

The School Climate Connection:

Safety, Mental Health & Attendance Through a Parent Lens

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Absenteeism



Safety



Mental Health



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Survey Background

- Results are based on a statewide survey of 1,069 Massachusetts parents with K-12 children, including oversamples of Black, Latino, and Asian parents.
- The survey was conducted from April 1 – April 14, 2026.
- Data was weighted to known population parameters by parental age, gender, race, education, and region.
- This survey is the 14th wave in a series of polls of K-12 parents in Massachusetts that began in May 2020 at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Results in the following slides make comparisons across prior waves where applicable.
- This project was sponsored by EdTrust in Massachusetts with support from The Barr Foundation.

Key Findings

- **Mental health concerns remain elevated and are often tied to academic performance and student support needs.** Concern is highest among parents of students who receive English Learner services and students with IEPs, as well as families reporting academic challenges in reading and math.
- **Attendance challenges reflect broader equity and well-being issues.** Beyond physical illness, absenteeism is linked to mental health, job conflicts, bullying, and family stress. Several key absenteeism drivers are highest among English Learners, students with IEPs, and those concerned about their child's academics.
- **Most families report students feel safe at school, but disparities persist by race/ethnicity.** Black and Asian parents are less likely than white parents to say their child feels very safe from discrimination. Latino and white families cite bullying as a more common safety concern.

Mental health concerns have receded somewhat

- Mental health concerns have eased somewhat since the height of the pandemic but remain elevated.

Mental health concerns have declined since 2021, but remain high
% of parents who say they are concerned about their child's mental health

	Concerned	Not concerned
April 2026	42%	58%
April 2025	45%	54%
October 2023	39%	60%
April 2023	45%	54%
November 2022	44%	55%
March 2022	48%	50%
February 2021	60%	38%

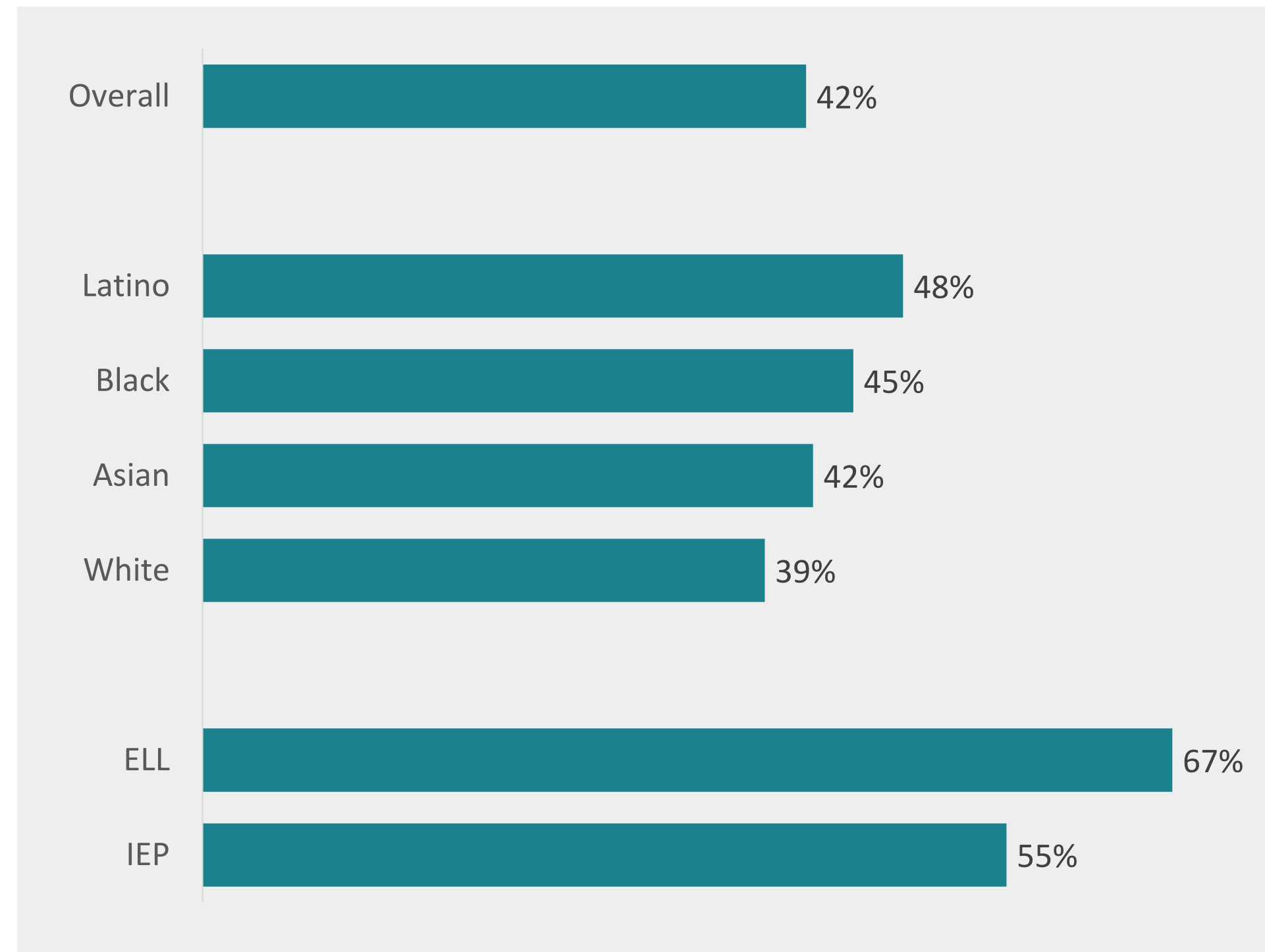
Note: Data above is from previous polls in the K-12 parent series asking the same question

Q: Thinking about your GRADE LEVEL child's mental and emotional health this year, would you say you are ____?

Mental health concerns vary

Mental health varies across groups

% who say they are concerned about their child's mental health



- Mental health concerns are elevated among Latino parents and parents of children who are English Learners or have IEPs.

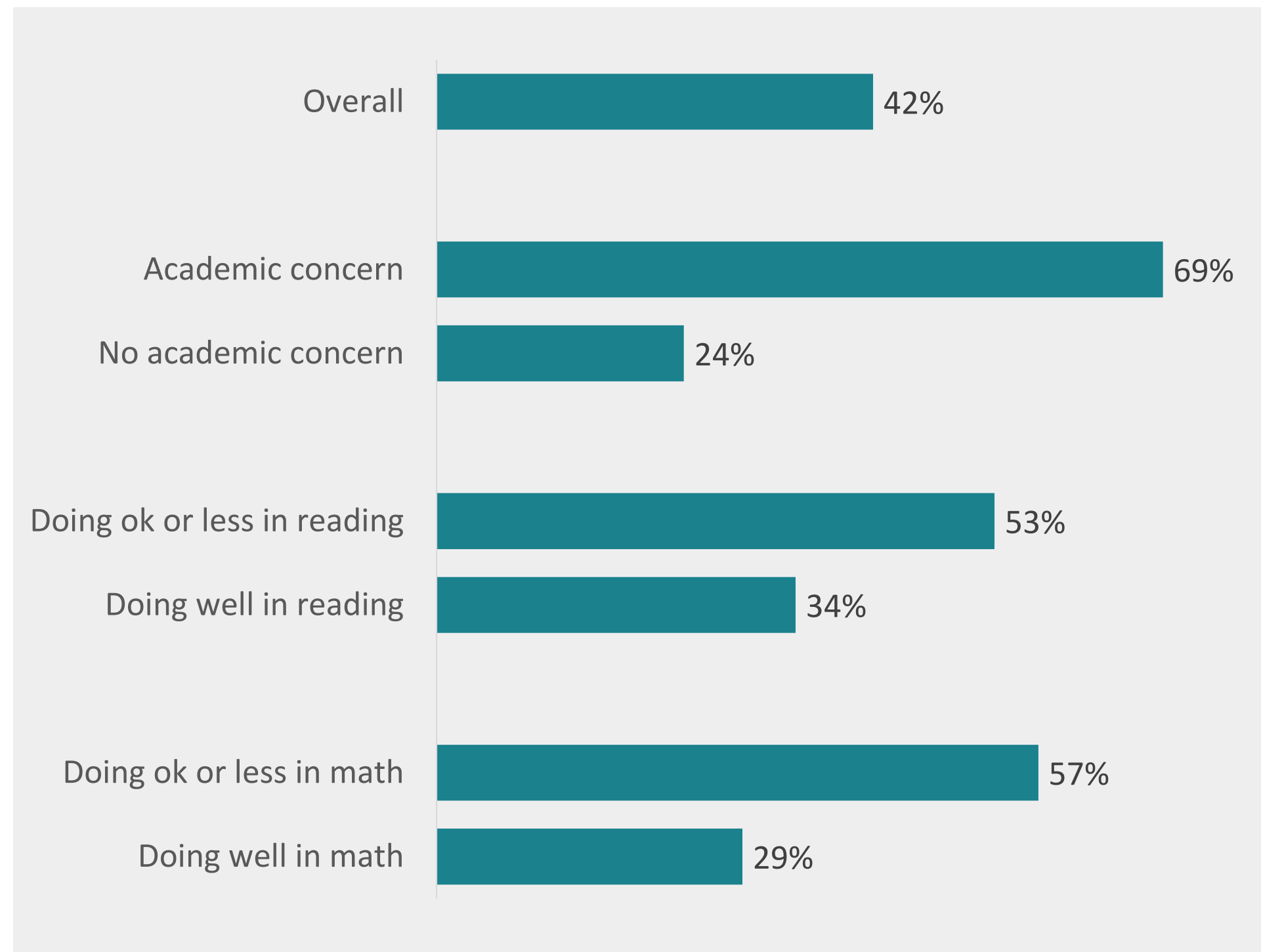
Q: Thinking about your GRADE LEVEL child's mental and emotional health this year, would you say you are _____?

Mental health, academic concerns related

- Parents concerned about their child's academics, in both math and reading, also report higher mental health concerns.

Academic, mental health concerns are often related

% who say they are concerned about their child's mental health



Q: Thinking about your GRADE LEVEL child's mental and emotional health this year, would you say you are _____?

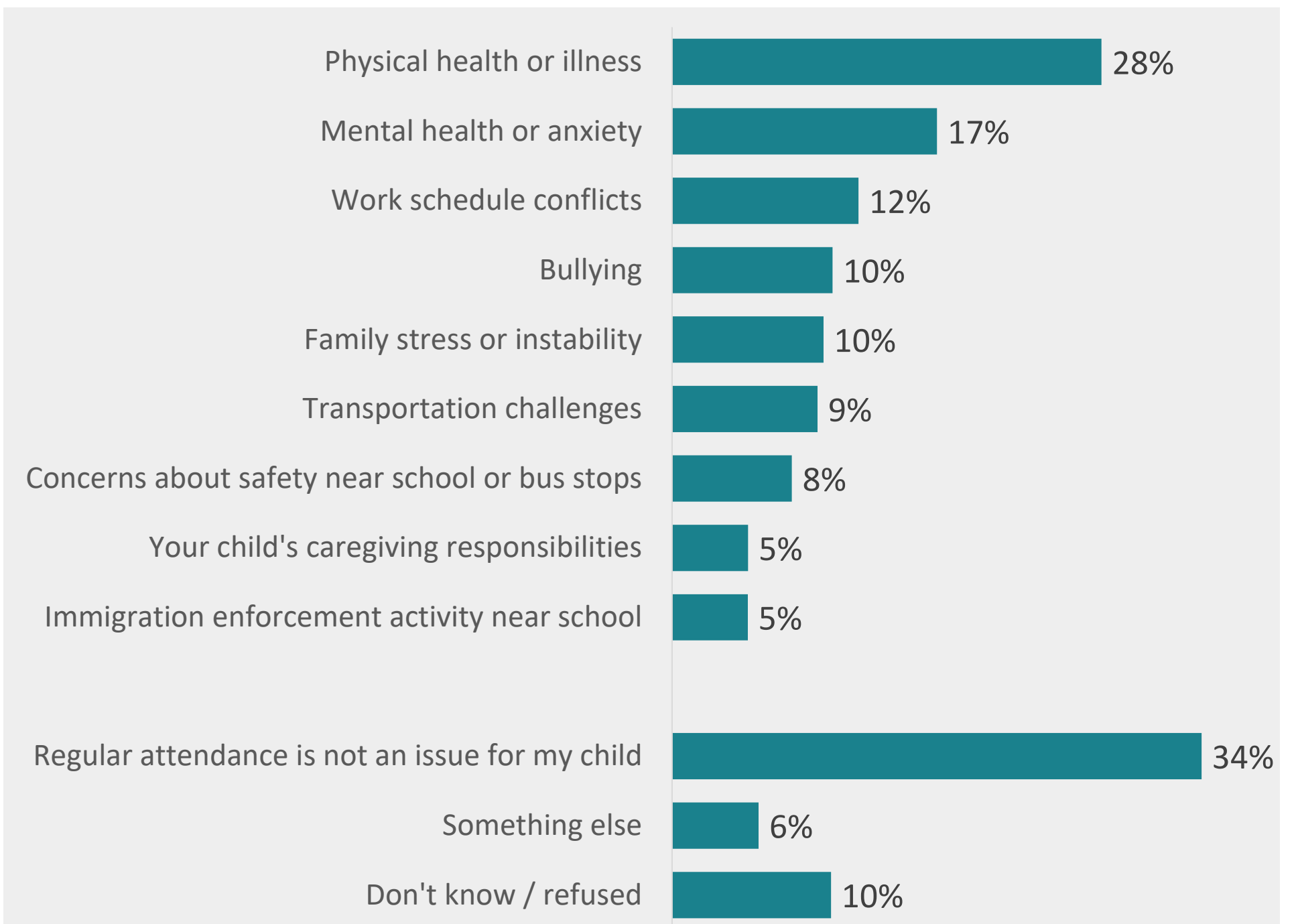
What's behind student absenteeism

- Physical illness and mental health or anxiety are the most common reasons parents give for absences.
- However, reasons for absenteeism vary between demographic groups.

Q: Some families have different experiences with school attendance. Which factors, if any, have affected your GRADE LEVEL child's attendance this school year?

Physical and mental health are the most common reasons for absences

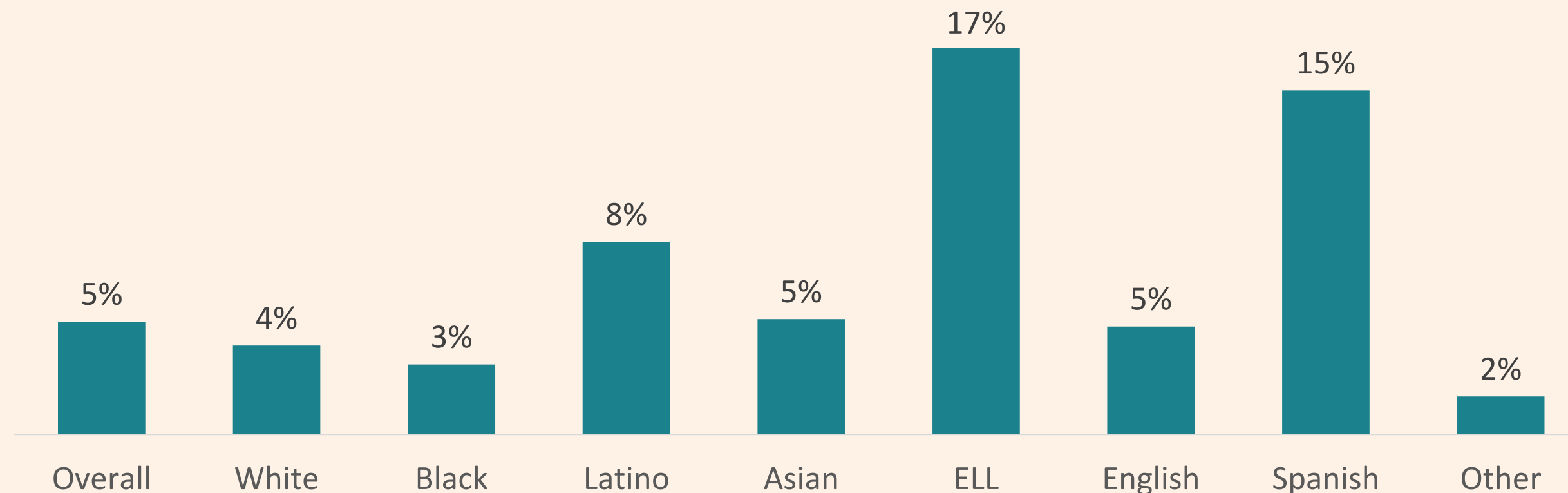
% who say ____ impacts their child's attendance



Impact of ICE on attendance

- Parents whose children receive ELL services (17%) and parents who say Spanish is spoken in their household (15%) are most likely to say immigration enforcement near their child's school has impacted their child's attendance this school year.

ICE and safety concerns impact attendance of ELL students, Spanish speakers
% who say concerns of ICE activity near school affected child's attendance this school year

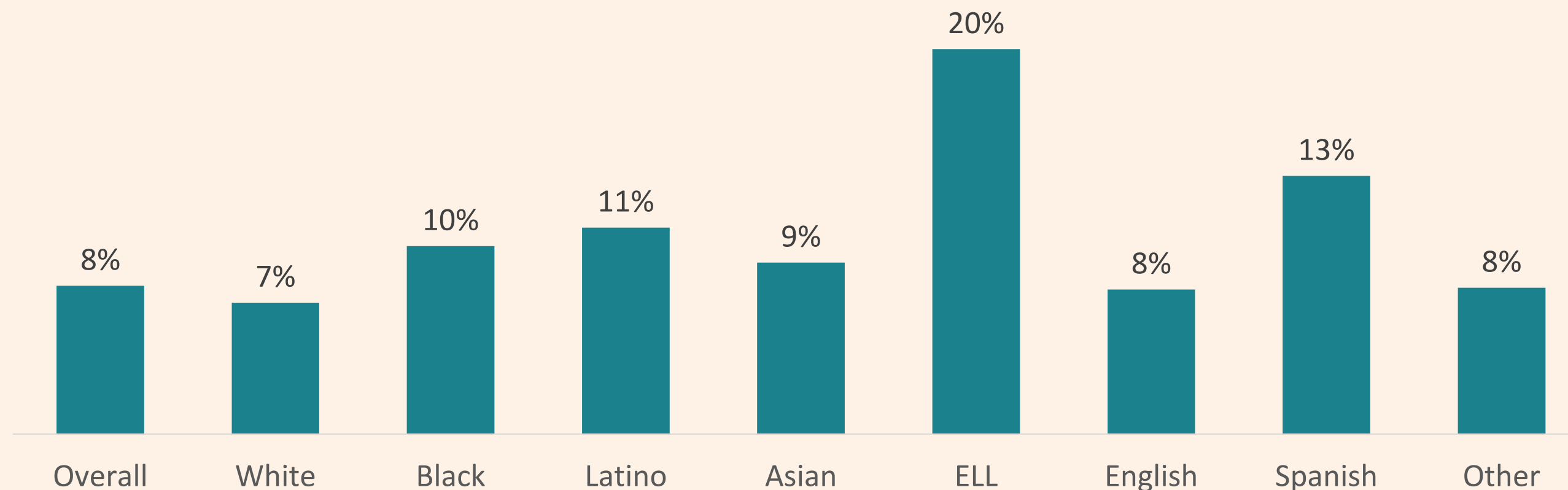


Q: Some families have different experiences with school attendance. Which factors, if any, have affected your GRADE LEVEL child's attendance this school year?

Safety concerns impact attendance

- Among parents whose children receive ELL services, 1 in 5 say safety near school or bus stops impacts attendance.

Safety concerns near school impact attendance of ELL students
% who say concerns of safety near school or bus affected child's attendance this school year



Q: Some families have different experiences with school attendance. Which factors, if any, have affected your GRADE LEVEL child's attendance this school year?

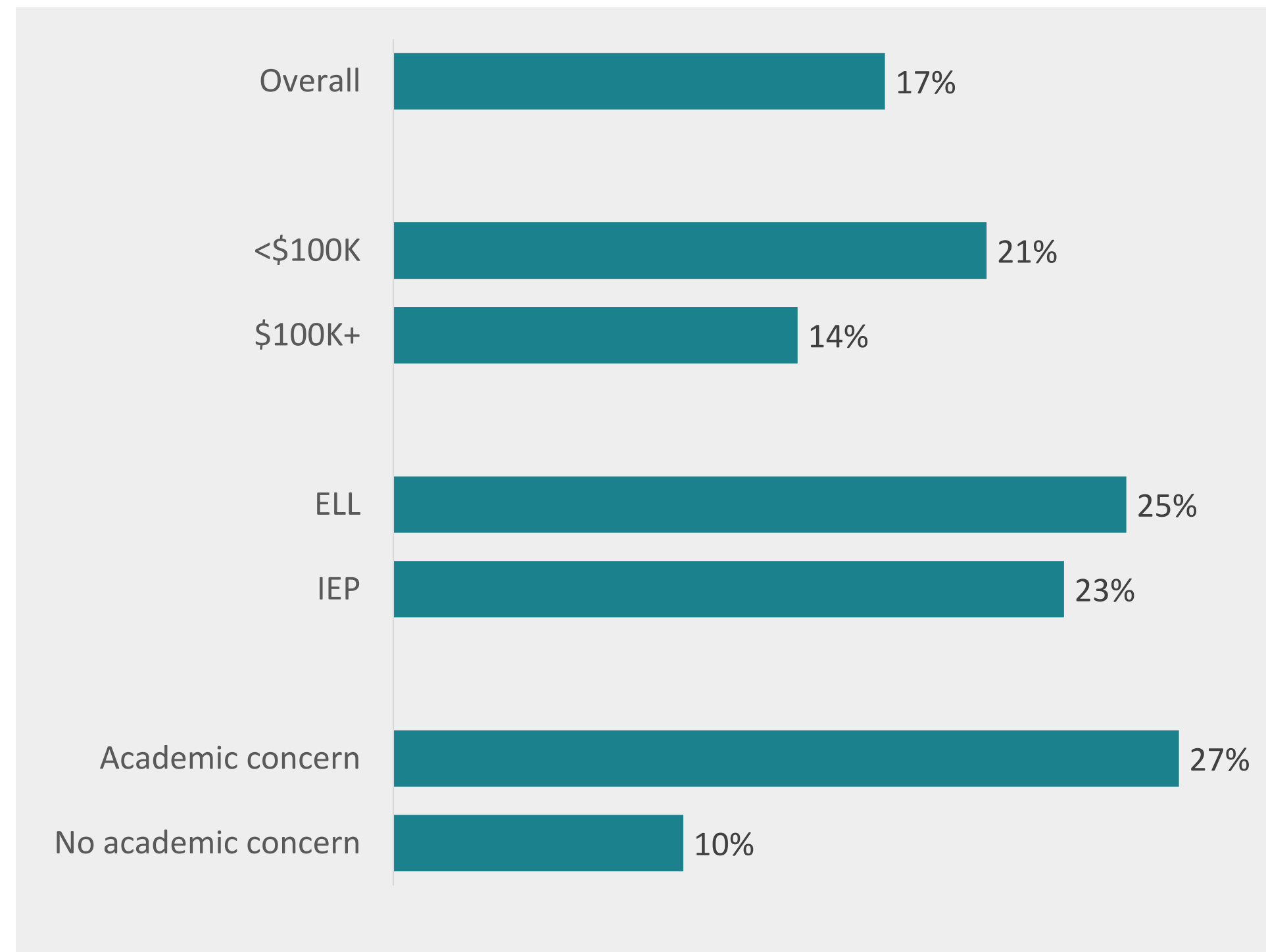
Mental health and absenteeism

- Some groups of parents are more likely to cite mental health challenges as a reason for absenteeism.
- Lower-income parents, those with children who are English Learners or have IEPs, and those concerned about their child's academics are more likely to say mental health affects their child's attendance.

Q: Some families have different experiences with school attendance. Which factors, if any, have affected your GRADE LEVEL child's attendance this school year?

Mental health impacts some students' attendance more than others

% who say mental health impacts their child's attendance



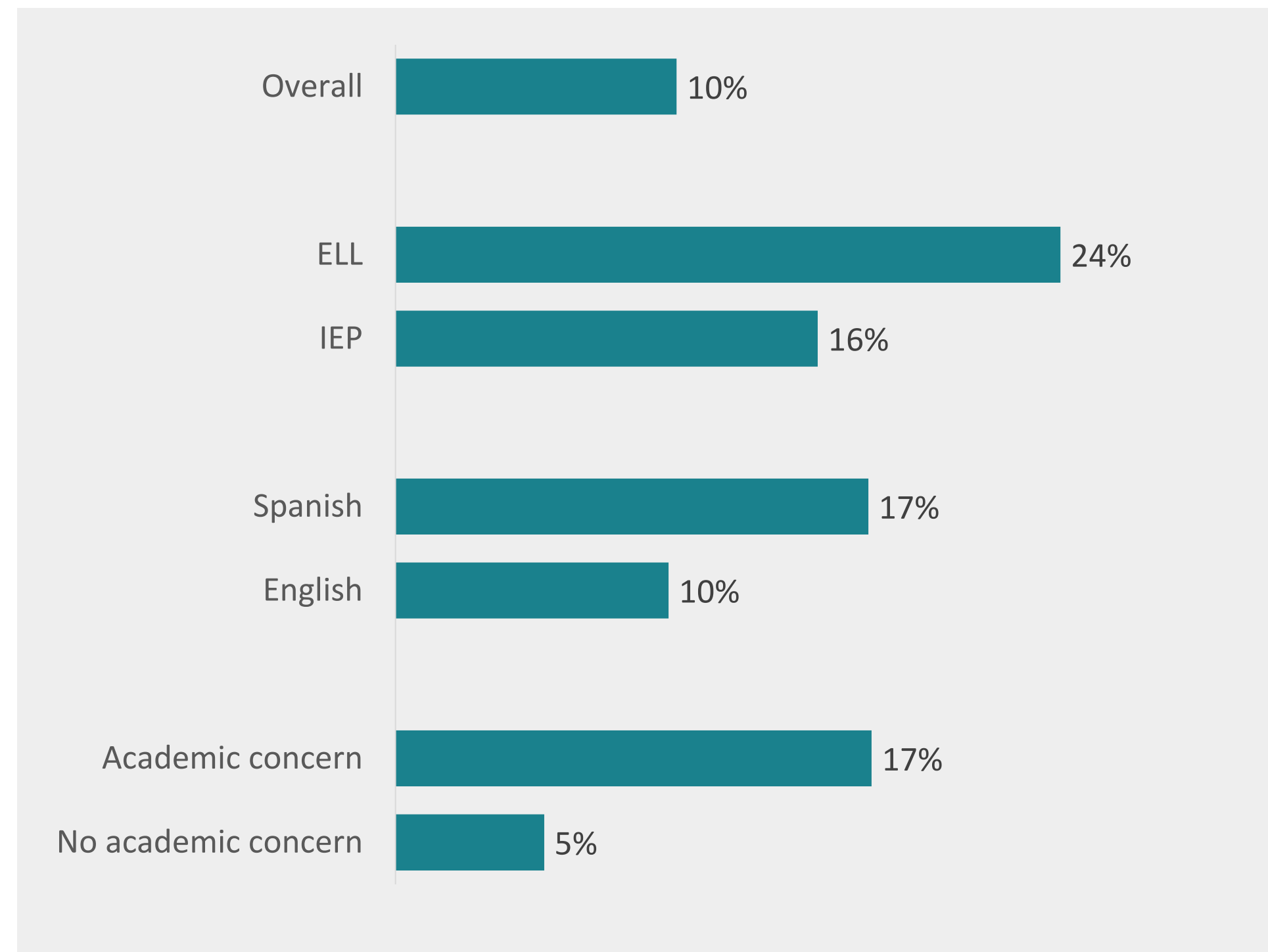
Bullying impact on attendance

- Bullying's impact on attendance is more common among parents of students who receive ELL services and those who speak English.
- Parents concerned about their child's academics are also more likely to say bullying affects attendance.

Q: Some families have different experiences with school attendance. Which factors, if any, have affected your GRADE LEVEL child's attendance this school year?

Bullying impacts some students attendance more than others

% who say bullying impacts their child's attendance



Differing factors behind absenteeism

- Black and Latino parents, and parents of children who receive ELL services, cite a wider range of reasons for absenteeism.

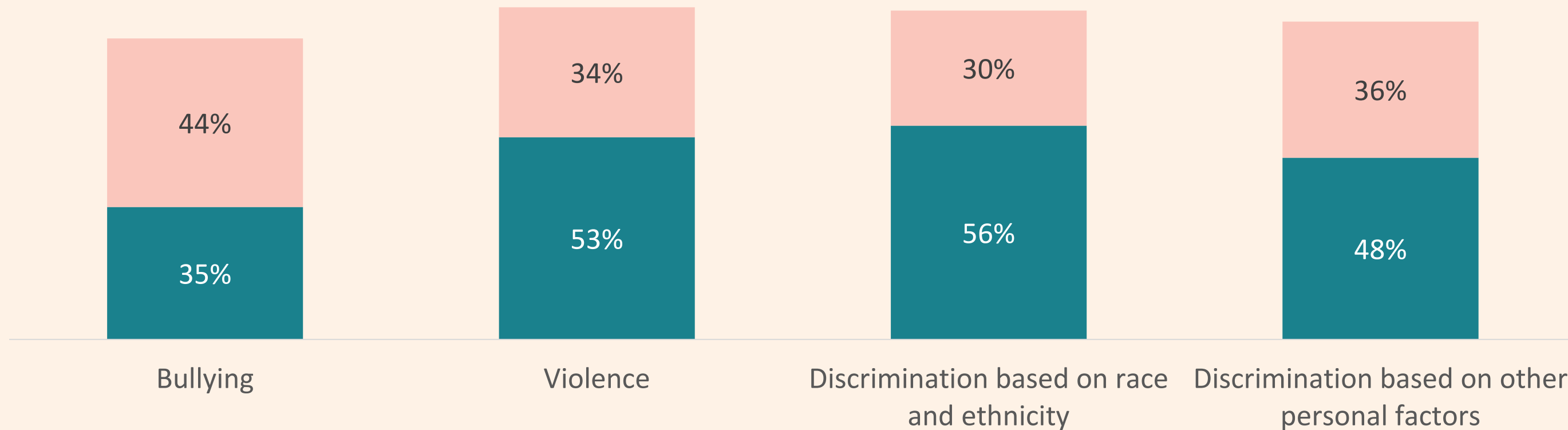
	Overall	White	Black	Latino	Asian	ELL	IEP
Physical health or illness	28%	31%	22%	25%	20%	34%	33%
Mental health or anxiety	17%	17%	16%	15%	14%	25%	23%
Work schedule conflicts	12%	11%	14%	14%	17%	24%	16%
Bullying	10%	9%	14%	14%	10%	24%	16%
Family stress or instability	10%	9%	12%	5%	8%	16%	15%
Transportation challenges	9%	7%	16%	17%	9%	20%	15%
Concerns about safety near school or bus stops	8%	7%	10%	11%	9%	20%	10%
Your child's caregiving responsibilities	5%	4%	7%	6%	7%	16%	10%
Immigration enforcement activity near school	5%	4%	3%	8%	5%	17%	8%
Regular attendance is not an issue for my child	34%	35%	29%	30%	35%	19%	26%
Something else	6%	7%	4%	3%	3%	3%	3%
Don't know / refused	10%	8%	17%	14%	16%	9%	8%

Overall feelings of safety in schools

- Most parents say their children are at least somewhat safe from bullying, violence, and racial and other discrimination, echoing findings from the 2022 wave. However, many fewer say their child feels “very safe.”

Overall parents feel their child is somewhat or very safe at school

% overall who say their child is safe from ____ while at school



*Q: When your **GRADE LEVEL** child is at school, how safe would you say they are from **READ FIRST**?*

Who feels “very safe”?

- Black parents are least likely to say their children feel “very safe” at school. AAPI parents are less likely to see their children as “very safe” from discrimination.

Black, AAPI parents are less likely to say their children are “very safe”
% overall who say their child is “very safe” from ____ while at school

	Overall	White	Black	Latino	Asian
Discrimination based on race and ethnicity	56%	61%	46%	54%	43%
Violence	53%	55%	49%	50%	58%
Discrimination based on other personal factors	48%	50%	40%	49%	41%
Bullying	35%	35%	39%	30%	45%

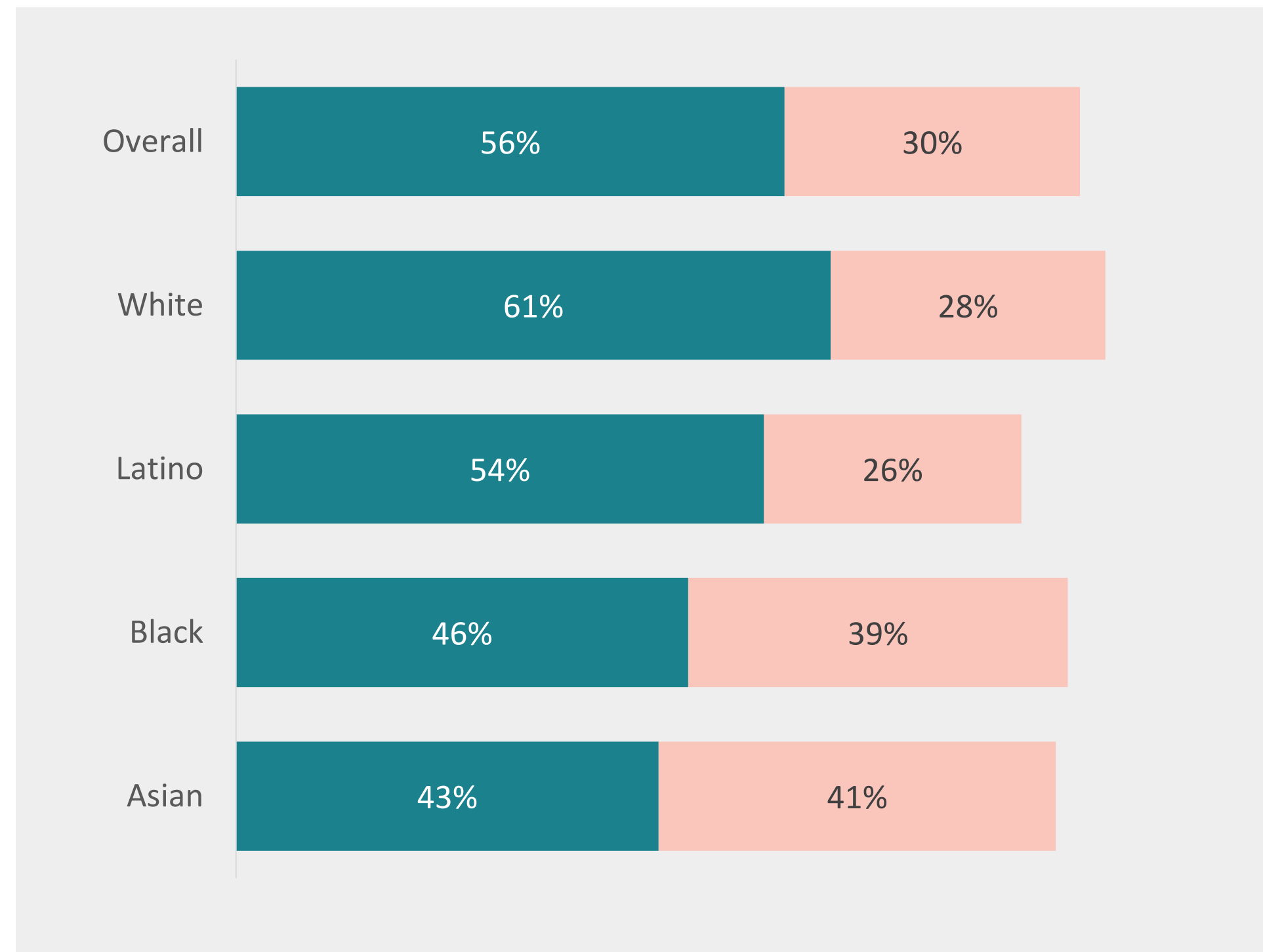
Safe from racial discrimination

- Black and Asian parents are also less likely to see their children as very safe from racial discrimination than are white parents.
- Latino parents are slightly less likely to say their children are safe overall.

*Q: When your **GRADE LEVEL** child is at school, how safe would you say they are from **READ FIRST**?*

Just over half say their children “very safe” from racial discrimination

% who say ____ their child is safe from racial discrimination at school



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