



# SPECIAL EDUCATION CAPSTONE

Bedford Central School District

*October 2023*

# INTRODUCTION

Over the past year, Hanover Research (Hanover) completed a series of research projects to assist Bedford Central School District (BCSD) in enhancing their special education program through the lens of supporting student learning, parent communication, and teacher training. Hanover collaborated with Bedford leadership to provide insights on:

- Education partners' perceptions of special education programming;
- Changes BCSD can implement to align special education programming and policies to education partners' needs;
- How other school districts implement successful special education programs.

Hanover completed two research studies to gather information from education partners on their opinions, experiences, and preferences, as well as a benchmarking report to provide information on how other schools organize their special education programs. BCSD also completed a town hall summary to uncover additional community viewpoints.

This document presents findings from each Hanover deliverable as well as high-level themes from the town hall summary, outlines general best practices, and provides overall recommendations based on accumulated results.

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# METHODOLOGY

Hanover Research completed the following two research studies and a benchmarking report on behalf of BCSD to gain insight into special education programming. Hanover also includes high-level findings from BCSD's town hall and general best practices in this report.

## Survey

April and May of  
2023

- Instructional Staff (n=118)
- District Staff (n=6)
- Parents (n=69)

193

Total Respondents



## In-Depth Interviews

June 2023

- Parent-Student Dyads (n=10)
- Students Only (n=2)
- Parents Only (5)

17

In-Depth  
Interviews



## Benchmarking Report

December 2022

- **Methodology:** Hanover used the Hanover peer district generator to identify eight benchmarked districts
- **Findings:** Benchmarked districts provided students with a comprehensive continuum of services, communicated clearly with families, and supported professional learning through outside partnerships.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

- Based on the findings of the survey, in-depth interviews, benchmarking report, best practices report, and BCSD's town hall, Hanover identified several recommendations around three primary themes, described below.
- Additional detailed recommendations are presented alongside findings on the following slides.

## **Parent Engagement & Communication**



Develop a plan for regularly communicating with parents about special education programming as well as their child's academic progress and collect input on district initiatives.

## **Inclusion & Academic Programming**



Provide students with rigorous academic instruction, enrichment opportunities, and shared learning and social time with the general education population.

## **Professional Development**




Train teachers in instructional practices for special education populations and provide teachers with time to collaborate and plan with one another.

# PARENT ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATION

## Daily Communication:

- Answer parent emails in a timely manner
- Ensure all parent concerns are logged and addressed
- Create a system for updating parents on students' progress and incidents of safety
- Create a clear website with information on relevant services and curricula
- Ensure communication is translated into multiple languages


Only one-third of parents indicate being satisfied with their school's performance in providing ongoing support to parents



## Special Education Program:

- Provide parents with detailed information on available services
- Decrease barriers to obtaining timely and accurate evaluations
- Document pull-out services and quarterly IEP progress reports
- Establish a formal, written complaint process whereby all grievances are documented and resulting actions are clearly communicated


Thirty-seven percent of parents indicate facing challenges in knowing available accommodations and services



## Personalized Communication:

- Regularly inform parents of students' academic learning experiences and achievement
- Instruct staff members to communicate with parents regularly
- Train staff members on effective communication and relationship building so that parents have positive interactions with staff

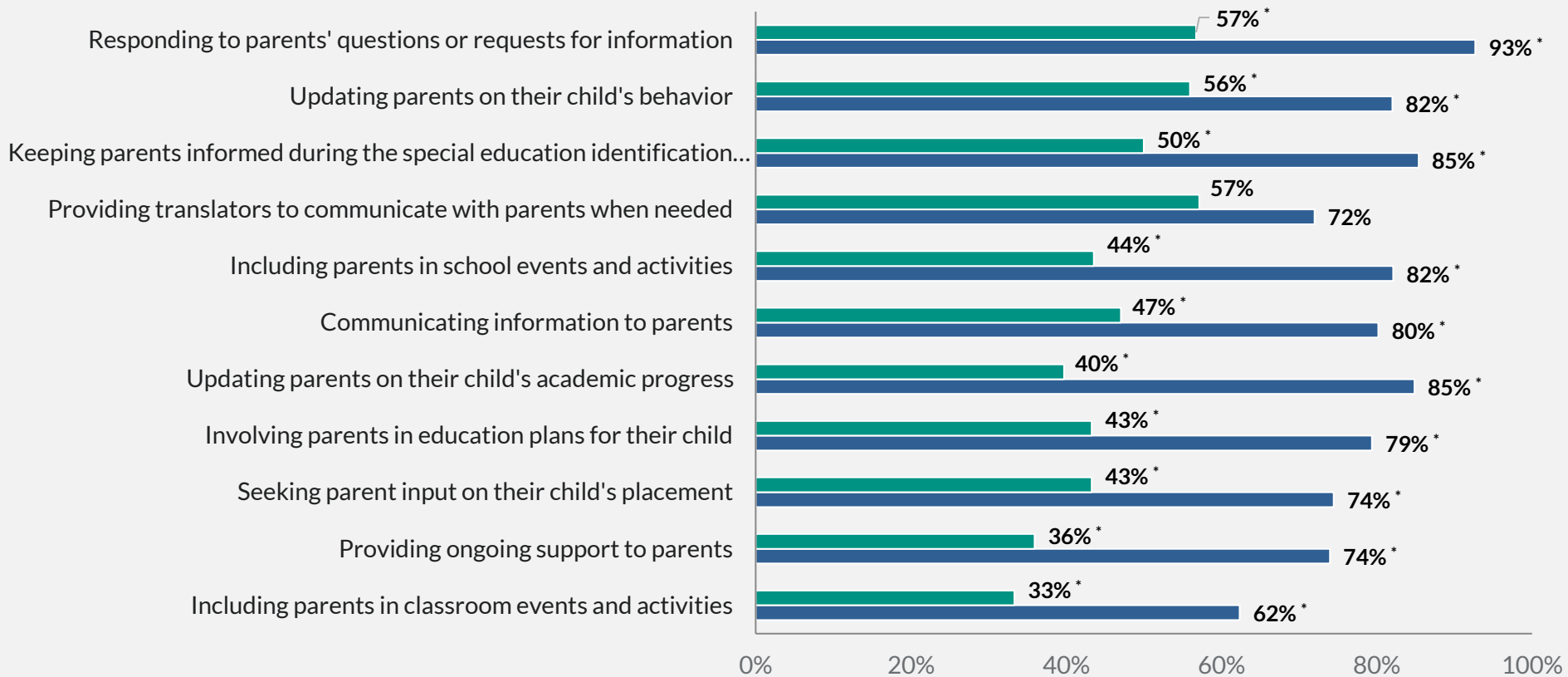
Thirty seven percent of parents indicate that a lack of feedback on their child's progress is a challenge for them



# ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATION- SELECT RESULTS

Please rate [your child's school's/your school's/BCSD's] performance in engaging parents of students who receive special education services.  
% Good + % Excellent

■ Parent (n=21-68) ■ Staff (n=85-101)






# INCLUSION & PROGRAMMING

## Academic Achievement:

- Provide students with rigorous academic opportunities, as well as preparation for college and careers
- Ensure students receive instruction that is aligned to standards, engaging, challenging, and relevant
- Implement all aspects of IEP plans


Thirty-nine percent of parents have low opinions of their school and district's performance in assisting SPED students



## Resources and Services:

- Provide special education students with the opportunity to develop different aspects of their abilities, including life skills and social skills.
- Ensure psychologists and guidance counselors are proactive in helping students manage their emotional and behavioral needs


Three-fifths of parents believe that schools are good or excellent at providing SPED students access to resources and services



## Placement and Inclusion:

- Regularly inform parents of students' academic learning experiences and achievement.
- Provide all special education students with opportunities to interact with general education students inside and outside the classroom.
- In co-taught classrooms, ensure that general education and special education teachers instruct and interact with students of all ability levels

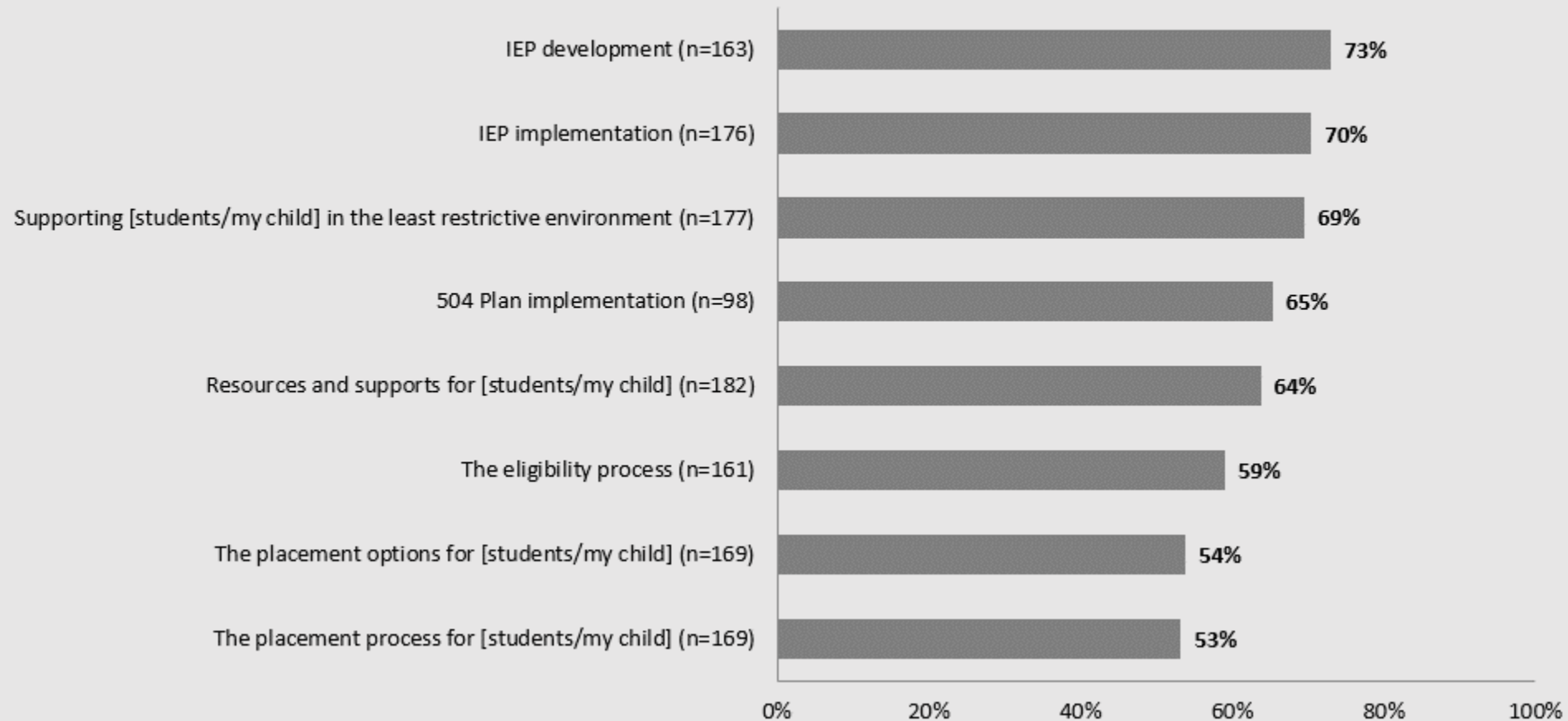
Roughly half of parents report being satisfied with the special education program with respect to the placement options



# INCLUSION & PROGRAMMING– SELECT RESULTS

To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the following components of [your child's/your school's/BCSD's] special education program with respect to...

*% Somewhat Satisfied + % Completely Satisfied*



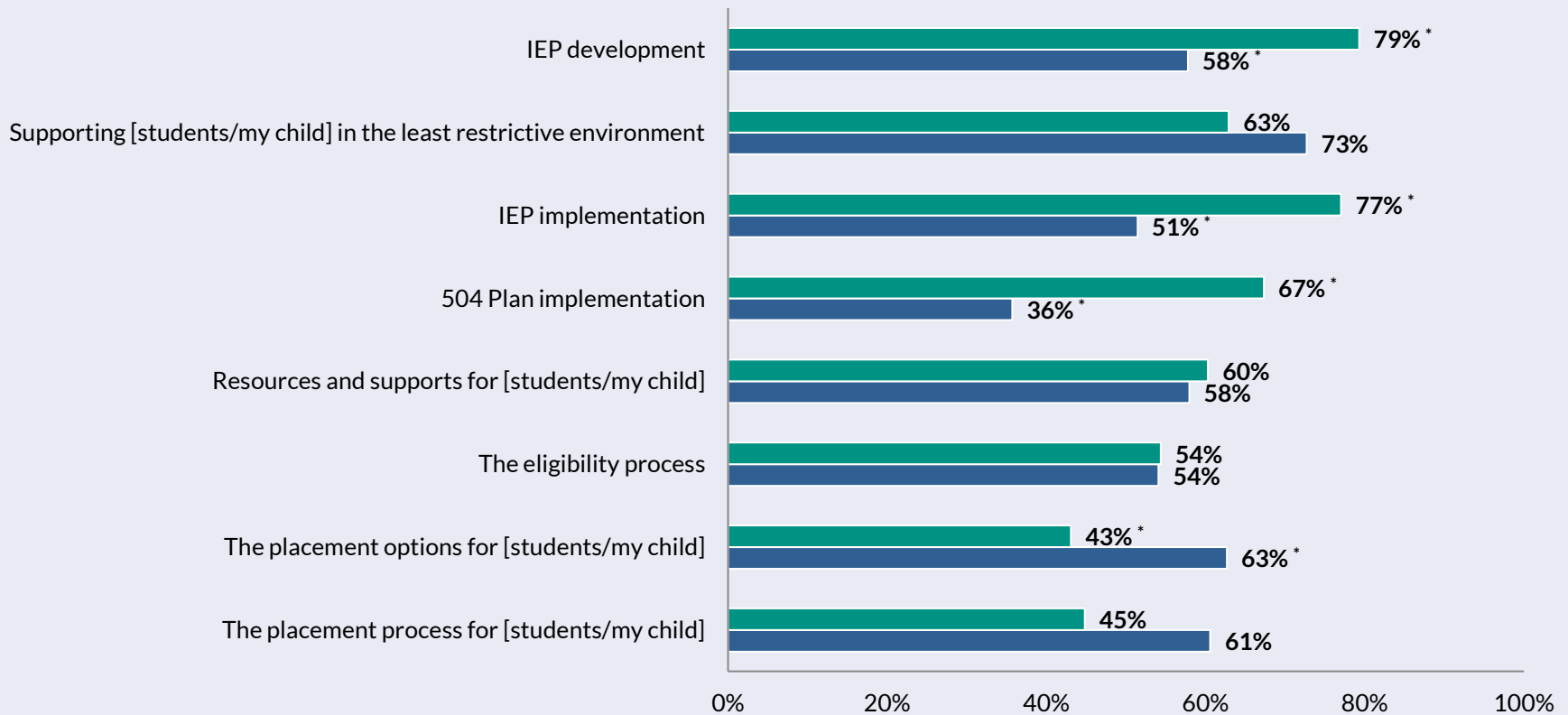


# INCLUSION & PROGRAMMING– SELECT RESULTS

To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the following components of [your child's/your school's/BCSD's] special education program with respect to...

% Somewhat Satisfied + % Completely Satisfied

Teacher (n=49-63)    Parent (n=14-69)



# INCLUSION & PROGRAMMING– BENCHMARKING & QUOTES



All benchmarked districts provide both “push-in” and “pull-out” methods of instruction and organize their services on a continuum, based on each individual student’s need.

*I wanted my daughter in the community. I did not want her out of the district. I want her to be part of this community. I want her to gain experiences. I want my friends' children to see her.*

*–Parent, High School*



***“Inclusion is not a program, it is a set of beliefs that drives actions, behaviors, and decisions.” –SEPTO Town Hall***

*They need to support them in the social area. If you have some peer groups where somebody can pair him up with someone, or creating opportunities for them that they can feel good about themselves. We're not fostering the social piece, like community services or programs that can be offered so he can continue gaining the confidence and building on the self-esteem.”*

*–Parent, High School*



All benchmarked districts employ one school psychologist or social worker per school, in addition to Special Education instructors or specialists, to ensure constant student support.

# TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## Professional Development:

- Offer more professional development opportunities to both general and special education teachers related to special education instructional practices
- Train teachers and service providers to interpret IEPs, provide students with their required services with fidelity, progress monitor, and make instructional changes for academic improvement
- Train teachers to teach special education students with dignity and respect, and to make them feel a sense of belonging at school
- Train teachers to prevent bullying of special education students
- Instruct teachers on strategies for communicating with and forming positive relationships with parents

Few instructional staff members report receiving PD in identifying students with disabilities, providing access to the core curriculum, transitioning students, evaluating students for placement, and engaging parents



## Collaboration:

- Provide staff members with more planning and preparation time.
- For co-taught classrooms, guide teachers in how to use planning time so that classwork is integrated and equitable.

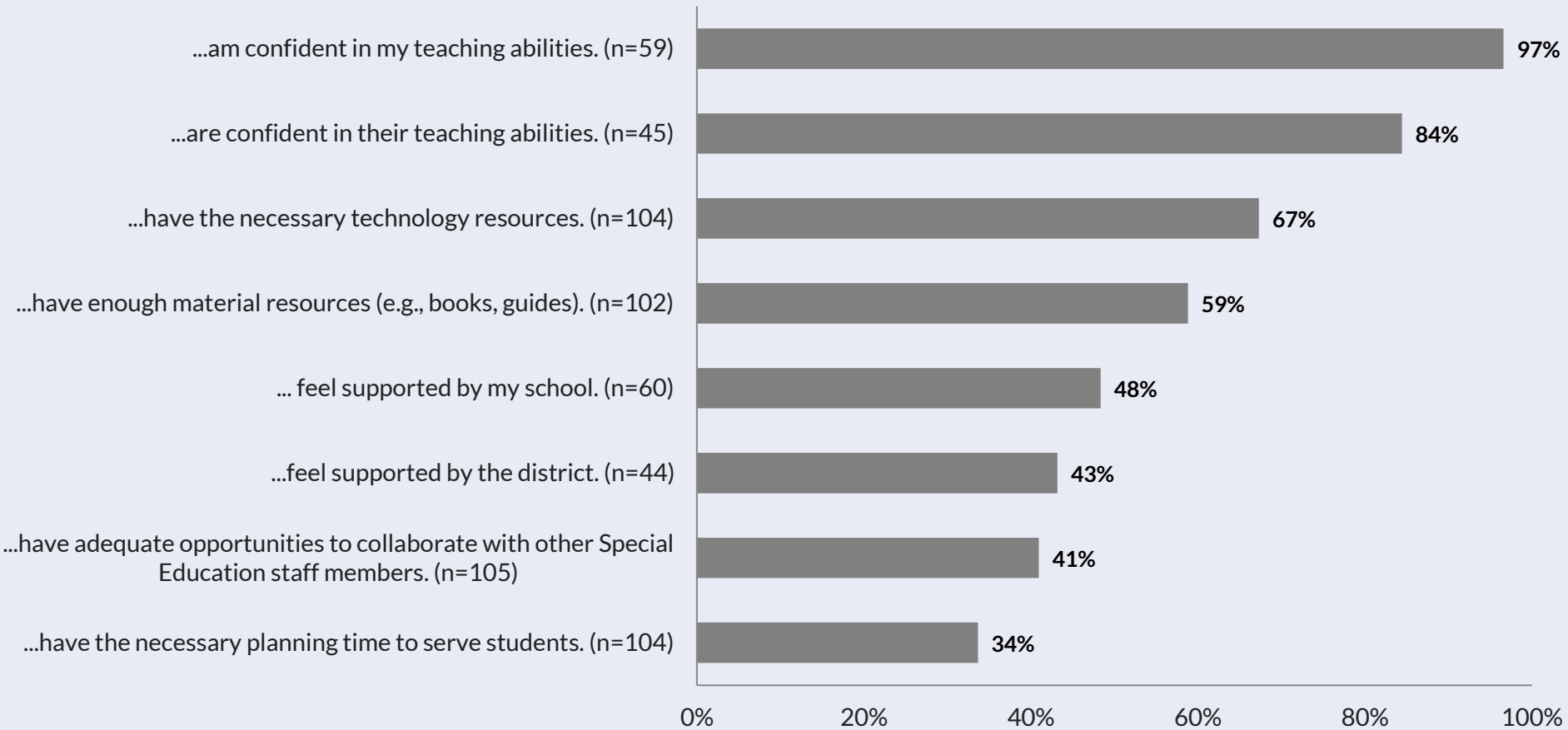
Half of teacher respondents consider having insufficient time to collaborate with general education teachers a challenge



# TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SELECT RESULTS

Please indicate how much you disagree or agree with the following statements. With regard to teaching students receiving special education services, [I/teachers]...

*% Somewhat Agree + % Strongly Agree*



# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT BEST PRACTICES & QUOTES



**Provide professional development aligned with equitable and inclusive principles and the district's vision to facilitate disability-inclusive environments.**

- Ongoing professional development allows teachers and staff multiple opportunities to learn or become updated on inclusive instructional practices and equitable standards adopted by the school or district
- Embedded and consistent professional learning ensures inclusive strategies are implemented with fidelity across the district and give teachers multiple opportunities to collaborate effectively and develop their practices.

*"The teachers were nice, but they didn't understand that I am motor impaired, not cognitively impaired. I'm not cognitively impaired, but I was treated as if I was the entire the entire time I was there."*

*-High School Student, Out-of-District*

*"It is very apparent that the Special Ed teacher is the primary contact point for him. There's very limited interaction with the General Ed teacher. Their homework and tests are graded not by the General Ed teacher, but by the Special Ed teacher. So it's almost like there's two populations within the classroom. To me, that really doesn't meet the best co-teach model."*

*-Parent, High School*





Thank you.

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