

# **Closing the Equity Gaps for Students with Autism & Intellectual Disabilities in the Inland Empire**



**April 2022**

[ieautism.org](http://ieautism.org)

# Acknowledgements

The Autism Society Inland Empire is grateful to the Inland Empire Community Foundation for funding this project tackling the issue of disability and ethnicity in our education system. Because of their funding, we were able to bring the most experienced organizations in this field together and gather the most pressing educational issues and stakeholder input on how to empower and advocate for change. Thank you for your investment in our disability community.

We want to thank the 1100 parents who took our survey and the 80 families who participated in the focus groups. Thank you to the non-profits who helped us gather the data. A special thank you to the CLASE community of Practice leaders, which serves the Inland Empire Developmental Disability community. They are passionate leaders who serve their community with love and compassion. It is a privilege to serve with you.

This paper was prepared by a few people I would like to recognize for their dedication to this project and our community: Clara Garcia, Director of Programs and Facilitator of the CLASE Community of Practice, and Virginia Sosa. Thank you both for your hard work and being tireless advocates for Autism and Developmental Disability community.

We hope that the data and stories will help our community engage in a united front in educational policymaking and systems change.

Sincerely,

*Beth Burt*

Beth Burt  
Executive Director  
Autism Society Inland Empire



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# Introduction

The Autism Society Inland Empire is grateful to the Inland Empire Community Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for funding this project tackling the issue of disability and ethnicity in our education system.

It is crucial to address the intersectionality of how students with multi-minority status such as disability and ethnicity can face double discrimination. Roughly 65% of students living in the Riverside and San Bernardino Counties are Latino. One out of eight students in special education is a student with Autism or Intellectual Disabilities (ID); over 13,000 students live in the Inland Empire, which includes Riverside and San Bernardino Counties (CA Dataquest 2018/19).

Latino parents have long reported no translation services, no interpreters at Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings, the inability to communicate with teachers or staff, lack of communication, and lack of expectations and knowledge on how to advocate for school services. Achievement measures such as graduation rates for the special education population are not published, leaving many questions on how equitable our special education system is, especially for Latino families.

COVID exasperated the social and racial disparities within the special education system, specifically for students with Autism and/or Intellectual Disabilities. This presents an opportunity to address these disparities with bold strategies beyond short-term triage.

We engaged over 1,200 people, including families, educators, and community leaders, to identify obstacles to educational equity, gather qualitative and quantitative data on academic achievement and access/quality of services, and develop strategies for overcoming identified barriers.

We hope this report can serve as a template for constituents to engage in educational policymaking and meaningful systems change.





# Equity Gaps for Students with Autism & Intellectual Disabilities in the Inland Empire

Educational equity incorporates ideas of access, opportunity, and need. Students with Autism or Intellectual Disabilities make up 21% of the special education population yet little is known about the issues facing this community.

Thank you to the Inland Empire Community Foundation for their generosity to fund this project to gather this data. Over 1200 parents living in the Inland Empire participated in the project.

Regardless of race and ethnicity, a substantial number of parents of children with Autism or Intellectual Disabilities feel that their children are not valued as individuals with the capacity to learn or progress.



**32%**

of parents surveyed feel the school values their special needs child "very little" or "not at all"



feel the teacher doesn't like or want their child in class.



## Hispanic students with Autism

were less likely to be identified with Autism, more likely to be placed in separate classrooms, and less likely to receive services than white students.

**39%**

Parents who felt discriminated against, disrespected, made to feel less than at a special education meeting.



**1 in 3**

students with Autism/Intellectual Disabilities experience bullying.

Over half (53%) of the Spanish-speaking families report asking for an interpreter for an IEP and not receiving one; 40% of Spanish-speaking families do not receive the translation of written IEP documents within 60 days.



Stark differences exist in how special education Spanish-speaking families share and attain information.

Parents Who Are Slightly Comfortable or Not Comfortable Sharing Concerns at a Special Education IEP Meeting





# How We Gathered Our Data

We appreciate the willingness of our Inland Empire parents to share their experiences, frustrations, and hopes and allow us to capture this data for this report.

Feedback from stakeholders, CLASE Community of Practice of Inland Empire Latino leaders, Interpreters at IEPs, and translations of IEP documents gathered in July 2021 were considered when creating a survey to identify educational disparities in the Inland Empire special education population.

The survey was translated into Spanish and distributed electronically through different social media platforms from September 20-November 1, 2021, using over 20 organizations viewed as trusted messengers in the special needs and Latino communities. Over 30,000 households were reached with the request to complete the survey.

Six focus groups were also conducted via Zoom by two Spanish-speaking Equity Project team members known in the community to ensure that the parents felt more comfortable talking about sensitive topics. A total of 80 parents participated in these focus groups. Each meeting had a different issue dominating the talking space for parents; all the sessions had common themes and areas of concern. Comments from the focus groups and survey participants are noted in the appropriate topic area.

**A combined total of 1,169 English and Spanish surveys were completed and 80 people participated in focus groups.**

- 54% of families live in Riverside County, and 46% live in San Bernardino County.
- The majority of survey participants are Hispanic (47%) and White (30%). The remainder is Black (8%), Asian Pacific Islander (8%), American Indian/Alaskan Native (3%), Two or more (4%), and Other (1%).
- The languages spoken mainly at home are English (77%) and Spanish (23%).
- The primary diagnosis for 76% of families is Autism and 24% for Intellectual Disability.
- 39% of families have a child in elementary, 15% in Preschool or TK, 19% in middle school, 18% in High school, and 9% in adult transition.
- 86% of survey participants have a child in special education and are currently on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).



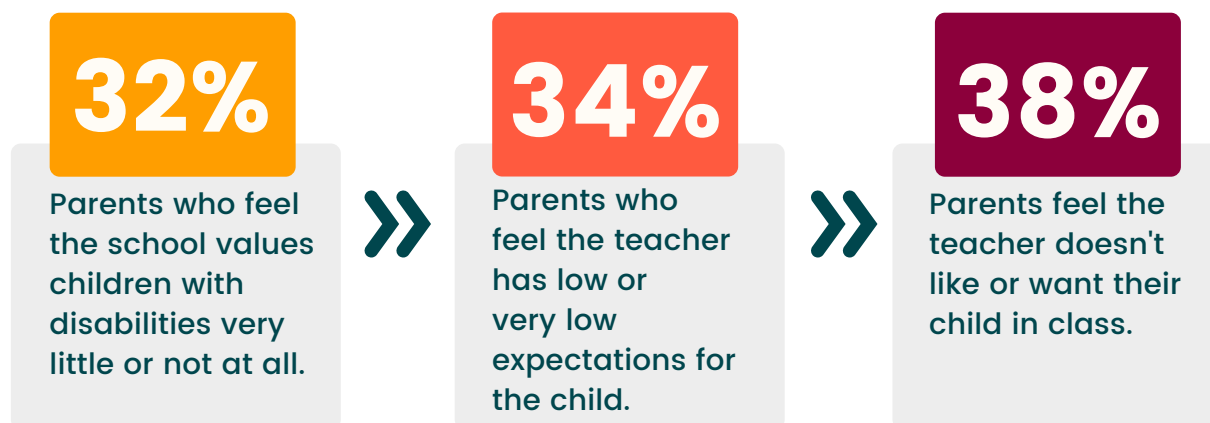
# Key Finding 1:

One in three special education parents feel their child is not valued by the school; 38% of parents feel the teacher does not like or want their child in the classroom.



One of the most heartbreaking findings was the number of parents, regardless of race and ethnicity, who feel that their children are not valued as individuals with the capacity to learn or progress, and the same number of parents who felt disrespected or discriminated against. Our data showed that 1/3 of families felt the school did not value their children, to a shocking 38% felt the teacher did not like or want their child in their class.

## FEELINGS OF ACCEPTANCE OF STUDENTS WITH AUTISM/INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES



938 SURVEY RESPONDENTS

We found the issue of disrespect is complex, with cultural differences. An act of disrespect is subjective and was rarely reported in an obvious, overt way by a district staff member toward a special needs child or parent.

Comments such as show the emotion of parents feeling their child is being rejected by the teacher and the school:

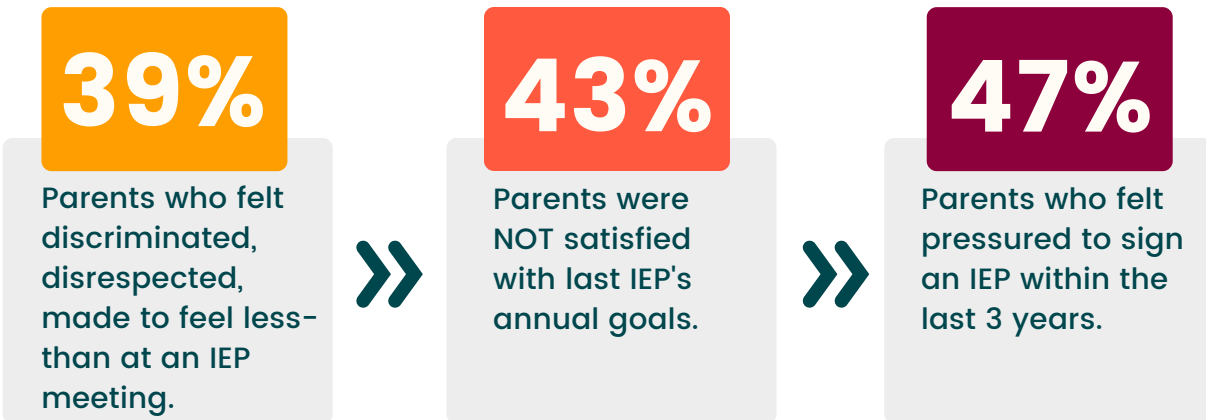
*"Que haya gente que realmente quiera a los niños, que no le dé asco..." [For there to be people that really love the children, who won't be disgusted...]*

*"...sí a los niños los hicieran convivir un poco más en clases regulares, en la hora de receso, fuera un poco menos para mí la discriminación..." [... if the children were made to coexist together a little more in regular classes, at recess time, the discrimination would be a little less for me...]*

# Key Finding 1:

One in three special education parents feel their child is not valued by the school; 38% of parents feel the teacher does not like or want their child in the classroom.

## FEELINGS OF RESPECT OF PARENTS OF STUDENTS WITH AUTISM/INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES



938 SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Furthermore, 40% of parents surveyed felt they had been discriminated against, disrespected, or made to feel less than at an IEP meeting. We took many of these issues and asked more in-depth questions to focus groups of 80 parents.

Parents reported a variety of subtle ways that made them feel devalued and insignificant but can be minimized or brushed off as a misinterpretation or overreaction on the parent's part:

- IEP goals are not worked on or met; IEP teams lack of preparation.
- Staff does not take the time to get to know their children and do not know their abilities or challenges.
- Not included in school activities.
- Families are not given services they have asked for or services that support the child's needs.
- Parents are not provided with proper interpretation and translated documents so they can be part of the decision-making process.
- Parents' time is not respected. This includes starting meetings late, not being prepared before the meeting start time, required IEP team members not being in attendance or leaving the meeting early, constantly looking at the time, IEP Team members having unrelated side conversations during the meeting, especially while the interpreter is speaking.
- **Parents feel their child is not treated with dignity.**

Parents also reported that there were times that parents didn't feel disrespected at the moment. Still, as years passed and they became more informed on their child's rights and parental rights, they reflected and realized they had been disrespected during prior interactions. Parents believe that most parents may not know they are being taken advantage of or won't file any complaints because of a cultural inclination not to want to attract attention to themselves and the family and avoid retaliation towards their child.



# Key Finding 1:

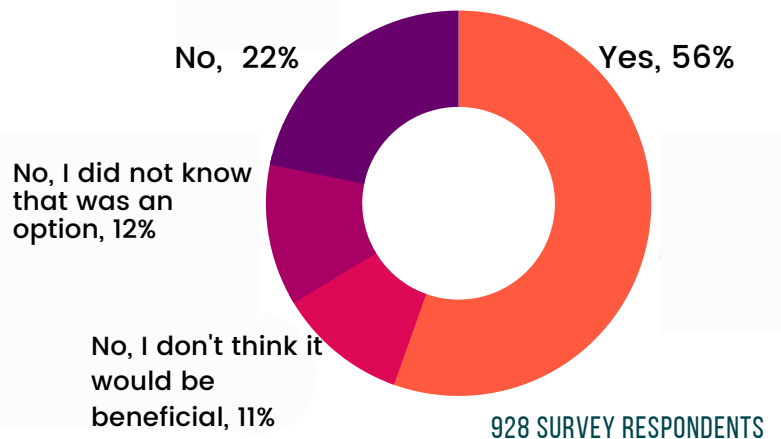
One in three special education parents feel their child is not valued by the school; 38% of parents feel the teacher does not like or want their child in the classroom.



Survey respondents indicated that (56%) of the students with Autism/IDD had had the opportunity to participate alongside other students without disabilities in PE, computer time, or music. However, parents consider inclusion to be things such as being included in the school campus culture. To be not just invited but also be included, even if that means that schools need to provide support for all students to be able to participate.

Adding to these feelings are the survey reports regarding inclusion. Inclusion is not just about the classroom and access to the same curriculum; it goes far beyond that. Inclusion is a philosophy based on the belief that ALL students belong to their school community - not just invited but also to be supported with a culture of belonging and acceptance.

## STUDENTS WITH AUTISM/IDD WHO PARTICIPATE ALONGSIDE STUDENTS WITHOUT DISABILITIES

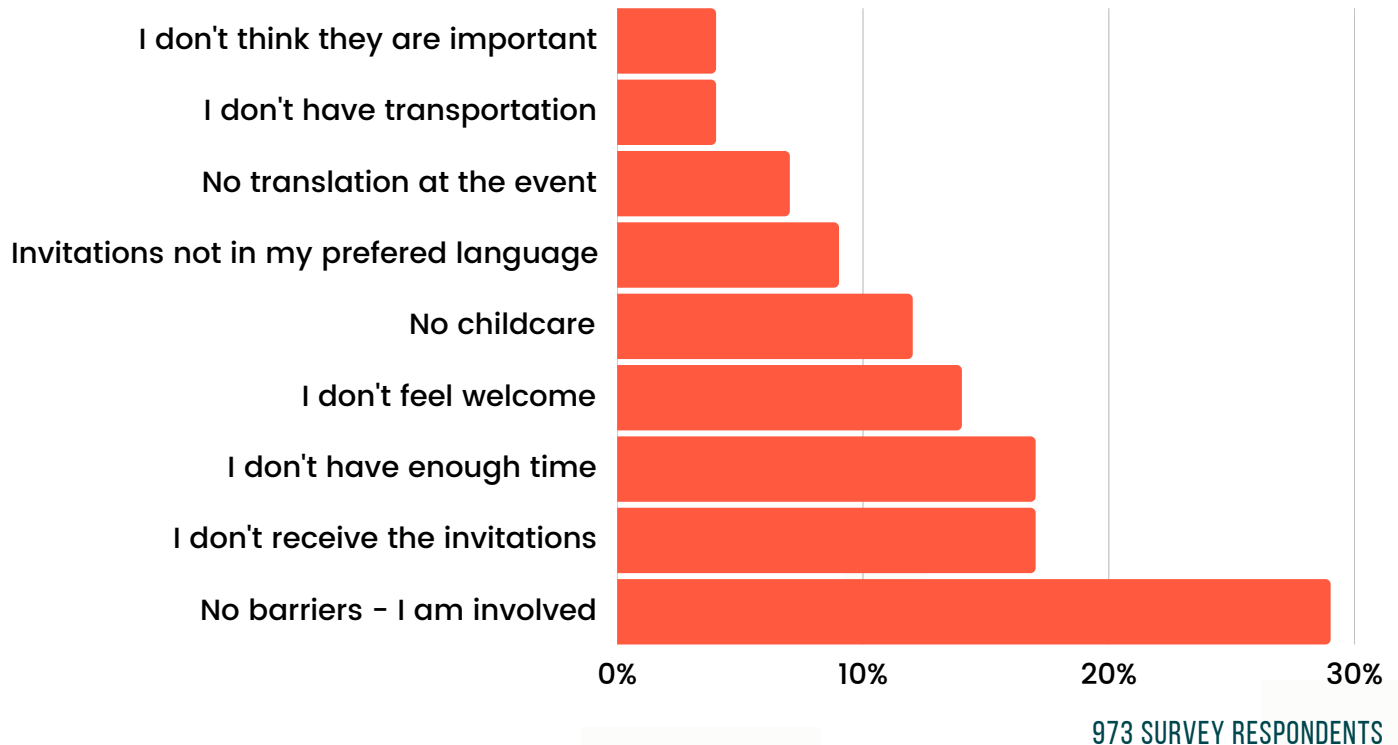


*"In all honesty, some schools or school personnel don't care about our kids with disabilities. They will ignore concerns and continue to do things that can affect our kids. Our kids don't take field trips because it's always an issue. It's very sad to watch how neurotypical kids get to go to Disneyland or other theme parks before covid because they have perfect attendance or because they advanced in math. When our kids overcome obstacles or excel academically, they just get congrats from the special Ed teacher who has worked hard to help them excel."*

# Key Finding 1:

One in three special education parents feel their child is not valued by the school; 38% of parents feel the teacher does not like or want their child in the classroom.

## BIGGEST BARRIER KEEPING YOU FROM PARTICIPATING IN SCHOOL EVENTS



We also explored the subject of parent involvement in school; 29% of parents with students of Autism/ID reported being involved in school events, 14% reported not feeling welcomed, 9% advised invitations to these events were not in their preferred language. We received many comments from families who felt that it was not a welcoming environment, including:

*"I get anxious, unsure how to participate with such vast differences between my child and others. Other parents don't understand a lot about autism and that feels alienating. I feel like neurotypical children and their families are unable to empathize with us."*

*"I don't like to support school events because my child's class never gets to be a part of things."*

*"Our kids are invited, but they are not part of the activities."*






# Call to Action:

**Need intentional planning, training and accountability for a culture of inclusion, belonging, and respect for all students and parents.**

## **CREATE A CULTURE OF INCLUSION, BELONGING, AND RESPECT FOR ALL STUDENTS AND PARENTS.**

Parents suggested a range of ideas to improve, such as:

- Having the representation of special needs students on the school's social media pages, school bulletins, and flyers. This will help special needs children and their parents feel that the schools value them and increase awareness, leading to acceptance.
  - Cultural competency training around special education and IEP issues. Starting meetings late, not being prepared prior to meet start time, required IEP team members not being in attendance or leaving the meeting early, constantly looking at the time, IEP Team members having unrelated side conversations during the meeting, especially while the interpreter is speaking can all be construed as disrespectful in certain cultures.
  - All teachers and staff should have more training regarding different types of disabilities. This is not limited to special education teachers and instructional aides; parents would like all staff informed because students cross paths with various staff members throughout school. Training topics included different disabilities, characteristics, and how to handle best a situation where a student is having an emotional meltdown or being bullied.
- 
- Highlight people of color with disabilities at school and in the classroom. Teaching students about the contributions that disabled people of color make to our society emphasizes that neither race nor disability should be equated with inferiority.

# Key Finding 2:

**Hispanic students were less likely to be identified with Autism, more likely to be placed in separate classrooms and less likely to receive services than white students.**



Autism occurs across all ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds equally; however, looking at data from the California Dataquest for the 2018/19 school year, there is some over/underrepresentation.

We would expect to see students with Autism as the same percentage as all students. Hispanic students were less likely (-8%), White students more likely (+4%), and Asian more likely (+4%).

According to the Centers for Disease Control 2022 report on the prevalence of Autism, in California among 4-year-olds, Hispanic and Asian or Pacific Islander children were more likely to be identified with ASD than White children. Hispanic children were also more likely to be identified with ASD than Black children. Still, there were no differences in the number of 8-year-old children identified with ASD across racial and ethnic groups.

This CDC data would raise the question of why there is a disparity in special education identification in California.

**% OF SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS WITH AUTISM COMPARED TO ALL ENROLLED STUDENTS IN RIVERSIDE AND SAN BERNARDINO COUNTIES SY 2018/19**

	% of Special Ed Students With Autism	% of Students
Hispanic	57%	65%
White	23%	19%
African American	8%	7%
Asian	7%	3%
Native American	1%	0.5%
Multi	5%	3%
Pacific Islander	0.3%	0.4%

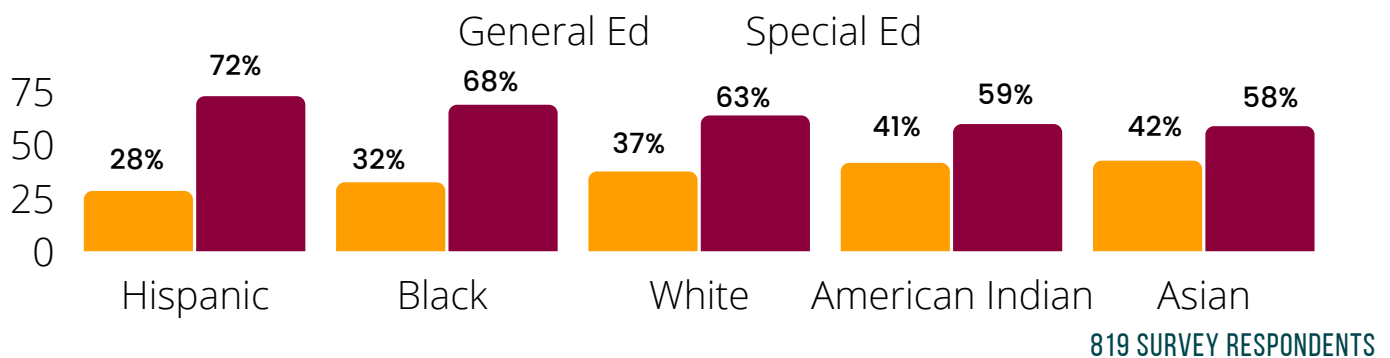
CALIFORNIA DEPT OF EDUCATION  
- DATAQUEST 2018/2019 DATA



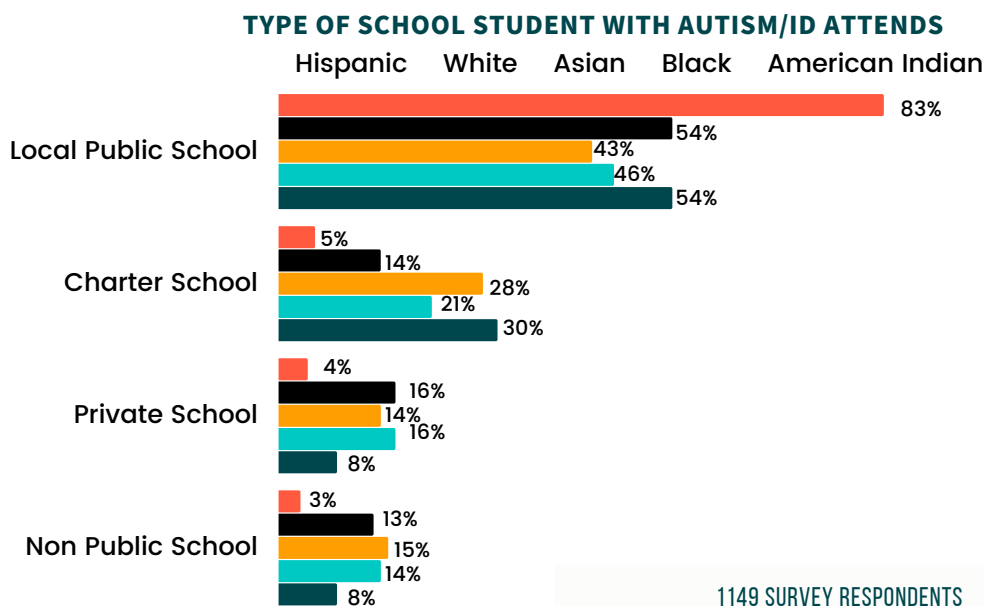
# Key Finding 2:

**Hispanic students were less likely to be identified with Autism, more likely to be placed in separate classrooms and less likely to receive services than white students.**

Hispanic and black students have a higher rate of being placed in special education classrooms at 72% and 68%, compared to white students at 63%. Compared to white students with disabilities, students of color with disabilities are more likely to be placed in separate classrooms. This may lead to lower educational outcomes for students of color in special education, as students with disabilities perform better in math and reading when in general education classrooms (Cole, S. M. et al. (2021) The Relationship of Special Education Placement and Student Academic Outcomes.



**Survey participants reported Hispanic students were less likely to be enrolled in charter schools, private schools, or non-public schools than other ethnicities.**



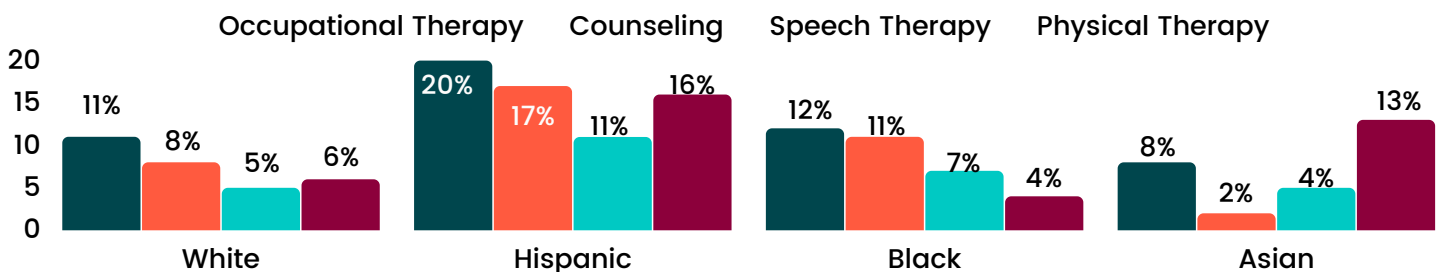
# Key Finding 2:

**Hispanic students were less likely to be identified with Autism, more likely to be placed in separate classrooms and less likely to receive services than white students.**

In special education, related services are supportive services that are required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education. Services can include a variety of services; however, speech-language pathology, physical and occupational therapy, and counseling are the most common for students with Autism and/or Intellectual Disabilities.

Survey results showed that Hispanic families were twice as likely as white parents to feel that their students do not have, but need these type of services. Hispanic families averaged 16% need for these services while white families averaged 7.5%, black families 8.5%, and asian families 6.75%.

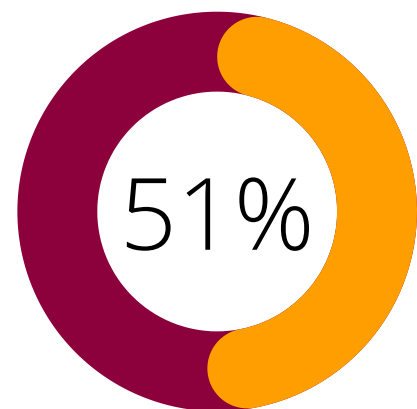
## PARENT FEELS THE STUDENT NEEDS THIS SERVICE BUT DOES NOT HAVE



962 SURVEY RESPONDENTS

More than half of all survey participants (51%) also indicated that they are not happy with the amount of time for services their student receives. Feelings such as this often breed mistrust and resentment towards the education system. Families wonder if their child is being discriminated against because of their ethnicity, disability, or if the school does not want to pay for services.

## FAMILIES SATISFIED WITH THE AMOUNT OF RELATED SERVICES THEY RECEIVE



974 SURVEY RESPONDENTS

*"I feel because they don't have the resources they set the plan around what works for them. Not what would best benefit my kiddo."*

# Key Finding 2:

Hispanic students were less likely to be identified with Autism, more likely to be placed in separate classrooms and less likely to receive services than white students.



## NEED FOR DISAGGREGATED DATA FROM CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.

We undertook this survey to help us identify areas of disparity and stakeholder feedback because there is not a current system in place where this data can be found.

In California, 1 in 5 special education students is qualified under Autism or Intellectual Disabilities (163,865 - 21%). While each student has unique needs, students with Autism and Intellectual Disabilities tend to have more significant needs than students with a specific learning disability (38%) or a speech/language impairment (21%). Yet, most data on the California Department of Education data dashboard includes data for all special education students - none of it is disaggregated.

In October 2021, through a public records request, we requested from the Department of Education:

- Graduation rates for special education students with Autism and Intellectual Disabilities broken down by ethnicity for Riverside County, San Bernardino County, and the state of California
- # of Students in Special Education with Autism and Intellectual Disabilities broken down by Age and Ethnic Group in California, Riverside County, and San Bernardino County

We were advised, “The California Department of Education does not compile graduation rate data disaggregated by disability type (e.g., autism) and, therefore, has no responsive records to these requests.”





# Call to Action:

**Transparent and public data to identify and address disproportionate representation in special education.**

The use of data is a powerful tool to strengthen academic outcomes for all students—especially underserved students. This data would advise whether certain groups of students are disproportionately identified or not identified for special education services, whether they are proportionately represented in special education classes and services, and are graduating with a diploma or a certificate of completion.

- The California Department of Education should collect and make public data disaggregated by race/ethnicity, English proficiency, and disability determination providing schools and the entire community with powerful tools for describing inequity and addressing its causes to achieve equity across subgroups.
- Include broader representation in stakeholder groups, including families with students with Autism and/or Intellectual Disabilities from different racial backgrounds, and provide translation opportunities so these stakeholders can inform policies and practices designed to improve the quality of instruction for underserved students.



# Key Finding 3:

**Over half (53%) the Spanish-speaking families report asking for an interpreter for an IEP and not receiving one; 40% Spanish-speaking families do not receive the translation of written IEP documents within 60 days.**

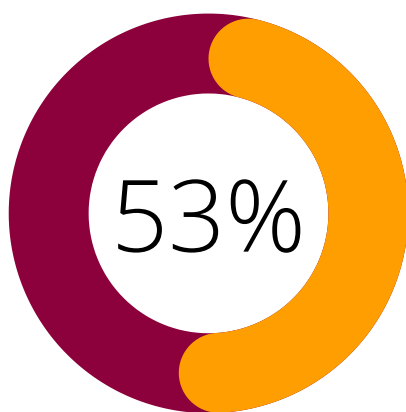


For years the Autism Society Inland Empire has heard frustration from Spanish-speaking families about not being able to participate in the IEP meeting because of either no interpreter or poor quality of interpretation. Parents can not participate fully in their child's education without being able to access critical information and meetings. While the law provides for this service, in practice our survey shows it is not being done consistently. In the focus group and in the survey, Spanish-speaking families frequently talked about how this has caused parents to feel that the school districts are keeping important facts about their child and their education from them.

Over half (53%) of the Spanish-speaking families reported a lack of access to qualified interpreters at special education meetings and over 40% of the Spanish-speaking families do not receive their translated Individual Education Plan (IEP) within 60 days.

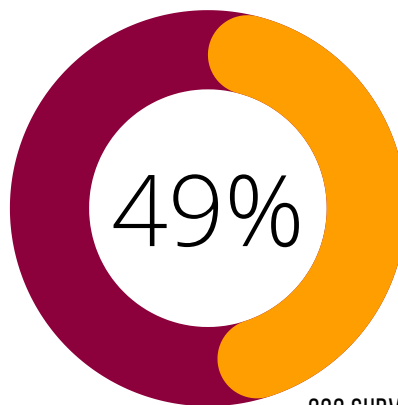
## **OVER HALF THE SPANISH-SPEAKING FAMILIES REPORTED A LACK OF ACCESS TO QUALIFIED INTERPRETERS AT SPECIAL EDUCATION MEETINGS**

**SPANISH SPEAKING FAMILIES:  
IN THE LAST 3 YEARS HAVE YOU  
ASKED FOR AN INTERPRETER AT AN  
IEP AND DID NOT RECEIVE ONE**



260 SURVEY RESPONDENTS

**SPANISH SPEAKING FAMILIES:  
HAVE YOU HAD AN INTERPRETER WHO  
WAS NOT QUALIFIED OR WAS NOT DOING  
A GOOD JOB COMMUNICATING ON YOUR  
BEHALF IN THE LAST 3 YEARS**



222 SURVEY RESPONDENTS



# Key Finding 3:

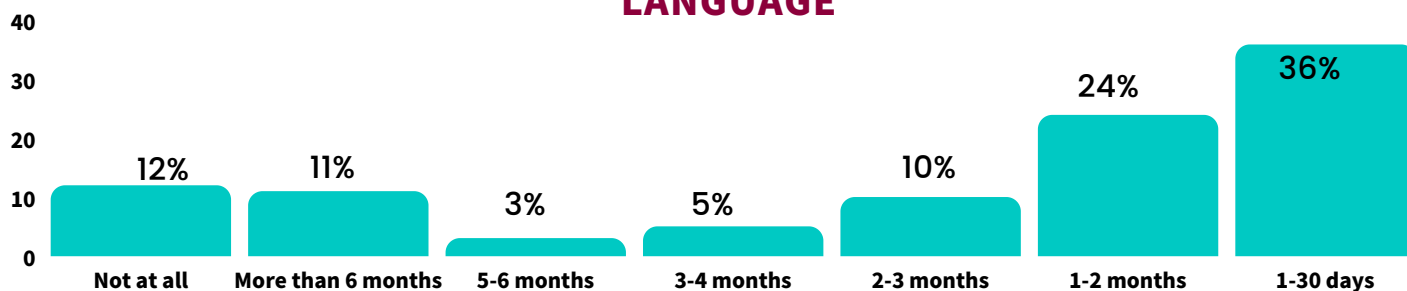
Over half (53%) the Spanish-speaking families report asking for an interpreter for an IEP and not receiving one; 40% Spanish-speaking families do not receive the translation of written IEP documents within 60 days.

41% percent of Spanish-speaking families reported they do not receive translated documents, Individualized Education Plans (IEP), or other documents within two months; half of those families (23%) do not receive the documents within six months or do not receive them at all.

These documents are essential for families to participate in their child's education. How would families know which services are to be provided or which goals are being worked on if they do not have access to the IEP? They are being asked to sign a contract they can not read.



## SPANISH SPEAKING FAMILIES: HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE FOR YOU TO RECEIVE TRANSLATED IEP/SPECIAL EDUCATION EVALUATIONS, ASSESSMENTS, OR OTHER DOCUMENTS TRANSLATED TO YOUR PREFERRED LANGUAGE



217 SURVEY RESPONDENTS

*"Lis distritos siempre quieren ocupar a cualquier empleado de la escuela que hable español-Inglés pero no entienden de que se está hablando en la junta una vez trajeron de intérprete a una señora de la cocina que yo tuve que ayudarle"*

*[The districts always want to get any school employee who speaks Spanish-English, but they do not understand what is being talked about in the meeting, once they brought in a lady from the kitchen as an interpreter that I had to help]*





# Call to Action:

**Non-english speaking families must have qualified interpreters and access to translated documents within 45 days.**

In Jan 2021, Illinois changed its Education Code and developed final rules regarding school districts providing interpreters at IEP meetings to support parents whose native language is other than English. The regulations set forth the requirements for an individual to be considered a “qualified interpreter” to provide interpretation services at an IEP meeting.

We urge California legislators to adopt a similar bill that sets qualifications for educational interpreters, which would define a qualified educational interpreter as an individual who:

- meets all school district employment eligibility criteria
- demonstrate proficiency in both English and the parent’s native language to be defined
- completes at least 6 hours of training on special education terminology and protocol (except that individuals who already hold special education licenses, endorsements, or approval are exempt);
- at least 9 hours of training on interpretation techniques and the role of an interpreter as specified in the rules; and achieve specified minimum scores on oral and written examinations on special education and interpretation.
- To maintain the designation of a qualified interpreter, the individual must participate in at least 6 hours of ongoing professional development related to interpretation once every two years in the categories identified in the rules. If a school district does not currently have an individual who meets the requirements for a qualified interpreter or a qualified interpreter is not available, the school district may use outside vendors, including telephonic interpreters.

While there is a requirement for families to have access to educational records, there is no time requirement for them to receive those documents. Legislatively, a bill that requires that local educational agencies (LEAs) provide parents with translated copies of a student's individualized education program (IEP) and related documents within 30-45 days of an IEP meeting and requires that a qualified interpreter translate the documents and notification to parents about their rights regarding interpretation and translation services.

# Key Finding 4:

**Stark differences exist in how special education Spanish-speaking families share and attain information.**

Research shows that parents play a vital role in a child's ability to succeed. Parent involvement can take various forms, yet Spanish-speaking parents often face multiple barriers that limit their ability to participate in their child's education.

Spanish-speaking parents who participated highlighted training needs including:

- Almost half (45%) of Spanish-speaking parents indicated that they felt only slightly comfortable or not comfortable at all asking questions or sharing concerns during IEP meetings, compared to a quarter (26%) of White parents.
- White parents talk to their children about their academic needs before attending an IEP meeting twice as much as Hispanic Spanish-speaking parents do (White 35%, Hispanic English-speaking 23%, Hispanic Spanish-speaking 18%).
- Almost a third (29%) of Hispanic Spanish-speaking families do not know which program path (diploma vs. certificate of completion) their child is enrolled in, 13% of Hispanic English-speaking families, and 4% of White families.
- 70% of Spanish-speaking families feel there is a language barrier that prevents them from becoming involved with their child's current teacher or school events.

*"El distrito no nos brinda ninguna dirección sobre los IEPs o el proceso de educación especial en absoluto, entramos muy a ciegas..."*

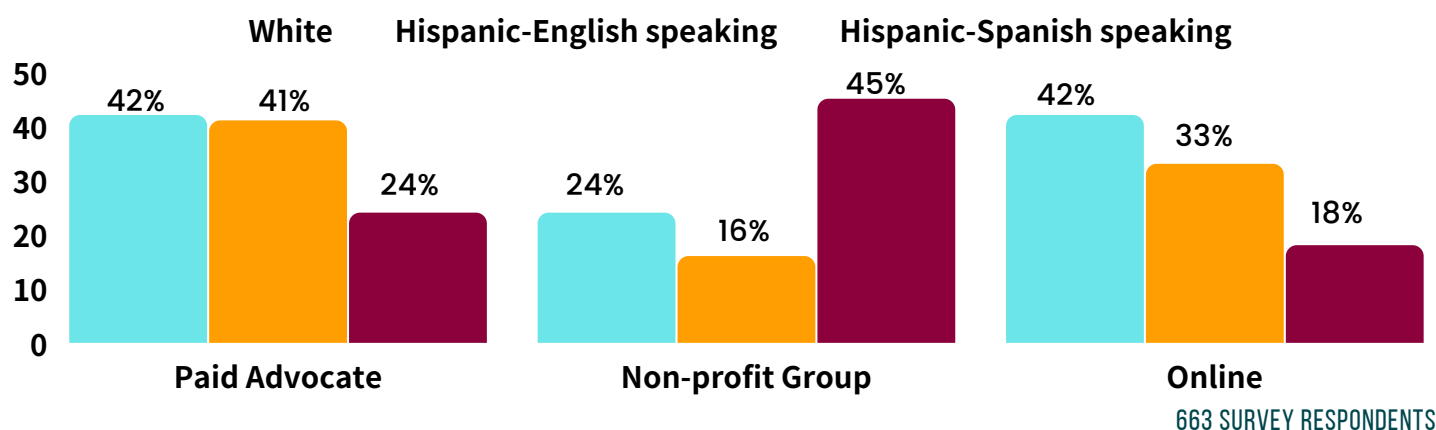
*[The district doesn't give us any direction on IEPs or the special education process at all, we go in very blindly...]*

# Key Finding 4:

## Stark differences exist in how special education Spanish-speaking families share and attain information.

There are also differences in where families attain information regarding special education services and where they seek advice. White parents were almost twice as likely to pay for a special education advocate (typically charge \$100-\$300 per hour) than Spanish-speaking families. (White 42%, Hispanic English-speaking 41%, Spanish Speaking 24%). Spanish-speaking families were almost twice as likely to receive their special education information from a Non-profit group (Spanish-speaking 45%, White 24%, Hispanic English-speaking 16%). Additionally, White families were much more likely to look for information online as Spanish-speaking families (White 42%, Hispanic English-speaking 33%, Spanish-speaking 18%).

### WHERE FAMILIES ATTAIN INFORMATION REGARDING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES



We feel it is essential to mention that as we talk about the need for training and more information, we remember that this information also needs to be delivered in a culturally sensitive way. Especially in the Latino community, numerous studies have shown that the most effective way to reach these families is to use the promotora model instead of traditional outreach models to reach Hispanic communities. Many communities face language barriers, are intimidated by complex service systems, or are monolingual Spanish speakers. They may not be able to read a flier or feel comfortable calling an organization to ask for help. Promotoras can provide one-on-one support or small group support. They talk to people in safe places, such as their own homes, and allow people to take in information at a relaxed pace.





## Call to Action

**Need for culturally responsive and quality training and information for Hispanic and Spanish-speaking parents.**

Schools have an obligation to provide all students with the access and opportunities necessary for college, career, and life success. Many families want to be part of the plan for success.

For the families who participated in the focus groups and the survey, comments indicated they would like to be informed and better equipped to decide on their child's education. Some ideas included:

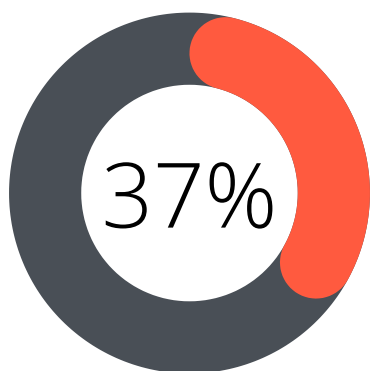
- Districts to provide culturally sensitive training and resources regarding IEPs and special education, including reaching out to Spanish-speaking parents. Parents indicated that they needed much notice to arrange for childcare or transportation, would like it to be offered and advertised in Spanish, and technology can be a barrier.
- Special education teachers could assist with helping to educate families when meeting one on one with them. Teachers could clarify confusing language written in the Procedural Safeguards Notice and that families are fully aware of their options.
- We applaud many of the Governor's 2022/23 proposals regarding special education; we want to ensure representation from many communities, including students and families of color with Autism and Intellectual Disabilities, in stakeholder groups.

# Key Finding 5:

## 1 in 3 students with Autism/Intellectual Disabilities experience bullying.



### STUDENTS WITH AUTISM/ID WHO HAVE BEEN BULLIED BY SOMEONE AT SCHOOL



980 SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Children with disabilities—such as physical, developmental, intellectual, emotional, and sensory disabilities—are at an increased risk of being bullied. Survey participants reported that one-third (37%) of all families have a child that has been bullied/cyberbullied by someone at school.

Our survey showed that white families (47%) are impacted twice as much as Hispanic families (22%), Spanish-speaking families indicated the least amount of bullying was occurring, only a third (15%) of what White families are experiencing. We asked about this topic during our focus group.

Many parents and community leaders expressed their concern about this topic. Some parents mentioned that they believed that another student at some point had bullied their child, but there was no follow-thru or accountability. Frequently students with communication or cognition challenges are considered unreliable witnesses and therefore not credible so administrators and educators refuse to take action. Additionally, these students may not disclose or understand that they are being bullied. It takes a fellow student to report the matter to their parent before the matter is discovered.

# Key Finding 5:

1 in 3 students with Autism/Intellectual Disabilities experience bullying.

Surprisingly, most of the commentary regarding bullying focused more on the role teachers and other staff members play in the matter. Parents stated that there were incidents where the teacher either allowed, created a situation, or even contributed to their child being bullied. Ultimately, the teacher sets the tone for what is acceptable behavior amongst the students.

*One mom shared an incident that happened to her fifth-grade son. He came home one day very sad, so she asked him what was wrong, he told her that he went to the library with his class, and everyone was picking out books. The teacher said to him that he shouldn't get books for his age and needed to get Kindergarten books. He stayed quiet; he was confused since everyone was getting fifth-grade books. His classmates laughed, made fun of him and called him a baby. The mom herself was confused and questioned why he didn't tell the teacher something because her son brings home fifth-grade books from class and reads them little by little. After thinking about it for a moment, she told him it was good that he didn't tell her anything and that maybe the teacher hadn't seen him bring home fifth-grade books. Her advice to him was to show her what he's capable of, so the teacher can see that even though he can't quite read at a fifth-grade level, he can read in the third or in fourth-grade level. Then the teacher and students will see that he's capable of reading above kindergarten. She told him this will help the teacher change her mindset.*







# Call to Action:

**Create a school environment where ALL students and parents can feel safe. Schools need to engage in open, honest conversations to develop multifaceted approaches.**

Any child can be a victim of bullying or harassment, but research has shown that children with special needs are more likely to be bullied or harassed and more likely to be seriously harmed. In addition, children with special needs may be less likely to be able to seek help to stop it.

Students with Autism and Intellectual Disabilities may need concrete examples and lots of repetition to understand a concept such as bullying. An annual school-wide assembly or online material may not be an effective way to teach these concepts. Parents suggested other ideas, including:

- Teaching all students, including special education students, about bullying and what should be done if they ever become a victim or a witness.
- Share information about bullying to help educate parents. This information needs to be delivered culturally appropriately, considering language and access to technology.
- One reason children and young adults with special needs might be at higher risk for bullying is lack of peer support. Helping educate non-disabled students about disabilities, different conditions, and respectful behavior.
- All teachers and school staff should receive training on cultural interaction. People of color perceive interactions differently and view some interactions as disrespectful or bullying.



# About the Autism Society Inland Empire

The Autism Society Inland Empire is a grassroots, non-profit organization serving over 17,000 individuals with Autism who live in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties. We create connections, empowering everyone in the Autism community with the resources needed to live fully.

We provide educational programs, wellness programs and fun social recreation programs for children, teens and adults with Autism, their family members and the professionals who service this community.



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Society**  
Inland Empire



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