

ANOTHER LOST YEAR?

Lessons from a year like no other



Districts across New York State returned to school in person for the 2021-2022 school year. However, parents, students, and educators quickly realized things were different than before the pandemic forced schools into distance learning and exacerbated the inequities that have long persisted in the education system.

New Yorkers were hopeful that the return to traditional classrooms would lessen the challenges worsened by the pandemic. But, for many students, in-person learning meant understaffed classrooms, inadequate academic support, and missed opportunities to learn. New York's students returned to classrooms, but it remains unclear how much they learned behind classroom doors.

Throughout the pandemic, the New York Equity Coalition and The Education Trust–New York partnered with Global Strategy Group to poll

parents across the state to learn more about this new and evolving education experience. Seven polls during the pandemic consistently show that parents and families:

- Feel left out of critical decisions that will impact their child's future;
- Are very worried about their child falling academically behind; and
- Experience growing concerns about their child's mental health.

The latest poll captured the experiences of parents and families during the first year students returned to school in person full-time. We asked parents across New York State about their family's education experiences in the 2021-2022 school year, highlighting the challenges they faced and the concerns they have for their children as the pandemic continues to take a toll on our



communities. We also asked about gaps between the recommendations of parents and experts and actions taken by districts to address critical issues. Experts have warned about unfinished learning, an accelerating mental health crisis, exclusionary school discipline practices, low student attendance, gaps in support services for students with disabilities and multilingual learners, and inadequate extended learning opportunities.

Families remain at the forefront of managing these issues amidst economic uncertainty and the ongoing pandemic.

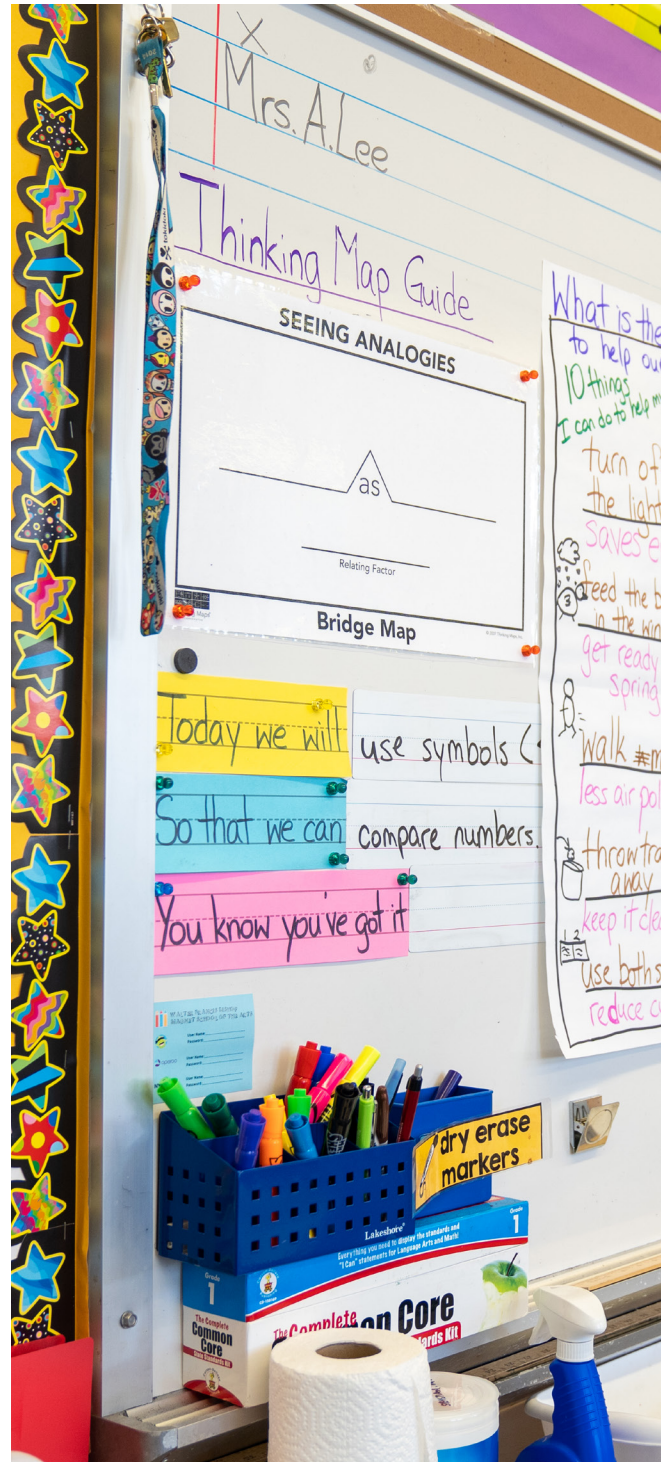
Poll results show that 43% of parents are concerned about access to meals and food for their child, with more than one in three (37%) parents reducing or skipping a meal during this school year. Food insecurity has a direct effect on student outcomes including attendance, mental health, and unfinished learning.

Consistent with previous polls, new poll results show that 87% of parents remain concerned about ensuring that their child does not fall behind academically. However, for the first time in the pandemic polling there is near equal concern from parents about ensuring their child's mental health needs are met (86%).

Worry over how to recover lost instructional time and support students' social emotional well-being has parents across the state concerned about whether their districts will seriously address these issues. With the infusion of **nearly \$9 billion from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)**, a historic **\$31B for education and fully funded foundation aid**, New York has an opportunity to earnestly address persistent and emerging opportunity gaps.

The latest poll shows that parents overwhelmingly support programs such as summer school, tutoring, and counseling to accelerate learning and address mental health challenges.

These new poll findings capture experiences during the 2021-2022 school year from the people who know our children the best – their parents and families. State education leaders – at every level — must center the voices of parents and act with urgency to support students during this moment and into the future.



FIVE KEY ISSUES FOR PARENTS AND FAMILIES:

ISSUE 1: Unfinished Learning

Every school district in the country returned to in-person learning in the fall of 2021, compared to just 74% of the largest school districts in the fall of 2020.

During remote and hybrid learning in previous school years, parents worried their child was not receiving enough direct instruction. Polling consistently shows that a significant majority of parents, including 87% of all parents in our latest poll, are concerned that their children are falling behind academically.

Studies suggest that students in majority-Black schools ended the 2020-21 school year six months behind in reading and math, compared to students in majority-white schools that ended up just four months behind in math and three months behind in reading.

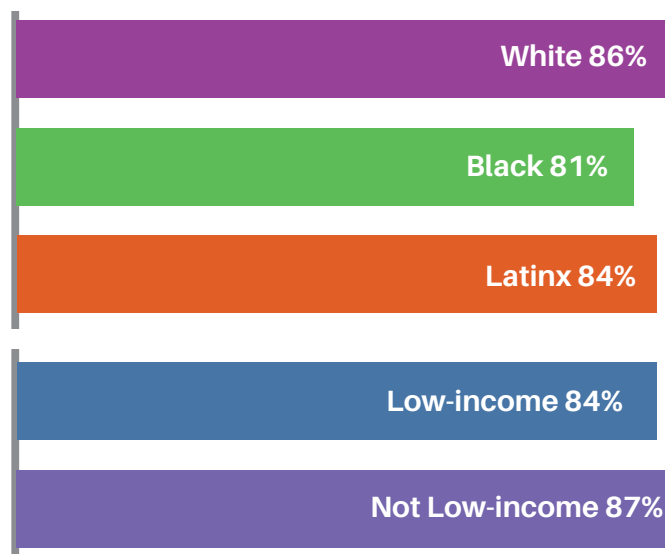
With state assessments suspended for the past two school years, it is difficult to understand how much New York students have fallen behind academically or how best to allocate new funding and intervention support. Additionally, efforts to make up for unfinished instruction remain uneven, particularly in schools that serve the greatest number of students from low-income backgrounds, which often provided remote learning for longer periods of time than other schools.

Yet, even with billions in funding to address unfinished learning, there are spending delays across New York — the New York City Department of Education had only spent half of their ARPA funding allotted for this school year as of March 2022. Such delays represent a missed opportunity to provide our most vulnerable students with the learning experiences they need to transcend current challenges and pursue academic excellence.

Poll Findings:

85% 

of parents are concerned their child is ready for the next grade level, up from 79% in fall 2021

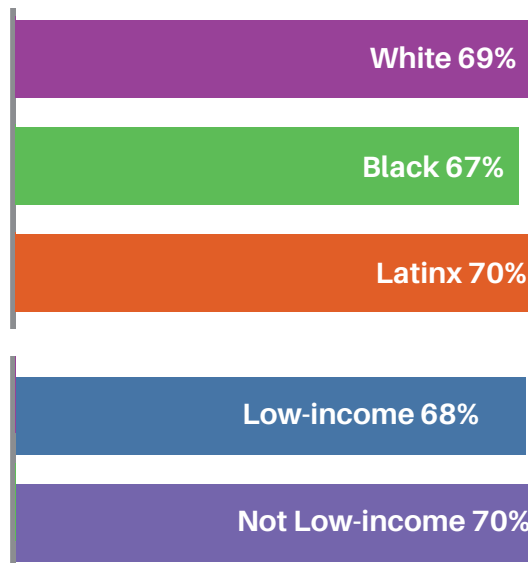


Demographic Breakdown

69%



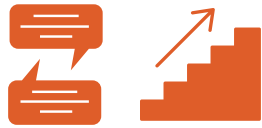
of parents are concerned their child has suffered from interrupted instruction during the pandemic or fallen behind grade level expectations



Demographic Breakdown

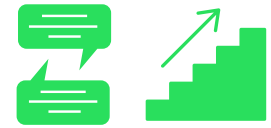
Polling also finds troubling gaps between what parents want for their children to address unfinished learning and what schools are providing:

97%



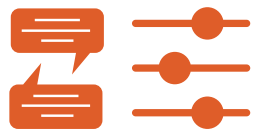
of parents want feedback from schools on whether their child is on grade level academically

ONLY 40%



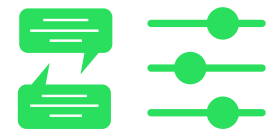
of parents believe their school has utilized this strategy during the current school year

95%



of parents want feedback from the school and teachers about their child's academic progress

ONLY 43%



of parents believe their school has utilized this strategy during the current school year

Policy Recommendations:

- **Measure learning and address the gaps.** Data from state assessments have different meanings for different stakeholders. Assessment results provide critical information to classroom teachers about students' mastery of learning standards. This year's state assessment results offer a baseline from which to measure progress, and an opportunity to design learning experiences in a data-informed and differentiated way. For policymakers, the 2022 assessment results provide an opportunity to hold districts accountable for the commitments made in budget and ARPA plans. Assessment data provides parents with an objective check-up on how their child is doing compared to other students across the state. State leaders should use assessment data to provide guidance to districts for the use of state and federal funding.
- **Provide a set of evidence-based curriculum that districts can use to enhance teaching and learning.** There are hundreds of curricula used across the state to meet the variety of needs that New York's learners have. However, not all curricula have the same value and many, particularly for

literacy, are not evidence-based. State leadership should urgently publish a set of curricula recommendations that align with their commitments to culturally responsive teaching, academic excellence, and evidence-based instruction. Districts should be encouraged to prioritize these curricula as part of their plan to address unfinished learning.

- **Institute a formative assessment process in every district.** Good teaching measures student learning — often. Every district throughout the state should institute a formative assessment process that assesses student performance against learning standards as they are taught. Formative assessments should take place every six to eight weeks, with guidance from the state on best practices. Data from formative assessments should be used to understand where students have strengths and where they need re-engagement with specific standards or learning targets. The results should also be clearly communicated with parents and families to ensure they are aware of whether their child is on track to meet academic expectations for their grade level.



IT IS CRUCIAL THAT SCHOOLS TAKE STEPS TO IDENTIFY STUDENTS AT RISK FOR FALLING BEHIND ACADEMICALLY, DIRECT RESOURCES TO ACCELERATE THEIR LEARNING, AND MAKE SURE PARENTS HAVE THE INFORMATION THEY NEED TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION." - YVETTE RUSSELL, READ ALLIANCE

ISSUE 2: SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

A safe and supportive school environment is critical for student academic success.

In December 2021, [the Surgeon General issued an advisory](#) calling for a swift and coordinated response to the mental health crisis. The advisory provided recommendations that a variety of stakeholders could take to improve the mental health of children, adolescents, and young adults. The advisory underscored information from parent polling: Parents continue to be concerned about the social-emotional development of their children.

The pandemic worsened mental health issues that existed before the pandemic. Many children lost access to services and social interactions. It is estimated that [one in every 200 students in New York City lost a caregiver because of pandemic illness. The estimates are worse for Black, Asian, and Latinx students.](#)

The mental health crisis coupled with declining public safety have elevated the concern of parents about their student's physical safety and mental well-being.

Parents are also worried that their student has missed instructional time because of quarantine or exclusionary discipline practices, like suspensions.

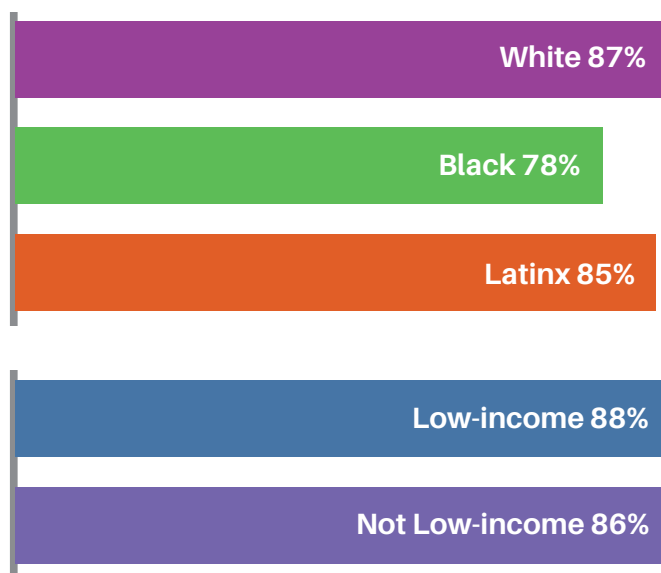
The latest poll data shows that mental health and supportive school environments are a concern for parents across racial and income groups. Parents are concerned about bullying and ensuring that their student's mental health needs are met. While 93% of parents report that it would be helpful for them or their student to have regular access to a school counselor, only 36% report that a counselor is available.

Poll Findings:

86%



of parents are concerned about ensuring their child's mental health needs are met

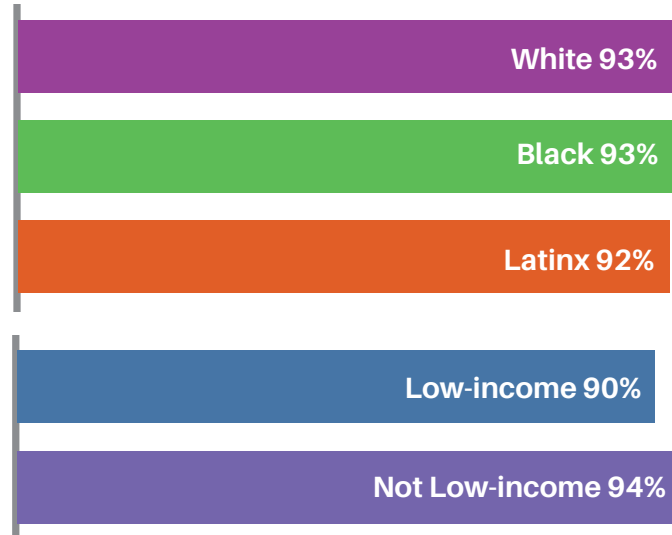


Demographic Breakdown

Poll Findings:

93% 

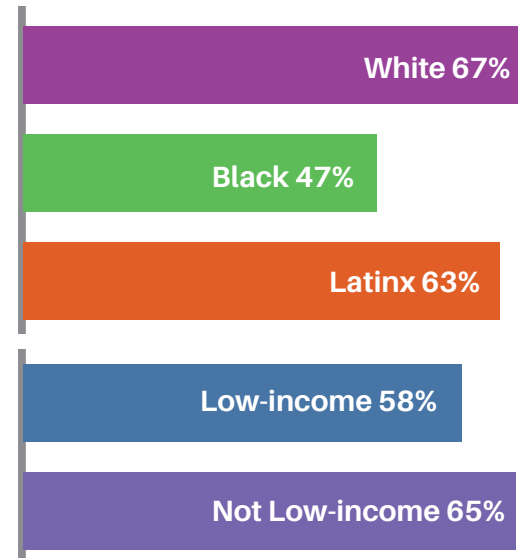
of parents think it would be helpful if schools provided additional support and resources if their child is struggling with mental health needs



Demographic Breakdown

63% 

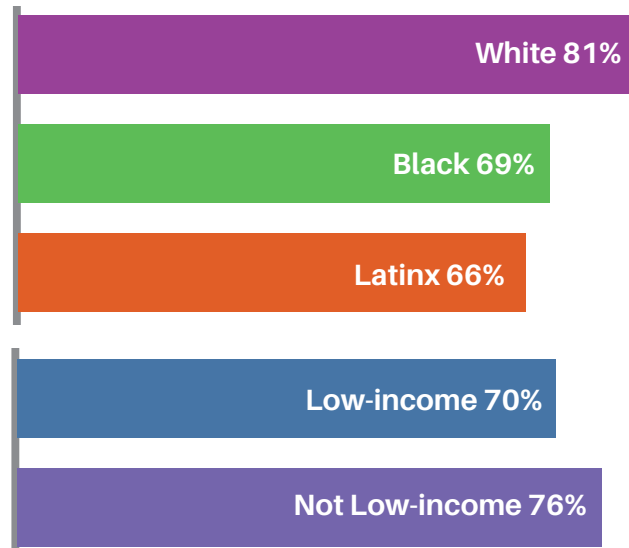
of parents are concerned about their child's mental health



Demographic Breakdown

74% 

of parents believe mental health problems are becoming more common in children since the pandemic started

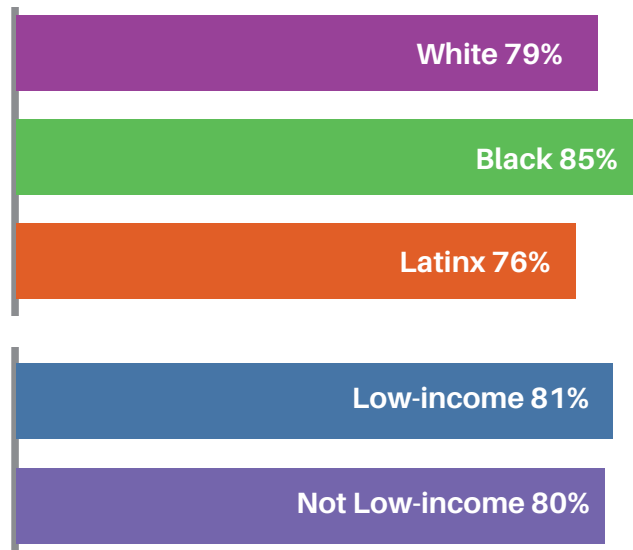


Demographic Breakdown

81%



of parents are concerned about bullying in schools

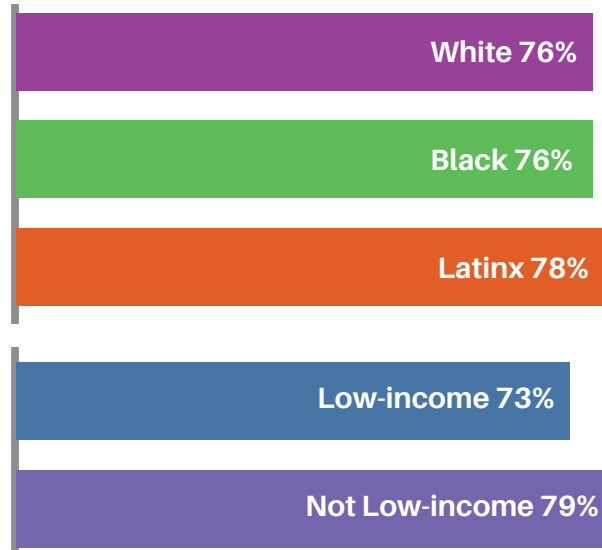


Demographic Breakdown

77%



are concerned about bullying on social media from classmates



Demographic Breakdown

Lost Instructional Time

37%



of parents reported their child's schools were closed at some point during the school year due to pandemic

50%

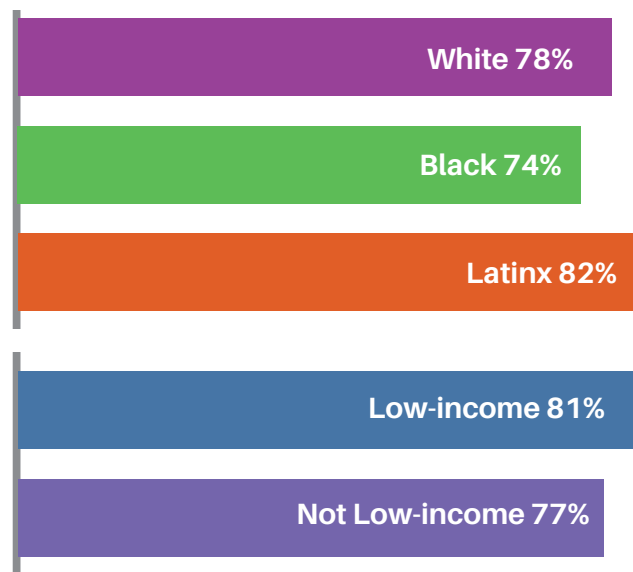


of students were quarantined due to virus during the school year

79%



of parents are concerned about their child missing too many days of school due to coronavirus-related illness or quarantine

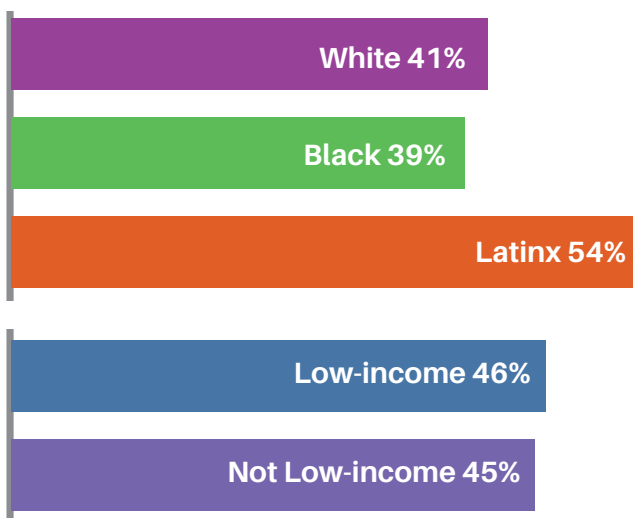


Demographic Breakdown

45%



of parents are concerned that their child will be suspended from class for minor infractions



Demographic Breakdown

98%



of parents think it would be helpful for schools to ensure their child is safe on school grounds



Demographic Breakdown



SUPPORTING STUDENTS SOCIAL EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH IS CRITICAL TO THEIR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT. NOW MORE THAN EVER, IT IS CRUCIAL THAT OUR SCHOOLS INVEST IN SCHOOL COUNSELORS, SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS, SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS, SCHOOL NURSES, AND OTHER SUPPORT STAFF TO HELP OUR STUDENTS NAVIGATE THESE DIFFICULT TIMES WE ARE IN.” - BOB ROTUNDA, NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL COUNSELOR ASSOCIATION

Policy recommendations:

- **Invest in mental health experts and restorative practices.** Districts should use new resources to ensure that high-poverty schools meet recommended student-counselor ratios. Districts should also increase the number of nurses and school psychologists available to support at-risk students and fortify early warning systems to ensure that students who are at risk are identified in time for effective intervention. Additionally, schools should make a commitment to reducing exclusionary discipline by investing in restorative practices that will address underlying social emotional issues.
- **Provide community-based mental health services in schools.** Schools should form partnerships with community-based mental health providers. Community providers can deliver supplemental services in schools to close equity and access gaps. Districts should also promote telehealth options for mental health care, particularly given current shortages of available support in certain geographic regions.
- **Expand community schools statewide.** A supportive and welcoming school environment is one of the best ways to increase attendance. Community schools are an effective strategy for increasing graduation rates and reducing chronic absenteeism. Comprehensive support in community schools helps foster relationships that effectively address chronic absenteeism and address the needs of those who are facing challenges. Students in community schools miss fewer days, feel safer, and are more likely to graduate on time.
- **Examine attendance data.** Districts should collect information about why students are absent – focusing on issues that have emerged or been exacerbated during the pandemic. Students are facing challenges related to housing insecurity, foster care, loss of caregivers, and even lack of family child care. Collecting data about why students are absent helps education leaders and policy makers more closely align resource allocation to the needs of families and communities.

ISSUE 3: EXTENDED LEARNING TIME AND SUMMER SUPPORT

Summer learning and afterschool programs have a positive impact on students' academic and social emotional well-being.

Extended learning opportunities play a key role in students' cognitive, academic, social, and physical development. Yet even before the pandemic, these programs were often not available to students of color and students from low-income backgrounds who often fall behind in math and reading each summer.


Pandemic interruptions intensified the need for expanded learning to help students catch up on lost instruction, engage in enrichment activities, and build relationships with caring adults and peers. Given the enormous burden currently on schools and teachers, this summer provides an ideal opportunity for schools to build partnerships with community organizations that work with youth.

ARPA requires states to utilize one percent of ARPA funding to implement summer enrichment programming and one percent of funding to support afterschool programs. New York State received over \$2 billion in funding to address unfinished instruction and \$180 million of those funds are reserved for summer and afterschool programming.

Current trends show that districts are planning summer programming, but their plans do not guarantee a seat for every child. Many parents are concerned.

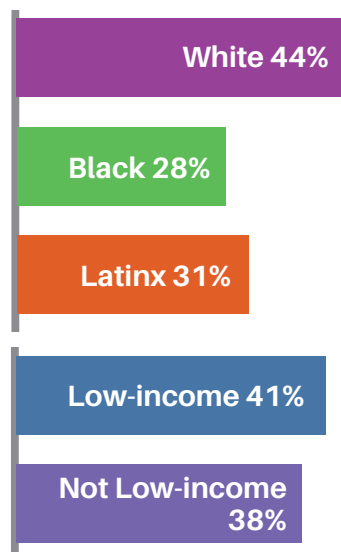
It is critical that New York school districts provide every student and family with the opportunity to participate in rich evidence-based learning and enrichment opportunities this summer.

Poll Findings

90%  of parents would find it helpful if schools provided more summer programs for students

Parents are concerned about the impact of summer break on their children:

39%  are concerned about unfinished learning ("That my child will forget some of what they learned during the school year and will need to catch up when they go back to school")

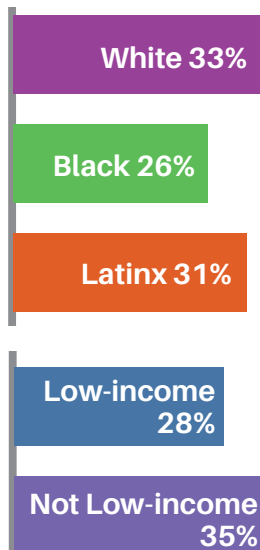


Demographic Breakdown

32%



are concerned about social isolation ("That my child will not have opportunities to socialize with other children")

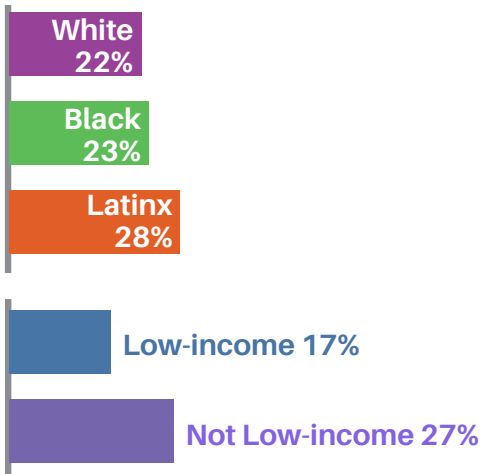


Demographic Breakdown

24%



are concerned about safety ("That my child will not have access to safe spaces and activities outside the home")

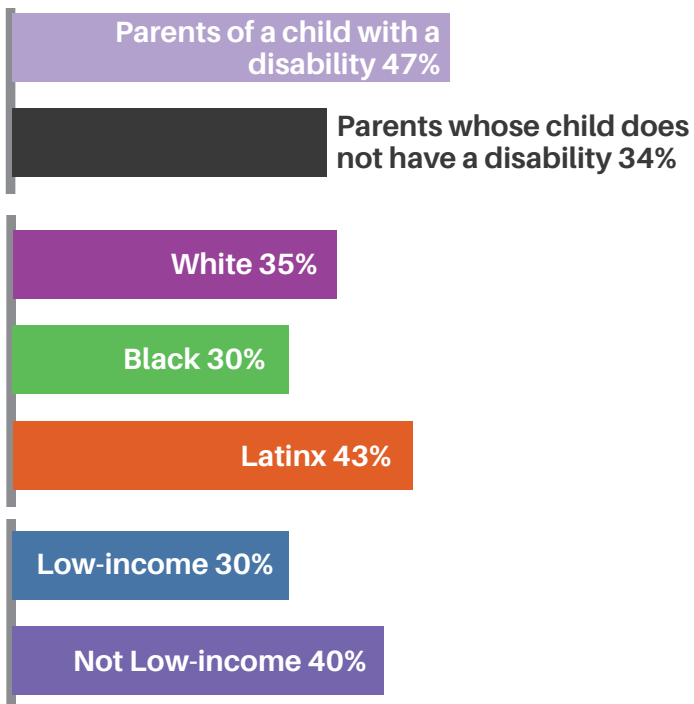


Demographic Breakdown

36%



of parents plan to enroll their child in academic support this summer



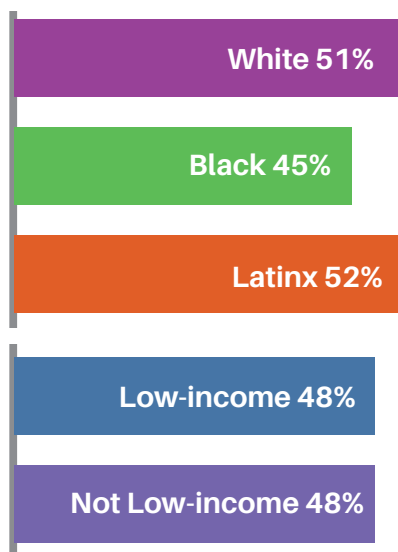
Demographic Breakdown

28%

of parents are concerned that their child will not have the opportunity to enroll in summer programming. Out of those parents,

47%

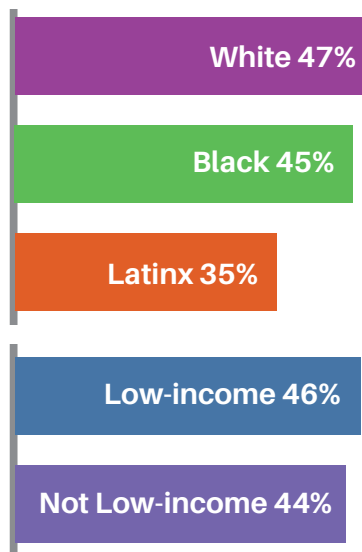
have concerns about being able to transport their child to and from summer programming



Demographic Breakdown

45%

have concerns about being able to afford summer programming for their child



Demographic Breakdown

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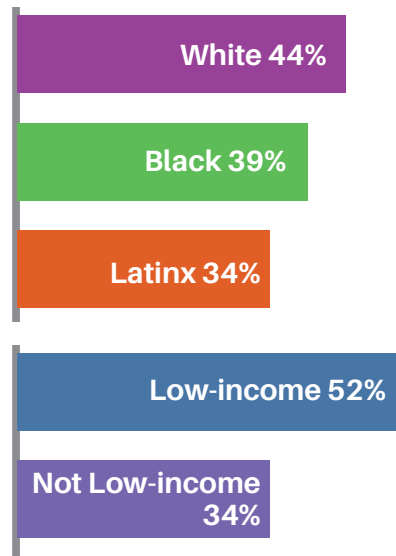
PUTTING STUDENTS ON THE PATH TO A BRIGHT FUTURE AND ACTUALIZING THEIR FULL POTENTIAL MEANS FOCUSING ON ACCELERATING LEARNING AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY, NOT JUST DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR, BUT ALSO DURING SUMMER BREAK WHEN STUDENTS ARE AT ADDITIONAL RISK FOR FALLING BEHIND ACADEMICALLY. -SAM RADFORD, CO-CHAIRPERSON OF WE THE PARENTS OF WESTERN NEW YORK



39%



are not aware of summer programming options for their child



Demographic Breakdown

52%



of low-income parents are concerned that their child will not have the opportunity to enroll in summer programming because they are not aware of summer programming.

Policy recommendations:

- **Provide a summer opportunity for every child.** Leverage the expertise of community-based organizations and build upon existing partnerships between schools and community-based organization providers to ensure that every child has an opportunity to enroll in summer programming. Summer opportunities should be offered during the day, but also during evening and weekend hours should families need. Summer opportunities should focus on enrichment, academics, and social-emotional learning. Where possible, students should have an opportunity to earn wages and engage with local businesses and industries.
- **Follow the research.** Summer programming is most beneficial when there is full-day programming that includes academic instruction and enrichment activities for five days per week for no less than five weeks. Students should have at least three hours of language arts and mathematics instruction per day provided by a certified teacher or qualified tutor. Small class sizes are best with no more than 15 students per instructor. Districts should also ensure that students have free transportation and meals.
- **Provide academic acceleration.** Districts should provide access to advanced coursework during the summer. Advanced coursework can come in the form of accelerated math or science, Advanced Placement courses, International Baccalaureate, dual enrollment, or other college credit-bearing opportunities.

ISSUE 4: STUDENTS WITH UNIQUE NEEDS

Unfinished instruction and interrupted support services have disproportionately impacted students with unique needs.

Even before the pandemic many students with disabilities and multilingual learners received inconsistent support services and limited access to high-quality learning experiences. Screening and evaluation delays have left many students without the learning support that they need to successfully complete academic tasks.

Multilingual learners are the fastest growing population in public schools, yet districts across the state have failed to provide support and communications in ways that meet their

needs. Parents often report that their district does not provide information in their home language or in ways that meet their needs.

Further, nearly 500,000 New York students have a disability.

During the pandemic, many students with disabilities have been underserved. They have experienced delays in services, loss of instructional time, and poor transportation for in-person learning. Poll findings support the fact that even with significant new federal and state funding, students with disabilities have been largely overlooked for summer and extended learning opportunities.

Poll Findings

Our polls have shown consistent support from parents for improving supports for multilingual learners and their families.

3 out of 4 

parents across each of our polls since the pandemic hit, including **78%** of parents in this poll believe it is helpful for schools to provide information for parents in languages other than English

ONLY 1 in 5

parents report that their school is providing this resource

80% 

of parents said that it would be helpful for schools to provide instructional materials for students learning English as a second language

ONLY 16%

of parents report that their school is providing this resource

Parents whose child has a disability

53% 

are concerned that their child will forget some of what they learned during the school year

35% 

are concerned that their child will not have the opportunity to enroll in summer programming

91% 

said that schools providing instructional materials and other resources to support students with disabilities would be helpful

Parents overall

39% 

are concerned that their child will forget some of what they learned during the school year

28% 

are concerned that their child will not have the opportunity to enroll in summer programming

86% 

said that schools providing instructional materials and other resources to support students with disabilities would be helpful

ONLY 27%

of parents whose child has a disability reported that their school is providing these resources

62% 

said that spending ARPA money on improving support to students with special needs and their families is very important

54% 

said that spending ARPA money on improving support to students with special needs and their families is very important

1 in 10

parents whose child has a disability reported that their school gave no additional money at all to improving support for students with special needs and their families this year.



STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS NEED THE SAME ACCESS TO QUALITY INSTRUCTION AS THEIR GENERAL EDUCATION AND ENGLISH-SPEAKING PEERS.” - LORI PODVESKER, INCLUDENYC

Policy recommendations:

- **Engage families to learn about their needs and address them.** New York State’s approved ARPA plan requires that school districts engage families and other stakeholders when developing plans for ARPA spending. State leaders should require school districts to publicly report stakeholder engagement with a minimum number of engagements that is proportional to the size of the school district. Districts should continue to be required to engage and incorporate the interests of students, caregivers, business leaders, classroom teachers, support staff, and community-based organizations. Forms of quality engagement include hosting town halls, focus groups, and forums.
- **The state should provide specific metrics to track outcomes for the use of new resources.** Federal guidance for ARPA funding does not require the state education department to track the use of new funding resources. However, the state education department should honor their commitment to equity and excellence by ensuring that there is equity in the way that current resources are being used – specifically as it relates to students with disabilities and multilingual learners. NYSED should measure the impact of the funding by providing districts with a set of metrics aligned with the needs of students across the state.
- **Bolster and expand early warning systems.** Students with disabilities thrive when educators identify their unique needs early and consistently support them throughout their education beginning with screens during infant and toddler years. New York should continue to invest in the expansion of early intervention services. The state should create a longitudinal data system that allows educators and service providers to proactively ensure seamless transitions and consistent support services for students with disabilities.

ISSUE 5: SUPPORTING PARENTS

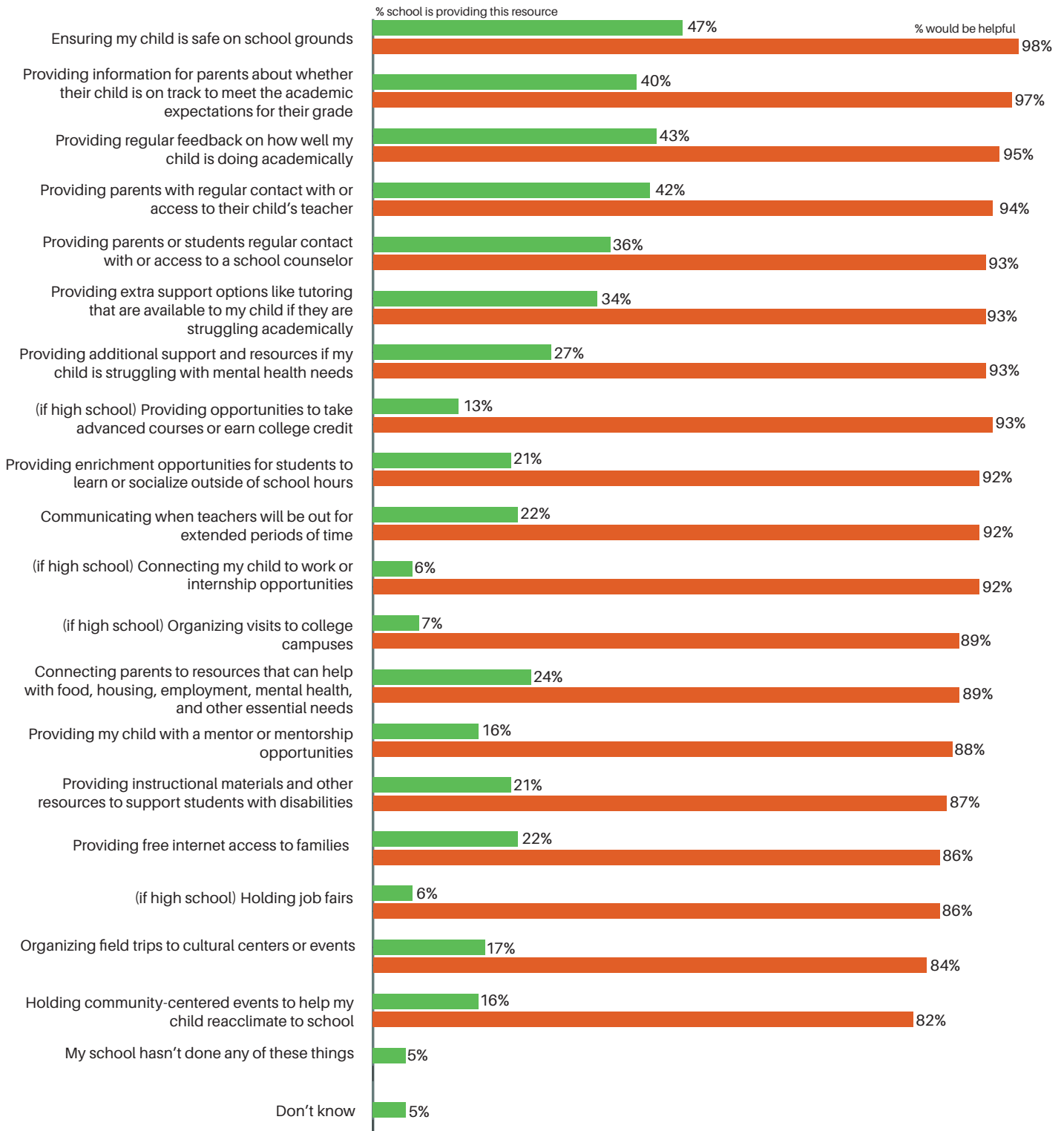
Across seven polls during the pandemic, parents have ideas about what would be most helpful to their families. However, there are consistent gaps between what parents say would be useful and what districts and schools are providing.

Resources that most parents would find useful are not at all complicated. Yet districts continue to miss the mark.



Poll findings:

Actions that would be helpful for schools to take to support students and families



Policy recommendations:

- Districts should utilize their new federal and state funding to address these areas **with urgency**. Doing so will accelerate student learning and help restore parent trust in the education system.
- Districts should continue to utilize quality family engagement strategies regularly including hosting town halls, focus groups, and forums.

