

# One of Us

naeyc®

National Association for the  
Education of Young Children

K-3 Teachers **Are** Early Childhood Educators



KEY FINDINGS FROM A  
NATIONAL SURVEY AND  
ONLINE FOCUS GROUPS

# NAEYC Strategic Priorities

## **GOAL:**

The early education profession exemplifies excellence and is recognized as vital and performing a critical role in society.

## **GOAL:**

Children birth through age 8 have equitable access to developmentally appropriate, high-quality early learning.

## **DESIRED RESULT:**

Skills, knowledge, competencies and qualifications are agreed upon and used to define the early care and education profession.

## **DESIRED RESULT:**

Developmentally appropriate practice is seen as indispensable for kindergarten through third grade.

# Primary Questions Driving Our Research

- How do K-3 educators feel about the **current state of their work**? What are the challenges and successes?
- In what ways do K-3 educators **feel like** early childhood educators?
- What do they **value most** from their professional preparation – and what do they think was missing?
- Do K-3 educators want to be part of a **unified profession** with educators of children ages three and four, and birth to three?
- What advocacy messages do they respond to, and in what ways might they engage as advocates?

# Research Methodology

## 1. In-depth, **online qualitative interviews**

- With 14 educators who teach grades K-3
- Conducted August 1-3, 2017

## 2. Quantitative **online survey**

- Nationally representative group of 537 teachers who currently or recently taught in grades K-3
- Conducted from August 23 - October 3, 2017
- Recruited from lists of NAEYC members, partner organizations and a commercially-available database
  - 14% of respondents identify as NAEYC members

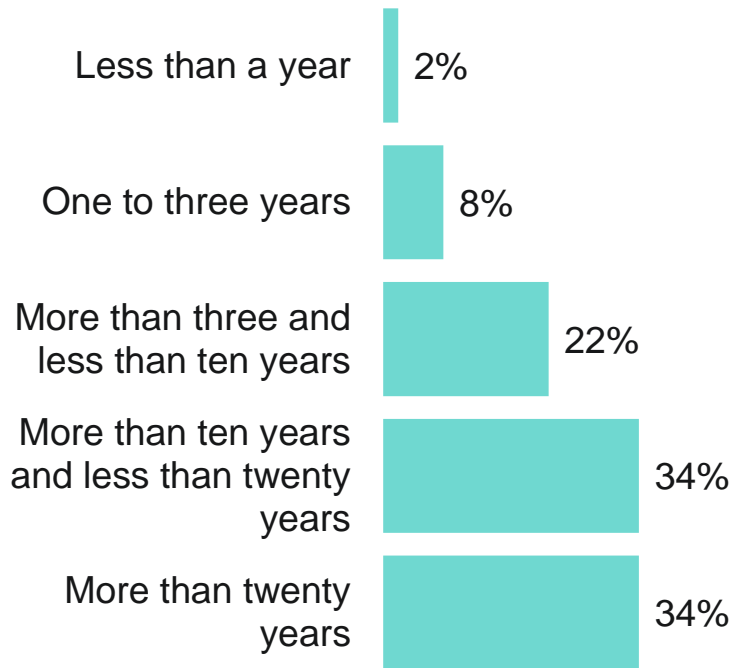
*NOTE: Questions tracked between surveys of educators serving children from 0-5 and parents allow for comparisons*

**Bipartisan research team of FM3 (D) and Public Opinion Strategies (R)  
Funding generously provided by the Richard W. Goldman Family Foundation**

**Two-thirds of respondents have been teachers for more than 10 years and three-quarters plan to stay in the profession long term.**

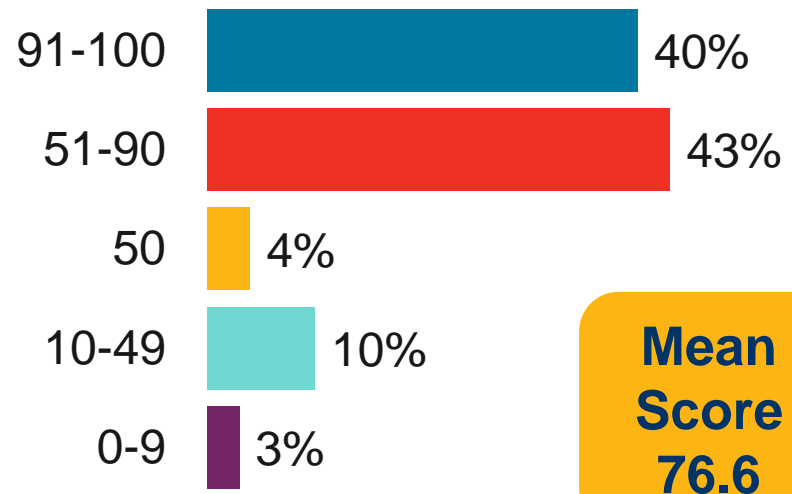
# Two-thirds of respondents have been teachers for more than 10 years and three-quarters plan to stay in the profession long term.

## For how long have you worked as an educator?



## Do you plan to keep working for the long term as an early elementary teacher in K-3?

Please rate the likelihood of teaching early elementary grades being your long-term career on a 0-100 scale, where 0 means you definitely will not continue in the field in the long term, 100 means you definitely will and 50 means you are unsure.



**Mean Score**  
**76.6**

# Meaningful and Challenging: What It Means to Be an Early Childhood Educator



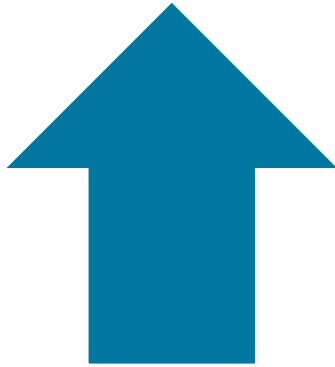
# K-3 educators and educators who work with children 0-5 share similar views about the importance of their jobs.

*How important to you are the following aspects of your job as an early elementary teacher?*  
(Extremely Important)

Aspects of Job	K-3 Educators	0-5 Educators
Feeling good about the impact I am having on children and my community	72%	75%
Working with dedicated and supportive co-workers	62%	64%
Having a work schedule that allows me to spend time with my family	56%	49%
Working in a field in which I am able to constantly grow and improve	51%	54%

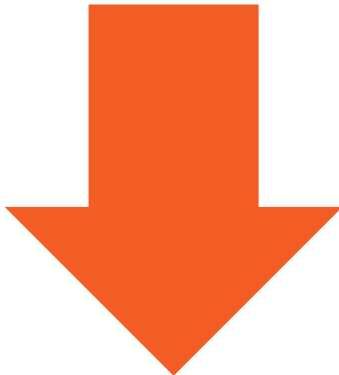


# Like / Dislike



## Like about teaching K-3

- Watching children grow and achieve
- Children's love of learning
- Teaching foundations

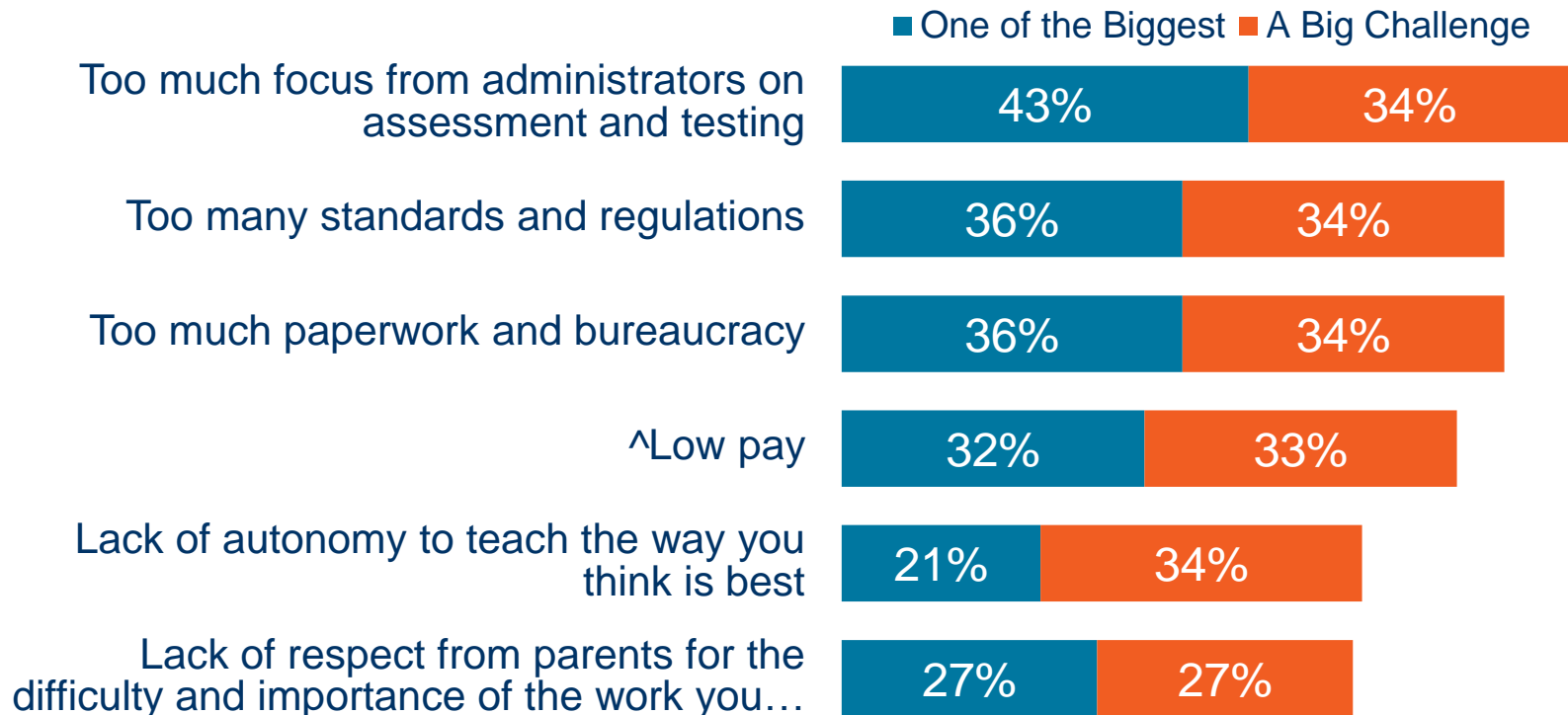


## Dislike about teaching K-3

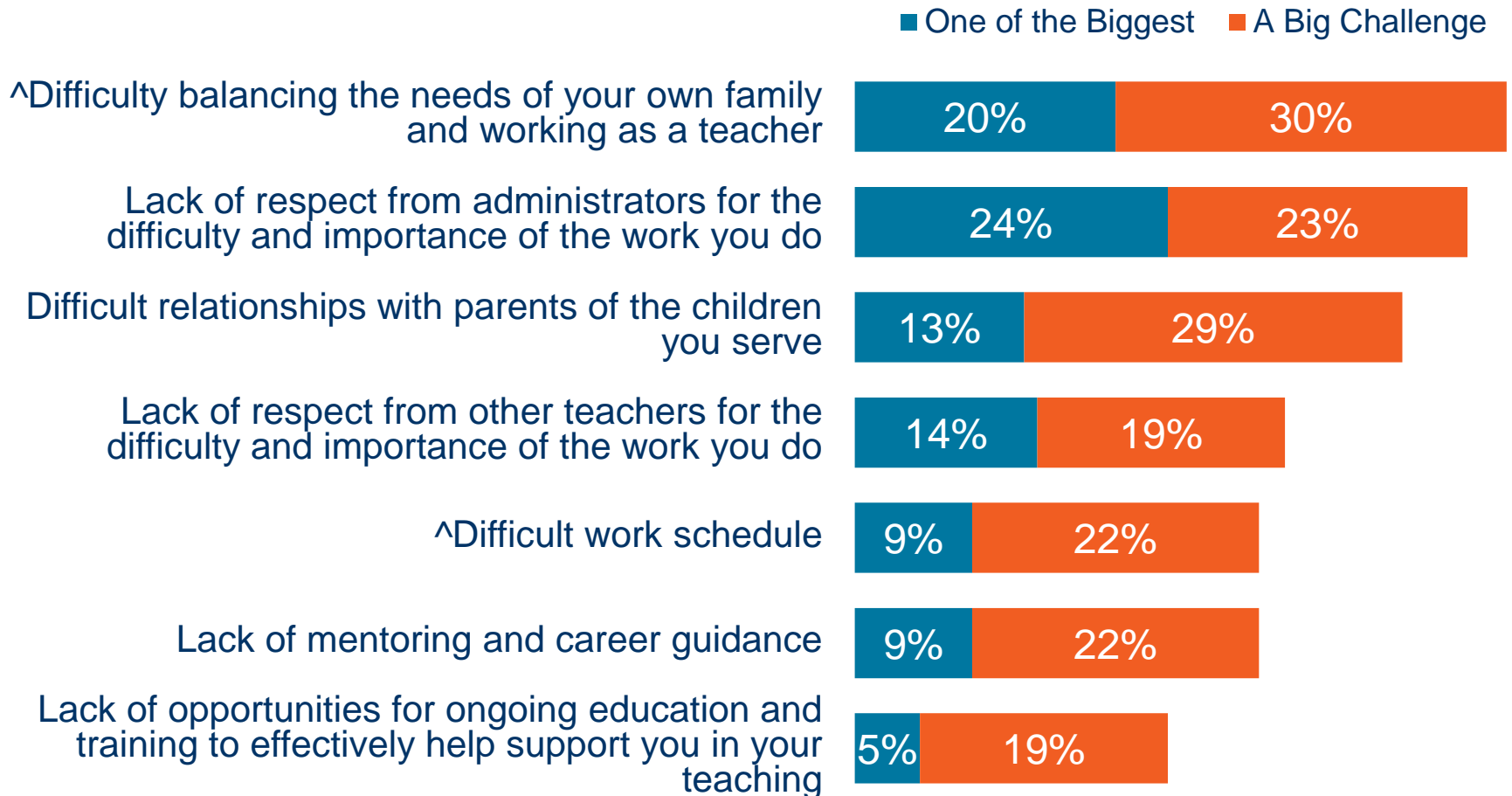
- Children not independent
- Demands on teachers
- Inappropriate standards
- Low pay

# Too much testing, regulations and bureaucracy, along with low pay, are seen as the biggest challenges.

*Below you will find a list of things that some people consider to be challenges facing early elementary teachers that have led some to switch to teaching other grades or switching professions altogether. Please rate them in terms of how challenging they have been for you personally.*



# Other commonly identified issues are viewed as less challenging



# There are notable differences in attitudes of teachers by experience, income and region.

- **Teachers with 10 years of experience or less** are much less likely to cite bureaucracy and paperwork as a challenge, compared to longer-tenured teachers, particularly those who have advanced degrees
- **More experienced teachers** also find the focus on assessments and amount of standards and regulations to be more challenging
- **Less experienced teachers** are more likely to say that lack of respect from parents is one of the biggest challenges
- **Teachers who do not plan to stay in the profession long-term** identify these issues as more challenging: lack of autonomy, lack of respect from administrators, and difficult relationships with parents
- **For teachers with incomes below \$60,000**, low pay is among the biggest challenges
- **Teachers in the South** are more likely to say that too much focus on assessments and low pay are challenges.

## Focus group participants, when asked to list challenges in an open-ended question, expressed concerns about meeting the needs of the children they teach.

*Not being able to help every child. There are some situations where parents are not very involved, when you know as a teacher they need to be.*

*Making sure that all of the children are getting the attention that they need. There is always that one child that flies below the radar that I feel gets a little less because they are in the background.*

*Keeping up with all the increasing demands placed on teachers with no additional support to meet those demands.*

*Meeting all the different expectations and the government, district and school level. It is hard as there are different things that each group expects and sometimes it is not appropriate.*

# Compared to educators of children 0-5, K-3 educators are more likely to cite paperwork/bureaucracy as a challenge and less likely to cite low pay.

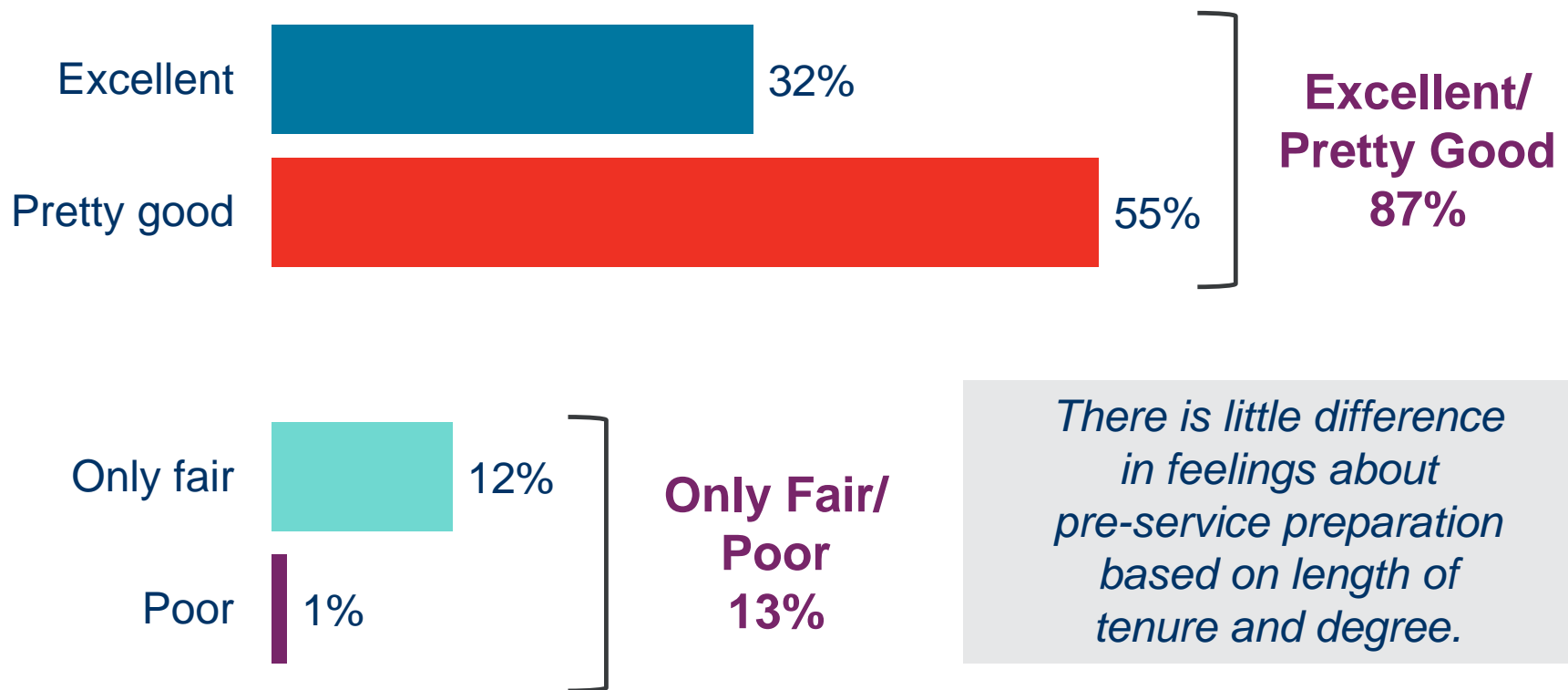
One of the Biggest/A Big Challenge	K-3 Educators	0-5 Educators
Too much paperwork and bureaucracy	65%	53%
^Low pay	65%	84%
^Difficulty balancing the needs of your own family and working as a teacher/early childhood educator	50%	38%
^Difficult work schedule	31%	29%
Lack of mentoring and career guidance	30%	40%
Lack of opportunities for ongoing education and training to effectively help support you in your teaching/help prepare you to be a teacher	25%	32%



# What It Takes: An Assessment of Professional Preparation

# The majority of teachers consider their pre-service training to be “good.”

*How would you rate the professional preparation and/or pre-service training you received to prepare you for your work as a teacher?*





# Most Helpful Elements of Pre-Service Training

**Two items were identified as “very helpful” by over half of respondents:**

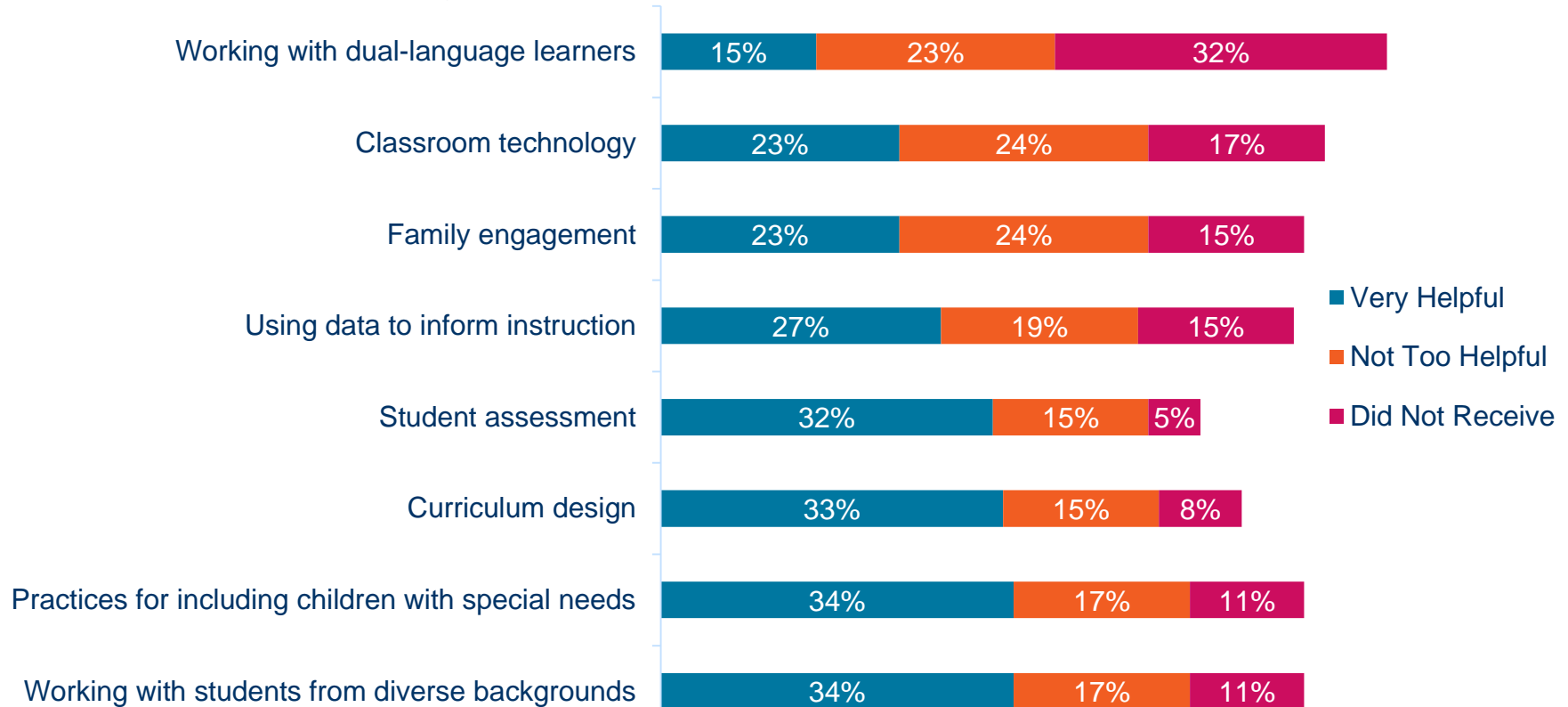
- › Observing / assisting in a real classroom: **64 percent**
- › Child development: **52 percent**

**Three additional items were considered “very helpful” by more than one-third of respondents:**

- › Literacy Instruction: **46 percent**
- › Math Instruction: **37 percent**
- › Classroom Management: **37 percent**

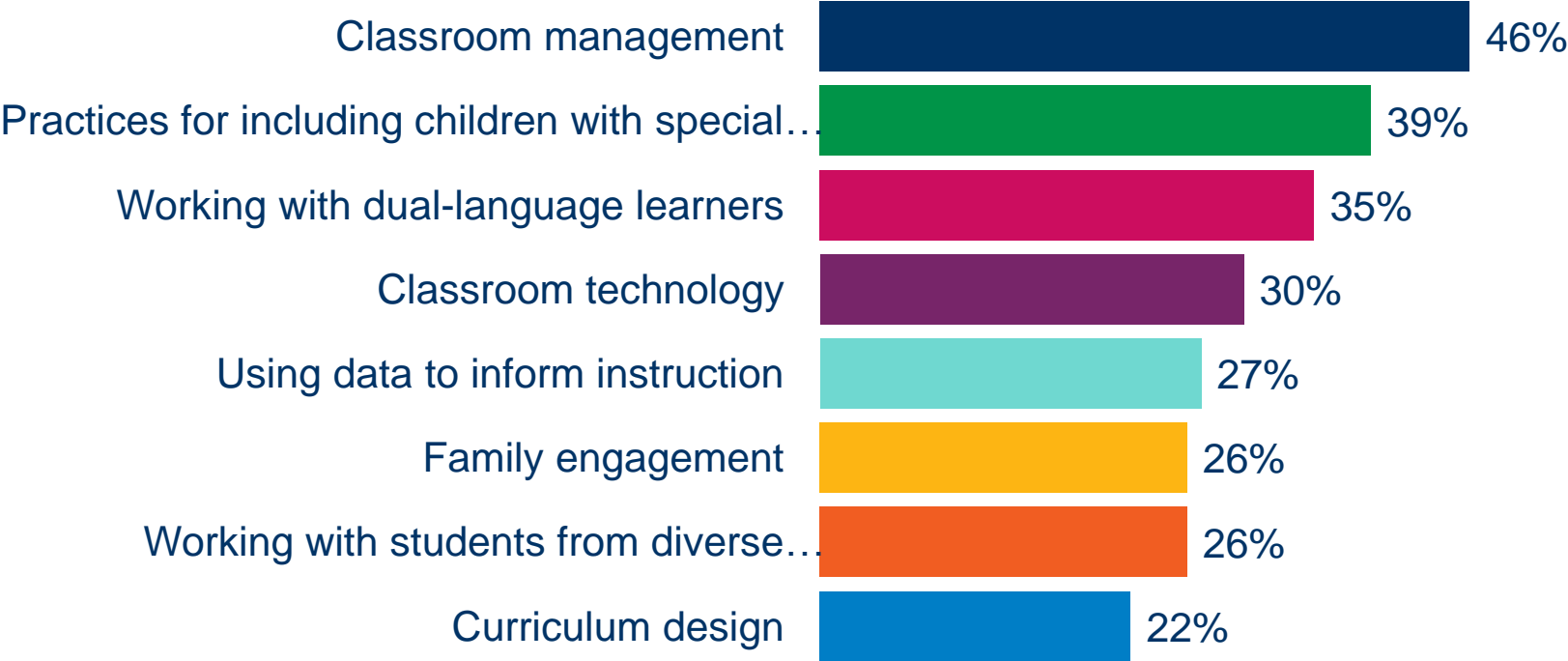
# Much of the rest of pre-service training was seen as “not too helpful” or was not received at all

*Please read the following list of aspects of the professional preparation and training you may have received before you started working as a teacher of children in kindergarten through third grade. Please indicate if that training was very helpful, somewhat helpful, or not too helpful.*



# Areas in which teachers did not receive effective training are the exact areas they wish they had.

*In which of the following areas do you wish you had more training before you started your career as a teacher of children in kindergarten through third grade?*



# Teacher Prep Takeaways

- **The quality of a teacher’s preparation** is correlated with his or her plan to persist in a teaching career.
  - Teachers who are more positive about their preparation are more likely to say that they plan to stay in the profession
  - Of those who rated their preparation as “excellent,” 35% are certain they will stay in the profession, compared to 24% of those who rated their preparation as “pretty good” and 21% who rated it as “only fair/poor.”
- **Kindergarten teachers, and teachers in all grades who consider themselves “early childhood educators”** are much more likely to say training in child development was “very helpful.”
- **Teachers of all grades** were most likely to say that observing a real classroom was very helpful and that they wanted more training in classroom management.
- **Non-white teachers** were somewhat more likely to say it was very helpful to have training in working with students of diverse backgrounds.

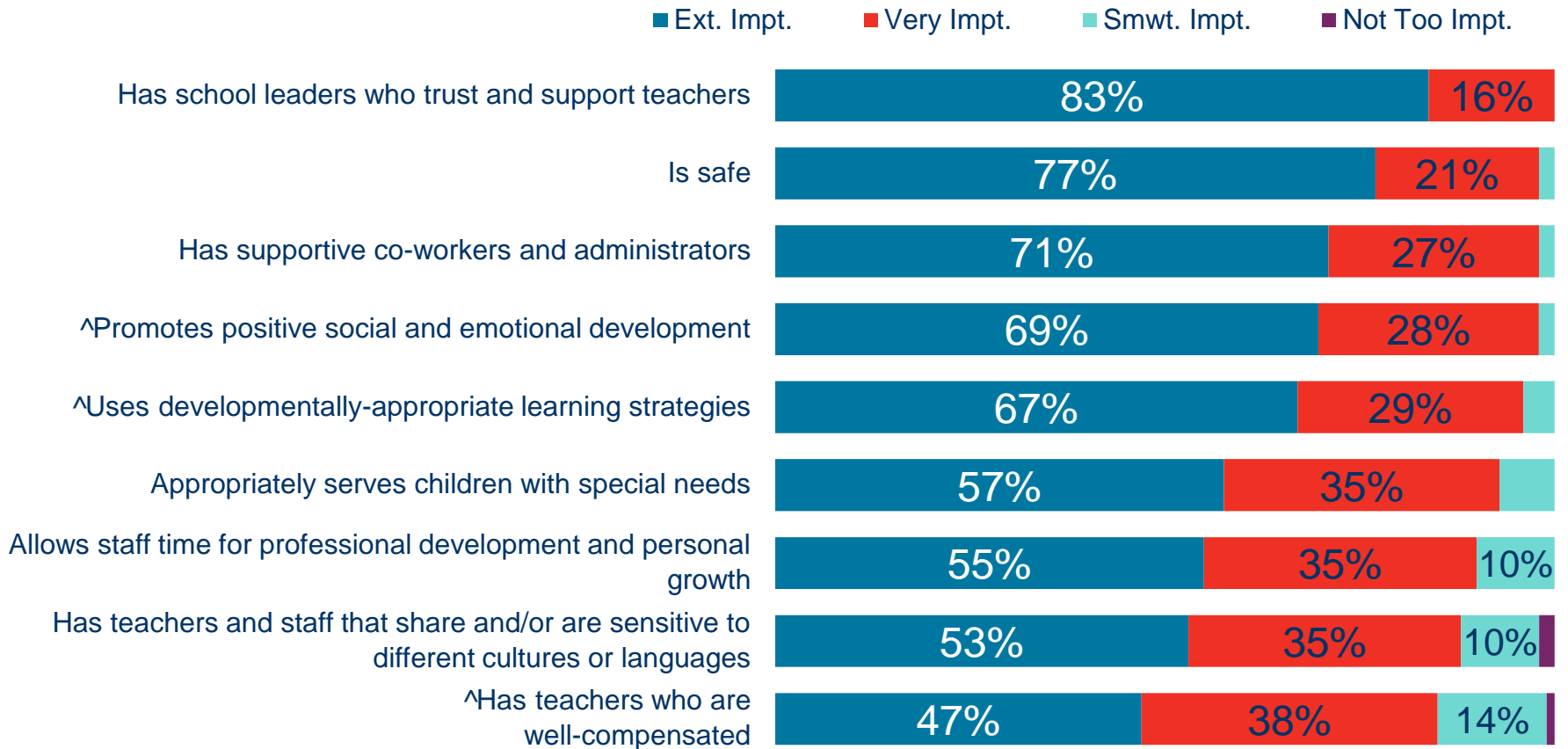


# Staying Alive: What Keeps Educators Educating

# K-3 teachers prioritize working in a school with leaders who trust and support teachers.

Q11. Not Part of Split Sample

Below you will find a list of characteristics of a school and/or an early elementary classroom. How important is each one to you in choosing the kind of classroom/school in which you want to work?



# Educators of children 0-5 were more likely to prioritize a school's reputation and the promotion of social/emotional development.

Characteristics	K-3 Educators	0-5 Educators	Diff.
Has a good reputation in the community	39%	63%	+24%
^Promotes positive social and emotional development	69%	92%	+23%
^Has teachers who are well-compensated	47%	68%	+21%
^Uses research-based curriculum and teaching strategies	43%	64%	+21%
Has a low student-to-teacher ratio	45%	65%	+20%
Allows staff time for professional development & personal growth	55%	74%	+19%
Is safe	77%	94%	+17%
Has adequate opportunities for family engagement	39%	55%	+16%
Deals appropriately with children who have behavioral problems	63%	77%	+14%
Has teachers & staff that share and/or are sensitive to different cultures & languages	53%	66%	+13%
Is easy to get to	22%	30%	+8%
Has a policy you agree with on suspending or expelling children	35%	35%	0%

# K-3 educators were more likely to appreciate a school that addresses children with special needs.

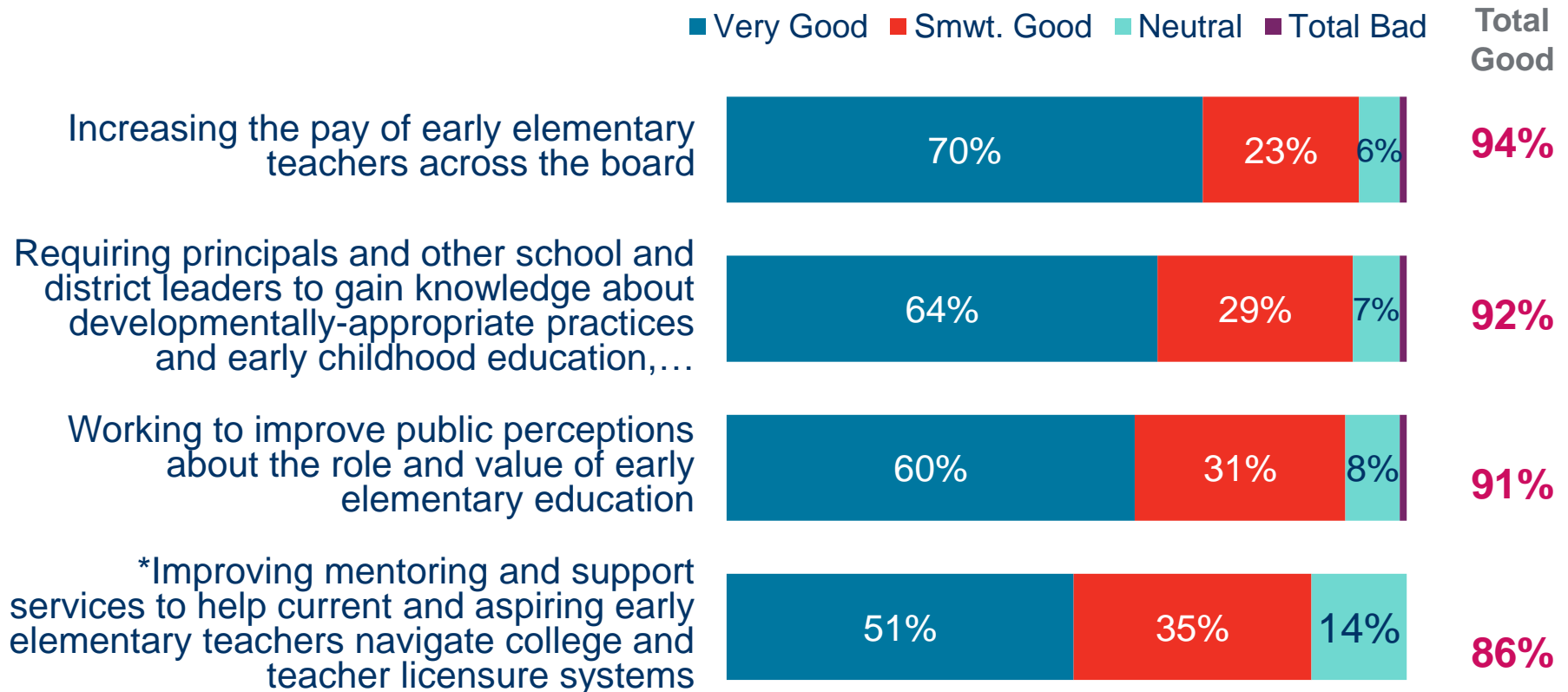
Characteristics	K-3 Educators	0-5 Educators	Diff.
Incorporates visual and performing arts	37%	36%	-1%
Is close to your work or home	29%	27%	-2%
Appropriately serves children with special needs	57%	49%	-8%

- Kindergarten teachers, teachers who consider themselves early childhood educators, and those who are more supportive of Power to the Profession are more likely to say that developmentally appropriate practices are extremely important.
- Lower-income teachers are more likely than higher-income teachers to say that convenience factors are important.



# Majorities of K-3 educators support increasing pay, principal knowledge, and public support

Below you will find a series of possible strategies for addressing the needs of early elementary teachers. Please indicate if you think it is a very good idea, somewhat of a good idea, somewhat of a bad idea, or a very bad idea.



# Opinions are split on expanding alternative certification with less than half of teachers calling it a good idea.

■ Very Good ■ Smwt. Good ■ Neutral ■ Total Bad **Total Good**

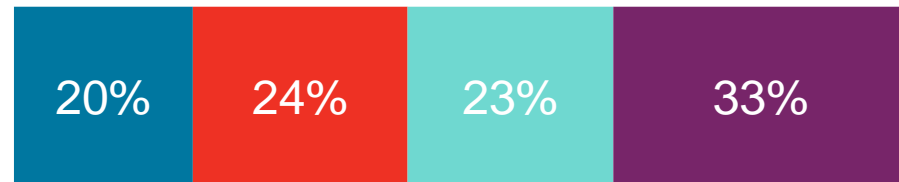
\*Improving mentoring and support services to help aspiring early elementary teachers navigate college systems and get a Bachelor's degree



Increasing scholarship funds or other financial incentives for aspiring early elementary teachers



Expanding alternative certification options to recruit teachers without a standard education degree



## There are differences in which strategies are considered “very good” ideas by grade level, tenure, ethnicity and pre-service training.

- **Kindergarten teachers** are more likely to say it is a very good idea to require school/district leaders to learn more about developmentally-appropriate practices and early childhood education.
- **Teachers with 20 years of experience or more** are more likely to say it is a very good idea to improve mentoring and support services around college and teacher licensure systems.
- **Non-white teachers** are twice as likely as white teachers to say it is a very good idea to expand alternative certification options, although it is still the idea with the least amount of support among both non-white and white teachers.
- **Less than a third of the teachers** who rate their pre-service training as “fair” or “poor” say that expanding alternative certification is a very good idea, but that is still higher than the teachers who rate their training as “excellent” or “good.”

**Unified:**  
Deepening the  
Connections  
Between  
K-3 and 0-5  
Educators



# Focus group participants felt connected to both educators of higher grades and birth-to-five educators, but for different reasons.

*With what aspects of your work do you feel connected to teachers who work in higher grades? And in what aspects of your work do you feel connected with educators who work with children birth to age five?*

## Connections to Birth to Five

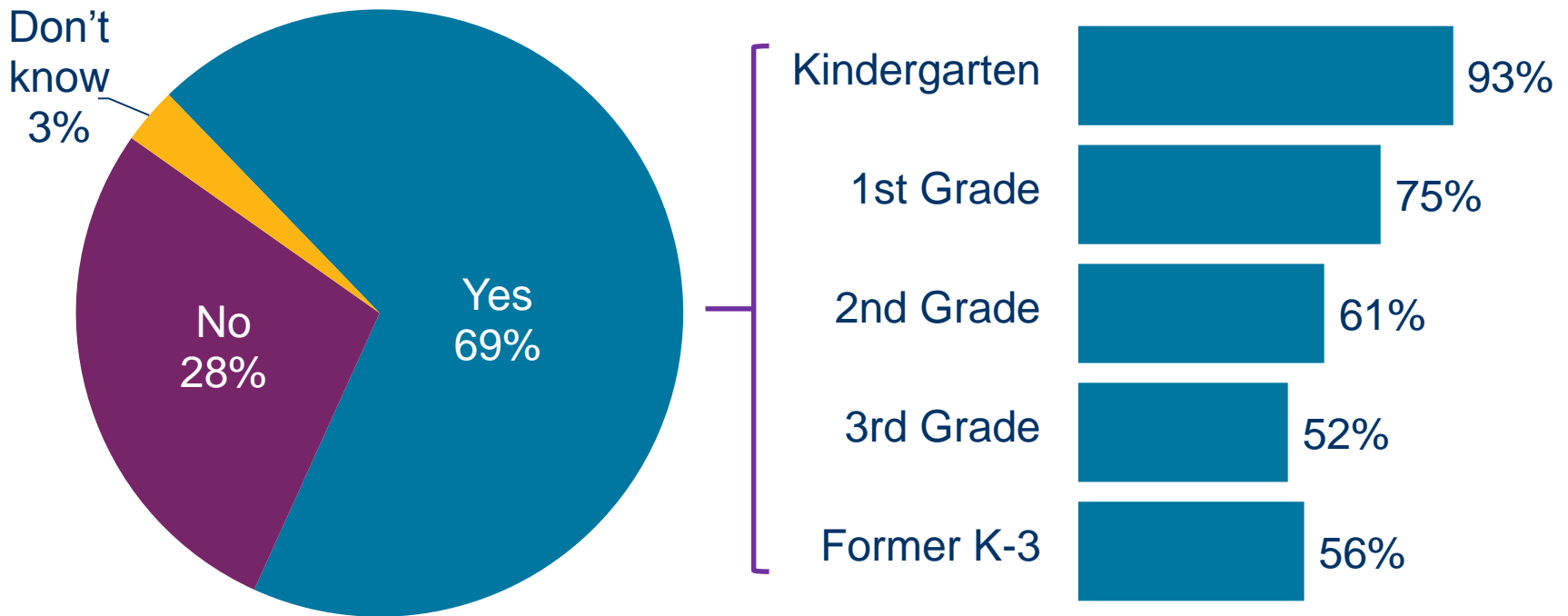
- Children learning how to learn
- Nurturing
- 0-5 educators are teaching building blocks for K-3

## Connections to Higher Grades

- Accountability
- At the same school (gr. 4-6)
- K-3 educators are teaching building blocks for higher grades

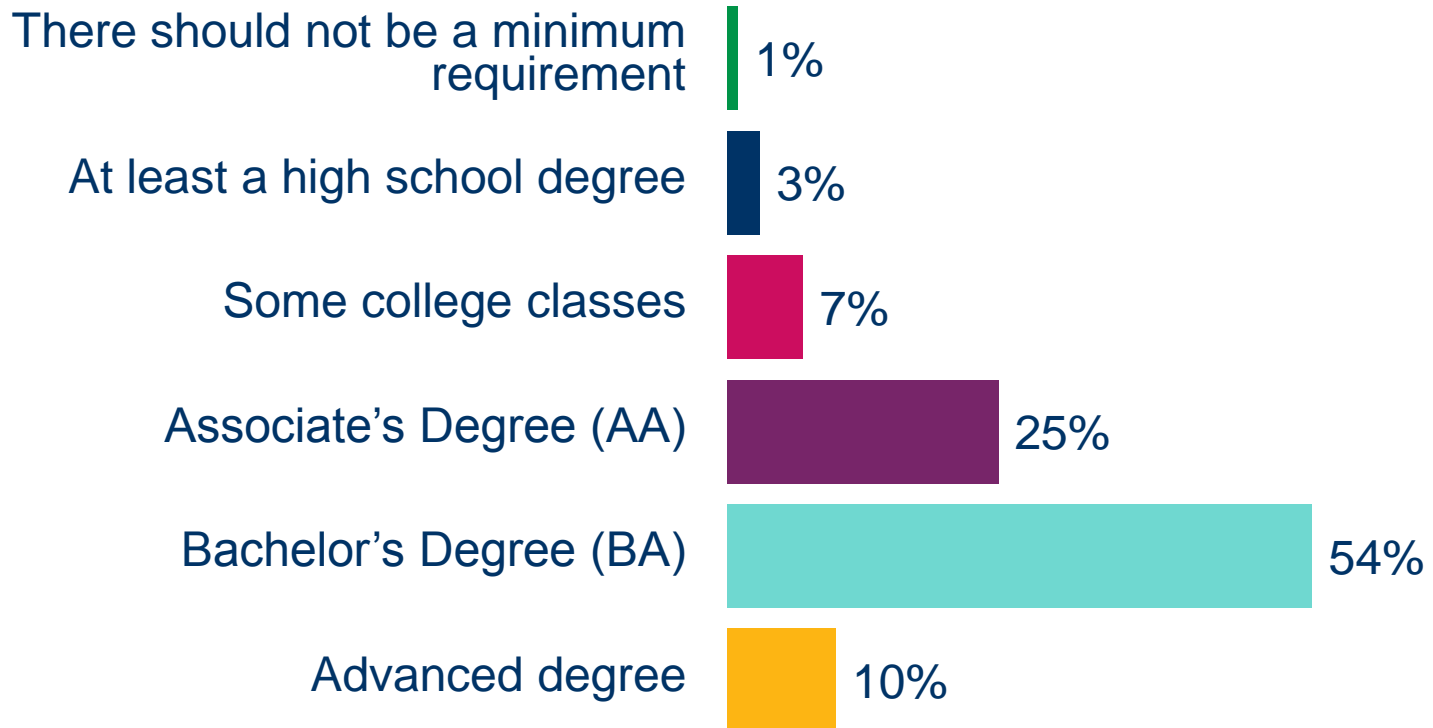
# Two-thirds of K-3 educators view themselves as an “early childhood educator.”

*Do you consider yourself to be an “early childhood educator?”*



# A slim majority of K-3 educators think educators of children birth through age 5 should be required to hold a Bachelor's Degree.

*What should be the minimum required level of education for the lead teachers who work with children from birth to age 5 in preschool, child care or other early learning programs?*



# Let's Hear It: Same Educational Requirements?

*I feel that they should have the same education as elementary teachers. It is vital that they understand the development of children so they know what is appropriate at that level.*

*I would LOVE to see pre-school teachers have levels of training so that pre-school education across the board would be of the highest quality. I also believe it is imperative that wages be raised SIGNIFICANTLY.*

*Teachers who are working with children from birth to age 5...should have the same level of education, training and certification that a public school teacher has. They are laying the first block of educational foundation, so they should be knowledgeable as well as certified.*

*I don't think it needs to be the same as my level as there is less vigorous content knowledge required for this level of teaching. What is required here is child physical and psychological development.*

*If it will be a requirement for teachers who teach birth to five years of age to have the same education as myself then they need to get paid the same amount as well. How are they going to pay off student loans making \$11.00 per hour?*



# Three-quarters of teachers are more likely to agree with the argument in favor of creating a unified and aligned system of early childhood education birth through age 8.

Below you will find two statements about the **Power to the Profession** initiative. Please read them and click on the one that comes closer to your point of view.

76%

We need a more aligned early care and education pathway from birth to third grade to increase the level of respect, and ultimately compensation, for educators. Educators in this critical time of life have much in common: we teach children foundational skills while supporting their growth to independence. It is important that we work as a unified field to better define who we are and what we do.

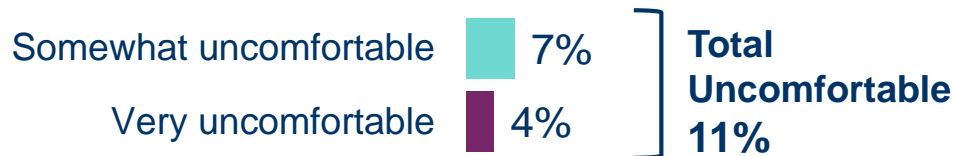
24%

Trying to align elementary school teachers with birth-to-five educators does not work. While we both work with young children, teaching babies is not the same as teaching third grade and there is much more that sets us apart: elementary school teachers have more education and training, are governed by different rules, are held to higher expectations, and should earn higher compensation.

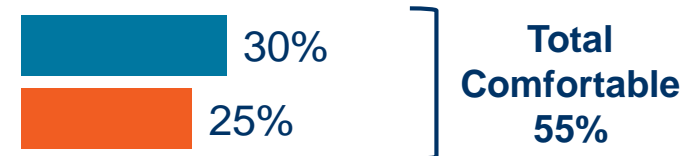
# A majority of K-3 educators say they would be comfortable being in a unified system with educators of children ages three and four and also birth to three.

How comfortable would you feel about being part of a unified system of preparation and credentialing with educators who work with **children who are in preschool (ages 3 and 4) / infants and toddlers (from birth to age 3)**?

## 3-4 year olds



## Birth to 3



# Kindergarten teachers and those who are white or have advanced degrees are more likely to be comfortable with a unified system.

- Kindergarten teachers are **more likely** to be comfortable with a unified system for both 3 and 4-year-olds and infants and toddlers.
- There is a significant **drop-off in comfort level** for second and third grade teachers when asked about a unified system with educators of children 0-3.
- White teachers are **more comfortable** with a unified system than non-white teachers
- Teachers with **advanced degrees**, particularly with degrees in early childhood education, are more likely to be comfortable.
- Teachers who consider themselves “early childhood educators” are nearly **20-points more likely** to be comfortable with a unified system from birth through third grade than those who do not.
- NAEYC members are **only slightly more comfortable** than the rest of the sample for both age groups.
- Teachers ages 18-29 are **the least likely to be comfortable** with a unified system, although there are only small differences overall by teachers’ ages.

# Gauging Comfort Levels for a Unified System

## *Why would you be **COMFORTABLE**?*

- Have experience / knowledge / education to share
- Consistency/same standards/uniform
- Continuity in education/foundation
- Mentor/support/give new teachers guidance
- Share/learn from others/exchange of ideas
- All teachers should have this training/work with all ages

## *Why would you be **UNCOMFORTABLE**?*

- Don't want to work with that age group/Too young
- Unqualified/Not experienced/Not trained
- Logistics/Different areas
- Teaching/Curriculum is different
- Develop differently

# Let's Hear It: Challenges & Concerns

Q18b & 20b. In a few of your own words, why would you be **UNCOMFORTABLE** about being part of a unified system of preparation and credentialing with educators who work with children in preschool (ages 3 and 4) or birth-to-three?

*Infants and Toddlers seem to be a far stretch from K-3. It's important to know developmental norms of all ages and stages, but a licensure program that is Birth-Grade 3 seems like you'd cover a lot of surface level ideas and not get to deep learning for all ages and stages.*

*Now that some states are including 3- and 4-year-old programs as part of public school, this could backfire where there is even more push-down of a curriculum. It also risks teachers thinking they are qualified for teaching grades like K-3 which are vastly different in the public school system.*

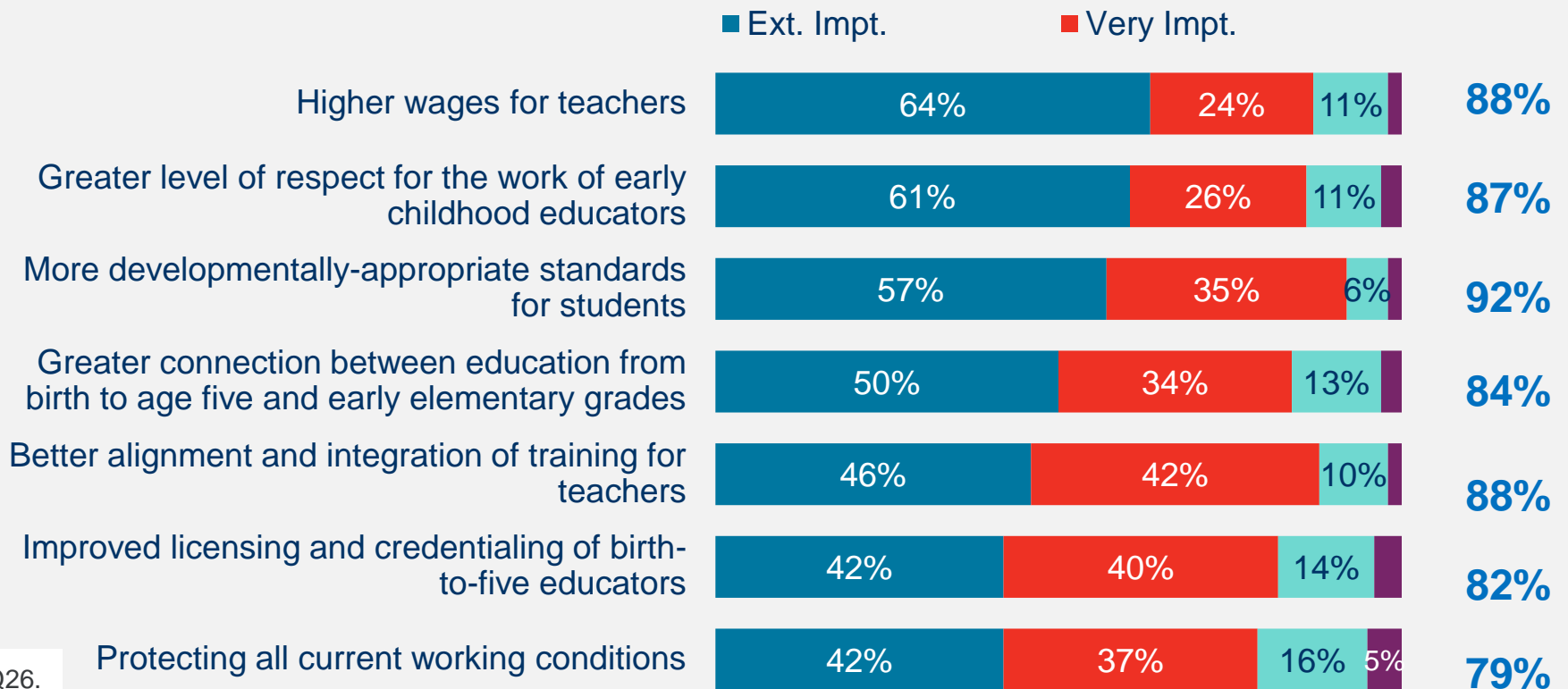
*Different ages require different academic rigor.*

*It is hard to relate preschool to grade 3. It would work perhaps through grade 1 or 2.*

*I'm not very good with children that young.*

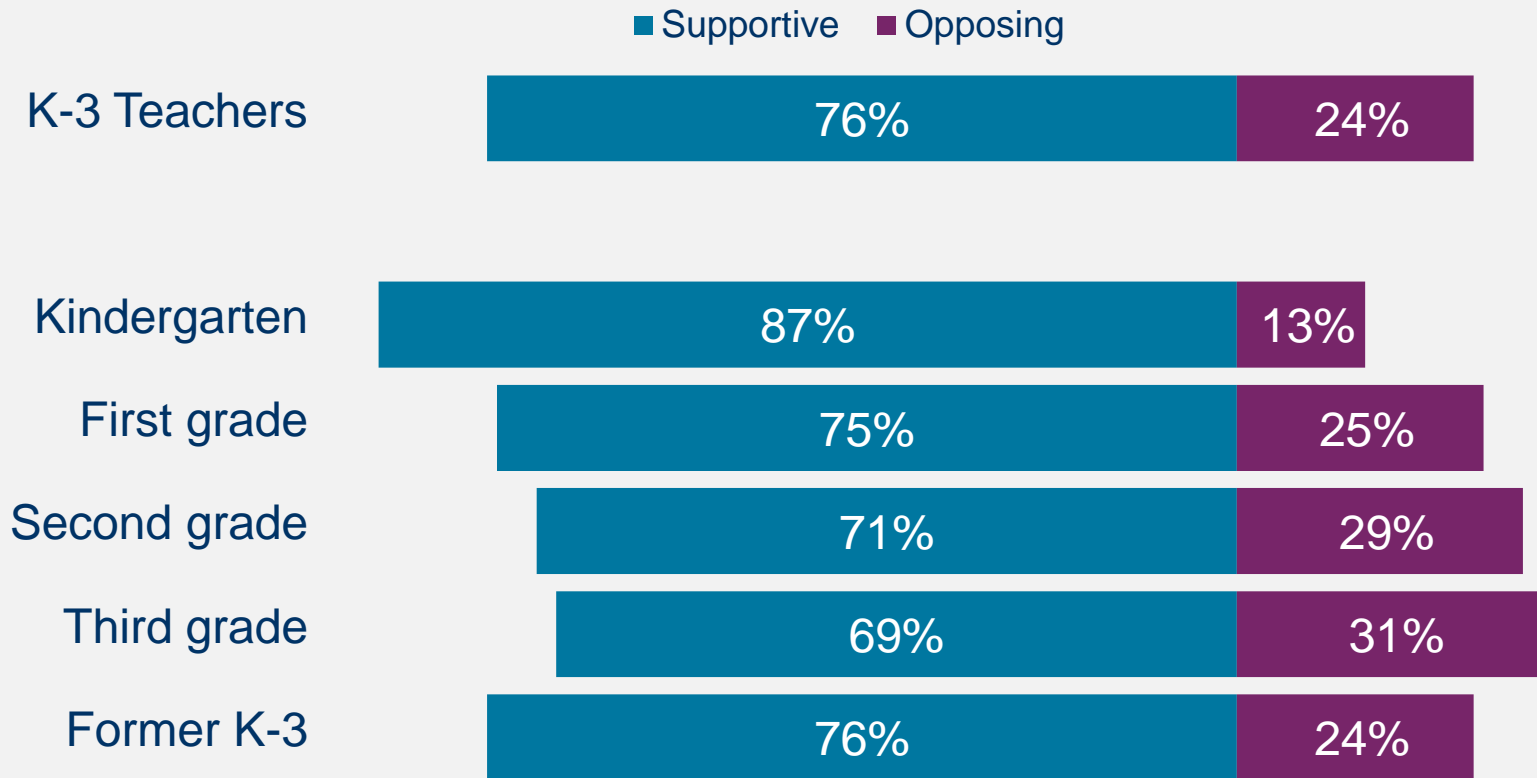
# Higher wages and greater respect are seen as the most important potential outcomes of a unified early childhood system.

Below you will find a list of potential outcomes from a unified credentialing and preparation system for educators who serve children from birth-3<sup>rd</sup>. Please indicate if that outcome is extremely important, very important, somewhat important or not too important.



Q26.

# Kindergarten teachers were more closely aligned with the argument in favor of a unified system than teachers of other grades.



Q27 by Q2.

# Advocating for Early Childhood Education

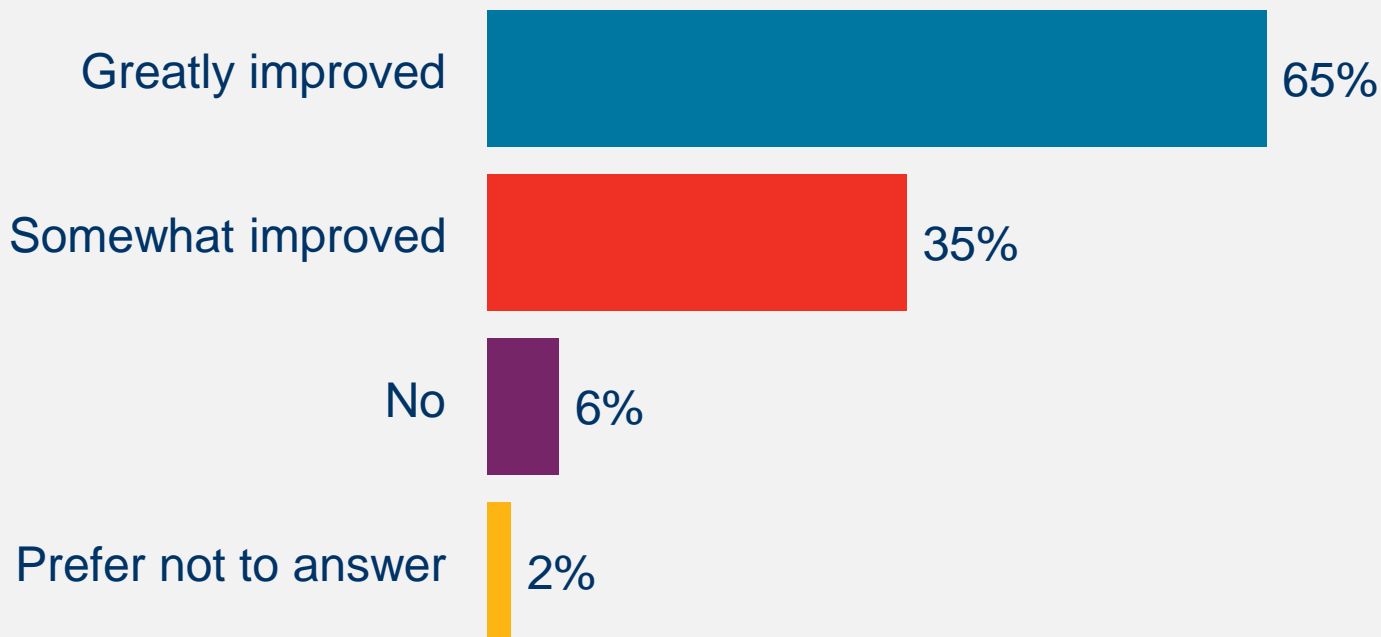


*"I feel like we have the power. Whether we take up the banner and try is different. And difficult. It takes time to affect change. And I have a full time job with two [children] at home. I am an advocate. But keep it simple."*



# Two-thirds of teachers say their work would be greatly improved if quality ECE was more available.

*Do you believe that your work as a teacher of children in kindergarten through third grade would be improved if quality early childhood education was available to more children from birth to age five? Is that greatly improved or just somewhat?*



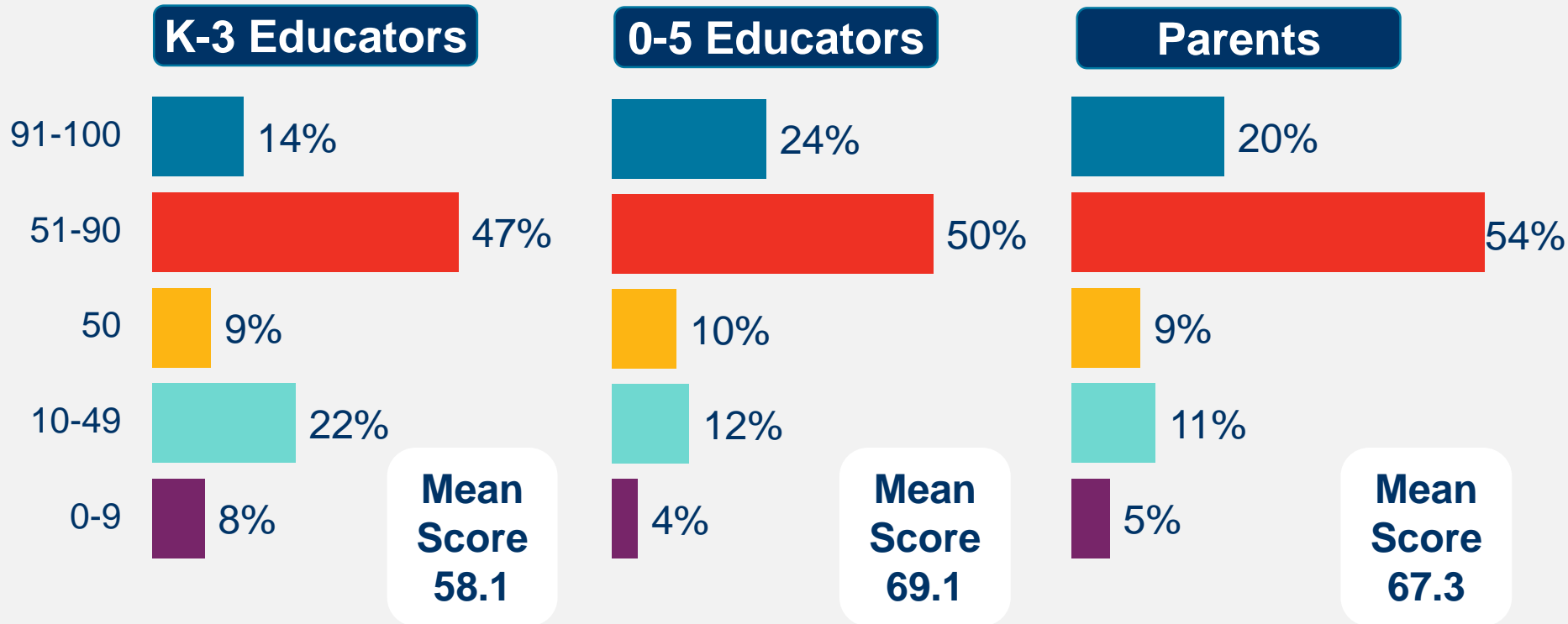
# Voters express high levels of trust for K-12 teachers, parents, early educators and child development experts.

*Here is a list of people and organizations that take positions on issues related to funding for early childhood education. Please tell me if you would generally trust each person or organization's opinion on this issue, or if you would be suspicious of it.*



# K-3 educators are less willing to advocate for ECE than educators or parents of children birth to five.

Some people say that one of the best ways to expand access to high-quality early childhood education for children from birth to age five is for elementary school teachers to be involved in the political process and advocate for it. Please indicate how interested you are in getting more personally involved in advocating for increased access to high-quality early childhood education. Please use a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 means you have no interest at all and 100 means you are extremely interested, with 50 being neutral.



# K-3 educators' willingness to engage in a range of advocacy actions is similar to parents' level of willingness.

Q31. Please indicate how willing you would be to take each of the following actions to help to advocate for increased access to high-quality early childhood education in your community. ^Not Part of Split Sample

**(Very Willing)**

Action	K-3 Educators	0-5 Educators	Parents
^Voting for a candidate or ballot measure who supported early childhood education	62%	82%	47%
^Talking to friends and family about supporting early childhood education	53%	72%	43%
Wearing a t-shirt or bracelet with a slogan supporting early childhood education	43%	63%	40%
Buying something where some of the money goes to supporting early childhood education	41%	63%	44%
Signing an online petition	40%	57%	44%
Signing a petition in person, such as at the door or in a parking lot	37%	48%	40%
Sharing, re-sharing, or clicking "like" on an article or image on Facebook, or another online platform	39%	51%	40%
Attending a meeting of a government agency, such as a city council or school board	32%	45%	33%

# Only about one-quarter of K-3 educators are very willing to send an email, volunteer their time, or provide their contact information.

Q31. Please indicate how willing you would be to take each of the following actions to help to advocate for increased access to high-quality early childhood education in your community. ^Not Part of Split Sample

**(Very Willing)**

Action	K-3 Educators	0-5 Educators	Parents
^Sending an email or other communication to a public figure or organization	29%	52%	36%
Volunteering time for an organization active in promoting early childhood education	24%	42%	36%
^Providing contact information so you can receive emails	24%	38%	35%
^Posting or commenting on details of your views on a blog, Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter	22%	34%	34%
Meeting personally with an elected official	22%	34%	33%
Changing your online profile picture to demonstrate solidarity with early childhood education	21%	36%	29%
^Pay more in taxes	14%	21%	22%
Attending a protest, rally, or demonstration	13%	22%	23%

## For More Information, Contact:

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