



# School District of Ladysmith

Community Survey Report

June 10, 2026

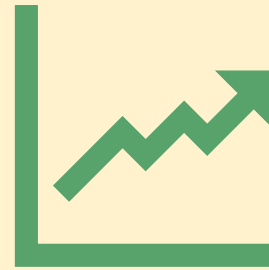
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**Our mission is to help educational leaders gather, organize, and use data to make strategic decisions.**

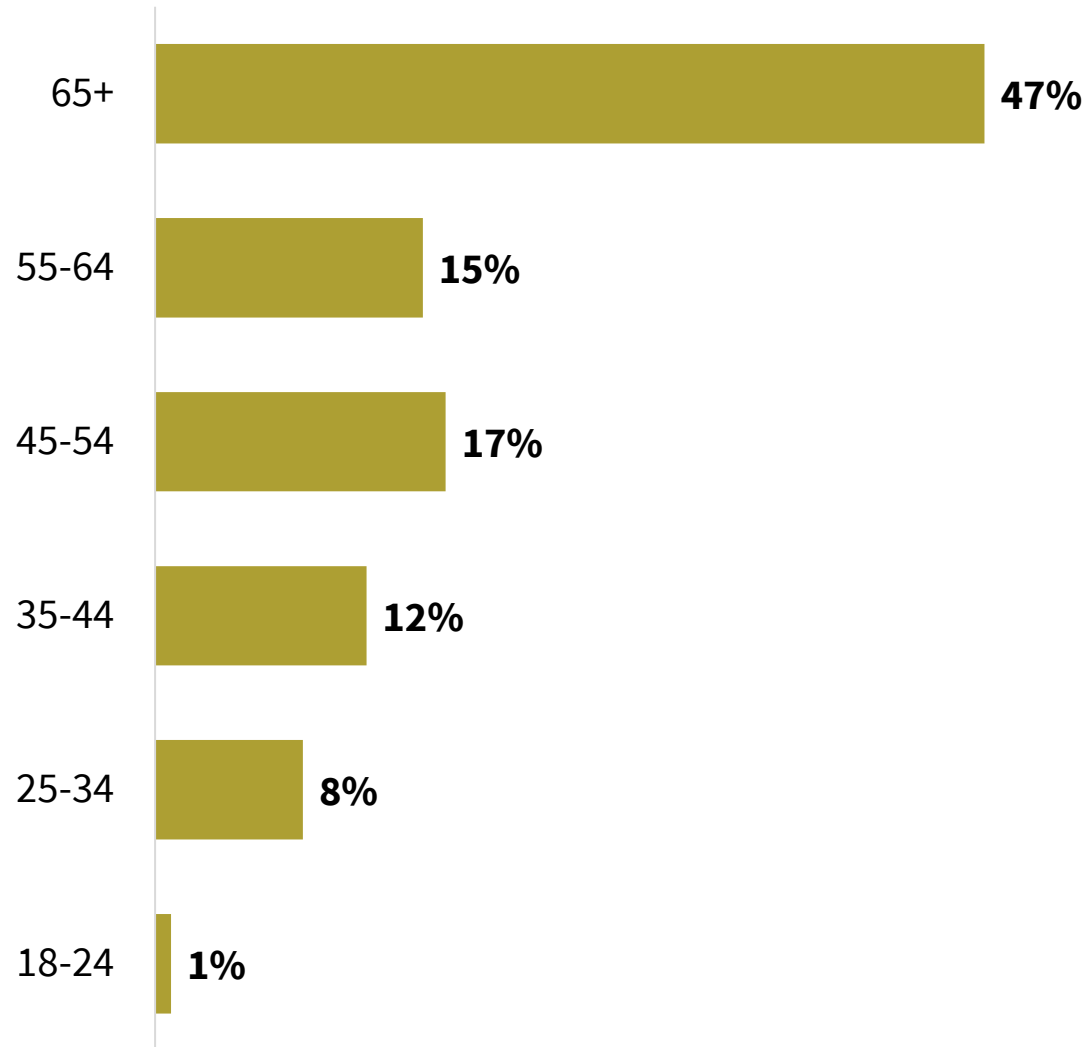
- Founded in **2002** to provide independent research
- Conducted over **3 million** staff, parent, and student, and community surveys for school improvement
- Helped more than **1,400** school districts navigate the strategic planning and referendum planning process

# Survey Information

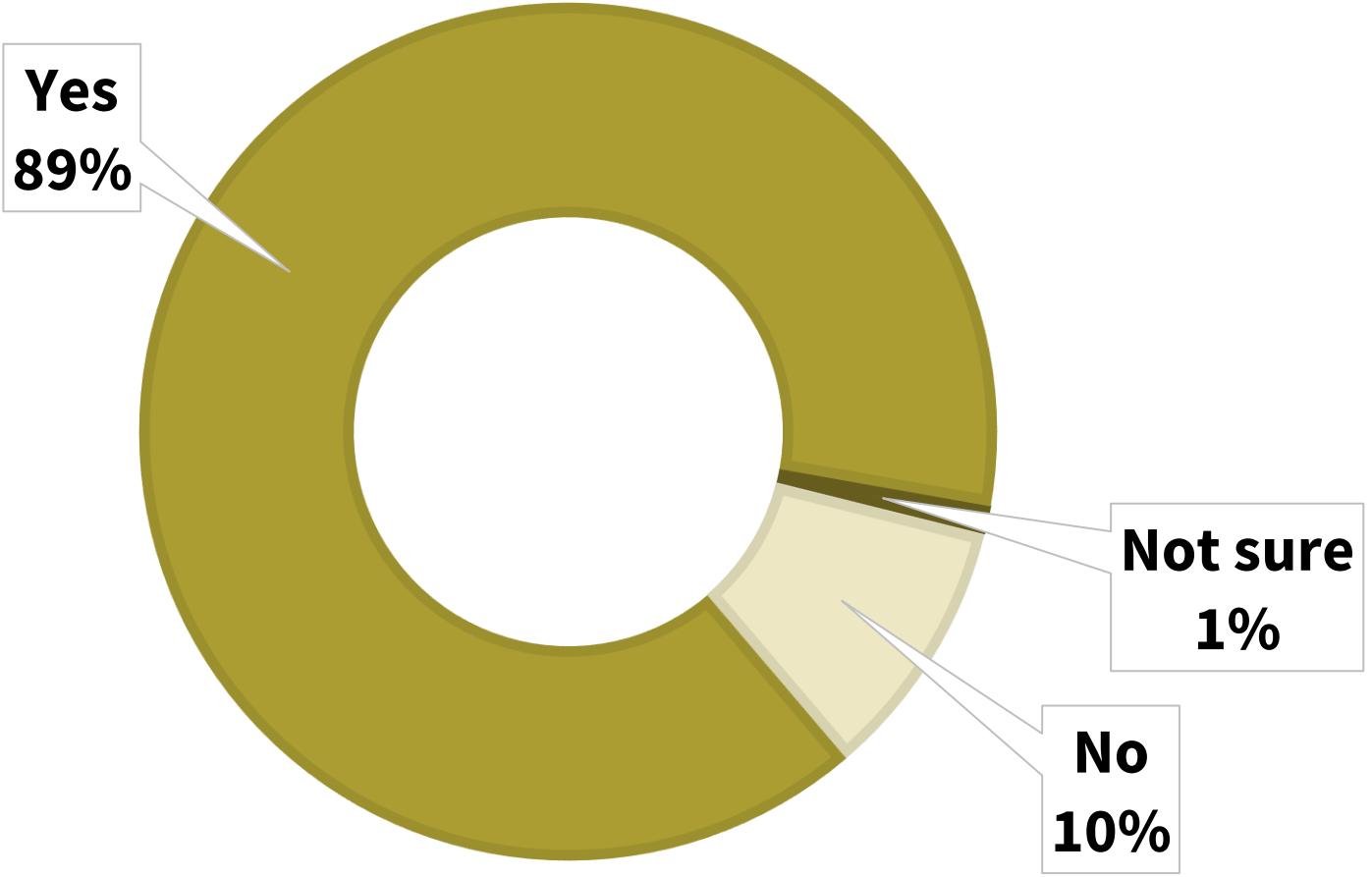
- **May 11, 2026** survey deadline
- **465** respondents (*477 in 2021*)
- **15.1%** response rate
- **+/- 4.65%** statistical margin of error



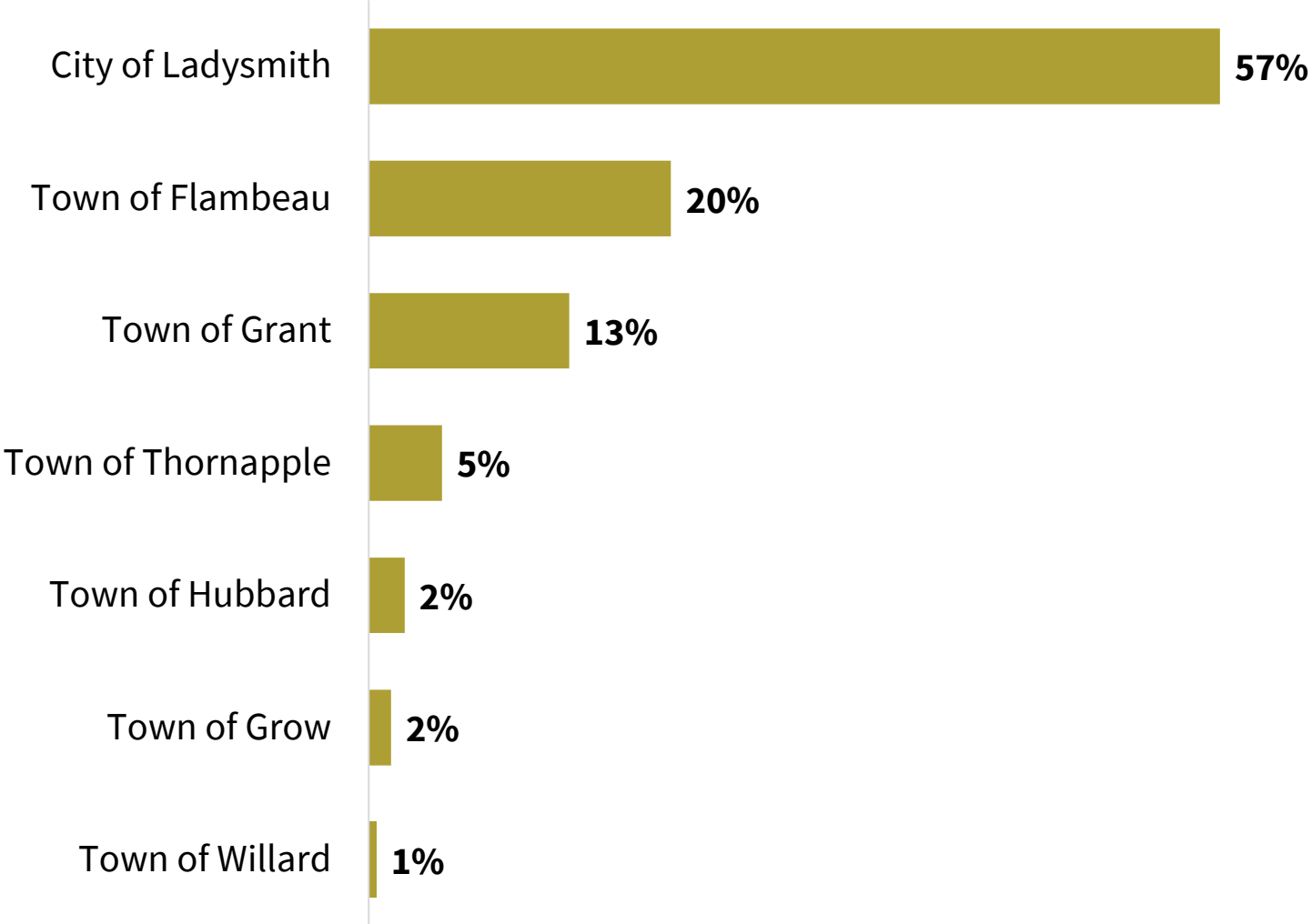
# What is your age?



# Is your primary residence in the School District of Ladysmith?



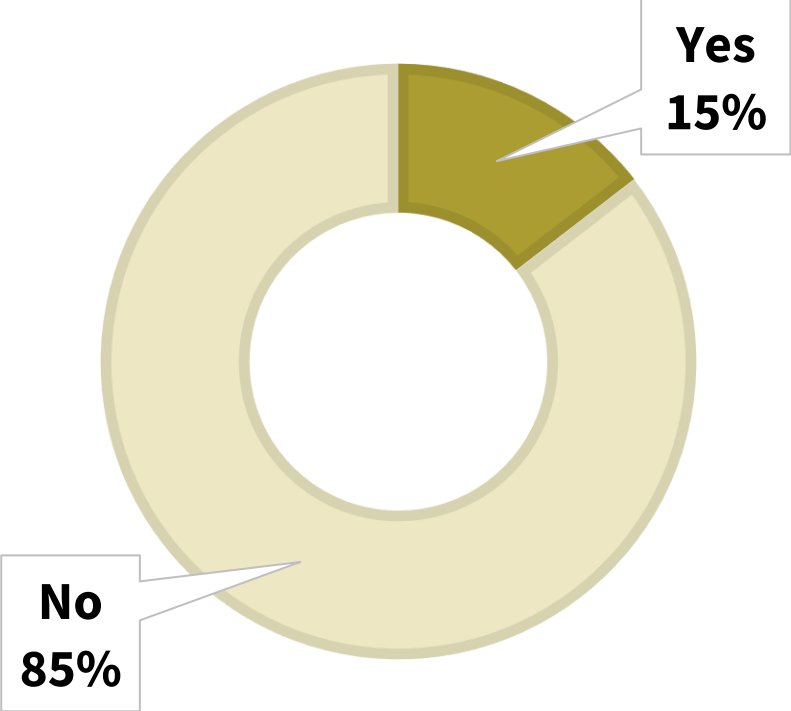
# In which municipality do you live?



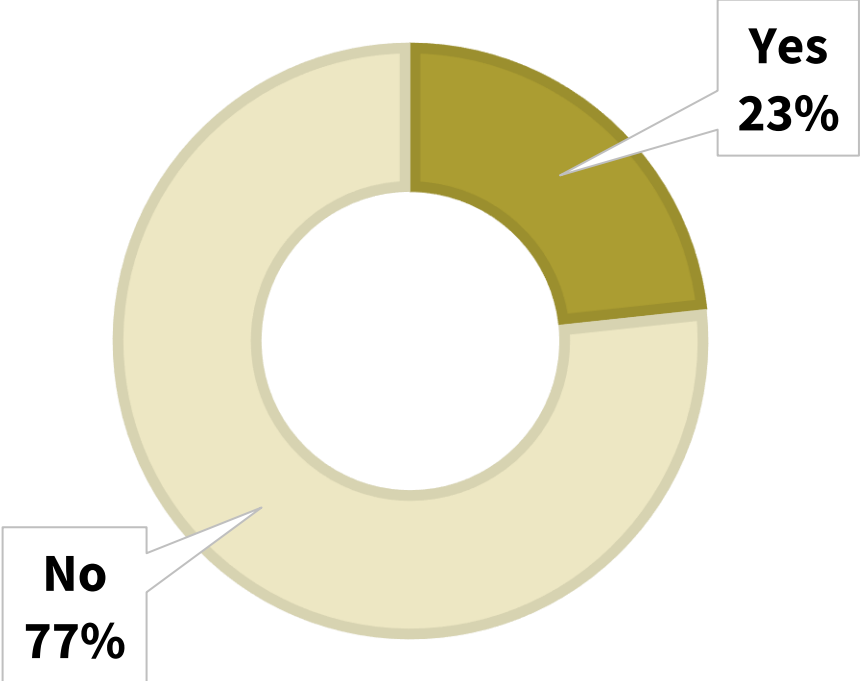
# Respondent Information



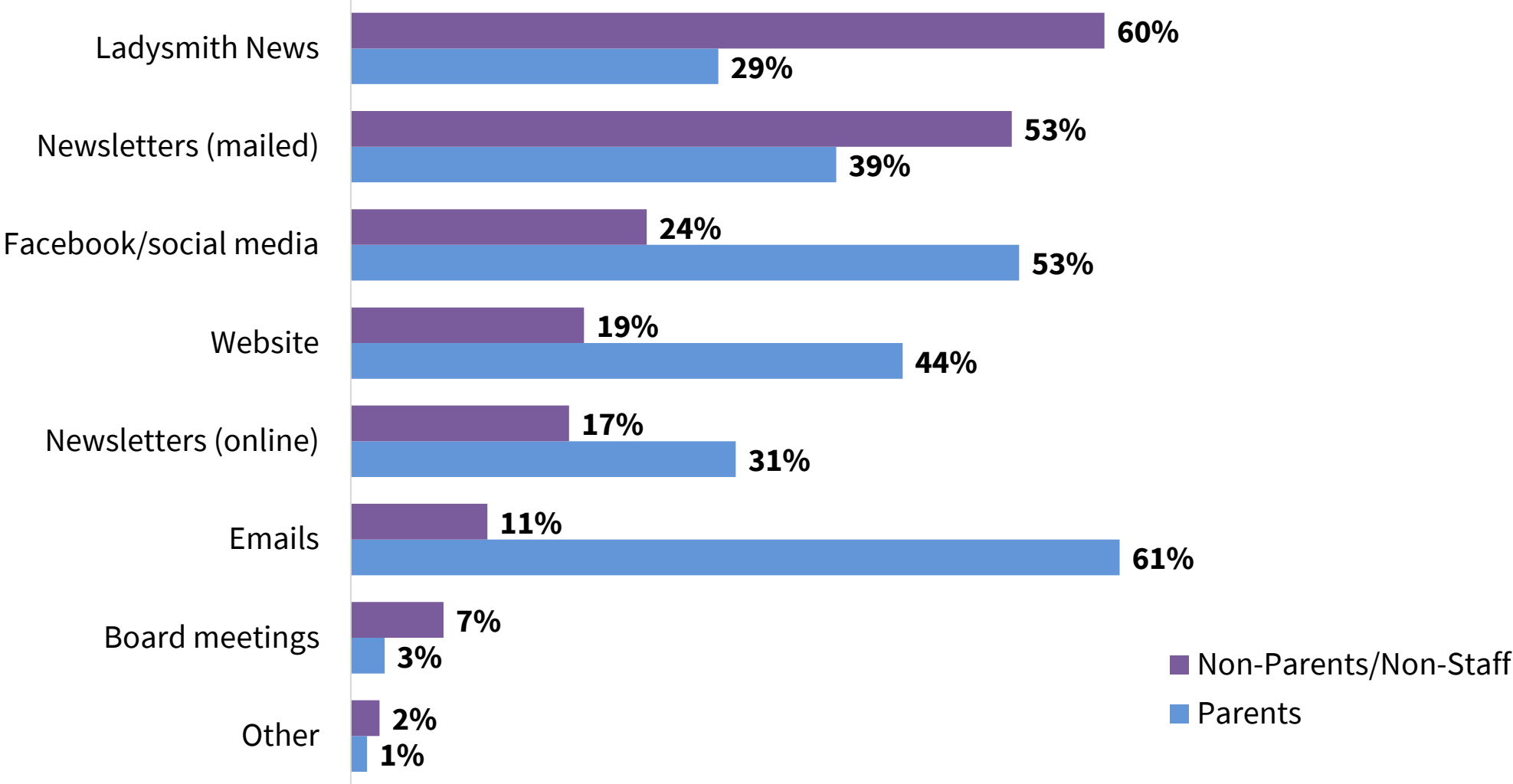
Are you an employee of the School District of Ladysmith?



Do you have children attending a school in the District?



# How would you like to receive information from us?



# Financial Background

There are two types of funding local voters can approve (*Ladysmith voters approved both in 2022*):

A **capital referendum** allows a school district to take out a loan (issue debt) to pay for major facility improvements. This funding cannot be used for day-to-day costs. ***This type of referendum is not being considered at this time.***

An **operational referendum** asks voters to approve additional funds to help pay for programming, student services, and building maintenance. ***This is the type of referendum explored in this survey.***



# Financial Background



- The additional funding approved in the 2022 operational referendum **expires next year**. This has provided \$600,000 to the District every school year. We have used the money to maintain student programs and services and keep staff compensation competitive with area districts.
- State and federal funding are not keeping up with **increasing costs** for busing, utilities, insurance, and services for students receiving special education.
- **ESSER funding** (additional funding during the COVID pandemic) allowed the District to balance a budget that would have otherwise resulted in deficit spending. ESSER dollars provided **temporary** relief that expired in 2023-24.
- Across Wisconsin, 74% of school districts have fewer students now than they did 15 years ago, including Ladysmith. This is an issue because the amount of money we receive is based on the number of students we have. Because these declines are spread across grade levels, **rarely is there an opportunity for meaningful savings through staffing reductions or attrition.**
- The **state limits the amount of money** available to the District from state aid and local property taxes. This funding level used to increase with inflation, but the state ended that in 2009. If that had continued, Ladysmith schools would have approximately \$2.5 million in additional funds this year (\$3,573 more per student).

# Financial Background

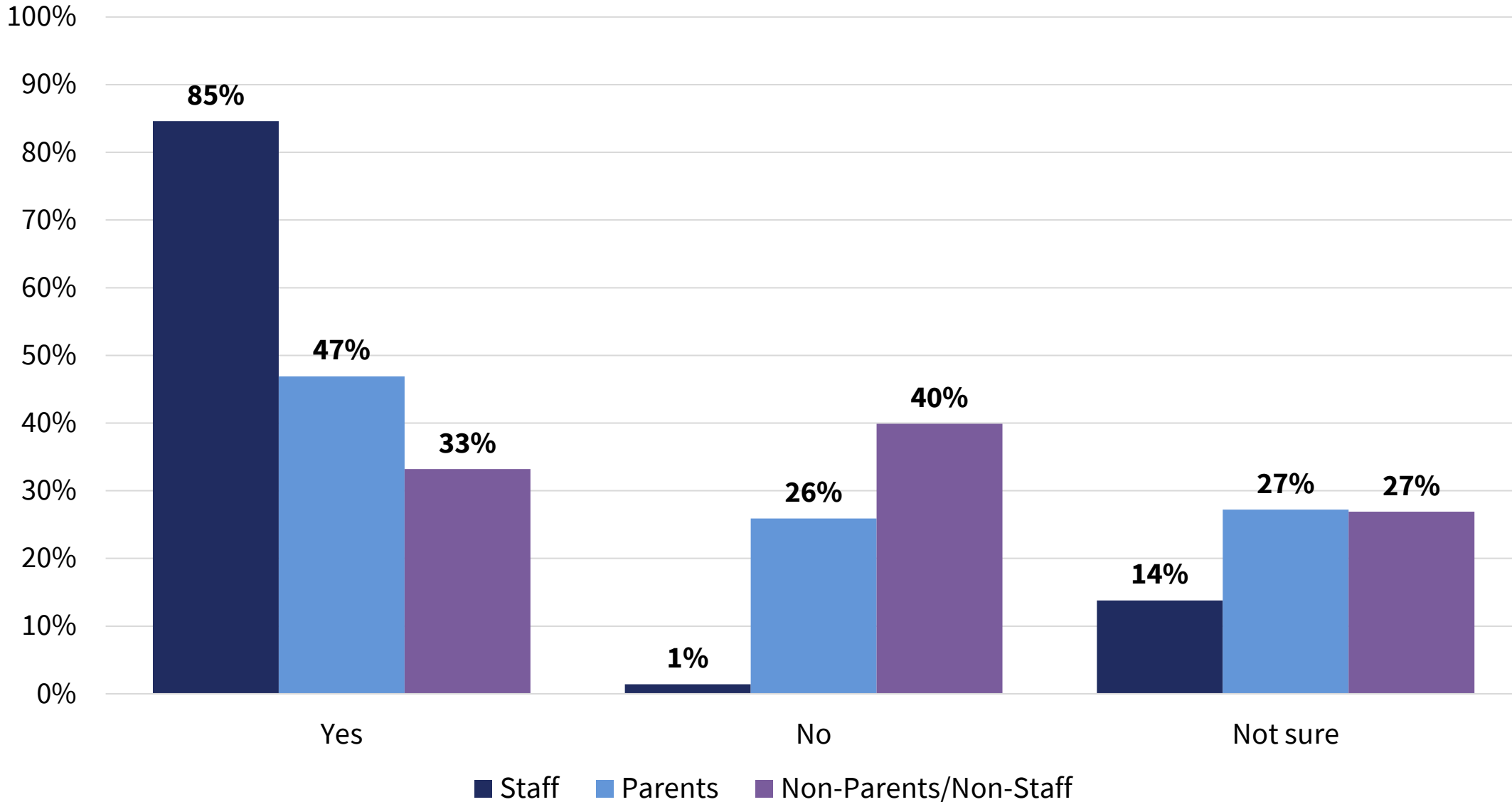


To help balance the budget over the past few years, the District has:

- Not filled some positions when employees retired or left (including reducing the middle/high school administration from two positions to one and not filling a school counselor and a district office staff position).
- Adjusted insurance plans to minimize cost increases.
- Partnered with neighboring school districts to share services.
- Paid off debt early to reduce interest expenses.
- Delayed non-essential building maintenance.
- Extended the replacement cycle for technology devices.

Even with these efforts, we are projecting a budget shortfall that averages \$1.2 million per year if voters do not support a replacement referendum. **We are not alone.** To address budget issues, 87% of Wisconsin school districts have asked their voters to consider an operational referendum.

# Would you support the District pursuing a replacement operational referendum?



# Operational Funding Support



In response to the challenges outlined on the previous page, the District has developed three options.

**Option 1:** If voters support a referendum providing \$950,000 each year, the District would:

- ✓ Maintain some current programs and services.
- ✓ Not fill some staff positions when people leave/retire.
- ✓ Address electrical, plumbing, HVAC, and safety needs that weren't covered in the 2022 capital referendum on an as-needed basis.

*Option 1 would increase taxes by approximately \$10 for every \$100,000 of property value per year.*

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**Option 2:** If voters support a referendum providing \$1.2 million each year, the District would:

- ✓ Maintain most current programs and services.
- ✓ Proactively address electrical, plumbing, HVAC, and safety needs that weren't covered in the 2022 capital referendum.

*Option 2 would increase taxes by approximately \$61 for every \$100,000 of property value per year.*

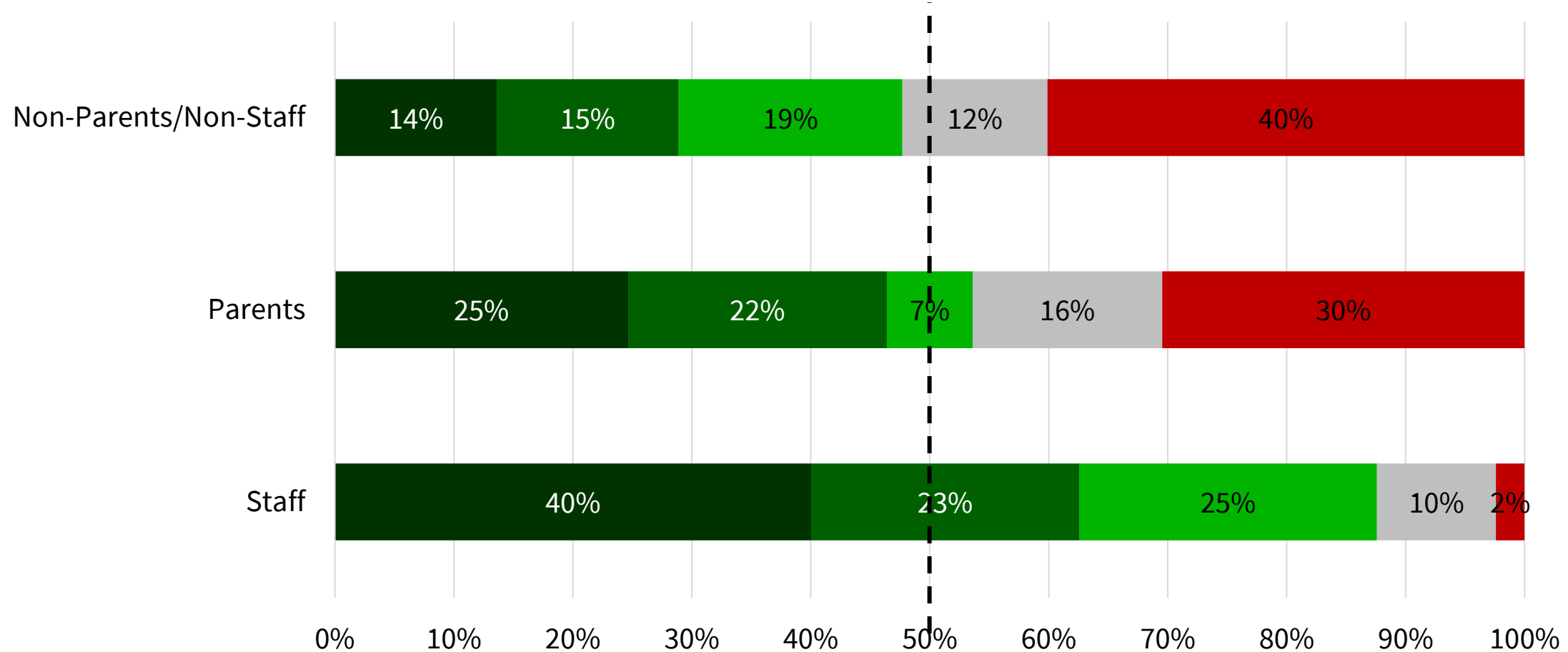
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**Option 3:** If voters support a referendum providing \$1.5 million each year, the District would:

- ✓ Maintain most current programs and services.
- ✓ Proactively address electrical, plumbing, HVAC, and safety needs that weren't covered in the 2022 capital referendum.
- ✓ Increase staff compensation to remain competitive in recruiting and retaining quality staff.

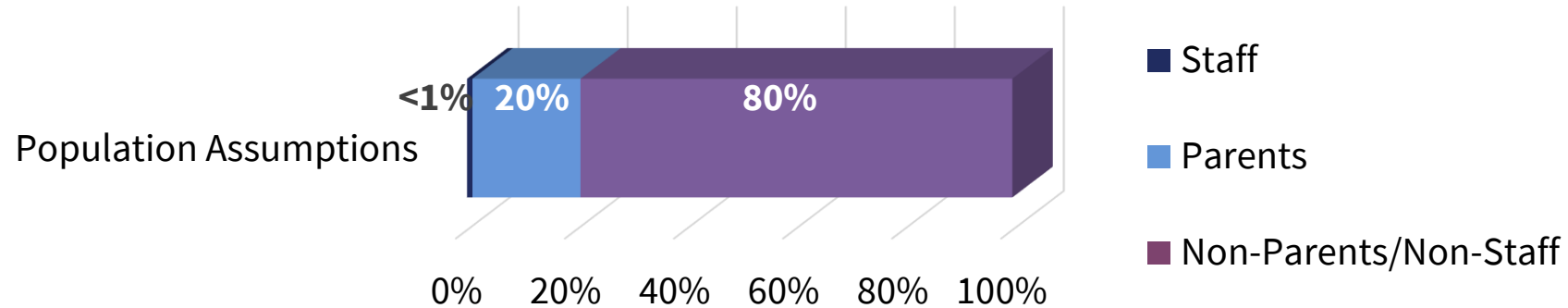
*Option 3 would increase taxes by approximately \$121 for every \$100,000 of property value per year.*

# Which operational referendum amount would you support?



■ \$1.5M per year ■ \$1.2M per year ■ \$950,000 per year ■ Not sure/need more information ■ No referendum

# Additional Analysis: Operational referendum support



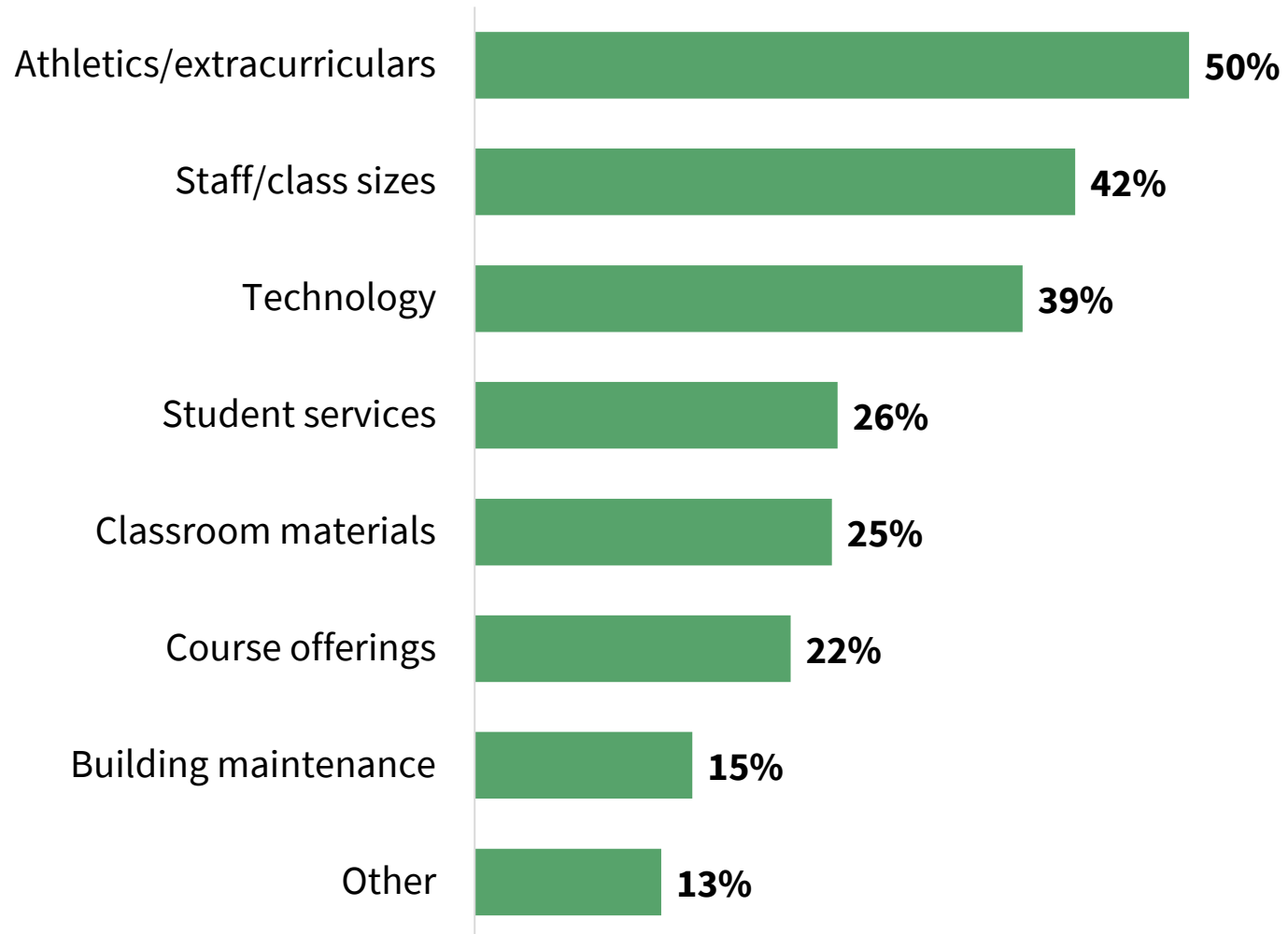
Weighted support:

$$\text{\$1.5M: } 0.20 (25\%) + 0.80 (14\%) = \mathbf{16.2\%}$$

$$\text{\$1.2M: } 0.20 (47\%) + 0.80 (29\%) = \mathbf{32.6\%}$$

$$\text{\$950,000: } 0.20 (54\%) + 0.80 (48\%) = \mathbf{49.2\%}$$

# Cost-cutting options





	Staff	Parents	Non-Parents/Non-Staff
	Cost-Cutting Order	Cost-Cutting Order	Cost-Cutting Order
Athletics/extracurriculars	2	4	1
Staff/class sizes	3	2	2
Technology	1	1	3
Student services	6	5	4
Classroom materials	4	3	6
Course offerings	5	6	5
Building maintenance	7	7	7
Other	8	8	8

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

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



Item	Staff	Parents	Non-Parents/ Non-Staff
Delivering a high-quality education	2.97	2.52	2.40
Keeping the public informed	3.25	2.68	2.50
Managing funds appropriately	3.08	2.33	2.03
Building pride in the community	3.18	2.58	2.56

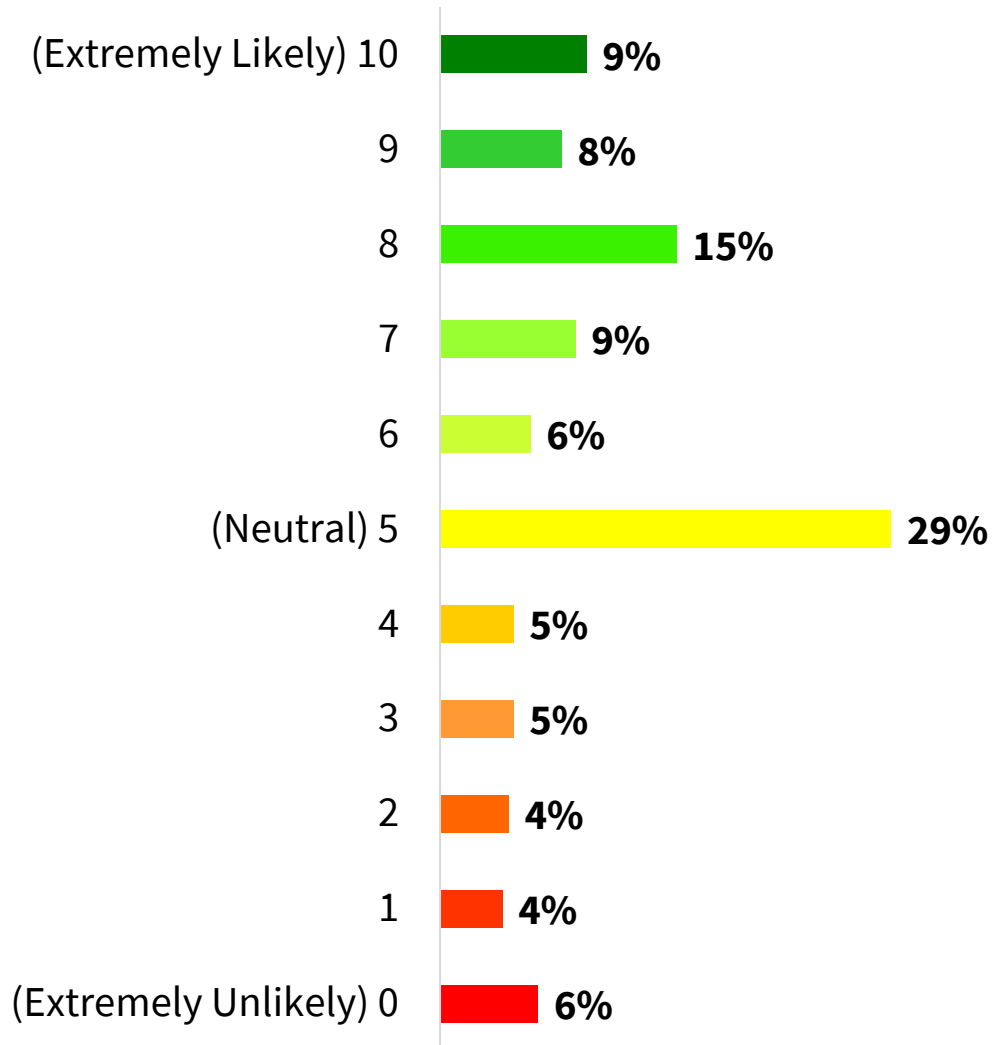
# How is the District doing in each of the following areas?

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



Item	Percent “Great” or “Good”	Score
Delivering a high-quality education	55%	2.53
Keeping the public informed	59%	2.66
Managing funds appropriately	43%	2.26
Building pride in the community	60%	2.67

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



**Ladysmith Score: 5.72**

# What did we learn?

- Weighted support for a \$950,000 operational referendum is within the margin of error of 50%.
- Therefore, the Board could consider putting a question on the ballot in November and let voters decide.





# SCHOOL PERCEPTIONS

*Measuring what matters*

262.644.4300 | [schoolperceptions.com](http://schoolperceptions.com)

