

Building Parent Power: Fostering A Movement of Informed Learning Agents

October 24, 2023



Moderator



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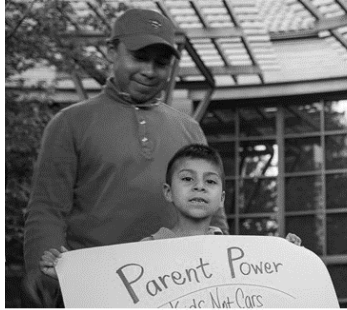
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Parent Power – discussion with Campaign for
Grade Level Reading

November 24, 2023

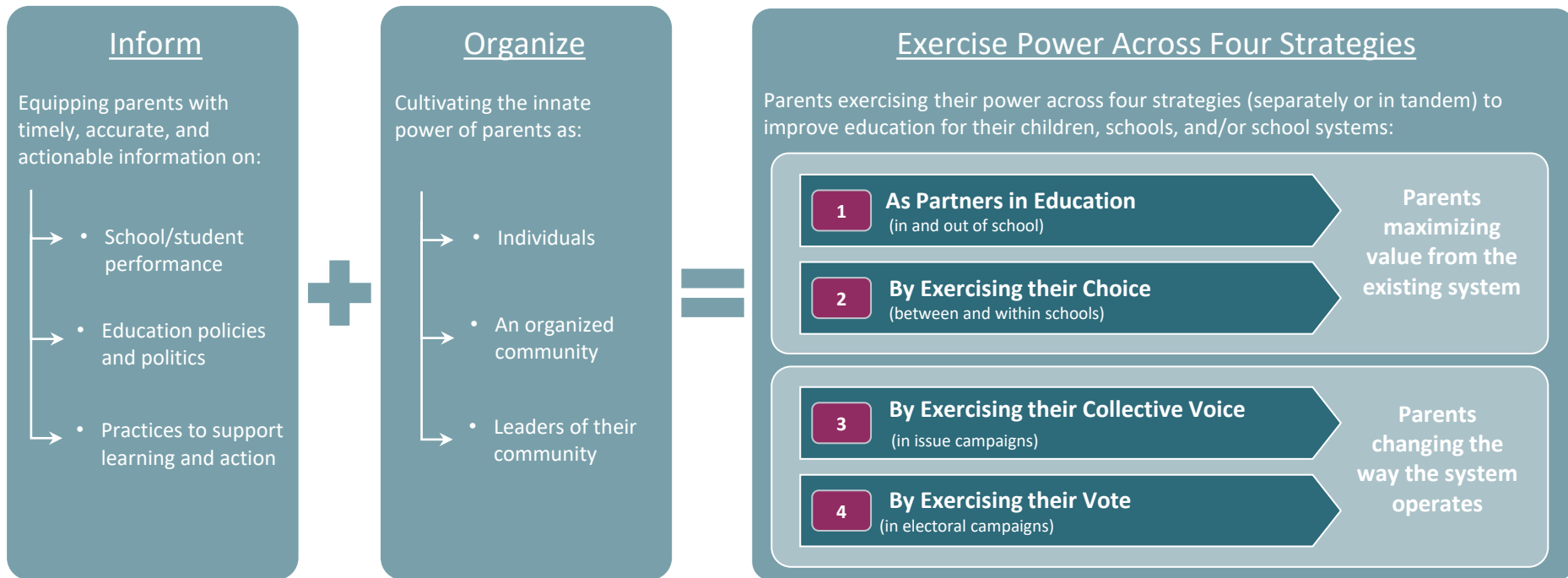
Why parent power (and by extension community power) is so important to changing education systems



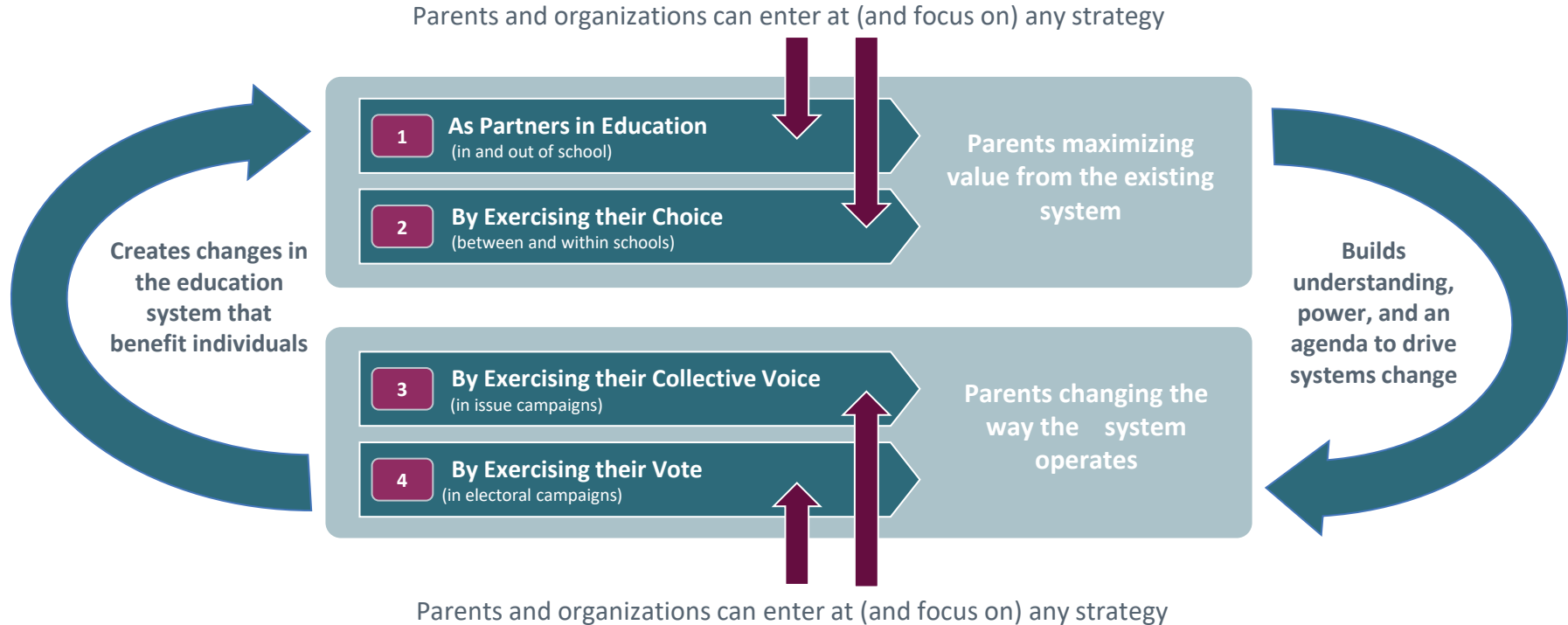
- Over the past three decades, education entrepreneurs, students, and parents* have demonstrated that with the right innovations, ALL children can learn and succeed.
- However, we have also discovered that the “supply” of these education innovations cannot reach its full potential because of political and policy barriers that inhibit what I call “actionable demand.”
- I deliberately use the term “actionable demand” because widespread “latent demand” exists for great schools in all communities. All communities care equally about the education and future of their children.
- But caring is not the same as power.
- Turning “latent demand” into “actionable demand” is therefore about power: informing and organizing parents so that they can exercise their innate power — individually and collectively — to create and sustain change.

* I am using “parent” as shorthand for any family or community member taking responsibility for the education and future of a child.

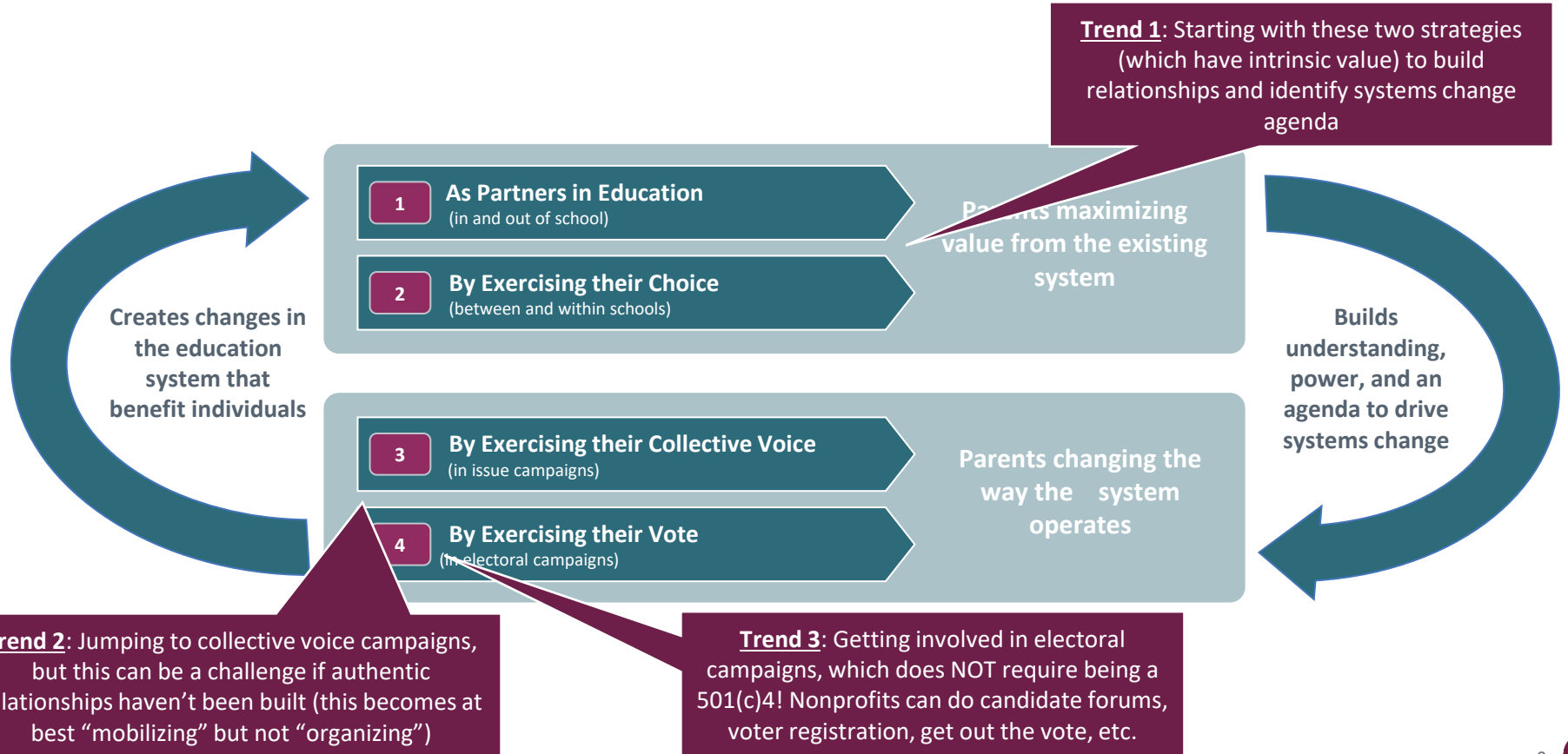
Creating “actionable demand” requires informing and organizing parents so they can exercise their innate power across four strategies.



These parent power strategies are distinct but also can form a mutually reinforcing cycle.



Three particular trends in how nonprofits engage in these strategies.



Not just parent power but community power.

- **Why I started with parent power:**

- Too often, well-intentioned education efforts discount parents out of a misguided belief that if parents were part of the solution, they would have already addressed the problem. These efforts usually diagnose the imbalance of power faced by many communities with failing education systems but then inadvertently perpetuate that power imbalance by continuing to exclude parents.
- *“We have this uncompromising belief in the infinite capacity of every child to learn, grow, create, be brilliant, and lead. We must have the same belief in their parents.”* —Matt Hammer, Founder and former CEO of Innovate Public Schools
- *“My mother says if you’re not part of the huddle, you’re not in the game. Parents are not in the game. We’re on the sidelines and we want to know how to get in.”* —Dawn Foye, Director of Talent and Culture at America’s Promise Alliance

- **However, all four of these strategies to exercise power also apply to students, teachers, and community members:**

- *“Just like parents know their kids better than other adults, kids are also learning every day (often in schools) how to know themselves better than anyone else. They deserve to be at the main table of education reform, not the kids’ table.”* —Hassan Hassan, CEO of 4.0 Schools

Key learnings for nonprofit leaders from how strong parent power groups scale.

1. Develop a strong mission and vision that provides clarity about the work and facilitates decision-making.

- When preparing to launch a new parent power organization, be explicit about the initial agenda and organization.
- Understand that one organization cannot do everything.



2. Establish structures to build power among parents and support their success.

- Build structures to regularly hear from parents to understand the issues their families are facing, and share tools, resources, and information to support them in crafting and executing issue campaigns.
- Reduce barriers to parent participation and celebrate parents regularly.



KIDS FIRST CHICAGO

3. Approach staffing and organizational structures with a flexible mindset and a willingness to make time.

- Staff need to have strong mission alignment and comfort with the intensive nature of organizing.
- Understand and consider trade-offs in board member composition.
- Be unafraid to make bold changes when something isn't working as the organization grows and evolves.

changes over



4. Build strategic relationships with funders and diversify revenue streams.

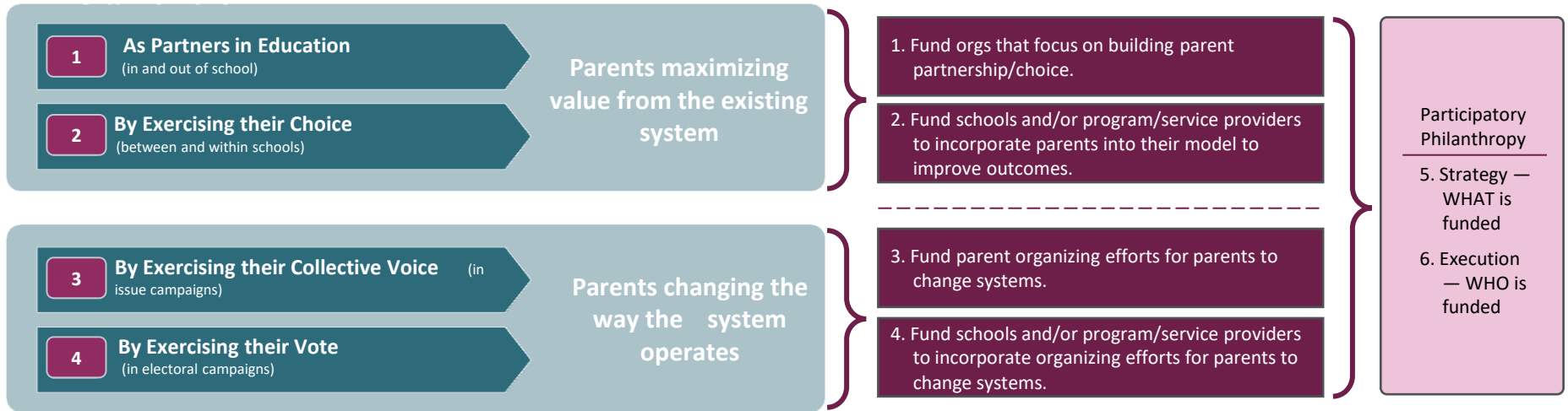
- Have a strategy in place for identifying and building relationships with funders who align with organization's mission, vision, and goals.
- When possible, identify ways to diversify the organization's base of funders.
- Be consistent and deliberate in navigating power dynamics and control of the organization's agenda with funders.



And some advice to funders.

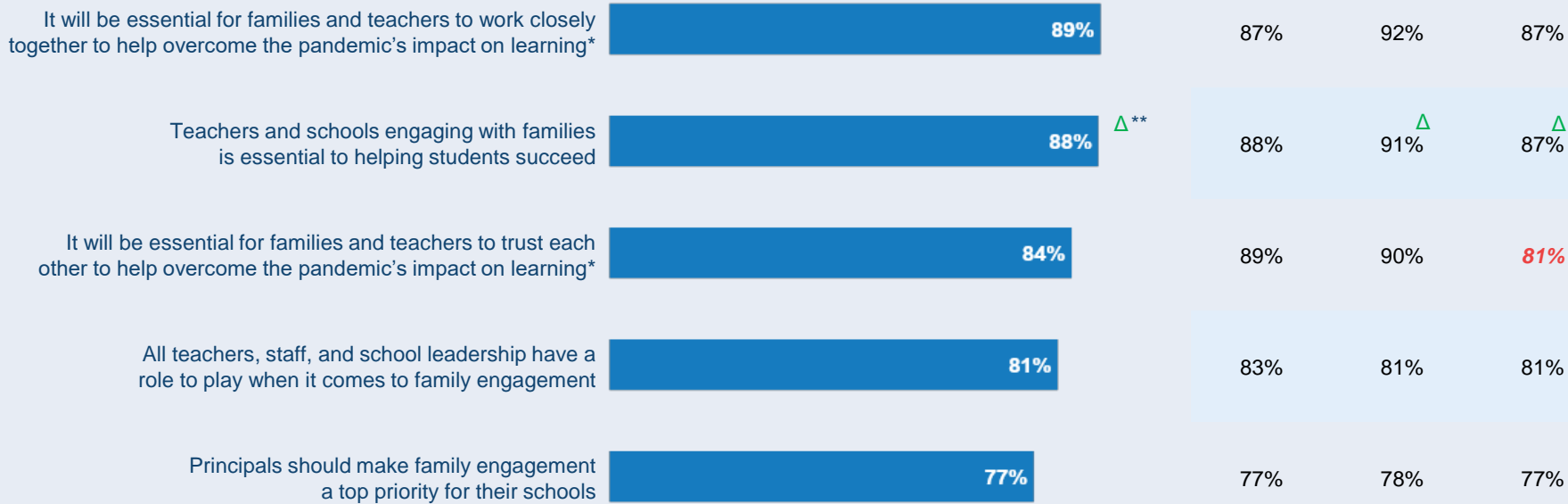
- 1. Start with (a) shifting internal organizational mindsets about the role of parents in driving change, (b) identifying and addressing internal implicit and explicit bias towards parents, and (c) exploring when/where/how to cede power.**
 - This is not about how we in education and in philanthropy invite the community to OUR table. Rather, it is the investment and effort we need to make to earn trust and credibility so that communities invite us to sit at THEIR table and contribute to a locally driven agenda for change.
 - Let parents lead the way and trust they know what they need. Funders will have to cede some power to make space for parents to exercise their innate power, particularly their power in setting the agenda, but as one parent organizing leader counsels, “you need to step back but you still need to step up.”
- 2. Think differently about funding timelines and measuring impact**
 - Supporting this work is not a marathon or a sprint but rather a commitment to walk 10,000 steps every day, and frequently around the same track, and sometimes walking backward.
 - Measurement is important and possible (though complex) in parent power work. Invest in the capacity of parent power groups to harness the power of measurement – www.parentpowerined.org
3. Ensure parent/student/community power is a consideration in a grant to every potential organization.
4. Look for opportunities to be thought partners and allies to organization leaders and offer other types of support in addition to direct funding.
5. Support organizations through leadership changes.

Some emerging themes on what this means for what philanthropy funds



Parents see working with teachers closely as essential for COVID recovery

Agreement with statements (% strongly + somewhat agree)



* = split-sampled item

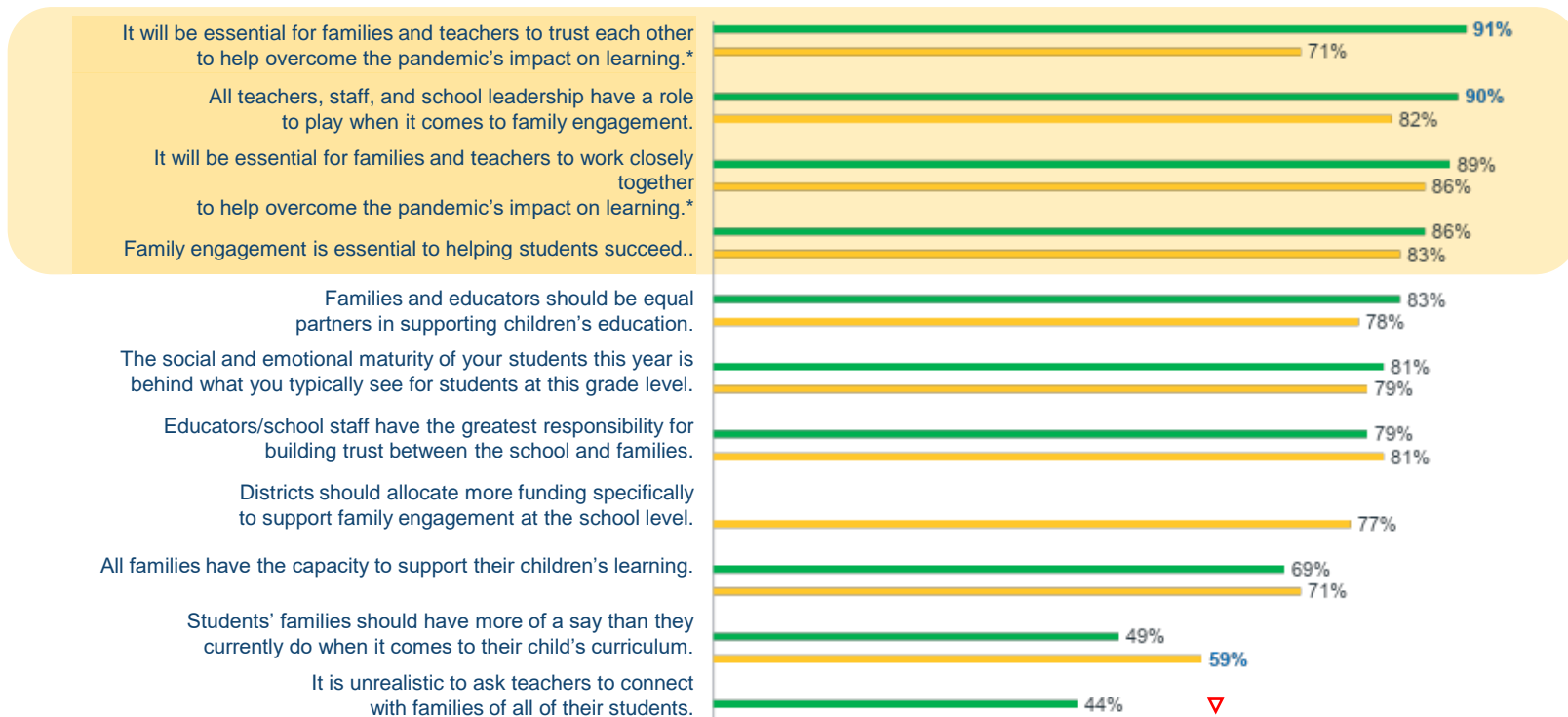
** "Family engagement is essential to helping students succeed" in 2021

Educators agree

Agreement with statements (% strongly + somewhat agree)

Teachers

Principals



* = split-sampled item
Ranked by Teacher data



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PEEP



PPS MISSION

Parents for Public Schools advances the role of families and communities in securing a high-quality public education for every child.

Founded in Jackson, Mississippi over 30 years ago (1989).

9 chapters in 7 states:

California
PPS of San Francisco

Hawai'i
PPS of Hawai'i

Mississippi
PPS of Greenwood &
Leflore County

PPS of Moss Point

PPS of Philadelphia

North Carolina
PPS of Pitt County

Ohio
PPS of Greater
Cincinnati

Oregon
CPPS of Portland

Wisconsin
PPS of Milwaukee



Leadership Development

When parents, schools,
and communities work
together, everybody
wins.

PPS National



Education
and Information



Advocacy
and Organizing



The PPS Brand of Parent Engagement

Traits of PPS engaged parents

- Equal partners
- Proactive problem solvers
- Effective decision-makers
- Standard raisers
- Mentors to others
- Committed to diversity
- Community advocates



Parent Engagement Program (PEP)



- Promotes strong home, school and community partnerships.
- Develops parent capacity to support school and district goals and is a comprehensive, research-based approach built on over 25 years of research
- Uses a proven methodology that is effective in developing and maintaining formal partnerships between community-based organizations, schools, districts and parents.

Benefits of Parent Engagement

- Lowers disciplinary intervention
- Improves grades
- Increases the graduation rate
- Sets positive goals for higher level studies
- Increases safety and order in the home
- Improves understanding between cultures





PEP'S Overarching Goal: Improving Student Success

- **Reduce barriers to learning** at home, at school and in the community
- **Engage and inform** other parents
- **Establish collaborative teams** to ensure equity for **all** students

PEP is research-based

Parents will be involved if:

- They feel welcome. They are invited
- They feel they have something to offer
- They know they should

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler

Research also tells us:

- Parent advocacy and support has a protective effect on children
- The more that families speak out for their children and support their progress, the better their children do. And the better schools perform.

Anne Henderson, Senior Consultant with the Annenberg Institute for School Reform



Questions & Discussion

Upcoming GLR Learning Tuesdays Webinars:

LEARNING LOSS RECOVERY CHALLENGE

Making Money Matter

Tuesday, October 31, 3–4:30 p.m. ET/12–1:30 p.m. PT

LEARNING LOSS RECOVERY CHALLENGE

Early Grade Retention: A Conversation about the Potential Benefits and Risks

Tuesday, November 7, 3:00-4:30 pm ET/12–1:30 p.m. PT

CRUCIBLE OF PRACTICE SALON

Community Mobilization and a Shared Agenda: Collective Impact Insights with 313Reads

Tuesday, November 14, 12:30–2:00 p.m. ET/9:30 am–13:00 p.m. PT

LEARNING LOSS RECOVERY CHALLENGE

Leaps and Bounds: How Early Learning Supports the “Mississippi Miracle”

Tuesday, November 14, 3:00-4:30 pm ET/12–1:30 p.m. PT

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