

Results of the Ohio Department of Education's Statewide Survey on Improving the Educational Outcomes for Students with Disabilities: March 2019



Executive Summary

Ohio educators, administrators and service providers were invited to respond to an online survey soliciting input on current strengths, opportunities, challenges and additional supports needed to improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities. The online survey was developed by professionals in the Ohio Department of Education's Office for Early Learning and School Readiness and Office for Exceptional Children, with input from stakeholders representing various centers within the Department and key experts in the field. Eight focus areas were addressed in the survey: (1) Culture of High Expectations; (2) Literacy Practices; (3) Professional Development; (4) Evaluations to Determine Eligibility; (5) Providing Services in the Least Restrictive Environment; (6) Recruiting and Retaining Professionals; (7) Use of Technology; and (8) Transitions. The survey, conducted during the second half of March 2019, was completed by 7,156 educators, administrators and service providers working in 88 counties across Ohio.

Two major findings emerged from the 2019 Statewide Survey on Improving the Educational Outcomes for Students with Disabilities. The first finding was that the most significant impediment to improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities is the demanding caseload experienced by intervention specialists. Intervention specialists have the knowledge and skills to be effective, however, they are stretched too thin in many schools across Ohio to provide the instructional and behavioral supports students need to be successful in their least restrictive environments. Service demands and scheduling constraints routinely result in grouping multiple students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Consequently, survey participants report their general education classrooms have significant proportions of students with complex learning and behavioral needs. Staffing shortages and heavy caseloads contribute to staff burnout and further exacerbate the situation by impeding schools' abilities to recruit, hire and retain intervention specialists. Survey results indicate school districts in rural regions have staff shortages that are particularly severe. Intervention specialists with expertise serving students with complex/multiple disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder, are in the greatest demand. Schools across Ohio need to build their capacities to meet the needs of students with disabilities to offset the impact of high caseloads.

The second finding pertains to school-level capacity to improve special education service delivery. Improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities requires schools to build their capacities to provide a continuum of supports. The survey results point to four areas in which the capacity of the school can be strengthened to benefit students with disabilities. These are:

- a. Advancing general education teachers' professional knowledge and skills to serve students with disabilities;
- b. Strengthening schools' implementation of a multi-tiered system of supports framework;
- c. Securing an adequate number of trained paraprofessionals; and
- d. Ensuring adequate support from an array of service providers.

Survey participants identified a need for general education teachers to advance their instructional practices to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Specifically, general education teachers would be better equipped to support a wide range of learner abilities if they had access to high-quality training in how to differentiate instruction. Evidence-based literacy instructional practices also were identified as a priority for professional development among general education teachers.

Building the capacity for effective service delivery also involves strengthening a school's multi-tiered system of supports, a data-driven framework in which students are matched to a level of instructional and intervention supports proactively based on student need. Survey participants indicated both a need to strengthen their schools' multi-tiered system of supports implementation and a perception that a multi-tiered system of supports was key to reducing the over-identification of students by race, gender or economic disadvantage.

Survey participants identified a need for adequate staffing of paraprofessionals to provide support to students with disabilities within general education classrooms. Paraprofessionals need to be well prepared to not only bolster students' instructional skills but also help support their social, emotional and behavioral skill development within the general education classroom.

A variety of service providers are needed to improve schools' capacities to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Survey participants emphasized the need for behavior interventionists, school psychologists and Board Certified Behavior Analysts to provide the supports needed to serve students in their least restrictive environments.

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The Ohio Department of Education invited Ohio educators, administrators and service providers to respond to an online survey soliciting input on current strengths, opportunities, challenges and additional supports needed to improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities. The invitation to respond to the survey was disseminated electronically on March 12, 2019. The deadline for responding to the survey was March 31, 2019.

Sample

The survey was completed by 7,156 respondents working in 88 counties across Ohio. Given the option of selecting all the roles in which they serve in Ohio's education system, the greatest percentage identified themselves as intervention specialists (37 percent); followed by general education teachers (31.1 percent); service providers who work directly with students with disabilities (11.7 percent); district administrators (6 percent); disabilities coordinators, administrators or supervisors (5.2 percent); and principals/assistant principals (4.9 percent). "Other" was selected as a response by 17.4 percent and included service providers who determined they did not work directly with students with disabilities (for example, school counselors, school nurses, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech and language pathologists), as well as "specials" teachers (art, music, physical education, media/library) instructional coaches, Title I reading teachers, and educators working in vocational and career-technical education programs. Eleven percent (11.4 percent) of those responding to this question identified themselves as serving more than one role.

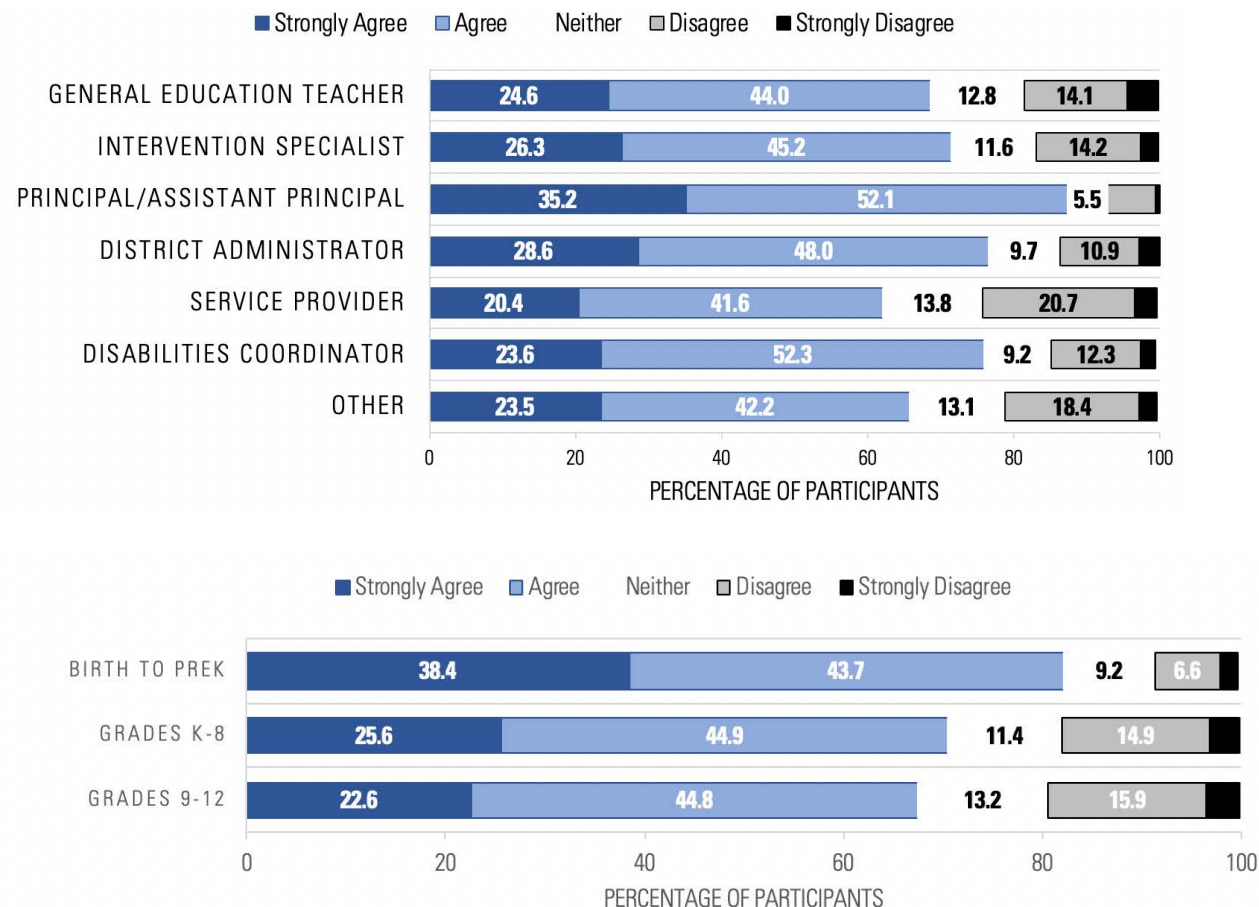
When asked to identify the age levels of the students they serve, the breakdown was as follows: Birth to age 3 (3.3 percent); Prekindergarten: Ages 3-5 years old (19.2 percent); Kindergarten to grade 3 (43.6 percent); Grades 4-8 (56 percent); Grades 9-12 (40.1 percent); and College (1.1 percent).

Results

Culture of High Expectations

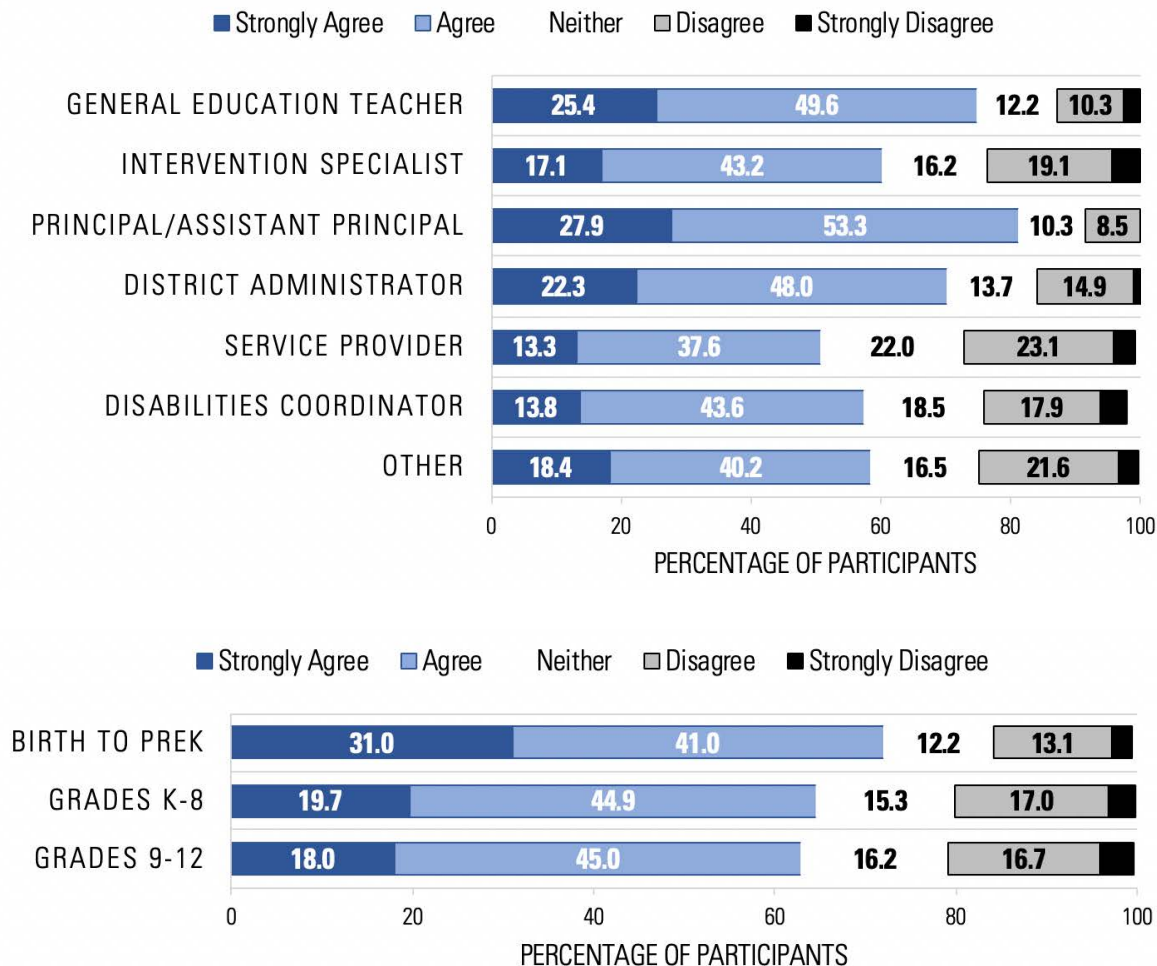
Educators and educational leaders expressed support for the notion that their schools foster a culture of high expectations for students with disabilities. A majority (71.1 percent) of the survey participants reported agreement with the statement: Administrators, teachers and support staff in the school where I work foster a culture of high expectations for all students with disabilities. Principals/assistant principals had the highest level of agreement, followed by district administrators and individuals who serve in the roles of disabilities coordinator, administrator or supervisor (see Figure 1). Professionals who serve children in the early childhood age range (Birth to age 3 and Prekindergarten: Ages 3-5) reported higher levels of agreement regarding the presence of a culture of high expectations than those who serve older students.

Figure 1. Percentage of Participants Responding to the Statement: Administrators, teachers and support staff in the school where I work foster a culture of high expectations for all students with disabilities.



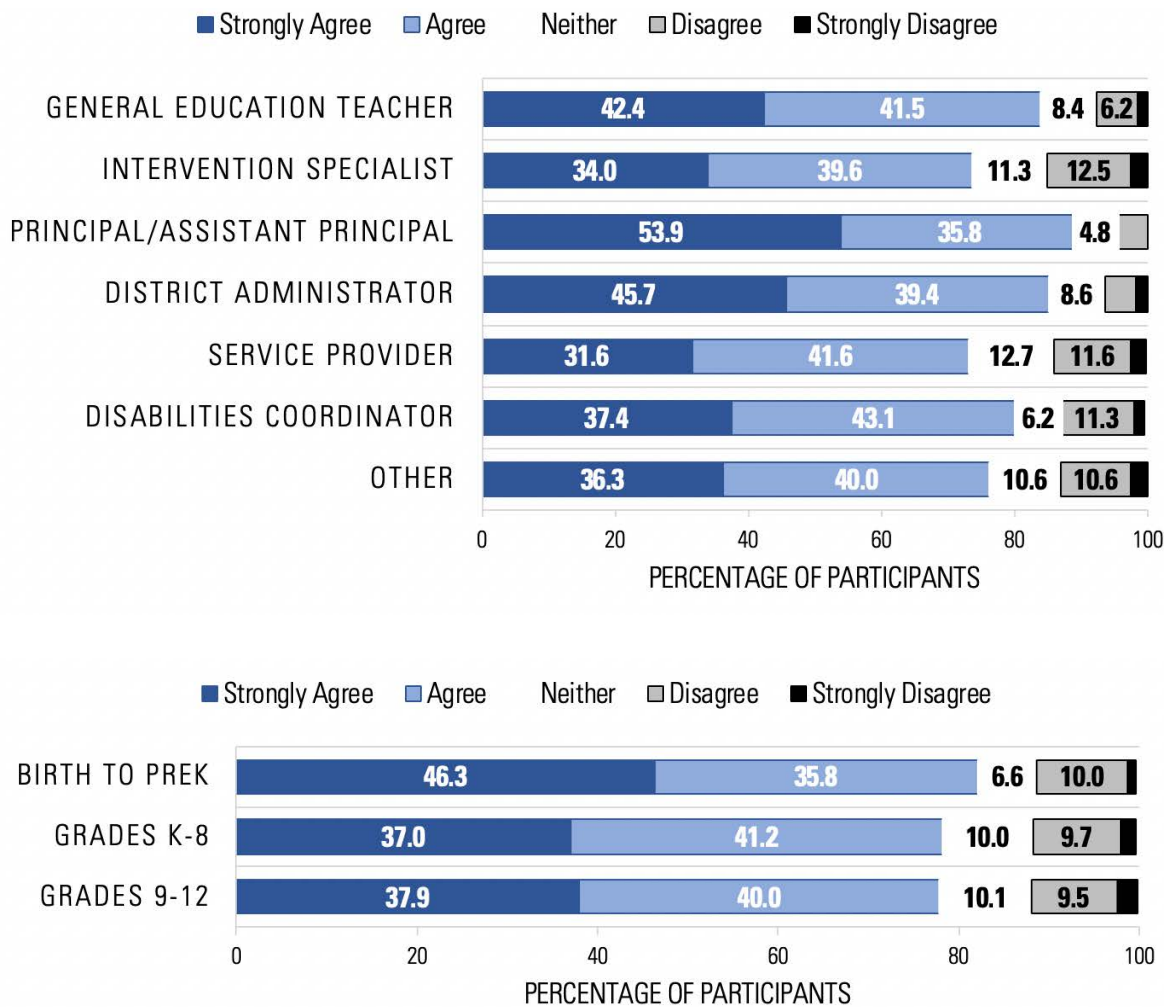
Likewise, a majority (66.1 percent) of the survey participants reported agreement with the statement: Personnel in the school where I work have the mindset that students with disabilities can succeed in general education classrooms with the right support. Principals/assistant principals had the highest level of agreement, followed by general education teachers and district administrators (see Figure 2). Only half (50.9 percent) of the service providers who work directly with students with disabilities reported that personnel in their schools believe students with disabilities can succeed in general education classrooms. Professionals who serve children in the early childhood age range reported higher levels of agreement with the statement than those who serve older students.

Figure 2. Percentage of Participants Responding to the Statement: Personnel in the school where I work have the mindset that students with disabilities can succeed in general education classrooms with the right support.



A stronger majority (79.7 percent) of the participants reported agreement with the statement: Administration, teachers and support staff in the school where I work foster a culture of belonging for all students with disabilities. Positive perceptions regarding a culture of belonging for students with disabilities were shared among educators and leaders across roles and age levels served (see Figure 3).

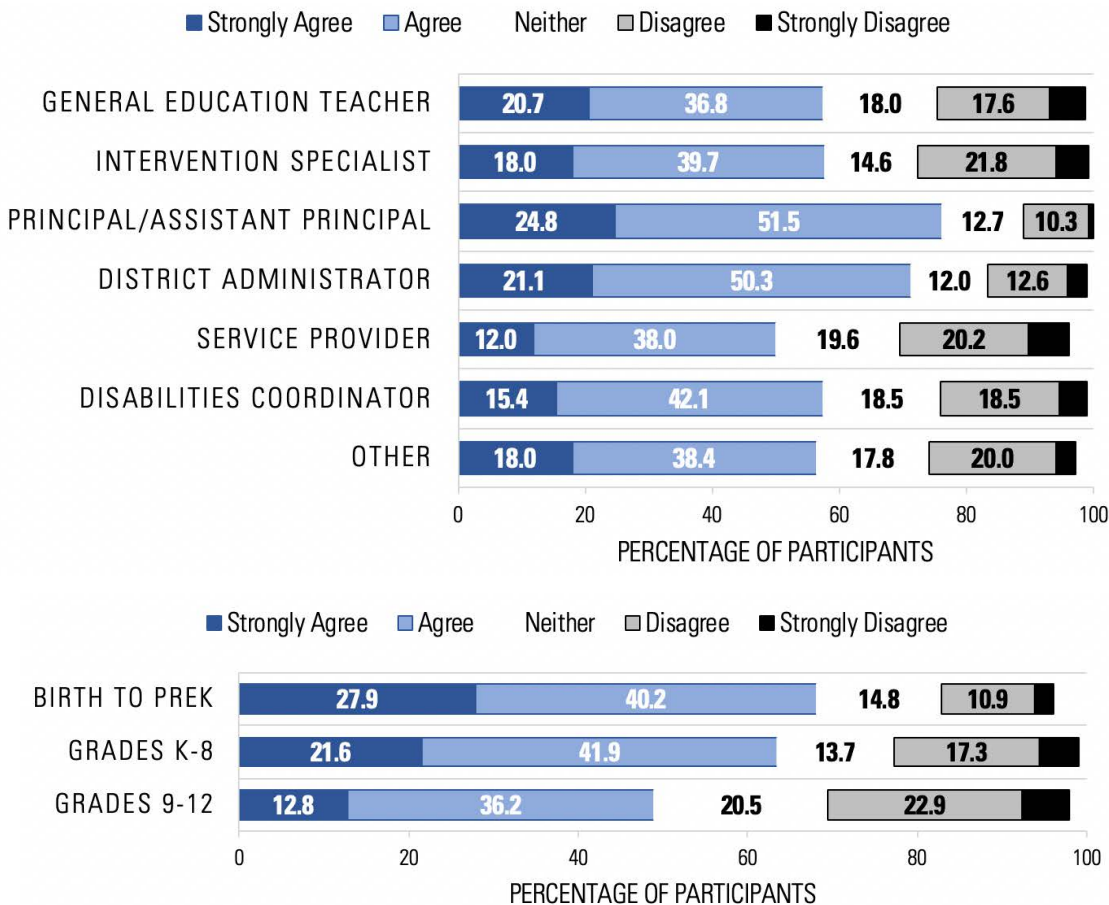
Figure 3. Percentage of Participants Responding to the Statement: Administration, teachers and support staff in the school where I work foster a culture of belonging for all students with disabilities.



Literacy Practices

Educators and educational leaders perceived that all learners received literacy instruction along the continuum of language and literacy development. Concerns, however, were expressed by the survey participants regarding their schools' capacities to adequately staff and fund the level of specialized supports needed to truly meet the language and literacy instructional needs of students with disabilities. The majority (60.2 percent) of the survey participants reported agreement with the statement: All learners (including students with disabilities) in the school where I work receive literacy instruction to meet their individual needs for learning to read. Principals/assistant principals had the highest level of agreement, followed by district administrators (see Figure 4).

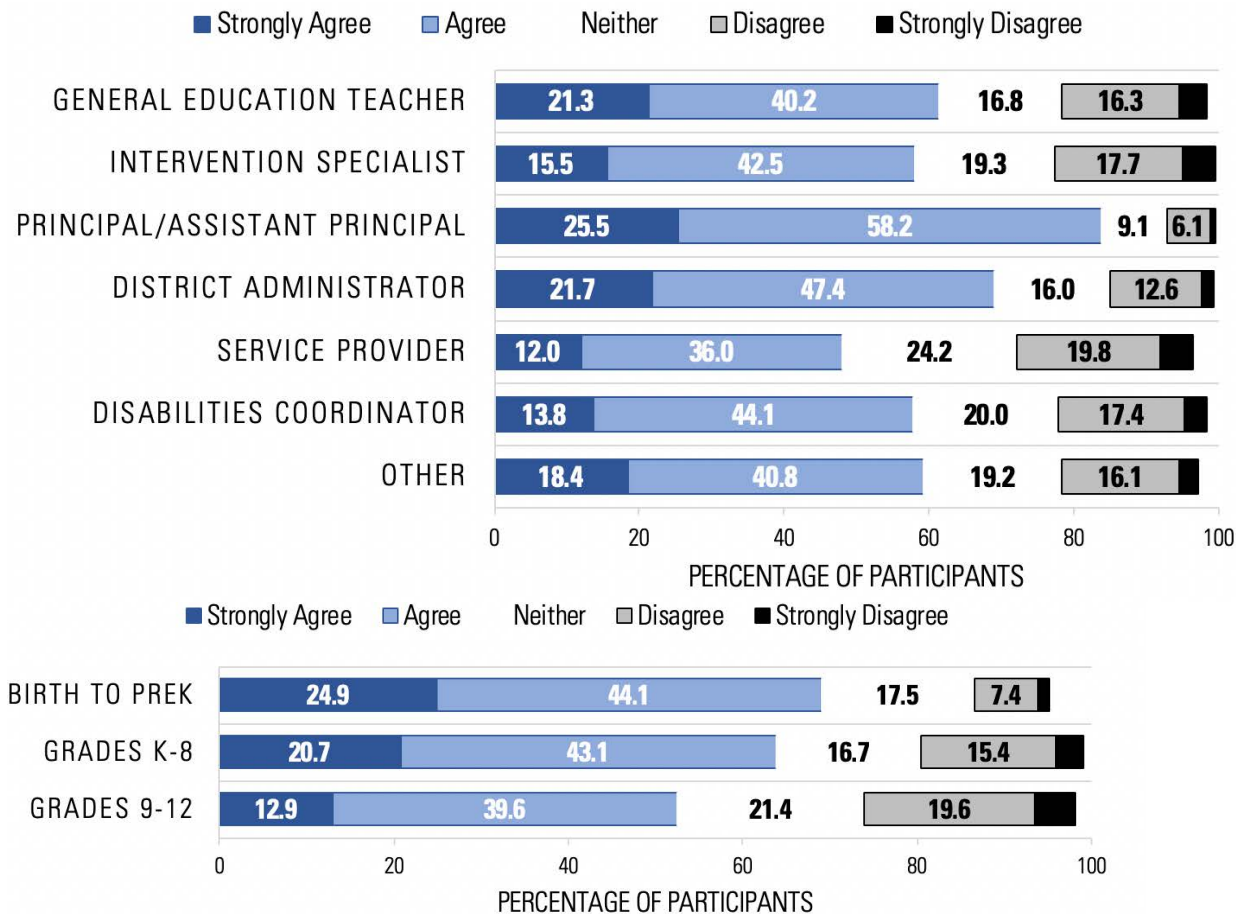
Figure 4. Percentage of Participants Responding to the Statement: All learners (including students with disabilities) in the school where I work receive literacy instruction to meet their individual needs for learning to read.



Only half (50 percent) of the service providers who work directly with students with disabilities judged that students in their school receive literacy instruction to meet their individual needs. Professionals who serve children in the early childhood age range reported higher levels of agreement regarding the provision of literacy instruction to meet students' needs than those who serve older students.

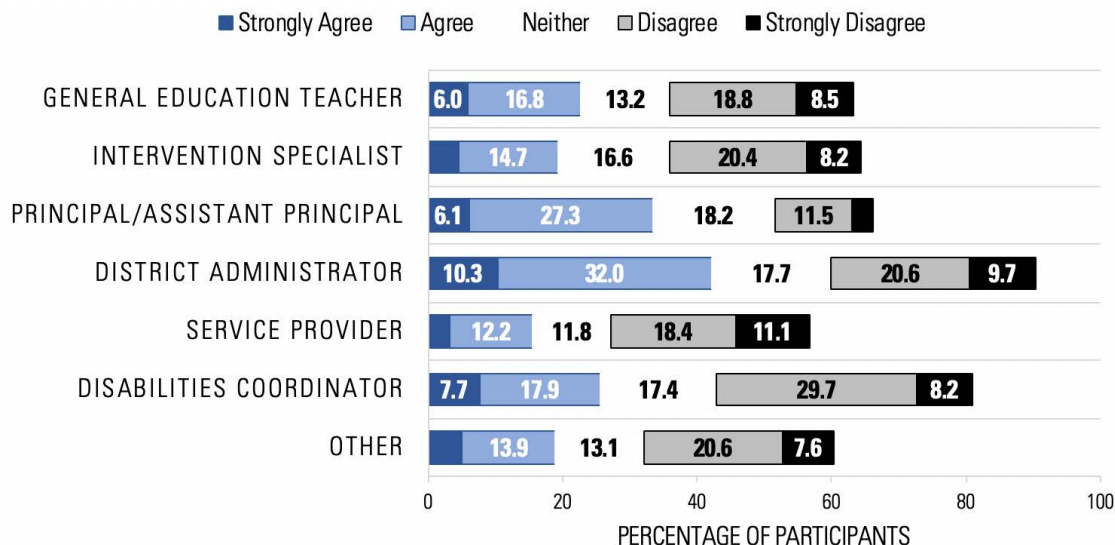
A majority (61.8 percent) of the participants reported agreement with the statement: The school where I work supports all children along the continuum of language and literacy development in order to move them to becoming proficient readers. Principals/assistant principals had the highest level of agreement, followed by district administrators (see Figure 5). Only half (50 percent) of the service providers who work directly with students with disabilities judged that their schools support all children along the continuum of language and literacy development. Professionals who serve children in the early childhood age range reported higher levels of agreement regarding the provision of literacy supports to move students to become proficient readers than those who serve older students.

Figure 5. Percentage of Participants Responding to the Statement: The school where I work supports all children along the continuum of language and literacy development in order to move them to becoming proficient readers.



Educators and educational leaders in middle and high schools were asked to respond to a survey item regarding literacy supports for students in these buildings. Only 35.6 percent of these participants reported agreement with the statement: In the school where I work, adequate supports are provided to meet the needs of middle and high school students who struggle with reading. The perception that adequate supports were not in place in middle and high schools was shared among the participants across all professional roles (see Figure 6). Among service providers who work directly with students with disabilities, only 12.2 percent agreed and 3.3 percent strongly agreed that adequate supports were in place. Among intervention specialists in middle and high schools, only 14.7 percent agreed and 4.6 percent strongly agreed that supports were provided to meet the needs of students who struggle with reading.

Figure 6. Percentage of Participants Responding to the Statement: In the school where I work, adequate supports are provided to meet the needs of middle and high school students who struggle with reading.



All survey participants were asked to identify the challenges they encountered in their schools around providing language and literacy instruction to students with disabilities. Among the possible answer choices, knowledge about how to differentiate instruction and the need for appropriate curriculum and instructional materials were selected by more than half of the participants (see Table 1).

Table 1. Percentage of Participants Selecting Each Answer Choice in Response to the Statement: The school where I work experiences challenges around teaching language literacy skills/reading strategies to students with disabilities.

Answer Choices	Percentage of Participants
Knowledge about how to differentiate instruction to meet diverse needs	56.4%
Curriculum and instructional materials	52.6%
Knowledge about evidence-based strategies and best practices	43.4%
Assessment (including progress monitoring) data to determine student's reading level	40.2%
Other	14.7%

N=5,799. Note: 11.5 percent of the respondents identified "No challenges" in response to this survey item.

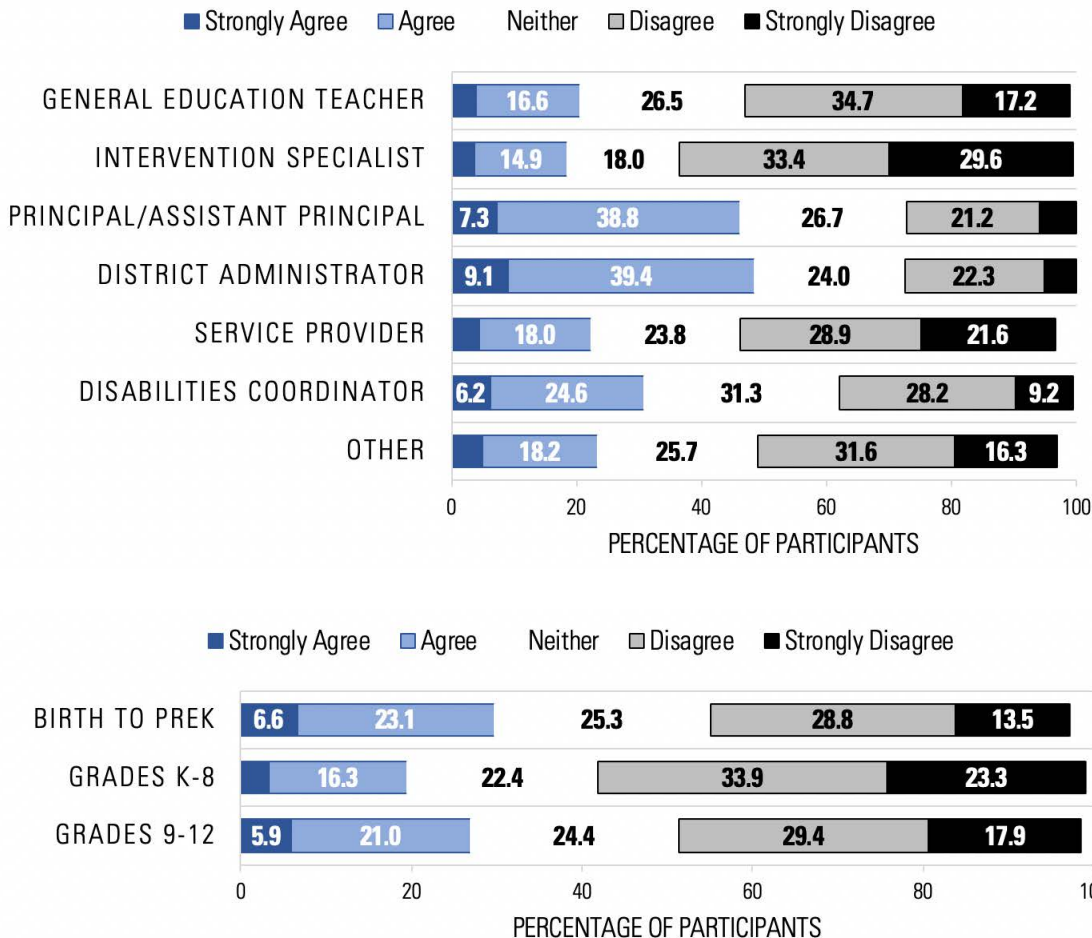
For those who selected "Other" as an answer choice, comments indicated a need for more instructional and intervention time for students with disabilities, which was possible only by securing more personnel (intervention specialists, paraprofessionals) to meet the significant and varied needs of students with disabilities. The comments reflected a frequently expressed concern that students are included in general education classrooms without adequate support for the classroom teachers and students with disabilities. The following comments exemplify the challenges to literacy instruction identified by participants:

- We do not have enough human capital to deal with the amount of support our students with disabilities need to succeed.
- Difficulty with the schedule and limited staff to teach these skills to students in the inclusion classrooms.
- Amount of staff necessary to meet all levels of students.
- Specialists are stretched too far and cannot meet the needs of all the students.
- Time and personnel to do all of the things necessary to help children with disabilities. Difficult to do small groups with so many behavior, trauma, and special needs children in a class.

Professional Development

Educators and educational leaders indicated limited agreement with the notion that the current opportunities for professional development met the needs of educators serving students with disabilities. Only 24.2 percent of the participants reported agreement with the statement: My school's professional development days address the specific needs of educators working with students in special education. Principals/assistant principals and district administrators had higher levels of agreement relative to participants serving other roles (see Figure 7). Limited support for the adequacy of professional development was reported among participants serving students at all age levels.

Figure 7. Percentage of Participants Responding to the Statement: My school's professional development days address the specific needs of educators working with students in special education.



Survey participants were asked to identify the professional development topics they need from a list of possible topics. The results are presented for educators serving students in early childhood (see Table 2), elementary school (see Table 3) and high school (see Table 4). Across all age/grade levels, the topics most frequently selected were differentiation, evidence-based language and literacy instructional practices, and multi-tiered system of supports.

Table 2. Percentage of Early Childhood Educators Selecting Each Answer Choice in Response to the Statement: I need access to the following professional development topics.

Answer Choices	Percentage of Participants
Trauma-informed classroom and school practices	42.4%
IEP development	33.6%
Evidence-based language and literacy instructional practices	31.9%
Differentiation	31.9%
Inclusive practices	31.9%
Multi-tiered system of supports	38.0%
Flexible assessment design	22.7%
Alternate assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities	22.7%
Co-teaching and/or planning	20.5%

Table 3. Percentage of Elementary School Educators Selecting Each Answer Choice in Response to the Statement: I need access to the following professional development topics.

Answer Choices	Percentage of Participants
Evidence-based language and literacy instructional practices	40.7%
Multi-tiered system of supports	38.3%
Differentiation	37.3%
Co-teaching and/or planning	35.9%
Flexible assessment design	35.8%
Trauma-informed classroom and school practices	33.9%
Inclusive practices	30.2%
General and extended standards/learning progressions	24.4%
IEP development	20.9%

Table 4. Percentage of High School Educators Selecting Each Answer Choice in Response to the Statement: I need access to the following professional development topics.

Answer Choices	Percentage of Participants
Differentiation	42.1%
Evidence-based language and literacy instructional practices	38.4%
Multi-tiered system of supports	37.7%
Co-teaching and/or planning	37.7%
Flexible assessment design	33.5%
Inclusive practices	33.3%
Trauma-informed classroom and school practices	33.1%
Graduation and post-secondary transitions	31.6%
General and extended standards/learning progressions	27.6%
IEP development	23.9%
Universal Design for Learning	23.2%
Alternate assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities	21.3%

Survey participants were asked to identify the challenges they encounter in accessing professional development on evidence-based instructional practices. Among the possible answer choices, time for professional development was selected by more than half of the participants (see Table 5). For those who selected “Other” as an answer choice, comments indicated a need for professional development topics that are directly relevant to meeting the needs of students with disabilities. The comments reflected a frequently expressed concern that most professional development was focused on topics relevant to general education teachers. The following comments highlight the challenges experienced in accessing professional development:

- No differentiated PD for special education. We attend the same PD as general education teachers.
- District has chosen to do “in-house” PD aimed at general ed classrooms. No other PD for SPED teachers.
- District does not provide many options for Intervention Specialists. Especially none for moderate/intensive teachers.
- Lack of relevant professional development to meet the needs of students with significant cognitive and developmental disabilities.
- District coaching and mentoring is available however, the focus [is] rarely on evidenced based instructional practices as it relates specifically to special education.
- General Education Teachers are not given professional development on how to work with students with disabilities despite the students being placed in general education settings full time.

Table 5. Challenges I face in accessing professional development on evidence-based instructional practices.

Answer Choices	Percentage of Participants
Not enough time for professional development opportunities	57.0%
Not enough money for professional development opportunities	49.8%
Not enough flexibility to attend	42.1%
No substitutes or pay available for substitutes	35.5%
Lack of quality options	29.7%
No release time from work	25.6%
No financial credit for classes or college credit	22.8%
Not enough virtual or online options	22.6%
Not enough summer options	19.7%
No district coach or mentor	19.3%
Not enough peer communities of practice	15.9%
Other	14.7%

N=5,175

The lack of professional development on evidence-based literacy instructional practices also was expressed frequently in the comments:

- A lot of PD opportunities do not give research-based strategies about how to teach reading.
- Quality phonics-based instruction is not being taught at all colleges and it is not the priority in many districts, so the PD and materials to provide the correct instruction are non-existent and it's frowned upon to even bring it up.

Two survey items asked participants to identify factors that made online professional development appealing and factors that made online professional development difficult. Among the possible answer choices, flexibility and the ability to revisit content at a later date were identified as factors that made online professional development appealing according to more than half of the participants (see Table 6).

Table 6. The following factors make online professional development appealing to me.

Answer Choices	Percentage of Participants
I have flexibility to complete it when it's convenient for me	82.3%
I can revisit it later when it is relevant and needed	63.5%
I can control the pace	54.6%
I don't have to travel	54.1%
I don't have to leave my classroom	36.8%
My peers and I get a consistent message that is not reliant on a trainer	29.9%

N=5,207

None of the possible obstacles to online professional development were selected by at least half of the participants (see Table 7). Two primary themes emerged from the comments: (a) the expectation that online professional development is completed on one's own time; and (b) internet access and technology barriers may limit access, particularly in rural regions of the state. Comments that illustrate these concerns are as follows:

- Expectation that it takes place on my own time.
- It is expected to be completed on my own time - 24 hour access - and it results in an unbalanced life of mostly work when you can do PD at 11pm at night.
- Often I need as much time to complete it as if attending PD in person, but am expected to magically find time in my day because it's online and "flexible."
- I do not have a computer or internet access at home & no time during school hours.
- I don't have high speed internet at home.
- Internet is not always reliable in rural Appalachian areas.
- Constant tech barriers & unreliable equipment.
- Difficulty getting the extra assistance to utilize technology.

Table 7. The following factors make online professional development difficult for me to access.

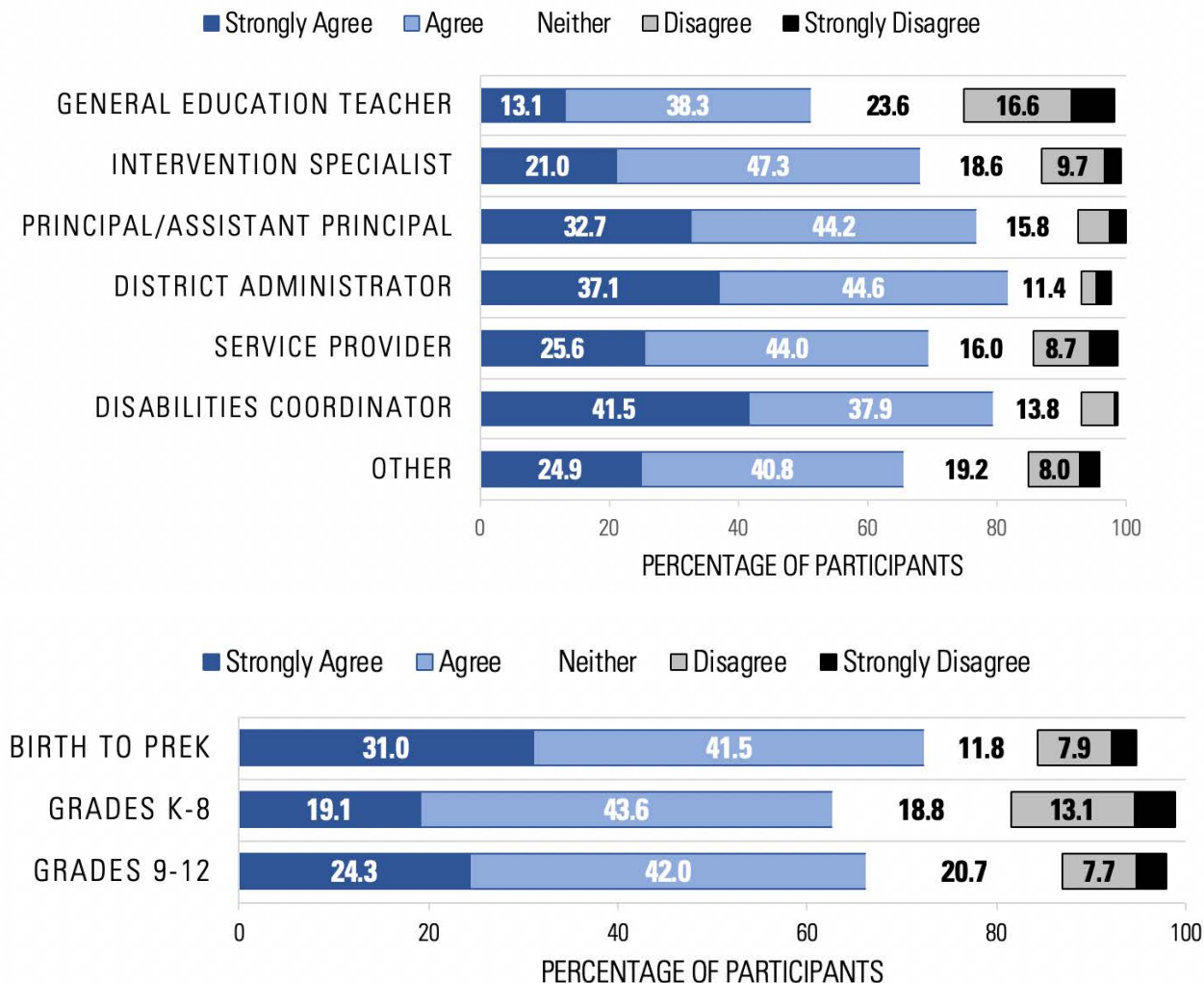
Answer Choices	Percentage of Participants
I can't interact with peers	42.3%
I cannot get my questions answered	36.1%
The lack of a facilitator to guide learning	34.2%
Most online training is text heavy	33.8%
I have difficulty maintaining attention and/or absorbing the information	32.1%
Talking heads are boring	30.6%
Too expensive	24.6%
Lack of continuing education credit	23.2%
Other	6.4%

N=4,925

Evaluations to Determine Eligibility

The majority of educators and educational leaders expressed agreement with the notion that evaluations are conducted effectively at their schools. Overall, 65.6 percent of the participants reported agreement with the statement: The school where I work conducts evaluations that effectively determine eligibility and student needs. District administrators; individuals who serve in the roles of disabilities coordinator, administrator or supervisor; and principals/assistant principals had higher levels of agreement in response to this statement (see Figure 8). General education teachers had relatively lower levels of agreement regarding the effectiveness of the evaluations conducted in their schools. A majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed with this statement among professionals serving students at all age levels.

Figure 8. Percentage of Participants Responding to the Statement: The school where I work conducts evaluations that effectively determine eligibility and student needs.



Survey participants were asked to identify the challenges they encounter around conducting evaluations in their schools. None of the possible answer choices were selected by more than half of the participants (see Table 8). One in four (25.6 percent) identified there were “No Challenges.”

Table 8. The school where I work experiences challenges around conducting evaluations to determine eligibility for special education services.

Answer Choices	Percentage of Participants
Not enough people to conduct evaluations	36.0%
Difficulties getting parent consent or engagement	34.0%
Scheduling difficulties	33.1%
Not enough resources to conduct	18.6%
Precise knowledge of characteristics across each disability	17.1%
Other	13.7%

N= 4,977

The comments indicate two primary obstacles to conducting evaluations to determine eligibility for special education services. The first obstacle, related to the answer choice “Not enough people to conduct evaluations,” specifically concerns the need for more school psychologists.

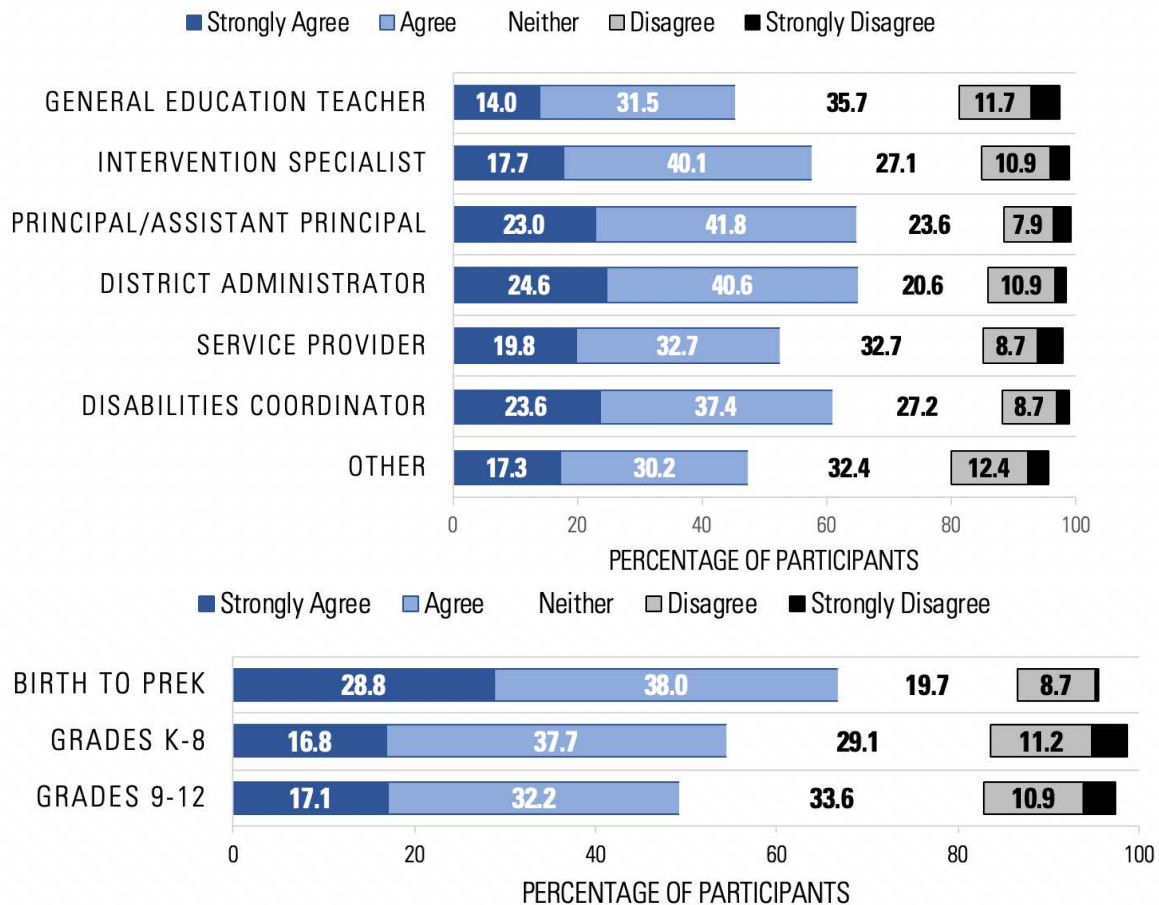
- Not enough school psychologists to get the work done.
- Shortage of school psychologists; overworked school psychologists.
- Our school has a school psych that is spread between 2-3 buildings. We could do better if we had a school psych dedicated to our building.
- Our school psychs work in the evenings and on the weekend at home to get the evaluations written since they are short staffed. They are overworked and need more help.

The second obstacle is the need for a stronger multi-tiered system of support (MTSS)/ Response to Intervention (RTI):

- Lack of a functioning RTI/MTSS process to address student needs before teams jump to evaluating students for suspected disabilities.
- The RTI process is unstructured and not efficient.
- The RTI process is long and many teachers feel their opinions and concerns about their students go unnoticed.
- Not enough RTI data- lack of progress monitoring. Lack of research-based interventions provided to ensure that student weaknesses are based on a disability rather than ineffective practices.

Educators and educational leaders expressed support for the notion that their schools used effective strategies to reduce over-identification in determining the eligibility of students for special education by race, gender or economic disadvantage. Over-identification of students identified as having educational disabilities is a chronic problem in K-12 education with African American children, boys and students living in poverty disproportionately identified as having disabilities. Just more than half (54 percent) of the survey participants reported agreement with the statement: The school where I work uses effective strategies to reduce over-identification of students with disabilities by race, gender or economic disadvantage. District administrators, principals/assistant principals and individuals who serve in the roles of disabilities coordinator, administrator or supervisor had the highest levels of agreement, followed by district administrators and individuals who serve in the roles of disabilities coordinator, administrator or supervisor (see Figure 9). Fewer than half of the general education teachers agreed or strongly agreed that effective strategies were being used to reduce over-identification. Professionals who serve children in the early childhood age range reported higher levels of agreement with this statement than those who serve older students.

Figure 9. Percentage of Participants Responding to the Statement: The school where I work uses effective strategies to reduce over-identification of students with disabilities by race, gender or economic disadvantage.



Survey participants were asked to identify the challenges they experience around reducing over-identification by race, gender or economic disadvantage. None of the possible answer choices were selected by more than half of the participants (see Table 9). One in three (34.1 percent) identified there were “No Challenges.”

Table 9. The school where I work experiences challenges around reducing over-identification of students with disabilities by race, gender or economic disadvantage.

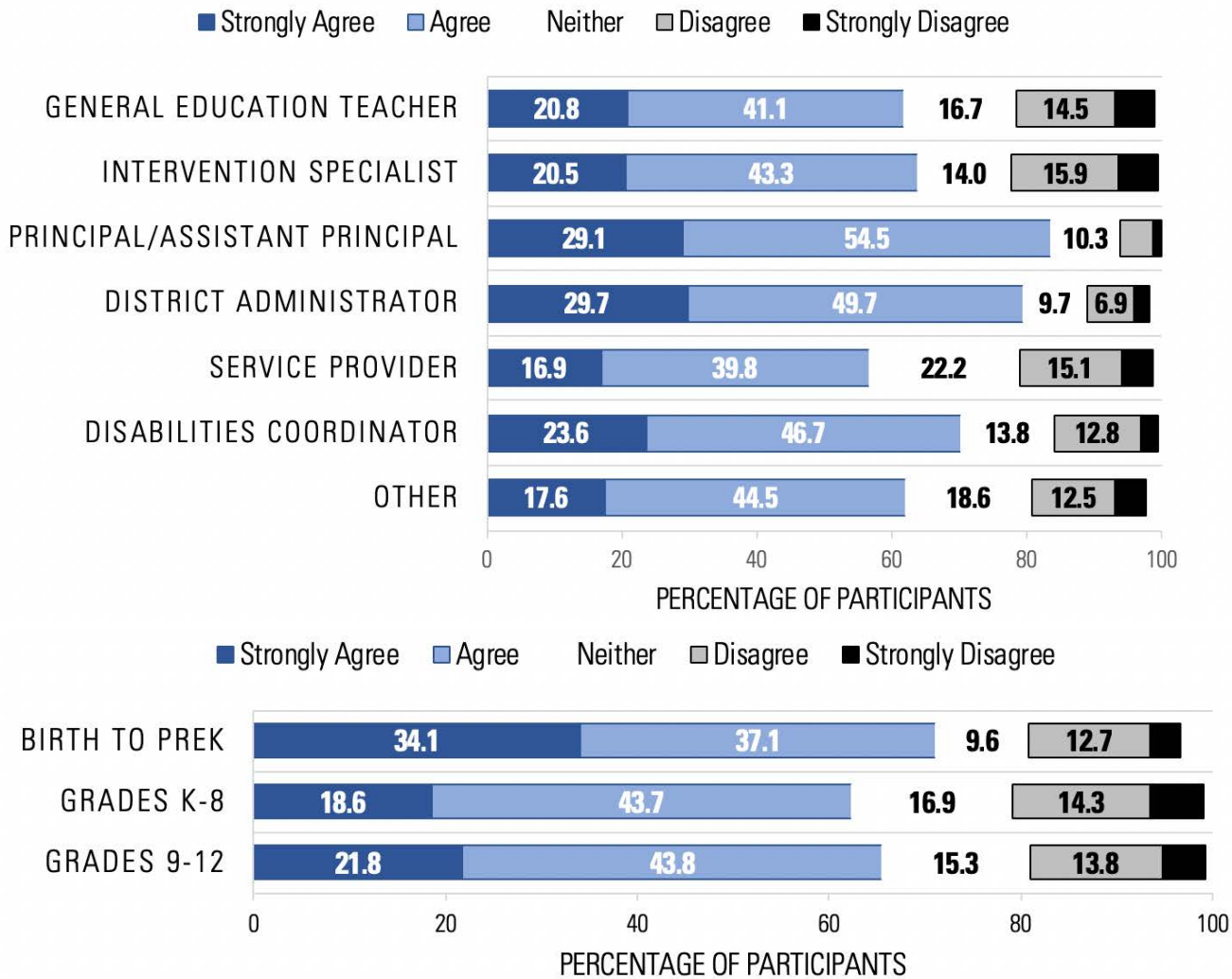
Answer Choices	Percentage of Participants
Need for effective multi-tiered system of supports	32.1%
Selecting curriculum able to meet diverse needs of learners	30.0%
Tier 1 instruction that provides access for all learners	25.8%
Knowledge about culturally inclusive practices	19.2%
Inconsistency in identification policies	17.8%
More research or information on students with disabilities by race, gender or economic disadvantage	17.5%
Access to subgroup data within special education	11.1%
Other	7.1%

N=4,654

Providing Services in the Least Restrictive Environment

Educators and educational leaders expressed support for the notion that their schools provide special education services in each student's least restrictive environment. A majority (64.1 percent) of the participants reported agreement with the statement: The school where I work provides special education services in each student's least restrictive environment so that students have access to and make progress in the curriculum. Principals/assistant principals had the highest level of agreement, followed by district administrators (see Figure 10). A majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed with this statement among professionals serving students at all age levels.

Figure 10. Percentage of Participants Responding to the Statement: The school where I work provides special education services in each student's least restrictive environment so that students have access to and make progress in the curriculum.



Survey participants were asked to identify the challenges they encounter in providing services to students with disabilities within the general education classroom. Among the possible answer choices, staffing shortages was selected by more than half of the participants, followed by classroom management/disruptions to instruction and the need for professional development targeting differentiation, modification and accommodations (see Table 10).

Table 10. The school where I work experiences challenges providing services to students with disabilities within the general education classroom.

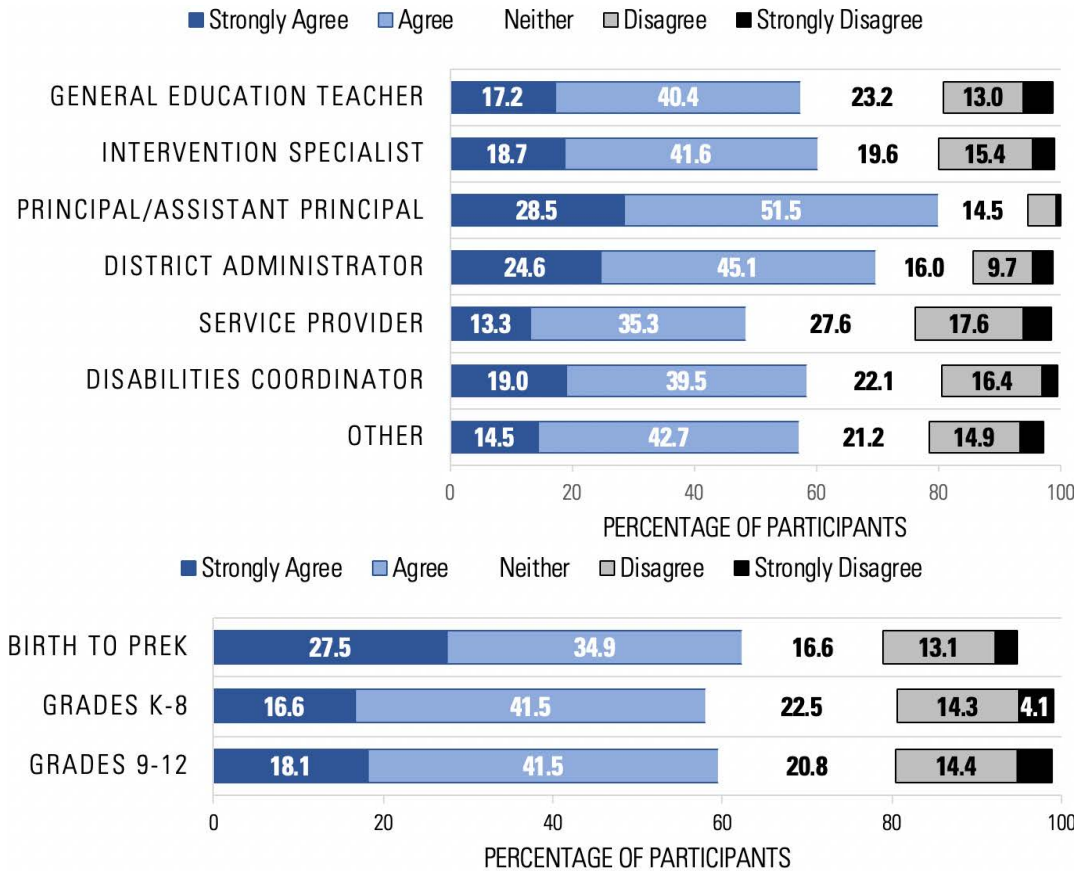
Answer Choices	Percentage of Participants
Staffing shortages/Lack of help	58.8%
Classroom management and/or disruptions to instruction	50.0%
Lack of professional development in differentiation, modifications and accommodations that support students	46.5%
Teachers who are flexible and/or accepting of learner diversity	39.4%
Higher demand for individualized instruction and assessment	38.3%
Pace of instruction	37.9%
Integration of supports and services	32.8%
Need for flexibility and/or help in Tier 1 instruction and assessment	33.0%
Teacher teams that are knowledgeable about learner diversity	32.5%
Coordination of services	27.4%
Evidence-based practices are not available or known	20.3%
Integration of content	17.9%
Other	8.6%

N=4,848

For those who selected “Other” as an answer choice, comments elaborated on the concern that staffing shortages and overwhelming caseloads result in students with disabilities not receiving the supports they need to be successful within the general education classroom:

- Staff shortage is always the biggest issue.
- Educating students with disabilities in the Gen Ed classroom takes much more support staff (Intervention Specialists) than we currently have in this building. The teachers are good--just not enough to be successful.
- Some kids truly can have their needs met by a co-taught classroom. Some do not. But, because of limited staffing and because there is no hard law limiting our caseload (just a state guideline), we have way too many high need kids in an inclusion classroom because we don't have the staff to be able to spread them out.
- Our IS teachers, SLP, and psych are all over caseload. At my max I had 22 kids as an IS. Another teacher had 26. Our head of Sped put kids out in gen Ed who had IEPs written for self-contained classrooms. It has been chaos all year!
- It's difficult to do true inclusion when intervention specialists are split between many classrooms.
- They put too many students with special needs into classes with regular education students. This ends up not benefiting any of the students.
- The number of students with disabilities in a classroom can be 40-50 percent. When behavioral issues arise, resources are taken away from the rest of the children who really need the extra help.
- 28 students in a classroom is too much resulting in those students with the highest needs not getting the support they need.
- Lack of continuum for FAPE, either full inclusion or not. Not every SWD can function in a gen ed class even with supports. It needs to be OK to have more self-contained classrooms or even smaller gen ed classrooms to better service. I know it's always a financial issue, but these are kids' lives we are talking about. Their future!!

Educators and educational leaders expressed support for the notion that their schools uses effective strategies to reduce the removal of students with disabilities from their least restrictive environments. More than half (59.6 percent) of the participants reported agreement with the statement: The school where I work uses effective strategies to reduce the removal of students with disabilities from their least restrictive environments. Principals/assistant principals had the highest level of agreement with this statement (see Figure 11). Among professionals serving students at each age level, more than half of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that their schools use effective strategies to reduce the removal of students from the students' least restrictive environments.

Figure 11. Percentage of Participants Responding to the Statement: The school where I work uses effective strategies to reduce the removal of students with disabilities from their least restrictive environments.

Survey participants were asked to identify the challenges they encounter around reducing the removal of students with disabilities from their least restrictive environments. None of the possible answer choices were selected by more than half of the participants (see Table 11). Nearly one-third (27.9 percent) identified there were “No Challenges.”

Table 11. The school where I work experiences challenges around reducing the removal of students with disabilities from their least restrictive environments.

Answer Choices	Percentage of Participants
Not enough knowledge, experience, expertise, or help	37.8%
Inconsistency in discipline policies	37.1%
Need for effective multi-tiered systems of supports/	25.8%
Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS)	35.8%
Knowledge and/or application of culturally responsive practices	17.4%
Other	8.9%

N=4,575

The comments provided in response to this survey item echo the concerns regarding the impact of staff shortages and overwhelming caseloads on service delivery and highlight a need for evidence-based interventions to address social-emotional and behavioral needs (Tier 2 interventions and comprehensive mental health services):

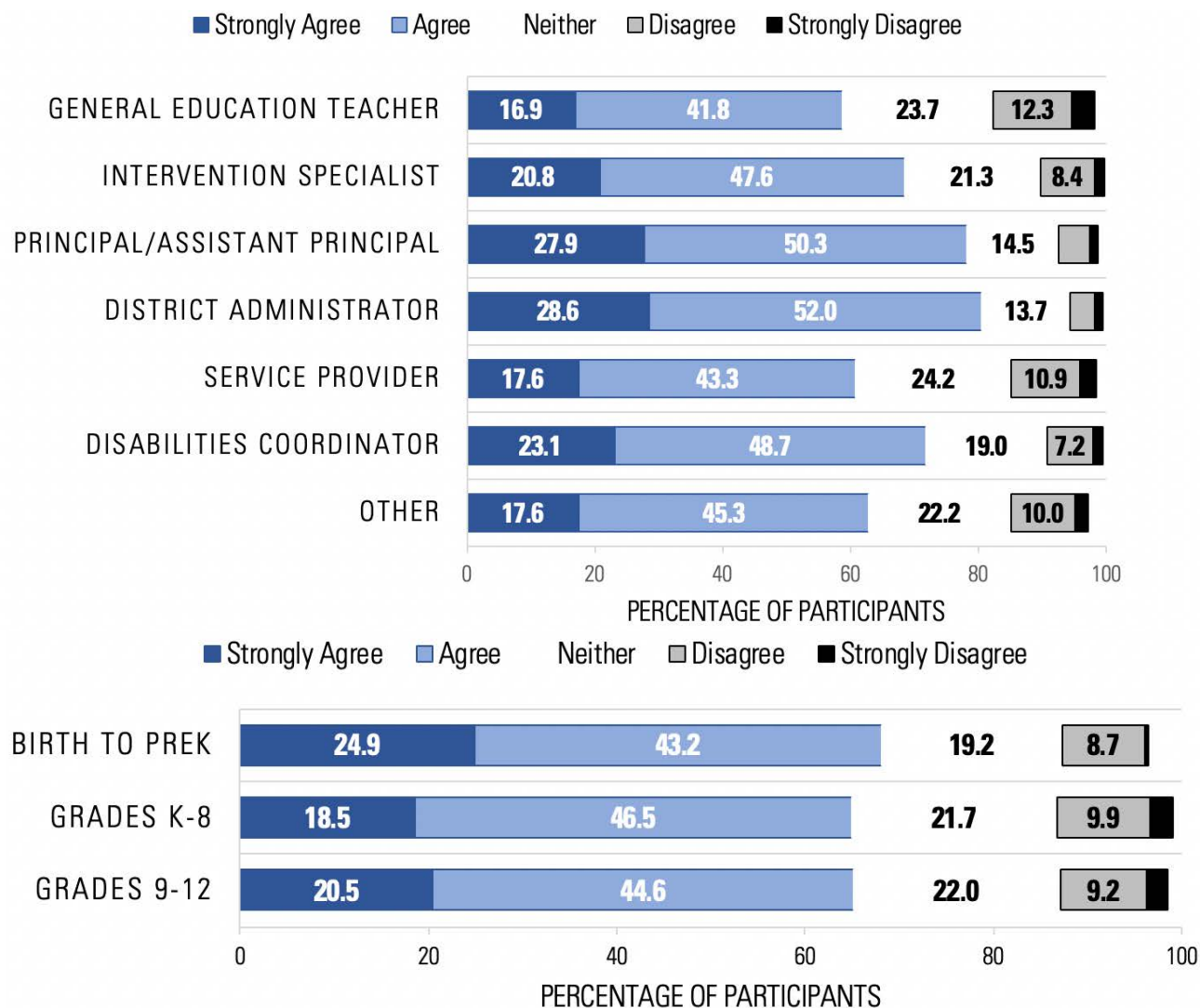
- Need more staff to support behavior of students so they are able to succeed in classroom.
- Not enough resources for staffing to provide support for behavioral difficulties (specifically).
- For some students, their LRE may be in a resource room for portions of the day rather than full inclusion. LREs need to be individually determined, rather than having a building-wide policy.
- Our district increasingly does not have a continuum of special education environments available to students based upon their needs. There has been a push for all students to be in general education classrooms, even when it not the most appropriate LRE and even when proper supports are not provided and even when the team decision is otherwise.

- We have provided PD to our teachers and support staff on PBIS, CPI, and Inclusion etc. We are also implementing many initiatives to help ensure all students are progressing in the general curriculum however the severity of the student needs has surpassed the capability of well-trained educators. There is a need for wrap around mental health services and alternative settings to deal with extreme situations.
- PBIS is implemented, but effective small-group/Tier 2 is almost non-existent, particularly in behavior.
- The student needs sometime surpass the teacher's ability to help. Once again, mental health services are in great need as this population (SWD) has a very high need for mental health services.

Recruiting and Retaining Professionals

Educators and educational leaders expressed support for the notion that their schools employ highly qualified service providers. A majority (65.8 percent) of the survey participants reported agreement with the statement: The school where I work identified and employs highly qualified service providers who can meet the needs of eligible children in an effective and collaborative manner. District administrators had the highest level of agreement, followed by principals/assistant principals (see Figure 12). Professionals reported high levels of agreement with this statement across all age/grade levels.

Figure 12. Percentage of Participants Responding to the Statement: The school where I work identified and employs highly qualified service providers who can meet the needs of eligible children in an effective and collaborative manner.



Survey participants were asked to identify the challenges they experience attracting and retaining qualified educators and service providers. None of the possible answer choices were selected by more than half of the participants (see Table 12). More than one-fourth (28.8 percent) identified there were "No Challenges." Among the answer choices provided, the lack of competitive pay was selected by the greatest number of participants.

Table 12. The school where I work experiences challenges around recruiting, finding and/or keeping professionals who work with students with disabilities. Table 12. The school where I work experiences challenges around recruiting, finding and/or keeping professionals who work with students with disabilities.

Answer Choices	Percentage of Participants
Professionals are not available, either because of high demand or	37.1%
The pay available is not competitive	36.7%
low interest	27.6%
Lack of professionals who have experience working with students	35.8%
with disabilities	27.4%
Lack of training for professionals to gain knowledge about working with students with disabilities	25.0%
Qualified professionals do not apply for our positions	21.1%
Other	12.9%

N=4,554

For those who selected “Other” as an answer choice, comments provide critical insights into the challenges some schools face in retaining qualified professionals for positions with high caseloads and limited support. The following comments exemplify the challenges and amplify the concerns raised in providing: (a) language and literacy instruction to students with disabilities; and (b) meeting the needs of students with disabilities in general education classrooms:

- Morale in my school is very low due to lack of support and resources. Teachers come and only stay for a year or two. We have autism units that do not have any kind of support. There are no BCBA's, and no behavioral supports of any kind for these students.
- Intense demands cause professional burnout and retention of qualified individuals can be challenging.
- Burn out rate is high because of the demands and the lack of support.
- Extremely high demands with a significant range of abilities, behaviors, and grade levels in one classroom paired with little to no district support and lack of inclusion in general education classrooms. It's too difficult of a job to do well for long.
- Cannot retain qualified intervention specialists - lack of district support; lack of focus on improving the academic lives of children with disabilities.
- Keeping professionals is incredibly difficult because of the outrageous demands we are expected to fulfill. The district does not use the work load calculator and needs to because intervention specialists are overworked and held to such high standards that are too taxing.
- High related services turnover due to district not adhering to workload [limits].
- The district wants to hire the bare minimum.
- It seems we need more people to help all the people in need... I think budget is most likely the problem.
- There is not enough funding for the positions we need to serve our kids. Staff are overworked, overwhelmed and easily burned out. We need more adults: mentors, social workers, special educators, reading interventionists, behavior interventionists, psychologists, therapists of all kinds ...
- Need for mod-severe expertise. Particularly ED and Autism. Need for BCBA's. IHE's are not adequately preparing or producing enough of these folks.
- Location is a factor due to fewer professionals living in rural areas further away from larger cities
- Rural location; economic disparity within district (and county) makes other schools more inviting.

Table 13 lists the positions survey participants identified as most in need of being filled.

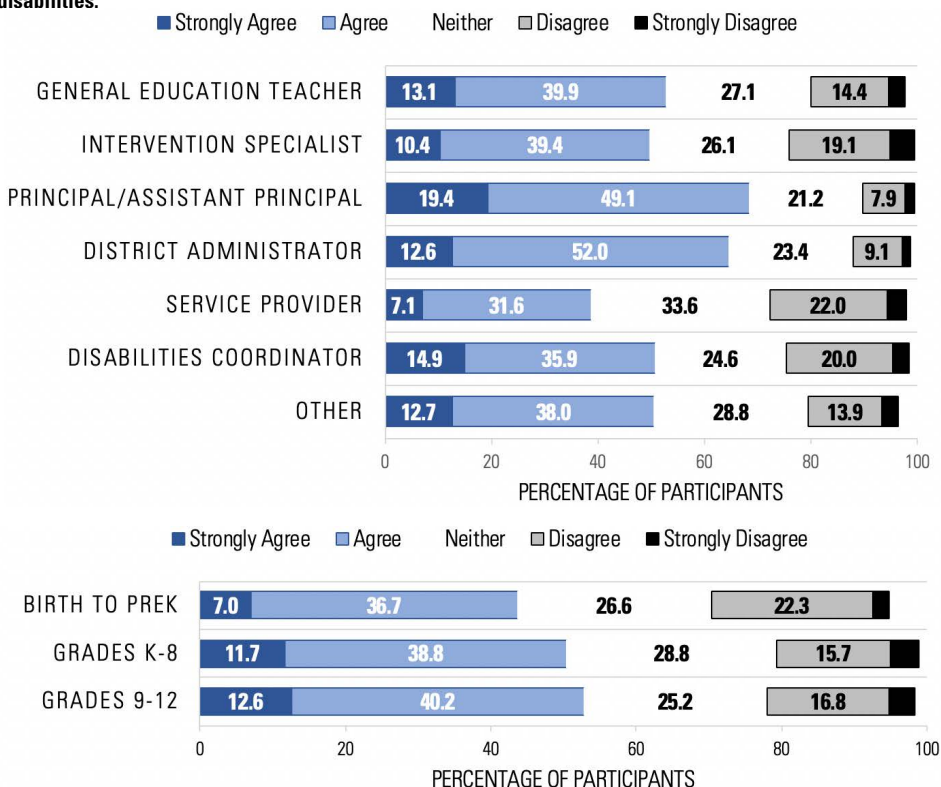
Table 13. In the school where I work, the following professionals are difficult to recruit, find and keep in positions that help students with disabilities.

Answer Choices	Percentage of Participants
Teachers of students with complex/multiple disabilities including autism spectrum disorder	38.2%
Behavior interventionists	37.0%
Teachers of students with complex/multiple disabilities	36.7%
Paraprofessionals or aides	36.3%
Teachers with training and experience with inclusive classrooms and/or co-teaching	34.8%
School psychologists or psychiatrists	24.9%
Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA)	20.0%
General education teachers	16.6%
School counselors or social workers	16.5%
Speech-language pathologists	15.1%
Interpreters (ASL, Non-English languages)	12.7%
Teachers of the visually impaired	12.4%
Teachers of the deaf/hard of hearing	12.2%
Occupational therapists	12.0%
Adaptive physical education teachers	10.4%
Other	9.7%

N=4,508

Use of Technology

Educators and educational leaders expressed modest support for the notion their schools use technology as an instructional tool effectively. Half (51.9 percent) of the survey participants reported agreement with the statement: The school where I work uses technology effectively as an instructional tool for students with disabilities. Principals/assistant principals had the highest level of agreement, followed by district administrators (see Figure 13). Levels of agreement with this statement did not vary markedly by the age/grade level of the students served by the participant.

Figure 13. Percentage of Participants Responding to the Statement: The school where I work uses technology effectively as an instructional tool for students with disabilities.

Survey participants were asked to identify the challenges they encounter around helping students gain proficiency with technology. Among the answer choices provided, just more than half of the participants selected not enough training, guidance or knowledge as a key obstacle to using technology effectively (see Table 14).

Table 14. The school where I work experiences challenges around helping students with disabilities access, use and become proficient with technology and accessible education materials.

Answer Choices	Percentage of Participants
Not enough training, guidance or knowledge	53.1%
Not enough money to access relevant technologies	41.1%
Not enough time	40.3%
Lack of quality options to access	27.6%
Other	10.9%

N=3,794

Transitions

Educators and educational leaders expressed modest support for the notion that their schools transition students with disabilities with the needs and interests of students in mind. Nearly half (49.3 percent) of the survey participants reported agreement with the statement: The school where I work transitions students with disabilities in a manner that utilizes information about the students' preferences, interests, needs and strengths. District administrators had the highest level of agreement, followed closely by principals/assistant principals and individuals who serve in the roles of disabilities coordinator, administrator or supervisor (see Figure 14). Levels of agreement with this statement were highest for professionals serving students in the early childhood age range, followed by those serving students in the high school age range.

Survey participants were slightly more positive in their perceptions regarding their schools' abilities to teach 21st century skills to students with disabilities (see Figure 15).

Figure 14. Percentage of Participants Responding to the Statement: The school where I work transitions students with disabilities in a manner that utilizes information about the students' preferences, interests, needs and strengths.

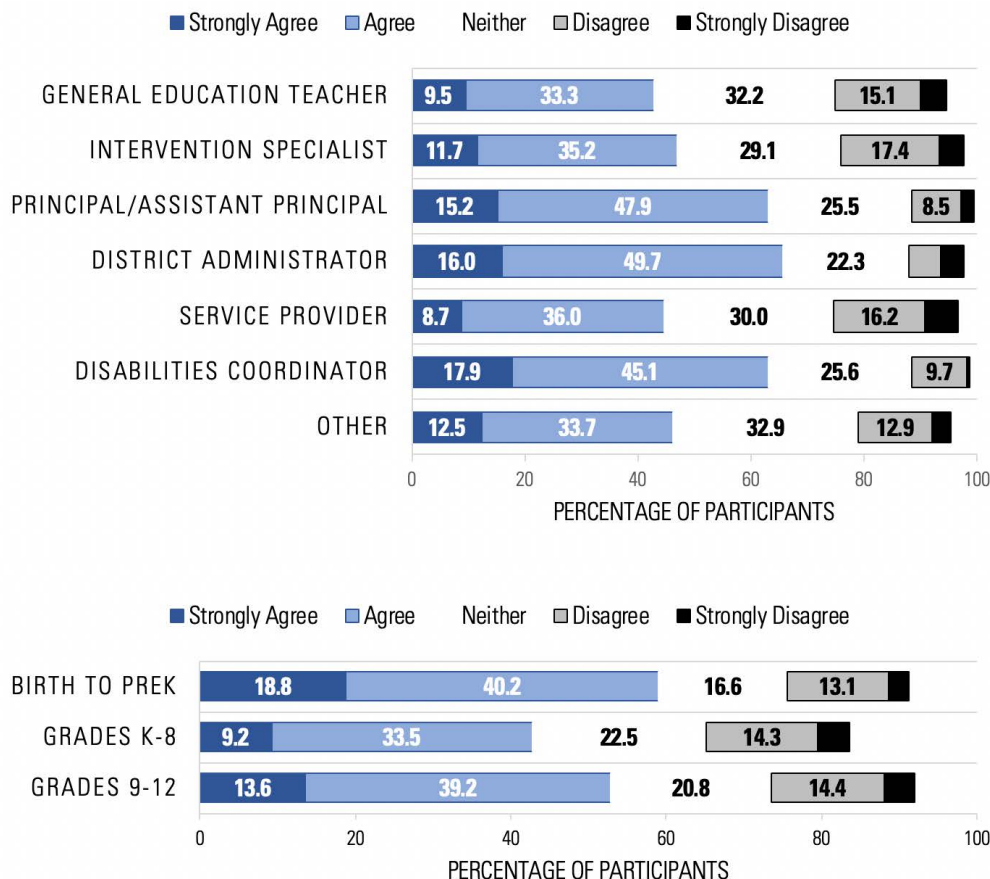
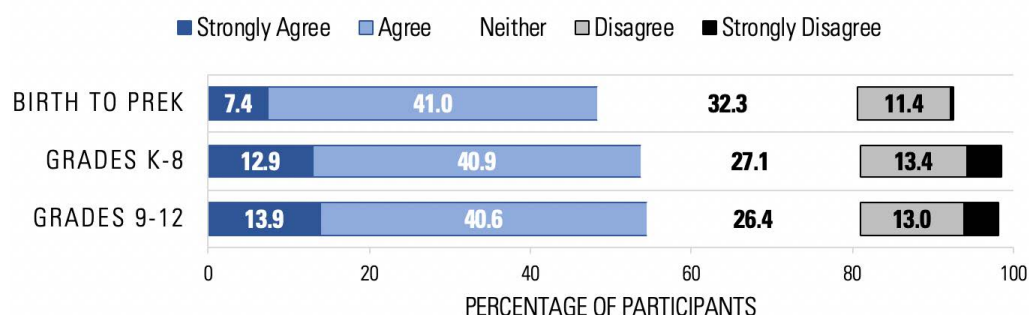
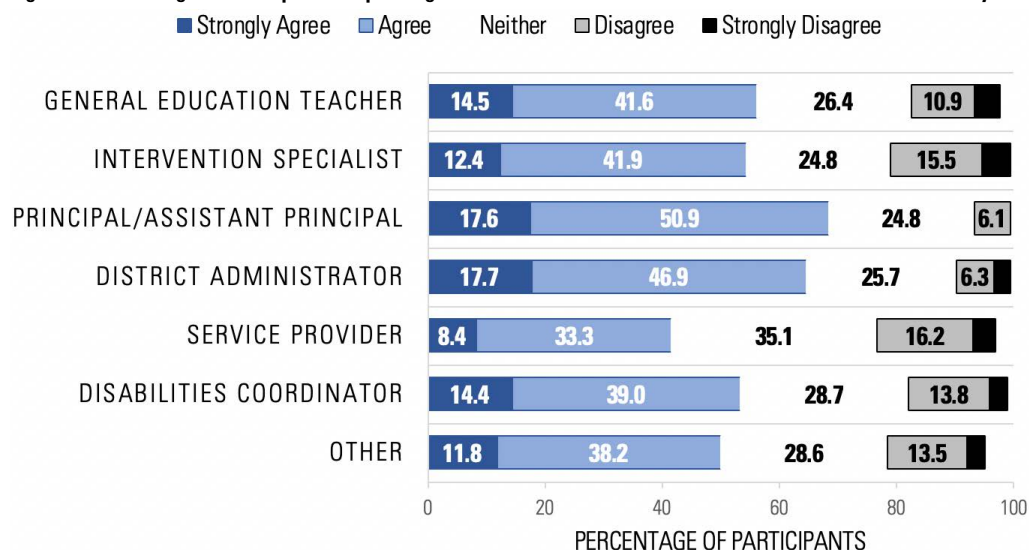


Figure 15. Percentage of Participants Responding to the Statement: The school where I work teaches 21st Century Skills to students with disabilities.

Survey participants were asked to identify the challenges they encounter around helping students transition in response to the statement: The school where I work experiences challenges around helping students with disabilities transition well. Transitions include from preschool to kindergarten, elementary to middle school, middle to high school, and high school to postsecondary education or work. The results are presented for educators serving students in early childhood (see Table 15), elementary school (see Table 16) and high school (see Table 17). Across all age/grade levels, the challenges most frequently identified were: not enough cooperation between schools; not enough time to plan; and a lack of knowledge or expertise on transitioning best practices.

Table 15. Percentage of Early Childhood Educators Selecting Each Answer Choice in Response to the Statement: The school where I work experiences challenges around helping students with disabilities transition well.

Answer Choices	Percentage of Participants
Not enough cooperation between schools	39.1%
Not enough time to plan	31.0%
Lack of services and supports	22.7%
Lack of knowledge or expertise on transitioning best practices	20.1%
Not enough help	19.2%
Lack of student files being transferred prior to arrival or lack of access to student files	10.5%
Not alerted to students transitioning to us	9.2%

Note: 27.5 percent of the respondents identified "No challenges" existed in response to this survey item.

Table 16. Percentage of Elementary School Educators Selecting Each Answer Choice in Response to the Statement: The school where I work experiences challenges around helping students with disabilities transition well.

Answer Choices	Percentage of Participants
Not enough cooperation between schools	30.8%
Not enough time to plan	30.0%
Lack of knowledge or expertise on transitioning best practices	27.5%
Lack of services and supports	26.2%
Not enough help	21.6%
Not alerted to students transitioning to us	17.4%
Lack of student files being transferred prior to arrival or lack of access to student files	16.3%

Note: 24.7 percent of the respondents identified "No challenges" existed in response to this survey item.

Table 17. Percentage of High School Educators Selecting Each Answer Choice in Response to the Statement: The school where I work experiences challenges around helping students with disabilities transition well.

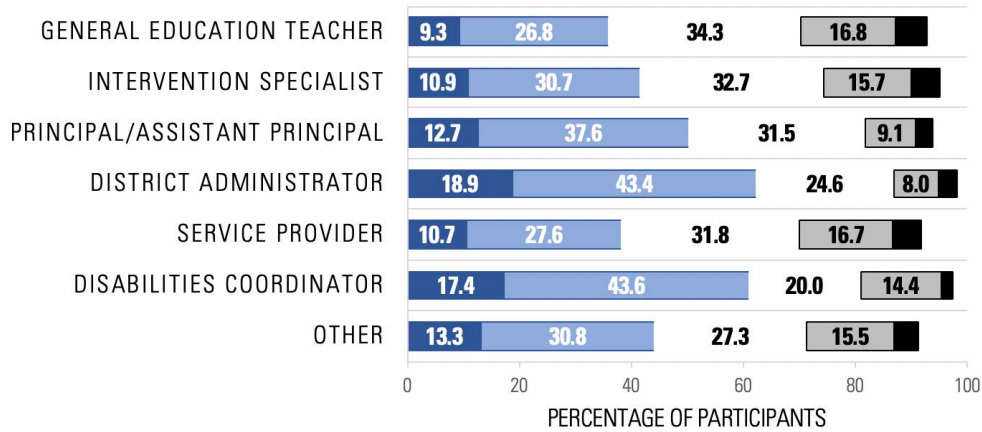
Answer Choices	Percentage of Participants
Lack of knowledge or expertise on transitioning best practices	30.8%
Not enough time to plan	29.8%
Not enough cooperation between schools	29.1%
Lack of services and supports	27.1%
Not enough help	21.1%
Lack of student files being transferred prior to arrival or lack of access to student files	18.2%
Not alerted to students transitioning to us	17.4%

Note: 24.2 percent of the respondents identified "No challenges" existed in response to this survey item.

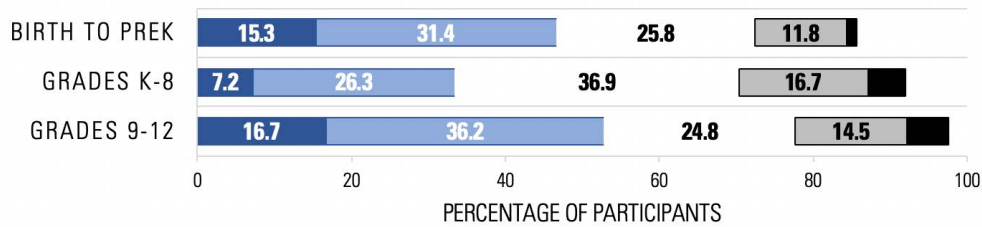
Only a minority of educators and educational leaders held positive perceptions of their schools' engagement with community collaborations. Fewer than half (45.2 percent) of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: The school where I work collaborates with community-based organizations/agencies, parents, area businesses and postsecondary institutions that support the education, training, employment and independent living goals of our students with disabilities. District administrators had the highest level of agreement, followed by individuals who serve in the roles of disabilities coordinator, administrator or supervisor (see Figure 16). Professionals who serve students in the high school age range reported higher levels of agreement, followed by those who serve children in the early childhood age range.

Figure 16. Percentage of Participants Responding to the Statement: The school where I work collaborates with community-based organizations/agencies, parents, area businesses and postsecondary institutions that support the education, training, employment and independent living goals of our students with disabilities.

■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Neither ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree



■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Neither ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree



Major Findings and Implications

Two major findings emerged from the Ohio Department of Education's Statewide Survey on Improving the Educational Outcomes for Students with Disabilities. The first finding concerns the impact of staffing shortages and caseload demands for intervention specialists. The second finding pertains to school-level capacity building needs to improve special education service delivery.

Staffing Shortages and Caseload Demands

The most significant impediment to improving educational outcomes for student with disabilities is the demanding caseload experienced by intervention specialists. Intervention specialists have the knowledge and skills to be effective, however, they are stretched too thin in many schools across Ohio to provide the instructional and behavioral supports students need to be successful in their least restrictive environments. Service demands and scheduling constraints routinely dictate grouping a number of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Consequently, survey participants report that their general education classrooms have significant proportions of students with complex learning and behavioral needs. Although respondents did not report challenges to providing a continuum of services, nearly six in 10 (58.8 percent) participants identified inadequate staffing and overwhelming caseloads as primary obstacles. For these survey participants, the issue was urgent and dire. Staffing shortages and heavy caseloads contribute to staff burnout and further exacerbate the situation by impeding the school's ability to recruit, hire and retain intervention specialists. Survey results indicate that school districts in rural regions have staff shortages that are particularly severe. Intervention specialists with expertise serving students with complex/multiple disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder, are in the greatest demand. Schools across Ohio need to build their capacities to meet the needs of students with disabilities to offset the impact of high caseloads.

Building the Capacity to Meet the Needs of Students with Disabilities

Improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities requires schools to build their capacities to provide a continuum of supports. The survey results point to four areas in which the capacity of the school can be strengthened to benefit students with disabilities. These are: (a) advancing general education teachers' professional knowledge and skills to serve students with disabilities; (b) strengthening schools' implementation of a multi-tiered system of supports framework; (c) securing an adequate number of trained paraprofessionals; and (d) ensuring adequate support from an array of service providers.

Survey participants identified a need for general education teachers to advance their instructional practices to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Specifically, general education teachers would be better equipped to support a wide range of learner abilities if they had access to high-quality training in how to differentiate instruction. Evidence-based literacy instructional practices also were identified as a priority topic for professional development among general education teachers.

Building the capacity for effective service delivery also involves strengthening a school's multi-tiered system of supports. Survey participants indicated both a need to strengthen their schools' multi-tiered system of supports implementation and a perception that a multi-tiered system of supports was key to reducing the over-identification of students by race, gender or economic disadvantage.

Survey participants identified a need for adequate staffing of paraprofessionals to provide support to students with disabilities within general education classrooms. Paraprofessionals need to be well prepared to not only bolster students' instructional skills but also help support their social, emotional and behavioral skill development within the general education classroom.

A variety of service providers are needed to improve schools' capacities to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Survey participants emphasize the need for behavior interventionists, school psychologists and Board Certified Behavior Analysts to provide the supports needed to serve students in their least restrictive environments.