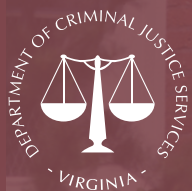




2021 Virginia School Safety Audit Highlights



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INTRODUCTION

Since 1997, Virginia law has required all public schools to conduct annual school safety audits (*Code of Virginia § 22.1-279.8*). The audit process assists schools and divisions in identifying and evaluating physical safety concerns and patterns of student and staff safety perceptions.

The Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety (VCSCS), in consultation with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), is responsible for developing the list of items to review and evaluate as part of the school safety audit required by the *Code of Virginia*. Additionally, VCSCS has established a standardized report format for school safety audits, reporting criteria, and procedures for report submission.

VCSCS has collected school safety data for the annual School Safety Audit Program since 2005. In order to maintain the relevance of the data collected by VCSCS, the audit process is reviewed and updated each year. To date, VCSCS has developed five components for the School Safety Audit Program:

- School Safety Survey
- Division Safety Survey
- Crisis Management Plan Review and Certification
- Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions
- School Safety Inspection Checklist Completion and Certification

The school and division safety survey(s) are intended to provide schools, divisions, and DCJS with information on how best practices for school safety are being implemented across Virginia. The results of these surveys provide valuable information on training and resources needed across the state. These surveys are updated each year in anticipation of emerging best practices and to gather data to inform policymakers.

In accordance with the *Code of Virginia § 22.1-279.8* paragraph D, “Each school board shall ensure that every school that it supervises shall develop a written school crisis, emergency management, and medical emergency response plan...” Additionally, “The local school board, the chief law-enforcement officer, the fire chief, the chief of the emergency medical services agency, the executive director of the relevant regional emergency medical services council, and the emergency management official of the locality, or their designees, shall annually review the written school crisis, emergency management, and medical emergency response plans.” Finally, “The local school division superintendent shall certify this review in writing to the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety no later than August 31 of each year.”

The Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions (VSS) is administered in collaboration with VDOE and researchers from Virginia Tech and the University of Virginia. The VSS consists of a student and staff survey component. In 2021, the staff survey was administered to all classroom instructors (teachers and teachers’ aides) and staff in Virginia. The student survey was administered to all 6th–8th graders. Beginning in 2022, the VSS will be administered alternating years between schools serving 9th–12th graders in even years and schools serving 6th–8th graders in odd years, with elementary school staff included in odd years. VSS results are intended to assist schools and divisions in understanding how connected students and staff feel to their school, the quality of relationships, perceptions of the learning environment, support for staff professional roles, and feelings of safety among students and staff.

Since 2013, the *Code of Virginia § 22.1-279.8 B* has required all public schools in the Commonwealth to conduct school building safety inspections using a standardized walk-through checklist provided by VCSCS. The School Safety Inspection Checklist is built upon the knowledge and training of crime prevention experts using criminal behaviors and fields of science included in the philosophy of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design¹. This checklist is required to be completed in

¹ Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is a multi-disciplinary approach of crime prevention that uses urban and architectural design and the management of built and natural environments. <https://www.cpted.net/>

each school a minimum of once every three years and allows schools and divisions to recognize their own unique challenges and address physical security priorities accordingly.

The culmination of the Virginia School Safety Audit (“the Audit”) is a review of all components at the school and division level. Based on the results of the Audit, schools and divisions can develop responses and solutions to identified vulnerabilities, which may include recommendations for structural adjustments, changes to safety procedures, and/or revisions to the student code of conduct. All data from the Audit is available to school divisions to assist with informing their practices and guiding decision-making related to student and staff safety. However, the *Code of Virginia* allows for some of the data to be protected from release to the public for safety and security reasons.

Further information regarding the components of the School Safety Audit as well as copies of the survey instruments can be located on the [DCJS website](http://www.dcs.virginia.gov/virginia-center-school-and-campus-safety/virginia-school-safety-audit-program) at www.dcs.virginia.gov/virginia-center-school-and-campus-safety/virginia-school-safety-audit-program.

The 2021 Virginia School Safety Audit Highlights

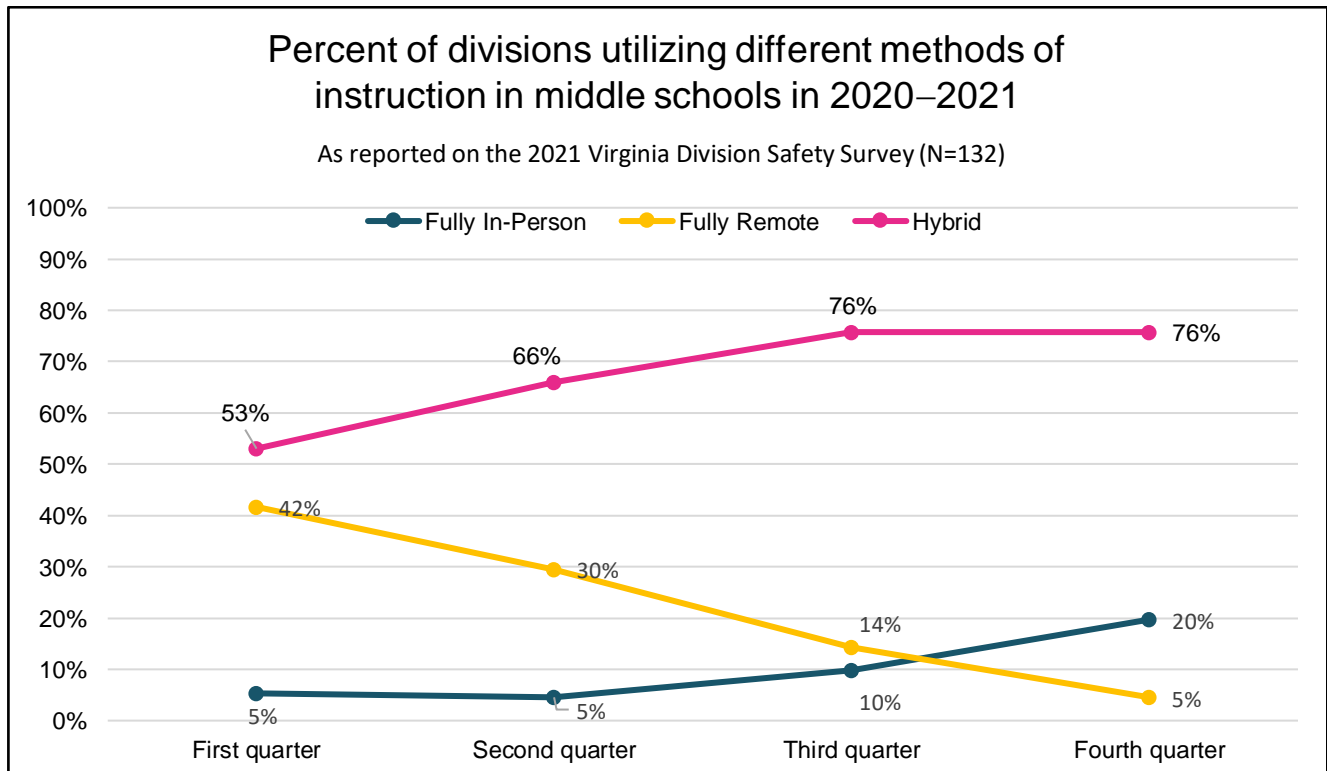
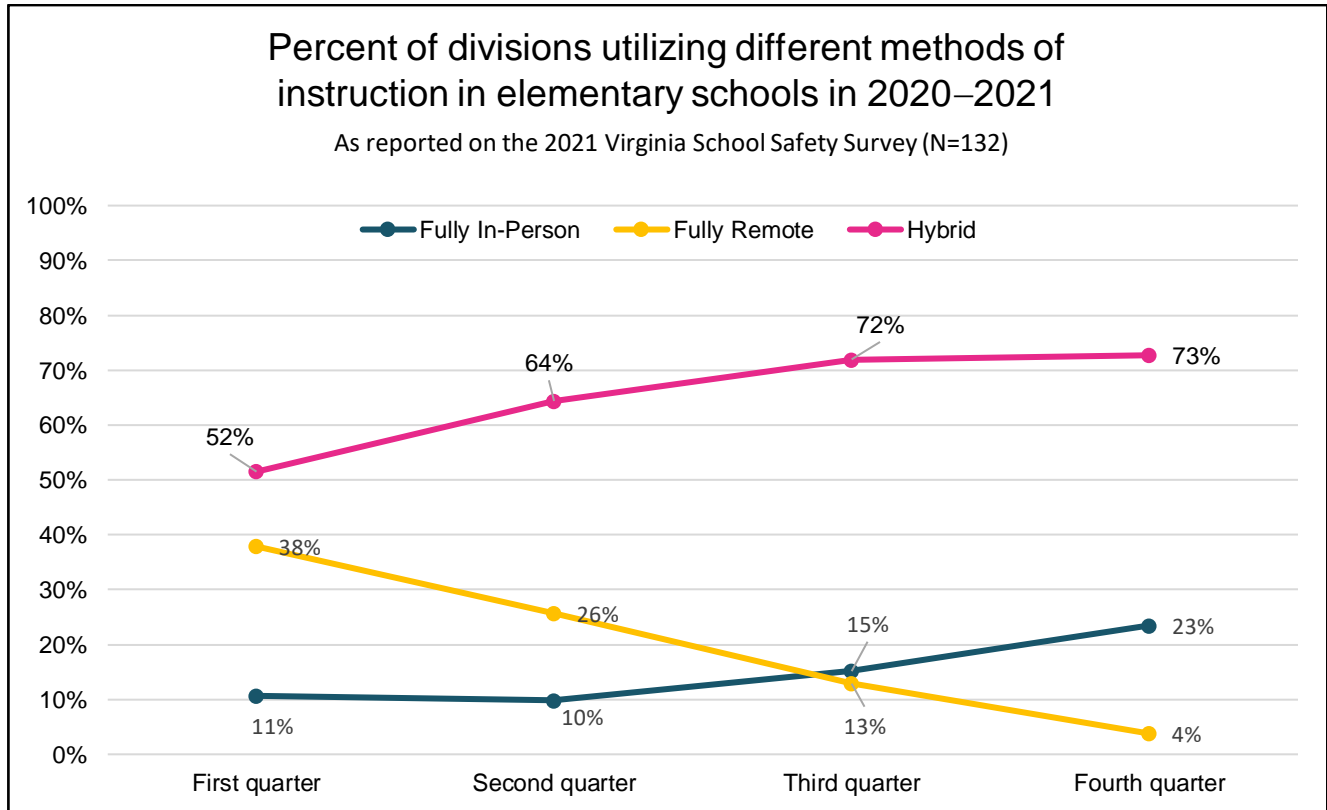
The Commonwealth of Virginia consists of 132 public school divisions in addition to the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice Division of Education, Virginia’s Academic-Year Governor’s Schools, Regional Alternative Education Programs, Regional Career and Technical Programs, and the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. A total of 1,967 public schools operated² in Virginia during the 2020–2021 school year. According to the Virginia Department of Education’s [Fall Membership database](#), there were 1,280,699 students enrolled in public schools during the 2020–2021 school year.

This document highlights and summarizes key data from all components of the School Safety Audit, to include comparisons across components and multi-year data trends. Reports summarizing state-level results by item can be found on the [DCJS website](http://www.dcs.virginia.gov/virginia-center-school-and-campus-safety/virginia-school-safety-audit-program) at www.dcs.virginia.gov/virginia-center-school-and-campus-safety/virginia-school-safety-audit-program.

AUDIT COMPONENT	2021 PARTICIPATION	CLARIFICATIONS
School Safety Survey	1,967 schools	Includes 12 non-traditional schools
Division Safety Survey	132 divisions	
Crisis Management Plan – review and certification	132 divisions	
Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions – Staff survey	1,932 schools	80,829 classroom instructors 20,855 staff
Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions – Student survey	342 schools	102,592 students in grades 6–8
The School Safety Inspection Checklist – completion and certification	132 divisions	Last certified in 2020

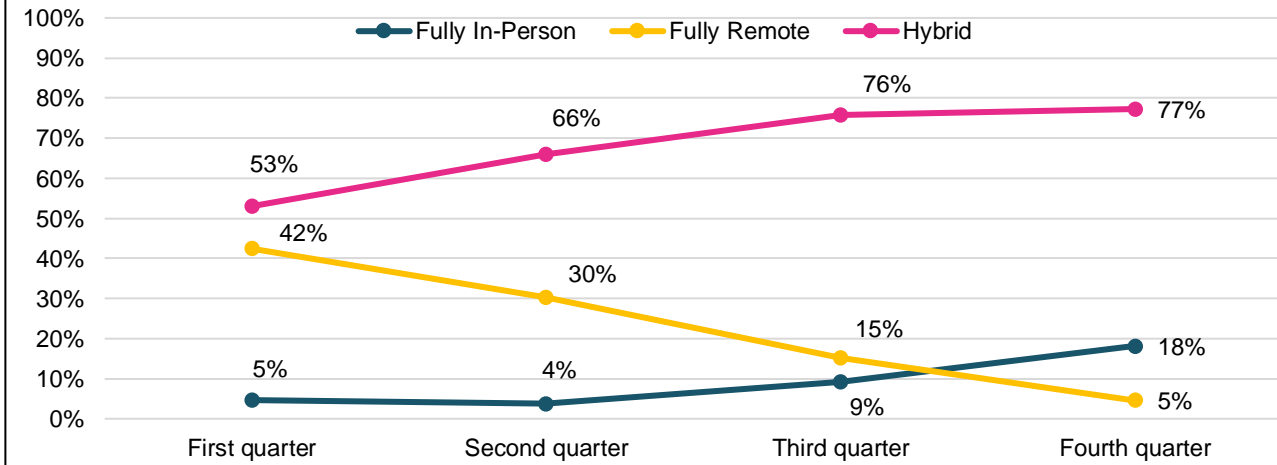
² For purposes of this survey, DCJS defined “school” as any separate physical structure that houses and instructs public school students during school hours. This is different from the Virginia Department of Education’s (VDOE) definition and is why their count of the number of schools is different. VDOE defines a school as “a publicly funded institution where students are enrolled for all or a majority of the instructional day; those students are reported in fall membership at the institution and the institution, at minimum, meets requirements adopted by the Board of Education.”

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic continued to impact the method in which students received educational services – fully in person, fully remote, or a hybrid of both in-person and remote instruction – during the 2020–2021 school year:



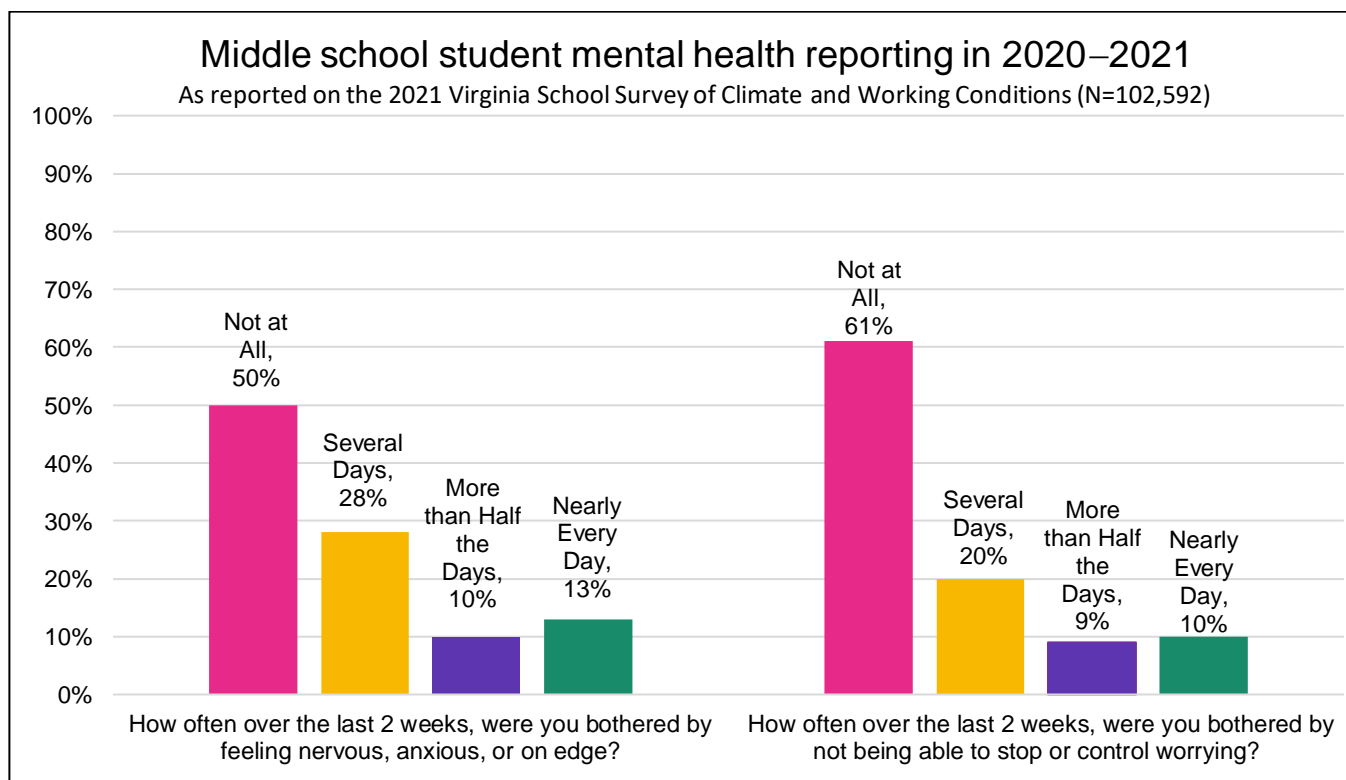
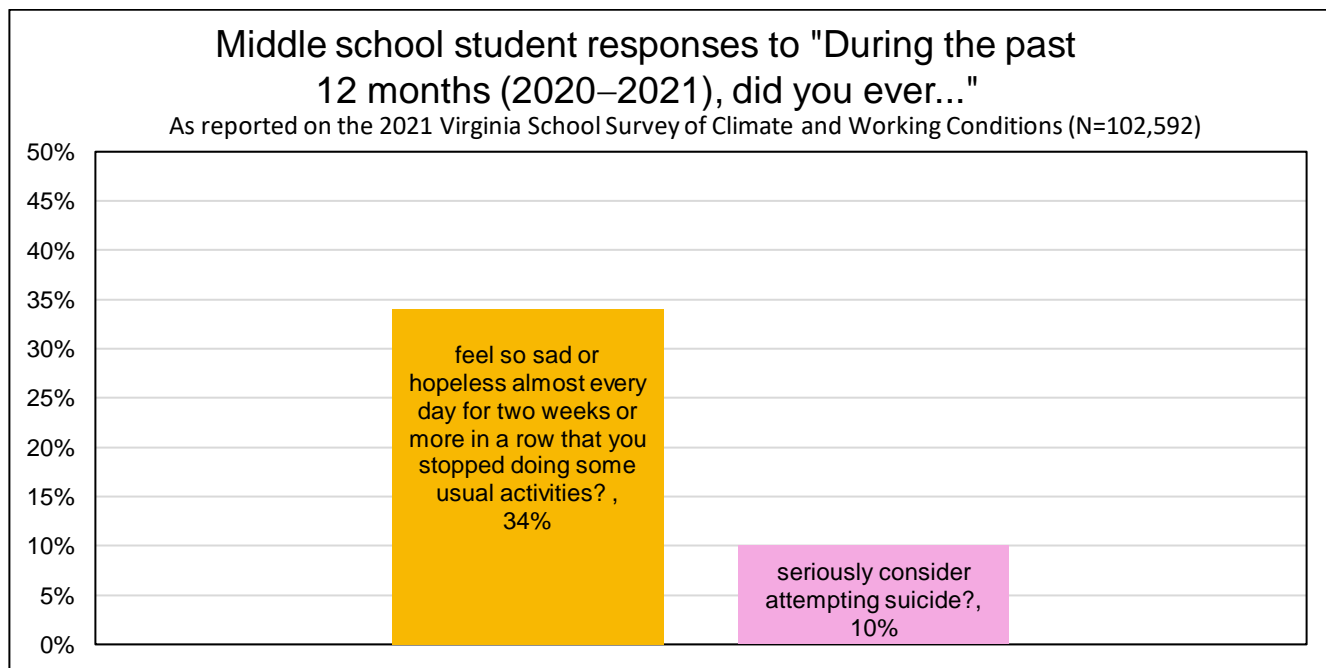
Percent of divisions utilizing different methods of instruction in high schools in 2020–2021

As reported on the 2021 Virginia Division Safety Survey (N=132)



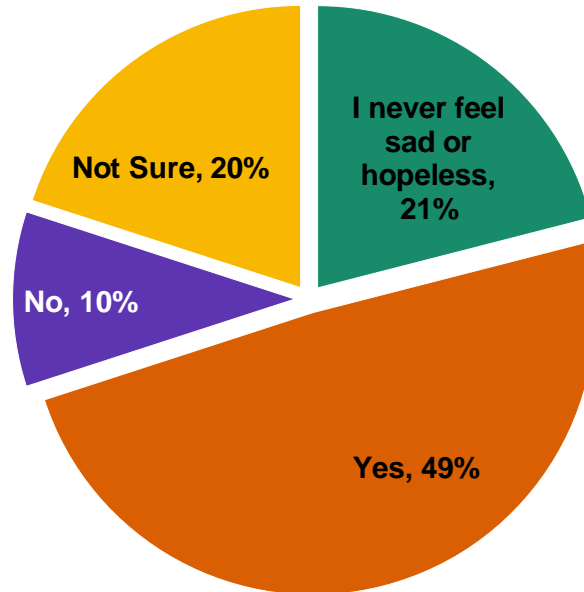
MENTAL HEALTH

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools, students, and staff will continue to unfold as data is collected throughout the coming years. An area of increased focus in recent years, and even more so with the pandemic, is the mental health of students and staff. Only 24% of administrators reported providing mental health training to staff, and only 12% of middle school students reported they had participated in mental health training in the 2020–2021 school year.



Percent of middle school students reporting
there was an adult they could turn to for help
when they felt sad or hopeless in 2020–2021

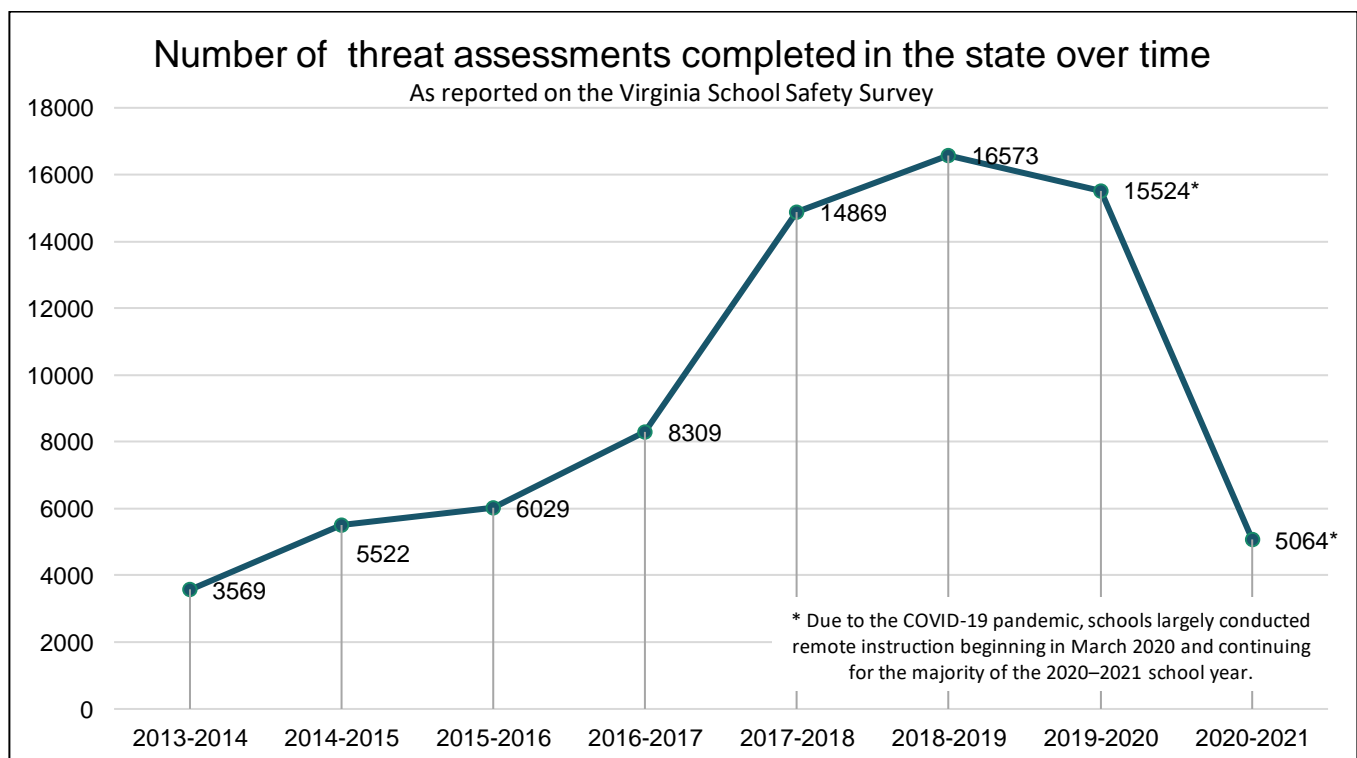
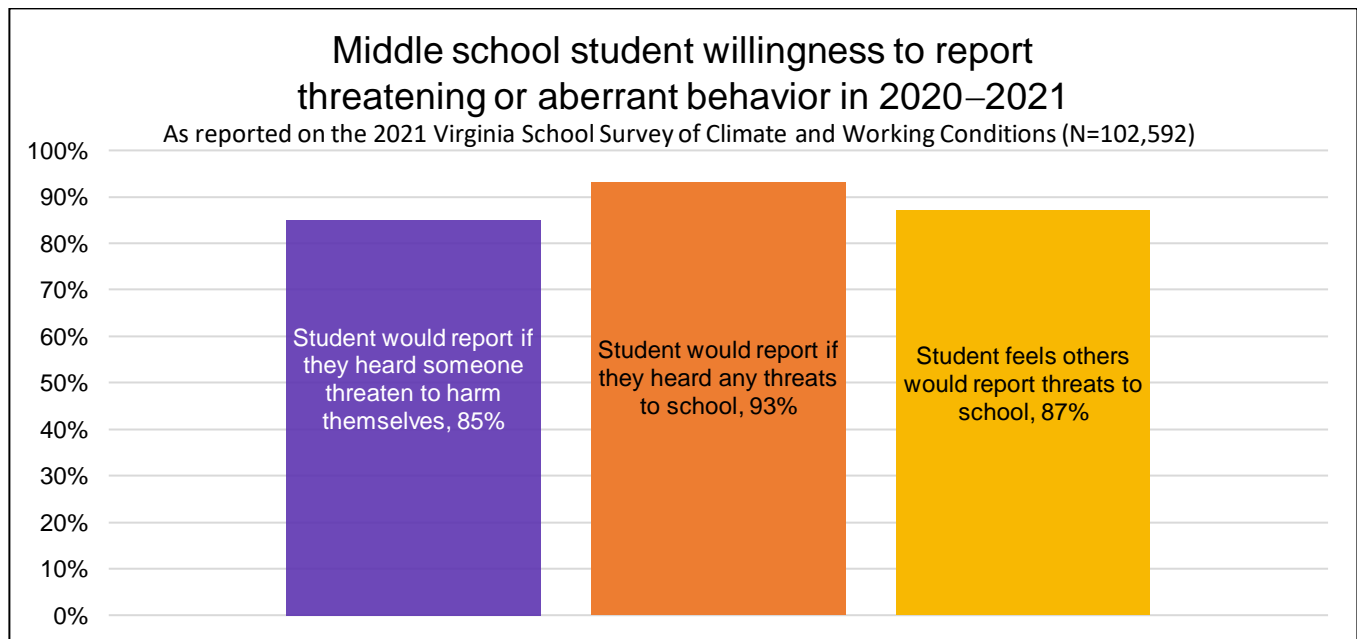
As reported on the 2021 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions (N=102,592)



THREAT ASSESSMENT

In 2013, the Virginia General Assembly enacted the *Code of Virginia* [§ 22.1-79.4](#), requiring all public school divisions to establish and operate threat assessment teams in support of their schools. This legislation also directs the DCJS Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety (VCSCS) to study the application and implementation of threat assessment in public schools.

While 95% of school administrators reported they had informed students on how to recognize and report threatening or aberrant behavior, only 57% of middle school students reported being aware that their school utilizes a team approach to respond to threats of violence from students or other individuals.



2021 VIRGINIA SCHOOL SAFETY AUDIT HIGHLIGHTS

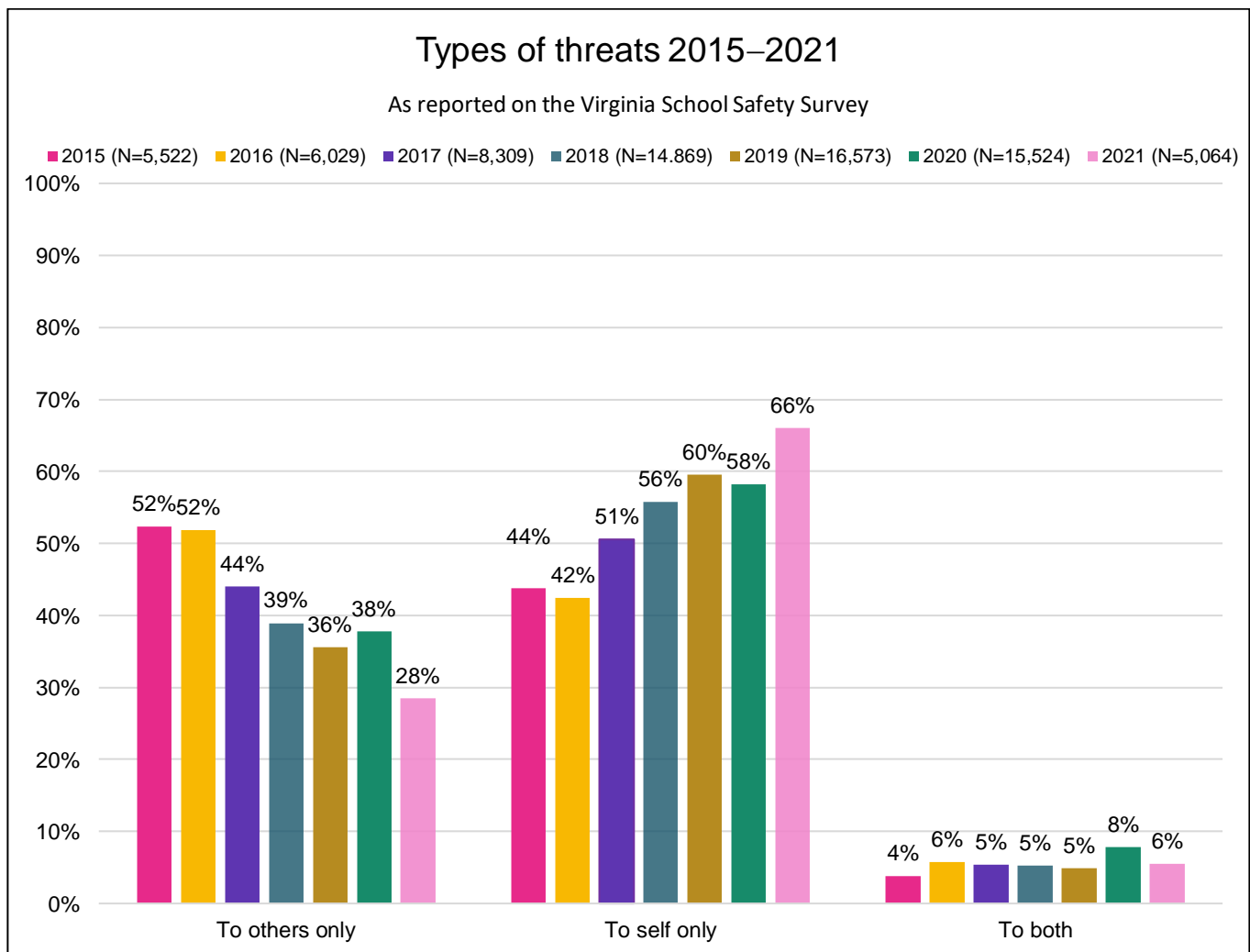
The following definitions were utilized to determine the type of threat:

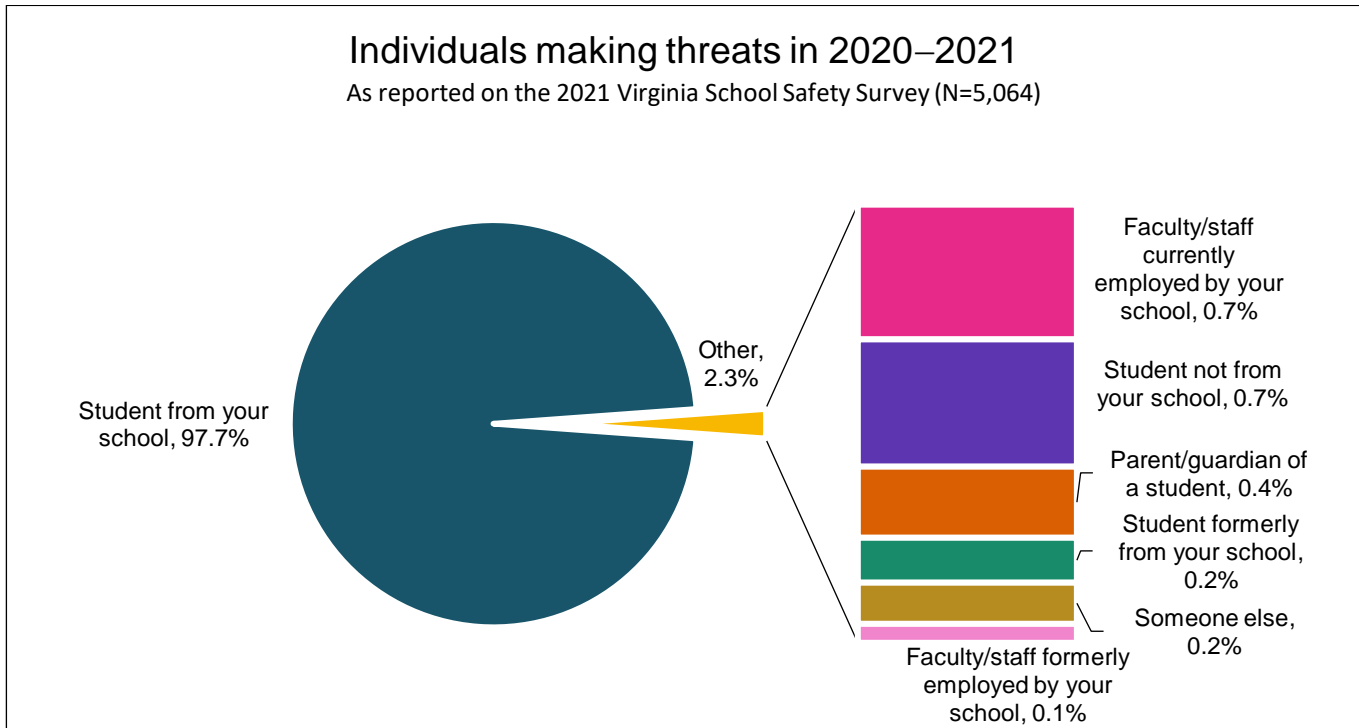
Threatened others only: threatened harm, posed harm to, or was perceived as posing harm to someone other than self, BUT DID NOT threaten suicide or self-harm

Threatened other(s) and self (To both): threatened harm, posed harm to, or was perceived as posing harm to someone other than self AND threatened suicide or self-harm, or was perceived as suicidal or posing harm to self

Threatened self only: threatened suicide or self-harm, or was perceived as suicidal or posing harm to self BUT DID NOT threaten others nor were they perceived as a threat to others

More than half of schools (69%; 1,350) reported that the threat assessment team handles threats of self-harm. In the remaining 31% (617 schools), counselors or administrators handle these types of threats.





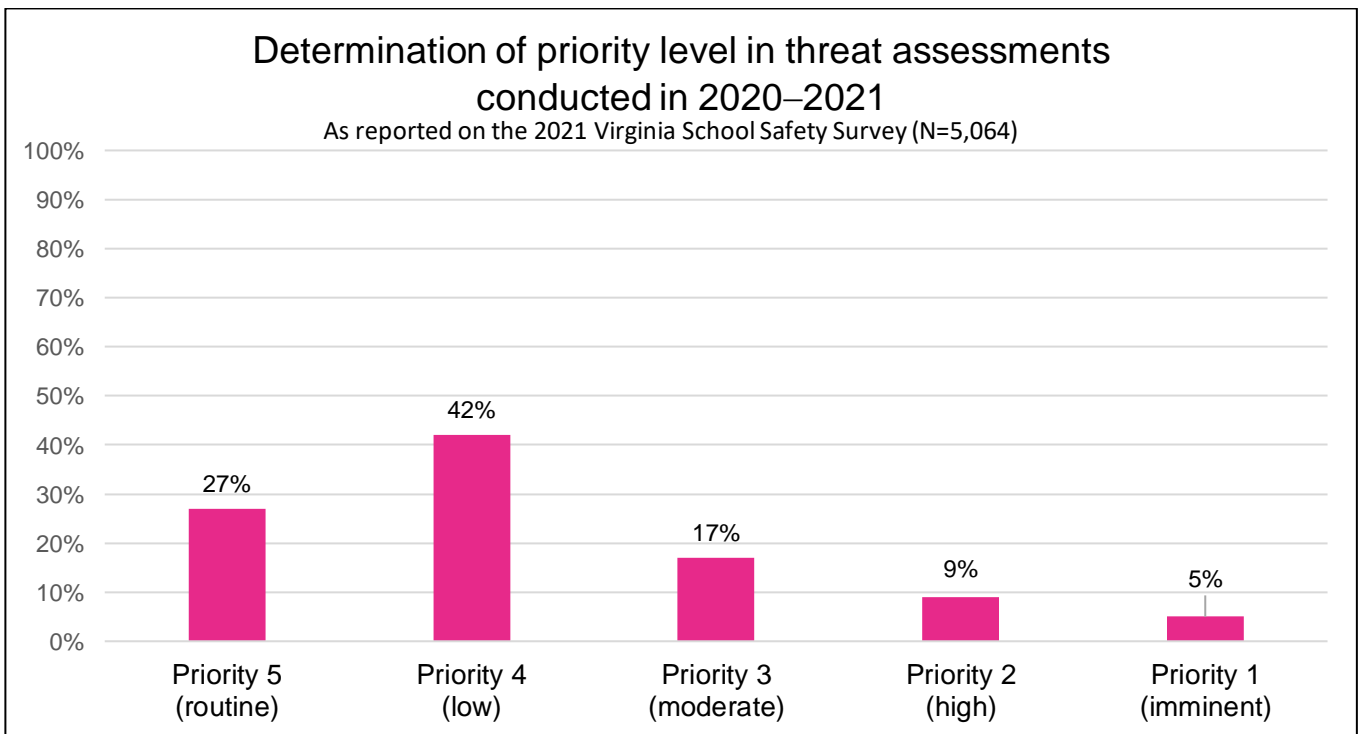
For the 2020–2021 school year, VCSCS updated ratings of priority levels for threat assessments in order to bring model policies in line with best practices in the field. This updated prioritization system for rating threat assessments creates a more holistic approach in examining the impact of the threat on the school community and not just the risk the subject poses in carrying out the threat. This new system takes into account the **STEP**³ model³, which considers the **Subject(s)**, **Target(s)**, **Environment**, and **Precipitating events** and the overall level of concern associated with a case.

The correlation between the new and previous threat ratings is below.

<i>New Priority Level/Classification System</i>	<i>Old Classification System</i>
Priority 1 (Critical/Imminent): Subject poses an imminent threat of serious violence or harm to self or others and has or may reasonably have significant impact on others. Requires immediate law enforcement and school administration notification, subject containment, target protection and safety planning, implementation of crisis response and notification protocols, ongoing assessment and management plan, and active monitoring.	Imminent: Subject/situation appears to pose a significant and immediate threat of serious violence toward others that requires containment and action to protect identified target(s).
Priority 2 (High): Subject poses, or is rapidly developing capability for, a threat of serious violence or harm to self or others; or is in urgent need of hospitalization or treatment. Targets/others are impacted. Typically involves environmental/systemic factors and consideration for precipitating events. Requires immediate notification of school administration and law enforcement, subject containment, target protection and safety plan, activation of crisis response protocols as appropriate, ongoing assessment and management plan, and active monitoring. Referrals as appropriate.	High Risk: Subject/situation appears to pose a threat, exhibiting behaviors that indicate a continuing intent to harm and efforts to prepare to carry out the plan; and may also exhibit other concerning behavior that require intervention.

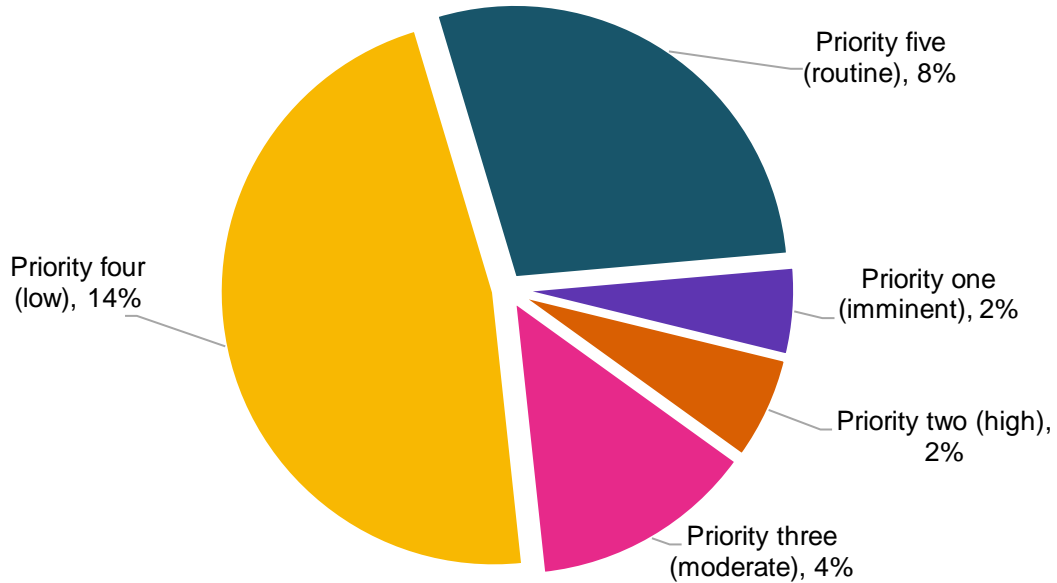
³ Deisinger, E.R.D. & Nolan, J.J. (2020). Threat assessment and management in higher education: Enhancing the standard of practice. In J.R. Meloy & J. Hoffmann (Eds.). International handbook of threat assessment: 2nd Edition. New York: Oxford.

<p>Priority 3 (Moderate): Subject does not pose a threat of serious violence or harm though risk cannot be ruled-out. Subject may be developing capability for harm and is engaging in aberrant or concerning behaviors that indicate need for assistance/intervention. Targets/others likely concerned and impacted. Environmental/systemic or precipitating factors may be present. Consider law enforcement/security notification as appropriate. Requires ongoing assessment and management plan, and active monitoring. Referrals as appropriate.</p>	<p>Moderate Risk: Subject/situation does not appear to pose a threat but exhibits behaviors that indicate a continuing intent or potential for future violence; and/or exhibits other concerning behavior that requires intervention.</p>
<p>Priority 4 (Low): Subject does not indicate a threat of violence or harm to self or others; would or may benefit from intervention or assistance with concerns. Target, environmental/systemic, or precipitating events may be present at low levels. May involve some ongoing assessment management with passive monitoring and/or periodic active monitoring, Referrals as appropriate; Close case if no team interventions or monitoring indicated.</p>	<p>Low Risk: Subject/situation does not appear to pose a threat and any exhibited issues/concerns can be resolved easily.</p>
<p>Priority 5 (Routine/No Known Concerns): Subject does not indicate a threat of violence or harm to self or others; or need for assistance or intervention at the time of assessment. No impact on others, environmental factors, or precipitants that need team intervention. Close case.</p>	<p>No Previous Classification</p>



Percent of threats that ultimately occurred in 2020–2021

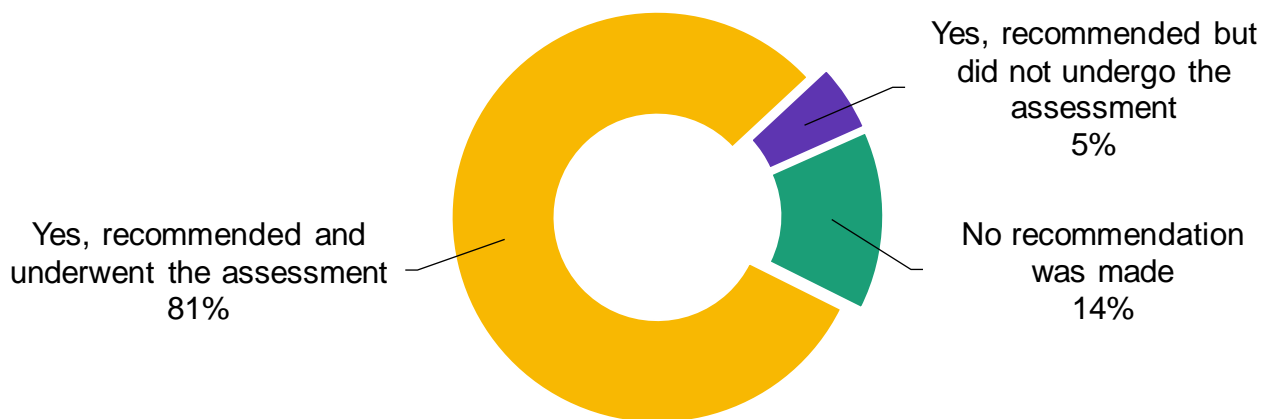
As reported on the 2021 Virginia School Safety Survey (N=5,064)

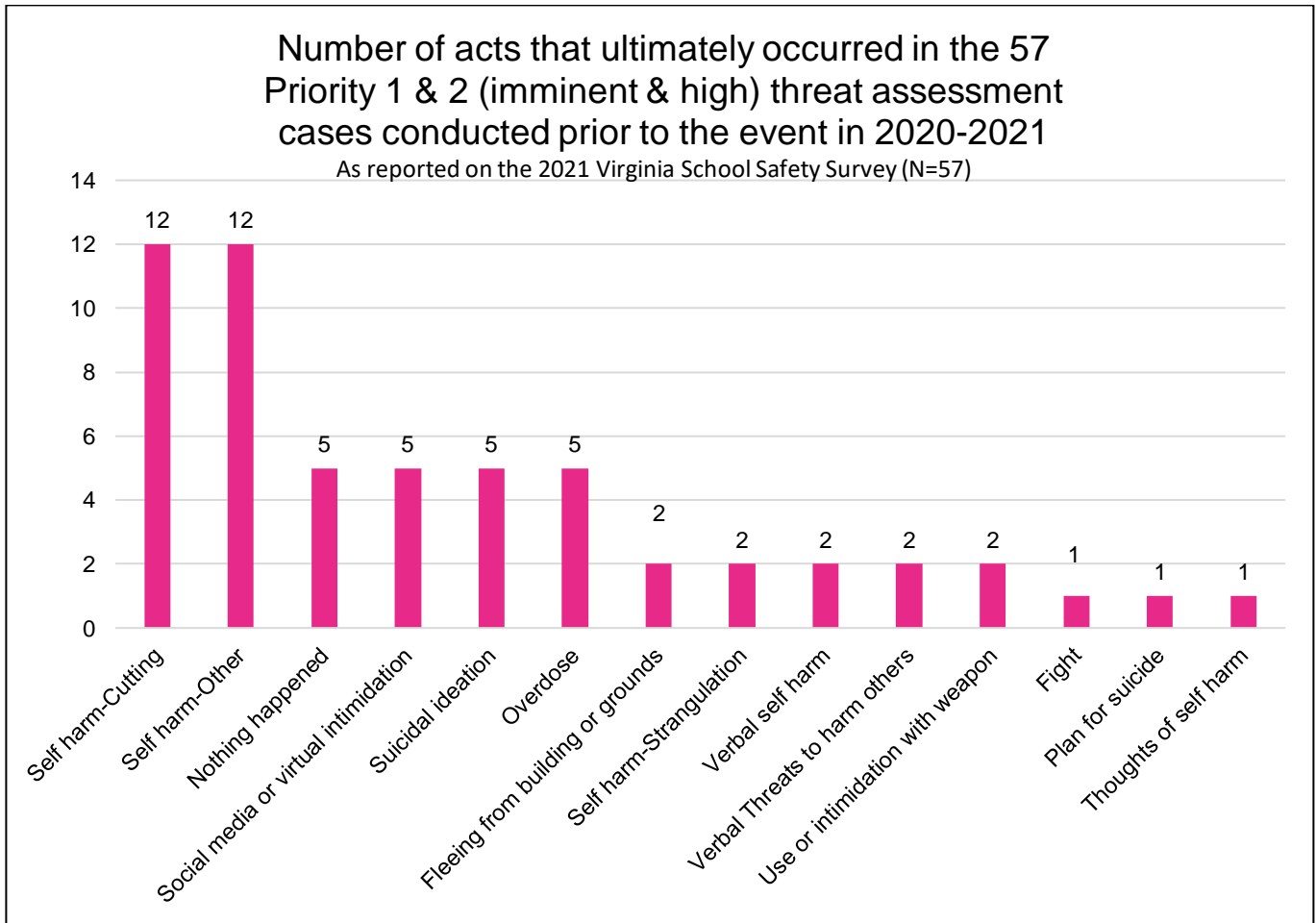


There were 172 threats classified as Priority 1 or 2 (imminent or high) where an act ultimately occurred, and VCSCS asked schools reporting these events to provide additional information. For 66% (114) of these threats, there was no reporting of the event prior to its occurrence, therefore the threat assessment was conducted after the event occurred in order to debrief the event and avert further events. There was only one report of a student death by suicide in 2020–2021; in this case, there was no prior knowledge and therefore no threat assessment conducted.

Percent of individuals recommended to undergo a clinical assessment by a community-based or private licensed mental health professional in Priority 1 & 2 (imminent & high) threat assessment cases in 2020–2021

As reported on the 2021 Virginia School Safety Survey (N=57)

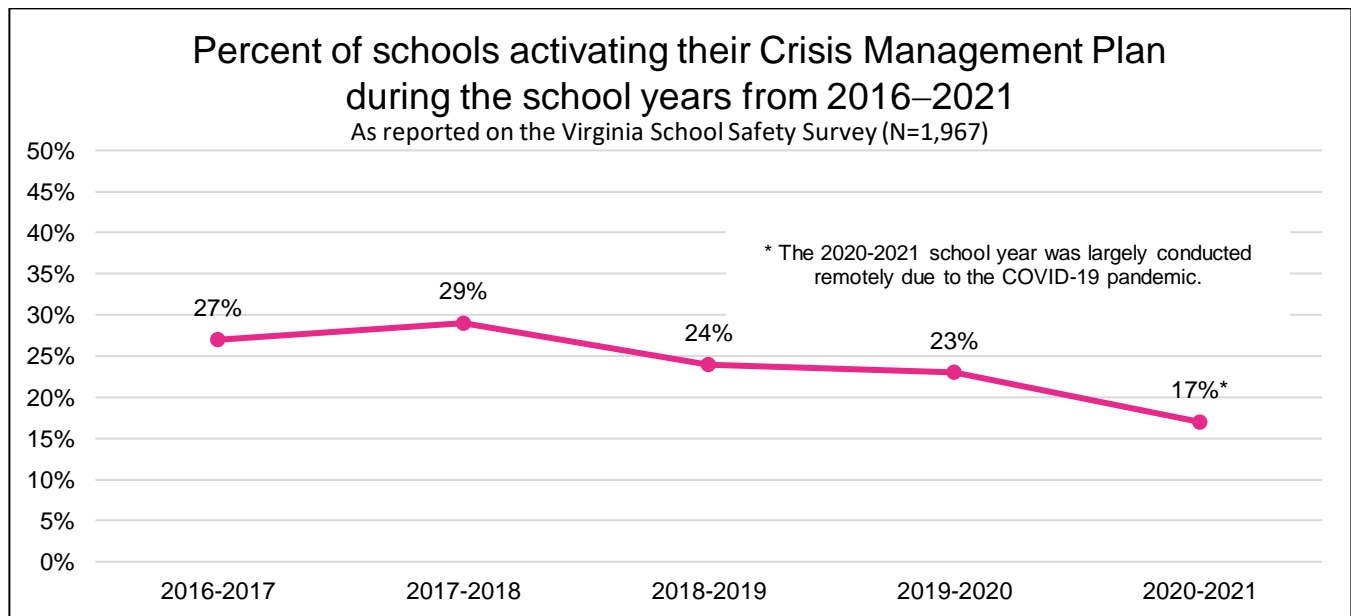




SAFETY AND CRISIS

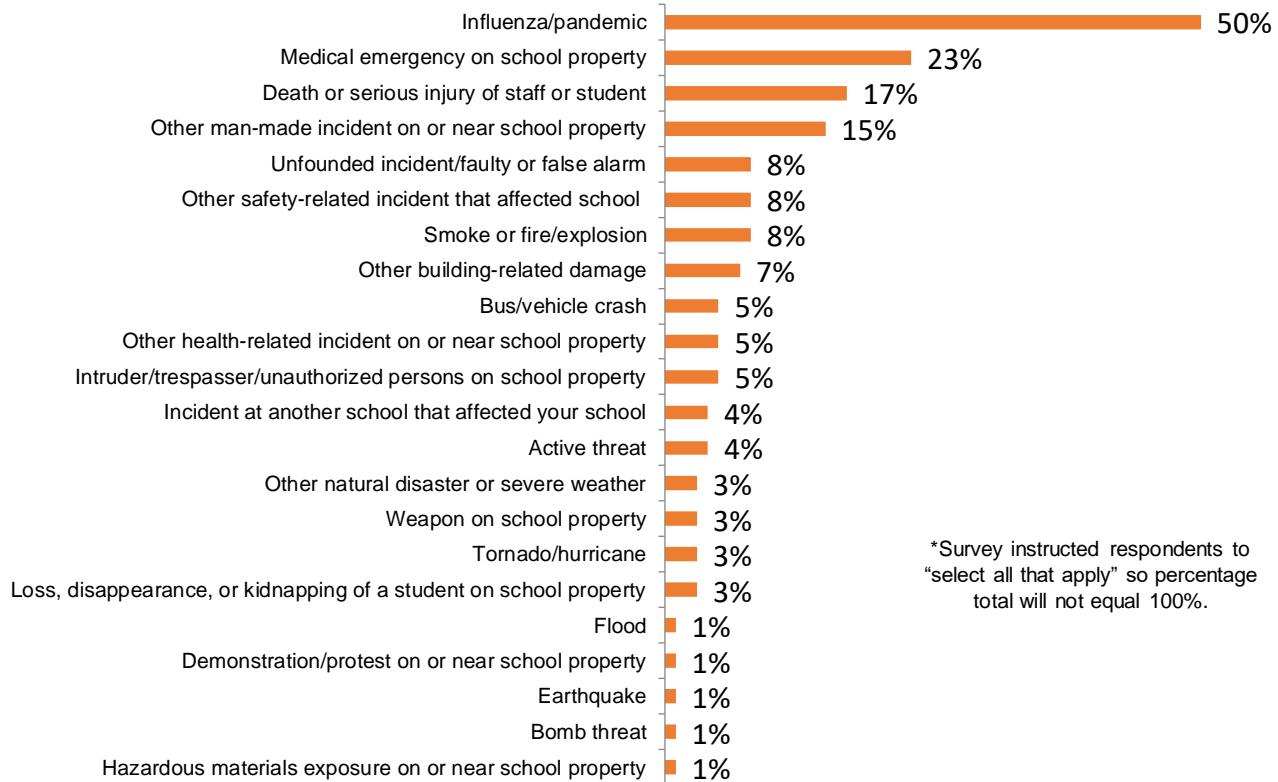
Since the creation of the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety (VCSCS) in 2000, VCSCS has focused on improving and enhancing safety by addressing topics that affect Virginia schools. The safety and security of school communities encompasses personnel, crisis management, school climate, and physical measures that constitute a school's ability to mitigate, prepare for, and respond to a crisis.

Crisis Management Plans



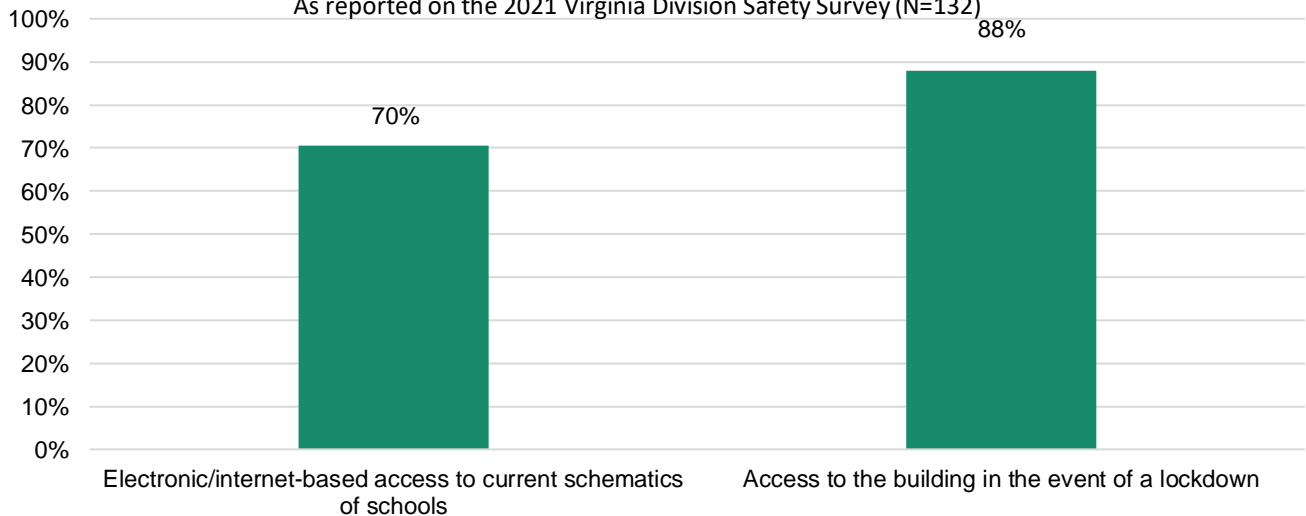
Reasons schools activated their Crisis Management Plan during the 2020–2021 school year

As reported on the 2021 Virginia School Safety Survey (N=343)



Divisions where first responders (police/fire/EMS) have access to school buildings in the event of a large-scale security incident

As reported on the 2021 Virginia Division Safety Survey (N=132)



Emergency Drills

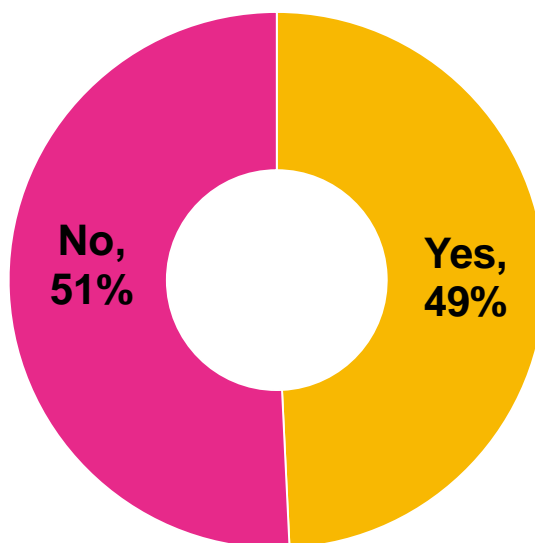
According to the *Code of Virginia* [§ 22.1-137.2](#), the Board of Education's Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia (SOA) [\(8 VAC 20-131-260\)](#), and the [Virginia Statewide Fire Prevention Code \(SFPC\)](#), all Virginia schools must conduct the following emergency drills each year:

- An initial fire drill within the first 10 days of the school year
- A second fire drill within the first 20 days of the school year
- At least one fire drill per month for the remainder of the school year
- A lockdown drill at least twice within the first 20 days of the school year
- A third lockdown drill after the first 60 days of the school year

Due to COVID-19, the Superintendent of Public Instruction and Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) provided a waiver of [§ 22.1-137.1](#) (tornado drills), [§ 22.1-137.2](#) (lockdown drills), and [§ 22.1-184](#) (school bus emergency drills) so that each local school board had the power, if desired, to waive lockdown and/or tornado drills for the entire division or on a school-by-school basis for the 2020–2021 school year. All fire drills were still required in accordance with the Statewide Fire Prevention Code.

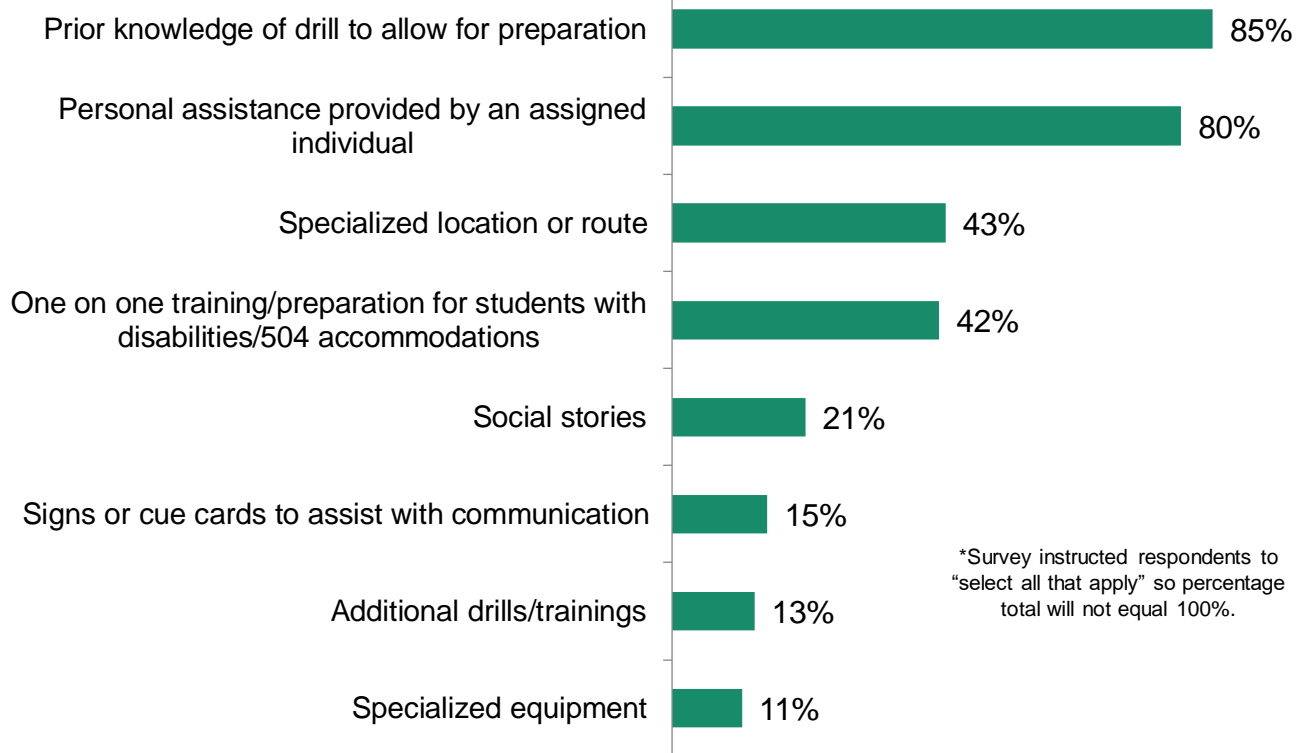
Divisions invoking the VDOE drill waiver in 2020–2021

As reported on the 2021 Virginia Division Safety Survey (N=132)



Accommodations that schools provided for students/staff with disabilities during drills in 2020–2021

As reported on the 2021 Virginia School Safety Survey (N=1,752; 89% of schools)



Security Personnel

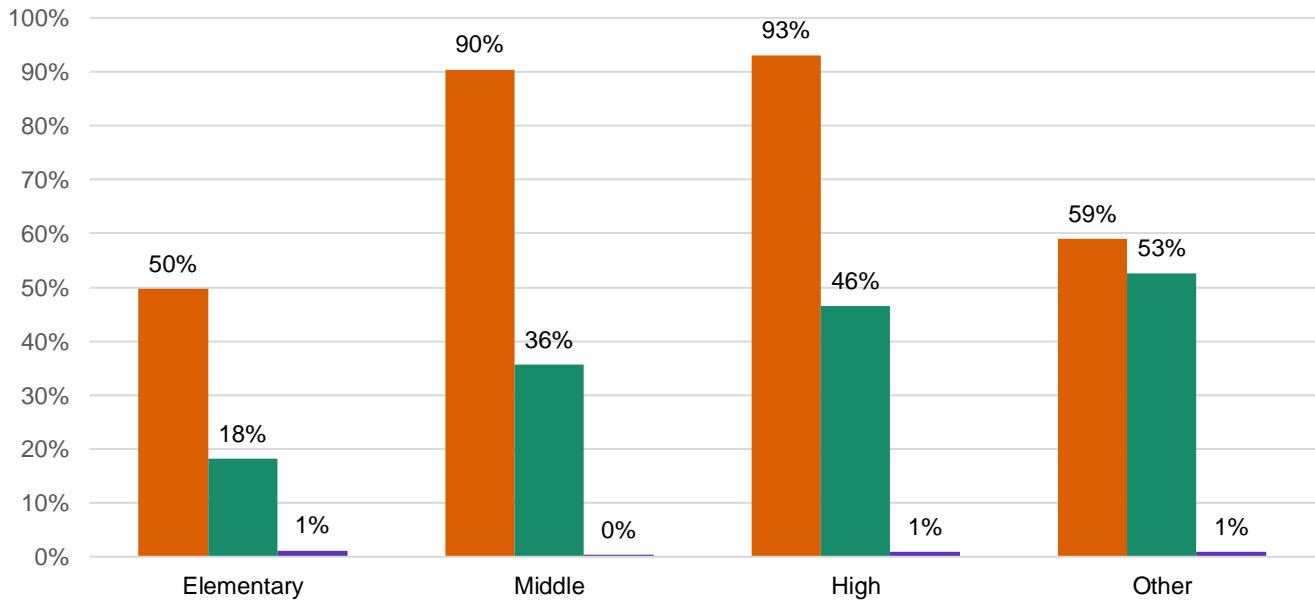
A School Resource Officer (SRO) is defined in the *Code of Virginia § 9.1-101* as "...a certified law enforcement officer hired by the local law enforcement agency to provide law enforcement and security services to Virginia public elementary and secondary schools."

A School Security Officer (SSO) is defined in *§ 9.1-101* as "... an individual who is employed by the local school board or a private or religious school for the singular purpose of maintaining order and discipline, preventing crime, investigating violations of the policies of the school board or the private or religious school, and detaining students violating the law or the policies of the school board or the private or religious school on school property, school buses, or at school-sponsored events and who is responsible solely for ensuring the safety, security, and welfare of all students, faculty, staff, and visitors in the assigned school."

Percent of schools with security personnel (full or part-time) in 2020–2021 by school level

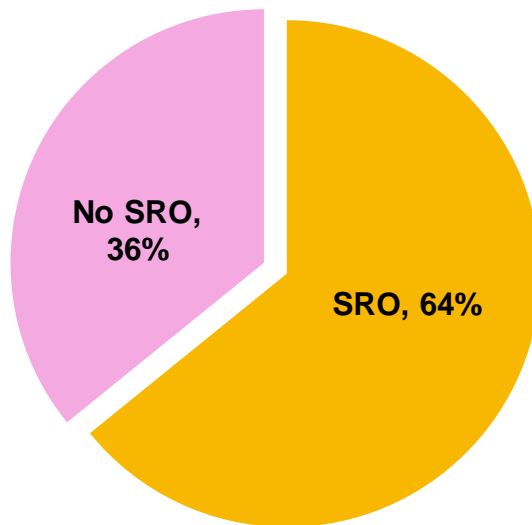
As reported on the 2021 Virginia School Safety Survey (N=1,967)

■ School Resource Officer (SRO) ■ School Security Officer (SSO) ■ Private security



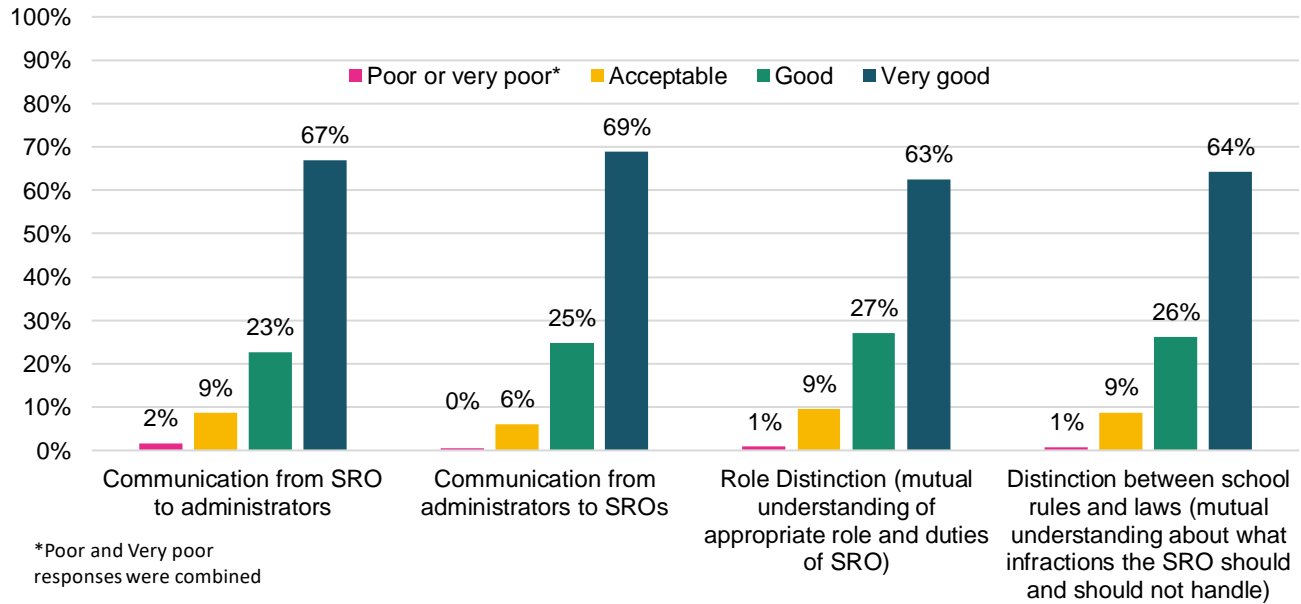
Percent of schools reporting having School Resource Officers (SROs) in their buildings at least part-time in 2020–2021

As reported on the 2021 Virginia School Safety Survey (N=1,967)

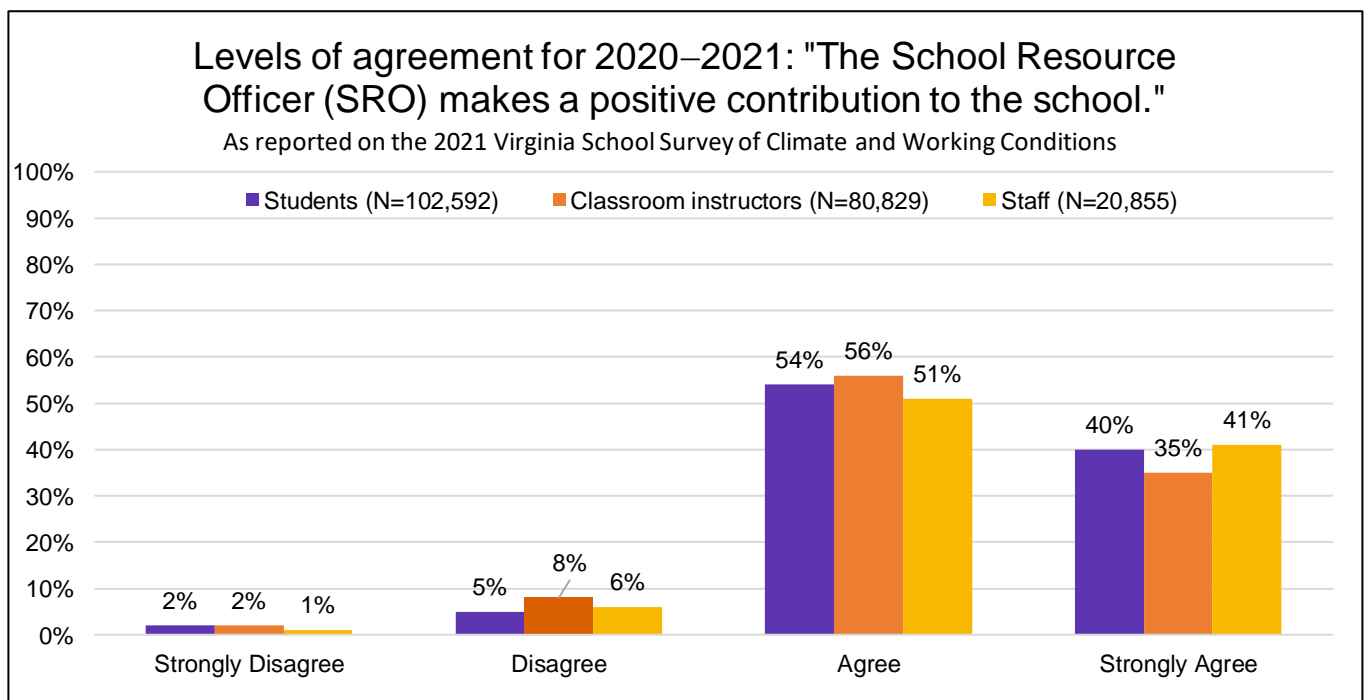
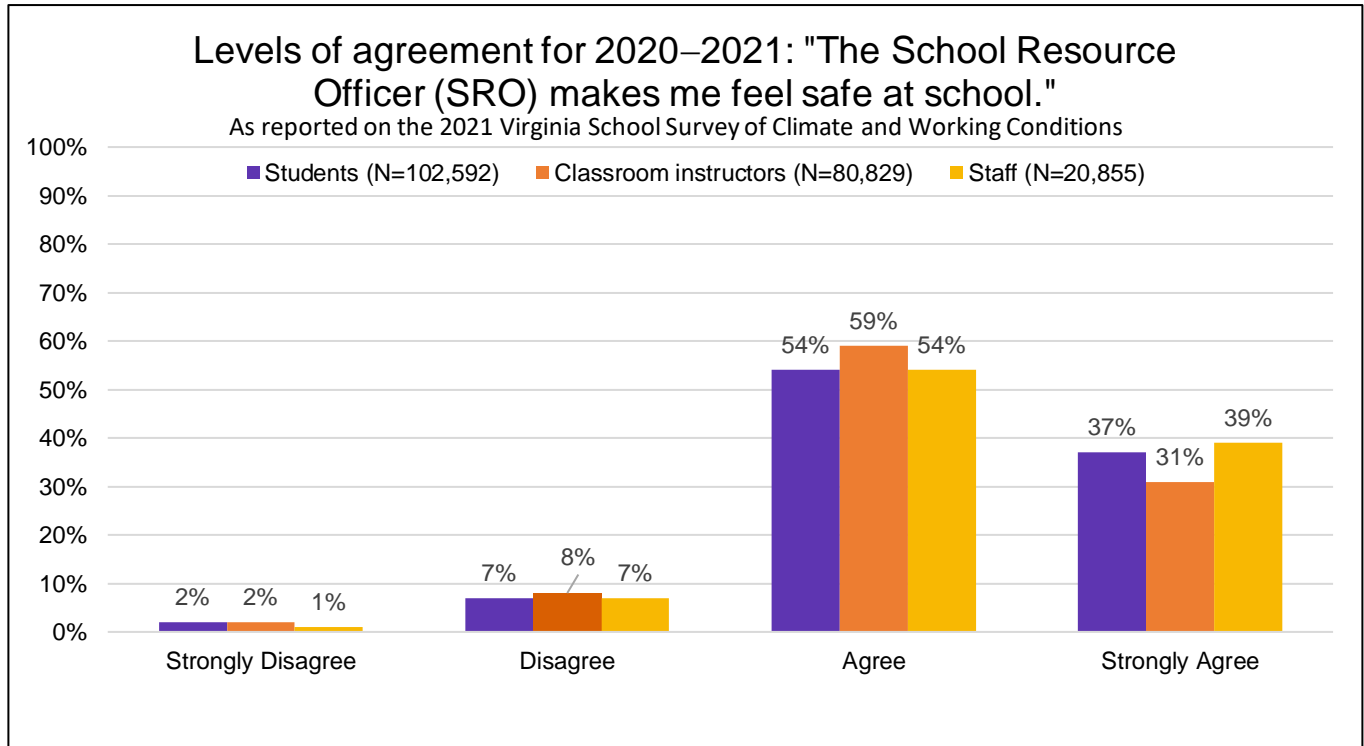


Rating of school-law enforcement partnerships by administrators in schools with School Resource Officers (SROs) in 2020–2021

As reported on the 2021 Virginia School Safety Survey (N=1,262)

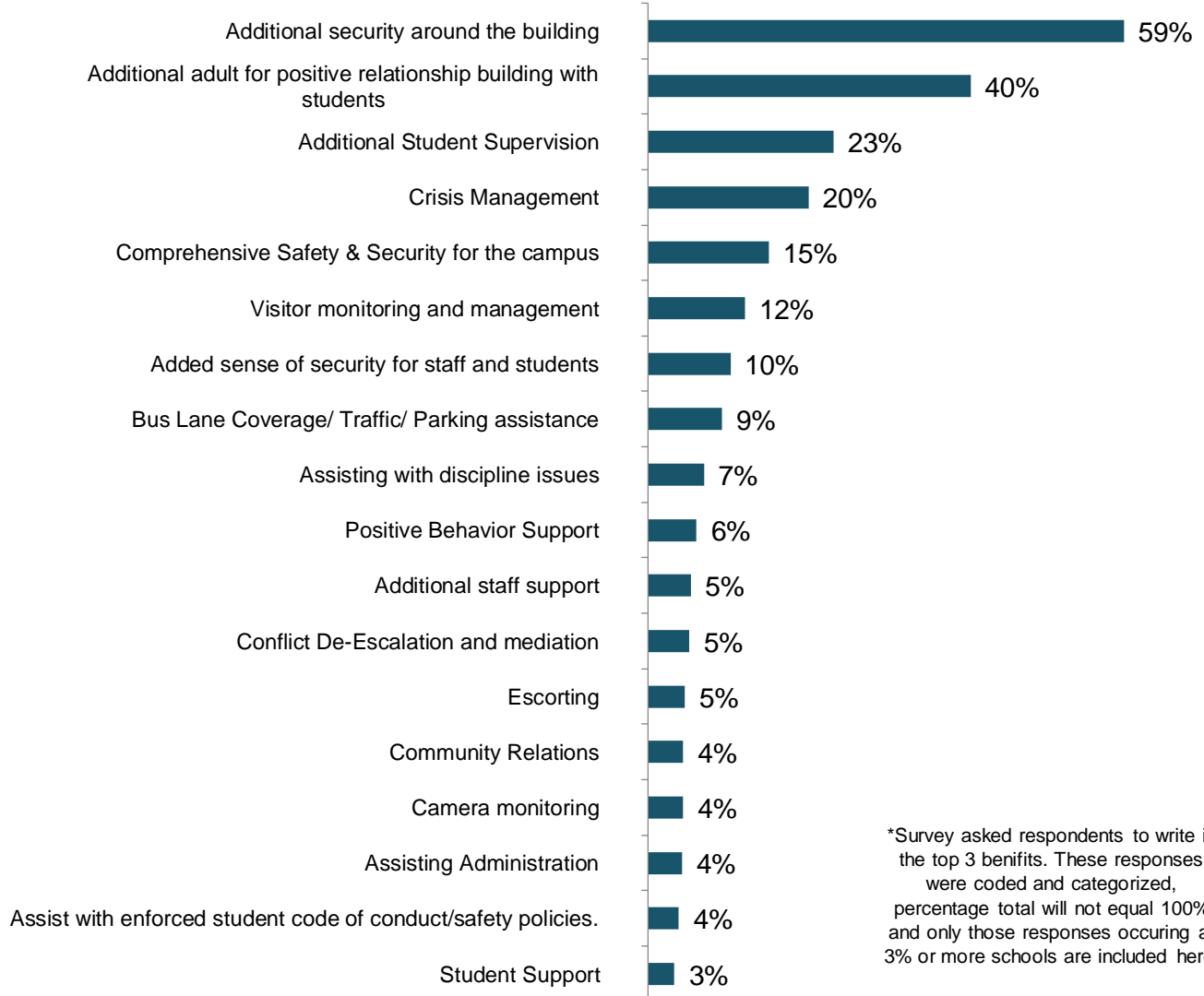


The 2021 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions asked middle school students, classroom instructors, and staff about their perceptions of the School Resource Officer (SRO). These SRO perception questions were only presented to the 60% (61,555) of students, 62% (50,114) of classroom instructors, and 67% (13,973) of staff who responded that they had an SRO in their building. Over 90% of each respondent group agreed or strongly agreed that the SRO makes them feel safe and makes a positive contribution to the school.



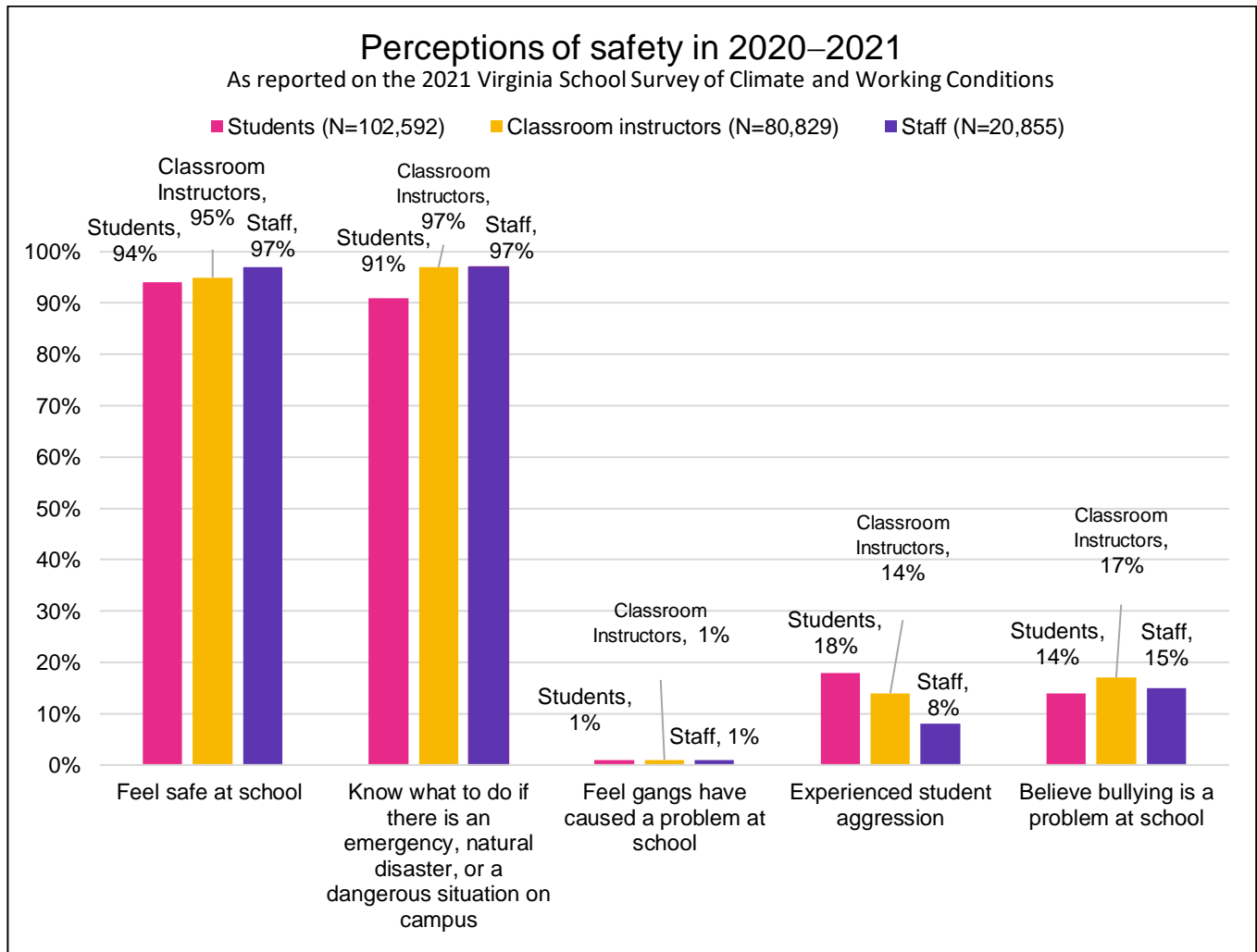
Benefits to having a School Security Officer (SSO) as reported by schools with SSOs in 2020–2021

As reported on the 2021 Virginia School Safety Survey (N=551)



School Climate

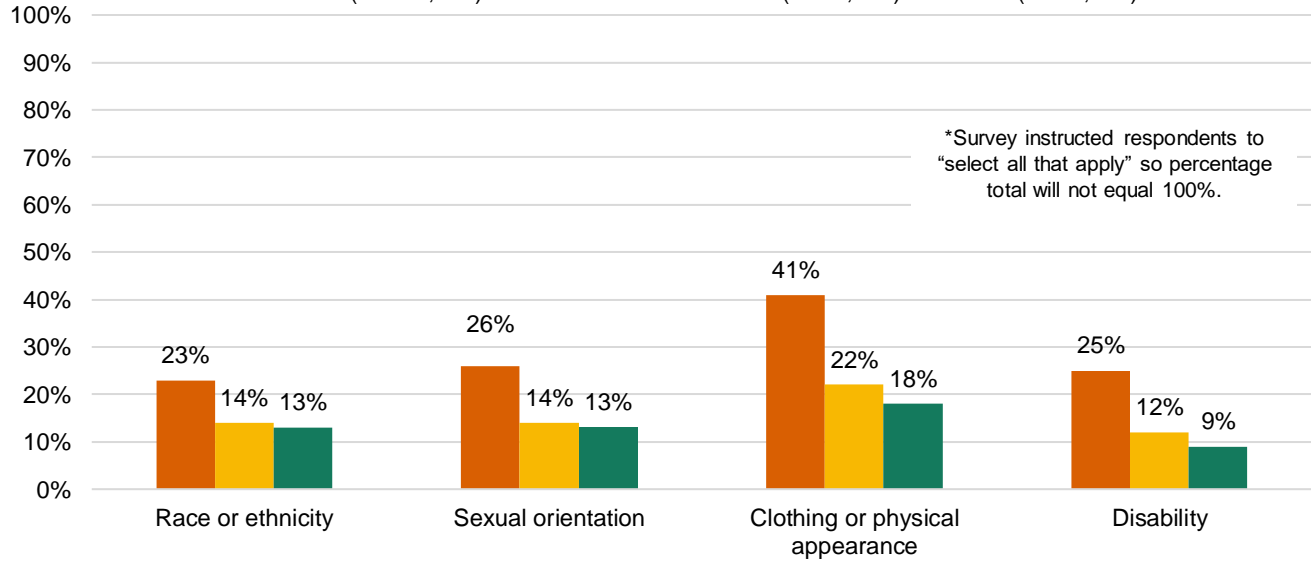
The Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions is intended to provide information on school climate, safety, and working conditions in order to maintain a safe and orderly school environment conducive to learning. The survey measures student, teacher, and staff perceptions of school rules and discipline, teacher-student relationships, student engagement in school, and the extent of bullying and teasing at school.



Perceptions of why students were bullied in 2020–2021

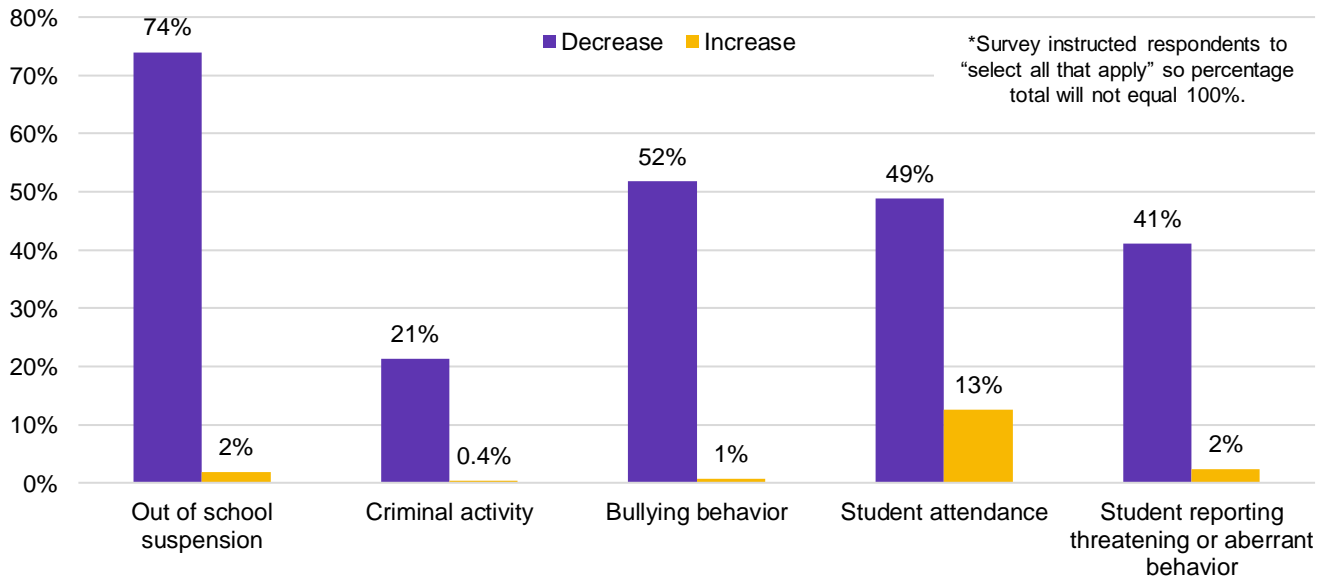
As reported on the 2021 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions

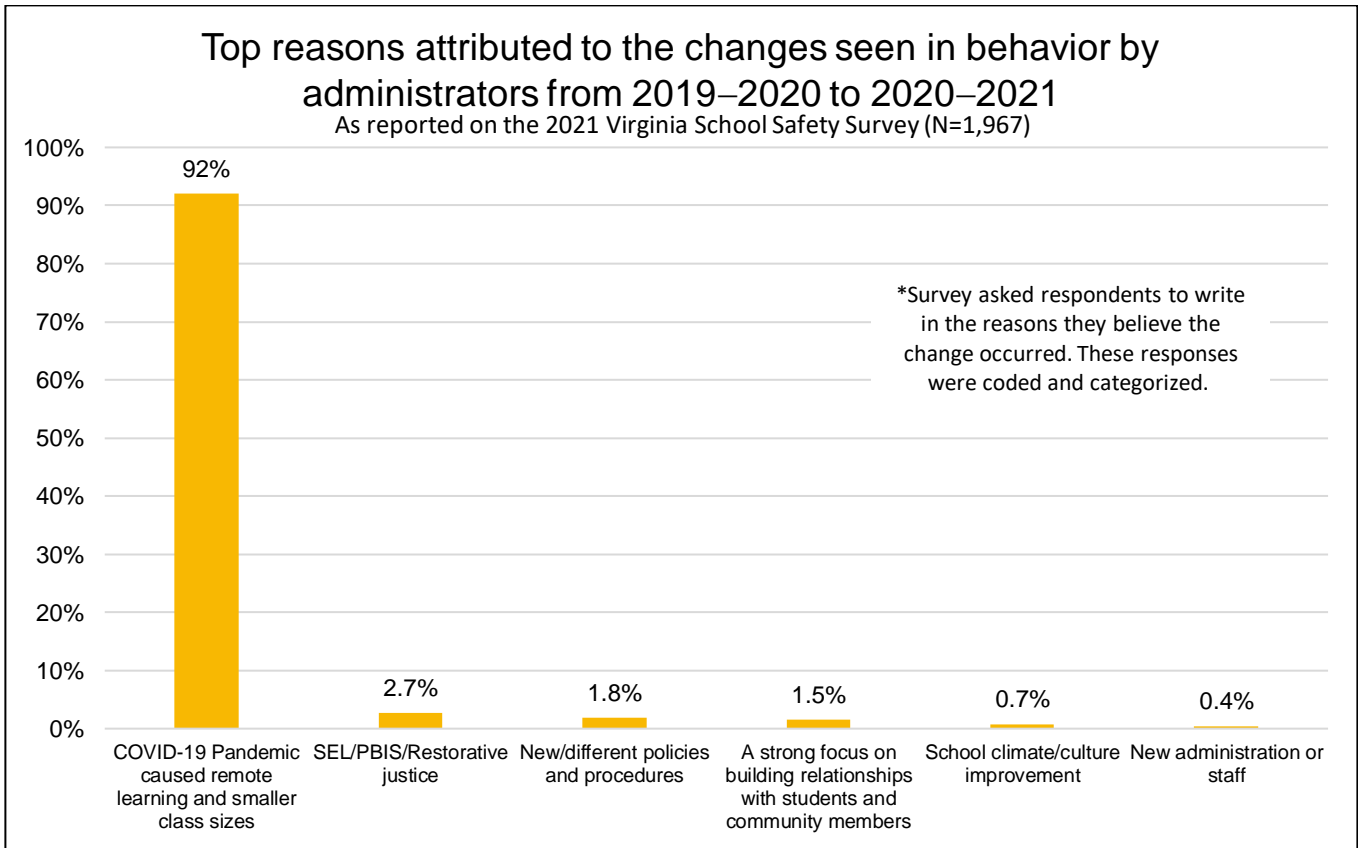
Students (N=102,592) Classroom instructors (N=80,829) Staff (N=20,855)



Changes in student behavior reported by administrators from the 2019–2020 to the 2020–2021 school year

As reported on the 2021 Virginia School Safety Survey (N=1,967)

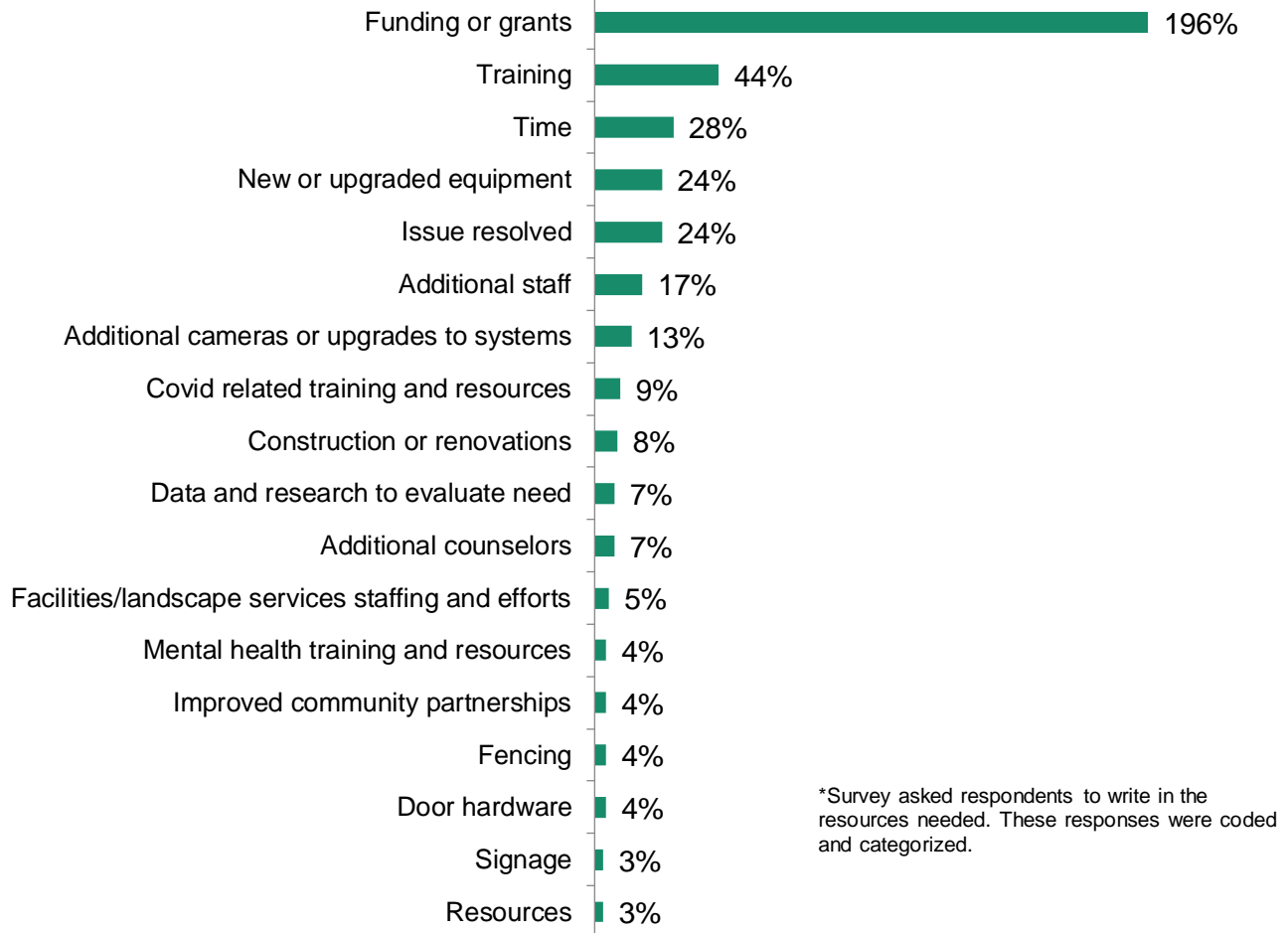




The culmination of the annual safety audit is a review of all relevant safety data to “... (i) **identify and if necessary, develop solutions for physical safety concerns**, including building security issues and (ii) **identify and evaluate any patterns of student safety concerns** occurring on school property or at school sponsored events. Solutions and responses shall include recommendations for structural adjustments, changes in school safety procedures, and revisions to the school board’s standards for student conduct.”

Resources needed by divisions to address the issues identified by divisions on the 2021 School Safety Audit

As reported on the 2021 Virginia Division Safety Survey (N=132)





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