New Jersey Parents: Activated to Engage

Findings from Focus Groups and an Online Survey

FALL 2020

This work is made possible by a grant from the Charles & Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation.

Research by:
Agenda

- Project Overview & Partners
- Research Findings & Discussion
- Recommendations & Next Steps
MISSION
Support parents as their children’s most effective advocate by ensuring they have a complete, holistic, and accurate picture of their children’s progress and success.

VISION
Every parent* is a learning hero – advocating effectively for their children’s academic, social, and emotional success, driving equitable school improvement.

* “Parents” encompasses parents and guardians
Work on New Jersey Parent Mindsets Includes:

☆ Partner Engagement
  - Outreach to individuals/organizations serving families throughout New Jersey
  - Continued communication with partners to inform the research and strategy for sharing findings, tools, and resources

☆ Research
  - Qualitative: Informal interviews and focus groups (May-June)
  - Quantitative: Poll based on national Learning Heroes survey with partner input (July-August)

☆ Rollout and Community Convenings
  - Fall meetings (virtual if needed) to share research results and engage additional New Jersey organizations directly in the findings and development of related actions
  - Tools and resources informed by research
Project Partners
Methodology

ñas Focus Groups (June 17th-18th, 2020)
• 4 virtual parent groups
• Mix of parents from North, South, and Central New Jersey
• Group 1: Parents of students in grades 3-5
• Group 2: Parents of students in grades 6-8
• Group 3: Parents of students in grades 9-12
• Group 4: Low Income parents of students in grades 3-8
• All groups were recruited to include a mix of races/ethnicities

☆ Survey (July 24th-August 2nd, 2020)
• n=500, with oversamples of Hispanic and African American parents
• Conducted online, in English and Spanish

Throughout this report, blue/red indicates statistically higher/lower differences between audiences.

Yellow text denotes results from a recent national survey of parents conducted by Learning Heroes (conducted April 4th-May 6th, 2020).
After Remote Learning, When Parent Engagement in Education Reached New Heights, Parents Maintained an Inflated Sense of Their Child’s Achievement

Parents’ increased participation in their child’s education did not translate into a more realistic perception of whether their child is at/above grade level.

Amidst a Sea of Worries and Concerns, Safety is Paramount

Parents are laser-focused on safety and whether their child’s school can safely open during the upcoming year. Academics represent less of a concern, in part, because parents believe their children performed well last spring.

While Parents Gave Schools the Benefit of the Doubt Last Spring, Parents Expect (Much) More This Fall

Increased parent expectations include ease of online access, more effective and engaging teaching, and opportunities for parent involvement.
Parent Mindsets
Although COVID Causes Anxiety and Worry, Parents also Feel Hopeful and Grateful

Given the current coronavirus situation in this country, how are you feeling as a parent?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling this Way</th>
<th>African Americans</th>
<th>Hispanics</th>
<th>Whites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hopeful</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grateful</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious/worried</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrated</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scared</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overwhelmed</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confused</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

-6% Compared to US

28% most prominent
Parents’ Top Concerns are Safety and the Social and Educational Impact of COVID on Their Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Worry Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools not being able to provide a safe environment for in-person learning for students this fall</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone in your family getting coronavirus</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your kids missing important social interactions at school or with friends</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your child’s emotional well-being</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School closures/changes will have a negative impact on your child’s education</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making sure your child stays on track so he/she is ready for the next grade</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much screen-time for your child</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to pay the bills</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figuring out what to do with your kids during the day</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to access learning activities or resources for your child to do over the summer</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your child not having the technology they need to keep up with their schoolwork</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having enough food to feed your family</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(\% worry a lot/some)
The Disconnect: More than 90% of NJ Parents Believe Their Child is at or Above Grade Level

Believe Child is At/Above Grade Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NJ</th>
<th>US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **African Americans**: 94% for Math, 93% for Reading
- **Hispanics**: 90% for Math, 88% for Reading
- **Whites**: 94% for Math, 90% for Reading

89% of NJ parents indicate their child is getting “mostly Bs” or better

**NJ Statistics (4th grade NAEP):**
- Math: 48% proficient or advanced
- Reading: 42% proficient or advanced
Parents’ Aspirations for Their Children Remain High, Even During this Time Period

How important is it to you that your child goes to college?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Absolutely essential/very</th>
<th>Extremely/very</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NJ</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- African Americans: 81% (NJ), 81% (US)
- Hispanics: 88% (NJ), 82% (US)
- Whites: 88% (NJ), 69% (US)

How confident are you that your child will be well prepared for entrance into and success in college upon graduation from high school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Absolutely essential/very</th>
<th>Extremely/very</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NJ</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- African Americans: 80% (NJ), 80% (US)
- Hispanics: 79% (NJ), 74% (US)
- Whites: 74% (NJ), 72% (US)

LEARNING HEROES: NJ PARENTS
Most Parents are Confident About Their Knowledge of Their Children’s Academic Standing

How confident are you that you have a clear understanding of how well your child is achieving academically?

82%

US: 82%

43% Extremely confident
39% Very confident
16% Somewhat confident
2% Not too confident
0% Not confident at all

African Americans: 51% Extremely confident, 36% Very confident
Hispanics: 49% Extremely confident, 36% Very confident
Whites: 41% Extremely confident, 40% Very confident
Parents are Less Confident Their Child is Well-Prepared for the Next Grade Level

How confident are you that your child will be well-prepared for their next grade level when school resumes in the fall?

72%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Extremely confident</th>
<th>Very confident</th>
<th>Somewhat confident</th>
<th>Not too confident</th>
<th>Not confident at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African Americans</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanics</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LEARNING HEROES: NJ PARENTS
Remote Learning: Looking Back at the Spring
Parent (and Child) Experiences During Remote Learning Were Mixed and Changed as the Crisis Progressed

For the first 3 weeks there was nothing. They were just posting activity worksheets on the county website. When remote learning started, I was relieved. Brought about structure and some stress off my shoulders.
– ES Parent

It was a struggle to make sure she was getting everything she needed and keep up with my work in the hospital. I have 3 kids and it was a lot and teachers did the best they could. I agree it got better over time. ELA teacher sent out video lessons that kept her interest, kept them pretty short.
– ES Parent

I go into her google classroom and look at what’s scheduled for the day and write it down so she knows. I’m not watching her all day when working so she has a little more freedom than in the classroom.
– Low Income Grade 3-8 Parent

If it had been one kid, it might have been alright. I have two in middle school…I don’t think (my kids) having to keep themselves motivated worked well.
– MS Parent

Technically, I think it worked very well. I wasn’t involved much at all. My daughter did everything. I just had to make sure she had a connection. She got done everything she needed to. They started late, so they did like half days. They didn’t really give a full day of instruction. Being thrown into it, it was basically assignments and then test and quizzes. Mostly on their own, not a lot of Zoom. Luckily, they gave a Chromebook to every student in the district, so had the tech, but didn’t have the content for interactive discussion. If this goes into September they probably will. They would have to have more content for teaching.
– HS Parent
While Remote Schooling Went Better than Parents Anticipated, it was a Challenge, Too

59% of parents agree that their child’s remote schooling went better than they expected. (57% nationally)

54% of parents agree that supporting their child while they are doing remote schoolwork was harder than they expected it to be. (52% nationally)

African Americans: 68%
Hispanics: 66%
Whites: 55%

African Americans: 58%
Hispanics: 61%
Whites: 50%
Four-In-Ten Parents Indicate Their Child Was Not Able to Complete Everything Required Last Spring

Forty-five percent (45%) of African American parents share this sentiment.

How often was your child able to participate in or keep up with distance learning activities provided by their school?

- **All the Time**:
  - African Americans: 55%
  - Hispanics: 60%
  - Whites: 62%

- **Most of the time**: 31%
- **Some of the time**: 8%
- **Rarely**: 1%
Digital Literacy and Confusion About Lessons Served as Primary Barriers to Participation

Reasons For Child Not Participating Much/At All

Base: Not Participating in Remote Schooling Most of the Time (n=57)

- New content was not explained enough for my child to complete assignments correctly: 27%
- The technology needed (either the device or website/app) was difficult to log into or use: 23%
- The materials my child’s school provided were not helpful for my child’s needs or learning level: 22%
- My child has some behavior issues that made it more difficult to prioritize schoolwork: 20%
- I wanted to minimize the tension and conflict that homework and academics create between my child and me: 20%
- I did not have time to help my child with his/her learning: 18%
- We did not receive information from the school/teacher on what my child should be doing: 17%
- We didn’t have the right technology at home for my child to learn or they had to share with another family member: 10%
- I didn’t think it was necessary for my child to worry about schoolwork during this time: 7%
Almost Half Believe Their Child Learned Most or all of What They Would Have in a Normal Year, but Concern for the Fall Remains

Parents in urban areas are more likely to feel this way (on all three measures) than others.

Taking into account your child’s remote learning at the end of the last school year, where do you think your child is academically going into the upcoming school year this fall?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>41%</td>
<td>They’re right where they should be to enter the next grade, just as if the school year had ended normally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48%</td>
<td>They might be a little behind where they would be in a normal year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7%</td>
<td>They might be quite a bit behind where they should be for the next grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18%</td>
<td>All the content they would have learned in a normal year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Most of what they would have learned in a normal year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39%</td>
<td>Some new material but not as much as they would have in a normal year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12%</td>
<td>Not much or any new material—it was mainly review of material covered earlier in the year.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>All the content they would have learned in a normal year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>Most of what they would have learned in a normal year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>Some new material but not as much as they would have in a normal year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>Not much or any new material—it was mainly review of material covered earlier in the year.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most Felt Grades Reflected Completion Rather Than Content Mastery

Compared to the regular school year, during remote schooling my child’s grades were based more on whether they completed assignments than how much they understood the content.

Academic progress itself, it's hard for me to tell. This last couple of months I don't think he was learning anything he hadn't already learned. Feels like he ended the year in March and the last couple of months he has been skating by. Don't think he has made much progress in the last couple months. If he showed up and did the work they asked him to do, they gave him an A.
– MS Parent

I feel like the grading for what we experienced, in the back of my mind I wondered if they are just bumping the grades up and making assignments longer and easier just to push through this time? And what are they going to do in the fall? He's not prepared at all to go into high school in the fall.
– Low Income Grade 3-8 Parent

68% Agree

Elementary School: 69%
Middle School: 70%
High School: 66%

African Americans: 65%
Hispanics: 75%
Whites: 68%

68% Agree
About a Third of Parents Say Their Child Did Not Have the Tech Needed for Remote Schooling

Tech and/or WiFi Access Source

- Already had own tech: 32%
- Using school provided: 33%
- Missing device or internet: 35%

10% missing a computer
16% missing internet
8% missing both

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Own</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Missing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African Americans</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanics</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parents Who Relied on District Technology in the Spring Expect Help Again This Fall

Which of the following resources did your child have access to whenever needed for schoolwork during remote schooling?

- **Consistent, reliable access to the internet**
  - 70% of these parents expect it will be provided again in the fall

- **A WiFi hotspot provided by the school or district for use at home**
  - 17% of these parents expect it will be provided again in the fall

- **A computer or tablet you already had in your household**
  - 68% of these parents expect it will be provided again in the fall

- **A computer or tablet provided by the school or district**
  - 34% of these parents expect it will be provided again in the fall
A Majority of Parents Believe All Students Will be “In the Same Place” This Fall

All students had remote schooling last spring, so they will mostly be in the same place academically going into the next school year.

58% Agree

African Americans: 57%
Hispanics: 56%
Whites: 59%
Parents Activated to Engage this Fall
Parents View Their Experiences Last Spring as a Potential Launching Point for the Fall

I am more connected with my child’s day-to-day education now than ever before.

71% Agree

African Americans: 72%
Hispanics: 80%
Whites: 68%

I have a much better understanding of what my child is expected to learn to be ready for the next grade since working with him/her during remote schooling last spring.

64% Agree

African Americans: 70%
Hispanics: 68%
Whites: 60%
Parents Have Higher Expectations for the New School Year

Expectations of Schools for Coming Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectation</th>
<th>Essential/Very Important</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintain online access to assignments, class materials, and other resources</td>
<td>Very Important: 53%</td>
<td>Absolutely essential: 89%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share data with parents about how their child is doing academically when</td>
<td>Very Important: 49%</td>
<td>Absolutely essential: 87%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school resumes in the fall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide tools for parents so they know how best to explain the material to</td>
<td>Very Important: 48%</td>
<td>Absolutely essential: 83%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>their children if they are confused or struggling while doing schoolwork at</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check to see where students are academically in the fall, to see what</td>
<td>Very Important: 46%</td>
<td>Absolutely essential: 84%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>material they may have missed during remote schooling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assuming some remote learning, offer more live video classes that are more</td>
<td>Very Important: 46%</td>
<td>Absolutely essential: 80%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>like classroom instruction during a regular school day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
...and, They are Activated to be More Involved and Informed This Fall

These numbers (except for lowering expectations) are all significantly higher than in the national survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Find more time to talk to my children about their everyday assignments</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get a better understanding of what my child is expected to learn at his/her new grade level</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek a better understanding of where my child is academically</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to my child’s teacher(s) about what I noticed regarding my child’s learning/schoolwork during the remote schooling last spring</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a stronger relationship with my child’s teacher(s) than I’ve had in the past</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand that the school provide better support for students’ emotional well-being going forward</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower my academic expectations for my child due to remote schooling</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parents See Value in and Need for a Fall Benchmark

The reasons that resonate the most for giving a fall benchmark include:

**Informing Teacher Instruction & Parent Support**  
(73% find this convincing)

⭐ Teachers and parents need an in-depth understanding
⭐ Deliver more targeted instruction
⭐ Help parents better support learning

**Retention of Knowledge**  
(70% find this convincing)

⭐ Kids often lose some academic skills
⭐ They could lose more academic skills this year than previously
⭐ Need to identify academic starting points
More than Half of Parents Agree with the Need for a Statewide Test Next Spring

It's important for students to take a statewide test in the spring to make sure they are meeting expectations in math and reading.

58% Agree

- 25% Agree
- 33% Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

- 21% Neither agree nor disagree
- 10% Neither agree nor disagree
- 9% Neither agree nor disagree

19% Disagree

African Americans: 67% agree
Hispanics: 66% agree
Whites: 50% agree

Darker shading = stronger intensity
Parents Would Appreciate Additional Tools for Collaborating with Teachers to Create a Plan for Their Child

How Helpful Would This Be?
A tool to develop a personalized plan for students for the upcoming school year. The tool uses input from the parent, teacher, and student on academic and personal goals, and input from the student’s recent academic performance, to develop this personalized plan.

How Helpful Would This Be?
Elementary School: 81%
Middle School: 91%
High School: 79%

African Americans: 91%
Hispanics: 88%
Whites: 78%

Darker blue = “Extremely Helpful”
Parent-Teacher Planning Tool

⭐ Developed as a stand-alone template but can be **customized** for districts and **used electronically**.

⭐ Electronic versions could be embedded into existing portals/learning platforms to ensure **student privacy**.

⭐ Districts can **customize**:
  - Branding/logos
  - Introductory Text
  - Resources

Not shown to survey respondents, only tested in focus groups.
Recommendations & Next Steps
Implications & Recommendations

⭐ Leverage the “COVID-era” parent to build stronger parent-teacher partnerships. Parents are eager and want to partner with their schools this year, so it is an opportunity for advocates to equip schools to build relationships with parents—the stalwarts AND those they have not reached before. Consider using multiple channels and messengers, including community organizations.

⭐ Parents understand the need and importance of assessment going into this school year, at both the beginning and end of the year. Build on this support through the beginning of the year benchmark. Position as a measure to help teachers and parents see where students are after remote learning in the spring. Doing so can also reinforce the importance of objective data on student progress.

⭐ Use the moment in time to close the disconnect. Parents will show up differently in the fall and are looking for more information on their child’s learning. Advocate for schools to launch the Parent-Teacher Communications Tool and share benchmark results with parents.

⭐ Unlike the spring, parents are expecting remote or hybrid learning to be more organized, structured, and similar to in-school learning. They also want more assistance/explanations about the subject matter taught so they can better support their child when they get confused. Share helpful resources and ensure parents know who to contact and how for additional support.

⭐ Keep in mind that safety is top of mind for parents. Communicating about academics or even social-emotional learning without ensuring parents have had their safety questions addressed will seem tone deaf. For schools or districts that are beginning the year with remote learning, address what the routine will look like every day and clearly outline the expectations of parents and students.
Share this information and the tool with parents and educators in your district.

If your school or district would like to customize the tool for broader use, let us know so we can work with you to:

- Update the branding/logo and the best district resources to include
- If using the tool electronically, discuss how to embed in the portal or learning platform so it can be sent and completed securely.

Share any additional feedback on this information and how to use it to support parents.
Contact

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