

Communicating with today's parents

Designing effective parent
partnerships for stronger
school communities

AUGUST 2026



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Navigating rising communication expectations

Today's school parents require a new approach to engagement. Rising communication expectations place significant pressure on Principals and Community Relations teams. Traditional, long-form updates no longer work for today's busy families.

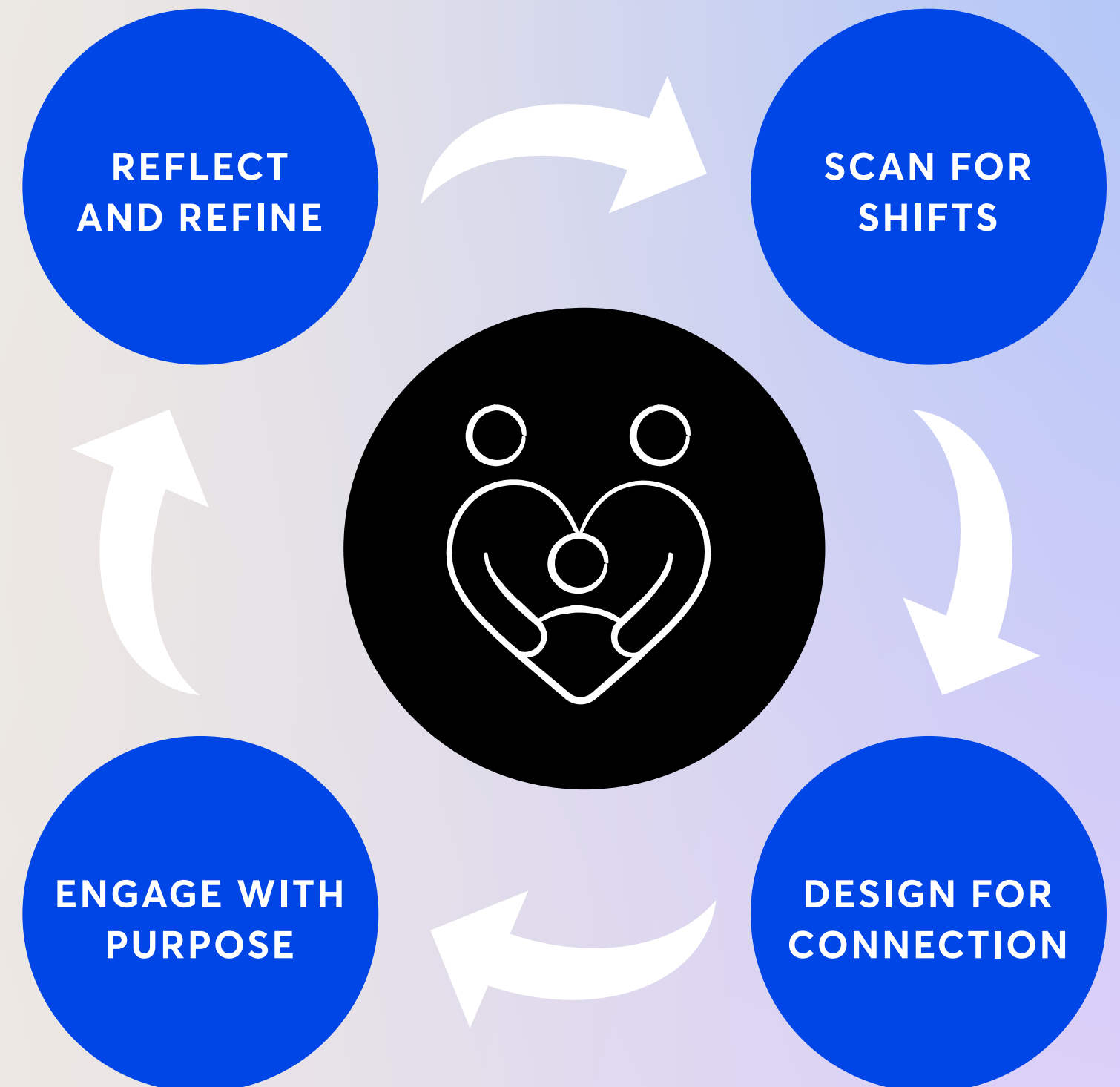
The corporate world has moved away from the annual staff review as the primary feedback vehicle. Instead, today's employees expect more frequent, informal feedback interactions. This shift has given employees the clarity and agency to adapt dynamically. There is a similar expectation shift in school communication. School leaders need to look beyond the annual parent-teacher interview or bi-annual student reports. Modern families expect more regular communication so they can be informed and support their child's learning more meaningfully.

These insights are designed as a companion to *A School Leader's Guide to Engaging the Next Generation of Parents*. It provides practical insight into the information parents value, their communication preferences, and event attendance barriers.

This helps leaders apply the Engage with Purpose phase of the Parent Partnership Cycle framework. Identifying communication gaps enables leaders to refine their school's communications rhythms and helps teams meet rising parent expectations.

THE PARENT PARTNERSHIP CYCLE

A framework for engaging parents in Thriving School Communities



Today's families value updates that focus on the whole child

KEY INSIGHT

Parent communication expectations are high (particularly within non-government schools), with modern parents placing equal value on social-emotional updates and academic progress.



Parents most value social and academic updates

Effective parent engagement begins by delivering the specific information families value most. Historically, schools were primarily seen as places for academic development, and therefore school communication focused on academic performance. Today, educators and parents recognise the importance of holistic child development, and the role schools play in this.

School parents are equally likely to value updates about how their child is doing socially (55%) as they are about their child’s academic results (55%). This suggests school leaders should give equal priority to social and academic updates in future communications. Understanding these priorities allows school communications teams to target resources where expectations are highest.

Non-government school parents are slightly more likely than government school parents to value updates on:

● Non-government ● Government



59% | 52%

Grades and academic results

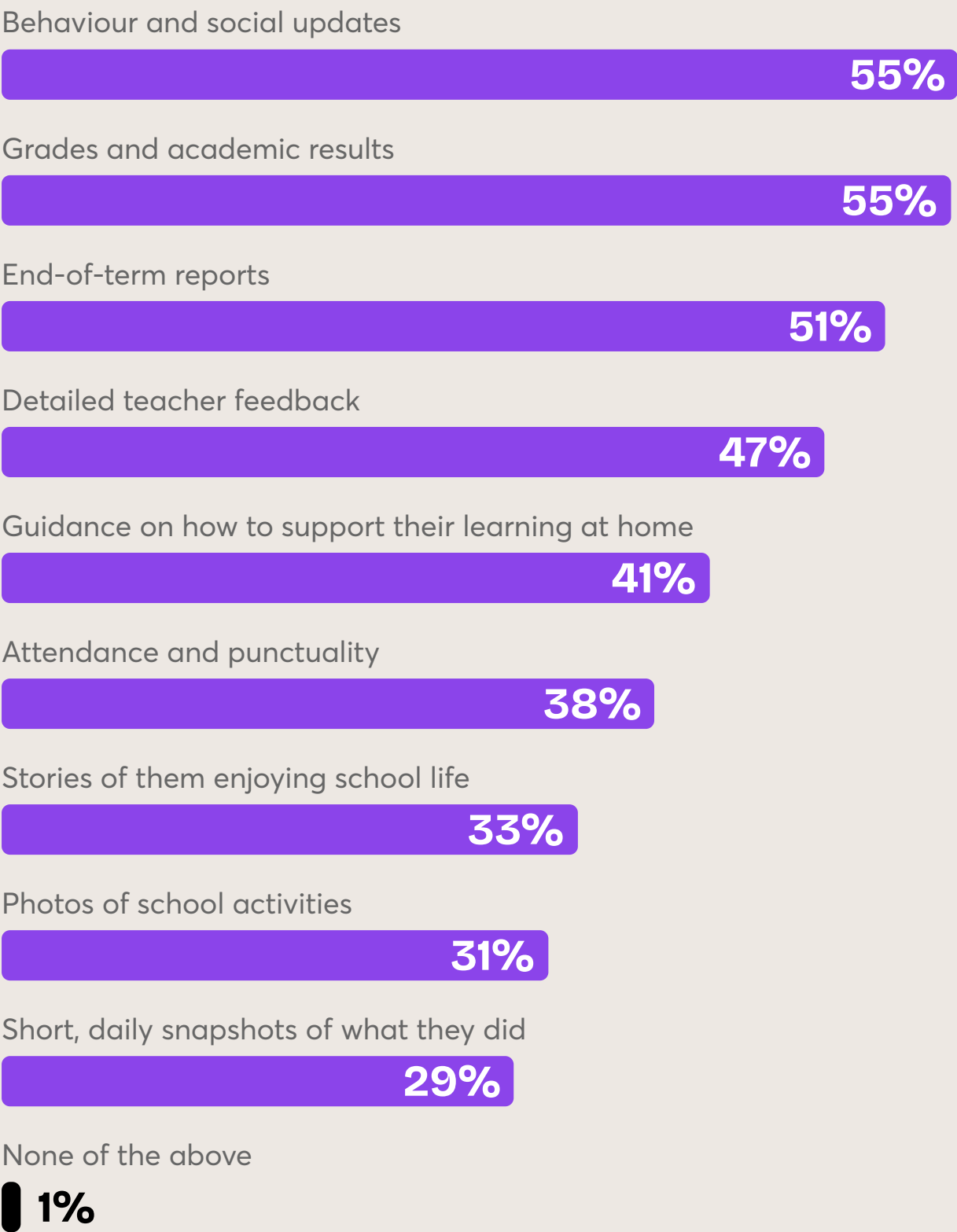


52% | 45%

Detailed teacher feedback

WHAT UPDATES ABOUT YOUR CHILD’S PROGRESS DO YOU VALUE MOST?

Please select all that apply.



Update Type	Percentage
Behaviour and social updates	55%
Grades and academic results	55%
End-of-term reports	51%
Detailed teacher feedback	47%
Guidance on how to support their learning at home	41%
Attendance and punctuality	38%
Stories of them enjoying school life	33%
Photos of school activities	31%
Short, daily snapshots of what they did	29%
None of the above	1%

05 Partnership by design

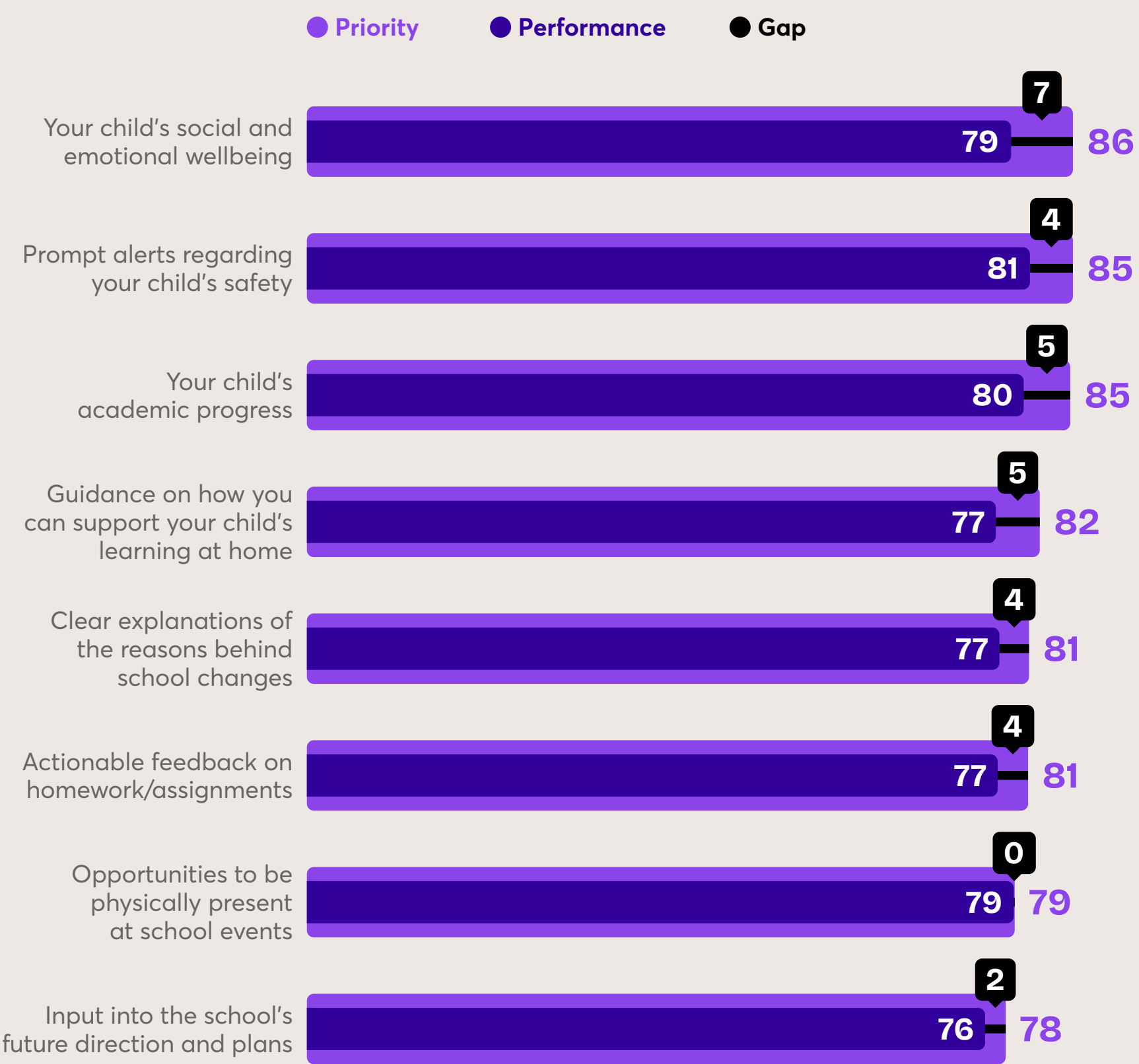
Parents seek more effective updates on social and emotional wellbeing

While holistic development is a focus for schools, traditional reporting methods have not always kept pace with changing expectations. Today, the largest communication gap between what parents expect and what schools deliver involves updates on their child’s social and emotional wellbeing (7-point gap). This is followed closely by updates on their child’s safety, academic progress, and guidance on supporting learning at home.

Understanding these perceptions helps leaders align their communication with what families value most. By targeting these specific areas, schools can ensure their finite resources achieve a greater impact.

PRIORITY AND PERFORMANCE

How much of a priority is it to receive communication from your child’s school in these areas and how well is the school performing?



“

?

If your child's school could do one thing to make it easier for you to stay engaged and informed, what would it be?

I hope that teachers can provide regular feedback on children's classroom participation, not just their grades.

SCHOOL PARENT

”

School stage influences communication preferences

While junior and senior school parents both value behavioural and academic updates, their specific preferences change across different stages of life. Junior school parents are more likely to value personalised daily updates. This may be shaped by the high-frequency updates normalised in early childhood education centres. Conversely, senior school parents place a greater focus on attendance and punctuality. Recognising these shifting rhythms allows school leaders to adapt their approach to match a family's changing journey.

Junior school parents are more likely to value:

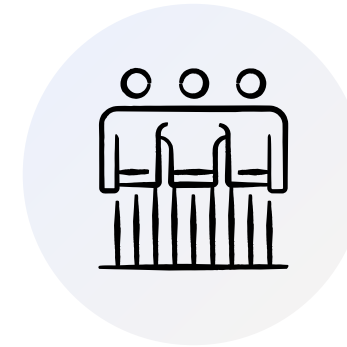
● Junior school parents

● Senior school parents



39% | 21%

Short daily snapshots of what their child did



39% | 29%

Stories of their child enjoying school life

Senior school parents are more likely to value:



42% | 32%

Attendance and punctuality updates



Connecting with families through care and responsiveness

KEY INSIGHT

Families prioritise regular, timely and proactive updates to prevent communication challenges.



Email is the ideal form of teacher communication

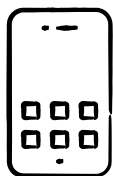
Effective communication occurs when the right information is communicated through the right channel. Unsurprisingly, school parents value different channels for different types of information. Asynchronous communication is most helpful for email communication with teachers (50%) and general updates through a school app (41%). For time-sensitive alerts, text messages (41%) are valued. Although parents are time-poor, two in five parents see in-person parent meetings (41%) as an ideal communication channel.

Parents are less likely, however, to value traditional communication channels of printed letters or notices sent home (27%) and regular digital newsletters (30%).

Non-government school parents are slightly more likely than government school parents to prefer the following communication channels:

● Non-government

● Government



44% | 38%

School mobile app



42% | 36%

Parent portal for grades, reports and finance



45% | 39%

In-person meetings

WHAT ARE YOUR IDEAL COMMUNICATION CHANNELS FROM YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL?

Please select all that apply.

Email for teacher communication

50%

In-person parent meetings

41%

Text message for urgent or time-sensitive alerts

41%

School mobile app for general updates

41%

Phone calls for teacher communication

39%

Parent portal for grades, reports and finance

38%

Instant messaging (e.g. WhatsApp or school app chat)

31%

Regular digital newsletters (e.g. weekly)

30%

Printed letters or notices sent home

27%

Prioritise timeliness, clarity and a warm tone to overcome communication barriers

Despite schools' best efforts to communicate to the modern parent, almost four in five parents (78%) have challenges with the communication from their child's school. The most notable challenge parents have is reactive contact. Nearly one in three parents (29%) find it challenging only being contacted when there is a problem. Slow responses times cause friction for one in five parents (22%). This reality affects sectors differently, with Government school parents facing problem-only contact more than non-government school families (32% cf. 25%).

Digital overwhelm is another key challenge, with too many different apps or platforms (26%), too much information that isn't relevant (24%), or when parents don't know where to find the information they need (19%).

Finally, communication style presents a challenge to some parents, including when communication feels cold or impersonal (22%), or one-sided (21%).

Information without curation can lead to disengagement. The inverse is also true: clear, targeted communication minimises these barriers and helps build community trust.



Only 1 in 5 parents have no challenges with school communication

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES WITH COMMUNICATION FROM YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL?

Please select all that apply.

Only being contacted when there is a problem

29%

Too many different apps and platforms

26%

Too much information that isn't relevant to me

24%

Slow responses to my emails or enquiries

22%

The communication feels cold or impersonal

22%

One-sided communication

21%

Communication isn't timely

20%

Not knowing where to find the information I need

19%

Language or inclusivity barriers

12%

None of the above

22%

“

?

If your child's school could do one thing to make it easier for you to stay engaged and informed, what would it be?

I hope the school can have a unified information platform where all notices, assignments, and activities are kept, so we don't have to search for them everywhere.

SCHOOL PARENT

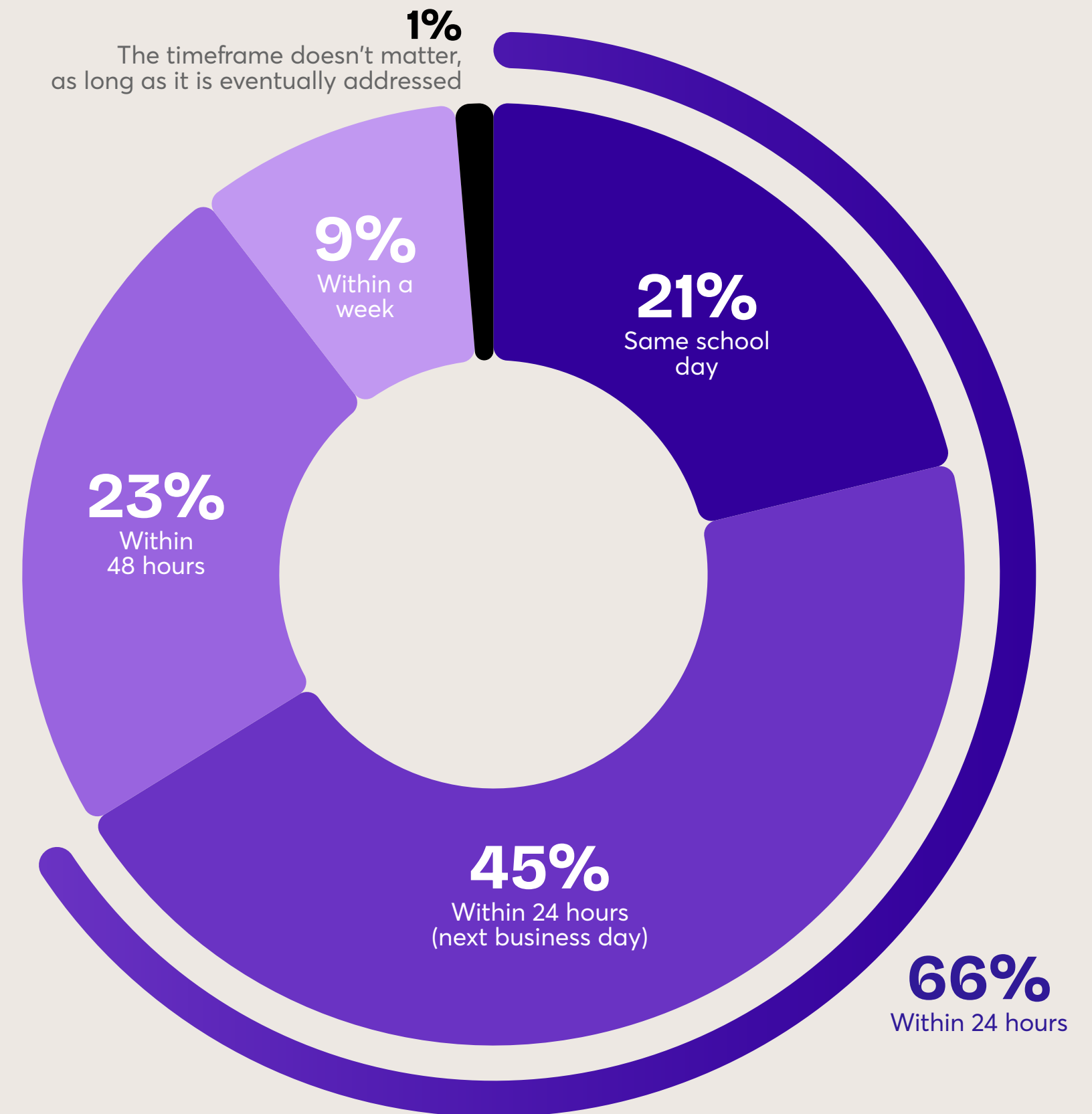
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Two-thirds of parents expect a response within 24 hours

The next generation of parents has grown up in an era shaped by instant information and on-demand services. From real-time tracking to rapid delivery, this daily environment naturally influences communication expectations within the school community. Because timeliness is a key element of family engagement, understanding these communication baselines is essential.

Almost half of parents (45%) expect a response to a non-urgent email within 24 hours. Furthermore, one in five (21%) look for a reply on the same school day. Combined, this means two-thirds of families (66%) expect a turnaround within a 24 hour period. The broader baseline, however, sits at 48 hours, with nine in ten parents (90%) expecting a response within this timeframe.

IF YOU SEND A NON-URGENT EMAIL TO A TEACHER,
WHEN DO YOU EXPECT A RESPONSE?



Bringing families together through shared experiences

KEY INSIGHT

Personal connections drive event engagement, bringing parents onto school grounds.



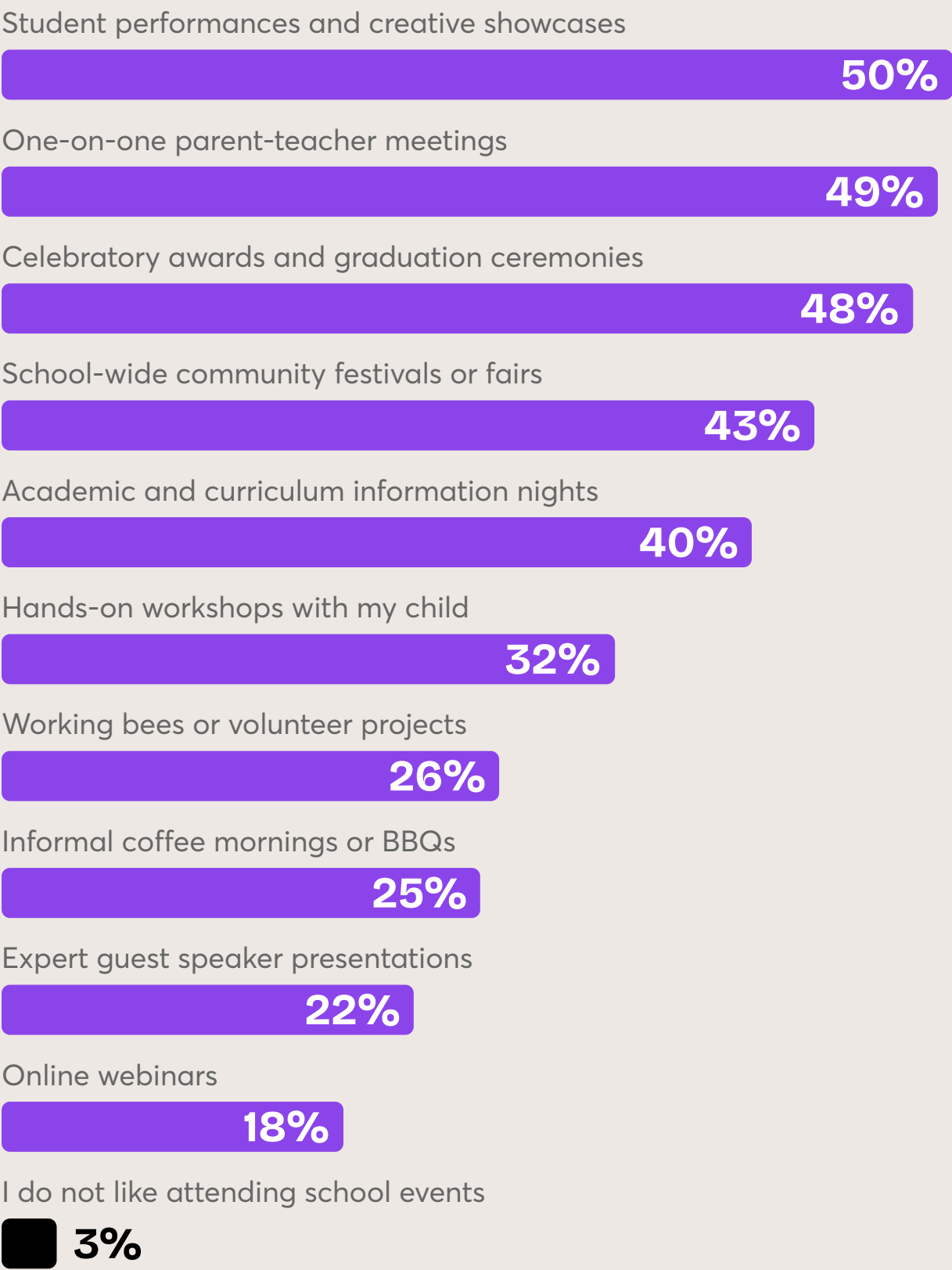
Creative showcases and celebrations drive parent attendance

The modern parent is time-poor, and digitally overwhelmed. Yet in an era marked by a loneliness epidemic, building a school community of belonging has never been more important. While almost all parents are interested in attending events (97%), many schools are struggling to turn this desire into attendance.

Bridging this gap relies on understanding deeper behavioural shifts. Modern families prioritise shared memorable experiences over passive information consumption. With limited time, families choose events that provide an emotional return rather than transactional meetings. It is unsurprising, therefore, that families most value attending celebratory, milestone events, such as student performances (50%) and graduation ceremonies (48%). They also highly value one-on-one parent teacher meetings (49%).

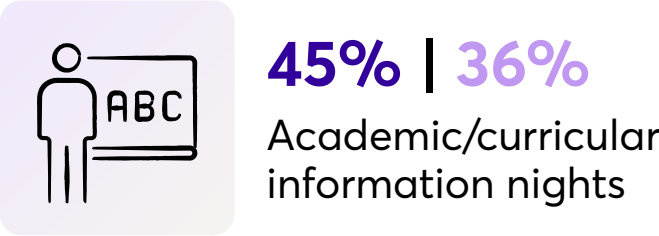
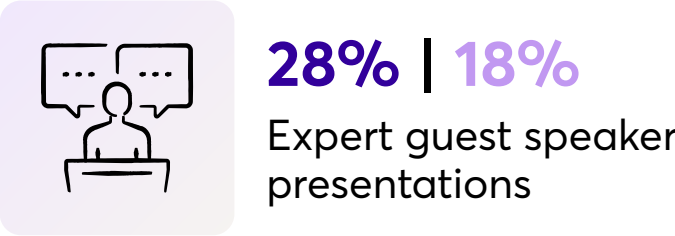
WHAT TYPES OF SCHOOL EVENTS DO YOU PREFER ATTENDING?

Please select all that apply.



Non-government school parents are more likely than government school parents to prefer attending the following events:

● Non-government ● Government



Personal connections drive event engagement

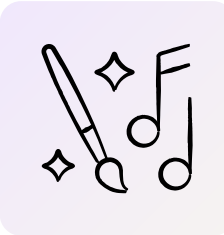
Unsurprisingly, parents are most likely to attend an after-hours event when it directly relates to their own child. This is either through watching them perform or showcase their work (58%) or having a private meeting with a teacher about their child's progress (49%).

Beyond these personal milestones, around two in five parents choose to attend events to build community connections. These connections can be with staff (41%), other parents (37%), or just to feel a part of the broader community (39%).

Non-government school parents are slightly more likely than government school parents to choose to attend an after-hours event focused on the following:

● Non-government

● Government



62% | 56%

Watching their child perform or showcase their work

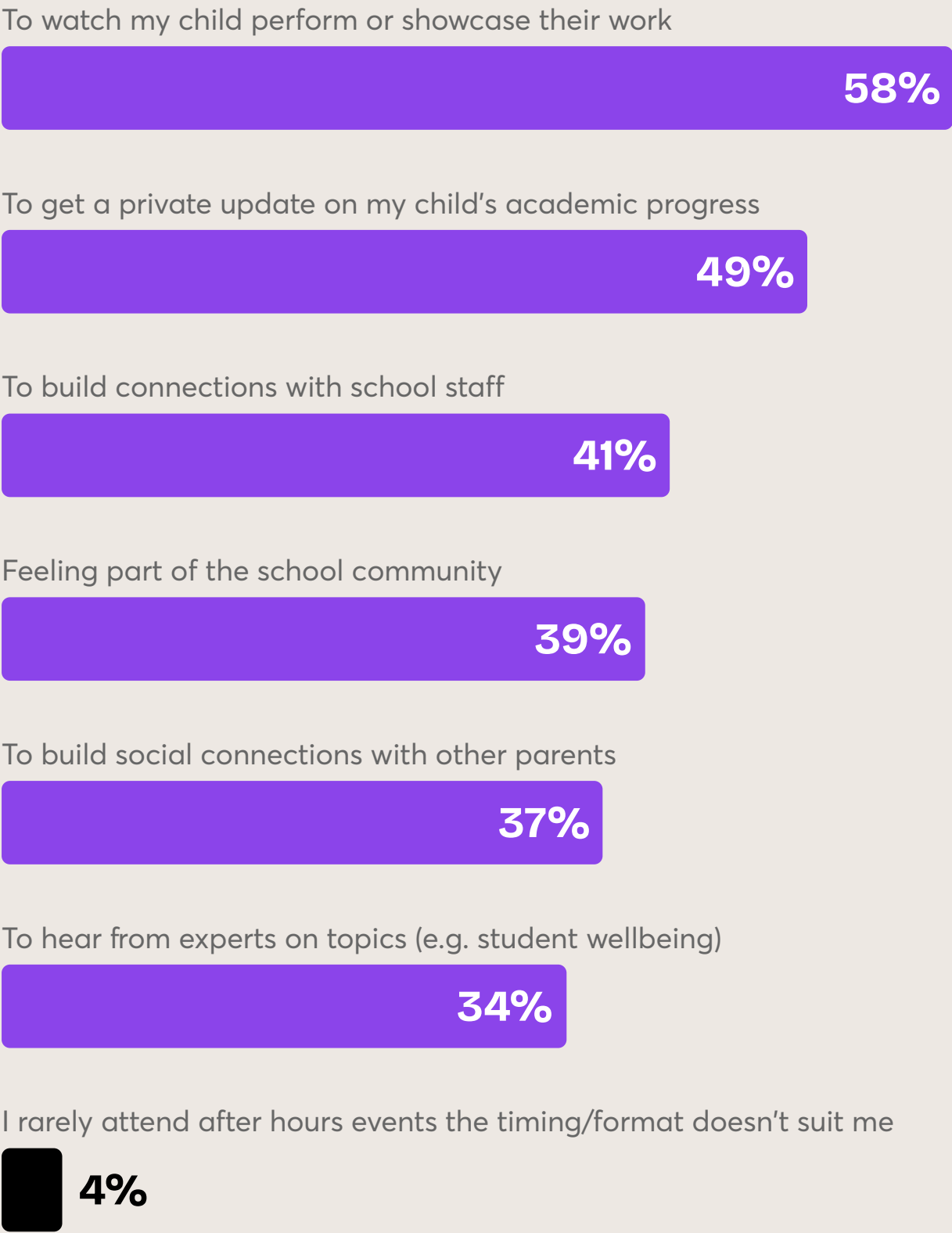


39% | 32%

To hear from experts on topics (e.g. student wellbeing)

WHY WOULD YOU CHOOSE TO ATTEND AN IN-PERSON SCHOOL EVENT AFTER HOURS?

Please select all that apply.



Reason	Percentage
To watch my child perform or showcase their work	58%
To get a private update on my child's academic progress	49%
To build connections with school staff	41%
Feeling part of the school community	39%
To build social connections with other parents	37%
To hear from experts on topics (e.g. student wellbeing)	34%
I rarely attend after hours events the timing/format doesn't suit me	4%

16 Partnership by design

Partnering with parents to support the student journey

KEY INSIGHT

True belonging grows when every child feels known and two-way conversations empower parents to partner in their learning.



Non-government schools are building strong parent partnerships

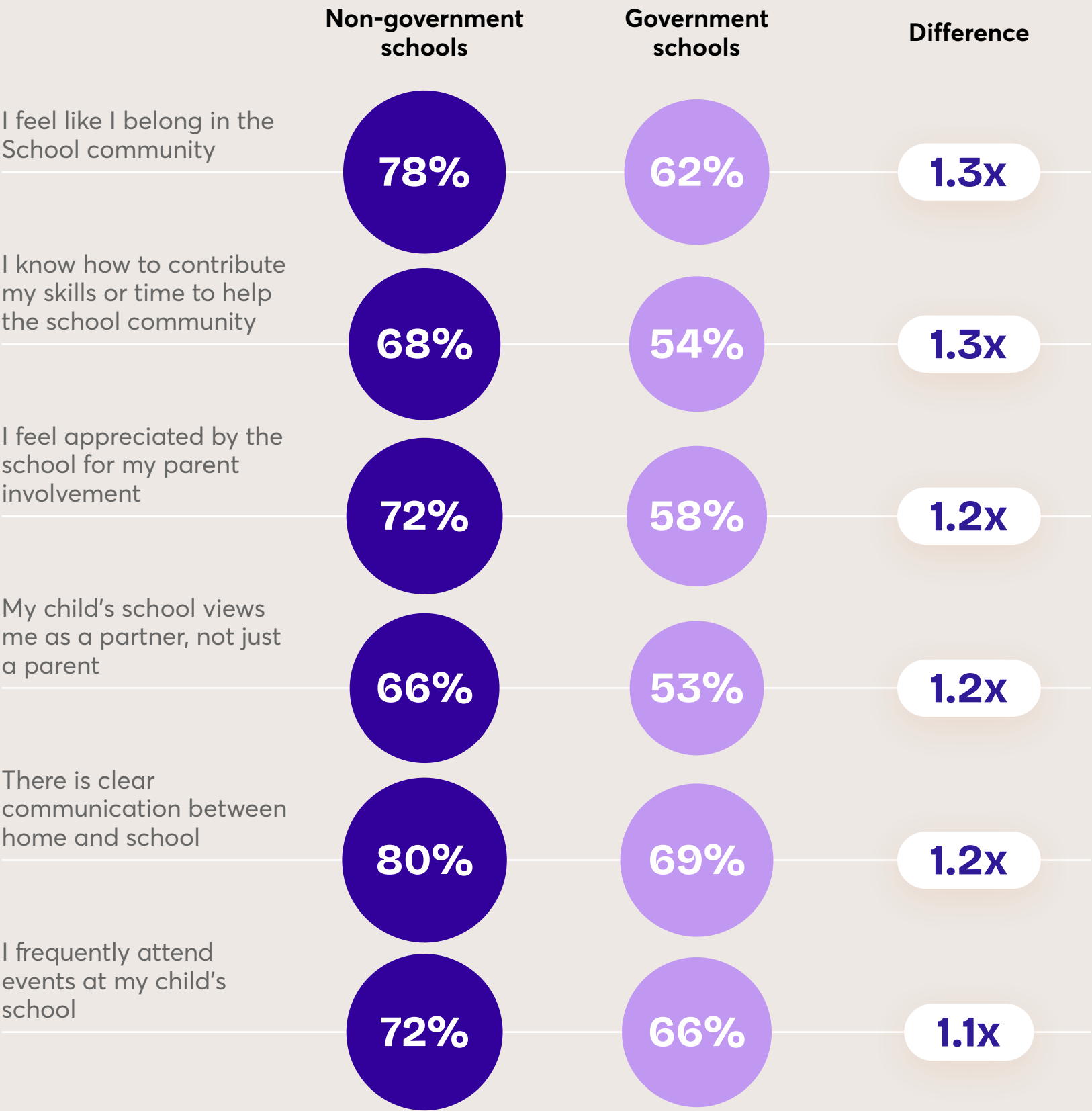
Many parents are not just looking for a school but for a village, a place of belonging and community. Non-government schools are successfully facilitating this connection, helping shift parents from transactional consumers to active contributors. Parents at non-government schools are 1.3 times more likely to feel like they belong in the school community (78% cf. 62%) and know how to contribute their time or skills to help (68% cf. 54%).

The sense of partnership is also stronger, with non-government parents feeling appreciated for their contribution (72% cf. 58%) and recognising the school views them as a partner not just a parent (66% cf. 53%).

Shifting parents from consumers to contributor remains vital for building a thriving community. Proactive communication can build the high-trust environment that lowers parental stress and anxieties before operational issues arise.

BUILDING PARENT PARTNERSHIPS

Strongly/somewhat agree



Belonging is built through being known

A shared sense of belonging is a hallmark of thriving school communities. When families feel they belong, natural barriers between home and school can come down. This trust allows families and educators to work together for student success.

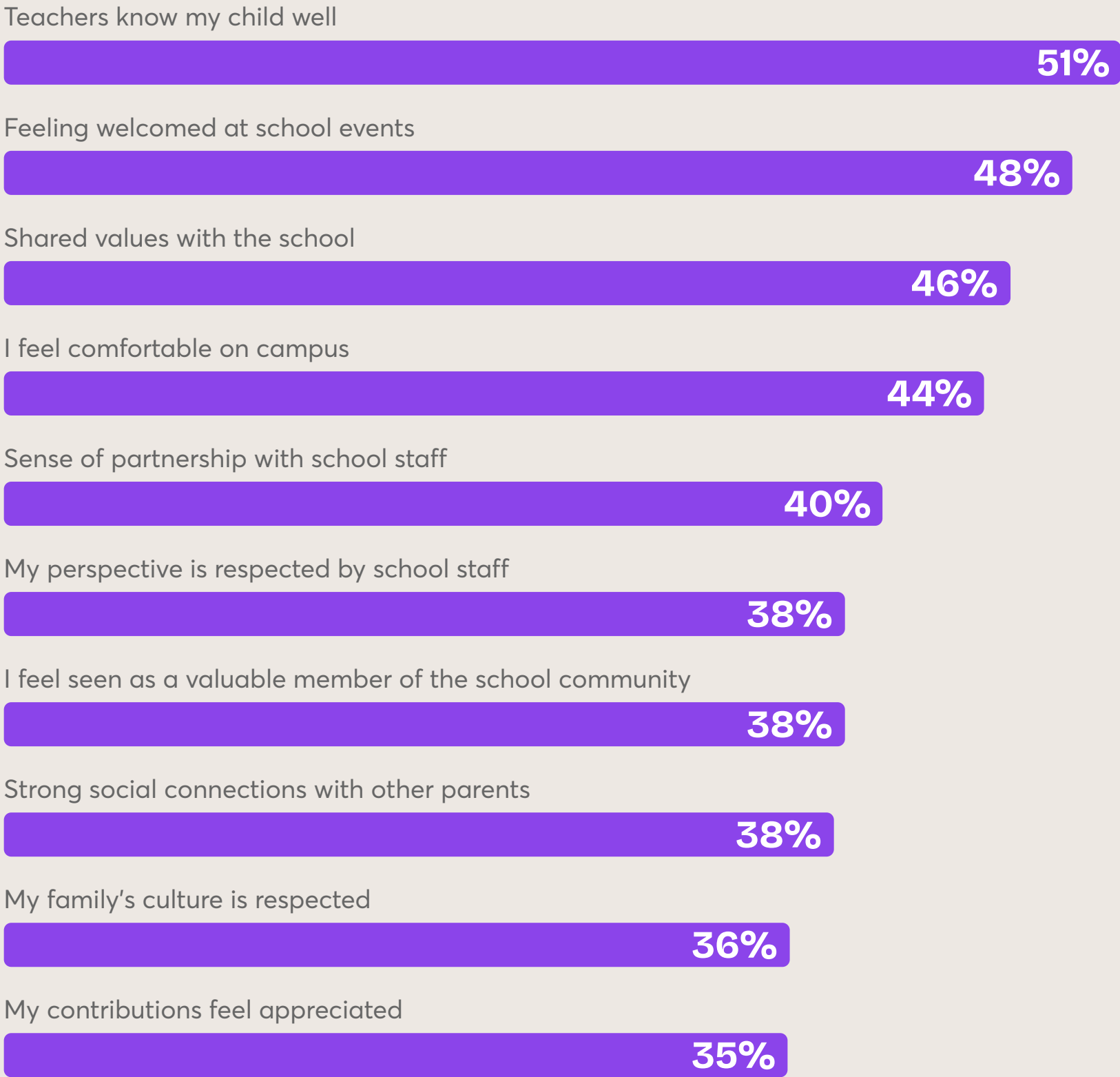
The key factor that helps parents feel they belong is knowing that their child is truly known by their teachers (51%). No parent wants their child to feel like a number. Belonging also strengthens when parents personally feel welcomed at school events (48%) and feel comfortable on campus (44%). A foundation of shared values (46%) and active partnership (40%) further builds on this connection.

Fostering these collaborative environments helps transform the school-family dynamic into a supportive educational partnership.

Non-government school parents are slightly more likely to see a sense of partnership with school staff as a key element of belonging (44% cf. 37%).

WHAT DOES BELONGING TO A SCHOOL COMMUNITY LOOK LIKE TO YOU?

Please select all that apply.



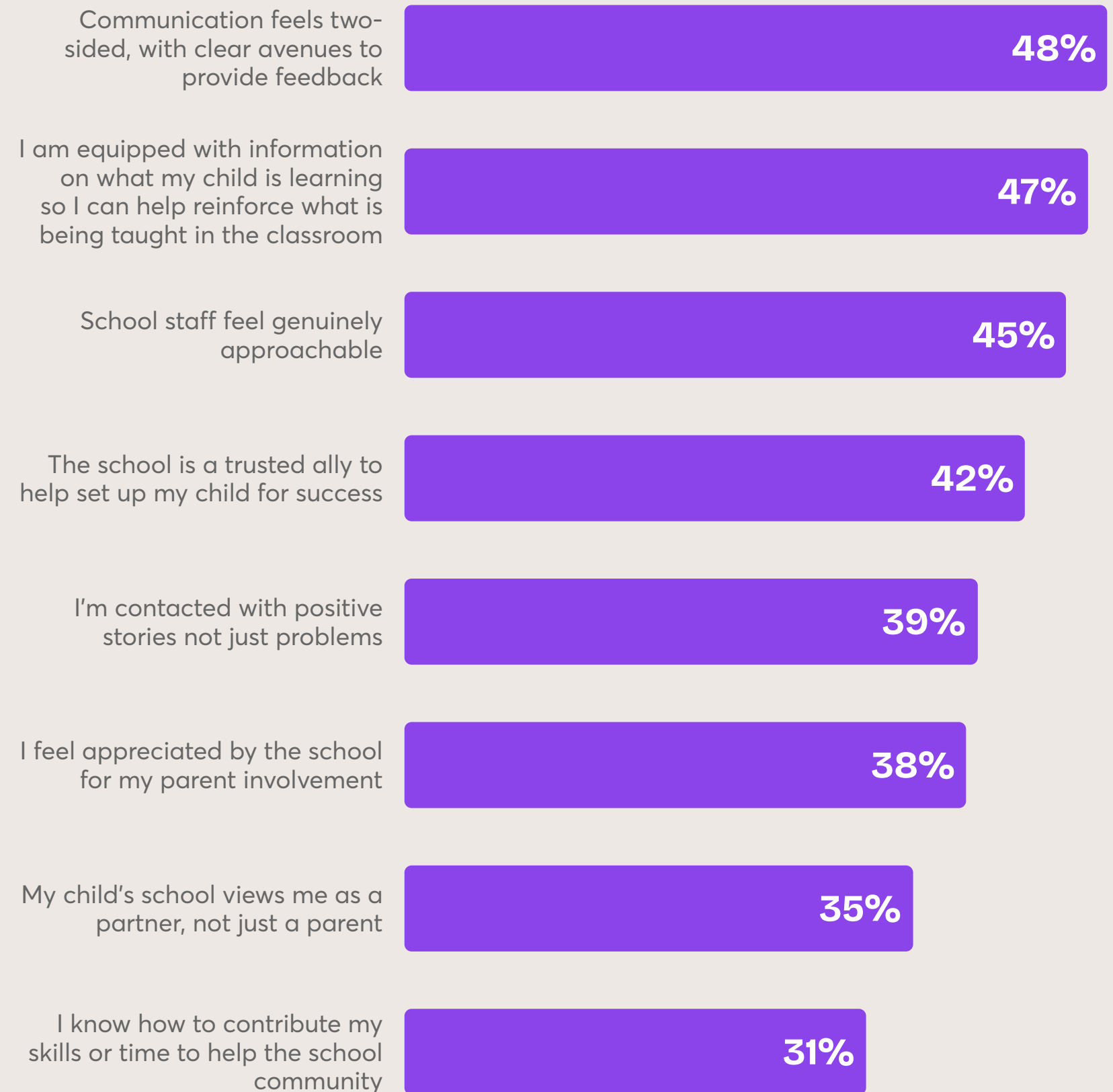
Educational partnerships are built through communication and collaboration

If a sense of partnership is a key element of belonging, then what does a parent-school partnership mean to families? Like any relationship, communication is a key element of partnership. Parents see two-way communication with clear avenues to provide feedback (48%) as a crucial factor of school partnerships. When parents have a sense of agency to advocate, provide input and gain clarity, it builds a firm foundation for working together.

This desire for input is closely linked to the home environment. Parents want a clear understanding of what their child is being taught so they can actively reinforce that learning at home (47%). The approachability of staff (45%) and viewing the school as a trusted ally in setting their child up for success (42%) are other crucial elements of an educational partnership.

WHAT DOES A PARENT-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP MEAN TO YOU?

Please select all that apply.



Engage with purpose: Leader's checklist

A checklist to help school leaders engage with purpose by evaluating and improving their communication strategies with today's parents.

Today's families value updates that focus on the whole child



Do our standard progress updates place equal priority on a child's social and emotional wellbeing alongside their academic outcomes?



Are we adapting our communication to match the changing needs of families as their children grow, avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach?

Connecting families with care and timeliness



Are we actively curating our messages to prevent platform fatigue, ensuring parents are not overwhelmed by irrelevant information across too many apps?



Do we intentionally reach out to families to share positive milestones, avoiding a culture where parents are only contacted when a problem arises?

Bringing families together through shared experiences



Do our school events focus on celebrating student showcases and community milestones, rather than simply delivering transactional information?



Have we built clear, structured opportunities into our community events for parents to casually network with school staff and build connections with other families?

Partnering with parents to support the student journey



How visibly does our school demonstrate to families that their child is uniquely known, valued, and cared for by their teachers, rather than just being a number?



Are we sharing curriculum updates so that families know what is being taught and can actively reinforce that learning at home?



How effectively are we providing clear avenues for two-way communication where parents feel comfortable providing feedback?

Measure what matters to parents using the Thriving Schools Index

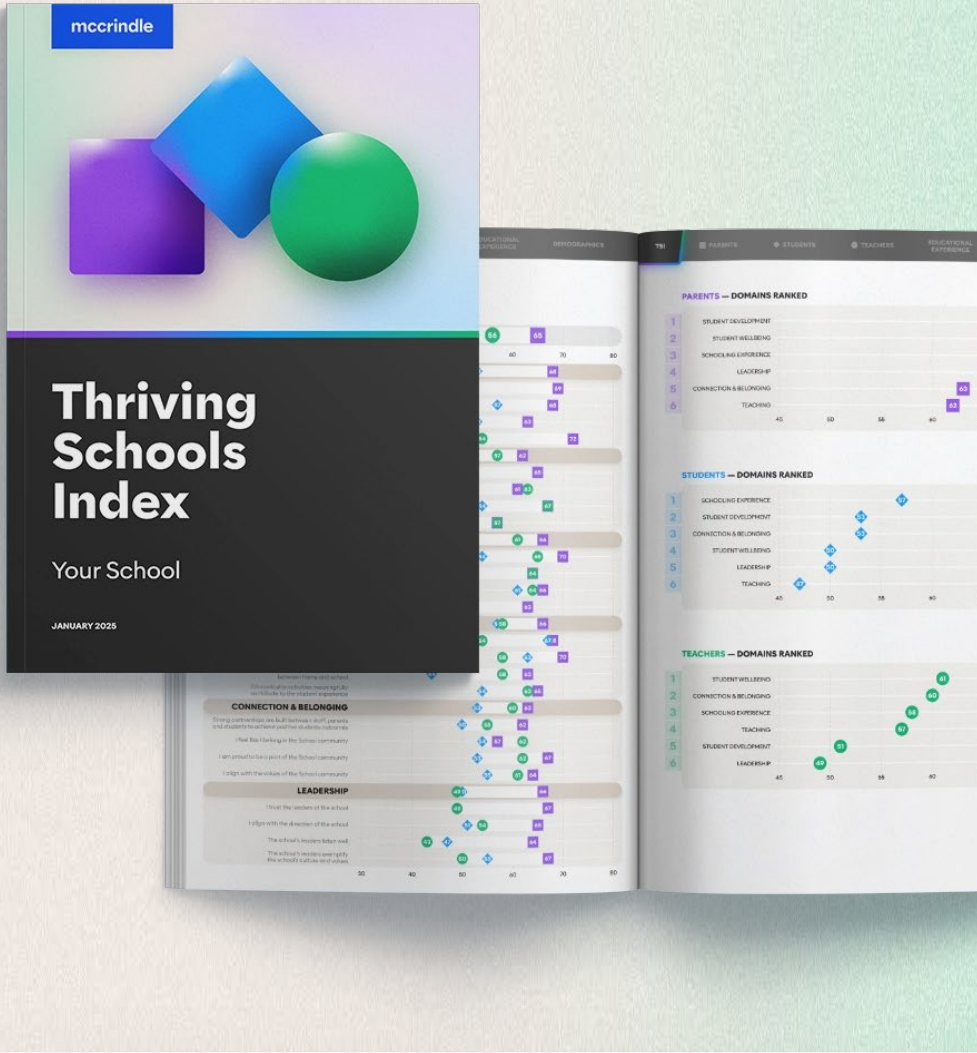
As this research reveals, sending too much un-curated information causes some families to stop paying attention. For school parent surveys, this leaves schools vulnerable to data skewed by a vocal minority.

When parents feel overwhelmed, they treat the school like a business rather than a partner. The Thriving Schools Index (TSI) changes this dynamic.

Instead of digging through endless data, you get a simple visual snapshot that shows how parents, staff, and students feel. It highlights your true strengths and growth areas, helping you move from reacting to complaints to leading with a clear plan.

Explore how the Thriving Schools Index can support your parent engagement efforts.

LEARN MORE



Respectful of time:

A quick 10-minute survey that values your parents' busy schedules.

Bridges the gap:

Uncovers exactly where staff feedback and parent expectations do not align.

Tracks growth:

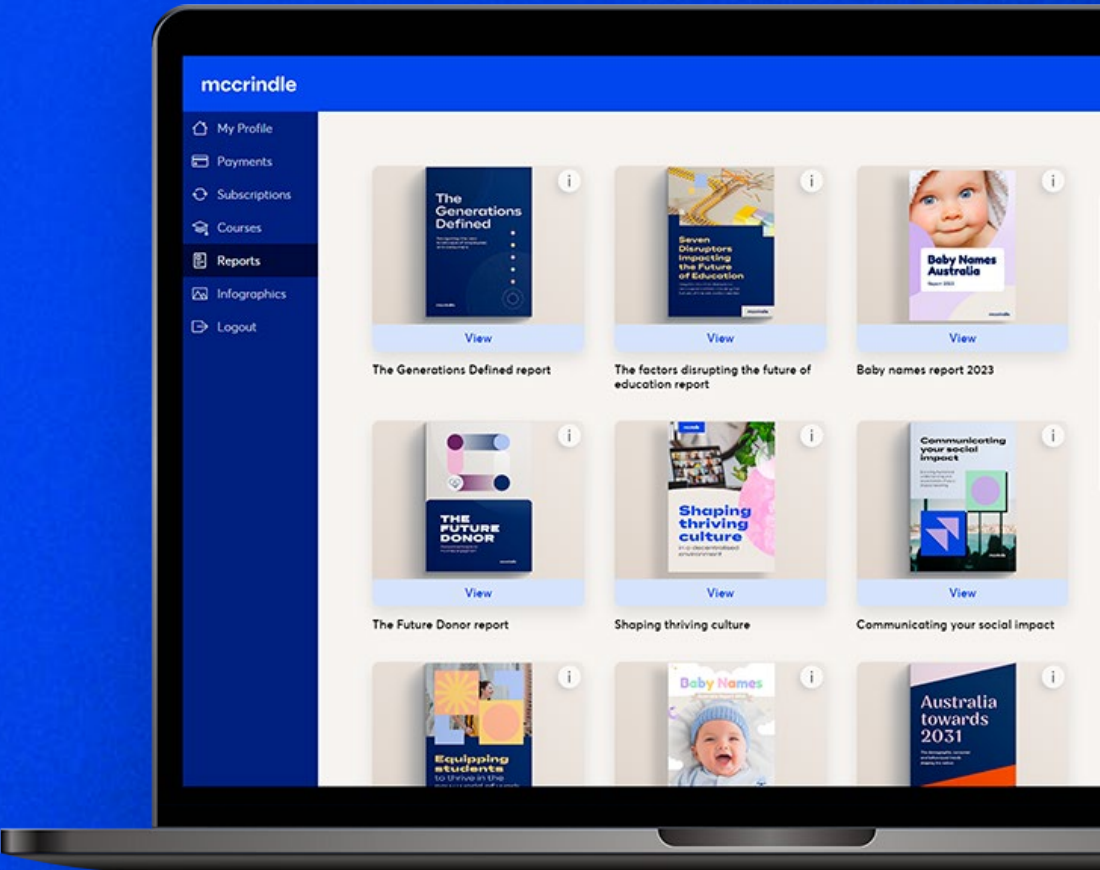
Allows you to test your community's health year-on-year to see if your changes are working.

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Research methodology

An online survey completed by Australians aged 18 to 80. Respondents who were parents of school aged children (n=1,000) were included in the study. The survey was in field from the 12th to the 26th of February 2026.

Weighting

The data in this report has been weighted to reflect the national school landscape. This includes a representative split across government (63.4%), Catholic (19.9%) and independent (16.7%) schools. The sample is also weighted for geographical location, ensuring a representative mix of parents from both metropolitan and regional areas.

Graphs and rounding

Data labels on the graphs in this report have been rounded and may, therefore, sum to 99% or 101%. Any calculations where two data points have been added are based on raw data (not the rounded data labels on the graph) which have then been rounded once combined.

The *Communicating with today's parents: Designing effective parent partnerships for stronger school communities* report is produced by:

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Title: *Communicating with today's parents: Designing effective parent partnerships for stronger school communities*

Publisher: McCrindle Research - mccrindle.com

URL: mccrindle.com

ISBN: 978-1-923850-00-2

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