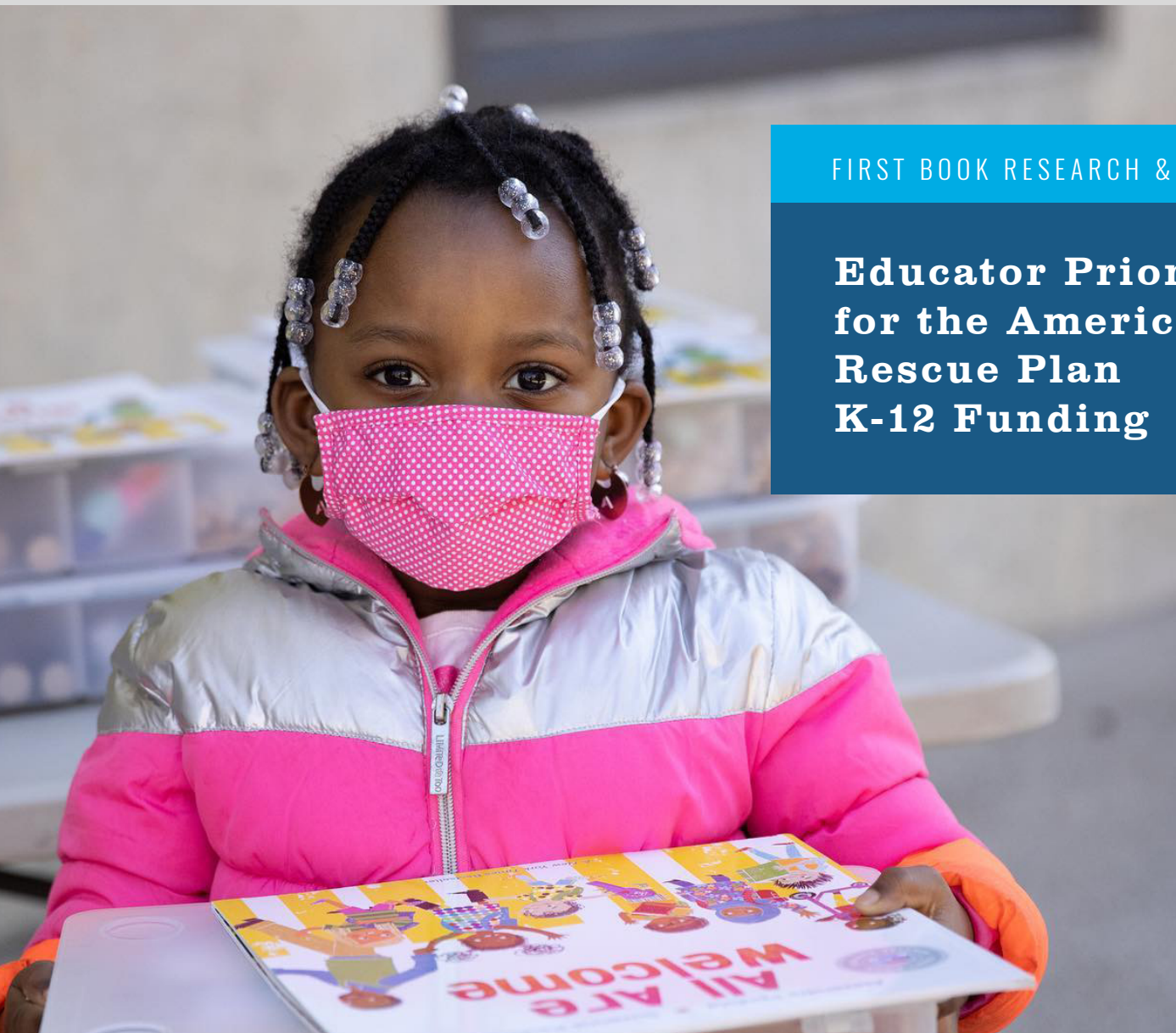




# THE VOICE OF AMERICA'S EDUCATORS TEACHING CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY

FIRST BOOK RESEARCH & INSIGHTS

**Educator Priorities  
for the American  
Rescue Plan  
K-12 Funding**



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## About the Survey

The American Rescue Plan Act has designated \$123 billion to support K-12 schools and educational programs following the pandemic. This funding has long been needed but is more critical than ever for schools and programs serving economically challenged communities. COVID-19 has exacerbated educational disparities, deepening pre-pandemic inequities which disproportionately impacts students of color and children in rural areas.

To elevate the voice of educators on the frontlines, First Book, a national nonprofit organization focused on removing barriers to quality education for children in need, surveyed its network of educators, all of whom work at Title I eligible schools and under-resourced programs. First Book Research & Insights asked educators to identify their priorities for American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding to support learning post-COVID. This report shares input from 2,004 educators supporting children in need ages 0–18.

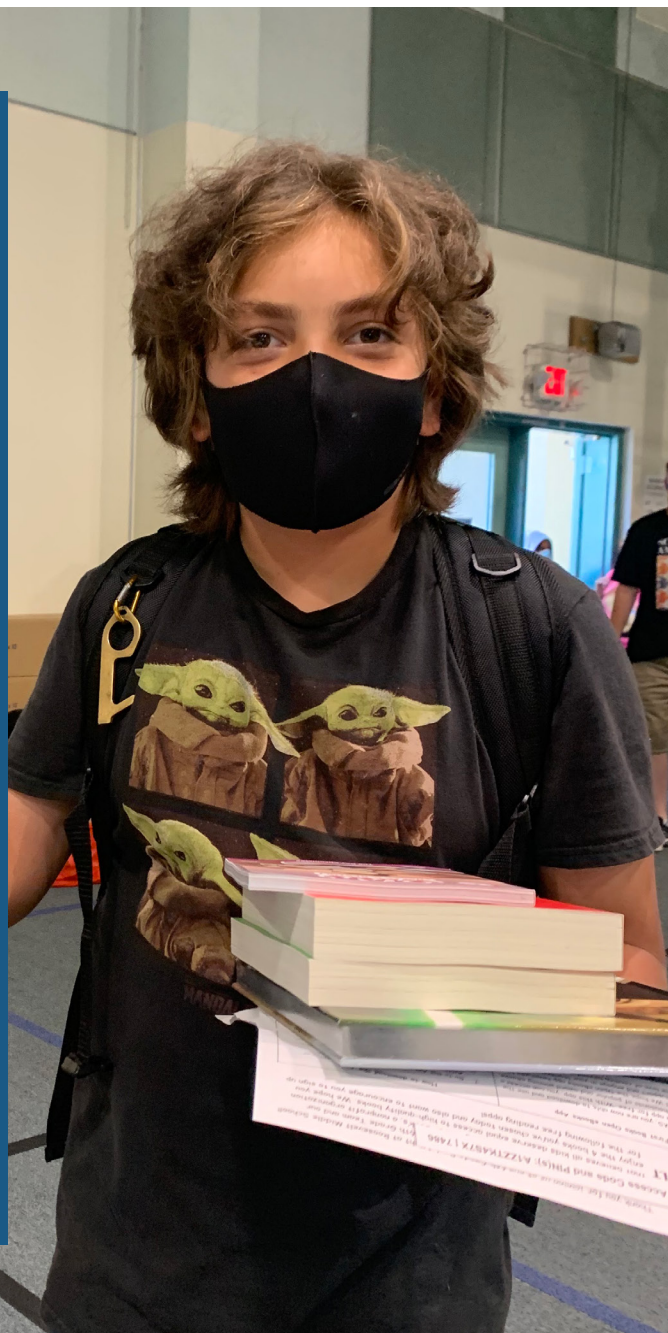
## Top Priorities for Educators

First Book's survey reveals critical perspective from educators related to the use of ARP funding. While those working directly with children in classrooms and programs are closest to the shifting needs, they have not been at the center of discussion around how ARP funding should be spent in their community. Ninety-seven percent of educators believe it is extremely or very important that their input is used to help determine how ARP funds are used, but only 17 percent have had the opportunity to share their opinion.

First Book's survey provides educators with a voice, and they have identified their top three priorities for ARP funding.

**To promote learning enrichment and learning recovery for the children they serve post-COVID, educators need:**

- 1** Books and learning materials
- 2** Student mental health support resources
- 3** Additional support staff



## Books and Learning Materials

For educators serving economically challenged areas, books and learning materials are the top-ranked priority, both for the community as a whole, and as the top priority for their own classroom/program.

When it comes to considering the school and communities as a whole, 86 percent of educators ranked books and learning materials in their top five priorities for ARP funding. When it comes to their own personal classroom/program, educators felt even more strongly.

**99%**

**of educators would personally prioritize using ARP funding for books to support the students they serve.**

Drilling into what educators would like to use those books for, it is evident they are vital tools to address a broad range of student needs. Eighty-seven percent of educators want books to encourage reading for pleasure, while 86 percent want books to engage struggling readers. Additionally, 82 percent want books that reflect diversity and inclusion, while a significant majority also want books to promote social-emotional learning, enhance their curriculum, and encourage empathetic, inclusive environments.

## Student Mental Health Support & Resources

Educators in the First Book Network have made it clear that their students need support to address mental health issues, which have been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the 2020 First Book COVID Response Survey, 87 percent of educators reported being more concerned about kids experiencing mental/emotional health challenges during the pandemic than they were before the pandemic. While 79 percent of educators ranked student mental health support resources in their top five priorities for ARP funding, it is troubling that only 14 percent of educators feel extremely/very prepared to support children who have experienced trauma over the past year.

To address this increased need, educators believe that stronger partnerships with community organizations could be helpful to support the students and families they serve. Specifically, 81 percent of educators believe community partnerships could help address child and family mental health needs. Additionally, 68 percent of educators report wanting books & conversation guides to help better equip them with the tools needed to support children experiencing trauma and grief.

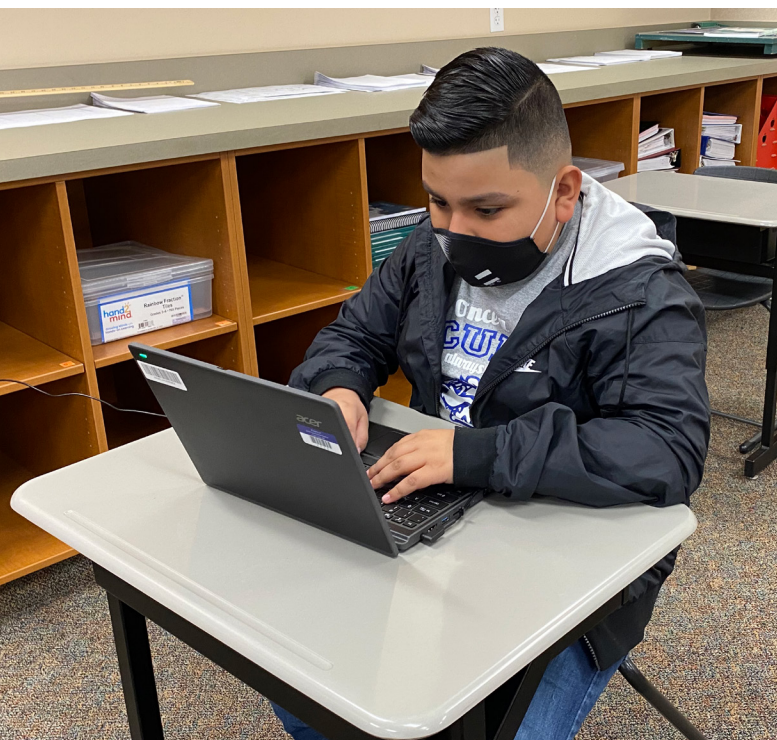
### Additional Support Staff

Fifty-nine percent of those surveyed prioritized spending ARP funding on additional support staff to help them address the barriers to education faced by their students. Nineteen percent of that group rated it as a top priority.

## Educator Spending

Educators faced with a lack of funding often dig into their own pockets to provide the resources their students need. What's revealing is that over the past year (May 2020 to May 2021), of the 98 percent of educators who reported spending their own money on resources for their classrooms/programs, 91 percent of those educators purchased books and 50 percent of those educators purchased food for the students and families they serve. Fifty-nine percent of those educators spent between \$100-\$500, while 13 percent spent over \$1,000 out of their own pockets.

The percentage of educators using their own money to purchase resources is up 20 percent from surveys (First Book Member Satisfaction Survey 2020, First Book Nurturing Survey 2020) done just a year ago.



## The Digital Divide

The transition to remote learning during COVID-19 underscores the detrimental impact of the digital divide. For the millions of children without reliable access to the internet or digital devices, educational opportunities abruptly diminished. Educators underscored the need to address this issue with ARP funding. Interestingly, with a significant number of devices distributed during the pandemic, the emphasis of need has shifted. Seventy-six percent of educators would now prioritize funds for digital/remote learning resources in their classroom, including apps (68 percent), internet/hotspots (58 percent) and online learning tools (52 percent).

Also, the responsibility of purchasing digital resources for students is shifting. Approximately 51 percent of teachers report spending their personal money on digital resources in the past, while only 32 percent of principals reported the same. However, principals/vice principals are now more likely to prioritize ARP funding to support closing the digital divide compared to other survey respondents. Approximately 84 percent of principals would prioritize using ARP funding for digital learning resources compared to 76 percent of all other respondents.

## What Educators Learned During COVID

Educators faced enormous challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, but there were also some positive takeaways. Many educators intend to embrace aspects of virtual learning experienced over the past year going forward, including increased communication with students, family engagement, and a higher priority on student health and wellbeing.

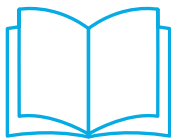
### Full Report Details

The following report outlines the detailed results of the survey, but the key takeaways are clear. Educators feel their input is essential to decide how ARP funding is used, with the three top needs being books, support for mental health, and additional staffing.

The purpose of First Book's Research & Insights work is to give a voice to all educators specifically serving children in need. The focus is to aggregate and share their insights on the challenges students face, educator best practices, and their views on how best to support their students. With the most significant investment in our education system designated for improving equity, First Book's goal is to raise up the voices of those working with children living in poverty so that education leaders can benefit from their insights in under-resourced programs and schools.



# SURVEY FINDINGS OVERVIEW



**Books remain a simple and almost unanimous need** among educators after this pandemic year.



**Additional staff are necessary** to fully support student and educator success at this time.



**Trauma response preparedness is high in demand**, but knowledge of how best to address trauma among students is low among educators.



**Whole child support is critical right now.** We must address student mental and emotional wellbeing, as well as meet basic needs to enable a child to thrive.



**The continuing digital divide must be addressed** to ensure the success of all students across the country.



**It's time to properly value educators.** We must support educators' mental and emotional wellbeing after this unprecedented teaching year. They need support in the classroom, adequate resources, and to be trusted.



**Community partnerships are needed** now more than ever to address mental health concerns and food insecurity.



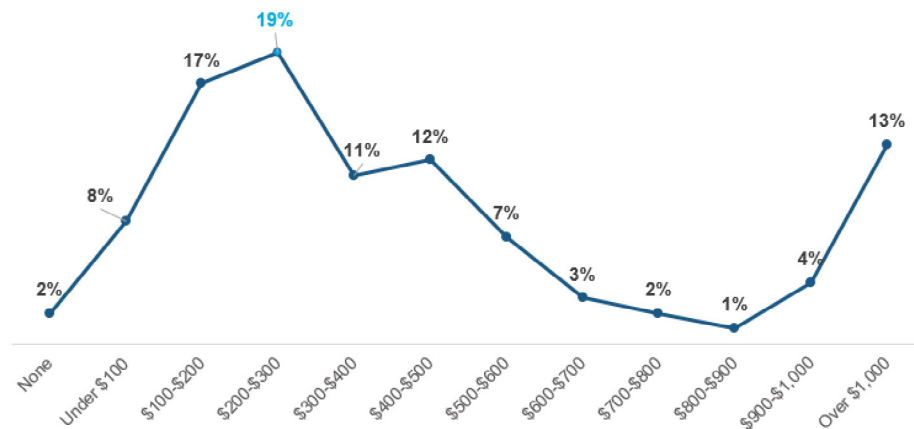
Including **educator voice** in ARP funding distribution is **critical**.



# SURVEY RESULTS

## Personal Money Spent

**Q** Over the past year, approximately how much of your own personal money did you spend to support your classroom, program, or the children you serve?



**59%** of educators spent between **\$100-\$500** of their own money over the past year to support the kids they serve. And **13%** spent over **\$1,000**

**Q** What did educators purchase with their own money?



## Takeaway

**98%** of educators spent their own money on **resources for their classrooms/programs** last year. **91%** of those educators **purchased books** with that money, and half purchased food for the students and families they serve.

## Crosstab Analysis

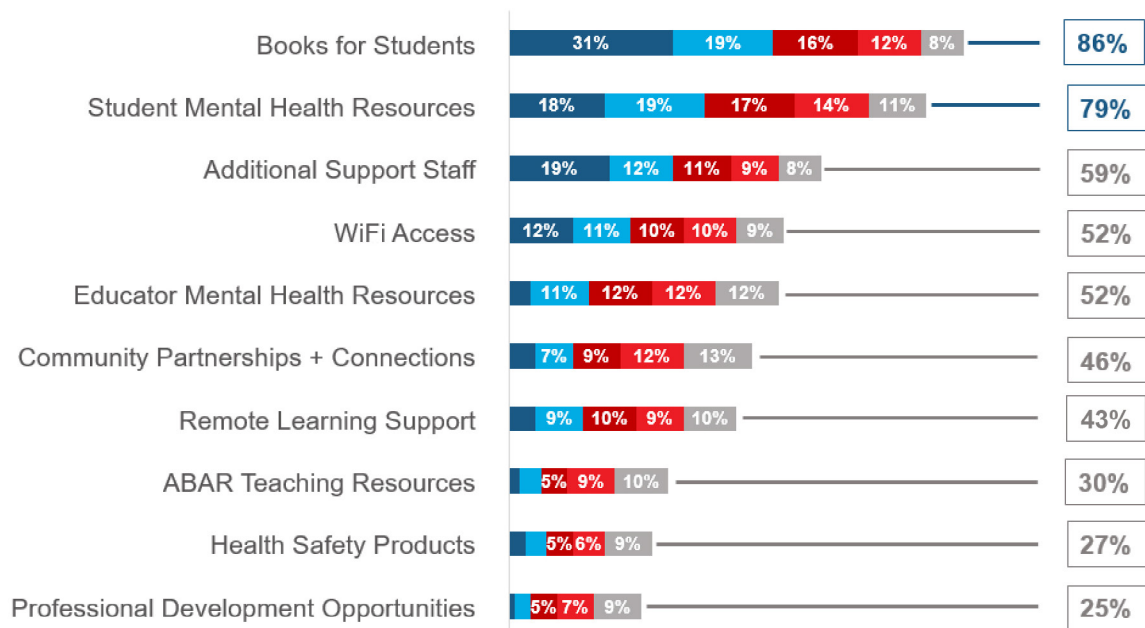
While educators who work directly with kids, such as teachers and librarians, are most often using their own money to purchase books, principals and vice principals are more often using their own money to purchase food and other basic needs items for students.

*79% of principals/vice principals currently spend their personal money to purchase basic needs items for students vs 43% of the general respondents. 75% purchase snacks and meals with their personal money vs 50% of the general respondents.*

## Learning Recovery Priorities for Your Community

The American Rescue Plan Act invests significantly in schools and educational programs across the country to support learning recovery, promote learning enrichment, and increase equity. Below are several key areas of focus for this funding.

**Q** Think about the challenges faced by children and families in your school or community. Which of the following areas would benefit most from a financial investment aimed at supporting learning recovery and enrichment among the kids you serve?



RANKINGS ■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

## Takeaway

**86%** of educators ranked **books & learning materials** in their top five big-picture ARP funding priorities.

**79%** of educators ranked **student mental health support resources** in their top five big-picture ARP funding priorities.

## TOP 10 AREAS OF NEED

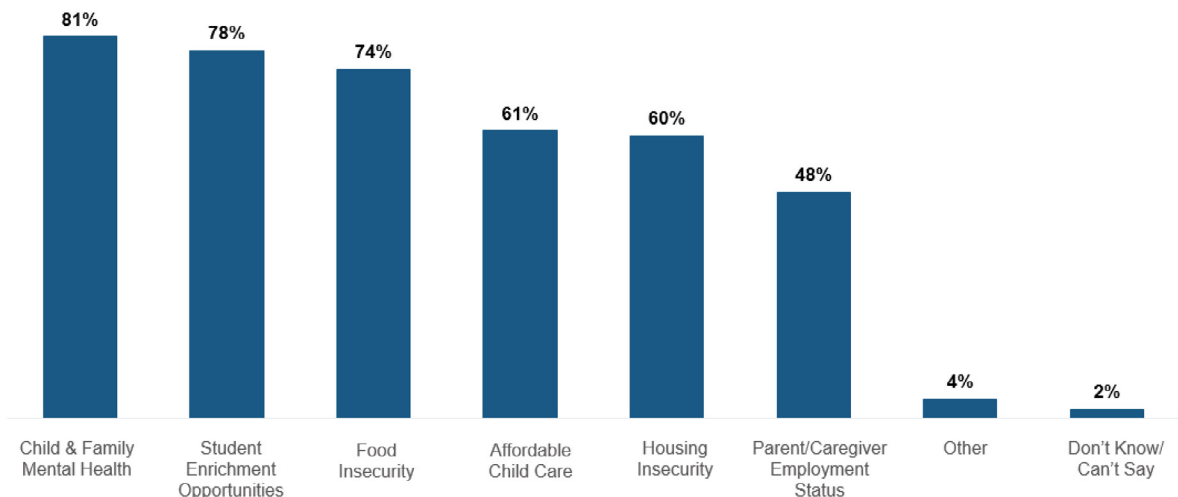
- 1 Books and learning materials for students
- 2 Resources to support student mental health and wellbeing
- 3 Additional support staff
- 4 Improved WiFi and broadband access
- 5 Resources to support educator/provider mental health and wellbeing
- 6 Greater connections and partnerships with other organizations serving families in the community
- 7 Increased technology to support remote learning
- 8 Professional development opportunities
- 9 Health and safety products (i.e., PPE, cleaning supplies, etc.)
- 10 Resources to support ABAR (anti-bias, antiracist) teaching

Our students want to read, but they don't have access to high-interest, good-quality reading materials. The items that we do have, that fit this category, end up never being returned, or are falling apart from so much use. Our school is living in a book desert, we need to be offering students a book ocean of materials. This is the only way to compete with technology, gaming, and television. We need to give kids things that make them want to choose to read over any of those other platforms.

# Community Support Organizations

Respondents who ranked “greater connections and partnerships with other organizations serving families in my community” in their top seven areas of need were asked this follow up question.

**Q** Which of these issues could additional community partnerships help to address for the children and families you serve? (*n* = 1,452)



## Takeaway

Educators want opportunities to connect with community organizations that can help support the students and families they serve. The most pressing community support needs: 1. Child & Family Mental Health, 2. Enrichment Opportunities for Students, and 3. Food Insecurity

**81%** of educators believe community partnerships could help address **child & family mental health**.

**78%** believe community partnerships could help support **enrichment opportunities for students**.

**74%** believe community partnerships could help address **food insecurity**.

## Crosstab Analysis

Educators representing Indian Reservation/Tribal Nation populations show a greater interest in using books to strengthen community partnerships compared to educators in other areas.

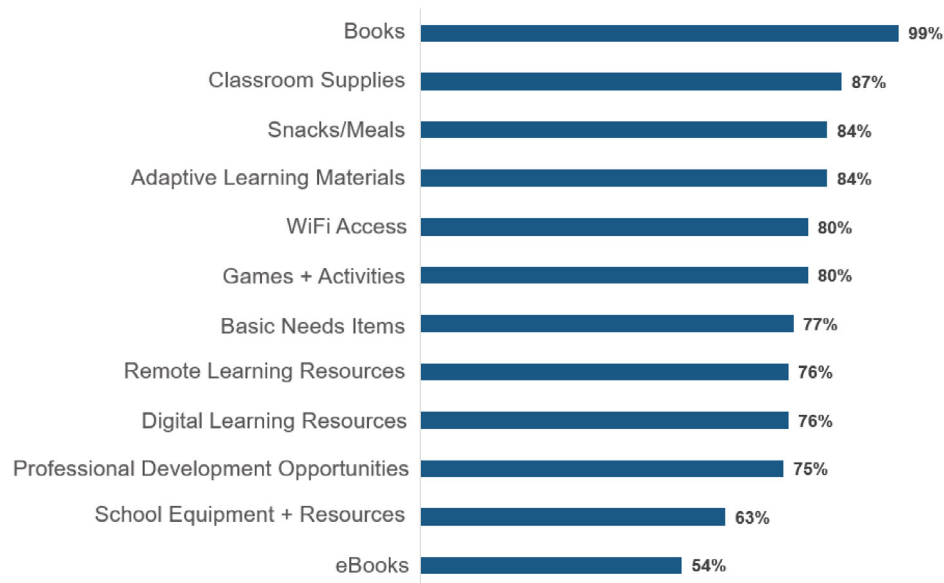
*59% report wanting to use books to strengthen community partnerships vs 35% of the general respondents.*

Mental health should be part of the core curriculum and not treated as an intervention. Mental health can be part of our regular curriculum and not another thing that is added on to teachers to figure out.

## Personal Learning Recovery Priorities

We'd like to learn more about what you personally need to make your class, program, or organization thrive.

**Q** If you had purchasing power for items to support your individual classroom/program or the kids you serve, how would you prioritize the following items?



### Takeaway

When it comes to personal prioritization, educators agree that books are a top priority purchase.

If allowed to direct ARP funding:

**99%** of educators would personally prioritize **books**.

**87%** of educators would personally prioritize **classroom, cleaning, and art supplies**.

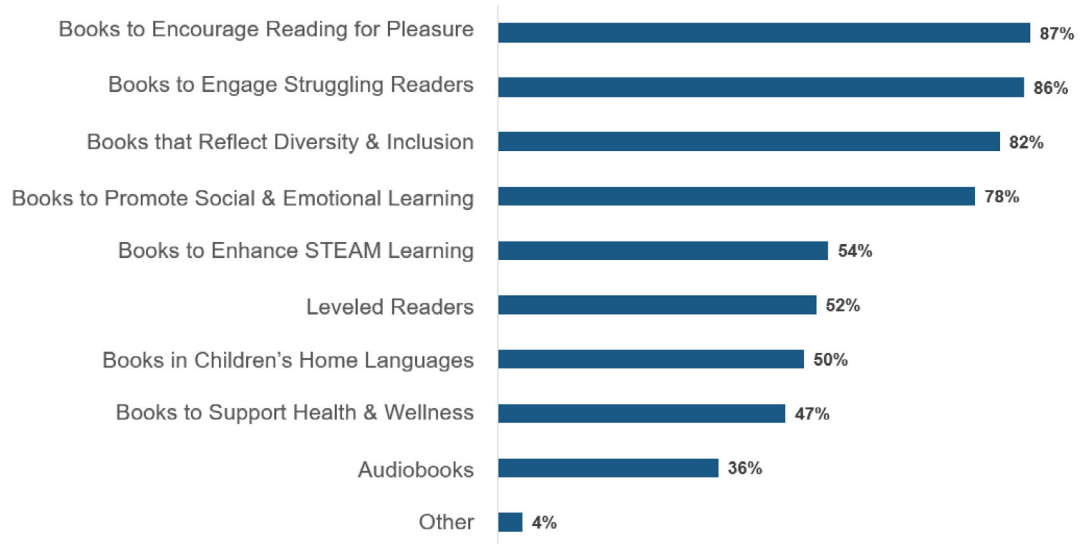
**84%** of educators would personally prioritize **snacks/meals for students**.

**84%** of educators would personally prioritize **adaptive learning materials**.

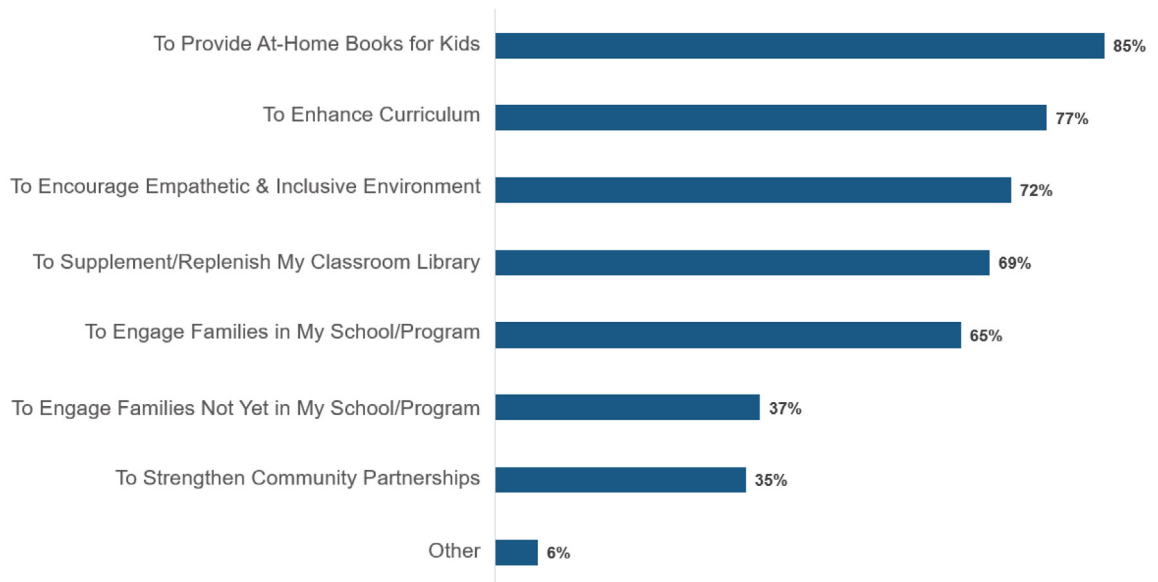
**80%** of educators would personally prioritize **WiFi access**.

## Books/eBooks

**Q** What kinds of books/eBooks would you want most to support learning recovery and enrichment of the kids you serve? (*n* = 1,986)



**Q** How will educators use their books? (*n* = 1,986)



## Takeaway

**87%** of educators want **books to encourage reading for pleasure**, while **86%** want **books to engage struggling readers**.

**82%** of educators want **books that reflect diversity and inclusion**, while **78%** want **books to promote social-emotional learning**.

**85%** of educators want to **send books home with kids**, while **77%** want to **enhance their curriculum**.

**72%** of educators want to use books to **encourage empathetic, inclusive environments**.

## Resources



What kinds of resources would you want most to support remote learning?



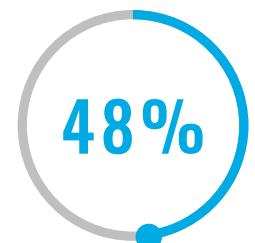
**Educational  
Apps**



**Hot Spots/  
Internet Access**



**Online Learning  
Tools**



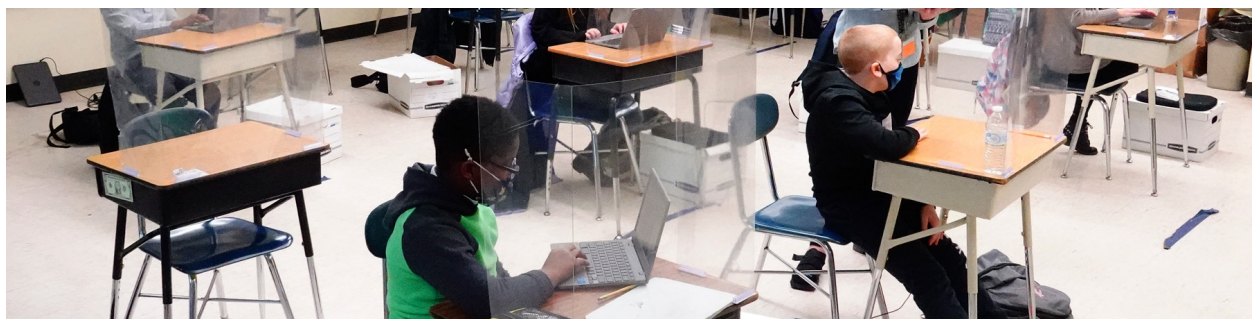
**iPads**

## Takeaway

**76%** of educators would prioritize **purchasing digital/remote learning resources**.

Most are looking for apps (68%), internet/hotspots (58%), and online learning tools (52%).

[We need] WiFi service that is across the board affordable (or FREE) to all. And available in every community (urban and rural).



## Games & Activities

Q What types of games and activities would you want most to support remote learning?

WHAT KINDS OF GAMES & ACTIVITIES	PERCENT (n=1,610)
<b>STEM Activities</b>	<b>73%</b>
Puzzles	64%
Board Games	63%
<b>Experiences Outside the School or Program Setting</b>	<b>61%</b>
<b>Outdoor Activity Equipment</b>	<b>60%</b>
Imaginative Play Materials	52%
Blocks & Builders	51%
Early Childhood Manipulatives	42%
Flashcards	32%
Workbooks	27%
Other	9%

### Takeaway

**80%** of educators would prioritize **purchasing games & activities**. The most wanted type of games/activities are STEM related (73%). Approximately **60% of educators** are looking for **activities that encourage learning outside of the classroom**, particularly outdoor activities.





# Professional Development

**Q** What types of professional development opportunities would you want most to support remote learning?

WHAT KINDS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	PERCENT (n=1,500)
<b>Improving Students’ Social-Emotional Development</b>	<b>77%</b>
<b>Support for Student Mental Health and Wellbeing</b>	<b>71%</b>
<b>Engaging Families in Their Child’s Learning and Development (remotely or otherwise)</b>	<b>70%</b>
Supporting Students with Special Needs	54%
Supporting English Language Learners	54%
Support for Educator/Practitioner Mental Health and Wellbeing	52%
ABAR (anti-bias, anti-racist) Teacher Training	50%
Distance Learning/Remote Teaching Training	34%
Creating High-Quality Early Childhood Environments	32%
Other	9%

## Takeaway

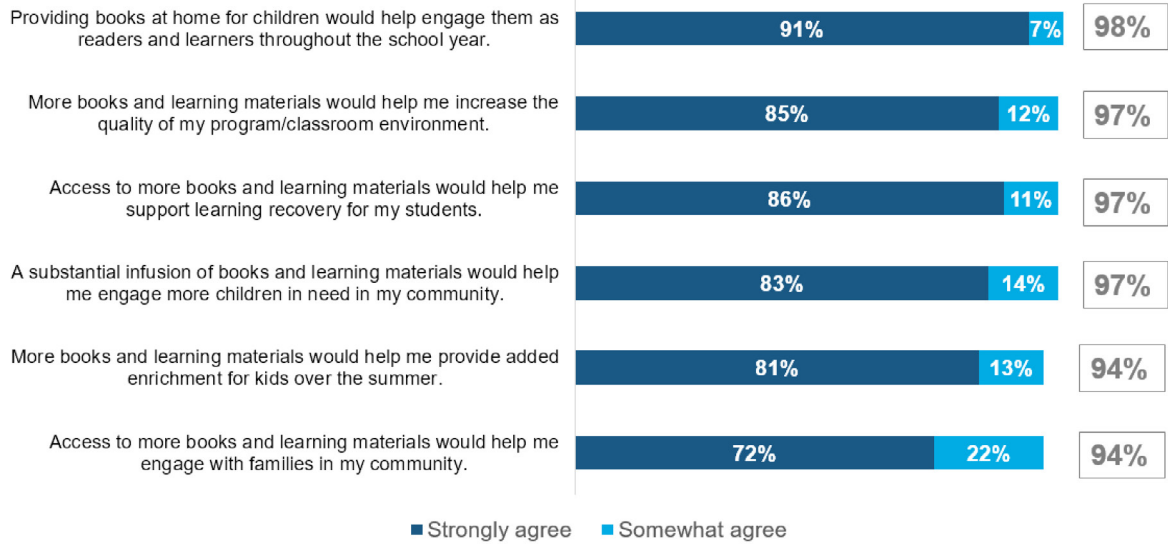
**75%** of educators would prioritize purchasing **professional development opportunities**. Most educators want training to support social and emotional skill development (77%) or student mental health (71%). The ability to engage families in their child’s education is also important to many members (70%).



## Potential Impact from Funding

Q

We'd like to understand the potential impact that funding from the American Rescue Plan Act may bring to underserved communities. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement.



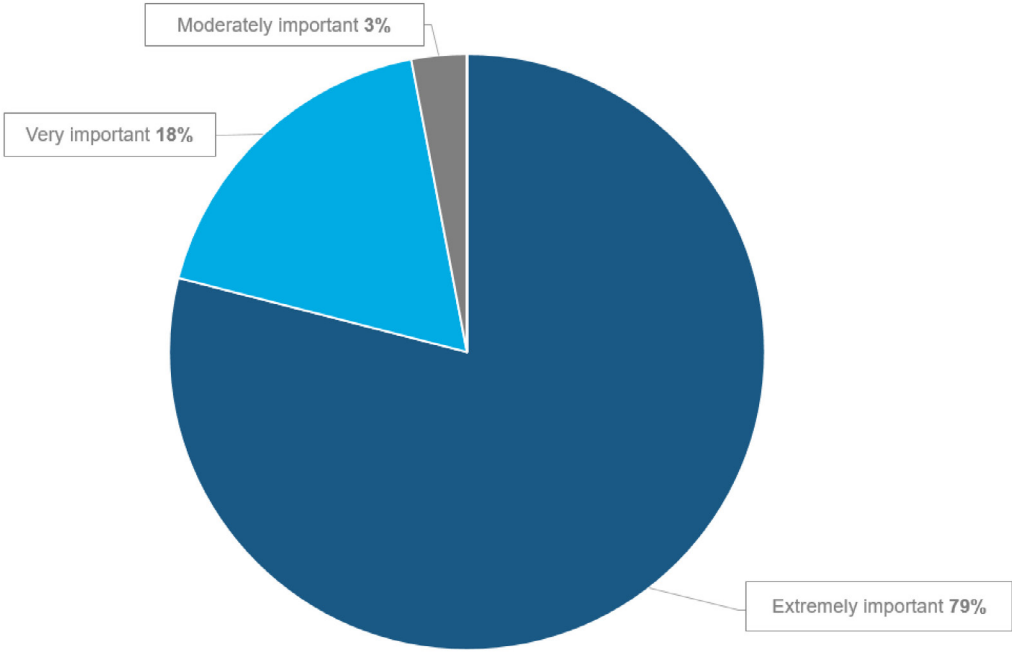
### Takeaway

Educator impact statements show the **great potential ARP funding has to support underserved communities**, if directed toward reading and learning materials.

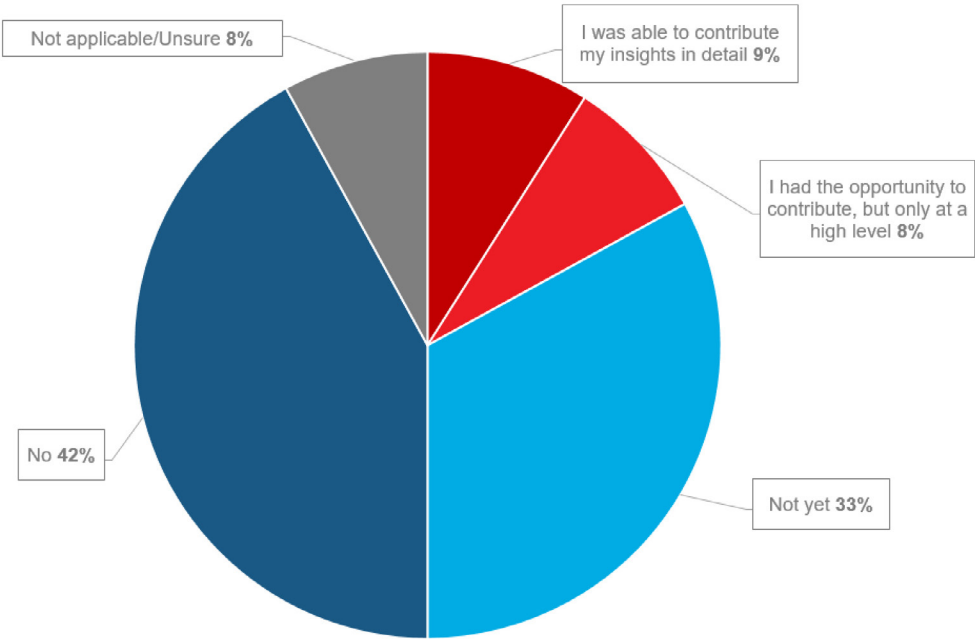


# Educator Input

**Q** As an educator/leader working to support children in need, how important do you believe it is to provide your input on how the ARP federal stimulus funds can be best used to improve educational resources and opportunities for the children you serve?



**Q** Have you had an opportunity to provide input regarding how the ARP federal stimulus funds can be best used to improve educational resources and opportunities for the children you serve?



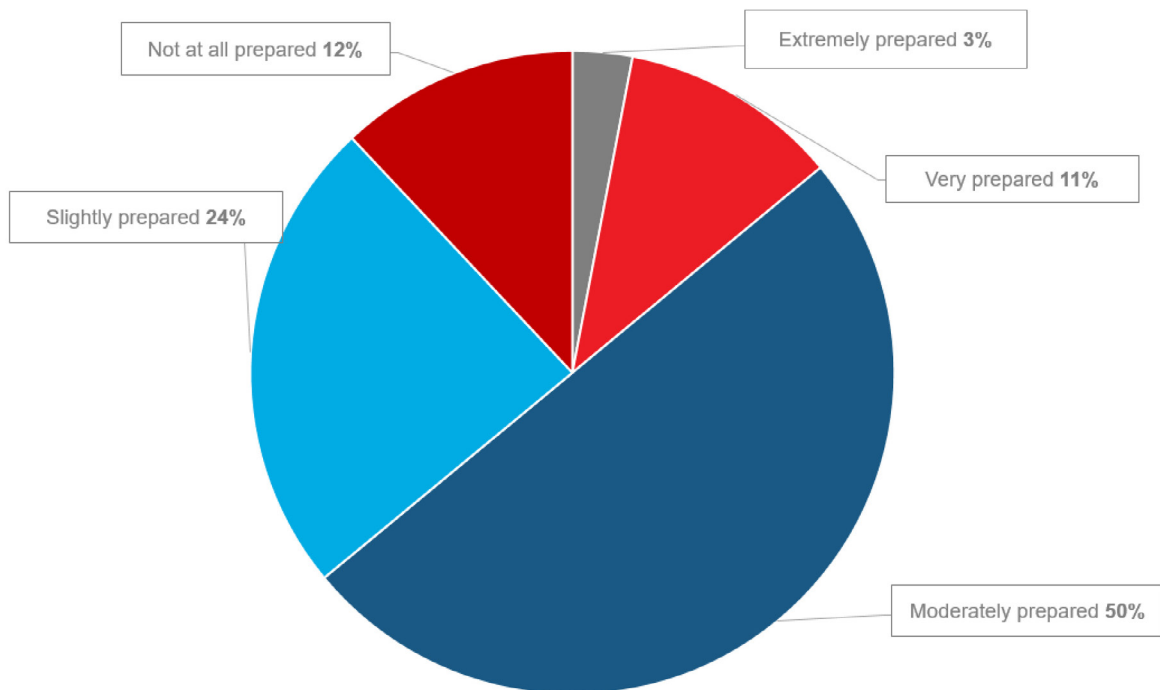
## Takeaway

**97%** of educators believe it is **extremely or very important that their opinions be considered** when determining where ARP funding is directed. Meanwhile, only **17%** have had the chance to **contribute to the funding conversation**.

Please invest money in trauma training for educators. When we came back in person, we saw many students who had gone without food, books, and who had been abused. Teach us how to handle these situations and recognize when there may be a serious issue.

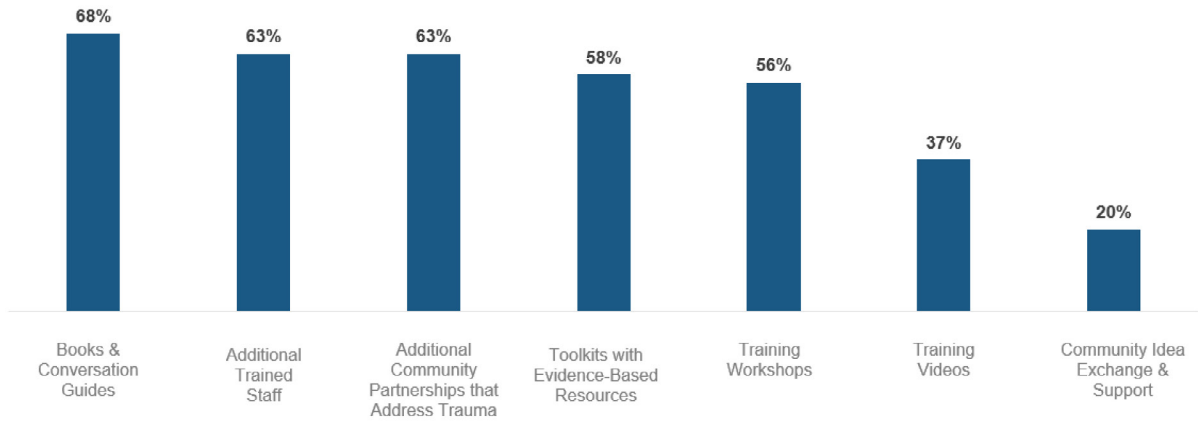
## Preparedness to Support Children Experiencing Trauma

**Q** How prepared do you feel to support children who experienced trauma, grief, and loss over the past year?





Which of the following resources would help better equip you to meet the needs of children experiencing trauma, grief, and loss?



## Takeaway

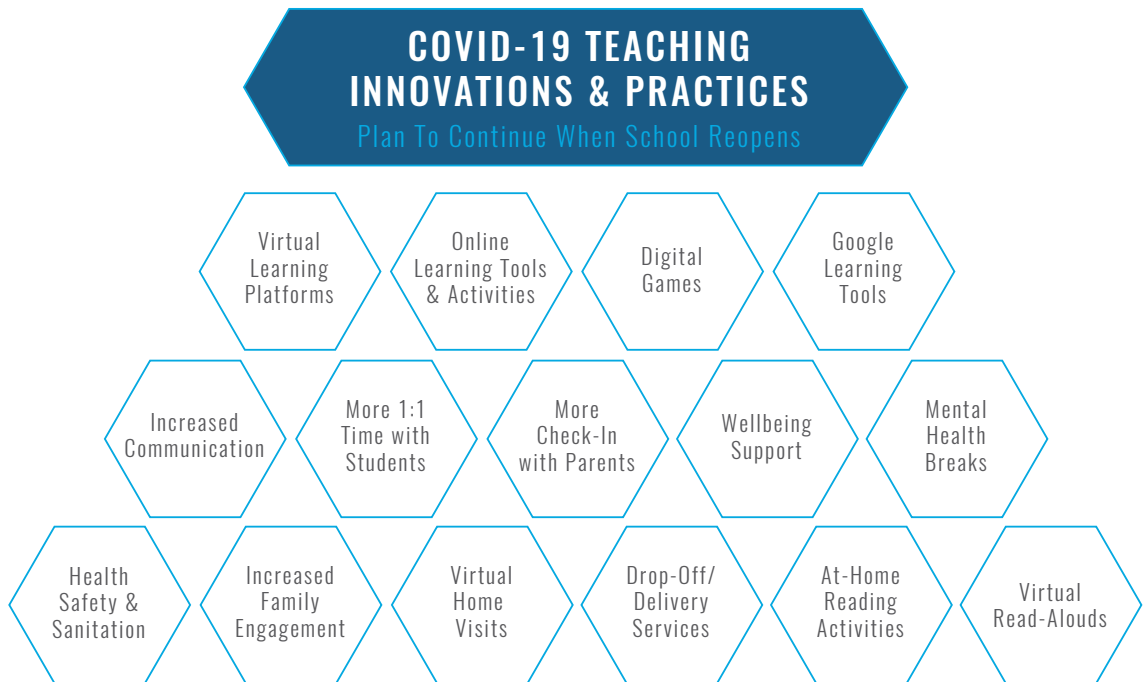
Only **14%** of educators **feel extremely prepared or very prepared to support children** who have experienced trauma over the last year. Books and conversation guides would be the most helpful resources for educators at this time (68%), with additional trained staff (63%), and additional community partnerships (63%) as close secondary and tertiary options.

We will need to put the social and emotional needs of students in front of academic needs. We cannot be successful with the latter if we do not address mental health / trauma our kids have experienced during the pandemic. We must help our kids heal first and foremost.



# Virtual Learning Innovations

**Q** Education settings looked a lot different over the past year and as a result, educators and providers had to find new ways to engage children and families. What new practice or teaching innovation did you adopt during the COVID-19 pandemic that you plan to continue using when your school or program reopens? *Results from this question reflect open-end text feedback.*



## Takeaway

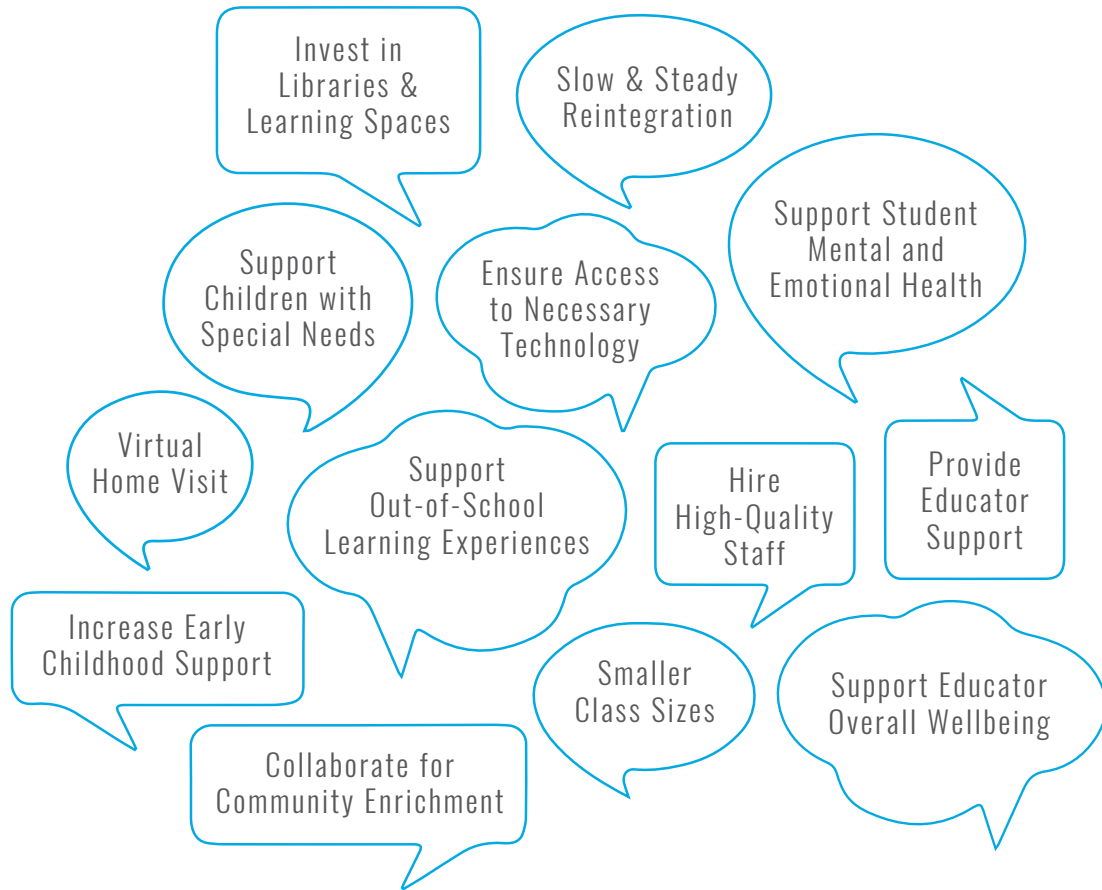
Many educators intend to **embrace and continue certain aspects of virtual learning**. Increased communication with students/families, prioritizing student health & wellbeing, and increased family engagement were all welcome benefits of this past year's remote learning that educators intend to continue into next year.



## Equity in the Community



What else should your district superintendent or education leaders know about what you need to promote equity for all children in your community? *Results from this question reflect open-end text feedback.*



The pandemic has shown in a real-time way how inequities in access to technology and internet can impact students.

# SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Participants from this study were registered First Book members, who work in Title 1 classrooms or programs in which at least 70 percent of the children served come from low-income families.

The survey administration period opened on May 27, 2021 and closed on June 7, 2021. First Book programmed this electronic survey in the QualtricsXM platform and distributed it via email.

## Survey Details



Recorded Responses

2,565

Completed Responses

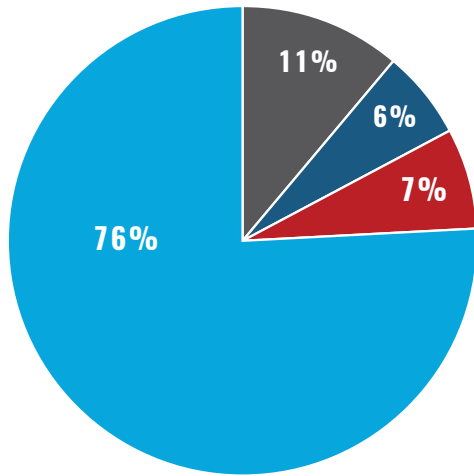


2,004



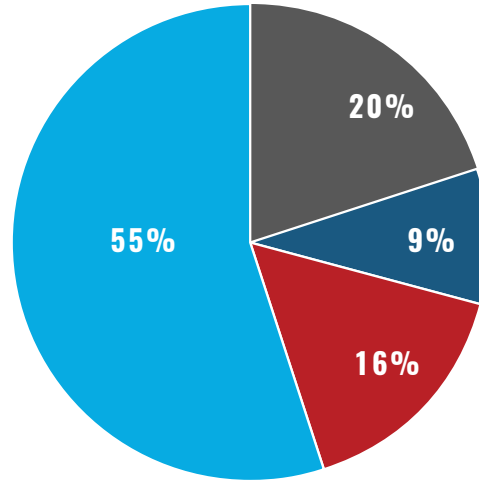
# Respondent Demographics

## ORGANIZATION TYPE



- School
- Early Childhood Program
- Nonprofit Organization
- Other

## EDUCATOR ROLE

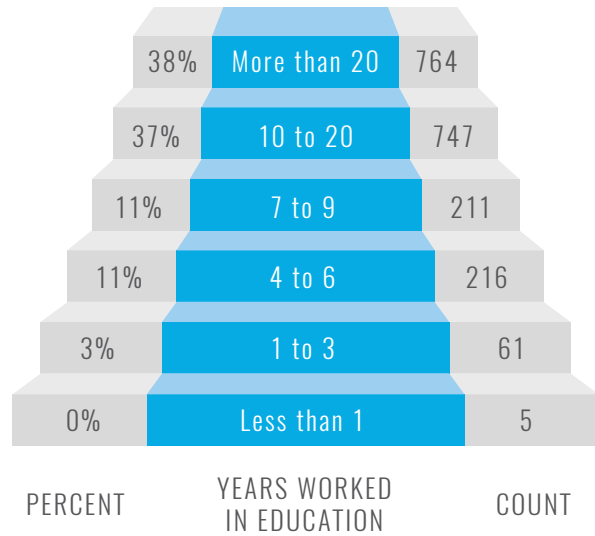


- Teacher/Teacher Aide
- Early Childhood Program
- Program Director/Administrator
- Other

ORGANIZATION TYPE	PERCENT	COUNT
School	76%	1,520
Early Childhood Program	7%	131
Nonprofit Organization	6%	126
Library	4%	79
Civic/Community Organization	2%	33
Other	2%	50
Out-of-School Time Program	1%	20
Faith-Based Organization	1%	14
Health Department/Clinic	1%	21
Shelter	0%	4
Military Organization	0%	0
Museum	0%	6

ANSWER	PERCENT	COUNT
Teacher/Teacher Aide	55%	1,106
Librarian/Media Specialist	16%	318
Program Director/Administrator	9%	173
Other	7%	137
Reading Specialist	4%	85
Family Engagement Specialist	3%	51
School Support Personnel	2%	34
Volunteer	2%	35
Principal/Vice Principal	1%	28
Health-Care Provider	1%	25
Child Care/Afterschool Provider	1%	12

AGES SERVED	PERCENT	COUNT
Early Childhood (ages 0-4)	31%	620
Elementary School (ages 5-10)	72%	1,442
Middle School (ages 11-13)	32%	640
High School (ages 14-18)	19%	371



STATE	COUNT
California	279
Texas	209
New York	118
Florida	105
Michigan	88
Illinois	85
Ohio	78
Pennsylvania	68
North Carolina	65
Arizona	57
Oregon	55
Washington	54
Massachusetts	50
Wisconsin	44
Maryland	43
Missouri	42
Tennessee	41
Virginia	36
Georgia	35
New Jersey	34
Indiana	29
Louisiana	28
South Carolina	26
Minnesota	24
Iowa	22
Alabama	21

STATE	COUNT
Kentucky	21
New Mexico	20
Kansas	19
Utah	18
Nebraska	18
Connecticut	18
Mississippi	18
Colorado	16
Oklahoma	13
West Virginia	11
Vermont	11
Delaware	10
Nevada	10
DC	8
Montana	8
Maine	7
Idaho	7
Hawaii	6
Arkansas	6
New Hampshire	6
Rhode Island	5
South Dakota	3
Alaska	3
Wyoming	2
North Dakota	2
Puerto Rico	2

GEOGRAPHIC SETTING	PERCENT	COUNT	ANSWER	PERCENT	COUNT
Urban	47%	951	Small (less than 2,500 students)	32%	647
Suburban	27%	541	Medium (2,500 students - 9,999 students)	21%	421
Rural	25%	492	Large (over 10,000)	41%	816
Indian Reservation/ Tribal Nation	1%	17	Don't know/can't say	6%	120
Military Base	0%	3			



# ABOUT FIRST BOOK

## Building a Path Out of Poverty Through Educational Equity

First Book, a nonprofit social enterprise, is dedicated to ensuring quality education for children in poverty. First Book's model removes the barriers to education by providing books and resources, generating innovative research, and elevating access to thought leaders to address critical educational equity issues.

Applying proven strategies of the private sector to fuel our growing ecosystem, we have aggregated the First Book Network, North America's largest group of educators (more than 500,000 professionals) serving kids in need. The Network grows by nearly 1,000 new members each week.



## How We Do It

### Original Research Harnesses the Voice of Educators

We conduct original research that amplifies the voices of our Network members and identifies their needs. We then engage field experts to create tools and resources to address those needs. We curate culturally relevant educational resources that resonate with our membership and the diverse children they serve, and leverage the power of aggregated buying to make these books and resources free or affordable through the First Book Marketplace, our award-winning eCommerce site.

## Continuous Innovation to Elevate Impact

We drive constant innovation and collaborate with field-leading organizations to continue elevating our models and bringing the best insights and new practices to the field of education while generating sustainable revenue to continue our work. We form win-win relationships that benefit those we serve, as well as the publishers, suppliers, purposeful corporations, governments, and other key stakeholders committed to improving educational equity.

## System-Changing Models Addressing the Whole Child

Finally, we address the needs of the whole child, supporting their education, basic needs, and wellness — all of which are essential to educational equity. Through our sophisticated distribution system, we efficiently deliver help where it is needed. The First Book educator-centric integrated design, grounded in rapid-cycle feedback, and powered by innovation and entrepreneurial thinking, provides hope and promise to children living in poverty and the educators who serve them.

## Our Model of Change

### First Book Network

Comprises North America's largest community of educators working on the frontlines with children in need at schools and programs across the U.S.

### First Book Marketplace

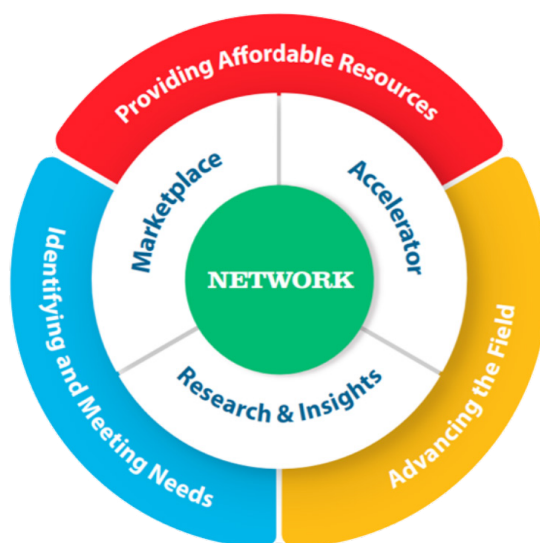
Provides the First Book Network with 24-hour, year-round access to an award-winning repository of free and affordable new books, educational resources, and basic necessities curated for kids in need ages 0-18.

### First Book Research & Insights

Advances education and poverty research by generating original data that amplifies educators' voices, drives First Book's models, and informs content on the First Book Marketplace.

### First Book Accelerator

Translates current research and evidence-based strategies from leading experts into actionable tools that are shared with our network — so educators don't have to wait months or years to use innovative best practices in their classrooms and programs.



## Our Commitment to Local Impact

First Book helps leaders maximize ARP funding for learning recovery and amplifies impact in under-resourced communities. To meet local needs, district and state-level collaborations are scalable, flexible, and measurable.

- Promote learning recovery by infusing Title I classrooms, libraries, afterschool, and summer programs with new books and art/school supplies.
- Support social and emotional wellness with starter home libraries for all low-income families in your state or district.
- Ensure sustained impact by connecting every eligible educator, and provider with ongoing access to low-cost books and educational materials.
- Accelerate planning and progress through First Book Research and Insights.
- Demonstrate your commitment to enhancing equity through tangible, measurable resource distributions to high-need communities.

For more information, visit **FIRSTBOOK.ORG** or follow the latest news on **LinkedIn**, **Facebook**, **Twitter**, and **Instagram**.



## Connect With Us

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