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Parent Mindsets Related to COVID-19, the Return to School, and Mental Health

Findings from a Tracking Survey of Public School Parents of K-12 Students

June 2022

Research
conducted by:



National Online Parent Survey:

- Nationwide sample of **2,538 parents and guardians** with children in public school, grades K-12, including
 - 1,019 elementary school parents
 - 461 middle school parents
 - 1,058 high school parents
 - 405 Black parents
 - 818 Hispanic parents representing a mix of acculturation levels
- Fielded April 24th–May 9th, 2022
- Offered in both English and Spanish
- Data were weighted to be representative of public-school parents in the U.S.
- This survey represents the third wave of a tracking study. Wave 1 was conducted July 23–August 8, 2021, and Wave 2 was conducted November 9–24, 2021.

***NOTE:** This project was supported by the CDC Foundation by way of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$447,531 with more than 99% funded by CDC/HHS and \$2,400, less than 1%, funded by non- government source(s). The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CDC/HHS, or the U.S. Government.*

Statistical significance indicators:

- Throughout this report, **green/red** indicates statistically **higher/lower** differences between audiences.
- Up/down arrows (▲/▼) indicate that Wave 3 data is statistically higher/lower than Wave 2 data.

Top Takeaways

1

Wave 3 reveals that parents (and their children) have taken great strides to adapt to living with the pandemic. Despite disruptive experiences at school and believing we still have a long way to go, parents have grown more comfortable with their children being in school. The emotions of both children and parents are trending in a positive direction, and parents believe next school year will be even better than this one.

2

However, not all parents express the same feelings of relief—parents of color remain more cautious about where we stand with the pandemic, and their COVID-specific worries about their children being in school remain significantly stronger than White parents' perspectives.

3

While most parents say they are following debates about appropriate curriculum both nationally and locally to some extent, only one-in-four indicate they are doing so closely. And, as we consistently notice in our data, language matters when it comes to issues in education policy. Specifically, the vast majority are comfortable with children learning “social skills like respect, cooperation, perseverance, and empathy,” to a greater extent than they are with “social and emotional learning.”

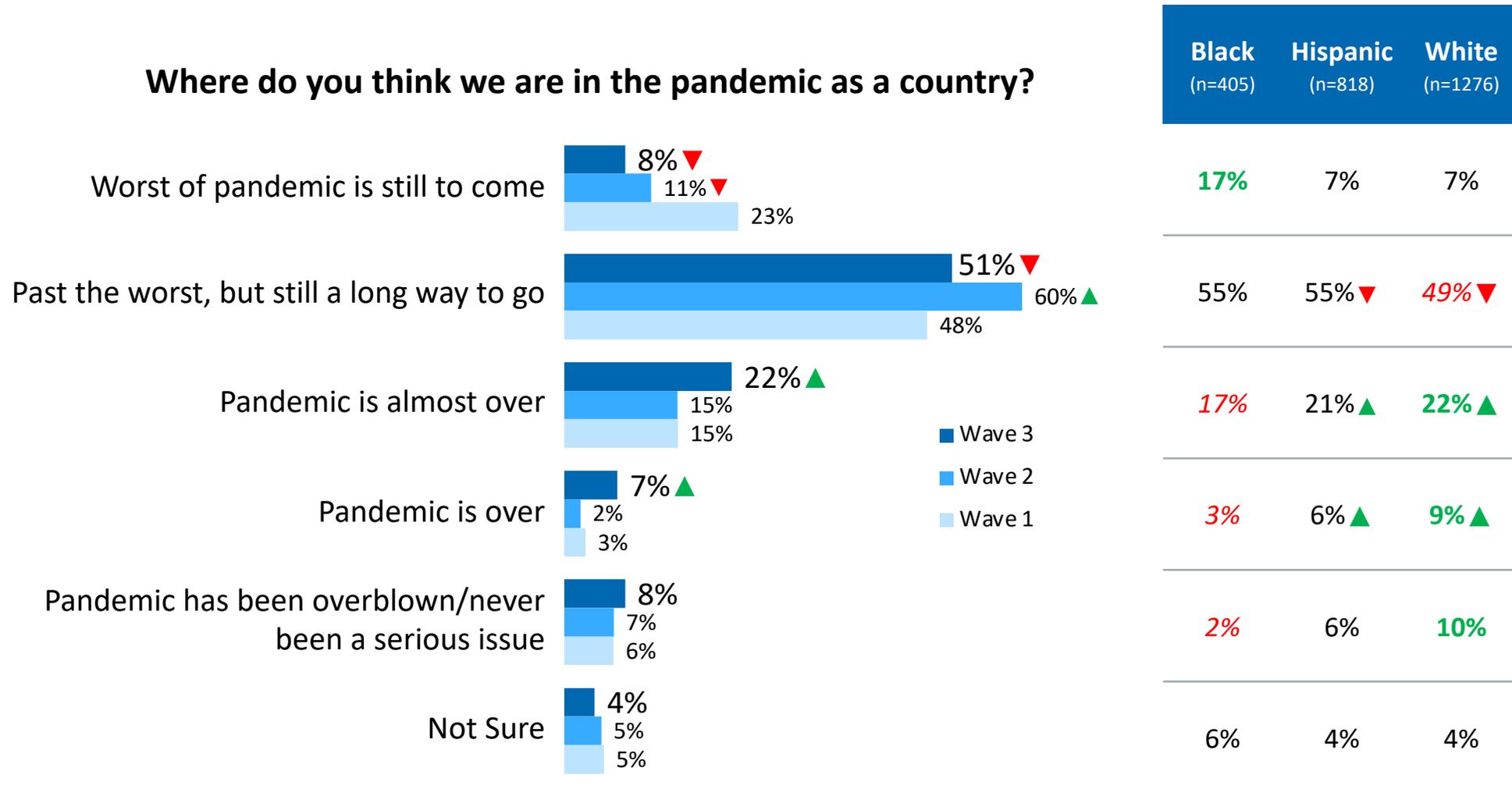
4

Social and emotional health is not a top priority for parents this summer, per se. They hope to use the time to relax and spend time as a family, as well as support their child's academic needs, but few plan to specifically seek out mental health resources for their child.

Parent Mindsets about Schools and the Pandemic

Overall, parents feel better about the stage of the pandemic than during previous survey waves

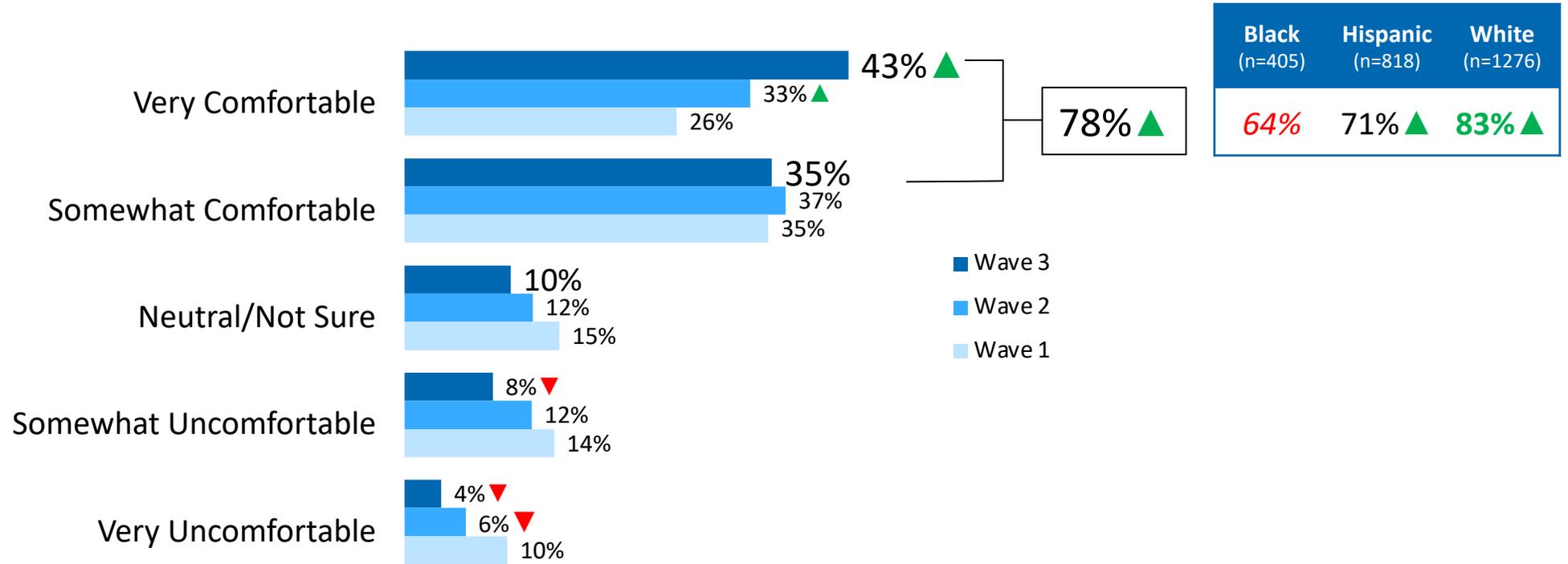
- Black parents remain more cautious than others with limited movement in their pandemic outlook.



Comfort with in-person learning has increased, most notably among White parents

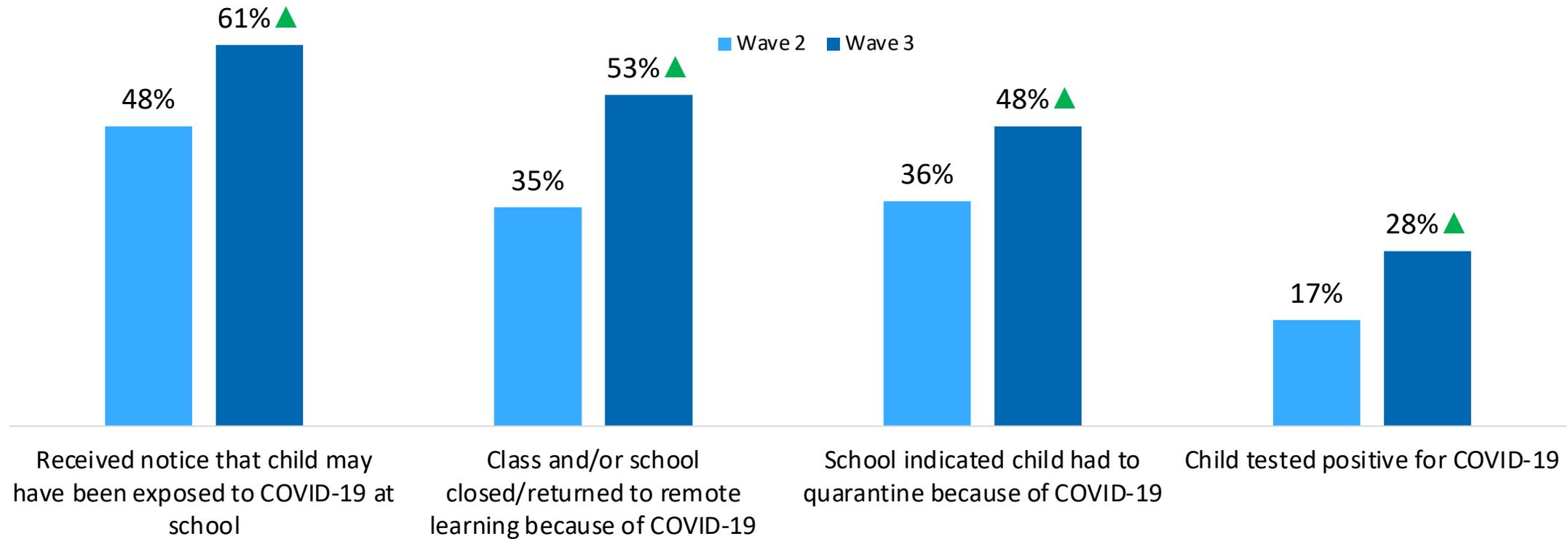
- Wave 3 reveals small gains among parents of color, but a 10-point increase among White parents.

How comfortable do you feel having your child at school in-person?



Parents hold this increased level of comfort with many experiencing exposure notifications and school disruptions due to the pandemic

Have Experienced Each So Far This School Year



Hispanic parents (54%)
High school parents (50%)

Hispanic parents (32%)

Parents' COVID worries on are the decline, while bullying and violence remain top concerns

- Hispanic parents are more likely to express worry about these items, especially compared to White parents.

Now that your child is back in school, how much do you worry about...?

■ Worry A Lot ■ Worry A Lot + Some

Δ Since Wave 2

% Worry A Lot + Some

	Black (n=405)	Hispanic (n=818)	White (n=1276)
Child being bullied at school	47%	66%	42%
Child contracting COVID-19 at school and getting sick	58% ▼	62% ▼	38% ▼
Child experiencing violence at school	53%	66%	38%
Child contracting COVID-19 at school and infecting family member	58%	61% ▼	38% ▼
Child being behind academically for their grade level	42% ▼	58% ▼	36% ▼
Child stress/anxiety about contracting COVID-19 at school	49%	55%	31% ▼
Child stress/anxiety about following health safety measures	43%	51% ▼	32%
My child being taught curriculum, topics, or perspectives I disagree with	37%	44%	33%
Child experiencing racism at school	46%	55%	21% ▼
Child having to follow health safety measures	37%	41% ▼	26% ▼

Child being bullied at school 27% 48%

Child contracting COVID-19 at school and getting sick 24% 47%

Child experiencing violence at school 25% 46%

Child contracting COVID-19 at school and infecting family member 22% 46%

Child being behind academically for their grade level 22% 42%

Child stress/anxiety about contracting COVID-19 at school 18% 39%

Child stress/anxiety about following health safety measures 16% 38%

My child being taught curriculum, topics, or perspectives I disagree with 16% 36%

Child experiencing racism at school 19% 33%

Child having to follow health safety measures 13% 31%

-2

-15 ▼

-3

-10 ▼

-9 ▼

-9 ▼

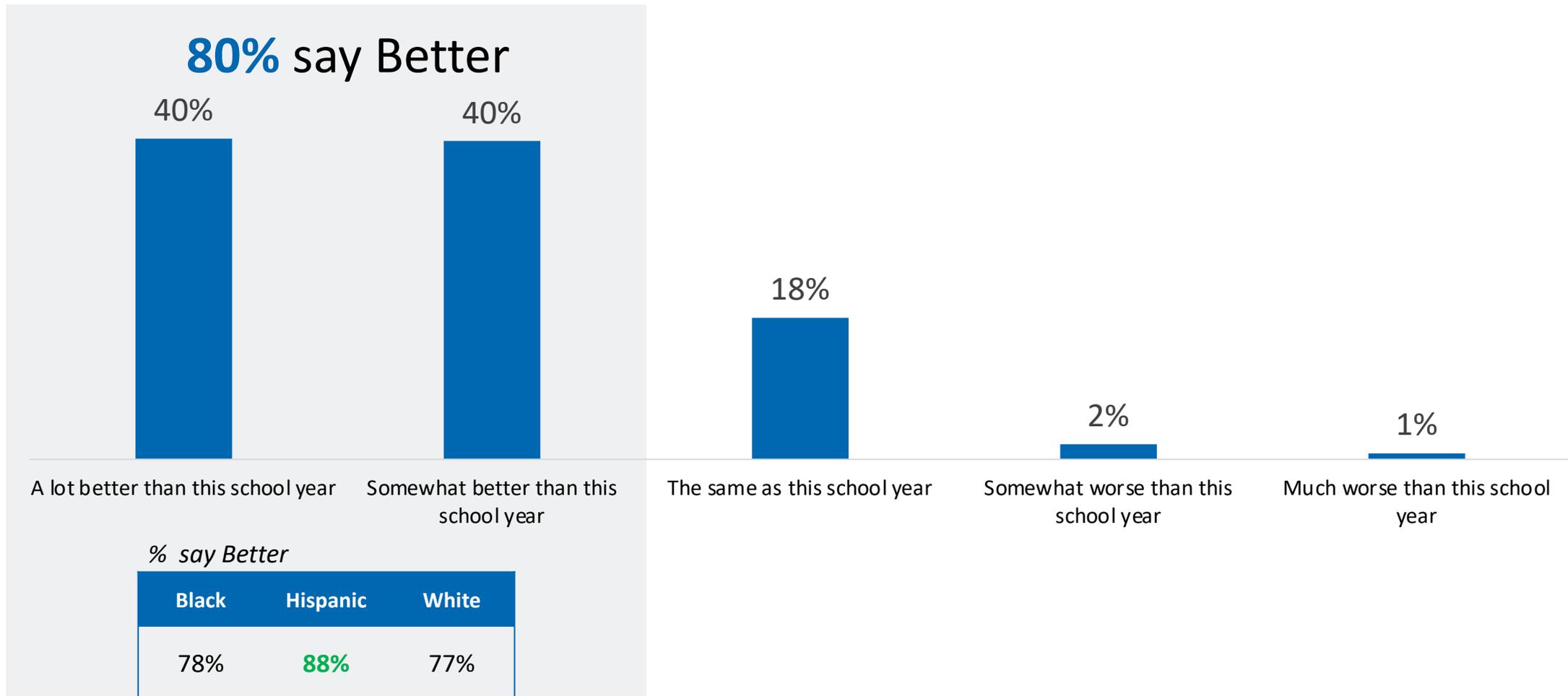
-6 ▼

-5 ▼

-5 ▼

Looking ahead, the vast majority of parents expect that next school year will be better

How do you think the next school year (2022-2023) will be for your child and family?



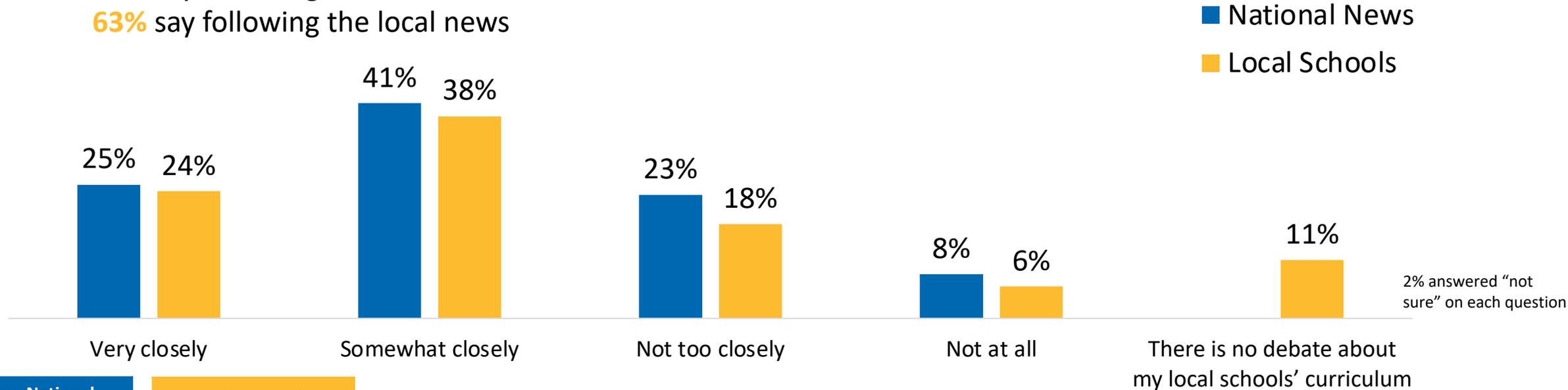
Curriculum Debate

Most say they are following curriculum debates nationally and close to home at least *somewhat* closely

- Only 1 in 4 indicate they are following these debates *very* closely.

How closely are you following debates over curriculum and what topics or subjects should be taught in schools/your local schools?

66% say following the national news
63% say following the local news



Follow National
PTA (35%)
College educated (35%)
Household income \$50K+ (31%)
Urban (29%)
HS Parents (28%)

Follow Local
PTA (37%)
Household income \$75K+ (32%)
College educated (32%)
Magnet/charter school parents (30%)

Parents overwhelmingly support schools teaching social skills in K-12 schools

- Approximately two-thirds of parents believe racial issues should be taught/discussed “a lot” or “some” at school, with parents of color most likely to indicate this sentiment.

How much should be taught or discussed about each topic in public schools?

Feelings about teaching that topic at ANY grade level up to and including high school

■ A Lot ■ A Lot + Some

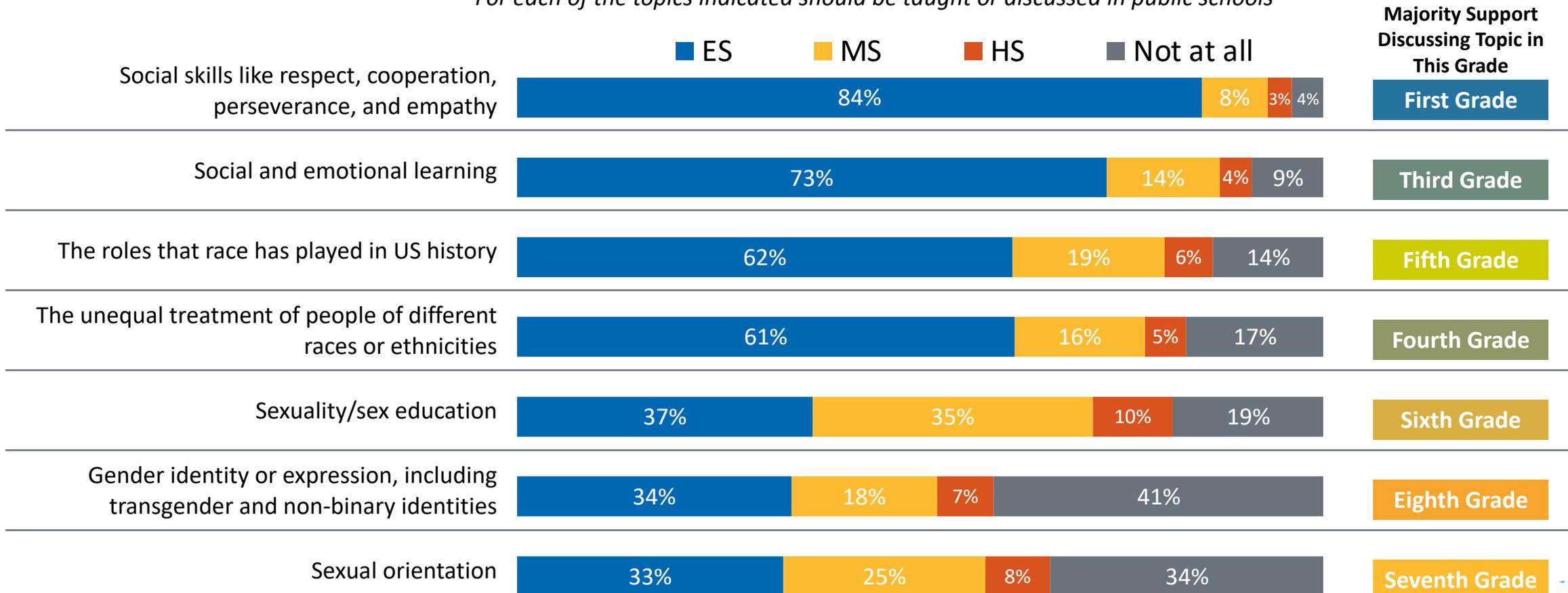
% Say A Lot

	Black (n=405)	Hispanic (n=818)	White (n=1276)	% None
Social skills like respect, cooperation, perseverance, and empathy	60%	69%	58%	2%
Social and emotional learning	45%	55%	38%	5%
The roles that race has played in US history	55%	46%	32%	10%
The unequal treatment of people of different races or ethnicities	53%	50%	31%	13%
Sexuality/sex education	26%	33%	20%	14%
Gender identity or expression, including transgender and non-binary identities	23%	22%	16%	33%
Sexual orientation	21%	26%	13%	28%

The vast majority believe social skills should be taught starting in elementary school, but topics of sexuality, sexual orientation, and gender identity reach major support in middle school

Lowest grade at which it is appropriate for schools to discuss each topic

For each of the topics indicated should be taught or discussed in public schools



There were minimal differences on the “majority support” grades when looking a school level or race/ethnicity, **but elementary school parents tended to be comfortable with content earlier** than parents of older children, and **parents of color tended to be comfortable with content earlier** than White parents.

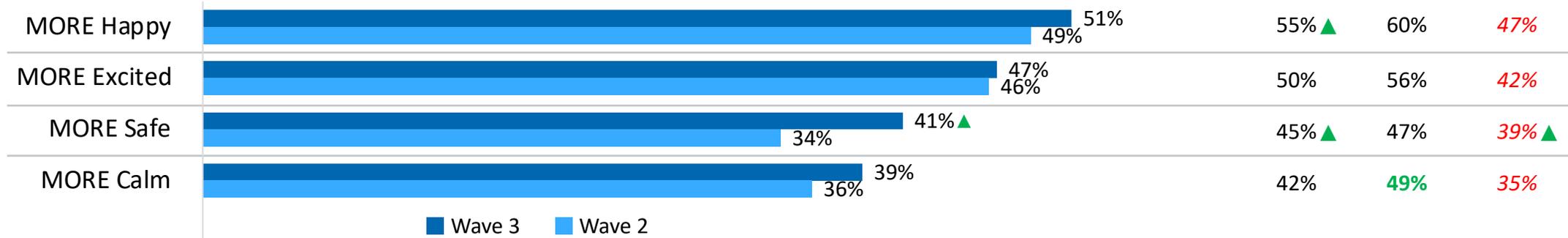
Mental Health (and Summer)

Children’s emotions (as reported by their parents) are trending in the right direction—especially feeling less negatively



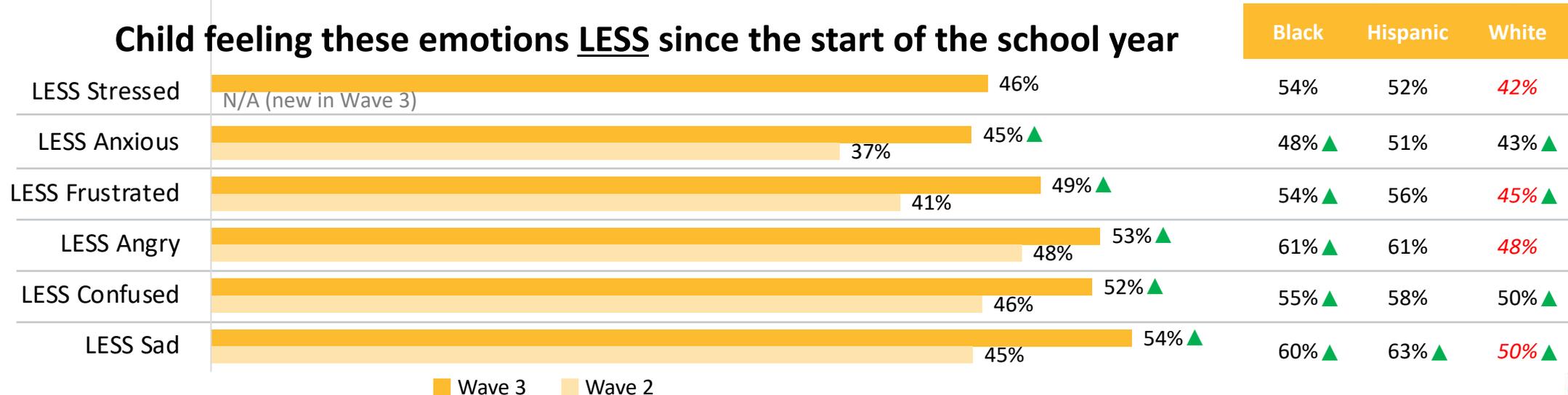
Child feeling these emotions MORE since the start of the school year

% Feeling **MORE** (Wave 3)



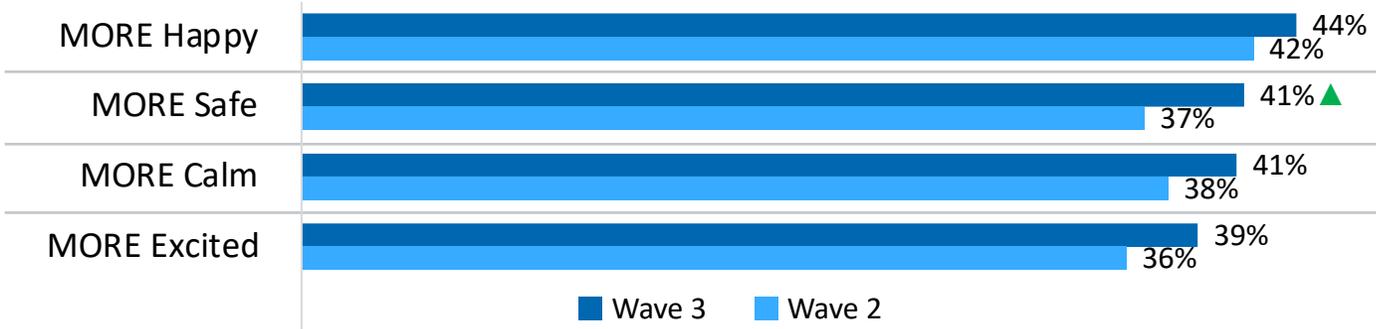
Child feeling these emotions LESS since the start of the school year

% Feeling **LESS** (Wave 3)



As was the case in Wave 2, parent perspectives mirror their perceptions of their children

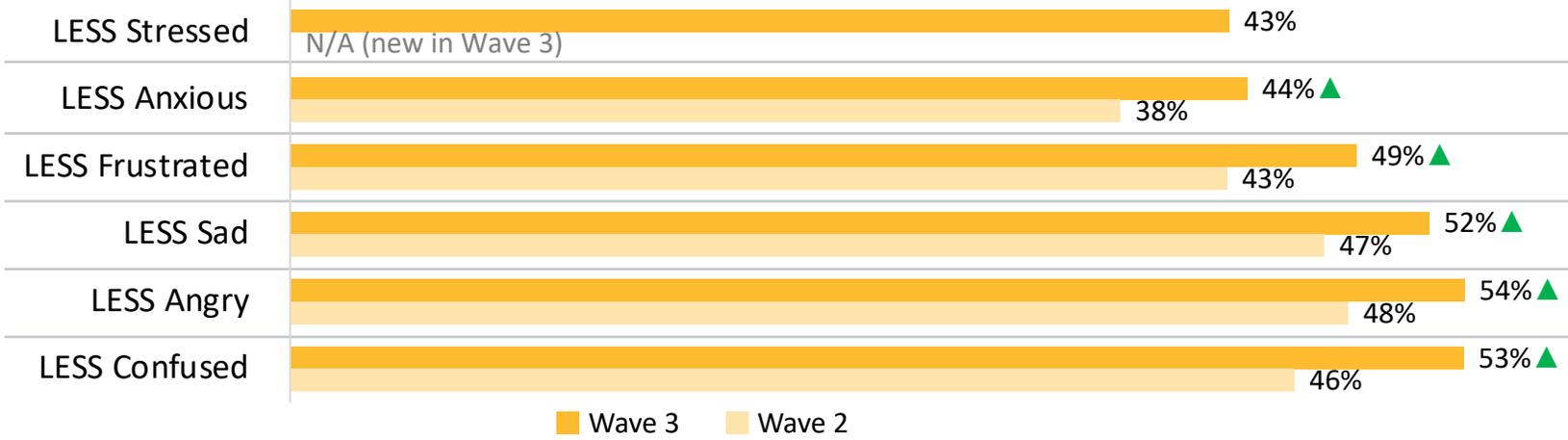
Parent feeling these emotions MORE since the start of the school year



% Feeling **MORE** (Wave 3)

	Black	Hispanic	White
MORE Happy	44%	53%	40%
MORE Safe	41%	48%	39%
MORE Calm	43%	51%	37%
MORE Excited	37%	50%	35%

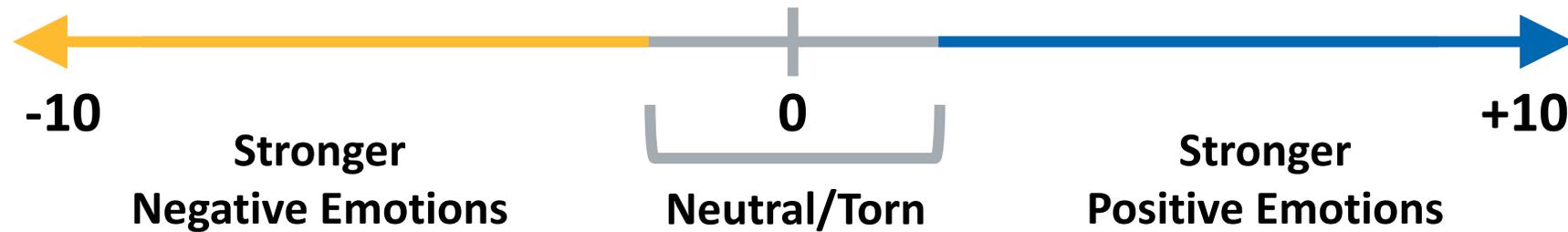
Parent feeling these emotions LESS since the start of the school year



% Feeling **LESS** (Wave 3)

	Black	Hispanic	White
LESS Stressed	48%	51%	38%
LESS Anxious	44% ▲	52% ▲	40%
LESS Frustrated	52%	57%	44% ▲
LESS Sad	58%	61%	47% ▲
LESS Angry	59% ▲	63%	49%
LESS Confused	58% ▲	61%	50% ▲

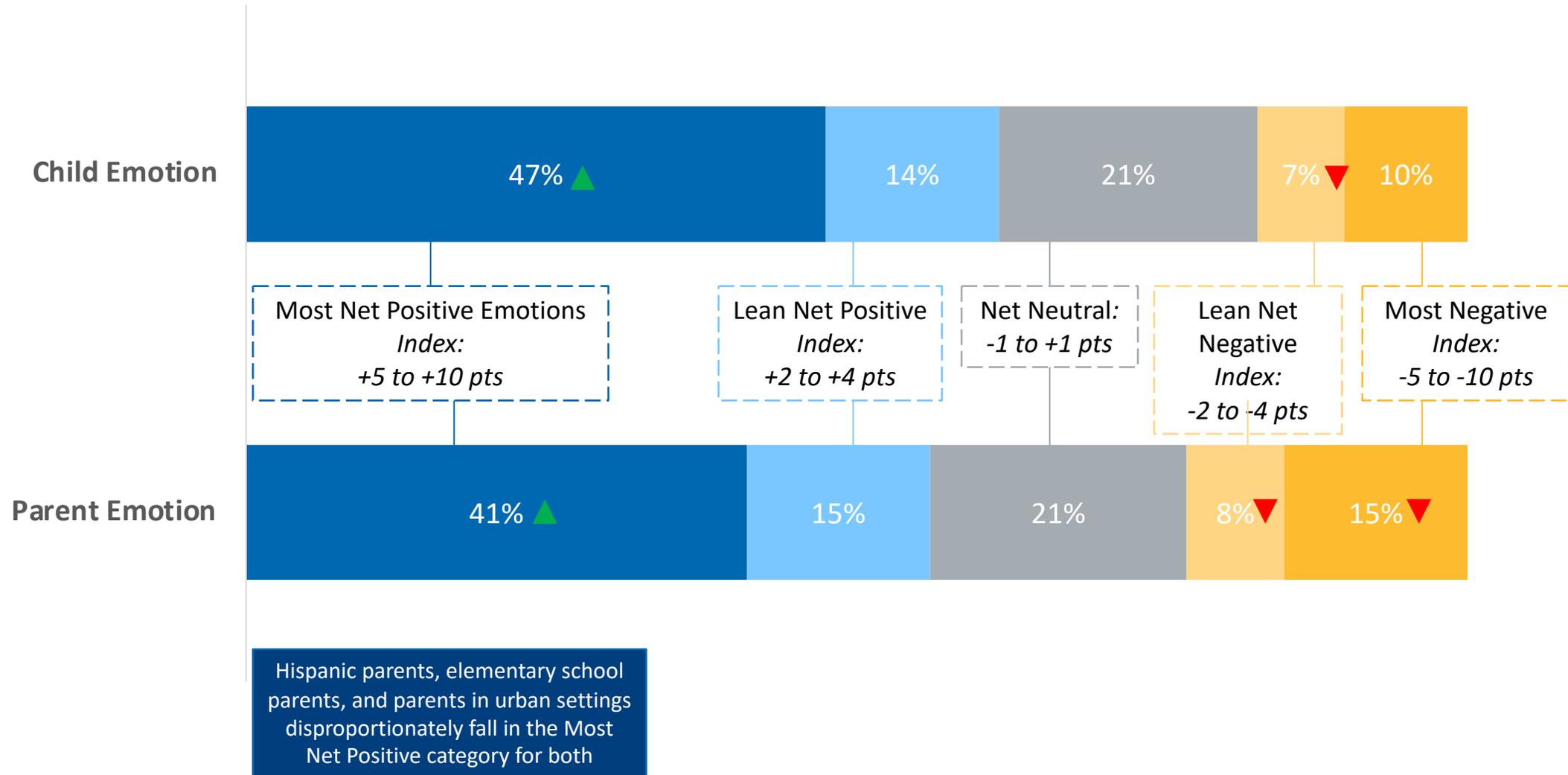
To further dig into parent and child emotions, we created an “Emotions Index”



<u>Index calculation:</u>	
-1 for...	+1 for...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling more of a negative emotion • Feeling less of a positive emotion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling more of a positive emotion • Feeling less of a negative emotion
0 for stayed the same or *not sure responses	

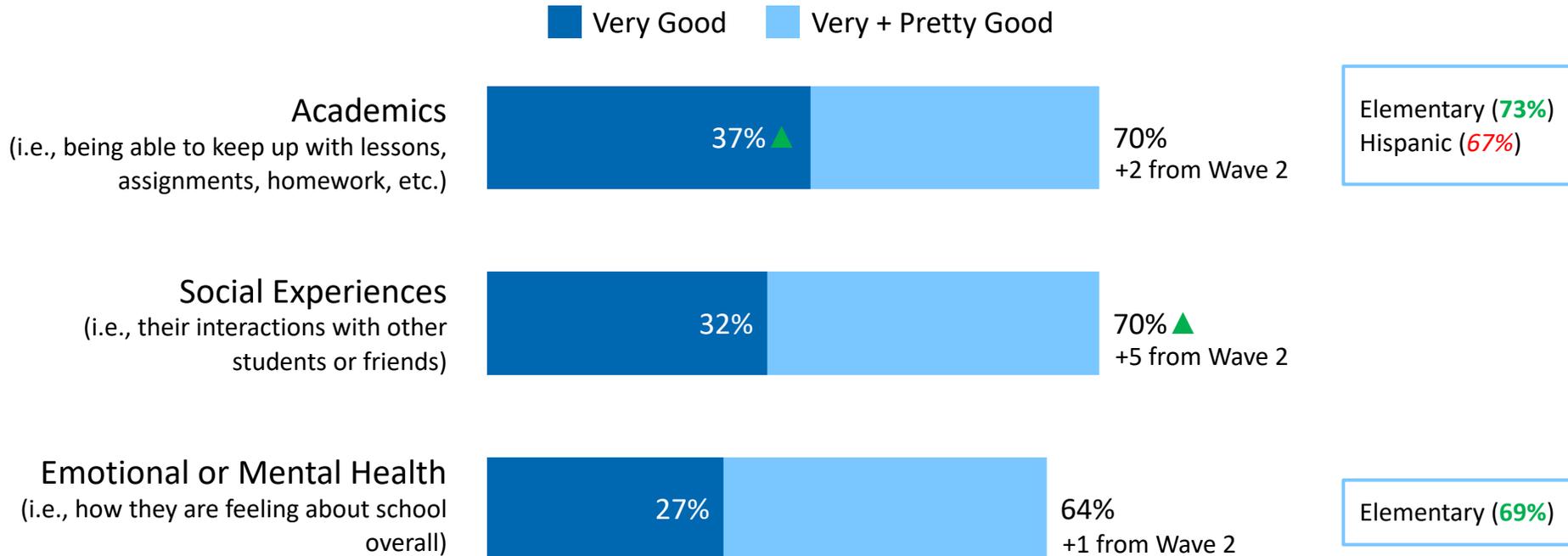
* Child emotion scale gave options for “not sure” in addition to “same.” Parent emotion scale did not.

Most parents report a net-positive shift in their and their child's emotions since the start of the school year...an even bigger shift than we saw last November



Parents also report that academics, social experiences, and emotional or mental health aspects of school are going well for their children—similar to what we saw earlier this school year

How has each of the following aspects of school been for your child so far this year?



This summer, parents want to relax—and help their child academically—more than seeking mental health resources



How much do you agree or disagree with the following?

% Strongly + Somewhat Agree

Strongly Agree Strongly + Somewhat Agree

Black (n=405)	Hispanic (n=818)	White (n=1276)
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Schools should actively work to increase a young person's feeling of purpose and self-esteem



84% 88% 82%

All I care about this summer is having a relaxing summer with my family



71% 81% 78%

This summer, it is important for me to work with my child on subjects they struggled in during the school year



79% 81% 63%

We are taking more time to talk about or take care of our social and emotional well-being at home than we did before the pandemic



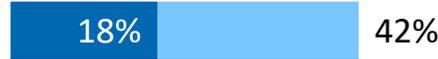
76% 76% 68%

Over the summer, I plan to seek out support or resources to help my child's social and emotional well-being



56% 54% 42%

I feel more burnt-out as a parent this year than I felt at this time last year



44% 43% 42%

I'm worried my family and I will not be able to enjoy the summer because of new COVID variants

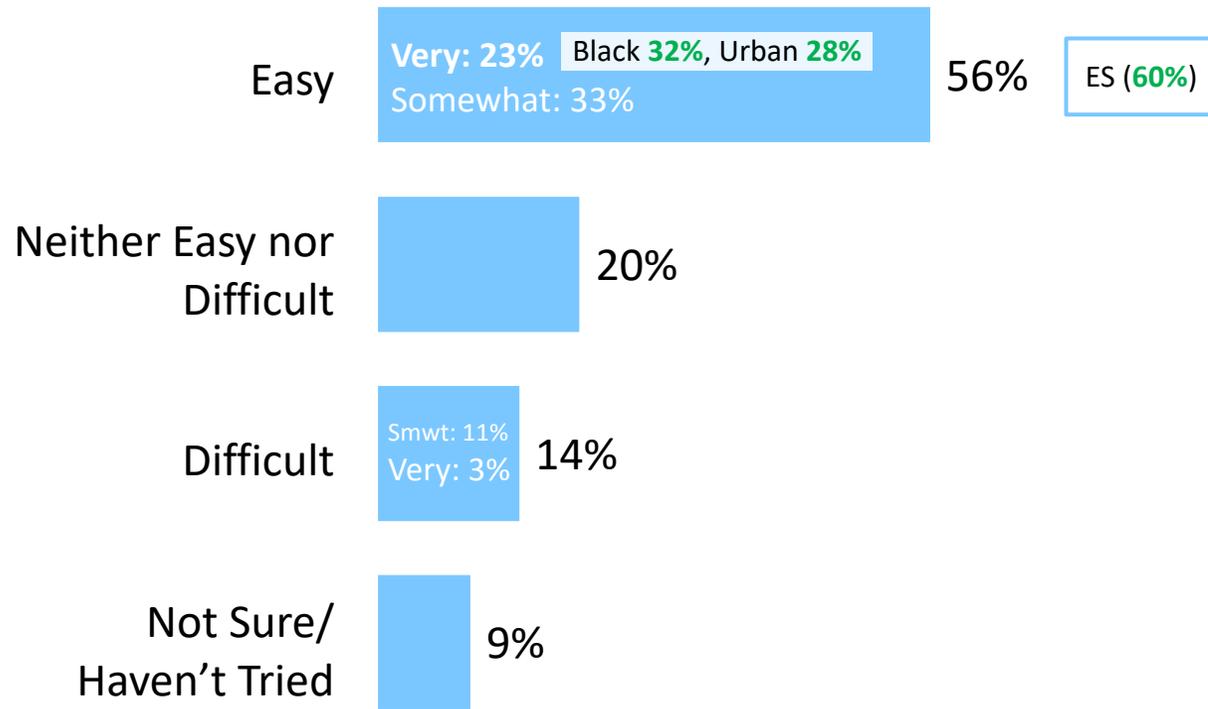


42% 48% 31%

A majority of parents believe it is at least somewhat easy to access supports for their children—over the summer and during the school year

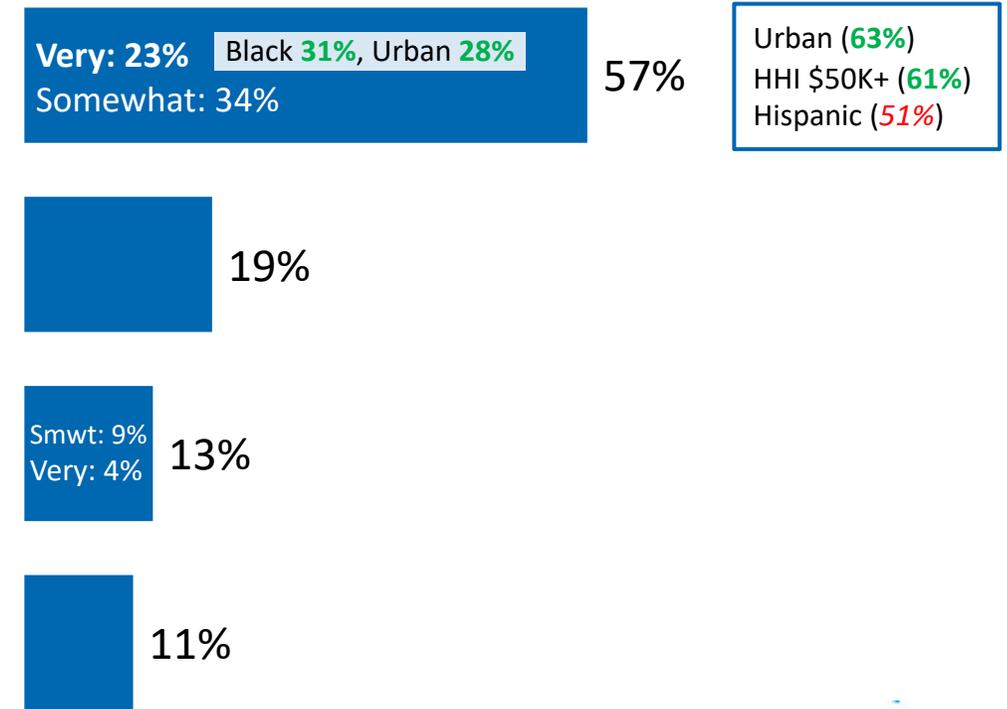
How easy or difficult is it to access resources, services, or programs to support your child’s social and emotional well-being?

From Wave 2 (During School Year)



(n=1427)

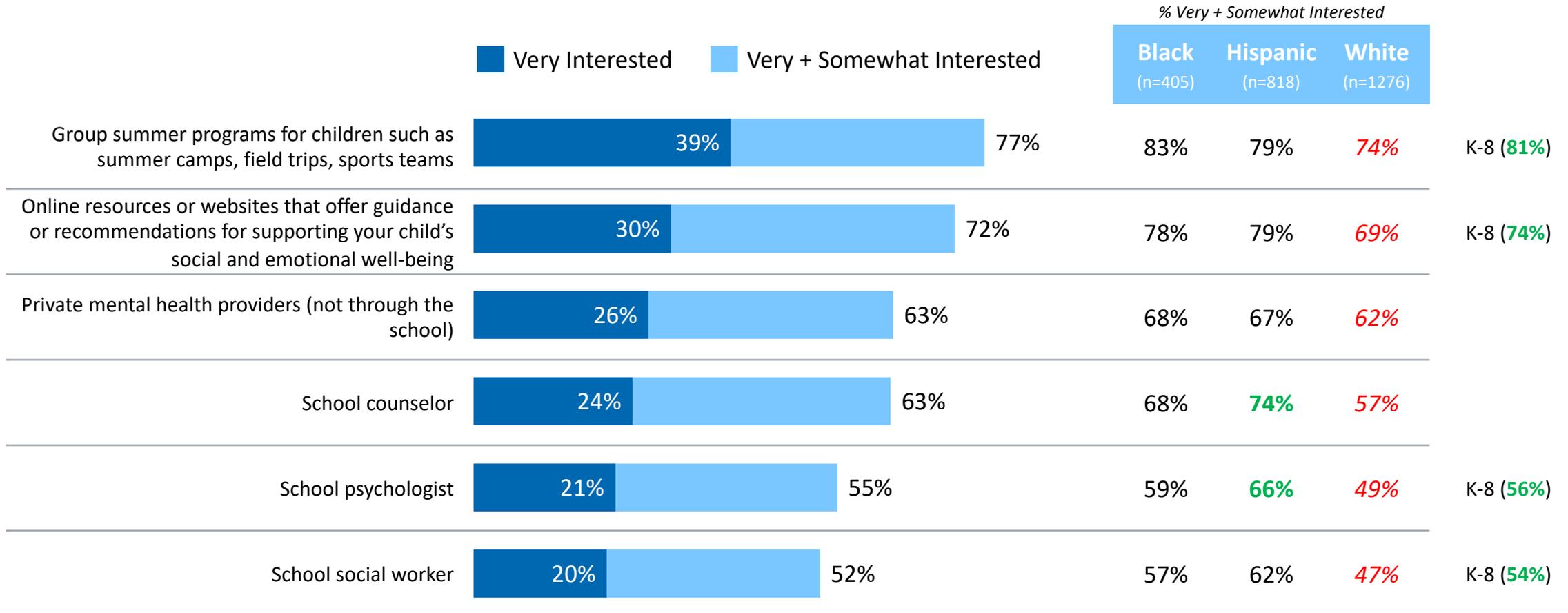
From Wave 3 (Asking “Over the Summer”)



(n=2538)

Parents are most interested in group activities and online resources to support their child's social and emotional well-being over the summer

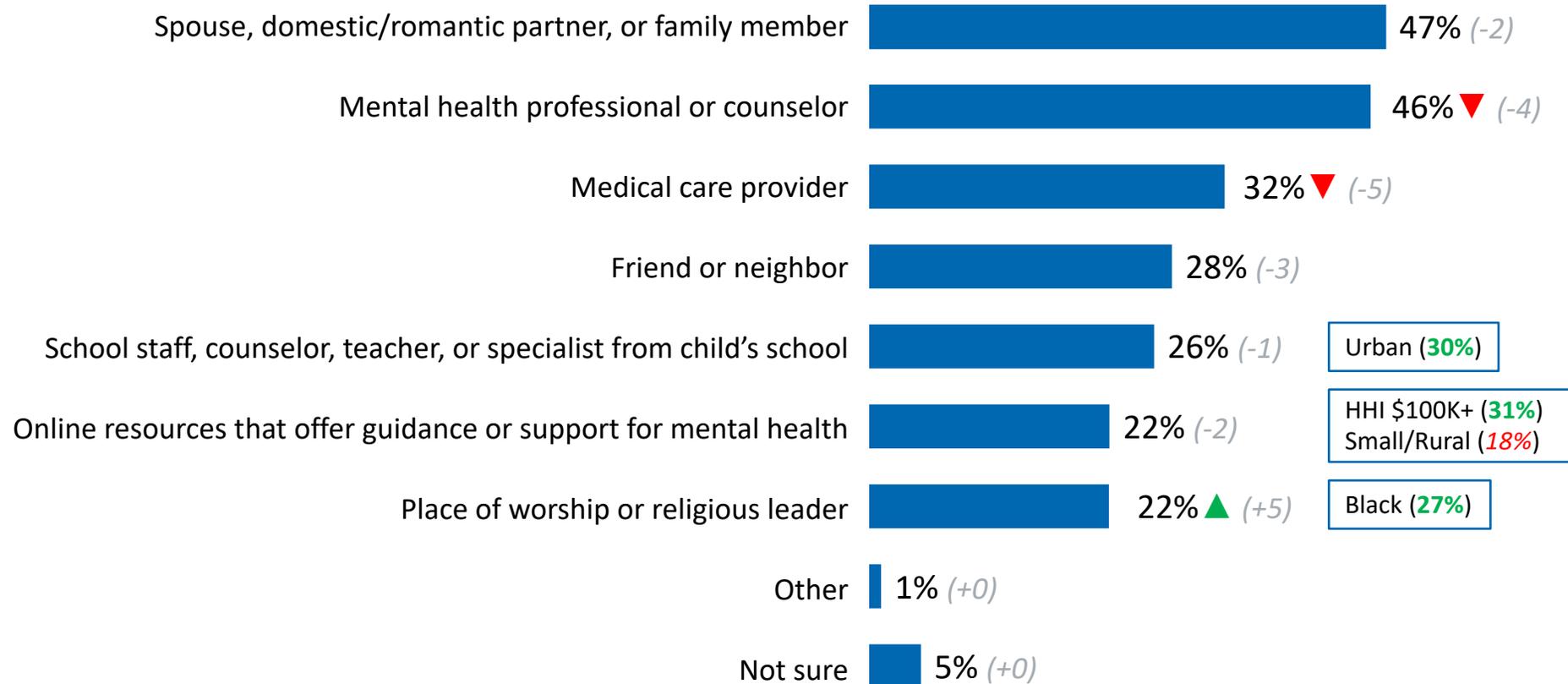
Interest in using each resource to support child's social and emotional well-being over the summer, if it were made available



Parents, themselves, are most likely to turn to a significant other, family member, or mental health professional for social and emotional support

- Over 1-in-4 Black parents would reach out to a religious leader for such support.

Which would you turn to for support for your social and emotional well-being?



Δ Since Wave 2 in parenthesis

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