Stopping the School to Prison Pipeline (SSPP) 2024-25 Learning Cycle Report

June 25, 2025

King County
Best Starts for KIDS

Overview

Summary

In recent years, the Stopping the School to Prison Pipeline team worked to develop a practice of utilizing performance measurement data to promote collective learning and continuous program improvement. This report documents the 2024-2025 learning cycle led by the team which engaged providers in identifying data-informed learning priorities and learning activities. Priorities included motivational strategies to sustain participant engagement and strategies to deepen parent or caregiver involvement. This report details the steps the team undertook as part of this effort, including building relationships as a foundation for data learning discussions, exploring program implementation progress through provider-driven insights, addressing challenges through provider-driven learning, and learning cycle feedback and evaluation. While learning cycle activities took place between 2024 and 2025, performance measurement data is retrospective, reflecting the 2023 and 2024 calendar years.

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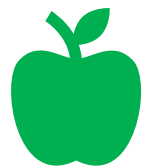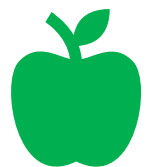4. Learning cycle review

Key takeaways

Performance measurement and learning practice work took place within a strategy-level relational environment curated by Program Managers. Relationship-building leading up to learning cycle work occurred over the course of a year and was essential for generating a foundation of trust upon which cross-agency learning could take place.

After a year of learning cycle activities, the average quarterly engagement rate for participants enrolled in Stopping the School to Prison Pipeline programs rose from 61% in 2023 to 69% in 2024. This occurred alongside improvement-focused changes in programmatic practices and refinement of data collection and reporting approaches.

Changes implemented by providers included utilization of SSPP's performance measurement data dashboard to set program goals, coordination of new staff trainings related to workshop concepts, and a shift toward prioritizing depth of engagement over breadth of reach.

Coordinating workshops to meet the various needs of multiple providers presented challenges for cohort-wide content relevance. Provider feedback indicated a desire for greater nuance in workshop content to better address the diverse experiences of the young people they engage with.

1. Introduction

Introduction to Stopping the School to Prison Pipeline (SSPP)

The Stopping the School to Prison Pipeline strategy area partners with communities to help create school to life success pathways for 12- to 24-year-old young people and their families most likely to be pushed into the criminal legal system or who are involved in the criminal legal system.

We invest in community-based programming that builds relationships, provides guidance, and connects young people to pathways of success - creating an environment (including systems, policies, and practices) that helps youth and their families, especially Black and Indigenous youth, and those who are disproportionately impacted by the school-to-prison-pipeline, embrace their worth, live up to their potential and pursue their aspirations with the full support of their communities.

SSPP guiding principles

The work of the Stopping the School to Prison Pipeline strategy is grounded in the following principles, which were co-created with youth, young adults, parents and caregivers, and community-based providers.

- Prioritize and champion the voices and choices of communities most affected by racism and poverty
- Foster equitable access to decisions and resources
- Learn from and help grow with community service providers
- Invest in culturally reflective and responsive supports
- Build on healing centered practices and comprehensive approaches
- Increase young people's positive cultural identity, self-worth, and leadership skills
- Promote solidarity and trust
- Develop anti-racist and anti-sexist practices, leadership and systems

2024-25 learning cycle participating programs

SSPP invests in programs that promote sustainable economic strengthening through workforce and career development activities, and/or positive identity development experiences, opportunities, education/guidance, relationships, apprenticeship-type programs, and/or reconnection to cultural heritage.

Programs participating in this cycle connected with young participants through outreach at community events, referrals from other community organizations, and/or partnerships with schools and school districts. Once participants enrolled, most programs allowed indefinite participation unless participants aged out (at 25) or enrollment capacity was reached. For the few programs with enrollment duration limits, duration ranged anywhere between three months (a quarter) to a full school year.

All programs operated independently under their own organizational vision and leadership, and each program's delivery approach varied accordingly. The procurement ensured alignment in goals across programs, while organizational culture, leadership, capacity and maturity determined the scope and nature of each program's services, including the demographics of focus communities and approaches to service delivery.

Examples of participating program activities

- Summer internship programs designed to expose young people to career or entrepreneurship opportunities aligned with their interests.
- Culturally-relevant case management, behavioral counseling, and advocacy for young people needing support navigating difficult home or school environments.
- Leadership development programming designed to teach young people about their civic rights and the policy-making process.

Providers & young people

Provider agencies running SSPP-funded programs were deeply rooted in the communities they served.

- Out of eleven providers, six were Black/African American-led, two Latinx-led, one native-led, one East-African-led, and one BIPOC-led provider.
- The racial composition of organizational leadership was highly representative of communities served.
- Majority were small to mid-size community-based organizations prioritizing cultural relevance over maximum reach.

2. Learning cycle project description & roles

Project description

Description

SSPP's learning practice is a coordinated approach to promote collective learning and continuous program improvement across funded providers. This practice utilizes performance measurement data to generate actionable learnings. In advance of the learning cycle, the team spends about two full quarters (depending on the cohort size) developing performance measurement plans in partnership with providers, which serve as the foundation of performance data collection and inform data interpretation for learning purposes.

Goals of the 2024-25 learning cycle

- Utilize performance measurement data to inform conversations about opportunities for service delivery improvement
- Identify common service delivery challenges and learning priorities across SSPP providers
- Support providers in addressing challenges through workshops focused on:
  - Effective strategies to motivate sustained participant engagement in programming
  - Strategies to engage parents and caregivers in supporting their youth in completing their program goals

Resources

- Staff capacity – 1 contract monitor, 1 program manager, 1 policy advisor, 1 evaluator. In addition to adequate staffing, our team was able to find time in between procurement and contract monitoring responsibilities for this project.
- Budget for learning activities, which was sourced from the SSPP strategy.

Roles

Roles – evaluator

- Facilitate reflective conversations regarding performance measurement data with program team. Make space for consideration of complementary sources of information, such as information from contract monitoring visits, along with performance measurement data insights.
- Promote curiosity and use of performance data as a springboard for inquiry
  - i.e.: here is what the performance measurement data says so far, what observations jump out to you? what questions do these observations raise for you?
- Perform data collection and analysis to support ongoing learning throughout cycle activities
  - i.e. documentation of anecdotal information from learning discussions, feedback data collection and synthesis.

Roles – program manager or contract monitor

- Participate in conversations about performance measurement data insights and develop questions to guide learning agenda
- Determine and lead the course of action in response to identified areas of inquiry
- Facilitate learning activities
- Lead conversations with providers about implementation of learning activity practices and identification of additional supports

3. Learning cycle phases

Learning cycle phases

Phase 1 – laying the groundwork for data learning discussions through relationship-building & measure validation

Phase 2 – exploring program implementation progress through provider-driven data insights

Phase 3 – addressing challenges through provider-driven learning

Phase 4 – provider feedback and workshop evaluation takeaways

Learning cycle phase 1

Laying the groundwork through relationship-building & measure validation

Prior to starting learning cycle activities, our team spent the better part of a year getting to know the staff affiliated with the various provider organizations and developing trust, rapport, and understanding around mutual expectations for the County-to-provider relationship. This phase of the work included the performance measurement planning process. While the cohort was asked to track a universal set of measures, each provider was given the freedom to define the measures in alignment with their unique program delivery approach.

Once these norms were in place, we introduced the concept of learning from performance measurement data and utilizing data to support the work of service providers representing historically under-invested communities as a practice of data justice (an approach that ensures fairness in how data is collected, analyzed, shared, and used). Building on this foundation, we introduced the SSPP performance measurement dashboard, an interactive dashboard visualizing SSPP performance measurement data trends, and began having data-informed learning discussions during our monthly cohort meetings.
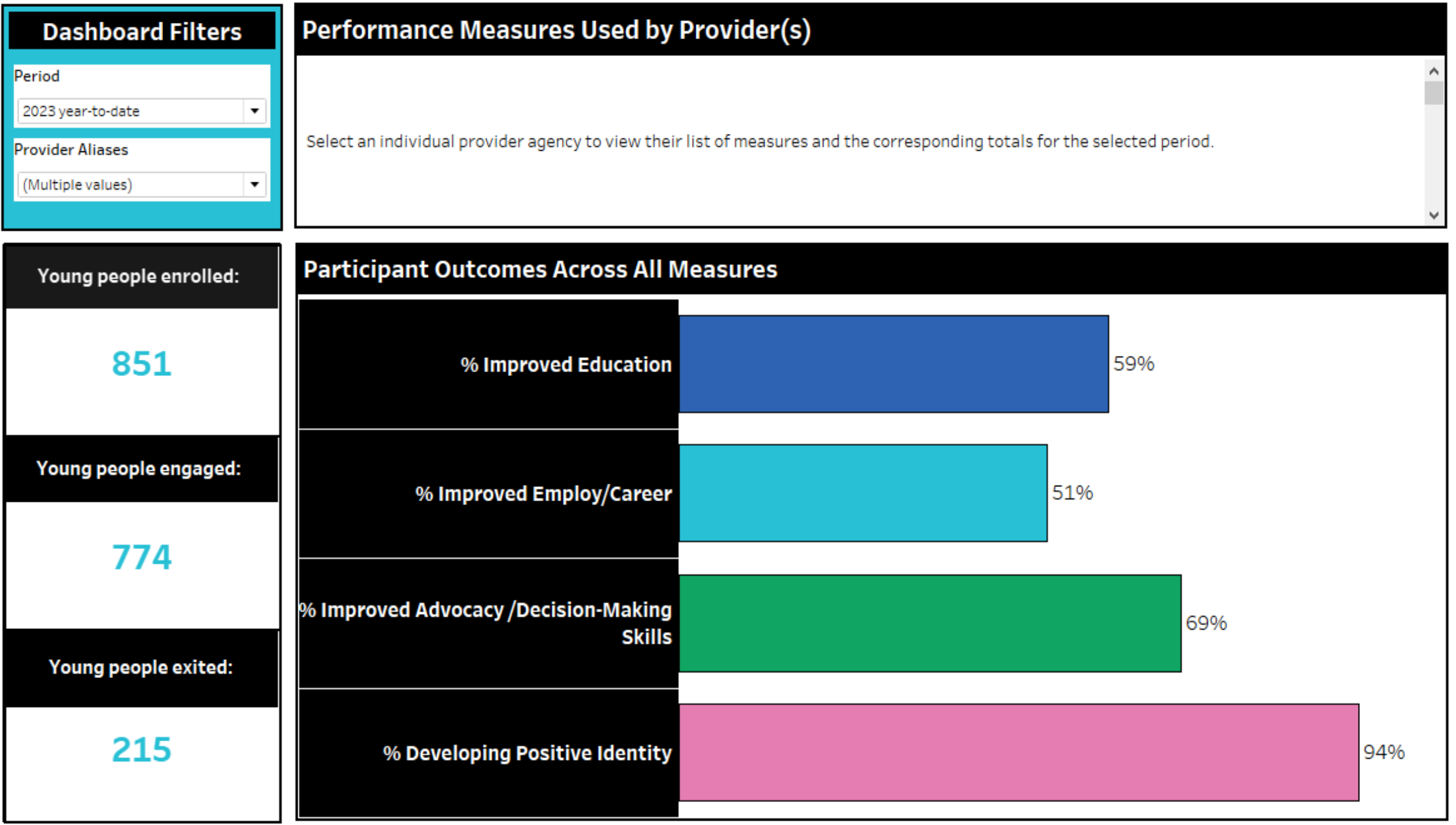
Activities

SSPP has had a long-standing practice of intentional relationship building with providers through the following activities:

- Monthly 30 min 1:1 check-ins with providers
- Monthly 2 hour virtual cohort meetings
- Quarterly 2 hour in-person meetings

The SSPP performance measurement dashboard

Laying the groundwork through relationship-building & measure validation

Dashboard Filters

Period
2023 year-to-date

Provider Aliases
(Multiple values)

Performance Measures Used by Provider(s)

Select an individual provider agency to view their list of measures and the corresponding totals for the selected period.

Young people enrolled:

851

Young people engaged:

774

Young people exited:

215

Participant Outcomes Across All Measures

- % Improved Education — 59%
- % Improved Employ/Career — 51%
- % Improved Advocacy /Decision-Making Skills — 69%
- % Developing Positive Identity — 94%

SSPP performance measures

Unique performance measure definitions were drafted for each funded program based on their respective service delivery approaches. All programs were required to use the following measures and given the option to incorporate additional measures.

- Number of young people enrolled
- Percent of young people consistently engaged in services
- Percent of young people with improved career or employment outcomes
- Percent of young people with improved education outcomes

Learning cycle phase 1

Laying the groundwork through relationship-building & measure validation

The performance measurement dashboard became a platform to explore questions about data reliability, transparency, and accountability on both sides of the County-provider relationship. Once providers saw their programmatic data visualized in a meaning-making context, they showed greater investment in the accuracy of their reporting and ensuring that their performance measurement definitions accurately represented their service delivery approaches.

A representative from one of the SSPP service providers, for example, noticed that the total number of participants engaged (or consistently attending) in their program after enrollment did not match engagement trends she was seeing in real-time. Through one-on-one conversations, we determined that the definition of engagement we had originally established for her program did not accurately reflect what her team was doing in practice. This mismatch between the data definition of engagement and how her team was documenting attendance (engagement) for enrolled youth based on their own assumptions was leading to a low rate of engagement being reflected on the dashboard for this program.

Early data conversations

How are you calculating the totals?...

Let's discuss what's in the numerator & denominator...

The data doesn't reflect what we're seeing...

What are you seeing on your end?... How can this be better documented and reflected in the data?

How is the County being accountable to communities? Show us how you're investing...

Here's list/map of Best Starts investments, let's discuss...

Learning cycle phase 2

Exploring program implementation progress through data insights

By the end of 2023, SSPP providers had **enrolled 771 young people** in school-to-career and life skills development programs. Most enrollees identified as Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino and predominantly hailed from ZIP codes characterized by high levels of systemic inequities in education access and economic opportunity. However, enrollment trends were accompanied by high rates of participant attrition, which concerned SSPP program managers. Thus, we engaged providers in conversations about the challenges they were experiencing in maintaining young participants engaged. Providers expressed difficulty in building investment from parents and caregivers, challenges with meeting the various participation interests of their young people, and a lack of reliable transportation for youth to get to programming. The time we dedicated to relationship-building prior to diving into these conversations was essential for eliciting candid responses.

2023 highlights

Successes

- Most kids enrolled in programs identified as Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino.
- 69% of enrollees came from ZIP Codes where systemic inequities were high.

Opportunities for improvement

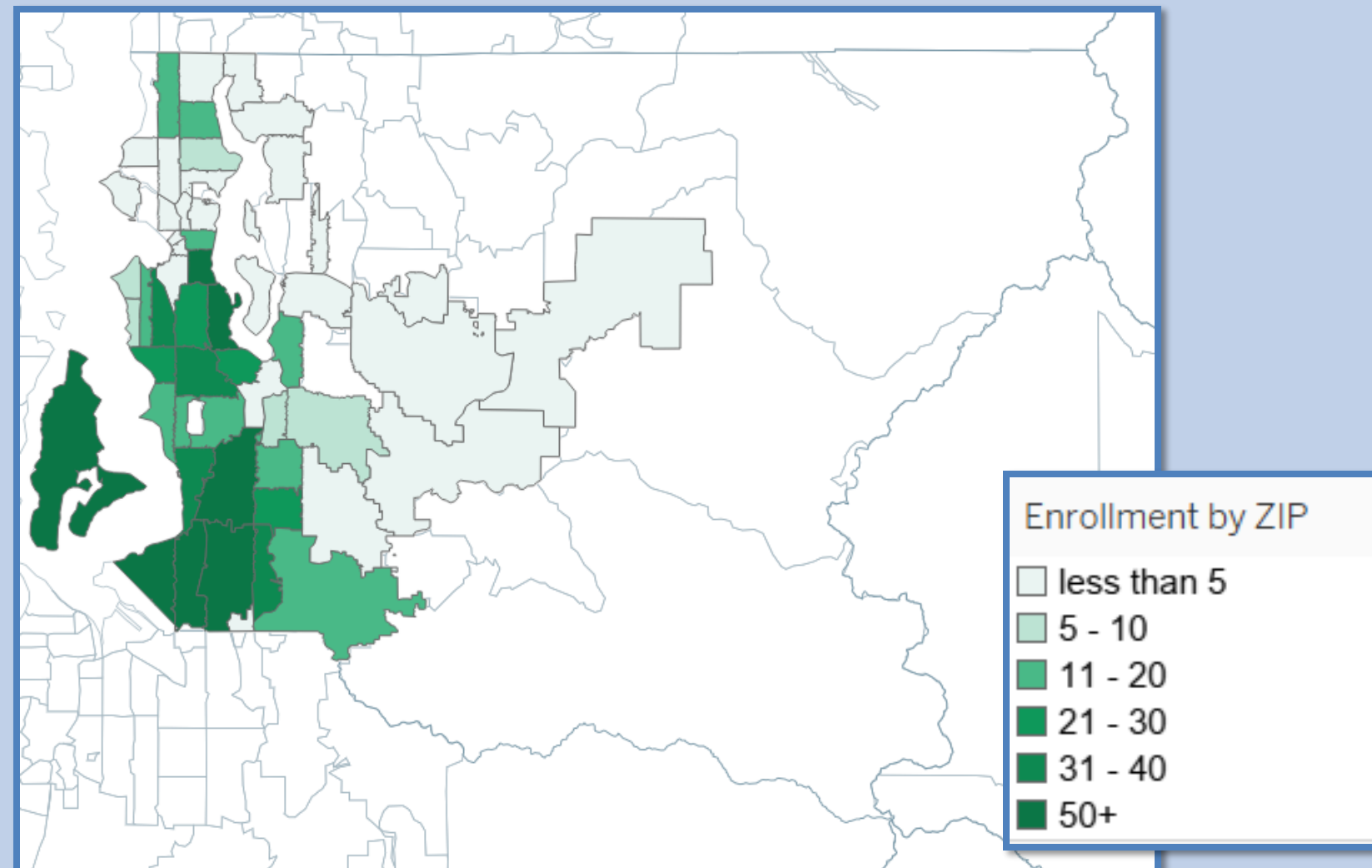- Engagement (or consistent attendance) post-enrollment at average rate of 61% of enrolled participants per quarter.

Common challenges around engagement

- Building parent buy-in
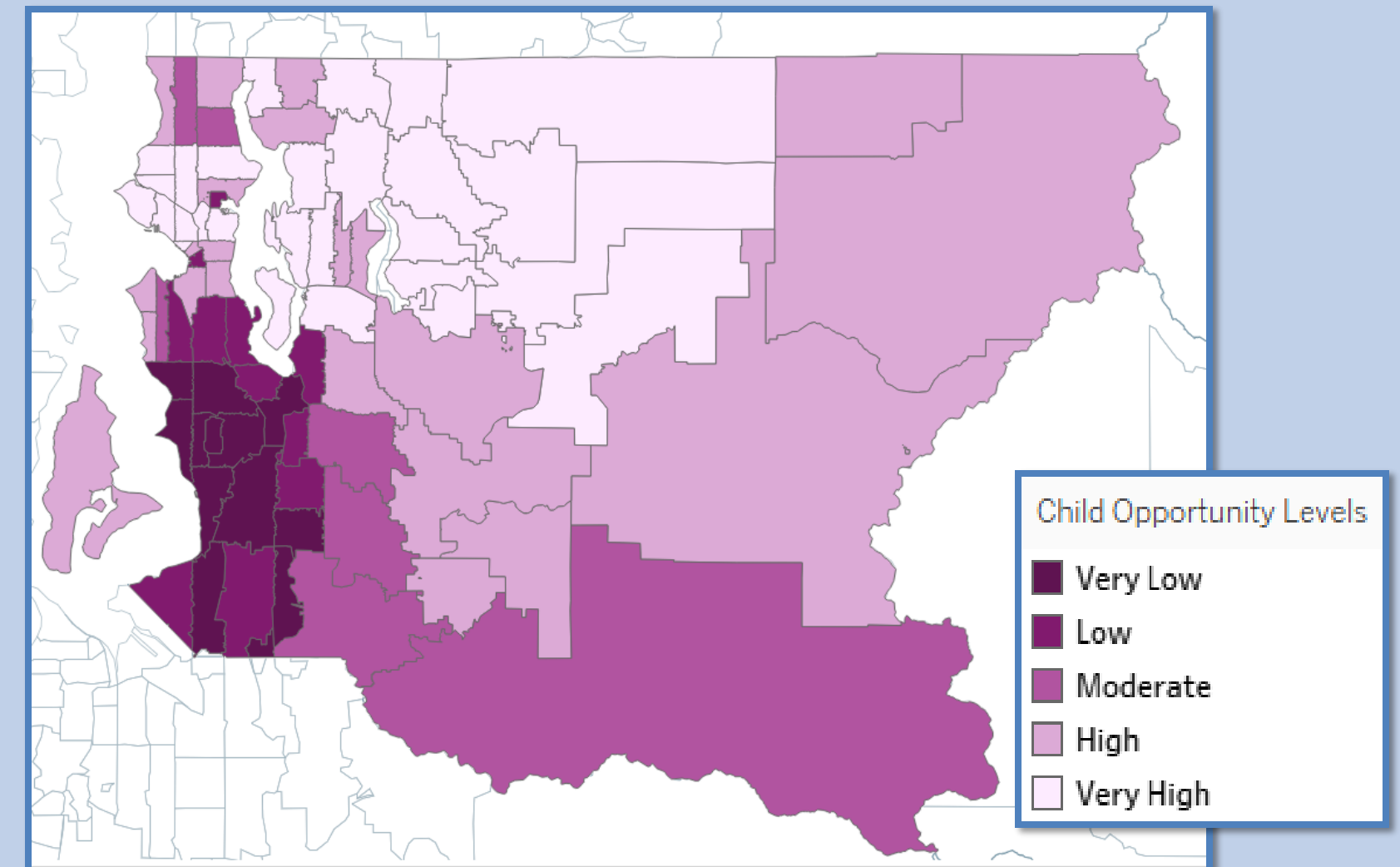- Cultivating participant motivation

Learning cycle phase 2

Exploring program implementation progress through data insights

Geographic distribution of participants

Child opportunity levels by King County ZIP

Enrollment by ZIP
- less than 5
- 5 - 10
- 11 - 20
- 21 - 30
- 31 - 40
- 50+

Child Opportunity Levels
- Very Low
- Low
- Moderate
- High
- Very High

Sources: Child Opportunity Index (COI) | diversitydatakids.org

The Child Opportunity Index (COI)

Best Starts for Kids (the funding source for Stopping the School to Prison Pipeline) often utilizes the Child Opportunity index to assess contracted providers' effectiveness at reaching children, youth, and families in communities that experience disproportionate levels of socioeconomic inequities because of systemic racism, among other root causes. The Child Opportunity Index was developed by diversitydatakids.org, a project based out of the Boston University School of Social Work.

Quality schools, parks and playgrounds, clean air, access to healthy food, health care and safe housing—these are some of the conditions and resources children need to grow up healthy and become successful adults. Many children in the U.S. live in neighborhoods that provide access to these conditions—neighborhoods we describe as "high opportunity." But many live in "low opportunity" neighborhoods with few or none of these conditions.
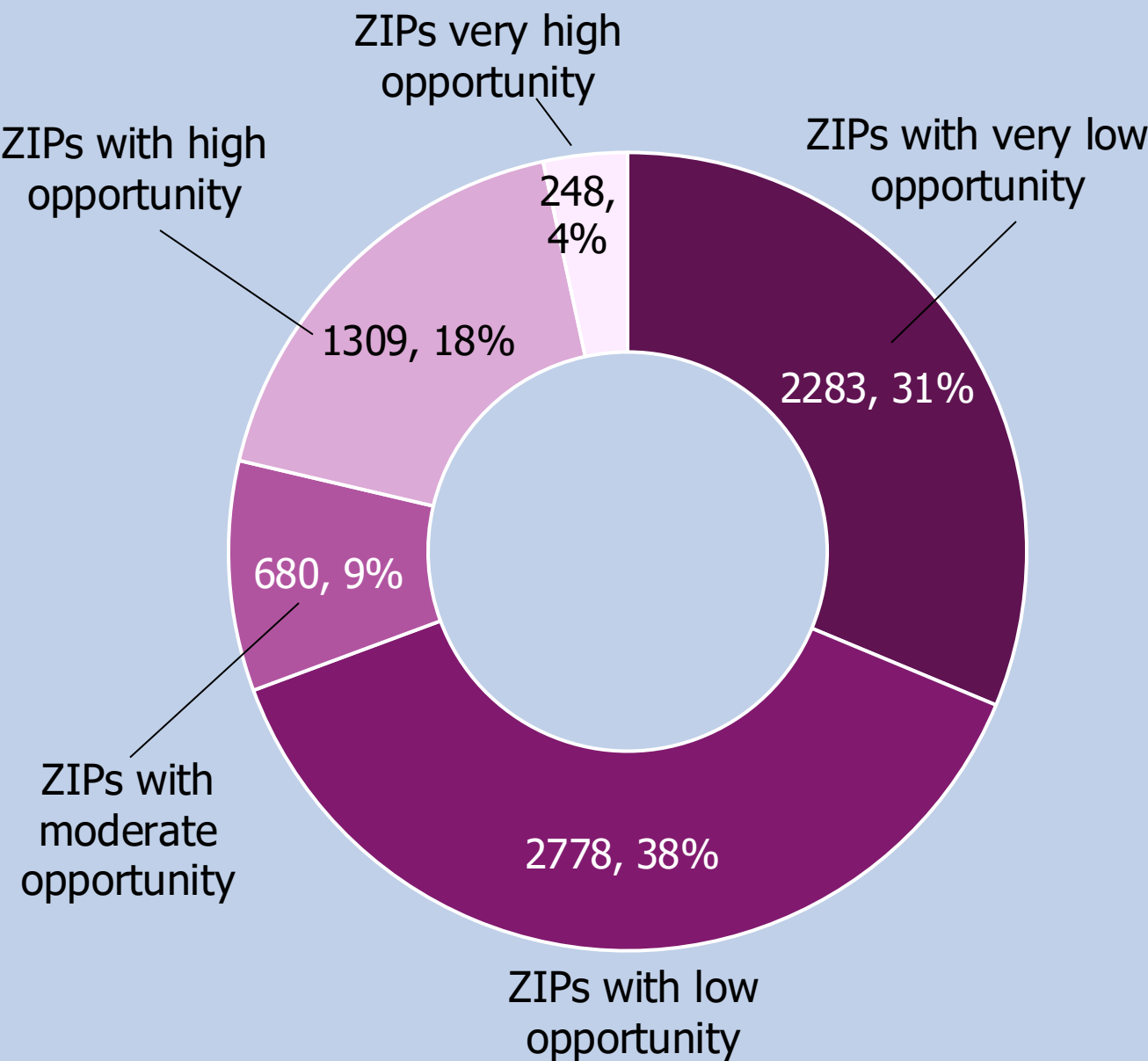
The Child Opportunity Index (COI) is an index of neighborhood features that help children thrive. COI 3.0 combines data from 44 neighborhood-level indicators into a single composite measure that is available for nearly all U.S. neighborhoods (about 73,000 census tracts) for every year from 2012 through 2021.

The 44 indicators are grouped into 14 subdomains that relate to three overall domains: education, health and environment, and social and economic.
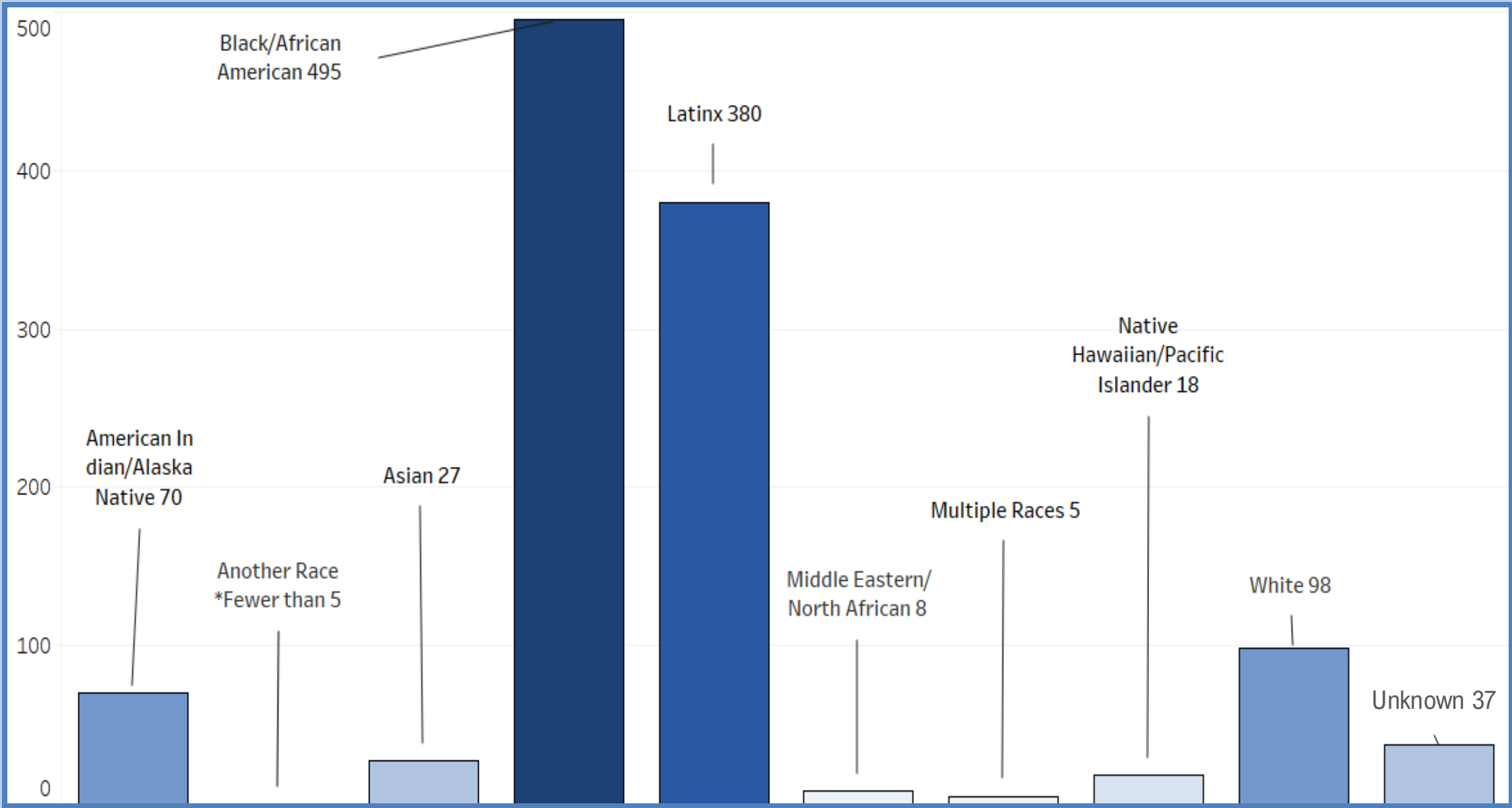
Source: https://www.diversitydatakids.org/research-library/research-brief/what-child-opportunity

Learning cycle phase 2

2023 SSPP Enrollments by geographic opportunity levels (n = 771)

- ZIPs very high opportunity: 248, 4%
- ZIPs with very low opportunity: 2283, 31%
- ZIPs with high opportunity: 1309, 18%
- ZIPs with moderate opportunity: 680, 9%
- ZIPs with low opportunity: 2778, 38%

SSPP 2023 enrolled participants disaggregated by race (n = 771)

- American Indian/Alaska Native 70
- Another Race *Fewer than 5
- Asian 27
- Black/African American 495
- Latinx 380
- Middle Eastern/North African 8
- Multiple Races 5
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander 18
- White 98
- Unknown 37

Learning cycle phase 2

Addressing challenges through provider-driven learning

Quarterly enrollment versus consistent engagement across 2023
The graph features data for providers that received funding from 2022-2025

What challenges prevent sustained engagement & program completion?

"A lot of youth feel really disconnected from their educators, so they feel like there's no point in attending schools or improving their performance."

"How can we be thinking and showing individual gains of youth that speak to the specific place that a young person is starting from? Even if young people are not making employment or education gains, showing up to programming may be a big improvement…"

Learning cycle phase 3

Addressing challenges through provider-driven learning

Once we identified collective learning priorities to support enhanced participant engagement, we took some time to learn about providers' learning preferences for the purpose of continuous program improvement. We conducted a brief survey where we asked about preferred learning modalities (i.e. one on one coaching, lectures or seminars, interactive discussions with cohort members, or attending conferences) and the types of professionals in the field of youth development they wanted to hear from. We also explored the unique types of challenges providers were navigating around ensuring consistent participation in programming through program monitoring visits and one-on-one conversations. Because of the differences in service delivery approaches, we had to balance individual program experiences with designing a learning environment that could support everyone. We used the information from the learning preferences survey and conversations to design a workshop series and recruit presenters whose background and expertise aligned with shared interests across the cohort.

Learning cycle phase 3

Addressing challenges through provider-driven learning

Provider learning preferences assessment

- Representatives from eight of the eleven providers participated in the survey.
- When presented with various options, six of the eight providers expressed interest in hearing from youth and family counselors.
- Through the survey and additional consultation, interactive discussions emerged as the preferred learning format.
- Through additional consultation, organizational leaders expressed a desire for members of their direct service teams to attend the learning activities.

Learning cycle phase 3

Addressing challenges through provider-driven learning

The workshops took place over the course of five months with cohort meetings and reflective discussions occurring in between workshops.

Workshop # 1 – Empowering Caregivers, Zane Counseling

- The role of caregivers in the context of school-to-career youth programs.

- Strategies for navigating the youth-parent relationship.

- Addressing cultural barriers for parent engagement.

- Care strategies for burnout in caregivers.

Workshop # 2 – Youth Engagement Strategies, NW Education Access

- Common reasons why young people disconnect from school.

- Factors that motivate disconnected youth to reengage.

- Effects of white supremacy culture on youth engagement.

- Antidotes to white supremacy culture.

Workshop # 3 – Navigating Cultural Trauma With Black Boys & Young Men, Steven Akuffo, LMHC

- The impacts of cultural and racialized trauma on Black boys and young men.

- Trauma-informed intervention strategies.

- Cultural identity development strategies.

Learning cycle phase 4

Workshop feedback and evaluation

During and after the workshops, we collected quantitative and qualitative feedback through workshop surveys and reflective discussions facilitated with the cohort. Quantitative feedback focused on presenter effectiveness, relevance of information, learning of new information, and participants' inclination to incorporate workshop information into their work. On a scale from one to five, participants provided high ratings for all three workshops across most of these areas, with scores mostly averaging above a four on a scale from one to five.

Workshop number one scored below average as it relates to providers feeling like they learned new information – slightly above a three, a somewhat neutral rating. Providers gave the most favorable feedback around workshop number three regarding the association between racialized trauma and the way those experiences may influence the behavior of young Black men and boys within schools and program environments. Many participants at this workshop were youth service practitioners from the African diaspora, and they expressed a high degree of resonance with the experience and identity of the workshop presenter. Providers were also asked to describe the most useful information covered during each workshop. The most prominent themes included – understanding of white supremacy culture and its negative effects on youth participation in school and programming, the importance of cultural identity development as an antidote to environments that push kids out, and resources to advocate for young people and help them navigate school to career systems.

Learning cycle phase 4

Workshop feedback and evaluation

During reflective discussions facilitated in cohort meetings which took place in between workshops, providers reflected on the themes from the workshops and how they were applying them to their work.
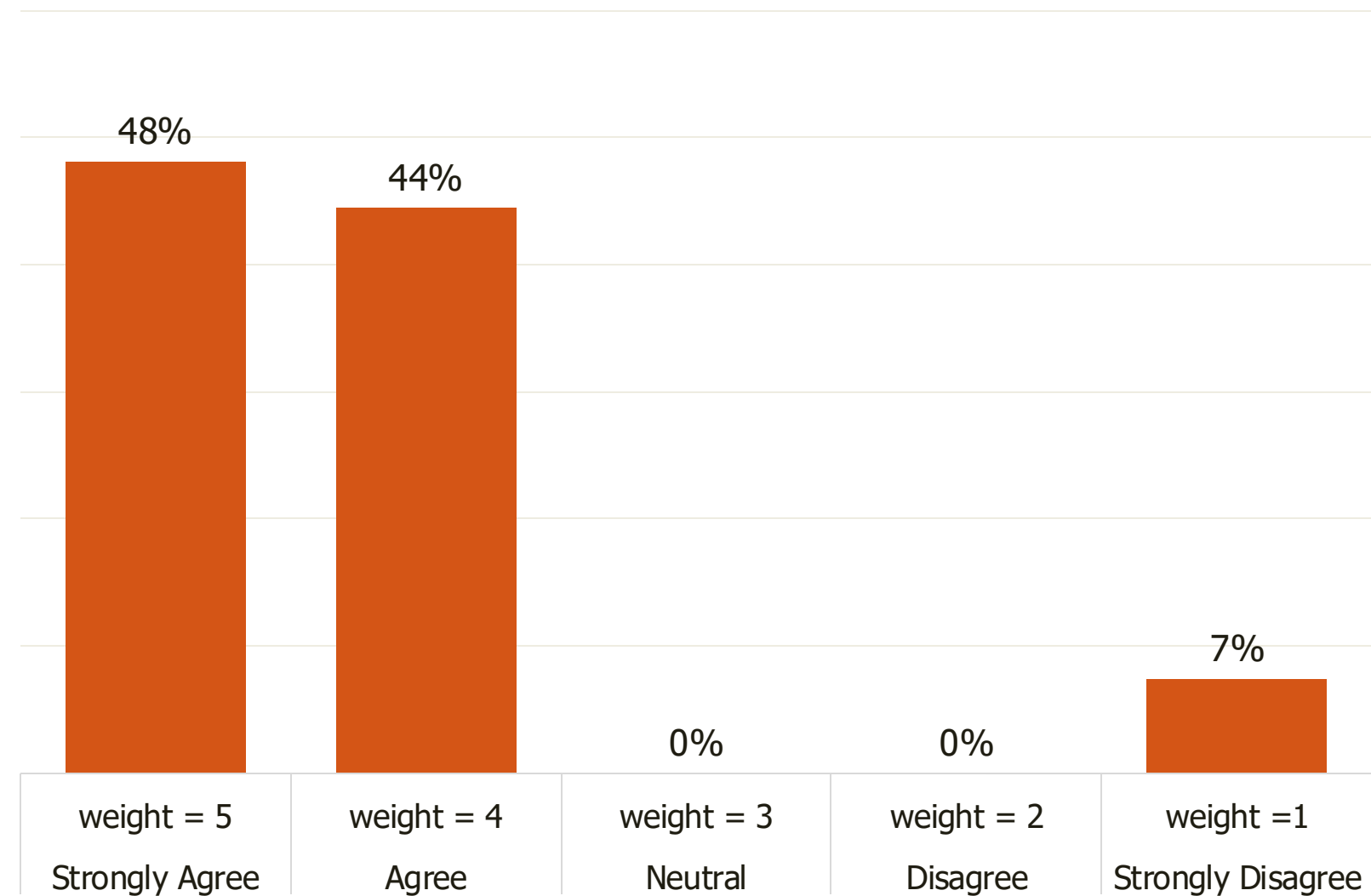
- One provider mentioned hosting trainings with their youth service team around identifying and mitigating biases in their work with youth.
- On a separate occasion, a different provider reflected on how the type of parent or caregiver engagement encouraged during the first workshop was not adequate or healthy for youth whose parents or caregivers had a negative influence in their lives.
- Another provider stated they had decreased the number of schools they worked with to be able to dedicate more staff time to supporting currently enrolled participants in working toward their goals.

Learning cycle phase 4

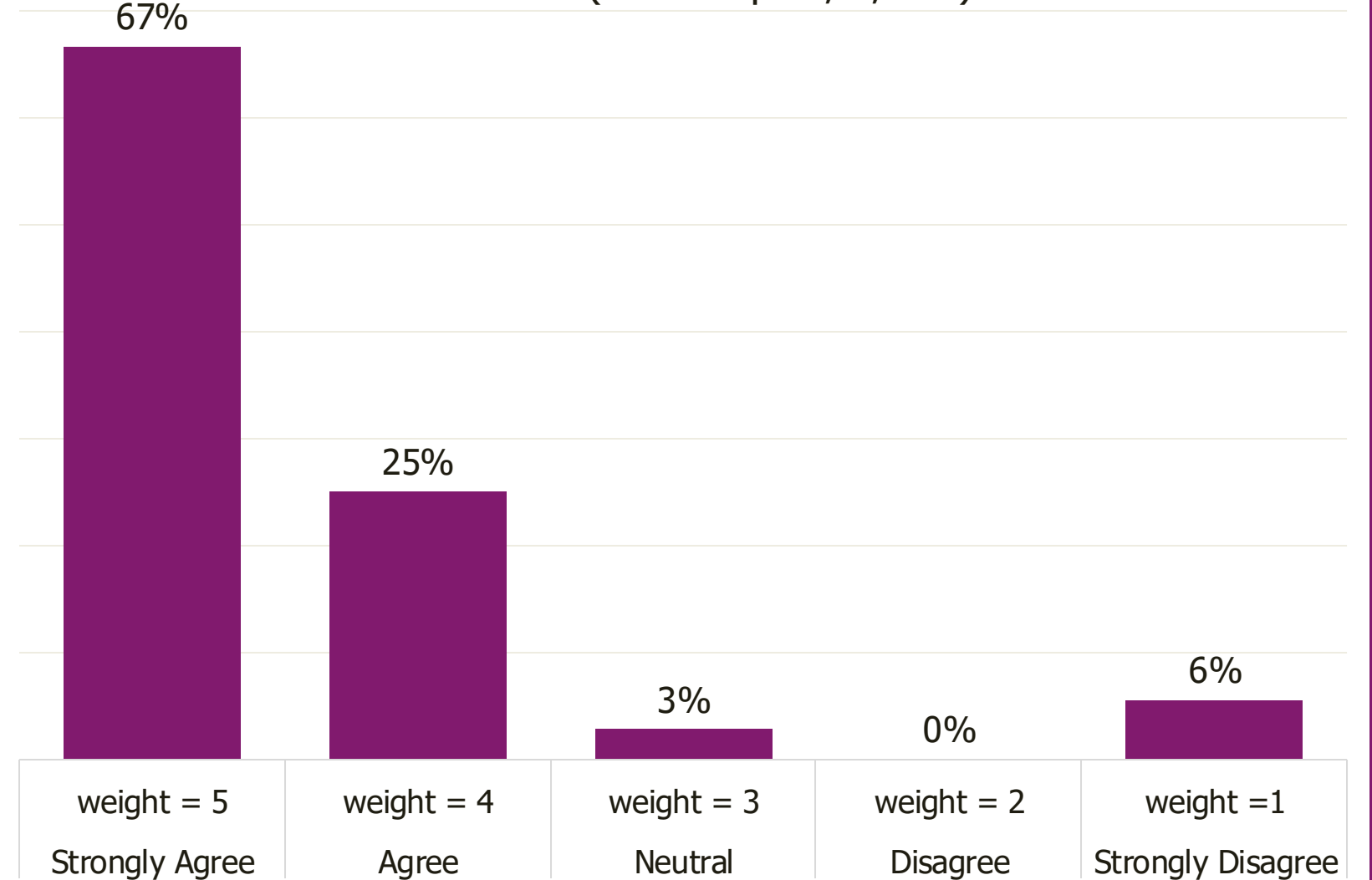## The presenter was effective in communicating about their experience on the topic (workshops 1 & 2 only)

Percent of respondents

48%	44%	0%	0%	7%
weight = 5	weight = 4	weight = 3	weight = 2	weight =1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Weighted response average: 4.3	Average # of responders per workshop: 13.5	Average # of providers represented per workshop: 8.5

The workshop provided information that was relevant to my work (workshops 1, 2, & 3)

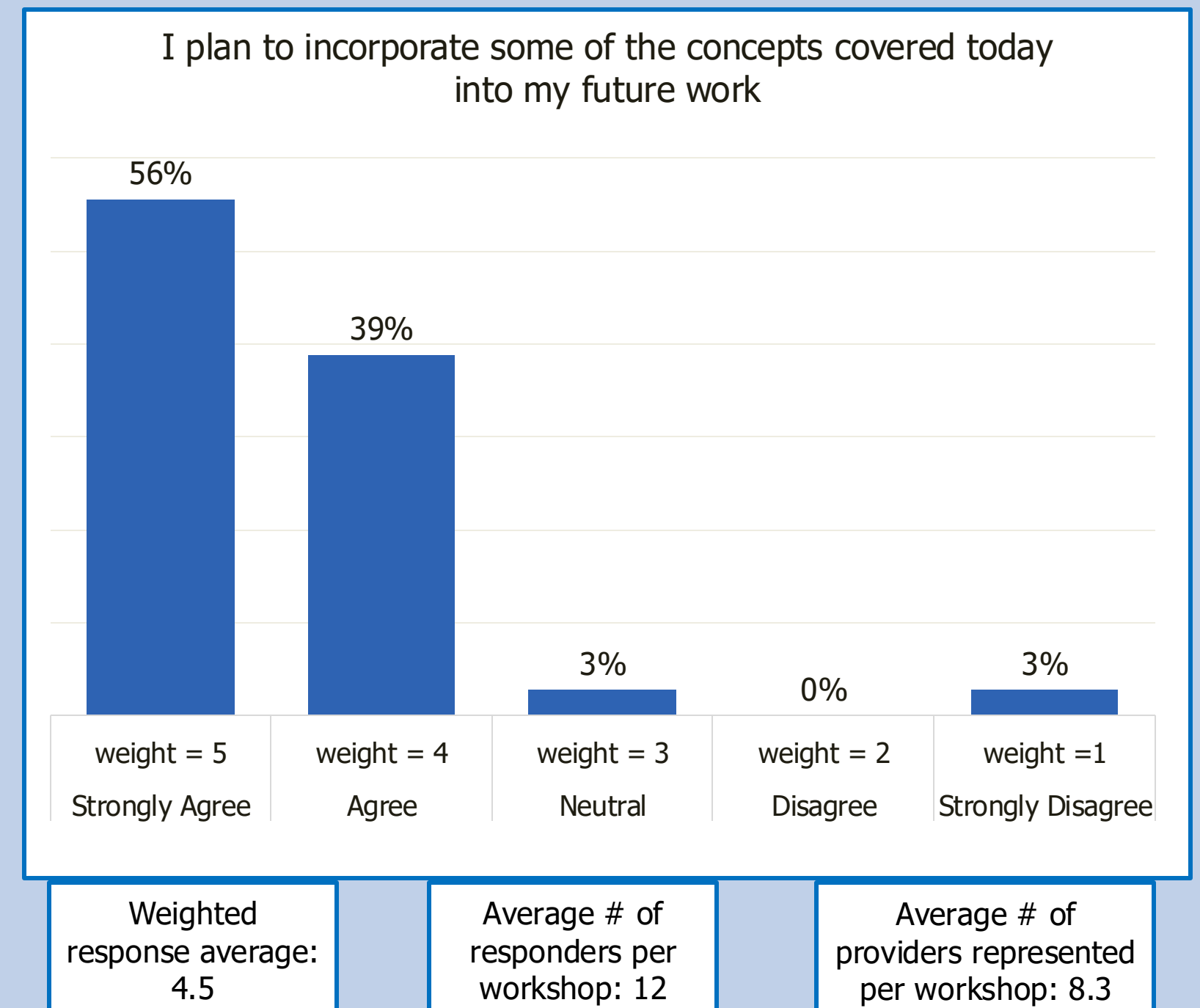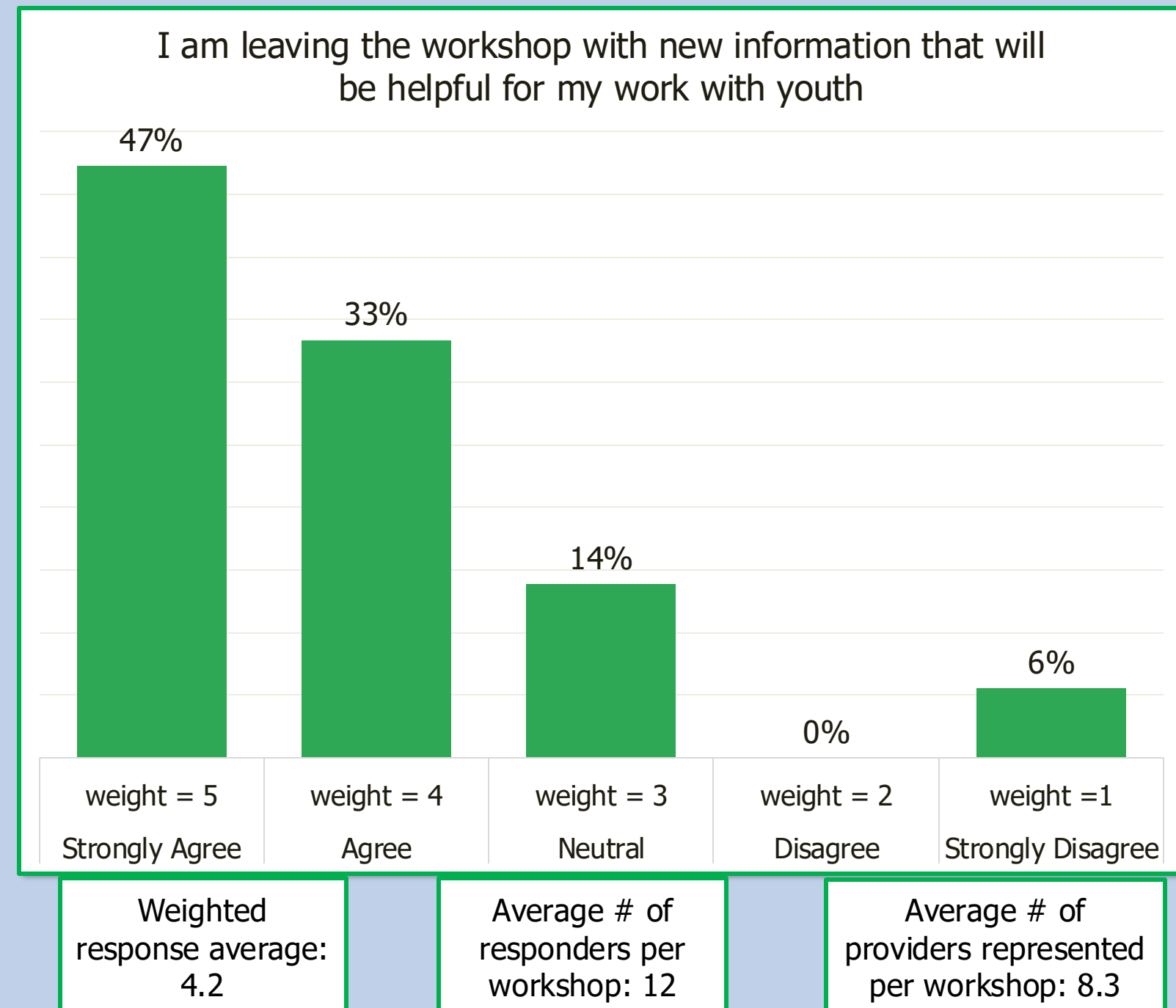|				
67%	25%	3%	0%	6%
weight = 5	weight = 4	weight = 3	weight = 2	weight =1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Weighted response average: 4.5	Average # of responders per workshop: 12	Average # of providers represented per workshop: 8.3

Note: the learning workshops were optional. Not all providers attended the events and participating staff varied across workshops for some participating provider agencies. The following graphs are meant to represent the overall sentiment of participants for all workshops as it relates to the four areas across which we evaluated the workshops.

Learning cycle phase 4

I am leaving the workshop with new information that will be helpful for my work with youth

Percent of respondents

weight = 5 Strongly Agree	weight = 4 Agree	weight = 3 Neutral	weight = 2 Disagree	weight =1 Strongly Disagree
47%	33%	14%	0%	6%

Weighted response average: 4.2

Average # of responders per workshop: 12

Average # of providers represented per workshop: 8.3

I plan to incorporate some of the concepts covered today into my future work

weight = 5 Strongly Agree	weight = 4 Agree	weight = 3 Neutral	weight = 2 Disagree	weight =1 Strongly Disagree
56%	39%	3%	0%	3%

Weighted response average: 4.5

Average # of responders per workshop: 12

Average # of providers represented per workshop: 8.3

Learning cycle phase 4

Workshop feedback and evaluation

Evaluation question: what information covered in the workshop will be most useful for your work?

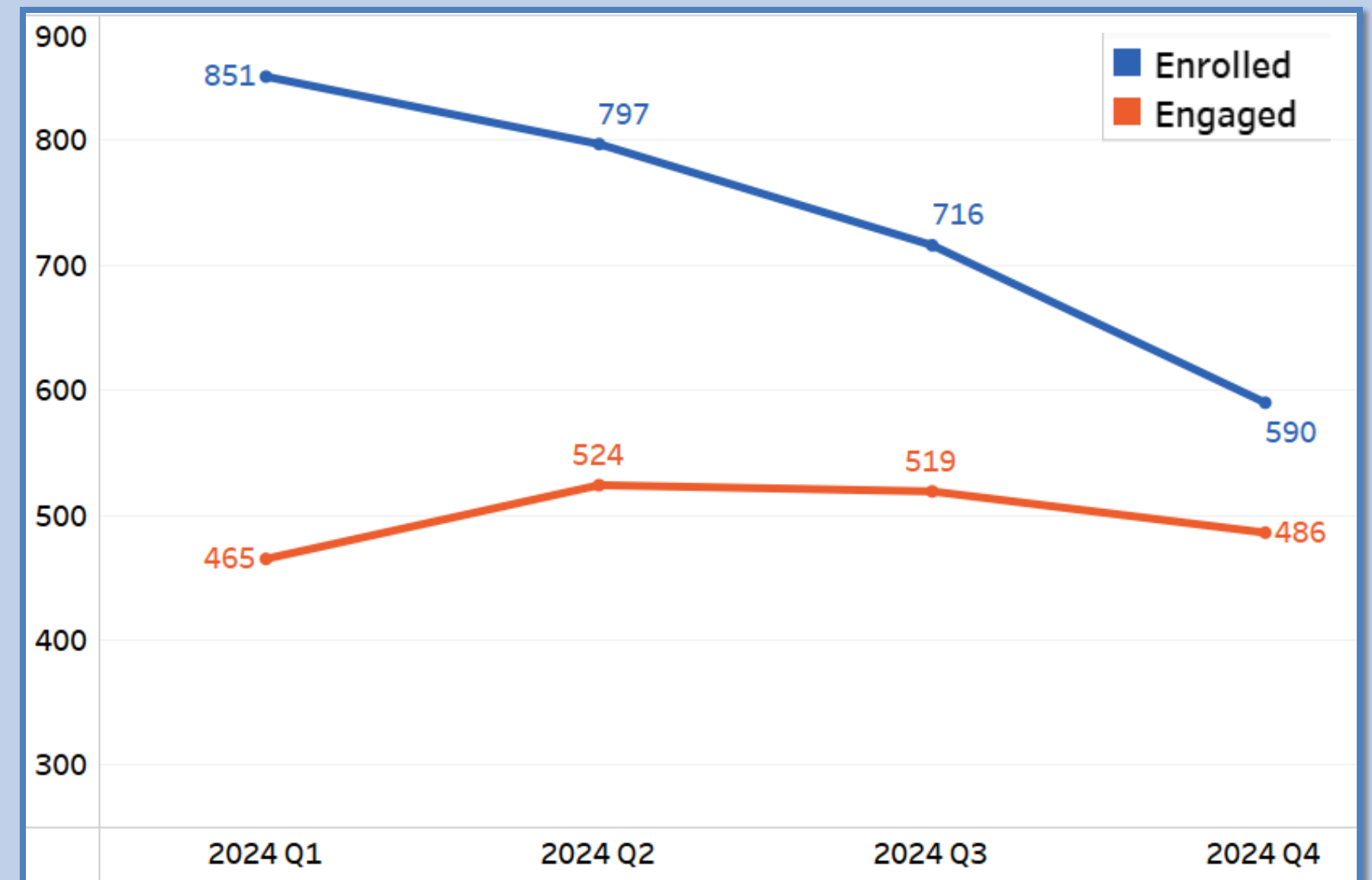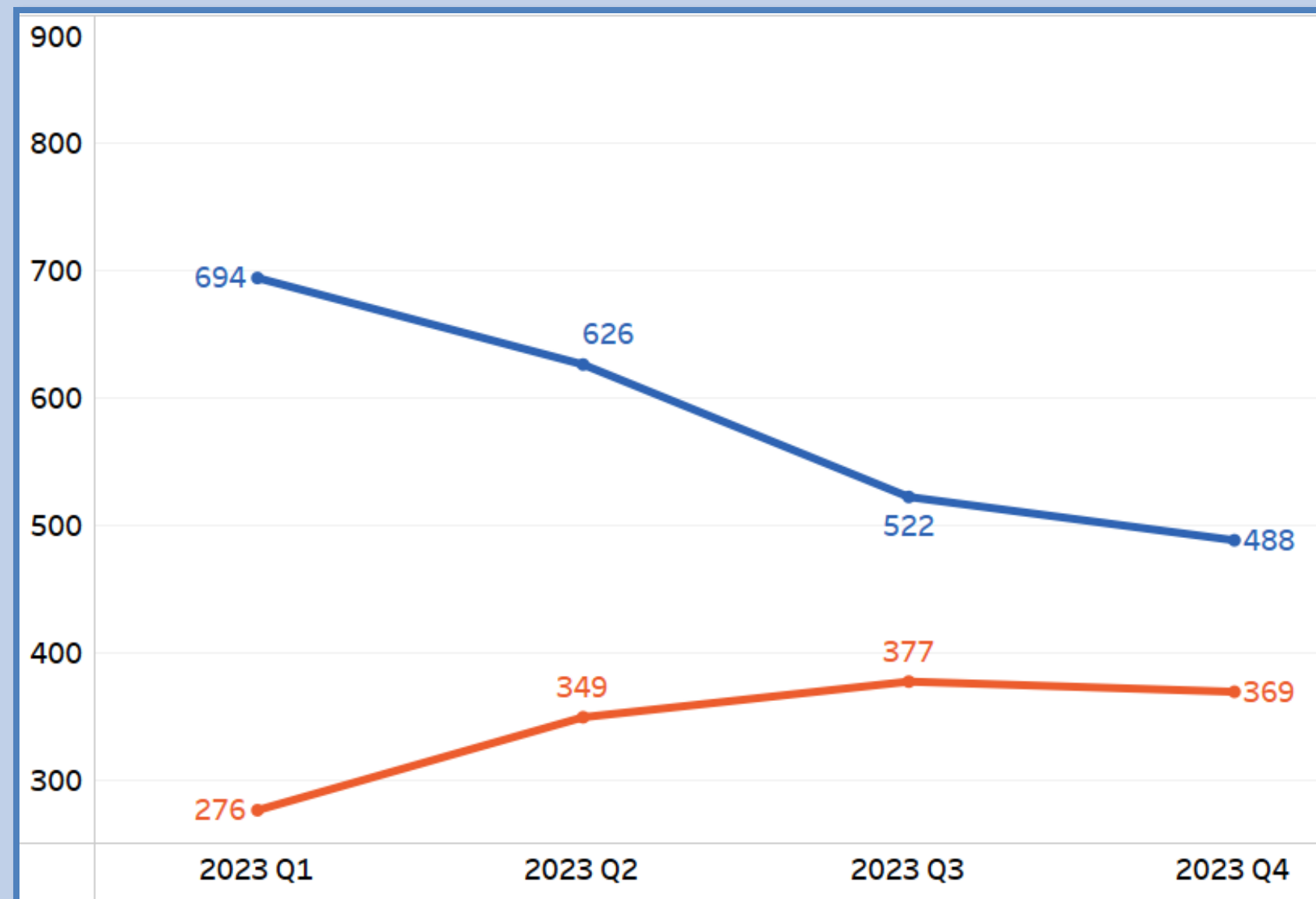| Workshop # 1 – Empowering Caregivers, Zane Counseling	Workshop # 2 – Youth Engagement Strategies, NW Education Access	Workshop # 3 – Navigating Cultural Trauma With Black Boys & Young Men, Steven Akuffo
"Parent/Caregiver interactions. It helps us understand what the parent's of the youth might be going through." "The ways other people are engaging with caregivers, the strategies that they are using, the resources, and starting with a story of hope."	"Continuing to advocate to incorporate strategies for challenges related [to] practices of white supremacy within our org, specifically power hoarding." "The sense of urgency [as white supremacy culture] really resonated with me and how we operate our curriculum with students and the requirements of pre surveys at the first session. Make difficult to build relationships."	"How taking away one's culture can change their whole outlook on the world." "Cultural competency in education, effects of culture loss and history on behavior and ways to heal"

4. Learning cycle review

Learning cycle review

Performance measurement data takeaways

Based on performance measurement data, the average quarterly engagement rate for enrolled participants improved from 61% in 2023 to 69% in 2024.

Improved engagement rates occurred alongside increased enrollments – the quarterly enrollment average was 583 in 2023 versus 739 in 2024.

Learning cycle review

Challenges we encountered along the way

1. Staff transitions

When we started planning the learning workshops in June of 2024, we knew we had to preserve enough staff time and capacity for re-procurement at the end of the year. Around this time, we had a staff transition involving the SSPP lead and had to delay implementation. Although we had originally planned to conclude the activities by the end of 2024 to make way for the new procurement process, we had to shift our timeline to October of 2024 to March of 2025, with the last workshop taking place after the closure of the application period. We suspect that the possibility of funding renewal presented by re-procurement likely influenced provider attendance, post-workshop survey responses, and other aspects of providers' engagement.

Learning cycle review

Challenges we encountered along the way (cont.)

2. Re-procurement

The King County Council mandate for all Best Starts contracts go back out for bid after 3 years presented a major disruption for the momentum we built around utilizing data to support provider learning and capacity building. Through this process, we realized just how long it takes to establish a foundation for an effective provider-driven and data-informed learning practice, and reprocuring halfway through the Best Starts levy cycle hindered our team's ability to build on the progress we had made and deepen our role as capacity builders.

3. Contract termination/discontinuations

We also experienced one contract termination and 2 contracts that ended at the end of 2024 during the learning cycle, which meant that not all the providers who participated were present for the entire experience. Eight out of the eleven providers we started the cycle with were still present at its conclusion. Three new providers were brought on board at the start of the workshop activities. Although the effect of these terminations on the cohort's engagement was not immediately apparent, we acknowledge they may have caused concerns that influenced engagement.

Learning cycle review

What we learned

Effective use of performance measurement data for learning and continuous improvement requires significant investment into relationship building with providers. When trusting relationships exist between County staff and providers, performance measurement data can help build a culture of collective accountability. This was evidenced by several providers expressing how helpful it was to see their performance in relation to similar peers in their field on the dashboard. We also learned that monitoring visits can be a great source of information for identifying challenges the performance measurement data cannot speak to alone. Throughout the cycle, communication between the Evaluator and contract manager and de-siloing of roles and information sources was essential in unearthing insights into program delivery challenges behind the numbers.

Things we'd like to do differently next time around:

- Start planning the learning cycle at the beginning of new contracts to maximize our time with providers, promote attendance, and coordinate in advance around other team deliverables.
- Ensure thoroughness and accuracy of performance measurement definitions during the performance measurement planning process and plan for fluctuations in definitions for newly implemented programs.
- Preserve consistency of monthly 1:1s with providers as these offered an opportunity to make important corrections to data collection issues.
- Proactively incorporate concepts from the workshops in cohort meetings taking place in between workshops.
- Continue to advocate to allow for the option of keeping contracts through the six-year duration of a levy cycle.