

The background is a solid dark blue color. It is covered with a repeating pattern of white line-art icons representing various educational subjects: bicycles, laptops, globes, books, speech bubbles, paper airplanes, and other school-related items. The icons are scattered across the entire page.

# **LEARNING** **HEROES**

## **THE CASE FOR AN ACCURATE PICTURE**

**PARENT MINDSETS ON EDUCATION  
TRENDS FROM 2016-2019**

**OCTOBER 2019**

Parents deserve an accurate picture of their children's achievement and development so they can become effective advocates. Only then will the system begin to be more responsive to the needs of parents and families.

## A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER & PRESIDENT

I founded Learning Heroes five years ago to support parents and guardians as their children's most effective education advocate. As both a mother and a researcher, I know the critical role parents play in their children's success.

What I didn't know and understand when I started Learning Heroes was why our nation hasn't moved further faster in preparing more students for success. And then in 2016, we revealed a massive insight and a light bulb went off.

**Our national survey of K-8 parents and guardians showed 90% of parents, regardless of race, income, and education levels, believed their child was at or above grade level in reading and math\*. In reality, the number is closer to 37%.\*\***

Why this dissonance? Teachers tell us parents rely too much on report card grades alone, a subjective measure which doesn't always equate to grade-level achievement. Teachers also say parent-teacher communication is the best way for parents to know if their child is achieving. However, over the past four years of surveying parents, we see less interaction between families and schools. Even though teachers have access to multiple measures of student progress, most teachers aren't expected to give families a holistic picture, reporting that they don't have the time, resources, or training to do so.

Since 2016, we've worked to give parents an accurate picture of their children's development and achievement, yet we see through the trends in our data that gains have been modest and place-based. To truly serve all students, and underserved students in particular, it is time to strengthen and create systemic communications that knit families and schools together, centered around delivering an accurate and holistic view of student progress.

We believe the trends in this report point to an urgency for collective action to help ensure parents have access to what they deserve – an opportunity to most effectively support their children's education.



*Bibb Hubbard*

**BIBB HUBBARD**

*\* Learning Heroes, Parents 2016-2019*

*\*\* National Assessment of Educational Progress 2017*

## PARENT MINDSET TRENDS: THE EARLY YEARS (K-8)

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It is both intuitive and well established that parents and guardians simply want their children to be happy and prepared for a successful and fulfilling life. Yet, we see through four years of research that parents are often given a false sense of security that has the potential to impede their hopes and dreams for their child's future success.

There remains a massive gulf between what we know about student progress and the perceptions parents have about their children's achievement, with nine out of ten of parents thinking their child is at or above grade level in reading and math. Parents rely on the one measure they know and trust – report card grades – to gauge if their children are on track for success. Yet, report card grades don't tell the whole story. Parents deserve a more complete and accurate picture.

## PARENT PERCEPTION VS. REALITY

Perception

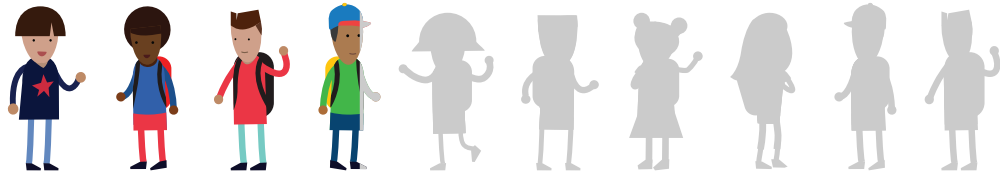
90%



**of parents**, regardless of race, income, and education level, believe their child is at or above grade level in reading and math.

Reality

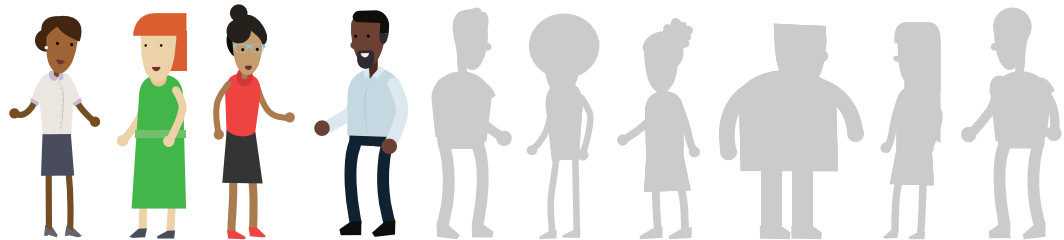
37%



**of students** nationally perform at or above grade-level work.

*2017 NAEP Data*

39%



**of teachers** report their students come prepared for grade-level work at the beginning of the year.

*Scholastic 2016 Principal and Teacher Survey*

PARENTS ARE INCREASINGLY CONFIDENT THEIR CHILDREN WILL BE PREPARED FOR COLLEGE

▼ Percent of parents who are confident that their child will be prepared for college



2017

60%

AA: 64%  
H: 60%  
W: 58%

2019

66%

AA: 72%  
H: 73%  
W: 63%

AA African American    H Hispanic    W White

## ...AND BELIEVE THEIR CHILD WILL GET A DEGREE

▼ Percent of parents who believe that their child will likely graduate from a 2- or 4-year college



**2017**

**AA: 74%**  
**H: 78%**  
**W: 71%**

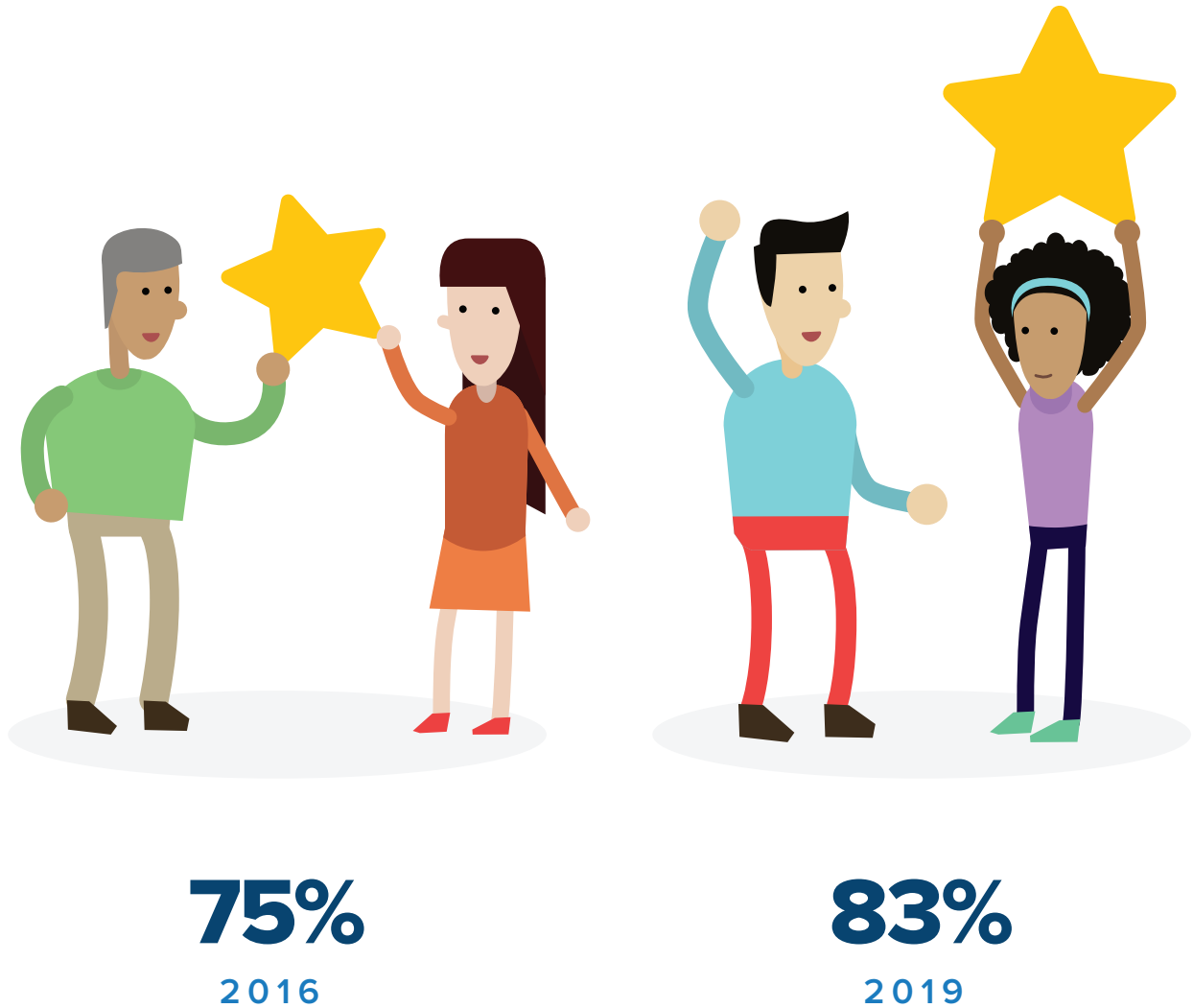
**2019**

**AA: 84%**  
**H: 85%**  
**W: 74%**

## SINCE 2016, PARENTS RATE THEIR CHILD'S SCHOOL MORE POSITIVELY

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▼ Percent of parents who rate their child's school as "excellent/very good"





## ...AND ARE LESS WORRIED ABOUT A NUMBER OF SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ACADEMIC INDICATORS

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▼ Percent of parents who worry about the following

**Happiness &  
Emotional  
Well-being**



**Peer Pressure**



**Gaining Knowledge  
& Skills to Be  
Ready for College**



**Whether Child Is on  
Track Academically**



## IN A FLIP FROM 2016, PARENTS NOW PLACE RESPONSIBILITY FOR IN-SCHOOL SUCCESS ON THEIR CHILDREN



▼ Percent of parents who place responsibility for in-school success on the...

2016

**37%**  
Child

**43%**  
Parent

**16%**  
Teacher

2017

**42%**  
Child

**43%**  
Parent

**12%**  
Teacher

2019

**59%**  
Child

**30%**  
Parent

**9%**  
Teacher

## ...AND ARE LESS LIKELY TO ENGAGE IN COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL

▼ Percent of parents who attend parent-teacher conferences

**77%**  
2017



**62%**  
2019

▼ Percent of parents who communicated with the teacher outside of a parent-teacher conference



**72%**  
2017



**50%**  
2019

▼ Percent of parents who help with homework



**86%**  
2017

**74%**  
2019

## TEACHERS SAY COMMUNICATING WITH THEM IS THE NO. 1 WAY TO KNOW A CHILD IS ACHIEVING, YET PARENTS SEE THINGS DIFFERENTLY

▼ Parents and teachers rank the most important ways to know how a child is achieving



### Teachers

**#1**



Regular communication with the teacher(s)

**#2**

Graded work and tests/quizzes from the teacher

**#3**



Report card grades

**#4**

Whether or not child struggles on homework

**#5**

Parent-Teacher conferences



### Parents

**#1**



Report card grades

**#2**

Whether or not child struggles on homework

**#3**

Graded work and tests/quizzes from the teacher

**#4**

Child's mood/body language

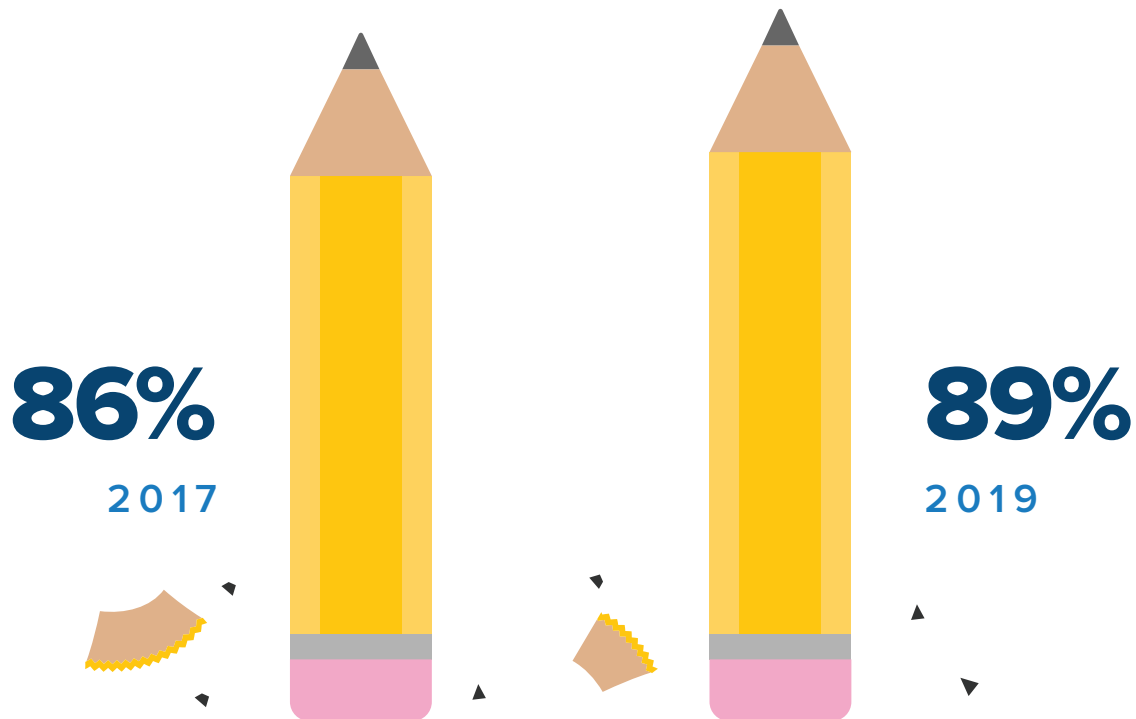
**#5**



Regular communication with the teacher(s)

## PARENTS RELY PRIMARILY ON GRADES AND REPORT THEIR CHILDREN GET A'S & B'S

▼ Percent of parents who rely on report card grades to know whether  
or not their child is achieving at his or her grade level



**85%**

of parents report that their  
children get A's and B's\*

## PARENTS BELIEVE REPORT CARDS MEAN GRADE-LEVEL ACHIEVEMENT

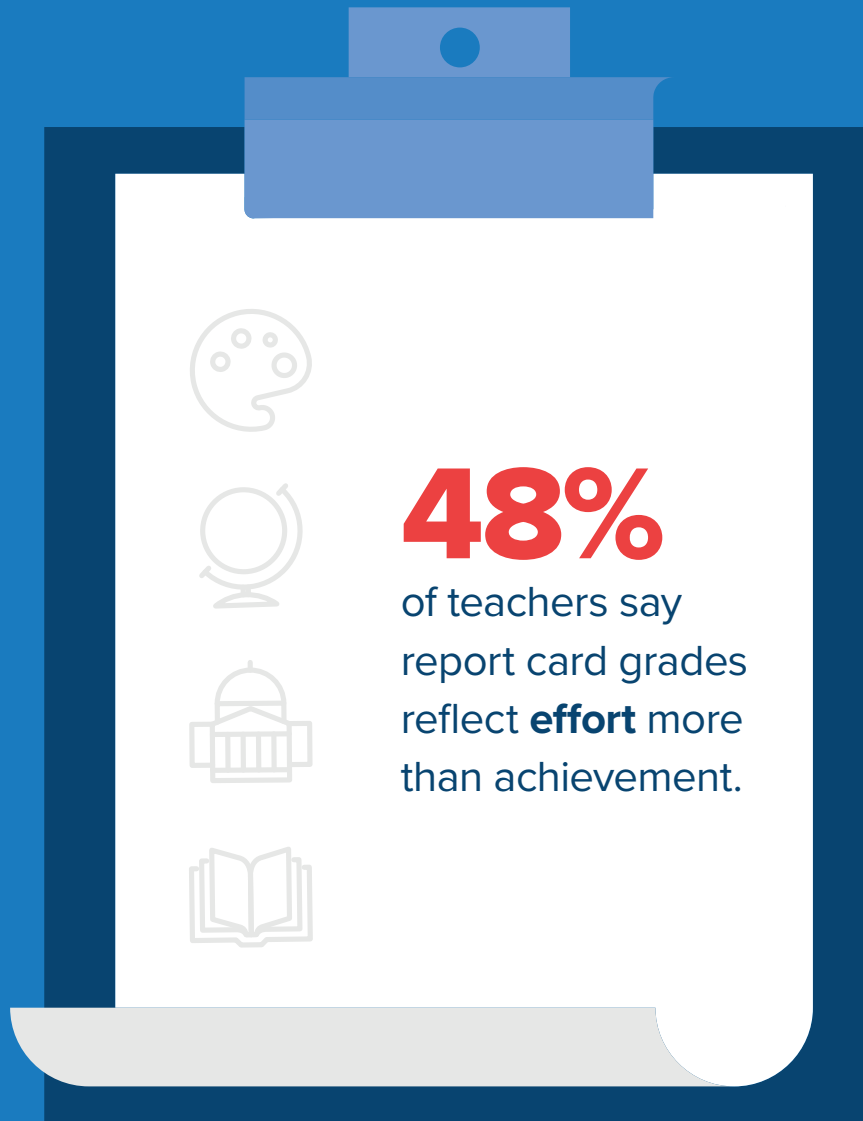
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▼ Percent of parents who believe grades equal grade-level



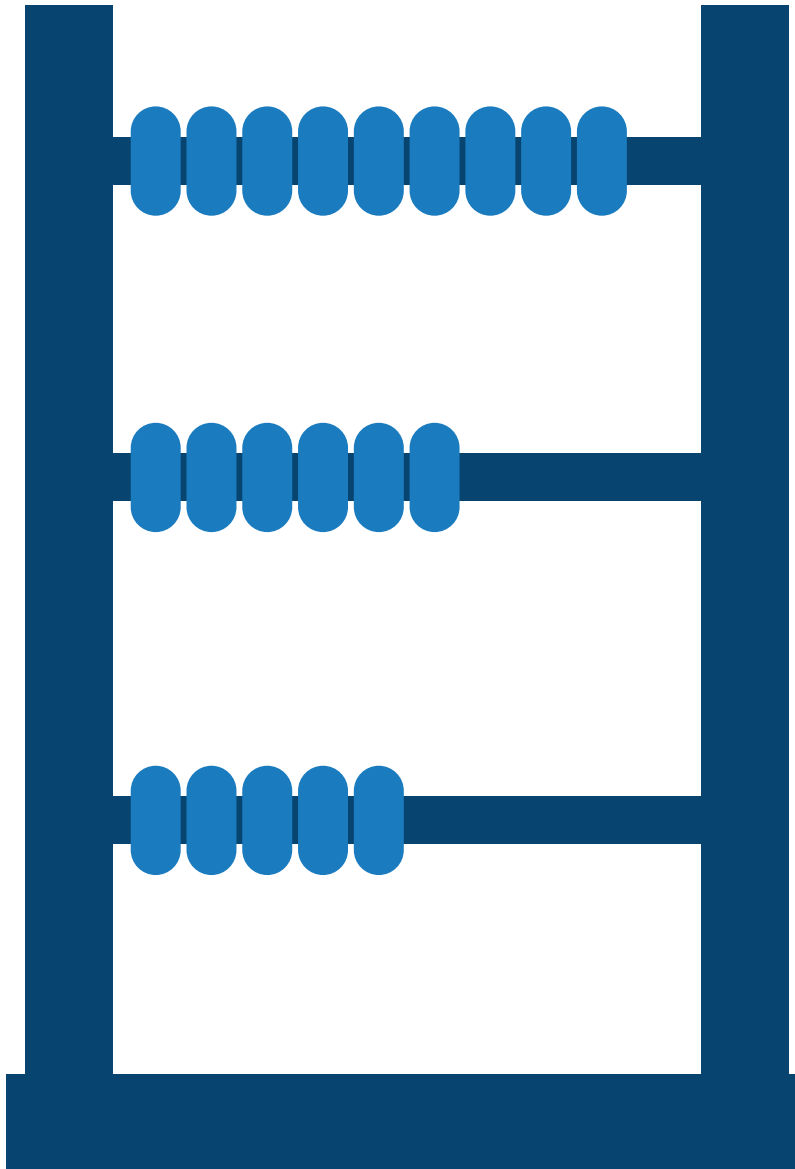
...YET, TEACHERS ACKNOWLEDGE REPORT CARDS REFLECT  
MORE THAN GRADE-LEVEL ACHIEVEMENT

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## WITH MULTIPLE MEASURES, PARENTS' MINDSETS SHIFT

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**88%**

of parents think their child is at or above grade level in math.

**61%**

of parents think their child is at or above grade level in math when told...

- ✓ Their child received a B in math
- ✓ Their child did not meet expectations on the state test

**52%**

of parents think their child is at or above grade level in math when told...

- ✓ Their child received a B in math
- ✓ Their child did not meet expectations on the state test
- ✓ Their child's school received an overall performance rating of C





# PARENT MINDSETS: THE HIGH SCHOOL YEARS

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In 2019, for the first time, Learning Heroes surveyed high school teachers and parents of high school students.

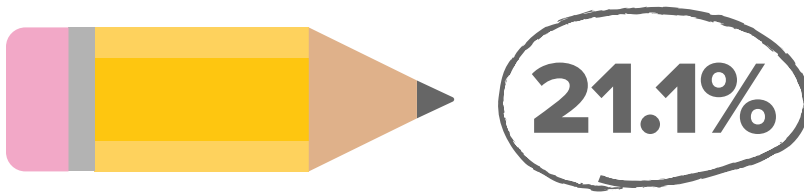
As the stakes get higher for students, parents hold even stronger beliefs that their children are on track for success in high school and college.

## COLLEGE REMAINS THE ASPIRATION

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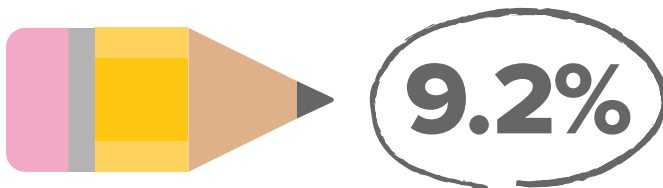


**Percent of parents who think it is extremely/very likely their child will get a 2–4 year degree**



**Percent of 25–64 year olds with a bachelor's degree**

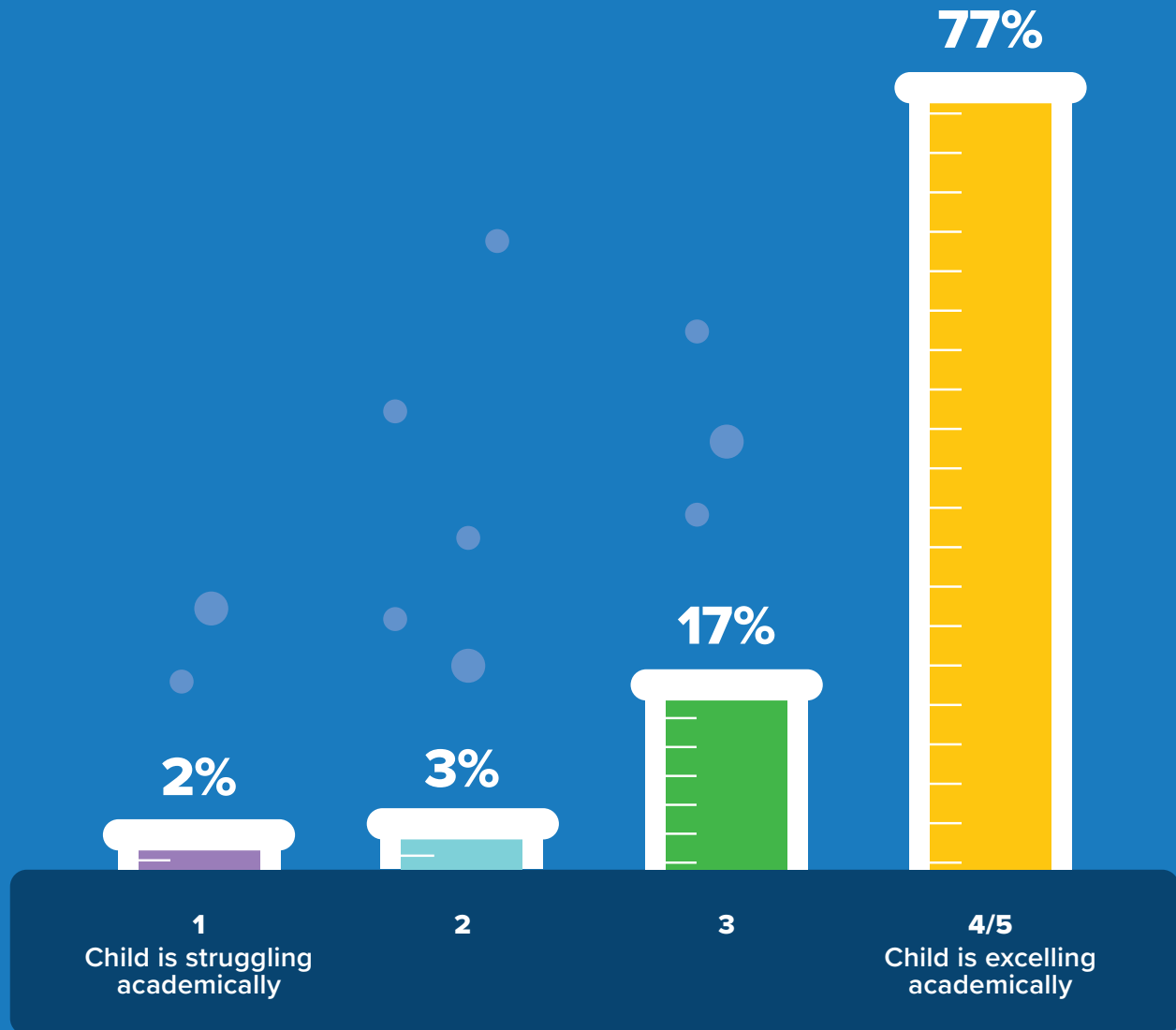
*A Stronger Nation, Lumina Foundation*



**Percent of 25–64 year olds with an associate's degree**

## ...AND PARENTS ARE CONFIDENT THEIR CHILDREN ARE EXCELLING ACADEMICALLY, EVEN AS THE STAKES GET HIGHER

▼ Percent of parents who rate how their child is doing academically

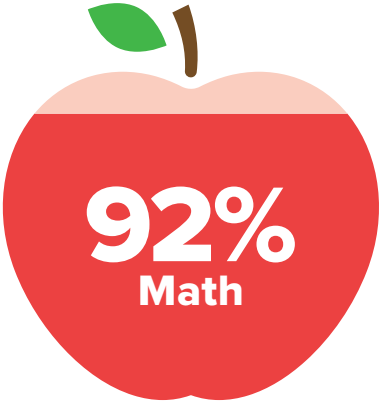


**PARENTS BELIEVE THEIR CHILD IS AT/ABOVE  
GRADE LEVEL, DESPITE NATIONAL DATA**

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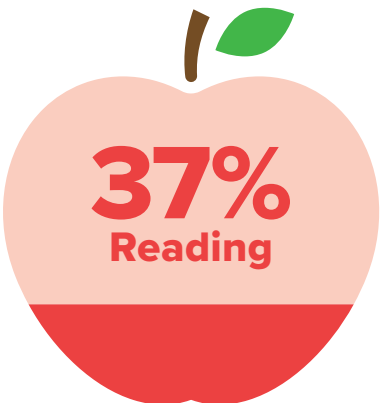
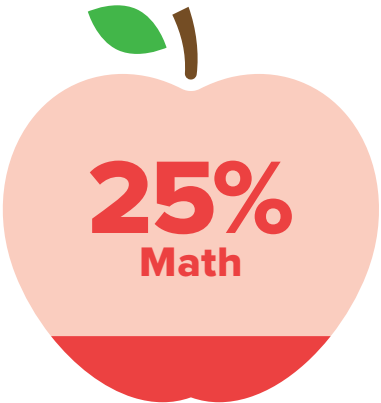
**Perception**

▼ Percent of parents who believe their child is at or above grade level



**Reality**

▼ Percent of high school students performing at or above grade level

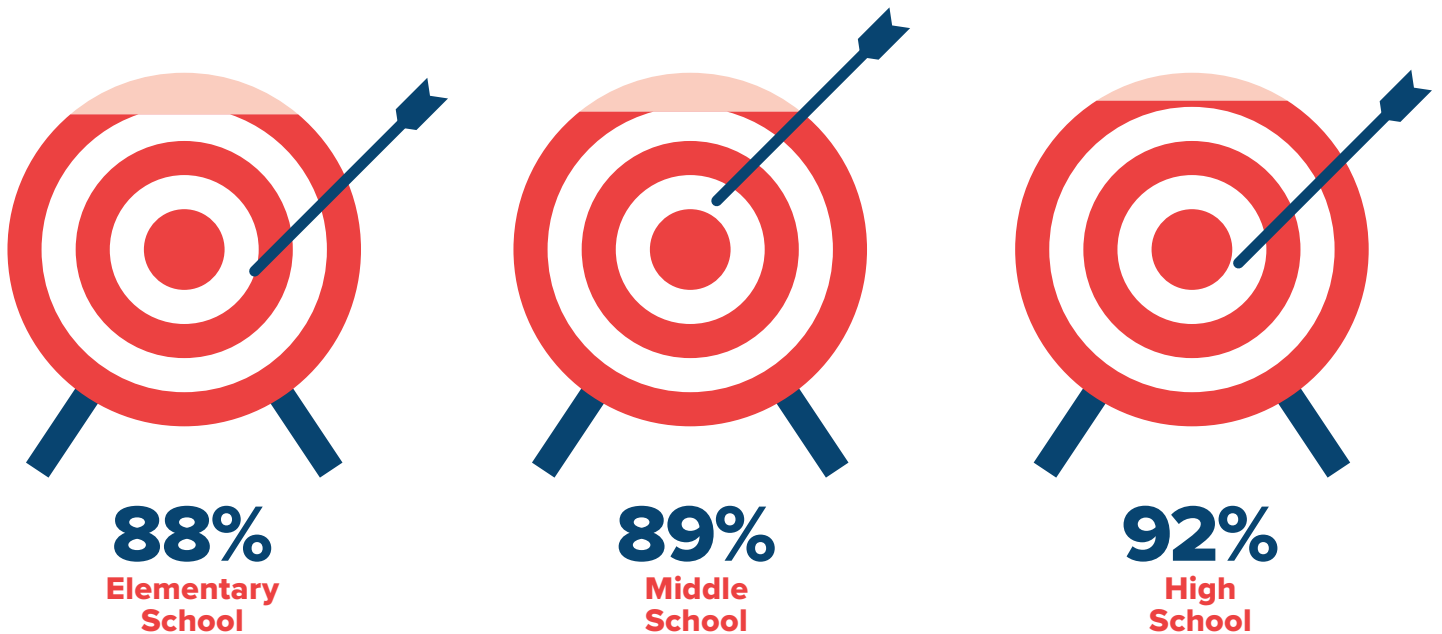


*\*2015 NAEP data, 12th grade*

## REPORT CARDS ARE STILL SEEN AS THE MOST ACCURATE MEASURE

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▼ Percent of parents who believe report cards are an accurate reflection of academic achievement



## AND AS CHILDREN PROGRESS, PARENTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO RELY ON GRADES TO KNOW IF THEIR CHILD IS ACHIEVING

▼ Percent of parents who rely on report cards to know their child is achieving on grade level

**86%**

Elementary  
School

**91%**

Middle School/  
High School



## WHEN IT COMES TO SUPPORTING THEIR CHILDREN, PARENTS NEED HELP

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▼ Percent of parents who say these resources would be very/extremely helpful



**71%**

A simple explanation of what  
your child is expected to  
learn this year

**67%**

Guidance on how to help  
your child become more  
independent

**67%**

A tool to help you support  
your child in planning for life  
after high school

## **IN CONCLUSION: MOVING FROM INSIGHTS TO ACTION**

We are grateful to our partners who have turned research into action, reaching millions of families. We applaud organizations and institutions that have delivered research-based resources to parents and guardians in schools, places of worship, out-of-school settings, and homes. And we celebrate exciting place-based results, as parents in certain settings now receive a more accurate picture of their child's academic and developmental achievement.

While all of this is important, it is simply not enough. Until parents have access to multiple measures that give parents a holistic view of their children's achievement, progress will be slow.

With this trend data in mind, now is the time to take collective action to yield faster results for all students, especially for the students and families who have been underserved for far too long.

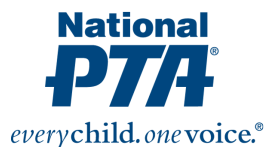
We hope you will join us as we continue – and expand – this journey to give parents the accurate picture they deserve.

## THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS AND PARTNERS FOR FIVE YEARS OF LEARNING

As Learning Heroes celebrates five years of listening to parents and engaging in dynamic learning, we are grateful to the philanthropic organizations that have supported the four years of trend data referenced here. Thank you to the Barr Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, One8 Foundation, and The Grable Foundation for your collaboration and support.

We would also like to thank our national partners who have helped inform this data since our inaugural national parent survey in 2016: National PTA, National Urban League, UnidosUS, and Univision.

**These organizations continue to fuel and shape this important work – and help reach and engage millions of parents nationwide.**



## METHODOLOGY

Thank you to Hart Research Associates and Edge Research for their collaboration.

Special thanks to Lynn Olson for the narrative.

### Parents 2016

This national survey was conducted by Hart Research Associates among 1,374 parents and guardians 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 6–22, 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 this report, though responses among parents across the three states largely parallel the findings among parents nationally.

### Parents 2017

Hart Research Associates conducted this national survey among 1,423 parents and guardians of public school children in grades K–8. It includes a nationally representative survey of 813 elementary and middle school parents. It also includes oversamples among Hispanics (to yield 293 Spanish-dominant Hispanic parents and 266 English-dominant Hispanic parents) and African Americans (to yield 280 African American parents). The online survey was conducted between March 22 and April 6, 2017, and was offered in both English and Spanish. The survey was administered by GfK, using their KnowledgePanel®, a probability-based Web panel designed to be representative of the United States.

## Parents 2018

Edge Research conducted this nationwide online survey among 1,705 parents and guardians with children in public school, in grades 3–8, with oversamples among African Americans, Hispanics, and parents of charter school students. The survey was fielded August 6–24, 2018 and offered in both English and Spanish. Quotas were set so the data would be representative by key demographics. In addition, Edge fielded a nationwide sample of 1,035 public school teachers, grades 3–8, fielded August 16–25, 2018.

Here too, quotas were set so data would be representative by key demographics.

Edge’s qualitative research in six locations (Dallas, TX; Braintree, MA; Bedford, NH; Pittsburgh, PA; Cincinnati, OH; and Sacramento, CA) included 80 sessions with mixed methodologies:

**12 parent focus groups**

**24 parent/child dyads**

**28 teacher interviews**

**8 virtual counselor interviews**

**8 virtual principal interviews**

## Parents 2019

Edge Research conducted this nationwide online survey among 2,952 parents and guardians with children in public school, in grades K–12, with oversamples among African Americans and Hispanics. The survey was fielded April 15 to May 5, 2019 and offered in both English and Spanish. Data were weighted to be representative of public school parents in the United States. In addition, Edge fielded a nationwide sample of 505 public school teachers, grades 3–8, fielded May 2–9, 2019. Quotas were set so data would be representative by key demographics.

## Additional data informing this survey included:

**Learning Heroes 2018 Parent Survey**

**Learning Heroes 2018 Teacher Survey (all elementary and middle school teacher data is from this survey)**

As illustrated above, survey methodology and data collection have changed over time. It is possible some of variations in the data could partially be attributed to these differences.





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# LEARNING HEROES

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If you would like to partner with Learning Heroes, please  
contact us at [communications@learningheroes.org](mailto:communications@learningheroes.org).