



A Better Chicago: Addressing Chronic Absenteeism in Chicago

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE: CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS' HISTORY	3
1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
Key Findings	5
Three-Pillar Framework	5
A New Way to Look at Chronic Absenteeism and the Impact in Chicago	6
2. NATIONAL SCAN AND INTERVENTION MAPPING	9
Intervention Scan	9
Individual Level Interventions	10
School Level Interventions	11
Systems Level Interventions	12
Case Studies: Multi-Level Approaches in Practice	12
Insights from the Intervention Scan	15
3. ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS AND STAKEHOLDER INPUT	19
Local Root Causes and Barriers	19
Exploration of Key Drivers	19
Survey Methodology and Response Summary	20
Quantitative Insights	20
Stakeholder Insight 1. Belonging is Fragmented Across Perspectives	21
Stakeholder Insight 2. Barriers Are Shared but Unevenly Weighted	21
Stakeholder Insight 3. Supports Converge on Trusted Relationships	21
Stakeholder Insight 4. The 9th Grade Transition is Critical	22
Stakeholder Insight 5. Transportation Adds Context to Barriers	22
Qualitative Insights	22
4. CHICAGO DATA ANALYSIS	24
CPS Data Analysis	24
Neighborhood Insight 1. Extreme (Acute) Chronic Absenteeism is a Significant Problem	26
Neighborhood Insight #2: The High School Transition is a Critical Time for Absenteeism	28
Neighborhood Insight #3: Absenteeism Rises as Students Progress Through High School	30
Neighborhood Insight #4: Elementary School Absenteeism Shows No Clear Pattern	32
Examining Trends Across Various CPS Programs	34
5. CPS POLICY SCAN & IMPLEMENTATION GAPS	42
6. RECOMMENDATIONS	45
7. CONCLUSION	49
8. APPENDIX	51
Appendix I. Acknowledgements	51
Appendix II. National & Local Interviews	53

Appendix III. Focus Groups	55
Appendix IV. Additional CPS Data Analysis for Englewood, South Shore, and Woodlawn schools	56
Appendix V. CPS Data Analysis of CPS Schools Reporting Stronger Graduation and/or Post-Secondary Outcomes but experiencing Higher Chronic Absenteeism	59
Appendix VI. Transitions in Focus Neighborhoods	63
Appendix VII. Absenteeism Increases as High School Progresses	65
Appendix VIII. Elementary Trends	67
Appendix IX. Full List of CPS Focus Elementary Schools with a Community School Model	69
Appendix X. CPS Policy Scan	71
Appendix XI. National Thought Leader Interview Summaries	77
Appendix XII. Intervention Scan	81
Appendix XIII. Survey Results	90

PREFACE: CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS' HISTORY

In 1985, a Designs for Change study found that half of freshmen who attended Chicago's high schools failed to graduate, which they labeled "*a human tragedy of enormous dimensions*." [EdWeek, 3/6/85](#)). A passage from the study's report states, "*As disturbing as these figures are, they conceal an even more desperate situation that affects those [Black and Hispanic] students who attend the system's segregated high schools--more than two-thirds of the original class of 1984.*"

Yet what has happened since? Through a sustained, coordinated, well-resourced effort over the intervening decades, CPS moved from being home to numerous dropout factories to a national leader in improving graduation rates, nearly doubling the rate from 49% in 2007 to 84% for the Class of 2024. (It is worth noting, however, that just as in the quote above, rates are lower for Black and Latine students, particularly at nonselective high schools in low-income areas.) A key factor in the improvement was a convergence of research and practice: when UChicago researchers identified the importance of 9th grade to graduation, then-CEO Arne Duncan announced a major push to improve this "Freshman on Track" metric starting in SY 2008-09. As Emily Krone Phillips details in her book "*The Make or Break Year*," "*Schools began to receive real-time data reports on how their freshmen were faring. Teachers, principals, administrators, policymakers, researchers and nonprofit organizations across the city began to create new strategies for supporting freshmen. Some strategies came from what's known as the Central Office, some from classroom teachers, and others from the many nonprofit organizations that worked with schools* (p. 5-6, *emphasis added*)."

Due to the high correlation between 9th grade on track and graduation rates, this work has changed the trajectory – and potential long-term life outcomes – of thousands upon thousands of CPS students.

In this report, we show that the problem of chronic absenteeism is indeed far worse than we'd imagined, particularly in high schools in this study's focus neighborhoods of Garfield Park, South Lawndale/Little Village and Austin. While this challenge may feel insurmountable, Chicago has a strong history of banding together to improve student outcomes systemwide, and we believe this can be done again. We recognize and honor the dedicated community-based organizations, parent advocates, and grassroots leaders in these neighborhoods who are at the forefront of this work. Their deep relationships and unwavering commitment are invaluable assets. By aligning with and learning from these community-led efforts, we can work together to ensure all students are on a path to thriving learning environments that allow them to shape their learning and take ownership of their futures.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Chronic Absenteeism, defined as a student missing 10% or more of school, is a growing crisis in Chicago and across the nation. While national chronic absenteeism rates peaked at 30% in the 2021-2022 school year, Chicago's rates are more severe. Pre-pandemic, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) already had a rate of 24%, which peaked at an estimated 45% in 2022 and currently stands at 41%, as noted in figure 1.

This is not just a Chicago problem. In a recent RAND study, district leaders around the country named absenteeism as the fourth most commonly identified challenge affecting their schools. Here in Chicago, principals responding to the Chicago Public Education Fund's annual engagement survey identified "chronic student absenteeism" as the top factor (above even budgetary concerns) impacting their schools.

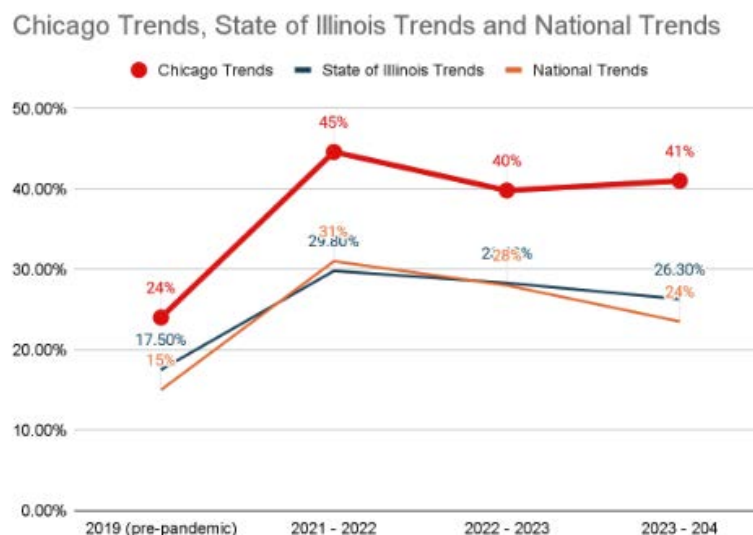


Figure 1: A graph comparing trends in Chicago, Illinois, and national chronic absenteeism rates (Source: ISBE and Department of Education).

The Luminary Collective (TLC) was honored to lead a comprehensive landscape analysis for A Better Chicago (ABC) to inform their strategy and future investments. Our approach included:

- **Data Analysis** to understand the magnitude of the challenge across the city's diverse communities.
- **Stakeholder Engagement** with hundreds of individuals—including students, parents, and school leaders—to capture critical on-the-ground perspectives.
- **Policy and Intervention Scans** to provide a comprehensive view of the existing landscape, including CPS policies and national case studies.

Key Findings

The CPS data analysis highlights a disproportionate impact on students of color and a wide variation across neighborhoods, with areas like Fuller Park and Douglas experiencing rates above 59%. This analysis applies a multi-tiered framework of absenteeism bands, revealing that a disproportionately high concentration of students in the "Acute Chronic Absence" band (missing 40+ days of school) is found within ABC-defined focus communities of Garfield Park, Austin, and South Lawndale. This finding is particularly pronounced at the high school level, where absenteeism trends upward during the transition from 8th to 9th grade and continues to rise as students progress through their high school career.

Our qualitative analysis, based on surveys, interviews, and focus groups, shed light on the complexity of chronic absenteeism. The primary drivers identified were mental health, family and economic pressures, safety concerns, and a lack of school engagement and connectedness. Effective strategies must, therefore, focus on building relationships and addressing these root causes rather than simply enforcing attendance policies.

Three-Pillar Framework

To tackle this complex challenge, we propose a three-pillar framework for action that focuses on strengthening systems and data routines that enable students to:

- **Be Here.** Students have the necessary supports to achieve consistent daily attendance.
- **Belong Here.** Students feel seen and valued and are connected to peers and adults in their school.
- **Thrive Here.** Students are empowered to shape their learning and take ownership of their futures.

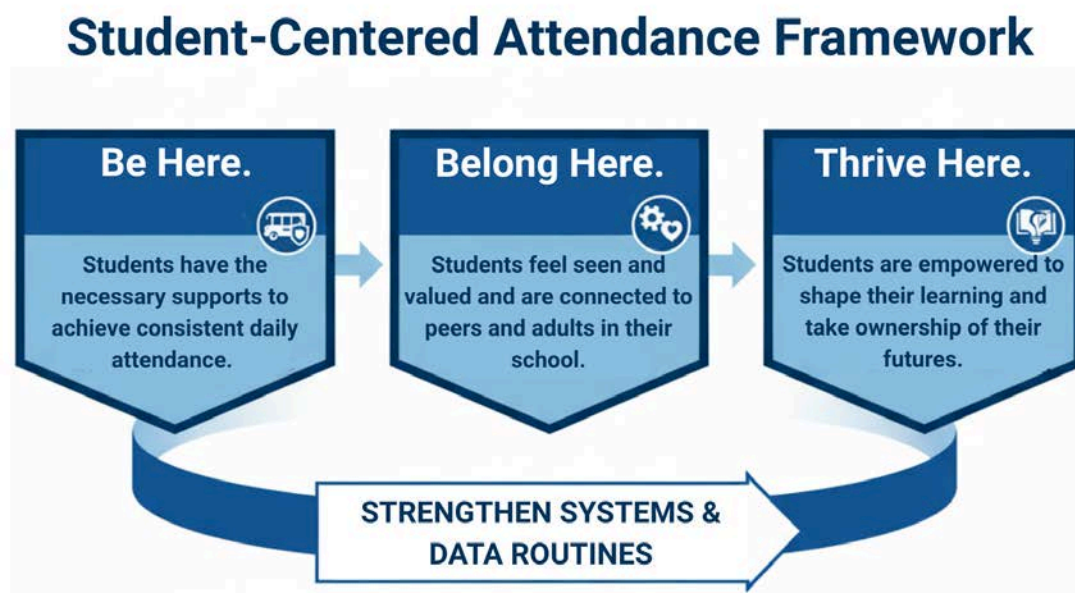


Figure 2: Student-Centered Attendance Framework. Designed by the members of this team, this model outlines a framework for how to tackle the challenge of increasing school attendance in order to improve overall student outcomes.

We believe that this issue cannot be solved by a single approach or actor, and it will take an entire ecosystem of schools, partners, and communities coming together to support our students. Chicago is up for the task, with a number of unique assets that should be leveraged:

- **A Robust Ecosystem of Education Partners:** Chicago boasts strong partnerships, including direct service nonprofits, research partners, and philanthropic and corporate partners invested in education.
- **A Strong Track Record of Getting Big Things Done:** From Freshman OnTrack to improved graduation rates, prior work in education shows what is possible when Chicagoans come together for our students.
- **Existing Policies in CPS:** Through our scan, we noticed that CPS already has many policies in place that, if implemented and tracked with fidelity, have the ability to help drive chronic absenteeism down at significant rates.

In conclusion, our analysis underscores the need for a targeted, data-driven strategy that addresses the unique challenges faced by students at different grade levels and in different neighborhoods. The actionable insights and recommendations in this report, framed by our three-pillar approach, will guide A Better Chicago in making a lasting impact on this critical issue.

A New Way to Look at Chronic Absenteeism and the Impact in Chicago

The traditional definition of chronic absenteeism—missing 10% or more of the school year—offers a limited view of a complex challenge. To gain a deeper understanding of the issue, we applied a granular, data-driven approach—analyzing the distribution of chronic absenteeism to reveal underlying patterns and gradations often hidden in aggregate data.

Our analysis adopts a tiered framework for student attendance, aligning with the methodology used by Attendance Works's DATTs¹ (District Attendance Tracking Tools). This approach, which categorizes student attendance into distinct bands, provides a more actionable and data-driven foundation for a tiered system of supports and interventions.

By viewing the problem this way, we can better understand the magnitude of the challenge and ensure that students with the highest needs receive the most intensive support. The tiered system is designed to allow schools and districts to apply more specialized and interagency interventions as student absences increase. The five bands of student attendance are below and visualized in Figure 3.

- **Satisfactory Attendance:** Missing less than 6% of school days. These students are attending regularly and do not require intervention (approximately **10 days** in a 176-day school year).
- **At-Risk Attendance:** Missing 6% to 9% of school days (**11 to 16 days**). This level of absence is associated with a decline in academic performance and warrants attention and preventative support.
- **Moderate Chronic Absence:** Missing 10% to 19% of school days (**18 to 33 days**). This is the traditional threshold for chronic absenteeism. Students in this band require targeted, focused interventions.

¹ Attendance Works. (2025, September 2). *Introducing the Updated DATTs and SATTs*.
<https://www.attendanceworks.org/introducing-the-updated-datts-and-satts/>

- **Severe Chronic Absence:** Missing 20% to 49% of school days (**35 to 86 days**). This level of absence suggests a need for a more intensified and specialized approach, often involving a student success team.
- **Acute Chronic Absence:** Missing 50% or more of school days (at least **88 days** over a 176-day school year). This band was recently added by Attendance Works to capture the growing number of students with extreme absences since the pandemic. It indicates a need for the most intensive and interagency interventions.

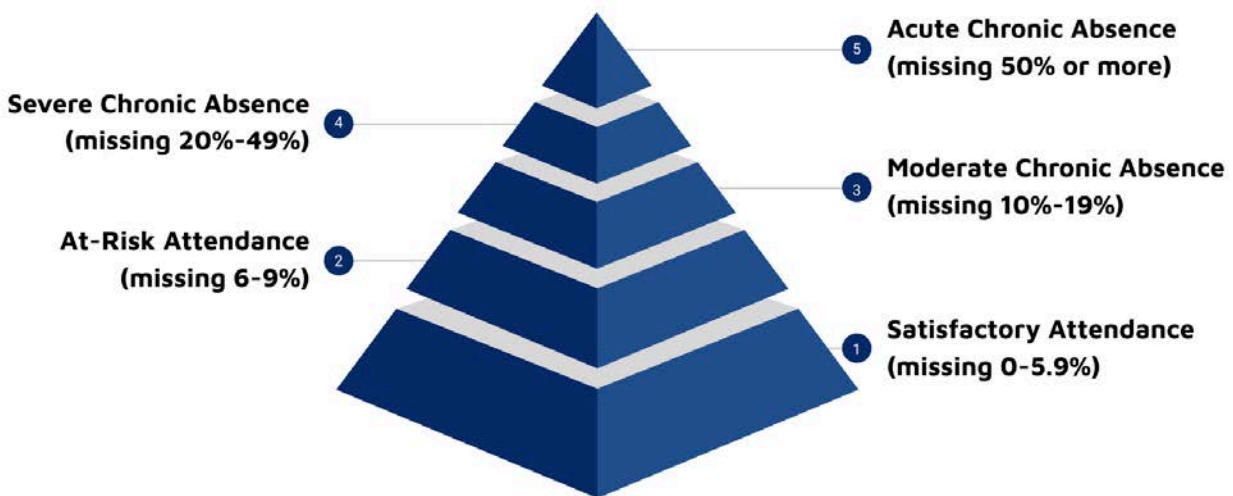


Figure 3: A visual representation of chronic absenteeism bands in their ideal state, with a majority of students maintaining Satisfactory Attendance.

Summary of Key Findings: Chronic Absenteeism Data and Analysis

The data first highlights a disproportionate impact on students of color in Chicago, with 46% of Black and 43% of Hispanic/Latinx/e CPS students being chronically absent in 2024, compared to 26% of white students according to CPS data. The challenge also varies greatly by neighborhood.

Our analysis uses defining five distinct bands of absenteeism to better assess the degree to which the problem exists so we gain a clearer picture of the challenge. The most significant finding is the disproportionately high concentration of students in the "Acute Chronic Absence" band (missing 40+ days of school) within the communities of Garfield Park, Austin, and South Lawndale, the ABC "focus communities," a higher concentration than the average levels district-wide. This suggests a need for targeted, intensive interventions in these areas.

The data also highlights a concerning trend where chronic absenteeism trends upwards during key transition points, particularly from 8th to 9th grade, and in 12th grade as students are preparing for life after high school. In contrast, elementary school absenteeism data shows no consistent pattern, indicating that the factors

driving absences are different for younger students and may be more localized to individual schools or circumstances.

In conclusion, our analysis moves beyond a simple definition to reveal that chronic absenteeism is a severe and escalating problem for specific student populations and communities. These insights underscore the need for a targeted, data-driven strategy at the more acutely chronic levels that also addresses the unique challenges faced by students at different grade levels and in different neighborhoods.

2. NATIONAL SCAN AND INTERVENTION MAPPING

Chronic absenteeism has risen to the level of a national crisis. The sheer number of news [articles, reports, webinars, and studies](#) on the topic continued to grow exponentially as we were conducting this scan. (A compendium of articles, reports, and webinars that informed this analysis can be found [here](#).) In a recent [RAND study](#), district leaders named absenteeism as the [fourth most commonly identified challenge](#) affecting their schools, after raising reading achievement, recruiting and keeping effective teachers, and raising math achievement. Here in Chicago, principals named “chronic student absenteeism” as the [top factor](#) (above even budgetary concerns) having an impact on their schools, according to the Chicago Public Education Fund’s annual [engagement survey](#). So we know this issue is significant, pervasive, and thus far stubbornly resistant to improvement, despite efforts being undertaken across the country.

Part of the challenge here is that chronic absence is not one thing. It is an indicator of underlying symptoms that may stand alone or that may act in concert with each other, making the challenge that much more difficult to solve. For this analysis, we’ve identified levels of intervention to consider in tandem with each other - **Individual, School, and Systems**, as we know this issue cannot be solved by a single approach or actor.

- **Individual Level:** These interventions are designed to directly support and engage students 1:1. They are often personalized and address the unique barriers or challenges a student faces.
- **School Level:** These interventions are implemented at the school-wide or classroom level. They are designed to create a positive school climate, improve instructional practices, and provide support that benefits a larger group of students.
- **Systems Level:** These interventions are implemented at the district, city, or state level. They are designed to align policies, promote collaboration across sectors, and address broader systemic issues that contribute to chronic absenteeism.

We’ve also identified the driving root causes which intersect within and across systems: mental health, motivation/connection, perceptions of safety and belonging, illness/medical issues, and structural and logistical barriers. (We describe these in detail in Section 3 of this report.) For interventions to be effective, they must be tailored to the root causes they are being used to address.

Intervention Scan

The interventions we describe below have at least some evidence to back their efficacy, but note that while some interventions may not yet have been studied, that does not mean they are not efficacious. And while the efficacy of any single intervention is difficult to isolate, our scan shows that districts making progress reducing chronic absence such as Washington D.C. and Richmond, VA, approach the issue through multi-level, coordinated efforts spanning individual, school, and systems levels. These approaches consistently emphasize addressing the underlying issues that prevent attendance.

Also bear in mind that a number of the more rigorous studies took place prior to the pandemic, so while the findings are likely still relevant, they do not account for normative shifts that occurred starting in 2020. (For more details and examples, see Appendix XII, and for the full list of interventions we reviewed, please see the [Interventions Spreadsheet](#).)

Individual Level Interventions

- **Structured mentoring programs:**

- In Chicago Public Schools, “[Check and Connect](#)” decreased student absences among students in grades 5-7 by 4.2 days, or 22.9 percent relative to the control group (note that this study occurred in 2011-2015, so pre-COVID). Core components of Check and Connect are: a mentor who works with individual students and their families, regular check-ins with the mentor (roughly 5x/month), timely personalized interventions to reestablish student connection to school, and learning and engagement with parents.
- Launched by an interagency task force, The [New York City Success Mentor program](#) utilized a mix of external (staffed by non-profit school partners) and internal school adult mentors. Mentors greeted and met regularly with their caseload of students, called homes, identified underlying causes of absences, celebrated students’ talents and successes, and worked with the school and its partners to connect students and their families with local resources to address specific challenges. Mentors benefited from having direct access to the attendance data of the students they mentored and being able to link students with pressing out-of-school issues with professional supports. They also had a voice in weekly principal-led student success meetings. Analyses of the NYC campaign’s pilot in 100 schools from 2010-2013 (pre-pandemic), with over 80,000 students, found that its efforts significantly improved students’ attendance rates, particularly for students from a high-poverty background. Students at participating schools were also significantly less likely (7%) to be severely chronically absent (attendance under 80%) and, conversely, significantly more likely (8%) to be “good attenders” with attendance rates at or above 95%.

- **High Impact Tutoring:**

- A [study of Washington DC Public Schools by the National Student Support Accelerator at Stanford University](#) (using SY22-23 data) found that students were 1.2 percentage points less likely to be absent on days they were scheduled for tutoring, a 7.0% reduction, and a more intensive implementation (combining key features of high-impact tutoring, such as in-school delivery, smaller tutor-student ratios, and increased frequency of sessions) amplified the positive effect. A [recent report from UChicago EdLabs](#) and MDRC underscores the importance of implementation, specifically finding that “overall we still see that the dosage students are getting falls far short of what would be needed to fully realize the promise of high dosage tutoring.” Given the high cost of this intervention and the recent layoffs in Chicago Public Schools, the future of this work locally is uncertain.

- **Warm Communication/Nudging:**

- There have been a number of studies on attendance nudging, of high interest in part due to its low cost relative to other strategies. EveryDay Labs, founded by Harvard professor and

researcher Todd Rogers, Ph.D., recently released a [randomized controlled trial](#) of over 27k students in district and charter schools in Washington, DC that found that a combination of mail and text nudges (3 of each over the fall semester) decreased chronic absenteeism rates by 1.7 percentage points, or 6.3%, among the focus population. (It is important to note, however, that this study focused on a category of students considered “Priority,” with an absence range of 5-30%, versus “Non-Priority” with an absence range of 30-95% based on prior studies of this intervention’s effectiveness, calling into question its potential efficacy in Chicago, particularly in our focus neighborhoods where the majority of students would fall in their “non-priority” category. Also, in a [prior DC study](#), the intervention appeared more efficacious for elementary students vs high school students, with 56% improved attendance vs 31% improvement.)

School Level Interventions

- **Student Success Systems:**
 - Akin to a next generation of OnTrack work, effective Student Success Systems are comprised of four essential elements: Strong Supportive Relationships; Real-Time, Actionable, Holistic Data; Strategic Improvement Actions; and Student-Centered Mindsets. They also rely upon Student Success Teams, cross-functional groups of adults who work together on a regular basis to implement and continually improve their local student success system. [Results from the second year of the GRAD Partnership](#) show that implementing grades, on average, saw chronic absenteeism rates decline from 29% to 21%, an 8 percentage point and 28% decline.
- **Family Engagement:**
 - Anecdotally, family engagement consistently arises as a key strategy in addressing chronic absenteeism. One of the most compelling studies of this is from the collaboration between [Learning Heroes and TNTP](#), where they discovered using Illinois’ 5Essentials data that schools with stronger family engagement before the pandemic experienced better-than-expected attendance, achievement, and school climate outcomes post-pandemic.
- **Home visits:**
 - External research on four large urban districts employing the [Parent-Teacher Home Visit model](#) in SY15-16 and SY 16-17 (pre-pandemic) shows that students who receive a relational home visit are 21% less likely to be chronically absent. It is important to note that this intervention is not explicitly focused on absenteeism, rather it is aligned to a specific set of core practices: 1) Visits are always voluntary for educators and families and arranged in advance; 2) Teachers are trained and compensated for visits outside their school day; 3) The focus of the first visit is relationship building – educators and families discuss hopes and dreams; 4) No targeting – visit all or a cross-section of students, so there is no stigma, and 5) Educators conduct visits in pairs and, after the visit, reflect with their partners.
- **Community Schools:**
 - Two recent (post-COVID) studies from the Learning Policy Institute show positive impact of well-implemented Community Schools. Key characteristics of high-quality community schools include: integrated systems of support, powerful student and family engagement, collaborative leadership with shared power and voice, expanded and enriched learning opportunities,

rigorous, community-connected classroom instruction, and a culture of belonging, safety, and care. A [qualitative study](#) of 4 elementary schools showed that by focusing efforts on 1) Improving Family Engagement, 2) Increasing Student Connectedness, 3) Systematically Tracking and Analyzing Data, 4) Utilizing Tiered Systems of Support, 5) Leveraging Partnerships, 6) and Deploying Community School Coordinators, the featured schools significantly reduced their postpandemic chronic absenteeism rates. The [quantitative study](#) echoed these findings, analyzing 458 schools in their first year of implementation and finding that these schools demonstrated a meaningful reduction in chronic absence—a reduction, on average, 30% greater than that experienced by similar matched comparison schools. These findings were most pronounced in elementary schools.

Systems Level Interventions

System-level interventions may be the hardest to quantify as they invariably involve multiple efforts across many organizations and institutions. Promising practices include **engaging with public health entities** as has been done in Washington DC, Los Angeles, Trenton NJ, and other cities to align supports and resources with student and family needs, particularly as related to physical and mental health; coordinating **public information campaigns** about the importance of school attendance; and ensuring that families **understand that school resources are often tied to attendance** (to inform them, not as a cudgel).

The emergence of **cross-district and cross-state networks** to address chronic absenteeism is promising. These include efforts from the High Tech High Graduate School of Education (the [National Attendance & Engagement Meta Network](#), as well as the California-focused [RAISE Network](#)), the San Diego County Office of Education's [ICAN](#), and the [Attendance Solutions Network](#) from the Johns Hopkins Partnership for Student Success. One proof point that is still being analyzed is Digital Promise's [Chronic Absenteeism: Insights and Innovations Cohort](#), which engaged 17 school districts across the country in their Inclusive Innovation model which brings those closest to the challenge—students, parents, families, and organizers—to the table with district leaders, educators, researchers, and solution developers to intentionally involve all stakeholders in the processes of co-research and co-creation. One participating district, Hudson City (NY) [evidenced a 12% drop in chronic absenteeism](#) following their engagement as a member of the cohort, and we hope to see additional evidence of impact from this work once they share the results.

Case Studies: Multi-Level Approaches in Practice

Many districts across the country have pursued multifaceted, multi-level approaches to tackle this issue:

Washington DC

DC Public Schools serve approximately 50,000 students. They take a citywide approach to chronic absenteeism, with the Mayor's office leading the [Every Day Counts! Taskforce](#) which includes DCPS, and numerous agencies including the areas of health, public safety and criminal justice, transportation, and economic opportunity. The district partners with EveryDay Labs to send targeted, research-backed letters and

text messages to families to reduce absenteeism [which showed an 11% reduction in chronic absenteeism among students receiving the intervention](#) (SY22-23). They also launched a data-sharing partnership, [CARE-H](#) (Collaborative for Attendance Resources in Education and Health) between DCPS and local medical providers for students who are enrolled at DCPS and are current Children's National Hospital patients to support student health and reduce absenteeism by enabling healthcare professionals to provide special outreach and medical attention to children that might be missing school and their families. Their intensive tutoring program was [analyzed by Stanford University's National Student Support Accelerator](#) which found that students were 1.2 percentage points less likely to be absent on days they were scheduled for tutoring, a 7.0% reduction. In partnership with the Flamboyan Foundation, DCPS has increased the number of home visits conducted, and working with XQ they have hosted [student design challenges](#), using school climate survey data. Overall, these efforts seem to be working: as of SY24-25, they reported a chronic absenteeism rate of 28.3, down from 31.4 the prior year and 48% in SY21-22.

Richmond, VA

Richmond Public Schools, which serves roughly 22,000 students, has taken on chronic absenteeism as a districtwide priority, and this focus seems to be paying off as their chronic absenteeism rate dropped from 37% in SY21-22 to 22% by the end of SY23-24. To achieve this reduction, the district implemented strategies like increased family home visits and partnerships with non-profits to address issues such as housing instability. The reduction is in part attributable to the work of Shadae Harris, former chief engagement officer for the district, who saw that, as related to parents, [the district had "an engagement problem, a relationship problem, \(and\) a trust problem."](#) For over 6 years, she worked to build a new approach to family engagement in the district, one that positioned parents as partners in co-creating new systems that better serve their needs. The district also partnered with a local housing-focused nonprofit, leveraging a foundation grant to help more than 120 families access rental deposits and lease negotiation help to move out of motels.

Tulsa, OK

In Tulsa Public Schools, which serves about 33,000 students, Superintendent Dr. Ebony Johnson has made reducing their chronic absenteeism rate from 44% to below 20% a key focus of her leadership through the ["Attend to Win"](#) initiative. They have pursued a multifaceted approach to the issue, partnering with organizations like [Impact Tulsa](#) to conduct root cause analysis to identify key local barriers to school attendance, which they deemed "the Big Four:" housing instability, safety concerns, transportation, and mental and physical well-being. They are also partnering with [The Opportunity Project](#) to expand out of school time offerings for students, whose [analyses](#) showed 3-4 additional days of attendance for students with consistent participation in quality OST programming. They formed a Collaborative Action Network to do a deep dive on absenteeism issues Pre-K through 3rd grade. Working with city and county government and agencies, they are tackling some of the systemic issues (advocating for changes in eviction policy, collaboration around transportation needs) and they are working directly with schools and community partners to provide support and fill gaps related to safety and health. They've also partnered with [TalkingPoints](#), leveraging technology to improve family-school engagement by enabling two-way text conversations, translated into the parents' preferred language. The platform sends text "nudges" about attendance, enables teachers to send positive

messages home and notifies parents about key school activities (conferences, etc.). A [study](#) of Talking Points found that students whose families used the platform had a predicted 6 additional days of attendance per year, for a 24% reduction in absenteeism. As they have not yet seen the level of improvement they seek – their overall rate of chronic absenteeism went from 47% to 44% over the course of SY 2023-2024 (24-25 data is not yet available) – the Superintendent is now considering accountability measures, such as linking attendance to eligibility for sports or extracurricular activities, the ability to transfer to a magnet or specialty school, or even in-grade retention.

Nashville, TN

Although not hitting national headlines as some districts are, Nashville Public Schools (serving 81,000 students) is making strides to reduce chronic absenteeism, seeing reductions at a faster rate than other large urban districts in Tennessee and the state overall. Their rate was 29.7 in SY21-22 and now stands at 24.1. A key strategy they've employed is integrating efforts to increase student attendance into the work of school-based MTSS (Multi-Tiered Systems of Support) teams, enabled by a platform called [Sown to Grow](#).

Sown to Grow is a universal screening tool where students log in weekly to select an emoji to describe how they are feeling and write a quick reflection as a Tier 1 intervention. Teachers review this data for their classes, and trend data goes to counselors and social workers, along with suggested Tier 2 groups and lists of students who may need Tier 3 interventions. Each student also has a relationship with a [Navigator](#), a caring adult who helps students chart a path to success in school. This “Every Student Known” initiative started during COVID but has evolved to a district philosophy. In addition to these school-based interventions, they have strengthened their partnership with [Communities in Schools Tennessee](#) to assess the unique needs of each school, its students and families, and coordinate with community partners to bring outside resources inside the school to help with day-to-day challenges and ongoing programs.

They also offer incentive-based programs, community events with support services, and have even created [music videos](#) to promote school attendance. During SY22-23, they stood up an Attendance Task Force which developed a set of recommendations including strengthening collaboration with immigrant/refugee focused agencies to improve communication between families with English learners and Nashville Public Schools, working with principals to appoint Family Attendance Ambassadors at each school, and building out mentoring support for students in partnership with community-based organizations. In January 2025, they entered into a partnership with Vanderbilt University to study chronic absenteeism in the district over a period of 18 months to examine the root causes of student disengagement and design stronger, data-informed attendance systems.

Detroit, MI

Detroit Public Schools serves about 53,000 students and has historically had one of the highest chronic absenteeism rates in the country, even before the pandemic. In partnership with the district, researchers Jeremy Singer and Sarah Winchell Lenhoff conducted an [in-depth study of chronic absenteeism in Detroit](#) from 2016 to 2023. This longitudinal perspective enabled them to chronicle several attempts at reducing absenteeism—most of which did not achieve intended targets but are instructive for other districts. Early

attempts (2017) included an after school program for middle school students and a communication campaign, neither of which appeared successful in reducing absenteeism. In the wake of increased accountability requirements from the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), in 2018 the district partnered with a nonprofit to work with the district on shared accountability, capacity building, and the use of actionable data as well as bringing in community partners to help address root causes outside of school walls. They used a tiered approach (similar to MTSS) with interventions tied to tiers, advocated for school-based attendance teams, and encouraged schools to have an adult point person for every student. The district also created a school-based position of “attendance agent.” This strategy, which lasted until the pandemic, also failed to significantly reduce absenteeism for two main reasons, 1) the role of attendance agent was not clearly defined, so implementation varied widely and these individuals were often overwhelmed by the sheer scope of the task they were taking on, and 2) the MTSS approach did not allow for sufficient differentiation of interventions within tiers to address the various barriers to attendance, nor was it resourced to enable provision of necessary support to students needing Tier 3 (intensive) interventions since that percentage of students was far higher than the 5% that category would typically serve in an MTSS model.

The pandemic further exacerbated Detroit’s already high chronic absenteeism rate, which rose to 77% in SY 21-22. The pandemic caused the coalition that led citywide efforts to reduce absenteeism to take an [“ecological” approach](#), explicitly acknowledging that absenteeism “is a proxy indicator for youth, family, and community wellness and a contributing factor to future youth success in school” (p.120) and that supports need to include families and communities and the ecosystem of organizations and agencies that serve them. This broadened conception rested on four pillars intended to foment systems change: research and continuous improvement, technical assistance and capacity building, multidirectional communications, and wraparound supports for students and their families (p. 121). As students fully returned to school, coalition leaders sought to weave these four pillars together in their work in individual schools, which ultimately resulted in an approach much like community schools. They brought in AmeriCorps members and instituted a Check & Connect program. Ultimately, the four pillars approach lacked a level of alignment between school needs and the resources the external partners could provide, so it was paused at the end of SY 23-24, though there was an overall reduction to 66% in SY22-23 and 23-24. Meanwhile, the district embraced the ecological model, intervening in areas such as housing, transportation, and health, including hiring a school nurse in every building. The district also improved its data reporting tools enabling school staff to access a user-friendly data dashboard and to produce reports with a few clicks. The district set a goal in 2024 to reduce chronic absenteeism to 43% (and increase daily attendance to 90%) by 2027. These more comprehensive efforts seem to be helping, as the rate for SY24-25 is 60.9% - still higher than state and national averages, but trending down. The authors conclude that chronic absenteeism must be seen as an ecological issue, not purely an educational one, therefore requiring partnership with systems outside of schools and districts to reduce it. They further underscore that deepening social and economic inequalities, seen starkly in places like Detroit, make the challenge of improving this metric even more difficult.

Insights from the Intervention Scan

What these case studies show is that in large urban districts, the approach to reducing chronic absenteeism varies by context and approach, but typically involves interventions at multiple levels of the system. Similarly,

in the case of Chicago Public Schools, we believe that a multi-level approach, where interventions are matched with school needs, is essential to address the vexing issue of chronic absenteeism. While we know the system lacks capacity for every school to implement every strategy, we believe that there are some foundational strategies that should be considered at scale and then a menu of interventions that schools and partner agencies can choose from based on local needs, resources, and organizational capacity.

Intervention Insight 1. Leverage Relationships for Student Belonging

At the **individual** level, it is clear that there is a deep need for students to feel connected to adults and peers at their schools. We recommend focusing on efforts to build a sense of belonging within schools, which could certainly be augmented by bringing in partner organizations that offer mentoring and perhaps tutoring to build developmental relationships with students that encourage them to attend school.

- The Partnership for Student Success shared a model of **partnership with college students** where work-study funds were used to compensate mentors and tutors - perhaps such a strategy could be piloted in Chicago given the mass layoffs of tutors that took place earlier this year due to budget cuts.
- **Peer mentoring** programs like [LinkCrew](#) can help build supportive student-student relationships and can be used specifically to help ease the transition to high school.
- **Warm communication** strategies can be implemented in low-cost ways and have been shown to have significant (if modest) positive impact on school attendance. Programs like TalkingPoints and EveryDay Labs could be piloted in target schools and tracked for effectiveness. Research shows that caregivers frequently underestimate the extent of absence, which can lessen their sense of urgency about addressing the challenge. Personalized letters or messages with up-to-date information can lead to changes in behavior.

Intervention Insight 2. Strengthen School-Level Systems

At the **school** level, we would emphasize the importance of implementing strong Early Warning/Student Success systems, and cross-functional Attendance Teams. These foundational practices are essential to beginning the process of triaging the high numbers of chronically absent students in CPS schools, particularly in the focus neighborhoods. Our team wondered: do schools even know how many of their students are missing 30% or more of the school year? And if they do, do they know the causes driving this high absence? Once schools have the lists of students and the reasons for their chronic absence, they can begin segmenting groups of students by causes to begin implementing relevant interventions to start reducing their numbers by getting students and families what they need to go to school. As we know from the [Reinvention Lab analysis](#), school-based interventions won't get every student back, but they are a sensible place for schools to start as they seek to broaden their net of support to include partners with specialized expertise to address non-school factors.

- In Chicago we have the benefit of **rich and accessible data sources** and practice-oriented research partners, so increasing capacity and use around 5E's, Cultivate and other school and classroom climate data could bolster efforts to increase attendance. Student perception data can be used in concert with

student voice approaches to ensure that adults in schools are making changes in ways that are responsive to student needs.

- **Family engagement** has been shown to be a “protective factor” against post-pandemic increases in chronic absenteeism, and was a key pillar of the strategy in Richmond that led to their precipitous reduction in chronic absence. We recommend supporting efforts to strengthen partnerships with families in ways that align with the research-backed [Dual Capacity Framework](#), an approach to building effective family engagement efforts that are linked to student achievement and school improvement. Supportive **home visits** are an effective (although resource intensive) approach to building stronger relationships with families.
- Chicago has over 200 **community schools partnerships** in place (including 27 of the 68 focus neighborhood schools). Most are coordinated through [Communities in Schools of Chicago](#) while 36 are [Sustainable Community Schools](#) in partnership with the CTU. [Research shows](#) that high-quality Community Schools can have a positive impact on attendance, and they can be tailored to the needs of the local community through partnerships and programming. There could be opportunities to provide capacity building support to increase the fidelity of implementation through organizations like the [Attendance Solutions Network](#) at Johns Hopkins, the [Coalition for Community Schools](#) and the [National Center for Community Schools](#). Community Schools staff can also be integrated into attendance teams to help focus their work on chronically absent students and their families, particularly if their root cause is an out of school issue (transportation, housing, health, food insecurity, etc.).
- Of course, **increasing student engagement** in classrooms and offering more **career-connected learning** opportunities are important levers in increasing student attendance and interest in school. Yet we know that changing educational practice at scale may be beyond the scope of what A Better Chicago is seeking to take on. We encourage ABC to work in partnership with other foundations in Chicago that are focused on instructional improvement and school-to-work connections to harmonize these efforts in a citywide attempt to reduce chronic absenteeism.

Intervention Insight 3. Build a Citywide, Cross-Sector Coalition

At the **system** level, we would prioritize building a cross-sector coalition to address chronic absenteeism head-on, as it is a citywide public health issue. A comprehensive approach would include health, transportation, and housing agencies as well as providers of social services.

- The city would also likely benefit from a **public information campaign**, using research-based, tested messaging. Perhaps as in other states like Colorado and Virginia this could be launched in conjunction with statewide efforts related to reducing chronic absenteeism. *(Note: IL recently passed SB 407 to establish a Chronic Absence Task Force - perhaps this group could consider looking at state-level actions like joining the [50% Challenge](#) or leading statewide communication efforts on this issue.)*
- We were heartened to see that CPS has joined Cohort 2 of the **National Attendance & Engagement Meta Network** at High Tech High Graduate School. Engaging in this network will enable district staff to learn from national leaders in using continuous improvement strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism and receive ongoing support as they seek to test change ideas locally here in Chicago.

To better contextualize and determine which of these approaches are most relevant and necessary for Chicago, we will now turn to the **voices of Chicago's stakeholders** to identify the most critical barriers students face.

3. ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS AND STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Chronic absenteeism is often a symptom of deeper, systemic issues rather than a simple lack of effort or motivation. Effective interventions focus on building relationships and addressing root causes rather than simply enforcing attendance policies.

Local Root Causes and Barriers

Based on the synthesis of our research and stakeholder engagement, we've identified the following key drivers of chronic absenteeism:

- **Mental Health as a Public Health Crisis:** Across our interviews and listening sessions, mental health was cited as a top reason for chronic absenteeism. As one principal powerfully stated, **"The lack of community mental health clinics places the entire burden on schools, who are not equipped to handle the scope of the problem alone."** This feedback was further reinforced in the "All in for Attendance: Education and Public Health Leaders Release Framework to Address Chronic Absence from Schools" report by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.
- **Family and Community Issues:** Family responsibilities, such as caretaking for younger siblings or sick family members, can be a significant barrier to attendance. As noted by one principal, even external factors like immigration-related fears in the neighborhood can cause a sudden, sharp decline in student attendance, showing how quickly students can be impacted by events outside of the school.
- **Safety Concerns:** The physical safety of students is a major barrier to attendance for some students as they travel to school. One principal stated that some students may not attend schools if they feel unsafe traveling to school due to external community conflicts.
- **Lack of School Engagement and Connectedness:** Students may feel unmotivated or disconnected from school. A principal shared that after listening to students, they realized the school environment itself was a barrier, with problems like locked bathrooms and a lack of engaging activities. This highlights the need for a targeted approach that reframes the work through **"engagement"** and **"relationships"** to build trust with students and reduce absence. Further, school engagement or connection to school were both referenced by leading research partners, including The University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, which is currently looking at student Cultivate survey responses, particularly as they relate to other student outcome indicators such as attendance and GPA. Survey responses also reflected this, as both students and adults named motivation and disconnection as root causes of absenteeism.

Exploration of Key Drivers

The data reveals that while Chicago shares national drivers like mental health and a post-pandemic shift in attendance norms, it also faces unique and highly concentrated challenges related to neighborhood violence and safety, which directly influence attendance. Furthermore, logistical barriers such as family caretaking and the need for students to work are prevalent and contribute to absenteeism.

Survey Methodology and Response Summary

The analysis of CPS attendance data has been essential in generating foundational insights. The Luminary Collective recognizes the importance of grounding these findings in stakeholder perspectives, particularly by incorporating the lived experiences of those most directly affected. In addition to the analysis of CPS data, we conducted a survey to gather additional insights and also carried out qualitative research through focus groups and interviews, complementing the CPS data with the perspectives and experiences behind the numbers.

The survey we conducted was intended to capture perspectives from multiple stakeholders around the school community. The following groups were invited to complete the survey: students, parents/caregivers, teachers, principals/school staff, and community partners. The groups were asked role-specific versions of the questions to ensure clarity and validity. Because the survey items were tailored to each role, responses were not combined into a single dataset. Instead, each group's responses were analyzed by distinct perspectives.

We received **130 responses**. The breakdown of responses by stakeholder groups were: **Students (15%), Parents/Caregivers (39%), School Staff (31%), and Community Partners (29%)**. The data, while directional, provides valuable insights into patterns across stakeholders and neighborhoods.

The quantitative responses were represented through reported frequencies and percentages, while qualitative, open-ended responses were analyzed using word frequency. The analysis revealed both shared aspects (such as barriers and interventions that overlapped between groups) and distinct differences.

A key finding from the survey was a significant difference in how students perceive their sense of belonging compared to adults. While **93% of parents** and **93% of school staff** felt students were safe, supported, and accepted at school, only **67% of students** agreed, suggesting a disconnect that can impact engagement.

The survey identified **four consistent barriers** to attendance across all groups: **1) Mental Health, 2) Lack of Motivation/Connection to School, 3) Safety, 4) Medical Illness/Challenges**.

- **Students:** Mental Health (53%), Lack of Motivation (47%), Feeling Unsafe (33%), and School Work (27%).
- **Parents:** Mental Health (62%), Medical Challenges (38%), Transportation (35%), and Lack of Motivation (33%).
- **School Staff:** Mental Health (75%), Lack of Motivation (55%), Medical Challenges (45%), and Family Responsibilities (30%).

Quantitative Insights

Key survey results show that chronic absenteeism is the result of a constellation of experiences, not one single issue, and it crosses all categories: health, relationships, transitions, and structural barriers. While students, families, school staff, and community partners share concerns about attendance, each group brings a unique perspective, from students centering friendships and mental health, to staff emphasizing interventions and outreach, to families navigating health and transportation, and partners weighing safety and motivation. Taken

together, the data reveals both areas of convergence, such as the vital role of trusted relationships, and areas of divergence, such as how barriers are prioritized across groups. The following insights synthesize these patterns, offering a clearer picture of where targeted, layered strategies may have a significant impact.

Stakeholder Insight 1. Belonging is Fragmented Across Perspectives

Survey results show stark differences in how students' belonging is understood and experienced across stakeholder groups. Just over half of students (53%) reported feeling a strong sense of belonging and connection, compared with 81% of staff and roughly half of parents/caregivers (49%) and community partners (52%). In terms of definitions of belonging, students most frequently cited friendship (21%), being respected by teachers (18%), and being accepted for who they are (18%). In contrast, adults gave more structural accounts of belonging: staff most frequently described belonging as being respected (19%) and being safe (18%), parents also, most frequently identified respect (24%) and being accepted for who they are (15%) and partners most frequently cited feeling safe (18%) and having connections with peers (16%). The findings further highlight that belonging is not one-dimensional and changes based on perspective. Students understand it as a peer-driven concept of having friends and a feeling of inclusion, while the adults take a broader view, understanding it as a concept related to safety, respect, and structural conditions. Therefore, to improve attendance, supports must aim to connect these two perspectives, meaning that they should strive to improve peer-to-peer belonging among the students, while the adults need to promote safety and respect.

Stakeholder Insight 2. Barriers Are Shared but Unevenly Weighted

Four clusters of barriers consistently emerged across groups: illness/medical needs, mental health, motivation, and transportation; however, the prominence of each differed. Mental health (27%) and motivation (22%) were most frequently noted by students. Parents were more likely to report barriers related to illness/ongoing health needs (19%) as well as safety and transportation (13% each). Staff more frequently identified structural barriers, such as transportation (16%) and caregiving/housing (13%), while community partners most often raised motivation (21%) and safety (12%). These differences indicate that while barriers were often shared across the ecosystem, they were not experienced uniformly. For families and students, mental and physical health-related challenges dominate; for staff and partners, structural barriers and safety concerns rise to the forefront. These findings suggest that solutions must operate at multiple levels, addressing immediate health and well-being needs while also tackling broader structural issues like transportation and safety.

Stakeholder Insight 3. Supports Converge on Trusted Relationships

When asked what helps students attend more consistently, one theme cut across all groups: the power of trusted relationships. Students most often credited support from peers and parents (18% each), followed by afterschool programs (13%) and trusted adults at school (11%). Parents also identified their own support (20%) as well as school safety (13%), and reliable transportation (12%) as particularly important. Community partners indicated that peer connections (13%) and adult connections (13%) were also among the most essential strategies. Staff reported that positive staff–student relationships (24%) were the single most crucial effective intervention, and also rated outreach (19%) and incentives (17%) favorably.

Despite differences in framing, the convergence is apparent: relationships with peers, caregivers, and school staff anchor consistent attendance. For staff in particular, these relationships are not only organic but are intentionally built into interventions such as outreach, mentoring, and family engagement. This finding points to the critical role of relational trust as both a protective factor and a leverage point for attendance. Importantly, these findings align with CPS's new districtwide Whole School Safety policy requiring schools to ensure every student has a trusted adult connection. The commonality of this theme across all stakeholder groups highlights the benefits of that policy, but also that implementation and follow-through are still important to the complete fulfillment of that policy's purpose in practice.

Stakeholder Insight 4. The 9th Grade Transition is Critical

The transition from 8th - 9th grade was a particularly salient challenge. Despite the small student sample size (n=5), most described relationships with other students and adults as making this transition easier. In contrast, parents were more likely to describe elements of strain: 46% said that increased workload or the different schedule made coming to school more challenging, and another 46% cited difficulty with commuting. Staff acknowledged both sides as 57% agreed students were connected to supportive adults, and 64% said they had peers to lean on, but half also noted workload strain as a barrier. Community partners also confirmed that 9th grade is jarring. Sixty-three percent agree that changes to the schedule or workload impede attendance. Viewed together, the data show a tension: despite the presence of relational buffers, academic preparedness and structural issues weigh on students and families. The 9th-grade year should therefore be treated as a leverage point, with interventions that pair academic preparation with intentional structures for peer and adult connection.

Stakeholder Insight 5. Transportation Adds Context to Barriers

Commute times and transportation barriers add important context to absenteeism. Students most commonly reported 15–29 minute commutes (47%), though over one-quarter faced either very short (<15 minutes) or extended (30+ minutes) travel. Parents revealed greater variation: while 27% of children had commutes under 15 minutes, another 24% reported 30–44 minutes, 16% 45–59 minutes, and 10% 60 minutes or more. Staff members were more likely to agree with students, with 41% also saying that 15–29 minutes was common. By contrast, community partners reported a more balanced distribution across the range of 15–59 minutes, due to the inequitable local availability of transportation. Small-n Likert responses add further nuance: parents and staff flagged cost, weather, and safety concerns, while all community partners (100%) agreed that reliability directly impacts attendance. Collectively, these results provide evidence that suggests that the mobility process is multilevel, characterized by barriers in terms of reliability, affordability, safety, and weather, which may further compound the existing challenges some families face in health, motivation, and pressures of caregiving. For adolescents, these barriers may be further compounded by early school start times, which research shows are misaligned with teen circadian rhythms (Weir, 2024). Research shows that when schools start later in the day, it leads to improved sleep, increased attendance, and more positive academic results. On a national level, this suggests that commute length and school start times are two structural levers which, when moved, can help alleviate risks associated with absenteeism.

Qualitative Insights

The Luminary Collective held 29 interviews and focus groups with 40+ participants. In the interviews, early, directional data findings from our survey were shared with participants to understand if the data was surprising, affirming of what was known, and what reactions participants had towards the information provided. The summaries were then categorized into three areas:

Effective Interventions: Successful strategies focus on building relationships and addressing root causes rather than simply enforcing attendance policies. Participants advocated for personalized approaches, noting that every school, student, and family is different. Examples of impactful interventions include:

- **Home Visits:** Home visit programs are seen as transformative for improving attendance. A principal shared that they personally conduct home visits to the families of students who have not yet enrolled. This effort brought a ninth-grade class from 52 students to 100 students on the second day of school, showing the power of these personalized efforts.
- **Providing Tangible Resources:** One organization found success by offering resources that go beyond academic needs, such as a fitness center for students to shower and providing clothing, bus cards, and meals.
- **Parent-Focused Campaigns:** Implementing campaigns that reframe the work through "engagement" and "relationships" is key to building trust with families and reducing absence.

System-Level Changes: Leadership was flagged as another significant driver, where effective school leaders make attendance a priority with staff and parents. Participants suggested a community-centered approach, where solutions are designed with the community, not just for them. Data integration is also key, with a focus on improving data collection, progress monitoring, and reporting.

Additional Insights from CPS Principals

- **Student Accountability:** One principal highlighted the need for greater **accountability for students and parents**, noting that there are "ZERO rules" in some areas. They advocate for a system where showing up for class has clear consequences, similar to a job, stating, "If you don't go to class you're not going to graduate; we're just talking about showing up."
- **Grading Policies:** Schools expressed concern that the practice of "no zero grading" may unintentionally undermine student motivation. This is a grading practice where a student cannot receive a score of zero on an assignment, even if they don't turn it in. They noted that when students believe they cannot receive a zero, some may conclude that attending class or completing work is less urgent, which can reduce engagement. They recommended that CPS take a clear and consistent stance on this issue.

In summary, Chicago's attendance challenges are less about lack of policies and instead more about meeting the deeper human needs for safety, mental well-being, and belonging - key factors that shape students' everyday experiences. We next turn to CPS data to further illustrate these qualitative insights and highlight specific areas where there is a need for additional attention and targeted support.

4. CHICAGO DATA ANALYSIS

As one of the nation’s largest school districts, CPS serves students across diverse neighborhoods and school models. Differences in socioeconomic status, English Learner (EL) status, student mobility, disability status (IEP), housing and/or food insecurity, transportation access, community safety, health challenges, caregiving responsibilities, and school climate all shape student experiences and outcomes.

Chronic absenteeism reflects these underlying conditions. Even at schools with strong topline outcomes such as high graduation and postsecondary enrollment rates, attendance remains a challenge. This tells us that conventional successful metrics can coexist with persistent absenteeism, signaling the need for targeted attendance strategies alongside academic support.

CPS Data Analysis

Currently, CPS and the State of Illinois use the narrow definition of chronic absenteeism (10%+). This data shows a simplified view of chronic absenteeism and does not speak to the distribution of students, making it difficult to fully grasp the severity of the challenge. We explored chronic absenteeism across multiple dimensions, analyzing the data from different angles to build a thorough and nuanced understanding of the patterns and key insights. In particular, the analysis concentrated on three community areas that were pre-selected by A Better Chicago to guide the scope of the analysis. These three community areas are: Austin, Garfield Park and South Lawndale. While the data might seem discouraging, it is important to note that CPS has a robust set of policies designed to support strong school attendance, as highlighted in this section’s policy scan.

In our analysis, we used data based on the bands provided to us by CPS². While these don’t align perfectly with Attendance Works’ thresholds, they approximate them. In future CPS data analyses, we recommend aligning with Attendance Works’ definitions. The figures below are based on a 176-day school year.

Table 1: Bands used to conduct the CPS data analysis

Chronic Absenteeism Bands	Satisfactory Attendance	At Risk Attendance	Moderate Chronic Absence	Severe Chronic Absence	Acute Chronic
Attendance Works’ Bands	0% - 5.9% 0 - 10 days	6-9% 10 - 16 days	10-19.9% 16 - 35 days	20-49% 35 - 86 days	50%+ 86+ days
Students Absent Days	0%-5.1% 0-9	5.6%-10.8% 10-19 days	11.3%-16.47% 20-29 days	17%-22% 30-39 days	22.7%+ ≥ 40 days

² For this analysis, CPS provided attendance data organized into bands that were not fully aligned with Attendance Works’ thresholds. These specific bands were generated in response to a prior FOIA request submitted by a third party before the start of this project. Because this dataset was already available, it allowed the analysis to be completed within the project’s required timeline. Obtaining new data with different band thresholds would not have been feasible within the allotted timeframe. In future CPS data analyses, we recommend aligning with Attendance Works’ definitions.

(bands used per CPS data)					
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A Comparative Analysis: High School vs. Elementary School Absenteeism

At the district-level, we see stark differences between attendance in elementary schools and high schools. The elementary school data presents a starkly different picture from the high school data. As shown in Table 2, the overall average chronic absenteeism rates are significantly lower in elementary schools, with 48% of students in the "Satisfactory Attendance" band compared to only 28% of high school students. This difference is even more pronounced in the "Acute Chronic Absence" band, where only 5% of elementary students fall compared to 21% of high school students. This is a critical finding that suggests the drivers of chronic absenteeism may be fundamentally different at these two educational levels.

In particular, we see a significant increase in absenteeism during the transition between 8th grade and 9th grade, as noted in figure 4. During this period, there is a consistent pattern of reduced attendance across schools located within the same communities.

Table 2: High School Vs. Elementary School Data, SY23-24

Chronic Absenteeism Bands	Satisfactory Attendance	At-Risk Attendance	Moderate Chronic Absence	Severe Chronic Absence	Acute Chronic Absence
Students Absent Days (bands used per CPS data)	0%-5.1% 0-9	5.6%-10.8% 10-19 days	11.3%-16.47% 20-29 days	17%-22% 30-39 days	22.7%+ ≥ 40 days
# High School Students Per Category	29,359	26,841	16,312	9,597	21,884
% High School Students in this category	28%	26%	16%	9%	21%
# Elementary Students Per Category	130,229	71,947	45,953	24,198	21,887
% Elementary Students in this category	48%	26%	17%	9%	5%

In addition, on average, across all of the CPS high schools, it would appear that there is a “somewhat” even spread across the categories of chronic absenteeism. However, the averages alone do not explain the full story because they mask the variation across communities and grade levels. When specifically looking at three focus communities, we can see distinct patterns, including noting that there is a higher concentration of students in the Acute Chronic Absence level.

Neighborhood Insight 1. Extreme (Acute) Chronic Absenteeism is a Significant Problem

The number of students in the category of Acute Chronic Absenteeism (e.g. missing 40 or more days) in the three focus neighborhoods are significant. These factors are not only observed in focus schools, but also in a number of district schools city wide. 34 of 82 CPS district high schools saw $\geq 30\%$ of students with ≥ 40 days absent. 17 of 82 district high schools saw $\geq 40\%$ of students with ≥ 40 days absent. The tables below show the distribution of data across the attendance bands within the three neighborhoods.

Table 3: Austin Distribution of Chronic Absenteeism, SY23-24

Chronic Absenteeism Bands	Satisfactory Attendance	At Risk Attendance	Moderate Chronic Absence	Severe Chronic Absence	Acute Chronic Absence
Data we have:	Students Absent 0-9 days 0%-5.1%	Students Absent 10-19 days 5.6%-10.8%	Students Absent 20-29 days 11.3%-16.47%	Students Absent 30-39 days 17%-22%	Students Absent ≥ 40 days 22.7%+
Austin # High School Students per Category	49	45	54	46	173
Austin % of High School Students	13%	12%	15%	13%	47%
Austin # Elementary Students per Category	4,204	2,829	1,811	915	966
Austin % of Elementary Students	41%	30%	18%	9%	9%

Table 4: Garfield Park - Distribution of Chronic Absenteeism, SY23-24

Chronic Absenteeism Bands	Satisfactory Attendance	At Risk Attendance	Moderate Chronic Absence	Severe Chronic Absence	Acute Chronic Absence
Data we have:	Students Absent 0-9 days 0%-5.1%	Students Absent 10-19 days 5.6%-10.8%	Students Absent 20-29 days 11.3%-16.47%	Students Absent 30-39 days 17%-22%	Students Absent ≥ 40 days 22.7%+
Garfield Park # High School Students Per Category	168	121	114	79	343
Garfield Park % of High School Students	20%	15%	14%	10%	42%
Garfield Park # Elementary Students	3,214	2,309	1,080	482	681
Garfield Park % of Elementary Students	50%	30%	14%	6%	4%

Table 5: South Lawndale Distribution of Chronic Absenteeism, SY23-24

Chronic Absenteeism Bands	Satisfactory Attendance	At Risk Attendance	Moderate Chronic Absence	Severe Chronic Absence	Acute Chronic Absence
Data we have:	Students Absent 0-9 days 0%-5.1%	Students Absent 10-19 days 5.6%-10.8%	Students Absent 20-29 days 11.3%-16.47%	Students Absent 30-39 days 17%-22%	Students Absent ≥ 40 days 22.7%+
# S. Lawndale HS Students Per Category	617	593	444	315	862
S. Lawndale	22%	21%	16%	11%	30%

% of HS Students					
South Lawndale # Elementary School Students Per Category	3,363	2,548	1,745	993	1,324
South Lawndale % of ES Students	42%	32%	15%	8%	7%

In addition to the neighborhoods analyzed above, in **Appendix V** we have additional analyses for Chicago's Englewood, South Shore, and Woodlawn neighborhoods to provide additional comparisons to the schools in our focus neighborhoods.

Neighborhood Insight #2: The High School Transition is a Critical Time for Absenteeism

Chronic Absenteeism trends upwards during points of transition. On average, we see increases in Chronic Absenteeism when transitioning from 8th grade to 9th grade across focus schools.

The graphs below outline key transition points from 8th grade to 9th grade in our three priority neighborhoods.

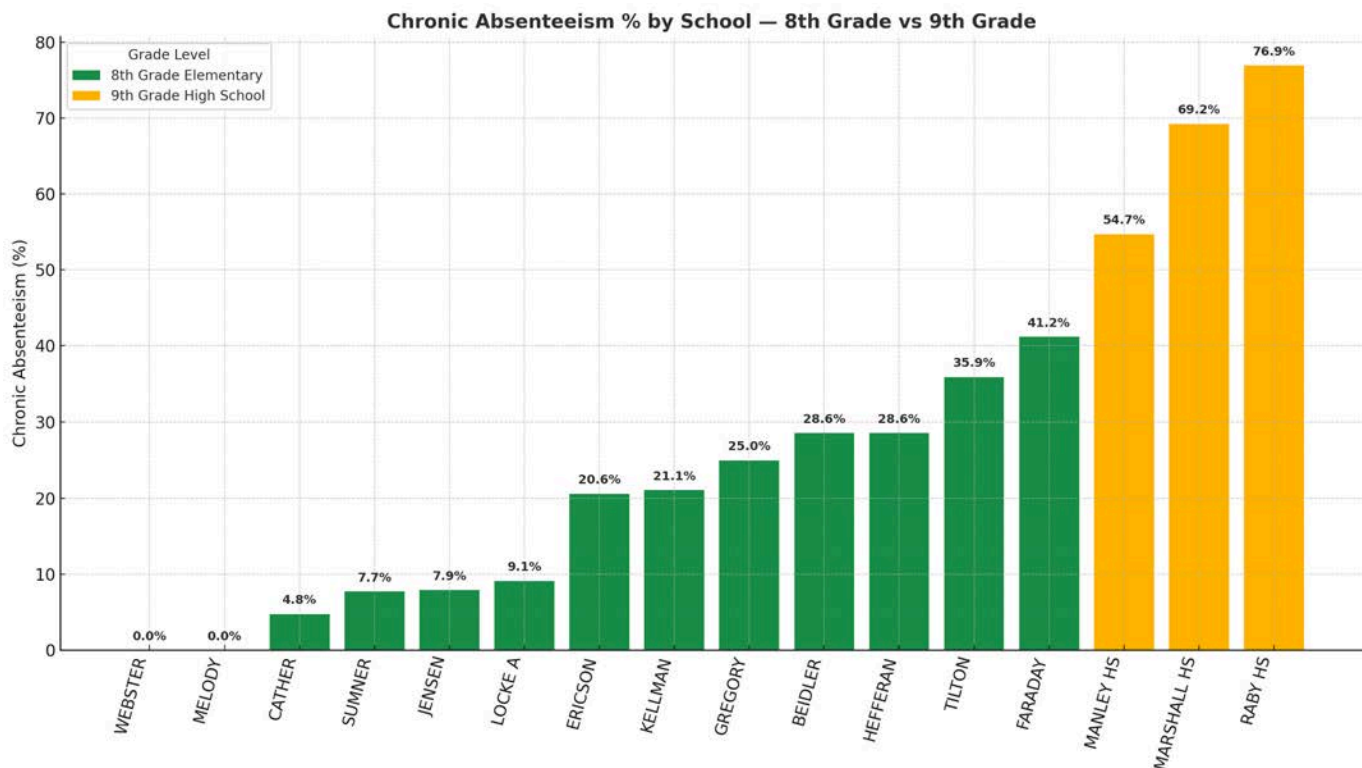


Fig. 4: Austin Transition 8th - 9th grade - SY23-24.

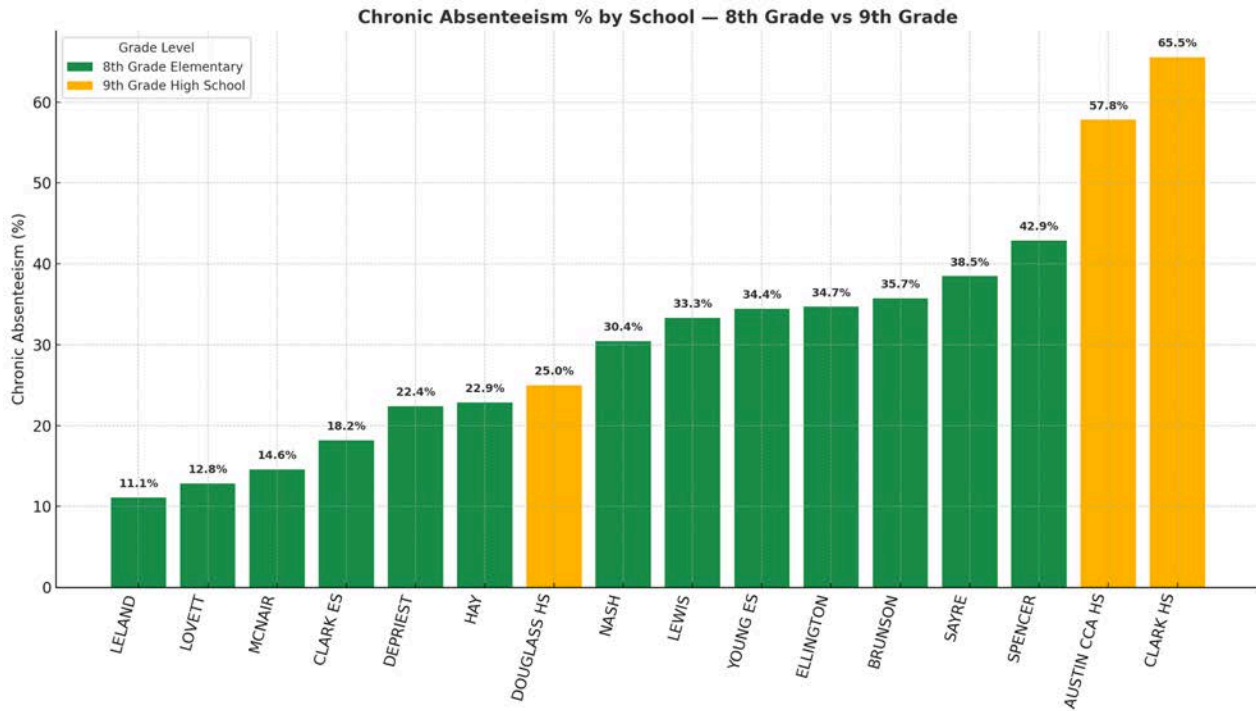


Fig. 5: Garfield Park Transition 8th - 9th grade - SY23-24.

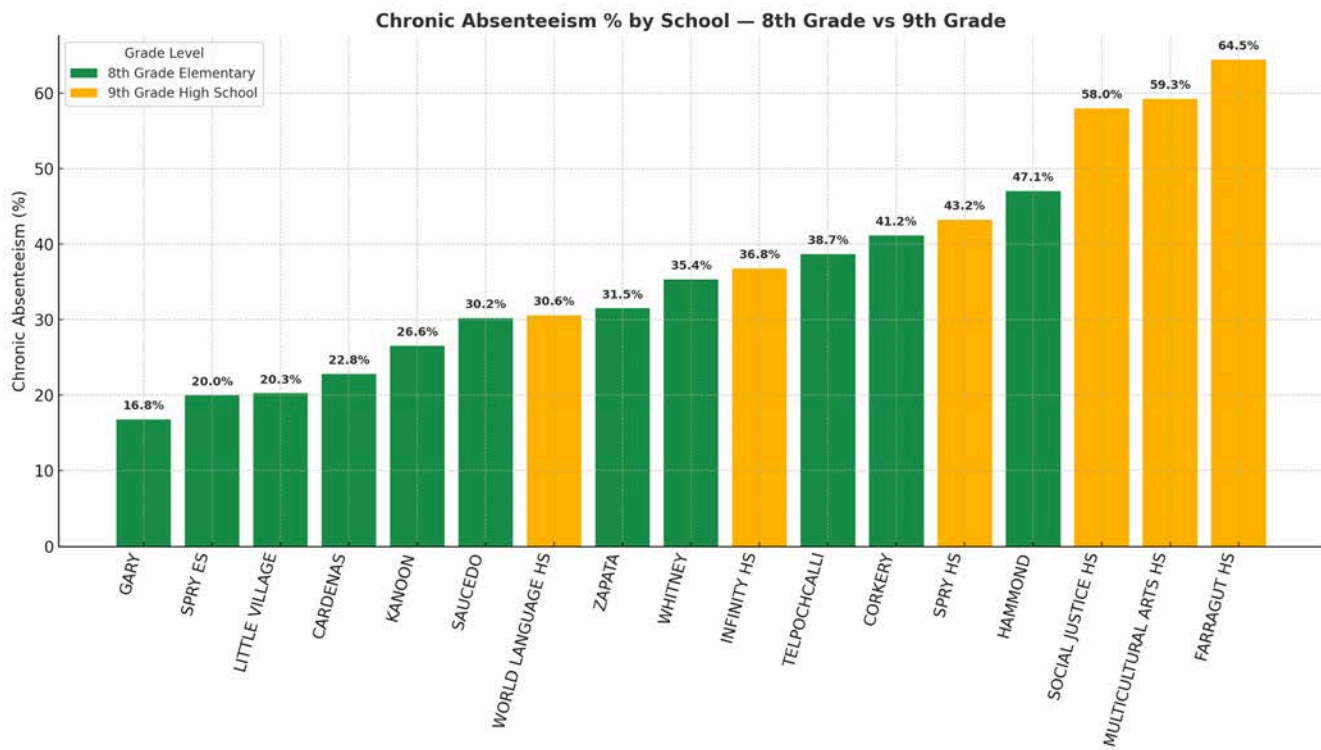


Fig. 6: South Lawndale Transition 8th - 9th grade - SY23-24.

Note: We know that not all 8th grade graduates matriculate to their neighborhood high schools, but for the purposes of this study and in these focus neighborhoods, we used data from the local schools.

Neighborhood Insight #3: Absenteeism Rises as Students Progress Through High School

The analysis shows a clear upward trend in chronic absenteeism as students advance from 9th to 12th grade.

The following graphs illustrate this upward trend across the focus high schools, underscoring the need for sustained engagement and interventions throughout the high school years.

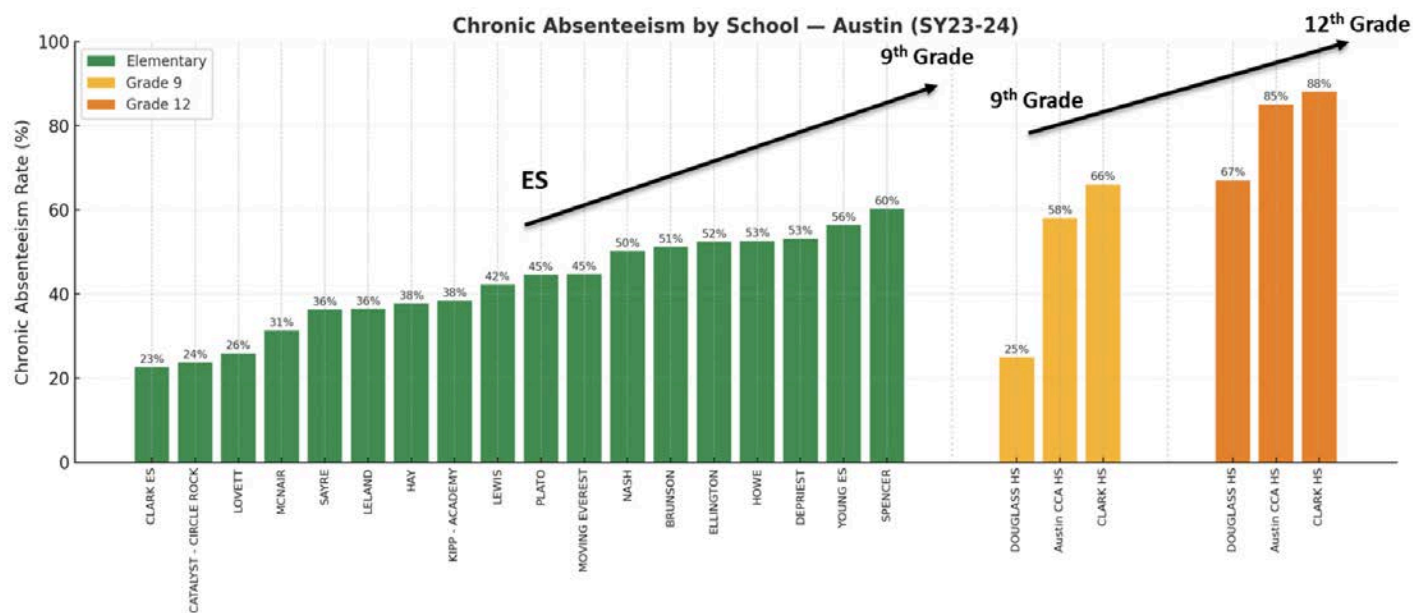


Fig. 7: Austin Grade Trends - Average Chronic Absenteeism - SY23-24.

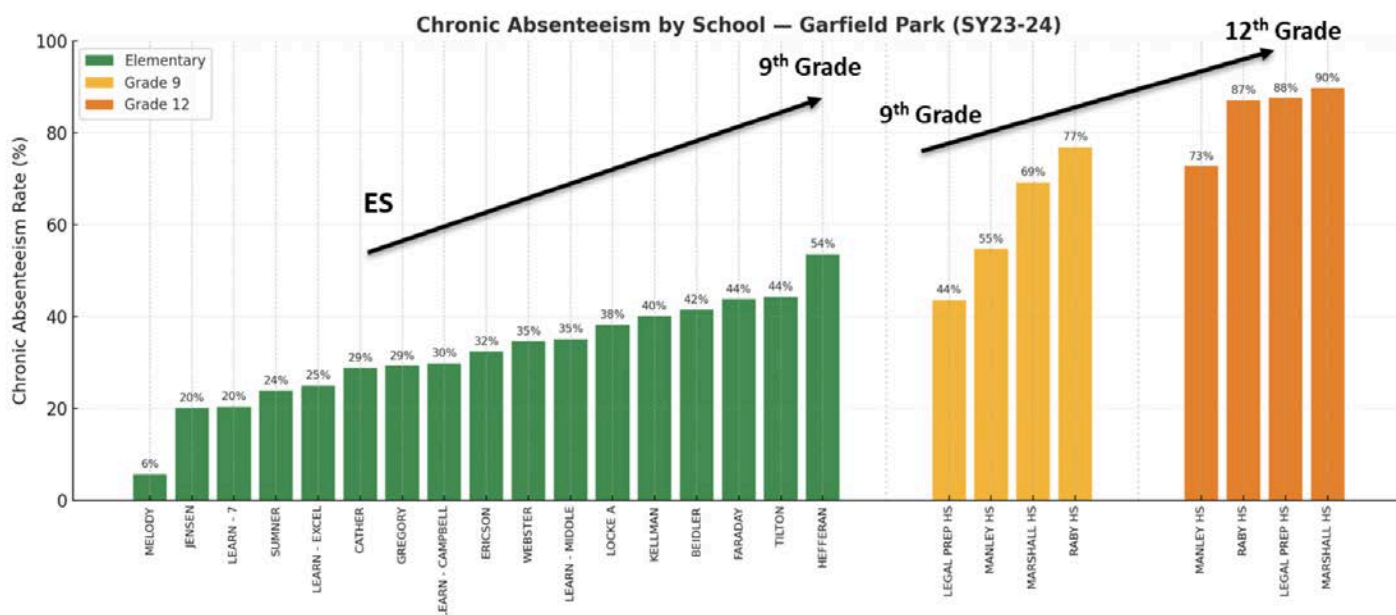


Fig. 8: Garfield Park Grade Trends - Average Chronic Absenteeism - SY23-24.

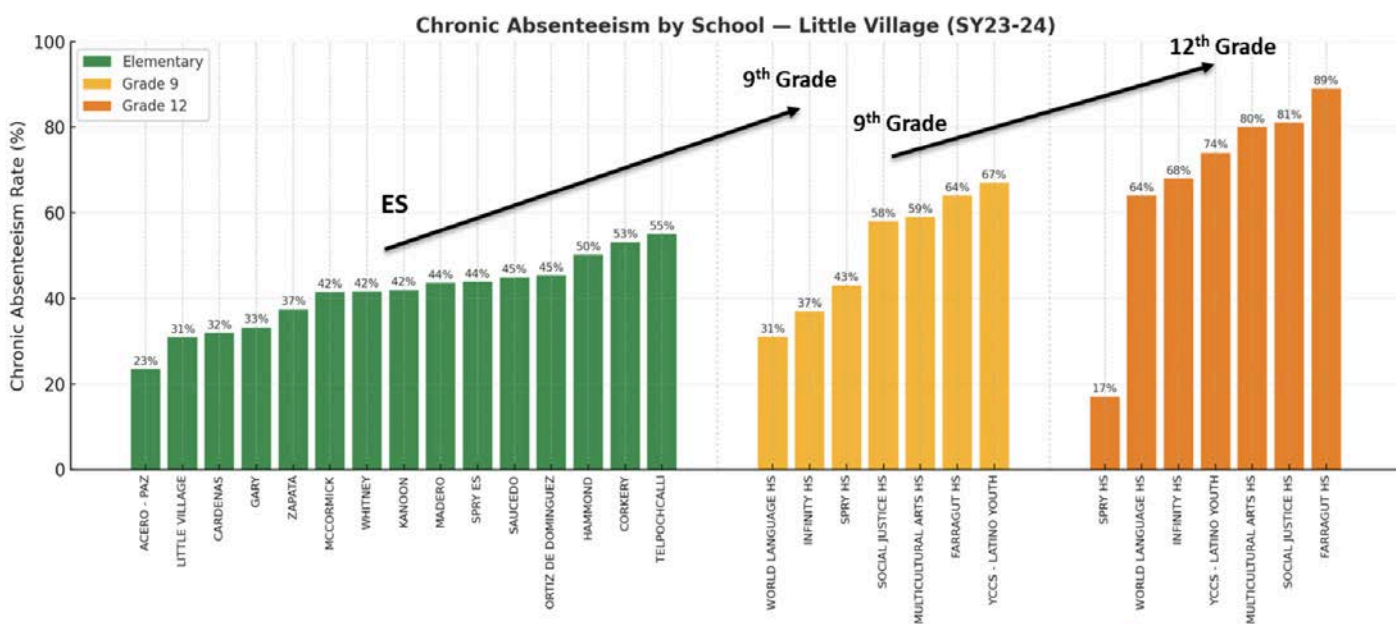


Fig. 9: South LAwndale Grade Trends - Average Chronic Absenteeism - SY23-24.

Neighborhood Insight #4: Elementary School Absenteeism Shows No Clear Pattern

Although there seems to be a consistent pattern as students progress through high school, there is no obvious pattern of Chronic Absenteeism as students progress through elementary school. The next few graphs show Chronic Absenteeism across sample schools in our focus neighborhoods.

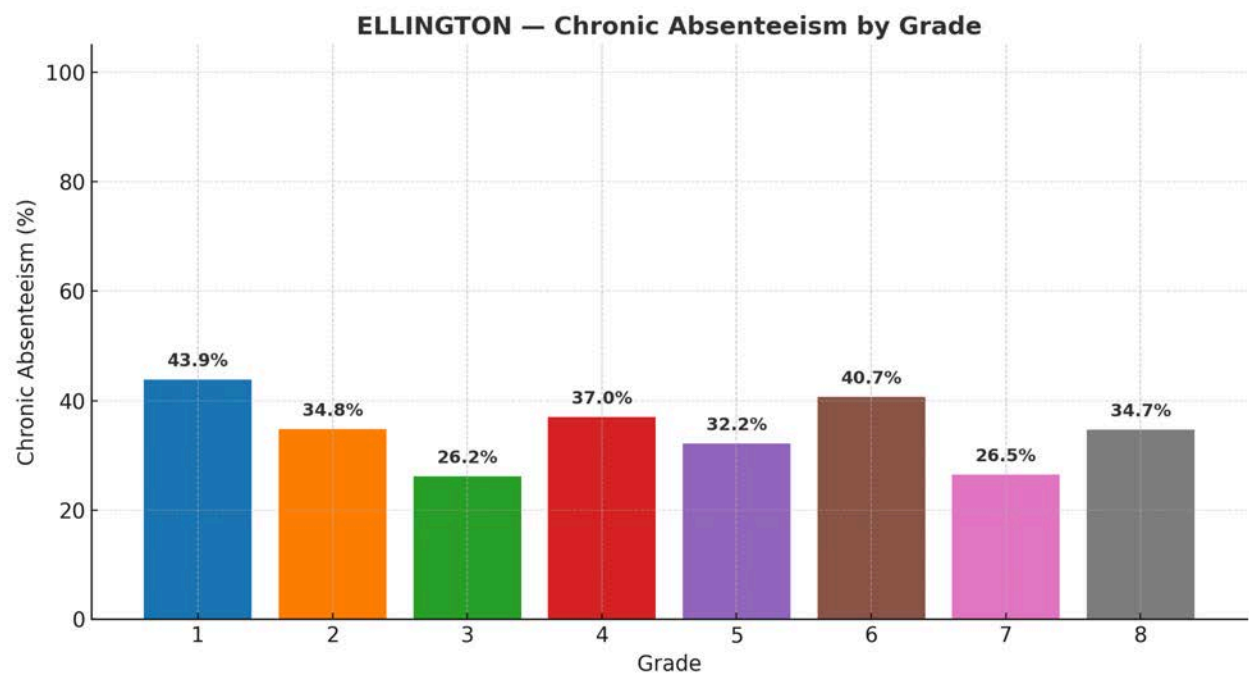


Fig. 10: Austin Example: ELLINGTON - SY23-24.

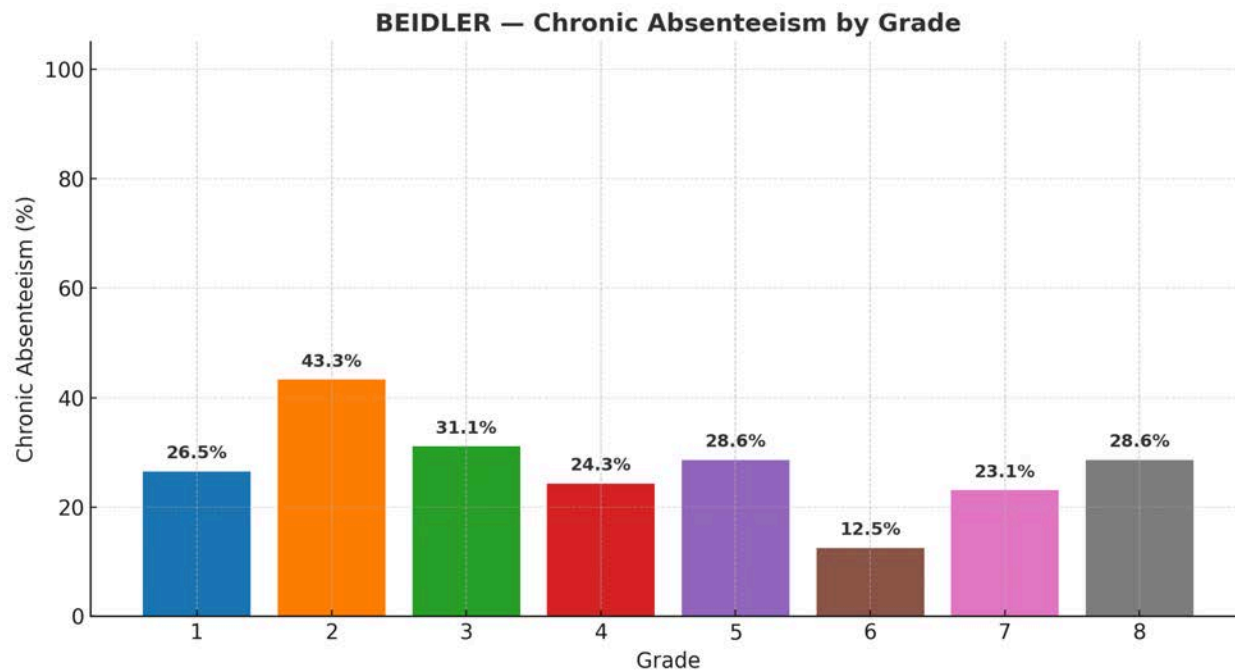


Fig. 11: Garfield Park Example: BEIDLER - SY23-24.

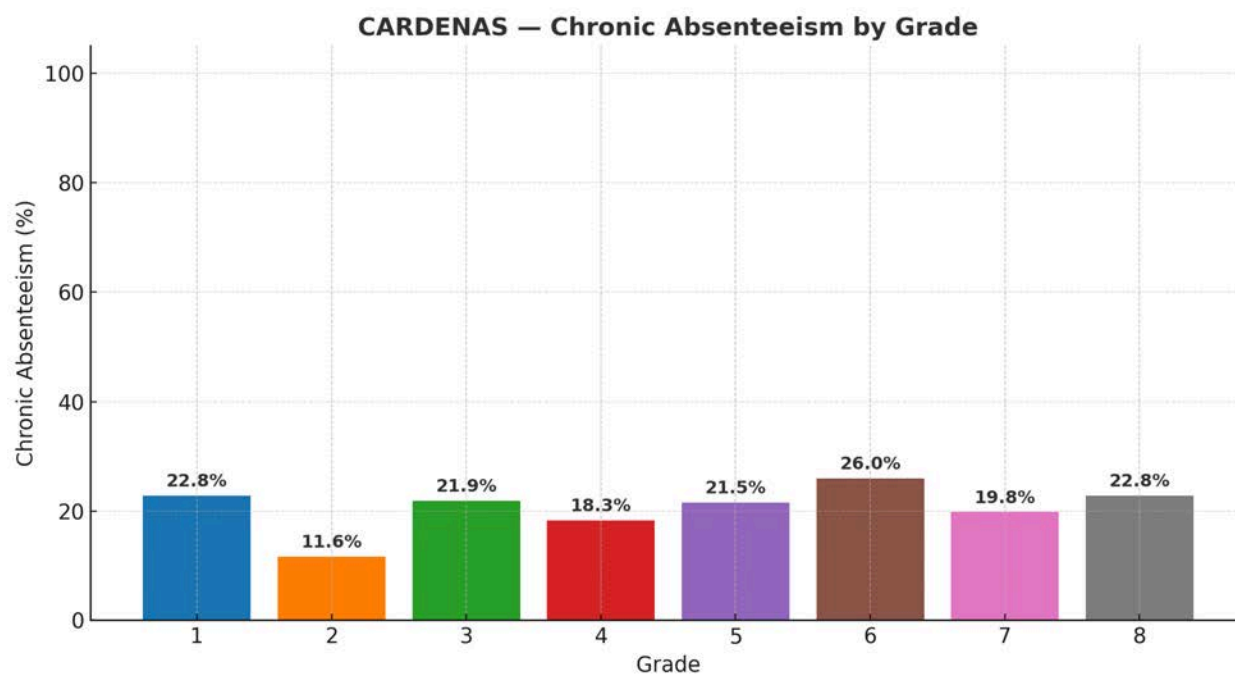


Fig. 12: South Lawndale Example: CARDENAS - SY23-24.

Examining Trends Across Various CPS Programs

In addition to the neighborhood analysis provided, the team aimed to better understand if there was a difference across district programming, including Communities in Schools, Selective Enrollment Programs, and we analyzed schools that are experiencing higher graduation rates, while experiencing higher chronic absenteeism. The next sections outline these findings.

Potential Lever: Community Schools

CPS has aimed significant investments towards a school model called the “Community School Initiative (CSI).” By partnering with local organizations, a CSI school provides integrated supports, which often include healthcare and mental health services, along with expanded learning opportunities and family engagement programs. This holistic approach aims to remove barriers to education and foster a supportive environment that improves student well-being and academic success. Since 2002, CPS has implemented the CSI in hundreds of CPS neighborhood schools with goals that include bringing together stakeholders to meet students’ and families’ academic and non-academic needs. This work is primarily funded by the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) grant. In cases where the funding is sent through a third party, instead of directly to CPS, the effort pairs the school with an external Lead Partner Agency, designating this model with the label, CSIx.

In addition, during the 2018–2019 school year, Chicago Public Schools (CPS), in collaboration and partnership with the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), began providing district funding to support the implementation of the Sustainable Community Schools (SCS) initiative in support of the Community School model in CPS neighborhood schools.

While the implementation of the program in Chicago is not directly aimed at improving attendance, there may be some anecdotal correlations to suggest opportunities to leverage the CSI/SCS approach to focus existing programs on this issue, thus building upon investments that have already been made. (Research discussed in the Interventions section shows that well-implemented CSI models can lead to improvements in student attendance.)

The snapshot below shows SY23–24 attendance outcomes for select elementary schools in our focus neighborhoods currently implementing one of the Community School models. Compared with their corresponding community-level averages, the data does not yet show a consistent pattern of positive impact of the Community School model on attendance; however, there are some bright spots where schools outperform their community averages. (A full List of CPS Elementary Schools with a Community School Model in focus communities can be found in Appendix VIII.)

Table 6: Attendance Bands for Select CPS Focus Elementary Schools with a Community School Model

School Name	Model	Number of Students	Satisfactory Attendance	At Risk Attendance	Moderate Chronic Absence	Severe Chronic Absence	Acute Chronic Absence	Combined Chronic Absence ≥ 20 days
Garfield Park								
Garfield Park Avg. Elementary Schools		4608	50%	29%	11%	5%	4%	21%
TILTON	CSI	261	38%	31%	13%	10%	8%	31%
FARADAY	CSI	199	46%	27%	15%	9%	4%	28%
JENSEN	CSI	302	60%	31%	5%	2%	2%	9%
MELODY	CSI	340	92%	4%	3%	1%	1%	4%
Austin								
Austin - Avg. Elementary Schools		7766	41%	30%	14%	6%	9%	29%
SPENCER - Austin	SCS	472	35%	28%	17%	9%	12%	38%
DEPRIEST	SCS	508	36%	29%	15%	8%	13%	35%
LELAND	CSI	345	54%	25%	10%	7%	3%	20%
South Lawndale								
S. Lawndale Avg. Elementary Schools		7042	42%	31%	14%	6%	7%	27%
TELPOCHCALLI	CSIx	279	30%	30%	17%	9%	13%	39%
MADERO	CSIx	269	36%	30%	17%	6%	11%	34%
KANOON	CSIx	446	41%	30%	13%	6%	10%	28%
MCCORMICK	SCS	448	43%	30%	13%	8%	6%	27%

Selective Enrollment Elementary School (SEES) Programs and Attendance Implications

We examined CPS Selective Enrollment Elementary School Programs to assess whether there were any patterns in their attendance measurements. The three programs that we analyzed were:

- 1) Regional Gifted Center (RGC) – defined as a K-8 school that offers “an accelerated instructional program that places an emphasis on thinking, reasoning, problem solving, and creativity.”
- 2) Classical School – defined as a K-8 School that provides “an accelerated program in literature, mathematics, language arts, and the humanities.”
- 3) Hybrid School – defined as a K-8 school that hosts both “gifted and neighborhood programs.” These schools may house Regional Gifted Center classes, but also offer general education classrooms to non-RGC students.

On average, schools that were “Fully Selective Enrollment (SE) - either a RGC or Classical School - showed stronger attendance in the category of “Satisfactory Attendance” (0-9 days absent) over Hybrid schools or the average across all CPS Elementary Schools.

Full Selective Enrollment Schools (RGC or Classical) vs. Hybrid Schools Attendance Bands

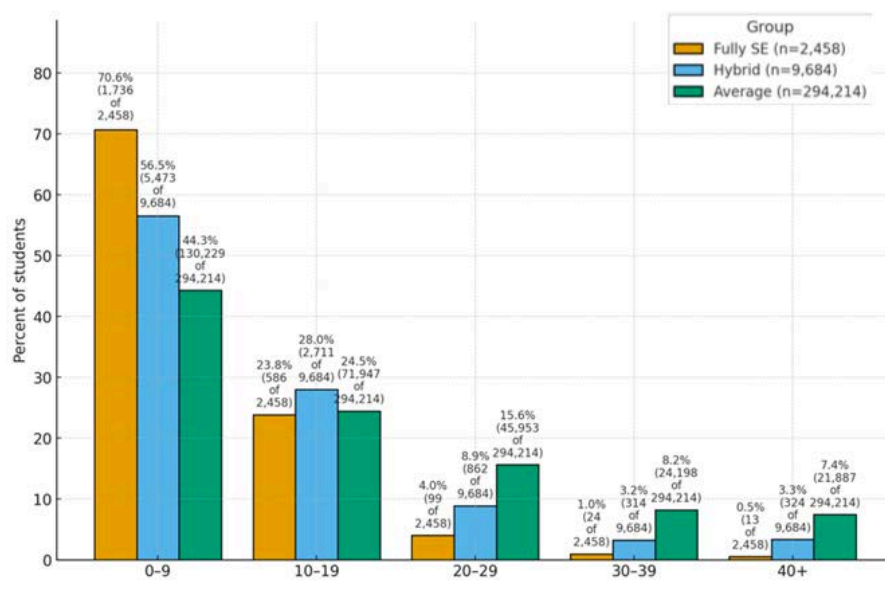


Fig. 13: Graph of full selective enrollment schools (RGC or classical) vs. hybrid schools attendance bands.
Source: CPS 2023-24

This is further illustrated when each school is examined individually for the “Satisfactory Attendance” band (0-9 days absent.) The trend shows that most of the schools that are full Selective Enrollment programs show a higher level of “Satisfactory Attendance” than most of the schools that house hybrid programs.

Schools Ranked by % Students with 0–9 Days Absent

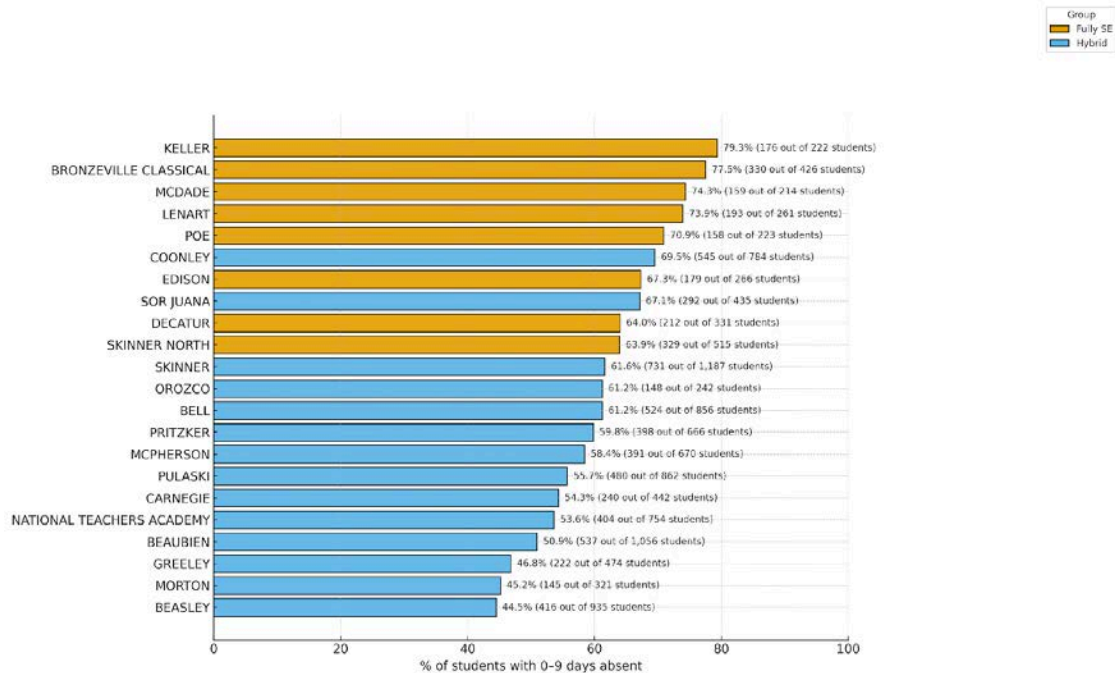


Fig. 14: Graph of SE schools ranked by percentage of students with 0-9 days absent.
Source: CPS 2023-24

Selective Enrollment High Schools

Admission to Selective Enrollment High Schools is highly competitive within Chicago Public Schools, requiring students to meet rigorous criteria to vie for limited available seats. These schools are designed to “*provide academically advanced high school students with a challenging and enriched college preparatory experience through a rigorous curriculum of honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses.*”

Because earning admission reflects both high academic ability and commitment, it can be assumed that students in these programs are often strongly motivated to maintain consistent attendance and strong performance.

Accordingly, a review of attendance data show that most Selective Enrollment High Schools have a higher-than-district-average share of students with “satisfactory attendance” (0-9 days absent.)

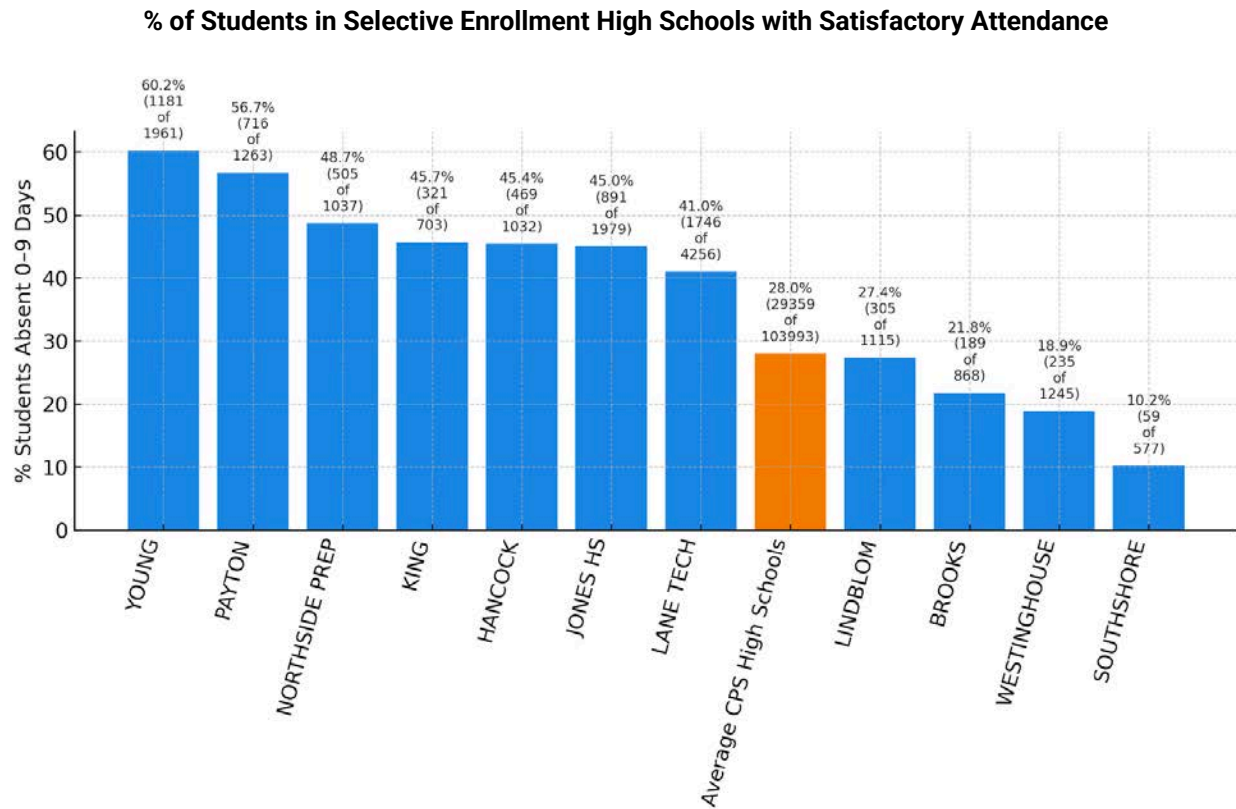


Fig. 15: Graph of percentage of students in selective enrollment high schools with satisfactory attendance.
Source: CPS 2023-24

While these attendance averages appear promising, when we examine attendance patterns as students move from 9th to 12th grade, the data show that even Chicago’s most selective and academically rigorous high schools are not insulated from the realities of attendance decline.

Like their non-selective peers, the selective enrollment high schools, on average, face a steady rise in chronic absenteeism from 9th to 12th grade, a reminder that attendance challenges cut across all school types.

The graph below demonstrates the increase in chronic absenteeism across all schools.

High School Selective Enrollment Grade Trends - Average Chronic Absenteeism

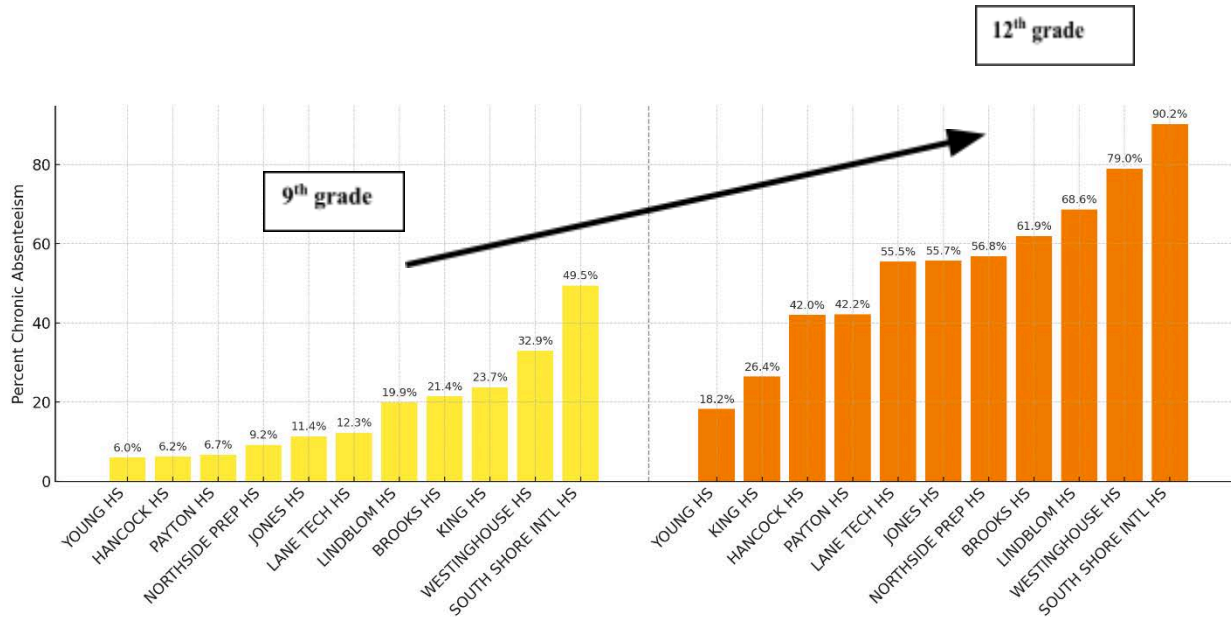


Fig. 16: Graph of high school selective enrollment grade trends and average Chronic Absenteeism.

Attendance in Relation to High School Outcomes

Finally, we conducted an analysis of CPS outcomes data. The next set of tables show examples of CPS high schools reporting higher 4-year graduation rates but experiencing higher chronic absenteeism, schools reporting stronger postsecondary enrollment within 12 months, but experiencing higher rates of absenteeism, and finally schools meeting both 4-year graduation rate and postsecondary enrollment within 12 months, but experiencing higher rates of chronic absenteeism.

Table 7: Examples of CPS High Schools Reporting Higher 4-Year Graduation ($\geq 70\%$) but experiencing Higher Chronic Absenteeism ($\geq 66\%$), SY23-24

School	% Grad (4-yr)	% College (12 mo)	% Chronic Abs.	Enrollment
North Lawndale College Prep Collins	86.7%	47.5%	89.3%	373
Crane Medical Prep HS	84.7%	57.0%	85.9%	264
Julian High School	77.1%	35.3%	84.2%	445
Clark Acad Prep Magnet High School	82.2%	52.9%	82.8%	391

Walter Henri Dyett High School for the Arts	87.0%	52.9%	74.7%	500
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Table 8: CPS High Schools Reporting Stronger Postsecondary enrollment within 12 months $\geq 60\%$ but experiencing Higher Chronic Absenteeism ($\geq 66\%$), SY23-24

School	% Grad (4-yr)	% College (12 mo)	% Chronic Abs.	Enrollment
Farragut Career Academy HS	59.8%	69.0%	84.6%	490
Raby High School	60.0%	64.9%	78.5%	146
Uplift Community High School	59.1%	87.5%	74.1%	158

Table 9: Examples of CPS High Schools meeting both 4-year graduation rate $\geq 70\%$ and Postsecondary enrollment within 12 months $\geq 60\%$ but experiencing Higher Chronic Absenteeism ($\geq 66\%$), SY23-24

School	% Grad (4-yr)	% College (12 mo)	% Chronic Abs.	Enrollment
Juarez Community Academy HS	82.1%	69.9%	73.7%	1540
South Shore Intl Col Prep HS	80.9%	71.3%	73.3%	562
Morgan Park High School	83.7%	67.3%	71.5%	1168
Curie Metropolitan High School	76.4%	65.3%	70.4%	2898
Senn High School	83.7%	70.9%	67.4%	1448

Summary of Key Insights

The analysis reveals that chronic absenteeism in Chicago is a complex issue requiring a more nuanced approach. Instead of a traditional definition, we've identified five distinct bands of absenteeism to gain a clearer picture of the challenge.

These insights underscore the need for a **targeted, data-driven strategy that addresses the unique challenges faced by students at different grade levels and in different neighborhoods. Further, our findings highlight:**

- **Disproportionate Concentration:** The most significant finding is the high concentration of students in the "Extreme (Acute) Chronic Absence" band (missing 40+ days of school) within the communities of **Garfield Park, Austin, and South Lawndale**. This highlights the need for targeted, intensive interventions in these areas.
- **Critical Transition Points:** The data also shows a concerning trend of increasing chronic absenteeism during key transition points, particularly from 8th to 9th grade and as they progress through 12th grade.
- **Elementary vs. High School:** In contrast, elementary school absenteeism data shows no consistent pattern across different grade levels, indicating that the factors driving absences are different for younger students and may be more localized.

5. CPS POLICY SCAN & IMPLEMENTATION GAPS

Chicago Public Schools has established a strong foundation of written policies, including a comprehensive set that can serve as effective levers to address chronic absenteeism. This analysis finds that rather than creating new policies, the greater opportunity lies in strengthening implementation across the system. Consistent tracking and alignment of practices across schools will be essential to realizing the full impact of these policies.

This section outlines the existing policies and identifies where A Better Chicago's support can most effectively close the persistent gaps between policy intent and on-the-ground reality.

Table 10: High Level Comparison of CPS policies from 2006 to 2022

2006 Policy (06-0222-P02)	2022 Policy (22-0622-P01)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on compliance • Focus on truancy • Tone more punitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on supports • More proactive • Tone more holistic

Table 11: Comprehensive Attendance Policy Comparison (2022 vs. 2006)

Category	2006 Policy	2022 Policy
Communications of Unexcused Absences	Mandatory robocalls and the option for personal phone calls if "feasible." Schools were also required to generate and send letters for 5 and 10 unexcused absences.	Mandatory robocalls, and also daily outgoing calls for all unreported absent students for the purpose of child safety. These calls must be logged. Mandatory letters for 5 and 10 unexcused absences are still required.
Make Up Work	N/A	All schools must develop and communicate a fair and equitable make-up work policy at the start of each year. This is a critical change, especially for students experiencing hardship, such as homelessness, pregnancy, or chronic illness.
Truancy Tracking	High emphasis on managing "Truancy" with punitive, compliance-driven measures. This included a 24/7 Truancy Hotline for citizens and businesses to report truant students. The policy also	No mention of how to manage "Truancy." The term is only used in definitions to differentiate a "Chronic Truant" (absent 5% or more without valid cause) from a "Chronically Absent" student (absent 10%

	utilized the Department of Chronic Truant Adjudication.	or more). This indicates a shift away from a punitive enforcement model.
Inter-Agency Coordination	Encouraged compliance-driven measures by linking attendance to housing, welfare, legal, and child welfare systems. This included coordinating with the Chicago Housing Authority and the Illinois Department of Public Aid to address attendance issues.	N/A

Broader Policy Connections

Beyond the core attendance policies, the policy scan reveals that over the years, CPS has adopted a suite of other policies that act as "attendance levers," demonstrating a more holistic approach to student well-being and connectedness. These policies recognize that attendance is often a symptom of deeper issues and aim to provide support to address them. In addition, there are other police/guidance that can impact student attendance indirectly and are categorized into these three categories:

- Connectedness
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Grading and Promotions

Below are a few key examples, a complete summary of CPS policies that have potential attendance levers can be found in Appendix IX.

- **Connectedness: Whole School Safety (22-0622-P01):** This policy mandates that every school has a Behavioral Health Team, which links safety concerns to well-being and, by extension, attendance. In addition, the policy requires every school to ensure that every student has a trusted adult that they have a relationship with to support their well-being.
- **Mental Health and Wellbeing: Comprehensive Mental Health & Suicide Prevention (22-0323-P01):** This policy allows for up to **five mental/behavioral health days** for students, directly addressing a primary barrier to attendance identified in our research. It also guides schools on forming Behavioral Health Teams.
- **Mental Health and Wellbeing: Student in Temporary Living Situations (STLS) (24-1101-P03):** This policy specifically focuses on removing systemic barriers that cause chronic absence for STLS students, acknowledging that housing insecurity is a major driver of non-attendance.
- **Grading and Promotion: Student Homework (23-0928-P01):** This policy aims to clarify homework expectations and supports remediation plans for students who need to make up work, a clear attempt to keep chronically absent students from falling behind academically.
- **Grading and Promotion: Minimum High School Requirements (17-0524-P01):** This policy outlines the minimum graduation requirements for high school students, including the requirement that all students must have a post-secondary plan, as implemented through the "Learn.Plan.Succeed" initiative, linking attendance to the motivation for students to reach their stated future goals.

- **Grading and Promotion: Joint CTU–CPS set of Professional Grading Standards & Practices:** Beginning SY 2017-18, CPS issued new guidance where schools could adopt school-wide grading practices including the notion of “no-zero” grading. It is important to note that CPS did not impose requirements across all schools, however, deferred to local school-level adoption and codified using protocols such as school handbooks and Continuous Improvement Work Plans (CIWP). Some schools have anecdotally expressed concerns that “no-zero” grading may have contributed to the de-valuing of consistent, in-person attendance.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our analysis, we recommend that A Better Chicago's future investments focus on a three-pronged approach to address chronic absenteeism at its root causes.

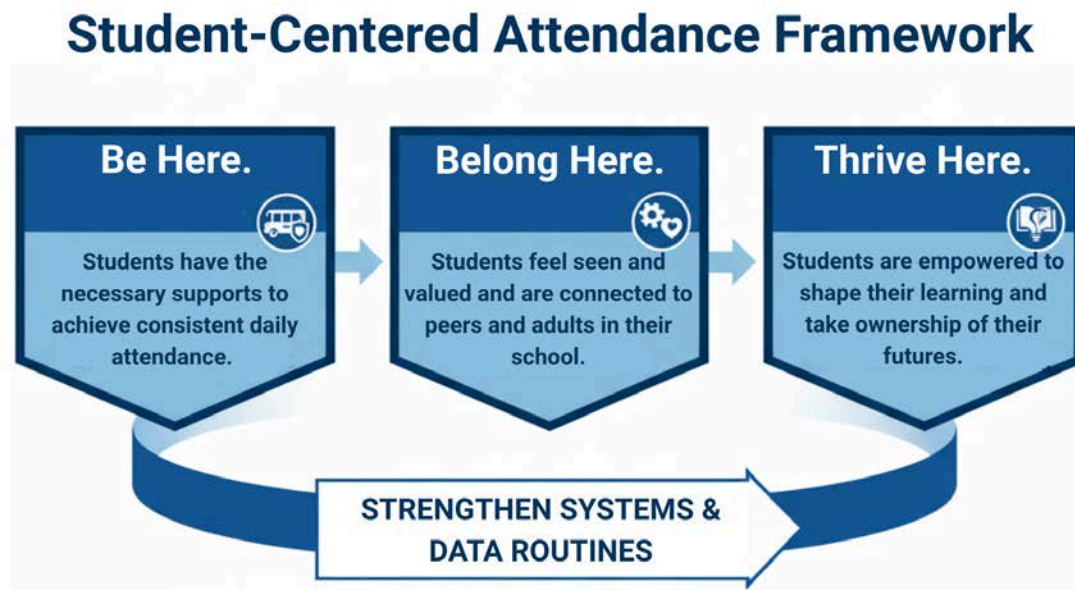


Figure 2: Student-Centered Attendance Framework.

Pillar I: Be Here.

This pillar addresses the foundational, logistical barriers that prevent students from attending school. Investments should aim to create a safe, healthy, and stable environment for students outside of and on their way to the school building.

- **Recommendation 1: Work Across Sectors to Build Citywide Urgency around Reducing Absenteeism.** Chronic absenteeism is not just an education problem – it also has dimensions of public health, safety, transportation, etc. Therefore, any meaningful citywide solution must engage a wide range of agencies, departments, and organizations. A Better Chicago should lead the charge in calling for the creation of partnerships between entities such as mental and physical health providers, the Chicago Housing Authority, the CTA, and other city agencies working together and directly with Chicago Public Schools to address the structural barriers and root causes that lead to chronic absence. These efforts have proven fruitful in cities like Washington DC and Richmond, VA and are also essential here. **Chicago examples include:** Chicago Connected Initiative to connect students to the internet during the pandemic, Community Action Councils, or CACS, Quality of Life Planning Cycles (QoLP), and other community-centric tables that bring diverse groups together.

- **Recommendation 2: Leverage local community-based organizations and school partners to tackle this issue head on.** Research suggests that chronic absenteeism is fundamentally school-specific, though neighborhood context and access to resources certainly play a role. A Better Chicago and its partners should lean in on school-based community partnerships to ensure they are focused on removing barriers to attendance by helping families access essential resources for basic needs like food, housing, and clothing. Dedicated roles, such as "Community Navigators," have proven effective in other cities to help connect families to needed resources in caring ways. **Chicago examples include:** Parent Mentors, COFI Power PAC, community navigator programs implemented by grassroots organizations.
- **Recommendation 3: Consider investing in flexible programming:** Post-pandemic, we see norms shifting about the value of in-person school. We recommend A Better Chicago explore and consider investing in alternative models of schooling and programs that provide flexibility in ways that are responsive to student needs, schedules, and interests, particularly at the high school level. Work-study type programs, virtual and hybrid offerings, even models like CreditFlex being innovated by the Reinvention Lab at Teach for America are examples worth looking into. Programs with flexible schedules and shorter school days might also accommodate students who need to work or care for family members. **Chicago examples include:** Personalized learning programs, Back to our Future, and other programs that offer flexibility.

Pillar II: Belong Here.

This pillar focuses on fostering a sense of belonging and building strong relationships with students and families, which our qualitative data shows are critical drivers of attendance. Investments should center on strengthening the human element of the school experience.

- **Recommendation 1: Support and Expand Mentorship Programs:** Research shows that adult-student and peer mentorship programs build a sense of belonging and community among students. Peer to peer mentoring programs can often be implemented in cost-effective ways and could provide a dual benefit of engaging upperclass students and helping freshmen navigate what we know is a challenging transition that leads to reduced school attendance. **Chicago examples include:** Choose to Change, BAM, WOW, Project One-Ten, Kenwood Academy Brotherhood and other efforts that foster and enable adult-student and peer-to-peer connections.
- **Recommendation 2: Create an Expectation that All Students are Connected:** Whether through sports, extracurricular activities, clubs, programs offered by OST partners, jobs, and so on, ensure that all students – particularly at the high school level - are connected to something outside of their academic classes that they enjoy. **Chicago Examples Include:** The Bloc, Project Exploration, Chicago Youth Centers, ACT Now Illinois.
- **Recommendation 3: Deepen and Expand Efforts to Engage Families:** As we've seen in other cities as well as in the Learning Heroes/TNTP study of Illinois, family engagement is a protective factor that supports improved attendance. Whether through working to shift norms around parent engagement from "blame and shame" to partnership and support, training and hiring parents to conduct outreach and home visits, inviting parents in and really listening to their hopes and dreams for their children to foster trust and belonging, the partnership between families and schools is essential to reducing

chronic absence. This can also include improving communication between schools and families, using research-based language and possibly technology tools. **Chicago examples include:** CPS Parent University, Parent Mentor networks, Intrinsic’s Parent Ambassador programming, Kids First Chicago, Raise Your Hand, and other parent-empowerment networks. Apps that enable two-way communication, such as Remind or School Connect, streamline translation, especially in areas that are densely populated with non-English speakers.

Pillar III: Thrive Here.

This pillar ensures that once students are in school and connected, their learning experience is relevant and compelling. It addresses the internal, instructional factors that can lead to disengagement and absence.

- **Recommendation 1: Invest in Engaging School Designs:** Prioritize pilot programs that explore whether changes to school design, such as advisory periods and hands-on learning, can improve student engagement and attendance. **Chicago examples include:** Summer Leadership Institute, The Chicago Public Education Fund’s Design Challenge, the CPS School Design RFP (when applicable), LEAP Innovations
- **Recommendation 2: Expand Career-Connected Learning and Programs with Real-World Exposure:** Students, especially at the high school level, have told us loud and clear that school feels disconnected from “real life” and their plans for their futures. Now is the time to double down on programs like internships, CTE programs, opportunities for workplace exposure and job shadowing, etc. **Chicago examples include:** Genesys Works, Embarc, Cristo Rey Schools, Early College programs
- **Recommendation 3: Involve Teachers in the Work of Reducing Chronic Absence.** Teacher-student relationships, student perceptions of teacher respect, cultural and real-world relevance of classroom content all play a role in whether students choose to come to school. Teachers need to be engaged in looking at absenteeism data, using survey results to encourage student voice and input into classroom environment and practices, conducting outreach to families, and knowing their students well in order to tailor instruction to their needs and interests. Now we know that this is an incredibly difficult time to be a teacher, so in addition to offering professional development and coaching support, attention must also be paid to teacher wellness, especially at a time when we are facing chronic teacher absence in addition to chronic student absence. **Chicago examples include:** Network for College Success, Teach Plus, CPS Wellness Plan

Foundational Practices: Strengthen Systems and Data Routines

- **Recommendation 1: Advocate for More Nuanced Attendance Reporting:** -The existing approach to CPS attendance data does not give the full picture. We recommend adopting the attendance models used by Attendance Works and other national partners for measuring and reporting on chronic absenteeism. These models use more detailed bands with clear descriptors, helping schools better understand the level of challenge, target interventions, and monitor changes over time with greater nuance. **Chicago examples include:** CPS’ MTSS Models, CPS’ continuous improvement working plans or CIWP.

- **Recommendation 2: Partner with Chicago Public Schools to strengthen implementation of policies related to student connectedness:** As we analyzed CPS policies relevant to absenteeism, we were struck by how many of them could be leveraged to improve attendance. These include an expectation that every student be connected to a trusted adult, requirements that all schools have Behavioral Health Teams, expectations for Student Voice Committees, and the creation of individualized post-secondary plans. While we know that tremendous challenges lie in policy implementation, the warrant for improved practice is there and perhaps by honing in on a subset of schools in focus communities, strategies for improving the way in which schools engage with these policies locally certainly seem worth testing.
- **Recommendation 3: Leverage Rich Data Sources to Improve Classroom and School Climate:** Years of research, much from right here in Chicago, has demonstrated the importance of “non-cognitive factors” in learning, and a sense of belonging is chief among them. In Chicago, we have rich data sources that shed light on school and classroom environments through 5Essentials, Cultivate, and other tools like PERTS Elevate. A Better Chicago could find ways to increase use and follow-through based on the data these tools provide in the form of coaching. **Chicago examples include:** To&Through Middle Grades Network, TeachPlus Network for School Improvement, Network for College Success Partner Schools

7. CONCLUSION

This comprehensive landscape analysis confirms that **Chronic Absenteeism** in Chicago is not merely a post-pandemic issue, but a profound systemic crisis that demands urgent, coordinated action. Our work, spanning data, policy, and direct stakeholder engagement, points to a clear, actionable path forward.

The Crisis and Its Scope

We established in the Executive Summary that chronic absenteeism, particularly the rise of Acute Chronic Absence (missing 40+ days), is jeopardizing the long-term potential of thousands of CPS students. This is a challenge of equity, disproportionately affecting Black and Hispanic/Latinx students in specific, high-need communities. Just as Chicago rallied to dramatically improve graduation rates through Freshman OnTrack, we must now apply that same collective will and focus to attendance.

Learning from the External Context

Our National Scan and Intervention Mapping demonstrate that successful outcomes are not random. Districts like Washington DC and Richmond, VA, have made measurable progress by adopting multi-level, coordinated strategies. Key to their success are integrated supports like structured mentoring, high-impact family engagement (such as home visits), improved communication, and systems-level coordination across health, public safety, and education.

The Human Reality: Root Causes

The Synthesis of Local Research and Stakeholder Findings provides the essential context that data alone cannot capture. Absenteeism is not a lack of motivation, but a manifestation of complex, intersecting barriers: severe mental health challenges, pervasive safety concerns, and a fundamental lack of belonging and connectedness in the school environment. These are the human drivers that any effective intervention must prioritize.

Validation in Local Data

The CPS Data Analysis provides the quantitative validation for this crisis, showing a clear concentration of the highest-need students in our focus communities. The data confirms that key transition points, especially the shift from 8th to 9th grade, are critical tipping points where students become disconnected. Furthermore, our Policy Scan revealed that while many good policies exist, the failure lies in the lack of consistent implementation and accountability, creating a crucial gap between intent and impact.

Path to Action: Our Three-Pillar Framework

To move beyond a fragmented approach, we propose the Three-Pillar Framework - Be Here, Belong Here, and Thrive Here - supported by foundational practices to strengthen data and systems. The recommendations laid out in this report are designed to be targeted, implementable, and sustainable, focusing on strengthening the student experience and the ecosystem around them.

A Better Chicago has a unique opportunity to catalyze a city-wide effort, leveraging Chicago's robust network of partners and its strong history of systemic improvement. By investing strategically in this framework, we can ensure every student is on a path toward a thriving learning environment and a successful future.

8. APPENDIX

Appendix I. Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the various partners who contributed to this analysis by providing their rich insights and perspectives.

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**Keating-Crawford,
Colleen**

Senior Researcher &
Designer
The Reinvention Lab at
Teach for America

Kemper, Dr. Sara

ED, Insights and
Research
Chicago Public Schools

Kennedy, Ellen

Principal
Richards Career
Academy

LoPiccolo, Jen

Director of School &
District Partnerships
Partnership for Student
Success

McKoy, Dominique

Executive Director
UChicago To&Through
Project

Malkin, Brian

Co-founder and CEO
Rang

McGee, Myisha

Director of High School &
Postsecondary
Education
Breakthrough Urban
Ministries

**Morgan-Greene, Dr
LaTacia**

Principal
Austin Career Academy

Moseley, Simone

Executive Director,
Student Support &
Engagement
Chicago Public Schools

Nanavati, Virag

Principal
Farragut Academy High
School

Pateria, Alka

Director of Strategy and
Partnerships
Council of Great City
Schools

Porter, Dr. Shanette

Director, Learning &
Development Group &
Research Assistant
Professor
UChicago Consortium on
School Research

Rubalcava, Carla

Managing Director of
Illinois Programs
Mikva Challenge

Slaughter, Drea

Executive Director
Garfield Park Right to
Wellness

Smith, Kimberly

Chief Inclusive
Innovation Officer
Digital Promise

Taylor, Dr. Curtis

Director
High Tech
High/Attendance Meta
Network

Vargas, Iliana

Director, Department of
Planning and Data
Management
Chicago Public Schools

Appendix II. National & Local Interviews

National Thought Leader Interviews	
Last Name, First Name	Organization/School/Foundation
Balfanz, Dr. Robert	Center for Social Organization of Schools Johns Hopkins/GRAD Partnerships
Bergman Ed.L.D., Eyal	Learning Heroes
Carlson, Kathleen	Bloomberg Associates & Philanthropies
Chang, Hedy	Attendance Works
Davis, Dr. Baron	Digital Promise
Duffy, Dr. Helen	Attendance Works
Frankowski, Sofi	Improve & Impact LLC
Germain, Dr. Emily	Former teacher, New York City & Austin, TX
Gibbs, Linda	Bloomberg Associates & Philanthropies
Harris, Dr. Shadae	Groundwork Consulting
Keating-Crawford, Collen	The Reinvention Lab at Teach for America
LoPiccolo, Jen	Partnership for Student Success
Smith, Kimberly	Digital Promise
Pateria, Alka	Partnerships Council of Great City Schools
Porter, Dr. Shanette	UChicago Consortium on School Research
Taylor, Dr. Curtis	High Tech High/Attendance Meta Network

Local Interviews	
Last Name, First Name	Organization/School/Foundation
Anello, Daniel	Kids First Chicago
Allensworth, Dr. Elaine	UChicago Consortium on School Research
Banks, Minister Johnny	A Knock at Midnight
Carmona Ed.D, Alfonso	Chicago Public Schools

Davis, Annie	Blackhawks Foundation
De la Torre, Marisa	UChicago Consortium on School Research
Fields, Yolanda	Breakthrough Urban Ministries
Gamboa, Maria	Multicultural Arts High School
Gerew, Nelson	The Chicago Public Education Fund
Guderyahn, Sarah	Blackhawks Foundation
Hougard, Meghan	Chicago Public Schools
Jackson, Dr. Janice K.	Aspen Institute
Kemper, Dr. Sara	Chicago Public Schools
Kennedy, Ellen	Richards Career Academy
McKoy, Dominique	UChicago To&Through Project
Malkin, Brian	Rang
McGee, Myisha	Breakthrough Urban Ministries
Morgan-Greene, Dr. LaTacia	Austin Career Academy
Nanavati, Virag	Farragut Academy High School
Rubalcava, Carla	Mikva Challenge
Slaughter, Drea	Garfield Park Right to Wellness
Vargas, Iliana	Chicago Public Schools

Appendix III. Focus Groups

Number of Attendees	Organization/School/Foundation
6	Multicultural Arts High School
3	Farragut Academy High School
2	Breakthrough Urban Ministries
2	CPS Parent
4	CPS staff (Admin/instructor/social worker)
2	CPS Principals

Appendix IV. Additional CPS Data Analysis for Englewood, South Shore, and Woodlawn schools

Englewood Community Analysis (SY23-24)

Chronic Absenteeism Bands	Satisfactory Attendance	At Risk Attendance	Moderate Chronic Absence	Severe Chronic Absence	Acute Chronic Absence
Data we have:	Students Absent 0-9 days 0%-5.1%	Students Absent 10-19 days 5.6%-10.8%	Students Absent 20-29 days 11.3%-16.47%	Students Absent 30-39 days 17%-22%	Students Absent ≥ 40 days 22.7%+
Englewood # High School Students per Category	127	181	156	105	693
Englewood % of High School Students	10.1%	14.3%	12.4%	8.3%	54.9%
Englewood # Elementary Students per Category	962	501	231	109	126
Englewood % of Elementary Students	49.9%	26.0%	12.0%	5.7%	6.5%

Elementary Schools: Bass, Bond, Kershaw, King, Mays, Nicholson

High School: Englewood STEM

South Shore Community

Chronic Absenteeism Bands	Satisfactory Attendance	At Risk Attendance	Moderate Chronic Absence	Severe Chronic Absence	Acute Chronic Absence
Data we have:	Students Absent 0-9 days 0%-5.1%	Students Absent 10-19 days 5.6%-10.8%	Students Absent 20-29 days 11.3%-16.47%	Students Absent 30-39 days 17%-22%	Students Absent ≥ 40 days 22.7%+
South Shore # High School Students per Category	622	524	347	232	362
South Shore % of High School Students	29.8%	25.1%	16.6%	11.1%	17.3%
South Shore # Elementary Students per Category	1105	745	409	263	316
South Shore % of Elementary Students	38.9%	26.3%	14.4%	9.3%	11.1%

Elementary Schools: Bouchet, Bradwell, O'Keeffe, Parkside, Powell

High Schools: Art in Motion HS*, South Shore International HS

*Note: Art in Motion HS is 7-12th grade – this data set only includes 9-12th grade

Woodlawn Community

Chronic Absenteeism Bands	Satisfactory Attendance	At Risk Attendance	Moderate Chronic Absence	Severe Chronic Absence	Acute Chronic Absence
Data we have:	Students Absent 0-9 days 0%-5.1%	Students Absent 10-19 days 5.6%-10.8%	Students Absent 20-29 days 11.3%-16.47%	Students Absent 30-39 days 17%-22%	Students Absent ≥ 40 days 22.7%+
Woodlawn # High School Students per Category	170	210	278	210	738
Woodlawn % of High School Students	10.6%	13.1%	17.3%	13.1%	46.0%
Woodlawn # Elementary Students per Category	996	719	291	153	179
Woodlawn % of Elementary Students	42.6%	30.8%	12.4%	6.5%	7.7%

Elementary Schools: Carnegie (Selective Enrollment), Fiske, Harte, Parkside, Ray, South Shore

High School: Hyde Park HS

Appendix V. CPS Data Analysis of CPS Schools Reporting Stronger Graduation and/or Post-Secondary Outcomes but experiencing Higher Chronic Absenteeism

Full List of CPS High Schools Reporting Higher 4-Year Graduation ($\geq 70\%$) but experiencing Higher Chronic Absenteeism ($\geq 66\%$)

School	% Grad (4-yr)	% College (12 mo)	% Chronic Abs.	Enrollment
Phillips Academy High School	74.1%	52.1%	89.5%	391
North Lawndale Prep Chtr-Collins	86.7%	47.5%	89.3%	373
Crane Medical Prep HS	84.7%	57.0%	85.9%	264
Dunbar Vocational Career Acad HS	72.4%	45.5%	84.7%	366
Julian High School	77.1%	35.3%	84.2%	445
Clark Acad Prep Magnet High Schl	82.2%	52.9%	82.8%	391
Wells Community Academy HS	73.7%	41.4%	80.5%	345
Collins Academy STEAM High School	74.1%	45.5%	75.2%	210
Walter Henri Dyett High School for the Arts	87.0%	52.9%	74.7%	500
CICS - Ralph Ellison Campus	73.5%	47.5%	73.7%	201
Schurz High School	76.4%	56.2%	73.5%	1219
Legal Prep Academy Charter HS	85.4%	32.1%	73.1%	211
Corliss High School	74.4%	34.3%	71.9%	279

North Lawndale Prep Chtr - Christiana	87.0%	55.1%	71.7%	299
Simeon Career Academy High School	85.6%	52.5%	71.4%	1067
Perspectives Chtr - High School of Technology	87.1%	41.8%	69.5%	418
Noble St Chtr-DRW Trading College Prep	79.2%	52.9%	68.9%	367
North-Grand High School	78.4%	56.9%	68.9%	1034
Roosevelt High School	75.2%	51.0%	67.4%	1094
Perspectives Chtr - IIT Campus	88.6%	48.5%	67.0%	396
Thomas Kelly College Preparatory	72.1%	57.6%	66.7%	1685

CPS High Schools Reporting Stronger Postsecondary enrollment within 12 months $\geq 60\%$ but experiencing with Higher Chronic Absenteeism ($\geq 66\%$), SY23-24

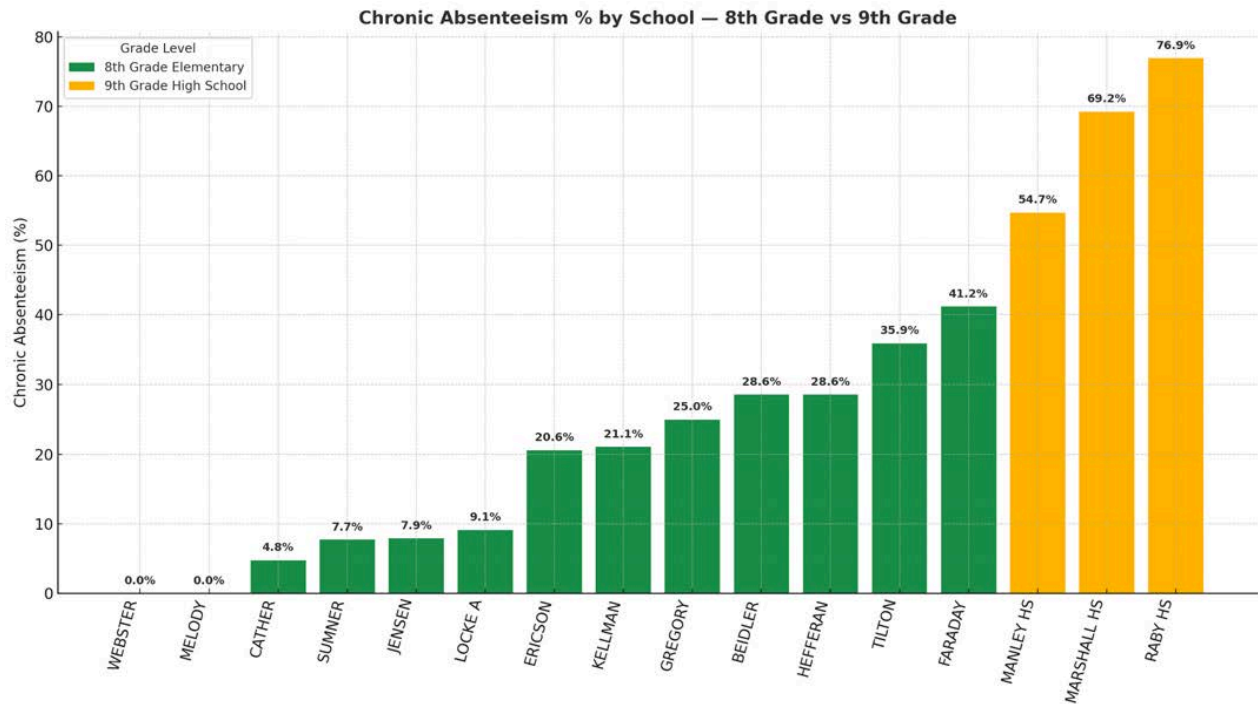
School	% Grad (4-yr)	% College (12 mo)	% Chronic Abs.	Enrollment
Farragut Career Academy HS	59.8%	69.0%	84.6%	490
Raby High School	60.0%	64.9%	78.5%	146
Uplift Community High School	59.1%	87.5%	74.1%	158

Full List of CPS High Schools meeting both 4-year graduation rate $\geq 70\%$ and Postsecondary enrollment within 12 months $\geq 60\%$ but experiencing with Higher Chronic Absenteeism ($\geq 66\%$), SY23-24

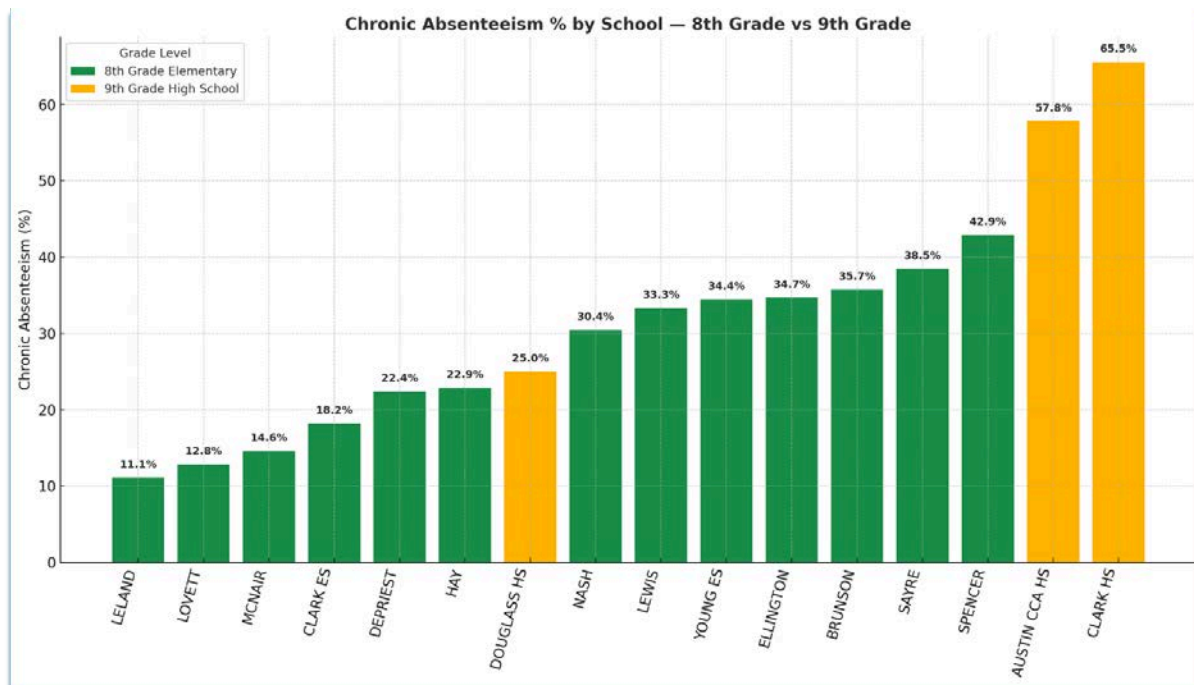
School	% Grad (4-yr)	% College (12 mo)	% Chronic Abs.	Enrollment
Hubbard High School	78.3%	60.2%	77.9%	1666
Spry Community Links High School	84.6%	61.1%	77.4%	60
Juarez Community Academy HS	82.1%	69.9%	73.7%	1540
South Shore Intl Col Prep HS	80.9%	71.3%	73.3%	562
Morgan Park High School	83.7%	67.3%	71.5%	1168
Curie Metropolitan High School	76.4%	65.3%	70.4%	2898
Washington G High School	85.3%	61.0%	68.3%	1499
Senn High School	83.7%	70.9%	67.4%	1448
Prosser Career Academy HS	89.2%	74.3%	66.4%	1163

Appendix VI. Transitions in Focus Neighborhoods

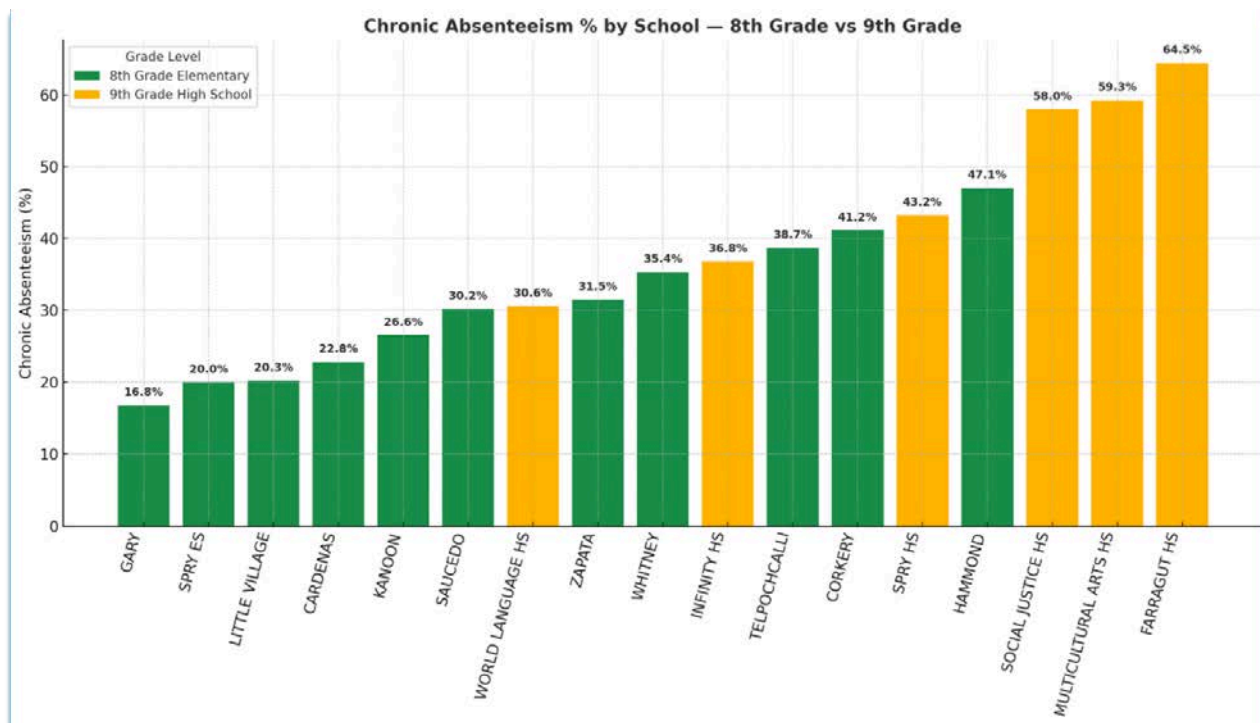
The graphs below outline key transition points from 8th grade to 9th grade in our priority neighborhoods.



Garfield Park Transition 8th - 9th grade - SY23-24



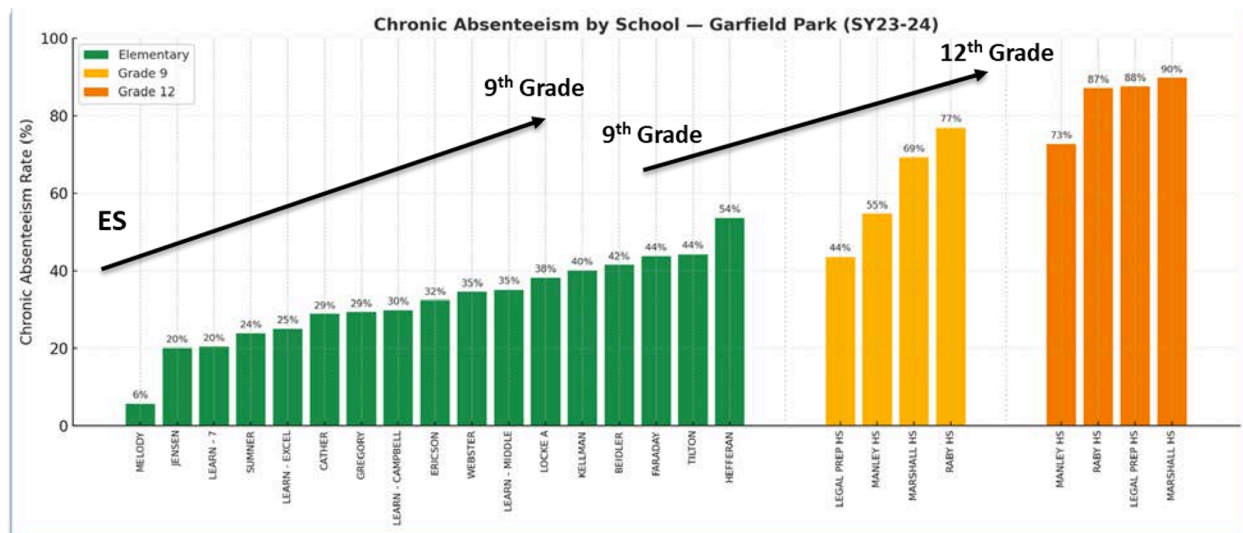
Austin Transition 8th - 9th Grade - SY23-24



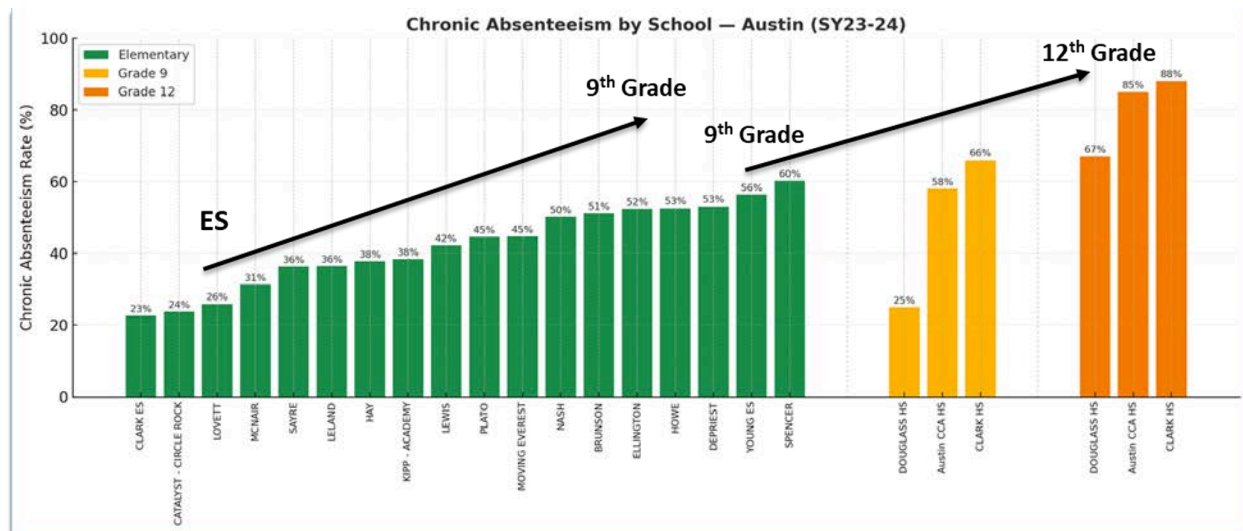
South Lawndale Transition 8th - 9th Grade - SY23-24

Appendix VII. Absenteeism Increases as High School Progresses

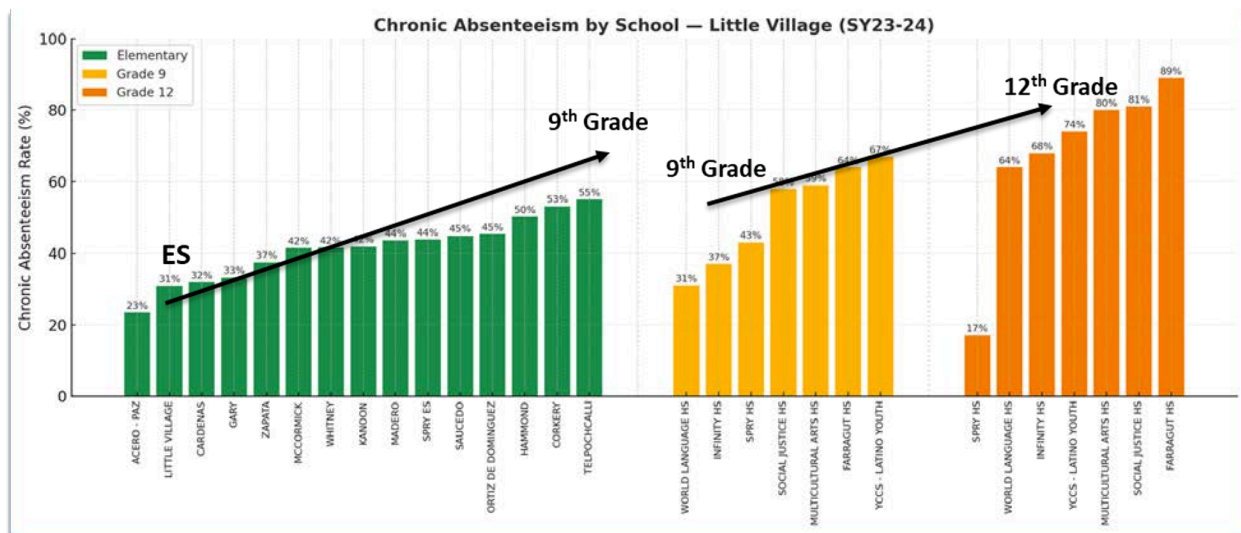
When reviewing Chronic Absenteeism data, our team noted increases as students progress through high school. On average, as students continue into high school as they head towards 12th grade, absenteeism rates continue to rise as students progress. The graphs demonstrate that while Chronic Absenteeism rates remain fairly constant across elementary schools, the moment students transition to high school, the rates increase, and continue to grow throughout the student's high school years.



Garfield Park Grade Trends - Average Chronic Absenteeism



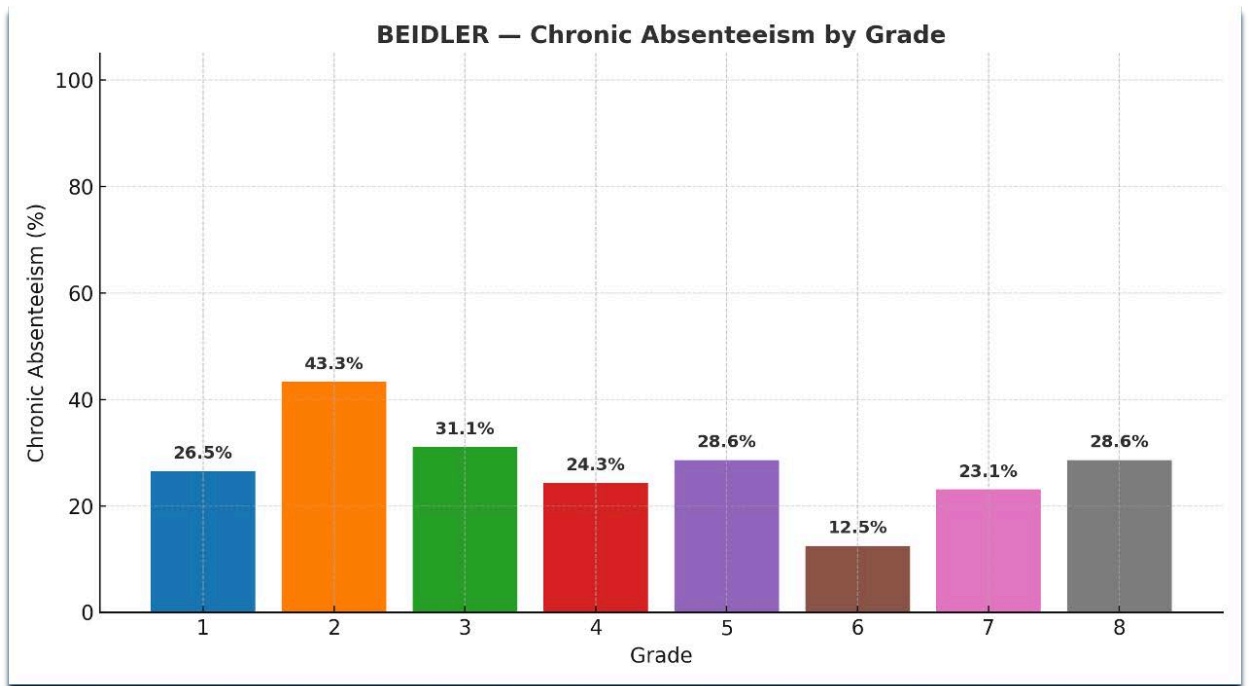
Austin Grade Trends - Average Chronic Absenteeism



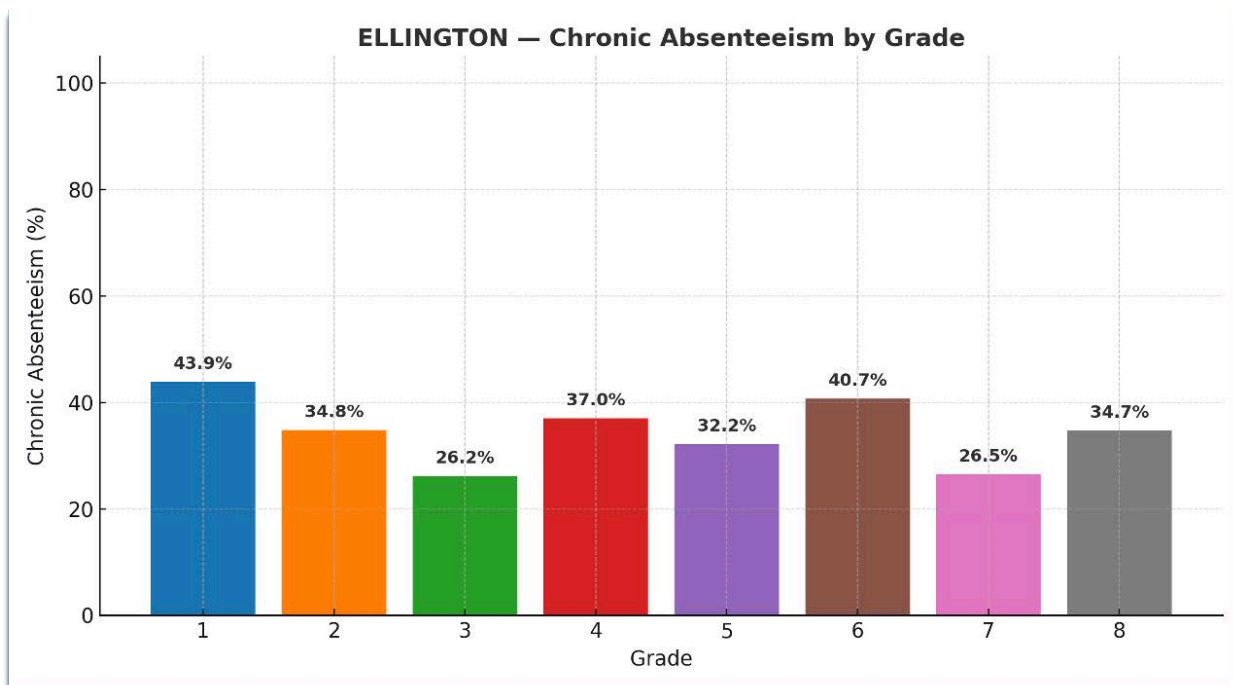
South Lawndale Grade Trends - Average Chronic Absenteeism

Appendix VIII. Elementary Trends

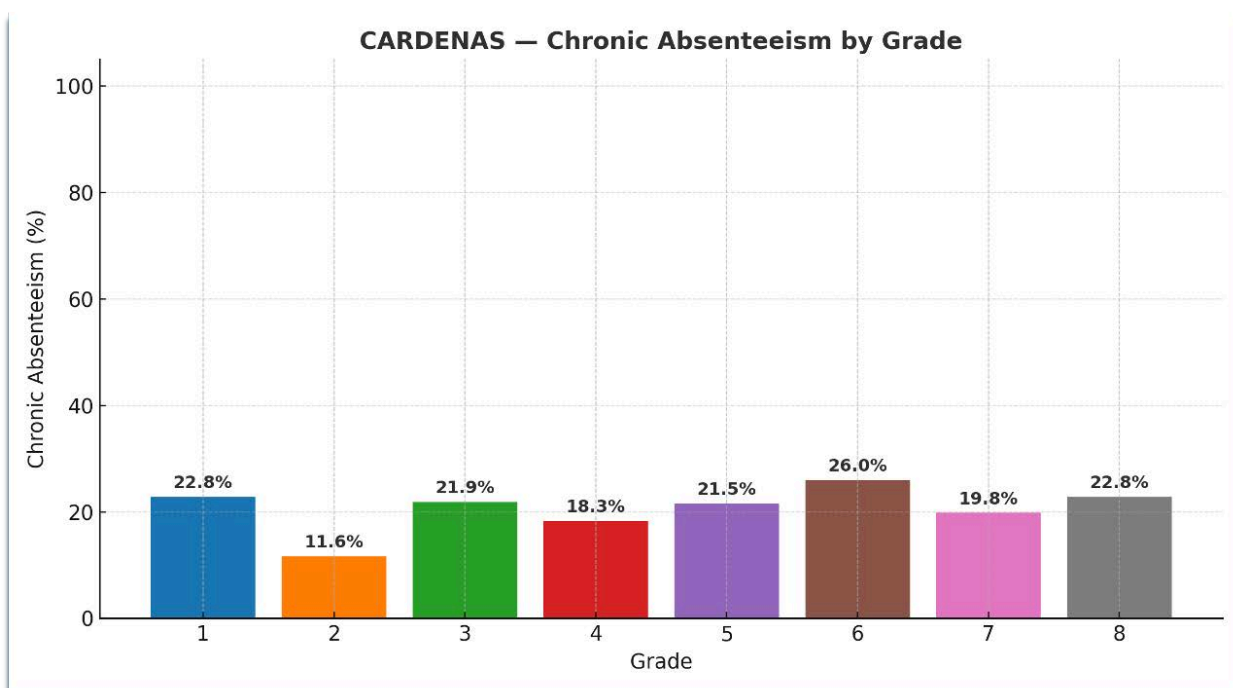
Lastly, in reviewing elementary school Chronic Absenteeism data, the team noted that there are no consistent trends for elementary school students. The next set of graphs hone in on school-level examples for each priority neighborhood.



Beidler Elementary School - Garfield Park



Ellington Elementary School - Austin



Cardenas Elementary School - South Lawndale

Appendix IX. Full List of CPS Focus Elementary Schools with a Community School Model

Attendance Bands for all CPS Focus Elementary Schools with a Community School Model SY23-24

School Name	Model	Number of Students	% Students Absent 0-9 Days	% Students Absent 10-19 Days	% Students Absent 20-29 Days	% Students Absent 30-39 Days	% Students Absent Greater than or Equal to 40 Days	% CA (Greater than or Equal to 20 Days)
Garfield Park								
Garfield Park Avg. Elementary Schools		4608	50%	29%	11%	5%	4%	21%
TILTON	CSI	261	38%	31%	13%	10%	8%	31%
FARADAY	CSI	199	46%	27%	15%	9%	4%	28%
BEIDLER	SCS	279	43%	30%	13%	7%	6%	27%
WEBSTER	CSI	192	46%	31%	11%	6%	6%	23%
ERICSON	CSIx	295	39%	40%	11%	5%	5%	21%
CATHER	CSI	340	48%	35%	9%	2%	6%	17%
SUMNER	CSI	206	54%	31%	6%	6%	3%	16%
JENSEN	CSI	302	60%	31%	5%	2%	2%	9%
MELODY	CSI	340	92%	4%	3%	1%	1%	4%
Austin								
Austin - Avg. Elementary Schools		7766	41%	30%	14%	6%	9%	29%
SPENCER - Austin	SCS	472	35%	28%	17%	9%	12%	38%
DEPRIEST	SCS	508	36%	29%	15%	8%	13%	35%
LELAND	CSI	345	54%	25%	10%	7%	3%	20%
South Lawndale								

S. Lawndale Avg. Elementary Schools		7042	42%	31%	14%	6%	7%	27%
TELPOCHCALLI	CSIx	279	30%	30%	17%	9%	13%	39%
MADERO	CSIx	269	36%	30%	17%	6%	11%	34%
SAUCEDO	CSI	881	37%	30%	18%	8%	8%	33%
KANOON	CSIx	446	41%	30%	13%	6%	10%	28%
MCCORMICK	SCS	448	43%	30%	13%	8%	6%	27%

Appendix X. CPS Policy Scan

There are many recent CPS policies that can include impacts on attendance as a lever. Below is a summary of these policies in three categories:

- Connectedness and Engagement
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Grading Policies

Each table lists a high level summary of the attendance lever for each policy.

CPS Policies Regarding Connectedness and Engagement

Adopted Date	Policy (Board #)	Attendance Lever
08/28/2025	Parent & Family Engagement Policy (Section 801.3 25-0828-PO6)	- Aims to improve parent and family engagement with schools by promoting and training schools on engagement plans
12/12/2024	Enrollment & Transfer of Students (Section 702.1 24-1212-PO2)	- Aims to improve protocols for student enrollment and transfer to delayed student onboarding
12/12/2024	Culturally Responsive Education & Diversity (CRED) (Section 102.2 24-1212-PO3)	-Aims to improve cultural and linguistic connectedness to students and families using equitable practices, student voice and professional development for staff
12/12/2024	Accommodation for Student Religious Practices (Section 701.3 24-1212-PO1)	- Implements excused observances and make-up work protections to enable students to practice their faith

09/26/2024	Bilingual Education (Section 603.1 24-0926-PO1)	- Aims to promote language equity to support students with dual language access
09/26/2024	Breakfast After the Bell (Section 407.4 24-0926-PO2)	- Promotes Universal after-bell breakfast to encourage student arrival
09/26/2024	Scholastic Eligibility for Interscholastic Sports & Activities (Section 605.6 24-0926-PO5)	- Teams/clubs serve as anchors; clear eligibility and support plans to motivate daily attendance and engagement.
06/27/2024	Student Travel (Field Trips & Overnight/Out-of-Town) (Section 702.14 24-0627-PO3)	- Increases opportunities for experiential learning and trips and therefore increase connectedness
08/29/2024	Volunteer Policy (Section 801.2 18-0822-PO4; amended by 24-0829-PO7)	- Aims to increase parent volunteers and build relationships
07/25/2024	Whole School Safety (Section 704.5 24-0725-PO9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aims to promote relationships and connectedness for students - Every school must have a Behavioral Health Team - Installs policies that drive student voice and relationships - Every high school must have a student voice committee

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Every student must have at least one trusted adult at their school.
05/24/2017	Minimum High School Requirements (17-0524-PO1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Outlines the minimum graduation requirements for high school students, including the requirement that all students must have a post-secondary plan, implemented through the “Learn.Plan.Succeed” initiative - Aims to drive student connectedness by linking attendance to the motivation for students to reach their stated future goals.

CPS Policies Regarding Mental Health and Wellbeing

Adopted Date	Policy (Board #)	Attendance lever
04/24/2025	Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation (Section 102.8A 25-0424-PO2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Process to promote timely investigations - Commit supports for students - Aims to reduce absences by addressing complaints in a more timely fashion
11/01/2024	Students in Temporary Living Situations (STLS) (24-1101-PO3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aims to removes barriers that cause chronic absence for STLS students

07/25/2024	Comprehensive Student Substance Use Prevention & Intervention (K-12) (Section 704.3 24-0725-PO7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aims to increase supports for students experiencing substance abuse including supports for re-entry - Reduces Code of Conduct infractions associated with substance abuse, therefore minimizes risks of student exclusions - Provides for prevention education
2/22/2024	Domestic Violence & Dating Violence (Section 704.4 24-0222-PO5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aims to improve supports for impacted students to avoid interruptions in attendance
10/25/2023	Administration of Medication (Section 704.2 23-1025-PO3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Allows on-site medication administration (including emergency meds) which aims to reduce preventable absences due to health needs.
05/24/2023	Local School Wellness Policy for Students (Section 704.7 23-0524-PO5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aims to reduce health barriers that can reduce preventable absences. - Provides implementation guidance on school wellness teams, nutrition standards, daily physical activity
05/24/2023	Chronic Conditions Management (Section 704.12 23-0524-PO2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promotes individualized health plans for students - - Promotes training for key health conditions to reduce preventable absences.
06/22/2022	Addressing Bullying and Bias-Based Behaviors (Section 705.5A 22-0622-PO5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aims to reduce absences to bullying incidents - Policy promotes guidance on preventative and response measures related to bullying and bias.

06/22/2022	Behavioral Interventions, Physical Restraints, Time Outs (PRT0) (Section 705.4 22-0622-PO3)	- Aims to support positive behavioral interventions through the training and implementation of appropriate guidance and limits on physical restraint/time out
03/23/2022	Comprehensive Mental Health & Suicide Prevention (Section 704.13 22-0323-PO1)	<p>- Aims to improve school-level mental health supports by providing guidance on Behavioral Health Teams, training and response.</p> <p>- Allows up to 5 mental/behavioral health days for students</p>

CPS Policies Regarding Grading and Promotion

Adopted Date	Policy (Board #)	Attendance Lever
09/28/2023	Student Homework (23-0928-PO1)	- Aims to clarify homework expectations including how support remediation plans for students requiring make up work
07/26/2023	605.5 Awarding HS Credit & Placement for HS-Level Courses Taken by Elementary Students (23-0726-PO1)	- Provides early access to HS credit and placement for eligible elementary school students
05/24/2023	605.11 Granting Credit Toward HS Graduation for Internet-Based Delivery (23-0524-PO1)	- Aims to provide flexible, approved online courses provide alternative pathways for students with barriers to attendance to earn credit and stay on-track.

01/25/2023	605.2 Elementary School Promotion (23-0125-PO1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implements system-wide monitoring to verify that the quality of instruction - Aims to provide for early identification of at-risk students and the implementation of systematic academic intervention
05/26/2021	605.7 Grade Change (21-0526-PO1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aims to install controls for grade changes to protect grading integrity
08/15/2017	Joint CTU–CPS set of Professional Grading Standards & Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guidance (not policy) including how schools could handle grading, including the notion of “no-zero” grading.
5/24/2017	605.3 Minimum High School Graduation Requirements (17-0524-PO1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Establishes new minimum graduation requirements that align with Illinois public colleges and universities. Also includes the new requirement that each student provide evidence of a Post-Secondary Plan

Appendix XI. National Thought Leader Interview Summaries

Interviewee(s)	Key Points
Hedy Chang, Executive Director and President and Helen Duffy, Senior Fellow, Attendance Works	Hedy explained that Attendance Works operates as a field catalyst organization, focusing on improving policy, building capacity, and creating awareness through research and data dissemination. She emphasized their theory of change, which involves using districts as units of change and states as vehicles for scaling, with a focus on addressing challenges in lower-income communities. Hedy highlighted their efforts in building capacity through initiatives like the state-focused “50% Challenge” in partnership with EdTrust and AEI, their technical assistance offerings, as well as their work in raising awareness and conducting annual reviews of attendance policy and practice.
Shanette Porter, Director, Learning & Development Group and Managing Director at the UChicago Consortium, and Research Assistant Professor at UChicago	Shanette presented her work on student experiences and structures, particularly highlighting the Cultivate Survey which measures student learning conditions and self-beliefs, and discussed strategies for improving school connectedness and reducing absenteeism, emphasizing student voice, agency, and dignity in school spaces. She shared that recent research shows that rising Cultivate scores correlate to improvements in attendance, grades, disciplinary outcomes, and test scores, and emphasized that improving student-teacher relationships is key. Shanette recommended a two-pronged strategy for improving school connectedness: engaging students in participatory data analysis to understand their experiences and involving educators in collaborative conversations with students to demonstrate their value and influence. We discussed the important role of professional learning supports and data utilization strategies, while emphasizing the importance of understanding and addressing different aspects of student belonging in educational settings (including academic, social, cultural, structural, and individual factors, while considering the complex identities of adolescents). Shanette shared an example of a school that improved attendance by creating an Amazon locker, demonstrating the value of building trust and partnerships with students to address sometimes unexpected barriers to attendance (as students were staying home to receive packages!).
Robert Balfanz, Distinguished Professor at the Johns Hopkins University School of Education, Director of the Everyone Graduates Center and the GRAD Partnership	During our interview, Robert (Bob) Balfanz from Johns Hopkins University described the comprehensive approach to addressing chronic absence in schools that his team espouses, focusing on strategies that have proven effective post-pandemic. The approach is categorized into four buckets: knowing the challenge (barriers, disengagement, and misinformation), prevention (supportive peer groups and adults), problem-solving (intervening when students are trending toward absence), and mitigation. The interview also highlights the role of non-school actors through three well-proven strategies: frequent and tailored nudge letters, strategic family engagement including home visits, and success coaches or mentors. The importance of strategic partnerships, data analysis, and the integration of student support teams (like those the GRAD Partnership is helping districts and schools build in their network) is a recurring theme. He also emphasized the challenge of scalability for individualized solutions, the

	effectiveness of different interventions based on student needs, and the importance of a system to trigger action based on student situations.
Emily Germain, Senior Researcher, Learning Policy Institute	Emily Germain, a former teacher now working at the system level, discussed the effectiveness of community schools in addressing the post-pandemic rise in chronic absenteeism. This approach focuses on an ecological and systemic view, treating chronic absenteeism as a "warning sign" of deeper issues. During our conversation, she highlighted key strategies like investing in a community school coordinator to bridge the gap between parents, students, and community partners. It also emphasizes the importance of using data to identify root causes and implement targeted, multi-pronged interventions. The notes mention that a "well-implemented" community school model is crucial and can lead to significant reductions in absenteeism, as seen in a school in Lynwood that went from 37% to 24% chronic absenteeism. The overall vision reframes attendance from a punitive issue to one of community support, aiming to build trust and ensure families feel safe and supported
Colleen Keating-Crawford, Senior Researcher and Designer, Reinvention Lab @ TFA	Colleen's work at the Reinvention Lab looks at pressing issues in our field and applies human-centered design methodologies, often engaging directly with students, to prototype potential solutions. While conducting research on chronic absenteeism, they developed a set of profiles of student engagement titled "The New Absenteeism," relying heavily on the perspectives of those closest to the issue - students themselves. From there, they are testing a solution that responds to the needs of students in the "Real-Life Learner" and "Checked Out" categories of their matrix called "Credit Flex," which leverages existing policies for independent study and other ways for students to get credit for experiential and mastery-based learning, often taking place outside of school walls. They may consider piloting this model in Chicago in partnership with TFA.
Shadae Harris, former Chief of Engagement, Richmond (VA) Public Schools	Dr Harris's name came up in several interviews so we were excited to have the chance to talk to her. She reframed and revamped parent and community engagement in Richmond Public Schools, using Dr Karen Mapp's "Dual Capacity Framework" as the guide for building respectful, two-way relationships where they had not previously existed. She also shared about the philanthropy-funded effort to partner with the housing agency to provide first and last month rent and deposits as well as reducing evictions for families with school-aged children. She is now working as a consultant directly supporting up to three districts in improving relationships between school and district staff and the students and families they serve.
Jen LoPiccolo, Director of District and School Partnerships for the Partnership for Student Success at Johns Hopkins University	Jen shared the origin of the Attendance Solutions Network - it grew out of the Partnership for Student Success (a formerly government-funded initiative of the Everyone Graduates Center). They launched their work on chronic absenteeism with a White House summit in May 2023 with Attendance Works, focusing on the role states could play in reversing the rise in absences post-pandemic. It was also intended to connect districts focusing on this issue to share practices and support each other. This year, they launched a philanthropy-funded effort to include Community Schools site coordinators in their capacity building work. They offer

	regular webinars and are starting up working groups to focus on specific interventions and strategies. They are hosting their annual summit on October 6th in Washington DC. They are also strengthening their alignment with the GRAD Partnership on implementing student success systems which have been proven to reduce chronic absence. They believe Institutions of Higher Ed (IHEs) have an important role to play as partners, with students using work-study funds to serve as tutors and mentors to high school students in particular using a near peer model.
Curtis Taylor, Director of the National Attendance and Engagement Meta Network and Sofi Frankowski, Consultant, HTH Graduate School	Curtis leads the National Attendance and Engagement Meta Network and Sofi is consulting with both the Meta (national) network and the RAISE network (California-specific), both of which are products of the Gates-funded National Coalition on Improvement in Education. Meta launched with partners who have gotten some traction on the issue of chronic absenteeism to isolate practices and learn from these more experienced peer organizations. They host two in-person convenings and run improvement reviews to surface the most impactful work and understand what is working for whom and under what conditions. The purpose of the RAISE network is to reduce chronic absenteeism in California by 50% by 2029. They are testing a preliminary change package with five core elements (District Leadership - effective messaging about attendance, Warm Communication - building on Todd Rodgers' work, First Faces - a warm welcome to the building), Data Routines - by name student watchlists, and School Attendance Teams). They will share a version of this once they have proof points, likely in 2026.
Kimberly Smith, Chief Inclusive Innovation Officer and Baron Davis, Senior Advisor, Digital Promise	Kim Smith co-leads the Center for Inclusive Innovation at Digital Promise and Baron Davis led the Chronic Absenteeism: Insights and Innovations cohort, a six month, rapid cycle learning project which included 17 school districts. Their approach followed DP's Inclusive Innovation R&D model where they support communities and schools in co-designing innovative solutions. Each district team conducted root cause analysis, learned to challenge their assumptions about families and students, looking inward before looking outward at barriers and trying to understand what's creating a negative experience for kids. They worked with partner districts to see students not as a problem to fix but as co-researchers and co-designers. Each team created a journey map, conducted student interviews, and co-designed solutions to address chronic absenteeism locally. They grouped the work districts opted to undertake in broad categories including, communication, tech and data interventions, student-centered interventions, family and community engagement, system-wide and policy level strategies, and instructional interventions. They found that solutions rooted in belonging had the greatest hold on kids and families.
Eyal Bergman, Senior Vice President, Learning Heroes	Eyal shared his expertise in family engagement and research findings, highlighting the significant impact of family involvement on reducing chronic absenteeism and discussing successful strategies from various school districts. He also described the follow-up study Learning Heroes is engaged in with TNTP, doing a matched pairs-style analysis of "beat the odds" schools in IL identified in their first study along with a parallel study of similar schools that did not beat the odds. They hope to have that study complete by the end of 2025.

Alka Pateriya, Director of Strategy and Partnerships, Council of Great City Schools	We primarily used this interview as an opportunity to ask Alka for recommendations of thought leaders we should speak to as part of this project. We spoke with many of the folks she recommended (Shadae Harris, Hedy Chang, Bob Balfanz, someone from the Attendance Solutions Network from the Partnership for Student Success.) She also mentioned Todd Rogers' work on clarifying and streamlining the communication schools send home to parents, particularly about absences. When asked about success stories among urban districts, she said she was unaware of any - many are still struggling with chronic absentee rates over 40% post-pandemic.
Janice Jackson, former CEO of Chicago Public Schools and former CEO of Hope Chicago	During this interview, Janice shared several strategies to address chronic absenteeism in schools, including early childhood campaigns for parents and using online tools for better data collection and analysis. They explored various AI tools and their applications in education, with Janice sharing insights about the Hope Chicago program's success and its impact on college enrollment.
Elaine Allensworth and Marisa de la Torre UChicago Consortium on Chicago School Research	Elaine and Marisa shared about their research project, currently underway, focusing on chronic absenteeism in Chicago Public Schools. Specifically, they are looking at the contributions of school, neighborhood, family, and individual factors to chronic absenteeism, as well as the consequences of absenteeism on student test gains, grades, and pass rates. A piece of their study looks specifically at the transition to high school and its impact on chronic absenteeism. So far, their research has found that absenteeism has increased for all student groups since the pandemic, the magnitude of which varies by school. School climate and teacher-parent trust have become even more strongly related to attendance post-pandemic. Additionally, there is a positive relationship between attendance and both GPA and test scores. One interesting note they shared is that they do not use 12th grade data in their analyses because there is a bug built into the data, namely that students continue to be recorded absent when they do not attend after graduation has occurred. The initial report is expected to be released in the fall of 2025 with the full study ending and final report anticipated in 2026.

Appendix XII. Intervention Scan

The full Interventions Spreadsheet can be accessed [here](#).

Individual Level

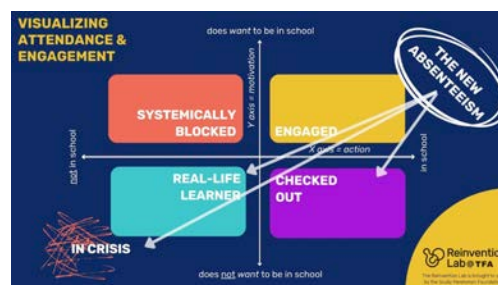
Intervention	Description	Key Root Causes Addressed (top barriers bolded)	Exemplars (if applicable)	Chicago Examples
Caring Adult/Mentoring	Fosters a positive connection between a student and at least one adult in the school, reducing dropout rates and improving social-emotional capacities.	Lack of Connection, Mental Health	Success Mentors (NYC), Relationship Mapping (Harvard), Navigators (Nashville)	CPS had previously tested and used "Check and Connect" across many elementary schools (resource-intensive). This program is not to be confused with the CPS Social Emotional Learning intervention, "Check In Check Out", an evidenced-based Tier 2 intervention for individual students. Though not explicitly targeted at school attendance, My Brother's Keeper Alliance programs as well as targeted mentoring programs such as Choose to Change, BAM (Becoming a Man) and WOW (Working on Womanhood) in partnership with Youth Guidance are in place in a number of CPS schools.
Peer Support and Mentoring	Creates a sense of community and support among students, leading to greater school engagement and connection.	Lack of Connection, Mental Health	Woodson HS (DC), Link Crew	Brighton Park Near Peers -college student mentoring; Kenwood Academy Brotherhood builds a sense of community across students that is led by alumni and "near-peers."
High-Impact Tutoring	Provides personalized, small-group tutoring to help students recover from unfinished learning.	Academic Barriers, Lack of Connection	Washington D.C.	A series of UChicago Ed Labs studies (preliminary study and full study) have shown positive academic impact of high-dosage tutoring, even when offered using a hybrid,

				tech-enabled approach (here), but they have not reported significant impact on attendance (in part due to data issues in the transition back to full-time in-person schooling post-COVID). A subsequent national study (including Chicago) shows that implementation issues, especially the “dosage” of the tutoring, matters for outcomes.
Mental Health Supports	Provides students with access to free, online mental health services to address a major root cause of absenteeism.	Mental Health	Los Angeles, Chicago	All schools have "Behavioral Health Teams" and the Office of Social Emotional Learning promotes ongoing support and professional development year round. In addition, select schools have access to online supports through partners such as Hazel Telehealth, and we learned that Mikva Challenge has a partnership with Transcend Health to provide mental health services to students.
Text Nudges / Warm Comms	Uses personalized, evidence-backed communications to build stronger family-school partnerships.	Family and Community Engagement	EveryDay Labs, Todd Rogers' research, U of C Behavioral Insights and Parenting Lab	U of C Behavioral Insights lab uses nudging with Head Start programs

In the course of conducting the scan, we encountered several frameworks for understanding reasons behind individual student absenteeism. The two shared here are the ones we found most compelling:



- **Barriers:** What's keeping students out of school?
- **Aversion:** Why doesn't the student want to go to school?
- **Disengagement:** Students wondering, what's the point of school?
- **Misconceptions:** Students and families not realizing how much school has been missed



- **Engaged:** Generally engaged in school, showing up, and doing their best.
- **Systemically Blocked:** Wants to be in school, but are not in school.
- **Real-life Learner:** Aren't in class, don't see school as valuable. Learns outside of school.
- **Checked Out:** In school, but mentally are not present.
- **In Crisis:** Do not have the basic needs met.

School Level

Intervention	Description	Key Root Causes Addressed	Exemplars (if applicable)	Chicago Examples
Early Warning and Student Success Systems, Attendance Teams	Ensures attendance data is accurate, consistent, and accessible to identify at-risk students and drive targeted interventions.	Lack of Systems & Data	Oregon, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Grad Partnership sites	Network for College Success (HS), Middle Grades Network and Teach Plus (MS). CPS high schools have access to a Risk and Opportunity Framework that shows incoming 8th graders is at risk of being off track due to GPA and/or attendance

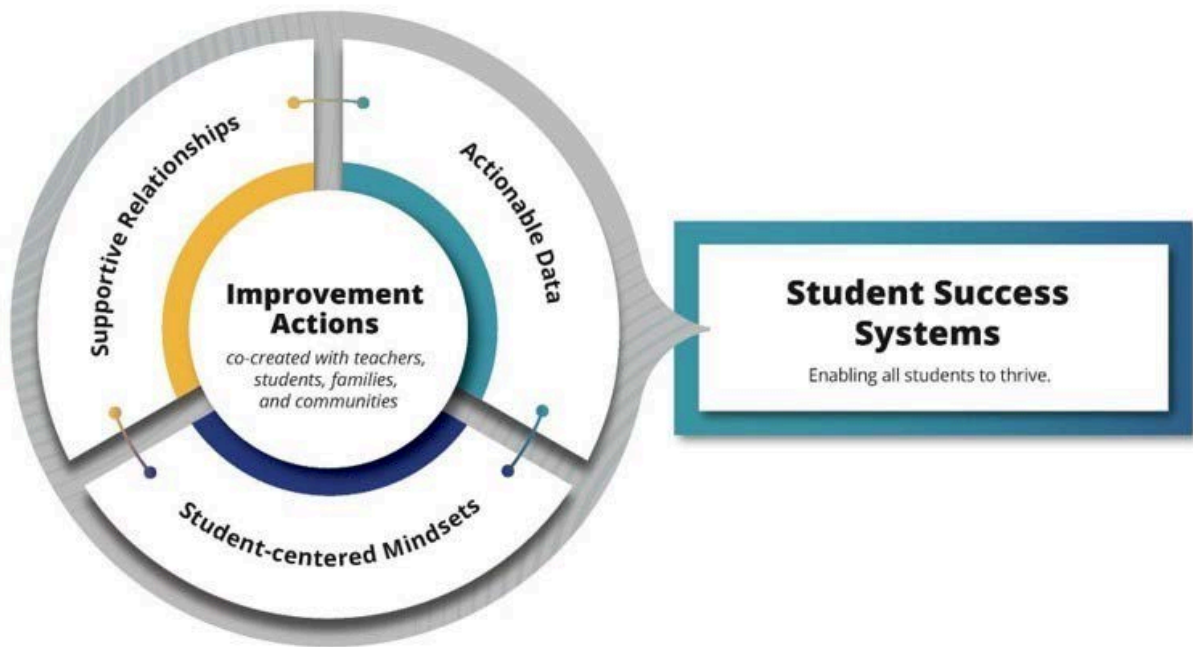
Relationship Mapping, Segmentation Analysis	Mapping student-adult relationships throughout the school; analyzing and plotting students on a matrix based on different drivers of absence.	Lack of Systems & Data, Lack of Connection	Reinvention Lab approach, Adult-Student Relationship Mapping	
Classroom Climate Surveys	Uses student survey data on school climate, safety, and supportive relationships to identify areas for improvement.	Lack of Connection, Academic Barriers	Cultivate, 5Essentials, PERTS Elevate, Panorama	Kelly HS is using Elevate data
SEL and MTSS-focused approaches	Chronic absenteeism can negatively affect students' social and emotional wellbeing, but efforts to increase students' social and emotional wellbeing are strongly connected to improvements in attendance. MTSS models provide support across tiers: Tier 1 (Universal), Tier 2 (Targeted) and Tier 3 (Intensive)	Mental Health, Lack of Connection	Sown to Grow (school districts including Oakland, Nashville, Stockton)	<p>In 2021, CPS implemented Branching Minds as tool to manage the use of MTSS strategies. In addition, the CPS Office of Social Emotional Learning supports schools with professional development in key areas including introduction to Branching Minds, how to create MTSS plans and monitor progress.</p> <p>CPS Office of Social Emotional Learning supports schools in the implementation of universal practices to support classroom engagement including Second Step, Calm Classroom and Conscious Discipline.</p>

Classroom Engagement	Incorporates engaging instructional practices, such as career-connected learning, to improve student attendance.	Lack of Connection, Academic Barriers	D.C.'s career prep program, where they've seen students attend nearly 13 more days of school compared to peers.	
Incentive Programs	Utilizes rewards and incentives to positively reinforce attendance, behavior, and academic performance.	Lack of Connection	Chicago-based incentive program "Rang" cites a 6% increase in on-time attendance and a 7% decrease in chronic absenteeism.	Rang is in 35 Chicago area schools. Farragut High School has implemented student-focused incentives such as awarding "free prom" to upperclassmen meeting a specified attendance threshold.
Student-Led Research (YPAR)	Trains students to research and improve issues they want to change, fostering a sense of ownership and relevance.	Lack of Connection	YPAR (UC Berkeley), Beloved Community	CPS policy mandates every school to have a student voice committee. Farragut's Principal elevated their student voice committee and through their leadership, implemented student requests such as a new student-designed lounge.
Family and Caregiver Engagement	Builds strong school-family partnerships through two-way communication, shared leadership, and collaborative problem-solving.	Family and Community Engagement	Dual Capacity Building Framework, Learning Heroes	Learning Heroes + TNTP study using 5E data in Illinois

Home Visits	Equips educators to conduct asset-based home visits to build trusting relationships with families.	Family and Community Engagement	Parent Teacher Home Visits (PTHV), Connecticut LEAP	Community based partner, A Knock at Midnight , has implemented the most well known CPS program for attendance-based home visits. The program is built upon a mix of relationship building and case management. While this has not been researched through an official evaluation study, schools reported that this was an effective program. For example - high schools reported seeing incremental improvements from 5-20 percentage points.
Community Schools	Integrates educators, families, and community partners to provide expanded learning opportunities, health and social services, and family engagement.	Family and Community Engagement, Lack of Connection, Mental Health, Medical/Illness	5,000 Communities in Schools partnerships	238 CIS partner schools and 36 Sustainable Community Schools in Chicago. 27 of 68 focus neighborhood schools are CIS or SCS partner schools
Change Packages	Provides packages of evidence-based practices to improve a specific outcome.	Lack of Systems & Data	Everyone Graduates Center/City Year Change Packages	

When thinking about implementing school level strategies, the [Grad Partnership](#)³ developed a helpful framework below on leading student success systems work. Student success systems are an evidence-based approach to addressing post-pandemic educational challenges. The four key components help organize a school community to better support the academic progress, career and college transitions, and well-being of all students.

³ Proven Strategies that Schools Can Use to Address Chronic Absenteeism: Learnings from The GRAD Partnership



Visual representation of building and leading student success systems.

Student Success Systems work when you:

1. **Set up student success teams:** school wide efforts including school leaders, teachers, counselors, and community; meet regularly; empowered to take actions.
2. **Progress monitor all students with key indicators:** key predictive indicators include attendance, behavior, course grades, school connections, and well-being.
3. **Monitor impact of actions and modify them until they work:** create conditions under which students thrive, to be proactive rather than reactive.
4. **Gather insights and co-create improvement actions:** take action at school, grade, classroom, small group, and individual level, building on evidence-based solutions.

Systems Level

Intervention	Description	Key Root Causes Addressed	Exemplars (if applicable)	Chicago Examples
Cross-Agency Collaboration	Aligns education, health, and community partners to share data and coordinate strategies to address chronic absence.	Mental Health, Medical/Illness, Family and Community Engagement	CARE (Chronic Absenteeism Reduction Effort) playbook	Through a partnership with Lurie Children's Hospital Center for Childhood Resilience, CPS has promoted the implementation of Behavioral Health Teams to all CPS schools. This work included the development of the BHT model and associated staff development and training.
Public Information Campaigns	Launches targeted messaging to encourage attendance and address misconceptions about school attendance.	Family & Community Engagement	Campaign informed by message testing conducted by AdCouncil; states such as Virginia and Colorado have invested in robust statewide campaigns (as well as all states participating in the 50% Challenge)	
Networks	Creates collaboratives with expert leadership to identify and test new interventions.	Lack of Systems & Data	Meta Network, RAISE, San Diego County Office of Education's ICAN, Attendance Solutions Network, Digital Promise Chronic Absenteeism: Insights and Innovations Cohort	Digital Promise cohort helped Hudson, NY see a 12% reduction.

Emphasizing Financial Benefit	Incentivizes a focus on attendance at the district or school level by highlighting the financial benefits of attendance (ADA funding).	Lack of Systems & Data		
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These interventions are implemented at the district, city, or state level. They are designed to align policies, promote collaboration across sectors, and address broader systemic issues that contribute to chronic absenteeism.

In order to contextualize these interventions in places where they've been tried, we offer below a series of district case studies.

Appendix XIII. Survey Results

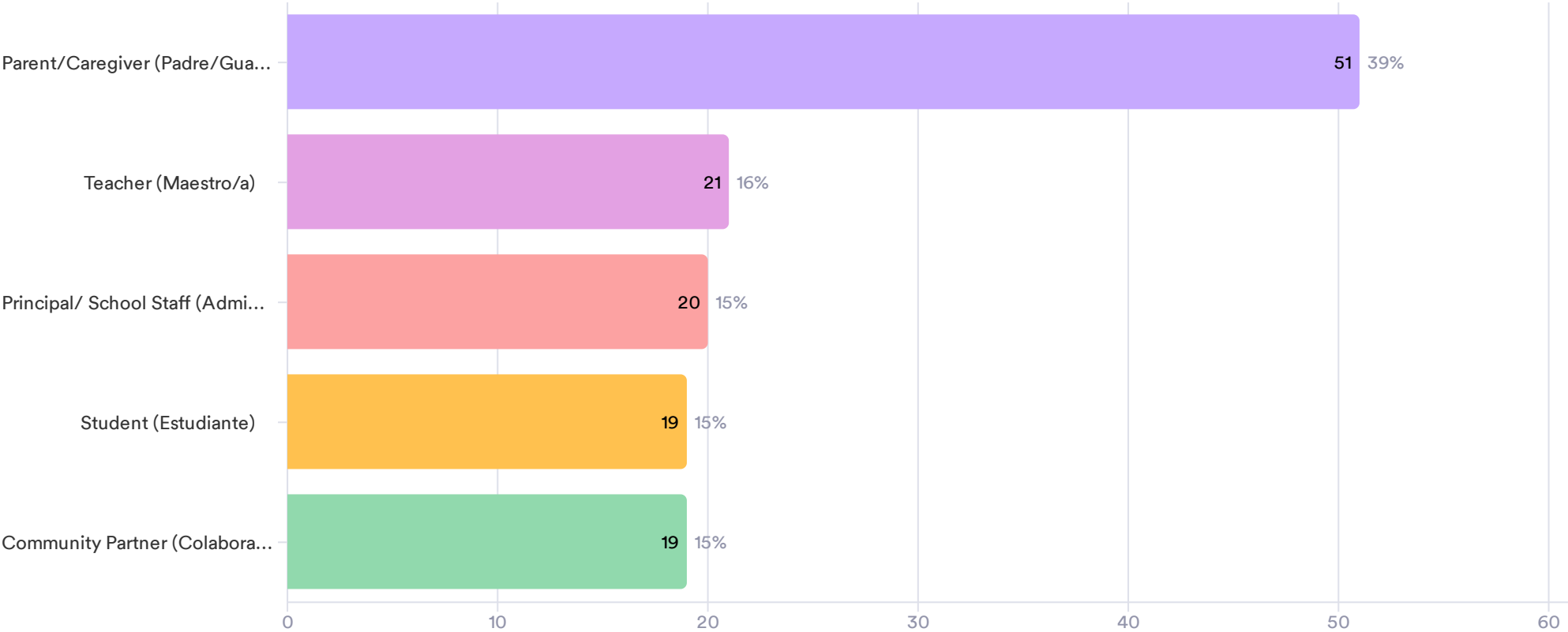
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Chronic Absenteeism Survey

All Stakeholders

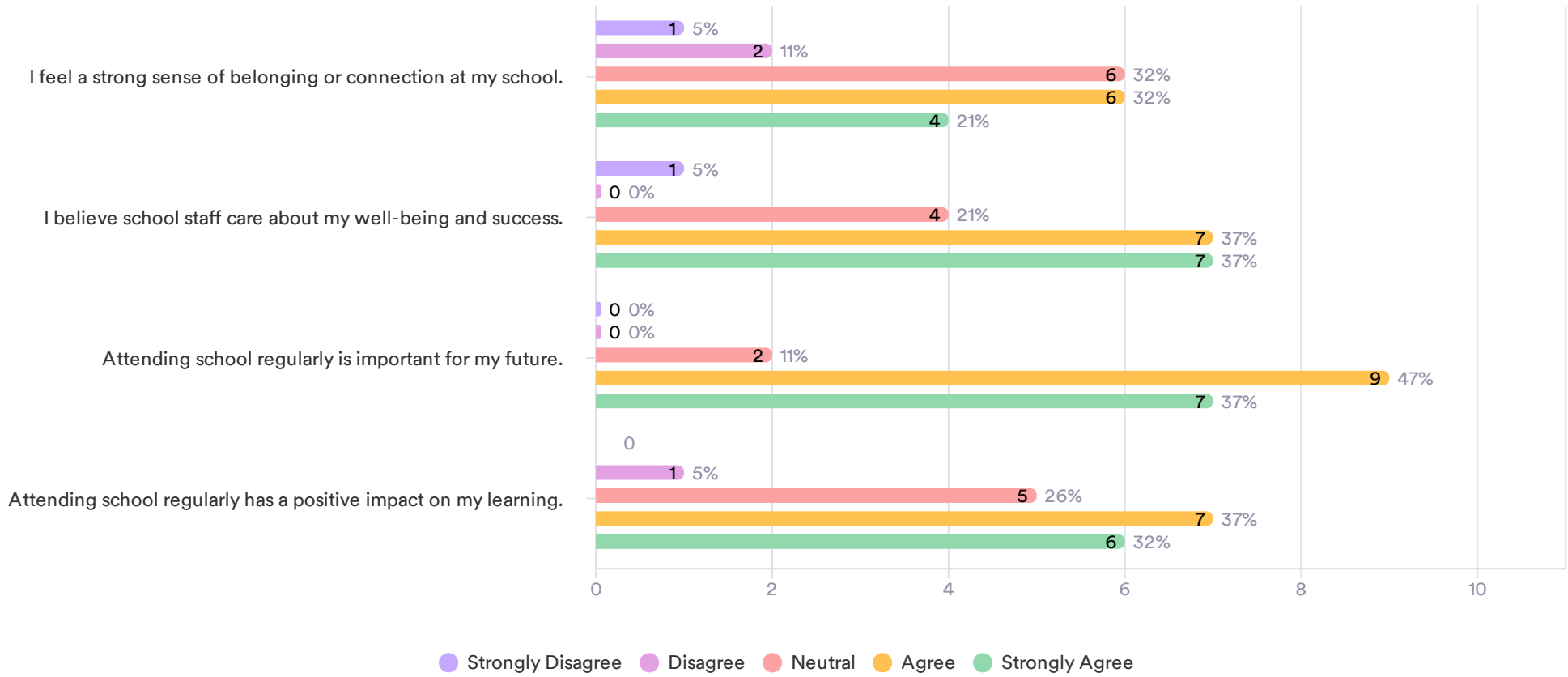
To proceed to the next section, please select which best describes your identity.

130 Responses



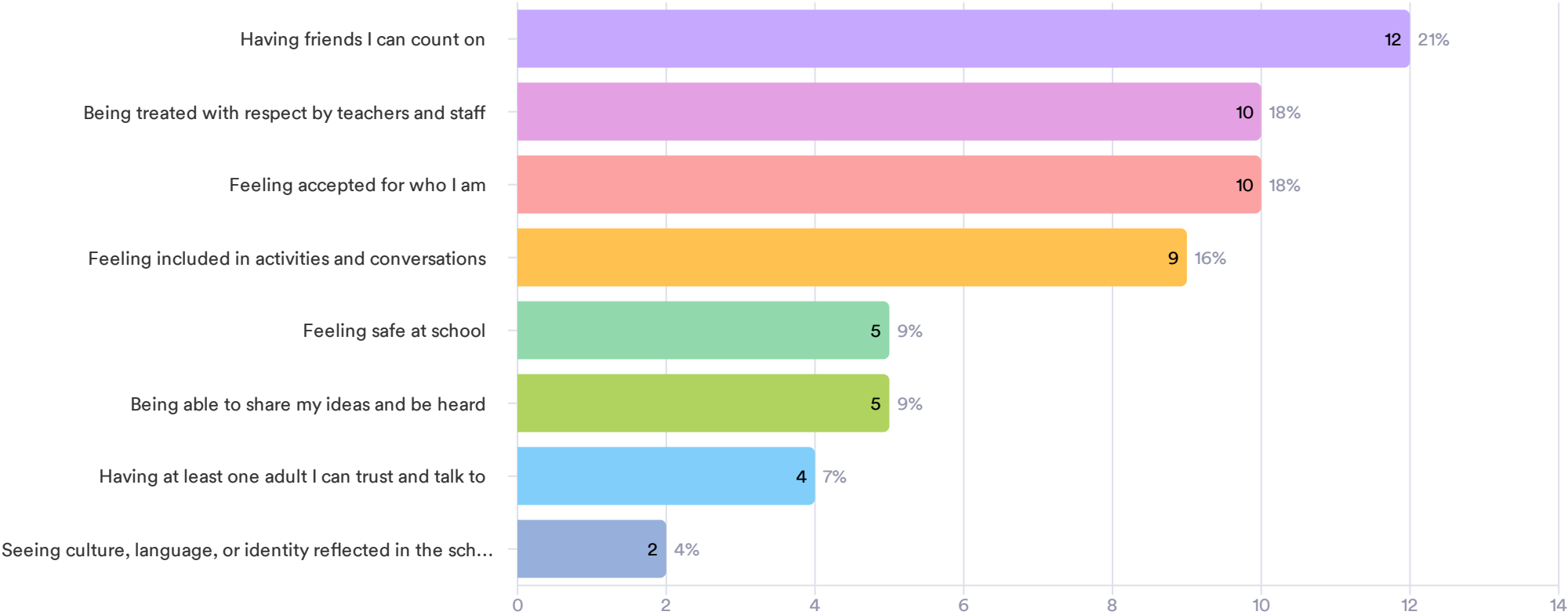
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

19 Responses



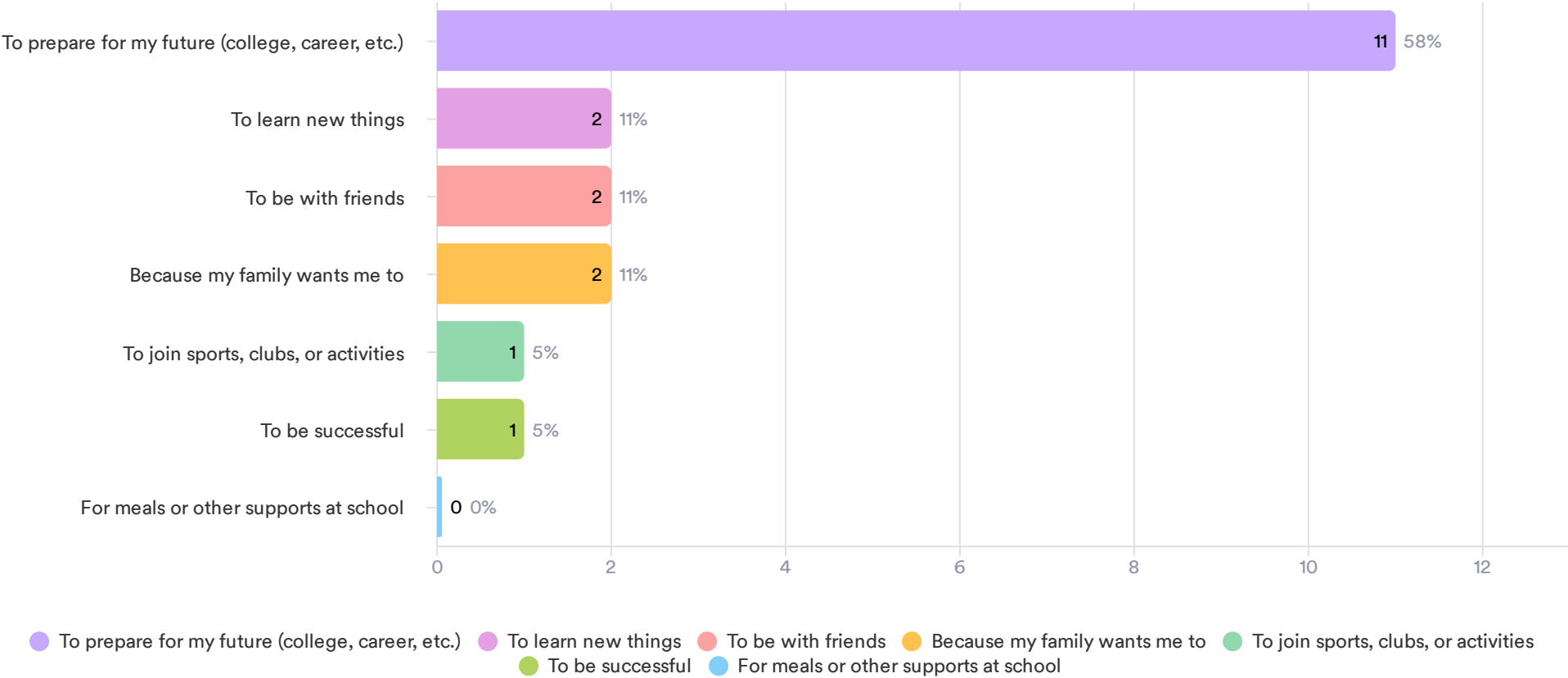
Belonging to me means (Select up to three that are most important to you)

57 Responses



What's the biggest reason you come to school most days (Choose the one that feels most true for you)

19 Responses



Chronic Absenteeism Survey - STUDENT

Thinking back to the last time you missed school, what was the primary reason? (Open-ended)

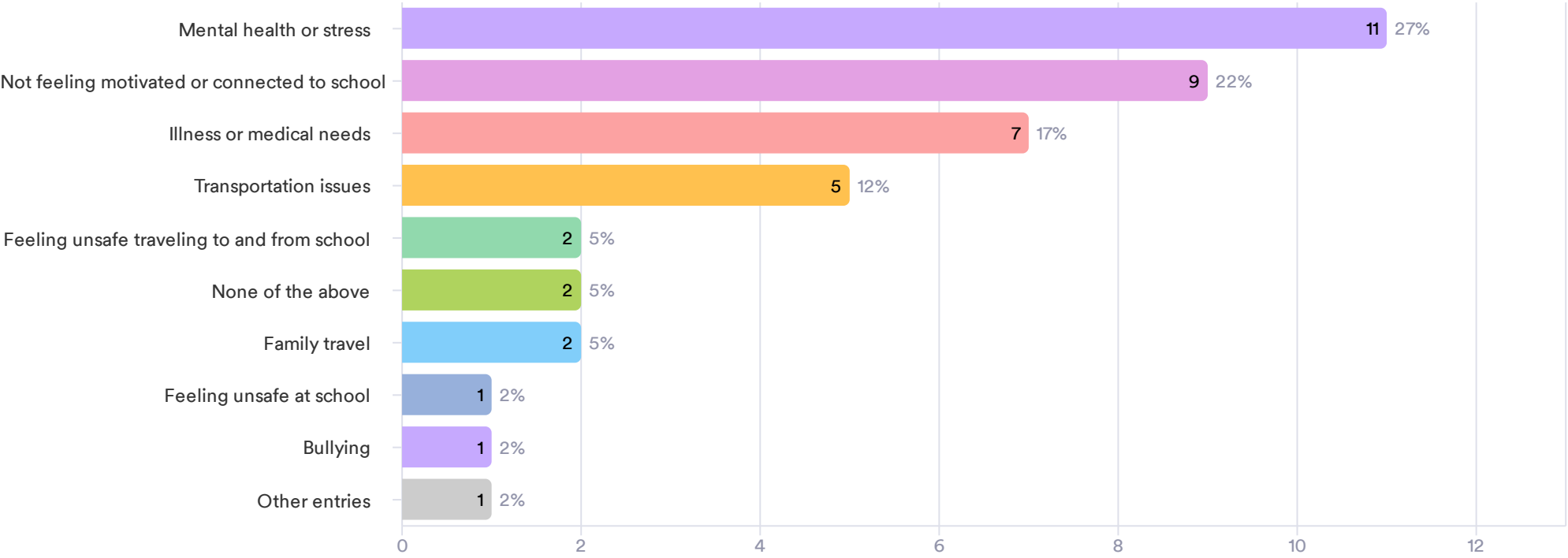
17 Responses

Data	Responses
I had a dentist appointment.	1
I was miss something fun	1
I was absent only on time last year, it was because of an appointment in the Consulate of Spain in Chicago due to documentation issues	1
Last time I missed school was in 6th grade because I had a fever of 102.	1
I was sick.	1
I was on a trip to Texas	1
I don't miss school because I go every day.	1
I had the flue and could not make it	1
illness	1
Mental health	1
I haven't been absent yet	1
I was sick	1
physical therapy	1

Chronic Absenteeism Survey - STUDENT

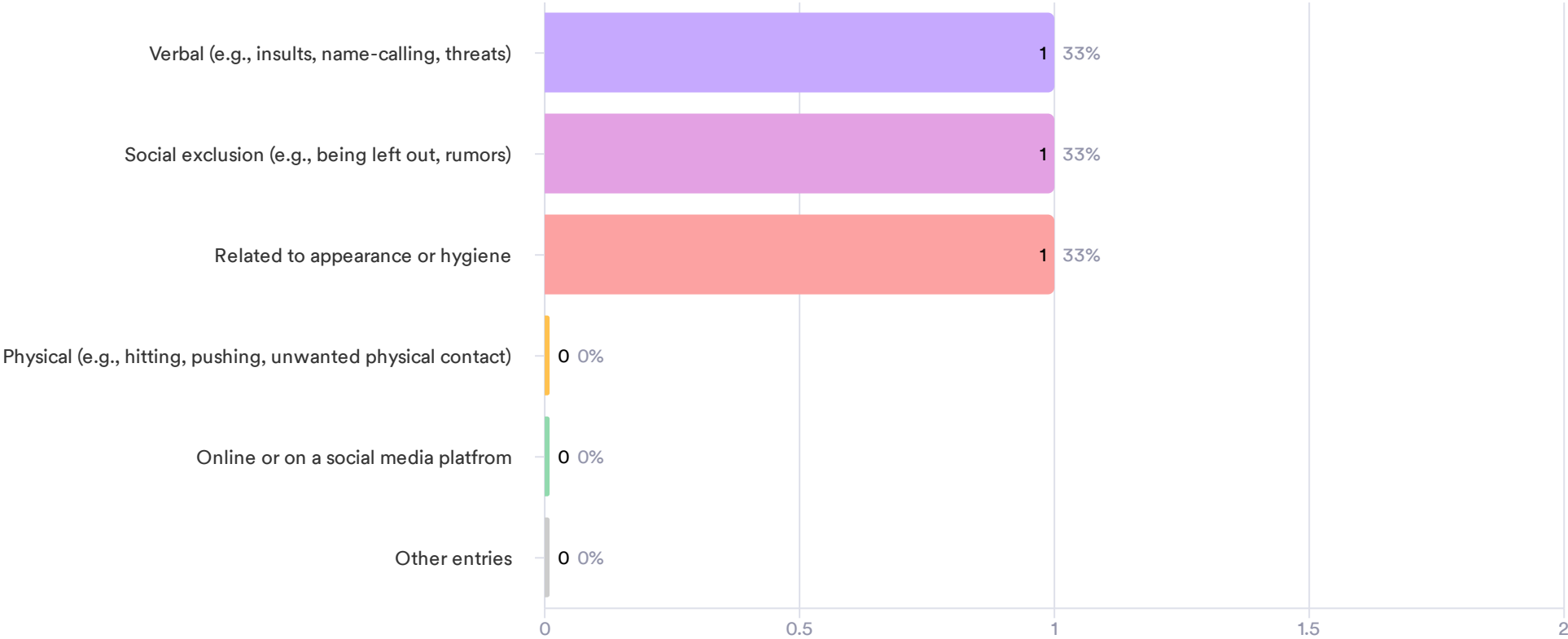
Reflecting on the past school year (2024–2025), which of the following made it harder for you to get to or stay in school regularly? (Note: even with good attendance, we would like to know what challenges you might encounter.) Select all that apply, even if you had mostly good attendance.

41 Responses



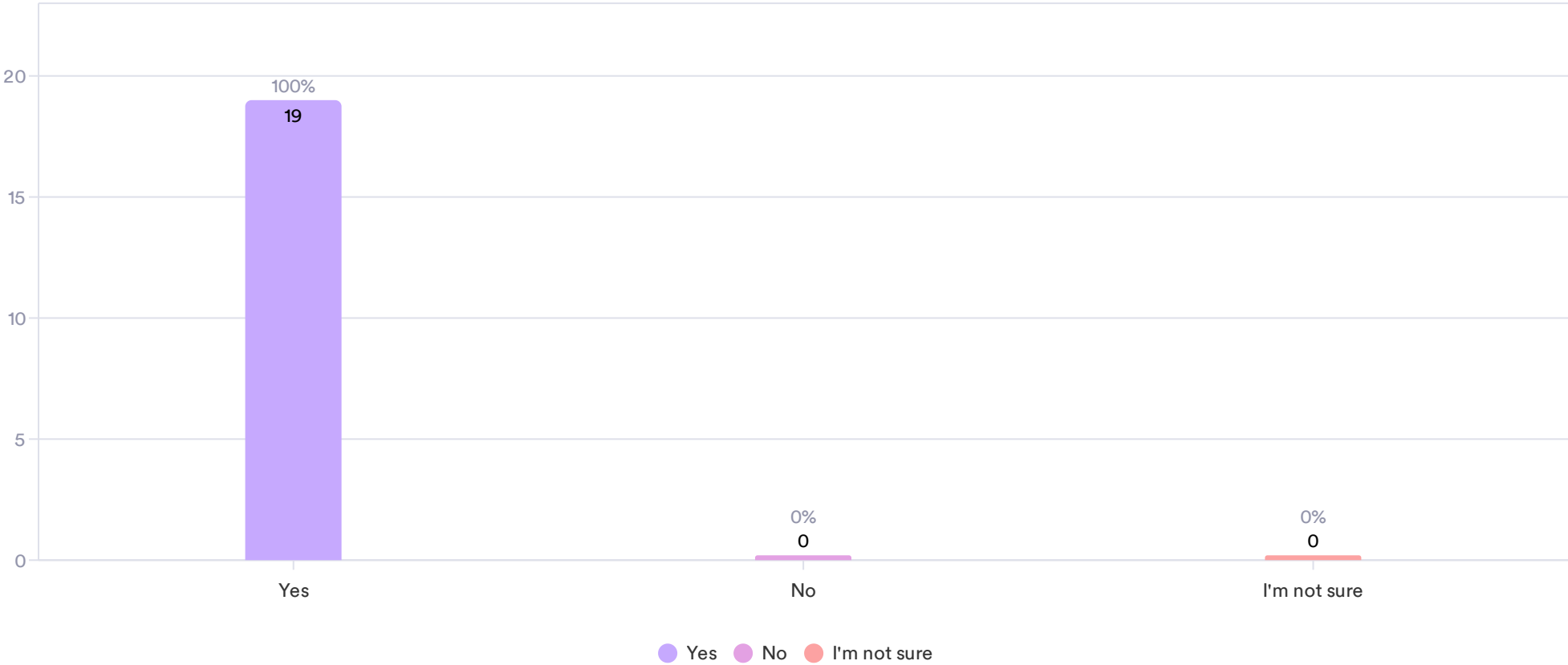
What did that bullying look like? (Select all that apply)

3 Responses



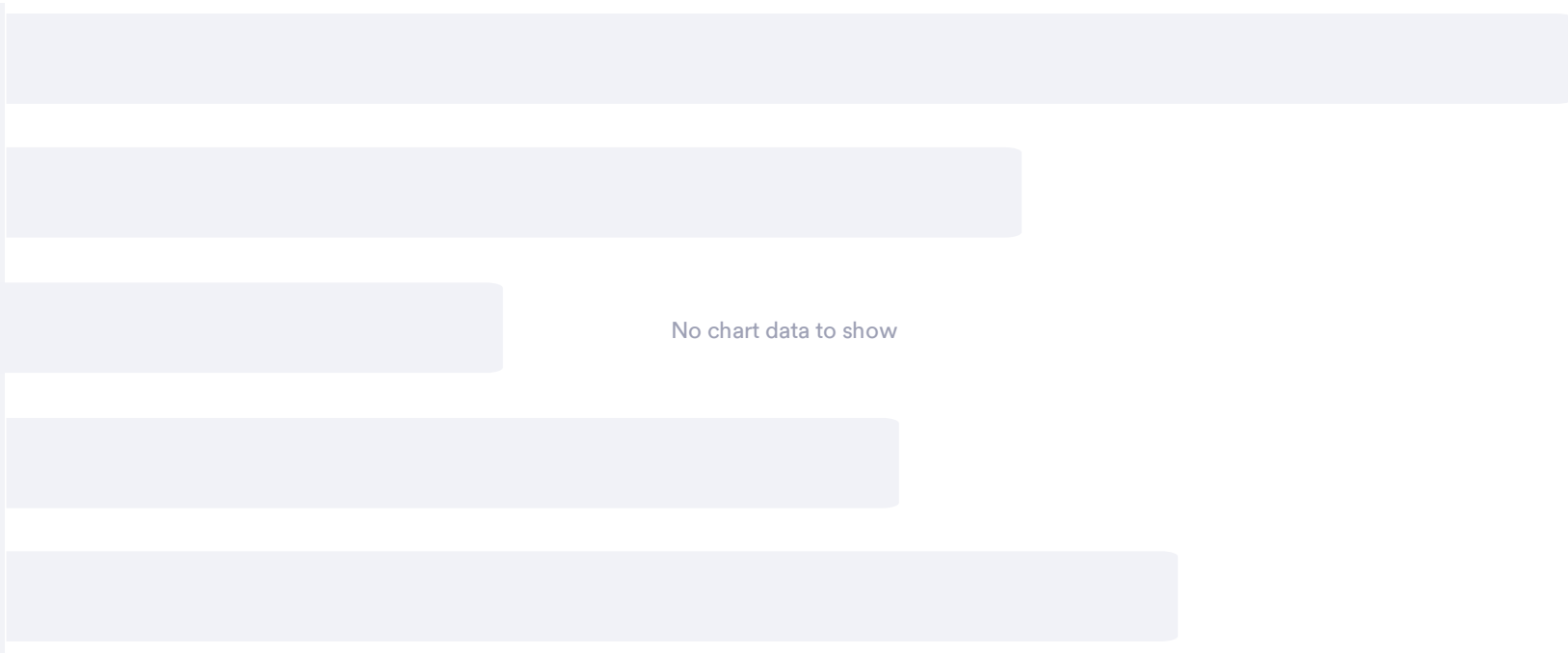
Did you have a safe and reliable way to get to school on most days this past school year?

19 Responses



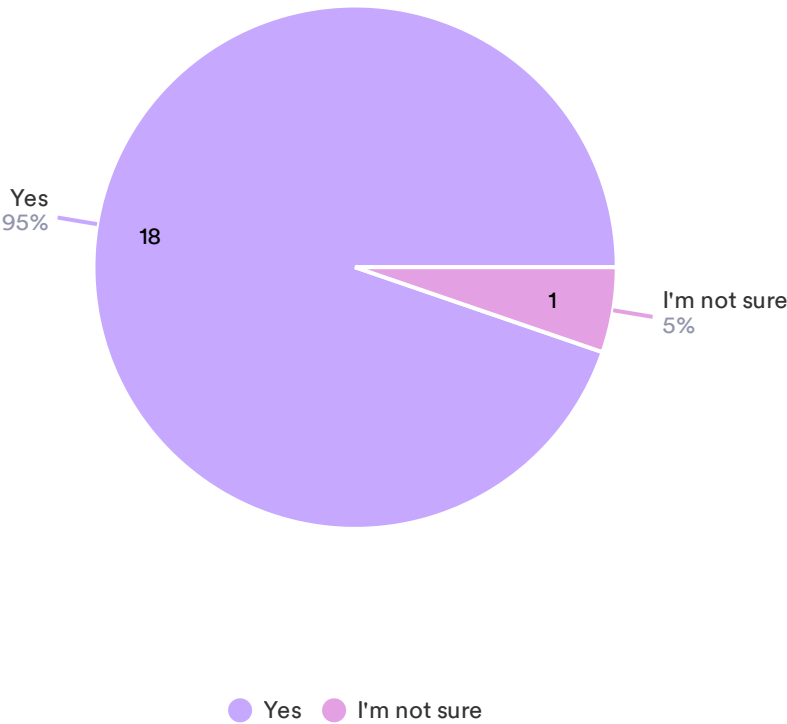
Thinking about your transportation this past school year, how much do you agree with the following statements?

0 Response



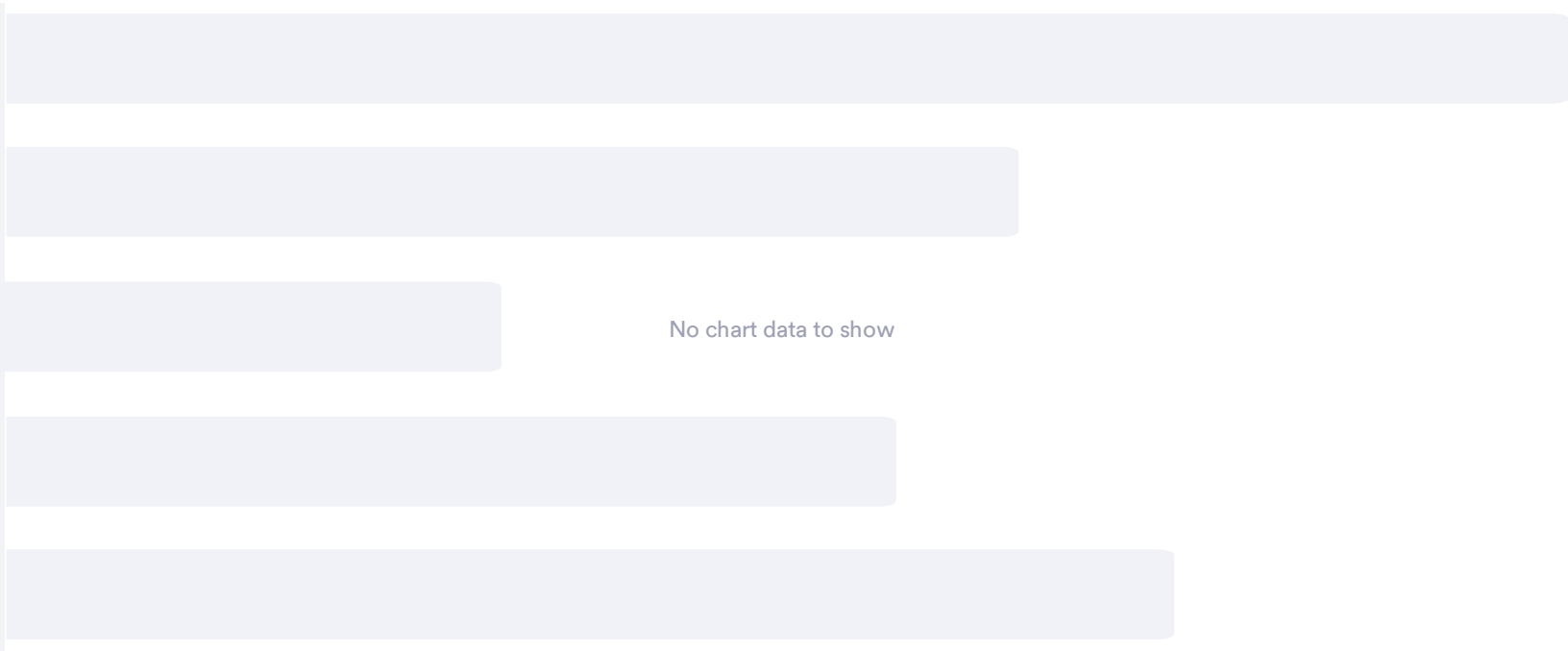
Did you have a safe and stable place to stay on most school nights?

19 Responses



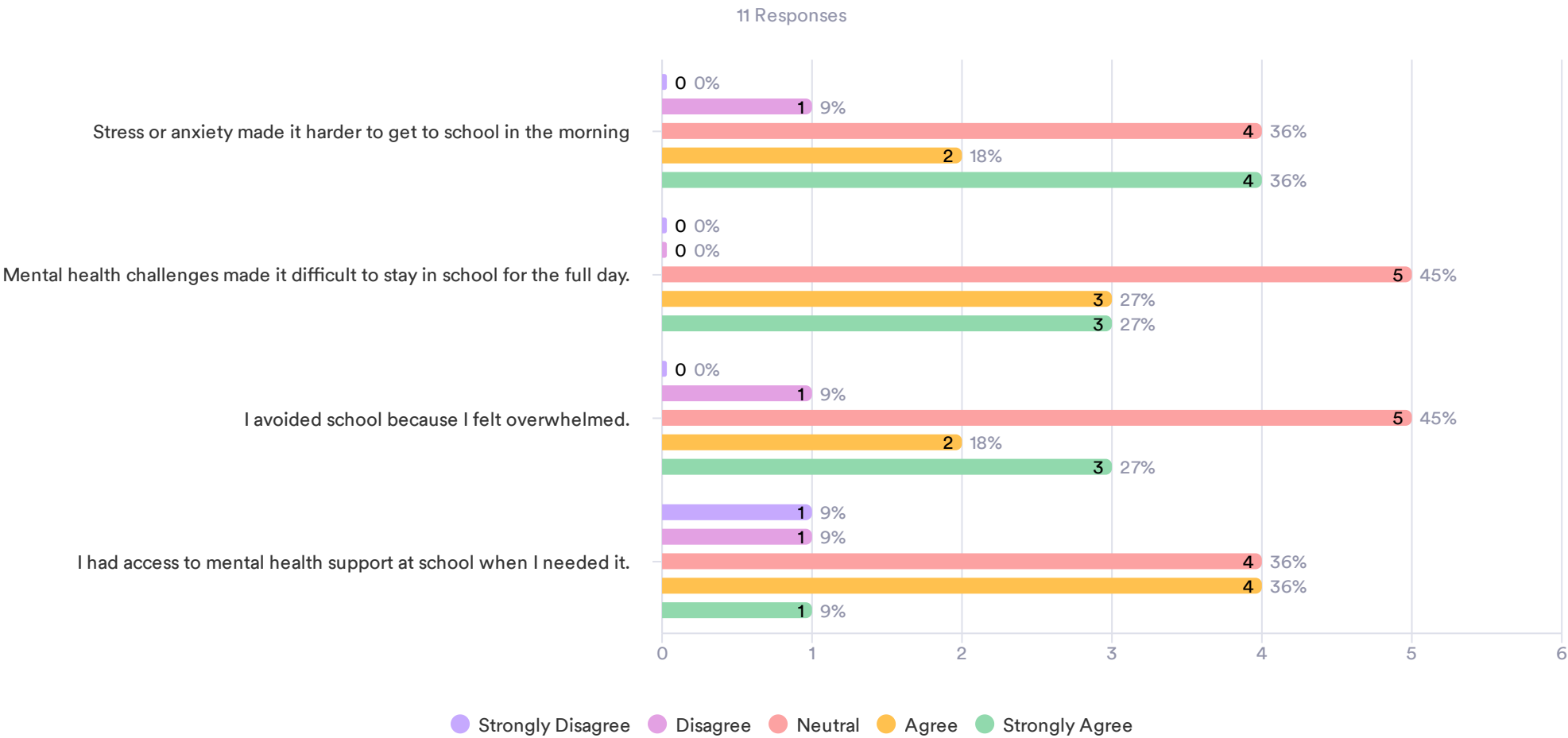
Thinking about housing challenges or homelessness this past school year, how much do you agree with the following statements?

0 Response



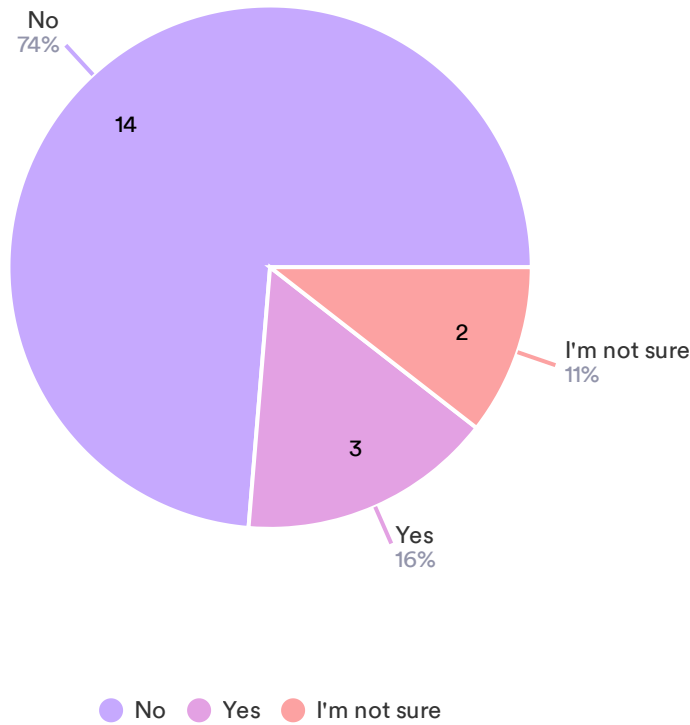
Chronic Absenteeism Survey - STUDENT

Thinking about your mental health, anxiety, or stress this past school year, how much do you agree with the following statements?

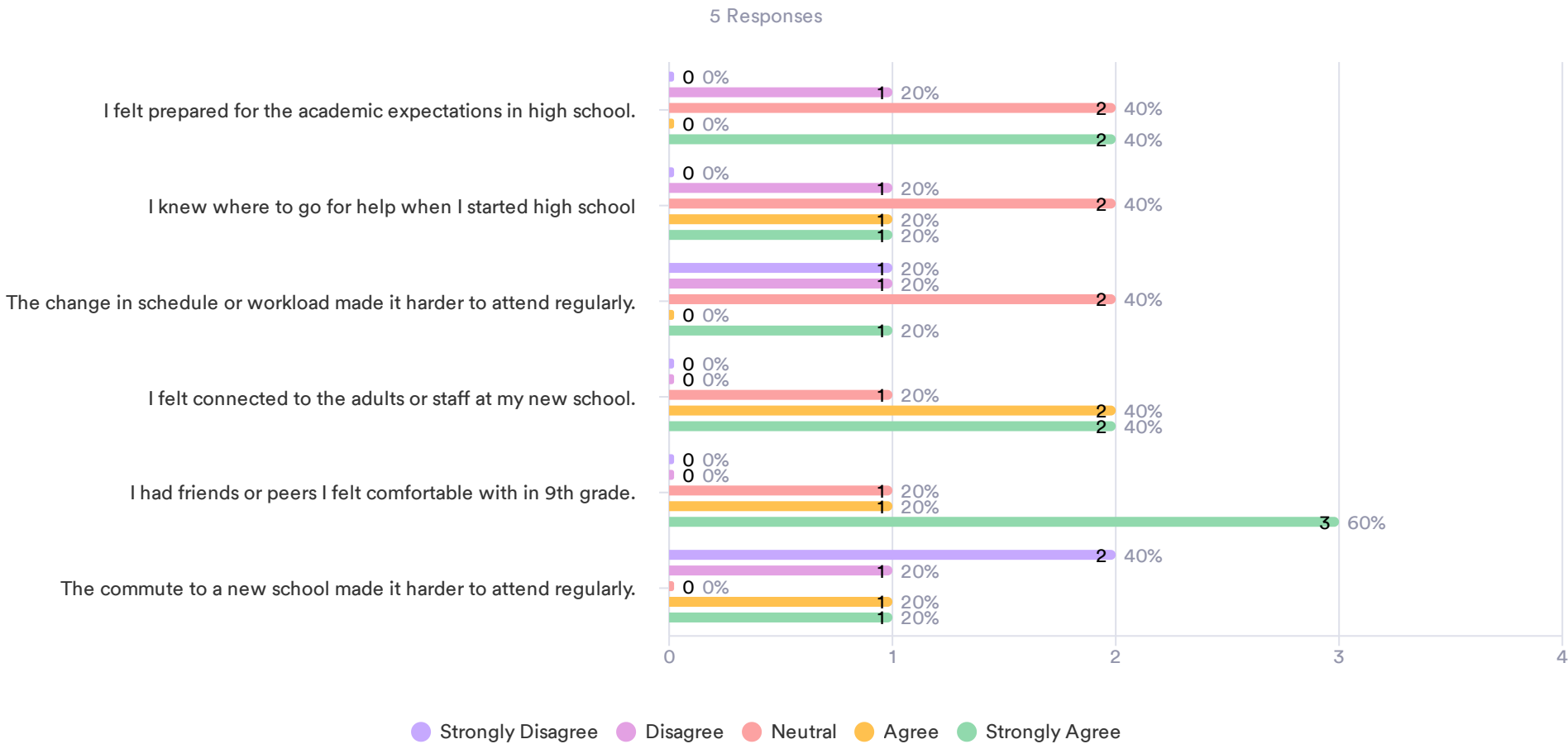


Last school year, did you transition from 8th to 9th grade?

19 Responses

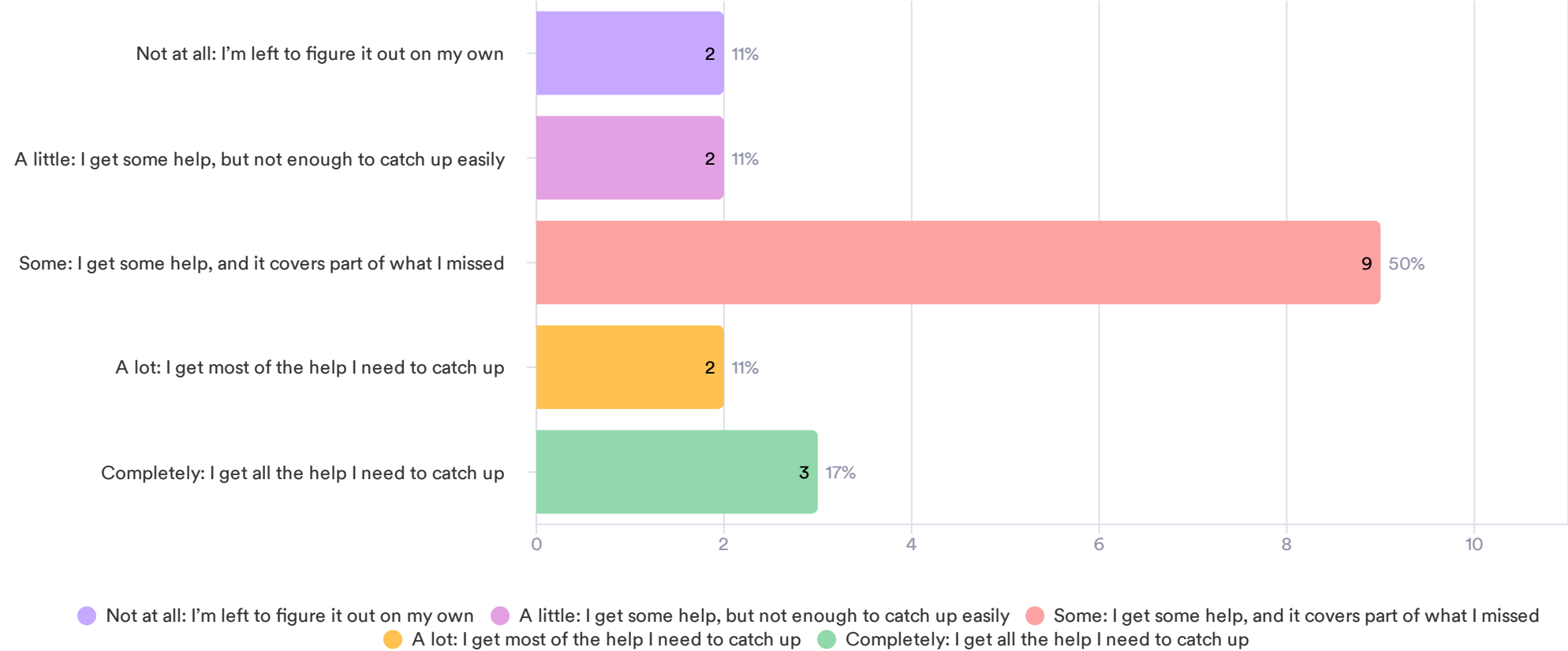


Thinking about the transition from 8th to 9th grade, how much do you agree with the following statements?



When you are absent, how supported do you feel by the school in helping you catch up?

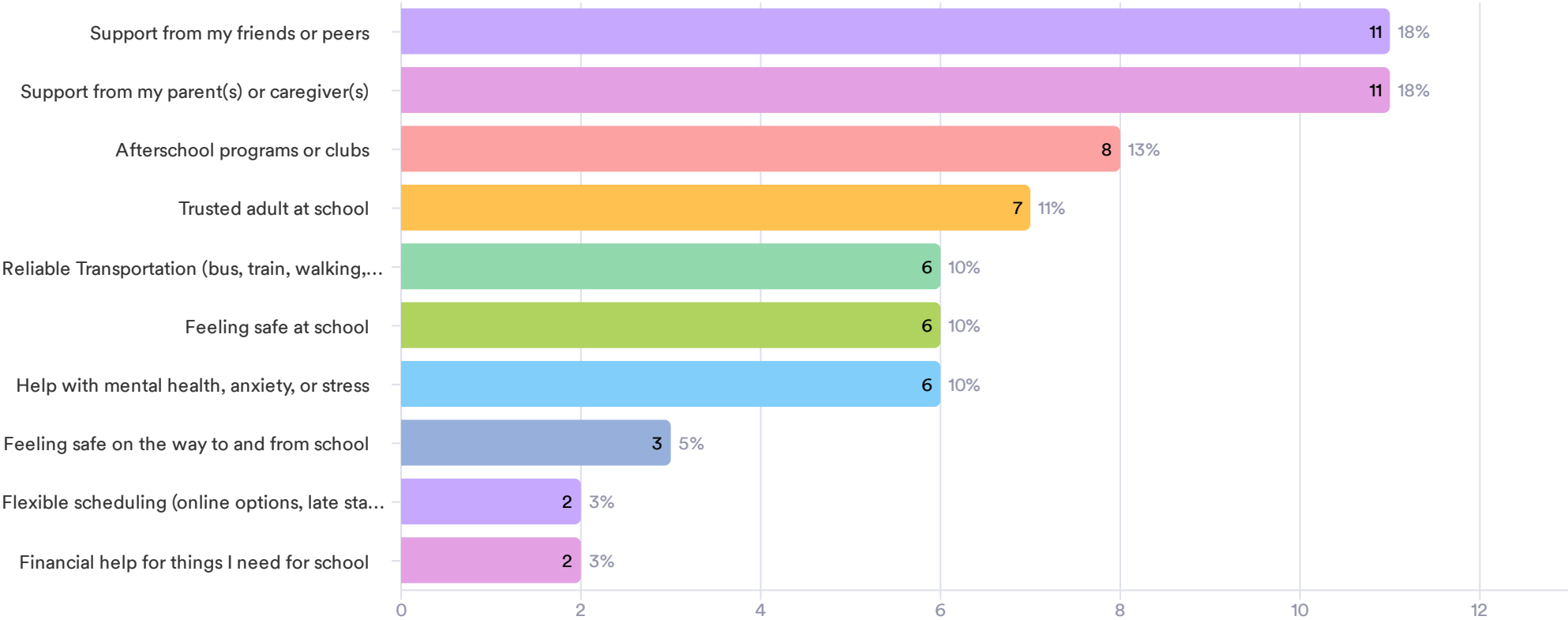
18 Responses



Chronic Absenteeism Survey - STUDENT

What has helped you attend school more consistently? (Select all that apply)

62 Responses



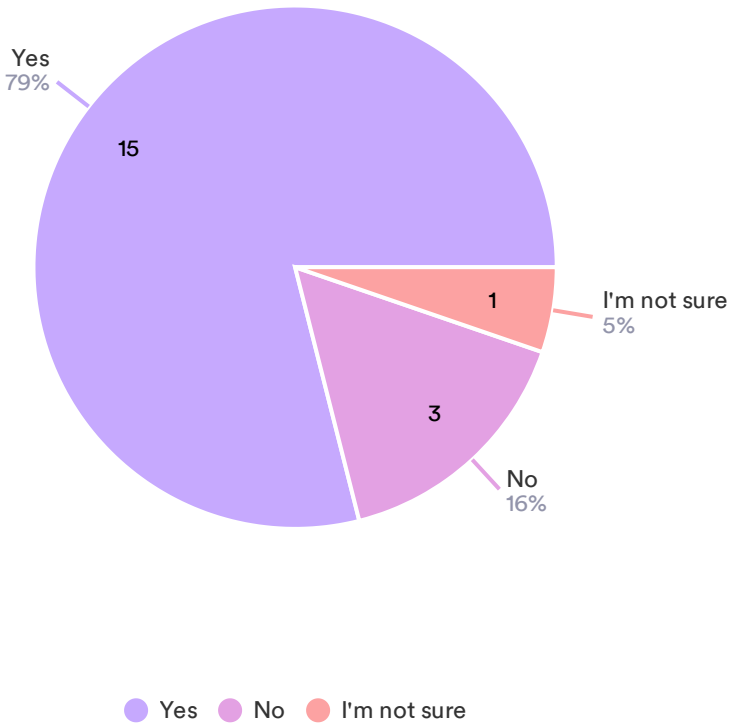
What is one thing your school or community could do to support regular attendance?

11 Responses

Data	Responses
Have incentives to show up.	1
I don't know	1
Motivation	1
Let me do my mentoring sessions.	1
like do more activities that are fun	1
Make day's shorter	1
Be less strict & demanding	1
Nothing	1
more mental health days and bring nack headphones because for many children music is very calming and improves mental health	1
maybe add fun activities for advisory to encourage kids to come early	1

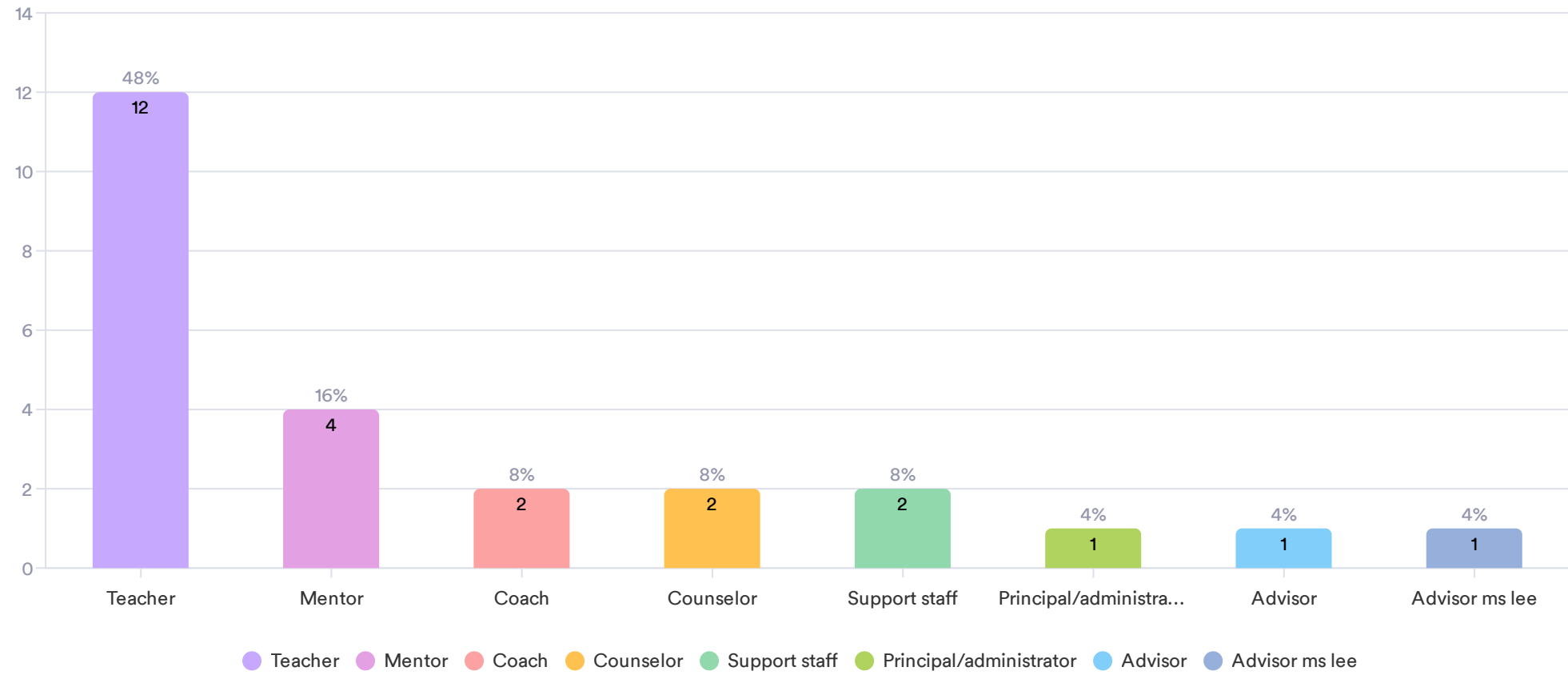
Is there an adult at your school or in your community you feel comfortable talking to when you have a problem?

19 Responses



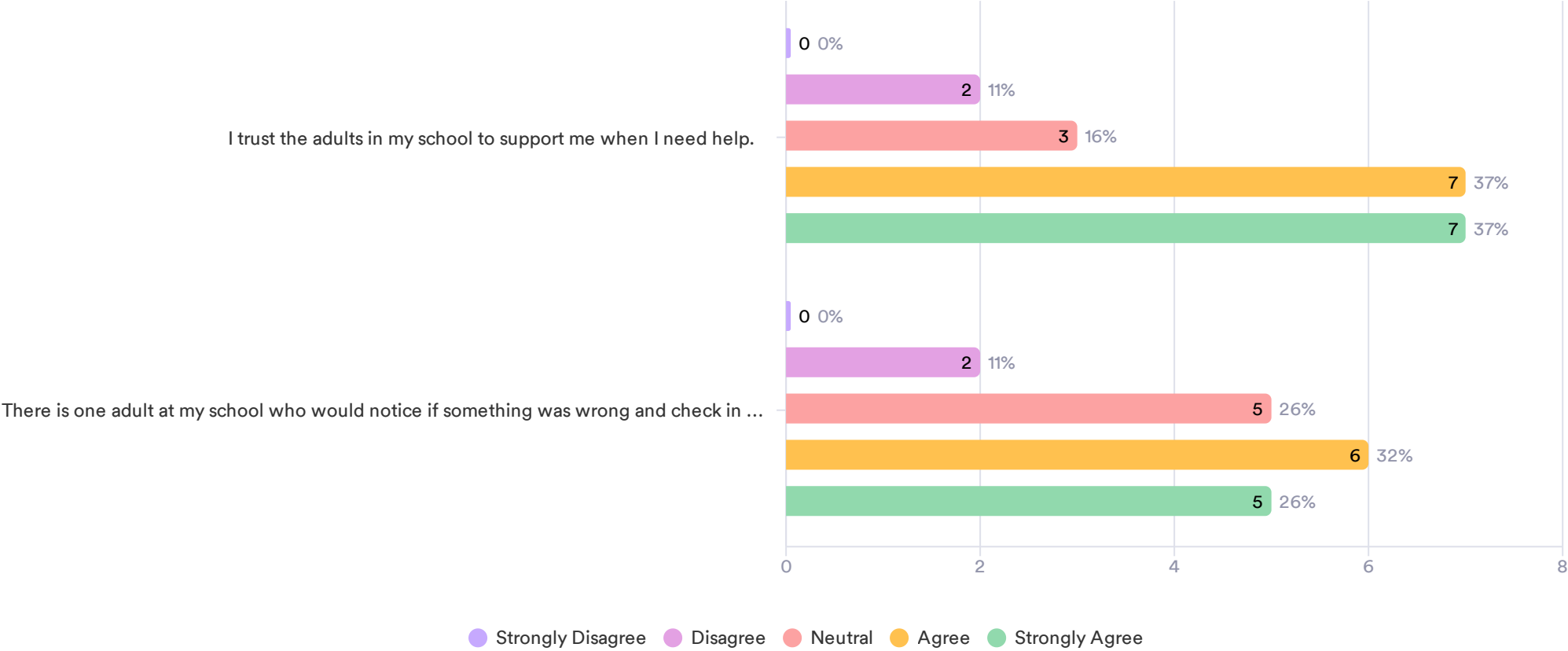
If yes, what kind of role did they have?

25 Responses



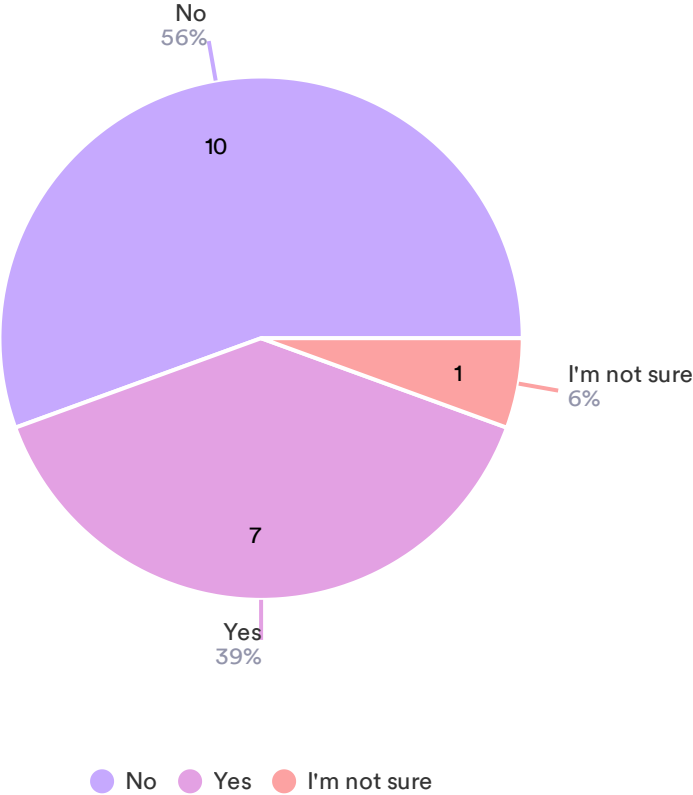
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

19 Responses



Is your school located in the same community or neighborhood where you live?

18 Responses



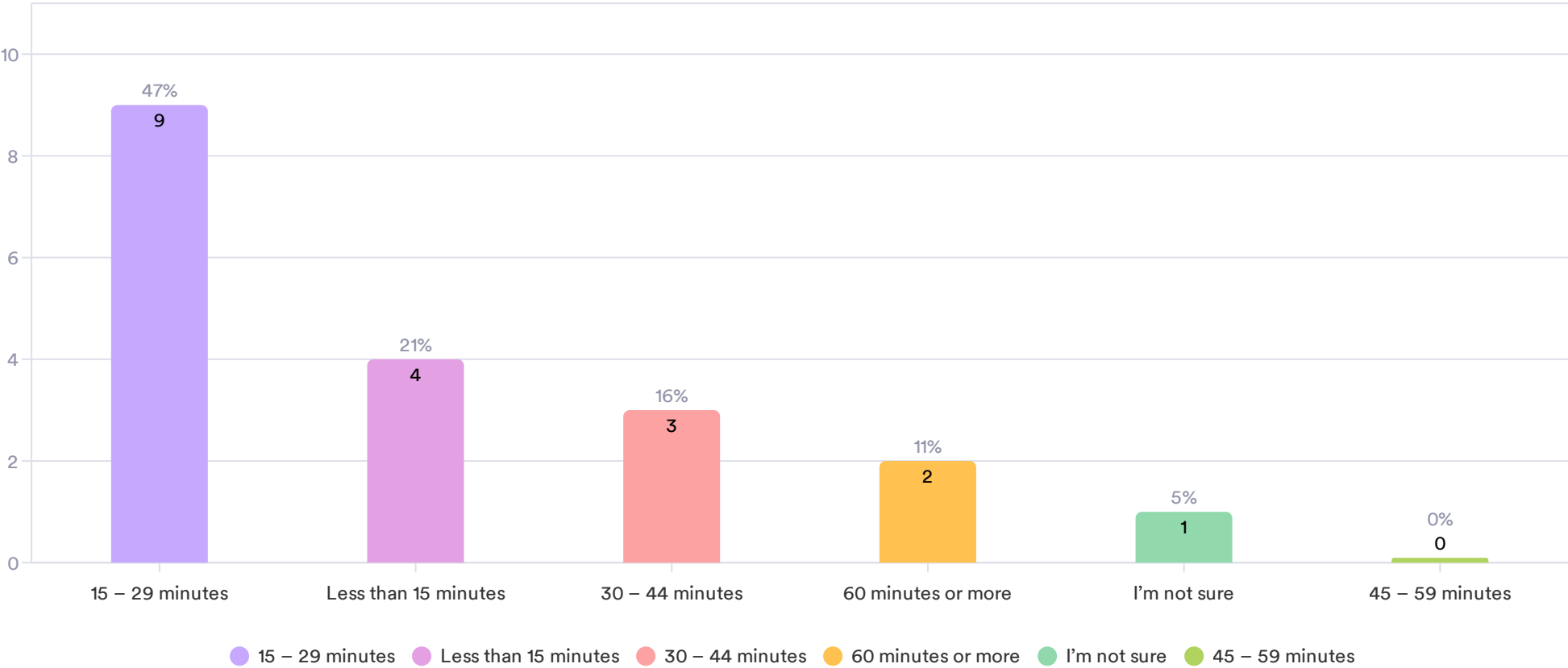
What is your home zip code?

14 Responses

Data	Responses
60641	9
...	1
60610	1
60620	1
60608	1
60609	1

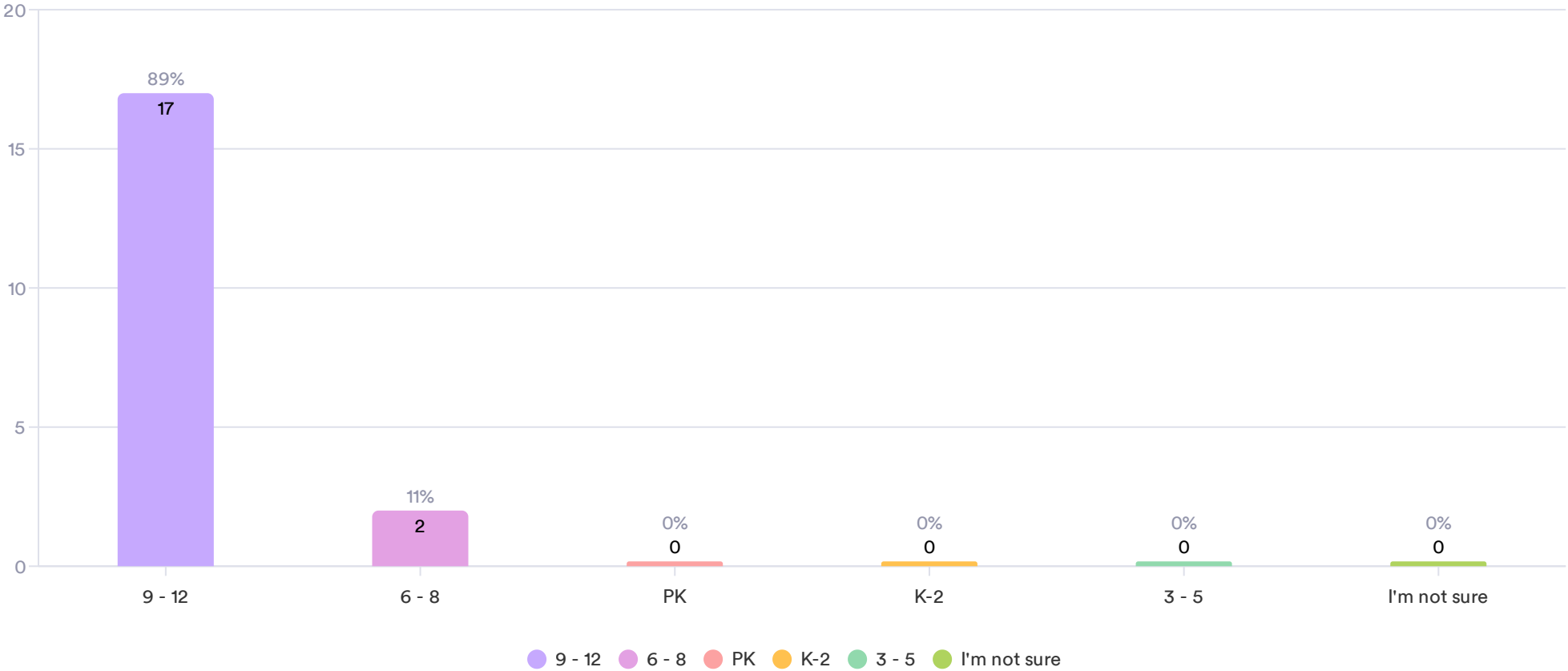
About how long does it take you to travel to school each day?

19 Responses



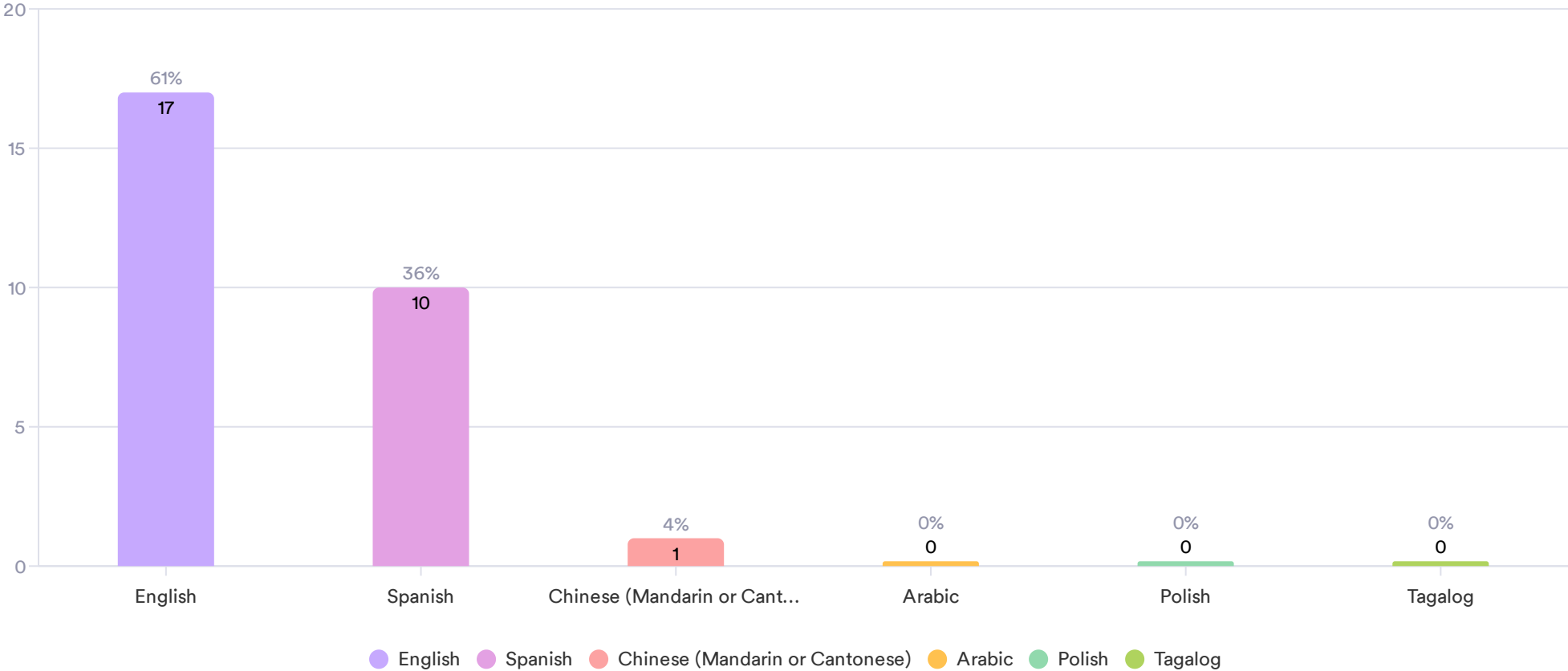
What grade are you in right now?

19 Responses



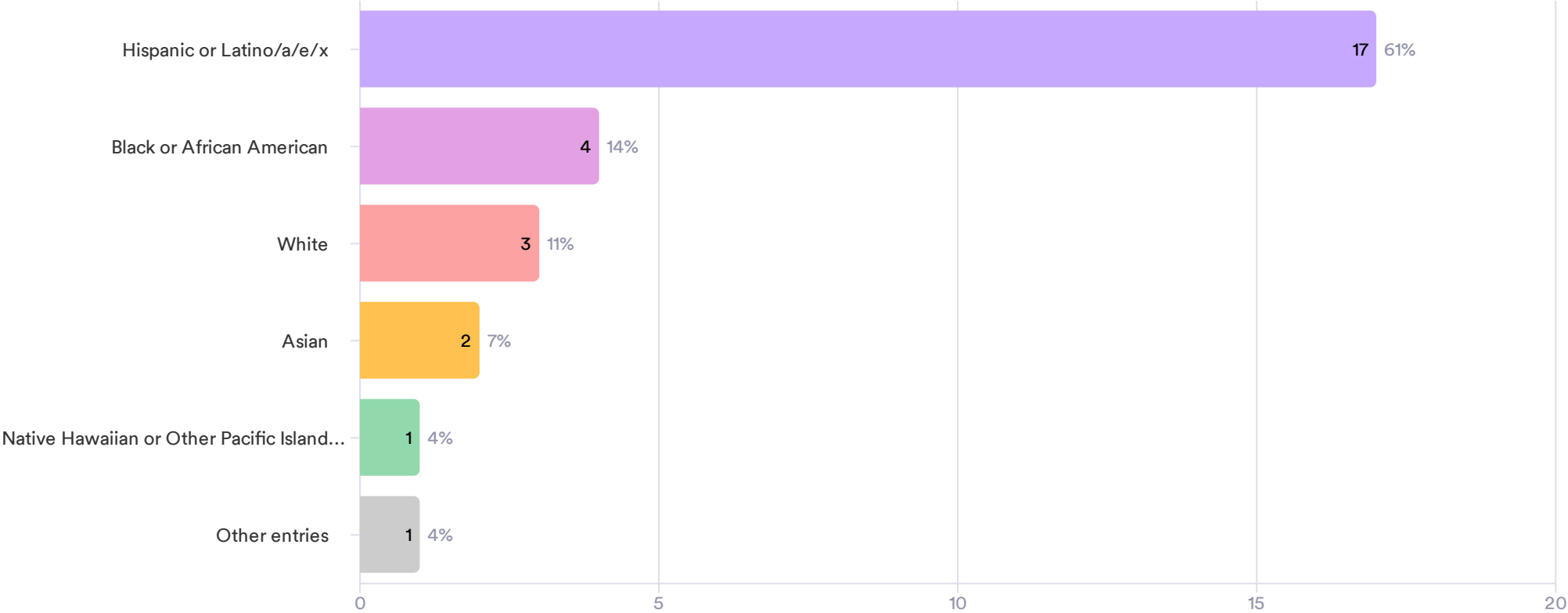
What language(s) do you speak at home? (Select all that apply)

28 Responses



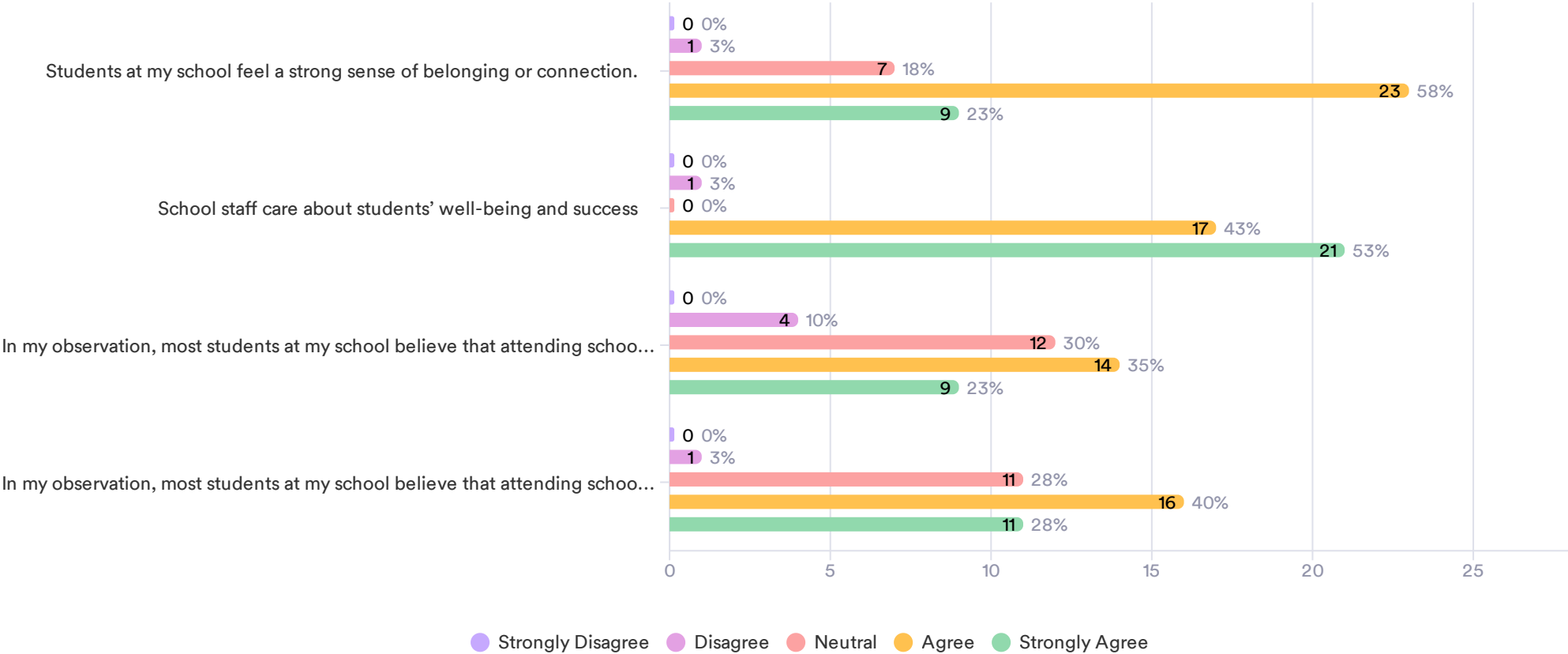
What is your race or ethnicity? (Select all that apply)

28 Responses



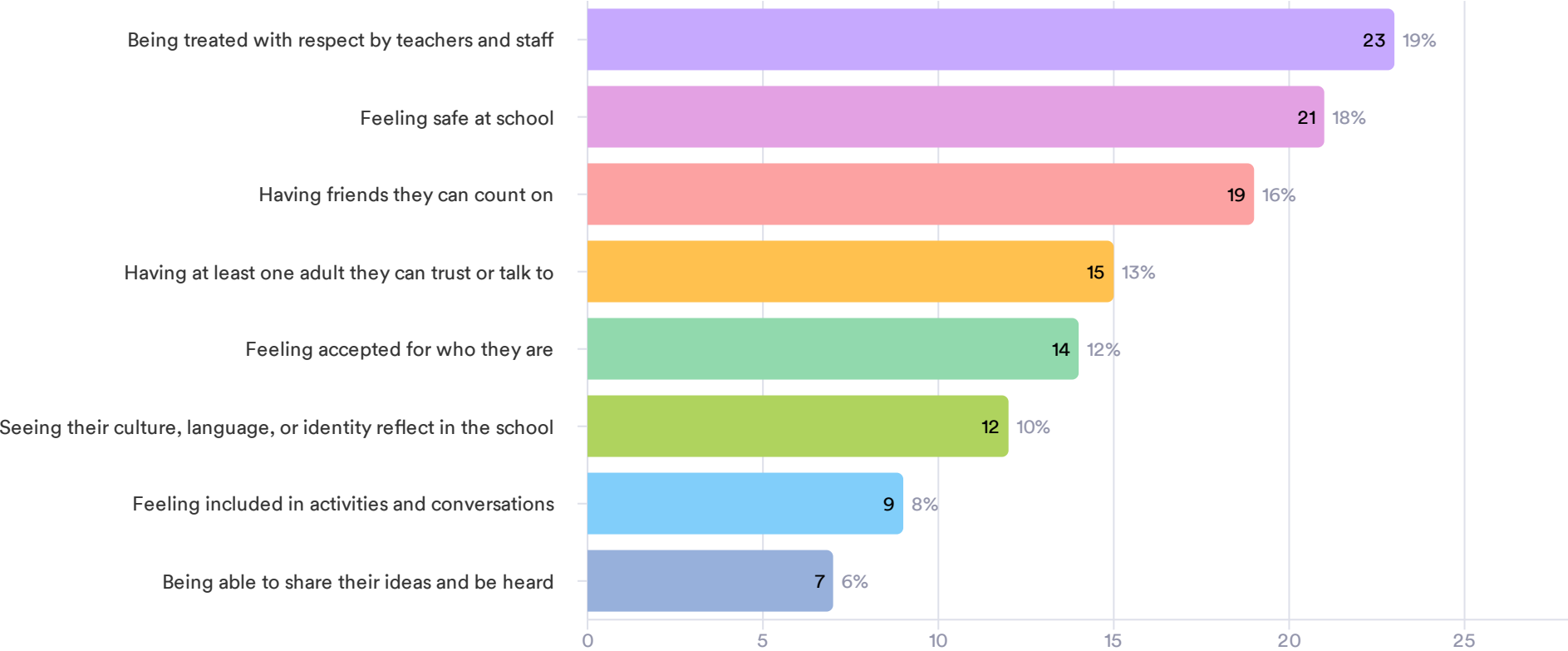
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

40 Responses



For students, belonging at school means... (Select up to three you believe are most important for students at your school.)

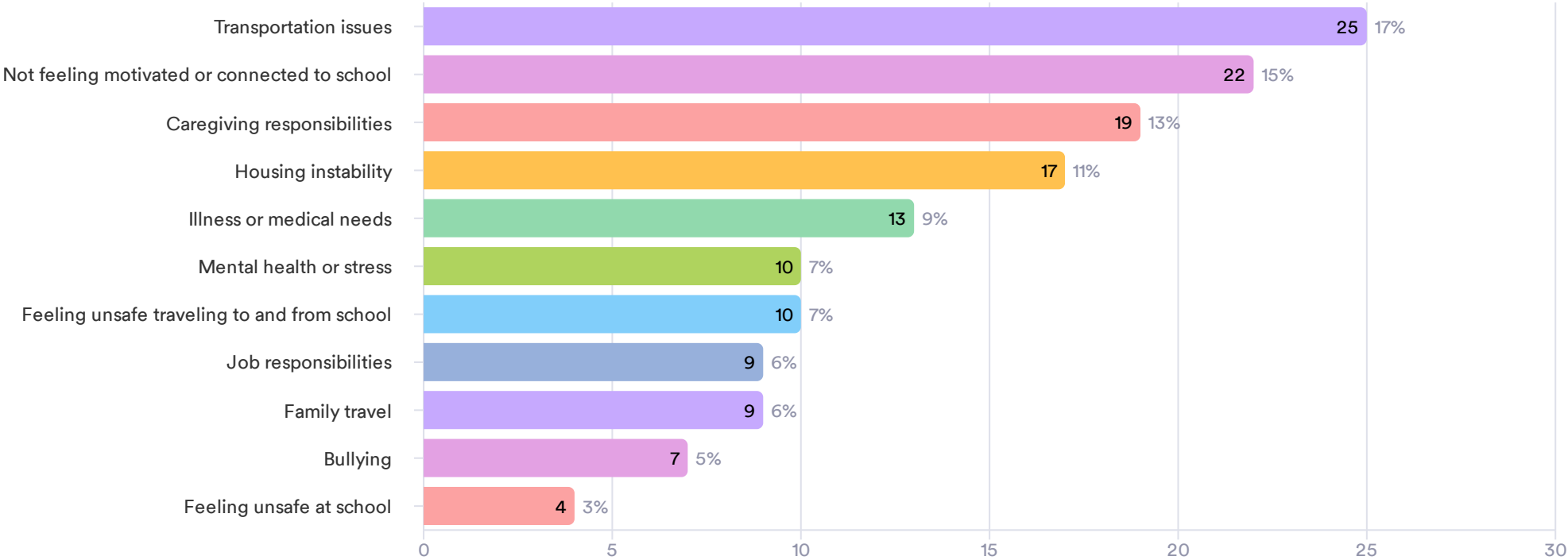
120 Responses

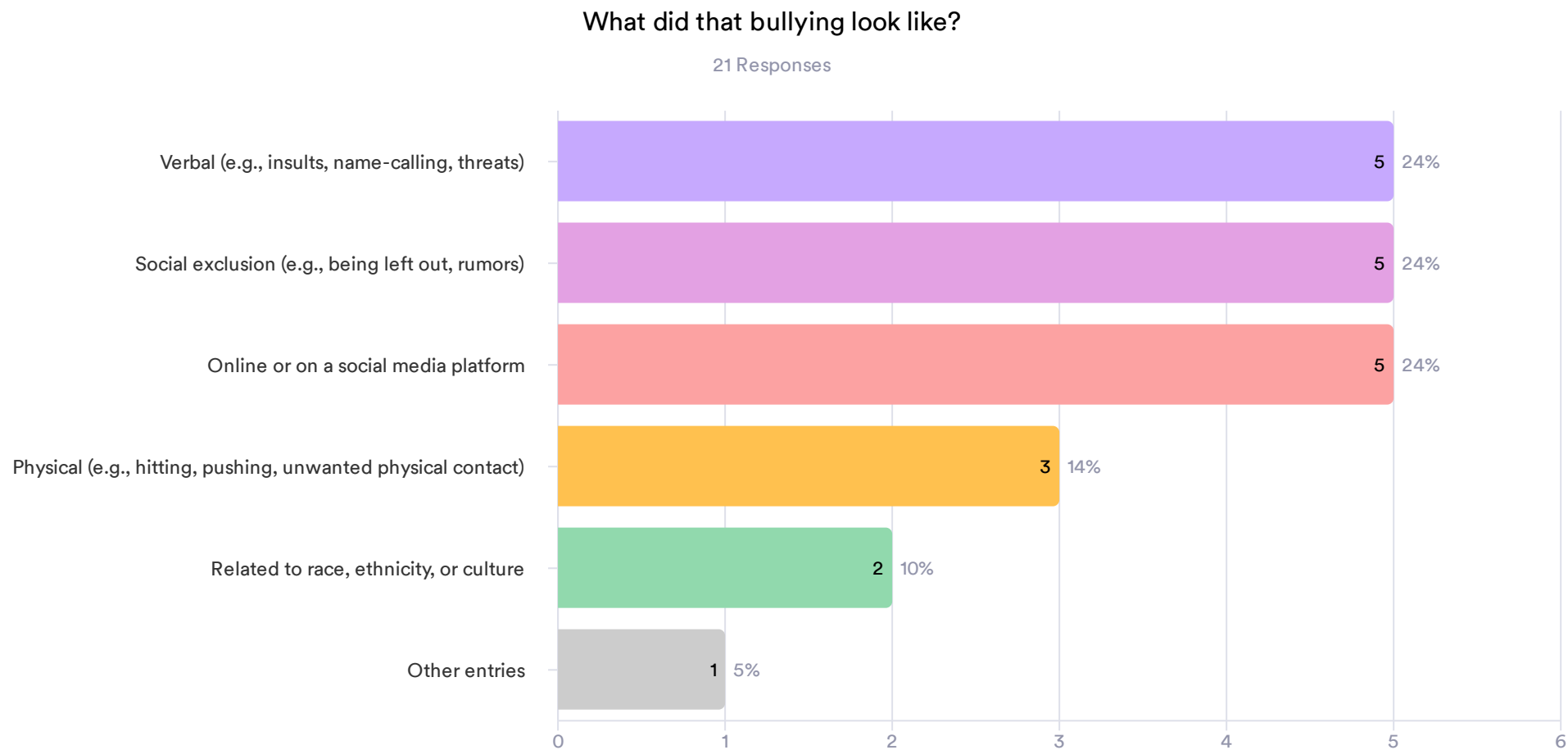


Chronic Absenteeism Survey - SCHOOL STAFF

Reflecting on the past school year (2024–2025), which of the following made it harder for your students to get to or stay in school regularly?
(Note: even with good attendance, we would like to know what challenges your students might encounter.) Select all that apply, even if your students had mostly good attendance

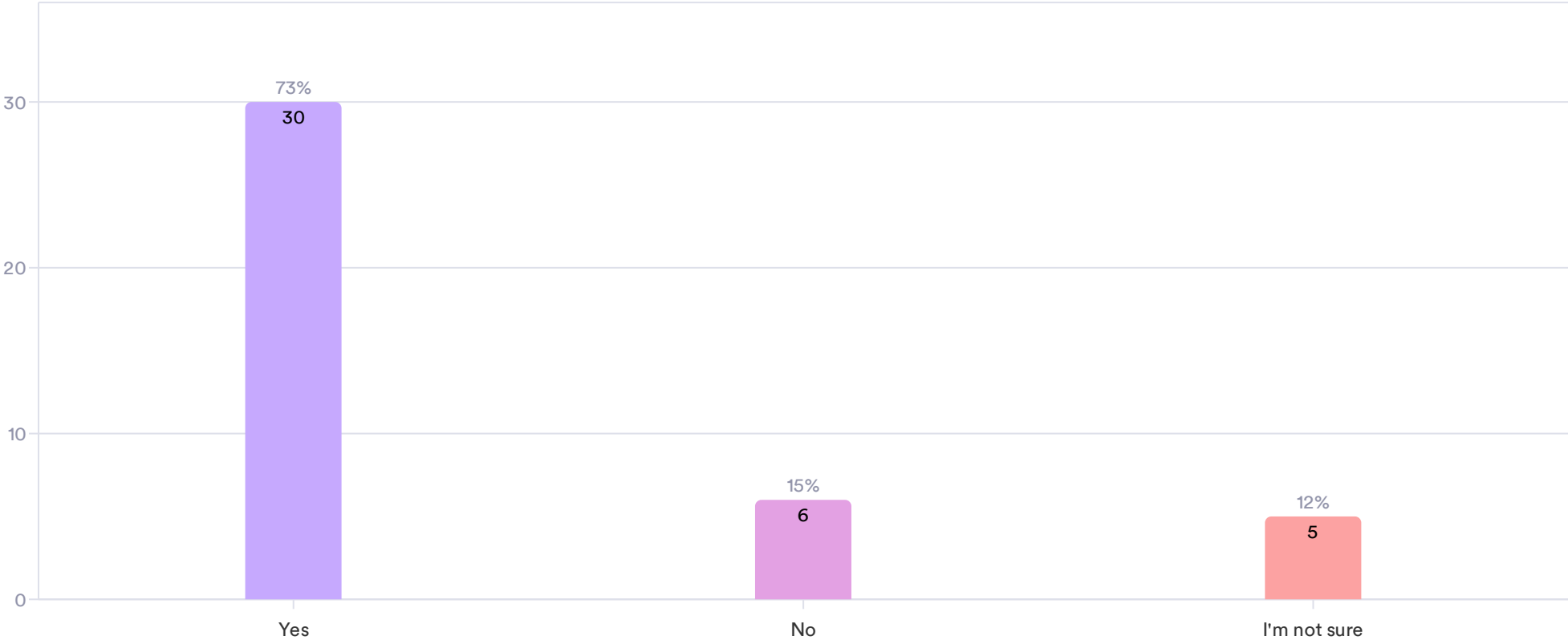
145 Responses





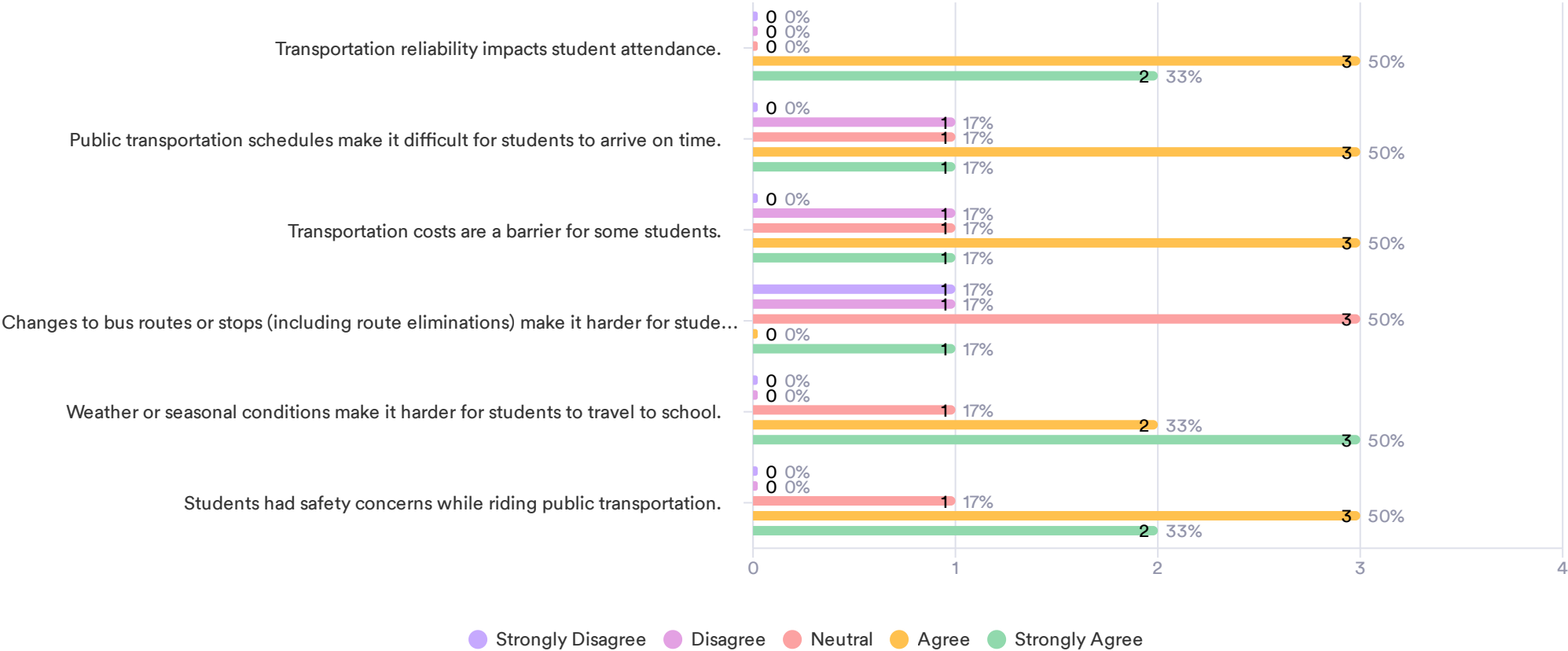
In your experience, did most students at your school have a safe and reliable way to get to school this past year?

41 Responses



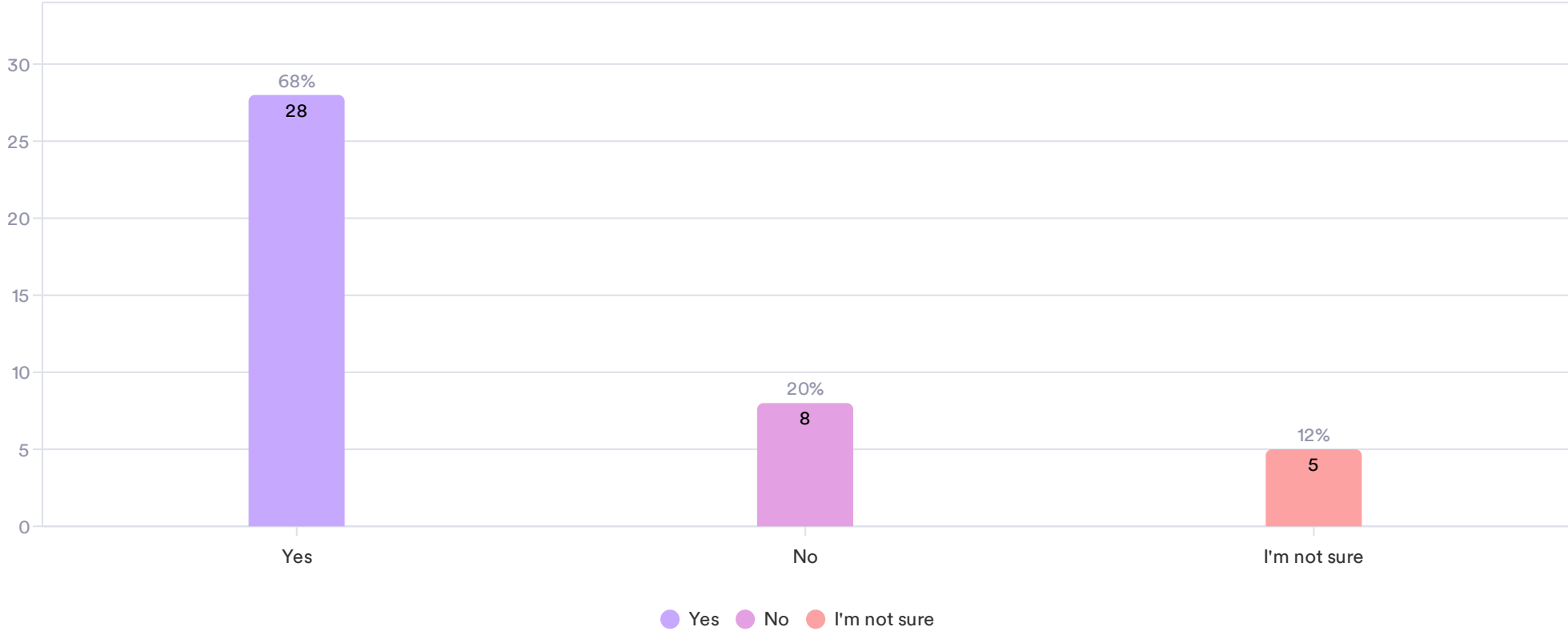
Thinking about transportation this past school year, how much do you agree with the following statements?

6 Responses



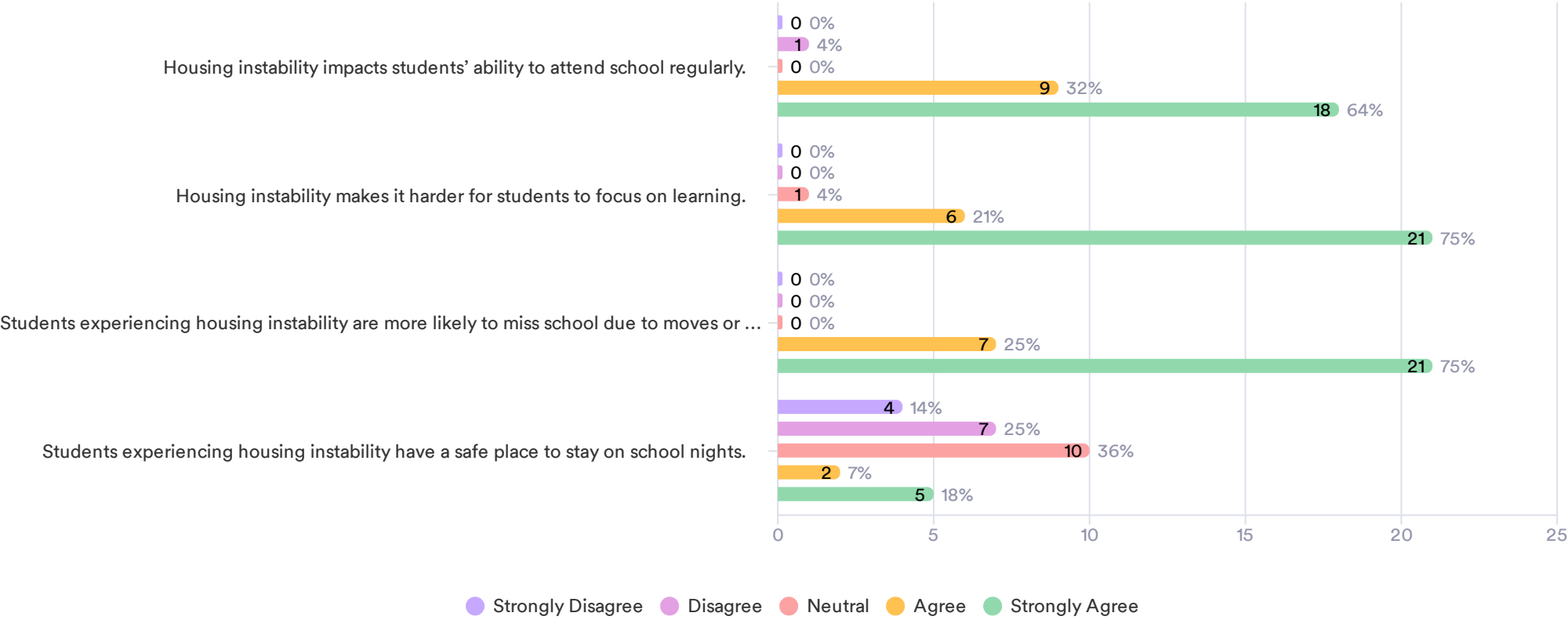
Based on your observations or knowledge, did any students you supported this past year experience housing instability that affected their attendance or engagement?

41 Responses



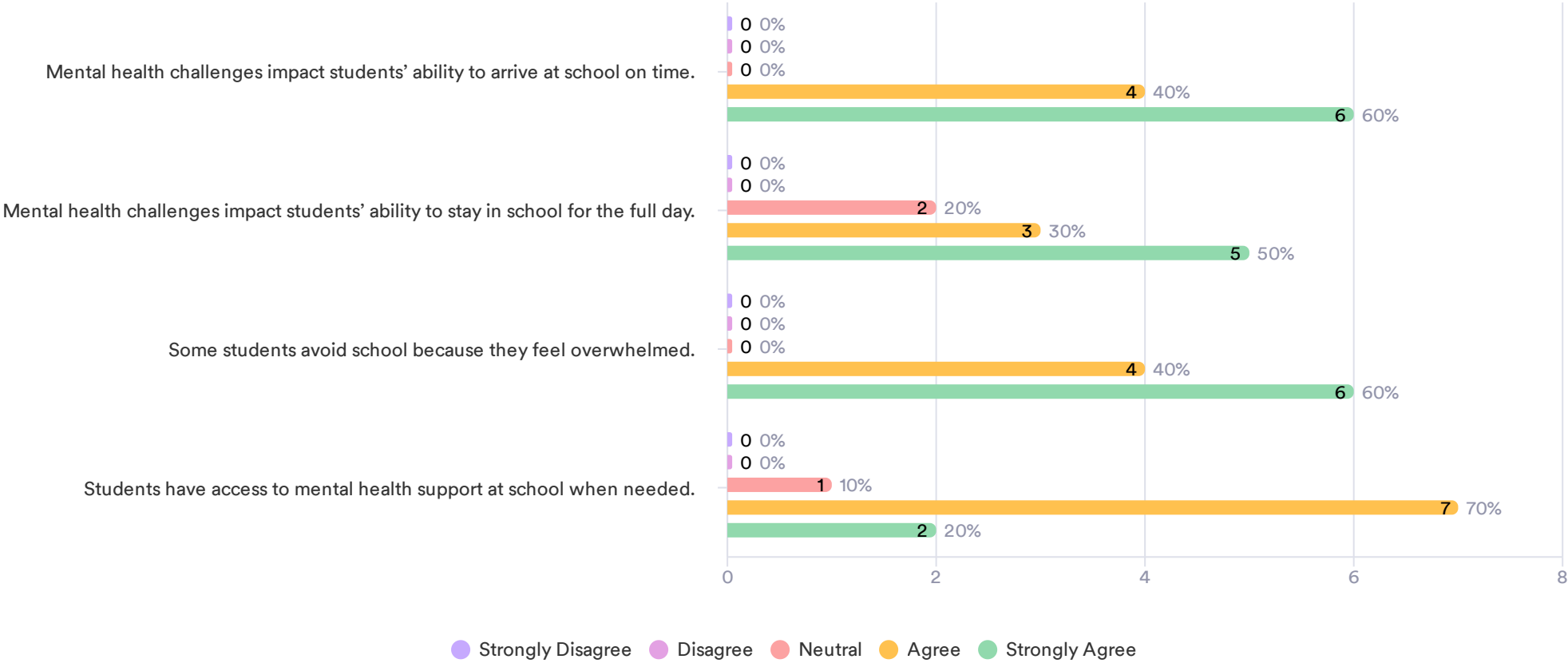
Thinking about students experiencing housing instability or homelessness this past school year, how much do you agree with the following statements?

28 Responses



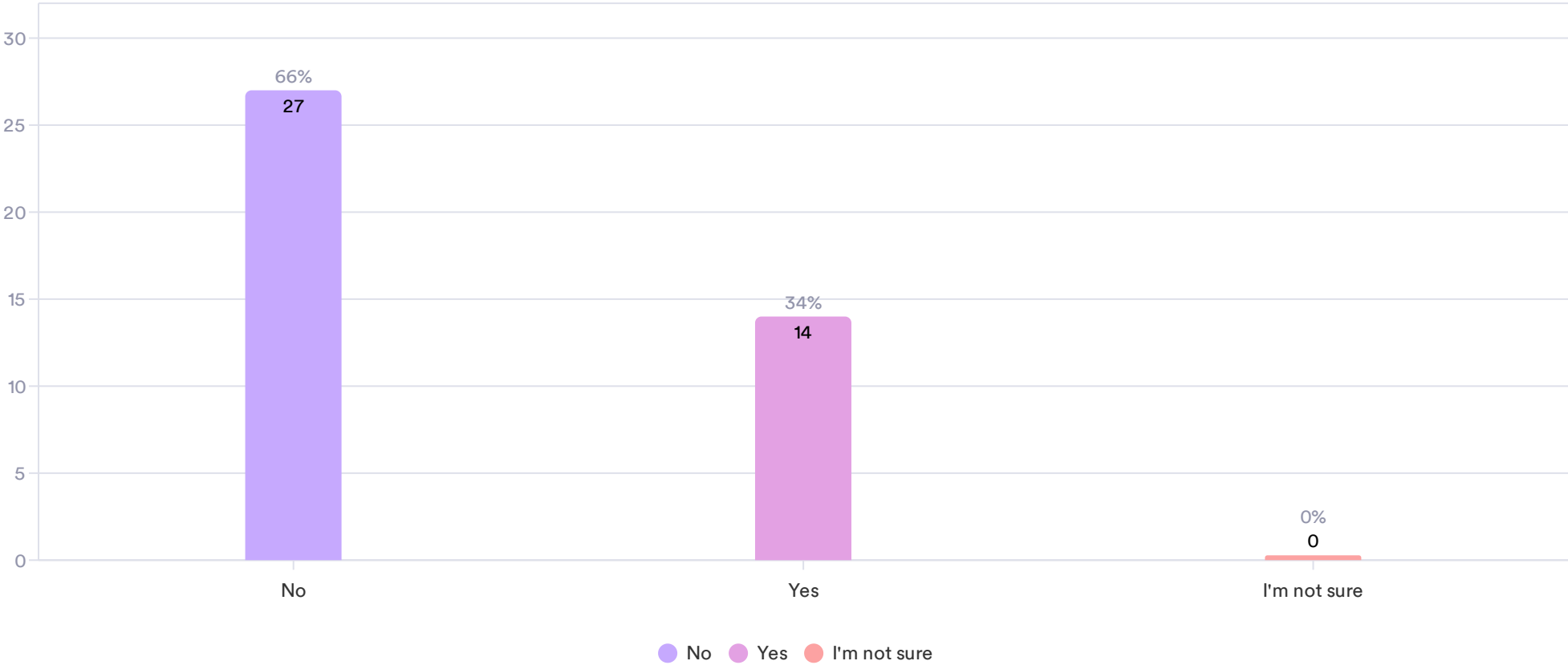
Thinking about student mental health, anxiety, or stress this past school year, how much do you agree with the following statements?

10 Responses



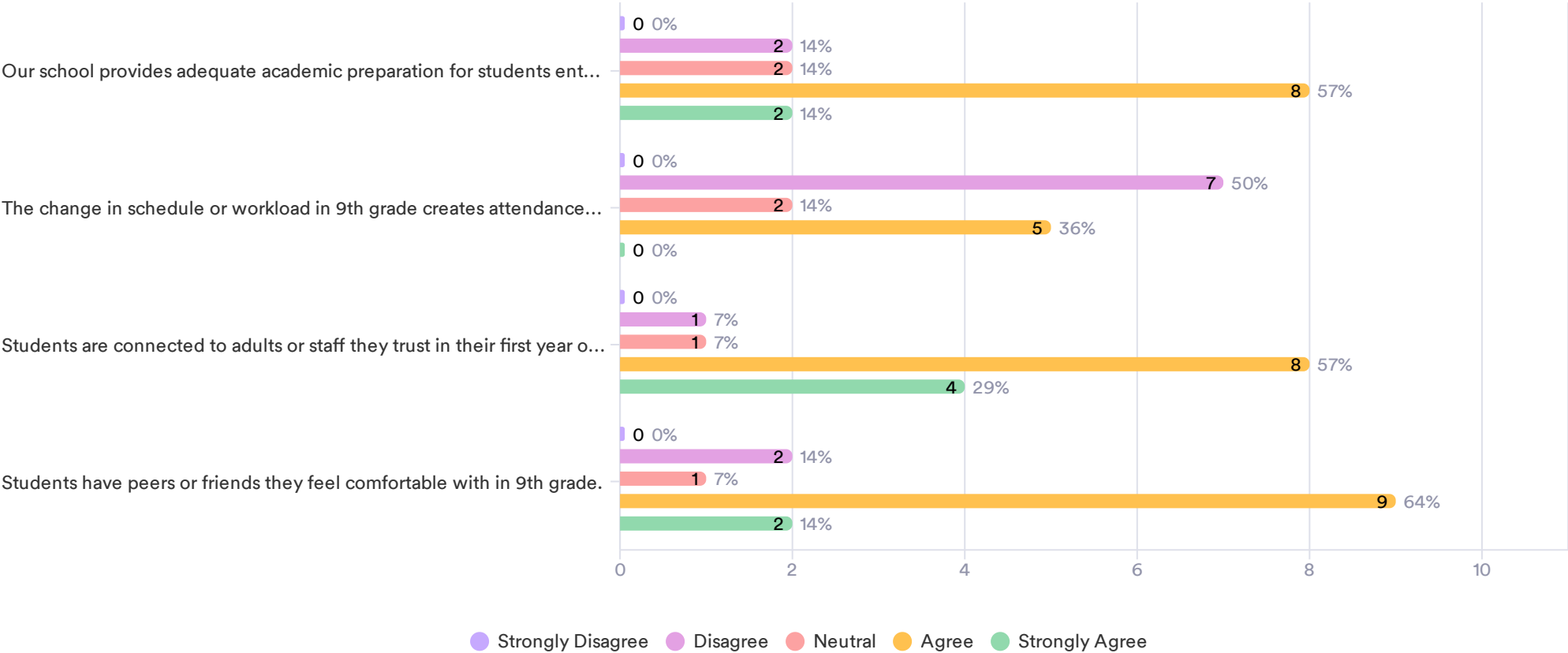
Do you currently teach or support 9th-grade students at your school?

41 Responses



Thinking about the transition from 8th to 9th grade at your school, how much do you agree with the following statements?

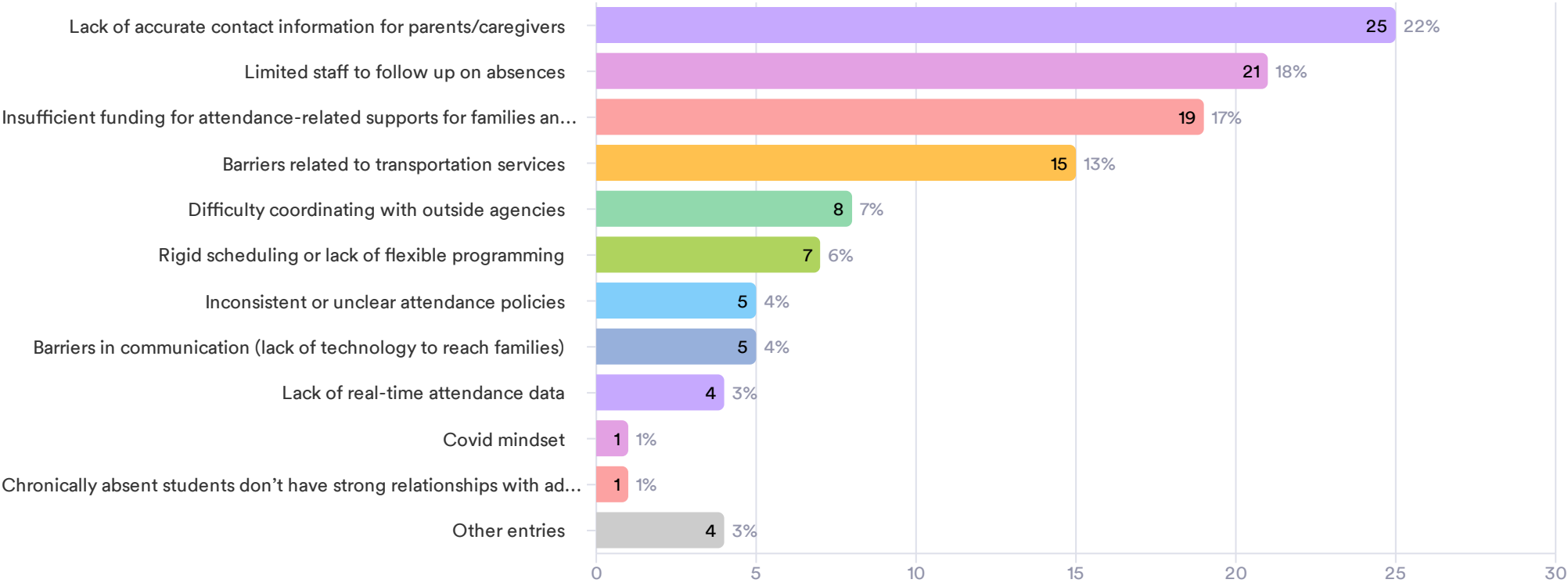
14 Responses



Chronic Absenteeism Survey - SCHOOL STAFF

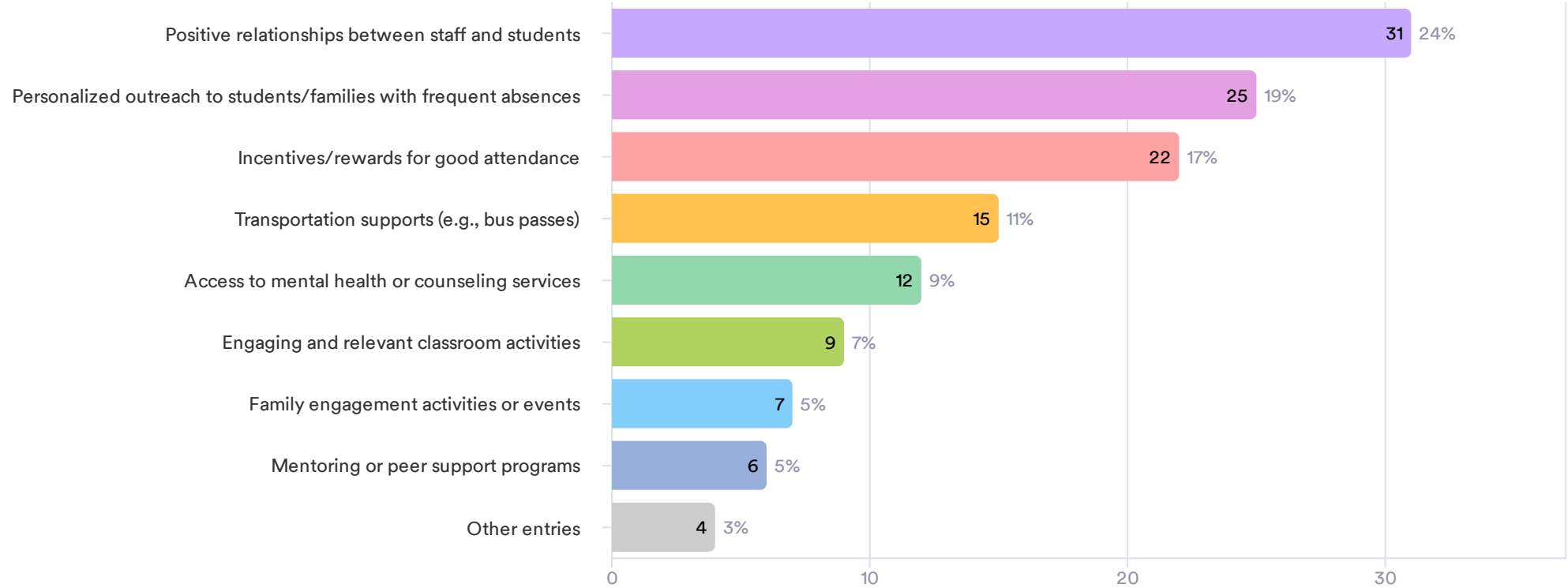
What policies, systems, or conditions (e.g., attendance procedures, staff capacity, access to real-time data, inter-agency coordination) make it harder for your school to support regular attendance? (Select all that apply)

115 Responses



What current practices or interventions at your school have been most effective in improving student attendance? (Select the top three that apply)

131 Responses



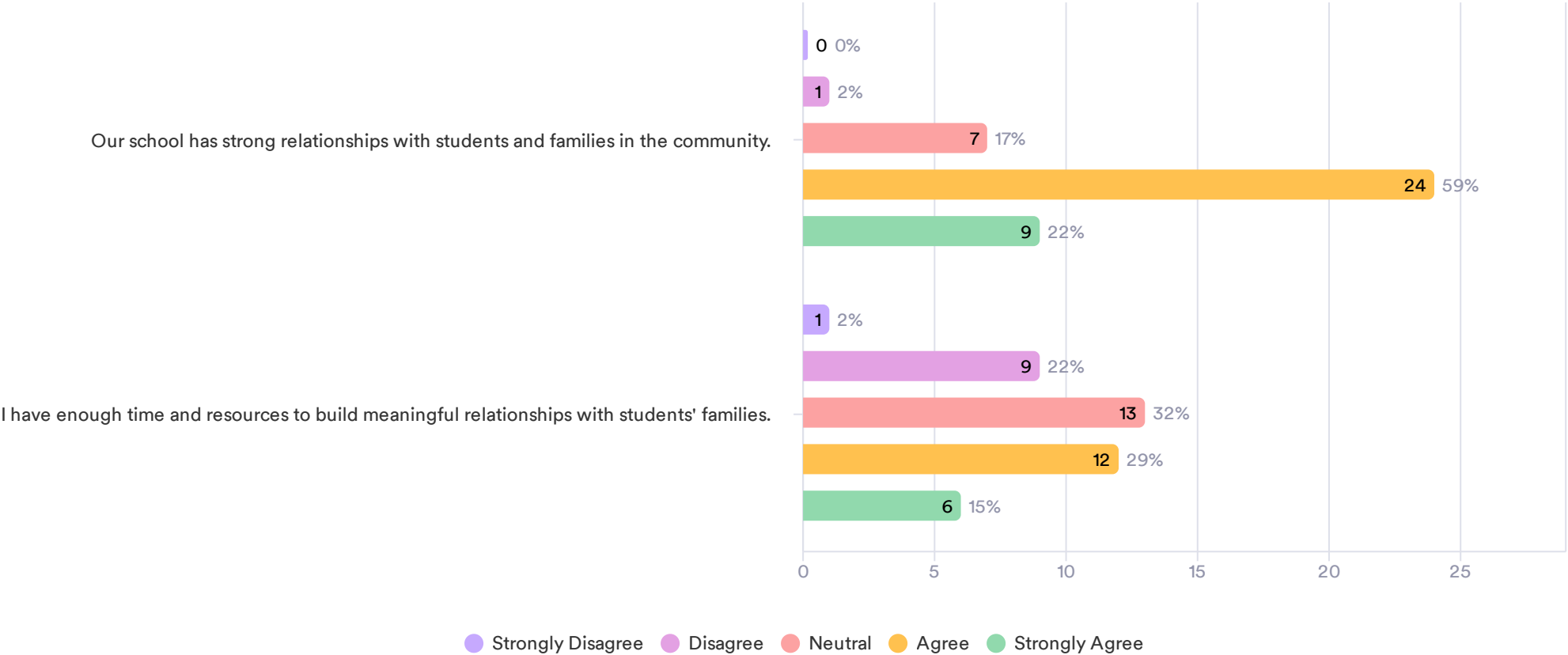
What is one thing your school or community could do to support regular attendance?

20 Responses

Data	Responses
We need better instruction in our classrooms. Better instruction--where student ideas are centered but simultaneously focus on both knowledge and skills--make students feel like school is for and with them, not done to them.	1
Continue to do outreach	1
Coordinate with outside agencies for additional funding to support attendance initiatives	1
Flexible scheduling if possible, have advisory or non-credit class in the morning with a fun activity to build community with students. That they are on-time to their 1st period class.	1
Personalized outreach to students/families with frequent absences	1
Work together to get students cutting school into the school building	1
Transparency in how we are supporting our tier 3 attendance students so teachers can be in the know/on the team	1
Find a way to help kids who are struggling with issues outside of school's control.	1
Other entries	12

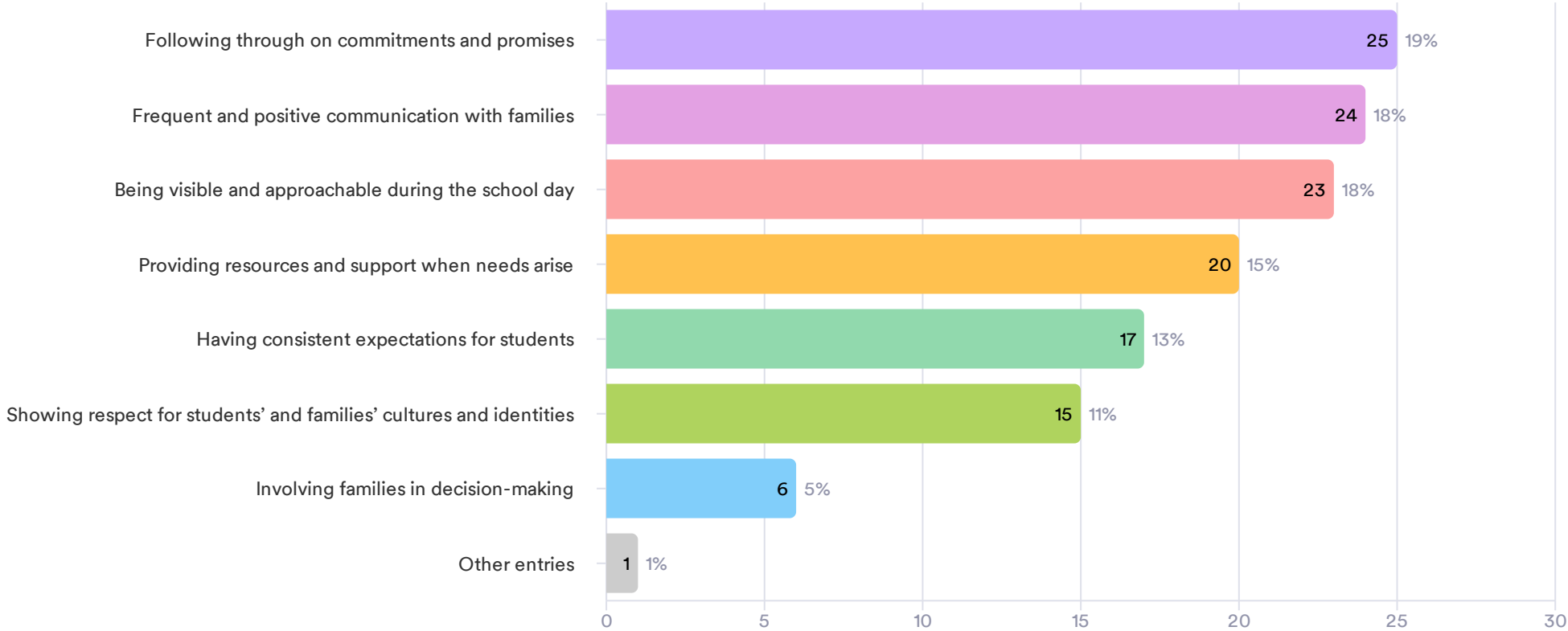
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

41 Responses



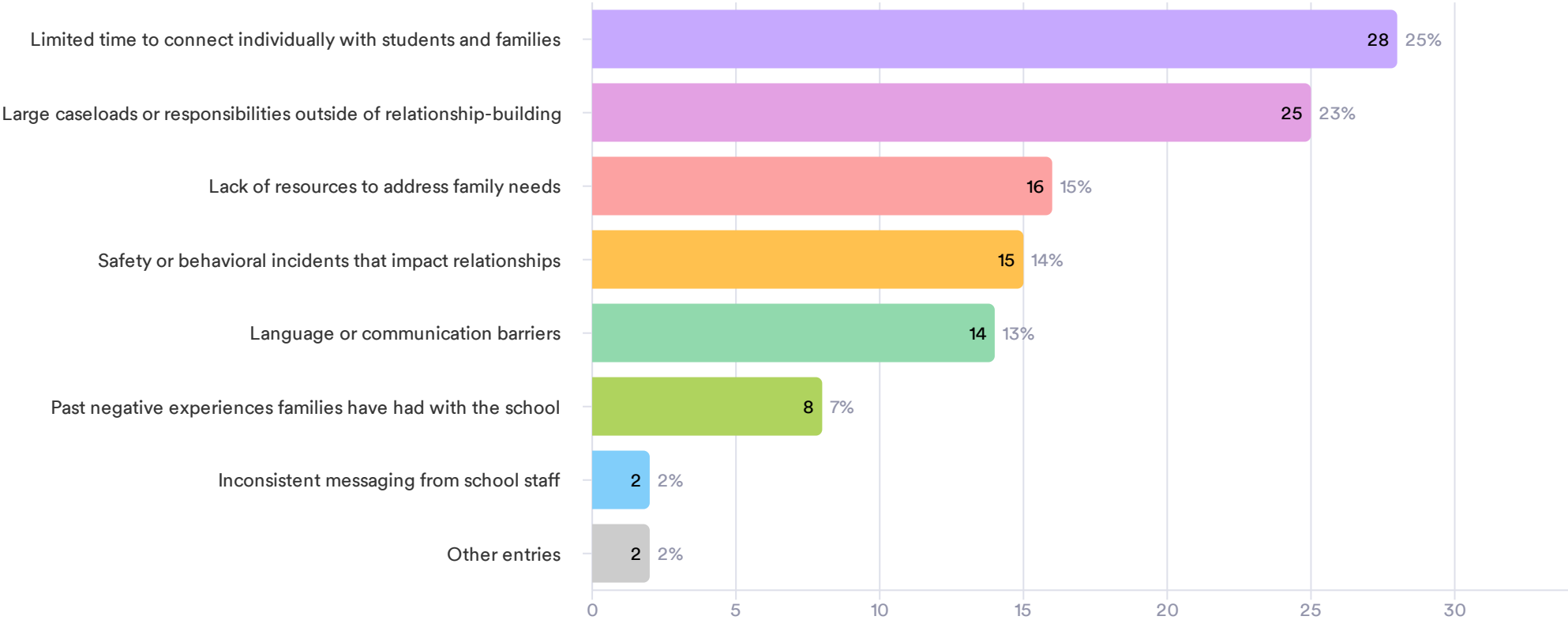
Which of the following options helps you build trust with students and families? (Select up to three)

131 Responses



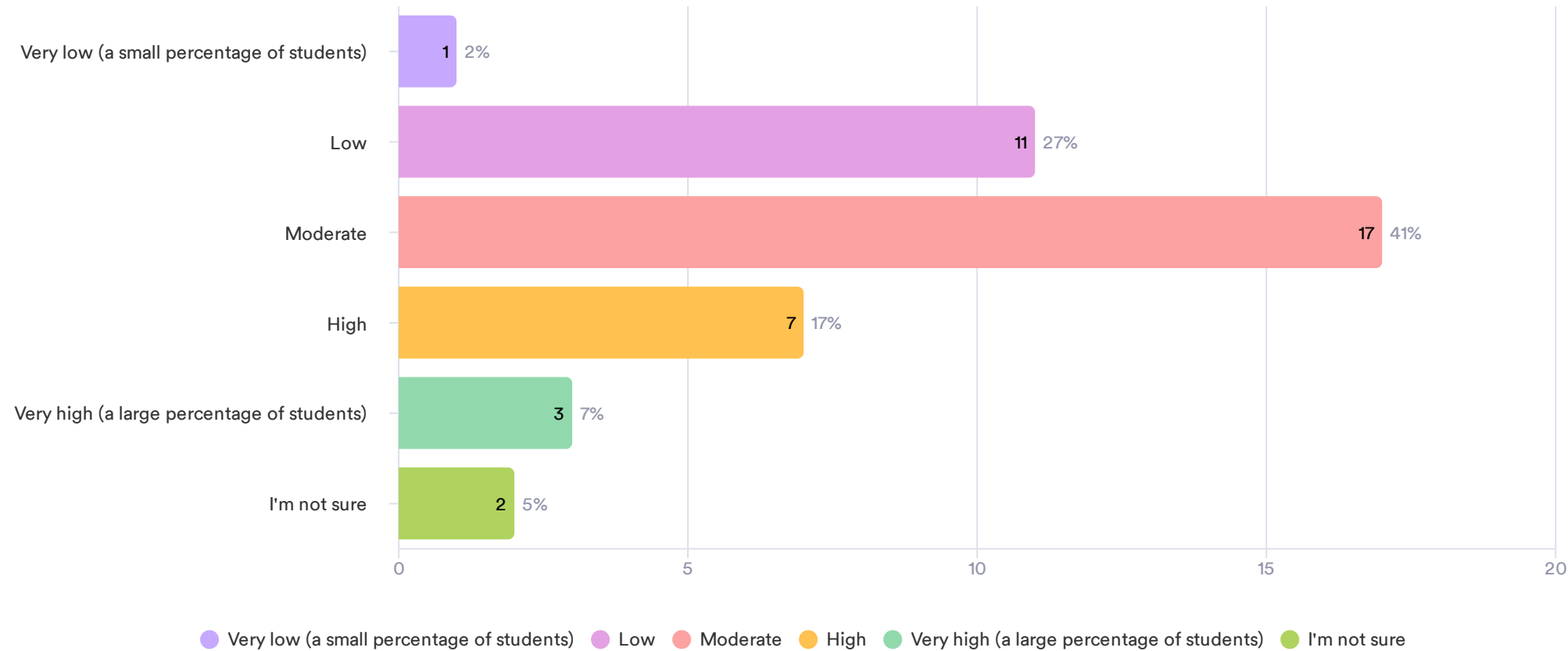
Which of the following options makes it harder to build trust with students and families (Select up to three)

110 Responses



How would you describe the level of chronic absenteeism at your school over the past year?

41 Responses



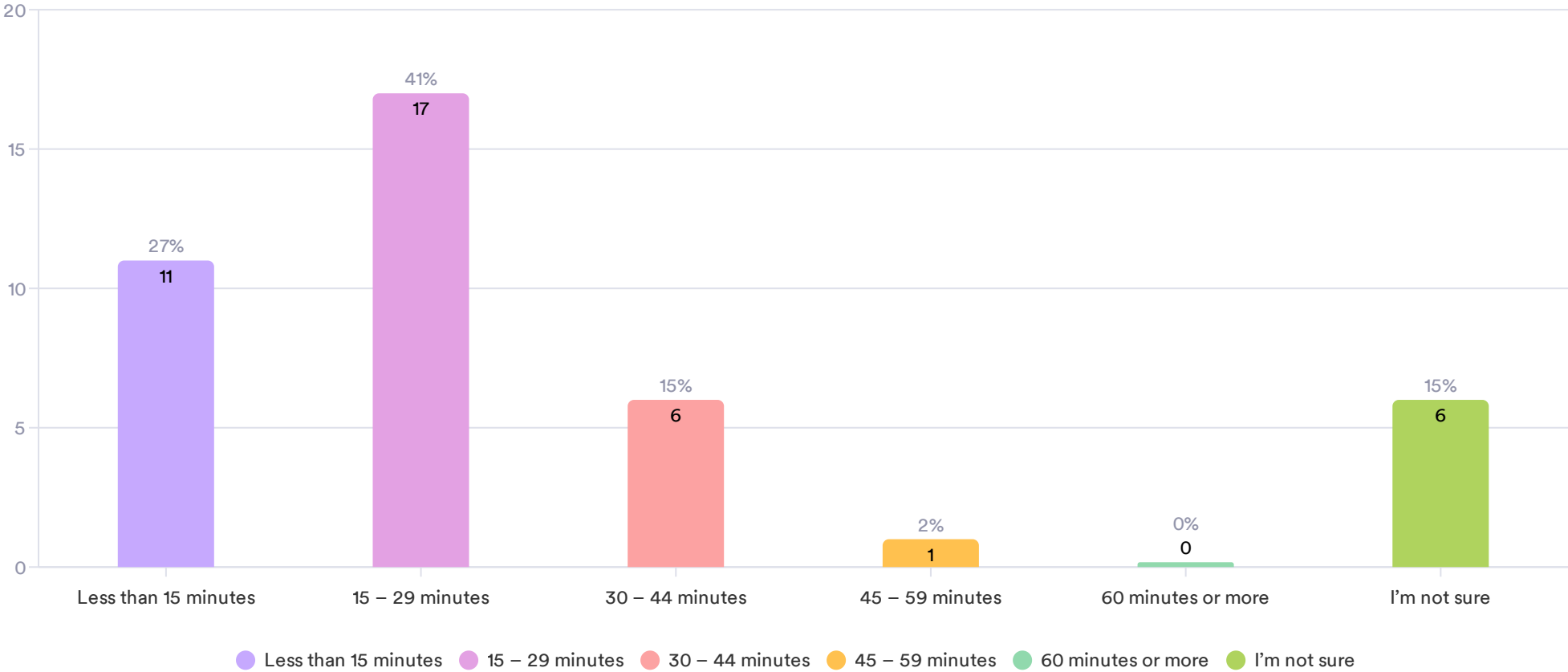
What is your school’s zip code?

41 Responses

Data	Responses
60609	5
60644	4
60641	2
60638	2
60618	2
60622	2
60632	2
60616	2
Other entries	20

On average, how long does it take most students at your school to travel to school each day?

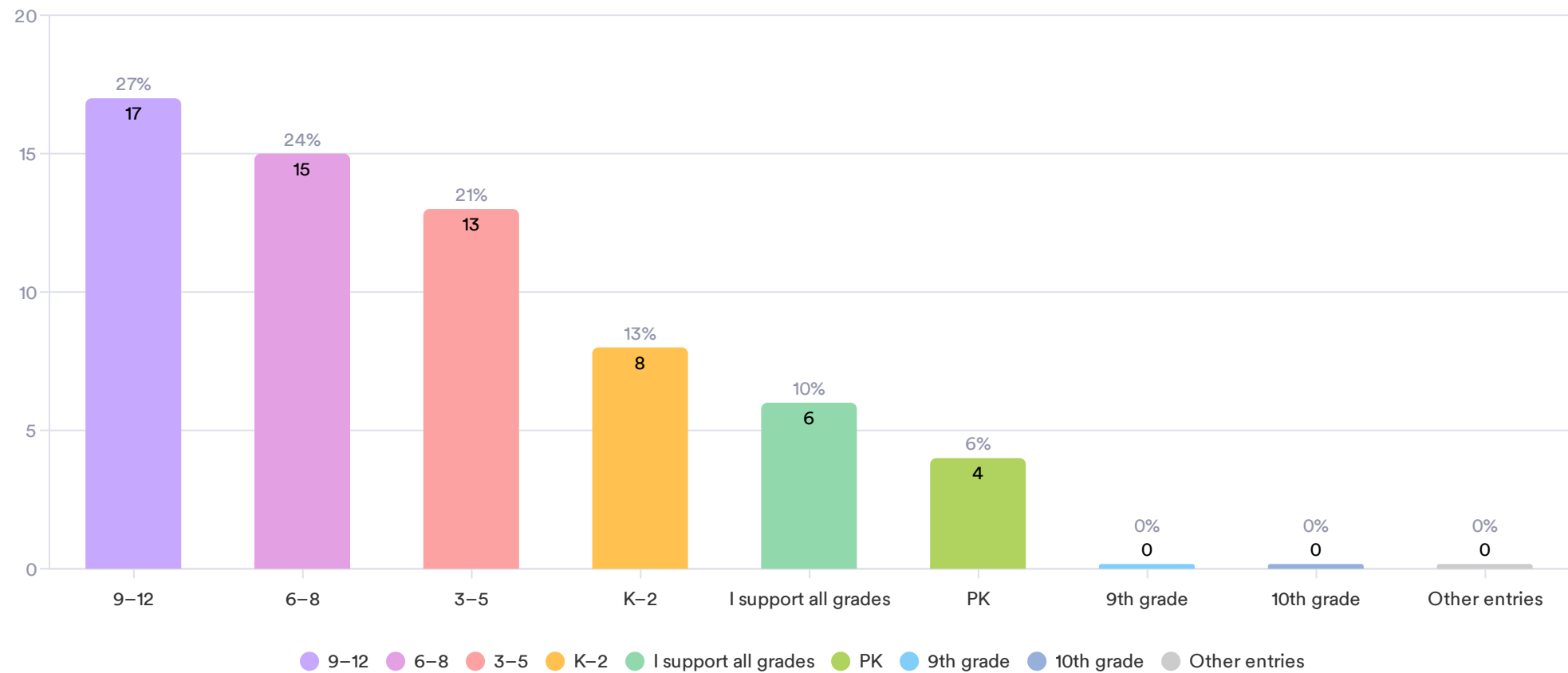
41 Responses



Chronic Absenteeism Survey - SCHOOL STAFF

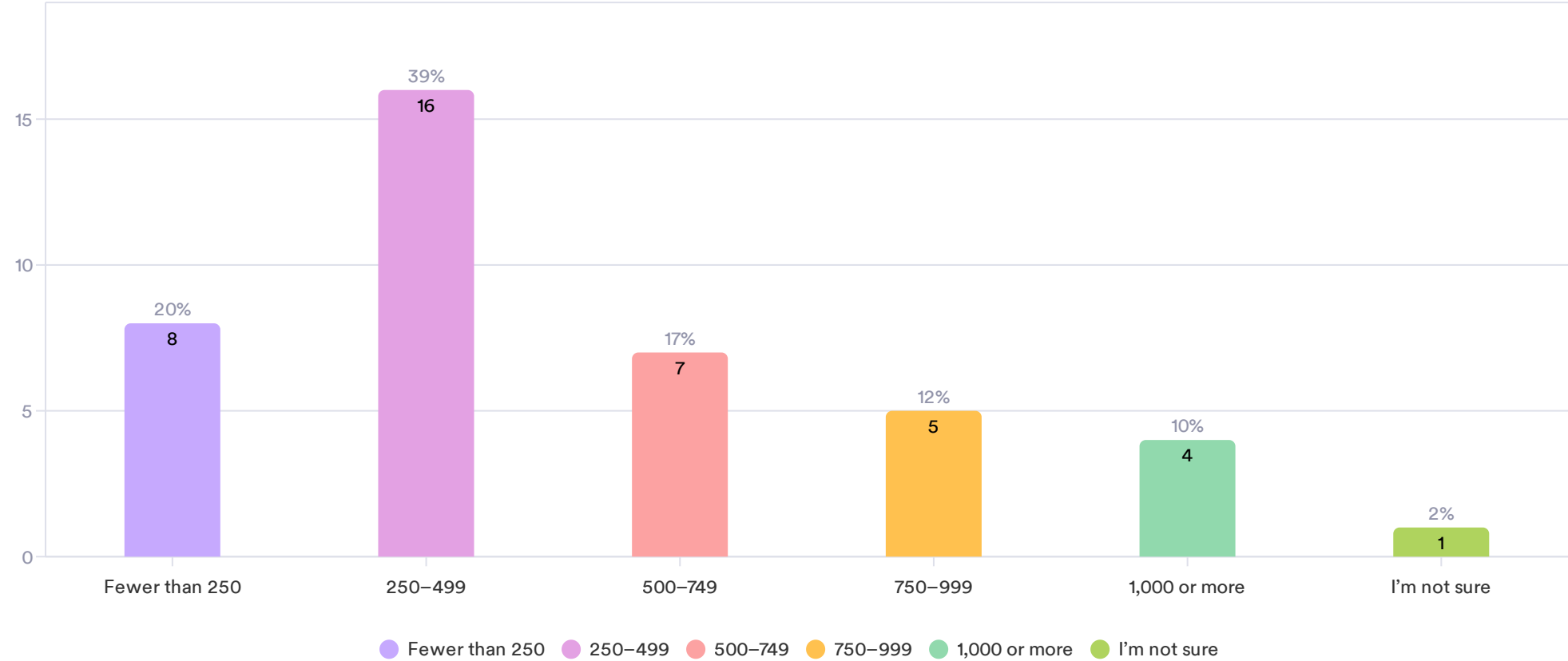
What grade level(s) do you currently teach or support in your role?(Select all that apply)

63 Responses



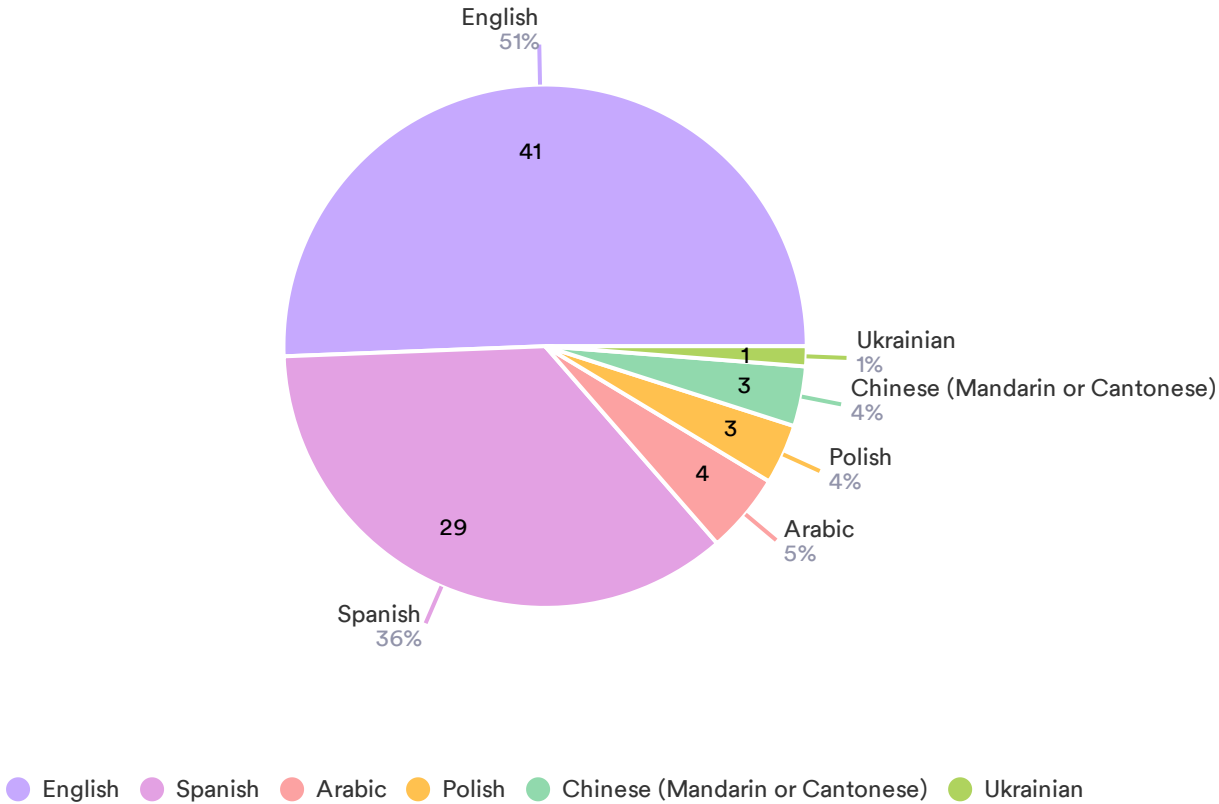
Approximately how many students are enrolled at your school this year?

41 Responses



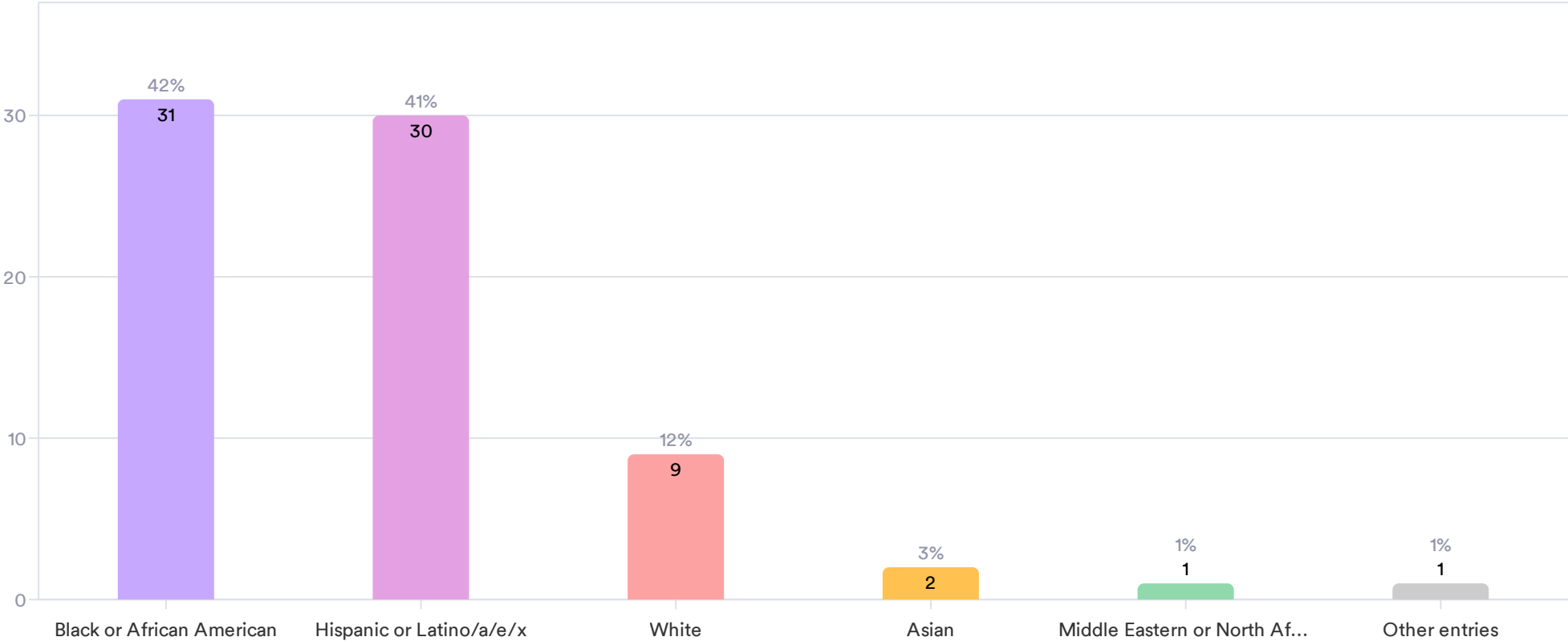
Which languages are predominantly spoken by students at your school? (Select all that apply)

81 Responses



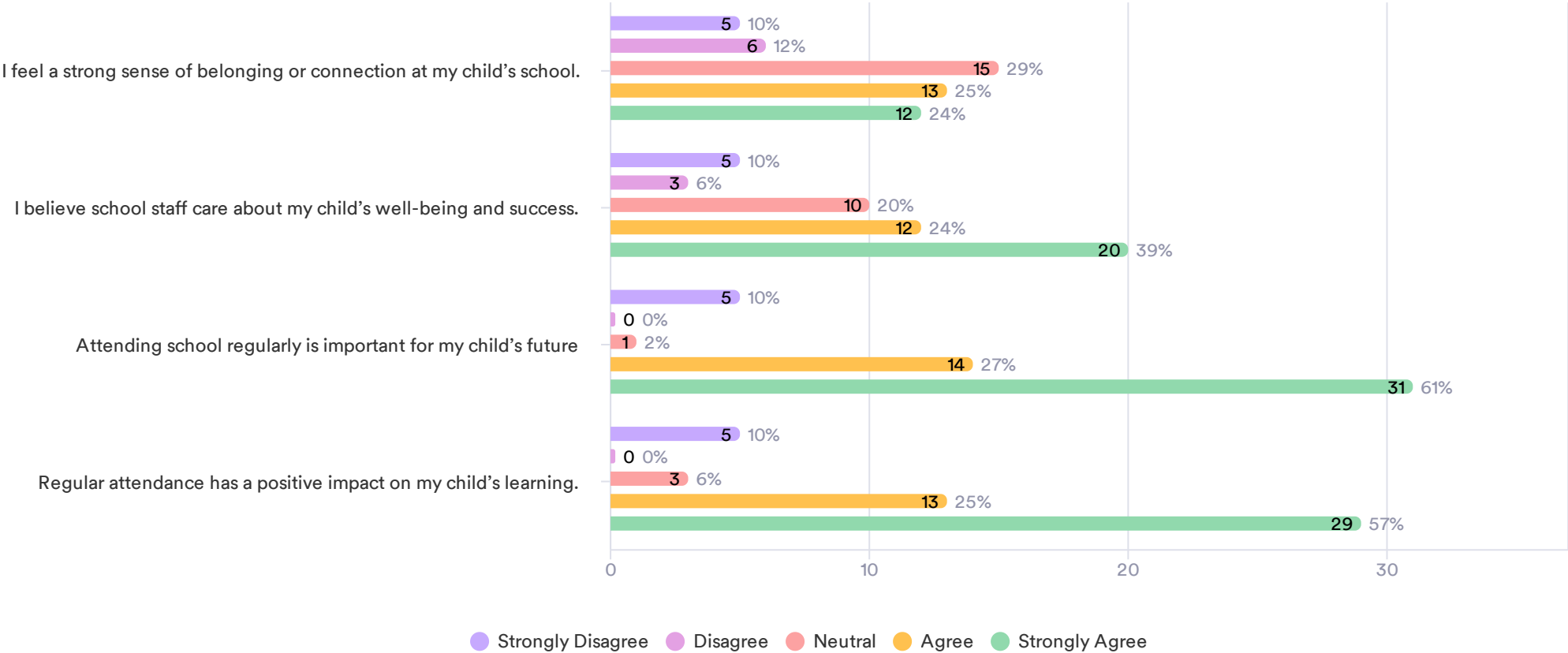
Which race or ethnic groups are most represented among students at your school? (Select all that apply)

74 Responses



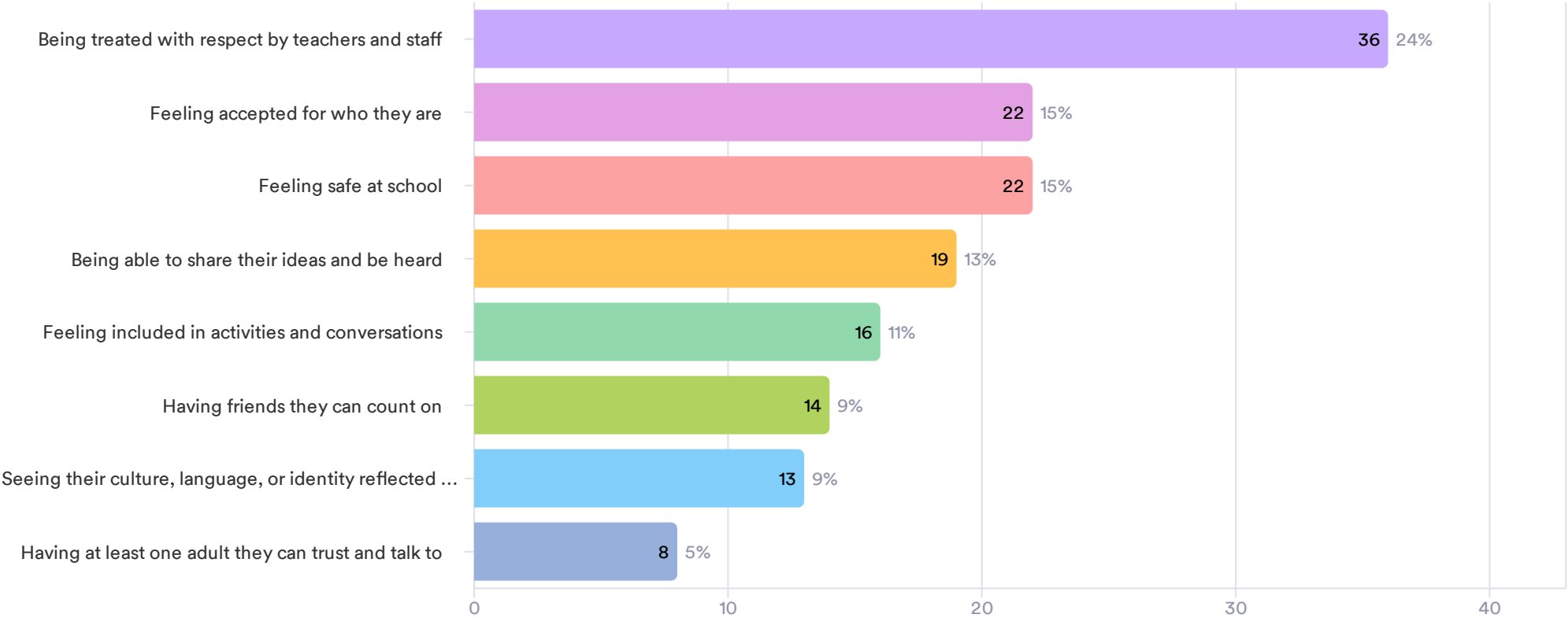
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

51 Responses



For my child, belonging at school means... (Select up to three that are most important to you)

150 Responses



Thinking back to the last time your child missed school, what was the primary reason? (Open-ended)

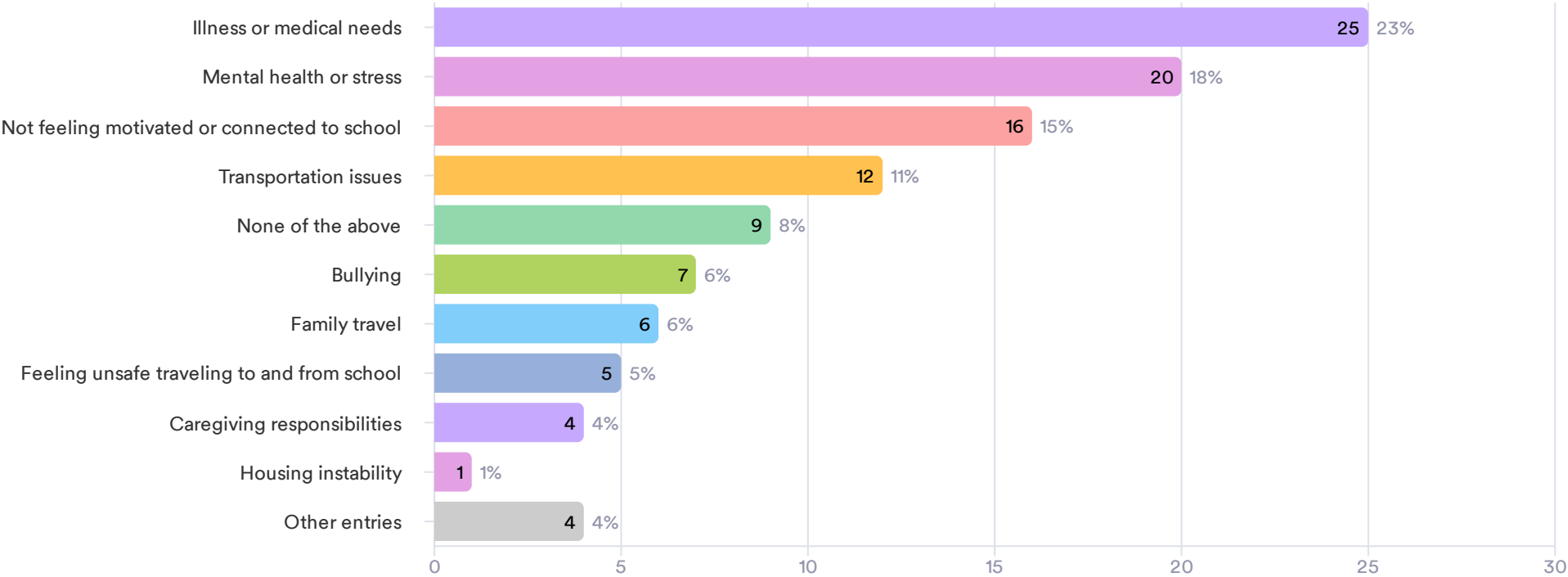
45 Responses

Data	Responses
Sick	4
Not feeling well	3
Illness	3
illness	2
It was for personal reasons	1
burnout	1
agotamiento	1
Doctor and dental appointment	1
Other entries	29

Chronic Absenteeism Survey - PARENT/CAREGIVER

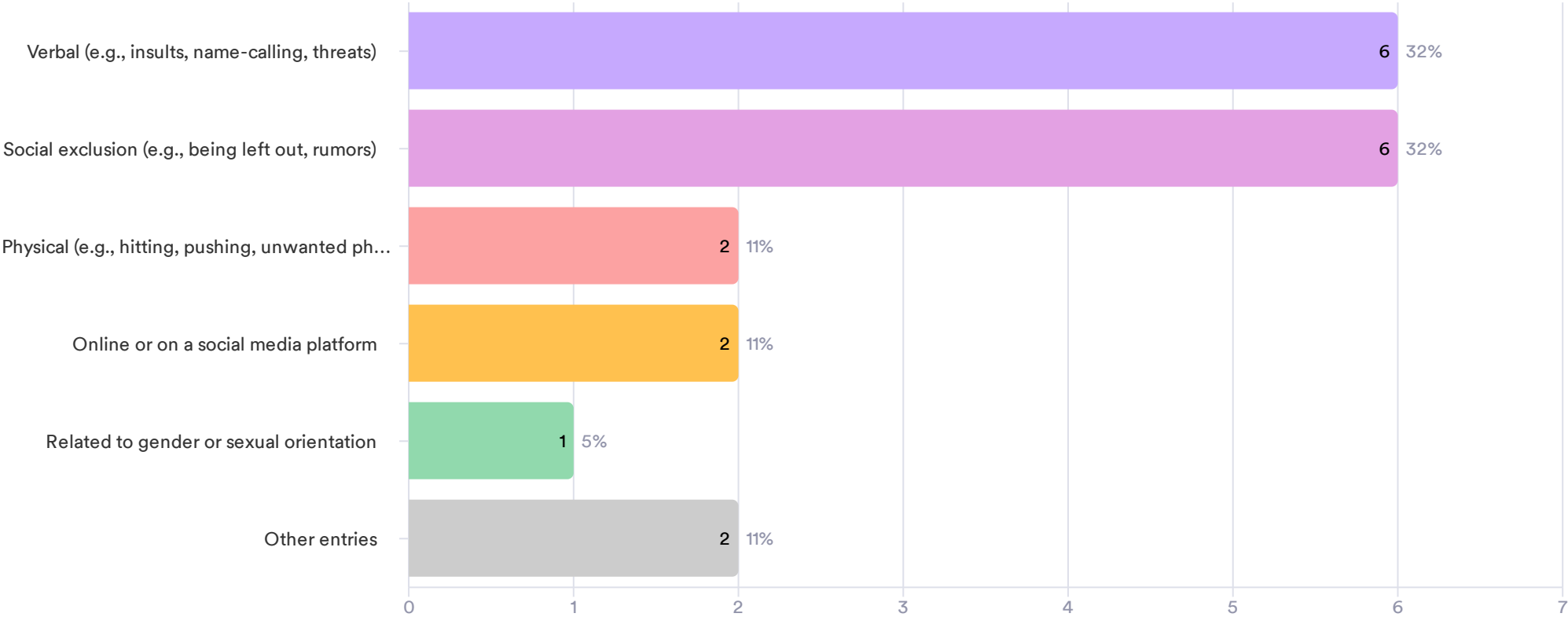
Reflecting on the past school year (2024–2025), which of the following made it harder for your child to get to or stay in school regularly?
Select all that apply—even if your child had mostly good attendance (Note, even with good attendance, we would like to know what challenges you might encounter)

109 Responses



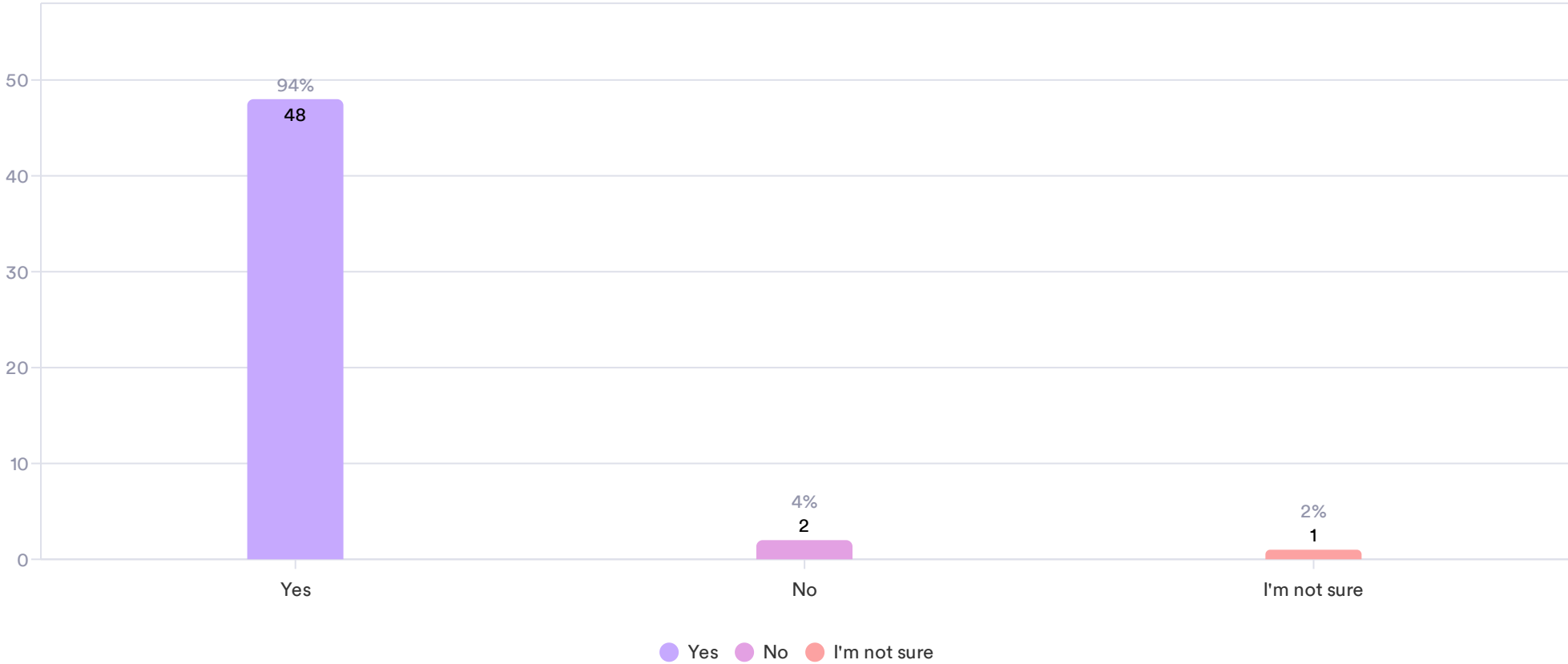
What did that bullying look like? (Select all that apply)

19 Responses



Did your child have a safe and reliable way to get to school on most days this past school year?

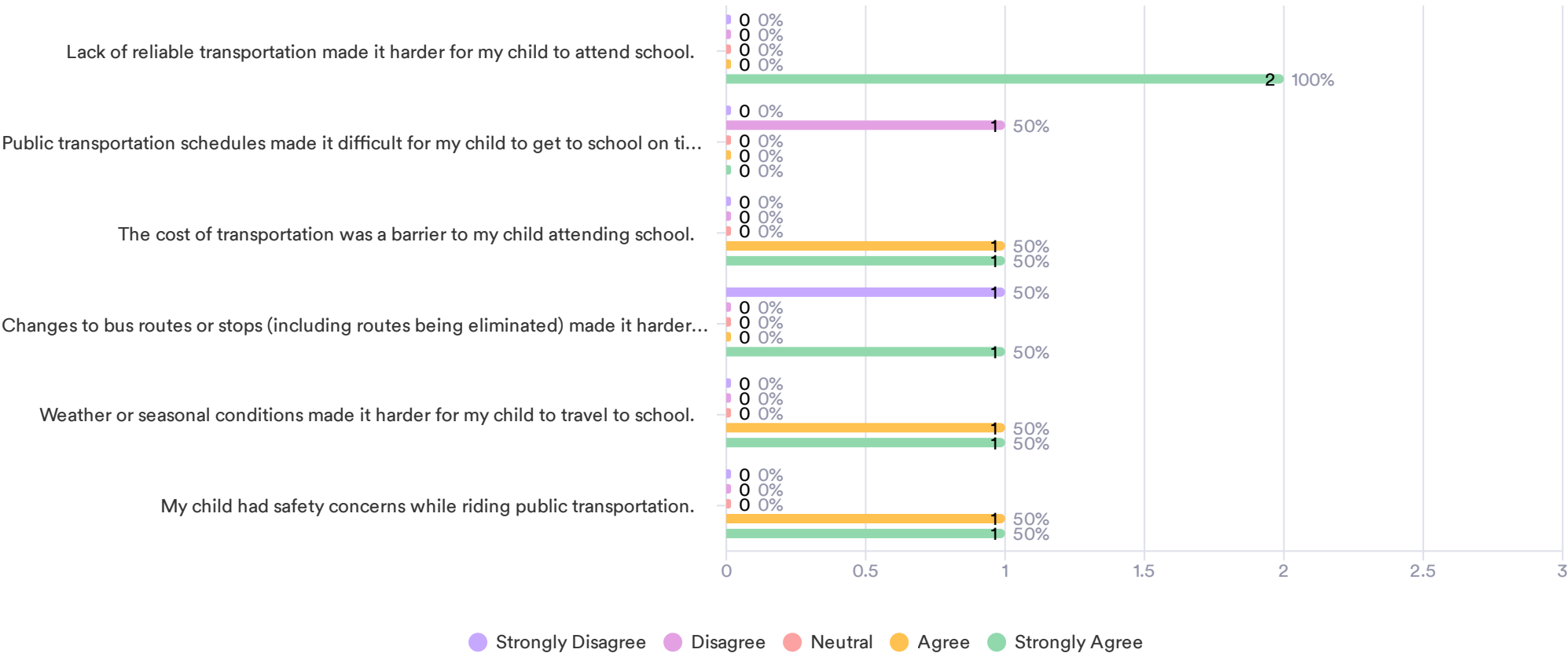
51 Responses



Chronic Absenteeism Survey - PARENT/CAREGIVER

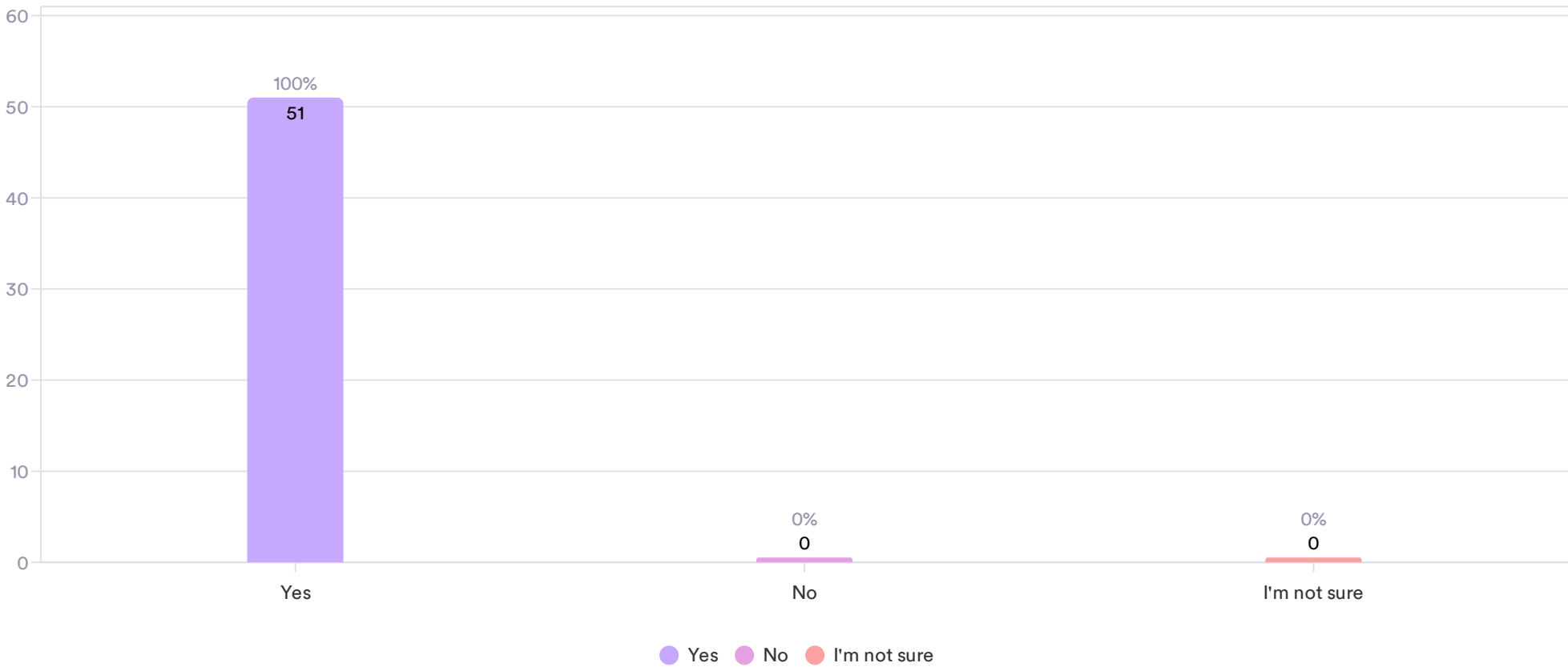
Thinking about transportation this past school year. How much do you agree with the following statements?

2 Responses



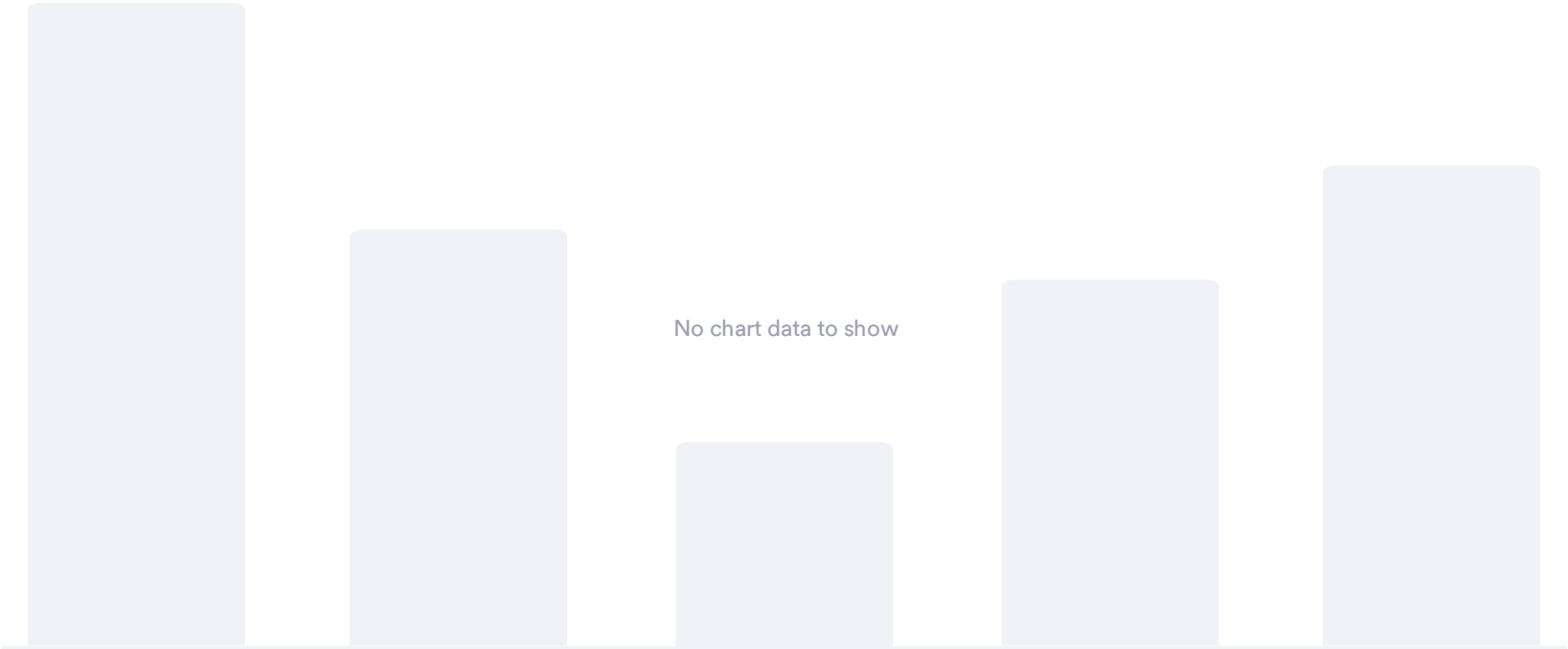
Did your child have a safe and stable place to stay on most school nights during the past school year?

51 Responses



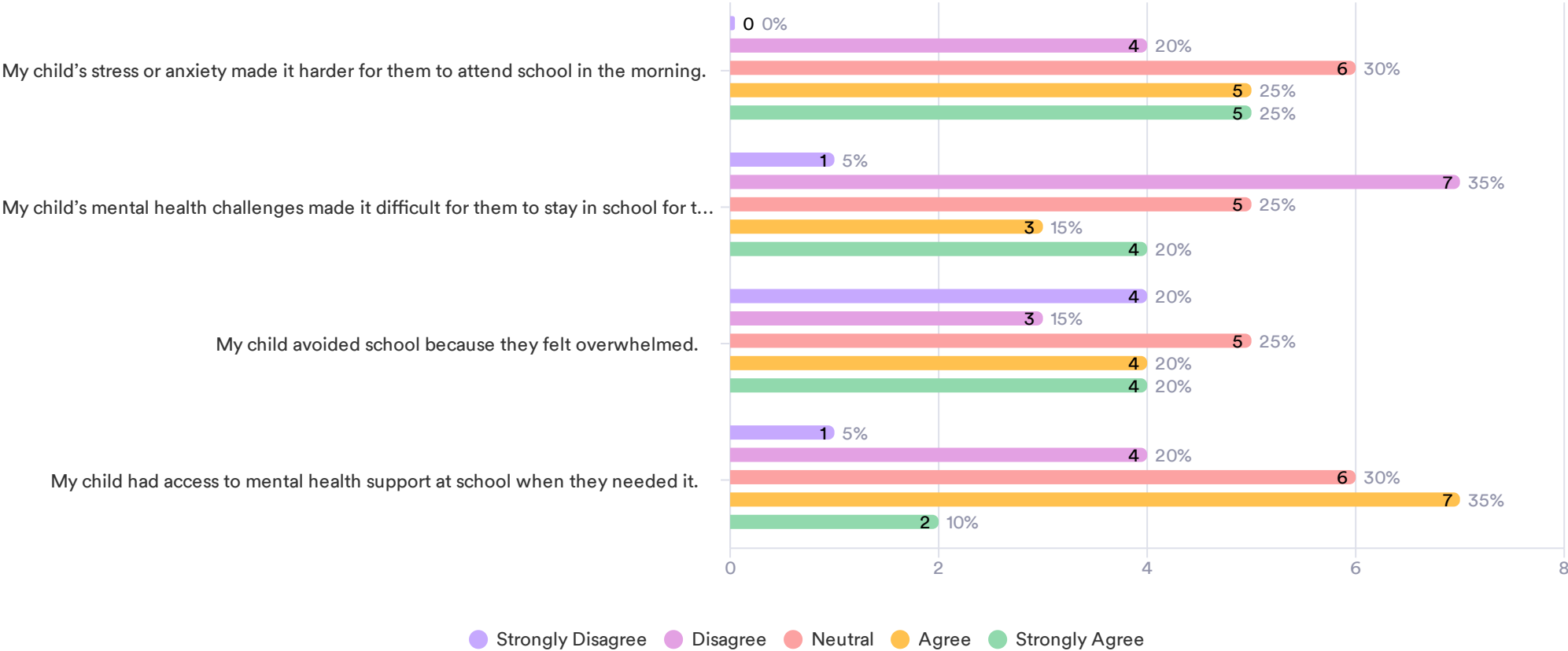
Thinking about your family’s housing situation this past school year, how much do you agree with the following statements?

0 Response



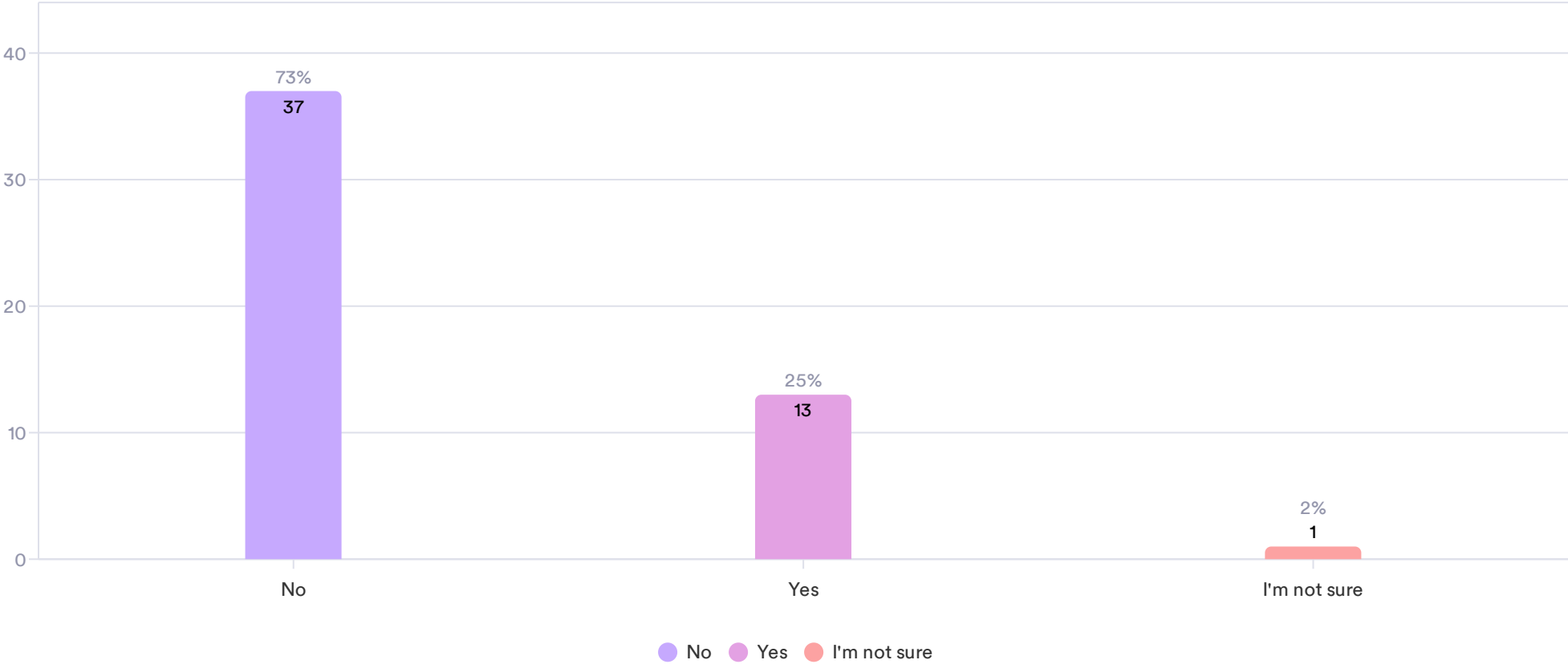
Thinking about your child’s mental health, anxiety, or stress this past school year, how much do you agree with the following statements?

20 Responses



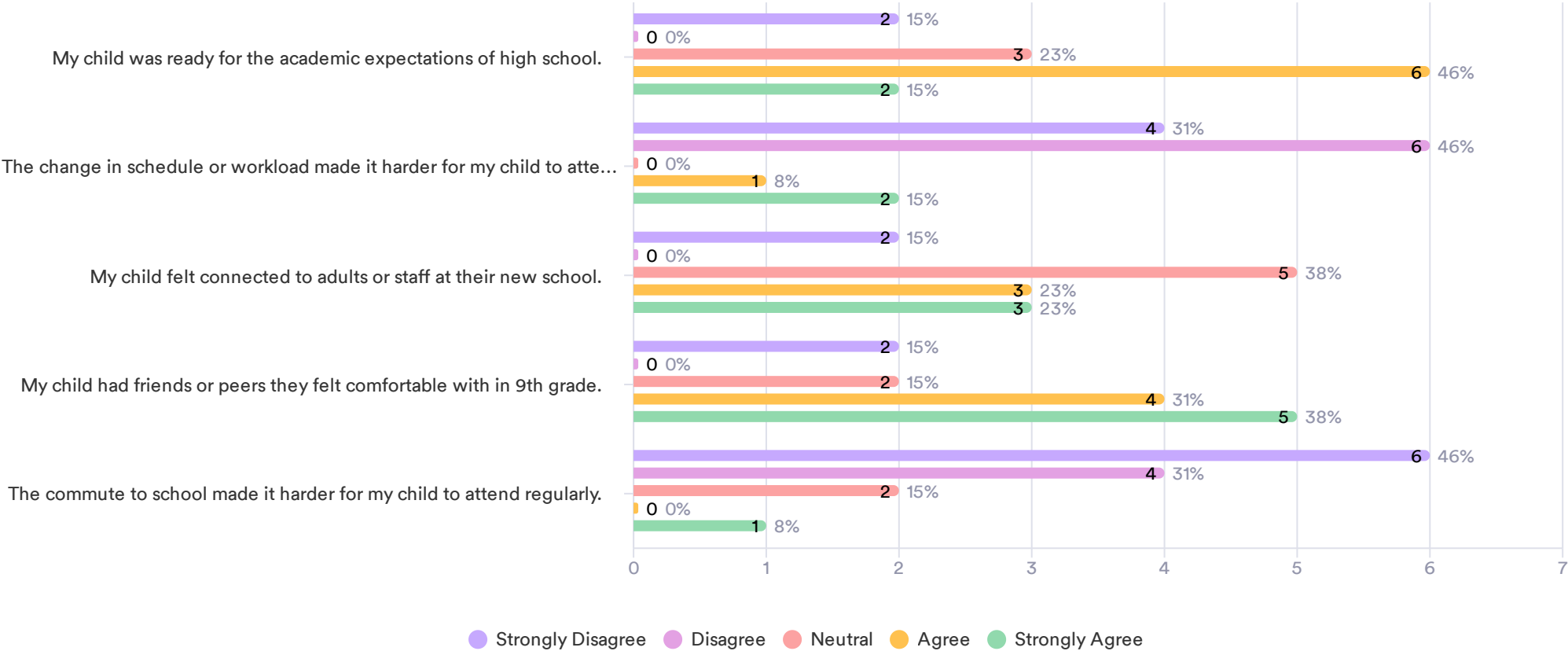
Last school year, did your child transition from 8th to 9th grade?

51 Responses



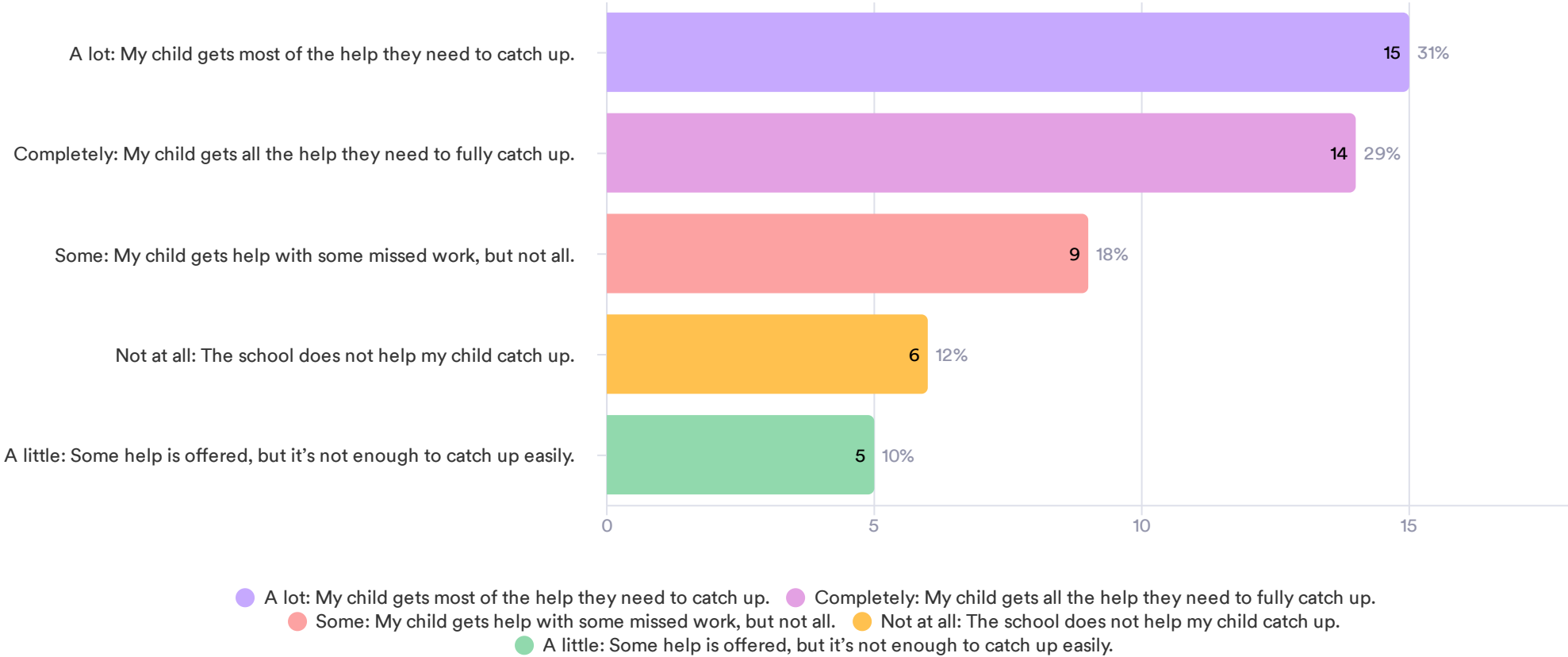
Thinking about your child’s transition from 8th to 9th grade, how much do you agree with the following statements?

13 Responses



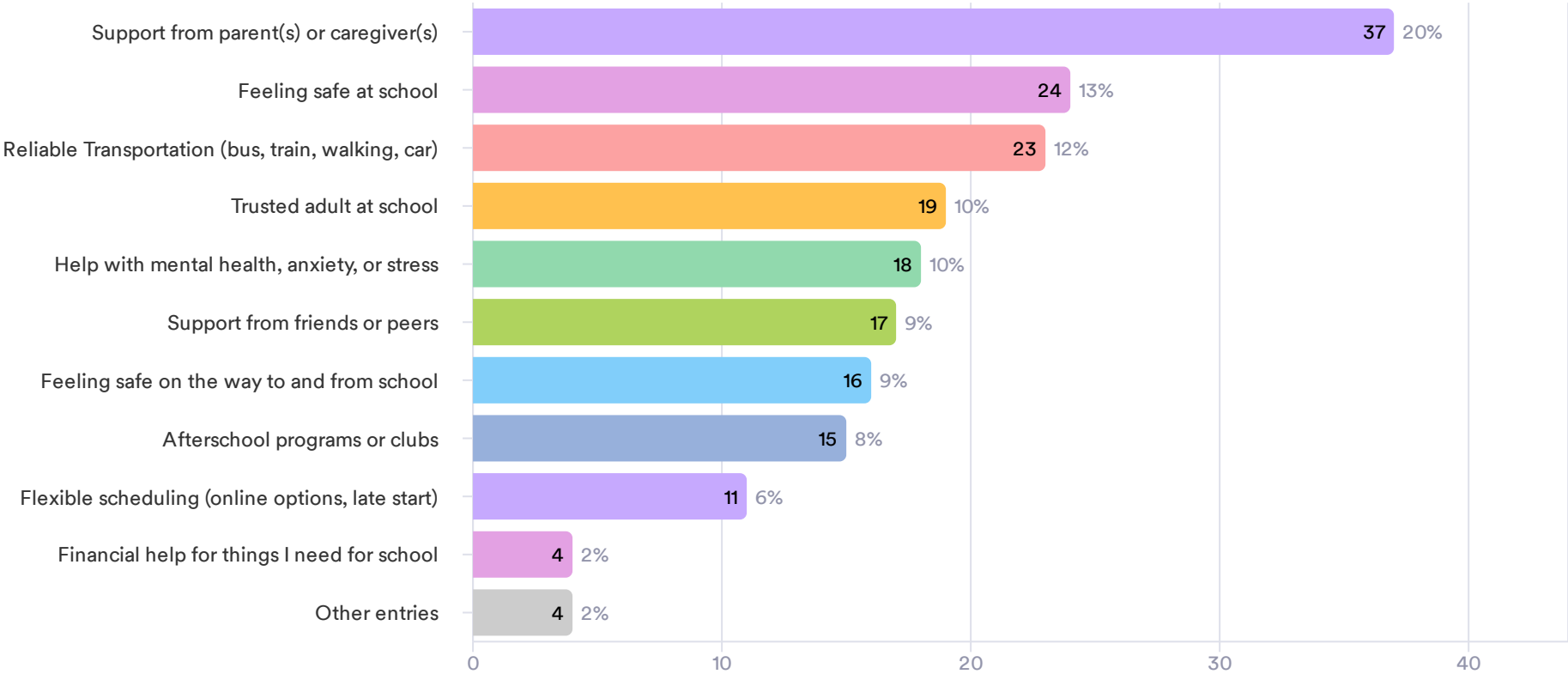
When your child is absent, how supported do you feel by the school in helping them catch up?

49 Responses



What has helped your student/child attend school more consistently? (Select all that apply)

188 Responses

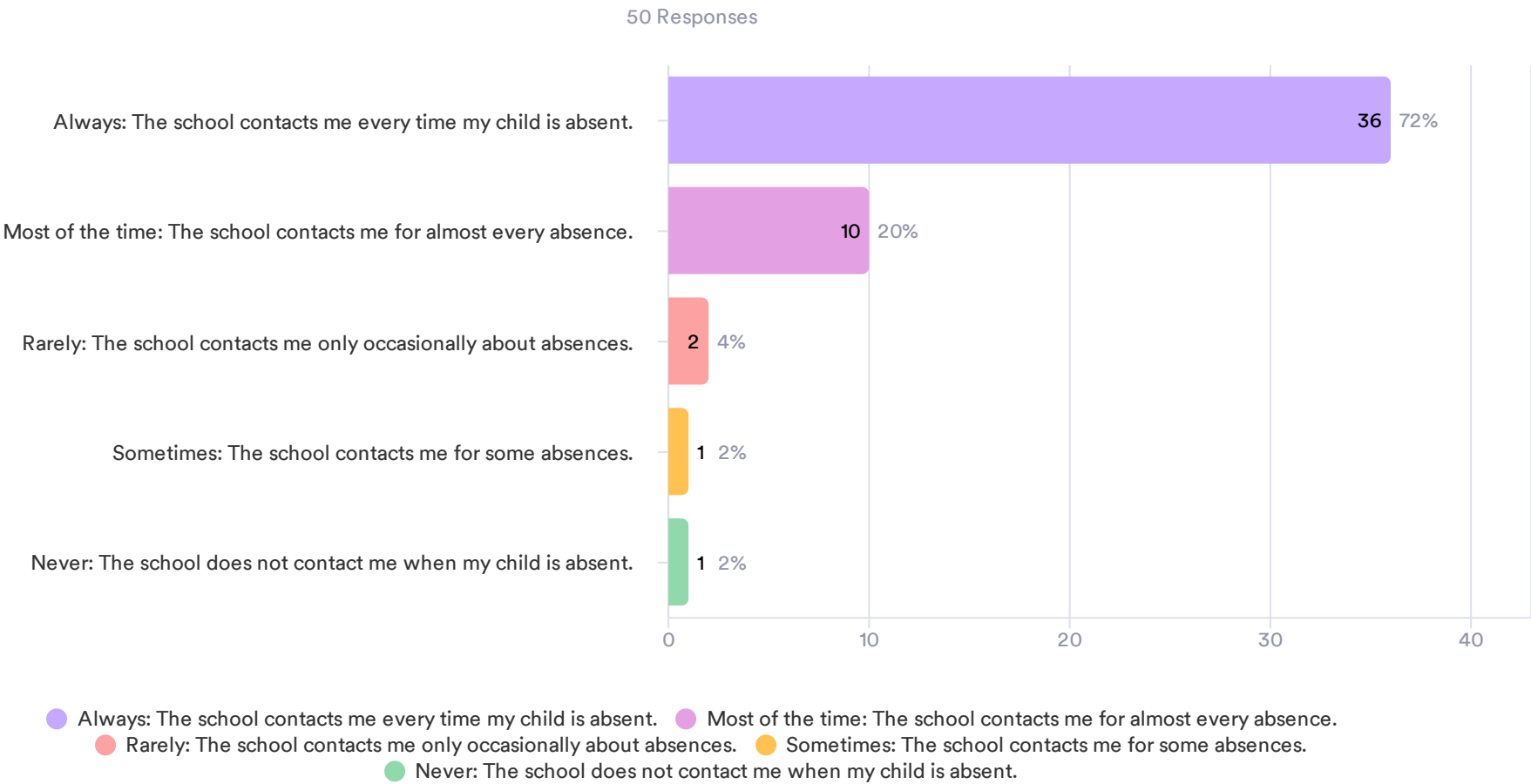


What is one thing your child’s school or community could do to support regular attendance? (Open-ended)

31 Responses

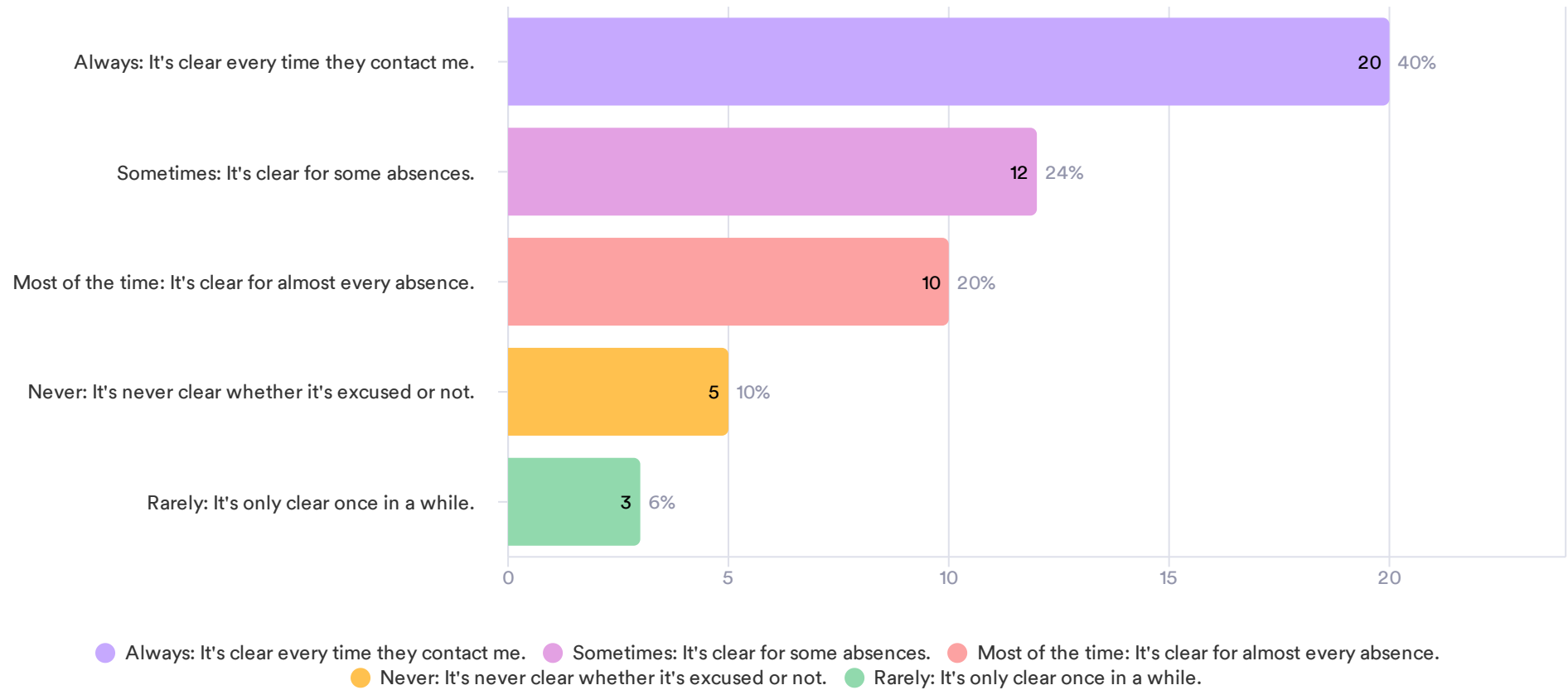
Data	Responses
Nothing. We are lucky in many ways. Illness is 90% of my kids' missed days; family travel is the remainder.	1
Stop putting so much focus on what they are wearing and focus on them learning	1
reinforce safety and positive energy at school	1
extender el deporte que no sea solo una temporada sino un habito	1
Allow him/her to leave school to attend doctors appointments	1
Do better at embracing the culture of your students. there is so much judgement and so little passion. There are so many teachers who dont even like kids. it's ridiculous	1
Provide shuttles	1
Rewards for his attendance	1
Other entries	23

When your child is absent, how often do you communicate with the school about the reason for the absence?



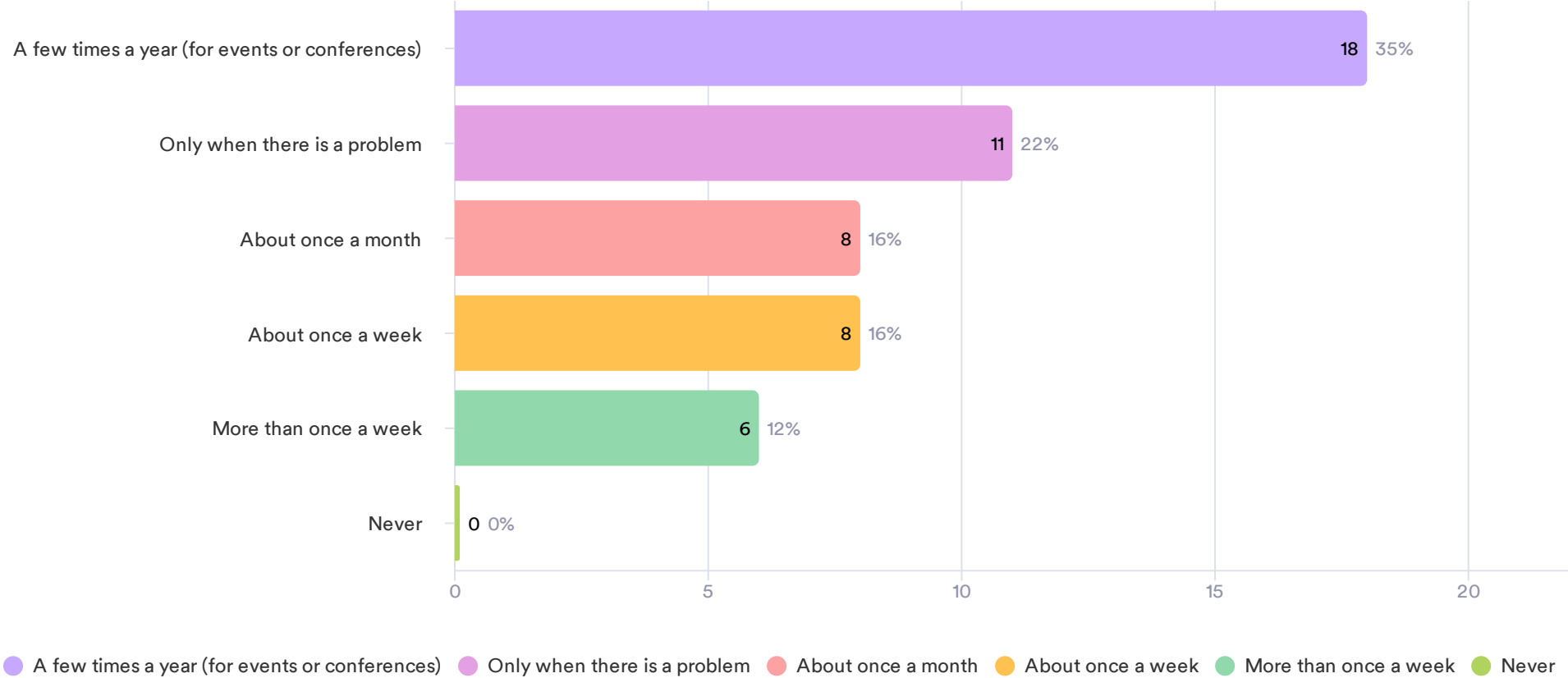
When the school contacts you about an absence, how often is it clear whether the absence is marked as excused or unexcused?

50 Responses



Outside of attendance issues, how often do you communicate with your child’s school?

51 Responses



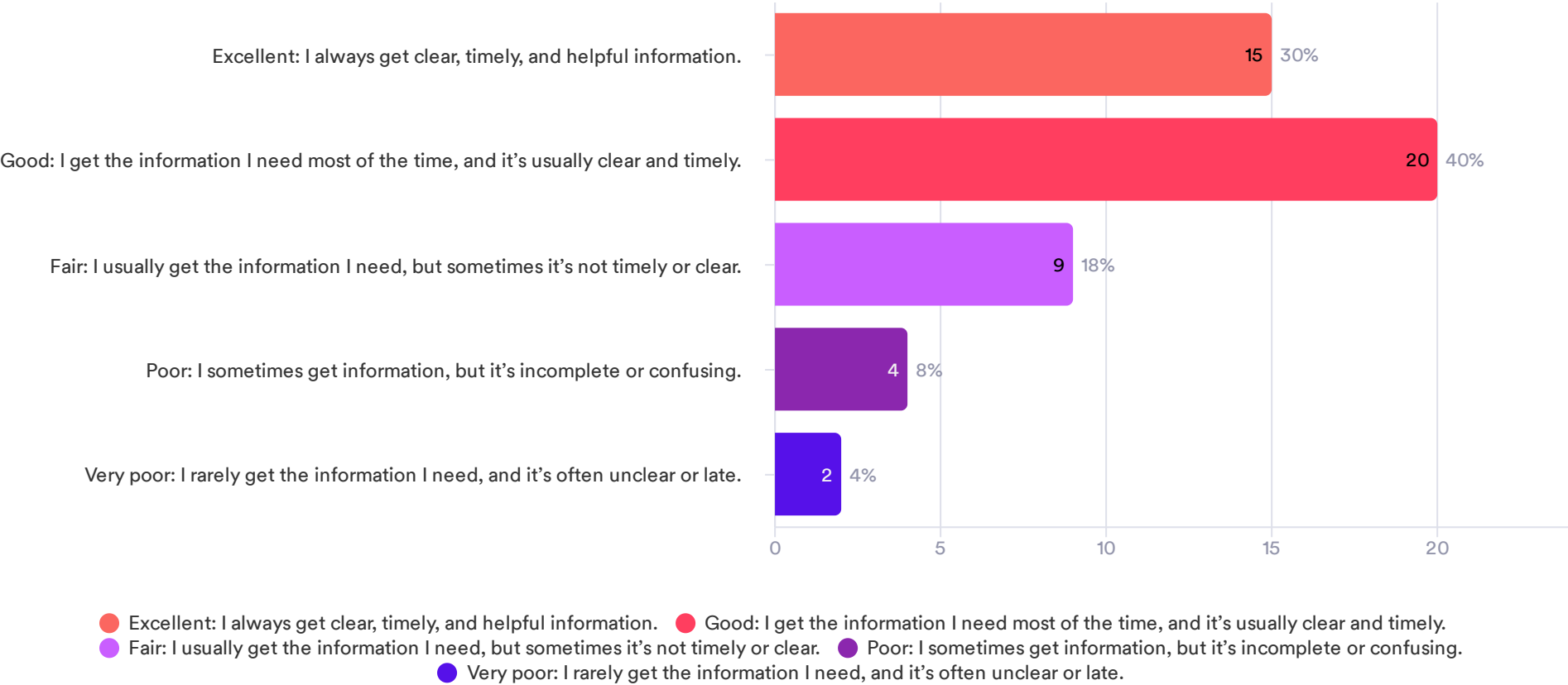
Test Entry

130 Responses

Data	Responses
No	130

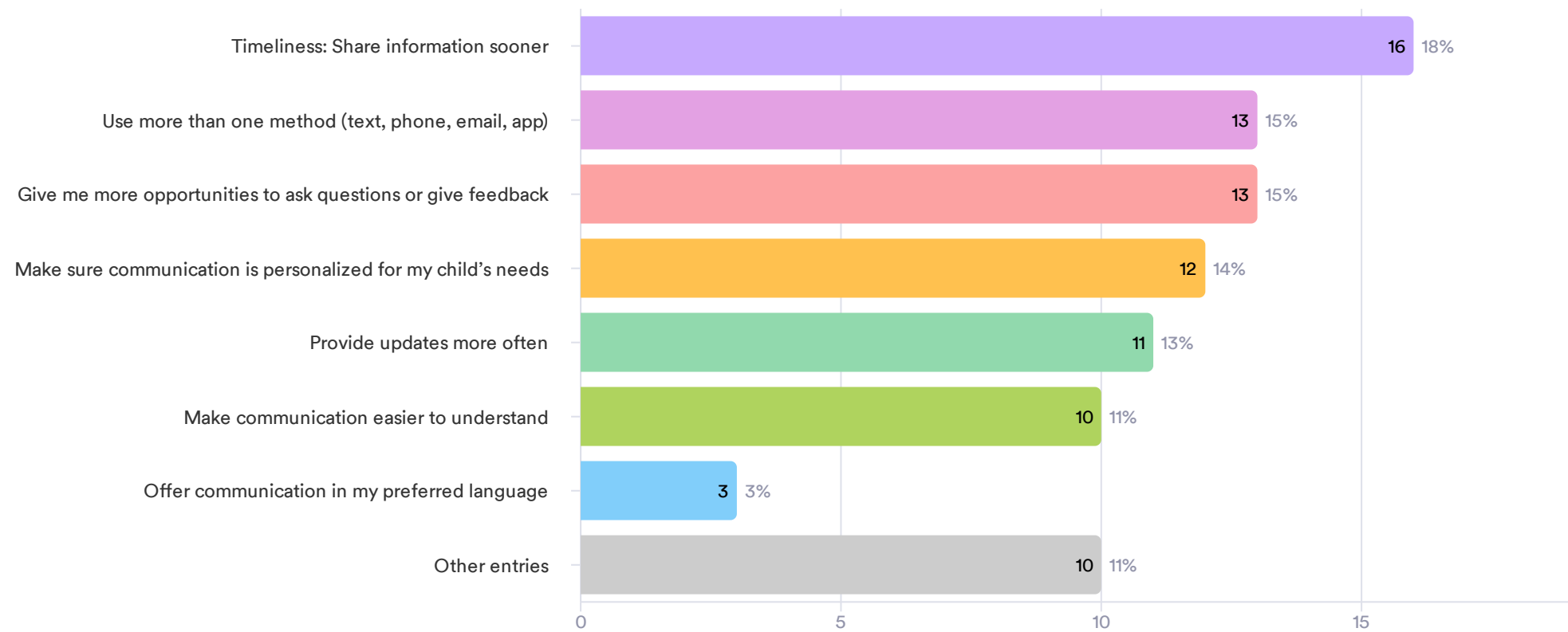
What is the quality of that communication?

50 Responses



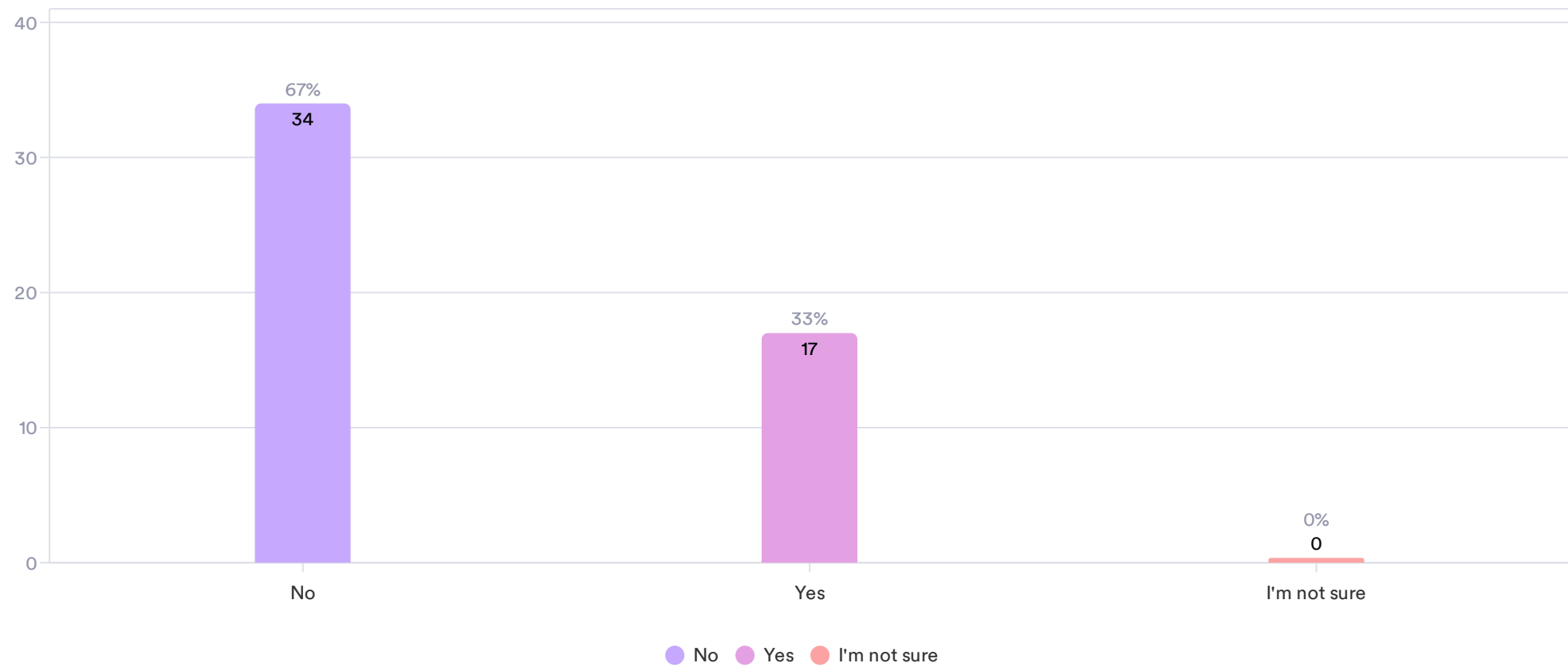
What could the school do to improve its communication? (Select up to three)

88 Responses



Is your child's school located in the same community or neighborhood where you live?

51 Responses



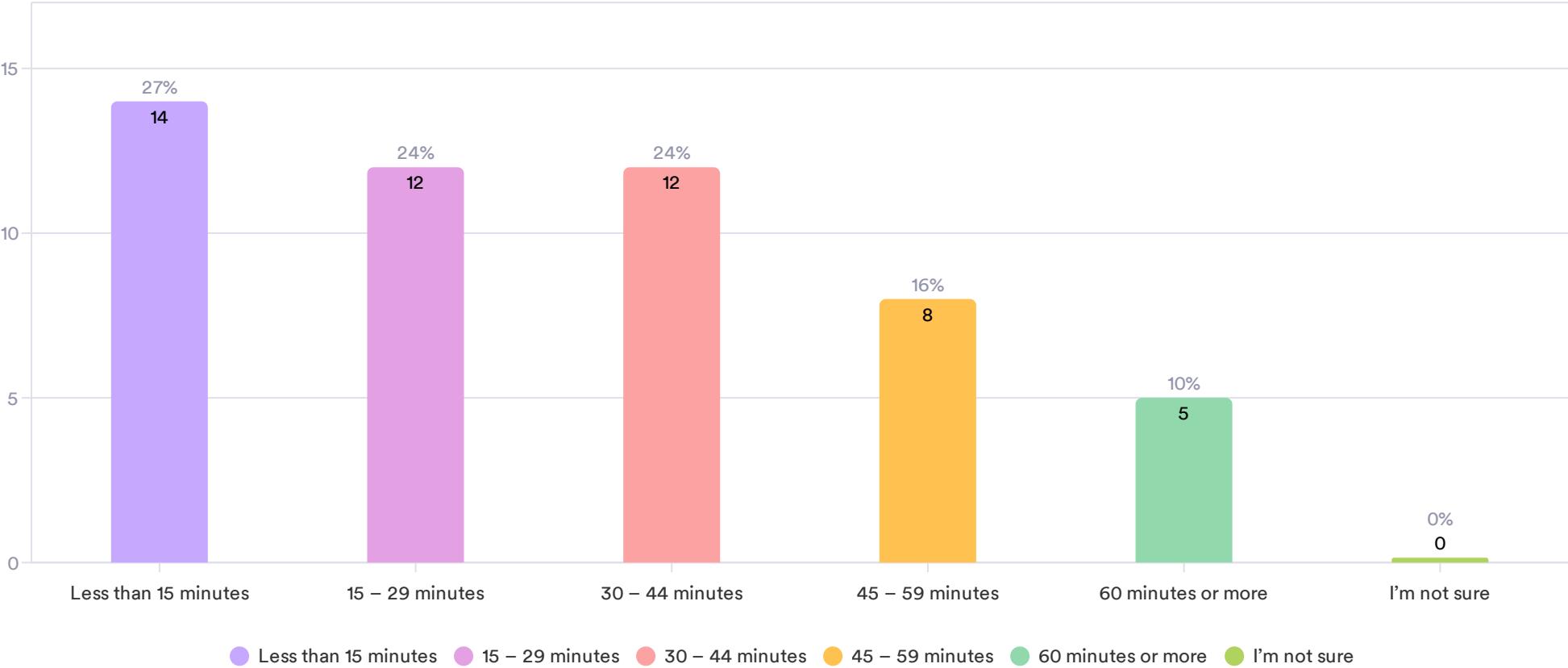
What is your home zip code?

48 Responses

Data	Responses
60641	10
60639	4
60624	3
60637	3
60618	2
60622	2
60644	2
60609	2
Other entries	20

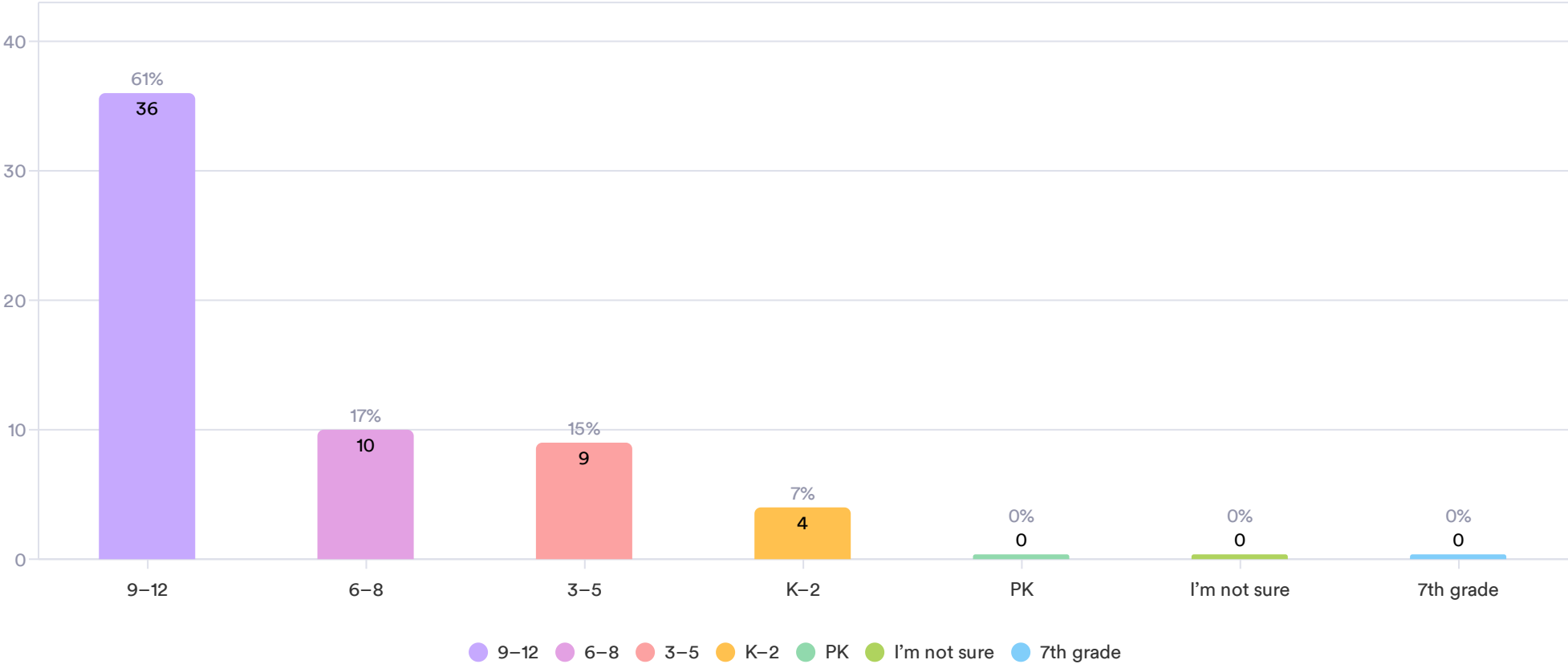
About how long does it take your child to travel to school each day?

51 Responses



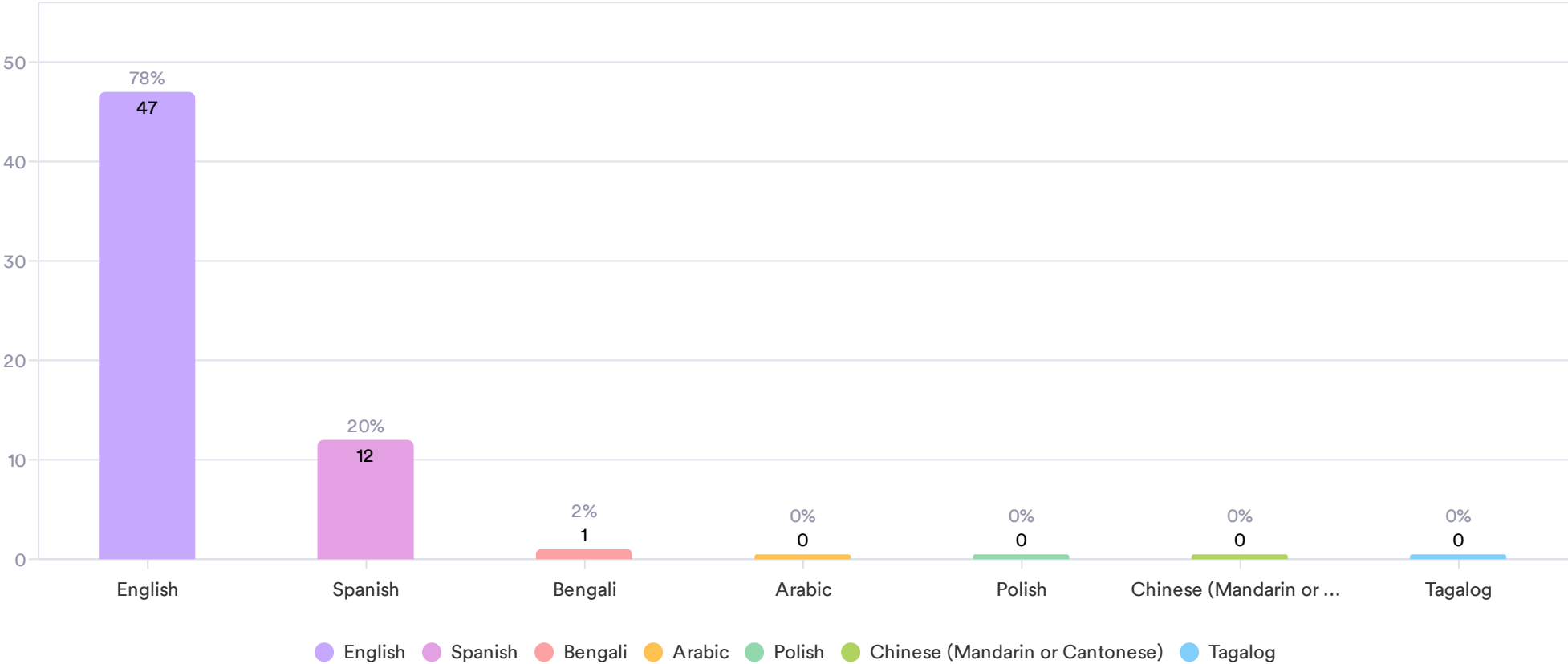
What grade level(s) is your child in this school year (2024–2025)?(Select all that apply if you have more than one child in school)

59 Responses



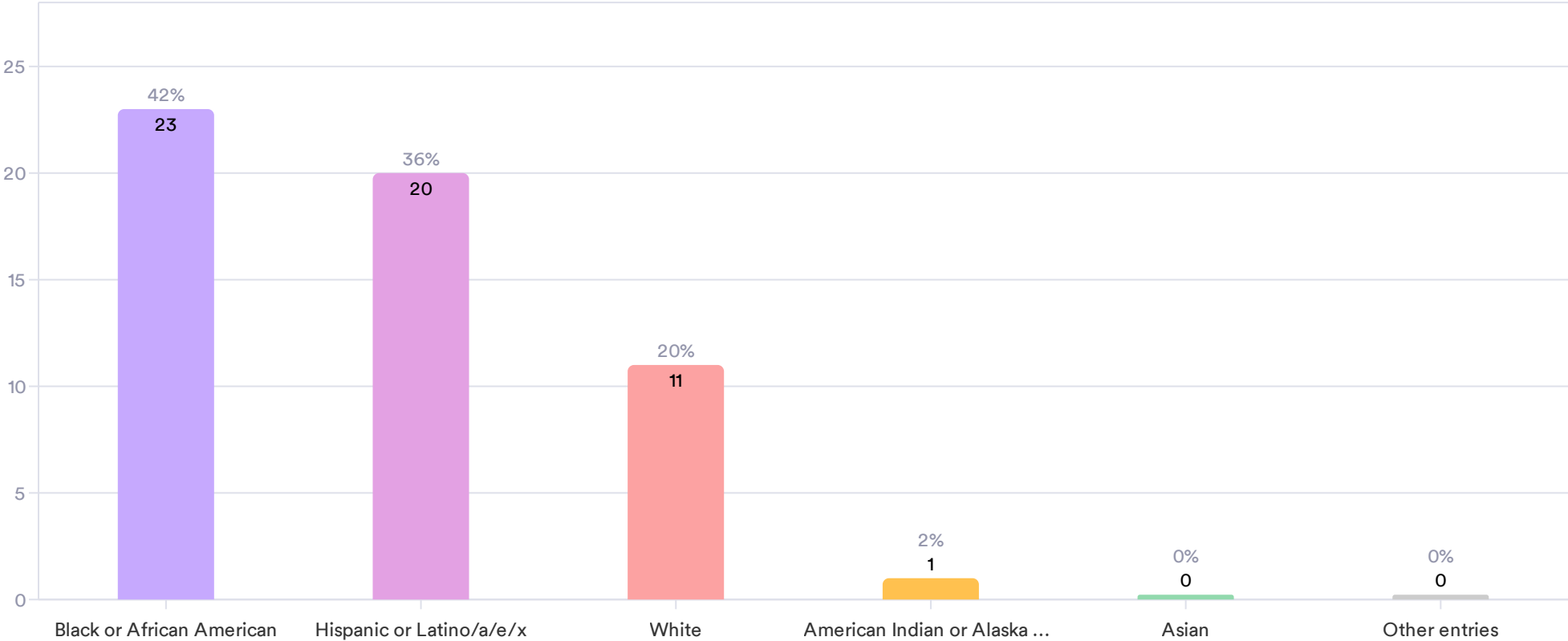
What language(s) do you speak at home? (Select all that apply)

60 Responses



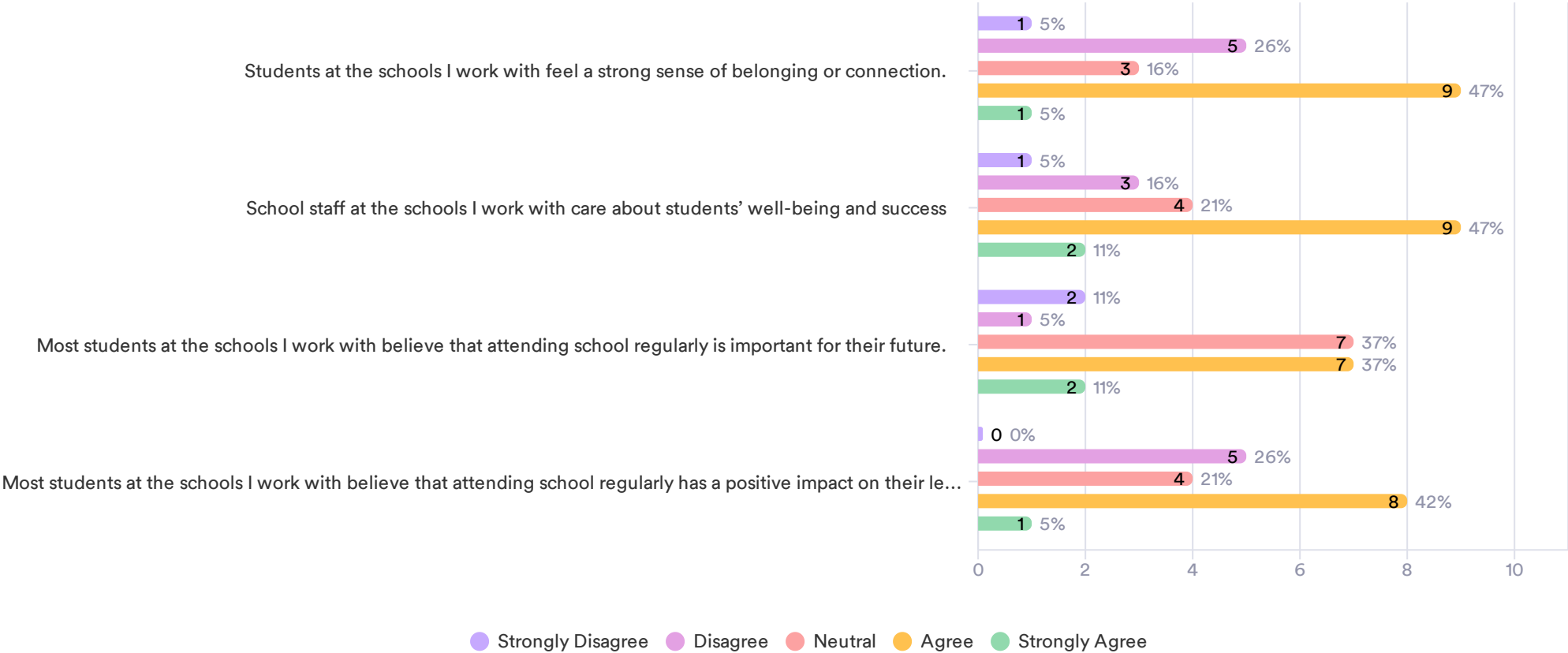
What is your race or ethnicity? (Select all that apply)

55 Responses



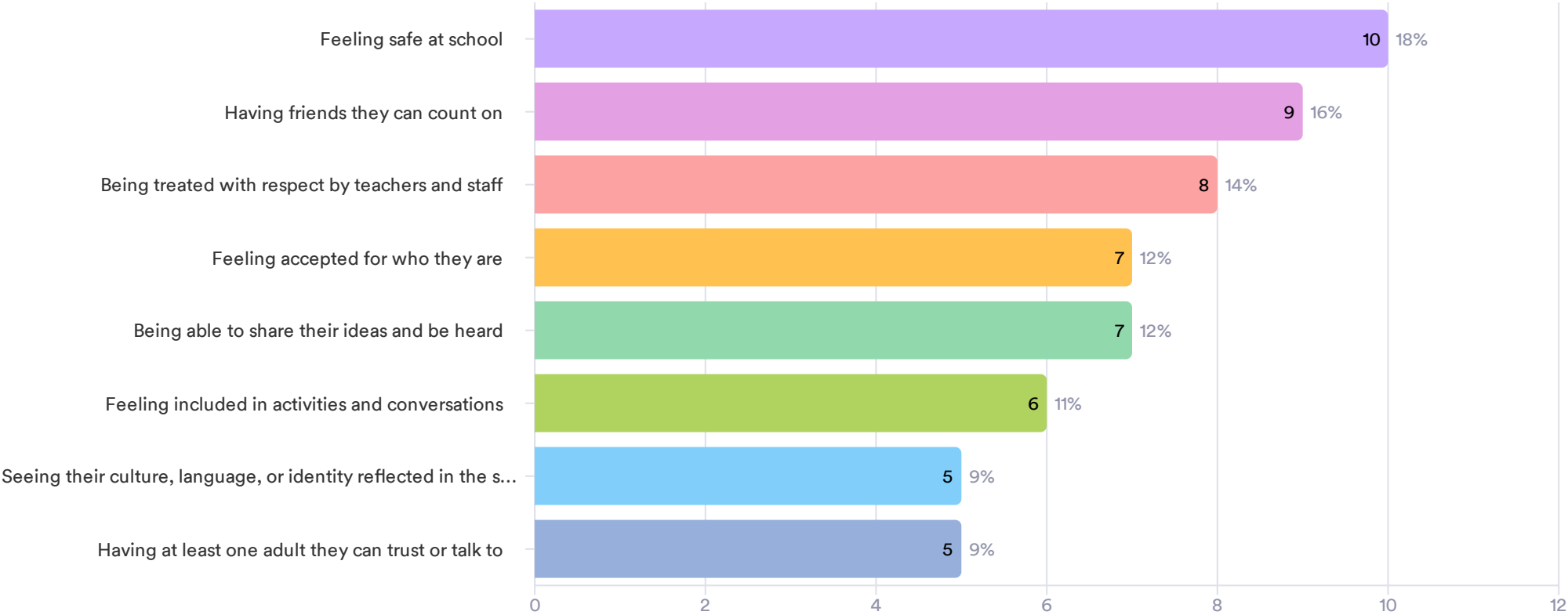
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

19 Responses



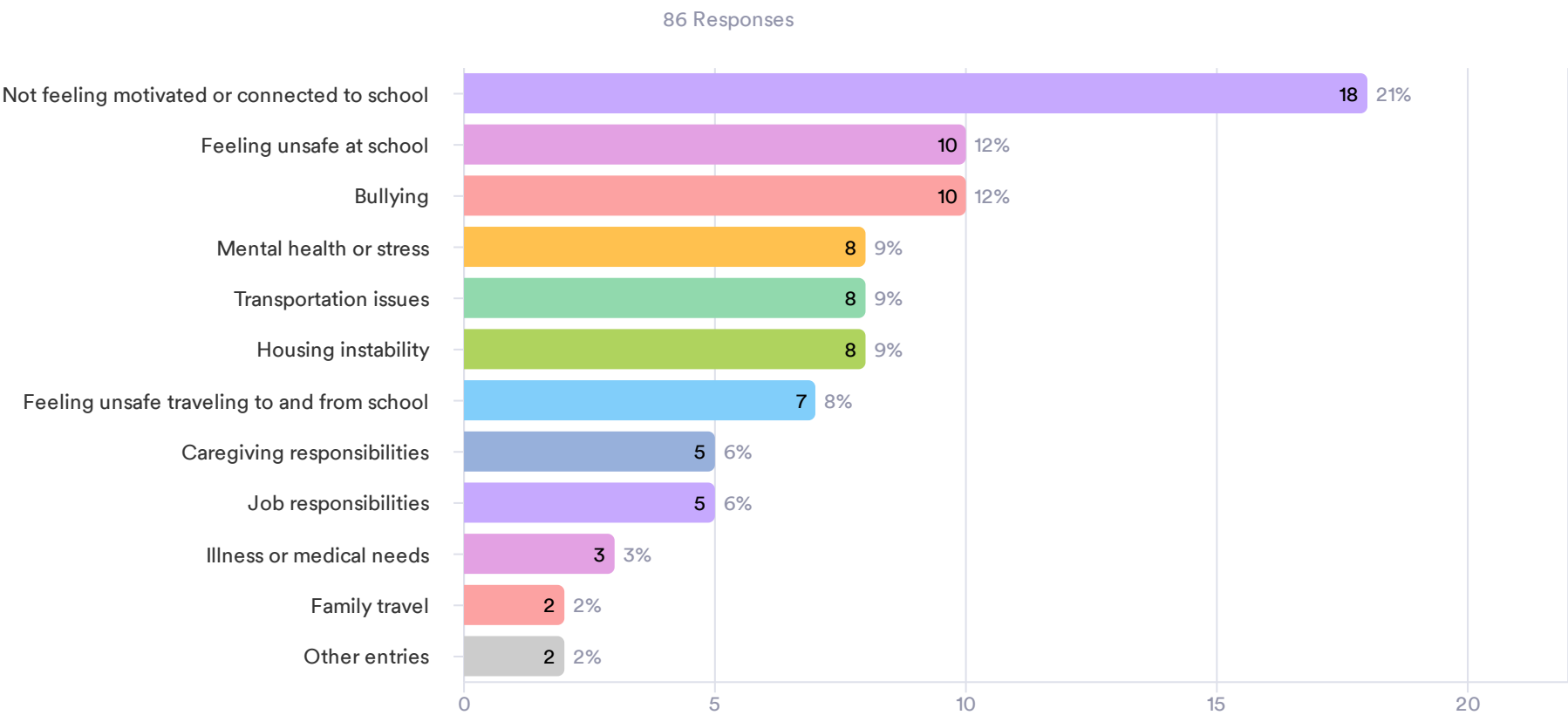
For students, belonging at school means... (Select up to three you believe are most important for students at the schools you work with.)

57 Responses



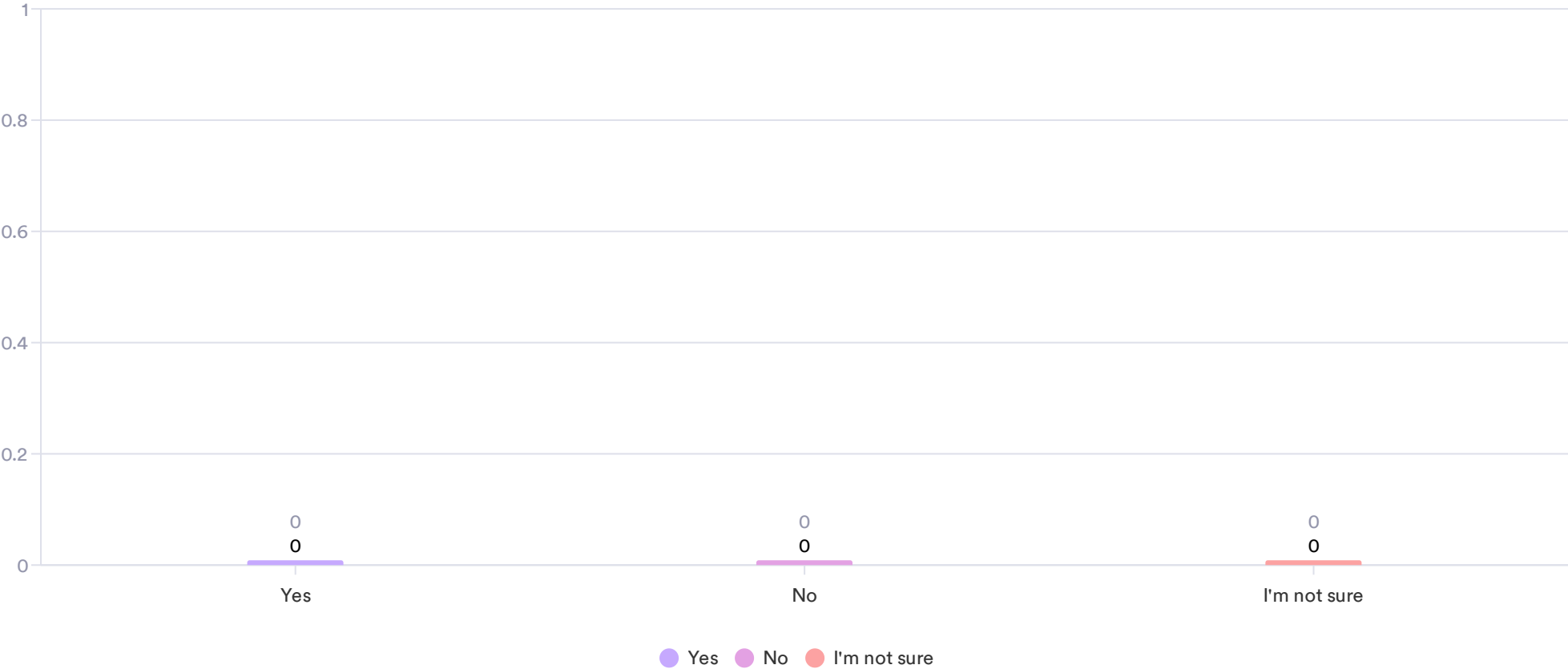
Chronic Absenteeism Survey - COMMUNITY PARTNER

Reflecting on the past school year (2024–2025), which of the following made it harder for the students or communities you work with to or stay in school regularly?(Select all that apply, even if the students you work with had mostly good attendance)



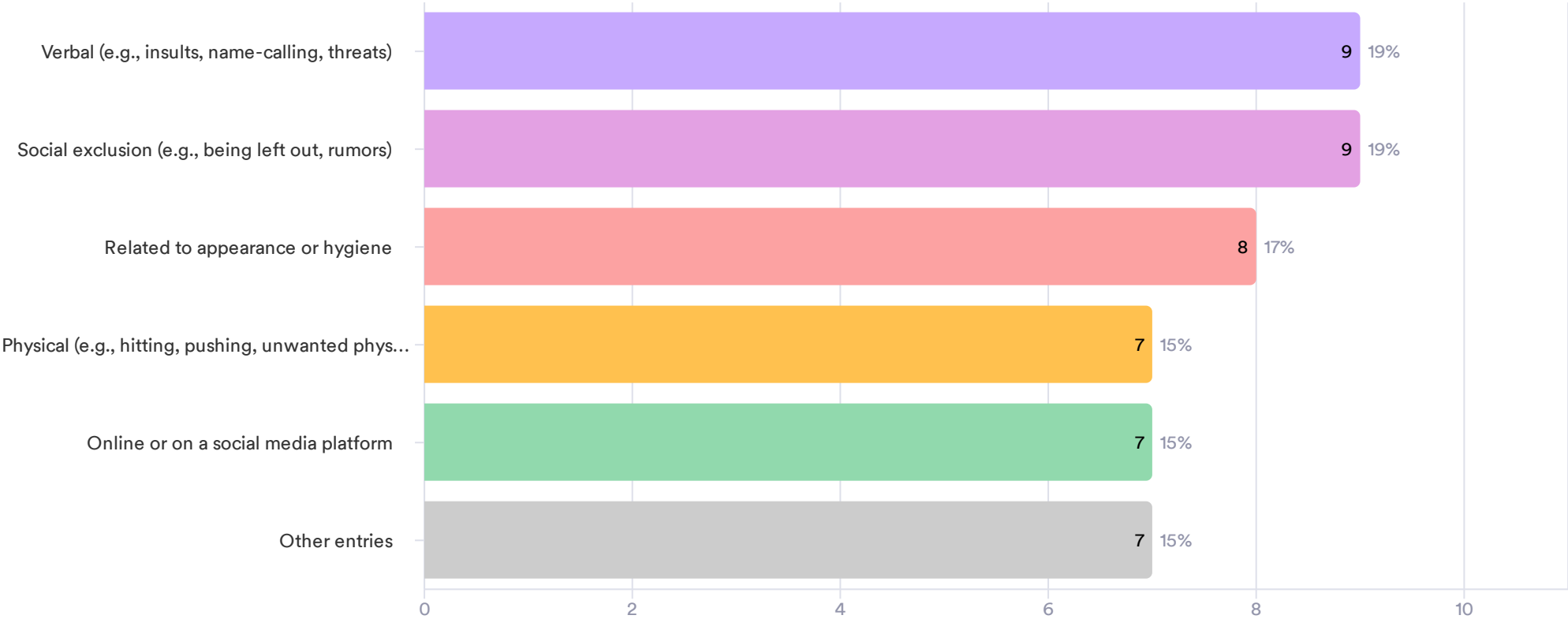
Last school year, I observed bullying among students in the schools or communities I work with.

0 Response



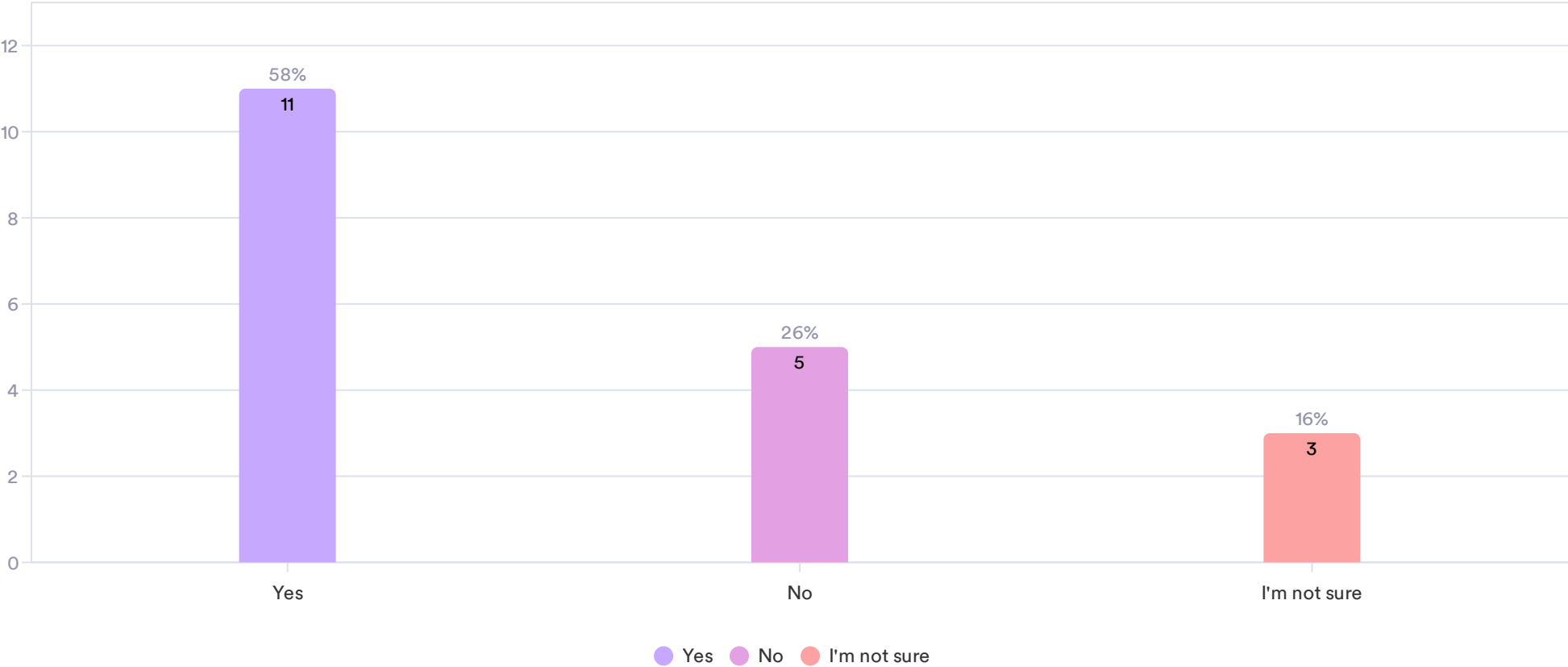
What did that bullying look like? (select all that apply)

47 Responses



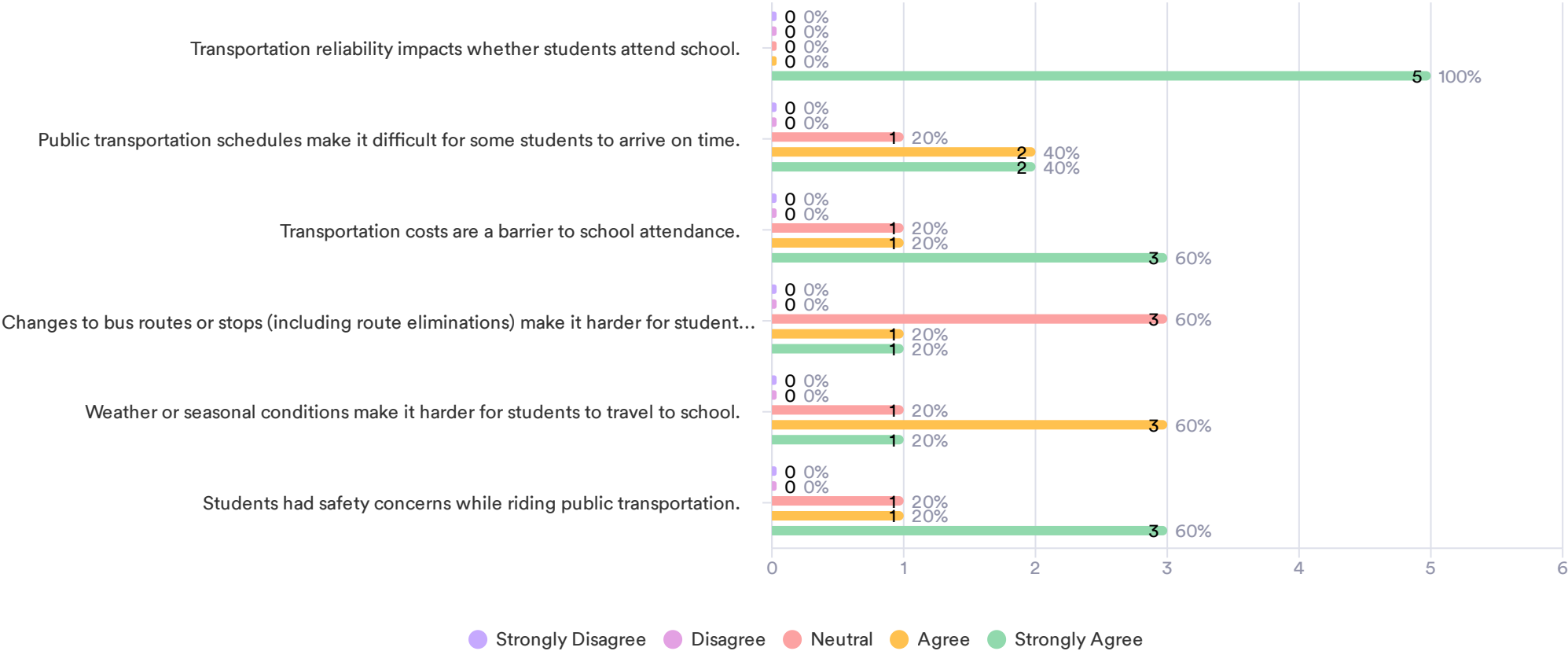
Based on your experience, did the students or families you work with have safe and reliable ways to get to school most days?

19 Responses



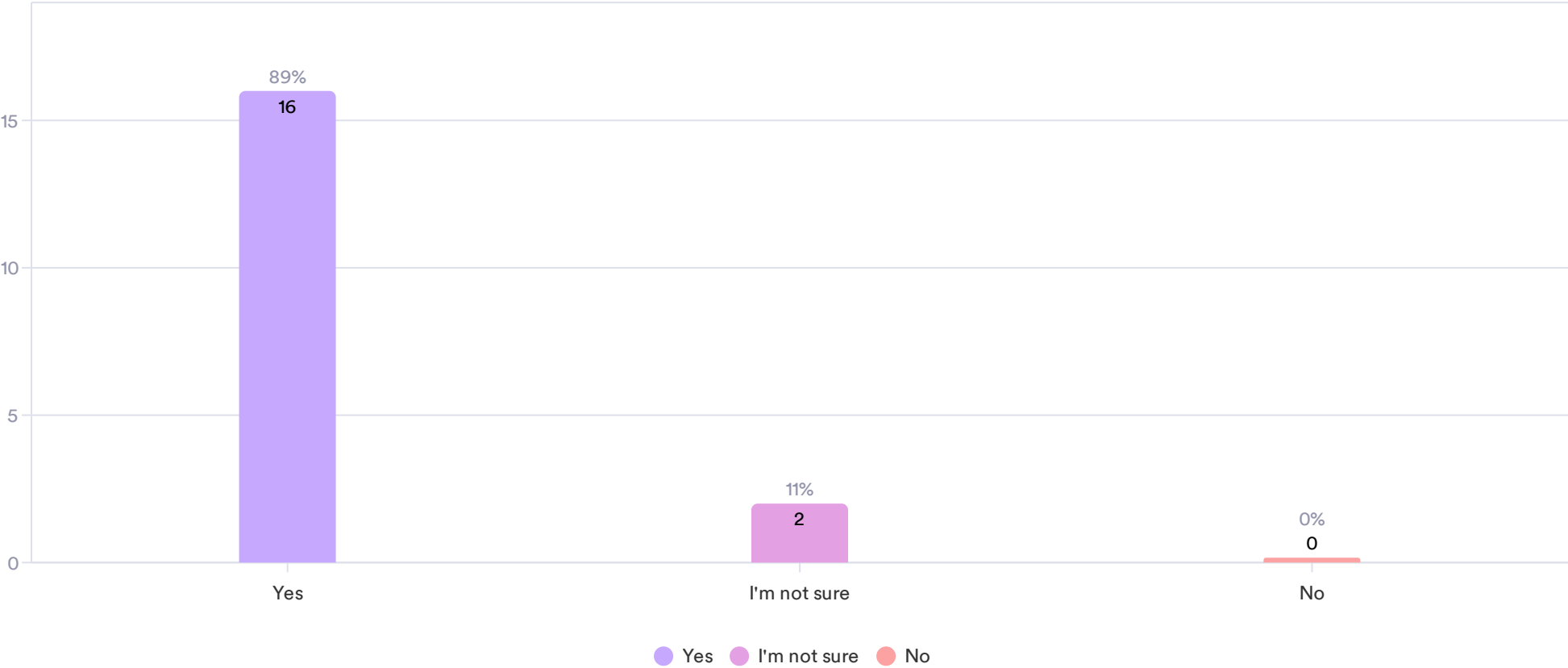
From your perspective, how much do you agree with the following statements about transportation?

5 Responses



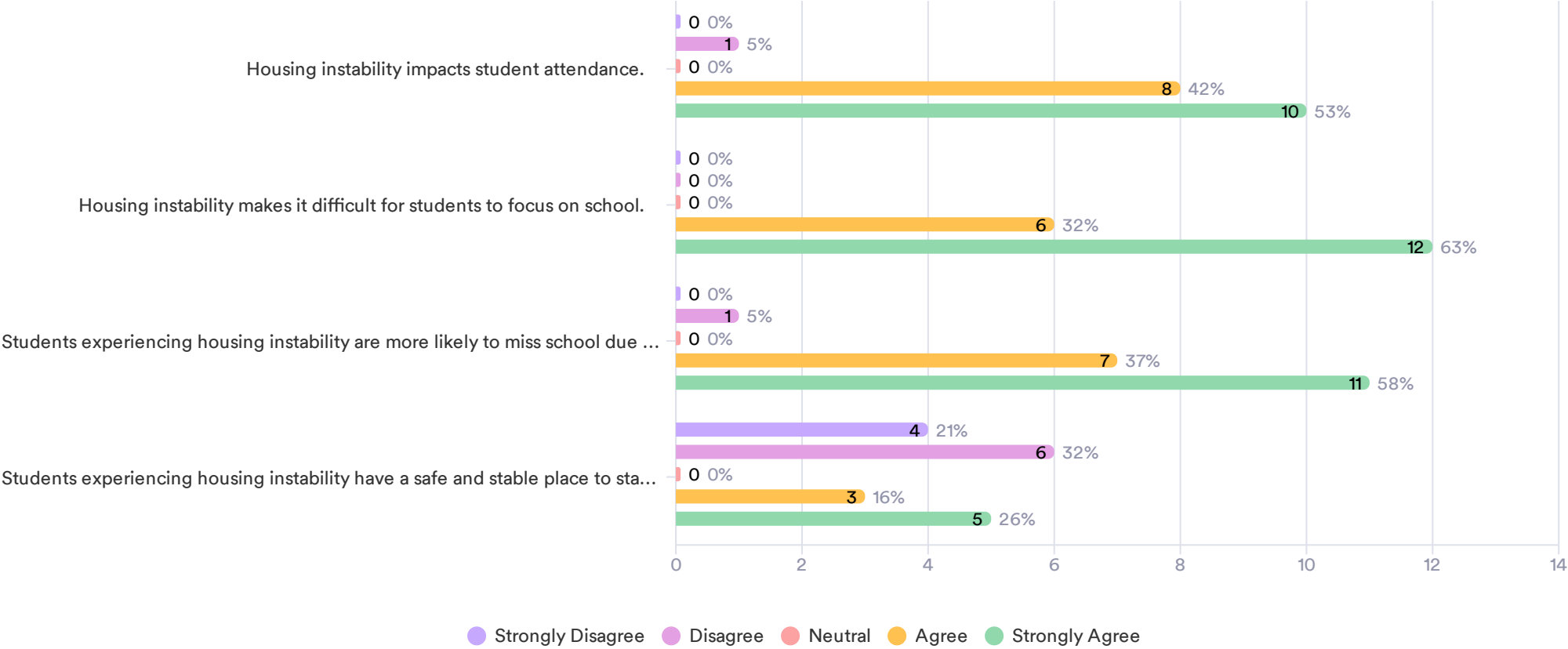
Do you work with students who experience housing instability?

18 Responses



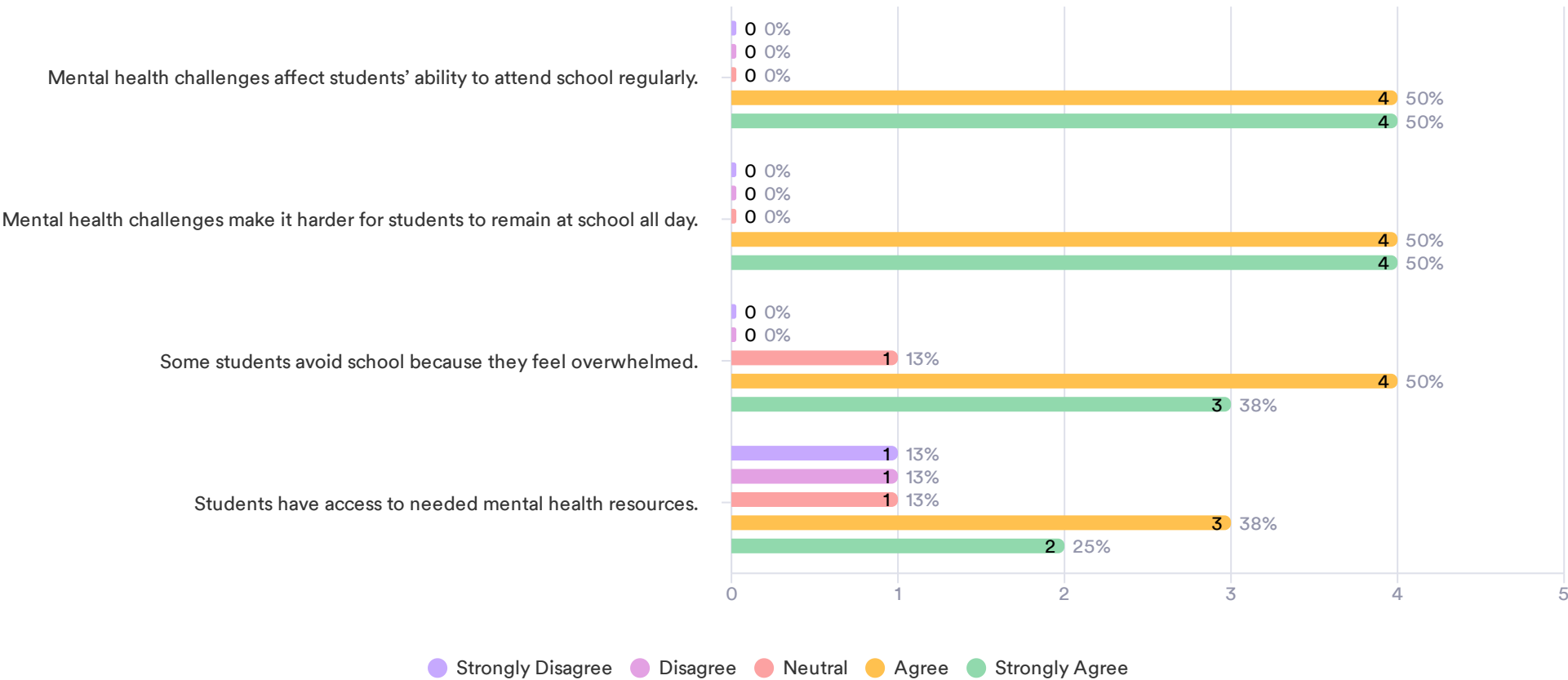
From your perspective, how much do you agree with the following statements about housing instability or homelessness?

19 Responses



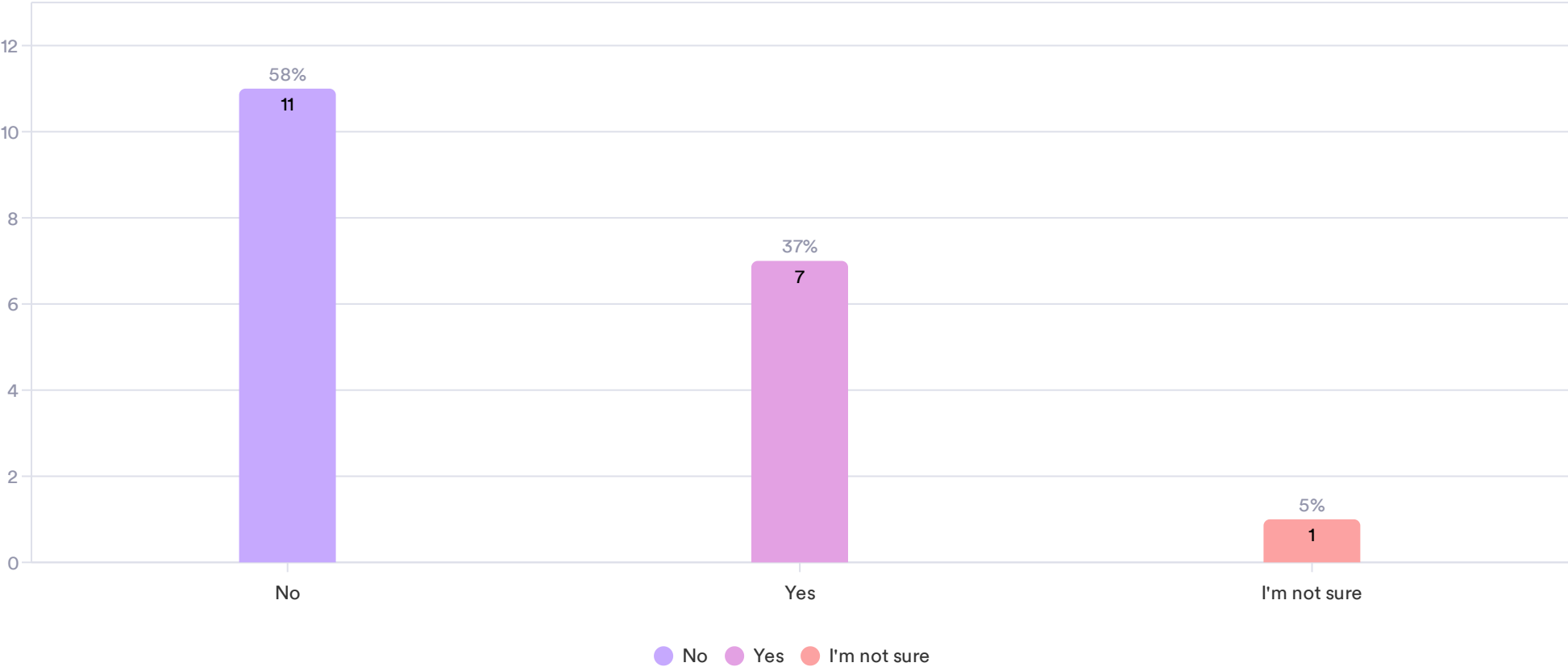
From your perspective, how much do you agree with the following statements about student mental health, anxiety, or stress?

8 Responses



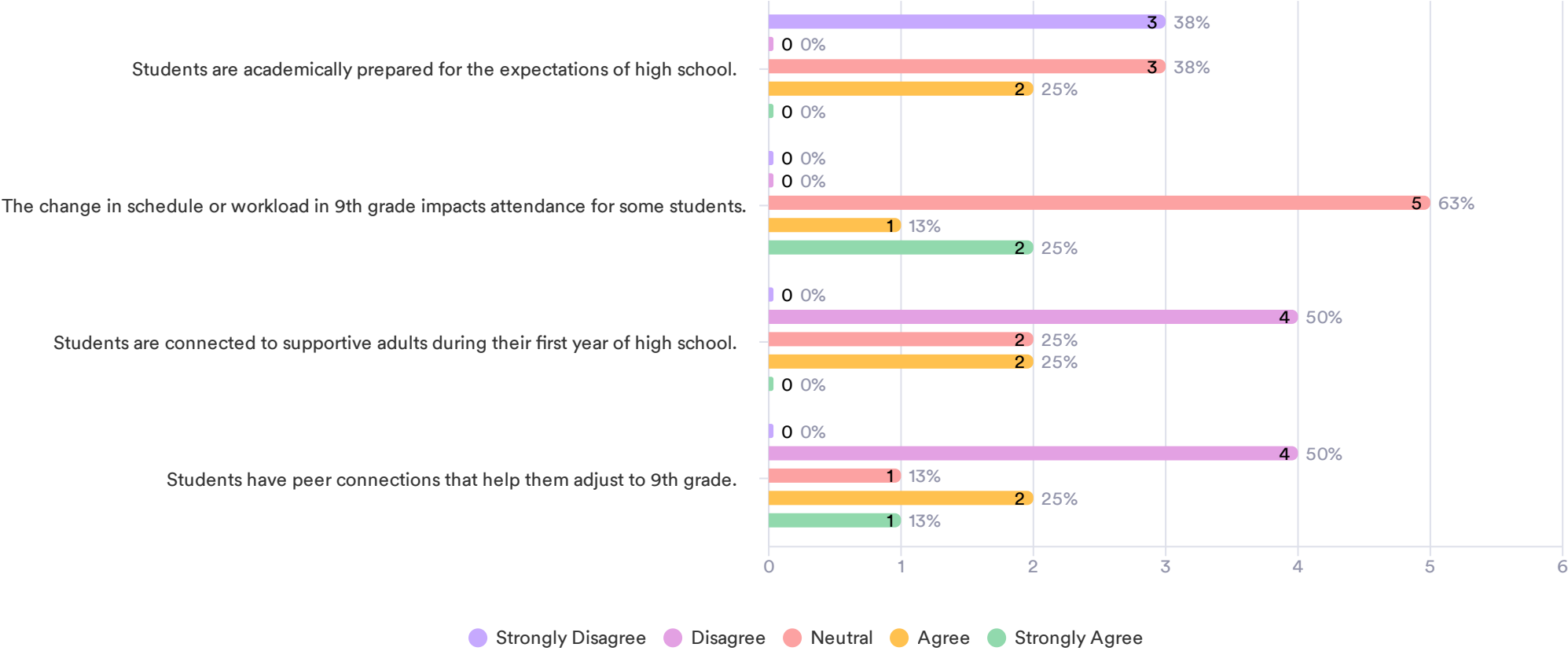
Last school year, did you work with 9th-grade students who had recently transitioned from 8th grade?

19 Responses



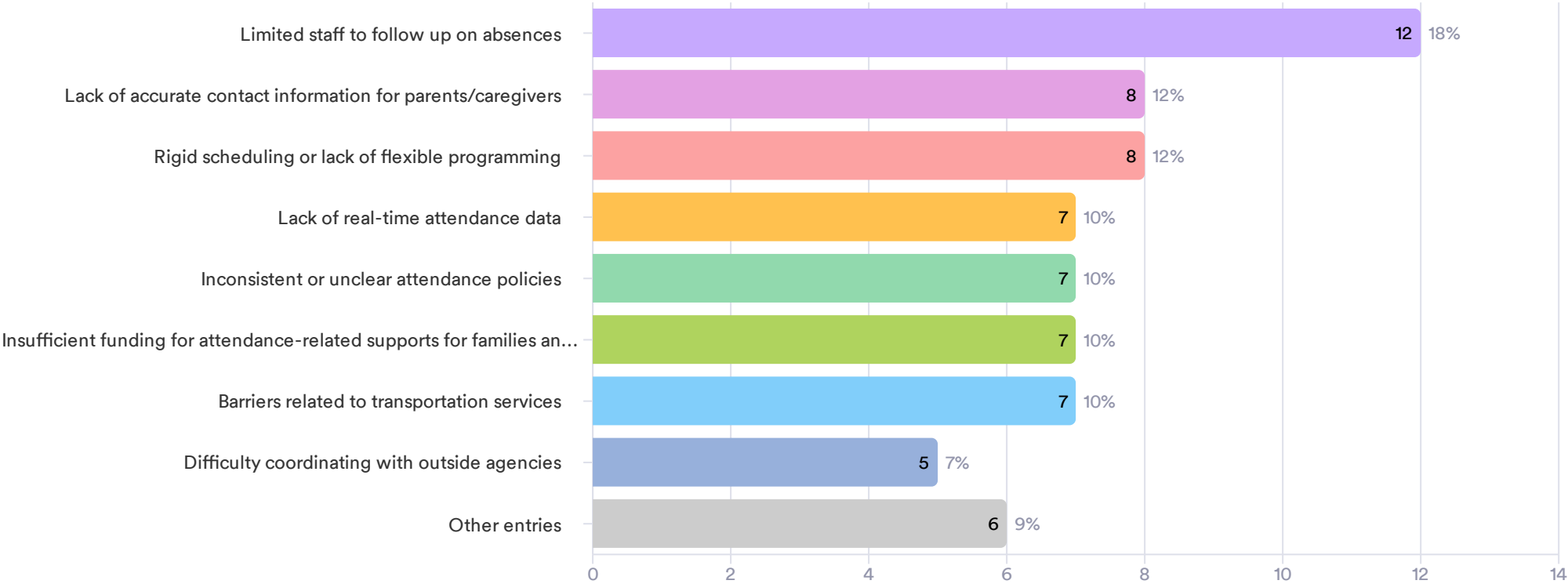
From your perspective, how much do you agree with the following statements about the transition from 8th to 9th grade?

8 Responses



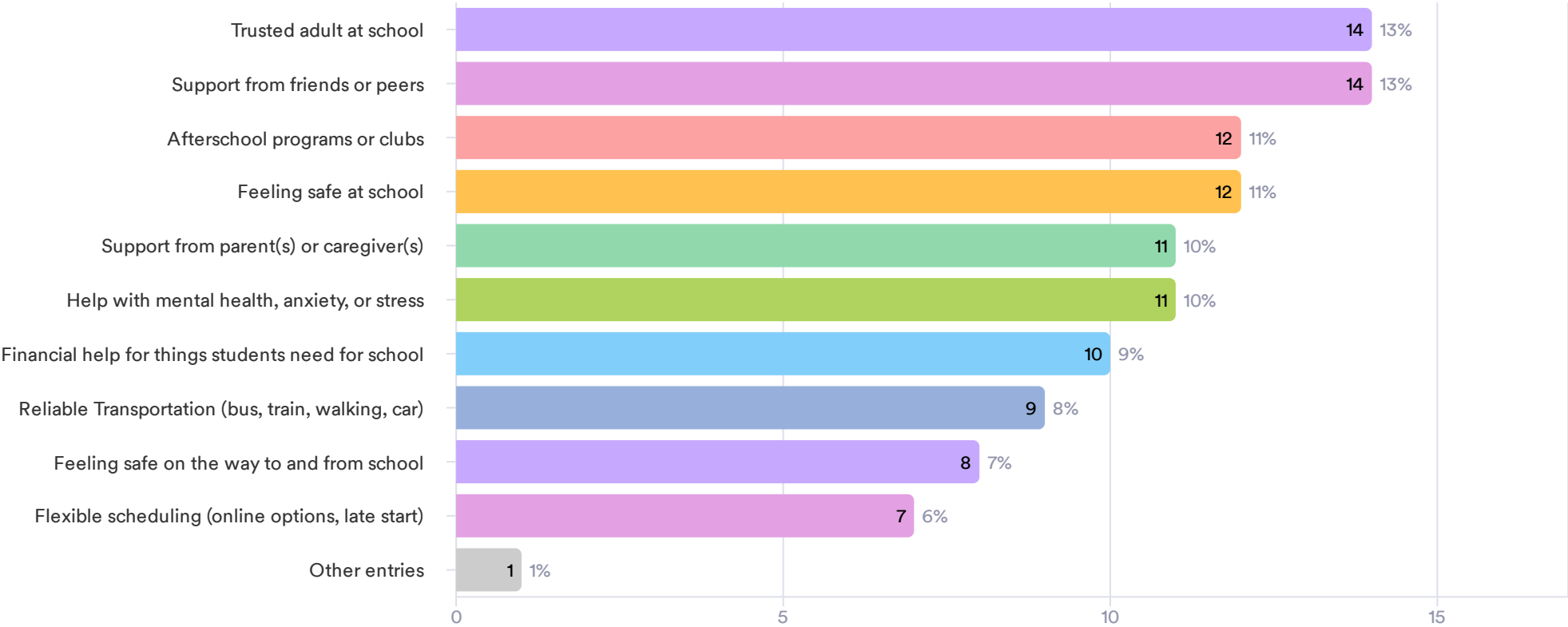
What policies, systems, or conditions (e.g., attendance procedures, staff capacity, access to real-time data, inter-agency coordination) make it harder for your school or organization to support regular attendance? (Select all that apply)

67 Responses



What's helped your students attend school more consistently? (Select all that apply)

109 Responses



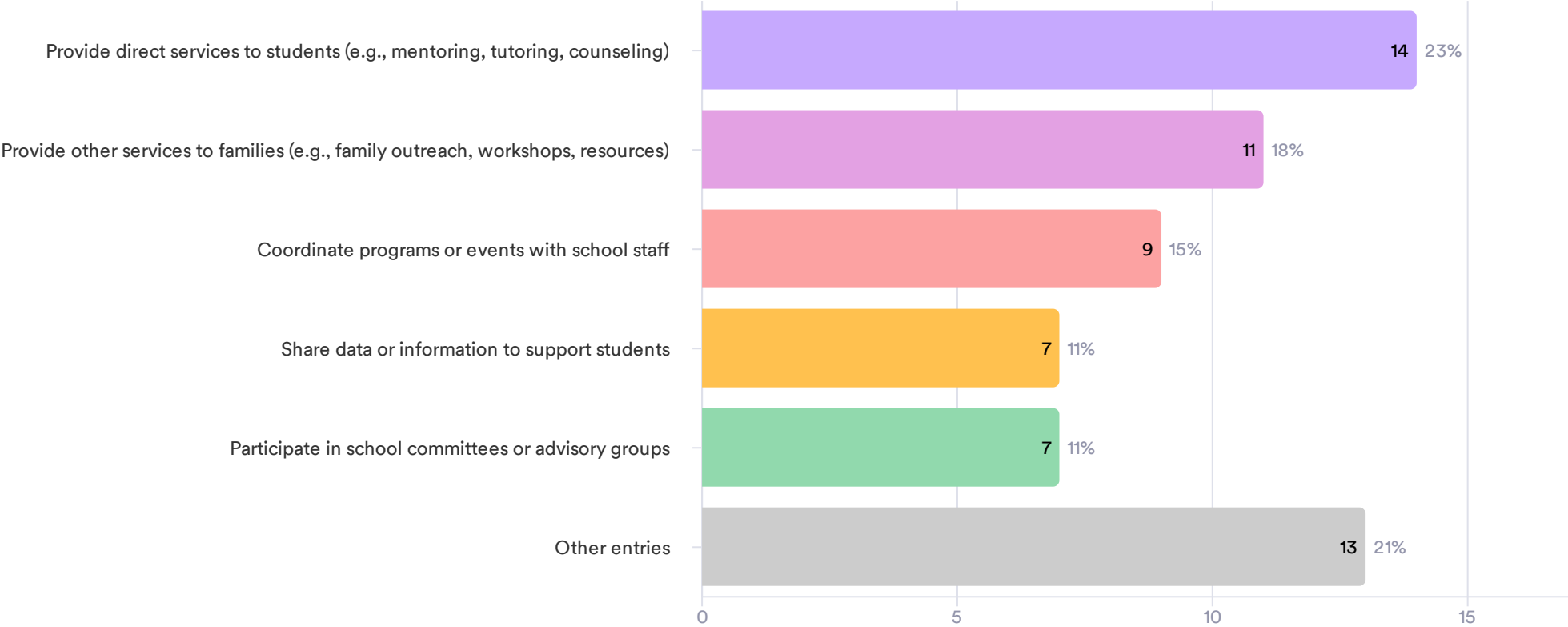
What is one thing the schools or the community could do to better support regular attendance for the students and families you work with?
(Open-ended)

11 Responses

Data	Responses
mental health awareness	1
Funding	1
Schools in partnerships with the community should be sure there is a safe place for students to get before and after school care (extended hours, 5AM start, 9PM close) to support families that need additional support for students like washing clothes, providing food, and extra school work support.	1
More truant officers	1
We need real-time data and people who are willing to prioritize reaching out to students and families to engage them in problem-solving around attendance and help students feel belonging, valued, welcome and missed when they are absent.	1
Working with parents to be consistent	1
focus on the whole student not just from 7:45 to 2:45. That is only a small part of their lives	1
transportation and more adult check-ins and support	1

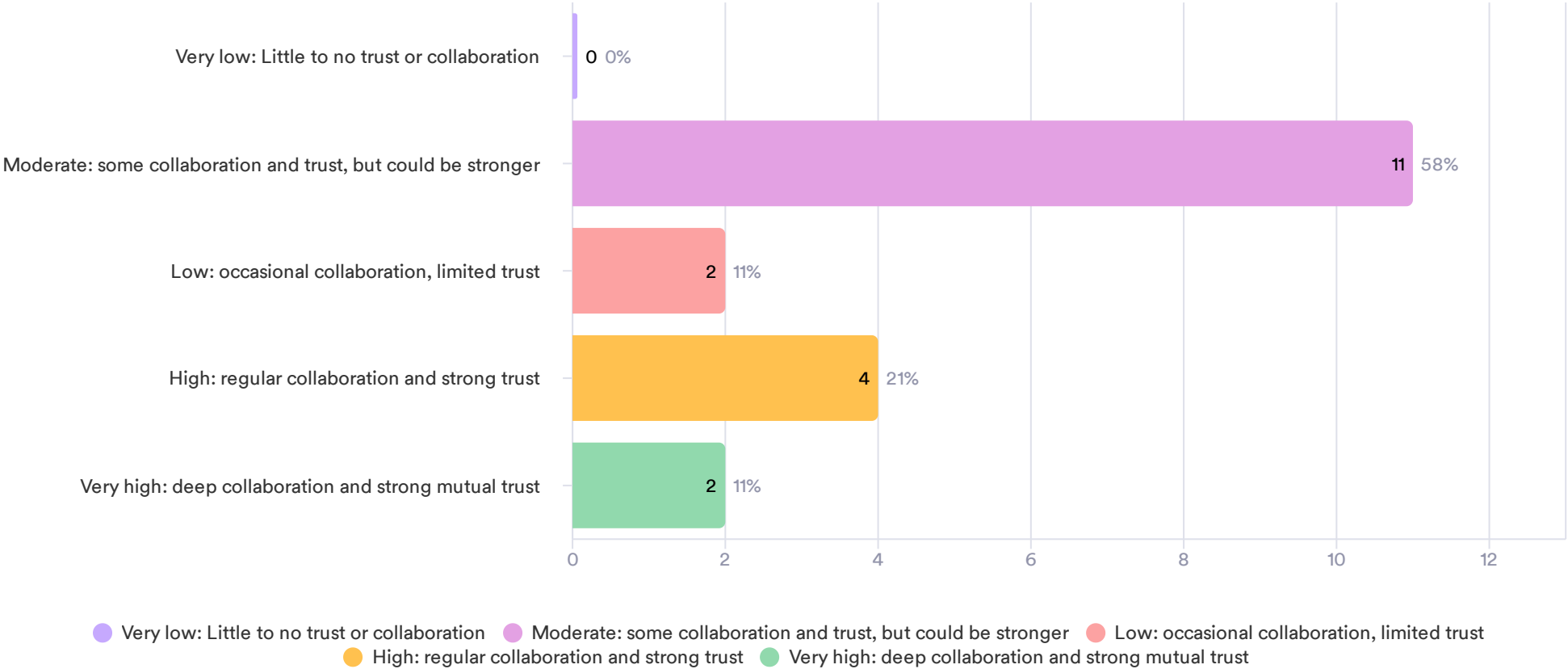
How do you currently work with schools to support students and families (Select all that apply)

61 Responses



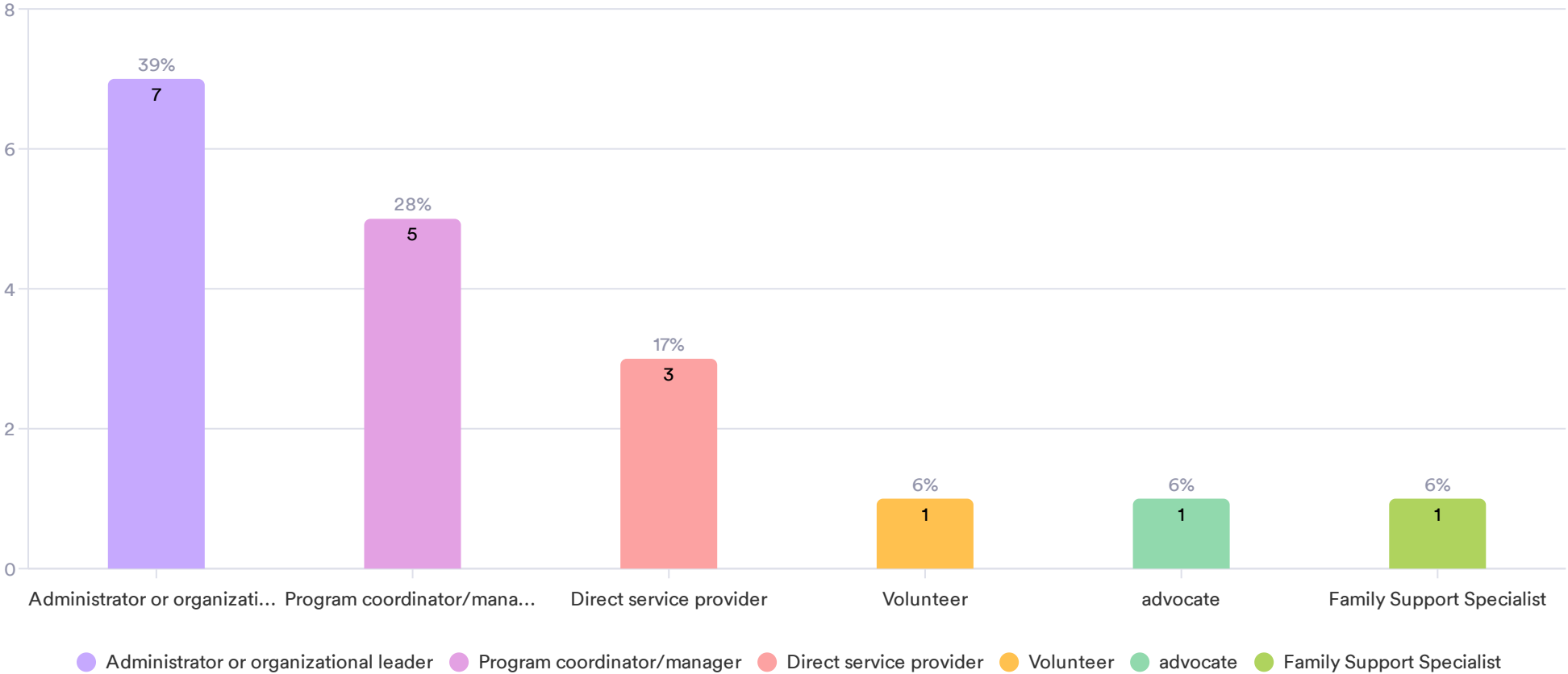
Overall, how would you rate the level of trust and collaboration between your organization and the schools you work with?

19 Responses



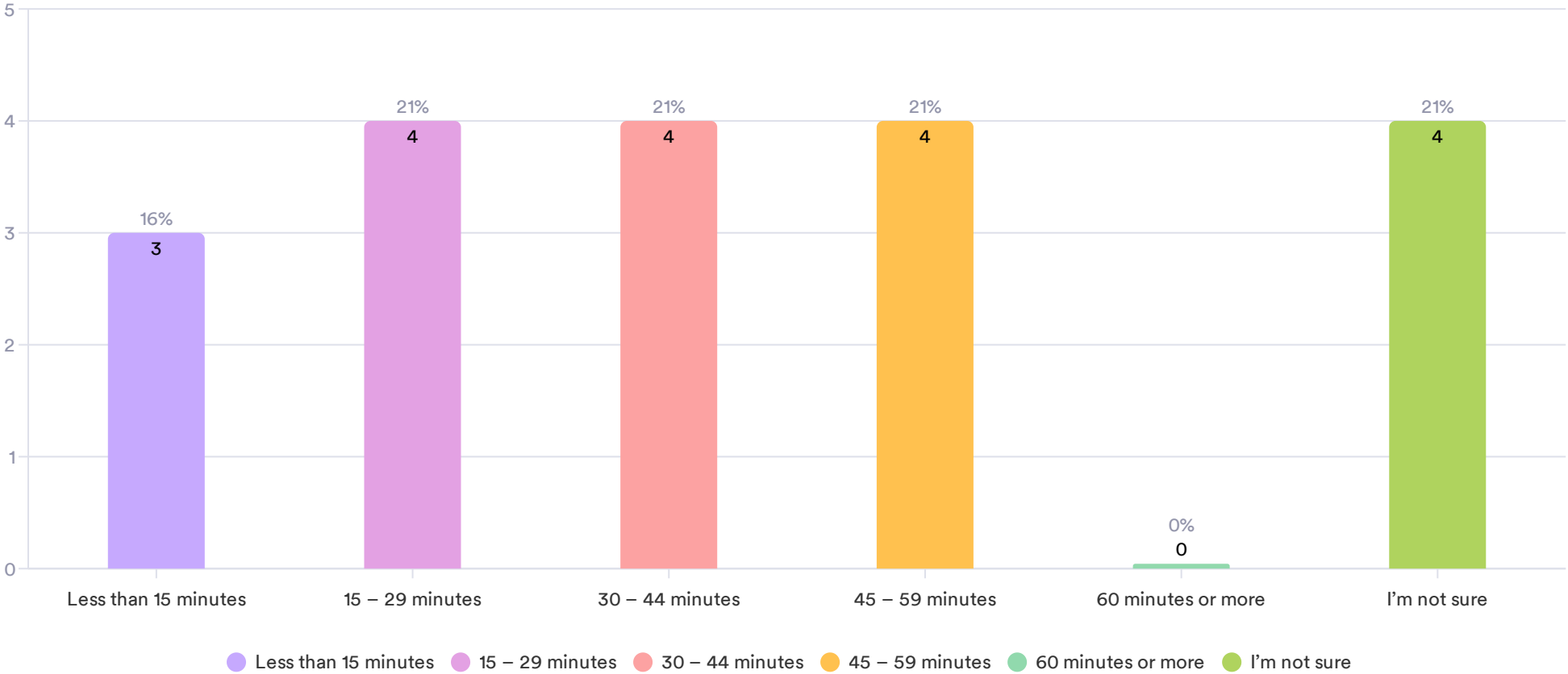
What is your role in your organization?

18 Responses



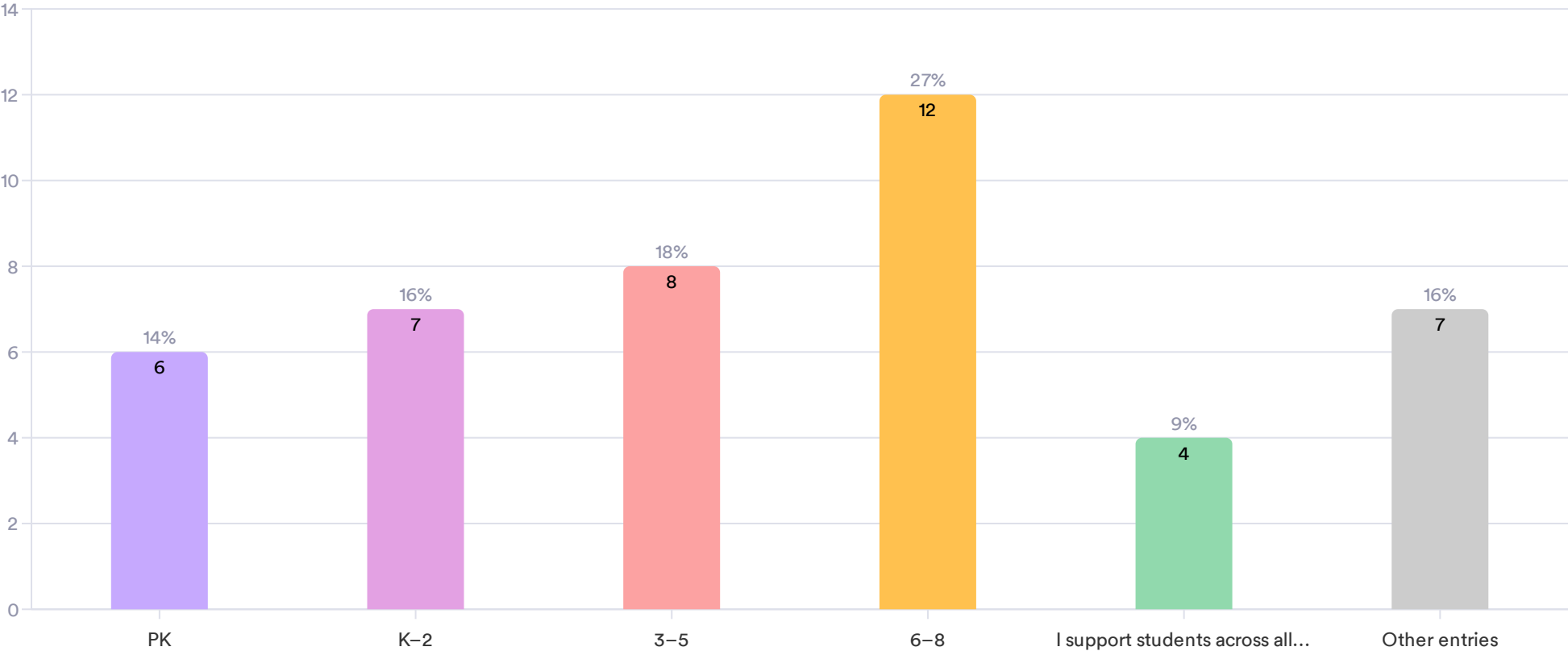
On average, how long does it take most of the students and families you work with to travel to school?

19 Responses



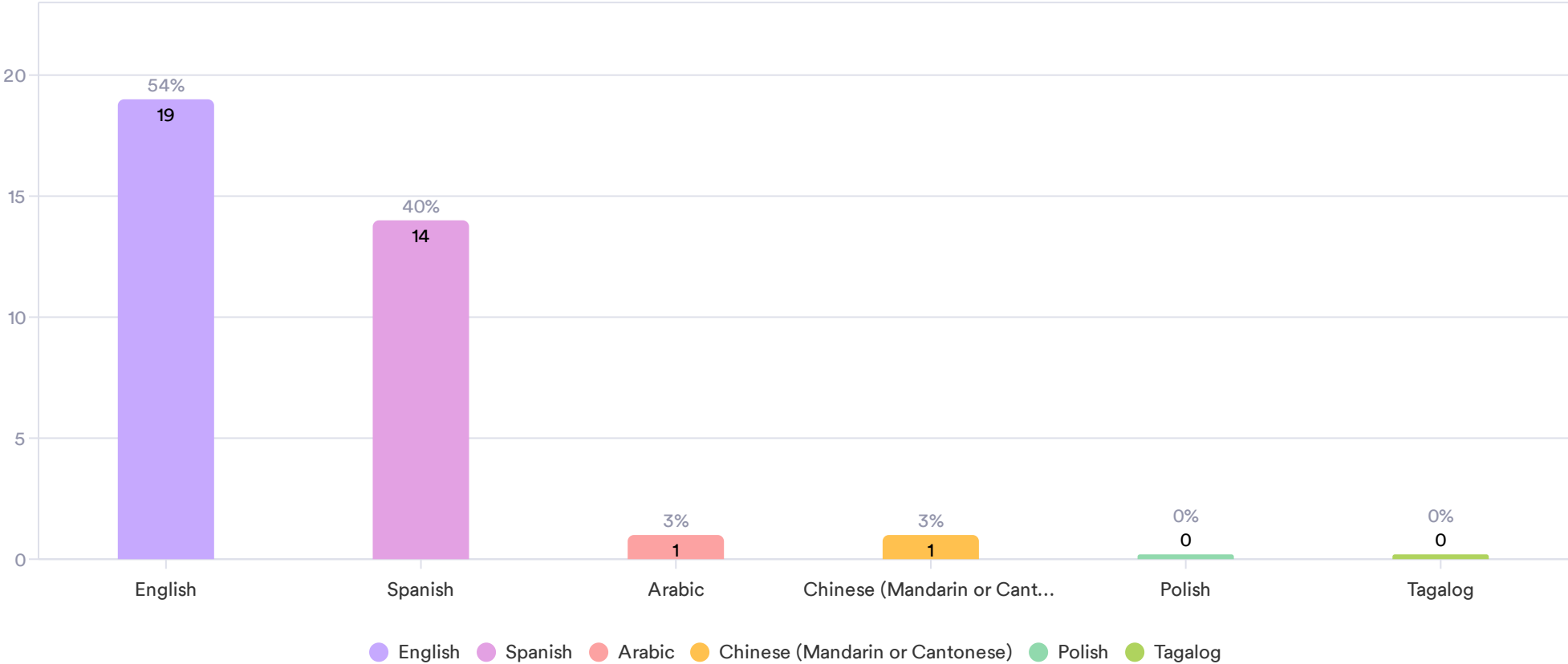
What grade level(s) do the students you support primarily fall into?(Select all that apply)

44 Responses



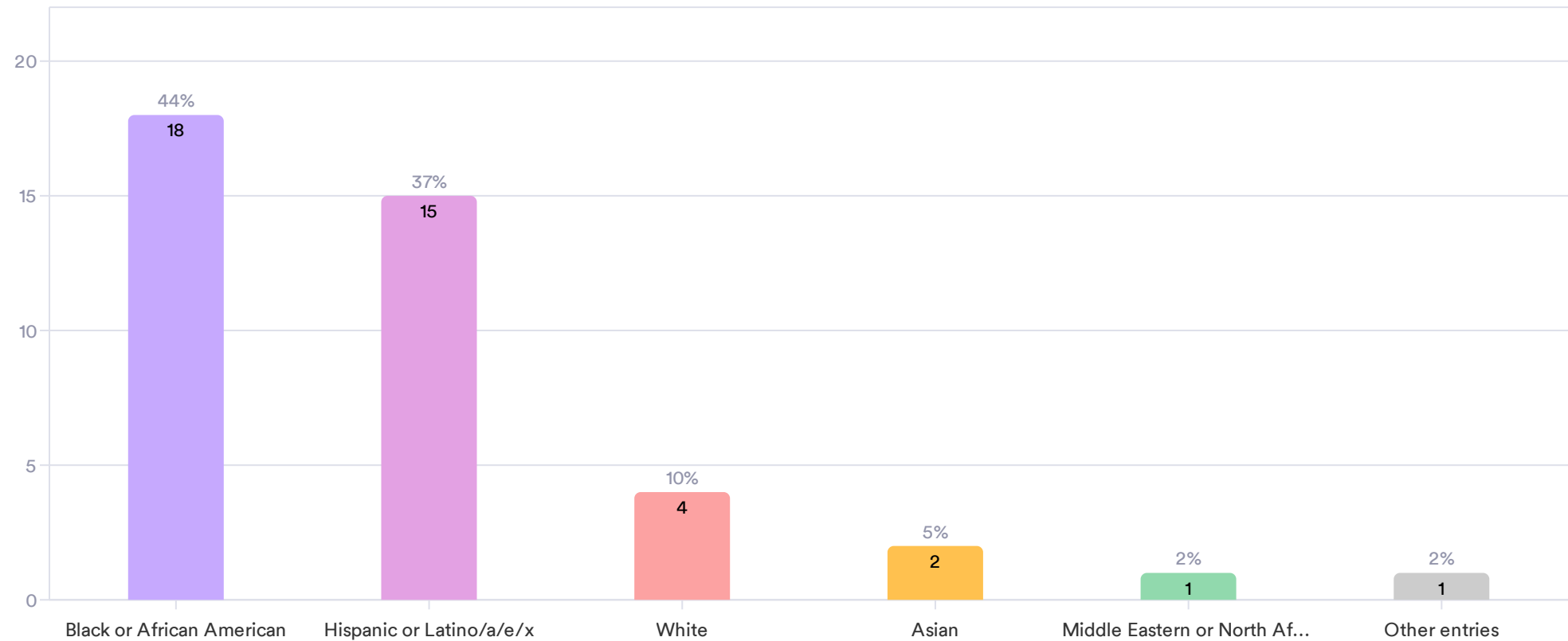
Which languages are commonly spoken by the students and families you work with? (Select all that apply)

35 Responses



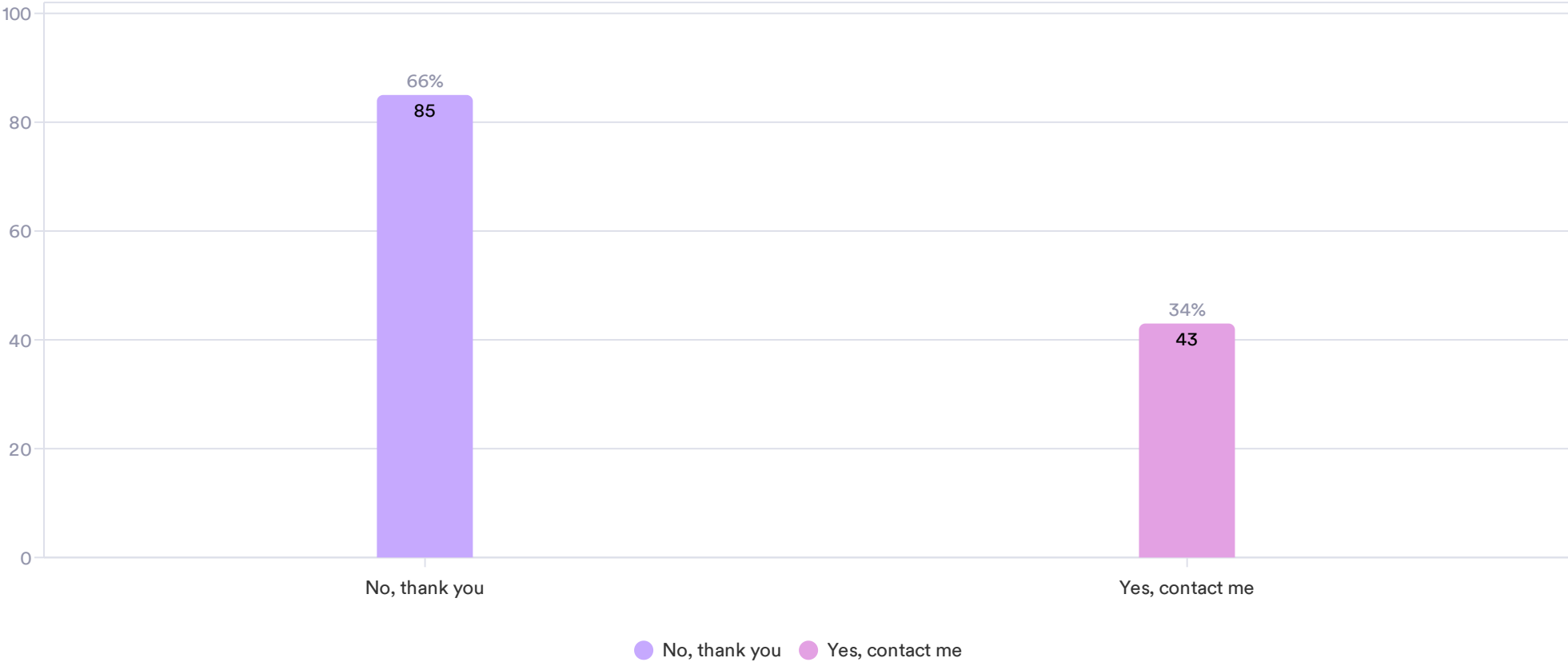
Which race or ethnic groups are most represented among the students and families you work with? (Select all that apply)

41 Responses



Interest in participating in focus groups

128 Responses



Thank You!

Chronic Absenteeism Survey