



# SLEP RESEARCH PROJECTS – CAPSTONE PRESENTATION

Prepared for Alexandria City Public Schools  
November 2022

# INTRODUCTION

ACPS partnered with Hanover Research to examine best practices and conduct several research studies to understand perceptions and experiences of stakeholders in the district around safety, security, and policing in an effort to support the SLEP Advisory Group in crafting recommendations.

***The following presentation includes:***

- Overview of Hanover Research projects
- Key Findings from across studies reflect the following:
  - Research on SROs
  - Perceptions of SROs
  - Feelings of Safety
  - Communication and Transparency
  - Increased Mental Health Support

## SLEP Advisory Group Mission

The mission of the SLEP advisory group is to assist ACPS leadership, the Superintendent and the School Board in reimagining the school law enforcement partnership with the Alexandria Police Department in order to ensure a positive, safe and equitable school experience for all students.

# RESEARCH STUDIES CONDUCTED BY HANOVER

Hanover Research completed the following three research studies on behalf of ACPS and SLEP:



## Best Practices For Policing In K-12 Schools

**June 2022**

Hanover reviewed best practices for structuring SRO programs and research examining the effects of SROs and school policing more broadly on school climate, safety, and student outcomes.



## SLEP Stakeholder Survey

**September -  
October 2022**

Hanover surveyed ACPS staff members, middle and high school students, parents of ACPS students, and community members familiar with ACPS.

**5,238**

Total Respondents



## Discussion Groups

**October –  
November 2022**

Hanover conducted 18 discussion groups with 142 middle and high school students, parents, and staff.

**142**

Discussion Group Participants

# KEY FINDINGS

# RESEARCH FINDING: THE ROLE OF SROs

- In effective SRO programs, SROs fulfill **educational and counseling** functions in addition to providing law enforcement services.
- The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) recommends adopting a **Triad Model** in which SROs serve as law enforcers, teachers, and informal counselors.

## Triad Model



A study drawing on a survey of 850 principals finds that law enforcement referrals increase by a significantly lower percent in schools where SROs adopt the Triad Model than in schools where SROs focus on law enforcement functions.

# RESEARCH FINDING: THE ROLE OF SROs



**SROs should not support day-to-day discipline for non-criminal behavior.**

The U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) recommends that policies governing SRO programs specify that **SROs do not respond to any event which would not require a 911 call in the absence of an SRO.** School policies and training for SROs should emphasize that SROs are not to support student discipline or refer students to the justice system for behavior that could be addressed more effectively through school disciplinary processes.

# RESEARCH FINDING: THE IMPACT OF SROs

- Some studies suggest SROs appear to reduce some forms of violence in schools, and that they impact stakeholders' perceptions of school climate and safety.
- Empirical studies of SROs suggest that law enforcement referral rates increase in schools where SROs are present; however, SROs themselves do not account for the majority of law enforcement referrals for minor or status offenses. Research presents mixed findings on the relationship between exclusionary discipline and the presence of SROs.



Several studies find that disproportionalities in law enforcement referrals and school disciplinary sanctions for students from racial or ethnic backgrounds increase in schools with SROs.

# PERCEPTIONS OF SROs

Across the survey and discussion group studies, most stakeholders rarely interact with SROs and most non-staff members do not know how to contact their SRO.

- Stakeholders who have interacted with SROs have largely positive perceptions. However, some participants across discussion groups describe SROs as distant and/or intimidating.
- Respondents are least likely to think the SRO acts as an informal mentor or role model or effectively de-escalates conflicts and are most likely to agree that the SRO consistently treats all students with respect and makes the school a safer place.



*“The **police officers** at the school are **what make me feel safe**. They’re **here to protect us** from the **shooters**, people with **guns**, people like **terrorists**.”*

*–Student (Hispanic, EL), Francis Hammond*

*“I don't really talk to them that much, but every time I come across them, they have a **kind of aggressive-ish tone**.”*

*–Student (Black), King Street*



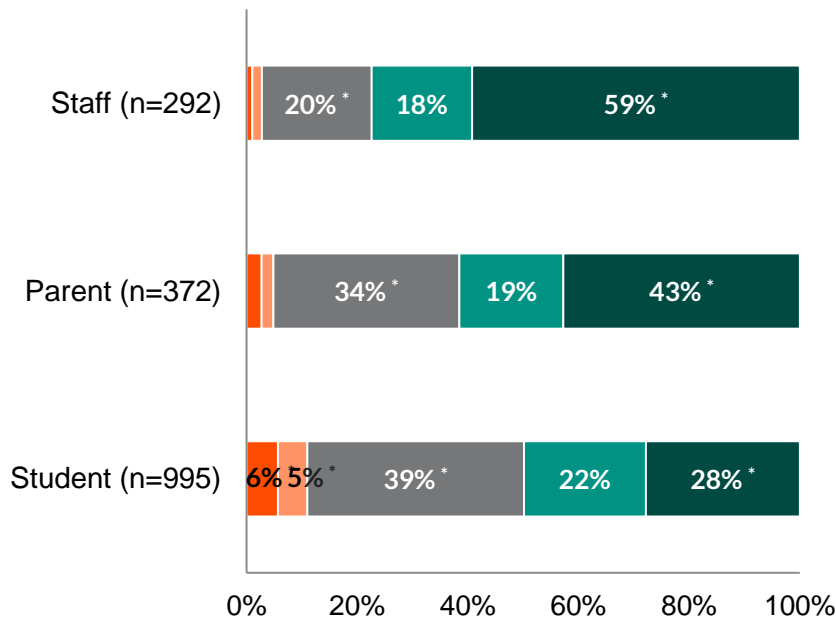
Discussion group participants suggest that intimidation and opposition to SROs can be overcome through community-building activities such as classroom visits or athletic events.



# PERCEPTIONS OF SROs

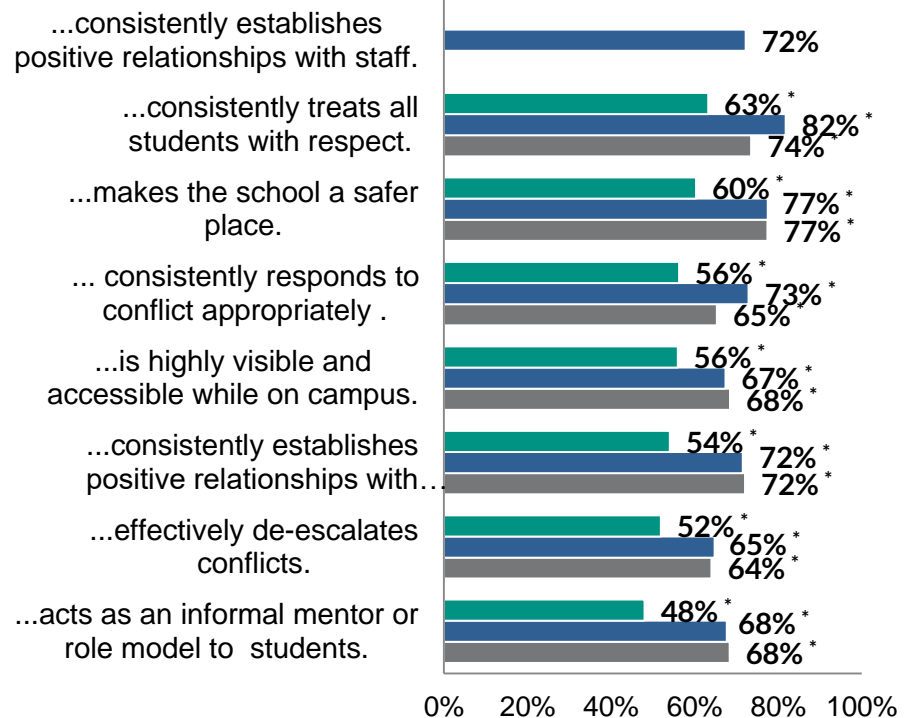
Please rate the level of quality of your interactions with your SRO:

- Very Negative
- Somewhat Negative
- Neither Negative nor Positive
- Somewhat Positive
- Very Positive



Please rate your agreement with the following statements: The SRO at [my/my child's] school...

- Student (n=1329-1498)
- Staff (n=210-294)
- Parent (n=326-473)



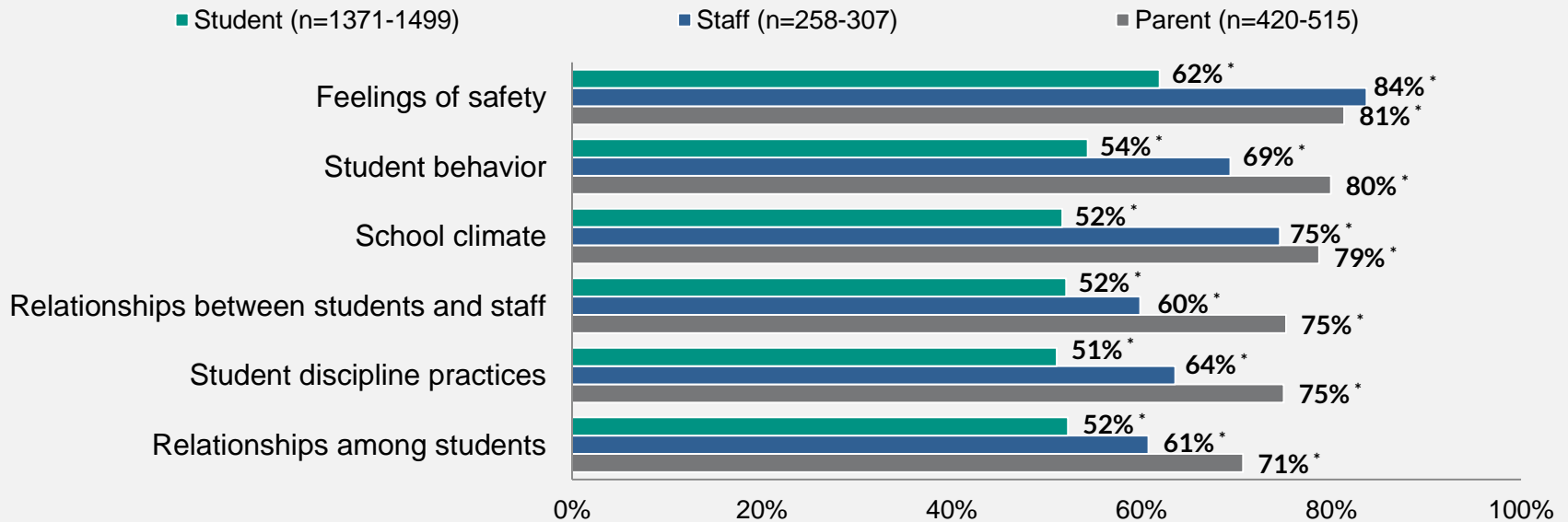
Note: These question were shown only to middle and high school students, staff, and parents. An asterisk (\*) indicates at least one statistically significant difference between groups.

# PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF SROs

While stakeholders are most likely to report that SROs have the greatest impact on feelings of safety, student behavior, and school climate, staff members and parents have more positive perceptions of the impact of SROs than students. Community members have mixed perceptions on whether SROs have a positive impact.

Based on your personal experience, how does the presence of an SRO impact the following areas in [your school/your child's school/division schools]?

% Somewhat Positively + % Very Positively



Note: This question shown only to middle and high school students, staff, and parents. An asterisk (\*) indicates at least one statistically significant difference between groups.

# FEELINGS OF SAFETY

**While the majority of stakeholders feel safe in and around school, perceptions of safety vary by group:**

- Middle and high school survey respondents feel less safe than Pre-K, elementary, and K-8 respondents.
- POC and multiracial respondents feel less safe compared to their white peers and are more likely to alter their behavior due to safety concerns than their white peers.
- Overall perceptions of safety are lower at Alexandria City High School – King Street Campus than other schools.



**Many survey respondents think schools have problems with bullying, violence or theft, and gangs, while discussion group participants emphasize fights as a substantial factor negatively impacting school safety.** Students also identify drug use as a major concern and express substantial discomfort with drug sales and use in bathrooms. Staff express concern about a perceived lack of follow-up actions to address student violence.



*“I feel safe from outside threats. But within our hallways, we have a lot of fights that break out randomly throughout the day, and I just don't want to be caught up in that.”*

*–Student (Black), Minnie Howard*

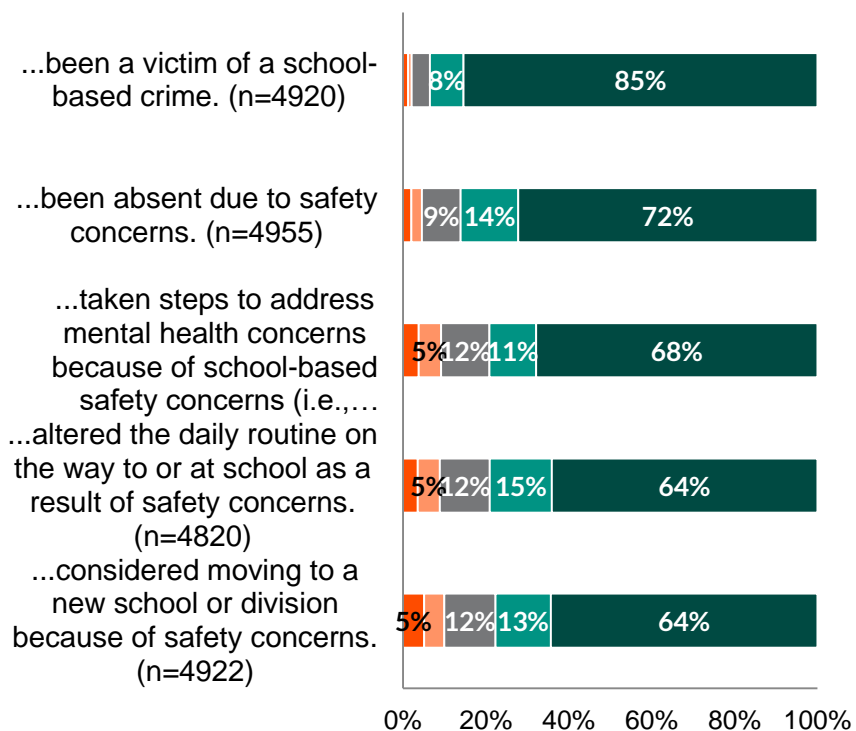
*“There's been a lot of altercations at the school, and when something happens, students could be right back in the classroom, whereas the parents haven't been notified, the students haven't really been dealt with or even asked what happened. Last year, some teachers were attacked after they were trying to break up a fight.”*

*–Staff, George Washington*

# FEELINGS OF SAFETY

Within the past year, how often [have you/has your child] done the following?

Very Often   Often   Sometimes   Rarely   Never

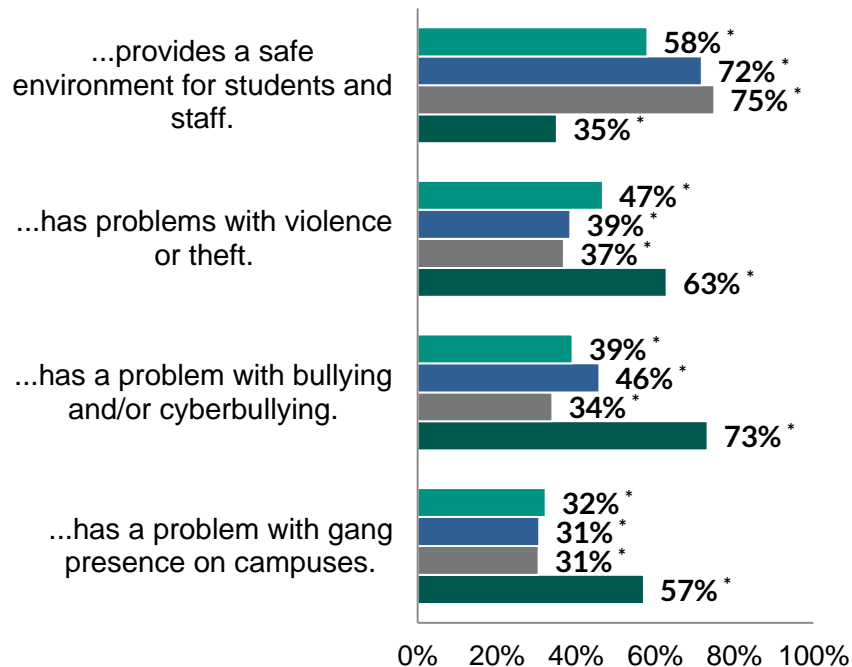


Note: This question shown only to students, school staff, and parents.

Please rate your agreement with the following statements: [My school/My child's school/The division]...

% Somewhat Agree + % Strongly Agree

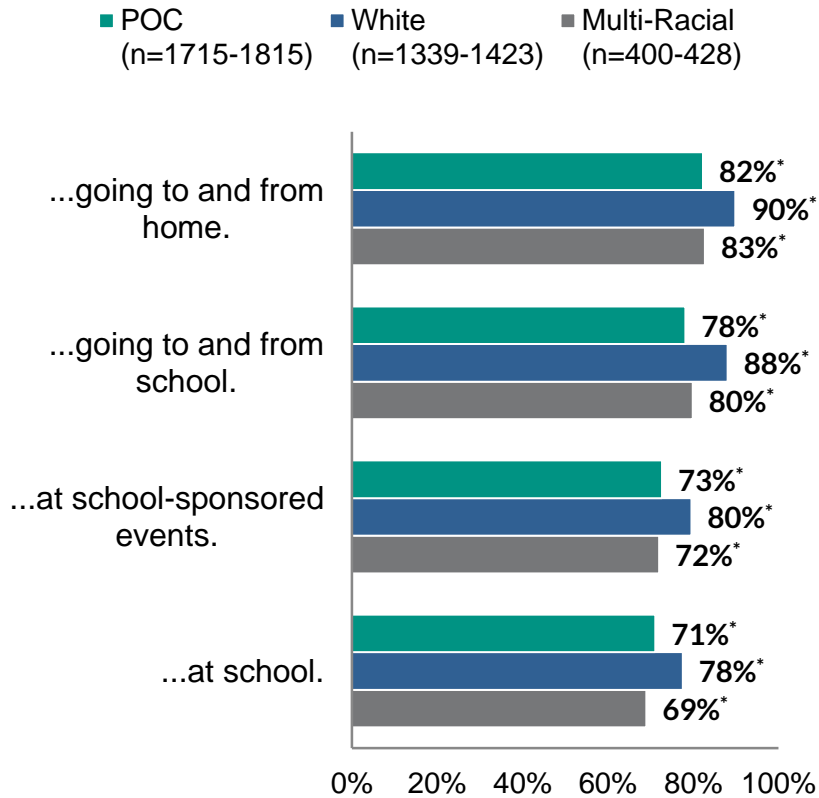
Student (n=2177-2462)   Staff (n=667-768)  
Parent (n=1334-1716)   Community (n=84-91)



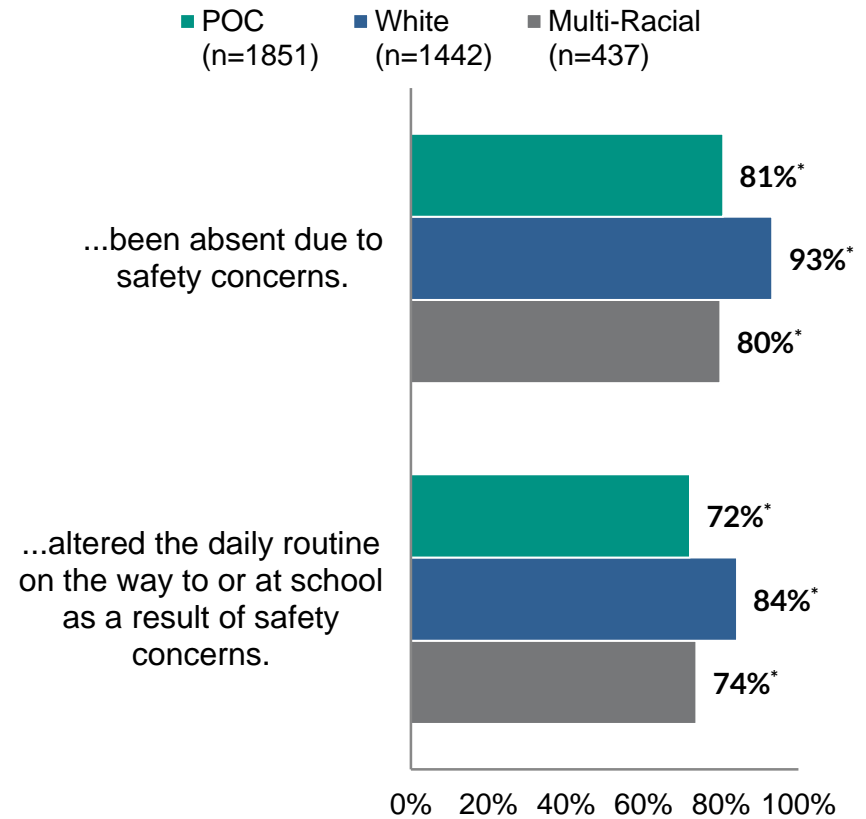
Note: An asterisk (\*) indicates at least one statistically significant difference between groups.

# FEELINGS OF SAFETY: BY RACE/ETHNICITY CATEGORY

**[I feel safe/My child feels safe]...**  
 % Somewhat Agree + % Strongly Agree



**Within the past year, how often [have you/has your child] done the following?**  
 % Rarely + % Never



# COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPARENCY

Stakeholders report room for improved communication and transparency around the student code of conduct, expectations for student behavior, and disciplinary actions. Discussion group participants desire additional data and information sharing on disciplinary incidents and suggest that increased data-sharing and communication to explain safety and security policies and procedures could be useful to increase support for the presence of SROs.



*There seems to be a lack of understanding of what the discipline procedures are. It feels like there are not consequences for behaviors. There doesn't seem to be a coordinated understanding among teachers of what the policies are, what they're supposed to do with the different tiers of behaviors, and then how they're being addressed. I just think that the entire community really needs to understand what the expectations are. I think that would help everybody feel more safe and secure."*

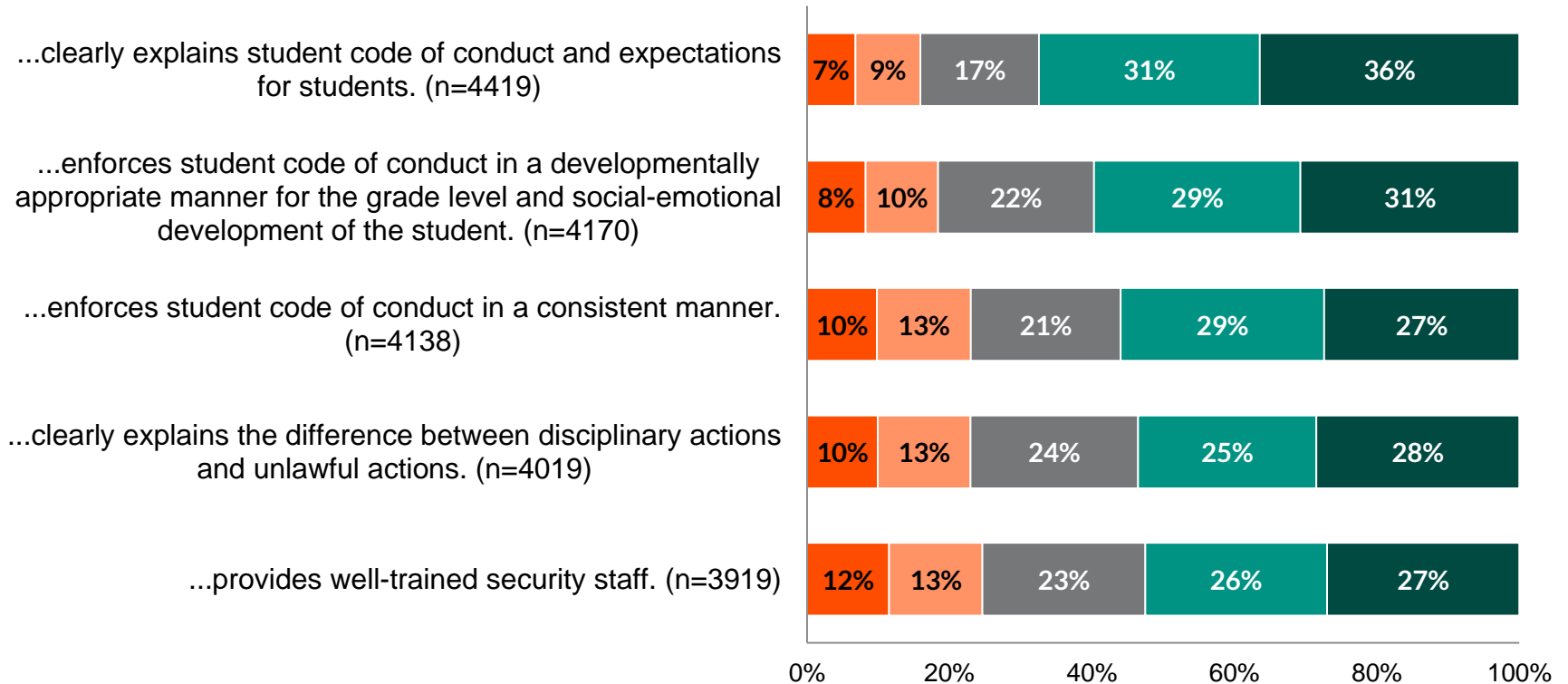
*-Parent (White), George Washington, King Street*



# COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPARENCY

Please rate your agreement with the following statements: [My school/My child's] school...

■ Strongly Disagree    
 ■ Somewhat Disagree    
 ■ Neither Agree nor Disagree    
 ■ Somewhat Agree    
 ■ Strongly Agree





# INCREASED MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Across studies, stakeholders describe additional mental health services and emphasize the importance of integrating policing and related security work with mental health and emotional supports. Discussion group participants note a decrease in social emotional skills and mental health in recent years and link gang activity, vaping, drug sales, and drug use in school bathrooms to students' mental health challenges.

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*“There were a lot of concerns about our rising sixth grade because **they were coming after off a year of COVID**. They just **didn't really know what to do when they got to the school**. So last year was a total new learning experience for them. These are nice kids. They **may not know how to behave all the time**. They **may not know how to settle an argument or to disagree with each other and not have it be in a way that's socially acceptable and also productive.**”*

*–Staff, Hammond*

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**ARE THERE ANY  
QUESTIONS?**





Thank you.

## CONTACT

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