



# California Attendance Parent Survey Results

August 2015

## Background

The Ad Council, in partnership with the California Attorney General's Office and with support from the California Endowment, is developing a parent-targeted communications strategy that emphasizes the importance of consistent school attendance and the impact absences can have on academic outcomes, even in elementary school.

To inform the communications strategy, the Ad Council conducted a multi-phased research project among parents of students in grades K-5 in California. The first research phase included expert interviews and in-home ethnographies among CA parents. This report outlines the detailed findings from the second research phase - a quantitative validation and concept test survey.

## Phase 2 Survey: Research Objectives

- **Validate** the exploratory research findings with quantitative results which are generalizable to all parents of elementary aged students in CA.
- Specifically, it will be used to:
  - **Gain a deeper understanding** of parents' attitudes and behaviors surrounding school attendance and truancy.
  - **Gain a better understanding** of what would move parents to act (i.e. ensure their child regularly attends school).
  - **Determine** which strategic direction/message platform is most clear, relevant and motivating.

# Methodology

What?	Parent Survey on Attendance Online survey of English-speaking parents Telephone survey of Spanish-speaking parents
When?	August 2015
Who?	California Parents of Students in grades K-5 <sup>th</sup> grade: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- English and Spanish-speaking parents</li><li>- Child absent 10+ times in the 2014-2015 school year</li><li>- Lower income (&lt;\$50k)</li><li>- Mix of race/ethnicity</li><li>- For Spanish-speaking parents - primarily speaks Spanish at home</li></ul>
How many?	n = 573 English-speaking parents n = 250 Spanish-speaking parents
How?	English Survey Respondents are part of an online panel - they were recruited through the panel and then screened through the online questionnaire. Spanish-language respondents were recruited via telephone lists in areas with higher concentrations of Spanish-speaking Hispanics. Interviewers are trained to conduct a Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI).
By whom?	Funded by California Endowment, managed by Ad Council and run by Cayenne Global Inc.

## Caveat: Phone vs. Online Survey

Since Spanish-speaking parents are difficult to recruit for online research, separate methodologies were used to survey English and Spanish-speaking parents. These separate methodologies require different sampling, survey questions and analysis.

They also elicit very different responses. For instance, parents taking a telephone survey are more likely to respond positively with a “socially-desirable response” than someone who is alone, taking an online survey.

**Caution should be used when interpreting results across the English and Spanish surveys.**

# Questionnaire

## Screening

Identify  
respondent  
(based on target  
audience criteria)

## Attendance Attitudes/ Behaviors

Questions about  
perceptions, attitudes &  
behaviors surrounding  
attendance and absences

## Concept Statement Feedback

Each respondent exposed  
to 2 (of 4) statements to  
compare differences in  
concept clarity,  
relevance, believability &  
motivation

## Statement 1

### **Attendance matters**

School, even in the early years, is critical to building a strong foundation for learning that will help your child succeed in middle school, high school and beyond. You cannot make up for too many absences with homework or take-home assignments. Each day your child is not in school is a missed opportunity to learn something they will need in order to understand more difficult material later. Help your child succeed in their future. Make sure they are in school every day.

## Statement 2

### **Absences add up**

Even in elementary school, missing 18 or more days per year (or just 2 days per month) is too many. Students who miss too many days in elementary school are more likely to fall behind in reading, writing and math. This makes them less likely to graduate high school. Keep track of and limit your child's absences in order to keep them on course to succeed in their future.



## Statement 3

### **Establishing poor attendance now has long-term consequences**

Can you imagine your child ditching school all the time? It may be difficult to picture now, but kids who miss too many days in elementary school are more likely to miss in middle and high school. This puts them at greater risk of dropping out. If you allow them to be absent too many times now they can form poor habits which could be harmful to their future success. Help your child build good attendance habits by making sure they are at school every day.

## Statement 4

### **All absences are equal**

Chances are your child will need to miss a few days of school this year. While some absences might seem more excusable, the impact is actually the same whether your child is sick, ditching or taking a family trip. Any absence makes it harder for your child to keep up with the everyday classroom learning that is needed to grow and succeed. Some absences are unavoidable; but too many will make your child fall behind and they might not be able to catch up. Save absences for when it is absolutely necessary and make sure they are in school every day.

# Results

# Respondent Info

# Demographic breakout

## Parents were screened to ensure:

Parent/guardian of a child in grades K-5 (public school)

Their child was absent 10 or more times in the 2014-2015 school year

Annual household income is <\$50k per year

For Spanish-speaking parents: mostly communicates in Spanish at home

	English-speaking parents	Spanish-speaking parents
Total respondents	n = 573	n = 250
Male	25%	20%
Female	75%	80%
Black / African American	10%	n/a
Caucasian / White	44%	n/a
Hispanic	33%	100%
Other	12%	n/a
HHI <\$25k	43%	63%
HHI \$25k-\$50k	57%	37%

# Summary

## The attitudes & behaviors found in this survey validate prior research

- Parents are well intended
  - They understand that education & attendance is important
  - Believe that some absences are more excusable than others
  - Believe they are doing all they can to make sure their child attends.
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- Yet, they are not *really* tracking absences
  - Parents are keeping their kids home for reasons other than illness
  - Ultimately, they do not think it's such a big deal if their child misses school (especially in grades K-5).

## Attendance Matters

**This statement is believable, relevant and motivating, but may be validating what parents already know.**

- Most parents selected this as the most convincing statement (62% & 82%)
- Almost all found it believable (95% & 96%)
- And almost all found it personally meaningful (92% & 95%)
- It makes most think about their child's attendance differently (75% & 88%)
- And many said they would share this information (53% & 72%) and/or do what the statement is asking (62% & 61%)
- Many parents said that “absences leading to dropping out” and “make-up work couldn't replace classroom learning” provided new information. And the notion of “helping your child succeed” and “not letting students fall behind” was motivating.
- But close to one-half of parents said that this concept is similar to what they have heard in the past. When asked what specially is similar, they cited the main idea of the message - that students will fall behind and that it's up to parents to ensure they attend.



## Absences Add Up

**Similar to ‘Attendance Matters’, this statement is believable, relevant and motivating but may also be validating what parents already know.**

- Almost all found it believable (96% & 95%)
- Almost all found it personally meaningful (89% & 96%)
- It makes most think about their child’s attendance differently, especially Spanish-speaking parents (81% & 94%)
- Many said they would share this information (54% & 75%) and/or do what the statement is asking (59% & 67%)
- Many felt that “just 2 absences per month” was new information; and coupled with “less likely to graduate,” it was convincing in making sure their child didn’t miss too many days.
- Still, only 50% of English-speaking parents and 13% of Spanish-speaking parents selected this as the most convincing statement. And most parents said that this concept is similar to what they have heard in the past about the importance of attendance.

## Too Many Absences Now Can Lead to Poor Habits Later

### **This statement resonated with Spanish-speaking parents**

- The overwhelming majority of Spanish-speaking parents said this statement was believable (93%). And 3 out of 4 (74%) selected this as the most convincing statement.
- Many of these parents felt that “absences were establishing poor habits” provided new information and make sure their child attended regularly.
- Almost all Spanish-speaking parents found it personally meaningful (93%) and many said they would share this information (68%) and/or do what the statement is asking (61%).

### **But, English-speaking parents’ responses did not align.**

- Far fewer English-speaking parents said the statement was believable (86%).
- Only 51% said they would share this information and 55% said they would do what the statement was asking.
- Fewer than one-third of English-speaking respondents (31%) selected it as the most convincing statement. And many said that the statement wasn’t meaningful because it didn’t apply to their situation.

## All Absences are Equal

**This statement was the least convincing for English and Spanish-speaking parents. It suffers from a lack of believability, relevance and motivation.**

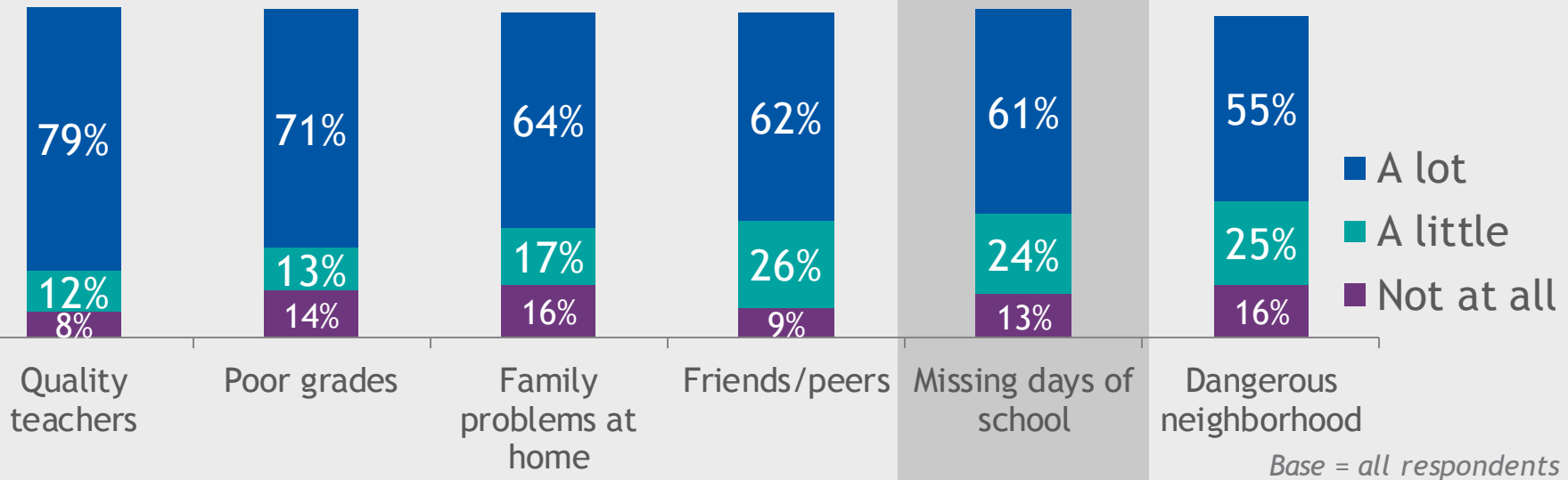
- While the majority of Spanish-speaking parents said this statement was believable (94%) and most said that it made them think differently about their child's attendance (84%), only 15% selected it as the most motivating statement.
- For English-speaking parents, this statement scored the lowest on believability (69%), new information (50%), willingness to share the information (44%) and motivation to act (74%).
- Almost all parents (98% & 93%) said they are willing to save absences for only when necessary in the 2015-2016 school year. And while the majority of parents admit to keeping kids home (when they could have otherwise gone), they mostly see themselves as keeping their kids home only when necessary. Therefore, it is not relatable or believable to tell them to save absences, because it sounds to them like we are encouraging them to send their kids to school when they are sick.

# Attitudes & Behavior

# Perceived factors for not graduating high school

Parents are far more likely to say that quality teachers and poor grades contribute to their child's chance of graduating high school 'a lot' compared with missing days of school (79% and 71% vs. 61% respectively).

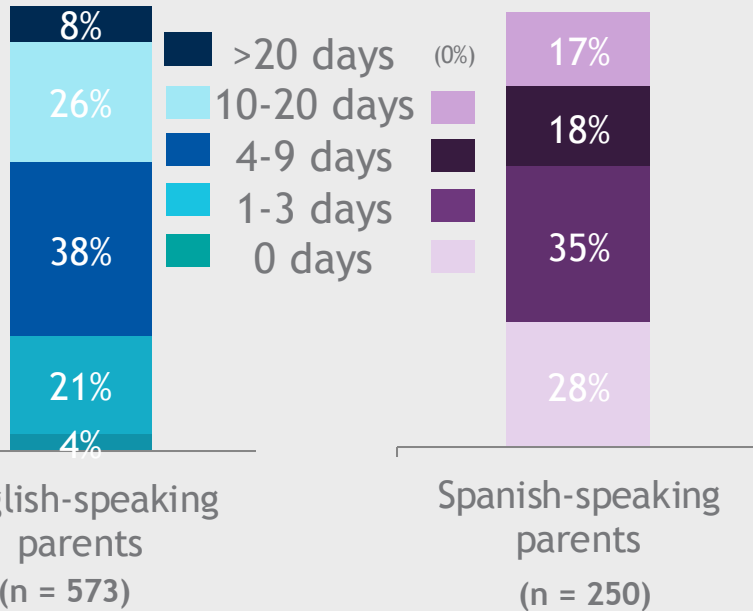
*How much do you think the following affects your child's chance of graduating high school?*



# Actual number of absences exceeds what parents consider ideal

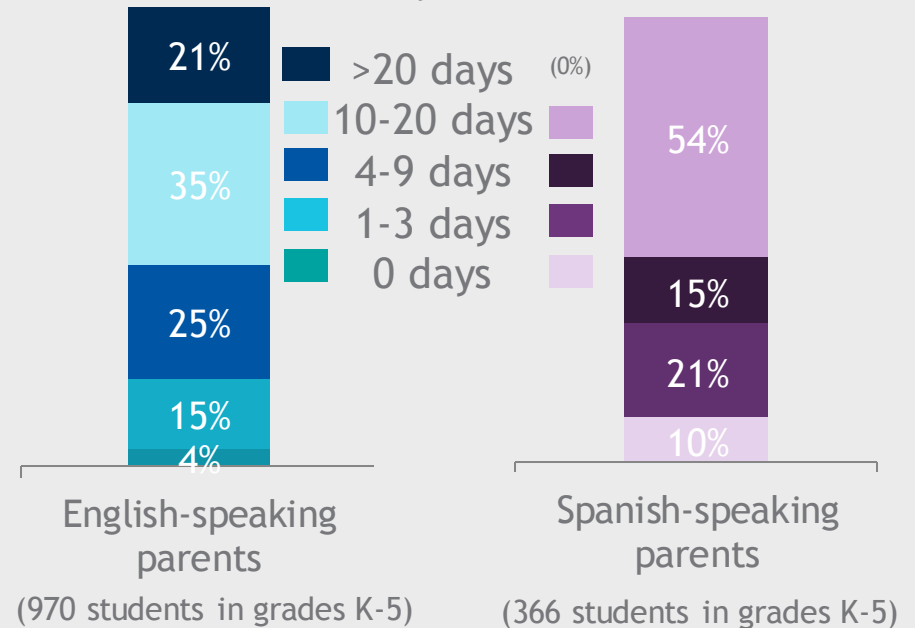
## Ideally

The majority of parents say that ideally their child should not miss more than 9 days of school



## Actually

In actuality, the majority of parents report that their child misses more than 9 days of school

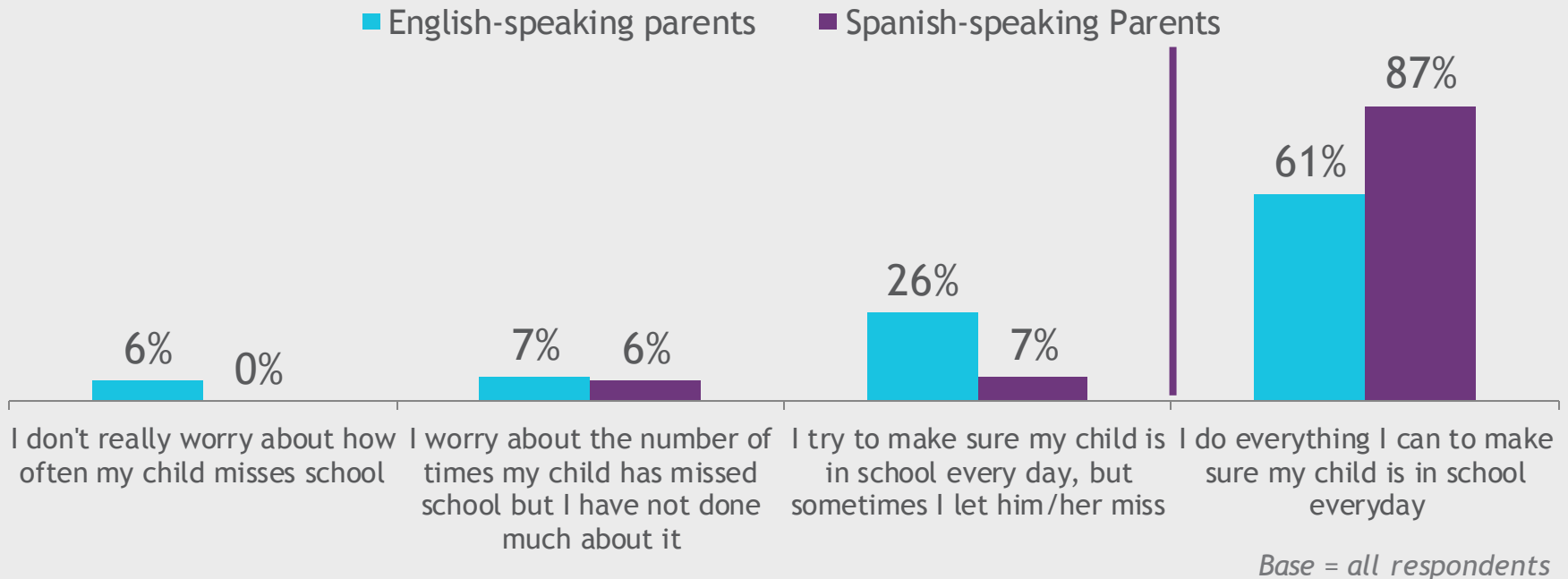


Q: Approximately how many days is it okay for your child to miss in a school year?

Q: Approximately how many days did you child miss in the 2014-2015 school year?

# Most parents have good intentions when it comes to attendance

The majority of parents say they currently do everything they can to make sure their child is in school every day. Spanish-speaking parents are even more likely to say so.



## Reported Behavior (in past 6 months)

English-speaking parents & Spanish-speaking parents

Kept track of total #  
of days missed

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**67%** & **60%**

Contacted teacher/admin  
regarding child's absences

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**66%** & **72%**

Looked up info about how  
to assure attendance

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**33%** & **58%**

Been contacted by school  
about child's attendance

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**42%** & **56%**

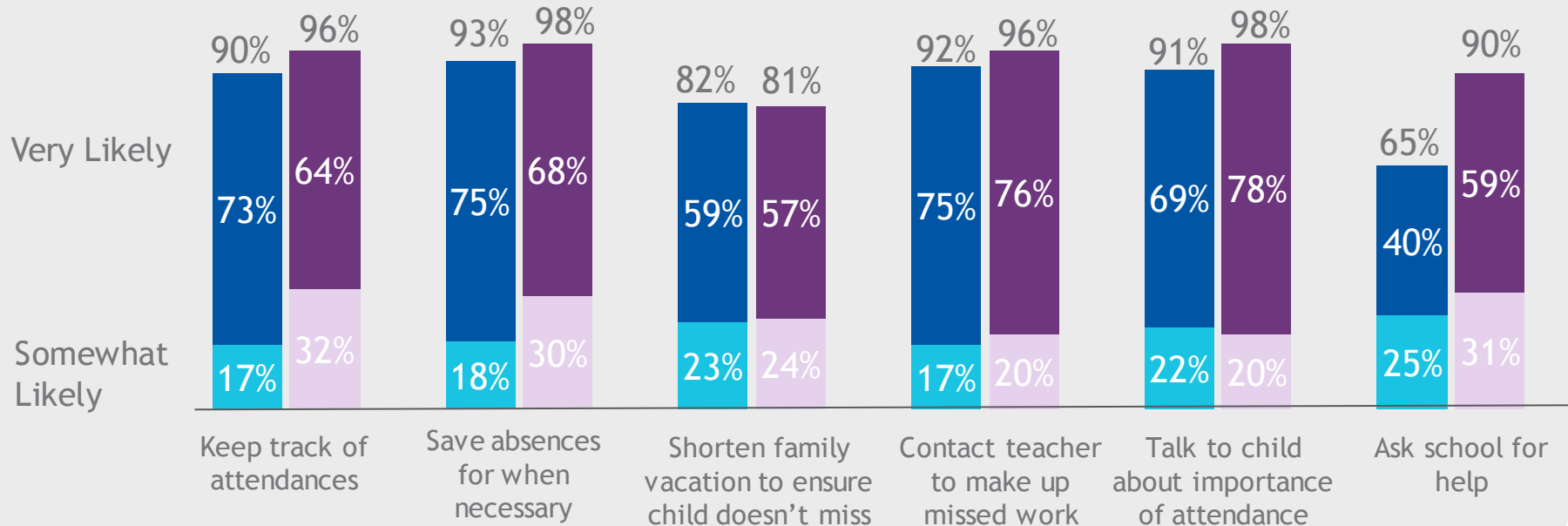
Base = all respondents



# Intentions for 2015-2016 school year

Most parents say they are likely to keep track of absences, talk to their kids and contact the teacher to make up missed work. They are less likely to shorten a family vacation or ask the school for help.

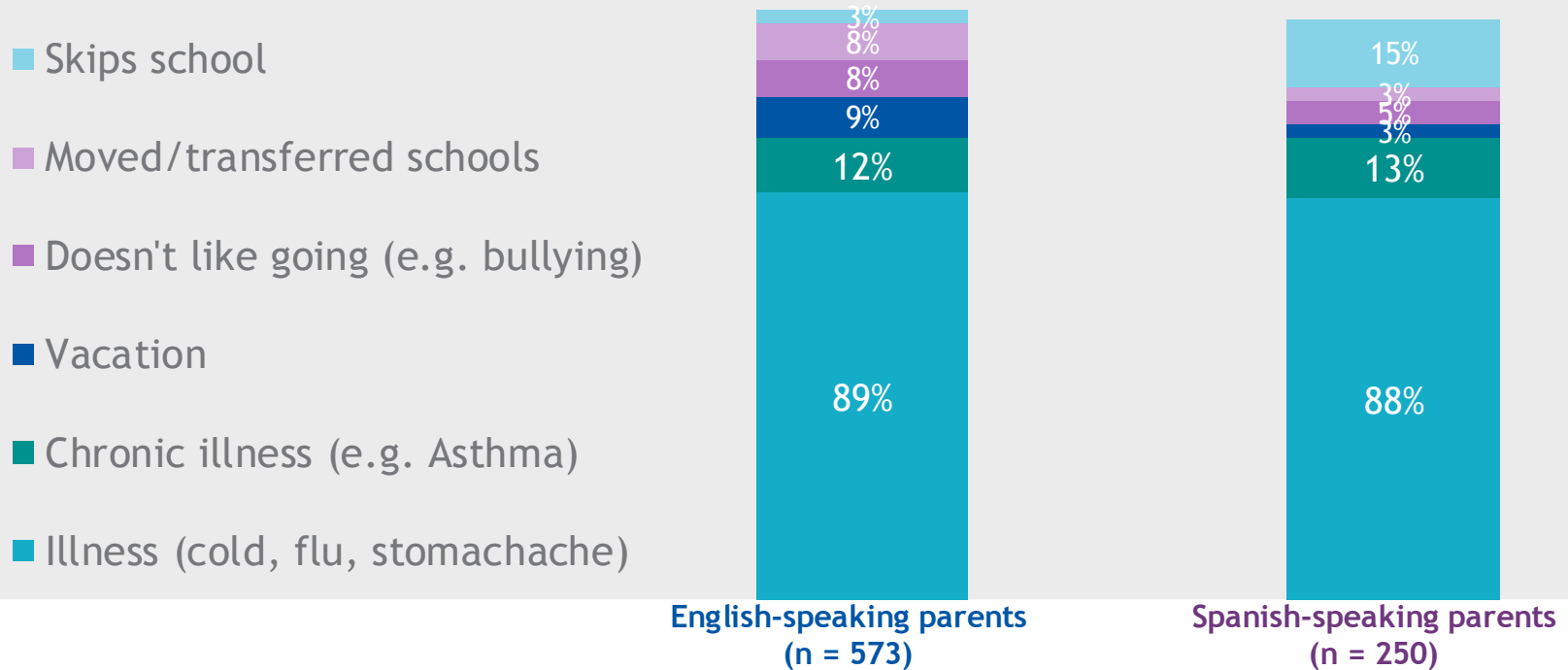
English-speaking parents & Spanish-speaking parents



# Many parents keep their kids home for reasons other than illness

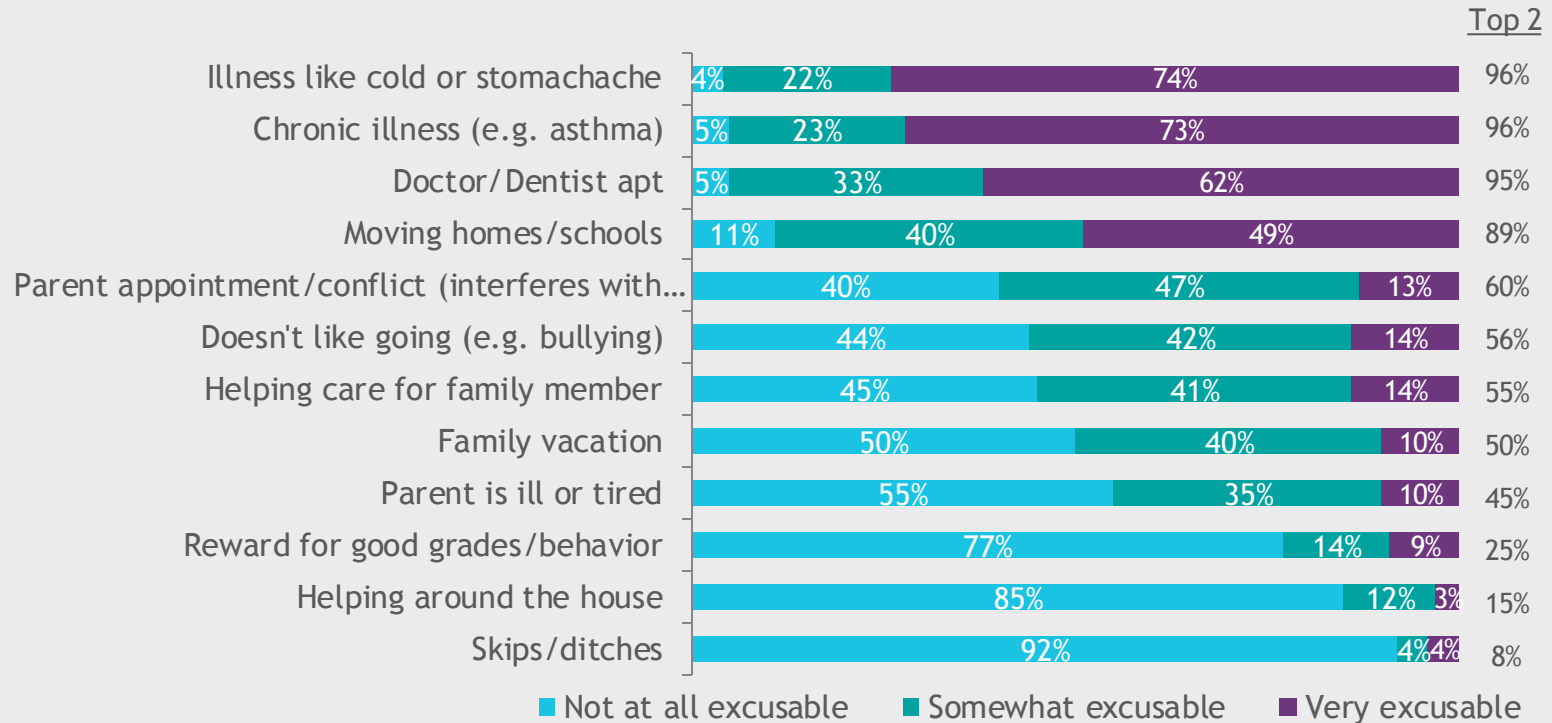
Illness is the top reason why parents report keeping their child home. However, 15% of Spanish-speaking parents report that their child skips school and 9% of English-speaking parents report keeping their child home for vacations and/or because their child didn't want to go.

*Which of the following best describes the reasons for their absences?*



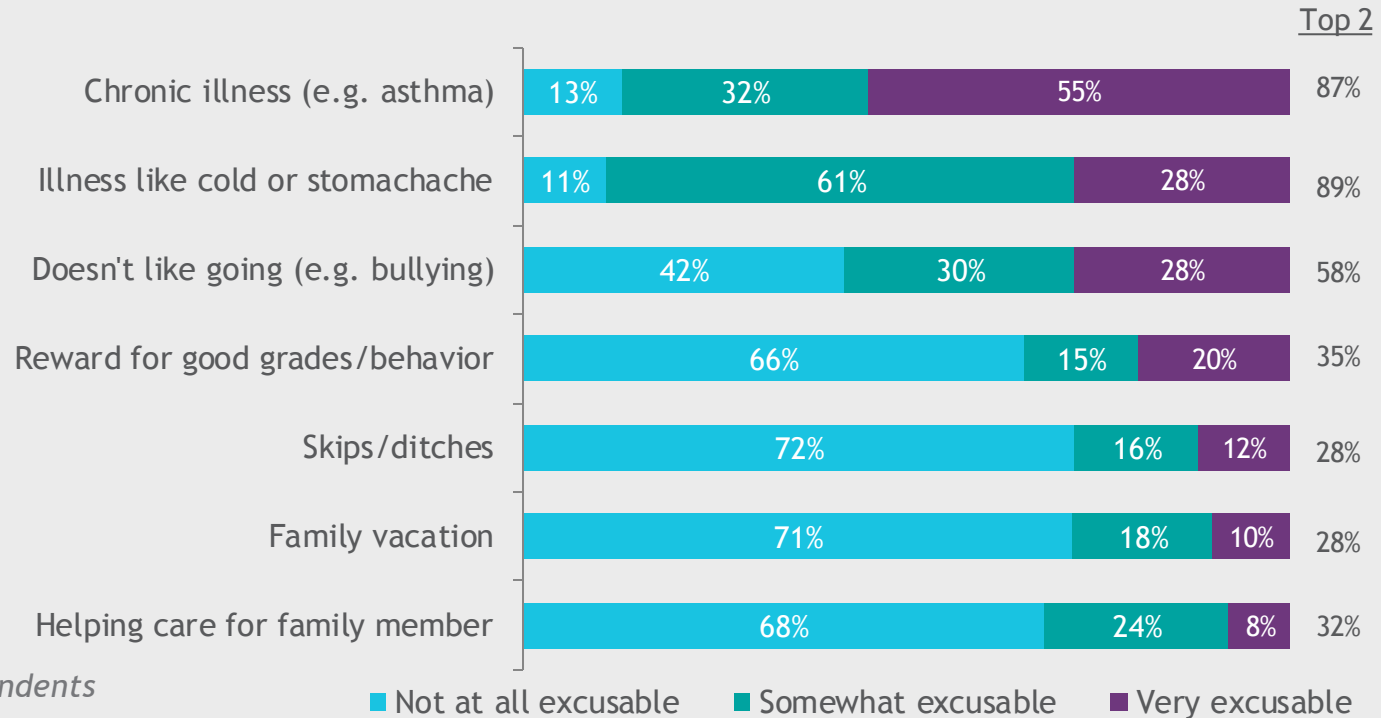
# Some absences are more excusable than others for English-speaking parents

Not surprisingly, absences that involve illness are considered the most excusable reasons.



# Some absences are more excusable than others for Spanish-speaking parents

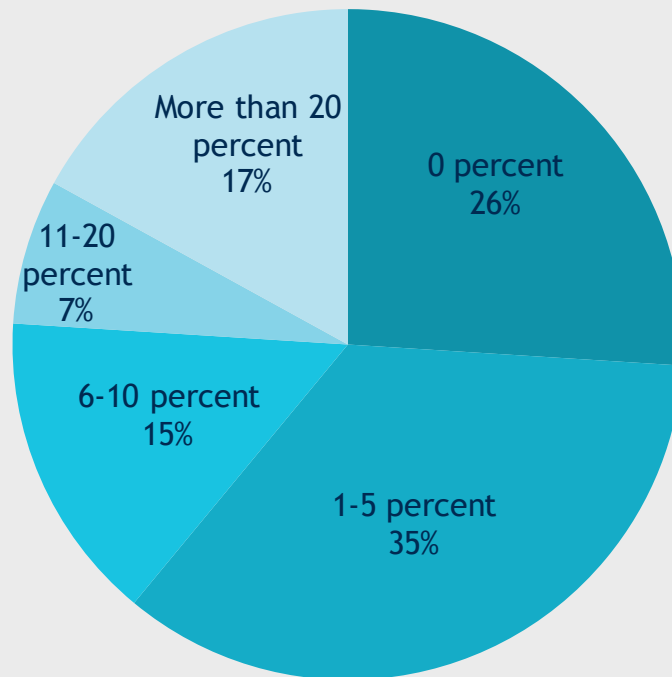
Absences that involve illness are considered the most excusable reasons. However, rewards for good behavior (35%) and skipping (28%) are also excusable to some.



## Parents admit that some absences are not necessary

*What % of times did your child stay home even though they could have probably attended?*

Approximately 1 in 4 parents say that their child could have attended more than 10% of the instances they were absent.



*Base = all respondents*

# Parents are not accurately tracking their child's absences

When asked about the number of missed days annually vs. monthly, English and Spanish-speaking parents are more likely to say they miss a couple of days per month (on average) than they are to say they've missed 10+ days total

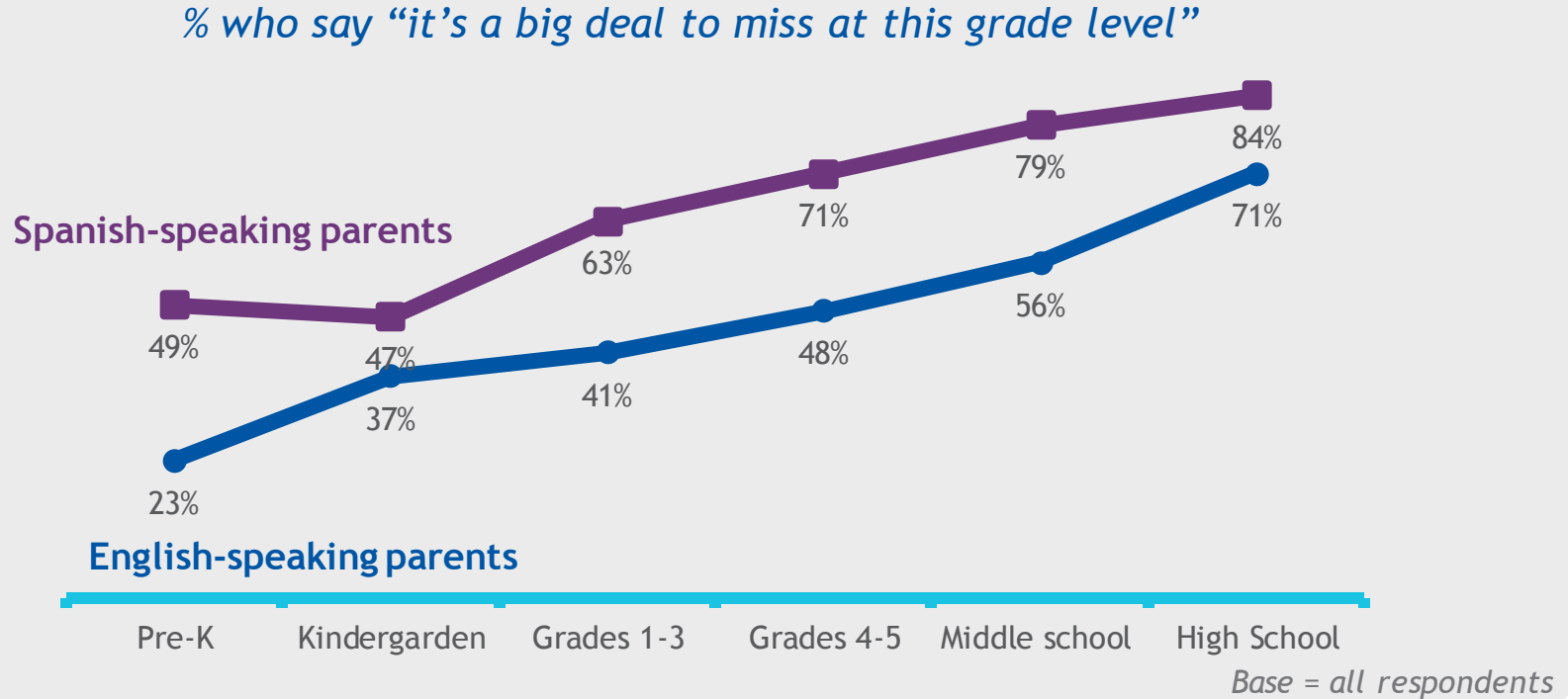


English-speaking parents  
(n = 573)

Spanish-speaking parents  
(n = 250)

# Relatively few parents perceive absences as a big deal in K-5

English and Spanish-speaking parents are significantly more likely to say that missing school “is a big deal” in the later grades.

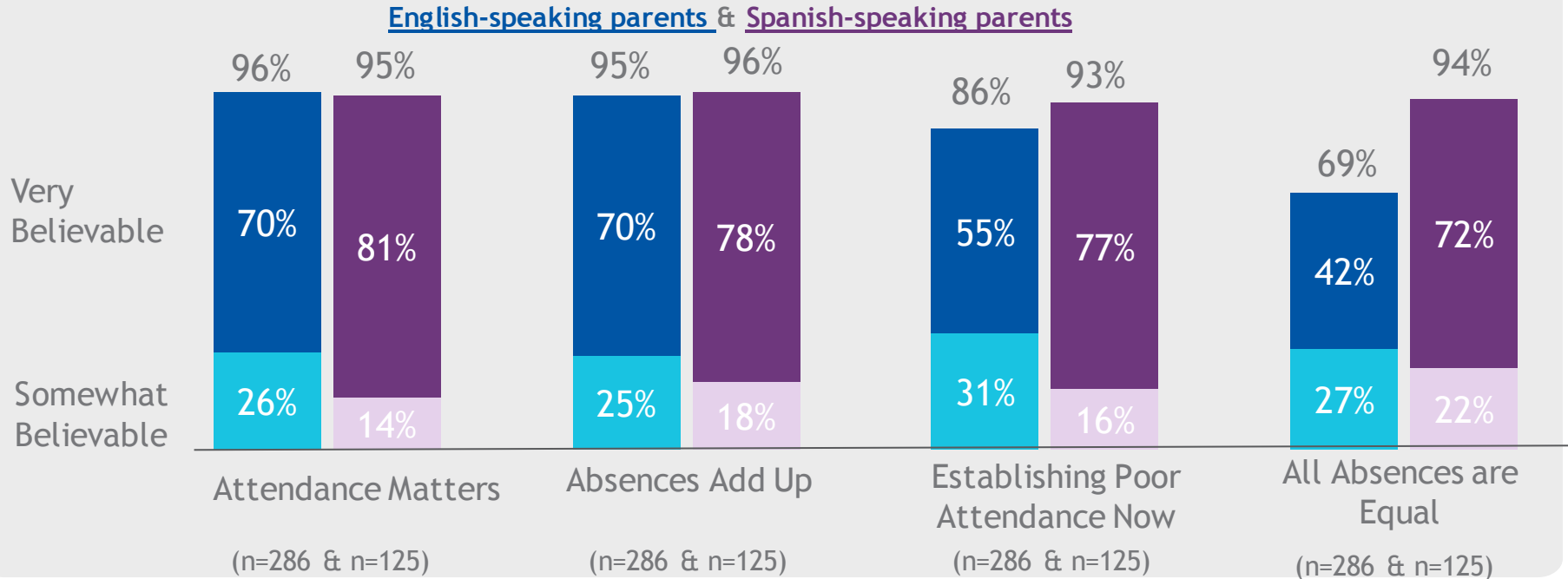


# Concept Test Results



# Believability

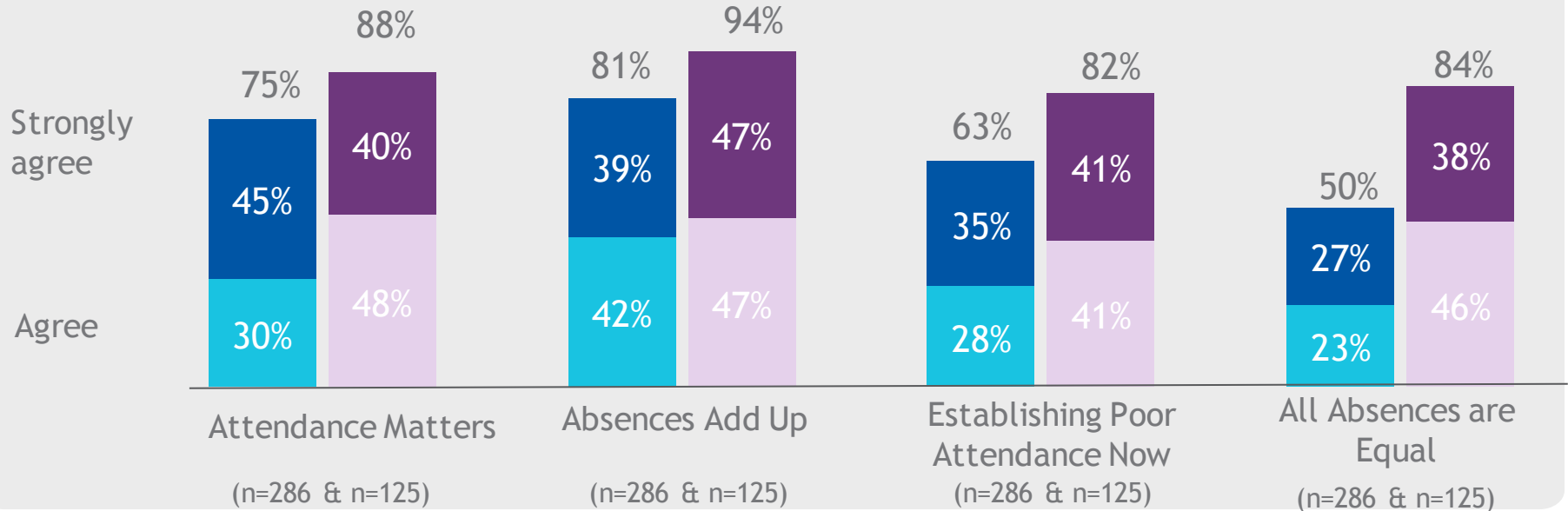
The overwhelming majority of parents found the statements ‘Attendance Matters’ and ‘Absences Add Up’ very believable. Spanish-speaking parents found all of the statements to be believable.



# Reconsidering child's school attendance

'Absences Add Up' and 'Attendance Matters' appear to be the statements that are most likely get English and Spanish-speaking parents to think about their child's attendance differently.

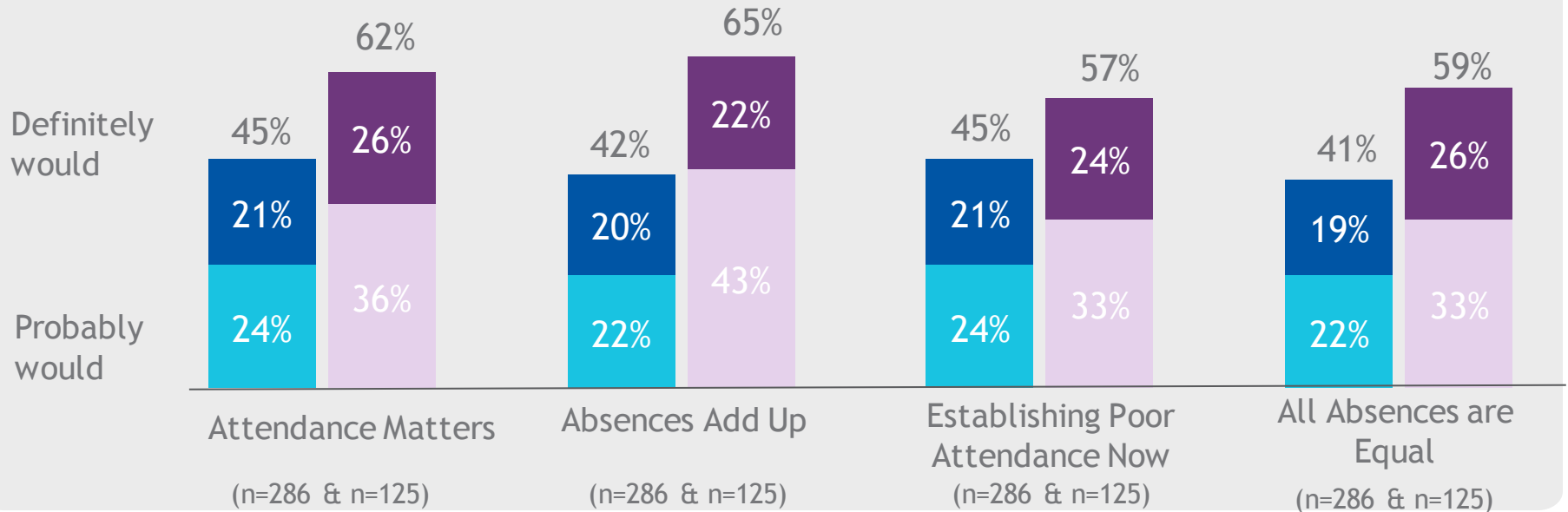
English-speaking parents & Spanish-speaking parents



# Motivation to visit a website to learn more

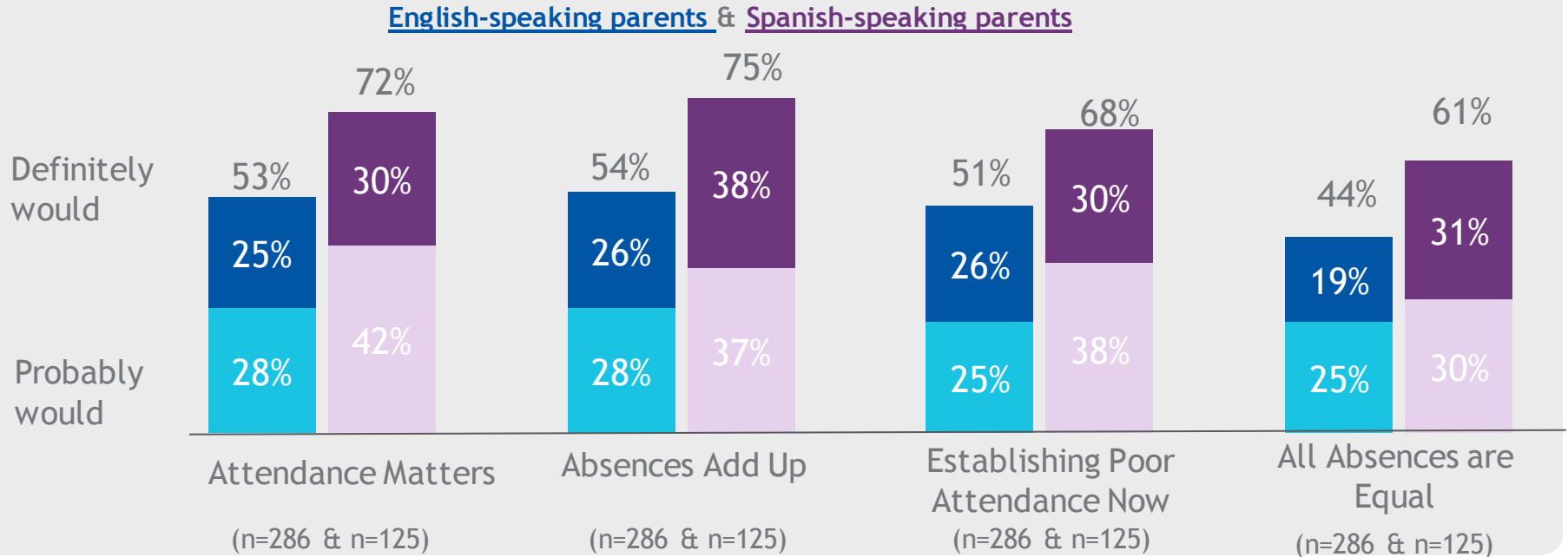
All of the statements were equally motivating in making English-speaking parents want to visit a website. 'Absences Add Up' and 'Attendance matters' were slightly more motivating for Spanish-speaking parents.

English-speaking parents & Spanish-speaking parents



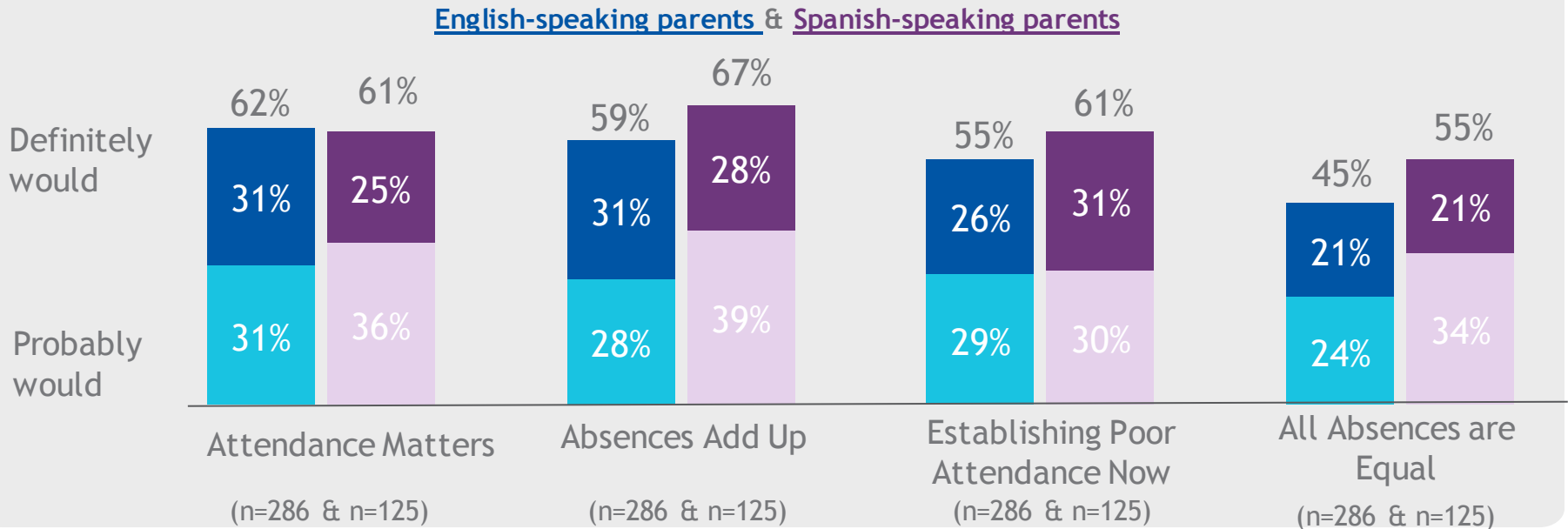
# Motivation to tell someone about this information

'Attendance Matters' and 'Absences Add Up' have the potential to spark more conversation among parents.



# Motivation to make sure their child is in school every day

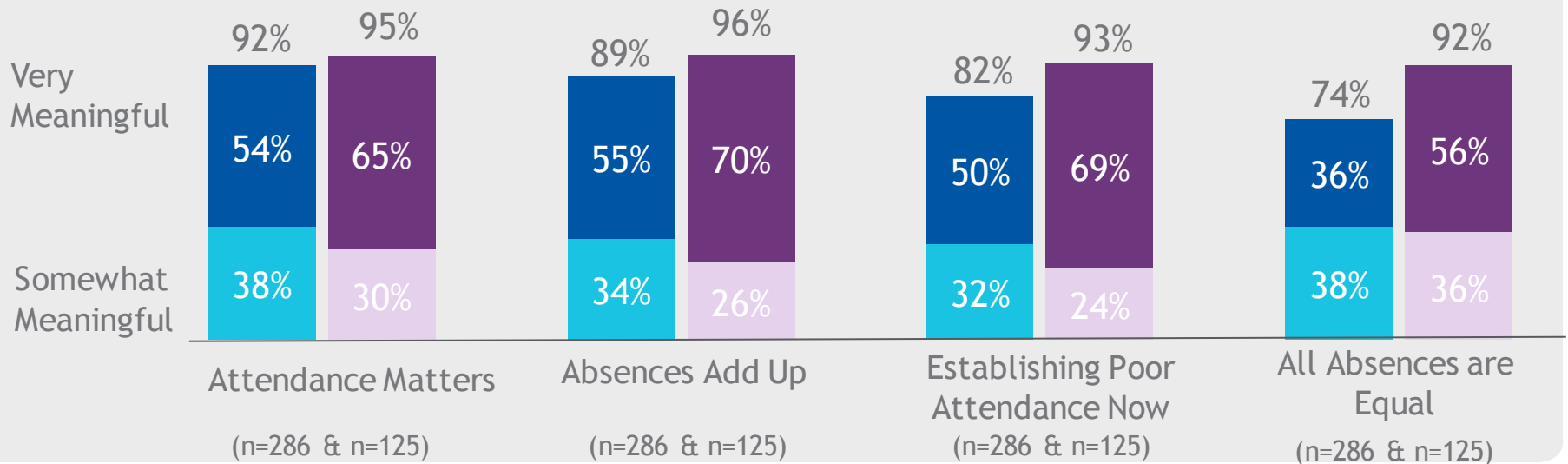
While 'Attendance Matters' and 'Absences Add Up' are equally motivating to English-speaking parents, Spanish-speaking parents reported that 'Absences Add Up' would inspire them to make sure their child is in school every day.



# Personally meaningful

'Attendance Matters' and 'Absences Add Up' were slightly more meaningful to English-speaking parents compared to the other statements. All of the statements were equally meaningful for Spanish-speaking parents.

English-speaking parents & Spanish-speaking parents

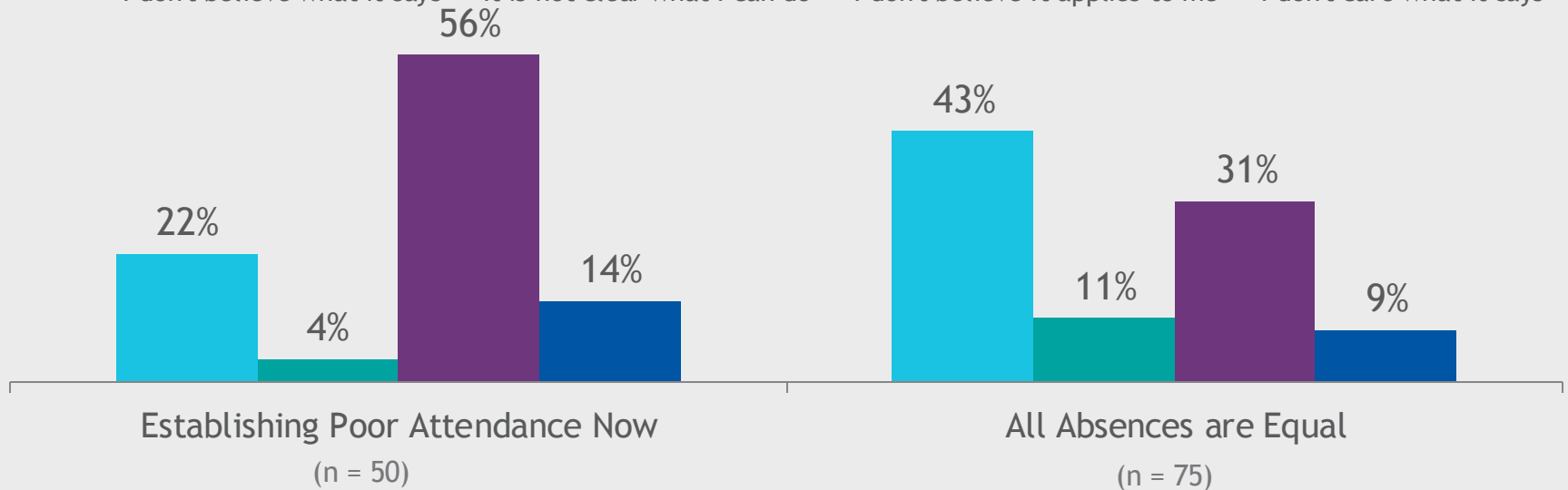


## Reason that a message is not personally meaningful

Parents said that ‘Establishing Poor Attendance Now’ was not meaningful because it didn’t apply to them. They felt that ‘All Absences are Equal’ was not believable.

*Which of the following best explains why the message is not meaningful to you*

■ I don't believe what it says ■ It is not clear what I can do ■ I don't believe it applies to me ■ I don't care what it says



\*Note not enough English-speaking parents said that ‘Attendance Matters’ (n = 24) and ‘Absences Add Up’ (n = 32) is not meaningful. And not enough Spanish-speaking parents said it for any statement. Sample sizes are too small to include.

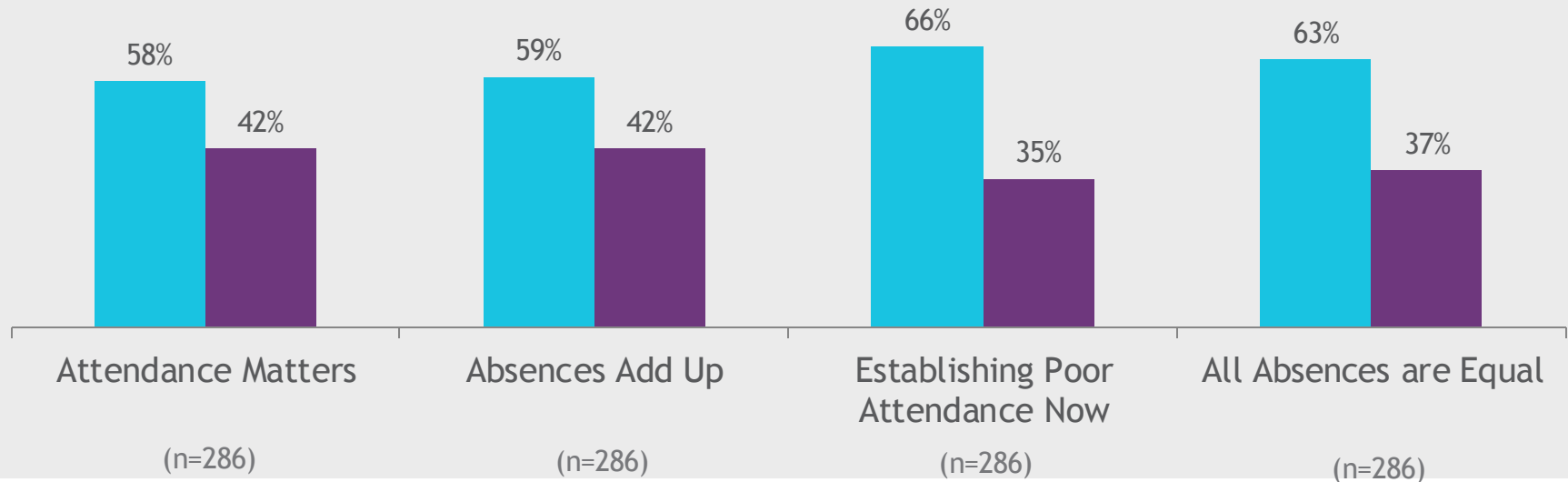
## A new way to frame the issue (English-speaking parents)

Most respondents said that the statements were different than what they have heard in the past, although 'Establishing Poor Attendance' appears to be the most unique.

*Is this statement a new way to think about your child's absences?*

■ Different

■ Similar



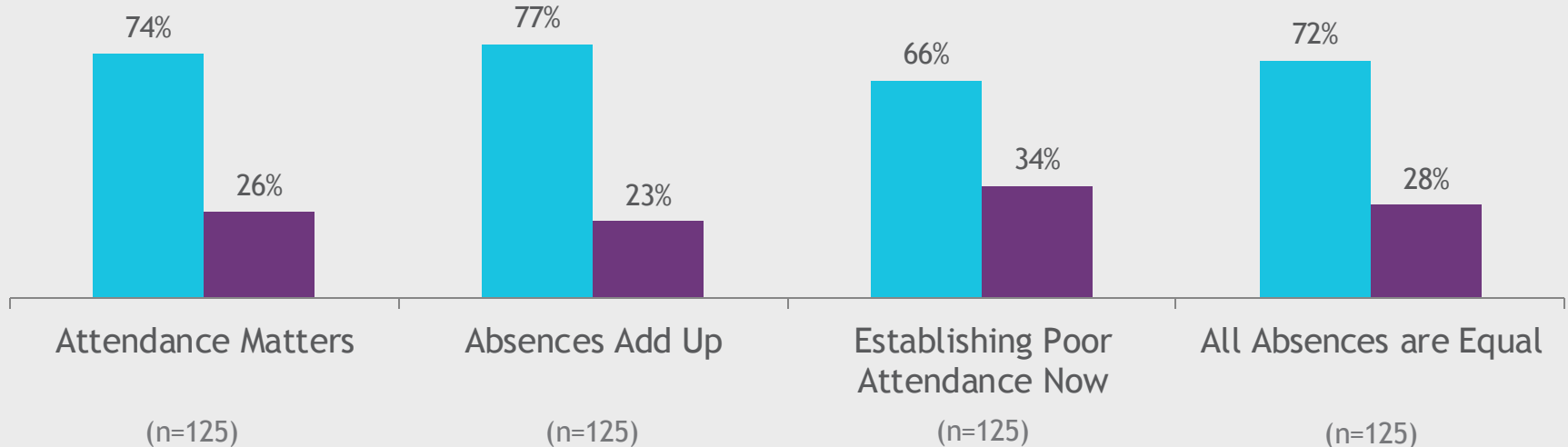


## A new way to frame the issue (Spanish-speaking parents)

Most respondents said that the statements were different than what they have in the past. However, 'Establishing Poor Attendance' appears to be less unique than the other statements.

*Is this statement a new way to think about your child's absences?*

■ Different ■ Similar



# Common Responses - What makes this statement new or different?

## Attendance Matters

Make-up work can't replace child's learning

Describes how to build a foundation for your child's future/success

Gives reasons why it matters

## Absences Add Up

Absences adds up/2 days a month is a lot

Statement gave reason/facts why it matters

Too many absences leads to falling behind

Describes the importance of staying in school

## Establishing Poor Attendance Now

Describes how absences have an effect on children & can create bad habits

Statement brings attention to the attendance problem

Describes the importance of staying in school

Statement gave reason/facts why it matters

## All Absences are Equal

All absences are considered the same

Too many absences leads to falling behind

# Common Responses - What makes this statement similar?

## Attendance Matters

The importance of not missing school

Don't let them fall behind

Be aware of child's absences

## Absences Add Up

The importance of not missing school

Don't let them fall behind

Be aware of child's absences

## Establishing Poor Attendance Now

Important not to miss school in early childhood

Be aware of child's absences

## All Absences are Equal

The importance of not missing school

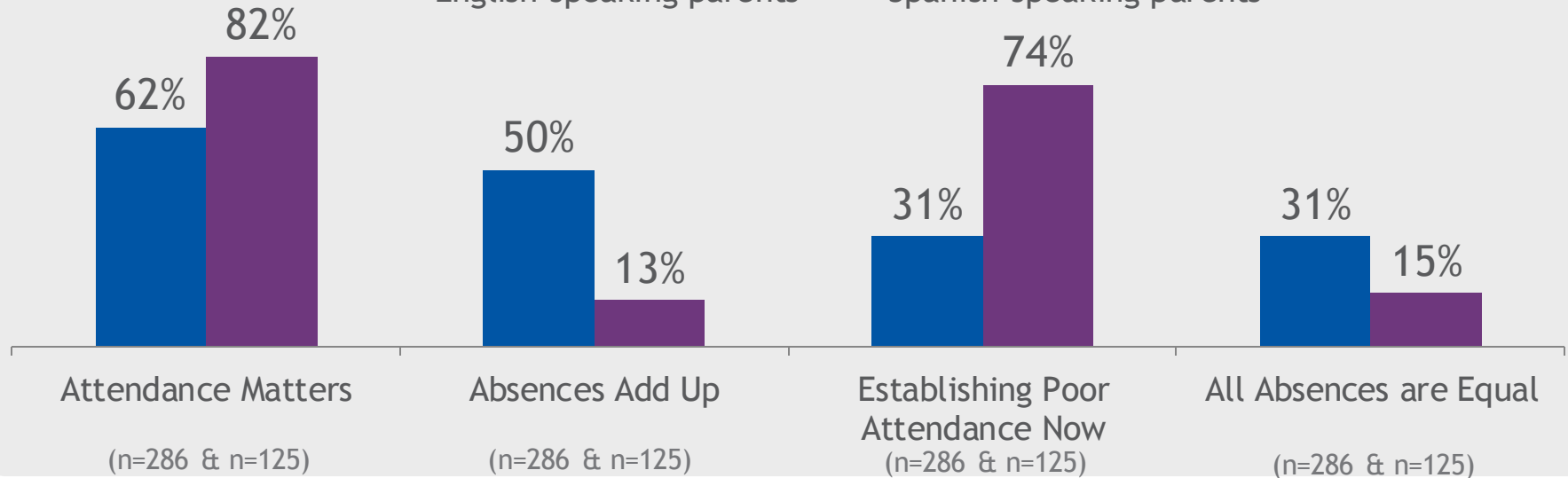
Don't let them fall behind

## Most convincing statement overall

Both English and Spanish-speaking parents selected 'Attendance Matters' as the most convincing statement.

*Of these two statements, which is the single most motivating in convincing you to make sure your child is in school every day?*

■ English-speaking parents ■ Spanish-speaking parents



# Common Responses - What is the most convincing part of the statement?

## Attendance Matters

The facts and numbers

Children may be left behind/ missing opportunities

Help your child succeed

Absences can lead to dropping out

## Absences Add Up

Children may be left behind/ missing opportunities

The facts and numbers

## Establishing Poor Attendance Now

Children may be left behind/ missing opportunities

The facts and numbers

Help child develop good habits for future

## All Absences are Equal

Children may be left behind/ missing opportunities

Was there anything you didn't like (about either statement)?

% who said "nothing"

**75%**

English-speaking parents

**92%**

Spanish-speaking parents

Common Responses

*"It's a negative message"*

*"Not all absences are considered the same"*

*"Sending sick children to school is not ok"*

*"Statement is too simple/common sense"*

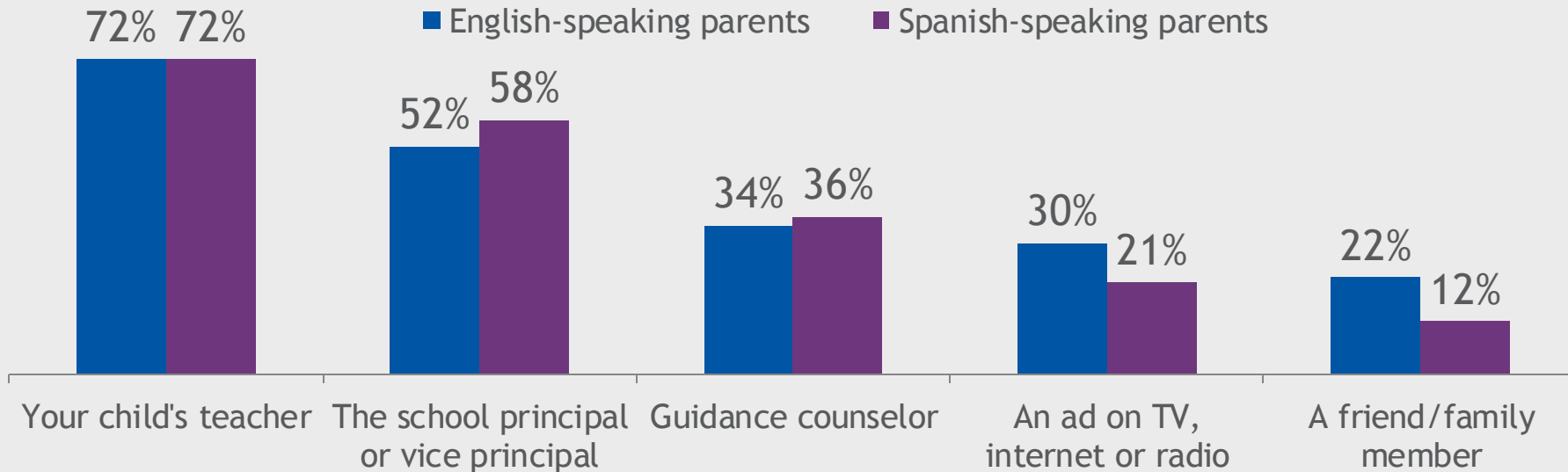
*"Statement is too forceful for children to attend"*

## Preferred message sources

Parents overwhelmingly prefer to hear about the importance of school attendance from their child's teacher.

*Which of the following ways would you prefer to hear about the importance of school attendance?*

■ English-speaking parents ■ Spanish-speaking parents



# Conclusions & Recommendations



## Considerations moving forward

### **All parents are just doing their best**

They need to feel supported and need to feel like you are on their side

They respond well to solutions and reasons

But need you to be realistic about what you are asking

Do not imply it is okay to send a child to school when ill

Avoid using any language that is accusatory and overly negative

**Do not call anyone a bad parent**

**Empower teachers to carry messages about the importance of attendance**

## Parents need specific examples and tangible tips

The information that was the most news worthy and convincing for parents included details and examples rather than vague statements. Consider using...

<b>This (specific)</b>	<b>Vs.</b>	<b>That (vague)</b>
Too many absences threaten your child's foundation for learning	Vs.	Attendance is important
Missing just 2 days per month can make them fall behind	Vs.	Don't let them miss too many days
You cannot make up for too many absences with homework or take-home assignments Too many absences makes them fall behind in reading, writing and math Too many absences makes them less likely to graduate	Vs.	Absences have consequences
Do everything you can to ensure they do not miss	Vs.	Make sure they attend every day

## Strategic Direction

Based on the findings from this quantitative survey, we recommend a communication strategy that combines the strengths of **Attendance Matters** and **Absences Add Up**.

The proposed strategy will include mostly tactical tips and detailed information. This will ensure that any messages will be clear, relevant, believable and motivating.

# Thoughts moving forward

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## Main Message

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### Every Absence Matters

Just 2 days missed per month can threaten your child's foundation for learning

## Call-to-action

Keep track and limit your child's absences

## Support Points

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Each absence is a missed opportunity to learn something they will need in order to understand more difficult material later

You cannot make up for too many absences with homework or take-home assignments

Too many absences makes them fall behind in reading, writing and math and makes them less likely to graduate

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