

# Reading Education Messaging

Findings and Recommendations from an Online  
Poll of K-5 Parents in America

# Methodology



Impact Research conducted an online survey of n=800 K-5 parents nationwide between October 2-9, 2023.



By sampling and weighting the demographic composition of the survey to the true population, this online survey is representative of the United States' demographic composition.



As the survey was conducted online, all the respondents have access to the Internet via a computer or a smartphone. Because the survey was conducted online, there is no calculated margin of error. By definition, a probability-based survey must be sampled randomly. Given that online survey respondents all have internet access, they do not qualify as a random sample of the true population and are therefore not assigned a statistical margin of error.

# Key Findings

- **Parents see some issues but not a crisis in reading education.** Most parents say their own kids are reading at or above grade level, even as they see national issues with it. Few think it's in a crisis state. With that said, 47% say their child has (or is) struggling to read, and 37% say reading is in a crisis once they hear the NAEP reading scores.
- **People think teachers are doing well teaching reading, consistent with their general trust for teachers.** 95% of parents think their child's teacher is doing a good job overall (48% say excellent), with virtually the same numbers for teaching kids to learn to read.
- **People know and believe in phonics/sound-it-out, but they don't inherently distrust cueing.** 86% of people know what phonics is (only 22% know cueing), and when pushed to choose parents overwhelmingly want phonics to be the teaching method.
- **If asked to choose, parents support ending cueing and using phonics to teach reading.** 80% support their state doing so, and 74% support their local school district doing so.

# Respondents predominantly have children in traditional public schools, in line with them educating 90% of American children.

They also represent a near even mix of K-5 parents.

## School Type

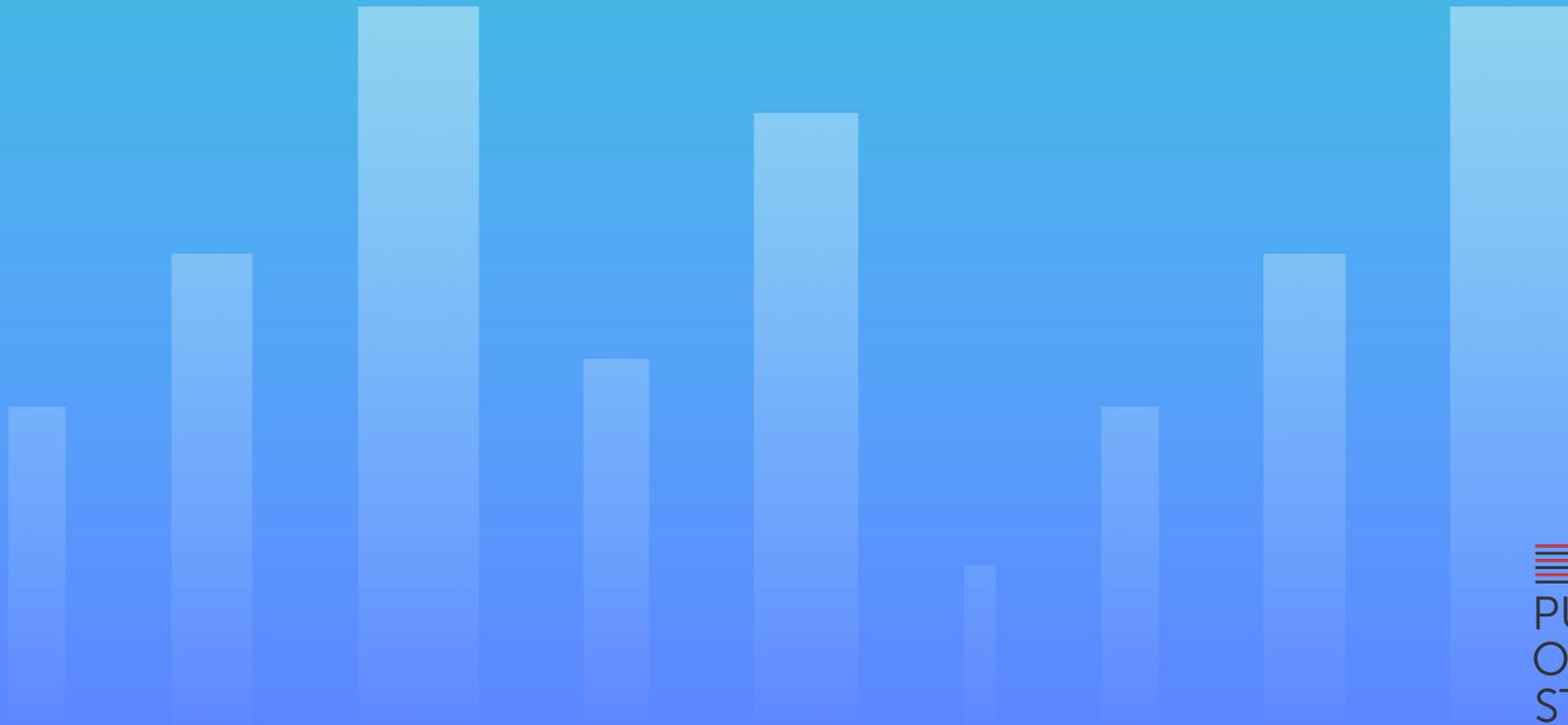


## Grade Level of Child





# OVERALL READING AND EDUCATION LANDSCAPE



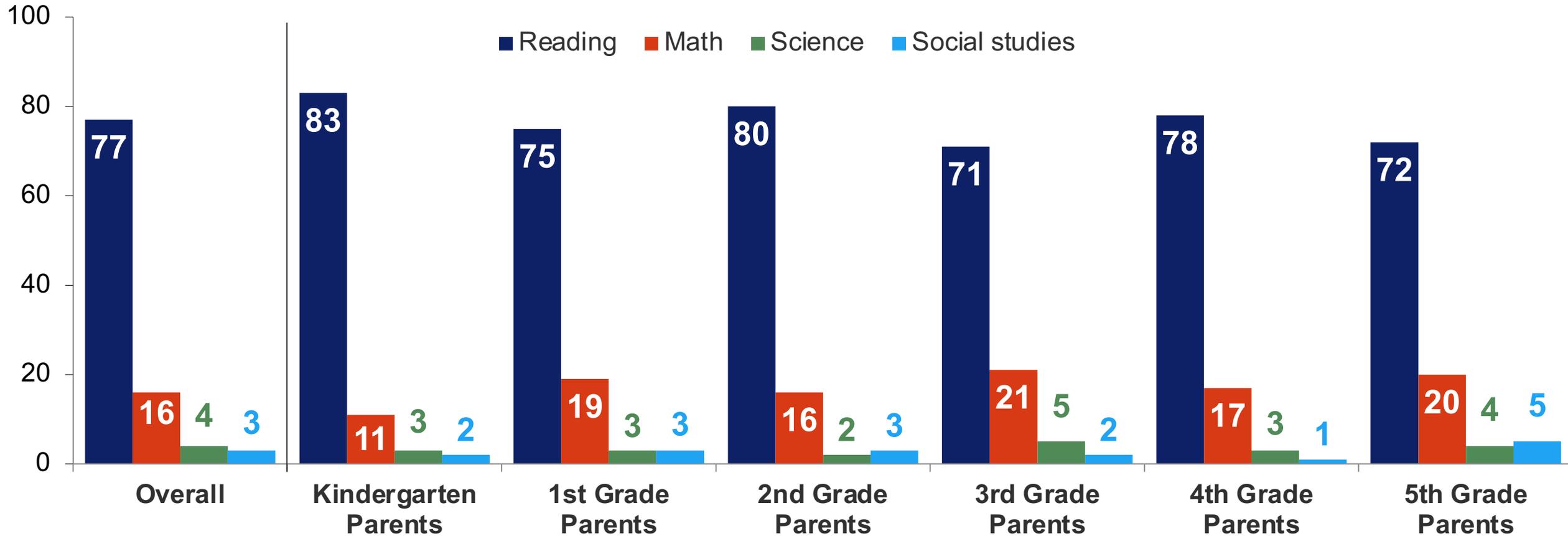
PUBLIC  
OPINION  
STRATEGIES

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# K-5 parents prioritize reading as by far the most important subject for their child's education

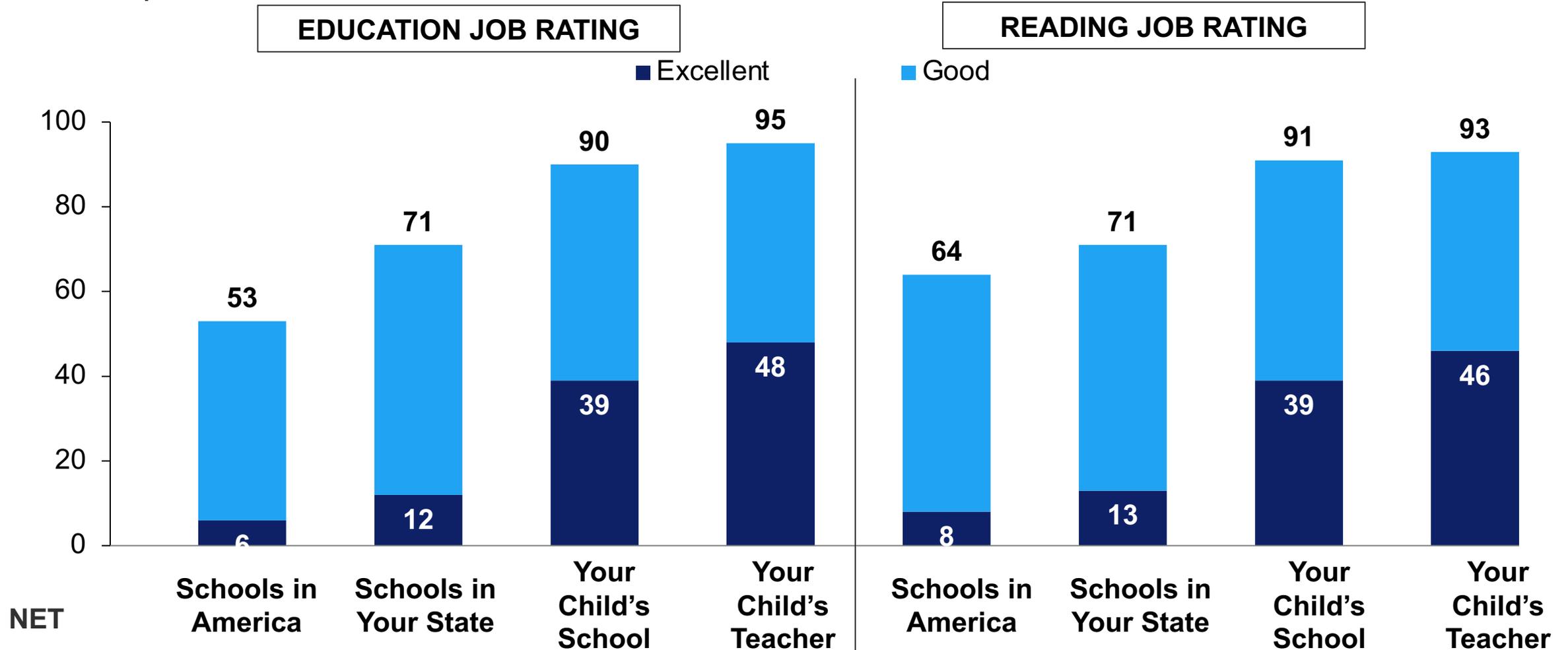
This is true across all K-5 grade levels with only math ranked highly otherwise.

Please rank the following in order of how important they are for your child's education:



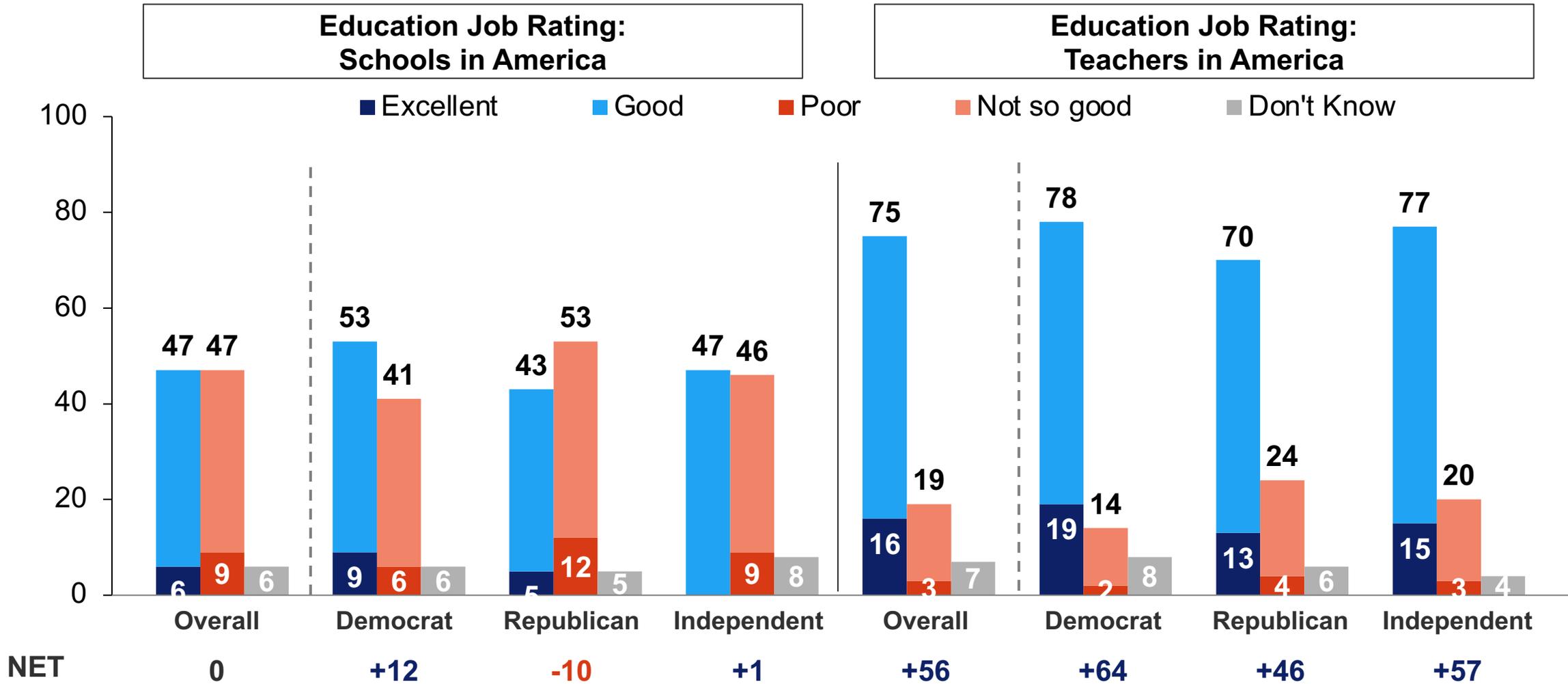
# They don't think national education is going particularly well, but the more local the better they think it is.

Nearly half think their child's teacher is doing an excellent job, the best rating they could give, compared to 8% for schools in America.



# These parents are split on the state of education in America, but they view teachers largely positively.

Despite culture war fights over schools, there are only minor gaps between partisans on this.



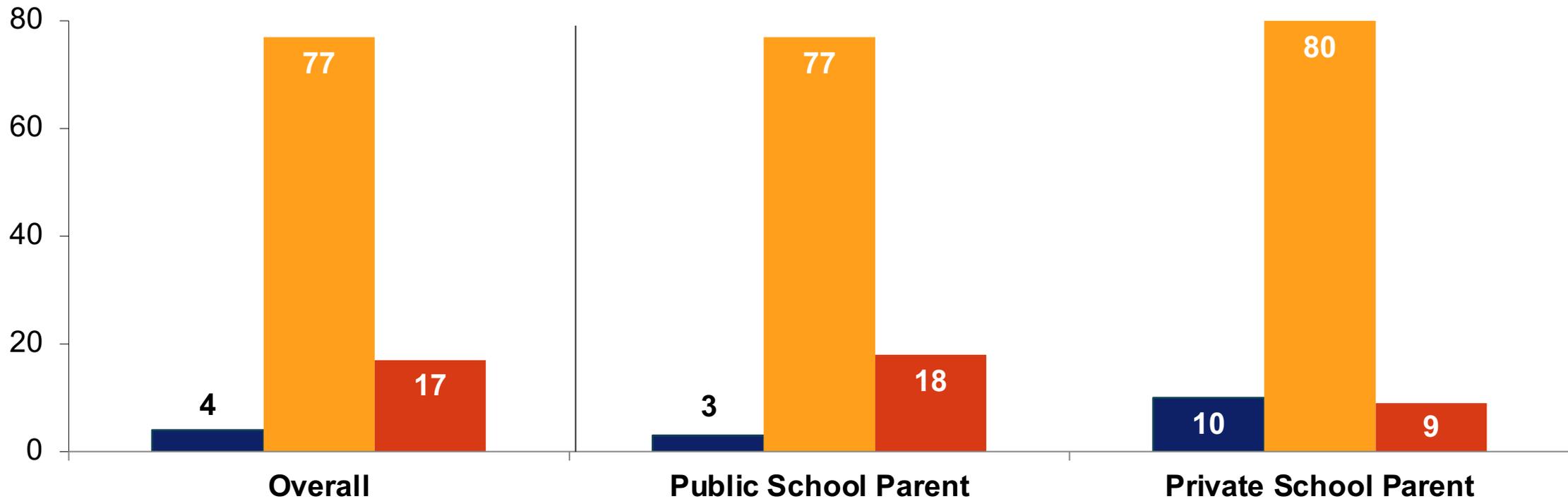
# Few parents feel their child's elementary school is getting emphasis on reading skills wrong, regardless of school type.

*Would you say that your child's elementary school is:*

Putting too much emphasis on reading skills

Putting the right amount of emphasis on reading skills

Putting too little emphasis on reading skills

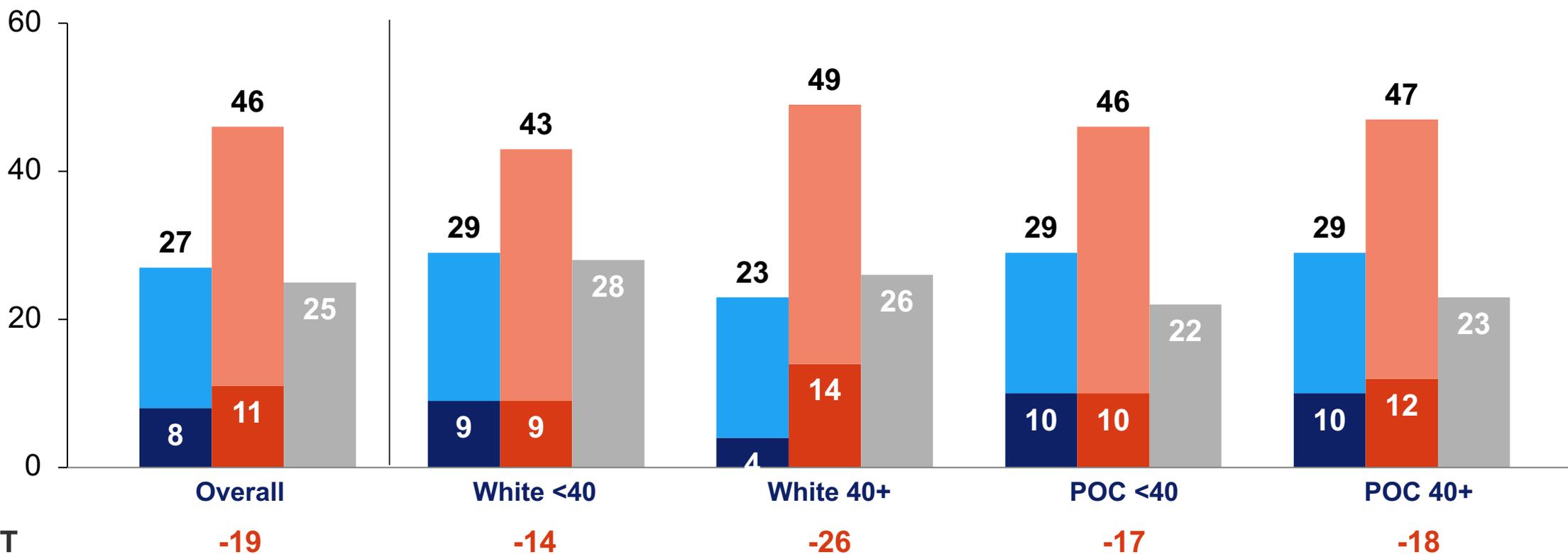


# Nearly half of these parents (46%) believe reading education has declined in recent generations, while 25% see little change.

Regardless of their view, most don't have strong opinions in either direction.

*Compared to the past generation or two, do you think kids on average in K-12 schools in America are reading:*

■ A lot better   ■ A little better   ■ A lot worse   ■ A little worse   ■ About the same

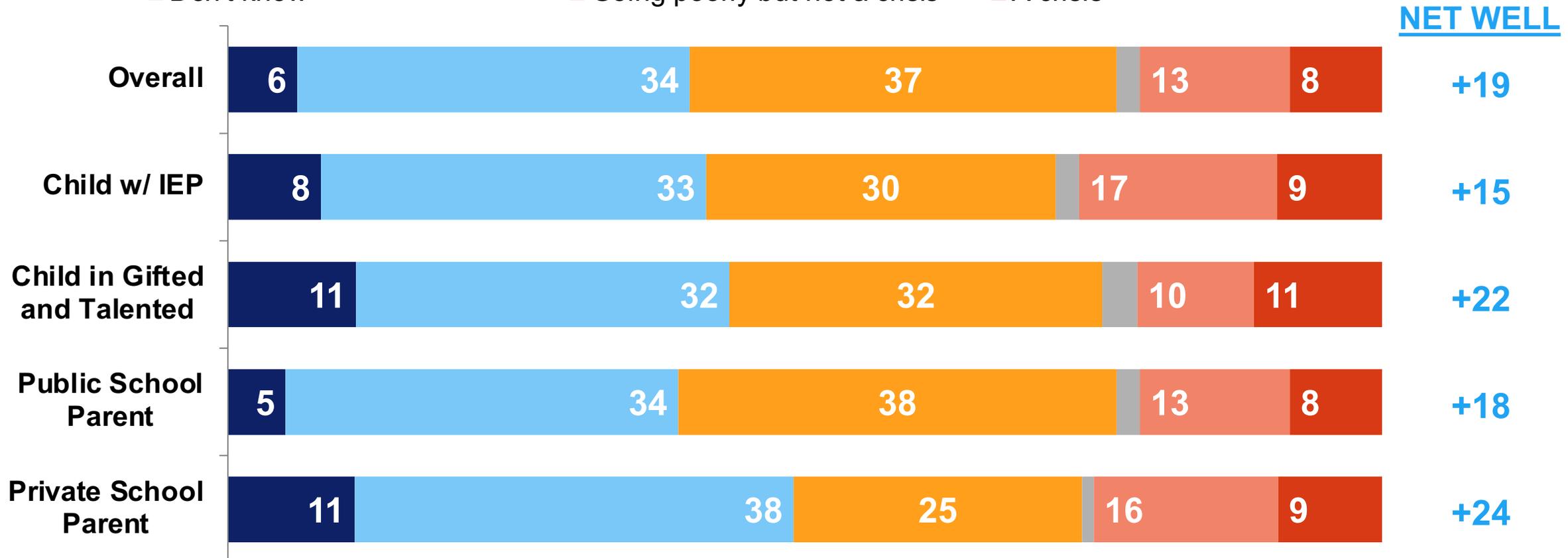


# Most rate reading education as going “pretty well” or “ok”

Very few people think it’s going very well (6%) or poorly/in a crisis (21%).

*Would you say that when it comes to teaching reading in K-12 schools, things are...*

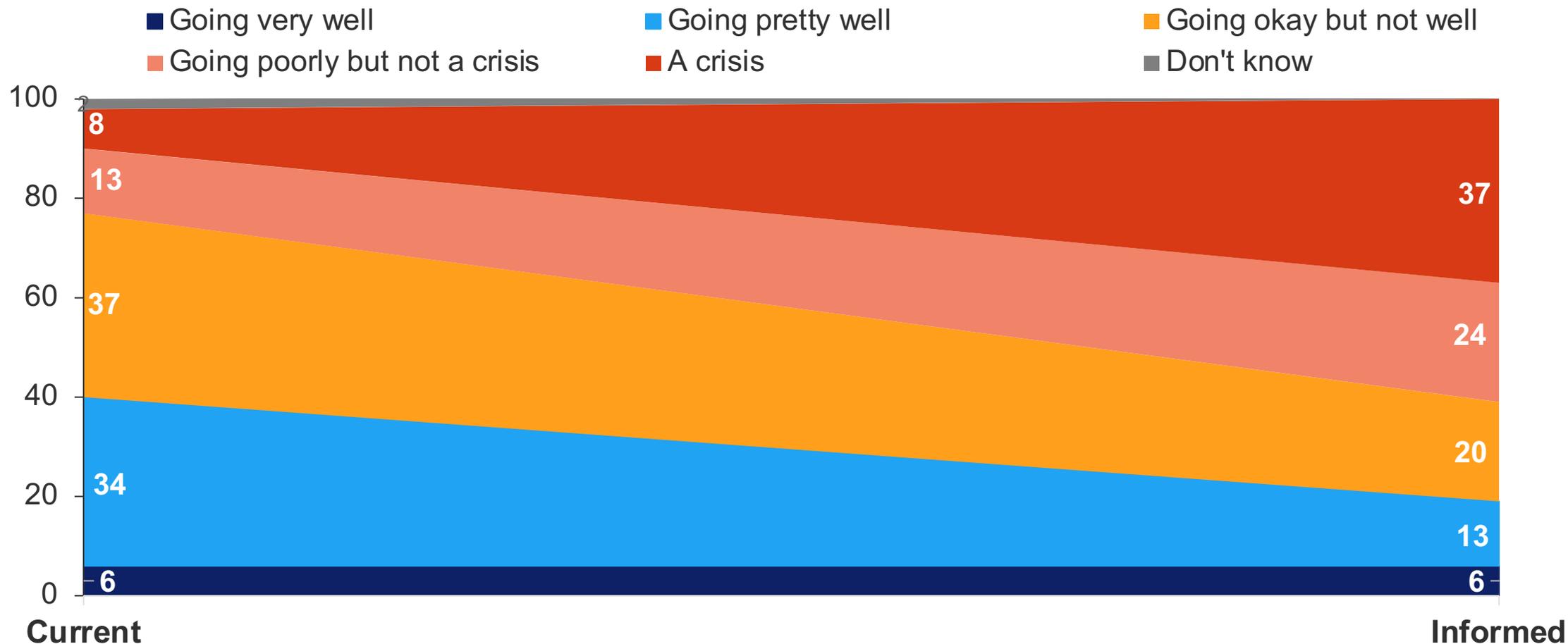
- Going very well
- Going pretty well
- Going okay but not well
- Don't know
- Going poorly but not a crisis
- A crisis



# Introducing a single data point on reading education failures—**NAEP scores**—dramatically raises the share who see problems.

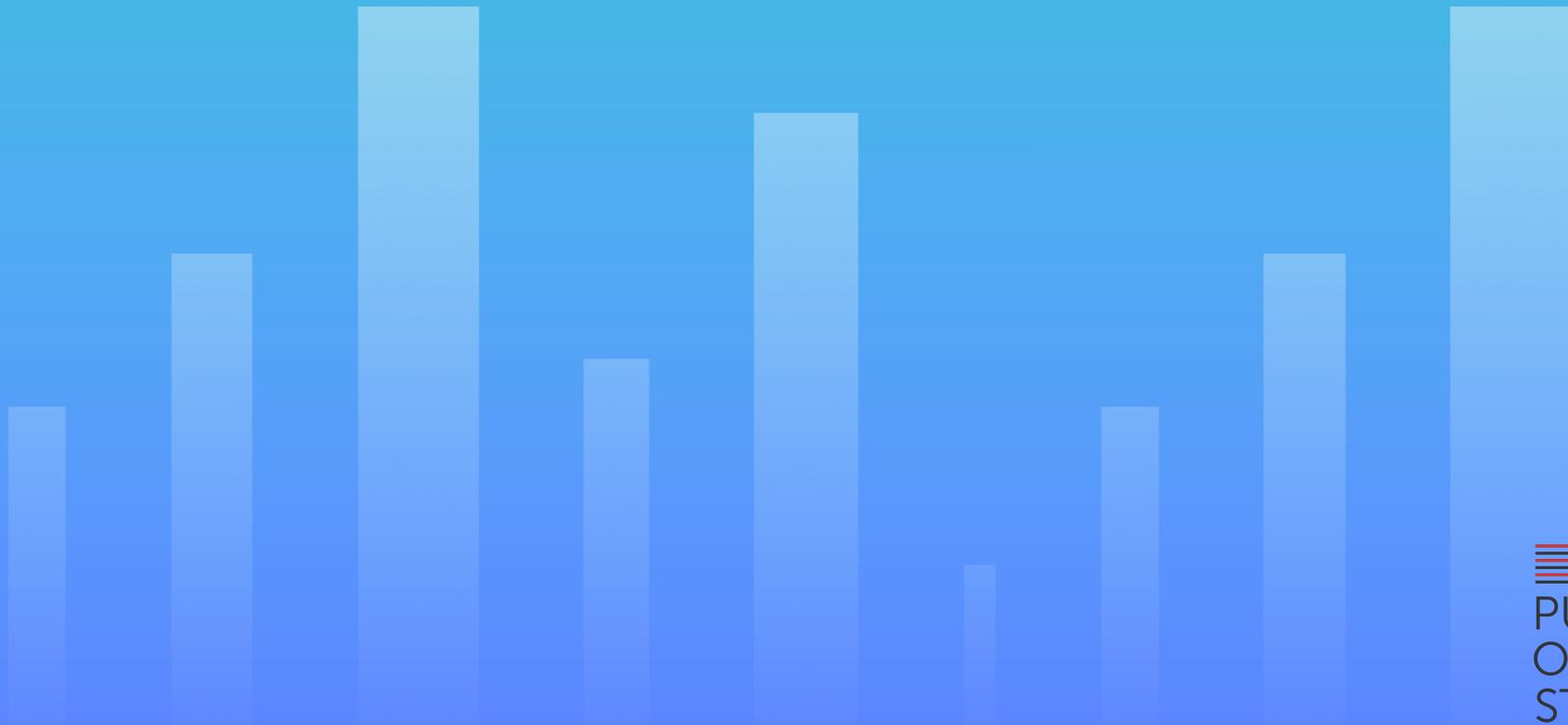
Most voters (61%) say education is in crisis or going poorly after hearing this statistic.

*National test scores have shown that only 32% of American 4th graders are proficient in reading as of 2022. Knowing this, would you say that when it comes to teaching reading in K-12 schools, things are?*





# HOW PARENTS VIEW THEIR CHILD'S READING

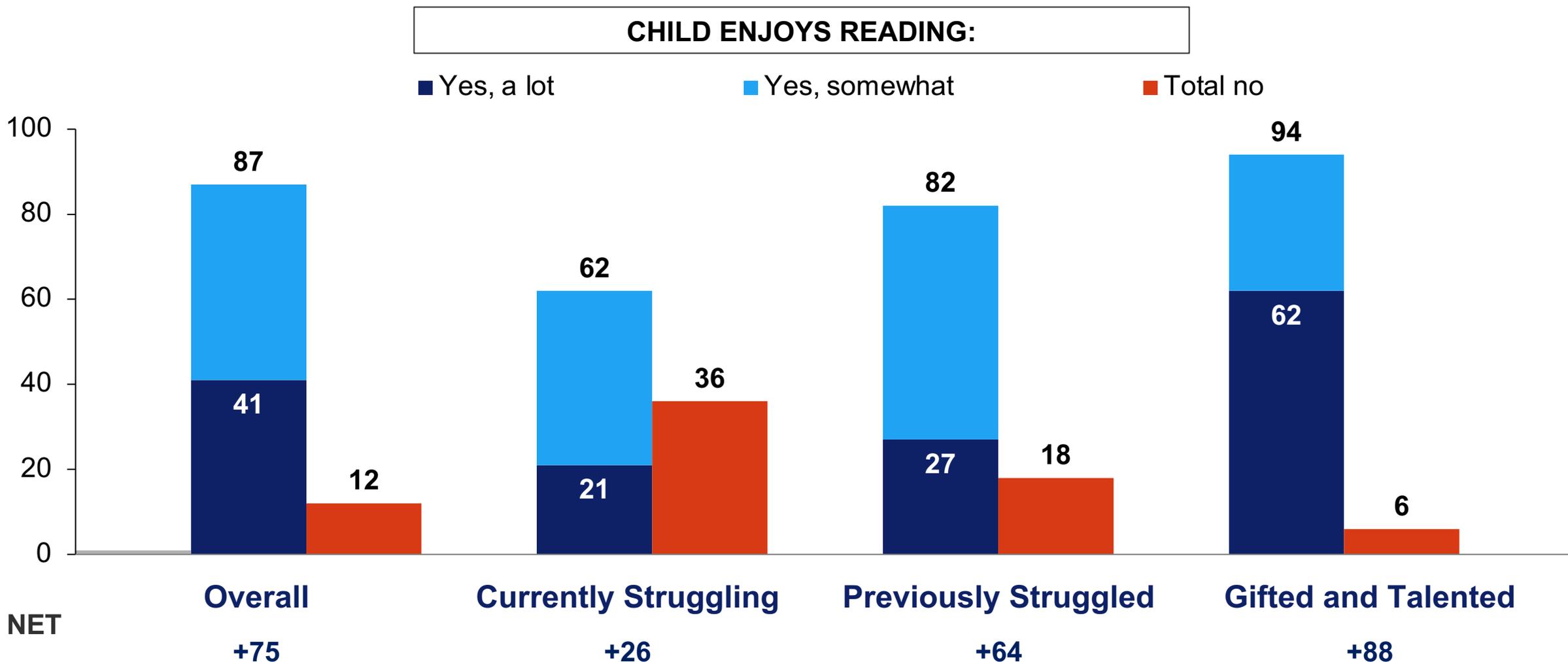


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# Most parents believe their kids enjoy reading, though intensity varies significantly across relevant groups.

Even 62% of parents who say their child struggles with reading say their child enjoys reading.

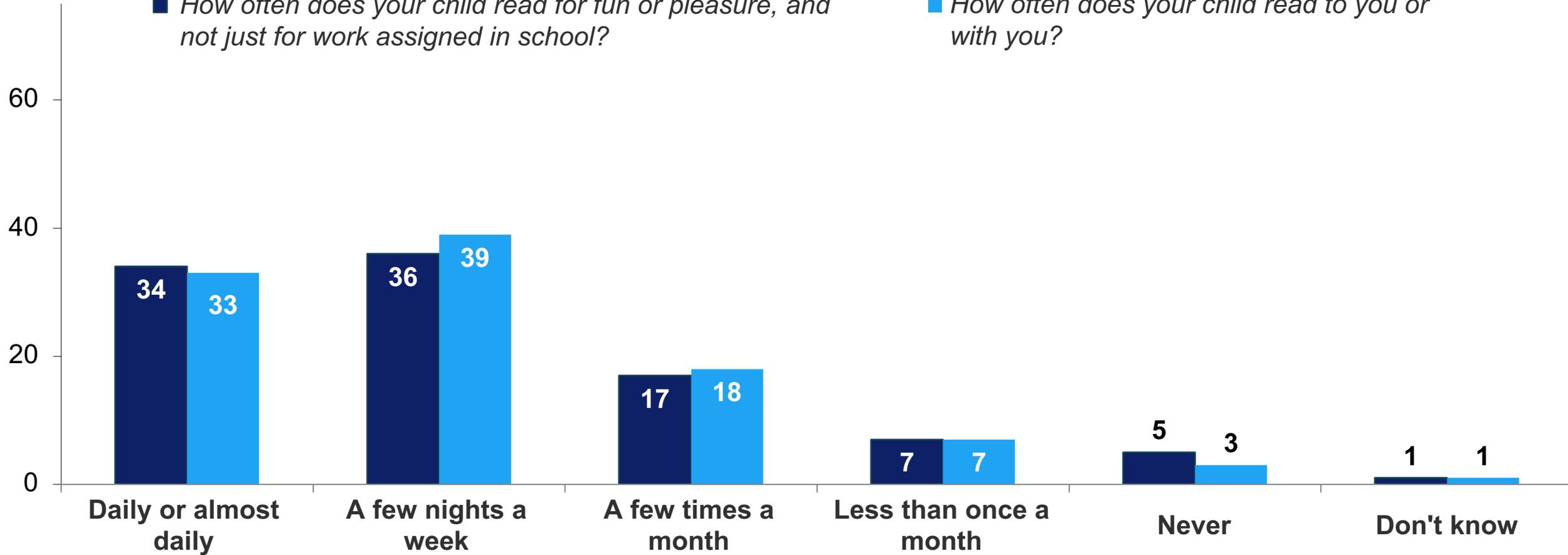


# Young children are reading outside of school, and with their parents.

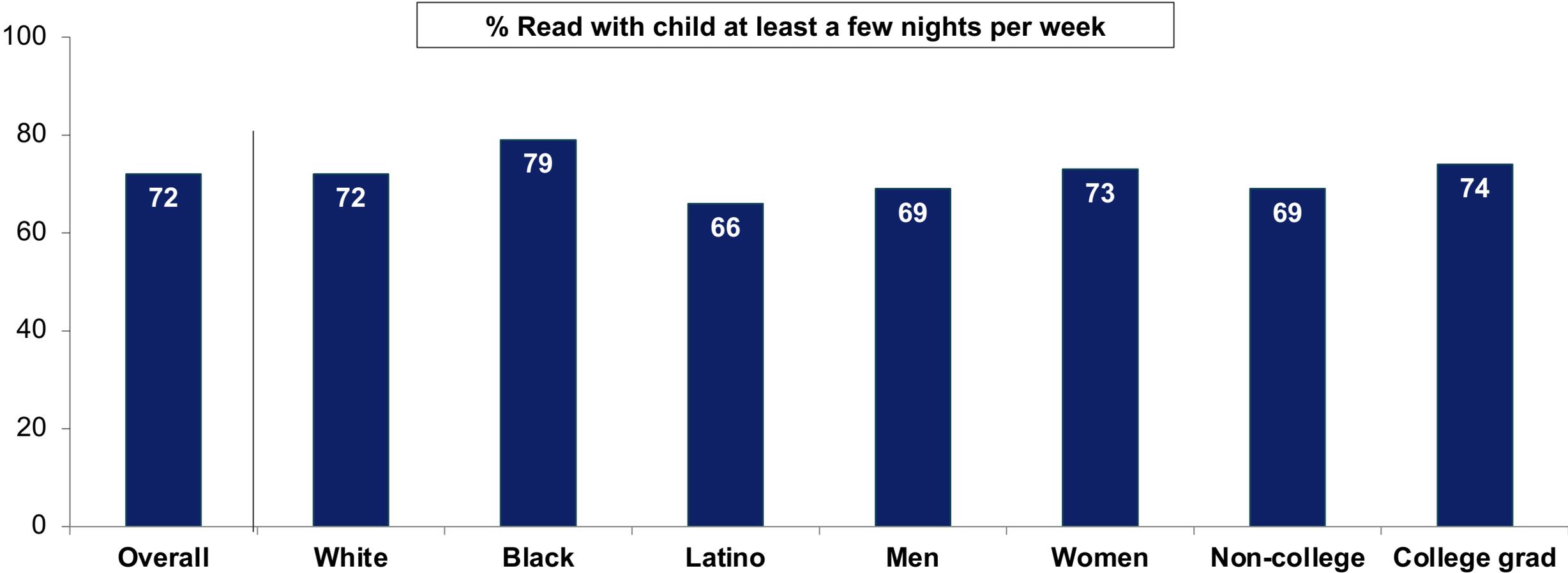
Most parents report their kids reading regularly for pleasure and to/with their parents.

■ *How often does your child read for fun or pleasure, and not just for work assigned in school?*

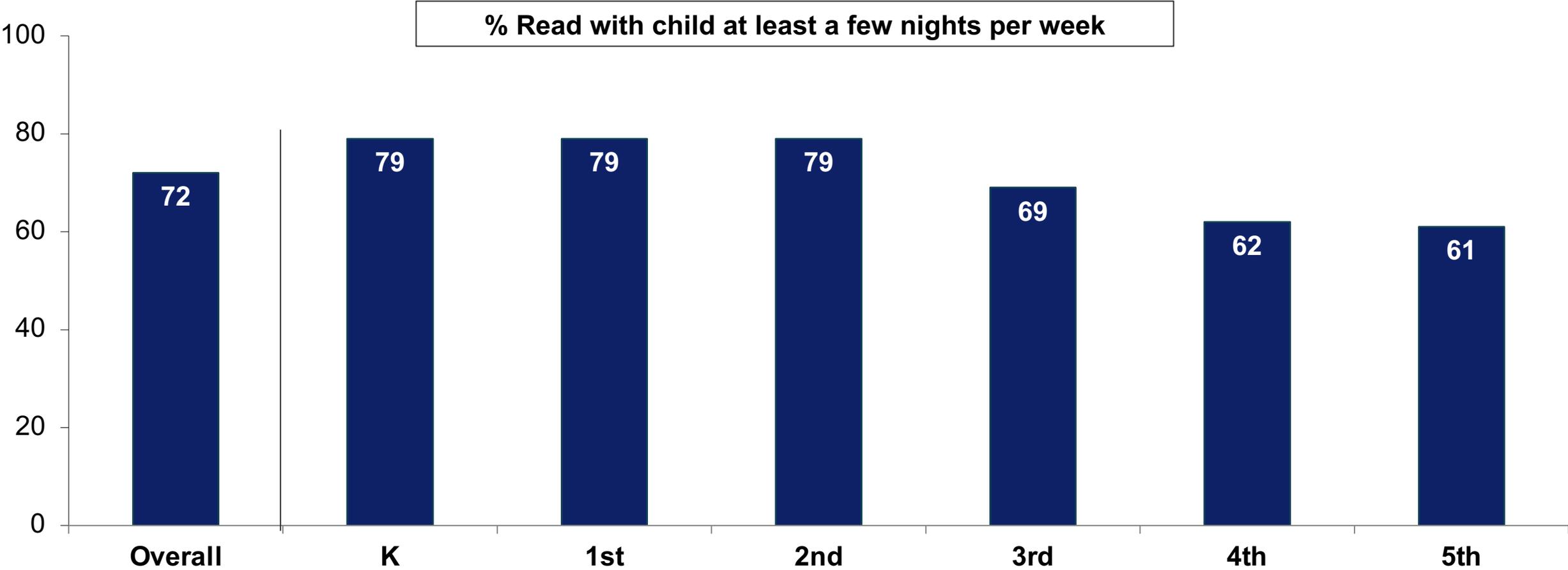
■ *How often does your child read to you or with you?*



# There are minor gaps by demographics on parents reading with their kids.



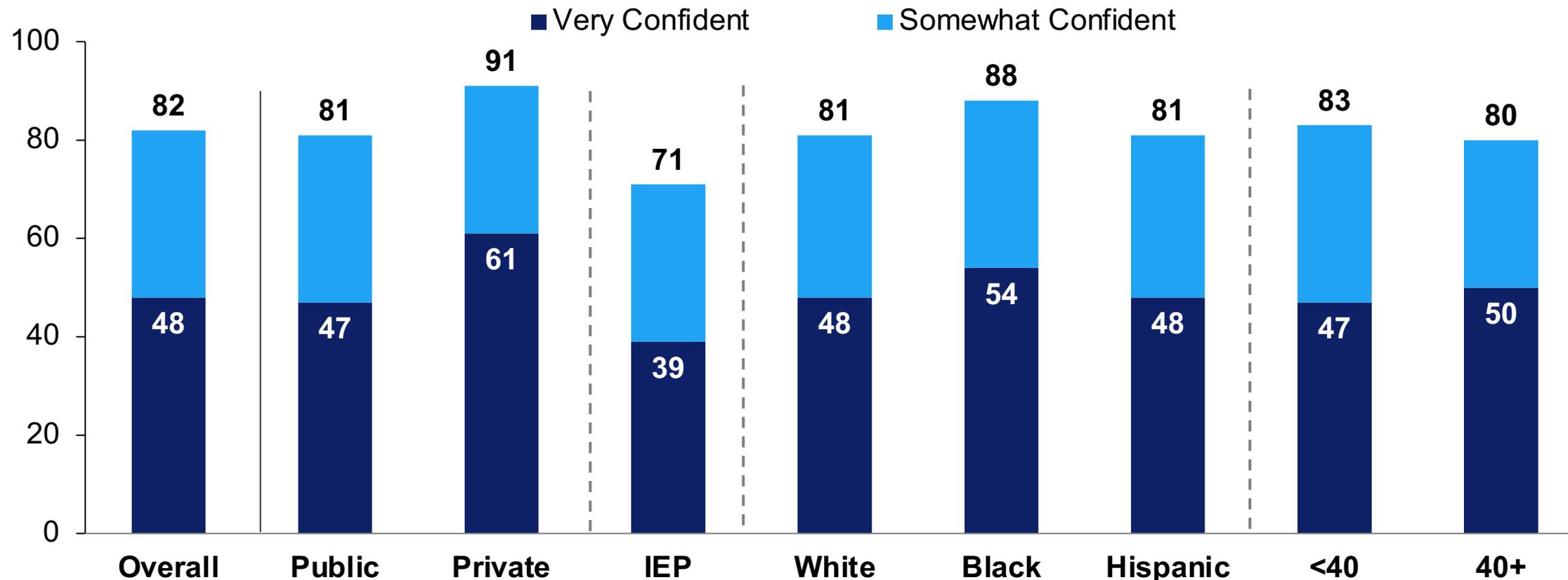
# Parents of older kids report reading with their kids less – but otherwise there are only small differences.



# Across the board, most parents are confident in their child's ability to read – half of whom are “very confident”

Parents with a child that has a learning difference/IEP trail other demographics.

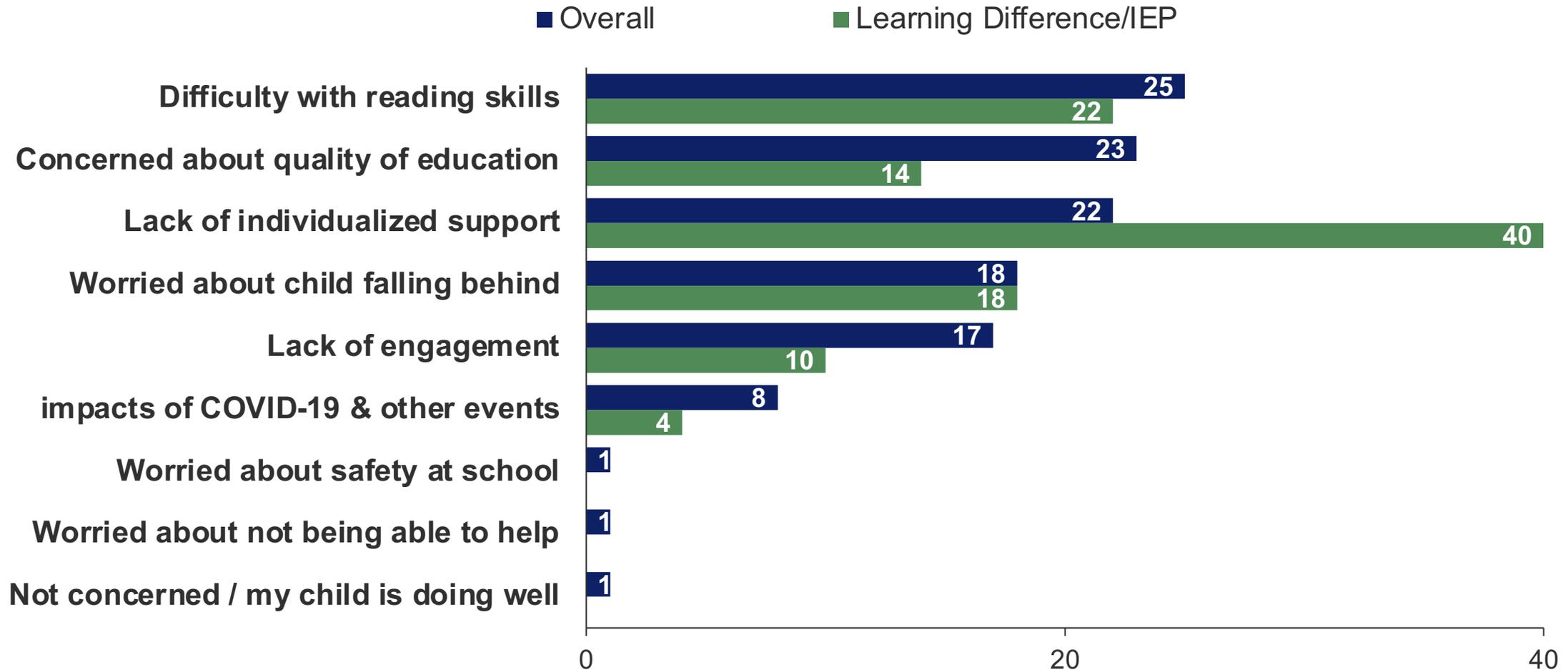
*When it comes to your child's progress learning to read, would you say that you are:*



# The 17% of parents who are worried about their child's reading have broad and varied concerns.

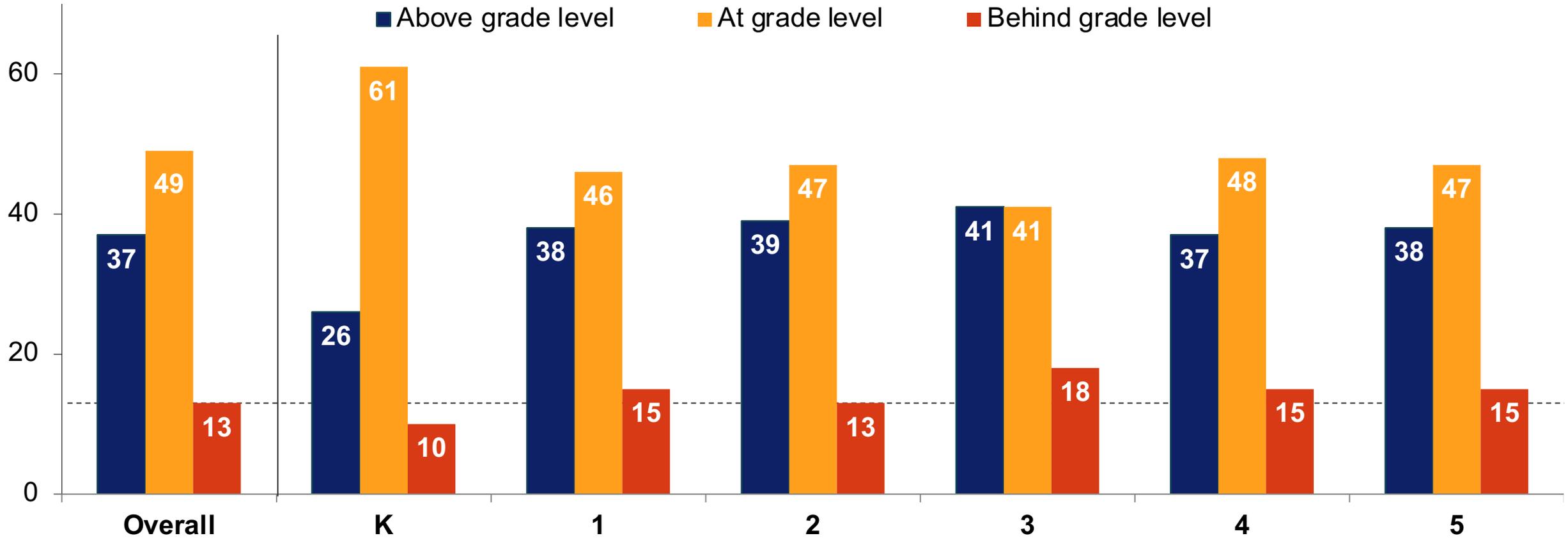
Parents of children with an IEP are twice as concerned about access to individualized support.

*In a few words, what concerns you about your child's progress learning to read? [OPEN-ENDED] [ASKED IF WORRIED]*



# Only 13% of parents rate their child's reading as behind grade level, which holds relatively consistent across K-12

*Would you say that your child's reading skills are:*



# Parents whose kids are behind grade level rate their kids' schools and teachers positively – they don't blame the teachers.

## Deep Dive: Parents of kids reading behind grade level

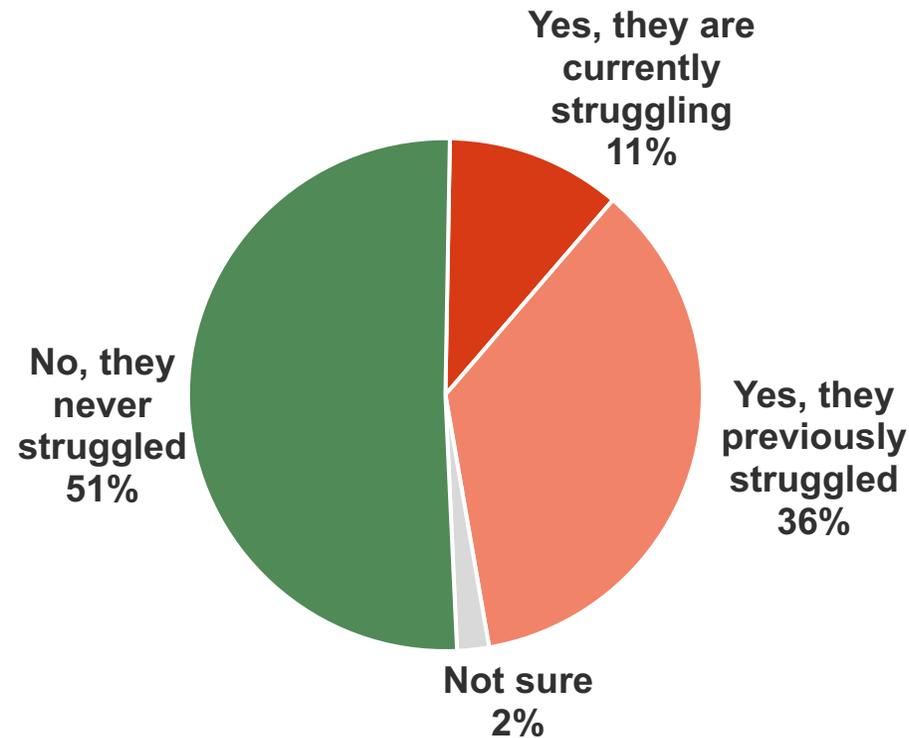
- Disproportionately women (76%)
- Less college-educated (25%)
- More Republican (48%)
- 55% have a child with learning differences or in an IEP program
  
- Positive ratings to their children's schools and teachers:
  - Your child's school: 79% positive / 15% excellent
  - Your child's teachers: 79% positive / 32% excellent

# While similar proportions of kids struggled learning to read (47%) as those that didn't (51%), there are vast differences across subgroups

The majority of kids reading above grade level have never struggled to read (80%).

Highest % No	
POC Female College Grads	65%
Child in Gifted and Talented	65%
Male Non-college grads	63%

**CHILD STRUGGLED LEARNING TO READ**



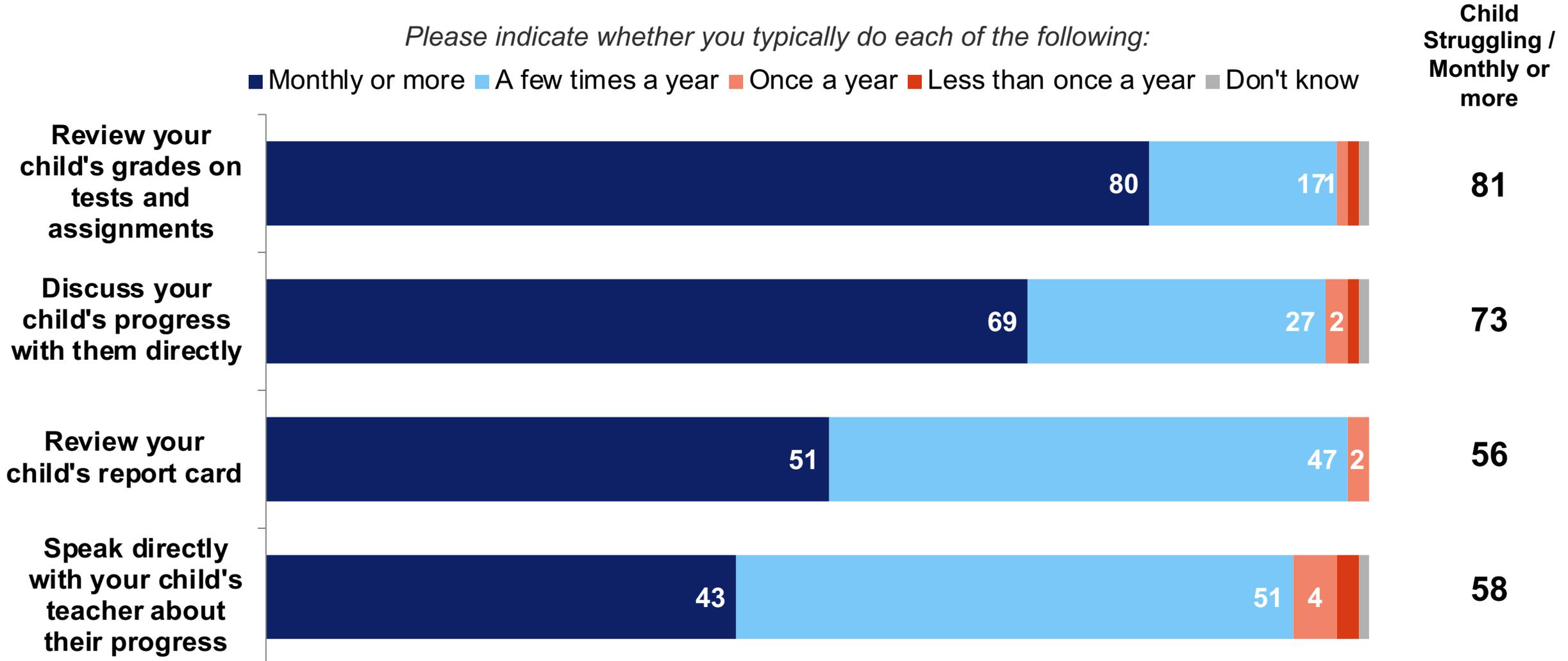
Highest % Yes	
Enrolled in reading classes outside of school	75%
Child with Learning Difference/IEP	72%
Used free tutoring service	72%
Income \$25k-\$40k	59%
Non-college women	55%
POC Non-college	54%

# Parents report being very informed of their child's progress, but they connect less frequently with their teacher(s) directly.

Parents who are aware their child is struggling to read are more likely to engage in their child's education.

Please indicate whether you typically do each of the following:

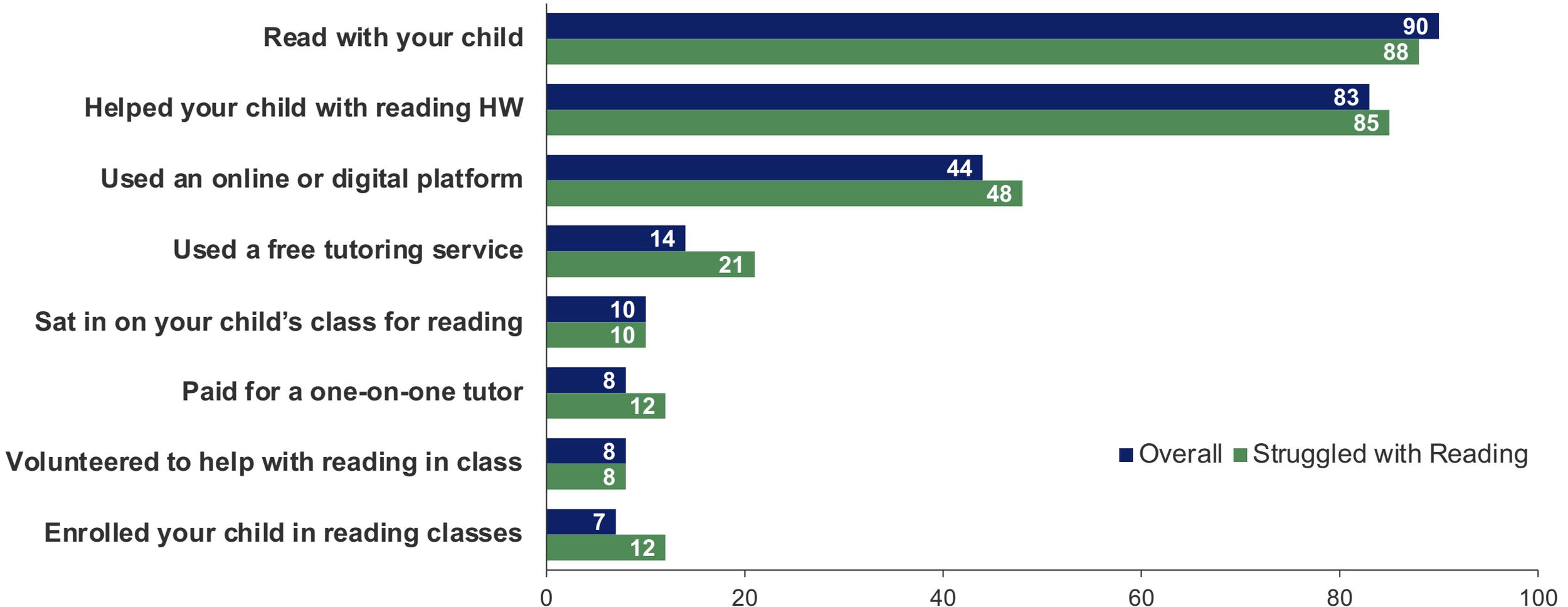
■ Monthly or more ■ A few times a year ■ Once a year ■ Less than once a year ■ Don't know



# Close to half of parents rely on online/digital resources, but few use tutors or sit in on their child's class.

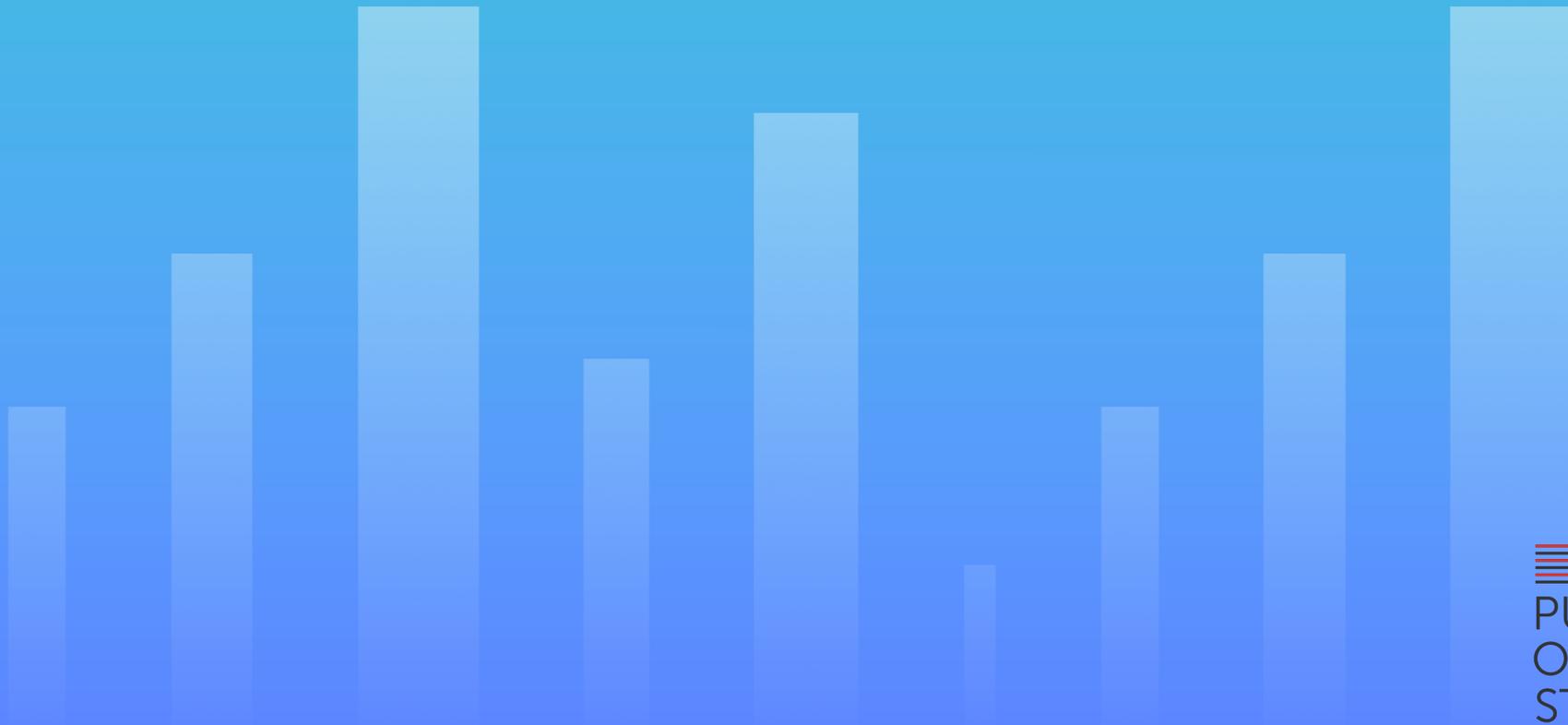
The patterns are similar among parents who perceive their child has struggled to read.

*As a parent, which of the following have you personally tried, if any, to help your child to learn to read?*





# OPINIONS OF READING CURRICULUM + TEACHING METHODS



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OPINION  
STRATEGIES

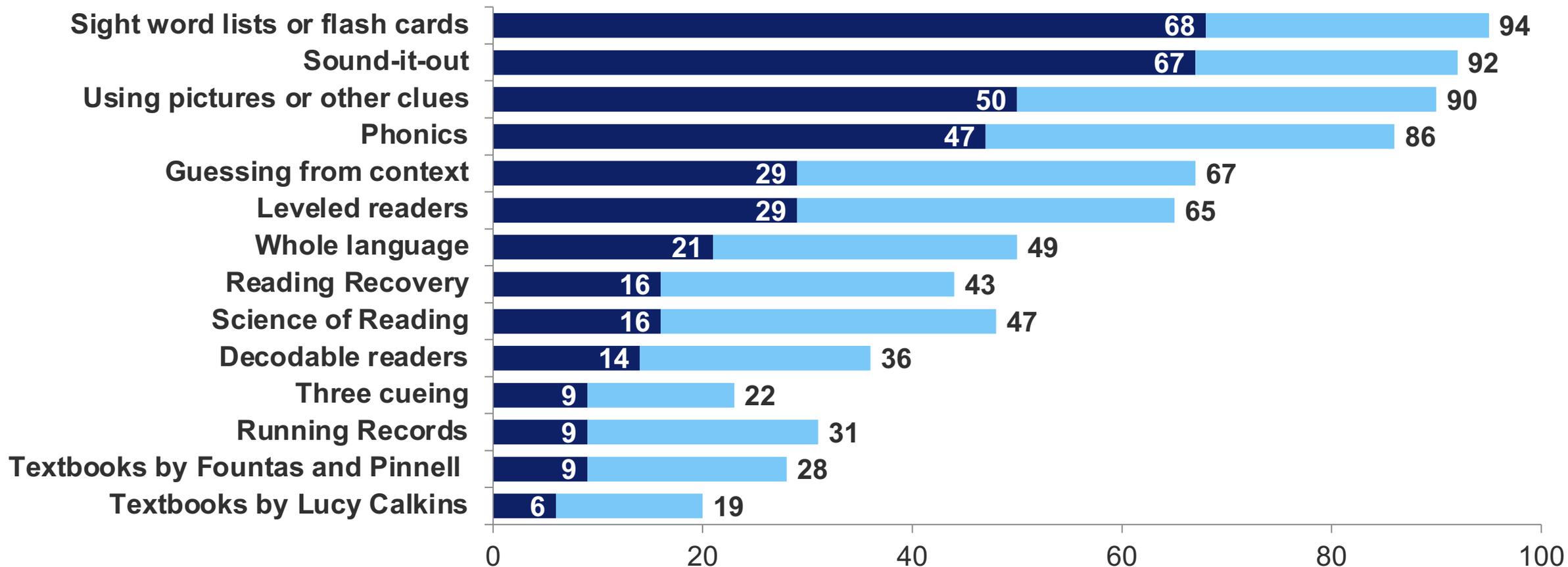
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# Parents are very familiar with phonics (and “sound-it-out”) both in name and concept.

Less than a fourth are familiar with three cueing in name (22%)—we can’t shorthand this and need to describe it as “guessing words from pictures or clues”.

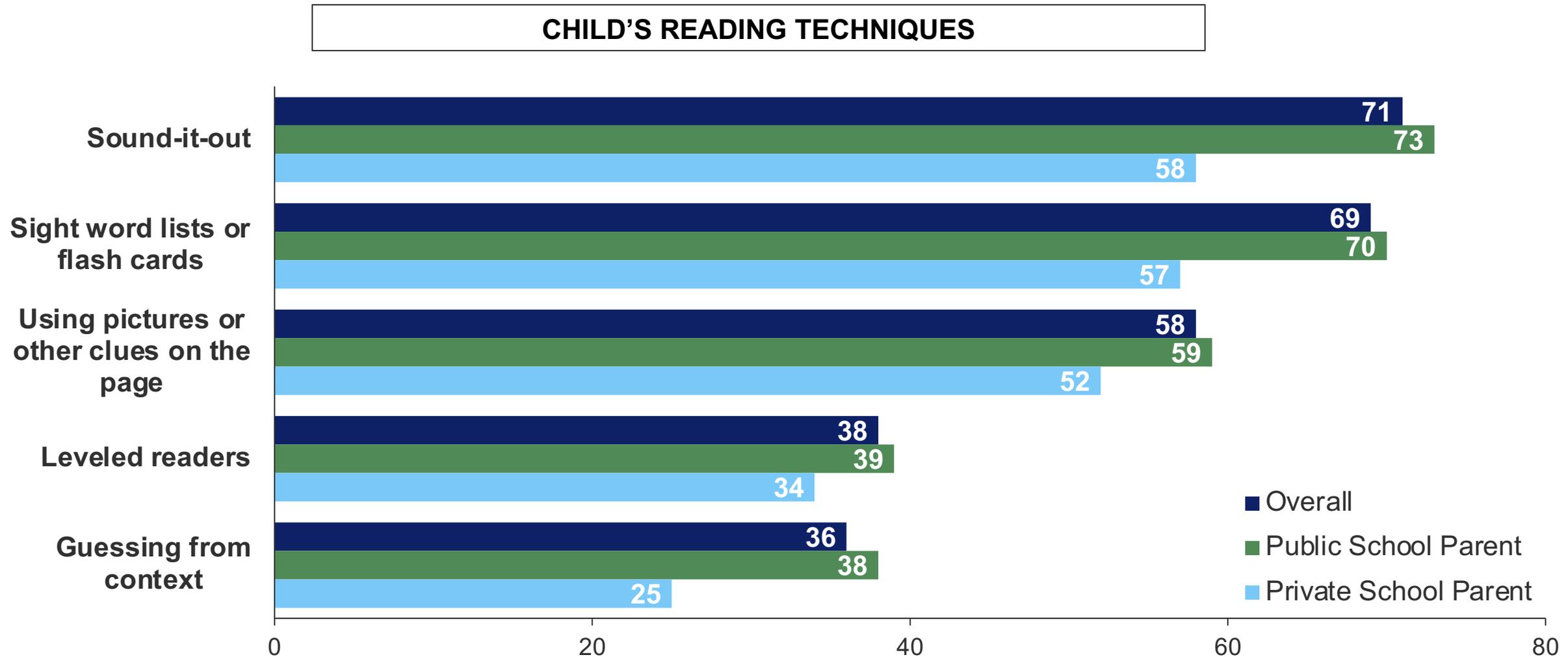
*Thinking about tools and methods teachers use in the classroom to help kids learn how to read, how familiar are you with each of the following?*

■ Very familiar ■ Somewhat familiar



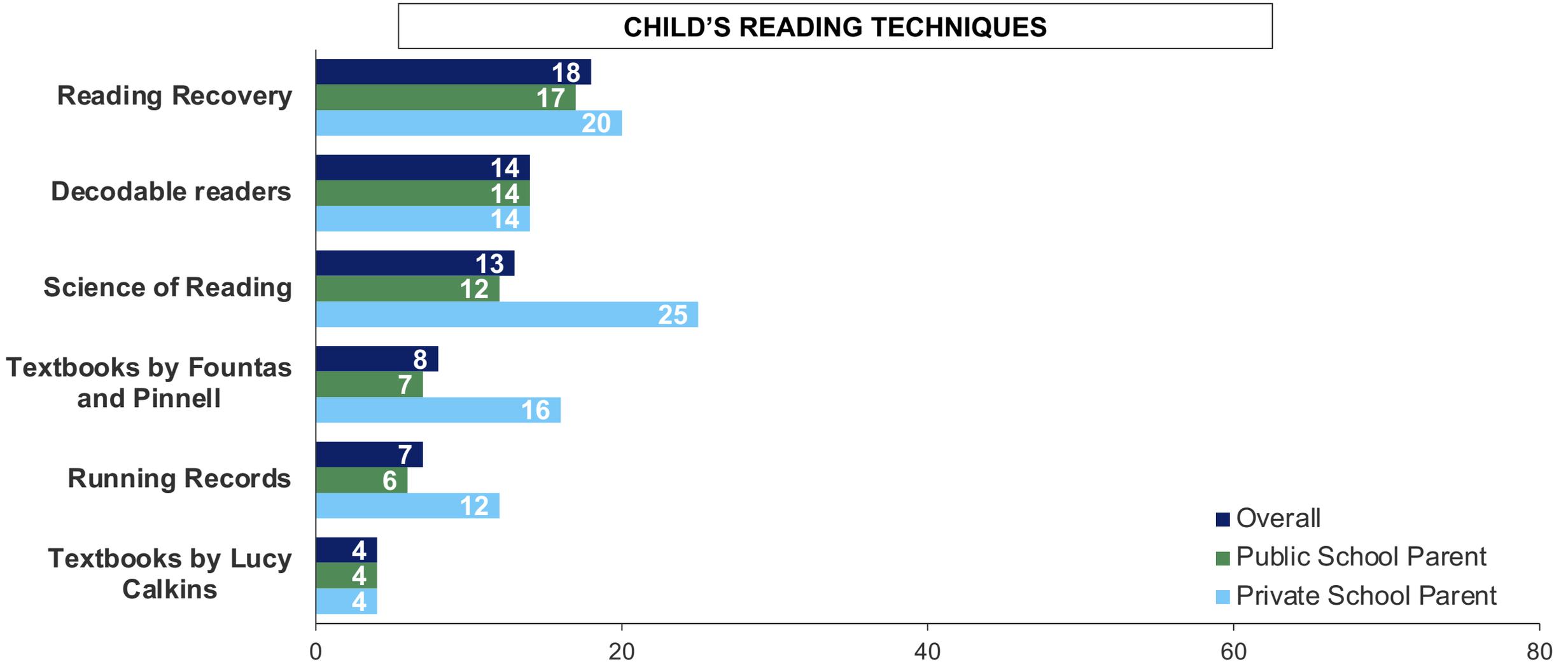
# Most parents believe their child was taught a combination of methods to read.

This included sound-it-out/phonics, sight words, flash cards, and guessing from clues on the page.



# The following terms were more jargon to people.

Some had more purchase among private school parents, but formal names (outside phonics) aren't known.

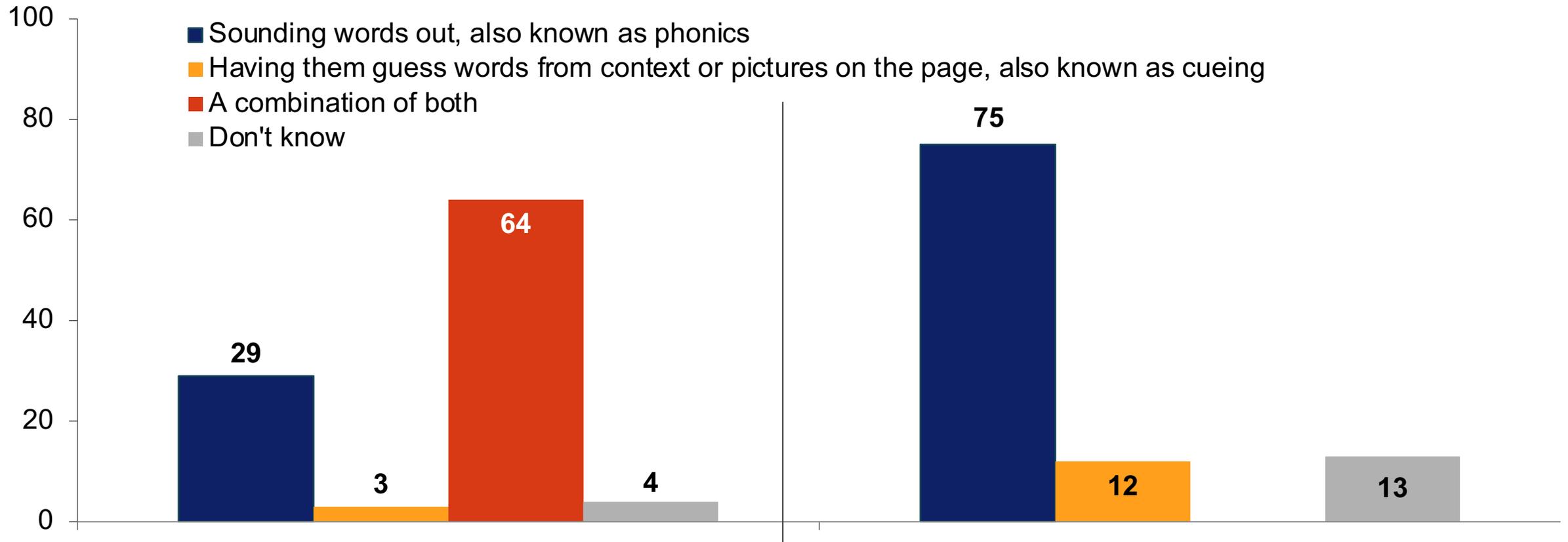


# Almost nobody prefers cueing as the main teaching method, but most parents say, “why not both?” without more information.

When forced to pick between the two, 3-in-4 prefer phonics.

*From what you know, what do you think research has shown is the best, most effective way of teaching kids to read?*

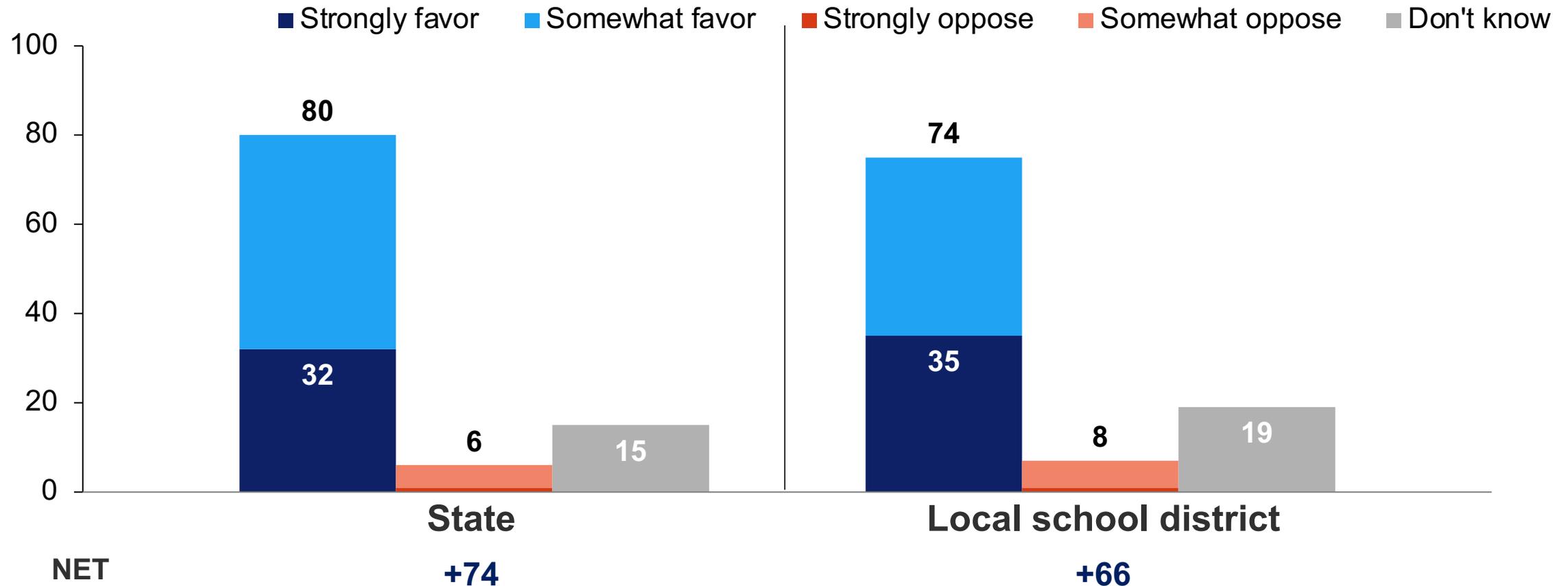
*[IF BOTH] Which of these two ways has research shown to be the most effective way to make sure kids learn to read?*



# When asked to choose, parents broadly favor teaching phonics and dropping cueing at the state and local level.

There are no discernible demographic differences by party, race, age, gender, or education.

Do you favor or oppose your \_\_\_\_\_ teaching phonics, not cueing, in reading instruction?



# Parents for ending cueing mostly said they'd do more research, reach out to teachers if they knew cueing was in their school.

Few parents even say they'd take more aggressive action, and we know people overreport this type of action.

*If you learned that your child's school was teaching reading using cueing and not phonics, which of the following would you do?  
[AMONG PARENTS WHO SUPPORT TEACHING PHONICS AND ENDING CUEING]*

	Overall	Public School	Private School	White	Black	Latino	Male	Female
Do more research into the effectiveness of each method	56	58	46	58	59	47	54	58
Reach out to your child's teacher and ask why they are not teaching phonics	47	48	49	49	49	40	41	51
Attend a PTA meeting and ask why they are not teaching phonics	27	27	24	23	38	27	29	26
Contact school administrators and ask why they are not teaching phonics	25	25	27	26	21	22	27	24
Inform other parents about it	18	17	21	17	16	16	23	15
Organize or join a committee or parents' group to address the issue	13	11	23	13	14	11	15	11
Call your state or local lawmakers asking them to require phonics instruction	8	8	12	8	10	7	10	7
None of the above	11	11	6	10	6	16	9	12