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2020-2021 Special Education Family Survey Statewide Report

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

Table of Contents

03	Executive Summary
06	Introduction
07	Methodology
08	Results: Response Rate and Demographics
12	Results: Quality of Services Indicator 8
14	Examining Racial Disparities
16	Results: Communication
17	Results: School Climate
18	Results: Partnership with Schools
19	Themes
20	Recommendations
21	Implications
23	Resources

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 requires state education agencies and local school districts to provide a variety of data and information to the US Department of Education. To address specific requirements, the Ohio Department of Education's (ODE), Office for Exceptional Children (OEC), conducts a survey referred to as the **Annual Special Education Family Survey**, designed to assist in understanding parents and caregivers' perceptions related to their involvement in their children's educations.

Data collected in 2021 capture the opinions of parents and caregivers representing approximately 300 Ohio school districts grouped in one of two Cohorts. While it is not appropriate to use these survey data to represent the opinions of all parents and caregivers of students with disabilities, these data constitute credible information related to the opinions and experiences of a large number of individuals and may be used along with other information to develop strategies to improve the responsiveness of local schools to the needs of students and their families.

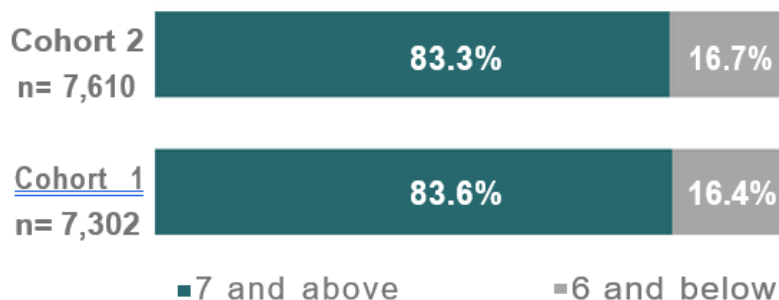
KEY FINDINGS

1. Many parents and caregivers participated and provided their opinions regarding key issues directly related to their partnerships with their local schools.

14,912 parents/caregivers (combined Cohorts 1 and 2)

2. A little over **83%** of Cohort 1 and 2 respondents indicated that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities. Targets, which were developed in collaboration with broad stakeholder input from virtual stakeholder groups, were 94% for Cohort 1 and 84% for Cohort 2. Parents or caregivers of Black and other children of color appeared to be slightly less likely to agree with this point of view.

81% Cohort 1 79% Cohort 2



3. Approximately (8) out of ten (10) respondents agreed that schools communicated with them when there was something they needed to know.
84% Cohort 1 83% Cohort 2
4. Nearly (9) out of ten (10) respondents agreed that their schools have been welcoming.
90% Cohort 1 86% Cohort 2
5. The percentage of respondents in various race and disability groups do not reflect the percentage of Ohio's enrolled students with disabilities.
11% respondents who identified as Black compared to 16.8% enrollment
6. Approximately seven (7) out of ten (10) survey respondents felt that their school makes children and families feel welcome, regardless of culture. About **20%** of respondents were not sure if their school made children and families feel welcome, regardless of culture. There were no remarkable differences in responses when the data was analyzed by race.
76% Cohort 1 73% Cohort 2
7. Approximately seven (7) out of ten (10) survey respondents felt that their school viewed them as the expert about how to best meet their child's needs.
72% Cohort 1 71% Cohort 2

The findings summarized along with themes expressed in responses to open-ended questions suggest several specific implications for educators. First, the local districts/community schools should strive to collect data from a broad range of parents or caregivers of students with disabilities. While results suggest that most parents and caregivers believe schools work with them to improve services and results for their students, parents and caregivers of students of color appear to be less certain about the degree to which they believe this to be true. Local districts/community schools should consider conducting additional forms of data collection, such as focus groups and/or group interviews to better understand the experiences of racially/culturally diverse families.

In addition, families reported experiencing the special education system as complex and difficult to understand and navigate. Thus, efforts should focus on understanding the barriers that families experience and developing and disseminating tools and strategies that address this complexity. Additionally, educators should seek to understand the communication needs of parents/caregivers and their students and use the results of this work to create specific strategies designed to meet the expressed communication needs.

Products and resources provided at the end of this report may be useful in supporting local efforts to successfully serve families and to address recommendations and other implications of survey findings. Specifically, **Partnering with Families Through Special Education** is a research brief that includes seven research-based strategies designed for educators regarding how to enhance partnerships with families through Special Education.

INTRODUCTION

The Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 requires state education agencies and local school districts to provide a variety of data and information to the US Department of Education. To address specific requirements, the Ohio Department of Education's (ODE) Office for Exceptional Children (OEC), conducts a survey referred to as the **Annual Special Education Family Survey**. This survey is designed to assist in understanding parents and caregivers' perceptions related to their involvement in their children's education as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities. This report provides a brief review of findings for parents and caregivers who participated in the survey in 2021.

Data collected in 2021 summarized the opinions of parents and caregivers' representing approximately 300 school districts and community schools in Ohio grouped into one of two Cohorts. All Ohio school districts and community schools were randomly assigned to one of six cohorts. Parents and caregivers of students in school districts in Cohort 1 were surveyed in the fall of 2021 while parents and caregivers of students in school districts in Cohort 2 were surveyed in the spring of 2021. Plans called for parents and caregivers in the remainder of districts and community schools to be surveyed in future administrations of the survey.

Available resources precluded implementation of surveys using probability samples. A probability sample would allow for the generalization of results to the broader population and the calculation of confidence levels associated with survey results. What this means is users of the survey data should proceed with caution. It is not appropriate to use these survey data to represent the opinions of all parents or caregivers of students with disabilities. However, these data do constitute credible information related to the opinions and experiences of a large number of parents and caregivers across the state. It is appropriate to use these data along with other information, to consider trends and to develop strategies to improve the responsiveness of local schools to the needs of students and their families.

METHODOLOGY

1. Accessibility

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

2. Communication

Emails were sent to superintendents and all Special Education Directors and other school district points of contact. Emails included an invitation to families to participate in survey.

3. Dissemination

Districts/Community Schools disseminated the invitation throughout the data collection period. Dissemination methods included websites, social media, emails, paper invitations, recorded messages, Google Docs, etc.

4. Culture Broker

Communication included a video from a culture broker to encourage Black families, in particular, to participate in the survey.

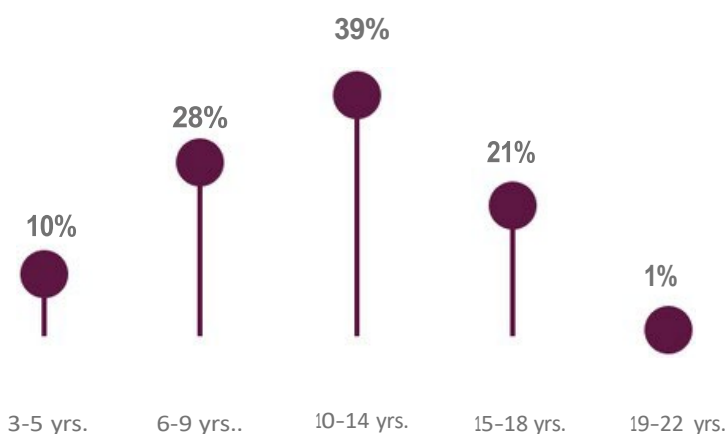
RESULTS: RESPONSE RATE AND DEMOGRAPHICS

	# Participating Districts/Community Schools	# <u>of</u> Responses
Cohort I	155	7,302
Cohort II	155	7,743

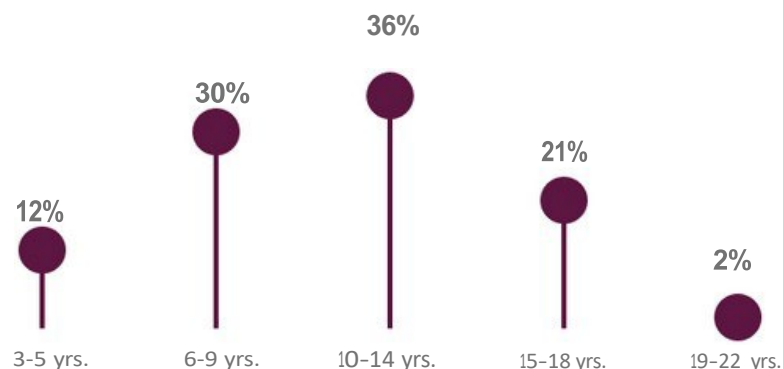
This table outlines information about the number of participating school districts/community schools for each Cohort as well as the total number of responses received. The final column indicates the number of responses included in the analysis for each Cohort. In some cases, responses were eliminated from analyses because respondents did not meet survey eligibility requirements. 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).

The charts below show the distribution of responses based on the age of the families' oldest child on an IEP.

Cohort I



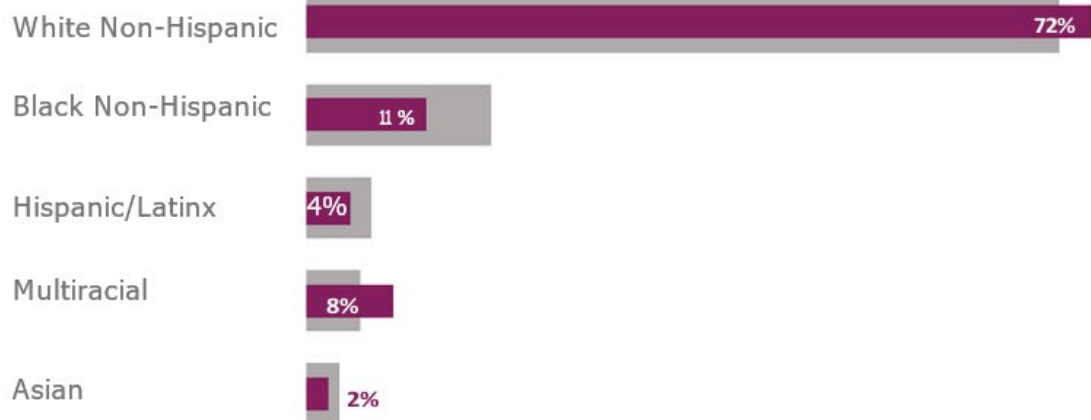
Cohort II



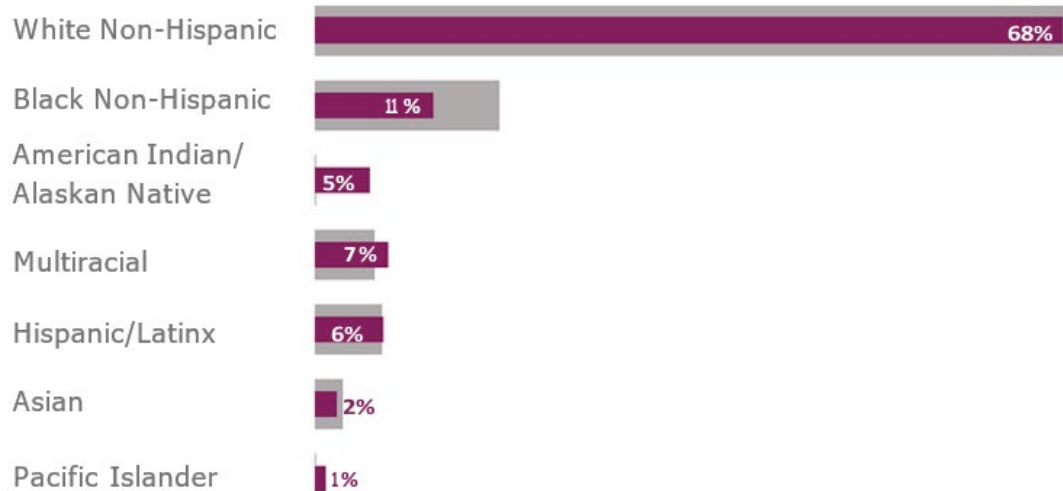
DEMOGRAPHICS: RACE CATEGORIES

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 graphs below indicate the percent of respondents of various races compared to the enrollment data for Ohio. The purple bars represent the percent of survey respondents by identified racial category. The grey bars indicate the percent of a particular race category enrolled in Ohio schools.

COHORT 1



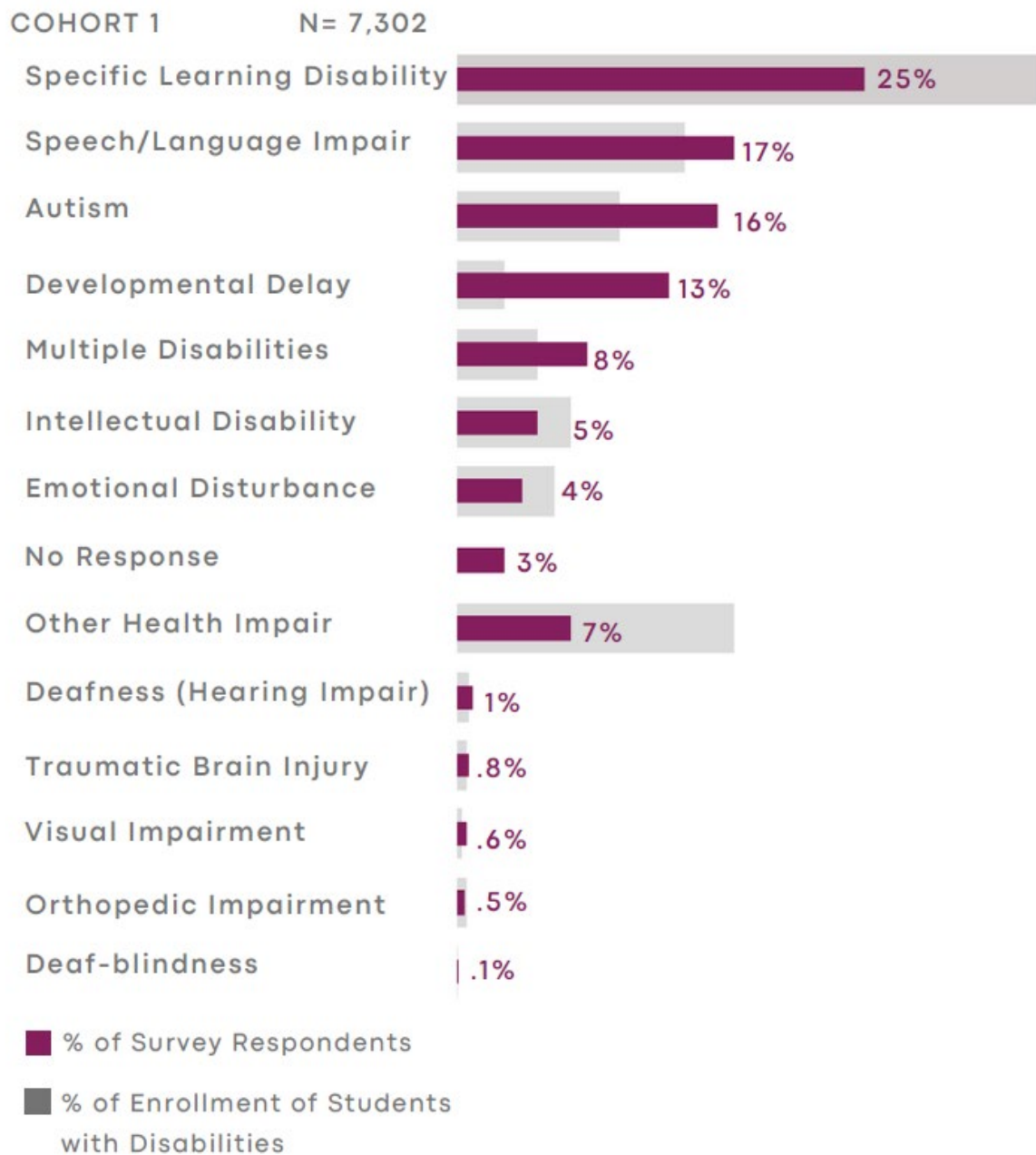
COHORT 2



■ % of Survey Respondents

■ % of Enrollment of Students with Disabilities

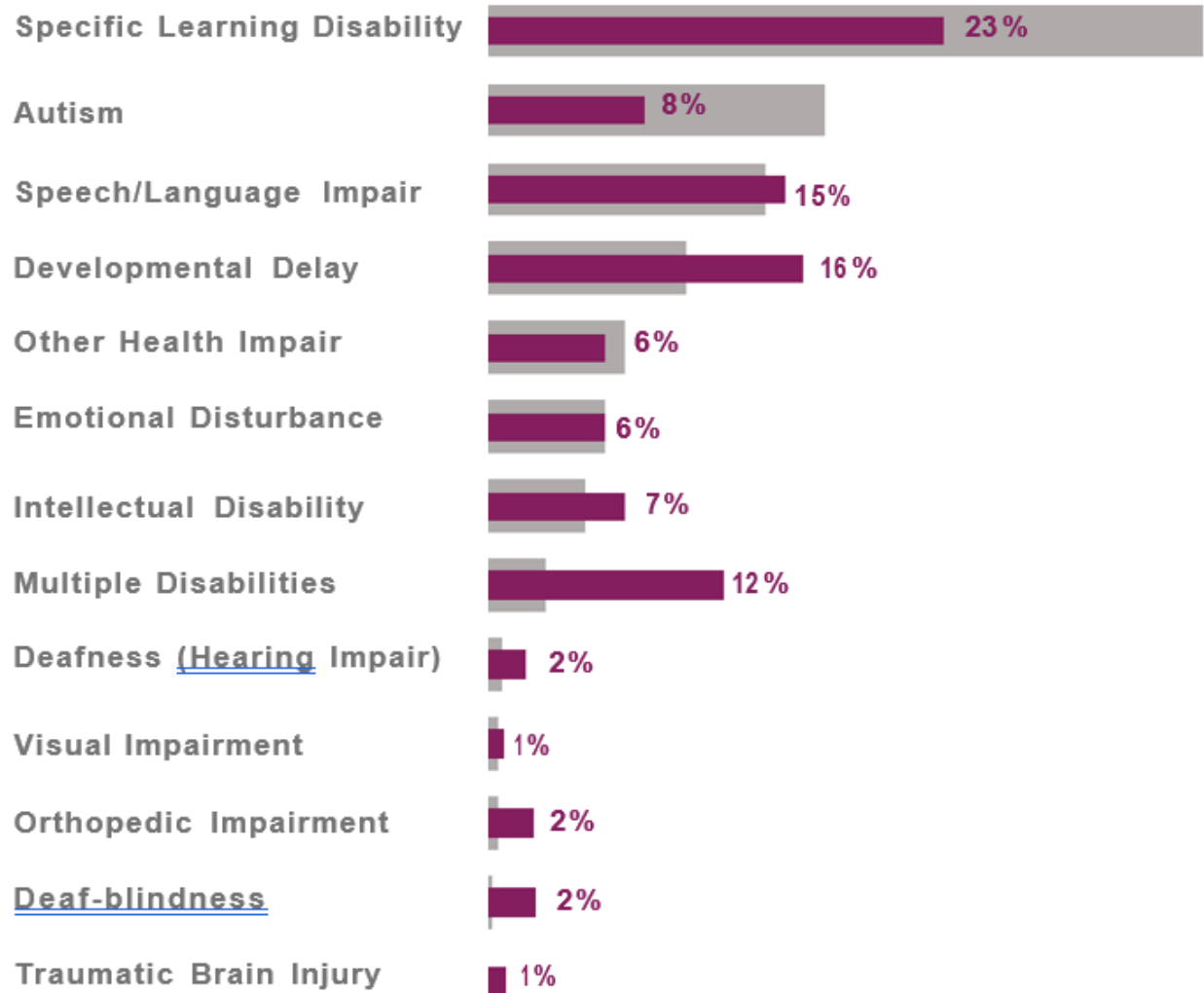
DEMOGRAPHICS: DISABILITY CATEGORIES



DEMOGRAPHICS: DISABILITY CATEGORIES

COHORT 2

N= 7,484



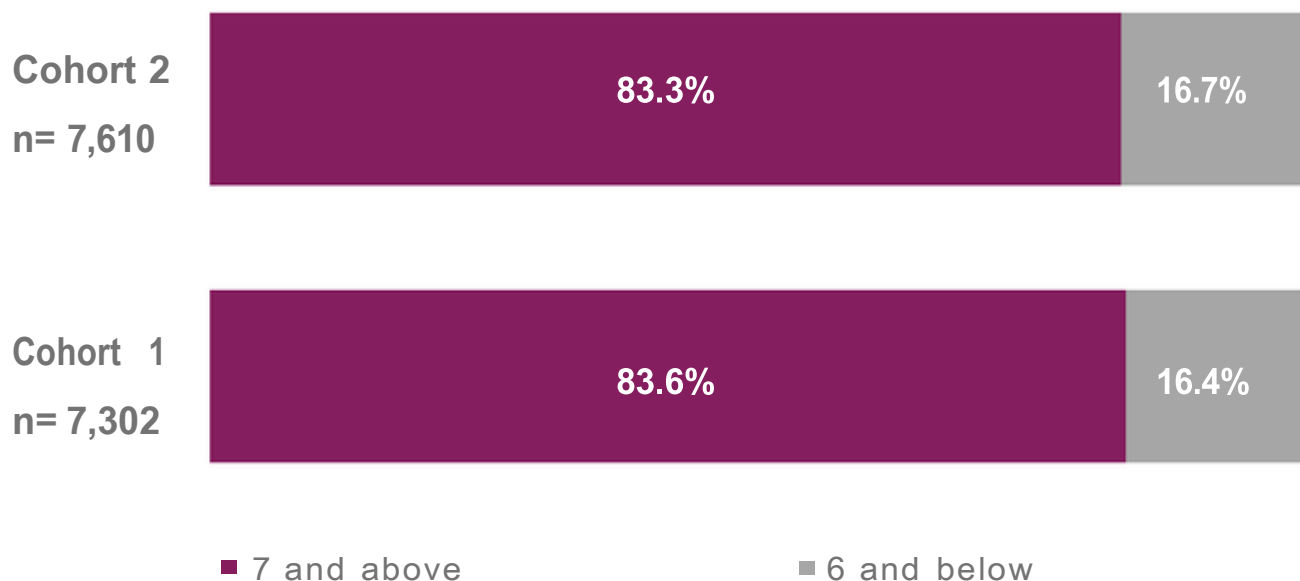
■ % of Survey Respondents

■ % of Enrollment of Students
with Disabilities

RESULTS: QUALITY OF SERVICES INDICATOR 8

The primary purpose of conducting the Annual Special Education Family Survey was to gain an understanding of the number of parents or caregivers who felt schools worked with them to promote their students' education achievement. This was assessed on a 10-point scale where a response of 7 or above was judged to indicate that a parent or caregiver felt that schools worked with them to improve services or results for their student.

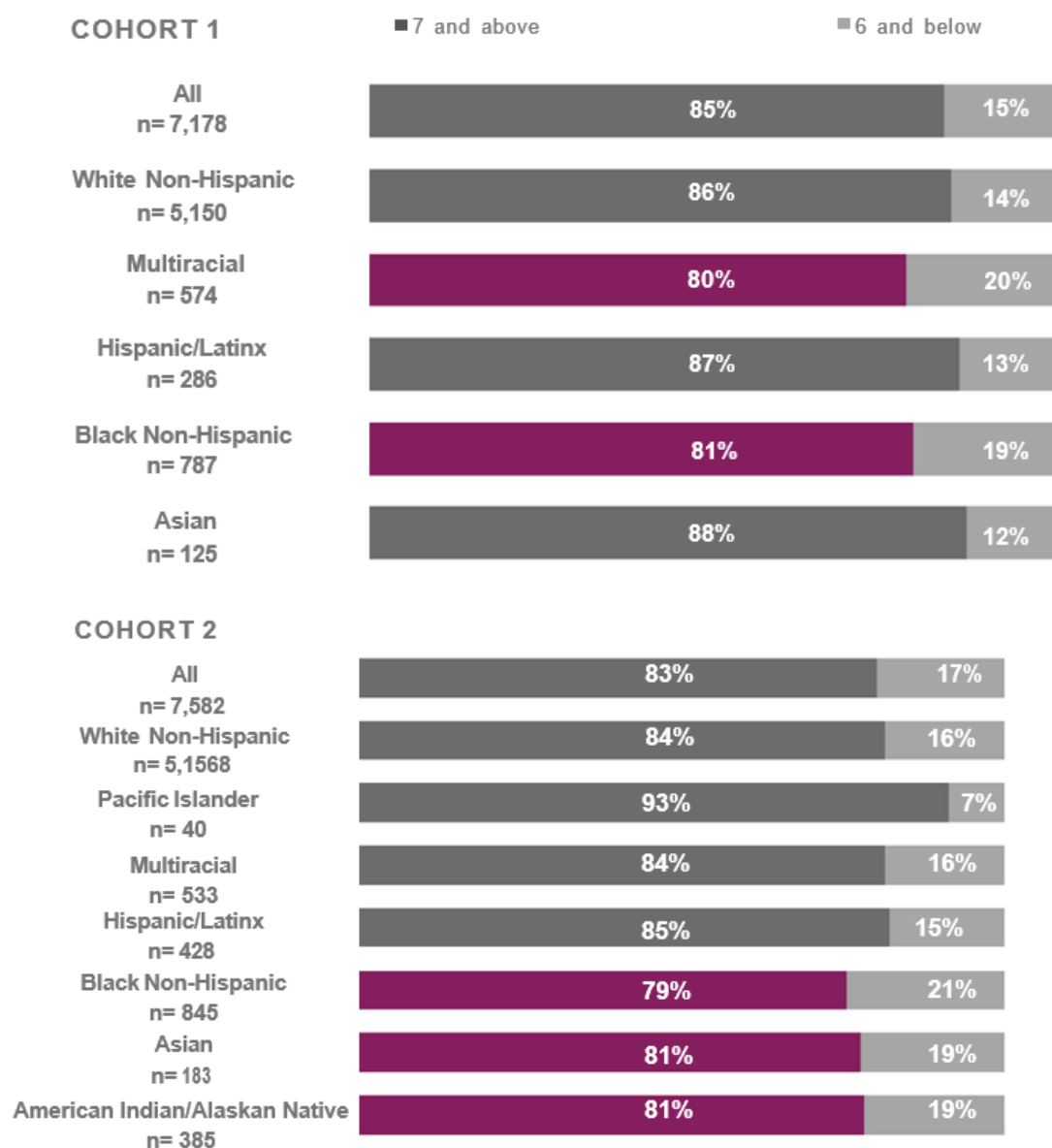
Responses for both Cohorts 1 and 2 indicate a little over 83% of all respondents reported that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities. The target for Cohort 1 was 94% and the target for Cohort 2 was 84%. The target for Cohort 1 reflected the survey methodology used prior to 2021. The target for Cohort 2 reflects access to more precise data and therefore is viewed as a more realistic goal.



RESULTS: QUALITY OF SERVICES INDICATOR 8

What do results look like when they are pulled apart by race?

Black, Asian, and American Indian/Alaskan Native families reported the lowest agreement with the question that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities when compared with other race categories.



EXAMINING RACIAL DISPARITIES

It is important to note that responses of families who are identified as minoritized are less favorable than those of white/non-Hispanic respondents. It is also important to consider inequities represented in the survey data and identify steps that can be taken to ensure more equitable and accessible experiences for families. Consider a few questions from the book **From Equity Walk to Equity Talk: Expanding Practitioner Knowledge for Racial Justice in Higher Education**.

Addressing the questions indicated below may be informative for local districts.

If they are present, what additional data do you want to collect to better understand the equity gaps? What are your equity goals?

What patterns do you notice? Which racial groups are experiencing inequities?

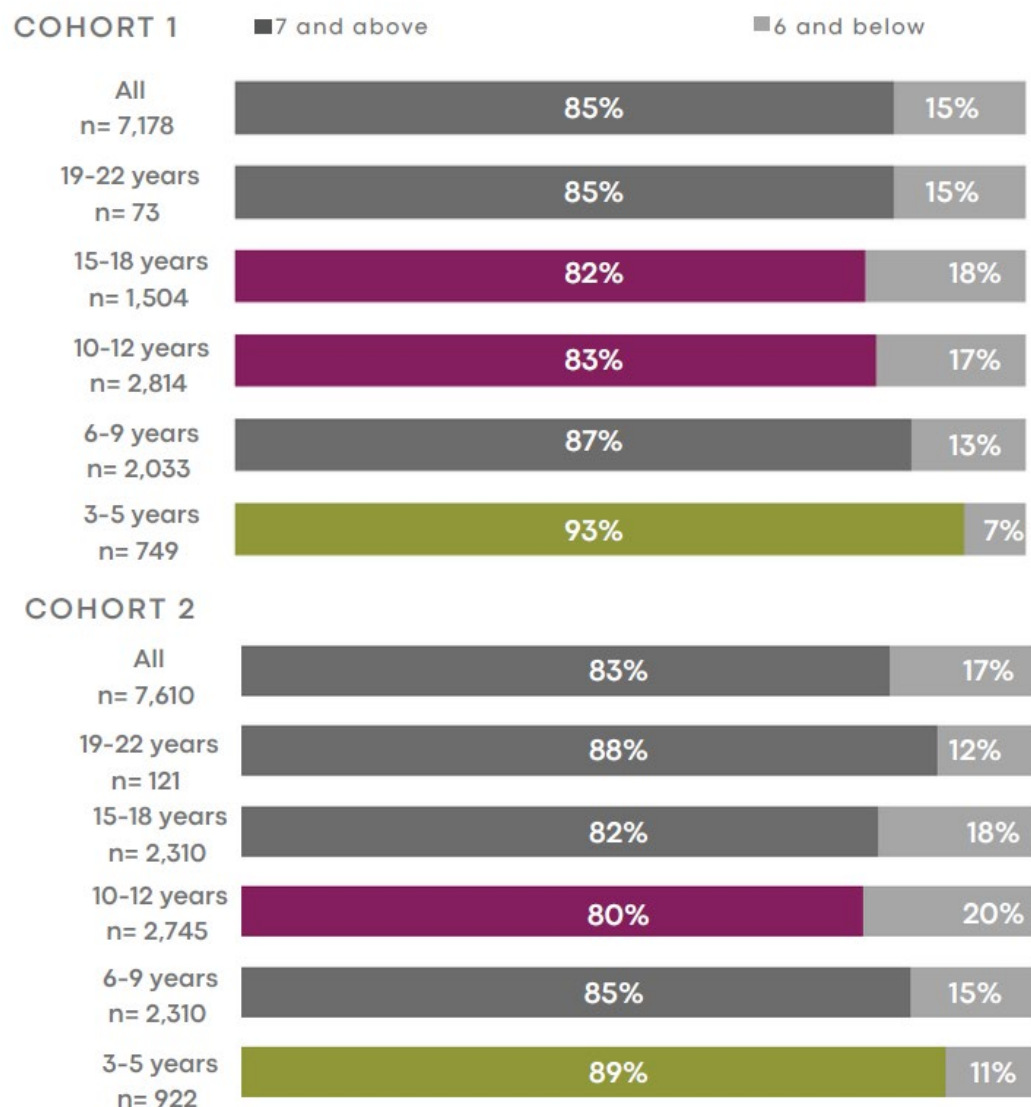
What are your hunches about what might be contributing to your equity gaps?

How do you get the number of responses by racial and disability categories to reflect the student enrollment in Ohio?

RESULTS: QUALITY OF SERVICES INDICATOR 8

What do results look like when they are pulled apart by age?

Families with children ages 3-5 showed the highest agreement with the question that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities when compared with the other categories while families with children ages 10-14 and 15-18 reported the lowest agreement.



RESULTS: COMMUNICATION

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

84%

Cohort 1

83%

Cohort 2

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

81%

Cohort 1

77%

Cohort 2

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

83%

Cohort 1

81%

Cohort 2

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

84%

Cohort 1

81%

Cohort 2

RESULTS: SCHOOL CLIMATE

Respondents agreed that their school has been welcoming.

90%

Cohort 1

86%

Cohort 2

Respondents felt that their school makes children and families feel welcome, regardless of culture.

76%

Cohort 1

73%

Cohort 2

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

88%

Cohort 1

85%

Cohort 2

RESULTS:

PARTNERING WITH SCHOOLS

Respondents felt that school meetings about their child's education were scheduled at times that were easy for them.

88%	85%
Cohort 1	Cohort 2

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

80%	77%
Cohort 1	Cohort 2

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.

82%	78%
Cohort 1	Cohort 2

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

87%	84%
Cohort 1	Cohort 2

Respondents felt that their school viewed them as the expert about how to best meet their child's needs.

72%	71%
Cohort 1	Cohort 2

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

84%	81%
Cohort 1	Cohort 2

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

82%	79%
Cohort 1	Cohort 2

THEMES RELATED TO QUALITY OF SERVICES

The survey provided the opportunity for respondents to explain why they answered questions on the survey the way they did. Several themes emerged from the analysis of these survey responses for Cohorts 1 and 2.

Theme 1

Communications between schools and parents/caregivers are a critical element in promoting school- parent/caregiver partnerships.

Theme 2

The system for addressing the needs of students with disabilities is highly complex and, at least in some instances, misunderstood by parents and caregivers.

Theme 3

Some parents/caregivers feel unsupported in efforts to address the needs of their students with disabilities.

Theme 4

COVID and the resulting pandemic had a profound impact on parents/caregivers and their students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings summarized above along with themes expressed in responses to open-ended questions suggest several specific implications. First, local school districts/community schools should continue the effort to collect data from a broad range of parents and caregivers of students with disabilities. In addition, efforts should be directed to increasing access to the survey, thus promoting wider participation. While results suggest that most parents and caregivers believe schools work with them to improve special education services and results for their students, parents, and caregivers of students of color appear to be less certain about the degree to which they believe this to be true. Local school districts/community schools should consider conducting additional forms of data collection, such as focus groups and/or group interviews to better understand the experiences of racially/culturally diverse families as a critical component of the **Annual Special Education Family Survey**. Two points deserve special attention relative to family communication.

Address Complexity

The system designed to address the needs of students with disabilities is highly complex and difficult to navigate. Efforts should focus on understanding the barriers that families experience to assist in the development and dissemination of tools and strategies that address this complexity.

Address Communication

Educators should seek to understand the communication needs of parents, caregivers, and their students and use the results of this work to create specific strategies designed to meet the expressed communication needs of parents, caregivers, and their students.

IMPLICATIONS FOR OHIO SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Indicator 8 refers to the percentage of parents with a child receiving special education services who report that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving educational success and other relevant outcomes for their students. This is important because there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that the degree to which parents or caregivers are truly involved and feel like they are part of meaningful partnerships with their students' schools predicts children's future success. As is apparent, Ohio is engaged in a significant effort to collect a variety of data related to Indicator 8. Currently, these data suggest that many parents/caregivers believe they are engaged in meaningful partnerships with their students' schools. However, data also suggest that this is not the case for all parents/caregivers. That is, some parents/caregivers do not agree that they are part of meaningful and productive partnerships with their students' schools.

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) is keenly interested in increasing meaningful and effective parent-school partnerships. The current target is that 84% of parents/caregivers agree that schools facilitate productive parental involvement. This goal and Indicator 8 data have significant implications for all school districts. Promoting practices and engaging in concerted efforts at the district level to increase the number of parents who are part of authentic partnerships with schools is a worthy goal.

The typical approach to addressing an issue such as this takes the form of implementation of a structured process designed to promote parental involvement. There are well developed procedures for engaging in such a process.

1. **Define the issue to be addressed**
2. **Consider alternatives for addressing the issue**
3. **Select a solution(s) to address the identified issue**
4. **Implement the intervention**
5. **Evaluate the degree to which the intervention was successful in achieving stated objectives**

Many Ohio school districts employ experienced professionals who are well-versed in such procedures. ODE can also refer districts to local, state and national resources that can support such efforts. Resources to support these activities are summarized on the next page of this report.

Interpretation of Indicator 8 data provides a basis for making judgements about the extent to which parents/caregivers believe they are part of authentic relationships with their students' schools. Opportunities to intervene to increase the number of parents/caregivers who agree with this sentiment are available to school districts across Ohio. Considering opportunities for improvement and identifying strategies that will assist improvement are critically important and may ultimately serve to support parents/caregivers and their students across Ohio.

RESOURCES

The products and resources listed below may be useful in supporting local efforts to successfully serve families and address recommendations and other implications of survey findings.

A variety of tools and resources can be accessed at the Family Engagement Center's website.

Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center

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.

Partnering with Families through Special Education

Video of Ohio professionals providing overviews of every major stage of the special education evaluation process.

Special Education Evaluation Process

Selected Ohio Department of Education resources related to families of students with disabilities.

Special Education Topics through Ohio Department of Education

Other available resources including locating and requesting a Parent Mentor and navigating the special education process.

Ohio Parent Mentor Project

The Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities (OCECD)

Special Education: Ohio Department of Education

The Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 requires state education agencies and local school districts to provide a variety of data and information to the US Department of Education related to parents and caregivers' involvement in their students' educations. 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 as a means to enhance educational outcomes for all students. The Ohio Department of Education is committed to engaging parents and caregivers in the effort to promote education success for students in Ohio.

QUESTIONS? CONTACT US.

MATTEW LOESCH

EDUCATION PROGRAM SPECIALIST
OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

CETE OHIO FAMILY SURVEY

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
CENTER ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR EMPLOYMENT

