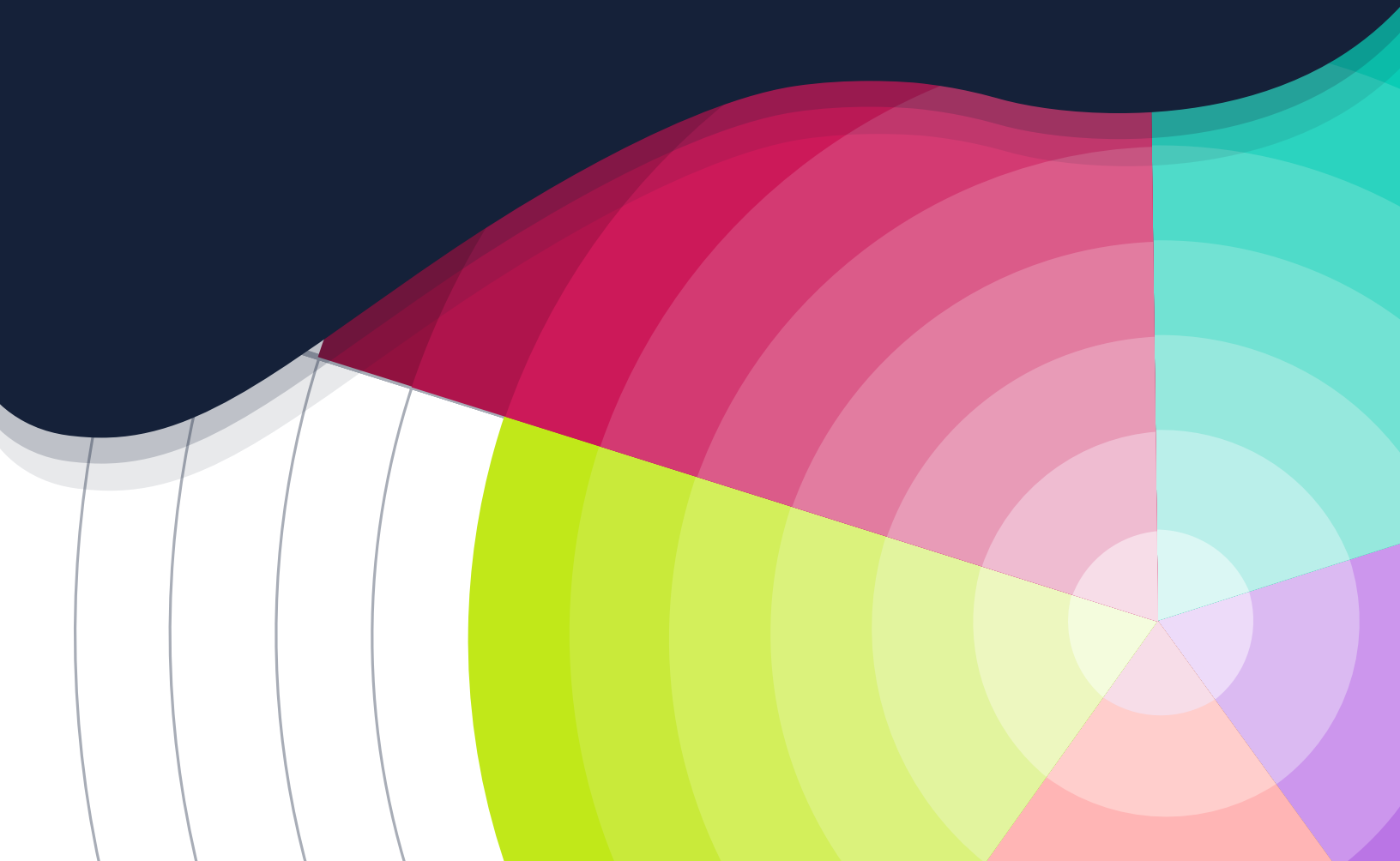




The State of Educational Opportunity in Wisconsin

A Survey of WI Parents

October 2024



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Dear Friends,

The Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty has a strong belief that our freedoms will endure only as long as Americans value and defend the principles and institutions that make our nation unique. Achieving this ideal requires equipping citizens with an education that values the character, skills, and knowledge needed to thrive in a free society. Central to this vision is a fundamental belief that parents should be actively involved in the upbringing of their children and should have a variety of high-quality educational options.

That's why we are excited to partner with 50CAN and Edge Research to share the results of a new survey of Wisconsin parents on the state of educational opportunity. We are hopeful that this survey will help paint a clear picture of parental perspectives on education, and ultimately provide policymakers with valuable insights into how the state excels and where improvements are needed, especially in relation to our peers.

The survey is organized into five categories of learning that families tell us are crucial for them and their children: 1) school quality and opportunity, 2) tutoring, summer and mental health, 3) out of school activities, 4) information and engagement, and 5) college and career readiness. A total of 403 parents and guardians of school-aged children across our state were surveyed between July 8 and August 22, 2024 as part of a nationwide research effort that reached more than 20,000 respondents.

The key findings of this survey follow. A digital copy of this report is available at will-law.org. Visit our partners at 50can.org to view the nationwide report and access the full data set.

Sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rick Esenberg'.

Rick Esenberg
President & General Counsel
Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty

Key Findings

-  **Satisfaction with schools is relatively low.** Only 44% of Wisconsin parents are very satisfied with their child's school. This is very close to the national average, though within the margin of error (45%).
-  **Parents feel like they have a choice.** Wisconsin has a long history of supporting a variety of school options, from creating the first modern school choice program to being an early adopter of public charter schools and establishing a comparatively robust open-enrollment system. With 69% of parents reporting that they believe they have options, Wisconsin ranks 10th nationwide in parental choice.
-  **Parents have little knowledge of school budget decisions.** Only 13% of parents responded that they are familiar with how budget decisions are made at their child's school, compared to 20% nationally, making Wisconsin 4th worst nationally. This stresses the importance of improving transparency of school finances. A WILL-supported bill for financial transparency became law in 2021 but has yet to be implemented by DPI.
-  **Parents care about school performance.** Wisconsin ranks near the national average of parents who review school performance, with 28% of parents reporting that they compare school performance information with other schools. This shows the need to have an accountability system that is readily accessible and easy for parents to understand.
-  **Confidence in college and career readiness is low.** The state lags behind national averages when it comes to parents' belief in their children's preparation for both college and a career. Only 30% of parents feel extremely confident that their children are being prepared for the workforce, while only 26% are extremely confident their child will be ready for college.
-  **There is an unmet demand for tutoring.** Since 2019, 74% of parents report that their children have not received any academic tutoring. Among those who have not received tutoring, 35% express interest in such services. However, for 44% of this interested group, cost is the primary barrier to accessing tutoring for their children. One way to address this is the creation of an ESA program that would allow families to spend their allocated educational dollars on services beyond the traditional brick-and-mortar classroom.
-  **Parents are interested in alternatives to traditional instruction for high school students.** More than 60% of Wisconsin parents expressed interest in dual enrollment, career and technical training, internship-based courses, and courses that result in industrial certification.
-  **Parents are critical of Wisconsin's education accountability system.** Wisconsin parents rate report cards, state tests, and grades on assignments significantly lower than the national average when determining how their child is doing in school.
-  **Parents overestimate how well their children are doing in school.** 43% of parents say that their child is "above grade level" in math, and 45% say the same in reading. However, according to state testing data, only 8.1% of students were rated as "Advanced" in English/Language Arts on the 2022-23 Forward Exam, and only 9.5% were in math.
-  **Most parents significantly underestimate what we are spending per student.** 61% of parents estimate that Wisconsin spends less than \$15,000 per student, with 49% believing we spend less than \$10,000 per student. In reality, the average district now spends \$17,908 between state, local, and federal funds. No district spends less than \$12,415.

Methodology

Edge Research conducted a nationwide survey of 20,090 U.S. parents and guardians of school-aged children (K-12th grade) in each of the 50 states plus the District of Columbia. **In Wisconsin, 403 parents and guardians of K-12 children were surveyed.** Respondents could take the survey in either English or Spanish, based on their preference. The survey was in the field from July 8 to August 22, 2024.

DATA COLLECTION

The survey used a mixed-mode methodology to reach as many households as possible. First, survey respondents were recruited using online, non-probability samples obtained via national opt-in consumer research panels. These surveys were mobile-optimized (meaning participants can take the survey on a PC or mobile device, which helps reach those who do not have internet access but do have a mobile data plan). In states where Edge Research was not able to collect at least 300 surveys using this method, they obtained supplementary text-to-web interviews.

SURVEY REPRESENTATIVENESS

As respondents entered the survey, they submitted demographic information, and quotas were set to ensure the sample is proportionately distributed in accordance with the most recent U.S. Census¹ and National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)² data on U.S. parents in each state. Quotas functioned by predetermining the number of desired respondents by gender identity, race, ethnicity, child’s grade and grade level in each state. Once the desired number was reached with each quota group, it closed, and additional respondents were turned away. After the survey came out of the field, Edge Research reviewed the data and applied additional weights by income, race/ethnicity, school level, and school type within states.

The following tables provide the demographics of survey respondents in WI after weighting.

RACE/ETHNICITY							
Hispanic/ Latino of Any Race	White Alone	Black/ African American Alone	Asian Alone	American Indian or Alaska Native Alone	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Alone	Some Other Race Alone	Two or More Races
9%	79%	6%	4%	0.6%	–	0.2%	2%

INCOME DISTRIBUTION		
Low Income	Middle Income	High Income
38%	54%	8%

¹ Annual Social and Economic Supplements, United States Census, [Annual Social and Economic Supplements \(census.gov\)](#)
² Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), [Index \(ed.gov\)](#)

SCHOOL LEVEL

K-5th	6th-8th	9th-12th
45%	24%	31%

GRADE OF CHILD

K	1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade	4th Grade	5th Grade	6th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade
7%	7%	8%	8%	8%	7%	7%	8%	9%	7%	7%	8%	8%

SCHOOL TYPE

Local or Traditional Public School	Public Magnet School	Public Charter School	Private Independent School	Parochial/Religious School	Virtual/Online Public School	Homeschool	Microschool	Other Type of School
74%	2%	4%	5%	5%	3%	3%	2%	1%

INCOME DEFINITIONS

In the pages that follow, we provide results for low, middle and high-income parents. These income buckets were calculated using the Pew Research Center’s study “The State of the American Middle Class”³ and their category definitions:

- Middle-income households are defined as those with an income that is two-thirds to double that of the U.S. median household income, after being adjusted for household size.
- Lower-income households have incomes less than two-thirds of the median.
- High-income households have incomes that are more than double the median.

Following these definitions, Edge Research adjusted the incomes reported in the survey to reflect a 3-person household using the equivalence scales technique. Pulling from the U.S. Census 2023 Annual Social and Economic Supplements, they used the 3-person household income breaks of \$61,000 to \$183,000 as middle, and values above and below those thresholds as lower and upper income respectively.

DATA QUALITY CONTROL AND STANDARDS

Edge Research employed several practices to ensure data quality. The survey platform used reCAPTCHA to screen for bots. They also applied a third-party tool called Research Defender to screen out known bad actors and respondents with high survey-taking rates. In addition, data was monitored regularly while in the field. Once all responses were collected, they applied additional data cleaning processes, clearing data for cheating, speeding, inattentiveness, and AI-generated responses.

Edge Research follows the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) Code of Professional Ethics and Practices⁴ to maintain the highest standards of competence, integrity, accountability, and transparency in public opinion and survey research work.

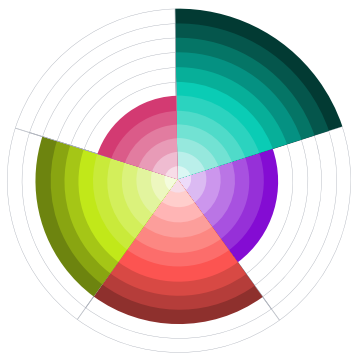
³ Kochhar, Rakesh, “The State of the American Middle Class,” [Pew Research Center](#), 5/31/24

⁴ Code of Professional Ethics and Practices, [American Association For Public Opinion Research \(AAPOR\)](#)

How to Read the Results

One challenge with a survey of this size was how to present the results in an accessible way that doesn't sacrifice the depth of insights. We decided to present the answers in two ways: first with an overview of the results across 15 questions for our state and then with a more in-depth look at how our state compared to all the other states for a few key questions.

OUR STATE SUMMARY



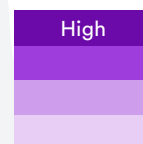
To help make it easier to look at our state's full results at a glance, we present the answers from our parents over two pages. At the top of the first page is the number of parents who participated in the survey.

We also provide a way to view our state's **relative strengths and weaknesses through a circle with five wedges**, one for each of the five categories of the survey: 1) School quality and opportunity (**pink**), 2) Tutoring, summer, and mental health (**green**), 3) Out of school activities (**teal**), 4) Information and engagement (**purple**), and 5) College and career readiness (**orange**).

Each of the five categories is made up of three questions. These are presented below each category with **our state's results compared to other states represented by a tier** shown to the right of each question, from low to high. These tiers are scored from 1 (low) to 4 (high) and the scores across the three questions determine how many rows are colored in for the wedge (up to a possible number of 12 rows).

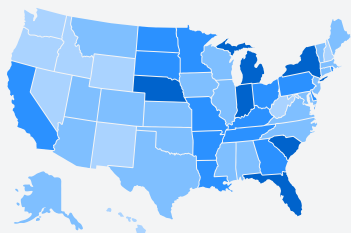
The state results for each question are presented in four circles: low-income, middle and high income, state average and national average. For yes/no questions, the results are presented as the percentage who said yes, rounded to the nearest whole number. For questions about parents' opinions and attitudes, we utilized a Likert scale and **reported out the percentage choosing the highest option**. For example, on question 1, which measures parents' satisfaction with their child's school, we present the percentage who answered that they were "very satisfied." This helps ground the comparison discussion in a high bar for success.

State Tier



OUR STATE IN CONTEXT

The second section of this report provides the results **for all 50 states plus D.C.**, one question at a time.



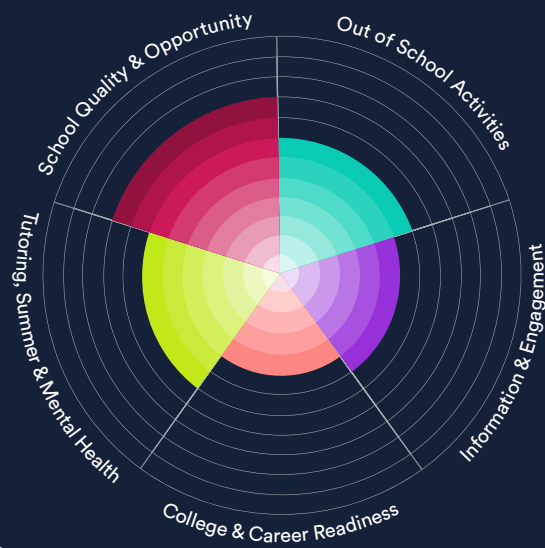
For the **maps**, a key provides the scale for the map and explains the numbers behind each of the four shades of blue. The darkest shade of blue is always the highest numbers and the lightest shade of blue is always the lowest numbers. Our state is outlined in red.

For the **list**, states are ordered from highest performing states at the top to lowest performing states at the bottom. This list shows the state average as a dark blue dot and the results for low-income families in a light shade of the section color and the results for middle- and high-income families as a darker shade of that color. Our state is identified with a red box to make it easier to spot.



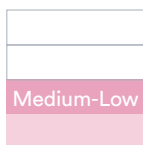
Surveyed July 8-August 22, 2024

Sample size (N) = 403 parents and guardians



SCHOOL QUALITY AND OPPORTUNITY

State Tier



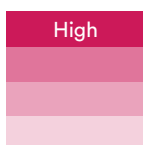
School Satisfaction

Percentage answering they are very satisfied with their child's school



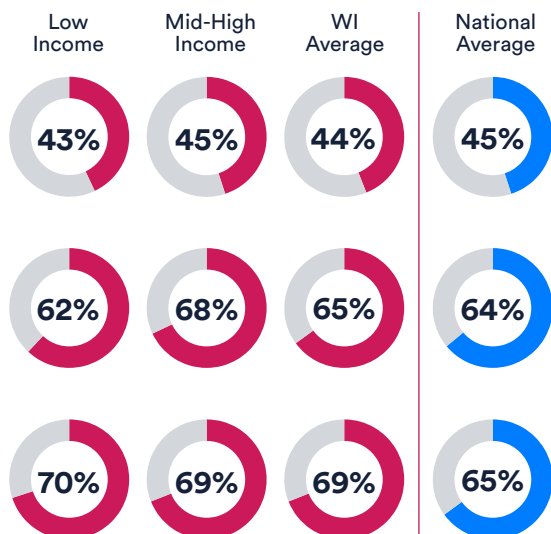
Would Make the Same Choice

Percentage answering that they would send their child to the school they go to today



Feel They Have a Choice

Percentage answering they feel like they have a choice in what school their child attends



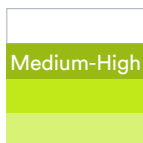
TUTORING, SUMMER AND MENTAL HEALTH

State Tier



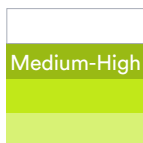
Tutoring Participation

Percentage of children who have received academic tutoring in this past school year



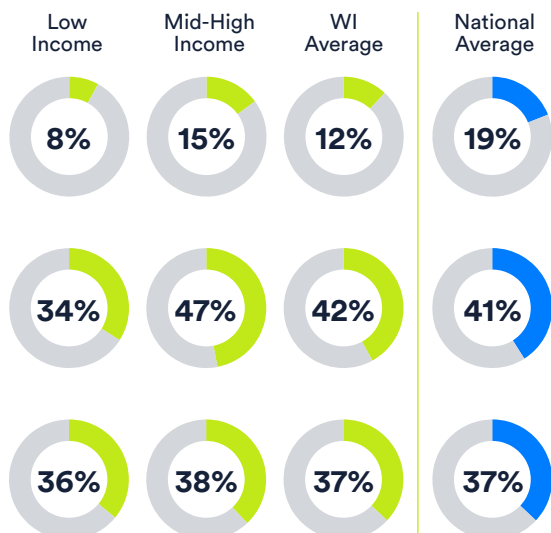
Summer Program Participation

Percentage of children who participated in a supervised summer program

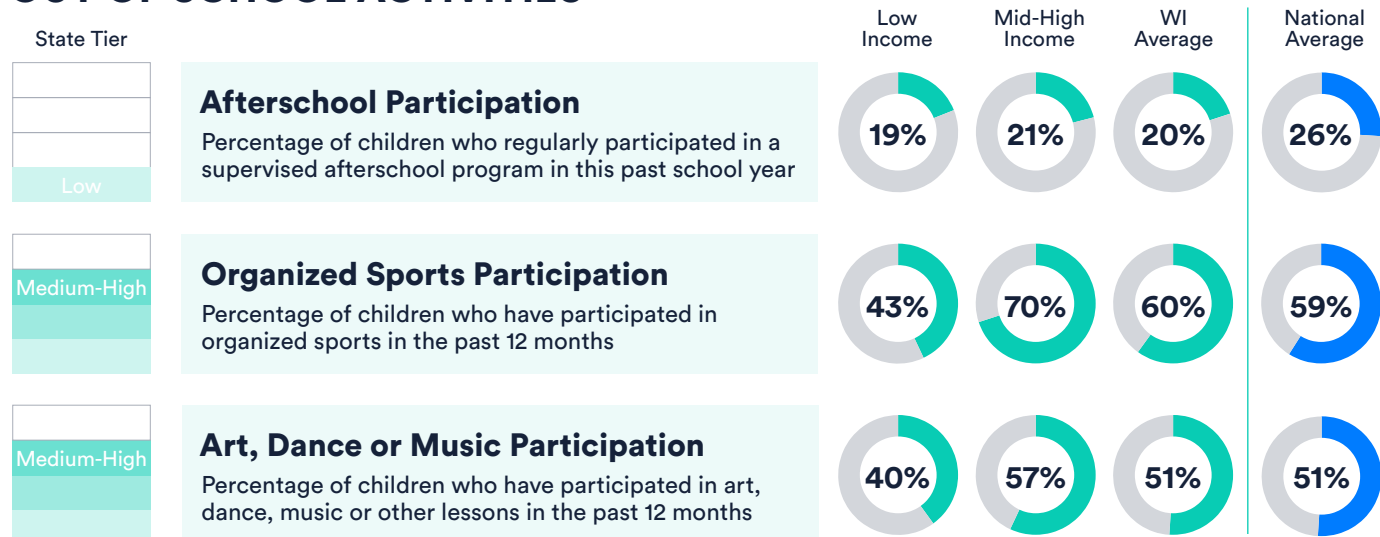


Mental Health Satisfaction

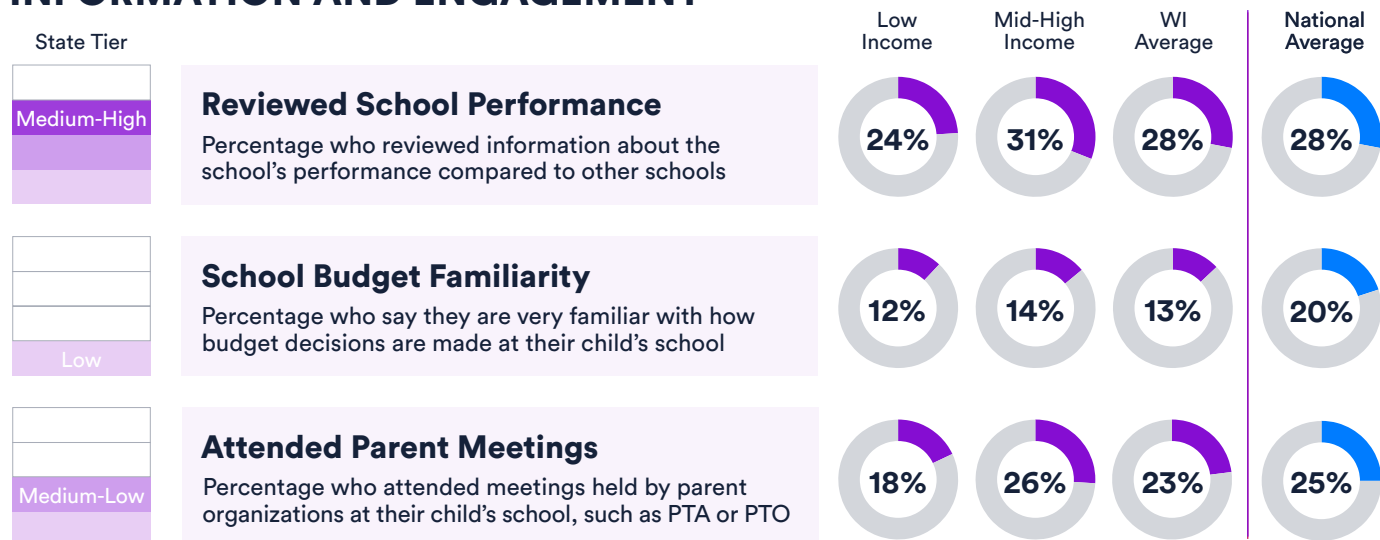
Percentage answering they are very satisfied with how the school supports their child's mental health needs



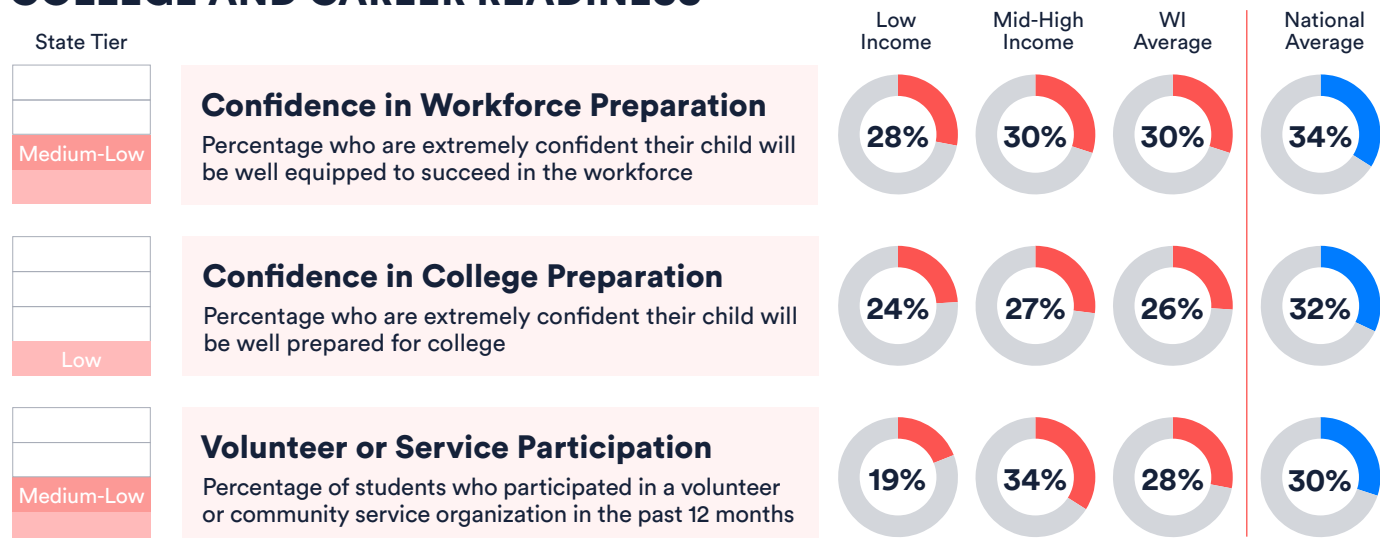
OUT OF SCHOOL ACTIVITIES



INFORMATION AND ENGAGEMENT



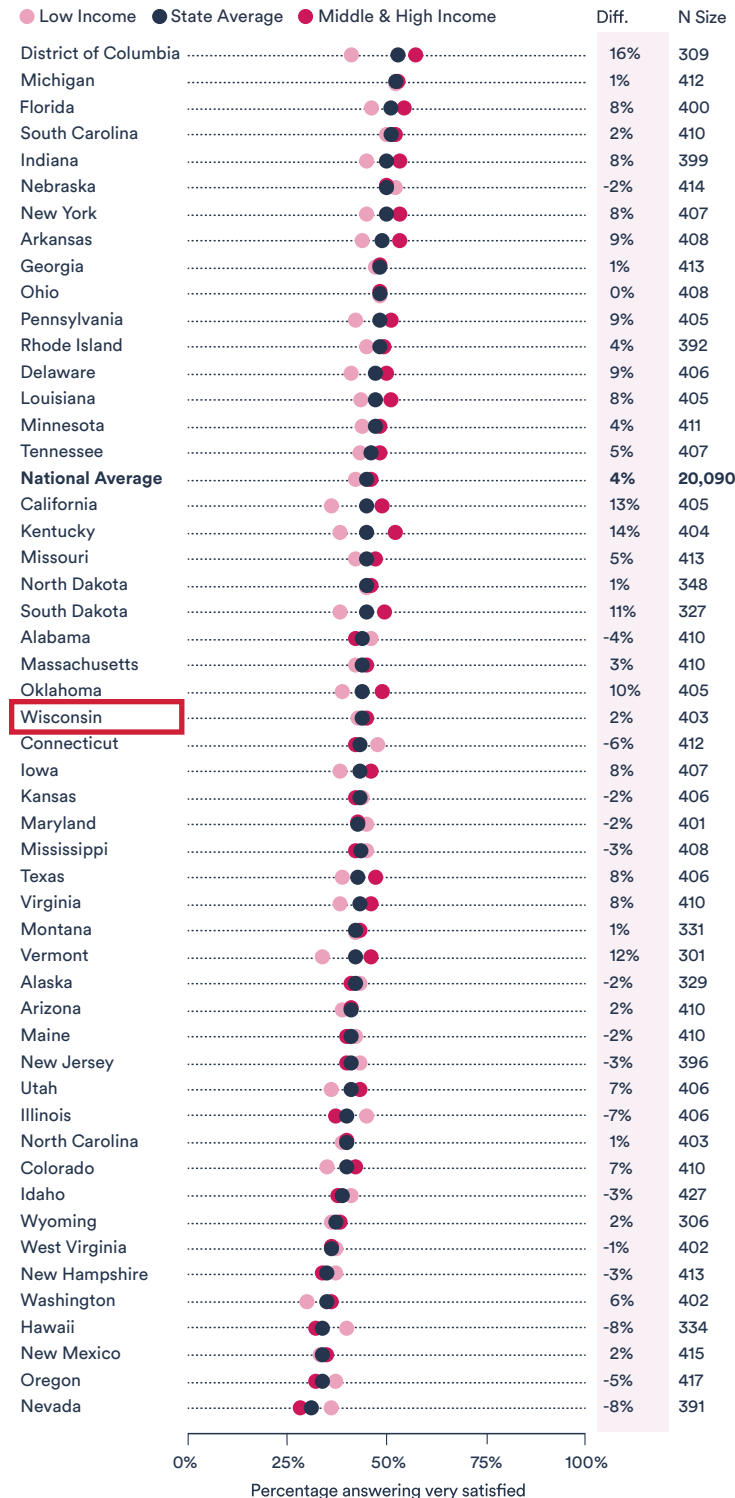
COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS



WI in Context: A 50-State Perspective

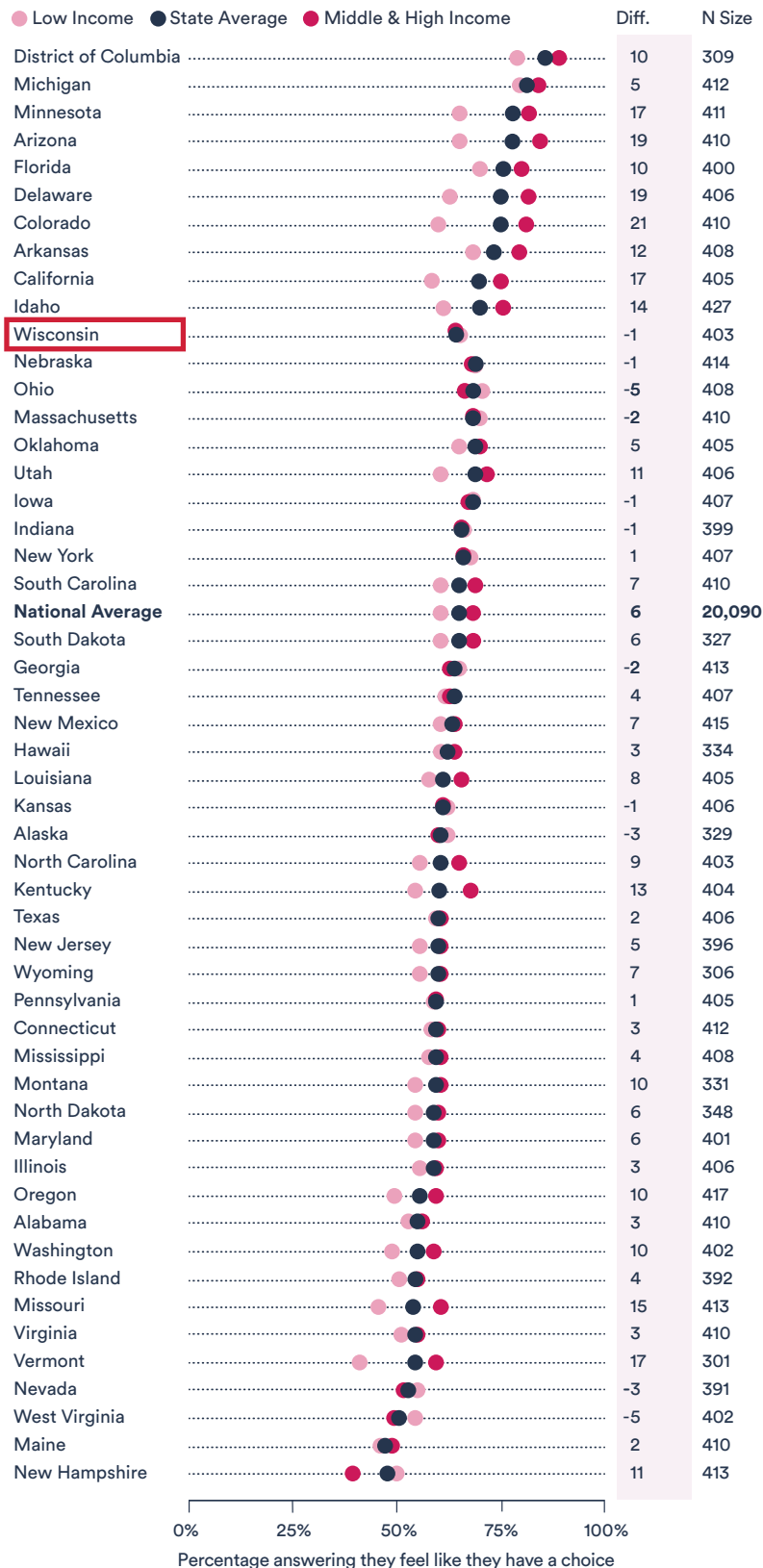
SCHOOL SATISFACTION BY STATE & INCOME

Percentage answering they are very satisfied with their child's school



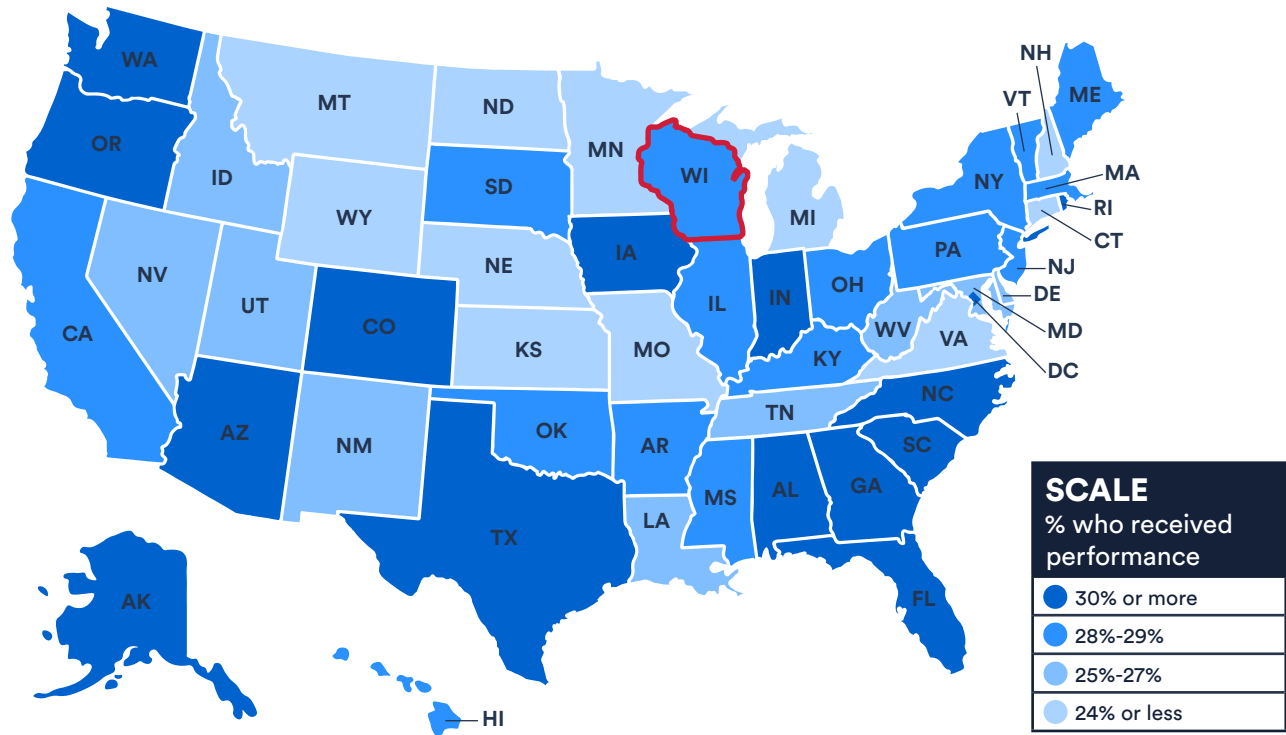
FEEL THEY HAVE A CHOICE BY STATE & INCOME

Percentage answering they feel like they have a choice in what school their child attends



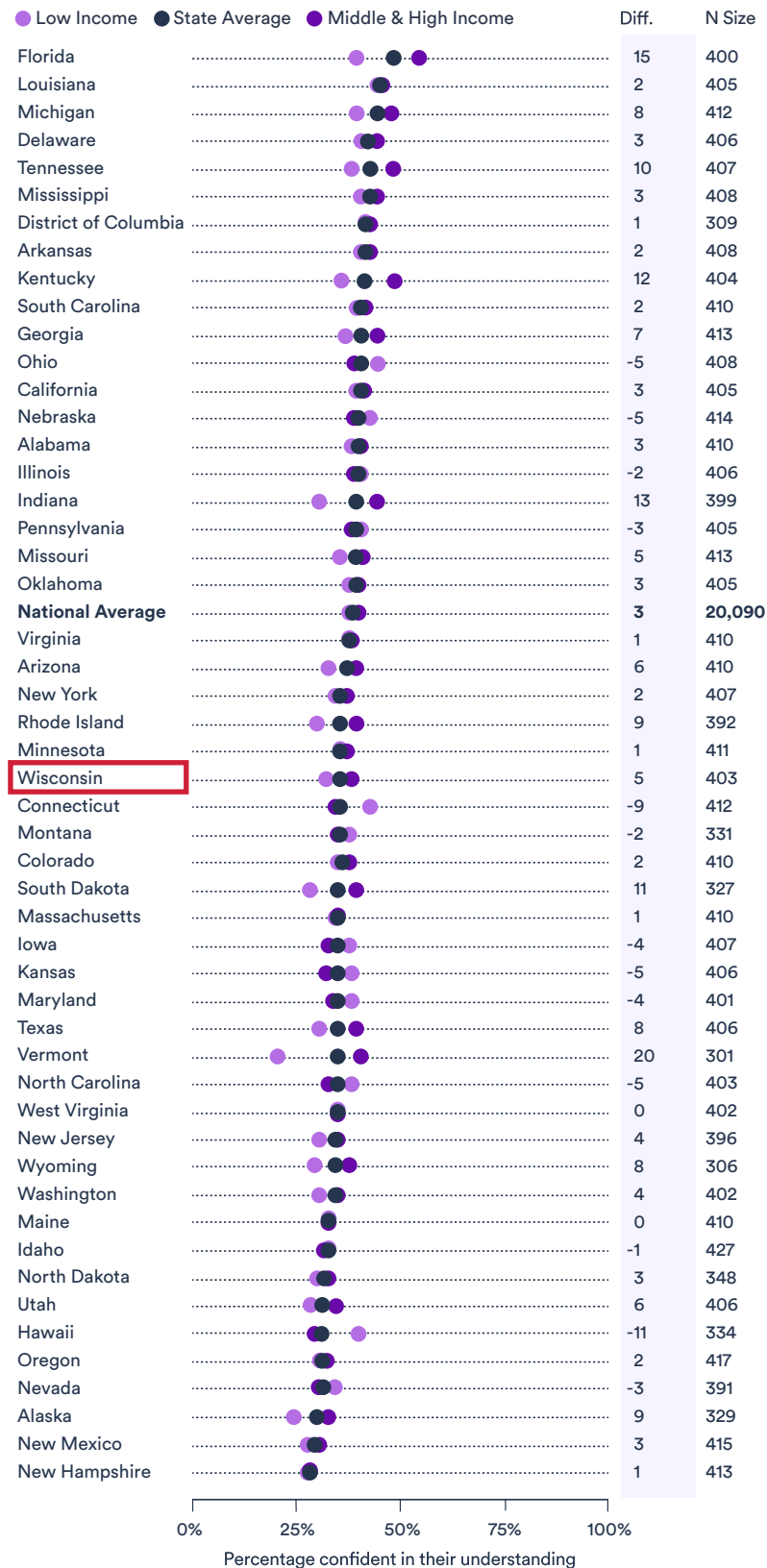
REVIEWED SCHOOL PERFORMANCE BY STATE

Percentage who in the most recent school year reviewed information about the school's performance compared to other schools



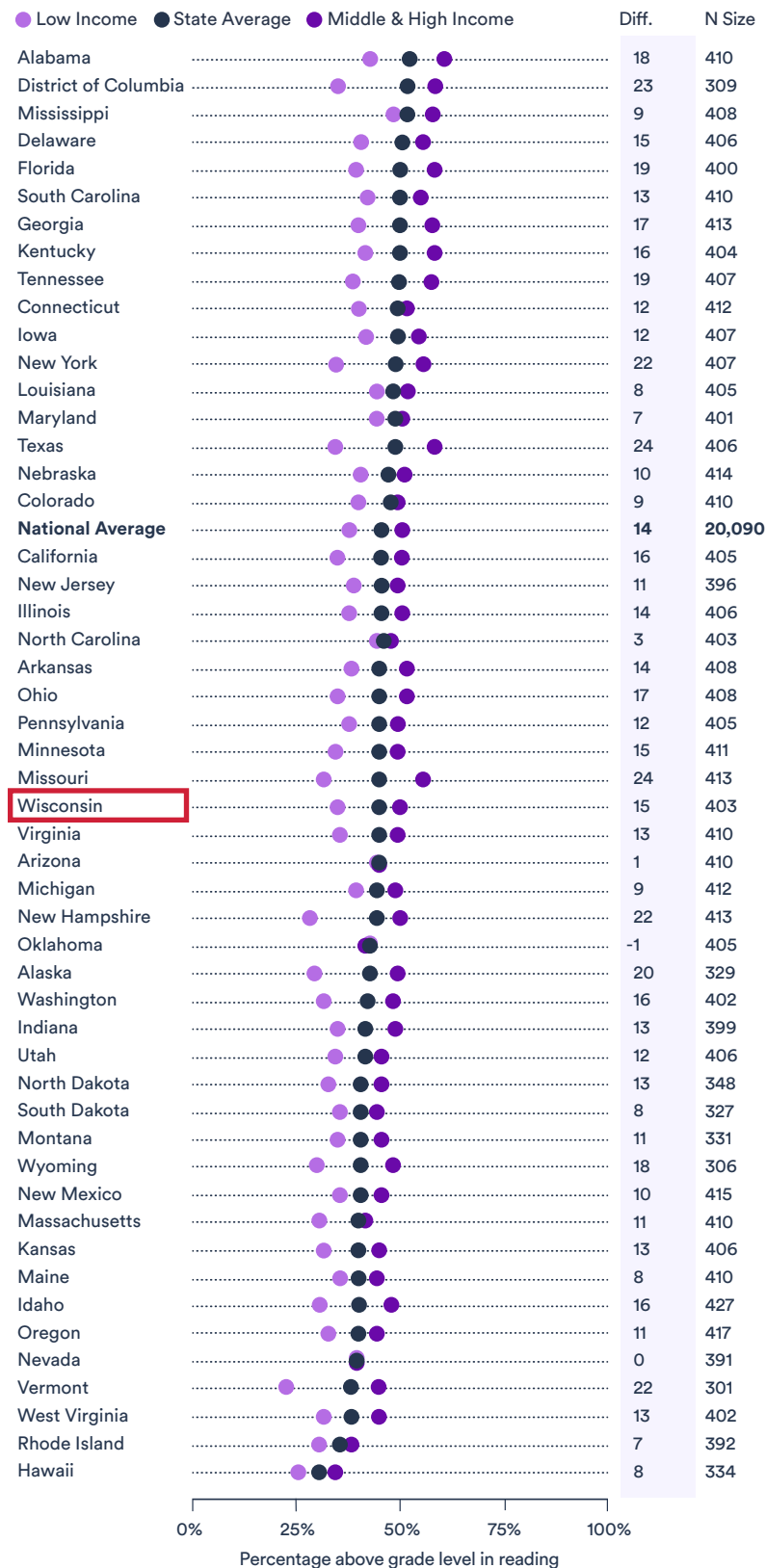
CONFIDENCE IN UNDERSTANDING BY STATE & INCOME

Percentage who are extremely confident they have a clear understanding of how well their child is achieving academically



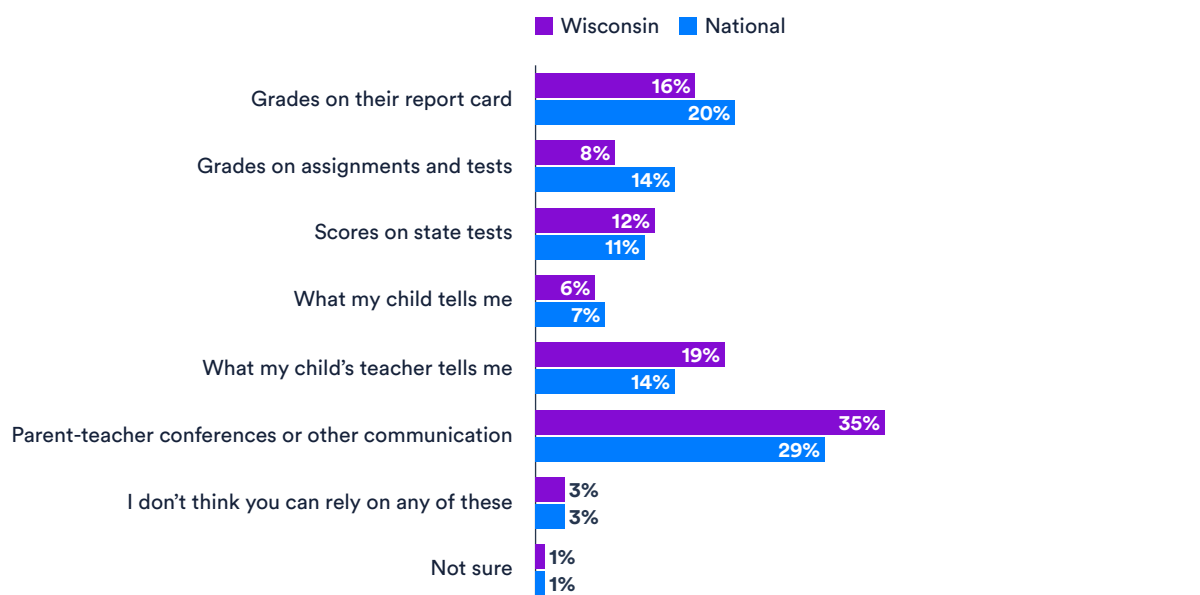
ABOVE GRADE LEVEL IN READING BY STATE & INCOME

Percentage who believe their child is performing above grade level in reading



PARENTAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Percentage who receive academic progress information from each source



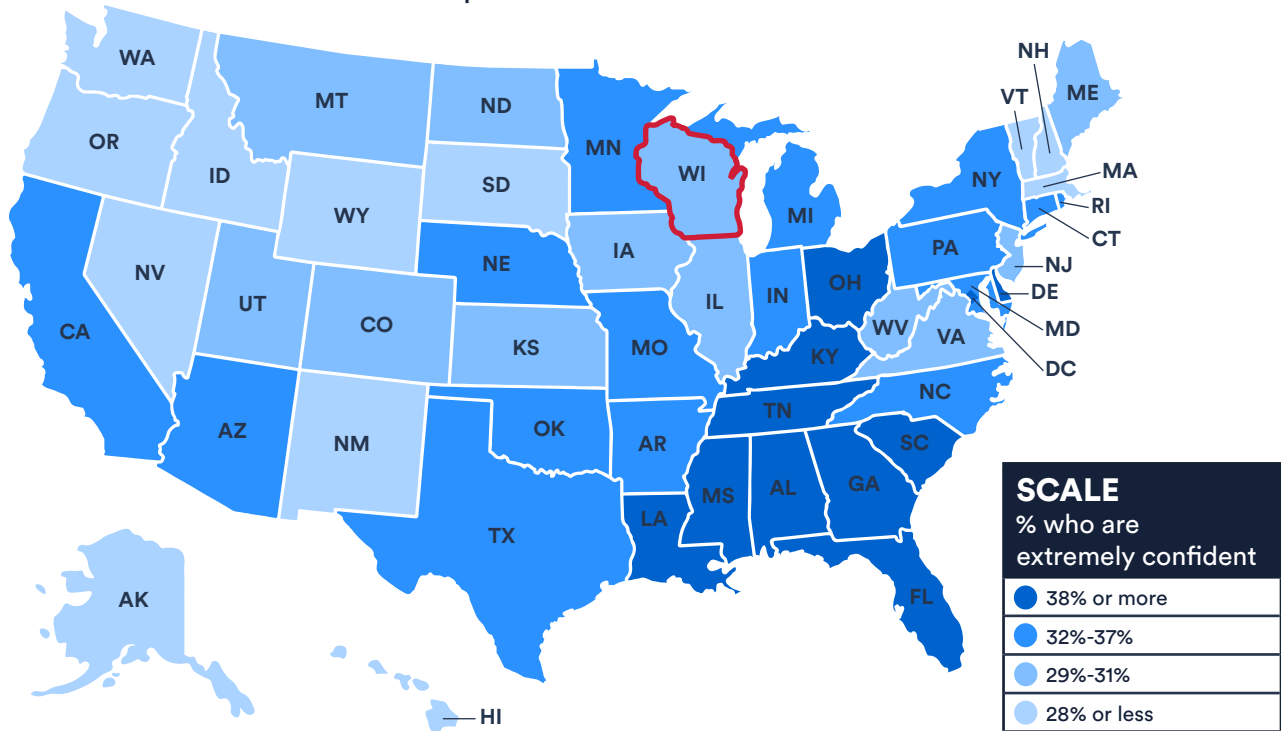
HOW MUCH PARENTS THINK SCHOOLS SPEND

Percentage who believe schools spend that amount per student per year

HOW MUCH PARENTS THINK SCHOOLS SPEND	WISCONSIN
Less than \$1,000 per student per school year	13%
\$1,000 to under \$5,000	23%
\$5,000 to under \$10,000	12%
\$10,000 to under \$15,000	13%
\$15,000 to under \$20,000	4%
\$20,000 to under \$25,000	3%
\$25,000 to under \$30,000	1%
\$30,000 to under \$35,000	1%
\$35,000 to under \$40,000	1%
\$40,000 to under \$45,000	-
\$45,000 to under \$50,000	1%
\$50,000 or more per student per school year	1%
Not sure	28%

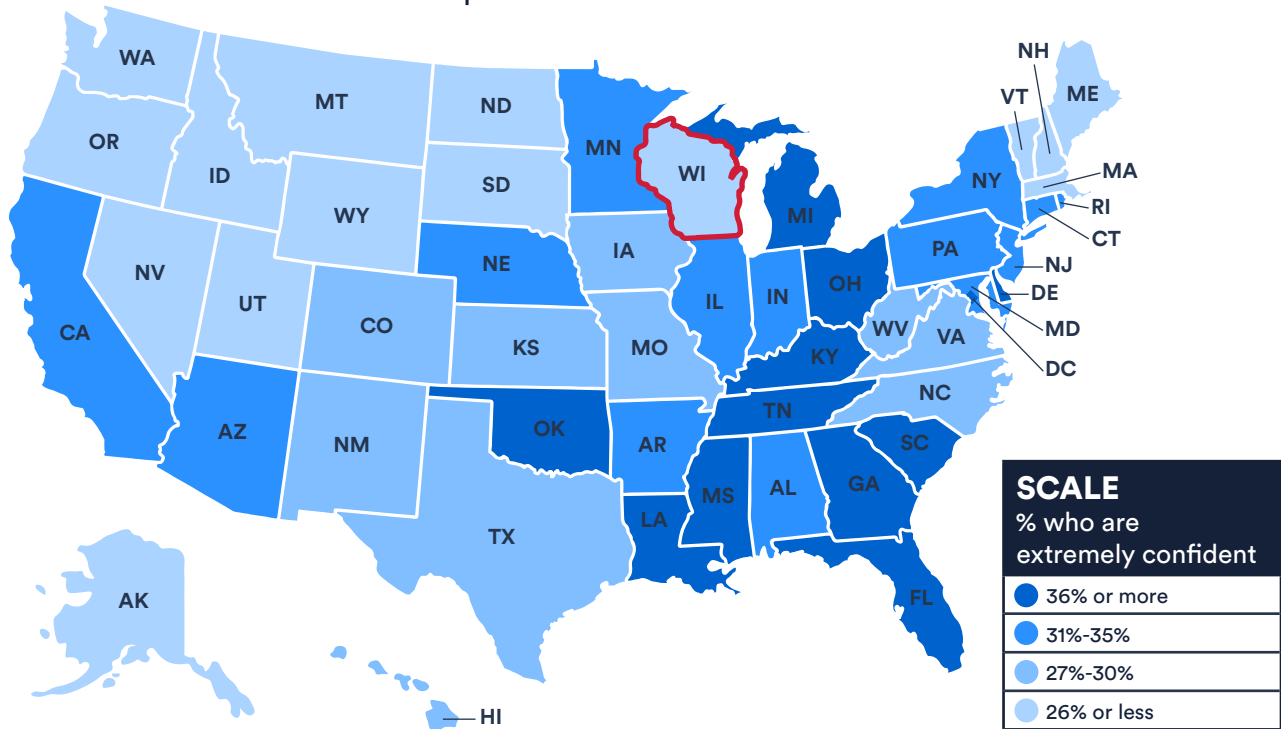
CONFIDENCE IN WORKFORCE PREPARATION BY STATE

Percentage who are extremely confident their child will be equipped with the knowledge, skills and competencies to succeed in the workforce



CONFIDENCE IN COLLEGE PREPARATION BY STATE

Percentage who are extremely confident their child will be equipped with the knowledge, skills and competencies to succeed in the workforce



ABOUT WILL

The **Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty Inc.** (“WILL”) is a public interest law and policy center based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Through litigation, education, and participation in public discourse, WILL advances the public interest in the rule of law, individual liberty, constitutional government, and a robust civil society. We do so in partnership with like-minded individuals and organizations who are committed to conservative principles and a government bound to serving the people, as our nation’s founders intended.

ABOUT 50CAN

50CAN is an education advocacy organization focused on building the dynamic, student-centered education system of the future so that all kids, regardless of address, receive a high quality education. At the center of this work is our support for local education advocates who together have secured more than 250 transformative policy wins since our founding in 2011. This advocacy work is complemented by fellowships to spark and amplify the voices of changemakers, support for educational entrepreneurs as they build proof points of a better tomorrow, and efforts to help elected leaders better serve the public through a deeper understanding of education policy.

ABOUT EDGE RESEARCH

Edge Research tells data-driven stories that make our clients’ programs, products, and brands successful. One of Edge’s key verticals is education, which ranges from early childhood development, to K-12 and postsecondary education, to lifelong learning. We work for dozens of foundations, advocacy organizations, curriculum providers, associations, districts, schools and universities. Edge is constantly in the field talking to parents, students, teachers, administrators, and other education decision makers – getting the pulse on the issues that matter most.

