New Understood and UnidosUS Study Confirms Lost School Year With 90% of U.S. Teachers and 61% of Parents Predicting Increased Challenges as Children Head Back to School

Teachers and parents unite to “reimagine the classroom” amid learning challenges

65% of parents observed learning challenges with their child over the last year yet nearly half of Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino parents say they can’t afford a diagnosis

Understood hosts Town Hall and launches interactive Take N.O.T.E. digital experience to help parents start conversations around potential learning differences

NEW YORK (AUGUST 24, 2021) — Understood, a social impact, nonprofit organization and the only lifelong guide for those who learn and think differently, today unveiled its 2021 Back to School Study, conducted in partnership with UnidosUS, the largest Latino civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States. The study focused on understanding the perspectives, anticipated challenges, and preparedness of teachers, parents, and students as we head back to school. Measuring the attitudes of 495 educators and 1,005 parents of children with and without learning and thinking differences like ADHD and dyslexia, the study found that as a result of the pandemic, more challenges lie ahead.

Over two-thirds (68%) of teachers and more than 60% of parents prefer and expect their children to return to school in person full-time. Despite feeling ready for a return to the classroom, 90% of educators are concerned about longer-term challenges that all students might face from missing traditional education last year. Top concerns include academic development (73%), anxiety (65%), and social (63%) and emotional (62%) advancement.
“As we head back to school, teachers and parents alike are concerned about the lasting impact of the pandemic on students including the learning challenges that they are observing,” said Fred Poses, CEO and co-founder of Understood. “Our findings examine how we can reimagine learning across the entire ecosystem.”

Reimagining the Classroom

The research found that open communications between teachers and parents will be pivotal in bridging at-home and in-classroom learning as we get ready for the new school year. Over 50% of educators have relied on technology over the past year, and have had to reimagine the classroom through innovation and creativity.

- **Steps for Improving Classroom Learning:** Educators see a need for even more hands-on activities (61%), smaller classrooms (57%), flexible learning environments (55%), and more one-on-one interaction with students (over 50%).

- **What Schools Can Do to Enhance Learning at Home:** Schools can support continued learning at home: 69% of respondents say that schools should offer advice to parents on how to support their children; additional learning devices, such as laptops and/or tablets should be supplied to households with more than one school-age child (66%); along with guidance to access social services (54%) and social-emotional learning support (51%).

- **How Parents Can Improve Learning:** The study also highlighted opportunities for parents to play a role in learning this year: 72% of educators suggest that parents have a designated and quiet workspace for their children; parents should partner better with teachers (61%); create a calendar for work and play (60%); spend more time assisting children with assignments (58%); and allow children to learn in nontraditional academic environments (outside classrooms) (51%).

“Encouragingly, more than half of both parents and teachers believe increased interaction between teachers, students,
and parents will help improve performance,” added Amanda Morin, Understood’s director of thought leadership and expertise. “Students who learn differently will face more challenges than usual this school year. So providing resources, such as Take N.O.T.E., and opportunities to connect parents and teachers to address these challenges is more important than ever.”

Parents Grapple With How to Get Academic Support for Kids

The majority of parents (60%) are eager to send their children back to in-person learning but are unsure how to address concerns about learning challenges and developmental needs from the last school year and pandemic learning environments.

- 50% of all parents are worried about their child facing challenges because of not having the same education last year due to COVID-19.
- 44% of parents say they don’t know how to start the conversations with educators around learning challenges they’ve noticed.
- More than eight out of 10 parents wish they had a tool to track their child’s behavior prior to their diagnosis, including 81% of Black/African American parents, and 83% of Hispanic/Latino parents.

Impact of Back-to-School on Diverse Students and Parents

More than 70% of Hispanic/Latino parents and 65% of Black/African American parents noticed their children experienced a learning challenge, and similarly to all parents surveyed, approximately a third said their children are continuing to struggle to adapt to COVID-19 rules and regulations in the classroom.
• Black/African American (46%) and Hispanic/Latino (44%) parents say they can’t afford a diagnosis for learning challenges they’ve observed.

• More than half (63%) of Black/African American parents and nearly half of Hispanic/Latino parents (44%) say they cannot find Spanish-language resources; about half say they don’t have the community support (50% of Black/African American and 48% of Hispanic/Latino parents).

• 39% of Black/African American parents are more likely to hire a learning specialist for their child; 42% plan to request a new evaluation for their child.

• More than half of Hispanic/Latino parents (54%) have anxiety related to talking about the learning challenges of their children and feel that their communities don’t support them; many (51%) have decided to not pursue noticeable challenges because their teachers don’t believe their children.

“At UnidosUS, we prioritize family engagement because we know education is critical to our community, and we see the barriers to participation in the school system,” said Margaret McLeod, Ed.D., vice president of education, workforce development, and evaluation at UnidosUS. “This research confirms that Latinx families are deeply invested in their children’s education and concerned about the impact of the pandemic on their learning. Students with learning differences and their families need access to timely, culturally, and linguistically appropriate resources to navigate this challenging environment.”

Conducted in July 2021, Understood and UnidosUS’ 2021 Back to School Study leveraged quantitative data from 495 educators and 1,005 parents of children with and without learning and thinking differences across the United States. Study respondents included educators as well as parents of children ages 5-18, with 30% identifying as Hispanic/Latino, 68% as White/Caucasian, 19% as Black/African American, 3% as Asian, and 2% as Native American. Full study results are available upon request.

Taking Action With Take N.O.T.E. and Discussion Forum
On September 9, 2021, Understood will host a Town Hall forum designed to bring together parents, teachers, and experts as part of a free, virtual forum to answer questions and discuss the social, emotional, and academic challenges that their children may be facing this school year, and how to respond to them.

During the “Real Talk: Taking N.O.T.E. of Learning Challenges in the New School Year” event, Understood, with the American Academy of Pediatrics, UnidosUS, CCSSO, Teacher of the Year Juliana Urtubey, and more will also highlight the benefits of Take N.O.T.E., a free, web-based interactive digital tool, developed in partnership with the American Academy of Pediatrics to help families notice and address learning challenges that they have seen during the pandemic that could be signs of learning and thinking differences.

The event will be livestreamed via Understood’s YouTube channel and syndicated across its Facebook channel (in English and Spanish). Interested attendees can RSVP here.

About Understood

1 in 5 Americans have learning and thinking differences, such as ADHD and dyslexia. They are often misunderstood, undiagnosed, and dismissed, and these differences are viewed as a weakness. This leaves many on a journey that is stacked against them and costs society more than $500 billion. Understood is the only lifelong guide for those who learn and think differently. Today, we help more than 20 million people each year discover their potential, how to take control, find community, and stay on a positive path along each stage of life’s journey. When others join this journey, and people are broadly embraced, everyone thrives. Understood is a 501(c)(3) private operating foundation based in New York. For more information, or to become a partner, visit u.org/media and follow us on Twitter @UnderstoodOrg.

About UnidosUS
UnidosUS, previously known as NCLR (National Council of La Raza), is the nation’s largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Through its unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an Affiliate Network of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico, UnidosUS simultaneously challenges the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos at the national and local levels. For more than 50 years, UnidosUS has united communities and different groups seeking common ground through collaboration, and that share a desire to make our country stronger. For more information on UnidosUS, visit www.unidosus.org or follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

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As children around the country return to school in coming months, new research from Understood and UnidosUS with teachers and parents predicts increased academic, mental health, and social and emotional challenges for learning.

90% of U.S. teachers and 61% of parents believe there will be increased challenges as children head back to school.

**Academic Challenges**

Approximately three-quarters (73%) of educators surveyed are concerned about children’s academic development in the new school year.

More than half (55%) of parents are concerned about their children’s academic development in the new school year. This is even higher among parents of kids with learning and thinking differences (68%) than without (41%).

**Mental Health**

More than half (65%) of educators surveyed are concerned about children’s anxiety going back to school. 43% expressed concerns about depression, and 62% are concerned about the overall emotional well-being of children.

Most parents surveyed (68%) are concerned about the mental well-being of their child and the school’s ability to help during the upcoming year, including 76% of parents of children with learning and thinking differences and 60% without.
Social & Emotional Development

The majority of educators (63%) surveyed are concerned about students’ social development this school year.

More than half (55%) of parents are concerned that their child will fall behind emotionally in the upcoming year and will not be able to catch up, including 68% of parents of kids with learning and thinking differences and 41% without.

Conducted in July 2021, Understood and UnidosUS’ 2021 Back to School Study includes quantitative data from 495 educators and a total of 1,005 parents of children with and without learning and thinking differences across the U.S. Respondents included educators as well as parents of children ages 5-18, with 30% Hispanic/Latino, 68% White/Caucasian, 19% Black/African American, 3% Asian, and 2% Native American respondents. Full study results are available upon request.