

How to Sell SEL:

Parents and the Politics of Social-Emotional Learning



By Adam Tyner

Foreword by Amber M. Northern and Michael J. Petrilli



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Foreword and Executive Summary

By Amber M. Northern and Michael J. Petrilli

America's hardnosed focus on academic achievement in recent decades has not improved schools nearly enough. Part of the recent move to incorporate other educational goals, such as perseverance and self-discipline—often under the banner of “social-emotional learning” (SEL)—is a response to our schools and students still being off-track two decades after passage of No Child Left Behind and almost four decades after *A Nation at Risk*. Some of the fervor around SEL also stems from longstanding beliefs about teaching the “whole child” and the obligation of schools to develop well-rounded individuals and good citizens. Indeed, much of SEL—such as the expectation that students learn to practice self-control, navigate social situations, and empathize with others—is as old as education itself.

The mental-health challenges imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic have also deepened the need to better support students' social and emotional needs as they acquire cognitive skills and knowledge.

Yet some worry that a focus on SEL will take precious time and attention away from academics, which also took a hit from the pandemic. And the SEL terminology itself is nebulous, jargony, and off-putting to parents who want schools to focus on the three R's or who worry that it might be code for liberal indoctrination.

If the “Common Core wars” taught us anything, it's that mishandling communication about education reforms can derail good intentions.

We wanted to gain greater clarity on what parents of K-12 school children think about SEL, how they understand it, whether they see it as more help or hindrance, and whether they have any concerns about its implementation. Understanding where parents agree or disagree and how their perspectives might split based on their racial, political, and religious backgrounds can help those on the ground to implement SEL in ways that reaffirm familial preferences, values, and priorities.

So we partnered with YouGov, a global public-opinion firm, to develop and field a nationally representative survey of 2,000 parents. Fordham's associate director of research Adam Tyner willingly served not only as author of the report but also data analyst and project manager.

The report is chockablock with notable insights and compelling data. We encourage you to [click through them](#) and see for yourself. For those in a hurry to get to the bottom line, however, here are our five key findings:

- 1. There is broad support among parents for teaching SEL-related skills in schools, although the term “social and emotional learning” is relatively unpopular.**
- 2. Democratic parents favor schools allocating additional resources to SEL more than Republican parents do. They're also more comfortable with the terminology.**

- 3. Across the political spectrum, parents regard families as the most important entities for cultivating SEL, yet there are partisan differences regarding how and where to emphasize SEL instruction.**
- 4. Republicans are somewhat more wary than Democrats that SEL might divert schools away from academics or conflict with their own values.**
- 5. Differences by parents' race, class, and religion are rarely as pronounced as differences by political affiliation.**

Based on those results, Tyner distills four policy implications, including recommending that SEL proponents focus on specifics rather than nebulous concepts. Faced with specifics such as schools teaching sensitivity to different cultures, parents get it and express approval, but abstract phrasing loses a lot of them. In addition, parents of all political stripes support indirect approaches to imparting the lessons of SEL, such as having teachers model common decency and common sense for their students.

The biggest takeaway? This is a good news story (and we're desperately in need of those)! The vast majority of parents want their children to acquire social and emotional skills and think that schools have a role in making that happen, even as they recognize the key role that they and other family members play. Parents are also mindful of tensions if SEL gets pitted against academics—so let's not do that! Because while parents agree overall that there is often not enough time in the day to teach both academics and SEL, that does not deter them from wholeheartedly supporting that schools teach all the SEL-related skills included in our survey.

But here's a cautionary flag: Republican parents especially hate the term "social and emotional learning." The preferred term for parents of both parties? "Life skills." Yep, that's right. We're well aware that verbiage may elicit eye rolls, but we'd be wise to pay attention.

So, to answer our report's title, how do you sell SEL to parents? Discuss it concretely, honor the role of families in its development, and—whatever you do—do *not* call it social and emotional learning.

Introduction

Whether a response to lackluster academic gains in our nation's schools or longstanding beliefs about the wider purposes of schooling, social and emotional learning (SEL) has gained a massive following in education circles. Further, the mental health challenges imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic have strengthened the demand that schools do more to support students' social and emotional needs. Yet as educators embrace SEL as an essential part of a child's education, we know too little about how parents view it and the extent to which its terminology can be nebulous, obscure, and off-putting to some, particularly to parents who want schools to stick to basic academics.

To better understand parents' take on SEL and to explore possible pitfalls in communicating with them about SEL and its place in schools, we commissioned this nationally representative poll of 2,000 parents of children in grades K-12. Although it finds that parents overwhelmingly support the essence of SEL and recognize its rightful place in America's schools, some differences of opinion break along partisan lines. It also reveals genuine challenges in getting the terminology right. Ultimately, results from the survey can help educators, policymakers, and philanthropists gain parental support for their efforts.

Methods

To gain a fuller understanding of parents' perspectives and opinions on SEL, the importance they assign (or not) to different aspects of it, and how they think their child's school is handling it, the Fordham Institute teamed up with YouGov to design and conduct this survey. It digs deeper into parent opinions on SEL than previous efforts and incorporates parental views on different domains of SEL (including cognitive, emotional, social, values, perspectives, and identity),¹ as well as related topics such as school discipline reform, grading policies, and character education. We also asked parents to select their highest and lowest priorities among a group of academic subjects, skills, and values.² Importantly, this nationally representative survey of 2,000 parents of students in grades K-12 enables comparisons of the viewpoints of parents of different backgrounds and political affiliations. Verbatim quotes from parents in the open-ended survey questions appear throughout the report for context. For more, see *About the Survey*.

Background

As the focus on SEL has increased—due in part to mental health challenges wrought by the Covid-19 pandemic—few studies have investigated how families are interpreting these changes, beyond polling them with a few isolated questions. A 2019 survey conducted by *Education Next*, for example, asked parents how much schools “should focus on student academic performance versus student social and emotional learning,” with 60 percent favoring a focus on the former versus 38 percent on the latter.³ On the other hand, a recent poll by *Phi Delta Kappan* found that most parents (78 percent) think schools should teach values as well as factual information.^{4,5} A 2018 survey conducted by Learning Heroes found that parents are more likely to view home as the place where these skills are “taught” and schools as the place where they are “reinforced.”⁶ And an international survey of parents published earlier in 2021 found that parents in some communities emphasized academics and job skills, while those in other communities put more emphasis on “self-knowledge, find[ing] their personal sense of purpose, and better understand[ing] their values.”

Parents' opinions of SEL are likely shaped by how their child's school approaches it (or doesn't). Recent surveys of educators have highlighted inconsistencies in the implementation of SEL programs. A 2017 survey reported that just one in four school administrators says that SEL is a major focus at their school, and most say the lack of teacher training is their biggest barrier.⁷ Surveys of teachers report that they often lack the time to devote to learning about and teaching SEL to their students.⁸ Identifying how support for different types of SEL varies among different groups of parents should inform more effective approaches going forward. Hence, this survey.

Findings

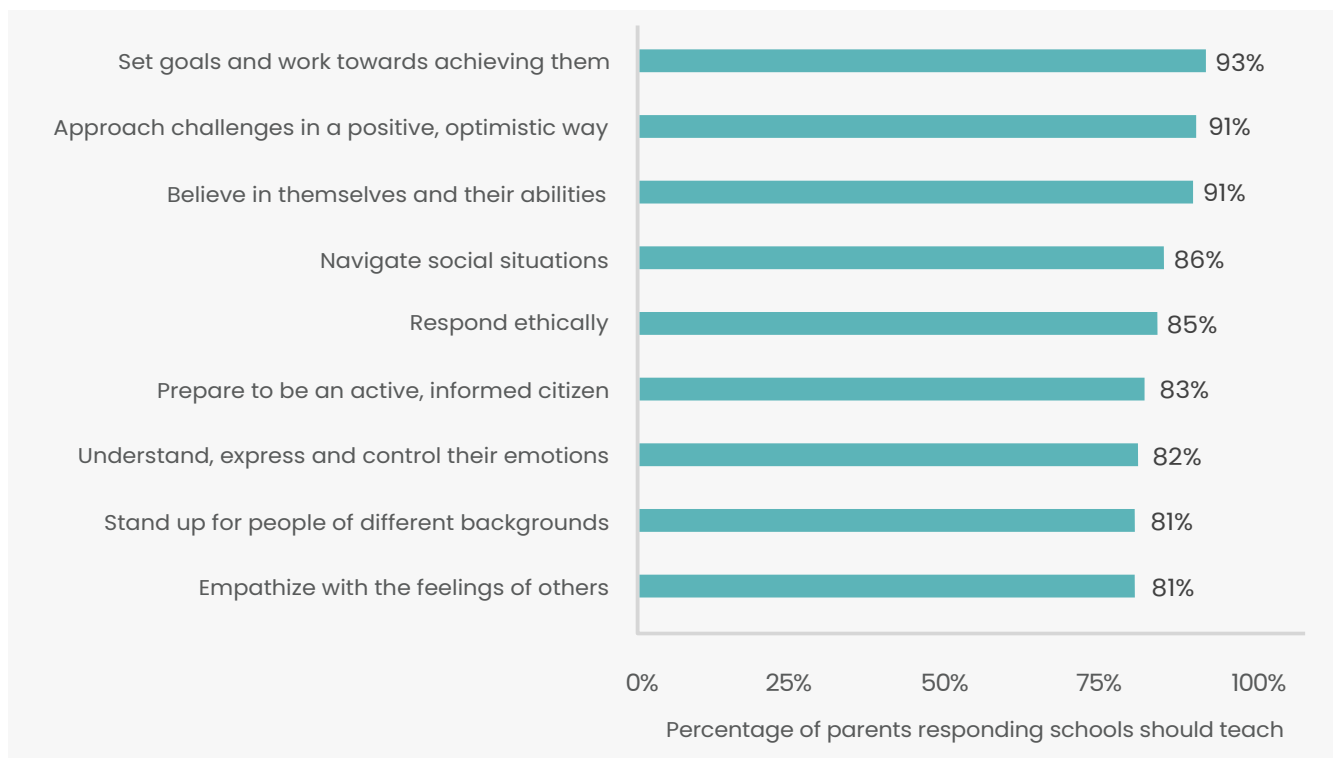
Support for the idea but not the label

Finding #1: There is broad support among parents for teaching SEL-related skills in schools, although the term “social and emotional learning” is relatively unpopular.

Parents agree that schools should be teaching specific SEL-related skills, such as goal setting and understanding people from different backgrounds. Yet they respond less favorably to abstract concepts and terms, including those that directly incorporate the words “social and emotional learning.”

1A. Regardless of background or politics, large majorities support schools teaching SEL skills, agree on the importance of many SEL-related concerns, and believe that schools should be doing at least as much as they currently are doing in the SEL realm.

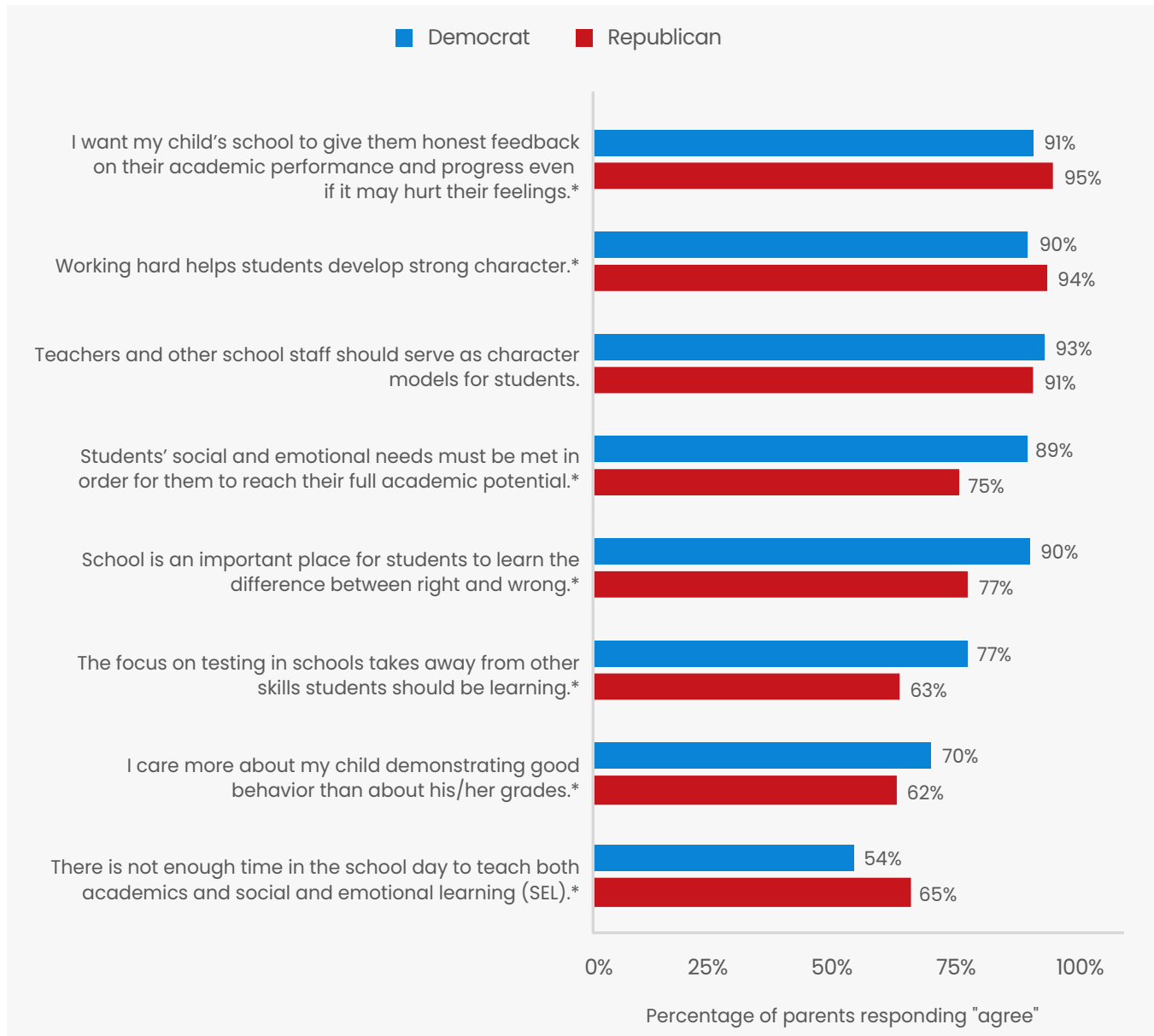
Figure 1. Large majorities of parents support schools teaching all nine SEL-related skills that the survey asked about.



Note: For the full text of the survey item, see *About the Survey*. Responses are ordered from most to least support for teaching the respective SEL skill in schools. *N* = 2,000.

Figure 1 shows that all nine SEL-related skills garner support from more than three-fourths of parents. For some skills, support is nearly unanimous: more than 90 percent support schools teaching their children to set goals, approach challenges in an optimistic way, and believe in themselves and their abilities. Breaking out results by race, class, political party, and religiosity shows that no group displays less than two-thirds support for schools teaching any of the nine SEL skills in the survey (not shown).

Figure 2. There is broad agreement among parents about a number of SEL-related issues.



Note: For the full text of the survey item, see *About the Survey*. Asterisks indicate that the difference between Democratic and Republican respondents is statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. "Agree" includes the responses "somewhat agree" and "strongly agree." Statements are ordered from most to least overall support. $N = 778$ for Democrats; $N = 451$ for Republicans.

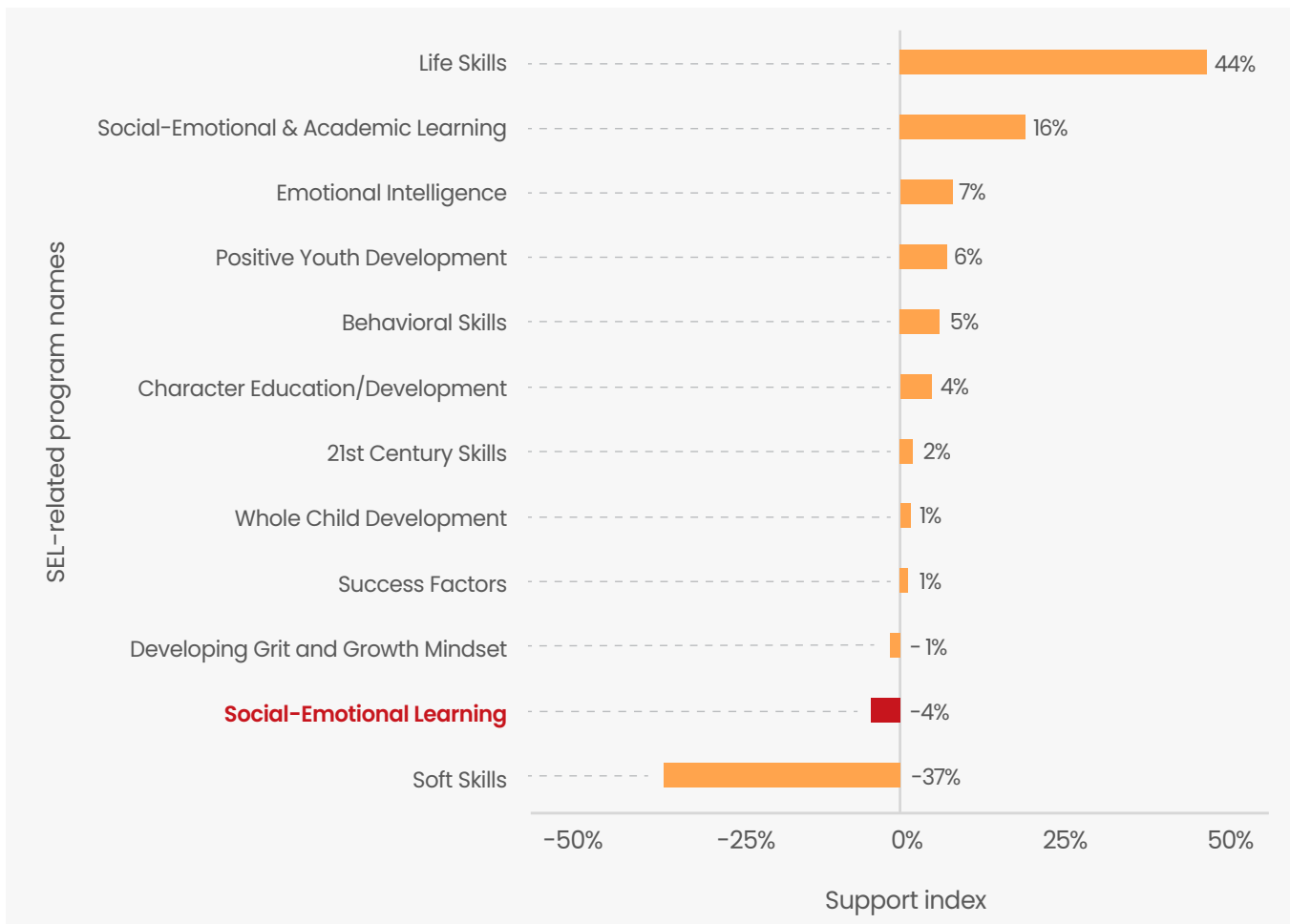
As we see in Figure 2, large majorities of parents of all backgrounds and politics also agree on a range of SEL-related issues. The biggest differences are generally by political party, but whether Democrat or Republican, there is near unanimity that students need honest feedback even if it might hurt their feelings, that working hard helps students develop character, that teachers and other school staff should serve as character models, that students' social and emotional needs must be met in order for them to reach their academic potential, and that school is an important place for learning right from wrong. Although less overwhelming, there is also wide agreement that testing detracts from other skills that students should be learning and that behavior is more important than grades.

This does not, however, mean that parents want schools to make SEL the top priority. Figure 2 also shows that majorities of parents of both parties agree that there isn't enough time in the school day to teach both academics and SEL, although this concern is more prevalent among Republican parents (65 percent) than Democratic parents (54 percent).

1B. Even as many specific elements of SEL garner broad support, the term “social-emotional learning” itself is less popular.

Although there is broad support for schools teaching SEL-related skills and agreement on many issues regarding what SEL should consist of in schools, skepticism surfaces in a number of places regarding the term “social and emotional learning” itself. Figure 3 shows how parents respond to various SEL-related or SEL-adjacent school programs.⁹ The strongest support is for a program called

Figure 3. Parents respond most positively to “Life Skills” and most negatively to “Soft Skills,” while “Social-Emotional Learning” ranks second to worst.

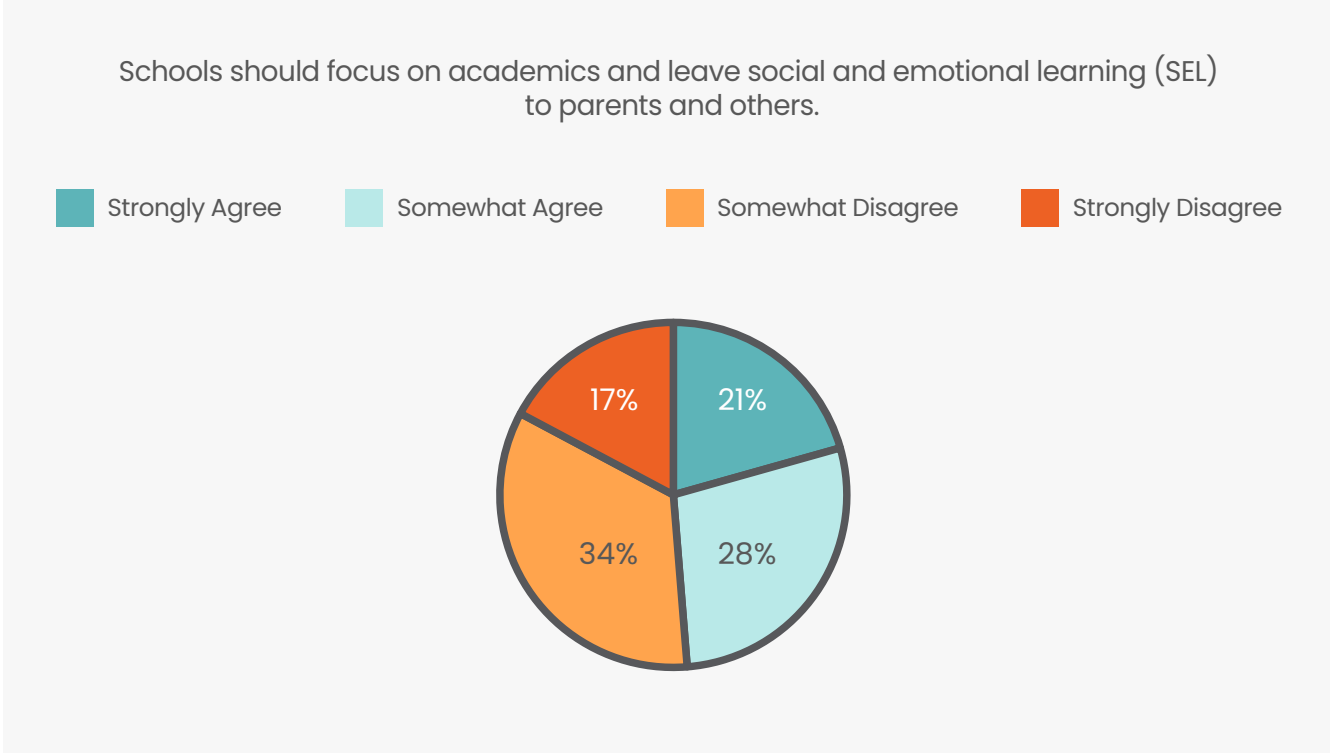


Note: The “support index” represents the percentage of respondents who indicate that the program is one they would most want their child enrolled in, minus the percentage responding it is one they would least want their child enrolled in. For the full text of the survey item, see *About the Survey*. Responses are ordered from greatest to least overall support. N = 2,000.

“Life Skills.” Second strongest—though lagging by a wide margin—is “Social-Emotional & Academic Learning.” But the term “Social-Emotional Learning”—without the addition of “Academic”—garners the second-lowest amount of support of any of the program labels we included.

When asked a question that frames the work of schools as a tradeoff between SEL and academics, about half of parents (49 percent) agree with the statement that “schools should focus on academics and leave social and emotional learning (SEL) to parents and others.” One parent in five agrees strongly with that statement (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Parents are split regarding the extent to which schools should focus on SEL.



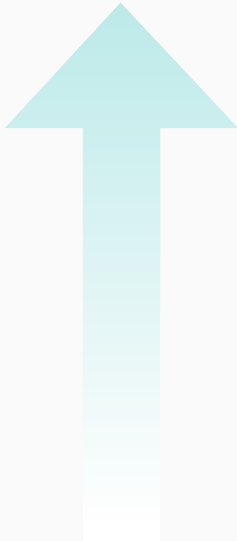
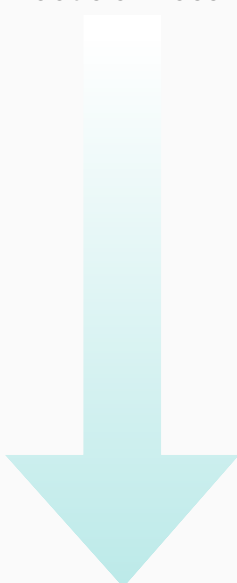
Note: For the full text of the survey item, see *About the Survey*. N = 2,000

1C. Parents most want their child’s school to focus on a mix of core academic subjects and SEL-related skills.

Although the responses in Figure 4 suggest that many parents are skeptical that schools are the appropriate venue for SEL, perhaps the “either-or” question orientation encourages a negative response. To better understand how parents view such potential tradeoffs, we gave them a series of exercises that asked them to rate thirty-two various skills, values, and subject areas that they wanted their child’s school to focus on most and least (for more about this “MaxDiff” exercise, see *About the Survey*).

Parents mostly favor core academic subjects and a few SEL-related skills. Specifically, they most value the skill of “reasoning and problem solving.” Core academic subjects including math, English/reading, science, computer science, and history, as well as career and technical education (CTE), land in the top ten. So do four SEL-related skills, namely, taking responsibility for one’s actions, communication/interpersonal skills, self-confidence, and self-motivation (Figure 5).

Figure 5. “Reasoning and Problem Solving” is the skill with the greatest support from parents.

Subject, Skill, or Value	Score	Importance
Reasoning and Problem Solving	676	
Mathematics	431	
Career, Technical and Vocational Education	361	
English/Reading Class	337	
Responsibility for Actions	301	
Communication/Interpersonal Skills	254	
Self-Confidence	230	
Science	210	
Computer Science/IT	199	
Self-Motivation	161	
Integrity	152	<p>Focus on More</p>
Respect for Authority	150	
Equality	136	
History	131	
Kindness	124	
Respect for Peers	100	
Perseverance	97	
Independent Reading/Read-Aloud Time	89	
Curiosity	89	
Teamwork	83	
Sensitivity to Other Cultures	76	<p>MEDIAN</p> <p>Focus on Less</p> 
Civics	72	
Active Citizenship	71	
Standing Up for the Less Fortunate	70	
Health Education	58	
Gratitude	56	
Courage	50	
Fairness	43	
Music Education	38	
Arts Education	38	
Foreign Language	32	
Recess/Gym Class	22	

Note: For more on this MaxDiff exercise, see *About the Survey*. SEL-related skills and values are shaded orange and academic subjects are shaded teal. Results were scaled so that the median score was equal to 100. Scores are interpretable such that “Courage,” which has a value of 50, can be considered roughly half as important to parents as the median item, “Respect for Peers,” with a value of 100. Recess/Gym is considered an SEL-related activity, as it is not academic and can promote SEL-related skills such as teamwork, cooperation, and resilience.¹⁰ N = 2,000.

When faced with choosing alternative priorities for their children’s education, parents put comparatively little emphasis on non-core academics such as recess/gym, foreign language, arts, music, and health, as well as values such as fairness, courage, and gratitude.

“[SEL is] important—but, all too often, it comes at the expense of actually learning.”
– Father of a fifth grader

Perspectives on SEL by party

Finding #2: Democratic parents are much more supportive of the term “social and emotional learning” and favor schools allocating additional resources to SEL more than Republican parents do.

Although there is support for SEL among all types of parents and some differences of opinions by parent race, class, and religion (see Finding 5), the largest and most consistent differences are by political party. In particular, Democratic parents value SEL in general—and specific ways of implementing it—more than Republican parents.

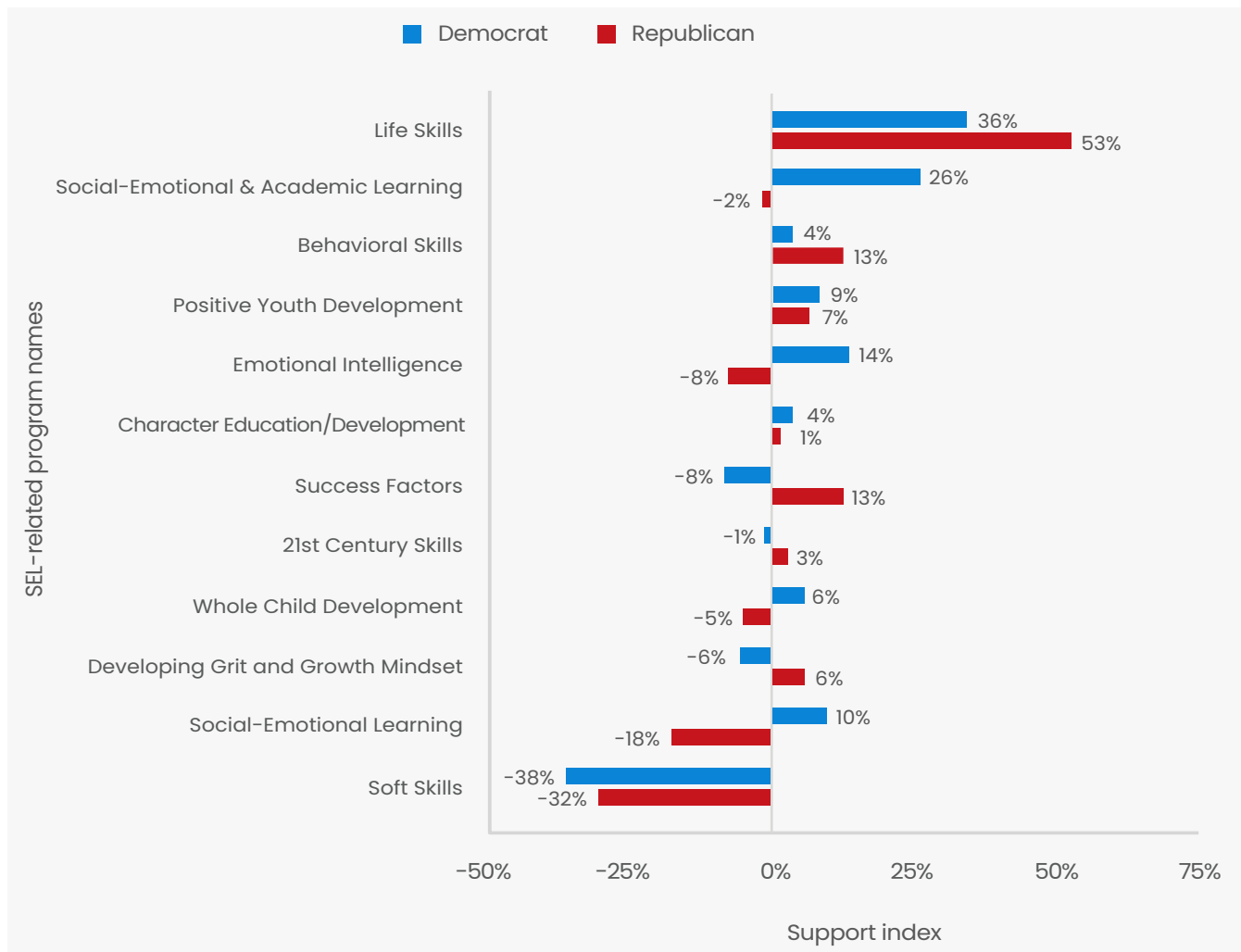
2A. Democratic parents are generally more supportive than Republican parents of the term “Social-Emotional Learning.”

We see real differences by political affiliation in the terminology that appeals to parents. Terms with SEL in the name are more preferred by Democrats. Two terms explicitly reference SEL (“Social-Emotional Learning” and “Social-Emotional and Academic Learning”), and both are ranked more negatively than positively by Republicans (Figure 6). In contrast, Democrats approve of both terms, though Democratic support for “Social-Emotional Learning” is lukewarm. More than two times the share of Republican parents (29 percent) select that same program as one they’d *least* want their child enrolled in compared to Democratic parents (13 percent).

Democratic and Republican parents are also split on the terms “Emotional Intelligence” and “Whole Child Development,” both of which are favored by Democrats, as well as “Success Factors” and “Developing Grit and Growth Mindset,” which are both favored by Republicans. “Character Education,” which some may associate with a more conservative mindset, turns out to be valued by Democrats about as much as by Republicans.

When SEL-related programs are described without the jargon, however, support soars on both sides of the aisle. The preferred term for parents of both parties was “Life Skills.” Similarly, when asked whether they agree with the statement, “Learning life skills and social skills at school is just as important as academics,” overwhelming majorities of parents of both parties agree, although Democrat agreement (92 percent) is stronger than Republican (75 percent) per Figure 11 later. Still, these terms imply different focuses of the programs, and our results—based solely on the terms alone—cannot explain why respondents view them so differently.

Figure 6. Parents rank the term “Social and Emotional Learning” second to last, with Republican parents especially turned off by it.



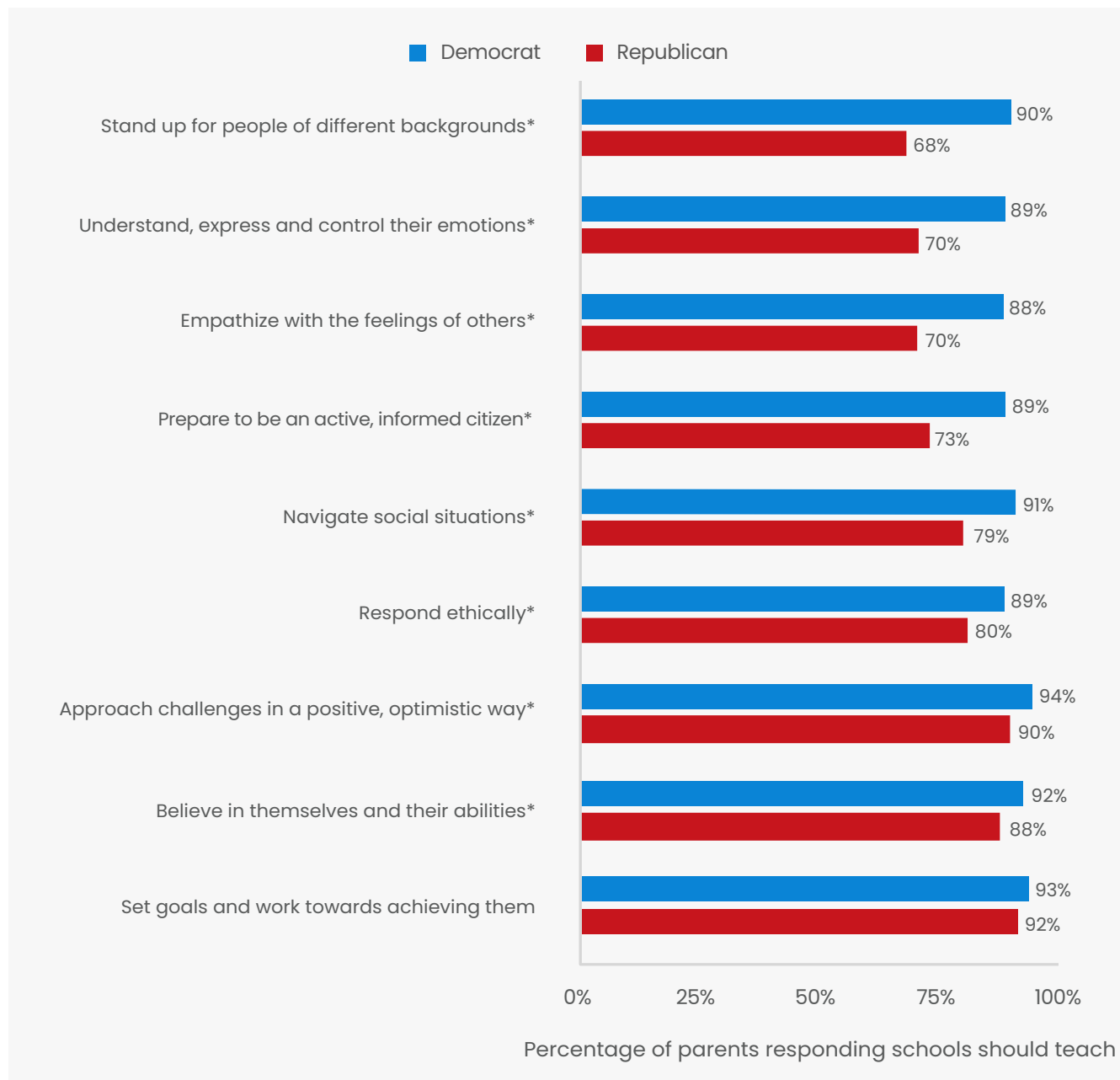
Note: The “support index” represents the percentage of respondents from each group responding that the program is one in which they would *most* want their child enrolled, minus the percentage responding that it is one in which they would *least* want their child enrolled. Responses are ordered from greatest to least overall support. For the full text of the survey item, see *About the Survey*. *N* = 778 for Democrats; *N* = 451 for Republicans.

2B. Democratic parents are more supportive than Republican parents of schools focusing on SEL-related skills.

Across the board, Democratic parents express very strong support (around 90 percent) for schools teaching various SEL-related skills and are more supportive than Republican parents of schools teaching every specific SEL-related skill included in the survey, although in one case the difference is not statistically significant (Figure 7). Yet Republican support for teaching SEL skills in schools is also strong, with more than two-thirds indicating support for “standing up for people of different backgrounds”—the least popular of these skills.

“Our country desperately needs citizens who can empathize with others, think positively, work with those different than themselves, seek common ground, problem resolve in positive ways.” – Mother of a first grader

Figure 7. Large majorities of parents support schools teaching SEL-related skills, regardless of party.




Note: Asterisks indicate that the difference between Democratic and Republican respondents is statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. Responses are ordered from the most to least divergent between parties. For the full text of the survey item, see *About the Survey*. $N = 778$ for Democrats; $N = 451$ for Republicans.

The results of the tradeoff exercise also show that Democrats value SEL more than Republicans (Table 1). Compared to Republicans, Democrats tend to prioritize SEL-related skills and values, including reasoning/problem solving, interpersonal skills, equality, sensitivity to other cultures, and active citizenship. Meanwhile, the only academic subjects that Democrats prioritize over Republicans are health education, civics, and arts education. (Per Table 2 under “SEL and Parent Values,” Republicans prioritize core academic subjects like math, English, history and science, more than Democrats.)

Table 1. Democratic parents prioritize SEL-related skills and values more than Republican parents do.

Democrats Rate Higher than Republicans
Reasoning and Problem Solving
Communication/Interpersonal Skills
Equality
Sensitivity to Other Cultures
Active Citizenship
Standing Up for the Less Fortunate
Kindness
Self-Motivation
Curiosity
Respect for Peers
Teamwork
Health Education
Civics
Arts Education
Fairness



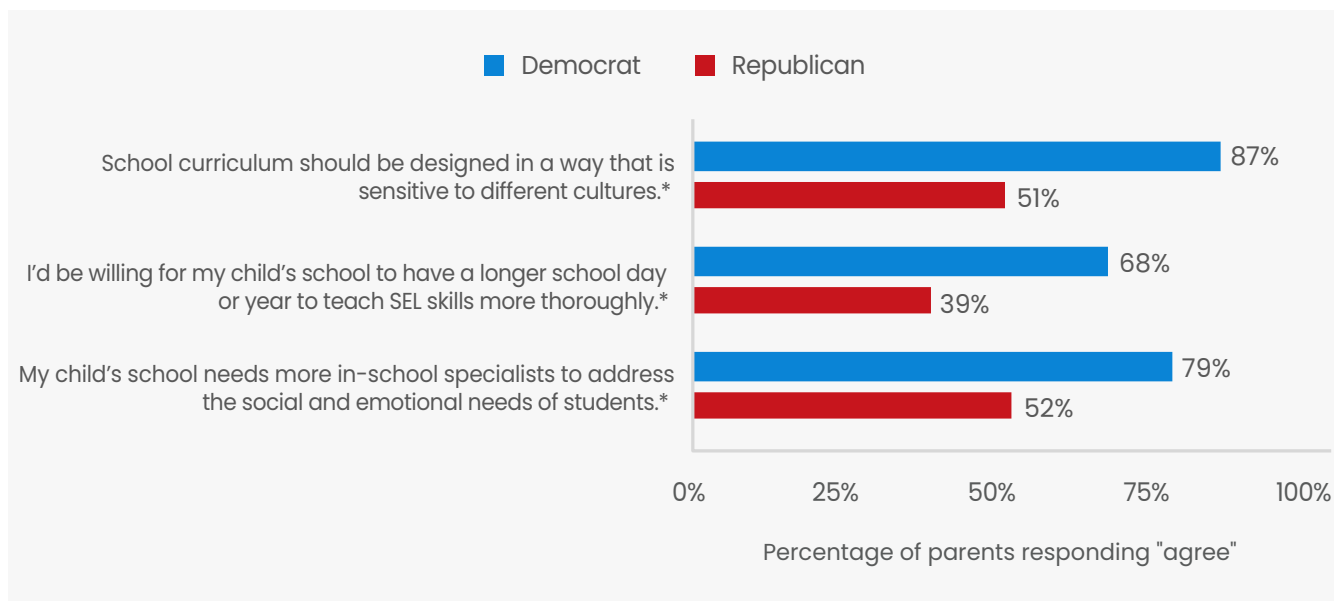
Note: Differences are statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. The list is ordered from greatest to least divergence between the parties. For the full text of the MaxDiff exercise, see *About the Survey*. $N = 778$ for Democrats; $N = 451$ for Republicans.

2C. Democratic parents favor schools allocating additional resources to SEL more than Republican parents.

Given their overall positive views of SEL, it makes sense that Democratic parents might favor more proactive efforts by schools to promote it. Specifically, Democrats are much more likely than Republicans to agree that the school day could be lengthened to make time for SEL and that their child’s school needs more specialists to address needs associated with SEL (Figure 8). Democratic parents are also more likely to agree that school curriculum should be designed in a way that is culturally sensitive, which some consider an aspect of SEL.

“Teachers aren’t therapists. Schools need more therapists and social workers.”
 – Father of a kindergartener

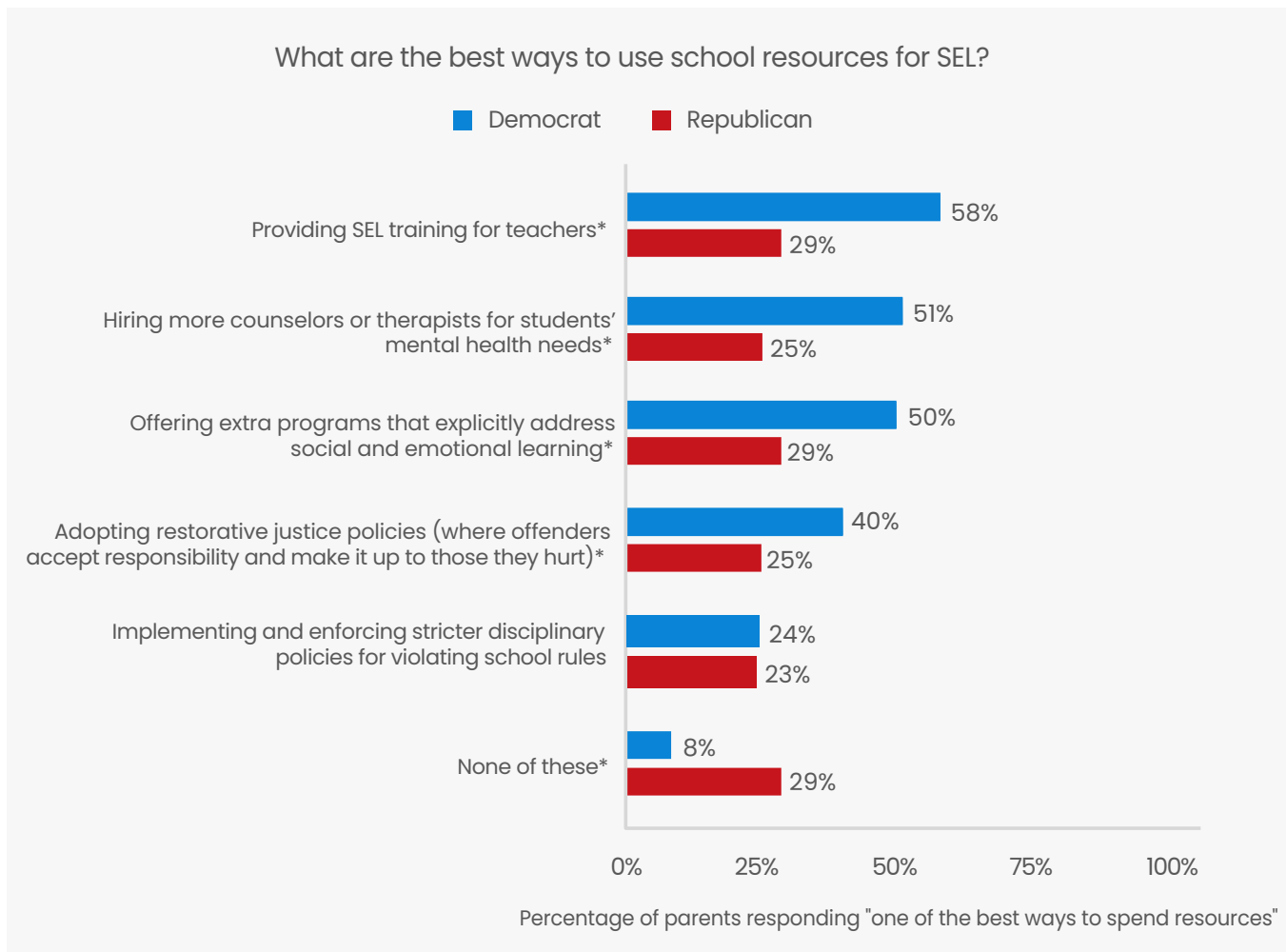
Figure 8. Democratic and Republican parents view the handling of SEL in schools quite differently, particularly when it comes to culturally sensitive curriculum and longer school days for SEL.



Note: Asterisks indicate that the difference between Democratic and Republican respondents is statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. Responses are ordered from the most to least divergent between parties. For the full text of the survey item, see *About the Survey*. $N = 778$ for Democrats; $N = 451$ for Republicans.

Likewise, when asked how schools should spend resources to strengthen SEL, 29 percent of Republican parents say they should do none of the suggestions, whereas just 8 percent of Democratic parents respond that way (Figure 9). The latter are much more positive than Republican parents when it comes to providing SEL training for teachers, hiring more counselors or therapists, offering new SEL programs, and adopting new restorative-justice policies.

Figure 9. Democratic parents are more likely to support varied uses of school resources to strengthen SEL.



Note: Asterisks indicate that the difference between Democratic and Republican respondents is statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. Responses are ordered from the most to least divergent between parties. For the full text of the survey item, see *About the Survey*. $N = 778$ for Democrats; $N = 451$ for Republicans.

The role of schools and families

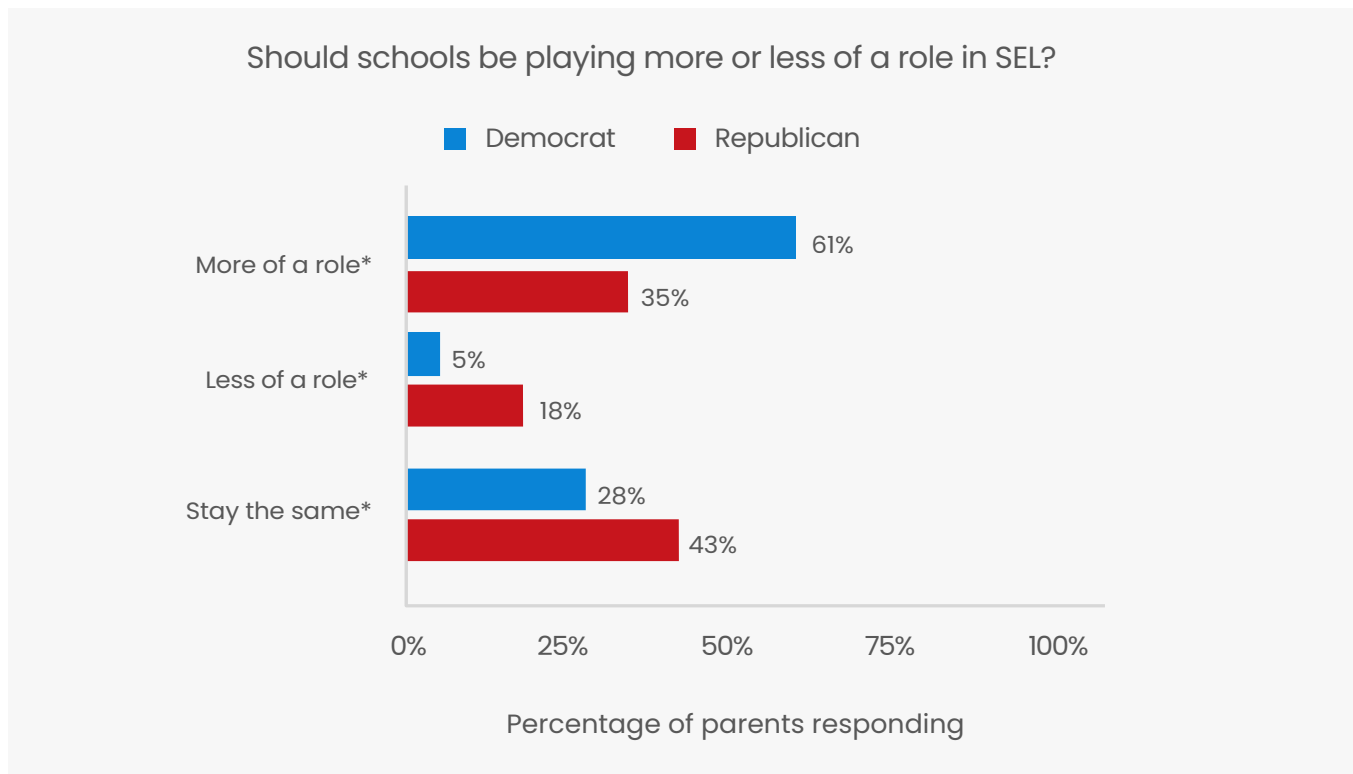
Finding #3: Across the political spectrum, parents regard families as the most important entities for cultivating SEL, yet there are partisan differences regarding how and where to emphasize SEL instruction.

Overall, parents agree that families are the most important source for instilling SEL but that school also plays an important role. Democratic parents, however, emphasize the role that teachers and formal education play more than Republican parents do. Republican parents, on the other hand, tend to prefer that SEL be addressed outside of school or through indirect approaches in school.

3A. Democratic parents think schools should be playing a larger role in the development of SEL, while Republicans tend to emphasize the role of the community.

Figure 10 shows that Democratic parents are much more likely than Republican parents (61 percent versus 35 percent) to say that schools should play a greater role than they currently do in developing SEL and considerably less likely to say they should play a smaller role (5 percent versus 18 percent). However, that does not mean that Republican parents generally oppose schools teaching SEL: More than three-fourths (78 percent) say schools should be doing about the same or even more with regard to SEL.

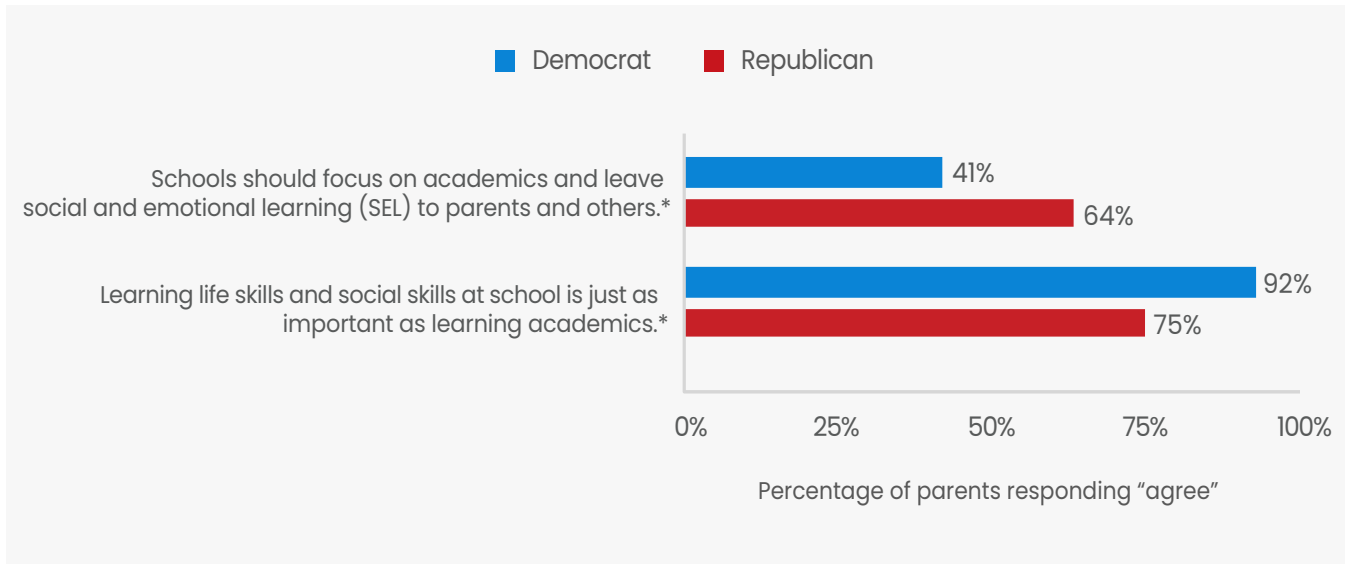
Figure 10. Democratic parents are more enthusiastic than Republican parents about schools playing a bigger role in SEL.



Note: Asterisks indicate that the difference between Democrat and Republican respondents is statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. “More of a role” includes the responses “somewhat more” and “much more of a role,” and “less of a role” includes the responses “somewhat less” and “much less of a role.” For the full text of the survey item, see *About the Survey*. $N = 778$ for Democrats; $N = 451$ for Republicans.

In contrast, Republicans, who are generally more skeptical of SEL are somewhat more likely to emphasize the role of non-school actors. Figure 11 shows that Republican parents are much more likely than Democratic parents to agree that “schools should focus on academics and leave social and emotional learning (SEL) to parents and others” (64 percent versus 41 percent). Although a large majority (75 percent) of Republican parents also agree that life skills and social skills are just as important for students to learn in school as academics, Democrats agree with this statement almost unanimously (92 percent).

Figure 11. Republicans are more likely to say SEL is best learned outside of school.

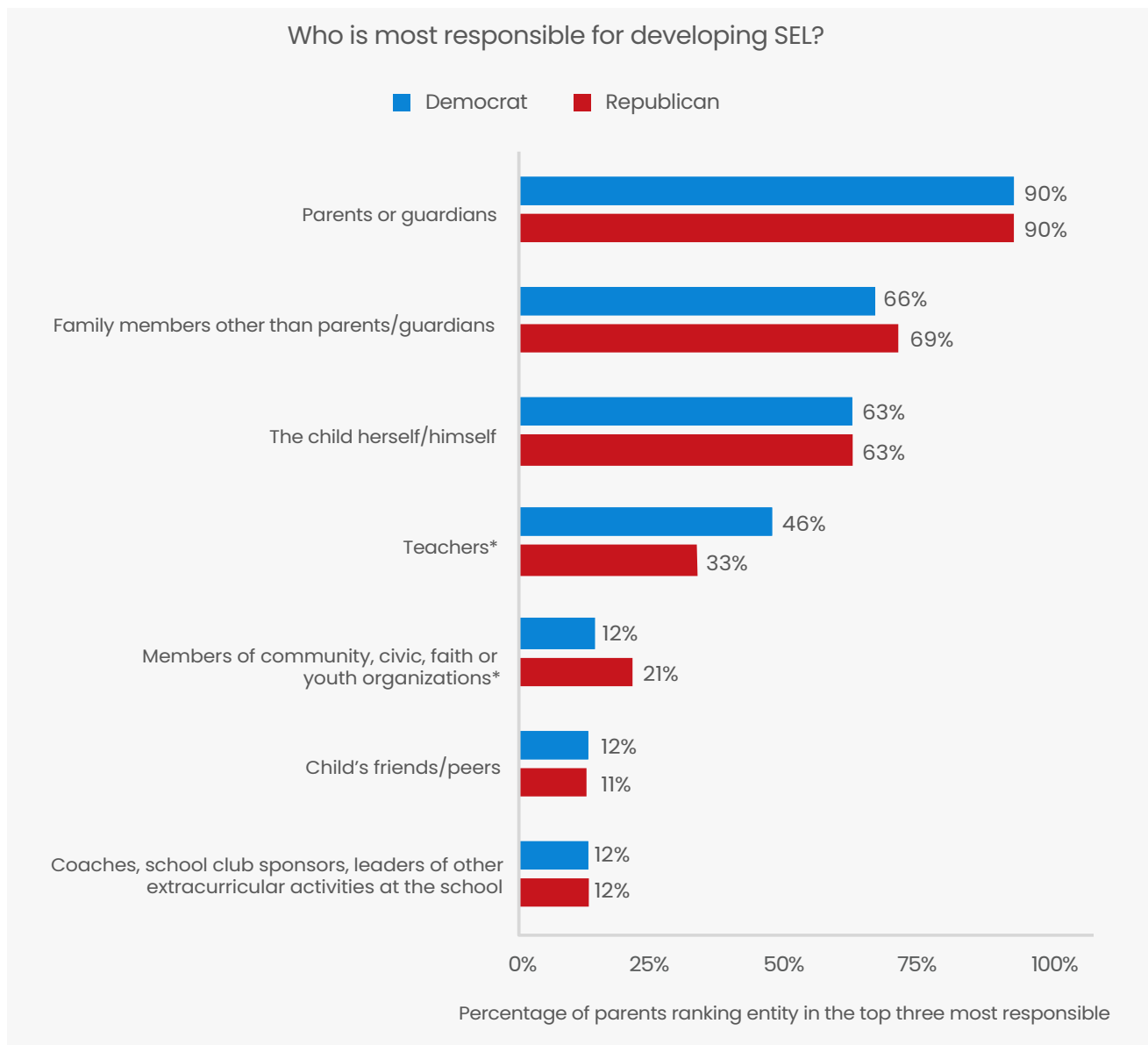


Note: Asterisks indicate that the difference between Democratic and Republican respondents is statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. "Agree" includes the responses "somewhat agree" and "strongly agree." For the full text of the survey item, see *About the Survey*. $N = 778$ for Democrats; $N = 451$ for Republicans.

When respondents are asked to consider the role of different actors in developing SEL, party differences narrow. Large majorities of both Democrats and Republicans say parents, family members, and the child herself/himself are among the most responsible for the development of SEL-related skills, and they view the lesser role of both coaches and the child's peers similarly (Figure 12). However, 46 percent of Democratic parents rate teachers in the top three, whereas just 33 percent of Republican parents do. On the other hand, 21 percent of Republican parents put members of community, civic, faith, or youth organizations in the top three, while just 12 percent of Democratic parents do.

"I wish there was more help funding wise for schools to implement SEL programs and initiatives." – Mother of a seventh grader

Figure 12. Large majorities of both Democrats and Republicans say that parents and family members are most responsible for developing SEL.



Note: Asterisks indicate that the difference between Democrat and Republican respondents is statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. The rated entities are ordered from most to least responsible based on the full sample. For the full text of the survey item, see *About the Survey*. $N = 778$ for Democrats; $N = 451$ for Republicans.

“Parents need to teach and reinforce [SEL] with their kids. Schools cannot make up for lack of parental investment.” – Mother of a second grader

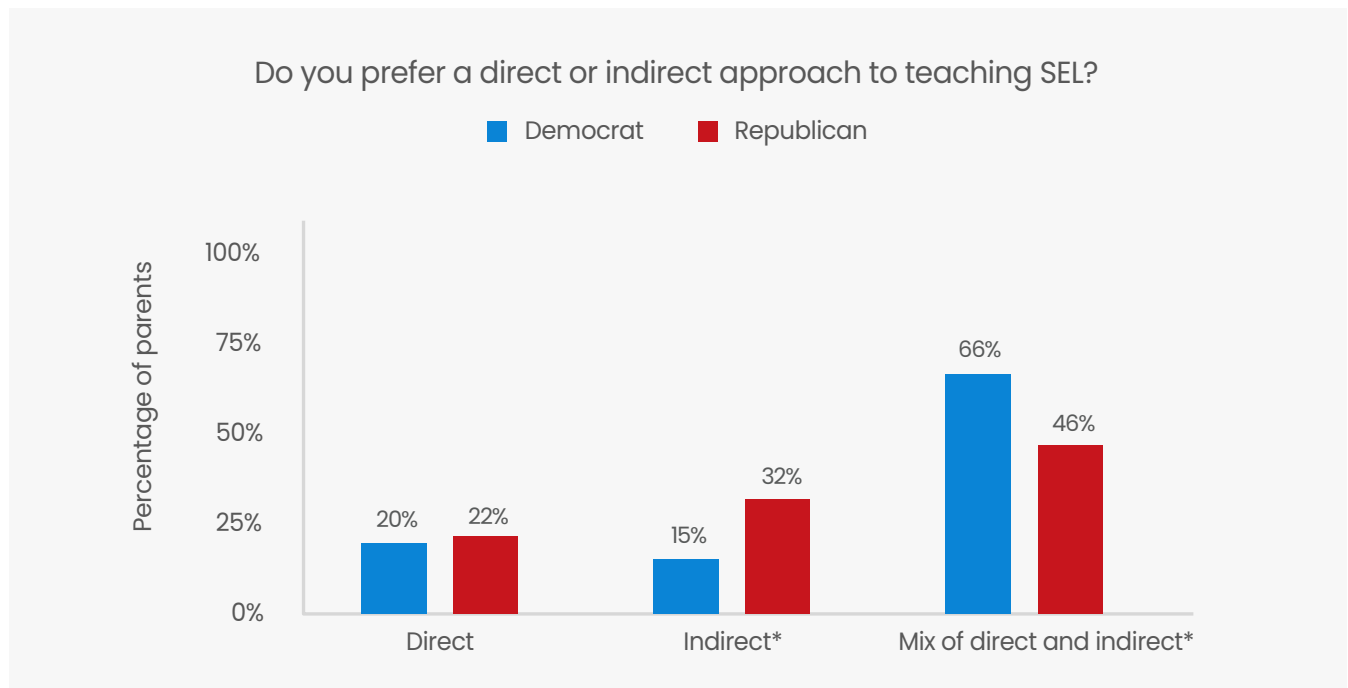
3B. Republican parents are more likely to prefer indirect approaches to teaching SEL in school than Democratic parents.

The survey asked those parents who believe schools should play a role in SEL learning their opinions about “direct” and “indirect” approaches to teaching SEL. Examples of direct approaches included “teachers teaching from a social-emotional learning curriculum” and “students participating in programs designed to cultivate social-emotional learning,” while examples of indirect approaches included “teachers taking advantage of teachable moments or serving as role models” and “students discussing challenges faced by a character in a story.”

Figure 13 shows that Republican parents are more than twice as likely as Democrats (32 percent vs. 15 percent) to respond that SEL should be taught indirectly. Still, a plurality of parents of all political stripes believe that SEL should be taught through a mix of direct and indirect methods.

More specifically, Democrats favor much more than Republicans the teaching of SEL in schools through cultural events, mindfulness and meditation, and school-wide SEL initiatives (not shown).

Figure 13: Republican parents are much more likely than Democratic parents to say that SEL should be taught indirectly.



Note: Asterisks indicate that the difference between Democrat and Republican respondents is statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. The question offered brief examples of direct (“teachers teaching from a social-emotional learning curriculum”; “students participating in programs designed to cultivate social-emotional learning”) and indirect approaches (“teachers taking advantage of teachable moments or serving as role models”; “students discussing challenges faced by a character in a story”). For the full text of the survey item, see *About the Survey*. Base includes only parents who believe schools should play a role in SEL education. Percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding. $N = 750$ for Democrats; $N = 345$ for Republicans.

“Confidence is built by doing, not by talking about how to do it.” – Father of a fifth grader

SEL and parent values

Finding #4: Republicans are somewhat more wary than Democrats that SEL might divert schools away from academics or conflict with their own values.


Republicans are more apt to prefer a vision of schools that prioritizes academics and traditional values, while Democrats prioritize typical SEL-related skills, such as communication, cultural sensitivity, and curiosity, more than their Republican counterparts.

As indicated, although majorities of all parents agreed with the statement, “There is not enough time in the day to teach both academics and social and emotional learning,” nearly two-thirds of Republicans voiced agreement, suggesting concerns that SEL may crowd out academics (see Figure 2 above).

Republican parents prioritize core academic subjects more than Democratic parents, especially when it comes to math, English, history, and science, as well as career, technical, and vocational education (Table 2). Still, Republicans prioritize two SEL-related skills more than Democrats: “respect for authority” and “responsibility for one’s actions,” both of which could be considered more traditional values. (Per Table 1 under “Perspectives on SEL by Party,” Democrats prioritize SEL-related skills and values, including reasoning/problem solving, interpersonal skills, equality, sensitivity to other cultures, and active citizenship, more than Republicans.)

Table 2. Republicans prioritize core academic subjects more than Democrats.

Republicans Rate Higher than Democrats
Mathematics
Career, Technical and Vocational Education
English/Reading
History
Respect for Authority
Responsibility for Actions
Science

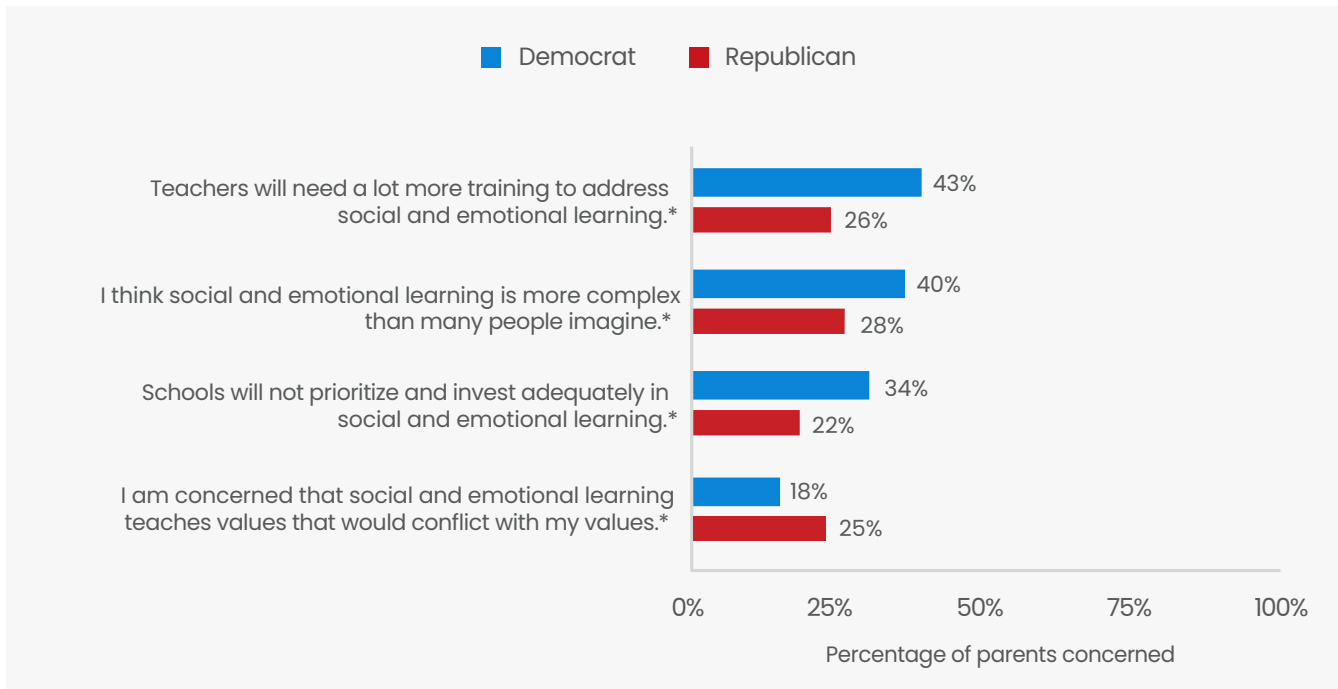


Note: Differences are statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. The list is ordered from greatest to least divergence between the parties. For the full text of the MaxDiff exercise, see *About the Survey*. $N = 778$ for Democrats; $N = 451$ for Republicans.

“Until our students are leading the world in mathematics, science, and reading skills, we don’t need to worry about fluff.” – Mother of a tenth grader

Aside from distracting from academics, Republicans are more likely to worry that SEL could promote controversial ideas or otherwise be out of step with their values. One-fourth of Republicans with concerns about SEL say that is in part because it may teach “values that conflict with my values” (Figure 14). That said, like their Democratic counterparts, Republicans express comparatively greater concern that teachers will need more training to address SEL and that it is more complex than people imagine.

Figure 14. Parents’ biggest concerns about SEL are that teachers will need more training and that SEL is more complex than many people imagine.



Note: Respondents could select multiple items. Selected responses shown. Asterisks indicate that the difference between Democratic and Republican respondents is statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. Responses are ordered from most to least divergent between parties. For the full text of the survey item, see *About the Survey*. Base includes only parents who expressed some concern about SEL. $N = 542$ for Democrats; $N = 299$ for Republicans.

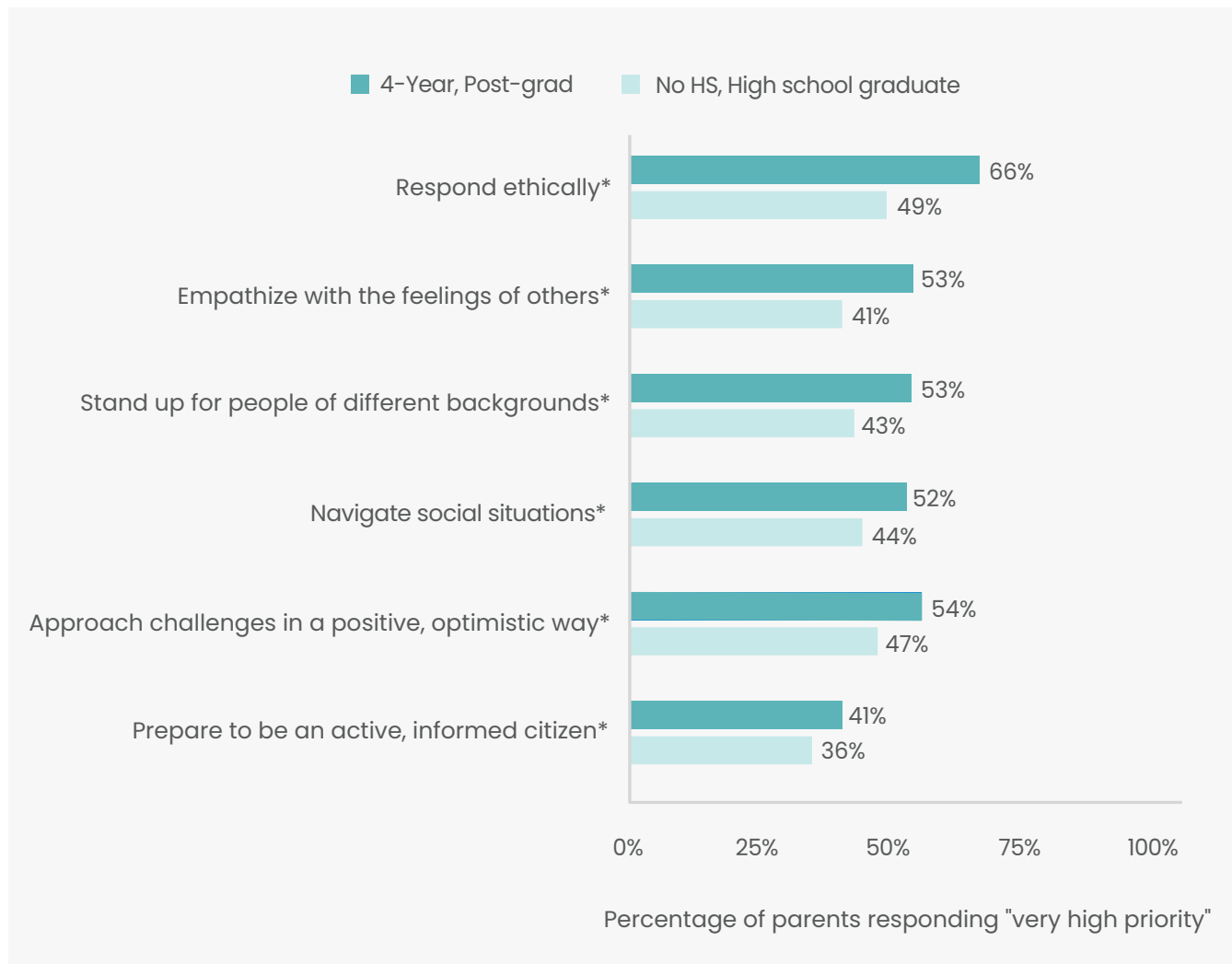
Finding #5: Differences by parents’ race, class, and religion are rarely as pronounced as differences by political affiliation.

For about half the survey questions, the divide between Democrats and Republicans is larger than the gaps among other demographic groups, but there are exceptions.

5A. Regarding the most important aspects of SEL and the best ways to teach it, education is the best predictor of how parents respond.

For example, it is a high priority of 66 percent of highly educated parents that their child “respond ethically even when it is hard to do the right thing,” compared with 49 percent of the least-educated parents (Figure 15). Smaller differences by level of parent education surface for SEL skills related to empathy, standing up for others, social skills, optimism, and citizenship. Still, large majorities of parents, regardless of education, support schools teaching all the SEL skills we asked about.

Figure 15. Compared to parents with less education, parents with more formal education rate a number of SEL skills as higher priority for their children.

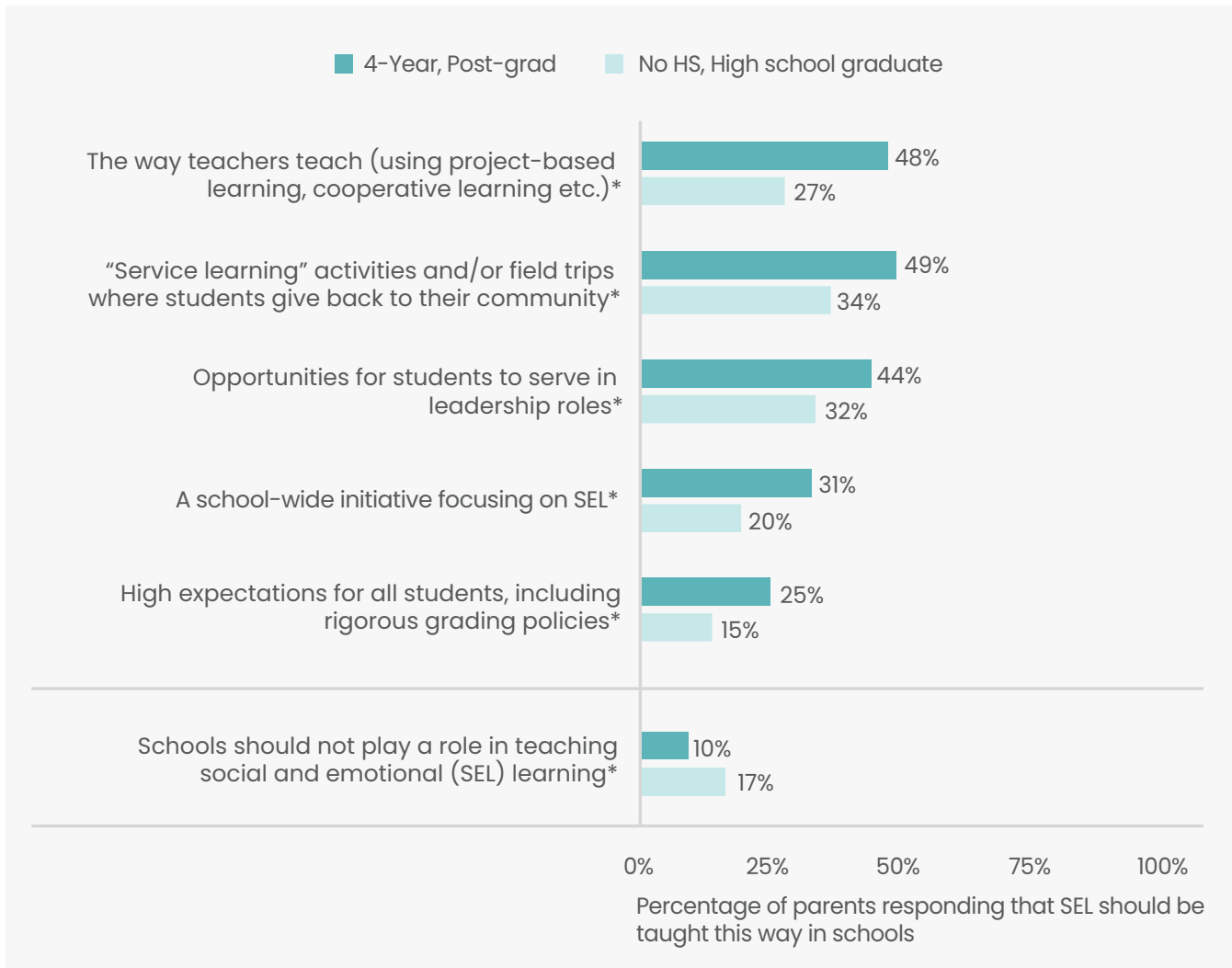


Note: Parents responding "very high priority" or "one of my highest priorities." Asterisks indicate that the difference between the most- and least-educated respondents is statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level, and only those differences are shown. Responses are ordered from most to least divergent between groups. For the full text of the survey item, see *About the Survey*. $N = 808$ for four-year degrees and post-grad; $N = 566$ for no high school and high school graduate.

Regarding how SEL should be taught in schools, more-educated parents also place somewhat higher value on the approaches mentioned in the survey, while less educated parents were slightly more likely to prefer that schools play no role in teaching SEL (Figure 16).

"Teachers will impart their own political and societal beliefs on the children. They are not to be trusted with sensitive conversations with children." – Father of a kindergartener

Figure 16. Compared to less-educated parents, more-educated parents are more likely to value particular school-level approaches to address SEL.



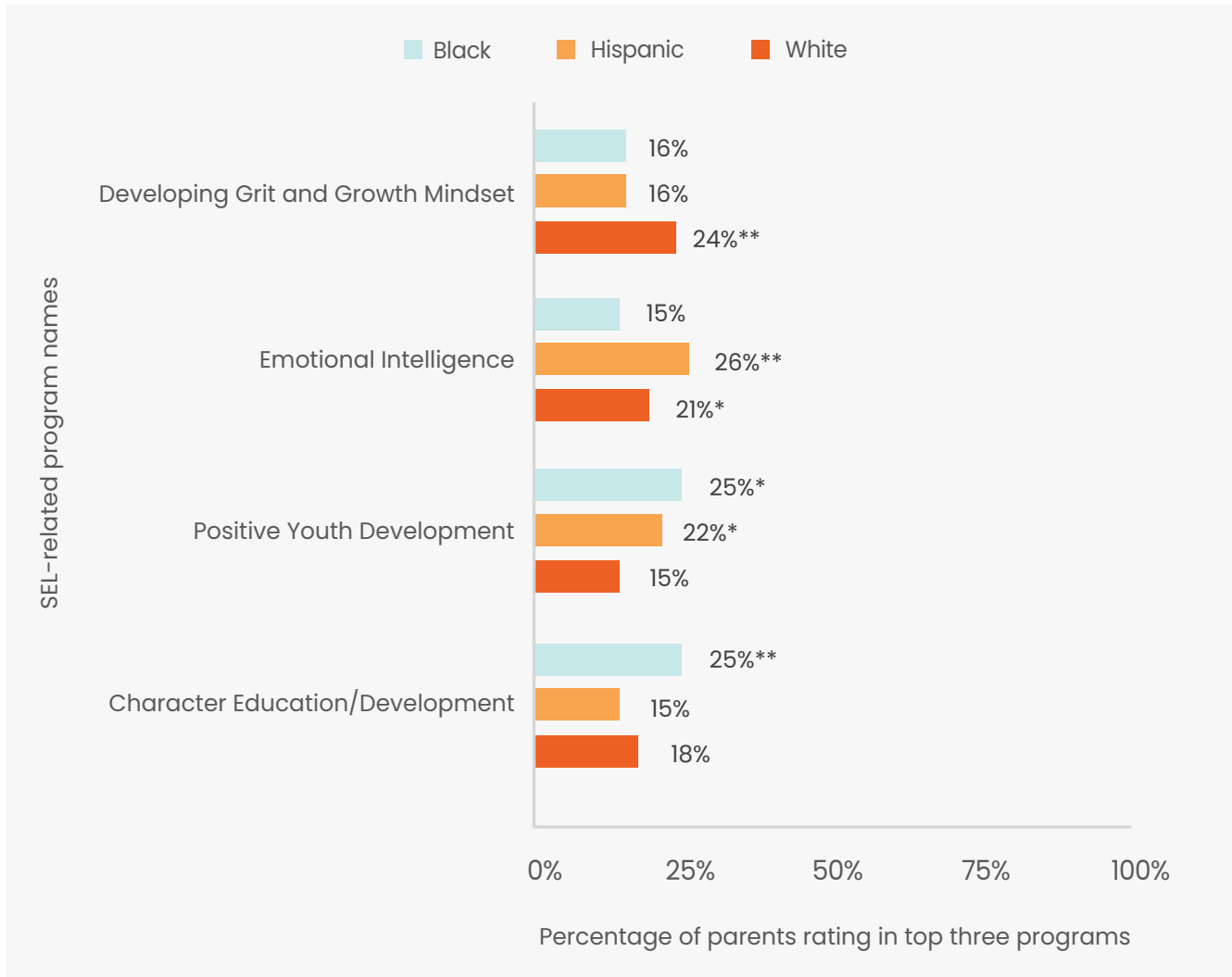
Note: Selected responses shown. Asterisks indicate that the difference between the most- and least-educated respondents is statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. Responses are ordered from most to least divergent between groups. “Agree” includes the responses “somewhat agree” and “strongly agree.” For the full text of the survey item, see *About the Survey*. $N = 808$ for four-year degree and post-grad; $N = 566$ for no high school and high school graduate.

5B. When referring to SEL-related terminology, race is a better predictor than other factors.

Generally, there are lots of similarities in how parents of different racial or ethnic backgrounds view SEL. When it comes to SEL nomenclature and what types of SEL resources are available in schools, however, there are some interesting differences.

Based on the name alone, Black parents are much more likely to respond positively to a program called “Character Education/Development” or “Positive Youth Development” than are White or Hispanic parents (Figure 17). Hispanic parents prefer “Emotional Intelligence” and “Positive Youth Development,” while White parents tend to prefer “Developing Grit and Growth Mindset.”

Figure 17. Parents of different races prefer varying SEL-related program names.

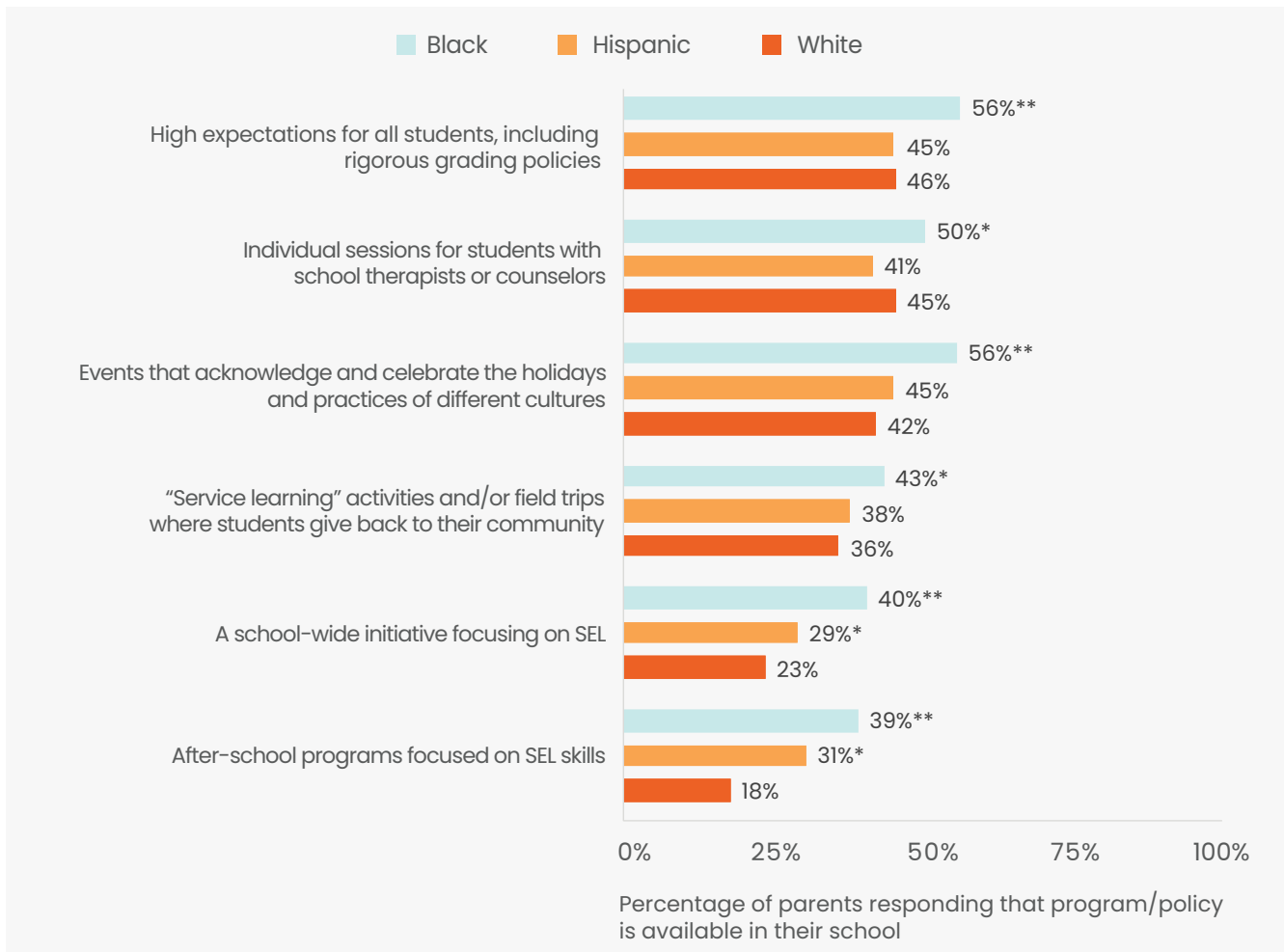


Note: One asterisk indicates that the proportion is greater than one of the other groups, and two asterisks indicate that the proportion is greater than two of the other groups, with differences statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. Only responses for which there is a statistically significant difference between at least two of the groups are shown. For the full text of the survey item, see *About the Survey*. $N = 275$ for Black parents; $N = 368$ for Hispanic parents; and $N = 1,139$ for White parents.

Black parents report more SEL-related activity occurring in their children’s schools than do their White counterparts for every item on the survey. This includes high expectations for all students, individual sessions with counselors, cultural events, service-learning activities, school-wide SEL initiatives, and after-school programs (Figure 18). It is unclear whether this difference reflects greater SEL resources in schools that are disproportionately Black, Black parents being more aware of SEL programming in their children’s schools, or something else.

“There should be a dedicated class on navigating relationships and being mindful of behavior and its consequences.” – Father of an eleventh grader

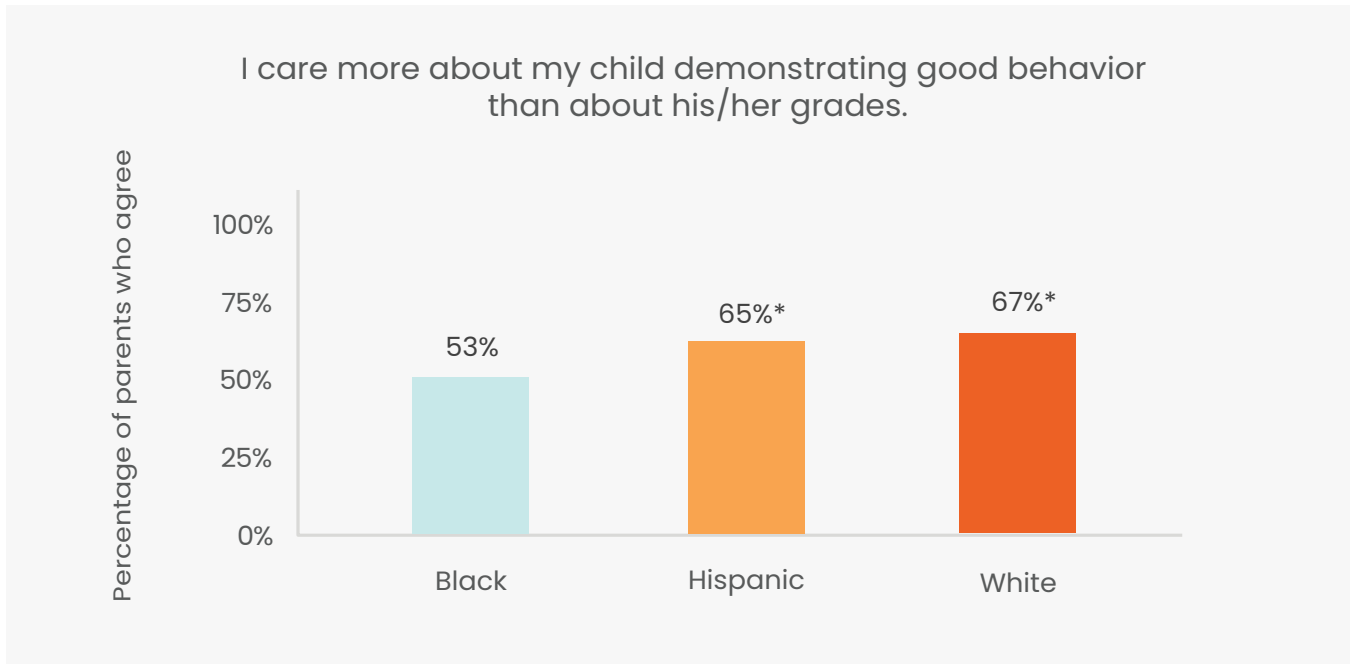
Figure 18. For each included SEL-related school policy or program, Black parents were at least as likely to report their child’s school having it as were Hispanic and White parents.



Note: One asterisk indicates that the proportion is greater than one of the other groups, and two asterisks indicate that the proportion is greater than two of the other groups, with differences statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. Only responses for which there is a statistically significant difference between at least two of the groups are shown. For the full text of the survey item, see *About the Survey*. $N = 275$ for Black parents; $N = 368$ for Hispanic parents; and $N = 1,139$ for White parents.

Interestingly, White and Hispanic parents are more likely to agree with the statement, “I care more about my child demonstrating good behavior than about his/her grades,” (67 percent and 65 percent, respectively) than Black parents (53 percent) (Figure 19).

Figure 19. White and Hispanic parents are more likely than Black parents to say they care more about good behavior than grades.



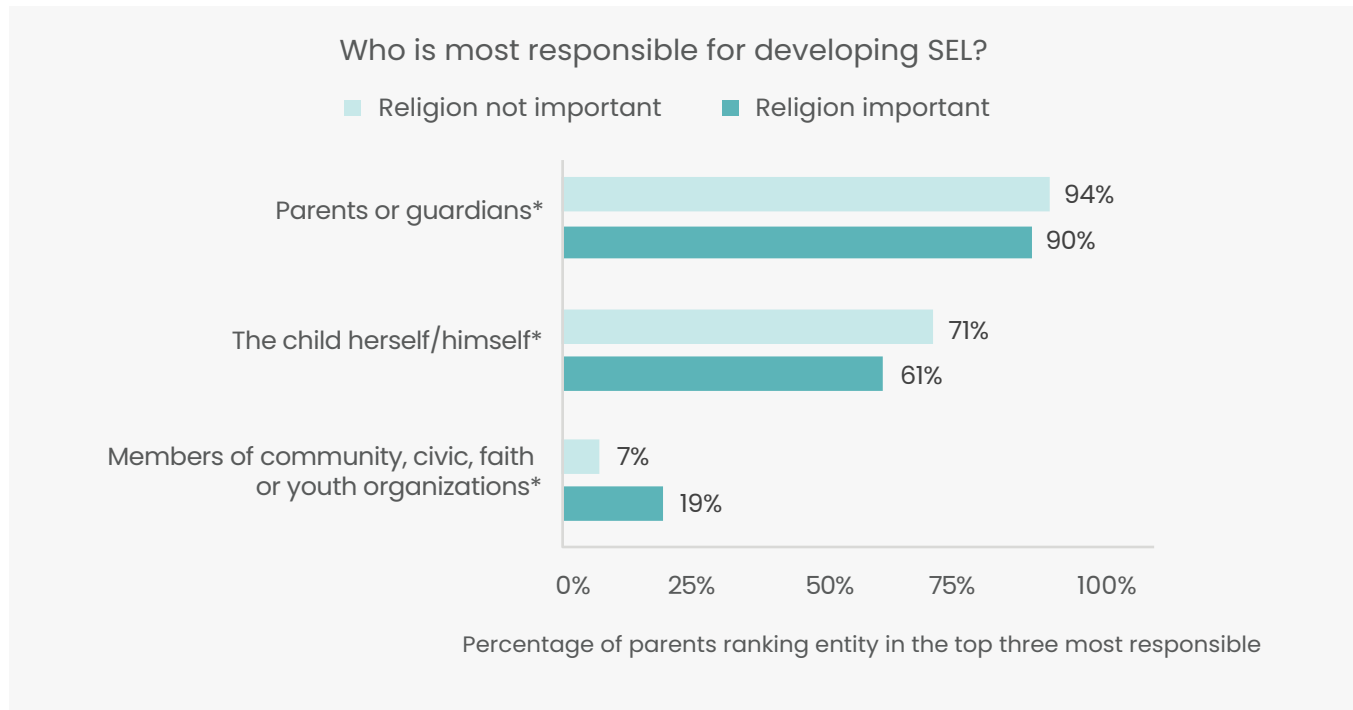
Note: Asterisks indicate statistically significant differences at the $p < 0.05$ level. “Agree” includes the responses “somewhat agree” and “strongly agree.” For the full text of the survey item, see *About the Survey*. $N = 275$ for Black parents; $N = 368$ for Hispanic parents; and $N = 1,139$ for White parents.

5C. On the question of who should develop SEL and concerns surrounding it, religiosity is the best predictor of parent response.

All types of parents view the family as the most important source of SEL development, but more religious parents are more than twice as likely as less religious parents to list members of community, civic, faith, and youth organizations as one of the most important sources (Figure 20).

“I think this type of learning should take place in as many aspects of my child’s life as possible.” – Mother of a ninth grader

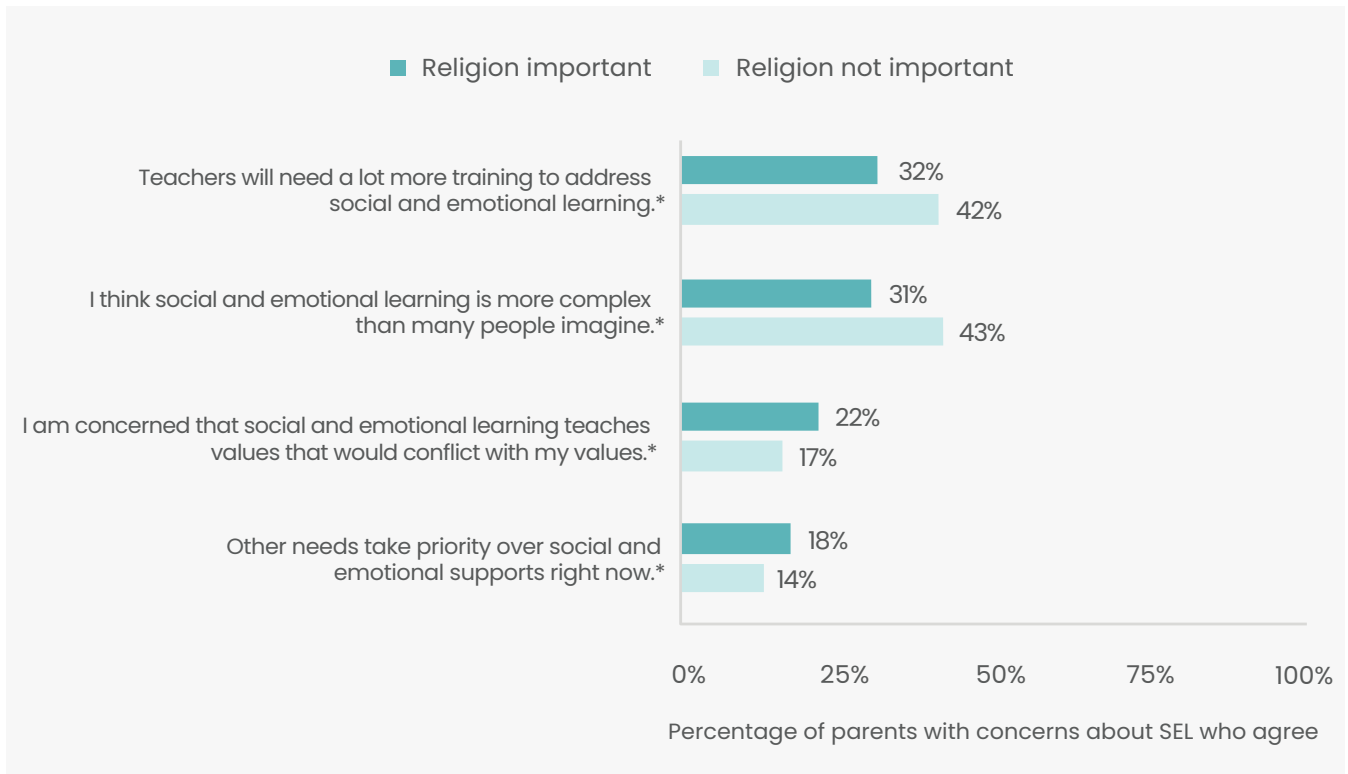
Figure 20. More religious parents are more likely to say the development of SEL is the responsibility of local organizations, while less religious parents place more responsibility on parents/guardians and the child.



Note: Asterisks indicate that the difference between the groups is statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level, and only those differences are shown. The entities are ordered from most to least responsible based on all survey respondents. Respondents who say religion is “very important” and “somewhat important” are included in the group “religion important” ($N = 1,262$), and those who say religion is “not too important” or “not important” ($N = 738$) are included in the group “religion not important.” For the full text of the survey item, see *About the Survey*.

Parents with different levels of religiosity also have differing concerns when it comes to implementing SEL. More religious parents are more concerned about schools implementing SEL in general than the less religious (34 percent versus 19 percent, not shown), but the two groups have differing specific concerns (Figure 21). While the more religious are more concerned about whether SEL fits with their values, the less religious worry that SEL is more complex than people may expect.

Figure 21. More- and less-religious parents have differing concerns when it comes to implementing SEL.



Note: Asterisks indicate that the difference between the groups is statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level, and only those differences are shown. Respondents who say religion is “very important” and “somewhat important” are included in the group “religion important” ($N = 927$), and those who say religion is “not too important” or “not important” ($N = 458$) are included in the group “religion not important.” For the full text of the survey item, see *About the Survey*.

Policy implications

Support among parents for the substance of SEL is strong, even as some have diverging views on how best to frame and implement it. The results of this survey point to four broad lessons for educators and policymakers looking to engage their communities productively in SEL efforts.

First, use plain language. The term “Social and Emotional Learning” has the advantage of packaging its values, which sometimes overlap with religious ideas about morality, in ways that aren’t apt to alienate people of various faiths. Unfortunately, the term may be off-putting to parents for other reasons.¹¹ Survey results show that the program name “social-emotional learning” is the second-least favored among all the names parents rated. Meanwhile, more commonsense terms such as “life skills” are broadly popular with parents across the political spectrum. If advocates can emphasize the practical uses of SEL, regardless of the name attached to it, they may help defuse concerns that it constitutes some sort of indoctrination program—or, as one of the surveyed parents survey put it, “just a fad of a woke culture.”

As with any endeavor where public buy-in counts, there is little value in speaking a language that your potential allies don’t understand or identify with.

Second, focus on specifics over the abstract. Democrats voice nearly unanimous support for all nine SEL-related skills mentioned in the survey, and Republicans generally agree that schools should teach things like empathy (70 percent) and sensitivity to different cultures (68 percent). On the other hand, support for the general idea of SEL is mixed. The strongest support from both Democratic and Republican parents is tied to traditional, familiar approaches such as offering students opportunities to exercise leadership or volunteer in the community, presumably because they are time-tested ways of developing young people’s character. When we focus on the specifics and the substance of SEL, parents get it and approve, but the abstract and general loses a lot of them.

Third, don’t ignore indirect methods to develop SEL. Republican parents are a bit more likely to say that SEL may crowd out academics and should be taught indirectly, but majorities of all types of parents voice some of these same concerns. When teachers focus on high expectations and implement tough grading standards and when students gain self-confidence through achievement, discipline, and extracurricular activities, both SEL and academics get boosted simultaneously. When teachers assign historical or literary fiction about characters who struggle to overcome a challenge or hold their students accountable for completing their homework, they’re doing the work of SEL, whether anyone calls it that or not. Likewise, they promote SEL by modeling healthy relationships, treating members of the school community with respect, and serving as exemplars of integrity.

In other words, regardless of how much explicit SEL instruction a student receives, much of the value of SEL can be learned by empowering teachers to excel in their subject areas while modeling common decency and common sense for their students.

Finally, leverage the influence of other adults in SEL development. Let's not forget that school is not the only—or even the primary—venue for cultivating SEL-related skills. Regardless of political affiliation, race, class, or any other demographic variable, parents say that families are the most important player in developing SEL. Coaches, peers, and youth leaders can play pivotal roles in developing young people's social and emotional skills, as well.

When it comes to SEL, we're all in it together.

About the Survey

Technical Appendix

This survey of 2,000 parents of K–12 students was conducted by YouGov from April 2 to April 16, 2021.

Matching and weighting

YouGov interviewed 2,735 respondents, which was matched down to a sample of 2,000 to produce the final dataset. Sample matching is a methodology for selecting representative samples from non-randomly selected pools of respondents. YouGov uses a statistical technique called proximity matching to select respondents who are as similar as possible to the reference population across a variety of characteristics. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race, and education. The frame was constructed via a stratified sample gleaned from the 2017 Current Population Survey (CPS)—specifically, a subset of parents with children ages 6–17.

The matched cases were weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores for each wave. The matched cases and the frame were combined, and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frame. The propensity score function included age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education, and region. The weights were then post-stratified via a four-way stratification of gender, age (three categories), race (four categories), and education (four categories) for each wave to produce the final weight.

Sampling methodology

Panelists are invited gradually through a process called “turbosampling.” Every 30 minutes, YouGov’s survey system evaluates the sample needs of all surveys in the field, selects a random sample from the whole panel, and invites the members of that random sample who are currently eligible for a survey. At the second stage, when a panelist responds to an invitation, the system selects the survey where that panelist is most needed and sends him/her there. For this reason, invitations tend to be fairly generic. Panelists who do not respond receive two reminder invitations.

MaxDiff methodology

MaxDiff is a methodology that leverages experimental design and hierarchical Bayesian analysis of a multinomial regression model to deliver respondent-level relative importance in as efficient of an exercise as possible. The respondent-level results can then be aggregated by any subgroup for statistical testing and reporting needs.

In this survey, a MaxDiff was used to determine the relative importance of various academic and SEL goals in school. Respondents were presented 32 skills or subject areas (12 academic and 20 SEL). Respondents saw 12 screens with eight items per screen. On each screen, they identified the area deserving most and least attention in school. An experimental design ensured sufficient evaluations of each area to determine the relative ranking of each.

Surveying during the Covid-19 pandemic

In anticipation of fielding the survey during the Covid-19 pandemic, we conducted additional mini-

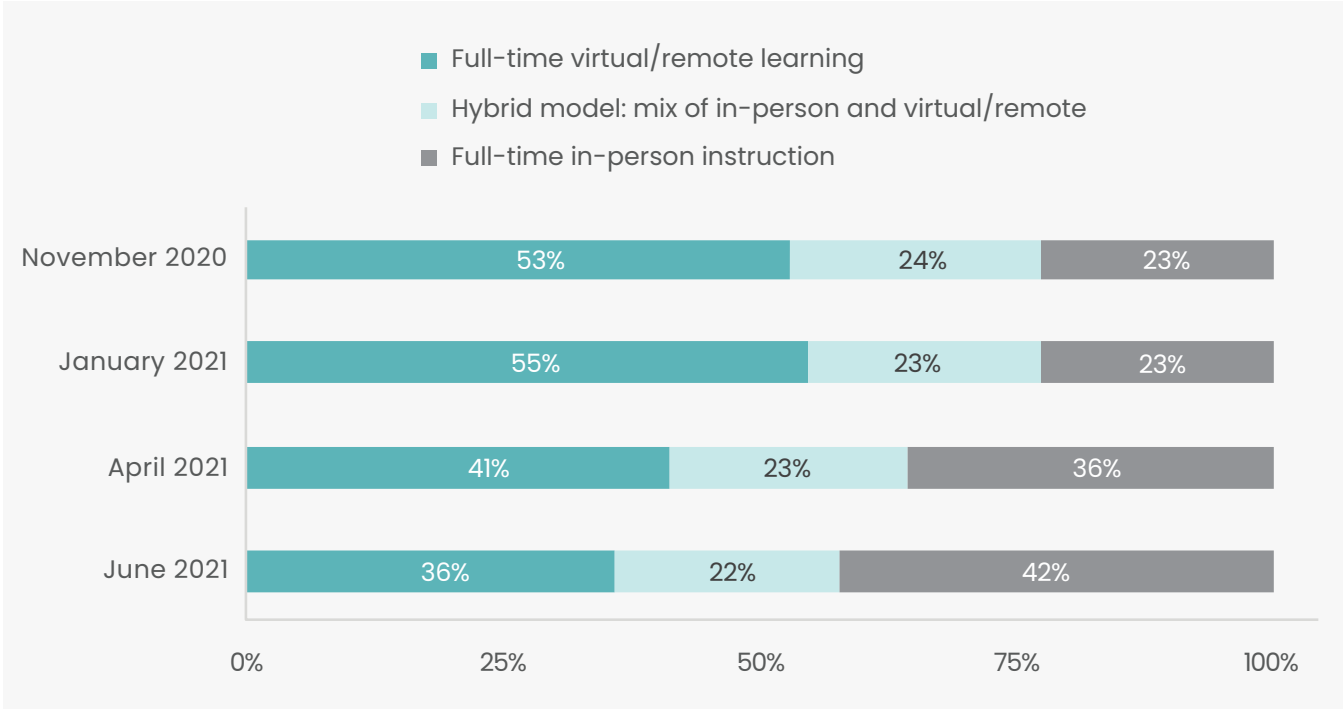
surveys from fall 2020 through spring 2021. In the three waves of “mini-surveys,” YouGov interviewed 541 respondents in both waves one and two and 544 respondents in wave three. Using the same sample matching methodology used in the main study, each of these samples were matched down to a sample of 500. These mini-surveys only asked parents a few questions about how they viewed the importance of SEL in order to contextualize the results of the main survey. Table A1 summarizes the data collection schedule.

Table A1. Data were collected from November 2020 to June 2021.

Data Collection	Dates
Mini-Survey, Wave 1	Nov 13, 2020, to Nov 23, 2020
Mini-Survey, Wave 2	Jan 12, 2021, to Jan 19, 2021
Main Survey	April 2, 2021, to April 16, 2021
Mini-Survey, Wave 3	May 27, 2021, to June 6, 2021

According to these survey results, there were some measurable changes in schooling over this turbulent year. For example, as the vaccination campaign ramped up and cases of Covid-19 plummeted during the first half of 2021, the share of students attending school completely in person rose from 23 percent to 42 percent, while the share of students participating in full-time virtual learning dropped from 55 percent to 36 percent (Figure A1).

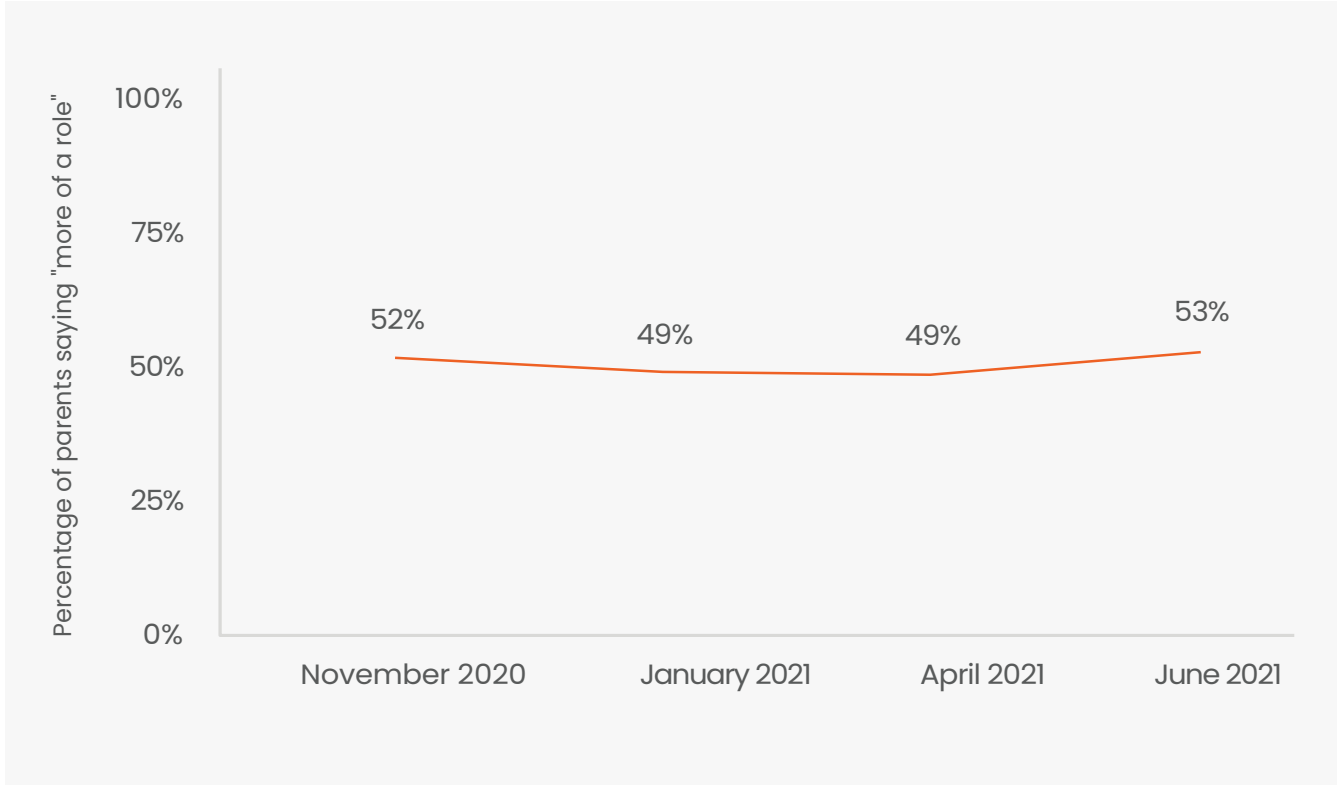
Figure A1. Students shifted to more in-person instruction during 2021.



Note: November data collection N = 419; January data collection N = 421; April data collection N = 1,835; and June data collection N = 429. Base is children currently enrolled in school.

Still, the results show that, on the whole, parent opinions about SEL were stable during this period. For example, the percentage of parents responding that schools should play more of a role in developing SEL varies only slightly during this period, moving from 52 percent in the November survey to 49 percent in the January and April surveys—and back to 53 percent in the June data collection (Figure A2).

Figure A2. There’s been little change over the last year regarding how parents view the role of schools in SEL development.



Note: November data collection $N = 419$; January data collection $N = 421$; April data collection $N = 1,835$; and June data collection $N = 429$.

Survey questionnaire

Response options were randomized and Likert scales randomly reversed for some respondents to prevent anchoring biases. Some questions were only asked of parents who gave specific responses to previous questions, as noted in the report.

Q1. Please let us know how much of a priority, if at all, is it to you that your **[INSERT age]**-year-old child have the knowledge, skills, and ability to do each of the following:

- a. set goals and work toward achieving them
- b. recognize their own emotions and understand, express, and control them
- c. recognize and empathize with the feelings and experiences of other people
- d. navigate social situations, solve conflicts, and get along with others
- e. respond ethically, even when it is hard to do the right thing
- f. prepare to be an active, informed citizen and participate in solving public problems
- g. approach challenges in a positive, optimistic way
- h. understand, respect, and stand up for people of different backgrounds, cultures, and experiences
- i. believe in themselves and their abilities in order to grow as a person and overcome obstacles

Scale:

Not a priority

Very low priority

Low priority

Moderate priority

High priority

Very high priority

One of my biggest priorities

Q2. The term “social and emotional learning” means the process of developing self-awareness, self-control, interpersonal skills, responsible or ethical decision making, and civic awareness. Do you think that [IF CHILD IN SCHOOL your child’s school should be playing more or less of a role in building

these skills than it currently is]//[IF CHILD NOT IN SCHOOL: schools should play more or less of a role in building these skills than they currently do]?

Scale:

Much more of a role

Somewhat more of a role

Neither more nor less of a role (stay the same)

Somewhat less of a role

Much less of a role

I don't know

Q3. When it comes to your child, please rank in order of who you think should be most responsible for developing the qualities we have been talking about. *Please rank all that apply for your child; where 1 is most responsible and 7 is least responsible.*

Parents or guardians

Family members other than parents/guardians

Teachers

Child's friends/peers

Coaches, school club sponsors, leaders of other extracurricular activities at the school

Members of community, civic, faith, or youth organizations

The child herself/himself

Q4. We just asked you about who ought to be responsible for developing the qualities we have been talking about, now we'll ask you who has made the greatest contribution when it comes to your child developing these qualities.

Besides parents and guardians, who in your opinion **has contributed the most** to your child developing these qualities? *Select all that apply.*

Family members other than parents/guardians

Teachers

Child's friends/peers

Coaches, school club sponsors, leaders of other extracurricular activities at the school

Members of community, civic, faith, or youth organizations

The child herself/himself

INTRO: We will be asking a series of questions about your child’s education and education in general. Understanding that school may look different this year due to COVID-19, please answer thinking about your child’s experience of school under **normal circumstances**.

Q5. Which, if any, of the following do you think schools should teach children? *Please select one response per row.*

Schools should teach children how to:

- a. set goals and work towards achieving them
- b. recognize their own emotions and understand, express and control them
- c. recognize and empathize with the feelings and experiences of other people
- d. navigate social situations, solve conflicts and get along with others
- e. respond ethically even when it is hard to do the right thing
- f. prepare to be an active, informed citizen and participate in solving public problems
- g. approach challenges in a positive, optimistic way
- h. understand, respect and stand up for people of different backgrounds, cultures and experiences
- i. believe in themselves and their abilities in order to grow as a person and overcome obstacles

Scale:

Yes

No

MAXDIFF INTRO:

The next series of questions will ask you to select the skills or subject areas that your child’s school should focus on **the most** and which your child’s school should focus on **the least**.

You will see a total of 12 screens with 8 items per screen. On each screen you will be asked to select one skill or subject area per category. We encourage you to select your responses based on your initial reaction.

Q6. Which of the following skills or subject areas do you think your child’s [IF HOMESCHOOL: education/ IF NOT: school] should focus on **the most** and which do you think your child’s [IF HOMESCHOOL: education/ IF NOT: school] should focus on **the least**?

SEL Elements:

1. Active Citizenship
2. Communication/Interpersonal Skills
3. Kindness
4. Integrity
5. Courage
6. Gratitude
7. Perseverance
8. Reasoning and Problem Solving
9. Curiosity
10. Respect for Authority
11. Respect for Peers
12. Responsibility for actions
13. Standing up for the less fortunate
14. Sensitivity to other cultures
15. Teamwork
16. Fairness
17. Self-confidence
18. Self-motivation
19. Equality
20. Recess/Gym Class

Academic Elements:

21. Independent reading/Read-aloud time
22. English/Reading class
23. Mathematics
24. History
25. Civics
26. Science

27. Foreign Language
28. Health Education
29. Arts Education
30. Music Education
31. Computer Science/IT
32. Career, Technical and Vocational Education

Q7A. The following school programs could relate to aspects of child development beyond academic skills. Based on the names only, which of these programs would you **most** want your child enrolled in? *Please select the programs you would most want your child enrolled in. You may choose up to 3.*

Q7B. The following school programs could relate to aspects of child development beyond academic skills. Which would you **least** want your child enrolled in? *Please select the programs you would least want your child enrolled in. You may choose up to 3.*

1. Success Factors
2. Social-Emotional Learning
3. Character Education/Development
4. Life Skills
5. Soft Skills
6. Emotional Intelligence
7. Positive Youth Development
8. 21st Century Skills
9. Social-Emotional & Academic Learning
10. Whole Child Development
11. Behavioral Skills
12. Developing Grit and Growth Mindset

Q8. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

1. Teachers and other school staff should serve as character models for students.
2. Learning life skills and social skills at school is just as important as learning academics.
3. Students' social and emotional needs must be met in order for them to reach their full academic potential.
4. School curriculum should be designed in a way that is sensitive to different cultures.

5. The focus on testing in schools takes away from other skills students should be learning.
6. My child's school needs more in-school specialists to address the social and emotional needs of students.
7. There is not enough time in the school day to teach both academics and social and emotional learning (SEL).
8. Schools should focus on academics and leave social and emotional learning (SEL) to parents and others.
9. I want my child's school to give them honest feedback on their academic performance and progress even if it may hurt their feelings.
10. I care more about my child demonstrating good behavior than about his/her grades.
11. I'd be willing for my child's school to have a longer school day or year to teach social and emotional learning (SEL) skills more thoroughly.
12. School is an important place for students to learn the difference between right and wrong.
13. Working hard helps students develop strong character.

Scale:

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Q9. How should social and emotional learning (SEL) skills be taught, if at all, in schools? *Please select all that apply.*

Through...

1. "service learning" activities and/or field trips where students give back to their community
2. events that acknowledge and celebrate the holidays and practices of different cultures
3. individual sessions with school therapists or counselors
4. opportunities for students to practice mindfulness or meditation
5. opportunities for students to serve in leadership roles
6. strict discipline and attendance policies that are uniformly enforced
7. a required course on SEL taught separate from other academic instruction
8. high expectations for all students, including rigorous grading policies

9. SEL topics being addressed in core academic classes (English, History, Science, etc.)
10. SEL topics being addressed outside of core academic classes (electives, homeroom, recess etc.)
11. the way teachers teach (using project-based learning, cooperative learning etc.)
12. after-school programs focused on SEL skills
13. a school-wide initiative focusing on SEL
14. Schools should not play a role in teaching social and emotional (SEL) learning

Q9A. Schools can teach social and emotional learning (SEL) skills both directly and/or indirectly. Which approach would you prefer for your child's school?

Direct (for example, teachers teaching from a social-emotional learning curriculum; students participating in programs designed to cultivate social-emotional learning)

Indirect (for example, teachers taking advantage of teachable moments or serving as role models; students discussing challenges faced by a character in a story)

A mix of both direct and indirect methods

Q10. Which, if any, of the following do you think would be the best use of schools' resources when it comes to strengthening social and emotional learning (SEL)? *Please select all that apply.*

1. Hiring more counselors or therapists for students' mental health needs
2. Providing SEL training for teachers
3. Offering extra programs that explicitly address social and emotional learning
4. Implementing and enforcing stricter disciplinary policies for violating school rules
5. Adopting restorative justice policies (where offenders accept responsibility and make it up to those they hurt)
6. None of these

Q11. What grade would you give your child's school on helping your child develop social and emotional learning skills?

- A
- B
- C
- D
- F

Q12. Which of the following are available or occur [IF CHILD IN SCHOOL: at your child's school/IF CHILD NOT IN SCHOOL: during your child's education?] *Please select one response per row.*

1. "Service learning" activities and/or field trips where students give back to their community
2. Events that acknowledge and celebrate the holidays and practices of different cultures
3. Individual sessions for students with school therapists or counselors
4. Opportunities for students to practice mindfulness or meditation techniques
5. Opportunities for students to serve in leadership roles
6. Strict discipline and attendance policies that are uniformly enforced
7. A required course on social and emotional learning taught separate from other academic instruction
8. High expectations for all students, including rigorous grading policies
9. SEL topics are addressed in core academic classes (English, History, Science, etc.)
10. SEL topics are addressed outside of core academic classes (electives, homeroom, recess, etc.)
11. Teachers incorporate SEL in the ways they teach (using project-based learning, cooperative learning, etc.)
12. After-school programs focused on SEL skills
13. A school-wide initiative focusing on SEL

Scale:

Yes

No

Don't know/Not sure

Q13. How concerned, if at all, are you about how efforts to implement social and emotional learning (SEL) initiatives in schools will actually work in practice?

Scale:

Extremely concerned

Very concerned

Somewhat concerned

Not very concerned

Not concerned at all

Q14. And which of the following are you most concerned about specifically? *Please select all that apply.*

1. Teachers will need a lot more training to address social and emotional learning.
2. I think social and emotional learning is more complex than many people imagine.
3. Schools will not prioritize and invest adequately in social and emotional learning.
4. I am concerned that social and emotional learning teaches values that would conflict with my values.
5. Often social and emotional learning programs are too infrequent, or too low quality, to make a difference for students.
6. Other needs take priority over social and emotional supports right now.
7. It will be too difficult to reliably measure whether students are mastering social and emotional skills.
8. Assessments intended to gauge whether students learn social and emotional skills may have unintended consequences or negative ramifications.
9. I am unclear what efforts on social and emotional learning look like in practice.
10. I feel like the interest in social and emotional learning may be a fad and may not last.
11. Other
12. I do not think social and emotional learning should be taught in schools

Q15A. What should schools be doing differently to help students?

Q15B. Please tell us your broader thoughts on social and emotional learning in schools.

Endnotes

- ¹ These items constitute the domains identified by the Explore SEL project at Harvard University, <http://exploresel.gse.harvard.edu/compare-domains>.
- ² Fordham and YouGov drew from a variety of sources, including traditional classifications of domains and skills from the Explore SEL project at Harvard University (see <http://exploresel.gse.harvard.edu>), to devise a list of topics that included key academic subjects and social and emotional skills with various intents, while minimizing conceptual overlap.
- ³ Michael B. Henderson, David Houston, Paul E. Peterson and Martin R. West, "Public Support Grows for Higher Teacher Pay and Expanded School Choice," *Education Next* 20, no. 1 (2019): <https://www.educationnext.org/school-choice-trump-era-results-2019-education-next-poll>.
- ⁴ Phi Delta Kappan "Frustration in the schools: Teachers speak out on pay, funding, and feeling valued," 2019, retrieved from <https://pdkpoll.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/pdkpoll51-2019.pdf>.
- ⁵ The Wallace Foundation also conducted a national survey, but it was primarily focused on after-school leaders and did not include K–12 parents. In a separate focus group with parents, however, they found that "parents were comfortable with the term [social and emotional learning]" but also "wanted the idea to be clearly explained" and "expressed concerns about how children would be evaluated and wanted to ensure that academics is always a priority." See Pam Loeb, Stacia Tipton, and Erin Wagner, "Social and Emotional Learning: Feedback and Communications Insights from the Field," slide presentation (New York: Wallace Foundation, 2016), <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/sel-feedback-and-communications-insights-from-the-field.aspx>.
- ⁶ Learning Heroes, "Developing Life Skills in Children: A Road Map for Communicating with Parents," March 2018, <https://bealearninghero.org/2018/09/17/developing-life-skills-in-children-a-road-map-for-communicating-with-parents>.
- ⁷ Jennifer L. DePaoli, Matthew N. Atwell, and John Bridgeland, *Ready to Lead: A National Principal Survey of How Social and Emotional Learning Can Prepare Children and Transform Schools* (Chicago, IL: CASEL, 2017), 21, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED579088.pdf>.
- ⁸ Marc A. Brackett, Maria R. Reyes, Susan E. Rivers, Nicole A. Elbertson, and Peter Salovey, "Assessing teachers' beliefs about social and emotional learning," *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment* 30, no. 3 (2012): 219–36, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0734282911424879>; John Bridgeland, Mary Bruce, and Arya Hariharan, *The Missing Piece: A National Teacher Survey on How Social and Emotional Learning Can Empower Children and Transform Schools* (Chicago, IL: CASEL, 2013), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED558068.pdf>; Rohanna Buchanan, Barbara A. Gueldner, Oanh K. Tran, and Kenneth W. Merrell, "Social and Emotional Learning in Classrooms: A Survey of Teachers' Knowledge, Perceptions, and Practices," *Journal of Applied School Psychology* 26, no. 2 (2009): 187–203, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15377900802487078>.
- ⁹ The Wallace Foundation tested some of these program names with educators and policymakers in a 2016 study. See Loeb, Tipton, and Wagner, "Social and Emotional Learning."
- ¹⁰ "The Importance of Recess," Harvard Medical School, July 2015, <https://www.health.harvard.edu/exercise-and-fitness/the-importance-of-recess>.
- ¹¹ When the Wallace Foundation examined how educators and parents responded to SEL-related terms in 2016, their parent focus groups yielded some cautionary results. Although educators responded favorably to the term "social and emotional learning," some parents were turned off by the word "emotional" and preferred simpler language, such as the term "life skills"—which, according to their report, "professionals did not favor." See Loeb, Tipton, and Wagner, "Social and Emotional Learning."