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# Parents 2016: **Hearts & Minds of Parents in an Uncertain World**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Commissioned by**

Learning Heroes

### **In collaboration with**

Univision

### **In partnership with**

National PTA

National Urban League

NCLR

UNCF

### **Research conducted by**

Hart Research Associates

### **With support from**

Carnegie Corporation of New York

Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation







April 21, 2016

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Dear Friends,

Parents and guardians are on the front lines of their child's education. They are incredibly engaged and deeply committed to their child's success, but given the dynamic nature of education today, they often lack important context and understanding for how best to support their child's learning. As a mother of two boys, I live this every day.

I founded Learning Heroes to inform and equip parents to help their child succeed in school. We want to better understand what's on their hearts and minds: What hopes and dreams do they have for their child? What goals do they set, and how do they know if their child is on track to meet them? When do they say "I've got this!" and when are they far less sure? What help are they looking for along the way?

To find out, Learning Heroes, in collaboration with Univision, and in partnership with the National PTA, National Urban League, NCLR and UNCF, commissioned *Parents 2016: Hearts & Minds of Parents in an Uncertain World*, a nationally representative survey of more than 1,300 parents, conducted by Hart Research.

As you will see from this report, parents know their child best, owning the responsibility for both their child's emotional well-being and academic success. But as parents pursue big dreams for their child, they often face stumbling blocks.

The study reveals a significant gap between parents wanting their child to receive a postsecondary degree and the likelihood of that happening, based on what the data tell us. And, despite national data that 33% of students are proficient in math and 34% in reading in 8th grade, 90% of parents believe their child is at or above grade level in math and reading. Further, while most parents believe their child is meeting the expectations and goals for his or her grade level, the survey also detected a lack of confidence that their child will be well prepared for college.

As a more accurate picture of their child's readiness comes into focus, ensuring parents remain strong partners with their child's teachers and have easy access to information, tools and resources to help support their child will be more important than ever.

To meet parents where they are in this new reality, Learning Heroes and its partners created *The Readiness Roadmap*, a suite of tools and resources for parents. As parents help their child live up to his or her full potential, we hope *The Readiness Roadmap* can be a support along the way.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bibb Hubbard". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Bibb Hubbard  
Founder & President, Learning Heroes





## Parents 2016: **Hearts & Minds of Parents in an Uncertain World**

In an increasingly polarized America, a new poll shows that parents of K-8 public school students—irrespective of race, ethnicity, income level, and educational attainment—share high expectations for their children. Chief among these is that 75% of all parents and even higher proportions of African American (83%) and Hispanic (90%) parents believe that attaining a two- or four-year college degree is very important for their child. More than four in five parents say their children are on track in school, and 90% of parents believe their children are achieving at or above grade level in math and the same percentage believe that about reading, despite national statistics to the contrary.

Learning Heroes, a non-profit that helps parents support their child's academic success, commissioned the survey of more than 1,300 K-8 public school parents in collaboration with Univision, and in partnership with the National PTA, National Urban League, NCLR, and UNCF. The survey, conducted by Hart Research, includes oversamples of Hispanics and African Americans, and explores what keeps parents up at night, how they view the importance of their role in their child's academic and developmental success, and what they need to help their child succeed in school, and in life.

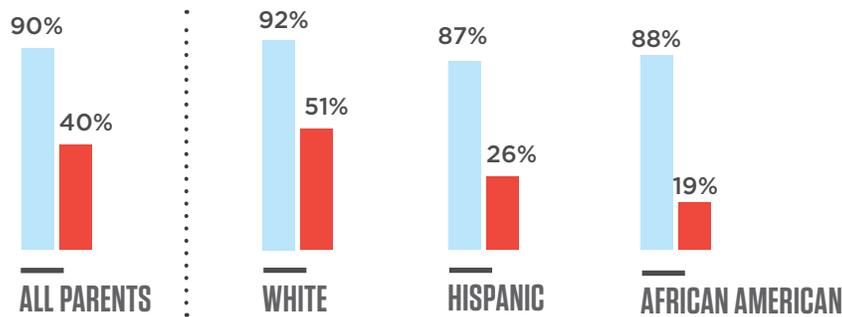
For instance, parents tend to worry more about the things they feel they cannot control. How will they keep their child safe outside the home and ensure his or her emotional well-being? Is their child being bullied? Many parents fear the all-pervasive social media and the uncertainty of raising a child amid violence and negative influences.

Most parents believe that their child is performing well in school and report they are deeply engaged in their child’s education. Many parents also take primary responsibility for their child’s success in school, even more than their child’s teacher or their child; communicate frequently with their child’s teacher; and believe that their child is getting an excellent or good education.

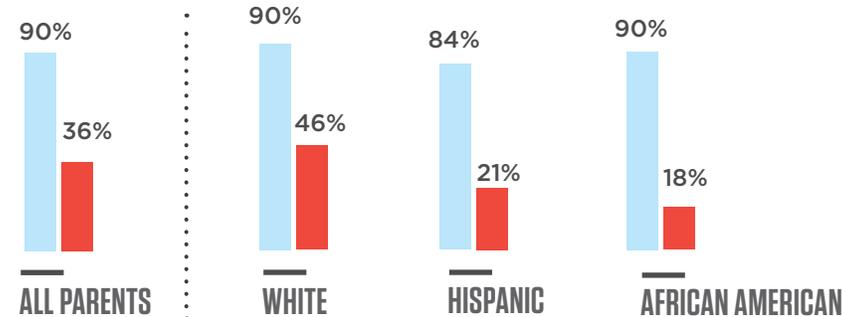
Yet the Nation’s Report Card from the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Educational Statistics (NAEP) shows that the majority of students are not keeping up with grade-level goals. In 2015, only 36% of 4th grade students scored at or above *Proficient* in reading; and 40% scored at or above *Proficient* in math. By 8th grade, 34% were *Proficient* in reading and the percent of students *Proficient* or above in math had fallen to 33%.

## Disconnect between parents' perceptions of their children's performance and student performance data

### MATH



### READING

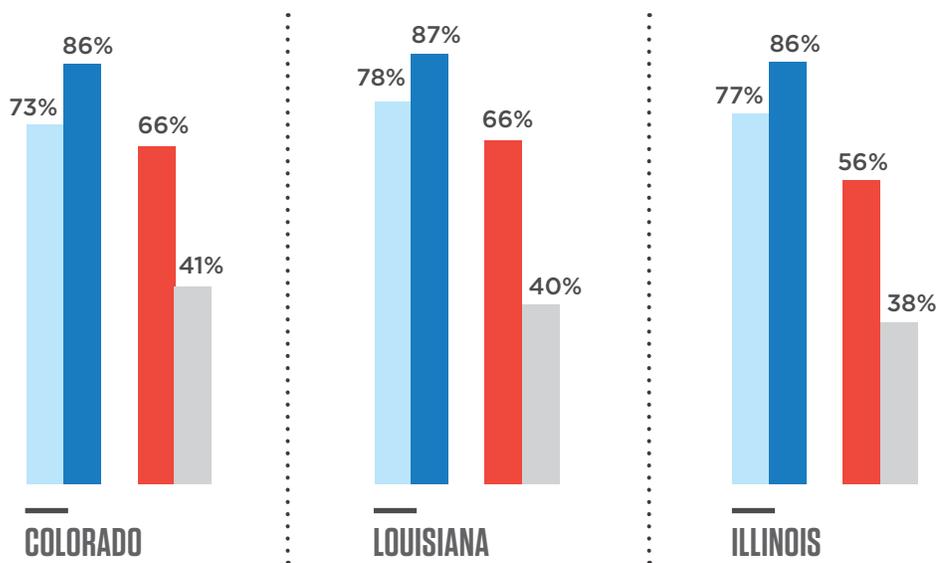


- PARENTS SAYING THEIR CHILD IS ACHIEVING AT OR ABOVE GRADE LEVEL IN THIS AREA
- 2015 NAEP REPORTING GRADE 4 STUDENT PERFORMANCE AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT IN THIS AREA

A contributing factor to this disconnect could be the transition most states have made in moving to new standards and aligned assessments. In 2014 - 2015, a majority of states switched to a state test aligned with college expectations to more accurately assess students' mastery in analyzing, critical thinking, and problem solving in reading and math.

## State snapshot: as states implement college-aligned standards, gap between parent expectations and student performance comes into focus

- PARENTS WHO SAY IT IS ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL/VERY IMPORTANT THEIR CHILD GOES TO COLLEGE AND RECEIVES DEGREE
- PARENTS WHO BELIEVE THEIR CHILD IS READING AT OR ABOVE GRADE LEVEL
- STUDENTS WHO MET THE 2014 BAR FOR ENGLISH PROFICIENCY, BEFORE STANDARDS CHANGED
- STUDENTS WHO MET THE 2015 BAR FOR ENGLISH PROFICIENCY, AFTER THE STANDARDS CHANGED



\* Data collected from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/map-common-core-2015-test-results.html#a1>

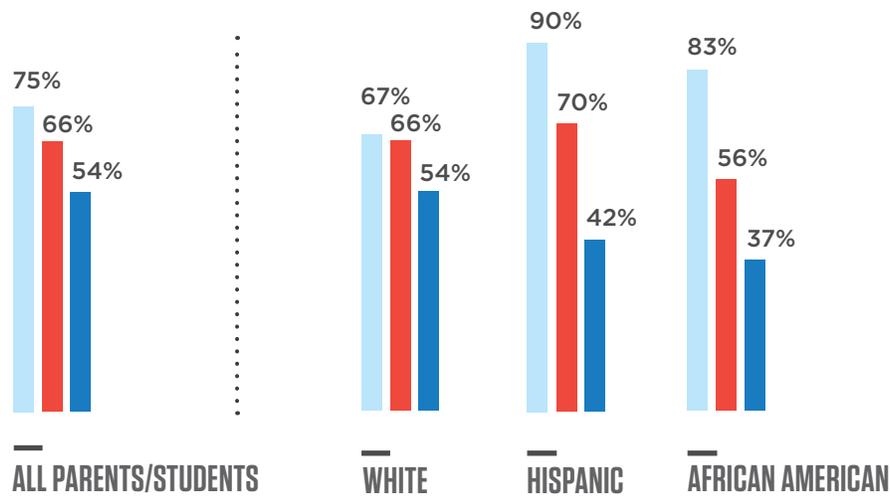
Although most parents say their child is meeting the expectations and goals for his/her grade level, and believe it is important for their child to go to college, the survey also detected an underlying lack of confidence (40% of parents) that their child will be well-prepared when the time comes.

## Parent aspirations for college vs. data on children getting to and through college

**■ PARENTS SAYING IT IS ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL / VERY IMPORTANT THAT THEIR CHILD GOES TO COLLEGE AND RECEIVES DEGREE**

**■ 2013 DIGEST OF EDUCATION STATISTICS REPORTING OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES WHO WERE ENROLLED IN COLLEGE THE OCTOBER AFTER GRADUATING**

**■ PROPORTIONS OF STUDENTS WHO ENTER COLLEGE AND GRADUATE WITHIN SIX YEARS (1)**



(1) American Dream 2.0. Data from various sources including "Signature Report 4, Completing College: A National View of Student Attainment Rates." [http://www.studentclearinghouse.info/signature/4/NSC\\_Signature\\_Report\\_4.pdf](http://www.studentclearinghouse.info/signature/4/NSC_Signature_Report_4.pdf). November 2012; and "Persistence and Attainment of 2003-04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Six Years Later." <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011151.pdf>. December 2010.

The earlier that parents understand what is expected of their child throughout their educational career, the greater the chance of putting that student on the path to success in college. Early intervention is critical to a child's overall academic success and if students fall behind in mastering critical skills, the gaps in their learning are exacerbated over time. Parents are a critical partner in addressing any gaps and advocating for their child to get the extra support he or she may need.





## Key Finding:

### Parents are deeply engaged in their child's development, placing primary responsibility on themselves and their family

Most parents believe they can make a considerable difference in their child's social and emotional development as well as in their learning and academic progress. Eighty-seven percent of all parents (with similar shares among Hispanic and African American parents) said they could personally make "a lot" or "a fair amount" of difference in their child's social and emotional development. About 85% of parents overall felt the same way about their child's learning and academic progress.

Forty-three percent of parents responded that they and/or the child's other parent have the greatest responsibility for their child's educational success. And 37% felt the child had the greatest responsibility. Only 16% felt the responsibility fell to the teacher.

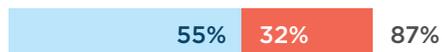
African American and Hispanic parents place themselves as the most responsible at even higher numbers: 51% and 54%, respectively.

### Parents own the responsibility for both their child's emotional development and academic progress

**PARENTS: HOW MUCH OF A DIFFERENCE DO YOU THINK YOU CAN MAKE IN THIS AREA OF YOUR CHILD'S LIFE?**

- I CAN MAKE A LOT OF DIFFERENCE
- I CAN MAKE A FAIR AMOUNT OF DIFFERENCE

**MY CHILD'S SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

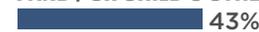


**MY CHILD'S LEARNING AND ACADEMIC PROGRESS**



**PARENTS: WHICH TWO OF THESE HAVE THE GREATEST RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR CHILD'S SUCCESS IN SCHOOL?**

I AND / OR CHILD'S OTHER PARENT



MY CHILD



MY CHILD'S TEACHER(S)



SCHOOL DISTRICT LEADERS



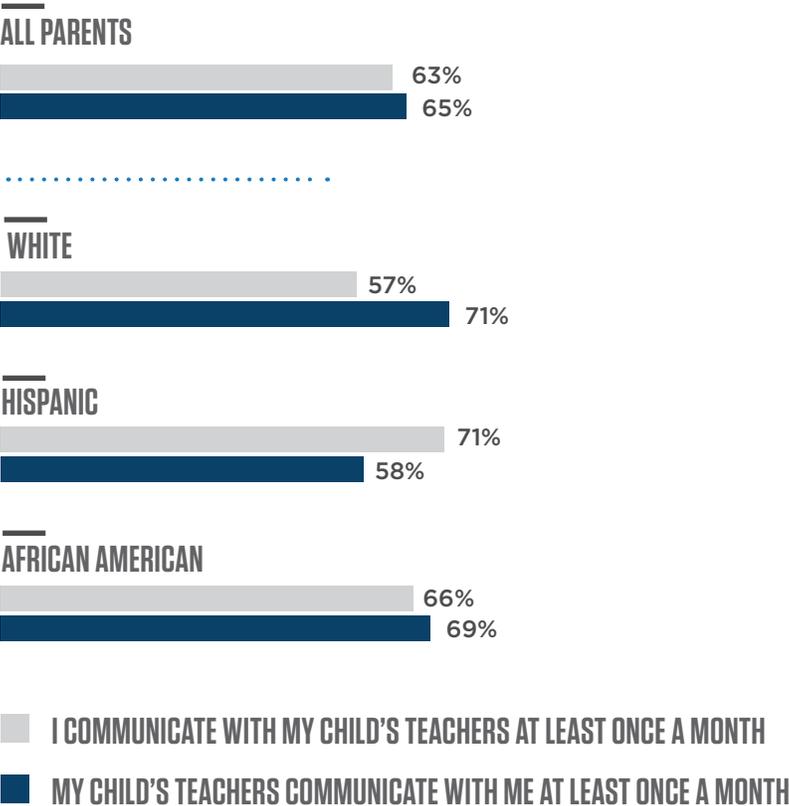
PRINCIPAL OF CHILD'S SCHOOL



Most parents (63%) communicate with their child’s teacher at least once or twice a month, and some (14%) communicate multiple times a week.

Hispanic parents say they are reaching out to teachers far more than teachers communicate with them. Seventy-one percent of Hispanic parents (and 73% of Spanish dominant parents) say they communicate with their child’s teacher at least once a month. Only 55%, on the other hand, say that their child’s teacher communicates with them at least once a month. This raises important questions about enduring linguistic and cultural barriers that the U.S. educational system must tackle in its partnership with the nation’s Hispanic parents.

**Parents’ level of communication with teachers does not always align with teachers’ level of communication with them**







## Key Finding:

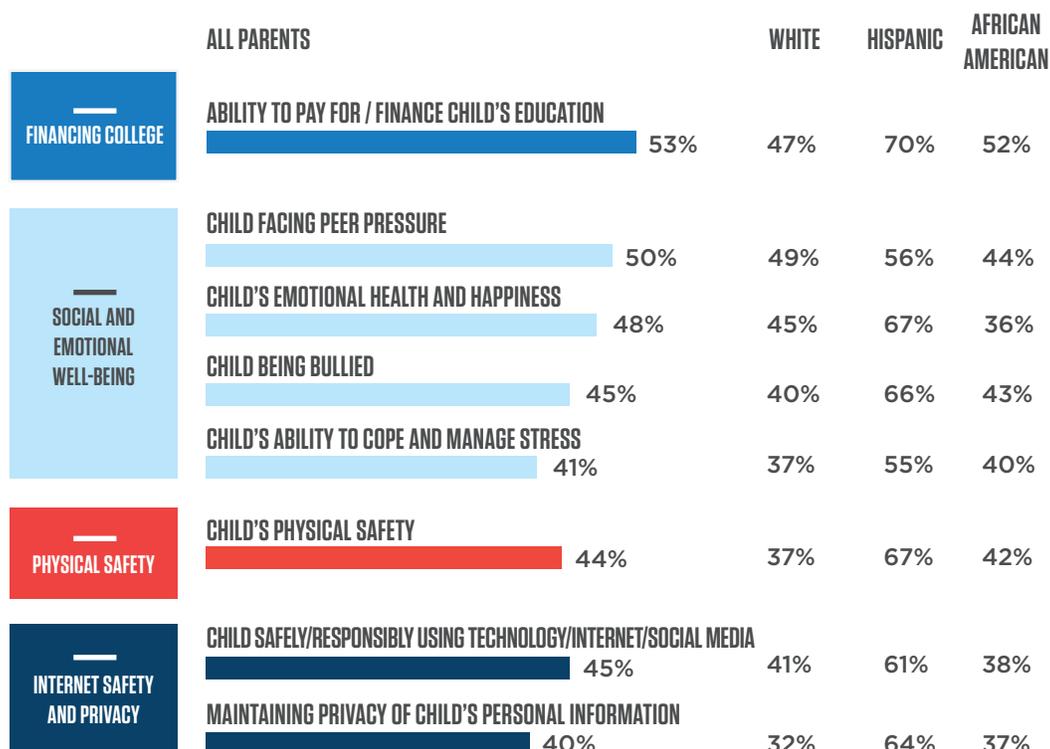
Parents worry most about: how to finance their child’s college education; peer pressure; emotional health and happiness; and safe use of the Internet and social media

More than half of all parents (53%) say they worry “a lot” or “some” about how to afford a college education for their child (70% of Hispanics and 52% of African Americans worry to the same degree). That paying for college ranks at the top of parental worries—slightly above the child’s emotional health and happiness, being bullied and the child safely/responsibly using technology (including the internet and social media)—underscores the importance of the college aspiration that most parents share for their child’s future.

Parents are also concerned about their child facing peer pressure, which might undercut what is learned at home or in school.

## Parents’ top concerns about raising their children focus most on paying for college, social and emotional well-being, physical safety, and Internet safety

Proportions saying they worry a lot or some about each in raising their child



## Key Finding:

### Parents are positive about their child's education

The majority of parents rate their child's education as excellent or good: 75% of all parents; 63% of Hispanic parents; and 75% of African American parents. More than half of parents think that the school's academic goals and standards are "about right," basing this belief on their child's grades, how challenged they are, and what they are hearing from their teachers.

The majority of parents (63%) also believe that they understand "extremely well" or "very well" the knowledge and skills expected of their child at each grade level. Nearly half of parents (47%) say they find out about these knowledge and skills from information from teachers and meeting/talking with teachers.

Eighty-five percent of all parents (76% of Hispanics and 83% of African Americans) think their child is on track to meet grade-level expectations for learning. Among parents who think their child is on track, 31% say they rely on communications from the teacher. Only 4% volunteer that they glean the information from standardized tests, which may reflect some confusion since 46% of parents would like more information on understanding/interpreting standardized test scores.

### Parents are positive about their children's academic progress

Proportions of all parents saying each

MY CHILD IS GETTING AN EXCELLENT OR PRETTY GOOD EDUCATION



THE ACADEMIC GOALS AND STANDARDS MY CHILD'S SCHOOL EXPECTS ARE:



MY CHILD IS ON TRACK TO MEET THE GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS FOR LEARNING AT GRADE LEVEL



I UNDERSTAND THE KNOWLEDGE / SKILLS MY CHILD IS EXPECTED TO LEARN EXTREMELY / VERY WELL





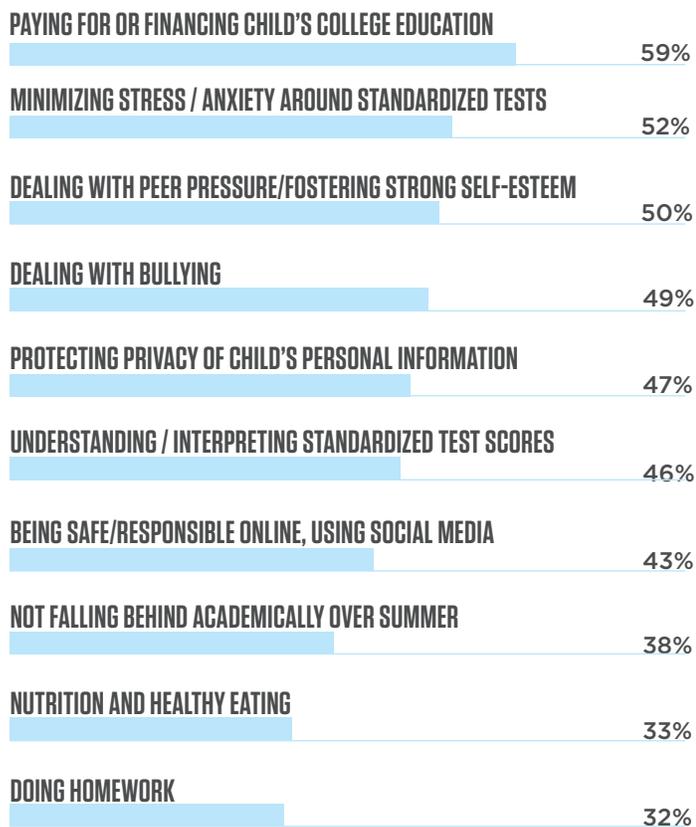
## Key Finding:

### Parents provide guidance on what they need to help their child be successful

Overwhelmingly, parents told us what would help them help their children: 59% of parents say they would benefit most from more information and knowledge in the area of financing college. A notable share (52%) could also use tips on minimizing the stress of standardized testing. Half of all parents say they would benefit from information in dealing with peer pressure and fostering self-esteem.

### The areas in which parents feel they could most use more information tend to be the ones that they worry about most: financing college and social-emotional issues

Proportions saying they could use more knowledge/information about this aspect of raising their child



When presented with specific resources to support their child’s learning, parents responded with equal enthusiasm.

Sixty-six percent of all parents would find a detailed explanation of their child’s goals for learning by grade level to be extremely or very helpful; 80% of Hispanics and 77% of African Americans say the information would be helpful.

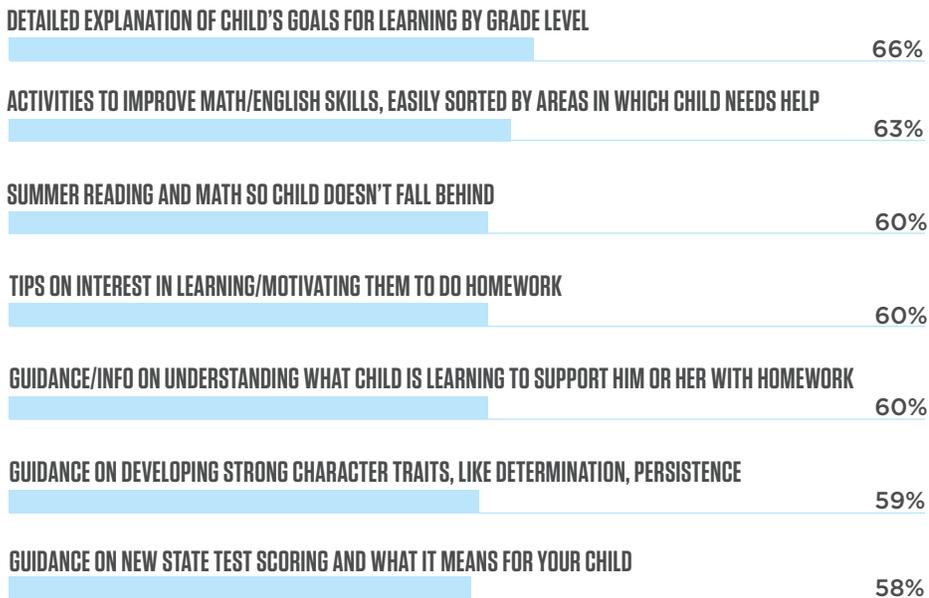
Activities to improve their child’s skills in English and math also met with eagerness by most parents (63%), as did summer reading and math activities (60%) so that the child does not fall behind.

Some other specific resources that parents believe would support their child’s development include a guide (58%) that walks through the scoring of new state tests and what it means for their child; tips on how to keep children safe online (54%); and information on how schools/school systems maintain privacy of student data (51%).

And about half (46%) of parents indicated a strong interest in a guide for talking with child’s teachers during parent teacher conferences.

## Many parents indicate that specific resources to support their children’s learning would be helpful

Proportions saying each area of information/resources would be extremely or very helpful



# Readiness Roadmap

Parents have big hopes and dreams for their children, which often include a college degree and a job that fuels their child's passions. But the road to success isn't easy, and many parents need help navigating the way.

Learning Heroes' mission is to inform parents about what's happening in their child's classroom and equip them to support their child's academic success.

The Readiness Roadmap was created by Learning Heroes and its partners to meet parents where they are. It is based on the findings of *Parents 2016: Hearts & Minds of Parents in an Uncertain World*, and provides parents with resources and tools including:

- Academic expectations by grade
- Tips on paying for college
- Information on emotional health and happiness
- Conversation guides to make the most of parent-teacher conferences as well as conversations with their child
- Tools to help parents understand where their child might need additional support
- Personalized resources to meet their child's individual needs

[www.bealearninghero.org/readinessroadmap](http://www.bealearninghero.org/readinessroadmap)



## Methodology

Hart Research Associates conducted this national survey among 1,374 parents of public school children in grades K-8. It includes a nationally representative survey of 802 elementary and middle school parents, as well as oversamples among Hispanics (to yield a total of 500 Hispanic parents) and African Americans (to yield a total of 265 African American parents). The online survey was conducted January 6 to 22, 2016 and was offered in both English and Spanish. It was administered by GfK, using their KnowledgePanel®, a probability-based Web panel designed to be representative of the United States. The survey has a margin of error of +3.2 percentage points for all parents. Sample tolerances for subgroups are larger.

Additionally, oversamples were conducted among parents of public school children in grades K-8 in three states to yield 324 parents in Colorado, 327 parents in Illinois, and 313 parents in Louisiana. The state surveys were conducted January 6 to February 1, 2016 and were administered by GfK, using their KnowledgePanel® and opt-in sample from a national panel. Findings from these state surveys are not included in the report, though responses among parents across the three states largely parallel the findings among parents nationally.

## Acknowledgements

Learning Heroes is grateful to the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation for their collaboration and financial support in the creation of this report. We would also like to thank the team at Hart Research, as well as our writer, Susan Kellam. And finally, our gratitude goes to Univision for their ongoing collaboration, and to National PTA, National Urban League, NCLR, and UNCF for their partnership in supporting parents as they help their children succeed in school.



**LEARNING**  
**HEROES**