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# **Educator Beliefs About School Diversity**

**Results of a National Survey**

EdWeek<sup>™</sup>  
**Research Center<sup>®</sup>**

# About Editorial Projects in Education

Editorial Projects in Education (EPE) is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization based in Bethesda, Md. Its primary mission is to help raise the level of awareness and understanding among professionals and the public of important issues in American education. EPE covers local, state, national, and international news, and issues from preschool through the 12th grade. Editorial Projects in Education publishes Education Week, America's newspaper of record for precollegiate education, *EdWeek Market Brief*, and the Top School Jobs employment resource. It also produces periodic special reports on issues ranging from technology to textbooks, as well as books of special interest to educators.

The EdWeek Research Center conducts surveys, collects data, and performs analyses that appear in Education Week and *EdWeek Market Brief*. The center also conducts independent research studies for external clients including for-profit and nonprofit organizations.

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## Executive Summary

**D**ecades after *Brown v. Board of Education*, school integration remains a contested yet persistent feature of American public education. Court rulings, shifting political winds, and demographic realities have complicated efforts to create racially and socioeconomically diverse schools, even as voluntary initiatives have emerged to fill gaps. Despite these challenges, public sentiment continues to favor integrated environments, and thousands of districts still maintain formal or informal diversity efforts. Against this backdrop, the EdWeek Research Center surveyed 420 educators in fall 2025 to better understand how teachers, school leaders, and district administrators perceive the necessity, feasibility, and impact of school integration today.

Survey findings reveal broad professional agreement that racial and socioeconomic diversity improves student outcomes. Large majorities of educators say that diverse schools lead to stronger academic outcomes. Reasons include the perception that integrated schools are better than homogeneous environments at helping students learn to navigate interpersonal differences and think critically. These perceptions align with decades of research results, but another widespread belief is only partially aligned: Educators are more likely to say diversity benefits students from lower-income families than to say it benefits students from higher-income families. Research suggests the impact on students from higher-income families is positive or neutral.

While educators generally support integration, they remain divided on whether large-scale initiatives are practical in the current legal and political environment. Although the majority believe racial and socioeconomic diversity is both necessary and achievable, significant shares cite logistical constraints or express the belief that such initiatives should not be attempted. Despite these misgivings, most do say their districts are taking at least modest steps to foster diversity, often through magnet programs or specialized offerings. Even so, the overall pattern suggests that integration, though less visible today than other education debates, continues to shape the nation's schools.

[\*Brown v. Board of Education\*](#) is often cited as a turning

Although the majority of educators believe **racial and socioeconomic diversity is both necessary and achievable**, significant shares cite logistical constraints or express the belief that such initiatives should not be attempted.

point in American education policy. The 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision found that school segregation—then legal in 17 states—was inherently unequal and that it violated the Constitution. In the wake of the ruling, schools throughout the nation were ordered to desegregate—at least for a time. By 1974, another Supreme Court ruling, [\*Milliken v. Bradley\*](#) made this more challenging when Justices struck down a plan to integrate Detroit's majority-Black public schools with majority-white schools in surrounding suburban districts. This ruling against cross-district desegregation complicated integration efforts in districts mainly or only serving students of one ethnicity or race.

Despite this setback, schools continued to integrate. In the South—which was home to the largest number of school desegregation cases—the share of Black students enrolled in majority-white schools increased from zero percent prior to *Brown v. Board* to a [peak of 43% in 1986](#).

## Executive Summary

Soon after that, integration began a long, downhill slide, hastened by the 1991 [Board of Education of Oklahoma City Public Schools v. Dowell](#) decision, which found that desegregation orders were meant to be temporary and could end once plaintiffs had made an earnest effort to comply. In Dowell's wake, school districts across the South were released from their desegregation orders.

Even without court orders, some districts embraced voluntary integration initiatives. However, these districts faced a different type of setback in 2007 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in [Parents Involved in Community Schools](#) that Seattle high schools could not use student race to help determine who was admitted to schools of choice with more applicants than seats. Although the ruling permitted schools to consider racial factors under certain circumstances, it made racial integration efforts more difficult to implement. By 2020, the share of Black students attending mostly white high schools had dropped to 17% in the Southern United States.

As *Parents Involved* curtailed race-based initiatives, districts implementing voluntary desegregation efforts focused more heavily on socioeconomic integration. Because socioeconomic status and race are correlated, this sometimes had the effect of also furthering racial integration. However, it was less likely to face legal challenges. Between 1996 and 2016, the number of districts and charter schools and networks with socioeconomic integration efforts increased from [two to 100](#). A [2021 study](#) found that Americans were more likely to support socioeconomic integration than racial integration.

As of 2020, 907 school districts and charter schools or networks were implementing voluntary or court-ordered integration programs that focused on socioeconomic and/or racial integration. But the current Trump administration has [announced plans](#) to terminate the nation's remaining court-ordered plans, including some that date back to the 1960s. The administration has also [threatened to](#) stop providing federal funds to districts that implement a range of voluntary diversity, equity, and inclusion practices.

Given these historic and political developments, it

## ABOUT THE SURVEY



### WHO

420 educators, including: 107 district leaders, 70 school leaders, and 217 teachers



### WHAT

A 29-question online survey



### WHEN

October 2-October 28, 2025

might appear that Americans have turned their backs on school integration. Yet a [2024 poll](#) found that 3 out of 5 Americans view racial and socioeconomic school segregation as a problem. More than half supported increasing government funding to help diversify their local schools. And close to 3 out of 4 parents say school diversity was an important factor when considering where to raise their children.

When it comes to school integration, educators are clearly key stakeholders since they are the frontline employees charged with implementing such reforms. Relatively little is known about their views on integration initiatives. In the fall of 2025, the EdWeek Research Center set out to address this gap by surveying 420 public school teachers, school leaders, and district leaders about their perceptions and experiences with desegregation. The results suggest that, like the public in general, educators are not ready to turn their backs on the idea of integrated schools.



## Do Educators Believe That Diversity Impacts Educational Outcomes?

As a body, [education research](#) suggests racially and socioeconomically diverse schools do impact academics. [In fact](#), the average socioeconomic status of a school has more of an impact on student outcomes than does the socioeconomic status of an individual student's family. But personal perceptions and beliefs are often informed by anecdotal experiences rather than research evidence. For this reason, the Research Center asked teachers and administrators to weigh in on their beliefs around the scope and impact of racial diversity on student outcomes.

Nearly 2 out of 3 educators surveyed (62%) say that the level of racial diversity in a school does impact most students' outcomes.

Female respondents were significantly more likely than male respondents to say that racial diversity impacted outcomes (72% versus 48%). These differences in perception are potentially related to [well-established ideological differences](#) between males and females, with males tending to embrace the more conservative values of the Republican Party—which has downplayed the role of race in society—and females leaning more toward the more liberal beliefs of Democrats—who have been more likely to call attention to racial impacts.

Educators' views of socioeconomic integration is similar to their views of racial integration. Nearly 3 out of 4 respondents agreed that socioeconomic diversity does impact most students' outcomes. No gender gap was observed.

Figure 1

The level of RACIAL DIVERSITY in a school does impact most students' outcomes.

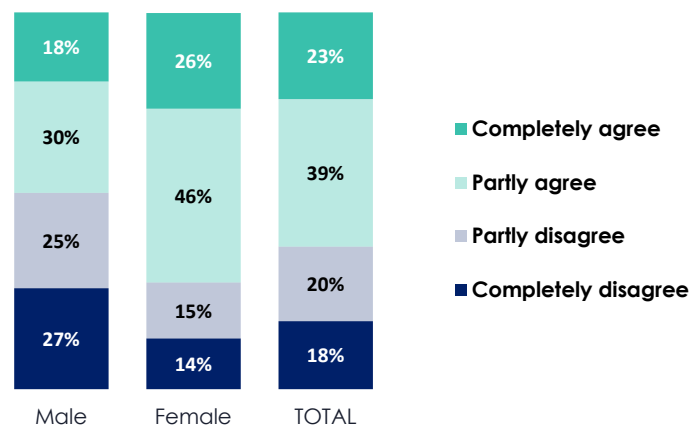
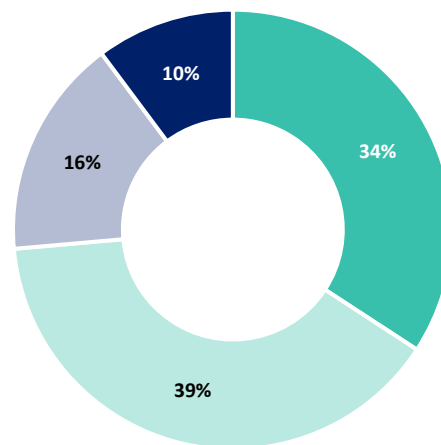


Figure 2

The level of SOCIOECONOMIC DIVERSITY in a school does impact most students' outcomes.



Totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

## Do Educators Believe That Diverse Schools Lead to Better College & Career Outcomes?

Educators' views of the impact of racial and socioeconomic integration align with [research](#) results, which suggest that students at integrated schools are less likely to drop out of high school and more likely to attend college. Children who attended integrated schools also have higher earnings as adults than those who attended segregated schools.

Large majorities of teachers and administrators (81%) perceive that racially diverse schools lead to better college and/or career outcomes than do schools lacking racial diversity.

Similarly, most educators say that schools with socioeconomically diverse enrollments lead to better outcomes than do schools lacking such diversity.

Figure 3

In your view, which of the following types of K-12 schools lead to better college and/or career outcomes for most students?

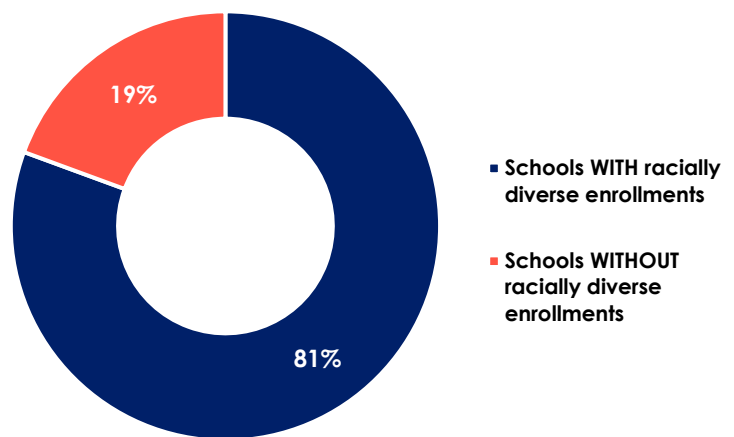
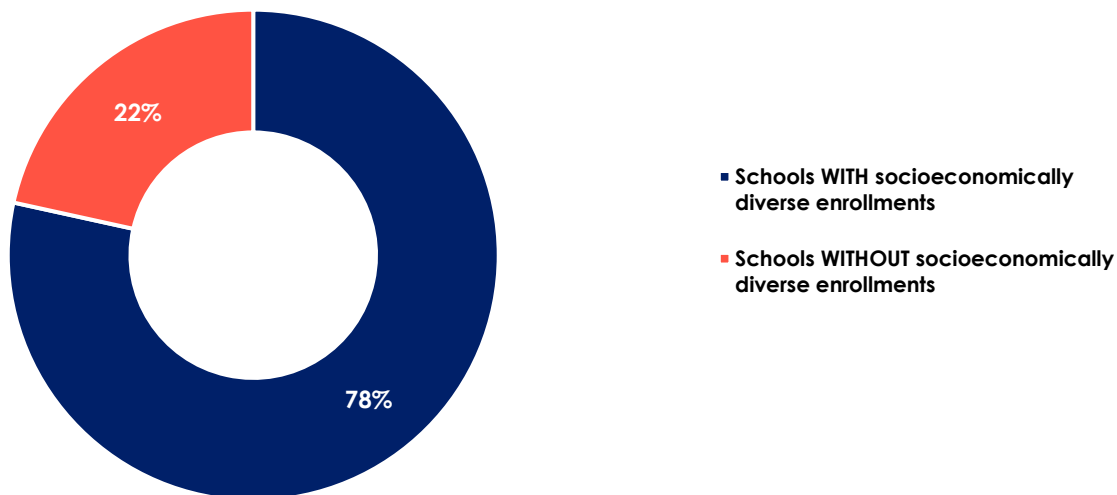


Figure 4

In your view, which of the following types of K-12 schools lead to better college and/or career outcomes for most students?



Totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

## Reasons Why Educators Believe That Socioeconomically Diverse Schools Lead to Better College and Career Outcomes

Respondents who said they believed that socioeconomically diverse schools lead to better college and career outcomes were asked to explain why.

The most common reason was the perception that diversity helps students understand people different than themselves. The second most common reason was the belief that student body diversity will help prepare students to navigate socioeconomic diversity in the workplace and/or college. Females were significantly more likely than males to say this was a reason they believed diversity led to better outcomes (84% versus 66%). Females were also more likely than males to say they believed that outcomes were better at diverse schools because:

- Students from higher-income families had opportunities to develop an appreciation for the privileges they enjoyed after encountering peers from lower-income families (23% for females versus 9% for males).
- Students from lower-income families encountered less discrimination at diverse schools than at non-diverse schools (25% for females versus 9% for males).

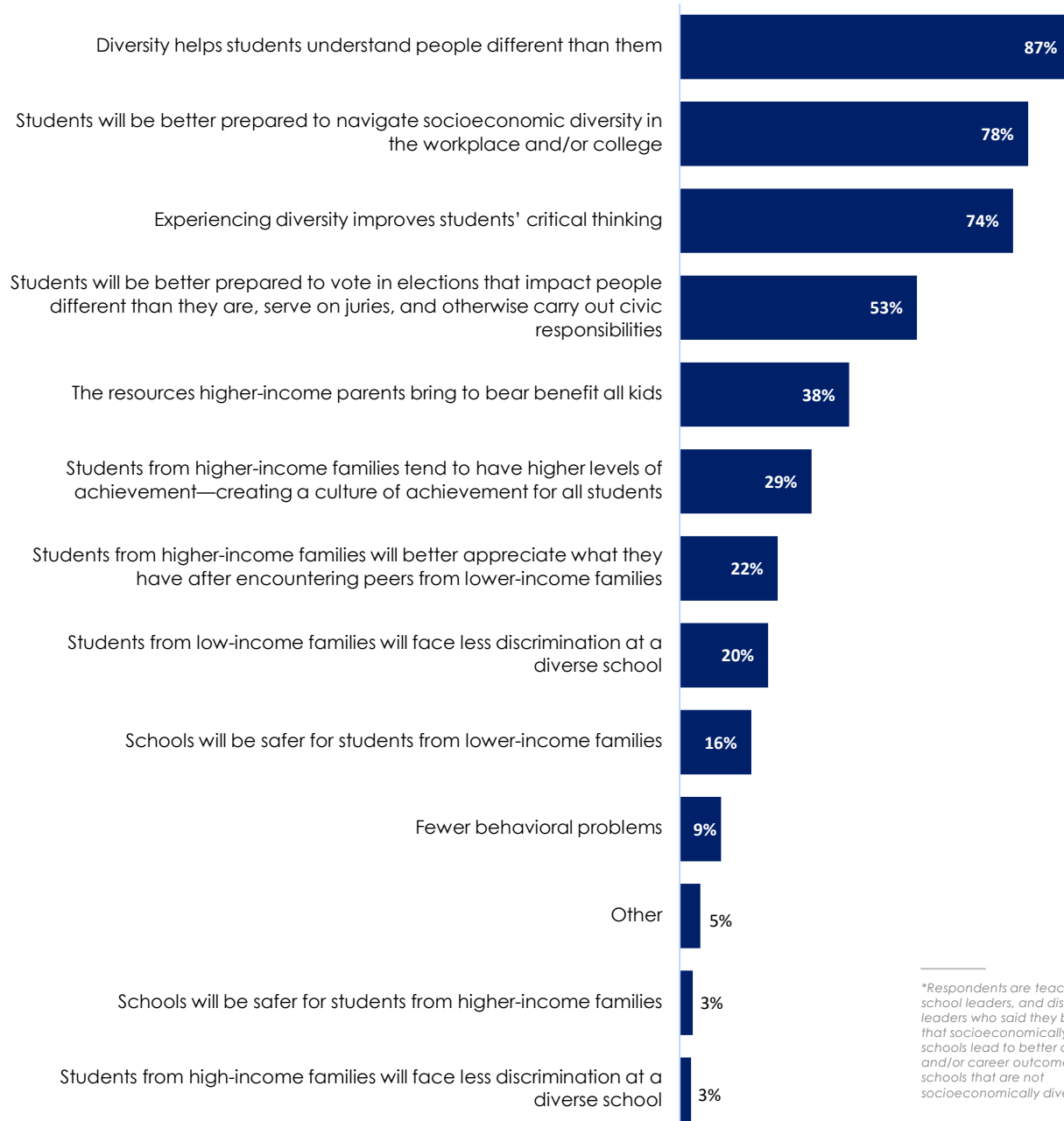
Other common reasons why educators perceived that socioeconomically diverse schools led to better outcomes than homogenous schools are the beliefs that experiencing diversity improves students' critical thinking (a belief supported by [research](#)) and that diverse schools better prepare students to vote in elections, serve on juries, and carry out other civic responsibilities. The belief that diverse schools lead to better outcomes because they help students prepare to carry out civic responsibilities was more common among white respondents (61%) than among those of other ethnicities and races (42%).

Research suggests that school integration is [associated](#) with lower rates of student discipline challenges. Despite such findings, relatively few educators said that diverse schools led to better outcomes because they are safer environments for students from lower-income families (16%). However, this perception was significantly more common among Gen Z and Millennial educators born after 1981 (29%) than among Generation X educators born between 1965 and 1980 (9%) or Baby Boomers born before 1965 (10%).

Relatively few educators said that **diverse schools led to better outcomes** because they are safer environments for students from lower-income families.

Figure 5

**Why do you think socioeconomically diverse schools lead to better college and/or career outcomes than schools that are not socioeconomically diverse? Select all that apply.\***



\*Respondents are teachers, school leaders, and district leaders who said they believed that socioeconomically diverse schools lead to better college and/or career outcomes than schools that are not socioeconomically diverse.



## Reasons Why Educators Believe Non-diverse Schools Lead to Better Outcomes

Like those who said they believed socioeconomic diversity led to better college and career outcomes, educators who perceived that socioeconomic diversity did not lead to better college and career outcomes were also asked to explain their views.

Common reasons included the perception that homogeneous schools experience fewer behavioral problems (a belief not supported by [research](#)); the view that limited resources go further when schools cater to a smaller range of student needs; and the sense that higher-income parents are less likely to pull their children out of non-diverse schools.

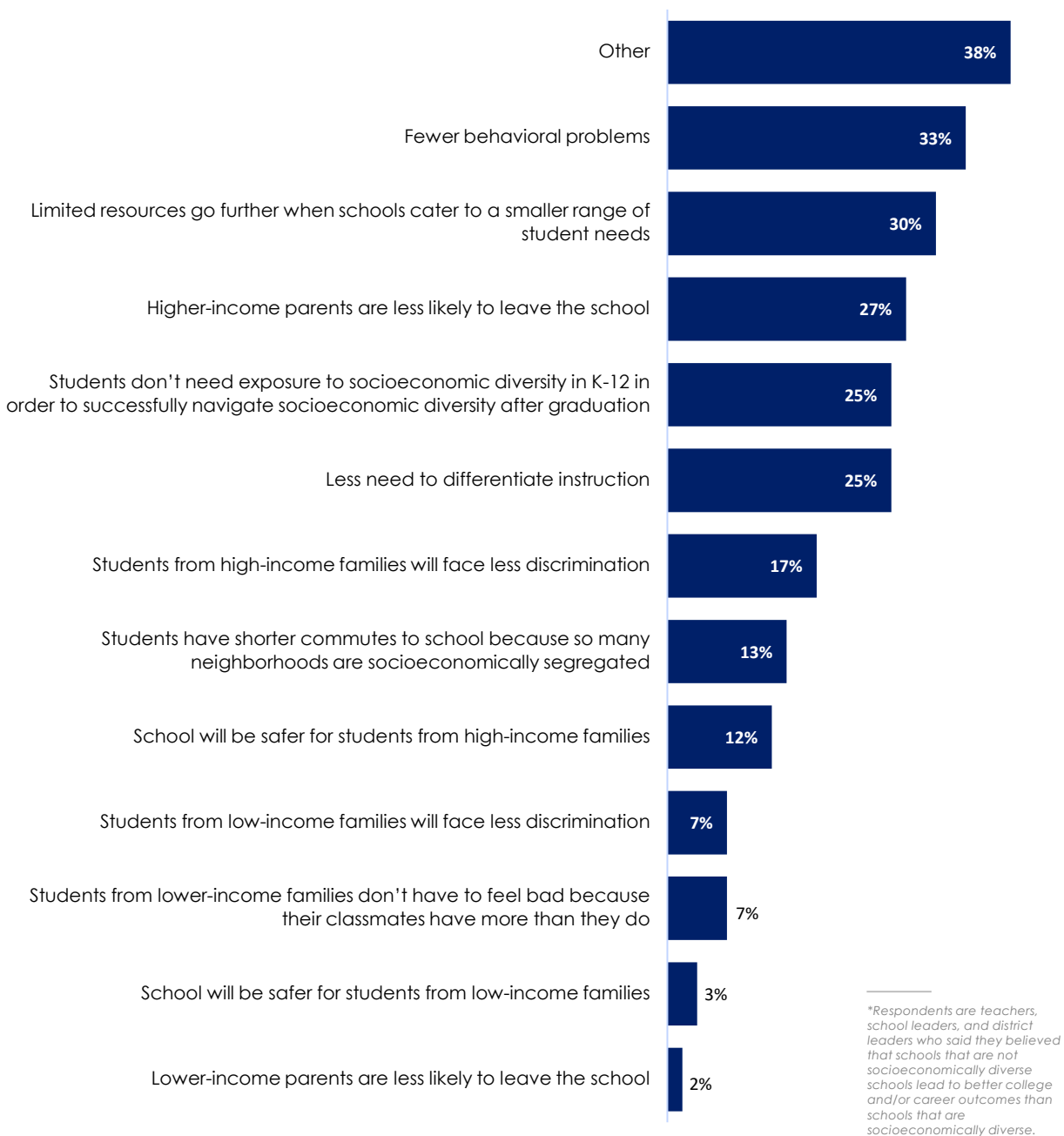
When asked to explain why they thought non-diverse schools led to better outcomes than socioeconomically diverse schools, 38% of educators wrote in responses rather than selecting multiple choice options. These comments included:

- “Even in schools with socioeconomic diversity, there’s no way to tell which student is from which class. K-12 isn’t set up to provide exposure to socioeconomic diversity even when it’s present.” -Middle school science teacher, TX
- “From my 20 plus years of experience, kids from lower-income families require more instructional time and the kids from higher-income families usually get left behind and do not grow to their potential because most of the effort in teaching is on the lower-income students.” -Elementary school special education teacher, TX (Research actually suggests that students from higher-income families are either not impacted academically by integration or that they experience [positive](#) effects.)
- “Educators are spending the majority of their time helping the students who are behind their peers. Academic and behavioral standards have been lowered.” -Middle school social studies teacher, MN
- “Academic success hinges much more on self-motivation and family support than it does on cohort characteristics.” District superintendent, CO

Common reasons [why educators believed that **socioeconomic diversity did not lead to better outcomes**] included the perception that homogeneous schools experience fewer behavioral problems.

Figure 6

**Why do you think schools WITHOUT socioeconomic diversity lead to better college and/or career outcomes than schools with socioeconomic diversity? Select all that apply.\***



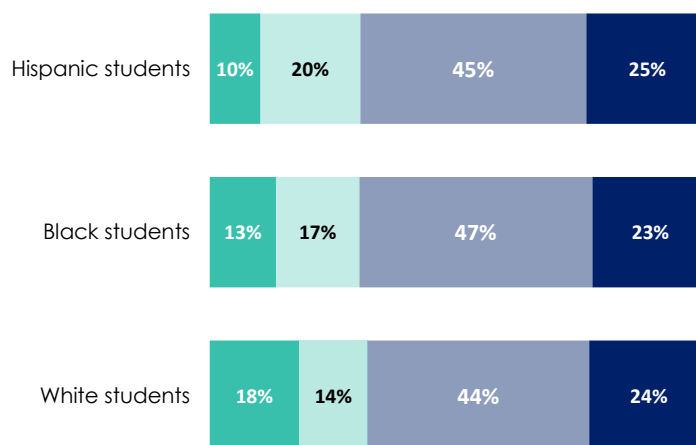
## Are Educators More Likely to Believe That Diversity Benefits Certain Student Groups?

Survey results suggest that there was no statistically significant difference between the share of educators who perceive that racial diversity benefits Black students, Hispanic students, or white students: 68 to 70% agreed that diversity benefited each group. School desegregation has been [demonstrated](#) to have positive impacts on Black students and neutral to positive impacts on white students.

Most educators also agreed that socioeconomic diversity benefits students from higher- and lower-income families. However, they were significantly more likely to say that it benefits students from lower-income families (76%) than to say that it benefits students from higher-income families (58%). This perception is only partly aligned with the [broader body of research](#) on this topic—which finds that socioeconomic integration either has no impact on the academic outcomes of higher-income students or that it benefits this group.

Figure 7

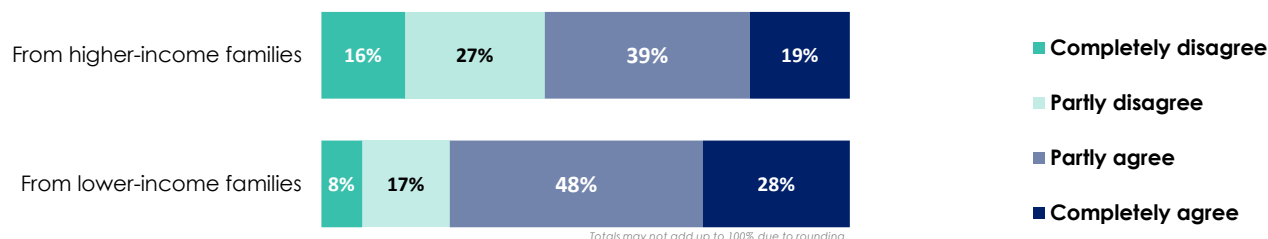
### Racially diverse schools lead to better outcomes for:\*



Survey respondents were randomly assigned to encounter one of three different versions of this question. One asked whether they completely or partly agreed or disagreed that racial diversity benefitted Black students. The other two asked the same question—but about white and Hispanic students. There was no statistically significant difference between the share of respondents who selected each category, for each racial group.

Figure 8

### Socioeconomically diverse schools lead to better outcomes for students:\*



Survey respondents were randomly assigned to encounter one of two different versions of this question. One asked whether they completely or partly agreed or disagreed that socioeconomic diversity benefits students from higher-income families. The other asked the same question—but about students from lower-income families. The share of respondents who said that socioeconomic diversity benefits students from lower-income families was significantly larger than the percentage who said socioeconomic diversity benefits students from higher-income families.

## Do Educators Believe Integration Initiatives are Feasible?

Survey results suggest that most educators (60%) believe that racial diversity is not only necessary but feasible. Most also say the same of socioeconomic diversity (54%). There was no statistically significant difference between the share who said socioeconomic diversity was both necessary and feasible and the share who said the same of racial diversity.

Just over a quarter of educators (26%) say that socioeconomic diversity is still needed but that it is impossible due to logistical challenges, legal obstacles, and/or stakeholder opposition. Nineteen percent said the same of racial diversity.

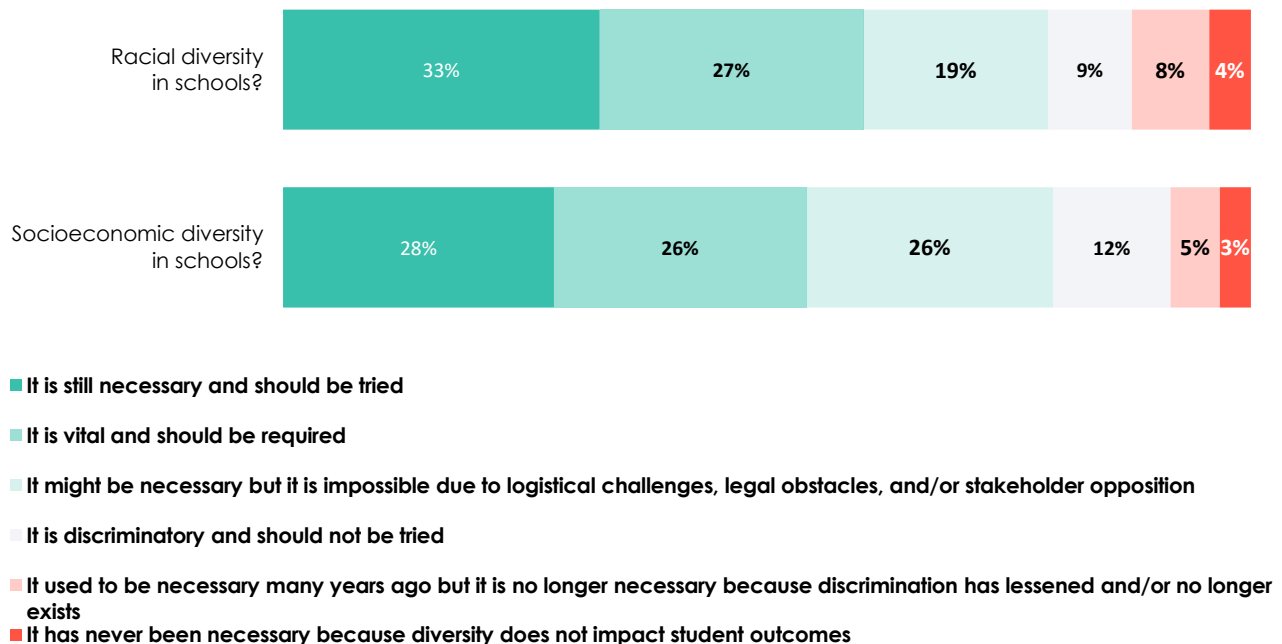
Roughly 1 in 5 respondents say that efforts to foster

racial and socioeconomic diversity should not be tried - either because it is no longer a problem, because it was never a problem, or because addressing the issue is, in unto itself, discriminatory.

Respondents in smaller school districts with less than 2,500 districts were significantly more likely to say schools should not try to foster socioeconomic diversity than were those in larger districts with 10,000 or more students (22% vs. 8%). In addition, white educators were significantly more likely than educators of other ethnicities or races to say that schools should avoid efforts to encourage socioeconomic diversity (18% versus 12%).

Figure 9

Which of the following statements most closely describes your view of efforts to foster:



## How Prevalent are School Diversity Efforts?

Most respondents (64%) say their districts are currently making some sort of effort to create or maintain racially and/or socioeconomically diverse schools. The most common approach—reported by about 1 in 4 respondents—is to offer special programs that attract students from across the district. Such efforts were reported significantly more often by urban educators (45%) than by teachers and administrators working in suburban (27%) or rural districts (12%). Magnet schools that use admissions practices to maintain racial and/or socioeconomic diversity were also reported more often by educators in urban areas (28%) than by those working in suburban (12%) or rural districts (5%).

Multiple rural educators noted in comments that measures such as magnet schools and special programs were logistically impossible in their districts due to their small sizes.

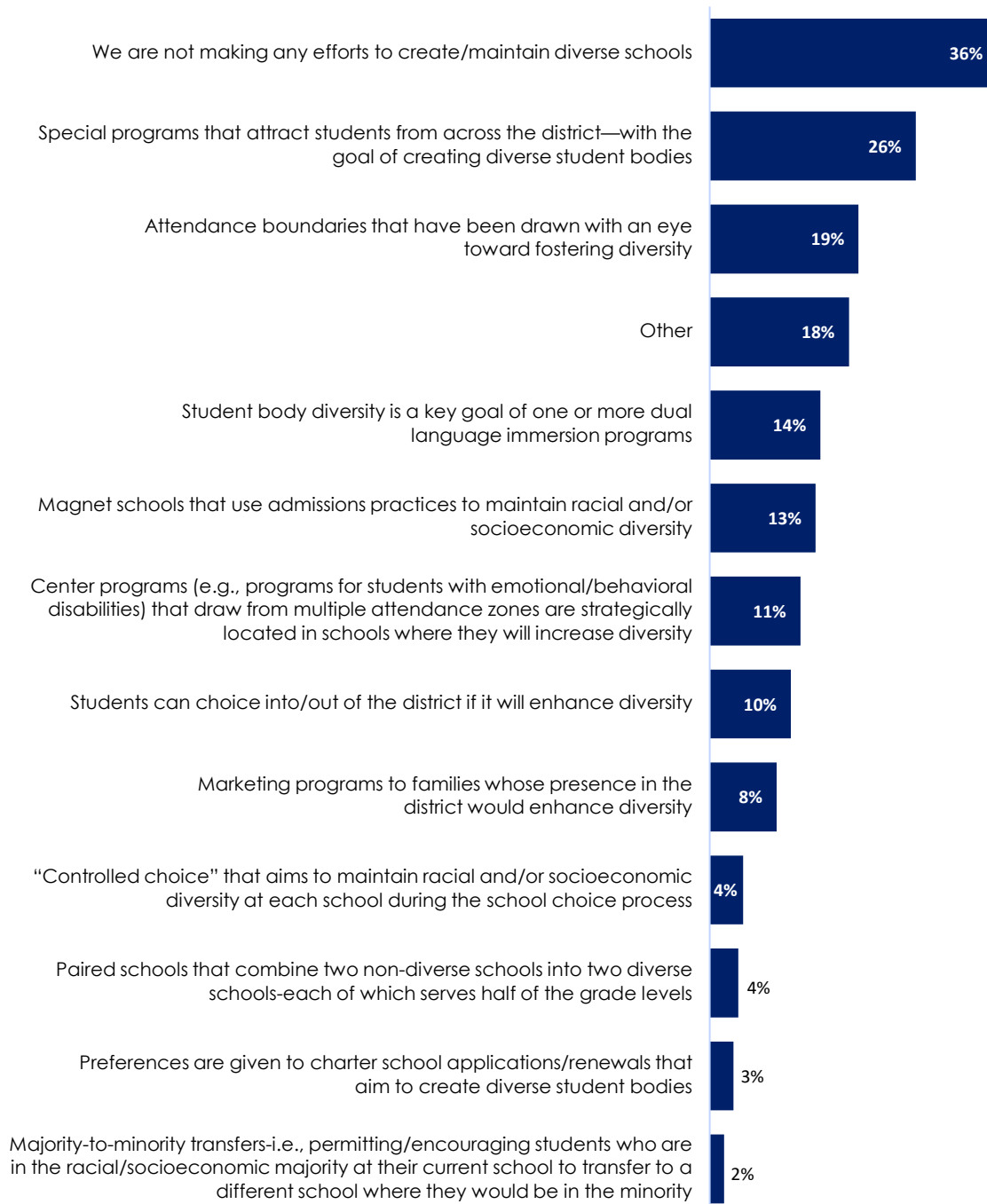
“We are rural and ALL students attend one school,” a district leader in rural Pennsylvania explained.

Magnet schools that use **admissions practices to maintain racial and/or socioeconomic diversity** were also reported more often by educators in urban areas (28%) than by those working in suburban (12%) or rural districts (5%).



Figure 10

**What efforts—if any—is your district currently making to create or maintain racially and/or socioeconomically diverse schools? Select all that apply.**



## Conclusion



**S**ocioeconomic and racial integration initiatives receive limited attention these days relative to other “hot” education-related topics such as AI, school culture war battles, or student mental health. The current presidential administration has expressed opposition to integration measures. But results of the EdWeek Research Center’s survey of teachers, school leaders, and district leaders suggest that most educators view school integration favorably. Further, most also indicated that their districts are taking at least some small steps toward creating integrated environments. Although such steps may fly under the radar, they nonetheless persist and are continuing to influence the demographic composition of our nation’s schools.

## Key Contributors



**Holly Kurtz** directs the EdWeek Research Center, which produces standalone studies as well as analyses for Education Week and special reports. Holly began working at Education Week in 2014 after earning a Ph.D. in 2013 from the University of Colorado at Boulder's School of Education and completing a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Colorado at Denver's School of Public Affairs. Prior to attending graduate school, she spent 11 years covering education and other topics for newspapers in Florida, Alabama, and Colorado.



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