



2020

State of School Safety Report

Research by Safe and Sound Schools





Introduction

Safe and Sound Schools is a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating a safer environment for children, students, parents, and communities.

Its annual State of School Safety report measures perceptions of school safety among key stakeholders: schools (including teachers, administrators, staff, and wellness and behavioral health professionals in schools) students in middle and high school, parents of school-aged children, public safety officials, and general community members.

Now in its third year, the State of School Safety report continues to highlight school safety issues communities need to address. Safe and Sound Schools hopes communities will use the findings from the State of School Safety 2020 Report to drive conversations and improve comprehensive school safety prevention, response, and recovery.

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2020 Survey Focus

Schools are objectively safe places. Together with their communities they have improved overall safety by broadening their understanding of comprehensive school safety by including all stakeholders and fostering a positive approach to keep our schools safe. The State of School Safety survey focus for 2020 is aimed to assess perceptions of school safety among stakeholders and better understand how safety concerns affect a student's self-perceived mental health. While also, uncovering effective strategies to help manage factors that contribute to feelings of danger or safety.

Of note, the survey implementation occurred just as the United States began aggressive efforts to contain COVID-19. Therefore, schools were not in session when stakeholders completed the survey. In addition, they faced new challenges and unknowns, pushing school safety away from the forefront of their daily lives. Despite this, hundreds of educators, parents, students, and public safety officials from around the country continued to weigh in on school safety, demonstrating their continued commitment to this important cause.



Methodology

01	Approach	Five surveys collected data from: students in grades 6-12, parents of school-aged children, educators, public safety officials, and general community members.
02	Methodology	The survey repeated some questions from previous studies, and added new questions to dive deeper on additional topics. Safe and Sound Schools distributed the survey to all community members, partner organizations, and through social media advertising.
03	Sample Size	815 participants; detailed demographics are available at the end of this report.
04	Sample Characteristics	The survey sample was a non-probability, snowball, and online survey deducted on Qualtrics.
05	Date Dates	Data was collected from March 30th, 2020, to April 10th, 2020



Summary of Findings

Year after year, stakeholders have shown a greater understanding about comprehensive school safety, and educators enhanced the safety of their schools by making easily accessible improvements.

As a result, stakeholders are feeling safer at schools than in years past. Every stakeholder group is still most concerned about active shooters, with mental health crises and in-person bullying coming in a close second. For students, concerns about school safety are resulting in physical and emotional symptoms at higher rates than parents report. All stakeholders value mental health professionals and would like to see an increased presence in the schools.

Communities have more work to do in the areas of educator training, mental health programs, reporting systems, reunification, and stakeholder engagement and communication.

Results



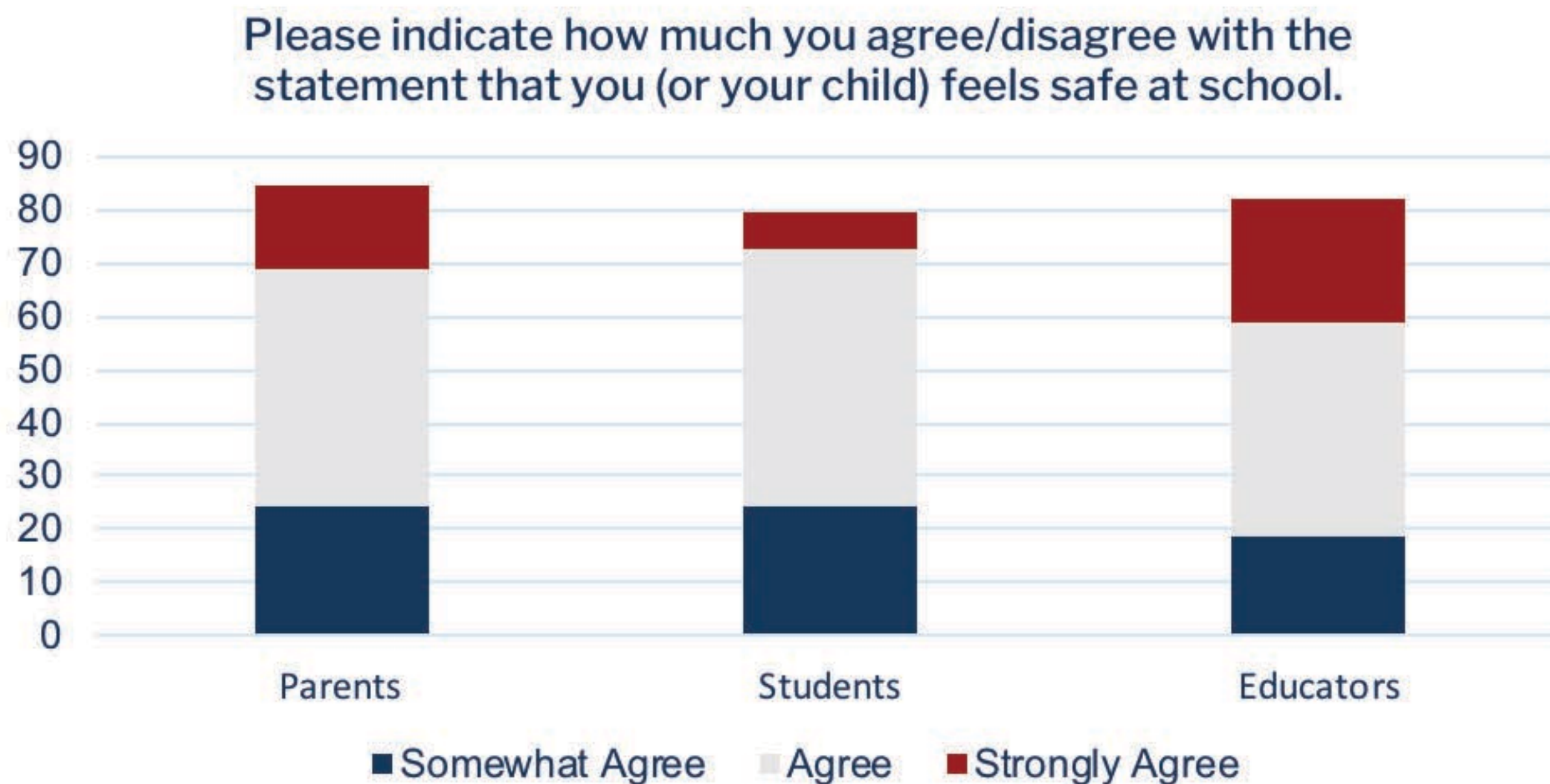
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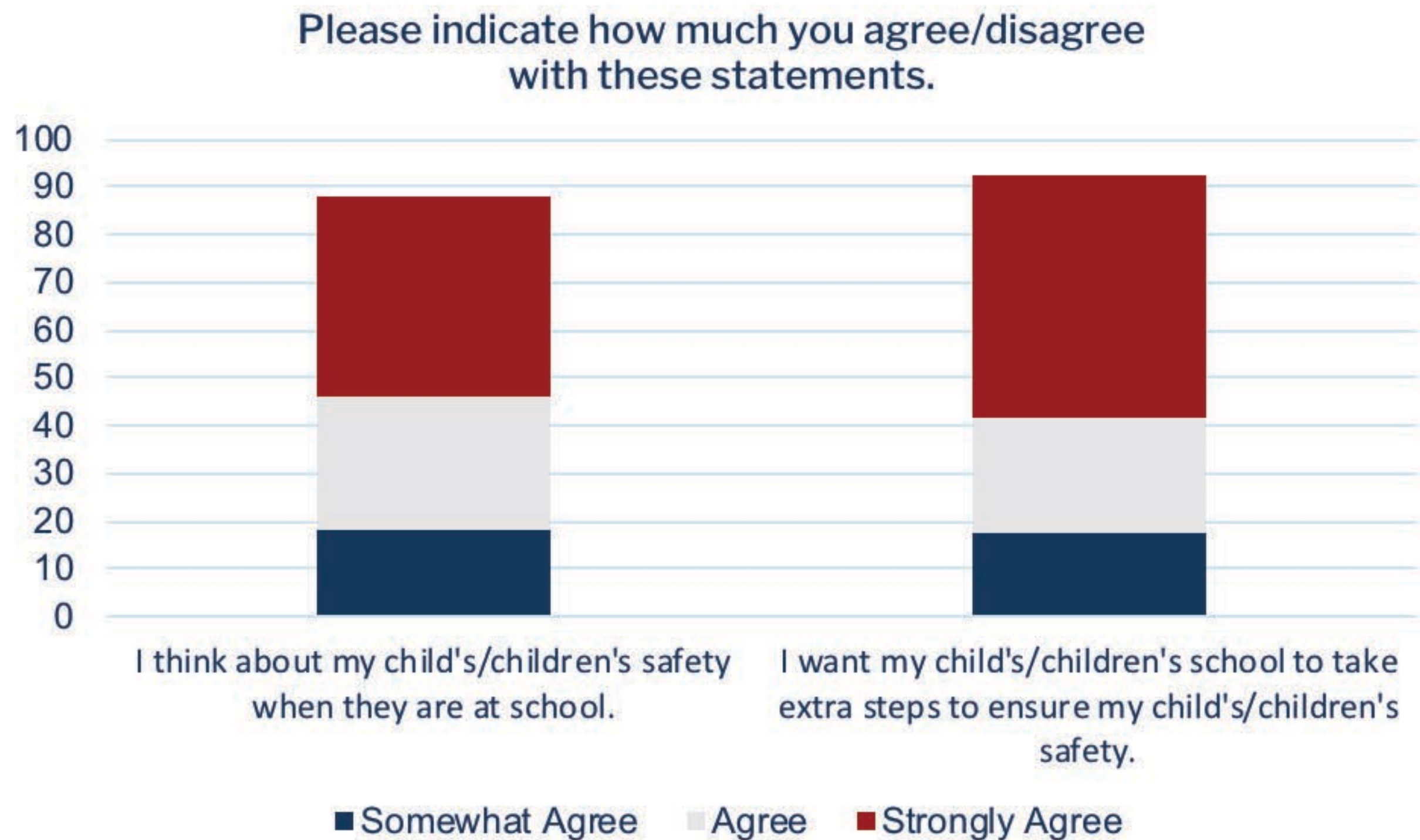


Perceptions of Preparedness

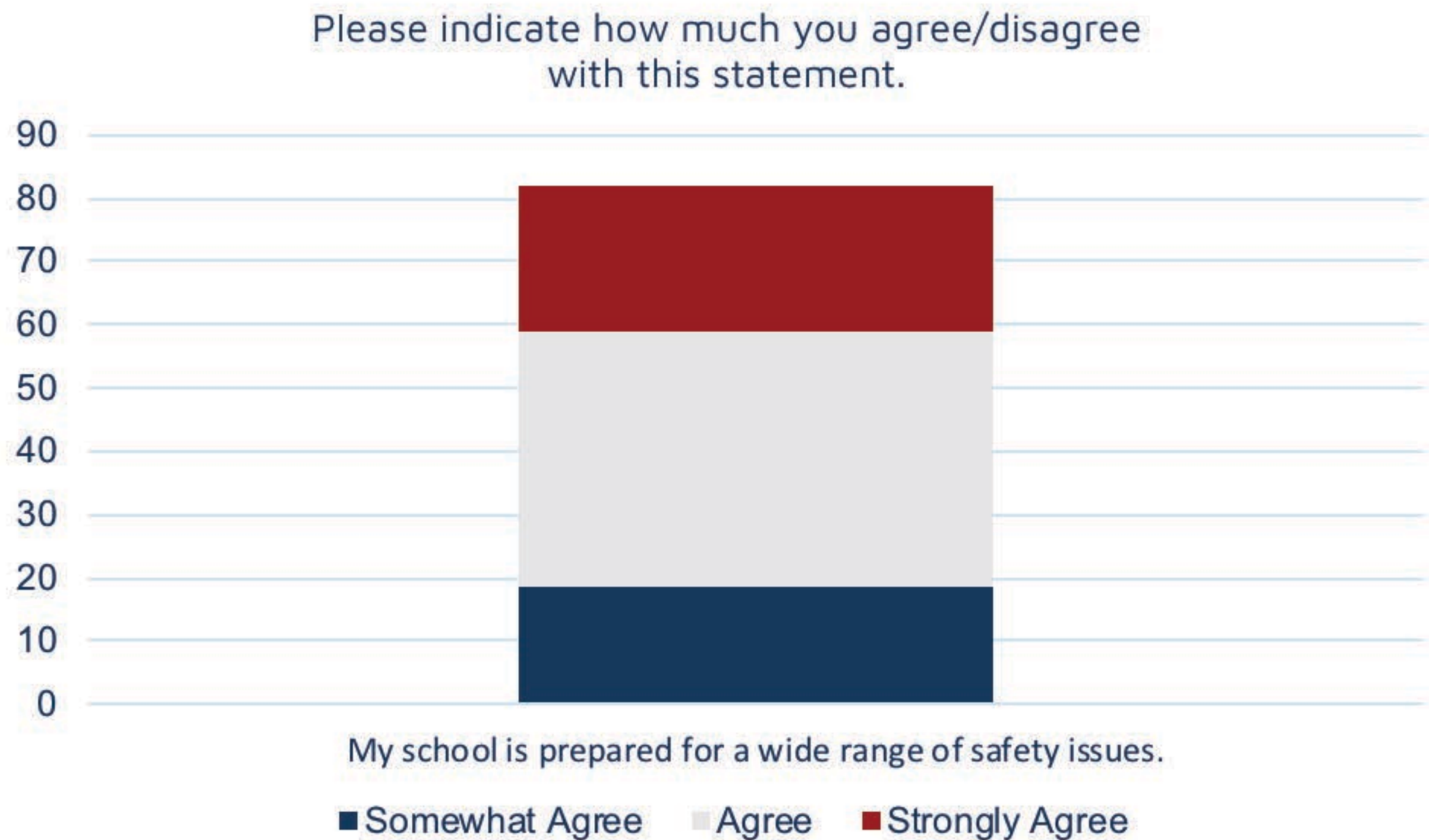
Overall, stakeholders feel safe at school. These results are a dramatic improvement over 2018 results, where only 50% of students and 55% of parents agreed with this statement. Even educators have shown an increase in confidence, from 72% agreement in 2018 to more than 80% in 2020.



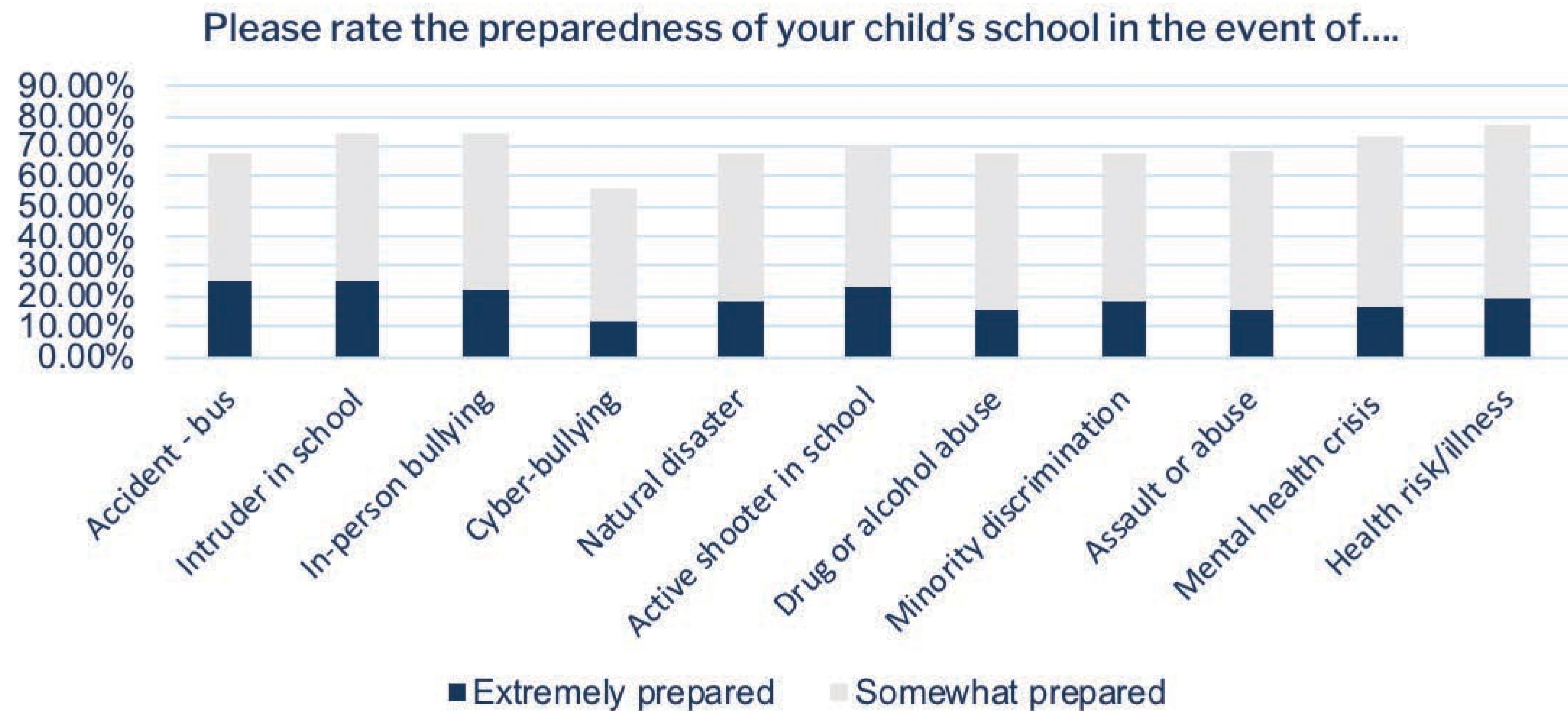
Parents still think about their child’s/children’s safety and would like to see schools take extra steps to ensure their children’s safety. These findings are consistent with 2018 results.



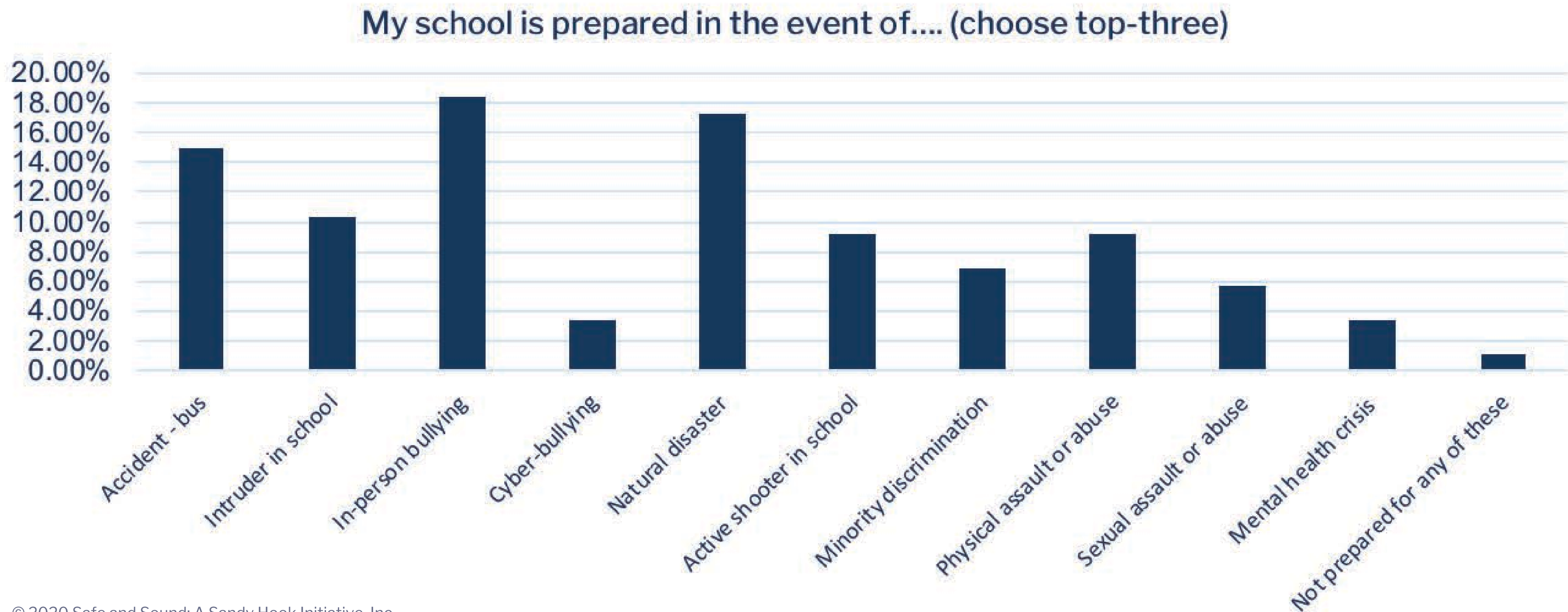
Educator confidence is high that their schools are prepared for a wide range of safety issues, consistent with findings in 2018 and 2019.

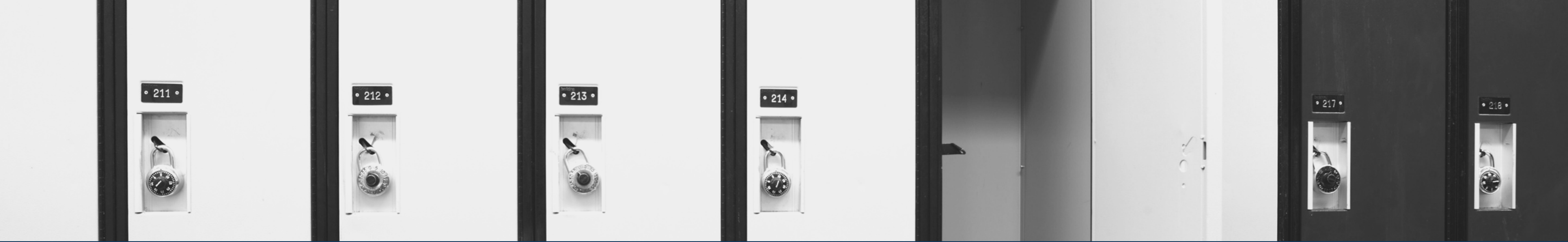


Parents feel overall their children’s schools are somewhat prepared for a wide range of emergencies, but are much less willing to say their schools are extremely prepared. By contrast in 2018, parents consistently returned high levels of “I don’t know” when asked this question. This shows great improvement in parent understanding about their school’s preparation.



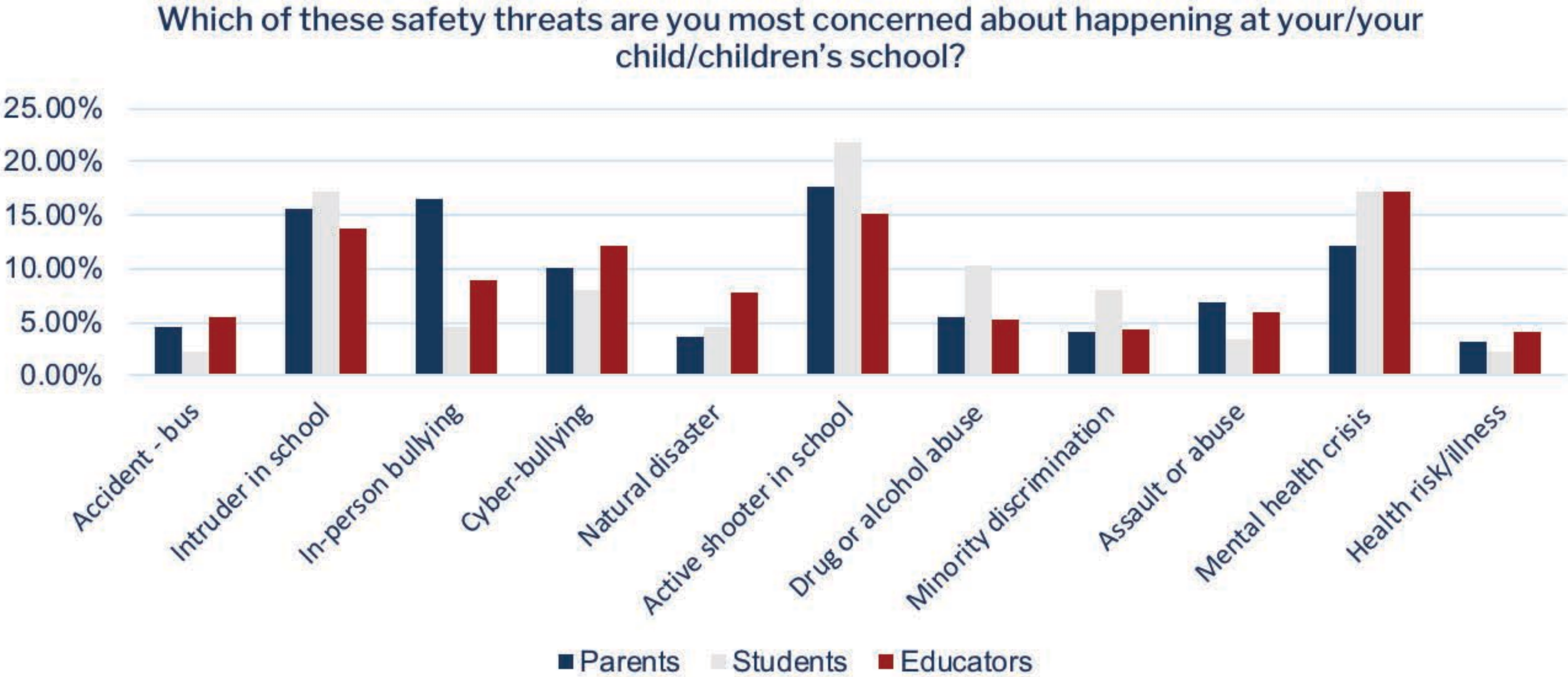
Students feel that their school is most prepared to address bullying, a natural disaster, or a school bus accident. Students feel their school is least prepared for a mental health emergency. In 2018, student confidence in preparedness was much more consistent across categories. This shows a greater understanding of safety preparedness by students.



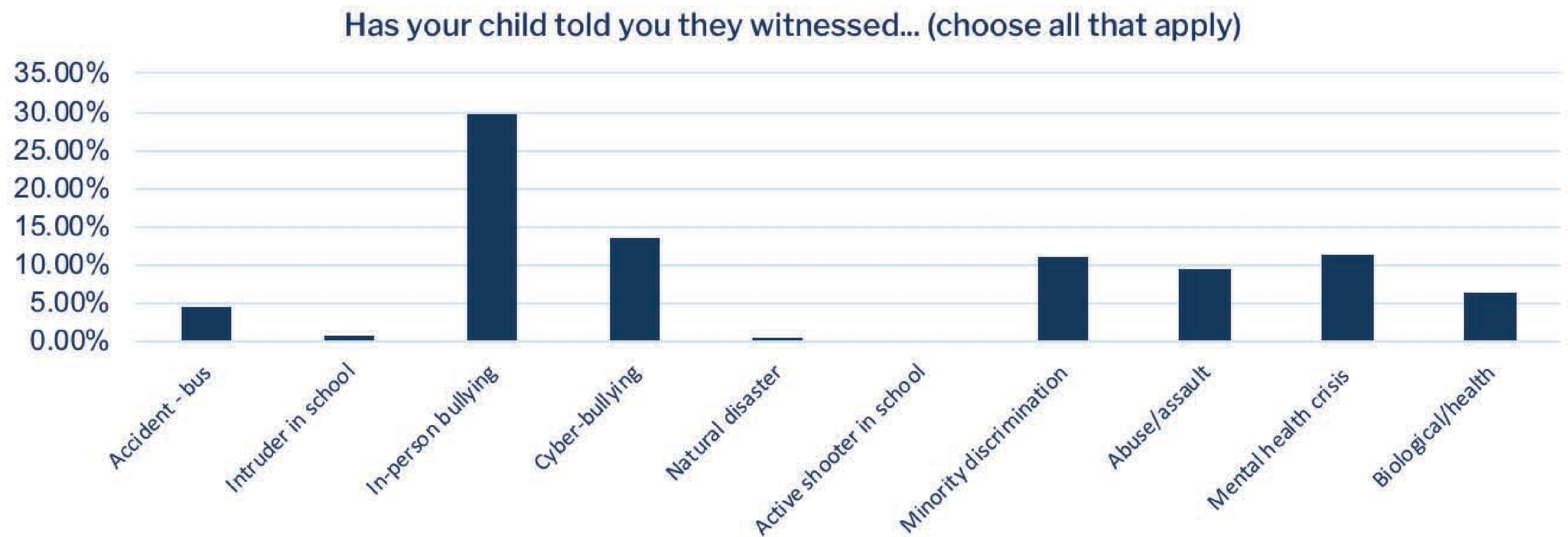


Safety Threats

While parents and students are most concerned with an active shooter, educators rank mental health crises as their top concern. These findings are consistent with 2019 results.



Parents most often said their child has witnessed in-person bullying, which was parents’ second-highest concern. Parents said their children also saw cyber-bullying, mental health crises, and discrimination or aggression toward a minority group in 2020. In 2018, parents and students reported more bullying, drug/substance abuse, weather-related incidents, and physical abuse than other threats.



Comprehensive School Safety

To help the 2020 survey data become actionable, Safe and Sound Schools is presenting additional findings within the Comprehensive School Safety Model. This will help community members better understand the results, implications, and next steps.

Survey results will be divided among six sections:

- Mental & Behavioral Health
- Health & Wellness
- Leadership, Law & Policy
- Culture, Climate & Community
- Physical Environment
- Operations & Emergency Management

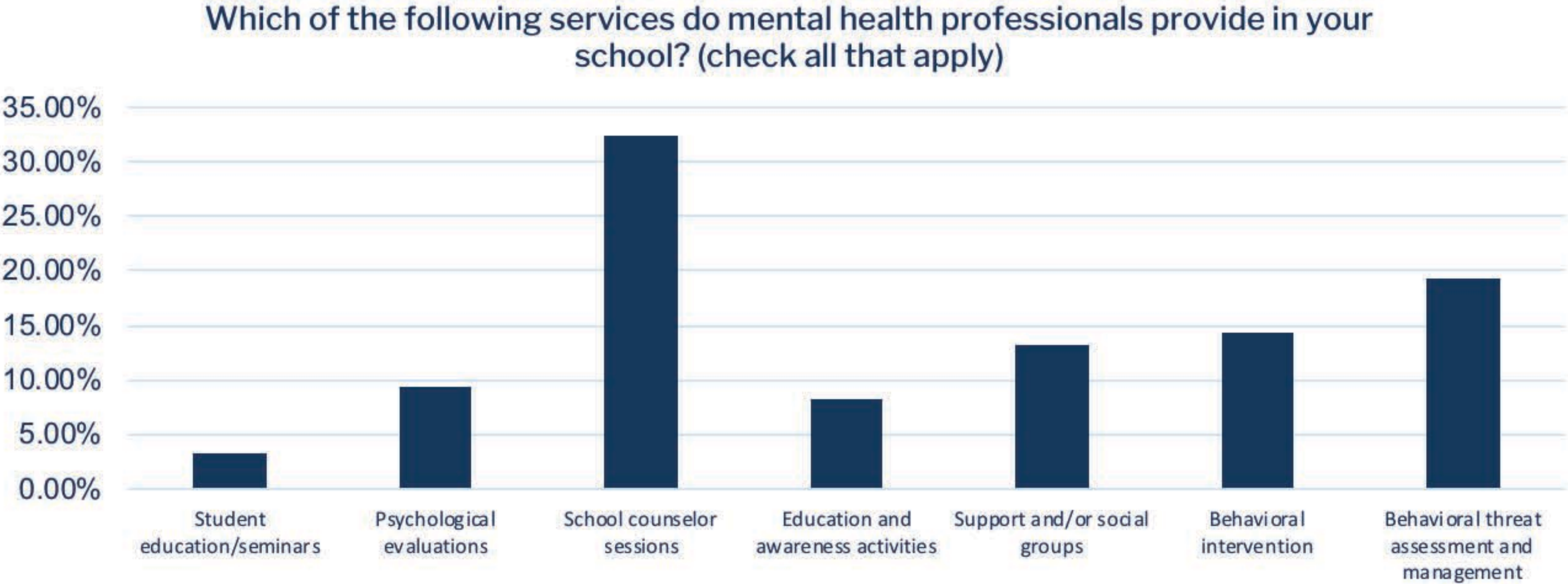
This provides a broad overview, as well as direction for those seeking to dive more deeply into specific topical areas.



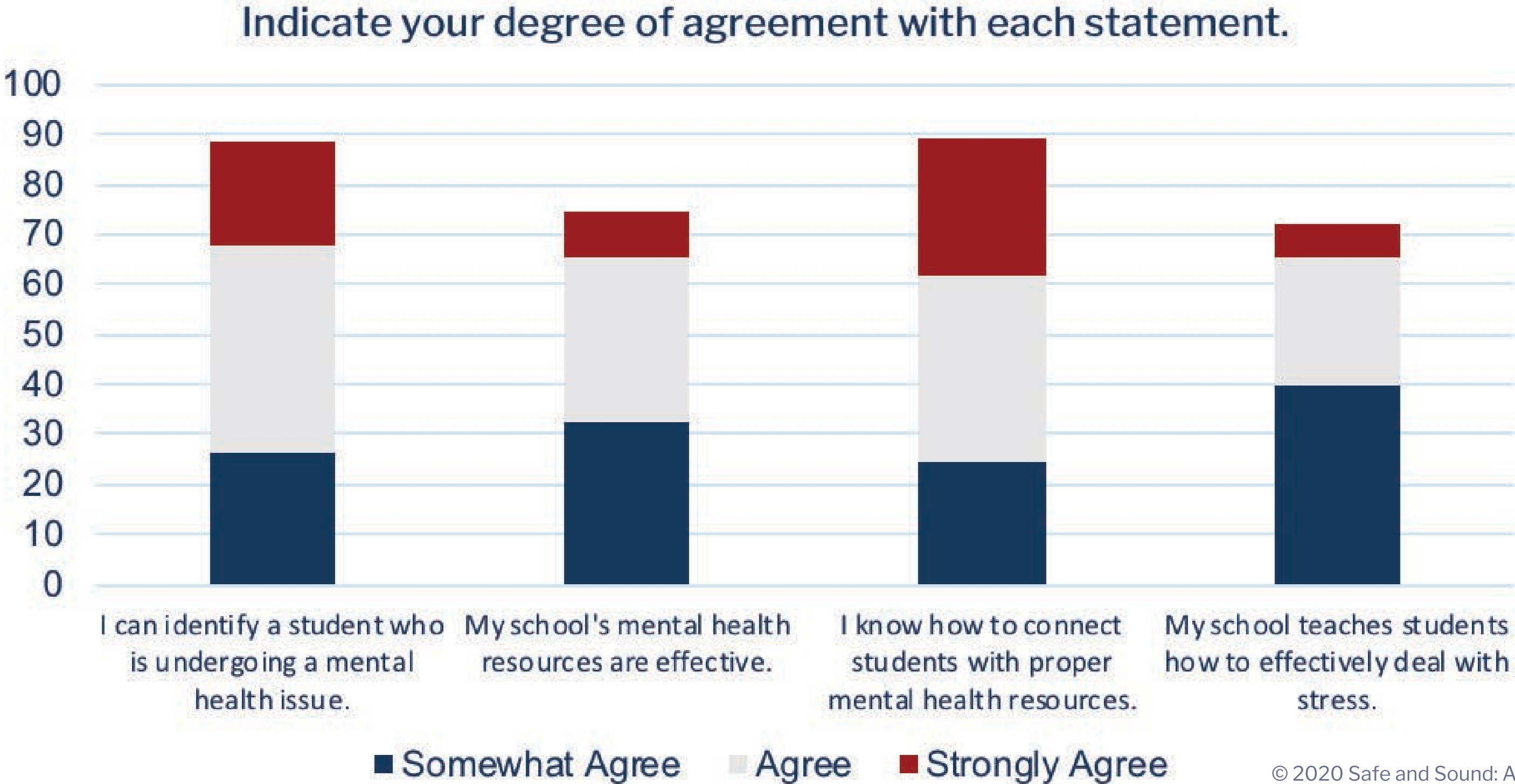


Mental & Behavioral Health

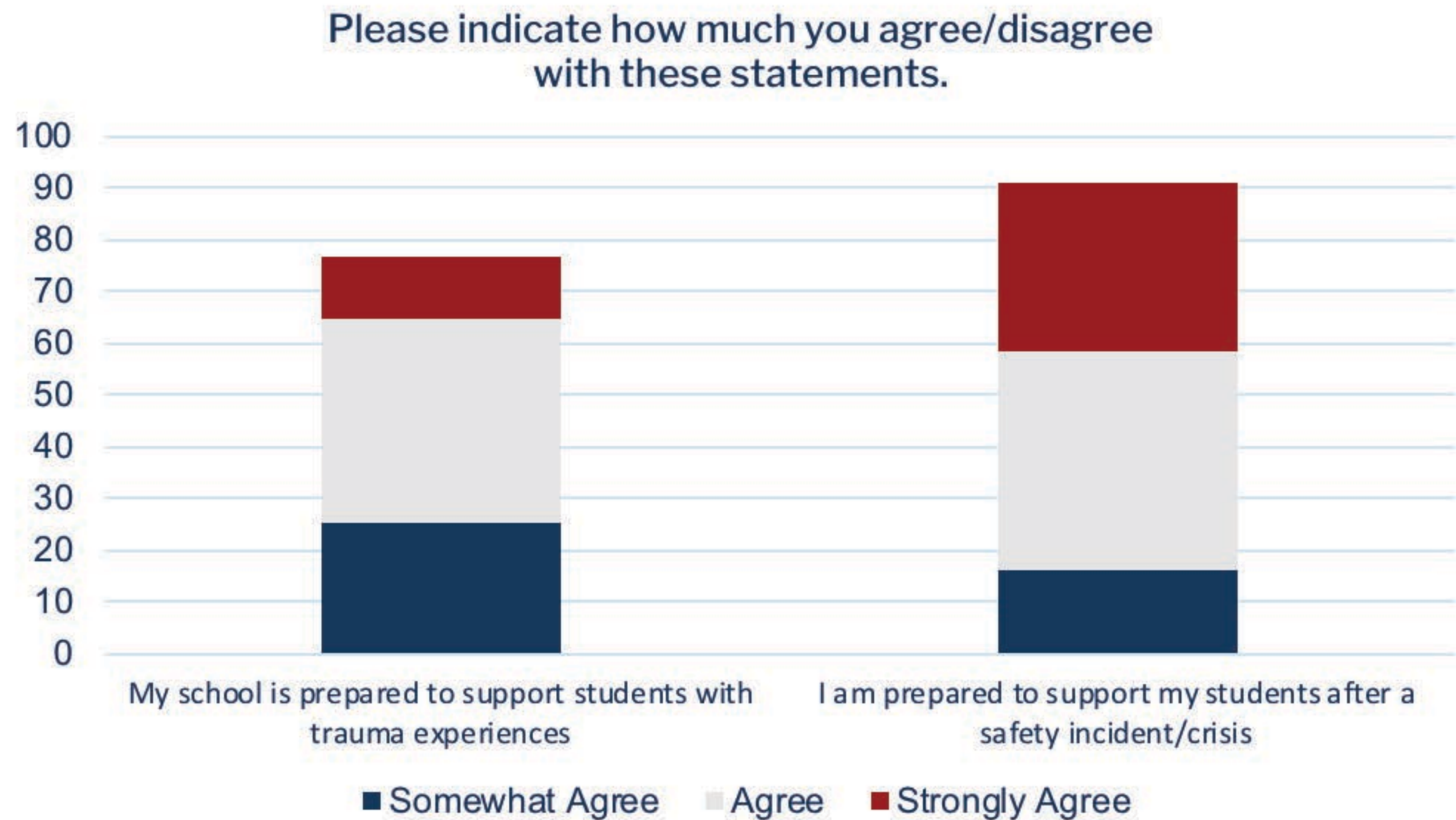
According to educators surveyed, the most prevalent mental and behavioral health services offered in schools are school counselor sessions, behavioral threat assessment and management, and behavioral interventions. There is definitely an opportunity to offer more breadth and consistency of services in schools.



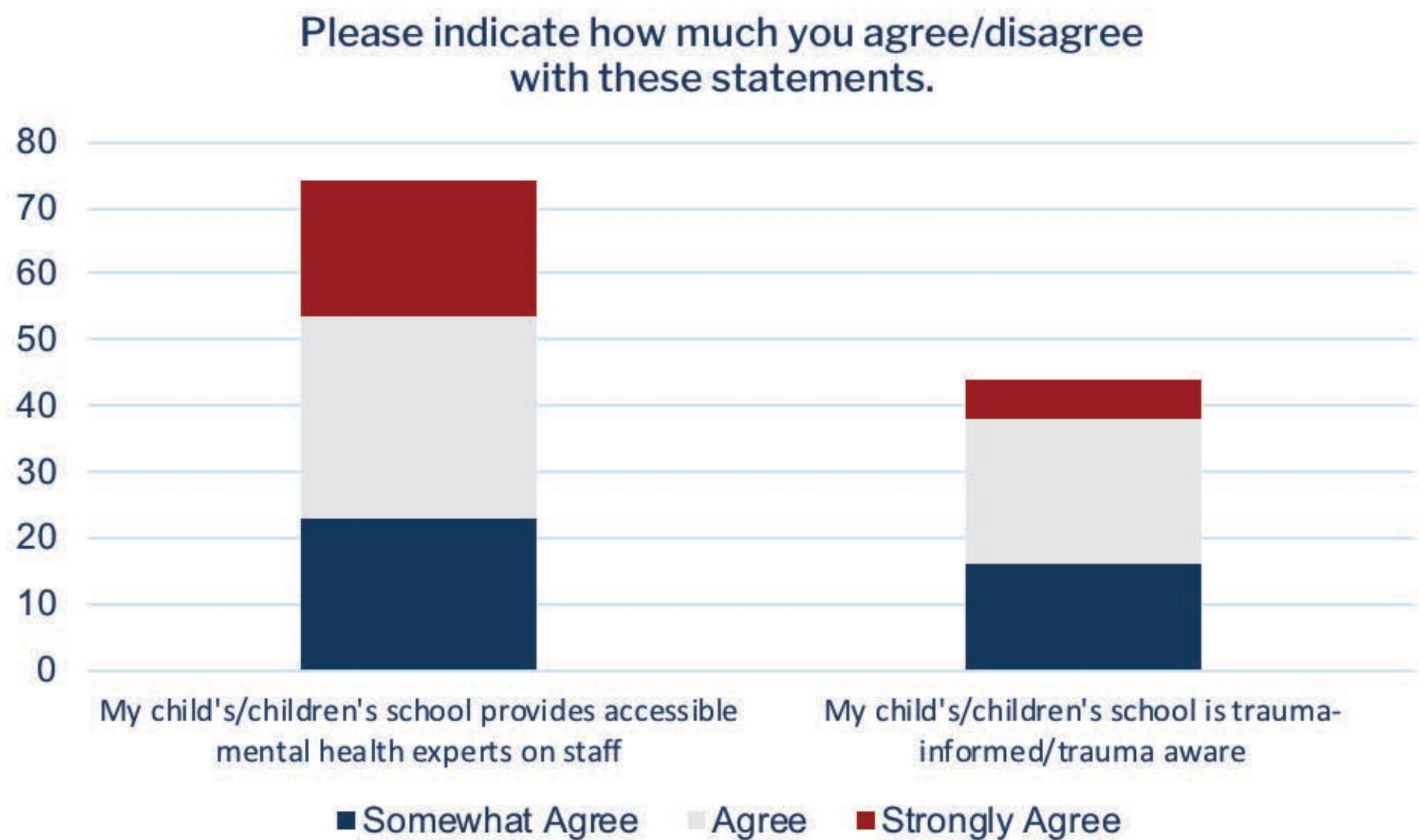
Educators reported that their school’s mental health resources are effective. However, educators do see mental health emergencies as a top safety threat (see Safety Threats section), and the second-top priority for budget allocations (see Leadership, Law and Policy section).



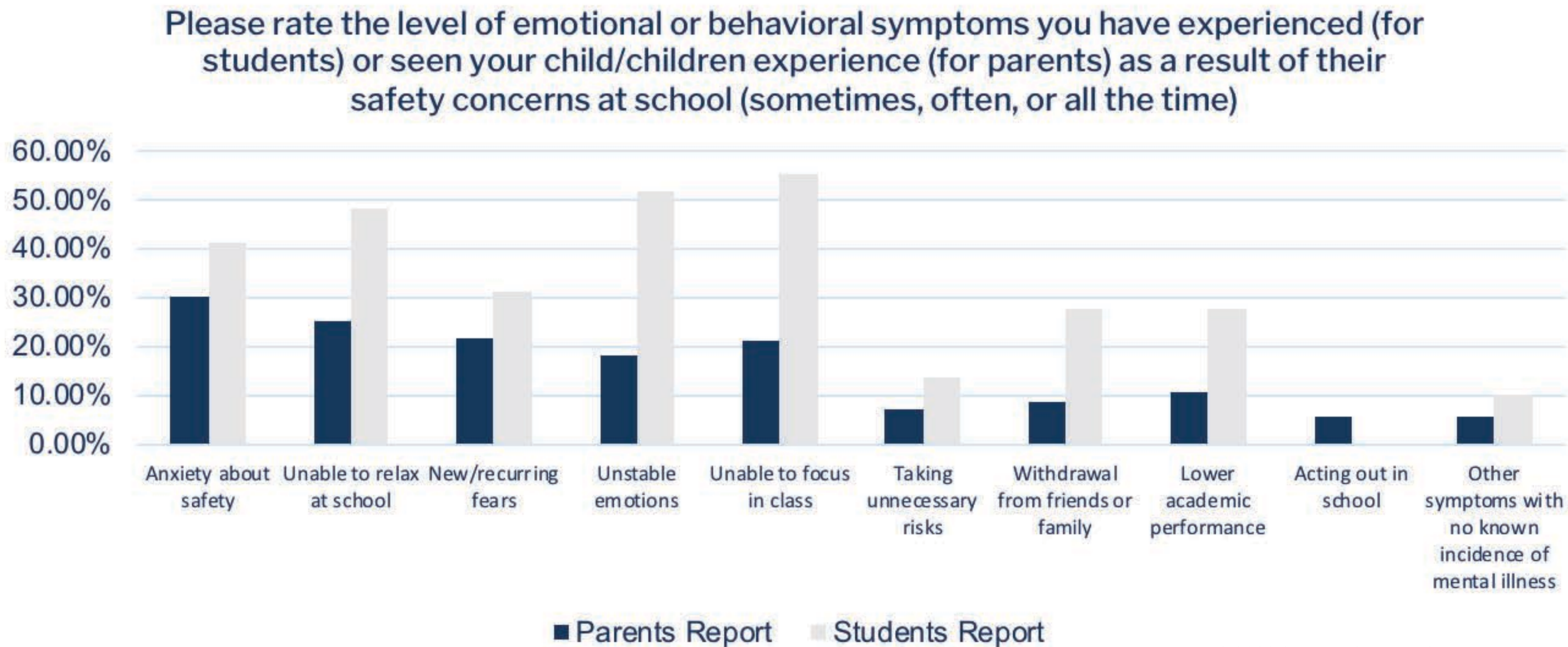
Educators rate their own capabilities in supporting students who have experienced trauma higher than parents rated them. This gap presents an opportunity to share more with parents about educator training.



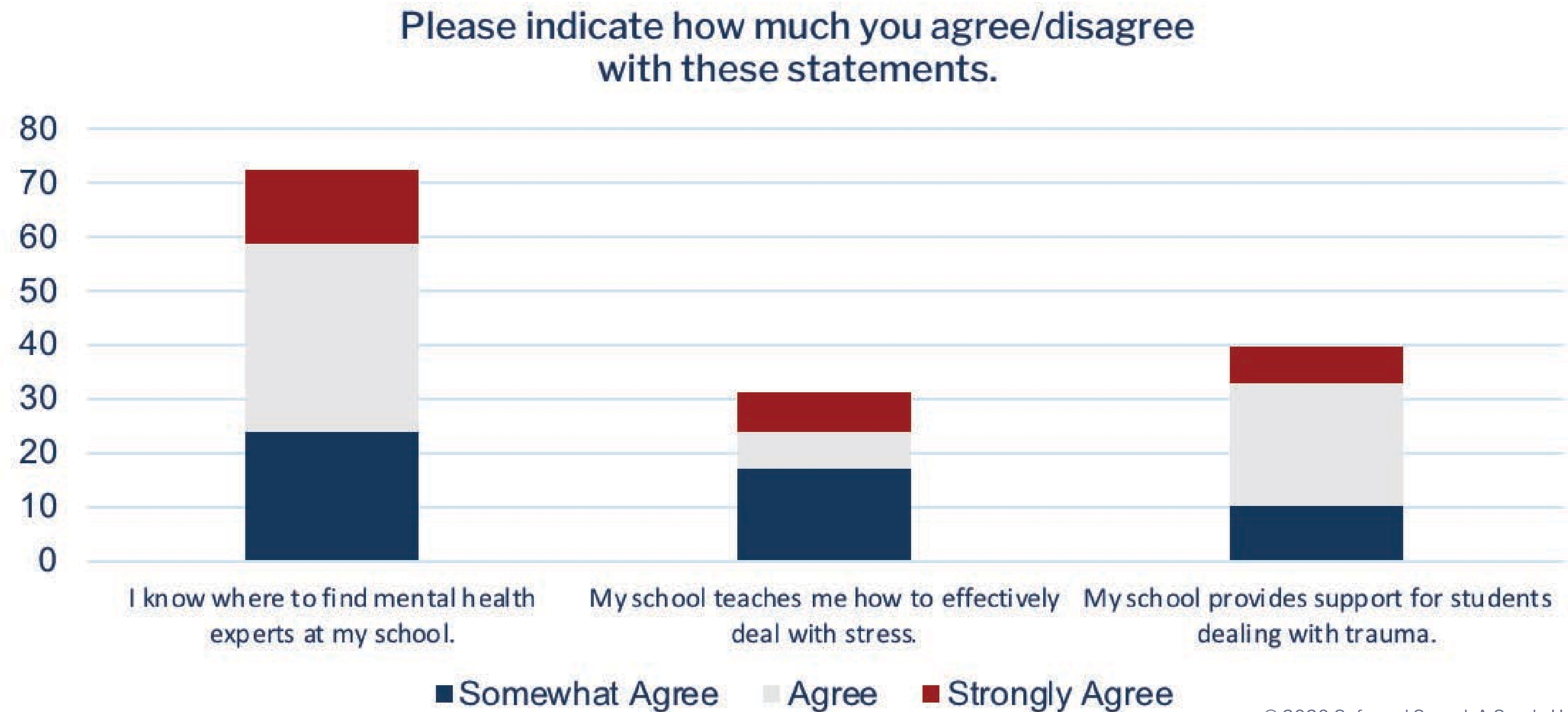
Parents agree their schools have mental health experts on staff, as compared to 2018, when only two-thirds of parent respondents knew if their schools provided adequate mental health staff. However, parents are not as confident as educators in the schools’ trauma-related capabilities.



Parents describe fewer emotional/behavioral symptoms of their children than students describe for themselves. Parents may not be fully aware of what their children are going through. Students with safety concerns are more likely to experience anxiety that may prohibit their ability to focus in class.



Even though most students know where to find mental health experts in school, most still do not think they are taught how to effectively deal with stress. Results are encouraging, however, as 2020 results are 10 percent higher than those from 2019, when only 21% of students thought the school teaches effective stress management.



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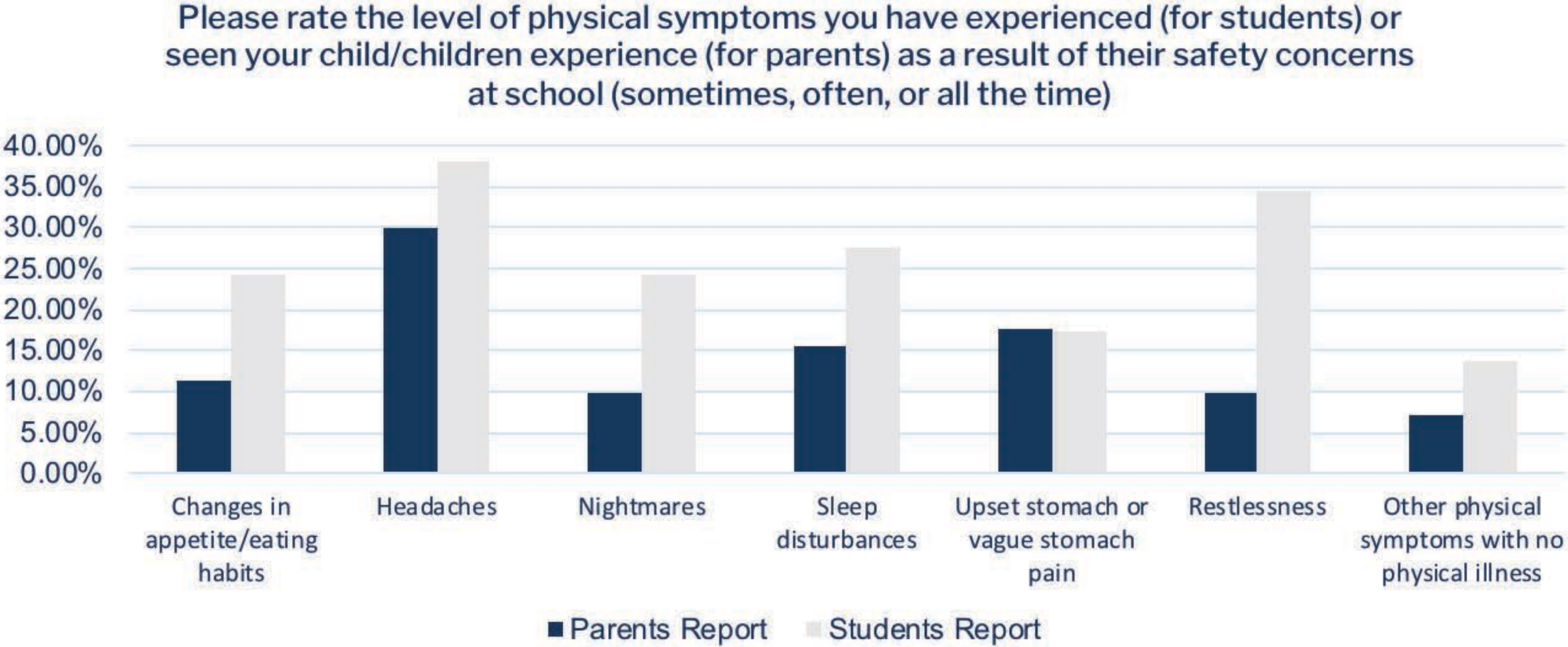
Progress is being made in our work supporting the mental and behavioral health needs of our schools. However, we need to continue to enhance existing efforts and strive to empower the whole school community to promote the mental wellness of our students.”

*Benjamin S. Fernandez, MS. Ed,
Loudoun County Public Schools*

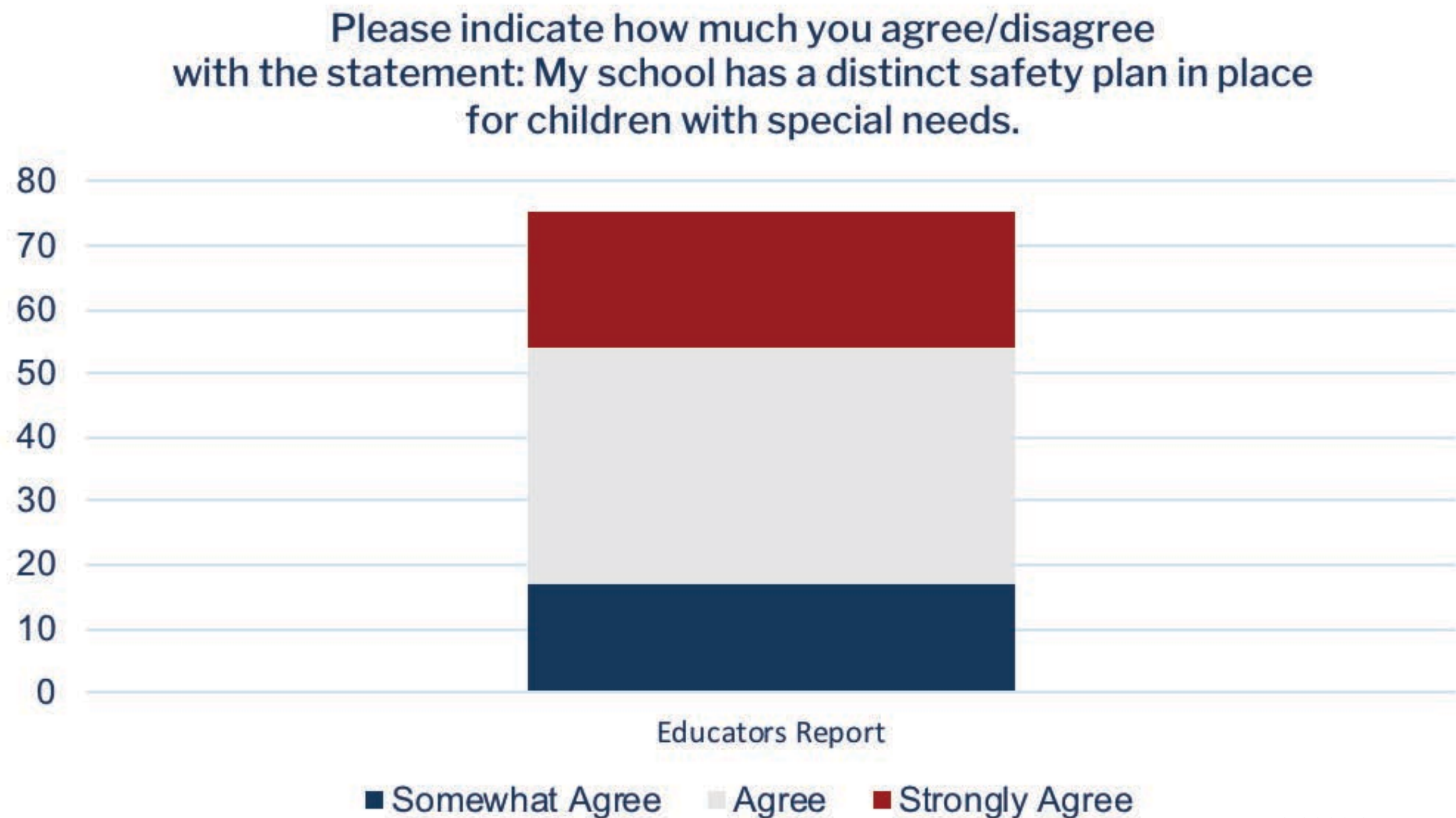


Health and Wellness

Parents describe fewer physical symptoms their children exhibit than students describe for themselves. Parents may not be fully aware of what their children are experiencing, in particular, restlessness and headaches.



While 21% of educators strongly agree that their school has a safety plan in place for children with special needs, there is a lot of room for improvement.



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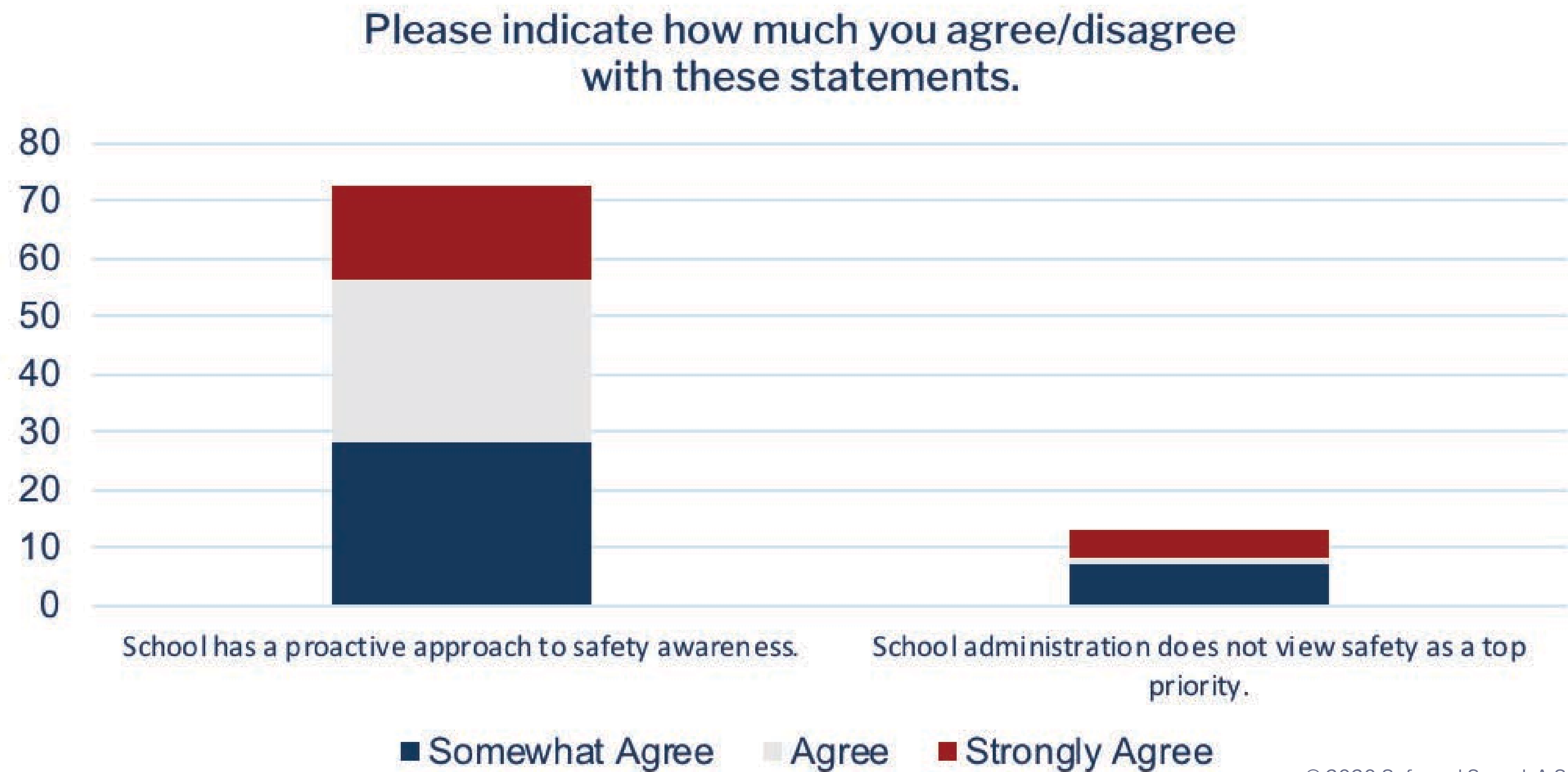
Mental health and wellness top the list of school safety desires of educators, students, and families. School nurses may be a student's first point of entry with mental health and wellness concerns. School nurses are vital members of student services teams and play an active role in student mental wellness promotion, mental health screening, and early intervention programs."

*Donna Mazyck, MS, RN, NCSN, CAE
Executive Director, National Association of School Nurses*

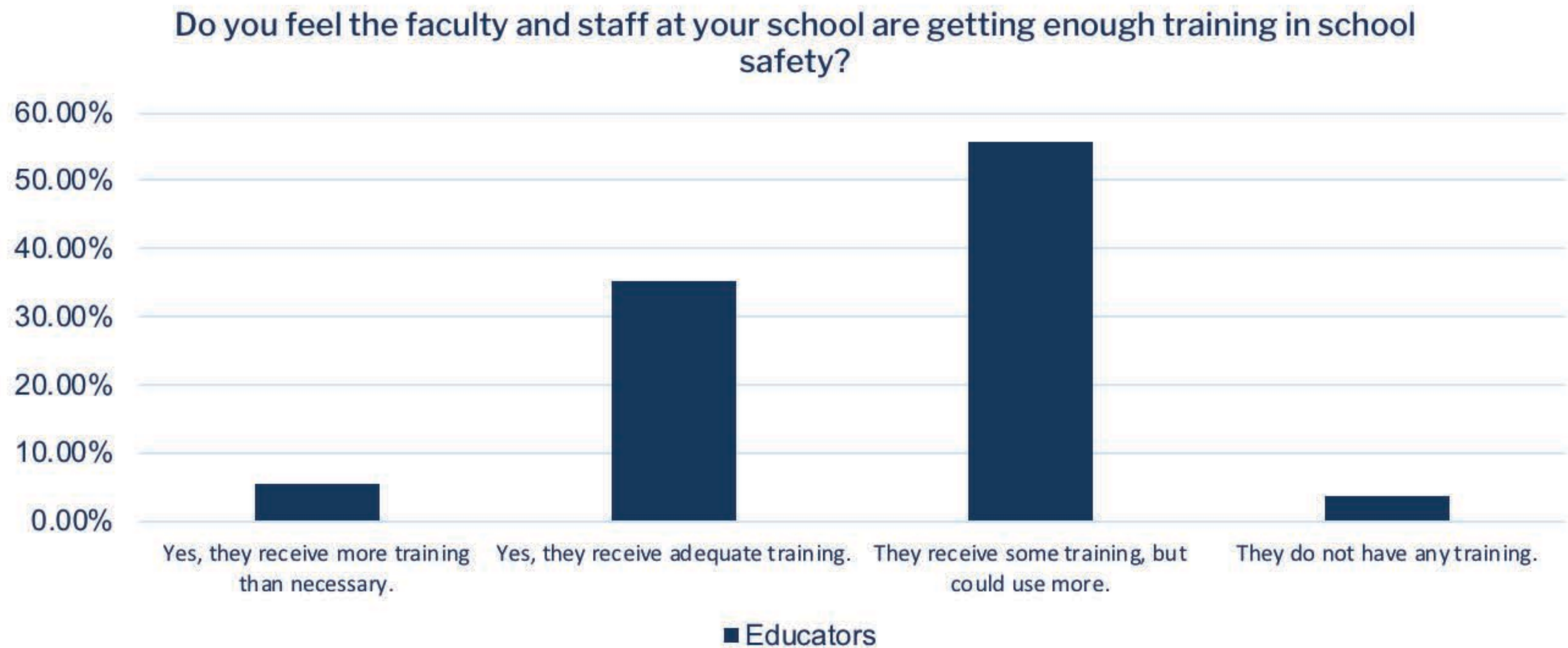


Leadership, Law & Policy

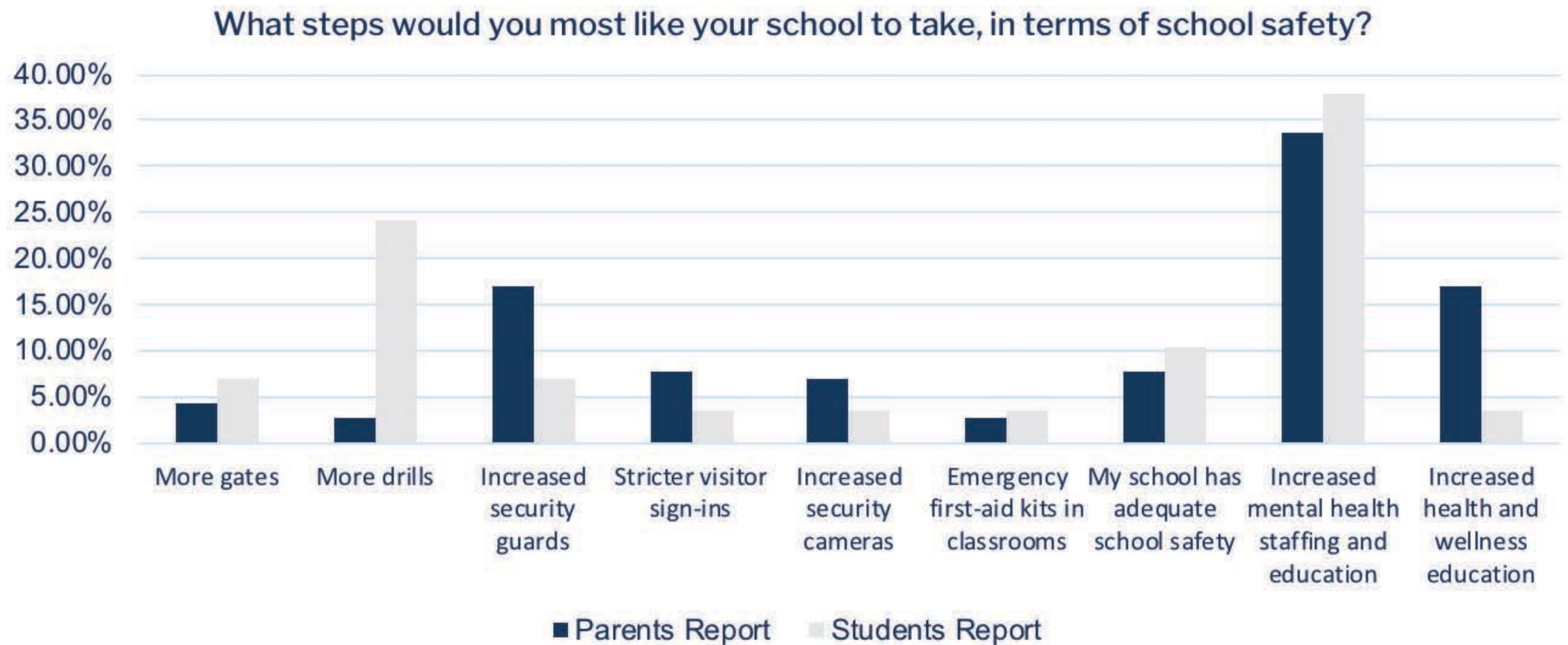
Parents generally agree that their child’s/children’s school takes a proactive approach to safety awareness, with very few respondents feeling the school does not view safety as a top priority.



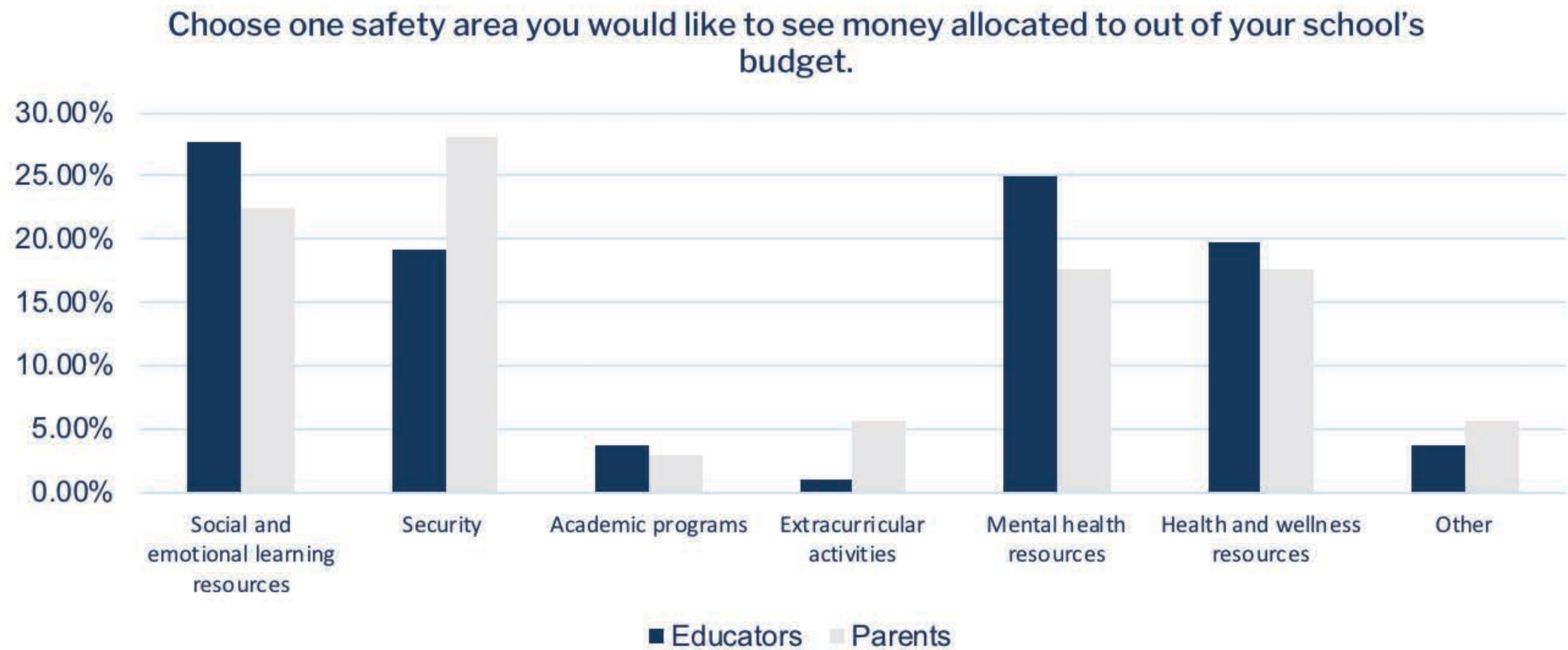
Over 55% of educators in this survey believe they could receive more school safety training.



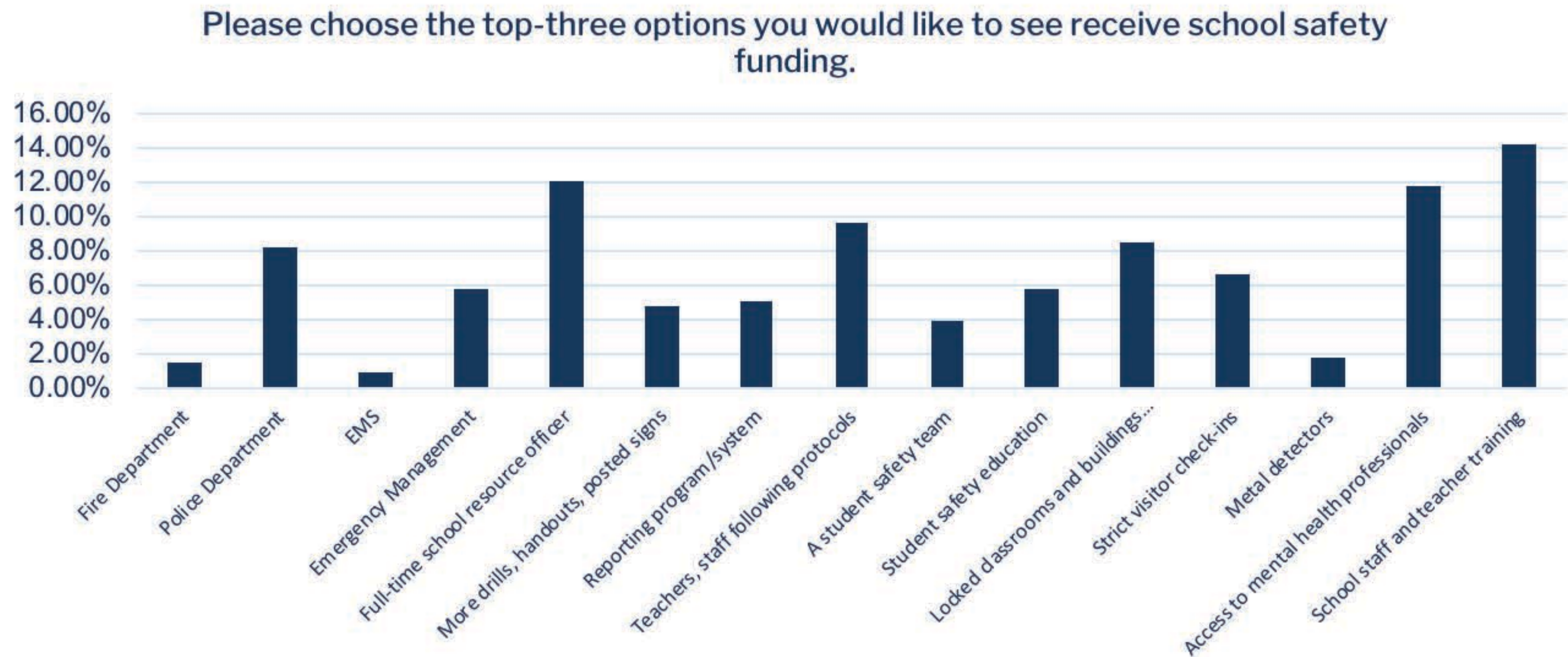
Parents and students are aligned on what steps they would most like schools to take to improve safety: increased mental health staffing and education. Students would next like to see schools provide more safety drills, whereas parents would like to see increased security guards and increased health and wellness education.



When it comes to budget allocations, educators wish to see future investments in social and emotional learning and mental health resources, while parents would like to see more money for security. These findings are consistent with 2019 results.



Given their focus, public safety officials had several specific priorities for funding: faculty training, hiring a full-time school resource officer, and access to mental health professionals.



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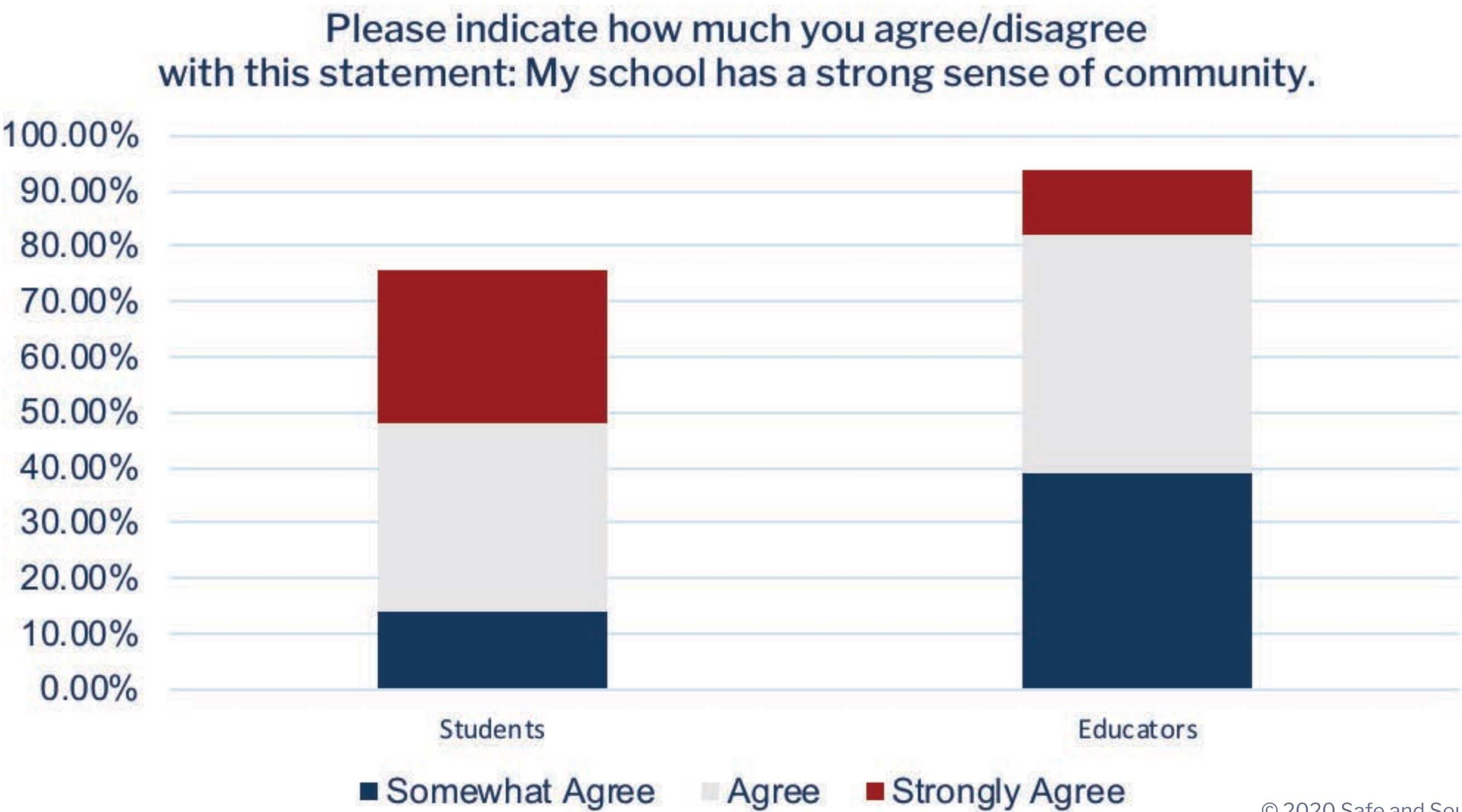
Schools have the attention of the Nation right now and there has never been a better time to focus on school safety. Parents recognize the work by school and district leaders to take student safety seriously. There has never been a more critical time to focus on the mental health needs of our children. Schools can be positioned to play a valuable role in connecting families to the appropriate mental health resources."

Dr. Brad Welle, Ed.D Deputy Superintendent

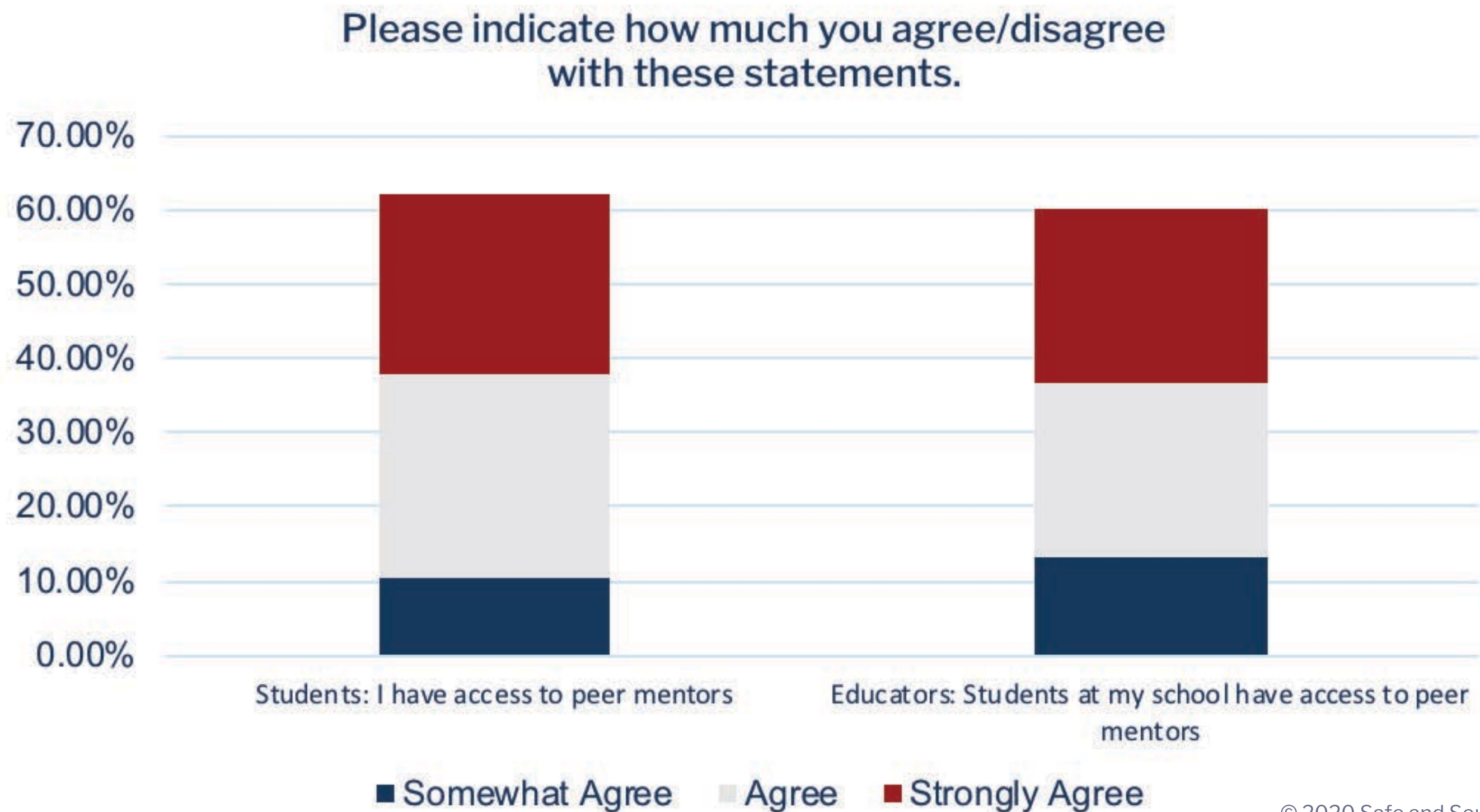


Culture, Climate & Community

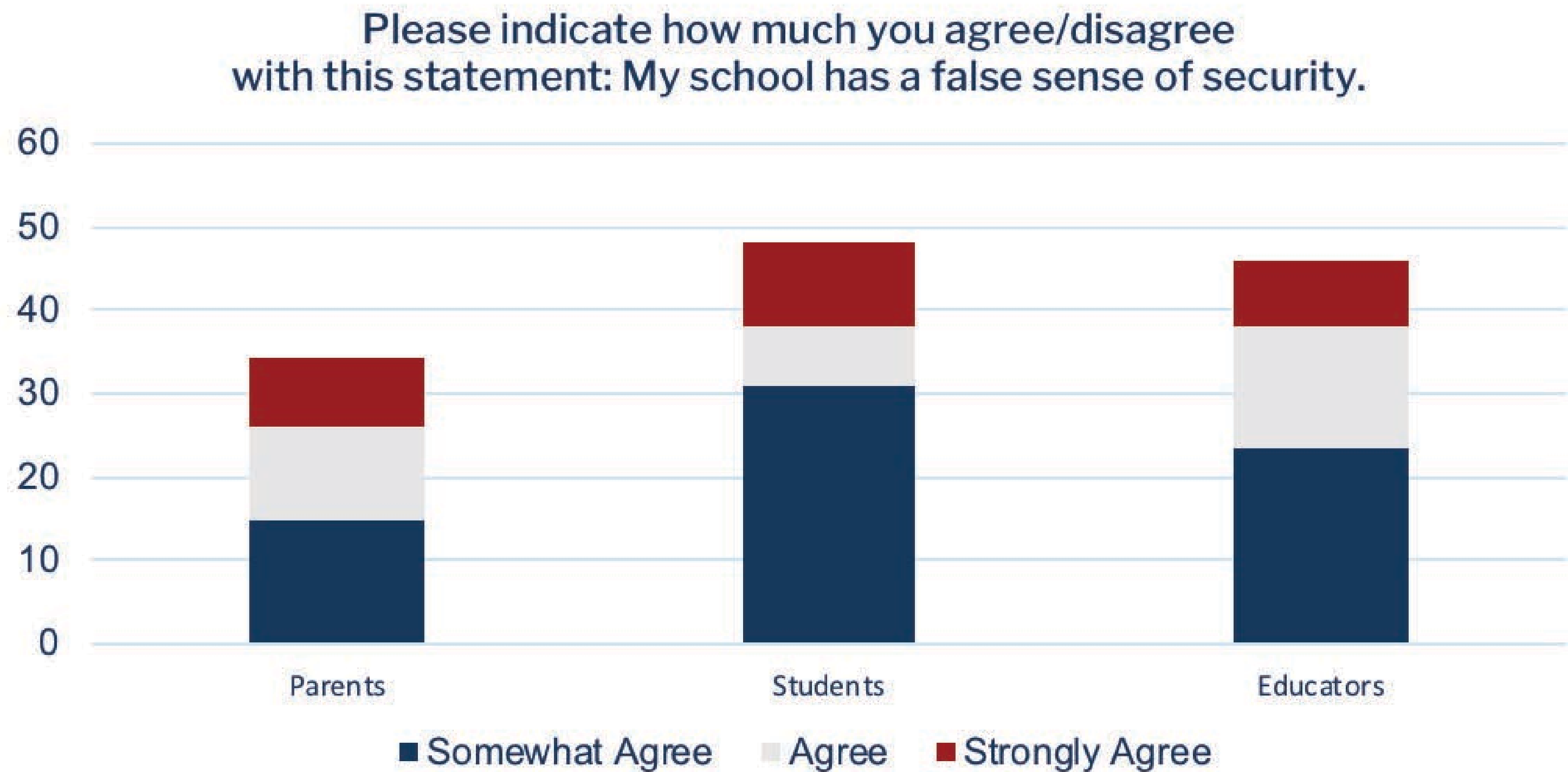
Educators report a stronger sense of community than students, which presents an opportunity to proactively reach out to and include students.



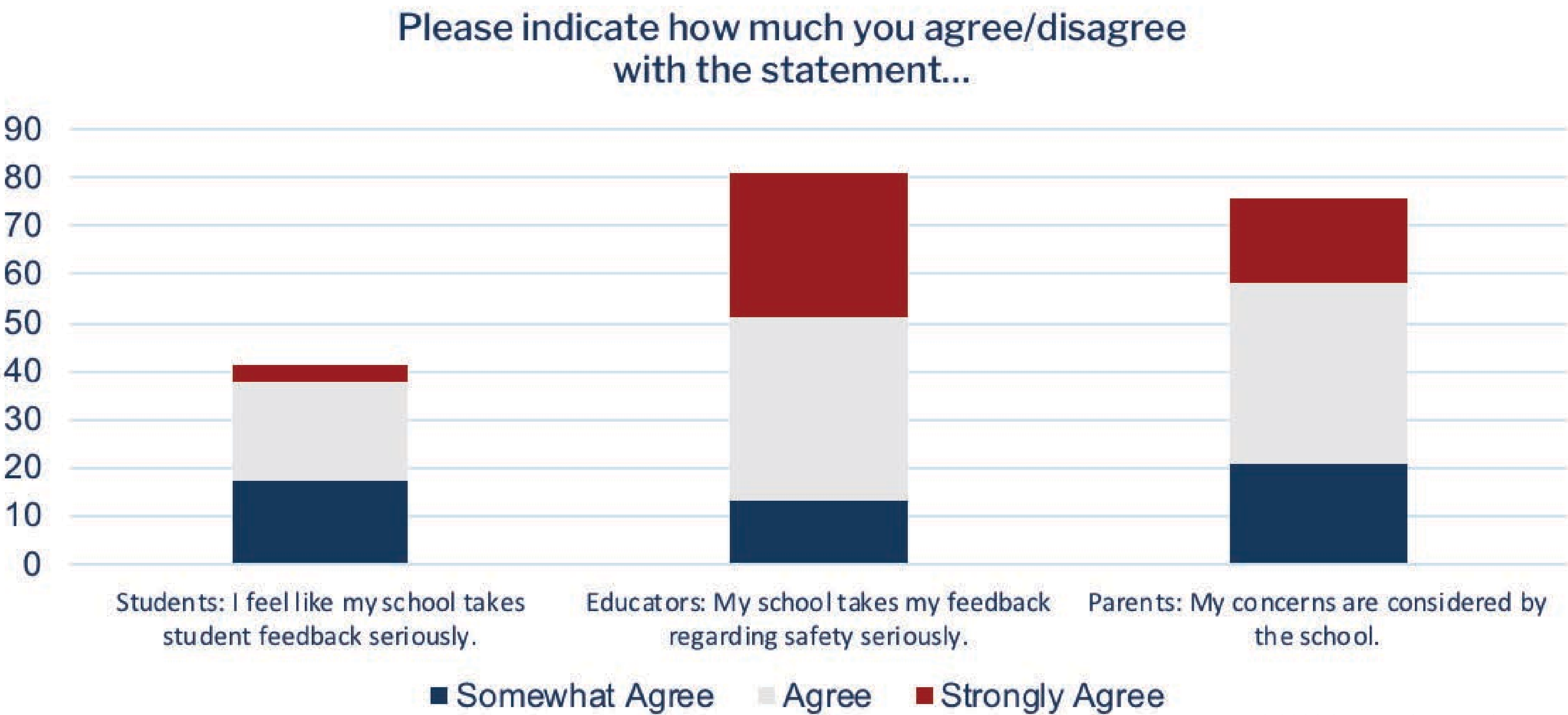
Students and educators agree on the access to peer mentors, which are important support systems for building a sense of community. Feedback illustrates an opportunity to grow the presence of these programs further.



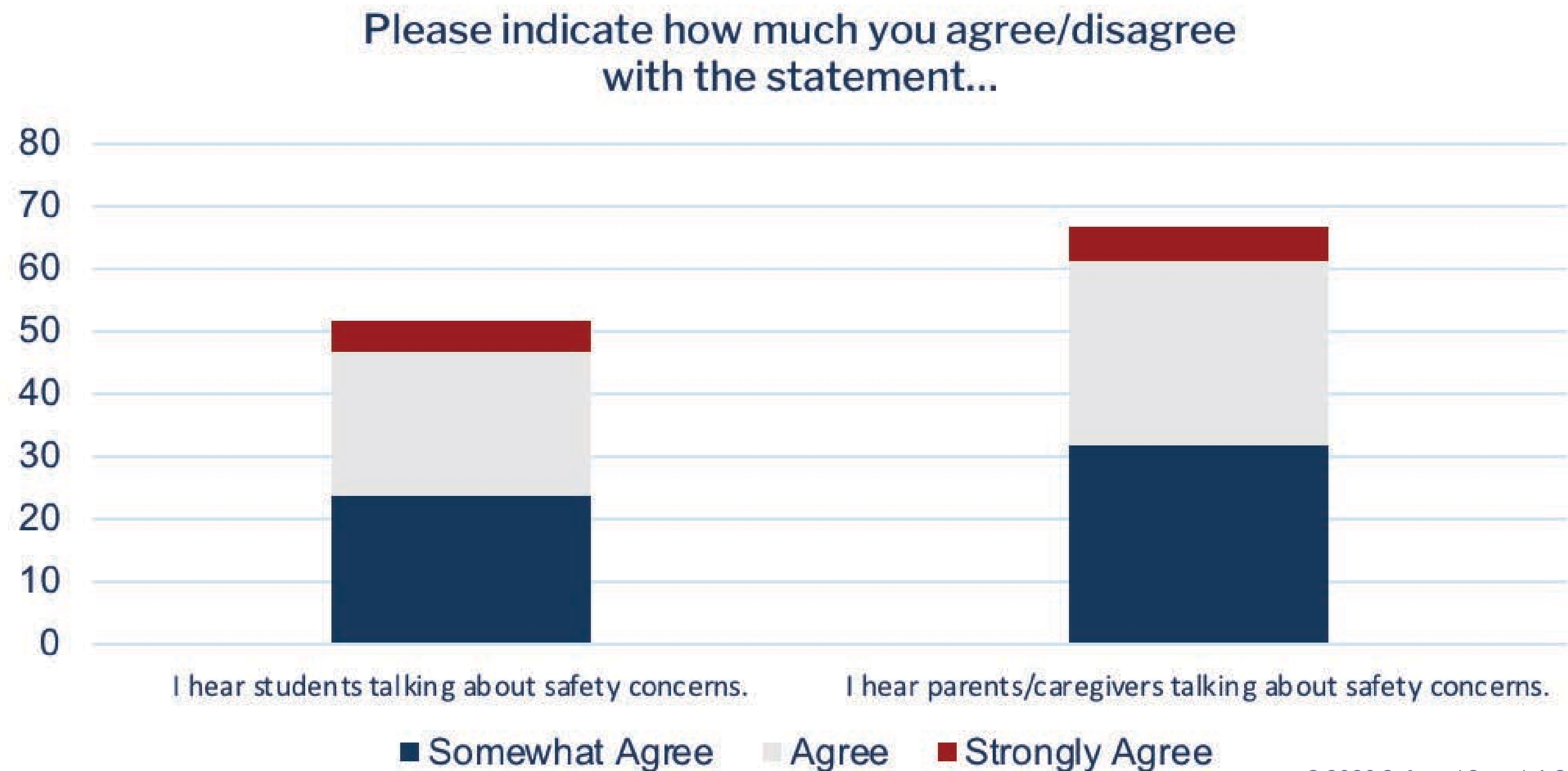
Students and educators still somewhat feel their school has a false sense of security. 2020 results are optimistic, as students have shown a slight year-over-year decline in this sentiment. Educator sentiment is consistent with 2019. This is the first year the report asked parents.



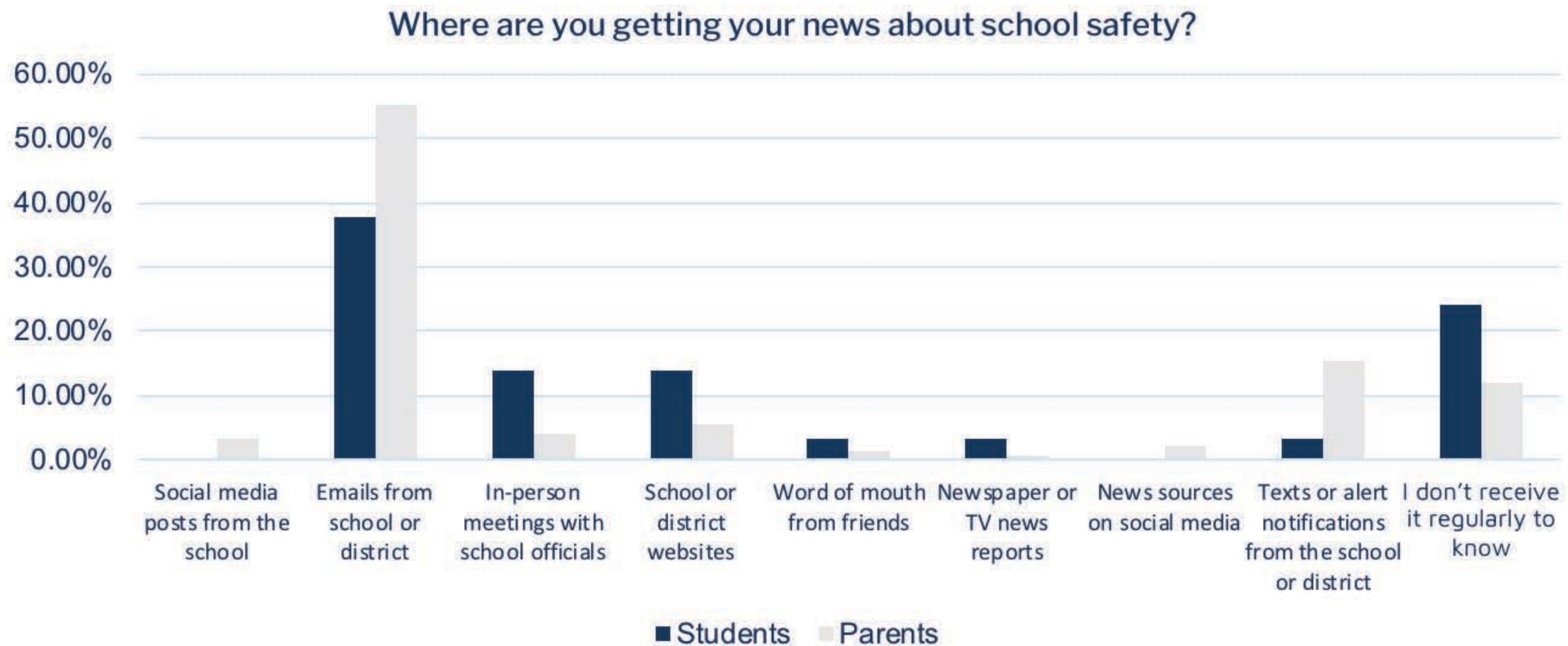
Educators have a high net agree (>80%) that their school takes feedback regarding safety seriously, followed closely by parents. Students, however, do not have as much agreement with the statement. This could be due to a lack of transparency and communication, or a culture issue. These results are consistent with 2019 findings. The 2020 survey was the first year asking parents this question.



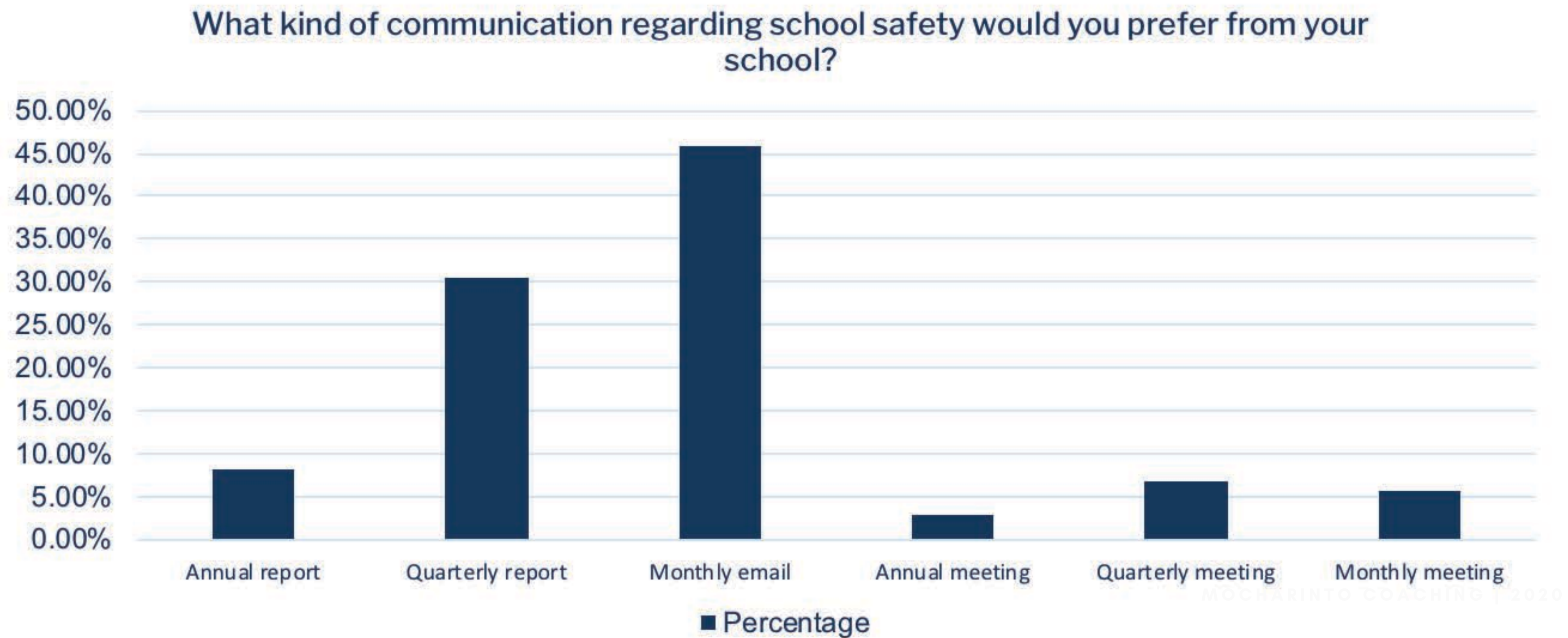
Educators have important perspective to share on how students and parents are feeling about the state of school safety in their community.



Email communication about school safety is the top information source for both parents and students. Note, nearly one quarter of student respondents say they do not receive news regularly. This is an opportunity to improve communication with students.



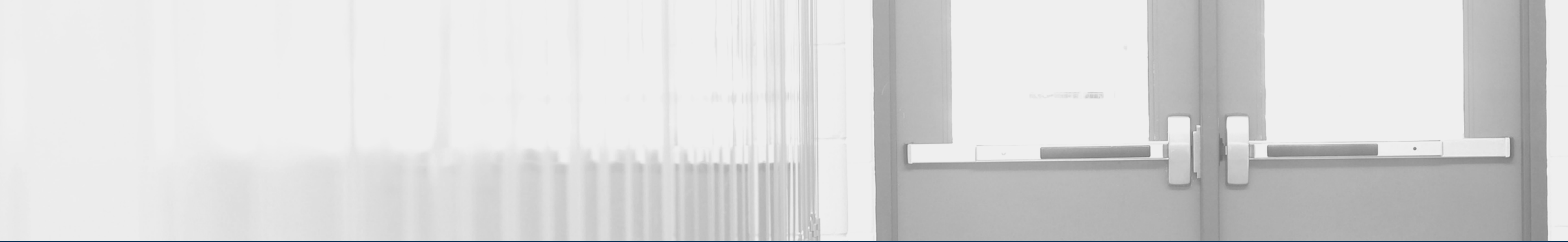
Parents would prefer learning about school safety through a monthly email. Schools should consider their preferences when drafting communication calendars. (Future surveys will also ask students for their communication preferences.)



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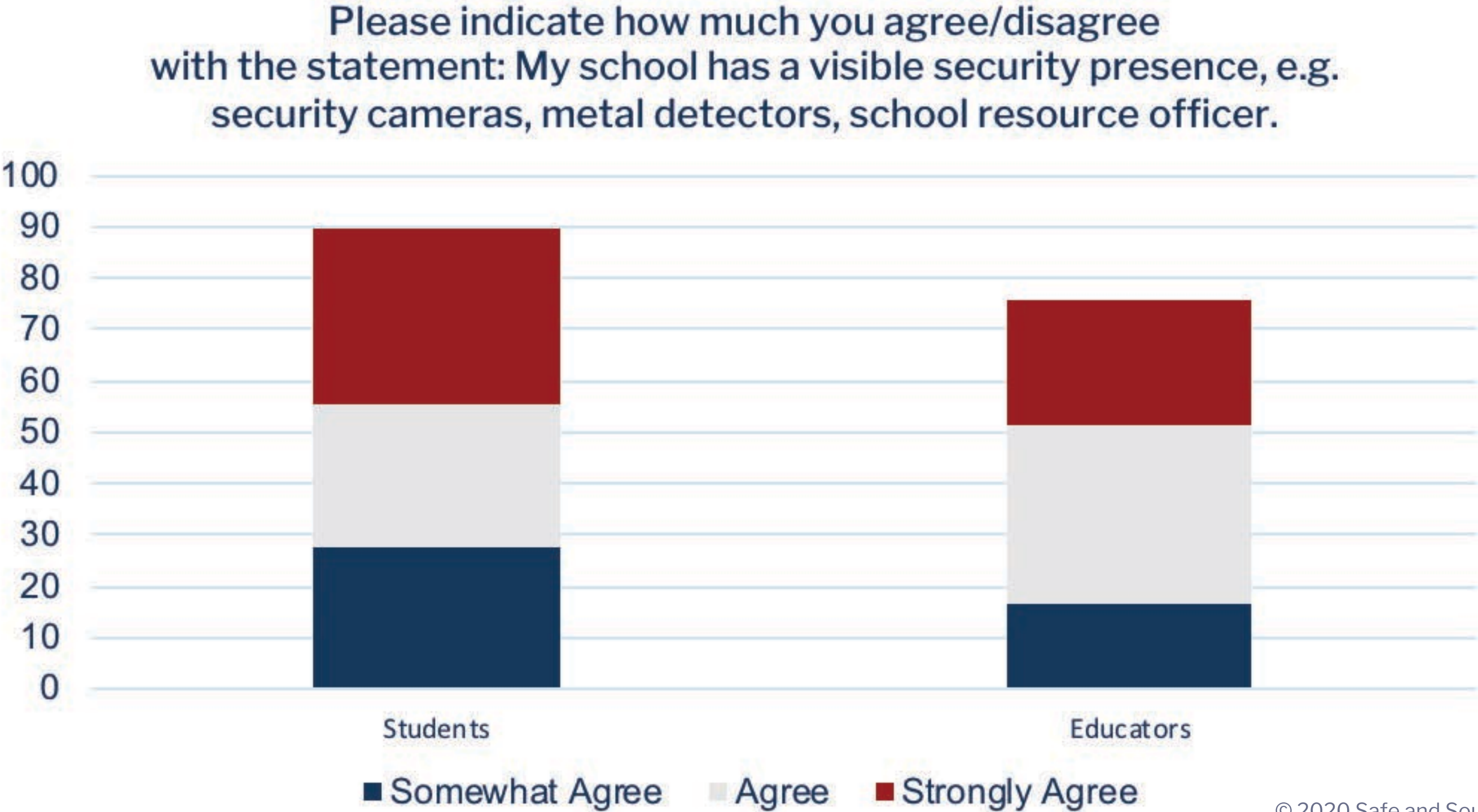
"School Safety in 2020 has taken on a whole new meaning. Safe to Learn in person or online means we have to build consistent social norms of safety while engaging and empowering students and parents to be part of the solution. In our response to the COVID19 Event consistency is essential in our response to creating safe and healthy schools and communities. Prevention and Response are integrated and the need for partnership and collaboration must be a priority. Now more than ever student and school safety is Everyone's Responsibility. Modeling best practice safety practices during in person learning and during remote learning accelerate the change of behavior we are looking for in our students to mitigate the impact of COVID19. Incorporating messages of prevention surrounding digital behavior is essential, teaching each individual how to identify concerning or unsafe behavior on social media along with safe reporting is part of a comprehensive safety and prevention plan."

*Susan Payne, Founder & Former Executive Director
of Safe2Tell & National School Safety Expert*



Physical Environment

Students and educators report having a visible security presence in their schools.



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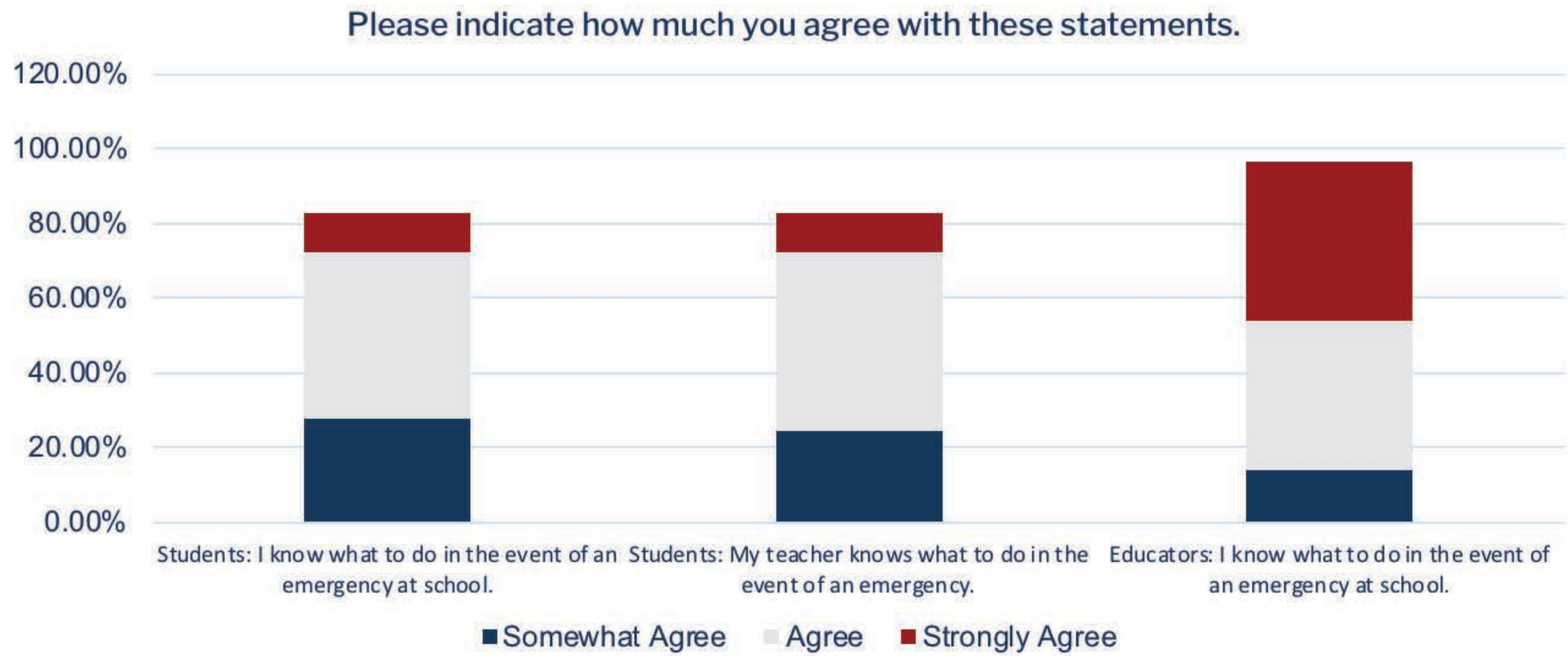
While a visible security presence is not necessarily a true indicator of protection effectiveness, it is encouraging to see elevated perception levels. School administrators can build on those levels by maintaining/optimizing systems, fostering a culture of safety awareness and educating stakeholders in practices that will contribute to the effectiveness of the security measures.

Paul Timm, PSP, Facility Engineering Associate, P.C.



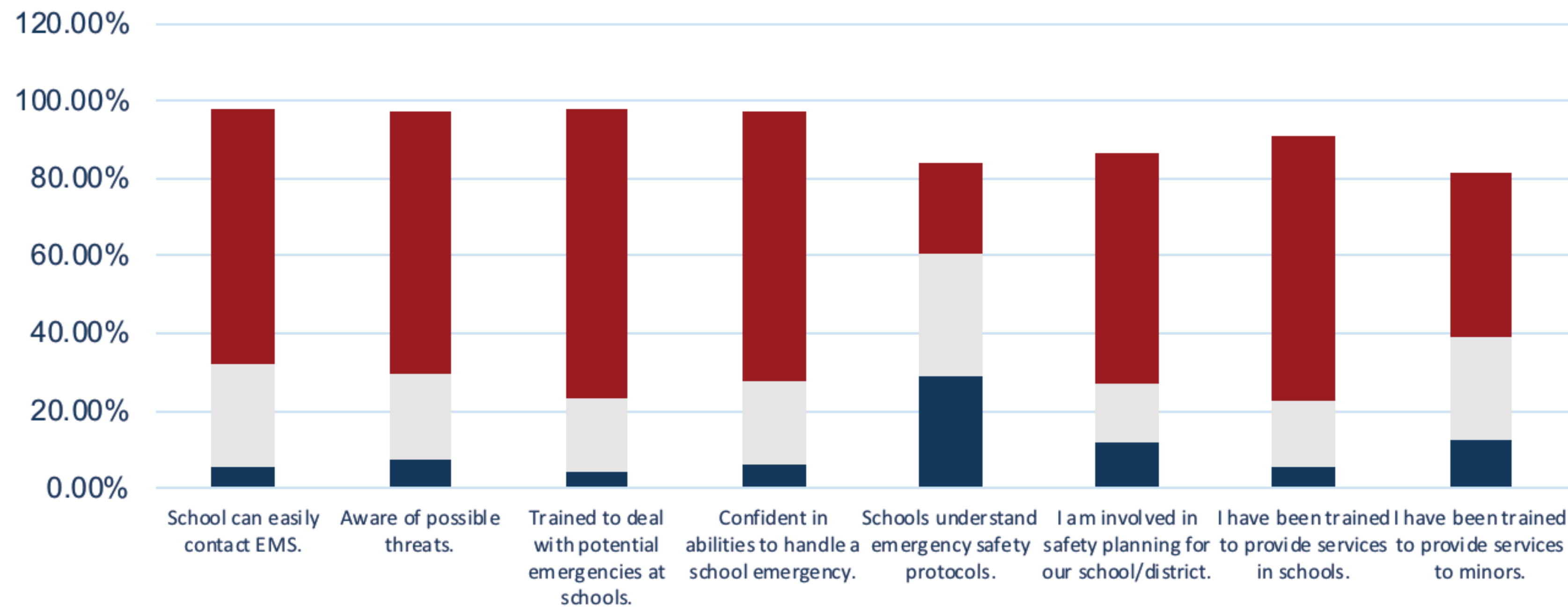
Operations & Emergency Management

Students and educators report feeling prepared about their ability to know how to respond to emergency situations.

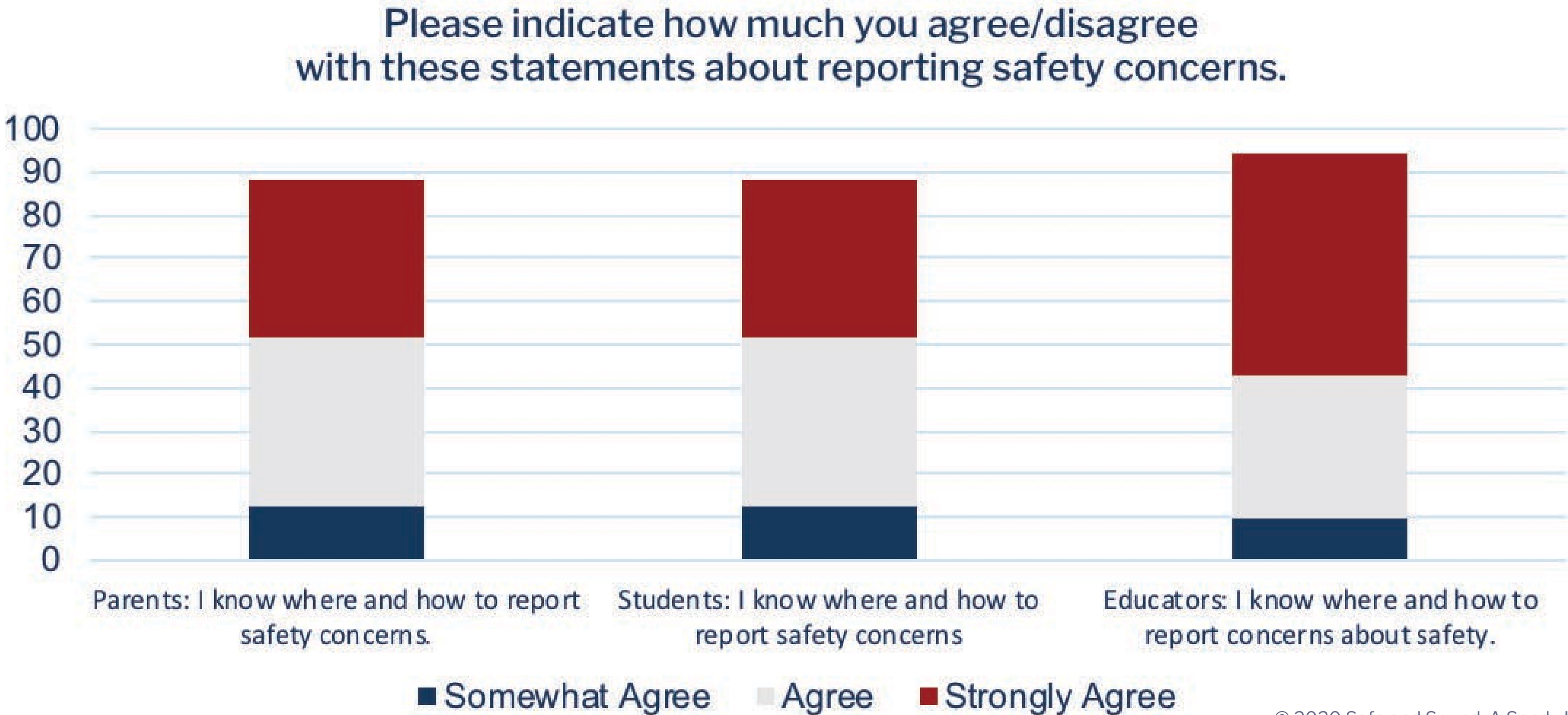


Overall, public safety officials feel very positive about the preparedness and assurance of school safety. However, there is an opportunity to improve school’s understanding of safety protocols.

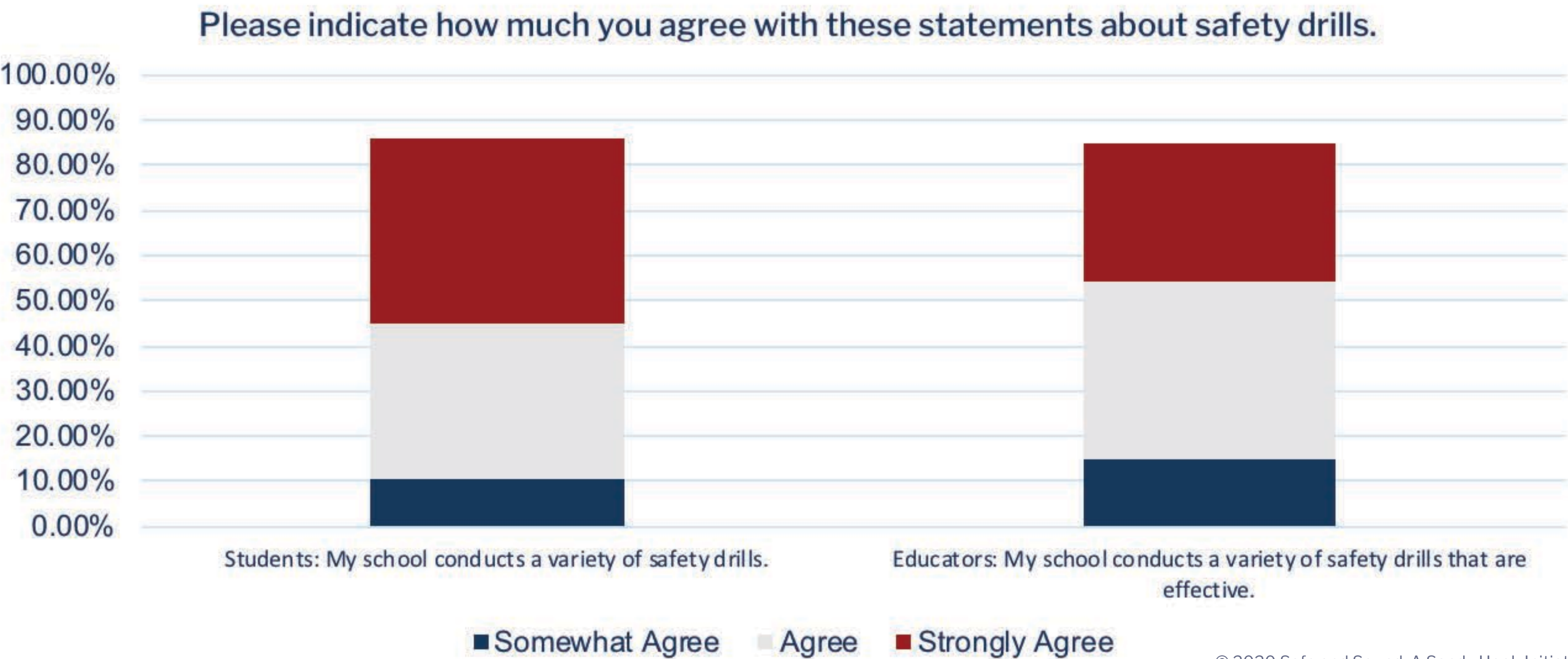
Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements.



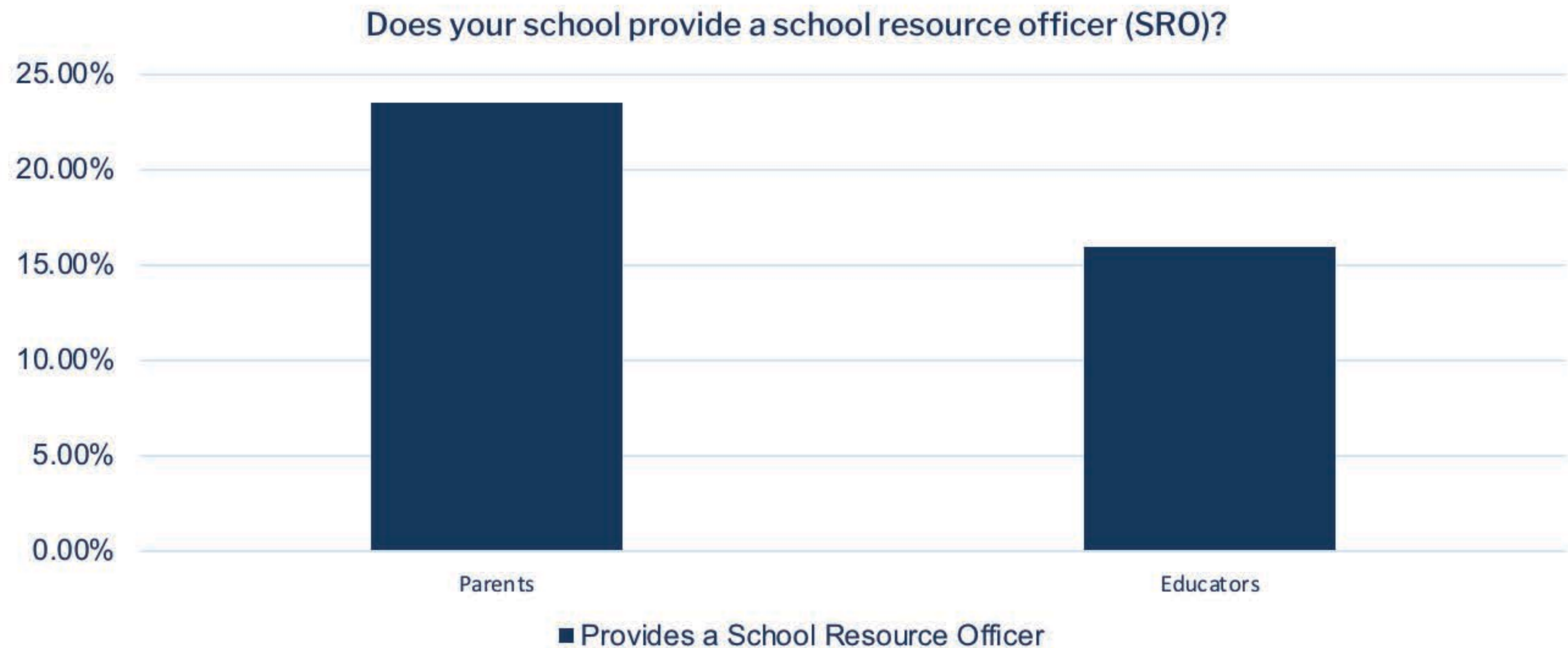
Parents, students and educators are confident about how to report safety concerns, yet when educators responded to this question, only 22% said their school provides a way to report safety concerns. This indicates school communities are relying on ad-hoc channels to report safety concerns.



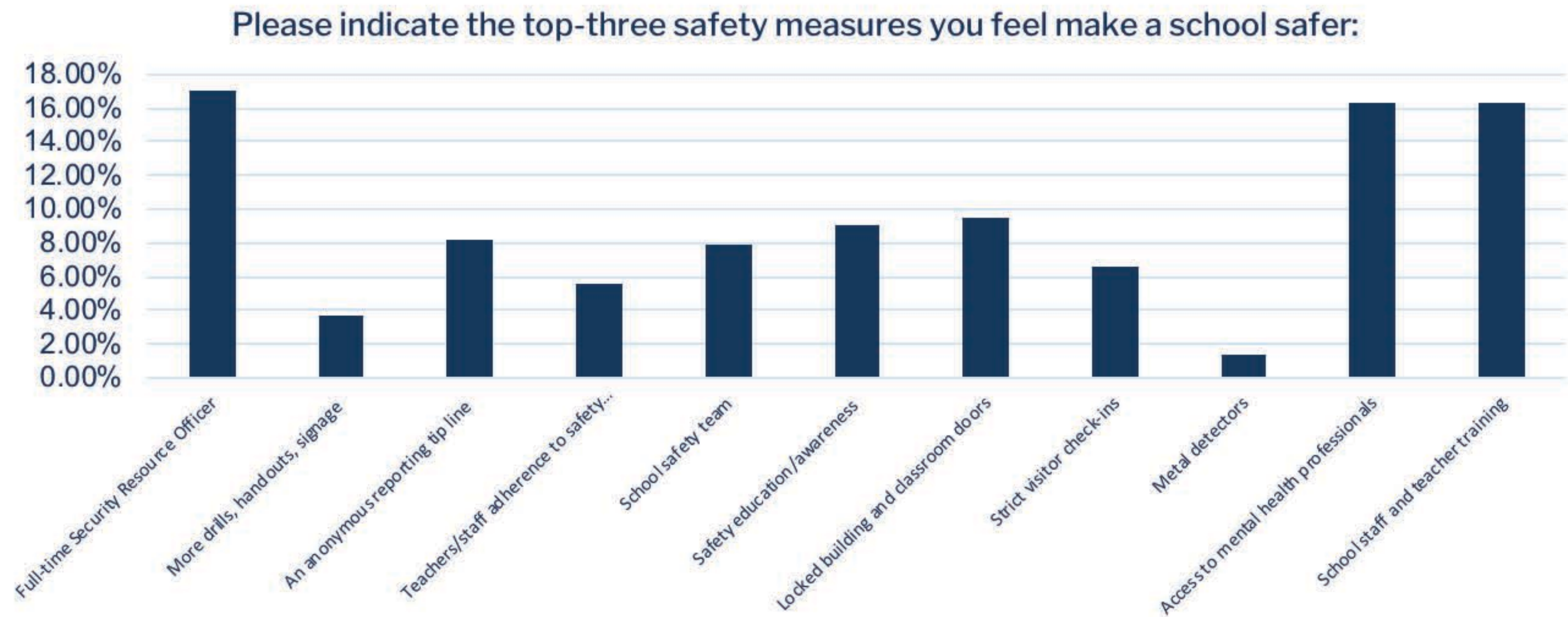
Students and educators show a high level of agreement about the variety of safety drills conducted. In 2018, only 49% of students and 68% of educators agreed with this statement, suggesting an increase in the prevalence and breadth of safety drills.



Survey respondents show there is significant room for opportunity to engage a school resource officer to help with protecting schools.

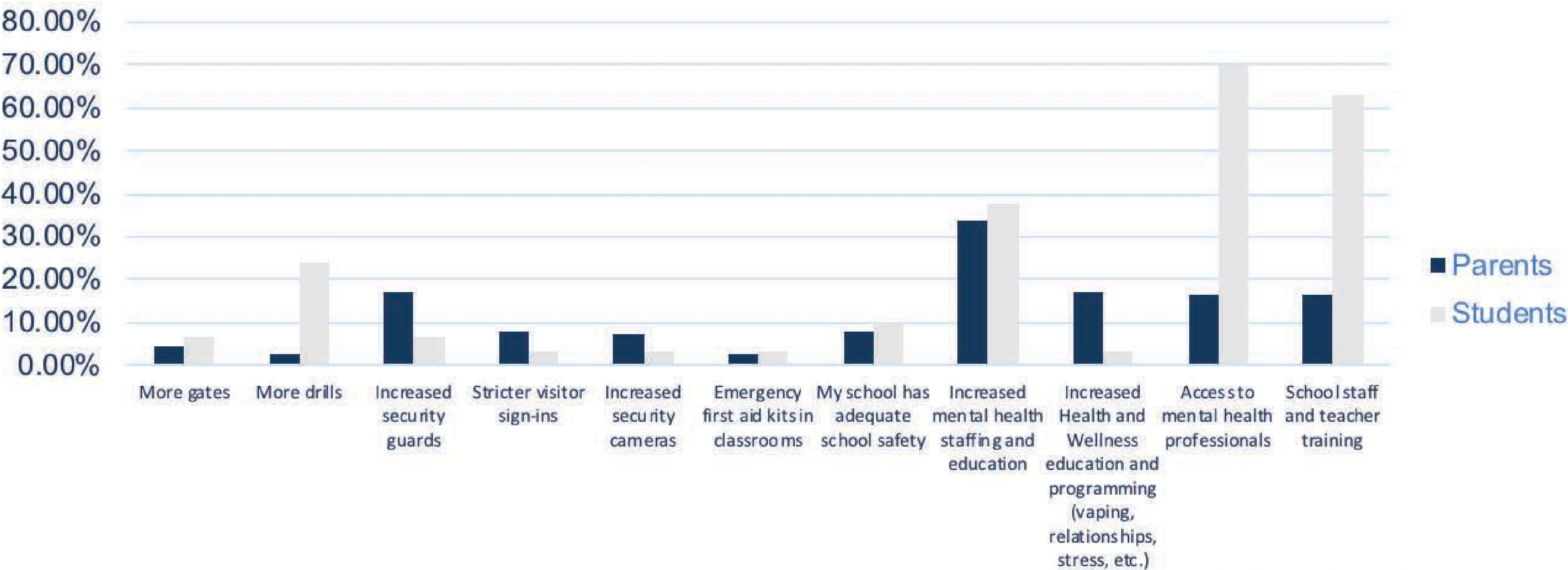


Parents like to see a full-time school resource officer, access to mental health professionals, and school staff and teacher training to make their schools feel safer. It could be that schools are taking action, but are not communicating it.

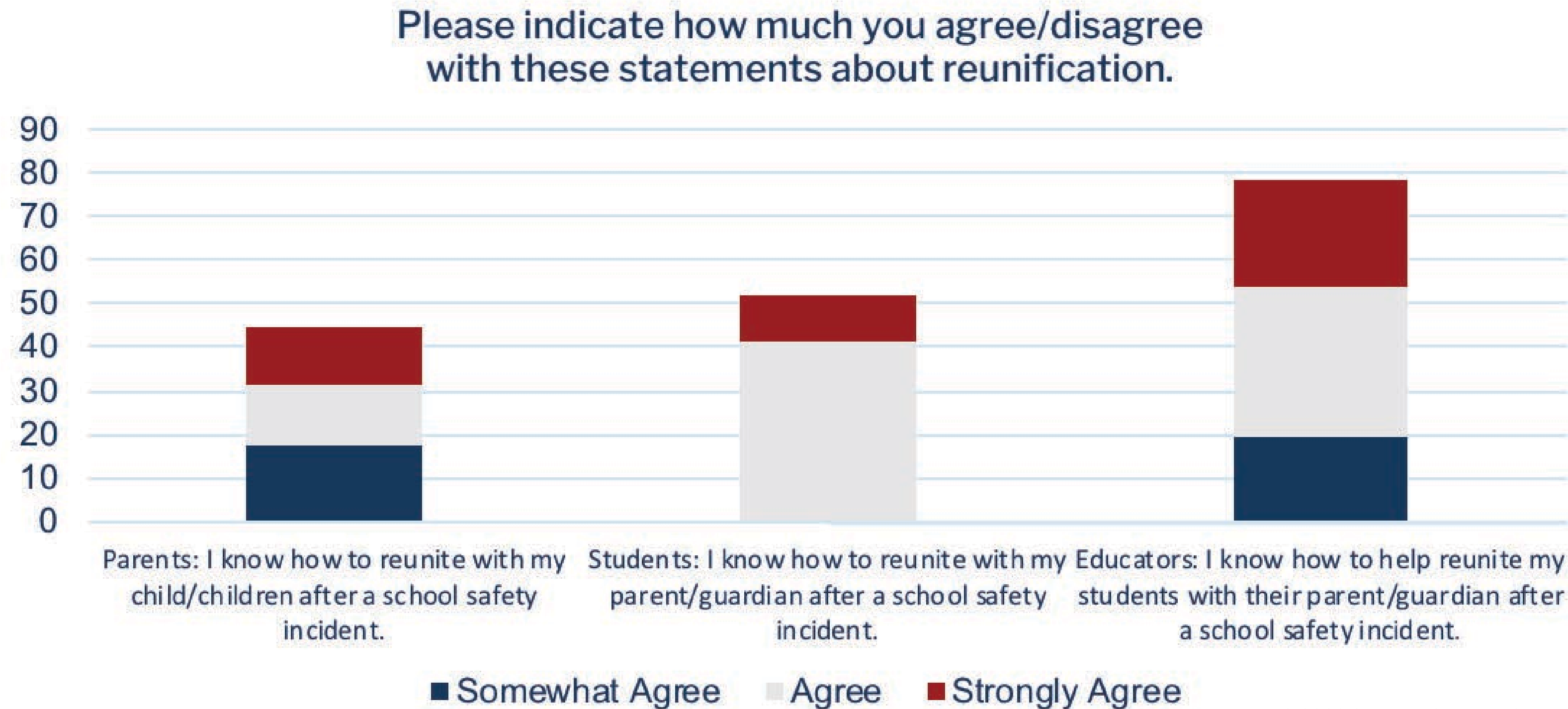


Parents and students recognize the need to continue to address mental health support in schools, as well as additional training.

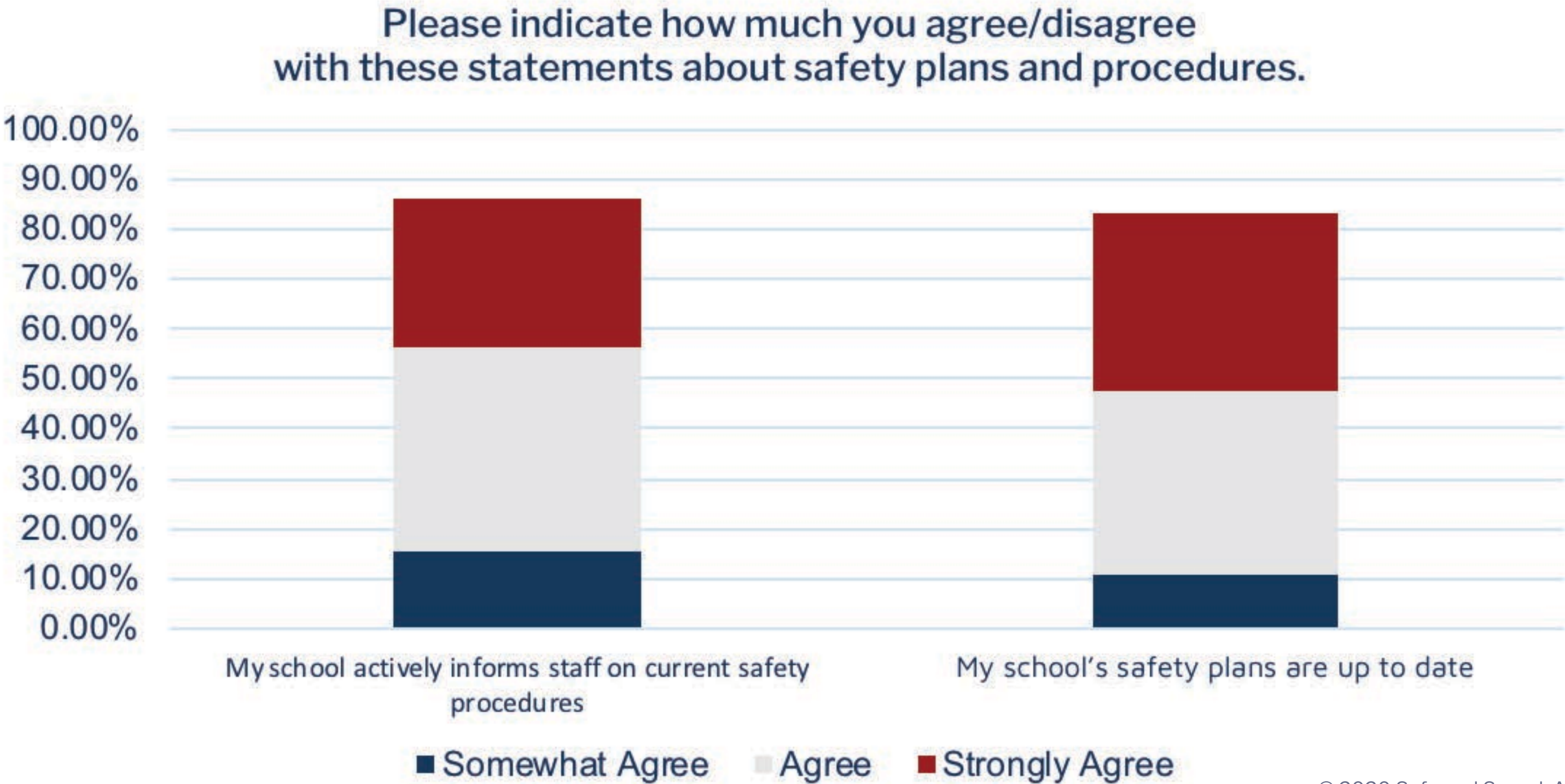
What steps would you most like your school to take, in terms of school safety?



Educators are far more confident about reunification procedures than students and parents. These findings are consistent with 2019 results and present an opportunity for additional training for students and parents.



Educators report being highly informed about safety procedures and feel confident their school’s safety plans are up to date.



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“This report is an invaluable resource for emergency management and emergency planning. It clearly demonstrates the need to provide additional training in the school environment to close the gap between the findings for teachers and the findings for students and parents. The findings also demonstrate the need to continue to integrate the emergency response community (police, SROs, fire, EMS, and emergency management) into the school environment on a more frequent basis. This includes training, planning, drills, and exercises but even more so on a day to day less formal basis like a “high five Friday” or a “hands only CPR training day.”. Students, parents, teachers, and staff need to be integrated into the process of emergency preparedness along with responders in order to formalize and familiarize all with emergency procedures and expectations. But even more so to develop a sense of comfort and confidence that they can all work together to manage any incident that may occur.”

John Montes, Emergency Services Specialist, NFPA

Implications

Presentations are communication tools that can be demonstrations, lectures, speeches, reports, and more. Most of the time, they're presented before an audience. They have a variety of purposes, making them powerful tools for convincing and teaching.

To create a stunning presentation, it's best to simplify your thoughts. Start with an outline of topics and identify highlights, which can be applied to whatever subject you plan on discussing. You can then organize them into your introduction, your main content, and your conclusion. Make sure you do enough research to support your points. It's also a good idea to pair data with visual aids like charts, graphs, or images. Just remember to keep your presentation easy-to-read. Avoid overloading a slide with too many words and choose a color palette that won't distract the audience.

School Safety

Recommendations

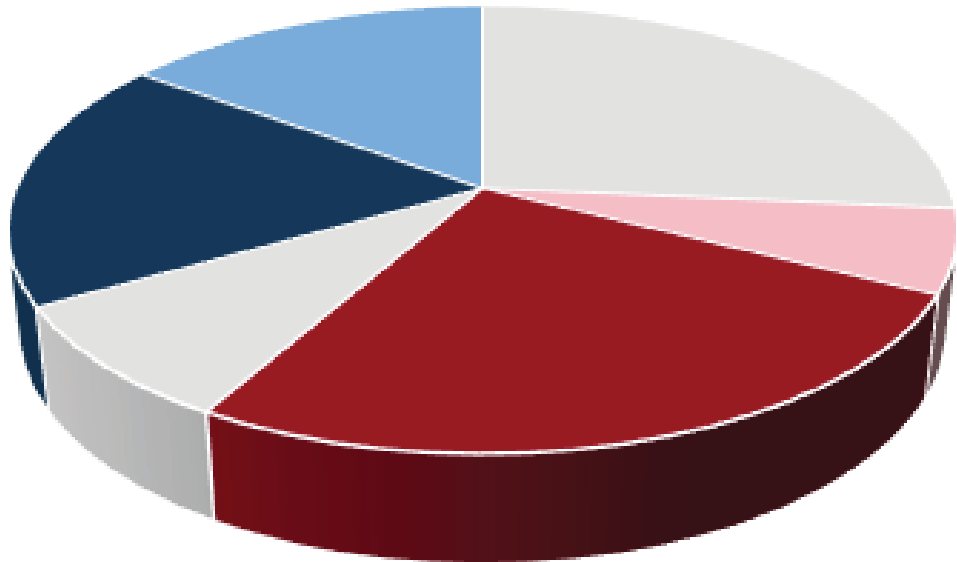
We have more work to do to improve mental health programs and resources in our schools. Many threats to the safety of our schools have a direct connection to mental health. From training to resources to peer mentoring programs to on-site staffing, mental and behavioral health should be on the top of every school community's priority list.

In addition, schools should continue to implement easily accessible programs, such as reporting, monthly parent update emails, safety drills, and facilitating greater student involvement.

Finally, schools need to address critical processes such as reunification, safety protocols, safety plans for students with special needs, and fostering a stronger school community.

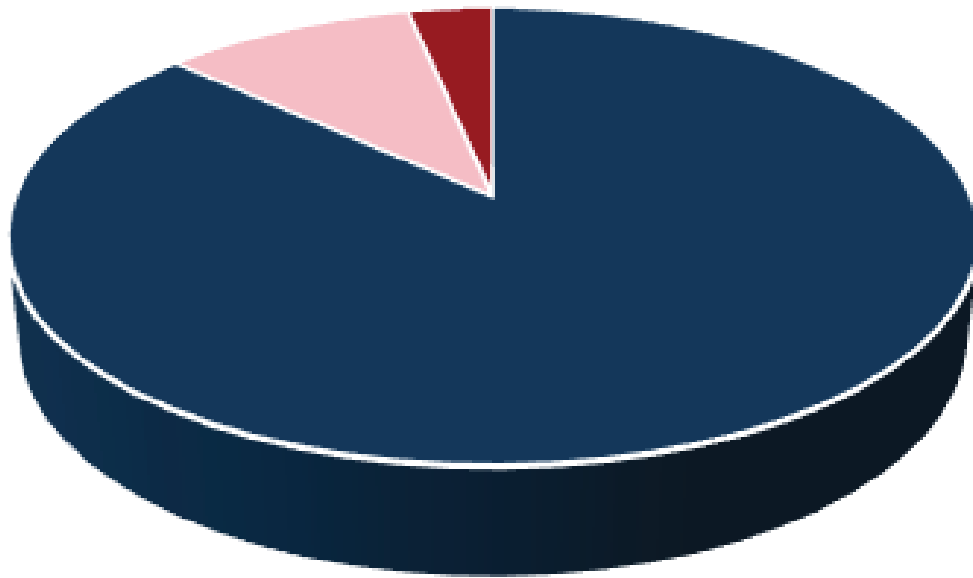
Demographics: The survey garnered 816 total respondents representing 43 U.S. states.

Respondent roles



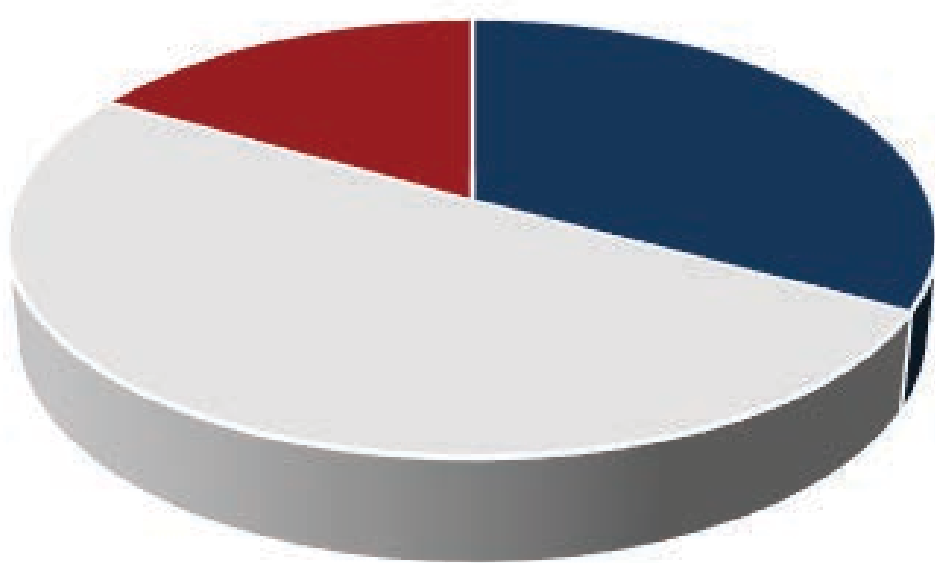
- Parents
- Students
- Educators
- School-based mental health professionals
- Public Safety
- General Community

School Type



- Public
- Private
- Charter

School Setting



- Rural
- Suburban
- Urban

Acknowledgements

Students and faculty from Boston University College of Communication conducted strategic background research, wrote the State of School Safety questionnaire, coded the survey, analyzed results, and helped prepare the final report. Special thanks to professor Anne Danehy for her oversight and research rigor, professor Amy Shanler for communication and survey participant outreach, and to Clay McDermott, Rachel Rubinstein, Lina Pyon, and Kevin Leonardofortheir countless hours spent on this research.

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