

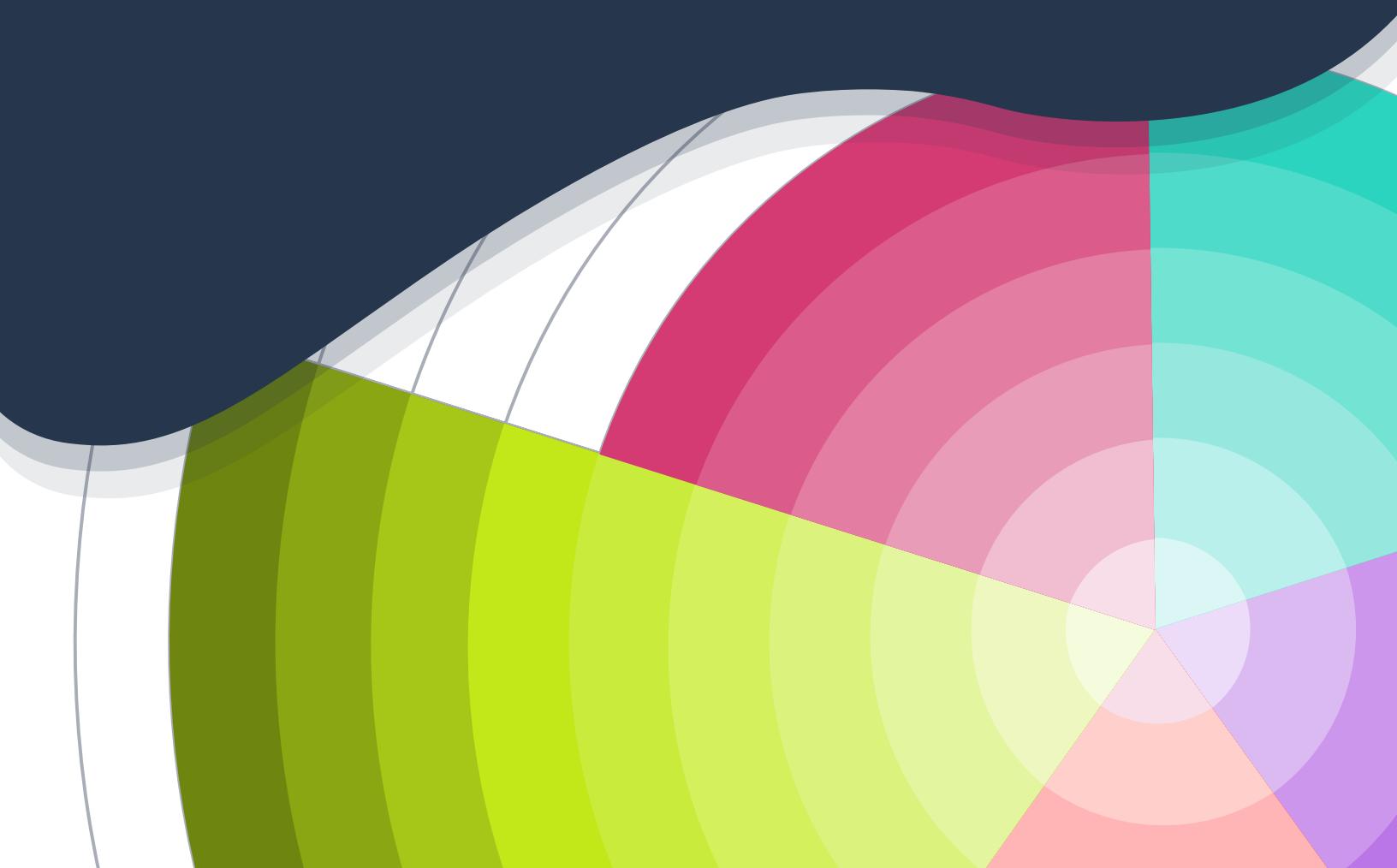


2nd Edition

The State of Educational Opportunity in North Carolina

A Survey of North Carolina Parents

February 2026



The State of Educational Opportunity in North Carolina

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Dear Friends,

Improvements to North Carolina's education system requires us to understand the experiences of families. Policies are only effective if they reflect what parents actually encounter when navigating schools, supports and options. Listening to families across income levels and communities helps clarify where policy is working, where it falls short and where targeted action can produce meaningful gains for students.

This principle drives CarolinaCAN's release of the second edition of the Survey of Educational Opportunity in North Carolina, developed in partnership with 50CAN and Edge Research. The survey provides an updated snapshot of how families are experiencing our education system today, while allowing for direct comparison to the results of the first edition, published in November 2024. As conditions for students and schools continue to shift, policymakers need timely, reliable data to assess whether families feel supported, informed, and able to access the opportunities intended for them.

Between September 30 and December 1, 2025, 617 North Carolina parents and guardians of school-aged children participated in the survey. Their responses are part of a national research effort that includes more than 23,000 families nationwide, with representative samples in every state and the District of Columbia, enabling meaningful state-by-state comparisons and providing critical context for policy decisions.

Several themes stand out from the North Carolina results:



Support for School Choice and Educational Options: North Carolina implemented a comprehensive Universal School Choice policy in 2024, providing all families access to public, private and charter schools. Now, over 70% of North Carolina families express that they strongly or somewhat favor private, charter and open enrollment models.



Support for Education Savings Accounts (ESAs): North Carolina currently operates a robust ESA program for students with special needs. Survey responses indicate strong parental interest in expanding the use of ESAs beyond special education, with 50% of parents strongly favoring the idea and an additional 28% of parents somewhat favoring expansion.



Access to High-Quality Tutoring: More than 60% of parents surveyed strongly favor increased public funding for tutoring. Families continue to feel the academic impact of the pandemic and emphasize

the need for targeted support to help students catch up. While demand for tutoring is strong across all demographics, low-income families again report the least access.



Increase Teacher Compensation: Increasing teacher salaries received majority support among North Carolina families, with 56% of families believing salaries are too low. While the General Assembly often highlights above-average starting salaries, North Carolina continues to rank near the bottom nationally in overall teacher pay.

The pages that follow include:

- An overview of the survey's **methodology** and how to interpret the results
- A concise **summary** of North Carolina's performance across all five categories and 15 questions
- Visual **comparisons** showing how North Carolina stacks up nationally and how responses have changed since the previous survey

The full North Carolina report is available at carolinacan.org. National results, the survey instrument, and the complete dataset can be found at 50can.org.

Our hope is that this second edition continues to support informed decision-making as North Carolina works to expand educational opportunity for every student.

Sincerely,



K. B - L. J.

Marcus Brandon
Executive Director
CarolinaCAN

Methodology

Edge Research conducted a nationwide survey of 23,104 U.S. parents and guardians of school-aged children (K-12th grade) in each of the 50 states plus the District of Columbia. **In North Carolina, 617 parents and guardians of K-12 children were surveyed.** Respondents could take the survey in either English or Spanish, based on their preference. The survey was in the field from September 30, 2025, to December 1, 2025.

DATA COLLECTION

The survey used a mixed-mode methodology to reach as many households as possible. First, survey respondents were recruited using online, non-probability samples obtained via national opt-in consumer research panels. These surveys were mobile-optimized (meaning participants can take the survey on a PC or mobile device, which helps reach those who do not have internet access but do have a mobile data plan). In states where Edge Research was not able to collect enough surveys using this method, they obtained supplementary text-to-web interviews.

SURVEY REPRESENTATIVENESS

As respondents entered the survey, they submitted demographic information, and quotas were set to ensure the sample is proportionately distributed in accordance with the most recent U.S. Census and National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data on U.S. parents in each state. Quotas functioned by predetermining the number of desired respondents by gender identity, race, ethnicity, child's grade, and grade level in each state. Once the desired number was reached with each quota group, it closed, and additional respondents were turned away. After the survey came out of the field, Edge Research reviewed the data and applied additional weights by income, marital status, parent gender, race/ethnicity, school type, and area (e.g., urban, suburban, small town, rural) within states.

The following tables provide the demographics of survey respondents in North Carolina after weighting.

RACE/ETHNICITY							
Hispanic/ Latino of Any Race	White Alone	Black/ African American Alone	American Indian or Alaska Native Alone	Asian Alone	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Alone	Some Other Race Alone	Two or More Races
12%	64%	18%	1%	3%	0.1%	0.2%	2%

INCOME DISTRIBUTION		
Low Income	Middle Income	High Income
42%	52%	6%

SCHOOL LEVEL		
K-5th	6th-8th	9th-12th
45%	23%	32%

¹ <https://www.census.gov/>

² <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/tableviewer/acsProfile/2021>

GRADE OF CHILD												
K	1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade	4th Grade	5th Grade	6th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade
8%	7%	8%	7%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%

SCHOOL TYPE									
Local or Traditional Public School	Public Magnet School	Public Charter School	Private Independent School	Parochial/ Religious School	Virtual/ Online Public School	Homeschool	Microschool	Other Type of School	
64%	6%	10%	10%	1%	2%	6%	1%	1%	

INCOME DEFINITIONS

In the pages that follow, we provide results for low-, middle- and high-income parents. These income buckets were calculated using the Pew Research Center's study on "The State of the American Middle Class" and their category definitions:

- Middle-income households are defined as those with an income that is two-thirds to double that of the U.S. median household income, after being adjusted for household size.
- Lower-income households have incomes less than two-thirds of the median
- High-income households have incomes that are more than double the median.

Following these definitions, Edge Research adjusted the incomes reported in the survey to reflect a three-person household using the equivalence scales technique. Pulling from the U.S. Census 2023 Annual Social and Economic Supplements, they used the three-person household income breaks of \$61,000 to \$183,000 as middle, and values above and below those thresholds as lower and upper income respectively. Edge Research also adjusted each household income using Regional Price Parities (RPPs)—indexes from the Bureau of Economic Analysis—that compare local prices to the national average. These tell whether an area is more or less expensive than the country overall. RPPs are applied differently based on what is known about the household's location. If the exact metro area is known, the RPP is used for that metro area. If the household is in a non-metro (rural or small town) area, the RPP for non-metro areas in that state is used.

DATA QUALITY CONTROL AND STANDARDS

Edge Research employed several practices to ensure data quality. The survey platform used reCAPTCHA to screen for bots. They also applied a third-party tool called Research Defender to screen out known bad actors and respondents with high survey-taking rates. In addition, data was monitored regularly while in the field. Once all responses were collected, they applied additional data cleaning processes, clearing data for cheating, speeding, inattentiveness, and AI-generated responses.

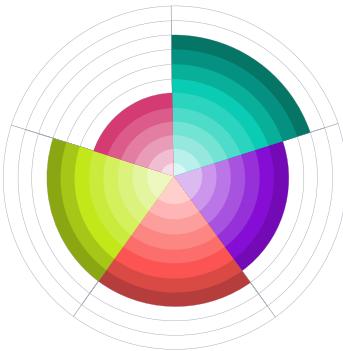
Edge Research follows the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) Code of Professional Ethics and Practices to maintain the highest standards of competence, integrity, accountability, and transparency in public opinion and survey research work.

³ <https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/time-series/demo/cps/cps-asec.2023.html#list-tab-165711867>
⁴ [Standards and Ethics - AAPOR](#)

How to Read the Results

One challenge with a survey of this size was how to present the results in an accessible way that doesn't sacrifice the depth of insights. We decided to present the answers in two ways: first with an overview of the results across 15 questions for our state and then with a more in-depth look at how our state compared to all the other states for a few key questions.

OUR STATE SUMMARY



To help make it easier to look at our state's full results at a glance, we present the answers from our parents over two pages. At the top of the first page is the number of parents who participated in the survey.

We also provide a way to view our state's **relative strengths and weaknesses through a circle with five wedges**, one for each of the five categories of the survey: 1) School quality and opportunity (pink), 2) Tutoring, summer, and mental health (green), 3) Out of school activities (teal), 4) Information and engagement (purple), and 5) College and career readiness (orange).

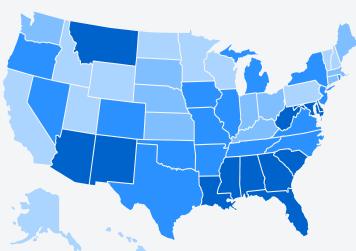
Each of the five categories is made up of three questions. These are presented below each category with **our state's results compared to other states represented by a tier** shown to the right of each question, from low to high. These tiers are scored from 1 (low) to 4 (high) and the scores across the three questions determine how many rows are colored in for the wedge (up to a possible number of 12 rows).

The state results for each question are presented in circles that offer a comparison of the state against the national average and the 2025 results compared to 2024. For yes/no questions, the results are presented as the percentage who said yes, rounded to the nearest whole number. For questions about parents' opinions and attitudes, we utilized a Likert scale and **reported out the percentage choosing the highest option**. For example, on question 1, which measures parents' satisfaction with their child's school, we present the percentage who answered that they were "very satisfied." This helps ground the comparison discussion in a high bar for success.



OUR STATE IN CONTEXT

The second section of this report provides comparative results for all 50 states plus D.C., one question at a time.



For the maps, a key provides the scale for the map and explains the numbers behind each of the four shades of blue. The darkest shade of blue is always the highest numbers and the lightest shade of blue is always the lowest numbers. Our state is outlined in red.

For the list, states are ordered from highest performing states at the top to lowest performing states at the bottom. Our state is identified with a red box to make it easier to spot.

NORTH CAROLINA

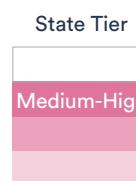


Surveyed September 30 - December 1, 2025

Sample size (N) = 617 parents and guardians



SCHOOL QUALITY AND OPPORTUNITY



Very Satisfied with School

Percentage answering they are very satisfied with their child's school

2024 NC Average



2025 NC Average



2024-2025 Difference



National Average



Would Make the Same Choice

Percentage answering that they would send their child to the school they go to today

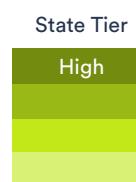


Feel They Have a Choice

Percentage answering they feel like they have a choice in what school their child attends



TUTORING, SUMMER AND MENTAL HEALTH



Tutoring Participation

Percentage of children who have received academic tutoring in this past school year

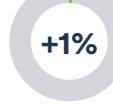
2024 NC Average



2025 NC Average



2024-2025 Difference

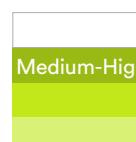


National Average



Summer Program Participation

Percentage of children who participated in a supervised summer program



Very Satisfied with Mental Health Support

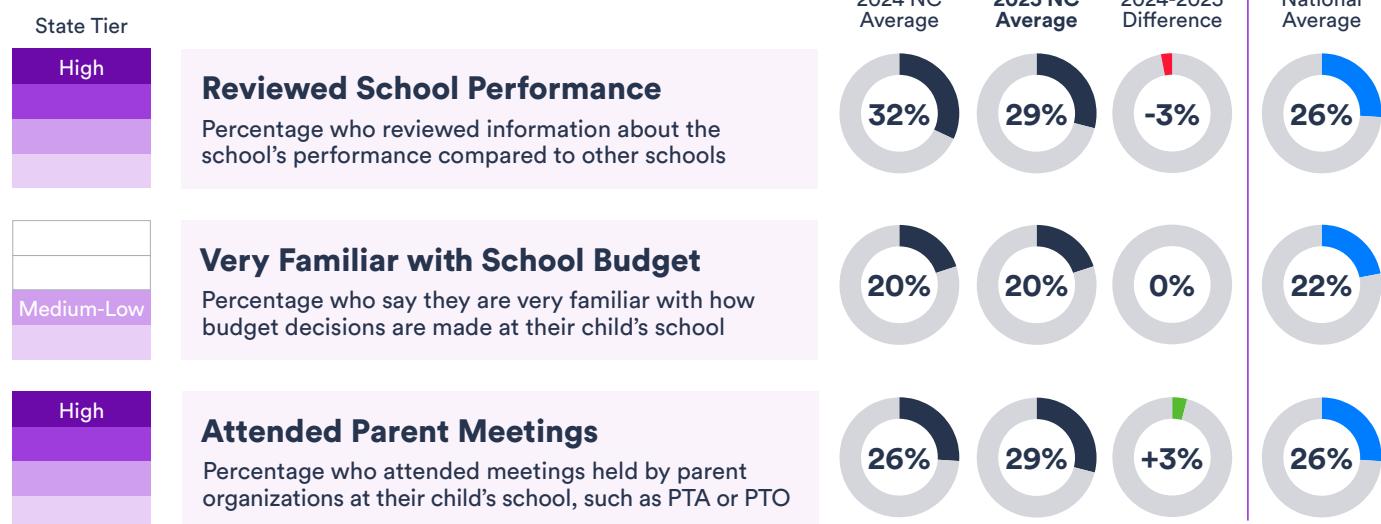
Percentage answering they are very satisfied with how the school supports their child's mental health needs



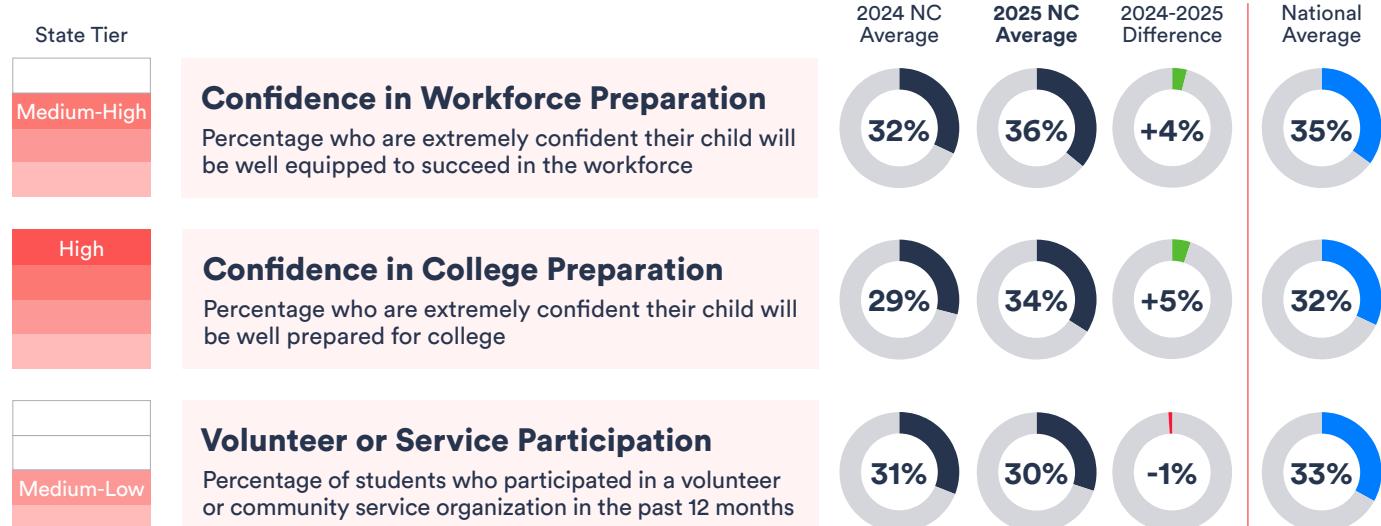
OUT OF SCHOOL ACTIVITIES



INFORMATION AND ENGAGEMENT



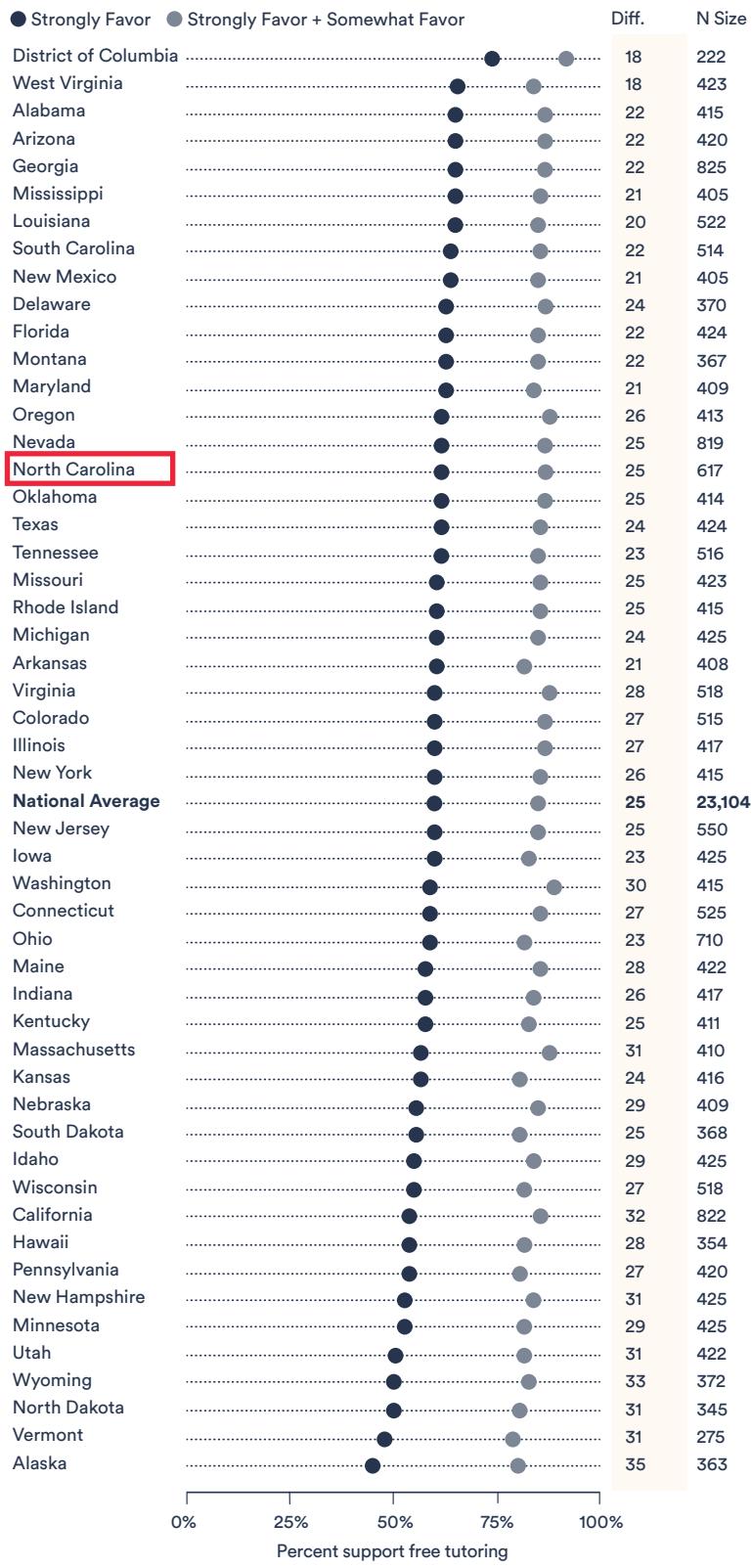
COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS



North Carolina in Context: A 50-State Perspective

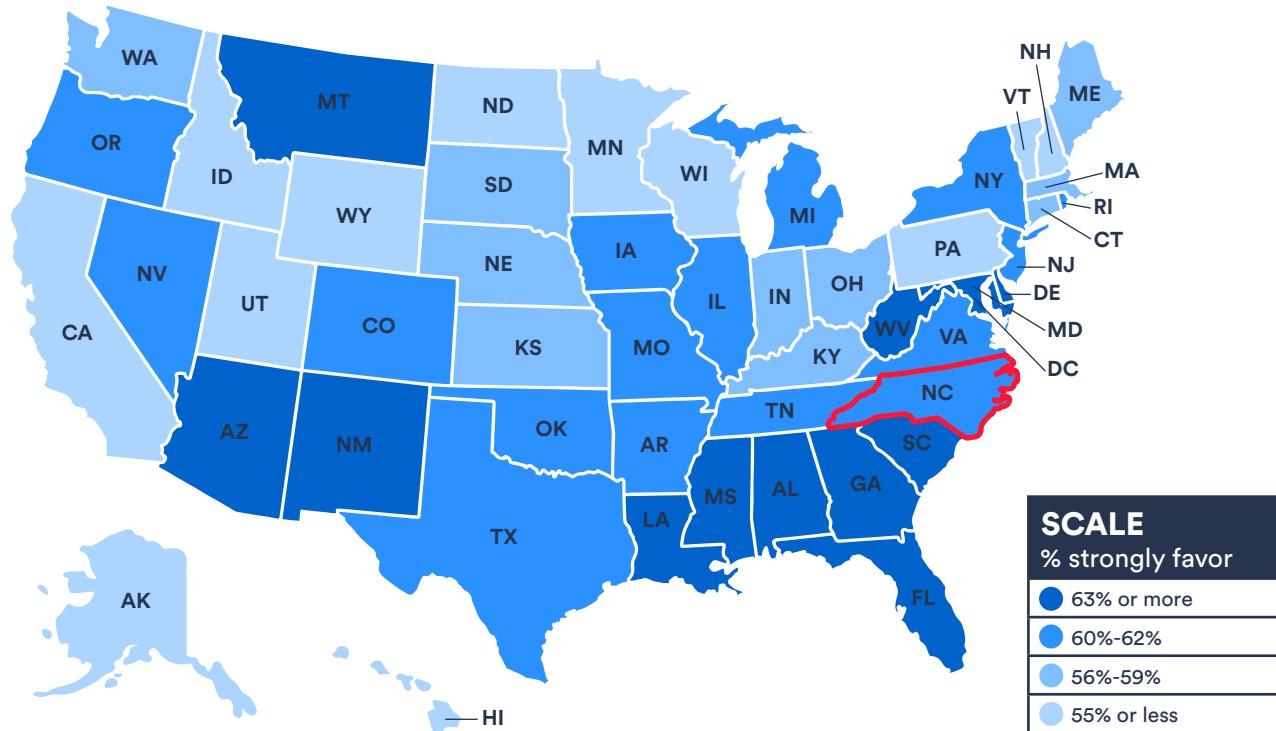
SUPPORT FOR FREE TUTORING BY STATE

Percentage answering they favor free tutoring for K-12 students who fall below grade level



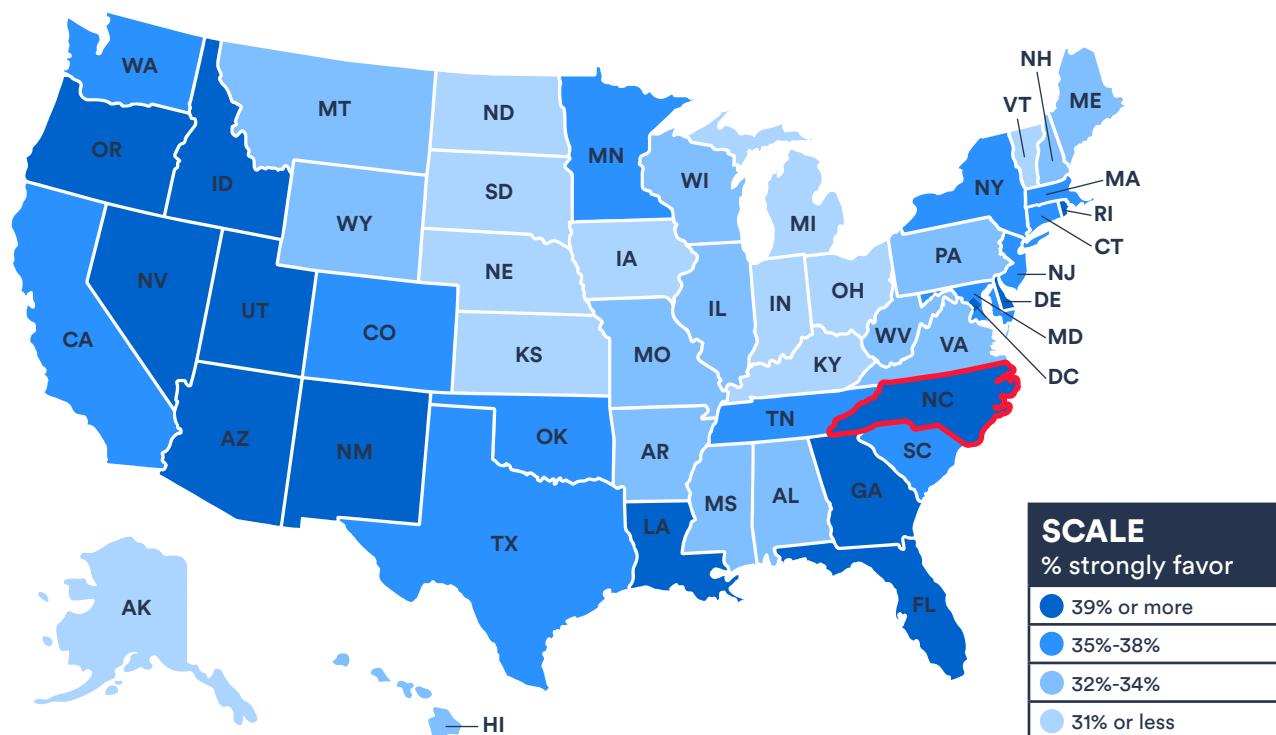
STRONGLY FAVOR FREE TUTORING BY STATE

Percentage answering they strongly favor free tutoring for K-12 students who fall below grade level



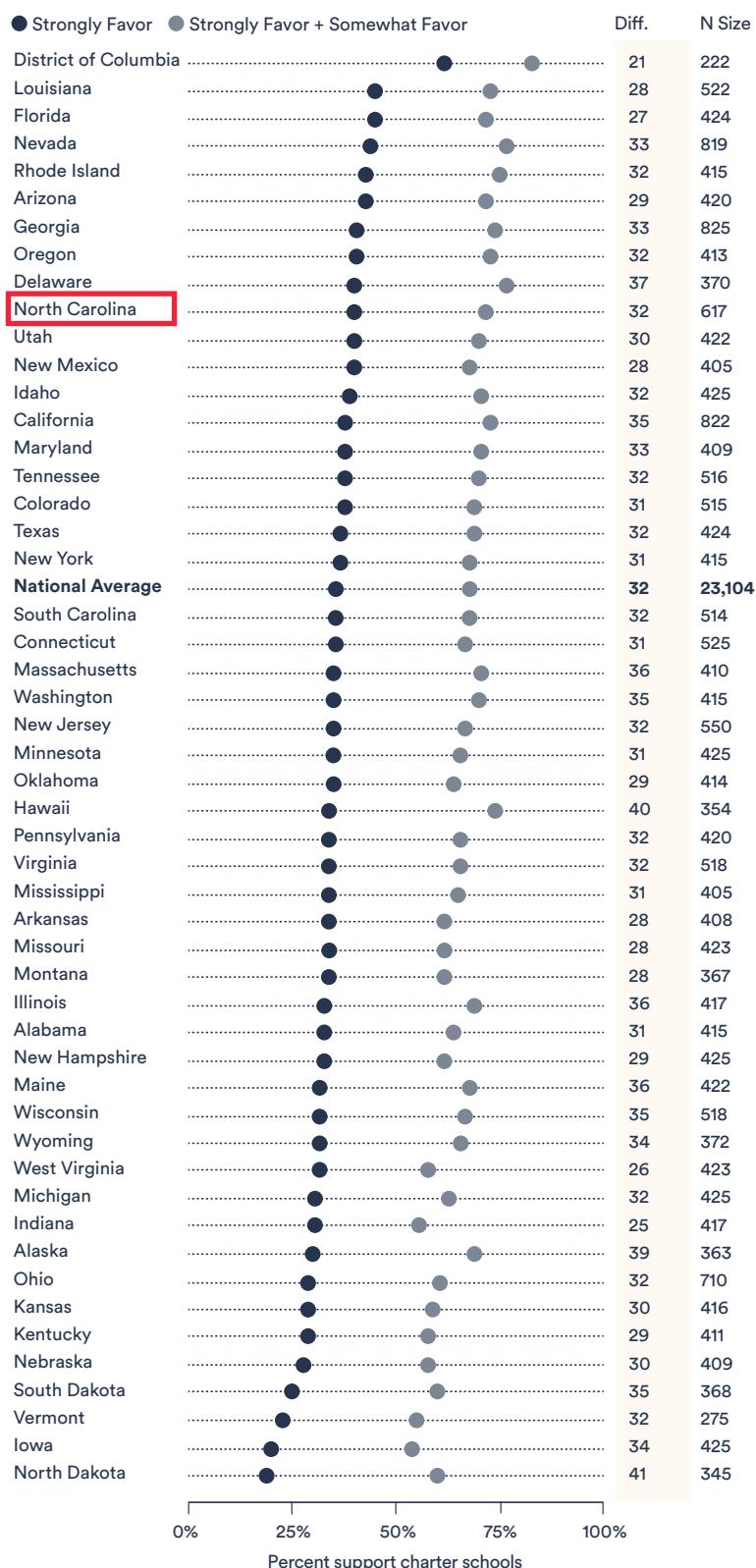
STRONGLY FAVOR CHARTER SCHOOLS BY STATE

Percentage answering they strongly favor charter schools (public schools exempt from some regulations in exchange for greater accountability for results)



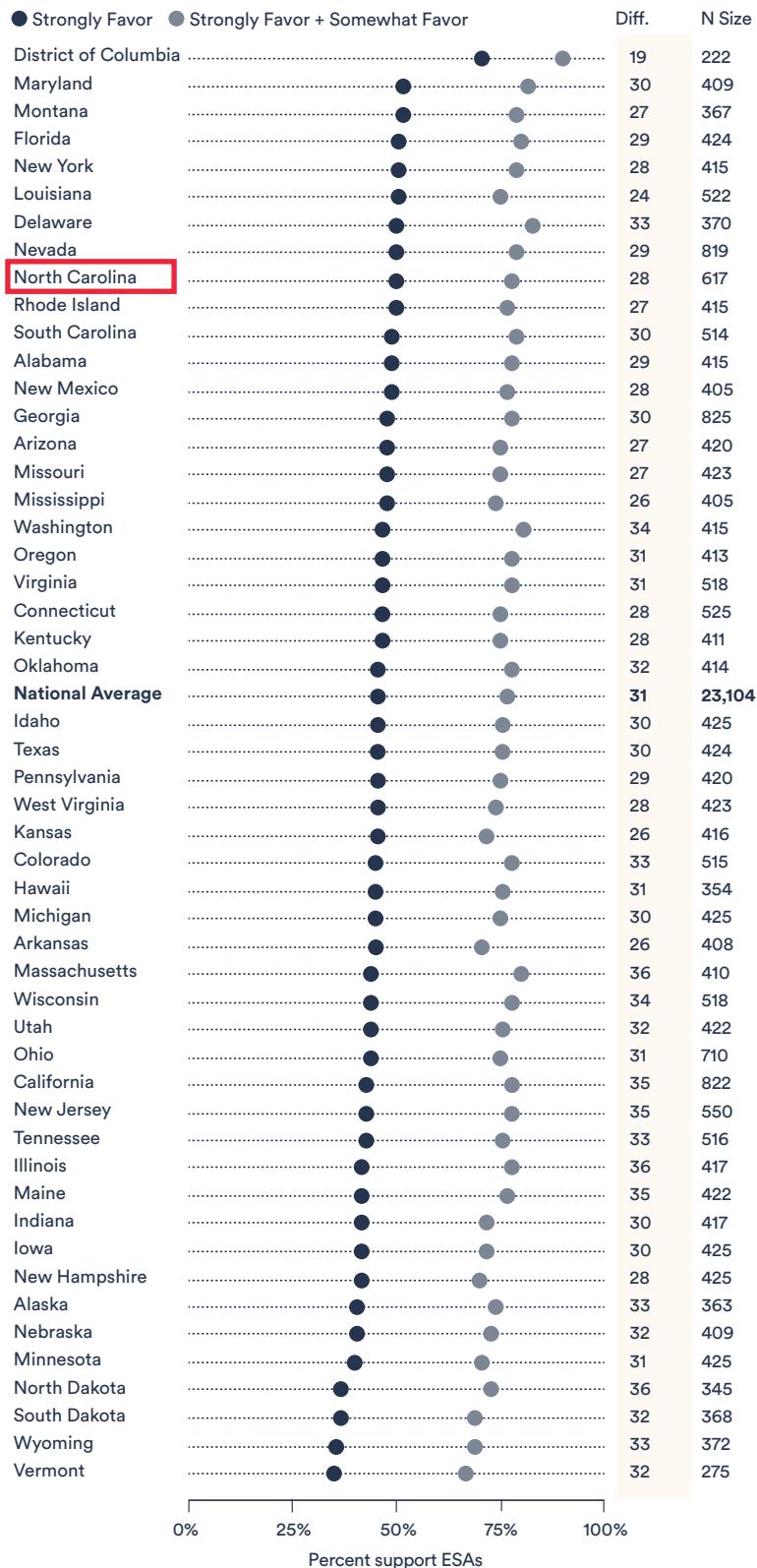
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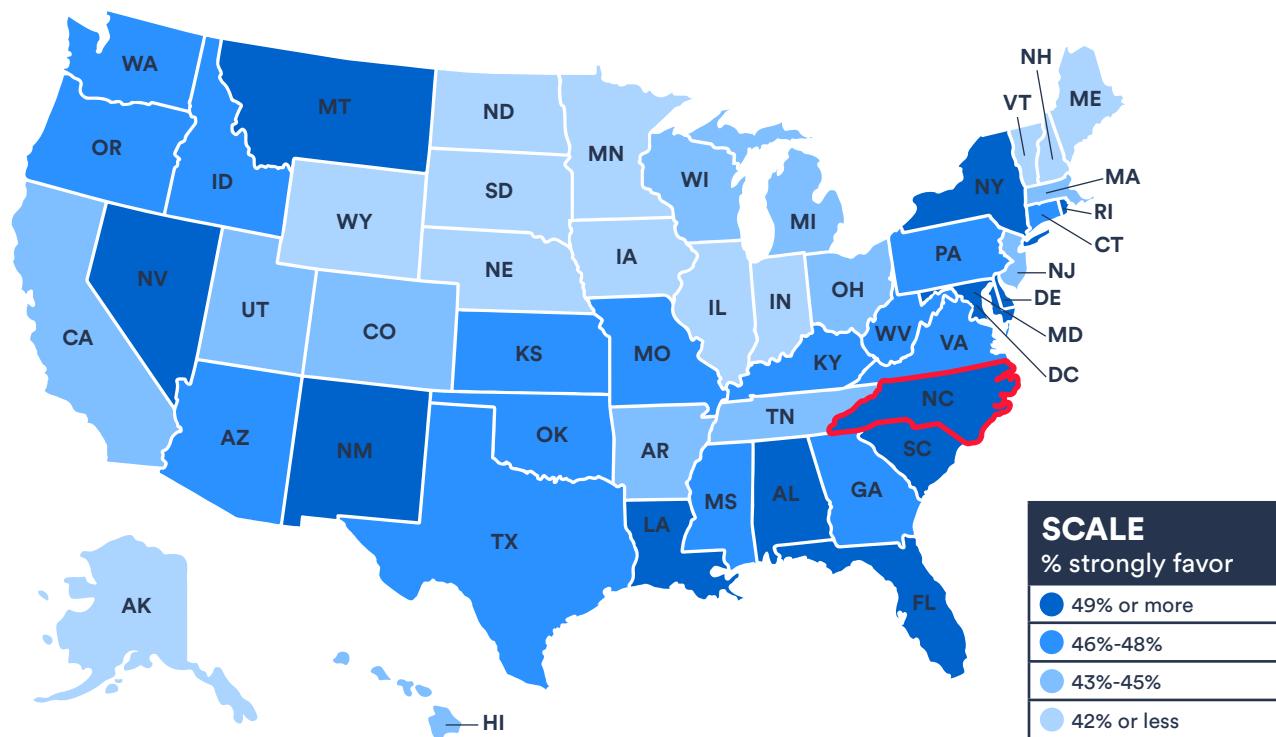
SUPPORT FOR EDUCATION SAVINGS ACCOUNTS BY STATE

Percentage answering they favor ESAs, a government savings account where parents can use the funds for multiple educational purposes



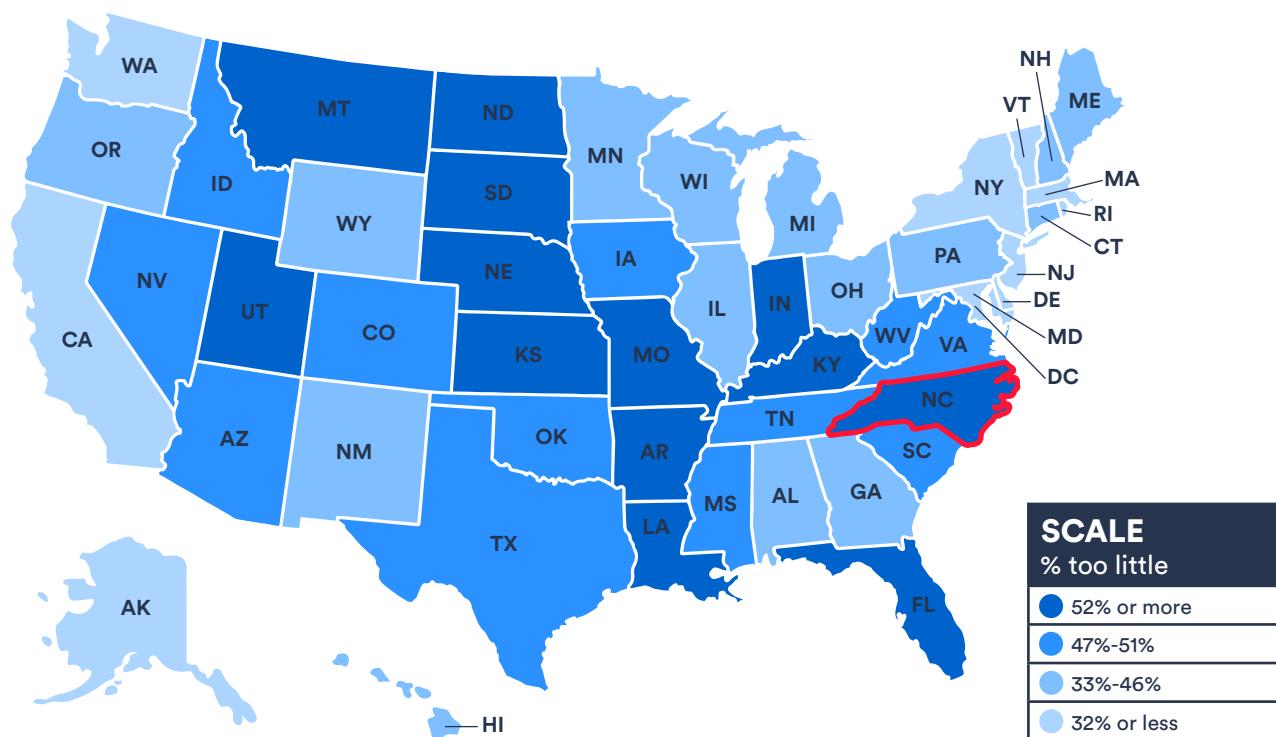
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Percentage answering they strongly favor ESAs, a government savings account where parents can use the funds for multiple educational purposes



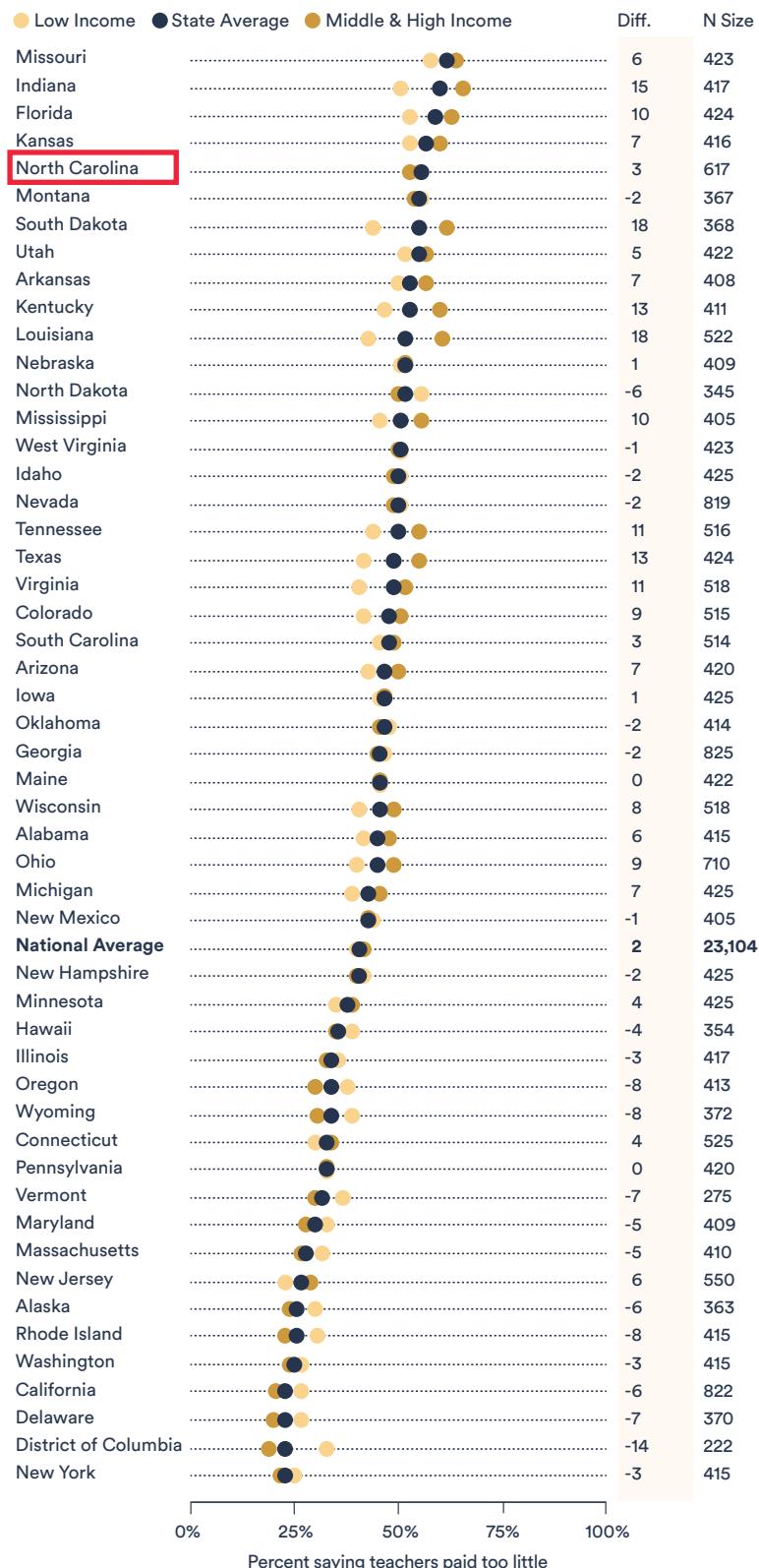
SUPPORT FOR HIGHER SALARIES BY STATE

Percentage who think the average public school teacher in their state is paid too little after being told the average public school teacher salary in their state



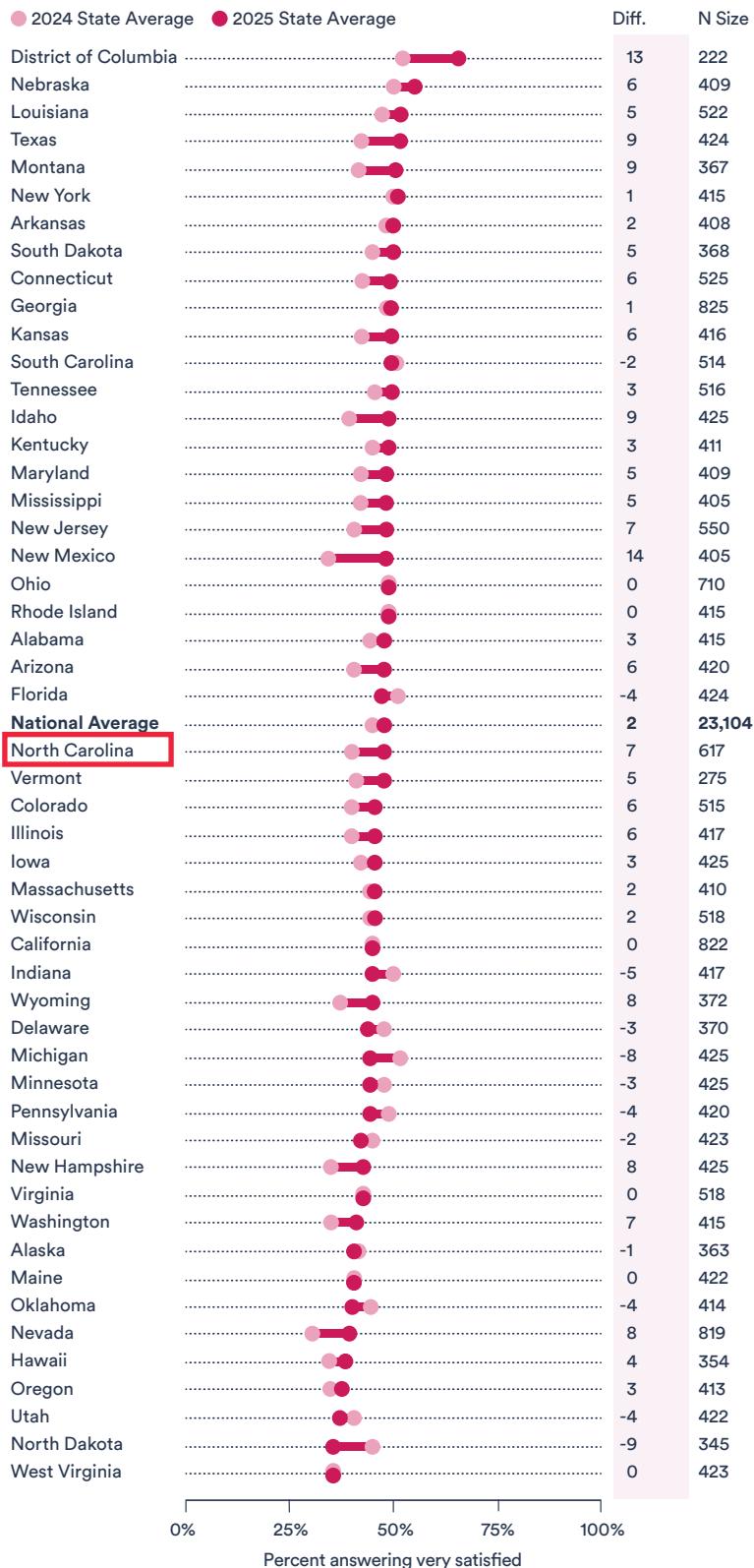
SUPPORT FOR HIGHER SALARIES BY STATE & INCOME

Percentage who think the average public school teacher in their state is paid too little after being told the average public school teacher salary in their state



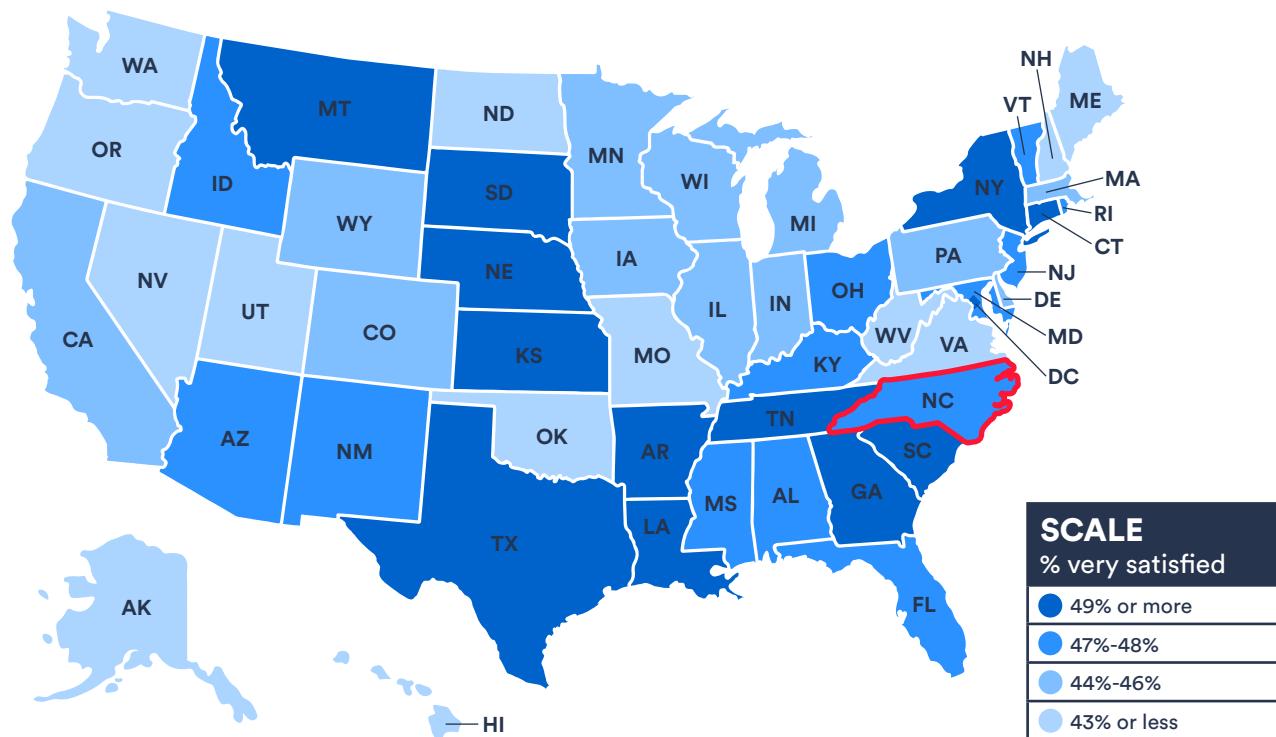
VERY SATISFIED WITH SCHOOL BY STATE & YEAR

Percentage answering they are very satisfied with their child's schools



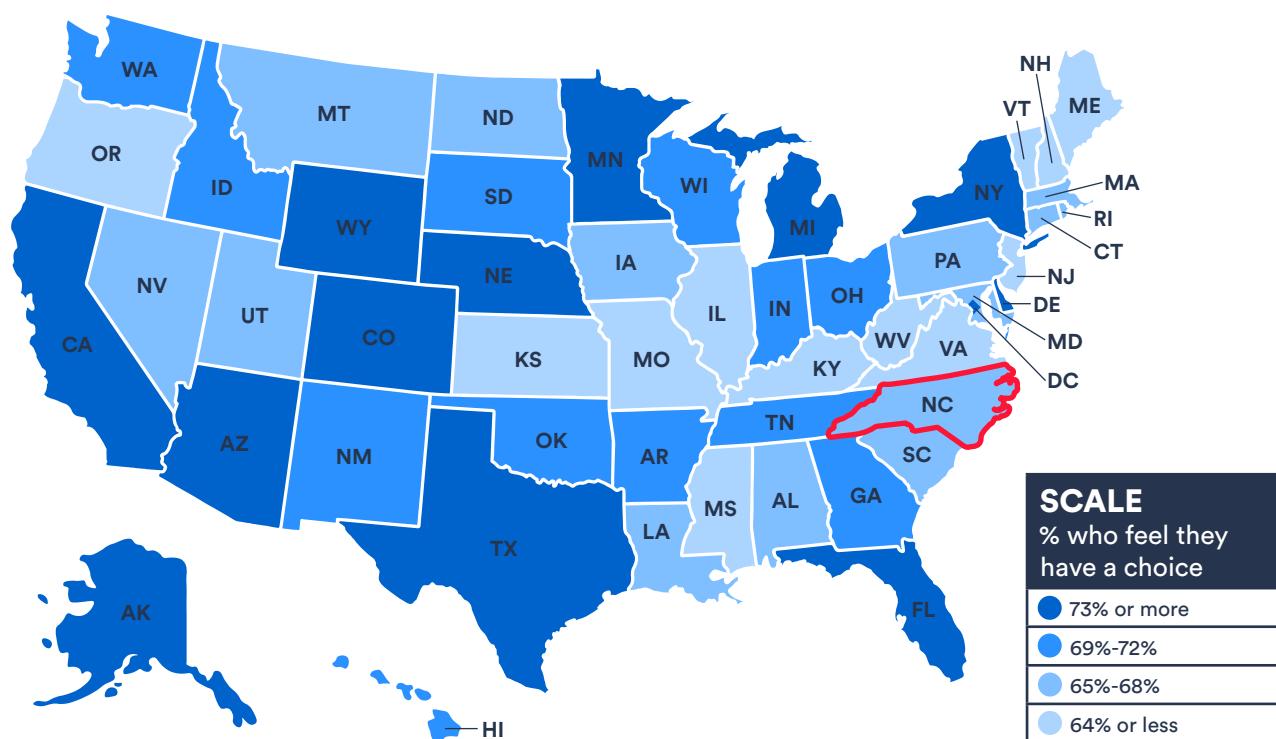
VERY SATISFIED WITH SCHOOL BY STATE

Percentage answering they are very satisfied with their child's schools



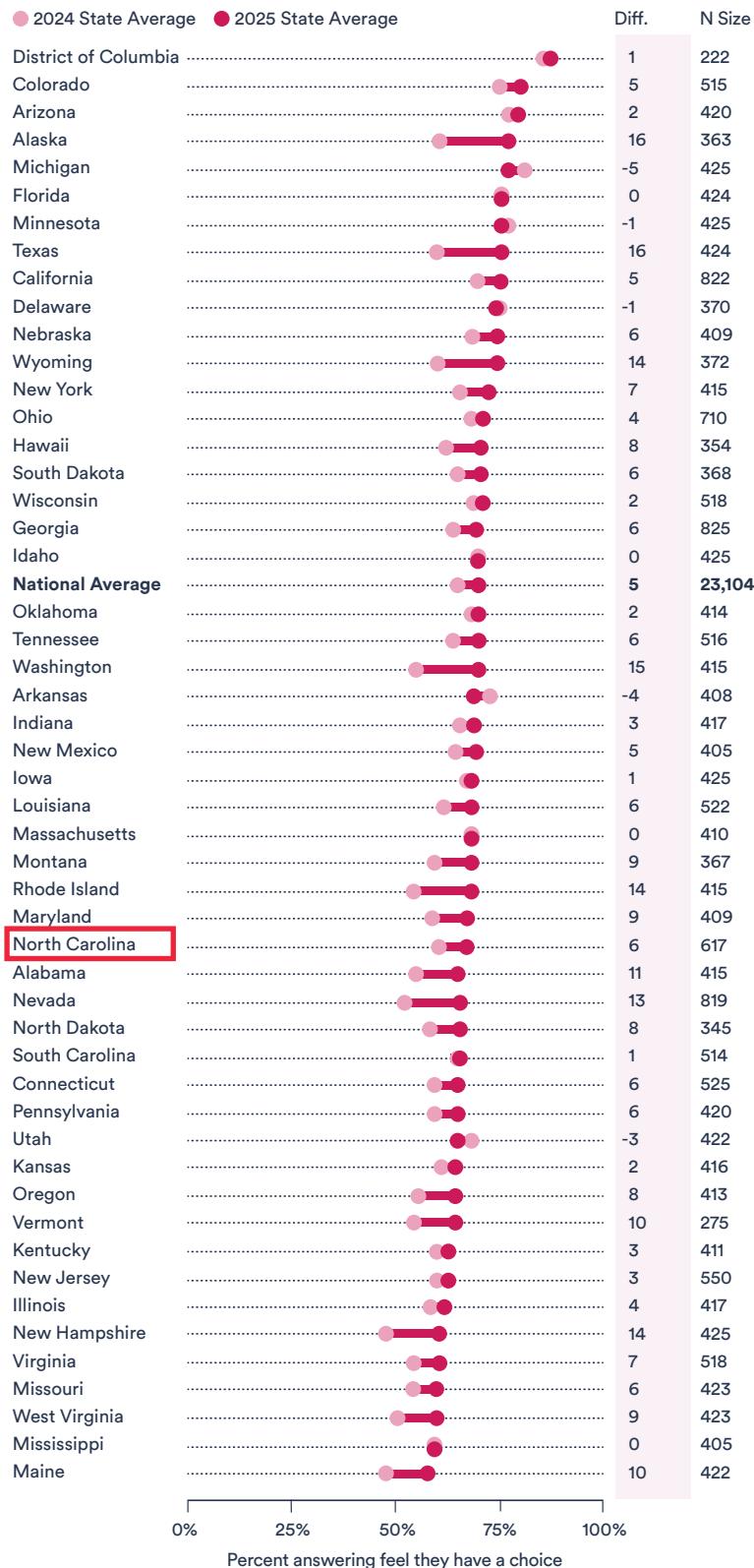
FEEL THEY HAVE A CHOICE BY STATE

Percentage answering they feel like they have a choice in what school their child attends



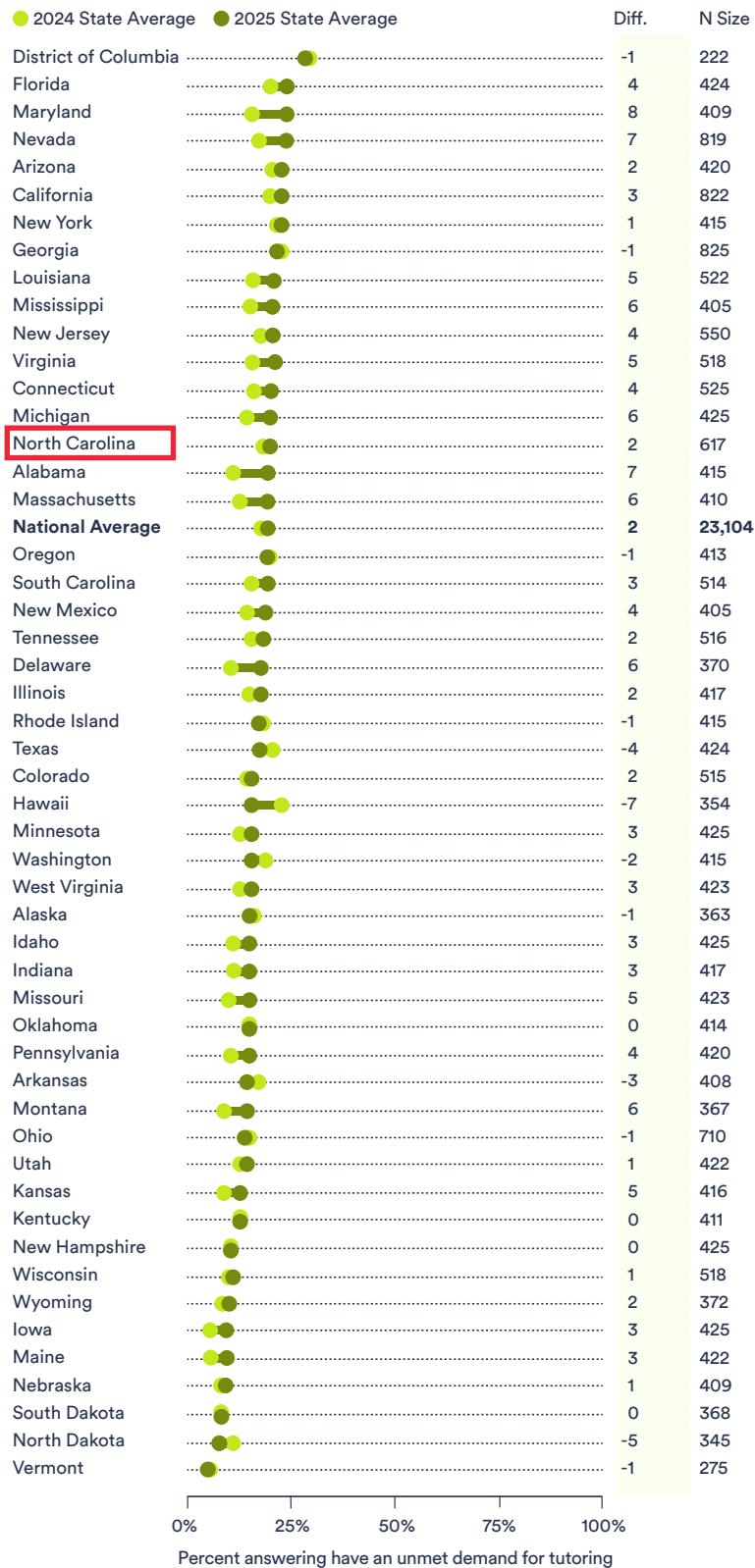
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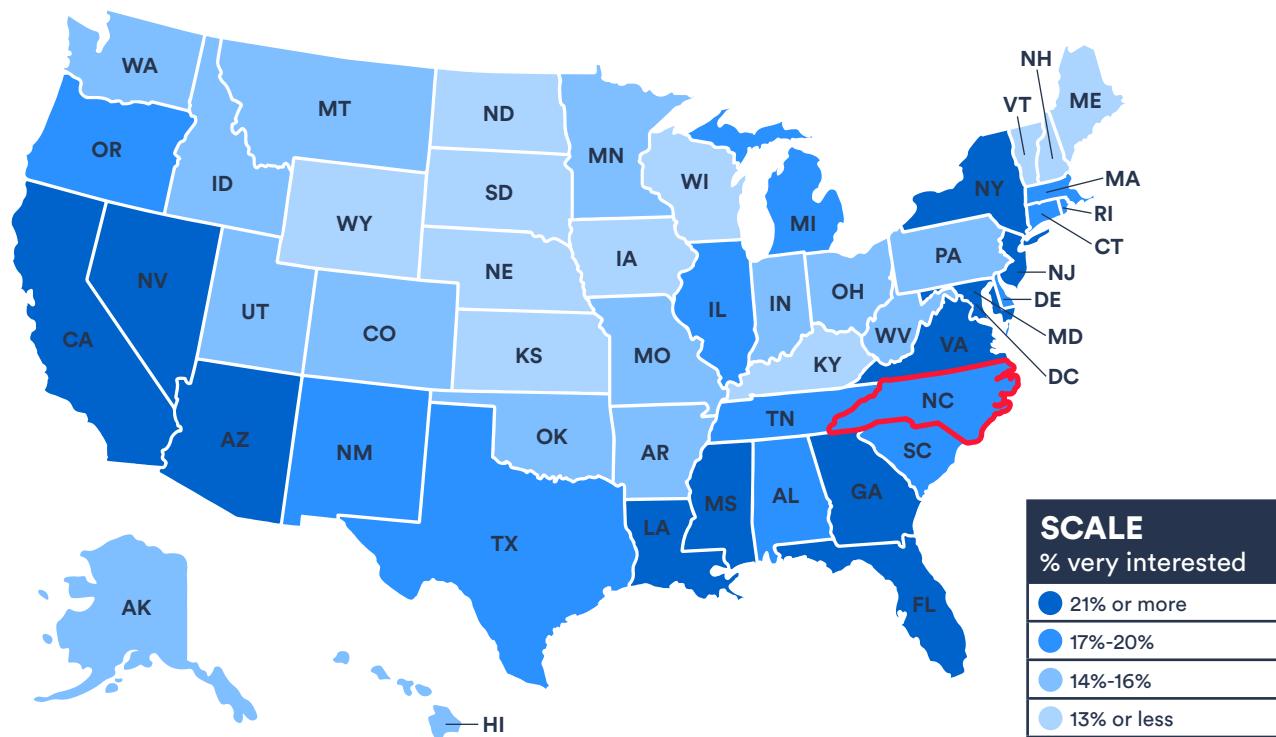
UNMET DEMAND FOR TUTORING BY STATE & YEAR

Percentage of families who don't have a tutor who are very interested in tutoring



UNMET DEMAND FOR TUTORING BY STATE

Percentage of families who don't have a tutor who are very interested in tutoring



ABOUT CAROLINACAN

CarolinaCAN advocates for the success of every North Carolina student, from Pre-K through college and career. Our work is centered on empowering, mobilizing and collaborating with everyday North Carolinians to advocate for a high-quality education system. We use research and communications, grassroots organizing and government relations to ensure North Carolina's education system is excellent for every student.

ABOUT 50CAN

50CAN is an education advocacy organization focused on building the dynamic, student-centered education system of the future so that all kids, regardless of address, receive a high quality education. At the center of this work is our support for local education advocates who together have secured more than 275 transformative policy wins since our founding in 2011. This advocacy work is complemented by fellowships to spark and amplify the voices of changemakers, support for educational entrepreneurs as they build proof points of a better tomorrow, and efforts to help elected leaders better serve the public through a deeper understanding of education policy.

ABOUT EDGE RESEARCH

Edge Research tells data-driven stories that make our clients' programs, products, and brands successful. One of Edge's key verticals is education, which ranges from early childhood development, to K-12 and postsecondary education, to lifelong learning. We work for dozens of foundations, advocacy organizations, curriculum providers, associations, districts, schools and universities. Edge is constantly in the field talking to parents, students, teachers, administrators, and other education decision makers – getting the pulse on the issues that matter most.

