

MARCH 2022

# THE COVID CONSTITUENCY

## FOCUS GROUP & NATIONWIDE SURVEY RESULTS



# The COVID Constituency

## Research Methodology

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- Qualitative – Focus Groups
- On behalf of The Hunt Institute, Lake Research Partners conducted two virtual focus groups, one among white parents (of children under 18) and one among parents of color (of children under 18) in **October of 2021**.
- A nationally representative set of participants were recruited based on categories such as gender identity, age, area type (urban, suburban, rural), geographical location, partisan identification, child age and grade level, school type of their child/children, household income, etc. Parents were also asked how their child is currently attending school (virtually, in person, or hybrid), whether their child is in an ESL program, and whether their child has a disability as defined by the ADA. Strong partisans, people who work in the education field or in market research, and those who have participated in focus groups within the last 12 months were excluded from consideration in the groups.
- Quantitative – Online Survey
- Lake Research Partners designed and administered an online survey that was fielded from November 8 to November 18, 2021. The survey reached a total of 800 likely 2022 voters nationwide along with oversamples of 100 African American, 100 Latinx, 100 Asian American/Pacific Islander, 100 Native American, and 100 parents of school age children (ages 5-22) likely voters. **The margin of error for adults is +/- 3.5%. The margin of error for subgroups is higher.**
- Survey respondents were drawn from an online panel and screened to be likely 2022 voters. The base sample was weighted slightly by gender, region, gender by region, age, race, race by gender, race by age, and party identification to reflect attributes of the actual population, and different racial groups were weighted slightly along different categories to be more representative. All oversamples were then weighted down into the base to reflect their actual proportion of likely 2022 voters nationwide.

## The COVID Constituency

### Summary of Findings

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Now is the time to have a post-COVID conversation about education and push for policy changes that benefit all students. Voters and parents of school age children strongly favor policy proposals that call for increased and sustained investments in public education that **ensure quality teachers and educators are in the classroom**, promote personalized learning as the standard, and expand job skills and other workforce training opportunities available to students.

- **Unfinished learning and school safety are major concerns for voters.** A solid majority of voters nationwide say COVID-19 has been disruptive to children’s education - 60% say it has been disruptive and 36% say it has been very disruptive. 86% of voters indicate that **ensuring schools are safe** is very important.
- **Voters support “whole child” approaches to public education.** Whether it is referred to as providing *equality in education or educational opportunities*, 85% and 86% of voters, respectively, say it is important our schools provide all students with this type of education.
- **Voters also prioritize policies that narrow the digital divide and bolster workforce skills.**
  - 84% of voters say **providing students with laptops, tablets, or other technology** would be helpful.
  - 87% of voters favor an **investment in job skills and workforce training** in schools.

## The COVID Constituency

# Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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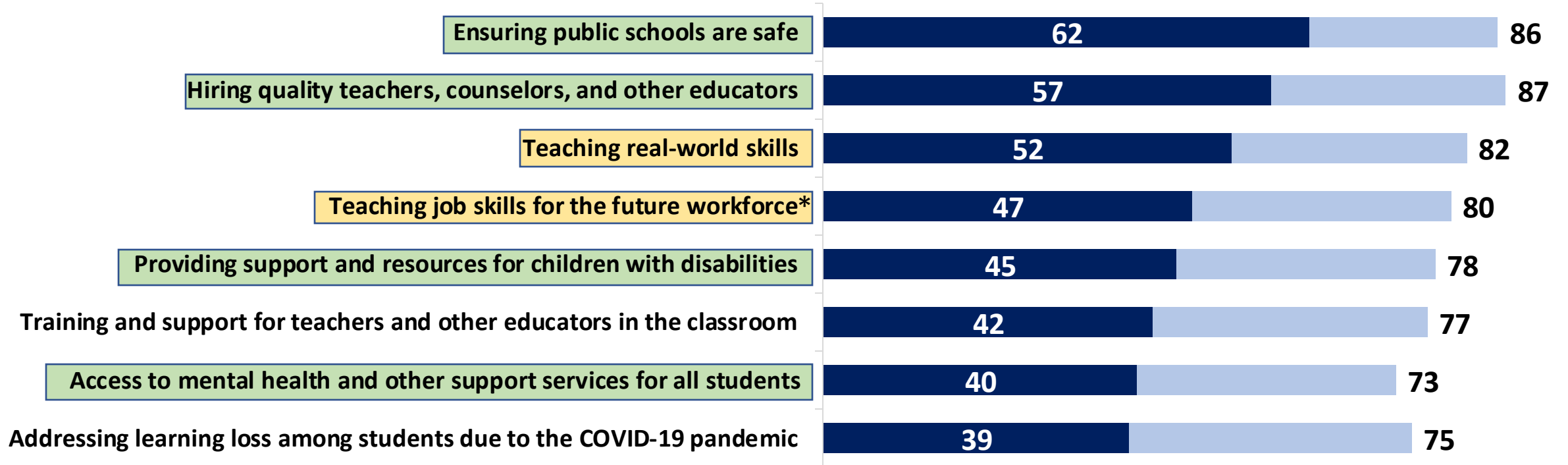
Public opinion surrounding how elected officials and leaders handled COVID have been mixed amongst voters. However, it is clear that voters were concerned about the state of education during the pandemic, especially about unfinished learning.

- A majority of voters say elected officials and leaders in their state have handled education and the impact of COVID-19 well (56%), but only 22% say they have handled it very well. **Another 42% say elected officials and leaders in their state haven't done well.**
  - Though majorities overall say their elected officials and leaders have done well, at least 45% of women, non-college voters, white voters, suburban, rural, and voters in 2022 Senate battleground states say they have not done a good job.
  - Across partisan lines, Republicans split (50% well, 49% not well), a slim majority of Independents say they are doing well (51%), and a majority of Democrats say they are doing well (63%).
- Two-thirds of voters think it is extremely or very likely that students have fallen behind academically during the pandemic, including 72% of Republicans, 64% of Independents, and 62% of Democrats.
- A solid majority of voters nationwide say COVID-19 has been disruptive to children's education - 60% say it has been disruptive and 36% say it has been very disruptive. Further, parents say COVID-19 has been disruptive to *their own* children's education (63% disruptive) and to their mental health and emotional wellbeing (57% disruptive).
- Nearly 4 in 10 voters (39%) indicated that learning loss among students due to the COVID-19 pandemic is both a very big problem and extremely important for public officials and education leaders to address.

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## Public Priorities for Education

Voters are most likely to say school safety, quality teachers, teaching real-world/job skills, and providing support and resources for children with disabilities are extremely important issues for public officials and education leaders to address.



\* Breaking this down further, a solid majority of parents of school age children (64%), including 7 in 10 parents of high school students (71%) believe having programs and courses that teach job skills for future workforce needs is very important.

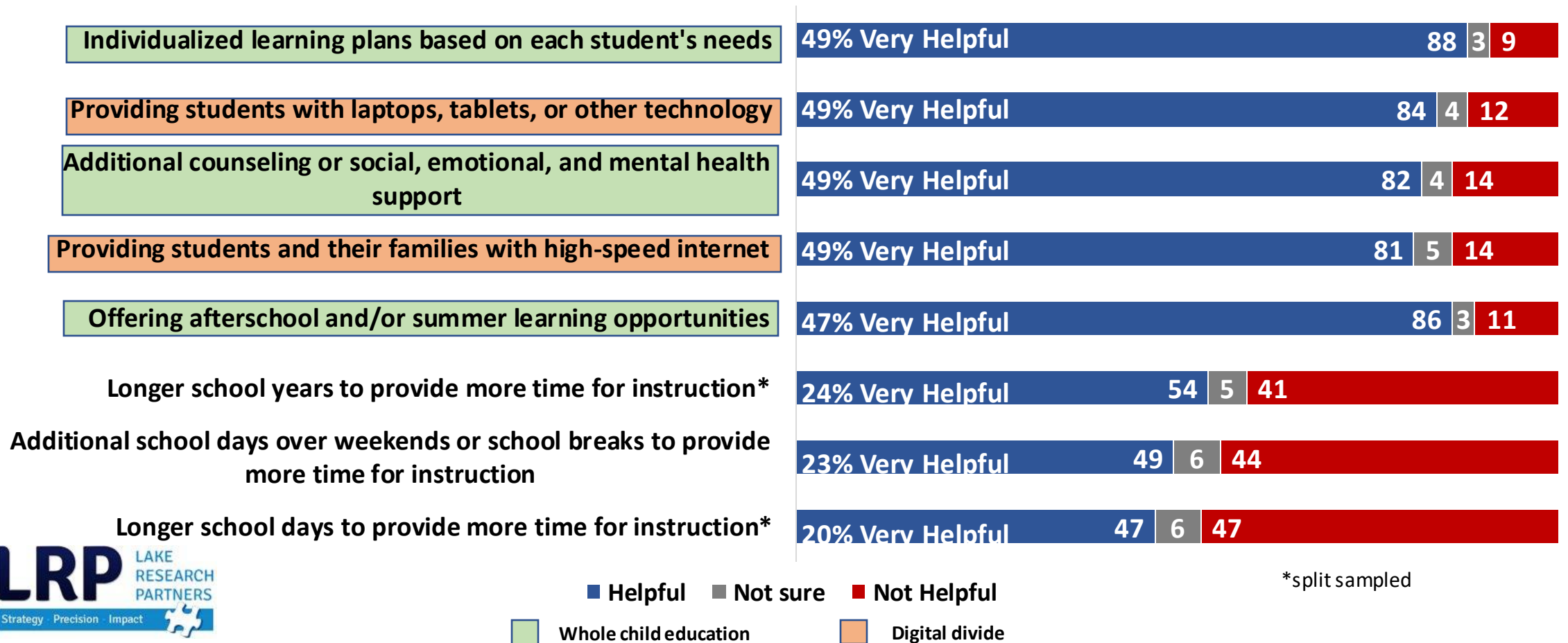


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## Public Priorities for Education Continued

Many public priorities align along 3 key topics: The digital divide, whole child learning, and workforce preparation. Other top public priorities align with general education and teacher supports.

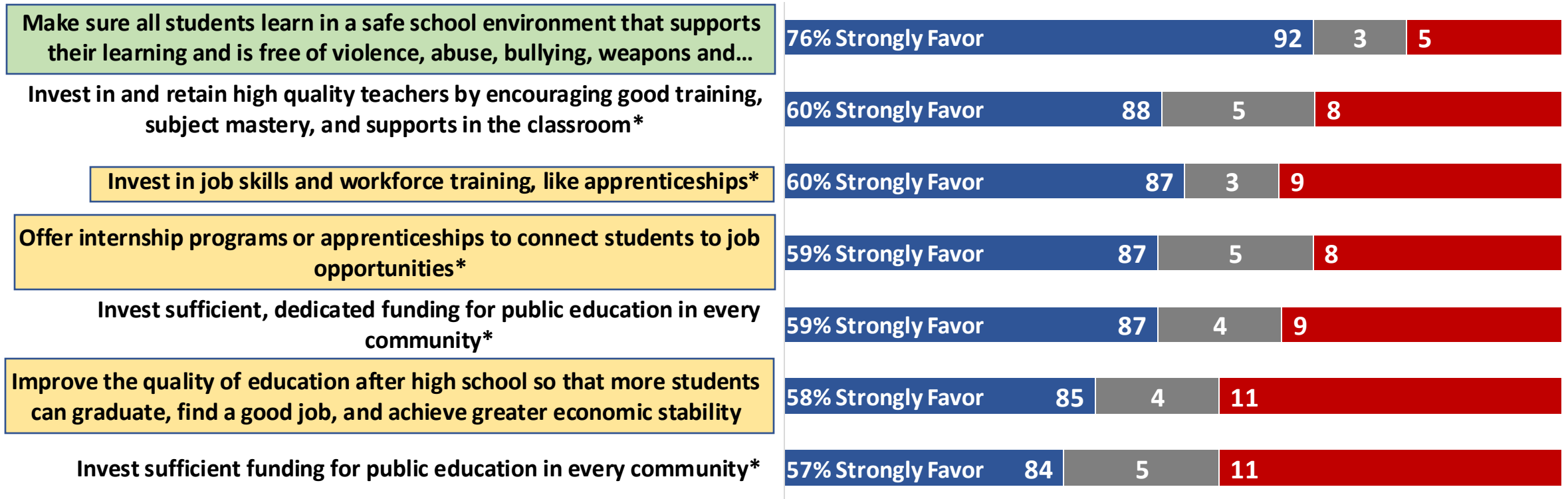
Moving forward, voters say the following policy proposals would be helpful to students.



# The COVID Constituency

## Public Priorities for Education Continued

Many public priorities align along 3 key topics: The digital divide, whole child learning, and workforce preparation. Other top public priorities align with general education and teacher supports.



■ Favor ■ Not sure ■ Oppose

\*split sampled

■ Whole child education

■ Workforce development



Voters also point toward supporting the teacher workforce as a highly rated priority in education.

- 61% of voters say **not enough training and support for teachers and other educators in the classroom** to be at least somewhat of a problem.
- 77% of voters say bolstering training and support for teachers and educators is very important.

Hiring quality teachers, counselors, and other educators is also a priority for voters, as 88% of voters favor policies to **invest in and retain high quality teachers**.



## The COVID Constituency

# Public Priorities for Education Continued

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- Subgroups of parents, including parents of children with a learning disability or an IEP, Latinx parents of school age children, and parents of pre-K children are among those most likely to say **providing a whole child education** is very important. Voters under 30, Black voters, and subgroups of women, including Black women, Democratic women, and younger women, are also among those most likely to say this is important.
- **Training and support for teachers** is extremely important to at least half of Latinx voters (51%), Democrats (51%), and urban voters (50%).
- Women (at least 50%), younger voters (at least 52%), Black voters (at least 61%), and Democrats (at least 56%) are especially likely to find **additional counseling, providing high-speed internet and other technology, individualized learning plans, and afterschool and/or summer learning opportunities** to be very helpful for students moving forward.

## The COVID Constituency

# Public Priorities for Education - Focus Groups

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- In the focus groups, parents were supportive of education that focuses not just on academics, but the students' mental and physical health as well as their social-emotional wellbeing and supports outside of the classroom.
  - “That means more than just their classroom time. It means their home time, their personal time, their leisure time, their emotional self, their environment that they have, that they have a home, that they have a bed to sleep, if they have food in their stomach, if they have everything they need to perform to the best of their ability.” – Parent of color
  - A mother of two from Georgia also voiced her support for increased mental health supports for children as they emerge from the pandemic: “We have to promote the mental health piece, promote connectivity, and increase access to internet and tech.”
- Parents also raised issues related to technology during the pandemic in these focus groups, the lack of support services and capabilities for individualized learning, learning loss among their children, and supports related to mental health and social-emotional development. They feel that COVID-19 revealed and exacerbated the weaknesses in these areas.
  - “I would say it’s just more of a disconnection for us. In a classroom setting [teachers are] able to pinpoint different children that respond in different manners. And there was no real actual support.” – Parent of color
  - “Normal was familiar, but not great. There were many shortcomings (in education) before COVID-19. COVID-19 highlighted those difficulties in education and how pervasive those problems are.” – Parent from Ohio

# Public Priorities for Education - Focus Groups

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- Another theme that came through in focus group conversations was the strengthening of job skills and post-secondary options in education.
  - One father of 3 from Ohio wanted to see an increase in the availability of vocational training at the secondary and postsecondary levels, noting that college should not be painted as the “end all be all” for students. He said college " is not the best course for every student, and vocational training is never portrayed as a viable option, and that cuts off a lot of opportunity for districts."
  - A grandmother, and mother of 4 children, from Orlando voiced that "We need to re-introduce those life skills courses in school" advocating for more life skills training in school.
- Many respondents also supported the idea of increasing teacher pay and school funding to better support their teachers.
  - One father of 3 from Texas felt that teachers do not get paid enough for the responsibilities they have to juggle
  - A mother from Atlanta shared "I would pay the teachers more...I would ensure they have the supplies they need. You get what you pay for."
  - A grandmother, and mother of 4 children from Orlando shared the same sentiments saying, "Teachers should not have to use their own money for supplies and/or plead for supplies."

**For more information about The COVID  
Constituency and resources from The  
Hunt Institute, follow our COVID  
Constituency webpage and Social Media:**

**[https://hunt-institute.org/covid-19-  
resources/the-covid-constituency/](https://hunt-institute.org/covid-19-resources/the-covid-constituency/)**

