



Colorado Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Mid-Point Survey

March 2023

COLORADO SCHOOL FINANCE PROJECT

Support Children - Support The Future

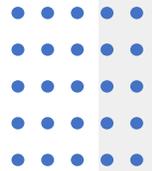


AUGENBLICK,
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Colorado
Education
Initiative

March 6, 2023



SURVEY CONTEXT AND PARTNERS

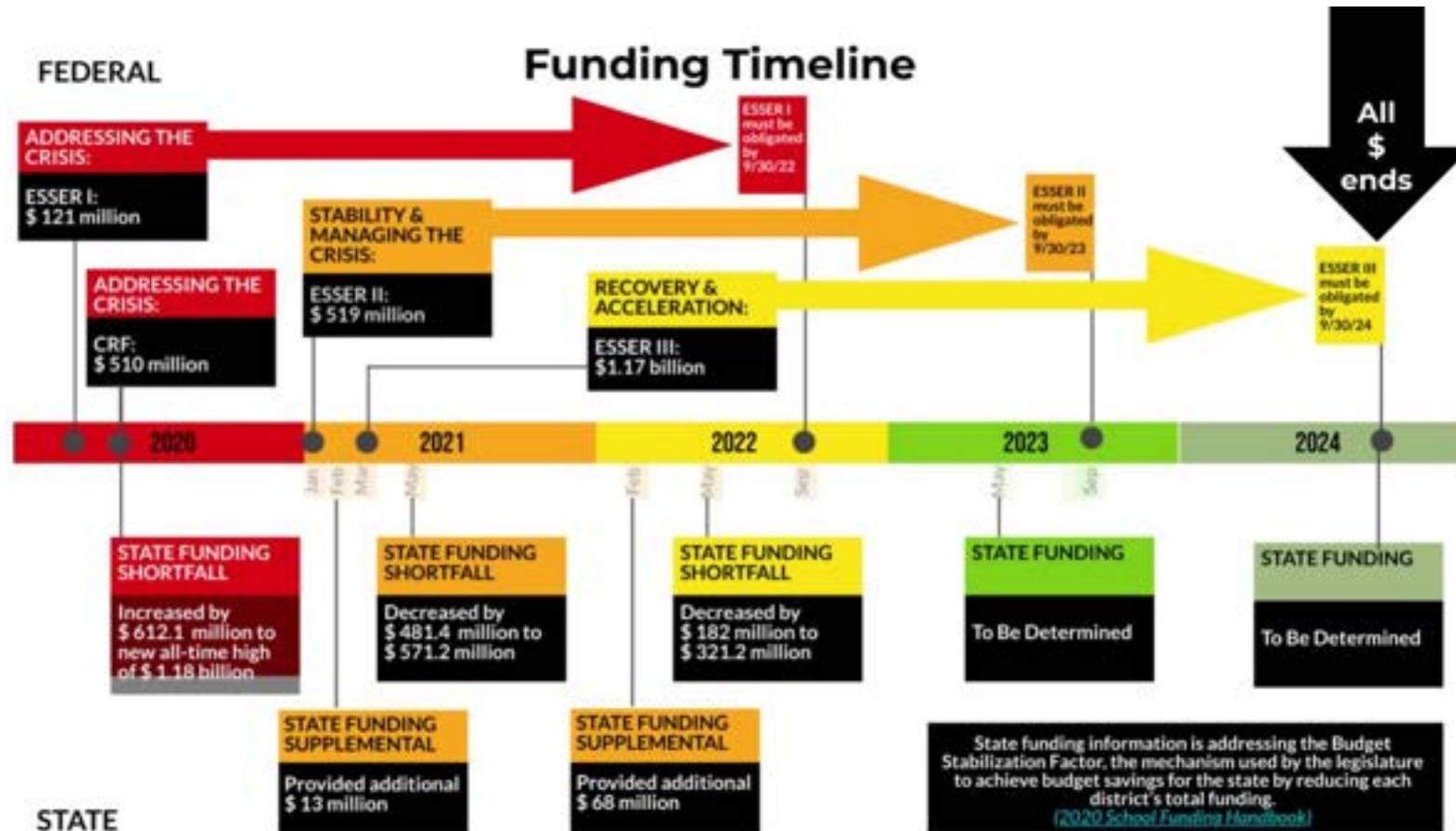
Colorado School Finance Project

- CSFP's mission is to compile, collect, and distribute research-based, non-partisan information and data on topics related to school finance for state and local policymakers.
- This survey was funded through a [Learning and Transparency Program](#) grant Colorado School Finance Project (CSFP) received from the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to provide ESSER-related technical and communication assistance to districts and BOCES. Its supports include:



CSFP Context: ESSER Timeline

It is ESSER halftime — all funds are required to be obligated by September 2024.



Colorado Education Initiative

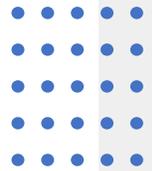
- CSFP conducted this survey in partnership with Colorado Education Initiative (CEI), a statewide nonprofit whose mission is to accelerate systems change to ensure every student in Colorado is prepared and unafraid to succeed in school, work, and life and ready to take on the challenges of today, tomorrow, and beyond.
- In the spring and fall of 2020, CEI partnered with CDE to conduct [two statewide needs inventories](#) to understand challenges facing schools and districts early in the COVID-19 pandemic and inform key decisions about funding, policy changes, and resources for districts and communities. Key findings from the 2020 work are featured on the following slide; the 2023 survey includes themes from these surveys.
- This survey is also a component of [Colorado's Statewide Family Engagement Center](#) grant, focused on building the capacity of families, schools, and communities to address learning recovery and related impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as implement practices and systems to improve student development and family well-being.

CEI Context: Greatest Needs in 2020

SPRING 2020: Beginning of Pandemic	FALL 2020: After Initial Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emotional support was the top student need followed by support for remote learning• Internet connectivity and food access were the top community needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• K-3 reading surfaced as the top student priority, followed by student mental health• Workforce and staffing needs were emerging as major district concerns

[Statewide needs inventories](#)





SURVEY OVERVIEW

Survey Overview

- The ESSER Mid-Point Survey provides a look at school and public perception of needs half-way through the ESSER funding cycles and includes follow-up questions from themes in the 2020 statewide needs inventories.
- The survey was administered statewide by CSFP and CEI to district leaders, teachers, school leaders, and community members from January 17 to February 6, 2023.

371 respondents overall,
representing 124 school
districts and 3 BOCES

**Districts and BOCES
represented serve 81% of
Colorado students**

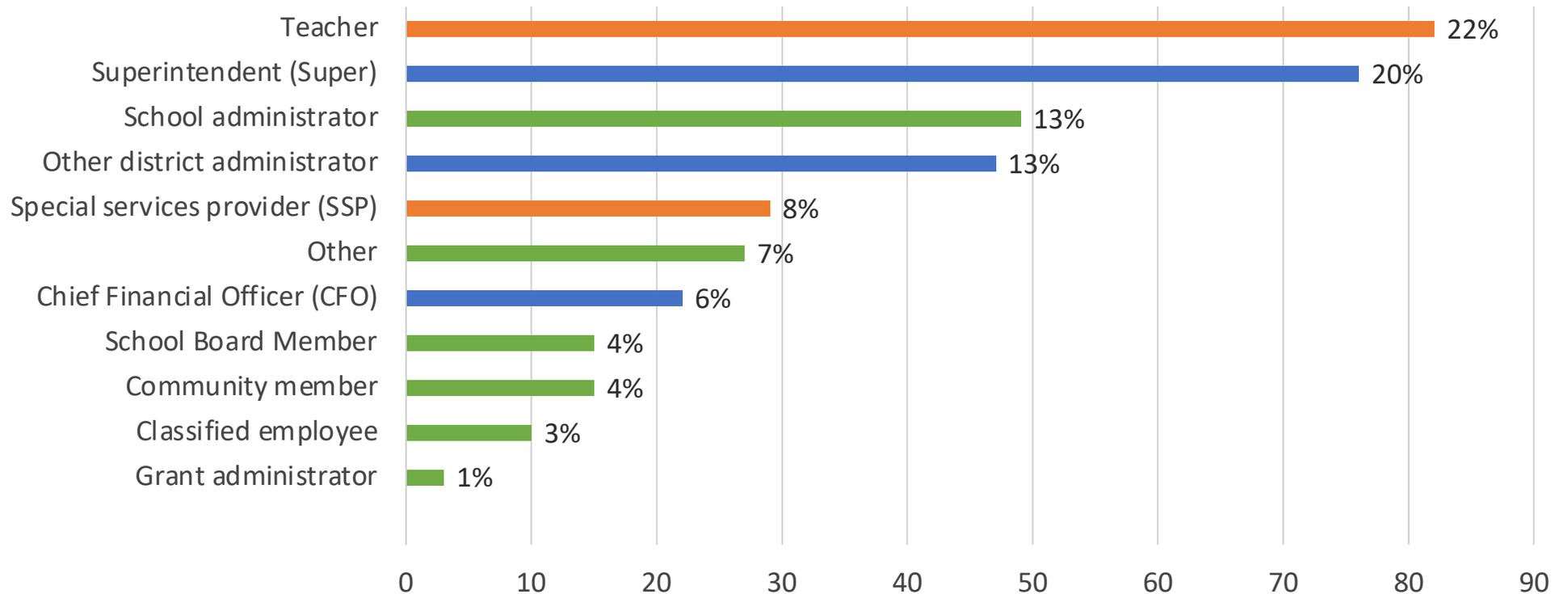
**Over 60% of respondents
represent rural (25%) or small
rural districts (38%), with the
remainder from non-rural
districts or not associated with
a particular district**

Report Overview

- This initial report provides a high-level summary of results across all respondents, comparing district leaders, teachers/special service providers (SSPs), and all other respondents on most questions. **A follow-up report will be released later this spring with more detailed student and district characteristics.**
- All Likert-scale questions use a 5-point scale, with 1 representing no need/challenges and 5 representing highest need/largest challenges. Unless otherwise noted, results shown reflect the average response within each respondent group. Generally, differences larger than .4 are statistically significant.
- District leaders' and teachers/SSPs' responses to open-ended survey questions were reviewed and categorized into themes, with comparisons made between these two groups. All other respondents were excluded from this initial qualitative analysis.

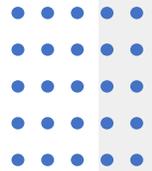
What is your role?

The count of respondents by role is displayed below, with percentages of total respondents reflected in the labels on the graph. Throughout the rest of this report, results are compared across three groups: (1) **District Leaders: One person per district using the highest-ranking respondent – superintendent, chief financial officer, or other district administrators.** (2) **Teachers and Special Service Providers (SSPs): SSPs include counselors, nurses, social workers, and similar roles.** (3) **All Other Respondents: Everyone not in the other groups, including school administrators, classified employees, school board members, and community members.**



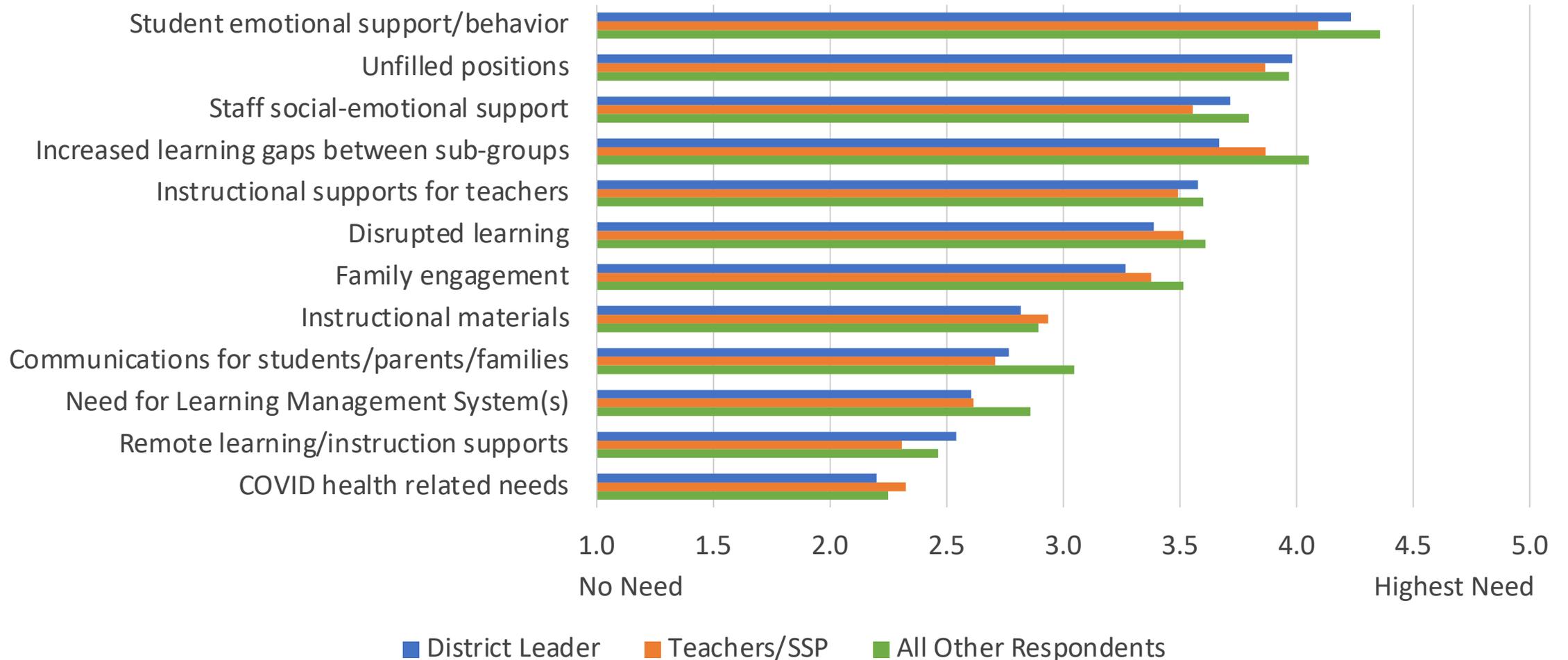
Executive Summary

- Across the survey, **respondent groups generally prioritized needs and challenges similarly**. However, the intensity of the need or challenge varied across respondent groups.
- The top three ongoing educational needs created by COVID are **student emotional support and student behavior, unfilled positions, and staff social and emotional support**.
- Student subgroups reported to face the highest level of ongoing challenges from COVID include **economically disadvantaged students, students experiencing trauma, and students with special needs**.
- Most challenging ongoing community needs from COVID are **affordable housing, mental health and/or counseling services, child and/or adult care, and financial assistance**.
- The majority of district leaders selected **navigating reporting and compliance standards as a main challenge to spending ESSER funds**, followed by challenges **filling available positions and hiring**.
- While district leaders expressed appreciation for these funds, many expressed the **need for more sustainable funding** to address ongoing staffing shortages, student social emotional challenges, and performance gaps.



SURVEY RESULTS: Ongoing COVID Impacts

What is the level of on-going educational need created by COVID in the following areas?



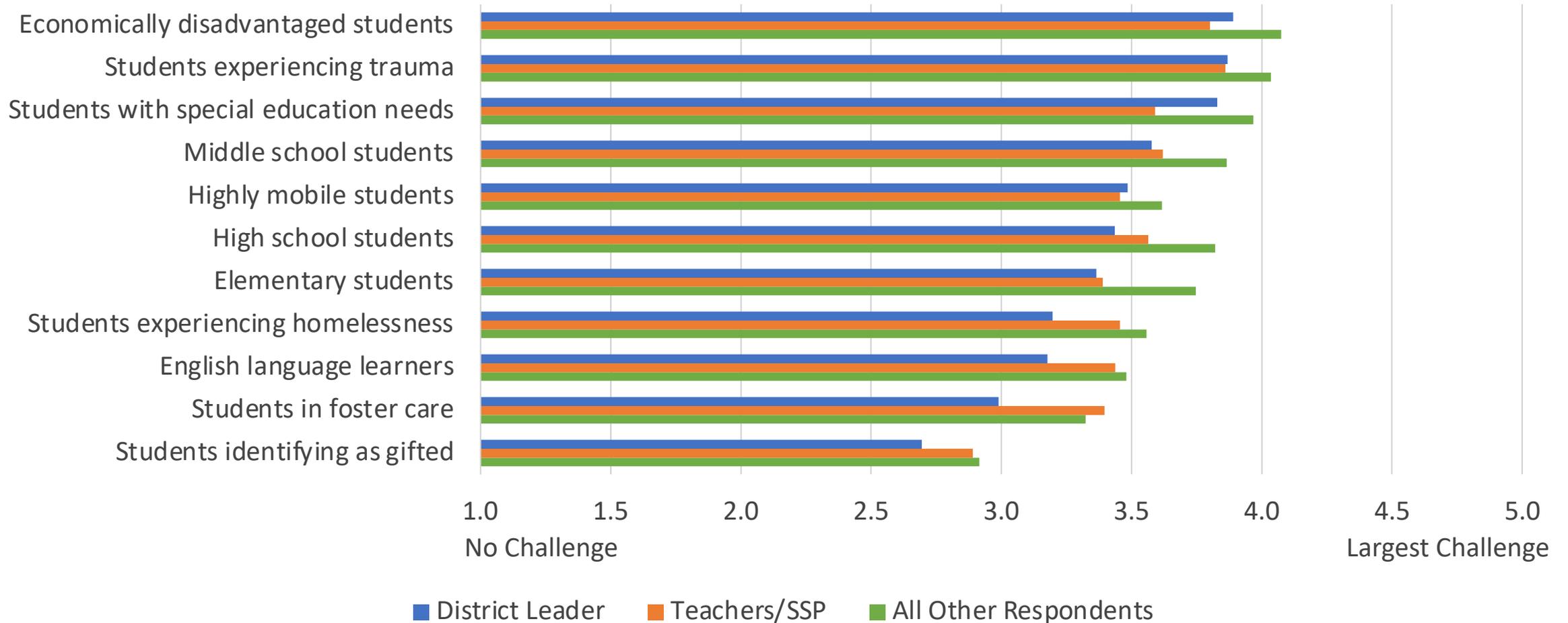
"The bottom line is that challenges that were faced prior to COVID are still challenges. The double-edged sword is we are still seeing and beginning to understand some of the impacts that became more challenging as a result of COVID. At the same time, we also are seeing some excuses ... that refer back to COVID as the culprit of all the woes in education."

- Non-Rural Special Services Provider

"Emotional health of students and staff should be the primary concern but you can't stop working on other things (like academics) just because the other is your main priority."

- Rural School Administrator

What is the level of on-going challenges facing the following student groups from COVID?



Please describe the highest two on-going challenges faced by student sub-groups.

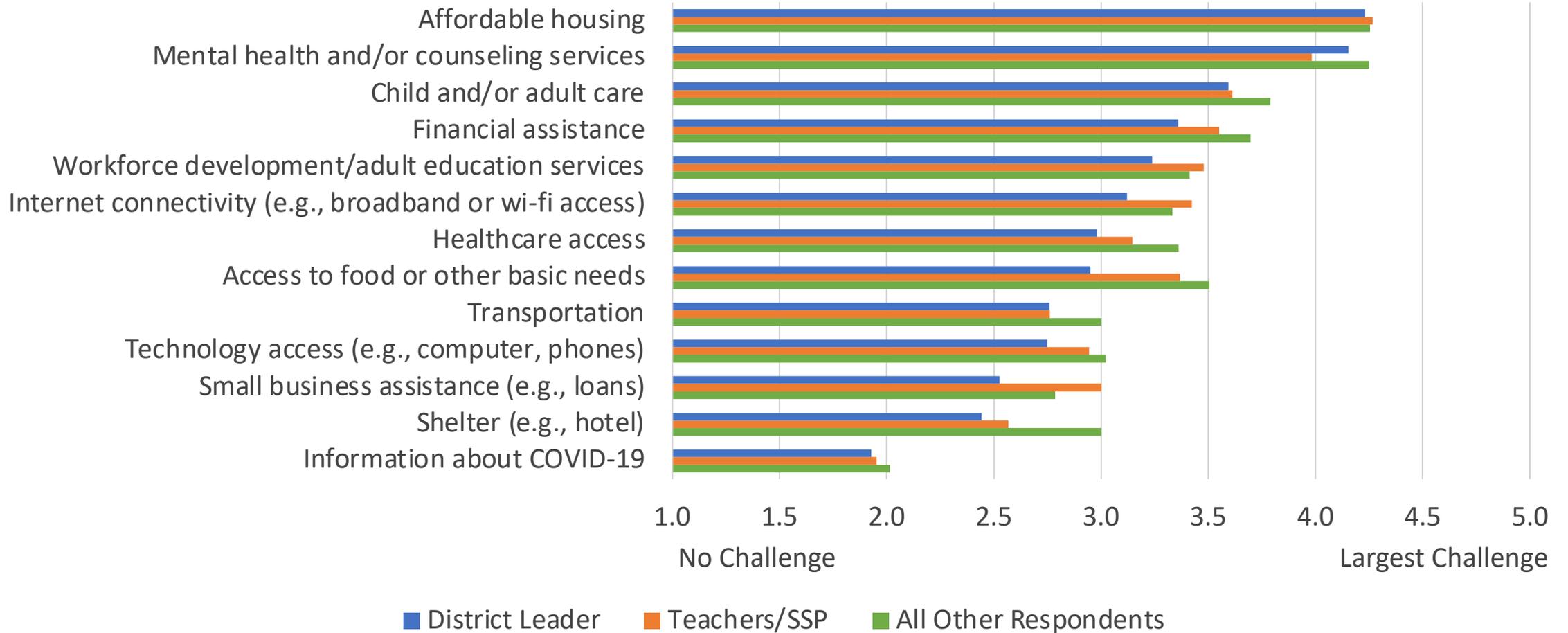
“We are experiencing high levels of student struggles that are extended through all grade levels in the schools. We have students who are several years below grade level expectations, behind in meeting graduation requirements, struggling with behaviors, and the overall mental health concerns extend through all aspects of the school experience.”

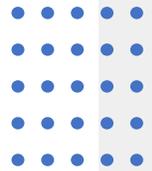
- Small Rural District Leader

District leaders (i.e., superintendents, CFOs, other district administrators) and teachers/special services providers (SSPs) shared similar challenges faced by the students in their schools in their open-ended comments on the survey.

- Commonly cited challenges were increased needs related to **mental health, social emotional learning (SEL), and behavioral challenges**. A few respondents also elevated the **mental health and SEL needs of staff**. Related to both academic and social emotional needs, district leaders and teachers/SSPs surfaced ongoing challenges in **attendance and engagement**.
- Some respondents mentioned **staff shortages** in general, with several naming particular needs in special education positions and counselors.
- Many district leaders and teachers/SSPs named **learning loss** caused by the pandemic as a key ongoing challenge, also noting the academic gaps between groups (in particular, **students with special needs and economically disadvantaged students**).

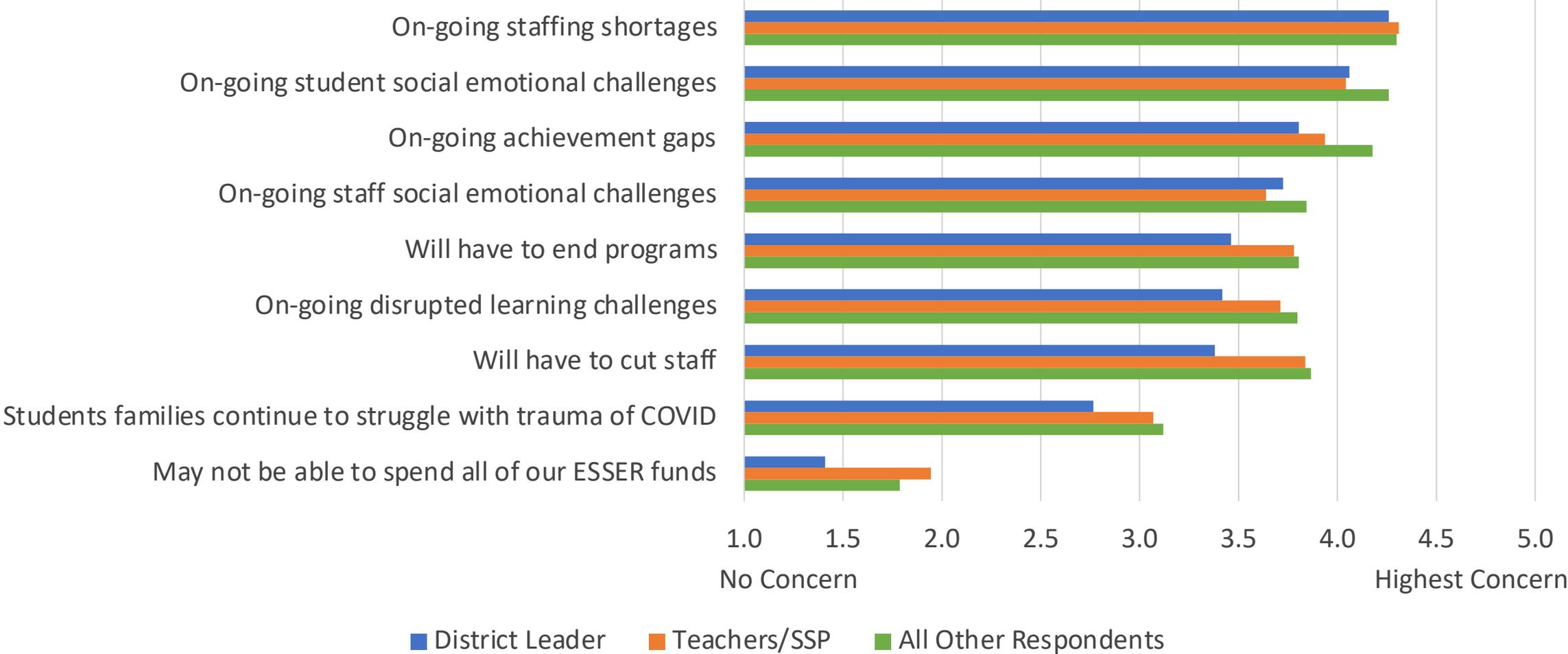
What are the on-going, local community needs from COVID?





SURVEY RESULTS: ESSER Funding

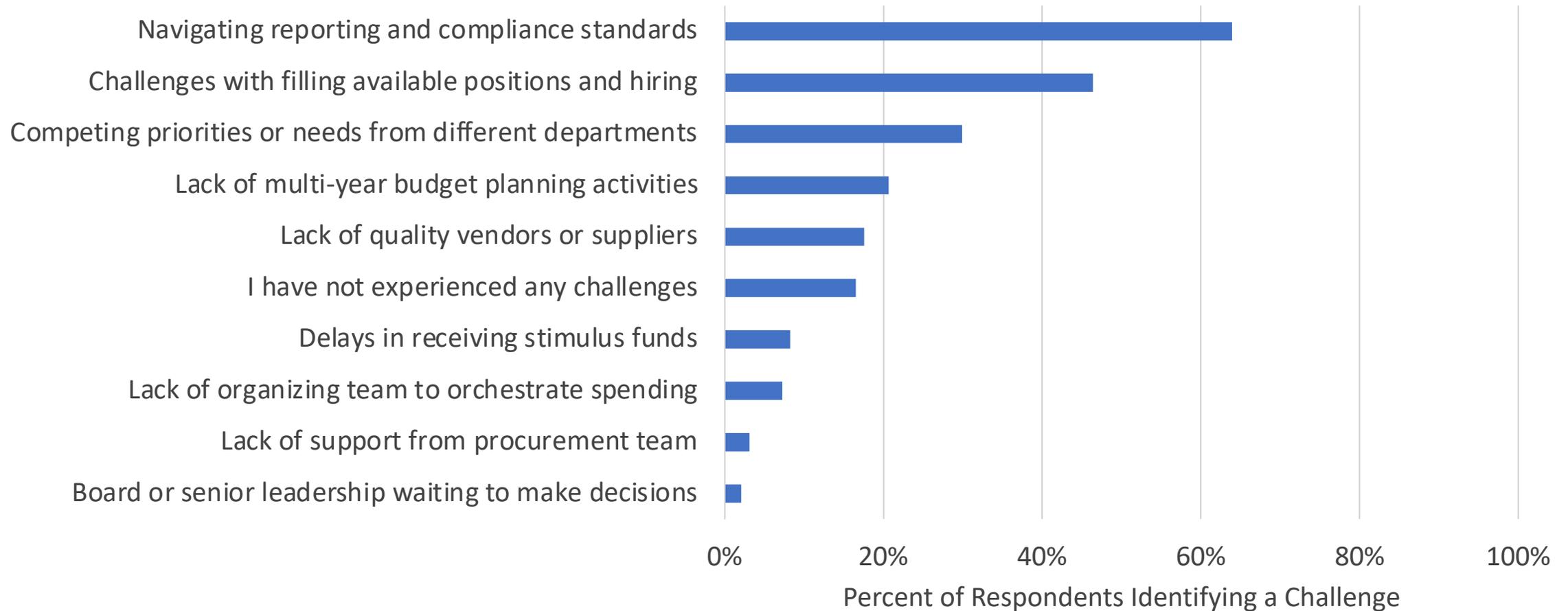
How concerned are you about these possible challenges when ESSER funding ends in fall 2024?



"ESSER funds were absolutely critical in addressing learning gap needs, especially of the greatest at-risk population but the dependence on those funds, especially for staffing, will be challenging to replace when ESSER funding ends."

- Non-Rural Chief Financial Officer

What have been your district's main challenges to spending ESSER funds? Please select up to three choices.¹



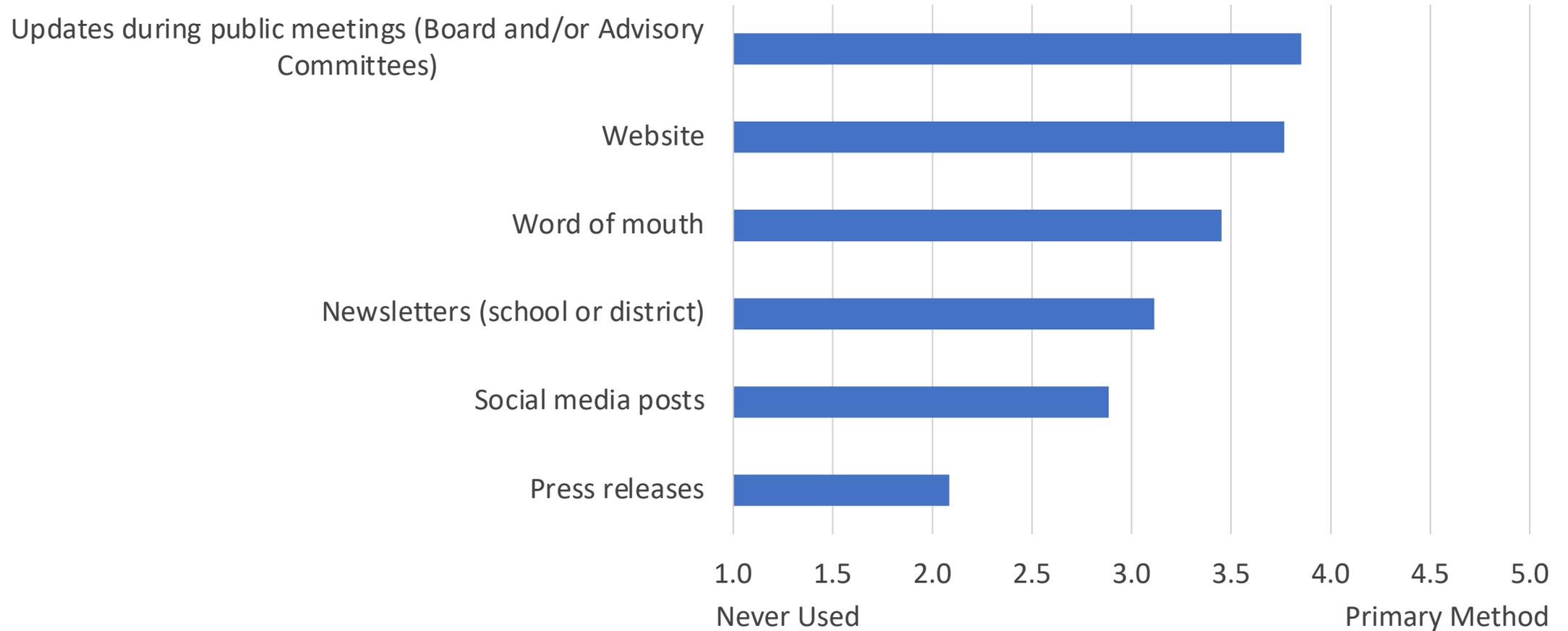
¹ Only district leader responses are provided here, since they hold technical responsibility for ESSER spending.

■ District Leader

"The two biggest challenges I am hearing the most about these days are unfilled positions and the continued need to authentically engage learners at all grade levels."

- Community Member

How often do you use these methods for communicating about the use of ESSER funds?¹



¹ Only district leader responses are provided here, since they hold responsibility for ESSER communications.

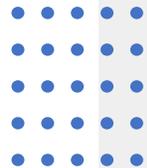
How does your district engage stakeholders in ESSER-related decision-making?

“All ESSER decisions are discussed in public board meetings. They are also communicated on the district website. The district also involves the District Accountability Committee and school staff in the planning process.”

- Small Rural District
Leader

Many respondents indicated that **stakeholder engagement in ESSER-related decision-making occur through existing meeting structures**, such as for District Accountability Committees (DAC) or local school boards. Some district leaders specified that they solicit feedback at meetings designated for budget and strategic planning discussions. The responses between district leaders and teachers/SSPs were similar.

- **Many teachers/SSPs indicated they do not know how their district engages stakeholders in ESSER decisions** nor have been asked to provide input in these decisions.
- Many district leaders also referenced a variety of **online approaches** to engage and inform community members, such as surveys, district/school websites, and emails. Other than a few teachers/SSPs mentioning the use of surveys, other online approaches were not identified.
- Some district leaders and teachers/SSPs also discussed stakeholder engagement happening through **school-level meetings**, such as for School Accountability Committees (SAC).



SURVEY RESULTS: Overall Reflections

What is your biggest lesson learned during the pandemic?

“Education is further behind than we thought. It is apparent that if we can't switch platforms without our students losing significant amounts of learning, we are doing something wrong. Students should be able to learn in a variety of settings, not just one.”

- Non-Rural District Teacher

The lessons learned during the pandemic were similar between district leaders and teachers/SSPs, with a few differences described below.

- Many respondents across both groups referenced the **importance of adaptation** as one of the biggest lessons learned during the pandemic, noting the changing needs of students and staff.
- District leaders noted a **general concern for equity**, while teachers/SSPs specified the additional challenges of economically disadvantaged families and the need for essential services provided by schools. Several respondents also identified learning gaps and other equity issues.
- Both groups reflected on the **limitations of remote learning**, including the importance of adequate technology, barriers to high-quality instruction, and mental health issues.
- Some district leaders and teachers/SSPs identified **the increasing mental health needs of both students and staff** in their responses to this question, and several emphasized the need for additional mental health supports.

What is your biggest lesson learned during the pandemic? (Continued)

“On a financial level, we realized that it is incredibly expensive to have the appropriate number of staff employed to meet academic, social/emotion[al], and physical needs of students and families...It requires substantially more people to provide appropriate interventions, opportunities to engage with parents, and line up supports and resources for students and families.”

- Rural Superintendent

The lessons learned during the pandemic were similar between district leaders and teachers/SSPs, with a few differences described below.

- While district leaders expressed **appreciation for ESSER funds**, many expressed the **need for more sustainable funding** to address learning gaps, staffing shortages, and mental health needs. Teachers/SSPs did not explicitly mention funding as much but shared similar concerns for learning, staffing, and mental health needs.
- A few district leaders and teachers/SSPs pointed to **divisions created by the pandemic**, including contrasting political views and decisions made about shifting to remote learning.

Please share anything else about the topics covered on this survey or other information you would like us to know related to your response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The learning gap and trauma are still there. More support is still needed. Programs/extra staff are still needed.”

- Small Rural District Teacher

When asked to share anything related to the topics of the survey and/or the COVID-19 pandemic, only a handful of survey respondents provided responses. While district leaders and teachers/SSPs both noted the need for additional mental health supports, they had differing thoughts on other issues. The following themes are broken down by the district leader and teacher/SSP groups and reiterate some of the themes previously described.

	District Leaders	Teachers/SSPs
Mental Health Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for additional supports • Behavioral concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for additional supports • Behavioral, attendance, and engagement concerns
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciation of the ESSER funds • Difficulty of obtaining funds • Need for more sustainable funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of understanding of ESSER spending and in a couple cases, skepticism about how funds were distributed
Equity Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs of different student populations • Funding challenges of small rural districts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning gaps due to lack of staff and other supports



**Additional
analyses will be
released in April.**

**In the meantime,
please reach out
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questions about
this report:**

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