

# Family Needs Assessment

KEEP LEARNING CALIFORNIA SURVEY REPORT  
SEPTEMBER 2023

As families and communities adapt to a post-pandemic landscape, it is critical to identify families' concerns relating to their children's education and overall well-being. Families care deeply about the success of their children's education, and their desire to support their educational journey is reflected in the results of this survey.

Transitioning to in-person instruction after remote and hybrid classroom modalities, the growing threat of gun violence, continuous economic disparities, and ongoing digital divide has meant that access to holistic supports remain essential for children and families to thrive. To identify the evolving needs and concerns of families across California we conducted phone interviews with close to 1,000 families with children from Transitional Kindergarten to High School.

We focused on five areas: Access to Resources, Areas of Concern, Student Absenteeism, Areas of Support, and School Communication. Regional differences continue to exist especially in Central Valley where digital equity gaps remain.

## METHOD

During Spring of 2023 we conducted phone interviews of 980 families in Spanish and English to listen to the needs of the communities. 71% of survey participants identified their students as being English Language Learners as well as 95% participants reported that they had children in elementary grade level.

## KEY RESULTS

78% of families reported that a tutoring resource was either a high priority or essential

60% of families are concerned about gun violence

48% of families said school absences were due to short-term illness

52% of families do not have mental health support

## ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Most families reported that they have access to vaccinations, COVID testing, and medical insurance.

However, our data shows that:

Half of families (51.94%) do not know how to receive telehealth.

Nearly half (54.59%) do not have access to social-emotional support.

One in three do not have access to medical care.

Along with mental and physical health concerns, survey results show:



Lingering effects of the pandemic emphasize the need to close the digital divide. Institutions may be moving past remote schooling and mask mandates, but the world is evolving to a digital frontier - for instance, schoolwork and school communication is increasingly done digitally - that is leaving our communities behind.

## REGIONAL DISPARITIES

### IN CENTRAL CALIFORNIA, THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IS NOTICEABLE:

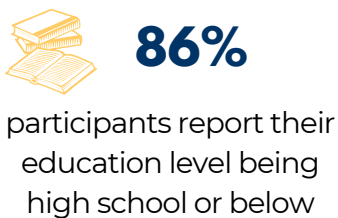
60% do not own technology outside of the school

45% do not have an email address

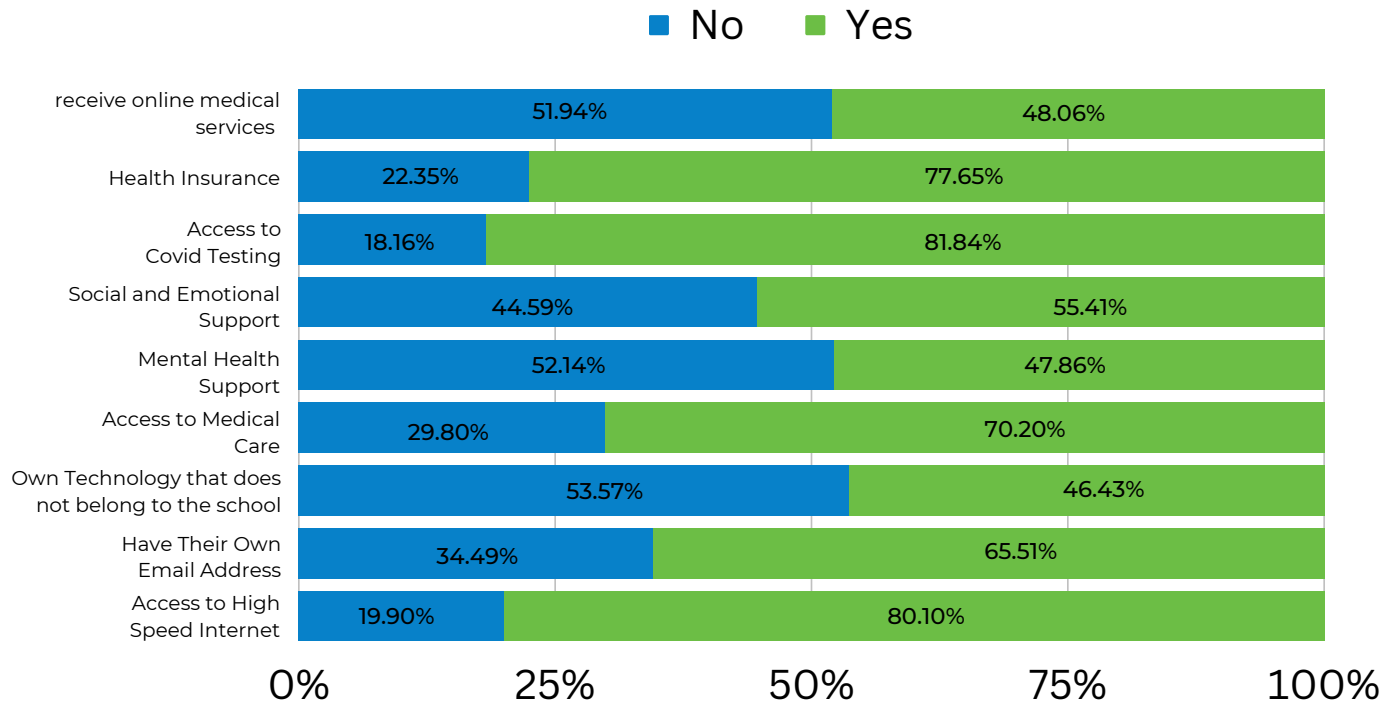
62% do not know how to receive medical care online or by phone

20% do not have access to high-speed internet

## KEY DEMOGRAPHICS



## ACCESS TO RESOURCES



## ACCESS TO ECE RESOURCES

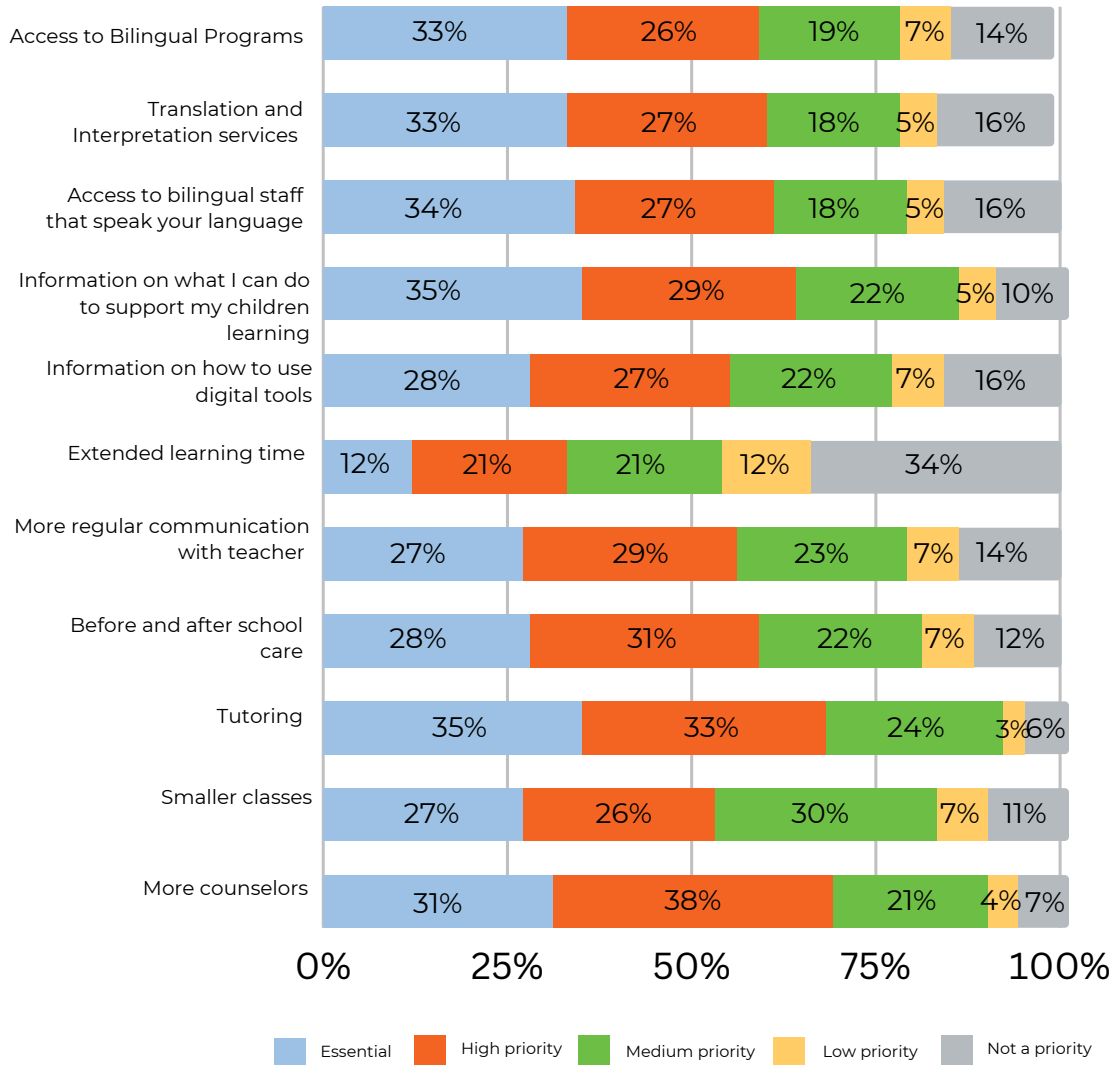
New this year, we asked families about whether they feel they have the resources to help their children’s early childhood education and development. Of the families we surveyed, 22% had children aged between 0-3. For those families, 45% percent reported feeling as though they did not have the access and support to financial resources necessary to support the healthy development of their young children.

**Do Families have access and support to financial resources to support the healthy development of their 0-3 children?**

■ No ■ Yes



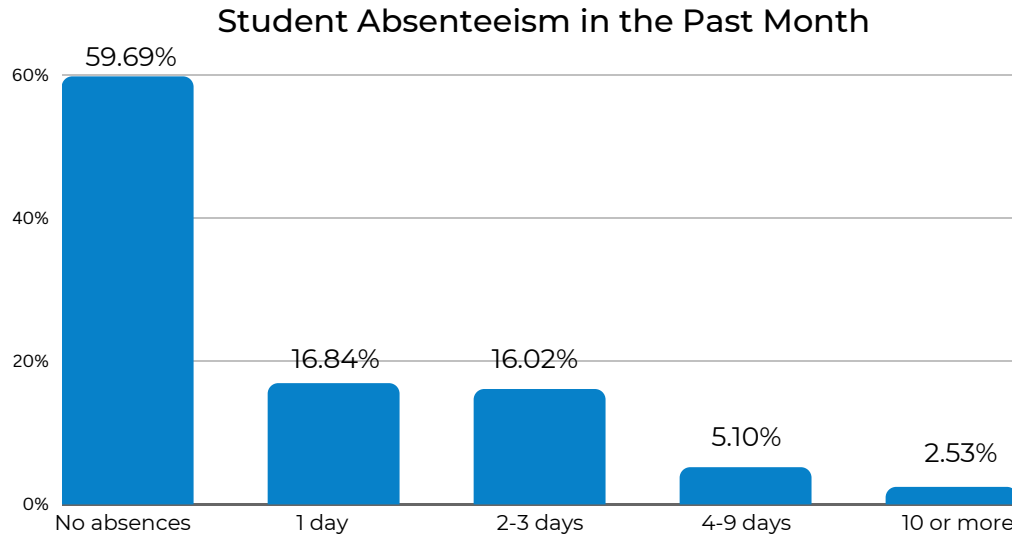
# AREAS OF SUPPORT



Families expressed what they need to support their children. Access to bilingual programs and translation services, along with more counselors, smaller classes, and regular communication with teachers are all necessary to create welcoming and enriched learning environments. The results of this survey highlight that fostering community within schools is crucial to the success of students.

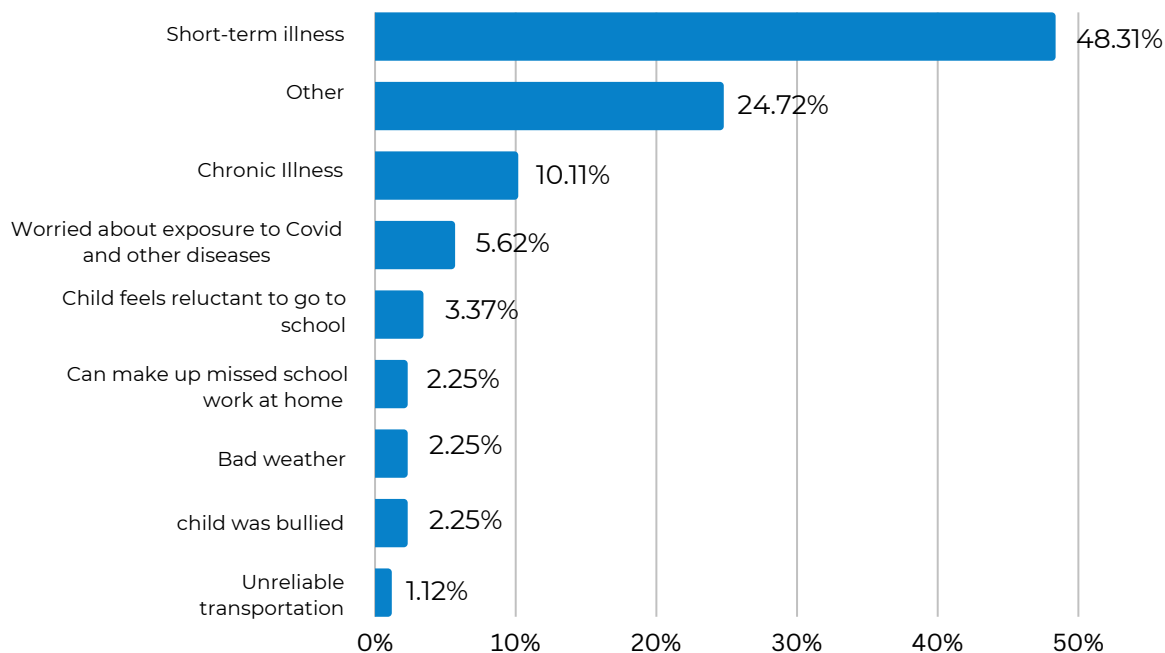
Offering robust after school programming, multiple and consistent modes of communication in the families home language, and opportunities for tutoring and extended learning are ways educators and community organizations can partner to support social emotional well-being and academic growth.

# STUDENT ABSENTEEISM



Student absenteeism is a growing issue across California. In the 2021-22 school year (SY), chronic absence jumped to 30%, way up from 12% just three years prior in SY2018-19, per the California Department of Education (CDE). Of the students that were chronically absent in SY2021-22, 66% were Latina/o/x. To gain a greater insight into this phenomenon, we asked families how many days their children missed of school in the past month, and why they missed those days. Nearly a quarter of the surveyed families' students missed two or more days of school in the past month, which would put them on pace to be chronically absent if extrapolated over the entire school year. Families cited short-term illness as by far the biggest reason for why their child missed school.

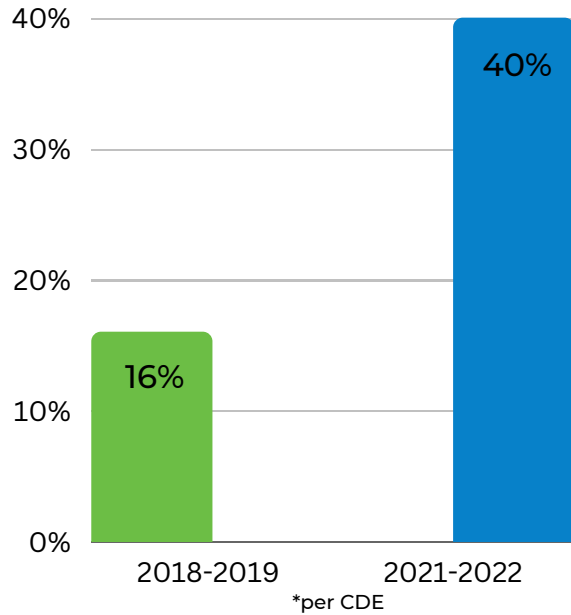
## Reasons Students Were Absent



## A CLOSER LOOK

Particularly worrying is the spike in absenteeism amongst kindergarten students. In SY2018-19, the chronic absence rate in kindergarten was 16%, which skyrocketed to 40% in SY2021-22, per CDE. Over 66% of chronically absent kindergarteners in SY2021-22 were Latina/o/x. Unfortunately, this trend has no signs of slowing down, as the early data coming in for SY2022-23 indicate that these numbers are continuing to climb.

Kindergarten Chronic Absence Rate



In order to gain a deeper insight into the reasons why students were missing school in kindergarten, Families in Schools and Attendance Works conducted three focus groups over the summer with families of kindergarten-aged children, in partnership with EdAdvance. Questions were asked to provide a framework for the discussions, but the participants were also encouraged to identify the salient issues for themselves. One group was conducted in Spanish, while the other two were conducted in English.

## FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

**Key Finding #1: Families need clarity about when students should be in school if they are not feeling well.**

Many families were confused about when to send their children to school when they were not feeling well. Most pointed to a lack of school guidance or communication as the primary reason. While some families mentioned that their schools had a formal policy, they felt as if there was uncertainty around expected practice.

*“My daughter got sent home last year because she had a slight fever and a headache. The school nurse said we needed a doctor’s note before she could come back. But when I called her teacher to let her know, she told me I should just send her in when she was up for it.”*

**Key Finding #2: Families are balancing kindergarten attendance with other family priorities.**

Many families felt that, when weighting other family priorities such as caring for other loved ones or figuring out transportation to work and school, it was okay for their kindergartener to miss some days of school.

*“We have one car in our house. I use that to drive her to school. But if my husband gets called into another shift, he takes the car, and we stay home. We’re already talking about what we’ll do next year when she’s in first grade.”*

**Key Finding #3: Families with older students have different attitudes toward kindergarten attendance.**

Several participants in the focus groups had other children who were older than kindergarten age, and spoke with a higher degree of confidence when discussing their decision-making process for when to send their children to school. They also discussed having additional support among friends when they needed help transporting children to school when other family situations arose.

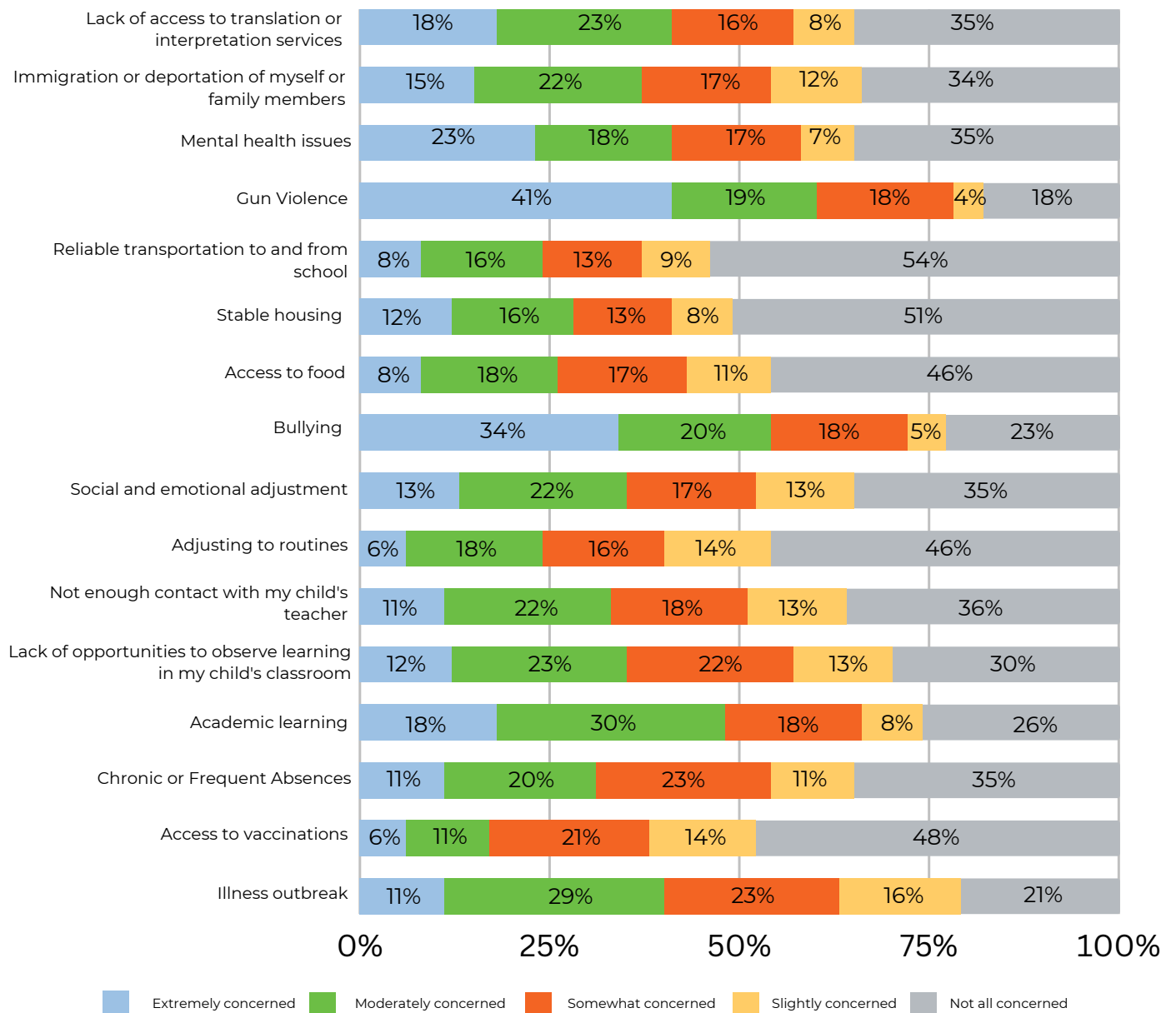
*“I think the biggest difference between all of you and me is that I have older kids. I’ve developed relationships with their friends’ parents. We text all the time about what’s going on in school. I go to them if I’m confused by what the school says. I ask for their opinions on what I should do with my kids. It helps a lot to have that support system.”*

# AREAS OF CONCERN

Student safety is at the forefront of surveyed families' minds. Worries surrounding illness outbreaks are replaced by the fear of school shootings, lack of mental health resources, and bullying. It is important to highlight that 60% of families shared that gun violence is a major concern and 54% are equally worried about bullying.

Ensuring schools provide students with a sense of safety can support relationship building, curiosity, and learning. Strengthening school culture and environment allows children and families to thrive.

## HOW CONCERNED ARE YOU ABOUT THE FOLLOWING:





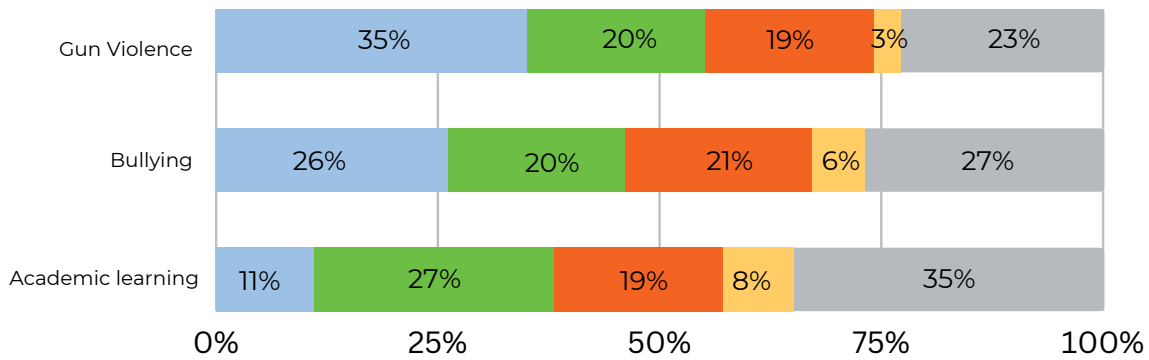
## DIFFERENCES ACROSS GRADE LEVELS

For surveyed families with students across different grade levels, the top three areas of concern remain relatively the same, with gun violence, bullying, and academic learning being the top concerns for families. However, the magnitude of concern grows for families with children in middle and high school, compared to families with children in elementary school.

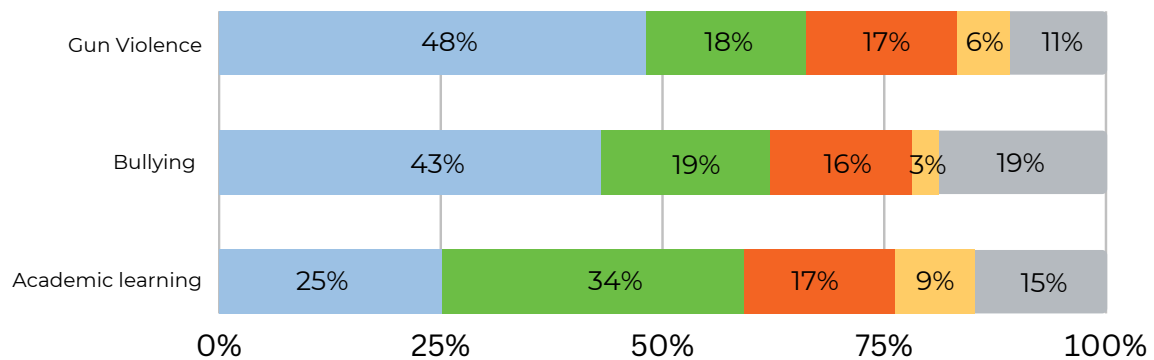
Of the small set of families with middle and high school students asked, around two-thirds are extremely or moderately concerned when it comes to gun violence, bullying, and academic learning.

### HOW CONCERNED ARE YOU ABOUT THE FOLLOWING:

#### GRADES PK-5



#### GRADES 6-12



■ Extremely concerned 
 ■ Moderately concerned 
 ■ Somewhat concerned 
 ■ Slightly concerned 
 ■ Not all concerned

# FAMILY ENGAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS

## RESOURCES FAMILIES FEEL WOULD BE MOST HELPFUL

The extended learning opportunities are available for my child (after school, Saturday school, summer school)



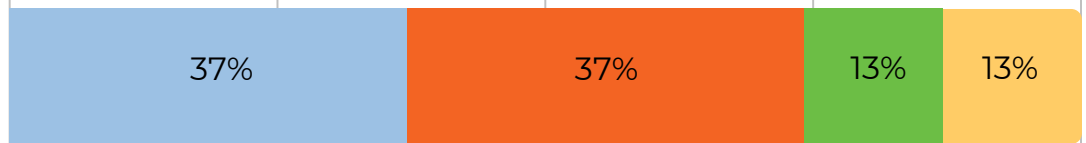
The social emotional supports available for my child



The academic supports available for my child at the school to strengthen learning opportunities



The health and safety processes in place at the school



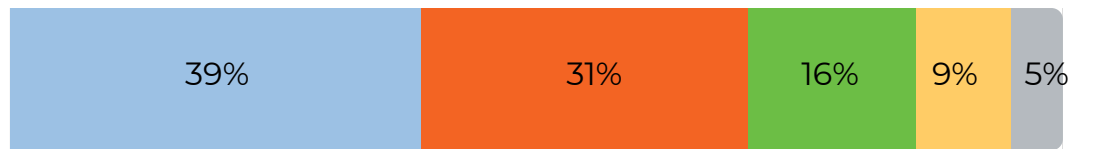
0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

■ Much more information ■ Somewhat more information ■ slightly more information ■ No more information

\*Survey Results

## SCHOOL COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS

Families that feel the school effectively communicates about their students academics



Families that feel welcomed by school staff to ask questions at school



0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

■ Effectively communicates ■ moderately communicates ■ somewhat communicates ■ slightly communicates ■ does not communicate

\*Survey Results

The vast majority of families surveyed feel that their schools effectively communicate with them about their students' academics and welcome them into the school community. Given that all of the families surveyed went through PIQE, this is a demonstration of the effectiveness that family engagement interventions can have in improving family-school partnerships.

Nonetheless, our survey identifies that families would like more information about after school opportunities, emotional support, additional learning opportunities, and safety procedures.

## NEXT STEPS

The findings of the 2023 Family Needs Assessment point to some areas of recent success for families due to the continued advocacy of communities and partners, such as wider-spread access to high-speed internet, COVID testing, and health insurance, as well as improved attendance in school and family-school partnerships. However, the survey also points to a number of areas of concern we will need to remain focused on, particularly:

### FOCUS AREAS

- Addressing families' concerns regarding gun violence, bullying, and academic opportunities
- Providing holistic, social emotional supports for families
- Ensuring schools have adequate bilingual staff and educators
- Closing digital equity gaps, particularly in the Central Valley
- Implementing strategies to support families in sending their students to school every day
- Communicating clearly with families on when and for how long to hold their children out of school due to short-term illness
- Informing families about and providing access to expanded learning opportunities, such as high-quality tutoring
- Building healthy school communities
- Maintaining and building school funding and resources to provide families with these necessary supports

We must advance these focus areas by continuing to empower families and communities, and strategically partnering with community-based organizations, schools, districts, institutions of higher education, governmental agencies, and philanthropic organizations. Together, we can ensure that families have access to the resources they need and all students have opportunities to succeed in and out of school.

# Thank You!

We want to take this time to thank The Children's Partnership, Californians Together, Public Advocates, The Education Trust-West, and the Heising-Simons Foundation for their support and partnership.

