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# Special Education Family Survey

**2021-2022  
Statewide Report**

September 2023

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Evaluation Team at The Ohio State University Center  
on Education and Training for Employment

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# Executive Summary

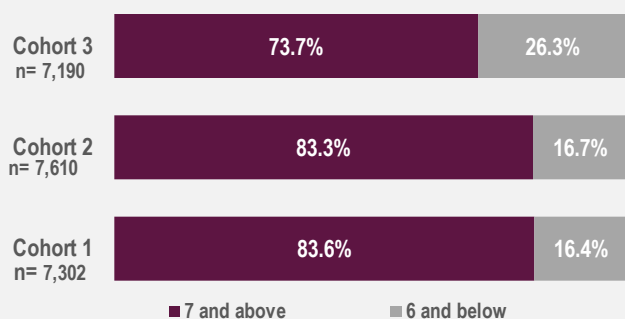
The Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 requires state education agencies and local school districts to provide a variety of data and information to the US Department of Education. To address specific requirements, the Ohio Department of Education's (ODE), Office for Exceptional Children (OEC)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

Data collected in 2022 capture the opinions of parents and caregivers representing 156 Ohio school districts and community schools. 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

- **7,190 parents and caregivers** provided their perspectives regarding key issues directly related to their partnerships with their local schools.
- The percentage of respondents in various race groups met the representation threshold with **15% respondents** who identified as Black compared to 16.8% statewide enrollment for Black students. This is the first year since the new survey was launched to meet this goal.
- There were certain instances of underrepresentation among students with different disability categories. Notably, **21% of respondents** identified their child as having a Specific Learning Disability, whereas the statewide enrollment for this category stands at 36%.
- **Nearly 74% of all respondents** indicated that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities. The percent of respondents rating this question a 7 and above is lower than the previous two cohorts.
- Approximately half of respondents (**49%**) who identified their child as Black held the view that schools actively encouraged parental participation to enhance services and outcomes for children with disabilities. However, three-quarters of parents/caregivers (**78%**) of those who identified their child as White agreed with the statement.
- The survey participants expressed generally favorable opinions regarding their communication experiences with their schools. Between **72% to 78% of respondents**, either **strongly agreed or agreed** with the statements related to communication. Unless responses are in 100% agreement, there is always room for improvement.
- **79% of** respondents expressed a positive perception of their school's welcoming atmosphere. However, when it came to the inclusivity of all cultures and the sense of parents/caregivers being actively involved in their child's educational journey, the level of agreement dropped to **71%**
- In general, survey participants were favorable (**75% to 80%**) 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.
- One aspect that could be explored is the level of parental/caregiver understanding of graduation prerequisites and the various choices accessible to students with disabilities. **Between 51% and 68%** of participants expressed agreement with the three questions concerning graduation.

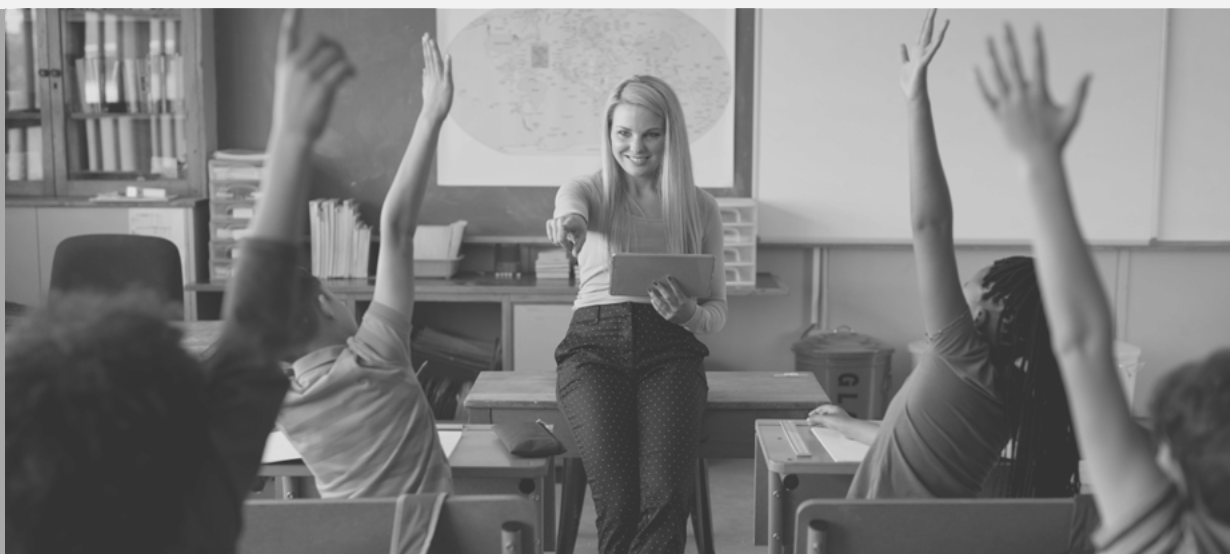


# What is the Annual Special Education Family Survey?

As a requirement of The Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004, state education agencies and local school districts 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 2022.

Data collected summarized the opinions of parents and caregivers representing 156 school districts and community schools in Ohio. All of Ohio's school districts and community schools were randomly assigned to one of six cohorts. Schools assigned to Cohort 3 administered surveys in the spring of 2022. Plans called for parents and caregivers in the remainder of districts and community schools to be surveyed in future administrations of the survey.

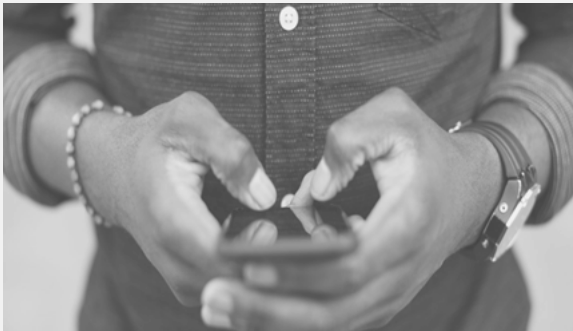
Probability samples were not used for the purpose of collecting data from the Cohort 3 schools. A probability sample would allow for the generalization of results to the broader population and the calculation of confidence levels associated with survey results. What this means is consumers of the survey 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 many 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.



# How is data collected?

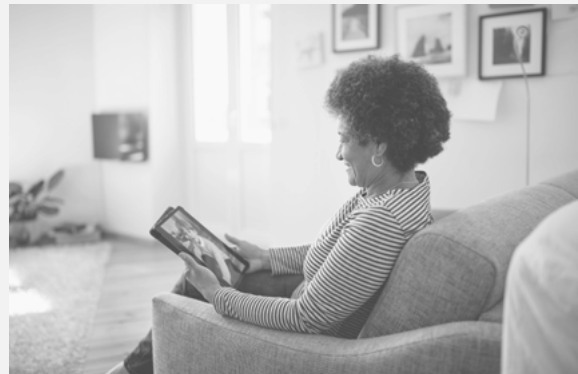
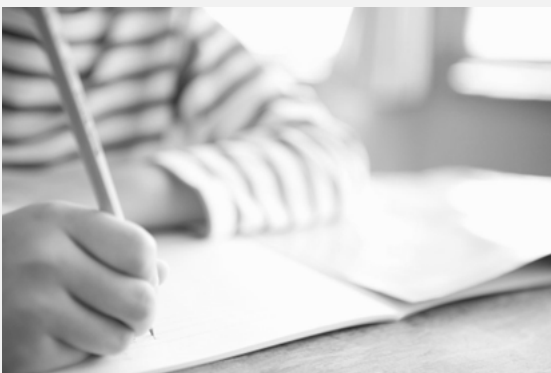
The survey collection period was from March 8 through May 6, 2022.

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



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 the survey.

Districts/Community Schools sent invitations to families through a variety of methods which included websites, social media, emails, paper invitations, recorded messages, Google Docs, etc.



To increase participation from families who are Black, the research team implemented a cultural broker strategy. Districts and Community Schools were encouraged to include a video from a culture broker to decrease the likelihood of underrepresentation.

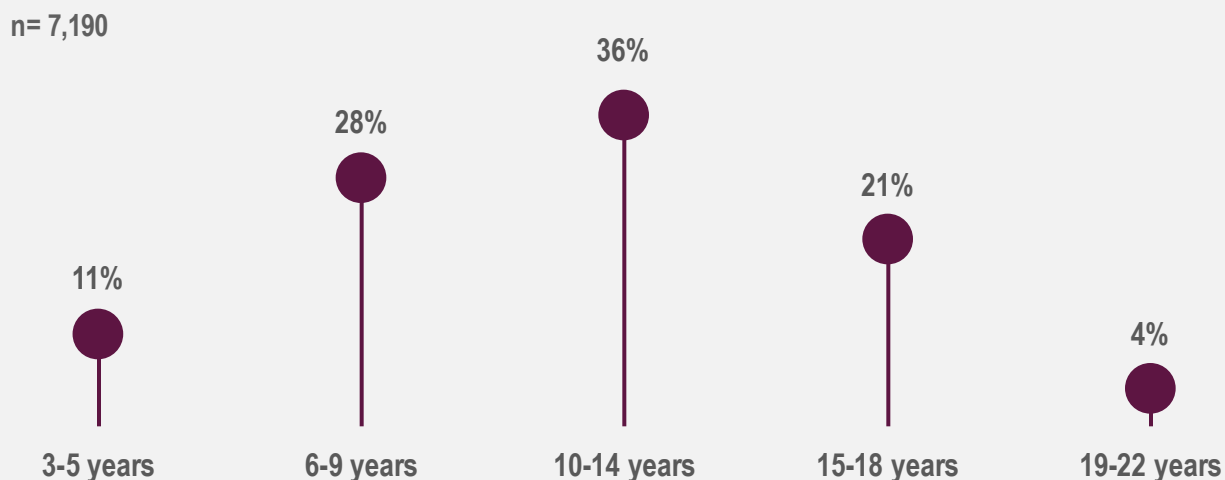
# Response Rate and Demographics

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
# of participating Districts/Community Schools	155	155	156
# of responses included in the analysis	7,302	7,743	7,190

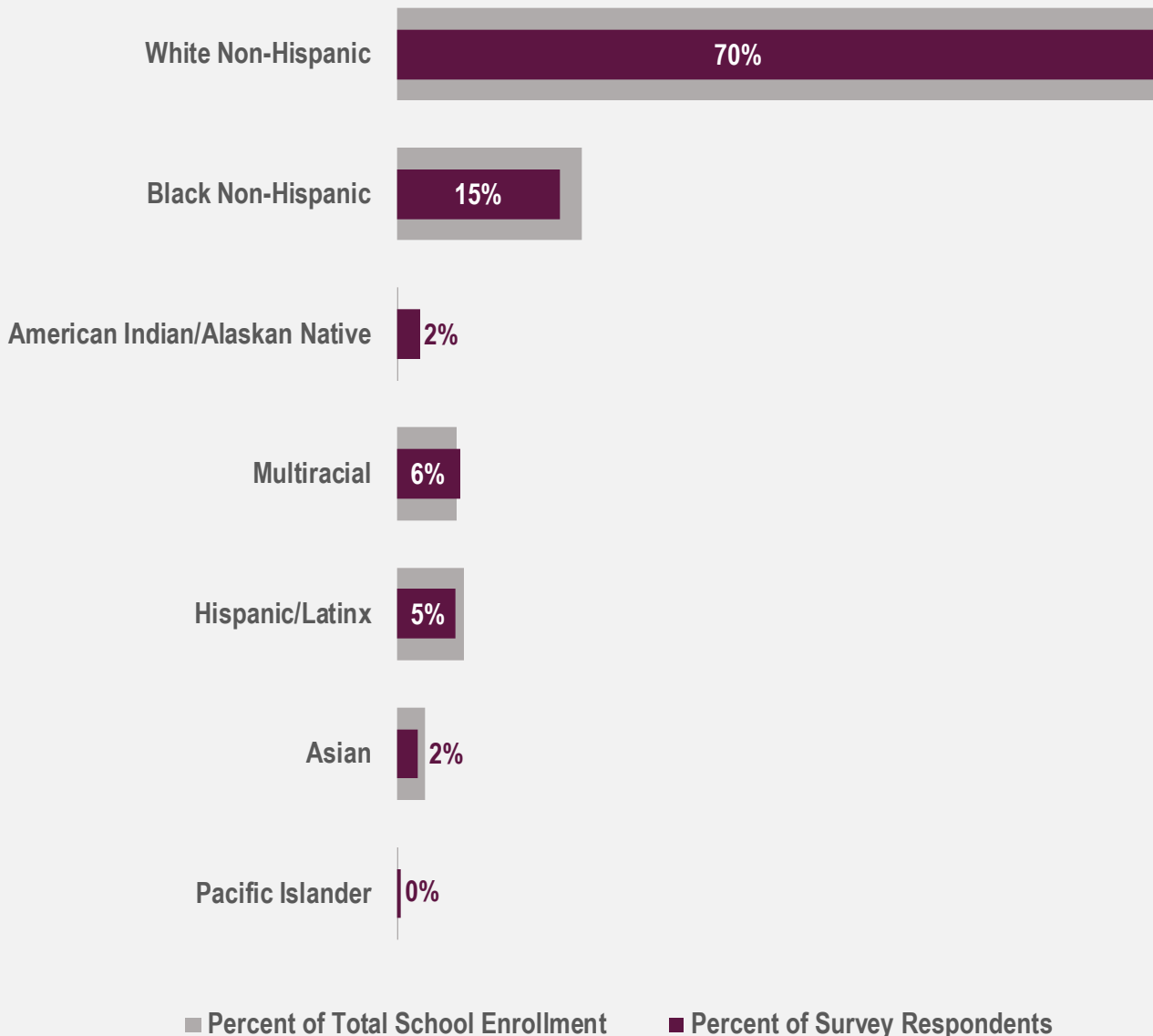
The chart below shows the distribution of responses based on the age of the families' oldest child with an IEP.

The highest response rate came from families who had a child **ages 10-14** followed by families who had a child **ages 6-9**. **More than 60%** of the responses were from families who had a child in elementary and middle school.



# Demographics: Race Categories

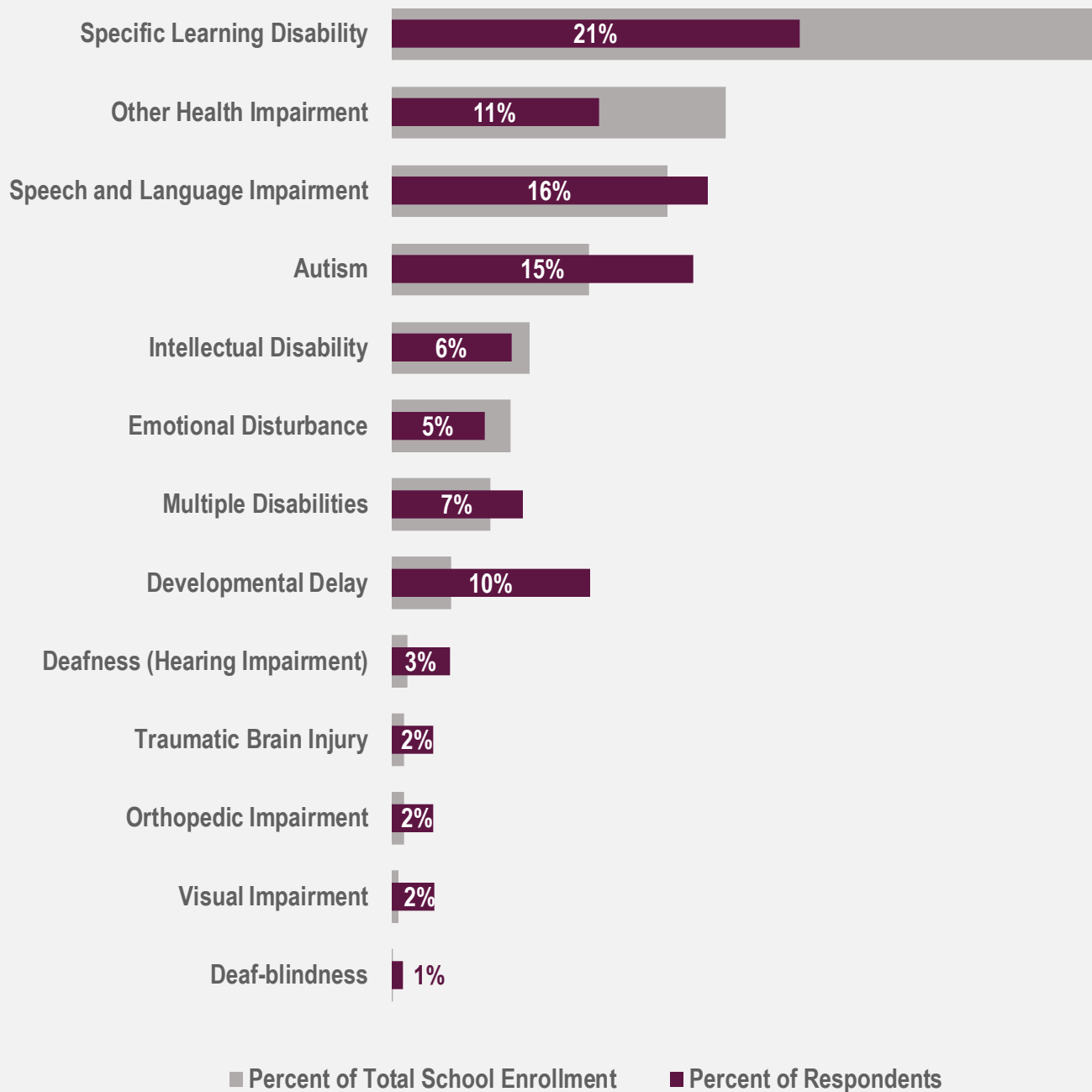
One survey goal was to have a respondent population whose race and disability type reflect the current enrollment data for students with disabilities in Ohio. The graphs on this page and the next page indicate the percentage of respondents of various races and disability categories compared to the enrollment data for Ohio. The purple bars represent the percentage of survey respondents by identified race categories. The gray bars indicate the percentage of a particular race category enrolled in Ohio schools. This is the first year the representation threshold has been met. As mentioned previously, the usage of a culture broker video may have contributed to meeting this threshold.





# Demographics: Disability Categories

This graph is like the graph on the previous page with the purple bars indicating the percentage of respondents with a child in a specific disability category. There is over-representation in some areas, including speech/language impairment, developmental delay, autism, and multiple disabilities, among others. There is also under-representation in categories, including specific learning disability and other health impairments.



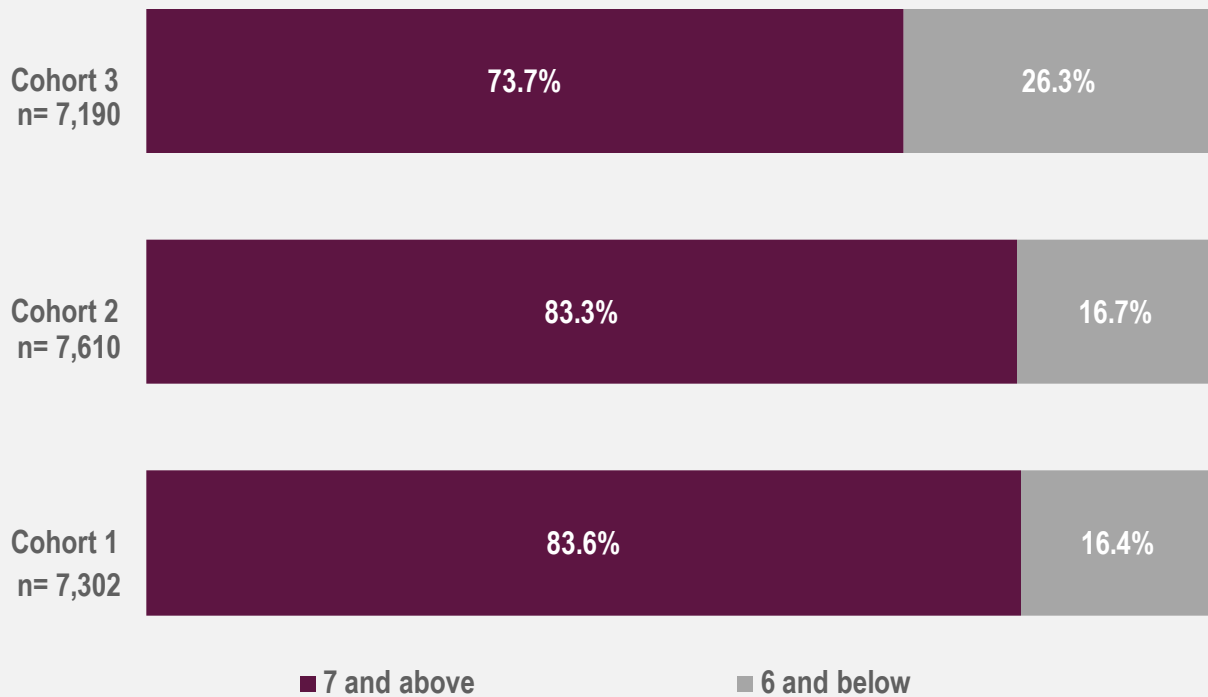
# Quality of Services: Indicator 8

The primary aim of conducting the **Annual Special Education Family Survey** was to ascertain the extent to which parents/caregivers felt that schools collaborated with them to enhance their students' educational accomplishments. This evaluation was based on a 10-point scale, with a rating of 7 or higher signifying that parents or caregivers perceived the schools' efforts to enhance services or outcomes for their students.

Responses for Cohort 3 indicate **nearly 74% 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 for Cohort 1 was 94%, the target for Cohort 2 was 84%, and the target for Cohort 3 was 85%. The target for Cohort 1 reflected the survey methodology used prior to 2021. The targets for Cohort 2 and 3 reflect access to more precise data and therefore are viewed as more realistic goals.

**Question: Taking all things into account, do you believe your child's school works with you to best meet your child's needs? Please respond on a scale of 1-10, 1 means "not at all" and 10 means "a great deal."**

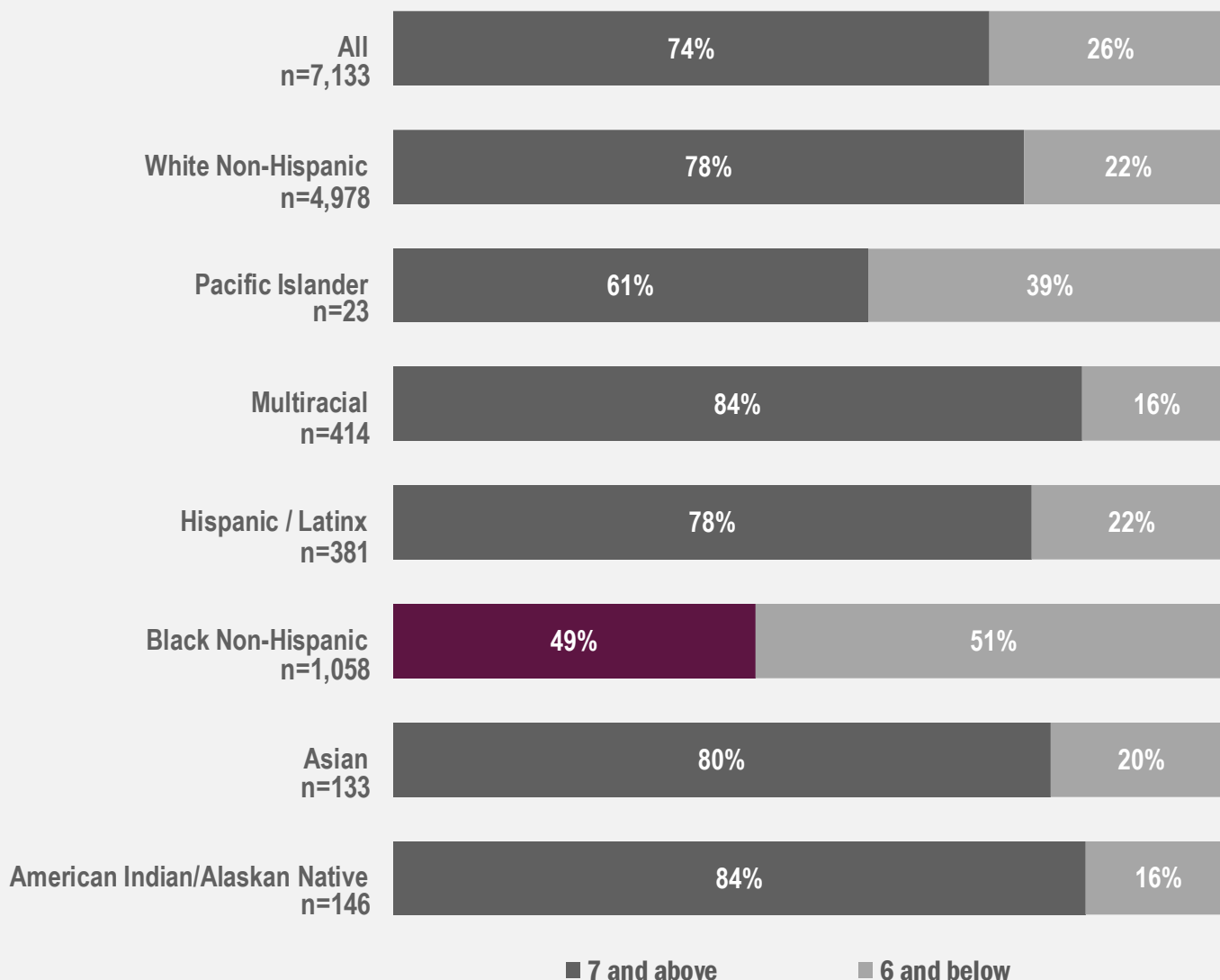


# Quality of Services: Indicator 8

## Broken out by race

The results exhibited notable disparities when examined through the lens of racial demographics. Roughly **half of the respondents (518 out of 1,058)** who identified their **child's race as Black agreed** with the notion that schools facilitate parental involvement to improve services and results for children with disabilities. This stands in contrast to the other race categories. Similarly, 61% of those who identified their child as Pacific Islander expressed agreement with the statement. However, it's important to note that the number of respondents in this category was limited, with 14 out of 23 indicating their agreement with the statement.

What do the results look like when separated by race categories?



# Examining Racial Disparities

It is important to note that the responses of families of color 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.

What are your equity goals?

If they are present, what additional data do you want to examine to better understand the equity gaps? If they are not present, what additional data might you collect to better understand disparities?

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

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

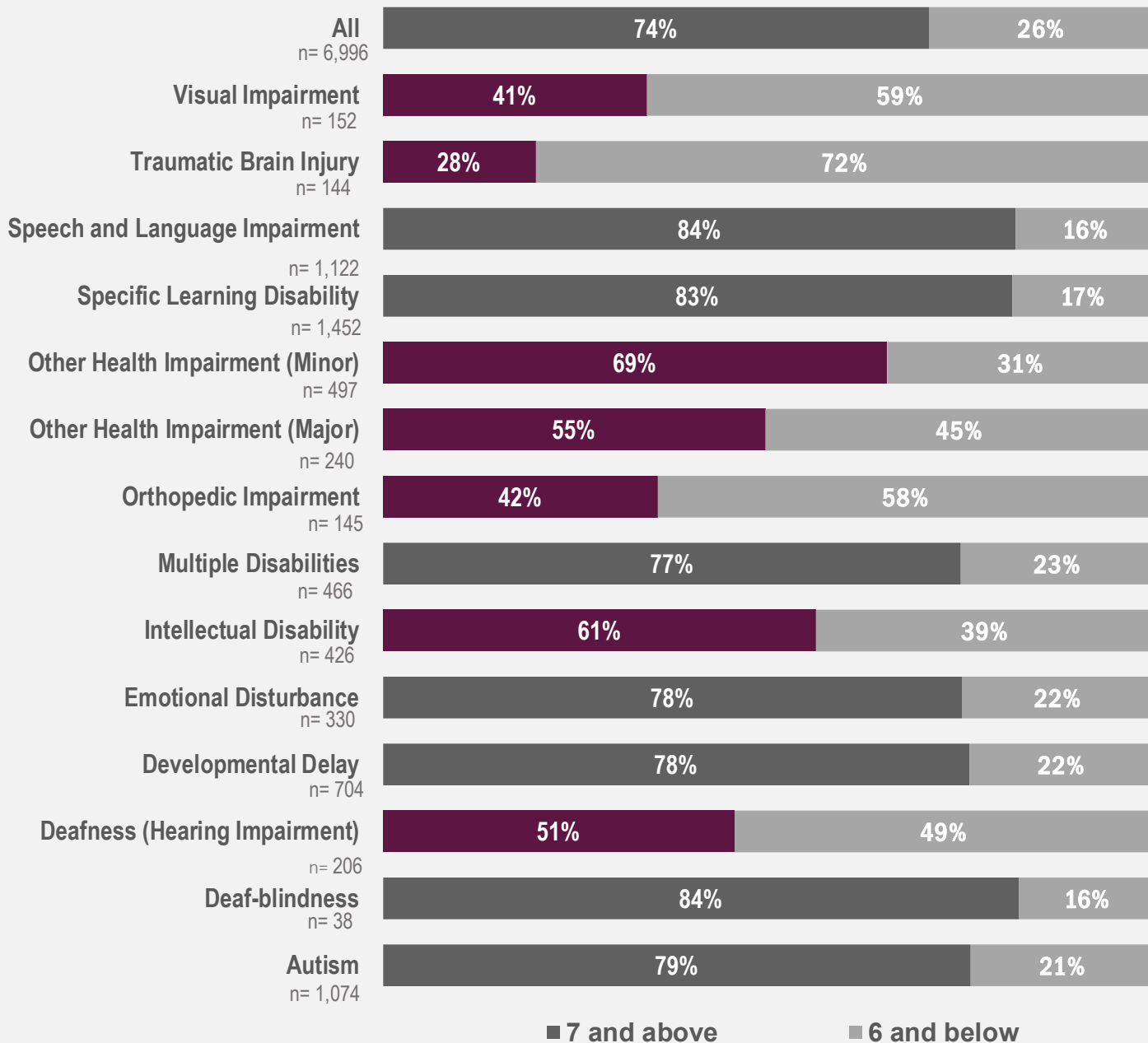


# Quality of Services: Indicator 8

## Broken out by disability category

Looking at the results separated by disability categories, there are many differences. The bars that are in **purple** have less than 74% of respondents answering 7 or above to the quality indicator question. The number of respondents in these categories is important to note as well since some have very small numbers. For example, traumatic brain injury had 144 responses, and 28% answered favorably to the quality indicator question.

### What do the results look like when disaggregated by disability categories?

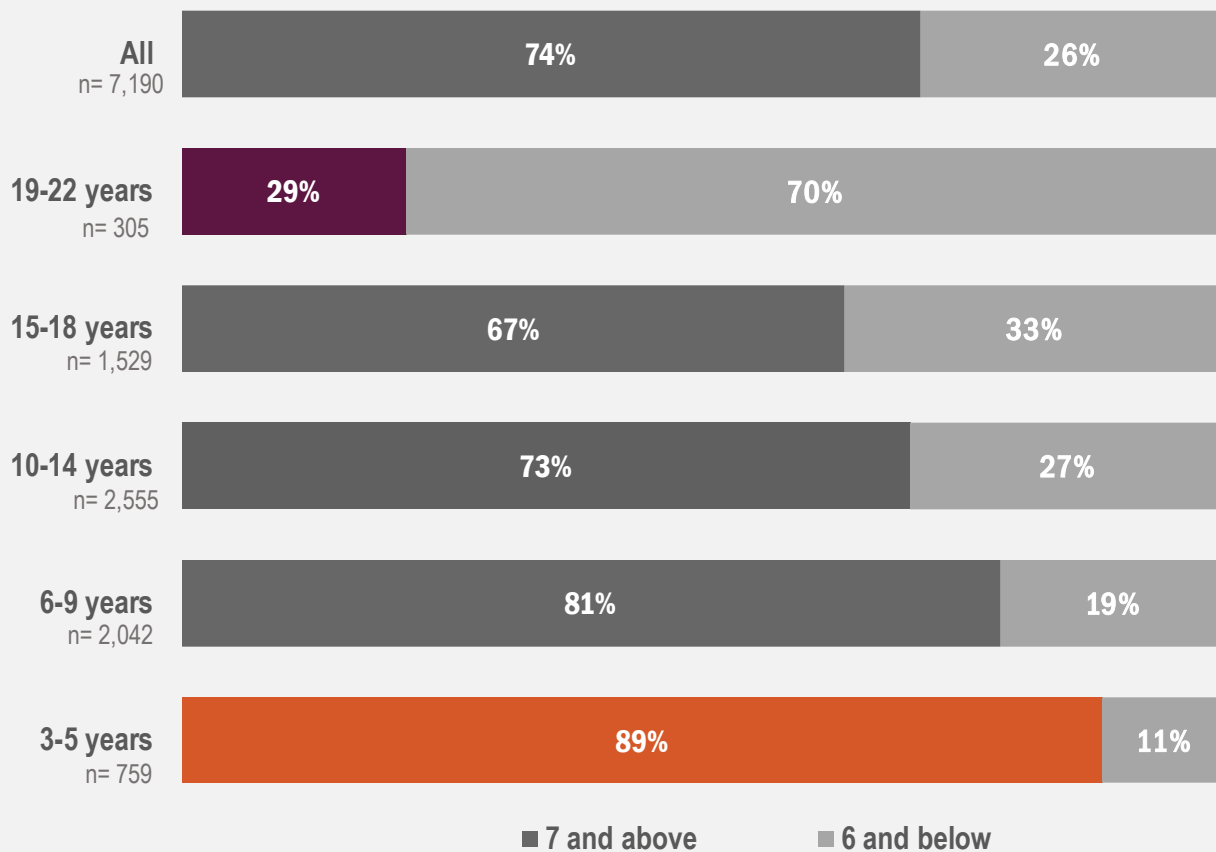


# Quality of Services: Indicator 8

## Broken out by age

Results were also disaggregated by age categories. The bar in **orange** indicates that **89% of respondents** who had a child between the ages 3-5 answered favorably to the quality indicator question. The bar in **purple** indicates that only **29% of respondents** who had a child between the ages 19-22 responded favorably.

### What do the results look like when separated by age?



# Reasons for Perceived Low Family Involvement

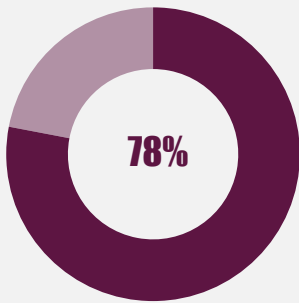
(i.e. disagreement that their child's school collaborated with them to enhance their students' educational accomplishments.)

- Respondents indicated that they found the special education process to be difficult and/or confusing.
- Some participants indicated that the IEP did not represent the best approach to support their child's success and felt the IEP was not being followed.
- Survey participants expressed that they believed schools were not attentive to their input or various communication issues with school staff.
- Survey participants believed that school authorities seemed to lack a sufficient understanding of their child's unique needs.
- Respondents did not feel supported by their child's school.

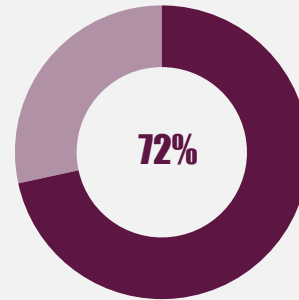


# RESULTS: COMMUNICATION

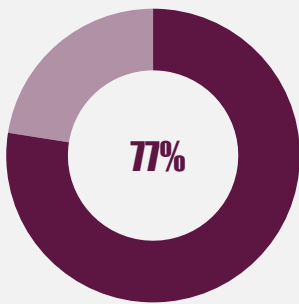
Respondents felt that people at their school communicated with them if there was something they needed to know about their child.



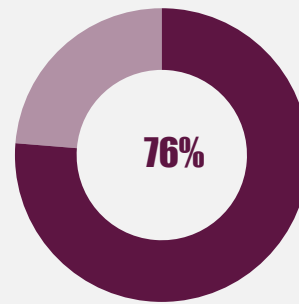
Respondents felt the amount of information received from their school was about right.



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



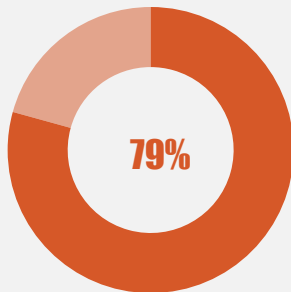
Respondents felt messages about their child's progress were easy to understand.



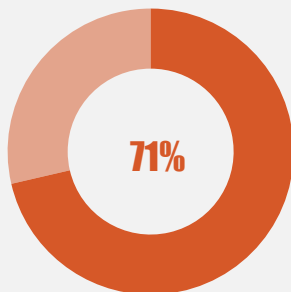


# RESULTS: SCHOOL CLIMATE

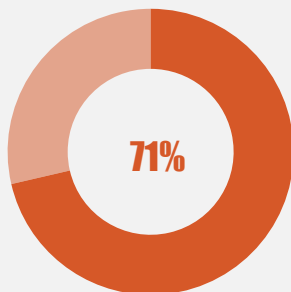
Respondents agreed that their school has been welcoming.



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

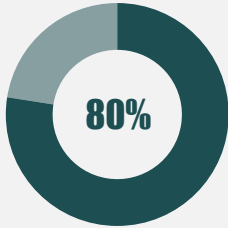


Respondents felt that they were an equal member of the team responsible for their child's education.

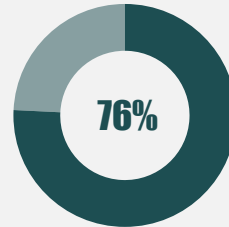


# RESULTS: PARTNERING WITH SCHOOLS

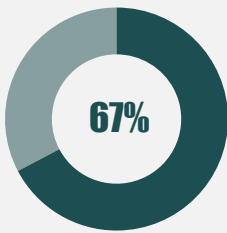
Respondents felt that school meetings about their child's education were scheduled at times that were easy for them.



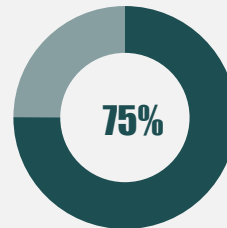
Respondents believed that they were on the same page with the school about their child's behavioral needs.



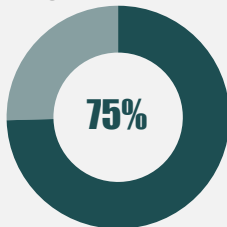
Respondents felt that their school viewed them as the expert about how to best meet their child's needs.



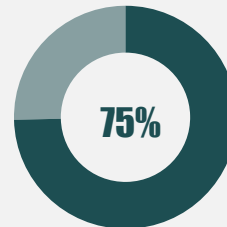
Respondents felt that if they had a problem with any part of their child's education, they could get the help they needed to solve it.



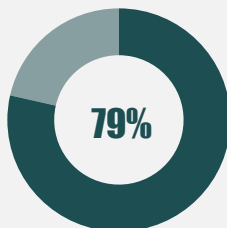
Respondents believed that they were on the same page with the school about their child's learning needs.



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

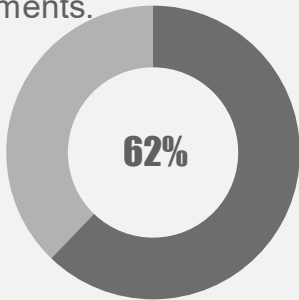


Respondents felt that they understood all the parts of their child's IEP.

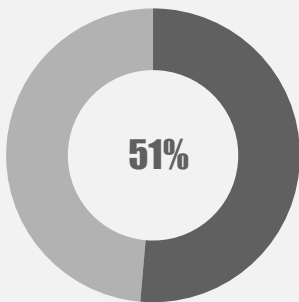


# RESULTS: GRADUATION

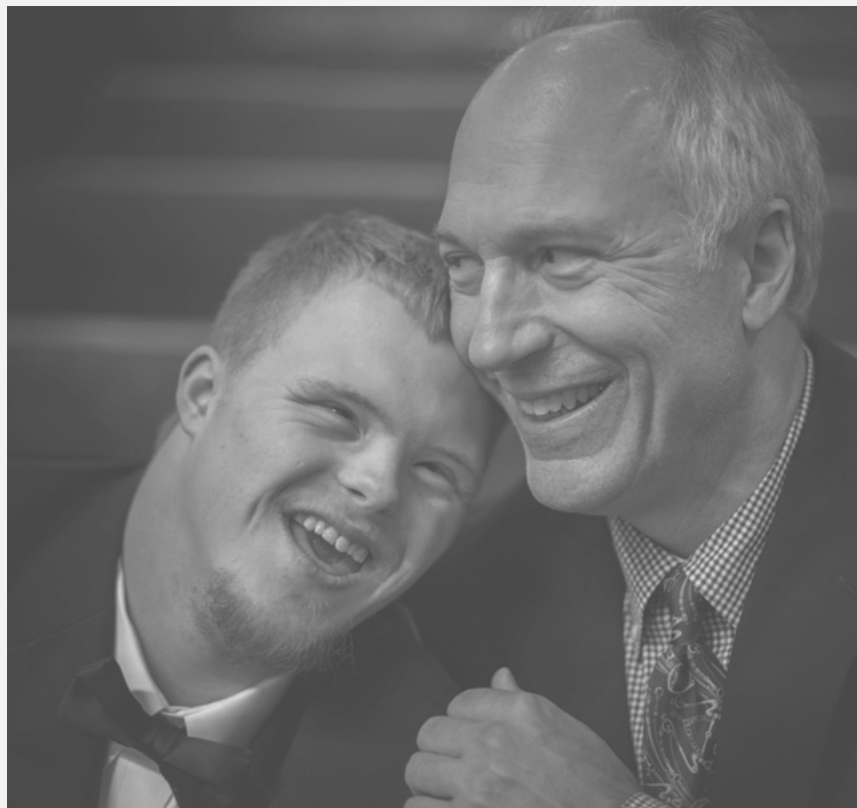
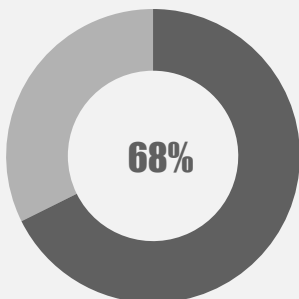
Respondents agreed that they understand Ohio's high school graduation requirements.



Respondents agreed that they understand options their child may use to graduate and that those options are different from students without an IEP.



Respondents agreed that they understand that their child may continue to receive special education services until they are 22, or complete regular graduation requirements like any other student.

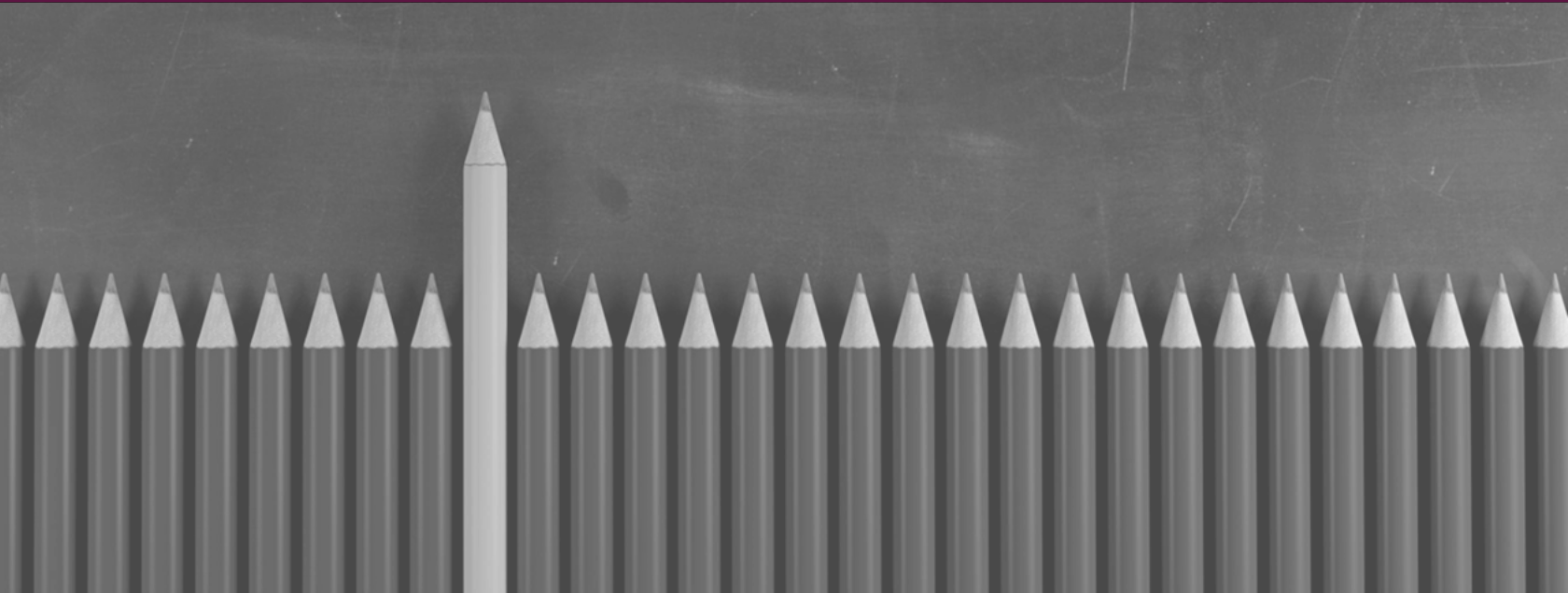


# Recommendations

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) is keenly interested in increasing meaningful and effective parent-school partnerships. The current target is that 85% of parents/caregivers agree that schools facilitate productive parental involvement. This goal 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 their efforts to collect data from a wide range of parents and caregivers of students with disabilities. The utilization of the culture broker video appears to have had a beneficial effect on achieving greater racial diversity in representation. It is advisable for schools to maintain this approach as a means of engaging families from diverse backgrounds.
- 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 also proven to enhance participation. Tapping into school resources like Parent Mentors and other staff members to extend personalized invitations to families is another effective strategy to encourage participation. These recommendations may also have a positive impact on meeting the representation threshold for disability categories.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## ACTION PLANNING

- Although the findings indicate that 74% 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 and is lower than the rate from the two previous cohorts. 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.
- The results highlight significant disparities in parents and caregivers of students who are Black when it comes to their perception of schools' collaboration with improving special education services and outcomes for their students. To gain deeper insights into the experiences of racially and culturally diverse families, local school districts and community schools should consider supplementing their data collection methods. This could involve organizing focus groups and group interviews to gather insights that can support the effort to interpret data collected in the **Annual Special Education Family Survey**.
- 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 serve families and address recommendations and other implications of survey findings.

## The Data Driven Dialogue Protocol

was developed to frame district and community school discussions and action planning.

The Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities provides support services to parents and families of children with a disability.

Office hours held by the Ohio Department of Education for Ohio high school graduation requirements or parents or caregivers can email questions to [gradrequirements@education.ohio.gov](mailto:gradrequirements@education.ohio.gov)

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

The Secondary Transitions Roadmap is an interactive Ohio Department of Education resource related to secondary transition.



Selected Ohio Department of Education resources related 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 provides a variety of resources regarding special education. Locating and requesting a parent mentor can be found at Ohio Parent Mentor.



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.

Office for Exceptional Children  
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**CETE Ohio Family Survey**  
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