

# **Communities Of Color And Public School Reform**

**Findings from qualitative and quantitative research  
Conducted May – June 2011**

**By Hart Research Associates, Brossard Research, and the  
Insights Marketing Group**

**Conducted in partnership with: Alliance for Excellent Education, Black Alliance for Educational Options, Campaign for High School Equity, Communities for Teaching Excellence, Leadership Conference Education Fund, League of United Latin American Citizens, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund, National Council of La Raza, National Indian Education Association, National Urban League, Public Education Network, United Negro College Fund, Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, Southern Education Foundation, Stand for Children**

# Objectives

- Understand the perceptions of low- to moderate-income African-American and Latino parents/caregivers concerning the schools in their communities and the schools their children attend
- Understand the importance of a college education and the college-going expectations that parents of color have for their children
- Assess attitudes of parents/caregivers toward key aspects of public school reform
- Identify effective means of connecting with parents/caregivers of color to enlist their support for school reform and improvement efforts

# Communities Of Color Research Team

**Brossard Research**

**Insights Marketing Group**

**Hart Research Associates**

- Mario Brossard of Brossard Research conducted all the African-American focus groups and led the analysis of the African-American portion of the qualitative and quantitative segments of this study.
- Rebeca Cantu-Helmstetler of Insights Marketing Group conducted all the Latino focus groups and led the analysis of the Latino portion of the qualitative and quantitative segments of this study.
- Geoff Garin of Hart Research assembled the team and coordinated all facets of the research. Mr. Garin led the analysis of the Native American and the Southeast Asian portions of this study.

***This research was conducted with the generous support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.***

# Methodology: Focus Groups

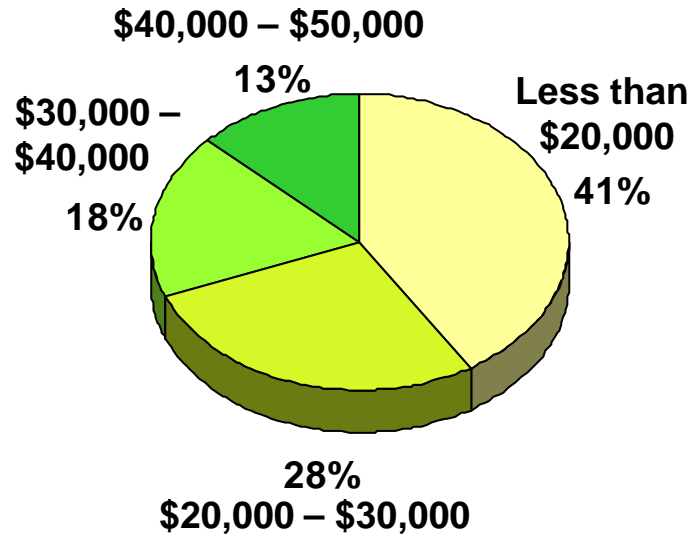
- Six focus groups were conducted among low- and moderate-income African-American parents and caregivers of children enrolled in public schools, including two sessions in Los Angeles, CA, two sessions in Columbia, SC, and two sessions in Pittsburgh, PA.
- Six focus groups were conducted among low- and moderate-income Latino parents and caregivers of children enrolled in public schools, including two sessions in Los Angeles, CA, two sessions in Chicago, IL, and two sessions in Raleigh, NC.
- Locations were selected based in part on the level of reform that has been undertaken in the local public schools and in part on the size of the local public school district.
- All focus groups were conducted between May 11 and 19, 2011.
- Two additional telephone focus groups were conducted with community-based leaders from Native American and Southeast Asian communities.

# Methodology: African-American Survey

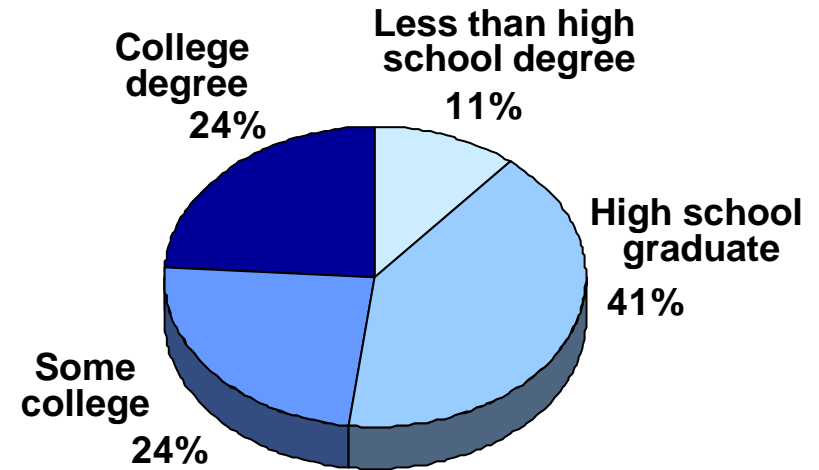
- A representative national cross section of 603 African-American parents and primary caregivers from low- and moderate-income households whose children currently attend public schools fielded June 21 to 30, 2011. The sampling was conducted to focus on areas with relatively high concentrations of African-American households.
  - 53% of African-American respondents say their children attend schools in which most of the students are African Americans, and another 31% report that many, though not most, of the students in their children's schools are African Americans.
  - 82% of respondents are parents, and another 13% are grandparents of the children to whom they are a primary caregiver.
- The median reported household income of respondents in this sample is \$33,214.

# Demographics Of African-American Sample

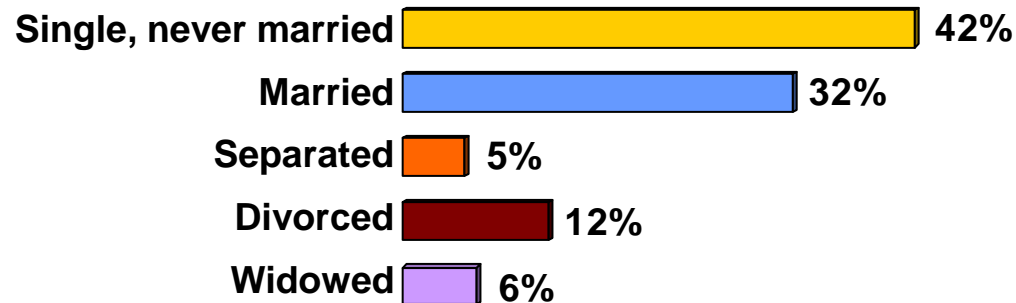
## Household Income



## Educational Attainment



## Marital Status

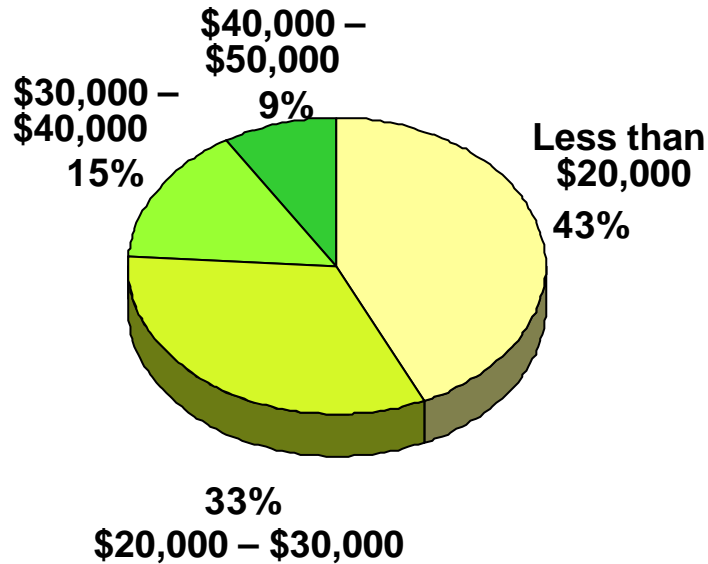


# Methodology: Latino Survey

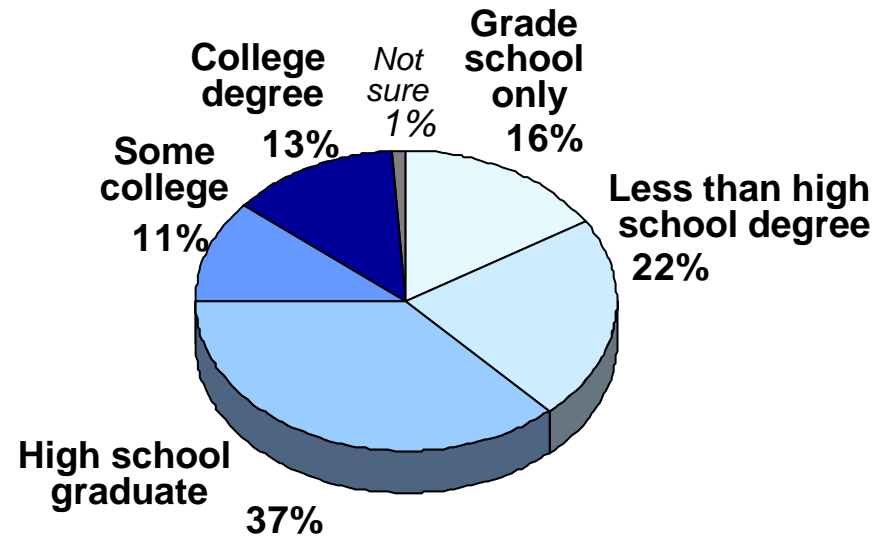
- A representative national cross section of 601 Latino parents and primary caregivers from low- and moderate-income households whose children currently attend public schools fielded June 25 to July 1, 2011. The sampling was conducted to focus on areas with relatively high concentrations of Latino households. Two-thirds of the interviews were conducted in Spanish.
  - 57% of Latino respondents say their children attend schools in which most of the students are Latino, and another 25% report that many, though not most, of the students in their children's schools are Latino.
  - 90% of respondents are parents, another 7% are grandparents of the children to whom they are a primary caregiver, and 3% are other blood relatives.
  - 54% of Latino respondents are foreign-born (two-thirds from Mexico), and 44% were born in the United States.
  - Three-quarters have no formal education beyond high school, including 38% who are not high school graduates. Only 8% have a four-year college degree.
  - The median reported household income is \$22,212.

# Demographics Of Latino Sample

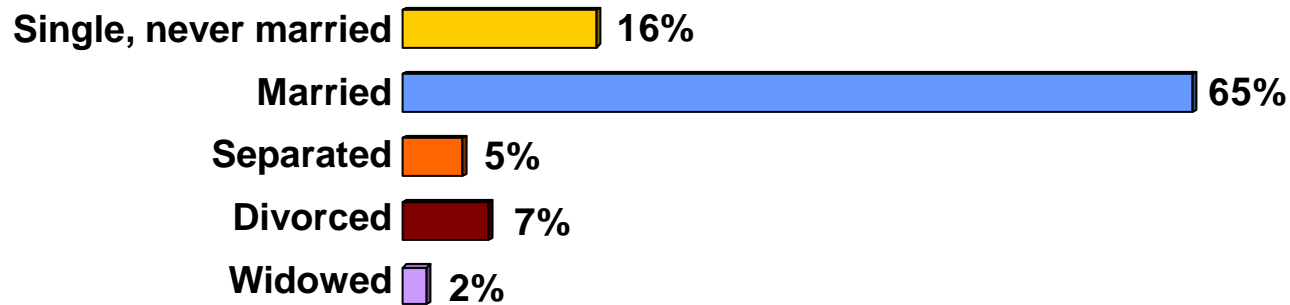
## Household Income



## Educational Attainment



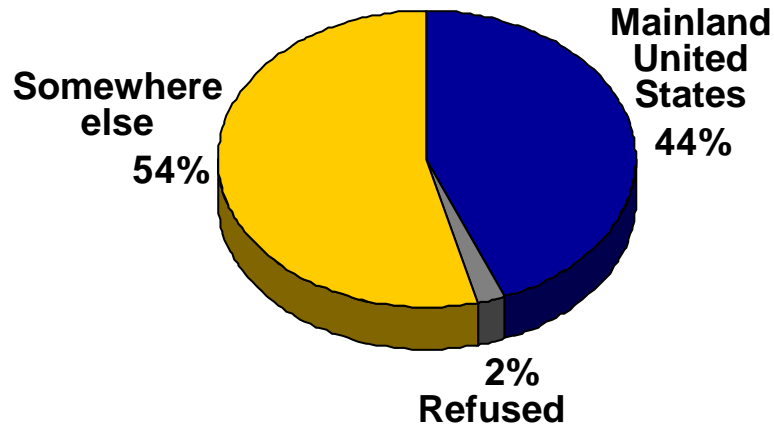
## Marital Status



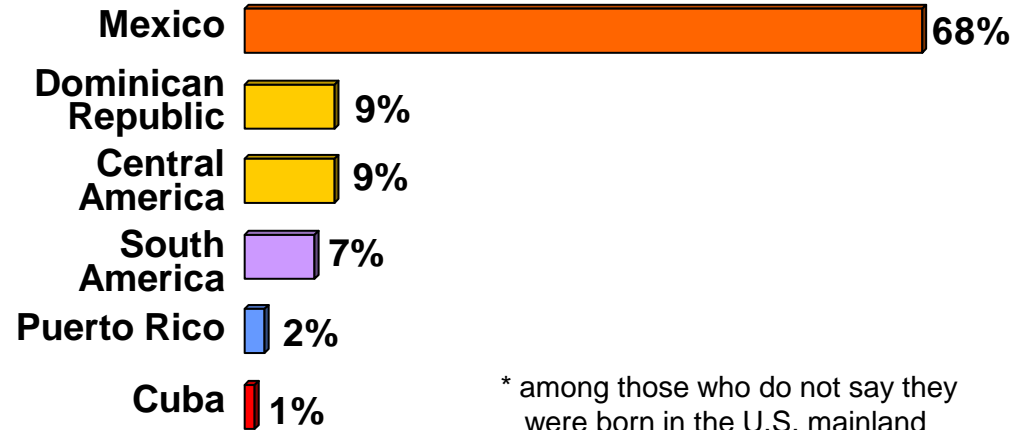


# Demographics Of Latino Sample

**Place of Birth**

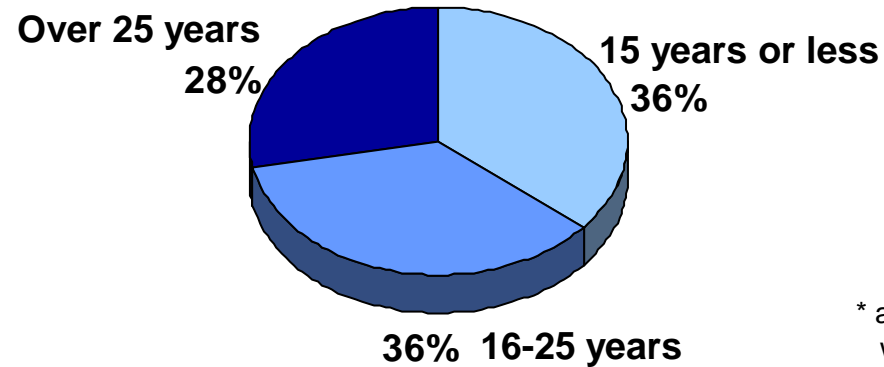


**Country of Birth\***



\* among those who do not say they were born in the U.S. mainland

**Length of Time Living in U.S.\***



\* among those who do not say they were born in the U.S. mainland

# Key Observations And Takeaways

- **Parents/caregivers express a clear concern about the state of public education and the need for change.** Majorities perceive high dropout rates and low college attendance rates to be problems in their communities, and when they think about schools that need to be reformed, they are thinking primarily about their own schools. In contrast, the general public is much less likely to see the schools in their own communities as needing reform (based on prior recent research).
- **Overwhelmingly, parents place responsibility for educational outcomes – including explicitly placing blame for poor outcomes – on parents, families, and students’ home lives, more than on deficient schools. And they certainly believe that poverty is a factor.** Their view of what is required to improve educational outcomes begins with the individual (parents taking more responsibility, students working harder, schools providing more individual attention to kids who need it), rather than systemic reform.
- **Parents of color – even more so than white parents – give strong support to the “college and career readiness goal,” and they express both a desire and an expectation for their own kids to go to college.** Parents of color are more concerned about affording college than about their child being prepared for it, but one of the things school reform advocates will have to address is that parents don’t know what they don’t know (or don’t know until it is too late).

# Key Observations And Takeaways

- **School funding is the initial prism through which parents think about school quality and reform.** They believe their schools are perennially underfunded and are skeptical of the suggestion that they can do more with less, because their whole experience with the public schools has been about having less. The first priority for increasing resources should be to increase help and attention for struggling students.
- **There is a clear and outspoken desire for teachers (specifically) to do a better job helping students.** Parents' view of good teaching is measured more by the amount of caring and attention teachers devote to children than by student performance on standardized testing. As a priority, parents put a greater emphasis on helping teachers improve than on weeding out bad teachers.
- **Parents generally are not even aware that there is an education reform movement for them to support, or that it is seeking their support.**

# Key Observations And Takeaways

- **Reactions to key elements of the reform agenda often are ambivalent.**
  - **Parents (especially African Americans) support high standards and expectations for all, but many believe that higher standards without more support is setting their kids up for failure.** In this context, there is a big emphasis on more individual help for struggling students, and among Hispanics, more help for students learning English.
  - **African Americans (but not Hispanics) have mixed feelings about using standardized testing as the means for measuring achievement and for holding schools and teachers accountable,** including parents who rate the schools in their community as not so good or poor. Parents feel it is unfair to use these tests as the measuring stick, because the tests do not take into account outside factors, like school resources, that affect student learning.
  - **When their local schools are performing poorly, the first option is to try to fix them rather than close them.** After a few years of intensive support, if a school still is failing, African Americans are open to the idea of it being closed, while Hispanics are less likely to believe there should be a deadline for improvement.
- **Parent organizations – above civil rights and community organizations, the media, and faith-based groups – are truly important and valued sources on which parents rely for information and coordination.** Parents are quite willing to use parent organizations as a vehicle for improving their schools or helping their children succeed.

# Key Observations And Takeaways

- **Both Native American and Southeast Asian community leaders also put a dominant emphasis on the importance of parental engagement and involvement in addressing the primary educational challenges of their communities.**
  - **Native American community leaders emphasize the importance of engaging parents to build a stronger college-going culture among Native American youth and creating a higher premium on educational success.** They note that many Native American parents were themselves failed or mistreated as students by the education system, which in turn creates an ongoing mistrust and distance from the education system today. Native American community leaders say a critical element for engaging parents, as well as students, is making schools more consistently respectful of Native American sovereignty, traditions, and culture.
  - **Southeast Asian community leaders indicate parents in their communities already have a strong orientation to educational success, but are not empowered to navigate the education system to help their children achieve their goals.** These leaders emphasize the importance of reaching out to parents through local community organizations that can help parents understand how to be effective consumers of the education system. In addition to language barriers, leaders note that traditions of deferring to educational authorities create hurdles to parents becoming effective advocates for their children, and they highlight the role that trusted community organizations can play in mediating and overcoming these barriers.

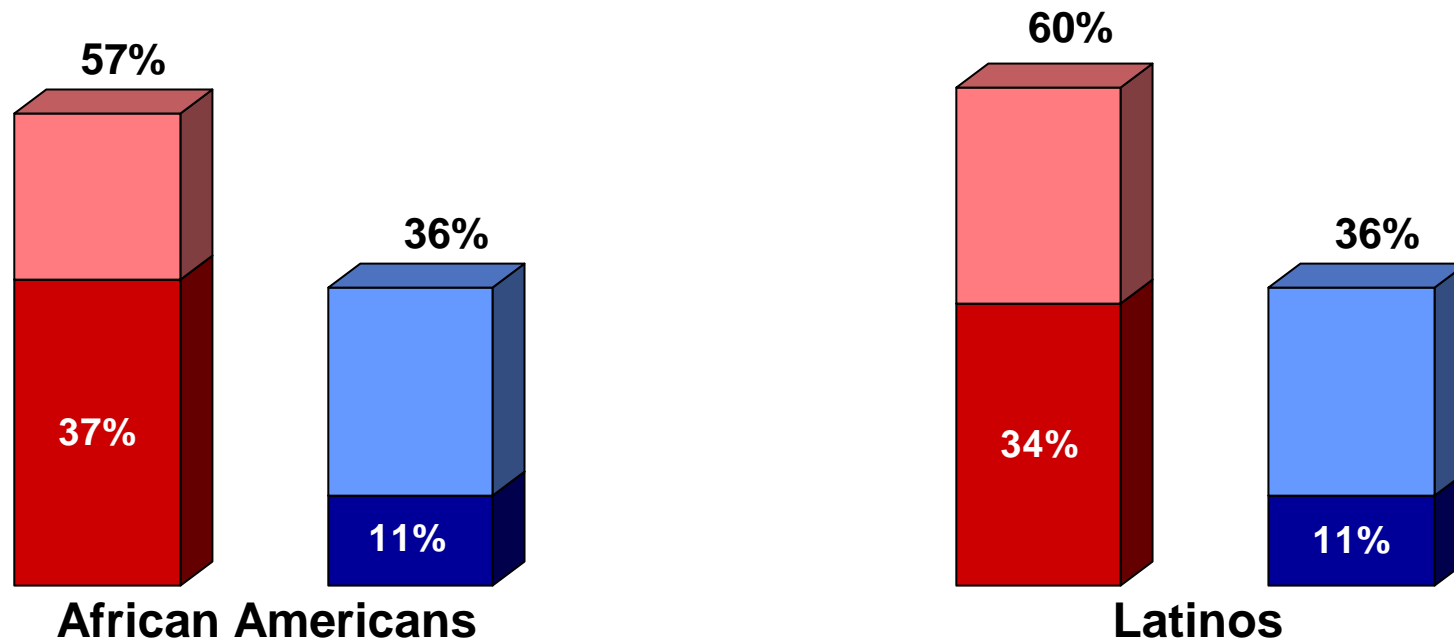
***A DETAILED  
LOOK AT THE  
FINDINGS***

# Parents clearly recognize that their local schools have problems that must be addressed.

- Majorities perceive high dropout rates and low college attendance rates to be big problems in their communities, leading these parents to think about the schools their children attend when thinking about the kinds of schools that are really in need of reform.

*How big a problem are the issues of [African-American/Hispanic] high school dropouts and low college attendance and graduation rates in your community?*

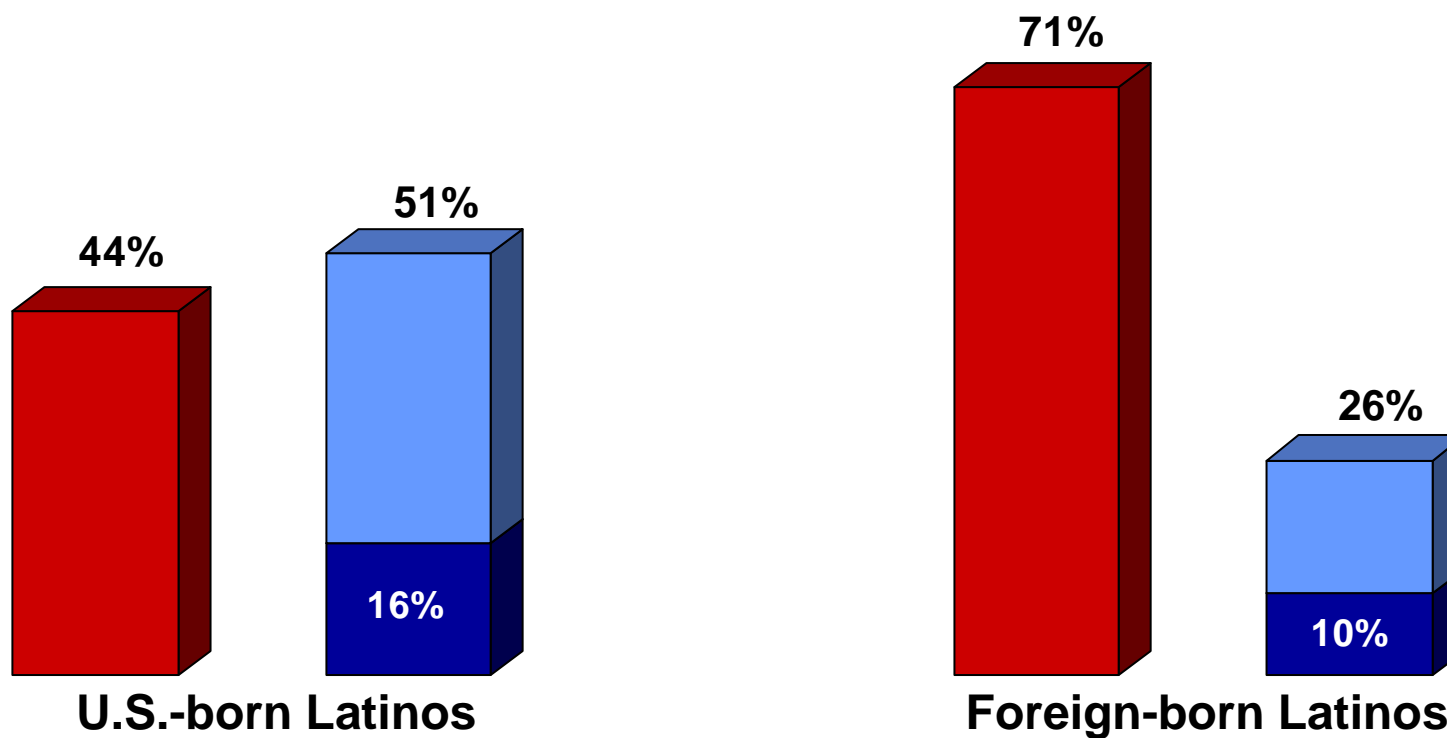
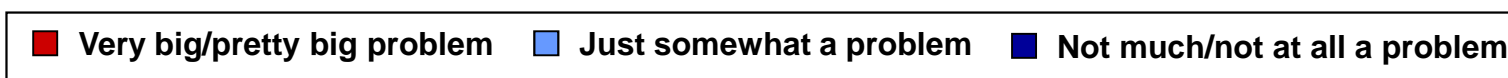
Very big problem    Pretty big problem    Just somewhat a problem    Not much/not at all a problem



# Parents clearly recognize that their local schools have problems that must be addressed: *U.S.-born vs. Foreign-born Latinos*

- Latinos born outside the United States identify high dropout rates and low college attendance rates as being particularly acute in their communities.

*How big a problem are the issues of Hispanic high school dropouts and low college attendance and graduation rates in your community?*

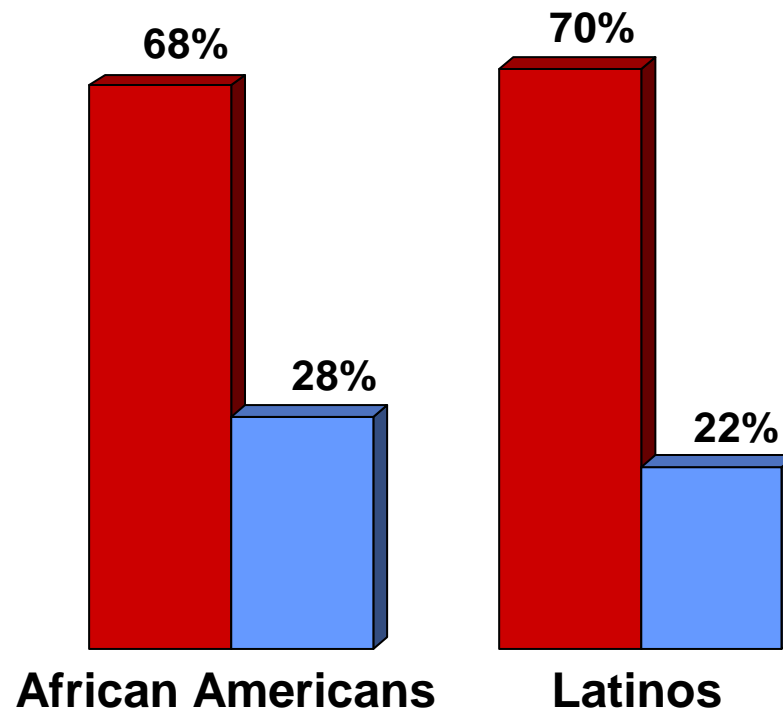




# Parents clearly recognize that their local schools have problems that must be addressed:

***IMOBY (in my own back yard)***

*When I think about the kinds of public schools that are really in need of reform and improvement, I think more about:*



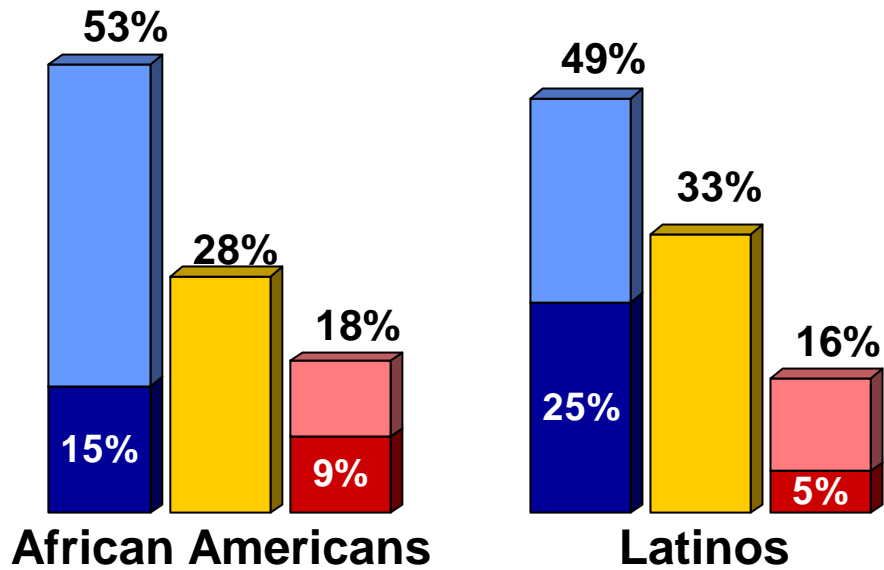
## **The general public, in contrast, is much less likely to see the schools in their own communities as needing reform.**

- Hart Research asked the same question of the general public in December 2008. In that survey, only 37% of all Americans (and just 35% of those with children in public schools) said they were thinking about the schools in their own communities – rather than schools in other places – as the ones really in need of reform and improvement.
- Among the most affluent Americans, those with a household income of more than \$100,000, fully 68% said they were thinking about schools in other places and communities as the ones really in need of reform and improvement.

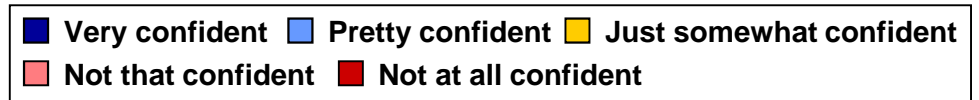
# Many parents still rate school performance favorably and are optimistic about educational outcomes for their children.

- Despite the fact that many see important problems in their communities, half of African Americans and Latinos rate the performance of their local schools as excellent or pretty good and are very or pretty confident that their kids will get the kind of education they want for them.

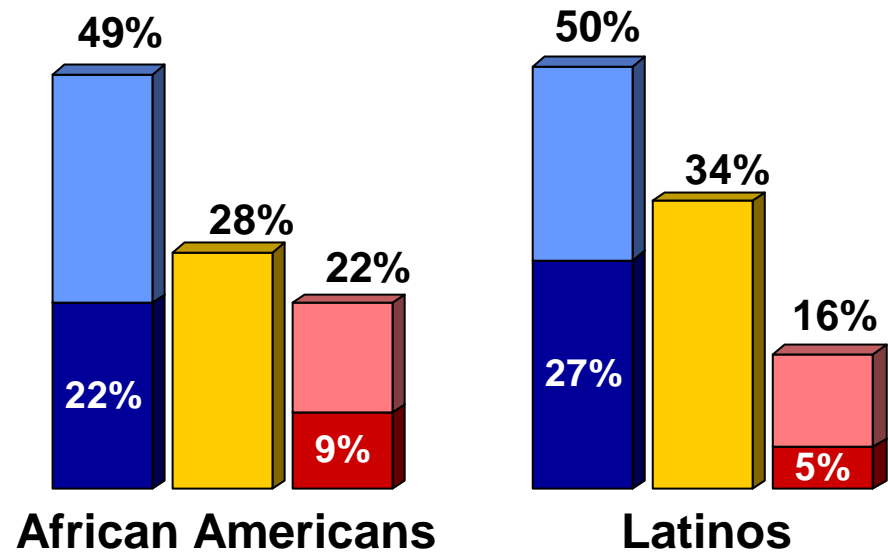
## Overall Performance of Public Schools in My Local Community



## Confidence that Local Public Schools Will Provide Education I Want for My Child



Latinos Very/Pretty Confident:  
 Born in U.S. 47%  
 Foreign-born 52%



# **When this dynamic is probed in focus groups, parents' confidence is based on expectations of themselves rather than on the quality of the school.**

**“I am confident because I just do not settle for less. I ask questions, I search and research, I have discussions about college, we have visited colleges. Failing is not an option.”**

*Low-income African-American mom/Pittsburgh, PA*

**“I have confidence that my kids will graduate college and in the top 10%, because they are my kids and I have instilled that in them since they were very young.”**

*Low-income Latino dad/Los Angeles, CA*

**“If my child starts slipping, I know that her mother and I are helping her on a nightly basis with spelling words, homework, etc.”**

*Moderate-income African-American dad/Columbia, SC*

**“I will always make sure he does [well]. I will not leave it up to the school systems to give him the best education possible. I will make sure they do!”**

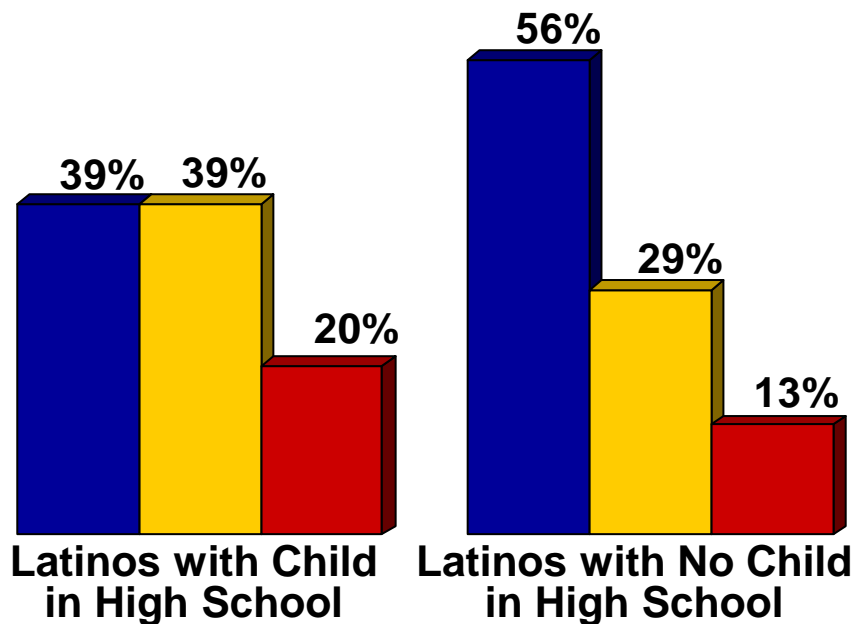
*Moderate-income Latino mom/Chicago, IL*

# Latinos with children in high school are less satisfied with schools and less confident about educational outcomes.

- Latino parents with children in high school are significantly less happy with their local public schools and express less confidence that the public schools in their community will provide their children with the kind of education they want for them.

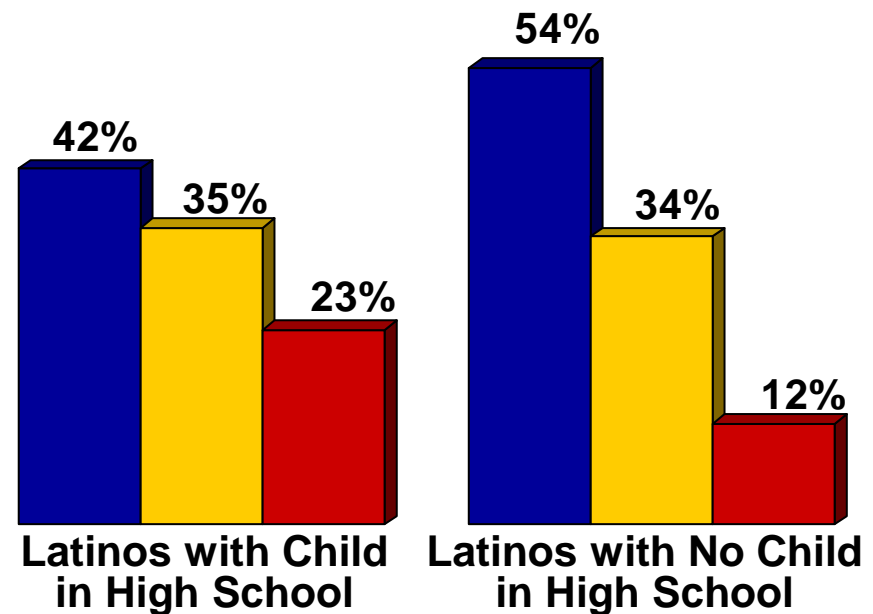
**Overall Performance of Public Schools in My Local Community**

■ Excellent/pretty good    ■ Just okay  
■ Not so good/poor



**Confidence that Local Public Schools Will Provide Education I Want for My Child**

■ Very confident/pretty confident    ■ Just somewhat confident  
■ Not that confident/not at all confident

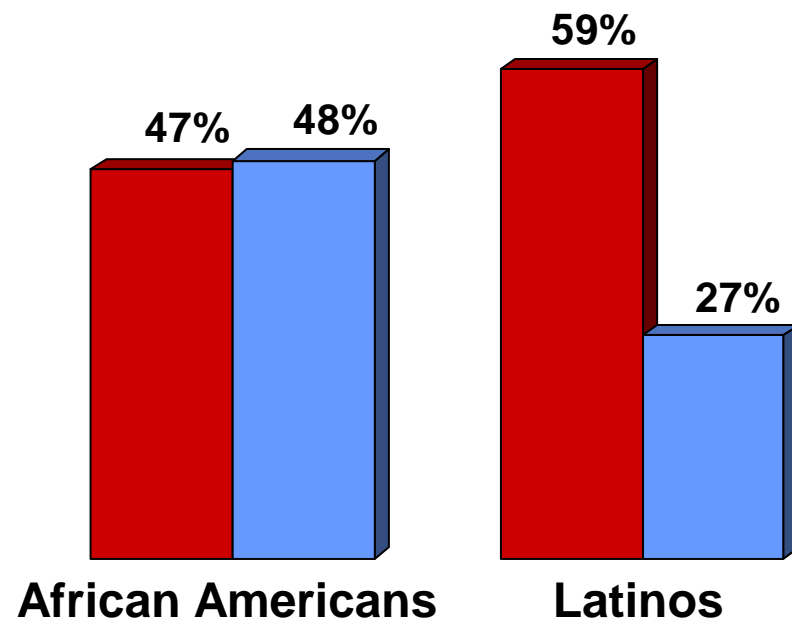


# Even the parents who express the most confidence in the schools in their community identify their schools as the ones in need of improvement.

*When I think about the kinds of public schools that are really in need of reform and improvement, I think more about:*

■ Schools in my community   ■ Schools in other places

*(among parents very confident their public schools will provide the education they want for their child)*



- Almost half the African-American parents and six in 10 Latino parents who are very confident that the public schools will provide their child with the kind of education they want for them focus on their local schools as the ones in need of reform.
- This belies the outwardly optimistic attitudes of many parents who understand deep down the real challenges that public schools face in low-income and moderate-income communities.

# Parents believe poor educational outcomes are primarily the fault of disinterested parents and home lives in disarray; few intuitively blame schools directly.

Recent statistics show that **half** of [Afr. Amer./Hispanic] students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade today **will drop out before HS graduation**: whom do you blame?

Recent statistics show **only about 10%** of [Afr. Amer./Hispanic] 8<sup>th</sup> graders **will complete any kind of college degree**: whom do you blame?



## Parents, families, home life



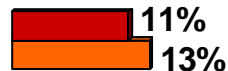
## Schools, school system



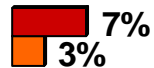
## Students themselves



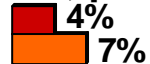
## Teachers



## Community, environment, atmosphere



## Gov't, politicians, lack of school funding



## Parents, families, home life



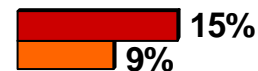
## Schools, school system



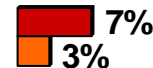
## Students themselves



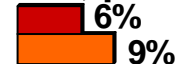
## Teachers



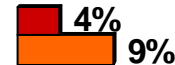
## Community, environment, atmosphere



## Gov't, politicians, lack of school funding

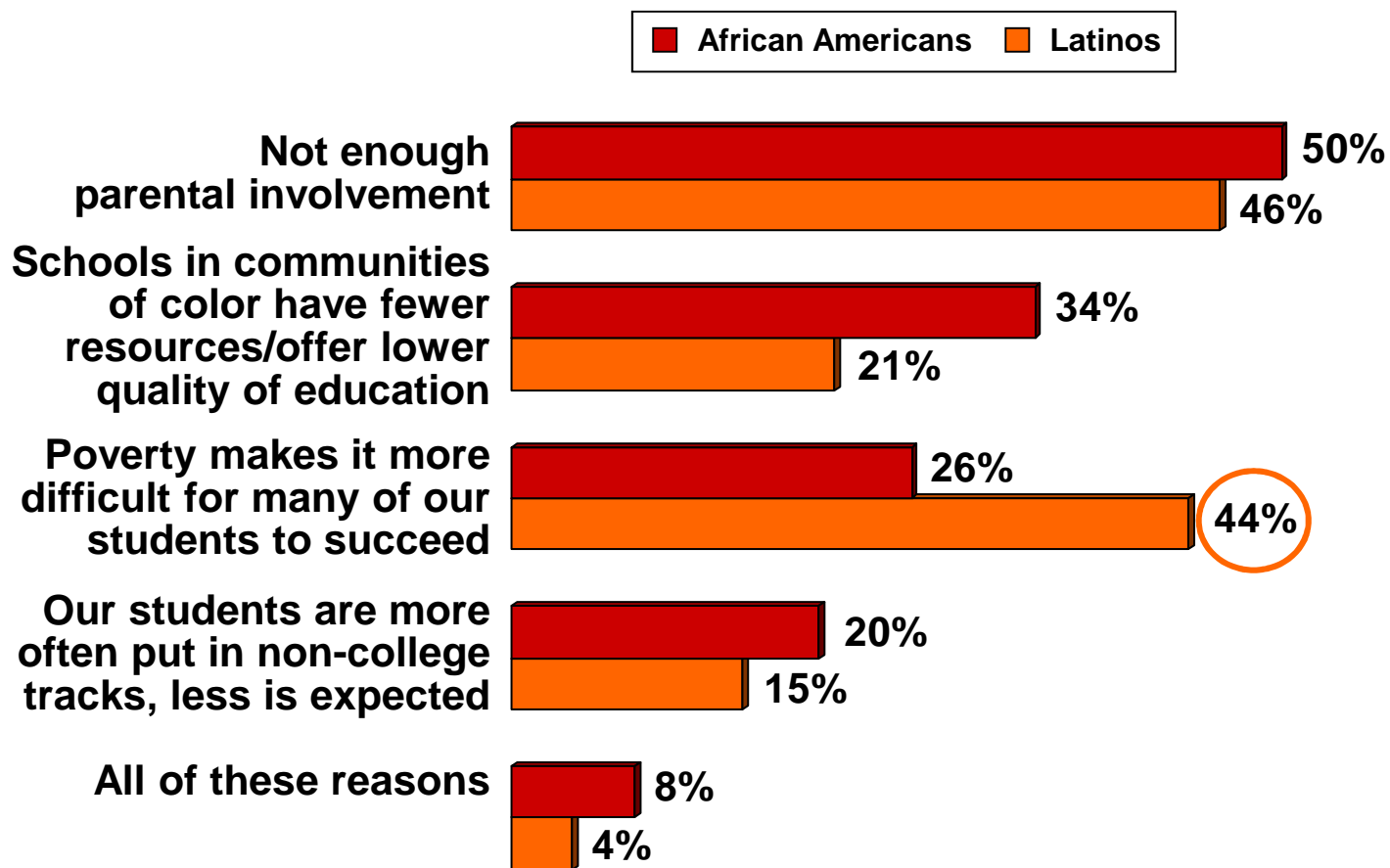


## Lack of money to afford college



# In addition to parental involvement, Latinos say poverty is a key factor in poor educational performance; African Americans highlight poorly resourced schools.

*Which one or two of the following reasons best explain why [African-American/Hispanic] students lag behind their white peers in high school graduation, college attendance, and college graduation rates?*





# **In focus groups, discussions of school improvement often revolve around lack of funding or need for more funding.**

**“The state needs to allocate more money to districts that have limited resources.”**

*Moderate-income African-American mom/Columbia, SC*

**“A lot of the programs they cut out. . . . You know, they don’t have electric shop anymore because they don’t have the funds for it, they don’t have wood shop anymore because they don’t have the funds for it. . . . Back in the day, they used to have the funds for that, but now they don’t have the funds for that anymore.”**

*Moderate-income African-American mom/Los Angeles, CA*

**“[Schools need] good after-school programs like reading and math available to kids who need extra help.”**

*Low-income Latino dad/Raleigh, NC*

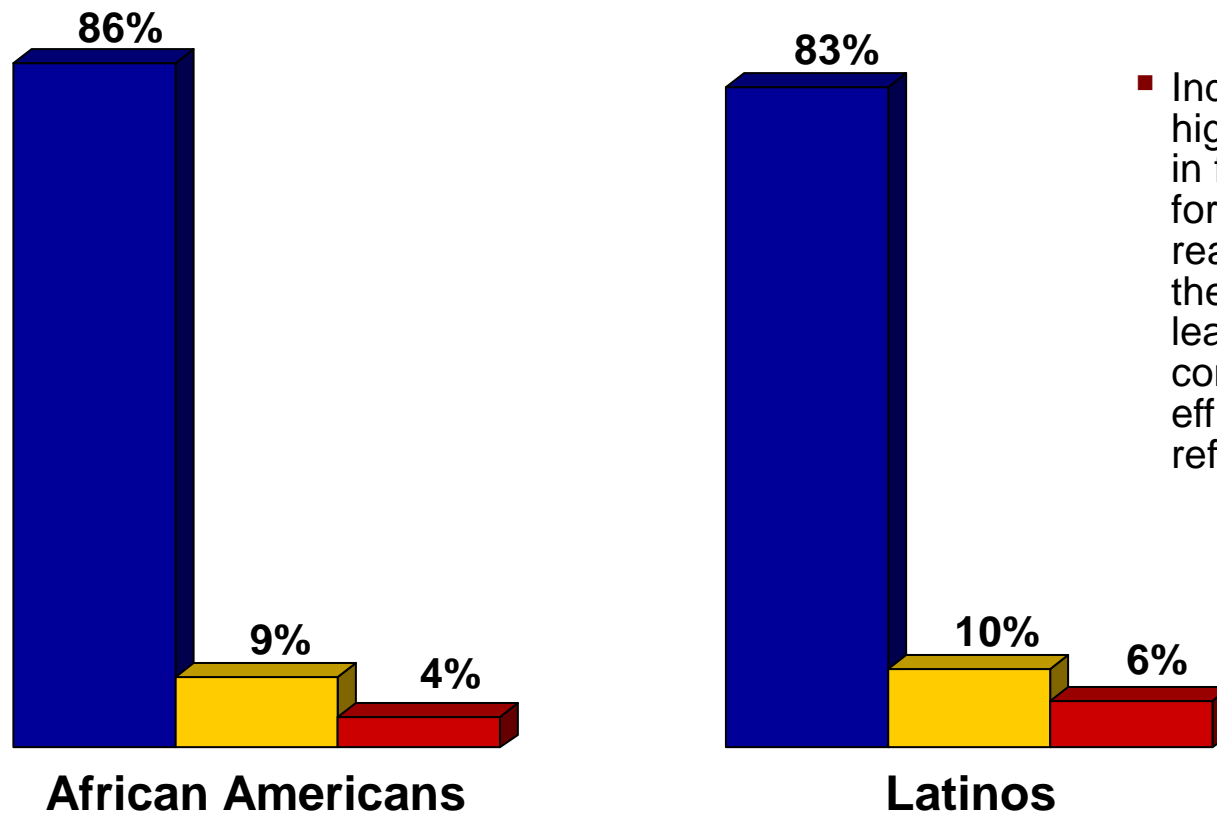
**“In my situation it’s overcrowded. There’s only eight classrooms in the whole school; we got probably 40 students in a class. I think there should be a little more one-on-one, and it’s lagging.”**

*Moderate-income Latino mom/Chicago, IL*

# There is a broad consensus that increased funding for schools would make a big difference.

*How much do you think increased funding for schools would help improve the quality of the public education children receive in your community?*

■ Would help a lot    ■ Would help somewhat    ■ Would help only a little/not much at all

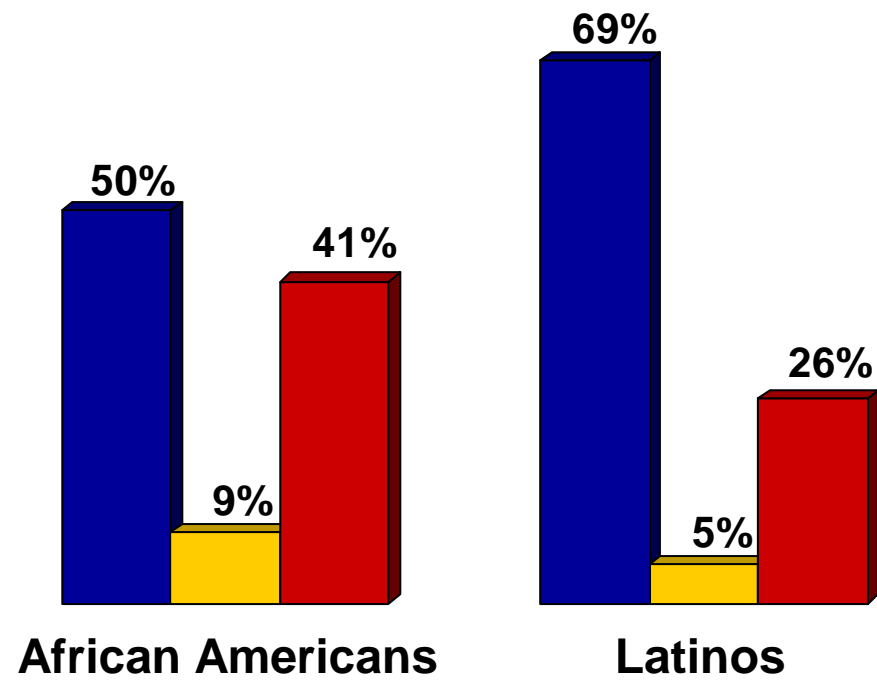


■ Indeed, the focus groups highlight the danger that cuts in funding and other resources for public schools create a real sense of defeat among these low-income parents, leading to questions and concerns about the value and efficacy of broader school reforms.

# African Americans are more likely than Latinos to say their children get fewer opportunities for success than white students do.

*Do you think [African-American/Hispanic] students in your community are given the same opportunities to learn and succeed as white students in your community and other nearby communities?*

■ Afr-Amer/Hisp students given same opportunities as whites   ■ Not sure   ■ Not given same opportunities



- Among African-American parents, the higher their educational attainment, the less likely they are to feel African-American students are given the same opportunities as white students. With more educational attainment, they have more exposure to whites peers and likely more firsthand knowledge of the education they receive. Latino parents, regardless of their education, see the playing field as more level.

### Attitudes among African-American Parents, by their Educational Attainment

	Given same opportunities	Not given same opportunities
High school/less	54%	36%
Some college	47%	43%
College graduates	41%	50%

# Ways In Which African-American And Latino Parents See Their Children Being Shortchanged

*In what ways are [African-American/Hispanic] students in your community not given the same opportunities to learn and succeed as white students in your community and other nearby communities?*

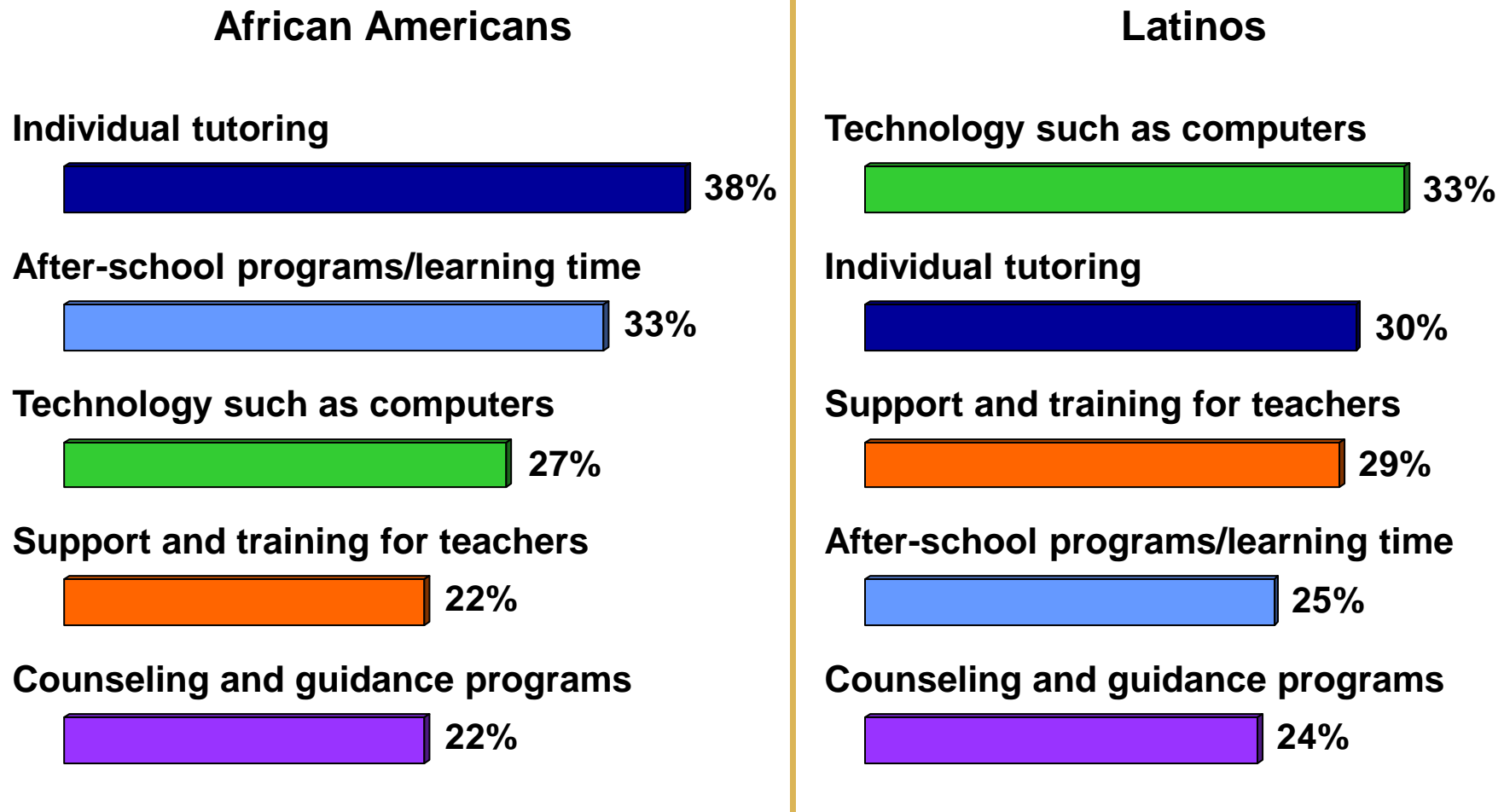
Volunteered Comments of African Americans*	
Black schools have <b>fewer resources, outdated</b> books, fewer computers	24%
<b>Whites</b> get a <b>better education, have better teachers</b>	23%
A poorer, low-income area; lower tax base, less funding for schools	11%
White schools have more programs, activities	8%
White students receive more attention, assistance from teachers	8%
Black schools have larger class sizes, overcrowded classrooms	6%
Teachers care more about white students than black students	6%

Volunteered Comments of Latinos*	
<b>Whites</b> receive <b>more attention, assistance from teachers</b>	22%
<b>Whites</b> get a <b>better education, have better teachers</b>	18%
Teachers care more about white students than Latino students	12%
Latino students get stereotyped, judged on their race, looks, accent	12%
Language barriers, not enough bilingual teachers	11%
A poorer, low-income area; lower tax base, less funding for schools	8%
White schools have more programs, activities	8%

\* Among parents who say African-American/Hispanic students not given same opportunities

# In an individual model of change, parents put priority on more tutoring and time for struggling students.

*If your school had more resources available to it, on which one or two of the following would you want those resources spent?*

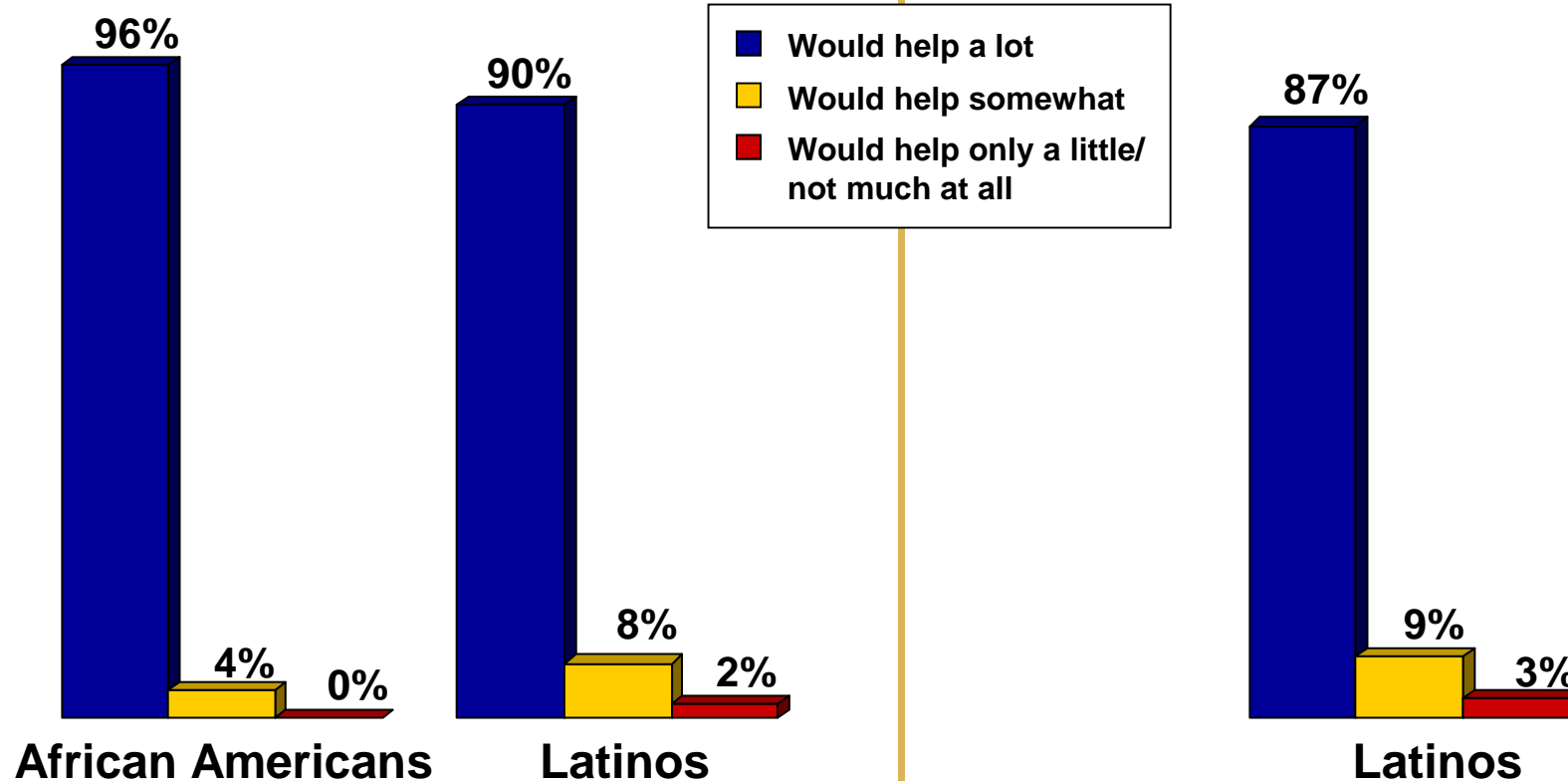


# More help for struggling students, including more help for ESL students, ranks near the top of what parents say would make a big difference.

*How much would this help improve the quality of the public education children receive in your community?*

More support/help for struggling students

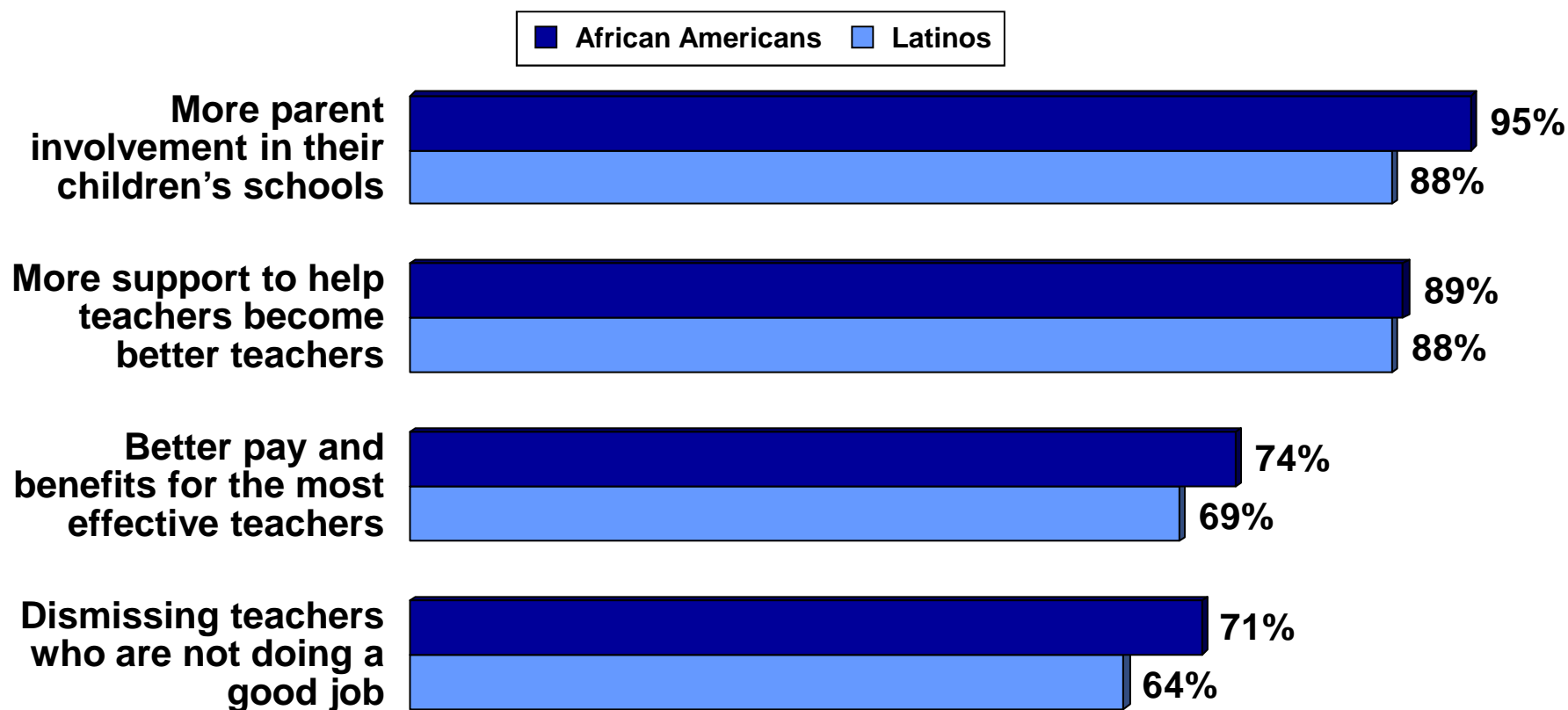
More help for students learning English



## Parents also emphasize the importance of good teachers in helping students succeed.

- Although parents see themselves as the starting point for the reform of public schools, they also recognize the need for improved performance inside the classroom.
- Parents' primary focus is on supporting teachers and helping them improve, but they are not opposed to weeding out the bad apples.

*Proportions saying each of the following would help a lot in improving the quality of public education children receive in their community*



# Better teaching, in large part, means caring teachers who give students individual attention.

- Parents believe an important element of effective teaching involves a caring attitude toward students. They feel teachers should care more about the well-being of their students than about how students perform on tests. If teachers care enough, they will do their part to prepare their children for the future.
- A manifestation of that caring attitude would result in teachers' devoting more individual time and attention to students, particularly those who are struggling. Parents firmly believe that having one-on-one time between teacher and student is critical to student success. With added resources, parents hope this can become the reality.

**“What makes a good school, I feel, is a tested and proven curriculum, along with teachers who show genuine concern and take individual time if needed with the students.”**

*Moderate-income African-American mom/Pittsburgh, PA*

**“I think what they should have in school are more books, more homework for them, and more teachers who are willing to help.”**

*Low-income African-American mom/Los Angeles, CA*

**“If my kid comes home from school very excited, then I think, ‘Wow, he has a good teacher, because she transmitted the excitement she has to him.’”**

*Low-income Latino mom/Chicago, IL*

**“What makes a good school? A good school should consist of teachers who embrace the idea that all students can learn and are willing to do all within their power to share what they know, encourage growth, and keep the parents involved.”**

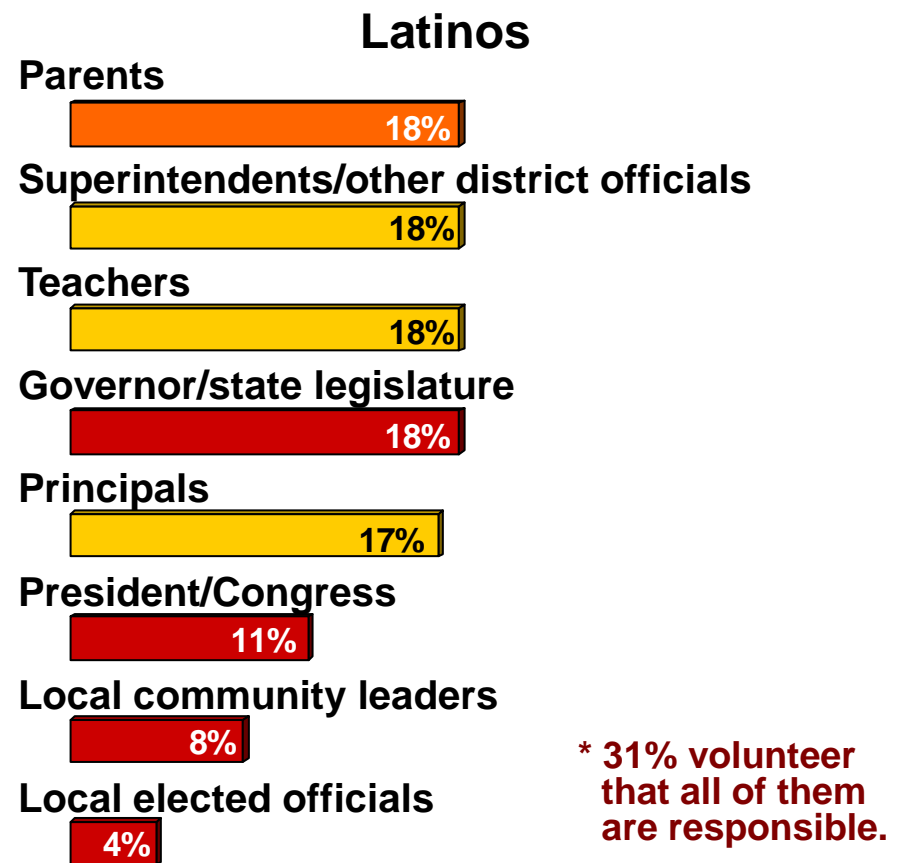
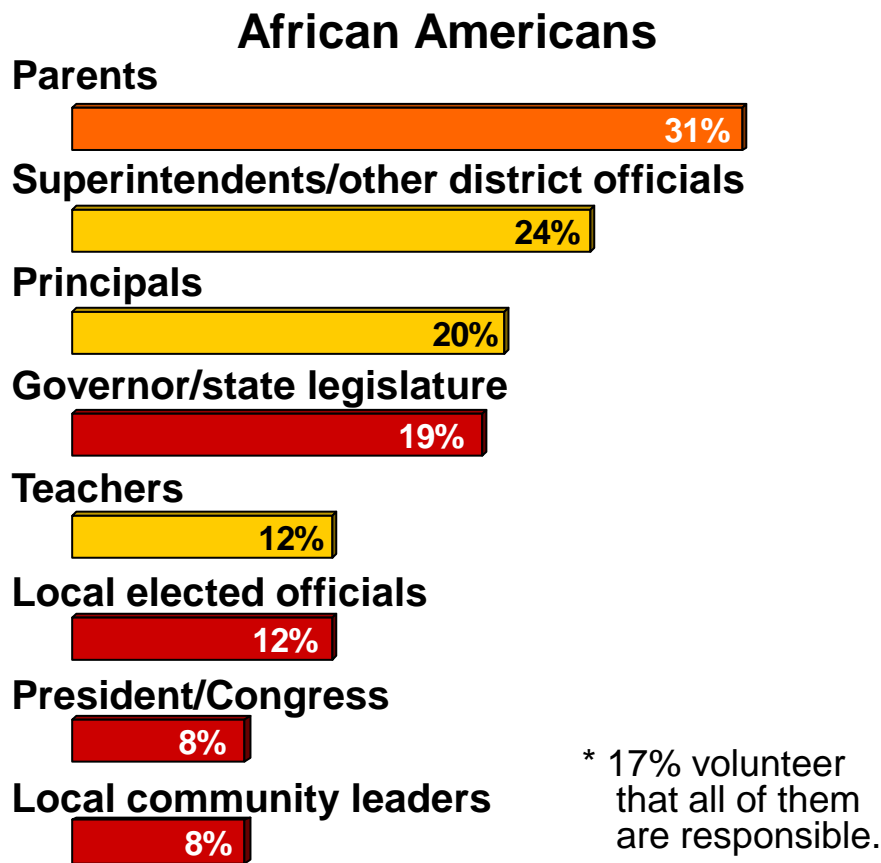
*Low-income African-American dad/Columbia, SC*



# While improving teaching is essential, parents say others bear more responsibility for making sure schools improve.

- Latinos see school reform as an undertaking that needs the hard work of the entire community, while African Americans are more likely to point to specific individuals, particularly parents and school officials, to carry the lion's share of the burden.

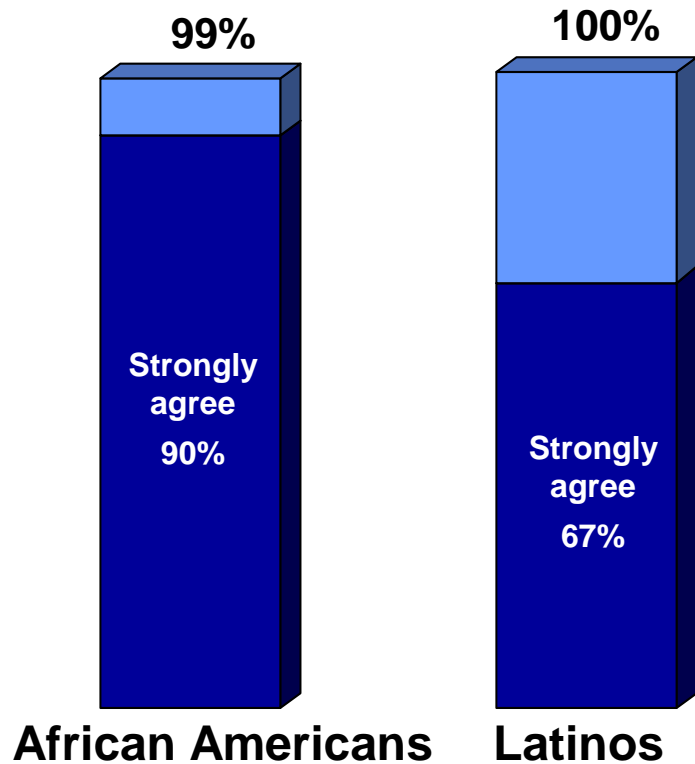
*When it comes to the public schools in your community, which one or two of the following do you think have the most responsibility for making sure the schools improve and get better?*



# Eyes on the Prize: Parents strongly support the goal of college and career readiness, and clearly desire for their own children to graduate from college.

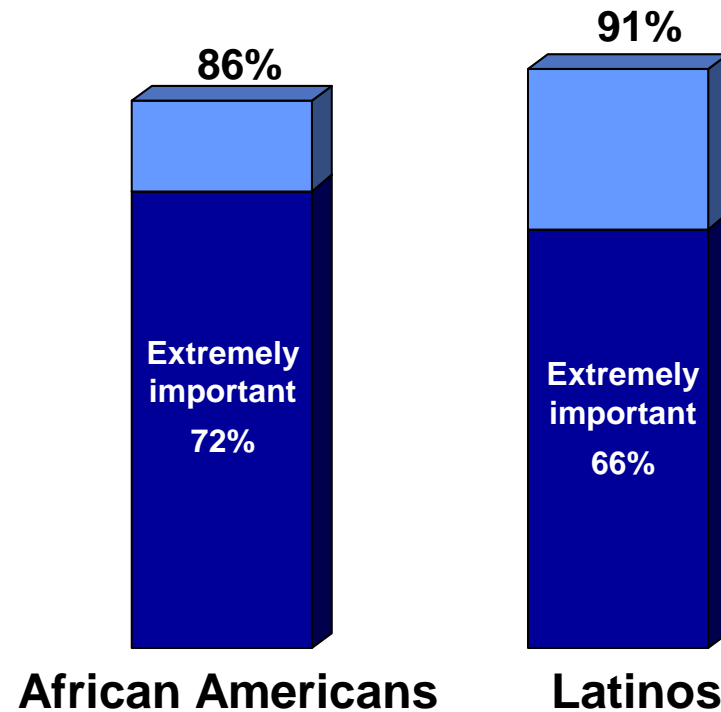
“The goal of the public school system should be to make sure that all students graduate high school ready for college and career.”

*I agree with this statement:*



Some say it is important for their children to attend and graduate from college, while others say it depends on the child, that college is not necessary for everyone.

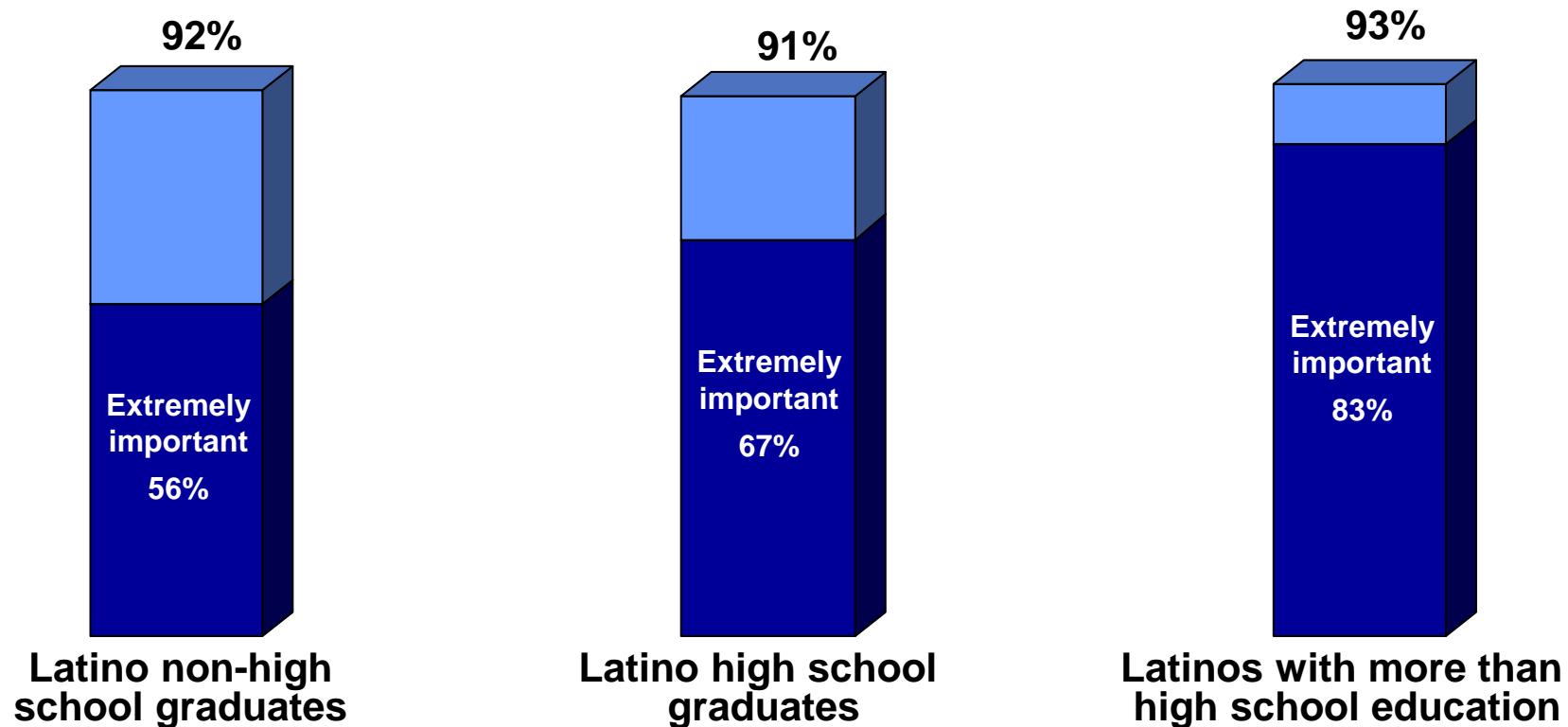
*It is extremely or quite important to me that my child attend and graduate from college:*



# Among Latinos, there are significant differences in the importance of college, by parent's educational attainment.

Some say it is important for their children to attend and graduate from college, while others say it depends on the child, that college is not necessary for everyone.

*It is extremely or quite important to me that my child attend and graduate from college:*



## **Parents strongly support college and career readiness goal: in their own words.**

**“If you see your kid graduating [college], he is validating all the work that I have done just to get him to the school, how much I have worked. And to see him graduate is the best feeling. You almost cry when you see that.”**

*Low-income Latino dad/Raleigh, NC*

**“Trade schools are not an option for my children. I will see to it that they get to college in order for them to get to where they want to be.”**

*Low-income African-American mom/Pittsburgh, PA*

**“We want all of our kids to be able to go out there – and not everyone has to go out to college – but to be able to go out somewhere and hold down a job or career.”**

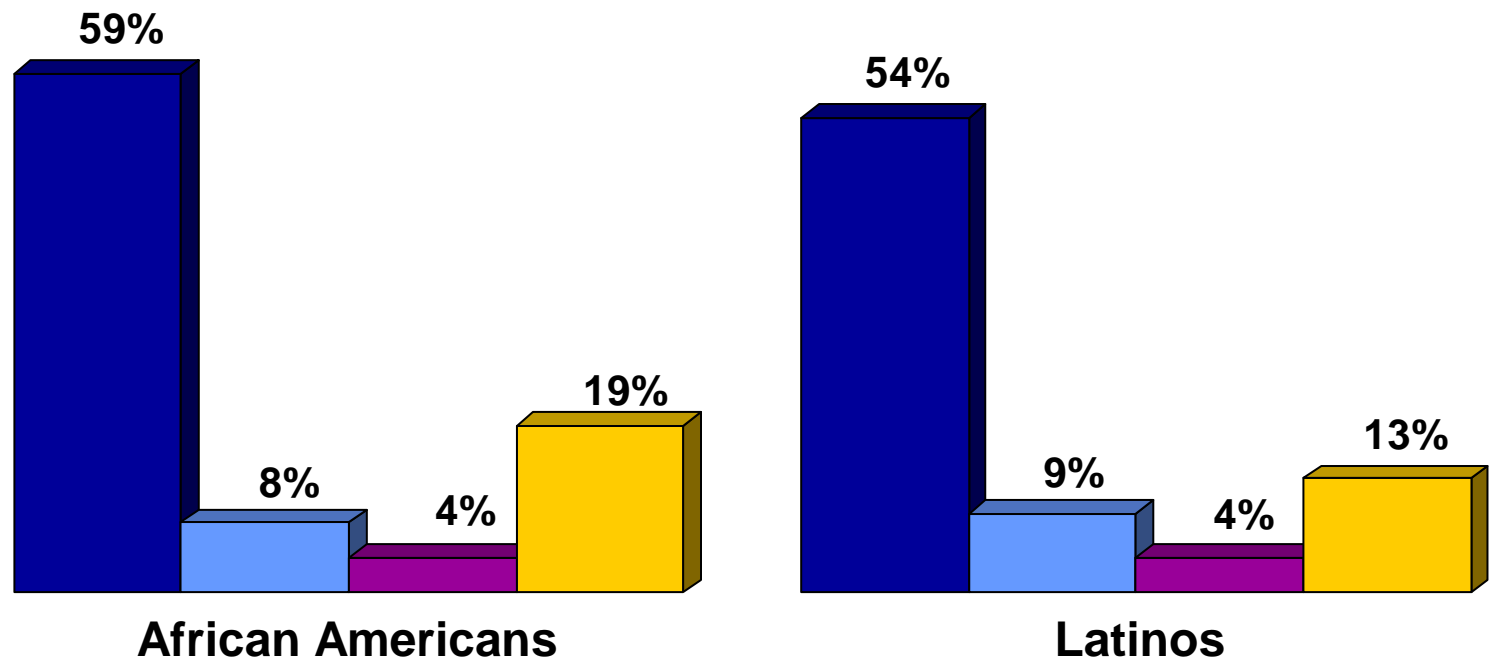
*Moderate-income African-American mom/Pittsburgh, PA*

**“For my son, I want him to be able to get a college education, but one that will help him succeed in getting a job. . . . I want him to get a career where I know that he will be stable and he will be able to take care of himself and his family for life.”**

*Low-income African-American mom/Los Angeles, CA*

# Overwhelmingly, the aspiration for “college” is focused on a four-year bachelor’s degree.

*When I think about college for my child, I am thinking more about:*

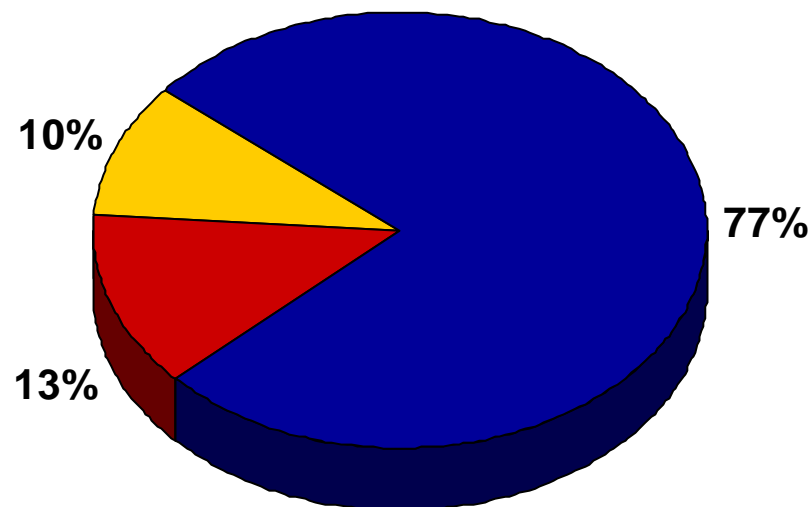


# Parents would prefer for their children to take more demanding college-prep math, even if it is harder to pass.

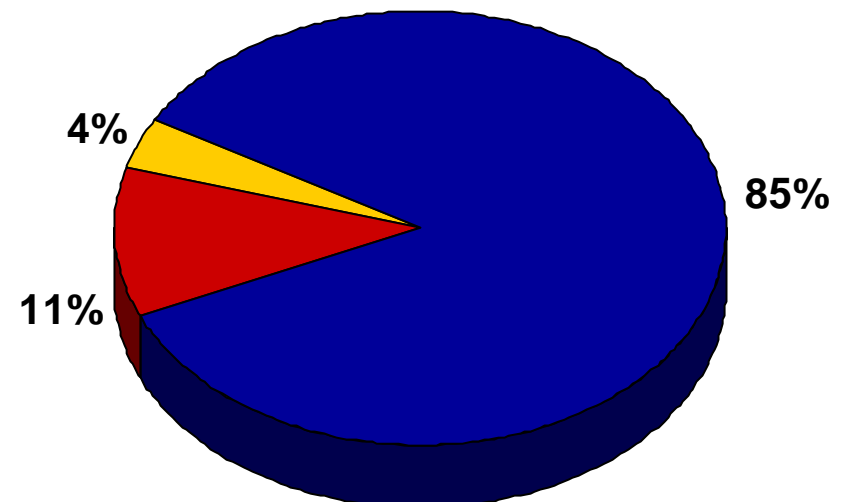
*The math course I would prefer for my child to take is:*

- More challenging college-prep math course, even if it is far more difficult to pass
- Less challenging math course that teaches basic skills, but not prepare them for college math
- Both/neither/not sure

**African Americans**



**Latinos**



# Parents are more concerned about not being able to afford college than about schools not preparing their children.

*Which one of the following, if any, is the BIGGEST obstacle to your child attending and graduating from college?*

## African Americans

Not being able to afford the cost of a college education



Public schools not preparing child academically for college-level work



Child not getting counseling and encouragement to aim for college



All equally



None of these



## Latinos

Not being able to afford the cost of a college education



Child not getting counseling and encouragement to aim for college



Public schools not preparing child academically for college-level work



All equally



None of these



# Parents' Reactions To Current School Reform Agenda

In this research we explored parents' reactions to key elements of the current agenda for education reform and key aspects of the school reform debate, but to put these findings in context, please note:

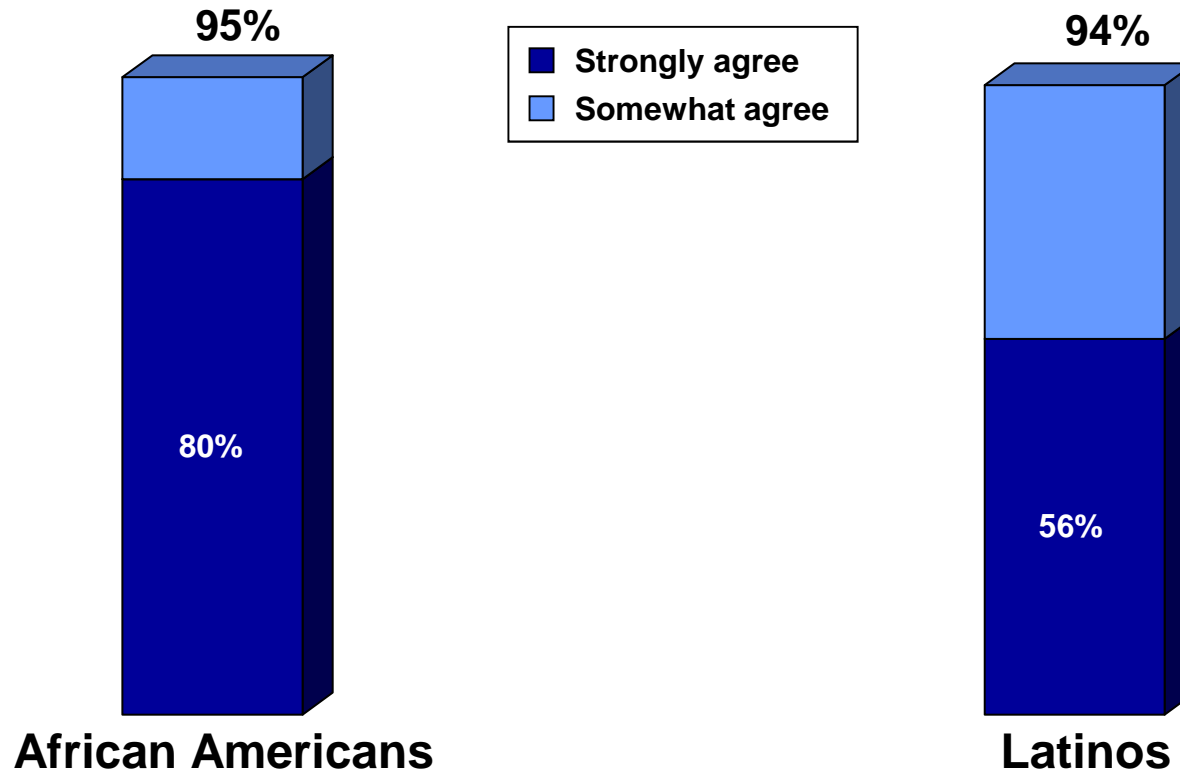
- With their focus set firmly on the problems with public education, very few parents and caregivers are familiar with the elements of the school reform agenda. Even in places where reform has begun to be implemented (Pittsburgh, Chicago, Los Angeles), it has not left an impression or any sense of positive change.
- The vast majority of parents and caregivers are not aware that there is an education reform movement for them to support or that is seeking their support.



# Reform Agenda Item: Higher Standards

- Conceptually, the notion of raised expectations and higher graduation standards that reflect being ready for college and career is well received. Preparation for college and a good career is typically what these parents desire from the public schools.
- While the strength of Latino parents' sentiment is not as strong as that of African Americans, the direction of overall opinion is the same.

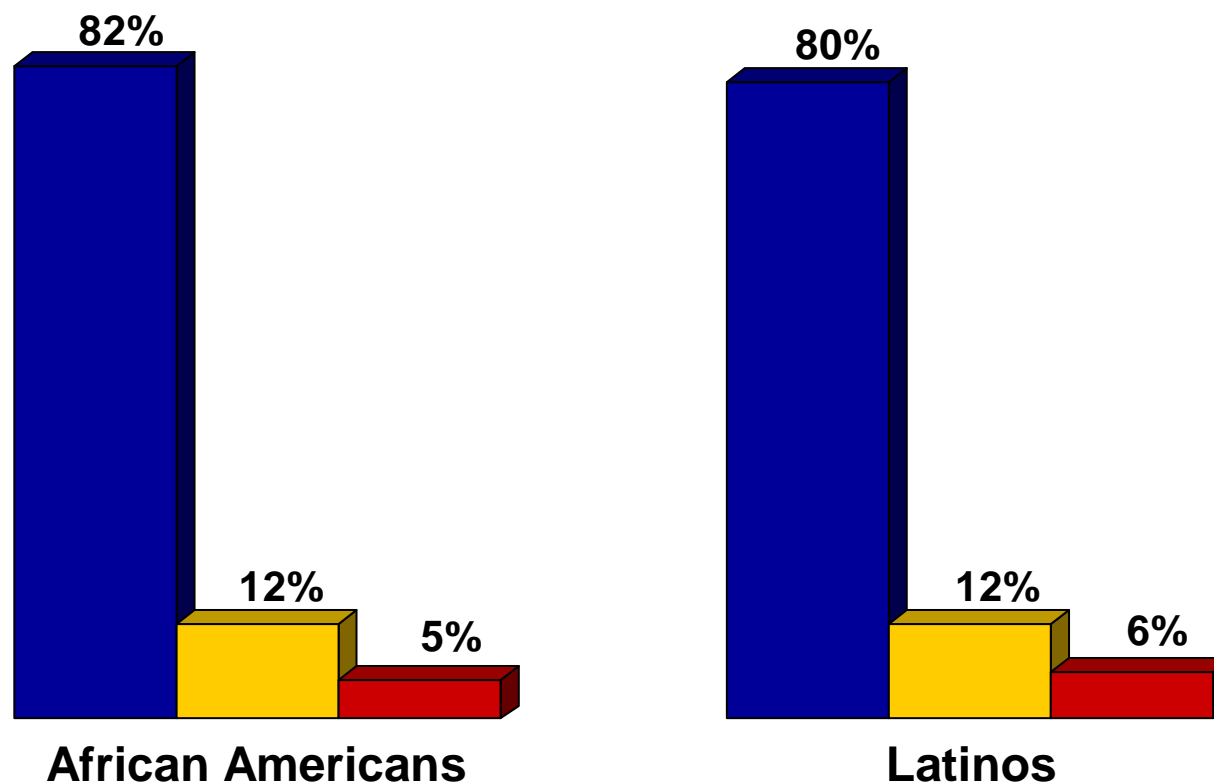
**“All children should be expected to achieve academic standards that reflect being ready for college and career to qualify for graduation from high school.”**



# Large majorities believe higher expectations for all, tied to higher standards, would help a lot to improve educational outcomes.

*How much do you think higher expectations for all students tied to higher standards would help improve the quality of public education children receive in your community?*

■ Would help a lot    ■ Would help somewhat    ■ Would help only a little/not much at all



**There is a broad concern, though, that higher standards without greater resources would be setting up minority students in low-income communities for failure.**

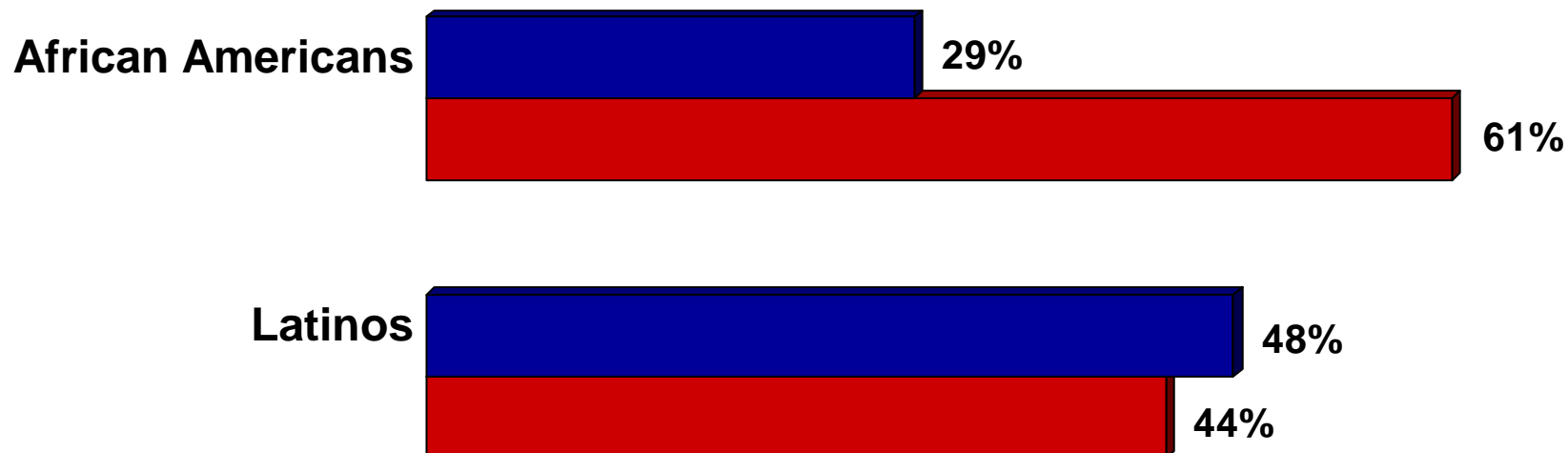
*From the focus groups:*

- The obstacle to parents' fully embracing higher standards revolves around the reality of implementing those higher standards in existing public school environments they view as underfunded and pedagogically substandard.
- Parents are incredulous about whether it is possible (or fair) to raise standards and expectations within the context of funding cuts, declining public school budgets, and perceived teacher apathy.
- African Americans are resolute and Latinos are divided over whether higher standards without more resources and academic supports will lead to greater academic achievement.

# African-American parents are the most likely to expect negative consequence for raising standards without more supports; Latino parents are evenly split.

*Which statement comes closer to your point of view?*

- Raising academic standards across the board will result in more students of color rising to the challenge and preparing themselves for college and successful careers.
- Raising expectations and standards for public school students will simply set more students of color up for failure unless schools in poor neighborhoods are given the resources to ensure that every child has the tools they need to meet these higher standards.



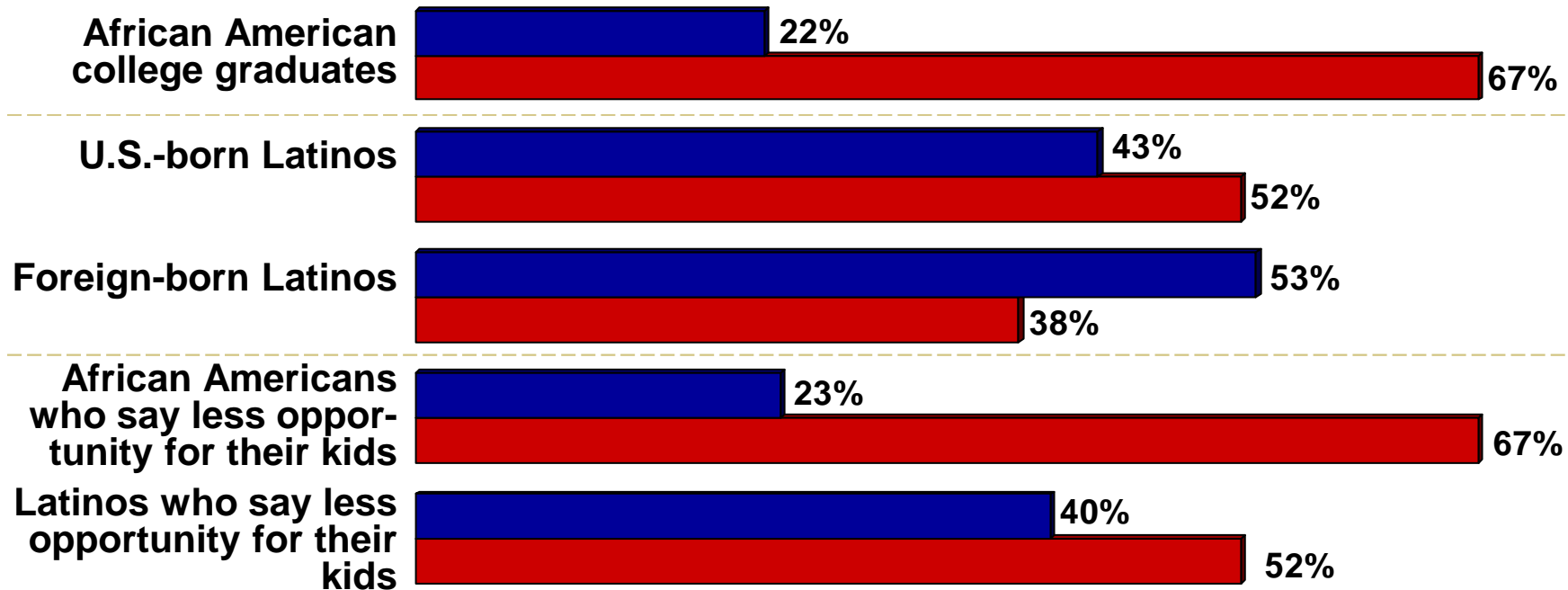
# Reform Agenda Item: Higher Standards

## *Setting Kids Up To Fail:*

- This sentiment is especially pronounced among black college graduates, native-born Latinos, and parents in both groups who believe their children are not given the same opportunities to learn and succeed as white students in their communities.

### *Which statement comes closer to your point of view?*

- Raising academic standards across the board will result in more students of color rising to the challenge and preparing themselves for college and successful careers.
- Raising expectations and standards for public school students will simply set more students of color up for failure unless schools in poor neighborhoods are given the resources to ensure that every child has the tools they need to meet these higher standards.



# Reform Agenda Item: Standardized Testing

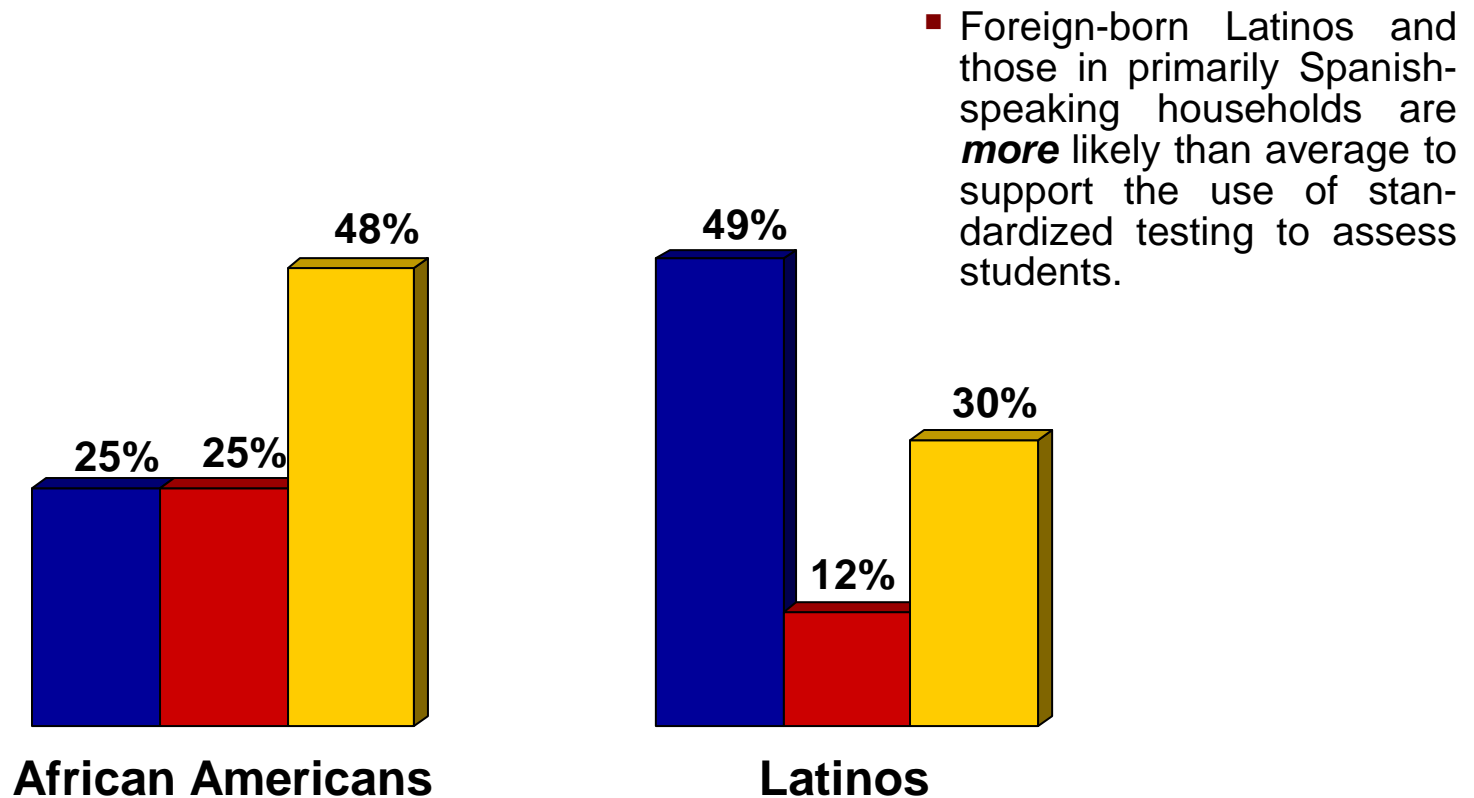
*From the focus groups:*

- Parents are very aware that schools use standardized tests to assess student progress and achievement. The idea of using standardized tests as a tool to assess the job that public schools and teachers are doing is a new concept for most parents of color.
- In the focus groups, parents explain that they feel it is unfair to use standardized tests as the measuring stick for student performance, because the tests do not take into account outside factors, like school resources, that affect student learning.
- Many are afraid that standardized tests will be used as a means of weeding out students trapped in schools that are underfunded and understaffed, and thus will be destined to fail.

# Latino parents show greater openness to the use of standardized testing to assess student performance, while African Americans are more skeptical.

*Do you think standardized tests SHOULD or should NOT be one of the ways schools measure student achievement in core subjects?*

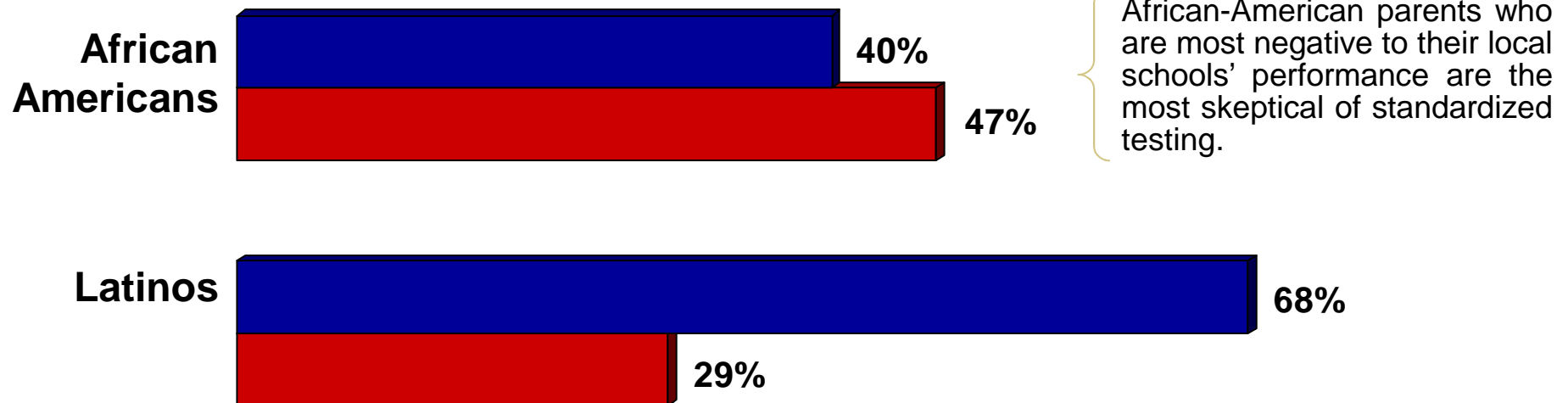
■ Should use standardized tests   ■ Should not use standardized tests   ■ Have mixed feelings



# A plurality of African-American parents say that standardized tests are a bad way to hold schools and teachers accountable; Latinos say it is important to use them.

*Which statement comes closer to your point of view?*

- It is important to use standardized test results to assess the performance of schools and teachers, because we need objective measurements to hold schools and teachers accountable for making sure that students are learning what they are supposed to.
- Standardized test results are a bad way to assess the performance of schools and teachers, because it creates an incentive for schools to teach to the test, and tests do not take into account outside factors that affect whether students are learning.





# Reform Agenda Item: Closing Underperforming Schools

*From the focus groups:*

- The idea of closing poorly performing schools is controversial among low- and moderate-income parents from communities of color. When their local schools are performing poorly, option number one is to try to fix them rather than close them. Parents want districts to redouble their efforts to improve the quality of teaching in these schools as well as provide more learning resources.

**“It’s not necessary to close down those schools: transfer the teachers. Sometimes you need that change so the children are motivated. They have a new image of everything, and they are going to have different types of teaching.”** *Low-income Latino mom/Raleigh, NC*

**“If you have a school that is substandard and is threatening to be closed, I don’t think they should threaten to close it, because education should not have a price tag on it. I think they should be able to put what they need in that school: the support systems, the teachers to bring that school up.”** *Low-income African-American dad/Pittsburgh, PA*

**“If they get more resources, I think they would get better results.”** *Low-income Latino mom/Chicago, IL*

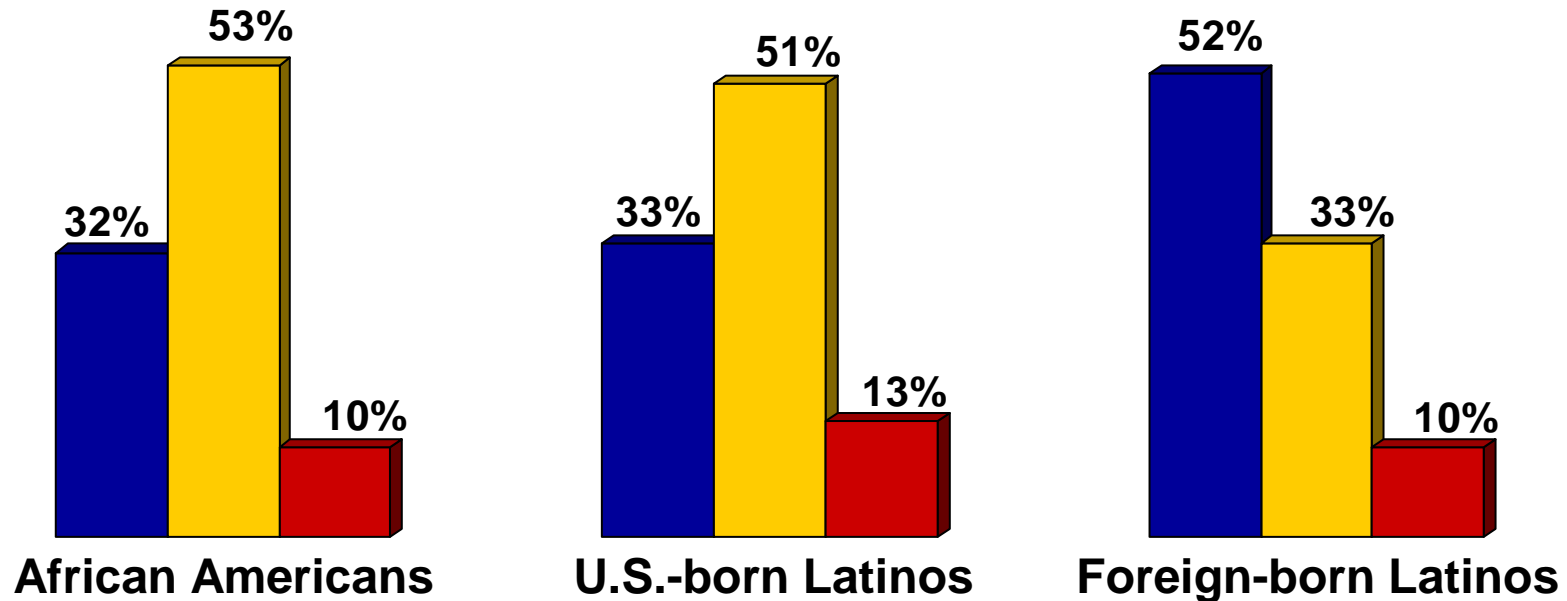
**“I don’t think it’s that good, because instead of closing them, I think teachers need more training, and they could provide better services to more children. And then you wouldn’t have the few schools that you have totally saturated.”** *Low-income Latino mom/Raleigh, NC*

# Verdict on low-performing schools: Work hard to mend them before thinking about closing them.

- This suggests the importance of making the school improvement period transparent and public, and being clear about the turnaround investments that are being contemplated.

*Which one of following should occur if a public school consistently performs poorly on standardized tests, has low attendance rates, and below-average graduation rates?*

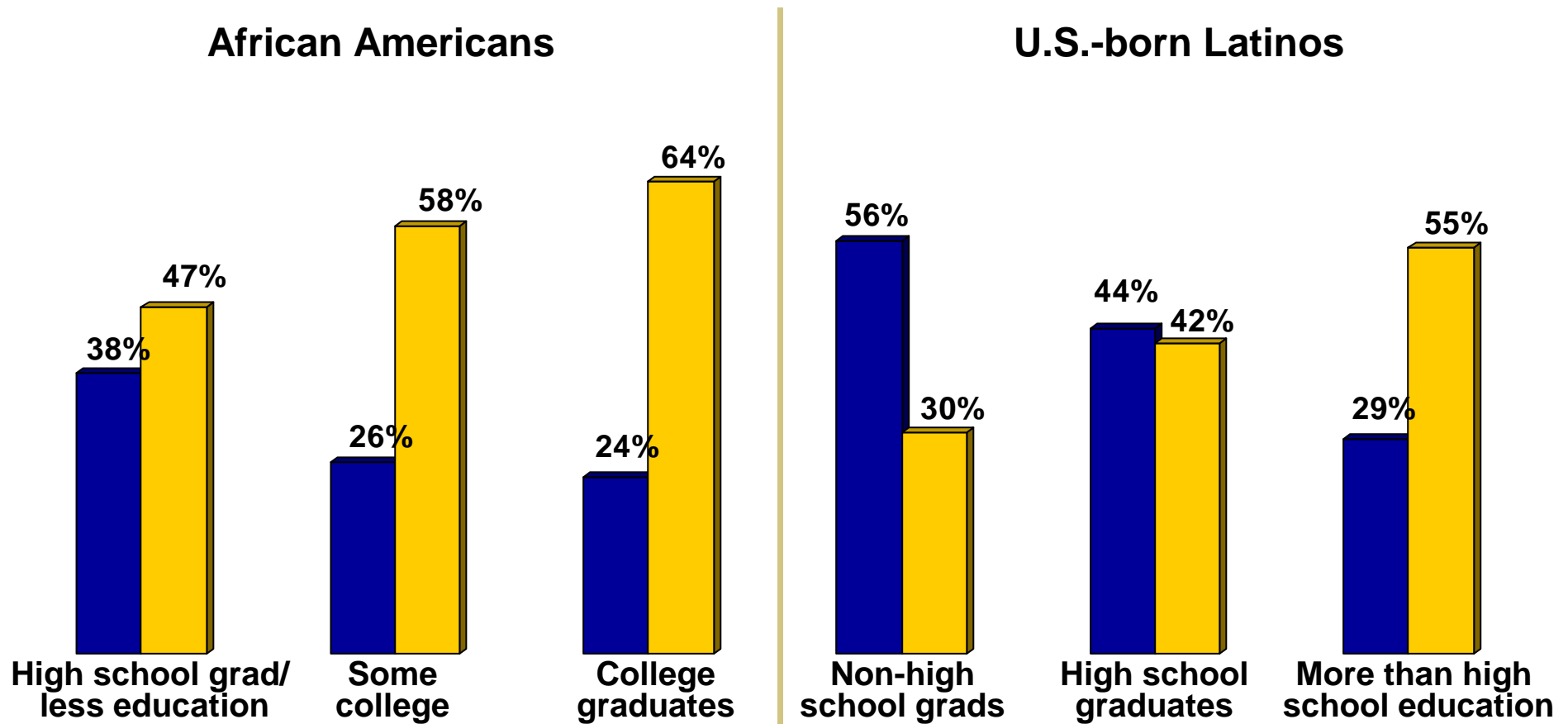
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| ■ It should be given intensive support to help it turn around, with no deadline for achieving better results | ■ It should be given intensive support, but then be closed if it does not improve within a couple of years | ■ It should be closed immediately and students should be given the opportunity to attend other, better schools |
|--|--|--|



# Willingness to set a deadline for school improvements is higher among parents with more educational attainment.

*Which one of following should occur if a public school consistently performs poorly on standardized tests, has low attendance rates, and below-average graduation rates?*

- It should be given intensive support to help it turn around, with no deadline for achieving better results
- It should be given intensive support, but then be closed if it does not improve within a couple of years



# Parent organizations like the PTO are the most trusted source for advice about public schools and reforms.

*Which of the following potential sources of information would you trust MOST to provide advice about the public education system and the best public school reforms taking place across the country?*

	African Americans	Latinos
<b>Parents organizations, such as the PTO</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>40%</b>
Civil rights organizations, such as [NAACP, Urban League/ National Council of La Raza]	12%	8%
Community-based organizations, neighborhood clubs	10%	8%
News media: television, radio and newspapers	9%	<b>15%</b>
Teachers unions	9%	6%
Private, nonprofit organizations such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	7%	6%
Clergy/minister/pastor	4%	4%

The top ways for parents to get involved are attending meetings and volunteering in schools; joining a local advocacy organization is at the bottom of the list of what they might do.

*Which of the following would you be MOST willing to do to help ensure that children in your community receive a high-quality education?*

