
Wisconsin Indicator 8: Family Engagement Survey – Follow-Up Report

Designated Themes Summary Report



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Introduction

Each year, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) administers a survey to families of students with disabilities. The Wisconsin Family Engagement Survey addresses Indicator 8 of the State Performance Plan (SPP)¹ which requires the State to indicate the: *“Percent of parents with a child receiving special education services who report that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities.”* While a primary purpose of the Family Engagement Survey is to meet Indicator 8 requirements, it also serves as a mechanism for providing feedback to the state and districts on areas of strength and areas of improvement surrounding family engagement.

DPI's Family Engagement Survey is administered between February and July of a given school year with roughly one-fifth of the districts in the state conducting the survey each year. Milwaukee Public Schools, with an average daily enrollment of over 50,000, conducts the survey on an annual basis. The survey consists of 23 closed-ended questions which measure the extent to which the school has a welcoming, respectful, and supporting environment.

The survey also includes one open-ended item: *“Please write any additional information that you think is important for improving the special education services students with disabilities receive. Your comments are optional. If you choose to give comments, they will be used by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to better inform districts of the feelings and needs of families.”*

The closed-ended questions are analyzed by DPI and are not included in this report. This report examines the responses to the one open-ended item. A previous report, *Wisconsin Indicator 8: Family Engagement Survey – Open-Ended Comments Summary Report*, categorized the open-ended comments into general and detailed themes. These themes “naturally” emerged from reading the comments, i.e., the themes represented points that respondents mentioned frequently enough to warrant a category.

In this report, the comments were categorized into four designated topic areas that relate to outcomes and experiences for students with disabilities. Additionally, the positivity/negativity of the comments in relation to these four designated themes was noted. These DPI-designated themes are listed below. Display 1 shows a visual depiction of these four designated themes.

- 1) How well is Wisconsin preparing students with IEPs for life after high school?
- 2) Are Wisconsin learners with IEPs learning in the same spaces as their peers?
- 3) How engaged are Wisconsin families in the learning of their children with IEPs?
- 4) How are Wisconsin learners with IEPs performing in key areas?

See the original report for a list of the advantages and disadvantages of open-ended items.

¹ Under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the State is required to report to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) its performance, progress toward targets, and improvement efforts on each of seventeen (17) indicators; the Parent Survey is Indicator 8.

Display 1: Visual Representation of the Four Designated Themes

1	 <p>How well is Wisconsin preparing students with IEPs for life after high school?</p>	2	 <p>Are Wisconsin learners with IEPs learning in the same spaces as their peers?</p>
3	 <p>How engaged are Wisconsin families in the learning of their children with IEPs?</p>	4	 <p>How are Wisconsin learners with IEPs performing in key areas?</p>

Highlights

- 22% (746) of survey respondents wrote a comment to the open-ended question.
- Low percentages of the respondents mentioned one of the four designated themes in responding to the open-ended comment. Of the 746 respondents who wrote a comment to the open-ended question:
 - 12% mentioned their child’s performance in key areas.
 - 6% mentioned family engagement when it is defined as the active participation of parents helping their child with learning at home. When family engagement is broadly defined to include parents communicating, supporting, and being generally involved in education activities, 66% of the comments could be classified as relating to family engagement.
 - 4% of respondents commented on their child being educated with their peers.
 - 1% of respondents commented on life after high school for their child.
- Parents of school-age children were more likely than parents of preschool children to have written a response related to Themes 1 and 2; the reverse was true for Themes 3 and 4.

Recommendation

- **DPI should consider asking four open-ended questions**, one of which specifically targets each of the four designated themes. This way respondents are given an equal chance and an “equal prompting” to make a comment about each of these four themes. Family members may have lots to say about their child’s performance in key areas, for example, but without being prompted, they may not have thought to write anything about this. By clearly asking about each theme, DPI will get a more representative response as to family’s attitudes surrounding these topic areas than what they are getting with the “spontaneous mentions.”

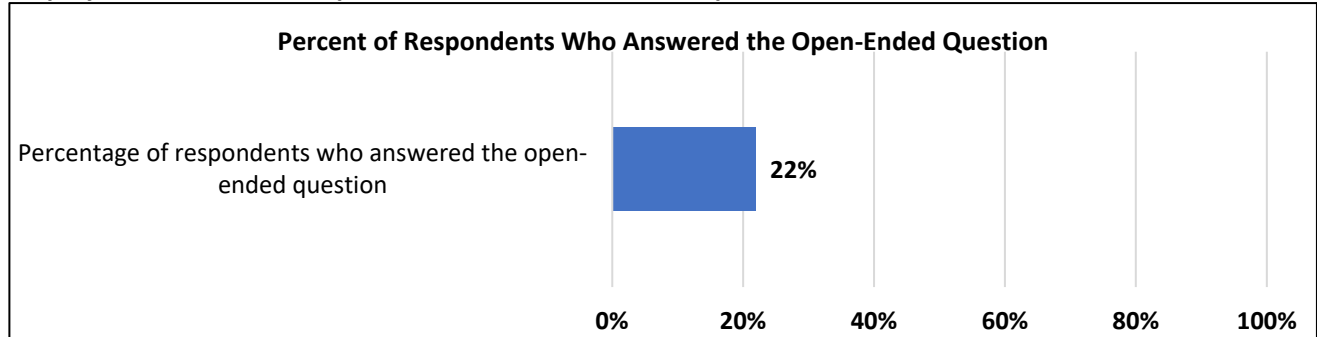
A: Designated Theme Results

Respondents were asked to include any additional information they thought was important for improving the special education services students with disabilities receive.

Overall Results

- Of the 3,341 respondents who completed the survey, 746 (22%) respondents wrote a response to the open-ended question (see Display A-1).

Display A-1: Percent of Respondents who Answered the Open-Ended Question

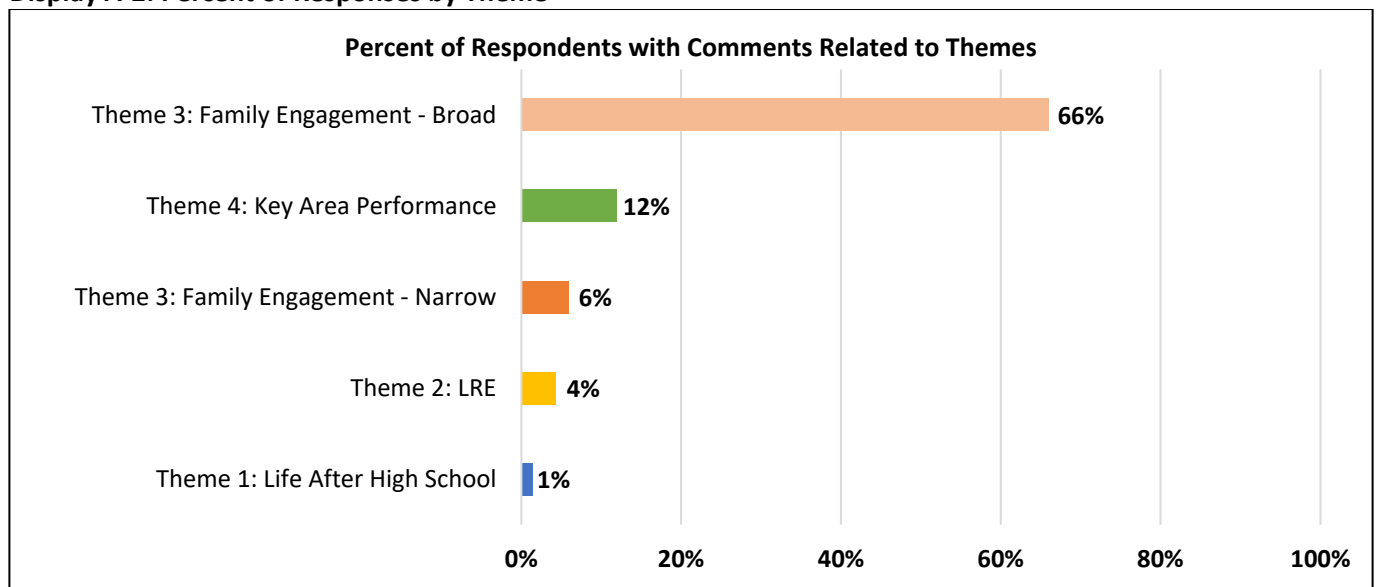


- These 746 responses were reviewed to determine if they pertained to one of the four DPI-designated themes. The four designated themes are indicated as follows:

Designated Theme	Code
1) How well is Wisconsin preparing students with IEPs for life after high school?	Life After High School
2) Are Wisconsin learners with IEPs learning in the same spaces as their peers?	LRE
3) How engaged are Wisconsin families in the learning of their children with IEPs?	Family Engagement
4) How are Wisconsin learners with IEPs performing in key areas?	Key Area Performance

- As can be seen in Display A-2, small percentages of the respondents mentioned one of these four designated themes.
- Of the 746 respondents who wrote a comment to the open-ended question:
 - 12% mentioned their child's performance in key areas.
 - 6% mentioned family engagement when it is defined in the narrow sense (i.e., as the active participation of parents helping their child with learning at home).
 - 66% mentioned family engagement when it is defined in the broad sense (i.e., parents communicating, supporting, collaborating, and being generally involved in education activities).
 - 4% of respondents commented on their child being educated with their peers.
 - 1% of respondents commented on life after high school for their child.

Display A-2: Percent of Responses by Theme



The following pages describe the results for each designated theme.

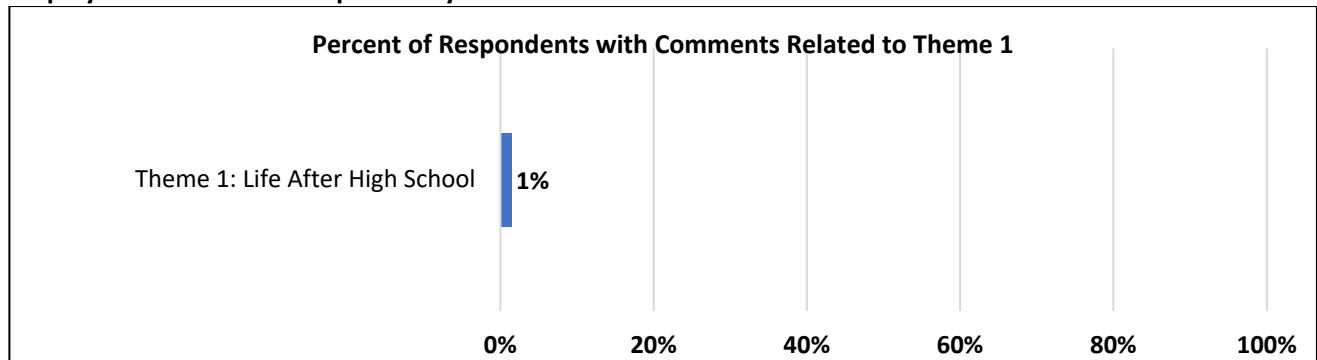


How well is Wisconsin preparing students with IEPs for life after high school?

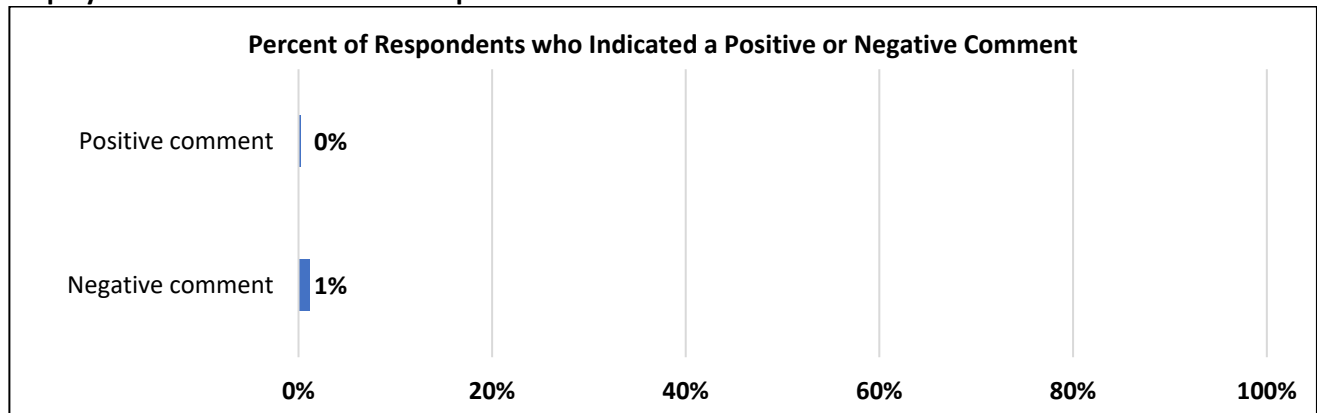
Designated Theme 1: Life after High School

- Of the 746 respondents who wrote a response to the open-ended question, 11 (1%) respondents wrote a comment related to how well Wisconsin is preparing students with IEPs for life after high school. Nine respondents wrote a negative comment, and two respondents wrote a positive comment related to this theme.
 - Respondents who wrote a negative comment generally mentioned wishing that the school would provide more information on college and transition-to-work opportunities and better prepare their child for life after high school.

Display A-3: Percent of Responses by Theme 1



Display A-4: Theme 1: Percent of Respondents who Made a Theme 1 Comment



Two examples of a positive comment:

- *“This program has been a real blessing for us as well as our son. It has provided guidance and understanding of various issues our son has faced. It also provides solutions and problem resolution. I feel this program, along with strong parental support will give our son the tools he needs to succeed in life. My wife and I view this program as an extension of the home offering the coping mechanisms and*

help at school. It has also improved his academic performance The ideas from various meetings have helped us, as well as our son."

- *"We are very fortunate to be in the Kettle Moraine school district they have done a great job on helping our child picking out the classes that fit their needs. Also, they are helping our child pick out a college that will fit their needs."*

Two examples of a negative comments:

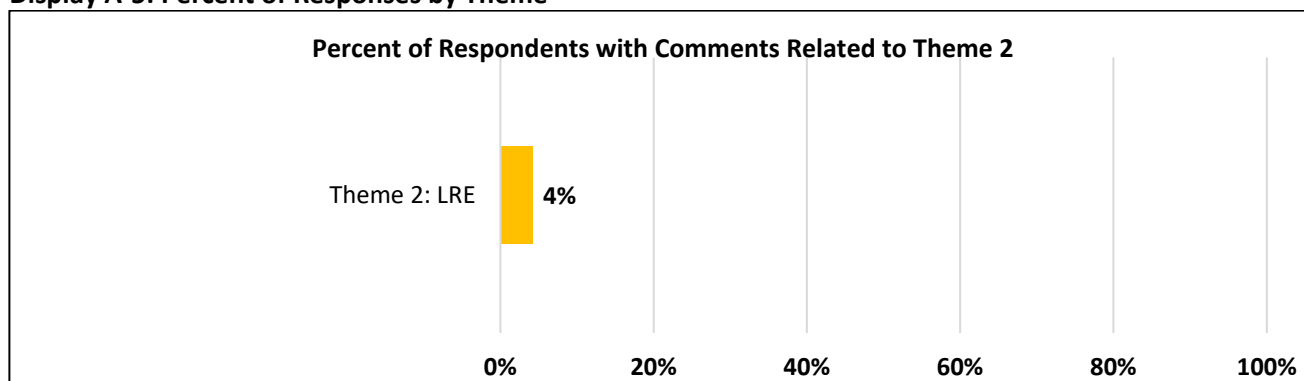
- *"I am very happy with services my son receives. The staff is wonderful and very good about communicating with me on a regular basis. But I would like more information (either from the school district or state) on 'transition to work' programs or other life skills courses that could be beneficial. I feel that is lacking and needed for high school students. Thank you."*
- *"Our District/School needs to become better educated as to what is out there in our community. They need to better connect with community services that are available, make better partnerships with businesses and county. I feel we need to be more in touch with what life will be like for our 18+ year old's/life after HS so we can better prepare them. It's like school and community are two entirely separate entities and they should be a unified partnership."*



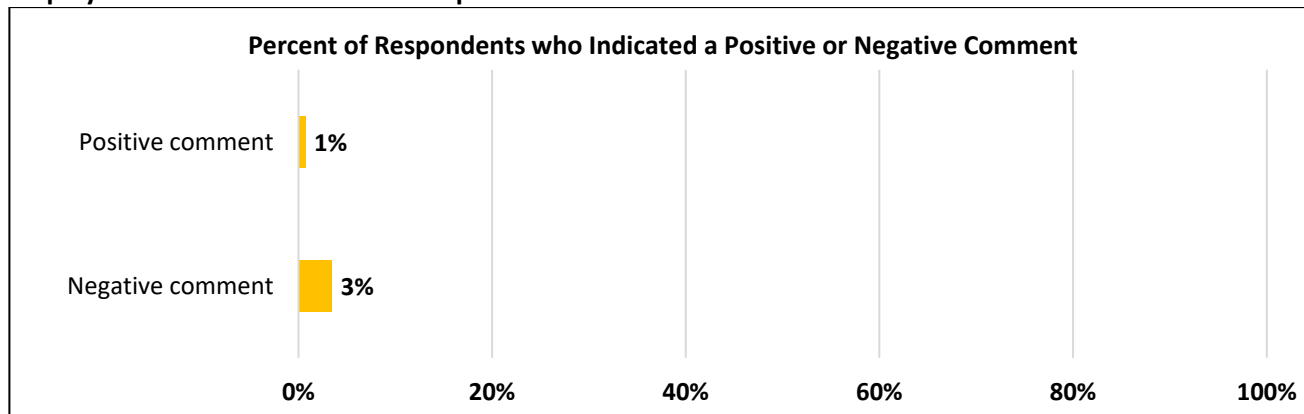
Designated Theme 2: LRE

- Thirty-two respondents (4%) wrote a comment related to students with IEPs learning in the same spaces as their peers. Of these respondents, 26 wrote a negative comment, and 6 wrote a positive response.
 - Respondents who wrote a negative comment generally mentioned that their child is isolated from peers, is pulled out of classes, or is not included in important peer-related activities.

Display A-5: Percent of Responses by Theme



Display A-6: Theme 2: Percent of Respondents who Made a Theme 2 Comment



Two examples of a positive comments:

- *“I can't say enough about the school district. Not only does the staff treat my child with dignity and care, the students who also attend the school with him have been very gracious and kind. It says a lot about the inclusion at the school, making each special needs child feel welcomed and involved with their peers.”*
- *“Our school leads the way on collaborative inclusive services and we are so fortunate for this. They have an inclusive theater club that includes a number of staff members and both students with and without disabilities. The Best Buddies Club has students who become lifelong friends. All staff*

members are versed in UDL, collaboration, and customer service. They ask for feedback before there's a problem. We have paraprofessionals who are trained in technology and can help create modifications as needed. We can share modifications that have worked for us and the team creates something similar going forward. We have had the staff place our teen as a classroom leader in front of typical peers on numerous occasions. Confidence soars as a result. As a parent who also works in education, we need to ensure that students with IEPs are not only in the general education classroom but actively engaged in the general education classroom with proper supports and modifications. Students also need to feel like they belong. They need to have authentic friendships and peer supports. And they need to be treated like leaders. Our district works hard to do these things and, as a result, students are achieving their best outcomes. Would recommend that all districts in WI are required to have educators trained in inclusive practices, UDL, building peer relationships, and differentiation and that they are required to carry it out."

Two examples of a negative comments:

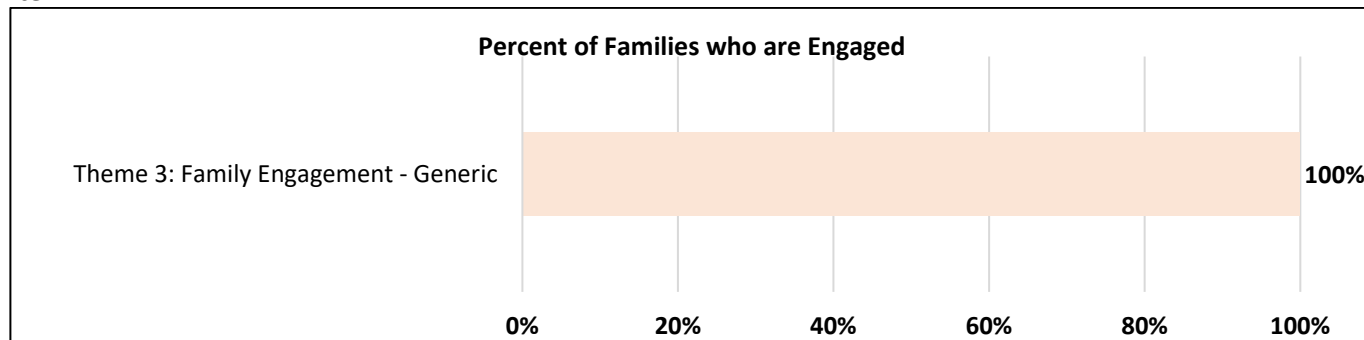
- *"Having an IEP is the worst thing that happened to my daughter. It has isolated her from the mainstream students and severely hampered her education. The AASD should be embarrassed by their lack of knowledge on the process. They have fundamentally changed who my daughter is and left her behind."*
- *"I do not attend the IEP meetings because of a statement made by a special education/speech staff member years ago regarding my grandson. It was very offensive. I do read the IEP and I do communicate via phone with the special education staff (just not during the IEP meeting). I am pleased with the effort and results in the last couple of years that the special education staff have provided for my grandson. I am concerned about the information and educational materials he misses out on when he is pulled from a class to go to special education. I do wish there was some way to avoid being pulled from a core class. If he was pulled from music class, I would not have any concerns. I think of music class as more of an elective and not a core class."*

Designated Theme 3: Family Engagement

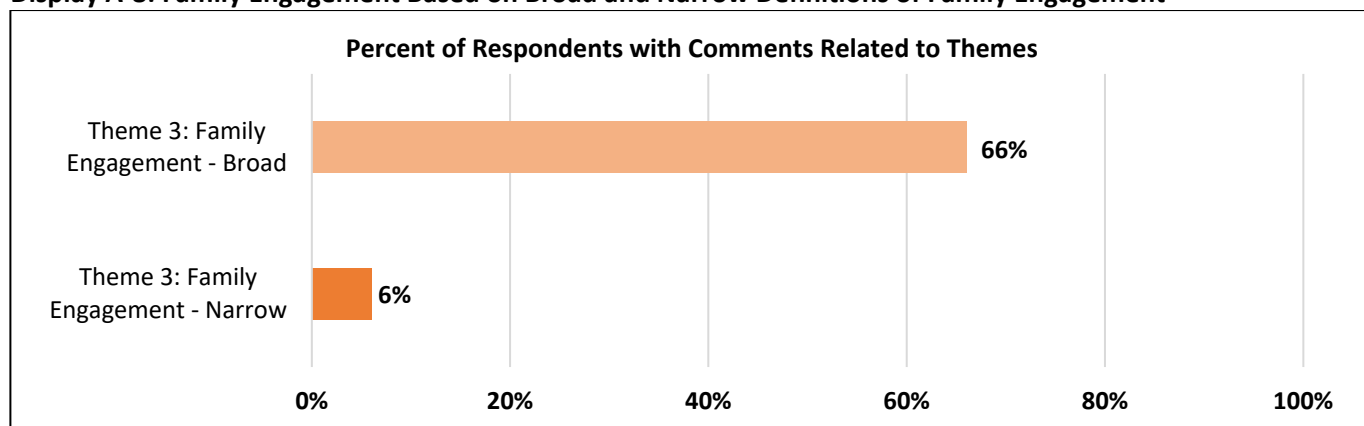


- In general, “family engagement” is a broad term that can be used to describe parents’ involvement in their child’s education to varying degrees; for example, do the parents volunteer at the school; do parents attend IEP meetings; do parents communicate their child’s needs with school staff; do parents’ support the decision surrounding the IEP? In short, this term can be used to categorize any number of staff-parent relationships.
- If family engagement is defined broadly, it stands to reason that any parent who completed the survey can be considered engaged, and even more so for parent respondents who provided an answer to the open-ended question as these questions take more time and effort to complete. Thus, at a very broad level, we could say that all 3,341 parents who completed the survey are “engaged” in their child’s education. A possibly more precise metric possibly is the 22% of the survey respondents who wrote a response to the open-ended question. In this regard, we could say that all 100% of parents who wrote a comment are “engaged” (see Display A-7).
- To further the precision of the “family engagement” construct, we could narrow our focus to those respondents who made a particular type of comment, namely those who commented about the staff-parent relationship. These are parents who are actively engaging with staff surrounding their child’s education; they are communicating with, collaborating with, and supporting staff members about their child’s school-related experiences. *This category was used in the original report; see the original report for the details on the staff-parent relationship general theme category.*
 - The staff-parent relationship category included several detailed themes: support, communication, collaboration, staff, care, and respect; 66% of respondents wrote something relating to the staff-parent relationship category (see Display A-8).
- In the past few years, the family engagement literature/research has focused on a specific type of family engagement. This type of family engagement is defined as a more meaningful engagement than that which is typically experienced at back-to-school nights, parent-teacher conferences, and bake sales. This meaningful engagement is defined as the active participation of parents helping their child with learning at home.
 - Using this narrow definition, 46 (6%) of written comments were related to parents’ engagement in the learning of their child(ren) with IEPs (see Display A-8). Thirty-two respondents provided a negative response, while fourteen provided a positive response (see Display A-9).
 - Respondents who wrote a negative comment generally mentioned wishing that the school would provide more information and strategies on how they as parents can help their children learn at home.

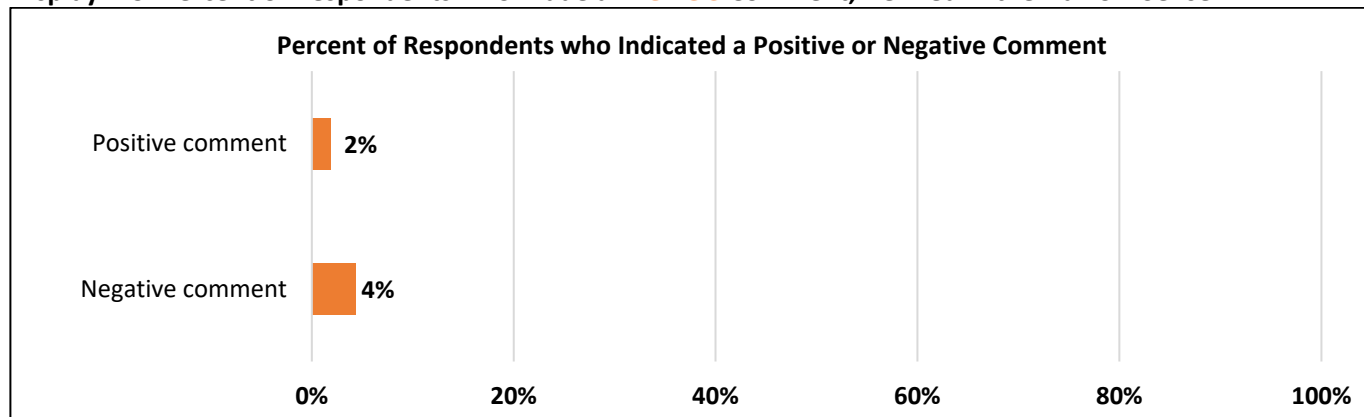
Display A-7: Family Engagement Based on Survey Respondents who Made a Comment to the Open-Ended Item



Display A-8: Family Engagement Based on Broad and Narrow Definitions of Family Engagement



Display A-9: Percent of Respondents who Made a Theme 3 Comment, Defined in the Narrow Sense



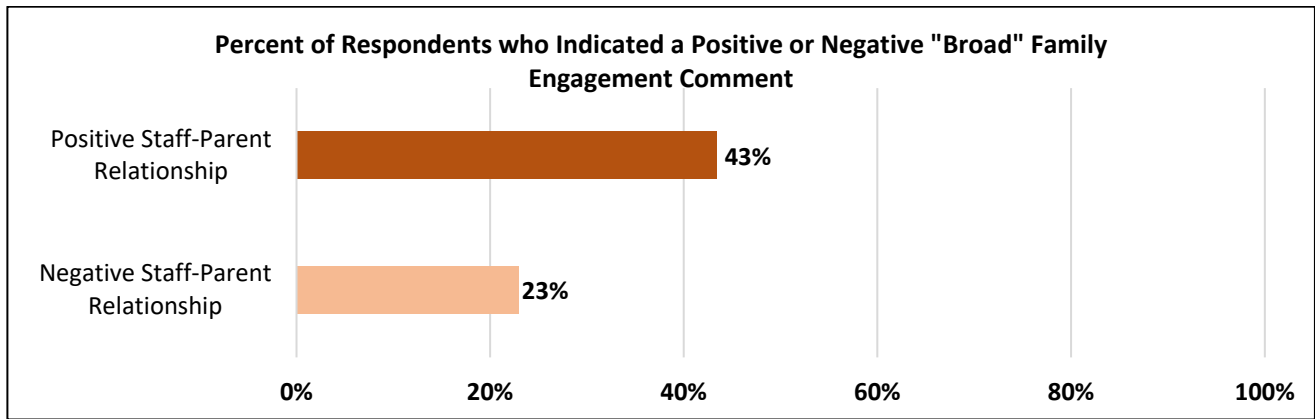
Two examples of a positive comments:

- *“I believe my daughter is progressing appropriately. Both her speech and kindergarten teacher help her out immensely with accomplishing her 5k goals and give us clear instruction on how we can help her further at home.”*
- *“Stacy Heath, Speech Therapist is AMAZING. I can't say enough great things about her. She has helped improved my son’s speech immensely. She always has fun activities he loves while helping him learn, and it's clear she enjoys it just as much as he does. As parents - that warms our hearts seeing another person not only invested in our child's success, but clearly loving her job. Mrs. Heath invites other staff to help bring ideas to myself and spouse so we can integrate those ideas into our home for helping Camden.”*

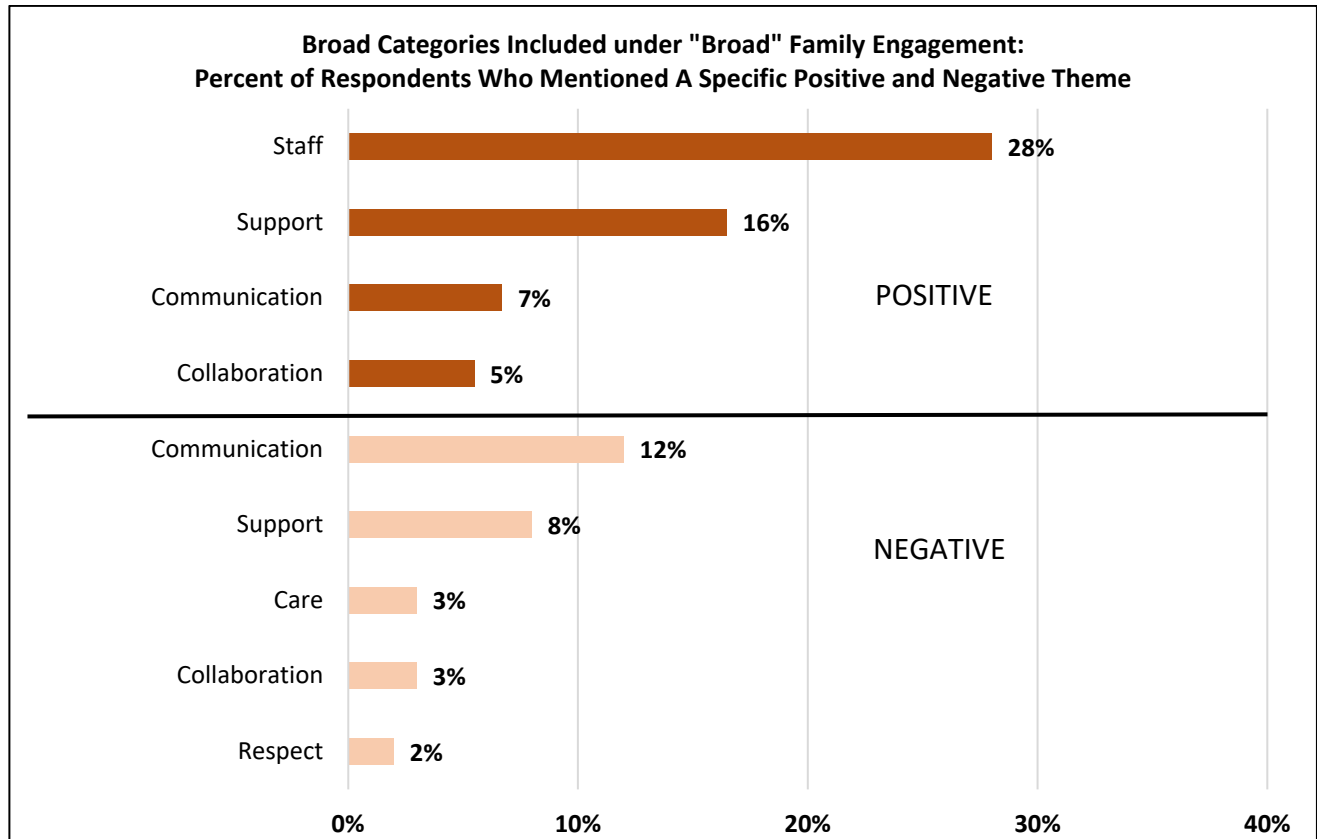
Two examples of a negative comments:

- *“I feel like there has been very little communication in regards to my child's IEP with us as parents. Any updates we receive are only at annual IEP update meetings or we need to seek out ourselves (and even then, get very little for feedback or updates on how our child is doing). Do not feel like an active participant. When we have asked how we can support at home to maintain consistency and increase progress we get very little for response. I do not feel like an equal participant on the team and feel like as a parent I have more I could offer to my child's progress with more communication.”*
- *“Great mid-year conference, 3rd quarter grades dropped significantly. No contact from any member of team to indicate child was struggling or what additional support school was providing, what we needed to do at home. Weekly meeting of team happening during quarter but no one reached out to me as a parent with concerns. I had to contact team and ask for additional assist, clarification, next steps etc., basically told the student effort wasn't there instead of figuring out what support was needed as the student was struggling with directions, expectations etc. and needed more guidance which was not being provided at school.*
- Displays A-10 and A-11 provide additional details on the 66% of written comments that were categorized into the staff-parent relationship category. These comments were explored in more detail in the original report.

Display A-10: Percent of Respondents who Made a Family Engagement-Related Comment, Defined in the Broad Sense



Display A-11: General Positive and Negative Themes Included under Family Engagement, Defined in the Broad Sense



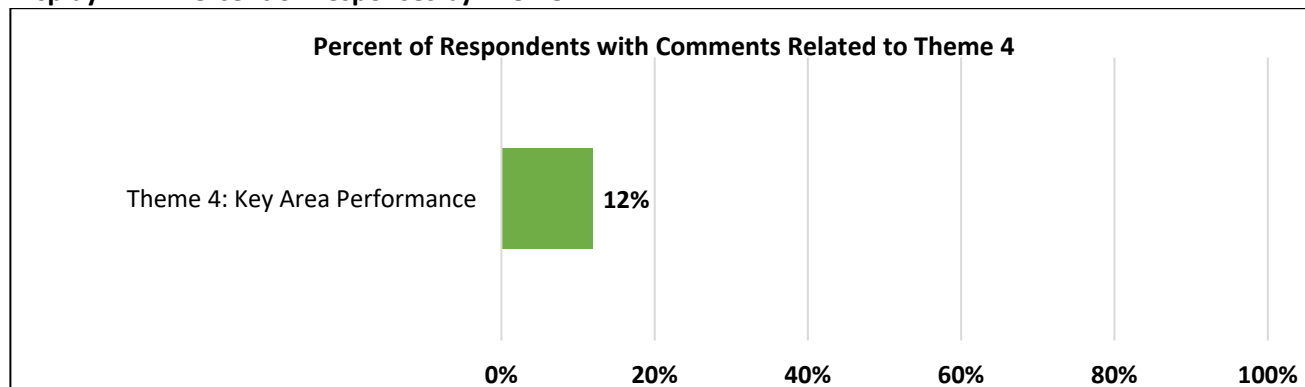


How are Wisconsin learners with IEPs performing in key areas?

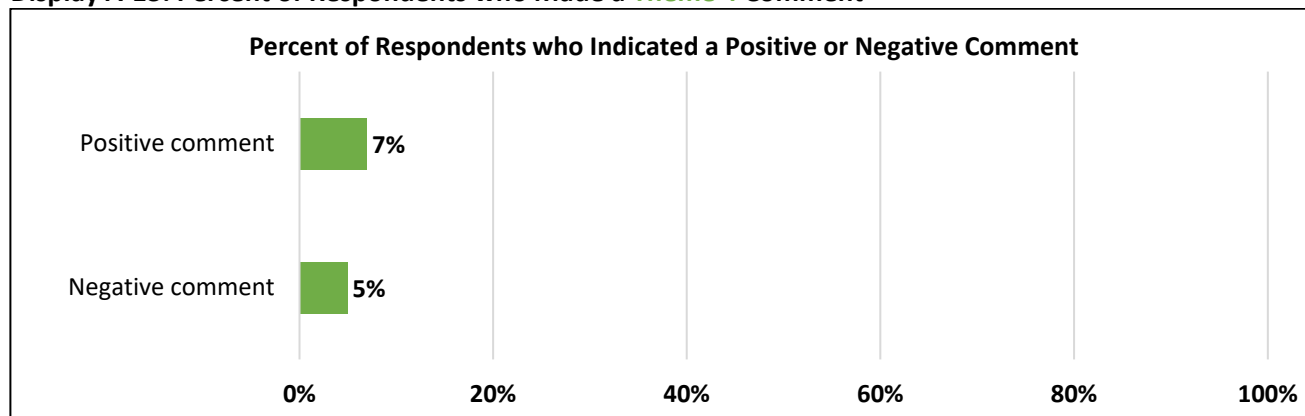
Designated Theme 4: Key Area Performance

- Of the 746 respondents who wrote a response to the open-ended question, 86 (12%) respondents wrote a comment related to how students with IEPs are performing in key areas. Thirty-four respondents gave a negative response, and 52 provided a positive response.
 - The negative comments generally mentioned that their child is making very little progress, is falling further behind, or is failing.

Display A-12: Percent of Responses by Theme



Display A-13: Percent of Respondents who Made a Theme 4 Comment



Two examples of a positive comments:

- *“I’m very appreciative of the services offered. I cannot say if it is a major reason my son has progressed, but he has come SO far in the last year that I know it at least helped! THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU!”*

- *“I am very pleased with my child’s school and the people who work with him every day. There is great communication between teachers and I, I can always get a hold of them if I have questions or concerns. My son is happy and gets the services he needs. He has progressed nicely and I am very proud of him.”*

Two examples of a negative comments:

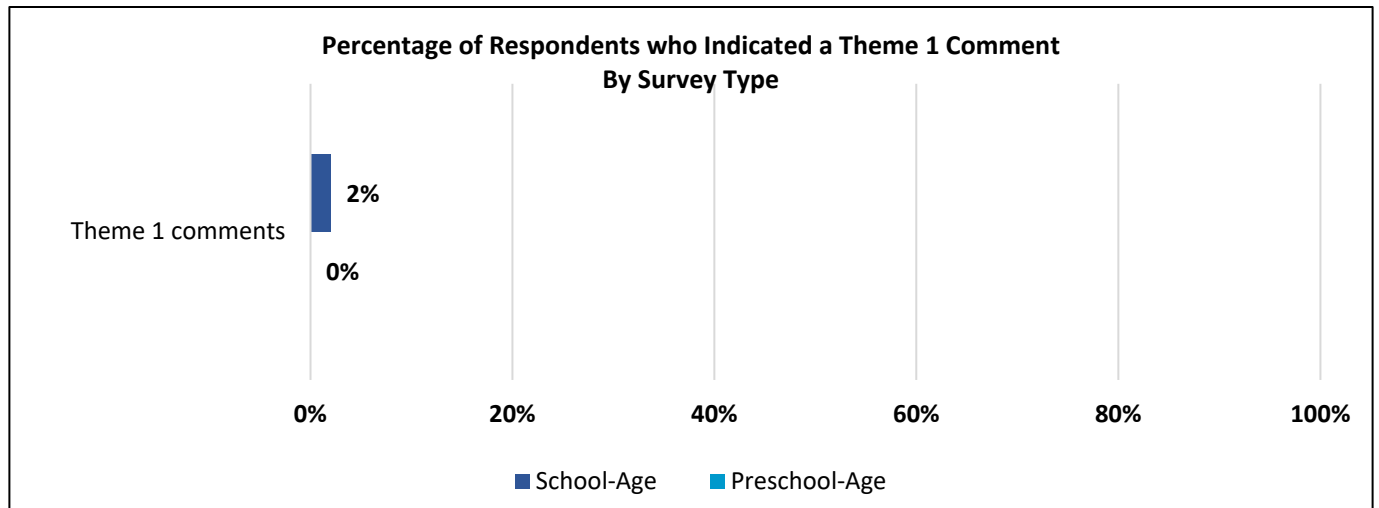
- *“So, my child has been in IEP for a few years. I see very little progress. I know that very little is a lot to a child however you would think that being in this program my child's grades would go up on a chart but it's a flat line. It gets frustrating seeing this. Having teachers tell you that your child has a disability is very rude.”*
- *“My child struggles in math - I would love for him to get a math tutor - he has been behind for several years and keeps falling more behind. IEP meeting are the same every year with little progress. The teachers don't communicate about issues until it's too late in the year. IEP meetings. The new principal doesn't go to the IEP meetings. The last one did and was very involved. We only talk 1 time per year. They just do what's required.”*

B: Designated Theme Results by Survey Type

Overall, parents of school-age children were more likely than parents of preschool children to provide comments that related to Themes 1 (Life After High School) and 2 (LRE). Parents of preschool children were more likely than parents of school-age children to provide comments that related to Themes 3 (Family Engagement) and 4 (Key Area Performance). No other disaggregations of the designated themes were done given the small percentages of responses to each theme. (Note that the broad definition of Theme 3 Family Engagement was further disaggregated in the original report.)

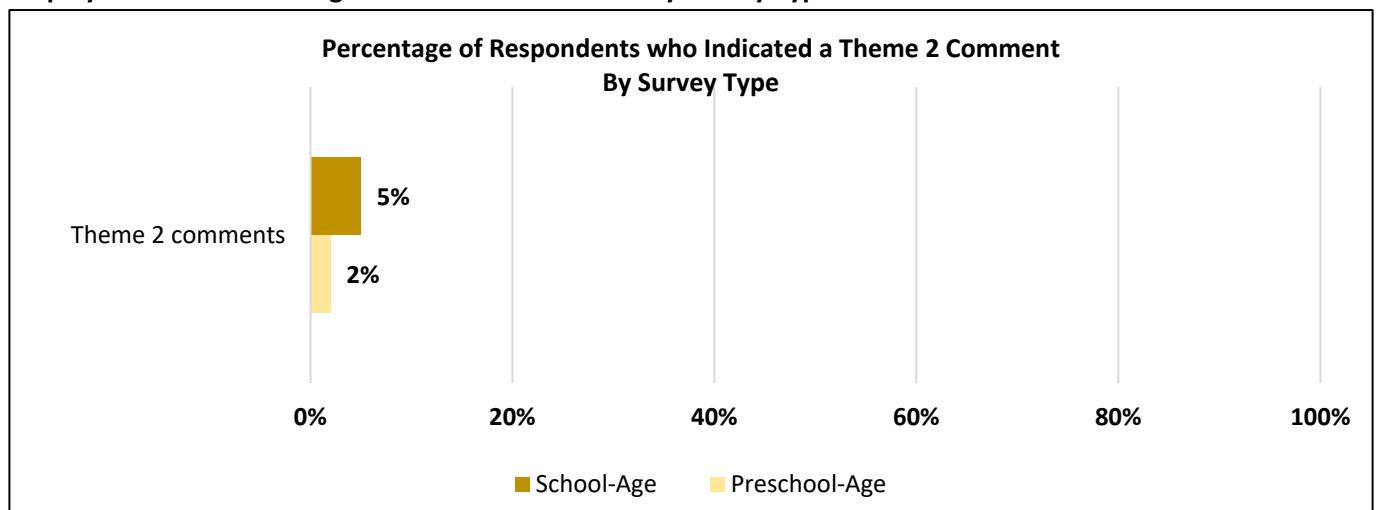
Theme 1: Life after High School

Display B-1: Positive or Negative Theme 1 Comment by Survey Type



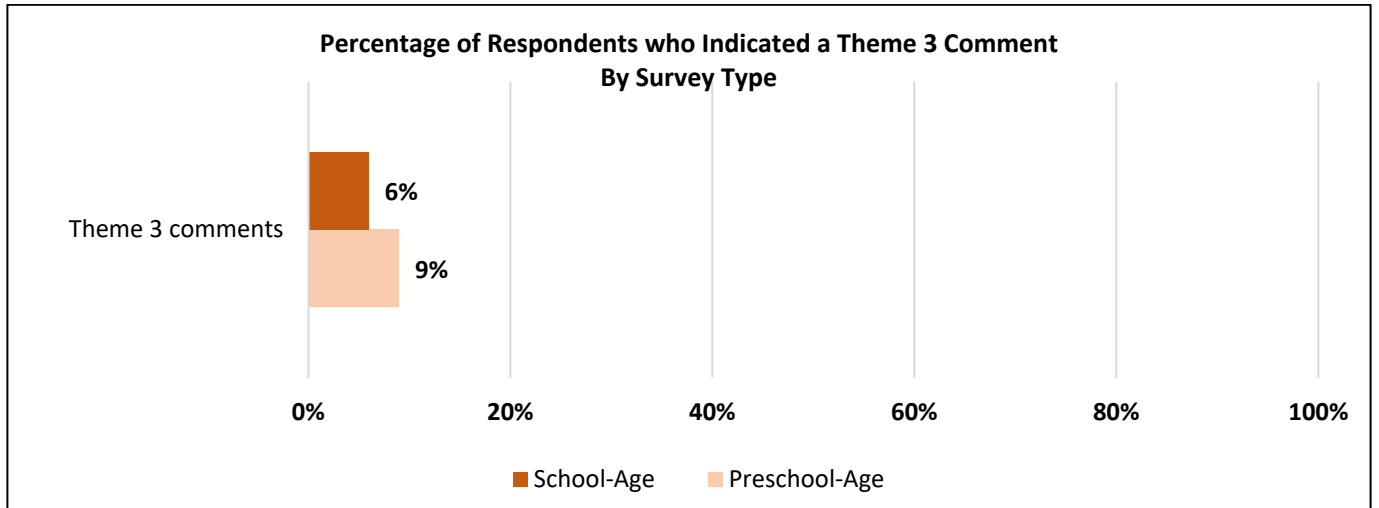
Theme 2: LRE

Display B-2: Positive or Negative Theme 2 Comment by Survey Type



Theme 3: Family Engagement

Display B-3: Positive or Negative Theme 3 Comment by Survey Type



Theme 4: Key Area Performance

Display B-4: Positive or Negative Theme 4 Comment by Survey Type

