

★
**LEARNING
HEROES**

The Parent Journey: *Cracking the Code for Families of Children with Learning Differences*

Findings from a National Survey of K-12 Parents

FEBRUARY 2023

Supported by:



Research conducted by:





MISSION

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

VISION

Parents and caregivers as learning heroes – advocating effectively for their children's academic, social, and emotional success, driving equitable school improvement.



Oak Foundation

Our mission

Oak Foundation commits its resources to address issues of global, social and environmental concern, particularly those that have a major impact on the lives of the disadvantaged.



Global



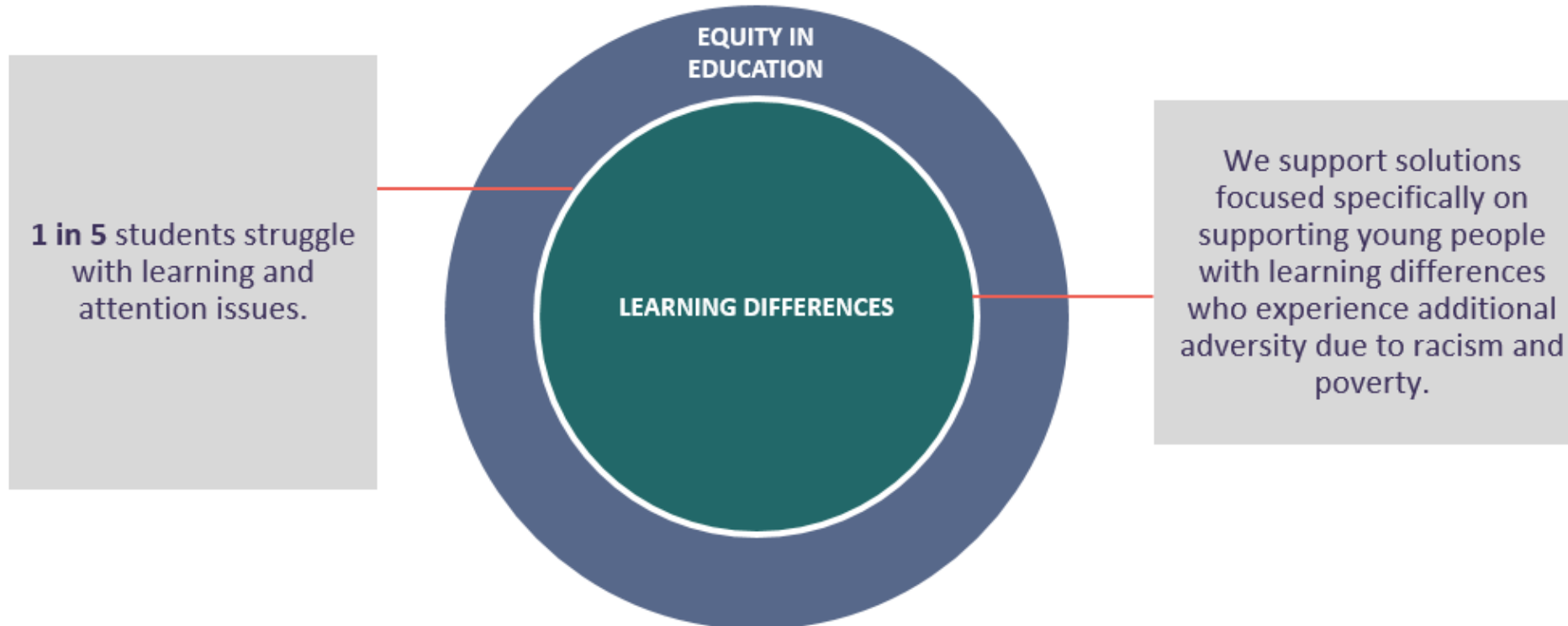
Social



Environmental

Oak Foundation | Learning Differences Programme

Our work to support students with learning differences is grounded in a commitment to educational equity.



Oak Foundation | “Learning Difference” Definition

Study respondents have children who *have been diagnosed or children who they suspect* are experiencing one of the following conditions:

- Dyslexia (difficulty reading)
- Dysgraphia (difficulty writing)
- Dyscalculia (difficulty in math)
- Executive Function Disorder
- ADD/ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder)
- Auditory and/or Visual Processing Disorders

Research Objectives



IDENTIFYING THE ISSUES

What is the parent journey to identify and evaluate a child with learning differences?



FINDING THE SUPPORTS

Who do parents turn to and trust for information and guidance?



REVEALING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Where are there untapped opportunities to improve, enhance, and expand support for families?



Research Phases

PHASE 1 | Landscape Scan, Expert Interviews
JUNE 2022

PHASE 2 | In-depth Interviews
JULY & AUGUST 2022

PHASE 3 | National Survey
OCTOBER & NOVEMBER 2022

PHASE 4 | Red Flag Focus Groups
FEBRUARY & MARCH 2023

PHASE 5 | Communications Playbook
APRIL 2023

Informed by Field Experts

- ☆ **Mary Brownell**,
distinguished professor of special
education, University of Florida
- ☆ **David Flink**,
founder and chief empowerment officer,
EYETOEYE
- ☆ **Shannon Garvey**,
special education coach
- ☆ **Jaime T. Koppel**, CEO,
Communities for Just Schools Fund

- ☆ **Lanya McKittrick**,
senior research analyst, Center for
Reinventing Public Education
- ☆ **Brittney Newcomer**, associate director
of thought leadership, Understood
- ☆ **Robin Tatsuda**, CEO,
ARC of King County, WA
- ☆ **Jane West**, Jane West Consulting,
specialist in education policy

How Can Parents “Crack the Code?”



THE FIRST STEPS

Parents need support to confront barriers like fear and anxiety that can prevent them from identifying and accepting their child’s learning difference.



EVALUATION & DIAGNOSIS

Early communication from trusted sources like pediatricians and teachers can lead to earlier intervention by parents.



ACCESS TO SCHOOL SUPPORTS

Parents of students who are identified and receiving services are more satisfied than those who suspect their child has a learning difference.



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

More regular and comprehensive communication about services can help parents get the support their child needs.

Cracking the Code | The First Steps



Methodology

Phase 3 | National Survey

- Online survey of parents of children who have been diagnosed or suspect their child has a learning difference (see definition)
- Oversamples of African American, Hispanic/Spanish-speaking, Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI), and Indigenous descent parents
- Total N=2,845
- Survey in English & Spanish
- Key: % in *blue* stat higher, *red* lower

FIELDDED: OCTOBER 6-NOVEMBER 2, 2022

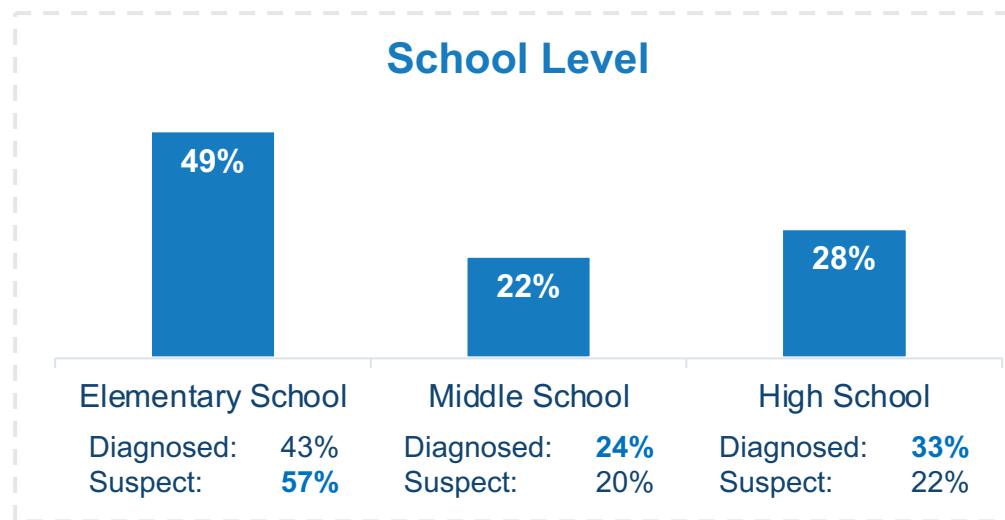
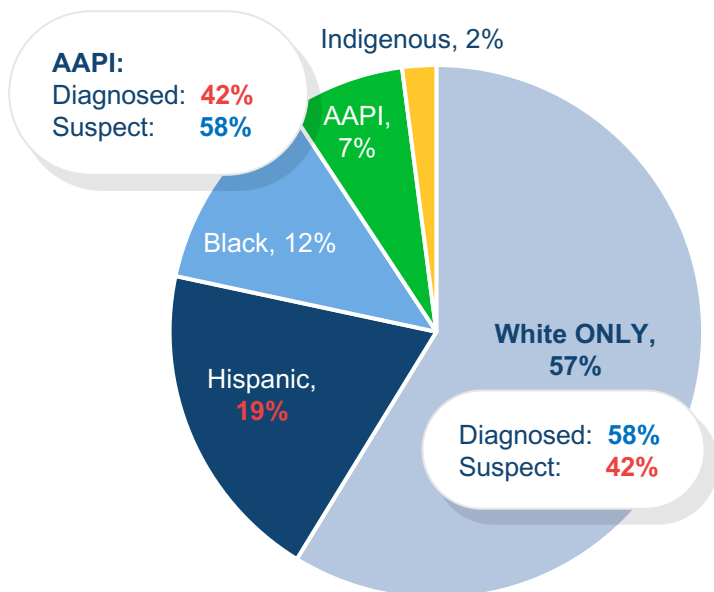
Respondent Profile | Learning Differences

	Diagnosed (54%)	Suspect (46%)	Total
ADD/ADHD	42%	33%	76%
Dyscalculia	8%	25%	32%
Dyslexia	12%	17%	29%
Dysgraphia	4%	13%	17%
Oppositional Defiance Disorder	7%	9%	16%
Auditory/Visual Processing Disorders	6%	8%	14%
Executive Function Disorder	3%	4%	7%
Anxiety <i>(not part of learning differences def)</i>	25%	33%	57%
Depression <i>(not part of learning differences def)</i>	13%	17%	30%

Mental Health:
61% say Anxiety
OR Depression,
26% say both

Average # of learning differences diagnosed and/or experienced: 1.76

Respondent Profile | Demographics



52% have a Family Member with a Learning Difference

Diagnosed **56%**

Suspect **46%**

Black 53%

Hispanic **46%**

AAPI **40%**

Indigenous 55%

White 54%

58% Boy, 42% Girl

Diagnosed: **63%** Diagnosed: 37%
Suspect: 52% Suspect: **47%**

47% have an IEP or 504 Plan
53% Do Not

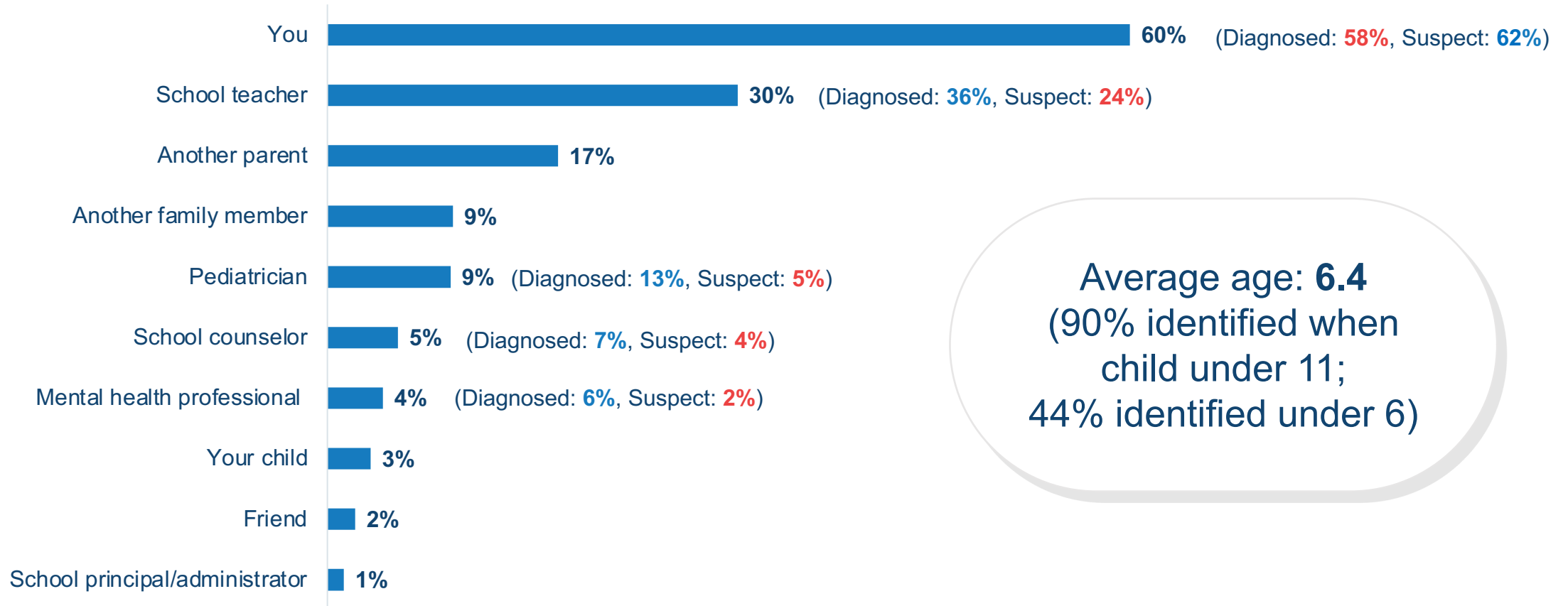
44% are SNAP Eligible*

33% take Medication
(**62%** ADD/ADHD diagnosis, 13% No ADD/ADHD)

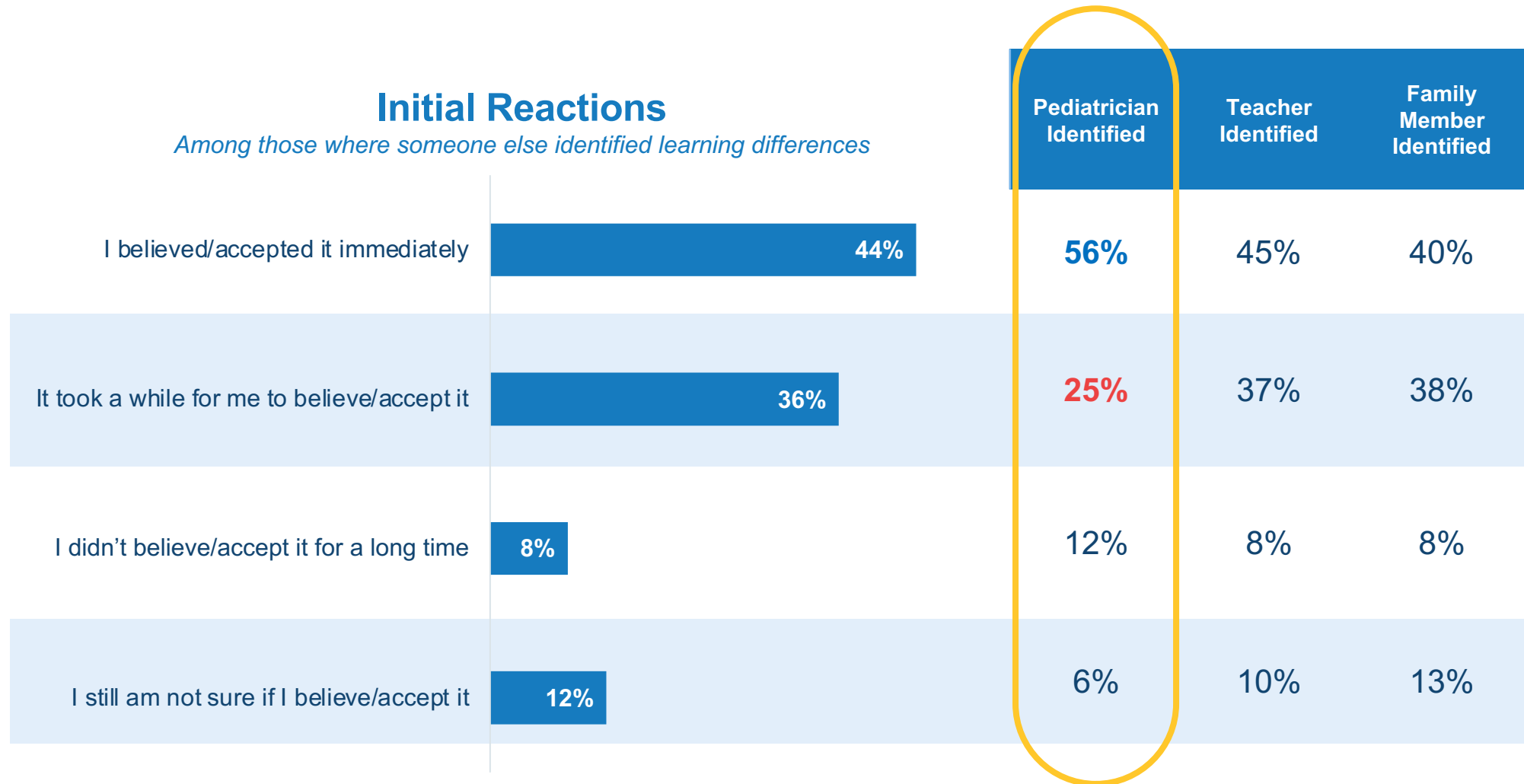
* Low-income households that are eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Parents Most Likely to First Identify

Who first thought that your child may have a developmental and/or learning difference? (Select all that apply)



Acceptance | Split If Identification Wasn't the Parent



Parent Experience | Feeling Judged

“When he first started school, I felt I was looked down on. I felt like I was judged. You’re a single mom, don’t have that much money ... I felt this tremendous sense of guilt, not that I did anything to cause it, but I felt guilty as a parent. I didn’t want him to have to struggle. I was lost and overwhelmed. The teachers are looking at me like, ‘Why can’t you control your child?’ I struggled a lot with that, being lost, confused, and guilty. I didn’t know how to fix it and help him.”

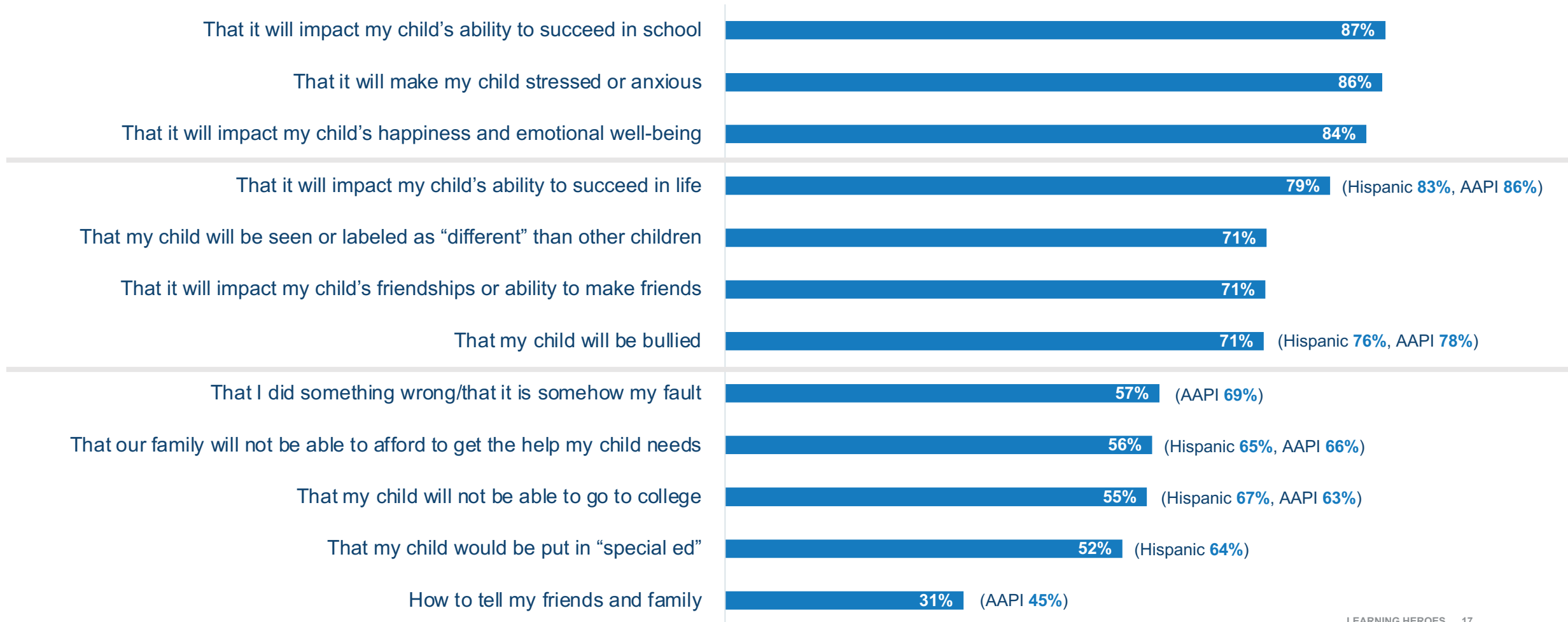
(Parent from qualitative interviews)



Acceptance | Parents Are Anxious

When you first thought your child had a learning difference, how concerned were you about each of the following?

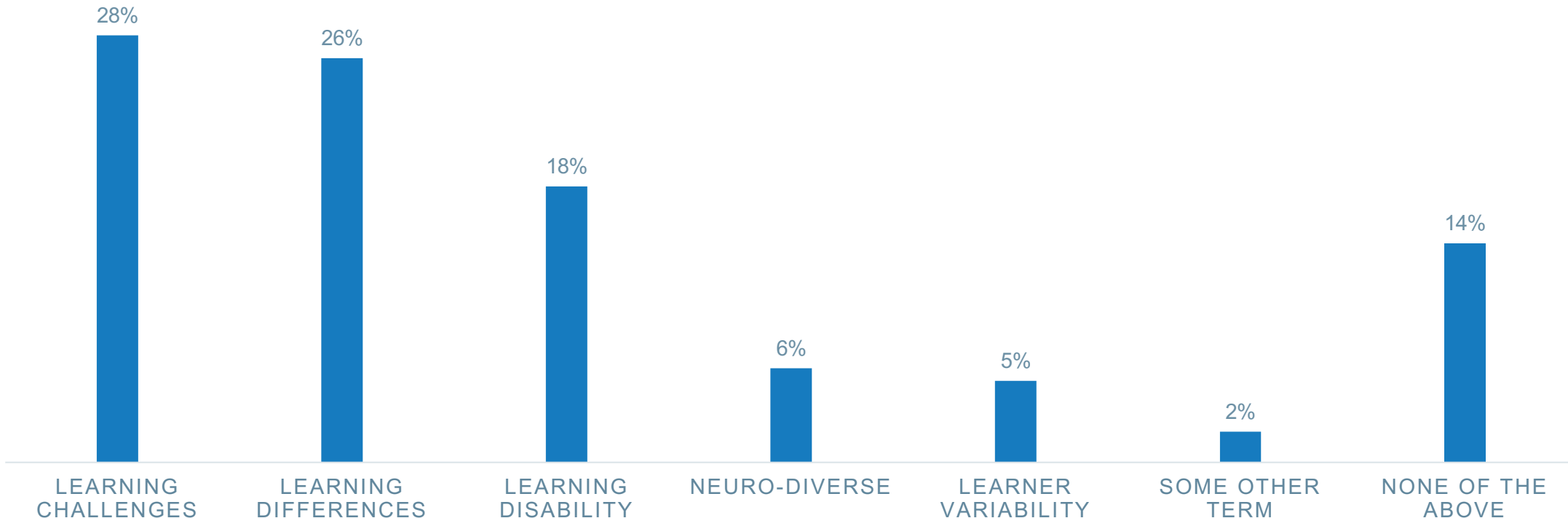
% Very/somewhat concerned



Which Term Resonates? It Depends...

As a parent, which one term do you prefer?

Families who have a child with a diagnosis prefer “Learning Differences” or “Disability,” those without a diagnosis prefer “Learning Challenges”

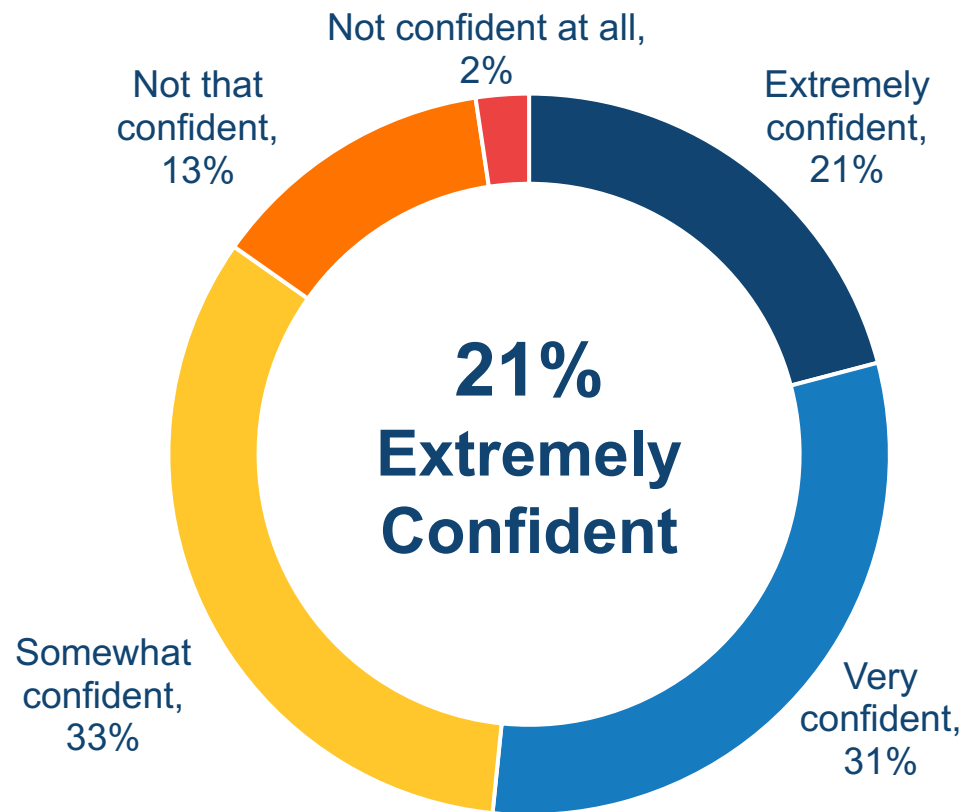


Cracking the Code | Evaluation & Diagnosis



Just Half of Parents Confident About How to Help Their Child

How confident were you that you knew what do to get your child the help they needed for their developmental or learning difference?



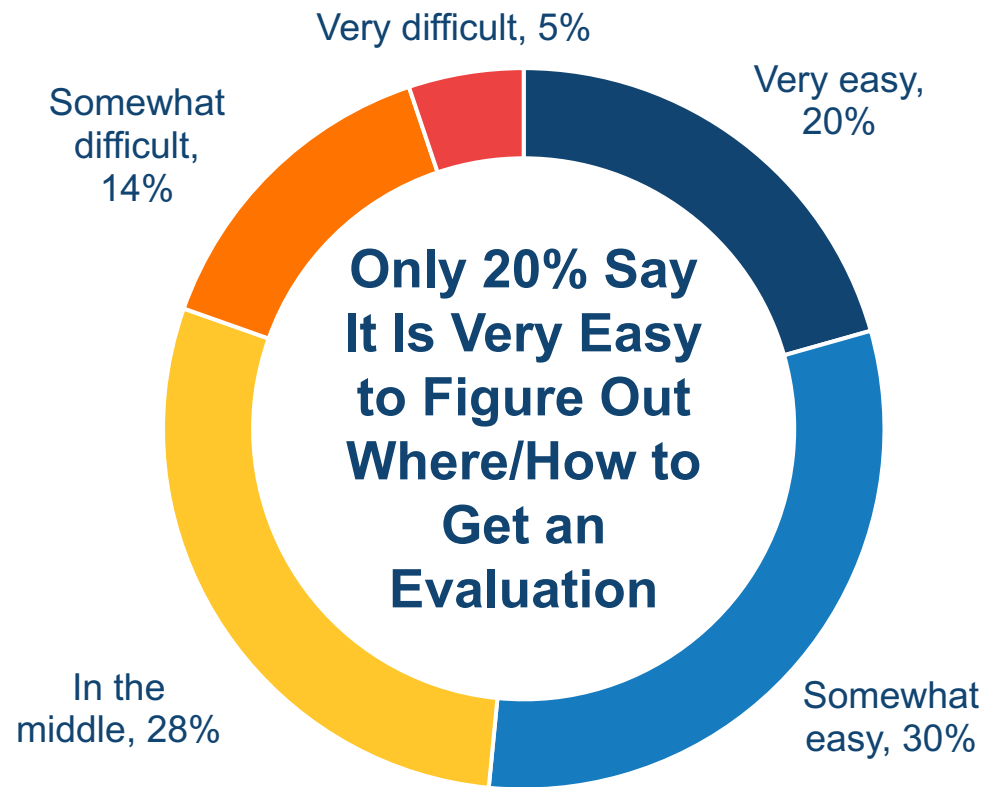
% Extremely confident

Diagnosed: **26%**
Suspect: **15%**

Black: **25%**
Hispanic: 18%
AAPI: **12%**
Indigenous: 24%
White: 21%

SNAP Eligible: **23%**
Not SNAP Eligible: **19%**

Evaluations | Few Find it Very Easy to Obtain



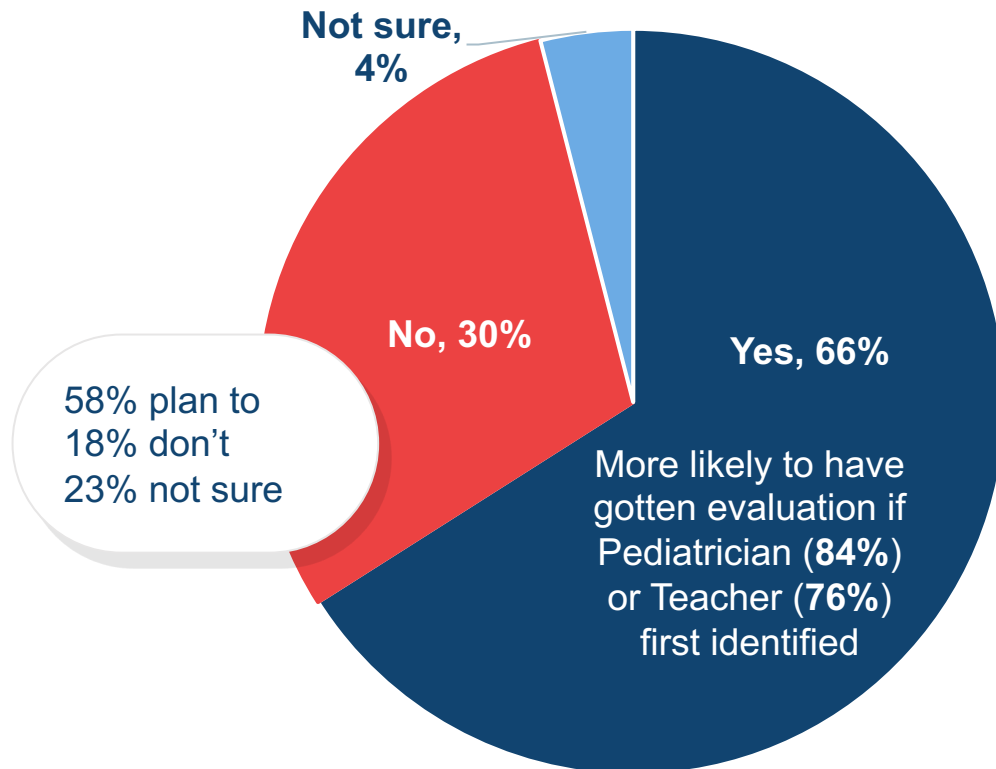
% Very/Somewhat Easy

Diagnosed: **59%**
Suspect: **40%**

Black: **52%**
Hispanic: 46%
AAPI: **38%**
Indigenous: 48%
White: **53%**

Majorities Who Have Not Yet Gotten an Evaluation Have Waited 6 Months+

Has your child had an evaluation to determine a diagnosis of their developmental and/or learning difference?



Top Barriers to Getting an Evaluation (among those who not planning or not sure)

Not sure my child has a learning difference and needs to be evaluated

My child will outgrow their behavior

Don't want my child to be labeled

My child just needs to try harder in school

Don't know where or how to get an evaluation

73% say it has been 6 months or more since someone first suspected
(among those who plan to get an evaluation)

Parent Experience | A Year Lost

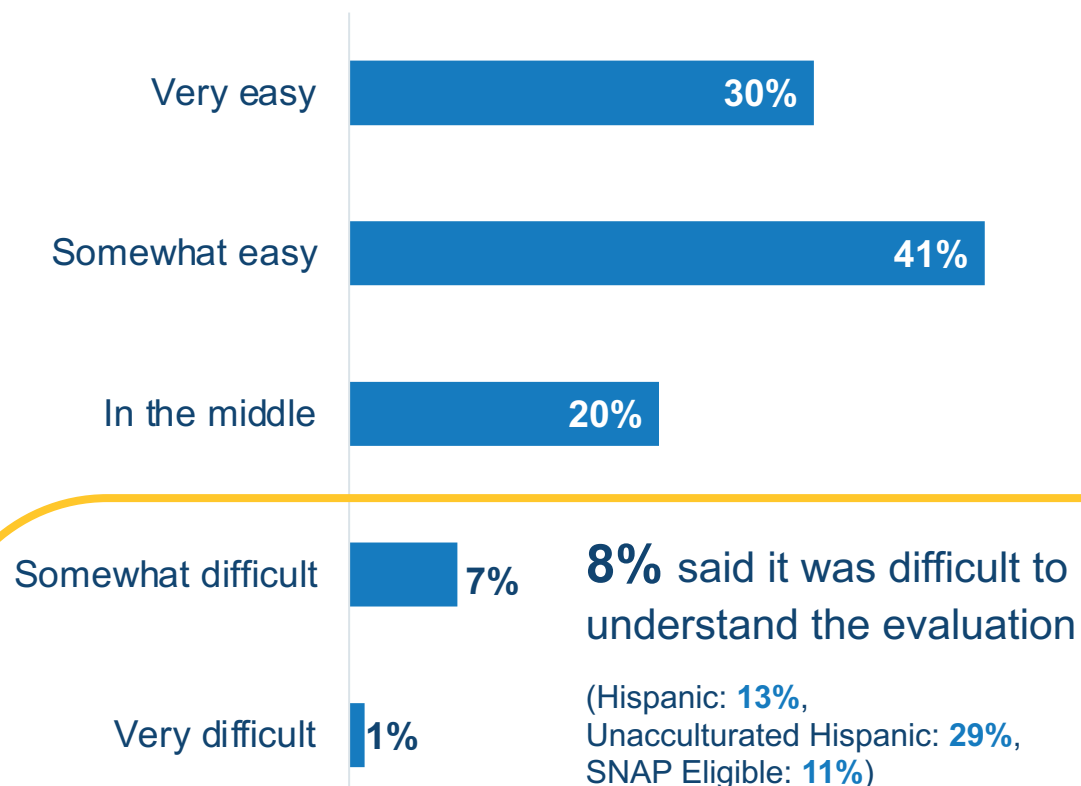


“If you’re going to let basically a whole year go by before saying we need to get her help...if I would have pushed the school a little bit more when they were saying hey there’s something wrong, maybe she would have been able to adapt to the medicine and get better grades earlier. I wish they would have suggested that she needed to be tested sooner.”

(Parent from qualitative interviews)

Evaluation Experiences

How easy or difficult was it to understand the evaluation?
(among those who had an evaluation)



No difference based on who conducted evaluation

What would have helped you better understand the evaluation?

*"Having someone explain it using **smaller words** or words that a normal person understands."*

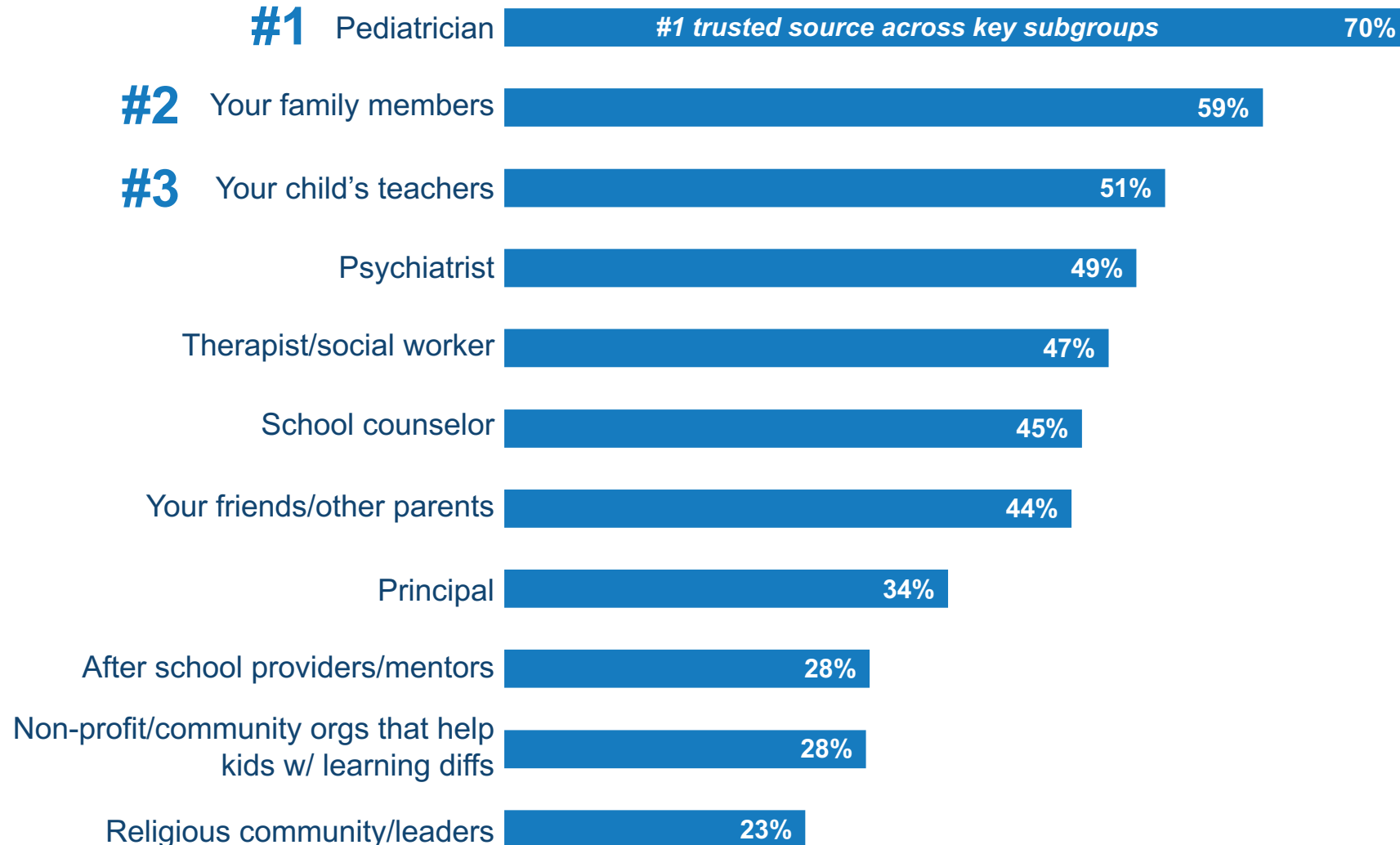
*"A parent version of the write up in **layman's terms**."*

*"If they would've explained it **instead of just handing me the test results**."*

Trusted Sources | Pediatricians Are the Lynchpin; Over Half Put their Trust in Teachers

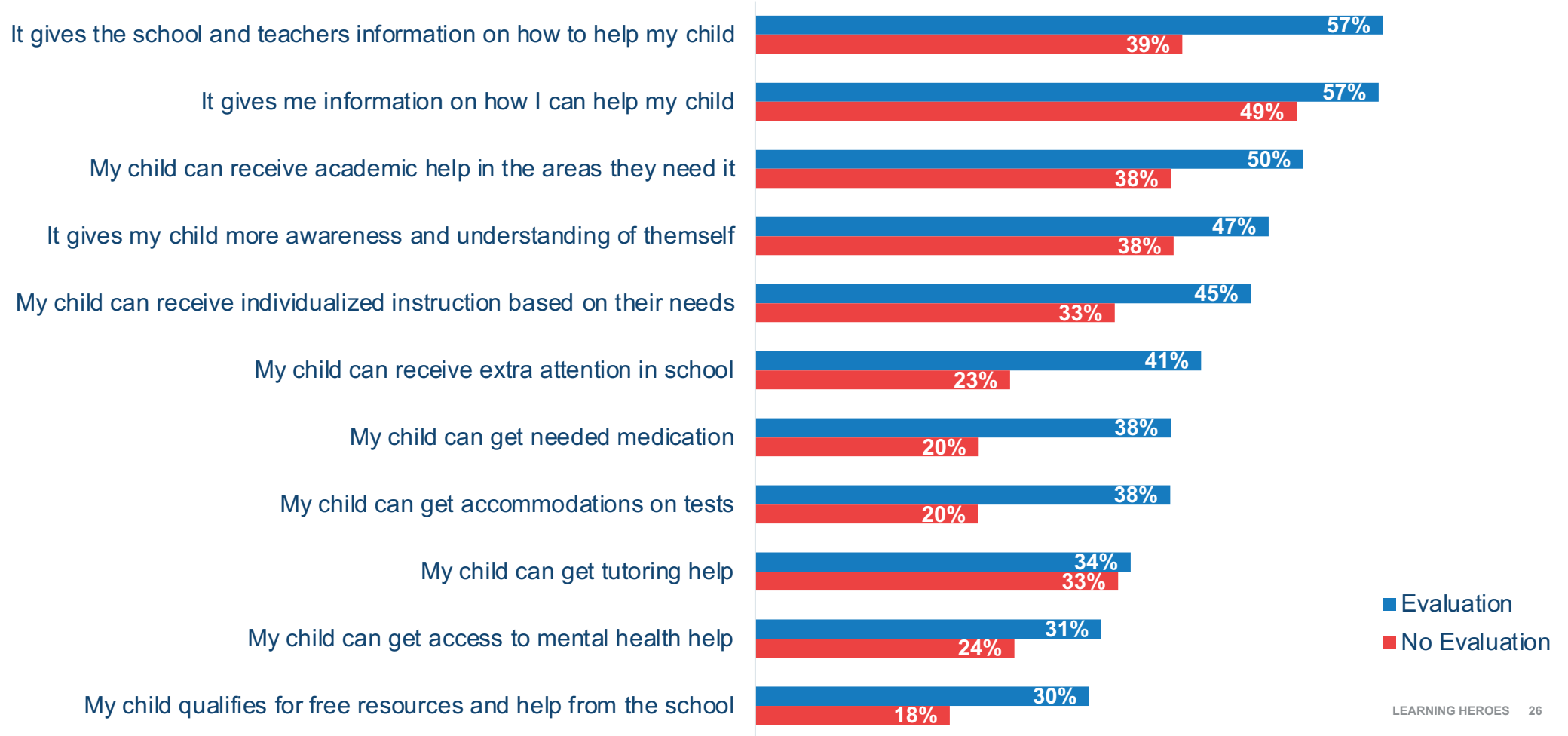
How much do you trust the following people to help you and your child with their developmental or learning differences?

% Trust a lot



Better Communication Is Needed About How Schools Can Add Support with an Evaluation

In which of the following ways do you think having an evaluation can or has helped you and your child? Please select all that apply.



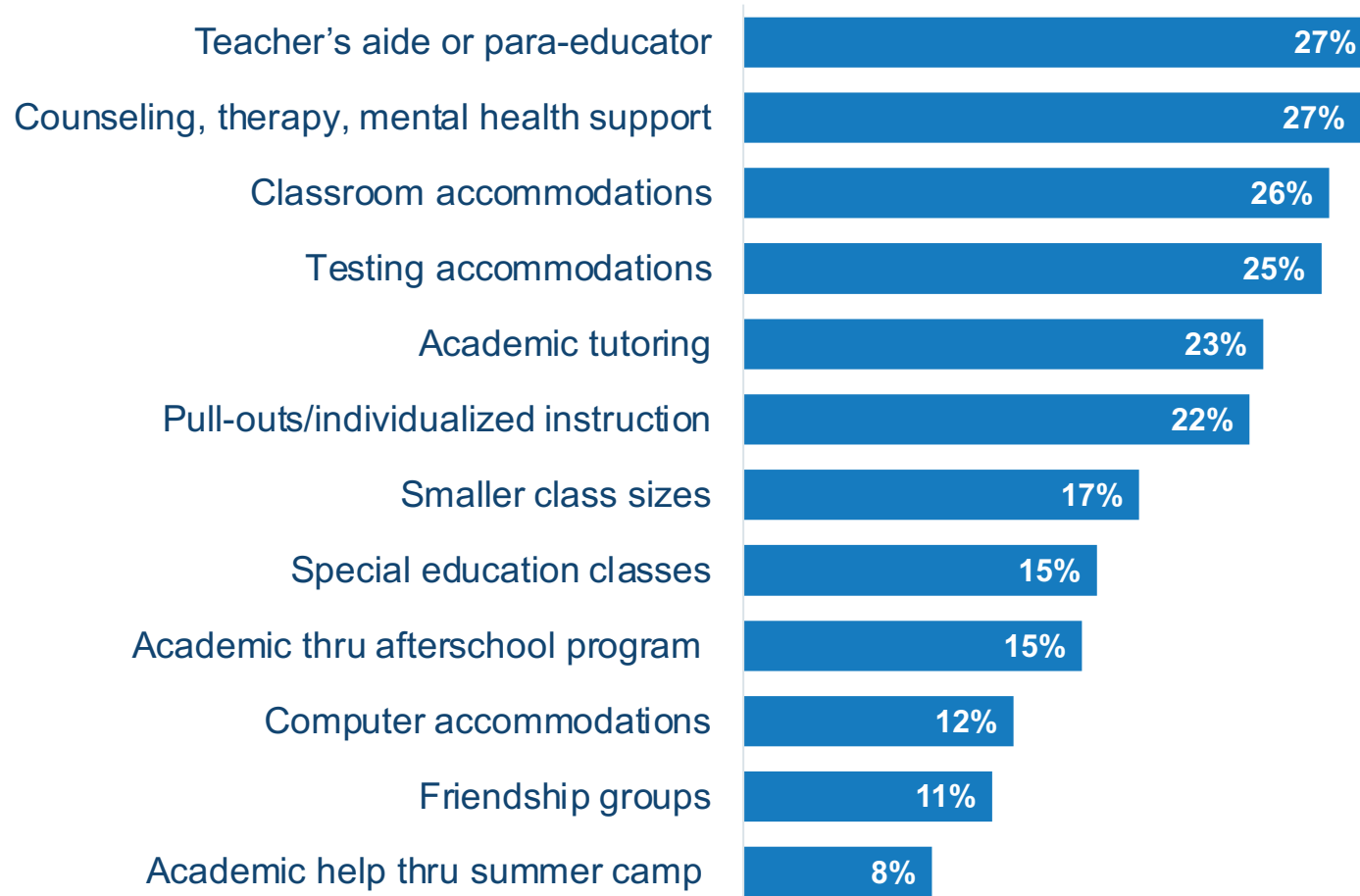
Cracking the Code | Access to School Supports



Most Parents Say Their Child Is Receiving Some Type of Service

Is your child receiving any of the following accommodations or services through school today?

(Please select all that apply)



78% receive some type of service

Higher among:

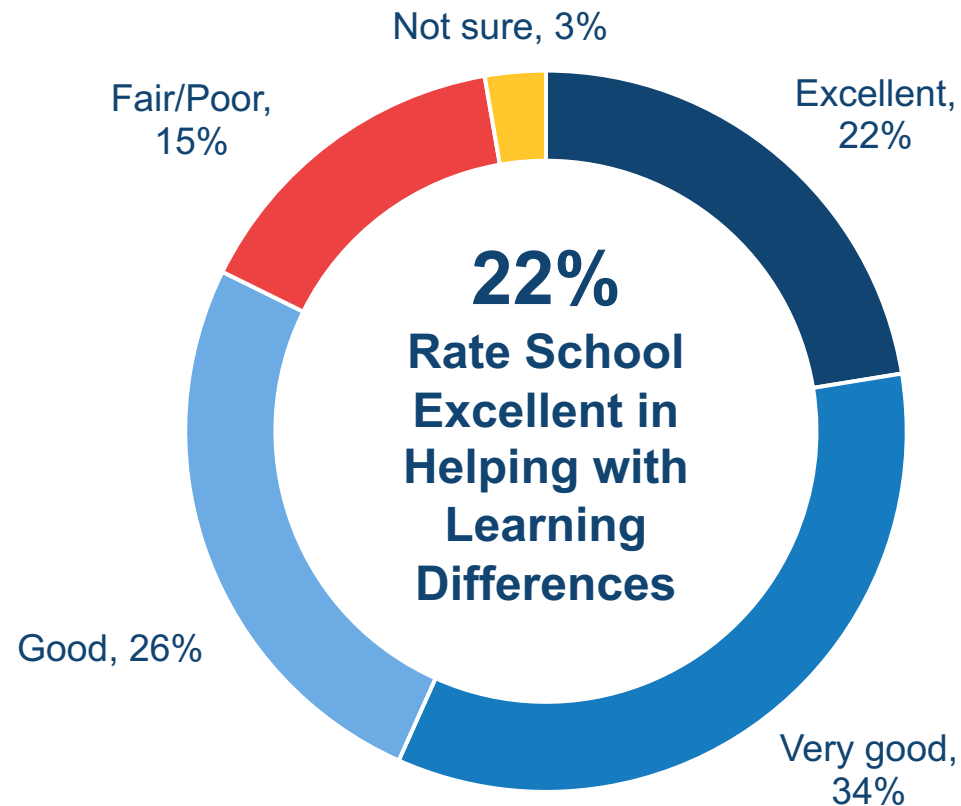
- Evaluation (**86%**)
- Urban (**83%**)
- Personal/family experience (**82%**)
- Boys (**80%**)
- SNAP Eligible (**80%**)
- No large racial or grade level differences
- **Younger diagnosed, more likely to have services**

**The more services you receive,
the happier you are with school**

Average # of services overall: 2.9
Rate school as excellent: **3.6**

Ratings of School Support Much Higher Among those Who Are Diagnosed vs. Suspect

How would you rate your child's school in helping you and your child with their developmental or learning differences?



% Excellent

Diagnosed: **27%**
Suspect: **17%**

Black: 22%
Hispanic: 26%
AAPI: **13%**
Indigenous: 23%
White: 22%

SNAP Eligible: **25%**

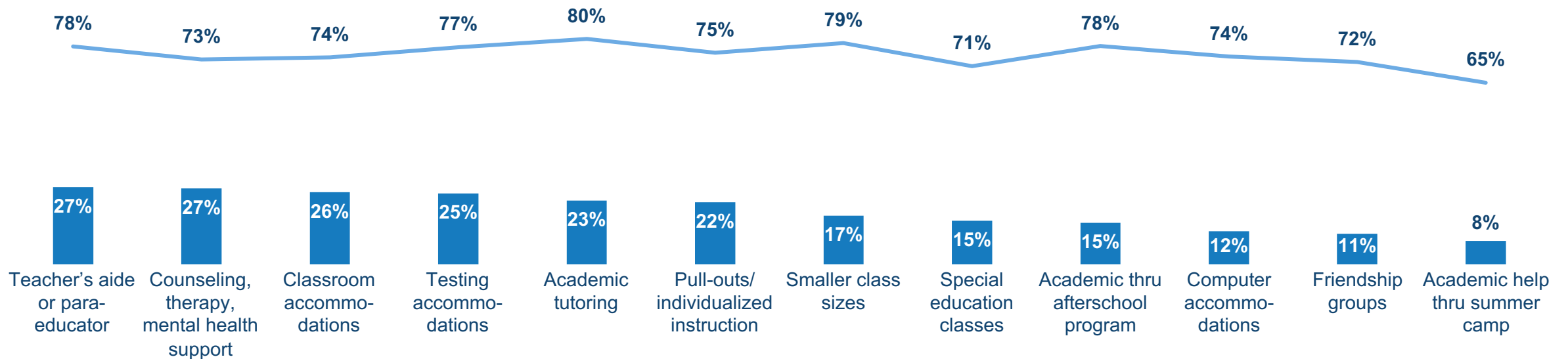
Elementary: **25%**
Middle School: 21%
High School: 20%

More Services = More Satisfaction

Is your child receiving any of the following accommodations or services through school today? How helpful is each of the services your child receives through school with your child's developmental or learning difference?

(Among those who receive these services)

■ Receive — Very Helpful



37% 32% 33% 35% 28% 31% 21% 22% 19% 18% 16% 12%

Those who rate school as "excellent" are more likely to receive myriad services

Half of Families Report Paying for Services Outside of School, on Average over \$2K Annually

48% pay for services outside of school

	SNAP Eligible	Not SNAP Eligible
Black	45%	59%
Hispanic	43%	65%
AAPI	44%	60%
Indigenous	38%	58%
White	40%	51%

SNAP Eligible	41%
Not SNAP Eligible	54%
Elementary	45%
Middle School	50%
High School	53%

Families spend \$227/month on average

Black	\$204
Hispanic	\$237
AAPI	\$252
Indigenous	\$261
White	\$227
SNAP Eligible	\$202
Not SNAP Eligible	\$239

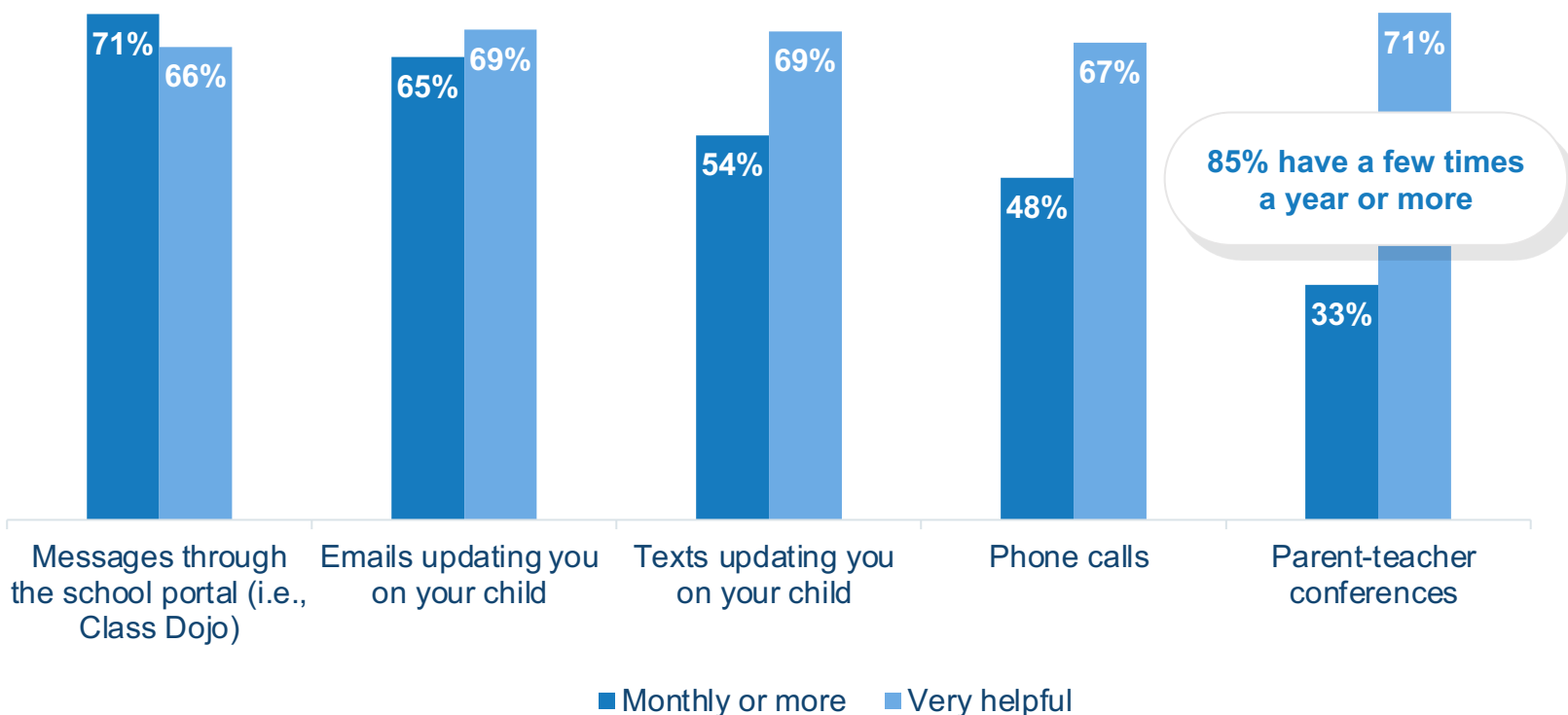
Among those who pay for services

Cracking the Code | Effective Communications



More Communication = Higher Ratings

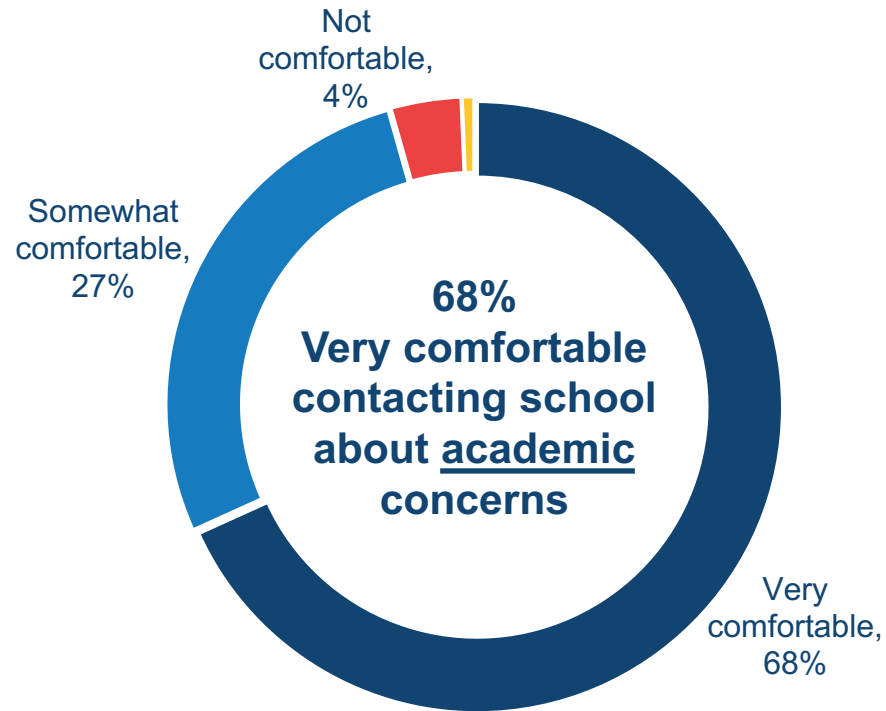
Regular School Communication + Helpfulness



Parents who say their school communicates at least monthly are twice as likely to rate their school as “excellent” in helping with learning differences

Para-Educators are key – parents communicating with them regularly are particularly happy

Parents Are More Comfortable Discussing Academic vs. Social and Emotional Concerns

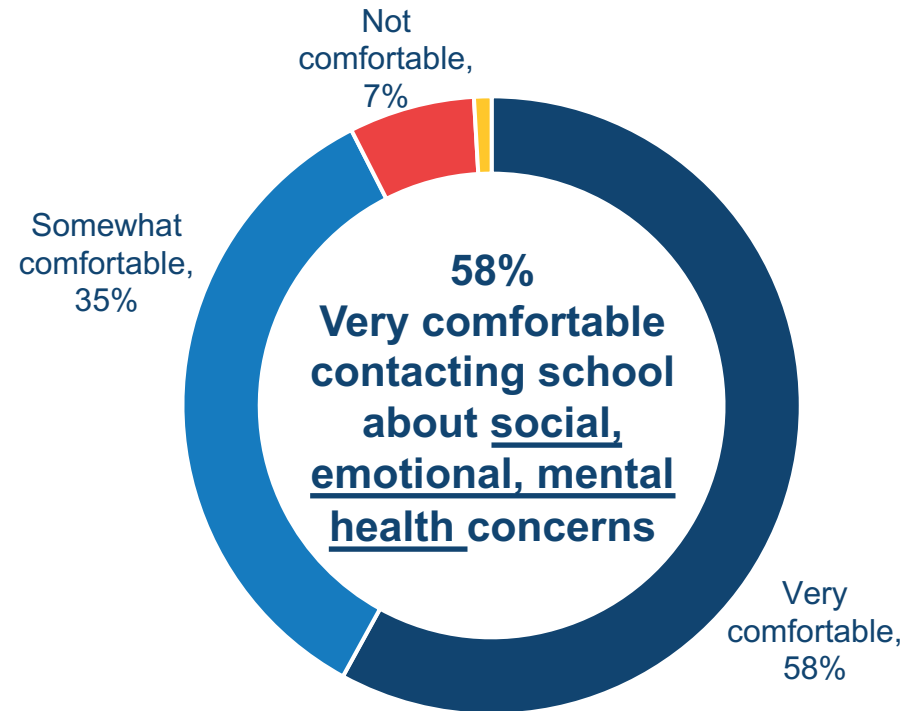


Very comfortable higher among...

Black: **74%**, Diagnosis: **71%**,
Post Grad **74%**, Conservative **74%**

Lower among...

AAP: **60%**, Suspect: **65%**



Very comfortable higher among...

Black: **68%**, Hispanic **61%**,
Elementary **62%**, Diagnosis **60%**

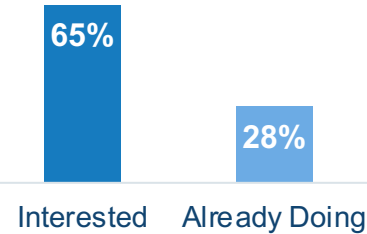
Lower among...

AAP: **50%**, White **56%**, Suspect: **55%**

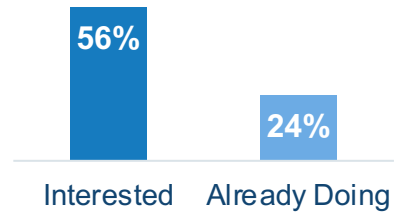
Opportunities to Improve How Schools Can Help

Below are some different ways that parents might work with school to help with their child's developmental and/or learning differences. How interested are you in each?

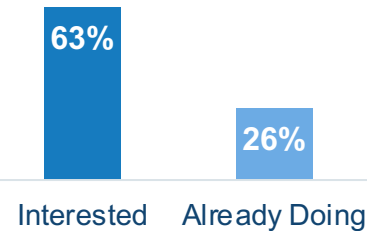
More information about **concrete ways** you can help your child at home



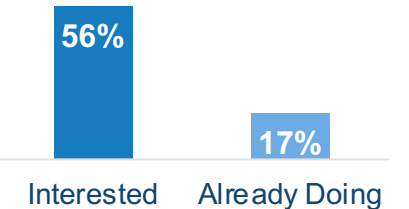
Connecting pediatrician and school to get a more **holistic approach** to child's needs



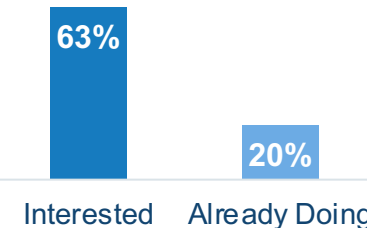
A **parent guide** on age-appropriate academic, social, and emotional milestones/indicators



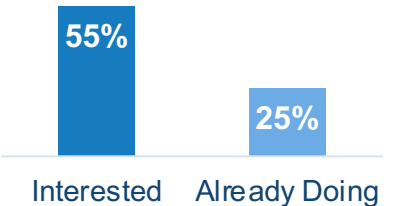
Participating in a **parent support group**



Training program for parents to better help and advocate for their child

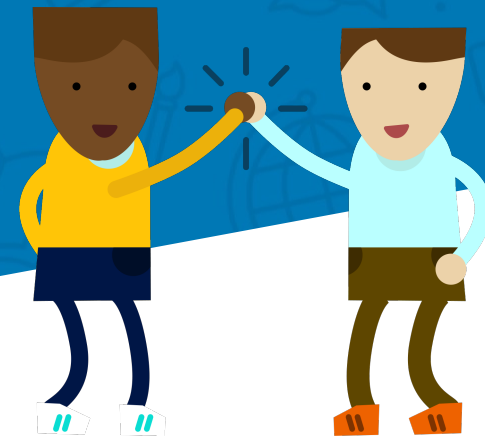


Connecting mental health provider and school to get more **holistic approach**



Note: Gaps for all **significantly greater for those who suspect their child has a learning difference**

What's Next?



Next Steps

3 Focus Groups | March

- Deep dive into families who have “cracked the code” and families who still suspect and have yet to obtain a diagnosis

Communications Playbook | April

- Suggestions? Contact us at Playbook@LearningHeroes.org



Contact

Bibb Hubbard

Founder & President, Learning Heroes
bhubbard@learningheroes.org

Pam Loeb

Principal, Edge Research
loeb@edgeresearch.com



Follow us on Instagram:
[@learning.heroes](https://www.instagram.com/learning.heroes)



Follow us on LinkedIn:
[@learning-heroes-us](https://www.linkedin.com/company/learning-heroes-us)



Like us on Facebook:
[/Bealearninghero](https://www.facebook.com/Bealearninghero)



Follow us on Twitter:
[@bealearninghero](https://twitter.com/bealearninghero)