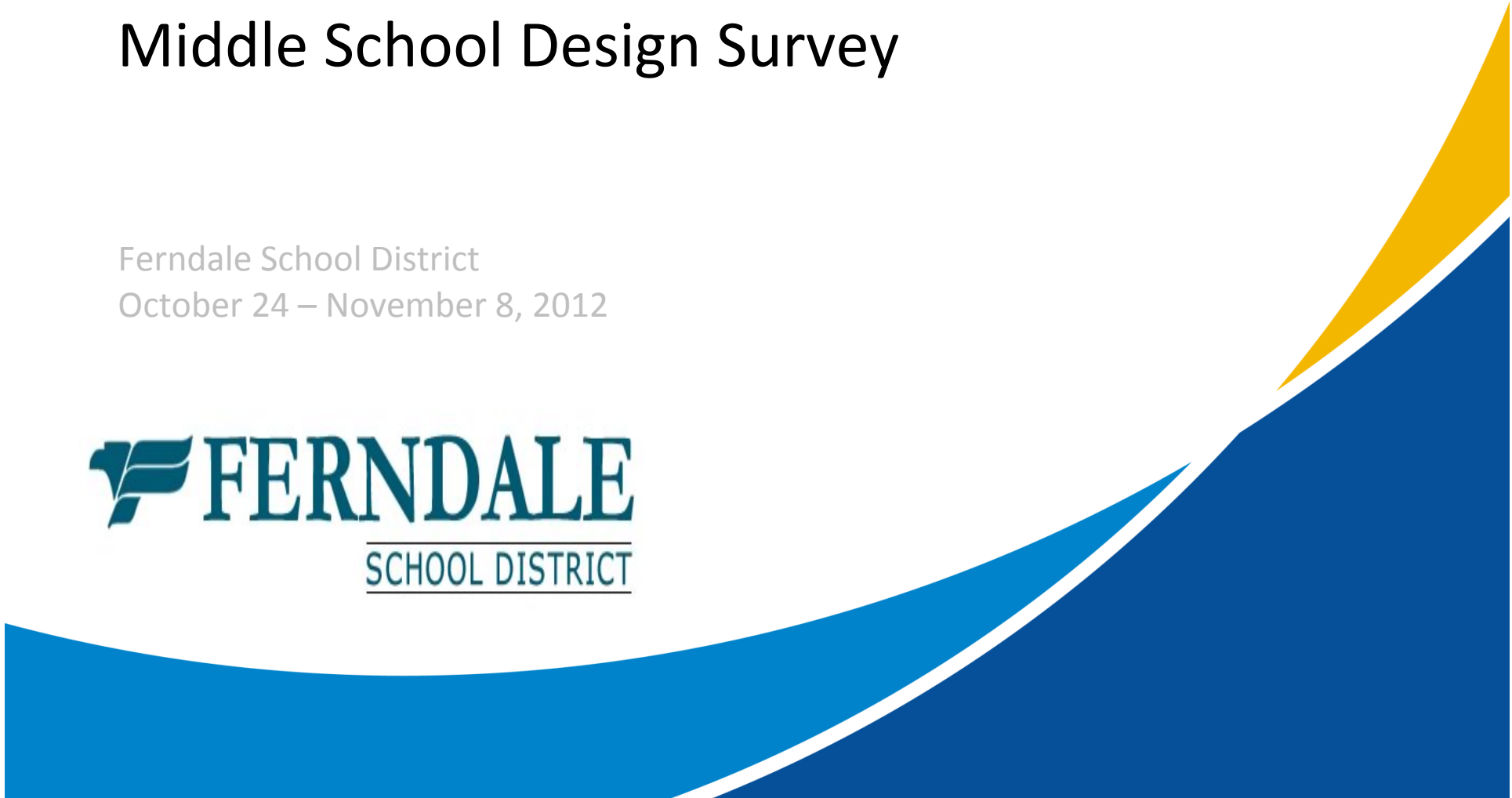


Middle School Design Survey

Ferndale School District
October 24 – November 8, 2012



Overview

Beginning in the fall of 2013, Ferndale School District grade 6 students will attend middle school. As the district prepares for transitioning 6th graders, it is taking the opportunity to rethink the middle school programs for all students.

A task force of parents and staff members was organized to research best practices in middle-level education, provide input about values and priorities for Ferndale, and solicit feedback from a broader group of stakeholders. This survey was intended to find out what parents and staff value most in middle school education.

The survey was available from October 24 through November 8, 2012, for parents of students in grades K-7 and all teaching and non-teaching staff to participate.

Technical Notes

There were a significant number of open response questions offered in this survey in order to collect as much input as possible. Each open response question was read, reviewed and analyzed by two people to identify common themes from both staff and parents. Additionally, responses were analyzed using a text analysis software (IBM SPSS Text Analytics for Surveys). The software is designed to quantify the categories, concepts and types of responses.

This is not an exact science given the nuance, semantics and taxonomy of language. In addition any bias, assumptions and inferences of readers may unduly influence theme analysis.

Themes were identified if approximately 10% of respondents for a question discussed the same or similar topic in their verbatim response.

Survey Participation

All staff in the district were sent an email inviting them to participate in the survey.

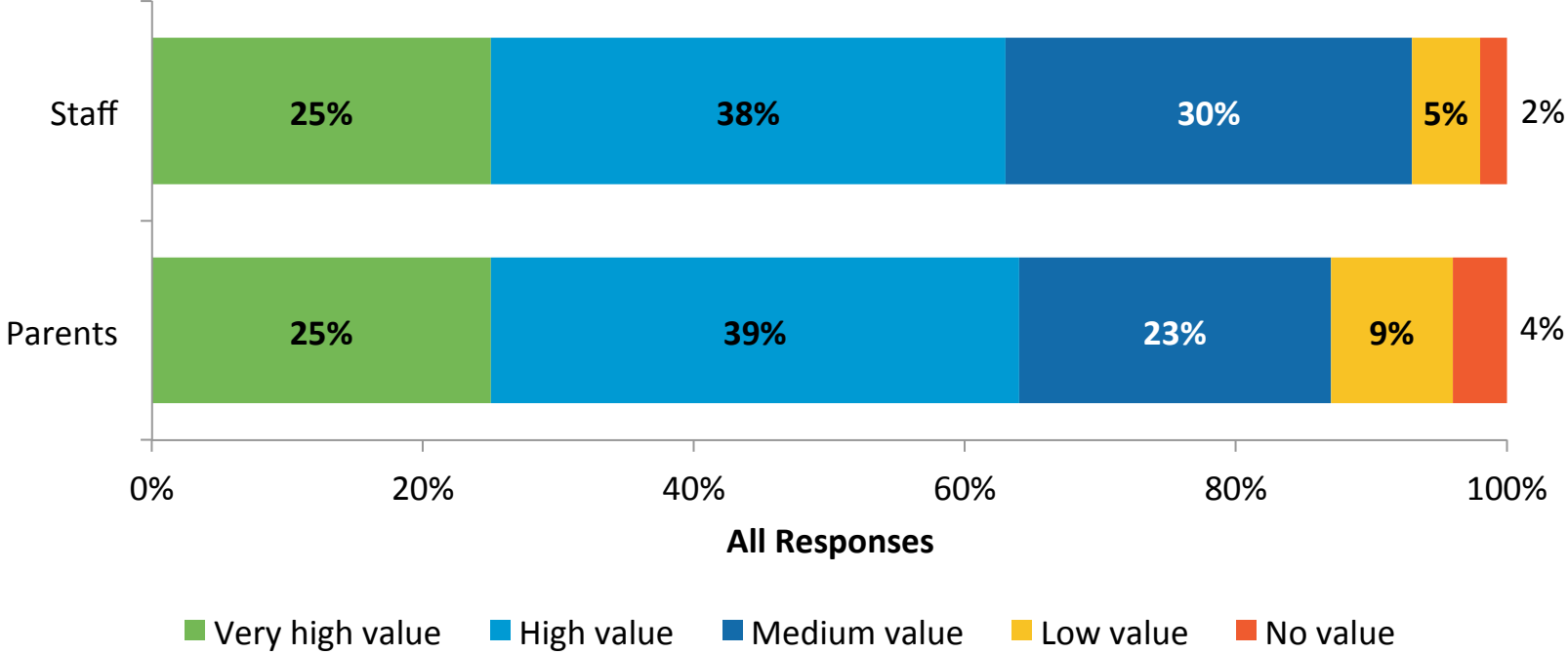
Responding Group	Number of Responses (n)	Max Possible Responses (Nmax)	Response Rate (%)
Staff	330	587	56%

Parents for whom the district had an email address received an invitation to participate in the survey. Additionally, parents could access the survey via a link on the district's website.

Responding Group	Number of Responses (n)	Responses from Emailed Invitations	Responses from Link on District Website
Parents	335	236	99

House Structure

In a house structure, the same group of students stays with the same 2-4 teachers for a significant portion of their day, as opposed to changing teachers and classmates for every subject. To what degree would you value this kind of structure for our middle schools in Ferndale?



Themes from Open-Ended Responses

House Structure for Middle School

Staff (n=82)

The house structure would be a good way to transition 6th grade students into middle school.

The 8th grade students should follow the same model as the high school students.

The house structure will work only if the teachers have solid instructional skills and the students are engaged in learning.

The house structure would be a good way to build strong relationships between teachers and students.

Staff are concerned that the house structure would not allow students enough interaction with students outside of their group.

Themes from Open-Ended Responses

House Structure for Middle School

Parents (n=82)

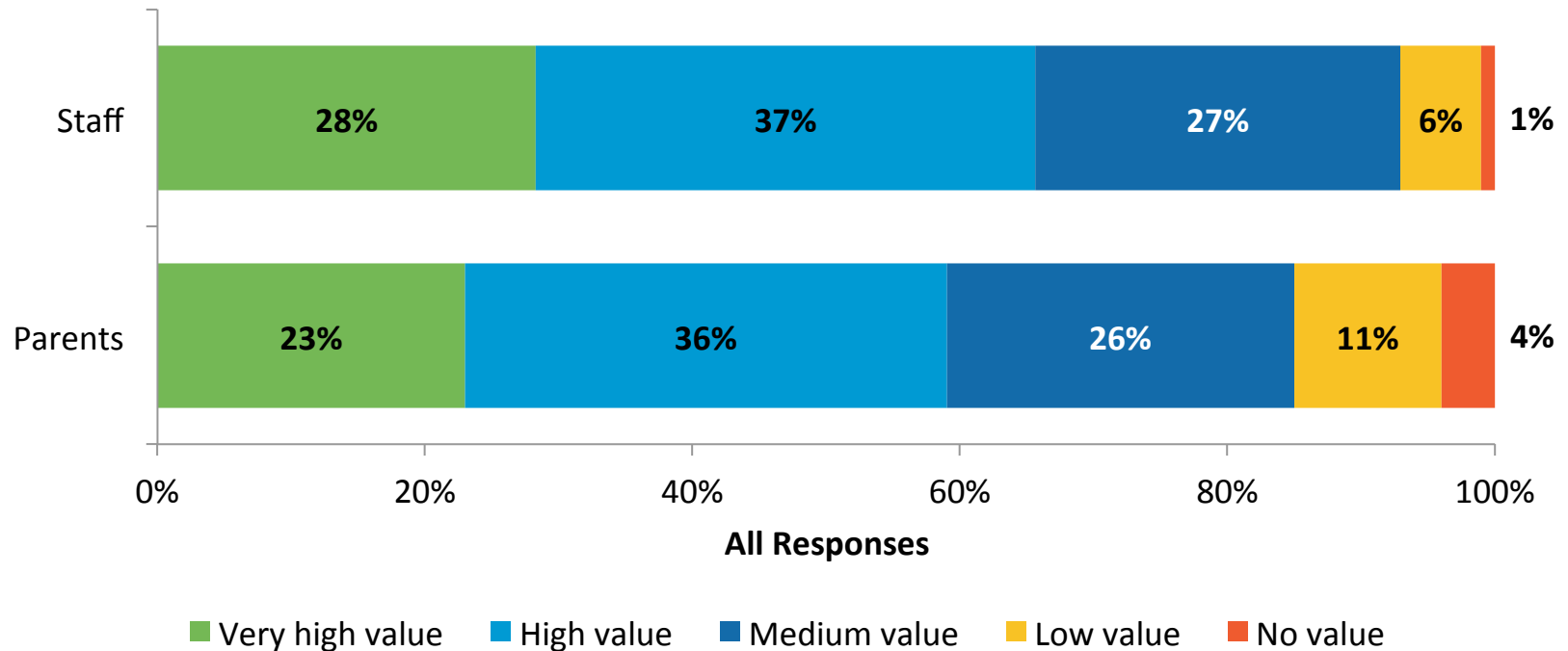
Parents wrote they believe this structure will work well if a group of students and the teacher are compatible. However, if the students and/or teacher are not a good fit, it could result in a negative experience for all.

Many parents commented that continuity provided by the house structure could be beneficial for 6th grade students but would not be a good fit for 7th and 8th grade students.

Other parents wrote that 6th grade should be a transition time for children, when they are exposed to having classes with several different teachers. Changing classes also provides more interaction with a wider range of other students.

Advisory Program

Advisory is usually a separate time during the day or week set aside for a teacher to work with a group of students on team building, academic planning, leadership training, study skills and/or social skills. To what degree would you value an advisory program in our middle schools?



Themes from Open-Ended Responses

Advisory Program for Middle School

Staff (n=66)

An advisory program would need to have a specific and engaging curriculum to be effective.

It is important for students to have one adult in the school whom they know they can trust.

Students should learn how to adjust to having classes with different teachers before starting high school.

Teachers who are advisors should have training for the role.

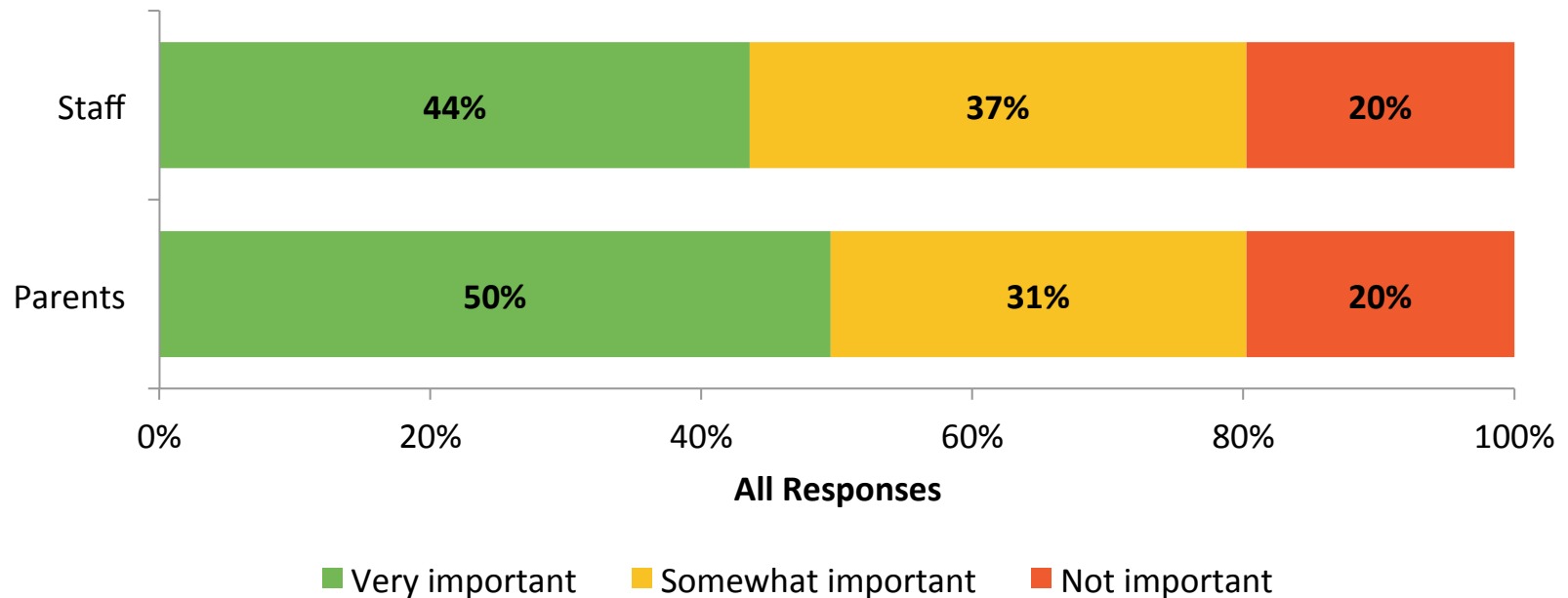
Parents (n=59)

Many parents wrote that they thought this would be a valuable program for the students.

Other parents felt the program should be optional, since many children would benefit more from having an academic course during the advisor time.

Schedule and Location of 6th Graders

Some middle schools are arranged so that 6th grade students are almost completely separated from 7th and 8th grade students in terms of their schedules and their location in the building. How important is this kind of separation to you?



Themes from Open-Ended Responses

Schedule and Location of 6th Graders

Staff (n=57)

Staff believe that there is a large developmental gap between 6th grade students and 8th grade students.

The 6th grade students should be separated from the older students during lunch and break times.

Separating the 6th grade students from the other grades could make them feel they are isolated and not wanted at the school.

Some interaction with the 7th and 8th grade students could be beneficial for the younger students.

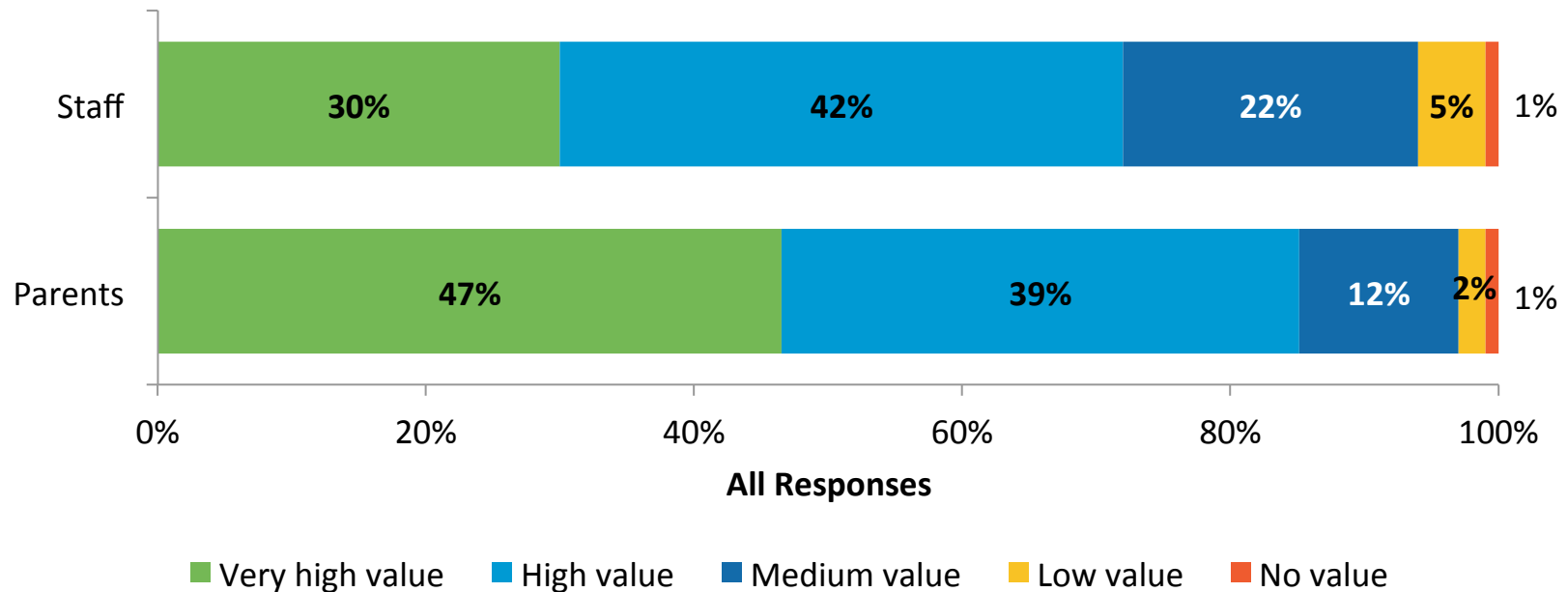
Parents (n=66)

More parents favored keeping the 6th grade students separated from the older students than parents who felt the 6th grade students would benefit from interacting with the older students.

Parents commented that exceptions should be made for 6th grade students who were ready academically and emotionally to take higher level classes with the 7th and 8th grade students.

Accelerated Learning

Acceleration means that students can work ahead in a particular subject matter if they are capable of doing so. A 6th or 7th grader, for instance, could take an 8th grade algebra class. To what degree do you value accelerated learning opportunities for all middle school students based on their abilities?



Themes from Open-Ended Responses

Accelerated Learning

Staff (n=64)

Gifted students should be allowed to take higher level classes with the older students if they are mature enough.

An alternative to gifted students taking classes with the 7th and 8th grade students is to offer accelerated classes within 6th grade.

It is better for the 6th grade students to remain separated from the older students.

Parents (n=67)

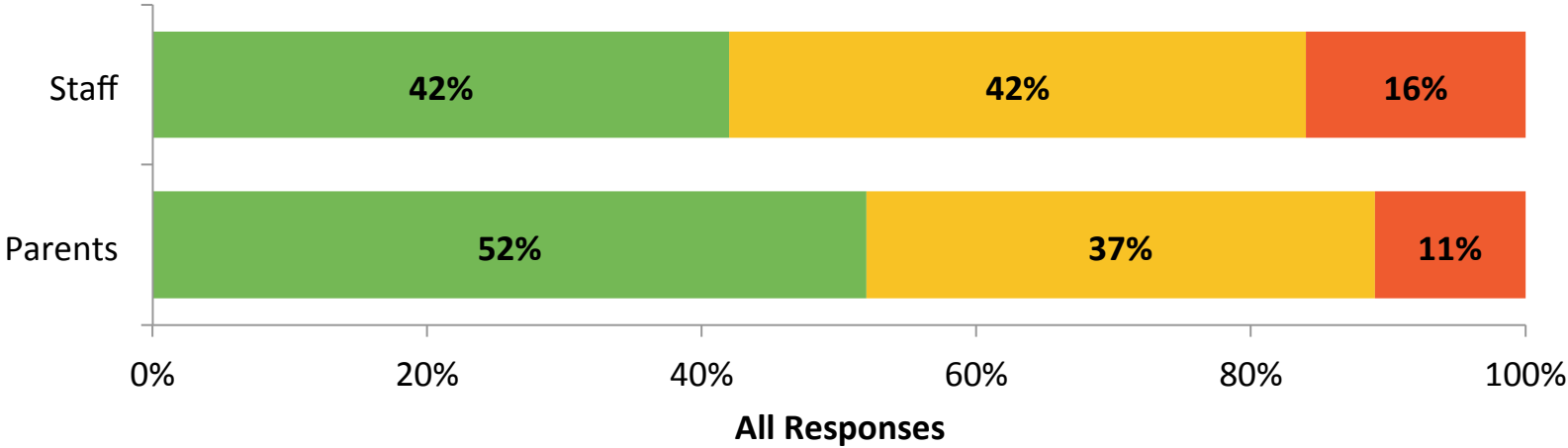
Parents commented that it is especially important in middle school that students are challenged academically to keep them engaged in school.

Parents wrote that accelerated learning should not replace the Aiming High program.

Parents commented that accelerated learning would help prepare students for high school classes.

One-to-One Environment for Technology

Ferndale’s Technology Advisory Committee has developed a plan for moving our district toward a one-to-one environment. According to the plan, each middle school student in grades 6, 7 and 8 will be assigned a laptop computer (or an equivalent piece of technology) in the fall of 2013 to support his or her learning. To what degree do you value this level of student access to technology?



- High value/Very supportive but would like more information
- Medium value/Need more information
- No value/Opposed to the one-to-one plan at this point



Themes from Open-Ended Responses

One-to-One Technology

Staff (n=84)

Staff commented that funding should be used to lower class sizes rather than provide technology.

Teachers stated that integration of technology requires training for both teachers and students to use it.

Some staff feel that students at the middle school level may not be ready for the responsibility of handling the devices.

Staff thought that providing devices to students would be a benefit for those students who do not have access to them at home.

Several staff wrote that technology cannot replace teachers.

Themes from Open-Ended Responses

One-to-One Technology

Parents (n=43)

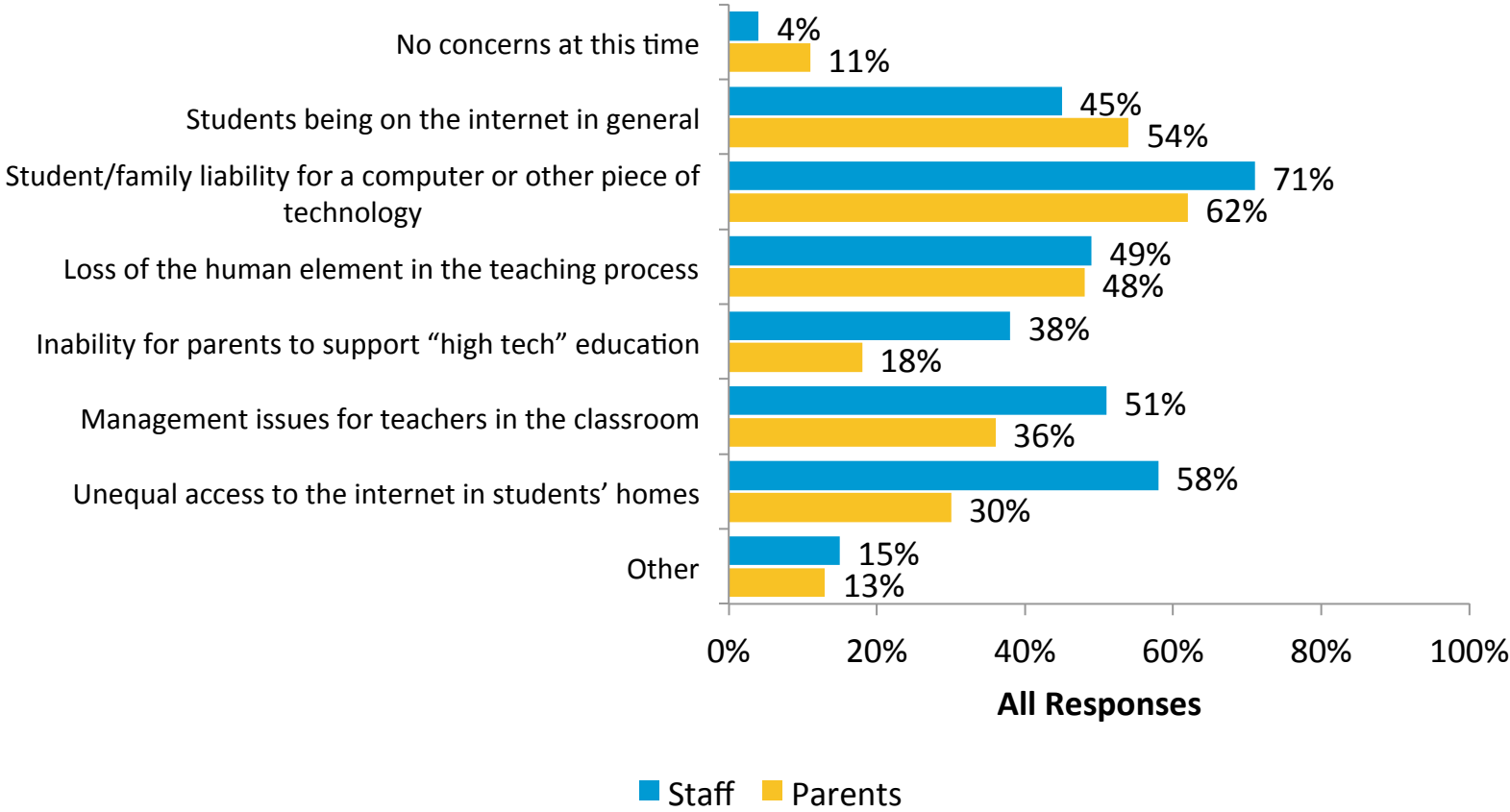
Parents commented that it is important that children learn how to use technology for their future success.

Parents wrote they are concerned about the cost of providing the laptops; how the students will be monitored while using them; online safety for students; and laptops being lost, broken or stolen.

Several parents commented that technology should not replace traditional classroom teaching.

Some parents wrote that the money used for purchasing laptops would be better used for reducing class sizes.

Concerns for One-To-One Technology Plan



Common Items identified under 'Other' included cost, training needs, support and logistics

Note: Multiple answers per participant possible. Percentages added may exceed 100 since a participant may select more than one answer for this question.



Themes from Open-Ended Responses

Concerns about Technology

Staff (n=49)

Staff comments referenced that funding would be better used by reducing class size rather than purchasing the devices.

Staff wrote that it was important for students to be accountable for the devices and use them appropriately.

Teachers expressed a need for training to implement the program successfully.

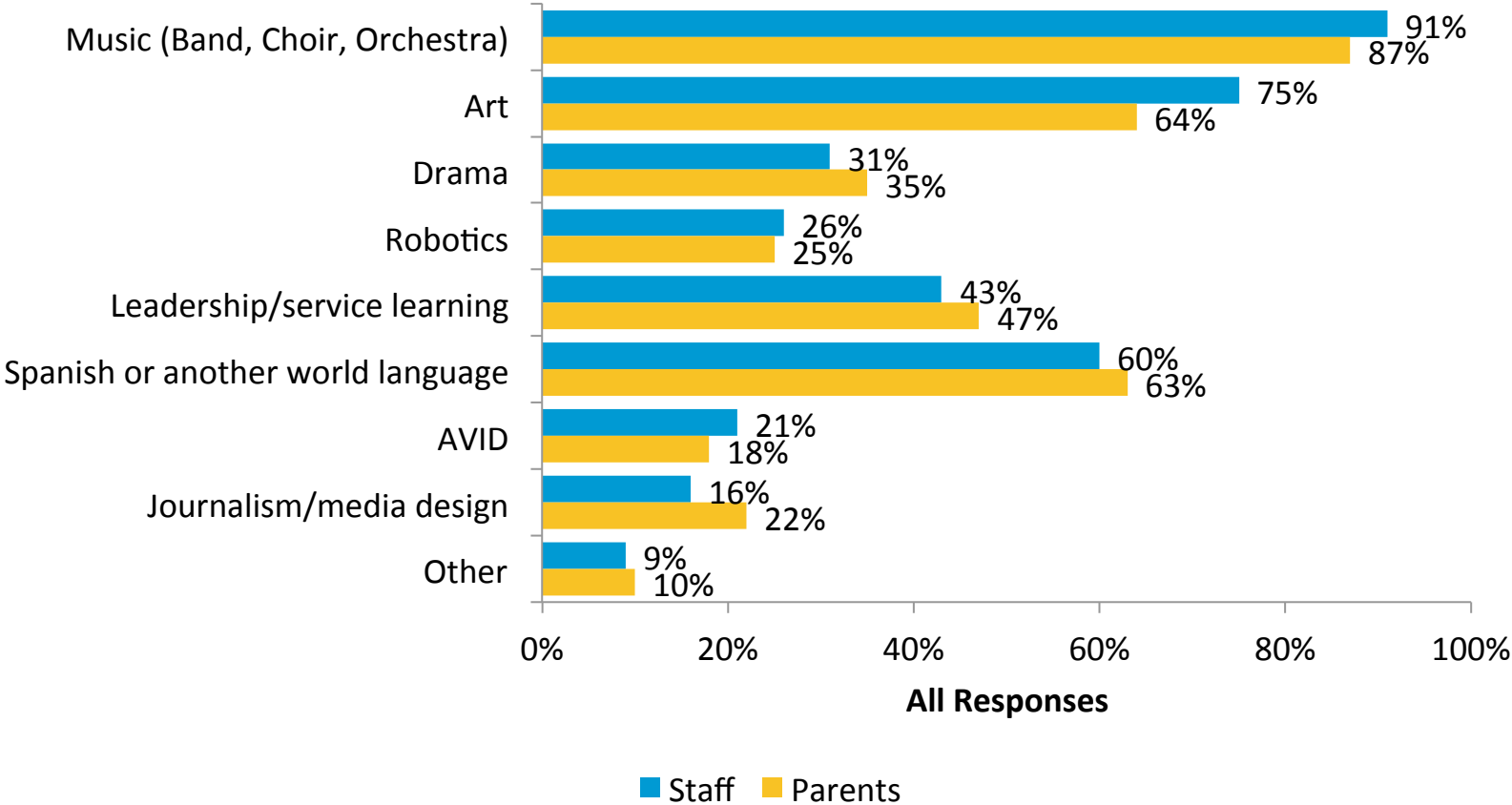
Parents (n=46)

Some parents wrote that they do not support providing every student with a laptop, particularly because it would detract from the personal interaction with teachers and other students.

Parents commented that their greatest concerns were that students would spend too much time on social networking sites and that their child(ren) could encounter safety threats online.

Parents wrote that they do not think teachers are currently trained to be proficient in using technology effectively for instruction.

Elective Options to be Included



Common Items identified under 'Other' included Physical Education, shop and woodworking

Note: Multiple answers per participant possible. Percentages added may exceed 100 since a participant may select more than one answer for this question.



Themes from Open-Ended Responses

Elective Options

Staff (n=30)

All of the electives listed are important and should not be limited.

It is not clear what AVID is.

The district should offer a wide range of electives to keep students interested in school.

Parents (n=52)

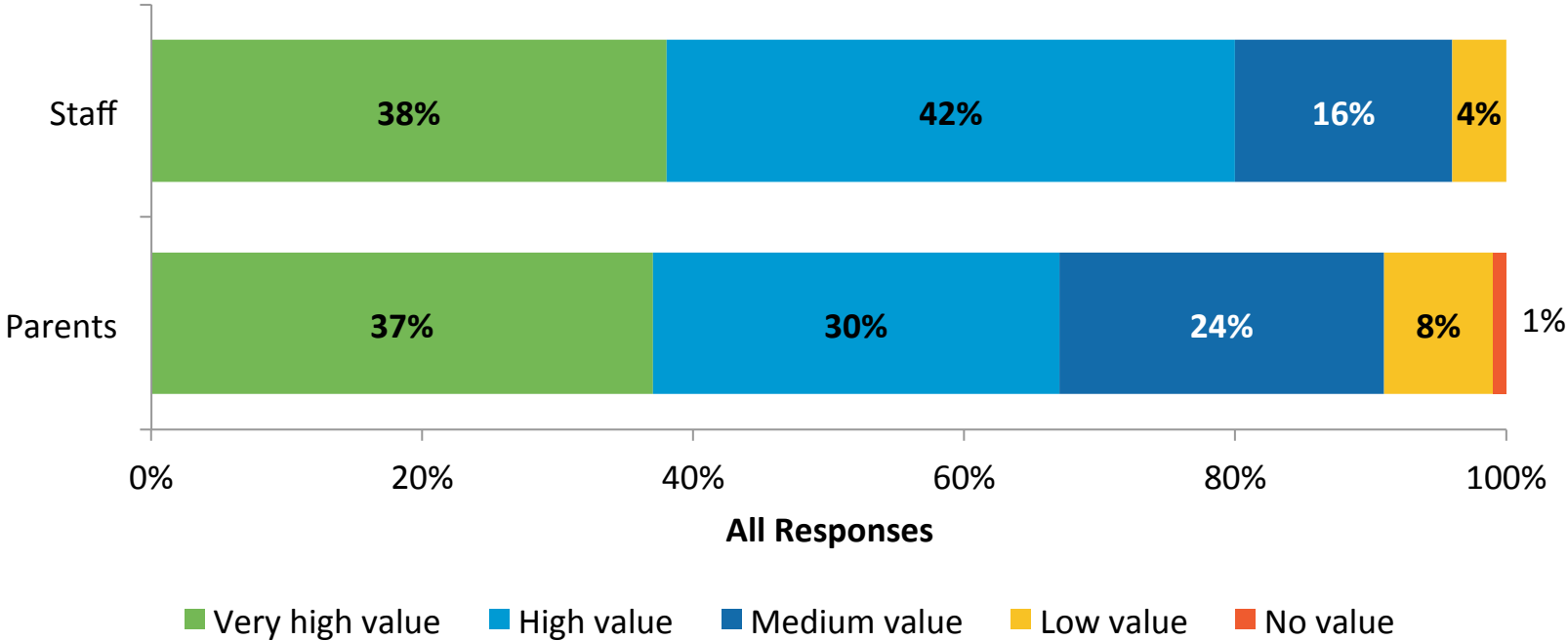
The two most common additional electives listed by parents were shop (wood, automotive, metal) and home economics (personal budgets, healthy diets, basic cooking and sewing skills).

Many parents were not familiar with the AVID program.

Parents wrote that electives in music, drama and arts are important for students.

Physical Activity

The time constraints of a school day can make it difficult to provide daily opportunities for exercise without making some trade-offs. To what degree do you value regular physical activity and/or PE classes for middle school students?



Themes from Open-Ended Responses

Physical Activity

Staff (n=65)

Staff stated that physical education promotes healthy habits for life and stimulates the brain and improves student learning.

Several staff members stated that physical education should be offered at least every other day throughout the academic year.

Some thought that students who participate in extracurricular sports should not be required to take physical education classes.

Parents (n=85)

Parents wrote that physical education provides significant benefits for children. It not only gives them exercise but teaches them healthy habits and teamwork. Exercise also increases learning.

Parents suggested that physical education be an elective class.

Parents commented that students who participate in extracurricular sports should not be required to take a physical education class.

Middle School Design Elements

Please prioritize the most important middle school design elements in the following list. Mark the item that is most important to you with a “10,” the item second most important with a “9” and so on until you have marked every item with a number and given the item least important to you a “1.”

Staff		Parents	
Design Element	Total Score	Design Element	Total Score
A rich array of extracurricular activities (clubs, intramurals, etc.)	2,145	A rich array of extracurricular activities (clubs, intramurals, etc.)	2,129
Separation of 6th grade students from 7th and 8th grade students	1,919	Specific emphasis on the development of social skills	2,093
Specific emphasis on the development of social skills	1,914	A rich array of elective classes	1,836



Rank Order (Highest to Lowest) Design Elements

Staff	Parents
A rich array of extracurricular activities (clubs, intramurals, etc.)	A rich array of extracurricular activities (clubs, intramurals, etc.)
Separation of 6th grade students from 7th and 8th grade students	Specific emphasis on the development of social skills
Specific emphasis on the development of social skills	Separation of 6th grade students from 7th and 8th grade students
Technology to support high quality 21st century learning	Regular physical activity
A rich array of elective classes	Personalization through an advisory program
Regular physical activity	A rich array of elective classes
Specific emphasis on the development of study skills	Specific emphasis on the development of study skills
Personalization through an advisory program	Technology to support high quality 21st century learning
Acceleration and/or remediation opportunities for all qualified students	A house structure that creates a smaller learning community by keeping the same group of students together with the same teachers for a portion of their day
A house structure that creates a smaller learning community by keeping the same group of students together with the same teachers for a portion of their day	Acceleration and/or remediation opportunities for all qualified students



Themes from Open-Ended Responses

Design Elements

Staff (n=35)

Many staff stated that all of the design elements are important and should be included.

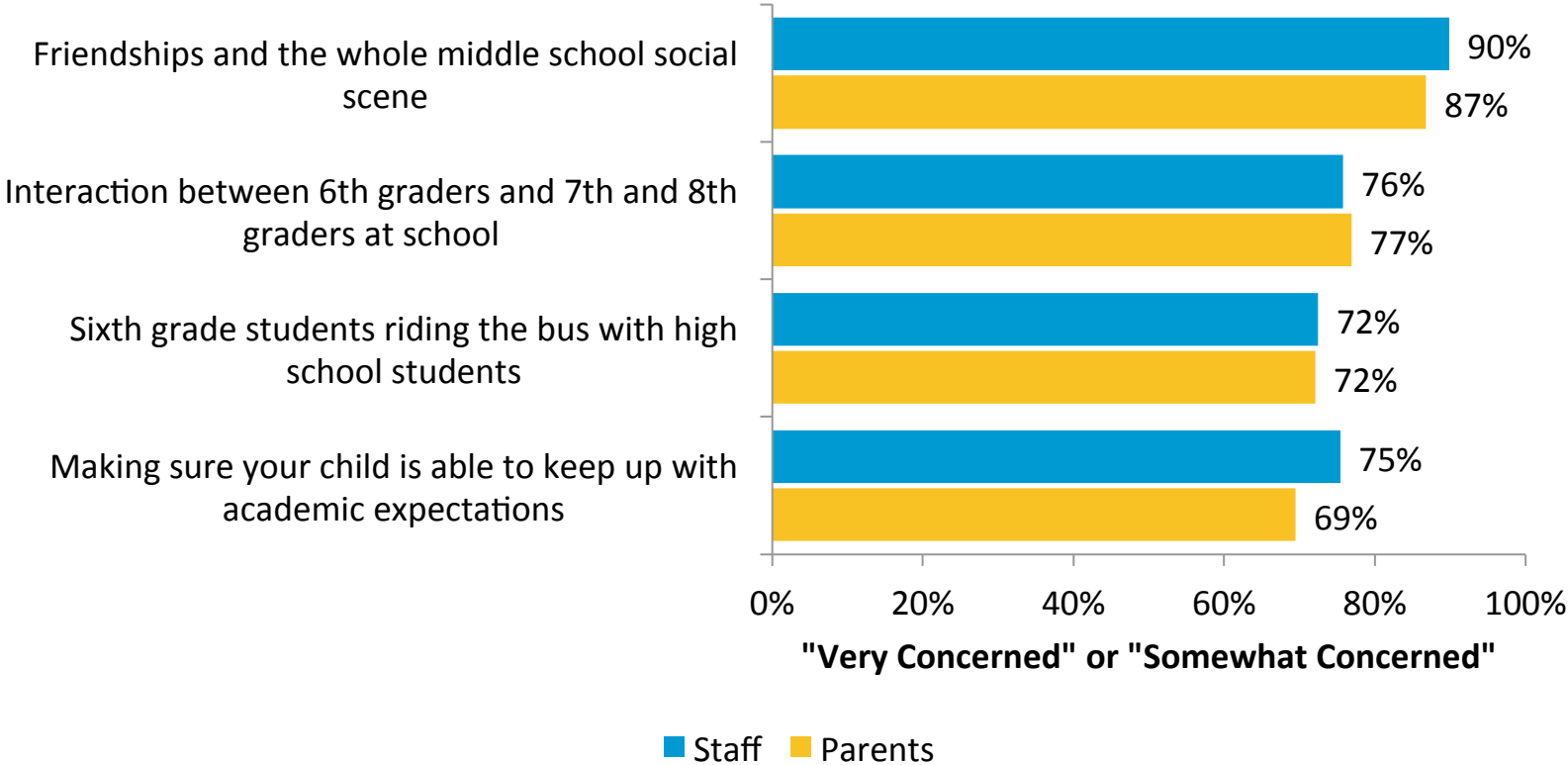
Parents (n=32)

Parents wrote that the Aiming High program should be continued.

Parents commented that the district should focus on providing challenging academic courses for students.

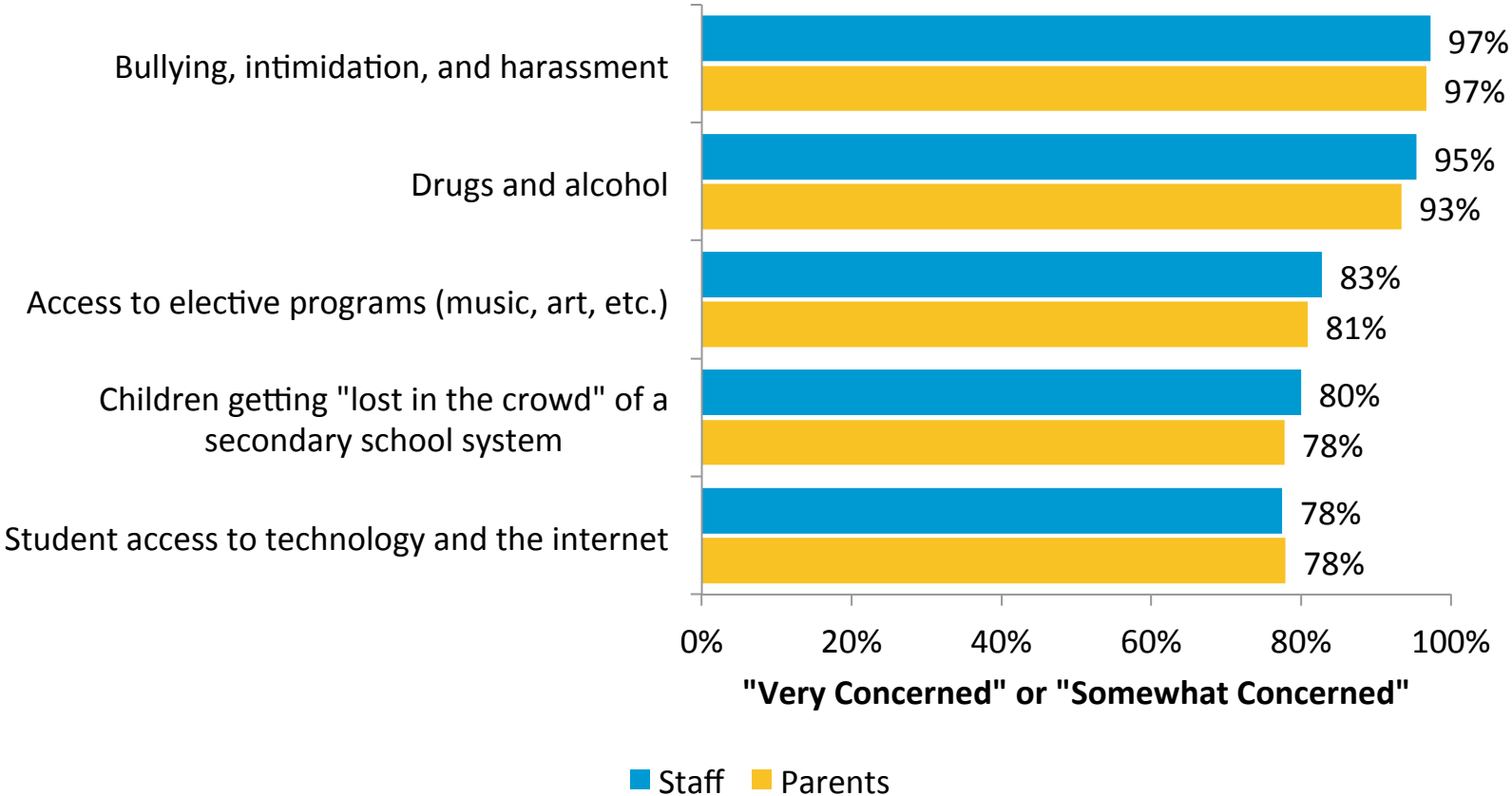
Issues Related to Middle School

Please indicate the degree to which you are concerned about each of the following issues.



Issues Related to Middle School

Please indicate the degree to which you are concerned about each of the following issues.



Themes from Open-Ended Responses

Issues Related to Middle School

Staff (only 14 responses)

There was an insufficient number of comments for analysis. In the response set there were no duplicate answers.

Parents (n=39)

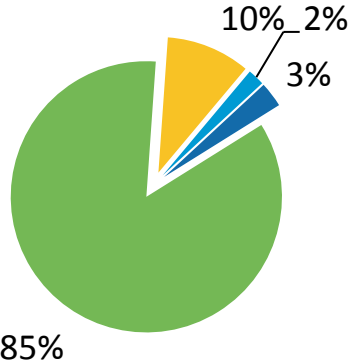
The concern listed most often by parents was that the 6th grade students would be bullied by the older students, particularly while on the bus.

The second most common concern listed was that the older students would have a negative influence on the 6th grade students by exposing them to drugs and alcohol.

Many parents commented that they are concerned that the Aiming High program will be cut.

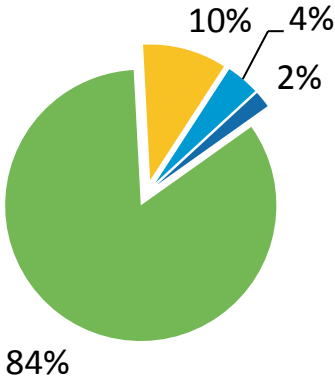
Internet Access at Home

Staff's view of student home access



- No Internet access
- Yes, dial-up Internet access
- Yes, high-speed Internet access
- Yes, Internet access via cell phone/mobile hot spot

Parents' view of student home access



- No Internet access
- Yes, dial-up Internet access
- Yes, high-speed Internet access
- Yes, Internet access via cell phone/mobile hot spot

Themes from Open-Ended Responses

Internet Access at Home

Staff (only 9 responses)

There was an insufficient number of comments for analysis. In the response set there were no duplicate answers.

Parents (n=27)

Parents commented that the difficulty and cost of getting internet access at their home makes it prohibitive. (Number of times)

Information on Transition to Middle School

What kind of information/support would help you and your student make the transition from elementary school to middle school?

Staff

Opportunities to visit and explore the middle school campus prior to the first day of school	63%
Informational meetings and/or programs for parents	45%
Informational meetings and/or programs for students	44%
Regular newsletters (either hard copy or online) with information about middle school sent to families when their children are in upper elementary school	41%
Contact with a staff advisor prior to the first day of middle school	29%
Middle level “help line” – a number to call with questions about middle school programs or students	21%
Social activities designed for students to meet one another	19%
A parent support network	16%
Suggested articles and/or books by middle level experts	3%
Other	2%

Note: Multiple answers per participant possible. Percentages added may exceed 100 since a participant may select more than one answer for this question.



Information on Transition to Middle School

What kind of information/support would help you and your child make the transition from elementary school to middle school?

Parents

Opportunities to visit and explore the middle school campus prior to the first day of school	70%
Regular newsletters (either hard copy or online) with information about middle school sent to families when their children are in upper elementary school	50%
Informational meetings and/or programs for parents	41%
Informational meetings and/or programs for students	39%
Contact with a staff advisor prior to the first day of middle school	29%
Social activities designed for students to meet one another	20%
A parent support network	12%
Middle level “help line” – a number to call with questions about middle school programs or students	11%
Suggested articles and/or books by middle level experts	5%
Other	2%

Note: Multiple answers per participant possible. Percentages added may exceed 100 since a participant may select more than one answer for this question.



Information on Transition to High School

What kind of information/support would help you and your student make the transition from middle school to high school?

Staff

Opportunities to visit and explore the high school campus prior to the first day of school	63%
Informational meetings and/or programs for students	47%
Informational meetings and/or programs for parents	43%
Contact with a counselor or staff member prior to the first day of high school	38%
Regular newsletters (either hard copy or online) with information about high school sent to families when their children are in middle school	36%
High school “help line” – a number to call with questions about high school programs or students	22%
Social activities designed for students to meet one another	19%
A parent support network	12%
Other	2%
Suggested articles and/or books by high school experts	1%

Note: Multiple answers per participant possible. Percentages added may exceed 100 since a participant may select more than one answer for this question.



Information on Transition to High School

What kind of information/support would help you and your child make the transition from middle school to high school?

Parents

Opportunities to visit and explore the high school campus prior to the first day of school	74%
Informational meetings and/or programs for students	48%
Regular newsletters (either hard copy or online) with information about high school sent to families when their children are in middle school	45%
Informational meetings and/or programs for parents	38%
Contact with a counselor or staff member prior to the first day of high school	37%
Social activities designed for students to meet one another	20%
High school “help line” – a number to call with questions about high school programs or students	10%
A parent support network	8%
Suggested articles and/or books by high school experts	5%
Other	1%

Note: Multiple answers per participant possible. Percentages added may exceed 100 since a participant may select more than one answer for this question.



Communication Preferences

Staff

Email	84%
Telephone notification	35%
Website	33%
Print information mailed to my home	25%
Print information sent home with my student	4%
Other	1%

Parents

Email	92%
Telephone notification	33%
Print information mailed to my home	30%
Website	20%
Print information sent home with my student	13%
Other	0%

Note: Multiple answers per participant possible. Percentages added may exceed 100 since a participant may select more than one answer for this question.



Themes from Open-Ended Responses

Is there anything else you would like to tell us to help with the middle school redesign process?

Staff (n=46)

Staff wrote that the accelerated programs should be maintained to provide challenging work for gifted students.

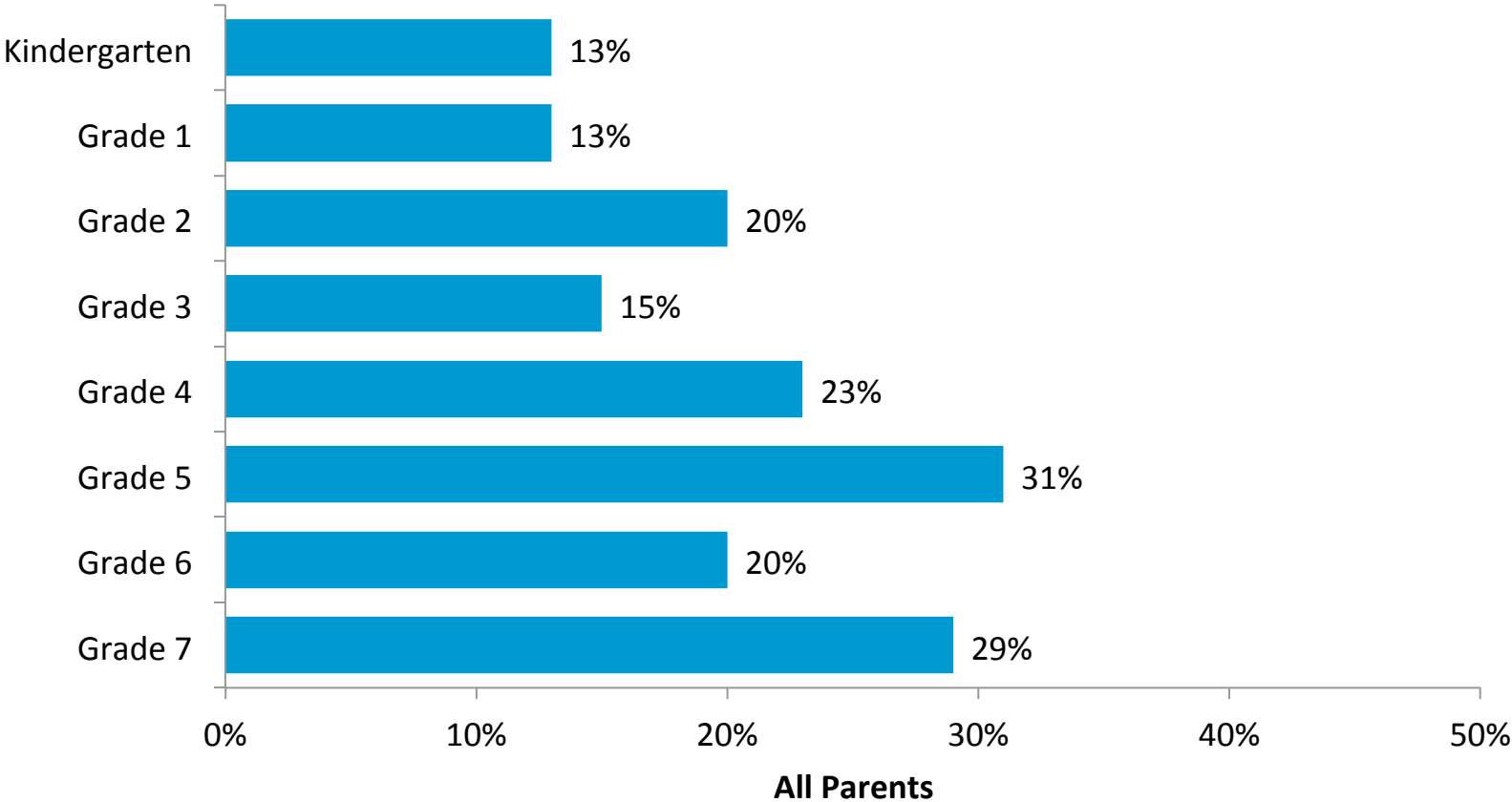
Parents (n=83)

Parents wrote that programs like Aiming High and accelerated learning are very important during the middle school years for children.

Parents commented that they feel moving the 6th grade students to the middle school is a good idea and they think the students will thrive there.

Parents wrote that it is very important for the district to continue keeping them informed during this process, educating them about the available programs.

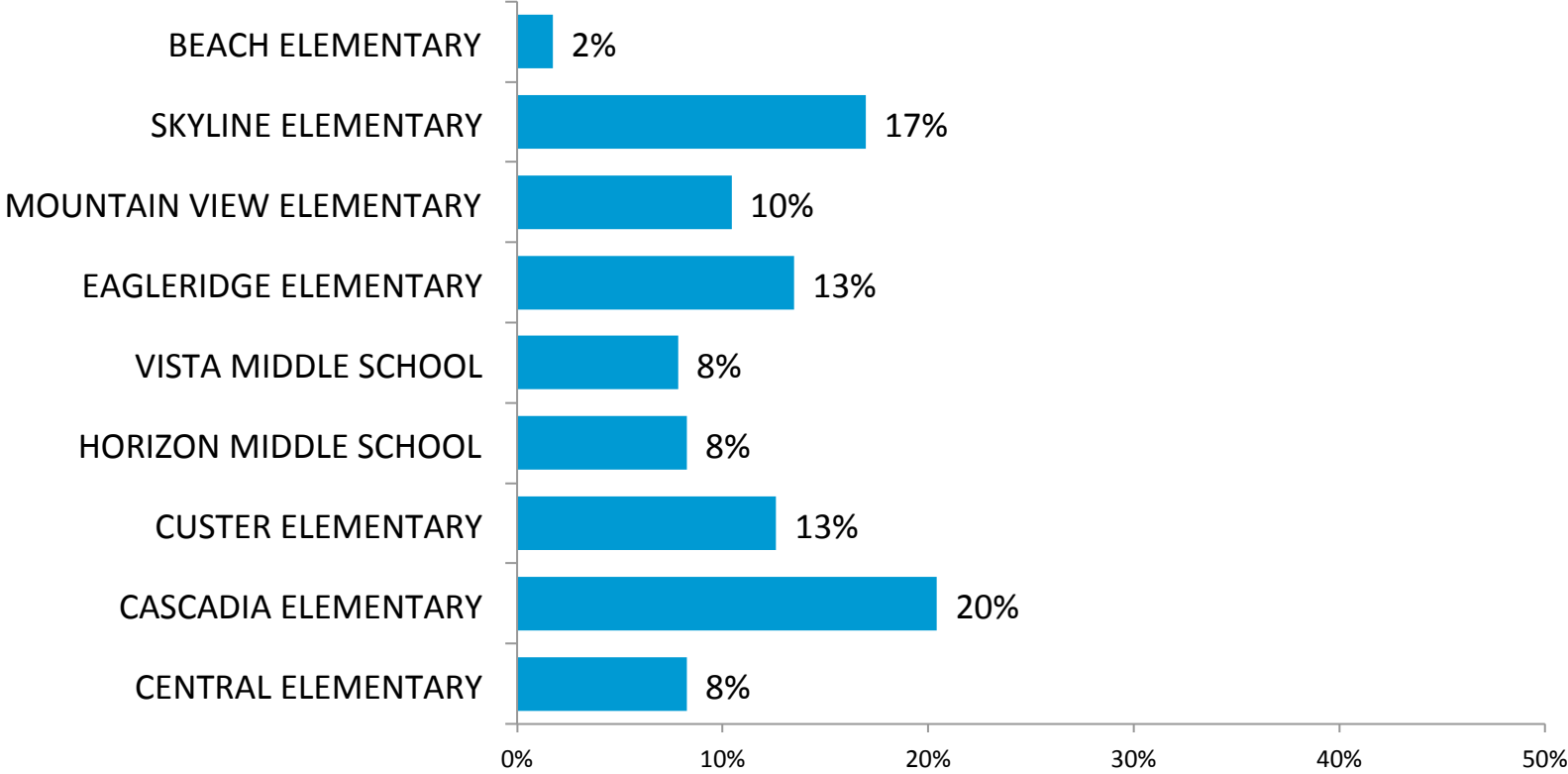
Parent Participation by Child's Grade Level



Note: The percentage refers to the relative percentage of the 335 total parents. Multiple answers per participant possible. Percentages added may exceed 100 since a participant may select more than one answer for this question.



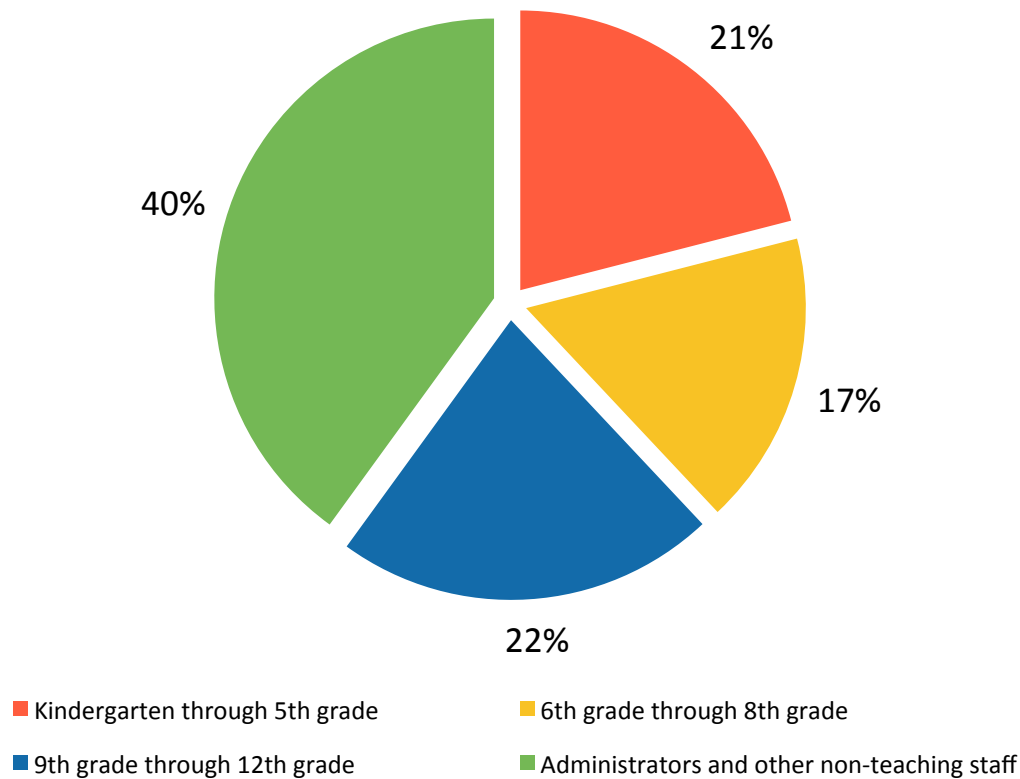
Parent Participation by Child's School Site



Note: The percentage refers to the relative percentage of the 335 total parents. Multiple answers per participant are possible. Percentages added may exceed 100 since a participant may select more than one answer for this question.



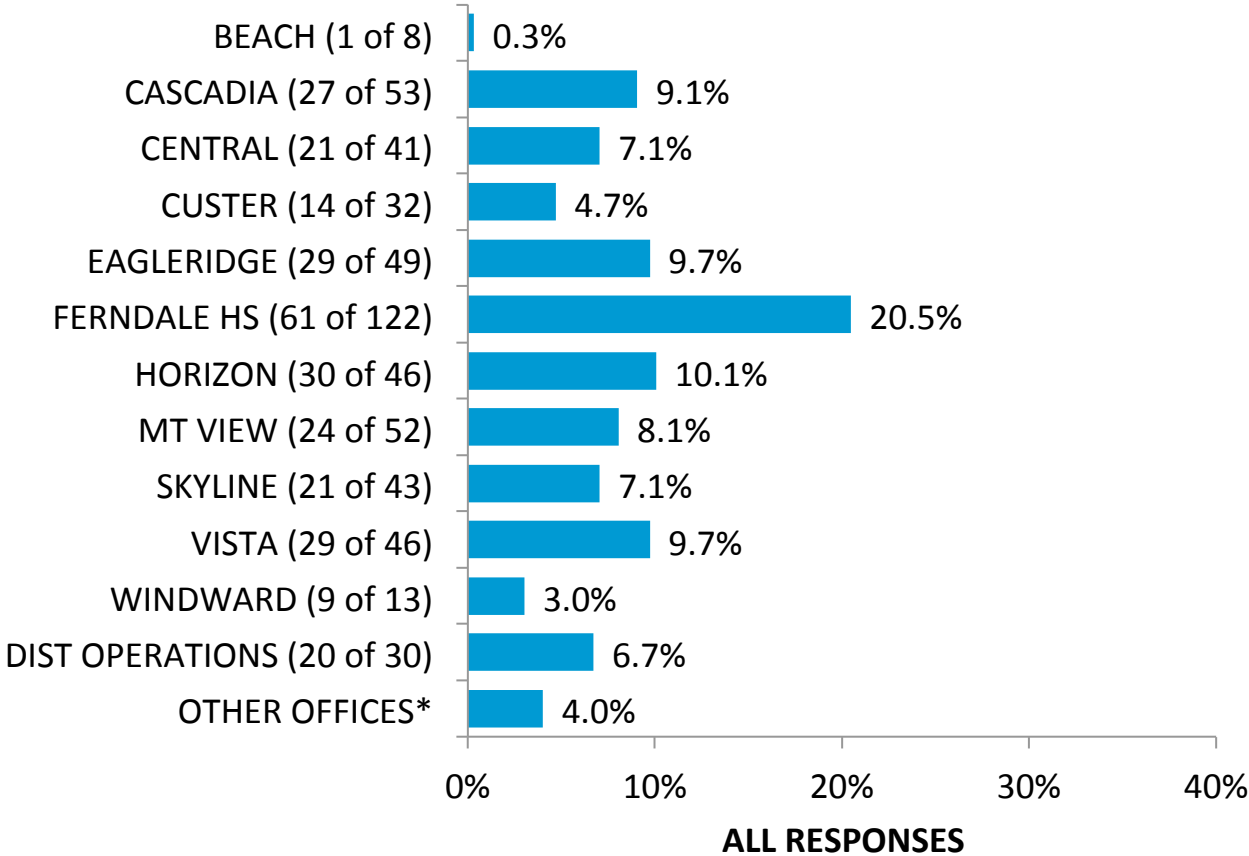
Staff Participation by Grade Level



Note: The percentage refers to the relative percentage of the 335 total number of staff who took the survey. Multiple answers per participant are possible.



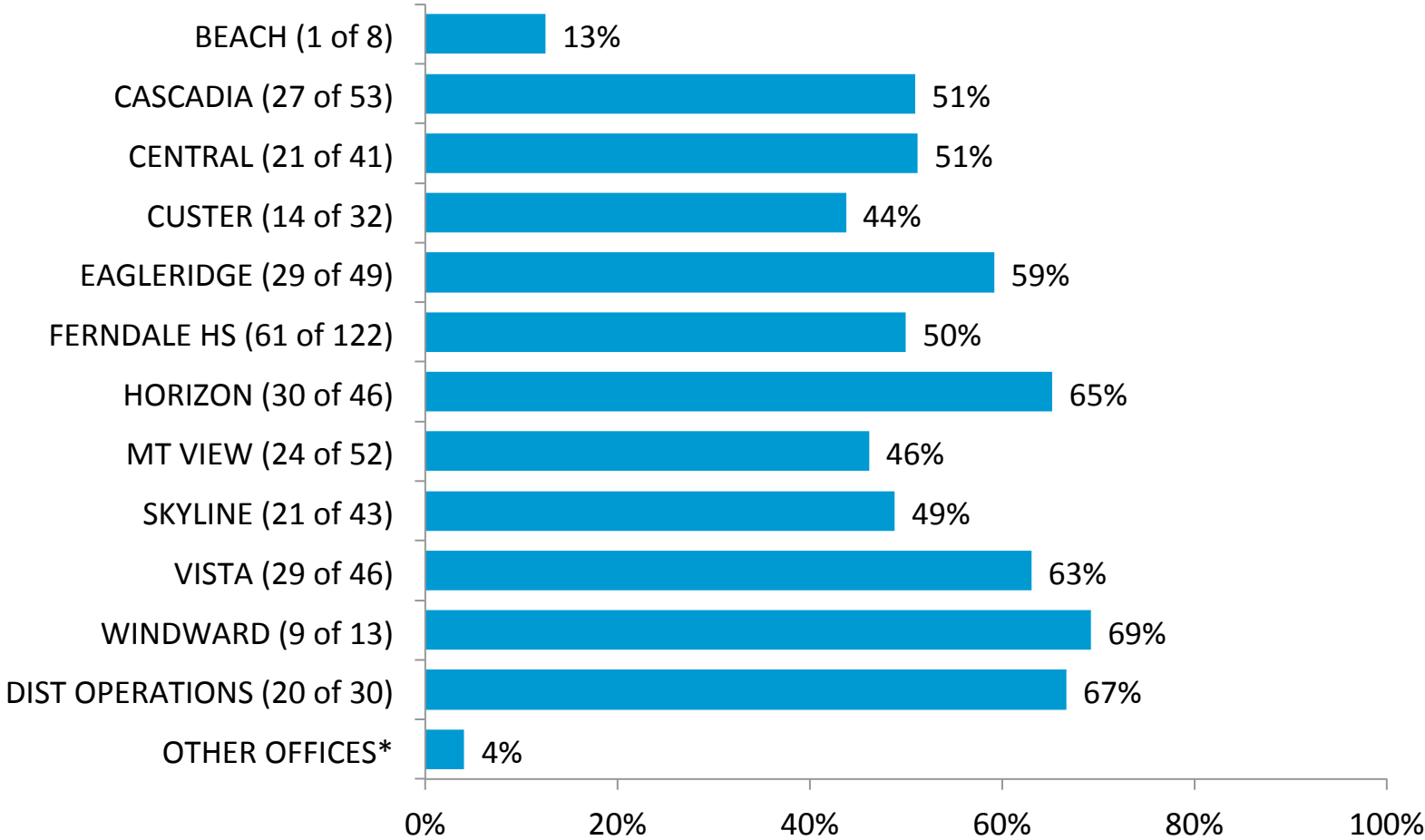
Overall Survey Participation of Staff by Work Site



* Other Offices includes responses from Curriculum and Instruction, District Office, Food Services, Maintenance, Special Services and Transportation.



Percent of Staff Participation by Total Work Site



* Other Offices includes responses from Curriculum and Instruction, District Office, Food Services, Maintenance, Special Services and Transportation.



Conclusions

Highlights

- 72% of staff respondents and 86% of parent respondents place a high or very high value on accelerated learning.
- At the same time, 44% of staff and 50% of parents feel that 6th graders should be separated from older students which seems to be in conflict with support for acceleration.
- Approximately 2/3 of all respondents—both parents and staff—place a high or very high value on the house structure.
- Similarly, 65% of staff and 59% of parents place a high or very high value on some kind of advisory program.
- Only 16% of staff and 11% of parents expressed that they are opposed to a one-to-one technology plan.
- Music, art and world languages are the highest valued electives by both staff and parent respondents.
- Both staff and parents said that providing a rich array of extracurricular activities and helping students develop positive social skills are among the highest priorities.
- Top concerns by both staff and parents are: (1) bullying, intimidation and harassment; (2) drug and alcohol use/abuse; and (3) developing friendships.
- The highest ranked activity for facilitating transitions to middle school and to high school is opportunities to visit the new school and explore prior to the first day of school.

Conclusions

Next Steps

- We need to resolve the apparent conflicting opinion between separation of 6th graders and acceleration.
- We need to do more education with everyone around certain programs like AVID advisory, and the use of technology as a learning tool.
- We need to provide more information about funding streams related to purchasing technology and hiring teachers to lower class size.
- We need to address parent and staff concerns about the logistics of a one-to-one technology program.
- We need to use this information to assist in designing our middle school program.