

FINAL REPORT

ARPA Survey Results

BACKGROUND:

In 2021, Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), a COVID-19 recovery initiative which provides direct financial relief and assistance to businesses, and aid to states, counties, and municipalities. As a result, Southampton will be receiving \$1.8 million which will be available to the Town over the next two years and must be spent by the end of fiscal year 2024. At the time, the guidance available from the federal government outlined four broad categories of eligible spending:

- respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency or its negative economic impacts, including assistance to households, small businesses, and non-profits;
- provide premium pay to workers performing essential work during the COVID-19 public health emergency;
- provide government services to the extent of the reduction in revenue to the Town due to the COVID-19 public health emergency in the most recent full fiscal year; and
- make investments in water, sewer, or broadband infrastructure.

PROCESS:

At the end of 2021, the Select Board decided to request residents' input as to priority spending and the Chair took the lead in drafting questions for review utilizing the survey monkey platform for the survey. It was noted that the goal of the Town was to utilize the ARPA funds in a fiscally responsible manner ensuring the funds have a long-lasting, positive impact on the community and its residents. ARPA funds were to be applied to non-recurring expenditures and onetime capital expenditures and programs. Those programs and projects not having alternative sources of funding and with a clear capacity to be achieved would also be considered. With that in mind, it was stated that new programs, hiring new staff, or add-ons to existing programs that require ongoing financial support would require a commitment that these would exist only for the duration of the three-year period for which ARPA funding is available, or other sources of funding could be identified to support their continuation.

A 12-question survey was developed that captured some basic demographics but then focused on ranking various actions that have often been discussed as priority needs in Southampton. It further asked questions about the impact COVID-19 has on households and local business, and the kinds of assistance needed. Likewise, those with school-age children in the household, either at Wm. E. Norris or Hampshire Regional High School, were asked about impact on students and what kind of interventions might be the most needed to help them get back to a better learning mode.

As of January 7, 2022, a link to the online survey and the corresponding QR code was posted on the home page of the town website as well as in various town newsletters. The survey was open until Feb. 14th. Hard copies were also available at the library, senior center and Town Clerk's office and were delivered back to a collection box outside Town Hall or mailed back to the Select Board.

A total 716 survey responses were received, with 634 being submitted online and 82 in hard copy. According to the 2020 Census, some 5,000 persons in Southampton are age 18 or older. Assuming they would be the population group to respond to the survey, this reflects 14% of town residents. As often happens with surveys, some persons inadvertently skip a question or perhaps misunderstand the choices by which to respond, but the following reflects the responses to each question. Percentages of those responding to each question have been rounded upwards.

1. The initial questions focused on basic demographics and the first one asked what described the respondents' situation the best.

306 or 43% stated they live in Southampton but work elsewhere.
196 or 28/% state they live and work in town.
190 or 27% are retired and live in town.

Twelve (12) persons responded they are business owners and four (4) stated that they owned property here but were not residents.

2. As to the number of years living in Southampton the responses were:

330 or 47% have been living here for more than 20 years.
154 or 22% have been residents for 11-20 years.
126 or 18% have lived here between 6 and 10 years.
97 or 14% have been in town less than 5 years.

One could assume therefore that most respondents are generally aware of some of town services and facilities, special characteristics or achievements as well as issues facing the town.

3. The age groupings in chronological order for those who responded to this question are broken out as follows and reflect a wide range of those who responded:

age 35-44	178 or 25%	age 25-34	66 or 9%
age 65-74	145 or 21%	age 75-84	57 or 8%
age 45-54	132 or 19%	age 18-24	15 or 2%
age 55-64	102 or 14%	age 85-94	11 or 2%

3 persons responding are 95 or older

4. This question asked where the town should invest its ARPA funds and referred to the guidelines for eligible spending as known at the time. Seven choices were provided. Respondents were told to select up to 3 choices and the online rules prevented more than that although not every chose the maximum number possible. The priority ranking of responses is as follows:

- Ensure broadband access and affordability (356 responses or 50%)
- Provide premium pay to first-responders/workers during the COVID-19 emergency (348 or 49%)
- Support small business development or recovery (287 or 40%)
- Other public safety programs (youth violence prevention and intervention, mental health and substance abuse services). (205 or 29%)
- Install more public sewer infrastructure along Rte. 10 (197 or 28%)
- Expand public water infrastructure where most needed (e.g: Hampton Ponds area) (195 or 27%)
- Direct assistance to households (e.g: food, rent/mortgage, childcare, COVID expenses) 164 or 23%

The top two recommended priorities are quite evident. In hindsight, the question about business development or recovery may have needed more clarity as to whether it refers to assisting existing businesses rather than attracting any new business. Other public safety programs ranked in the middle range followed closely by issues of water and sewer expansion. The water issues at Hampton Ponds also relate to proper sewage disposal systems so this question might have been a bit confusing. Direct assistance to households is further developed in a later question. Interestingly, even when filtered by age groups of 25-44 year olds and 65-84 year olds, the same top three priorities arose.

5. This question asked respondents to rank the list of possible actions from 1 to 6, with 1 being the highest should they prove to be eligible for ARPA funds spending.

The survey platform uses a particular weighting system for these kinds of ranking questions. It calculates the average ranking for each answer choice so you can determine which answer choice was most preferred overall. Here are the results in order of priority. 65% of respondents had the public safety facilities and equipment as their first or second priority followed by 38% having Conant Park and other recreation/nature areas as one of their top two priorities.

- Public safety facilities and equipment
- Improve/expand Conant Park and other recreation and nature trail areas
- Direct assistance to children and families for technology education and/or equipment
- Heating, ventilation and cooling system (HVAC) improvements in town buildings
- Community solar energy initiatives
- Senior center development

Interestingly, a cross-tab analysis provides priorities as seen through a sampling of two age groups. Through the eyes of those age 25-44 the list changed slightly. There were 244 persons in that grouping. 60% of them responded with public safety as a first or second priority, followed by Conant Park at 46% and direct assistance for technology at 35%. Not surprisingly 56% had senior center as their 5th or 6th choice. In rank order, HVAC improvements and solar initiatives were 4th and 5th respectively.

Further filtering the total respondents to a group of those age 65-84 provided the following perspective on that same question. 201 persons were in that grouping and almost 70% had public safety in their top two priorities, but Conant Park was the last priority and the senior center was a second priority with 31%. Direct assistance ranked 3rd and community solar initiatives, 4th but were almost a tie in the weighted score.

6. When asked about the economic impact of COVID-19 on the household:

418 persons or 58% stated there was no impact. 46 or 6% indicated that there had been a positive impact but did not provide details. However, 252 or 35% indicated that COVID-19 had affected them negatively from an economic lens.

7. As a follow-up question to the above, 230 persons of the 252 chose to specify what kind of assistance they needed. They were asked to choose up to 4 answers.

Direct cash assistance	109	47.39%
Utility assistance	82	35.65%
Rental or mortgage assistance	67	29.13%
Internet access	67	29.13%
Food assistance	52	22.61%
Mental health services	45	19.57%
Unemployment benefits	31	13.48%
Emergency childcare services	30	13.04%
Counseling services	25	10.87%
Job training	12	5.22%
Substance use treatment service	8	3.48%

It should be noted that no time period (eg: from June to December 2021) was specified in this question, but given when the survey was administered, one can think that they might have reflected on their situation over the past year, if not longer. Also, since the survey was anonymous, there is no way to identify which

households these are, but it does provide a snapshot of the types of issues affecting some of the residents in Southampton during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is interesting that no one took advantage of available funds through the Housing Authority during 2021 for residents needing rental or mortgage assistance.

8. This question was probably both not well-articulated nor well understood. It stated IF you are an employer in Southampton, what one statement best describes your employee situation.

Only 568 persons chose to answer with 148 persons skipping the question altogether although there was an option of Not Applicable. With 510 of those responding choosing Not Applicable, that left three options to respond.

- 24 reported they were understaffed and had difficulty finding and retaining employees
- 12 stated they were fully staffed but had difficulty finding and retaining employees and,
- 12 stated they were fully staffed but had no difficulty finding and retaining employees.

The problem with these findings is that back in Question #1 of the survey, only 12 persons said they owned a business in Southampton. It has not been possible to understand what might have contributed to these responses that don't correlate. The responses are indicative only and unfortunately have little further value.

9. This question asked a yes/no question, whether there were school-age children in the household.

If the response was No, those persons were at the end of the survey.
A total of 292 respondents answered Yes and continued with the survey.

10. This question asked the grade-level distribution of students in the household for the 2021 school year.

A total of 287 parents responded while 5 who said they had school-age children did not respond at all. With those responding, the majority had children at Wm. E. Norris primarily in Grades Pre-K through 3. At Hampshire Regional High School, the majority of parents stated they had children in Grades 9-12.

The following represents the number of children, not the number of respondents. Thus 287 parents have a total of 415 children in school, there are 285 students at Norris and 130 at HRHS.

Pre-K through 3rd grade	56.10%	161
4th through 6th grade	43.21%	124
9th through 12th grade	29.27%	84
7th through 8th grade	16.03%	46

Those having students in Pre-K through 6th grade saw both of the following questions as it would be possible for someone to have children in both schools. For those who indicated having children only in Grades 7-12, they were forced to skip Question 11 about Norris and moved to Question 12 about HRHS.

11. Recognizing the unique educational challenges COVID presented and the learning gap that followed, parents/guardians of children at Wm. E. Norris were asked what assistance they thought would best benefit their student if funds were available.

Of the total of 287 parents answering the previous question and possibly having children at both schools, this question was directed to Norris parents only. These 232 parents indicated the top needs as being:

- 77 A behavioral specialist to assist students with social, emotional, behavioral needs
- 36 A full-time reading interventionist
- 36 Dedicated summer school sessions
- 24 A full-time math interventionist

32 persons provided other ideas including but not limited to: keeping the kids in school, restoring budget cuts from the previous year, hiring a librarian and a music teacher, more after school activities, providing gifted/advanced classes, more support for special education and teachers in general via classroom assistants and supplies and eliminating the mask requirement.

An additional 31 persons chose to answer Not Applicable which could be interpreted to mean their student was doing okay and did not necessarily need any particular intervention.

12. The same question was posed to those parents/guardians of students at Hampshire Regional High School.

258 people answered this question but 142 marked Not Applicable.
The 116 parents chose to indicate their choice as follows:

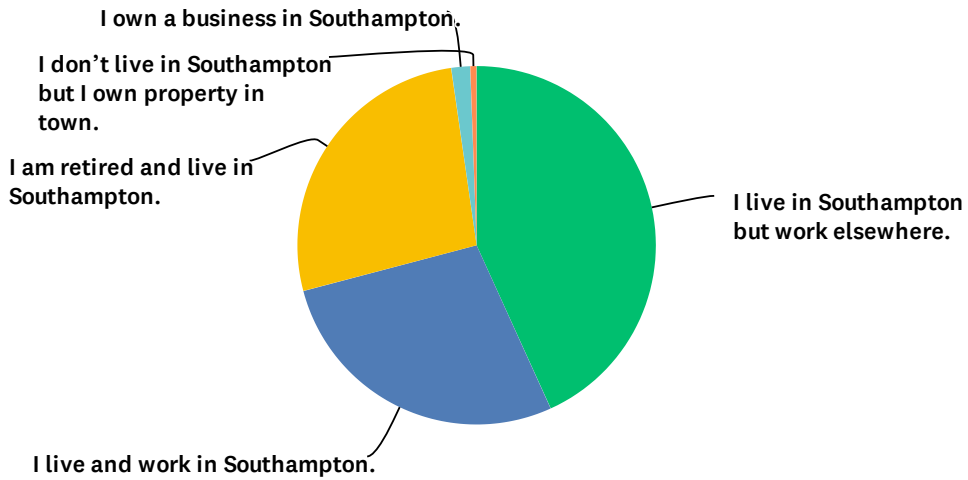
53 chose an additional adjustment counselor to address student mental health needs.
30 indicated a preference for an additional Tier 2 intervention teacher to support regular education students and those with 504 Plans and 16 selected a reading specialist to work with non-special education students at the middle school level as their priority need.

An additional 17 chose Other and provided a few ideas such as hot spots at the town library, more funds for technology like laptops, a pay increase to encourage more substitute teachers, increased social functions and an outdoor team building series to foster safe peer interaction, encourage cooperative problem-solving, provide leadership opportunities, and give kids a chance to decompress and just be kids. It should be noted that a final cross-referencing revealed 36 parents mistakenly responded to this question. This was determined because they had indicated per an earlier question as only having students at Norris. However, even subtracting these individuals and their choices, the priority ranking of responses remained the same.

Chris Fowles
March 2022

Q1 Please mark what describes your situation the best. Choose only one.

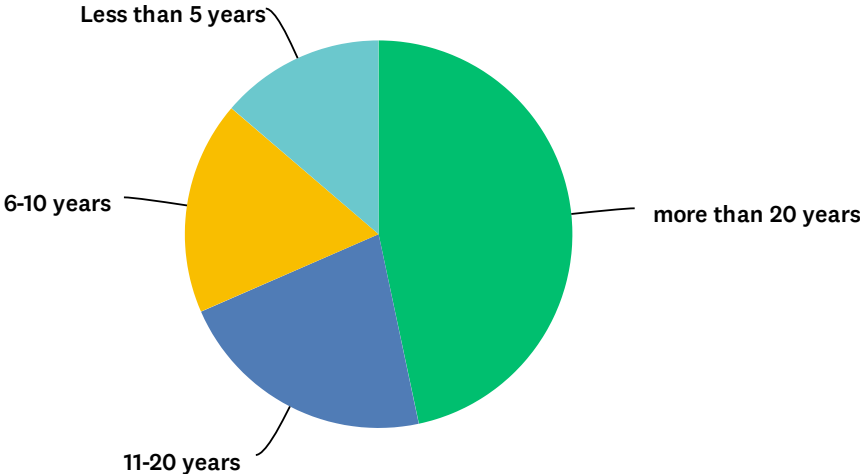
Answered: 708 Skipped: 8



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I live in Southampton but work elsewhere.	43.22%	306
I live and work in Southampton.	27.68%	196
I am retired and live in Southampton.	26.84%	190
I own a business in Southampton.	1.69%	12
I don't live in Southampton but I own property in town.	0.56%	4
TOTAL		708

Q2 How long have you lived in this community?

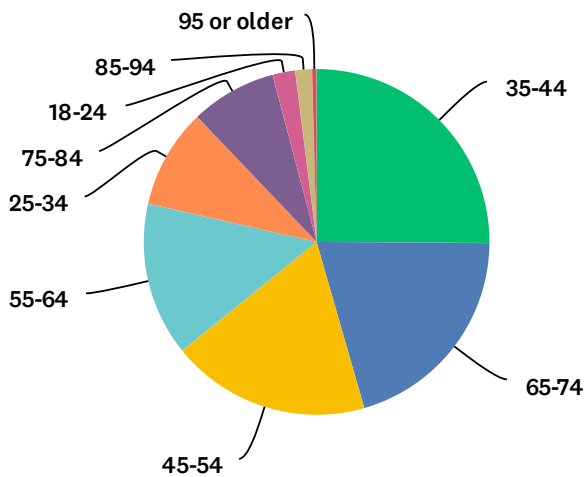
Answered: 707 Skipped: 9



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
more than 20 years	46.68%	330
11-20 years	21.78%	154
6-10 years	17.82%	126
Less than 5 years	13.72%	97
TOTAL		707

Q3 What is your age?

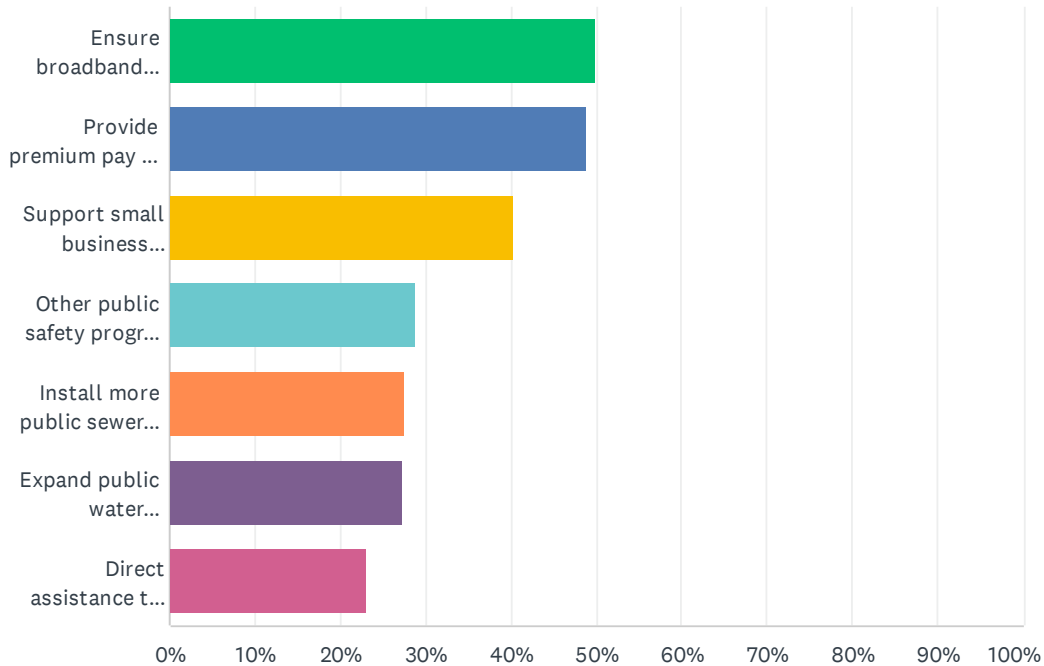
Answered: 709 Skipped: 7



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
35-44	25.11%	178
65-74	20.45%	145
45-54	18.62%	132
55-64	14.39%	102
25-34	9.31%	66
75-84	8.04%	57
18-24	2.12%	15
85-94	1.55%	11
95 or older	0.42%	3
TOTAL		709

Q4 In which of the following areas should the town invest its ARPA money? Choose up to 3.

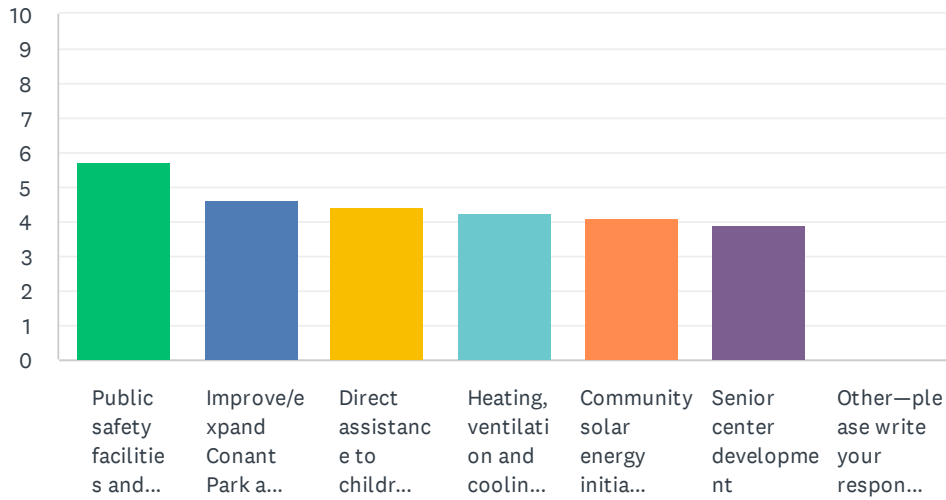
Answered: 714 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Ensure broadband access and affordability	49.86% 356
Provide premium pay to first-responders/workers during the COVID-19 emergency	48.74% 348
Support small business development or recovery	40.20% 287
Other public safety programs (youth violence prevention and intervention, mental health and substance abuse services, etc.)	28.71% 205
Install more public sewer infrastructure along Rte. 10	27.59% 197
Expand public water infrastructure where most needed (eg: Hampton Ponds area)	27.31% 195
Direct assistance to households (eg: food, rent/mortgage, childcare, COVID expenses)	22.97% 164
Total Respondents: 714	

Q5 IF funds should be allowable for any of the following items, where do you recommend we invest our ARPA money? Rank your priorities from 1-6 with 1 being the highest.

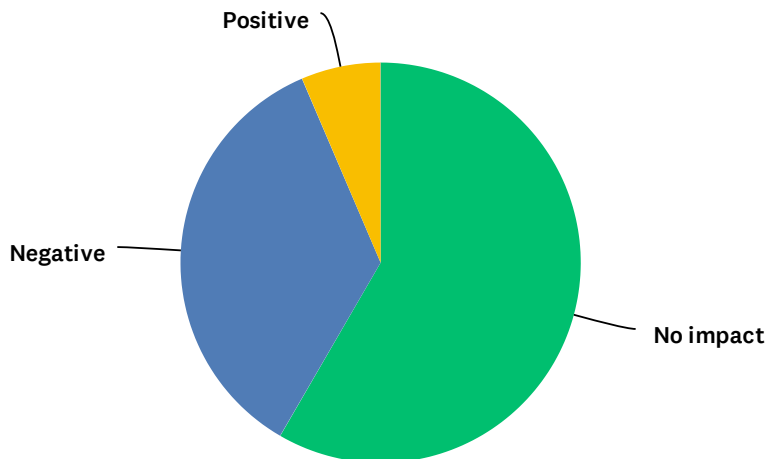
Answered: 714 Skipped: 2



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	TOTAL	SCORE
Public safety facilities and equipment	46.20% 328	18.45% 131	12.54% 89	10.70% 76	8.03% 57	4.08% 29	0.00% 0	710	5.72
Improve/expand Conant Park and other recreation and nature trail areas	18.10% 128	19.52% 138	16.83% 119	14.29% 101	17.82% 126	13.44% 95	0.00% 0	707	4.65
Direct assistance to children and families for technology education and/or equipment	13.76% 97	16.17% 114	18.01% 127	17.45% 123	19.01% 134	15.60% 110	0.00% 0	705	4.41
Heating, ventilation and cooling system (HVAC) improvements in town buildings	6.35% 45	18.90% 134	19.46% 138	19.89% 141	18.90% 134	16.50% 117	0.00% 0	709	4.24
Community solar energy initiatives	10.58% 75	14.25% 101	17.21% 122	16.36% 116	16.93% 120	24.68% 175	0.00% 0	709	4.11
Senior center development	5.67% 40	13.17% 93	16.29% 115	20.96% 148	18.70% 132	25.21% 178	0.00% 0	706	3.91
Other—please write your response below	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0	0.00

Q6 Has the COVID-19 pandemic had a positive or negative economic impact on your household?

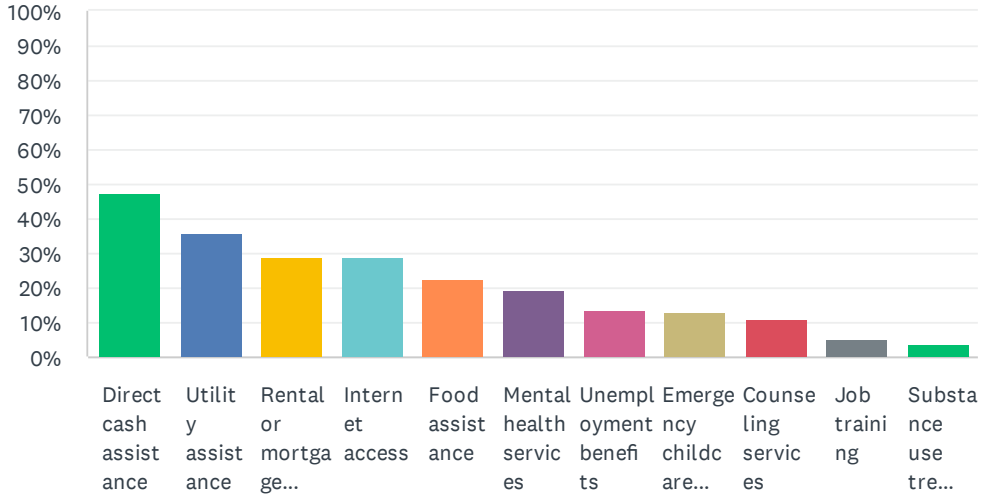
Answered: 716 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
No impact	58.38%	418
Negative	35.20%	252
Positive	6.42%	46
None of the above	0.00%	0
No impact	0.00%	0
TOTAL		716

Q7 If COVID-19 has had a negative impact on your household, what assistance do you need? Check up to 4 responses.

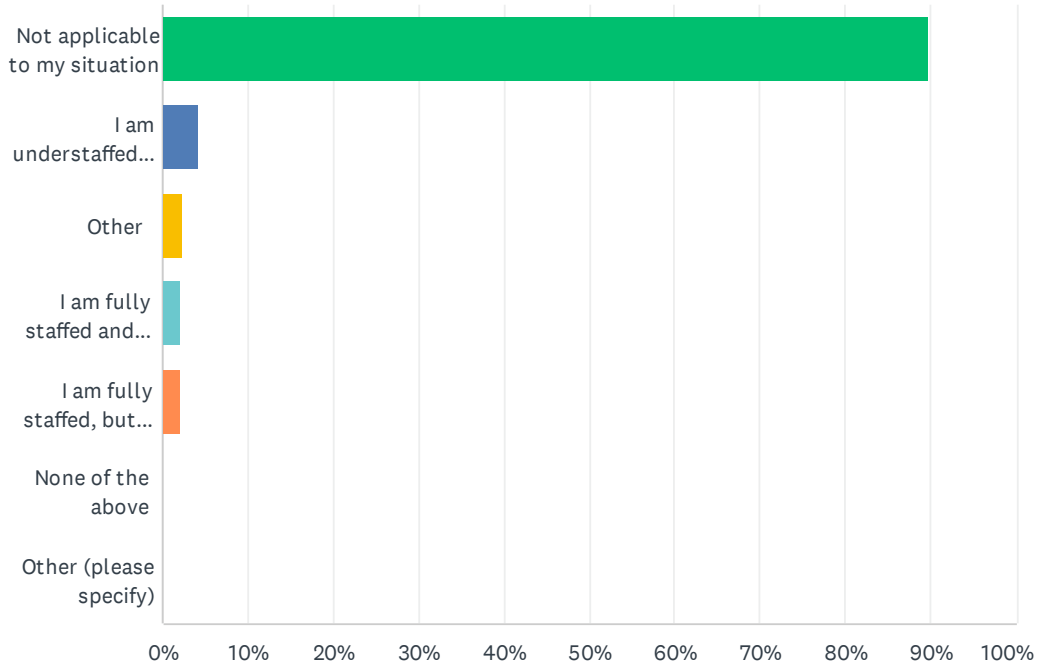
Answered: 230 Skipped: 486



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Direct cash assistance	47.39% 109
Utility assistance	35.65% 82
Rental or mortgage assistance	29.13% 67
Internet access	29.13% 67
Food assistance	22.61% 52
Mental health services	19.57% 45
Unemployment benefits	13.48% 31
Emergency childcare services	13.04% 30
Counseling services	10.87% 25
Job training	5.22% 12
Substance use treatment services	3.48% 8
Total Respondents: 230	

Q8 If you are an employer in Southampton, which of the following statements best describes your current employee situation? Choose only one.

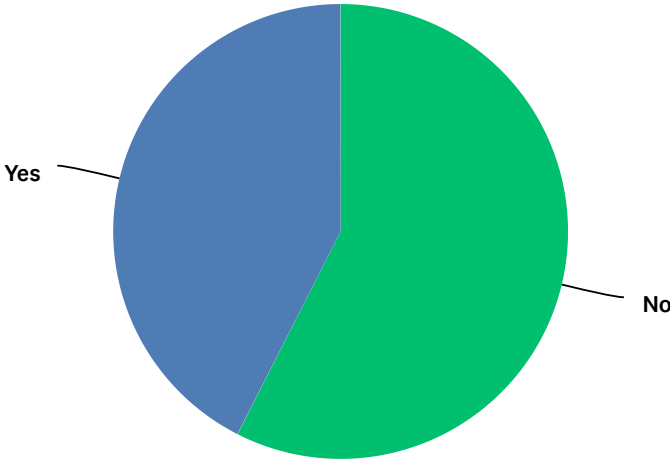
Answered: 568 Skipped: 148



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Not applicable to my situation	89.79%	510
I am understaffed and have difficulty finding and retaining employees	4.23%	24
Other	2.29%	13
I am fully staffed and have no difficulties in finding and retaining employees	2.11%	12
I am fully staffed, but have had difficulties in finding and retaining employees	2.11%	12
None of the above	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 568		

Q9 Do you have school-age children in your household?

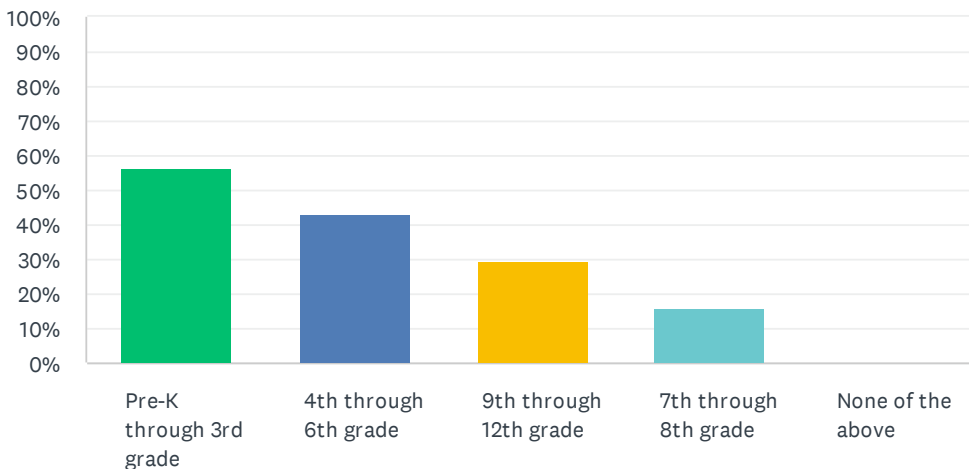
Answered: 687 Skipped: 29



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
No	57.50%	395
Yes	42.50%	292
TOTAL		687

Q10 For the 2021 school year, the children in your household are students in which of the following grades? Check all that apply.

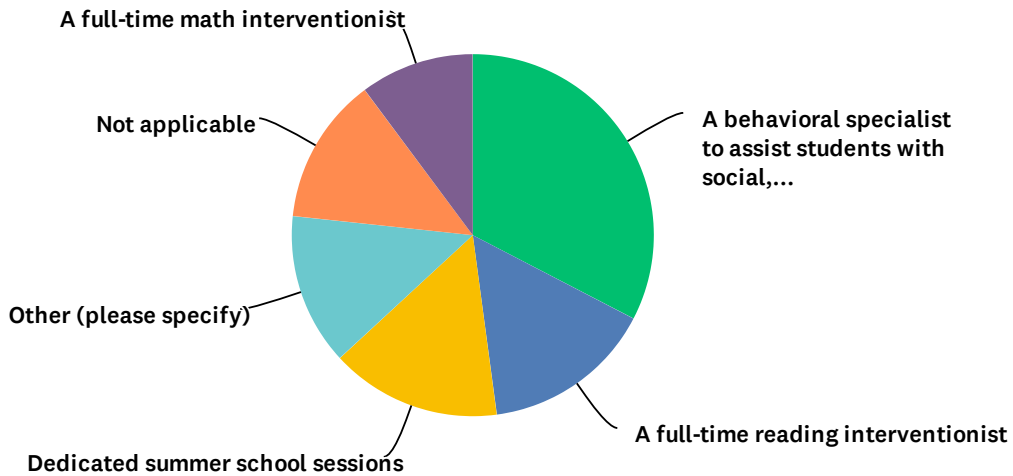
Answered: 287 Skipped: 429



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Pre-K through 3rd grade	56.10%	161
4th through 6th grade	43.21%	124
9th through 12th grade	29.27%	84
7th through 8th grade	16.03%	46
None of the above	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 287		

Q11 For parents/guardians of students at Wm. E. Norris school, recognizing the unique educational challenges COVID presented and the learning gap that followed, what assistance do you think would best benefit your student if funds were available?

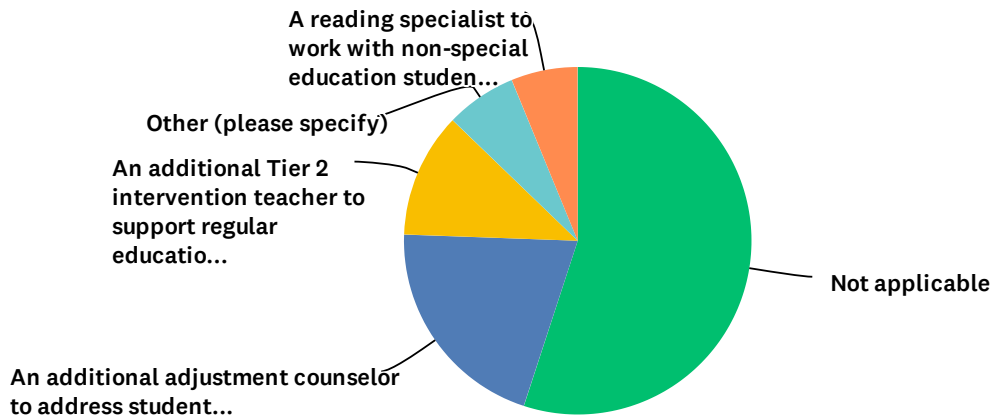
Answered: 236 Skipped: 480



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
A behavioral specialist to assist students with social, emotional, behavioral needs	32.63%	77
A full-time reading interventionist	15.25%	36
Dedicated summer school sessions	15.25%	36
Other (please specify)	13.56%	32
Not applicable	13.14%	31
A full-time math interventionist	10.17%	24
TOTAL		236

Q12 For parents/guardians of students at Hampshire Regional High School, recognizing the unique educational challenges COVID presented and the learning gap that followed, what assistance do you think would best benefit your student if funds were available?

Answered: 258 Skipped: 458



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Not applicable	55.04%	142
An additional adjustment counselor to address student mental health needs	20.54%	53
An additional Tier 2 intervention teacher to support regular education students and those with 504 Plans	11.63%	30
Other (please specify)	6.59%	17
A reading specialist to work with non-special education students at the middle school level	6.20%	16
TOTAL		258