

# What Parents Talk About When They Talk About Learning

A National Survey About Young Children and Science

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# Introduction

# Parental Involvement in Early Science

- Early science experiences can provide a foundation for a variety of skills
- Parents can play an important role in improving their children's literacy and math learning
- Similarly parent involvement could be vital in improving children's science learning—especially given many early education programs do not address science
- Parental involvement may be particularly important for first-generation children, who are more likely to be in parental care and less likely to be in center-based care.



# This Study

- Purpose: Explore how parents and caregivers view their role in supporting their three- to six-year-old children's learning, particularly science.
- This presentation also examines whether Latino parents' experiences differ from other parents in the study.



# Research Question

How do parents and caregivers help their young **children learn in general and learn science in particular?**

- What are parents' attitudes and beliefs about children's early learning?
- How do parents support their children's early learning?

A photograph of a child's hands pouring a green liquid from a clear plastic bottle into a glass at a kitchen sink. The background shows a window with several jars on the sill, including one with blue liquid and another with green liquid. The scene is brightly lit by natural light from the window.

# Methods

# National Survey

- National telephone survey of 1,442 parents with at least one 3-6-year-old child living at home
- 909 families (63%) had an annual household income of \$50,000 or less
- 289 parents of Hispanic or Latino origin



# Qualitative Study

- Eight focus groups with a total of 65 families in three locations
- Two home visits with 10 families (selected from focus group participants to ensure variety of comfort with science and use of digital media)
- Science journal between home visits



A young girl with dark, curly hair is leaning over a white plate with a blue and green patterned rim. She is holding a magnifying glass over a small, yellowish, segmented object on the plate. The background is blurred, showing other people and a red and white striped shirt. Overlaid on the right side of the image are three overlapping squares in shades of blue and teal.

# Results

# Responsibility for Learning

**99%** of parents

- ➔ **Report that they want to be involved in their children's education**



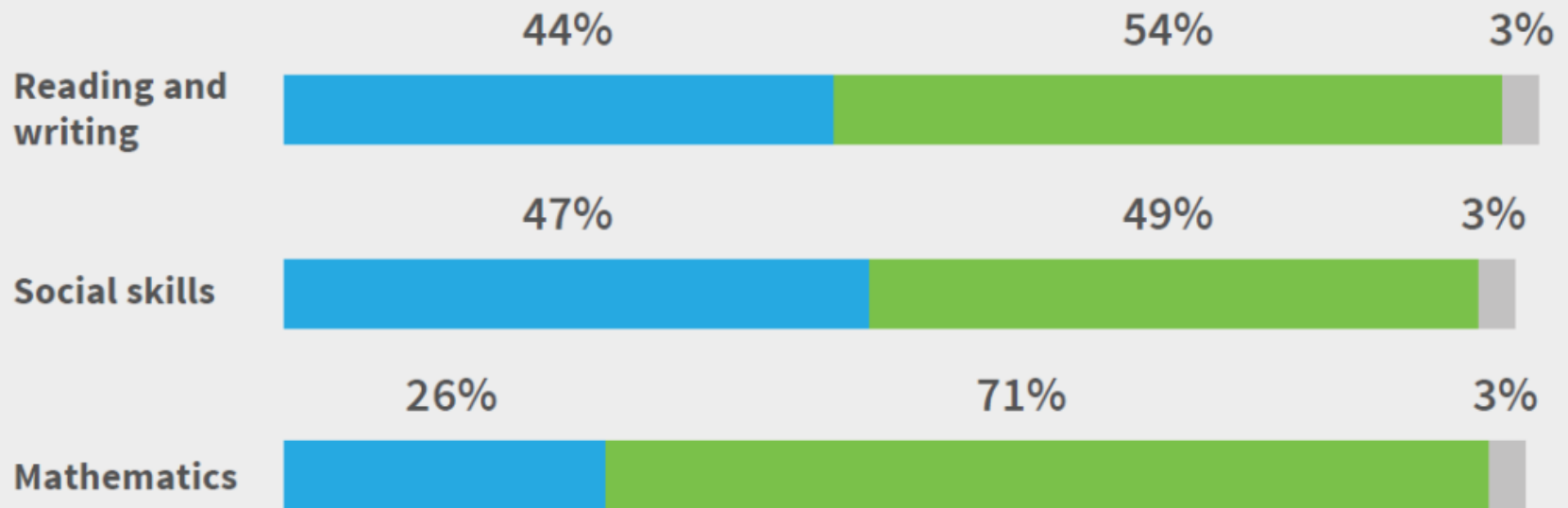
# Responsibility for Learning

**85%** of all parents

**74%** of Latino parents

- **Report that their child will not learn everything they need to know in school.**

# Parent perceptions of the importance of science



● More important than science    ● As important as science    ● Less important than science

# Parents Say

“

*I think high school is a good time for them to learn science. I think it's overrated, seriously, because my daughter, she's in first grade, and they're teaching her science, and she looks at me like, "What the heck am I supposed to learn with this?" ...I think they should focus on other things more important than science. I know it's going to be more important at one point because it has to do with math and everything, but right now I don't feel that it's necessary in the first grade.*

”



# Parents Say

“

*It's important for education. It's important for the kids to know, like you says, where's the food come from? It's important to know how is the water we drink so clean if we know it comes from a reservoir that's full of yucky stuff. It's very important to educate them.*

”

# Confidence

**Percentage of Parents Who Feel “Very Confident” in their Ability to Help Their Children Learn Age-Appropriate Skills**

75%



**Reading and writing skills**

73%



**Math skills**

71%



**Behavioral, social, and emotional needs**

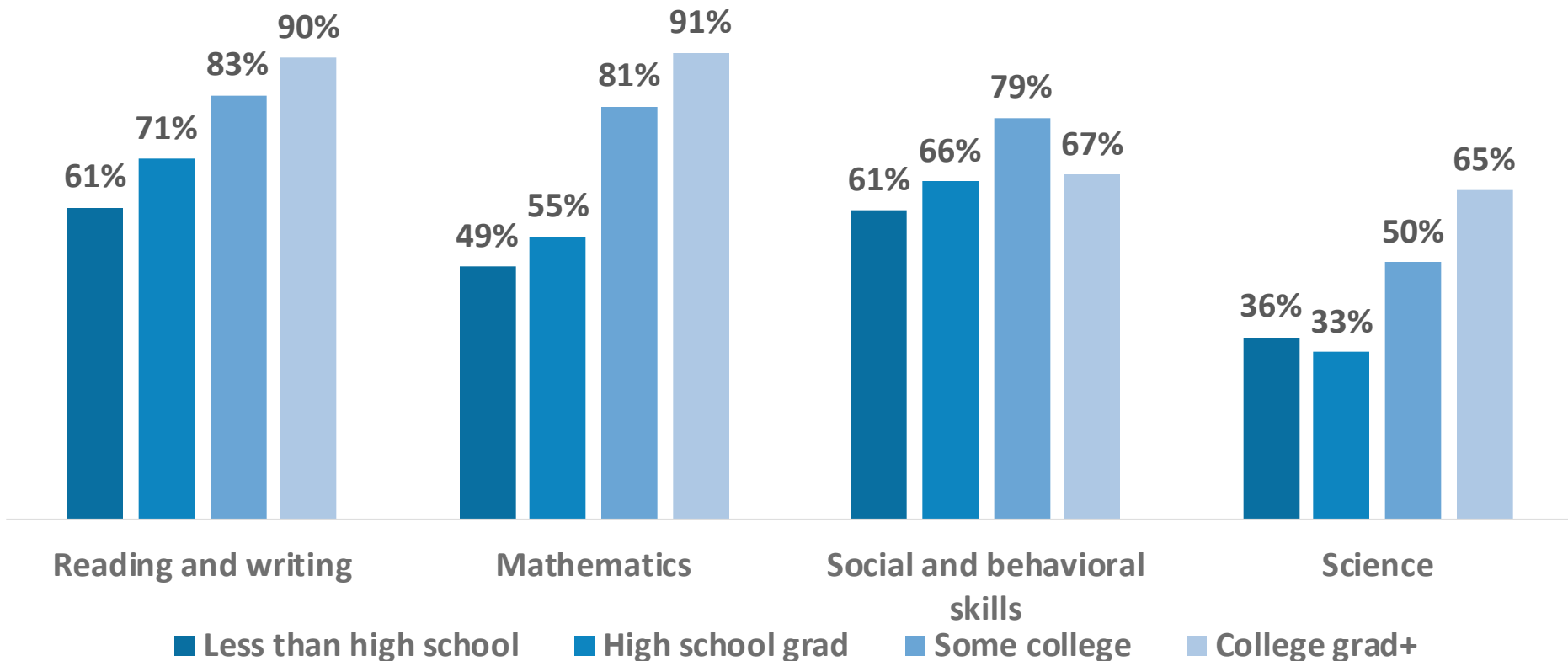
**54%**



**Science skills**

# Confidence

**Percentage of Latino Parents Who Feel “Very Confident” in their Ability to Help Their Children Learn Age-Appropriate Skills, by Parent Education**





# Confidence

Parents described their confidence about science in terms of their ability to...

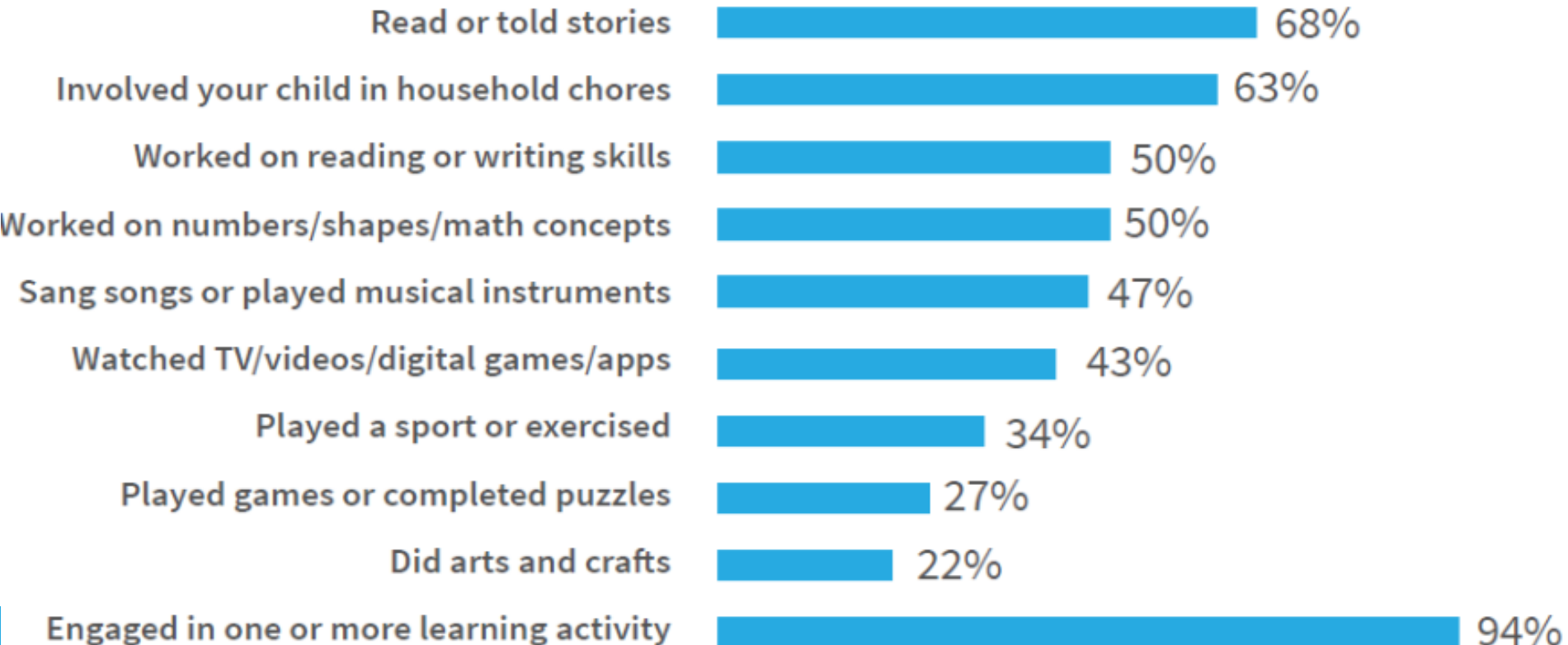
- answer spontaneous questions, and
- communicate information appropriately.

Some Latino parents also talked about challenges related to language in particular.

# Learning Activities

## Percentage of Parents Who Report Engaging in Learning Activities With Their Child Daily

### General Learning Activities



# Science Activities

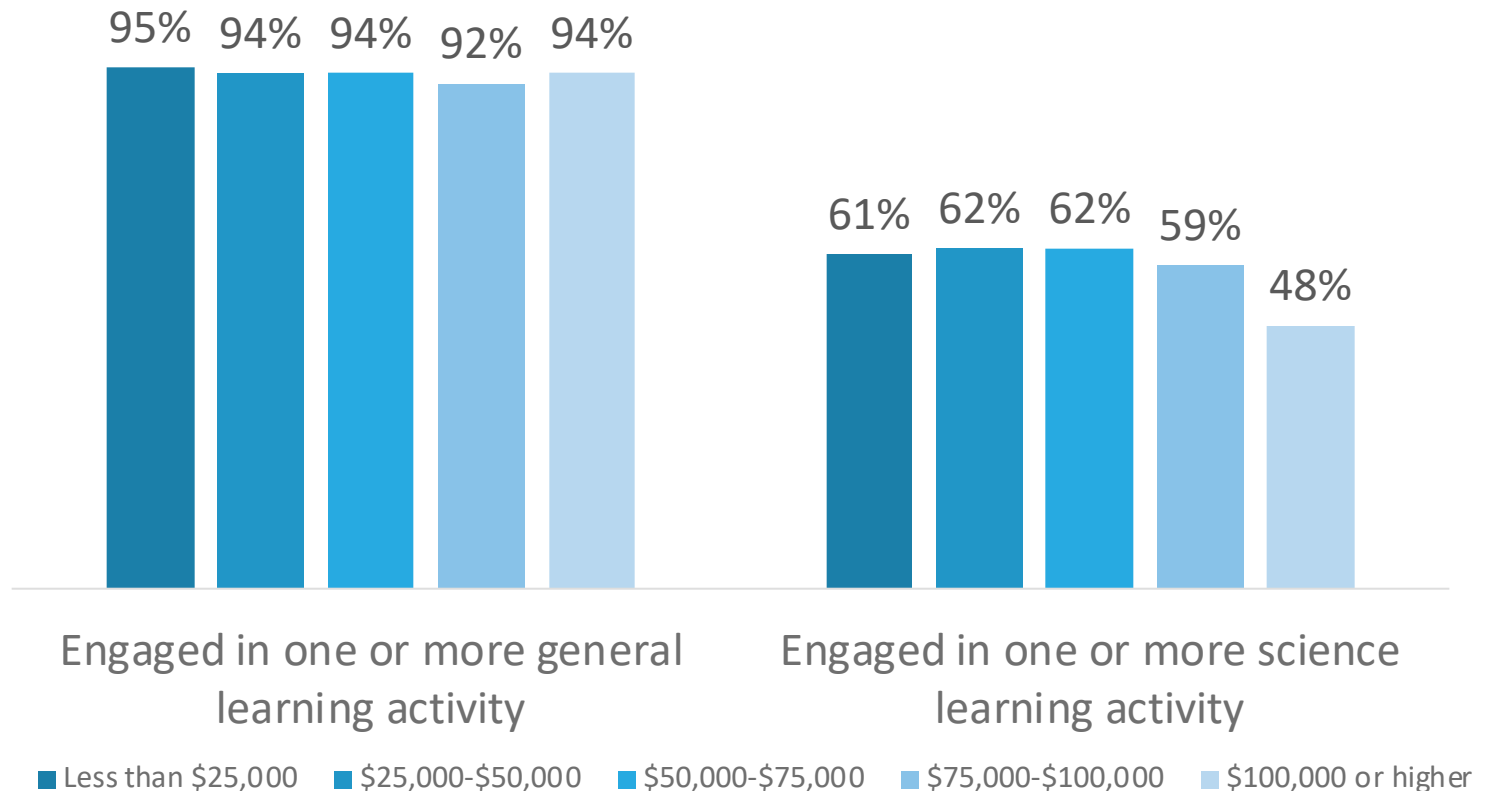
## Percentage of Parents Who Report Engaging in Science-Related Learning Activities With Their Child Daily

### Science Learning Activities



# Science Activities

**Low-income parents reported engaging in science-related activities more frequently than higher-income parents**



# Science Activities





# Parents Say

“

*I don't know if it counts, but when I go to the market, my kids help me to pick the fruits and vegetables.*

”

# Parents Say



*In our community, we're doing a farm, so right now we're planting, and we're learning about how the plants survive, how many times they should be watered a day, especially in the sun, what kind of food it's going to give us and what we can create out of that food.*



# Supports

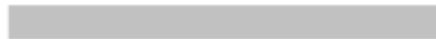
**Percentage of Parents Who Reported That a Given Support Would Help “a Lot” in Doing More Science at Home**

45%



Better access to technology

52%



Ways to get yourself more interested in science

64%



Ways to get your child more interested in science

64%



Information about what your child should learn about science

71%



Ideas for doing science activities with everyday materials

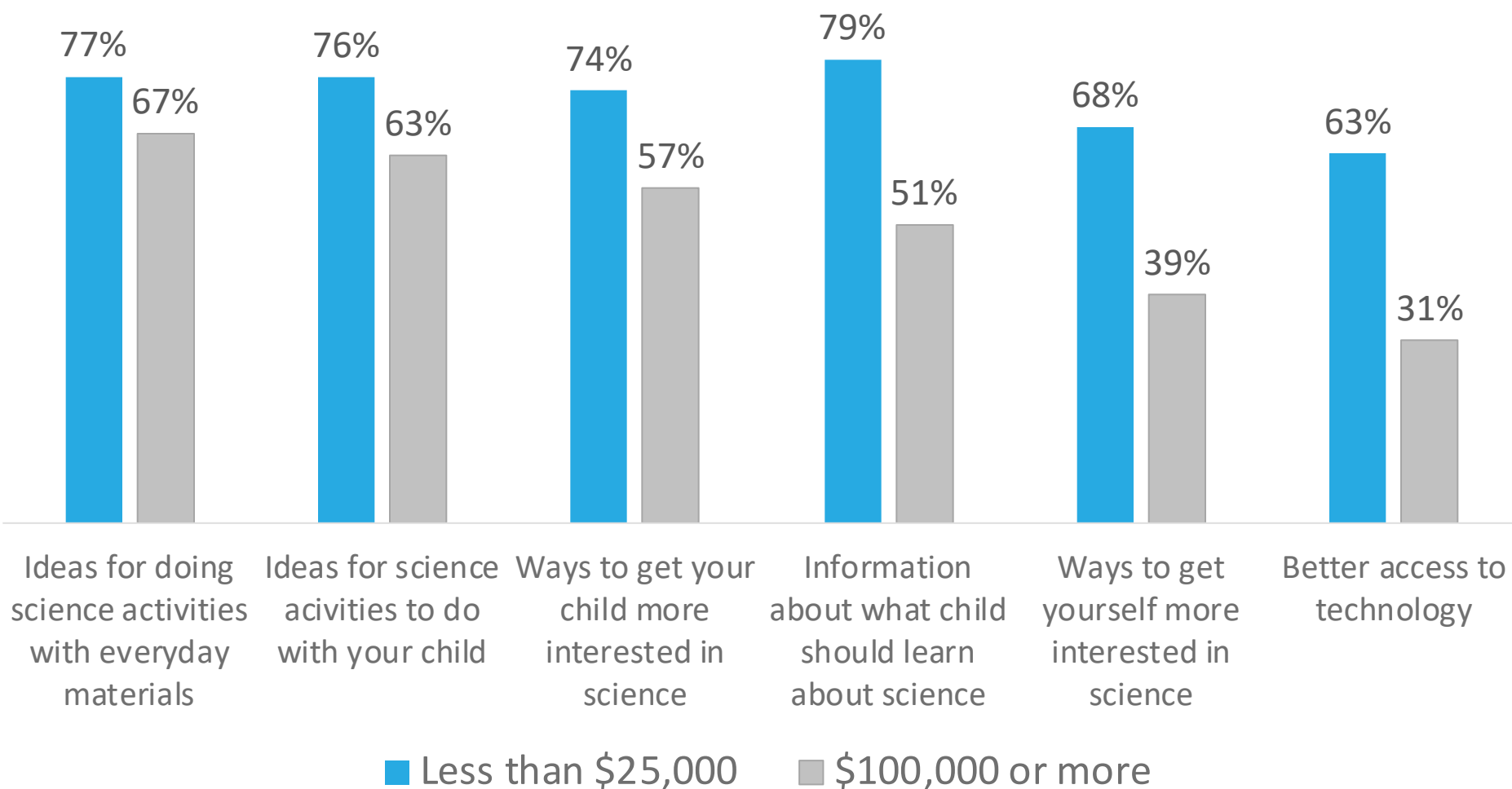
71%



Ideas for science activities to do with your child

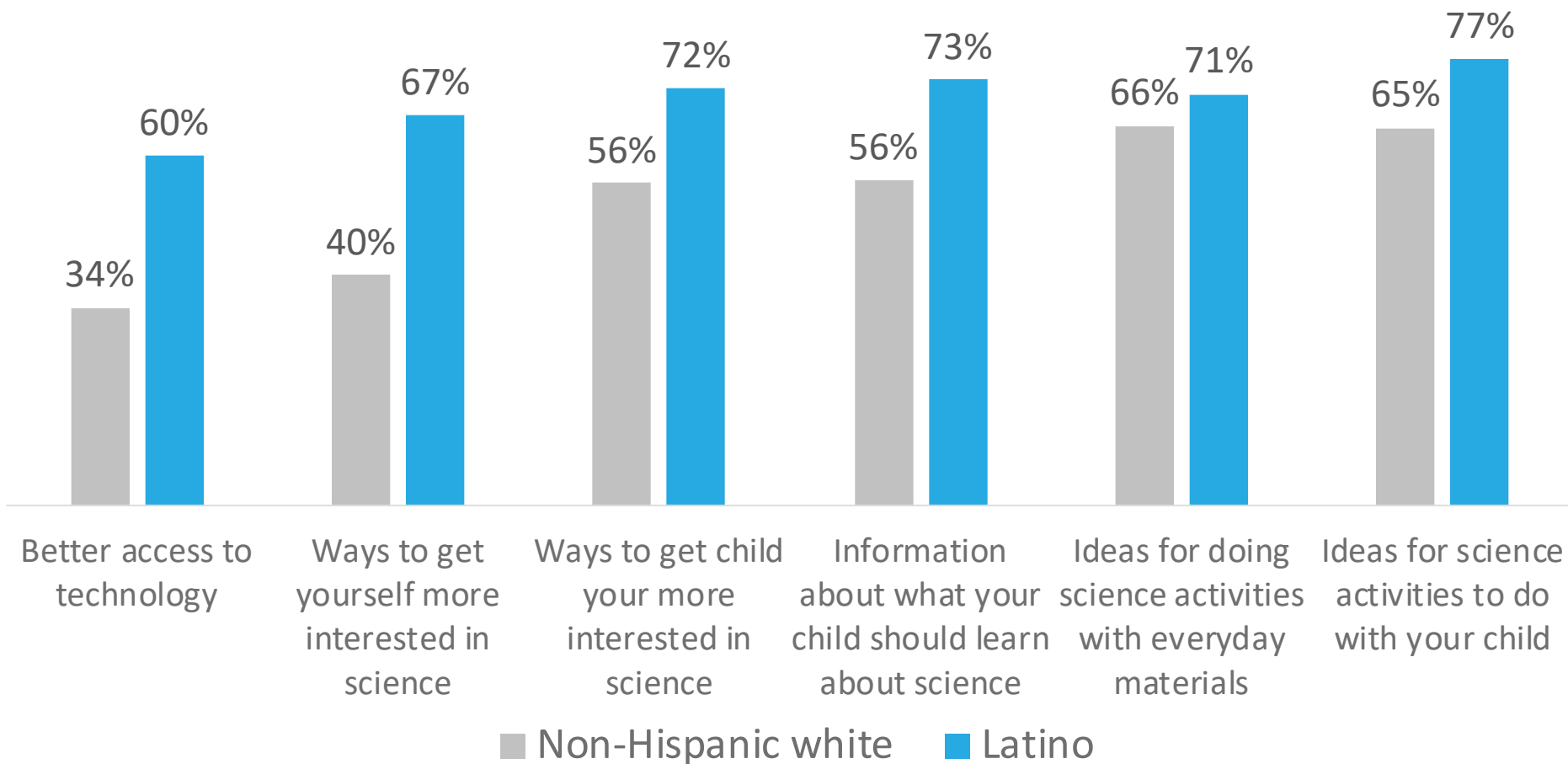
# Supports

## Percentage of Parents Who Reported That a Given Support Would Help “a Lot” in Doing More Science at Home, by Family Income



# Supports

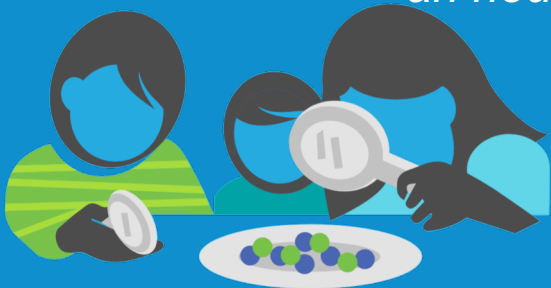
**Percentage of Latino Parents Who Reported That a Given Support Would Help “a Lot” in Doing More Science at Home, by Ethnicity**



# Parents Say



*I think identifying ideas that ... I can do without it being, you know—I don't know if this is going to sound bad—but, like, a really huge thing. Because we're super stressed for time, too. So, I can't go and make her something that's going to take, you know, 20 minutes to set up and 30 minutes to do, and then an hour to clean it off everything...*





# Parents Say



*Whatever I can really scrounge up. If she wants to learn something about animals, or basic animals like hamsters or turtles or fishes, I go to Petco, because I need to get food for the dogs, and she loves looking at animals, fishes, especially we pass by Walmart or anywhere, she'll ask me questions now and then. "Oh, look, a little crab," and I'm like, "Sorry, it's fake."*





# Discussion

# Supporting Parents

- All parents are interested and invested in their children's education.
- Many may not recognize the role they play in science exploration.
- Inspiration, encouragement, ideas and accessible resources may help.

# Acknowledgements

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# Thank You



Report available at  
<http://www.edc.org/what-parents-talk-about>

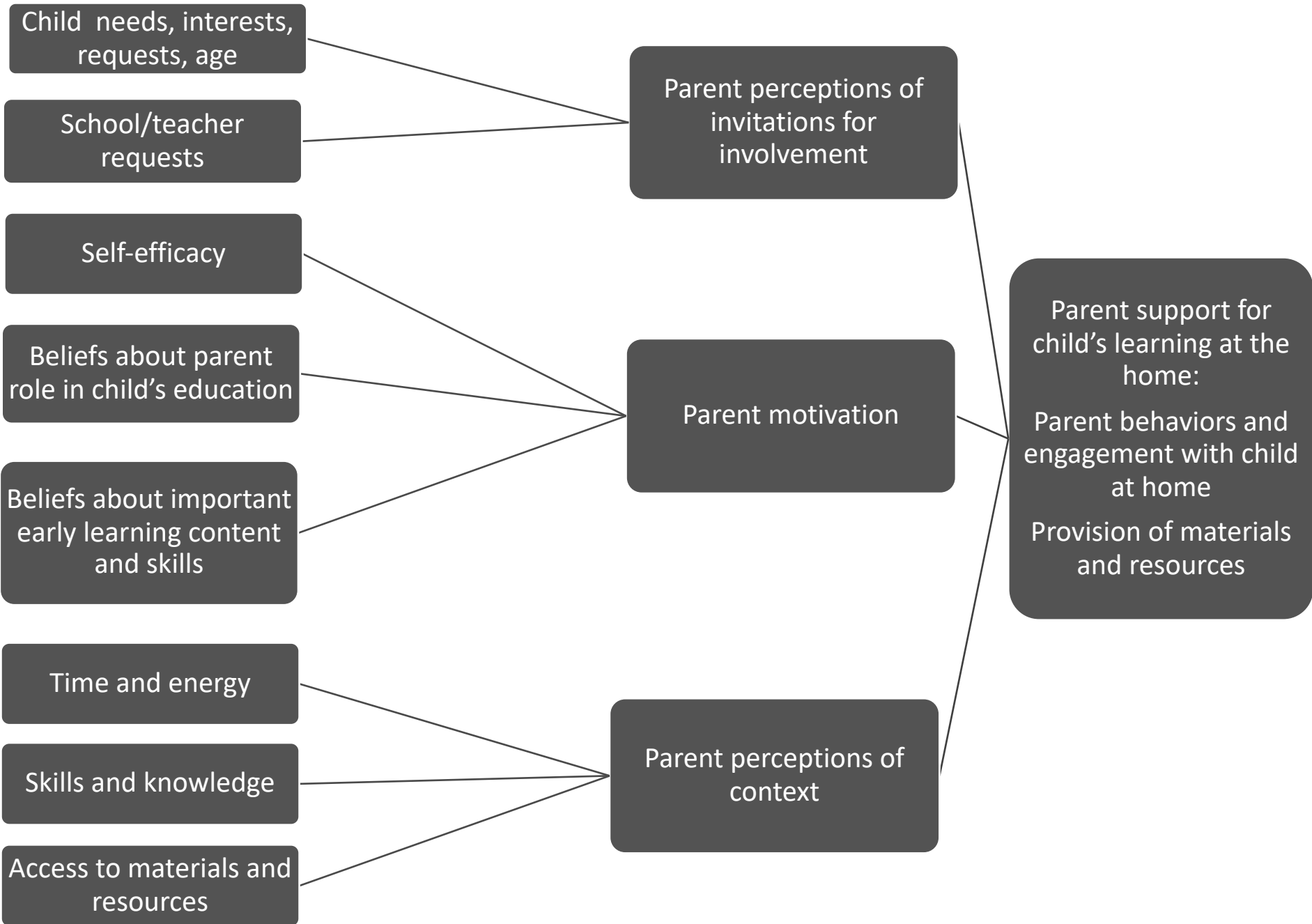
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# Parents Say

“

*Parent 1: Yes, because if they ask you something [about science] that we still don't know... We have to be prepared, we have to know the answer to each question that our children ask us.*

*Parent 2: And if you don't know the answer it's difficult to talk to them and elaborate in their language...*

”

# Media Resources

- Young children use educational media & science-related media regularly.
- Additional resources for everyday science have potential to help parents and children.

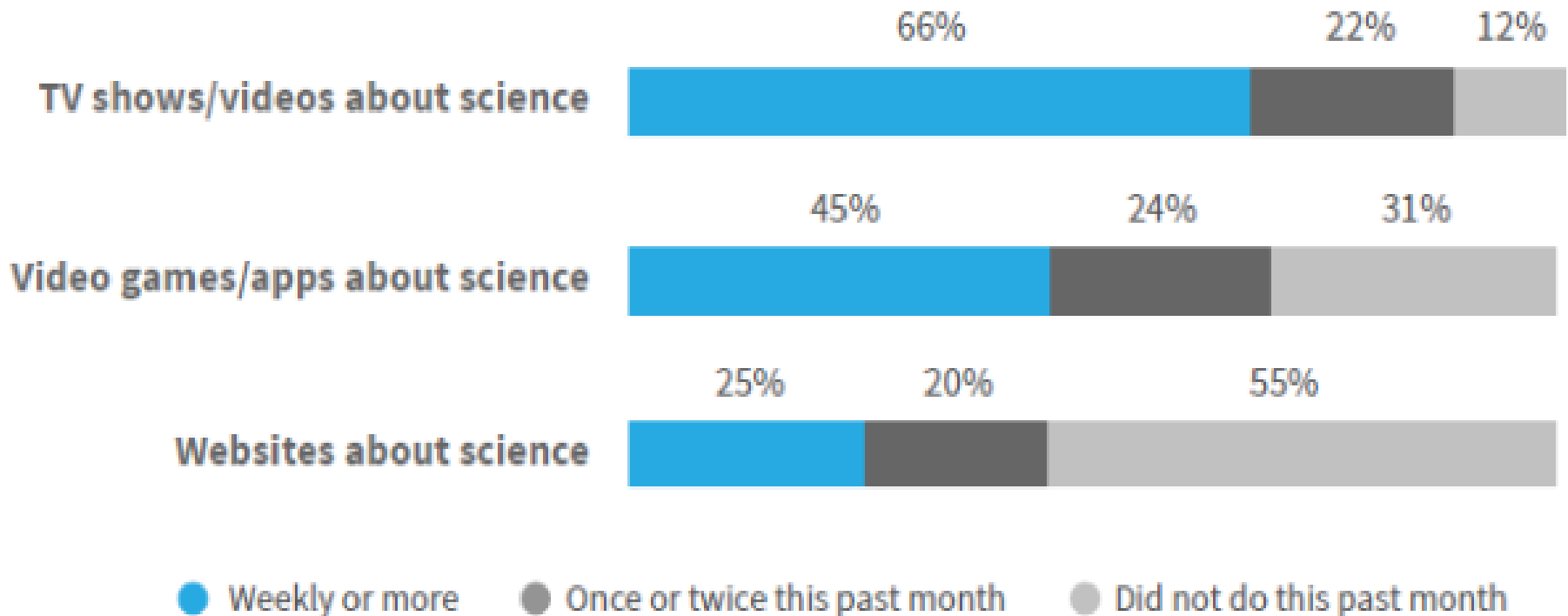
# Digital Media Supports

- **94%** of parents reported that their child watched educational TV shows or videos in the past month.
- **84%** of parents reported that their child had played a digital game or app in the past month.



# Digital Media Supports

Many children use science media weekly or more



# Digital Media Supports

Parents' report of supports they provide while using science media, among parents who used science media in the last month

95%

Monitor child's viewing and playing

94%

Compliment or encourage a child

86%

Explain or talk about something that you're watching or playing

75%

Watch a show or play a game or app along with child

73%

Help your child access and play a show, app, or game

69%

Talk about connections between a show, app, or game

# Digital Media Supports

- Parents most frequently use science media to search for answers to specific questions
- View science media as entertainment rather than educational
- Lack of explicit goals for children's use of science media