



New Research Uncovers Opportunities for Families to Access More Support for Students with Learning Differences

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WASHINGTON, May 17, 2023 – One in five students in the U.S. struggle with learning and attention issues. A [national survey](#) of parents of students with learning differences released today by Learning Heroes in partnership with the Oak Foundation identifies key ways to help parents “crack the code” to access more support for their children. The survey, supported by Oak Foundation, included more than 2,800 parents of children diagnosed with or suspected to have challenges with reading, writing, or math; executive function; and/or attention, auditory, or visual processing. Learning Heroes also released an accompanying “Playbook” for educators and practitioners.

“Oak Foundation is committed to unlocking the creativity and power of every young person,” said Heather Graham, director of the foundation’s learning differences program. “We’re hoping that this research can help schools and nonprofit organizations improve educational opportunities for young people with learning differences, especially those who experience further marginalization due to racism and poverty.”

“Parents who have children with learning differences face too many barriers in accessing vital resources to support their children’s growth and development,” said Bibb Hubbard, founder & president of Learning Heroes. “Many of these barriers – which include where and how to get a diagnosis, transportation to services, and opportunities to connect with families having similar experiences – have an outsized impact on low-income families especially. Families need more equitable policies and practices to ensure services are available to every family who needs them.”

Following are key insights from the survey data:

- **Too many children’s needs are going undiagnosed:** Less than half of these parents (46%) are confident about how to get their child the help they need. Only 14% say it is very easy to figure out where or how to get an evaluation. Fears about how a label will impact their child can prevent families from seeking help. Three-quarters of those who plan to get an evaluation but have not done so say they have waited six or more months since the issue was raised. As a result, almost half of respondents suspect their child has a learning difference but have not pursued a diagnosis, leaving too many children vulnerable.
- **Early identification is key:** Pediatricians are generally trusted sources and can play an important role in helping parents accept and move to a diagnosis more quickly. Parents whose child has received a diagnosis are twice as likely to say their school does an excellent job in helping with learning differences (34% excellent) vs. those without a diagnosis (17% excellent).
- **Parents are equally concerned about their child’s academic and emotional well-being.** Six-in-10 parents who have a child with a diagnosis or suspect their child might have a learning

difference report their child experiences anxiety and/or depression. Yet parents are significantly less comfortable discussing social-emotional issues vs. academic ones with their school.

- **The more services a child receives, the more satisfied parents are with their school.** The parents who rate school as “excellent” are more likely to receive myriad services. While parents rate a variety of individual services and accommodations as “very helpful,” far fewer parents report that their child has access to these services.
- **Regular communication, particularly with paraprofessionals, significantly impacts parent satisfaction.** Parents who say their school communicates at least monthly are twice as likely to rate their school as “excellent” in helping with learning differences. Parents communicating with para-educators regularly are particularly happy.
- **Parents in the survey and in focus groups identified a number of ways in which schools could provide additional help and support.** These include concrete ideas about how to help their child at home; a guide on age-appropriate academic, social, and emotional milestones; better connecting schools with pediatricians and mental health providers to increase coordination; and training programs and parent support groups to help them better advocate for their child and reduce isolation.

About Learning Heroes

Learning Heroes supports parents as their child’s most effective education advocate, catalyzing equitable learning environments for all students. Through partnerships with states, districts, and organizations, we reach more than 20 million parents annually. For more information visit bealearninghero.org.

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