaborated with them to enhance their students' educational accomplishments. Parents and caregivers rated the schools' efforts to improve student services or outcomes on a 10-point scale. A score of 7 or higher indicated positive perception.

Responses for Cohort 4 indicate **80% of all respondents** reported that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities. Although the data across cohorts should not be used for comparison, it is interesting to note the differences in the percentage of parents/caregivers who rated this question 7 and above.

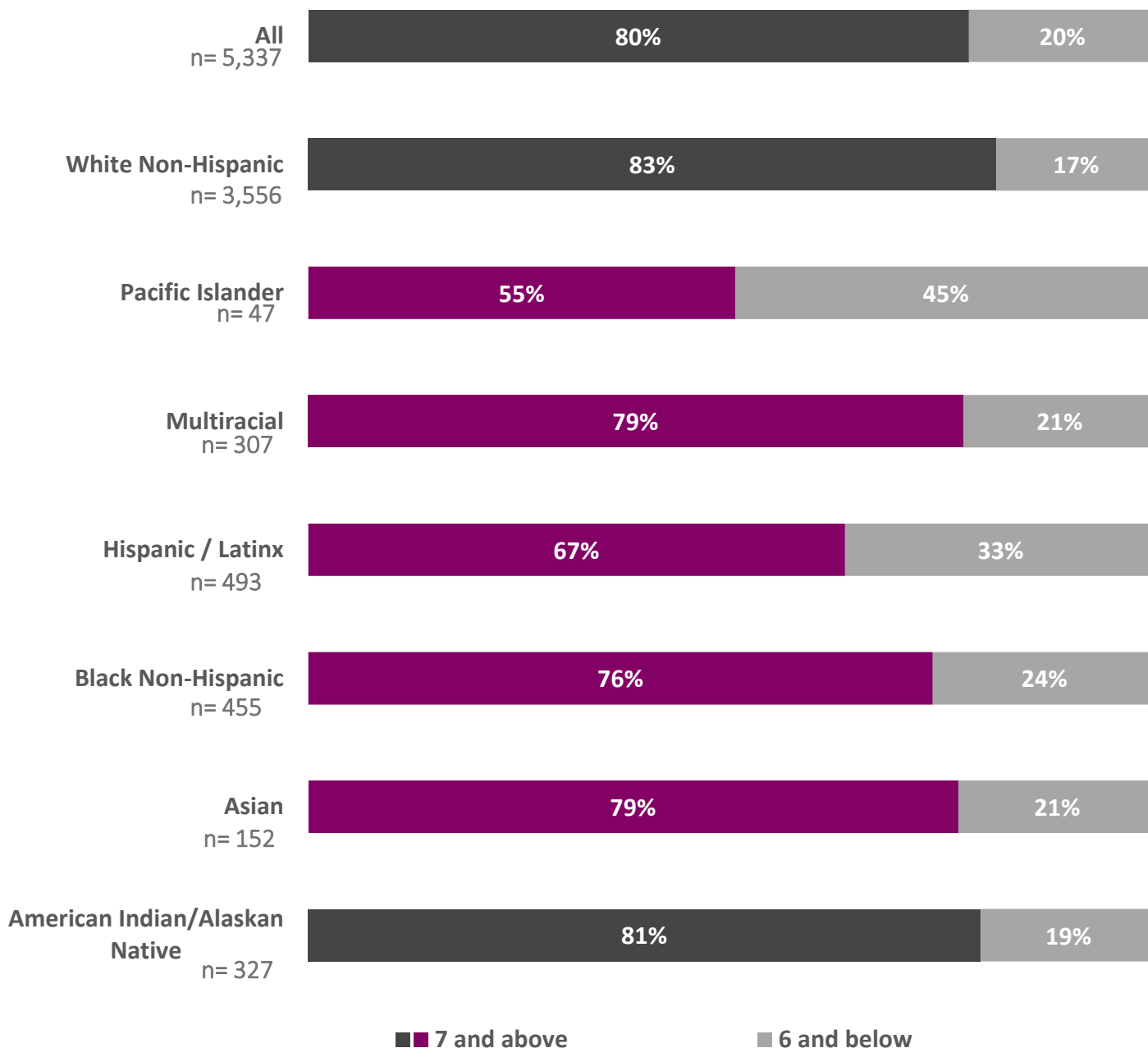
The target percentages were as follows: 94% for Cohort 1, 84% for Cohort 2, 85% for Cohort 3, and 86% for Cohort 4. Targets were not achieved for any of the Cohorts. The target for Cohort 1 was set based on the pre-2021 survey methodology, while Cohorts 2 and 3 had more realistic targets, informed by precise data. While there was no decline in performance from Cohort 3 to Cohort 4, the target for Cohort 4 was not achieved, indicating that there is still room for improvement.



Quality of Services: Indicator 8

Analysis by Race

How do the results vary across different racial categories? Responses below 80% in the individual race categories may indicate disparities. Despite the low number of respondents, it is important to explore and examine practices through an equity lens. The bars shown in purple indicate that **less than 80%** reported that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities.



Examining Racial Disparities

Survey results indicate disparities in experiences between families of color and White/non-Hispanic families. To address these inequities, it is crucial to examine the data closely and identify strategies to create more equitable and accessible experiences for all families. Local districts are encouraged to dialogue using a variety of questions to inform their planning efforts:



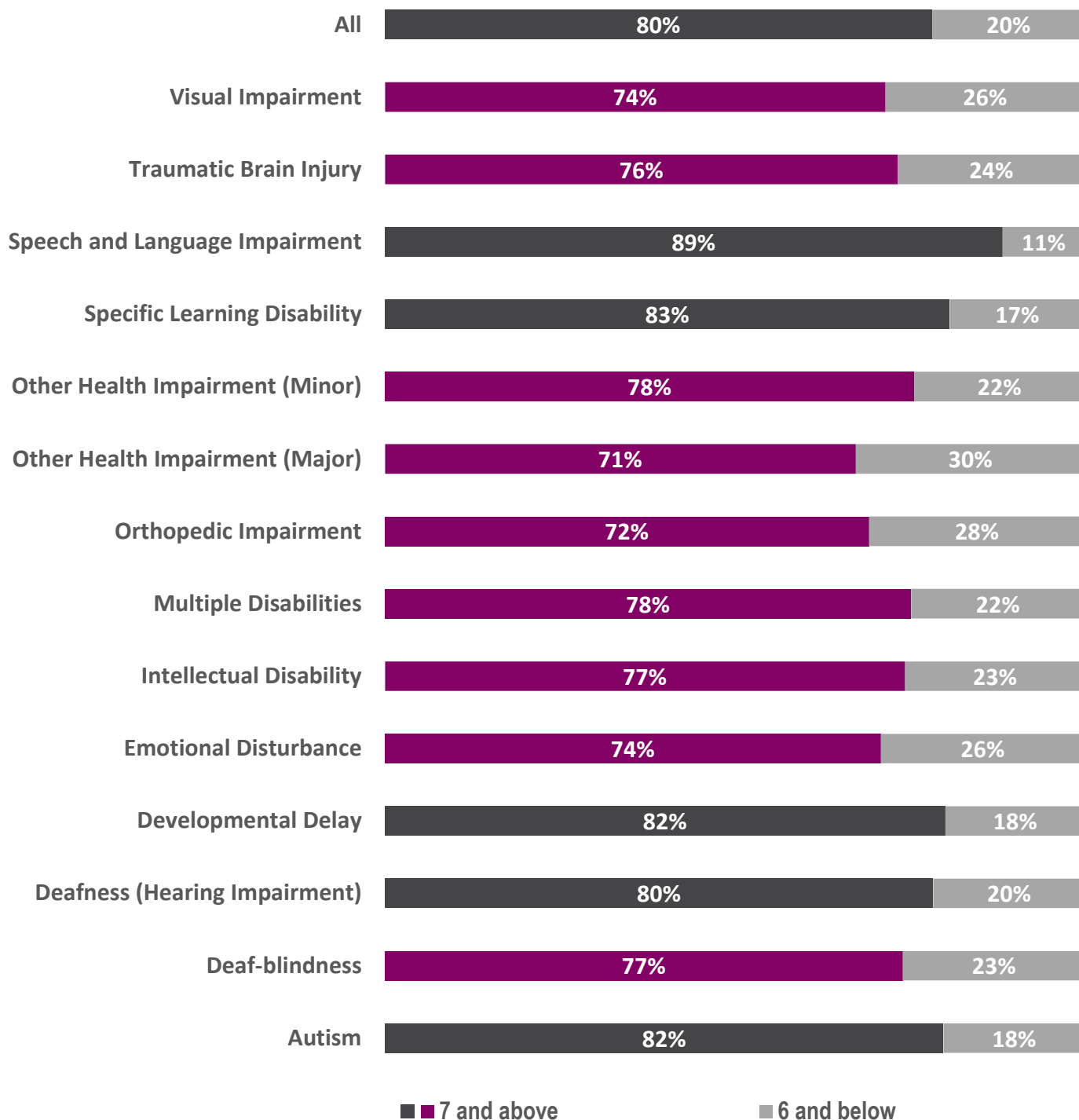
- What are your equity goals?
- Which racial groups are experiencing inequities?
- What additional data do you want to examine to understand the equity gaps better?
- How will you involve families with lived experience in your discussions?
- Do you notice any patterns?
- What are your hunches about what might be contributing to equity gaps¹?

¹McNair, T. B., Bensimon, E. M., & Malcom-Piqueux, L. E. (2020). *From Equity Talk to Equity Walk: Expanding Practitioner Knowledge for Racial Justice in Higher Education*. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass.

Quality of Services: Indicator 8

Analysis by Disability Categories

How do the results differ among various disability categories? When examining the results by disability category, notable variations emerge. The **purple bars indicate that fewer than 80%** of respondents rated the quality indicator question as **7 or higher**. Although the number of respondents in these categories might be quite small, it is valuable to investigate these differences in the data.



Reasons for Low Ratings on Family Involvement

A rating of 6 or below on the quality of services question, reflects respondents' disagreement that their child's school collaborated with them to enhance their student's educational accomplishments.

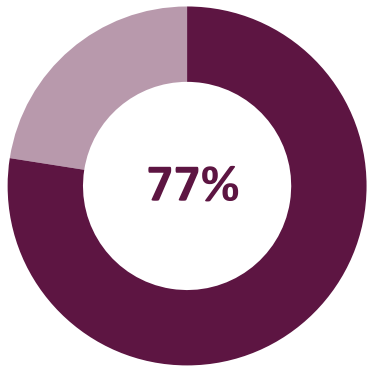
Respondents who answered 6 or below on the quality of services question were asked to provide the top three reasons for their rating.



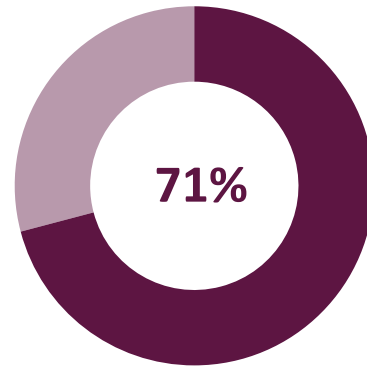
Reason	Number of Respondents
Difficulty with communicating with school personnel.	397
IEP does not represent best approach to support child.	391
IEP not being followed.	320
Special education process difficult and/or confusing.	310
School officials do not appear to know enough about my child's unique needs.	291
Do not feel supported by school.	250
IEP too hard to understand.	215

Results: Communication

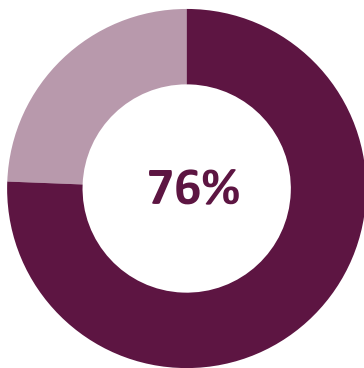
Respondents felt that people at their school communicated with them if there was something they needed to know about their child.



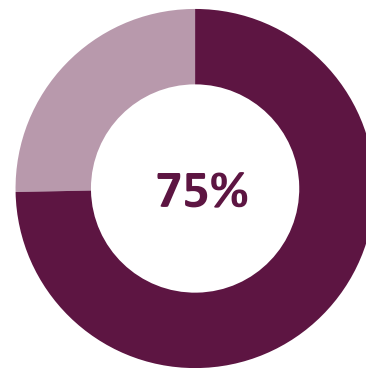
Respondents felt the amount of information received from their school was about right.



Respondents understood how the school is carrying out their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

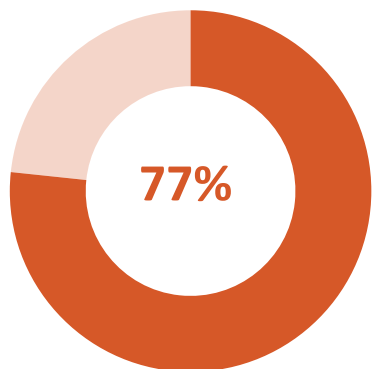


Respondents felt messages about their child's progress were easy to understand.

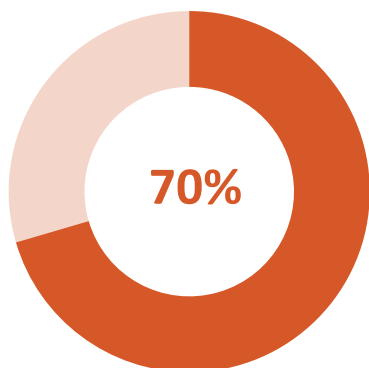


Results: School Climate

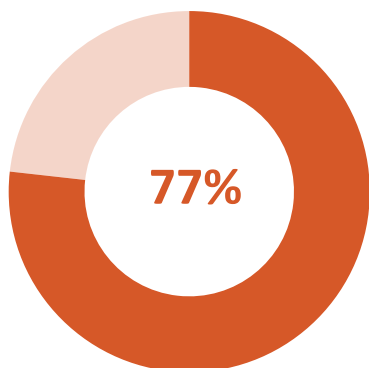
Respondents agreed that their school has been welcoming.



Respondents felt that their school makes children and families from all cultures feel welcome.

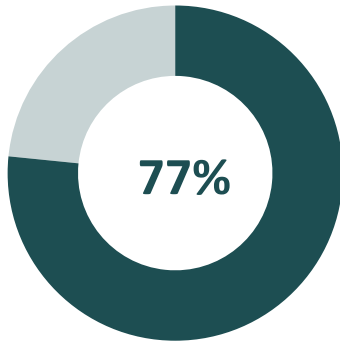


Respondents felt they were an equal team member responsible for their child's education.

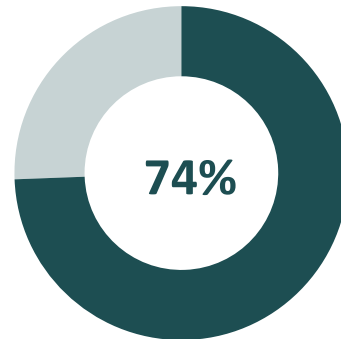


Results: Partnering with Schools

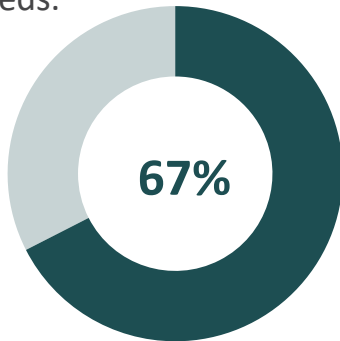
Respondents felt that the timing of school meetings about their child's education was convenient for them.



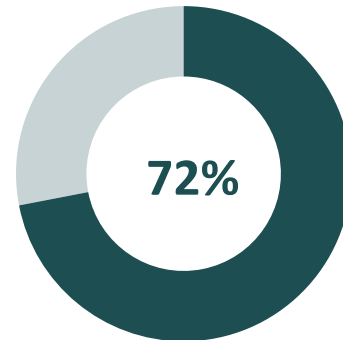
Respondents felt that if they had a problem with any part of their child's education, they could get the help they needed to solve it.



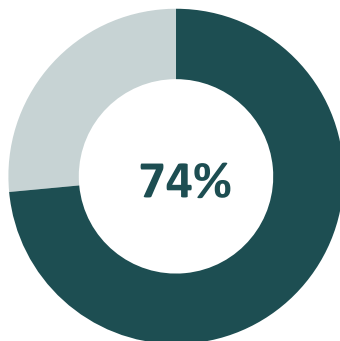
Respondents felt that their school viewed them as the expert on best meeting their child's needs.



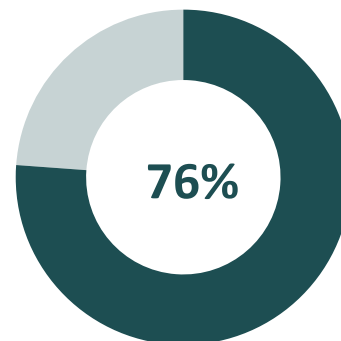
Respondents believed that their school followed through on what they said they would do.



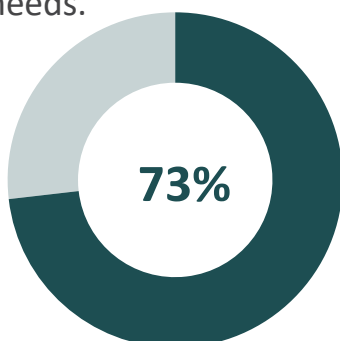
Respondents believed they were on the same page with the school about their child's behavioral needs.



Respondents felt that they understood all the parts of their child's IEP.

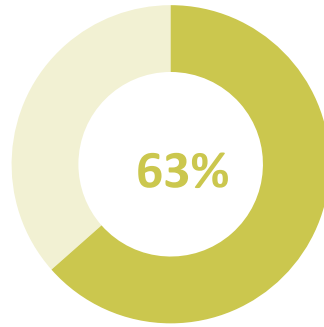


Respondents believed that they were on the same page with the school about their child's learning needs.

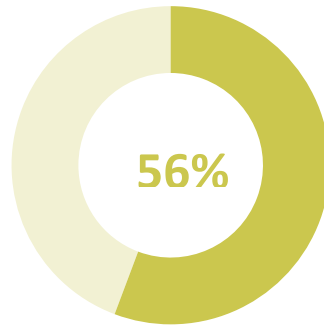


Results: Graduation Requirements

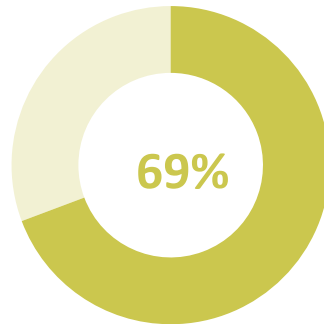
Respondents agreed that they understand Ohio's high school graduation requirements.



Respondents agreed that they understand the graduation options available to their child and recognize that these options differ from those for students without an IEP.



Respondents agreed that they understand their child can either continue to receive special education services until age 22 or fulfill the standard graduation requirements like any other student.



Recommendations

The Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (ODEW) is invested in increasing meaningful and effective parent-school partnerships. The current target is that 86% of parents/caregivers agree that schools facilitate productive parental involvement. This priority and survey data have significant implications for all school districts. Promoting practices and engaging in concerted efforts at the district/community school level to increase the number of parents who are part of authentic partnerships with schools is a worthy goal. The results presented in the preceding pages suggest several significant recommendations.

DATA COLLECTION EFFORTS

- Local school districts and community schools should continue collecting data from a diverse range of parents and caregivers of students with disabilities, with a particular focus on achieving greater racial diversity in representation. It is advisable for schools to explore various approaches to engage families from diverse backgrounds effectively.
- Improving the survey's accessibility to boost participation rates should be prioritized. A crucial first step would involve identifying the total number of families at each school with a child on an IEP. Employing a variety of distribution methods for the survey, along with regular reminders, has proven to enhance participation. Tapping into school resources, such as Parent Mentors and other staff members, to extend personalized invitations to families is another effective strategy. These recommendations may also positively impact meeting the representation threshold for disability categories.



A diverse mix of voices leads to better discussions, decisions, and outcomes for everyone.

Sundar Pichai, CEO of Alphabet Inc. and Google

ACTION PLANNING

- Although the findings indicate that 80% of parents and caregivers perceive schools as collaborating with them to enhance special education services and outcomes for their students, this figure falls short of the target set for the quality indicator. It is advisable for every school district or community school to conduct a more thorough analysis of their unique data to identify potential strategies in response to their results. To assist with this process, a Data Driven Protocol has been created for utilization by a team of individuals involved with special education or family engagement initiatives.
- Local schools and community schools will want to examine their individual results for the four different groups of questions (communication, school climate, partnering with schools, and graduation) to determine which areas are meeting their desired outcomes and where there are areas for improvement. Again, the Data Driven Protocol can be instrumental in formulating purposeful strategies for improvement.

Resources

The products and resources listed below may be useful in supporting local efforts to successfully expand authentic and meaningful parent engagement and collaboration with schools and address the recommendations detailed in this report.

- [The Data Driven Dialogue Protocol](#) was developed to frame district and community school discussions and action planning.
- [Office hours](#) are held by the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce for Ohio high school graduation requirements; parents or caregivers can email questions to gradrequirements@education.ohio.gov.
- [The Secondary Transitions Roadmap](#) is an interactive Ohio Department of Education and Workforce resource related to secondary transition.
- [Selected Ohio Department of Education and Workforce resources](#) that relate to families of students with disabilities.
- [Partnering with Families Through Special Education](#) is a research brief that includes seven research-based strategies for educators designed to enhance their special education partnerships with families.
- [The Ohio Department of Education and Workforce](#) resources provide a variety of resources regarding special education. Locating and requesting a parent mentor can be found at [Ohio Parent Mentor](#).
- [The Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities](#) provides support services to parents and families of children with a disability.
- A variety of tools and resources can be accessed on the [Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center's website](#).





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The Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 requires state education agencies and local school districts to provide various data and information to the US Department of Education related to parents' and caregivers' involvement in their students' education. The purpose of assembling and reporting this information is to both support and promote such involvement. There is strong support for the value of parent/caregiver involvement in enhancing educational outcomes for all students. The Ohio Department of Education and Workforce is committed to engaging parents and caregivers in the effort to promote education success for students in Ohio.

Questions?

Contact Us.

The Ohio State University
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[CETE Ohio Family Survey](#)

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