PARENT VOICES



WHAT'S IN A WORD: ASCENDING

For policies and programs to be effective, it is essential to listen to the voices, perspectives, and language of people whose lives are most impacted by them. To capture those perspectives, Ascend, working with Lake Research Partners, conducted 12 online focus groups of parents across race, ethnicity, and geography in fall 2020 to ask parents with young children how they were experiencing this unique moment in our history and language that could describe families' hopes, goals, dreams, and challenges. Across groups, the parents had a robust set of ideas and values associated with the term Ascending.

ASCENDING

Parents think the word "ascending" means coming together, rising up, moving forward, seeking growth or a common goal, getting an education, creating a better future for their kids than the life they had, and doing better than the previous generation.

- "I think coming together as a community, striving for the common goal, and just always seeking growth as the overall goal." — Mother (mixed races), under 200% FPL prior to pandemic, MN
- "I would think probably growing. You know growing as a family. You know making sure, you know as your child is growing through school, you know, as a person as a student. Parents learning from their children, ascending to be in a better parent and...very, you know higher prosperity. Whatever it is, is reaching that and you know if more is needed or wanted then you know ascending to that as well." Latino father, WA/OR/CO
- "Build them up for the future; have them build themselves up to maybe build up the next generation for the future as well."
 Latino father, WA/OR/CO
- "Just going to new levels. You know just taking flight. Different stages. Progressing upward. Moving forward."
 African American father, nationwide
- "Putting your children in a better position than the position you had when you were growing up."
 African American father, nationwide
- "Education, doing better than the previous generation. That's what my dad always said, he said, you know, I want you all to ascend, I want you all to do better than I did, I want you all to have more chances than I had. And so that's what I've tried to provide for my children." Latina mother, WA/OR/CO
- "I would say more of, like, a hand off instead of, like, a handout for services. Because the way they're designed now and how they, you know, you never get ahead because the minute you start making something you know then they take it away from them, so that they're right back where they started." Native American mother, nationwide
- "Rise above." White mother, TN/MS/GA
- "Well, anything. Current situation. To be better than before." White mother, TN/MS/GA
- "I would say, like, going up, growing. Like growing, like learning from our past so, like, just ascending into the future, making better choices. Getting over, maybe coming to terms with all the hate speech and the racism. Like, rising above it." White mother, TN/MS/GA



- "That means prospering to me as if my children are not only elevating themselves in school but potentially socially."
 Black/African American father, OH/MI/PA
- "Consistently growing." Black/African American father, OH/MI/PA
- "I guess it just means progressing in the right direction. Yeah, just kind of bettering yourself. Yeah, I think that's kind of, like, how I would define it." White non/partial-custodial father, nationwide
- "What my son's name means in our language is ascending. I have thought about this a lot. So, I think it means to **rise above or be above**. So, for me when I think of ascending, it just means, like, how to distinguish yourself in a better way or higher way, not necessarily physically above but just how to continue to grow and be better." Asian mother, nationwide

When we delved deeper into what it would mean if "America were ascending," participants say it would mean we are getting better and making progress as a nation. The country would be moving in an upward direction. If America were ascending, racism and police brutality would be gone, health resources would be available to everyone, thus people would be able to live better. Some also felt that if America were ascending, we would have progressive policies like universal education, housing, and healthcare. Associating ascending with ending racism came up in both POC and white groups.

- "No racism." African American mother, TN/MS/GA
- "Equal opportunities." African American mother, TN/MS/GA
- "No police brutality." African American mother, TN/MS/GA
- "Well, I'm pretty liberal, so for me that would look like, ugh, universal healthcare, market regulations so that corporations couldn't tamper with politics and, and the general well-being of the common good. Free higher education, more housing, just stuff like that. I guess think Bernie Sanders, like that's kind of where I would think." Latina mother, WA/OR/CO
- "To me, if America was ascending, racism would be decreasing, health would be going up, maybe a cure to cancer available to everyone. Just not so much that money controls the world or that certain people with money control the world or etcetera, etcetera, just better ways of living." Mother (mixed races), under 200% FPL due to pandemic, NJ/CT/MD
- "To ascend means to go up, so for America to do that, it would just mean to me that we would just be moving in an upward direction to better things, whatever it may be." Mother (mixed races), under 200% FPL due to pandemic, NJ/CT/MD
- "I think when you say if America was ascending, what brings to me is just like, education would be a big thing. Like, and it's not just about college. You've got to start education young. Like, I think college discussion is great. Making college more affordable would be great, but also making preschool more accessible. And so, I feel, like, if we're going to ascend, if America is ascending, our education system would be bulletproof and well-funded and number one in the world. And it's, I mean it's not." Native American mother, nationwide
- "It would be the land of the free for real." Black/African American father, OH/MI/PA
- "Definitely something done about the wealth and equality." Black/African American father, OH/MI/PA
- "I don't know if it will ever be like completely, like all equal, but it needs to be a bit more evenly distributed, like, because it is crazy." Black/African American father, OH/MI/PA
- "You know doing better than whatever we were doing before. Being better as a country and kind of getting back to where we were before with America being a world leader in anything and everything. I feel like we have kind of gotten away from that, so we are kind of no longer ascending as a country." White non/partial-custodial father, nationwide
- "For me, it is more of people's lives are improving, people's quality of lives is getting better, so less people that are living paycheck to paycheck, less homeless people, and our needs getting met." Asian mother, nationwide
- "Better healthcare." Asian mother, nationwide
- "I believe it would look like **communities coming together**, **racial tensions steadily declining**, **and being able to relate to other people regardless of beliefs as a whole**, **not just individuals separately**." White mother, nationwide