

July 2025

Family Survey for Special Education

**2023-2024
Statewide Report**



Prepared by The Excellence in Engagement and Evaluation Team
at The Ohio State University
Center on Education and Training for Employment



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Executive Summary

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 requires state education agencies and local school districts to provide various data and information to the U.S. Department of Education. To meet these requirements, the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (ODEW) conducts the annual Family Survey for Special Education to gather feedback from parents and caregivers of students with disabilities. The survey focuses on key areas of family engagement, including communication, school climate, partnerships, and understanding of graduation requirements.

Objectives:

- 1. Understand Family Engagement:** Explore parents/caregivers' views on school communication, school climate, partnerships, and understanding of graduation requirements and options for students with disabilities.
- 2. Highlight Perceptions:** Present credible data reflecting diverse perspectives of parents and caregivers of students with disabilities, acknowledging potential limitations in data representation.
- 3. Inform Policy and Practice:** Provide data-informed insights to guide local and state educational policies and practices.

In 2024, responses were collected from families in 141 school districts and community schools assigned to Cohort 5. All districts in Ohio are assigned to one of six cohorts, with previous and future surveys covering the remaining groups.

While the data provide valuable insights, they should be interpreted with care. Because probability sampling was not used, results cannot be generalized to all families. Confidence in the findings is stronger when response rates are high and when respondents reflect the diversity of the student population.

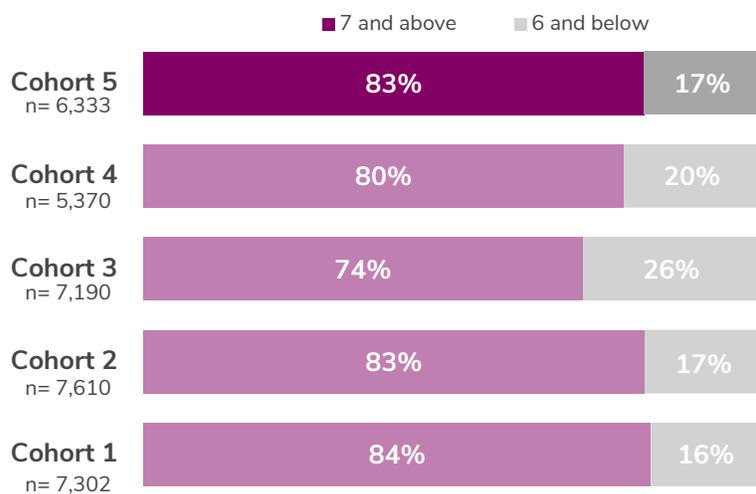
These results are best used alongside other data sources to support planning, guide strategy development, and inform policy decisions. Districts and community schools may use the [Data-Driven Dialogue Protocol](#) to facilitate meaningful discussions around their local data.

This report provides a concise overview of key findings from the 2024 survey participants.

Key Findings

Survey Respondents:

- **6,333 parents and caregivers** provided their perspectives on engagement with local schools in the context of special education.
- In Ohio, 20% of students with disabilities are Black non-Hispanic. However, only 9% of survey respondents identified their student as **Black**, indicating a significant underrepresentation of 11 percentage points.
- Ohio's enrollment for **Other Health Impairments** is 19%. In comparison, the response rate in this category was only 8%. 22% of respondents identified their student as having a **Specific Learning Disability**, compared to the statewide enrollment of 34% indicating a significant underrepresentation of 11 percentage points.
- With Ohio's **Autism** enrollment at 14% and a response rate of 19%, and **Developmental Delay** at 4% with a response rate of 11%, these categories were **overrepresented** in the survey by 5 and 8 percentage points, respectively.
- **83%** of respondents indicated that schools facilitated parent involvement to improve services and results for students with disabilities. While the percentage of respondents rating this question a 7 or above (max 10) is higher than that of the previous cohort, it still falls short of the set target of 87%.



Survey Results:

- Participants generally expressed positive opinions about their **communication experiences** with schools, with 77% to 84% of respondents indicating they strongly agreed or agreed with each statement. The lowest-rated item was related to the amount of information received, while the highest-rated was 'The school keeps me informed about my child.'
- Regarding **school climate**, 86% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their school is welcoming. In contrast, only 77% felt that their school is welcoming to families from all cultural backgrounds.
- Overall, survey participants responded favorably (71% to 85%) to questions about **partnering with their schools**. 85% strongly agreed or agreed that they understand their student's IEP and that meetings are scheduled at convenient times. In contrast, only 71% felt that the school views them as experts in meeting their student's needs.
- Concerning parents and caregivers' understanding of **graduation** requirements, only 54% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they know the graduation options for students with IEPs.





Data Collection

The survey collection period extended from March 5 through May 7, 2024.

User Friendly and Multilingual

The survey was made accessible online and on mobile devices. It was available in English, Spanish, Nepali, Somali, Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese to ensure accessibility.

Encouraging Broad Family Participation

To support participation from all parents and caregivers of students with disabilities, the research team used targeted outreach strategies. One approach involved creating a personalized video from a trusted community member. Districts and community schools were encouraged to distribute the video to help build trust and reduce underrepresentation.

Invitation to Participate

Emails were sent to superintendents, special education directors, and other school district personnel. These emails included an invitation for families to participate in the survey.

Dissemination Methods

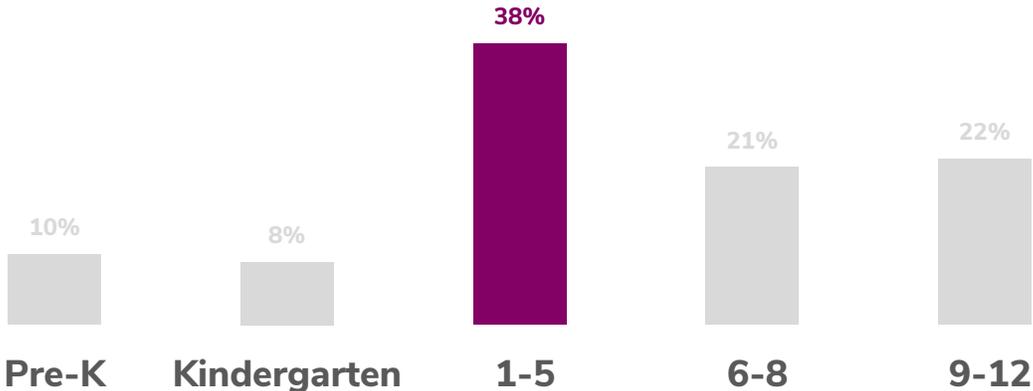
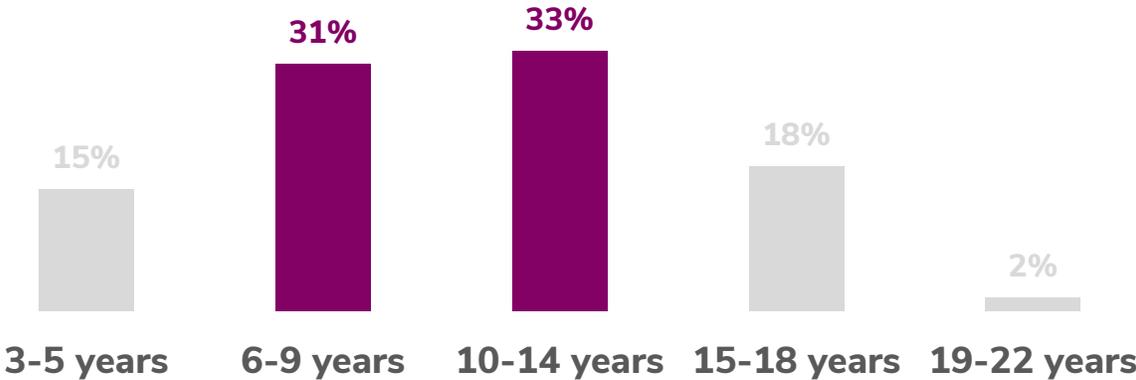
Districts and Community Schools employed varied channels to invite families to participate in the survey. These channels included school and district websites, social media platforms, direct emails, paper invitations sent home with students, recorded voice messages, and shared Google Docs. This multi-faceted approach aimed to ensure that all families received the invitation through their preferred communication method.

Response Rate and Demographics

The table below outlines information about the number of participating school districts/community schools for each cohort as well as the total number of responses received. There were two basic criteria that qualified a parent or caregiver for participation: their student was aged 3-22 and their student had an official Individualized Education Program (IEP).

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Cohort 5
# participating districts/community schools	155	155	156	140	141
# responses included	7,302	7,743	7,190	5,370	6,333

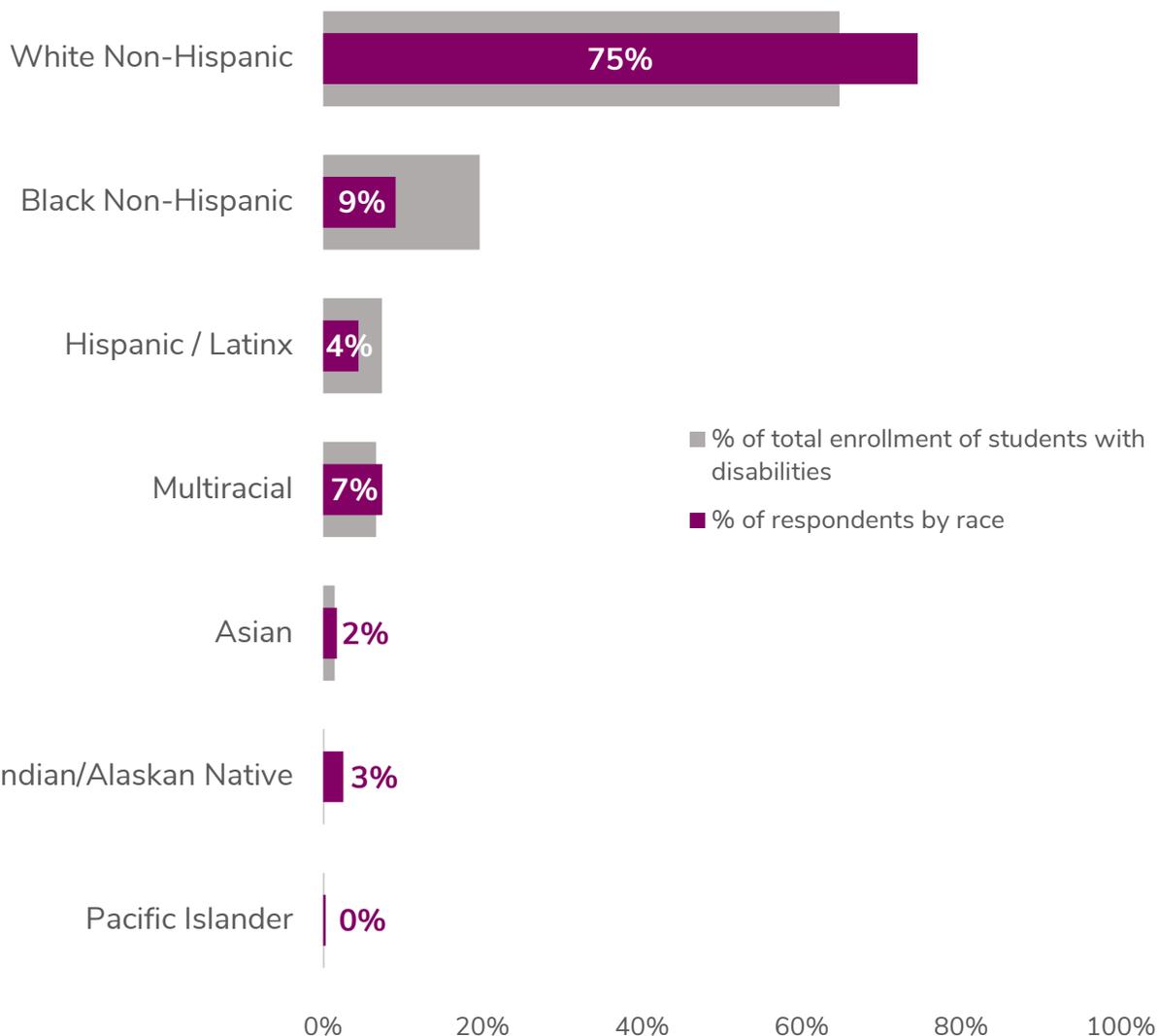
The charts below show the distribution of responses based on the age and grade level of the families' oldest child with an IEP. The **highest response rate** came from families who had a child **ages 10-14** followed by families who had a child **ages 6-9**. **Just over one-third** of respondents reported having a student in grades 1-5, and nearly 60% of responses came from families with children in elementary and middle school.



Demographics: Race Categories

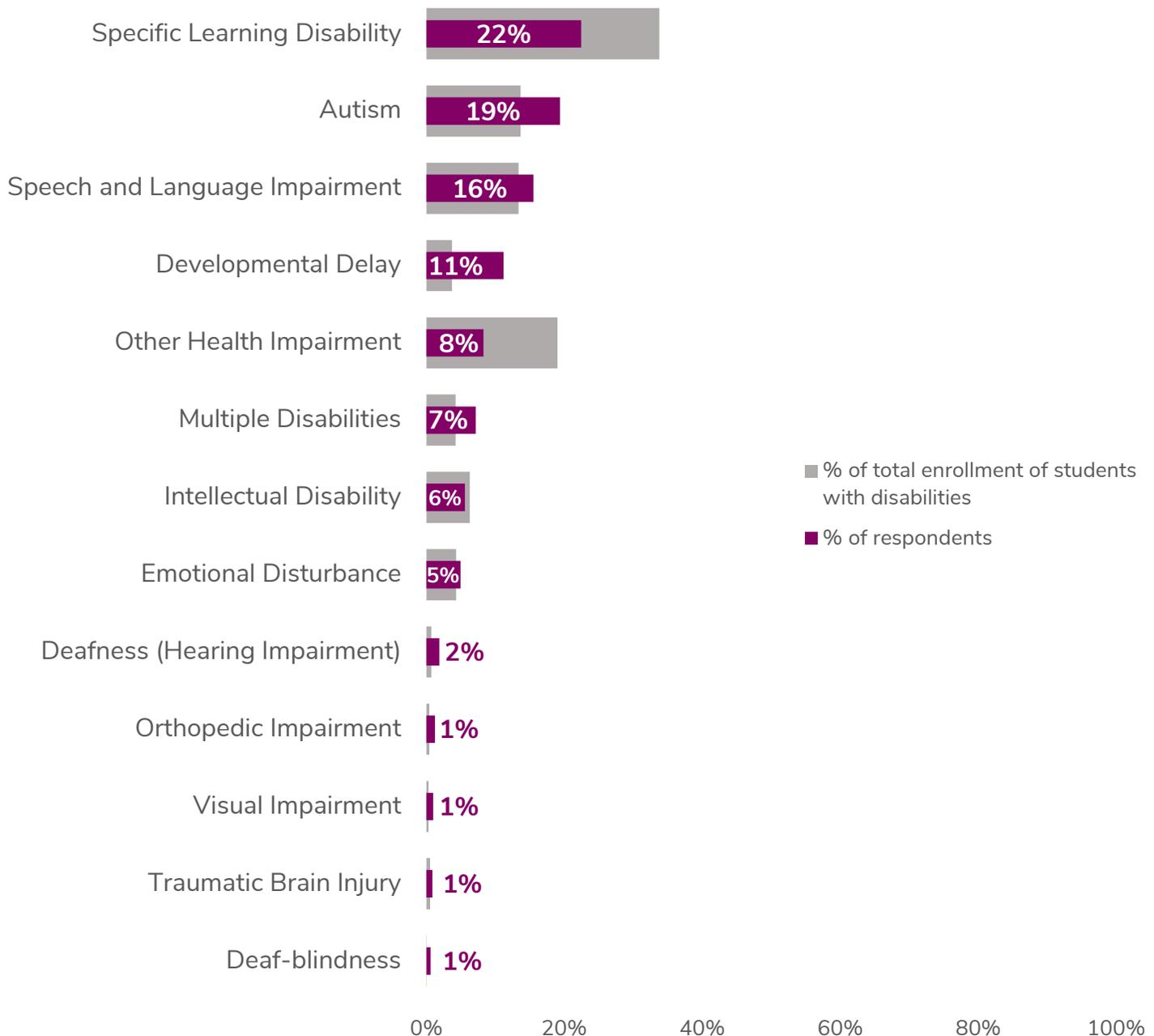
One goal of the survey was to ensure that the racial and disability representation of respondents reflected the current enrollment data for students with disabilities in Ohio. The graph below compares the percentage of survey respondents by race category to statewide enrollment figures.

Purple bars represent the percentage of survey respondents by race, while gray bars show the corresponding percentages in Ohio's student population. Statewide, **65% of students with disabilities are White Non-Hispanic** and **20% are Black Non-Hispanic**. However, only **9%** of survey respondents identified their student as **Black**, indicating a significant underrepresentation of 11 percentage points. In contrast, **75%** of respondents identified their student as **White**, reflecting an overrepresentation of 10 percentage points. All other racial categories fell within an acceptable margin of $\pm 3\%$.



Demographics: Disability Categories

The purple bars represent the percentage of survey respondents by the student’s primary disability category, while the gray bars show the corresponding statewide enrollment percentages for each category. Students identified with **Autism** and **Developmental Delay** were **overrepresented** in the survey by 6 and 7 percentage points, respectively. In contrast, students with **Other Health Impairment** and **Specific Learning Disabilities** were **underrepresented** by 11 percentage points. All other disability categories fell within an acceptable margin of $\pm 3\%$.



Quality of Services: Indicator 8

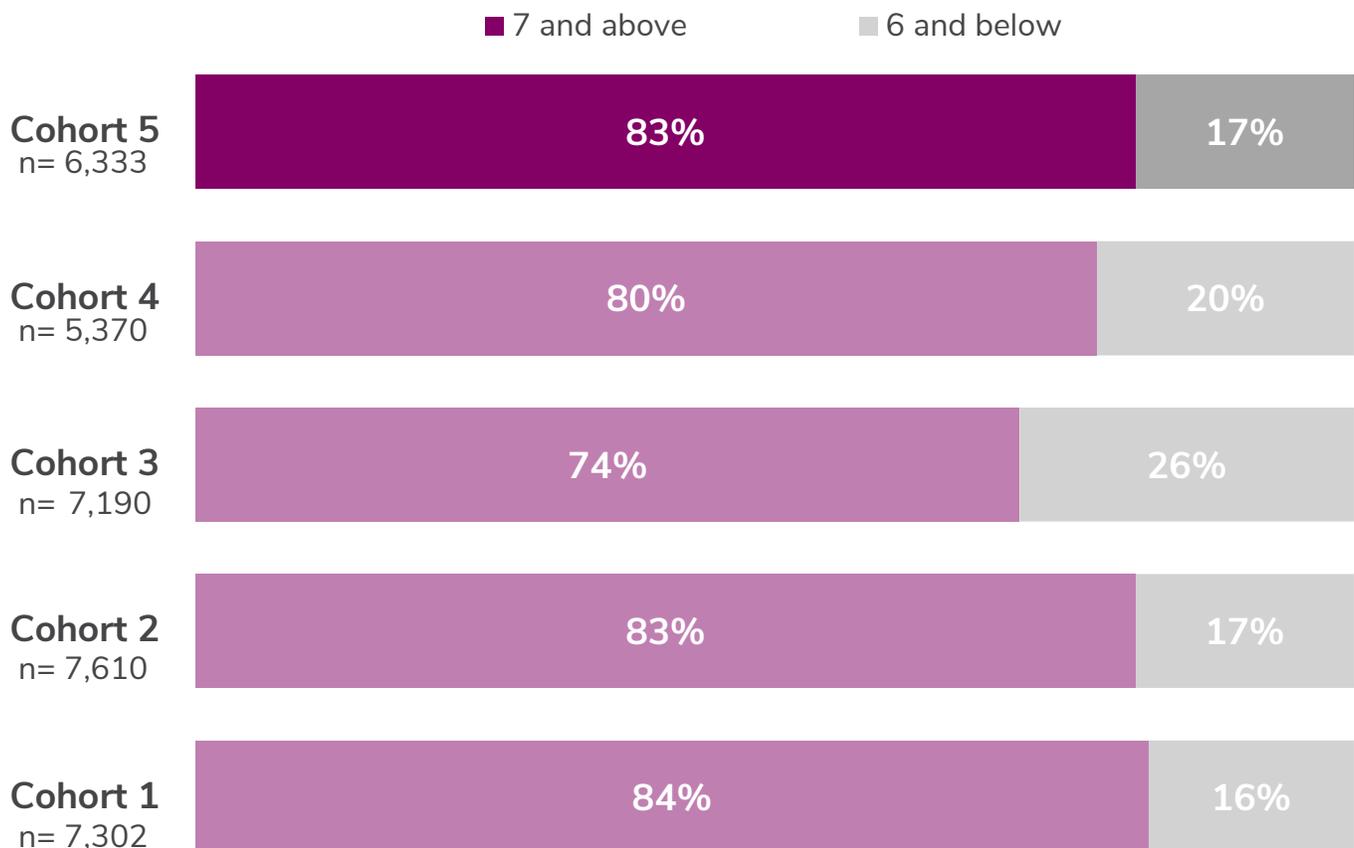
The primary purpose of the annual **Family Survey for Special Education** is to assess the extent to which parents and caregivers feel that schools collaborate with them to support their children's educational success. Respondents rated the schools' efforts to improve services and outcomes for students with disabilities using a 10-point scale, where a score of 7 or higher reflected a positive perception.

In Cohort 5, **83% of respondents** reported that schools actively supported parent involvement as a strategy to enhance services and outcomes for children with disabilities. While comparisons across cohorts should be made with caution, it is noteworthy that the percentage of parents and caregivers rating this item a 7 or higher has varied over time.

The target percentages for each cohort were as follows:

- Cohort 5: 87%
- Cohort 4: 86%
- Cohort 3: 85%
- Cohort 2: 84%
- Cohort 1: 94%

None of the cohorts met their respective targets. The target for Cohort 1 was based on the pre-2021 survey methodology, while the targets for Cohorts 2 and 3 were adjusted to reflect more realistic expectations informed by updated data. Although there was no decline in performance between Cohorts 4 and 5, the Cohort 5 target was not met, indicating continued opportunities for improvement in fostering meaningful parent-school collaboration.



Reasons for Low Ratings on Family Involvement

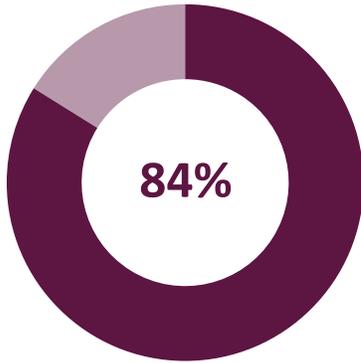
A rating of 6 or below on the quality of services question indicates that respondents did not agree that their child’s school collaborated with them to improve educational outcomes. Those who gave a rating of 6 or lower were asked to identify the top three reasons for their response. The number of respondents and their selected reasons are summarized below.



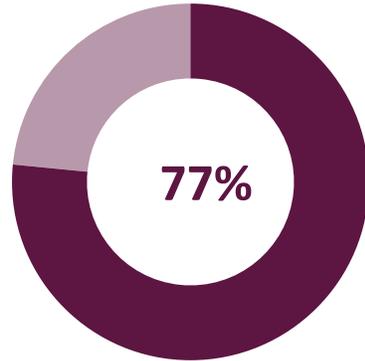
Reason	Number of Respondents
Difficulty with communicating with school personnel	457
School officials do not appear to know enough about unique needs	397
IEP not being followed	312
Special education process difficult and/or confusing	308
IEP does not represent best approach to support child	308
Do not feel supported by school	275
IEP too hard to understand	121

Results: Communication

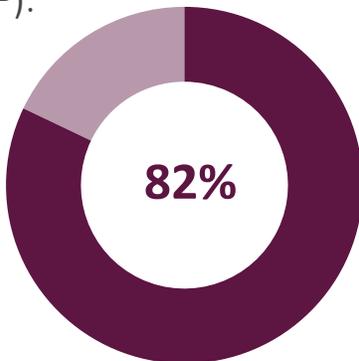
Respondents felt that school staff communicated with them effectively when there was important information regarding their child.



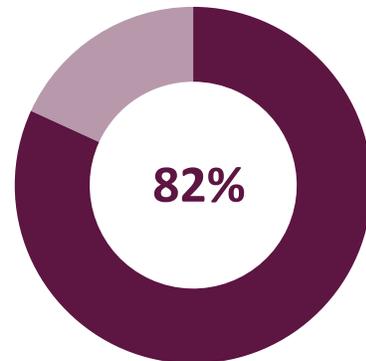
Respondents felt that the amount of information they received from their school was appropriate.



Respondents indicated that they understood how the school is implementing their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

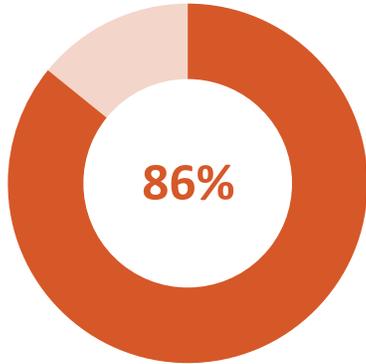


Respondents felt that the messages they received about their child's progress were clear and easy to understand.

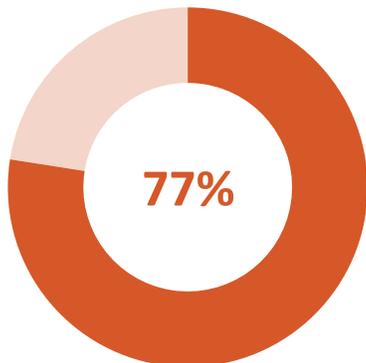


Results: School Climate

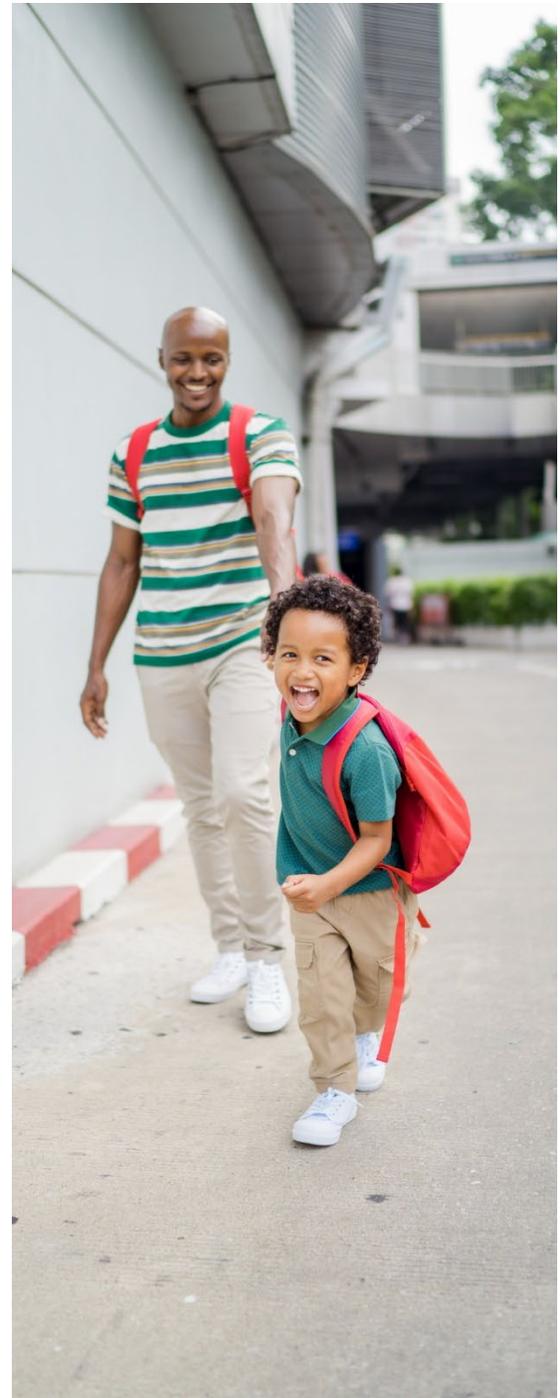
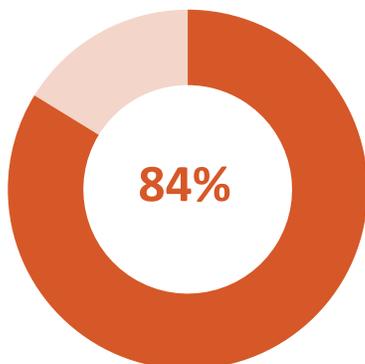
Respondents felt that their school was welcoming.



Respondents agreed that their school is welcoming to children and families of all cultural backgrounds.

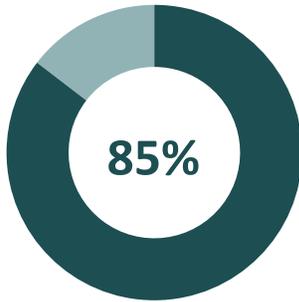


Respondents felt they were treated as equal partners in their child's education.

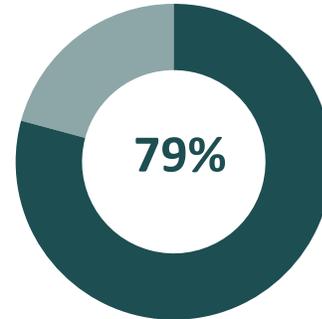


Results: Partnering with Schools

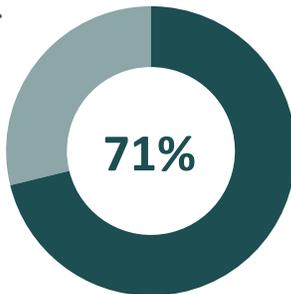
Respondents agreed that school meetings about their child's education were scheduled at convenient times.



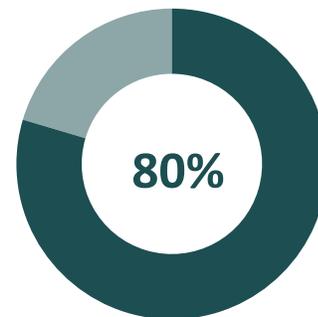
Respondents felt that if they had a problem with any part of their child's education, they could get the help they needed to address it.



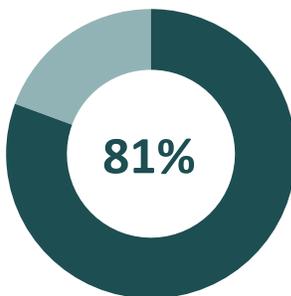
Respondents felt that their school recognized them as experts in understanding and meeting their child's needs.



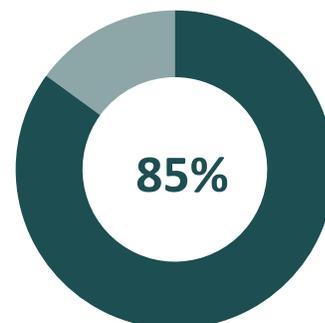
Respondents expressed confidence that the school follows through on its commitments.



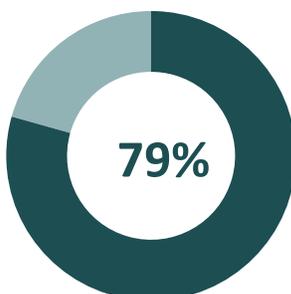
Respondents felt they were aligned with the school on how to support their child's behavioral needs.



Respondents reported that they understood all components of their child's IEP.

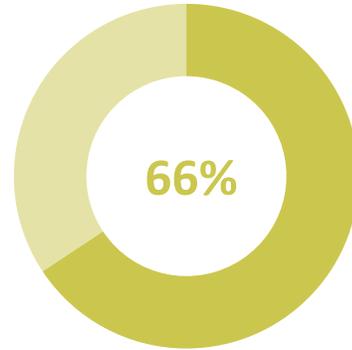


Respondents felt they were aligned with the school on how to support their child's learning needs.

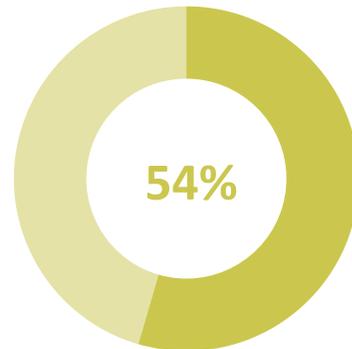


Results: Graduation Requirements

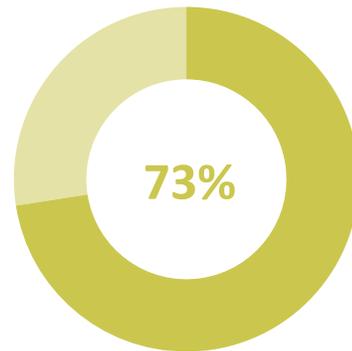
Respondents agreed that they have a clear understanding of Ohio's high school graduation requirements.



Respondents indicated they understand the graduation options available to their child and are aware that these differ from those for students without an IEP.



Respondents agreed that they understand their child has the option to either continue receiving special education services until age 22 or meet the standard graduation requirements applicable to all students.



Recommendations

The Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (ODEW) is committed to enhancing meaningful and effective family-school partnerships to support the success of students with disabilities. The current statewide goal is for 87% of parents/caregivers to agree that their children’s schools promote meaningful parent involvement. Achieving this goal holds significant implications for every school district. To advance this effort, districts and community schools should review their results, recognize areas of strength, and identify opportunities for growth in their collaborations with parents/caregivers. The findings presented in the preceding sections have informed the following key recommendations.

Data Collection Efforts

- Local school districts and community schools are encouraged to continue collecting data from a wide range of parents and caregivers of students with disabilities to ensure the representation of all populations. State-level response data, disaggregated by race and disability category, revealed **underrepresentation** among certain groups—particularly **Black families**, as well as families of students with **Other Health Impairments and Specific Learning Disabilities**. It is important for districts and community schools to closely examine their own response rate data, interpret its implications, and develop strategies to more effectively engage families based on the unique characteristics of their communities.
- Improving the accessibility of the survey to boost participation rates should be a priority. A crucial first step involves identifying the total number of families at each school with a child on an IEP to inform targeted outreach efforts. Utilizing a variety of distribution methods; leveraging trusted relationships with parents, staff members, and parent mentors; and sharing the survey during school meetings and events to enhance visibility are all effective strategies.

Action Planning

- Findings indicate that 83% of parents and caregivers perceive schools as collaborating with them to enhance special education and outcomes for their students—a percentage that is higher than that of the previous two cohorts. However, this figure remains below the target set for the quality indicator, 87%. At the state level, analyzing selected reasons provided by families who rated the quality indicator below 6 can help identify priority areas for developing targeted family resources and professional learning opportunities for educators. In addition, reviewing disaggregated quality indicator results by race, age, and disability category can support reflection on factors contributing to both higher and lower ratings, guiding future state-level planning.
- Local school districts and community schools will want to examine their own data and identify actionable next steps. The overall quality indicator, reasons for lower ratings, disaggregated subgroup data, and the four focus areas covered in the survey (communication, school climate, partnering with schools, and graduation) should be considered. These elements can help determine which areas are meeting expectations and which require targeted improvement efforts. To support this process, a **Data Driven Protocol** has been created for utilization by a team of individuals involved with special education or family engagement initiatives.

Resources

The products and resources listed below may be useful in supporting local efforts to successfully expand authentic and meaningful parent engagement and collaboration with schools and address the recommendations detailed in this report.

For Educators:

- [The Data Driven Dialogue Protocol](#) was developed to guide discussions and action planning within districts and community schools.
- A variety of resources and training opportunities to enhance family engagement efforts are available at the [Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center's website](#).
 - [Partnering with Families Through Special Education](#)
 - [Professional learning opportunities](#)
- The following resources from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce support family engagement and special education efforts:
 - [Parent Engagement](#)
 - [Framework for Building Partnerships Among Schools, Families and Communities](#)
 - [Special Education](#)
 - [Dyslexia Supports](#)
 - [English Learners with Suspected Disabilities](#)
 - [Building Effective Family, School, and Community Partnerships](#)

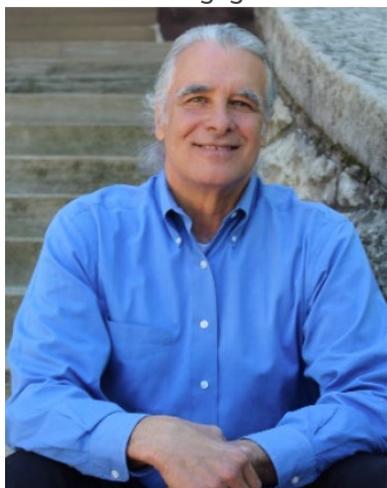
For Families:

- These selected resources from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce support families of students with disabilities:
 - [The Evaluation Roadmap for families](#)
 - [The Secondary Transition Roadmap for families](#)
 - [A Guide to Parent Rights](#)
- [Office hours](#) held by the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce for Ohio high school graduation requirements; parents or caregivers can email questions to gradrequirements@education.ohio.gov.
- [Ohio's Parent Mentors](#) help families navigate local and state special education processes and services and provides relevant resources.
- The [Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities](#) provides support services and [informational tip sheets](#) for families of children with a disability.
- The [Ohio Center for Autism & Low Incidence](#) provides support and resources through various centers such as [Family and Community Outreach Center](#).



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The Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 requires state education agencies and local school districts to provide a variety of data and information to the US Department of Education related to parents' and caregivers' involvement in their students' education. The purpose of assembling and reporting this information is to both support and promote such involvement. There is strong support for the value of parent/caregiver involvement to enhance educational outcomes for all students. The Ohio Department of Education and Workforce is committed to engaging parents and caregivers in the effort to promote educational success for students in Ohio.

Questions? Contact Us.

The Ohio State University
Center on Education and Training for
Employment

[CETE Ohio Family Survey](#)

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