

Community Survey Results

Mercer County School District

Summer 2021



SCHOOL PERCEPTIONS

Our mission is to help educational leaders gather, organize, and use data to make strategic decisions.

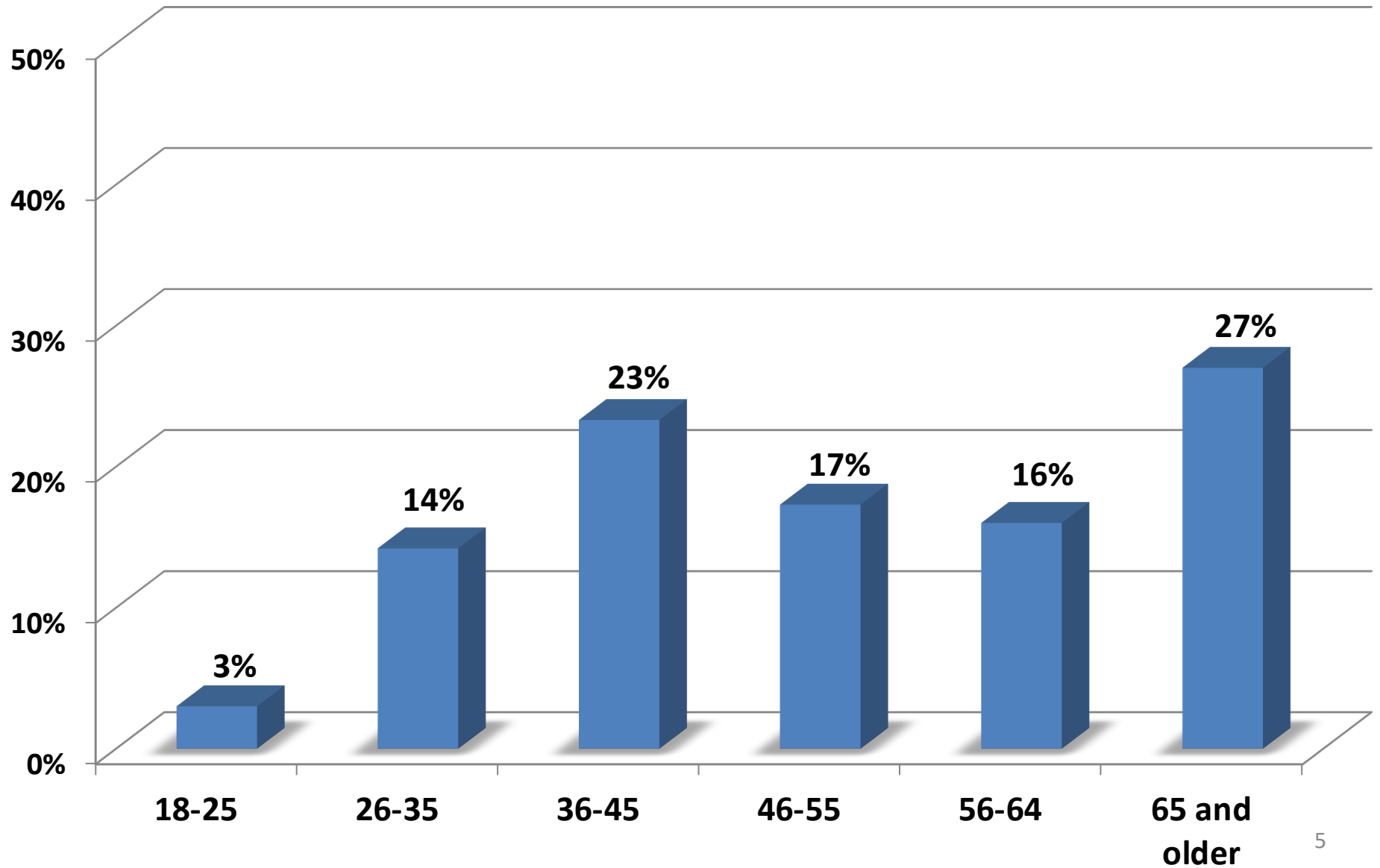
- Founded in 2002 to provide independent research
- Conducted more than **10,000** staff, parent, student, and community surveys for school improvement
- Helped more than **800** districts navigate the strategic planning and referendum planning process

Survey Summary

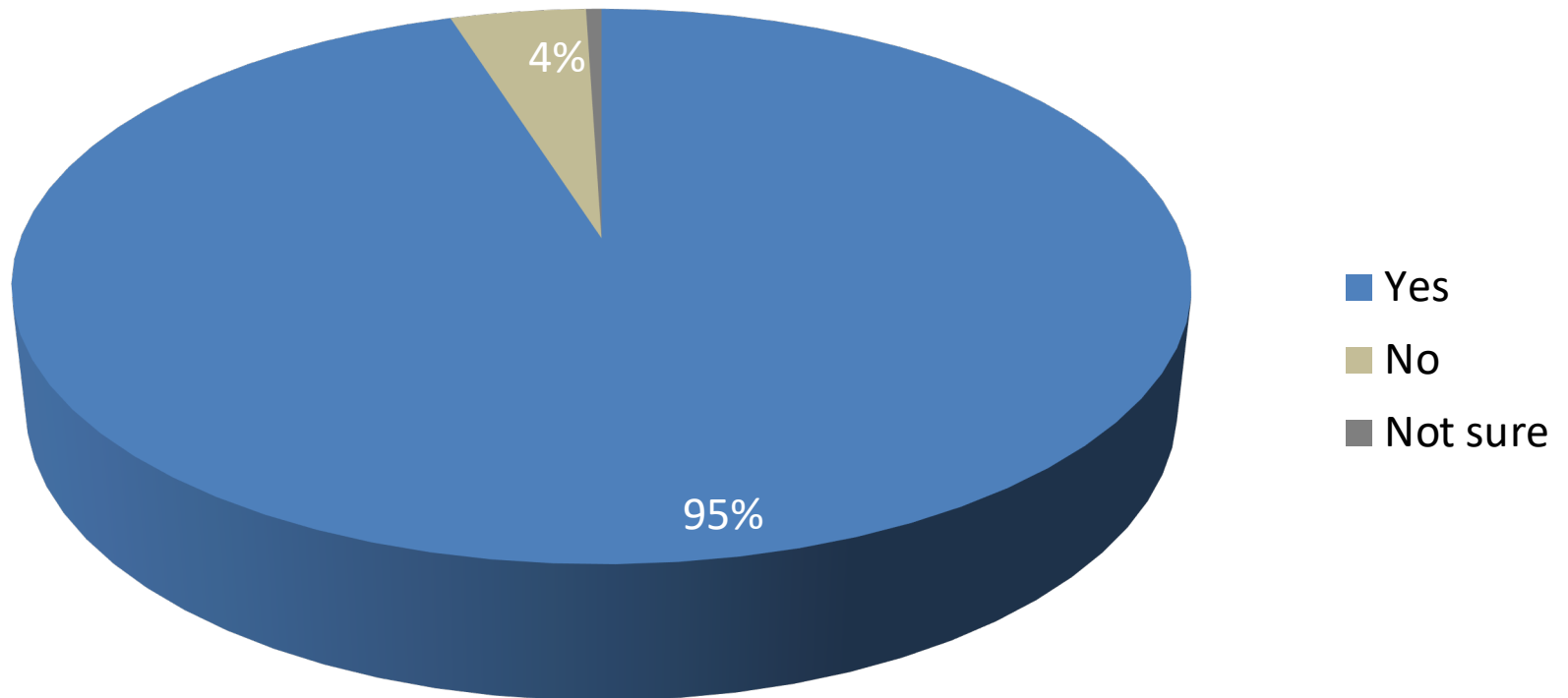
- The survey was conducted in August 2021.
- Residents within the District were mailed a paper survey.
 - Each survey included a unique survey access code for those who preferred to take the survey online.
- Total responses = 791 (277 paper)
- Participation rate = 20%

Respondent Information

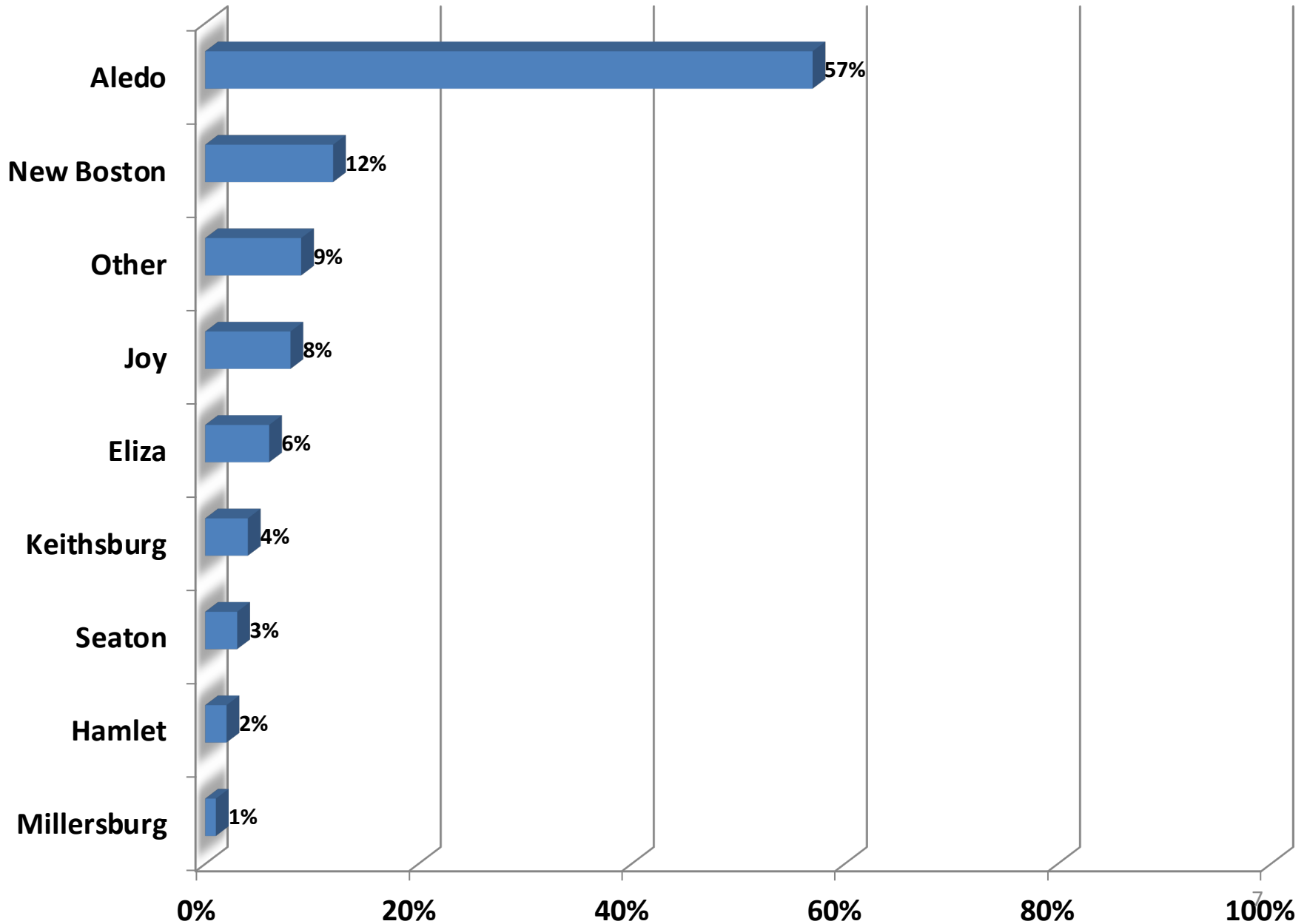
What is your age?



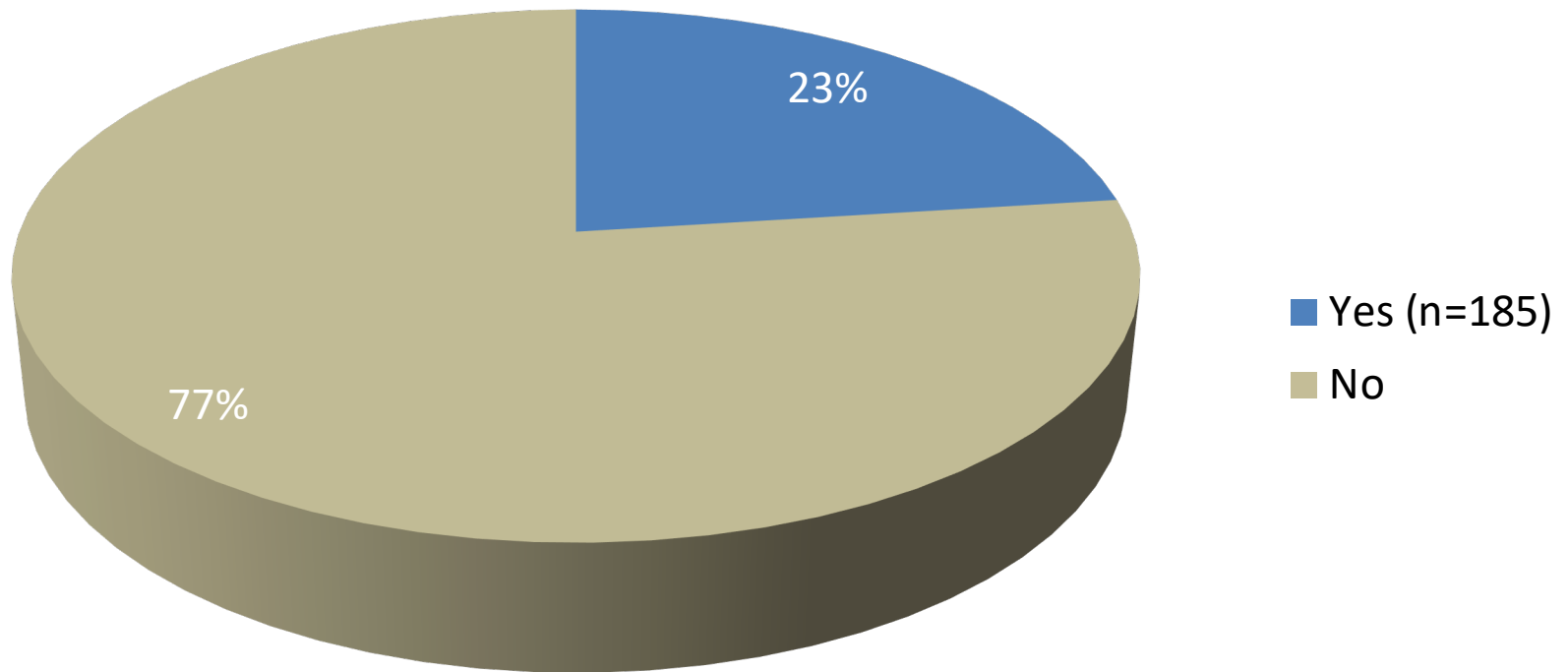
Do you live within the Mercer County School District?



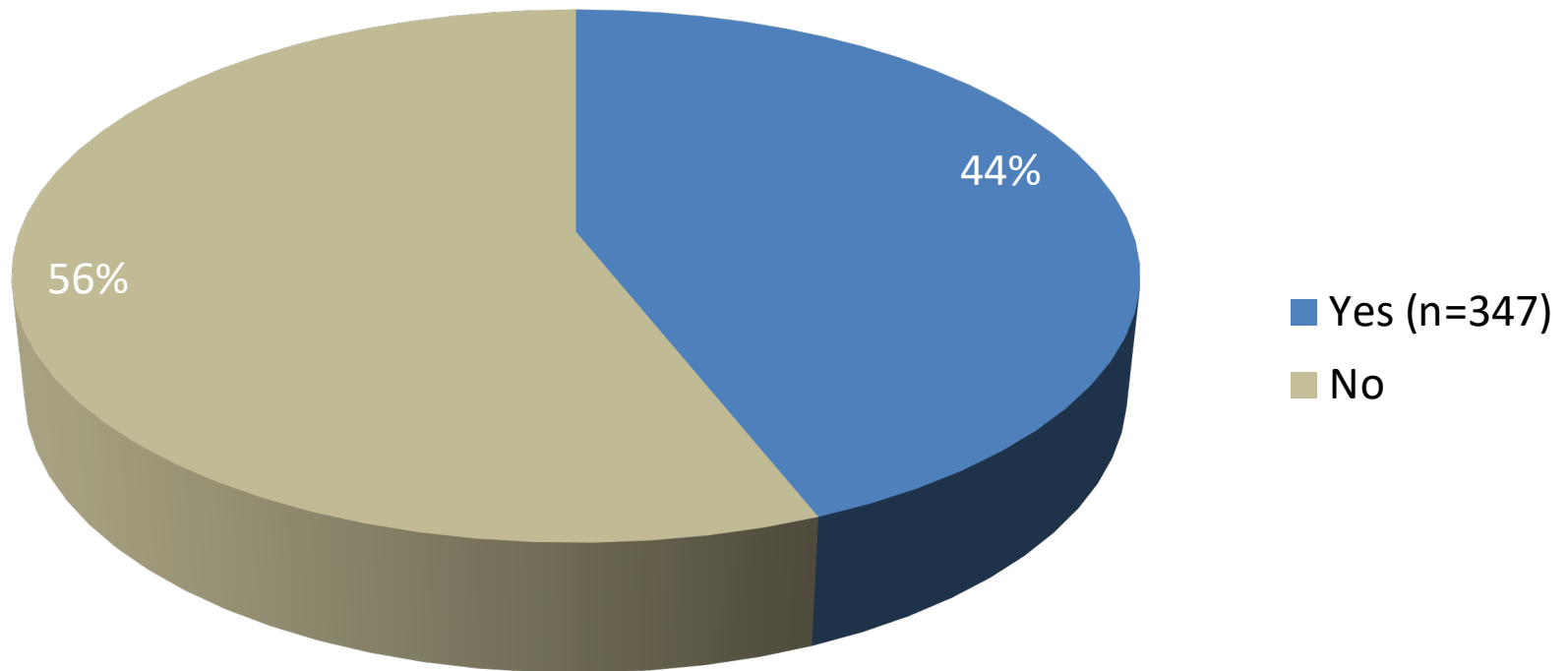
In which municipality do you live?



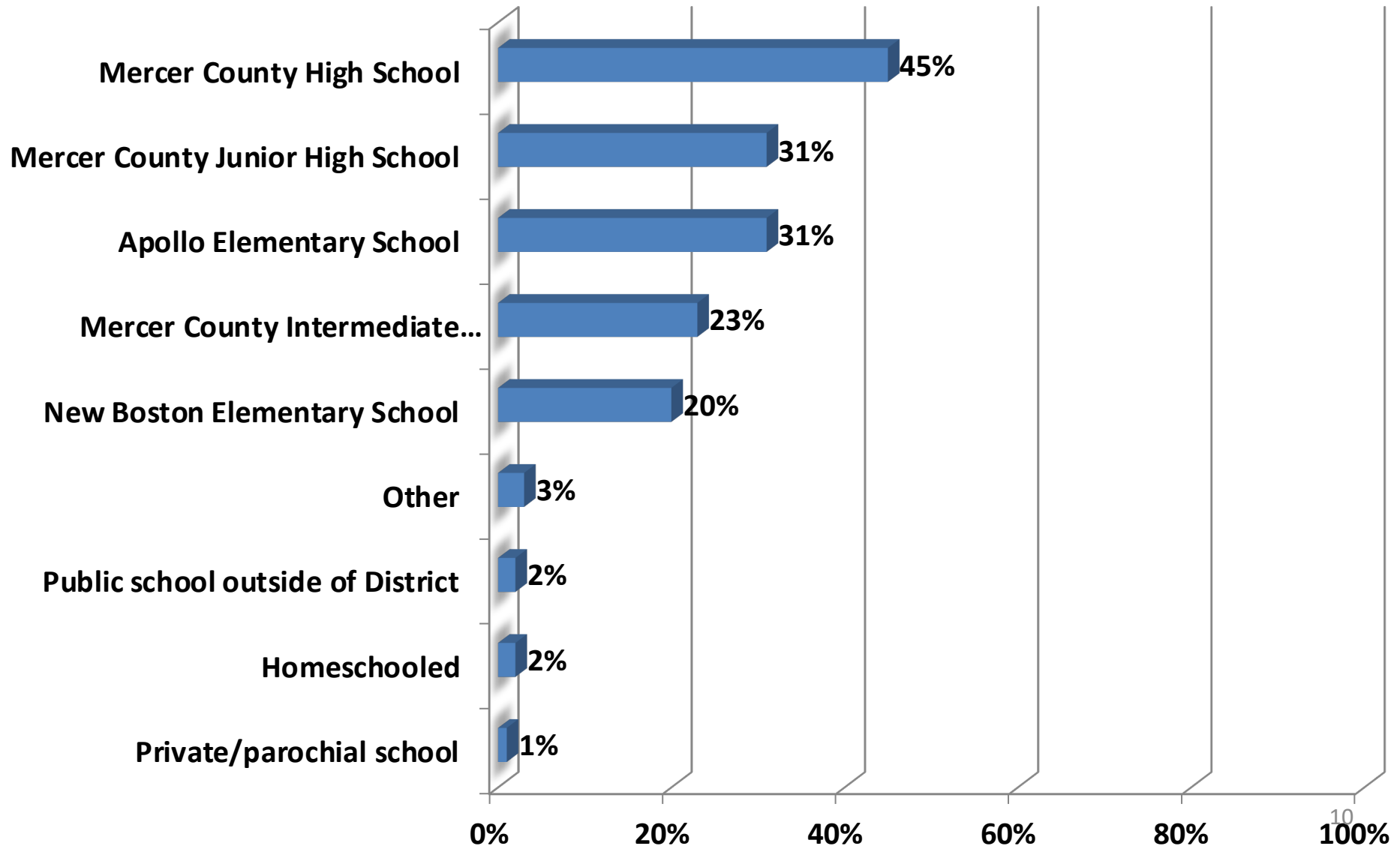
Are you an employee of the Mercer County School District?



Do you have children attending our schools?

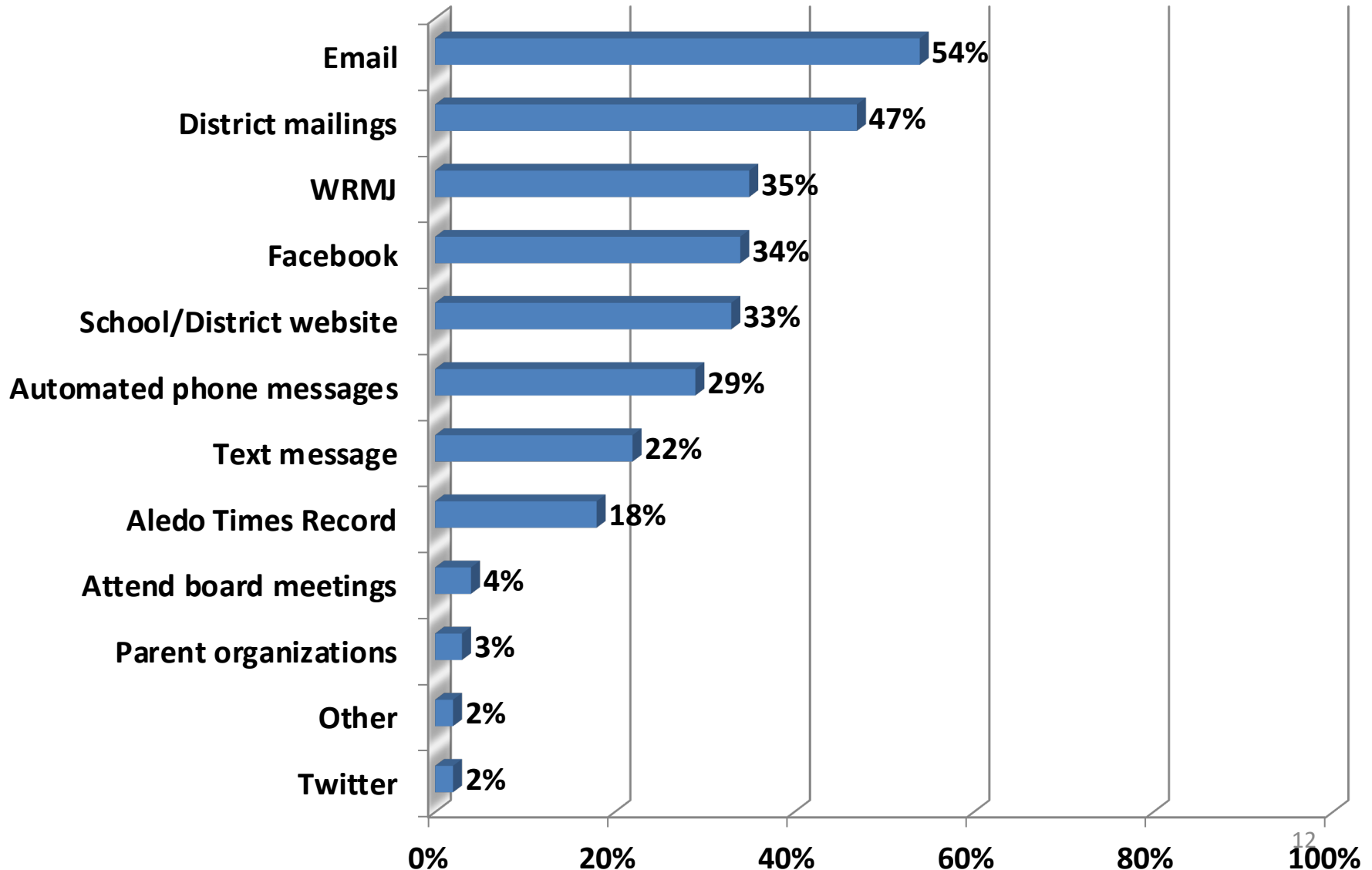


If you have school-aged children, what school(s) do they attend?



Communication

How would you like to receive information from the District? *(Select all that apply.)*



Facility Background Information

The Board of Education used a recent facility review to identify investments that are needed across our schools.
Key findings identified in that report are:

Outdated Learning Environments

Many of the classrooms and labs throughout the District have not been updated in several decades. Teaching and learning have changed significantly since our schools were originally constructed. As a result, classrooms are too small and lack the flexibility, infrastructure, and electrical capacity needed to support more modern instruction. Specific examples include:

- ✓ Apollo Elementary's STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) courses are taught in classrooms without the space for lab equipment.
- ✓ Apollo Elementary's gym is also used as a cafeteria. This requires staff to set up/take down lunch tables each day and limits instruction time for physical education classes.
- ✓ STEM courses at both New Boston and the high school are taught in spaces that were not designed to support this type of hands-on, lab-based learning.
- ✓ Schools do not have flexible learning spaces for large-group instruction and small-group tutoring, collaboration, and project work areas.
- ✓ The high school has limited classroom space for students with special needs.

Additionally, because of the age of our facilities and the number of load-bearing walls, remodeling options that address these needs above are very limited.

Aging/Inefficient Building Systems

A summary of each building's major needs is included below.

School	Year Built (Additions)	Critical Building Issues (including health, life, and safety state mandates)
Apollo Elementary	1969 (1981, 1990)	Overcapacity ; aging water system; heating/ventilation/AC systems need replacement in classroom areas; inefficient lighting and utilities; dated and worn flooring and doors; portions not compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Est. Cost: \$1.7 million
New Boston Elementary	1937 (1965, 1978, 1979, 1999)	Portions not compliant with ADA; aged and improper plumbing installations; inadequate boiler capacity for additions; electrical work unable to handle additions without upgrades; portions not compliant with fire codes. Est. Cost: \$2.0 million
Intermediate School	2002	Inefficient kitchen equipment should be relocated; not compliant with newest fire codes; worn and aged floors and ceilings; some bathrooms not compliant with ADA. Est. Cost: \$1.1 million
Junior High School	1937 (1954, 1965, 1979)	Overcapacity ; any upgrades would require new water service and fire protection systems; many issues with ADA compliance; labs and classrooms need better ventilation; aged and inefficient electrical systems; cracked and chipping brick/masonry. Est. Cost: \$4.2 million
High School	1952 (1969)	Some ADA noncompliant bathrooms, doors, and classroom spaces; inefficient lighting and utilities; worn and aged floors, ceilings, walls, and windows; cracked and chipping brick. Est. Cost: \$5.1 million

The total cost to fix the building systems is **\$14.1 million**. The District would need to address these issues to comply with state and federal mandates and keep our schools safe.

Elementary Schools

Mercer County is at a crossroads. We currently operate two elementary schools, serving students in prekindergarten through fourth grade. This configuration was appropriate when the schools were built and during the first 10 years of consolidation. However, instruction has changed greatly since that time. Therefore, fifth grade students will move to the elementary school level next year.

As identified on the previous page, a significant investment at the elementary level will be needed soon. Some community members have asked if it makes sense to continue to invest in an older building. Others feel we should continue to update the existing school. **Therefore, before any money is spent on the current buildings, the Board would like your feedback on these two options:**

Option 1: Consolidate operations.

The District could consolidate elementary operations to one site. Both Apollo and New Boston would be closed. A new, centrally located elementary school could be built on the junior high site to serve all students in prekindergarten through fifth grade. **Estimated cost: \$17 million.**

This option would save money each year by having fewer buildings to heat, clean, and operate and would also make it easier to share staff. A new elementary school would provide consistent programming for all elementary school students in a more modern learning environment that offers small-group instruction and hands-on learning spaces. **Annual savings: \$1 million.**

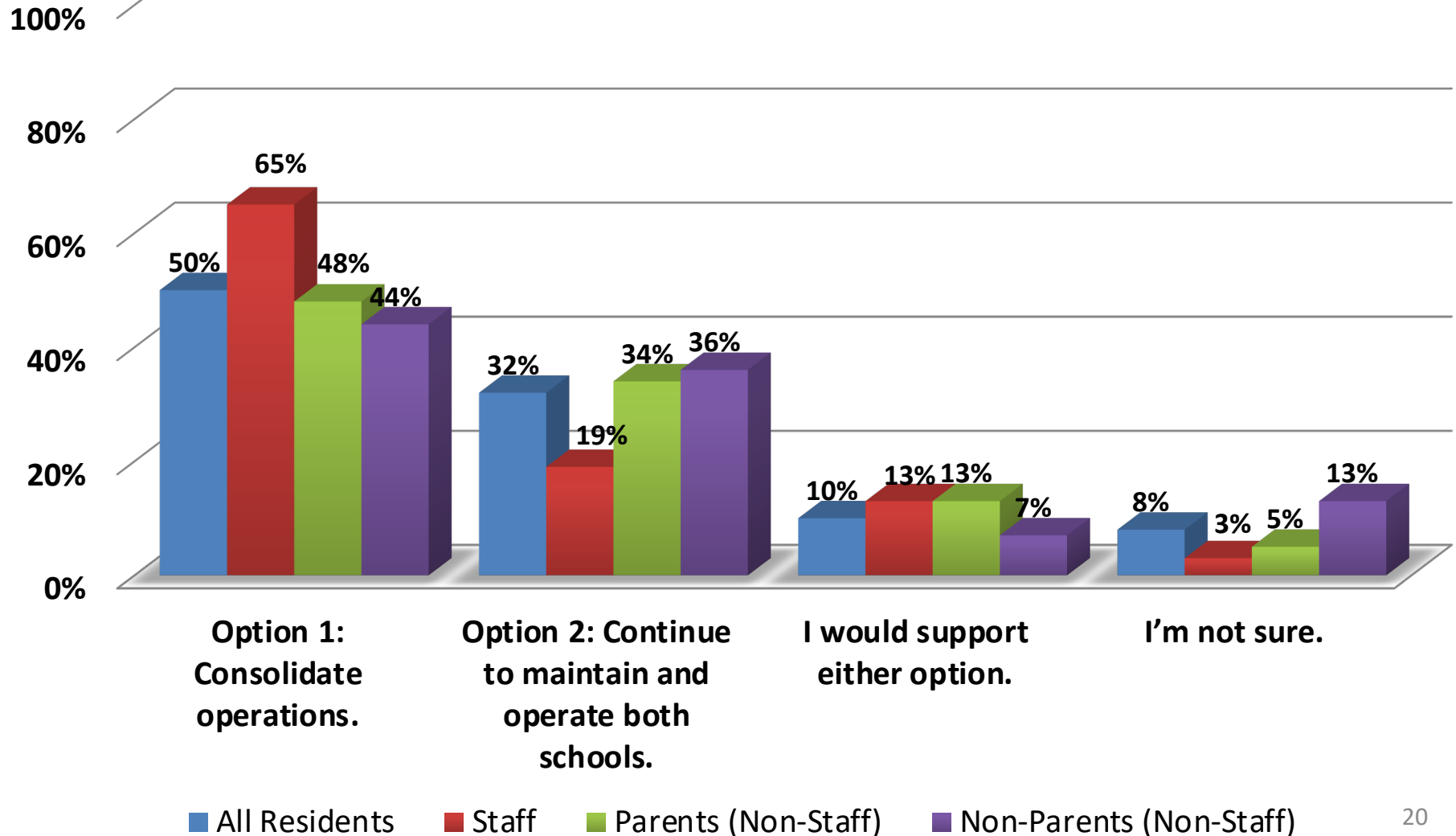
Option 2: Continue to maintain/operate both elementary schools.

The District could continue to operate both New Boston and Apollo Elementary schools to serve grades kindergarten through fifth grade. Seventh- and eighth-grade students will move to the middle school beginning in 2022-2023. Prekindergarten students will continue to attend the Joy campus. Option 2 would also address critical health, life, and safety problems at our schools, including Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance issues. **Estimated cost: \$17 million.**

However, because these buildings are more than 50 years old, additional costs will be incurred over the next ten years to repair and replace major building systems, such as heating/ventilation, electrical, plumbing, windows, roofs, etc.

If the costs were similar, which option should the Board of Education pursue?

(Mercer County Public School District Residents Only)



High School

Mercer County High School was built in 1952 with additions in 1969 and 1976. Several areas of the school have not been updated since that time. The District identified the following projects that would address the school's most pressing needs at an estimated total cost of **\$16.7 million**.

What priority would you place on each of the following updates at Mercer County High School?

High = 3, Medium = 2, Low= 1

Item	All Residents	Staff Residents	Parent Residents (Non-Staff)	Non-Parent Residents (Non-Staff)
Renovate Vocational/Tech Ed (“Shop”): These courses could be improved with improved/updated technology and equipment to create hands-on learning opportunities for students interested in the trades and skilled professional careers. <i>Est. cost: \$1 million</i>	2.27	2.10	2.35	2.27
Replace Building Systems: Floors, windows, doors, and lights around the school are worn, dated, and have reached the end of their service life. <i>Est. cost: \$4.8 million</i>	2.34	2.48	2.40	2.25
Update Special Education Areas: Classrooms and other teaching/learning areas would be renovated to help meet the needs of students with learning difficulties. <i>Est. cost: \$1.4 million</i>	2.24	2.29	2.31	2.16
Remodel and Expand Cafeteria and Commons: This area is original to the building and is undersized for the current enrollment. The kitchen also has faulty appliances that must be replaced. <i>Est. cost: \$2.9 million</i>	2.30	2.66	2.33	2.12
Renovate and Expand Physical Education Areas: There is a need to expand and improve the fitness spaces to better meet the health and physical education course needs, design spaces for student athletics, and increase storage areas. <i>Est. cost: \$3.6 million</i>	1.64	1.93	1.61	1.53
Update Entrance Area: A renovated entrance area would include office space expanded to include the room for a school nurse, better access to the auditorium and gym for school events, and improved/more accessible restrooms. <i>Est. cost: \$3 million</i>	1.64	2.10	1.55	1.51 23

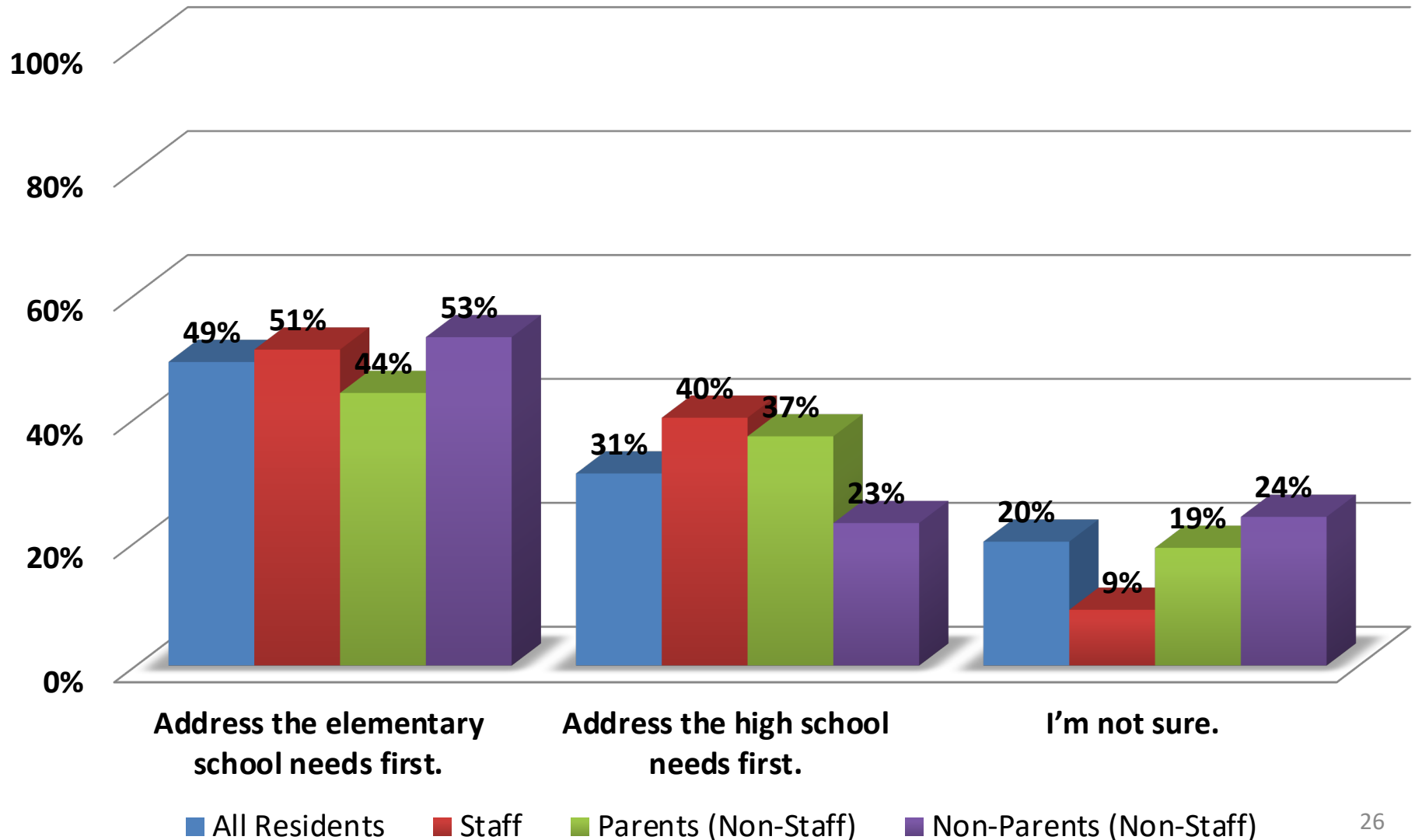
Facility Planning Priority

The cost of all the facility projects identified in this survey would exceed **\$50 million**. We understand doing all these projects at one time is not realistic. In fact, the cost to build a new high school would be more than \$35 million, which is beyond what the District is allowed to borrow.

Therefore, the District needs to prioritize the projects based on our community's feedback.

What do you believe the highest planning priority of the Board of Education should be?

(Mercer County Public School District Residents Only)



Financial Background Information

The District will finalize a facility update plan based on the priorities of the community and their willingness to financially support the projects.

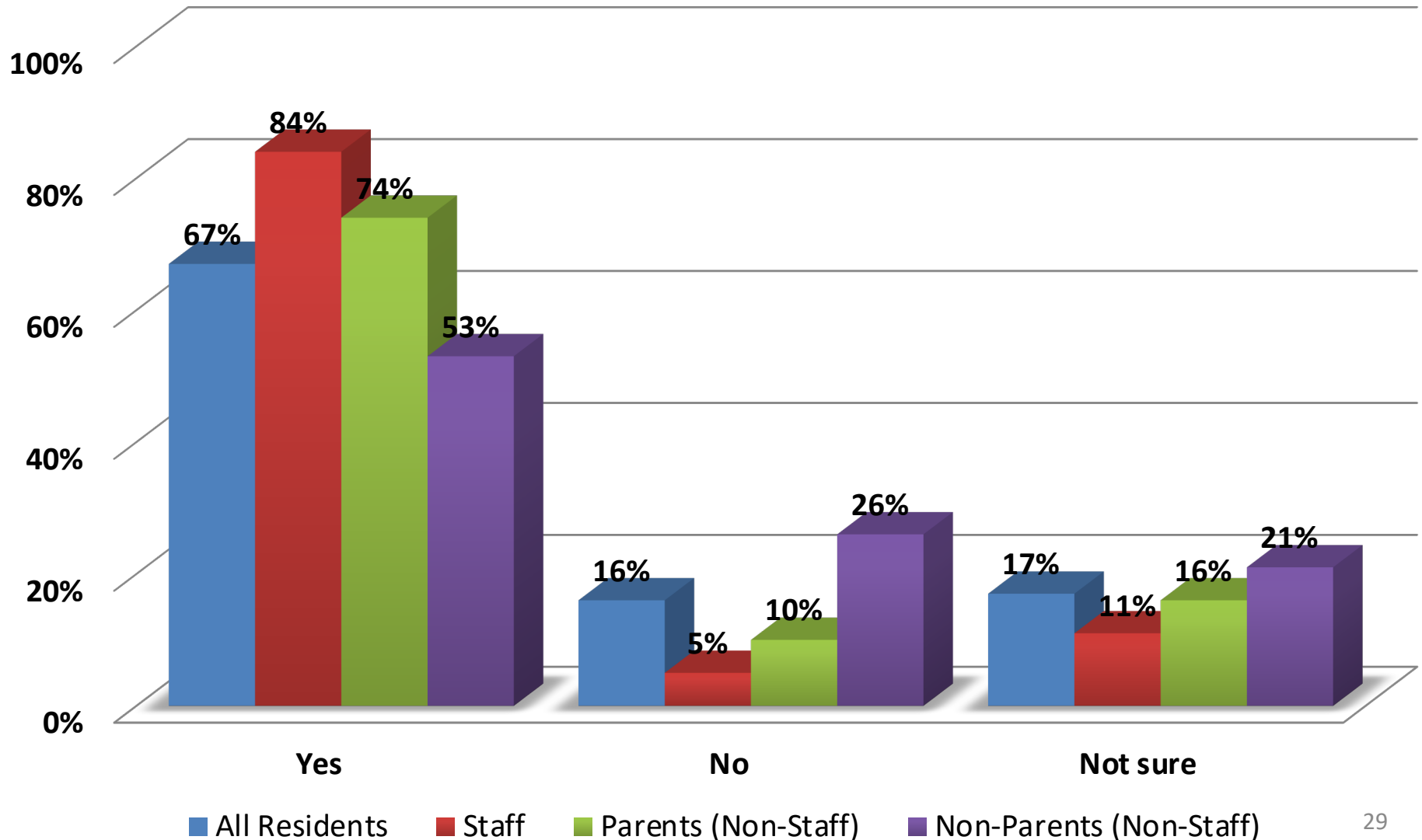
Mercer County Schools have secured and continue to pursue funding related to COVID-19 relief from both the state and federal government. However, to build a new school and/or make significant investments at the high school, the District would need to pursue a referendum.

The District has been working hard to control costs. We believe this is a good time to consider an investment to better position us for the long term for the following reasons:

- ✓ We will make our final loan payment on our current debt in 2027, and the debt portion of the school property tax bill will drop. Using a homeowner analogy, we are about to pay off the mortgage on our home.
- ✓ The District will be able to borrow over \$13 million for facility projects without increasing tax rates over the current level.
- ✓ Consolidating our elementary schools could save approximately \$20 million over the next 20 years (about \$1 million per year).
- ✓ Interest rates remain near historic lows.

Would you support the District pursuing a referendum to update our schools, assuming the projects included were acceptable to you?

(Mercer County Public School District Residents Only)



Funding Support

The following table shows the estimated tax increase over the current level for various referendum amounts. The asterisk (*) below notes the cost associated with building a new elementary school.

Referendum amount	\$15 million	\$17 million*	\$19 million	\$21 million	\$23 million
School tax increase for a home valued at \$100,000	\$18 per year (\$1.50/month)	\$36 per year (\$3/month)	\$54 per year (\$4.50/month)	\$72 per year (\$6/month)	\$90 per year (\$7.50/month)

How much of a school tax increase would you support through a referendum, assuming the projects included were acceptable to you?

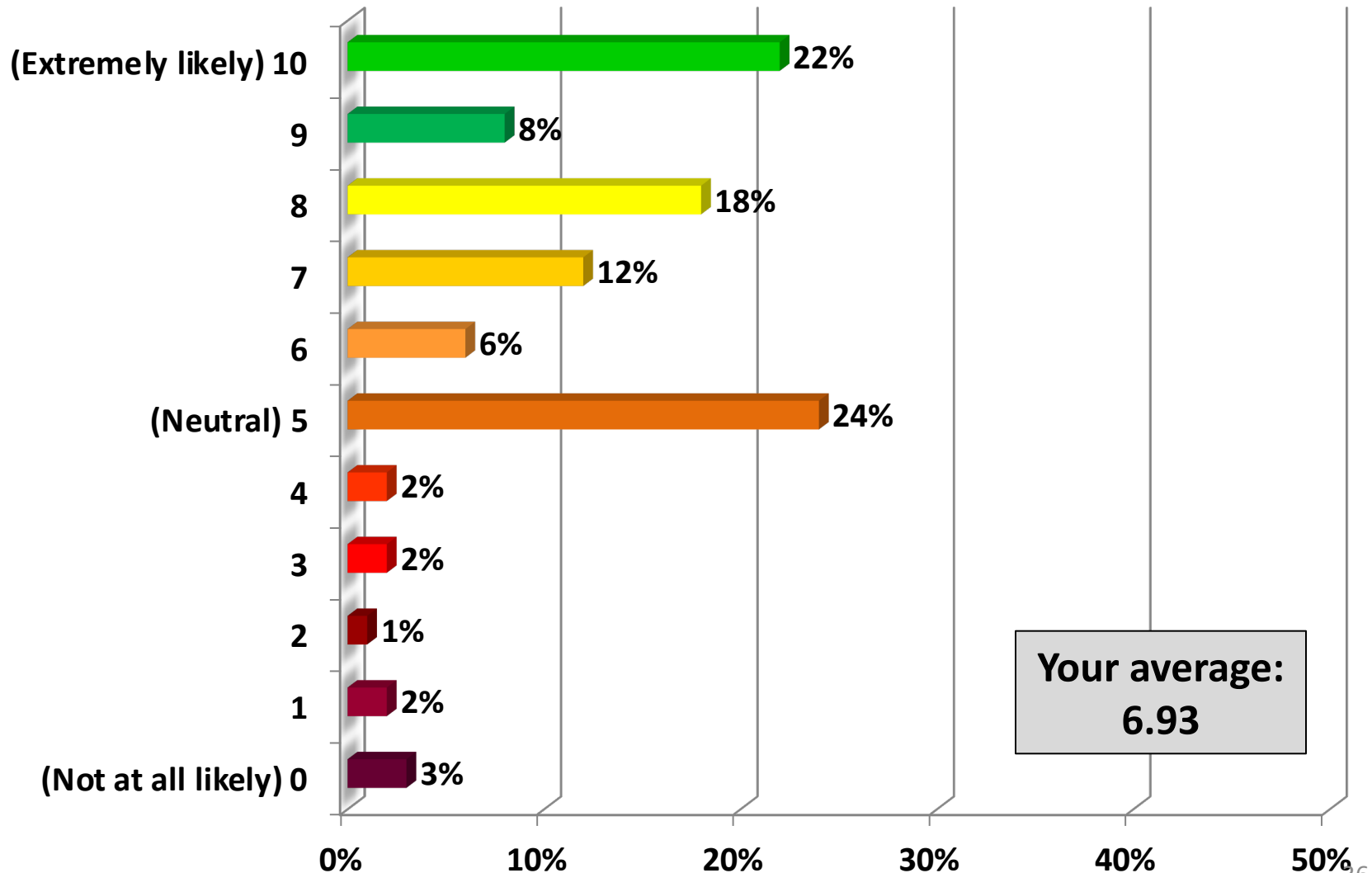
Tax impacts assume issuing bonds with 3% interest rates and are calculated with the reduction in loan payments explained on the previous page.
(Mercer County Residents Only)



Overall Satisfaction

On a scale of 0 – 10, how likely would you be to recommend the District to a friend or family member?

(All Respondents)



In summary:



- What did we learn?
 - A plurality of survey-takers support **consolidating elementary operations** (majority with support for either option).
 - Highest prioritized HS projects: **tech ed, building systems, special ed, and cafeteria**
 - Majority support addressing **elementary needs first**
 - Majority support **pursuing a referendum**

In summary:



- How large of a referendum would the community support?
 - Tax threshold that reaches majority support is at **\$15 million**

Thank you!



Parent Surveys - Staff Surveys - Student Surveys - Community Surveys
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