

INTERNATIONAL
LITERACY
ASSOCIATION

WHAT'S HOT IN LITERACY

2020 REPORT



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Introduction

THE INTERNATIONAL LITERACY ASSOCIATION (ILA) has long published the findings of the What's Hot in Literacy survey to note trends and foster critical conversations in literacy.

What's Hot first appeared in the members-only newspaper of the International Reading Association—now ILA—in 1997 under the title What's Hot, What's Not. The original survey took the temperature of a list of topics deemed important by a sample of approximately 25 literacy leaders.

By 2001, the questions *What should be hot?* and *What shouldn't be hot?* were added, painting a more comprehensive picture of what the hot topics in reading and writing instruction should be and how the conversations in education needed to shift. The result was an annual, comprehensive ranking of issues.

In 2017, ILA redesigned the survey and launched a broader outreach, reaching a cross-sector of literacy leaders and getting input from more than 1,000 of them. The following year, ILA partnered with YouGov, a global market research firm, to collaborate on and manage the survey and report, which then became a biennial publication.

This year's survey, again created with YouGov, reflects ILA's commitment to generating resources that are substantial and relevant to the field of literacy education. Survey questions were reconfigured to allow for more expansive answers, giving respondents the opportunity to offer more insight regarding their own experiences and challenges in providing high-quality literacy instruction.

Although previous iterations of the survey identified which topics were considered important, the goal of this year's expanded survey was to better identify the needs of classroom teachers, specialized literacy professionals, and school principals/district administrators.

Understanding more about what literacy educators say they need is crucial in advancing the literacy profession and helping to shape the future of literacy instruction.

“

We need to come together as a team of literacy professionals to cooperatively address the literacy issues and needs facing today's students in our modern world.

—Classroom Teacher,
United States

”



Methodology

ILA'S GOAL WITH THE 2020 SURVEY was to deepen engagement with survey respondents and provide more valuable insight while still maintaining the intimate conversations that have allowed literacy professionals to share their views.

To develop this new direction, the research included two phases, both conducted in partnership with YouGov, an independent research company:

PHASE 1: Four online mini-focus groups were conducted with a cross-section of 17 literacy experts to discuss the state of literacy and determine the topics to be included in the 2020 survey.

PHASE 2: An online survey was conducted between August 29, 2019, and September 18, 2019. This year's survey was restructured, with Q-methodology implemented to allow respondents to prioritize topics and rate the amount of attention these topics are receiving.

Additionally, the list of topics was adjusted on the basis of the findings from and comments provided in response to the 2018 survey, along with the findings and comments from Phase 1.

The survey also took a deeper dive into several areas that were addressed in the focus groups. As a result, additional questions were included to allow participants to expand on their selections and offer insight.

The survey closed with 1,443 total respondents from 65 countries and territories. The quotes used in this report were sourced from open-ended responses offered in the quantitative survey.

“

Literacy ability or capacity is the base rock for understanding any instruction in any discipline.

—Special Education
Teacher, Nigeria

”

Survey Respondents

1,443 total respondents
from **65** countries and territories

TOP RESPONDING COUNTRIES

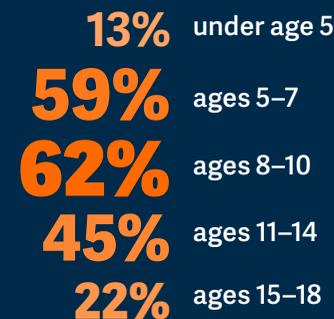
- United States
- Canada
- Australia
- New Zealand
- Philippines
- Jamaica
- Nigeria
- India
- South Africa
- United Kingdom

EMPLOYMENT

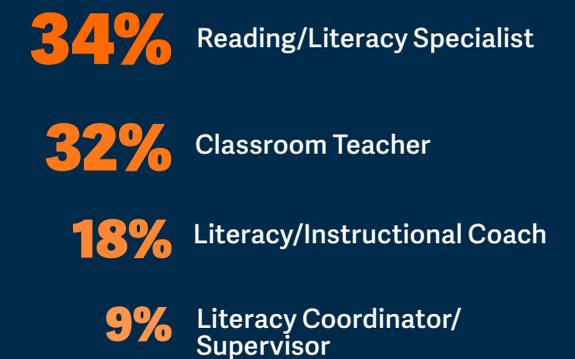


EXPERIENCE

Age of Students (among those in education)



Roles Among Teachers



Executive Summary

TO DETERMINE THIS YEAR'S RATINGS, respondents were presented with a list of 20 topics and asked to choose as many topics as they would like, in no particular order, that they felt were among the most important in improving literacy outcomes in the next decade.

The following were the most commonly chosen topics:

- **Determining effective instructional strategies for struggling readers** **66%**
- **Building early literacy skills through a balanced approach that combines both foundational and language comprehension instruction** **65%**
- **Increasing equity and opportunity for all learners** **59%**
- **Providing access to high-quality, diverse books and content** **59%**
- **Increasing professional learning and development opportunities for practicing educators** **58%**

To establish a more accurate picture of what's most important, respondents were then asked to rank the topics they had chosen to indicate their top five. When they used this rank sort approach, **the following topics emerged as most critical:**



Executive Summary (cont.)

THIS YEAR'S SURVEY EXPANDED beyond asking educators to rank the list of topics. To produce a more robust, meaningful report, respondents were asked to offer deeper insight into the challenges they face, the support they require, and the solutions they feel are necessary to advance literacy outcomes.

Among the key findings:

- Literacy professionals are almost unanimous in their assessment that all children deserve access to a free, high-quality preschool education that lays a foundation for literacy development (**96%**).
- According to respondents, the **greatest barrier** to equity is the variability of teacher knowledge and teaching effectiveness. Throughout the report, respondents cite differences in teacher preparation programs and the availability of and support for ongoing professional learning and development.
- The majority (**60%**) of respondents do not agree that today's teacher preparation programs are equipping educators with the skills they need for effective reading instruction.
- Equity and professional development are among the **top five** most important topics to improve literacy outcomes, and they are both deserving of more focus and attention among education policymakers. In addition, addressing inequity is the **No. 1** area respondents report wanting more support in (**49%**).
- When asked to identify professional development (PD) needs, **49%** of respondents say they want more PD on using digital resources to support literacy instruction. This response stood out, as the topic of digital literacy is one in which respondents are split when it comes to attention received; **26%** feel it deserves less attention, while **25%** feel it deserves more.
- Addressing disconnects between school curriculum and students' actual needs in terms of literacy support and instruction is the **No. 1** greatest challenge in literacy reported by respondents (**58%**), followed closely by supporting students with social-emotional or behavioral challenges (**52%**) and supporting students reading below grade level (**48%**).
- Issues of access to books and time for reading play prominently in survey responses. Inadequate access to books in families' homes is rated as the second greatest barrier to equity (**57%**). In addition, **70%** of literacy professionals say there is not enough time in the day set aside for independent reading.
- Not surprisingly, respondents are divided on phonics instruction, with **31%** reporting they feel the topic deserves more attention and **24%** saying they feel it deserves less attention.
- Respondents not only value literacy research but also want more support with it. When asked about the responsibilities of literacy educators, **89%** cite staying abreast of the latest literacy research, which also emerges as an area in which **44%** of respondents say they need more support.
- The majority of respondents (**61%**) say they need additional time to collaborate/confer with other teachers facing similar challenges.

A CLOSER LOOK
SECTION I



Improving Literacy Outcomes: Setting the Stage

Determining the Most Critical Topics

“EXCELLENT LITERACY INSTRUCTION builds a strong foundation for learning and, in turn, equips children to develop their potential, growing into adults who participate fully in their communities and society, enjoying the fullness that continuous learning brings to their lives.”

—From *Children’s Rights to Excellent Literacy Instruction*
(International Literacy Association, 2019)

When it comes to early literacy instruction, no one is more keenly aware of its importance and the potential to help or hinder a child’s ability to learn than those entrusted to teach critical skills. And, for the most part, you’d be hard-pressed to find people more passionate about the topic.

The results of the ILA 2020 What’s Hot in Literacy Survey underscore these principles. Read on to learn more.



“

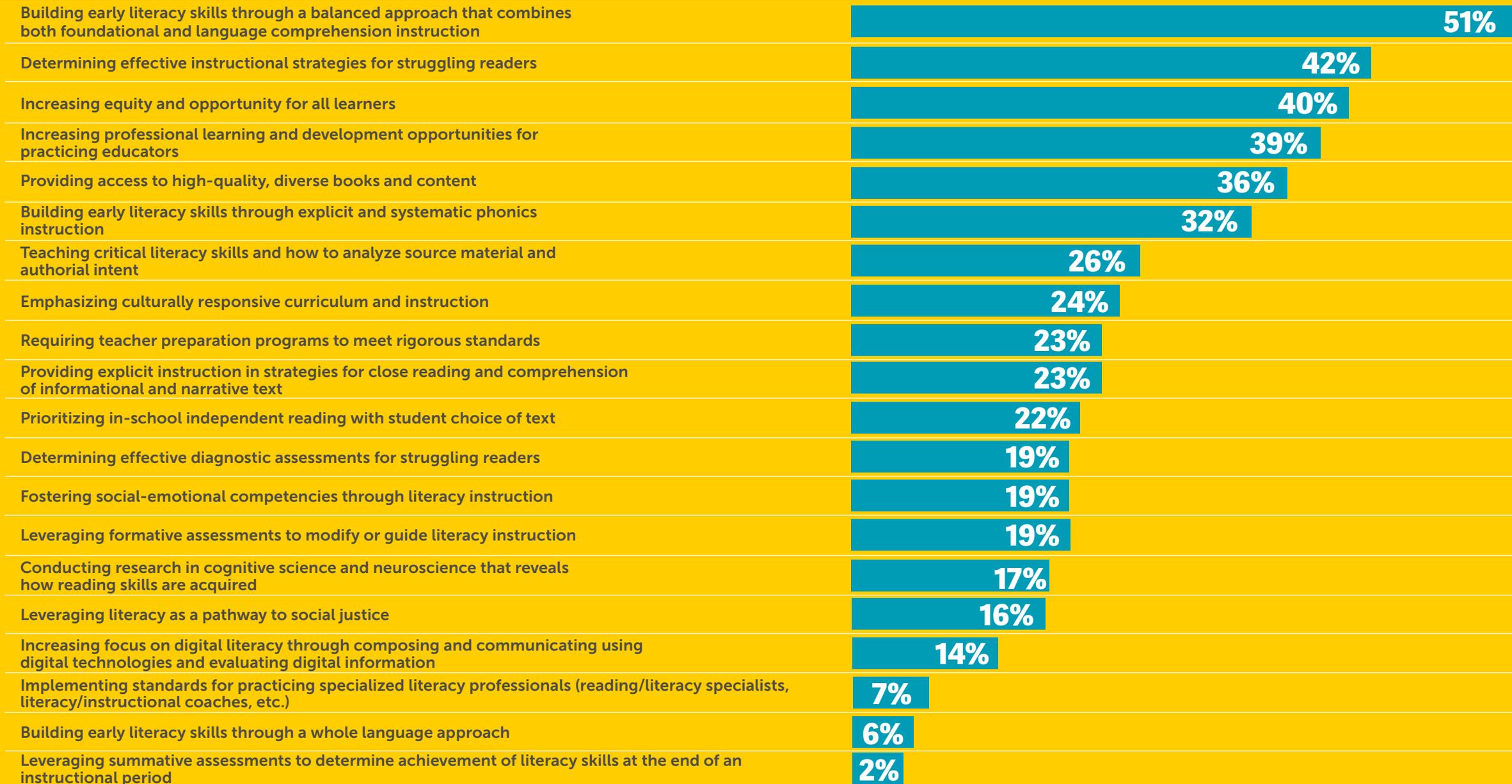
We must provide engaging, appropriate instruction to fire up struggling readers and help them be better readers and writers.

—Literacy Consultant,
United States

”

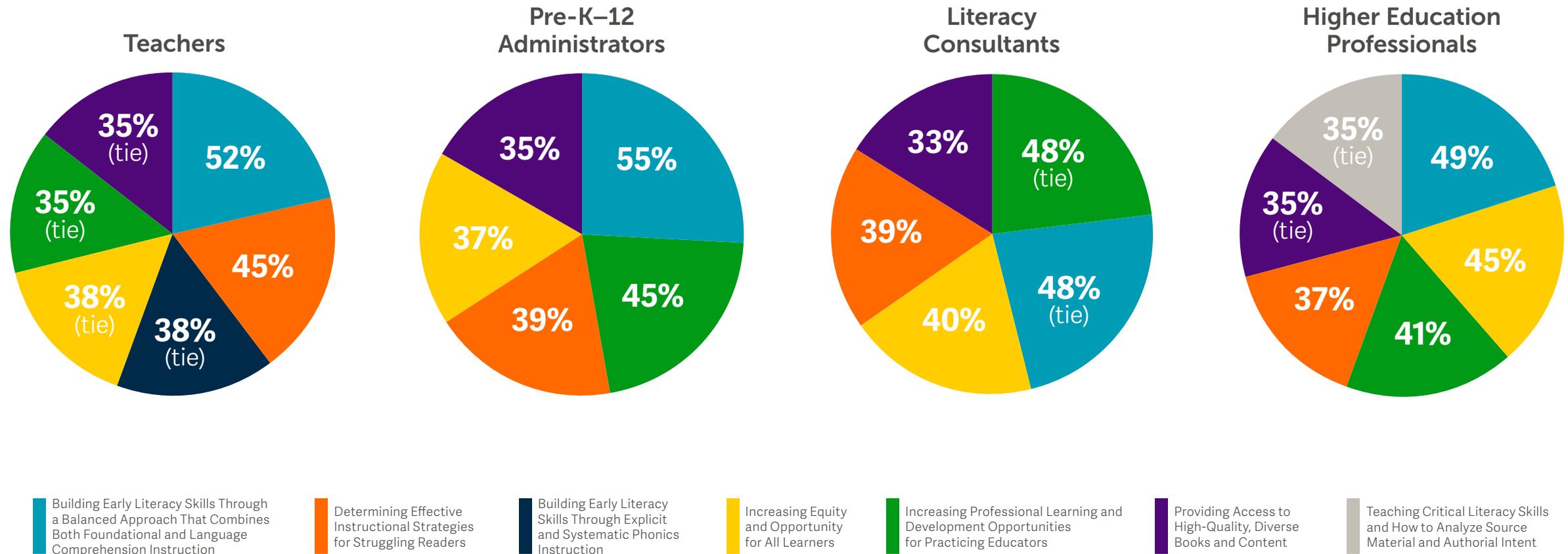
Top Critical Topics for Improving Literacy Outcomes in the Next Decade

■ CHOSEN AS A TOP 5 TOPIC



Respondents Think More Alike Than Not

INSTRUCTIONAL CONCERNS UNIFY teachers, pre-K–12 administrators, literacy consultants, and higher education professionals. The same top critical literacy topics appear on all four subgroup lists, albeit in slightly different orders. Two notable differences: Teachers, who make up **56%** of the 1,443 respondents, also include building early literacy skills through explicit and systematic phonics instruction (and rank it third highest), while those working in higher education (**37%** of respondents) add teaching critical literacy skills and how to analyze source material and authorial intent.



Where the Focus Is and Where It Should Be

LITERACY EXTENDS BEYOND READING to include the skills students need to understand, question, and participate in the world around them. In doing so, literacy transforms not just the child but also the community.

Given that, it's not surprising that **54%** of literacy professionals believe the topic of equity and opportunity for all learners deserves more attention and focus from education policymakers. By comparison, only **4%** of respondents think the topic receives too much attention.

Equity isn't the only concern. Nearly all of the top 10 most critical topics to improve literacy outcomes in the future are also among the top 10 topics that literacy professionals say deserve more focus and attention.

In some cases, professionals are split more evenly. When it comes to increasing focus on digital literacy through composing and communicating using digital technologies and evaluating digital information, for example, **26%** of respondents believe the topic receives too much attention while **25%** think it should get more.

Not surprisingly, considering current conversations in the field, respondents are divided over the topic of phonics, with **24%** saying building early literacy skills through explicit and systematic phonics instruction currently gets too much attention and **31%** saying it deserves more attention.

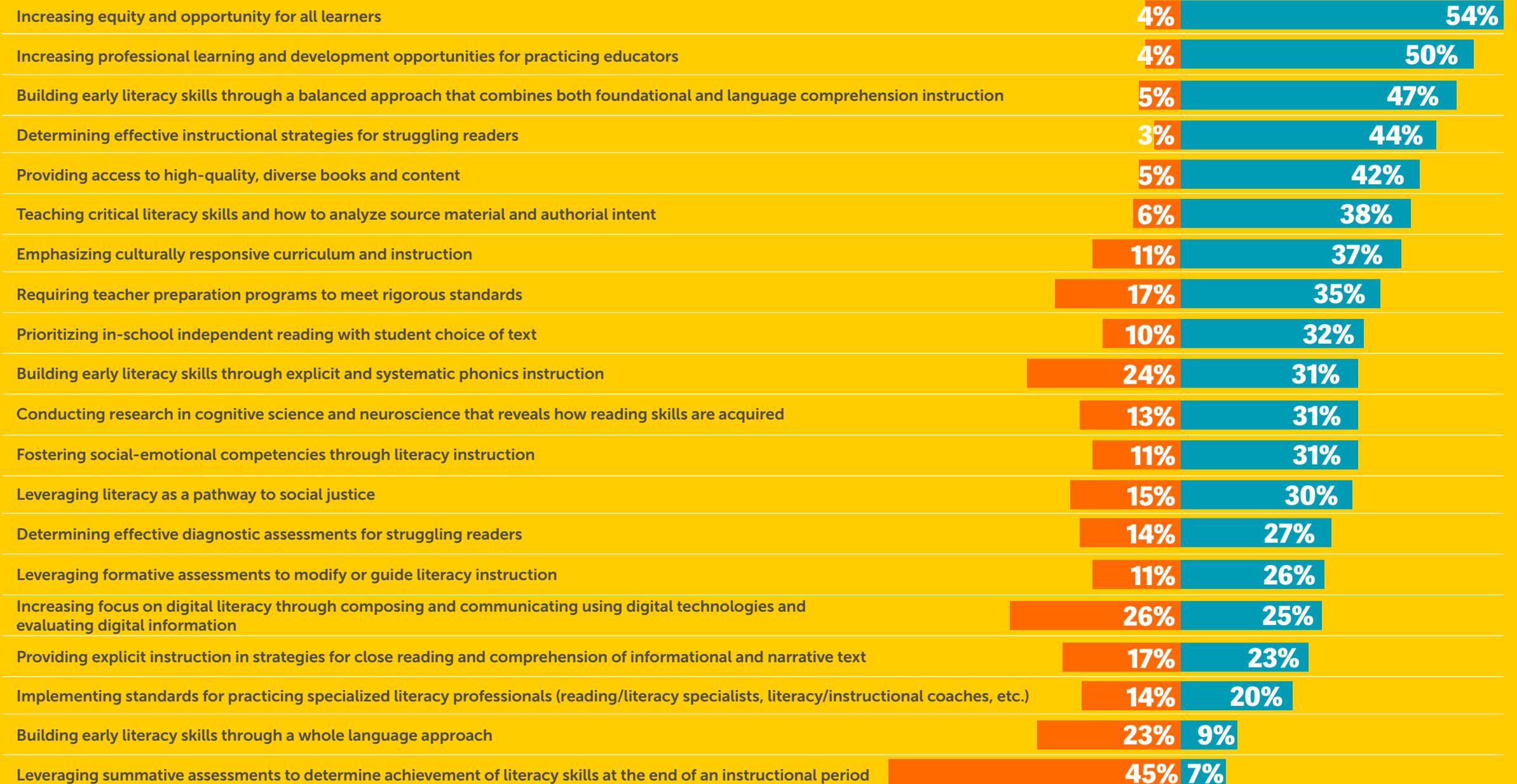
“

The issues of equity and social justice as well as social-emotional learning are real and impact children and adults alike. As part of the literacy agenda, there will be an opportunity to heighten awareness of these issues and focus on a variety of intervention plans to address them.

—Teacher Educator, Jamaica

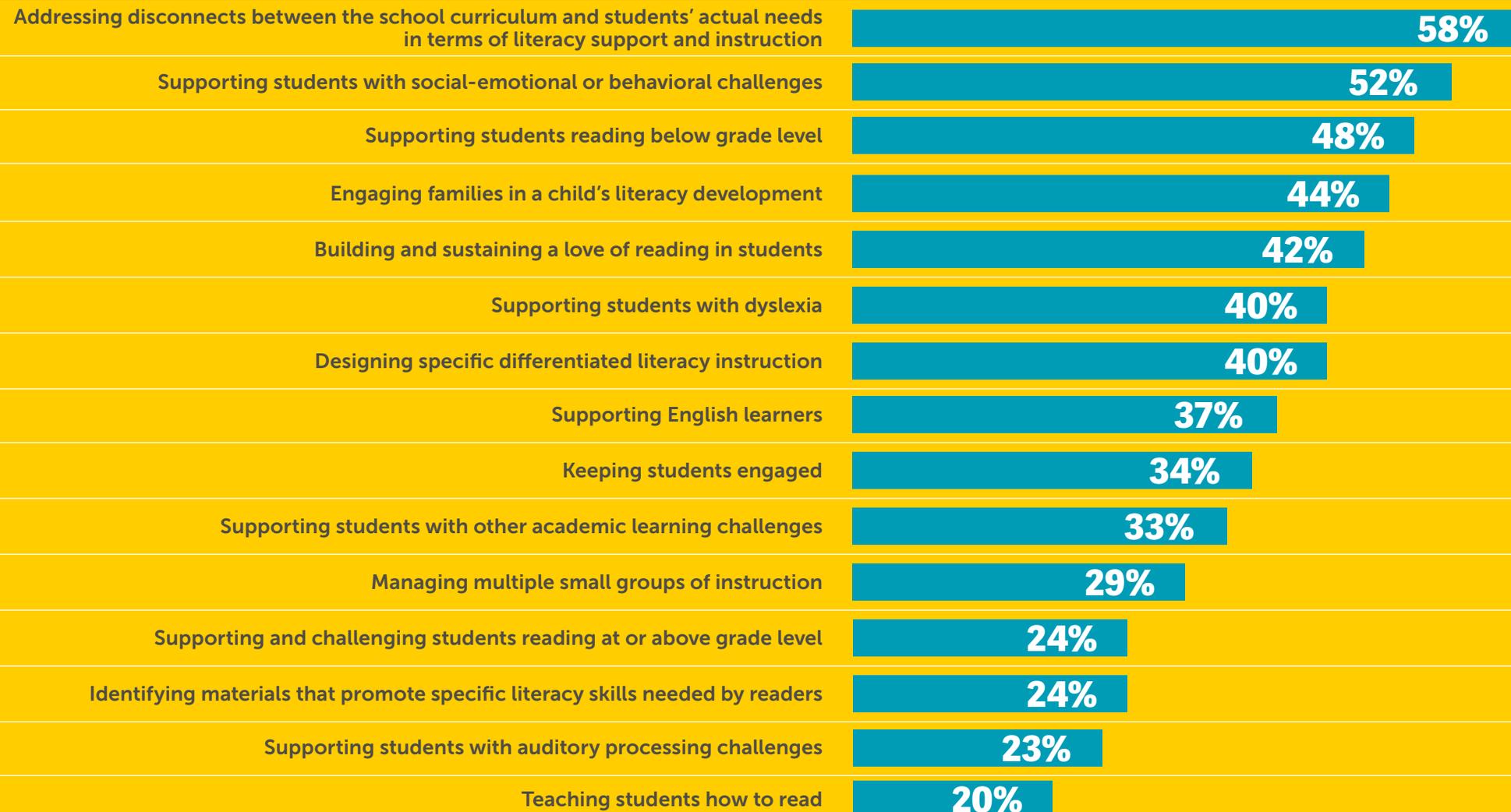
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Receiving Too Much Focus and Attention vs. Should Receive More Focus and Attention



The Greatest Challenges Facing Literacy

WHEN ASKED TO IDENTIFY THE GREATEST CHALLENGES IN LITERACY EDUCATION, some common themes emerge: connecting curriculum and instruction, addressing student challenges, leveling the reading playing field, and differentiating instruction.



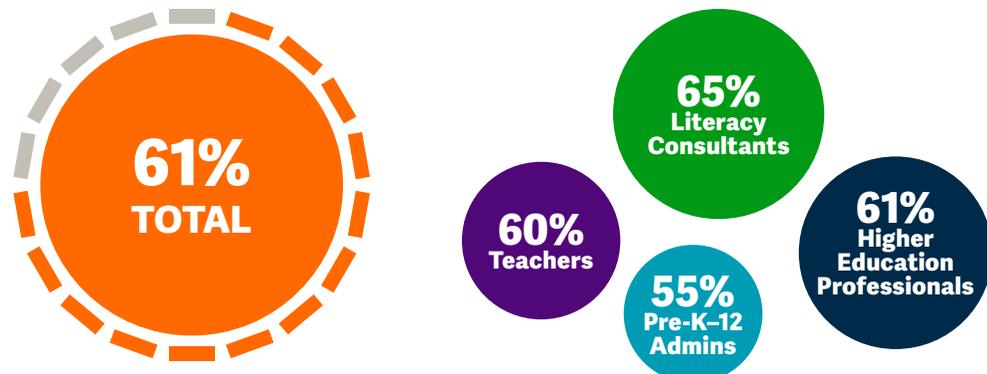
Supports to Help Students Succeed

WE KNOW THE SINGLE GREATEST FACTOR IN A STUDENT'S ACHIEVEMENT IS THE TEACHER, but we also know that teachers cannot, and should not, feel alone in helping students reach their potential. That's what makes access to collaboration, professional development, and evidence-based research strategies so critical for both teachers and students to succeed.

When respondents were asked to choose what support they need to address challenges in literacy, more than anything else, they chose more time for teachers to collaborate with other educators facing similar challenges. **Sixty percent** of teachers and **65%** of literacy consultants believe additional time with colleagues can ensure the greatest challenges in literacy are addressed.

All other needs respondents pointed to fall into the categories of assessments and interventions, access to materials, and professional development.

#1 Additional time to collaborate/confer with other teachers facing similar challenges



Assessments and Interventions

- #2 Creation and implementation of academic interventions for students who require them (50%)
- #6 Assessments that help pinpoint student challenges (36%)
- #9 Diagnostic assessment tools and expertise (31%)

Access to Materials

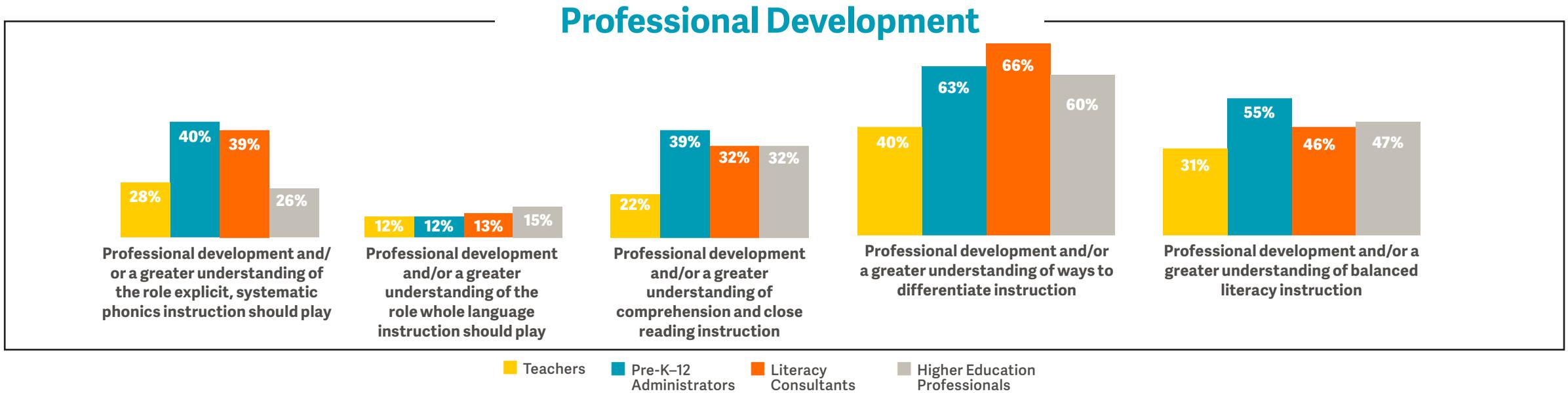
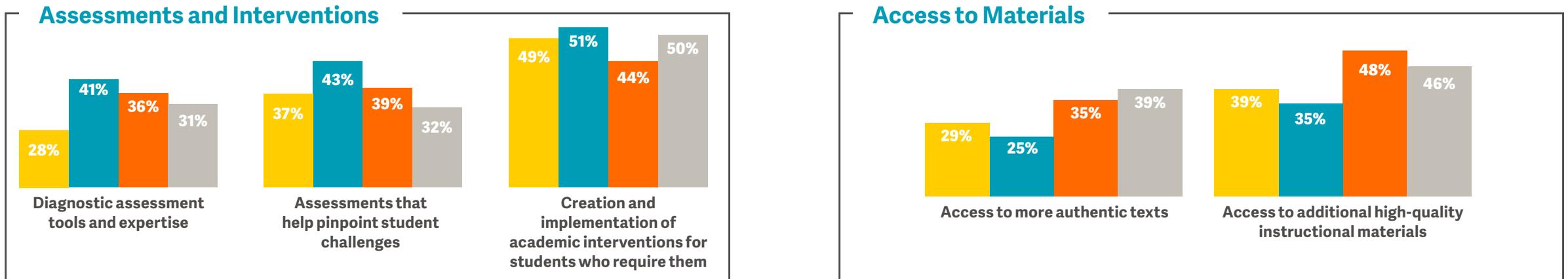
- #4 Access to additional high-quality instructional materials (42%)
- #7 Access to more authentic texts (32%)

Professional Development and/or a Greater Understanding of

- #3 ways to differentiate instruction (50%)
- #5 balanced literacy instruction (39%)
- #10 the role explicit, systematic phonics instruction should play (30%)
- #11 comprehension and close reading instruction (27%)
- #12 the role whole language instruction should play (13%)

Educational Roles and Views on Support

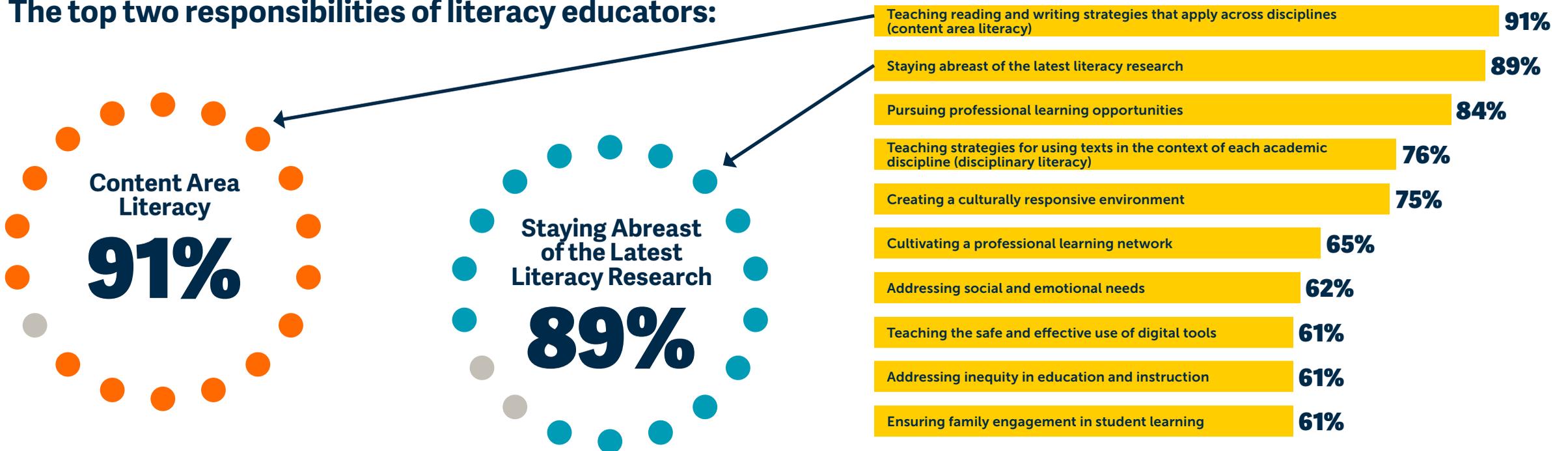
OPINIONS VARY ON WHAT SUPPORTS are most needed to address the challenges mentioned, depending on respondents' positions in the literacy field. The breakdown below displays some of the differences in responses among teachers, pre-K–12 administrators, literacy consultants, and higher education professionals.



The Responsibilities of Literacy Educators

LITERACY PROFESSIONALS SERVE AS EDUCATIONAL LIFE PRESERVERS, given the wide swath of situations and issues that affect a child's literacy learning and development. Their responsibilities, according to respondents, include creating instructional strategies and activities, knowing how to deliver instructional strategies effectively, and ensuring professional excellence.

The top two responsibilities of literacy educators:



Because a child's life outside the classroom can impact performance on the inside, it's also important, respondents say, that literacy educators are capable of addressing the needs of the whole child. More than **60%** believe a literacy educator is responsible for creating a culturally responsive environment, being able to address the social and emotional needs of a student, addressing inequity, and finding ways to ensure families are engaged in student learning.

Areas in Need of More Support

AFTER NOTING THE TOP RESPONSIBILITIES OF LITERACY EDUCATORS, respondents were asked if there were any responsibilities with which they need more support—and a wide range was cited. Topping the list: addressing inequity in education and instruction, staying abreast of the latest literacy research, and ensuring family engagement in student learning.



“

Effective teaching cannot afford to be generic. One size cannot fit all. Current research is bringing more and more pertinent information to light. When we know better (and when we know more), we do better for our students.

—Classroom Teacher,
Cayman Islands

”

A CLOSER LOOK
SECTION II



Addressing Instructional Inequity

Examining Barriers to Equity

UNSURPRISINGLY, NEARLY ALL LITERACY PROFESSIONALS agree that literacy is a fundamental right—**98%** of them, to be exact. And to guarantee that right, **96%** of them are in favor of free, high-quality preschool education that lays the foundation for literacy development.

This overwhelming support reflects a commitment to increasing equity and opportunity for all learners—a topic that **40%** of respondents identify as a top critical issue.

It's also an issue for which they're willing to shoulder responsibility. In fact, **82%** feel literacy educators should be accountable for addressing inequity and human rights with their students. Even so, a majority (**84%**) acknowledge that we still have a long way to go in terms of recognizing and addressing biases in literacy instruction.

Another barrier to equitable literacy instruction: the variability of teacher knowledge and effectiveness. A whopping **71%** of respondents selected this as one of the greatest barriers to equity in literacy.



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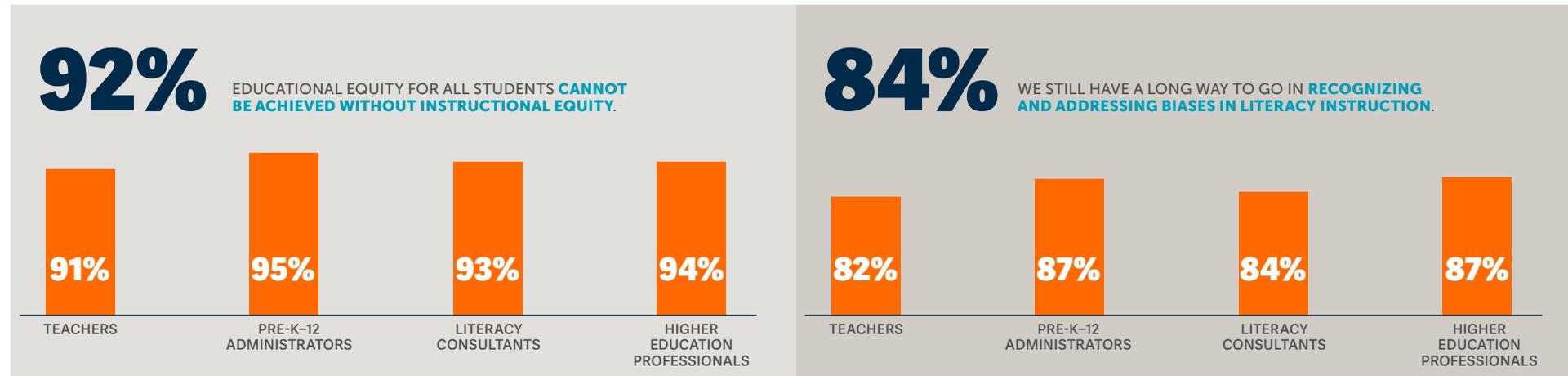
Early childhood education is overlooked by many, especially the education community. High-quality, literature-rich early childhood education helps close the gaps before it is too late. Preschool needs to be universal and kindergarten should be full day.

—Classroom Teacher,
United States

”

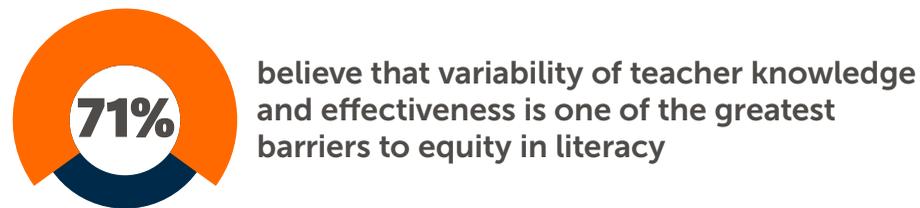
Examining Barriers to Equity (cont.)

A MAJORITY OF THOSE WHO COMPLETED THE SURVEY believe that instructional equity is key to achieving educational equity.

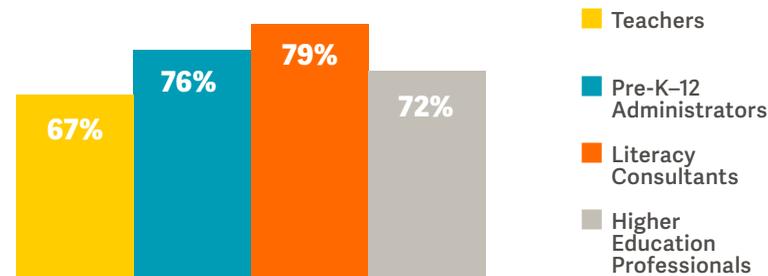


Shortcomings in awareness and response to issues related to diversity and/or cultural sensitivities are also cited as barriers to equity, as are inadequate access to high-quality resources and variability in family engagement.

In all, the majority of the barriers cited (displayed in full on the following page), focus on areas of intervention and support; issues of diversity, bias, and cultural responsiveness; and access to resources in school and at home.



Percentages Among Subgroups



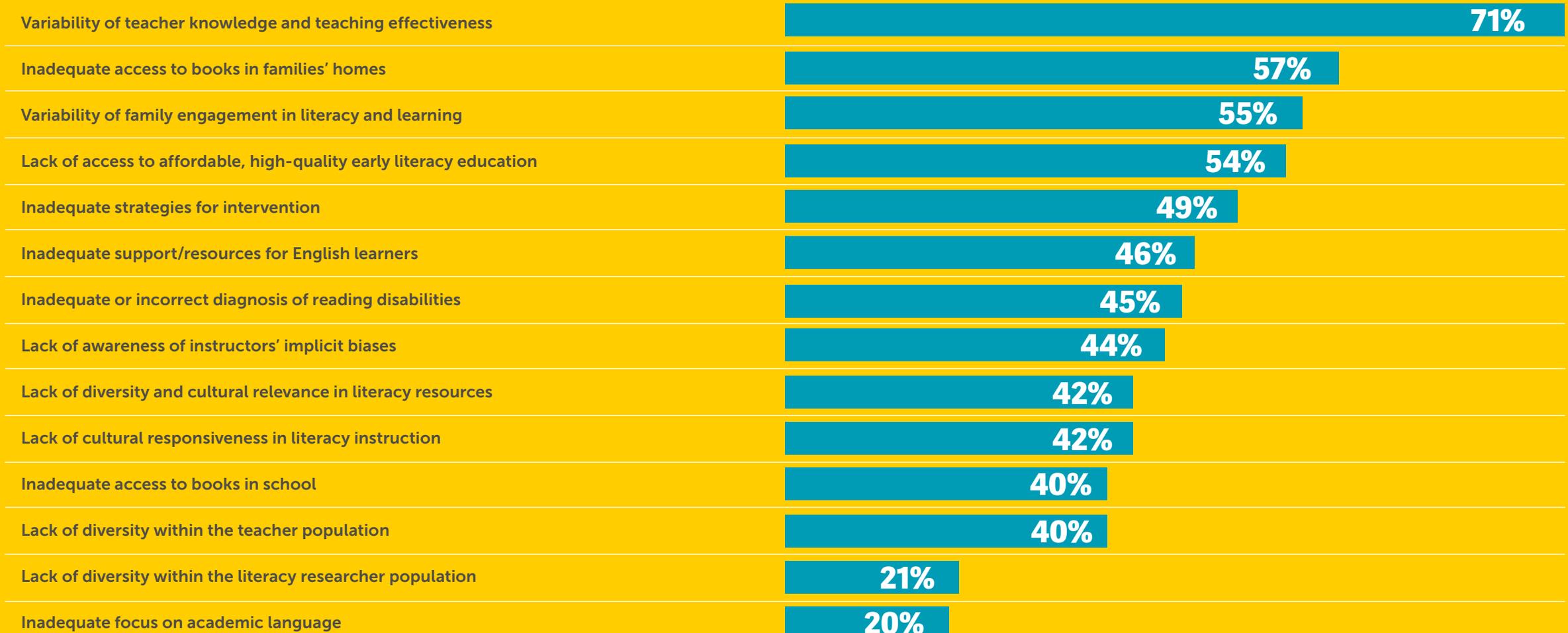
“

All people, regardless of gender, age, race, and ability, should have equal distribution of education... knowledge and resources.

—Teacher Educator, Kenya

”

The Barriers to Equity in Literacy Education



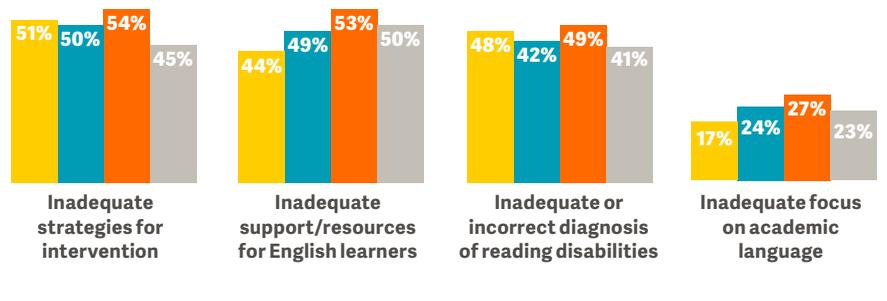
Educational Roles and Views on Barriers to Equity

DEPENDING ON THEIR ROLE AND MISSION, literacy professionals have varying opinions on where barriers to equity lie. When answering the question *What do you feel are the greatest barriers to equity in education?*, we found that teachers place a higher emphasis on barriers related to challenges at home, such as the variability of family engagement in literacy and learning and inadequate access to books in families' homes.

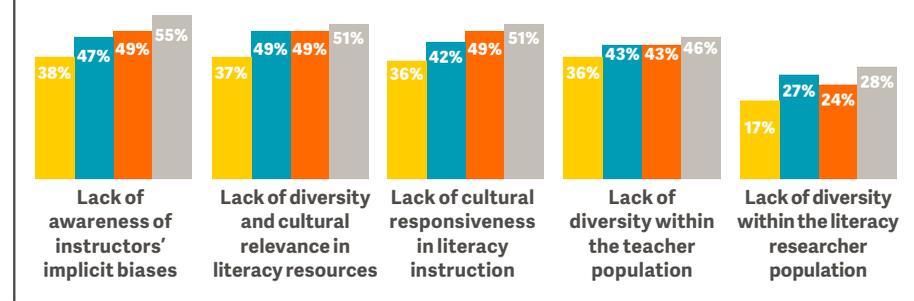
Higher education professionals, pre-K–12 administrators, and literacy consultants focus more on barriers related to diversity, including lack of awareness of instructors' implicit biases and lack of diversity and cultural relevance in literacy resources. Another notable difference is administrators placing a lower emphasis on inadequate access to book in schools.

For literacy consultants, additional emphasis is placed on intervention and support, such as inadequate strategies for interventions and inadequate support/resources for English learners.

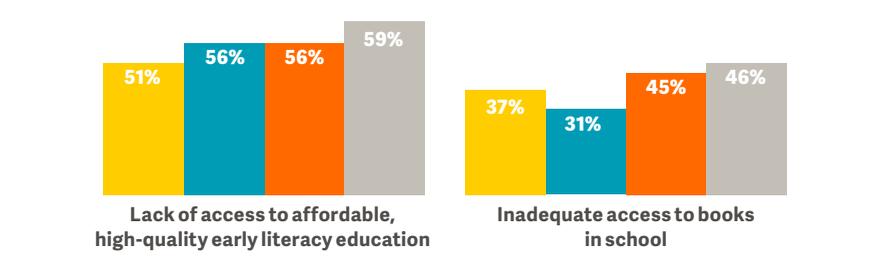
Intervention and Student Supports



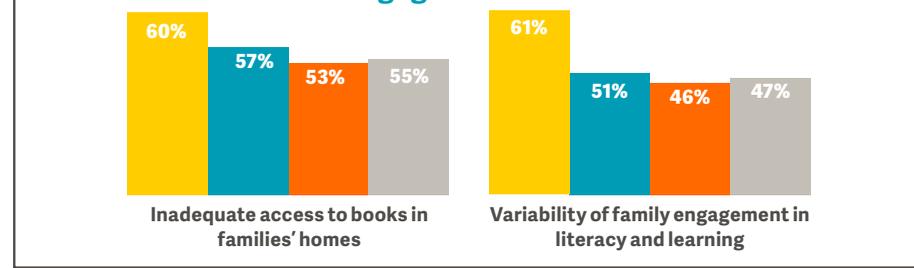
Diversity and Equity Issues



School-Based Access



At-Home Access and Engagement



A CLOSER LOOK
SECTION III



Ensuring Excellence in Reading Instruction

Excellence Starts at the Beginning

EVERY DAY, TEACHERS ARE TASKED

with providing literacy instruction that meets the needs of all learners. To do that, they must be equipped with knowledge of foundational literacy instruction and how to apply evidence-based best practices, as well as the ability to work effectively with other educators in a collaborative environment.

Excellence begins with teacher preparation, but it doesn't end with preservice programs; excellence must be sustained by research and lifelong learning. From the perspective of respondents, more work needs to be done to remove barriers and prepare teachers for the rigorous challenges they will face in the classroom and to support their ongoing professional growth through access to professional development opportunities and the latest literacy research.



“

Quality in education depends on the quality of interactions students receive in all scenarios. Teachers well prepared are needed to improve literacy in all learners.

—Classroom Teacher, Venezuela

”

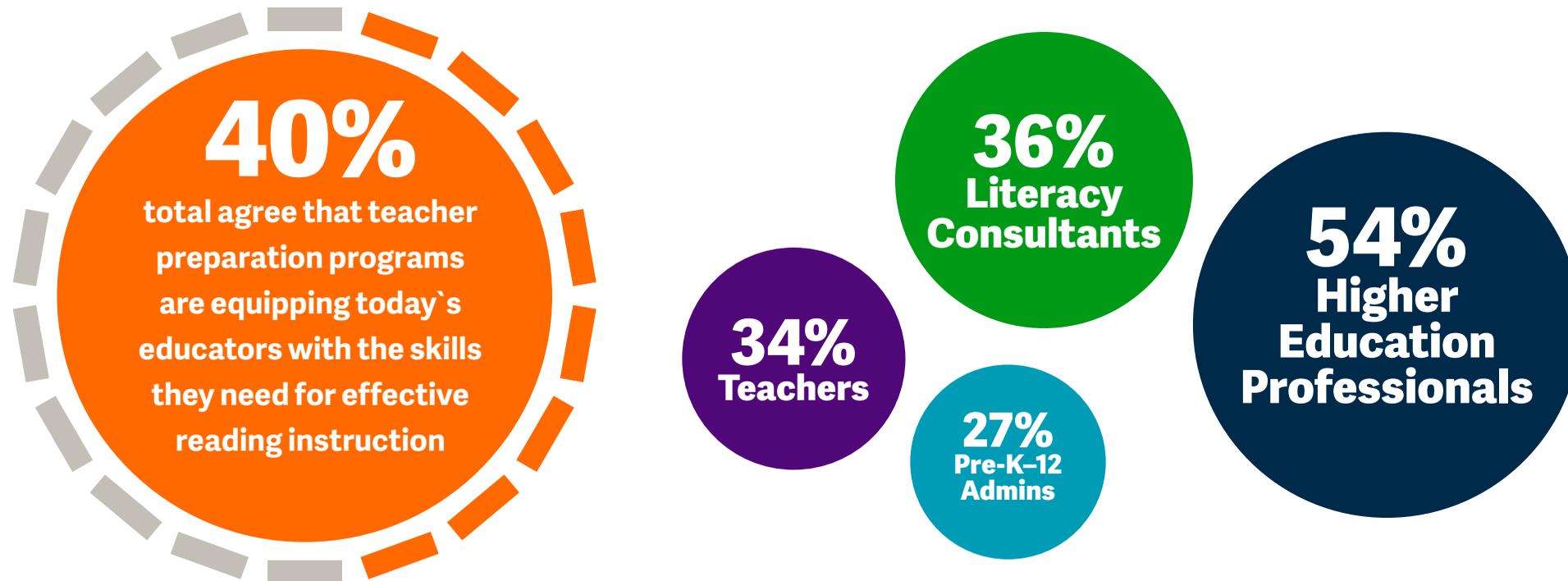
Teacher Preparation Programs Must Be Strengthened

WHEN IT COMES TO TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS, a minority of respondents—only **40%**—say that they are equipping today's educators with the skills they need for effective early reading instruction.

Those who work closest with students and their families feel most strongly about the need for improvements to teacher preparation programs. Only **27%** of pre-K-12 administrators agree that teacher preparation programs are adequately preparing teachers, followed by teachers (**34%**), literacy consultants (**36%**), and higher education professionals (**54%**).

This wide range suggests a significant disconnect between the people who are training the next generation of educators and educators themselves.

On Teacher Preparation Programs



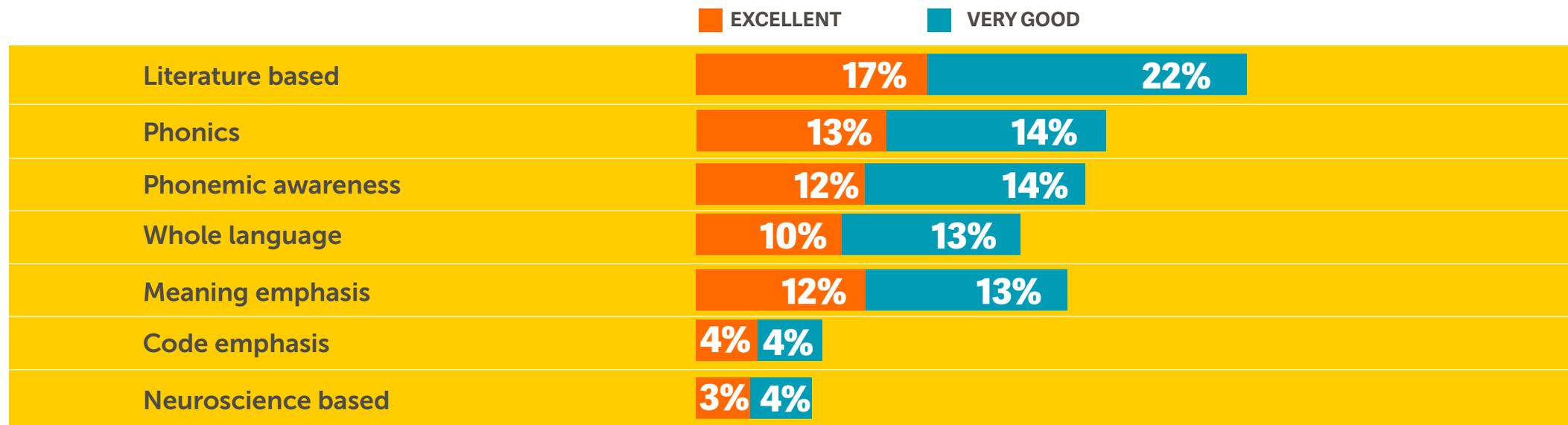
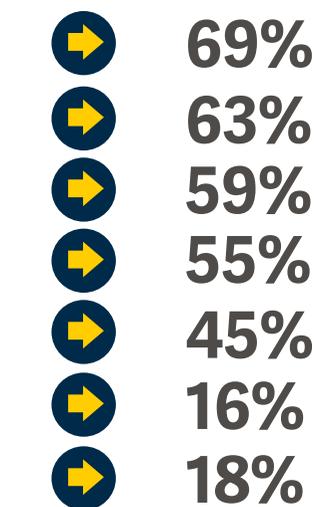
Teachers Rate Their Own Preparation

TO GAIN FURTHER INSIGHT, teachers were asked to share what methods of early literacy instruction were included in their preservice programs and to rate how well prepared they were in each of those methods.

Literature-based methods were cited most often, though only **39%** of respondents feel they were adequately prepared to employ them. Additionally, while majorities say their program included phonics (**63%**) and phonemic awareness (**59%**), only **27%** and **26%**, respectively, say their program did an “excellent” or “very good” job of preparing them to use these methods.

Similar results were found for other methods as well.

percentage of teachers who say each method was included in their preparatory program



The impact of this limited preparation in instructional methods may be seen in the responses from teachers working with students under the age of 10. Though they are the ones working directly with early readers, they are surprisingly less likely than teachers of older students to feel prepared in phonics, phonemic awareness, and whole language methods.

Comparing Methods and Importance

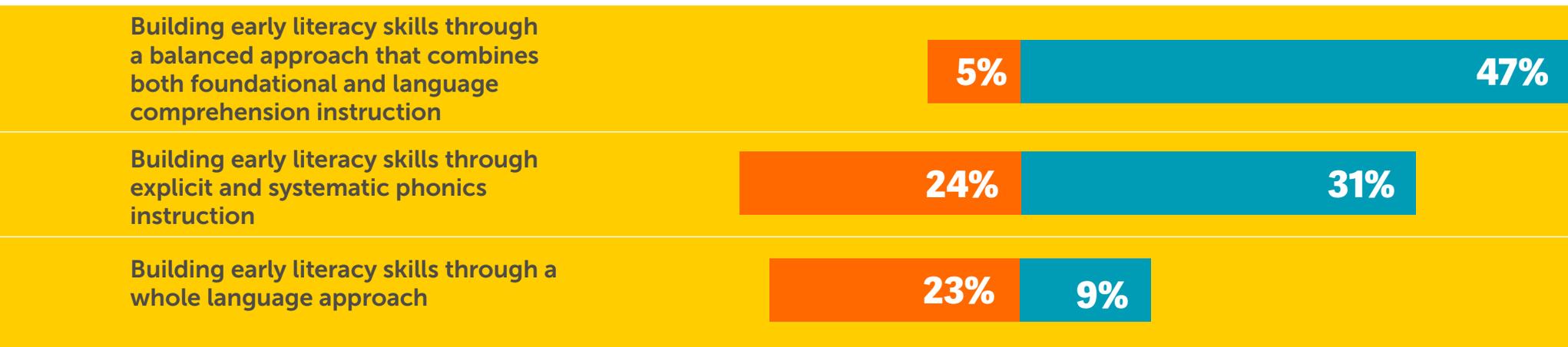
LITERACY PROFESSIONALS' THOUGHTS on the most important methods for early reading instruction mirror the differences found among the focuses in their teacher preparation programs.

A majority (51%) say a balanced approach that combines both foundational and language comprehension instruction is among the most critical topics for improving literacy outcomes in the next decade, with 47% saying the topic doesn't receive enough attention.

When it comes to explicit and systematic phonics instruction, only 32% say it is among the most critical topics. And respondents are split in how much attention the topic is given, with 31% saying we should be paying more attention to phonics instruction and another 24% saying it already gets too much.

Regarding professional development, 39% of respondents would like more PD and/or a greater understanding of a balanced approach, while 30% would like more PD and/or a greater understanding of explicit and systematic phonics instruction.

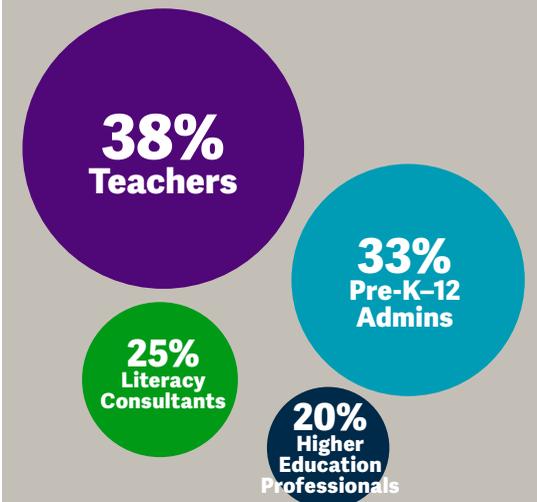
■ RECEIVING TOO MUCH FOCUS AND ATTENTION
 ■ SHOULD RECEIVE MORE FOCUS AND ATTENTION



FOCUS ON PHONICS

There is little variation in how subgroups feel regarding the importance of building early literacy skills through a balanced approach. No significant differences are found in the importance they place on a whole language approach either, but notable differences among subgroups exist in the importance placed on explicit and systematic phonics instruction.

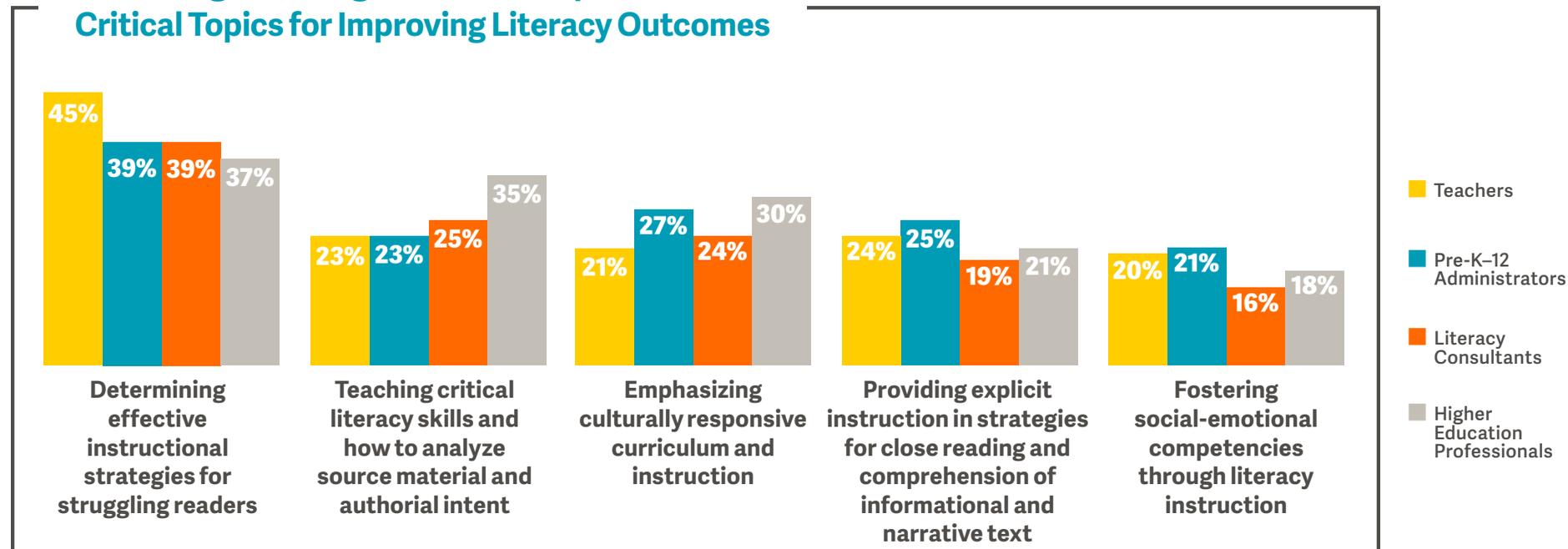
Percentage Ranking Phonics Instruction as a Top 5 Critical Topic



Issues in the Classroom

BEYOND TEACHER PREPARATION, other areas of importance in ensuring excellence in reading instruction center on issues related to instructional excellence. More specifically, respondents point to areas such as determining effective instructional strategies for struggling readers (42%), teaching critical literacy skills and how to analyze source material and authorial intent (26%), emphasizing culturally responsive curriculum and instruction (24%), providing explicit instruction in strategies for close reading and comprehension of informational and narrative text (23%), and fostering social-emotional competencies through literacy instruction (19%).

Percentage Ranking Each in the Top 5 Most Critical Topics for Improving Literacy Outcomes



“

Extremes are usually not helpful for progress. Taking a balanced approach to literacy that includes word strategies, read-alouds, shared and guided reading, independent reading, and a similar program in writing is the best approach to capturing all learners.

—Literacy Consultant, Canada

”

Addressing Challenges in Reading Instruction

ISSUES RELATED TO READING INSTRUCTION are among the greatest challenges in literacy, with the biggest hurdles including supporting students reading below grade level (**48%**), supporting English learners (**37%**), and teaching students how to read (**20%**).

To help level that playing field, **50%** of literacy professionals say the support they need is academic interventions for students who require them, while **31%** say they need diagnostic assessment tools and expertise in using them.

The topic of differentiating instruction is also among the top challenges, with **40%** citing the greatest challenge as designing specific differentiated literacy instruction and **29%** pointing to managing multiple small groups of instruction.



Professional development and/or a greater understanding of ways to differentiate instruction is identified by **50%** of respondents as a support that is needed to address literacy challenges.

“

Teachers need more autonomy to plan authentic literacy instruction based on real literature and talk. Teachers must move beyond the scripted curriculum. There is no quick fix in literacy education.

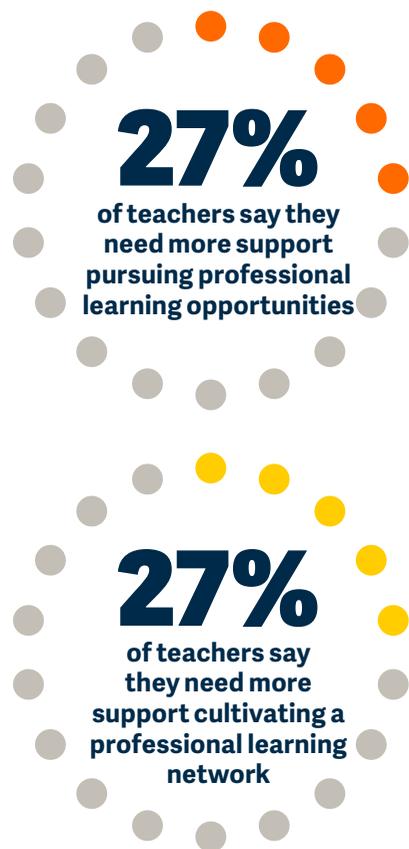
—Teacher Educator, United States

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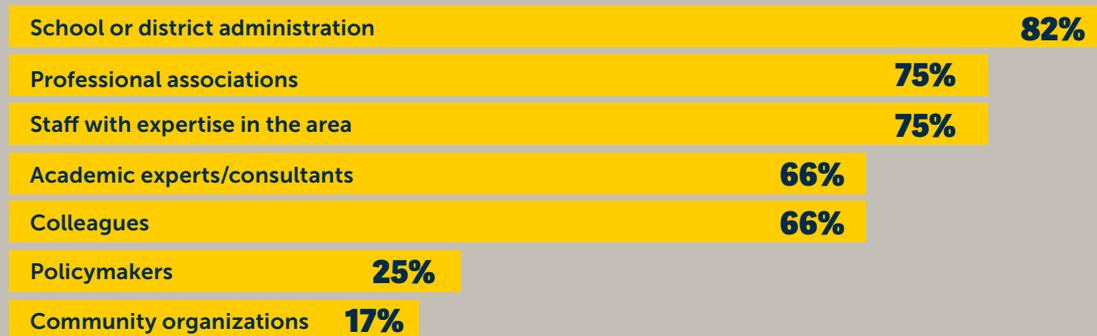
Where More Support Is Needed

GIVEN THE CHALLENGES OF TEACHING STUDENTS with varying abilities and experiences, it's not surprising that more than a quarter of teachers—**27%**—say they need support in both creating a professional learning network and pursuing professional learning opportunities.

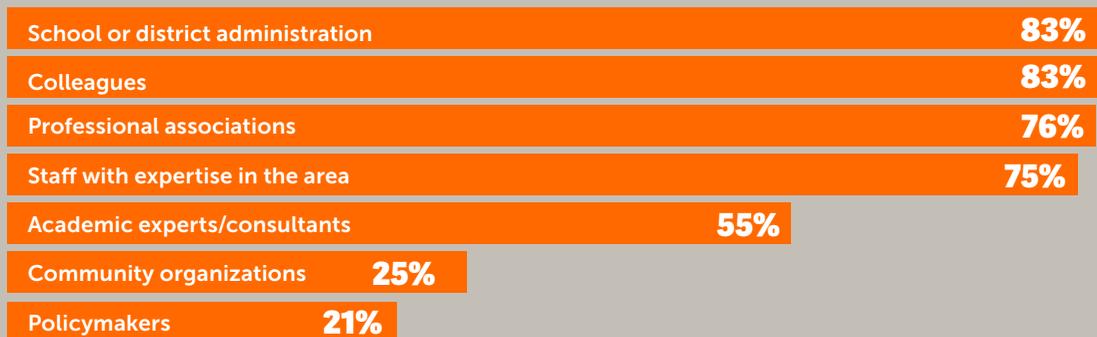
In both situations, literacy professionals who selected these items as among the top three responsibilities of literacy educators believe that help should come from their school or district administration, professional associations, and staff with expertise in the area.



Who should provide direction, leadership, and support pursuing professional learning opportunities?



Who should provide direction, leadership, and support cultivating a professional learning network?



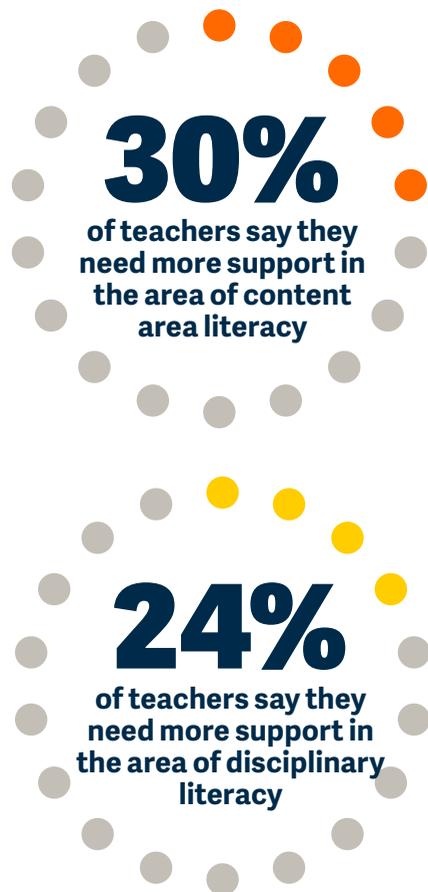
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

Teachers were asked if there were any specific areas in which they would like more professional development to strengthen their literacy practice. The top five areas were selected:

1. Using Digital Resources to Support Literacy Instruction **49%**
2. Supporting Social-Emotional Learning **40%**
3. Writing Instruction **39%**
4. Addressing Issues of Social Justice **36%**
5. Teaching Vocabulary **28%**

Where More Support Is Needed (cont.)

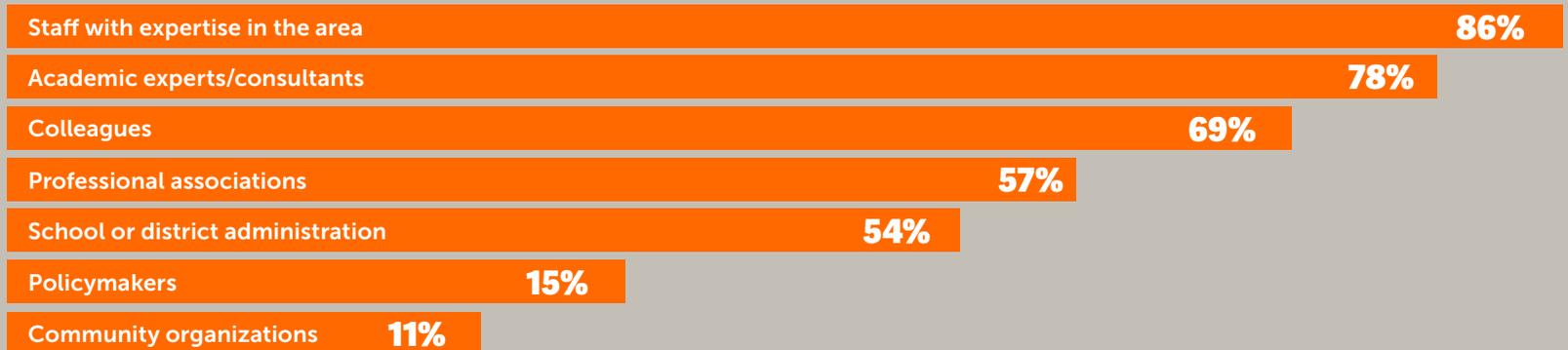
IN ADDITION, **30%** of teachers say they need more support with content area literacy, while **24%** say they need support with disciplinary literacy. Literacy professionals who selected these items as among the top three responsibilities of literacy educators believe support should come from staff with expertise in the area, academic experts/consultants, and colleagues.



Who should provide direction, leadership, and support in content area literacy?



Who should provide direction, leadership, and support in disciplinary literacy?



The Role of Research

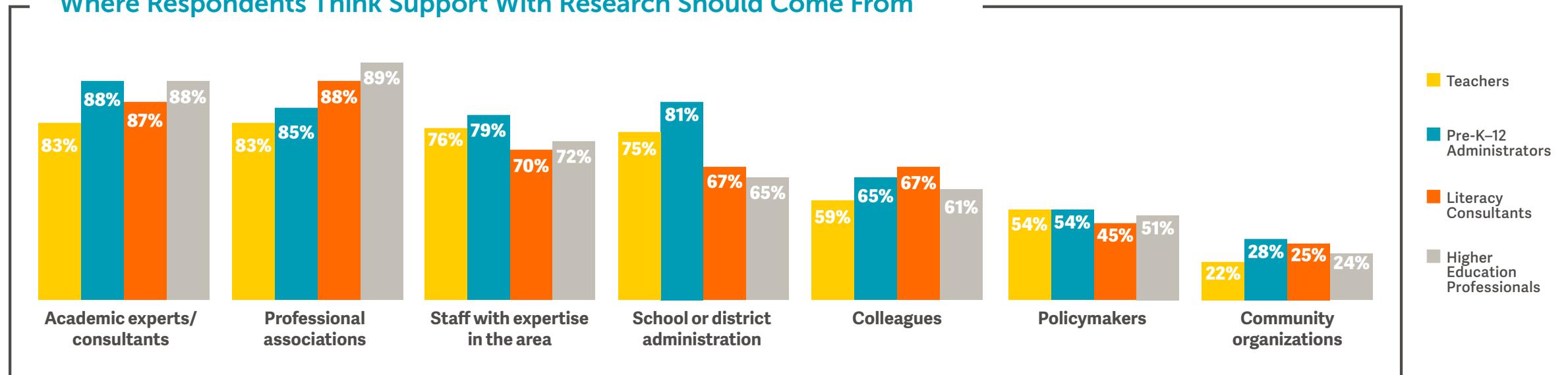
RESPONDENTS HIGHLY VALUE the role of research in ensuring excellence in reading instruction, with an overall **93%** agreeing that research is the backbone of effective literacy instruction. It may not be surprising that literacy consultants and higher education professionals agree the most (**96%**), but pre-K–12 administrators (**94%**) and teachers (**90%**) follow closely behind.

There is also an awareness that literacy research isn't something static but rather constantly evolving. Half or more of teachers, literacy consultants, and higher education professionals say that staying up to date on research is among the top three most important responsibilities of literacy educators.

It's also cited as an area in which literacy professionals want more support. Nearly half of all respondents—**44%**—say that staying abreast of the latest literacy research is an area in which they need more support. When it comes to who should provide that assistance, several avenues are cited.

A strong majority (**85%**) agree that academic experts and professional associations should provide the direction, leadership, and support to help educators keep up with research. There is also support among respondents for help being provided internally, though disconnects can be found there. For example, **81%** of administrators and **75%** of teachers feel support with research should come from school or district administration, but only **67%** of literacy consultants and **65%** of higher education professionals agree.

Where Respondents Think Support With Research Should Come From



A CLOSER LOOK
SECTION IV



Promoting Access and Opportunity

The Right to a Literacy-Rich Environment

ILA'S CHILDREN'S RIGHTS TO EXCELLENT LITERACY INSTRUCTION

position statement asserts that all children have the right to supportive learning environments and high-quality resources. That includes not only access to books at school and at home but also robust literacy-rich experiences that honor social and cultural identities and are culturally responsive, student centered, and free of bias.

What's Hot respondents support this right, with more than one third saying providing access to high-quality, diverse books and content is among the top five most critical topics for improving literacy outcomes in the next decade, and **59%** saying it is among the most important topics.

Despite the critical importance, however, students don't always have the chance to read when and where they want or the opportunity to experience books that provide—in the words of scholar Rudine Sims Bishop—windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors.



“

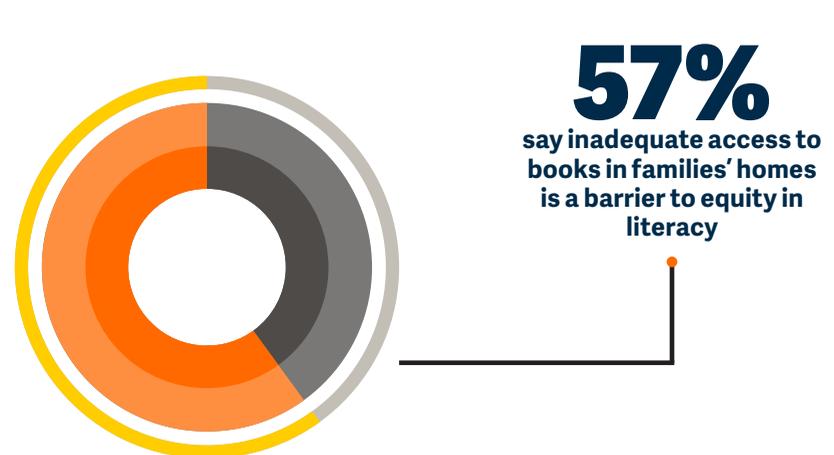
The narratives in children's literature matter. They have huge influence. We are showing children what society values, devalues, and who is invisible. We must share many diverse stories and help prevent stereotypes and future generations [from inheriting] bias.

—Researcher/Scholar,
United States

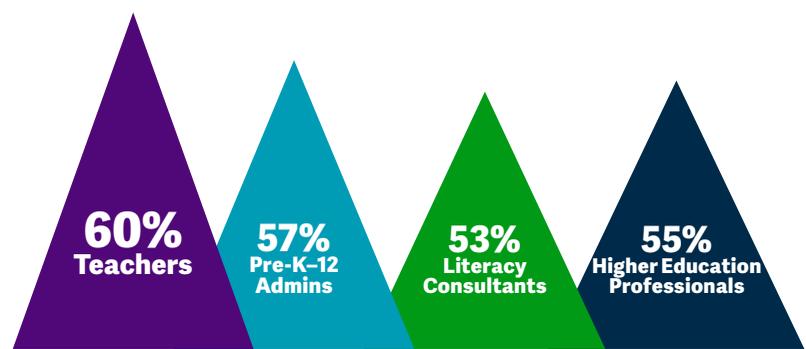
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Issues of Access

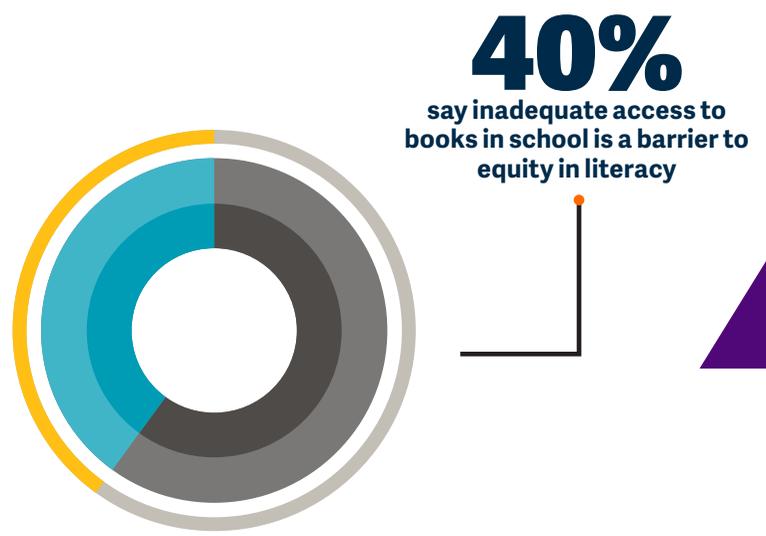
ACCESS TO BOOKS IN GENERAL is viewed by respondents as a top barrier to equity in literacy instruction. **Fifty-seven percent** of respondents say a barrier is families not having enough books at home, while **40%** say a barrier is not having enough at school.



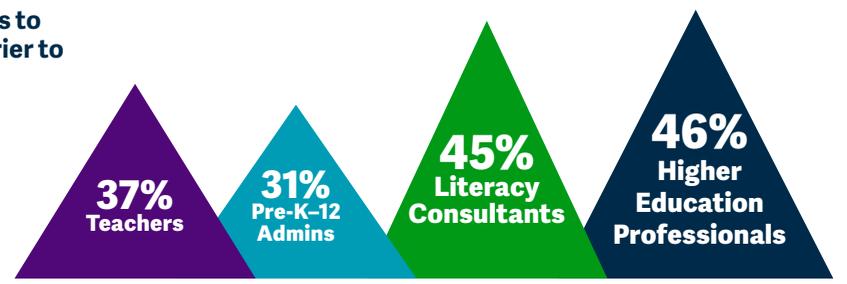
Inadequate Access to Books in Families' Homes



Given this, it's not surprising that **42%** of literacy professionals say more support is needed in getting access to high-quality instructional materials and **32%** say more support is needed in gaining access to more authentic texts.



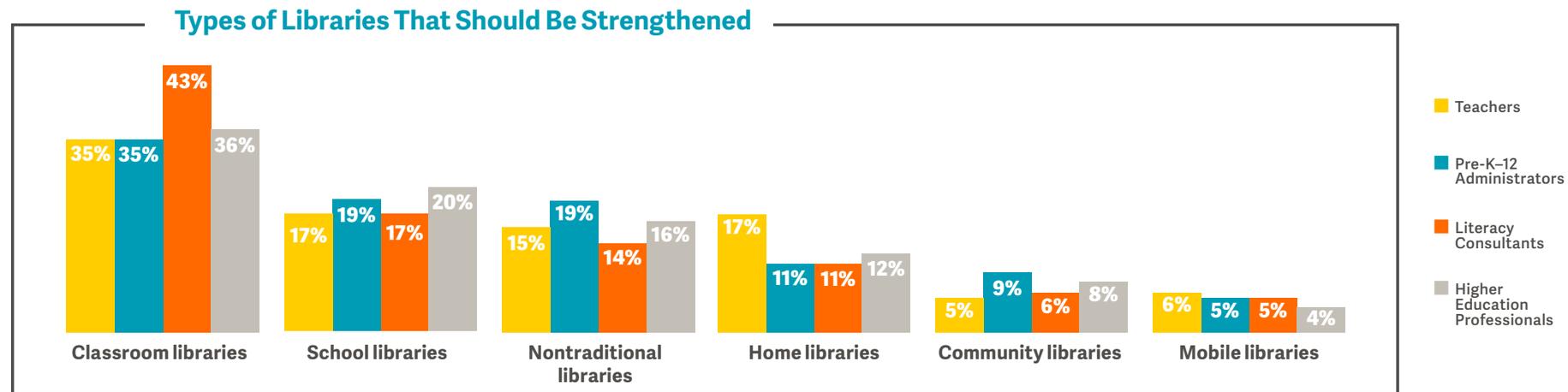
Inadequate Access to Books in Schools



Where Access Should Be Improved

STRENGTHENING CLASSROOM LIBRARIES is a top way to ensure students have access to high-quality books, say **36%** of respondents, while **18%** say school libraries should be bolstered. Only **15%** think strengthening home libraries is key and a mere **7%** point to community libraries.

Literacy consultants are more likely to say that classroom libraries should be strengthened, while teachers put more emphasis on strengthening home libraries. This is a trend seen throughout the report: Teachers tend to look more for external support when looking at challenges and solutions.



It's critical to note the importance of high-quality and authentic texts as well. Respondents recognize that the issue of access and opportunity is about more than just access to books themselves: **42%** of literacy professionals cite a lack of diversity and cultural relevance in literacy resources as a barrier to equity in literacy instruction, and an equal percentage point to a lack of cultural responsiveness.

In addition, **75%** say creating a culturally responsive environment is a responsibility of literacy educators.

THE VALUE OF LIBRARIANS

Respondents could choose only one answer to the question of which type of libraries should be strengthened, and survey results tell us that classroom libraries are seen as a main access point to reach the most learners. But this in no way implies that educators don't use or value school and community libraries and librarians as sources of support for literacy learning. If anything, it demonstrates the need for more resources that can connect educators and families with these knowledgeable literacy partners. For some ideas, see ILA's *Advocating for Children's Rights to Read* manual:

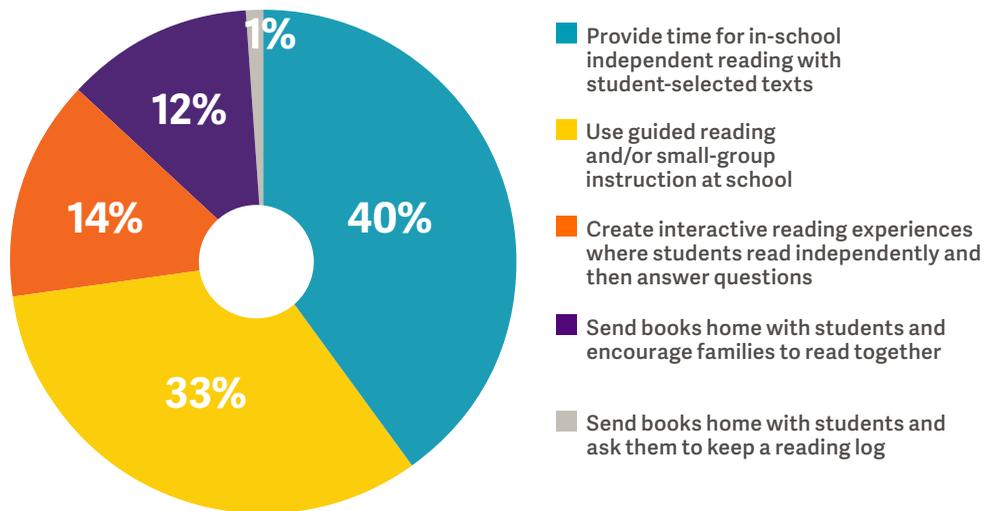
rightstoread.org/takeaction.

Time for Independent Reading

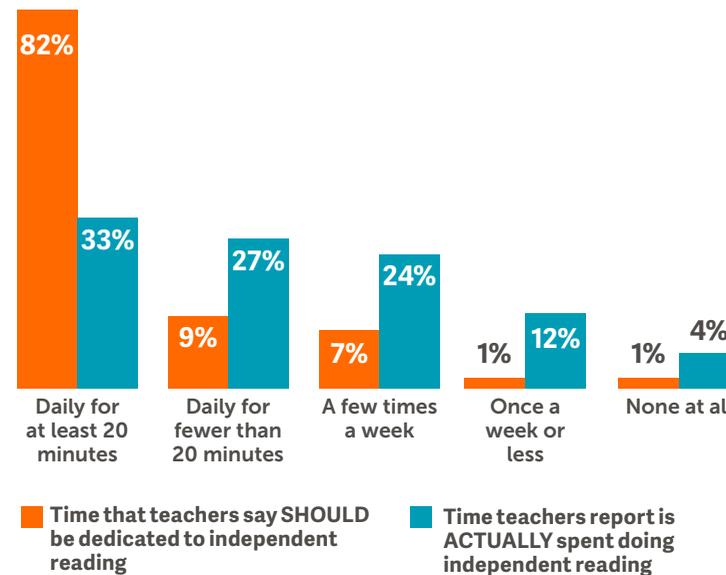
IN ADDITION TO IMPROVING ACCESS TO RICH READING MATERIALS, **40%** of respondents say that making time for student-selected independent reading during the school day is the best way to help all students grow into strong readers.

Another **33%** say guided reading and/or small-group instruction is the best way. Literacy consultants are more likely than teachers to prefer guided reading and/or small-group instruction over time for student-selected independent reading.

Best Way to Ensure Students Grow Into Strong Readers



Independent Reading Time in School



Independent reading is an area where teachers are especially passionate: **25%** place prioritizing student-selected independent reading as a top five critical topic, six percentage points more than pre-K–12 administrators and nearly 10 percentage points more than literacy consultants.

And while **91%** of teachers say time should be set aside daily for independent reading in school, a significantly smaller amount—**60%**—are actually able to block off the time.

“

Valuing time to be spent on independent reading in the classroom makes all the difference, I think, in literacy instruction. If you can inspire children to read and they don't want to put the book down, it solves a lot of these problems! Being patient and finding that key with each student is paramount.

—Classroom Teacher, Turkey

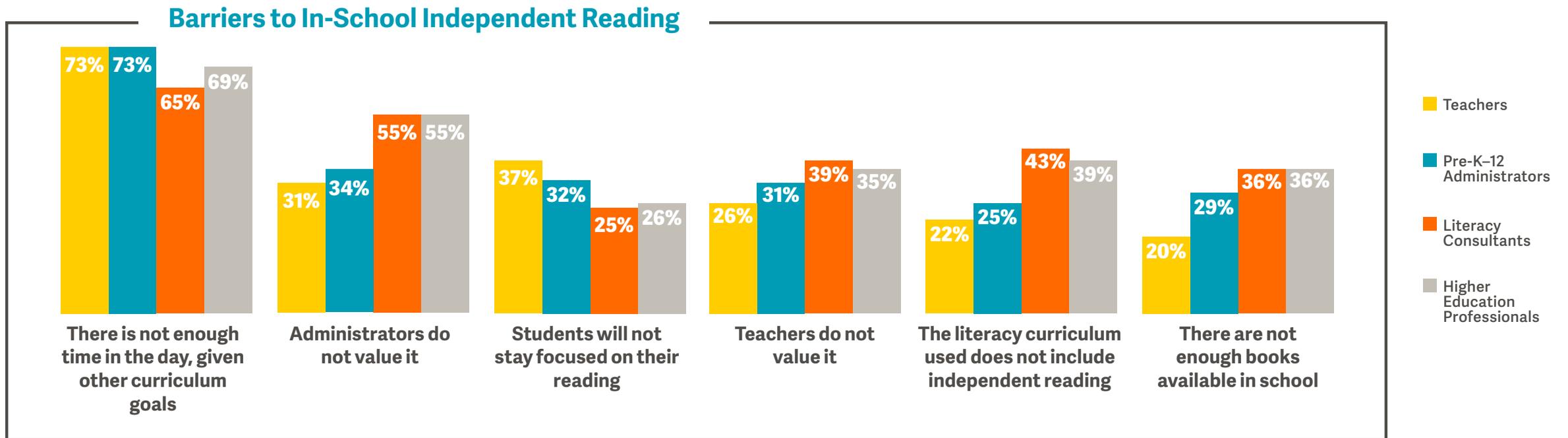
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Barriers to Independent Reading

SO WHAT ECLIPSES INDEPENDENT READING TIME during the school day? When asked to choose, **70%** of respondents say there isn't enough time in the day, given other curriculum goals.

Other reasons cited include independent reading not being valued by pre-K–12 administrators (**40%**), students not staying focused on their reading (**32%**), teachers not valuing it (**30%**), the literacy curriculum does not include independent reading (**30%**), and there are not enough books available in school (**27%**).

In some cases, there are stark differences in answers among the literacy professionals. Literacy consultants and higher education professionals are much more likely to say administrators and teachers do not value independent reading. Conversely, teachers and administrators are more likely to say student attention is a factor affecting independent reading. They also are less likely to cite a lack of books in school as an issue.



Topic Comparisons

WHEN WE DELVED INTO THE DEMOGRAPHICS of survey respondents, we looked at the variations among certain subcategories of professionals and found some interesting differences in responses when comparing by region, profession, or student learner level.

- Teachers working with students ages 15–18 are **more likely** than those working with younger students to say barriers to equity include inadequate support/resources for English learners (**57%**), lack of diversity and cultural relevance in literacy resources (**51%**), and inadequate access to books in school (**40%**).
- Teachers who work with students ages 10 and under are **more likely** than those working with older students to select increasing professional learning and development opportunities for practicing educators in their top five critical topics.
- Those in the Western region of the United States are **least likely** to agree that teacher preparation programs are equipping educators with needed skills for reading instruction: West (**31%**), Northeast (**40%**), Midwest (**40%**), and South (**44%**).
- Teachers working with students ages 10 and under are **less likely** to feel prepared in regard to phonics, phonemic awareness, and whole language methods compared with teachers working with ages 11–14.
- Teachers working with students ages 11+ are **more likely** than those working with younger students to say it is important to provide access to high-quality, diverse books and content: 11–14 (**37%**), 15–18 (**38%**), 8–10 (**33%**), and 7 and under (**34%**).
- Teachers are **more likely** to say prioritizing independent reading is a top five critical topic (**25%**) than pre-K–12 administrators (**19%**), higher education professionals (**18%**), and literacy consultants (**16%**).
- Pre-K–12 administrators (**85%**) are **more likely** to say that 20+ minutes a day should be dedicated to independent reading as compared with higher education professionals (**80%**) and literacy consultants (**78%**).
- A desire to strengthen school libraries is **more often** cited by literacy professionals in urban settings (**21%**) compared with those from rural settings (**16%**) and suburban settings (**16%**).

Appendix A: Acknowledgments

THE WHAT'S HOT IN LITERACY SURVEY RESULTS have been a trusted resource for classroom teachers, teacher educators, researchers, and literacy leaders across the spectrum for 20-plus years. ILA thanks the following literacy professionals who played a part in the qualitative phase of this year's project by participating in one of four online focus groups. Their feedback was used to select the topics included in the 2020 survey.

- **Patrick Burke**, Lecturer, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, Ireland
- **Esmeralda Carini**, Literacy District Educational Specialist, Hawaii Department of Education
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- **Paul Emerich France**, Teacher, The Latin School of Chicago, Illinois
- **Sean Gaillard**, Principal, Moore Magnet Elementary School, North Carolina
- **Maureen Hall**, Literacy Coach, Rutgers Center for Literacy Development, New Jersey
- **Jacy Ippolito**, Associate Professor and Department Chair, Salem State University, Massachusetts
- **Aeriale Johnson**, Teacher, Washington Elementary School, California
- **Margaret G. McKeown**, Clinical Professor Emerita, Senior Scientist, Learning Research and Development Center, University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
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- **Molly Ness**, Associate Professor, Fordham University, New York
- **Stephen Peters**, ILA Vice President of the Board and Superintendent, Laurens County School District 55, South Carolina
- **Eugene Pringle Jr.**, Assistant Professor, Bethune-Cookman University, Florida
- **Melissa Sonnek**, Elementary Program Administrator, Roseville Area Schools, Minnesota
- **Jacob Olaoluwa Sule**, Executive Director, iRead To Live Initiative, Nigeria
- **Jon M. Wargo**, Assistant Professor, Boston College, Massachusetts

Appendix B: Locations Represented

THE ILA 2020 WHAT'S HOT IN LITERACY SURVEY received 1,443 responses from the following 65 countries and territories:

Afghanistan	Honduras	Portugal	UK - Armed Forces Europe (APO AE)
Australia	India	Puerto Rico	United States
Brazil	Indonesia	Romania	Venezuela
Bulgaria	Ireland	Rwanda	Virgin Islands, British
Cambodia	Israel	Saint Kitts and Nevis	Yemen
Cameroon	Jamaica	Saint Lucia	
Canada	Japan	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	
Cayman Islands	Kenya	Serbia	
China	Luxembourg	Sierra Leone	
Colombia	Malaysia	Singapore	
Croatia	Mauritius	South Africa	
Czech Republic	Mexico	South Korea, Republic of	
Denmark	Mozambique	South Sudan	
Egypt, Arab Rep.	Nepal	Sweden	
eSwatini (formerly Swaziland)	Netherlands	Taiwan	
Finland	New Zealand	Thailand	
Germany	Nigeria	Trinidad and Tobago	
Ghana	Pakistan	Turkey	
Grenada	Peru	Uganda	
Guam	Philippines	United Kingdom	

Appendix C: Subgroup Definitions

FOR THE PURPOSE OF EXAMINING VARIATIONS among survey answers, we asked respondents to select the role with which they most closely identified. We then organized the selections into the categories of Teachers, Pre-K–12 Administrators, Literacy Consultants, and Higher Education Professionals.

Teachers

Classroom Teacher
Librarian/Media Specialist
Literacy Coordinator/Supervisor
Literacy/Instructional Coach
Reading/Literacy Specialist
Special Education Teacher

Pre-K–12 Administrators

School Administrator
District Administrator

Literacy Consultants

Literacy/Education Consultant for Pre-K–12 Schools
Literacy/Education Consultant Outside of Pre-K–12 Schools

Higher Education Professionals

Full-Time Student
Researcher/Scholar
Teacher Educator
University/College Administrator



Literacy is the key to making our world a better place, which is something we should all strive for—to leave it better than we found it.

—School Administrator, Canada

**INTERNATIONAL
LITERACY
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About the International Literacy Association

The International Literacy Association (ILA) is a global advocacy and membership organization dedicated to advancing literacy for all through its network of more than 300,000 literacy educators, researchers, and experts across 146 countries. With over 60 years of experience, ILA has set the standard for how literacy is defined, taught, and evaluated. ILA's *Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals 2017* provides an evidence-based benchmark for the development and evaluation of literacy professional preparation programs. ILA collaborates with partners across the world to develop, gather, and disseminate high-quality resources, best practices, and cutting-edge research to empower educators, inspire students, and inform policymakers. ILA publishes *The Reading Teacher*, *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, and *Reading Research Quarterly*, which are peer reviewed and edited by leaders in the field. For more information, visit literacyworldwide.org.



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