

Parent Survey on the Education of Students with Dyslexia in Australia

**Compiled by Tanya Forbes – Founder of the Gold Coast Dyslexia Support Group and
Dyslexia QLD Support**

Recently a national survey was conducted to investigate the current experiences of parents in the education of their children with dyslexia.

Responses were received from 1720 participants nationwide over a four week period from the 24th July 2016 until the 20th of August 2016. The scope of the survey is students from Prep/Kindergarten through to Year 12 from every state and territory and includes all school sectors.

This data represents the universal experiences of Australian parents and thank you so much to all those who participated in this survey and shared their experiences.

The data collected paints a clear picture of the current education opportunities provided to students with dyslexia in Australia. We hope the results from this survey will assist to cause momentum to inform and improve the learning experiences of children with dyslexia.

The survey examines the following:

- The Identification of Students with Dyslexia
- The Implementation of Professional Recommendations in Schools
- The Characteristics of Dyslexia
- Teacher Knowledge and Quality of Instruction
- School Support and Parent Engagement
- Differentiation and Adjustments
- Intervention and Learning Support
- Social and Emotional Impact
- Parent Advocacy

A comprehensive list of recommendations to support the education of students with dyslexia is provided at the end of the survey.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dyslexia is the forgotten learning disability despite its inclusion in the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and Disability Standards for Education (2005). Dyslexia is on a continuum from mild to severe and is far more prevalent than realised. The occurrence of dyslexia is widespread with 10% of the population being directly affected [Australian Dyslexia Association] and up to 20% of the population being on the dyslexia continuum [International Dyslexia Association]. This means that in every classroom, there will be between 3-5 students with dyslexia that will struggle to access the curriculum and participate on the same basis as their peers. These are bright and capable children that are not able to access the curriculum or demonstrate their knowledge and abilities due to their barrier with written language combined with a lack of support from the education system.

Most students with dyslexia are currently unidentified and unsupported in our schools. Those students who have been formally identified are often denied adequate support such as differentiated instruction, reasonable adjustments and tiered intervention. Most parents are unsatisfied with the quality of classroom and reading instruction due to limited teacher knowledge and inadequate teacher training. Parents have to advocate continuously for recognition and support for their child. Many schools claim that since dyslexia is 'unverified' and/or 'unfunded' there is no obligation to provide specialist assistance to students.

Due to the shortcomings of the education system, families are experiencing financial hardship. Many outlay substantial amounts of money for diagnostic assessments and external specialist intervention, however this is rarely subsidised. The level of private specialist teaching required to support students with dyslexia is beyond the means of many families. The current high demand for services exceeds the existing supply, and services are scarce or not available in regional locations.

The survey does indicate the presence of proactive lighthouse schools and champion teachers that have embraced evidence-based teaching practices to support students with dyslexia.... Unfortunately, these teachers and schools are the distinct minority.

The overlying concern is the education system is doing very little to address the needs of students with dyslexia and other related learning differences. The lack of understanding and inadequate provision of support for students with dyslexia in education is widespread. This is having a detrimental impact on the quality of education and emotional well being of our children.... as well as being very restrictive to their education potential and limiting their future opportunities.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The Identification of Students with Dyslexia

In 72% of instances, it is the parent or carer who first identifies the child is at risk of a reading difficulty. Most children (88%) have a formal assessment from a recognised professional at an average cost of \$1105. In the majority of cases the cost of the assessment is not subsidised and the expense is covered solely by the family.

The Implementation of Professional Recommendations

Comprehensive professional recommendations are not being successfully implemented by many schools.

Only 3.3% of schools have implemented all recommendations and another 14.6% of schools implemented most of them. In contrast, for 50.9% of cases, few or no recommendations have been implemented.

Similarly, for 36.6% of cases were recommendations implemented in a timely manner, whereas for 19% of cases it took many years of advocacy and for another 18%, these recommendations have never been implemented.

The Characteristics of Dyslexia

Research is investigating the heritability of dyslexia. The survey indicates in 57% of cases there is a family member with dyslexia and another 15% of respondents suspect there may be a family member with dyslexia.

Children with dyslexia predominantly struggle with reading, spelling and writing but there are also many other associated difficulties including concentration, working memory and slow processing speed. These children also may show strengths in areas such as creative arts, sport or STEM subjects. Parent satisfaction that their child's strengths and weaknesses are acknowledged and supported by the school is highly variable; with the majority of parents being 'somewhat satisfied' and the overall rating was 'somewhat unsatisfied.'

Teacher Knowledge and Quality of Instruction

Parents are not satisfied with both the mainstream classroom instruction and reading instruction their children receive within schools.

Only 18.8% of parents were satisfied or very satisfied with the classroom instruction, similarly the data indicates only 16.6% were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of reading instruction. The majority of parents were unsatisfied with the classroom instruction rating at 50.6% and reading instruction at 60.9%.

21% of parents felt their child's teacher had a good understanding of their child's learning needs and 82% believed that teachers do not have adequate knowledge and training in dyslexia.

School Support and Parent Engagement

Of the parents surveyed, 13% and 43% of schools were considered proactive and receptive respectively. This was offset by the remaining 44% of schools being described as reluctant and resistant. Only 4% of parents believe schools are knowledgeable in the legislation particularly the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and Disability Standards in Education 2005.

Parent engagement rated more positive with 63% of parents satisfied with the quality of communication and 72% are consulted regularly, either each term or semester. It should be noted, it is usually the parent who initiates contact and only 55% of students currently have an individual learning plan or equivalent.

Differentiation and Adjustments

The lack of provision of differentiated instruction and adjustments was the most concerning section. In every case at least 76% of students are not being adequately supported. The number of students that regularly receive classroom accommodations is 23.1%; universal design for learning is only 10.6%; assistive technology is at 23.3%; reasonable adjustments for assessments are 17.9%.

Intervention and Learning Support

In Australian schools, it is a matter of chance as to whether a student will receive intervention or learning support.

Currently, only 18 % of students with dyslexia receive differentiated classroom instruction. The provision of intervention is more generous with 41% of students receiving small group intervention, 36% obtain learning support and 11% access individualised intensive intervention. For every student that receives regular assistance (31%), there is a student that rarely or never gets support (39%). Sadly 30% of students receive NO additional support at all.

Only 7% of parents found their child's school meets their learning needs. Due to limited support in our schools, 31% of parents are required to provide extra intervention at home and 50% of families pay for external specialist intervention at an average cost of \$410 per student per month. Another 12% of families would like to be able to provide extra support but cannot afford it or are unable to provide it.

Social and Emotional Impact

The secondary effects of unsupported dyslexia are evident in the social and emotional impact on students with dyslexia.

Tragically, 72.9% of students experience anxiety, 67.2% are highly stressed and 21.8% battle with depression. Half these children have disengaged from learning (50.4%) and many regularly experience constant failure (40.0%). The eroded self worth and damaged self esteem of many, many students is highlighted these alarming statistics.

A lack of understanding by some teachers is highlighted by 33.8% of students being humiliated for work not being to standard and 26.3% of students being punished for not completing their work. These students need scaffolding and extra time but instead, they are often judged by for being lazy and not trying hard enough.

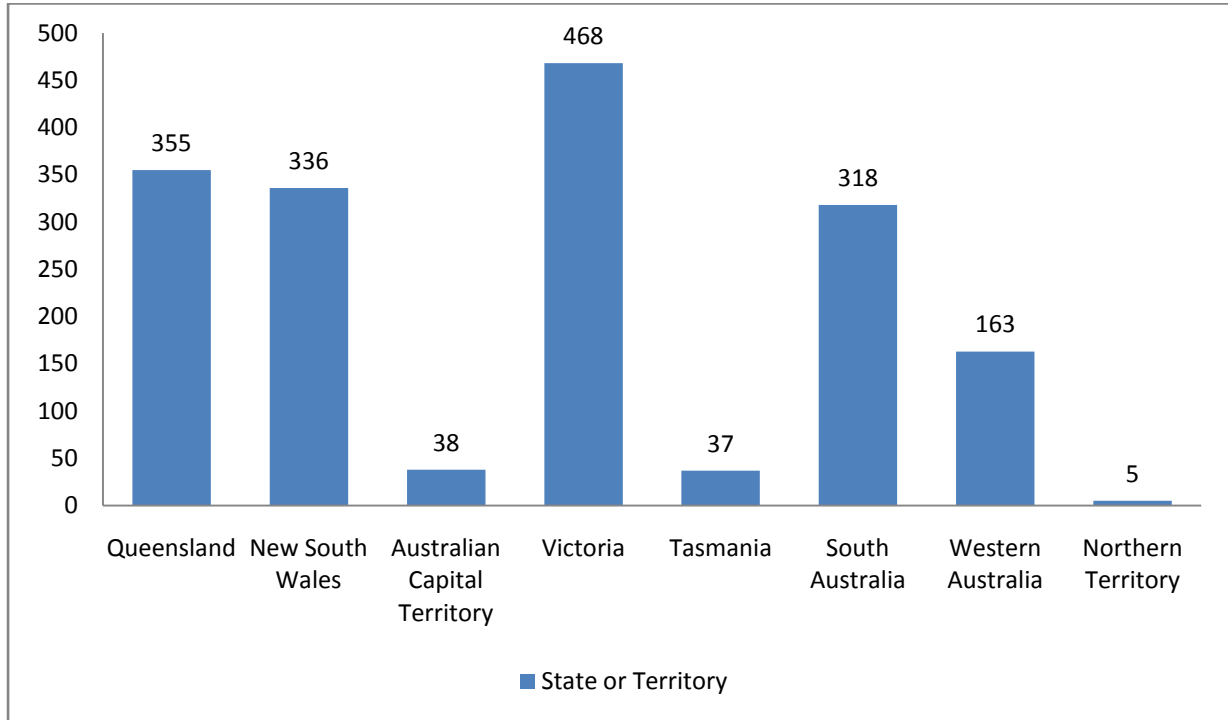
Parent Advocacy

Despite education policies supporting parent engagement in schools, the overwhelming majority of parents encounter difficulty advocating for the child. Only 2.8% of parent describe advocacy as an easy process, 24.1% encountered some hurdles, 42.7% experienced many obstacles and 30.4% describe the process as near impossible.

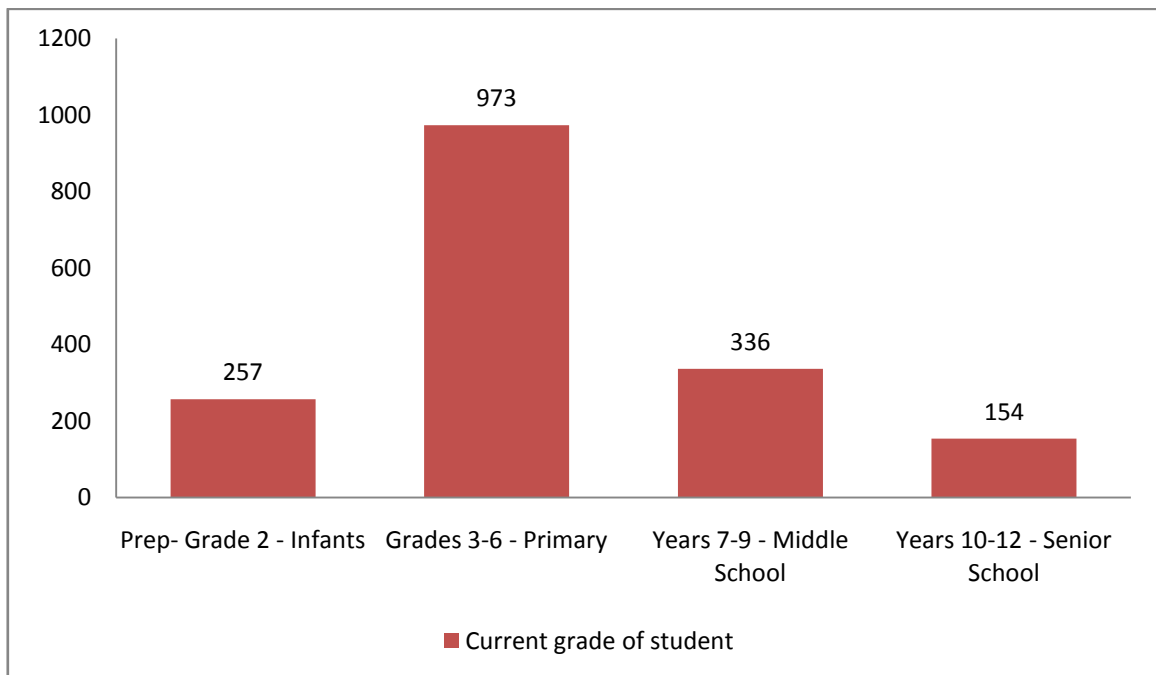
RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

The Scope of the Survey

Question 1: Which state or territory does your child attend school?

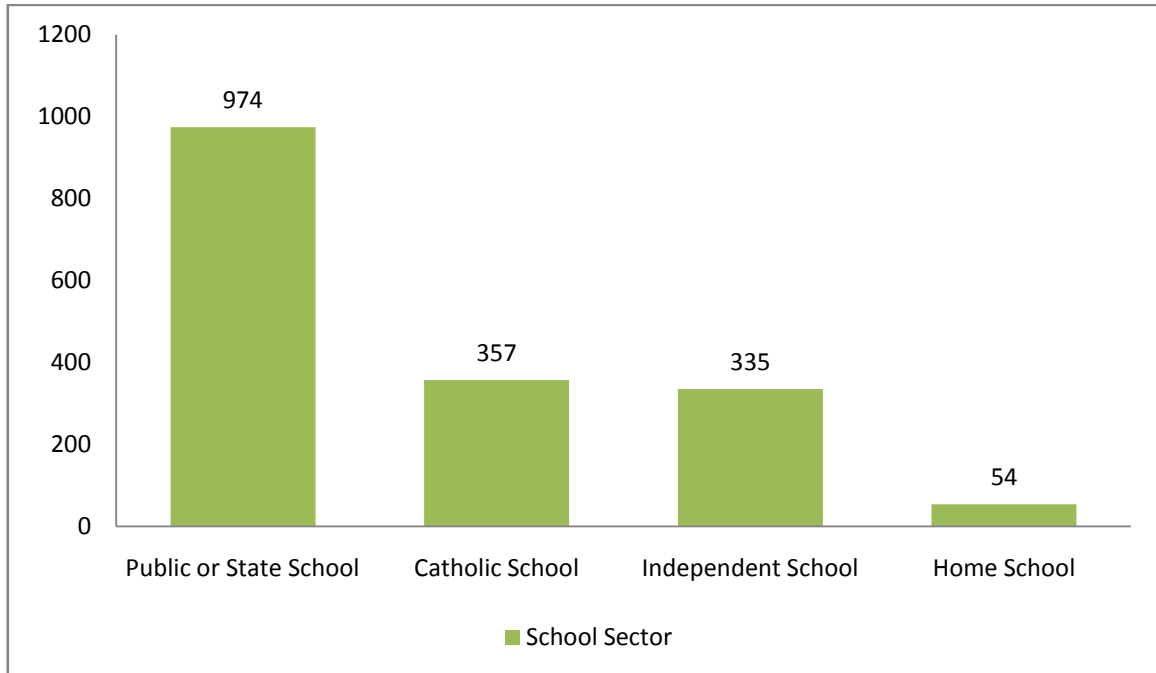


Question 2: Please indicated the current grade of your child



The Scope of the Survey

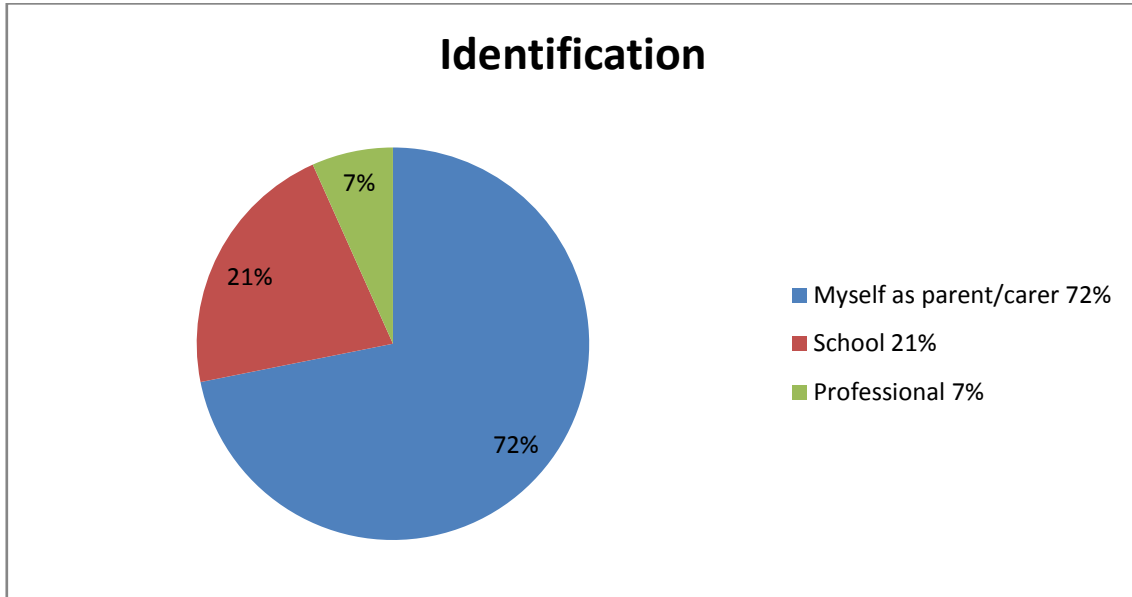
Question 3: What types of school does your child attend?



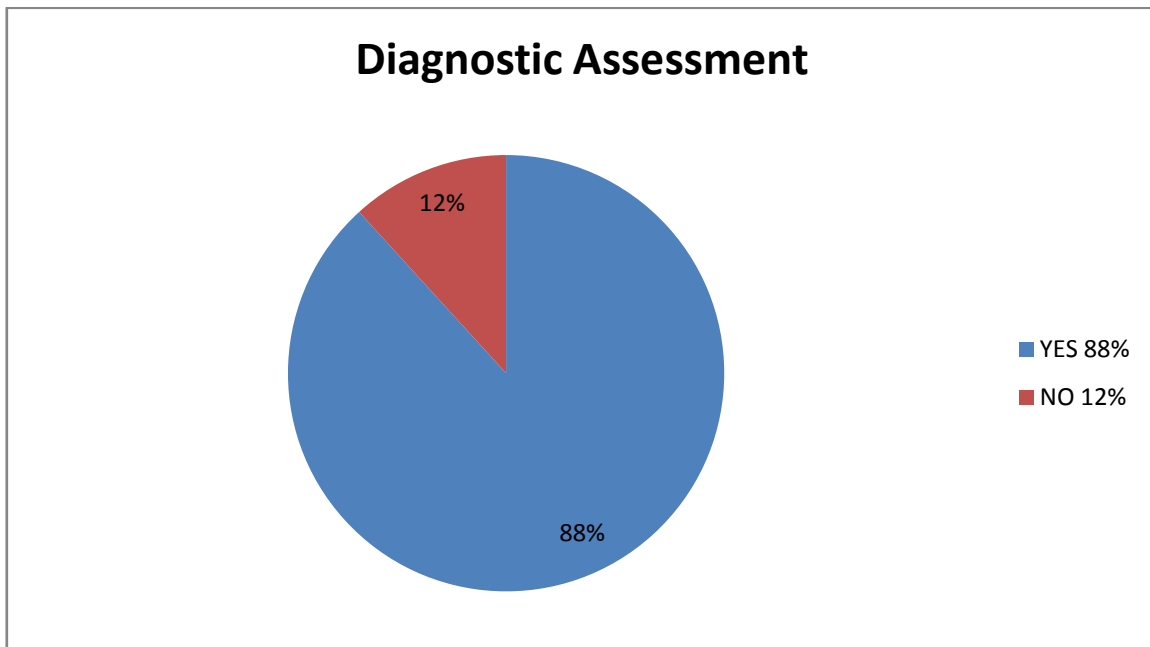
The Identification of Students with Dyslexia

Question 4: At what age was your child first formally identified as being at risk of a reading difficulty? Average age was 7.06 years old

Question 5: Who was it who first identified your child may have a learning difficulty?

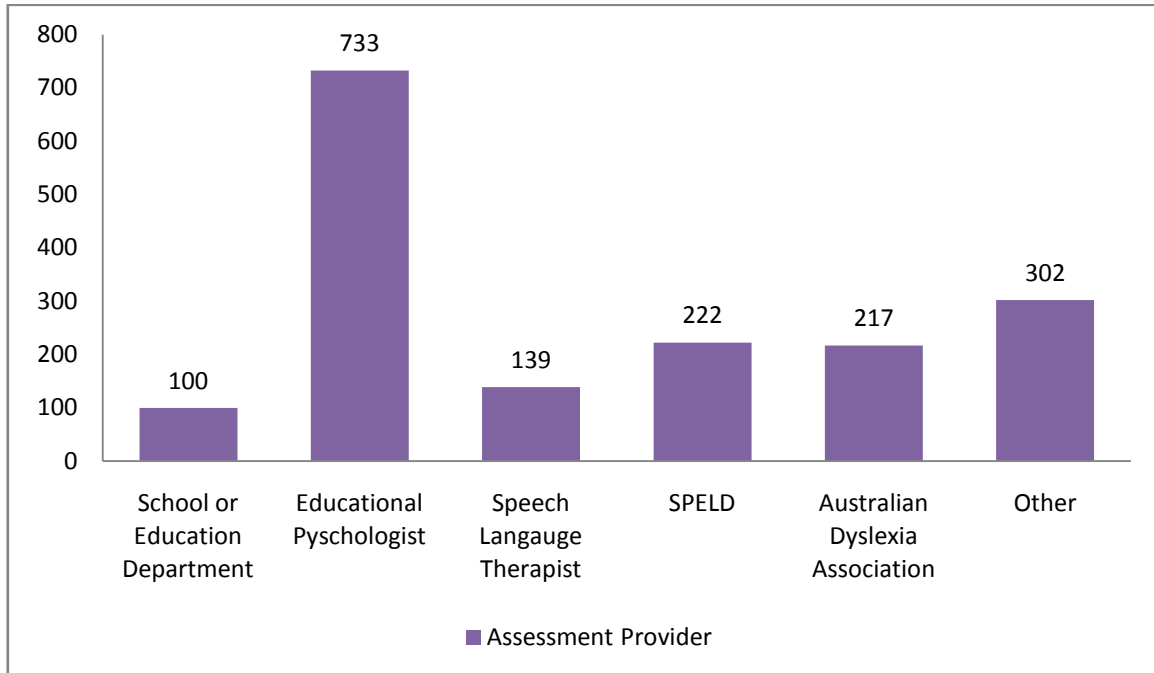


Question 6: Does your child have a formal assessment or diagnosis?

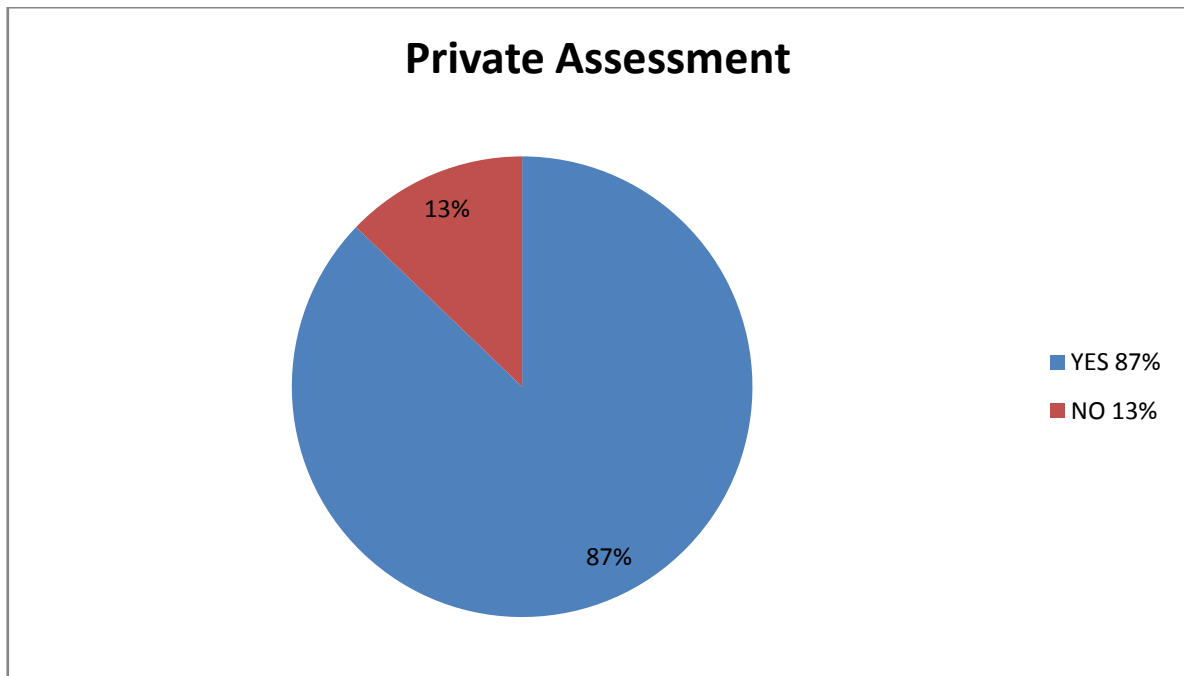


The Identification of Students with Dyslexia

Question 7: Who conducted the assessment for your child?



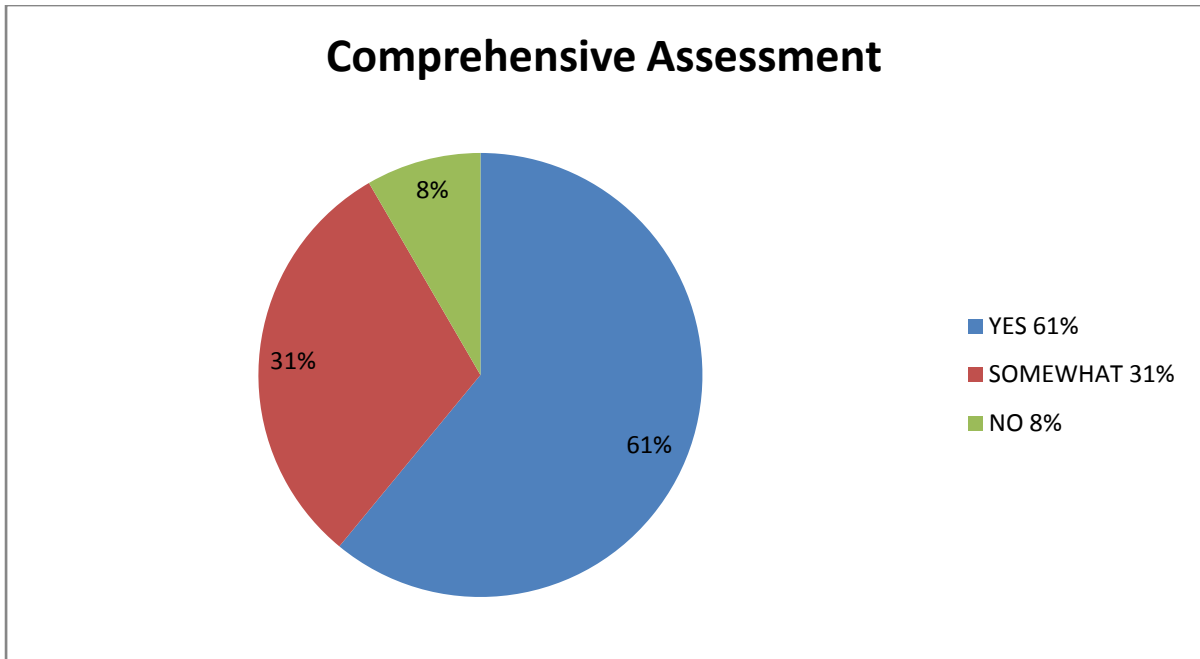
Question 8: Did you have to pay for an assessment and what was the cost?



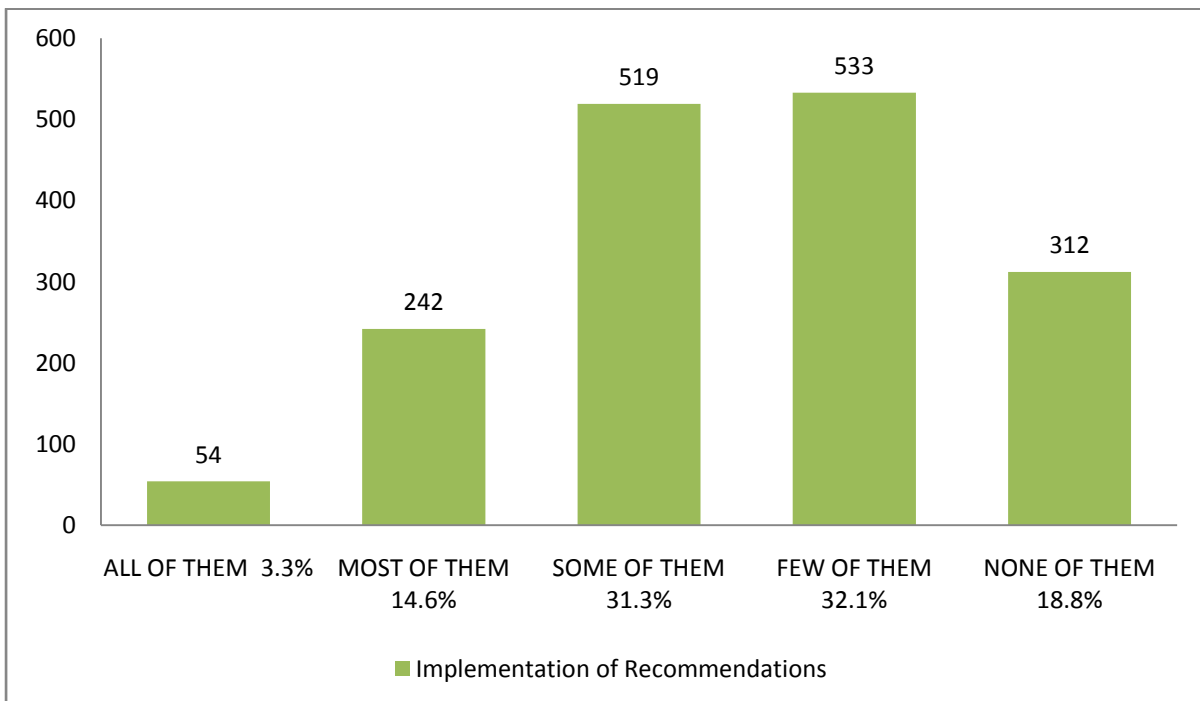
The average cost per assessment was \$ 1105 for each student.

The Implementation of Professional Recommendations

Question 9: Were the professional recommendations comprehensive?

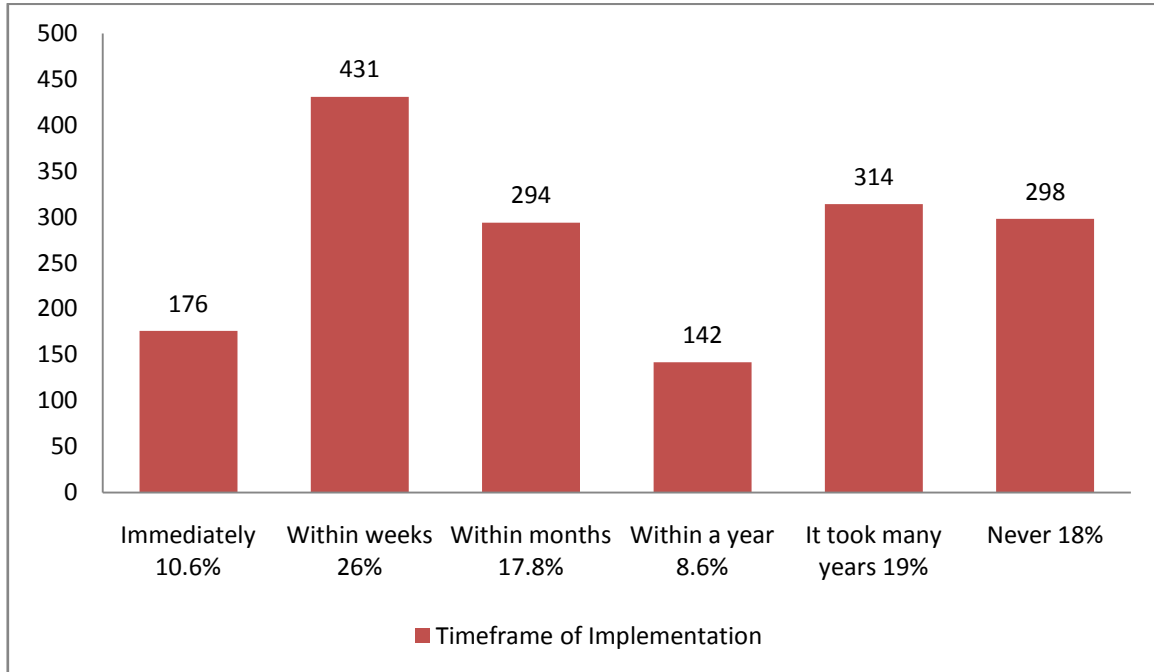


Questions 10: Have these professional recommendations been successfully implemented by the school?



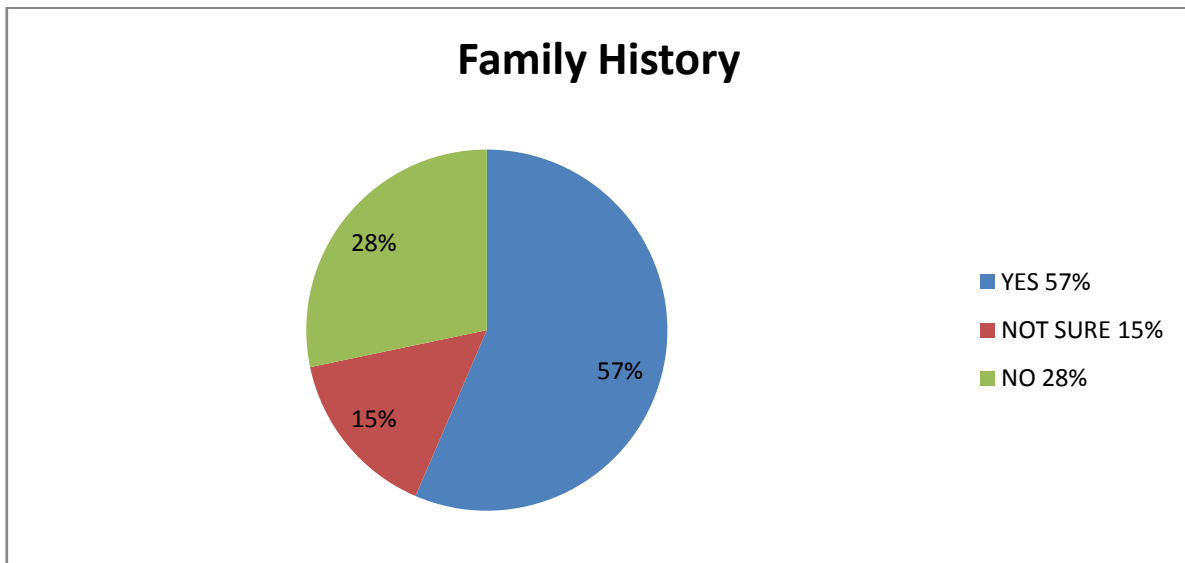
The Implementation of Professional Recommendations

Question 11: How soon after the assessment were recommendations put in place in the classroom?



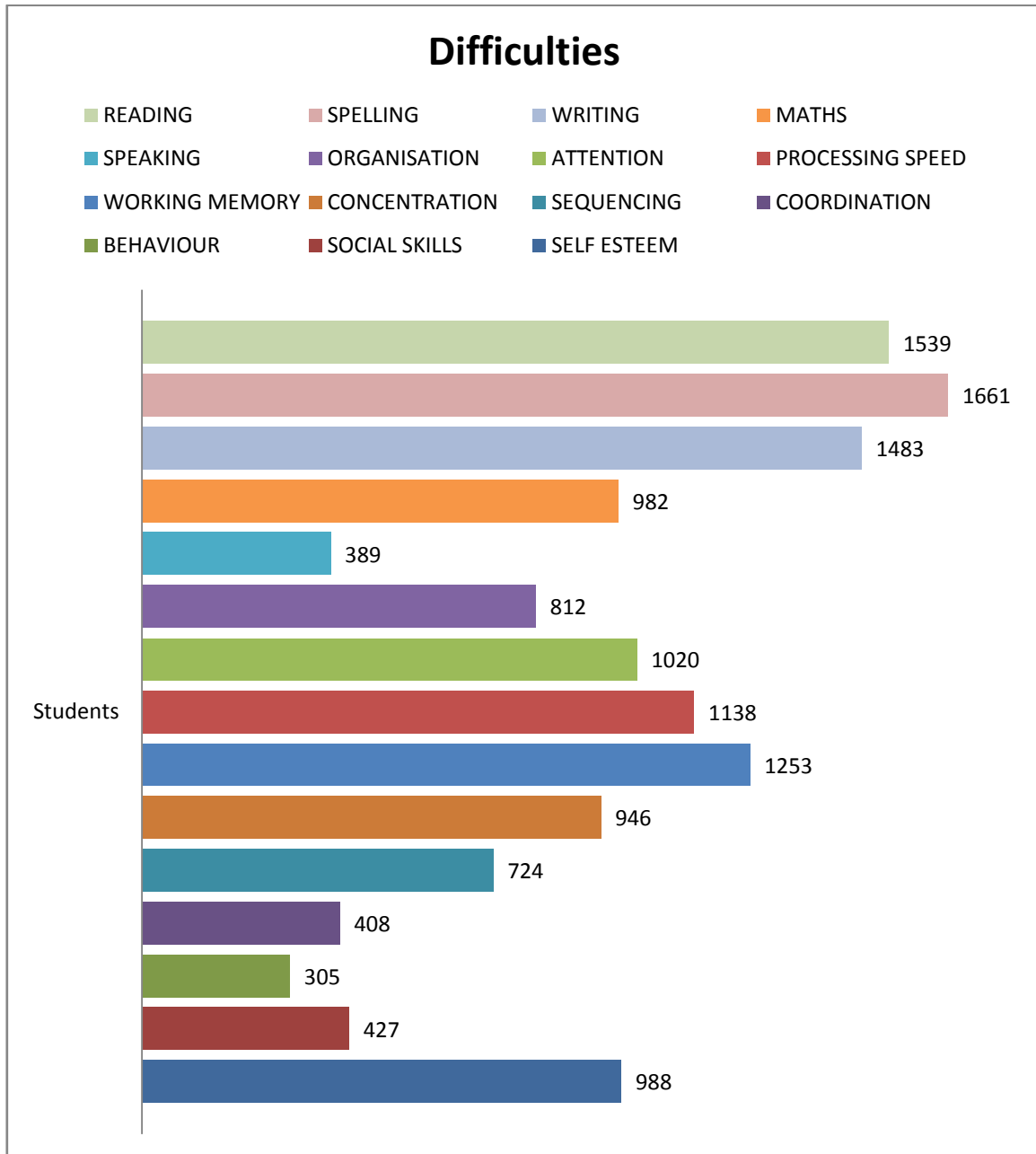
The Characteristics of Dyslexia

Question 12: Is there a family history of dyslexia?



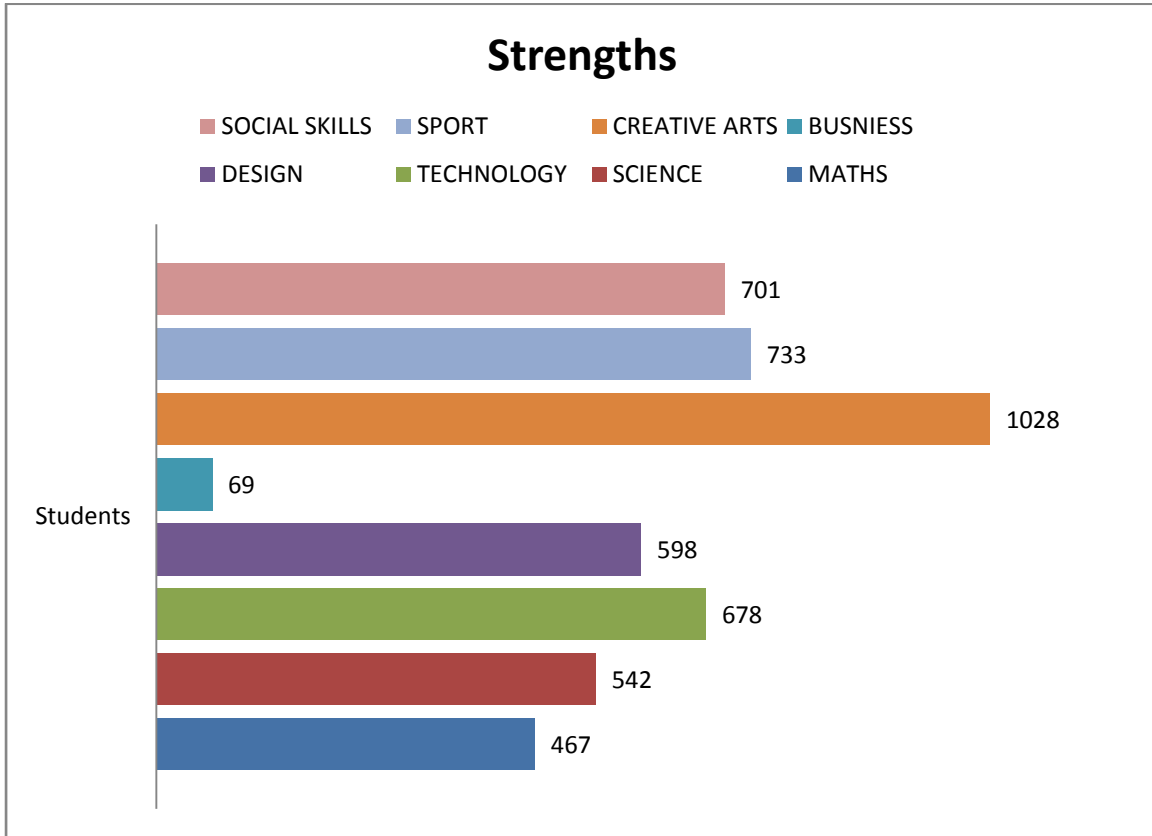
The Characteristics of Dyslexia

Question 13: My child has difficulties with: (please select more than one as it applies to your child)

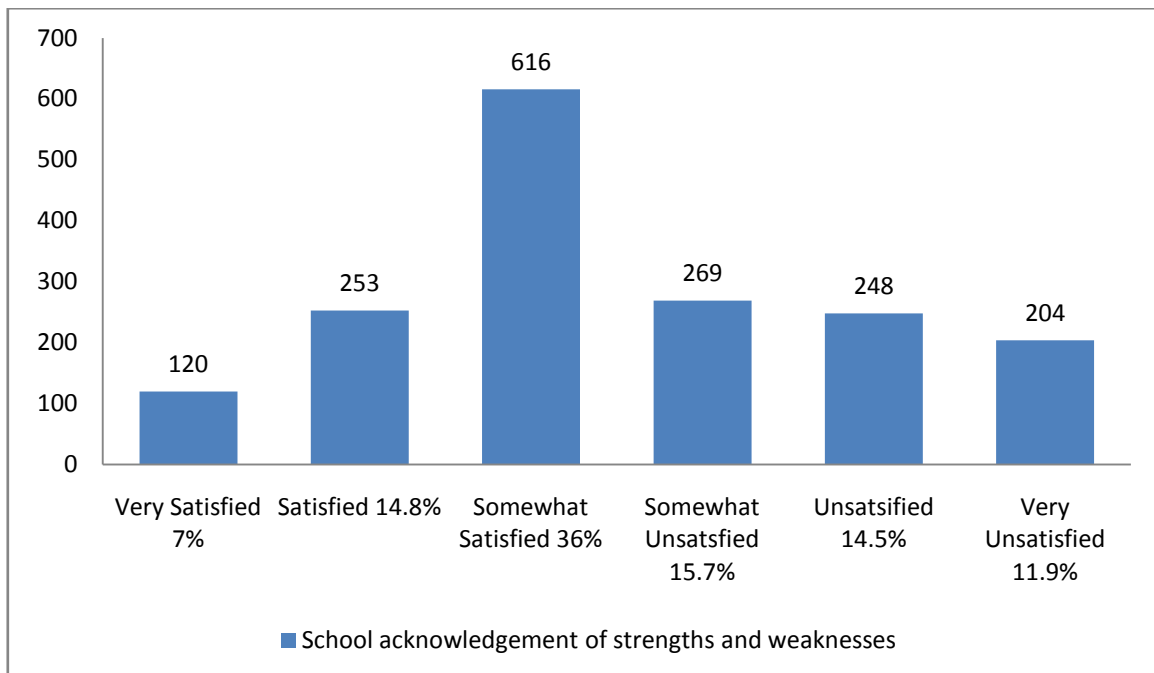


The Characteristics of Dyslexia

Question 14: My child shows strengths in the following areas: (please select more than one as applies to your child)

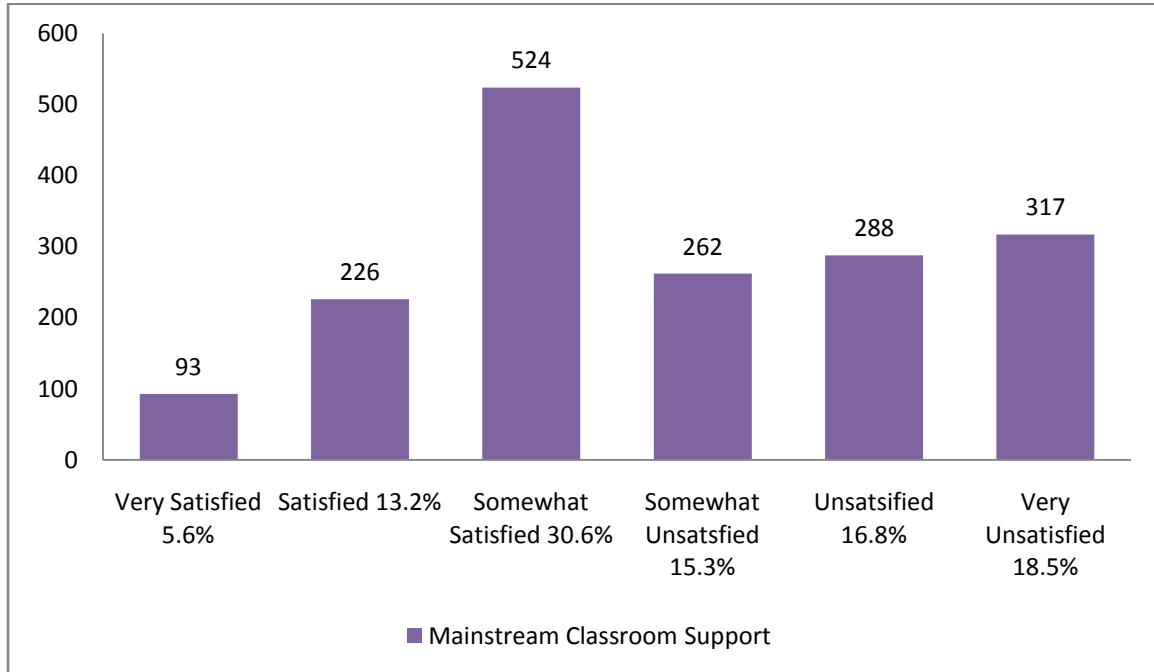


Question 15: My child’s strengths and weaknesses have been acknowledged by the school

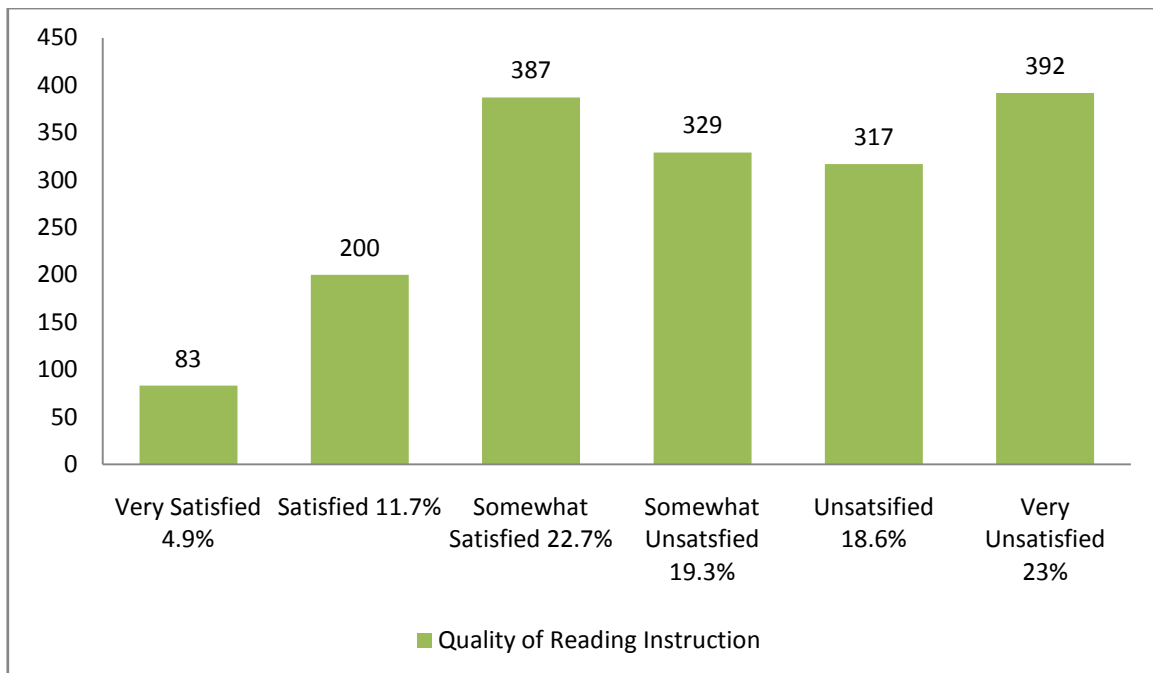


Teacher Knowledge and Quality of Instruction

Question 16: Describe your overall level of satisfaction with the level of support your child receives in their mainstream classroom?

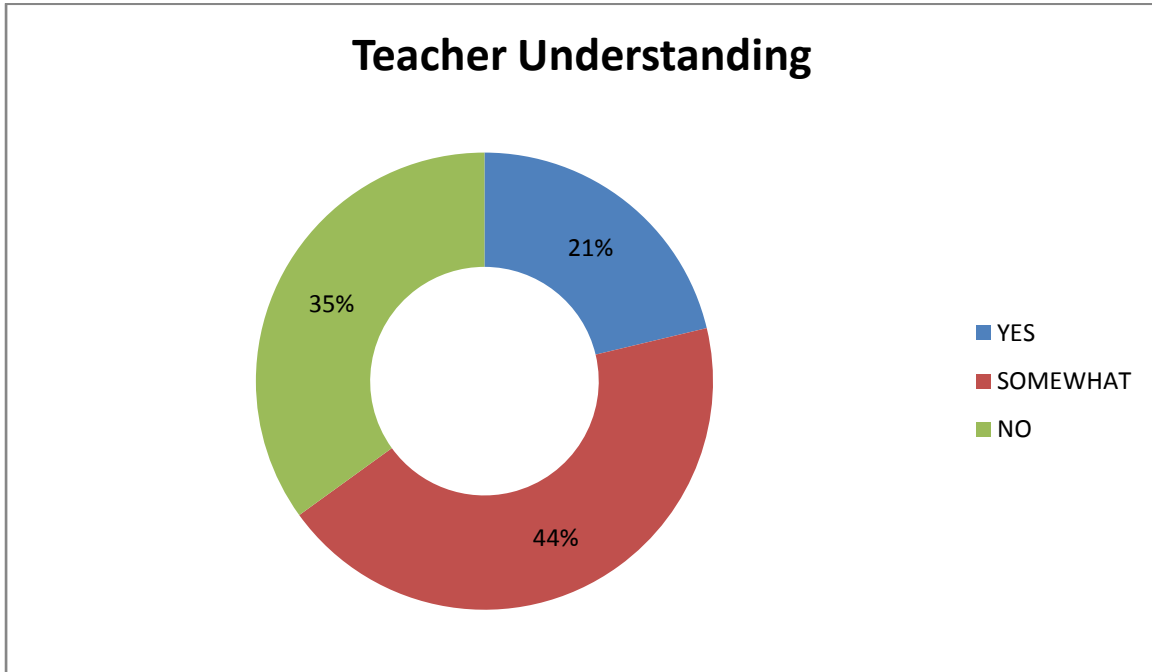


Question 17: Describe your overall level with the quality of reading instruction that has been provided to your child?

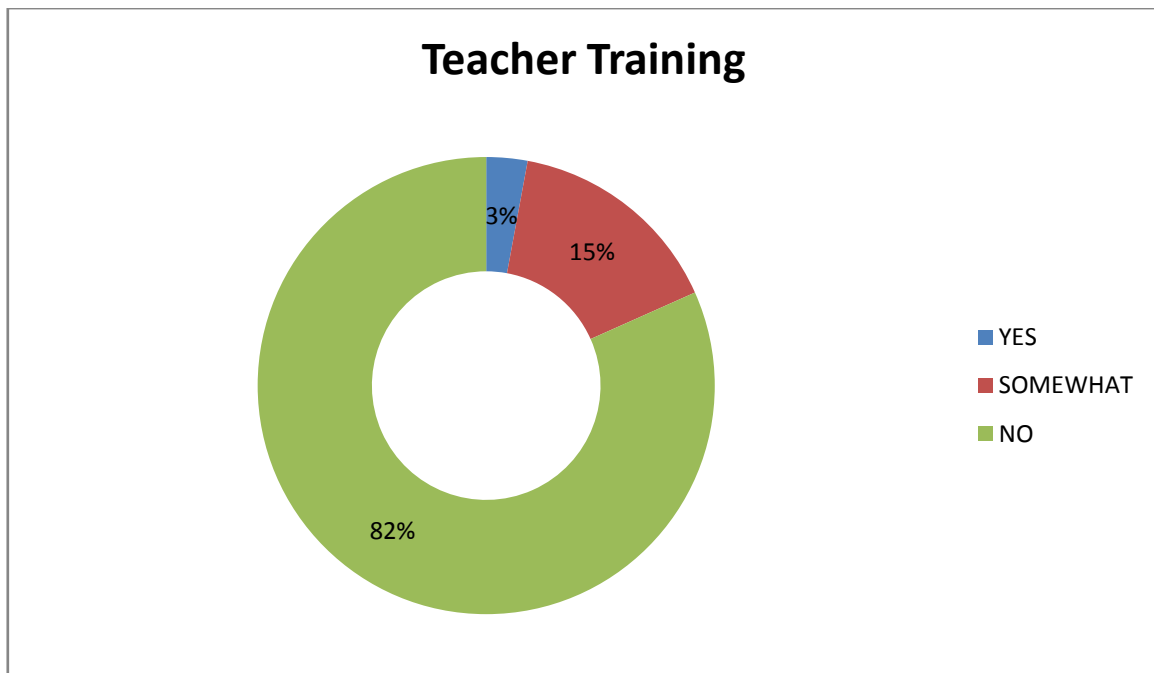


Teacher Knowledge and Quality of Instruction

Question 18: Does your child's teacher have a good understanding of your child's learning needs?

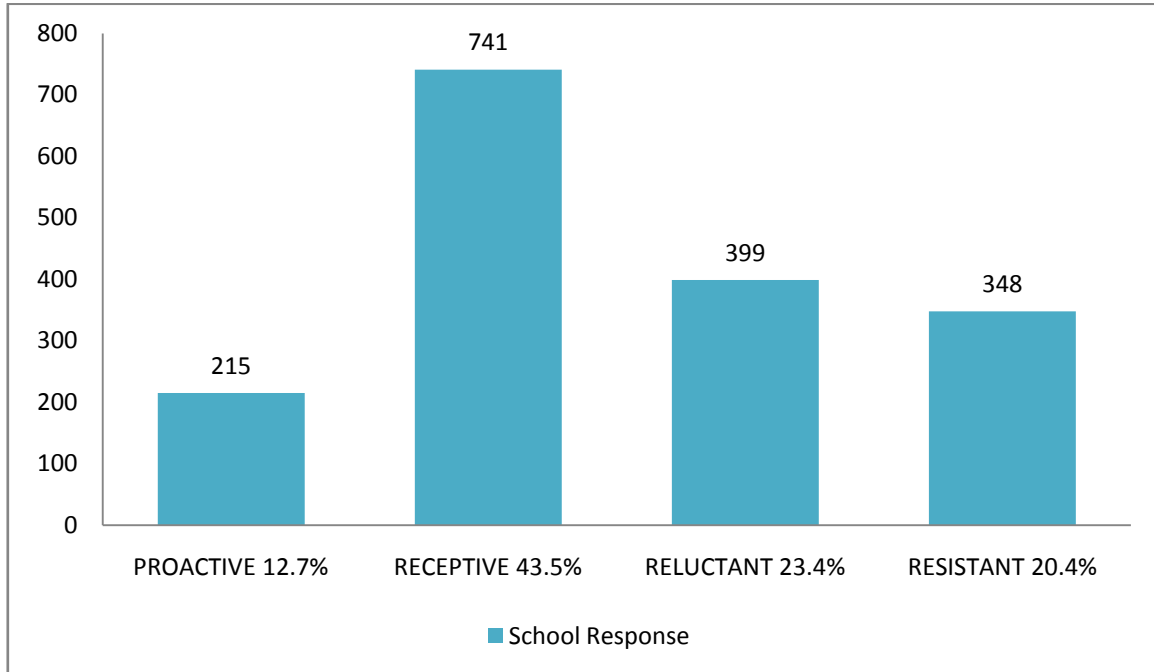


Question 19: Do you consider teachers are knowledgeable with adequate training in dyslexia?

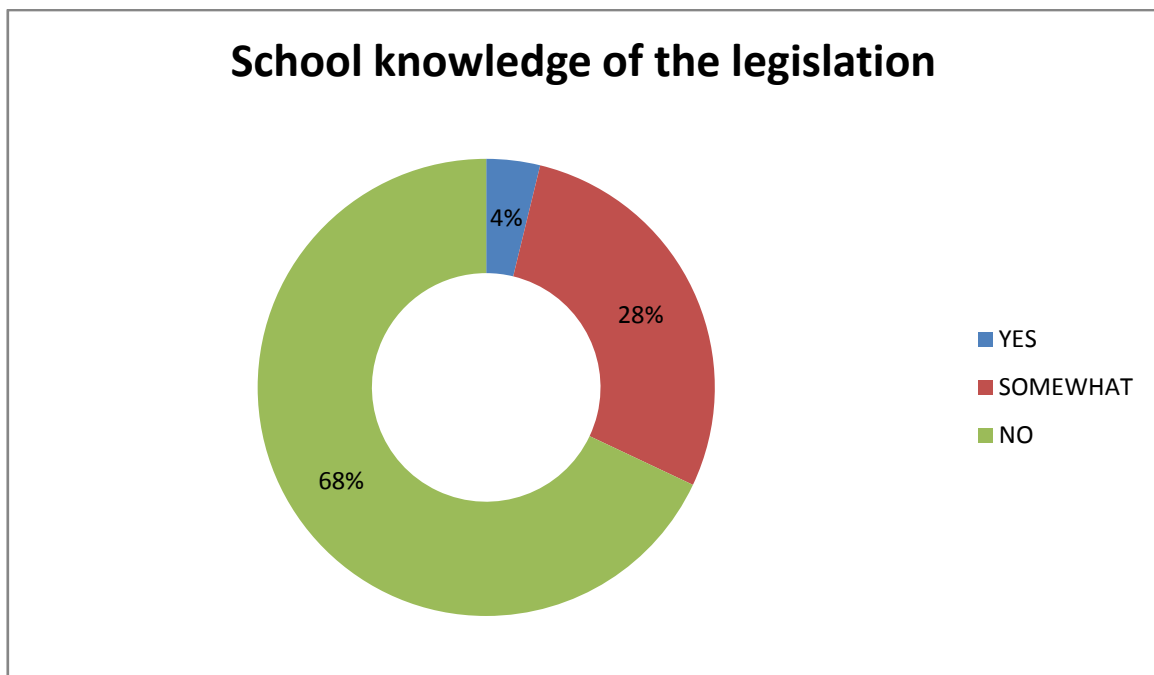


School Support and Parent Engagement

Question 20: Describe the reaction of the school to respond to your child’s learning difficulty

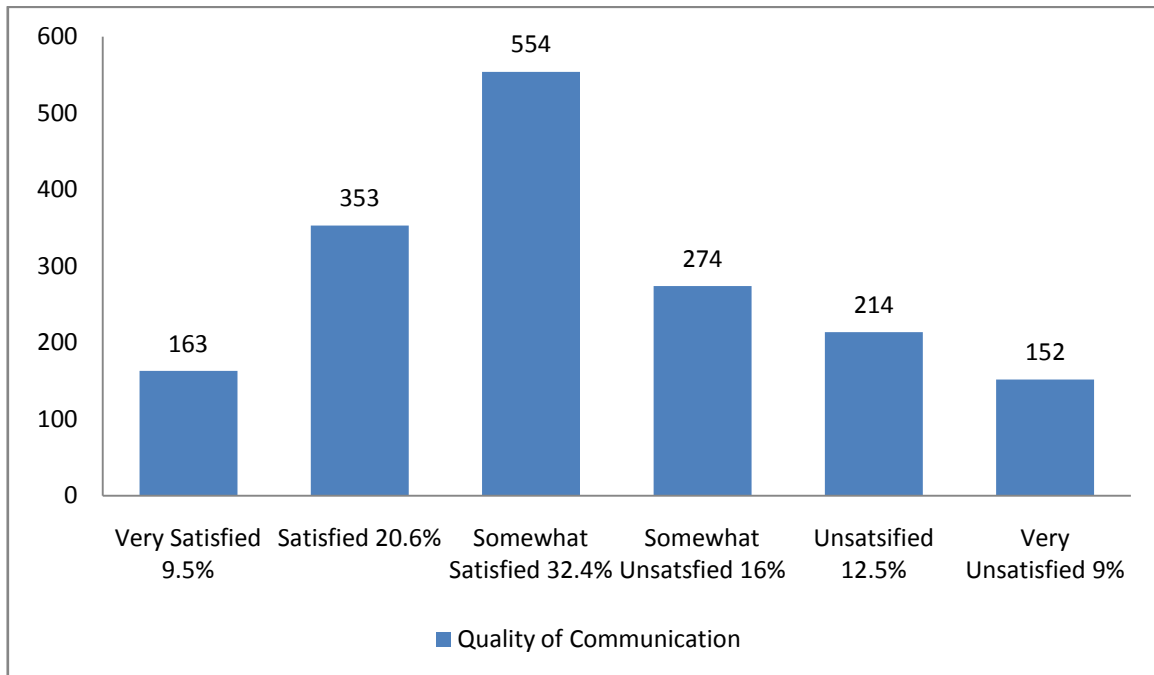


Question 21: Do you consider schools are knowledgeable in the legislation (Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and Disability Standards in Education 2005) in relation to dyslexia and related learning differences?

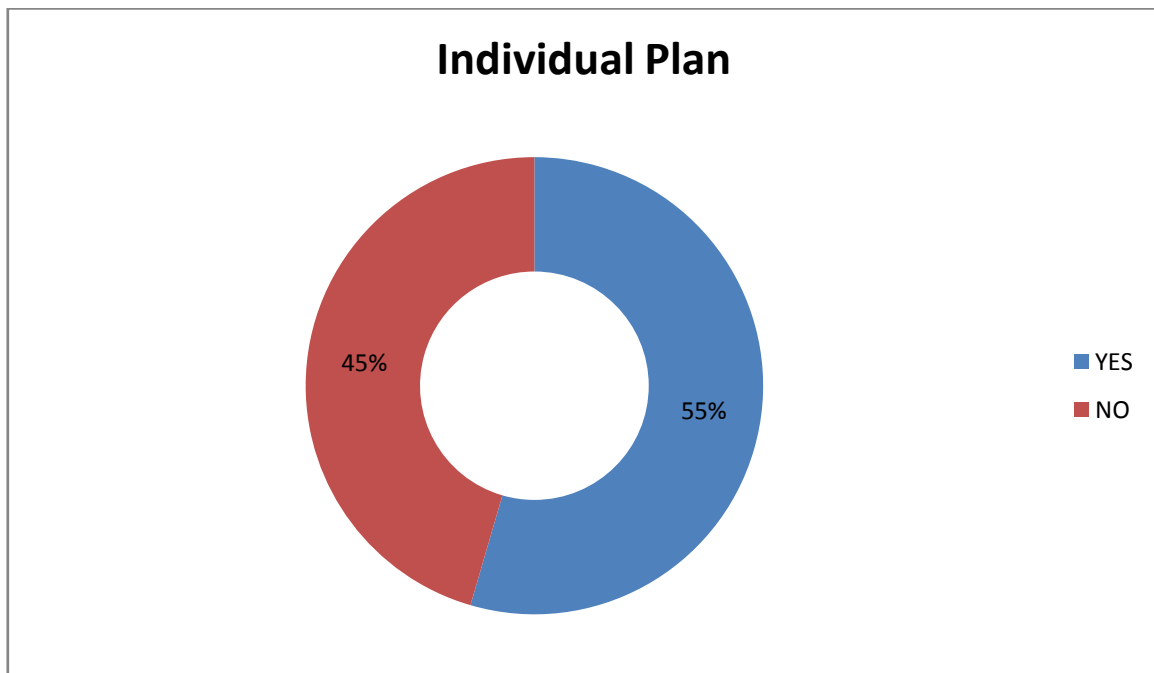


School Support and Parent Engagement

Question 22: Describe the quality of communication between you and your child’s school

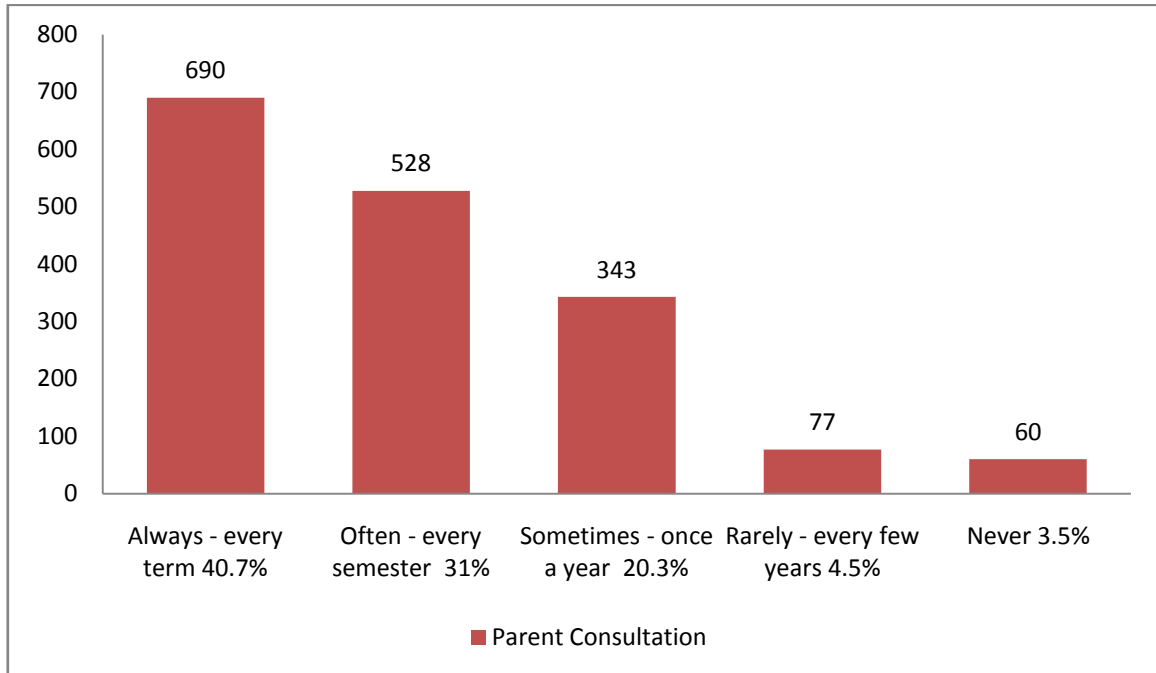


Question 23: Does your child have an individual learning plan in place? This may be known as an IEP (Individual Education Plan), ILP (Individual Learning Plan), ICP (Individual Curriculum Plan), ISP (Individual Student Plan) or PLP (Personalised Learning Plan).



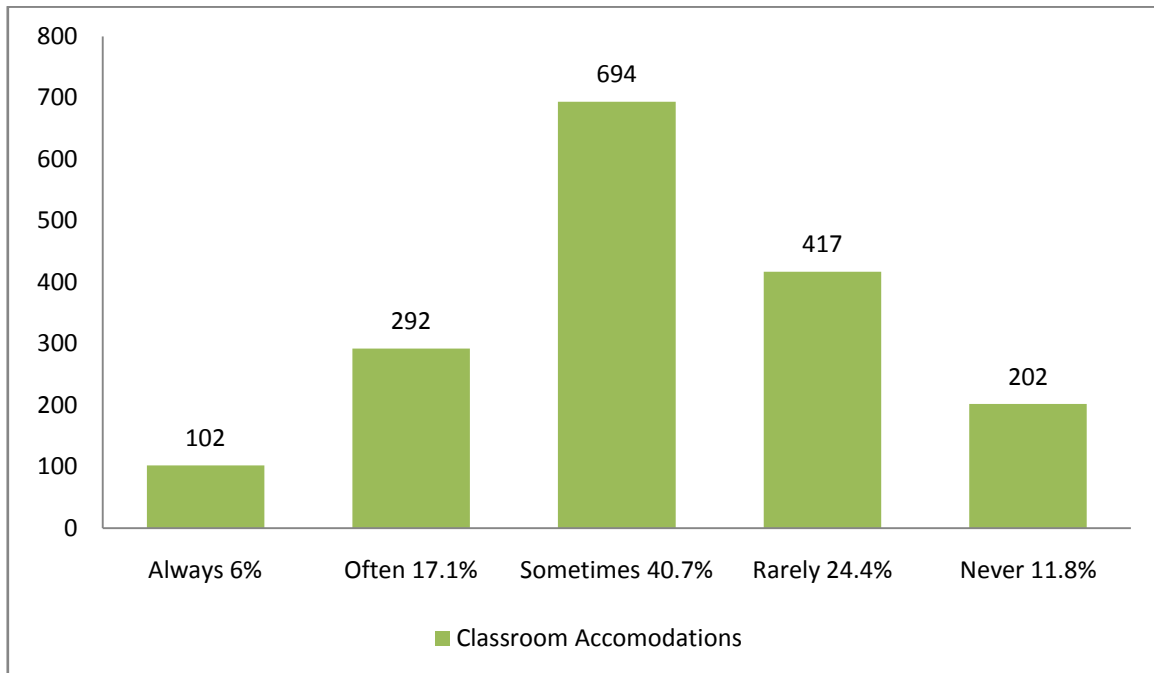
School Support and Parent Engagement

Question 24: As a parent or carer, are you involved in consultation of your child’s learning?

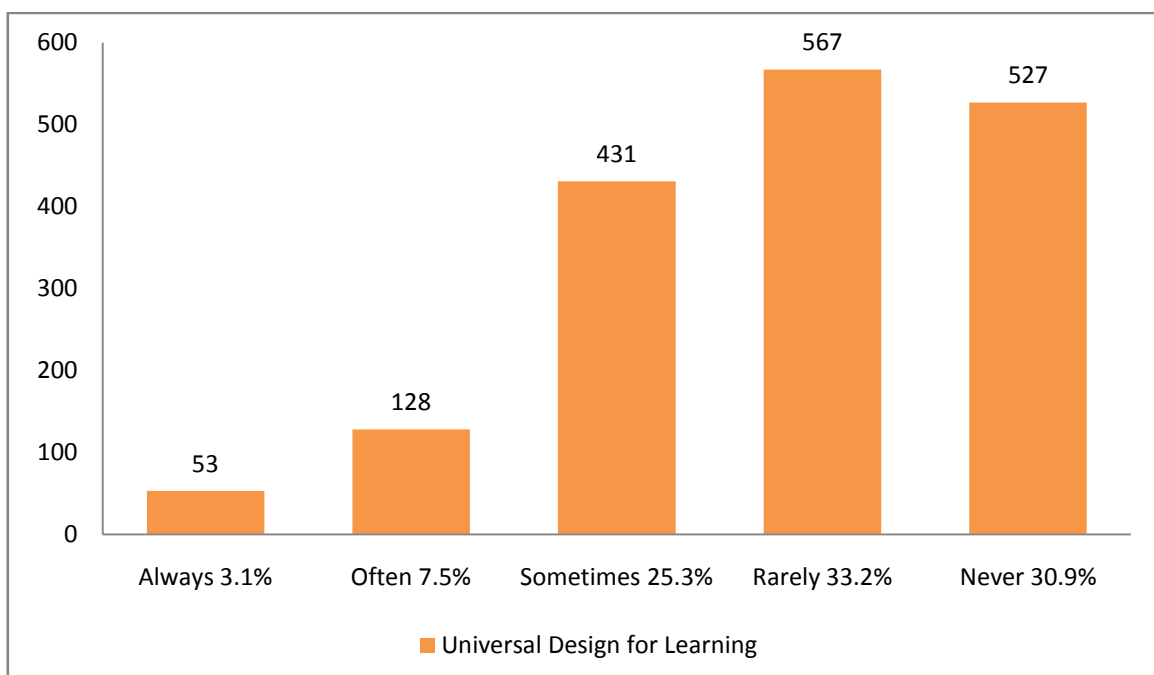


Differentiation and Adjustments

Question 25: Are classroom accommodations provided to your child? Examples include highlighting key points; breaking tasks into small steps; visual displays and graphic organisers; not being expected to copy large amounts of notes or being asked to read aloud?

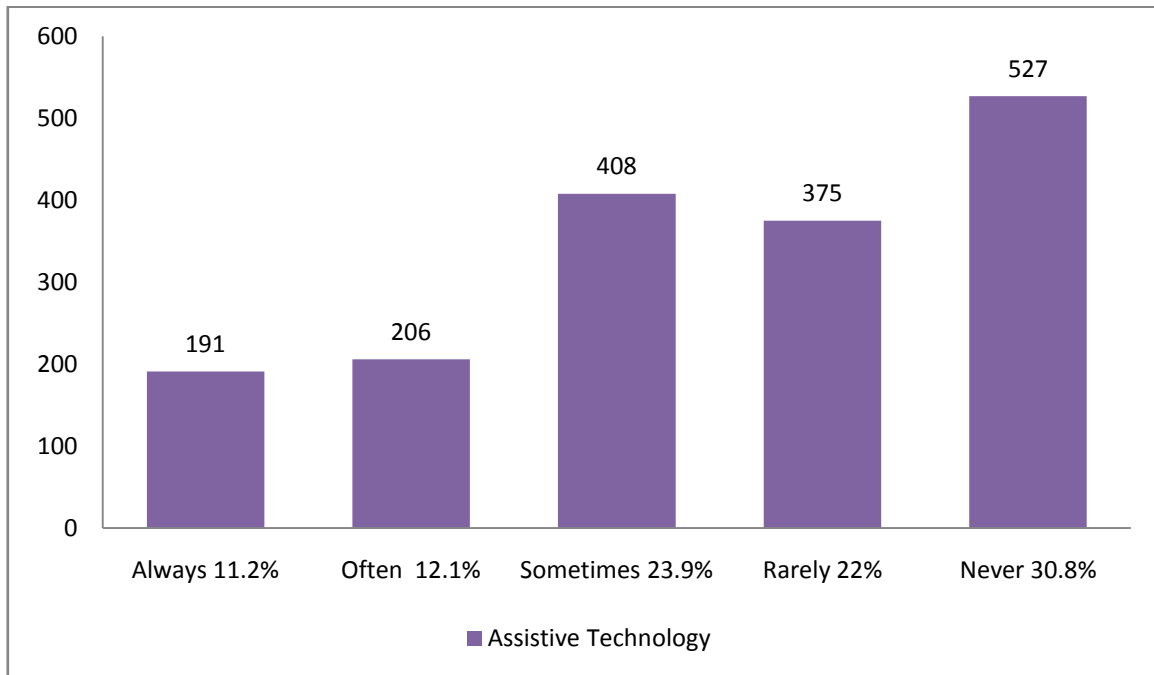


Question 26: Does your child receive information presented in alternative format and/or a range of media and forms? This may include a larger font with more spacing; audio, visual and/or digital presentation.

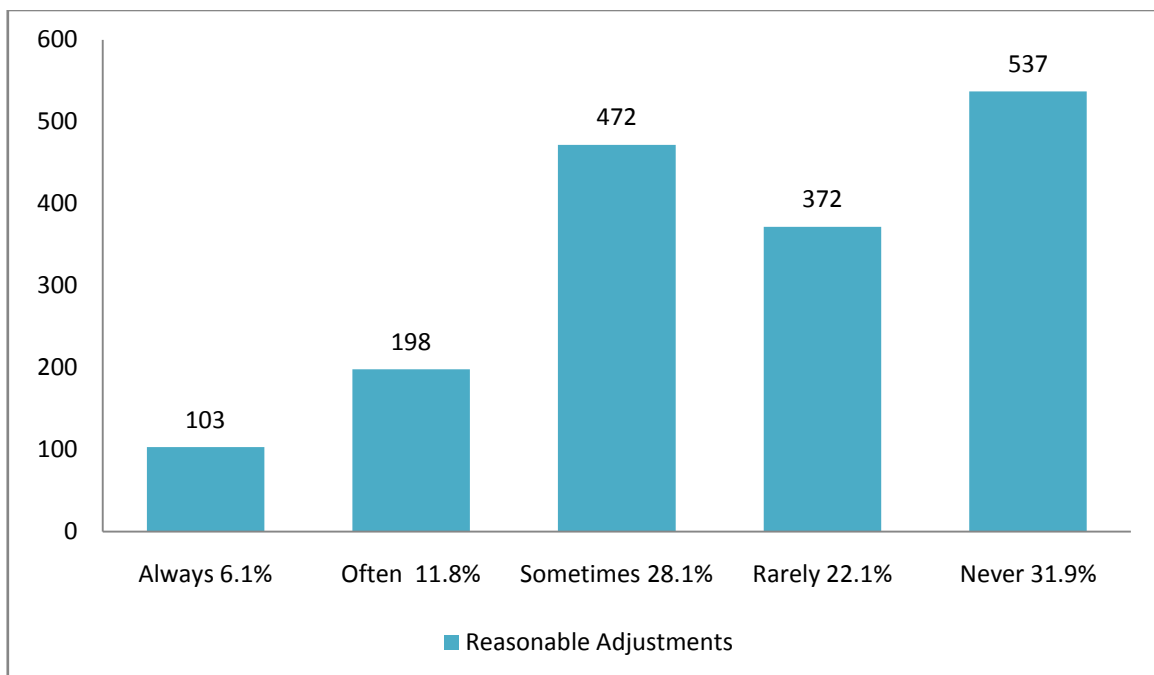


Differentiation and Adjustments

Question 27: Does your child have access to assistive technology? This includes laptops and devices with software and apps such as text to speech, speech recognition and mind mapping tools.

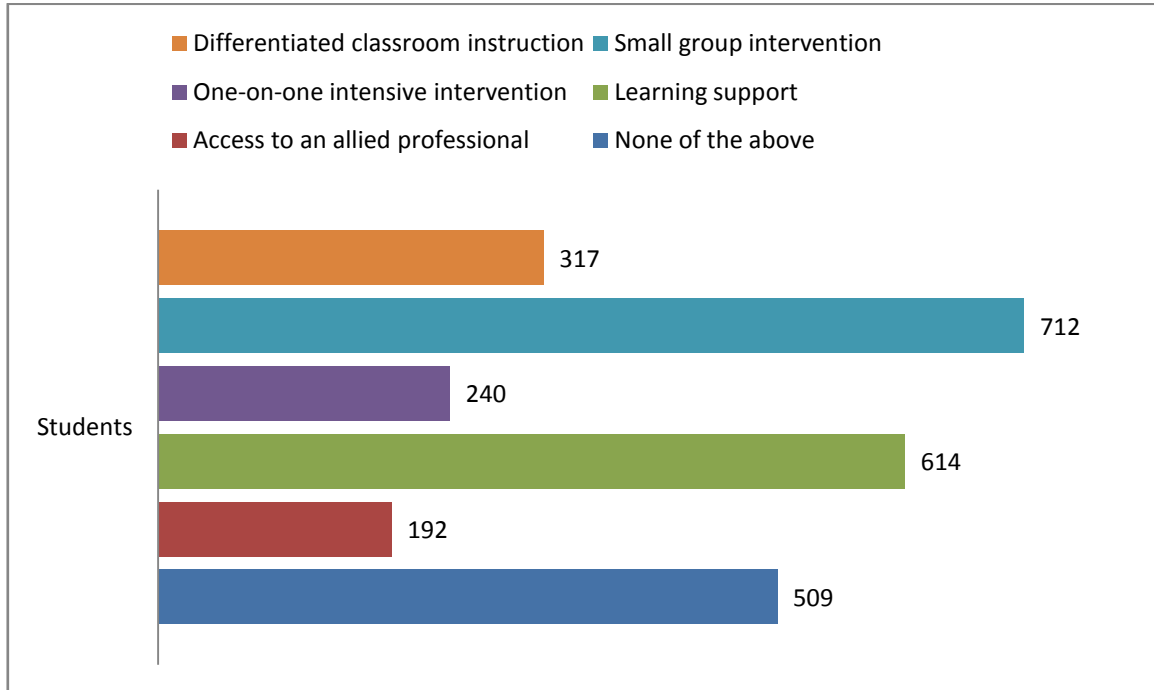


Question 28: Does your child receive reasonable adjustments for exams and assessments? Examples include extra time; separate venue; rest breaks, alternative methods; assistive technology; provision of a reader and/or scribe.

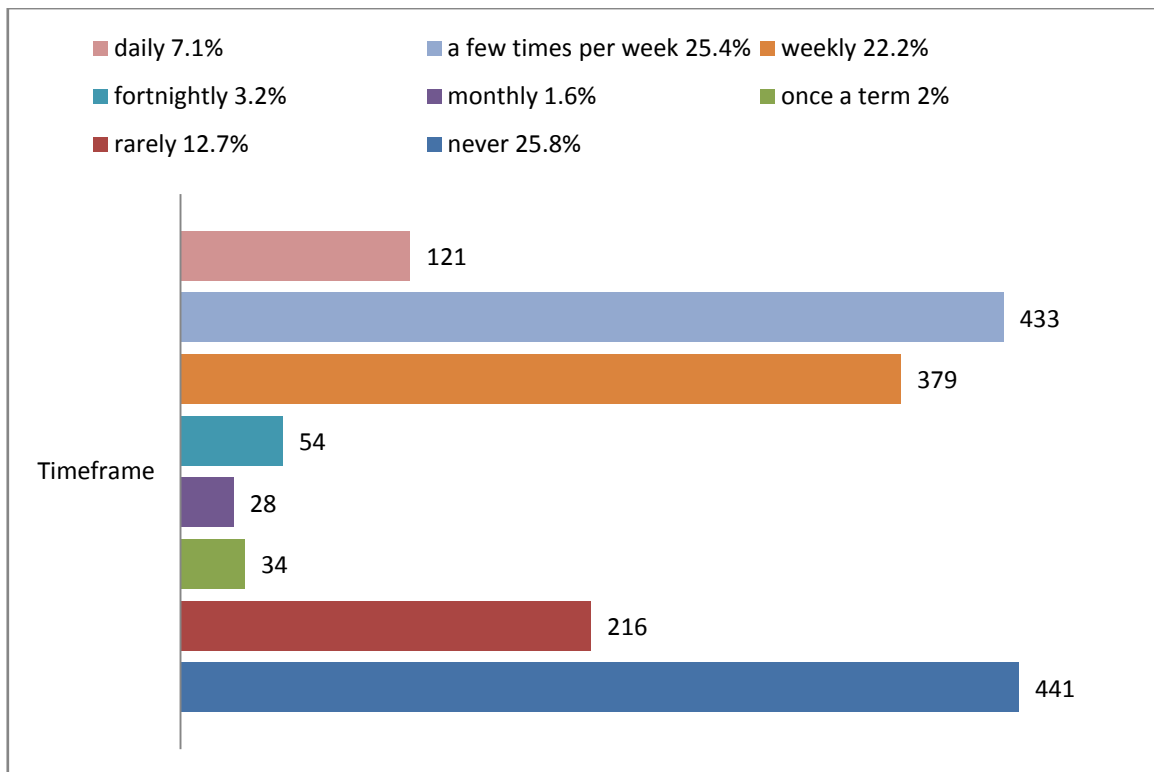


Intervention and Learning Support

Question 29: My child receives the following support at school (you may select more than one choice):

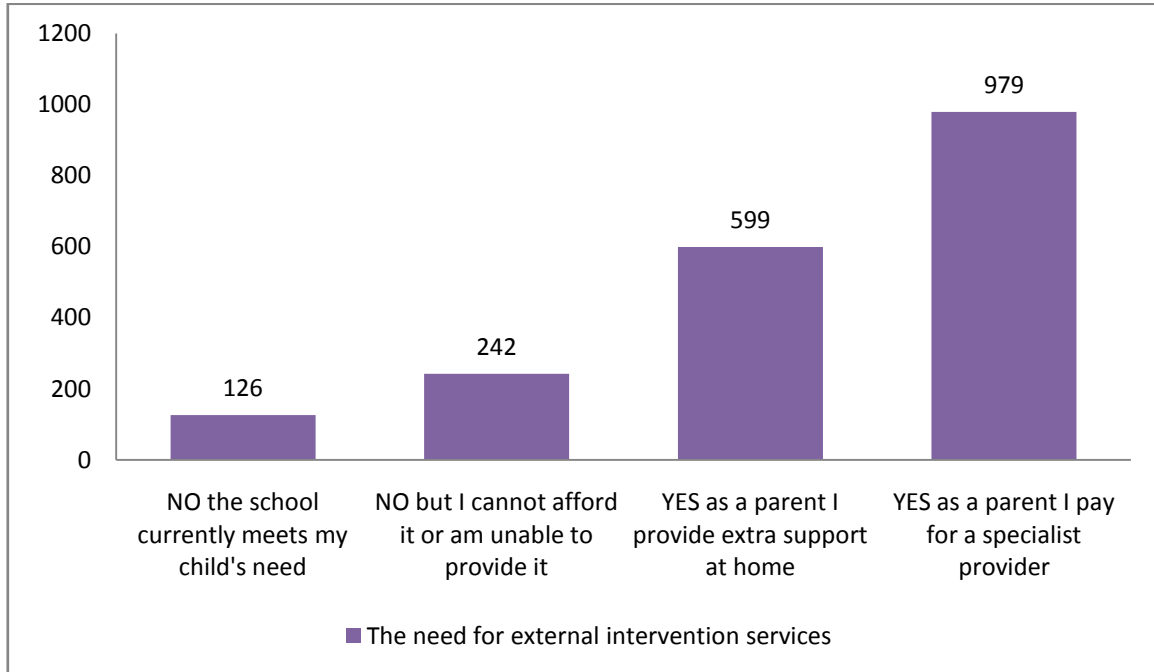


Question 30: How often does your child receive intervention, specialist services or learning support at school?



Intervention and Learning Support

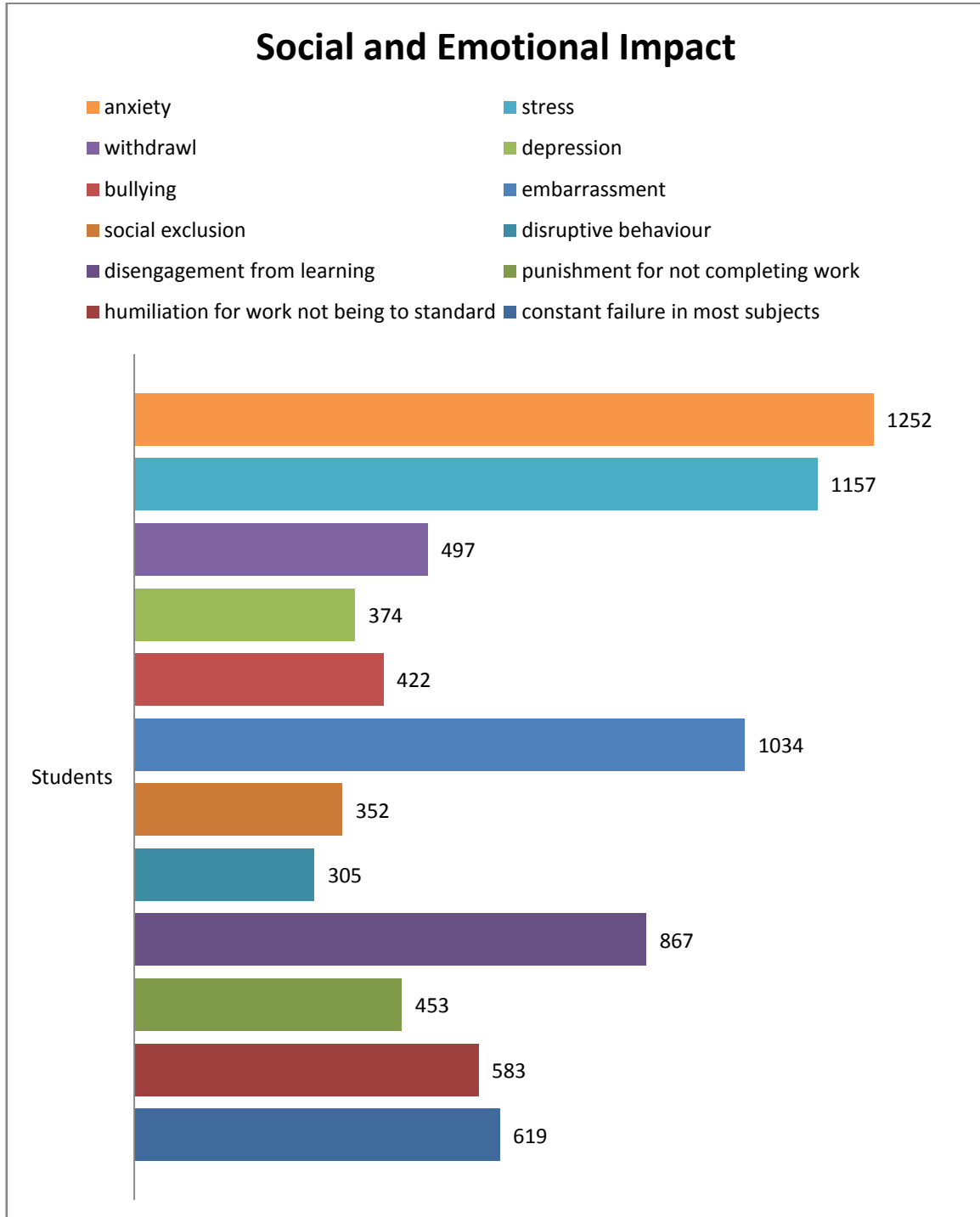
Question 31: Do you have to provide specialist instruction and intervention outside of school?



The average cost of private specialist services per month: \$410.

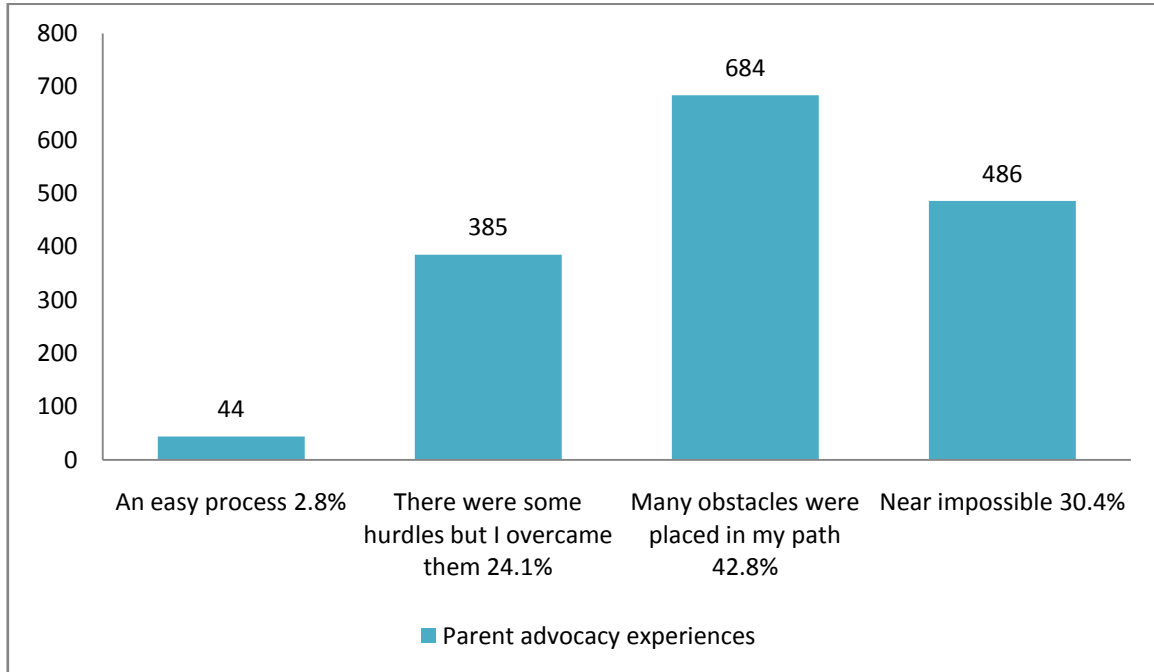
Social and Emotional Impact

Question 32: Does your child experience any more of the following? (You may select more than one choice)



Parent Advocacy

Question 33: How difficult would you describe your advocacy journey to obtain recognition and support for your child?



RECOMMENDATIONS

Currently there is a huge research to practice gap in education and pivotal guidelines such as the [National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy \(2005\)](#) and the National Dyslexia Working Party recommendations from [Helping people with dyslexia: a national action agenda \(2010\)](#) are not being implemented.

The National Dyslexia Working Party recommendations from [Helping people with dyslexia: a national action agenda \(2010\)](#) outlines what steps should be taken to address the needs of students to reduce the functional impact of dyslexia. So far, most of these recommendations have not been implemented by government, education authorities or schools.

Evidence based reading instruction

The [National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy \(2005\)](#) identifies the ways in which research evidence on literacy teaching can best inform classroom teaching practice and support teacher professional learning.

Research supports an explicit and structured approach to the teaching of reading with instruction in phonology (phonological and phonemic awareness), sound-symbol associations (letter-sound correspondences), as well as syllable structures, morphology, syntax and semantics.

<https://www.ldaustralia.org/client/documents/LDA%20Position%20Statement.pdf>

The Importance of Early, Early, Early

The primary difficulty experienced by children with dyslexia involves problems in learning to accurately and fluently decode and encode words in their printed form. This difficulty is often caused by a phonological deficit (processing speech sounds in words) combined with problems understanding letter-sound relationships (phonics).

EARLY prevention, EARLY identification and EARLY intervention significantly reduce the number of children with reading difficulties since a weakness in early decoding skills will impact on the development of fluent word reading, vocabulary and comprehension.

Early recognition and treatment of weaknesses in phonological awareness, rapid automatic naming and sound-symbol correspondences is critical in the prevention of reading problems in the child who is at risk of reading difficulties.

Early Prevention

Children learn to read when they are provided with systematic, explicit and intensive instruction using multisensory techniques in phonological & phonemic awareness and synthetic phonics in the early years of school.

When children are explicitly taught the connection between speech and print:

- They understand the alphabetic principle and the way letters (graphemes) represent sounds (phonemes) in words.
- They acquire the necessary knowledge and strategies required for decoding (reading) and encoding (spelling).

Early Identification

Dyslexia can be identified with 92% accuracy at age 5 ½ years old (National Institute of Child Health and Development, 1998).

Young children 'at risk' will demonstrate weaknesses in the following domains:

- Phonemic awareness
- Knowledge of letter names and letter sounds
- Rapid automatic naming

Screening to identify children 'at risk' of reading difficulties should be mandatory in the first semester of Prep or Kindergarten followed by a Phonics Screen in Grade 1.

Early Intervention

Children identified 'at risk' of reading difficulties require more intensive and targeted instruction in phonemic awareness and synthetic phonics in the early years (Prep – Grade 3).

Research conducted by Linda Siegel identified 23.8% of kindergarten children were 'at risk' of reading difficulties. With appropriate evidence based early intervention, only 5% of the children still had reading difficulties at the end of Grade 1, and by Grade 6 that number was reduced to 1.5%. (Lesaux, N. K. and Siegel, L. S. 2003 *Developmental Psychology*, 39, 1005-1019). The results of this study show that it is possible to detect the children who are at risk for reading difficulties early and provide an effective classroom based intervention to help most of these children. Early intervention is less expensive since it is taught by teachers as part of reading instruction done in the classroom.

Research conducted by Sally and Bennett Shaywitz using functional MRIs demonstrated early phonological-based intervention facilitated the development of neural pathways required for skilled reading. Evidence based intervention increased activation in the left hemisphere (including the interior frontal gyrus and parieto-temporal regions), these brain

regions that correlate to improvements in word reading fluency. Intervention was most effective before the age of 8 years old. (Shaywitz et al 2003 Development of left occipitotemporal systems for skilled reading in children after a phonologically- based intervention).

Early intervention allows students to get help before reading problems become entrenched. Once there is a gap, it is very hard to close. 74 percent of poor readers in Grade 3 remain poor readers in Grade 9 (Francise et al 1996). Students at risk need every opportunity early because after Grade 4 the focus in learning shifts from learning-to-read to reading-to-learn.

Tiered intervention

The tiered model of intervention has three levels of instruction which is responsive to the student's needs based upon research-based interventions.

Tier 1 – high quality evidence-based classroom instruction for all students.

Tier 2 – additional small group early intervention for children identified 'at risk' of difficulties.

Tier 3 – intensive individual intervention for students with severe and persistent difficulties.

Intervention should be provided by a specialist teacher in each school with extensive knowledge of both explicit, multisensory instruction and the learning needs of students with dyslexia.

Differentiation

Differentiation means tailoring instruction using alternative learning pathways with targeted responses and scaffolded support to cater to individual differences (consider students strengths, interests, goals and needs).

Ways to differentiate:

- Content – curriculum and resource materials
- Process – teaching strategies and learning activities
- Products – assessment methods
- Learning environment

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/whatdifferentiatedinstruction>

Pedagogy or Programs

Programs should be considered a stepping stone to build teacher's knowledge and confidence but they are not the ultimate solution. Improving pedagogical knowledge and teacher skills should be the ultimate goal. Effective teachers need pedagogical content

knowledge (knowledge about how to teach in particular disciplines) rather than only knowledge of a particular subject matter (Shulman 1987).

Explicit instruction is a systematic method for presenting learning material in small steps (explain, demonstrate worked examples, guided practice then independent practice) while checking for student understanding. Research indicates this is the most effective teaching practice to maximise progress and achievement of ALL students. It caters for individual differences among students through different entry points, reinforcement, opportunity for practice, and corrective feedback.

http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=learning_processes

Classroom accommodations

Some suggestions include:

- Simple, clear and concise verbal instructions
- Break tasks up into small manageable steps
- Demonstrate examples of what is required
- Proactively monitor for understanding
- Rephrase if the child does not understand or remember
- Encourage questions
- Be prepared to repeat instructions
- Be patient with mistakes and requests for help
- Allow extra time to complete their work
- Emphasize major ideas and restate important points
- Support explanations with a visual display such as diagrams, concept maps or flow charts
- Give lots of positive feedback for effort and application

<http://eida.org/dyslexia-in-the-classroom/>

Universal Design for Learning

UDL involves designing the curriculum, learning materials and instruction methods to be accessible to all learners with different needs and abilities.

- Alternative formats
- Present information in a range of media
- Alternative assessment methods - oral assessments as alternatives to written tasks

<http://www.cast.org/our-work/about-udl.html#.V94eDIh96Uk>

Assistive technology

Assistive technology is defined as hardware, software and applications designed to assist students with learning disabilities. Assistive technology can assist students understand the material presented, store information and composes responses.

Important software and apps include:

- text-to speech
- speech recognition
- audio recordings
- text prediction
- spellcheckers
- mind mapping

Reasonable Adjustments for Exams and Assessments

Adjustments provide students with disabilities an opportunity to participate in education *on the same basis* as student peers without the disability.

Suggestions to consider include:

- Additional time
- Separate venue
- Rest breaks or split sessions
- Use of a reader
- Use of a scribe
- Access to assistive technology
- Alternative formats
- Present information in a range of media
- Alternative assessment methods - oral assessments as alternatives to written tasks
- Use generic terms and inclusive language when constructing assessment tasks

This submission was prepared by Tanya Forbes - Founder of the Gold Coast Dyslexia Support Group and Dyslexia QLD Support

The Gold Coast Dyslexia Support Group and Dyslexia QLD Support have over 2,000 proactive parent and teacher members who are advocates for students with dyslexia. Their objective is to increase awareness, share information and provide support to parents, students, teachers and schools on issues involving dyslexia.