VOICES OF NEW ORLEANS YOUTH: WHAT DO THE CITY'S YOUNG PEOPLE THINK ABOUT THEIR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES?

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Overview

Most cities have limited information about what their young people experience and how youth view their schools and communities. We know a great deal about student test scores, high school graduation rates, and neighborhood poverty rates, but these data points tell us little about students' experiences or how public programs and institutions can better serve them.

This study summarizes results from the first New Orleans citywide youth survey, which we conducted in conjunction with local education and community organizations during the 2018-19 school year. Below we summarize the key findings from students in New Orleans' publicly funded schools. We also discuss differences between the responses of white students and students of color, which is of particular importance, given the large share of people of color in the city and the longstanding inequities they have historically faced in school, community, and life opportunities.

- **Teacher Quality:** New Orleans students rate their teachers highly in some areas (e.g., ability to challenge students), but lower in others, particularly classroom management. These ratings are somewhat lower than those of a national comparison group. For both New Orleans and the national comparison group, students of color rate their teachers lower than white students on most measures.

- **School Climate:** Though many students agree that school discipline is fair (68%) and bullying is not a problem (64%), roughly one third of students do not. Additionally, students of color tend to report lower ratings than white students on multiple aspects of school climate.

- **Students' Beliefs:** Students frequently agree that they value their education (70%) and that the effort they put

into their schoolwork pays off (71%). Consistent with national trends, they have high ambitions, with 76% reporting that they will pursue a college degree. One of the few areas in which we find that schools' state-assigned letter grade relates to students' responses is in college aspirations: students in A and B schools are more likely to believe that they will go to college, compared to students in lower-rated schools.

- **Transportation:** Most students (70%) report school commutes of less than 30 minutes.
- **Neighborhoods:** New Orleans youth frequently report having social support (67%) and feeling safe in their neighborhoods (72%). 44% participate in service activities in their communities, with students of color more likely to participate than white students. The majority of white students report feeling safer in the presence of police, while the majority of black students do not.

Having input from the city's youth is invaluable in understanding how they experience their schools and neighborhoods, and we are excited to be able to highlight their voices. These results offer insight into how we, as a city, are serving our children. In instances where these results suggest there are concerns in our schools and communities, we acknowledge that these are complicated issues. There are many possible contributing factors, as well as many avenues to address them. We hope the results from this survey will prompt new conversations and provide a call to action to improve the lives of New Orleans' young people.

Background

Many organizations produce statistics about New Orleans youth. Our own prior reports have focused on test scores, graduation rates, college-going rates, discipline rates, and other measures that schools report to the state. The Cowen Institute has provided surveys of parents and their satisfaction with the system. The Data Center has regularly documented child poverty, homelessness, obesity, child abuse, incarceration, and other measures.

All of these efforts are important, to be sure. There are good reasons to document and report on measures of academic achievement, parent satisfaction, and socio-economic status. But these measures paint a fundamentally incomplete picture because they omit one key thing: the voices and direct experiences of young people themselves. We hear this regularly in response to our reports at the Education Research Alliance for New Orleans.

In recent years, NOLA Public Schools (NOLA-PS) established a student advisory group to provide an avenue for students to voice feedback and suggestions to district leadership. The students leading this advisory group, in turn, administered their own survey to ensure that students across the city could provide input about extracurricular programs, course offerings, student support, and many other topics. The NOLA-PS youth-led survey offers school officials key insight into student perceptions of their experiences at school, with questions developed by student leaders based on their understanding of students' challenges.

Steering Commitee for the Citywide Youth Survey

- Cowen Institute
- Education Research Alliance for New Orleans
- FirstLine Schools
- The Data Center
- The Forum for Youth Investment
- Institute of Women & Ethnic Studies
- Laureus Sport for Good Foundation
- Louisiana Department of Education
- Louisiana Public Health Institute
- New Orleans Health Department
- NOLA Public Schools
- New Orleans Youth Alliance
- Orleans Public Education Network
- PS Consulting NOLA, LLC
- Recovery School District

The NOLA-PS student advisory group's survey largely covered different topics than ours, but we note below some of the areas of overlap in the two surveys.

To add to the available information around student perceptions in New Orleans, our team brought together a Steering Committee of diverse education and community organizations in 2016 to develop a rigorous survey with validated questions that focuses on what we believe to be the most pressing and under-examined issues in the city (see the orange box on the previous page). This citywide youth survey included questions not only about students' perceptions of their schools but also about experiences in their neighborhoods. We use these survey data to answer the following questions:

> " *The citywide youth survey included questions not only about students' perceptions of their schools but also about experiences in their neighborhoods.* "

- What do New Orleans youth think about their <u>teachers</u>, and how do their responses compare to those of a national comparison group?
- What do New Orleans youth think about <u>school climate</u>?
- What are the <u>academic beliefs and behaviors</u> of New Orleans youth?
- What do New Orleans youth say about <u>school transportation and attendance</u>?
- What do New Orleans youth say about their <u>out-of-school experiences</u>?
- How did student responses vary <u>by race and school performance score</u>?

It is difficult, if not impossible, to measure all aspects of children's well-being, but in this report, we try to provide some insight by highlighting the voices of New Orleans' youth on several topics of broad community interest. We selected the survey measures we used not only because they are of interest to the community but also because they have been shown to predict student outcomes in school and in life. The accompanying technical appendix cites specific studies demonstrating these associations between student perceptions and long-term outcomes.

How Did We Carry Out the Analysis?

We invited all 77 publicly funded New Orleans schools that served students in any of the surveyed grades (6th- 11th) to participate. Ultimately, 3,807 students from 21 schools completed the survey. We thank these schools and students for their participation. Within these schools, our partners at the Louisiana Public Health Institute (LPHI) administered the 20-minute survey during regular school hours in the 2018-19 school year. The survey was available in English or Spanish, with a read-aloud option embedded in the electronic version. Because of time limits and in some cases, content, certain questions were only answered by high school students or by a smaller sample of students.

This report is designed to speak to the experiences of New Orleans students, rather than to report school-level averages, so each student's responses are weighted equally in the results we report. As a result, large schools with more surveyed students contribute more to the averages we report than smaller schools.

We carry out a number of analyses to determine whether our sample is representative of all youth attending New Orleans publicly funded schools, comparing students' schools' characteristics and self-reported race with publicly available 2018-19 enrollment data from the Louisiana Department of Education.

There are some differences between the sample of surveyed students and the city as a whole; for example, schools that received a letter-grade rating of B and D in the state's accountability system are under-represented, as are schools in New Orleans East. However, the sample includes at least one school in each of the city's seven geographic zones and at least two schools from each letter grade (A through F).

Additionally, the demographics of our surveyed schools were similar to the population of students in New Orleans' publicly funded schools. Though the differences between our sample and the city as a whole are relatively small, we ran additional analyses using survey weights that adjust for differences between our sample and the district population. These results were generally very similar and are therefore provided only in the technical appendix.

> " *The demographics of our surveyed schools were similar to the population of students in New Orleans' publicly funded schools.* "

Almost all of the survey questions come from existing surveys that have been previously validated, and as a result, survey response scales vary by question. Below, we report student responses to survey items in two ways, depending on their scales. For example, students had four response options to questions about the fairness of discipline at their school: strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. Looking at all responses to every item about the fairness of school discipline, we calculate how often students agreed with the statements by selecting either "agree" or "strongly agree" (68% of the time). Additional detail on these calculations is included in the technical appendix.

All measures in this report are defined so that higher values are considered more positive. Most of the measures are naturally worded this way. For example, students were asked to rate their agreement with the statement "I always study for tests" on a scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4), where "strongly agree" corresponds to a positive academic behavior. However, some measures were initially negatively framed and required reversing the scale in order to make a higher value a positive outcome. For example, one survey item asked students to rate their agreement with the statement "Students at this school fight a lot" on the same scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. For these items, we flip the scale so that an answer of "strongly disagree" is assigned a score of 4, and "strongly agree" is assigned a score of 1.

We also examined whether the responses for different racial/ethnic subgroups were statistically different from those of their white peers. For brevity and clarity within this report, we only show the differences between black and white students' responses, but responses from Hispanic students were similar to their black peers. Additional details about Hispanic students' responses can be found in the accompanying technical appendix. We analyzed other races and ethnicities (Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian, and multiracial students) as a combined group, as each subgroup had a very small sample.

In the figures below, we display simple differences in survey responses by race. As reported in the appendix, we also test for differences by race using a regression analysis that accounts for student grade level (middle or high school) and, in some cases, school letter grades (A-F) and the percentage of low-income students. Similarly, to test for differences by
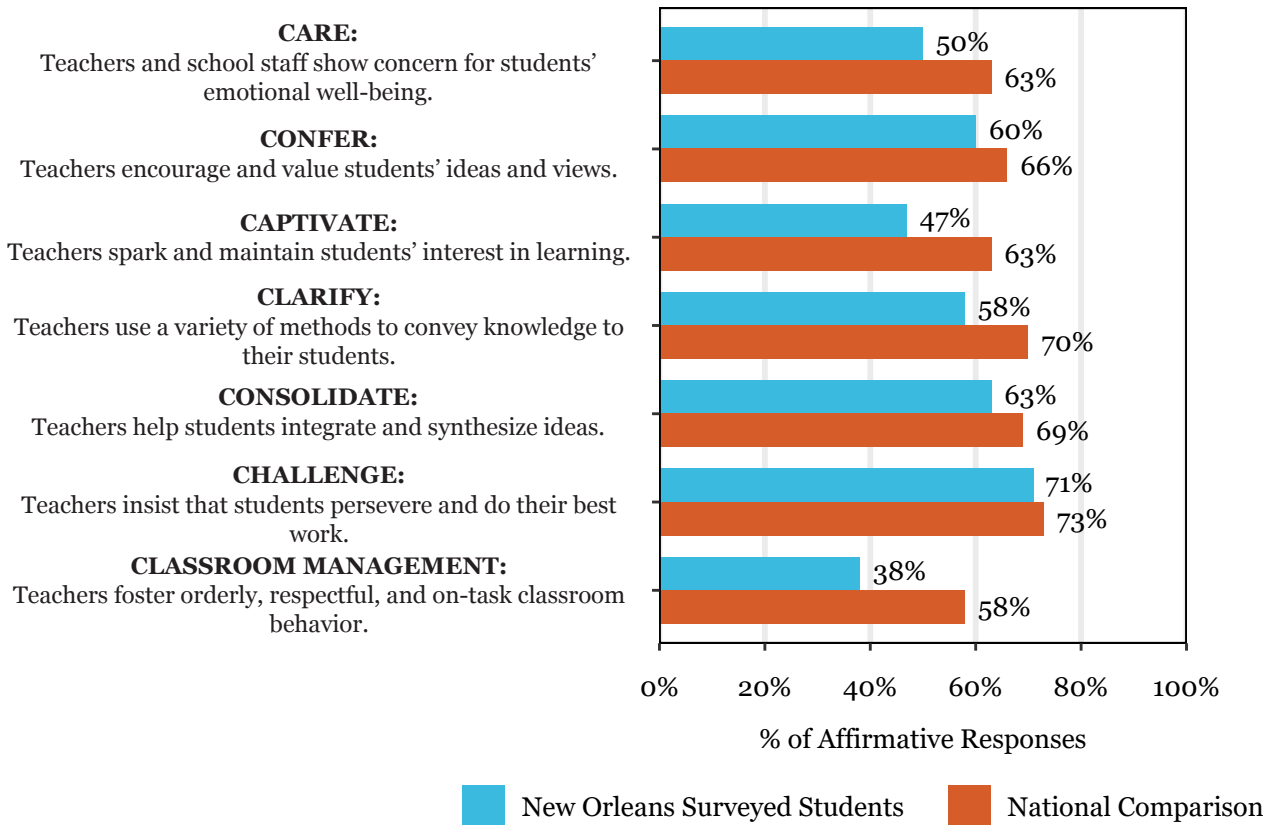
school letter grade, we use a regression analysis accounting for student grade level, race, and the percentage of low-income students in the school. We discuss any differences between the reported unadjusted results and the regression results in the text.

Below, we summarize our findings. While we wish to thank the many organizations involved, we also want to emphasize that the analysis and interpretations are our own and should not be attributed to the other organizations on the survey Steering Committee.

What do New Orleans youth think about their teachers?

A growing body of research finds that teacher performance varies widely, even within a given school. Research also suggests that these differences affect students' long-term life success. In short, teachers matter. To examine the quality of teaching, we included measures provided by Tripod Education Partners, which are used to rate teachers in seven key areas. These Tripod 7Cs® measures are predictive of student outcomes. Across all questions about teacher quality, New Orleans' students rate their teachers highly (agree or strongly agree) just over half of the time (55%). However, answers vary across the different aspects of teacher quality (Figure 1).

Figure 1: New Orleans students rated their teachers lower than students in a national comparison group did on every dimension of teacher quality, particularly Classroom Management.

CARE:
Teachers and school staff show concern for students' emotional well-being.
50%
63%

CONFER:
Teachers encourage and value students' ideas and views.
60%
66%

CAPTIVATE:
Teachers spark and maintain students' interest in learning.
47%
63%

CLARIFY:
Teachers use a variety of methods to convey knowledge to their students.
58%
70%

CONSOLIDATE:
Teachers help students integrate and synthesize ideas.
63%
69%

CHALLENGE:
Teachers insist that students persevere and do their best work.
71%
73%

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT:
Teachers foster orderly, respectful, and on-task classroom behavior.
38%
58%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

% of Affirmative Responses

■ New Orleans Surveyed Students   ■ National Comparison

Notes: For more information on the range of responses across schools in New Orleans, see technical appendix.
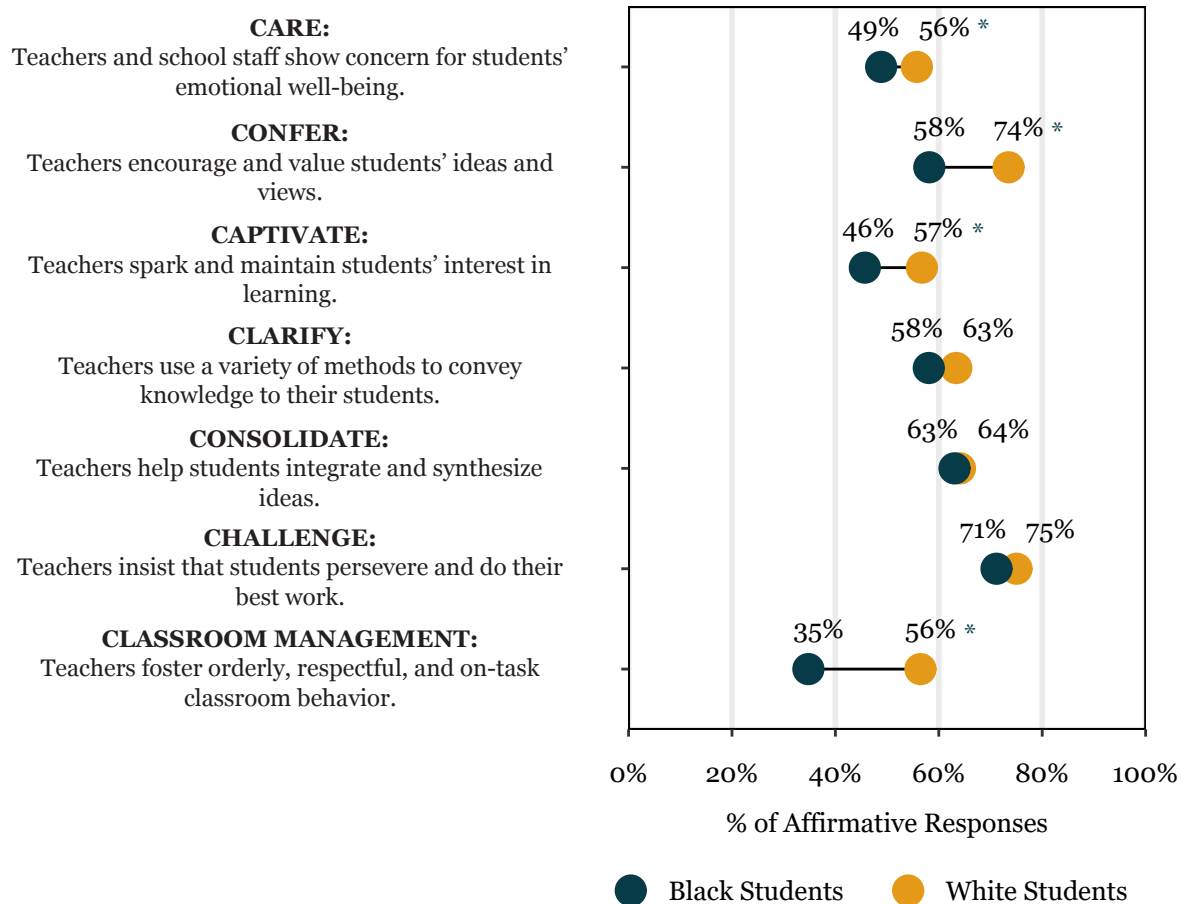
New Orleans teachers are consistently rated highly in challenging their students and helping them synthesize new ideas. However, students are much less likely to agree that their teachers successfully manage their classrooms, captivate their interest, or show concern for their well-being. NOLA-PS's student advisory council survey similarly found that fewer than half of students felt emotionally supported by most teachers.

Figure 1 also compares New Orleans students' ratings from our survey to ratings by a national comparison group from 1,247 schools across the country. These comparison schools, pulled from Tripod Education Partners' national dataset, were matched to our survey sample based on racial composition, as this was the only student background factor where matching was possible. We find that New Orleans students rated their teachers lower than students in the national sample on every dimension, with substantial differences for Classroom Management, Clarify, Care, and Captivate. However, on every dimension, at least one New Orleans school scored above the national comparison group's rating.

How do students' perceptions of teachers vary by race and school performance scores?

Figure 2 shows the differences in the responses of black and white New Orleans students across the seven teacher quality measures.

Figure 2: Black students rated their teachers lower than white students did on every measure of quality.

CARE:
Teachers and school staff show concern for students' emotional well-being.
49% 56% *

CONFER:
Teachers encourage and value students' ideas and views.
58% 74% *

CAPTIVATE:
Teachers spark and maintain students' interest in learning.
46% 57% *

CLARIFY:
Teachers use a variety of methods to convey knowledge to their students.
58% 63%

CONSOLIDATE:
Teachers help students integrate and synthesize ideas.
63% 64%

CHALLENGE:
Teachers insist that students persevere and do their best work.
71% 75%

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT:
Teachers foster orderly, respectful, and on-task classroom behavior.
35% 56% *

% of Affirmative Responses

● Black Students   ● White Students

Notes: An asterisk denotes that the difference between black and white students' ratings was statistically significant. Hispanic students' answers were typically very similar to black students' answers; details about their responses can be found in the technical appendix.

While there are some differences across all measures, only those marked with an asterisk are measures where black students' responses were significantly lower than those of white students: those include the Care, Confer, Captivate, and Classroom Management measures. The largest differences we observed between black and white students' perspectives were for Confer (16 percentage points) and Classroom Management (21 percentage points).

The differences in Figure 2 do not account for school quality and the percentage of disadvantaged students. When we do account for these factors in New Orleans, we no longer see differences by race in students' perceptions of Classroom Management and how Captivating their teachers are. These results indicate that for those two measures, differences we observe between black and white New Orleans students are due to differences in the types of schools they attend. It is worth noting, though, that even when comparing students in similar schools, black students are still less likely to feel that teachers care about them and value their ideas (Care and Confer).

Our New Orleans sample of schools is too small to reliably examine racial disparities within schools, but Tripod Education Partners, who provided the national results, did examine racial differences in responses for students within the same schools and within the same classes for the national comparison group. The disparities in New Orleans are substantially larger than those of the national sample for Care, Confer, Captivate, and Classroom Management. For the national comparison group, racial disparities ranged from 2 percentage points (Care) to 9 percentage points (Classroom Management).

These differences in students' perspectives by race could arise because they are sorted into different classes in the same school, or because they have different experiences with the same teacher in the same class. When comparing students' ratings of the same teacher in the national sample, black and white students give similar ratings for Confer and Classroom Management, indicating that disparities in the national comparison group's perceptions of these measures arise when black and white students have different teachers, either within the same school or at different schools. However, when rating the same teacher, black students nationally still rated their teachers slightly lower in the Care and Captivate dimensions. Though we can't be certain that these patterns are the same in New Orleans, the national results highlight potential sources for racial disparities in students' ratings of their teachers.

We also compare New Orleans students' ratings of teachers by school letter grade ratings and find almost no significant differences in students' perceptions. However, we do find that students in D/F schools believe that their teachers challenge them more often than students in A/B schools, meaning that students in these schools perceive even higher expectations from their teachers than students in A/B schools do.

> *We also compare New Orleans students' ratings of teachers by school letter grade ratings and find almost no significant differences in students' perceptions.*

The fact that student perceptions of teachers were unrelated across letter grades is less surprising than it seems. First, the letter grades are based mainly on test scores and, while our measures are correlated with test scores, that relationship is far from perfect. Second, our measures reflect the quality of instruction in the classroom and how well teachers contribute to student learning; the letter grades, in contrast, focus on outcome levels. These results therefore reinforce the limitations of letter grades.

What do New Orleans youth think about school climate?

The above measures of teaching effectiveness refer to specific aspects of classroom instruction. School climate, in contrast, refers to the overall quality and character of the schooling environment. We measure six aspects of school climate, drawn from the U.S. Department of Education's School Climate Survey: absence of bullying, sense of school safety, fairness of discipline practices, feelings of emotional safety, perceptions of equitable treatment, and comfort of physical environment. These dimensions of school climate are associated with student engagement, academic achievement, and violence prevention.

Students responded positively to school climate questions 65% of the time. About two-thirds of the time, students agree that discipline at their school is fair and that bullying is not a problem, and high school students agree that their school treats students equitably (Figure 3). The NOLA-PS student advisory group's survey found similar results for both equitable treatment and emotional safety.

Figure 3: Slightly more than half of students give positive responses on our school climate measures.

Measure	
ABSENCE OF BULLYING: Students at this school are not frequently picked on or teased.	64%
SENSE OF SCHOOL SAFETY: Students do not feel that violence is a problem at their school.	69%
FAIRNESS OF DISCIPLINE: Rules and strategies applied in school to manage students' behavior are clear and equitable.	68%
FEELINGS OF EMOTIONAL SAFETY: Students feel socially accepted and safe to express emotions at school.	58%
PERCEPTION OF EQUITABLE TREATMENT: Students are treated equitably and respectfully regardless of gender, race, or cultural background.	69%
COMFORT OF PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT: School buildings are comfortable, clean, and well-maintained.	51%

% of Affirmative Responses

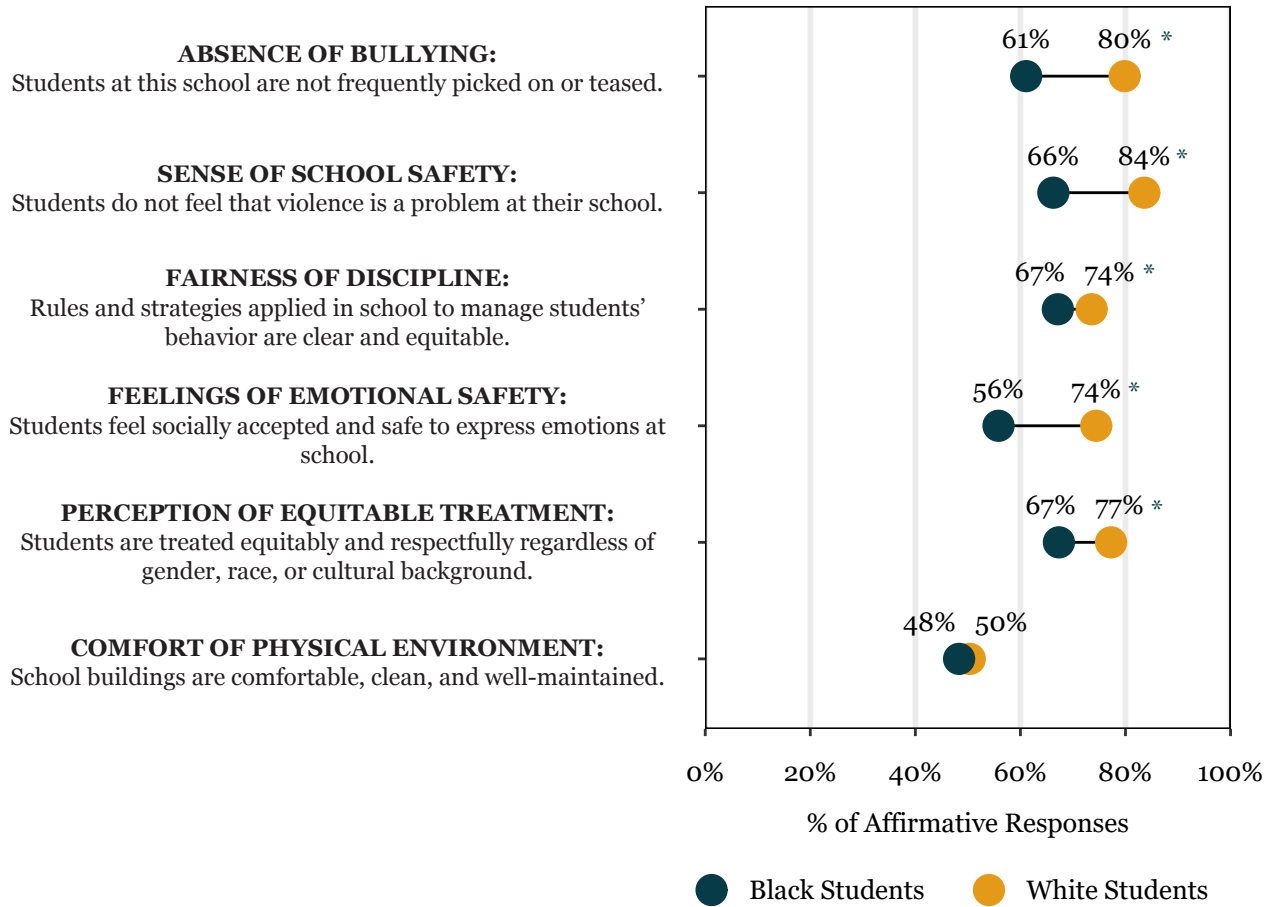Notes: Questions about the Perception of Equitable Treatment were only asked of high school students.

How do students' perceptions of school climate vary by race and school performance score?

New Orleans' black students rated their schools' climates significantly lower than white students did on five of the six measures (Figure 4). The largest differences in ratings are on the absence of bullying (19 percentage points), the sense of school safety (17 percentage points), and students' feelings of emotional safety at school (18 percentage points), as shown below. Though black students still answer positively about these categories more than half the time, their responses are substantially less positive than those of their white peers.

> " *New Orleans' black students rated their schools' climates significantly lower than white students did on five of the six measures.* "

Figure 4: Black students in New Orleans perceive poorer school climates than white students.

ABSENCE OF BULLYING:
Students at this school are not frequently picked on or teased.
61% 80% *

SENSE OF SCHOOL SAFETY:
Students do not feel that violence is a problem at their school.
66% 84% *

FAIRNESS OF DISCIPLINE:
Rules and strategies applied in school to manage students' behavior are clear and equitable.
67% 74% *

FEELINGS OF EMOTIONAL SAFETY:
Students feel socially accepted and safe to express emotions at school.
56% 74% *

PERCEPTION OF EQUITABLE TREATMENT:
Students are treated equitably and respectfully regardless of gender, race, or cultural background.
67% 77% *

COMFORT OF PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT:
School buildings are comfortable, clean, and well-maintained.
48% 50%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%
% of Affirmative Responses

● Black Students   ● White Students

Notes: An asterisk denotes that the difference between black and white students' ratings was statistically significant.
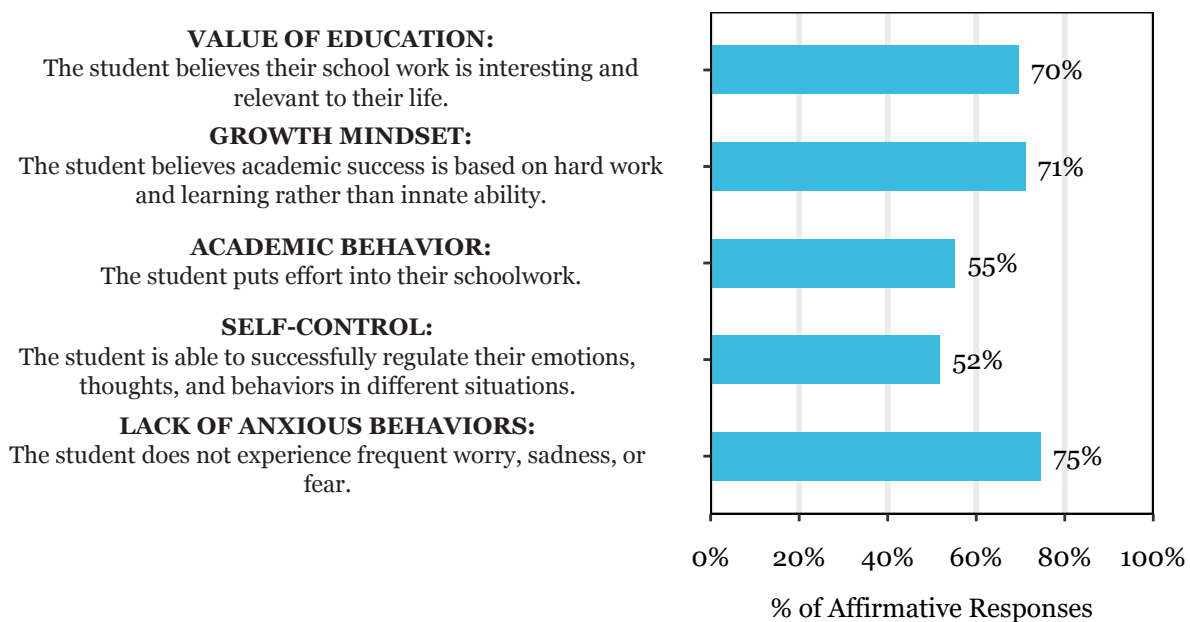
We observed no differences in students' perceptions of climate by school letter grade, indicating that the letter grade, which primarily reflects academic achievement, does not reflect other important aspects of the educational environment. Students in D/F schools were just as likely as those in A/B schools to feel safe, socially accepted, and fairly treated.

What are the <u>academic beliefs and behaviors</u> of New Orleans youth?

This survey measured five beliefs and behaviors that are often predictive of student outcomes: value of education, growth mindset, academic behavior, self-control, and lack of anxious behaviors.

Overall, students respond positively two-thirds of the time when asked about their academic beliefs and behaviors. More than two-thirds of the time, students agree that their education is valuable, that they have a growth mindset, and that they do not feel overly anxious or worried (Figure 5). However, students agreed only about half the time that they are able to manage their behaviors well and prioritize their schoolwork.

Figure 5: Students frequently report that they value education and believe that their effort pays off.

VALUE OF EDUCATION:
The student believes their school work is interesting and relevant to their life. — 70%

GROWTH MINDSET:
The student believes academic success is based on hard work and learning rather than innate ability. — 71%

ACADEMIC BEHAVIOR:
The student puts effort into their schoolwork. — 55%

SELF-CONTROL:
The student is able to successfully regulate their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations. — 52%

LACK OF ANXIOUS BEHAVIORS:
The student does not experience frequent worry, sadness, or fear. — 75%

% of Affirmative Responses

Though we do not have a national comparison point for these findings, a 2018-19 student survey covering similar topics shows that our growth mindset results (71% agreement) are very similar to those from five metropolitan areas in California (70-73% agreement). In contrast, New Orleans students' beliefs in their self-control skills (52% agreement) are well below that of the surveyed students in California (71-73%).
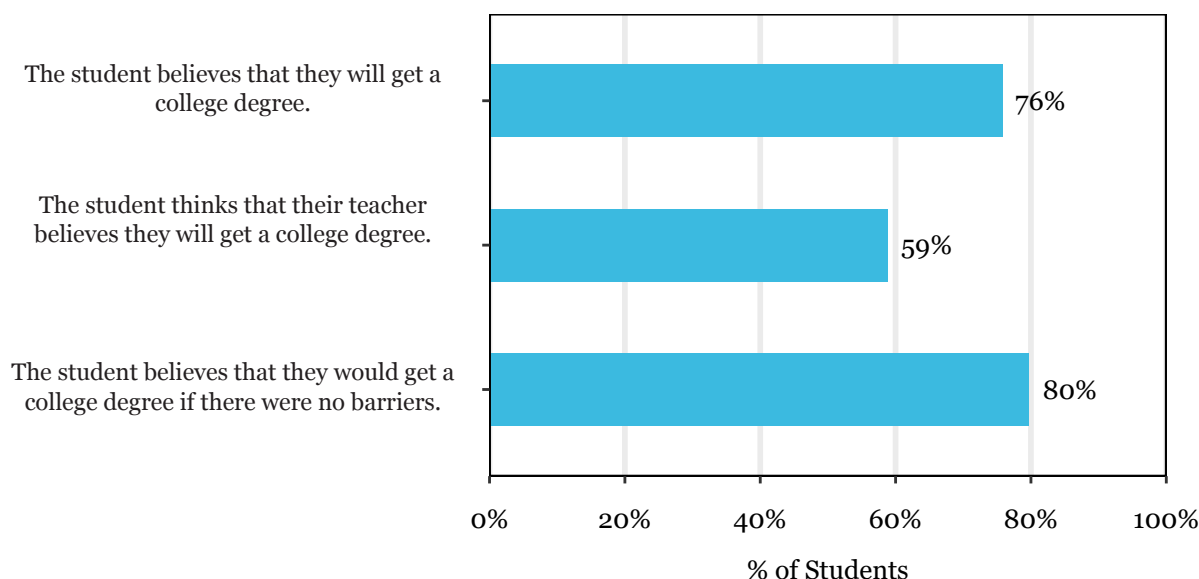
Most New Orleans students feel motivated to continue to higher education. In keeping with national patterns, a large percentage of students (76%) intend to finish at least a college degree (Figure 6). A majority (59%) of students also agree that their teachers believe they will go at least as far as college, which is consistent with our earlier finding that students perceive high expectations from their teachers.

> *Most New Orleans students feel motivated to continue to higher education.*

Figure 6: A large majority of students believe that they will get at least a college degree.

The student believes that they will get a college degree. — 76%

The student thinks that their teacher believes they will get a college degree. — 59%

The student believes that they would get a college degree if there were no barriers. — 80%

% of Students

Notes: A previous version of this figure reflected only a subset of student responses. This figure has been updated to reflect all student responses.
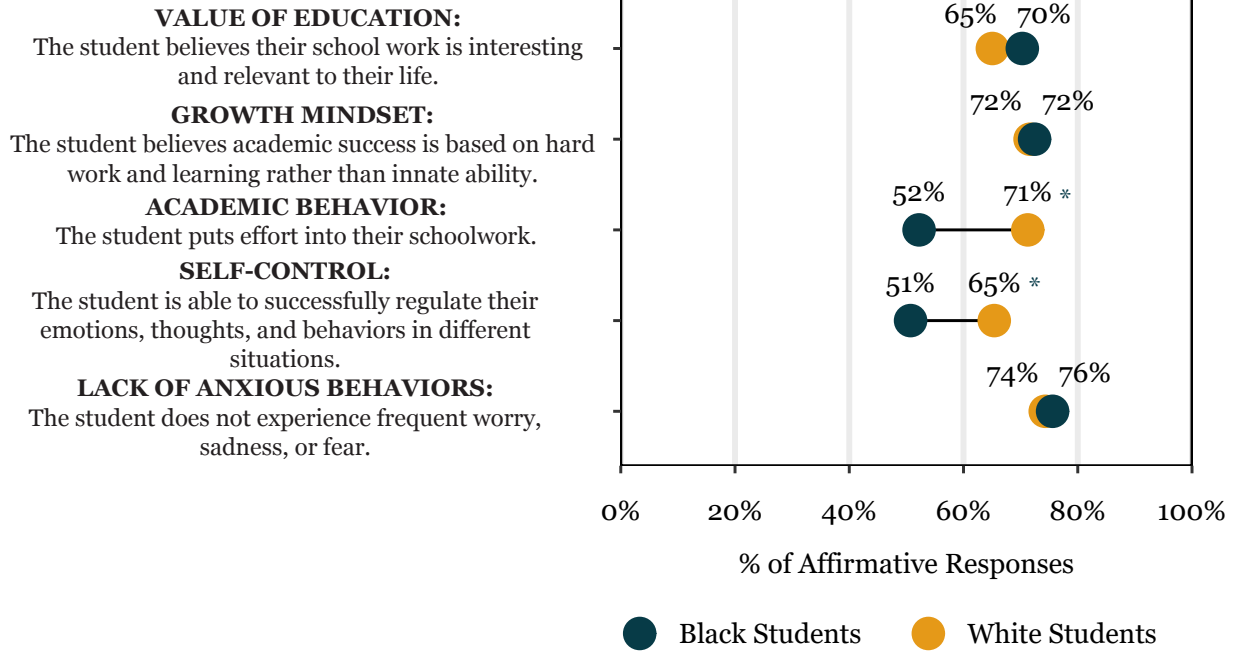
These results highlight a problematic gap between expectations and reality. Seventy-six percent New Orleans students expect to attend college, but in fact only four out of five will even graduate from high school, and of those, only three out of five enroll in college immediately following graduation. This gap indicates that students want to get to college but may not have access to the resources necessary to accomplish this goal.

> " *This gap indicates that students want to get to college but may not have the resources necessary to accomplish this goal.* "

How do students' academic beliefs and behaviors vary by race and school performance score?

We see fewer differences in students' reports of their academic beliefs and behaviors by race. Black students are just as likely as white students to report endorsing a growth mindset and valuing their education, but they also report lower levels of self-control (14 percentage points) and academic behaviors (19 percentage points; Figure 7). This racial disparity in students' reported self-control is also present in the aforementioned California survey (they did not assess academic behaviors). Notably, differences in self-control and academic behavior by race for New Orleans students, as well as perceptions of the fairness of discipline, were no longer statistically significant after accounting for differences in school performance and the percentage of disadvantaged students.
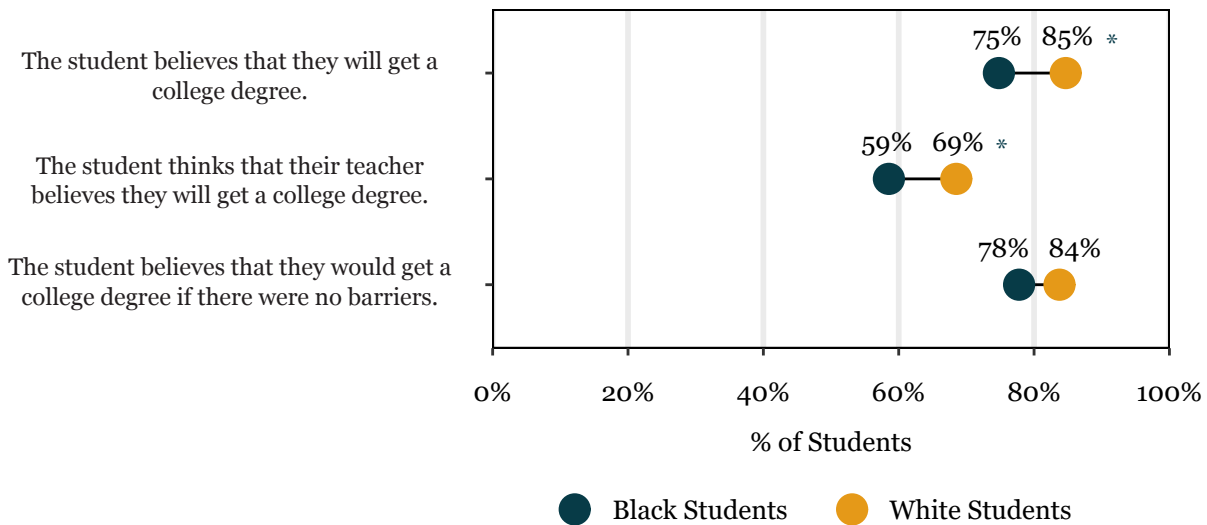
Figure 7: Black students are less likely than white students to believe in their abilities to put in academic effort and maintain self-control, but they have similar beliefs in the value of education and having a growth mindset.

VALUE OF EDUCATION:
The student believes their school work is interesting and relevant to their life.

GROWTH MINDSET:
The student believes academic success is based on hard work and learning rather than innate ability.

ACADEMIC BEHAVIOR:
The student puts effort into their schoolwork.

SELF-CONTROL:
The student is able to successfully regulate their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations.

LACK OF ANXIOUS BEHAVIORS:
The student does not experience frequent worry, sadness, or fear.

65% 70%
72% 72%
52% 71% *
51% 65% *
74% 76%

% of Affirmative Responses

● Black Students   ● White Students

Notes: An asterisk denotes that the difference between black and white students' ratings was statistically significant.

Figure 8 shows that, though black students are likely to believe that they will attend college, they are still less likely to endorse this belief than their white peers. This disparity is similar when asking students how far their teachers believe they will get.

Figure 8: Black students are less likely to believe that they will attend college than their white peers.

The student believes that they will get a college degree.

The student thinks that their teacher believes they will get a college degree.

The student believes that they would get a college degree if there were no barriers.

75% 85% *
59% 69% *
78% 84%

% of Students

● Black Students   ● White Students

Notes: An asterisk denotes that the difference between black and white students' ratings was statistically significant. A previous version of this figure reflected only a subset of student responses. This figure has been updated to reflect all student responses.

When comparing students' responses by school performance scores, students' aspirations for college are high across all letter grades. However, students in A/B schools are more likely to believe that they will complete college, relative to students in C and D/F schools. Still, 74% of students in D/F schools, and 80% of students in C schools, believe that they will go to college or further, relative to 90% of students in A/B schools. We found no significant differences on other measures of students' academic beliefs and behaviors by school performance score.

What do New Orleans youth say about school transportation and attendance?

One practical factor affecting students inside and outside of the classroom is transportation to school. Long bus or car rides could mean that students are losing out on sleep and spending less time with family or on homework. This has been an issue of particular concern with the elimination of attendance zones and use of school choice among charter schools in New Orleans; students can apply to attend school anywhere across the city, and are not guaranteed a seat in their closest school. This allows families to choose their preferred schools, but comes at a cost in terms of transportation time and other resources.

Figure 9 shows reported student transportation times to school in the morning across all modes of transportation. The majority of all surveyed students (70%) report that it takes them 30 minutes or less to get to school in the morning, with only 7% saying they spend more than an hour traveling to get to school.

Figure 9: Most students travel 30 minutes or less to school in the morning.

| 32% | 38% | 22% | 7% |

■ <15 mins   ■ 15-30 mins   ■ 31-60 mins   ■ 60+ mins

% of Students (All Modes of Transport)
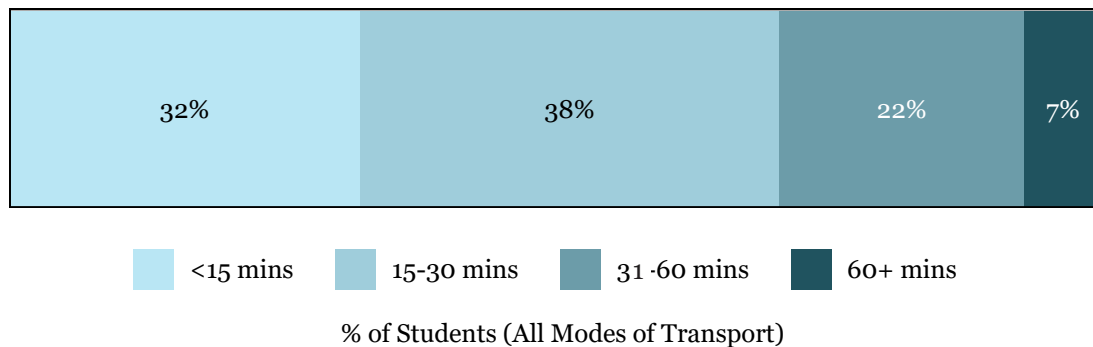
Fifty percent of students reported taking the yellow school bus to school. For those students, travel times are slightly longer. However, a majority of students who take the bus (60%) still say they experience travel times of 30 minutes or less, with just over 10% saying they spend an hour or longer traveling to school. These results are fairly consistent with a recent report we released in partnership with the Urban Institute, which estimated a median school bus commute time of 35 minutes for New Orleans students, using bus route data from nine schools.

> " *A majority of all students (70%) still say they experience travel times of 30 minutes or less, with 7% saying they spend an hour or longer traveling to school.* "

Figure 10 shows the percent of surveyed students from each zip code traveling greater than 30 minutes to school every morning, which helps us further understand students' transportation experiences. Students from New Orleans East, the West Bank, and Uptown report experiencing longer transportation times than those from other areas of the city.

Figure 10: Students in New Orleans East, the West Bank, and Uptown have the longest commute times.

Legend: 10-19.9% | 20-29.9% | 30-39.9% | 40%+ | Too few students surveyed

% of Students Traveling >30 Minutes to School
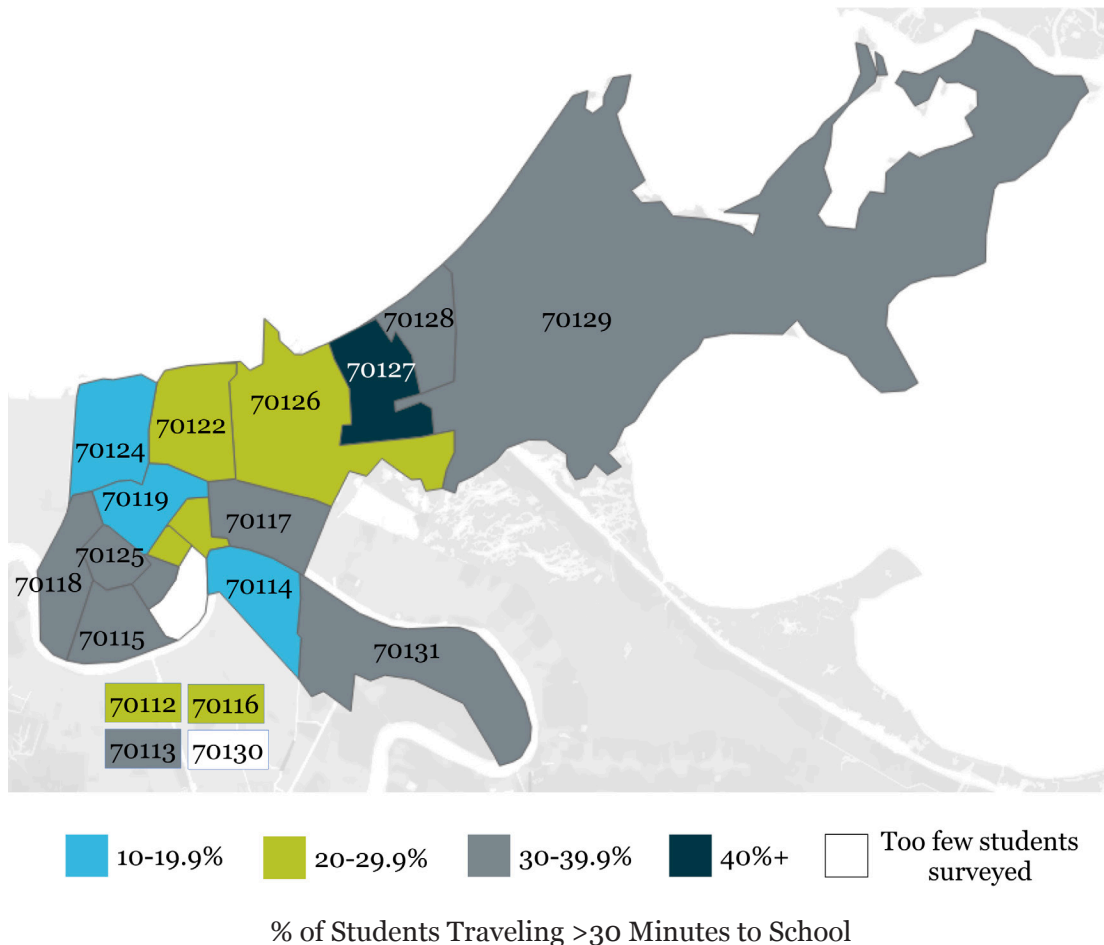
We also asked students about their attendance behaviors and found that the vast majority of students report being absent (91%) or late (89%) from school fewer than four days over the previous month. Of the students who report being absent or late for four or more days, the most frequently cited reasons include illness (50%), missing the bus (31%), or the bus or ride being late (29%).
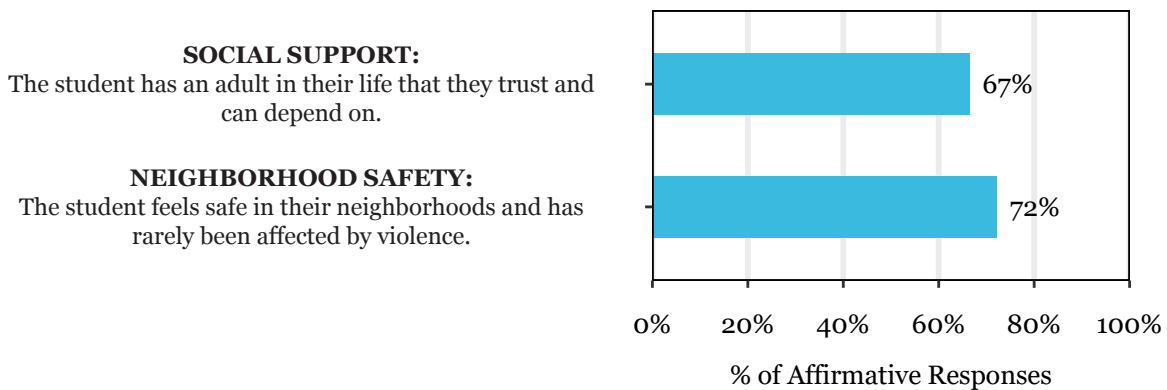
How do students' experiences of school transportation and attendance vary by race and school performance score?

We saw no transportation and attendance differences by school performance score. However, black students were more likely than white students to report having been late in the past four weeks. Part of this difference may be due to different modes of transportation: black students were nearly twice as likely as white students to report taking the school bus, and roughly three times as likely to report absence or lateness related to bus or transportation issues.

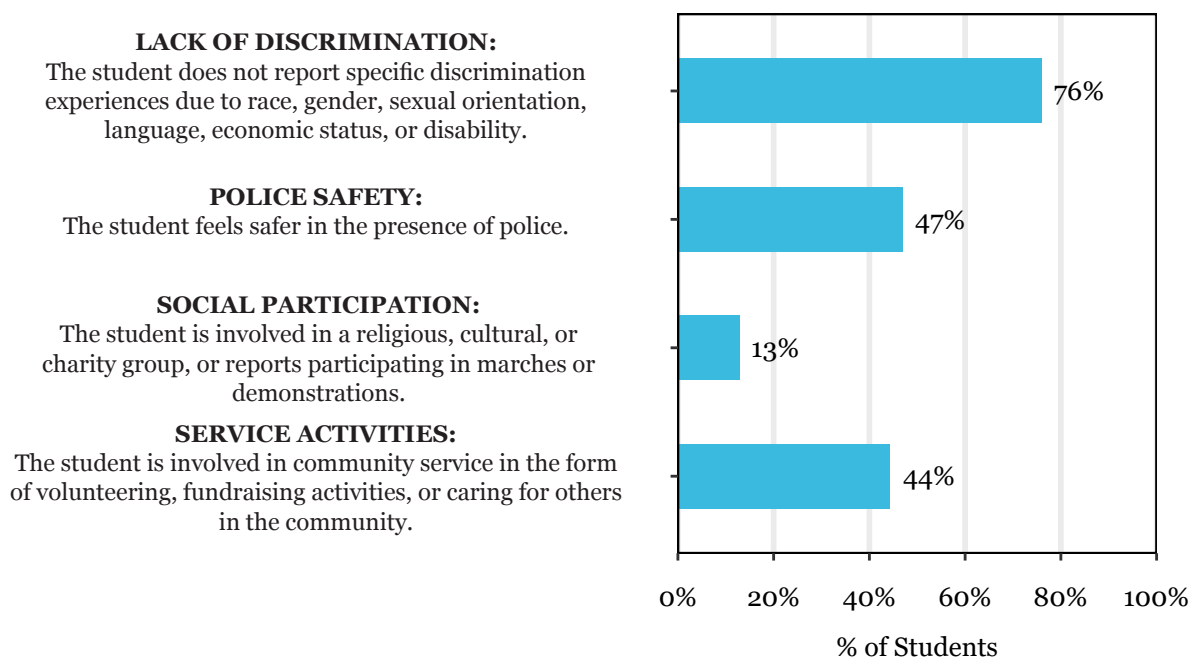# What do New Orleans youth say about their out-of-school experiences?

While we often focus on schools, young people actually spend more time outside of educational settings. Their experiences beyond school walls are important in their own right, and are also intertwined with classroom experiences. In an effort to get a more holistic picture of youth in the city, this survey measured multiple aspects of out-of-school experiences. Most students believe that they have good social support systems in place and feel safe in their neighborhoods (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Most students report having social support and feeling safe in their neighborhoods.

SOCIAL SUPPORT:
The student has an adult in their life that they trust and can depend on.
67%

NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY:
The student feels safe in their neighborhoods and has rarely been affected by violence.
72%

% of Affirmative Responses

The majority of students also report having not experienced any form of discrimination covered on the survey, including having been hassled by the police (Figure 12). However, fewer than half of students agree that they feel safer in the presence of police.

Figure 12: Though most high school students reported no experiences of discrimination, including being hassled by police, fewer than half reported feeling safer in the presence of police.

LACK OF DISCRIMINATION:
The student does not report specific discrimination experiences due to race, gender, sexual orientation, language, economic status, or disability.
76%

POLICE SAFETY:
The student feels safer in the presence of police.
47%

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION:
The student is involved in a religious, cultural, or charity group, or reports participating in marches or demonstrations.
13%

SERVICE ACTIVITIES:
The student is involved in community service in the form of volunteering, fundraising activities, or caring for others in the community.
44%

% of Students

Notes: Questions about Lack of Discrimination, Social Participation, and Service Activities were only asked of high school students.
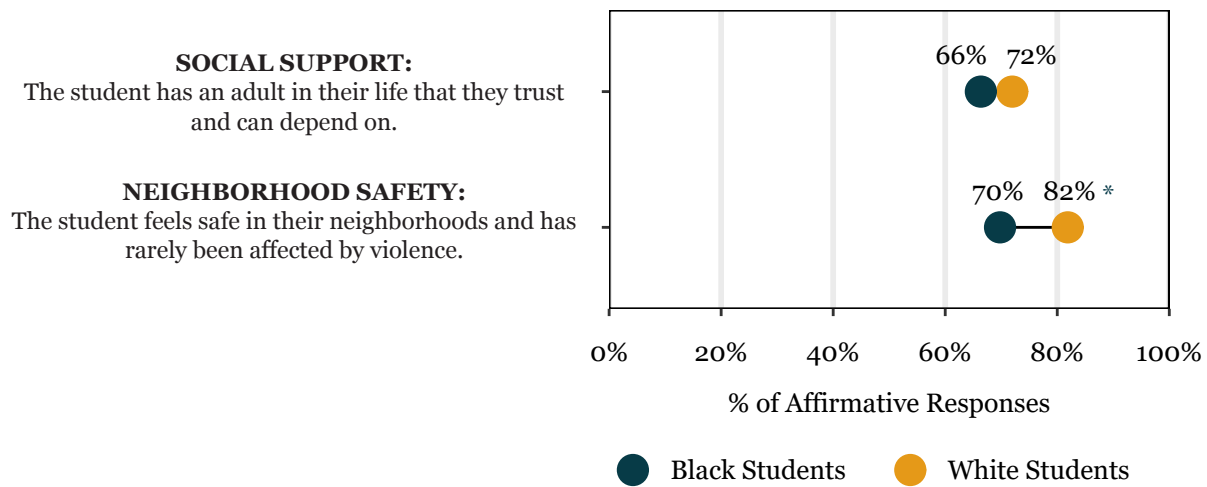
When responding to questions about service activities in their communities, nearly half of high school students reported that they engage in these activities more than a few times per year.

We also asked high school students about their substance use. Fewer than one third of surveyed high school students report ever having tried alcohol or marijuana. In the case of alcohol, this is substantially lower than national norms. This could be due, in part, to differences in survey administration, as the national Youth Risk Behavior Survey, which generates these national estimates, goes to great lengths to convince students of the anonymity of their responses, and conducts make-up surveys for absent students. In contrast, while our survey was also anonymous, it was administered mostly by school staff, and students may have been reluctant to report this sensitive information. For this reason, we have less confidence in the responses related to substance use.

How do out-of-school experiences vary by race and school performance score?

On measures of students' out-of-school experiences, black students are less likely to report feeling safe than white students, though they reported similar levels of social support (Figure 13).

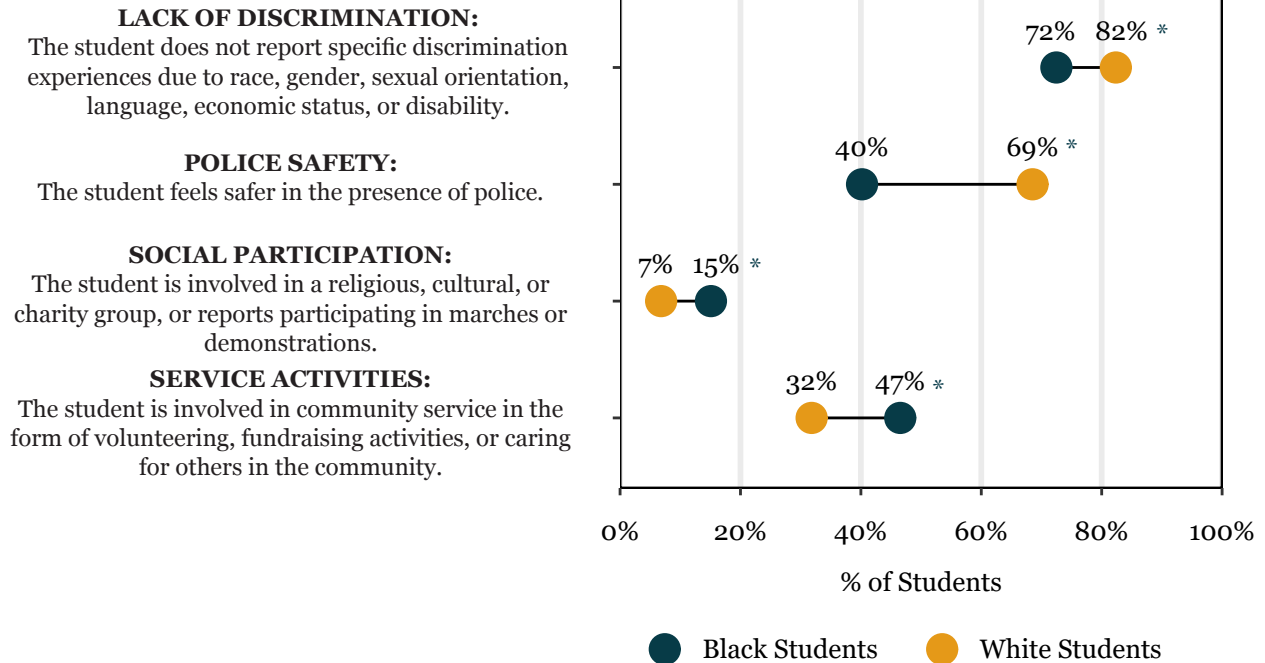**Figure 13: White students feel safer in their neighborhoods than their non-white peers.**

SOCIAL SUPPORT:
The student has an adult in their life that they trust and can depend on.
66% 72%

NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY:
The student feels safe in their neighborhoods and has rarely been affected by violence.
70% 82% *

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%
% of Affirmative Responses

● Black Students   ● White Students

Notes: An asterisk denotes that the difference between black and white students' ratings was statistically significant.

Figure 14 shows that 82% of white students had not reported any form of discrimination covered on the survey, compared to only 72% of black students. We also find that 69% of the time, white students reported feeling safer when police are present, as compared to black students, who felt safer only 40% of the time. There were fewer disparities when it came to students feeling socially supported in their communities. Around 2/3 of black and white students reported having an adult in their life that they can depend on, and black students were more likely than white students to be civically engaged, both in service activities and in social organizations.

Figure 14: White students are less likely to report experiencing discrimination, and more likely to report feeling safer in the presence of police, than their black peers.

LACK OF DISCRIMINATION:
The student does not report specific discrimination experiences due to race, gender, sexual orientation, language, economic status, or disability.

POLICE SAFETY:
The student feels safer in the presence of police.

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION:
The student is involved in a religious, cultural, or charity group, or reports participating in marches or demonstrations.

SERVICE ACTIVITIES:
The student is involved in community service in the form of volunteering, fundraising activities, or caring for others in the community.

Notes: An asterisk denotes that the difference between black and white students' ratings was statistically significant.

Summary

The purpose of our first citywide youth survey is to provide a detailed portrait of New Orleans' students experiences both inside and outside of their schools. Though there are many ongoing efforts to improve the lives of young people, we still clearly have a long way to go as a city. It is positive to see that students are challenged in the classroom, but worrisome that more do not think teachers care about them or their ideas and that students have less positive views of their teachers relative to a national comparison group.

It is also good that, despite high crime rates, most youth feel safe and supported in their neighborhoods. However, it is a concern that so many do not feel safer when in the presence of police. Moreover, it should give us pause that on this—and so many other measures—students of color are less likely to report positive experiences than white students.

These results are a call to action for schools and other organizations in the city. They tell us, in some detail, where we are falling short. It is our hope that New Orleans' leaders of education, government, and non-profits will listen and respond to what the city's youth are telling us. In the coming years, we plan to administer this survey again. We will keep listening.

How is this Research Related to Other ERA-New Orleans Studies?

The insights gleaned in this report build on previous research from the ERA-New Orleans:

In *New Orleans Student Commute Times by Car, Public Transit, and School Bus*, which was released in partnership with The Urban Institute, Jane Arnold Lincove and Jon Valant found average commute times were 35 minutes each way for students who took the school bus, 14 minutes by car, and 47 minutes by public transit. This is fairly consistent with our survey results, which indicate that 70% of all students travel 30 minutes or less to school.

Mónica Hernández examined the topic of fair discipline in *The Effects of the New Orleans School Reforms on Exclusionary Discipline Practice*s. There was a large spike in the expulsion rate (1.5-2.7 percentage points, a 140-250% increase) in the first few years after the reforms, but rate returned to pre-Katrina levels after public pressure and legal challenges. In addition, the city developed a centralized expulsion system in 2013. In our survey, 68% of respondents report that discipline policies at their school are clear and equitable.

In *Teachers' Perspectives on Learning and Work Environments under the New Orleans School Reforms*, Lindsay Bell Weixler, Douglas N. Harris, and Nathan Barrett surveyed teachers who worked before and after Katrina. These teachers reported lower job satisfaction due to less job security, longer hours, and less autonomy over their work. However, they also reported a greater emphasis on academic and socio-emotional goals, greater use of data, and stronger school cultures. While this report focuses on student voices, it is also important to consider teachers' perspectives of their learning and work environments.

About the Education Research Alliance for New Orleans

The mission of the Education Research Alliance for New Orleans (ERA-New Orleans) is to produce rigorous, objective, and useful research to understand the post-Katrina school reforms and their long-term effects on all students. Based at Tulane University, ERA-New Orleans is a partnership between university-based researchers and a broad spectrum of local education groups. Our Advisory Board includes (in alphabetical order): the Louisiana Association of Educators, the Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools, the Louisiana Federation of Teachers, the Louisiana Recovery School District, New Schools for New Orleans, the Orleans Parish School Board, the Orleans Public Education Network, and the Urban League of Greater New Orleans. For more information, please visit the organization's website below.

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