

Family Involvement in Education: A NATIONAL PORTRAIT

Highlights

Sponsored by:

The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education
The GTE Foundation
The U.S. Department of Education

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Introduction

This booklet showcases findings from a new analysis of data from “Family Involvement in Education: A National Portrait” and provides a checklist for parents to assess their own school on issues of family involvement. The National Portrait Study was sponsored by the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, the GTE Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Education. The study was conducted in May and June of 1997 by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago.

Key findings of the survey are that

- Schools are working hard to involve parents in their children's schooling, and parents are actively engaged in their children's learning experience.
- Even so, most parents would like still more information and assistance from schools and teachers about how to support their children's education, both at school and at home.
- In addition to in-school activities, parents are eager for their children to have school-based after-school and summer opportunities. Demand for these programs significantly outstrips current supply.
- Primary school parents are more involved in every aspect of their children's schooling than are middle school parents.

Interested readers may contact 1-800-USA-LEARN to obtain a copy of the unabridged report, “Family Involvement in Education: A National Portrait.”

Instructions

The following pages present a series of indicators of family involvement that have been developed from the National Portrait data. Parents and school administrators can use this booklet to assess their own schools according to these indicators and to see how their experiences compare to those of the National Portrait parents.

On each checklist page, follow the instructions under "How Does Your School Total Up?" to check off your answer to the questions shown. Count up the number of checks and write the number in the box marked "Total." In the lower graph, find the number you wrote in the "Total" box.

Refer to the percentages in the indicator box to see how all National Portrait parents compared their own child's school to your child's school. For example, if you marked "four" in the "Total" box on this page, then 33 percent of parents were invited to more of these activities than you were; 26 percent of parents were invited to the same number of activities as you were; and 41 percent of parents were invited to fewer activities than were parents at your child's school.

Survey Methodology

In the spring of 1997, National Portrait Study participants were drawn from the 1996 General Social Survey, which constructed a nationally representative sample of households to study social indicators in the United States. Each National Portrait participant was asked to discuss the schooling experiences of one child during the 1996-1997 school year. That child was randomly selected from all of the children enrolled in grades one through eight in a regular school and for whom the participant was a primary caretaker.

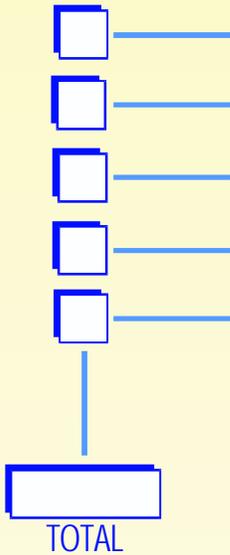
Three hundred seventy-six parents completed the ten-minute telephone interview, for a final response rate of 71.5 percent. The Office of Management and Budget requires the U.S. Department of Education to note that without a 90 percent response rate on this survey, "the data are not nationally representative," and that there is "potential bias" in the sample.

Opportunities

An overwhelming 90 percent of parents reported at least two different opportunities to be involved at their child's school. Schools most often encourage activities such as volunteering or committee work that helps the school budget. Less often, schools sponsor workshops or tell parents about community resources -- activities that may improve student outcomes but also require school resources. A disappointing 38 percent of parents had never been invited to observe their child's classes while in session.

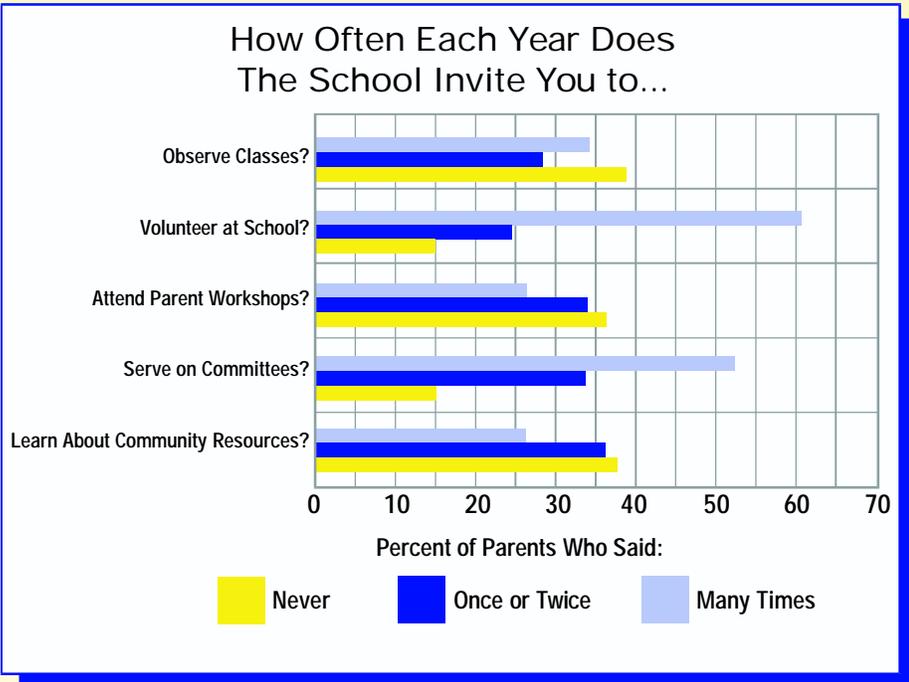
How Does Your School Total Up?

✓ = at least once

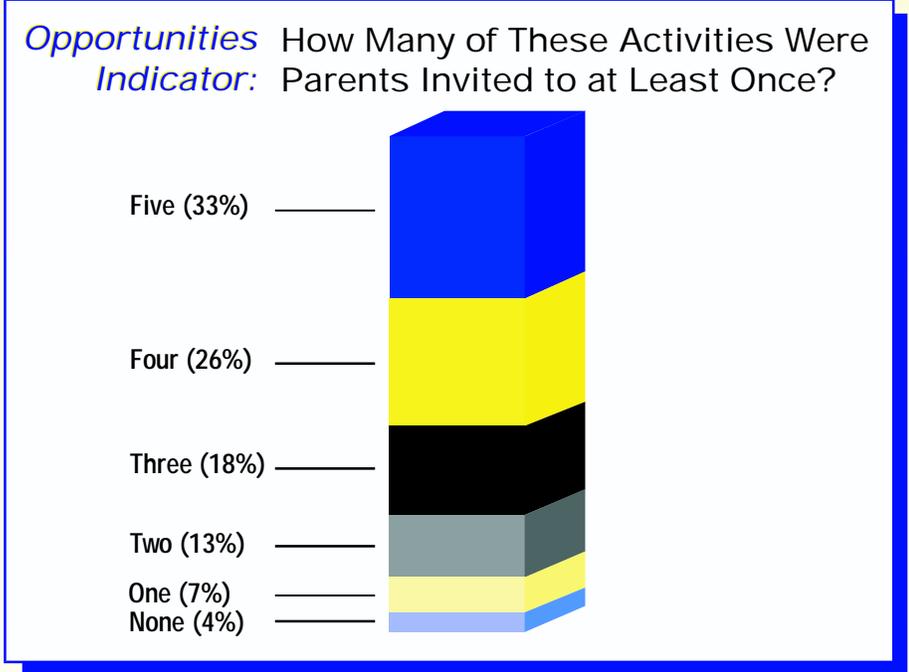


How does your school compare?

How Often Each Year Does The School Invite You to...

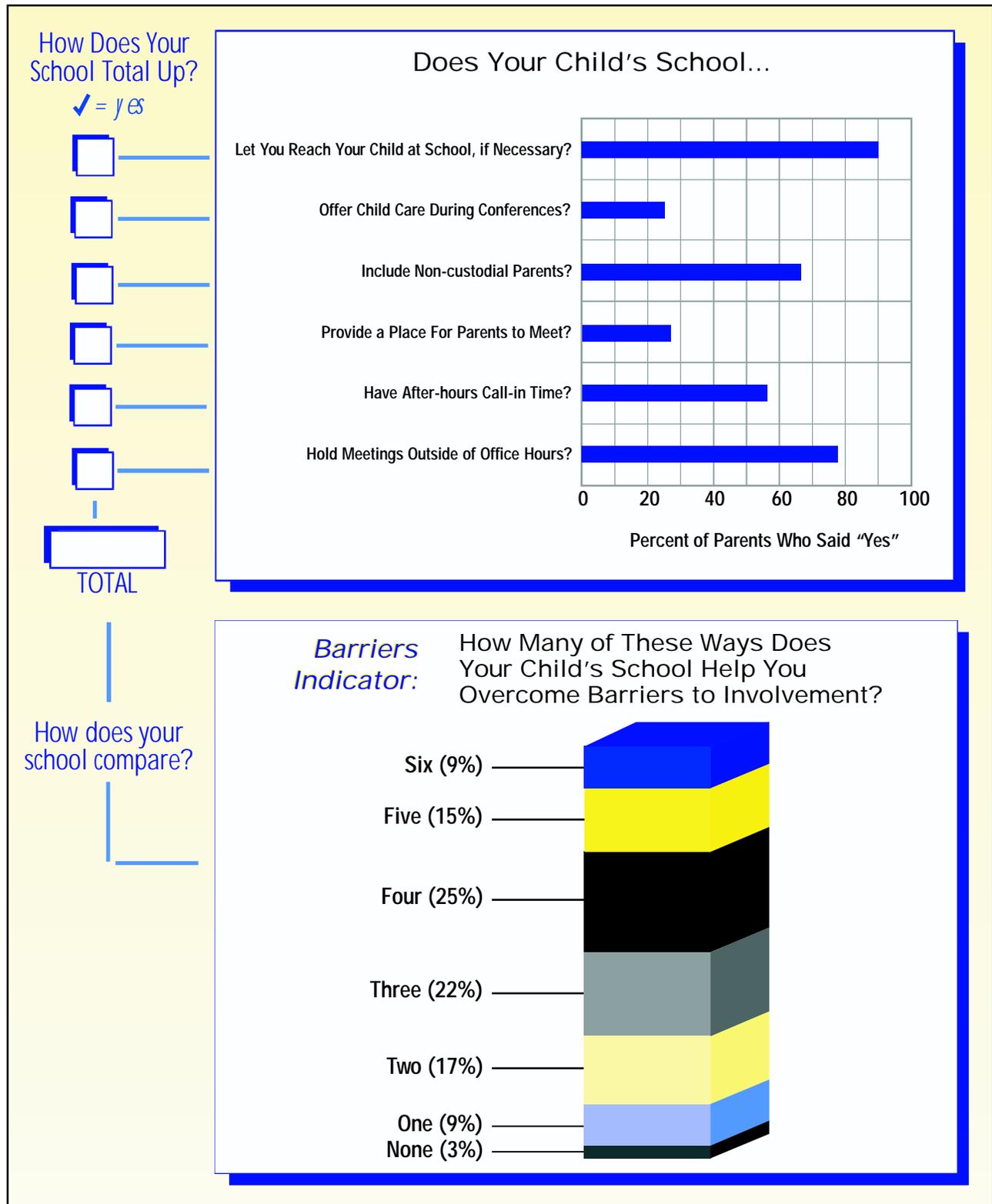


Opportunities Indicator: How Many of These Activities Were Parents Invited to at Least Once?



Barriers

If parents face barriers to being involved at school, invitations alone aren't worth much. Schools seem to realize this, and 85 percent of schools schedule meetings or call-in times on weekends, early mornings, or evenings, to make it possible for working parents to attend. Even this doesn't seem to be enough -- over 90 percent of parents who didn't have these options would like to have them.



Communication Topics

How well are schools using these communication technologies? Two of three parents felt that their child's school did "very well" in explaining how children were expected to behave. Parents were less complimentary about achievement information. Fewer than half thought that the school did very well in explaining what children should know and be able to do at their grade level, and just one in three said that the school did very well in providing samples of successful work done by students at different grade levels. Thirty percent of middle school parents reported that the school did very well in providing information about future educational opportunities for their child.

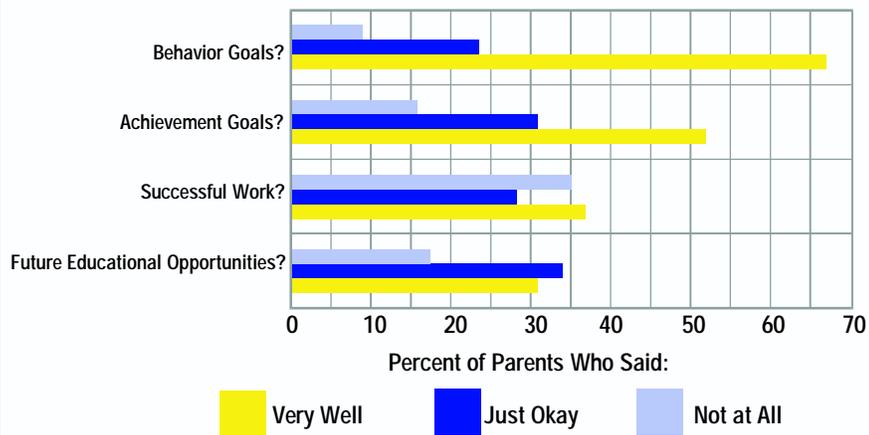
How Does Your School Total Up?

✓ = very well

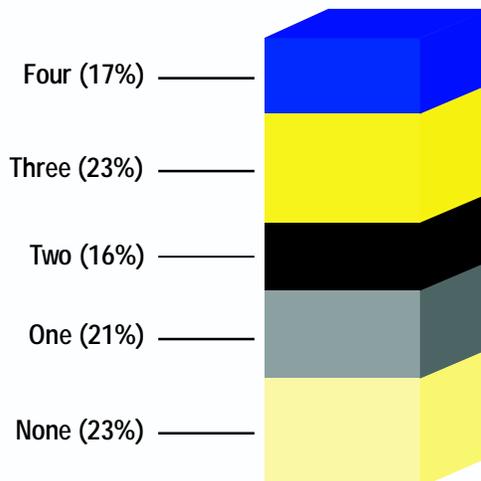
 |

How does your school compare?

How Well Did the School Let You Know About...

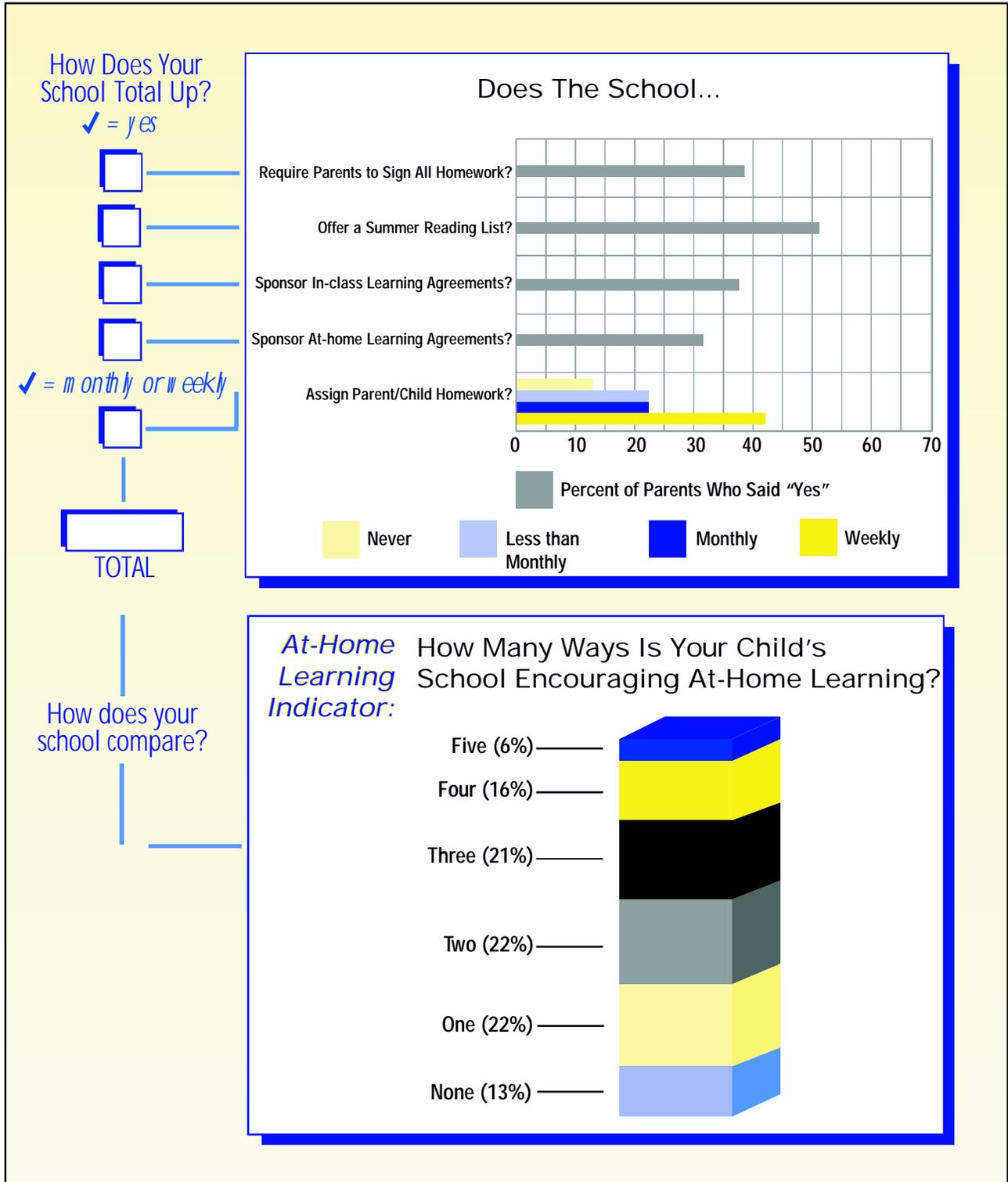


Communication Topics Indicator: How Many Topics Did the School Do "Very Well" Communicating?



At-Home Learning

Eighty-eight percent of National Portrait parents read together at home with their child at least monthly. Almost half of study parents reported that their child's school bolsters this commitment to learning at home by offering summer reading lists or involving parents in homework assignments. Approximately one in three parents also signed agreements with their child's teacher to support learning both in the classroom and at home.



Parent/Teacher Interactions

Ninety-four percent of National Portrait parents had at least one contact with their child's teacher during the school year. Eight of every ten reported that their child's teacher listens to parents, is accessible by telephone, and gives positive feedback about the child. Parents also noted some room for improvement: only 71 percent said that teachers followed through on parents' requests, and fewer recalled the teacher making a suggestion about how the child might improve at school.

How Does Your School Total Up?

✓ = yes

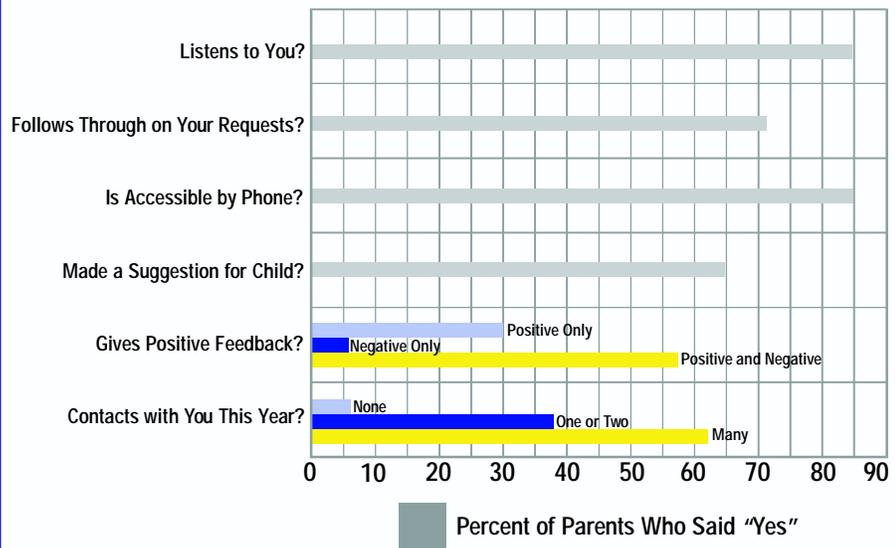
✓ = some positive

✓ = at least once

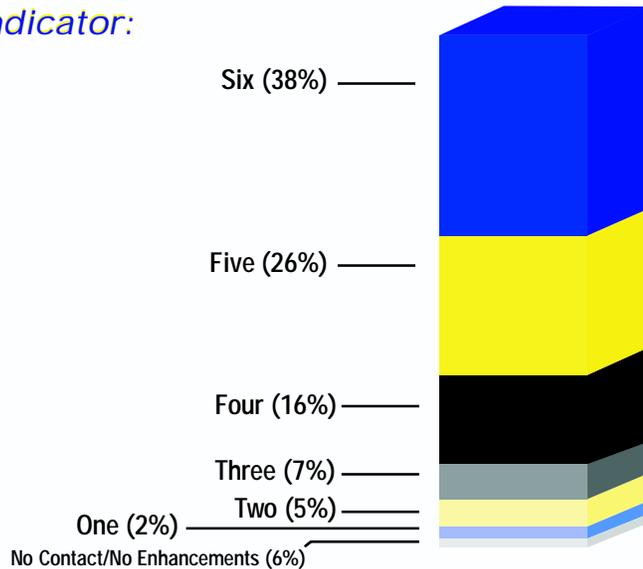
TOTAL

How does your school compare?

About Your Child's Teacher...

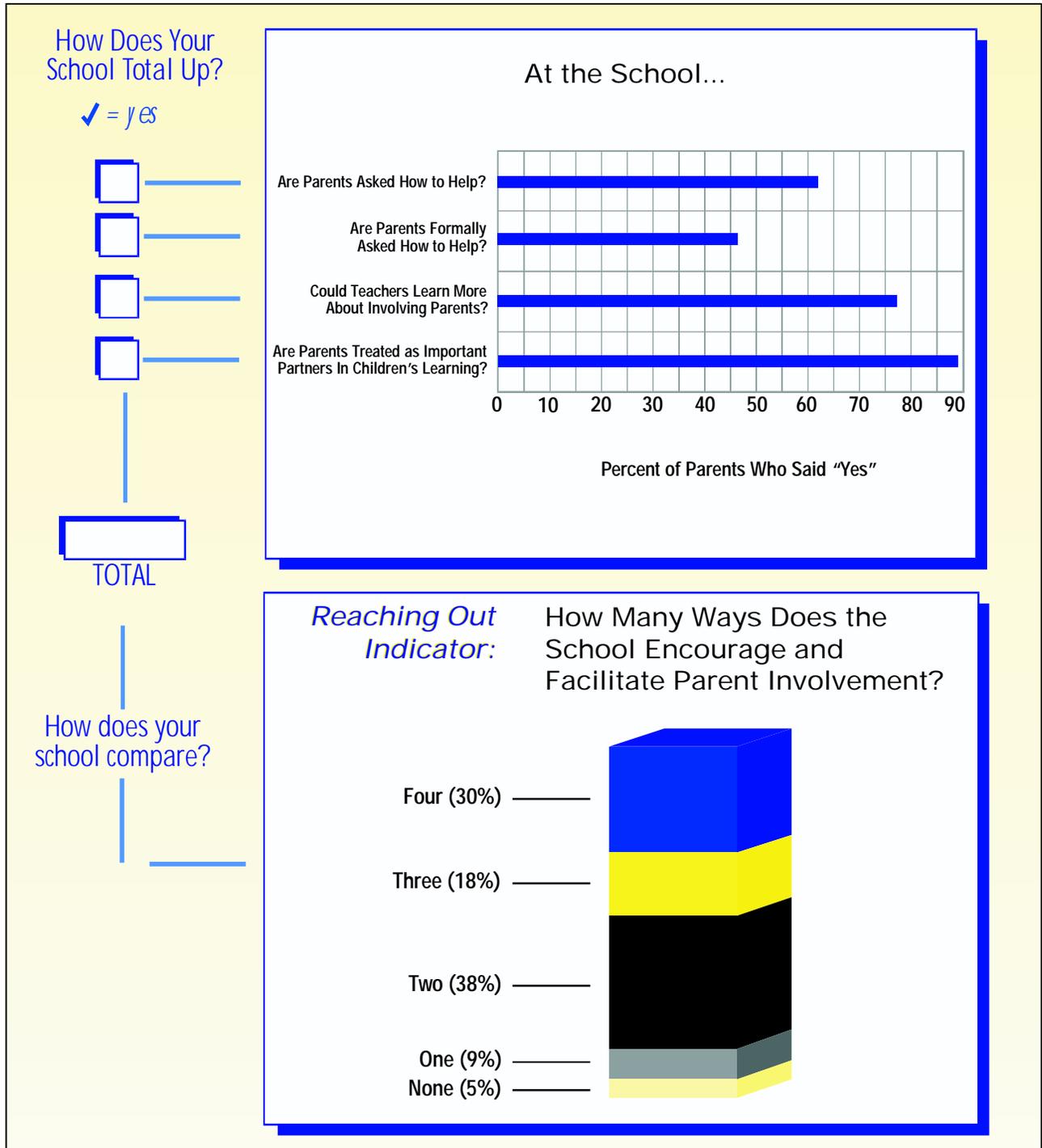


Parent/Teacher Interactions Indicator: How Many Ways Did Teachers Enhance Interactions with Parents?

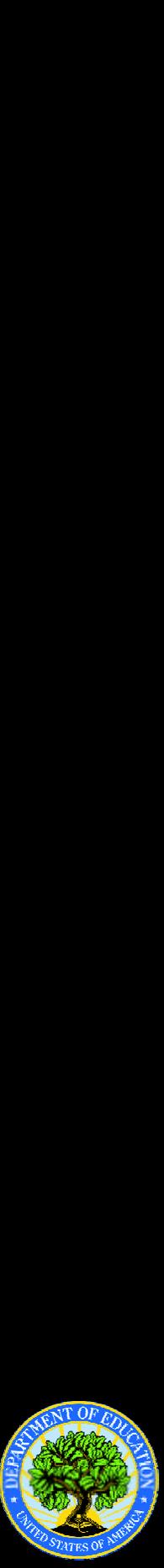


Reaching Out

Parents are aware and appreciative of schools' efforts to involve them in their children's education. Eighty-nine percent of National Portrait parents say that their child's school treats them as important partners in their child's education. Parents' responses also point the way for additional work: 77 percent feel that the teachers need to learn more about encouraging involvement. Schools can begin encouraging involvement by asking what parents need. Thirty-eight percent of parents had never been asked how their school might help them be more involved at school.



For copies of the highlights or main findings of
"Family Involvement in Education: A National Portrait"
or for more information on the
Partnership for Family Involvement in Education,
call: **1- 800-USA-LEARN** or visit the Department's
web site at **www.ed.gov**.



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