Developing Life Skills in Children:

A Road Map for Communicating with Parents

Purpose

CONTEXT

Parent understanding will be a factor in the spread and scale of evidence-based practice supporting social, emotional, cognitive, and academic development.

GOAL

Gain a deeper understanding of how parents think, feel, prioritize, and talk about the intersection of social, emotional, cognitive, and academic development.

Project Phases

PHASE 1

Landscape analysis and partner immersion

APRIL/MAY 2017

PHASE 2

Six parent focus groups

MAY/JUNE 2017

PHASE 3

National survey of K-8 parents

JULY/AUGUST 2017

PHASE 4

Four red-flag check focus groups with parents

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2017

Research Methodology

TEN FOCUS GROUPS IN 5 CITIES:

Dayton, OH
Wilmington, NC
Oakland, CA
Philadelphia, PA
Colorado Springs, CO

NATIONAL ONLINE SURVEY OF K-8 PARENTS:

National survey of more than 2,000 K-8 parents

- 500 African American parents oversample;
- 500 Hispanic parents oversample;
- 100 Low income parents oversample

Fielded August 25-September 12, 2017

Offered in both English and Spanish

Quotas set so representative by key demographics

Survey conducted by Edge Research

Note: Survey recruited through Survey Sampling International online, non-probability panel

Key Insights

1 SKILLS BEGIN AT HOME; REINFORCED AT SCHOOL.

Parents believe that home and school both have a role in children's social, emotional, cognitive, and academic development, but not an equal one.

2 REAL WORLD EXAMPLES BRING STRATEGIES TO LIFE.

Video clips showing students engaged in social, emotional, cognitive, and academic development can be a powerful way to make these concepts concrete.

3 EDUCATION JARGON DOESN'T TRANSLATE.

The language educators typically use to talk about social, emotional, cognitive, and academic learning and what parents understand it to mean are often quite different.

4 MEASUREMENT MISGIVINGS.

Parents object to having their child graded, rated, or formally assessed on social, emotional, and cognitive skills.
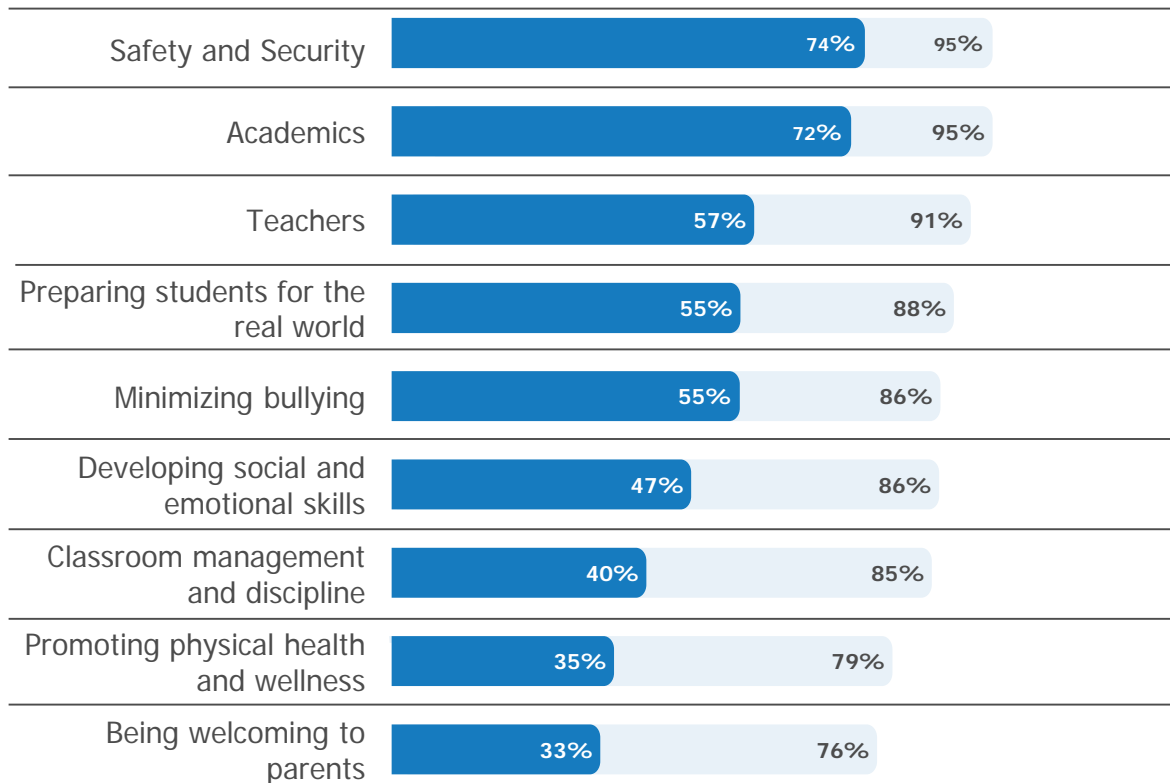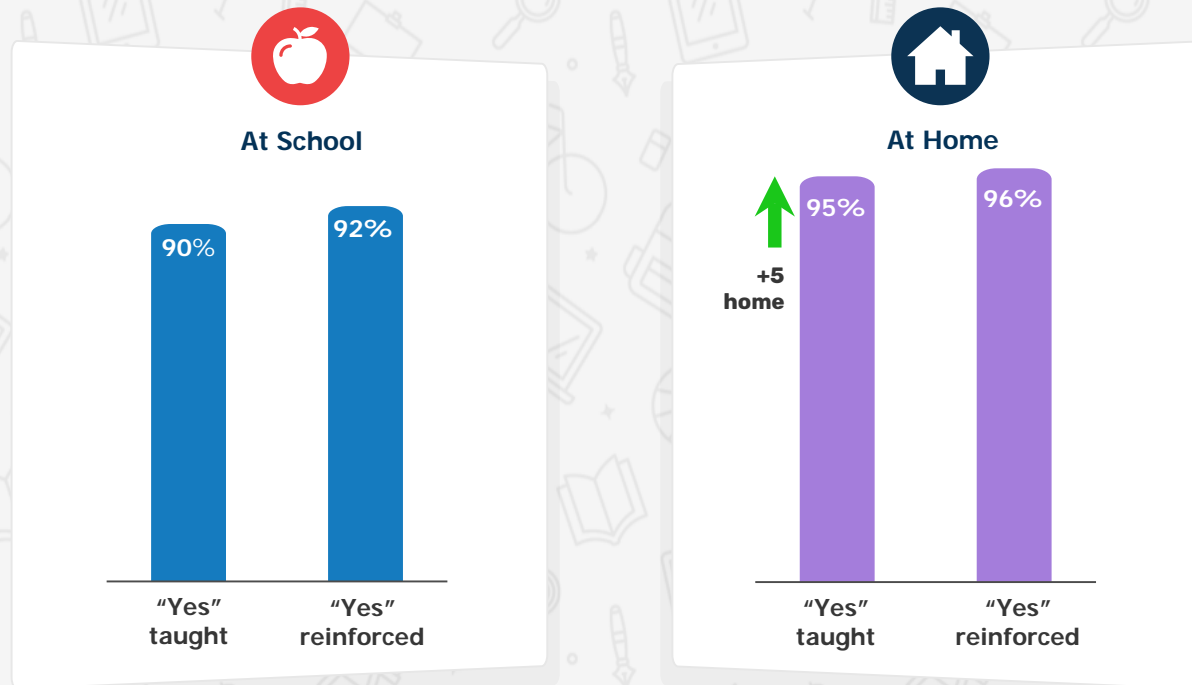
Parents Expect Schools to Play a Role

Question:
Importance as you think about your child and his/her school

■ Top priority
☐ High priority

Category	Top priority	High priority
Safety and Security	74%	95%
Academics	72%	95%
Teachers	57%	91%
Preparing students for the real world	55%	88%
Minimizing bullying	55%	86%
Developing social and emotional skills	47%	86%
Classroom management and discipline	40%	85%
Promoting physical health and wellness	35%	79%
Being welcoming to parents	33%	76%

While Both School and Home Have a Role, Home is at the Center for teaching Life Skills

At School

90% "Yes" taught
92% "Yes" reinforced

At Home

+5 home

95% "Yes" taught
96% "Yes" reinforced

Parents Choose "Life Skills"

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QUESTION:
Which one term do you prefer to describe the skills and traits that you identified as important?

Term	Percentage
Life skills	31%
Social, emotional & academic development	15%
Character development	12%
Social, emotional & cognitive development	9%
Whole child	9%
Learning mindsets and skills	7%
Social and emotional learning	5%
Growth mindsets	4%
Social learning	4%
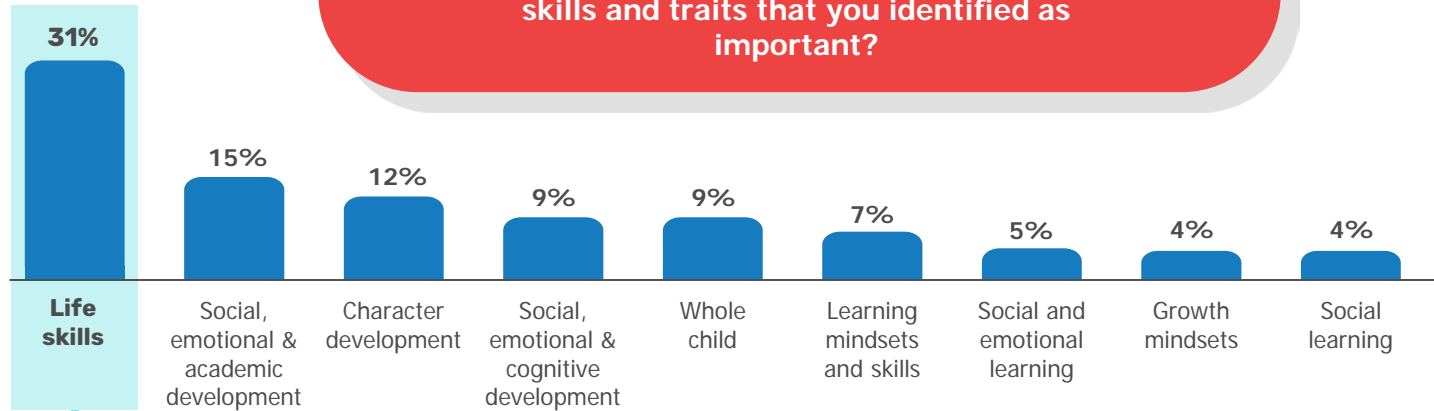
"Simple"

"All encompassing"

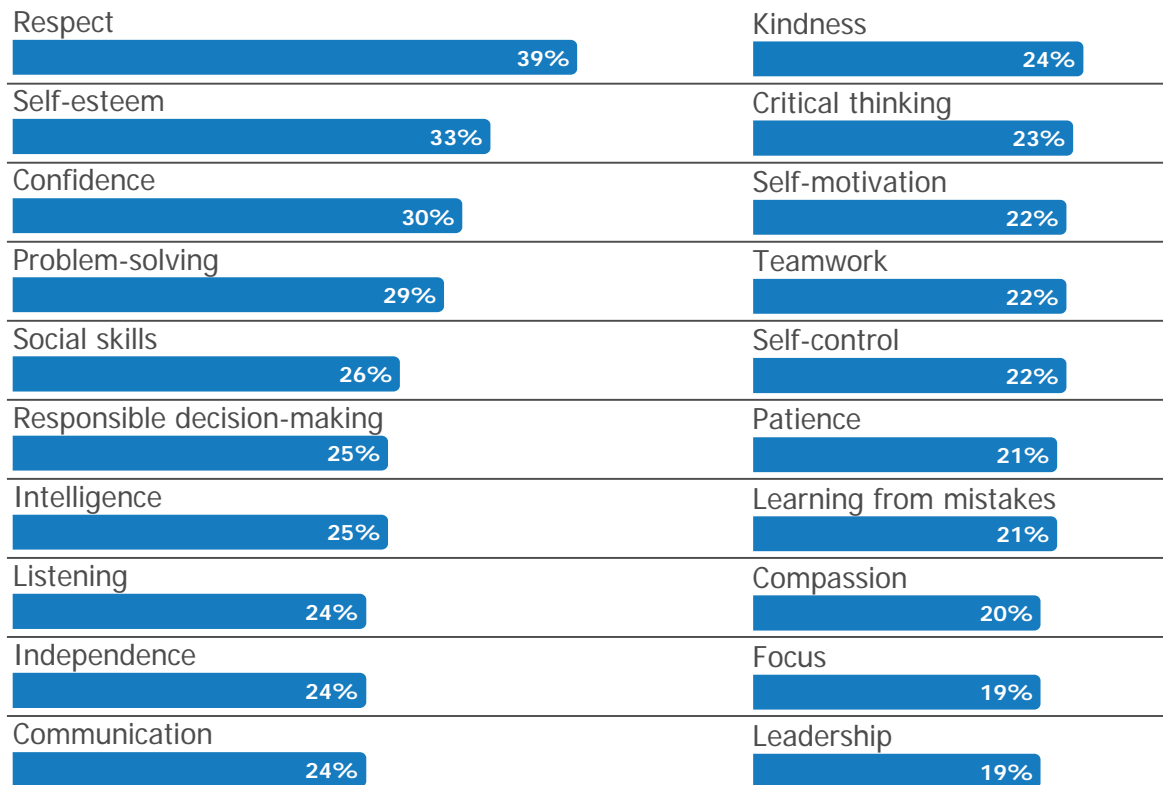"Because you use them everyday in life, schools, jobs and family"

Identifying Skills & Traits that Parents Prioritize

Please select up to 10 skills and traits that you think are the most important for your child to have.

Learning from Mistakes	Managing Emotions & Behavior	Perseverance	Taking on Challenges	Prosocial Behavior	Self-motivation	Social Skills	Self-management
Communication	Responsible Decision-making	Social Awareness	Love of Learning	Perspective Taking	Kindness	Critical Thinking	Creative Problem Solving
Respect	Problem-solving	Relationship Skills	Resilience	Executive Function	Compassion	Persistence	Self-directed Learning
Confidence	Teamwork	Adaptability	Engaged Learning	Coping	Independence	Caring	Optimism
Self-esteem	Self-control	Conflict Resolution	Tolerance	Managing Stress	Self-awareness	Gratitude	Mindfulness
Setting Goals	Empathy	Focus	Curiosity	Being Organized	Learning Mindsets	Grit	Cognitive Regulation
Courage	Dedication	Flexibility	Emotional Intelligence	Patience	Intelligence	Self-Regulation	Leadership
Listening	Accepting Others	Academic Mindsets	Growth Mindsets				

Parents Top Skills & Traits

Skill	%		Skill	%
Respect	39%		Kindness	24%
Self-esteem	33%		Critical thinking	23%
Confidence	30%		Self-motivation	22%
Problem-solving	29%		Teamwork	22%
Social skills	26%		Self-control	22%
Responsible decision-making	25%		Patience	21%
Intelligence	25%		Learning from mistakes	21%
Listening	24%		Compassion	20%
Independence	24%		Focus	19%
Communication	24%		Leadership	19%

Fewer Select These Skills & Traits

Skill	%		Skill	%
Optimism	10%		Learning mindsets	7%
Tolerance	10%		Self-regulation	6%
Persistence	10%		Prosocial behavior	4%
Curiosity	10%		Cognitive regulation	4%
Resilience	8%		Grit	3%
Coping	8%		Executive function	3%
Growth mindset	8%		Perspective taking	3%
Mindfulness	8%			
Self-directed learning	7%			
Flexibility	7%			

WHEN WE SAY...

Self-Regulation...

Grit...

Executive Function...

Growth Mindset...

PARENTS HEAR...

...Like therapy?

...A negative struggle?

...Going to the bathroom?

...Ability for my child's mind to expand and grow?

Concepts Resonate, but Education Jargon Doesn't Translate

WE SAY...	PARENTS THINK...	PARENTS SAY...
Resilience • Perseverance • Persistence	"Don't use fancy words. Just say what you're trying to say. Taking responsibility for yourself?"	Bouncing back • Overcoming obstacles • Learning from mistakes • Sticking with it
Grit	"Strikes me as negative, like a struggle."	Taking on challenges • Pushing yourself • Not giving up
Executive Function	"Is that going to the bathroom?"	Organizational skills • Setting goals • Ability to focus • Managing time well
Self-Regulation	"That sounds like my child is going through some sort of therapy."	Self-control
Growth Mindset	"Not sure what that means?"	Hard work pays off • It's all in the effort • Learn and grow from mistakes

Parents Are Interested in Learning More

"Very Interested" in Different Programs	Identifies w/ Benefits	Identifies w/ Benefits and Risks	Identifies w/ Risks
Blended into the learning environment — 53%	68%	43%	30%
Occasional lessons or activities — 53%	66%	46%	30%
Specific program or lesson plan — 49%	62%	40%	31%
District-wide commitment — 47%	60%	39%	26%
Opportunities to practice outside of school — 47%	58%	40%	29%

Parents Need Real World Examples

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Parents responded positively to videos that show student participation:

They provided a frame of reference and parents were able to see it for themselves.

Writing: Building a Community
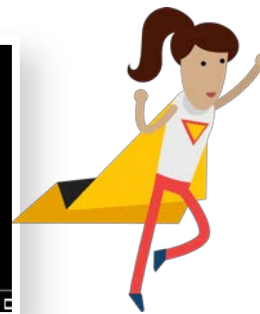
"It makes the kid feel he's important. I feel like my kids are not heard. It's important to show kids their value. This will help them be better people when they grow up."
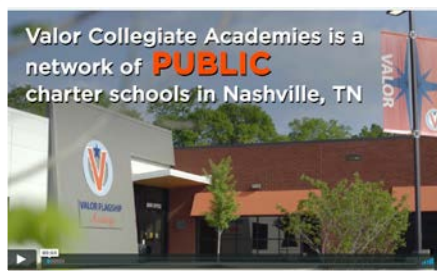
— CO, Parents

Parents Need Real World Examples

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Valor: Site Tour Video

"Be proactive, that's good, and there is a lot of stuff I like, but don't have it going on an hour.... Do 5 mins, and then get back to math."
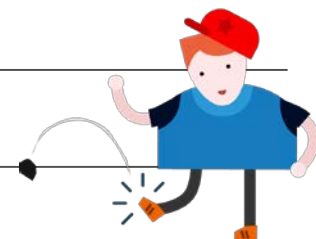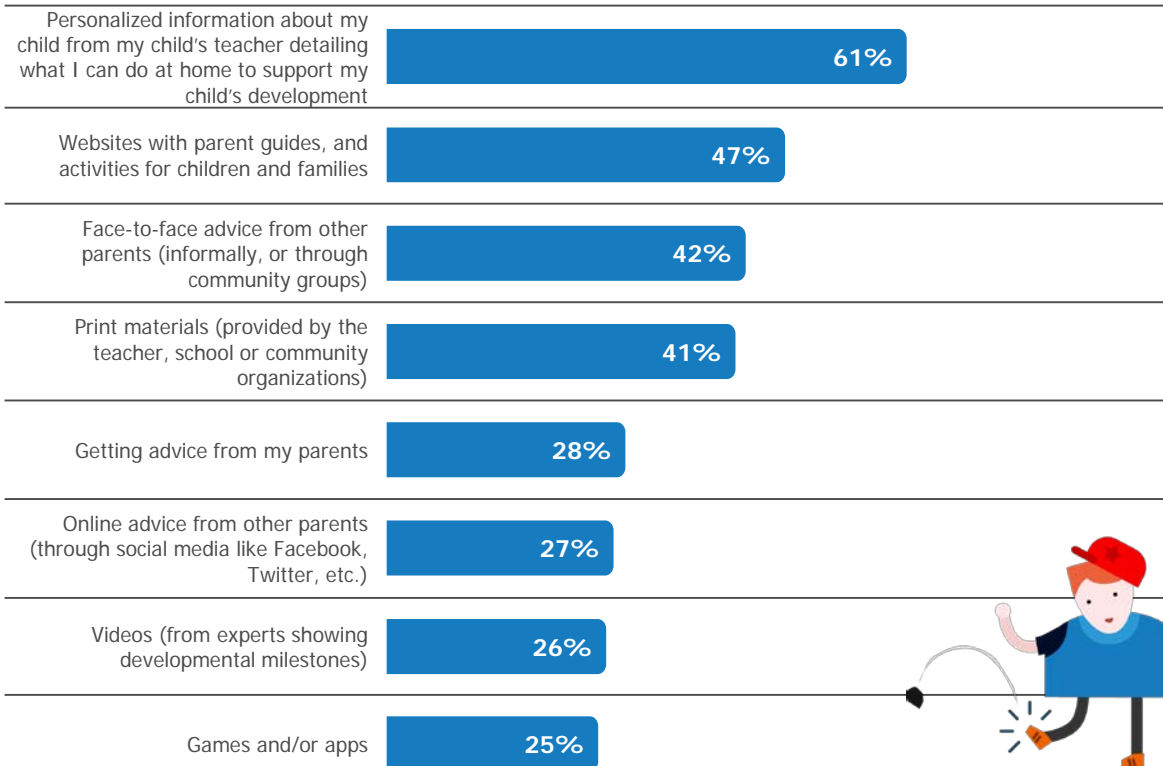
— CO, Parents

Resources Tailored for Their Child Most Helpful

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% of parents selecting, with the option to select multiple responses. No major differences across sub-groups

Which resources are most helpful to you as a parent to support your child in this type of learning?

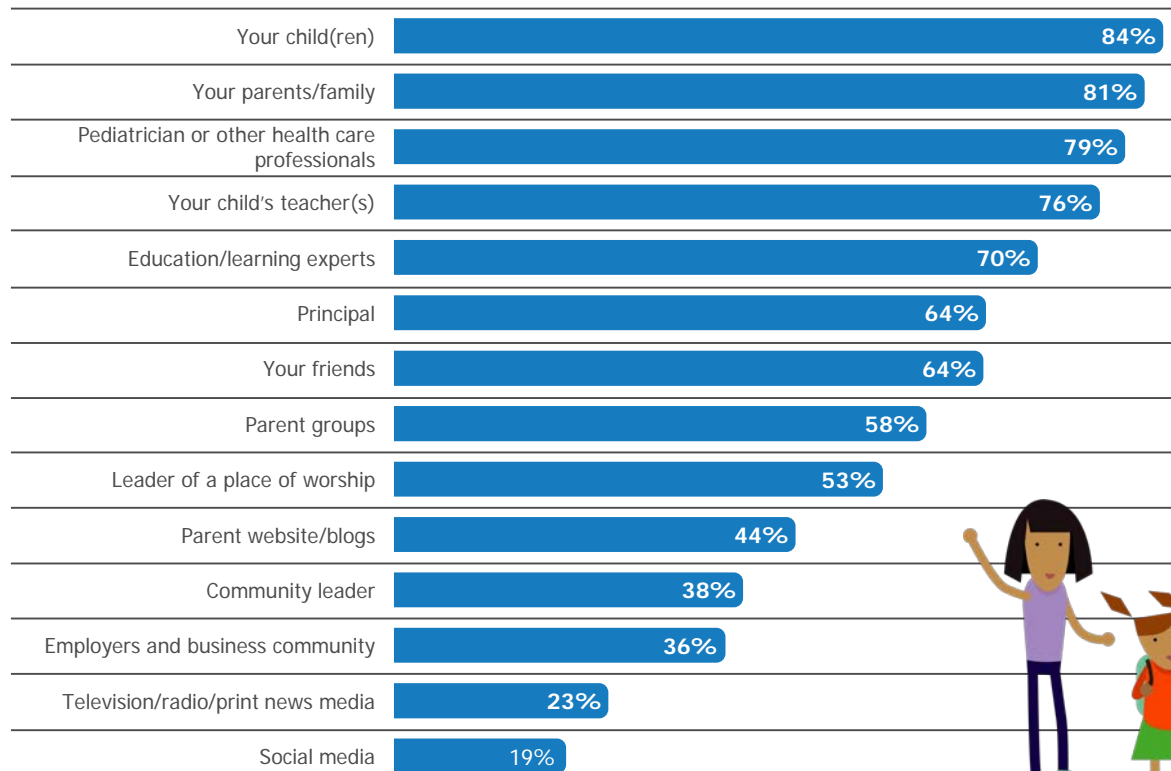| Resource	%
Personalized information about my child from my child's teacher detailing what I can do at home to support my child's development	61%
Websites with parent guides, and activities for children and families	47%
Face-to-face advice from other parents (informally, or through community groups)	42%
Print materials (provided by the teacher, school or community organizations)	41%
Getting advice from my parents	28%
Online advice from other parents (through social media like Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	27%
Videos (from experts showing developmental milestones)	26%
Games and/or apps	25%

Who Parents Trust

% of parents rating trust as 4 or 5 out of 5. No major differences across sub-groups.

Question:
How much do you trust the following sources when it comes to information about this topic?

Source	Trust
Your child(ren)	84%
Your parents/family	81%
Pediatrician or other health care professionals	79%
Your child's teacher(s)	76%
Education/learning experts	70%
Principal	64%
Your friends	64%
Parent groups	58%
Leader of a place of worship	53%
Parent website/blogs	44%
Community leader	38%
Employers and business community	36%
Television/radio/print news media	23%
Social media	19%

Pushback on Formal Assessment

Parents want to know how their children are doing – they prefer frequent, informal communication.

When shown real-world measurement examples, most think they go too far.

Parents say ratings and grades are not helpful information.

Parents reject metrics around "Grit," "Hope" and "Love."

Parents balk at 1-5 scales or Y/N, and prefer measures of visible behavior over internal capacity.

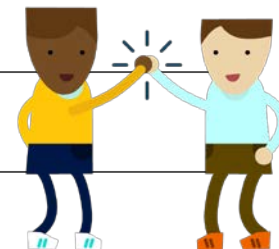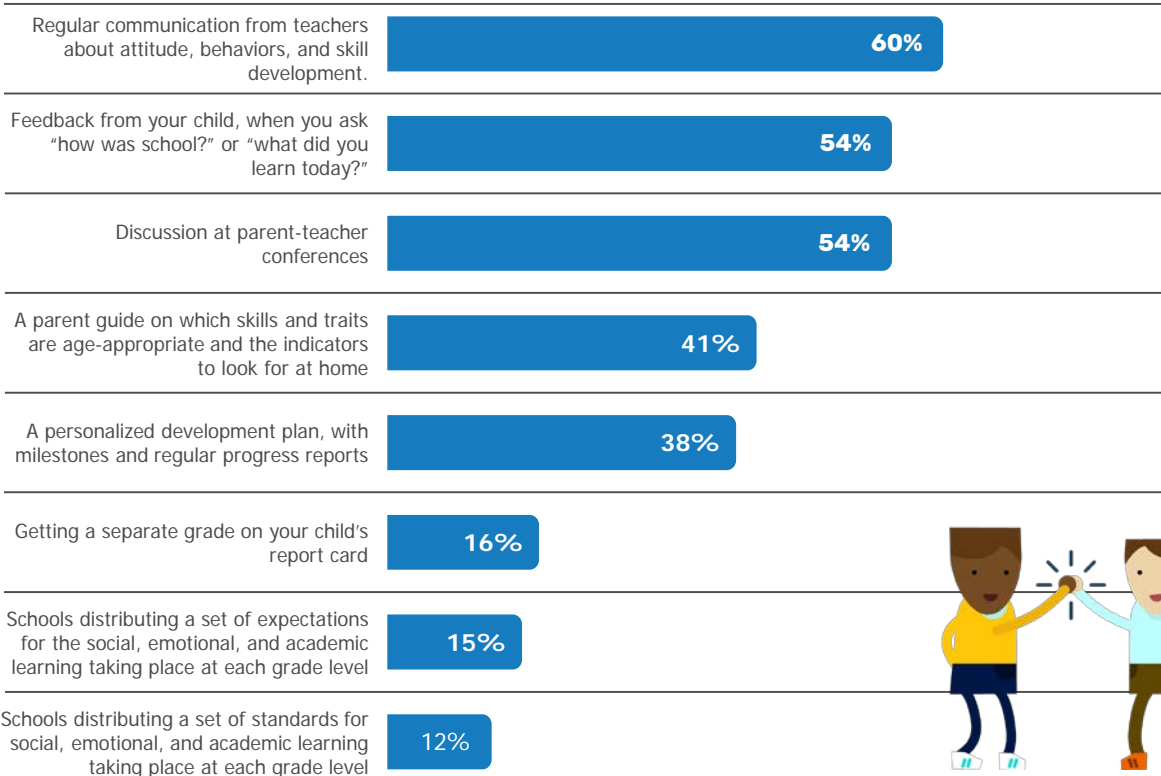| Character Grades					
Scoring Scale: 3 = Frequently; 2 = Sometimes; 1 = Rarely					
Character Strength		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
GRATITUDE	o Shows appreciation for opportunities o Shows appreciation for others	1	3	2	
GRIT	o Finishes what he or she starts o Never gives up in the face of a challenge o Takes risks to solve problems	1	2	2	
HOPE	o Believes his or her choices make a difference o Demonstrates resiliency	1	1	1	
SELF CONTROL	o Actively listens o Follows instructions o Regulates feelings & controls behaviors o Stays focused & resists distraction	1	1	1	
SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE / LOVE	o Asks questions to deepen understanding o Embraces similarities and differences o Shows love by asking for help o Shows love by giving help	2	3	2	
ZEST	o Actively participates o Eager to explore new things o Invigorates others	2	2	2	

Parents Don't Want Their Child Graded or Rated

% of parents selecting, with the option to select multiple responses. No major differences across sub-groups
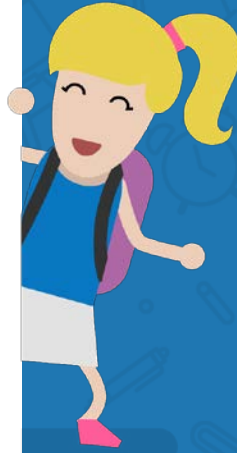
Question:

What type of feedback is most helpful to you as a parent to understand your child's progress in this type of learning?

Regular communication from teachers about attitude, behaviors, and skill development.	60%
Feedback from your child, when you ask "how was school?" or "what did you learn today?"	54%
Discussion at parent-teacher conferences	54%
A parent guide on which skills and traits are age-appropriate and the indicators to look for at home	41%
A personalized development plan, with milestones and regular progress reports	38%
Getting a separate grade on your child's report card	16%
Schools distributing a set of expectations for the social, emotional, and academic learning taking place at each grade level	15%
Schools distributing a set of standards for social, emotional, and academic learning taking place at each grade level	12%

Acknowledgements

Thank you!

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