

Clear Data, Better Decisions

What New Yorkers Need from a Statewide
Education Data System



Clear Data, Better Decisions: What New Yorkers Need from a Statewide Education Data System

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Introduction

Data in our education, health, labor and higher education systems can actively support student success from birth through entry into the workforce. When used effectively, data identifies opportunity gaps, drives equitable systemic change, ensures smart resource allocation, and holds system leaders accountable. Students, families, educators, and policymakers can also rely on timely, accurate, and actionable information to make well-informed decisions. By empowering individuals, informing policy, and guiding research, data can and should play a key role in improving educational outcomes and expanding opportunities.

New York enrolls the [fourth largest](#) number of students in the nation and already collects extensive data on students' educational journeys from birth through entering the workforce. However, the state remains one of the few without a coordinated system to link this data across sectors and over time. Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) can play a transformative role in creating better educational and career pathways for all New Yorkers, by linking information across sectors and systems in a meaningful and sustained way.

EdTrust-New York has consistently advocated for greater data transparency, created longitudinal data tools like our [To and Through tool](#)—which tracks high school students through college persistence and degree attainment—and has led efforts to ask for long-term and cross sector data on student success. Without an SLDS, however, New York struggles to provide this information to families and policymakers. For example, an SLDS could identify factors in middle and high school



Photo by Allison Shelley for EDUimages

programs that led to successful postsecondary outcomes. This type of information is both important to families and is important information for state policymakers as the state considers changes to graduation requirements.

As such, EdTrust-New York supports the state's current initiative to create an SLDS that connects data from public agencies that oversee our statewide education, labor, early childhood, and higher education systems. At the same time, we recognize the need to address significant concerns about student privacy and how data is used to promote equity and transparency. Building trust and safeguarding privacy requires centering racial and economic equity in the SLDS's design and structure that manages the SLDS. It also requires meaningful engagement with communities and stakeholders—students, families, educators, school leaders, and other practitioners—who shape student experiences every day.

To better understand New Yorkers' views on education data and SLDS development, EdTrust-New York conducted a statewide poll of 1,000 likely voters earlier this year. We also held focus groups with more than 30 parents across the state to capture their perspectives on education data, SLDS, student privacy, and educational equity.

Polling results give us important insights into what New Yorker parents think, offering critical guidance to state leaders as they design the SLDS and work to improve our state's education system.

Building trust and safeguarding privacy requires centering racial and economic equity in the SLDS's design and structure that manages the SLDS.



Key Findings

Current State of Education in New York

- **Widespread Dissatisfaction:** New Yorkers across the political spectrum are largely dissatisfied with the current state of education.
- **Top Voter Priorities:** Providing a quality education and ensuring spending transparency and efficiency are top priorities for voters, particularly those that believe education is on the wrong track.

Awareness and Support for a SLDS

- **Initial Awareness and Receptiveness:** While voters have limited knowledge of SLDS, nearly half support it with just a basic understanding, and support increases significantly as they learn more, particularly through clear, plain language messaging.
- **Resonance with Voters of Color:** Messaging on the benefits and value of having an SLDS especially resonates with Black and Latinx voters.
- **Need to Address Privacy Concerns:** Concerns about data privacy erodes support for SLDS, particularly for voters of color, and voters believe data privacy must be proactively addressed.
- **Political Opportunity:** SLDS can provide a political boost for state legislators that support it.

Parent Perspectives on SLDS

- **Usefulness to Families:** Parents' top priorities for the use of an SLDS are to evaluate the impact of high school and college on post-secondary success.
- **Key Priorities:** A majority of parents believe that an SLDS would give them the information needed to make the right decisions for their child's education.
- **Impact of Messaging:** Parent support significantly increased after hearing a more detailed plain-language description of SLDS.

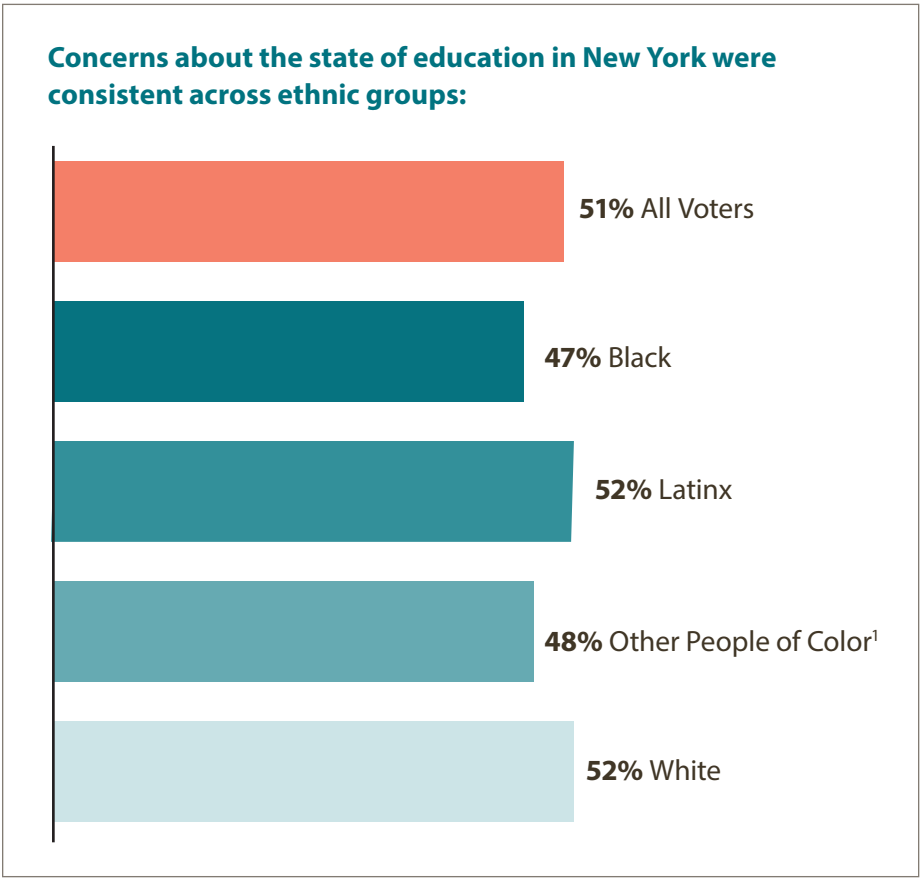
To complement the statewide poll and amplify parent voices, EdTrust-New York organized six focus groups with over 30 parents from diverse backgrounds, including parents who identify as Asian American and Pacific Islander, Black, Latinx, South Asian Indian, and White, and from communities across our state including from Western New York, Hudson Valley, Long Island, and New York City. These sessions gathered deeper input on how to design, implement, and communicate the SLDS effectively. Parents shared candid insights about how families currently experience education data and data they would like to see the SLDS help them navigate and advocate for their children's educational journeys. This report includes direct quotes from the focus groups to reinforce key poll findings, along with additional insights gleaned from the focus groups discussions.


Deep Dive: Poll Findings

Finding 1


New Yorkers across the political spectrum are largely dissatisfied with the current state of education.

Over half (51%) of voters believe New York’s education system is on the wrong track. Parents were equally concerned, with 50% saying education is heading in the wrong direction.




51% 

of voters believe New York’s education system is on the wrong track.

50% 

of parents believe New York’s education system is on the wrong track.

PARENT INSIGHTS 

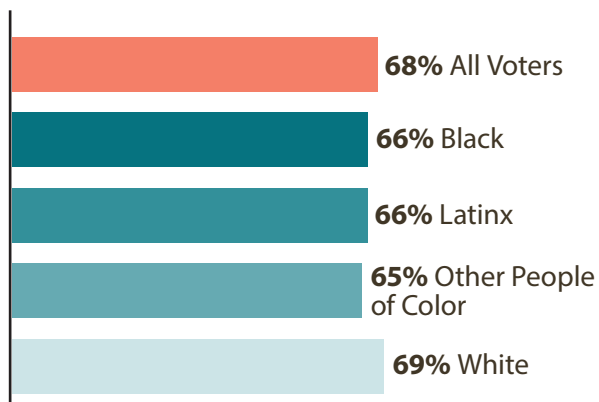
Parents in the focus groups voiced similar frustrations with the current state of education, pointing to issues like curriculum misalignment, inadequate follow-up on student needs, and disjointed transitions between early childhood, K–12, and postsecondary education. **One parent asked, “Why is there no system to track what happens when students leave high school? We just lose them in the data.”**

¹ For the purposes of this poll data, “other people of color” refers to respondents who did not identify as Black, Latinx, or White; due to small sample sizes, data for Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Native American respondents could not be reported separately and are included in this aggregated category.

Finding 2

Quality education and spending transparency are top priorities for voters, particularly those that believe education is on the wrong track. Black voters prioritized the role of schools in preparing students to graduate from college and secure good paying jobs.

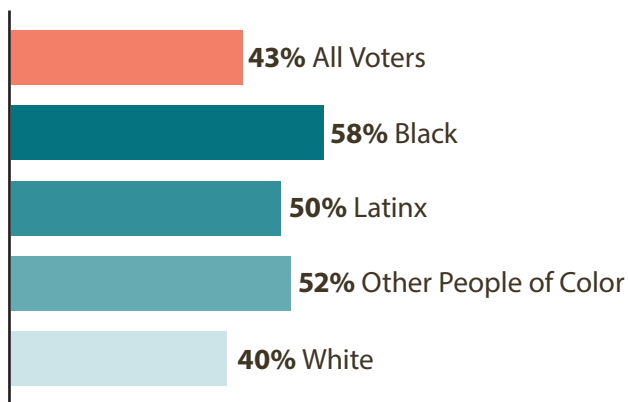
Sixty-eight percent of voters believe that students getting the best possible education should be the state's top priority for education, and results were consistent across ethnic groups.



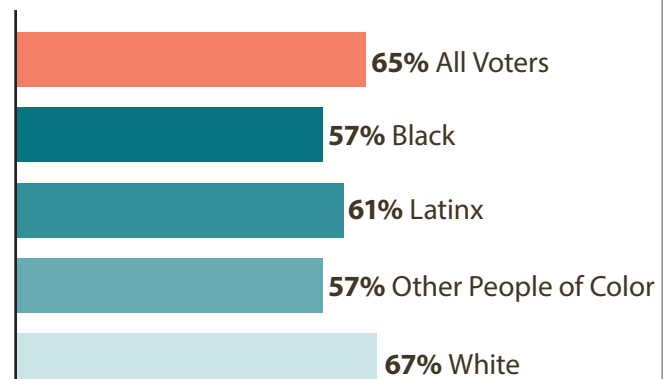
68% 

of voters believe that students getting the best possible education should be the state's top priority for education, and results were consistent across ethnic groups.

Black, Latinx, and Other People of Color voters supported preparing students to graduate from college as the state's top priority, compared to 40% of White voters.



Sixty-five percent of voters believe that having strong transparency in how tax dollars are invested in education should be the state's top priority for education. A majority of Black and Latinx voters supported this as a top priority, although at a lower rate than all voters.



Finding 3

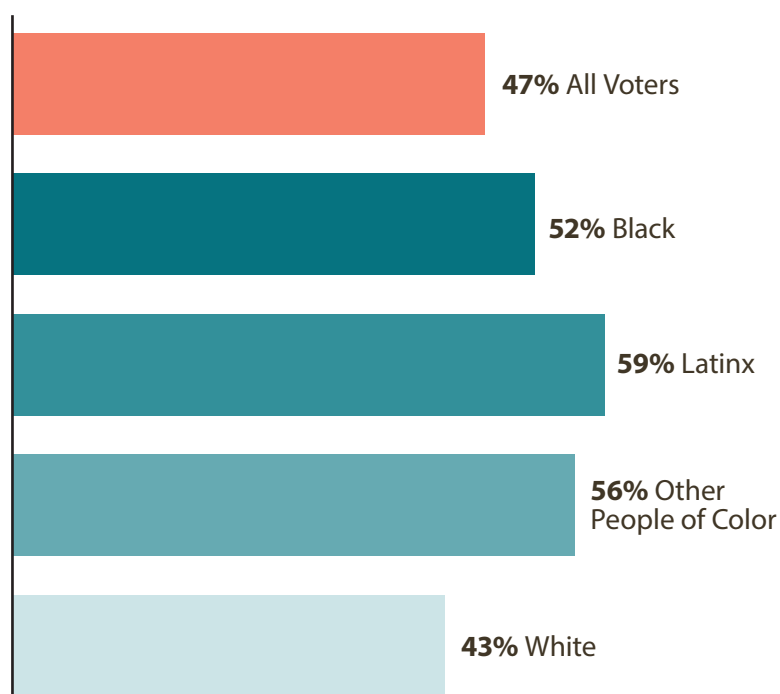
While voters have limited initial knowledge of SLDS, nearly half support it with a basic understanding, and support increases significantly as they learn more, particularly through clear and simple messaging.

Forty-seven percent of voters expressed support for a basic definition of SLDS as “...connect(ing) existing statewide information from early childhood through education after high school and the workforce over time,” with Black and Latinx voters showing even higher levels of support. However, 19% of voters were unsure of their position after hearing this definition, highlighting the need to raise awareness and provide more education on SLDS.

47% ✓

of all voters expressed support for a basic definition of SLDS.

Support after basic SLDS definition:

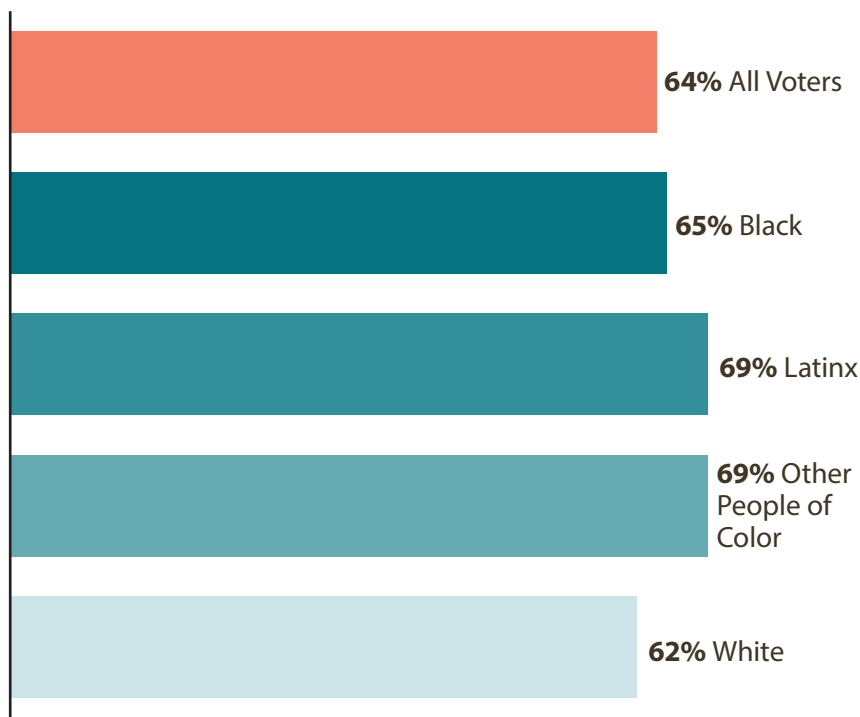


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“Data is critical. If you can show the data, you can show the trend. Then you can force some kind of corrective action. You can force some kind of oversight. In terms of advocacy, data is the beginning point.”
— Parent, speaking during an EdTrust-New York led focus group

Finding 3

When voters are presented with a slightly more detailed explanation of SLDS as “...investing in statewide systems to share existing data and information, to better evaluate the impact of education programs from early childhood through education after high school,” support increases significantly across all groups.



64%  ↑

expressed support for SLDS with a slightly more detailed explanation.

“

“If you give us examples — real stories — that show how this helps my child get what they need, then I’m all in.”
— **Parent, speaking during an EdTrust-New York led focus group**

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Focus groups reinforced this finding, as parents repeatedly called for explanations that were “clear, visual, and relatable.” They emphasized the need for tools like infographics, video explainers, and trusted community-based messengers.

Finding 4

Messaging on the benefits and value of having an SLDS especially resonates with Black voters.

Support for SLDS increased significantly, including 23 percentage points among Black voters, when the system was framed as a tool for addressing inequities and improving student outcomes.

Percentage point increase in support of SLDS after hearing its benefits and values:

- ↑ **18** percentage point increase in support for **all** voters
- ↑ **23** percentage point increase in support for **Black** voters
- ↑ **10** percentage point increase in support for **Latinx** voters
- ↑ **15** percentage point increase in support for **Other People of Color** voters
- ↑ **21** percentage point increase in support for **White** voters

PARENT INSIGHTS



Focus groups with parents echoed this emphasis on equity. One Black parent explained, “We know our schools don’t have the same resources. If we had real-time data, we could push back and demand better.” Latinx parents voiced a strong interest in multilingual tools and building trust through local organizations.

64% 

expressed support for SLDS with a slightly more detailed explanation.

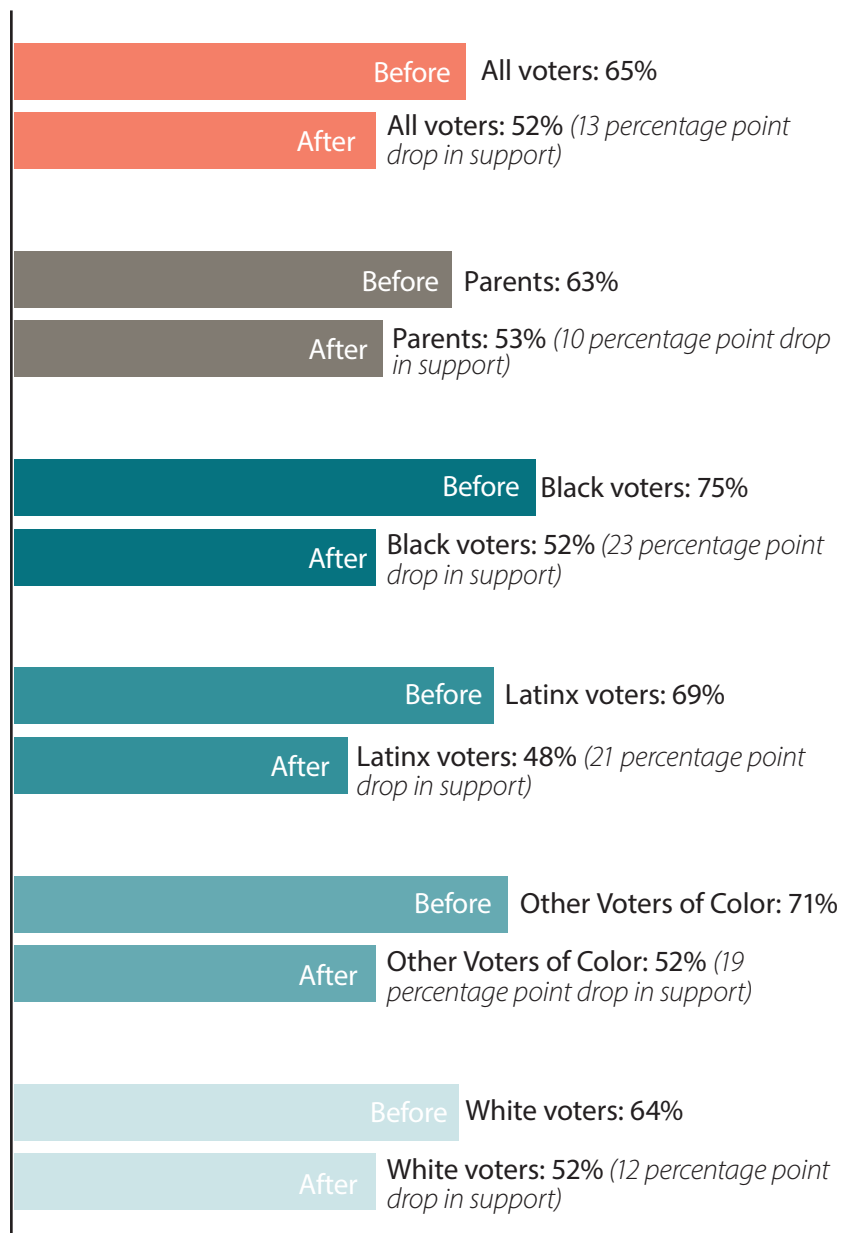
“*[if it’s shared in English only] make sure the information is available in the different languages... because... if it’s presented to Spanish speaking families or put out there, they don’t think that it’s welcoming to themselves.*” – **Parent, speaking during an EdTrust-New York led focus group**

Finding 5

Concerns about data privacy erodes support for SLDS, particularly for voters of color, so data privacy must be proactively addressed.

Polling shows that support for SLDS drops significantly when framed with student privacy concerns—especially among voters of color. Black voter support fell by 23 percentage points after concerns about privacy were shared, and Latinx voter support dropped by 21 percentage points. However, 41% of voters said reassurances about data security alleviated their concerns.

Decrease in support for SLDS after hearing privacy concerns:



10 ↓

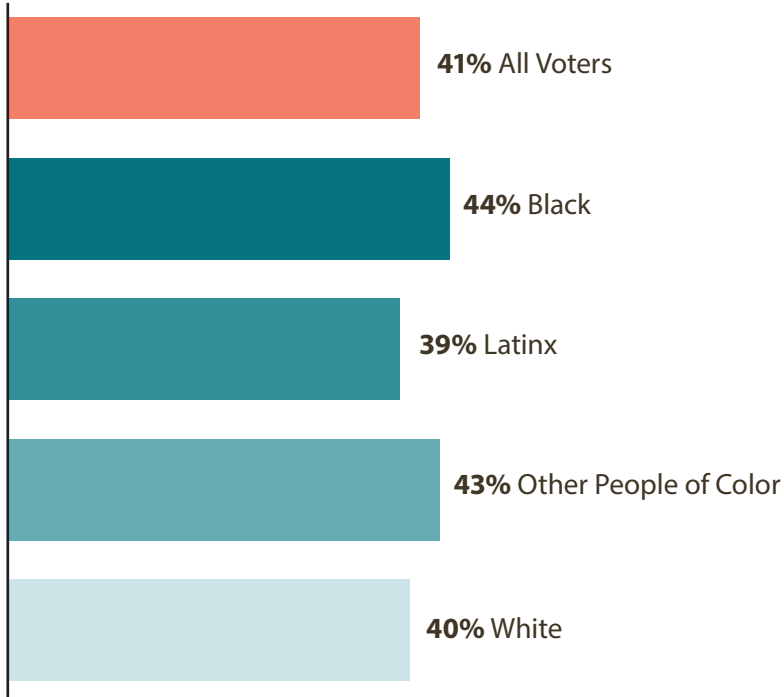
percentage point drop in support for SLDS after parents were presented with concerns about student data privacy.

“

“Saying access to data is one thing, but how people will use the data, and whether they’ll be supported to use it, is more important.”
— Parent, speaking during an EdTrust-New York led focus group

Finding 5

Reassurances about privacy safeguards helped alleviate some privacy concerns:



41% 

of all voters said reassurances about data security alleviated some concerns.

“

“Trust is everything. If you don’t explain how this protects us, we won’t support it.” – Parent, speaking during an EdTrust-New York led focus group

PARENT INSIGHTS

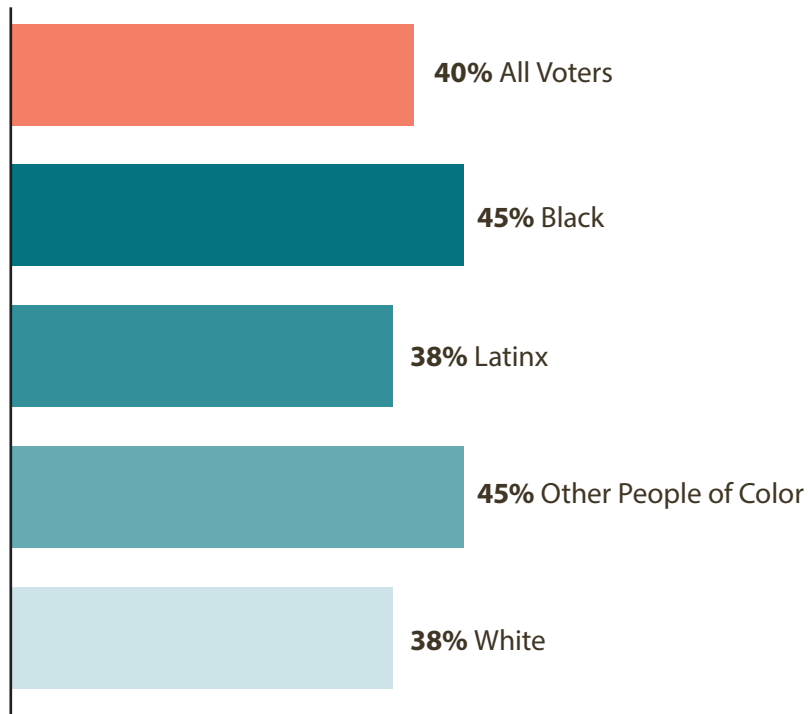
Parents in the focus groups expressed similar concerns. **Several asked, “Who owns this data? What happens if it’s wrong?”** They strongly called for transparency around how the data is used, protected, and corrected.



Finding 6

SLDS can provide a political boost for state legislators that support it.

Forty percent of all voters say they would view their state legislator more favorably if they supported SLDS, while only 15% would view them unfavorably.



40%



of all voters say they would view their state legislator more favorably if they supported SLDS.

“

“If I had really solid, hardcore data about what’s going on in all the other districts, like a better picture than what is currently publicly available, I could say [to my legislators] here, this is why my district needs more money.” – Parent, speaking during an EdTrust-New York led focus group

PARENT INSIGHTS



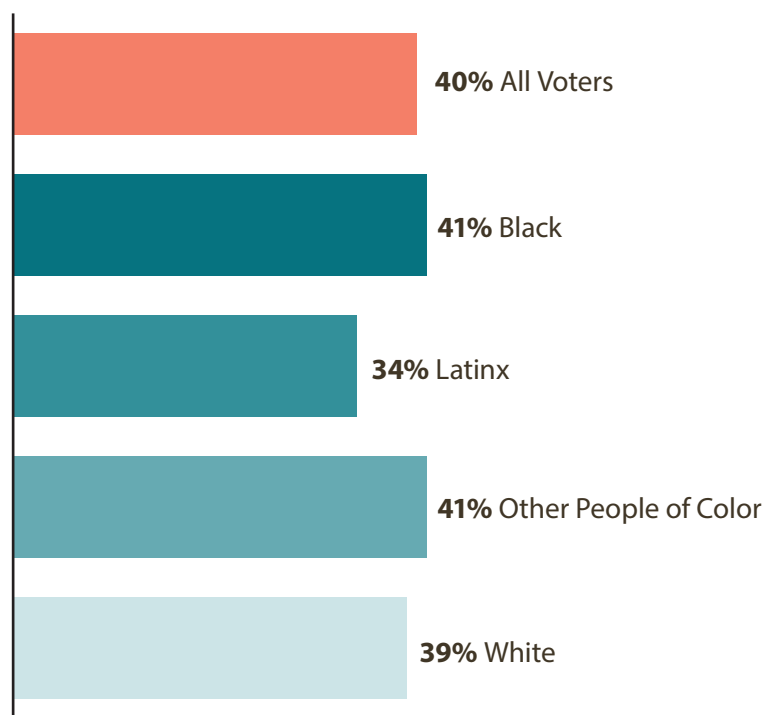
Parents in the focus groups expressed frustration with policymakers who “don’t follow through” and stressed the data could help track legislative accountability. **One parent said, “They always say they’re fighting for us, but where’s the proof? SLDS could show who’s really doing the work.”**


Finding 7

Parents' top priorities for the use of an SLDS are to show how education impacts long-term success.

Parents prioritized information that connects high school experiences to college or vocational enrollment and completion, and college or vocational training to future earnings and success. This is the type of data they find most helpful for making decisions about their children's education.

Rated the impact of college on future success as a top priority:



40% 
of all voters rated the impact of college on future success as a top priority.

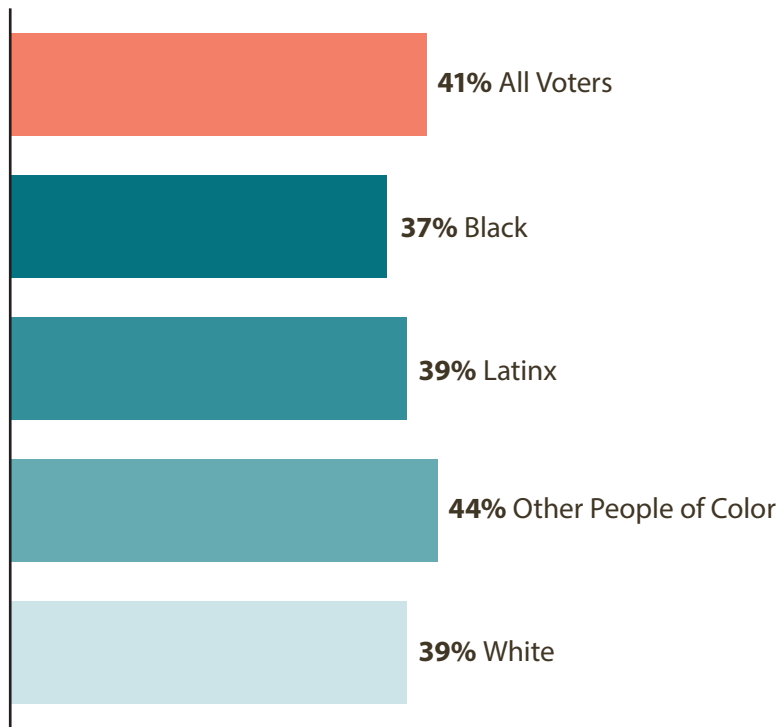
“We’ve tried everything—tutoring, afterschool, summer school. But nobody can tell me if it’s actually working.”
— Parent, speaking during an EdTrust-New York led focus group

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This feedback aligns with what parents shared in the focus groups. They strongly want to “see the full story” of their child’s education journey, from early learning through high school and beyond. Many parents expressed feeling “left out” or “kept in the dark” about how well interventions or schools are working. Parents want data that shows whether their child’s school is setting them up for success and what out of school support is helping them learn.

Finding 7

Rated the impact of high school on college as a top priority:



41%



of all voters rated the impact of high school on college as a top priority.

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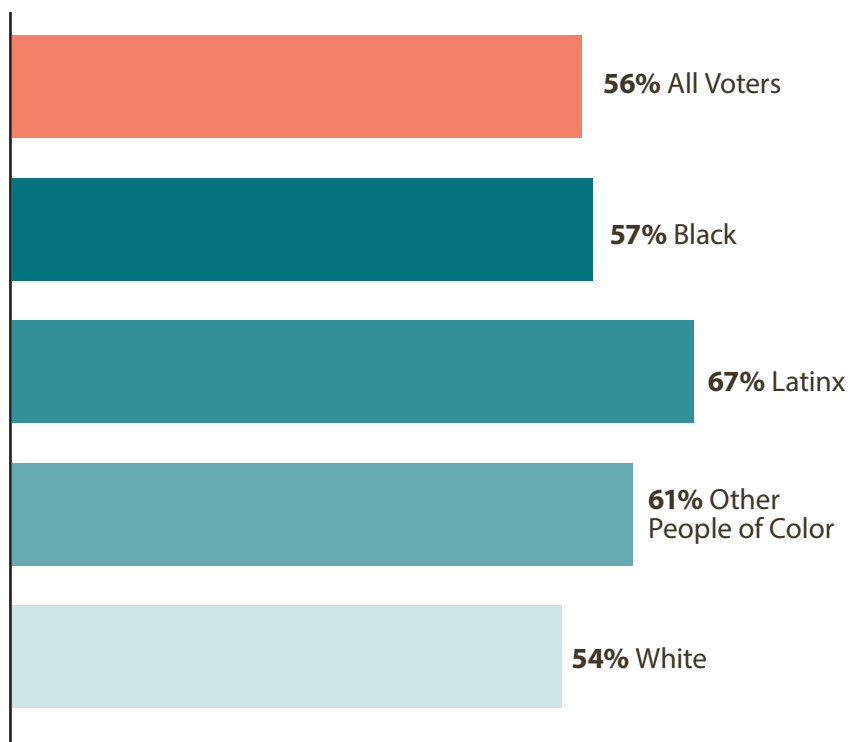
“Anytime you can get data and information that’s supported by real facts, it benefits a parent. Because now I can put my child in the best position to be the best person possible — because now I know who you are, I know what you’re doing, I know how you’re interacting with your classmates, right? I know what your aptitude is — whether you’re good at math, good at English, or good at science. I know all those things, and if I can highlight that information when we sit down and make decisions about college or whether you go to a trade school, I have all this data to use as reference points.” — Parent, speaking during an EdTrust-New York led focus group

Finding 8

A majority of parents agree that an SLDS is most effective as a tool that empowers them to make decisions about their child's education, with higher rates of support from Black and Latinx parents.

When parents were asked whether an SLDS would provide the information they need to make educational decisions, 56% of all parents agreed after hearing the benefits of an SLDS, with parents of color showing even higher support.

Rated the impact of college on future success as a top priority:



56% ★

of all voters rated the impact of college on future success as a top priority.

“

We make so many decisions with limited info. If I had the data on which schools are preparing kids for careers or college, I'd know where to send my son.” – Parent, speaking during an EdTrust-New York led focus group

PARENT INSIGHTS



Focus group feedback aligns with this finding. Parents strongly want to “see the full story” of their child’s education journey—from early learning through high school and beyond.

Conclusion

New York can be a national leader by creating a statewide longitudinal data system that unifies data from birth through career, ensuring equitable and accessible information for all.

As the New York State Education Department (NYSED) continues developing the SLDS, we urge the Governor to sustain this early momentum. The results of this polling highlight what matters most to New York parents and offers essential direction for state leaders — direction that is reflected in EdTrust-New York’s [core equity principles](#) for the development of an SLDS.

About the Data

EdTrust-New York conducted a statewide poll of 1,000 likely voters earlier this year. We also held focus groups with more than 30 parents across the state to capture their perspectives on education data, SLDS, student privacy, and educational equity.

We are committed to disaggregating data by specific racial and ethnic groups whenever possible, as part of our broader commitment to equity and transparency. In this poll, when we reference other people of color, we are referring to respondents who identified as an ethnicity other than Black, Latinx, or White. Due to small n-sizes, we were not able to report separate findings for Asian American and Pacific Islander, or Native American respondents. Their responses are included in the aggregated other people of color category.

Acknowledgments

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