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Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Key Findings	4
Detailed Findings	8
1. School-Family Partnership	8
Communication Between Schools and Families Engaging Every Family	
2. Academic Progress and Parents' Perceptions	17
Informing Parents	19
3. Optimizing the School Environment	22
Technology Access at School	24
Conclusion	26
Methodology	28

Introduction

In the spring of 2023, Gallup partnered with the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) to conduct a survey of almost 3,000 public school parents statewide.

The goal of the research was to better understand parents' and guardians' experiences with education and their child's school, and to measure the current state of family engagement at schools across the state.

In North Dakota, "family engagement" refers to the partnership between families and schools as a strategy to improve classroom learning and student outcomes. Strong engagement is built on mutual trust and understanding.

Gallup implemented an address-based sampling methodology to collect mail survey responses from 2,938 public school parents and guardians across the state in early spring 2023. The approach resulted in a representative sample of public school parents in North Dakota, meaning that the characteristics of respondents match the characteristics of public school parents in North Dakota.

Findings provide important insight into parents' current thoughts about their child's educational success and engagement, as well as their concerns and worries. Parents also provide information on topics including school technology access, school safety, academic progress, communication with their child's school and other aspects of family engagement. The study shows strong family-school communication and positive perceptions of the school environment, as well as areas for future improvement. NDDPI is committed to providing information to schools to make informed decisions regarding family engagement, and data will ultimately assist in efforts to improve support for every child, school and family.

¹ Family engagement. (n.d.). North Dakota Department of Public Instruction. Retrieved June 14, 2023, from https://www.nd.gov/dpi/familiescommunity/families/family-engagement



Key Findings

• A majority of parents (73%) say their child's school encourages family engagement.

Very few families have negative perceptions: Only 1% say family engagement is discouraged by their child's school. This is true for families of all racial/ethnic backgrounds, where statistical comparisons are possible.²

Cultural education is related to family engagement.

Parents who say their child receives Native American history education are more likely than others to also say their school encourages family engagement (78% vs. 69%). Among Native American parents, the difference is even greater (83% vs. 61%).

 Families communicate with schools frequently and openly, especially through their child's teacher.

Eighty-six percent of parents agree there is an open channel of communication with their child's teachers, and 70% say they've provided feedback to administrators or teachers at some point in the school year. Native American parents are even more likely to say they've provided feedback to administrators or teachers (85% say they have provided feedback).

 Parents generally report positive opinions when it comes to their child's educational environment.

Eighty-two percent say the school is a welcoming environment for families from all backgrounds, and 84% believe their child's school provides students with the knowledge and skills they need to be successful.

² The only racial and ethnic groups with sufficient group sizes for reportability were White parents and Native American parents. Differences by race and ethnicity for other parents could not be assessed individually.

While family involvement and engagement are similar, researchers say **engagement is the key to success**. Engagement goes beyond involvement when parents have two-way communication and are part of the decision-making process.³ In this study, parents report involvement and engagement in several ways:

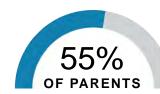




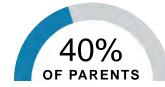
communicate with their child's teacher at least a few times a year, and 51% do so at least a few times a month.



report attending a parent-teacher conference in the 2022-23 school year, as of March of 2023.



have volunteered at least a few times this year outside of school hours.



have volunteered at least a few times this year during school hours.

ENGAGEMENT



say teachers are always or mostly responsive to parents' concerns.



agree there is an open channel of communication with their child's teacher.



have provided feedback to the school's administrator or to their child's teacher in the current school year.



agree their **child's school understands what is important to them** as a parent.

³ The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2023, February 1). Parental involvement vs. parental engagement. https://www.aecf.org/blog/parental-involvement-vs-parental-engagement#:~:text=What%20many%20may%20mot%20know,the%20school%27s%20decision%2Dmaking%20process

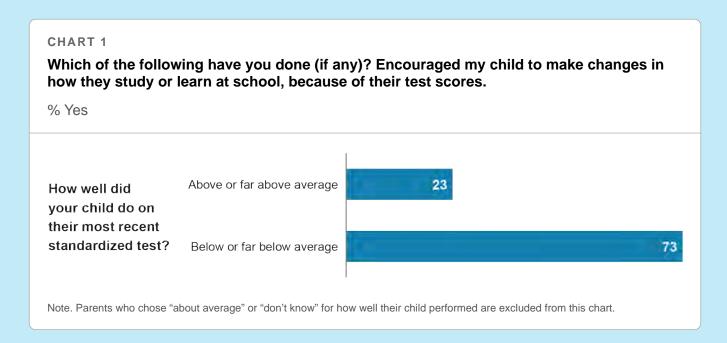
• One in six parents (17%) say their child's test scores are difficult to understand.

- Parents who have difficulty understanding standardized test scores are about four times as likely as others to say their child performed below average on the test (33% vs. 9%), and slightly more than twice as likely to say their child is falling behind (38% vs. 17%).
- However, the parents who have the most difficulty interpreting test scores are tenacious about seeking support. After controlling for students' test performance (as reported by parents), parents who have difficulty understanding test scores are often more likely than other parents to pursue educational interventions. For example, among those with average-scoring students, 37% of parents who find it difficult to understand the scores have arranged additional services (after school programs, tutoring, etc.), compared with 21% of those who say they find it easy to understand the scores.

Parents who know their child is falling behind are the most likely to seek additional support. For example:

- Seventy-three percent of those who say their child scored below average have helped their child make adjustments to how they study and learn, compared with 23% of those whose say their child scored above average.





However, just 13% of parents say their child performed below average on the most recent standardized test (e.g., the North Dakota State test, NWEA MAP or Kindergarten Readiness Test), even though the 2021-22 North Dakota State test results indicate roughly 58% of students are scoring below grade level.⁴ The is an opportunity to help more parents understand their child's academic performance, which could result in more parental engagement.

⁴ The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2023, February 1). Parental involvement vs. parental engagement. https://www.aecf.org/blog/parental-involvement-vs-parental-engagement#:~:text=What%20many%20may%20mot%20know,the%20school%27s%20decision%2Dmaking%20process

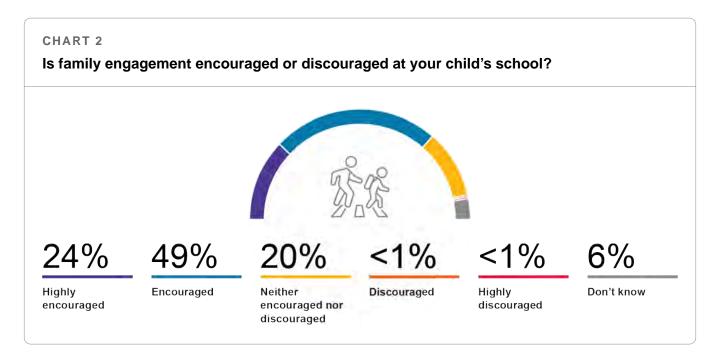
Detailed Findings

The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction is dedicated to building a partnership between schools and families. A strong partnership can include trustworthy relationships, open two-way communication, academically successful students and safe school buildings, among many other things. In this report, Gallup analyzes parents' experiences with each of these topics to provide actionable insights.

1. School-Family Partnership

The relationship between a child's family and their school is important. Family engagement has the potential to improve children's academic outcomes and promote positive behaviors, such as better attendance and homework habits. However, a strong school-family relationship requires trust, accessibility and shared decision-making.

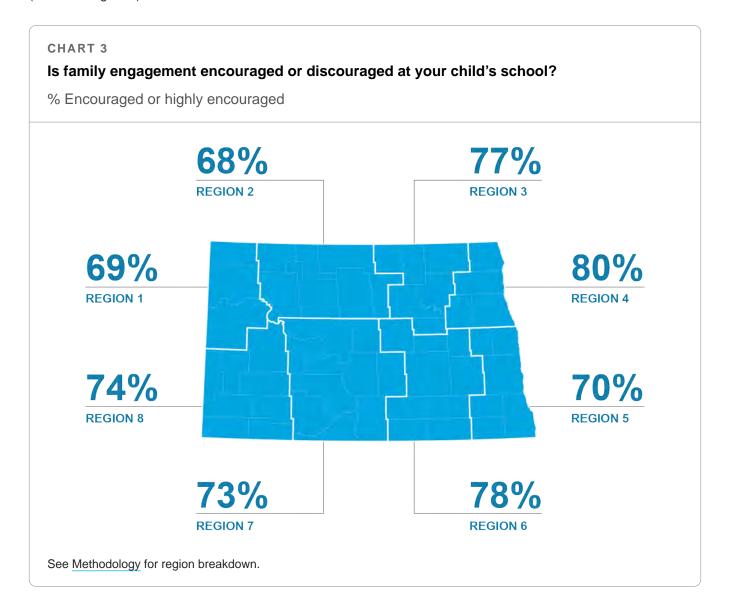
About three in four parents say family engagement is encouraged at their child's school, including one in four who say engagement is highly encouraged. Just 1% say family engagement is discouraged.



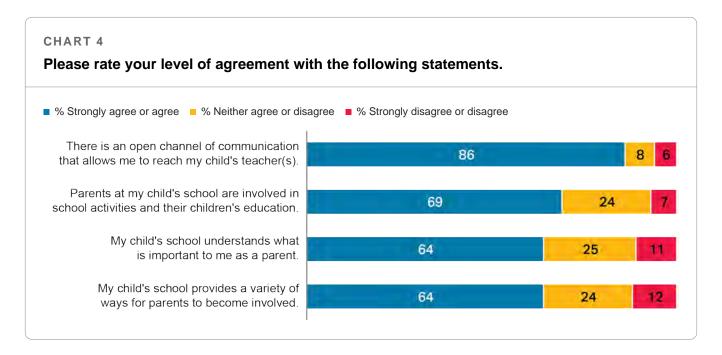
Parents of all racial backgrounds feel similarly when it comes to their school's encouragement of family engagement, a success for efforts to be inclusive of all families.

⁵ American Psychological Association. (n.d.). Parental-youth communication. https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/programs/safe-supportive/parental-engagement#:~:text=Parent%20engagement%20in%20schools%20is%20defined%20as%20parents,their%20children%E2%80%99s%20and%20adolescents%E2%80%99%20learning%20and%20development.%201

While some variability exists between regions in the state, the only significant difference is observed between Region 4 (80% say their child's school encourages or highly encourages family engagement) and Regions 2 and 5 (an average of 69% say the same). Other regions fall in between and differences are not statistically significant (such as Region 1).



Two-way communication between schools and families is a key component of engagement. In addition to their opinion on general family engagement, parents also share their feelings about communication and parental involvement. Among all parents, a majority (86%) say there is an open channel of communication that allows them to reach their child's teacher, and 64% agree that "my child's school understands what is important to me as a parent."



Parents who disagree that their child's school understands what is important to them (11% overall) **report having more trouble communicating with the school** than other parents. They are also more likely to say teachers are mostly or always unresponsive to concerns than other parents (35% vs. 4%) and to say the quality of communication they receive from the school is fair or poor (72% vs. 8%) than those who agree their child's school understands what is important to them. While communication seems more challenging, this group of parents reports similar rates of providing feedback to administrators or teachers (78%, vs. 74% of those who feel their child's school understands what is important to them).



Strong family engagement starts with involvement in activities, such as volunteering or participating in parent-teacher conferences. How do parents get involved?



84%

of parents say they **attended a parent-teacher conference** in the 2022-2023 school year (from data collected February-April 2023).



55%

of parents have **volunteered at least a few times a year with the school** outside of school hours, and 40% say they have volunteered at least a few times this year during school hours.



51%

communicate with their child's teacher at least a few times a month, and 92% do so at least a few times a year.



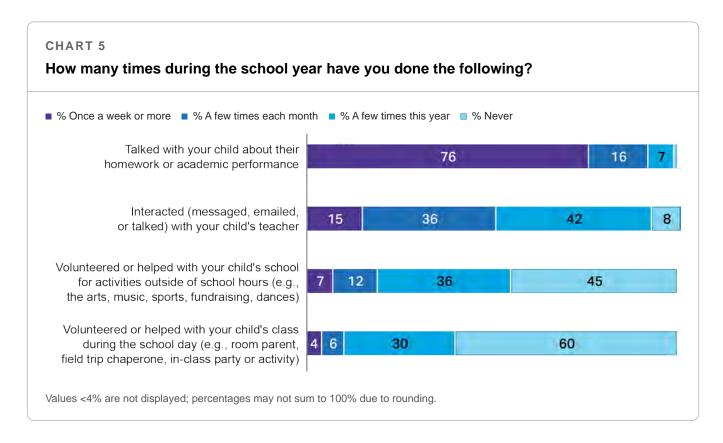
Communication Between Schools and Families

How satisfied are parents with the communication they receive from their child's school? A majority (82%) of families say they receive excellent (34%) or good (48%) communication from their school. Just 4% say the quality is poor.

Communication at elementary schools is rated higher than communication with junior high and high schools. Eighty-nine percent of parents with elementary school students rate the communication as good or excellent, compared with 75% of junior high and high school parents.

Parents also report on whether they've shared concerns with the school and whether the school was responsive to that feedback. Of all parents, 70% say they've provided feedback to the administrators or teachers at their child's school. Native American or Indigenous parents are more likely than parents of other racial/ethnic backgrounds to have provided feedback to the administrators or teachers (85% vs. 69%).

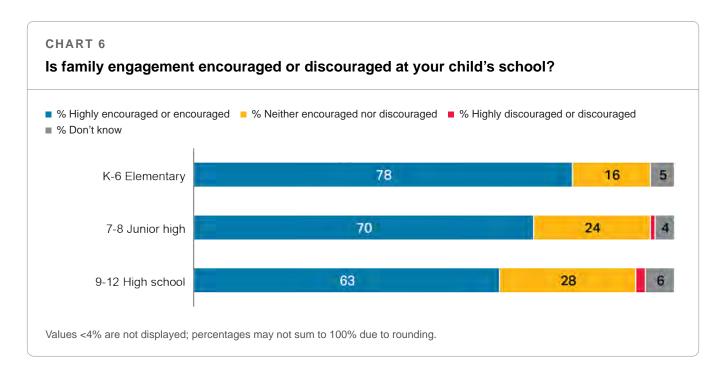
In terms of responsiveness, 91% of parents say teachers are always (46%) or mostly (45%) responsive to parents' concerns. Eighty-eight percent of parents say the same about support staff, and 78% say the same about the administration (e.g., superintendent, principal). Eleven percent of parents say they don't know how responsive the administration is, which may represent those who have never contacted administration to share a concern.



Engaging Every Family

Family engagement can take many forms, and it may look different from school to school, between regions or between families. Understanding the nuances of those experiences is a key component of NDDPI's commitment to engagement with every family.

Parents with children in elementary school (78%) are more likely than those with children in junior high (70%) or high school (63%) to say family engagement is encouraged. This includes 28% of elementary parents who say family engagement is highly encouraged, as well as 26% of junior high and 17% of high school parents who say the same.





Overall, about one-quarter (20%) of parents report that family engagement is "neither encouraged or discouraged" at their child's school or say they don't know whether family engagement is encouraged (6%). A lack of opportunities for parental involvement and the quality of communication may play a role. Parents who say family engagement is not encouraged at their school are less likely than others to say the school provides a variety of ways for parents to be involved (23% vs. 79%) and nearly half as likely to say they receive good or excellent communication from the school (50% vs. 93%).

Importantly, although about one-quarter of parents do not report that family engagement is encouraged at their child's school, these parents are just as likely to talk with their child about their homework, and a majority (76%) attend parent-teacher conferences. **Just because the school may be perceived as not encouraging engagement does not mean the parents are disengaging.** Schools working to improve their partnership with families still have opportunities to interact with parents and improve their relationship.

CHART 7 Relationship Between Encouraging Family Engagement and Parents' Experiences With Schools Among those who say family engagement is highly encouraged or encouraged Among all others My child's school provides a variety of ways for parents 23 to become involved: % Agree or strongly agree How would you describe the quality of communication you receive from your child's school? % Excellent or good My child's school understands what is important to me as a parent: % Agree or strongly agree 38 Parents at my child's school are involved in school activities and their children's education: % Agree or strongly agree There is an open channel of communication that allows me to reach my child's teacher(s): % Agree or strongly agree This current school year, have you ...? Attended a parent-teacher conference or meeting: % Yes How many times during this school year have you done the 93 following? Talked with your child about their homework or academic performance: % A few times each month or more

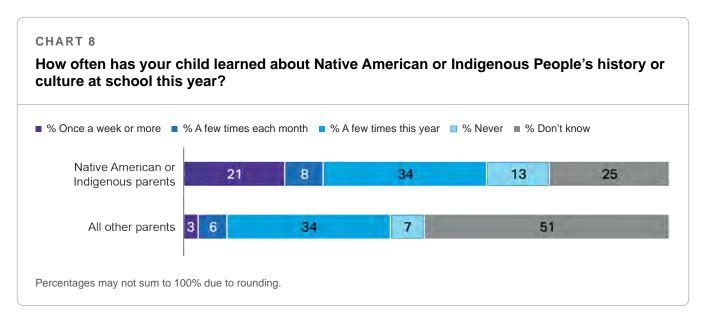
North Dakota Senate Bill 2304 was passed in 2021 requiring schools to include curriculum on Native American and Indigenous People's history. Prior research suggests cultural inclusion can improve engagement and feelings of belonging.⁶

In this study, 78% of those whose child has learned about Native American history also say family engagement at their school is encouraged or highly encouraged, compared with 61% of those who say their child has never learned about Native American history this school year (and 70% of those who don't know whether their child learns about the topic).

Among all parents, 5% say their child has learned about Native American and Indigenous People's history once a week or more, 6% say a few times a month, 34% say a few times this year, 8% say never, and 48% don't know.

About one in five Native American parents say their child learns about Native American or Indigenous People's history once a week or more. Native American parents are most aware of whether their child's education includes Native American and Indigenous People's history, but one-quarter of Native American parents still say they don't know. About half of parents of other racial backgrounds say they don't know whether their child has learned about Native American history at school this year.





⁶ Examining American Indian perspectives in the Central Region on parent involvement in children's education. (2008, August). Regional Educational Laboratory Program. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/central/pdf/REL_2008059_sum.pdf

2. Academic Progress and Parents' Perceptions

When asked about their child's learning this school year, two-thirds of parents (66%) say their child is on track, while 21% say they are falling behind, and 13% say they are getting ahead. When asked about their child's performance on the most recent standardized test, 32% of parents say their child performed about average, 13% say below average, 40% say above average, and 15% of parents don't know or are unsure about their child's performance. The most recent test a child took could include exams such as the North Dakota State test, NWEA MAP, the SAT/ACT or Kindergarten Readiness Test (KRT), among others.

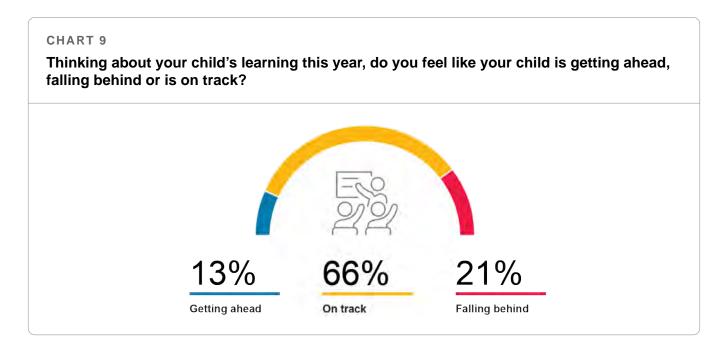




CHART 10

How well did your child do on their most recent standardized test?



40%

Above or far above average

32%

About average

13%

Below or far below average

15%

Don't know

These results indicate that parents may not have an accurate understanding of their child's current grade-level knowledge. According to the results of the 2021-2022 North Dakota State Assessment (NDSA) — a summative assessment administered to all students in grades 2-8 at the end of the school year — only 45% of students were at or above grade level in ELA achievement, and only 39% were at or above grade level in math.

Perceptions of academic rigor and students' progress vary among parents with different incomes and educational backgrounds. Those in lower-income households⁷ are about four times as likely as other parents to say coursework is too hard (19% vs. 5%) and twice as likely to say the amount of coursework is too much (17% vs. 9%). Those in lower-income households are also the most likely to say their child is falling behind, compared with parents in higher-earning households (34% vs. 19%, respectively). Income and educational attainment are closely linked, meaning that parents with less formal education (a high school diploma or less) have similar perceptions as those in lower-income households.

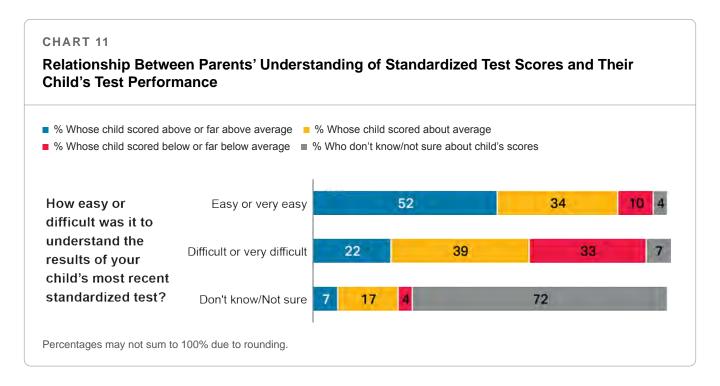


⁷ In this comparison, lower-earning households are defined as those with an annual income of less than less than \$32,500.

Informing Parents

For parents to be involved in decision-making processes, they need to be informed of their child's progress — especially when it comes to the meaning of their child's test scores. Almost one in five parents (17%) say their child's test results are difficult to understand, and another 16% say they don't know or are unsure if the results are easy or difficult to understand. Parents' understanding differs by their education and income level — parents with a bachelor's degree or higher are more likely than others to find the results easy to understand (71% vs. 64%) as are those in a household with a median income⁸ or above (70% vs. 64%).

The families who most need academic support are also the most likely to have difficulty understanding their child's test scores. Parents who have difficulty understanding their child's test scores are twice as likely as other parents to say their child is performing below average (33% vs. 9%) and to say their child is falling behind (38% vs. 17%). Significant differences still exist after controlling for parents' education level.



Still, the difficulty in understanding scores does not stop parents from being actively engaged in their children's education.

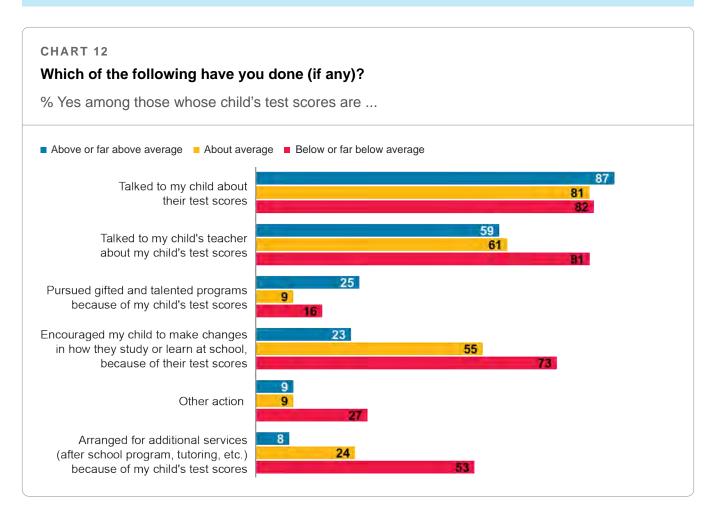
After controlling for the students' test performance (as reported by parents), parents who have difficulty understanding test scores are often more likely than other parents to pursue educational interventions.

For example, among those with average-scoring students, 37% of parents who find it difficult to understand test scores arranged for additional services (after school programs, tutoring, etc.), compared with 21% of those who find it easy to understand the scores.

^{8 &}quot;Median income and above" is defined as any parent who selected "\$65,500 to \$99,999" or a higher category as their annual household income. The 2021 American Community Survey five-year estimate for median household income in North Dakota was \$68,131.

Information is power for parents who want to support their child academically.

Overall, parents who know their child is scoring below average are the most likely to talk to their child's teacher and to pursue other educational interventions. This result is another indication of parents' determination to support their child's education when the need arises. However, some parents might not be aware of the need or might underestimate the need. As previously reported, 13% of parents say they think their child performed below average on the most recent standardized test, but the 2021-22 NDSA results indicate about 58% of students are scoring in the "novice" or "partially proficient" categories. These categories correspond to below-grade-level performance, although parents may not fully understand the labels. Or, since the 50th percentile (average) of performance still falls below grade level, it's possible that parents might recognize their child is performing about average and therefore not see a need to help them achieve grade-level performance. Finally, it's also possible that children who are behind but catching up are described as "on track" by their parents. In general, if parents are more likely to pursue educational interventions based on their perception of low test scores, it's important for parents to have an accurate understanding of their child's performance.



Overall, most parents (79%) talk to their child about their test score, and about six in 10 (59%) have talked to their child's teacher about the test score. About three-fourths (76%) of parents say they talk with their child about homework at least once a week; this is true for parents with children of all ages, from elementary to high school.

COMMUNICATION COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

Parents who find it difficult to understand their child's test score are also less likely to believe they are receiving quality communication from their child's school. Of parents who find it difficult to understand the score, 64% say the quality of communication from their child's school is excellent or good, compared with 87% of parents who find it easy to understand the score.

CHART 13 How would you describe the quality of communication you receive from your child's school? How easy or difficult was it to understand the results of your child's most recent standardized test? Easy or Difficult or Don't know/ very easy very difficult Not sure 31 **Excellent** 38 Quality of communication from school Good 49 46 47 11 12 Fair 28 2 8 **Poor** Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

3. Optimizing the School Environment

A majority of parents (87%) are satisfied with the quality of education provided by their child's school. However, perceptions differ by race/ethnicity. Eighty-eight percent of White parents are satisfied or very satisfied, compared with 77% of Native American parents. The study included too few parents of other racial backgrounds to make statistical comparisons between other individual racial and ethnic groups.

Parents overwhelmingly report positive opinions when it comes to their child's school environment:



84%

say their child's school **provides students with the knowledge and skills they need** to be successful.



82%

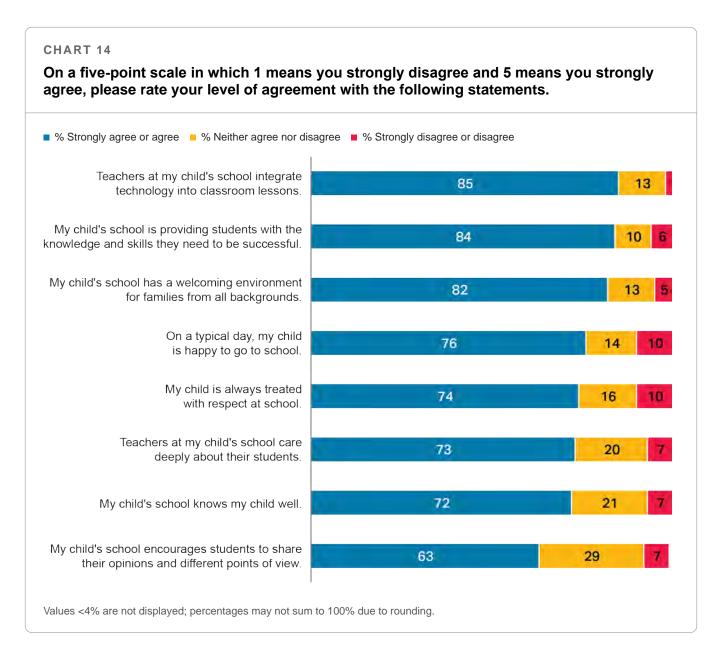
report the school is a **welcoming environment** for families from all backgrounds.



76%

say that on a typical day, their child is happy to go to school.





About one in 10 parents disagree that their child is happy to go to school or disagree that their child is respected at school. Bullying and harassment may play a role: Parents who disagree or are neutral when asked if their child is respected at school are about four times more likely than others to say their child is often a victim of bullying or harassment (24% vs. 6%).

Safety is a major component of the school experience. Eighty-five percent of parents agree or strongly agree their child's school is committed to keeping students safe; this is true for families of all racial/ethnic backgrounds where statistical comparisons were possible. Yet, nearly half (47%) still worry about their child's safety at school "often" or "sometimes." A little more than one-third (37%) also report that their child is the victim of bullying or harassment at school often or sometimes.

Native American and Indigenous parents worry often about their child's safety at school at twice the rate of White parents (24% vs. 12%, respectively). The study included too few parents of other racial backgrounds to make statistical comparisons between other individual racial/ethnic groups.

Technology Access at School

Parents report high rates of technology access at their child's school:



85%

say teachers integrate technology into lessons at school.



81%

say their **child's school has a computer or tablet** for each child (13% say they don't know).



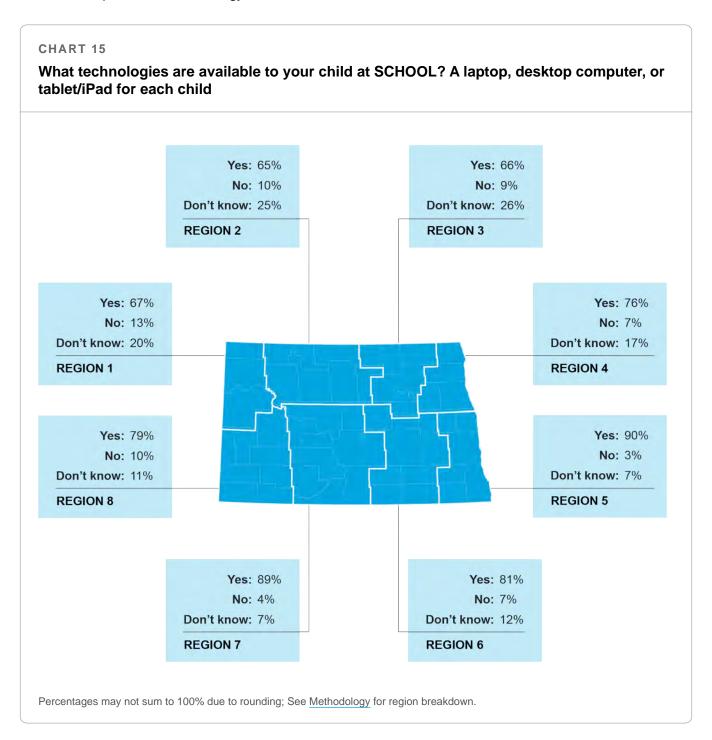
56%

say there are **smart boards in most or all classrooms** (38% say they don't know).



Parents in households earning above the North Dakota median income are somewhat more likely than parents earning below the median income to say their child's school has at least one computer in each classroom (83% vs. 78%). The prevalence of technology does not differ significantly by parents' racial background, where comparisons are possible.

Some differences in technology access at school exist by region, although many parents simply don't know if their child's school provides the technology.



Conclusion

North Dakota parents are feeling good about their local schools — parents report high rates of satisfaction with the quality of education, a welcoming environment for families of all backgrounds and confidence in the school to keep students safe and provide their child with the knowledge and skills they need for success.

Some of the most noteworthy results show up in families' experiences with understanding and acting on their child's test scores. Across the board, parents take a variety of actions based on their child's scores. However, parents who think their child has scored below average are the most likely to arrange additional academic services or encourage their child to make changes in how they study. And, even though one in five parents have difficulty understanding their child's test scores on a recent standardized test, the parents who have the most difficulty are also the most likely to seek out additional academic services. This demonstrates that North Dakota families are responsive to the educational needs of their children and want to take action when their child needs it.

Some parents may simply not be aware of the need. In this study, 13% of parents say they think their child performed below average on the most recent standardized test, compared to 2021-22 North Dakota State Assessment (NDSA) results that show about 58% of students are scoring in the novice or partially proficient categories. More data may be helpful to wholly understand parents' perceptions, as there are many ways to track students' progress, and North Dakota schools use a variety of formative and summative assessments. Indeed, it is not recommended to use only the NDSA as a measure of how a student is performing, as homework, attendance, teacher comments and other types of evaluation are also beneficial. However, evidence suggests that helping more parents understand their child's scores might also empower them to support their child academically when it's needed.

When it comes to providing parents with the information they need, classroom teachers likely play a critical role. Results show that teachers are a primary touch point for engaging with families, as 92% of families already communicate with their child's teacher at least several times a year, and 84% of parents see them at parent-teacher conferences. Furthermore, this relationship is often a positive one — 90% of parents say their child's teacher is mostly or always responsive to their concerns. Family-school communication might also play a role, as parents who find the test results difficult to understand are also less likely to say they receive good or excellent communication from the school.

Overall, North Dakota public schools have a strong foundation with families, built on open lines of communication, responsive school staff and confidence in educational quality. As schools and families work together to build on that foundation, parents' voices will be crucial to help aim development and to best engage every student and family.



Methodology

Data for this report were collected via mail surveys from Feb. 6-March 23, 2023. Gallup sent mail surveys to a random selection of adults in North Dakota. Two reminder postcards were sent at one-week intervals following the initial survey packet. To reach the right people and collect sufficient responses from each region, additional surveys were sent to regions with lower populations and to households that were more likely to have parents. Gallup surveyed 2,938 adults overall, each of whom is a self-reported parent or guardian with a child in a North Dakota K-12 public school.

The margin of error (MOE) for selected subgroups is listed below. The MOE is a measure of precision: For each subgroup, there is a 95% chance that the estimate is within +/- the adjusted MOE. For example, 74% of families overall report that family engagement is encouraged at their child's school. With a MOE of 3.3%, there is reasonable certainty (a 95% chance) that the true estimate is between 70.7% and 77.3%.

Other than White parents and Native American and Indigenous parents, there were not sufficient group sizes to report by individual racial/ethnic groups. In addition to the racial/ethnic groups listed below, there were 60 Hispanic parent respondents, 48 Asian parents, 40 Black parents and five who selected "other." For this study, Gallup's standard required a sample size of at least 100 in order to report.

Category	Sample Size	Design Effect	Adjusted MOE
Overall	2,938	3.4	3.3%
White parents	2,600	3.6	3.7%
Native American and Indigenous parents	185	2.0	10.2%
Region 1	151	3.4	14.6%
Region 2	295	3.0	9.9%
Region 3	241	2.9	10.7%
Region 4	302	3.3	10.3%
Region 5	825	3.4	6.3%
Region 6	267	3.5	11.2%
Region 7	655	3.4	7.0%
Region 8	202	2.9	11.7%

REGION BREAKDOWN

Region Number	County
Region 1	Divide
	Williams
	McKenzie
	Burke
	Renville
	Bottineau
Region 2	Mountrail
	Ward
	McHenry
	Pierce
	Eddy
Region 3	Ramsey
	Cavalier
	Towner
	Benson
	Rollette
Region 4	Nelson
	Grand Forks
	Walsh
	Pembina
Region 5	Sargent
	Richland
	Ransom
	Cass
	Steele
	Traill

Region Number	County
Region 6	Wells
	Foster
	Stutsman
	Logan
	McIntosh
	Lamoure
	Dickey
	McLean
	Sheridan
	Mercier
	Oliver
Pagian 7	Burleigh
Region 7	Kidder
	Morton
	Grant
	Sioux
	Emmons
Region 8	Golden Valley
	Billings
	Dunn
	Stark
	Slope
	Hettinger
	Bowman
	Adams



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