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Parent Perceptions Poll

2025-2026

Prepare for Kids Hope Alliance

Historical Overview

In summer 2022, the Jacksonville Public Education Fund (JPEF) released a brief based on a countywide representative poll of 304 parents of children under age 12. The poll examined parents' awareness of the importance of early literacy, their own and their children's reading behaviors, and their access to reading resources. The brief found that Duval parents, across all demographic categories (such as race, zip code, and education), shared similar beliefs about the importance of early literacy to later success. However, it also revealed that some parents face significant barriers to being as involved in their children's learning as they would like. In response, the READ JAX steering committee saw an opportunity to deepen impact by focusing subsequent efforts on eight schools where related work was already underway and where families reported barriers to access.

During the 2023-24 academic school year, JPEF repeated the parent perceptions poll in the same eight targeted schools using parent information provided by Duval County Public Schools. JPEF once again partnered with the Public Opinion Research Lab (PORL) at the University of North Florida to implement the poll. This study utilized a multi-modal design incorporating both telephone and online surveys. The final sample consisted of 294 parents of children under the age of 12 in the eight targeted schools. The survey was directed by Dr. Michael Binder, PORL faculty director, and UNF professor of political science. Parents were asked about their beliefs about literacy, reading behaviors, and ease of access to reading resources. The responses were synthesized into school-level insights for targeted intervention in the eight targeted schools.

After consulting with experts, including READ JAX steering committee, Literacy Enhanced Afterschool Providers (LEAP), and Parents Who Lead (PWL) Alumni who were engaged in targeted interventions with family engagement for the eight targeted schools, the parent perception poll was revised to focus on external factors contributing to student absenteeism. Although LEAP partners routinely collect data on student growth, parent satisfaction and literacy practices, and resource provision among participants in their programs, they identified a gap in a foundational enabling condition of their work: chronic absenteeism. Chronically absent students cannot benefit from LEAP after-school programming provided by Boys and Girls Clubs of Northeast Florida (BGCNF) and Communities in Schools (CiS), because participation requires school-day attendance. Partners requested support in better understanding the factors contributing to student absences. To address this need, the survey examined barriers across five domains. The domains for this survey were drawn from the Ecological Systems Framework as well as community convening feedback; the items themselves were drawn from empirically validated tools. The domains are transportation, safety, major life events, school operations, and institutional resources.

2025-26 Parent Perceptions Poll Findings

The 2025-26 parent perceptions poll, the "Family School Experience Survey," was administered by READ USA, Inc. and launched in the fall of the 2025-26 school year using the revised questions focused on barriers to attendance (see Appendix A). Throughout this report, reading performance disparities are understood as symptoms of systemic issues, not a reflection of student skill or family commitment to education. LEAP programming can only reach students who show up, making the upstream barriers that contribute to absenteeism the central focus of this survey.

The survey received 191 responses and captured family experiences related to transportation, school access, neighborhood safety, school relationships, afterschool participation, housing stability, major life events, institutional trust, and awareness of community resources. Several key themes emerged from the findings.

Theme I: Transportation Equity and Infrastructure Barriers

Transportation is the most immediate and tangible barrier between families and consistent school attendance. Most respondents (75%) rely on personal vehicles to get their children to school, which means attendance can be disrupted by car repairs, gas costs, or other unexpected expenses. Caregivers reported an average cost of \$1,277 for a major unexpected repair. Access to transportation is therefore not, by itself, a sufficient indicator of consistent school access; rather, consistent access relies on financial stability and vehicle reliability.

While 8% of respondents indicated that their child walked to school, walking is not a reliable alternative for many families due to neighborhood safety concerns, discussed below in Theme II. Bus service appeared reliable among the small number of families using it, but the sample was too limited to draw broader conclusions.

In Families' Own Words

"When my truck breaks down unexpectedly or if I don't have any gas money... my kids walk 4 miles every day... now I refuse to walk eight miles... so they'll just stay home."

"I had to walk them to school, back home, then walk back to pick them up... just for them not to miss school."

"Transportation/no car/limited income and financial resources."

Theme II: Community Safety and Neighborhood Conditions

Safety concerns shape every aspect of community movement for families in the targeted neighborhoods, from whether a child can walk to the school gate to whether a caregiver feels secure waiting at a bus stop. As mentioned above, 79% of respondents indicated that their child would have to cross major highways or streets to walk to school. Additionally, the concerns most frequently cited in the open-ended responses were crime, drugs, violence, theft, and speeding vehicles. A smaller set of respondents also cited food deserts, lack of adequate resources, and poor infrastructure, including potholes and missing sidewalks.

Safety Questions	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
"My child can walk to school without crossing major highways or streets."	18.1%	78.9%	3.0%
"People can travel freely anytime, anywhere, including late at night without being on alert."	17.5%	66.9%	15.7%
"People aren't worried they will be a victim of a crime."	18.2%	52.1%	29.7%
"People are not harassed when walking down the street."	28.5%	46.7%	24.8%
"People feel safe and secure in their homes."	70.5%	11.4%	18.1%

In Families' Own Words

"Every day is different... it's always something going on... shootings, theft... people are harassed by strangers sometimes. You have to stay alert even during the day."

"The crime and murder rate in Jacksonville has gone up drastically."

"People don't pay attention and swerve and can run you over."

Theme III: Family Stability and Housing Security

Attendance issues are frequently symptoms of broader household instability, not a lack of commitment to education. When the home environment is in crisis, consistent school attendance becomes secondary to managing immediate survival needs. The survey data confirms that a meaningful share of families in this sample experienced significant disruptions during the data collection period.

Among the 191 respondents, 86 (45%) reported experiencing at least one major life event in the six months prior to taking the survey. The most common disruptions reported were:

- Death of a family member: 34 respondents
- Moving: 24 respondents
- New job: 18 respondents
- Job loss: 17 respondents
- Justice involvement: 8 respondents

On housing, most respondents reported stable housing situations (rented or owned homes). However, 9 respondents reported living in non-stable conditions, including temporary stays with relatives or friends, hotel or motel stays, transitional housing, shelters, or camper living. Additionally, 37% of respondents who answered the question about housing costs reported a rent or mortgage increase that made payment difficult, adding rising housing costs to the financial pressures described in Theme I.

Among respondents who reported moving in the past 12 months, the data shows a pattern consistent with the infographic in Appendix B: rent increases correlate with mobility, and mobility disrupts school consistency.

In Families' Own Words

"I have no family or friends... to help during times like this."

Theme IV: Institutional Trust and the Parent-School Relationship

One of the most important findings in this dataset is what it reveals about the parent-school relationship specifically. Unlike broader institutional trust, which is fragile across most systems, families in this sample report a notably positive relationship with their children's schools.

Among respondents who answered the school relationship questions (approximately 156 per item):

- 82% say they always feel welcome at their child's school
- 80% say school staff always care about their child and family
- 72% say school administration always follows through on promises
- 87% are satisfied with school staff communication

This data reveals that families are not disengaged from their schools. The barriers driving absenteeism are largely external to the school building, which strengthens the case for community-level and city-level intervention rather than school-level blame.

Trust in broader systems tells a more complicated story. The survey asked respondents to rate their level of trust in nine institutions. The results (approximately 130 respondents per item) reveal a clear hierarchy:

Institution	% Who Trust (Strongly or Somewhat Agree)
Community providers (afterschool programs)	49%
School system	46%
Social Services	42%
Co-workers	39%
Healthcare system	38%
Neighbors	38%
Social Workers	38%
Police	37%
Justice system	32%

Community providers (afterschool programs) rank highest, which is a direct validation of the LEAP model, and the relational investment BGCNF and CiS have made in these communities. The justice system ranks lowest at 32%, consistent with historical and lived-experience patterns. Police trust at 37% is low but not the lowest, suggesting a nuanced picture rather than blanket institutional rejection.

Notably, 40% of respondents feel social services benefit families in their neighborhood, while another 30% are unsure. This substantial uncertainty, rather than outright distrust, points to a visibility and access problem: services may exist, but families either do not know how to reach them or have encountered enough barriers that they have disengaged.

The survey also captured school-level operational changes that affect family trust. Among respondents who answered questions about school changes, 27% reported their child's school had changed in the past year, and 25% reported a change in principal or administrative staff.

Administrative turnover is consistently identified in the literature as a trust-eroding factor, and the survey data reflects this as a real presence in these communities.

Theme V: Families Are Already Connected

Despite the barriers documented in the themes above, families in this sample are not disconnected from the educational ecosystem available to them. Ninety-one percent of families reported that their children participate in afterschool programs, with 95% of these families choosing the Boys and Girls Club of Northeast Florida. This high rate of participation demonstrates that families are actively seeking out and engaging with the resources already in place.

This finding sharpens the urgency of the barriers identified earlier. Chronically absent students cannot benefit from LEAP programming, regardless of how engaged their families are with the afterschool ecosystem, because participation depends on school-day attendance. In other words, high engagement and high barriers are coexisting in the same families: the demand and willingness to participate are present, but upstream obstacles like transportation, safety, and housing instability are preventing that engagement from translating into consistent attendance. This reinforces that removing these upstream barriers, rather than increasing family motivation, is the more essential lever for improving outcomes.

Theme VI: Willing but Underserved

Families in this sample also expressed a clear openness to additional support. Seventy-two percent said they would be open to receiving information about programs addressing issues they care about, indicating that families are ready and willing to be reached by the right outreach.

At the same time, a visibility gap persists. According to the infographic summary, only 48% of families feel that social services benefit their neighborhood, suggesting many are not yet convinced that these programs are having a meaningful effect on the ground. Taken together with the openness to outreach noted above, this points to a usability and access problem rather than a trust problem: families are not rejecting these services outright, but many are not yet seeing or feeling their impact. Closing this gap will likely require more visible, proactive, and trusted outreach rather than passive availability of services.

What Families Are Asking For

- Infrastructure investment: Sidewalk repair and installation along school routes crossing major highways, lower speed limits in residential school zones, and improved street lighting were cited repeatedly in both survey open-ends and listening sessions.
- Crime reduction and neighborhood safety: Direct intervention on violence, drug activity, and harassment, with a community engagement approach rather than reliance on policing alone.
- Resource visibility and navigation support: 72% of respondents say they are open to receiving program information, but 30% are unsure whether social services benefit families in their neighborhood. Closing this usability gap requires proactive, trusted outreach rather than passive publication.

Conclusion

The 191 families who completed the 2025-26 Family School Experience Survey have provided a clear, data-grounded picture of what stands between children in the eight targeted schools and the literacy outcomes they deserve. The barriers are structural. Transportation fragility, unsafe walking conditions, housing instability, life disruptions, and uneven access to trusted institutional support are not problems of individual motivation; they are systems of constraint that require systems-level responses.

At the same time, this data carries an important message of strength. Families in these communities deeply trust their children's schools and the community providers who serve them. The LEAP model, and the relational investment of BGCNF and CiS in particular, has earned genuine confidence from the families it serves. That relational capital is an asset worth protecting and building on.

The path forward requires treating parent voice not as background context but as strategic intelligence. The families in this survey have identified the barriers, named the solutions, and demonstrated both their commitment to education and their openness to support. The next step is to match that commitment at the city, systems, and sector level.

Appendix A: 2025-26 Parent Poll/Survey

Transportation Equity (Access & Cost Barriers)

- Distance (time): About how long, in minutes, does it take you to get your child(ren) to school?
- Distance (mileage): About how far, in miles, is your child's school from your place of residence?
- Primary modality of getting to school: How does your child travel to school most days? (walk, car, bus, bike, other public transit)
- Consistent bus access (if bus is selected): How often does the bus arrive on time? How easy is it to get to the bus stop? Has the bus schedule or route changed in the past 6 months?
- Consistent independent car access (if car is selected): Do you have a license? Do you have your own personal vehicle?
- Sidewalks/walkability (if car is selected): Are there sidewalks along the walk from your residence to the school? What conditions are they in?
- Average monthly cost (gas, maintenance, passes): How much do you spend on gas per month? How frequently do you pay for routine maintenance? When was the last unexpected major repair, and what did it cost?

Safety (Perceived Barriers)

- Feeling safe walking to school/work: My child(ren) can walk to school without crossing major highways or streets. People can travel freely anytime, anywhere, including late at night, without being on alert. People feel safe and secure in their homes. People aren't worried they will be a victim of a crime.
- Neighborhood violence: People are not harassed when walking down the street. Can you tell me a story about why you feel that way? (open-ended)

School Operations (Structural & Policy-Driven Barriers)

- School change: In the past year, has your child(ren)'s school changed? If so, why? (anticipated reasons: school closed, family moved, child in foster care, school planned for closure, other)
- Schedule change: In the past year, has your child(ren)'s school schedule changed? If so, why?
- Administrative change: In the past year, has your child(ren)'s principal or other administrative staff changed?
- Consistent school bus access: How often does the school bus arrive on time? How easy is it for your child(ren) to get to the bus stop? Has the bus schedule or route changed in the past 6 months?
- OST programs utilized: Does your child attend after-school or out-of-school time programs? If so, which organization(s)? (READ USA, Communities in Schools, Boys and Girls Club, The Performers Academy, Girl Scouts, MaliVai Washington Youth Foundation, Born 2 Excel, YMCA, other)
- Relationships with school staff: Do you feel welcome at your child's school? Do you feel staff care about your child(ren) and family? Do administrators follow through on promises? Can you share a story about why you responded this way?
- Communication from school: Are you satisfied with how often and in what way school staff communicate with you about your child? Please explain.

Major Life Events (Individual Barriers)

- In the last 6 months, have you experienced: moving, death of a family member, birth of a family member, marriage, new job, job loss, divorce, or justice involvement?

- Unhoused/insecure housing: In the past 12 months, have you slept in a rented/owned home, with family, at a shelter, in a camper, temporarily with a relative or friend, at a hotel/motel without a permanent home, in transitional housing, at a group home, or at a treatment center?
- In the past 12 months, how many times have you moved?
- In the past 12 months, was there a rent or mortgage increase that made payment difficult? Did you not pay or underpay rent or mortgage?
- Domestic abuse/other ACEs: Has anyone in your home ever hit, punched, beaten, or threatened to harm each other?

Institutional Resources (Interpersonal & Historical Barriers)

- Trust: How strongly do you agree or disagree that the following can be trusted — the healthcare system, the police, the school system, community providers (such as afterschool programs), social services, social workers, the justice system, your neighbors, your co-workers?
- Awareness & access: What do you feel is the biggest problem in your neighborhood, and what should be done about it? Do social services and programs benefit families in your neighborhood? Would you be open to receiving information about a program addressing that issue? Does anything prevent you from accessing hospitals, schools, or other community resources?

Additional Factors Included in Analyses

- Infrastructure spending
- Rate of poverty
- Rate of disability
- External data sources on neighborhood safety
- Principal years of experience
- Home zip code and school zip code

Open-Ended

- Is there anything we did not ask about or talk about that affects why you go to school?

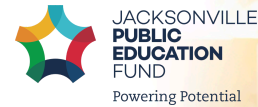
Sidewalk Quality Definitions

- Perfect/Very Good: No defects, or nearly no defects, and no surface conditions that would impact mobility.
- Good: Sidewalks have some cracks or other imperfections, but not to a degree that presents immediate significant mobility concerns.
- Moderate: Sidewalk has some deterioration that may currently or imminently present mobility challenges.
- Poor: Sidewalk presents immediate mobility concerns and/or risks near-term deterioration.
- Critical: Sidewalk has significant damage or other conditions that make it nearly completely impassable for individuals using mobility-assistance devices.

Appendix B: 2025-26 Infographic

FAMILY SCHOOL EXPERIENCE SURVEY

Barriers to Attendance and Early Literacy
2025 Survey Findings from Northeast Florida



This infographic presents findings from the 2025 Family School Experience Survey, collecting 191 responses from families in the Arlington, Northside, and Westside clusters of Northeast Florida. The core takeaway is a shift in perspective: reading disparities and chronic absenteeism are symptoms of systemic issues, specifically hazardous walking routes, car dependency, and housing instability, rather than a lack of parental dedication to education. The data is organized into six thematic areas that contrast significant physical and economic barriers with strong social and emotional foundations. While families feel highly welcome and satisfied with their schools, external "upstream" barriers frequently prevent students from consistently accessing the educational and afterschool ecosystems available to them.



1

THEME 1: TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



75%

Rely on Car Travel

Daily attendance is fragile and tied to vehicle operability, with an average unexpected repair cost of \$1,274.



7%

Use the Bus

Low usage reinforces that public transit is currently not a reliable alternative for families in these clusters.



79%

Lack Safe Walkways

Most families disagree that their child can walk to school safely without crossing major highways or busy streets.

2

THEME 2: CONSTANT SAFETY CONDITIONS



66%

Cannot Travel Freely Without Being on Guard

Families report they must remain constantly alert while moving through their neighborhoods.



52%

Worry About Crime

Over half of respondents are unsure or disagree that they will not be a victim of crime in their community.



46%

Experience Harassment

Nearly half of families report that people are often harassed or lack security when walking down the street.

3

THEME 3: FAMILY STABILITY AND HOUSING



45%

Faced Major Life Disruptions

Nearly half of families experienced events like the death of a family member, moving, or job changes in the last six months.



37%

Struggle with Rising Housing Costs

Reported rent or mortgage increases make payments difficult, driving mobility and instability.

The Weight of Isolation

Families often feel the absence of a "village" or community support network during times of crisis.

– Survey Respondent

4

THEME 4: INSTITUTIONAL TRUST & RELATIONSHIPS



82%

Always Feel Welcome

Despite external barriers, families report a consistently positive relationship with their child's school.



87%

Satisfied with Communication

An overwhelming majority of families are satisfied with how school staff communicate with them.



Administrative Stability Matters

27% of families reported a school change and 25% reported a change in principal in the past year, impacting relational trust.

The Trust Hierarchy:



5

THEME 5: FAMILIES ARE ALREADY CONNECTED



91%

Participate in Afterschool Programs

Families are easily embedded in the educational ecosystem, with 95% of these families choosing the Boys and Girls Club of Northeast Florida.



High Engagement vs. High Barriers

Chronically absent students cannot benefit from LEAP programming, making the removal of "upstream" barriers essential.

6

THEME 6: WILLING BUT UNDERSERVED



72%

Are Open to More Information

Families are ready to be reached and want information about programs addressing issues they care about.



48%

The Visibility Gap

Only 48% feel social services benefit their neighborhood; this is identified as a usability and access gap, not a trust gap.

Appendix C: 2025-26 Infographic Summary

The 2025 Family School Experience Survey infographic presents findings from 191 responses collected from families in the Arlington, Northside, and Westside clusters of Northeast Florida. Its core takeaway is a shift in perspective: reading disparities and chronic absenteeism are symptoms of systemic issues, specifically hazardous walking routes, car dependency, and housing instability, rather than a lack of parental dedication to education. The data is organized into six thematic areas that contrast significant physical and economic barriers with strong social and emotional foundations. While families feel highly welcome and satisfied with their schools, external “upstream” barriers frequently prevent students from consistently accessing the educational and afterschool ecosystems available to them.

Theme 1: Transportation and Infrastructure

- Rely on car travel: 75% — Daily attendance is fragile and tied to vehicle operability, with an average unexpected repair cost of \$1,274.
- Use the bus: 7% — Low usage reinforces that public transit is currently not a reliable alternative for families in these clusters.
- Lack safe walkways: 79% — Most families disagree that their child can walk to school safely without crossing major highways or busy streets.

Theme 2: Constant Safety Conditions

- Cannot travel freely without being on guard: 66% — Families report they must remain constantly alert while moving through their neighborhoods.
- Worry about crime: 52% — Over half of respondents are unsure or disagree that they will not be a victim of crime in their community.
- Experience harassment: 46% — Nearly half of families report that people are often harassed or lack security when walking down the street.

Theme 3: Family Stability and Housing

- Faced major life disruptions: 45% — Nearly half of families experienced events such as the death of a family member, moving, or job changes in the last six months.
- Struggle with rising housing costs: 37% — Reported rent or mortgage increases make payments difficult, driving mobility and instability.
- Survey respondent quote: Families often feel the absence of a “village” or community support network during times of crisis.

Theme 4: Institutional Trust and Relationships

- Always feel welcome: 82% — Despite external barriers, families report a consistently positive relationship with their child's school.
- Satisfied with communication: 87% — An overwhelming majority of families are satisfied with how school staff communicate with them.
- Administrative stability matters: 27% of families reported a school change and 25% reported a change in principal in the past year, impacting relational trust.

Theme 5: Families Are Already Connected

- Participate in afterschool programs: 91% — Families are easily embedded in the educational ecosystem, with 95% of these families choosing the Boys and Girls Club of Northeast Florida.

- High engagement vs. high barriers: Chronically absent students cannot benefit from LEAP programming, making the removal of “upstream” barriers essential.

Theme 6: Willing but Underserved

- Are open to more information: 72% — Families are ready to be reached and want information about programs addressing issues they care about.
- The visibility gap: 48% — Only 48% feel social services benefit their neighborhood; this is identified as a usability and access gap, not a trust gap.