



SURVEY BRIEF

2023 Voice of the Superintendent

Key Survey Findings and Crucial Conversations for the Year Ahead



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About This Survey

Methodology

The 2023 Voice of the Superintendent Survey was distributed online from November 2, 2022, to December 1, 2022.

One hundred and ninety-eight superintendents from across 37 states completed the survey,¹ which was designed to provide current superintendents with data about the experiences, needs, and perspectives of their peers.

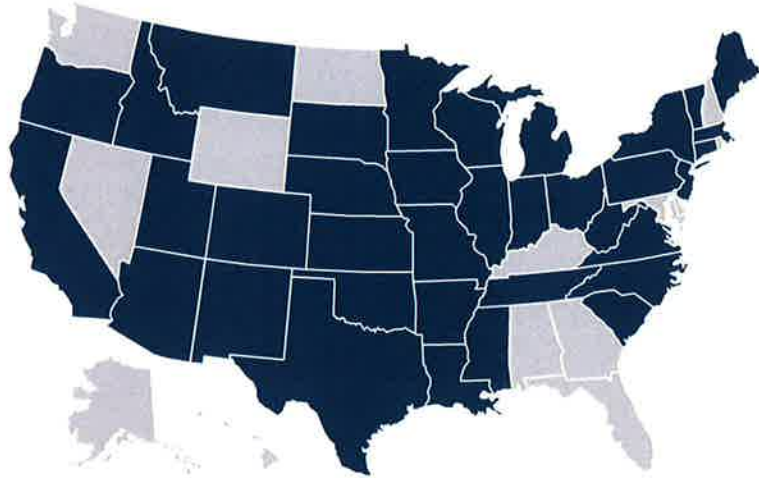
Only school superintendents participated in the survey.

The survey instrument assessed respondents':

- Perceptions of current success and optimism about the future
- Levels of concern about student academic and non-academic issues
- Levels of concern about ability to hire qualified candidates, retention of key employee groups, and staff morale
- Perceptions of community confidence through parent behaviors and concern about the influence of external groups
- Perspectives on key questions about the future of student success, school staffing, and community engagement
- Recommendations for new superintendents

Profile of Respondents

■ Locations of Survey Respondents¹
(n=198)



Gender Identity

She/her	He/him	Self-identify	Prefer not to answer
29%	60%	2%	9%

Years of Experience as a Superintendent

<3 years	3–5 years	6–10 years	10+ years
29%	21%	25%	25%

District Size

<1,000	1,000–4,999	5,000–19,999	20,000+
21%	45%	30%	4%

Community Type

Urban	Suburban	Rural
9%	47%	44%

Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Priced Lunch (FRPL)²

0–24%	25–49%	50–74%	75–100%
22%	33%	30%	15%

1) States are reflective of survey respondents who provided their district name.

2) Free/Reduced Priced Lunch hereafter referred to as FRPL.



Key Themes for 2023

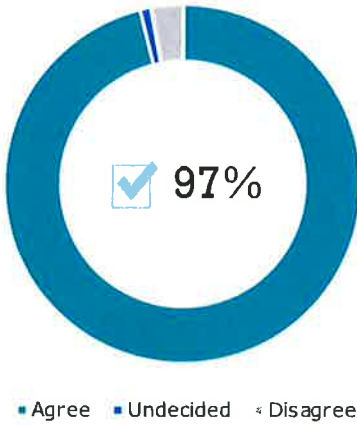
Survey Sections:

- State of the Superintendency
- Student Success
- Staffing and Morale
- Community Confidence

Priorities Are Clear, but Some Say Funding Still Insufficient

Superintendents Are Clear-Headed on What Matters Most in Their Districts in 2023

Responses to the statement, "I can name the three most important objectives for my district this year."

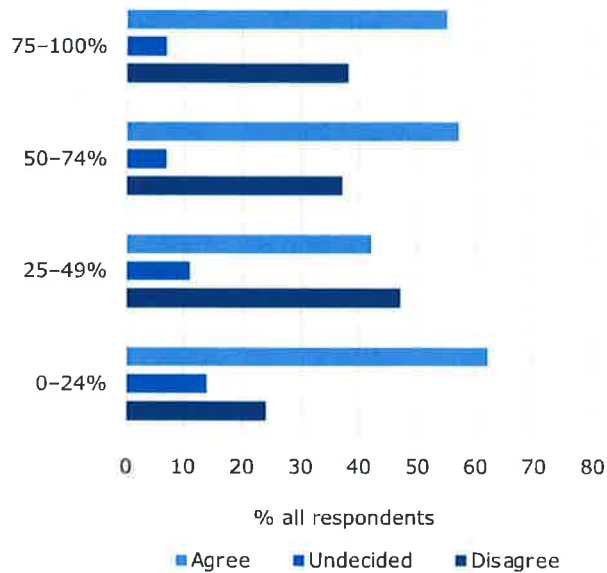


Despite the myriad challenges present in K-12 schools today, almost all district leaders say they know which issues need the most urgent attention in their schools.

- 97% of superintendents say that they can name the three most important objectives for their districts this year.
- Not more than 5% of superintendents in any demographic category disagreed with this statement, showing remarkable uniformity across the subgroups we analyzed.

But Divided on Whether They Have Sufficient Funding to Achieve Their Strategic Goals

Responses to the statement, "Our district has sufficient funding to achieve those three objectives."



While respondents consistently understand what matters most for their districts, we see no such consensus on whether districts have the funds needed to achieve those objectives.

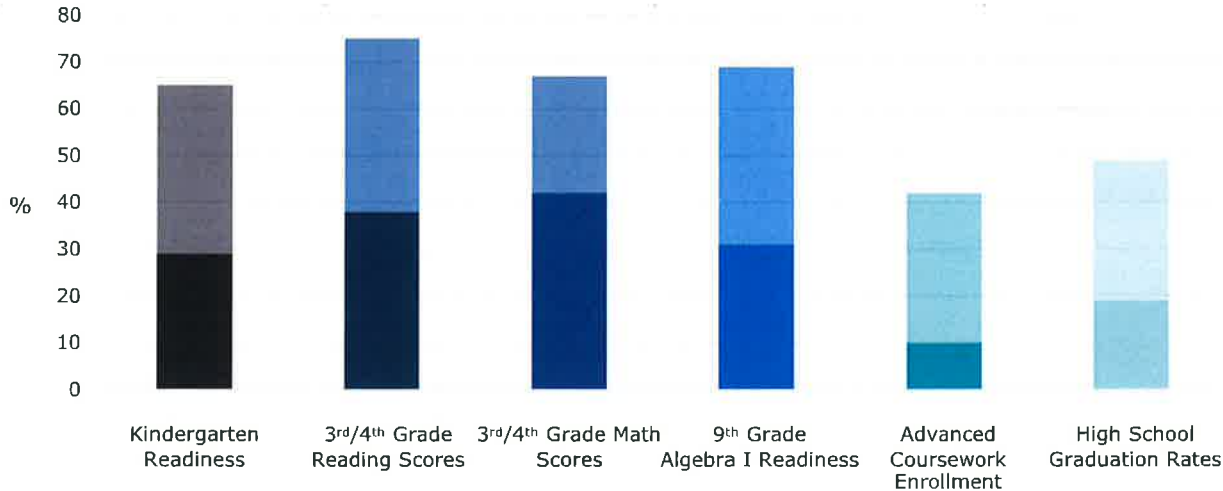
- Just 53% of superintendents believe they have the funding necessary to achieve the three most important objectives for their district this year.
- Those who disagree are more likely to serve urban districts than suburban or rural school systems.
- Perhaps predictably, likelihood to disagree was also greatest in districts where more than 75% of students qualify for FRPL.¹
- Interestingly, those with between 25 and 49% FRPL¹ were the group most likely to disagree. This may reflect that these districts often provide a significant number of resource-intensive services without the benefit of either high local tax dollars or substantial federal funding.

1) Free/Reduced Priced Lunch.

Foundational Skills Top the List of Academic Concerns

Percentage of Superintendents Expressing Moderate or Major Concern About Issues Related to Student Academic Achievement

Lighter = Moderate Concern Darker = Major Concern



“Missed learning” has been well documented over the past two years. So, as we expected, the majority of superintendents cited moderate or major concern about current early literacy and math scores in their schools. However, major concern about key academic indicators at the secondary level was consistently lower, raising questions about whether more focus needs to be placed on the consequences of missed learning from ninth through twelfth grades.

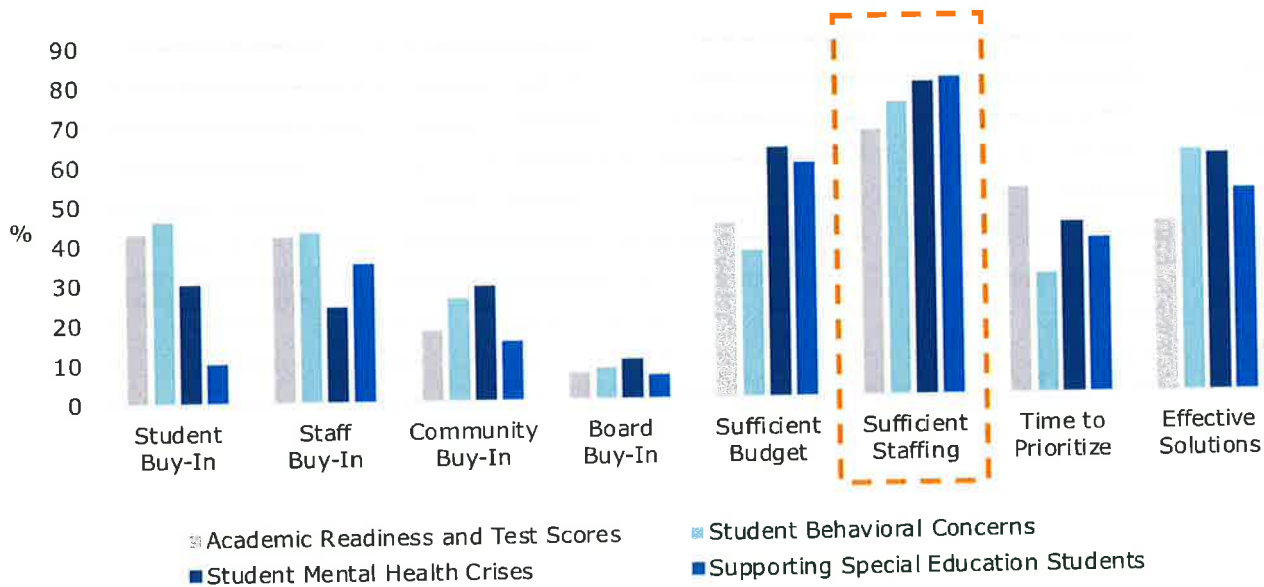
- 75% of superintendents cite third- and fourth-grade reading scores as a moderate or major concern in their schools, with 40% selecting “major concern” for this issue.
- Responses regarding third- and fourth-grade math assessment scores are nearly identical to those about early literacy, with 76% of total respondents citing this issue as a moderate or major concern.
- Likelihood of third- or fourth-grade reading and math scores being a major concern was nearly 6x greater for districts with at least 75% FRPL¹ than in districts with fewer than 25% FRPL¹ (Reading = 69% versus 12%, Math = 76% versus 17%).
- Rates of concern about the percentage of students ready for Algebra I initially look similar to overall concern about early literacy and math, with 70% of all respondents citing this as a moderate or major concern.
- But superintendents are far less likely to see Algebra I readiness as a major concern, with just 32% of respondents selecting that option (rising to 48% for those with 75%+ FRPL.¹)
- Superintendents expressed the least concern about the percentage of students taking advanced coursework. Fifty-nine percent of respondents said this was, at most, a mild concern, but one in five said this issue was no concern at all.
- Overall, roughly half of superintendents (49%) report moderate or major concern about the percentage of students on track for graduation. But again, 38% of superintendents with 75%+ students receiving FRPL¹ regard this as a major concern, compared with just 2% of those with 24% FRPL¹ or less.

1) Free/Reduced Priced Lunch.

To Solve Today's Challenges, Districts Need...Talent

Superintendents Say Staffing Challenges Are Their Biggest Barrier to Success

"For each listed category of challenges, which resources are you lacking to help fully address the challenge? Select all that apply."



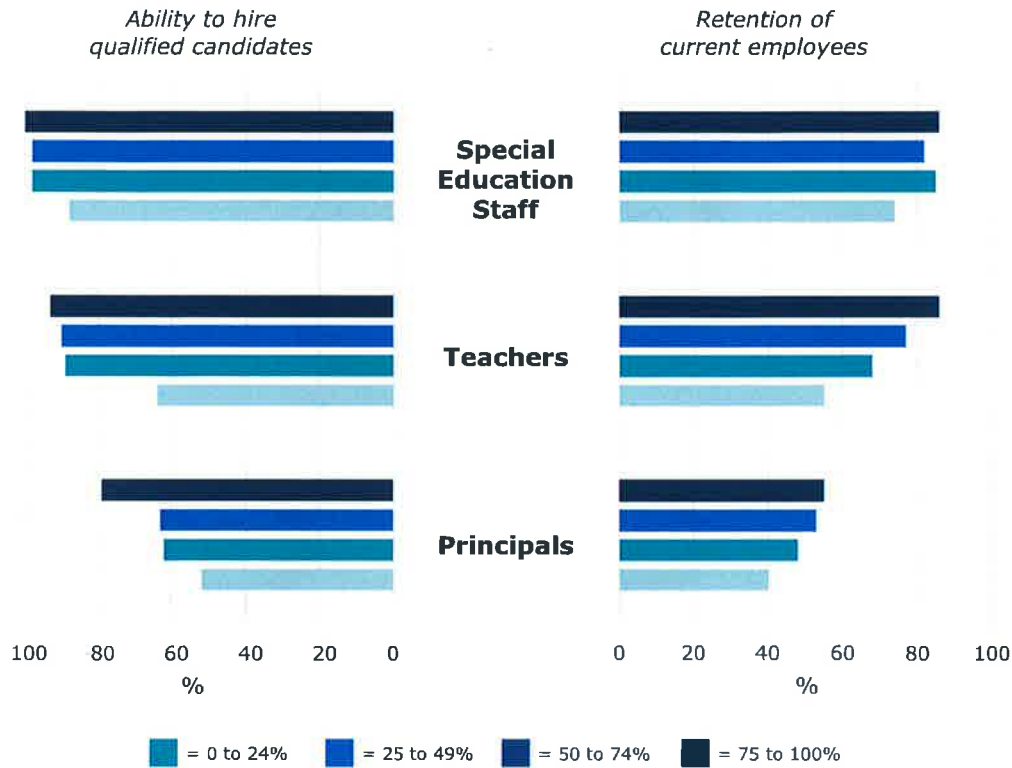
With such a wide range of critical and urgent challenges needing to be addressed, this survey also aimed to understand what superintendents believe will limit their ability to make progress. One answer rang out loud and clear: insufficient staffing.

- Sufficient staffing was the resource superintendents said they were lacking to fully address academic challenges (67%), student behavioral concerns (74%), and student mental health crises (79%).
- Sufficient staffing was also the most consistently cited need for fully supporting students in special education programs today (80%).
- Budget is second to staffing in reported needs to address student mental health crises and adequately support special education students.
- Roughly half of superintendents (52%) say they lack the time to prioritize academic readiness and test scores in their districts. That number rises to 66% for those with 75%+ FRPL.¹
- Superintendents are most likely to say they lack effective solutions for addressing student behavioral challenges and mental health crises in their schools.

1) Free/Reduced Priced Lunch.

Staffing Concerns Greatest Where Student Needs Are Highest

Percentage of Superintendents Who Report Moderate or Major Concern About Employee Retention and Ability to Hire Qualified Candidates, by Percentage of Students Receiving FRPL¹



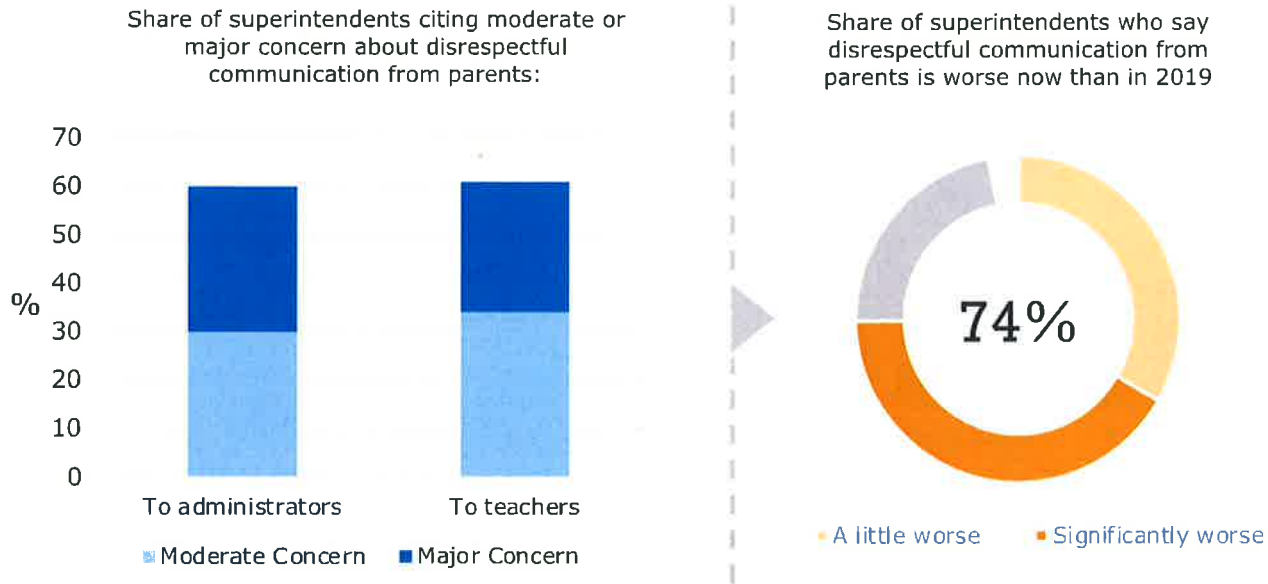
As shown on the previous page, concern about hiring and retention of school-based staff is high for the majority of superintendents. But levels of concern also rise in correlation with the share of students who qualify for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch. And as we shared on page 11, those districts also serve students who are most likely to need additional support today.

- Among districts with 75 to 100% FRPL,¹ 83% of superintendents report major concern about the ability to hire qualified teachers (compared with just 38% of those with 0 to 24% FRPL¹).
- The likelihood of a superintendent citing principal retention as a “major concern” doubles among districts with 75 to 100% FRPL¹ in comparison with all other quartiles.
- The most glaring statistic here is that 100% of superintendents in districts with 75%+ FRPL¹ report teacher morale to be a moderate (28%) or major (72%) concern in their districts.
- 100% of respondents with 75%+ FRPL¹ also report moderate or major concern about their ability to hire qualified special education staff. Additionally, rates of major concern increase from 60% among districts with 0 to 24% FRPL¹ to 90% for those with 75 to 100% FRPL.¹

1) Free/Reduced Priced Lunch.

Parents' Behavior is Harming the Employee Experience

Disrespectful Communication from Parents Has Increased in Districts of All Types



To raise teacher morale, district leaders will need to address both internal and external factors. The most significant driver of low morale among educators today may not be low pay, overwork, or even classroom behavior. For many, the way educators are perceived and treated by parents and community members is having just as significant an effect.

- More than half of superintendents report moderate or major concern about disrespectful communication from parents to teachers (61%) and administrators (62%) this year.
- Three out of four superintendents say this issue is worse now than before the pandemic.
- Fifty-three percent of all respondents also say that community tension and parental pressure are the greatest drivers of low staff morale in their schools.
- The reason for these disrespectful communications is not entirely clear from this survey. Forty-three percent of superintendents report at least moderate concern about parent/caregiver complaints regarding school curricula/instructional materials. Thirty-six percent report similar levels of concern about parent complaints regarding teacher quality and behaviors. But no more than 10% of respondents cited major concern about either of these categories.
- However, 63% of superintendents cite moderate to major concern about the influence of political groups on parent communications and behaviors, with half of those (33%) reporting this to be a major concern.



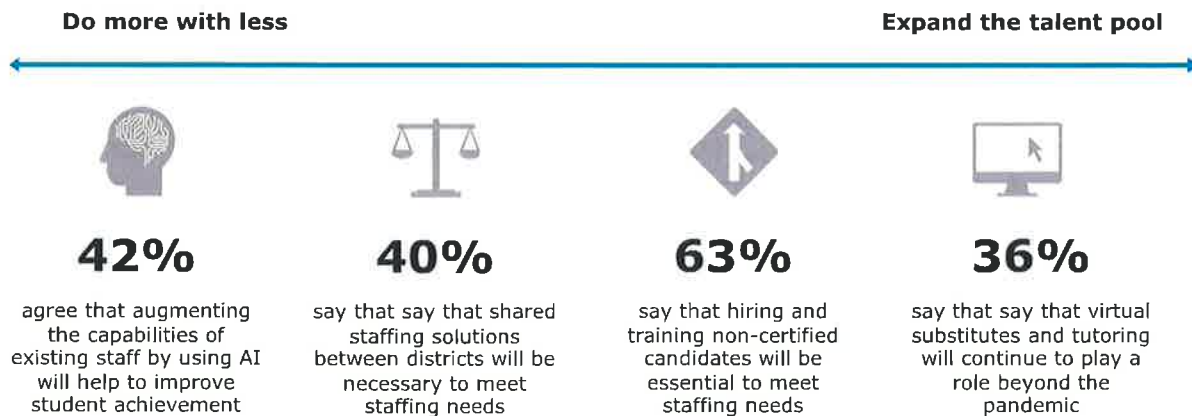
Looking Forward

Three Essential Discussions for the Year Ahead

Overcoming Persistent Staffing Shortages

Which Creative Staffing Solutions Will Become Standard Practice?

Superintendents' Perspectives on the Future of Alternative Staffing Models



The near-term outlook for staffing in schools is not good. From 2008-2019, the number of students completing teacher preparation programs in the United States dropped by more than a third. Across 2021 and 2022, about 20% of traditional teacher education programs say the pandemic caused further enrollment drops of 11% or more.

With shortages likely to continue across classroom teachers, counselors, and other key roles, districts will likely need to explore new, innovative staffing models to meet the academic and social/emotional needs of today's students.

But as you can see above, while several possible solutions each receive some support, there is little consensus around what districts will double down on to solve staffing challenges in schools. Collaboration between districts and support organizations to find sustainable and effective staffing models will be essential as the industry searches for a path forward.

Questions for District Leaders to Discuss

- ▶ Where do we see opportunities for shared staffing between districts today?
- ▶ How would we talk to staff about increasing their capacity through the use of emerging technologies (such as artificial intelligence tools), both inside and outside of the classroom?
- ▶ Where do we most need new staffing models and solutions (for example, special education or school maintenance and operations)?

Goldberg, E. (2021, April 7). *As Pandemic Upends Teaching, Fewer Students Want to Pursue It*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/27/us/covid-school-teaching.html>



Wise Words for New Superintendents

Essential Advice to New District Leaders from Their Peers



Closing Thoughts



Education's Trusted Partner to Help Schools and Students Thrive

Proven Solutions for K-12's Current, Critical Challenges



Student Success

Unlock Student Success

- Student Behavior
- Early Literacy
- Student Mental Health



Employee Experience

Re-Imagine the Employee Experience

- Teacher and Staff Morale
- Principal Hiring and Development
- Employee Recruitment and Retention



Community Confidence

Strengthen Community Confidence

- Parent and Community Buy-In
- Flashpoint Management
- District Communications



About EAB and the District Leadership Forum

The District Leadership Forum helps district leaders identify and implement proven solutions to current, critical challenges.

Through our research, events, and advisory services we provide superintendents and their teams with expert guidance as well as hands-on support to make meaningful change in their districts.

180+

Districts in the District Leadership Forum

37

States represented

600-180k

Students per district we serve

Learn how the District Leadership Forum can help your district achieve its goals at eab.com/k12