

Universal School Meals in Philadelphia: Findings from a Mixed Methods Needs Assessment

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Meet the Team



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Why are we doing this study?

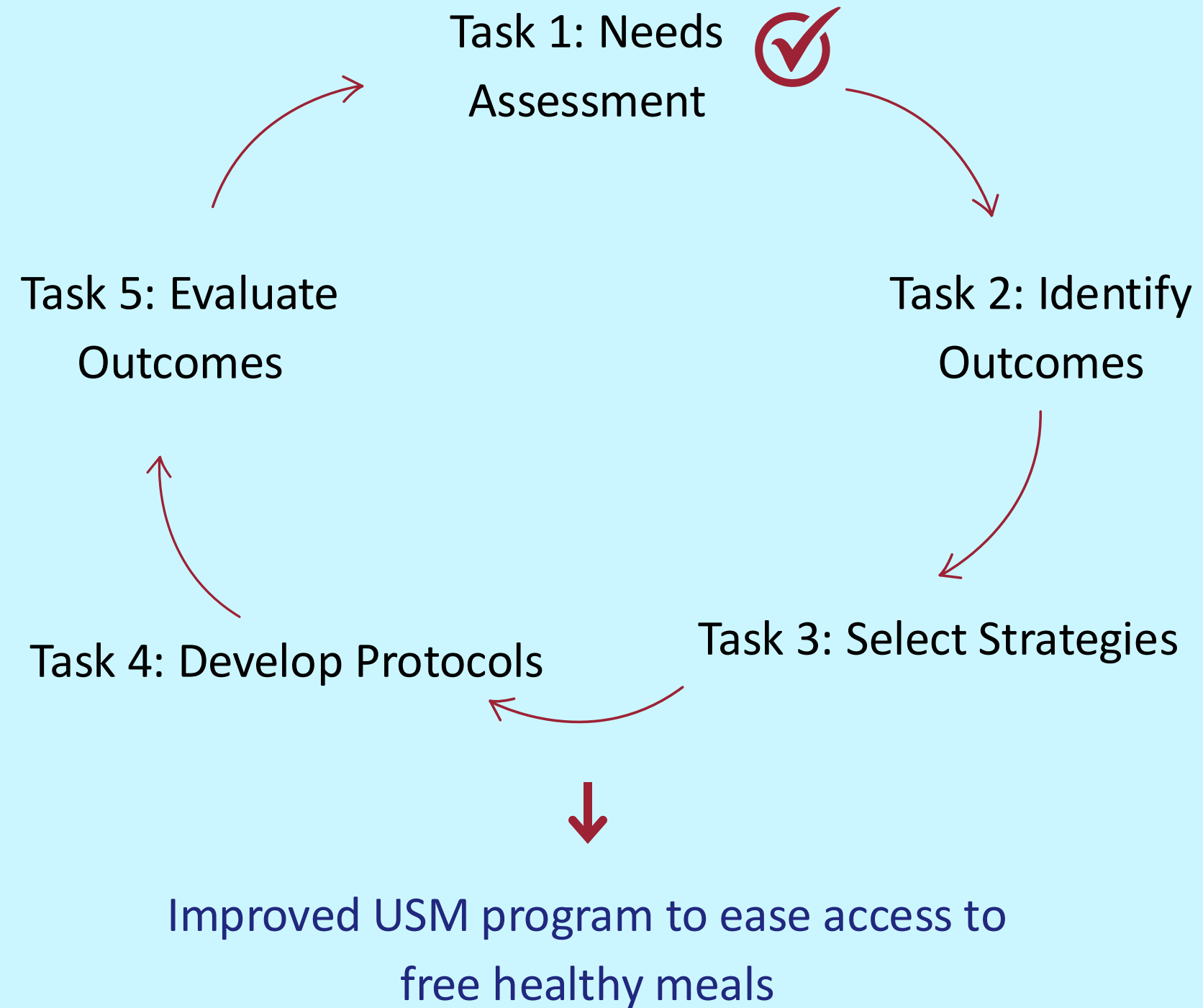
Food Insecurity is rising in Philadelphia

The Community Eligibility Provision allows **ALL** students regardless of financial status to receive both free breakfast and lunch

Only half of students are eating the meals and we want to know how we can fix this



Our Study's Process: Implementation Mapping



Overview of Sample

8 schools;

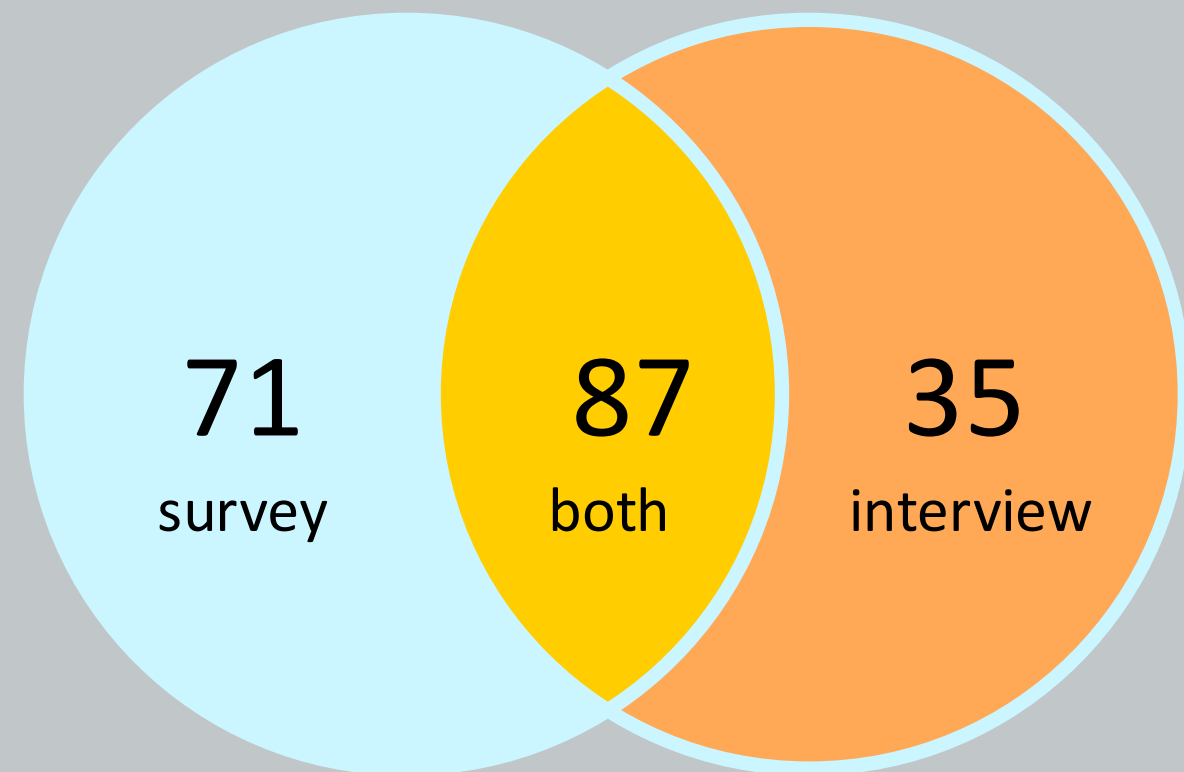
6 elementary-middle (2 satellite service)

2 high schools



Grouped into High/Low participation based on district averages from Fall of 2023 of
32% participation in breakfast and 48% participation in lunch

Methods



OBSERVATIONS

We observed breakfast and lunch at least twice at each school



SURVEYS

We received 158 surveys

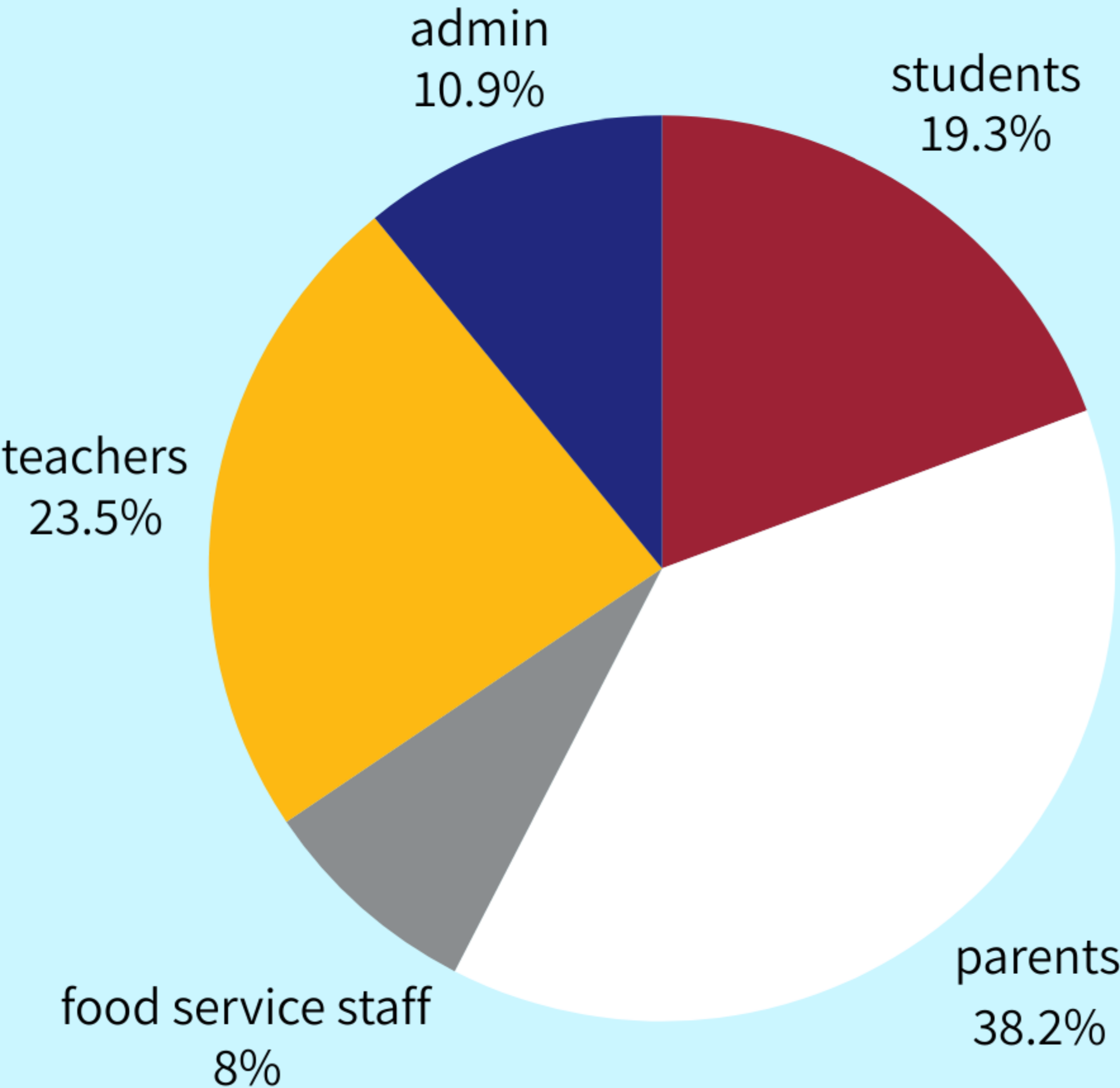


INTERVIEWS

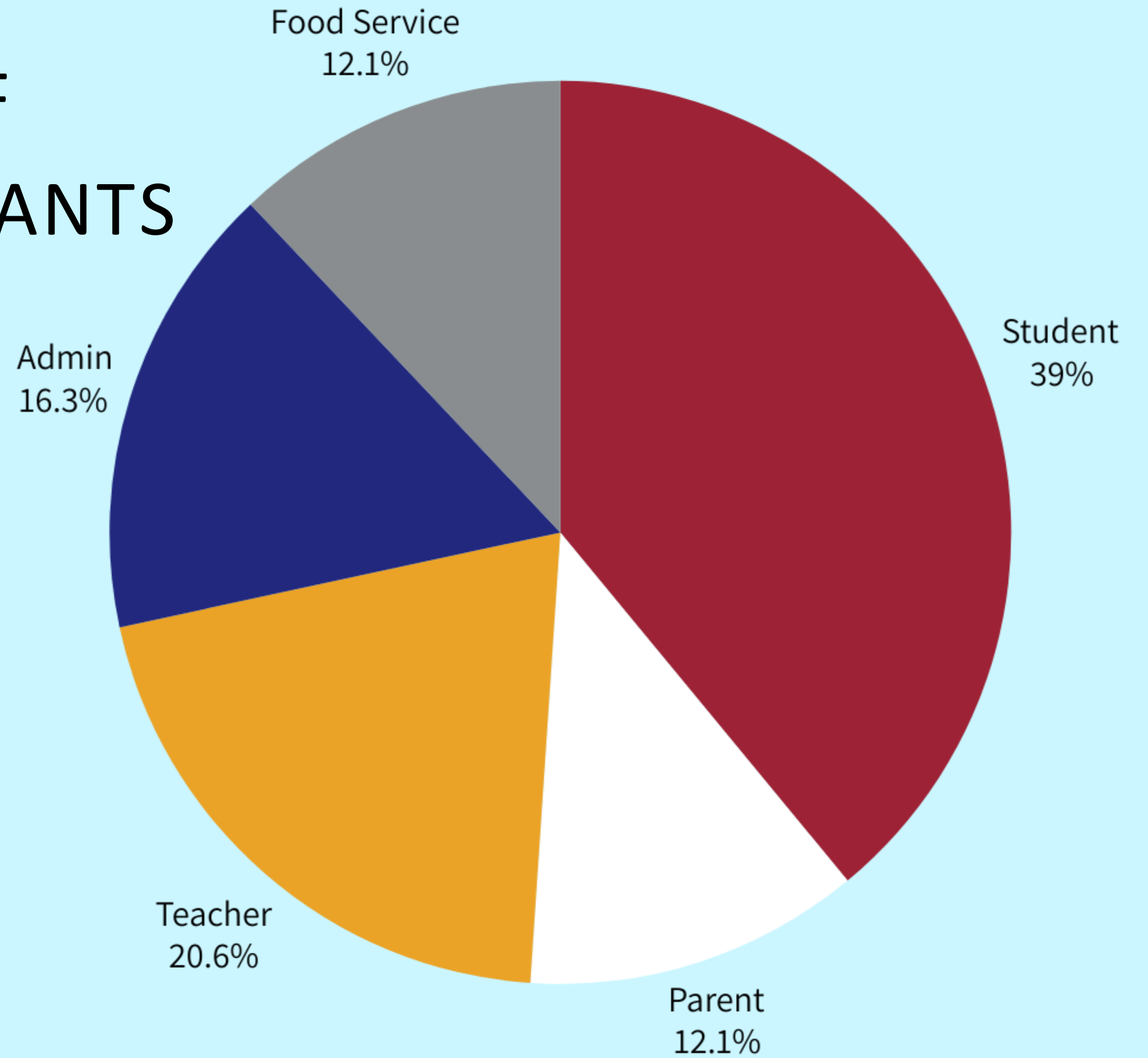
We completed 122 interviews



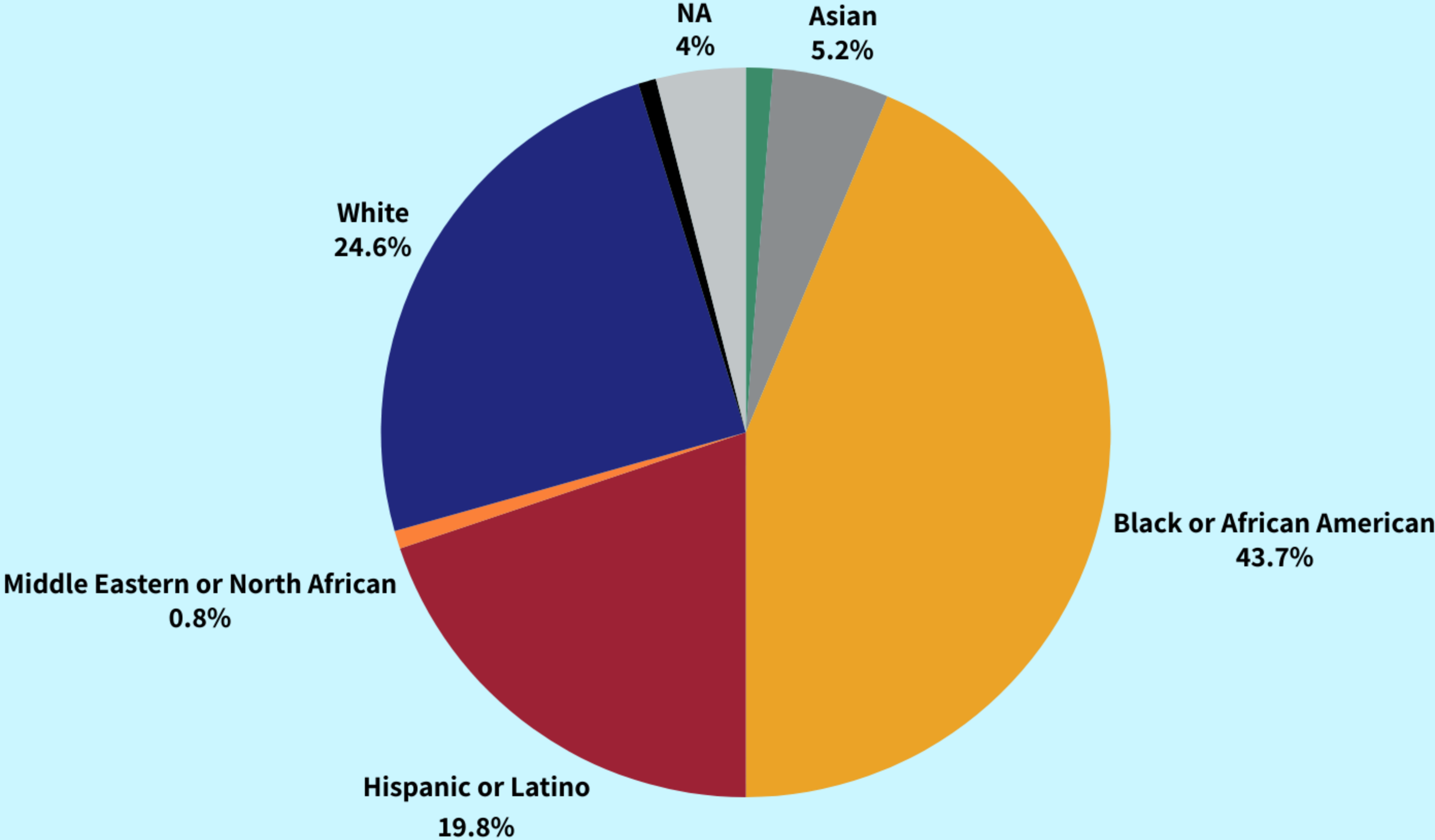
BREAKDOWN OF SURVEY PARTICIPANT ROLES



BREAKDOWN OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

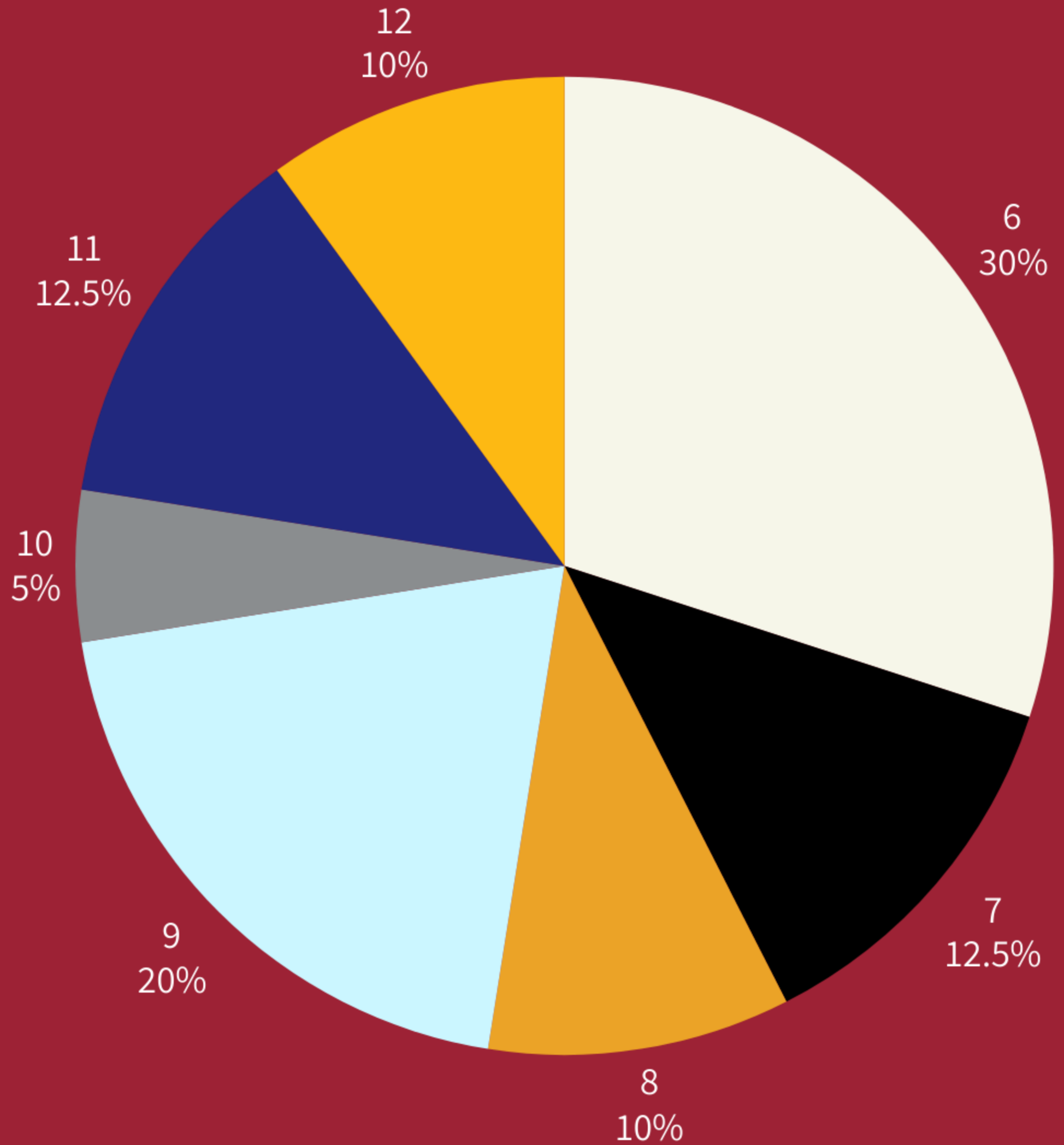


RACIAL/ETHNIC BREAKDOWN OF STUDY SAMPLE



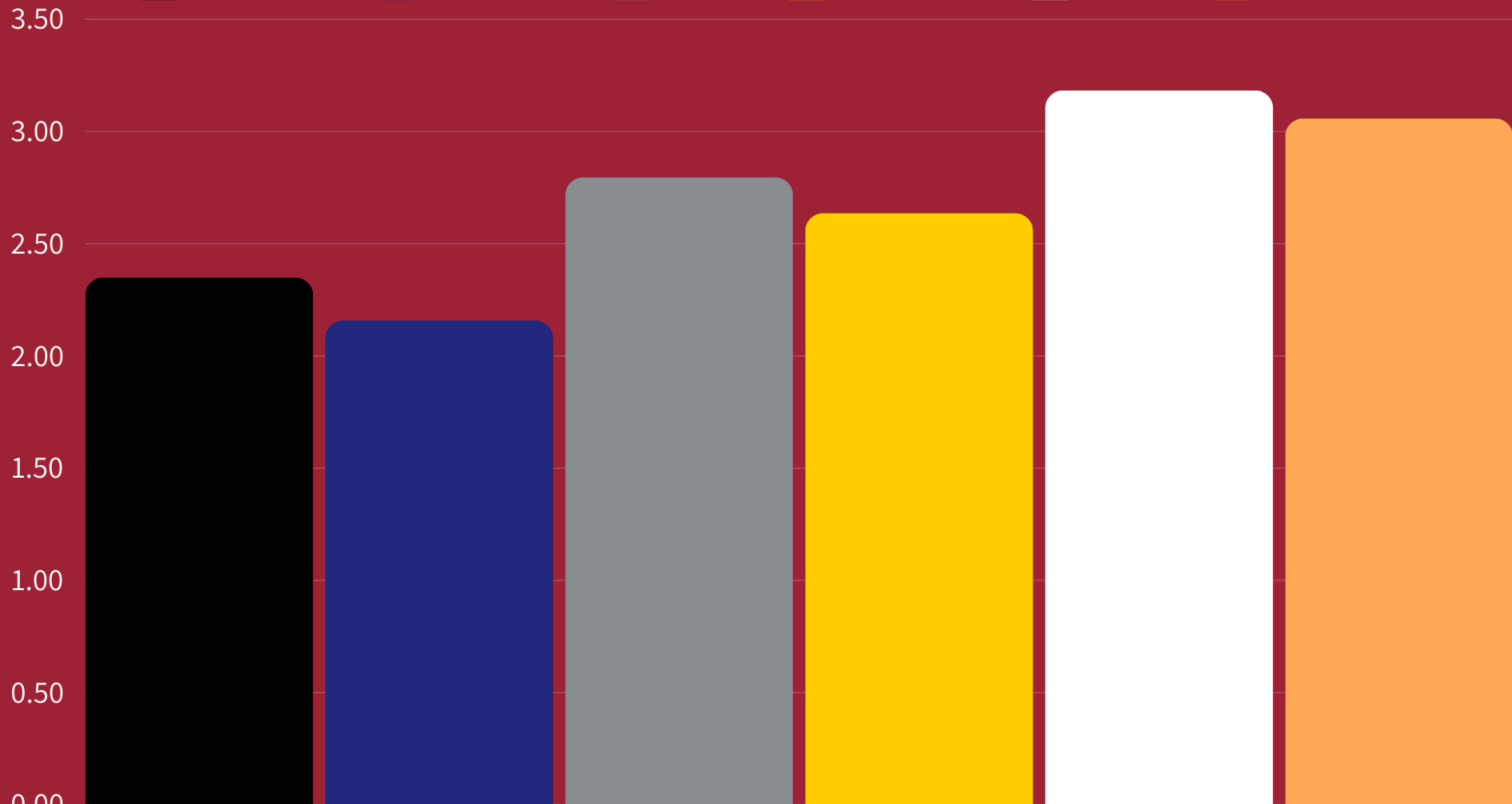
SURVEY SAMPLE GRADE LEVEL

6 K-8 SCHOOLS (MIDDLE GRADES ONLY)
2 HIGH SCHOOLS



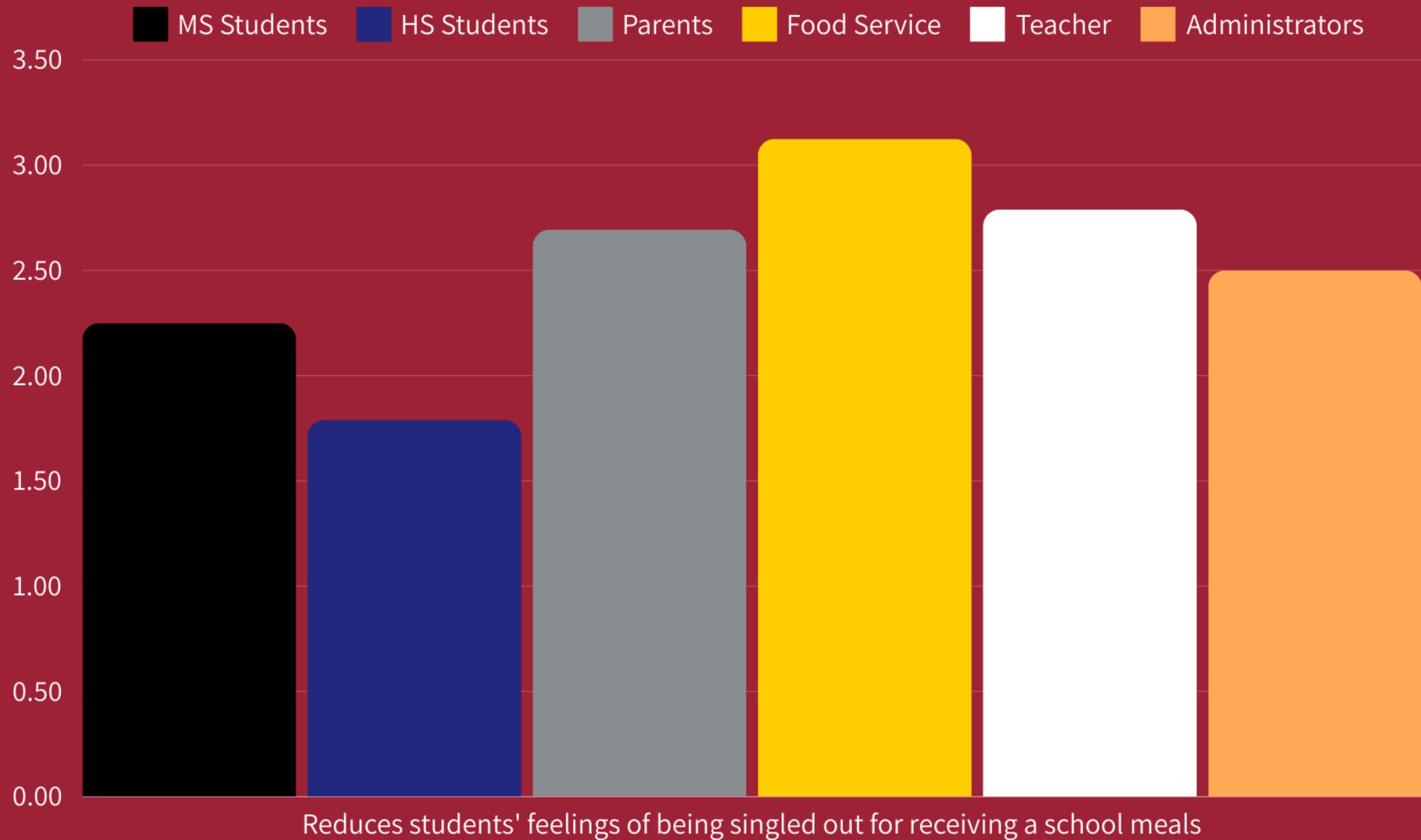
What is the perceived impact of school meals?

MS Students HS Students Parents Food Service Teacher Administrators

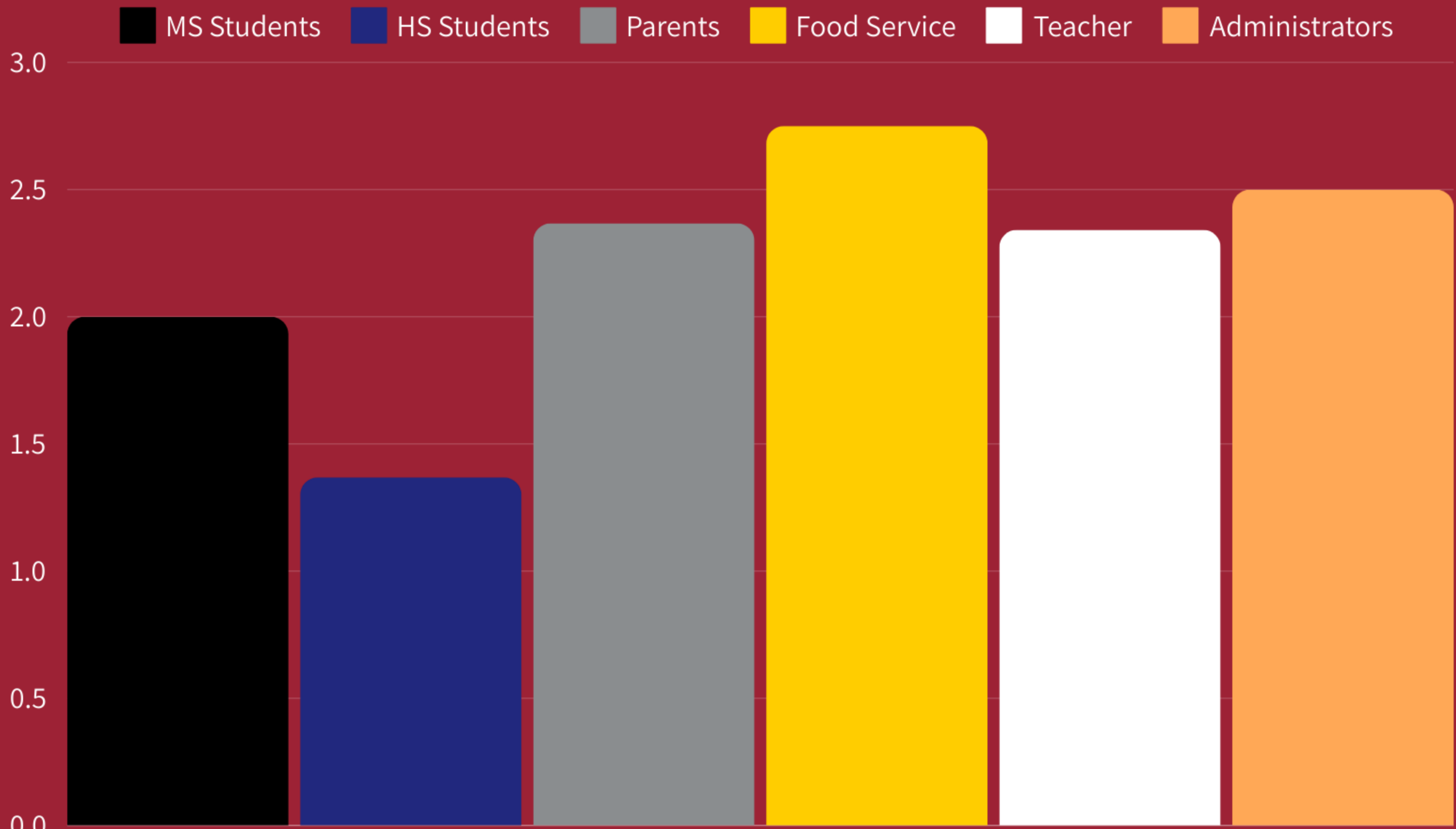


Helps the low-income students in my school access healthy food/Helps access nutrition support

Do free school meals reduce stigma among students?

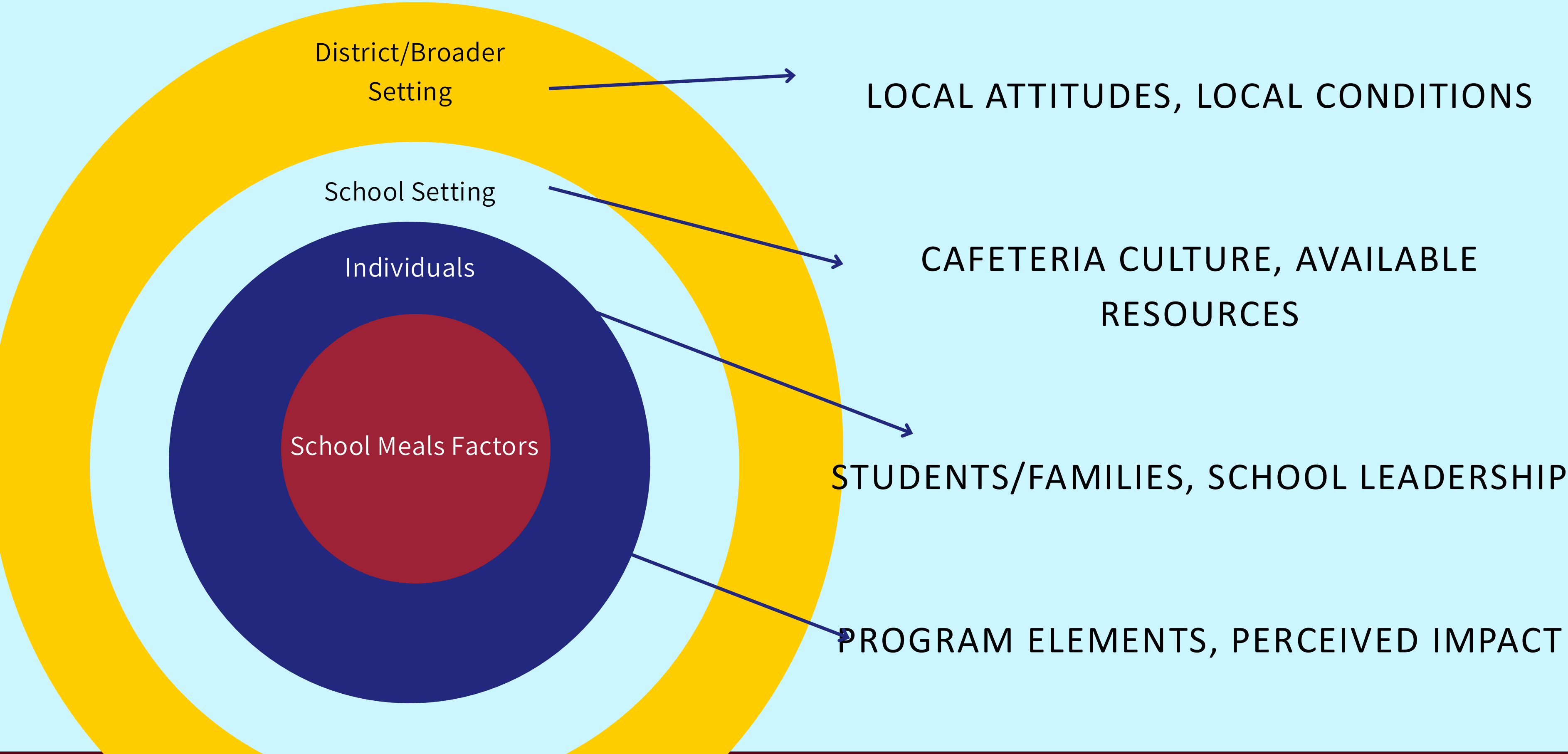


Do people feel empowered to give input on school meals?

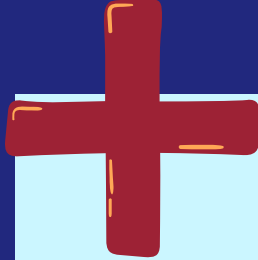


Empowers the students/school community to provide input on free school meals

Snapshot of Major Themes linked to framework




School Meals Factors: Program Characteristics



“Not all the food is bad, or poor quality. You know, there's like **fresh fruit** and **vegetables** and stuff like that. There's food that's fine. **High protein.**”

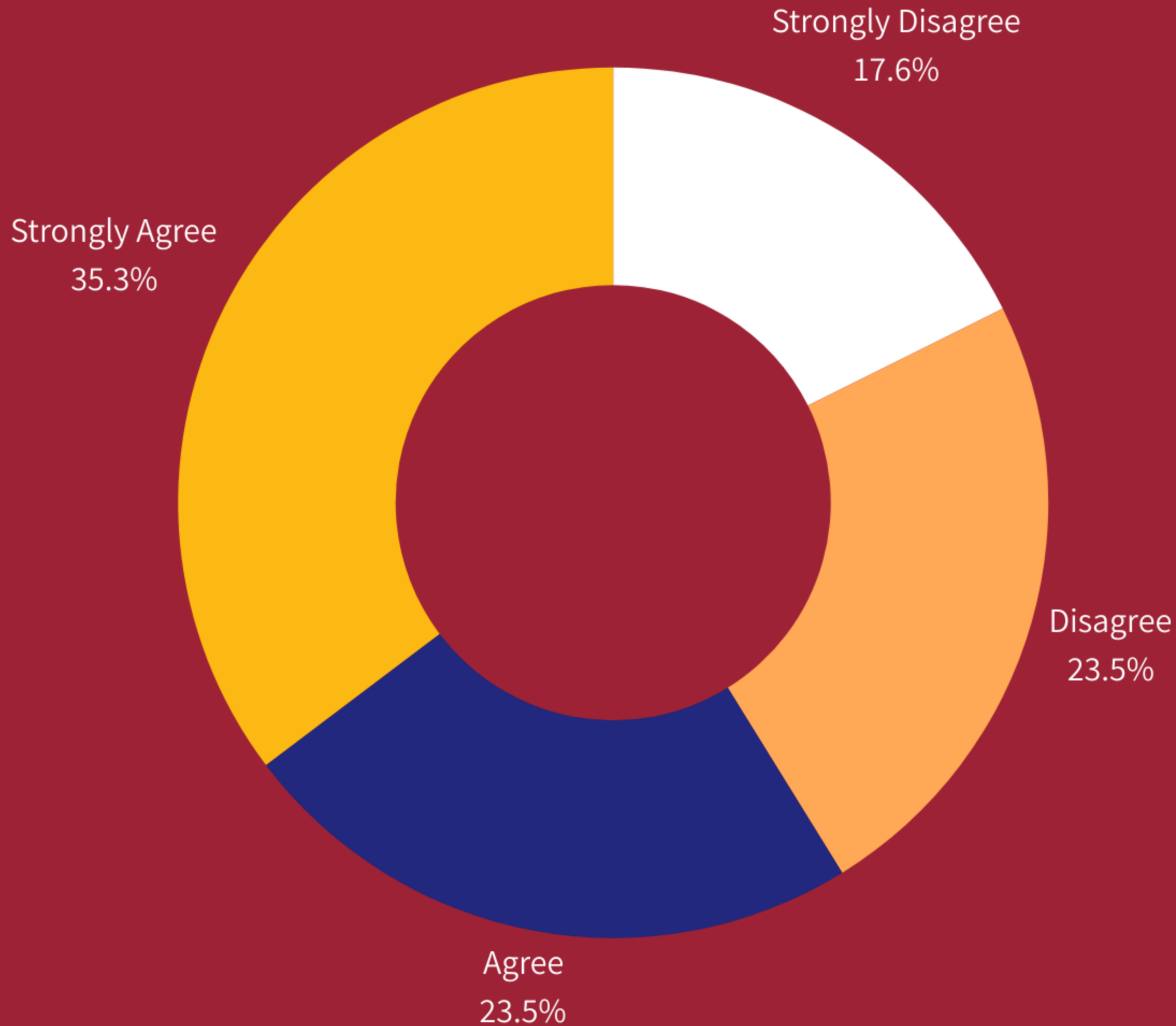
(Principal, sat)



“For me, I think of the food quality. I think just to a large extent, if the **food quality were better, the stigma would be less.**”

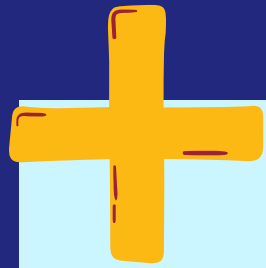
(Principal, sat)

“I mean, I feel like the **food isn't really presentable**. Like, let's say I took a picture and posted on social media. Okay, woah, what is that they're feeding that to you. Yeah. Like, it just **doesn't look appealing** to most kids.” (HS Student, FS)

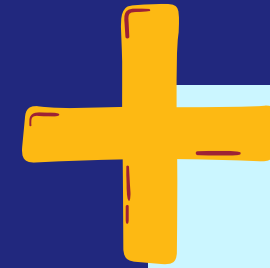


We asked **Admin** if they believed that free school meals increases the availability of higher quality foods to students (compared with foods they can bring from home/buy at corner stores).

School Meal Factors- Perceived Impact



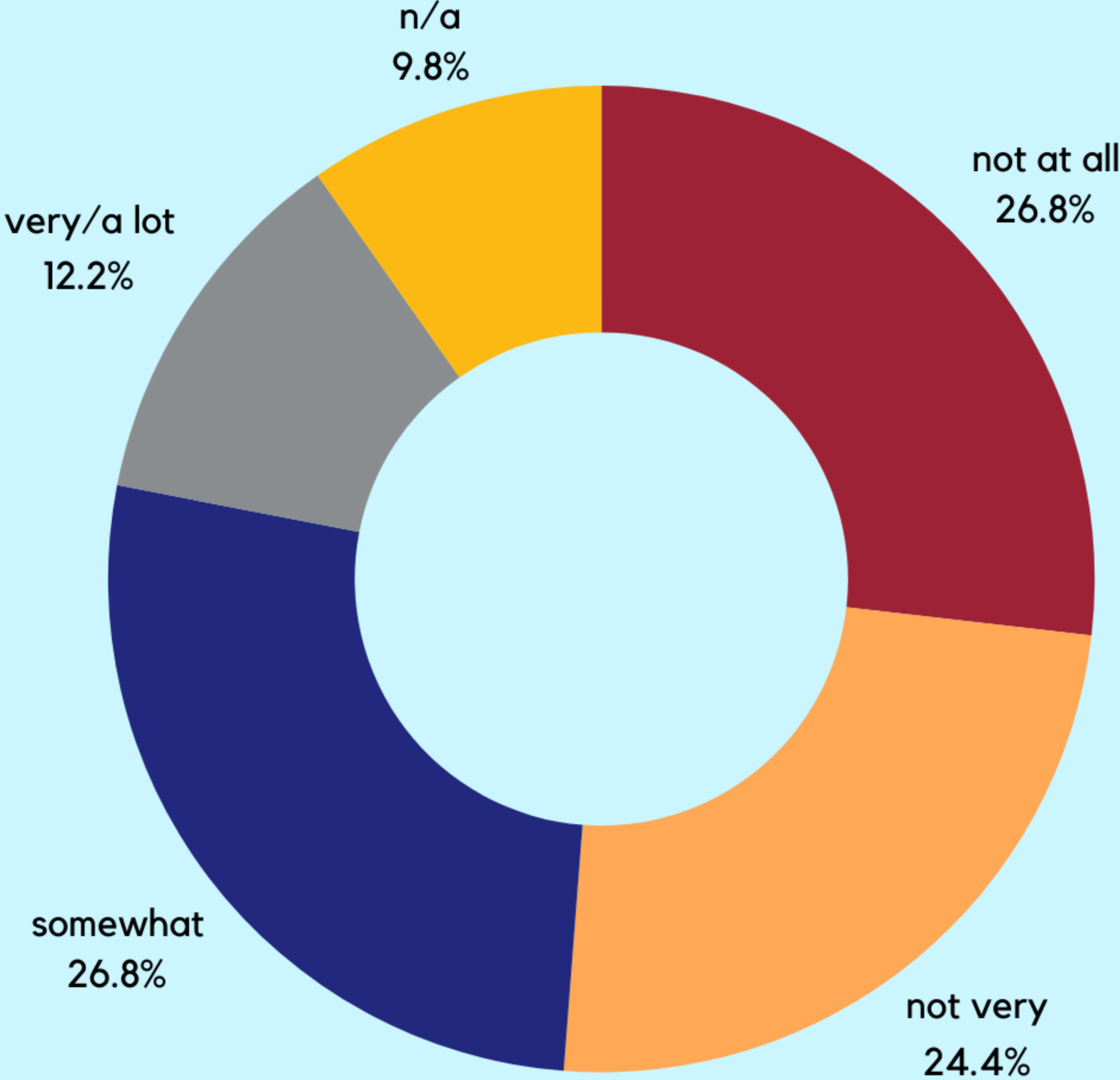
“And I think that today, when they eat it, they're more focused. And clearly they need it, right? Because they maybe haven't eaten yet. And it just gives them that little boost.” (Teacher, FS)



“The benefits of free lunch and free breakfast is it comes in handy because a lot of parents right now are, you know, living under their needs, you know, living paycheck to paycheck. Sometimes parents don't got, you know, food in their fridge to feed their kids. So being able to go to school and get two free meals is important.”
(Parent, Sat)



We asked students if they think school meals help them be less hungry and ready for learning:



Individuals: Students/Parents



“And my students are a very vocal, and I always try to teach them to really advocate for themselves, right that you want to be heard. And I think that's something that we're doing a good job, because they will let you know that they don't like something.”
(HS Principal, FS)



“Or they'll bring their own or they have like tons of snacks, but they consider as a lunch, which is, that's what they see as lunch sometimes.” (HS Teacher/admin, FS)

“I don't if I don't eat the meal. I just drink the chocolate milk and if we have Apple or like fruit cup. I'll eat that too. So at least I got something in my stomach” (Student, Sat)

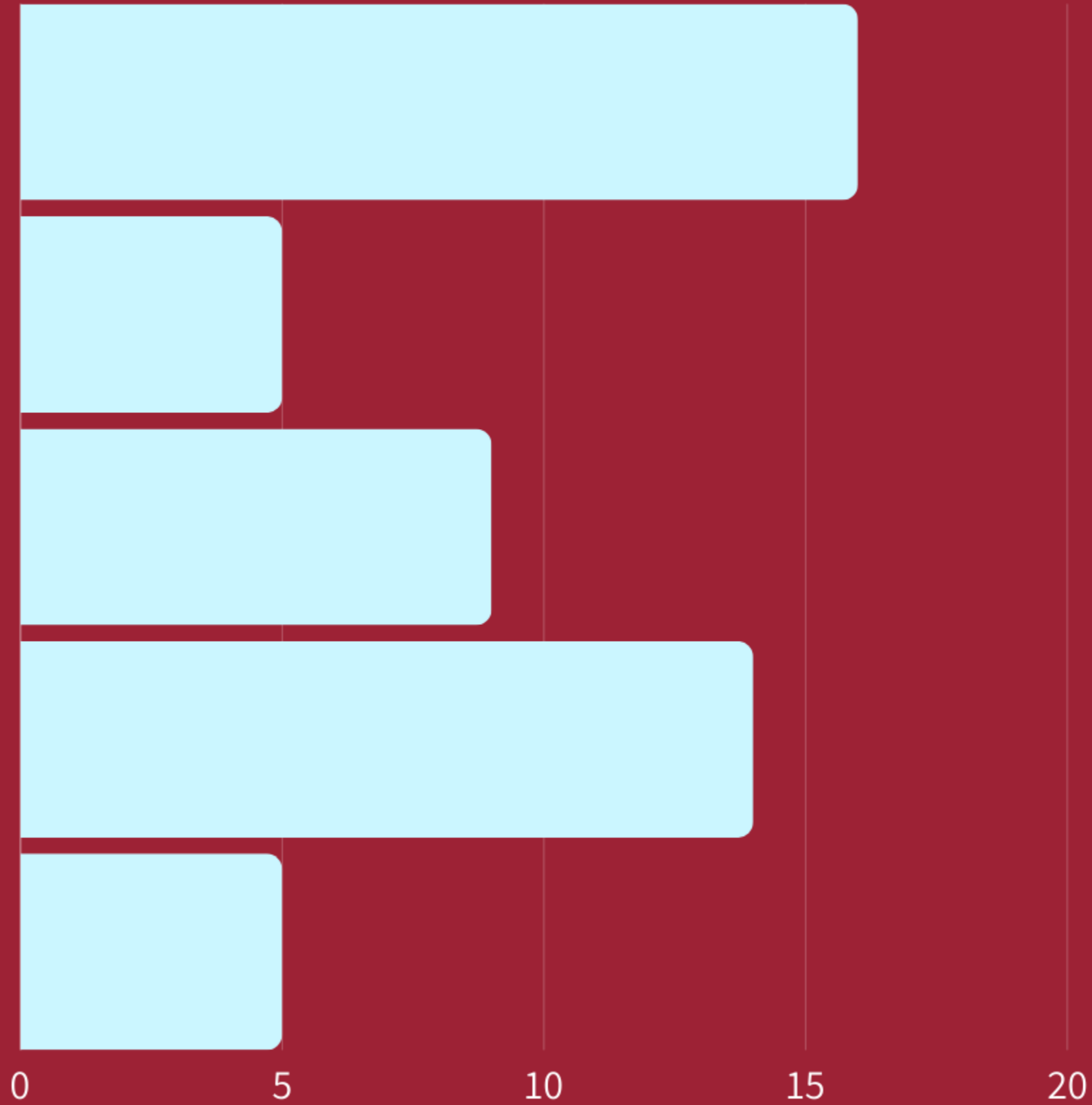
strongly disagree

disagree

somewhat agree

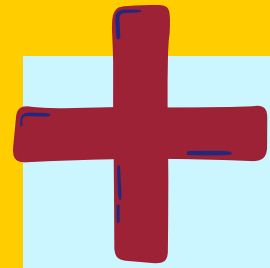
agree

strongly agree



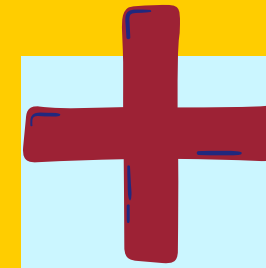
We asked **parents**: Does feeling stigmatized impact you/your child's decision to participate in school meals?

Individuals: School Leadership



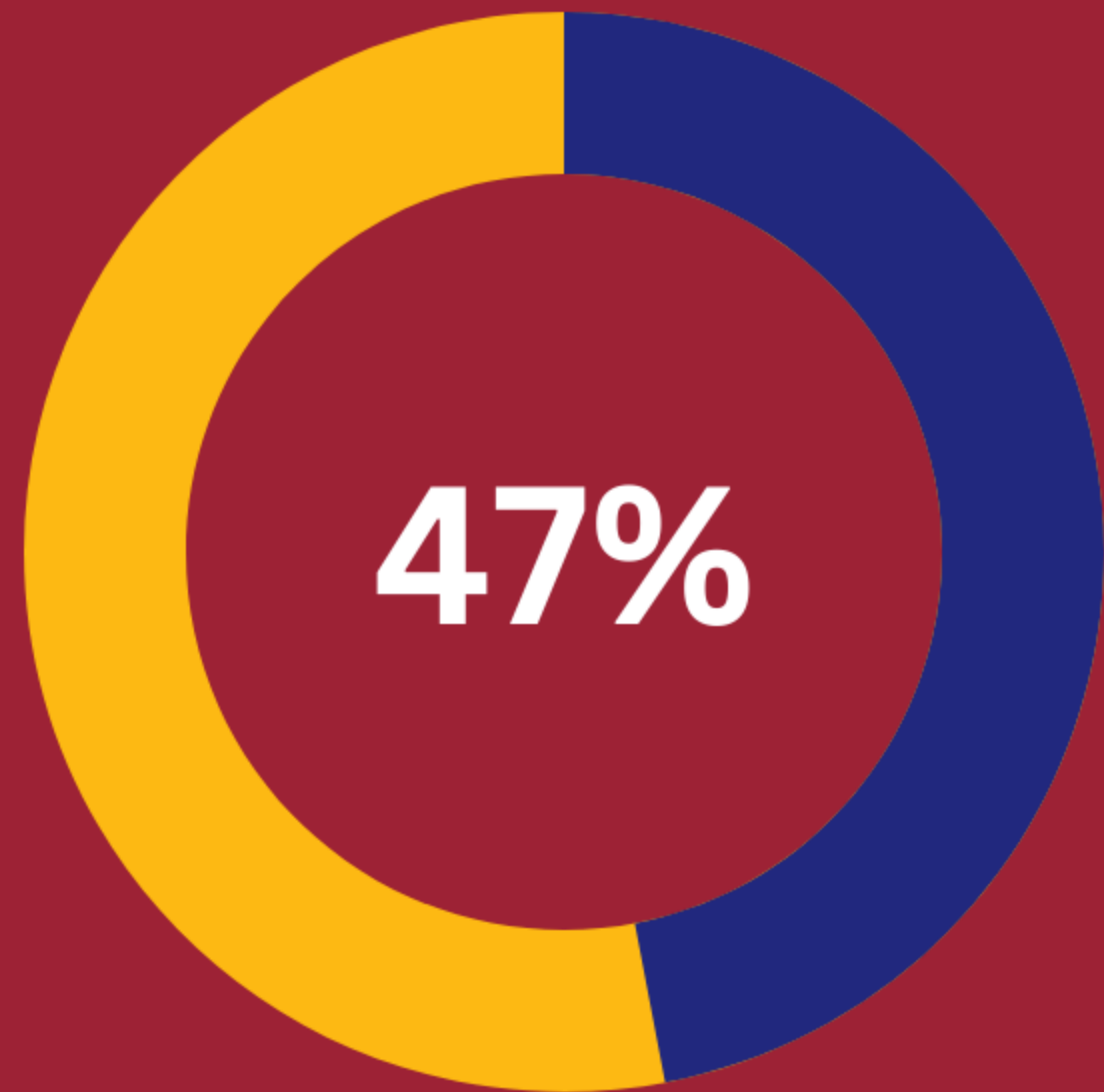
“And then when the kitchen staff was short, like when they had to move workers out, I was like, You know what, open the door, **let me go back and help them serve.**”

(HS Principal, FS)



“Um yeah, with the principal and the climate staff. **They like to play a little music**, get the kids, you know, a happy lunch break.”

(Teacher, FS)



Of school teachers feel that their principal has taken an active role in the implementation of school meals.

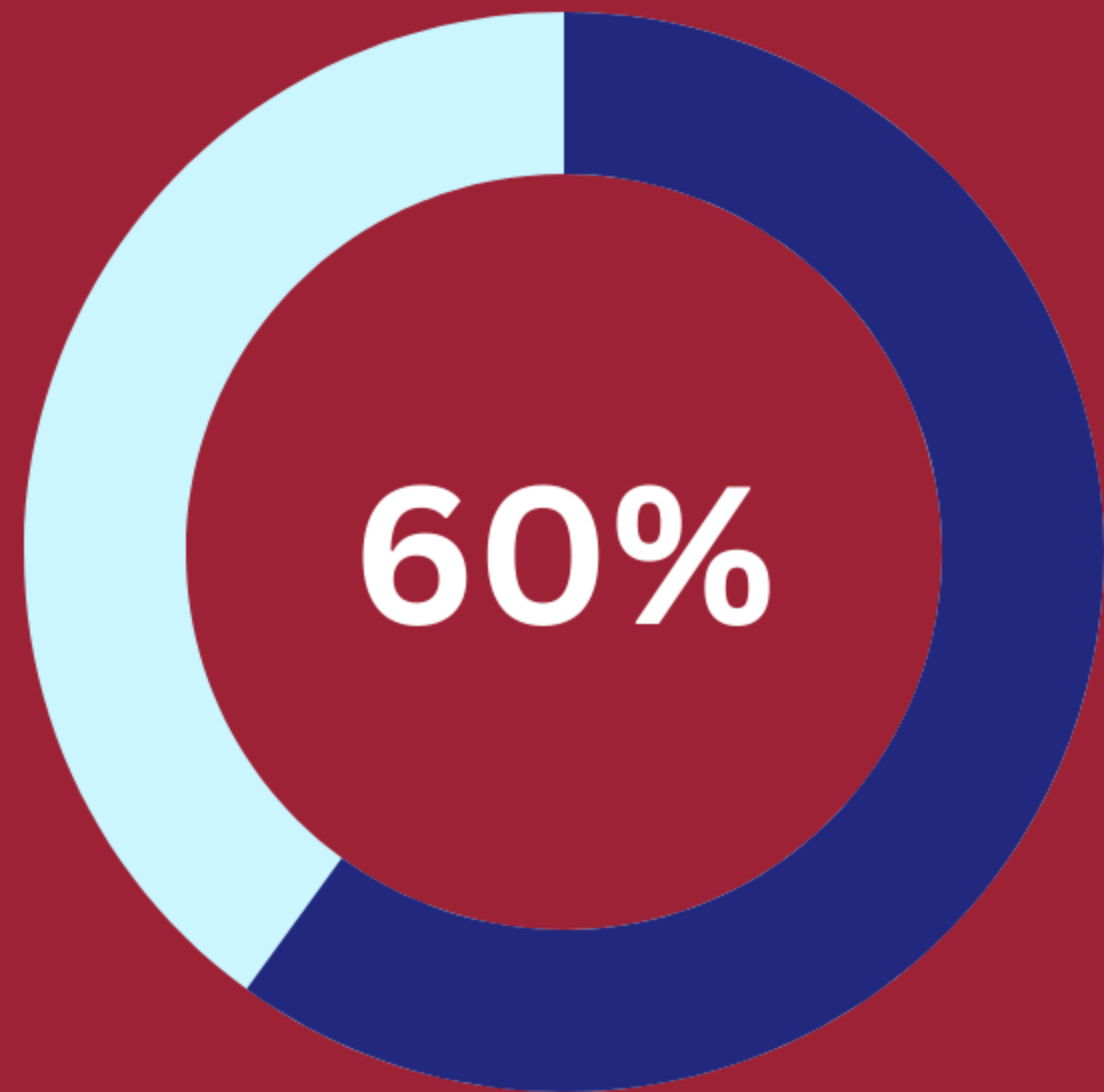
Inner Setting: Available Resources

“Yes. And how is the staffing right now? Are you at the staff you need? Or do you need?”

“I'm short 2. 3? I've been so long, I can't remember.” (HS Food service, FS)

“So I feel like there needs to be a little extra. A little extra snack or something in their in their day. Besides just lunch and breakfast.” (HS Food service, FS)

“Like we only got like five minutes at eat or 7 minutes.... it takes it takes four minutes to get everyone in line and get their lunch. Like it takes them to get to the lunchroom. And then they and then just like two minutes into the lunch room. Yes.” (MS Student, FS)



Of school teachers/staff
feel that the school meals
program requires more
work than can be
accomplished with current
resources available to their
school



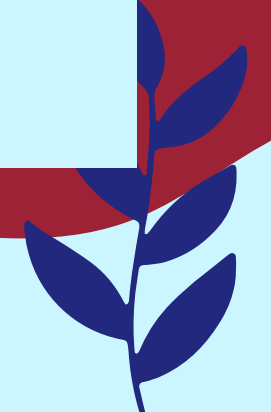
School Setting: Cafeteria Culture



“But for the kids like for them, it's social hour. They're always more focused on like, being with their friends. This is the first time throughout the day that they get to see all their friends from like, their different classes so it's always, it's always like a good vibe in there.”(Climate, Sat)



“They call it a freebie. Yeah. It's like, oh, you're getting you're getting the free lunch. You suck.”
(HS Students, FS)

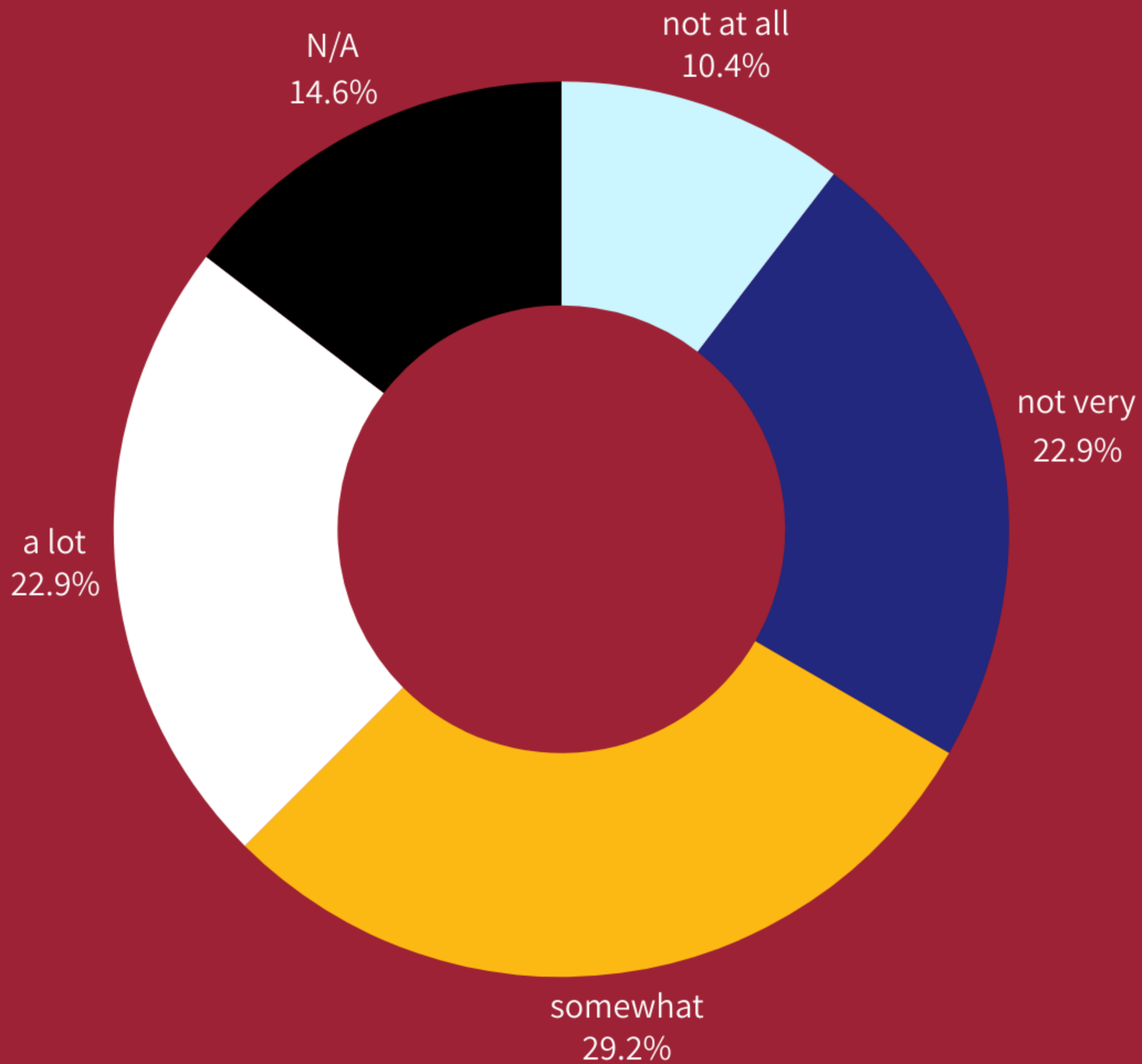


District/Broader Setting: Local Attitudes



“In the last two years, it's become very inclusive and very like we're serving was what it is the thing falafels and stuff. Wow. Okay, the children so I know that the district as a whole it is reflecting a different cultures.” (Parent, FS)


“Well, we have a lot of we have a lot of Spanish students here and they're not getting you know with what they will eat on a regular Yeah, they're they're actually getting...it's like American food. Yeah. Yeah, they're even more of American food opposed to you know, their culture.” (Admin, FS)



We asked parents if they feel that the school meals program takes the culture of the local area into account.




Outer Setting: Local Environment

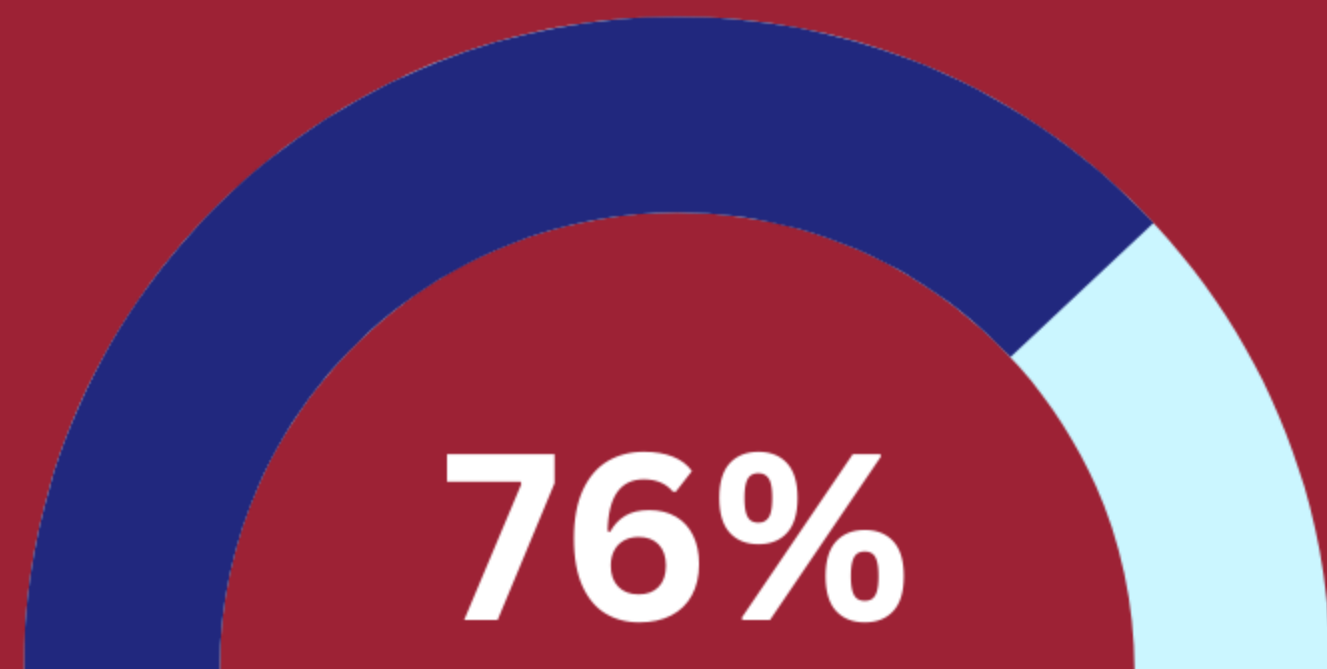


“Yeah, it's not many grocery stores around this area... it's a few corner stores that they received in fabulous bunch of junk, right? They don't so like fresh produce or things like that. It's always the quick meals, like the chicken fingers and fries, the sandwiches. So I do not think it's a lot of grocery stores close in this area. So that can be an issue for some of our parents.”

(Teacher, FS)

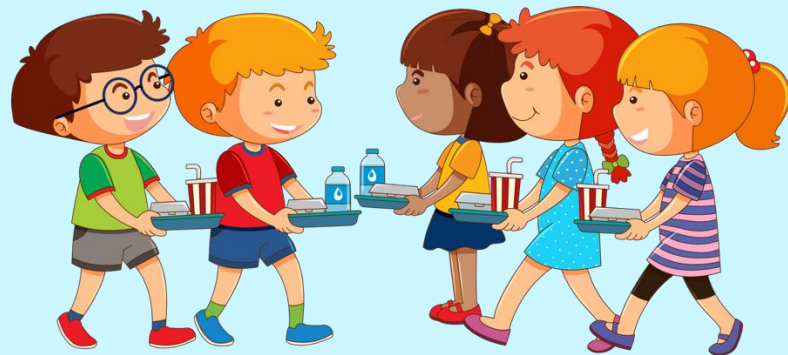
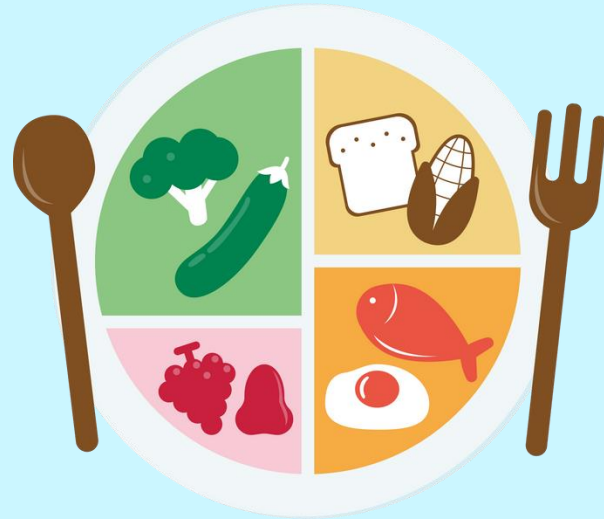


“So if they were exposed to more food like that was a little bit Different. It's not really different, but they don't. They know junk food. They live around junk food, they eat junk food. They go to the corner store, they get their food. They know it. So they like it” (Teacher, sat)



Of teachers either agree/strongly agree that that this policy improves the nutrition status of students who lack consistent access to food

Barriers and Facilitators Across High- and Low- Participation Groups



- Cafeteria Culture
 - Stigma, social culture
- Neighborhood Conditions
 - Corner stores, concerns with violence
- Need for Meals
 - Food insecurity and hunger, needs met

Next Steps for the Study

How we will use these findings?

- We are sharing the findings from this study across the city of Philadelphia, the United States, and internationally to raise awareness of school meals
- We are using these results to design and evaluate changes to implementation of school meals next year

How can you get involved?

- We have a Community Advisory Board (CAB) and are building a community network listserv to share updates on the project. Want to get involved? Contact us below!

Support from CAB and School District

While we have been working alongside the School District, we have built a Community Advisory Board of representatives of Community organizations, parents, and students that helped us to better understand the community we are working with

Laura Crandall
Dr. Jonathan Deustch
Irene Hong
Hillary Kane



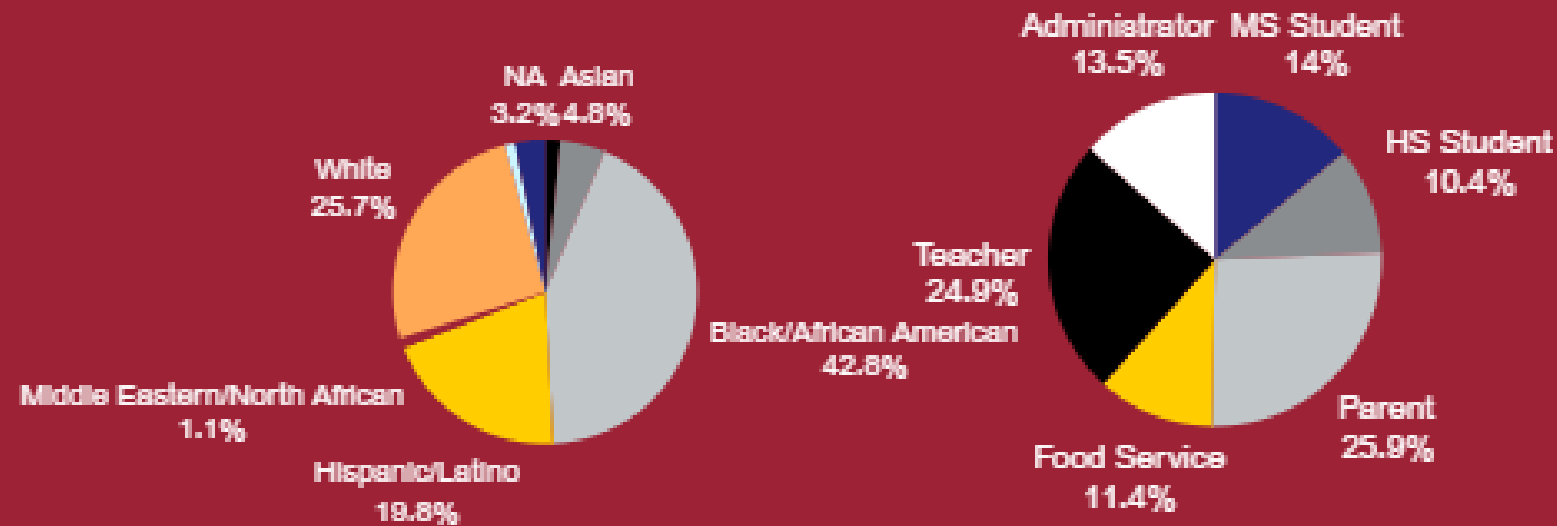
Jacob Kurtz
Rose Marone
Randy Persaud
Sultan Raheem

School Meals at The School District of Philadelphia

What do the students, parents, and staff at the school district think about school meals?

Who did we talk to?

We learned from 193 participants across 8 schools (6 elementary-middle, 2 high) in the district. Participants were varied in terms of race, ethnicity, and we had an equal distribution of roles.



What did we find?

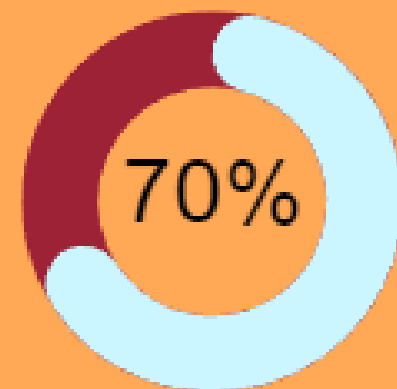


Of students feel that the school food is healthy (answered either "agree" or "strongly agree")



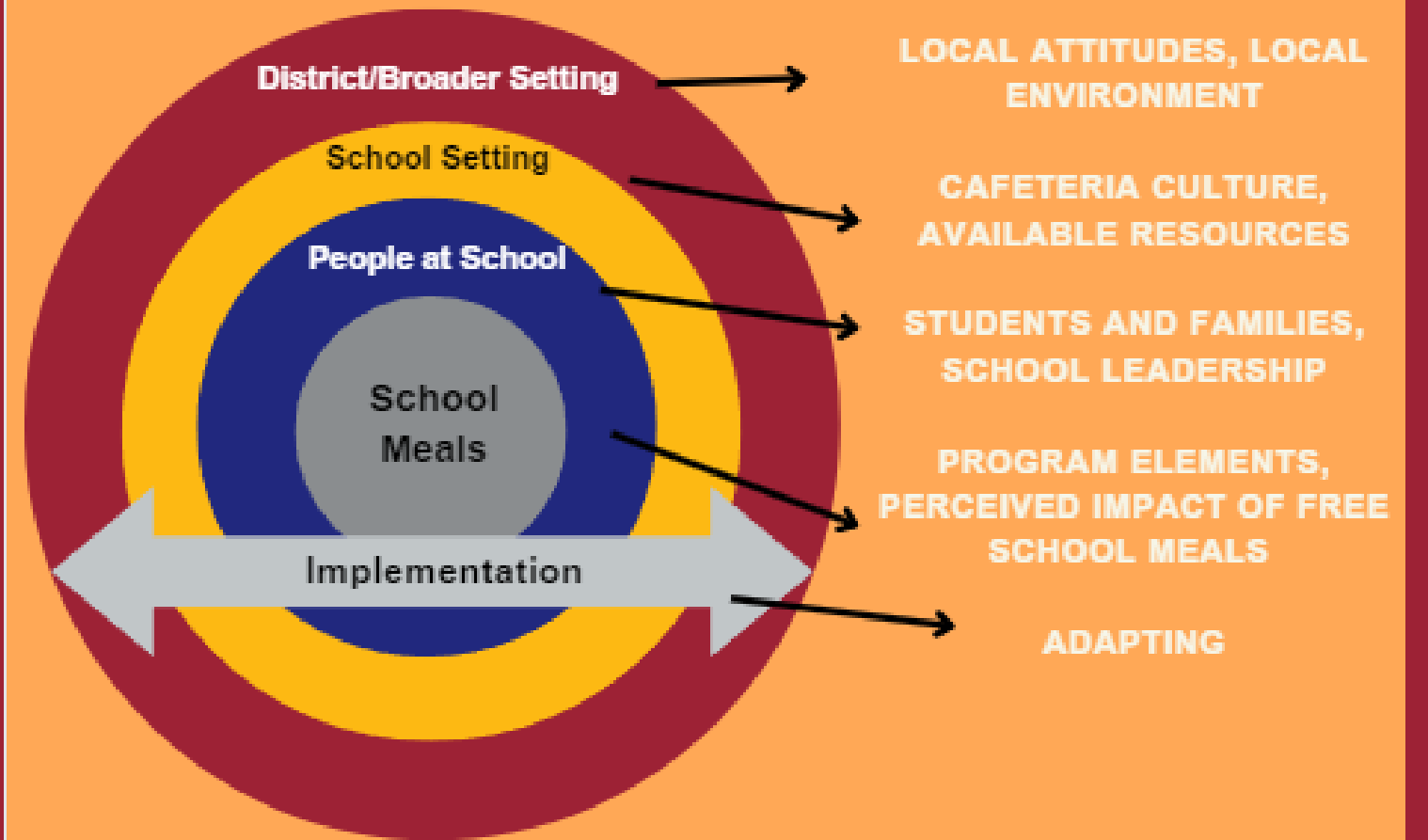
Of students feel school meals helps students struggling with hunger (answered either "agree" or "strongly agree")

'I feel like they put like other stuff on the plate that we don't eat instead of just giving us more of things we like.'
(MS Student)



Students feel that they do not have a say in the foods included

Most popular focus areas from the district



Insights from Students

'They call it a freebie. Yeah. It's like, oh, you're getting you're getting the free lunch. You suck.' - Cafeteria Culture

Insights from Parents

'In the last two years, it's become very inclusive and very like we're serving was what it is the thing falafels and stuff... so I know that the district as a whole it is reflecting a different cultures.' - Local Attitudes

Insights from Staff

'And I think that today, when they eat it, they're more focused. And clearly, they need it, right? Because they maybe haven't eaten yet. And it just gives them that little boost.' - Perceived Impact of Free Meals

Thank you!

Questions!

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