

**LEARNING  
HEROES**



# New Jersey Parents: Activated to Engage

Findings from Focus Groups  
and an Online Survey

FALL 2020



Research by:  **EDGE**  
research

*This work is made possible by a  
grant from the Charles & Lynn  
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# Agenda

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**Project Overview  
& Partners**



**Research Findings  
& Discussion**



**Recommendations &  
Next Steps**



## VISION

Every parent\* is a learning hero – advocating effectively for their children’s academic, social, and emotional success, driving equitable school improvement.

## MISSION

Support parents as their children's most effective advocate by ensuring they have a complete, holistic, and accurate picture of their children’s progress and success.

\* “Parents” encompasses parents and guardians

# Work on New Jersey Parent Mindsets Includes:

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## ★ Partner Engagement

- Outreach to individuals/organizations serving families throughout New Jersey
- Continued communication with partners to inform the research and strategy for sharing findings, tools, and resources

## ★ Research

- Qualitative: Informal interviews and focus groups (May-June)
- Quantitative: Poll based on national Learning Heroes survey with partner input (July-August)

## ★ Rollout and Community Convenings

- Fall meetings (virtual if needed) to share research results and engage additional New Jersey organizations directly in the findings and development of related actions
- Tools and resources informed by research



# Project Partners

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# NJ Research Findings and Discussion



# Methodology

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## ★ Focus Groups (June 17th-18th, 2020)

- 4 virtual parent groups
- Mix of parents from North, South, and Central New Jersey
- Group 1: Parents of students in grades 3-5
- Group 2: Parents of students in grades 6-8
- Group 3: Parents of students in grades 9-12
- Group 4: Low Income parents of students in grades 3-8
- All groups were recruited to include a mix of races/ethnicities

## ★ Survey (July 24th-August 2nd, 2020)

- n=500, with oversamples of Hispanic and African American parents
- Conducted online, in English and Spanish

Throughout this report, **blue/red** indicates statistically **higher/lower** differences between audiences.

**Yellow text** denotes results from a recent national survey of parents conducted by Learning Heroes (conducted April 4<sup>th</sup>-May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020).



# Insights

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## **After Remote Learning, When Parent Engagement in Education Reached New Heights, Parents Maintained an Inflated Sense of Their Child's Achievement**

Parents' increased participation in their child's education did not translate into a more realistic perception of whether their child is at/above grade level.



## **Amidst a Sea of Worries and Concerns, Safety is Paramount**

Parents are laser-focused on safety and whether their child's school can safely open during the upcoming year. Academics represent less of a concern, in part, because parents believe their children performed well last spring.



## **While Parents Gave Schools the Benefit of the Doubt Last Spring, Parents Expect (Much) More This Fall**

Increased parent expectations include ease of online access, more effective and engaging teaching, and opportunities for parent involvement.

# Parent Mindsets



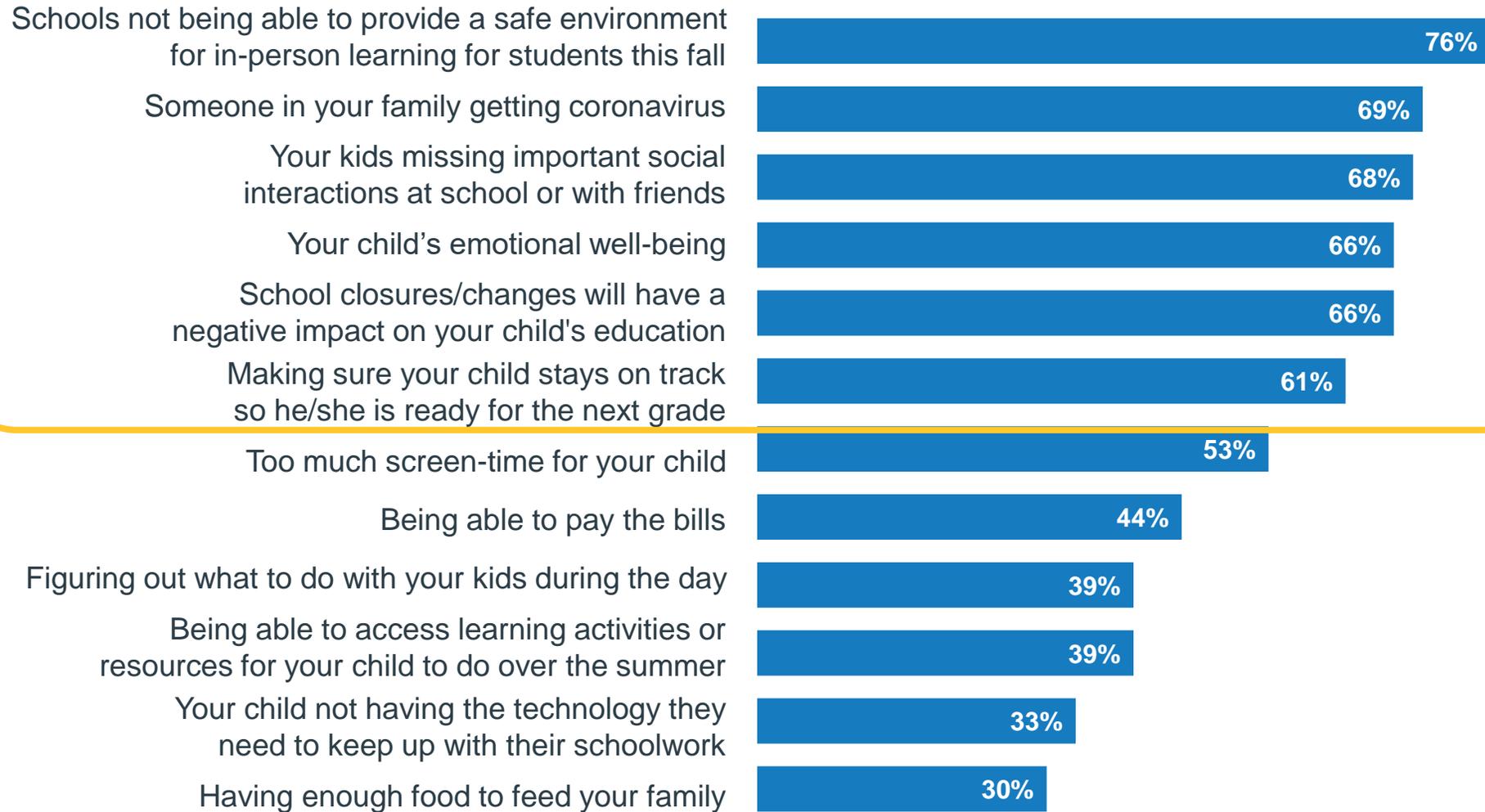
# Although COVID Causes Anxiety and Worry, Parents also Feel Hopeful and Grateful

Given the current coronavirus situation in this country, how are you feeling as a parent?

| Compared to US | Feeling this Way  |           |        |     |     |
|----------------|-------------------|-----------|--------|-----|-----|
|                | African Americans | Hispanics | Whites |     |     |
|                | Hopeful           | 71%       | 81%    | 75% | 67% |
|                | Grateful          | 71%       | 79%    | 70% | 67% |
|                | Anxious/worried   | 69%       | 60%    | 66% | 73% |
|                | Frustrated        | 60%       | 49%    | 54% | 64% |
| -6%            | Optimistic        | 59%       | 64%    | 67% | 54% |
|                | Scared            | 55%       | 52%    | 48% | 58% |
|                | Overwhelmed       | 54%       | 60%    | 52% | 55% |
|                | Calm              | 53%       | 59%    | 55% | 47% |
| -10%           | Safe              | 50%       | 48%    | 51% | 49% |
|                | Confused          | 48%       | 43%    | 49% | 49% |

28% most prominent

# Parents' Top Concerns are Safety and the Social and Educational Impact of COVID on Their Children

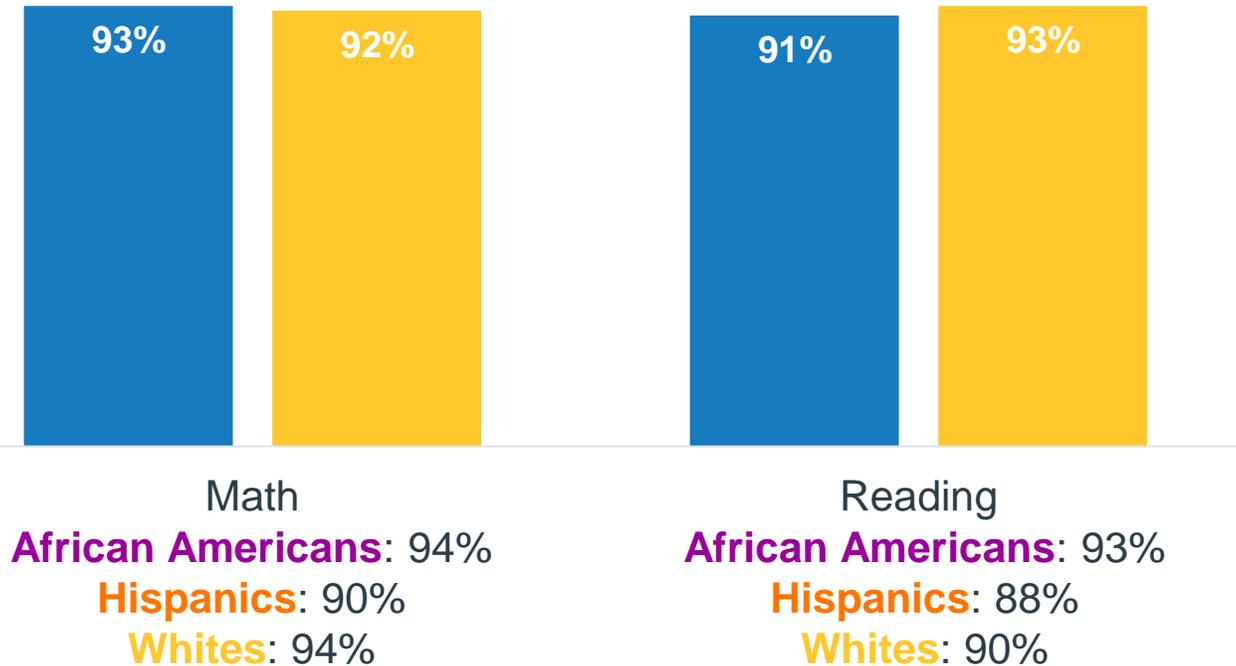


(% worry a lot/some)

# The Disconnect: More than 90% of NJ Parents Believe Their Child is at or Above Grade Level

Believe Child is **At/Above Grade Level**

■ NJ ■ US



**89%**

of NJ parents indicate their child is getting “mostly Bs” or better

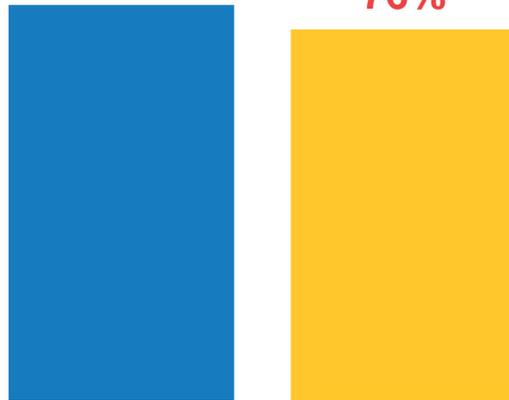
NJ Statistics (4<sup>th</sup> grade NAEP):  
Math: **48%** proficient or advanced  
Reading: **42%** proficient or advanced

# Parents' Aspirations for Their Children Remain High, Even During this Time Period

How important is it to you that your child goes to college?

81%

76%

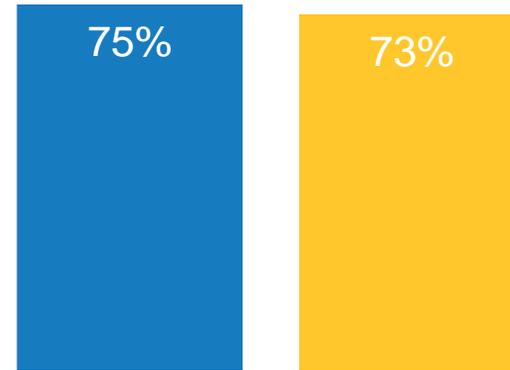


Absolutely essential/very

How confident are you that your child will be well prepared for entrance into and success in college upon graduation from high school?

75%

73%



Extremely/very

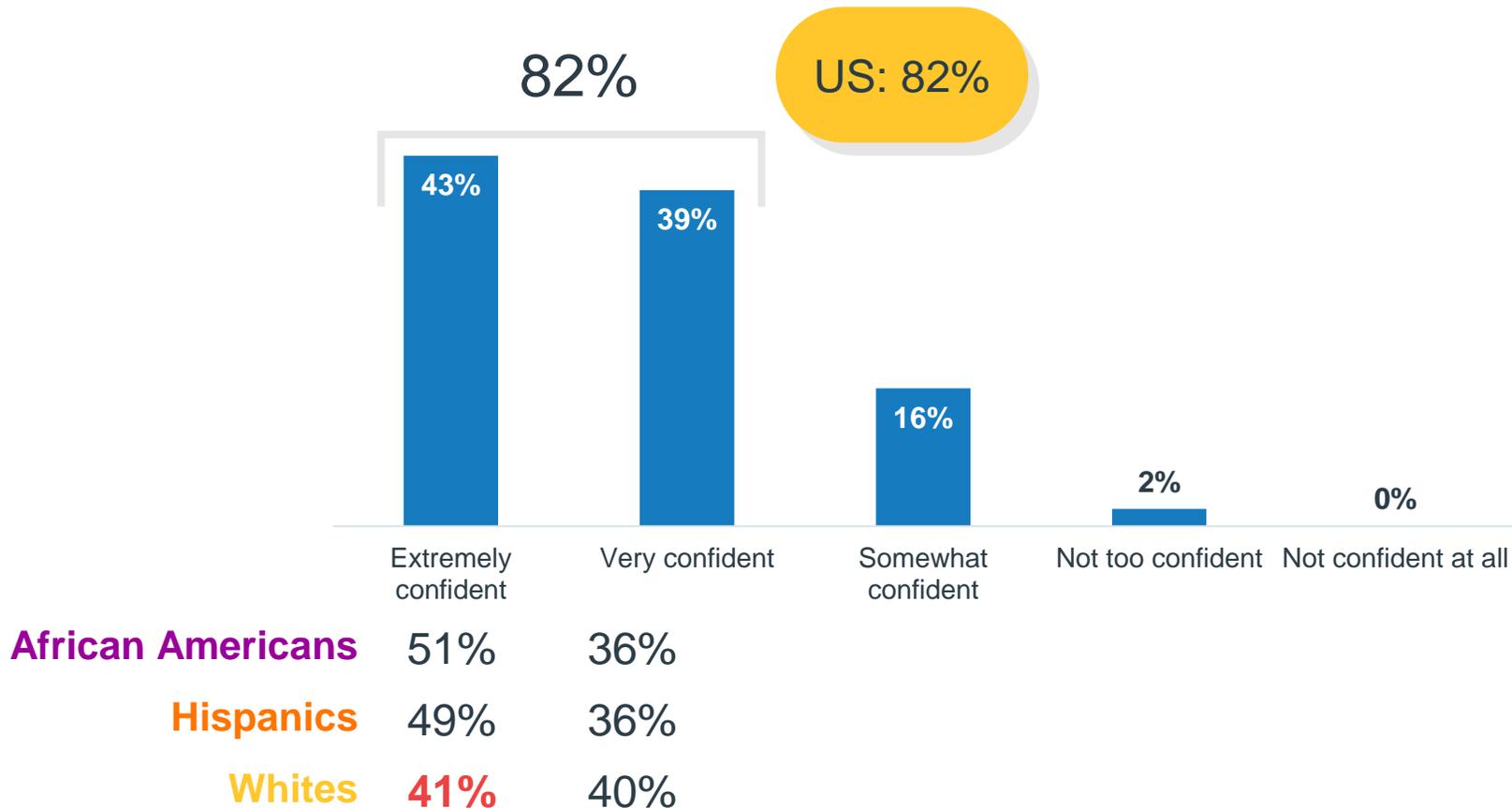
■ NJ ■ US

|                          | NJ  | US  |
|--------------------------|-----|-----|
| <b>African Americans</b> | 81% | 81% |
| <b>Hispanics</b>         | 88% | 82% |
| <b>Whites</b>            | 88% | 69% |

|                          | NJ  | US  |
|--------------------------|-----|-----|
| <b>African Americans</b> | 80% | 80% |
| <b>Hispanics</b>         | 79% | 74% |
| <b>Whites</b>            | 74% | 72% |

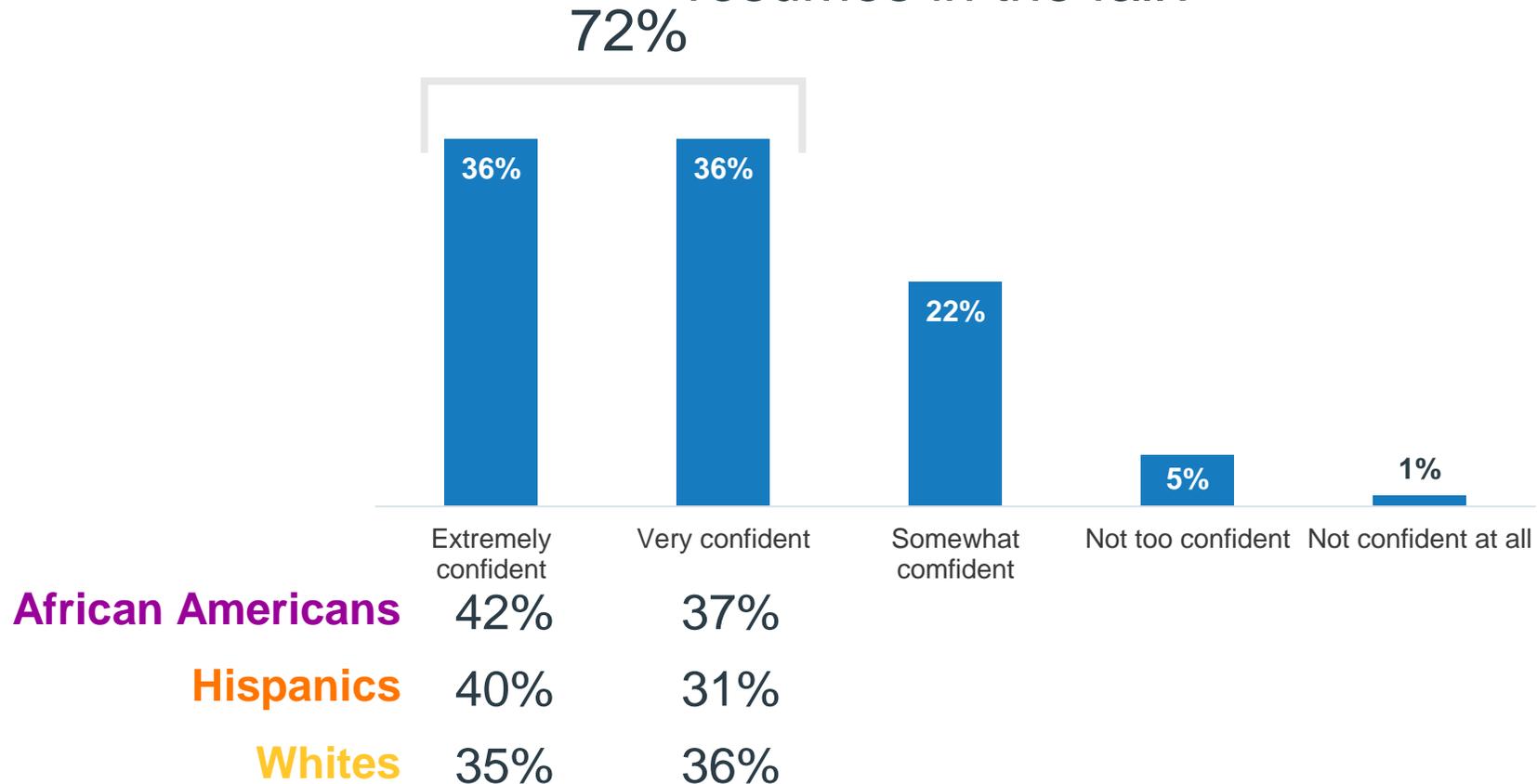
# Most Parents are Confident About Their Knowledge of Their Children's Academic Standing

How confident are you that you have a clear understanding of how well your child is achieving academically?



# Parents are Less Confident Their Child is Well-Prepared for the Next Grade Level

How confident are you that your child will be well-prepared for their next grade level when school resumes in the fall?



# Remote Learning: Looking Back at the Spring



# Parent (and Child) Experiences During Remote Learning Were Mixed and Changed as the Crisis Progressed

For the first 3 weeks there was nothing. They were just posting activity worksheets on the county website. When remote learning started, I was relieved. Brought about structure and some stress off my shoulders.

– **ES Parent**

It was a struggle to make sure she was getting everything she needed and keep up with my work in the hospital. I have 3 kids and it was a lot and teachers did the best they could. I agree it got better over time. ELA teacher sent out video lessons that kept her interest, kept them pretty short.

– **ES Parent**

If it had been one kid, it might have been alright. I have two in middle school...I don't think (my kids) having to keep themselves motivated worked well.

– **MS Parent**

I go into her google classroom and look at what's scheduled for the day and write it down so she knows. I'm not watching her all day when working so she has a little more freedom than in the classroom.

– **Low Income Grade 3-8 Parent**

Technically, I think it worked very well. I wasn't involved much at all. My daughter did everything. I just had to make sure she had a connection. She got done everything she needed to. They started late, so they did like half days. They didn't really give a full day of instruction. Being thrown into it, it was basically assignments and then test and quizzes. Mostly on their own, not a lot of Zoom. Luckily, they gave a Chromebook to every student in the district, so had the tech, but didn't have the content for interactive discussion. If this goes into September they probably will. They would have to have more content for teaching.

– **HS Parent**

# While Remote Schooling Went Better than Parents Anticipated, it was a Challenge, Too

**59%** of parents agree that their child's remote schooling went better than they expected.  
**(57% nationally)**

**African Americans:** 68%  
**Hispanics:** 66%  
**Whites:** 55%

**54%** of parents agree that supporting their child while they are doing remote schoolwork was harder than they expected it to be.  
**(52% nationally)**

**African Americans:** 58%  
**Hispanics:** 61%  
**Whites:** 50%

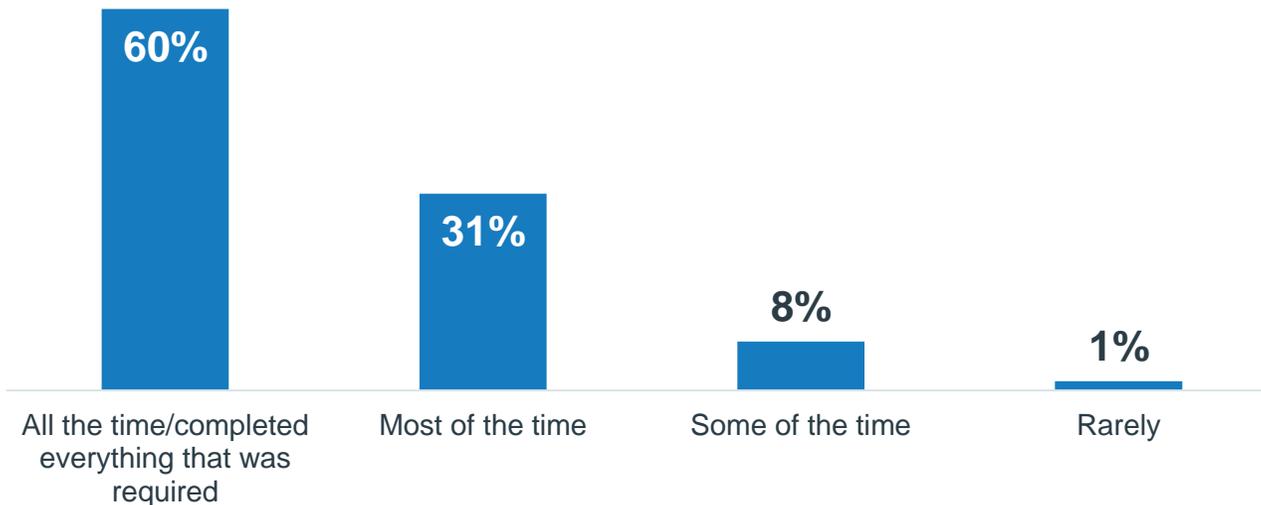
# Four-In-Ten Parents Indicate Their Child Was Not Able to Complete Everything Required Last Spring

Forty-five percent (45%) of African American parents share this sentiment.

How often was your child able to participate in or keep up with distance learning activities provided by their school?

**All the Time**

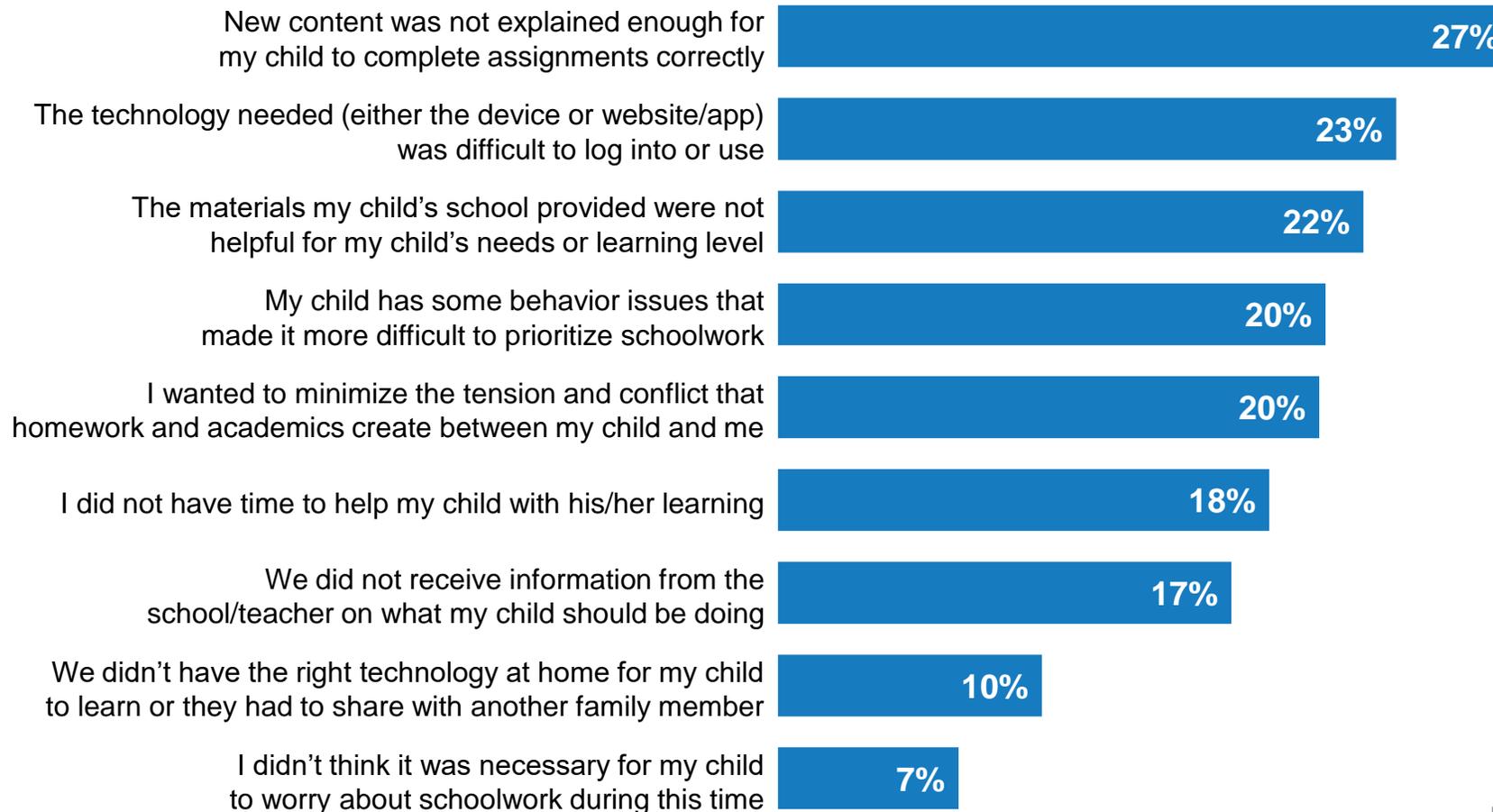
**African Americans:** 55%  
**Hispanics:** 60%  
**Whites:** 62%



# Digital Literacy and Confusion About Lessons Served as Primary Barriers to Participation

## Reasons For Child Not Participating Much/At All

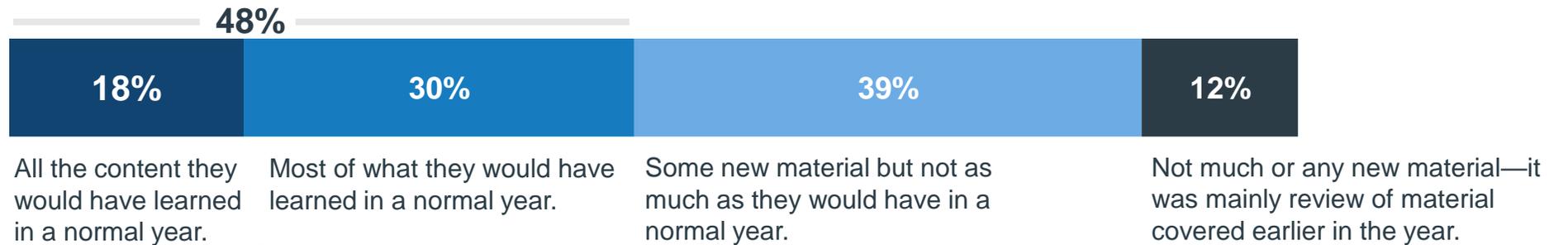
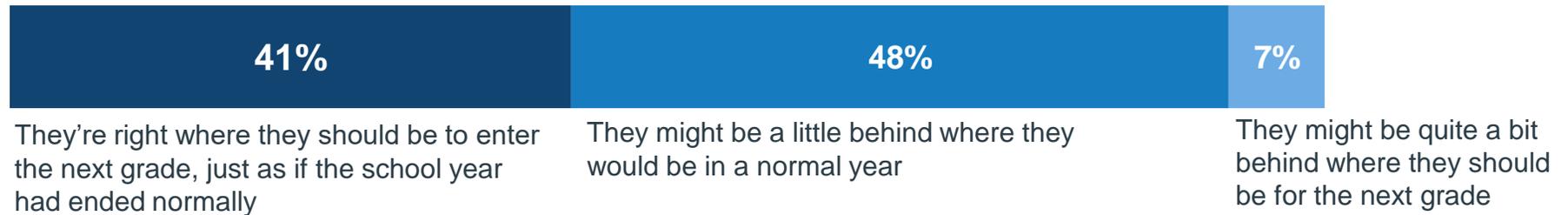
Base: Not Participating in Remote Schooling Most of the Time (n=57)



# Almost Half Believe Their Child Learned Most or all of What They Would Have in a Normal Year, but Concern for the Fall Remains

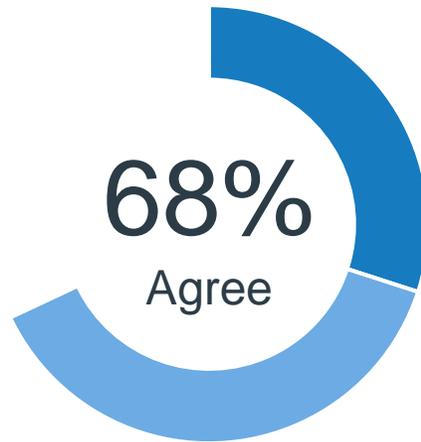
Parents in urban areas are more likely to feel this way (on all three measures) than others.

Taking into account your child's remote learning at the end of the last school year, where do you think your child is academically going into the upcoming school year this fall?



# Most Felt Grades Reflected Completion Rather Than Content Mastery

Compared to the regular school year, during remote schooling **my child's grades were based more on whether they completed assignments than how much they understood the content.**



**Elementary School:** 69%

**Middle School:** 70%

**High School:** 66%

**African Americans:** 65%

**Hispanics:** 75%

**Whites:** 68%

Academic progress itself, it's hard for me to tell. This last couple of months I don't think he was learning anything he hadn't already learned. Feels like he ended the year in March and the last couple of months he has been skating by. Don't think he has made much progress in the last couple months. If he showed up and did the work they asked him to do, they gave him an A.

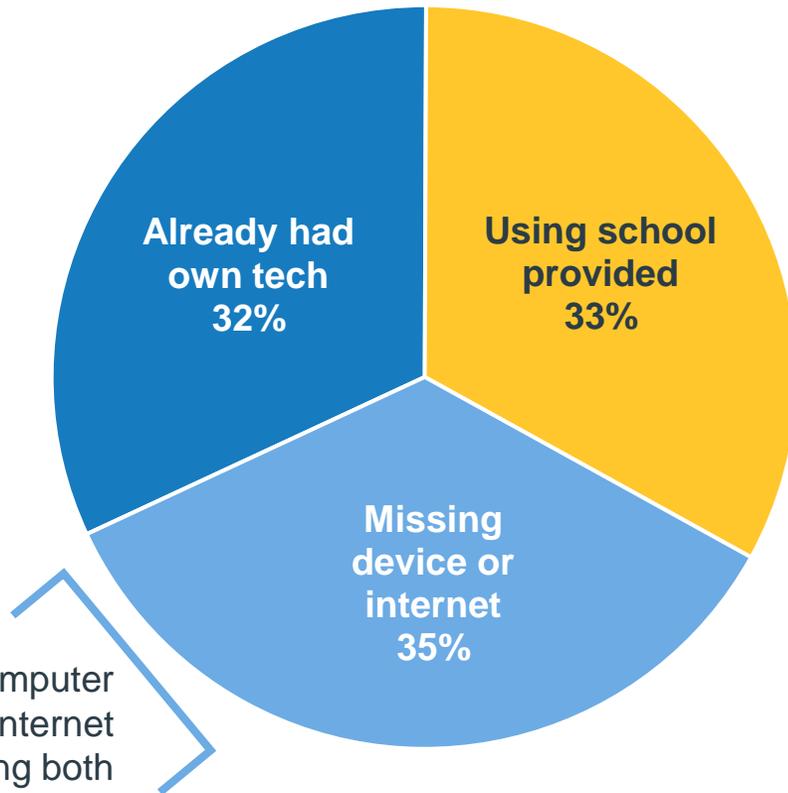
– *MS Parent*

I feel like the grading for what we experienced, in the back of my mind I wondered if they are just bumping the grades up and making assignments longer and easier just to push through this time? And what are they going to do in the fall? He's not prepared at all to go into high school in the fall.

– *Low Income Grade 3-8 Parent*

# About a Third of Parents Say Their Child Did Not Have the Tech Needed for Remote Schooling

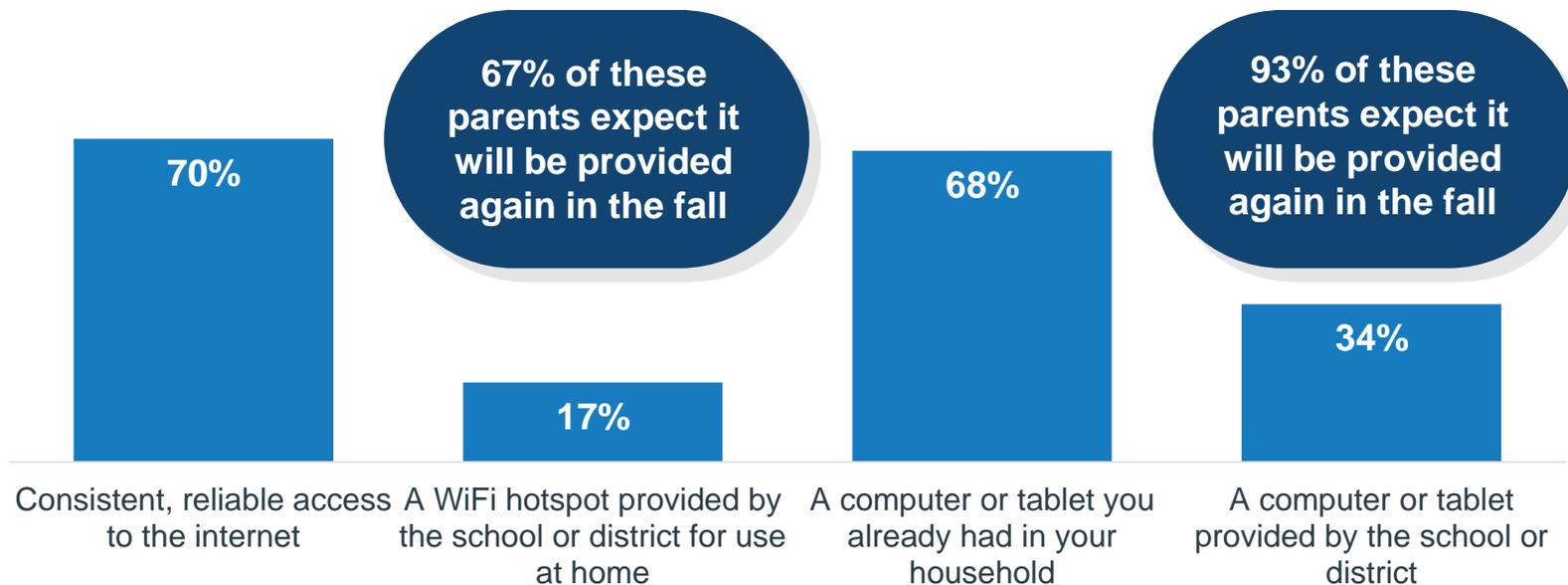
## Tech and/or WiFi Access Source



|                          | Own        | School | Missing    |
|--------------------------|------------|--------|------------|
| <b>African Americans</b> | <b>24%</b> | 37%    | <b>39%</b> |
| <b>Hispanics</b>         | 31%        | 30%    | <b>39%</b> |
| <b>Whites</b>            | <b>35%</b> | 35%    | <b>30%</b> |

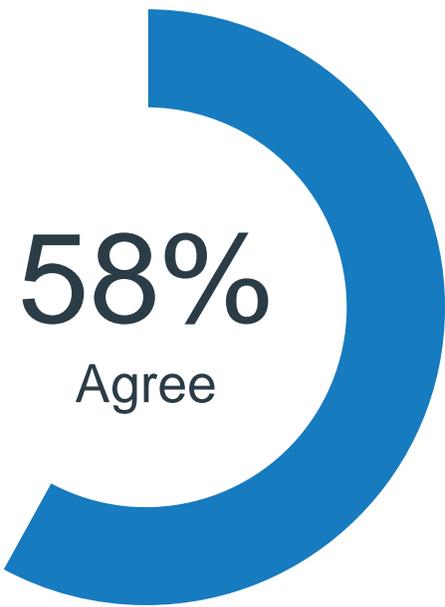
# Parents Who Relied on District Technology in the Spring Expect Help Again This Fall

Which of the following resources did your child have access to whenever needed for schoolwork during remote schooling?



# A Majority of Parents Believe All Students Will be “In the Same Place” This Fall

All students had remote schooling last spring, so they will mostly be in the same place academically going into the next school year.



**58%**  
Agree

**African Americans:** 57%

**Hispanics:** 56%

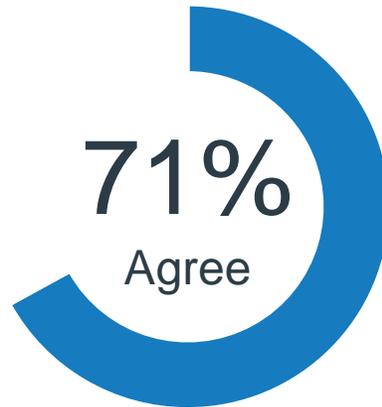
**Whites:** 59%

# Parents Activated to Engage this Fall



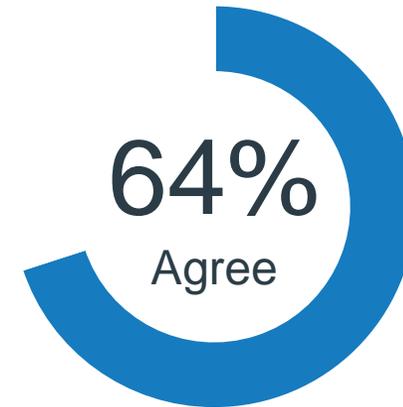
# Parents View Their Experiences Last Spring as a Potential Launching Point for the Fall

I am more connected with my child's day-to-day education now than ever before.



**African Americans:** 72%  
**Hispanics:** 80%  
**Whites:** 68%

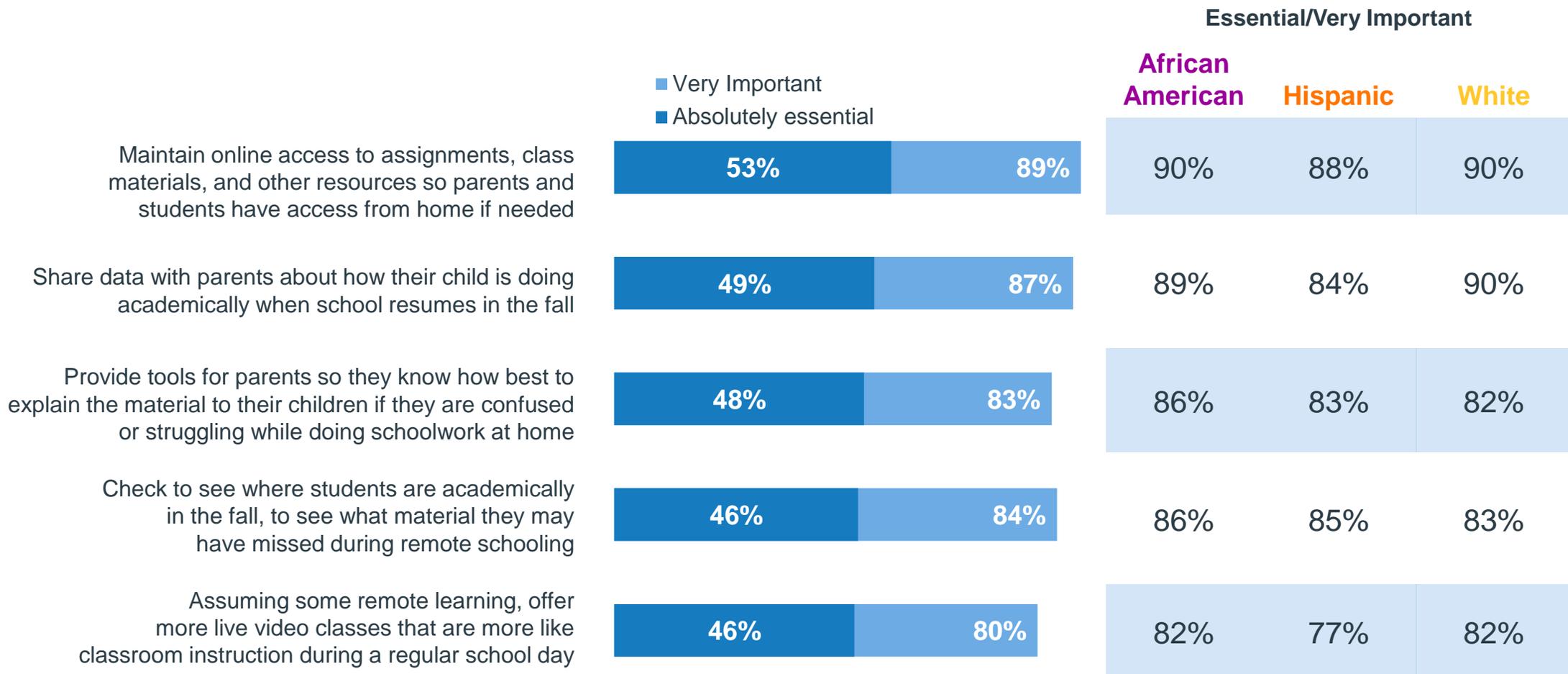
I have a much better understanding of what my child is expected to learn to be ready for the next grade since working with him/her during remote schooling last spring.



**African Americans:** 70%  
**Hispanics:** 68%  
**Whites:** 60%

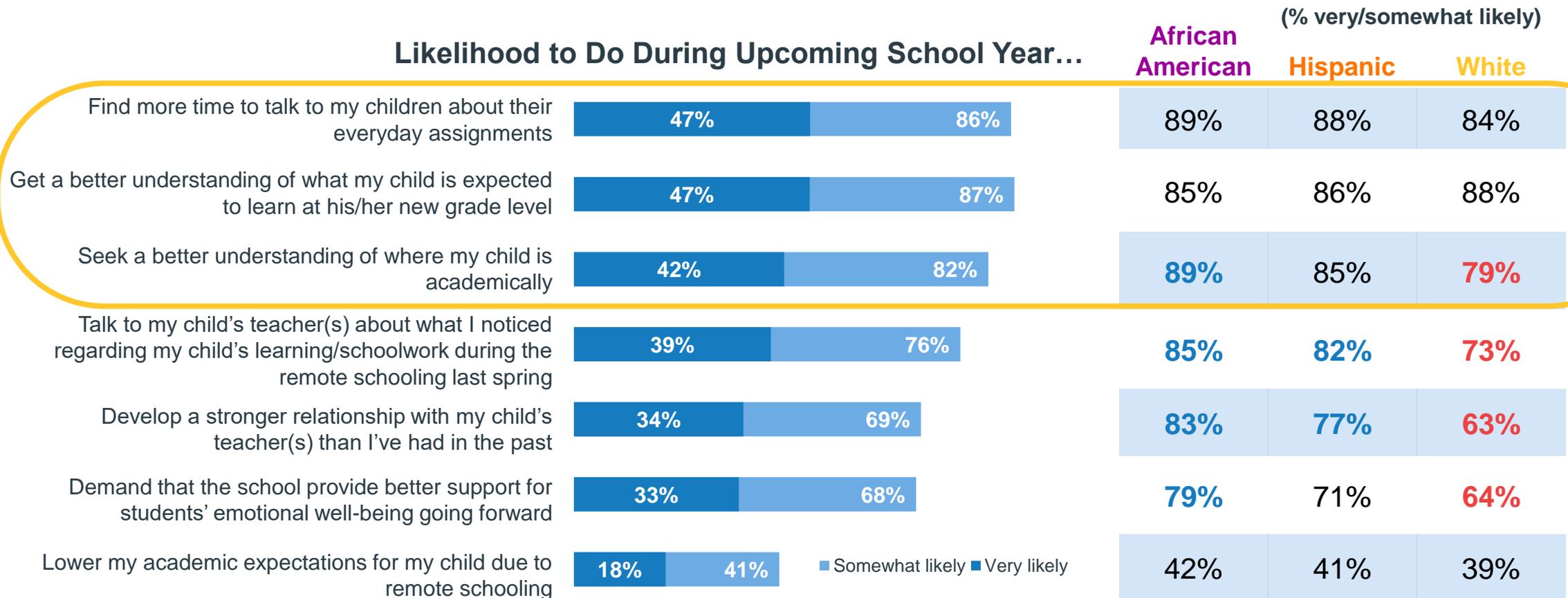
# Parents Have Higher Expectations for the New School Year

## Expectations of Schools for Coming Year



# ...and, They are Activated to be More Involved and Informed This Fall

These numbers (except for lowering expectations) are all significantly higher than in the national survey.



# Parents See Value in and Need for a Fall Benchmark

The reasons that resonate the most for giving a fall benchmark include:

## Informing Teacher Instruction & Parent Support (73% find this convincing)

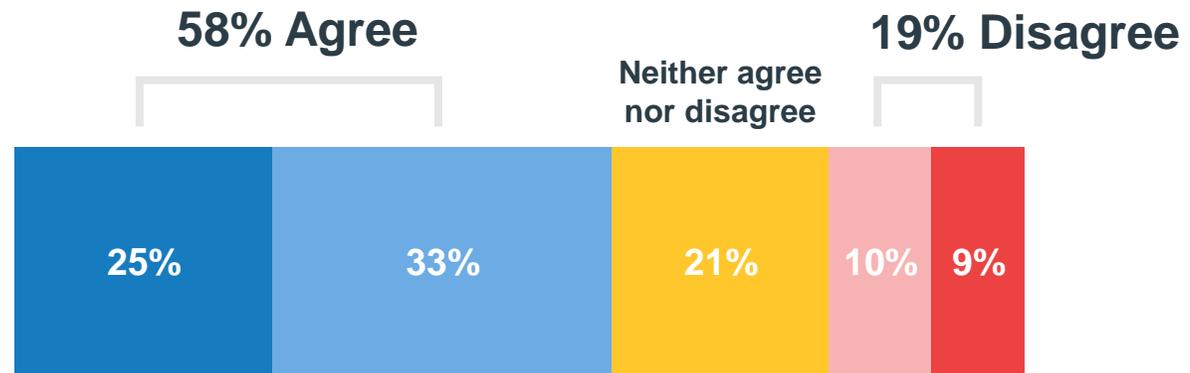
- ☆ Teachers and parents need an in-depth understanding
- ☆ Deliver more targeted instruction
- ☆ Help parents better support learning

## Retention of Knowledge (70% find this convincing)

- ☆ Kids often lose some academic skills
- ☆ They could lose more academic skills this year than previously
- ☆ Need to identify academic starting points

# More than Half of Parents Agree with the Need for a Statewide Test Next Spring

It's important for students to take a statewide test in the spring to make sure they are meeting expectations in math and reading.



**African Americans: 67% agree**  
**Hispanics: 66% agree**  
**Whites: 50% agree**

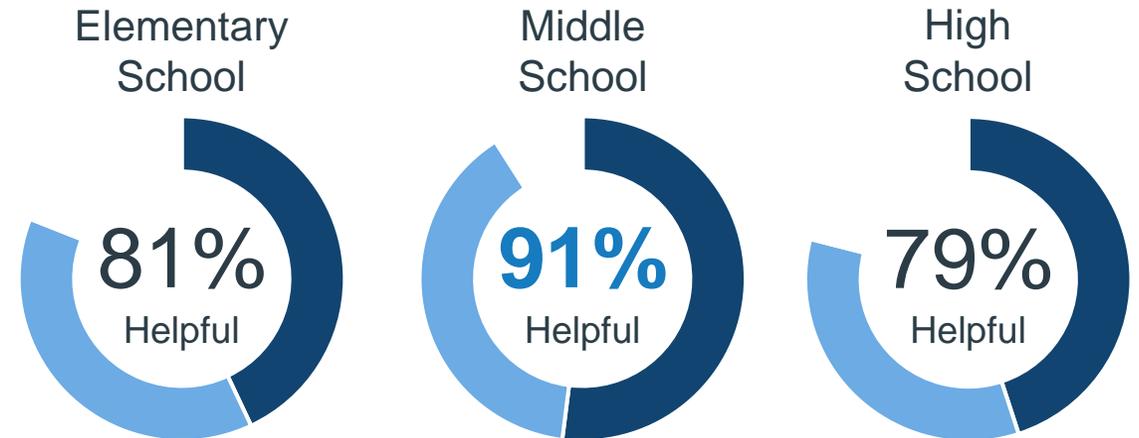
*Darker shading = stronger intensity*

# Parents Would Appreciate Additional Tools for Collaborating with Teachers to Create a Plan for Their Child

## How Helpful Would This Be?

A tool to develop a personalized plan for students for the upcoming school year.

The tool uses input from the parent, teacher, and student on academic and personal goals, and input from the student's recent academic performance, to develop this personalized plan.



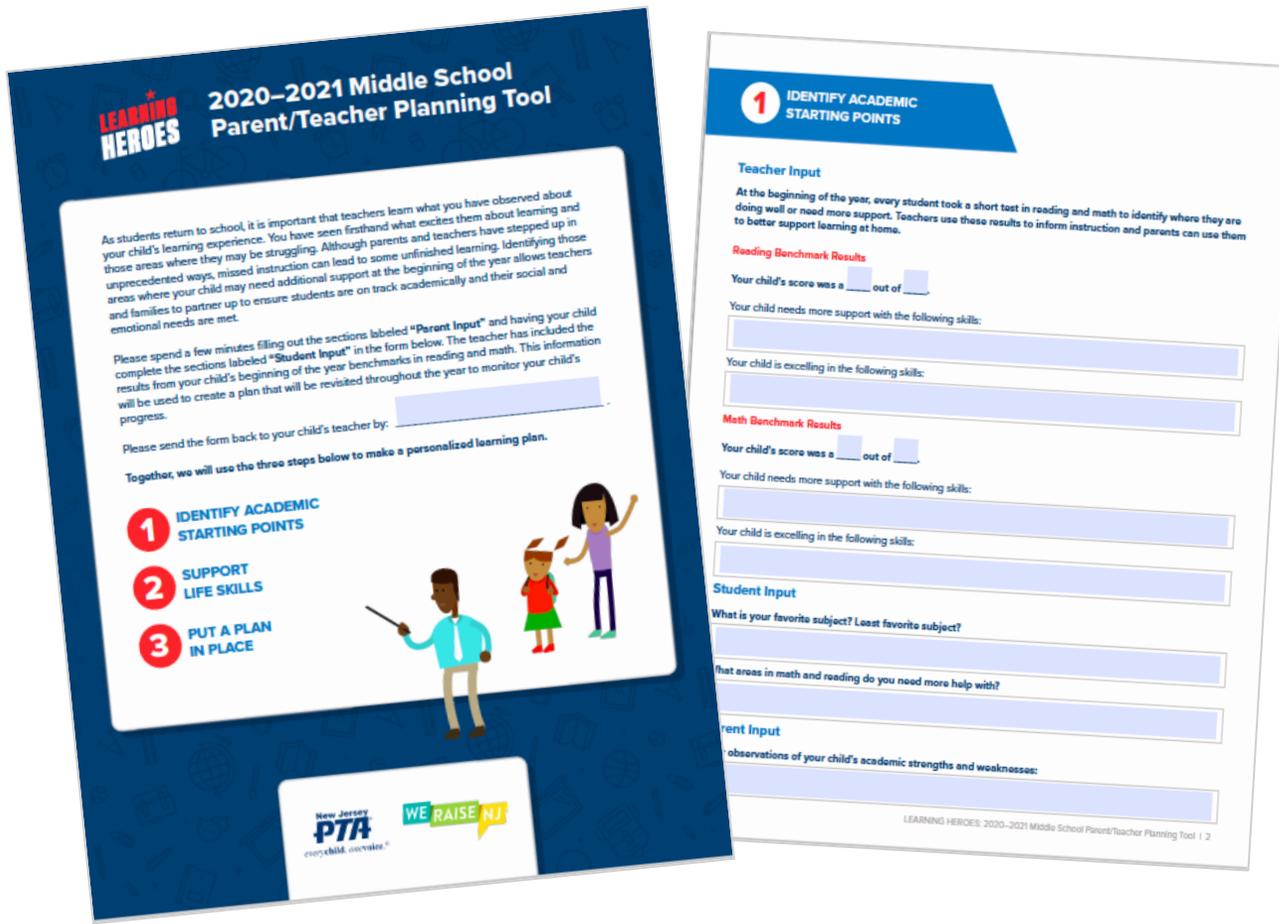
**African Americans:** 91%

**Hispanics:** 88%

**Whites:** 78%

*Darker blue="Extremely Helpful"*

# Parent-Teacher Planning Tool



- ★ Developed as a stand-alone template but can be **customized** for districts and **used electronically**.
- ★ Electronic versions could be embedded into existing portals/learning platforms to ensure **student privacy**.
- ★ Districts can **customize**:
  - Branding/logos
  - Introductory Text
  - Resources

*Not shown to survey respondents, only tested in focus groups.*

# Recommendations & Next Steps



# Implications & Recommendations

- ☆ **Leverage the “COVID-era” parent to build stronger parent-teacher partnerships.** Parents are eager and want to partner with their schools this year, so **it is an opportunity** for advocates to equip schools to build relationships with parents—the stalwarts AND those they have not reached before. Consider using multiple channels and messengers, including community organizations.
- ☆ Parents understand the need and importance of assessment going into this school year, at both the beginning and end of the year. **Build on this support through the beginning of the year benchmark.** Position as a measure **to help teachers and parents** see where students are after remote learning in the spring. Doing so can also reinforce the importance of objective data on student progress.
- ☆ **Use the moment in time to close the disconnect.** Parents will show up differently in the fall and are looking for more information on their child’s learning. Advocate for schools to launch the Parent-Teacher Communications Tool and share benchmark results with parents.
- ☆ Unlike the spring, parents are expecting remote or hybrid learning to be more organized, structured, and similar to in-school learning. They also want more **assistance/explanations about the subject matter taught** so they can better support their child when they get confused. Share helpful resources and ensure parents know who to contact and how for additional support.
- ☆ Keep in mind that safety is top of mind for parents. **Communicating about academics or even social-emotional learning without ensuring parents have had their safety questions addressed will seem tone deaf.** For schools or districts that are beginning the year with remote learning, address what the routine will look like every day and clearly outline the expectations of parents and students.

# Next Steps

- ☆ Share this information and the tool with parents and educators in your district.
- ☆ If your school or district would like to customize the tool for broader use, let us know so we can work with you to:
  - Update the branding/logo and the best district resources to include
  - If using the tool electronically, discuss how to embed in the portal or learning platform so it can be sent and completed securely.
- ☆ Share any additional feedback on this information and how to use it to support parents.

# LEARNING HEROES



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