



Merrill Area Public School District

Preliminary Community Survey Report

December 13, 2023

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

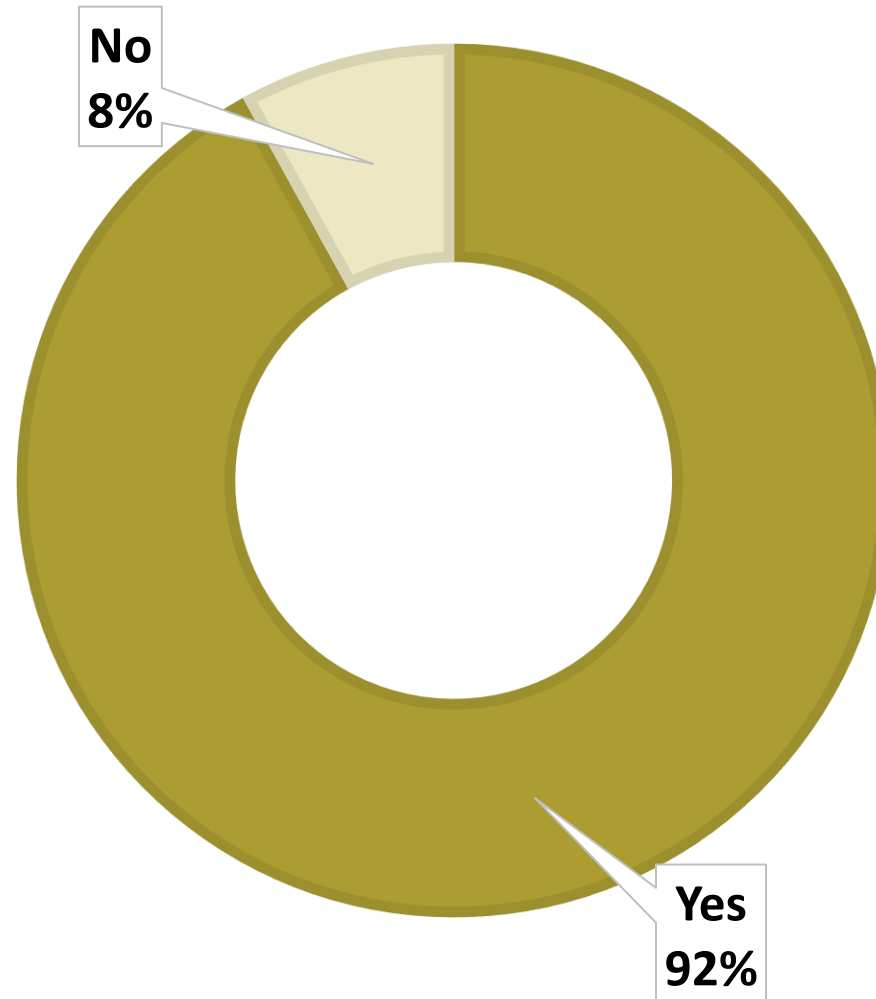
- Founded in 2002 to provide independent research
- Conducted over 10,000 staff, parent, and student, and community surveys for school improvement
- Helped more than 900 districts navigate the strategic planning and referendum planning process

Survey Information

- **November 20, 2023** survey deadline
- **1,522** total respondents
- **14%** response rate
- **+/- 2.56%** margin of error



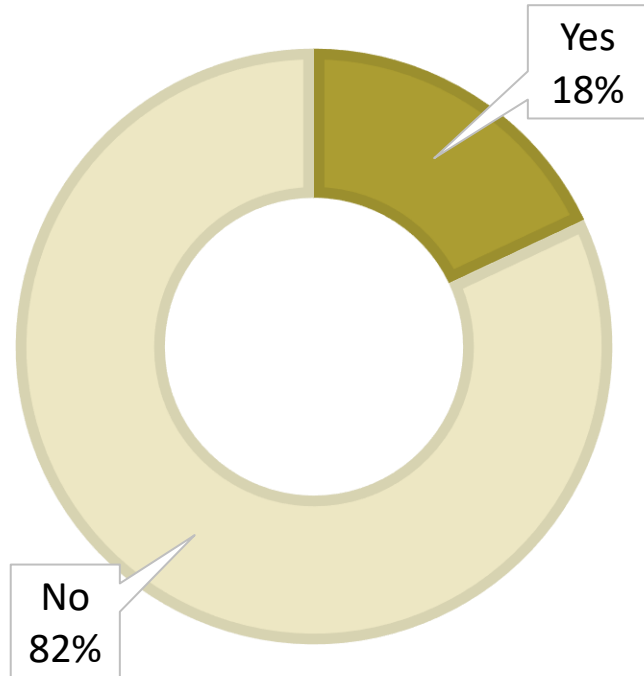
Do you live in the Merrill Area Public School District?



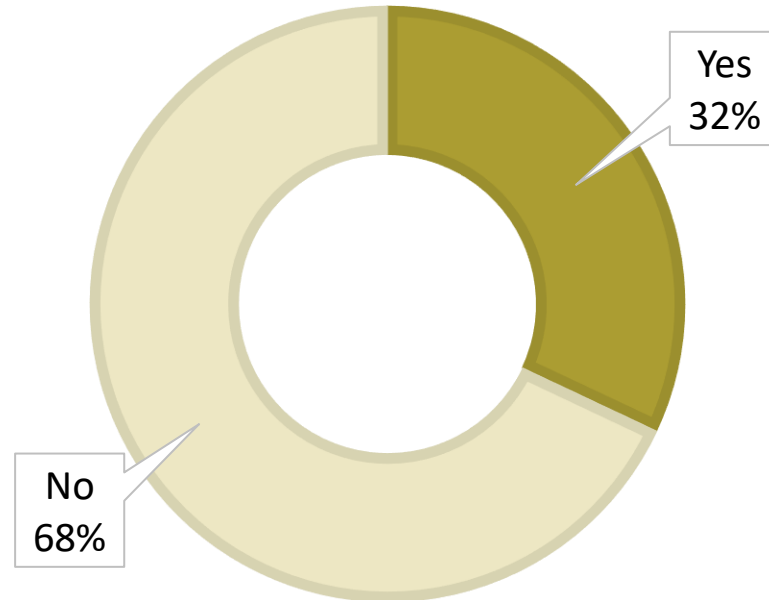
Respondent Information



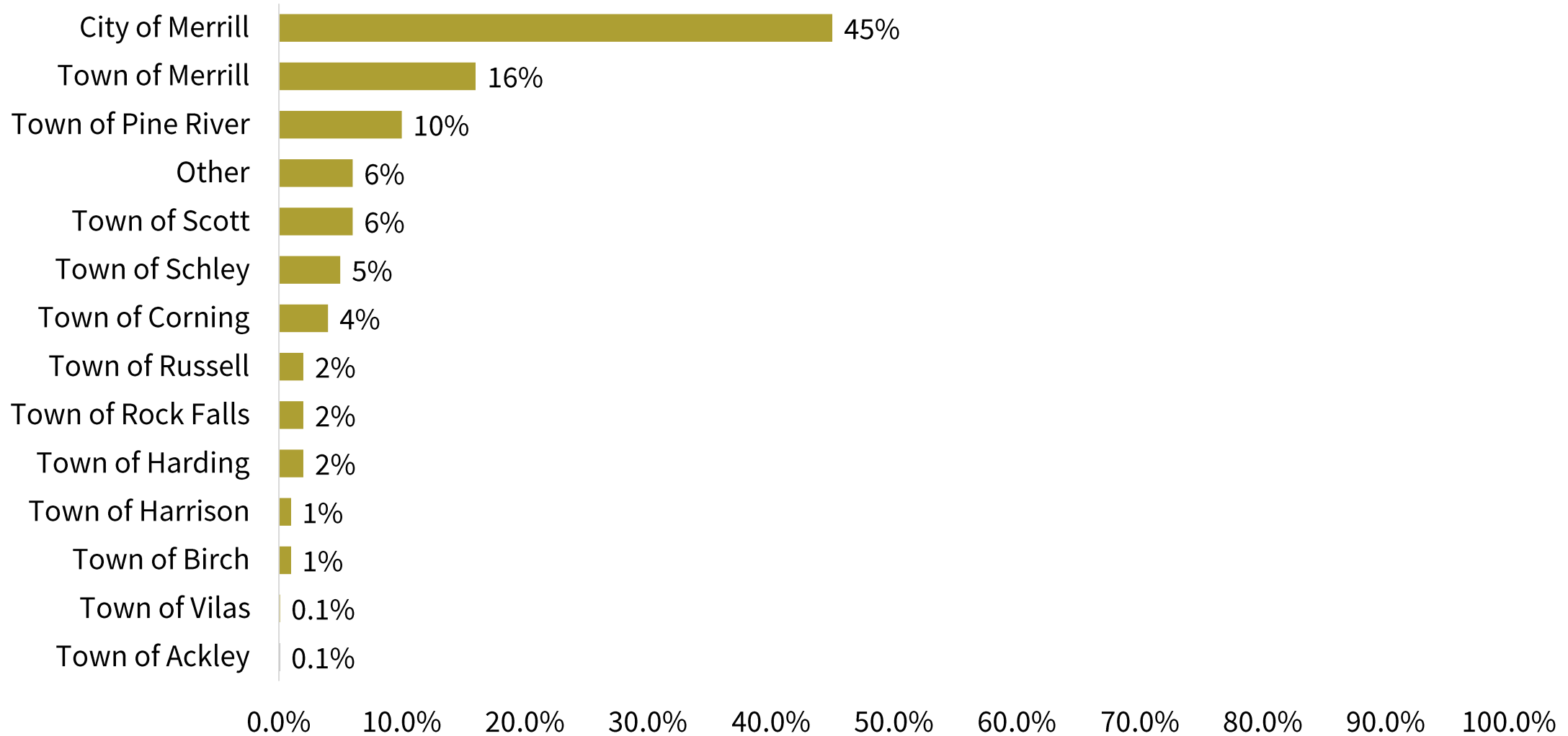
Are you an employee of the Merrill Area Public Schools?



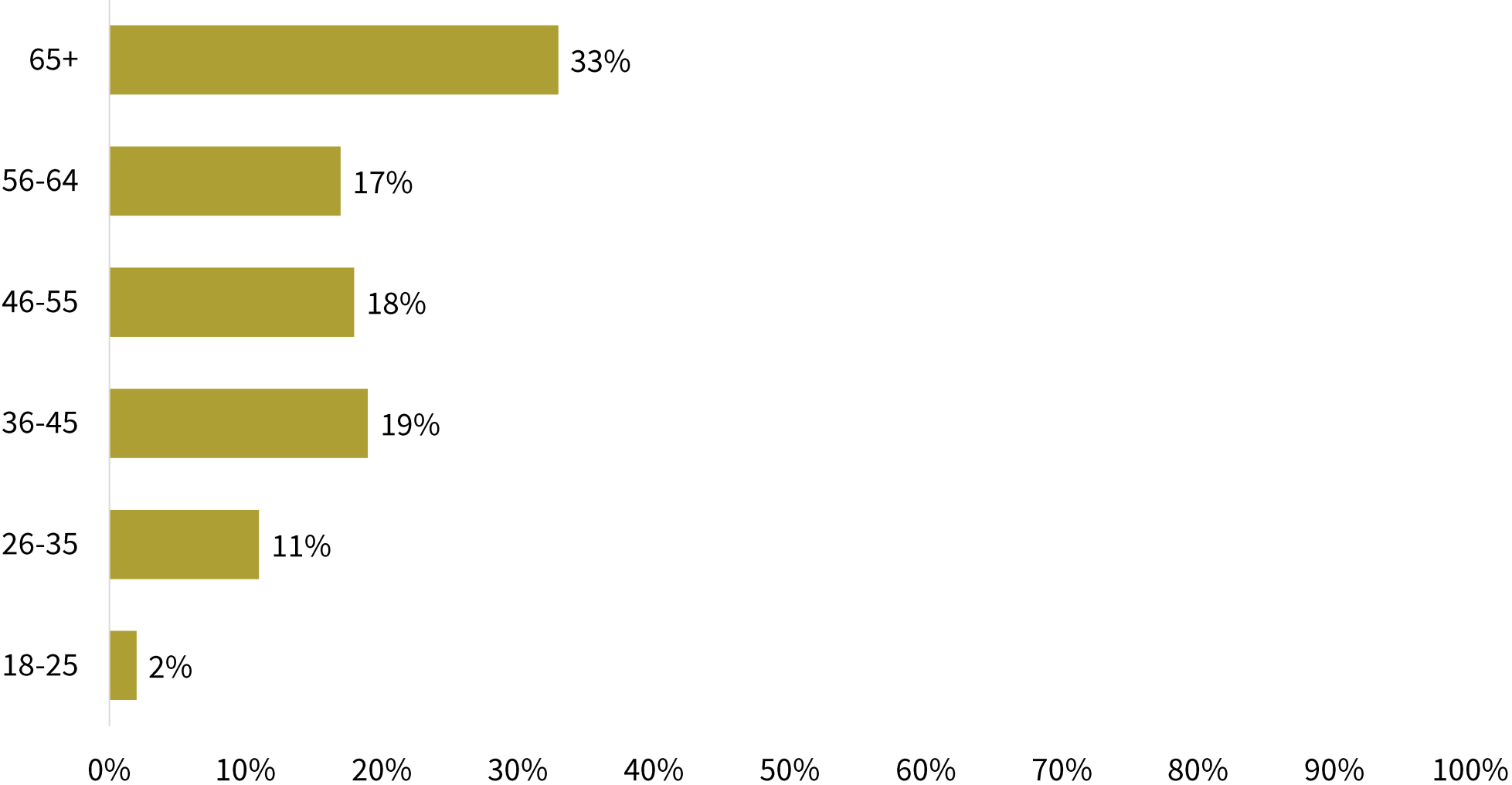
Do you have a child(ren) attending the District?



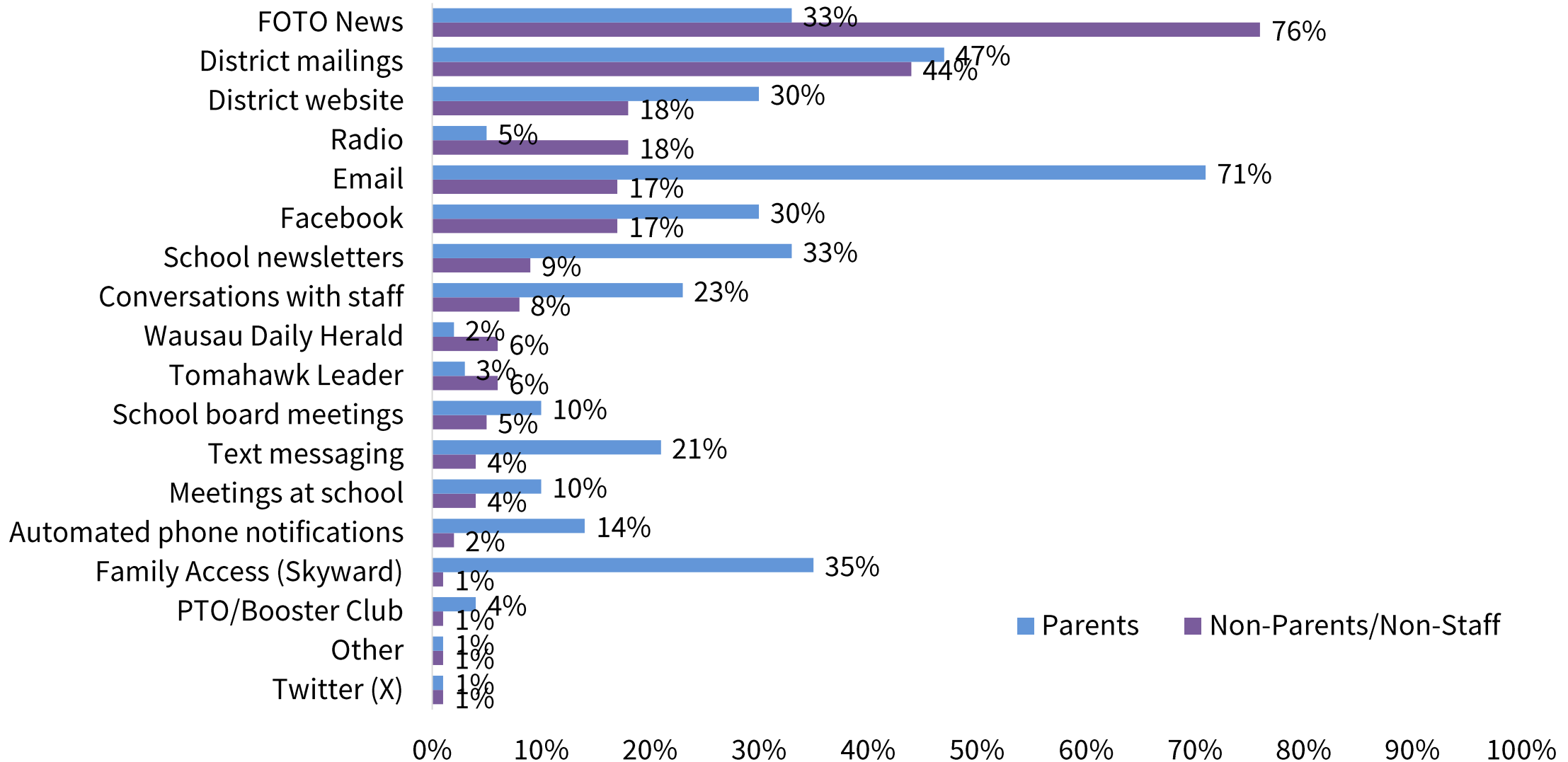
In which city or township do you reside?



What is your age?



How do you *like to receive* school/District information?



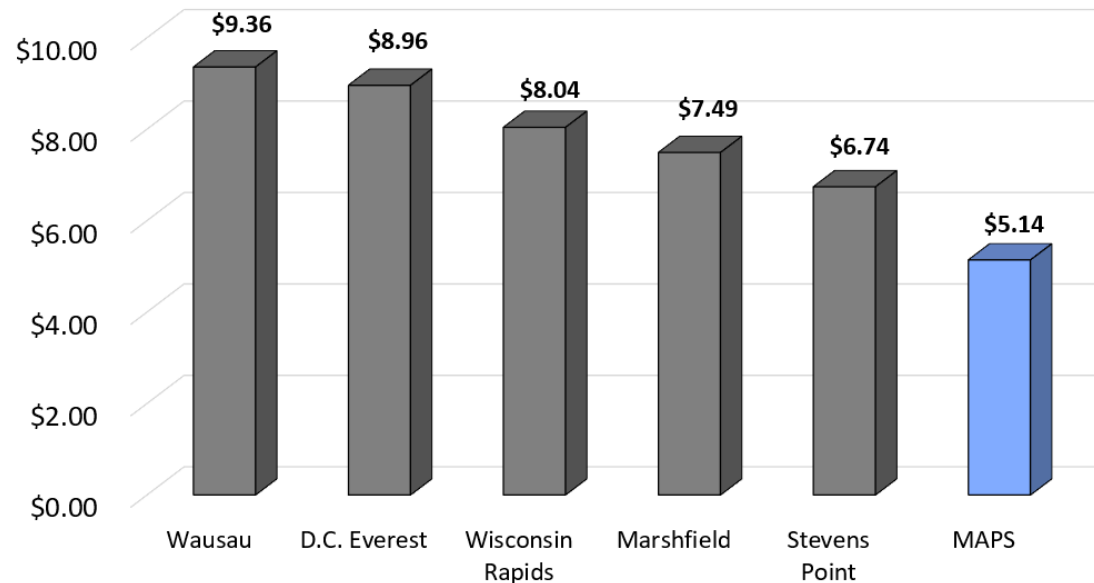
Funding Challenges



The Merrill Area Public Schools (MAPS) has the lowest property tax mill rate in our conference and one of the lowest in the state.

This level of funding makes it difficult to remain competitive with our neighboring districts.

Property Tax Mill Rates
Conference Comparison (2022-23)



Facility Challenges



A comprehensive study evaluated each of MAPS's 11 buildings on the following:

- **Utilization:** Utilization is calculated based on class size and number of classrooms available, and the rate each room can be utilized. This calculation does not factor in the size of support areas such as the cafeteria, gym, tech. ed., and special education. Because it is not possible to selectively heat and maintain portions of the buildings, money is spent on areas that are either not being used or are being underutilized.
- **Investment Needed:** On average, our buildings are nearly 70 years old. These older buildings are expensive to maintain, heat, and clean. Over the next 10 years, a significant investment will be needed in the major building systems. Examples include upgrading heating/ventilation, electrical, and plumbing systems as well as replacing roofs, lighting, flooring, windows, and doors.

Facility Challenges



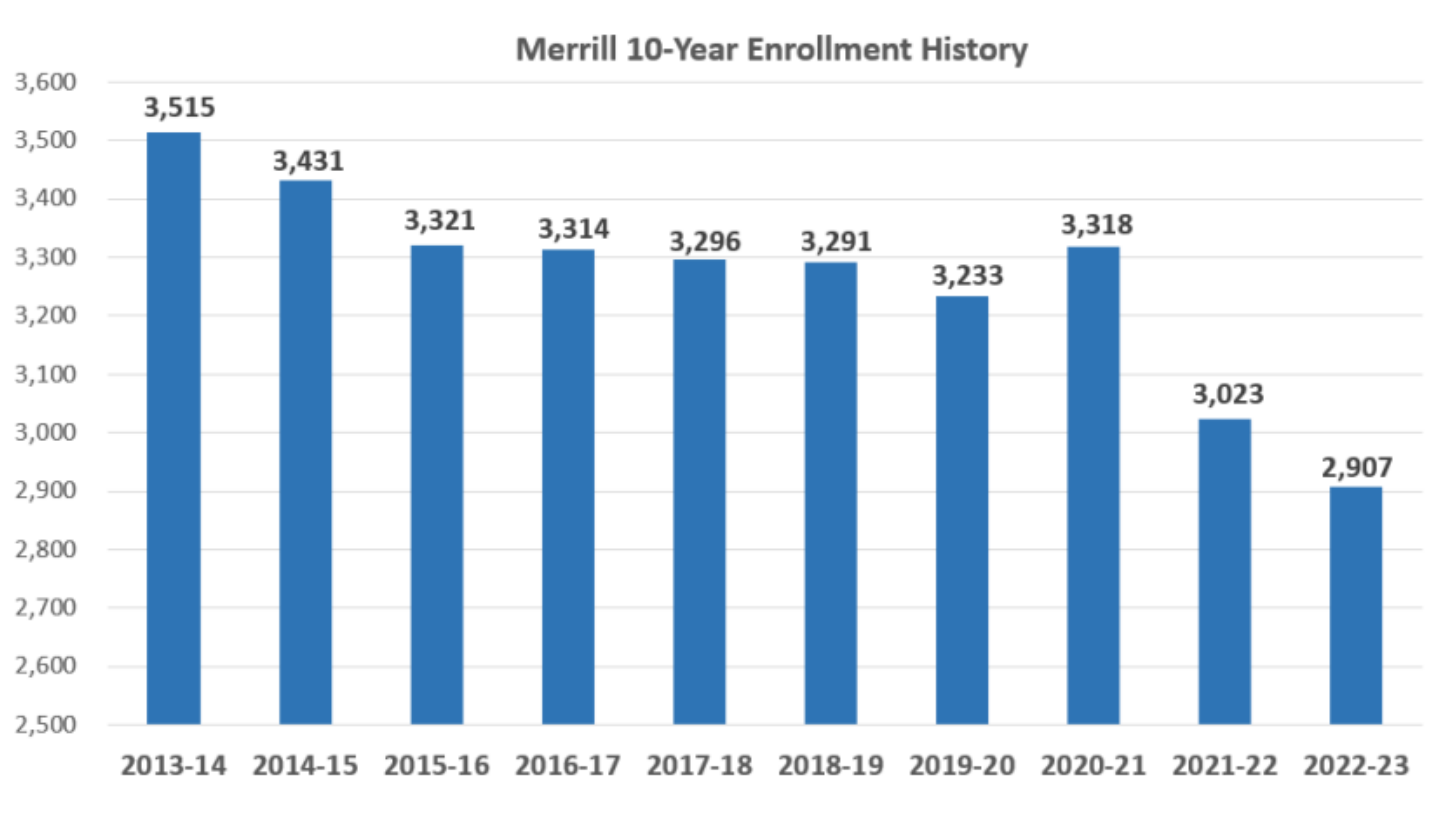
| Building | Year Built | Utilization | Future Investment (in today's dollars) |
|--------------------------------------|------------|-----------------|---|
| Pine River School for Young Learners | 1961 | 87% | \$2 million |
| Jefferson Elementary | 1973 | 0% (not in use) | \$6.3 million |
| Kate Goodrich Elementary | 1997 | 77% | \$8.4 million |
| Washington Elementary | 1958 | 74% | \$7.2 million |
| Prairie River Middle School | 1922 | 52% | \$34.3 million |
| Merrill High School | 1962 | 56% | \$28.5 million |
| Northern Achievement Center (NAC) | 1976 | N/A | \$1.3 million |
| Storage Building (Old NAC) | 1973 | N/A | \$1 million |
| District Office | 1972 | N/A | \$1.4 million |
| Maintenance Shop | 1972 | N/A | \$1 million |
| School Forest Lodge | 1980 | N/A | \$300,000 |
| | | | Total \$91.7 million |

To review the entire study, please visit www.mapsedu.org/district/facilities-planning.cfm

Facility Challenges: Declining Enrollment

Over the past 10 years, student enrollment has dropped by over 17% (more than 600 students). The fewer students we have, the less state funding we receive.

We cannot afford to continue to staff, heat, clean, and maintain all 11 buildings.



Recommended Base Plan

What is being proposed?

To respond to these challenges, the District held three community focus groups this summer. The goal of the sessions was “making the best use of our best buildings.” This includes:

Closing/selling buildings: To reduce operating costs and eliminate future maintenance expenses.

Consolidating operations: To improve efficiencies, make it easier to balance class sizes, and provide more opportunities for our students.

Investing in the remaining buildings: To upgrade building systems and create more functional learning environments.



Recommended Base Plan



Based on input from the community focus groups, a Base Plan was developed that would close four buildings and seek to sell the Pine River property.

- Move Pine River School for Young Learners, Bridges Virtual Academy (BVA), and the Northern Achievement Center (NAC) program to the Jefferson Elementary building.
- Tear down the Northern Achievement Center (NAC) and the Storage Building (Old NAC).
- Remove the District Office and maintenance building.

Updates at Jefferson Elementary include:

1. Renovate area for the Head Start program.
2. Renovate area for the Bridges Virtual Academy.
3. Renovate area for the Northern Achievement Center.
4. Maintain gym and kitchen.
5. Create separate entrances for NAC and Head Start.
6. Create dedicated playground areas.

The plan would also renovate underutilized high school space to accommodate the District Office and rebuild the maintenance building.

Base Plan estimated cost: \$16 million

Recommended Base Plan



Funding Support



A capital (facilities) referendum allows a district to issue debt (take out a loan) to pay for major facility improvements. **Unlike 83% of other districts in the state, MAPS has not pursued a capital referendum in more than 20 years.**

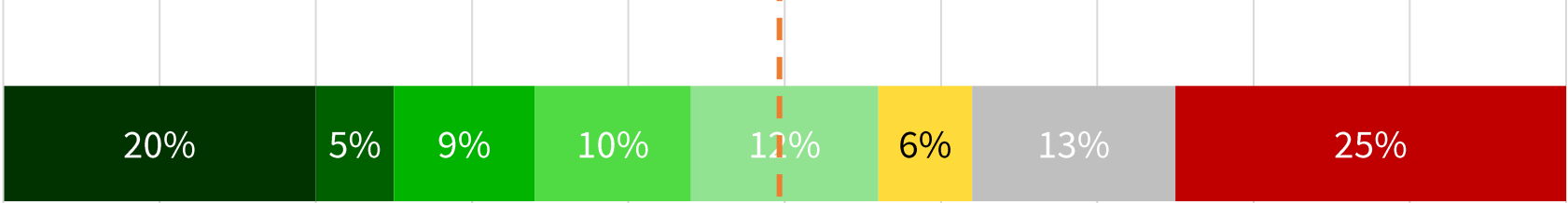
MAPS voters would need to approve this type of referendum to pay for the \$16 million recommended base plan. The referendum could be expanded to begin to update the major building systems at the remaining buildings. (A breakout for each school can be found on page 3.)

| ANNUAL PROPERTY TAX IMPACTS FOR VARIOUS REFERENDUM AMOUNTS | | | | | |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Base plan | \$16 million | \$16 million | \$16 million | \$16 million | \$16 million |
| Investment to update remaining building systems | \$0 | \$5 million | \$10 million | \$15 million | \$20 million |
| Total Referendum Amount | \$16 million | \$21 million | \$26 million | \$31 million | \$36 million |
| Estimated tax increase for each \$100,000 of property value | \$32 per year | \$48 per year | \$63 per year | \$79 per year | \$94 per year |

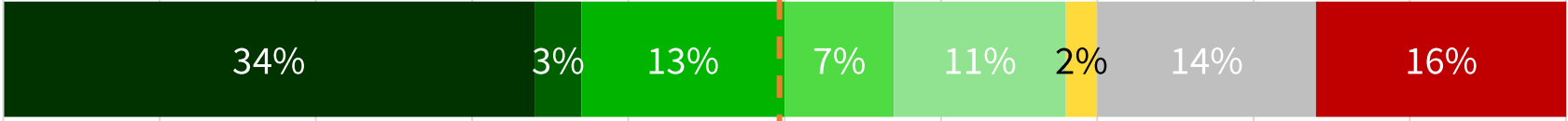
What facilities referendum amount would you support?



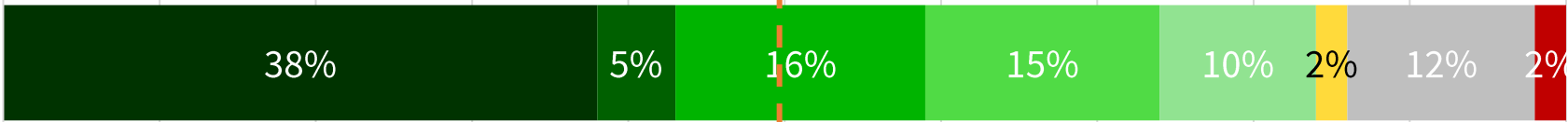
Non-Parents/Non-Staff



Parents



Staff

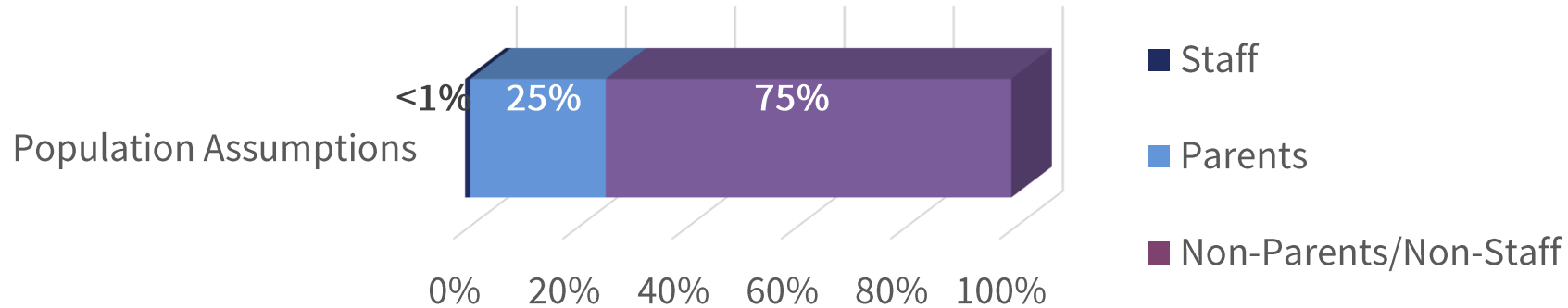


0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ \$36 mil
 ■ \$31 mil
 ■ \$26 mil
 ■ \$21 mil
 ■ \$16 mil
 ■ Smaller referendum
 ■ Not sure/need more information
 ■ No referendum

Additional Analysis:

Would the \$36 million referendum be supported?



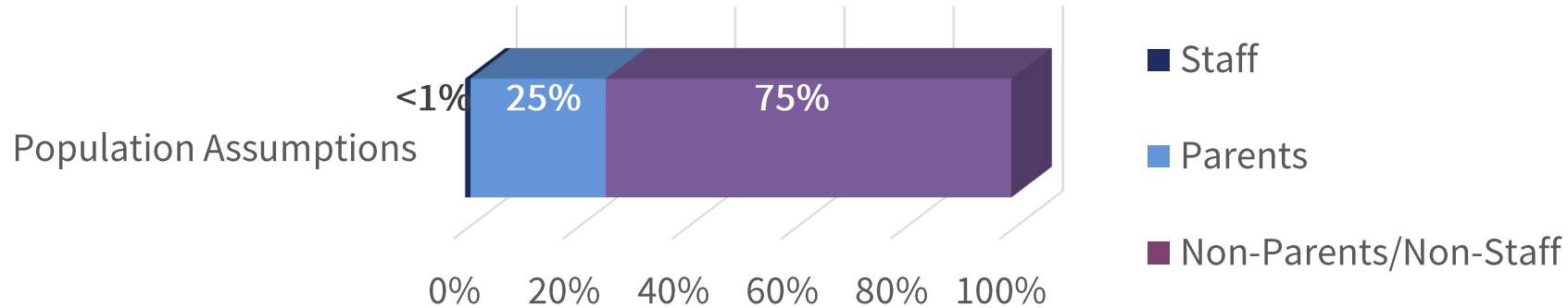
Weighted support for *Definitely yes and Probably yes*:

$$0.25 (34\%) + 0.75 (20\%) = \underline{\underline{23.5\%}}$$



Additional Analysis:

Would the \$31 million referendum be supported?



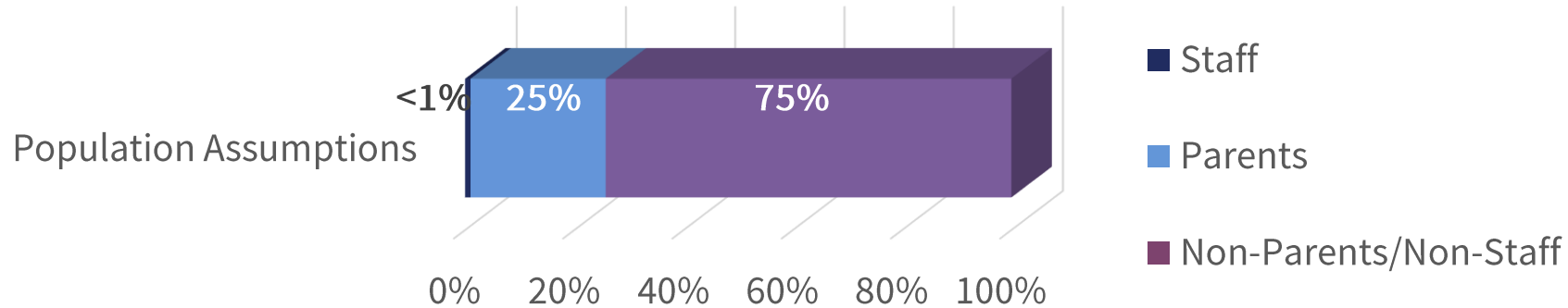
Weighted support for *Definitely yes and Probably yes*:

$$0.25 (37\%) + 0.75 (25\%) = \underline{\underline{28.0\%}}$$



Additional Analysis:

Would the \$26 million referendum be supported?



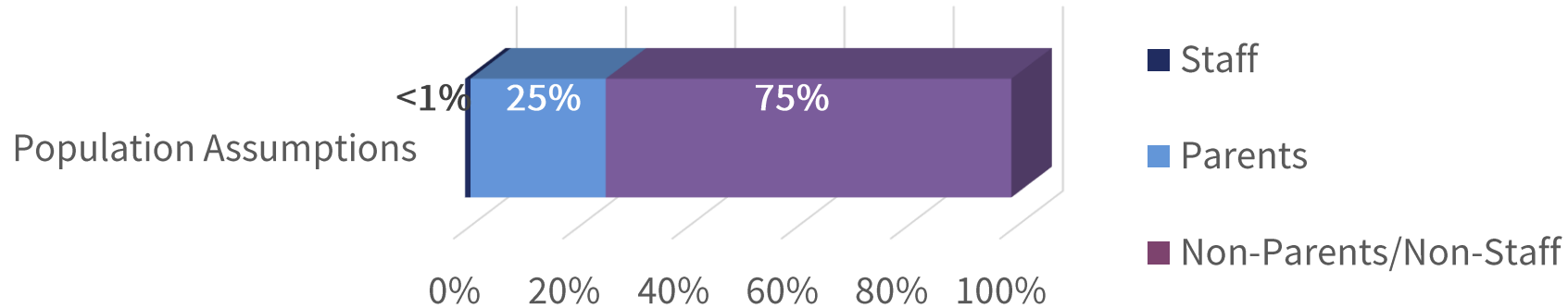
Weighted support for *Definitely yes* and *Probably yes*:

$$0.25 (50\%) + 0.75 (34\%) = \underline{\underline{38.0\%}}$$



Additional Analysis:

Would the \$21 million referendum be supported?



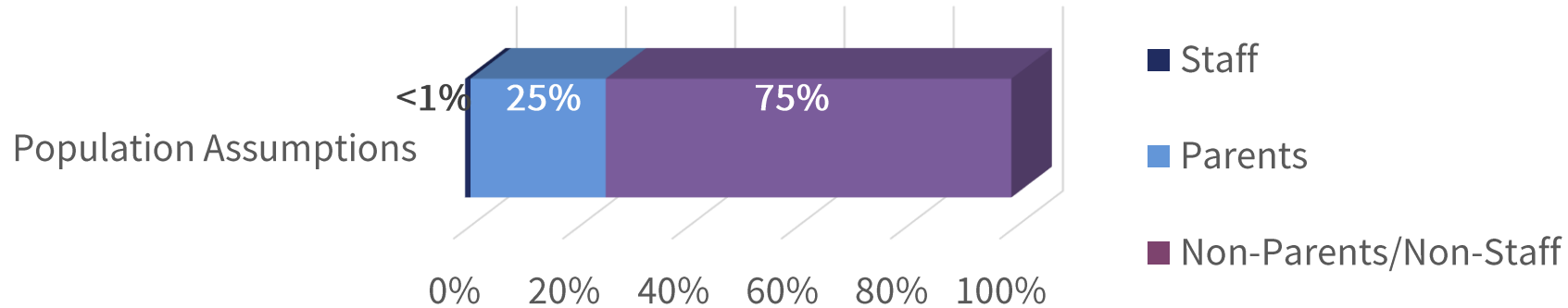
Weighted support for *Definitely yes and Probably yes*:

$$0.25 (57\%) + 0.75 (44\%) = \underline{47.3\%}$$



Additional Analysis:

Would the \$16 million referendum be supported?



Weighted support for *Definitely yes and Probably yes*:

$$0.25 (68\%) + 0.75 (56\%) = \underline{\underline{59.0\%}}$$



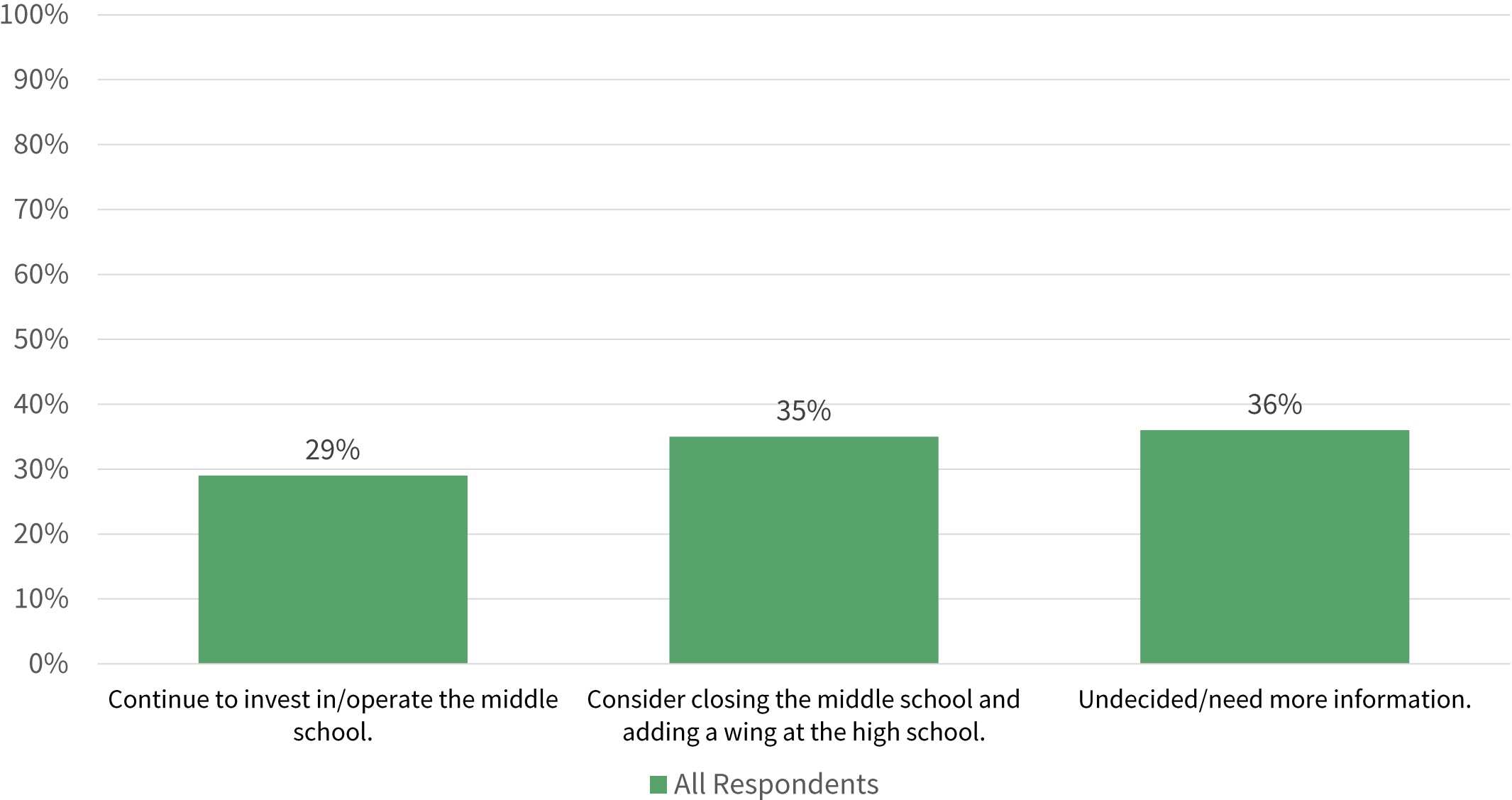
Future Planning

As we continue to develop the facilities master plan, we need to decide if/how to make future investments at Prairie River Middle School. During the community focus group meetings, some people thought the school could be closed, the 5th grade could be moved to Washington Elementary, and the high school could be expanded with a separate wing to serve students in 6th-8th grade. If the students were moved, the District would still maintain the pool, auditorium, and gym for school and community use.



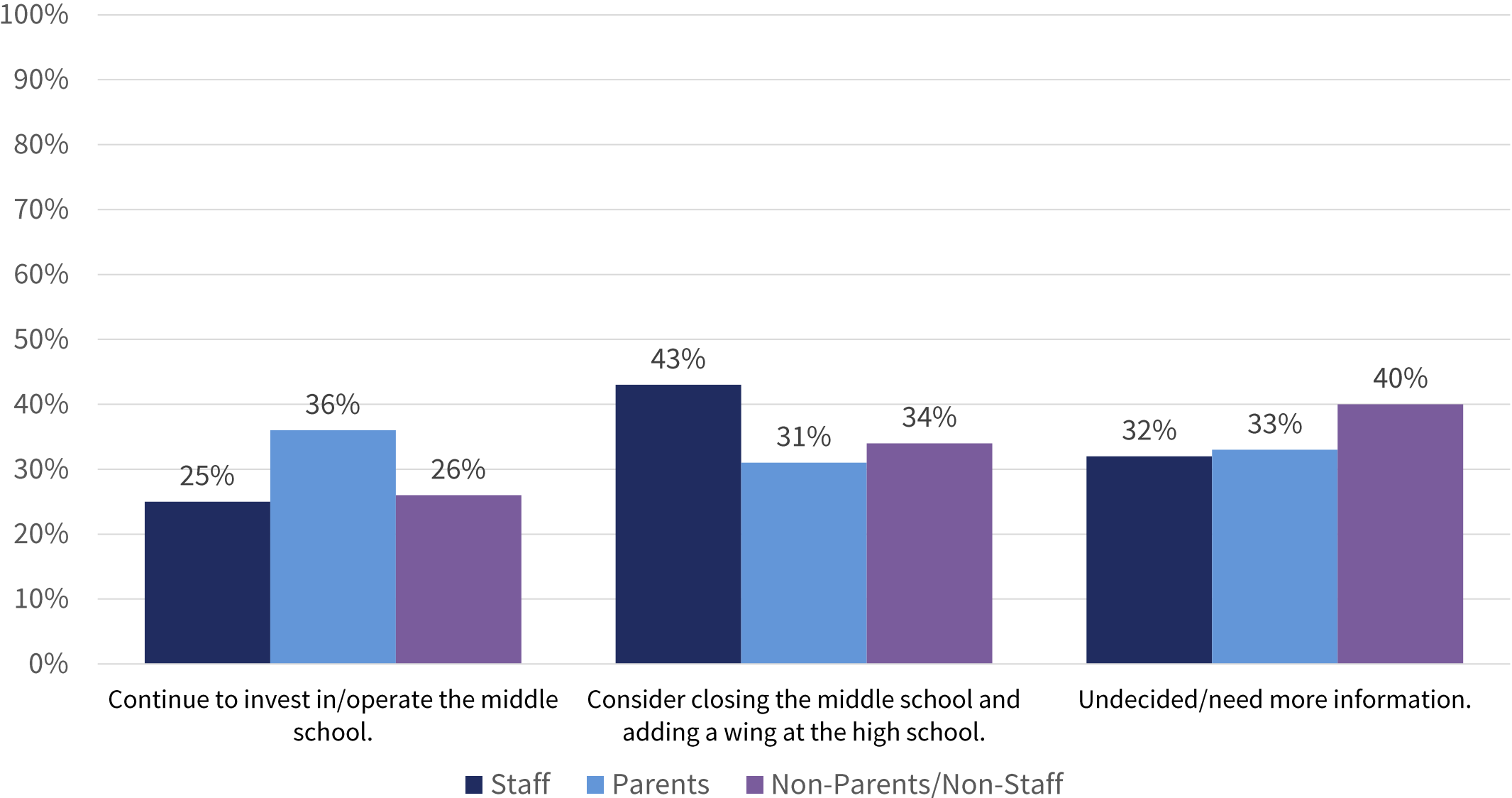


What advice would you give regarding Prairie River Middle School?





What advice would you give regarding Prairie River Middle School?



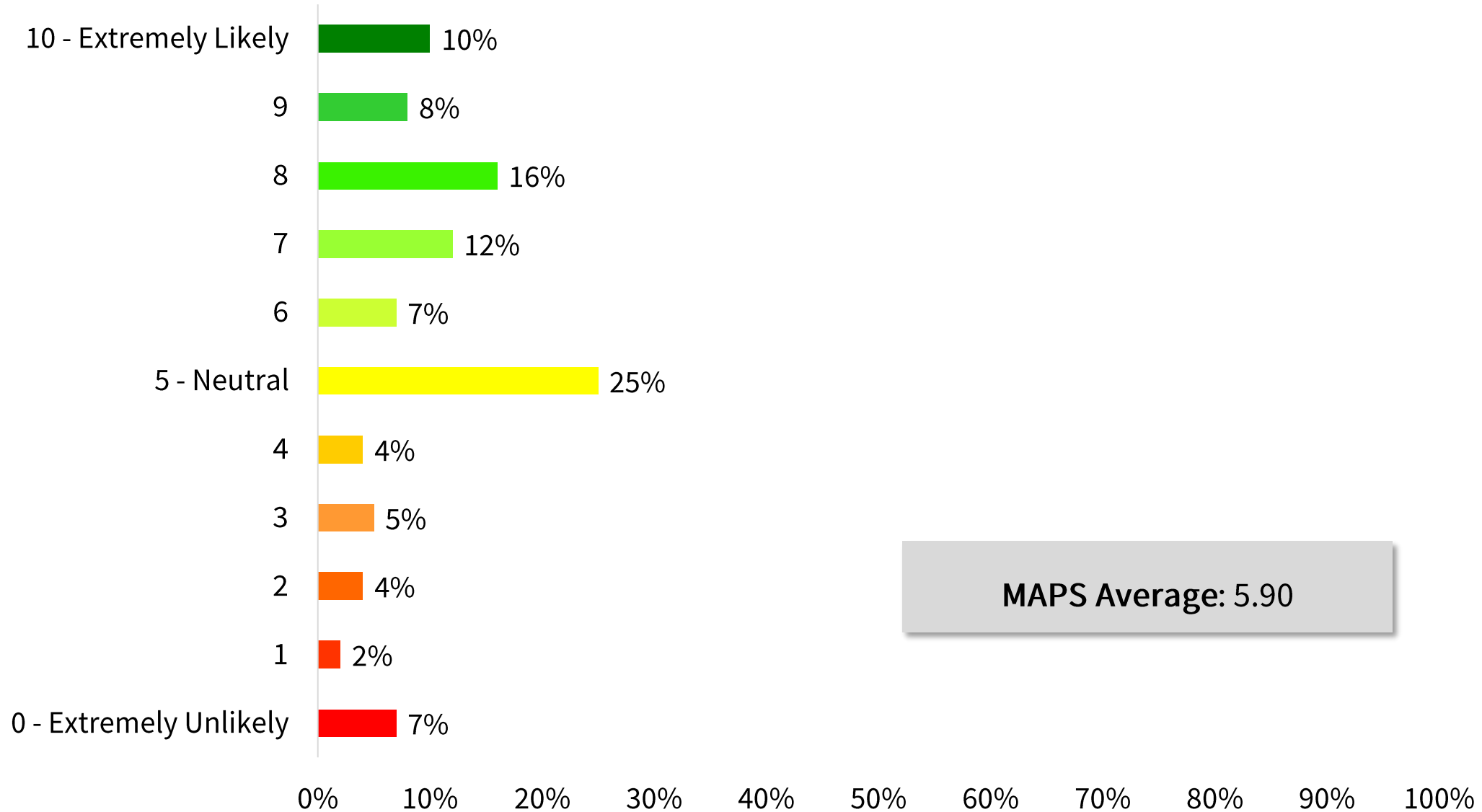
How is the District doing in each of the following areas?

Great = 4, Good = 3, Fair = 2, Poor = 1



| Item | Percent “Great” or “Good” | Average |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------|
| Delivering a high-quality education | 65% | 2.72 |
| Keeping the public informed | 61% | 2.66 |
| Managing funds appropriately | 46% | 2.30 |
| Building pride in the community | 59% | 2.63 |

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



What did we learn?

- If held today, the community would likely support a \$16 million referendum to support the base plan.
- Expanding the referendum to update major building systems did not reach majority support.
- Respondents were split on the future use of Prairie River Middle School with a large proportion undecided.





SCHOOL PERCEPTIONS

Measuring what matters

262.644.4300 | schoolperceptions.com

