



First Book Education Barriers Survey

A survey identifying the most common barriers to education for kids in need, according to the educators that serve them

September 2019





ABOUT FIRST BOOK

First Book transforms the lives of children in need. We believe that education is a path out of poverty for the more than 30 million children, ages 0-18, living in drastically under-resourced low-income communities—who now represent more than half of all public school children in America.

First Book reaches a network of nearly 450,000 educators working with kids in need. Through a sustainable, market-driven model, First Book makes everything from brand-new, high-quality books and educational resources, to sports equipment, winter coats, snacks, and more, affordable to its member network.

Since 1992, First Book has distributed more than 185 million books and educational resources to programs and schools serving children from low-income families in more than 30 countries. With an additional 1,000 educators joining each week, First Book is the largest and fastest-growing network of educators exclusively serving kids in need in the United States and Canada.



ABOUT FIRST BOOK RESEARCH & INSIGHTS

First Book Research & Insights leverages First Book's 27 years of experience working directly with educators serving low-income communities. First Book aggregates and amplifies their voices, whose unique experience is often missing from existing research.

Through surveys, focus groups, and data analysis, First Book Research & Insights examines the unmet needs and challenges unique to underserved schools and programs, and identifies solutions for removing these educational barriers.

Other First Book Research & Insights studies include:

- [**The First Book-Molina Healthcare Health Needs Assessment**](#) found that addressing students' social and emotional health was deemed as urgent as their physical needs.
- In partnership with the Joan Ganz Cooney Center, [**Mind the Gap: Improving Access to High Quality Media**](#) reported on the obstacles to incorporating digital games and learning into classrooms and programs in low-income
- [**First Book developed the Stories for All Project™**](#) based on research with First Book educators that diverse books can positively affect children's attitudes toward reading.
- [**First Book developed the Trauma Toolkit**](#) in response to surveys and focus groups that identified trauma and toxic stress as prevalent issues in their classrooms and programs.



THE FIRST BOOK SOCIAL ISSUES IMPACT SURVEY: METHODOLOGY

The First Book Educational Barriers Survey was designed by First Book Research & Insights with support from ImpactED at the University of Pennsylvania. It aimed to identify the most common barriers to education faced by kids in need and the resources educators require to address them.

Survey Type/Mode: Cross-sectional online questionnaire

Sample Design: Random sampling of educators registered with First Book, contacted by email. All educators work in classrooms or programs in which at least 70 percent are low-income (2x poverty rate).

In-field Dates: March 15 – April 5, 2019

Audience Size: 320,000

Sample Size: 2,817 (partial completes) - 1,409 (full completes); respondent count for each question is listed

Response Rate: 1%

Completion Rate: 50%

Calculations Performed on Raw Data: Percentages were calculated out of the total number of unique respondents, and not the choice totals (the total number of times a choice was selected). This is relevant for multiple choice questions, where respondents could select more than one answer.

Representative Audience: Educators and program leaders serving Title I or Title I-eligible schools and programs.



KEY FINDINGS

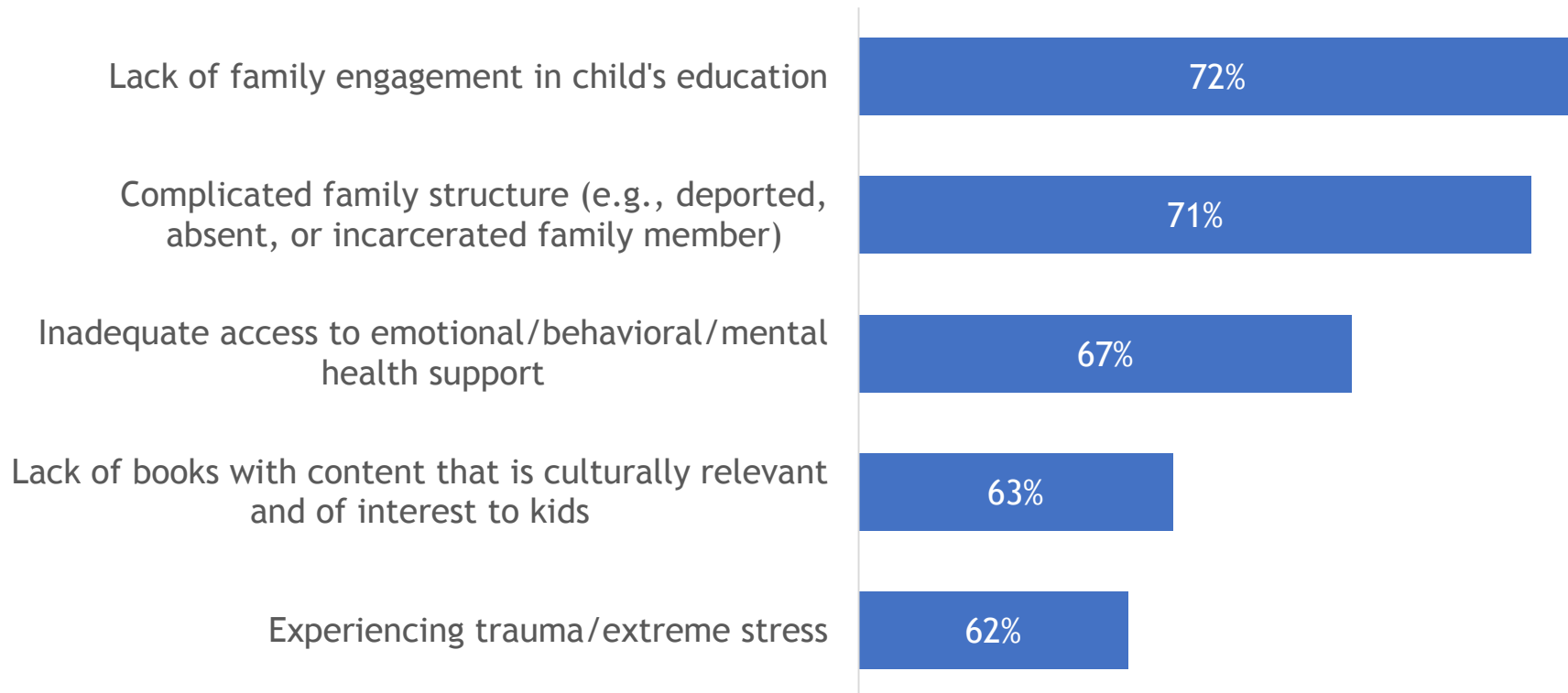
Educators are providing much more than an education, and they need the resources to be able to do it.

- According to educators serving kids in need, the five most common barriers to learning in their classrooms are all related to the toxic stress of poverty, including Inadequate access to mental health support and complicated family structures.
- With the right support, educators felt that they could impact the most common barriers, including things like trauma and extreme stress.
- Educators cited professional development as often as—or in some cases, more than—funding as the most needed resource to address education barriers.
- Educators serving kids in need prioritized creating safe environments and developing stable relationships ahead of educational resources when it comes to teaching.



ACCORDING TO EDUCATORS, THE MOST COMMON BARRIERS TO LEARNING FOR KIDS IN NEED STEM FROM THE TOXIC STRESS OF POVERTY

Q: To the best of your knowledge, please indicate how common the following barriers to learning are among the kids you serve, from extremely common to do not know/can't say. Data below represents the percentage of educators who identified each barrier as extremely or very common.



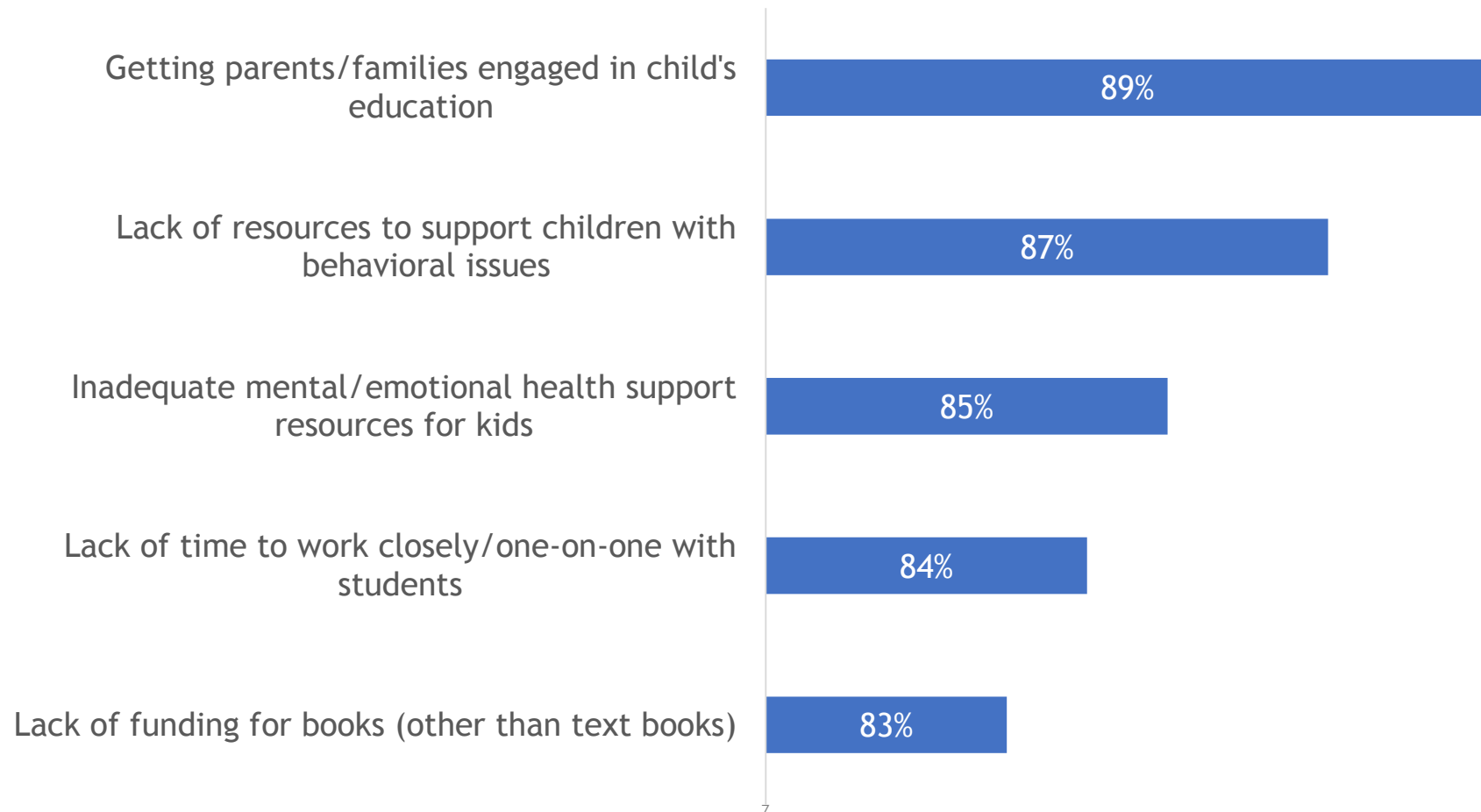
Other issues surveyed with percentage selecting: Lack of books with appropriately leveled content- 57%, Hunger/food insecurity- 52%, Substance use disorder within the family- 51%, Lack of school supplies (e.g., notebooks, pencils)- 50%, Language barriers (e.g., being an EL learner or child of EL learners)- 49%, Navigating unsafe environments (e.g., community or domestic violence)- 48%, Inadequate access to health care (e.g., physical needs)- 42%, Living with special needs/learning disabilities- 42%, Inadequate access to clothing/hygiene products- 39%, Homelessness/housing insecurity- 38% Lack of access to up-to-date textbooks- 38%, Racist/hostile environments- 28%



THE TOXIC STRESS OF POVERTY IS ALSO A BARRIER TO TEACHING

When educators identified the barriers that most impacted their ability to teach, a lack of mental and behavioral health services both landed in the top five, in addition to a lack of family engagement.

Q - Please indicate the degree to which you agree that the following circumstances serve as barriers to your personal ability to educate/support your kids in the fullest way possible. Percentages indicate educators that responded as strongly or somewhat agree.



Other issues surveyed with percentage selecting as #1 priority: Lack of resources to support children with special needs-74%, Lack of time to acquire/shop for resources (e.g., time at your computer, time outside of day-to-day operations)-73%, Limited availability of content that's relevant/of interest to my kids-68%, Insufficient educational supplies (e.g., notebooks, pencils)-62%, Inadequate tools to manage my own stress levels as an educator-62%, Large class sizes-62%, Lack of resources to support English Language Learners-60%, Lack of professional development/training opportunities-55%, Administrator/leadership concerns-49%, Out of date text books-41%

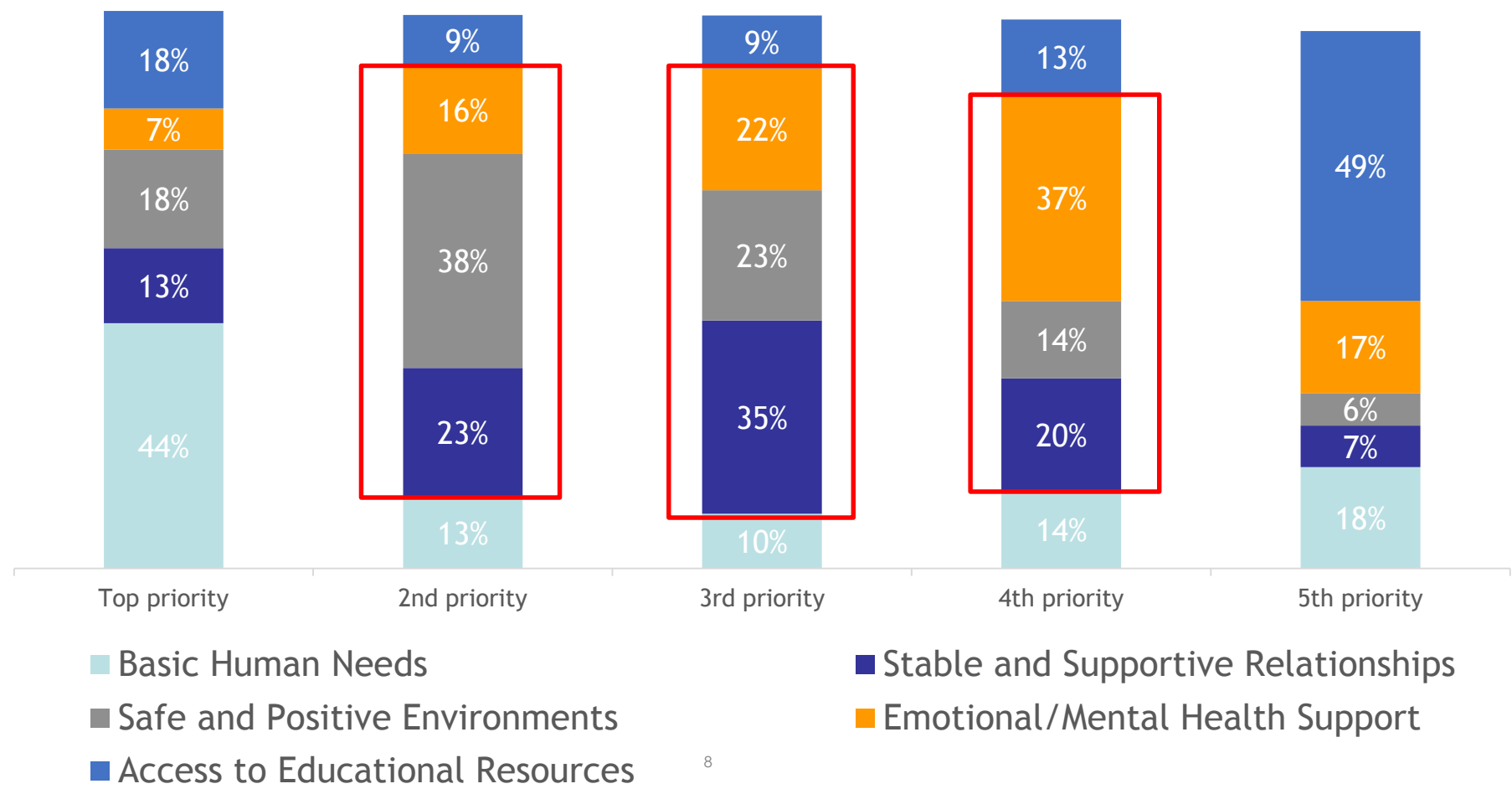
n = 1,706



EDUCATORS PRIORITIZE CREATING SAFE ENVIRONMENTS, DEVELOPING STABLE RELATIONSHIPS, AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT MORE THAN ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

After basic human needs, educators consider safety, stability, and mental health as their top priority in the classroom

Q7 - In your current role, how do you prioritize addressing each category of need in your daily work?

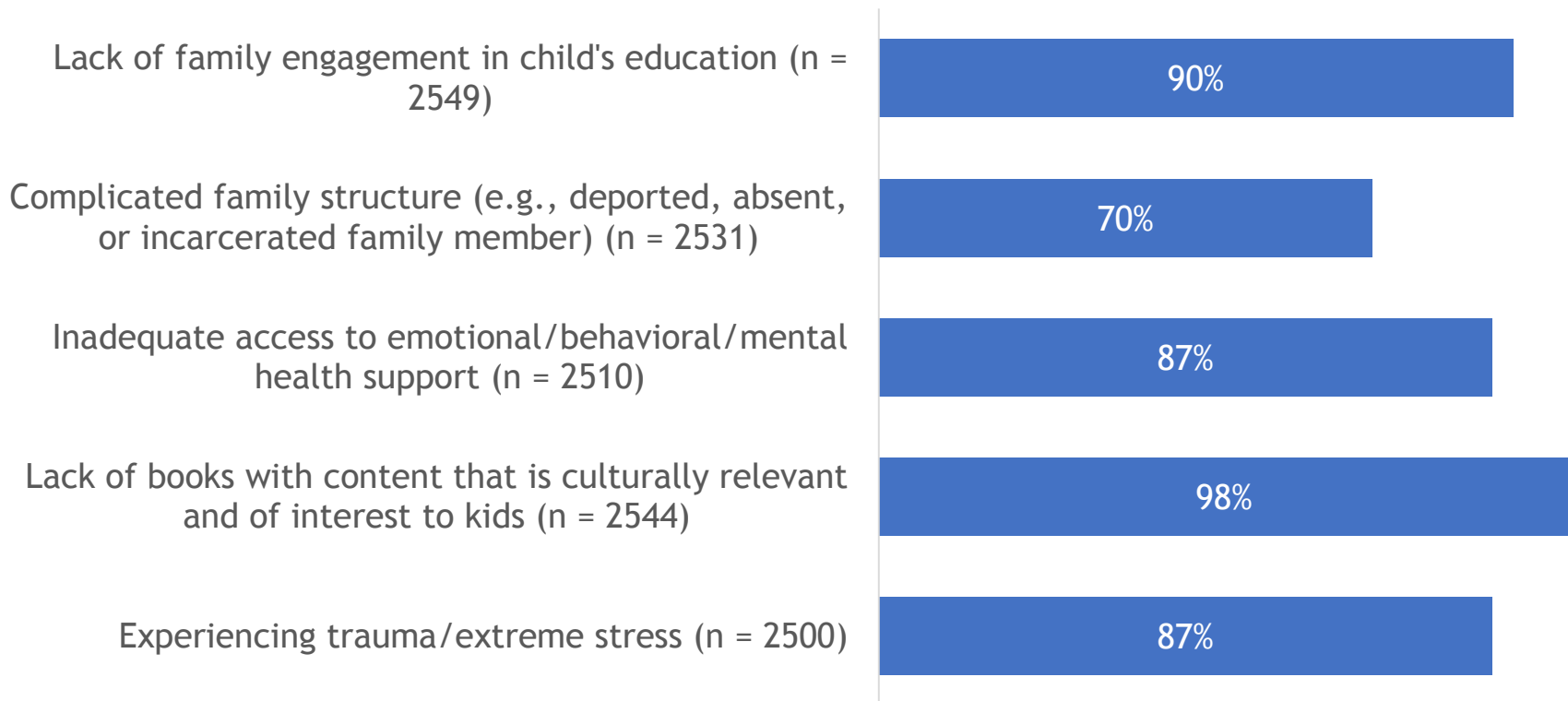




WITH THE RIGHT RESOURCES, EDUCATORS FEEL LIKE THEY COULD POSITIVELY IMPACT BARRIERS TO LEARNING—EVEN WHEN THEY START AT HOME

Q- How much influence do you feel you could have on kids who face the following barriers, if provided with the right resources and support? Data below represents the percentage of educators who reported they could have a great deal or some influence on each of the top five barriers.

N value varies with carry forward logic

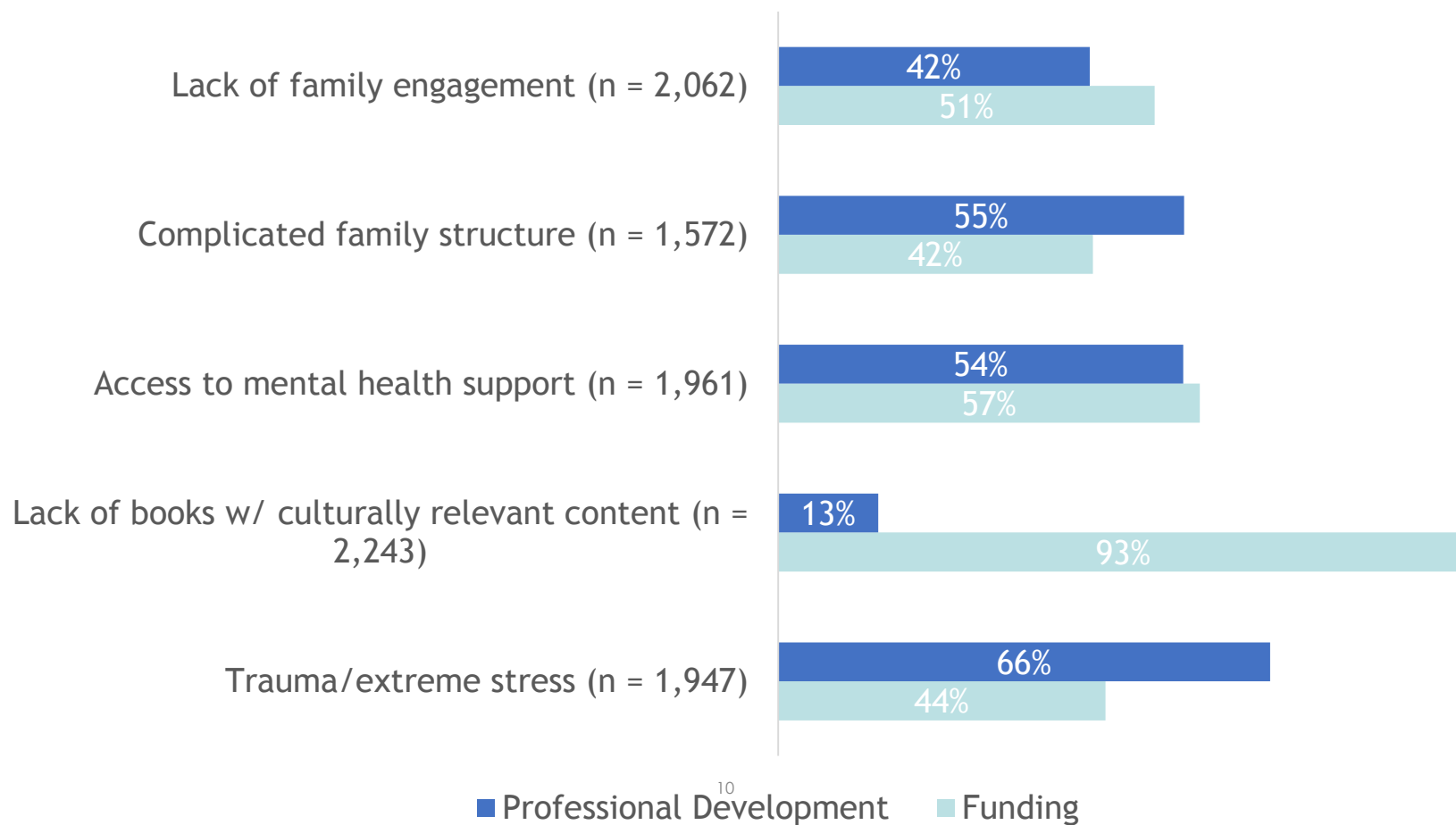




EDUCATORS WANT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AS MUCH AS OR MORE THAN FUNDING TO ADDRESS STRESS-RELATED BARRIERS TO LEARNING

When it comes to addressing trauma, educators chose professional development over funding

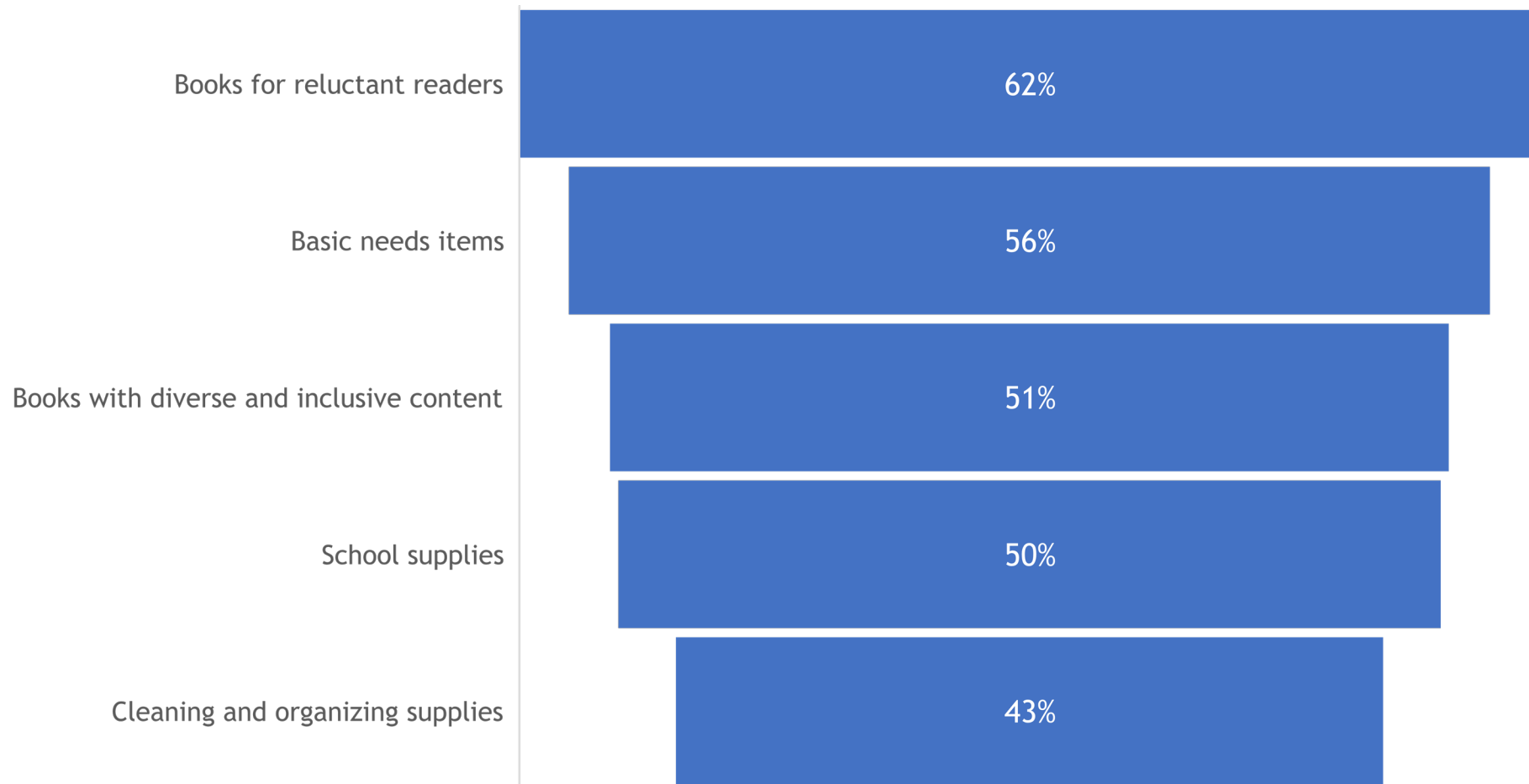
Q: For each barrier below, please indicate which option(s) complete this sentence for you: "I could have a greater impact on kids struggling with this barrier if I had more _____."





EDUCATORS ARE MORE WILLING TO SPEND THEIR OWN MONEY ON RELEVANT BOOKS THAN ANY OTHER RESOURCE

Q: #1 Priority: This type of resource is so important to me, I would spend my own money (within limits) on products in this category.



Other issues surveyed with percentage selecting as #1 priority: Social-emotional learning resources-35%, Books with Guided Reading Levels (GRL)-31%, Family engagement resources-31%, Resources for children with behavioral issues-30%, Support resources for kids experiencing trauma/extreme stress-29%, Hands-on STEAM activities-28%, Art supplies-26%, Books with Lexile levels-26%, STEAM books-25%, Resources for children with special needs-24%, English Language learning resources-22%, Play supplies-18%, Technology (hardware)-8%, Technology (software, e.g. eBooks, eGames)-8%, Financial literacy resources-7%



We asked First Book educators to elaborate on how these barriers impact the classroom. The responses had one common theme:

EDUCATORS ARE PROVIDING SO MUCH MORE THAN AN EDUCATION

"I work in a county where 70 percent of the children live in impoverished homes with lack of food and housing security. Many of them do not have access to basic needs or things like medical care or resources or supports for emotional or behavioral issues. This makes education a difficult task, and many of these children fall under the curriculum bus, so to speak."

"Mental health support for people of all ages is terribly lacking. With strong relationships at school or other places, and mental health supported, as long as kids are not still hungry or in pain, they will learn. All the educational resources in the world will not be effective unless mental health, physical needs and positive relationships exist."

"The majority of youth we serve are in foster care and meeting their basic needs, providing a safe environment, ensuring their mental health is being addressed are the three top priorities for me. I also believe if they have a caring and supportive adult they would do better in school. Access [to educational resources] should not be last on the list; however, for the population I work with it has to be. Navigating the system tends to take more time away from getting them the basic needs for school."



RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Ages of kids served (select all)	%	Count
Early Childhood	15%	212
Preschool	16%	223
Elementary School	58%	810
Middle School	22%	311
High School	13%	186
All of the above	8%	117
Total	100%	1403

Job Title	%	Count
Teacher/Teacher aide	57%	802
Librarian/Media Specialist	12%	163
Program Director/Administrator	11%	155
School Administrator	2%	22
Reading Specialist	5%	64
Volunteer	2%	30
Principal/Vice Principal	1%	8
School Support Personnel	2%	33
Health care provider	1%	12
Other	8%	114

Organization type	n = 1,403
School	75%
Early childhood program	9%
Civic/community organization	4%
Library	4%
Out-of-school time program	2%
Faith-based organization	1%
Health department/clinic	1%
Shelter	0%
Military Organization	0%
Museum	0%
Other	4%

Classroom/Program Setting	%	Count
Urban	50%	700
Suburban	24%	342
Rural	25%	346
Indian Reservation/Tribal nation	1%	14
Military base	0%	1
Total	100%	1403



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