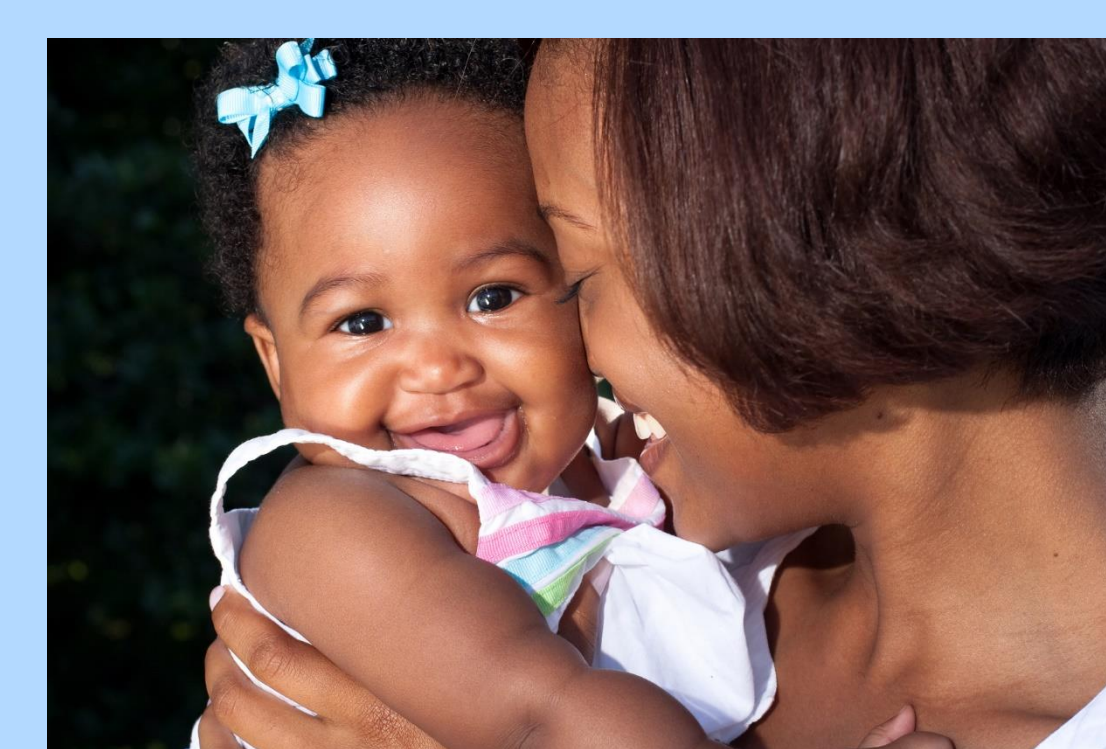


## ABSTRACT

An estimated 30 million word gap exists by age 4 in the cumulative number of words addressed to children in poverty compared to those in advantaged circumstances. This poster presents results of a survey of more than 1,000 diverse stakeholders asked to identify the most important research priorities to bridge that word gap.



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## INTRODUCTION

Many children growing up in poverty enter school with a serious learning disadvantage that emerges in their earliest years—substantially smaller vocabularies than their more advantaged peers. This disparity in child vocabulary size between groups (the “Word Gap” is often traced to low exposure to talk in children’s home and child care environments (Hart & Risley, 1995).

While research has pointed to evidence-based interventions to improve children’s language learning environments and thereby reduce this word gap, this knowledge to date has had limited population-level impacts.

The Bridging the Word Gap Research Network (BWGRN) was funded by Health Resources and Services Administration to build an infrastructure to advance the field of intervention to reduce the word gap. The BWGRN’s first charge is to articulate a stakeholder-informed national research agenda for bridging the word gap. This poster presents that agenda and describes how it was developed.

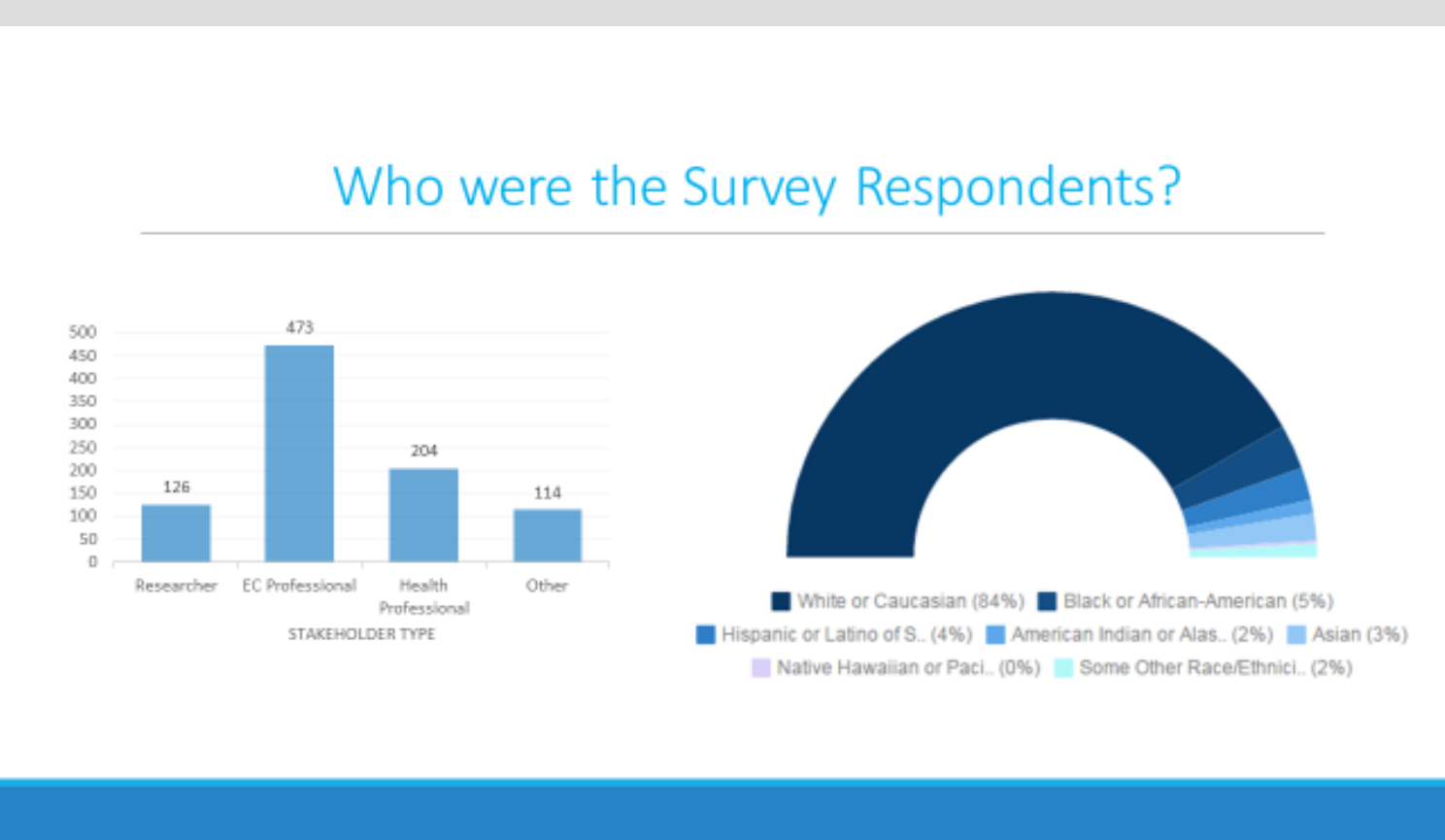
## METHOD

We carried out an iterative process to develop a survey to ask a variety of stakeholders to identify *how important* each of 16 research topics were to reduce the word gap and to ask which research topic would *make the biggest difference* in reducing the word gap.

We created a web-based survey and distributed the link to our Network members and to a wide variety of organizations to solicit feedback from diverse stakeholder groups including researchers, program managers, early intervention providers, early childhood educators, health professionals, policymakers, public and private funding agency representatives, and representatives from specific cultural and linguistic communities.

Snowball sampling was used with each stakeholder group asked to forward the survey to additional groups. The survey was open for 3 months. It is estimated that the survey link was sent to at least 247, 218 email addresses.

## RESULTS

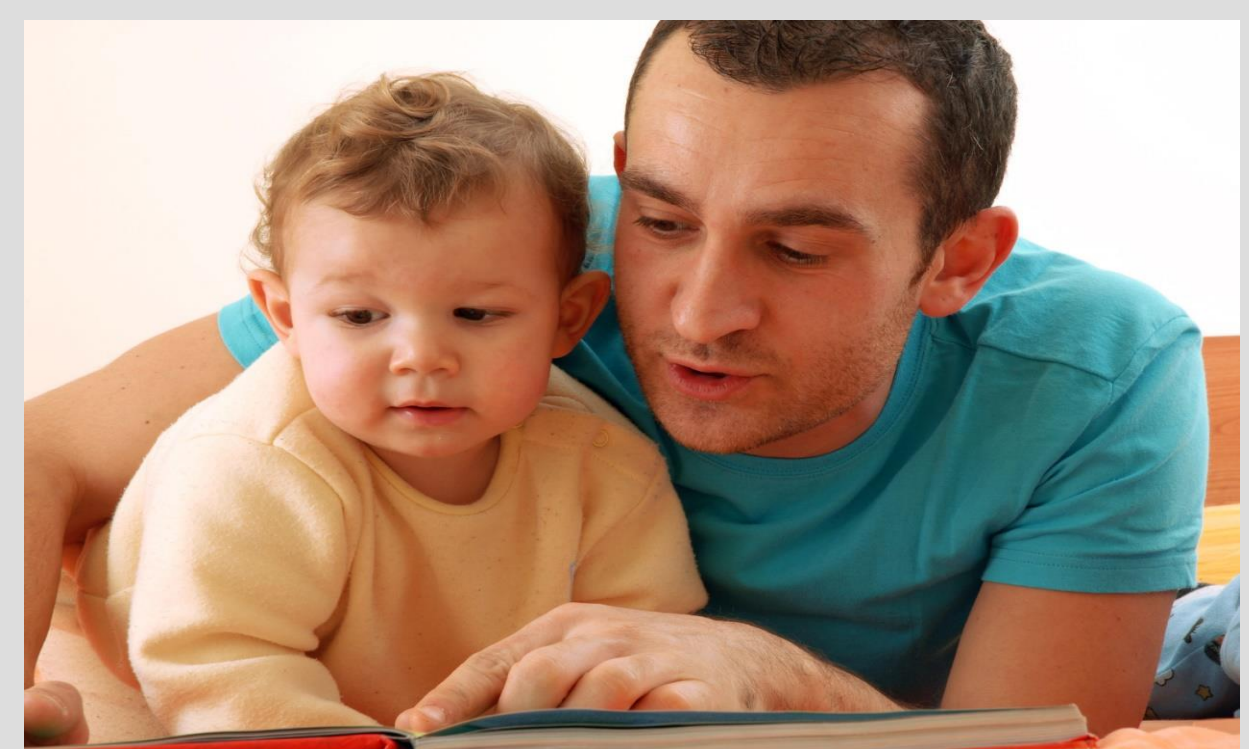


**What were the Mean Ratings of Importance of Each Research Topic Across All Respondents? (1 = Not at all important; 5 = Extremely Important)**

Research Topic	Mean Rating
Developing <u>new strategies to help parents</u> and other family members talk and interact with their young children	4.40
Identifying ways in which families’ <u>home language and culture</u> should be incorporated into language interventions to increase their effectiveness and sustainability	4.39
Determining the <u>effectiveness of existing strategies</u> for changing adult behavior that promotes children’s language development	4.24
Learning which language interventions or strategies work best for <u>specific groups of children or for use in specific situations</u> or settings	4.24
Identifying <u>strengths families</u> demonstrate that help them overcome challenges and stay engaged in interventions designed to support their child’s language development	4.23
Soliciting the opinions of parents, caregivers, educators, and others to determine the <u>usefulness and practicality</u> of language interventions to increase the likelihood that they will routinely be used	4.23
Identifying the <u>most effective messaging strategies</u> or interventions for reaching parents, child care providers, and other caregivers about talking and interacting with their children	4.20
Developing <u>new practices that early childhood teachers</u> and child care providers could use to foster young children’s language development	4.16
Identifying <u>risk factors</u> (such as depression, stress, substance abuse, domestic violence) that influence caregivers’ engagement in language intervention and the ways in which interventions should be individualized to address these risk factors	4.10
Identifying new strategies that <u>community- or neighborhood-based</u> organizations can employ to work with groups of parents and caregivers in learning about ways to promote children’s language	4.02
Developing new ways that <u>cities and communities</u> can get the message out about ways in which parents, caregivers and early educators can foster young children’s language development	3.94
Identifying factors that might influence how well language interventions are <u>implemented</u> (For example, determining whether a language intervention is implemented more accurately after in-person training than after video-based training)	3.81
Developing <u>analytic techniques</u> that can determine whether community wide bridging the word gap efforts are working	3.79
Developing <u>new ways to measure</u> how much and how well parents talk and interact with their children	3.69
Identifying <u>basic language development</u> processes that inform the design of new language interventions	3.65
Developing and testing <u>new techniques for analyzing growth</u> in child language and communication skills	3.60

## RESULTS

- Top 5 Research Priorities (“What research topic would make the biggest difference in reducing the word gap?”)**
1. Develop new strategies for parents and other family members to use to talk and interact with their children (27.2%)
  2. Learn which language interventions work best for specific groups of children (8.7%)
  3. Identify ways that home language and culture can be incorporated (8.4%)
  4. Identify effective messaging strategies for reaching parents (8.3%)
  5. Determine the effectiveness of existing strategies (7.5%)



Research Topic	Researchers	Early Childhood Professionals and Home Visitors	Community Members	Health Care Professionals
Parent strategies	21.3%	31.6%	20.8%	29.6%
Individualizing interventions	17.2%	5%	6.6%	11.7%
Home language and culture	8.3%	11.7%	6.6%	6.3%
Messaging	3.6%	6.4%	13.2%	10.7%
Effectiveness	13%	5.3%	6.6%	6.3%

Research Topic	Respondents of Color	White Respondents	Grad Degrees	Less than Graduate Degrees
Parent strategies	26.9%	27.3%	26.8%	28.9%
Individualizing interventions	7.9%	8.9%	9.8%	3.9%
Home language and culture	11.6%	7.5%	8.4%	10.3%
Messaging	7.4%	8.5%	8.4%	8.8%
Effectiveness	6.5%	7.8%	7.6%	6.4%



## CONCLUSIONS

- ✓ The number one research priority identified by the majority of stakeholders and by each stakeholder group was: Developing new strategies to help parents and other family members talk and interact with their children.
- ✓ Next highest priorities were learning which language interventions worked best for specific groups of children (“individualizing”), and identifying ways to incorporate families’ home language and culture into language interventions.
- ✓ Researchers were much more likely to identify “individualizing” as a top priority area (17%) than were early childhood professionals (5%).

## NEXT STEPS

- ✓ To obtain more input on the identified research priorities, the entire agenda is currently posted for public comment on our website.
- ✓ Parent feedback is being solicited from members of diverse language and cultural groups.
- ✓ The Bridging the Word Gap Network is currently carrying out research syntheses to identify what is known and where research gaps exist in the identified priority areas.
- ✓ The national research agenda will be used to guide the Bridging the Word Gap Research Network’s future studies.
- ✓ The research agenda will be shared with potential public and private funders to encourage research in the identified areas.

## REFERENCE

Hart, B., & Risley, T. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.



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