NORTH FORK

LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

SURVEY RESULTS

SPRING 2025

PRESENTED BY:

THE impact | group
IGPR.COM



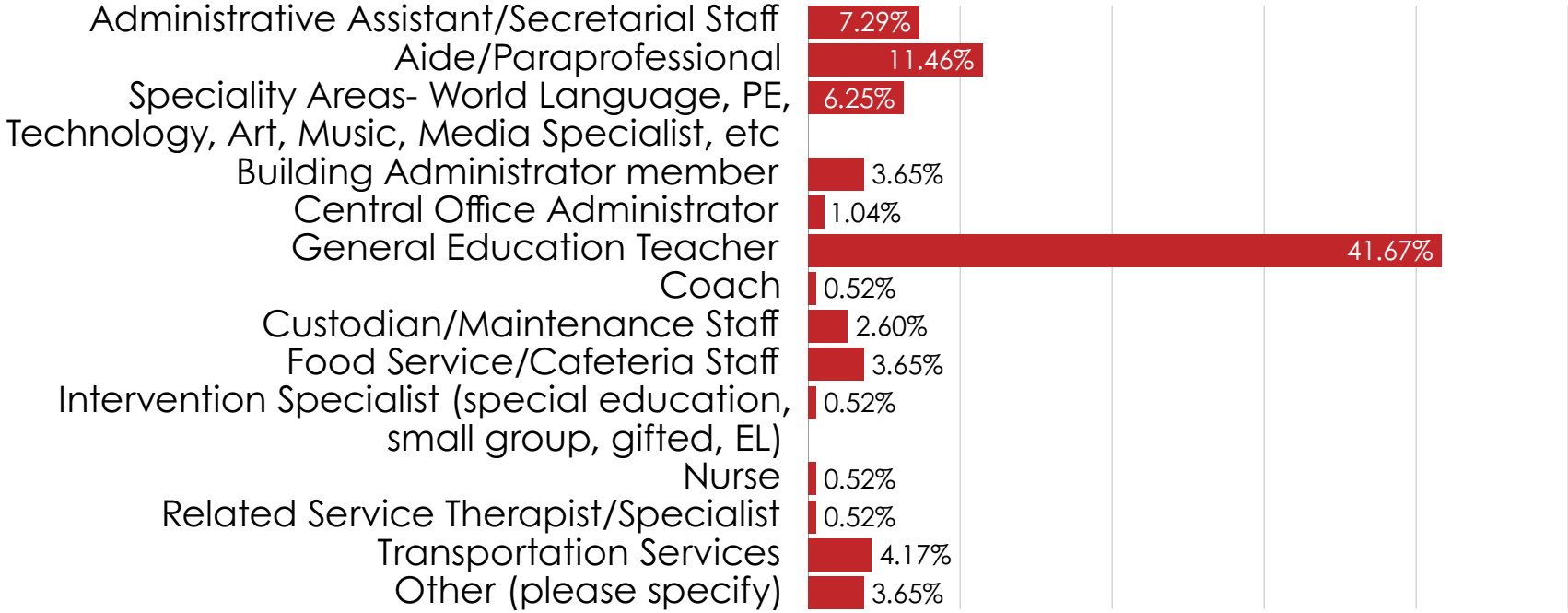
STAFF SURVEY

SPRING 2025

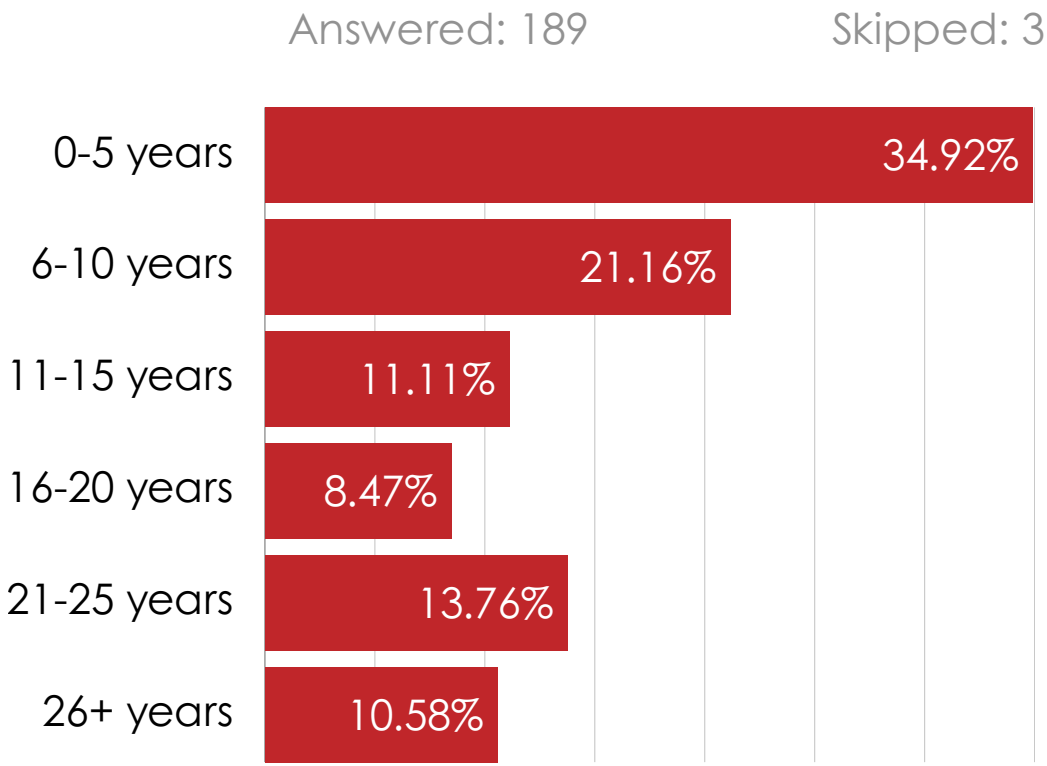
PRESENTED BY: THE impact | group IGPR.COM

Q1 Which of the following best describes your role in the North Fork Local School District?

Answered: 192 Skipped: 0

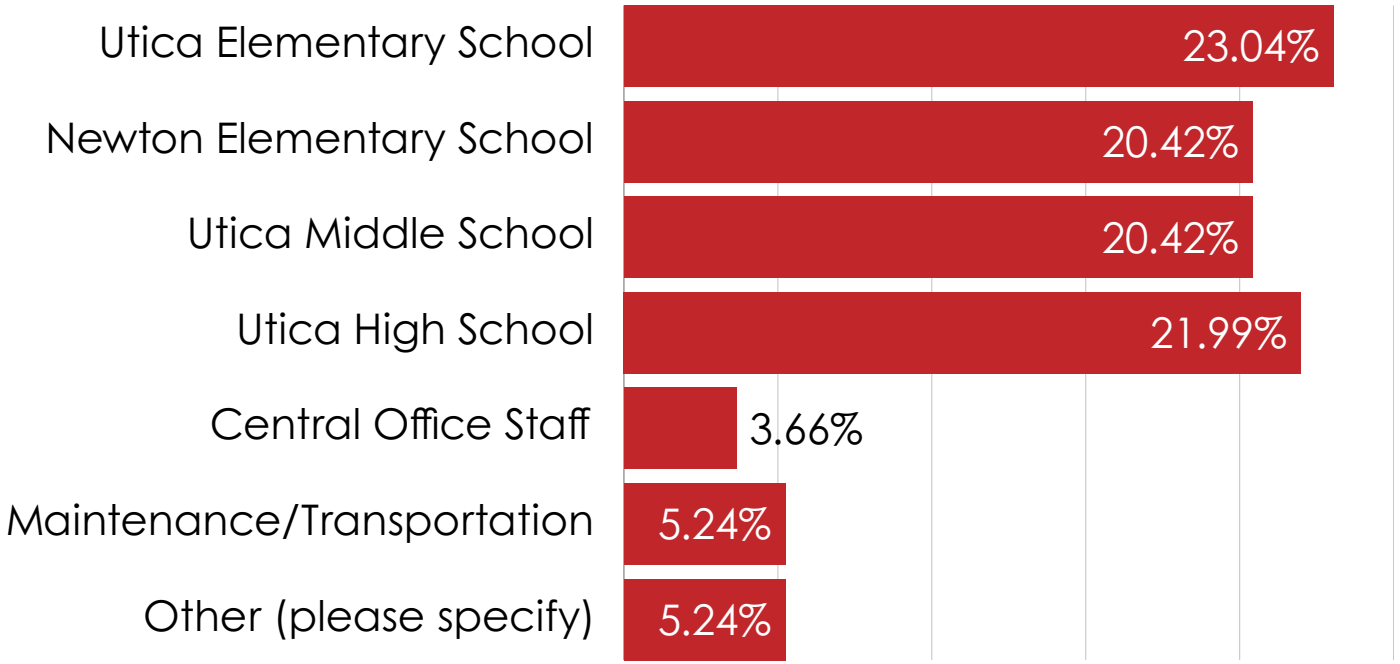


Q2 How many years have you been employed in the district?



Q3 What is your primary building assignment?

Answered: 191 Skipped: 1



"Other" includes multiple building assignments.

Q4 How would you describe North Fork Schools in two or three words?

Answered: 177 Skipped: 15



Q5 What are the greatest strengths of the North Fork Schools? What makes you proud?



Answered: 176 Skipped: 16

- **Dedicated and Caring Staff:** The staff is consistently described as caring, dedicated, hardworking, and putting students' best interests first. There is a strong sense of internal support and collaboration among staff members.

- **Strong Sense of Community:** The district benefits from a strong, involved, and supportive community. Many responses highlight a "small school feel," "close-knit" environment, and a general willingness for the community to rally around the schools and its members in times of need.

- **Student Focus and Well-being:** The district is committed to meeting the emotional and academic needs of students. Strengths include specialized support for students with special needs (gifted, inclusion, resource room, self-contained) and a variety of activities for students to participate in (academics, arts, athletics, agriculture).

- **Supportive Administration at the Building Level:** Many staff members appreciate the support, responsiveness, and value they feel from their building principals and administration.

- **Physical Improvements and Pride Points:** Recent additions and upgrades are noted as strengths and sources of pride, such as the new track, new weightroom equipment, and new buses/bus garage.

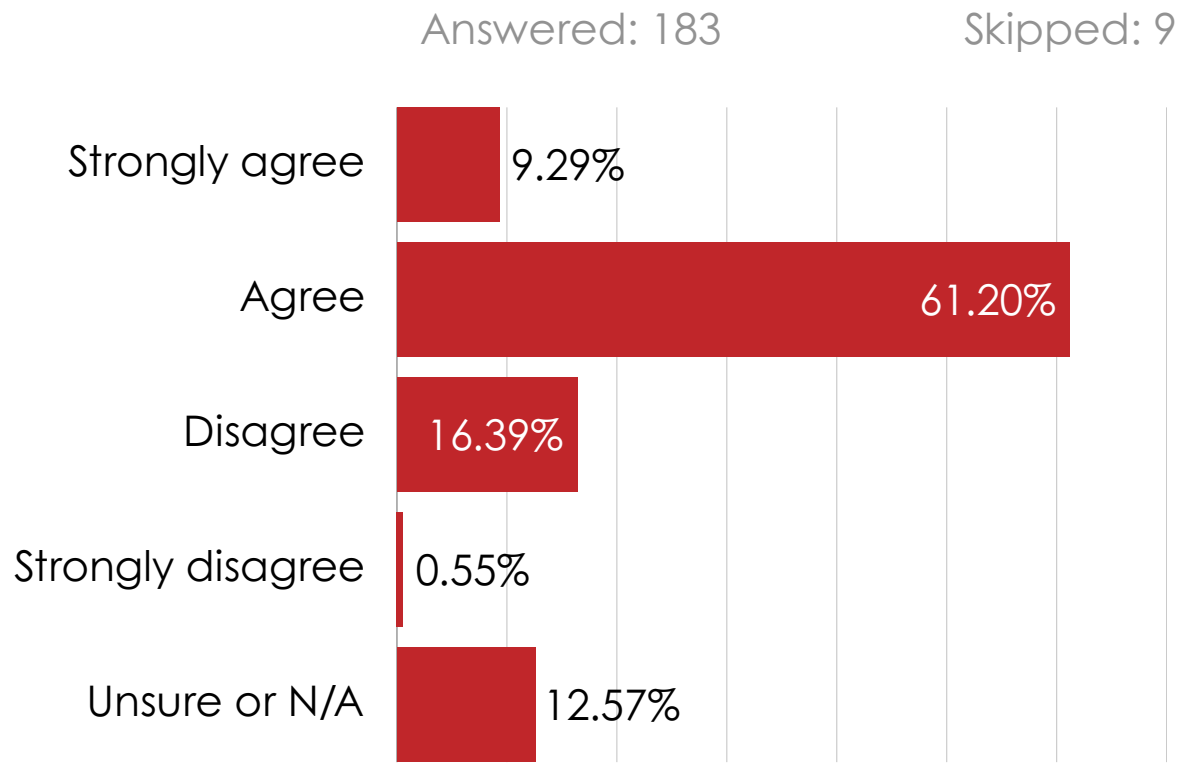
Q6 What are some of the areas for improvement? Please share your thoughts.



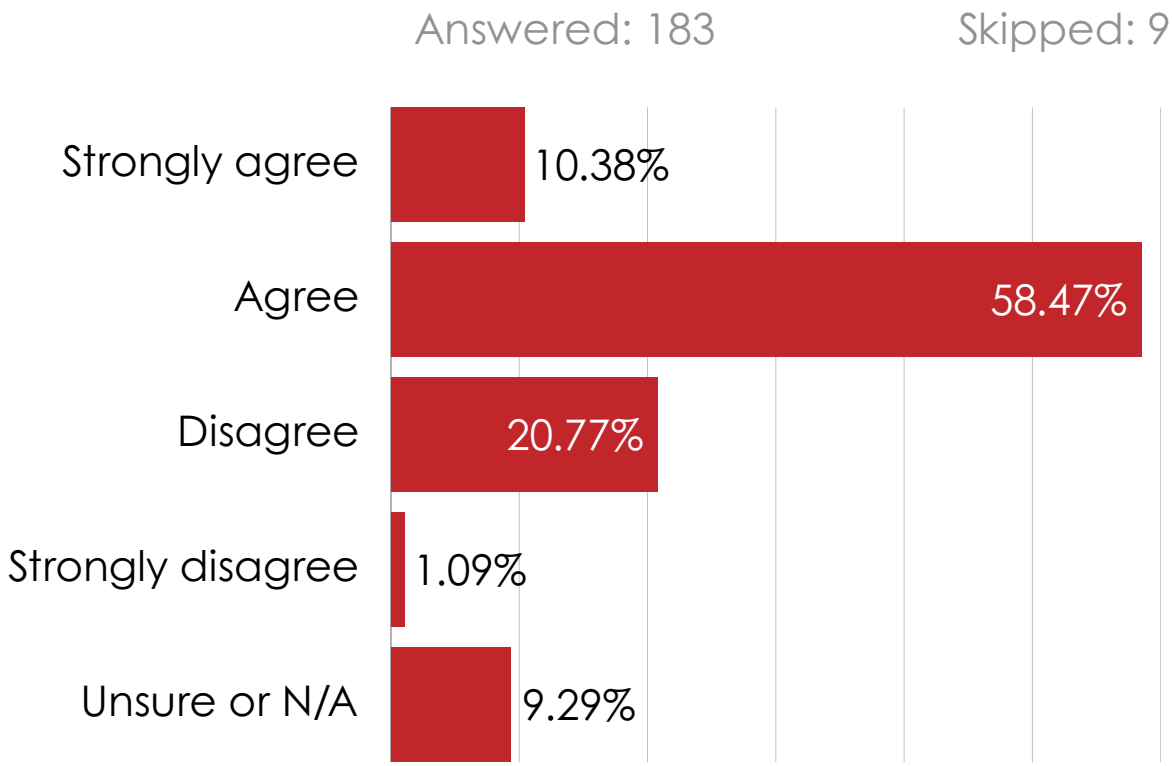
Answered: 179 Skipped: 13

- **Communication & Transparency:** A pervasive theme is the need for improved, consistent, and transparent communication throughout the district (administration to staff, building to building, and board/central office to staff). Staff often learn important district news from public sources like Facebook before being formally notified.
- **Middle School Facilities:** There is an urgent and widely-expressed need to replace or significantly update the middle school building due to its age, falling-apart condition, outdated facilities, and related health concerns (e.g., mold).
- **Technology & Resources:** The district's technology is frequently described as outdated, unreliable, and insufficient, specifically mentioning slow Wi-Fi, old computers, limiting use of iPads over modern devices like Chromebooks, and a need for better technology support staff.
- **Compensation and Pay:** Staff salaries for teachers and coaches are cited as being near the bottom compared to surrounding districts, making it difficult to live off the salary and attracting/retaining talent.
- **Administrative and Board Support:** Concerns are raised about inconsistent support from administration, a lack of follow-through, insufficient teacher voice in decisions, and a need for clearer roles and greater accountability from leadership and board members.
- **Academic Programs and Offerings:** Suggestions include needing more diverse and advanced elective courses at the middle and high school levels, better support for struggling readers and students with special needs, and a need for better college readiness programs.
- **Student Accountability and Discipline:** There is a desire for higher expectations and more consistent consequences for students and parents regarding behavior and accountability.
- **Operational Issues:** Specific operational needs include addressing the substitute teacher shortage, providing more relevant professional development, and reevaluating policies like restricted staff access to buildings on weekends.

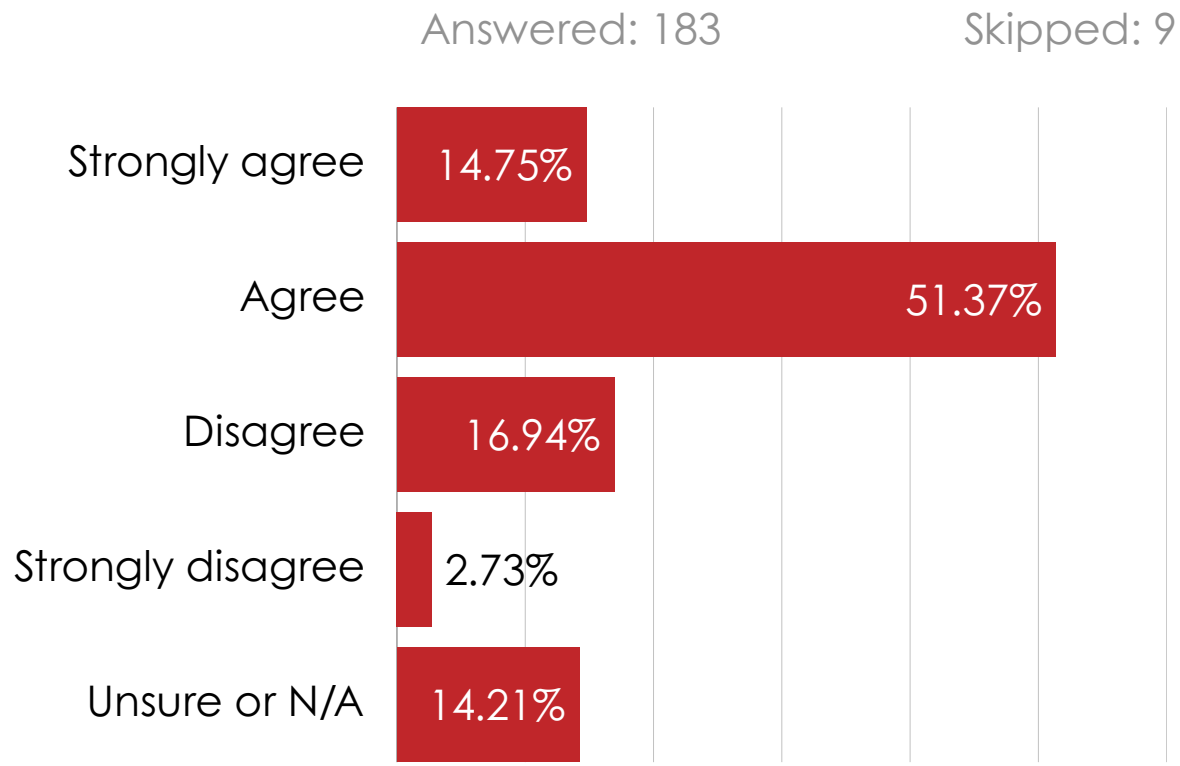
Q7 The district provides a high-quality education across all buildings.



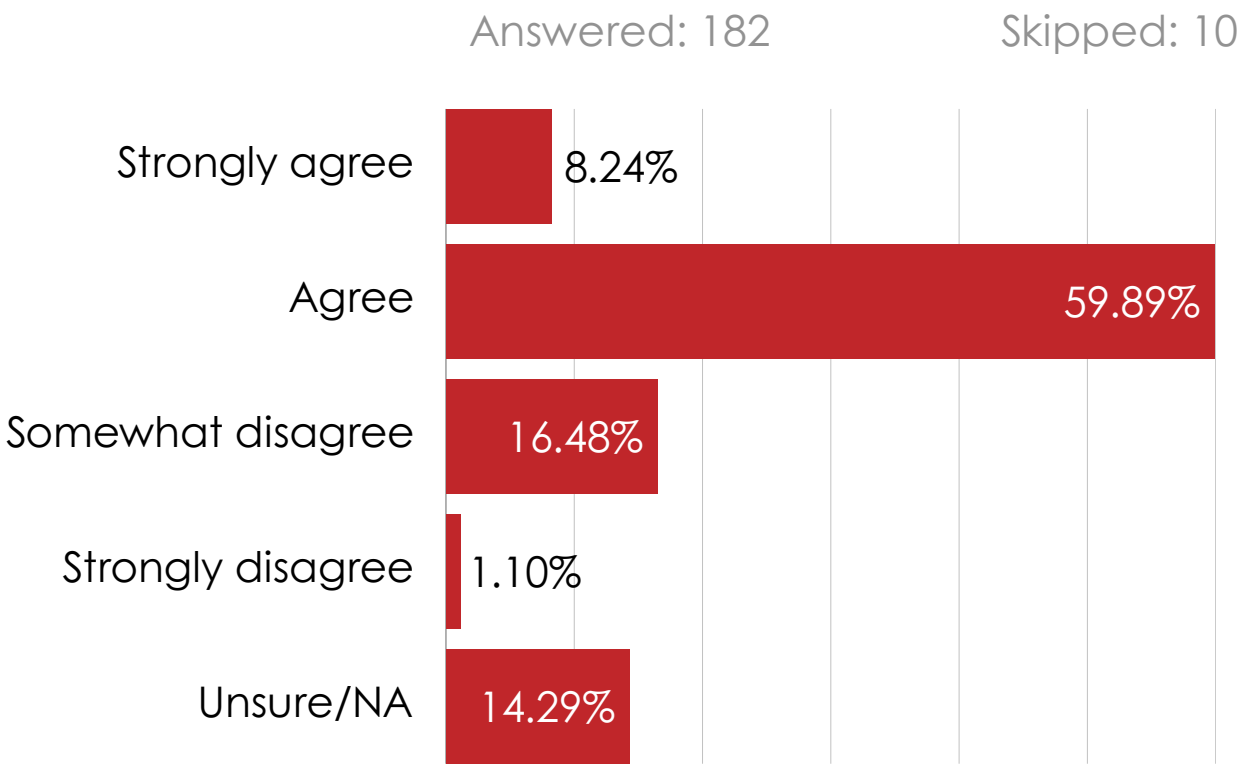
Q8 The district sets high expectations for all students.



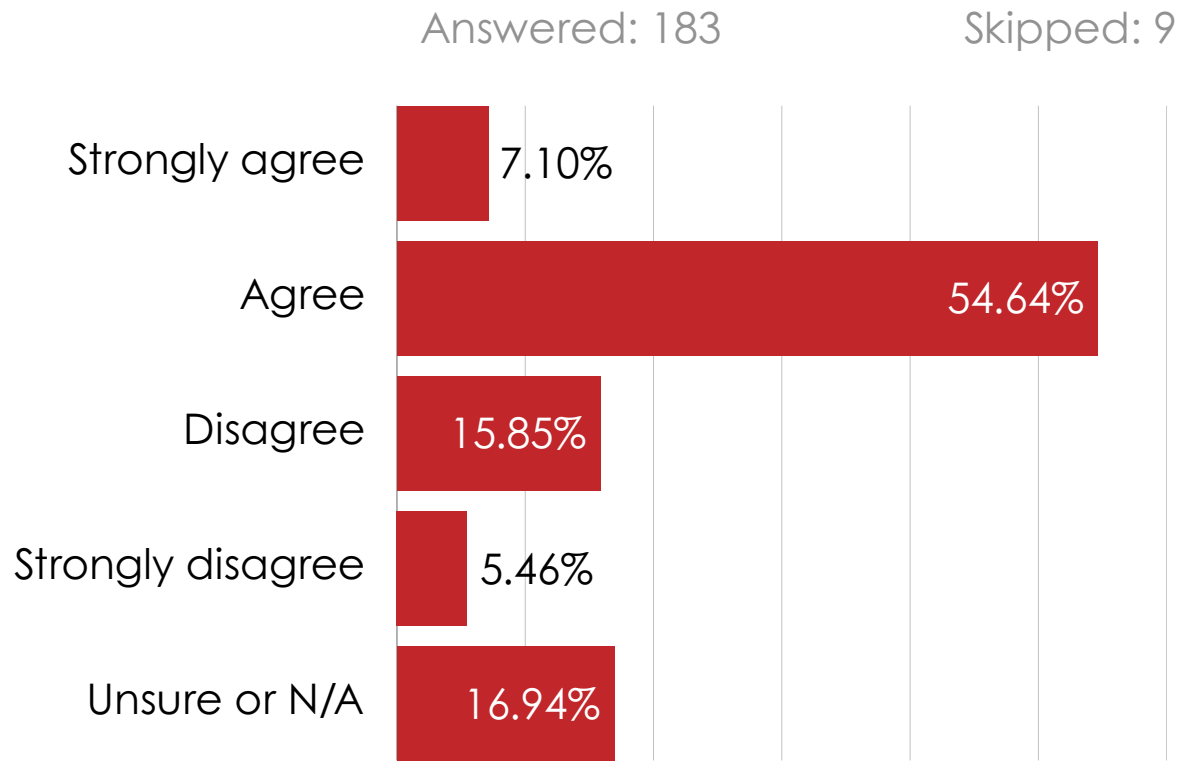
Q9 The district offers learning opportunities that meet students' varied career and personal interests.



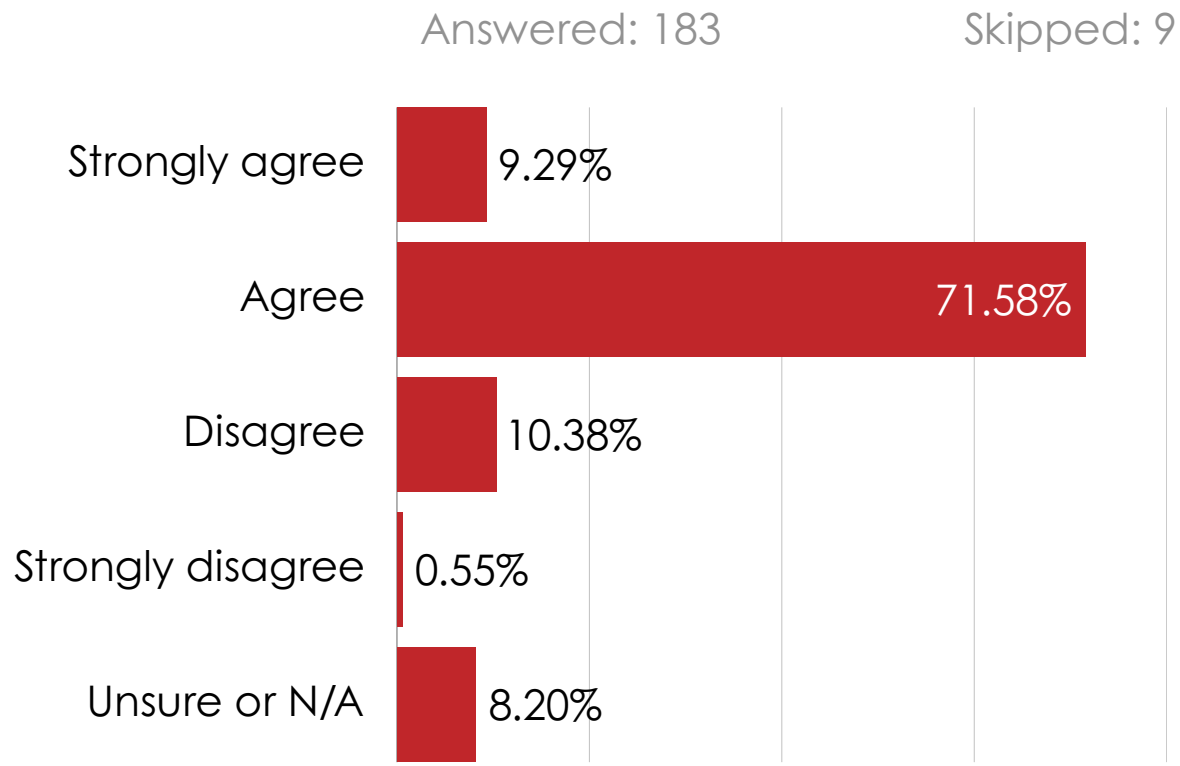
Q10 The district helps students develop the right balance of skills, knowledge and character education to help them succeed in the ever-changing world after they leave the district.



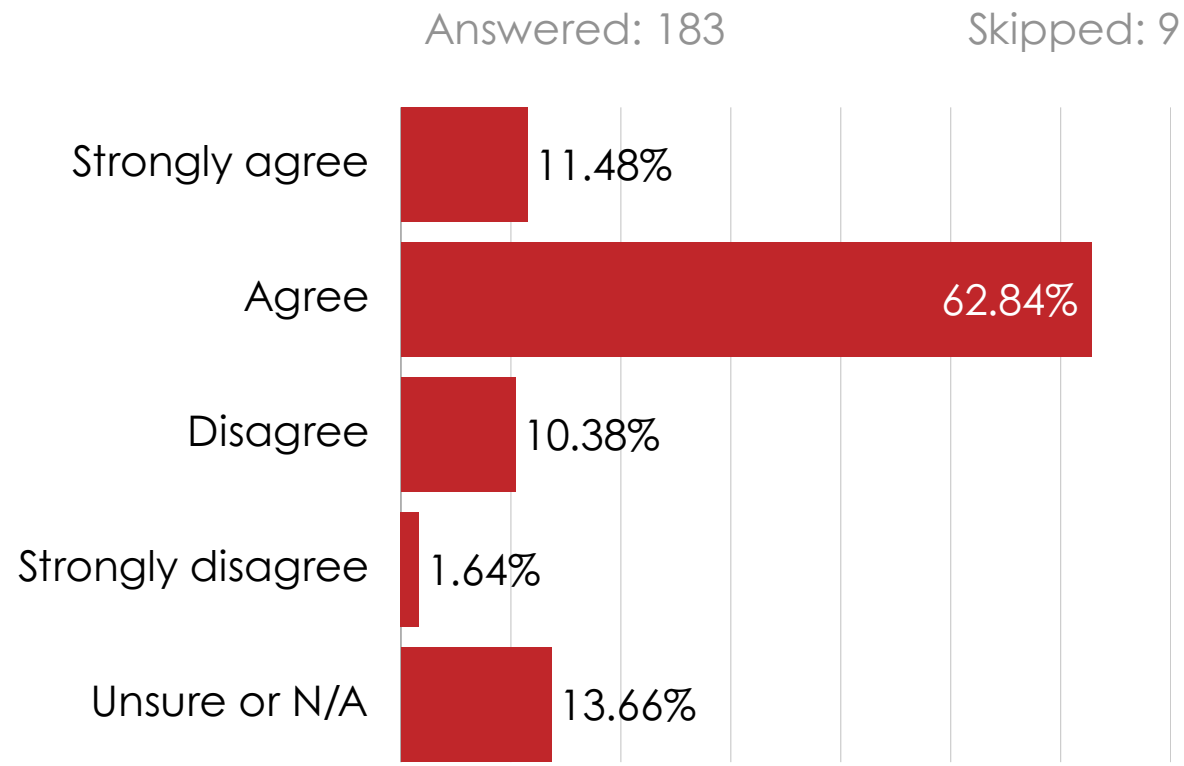
Q11 The district provides high-quality performing arts programs (band, choir, drama).



Q12 The district provides high-quality extracurricular activities and opportunities.



Q13 The district provides high-quality athletic programs.



Q14 Please use this space to provide feedback regarding Teaching and Learning in the North Fork School District.



Answered: 105 Skipped: 87

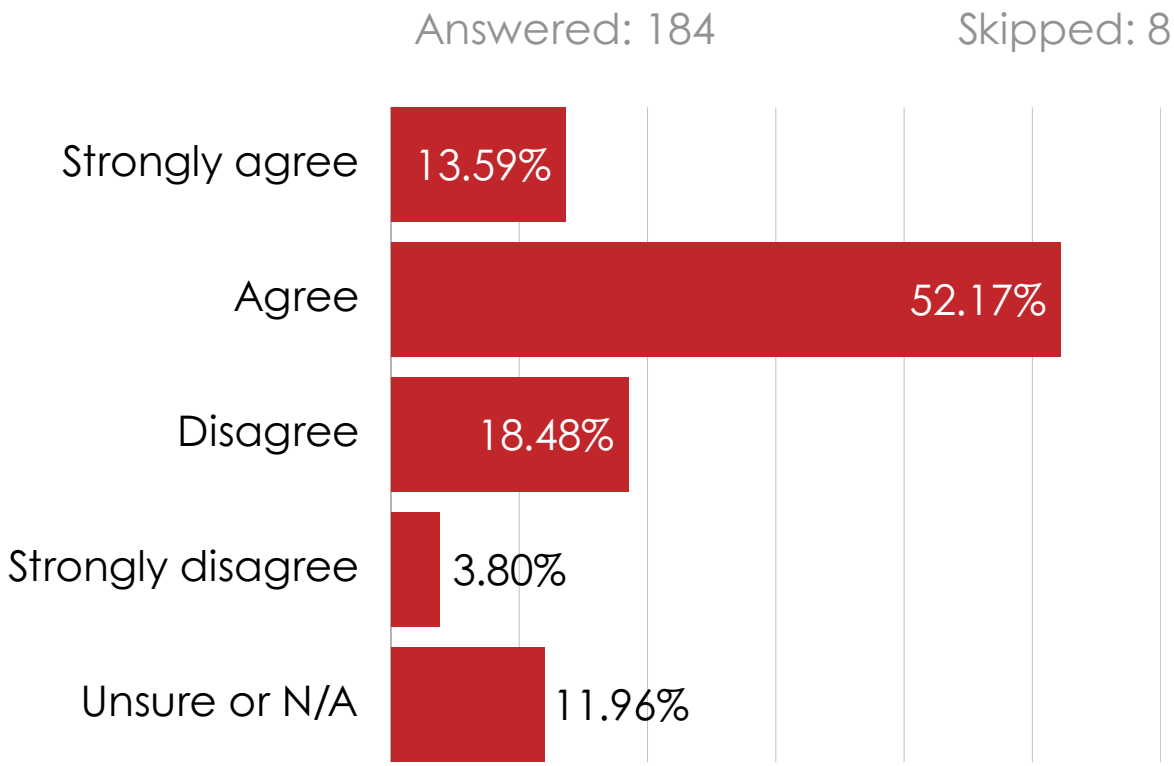
Strengths and Dedication:

- **Dedicated and Caring Staff:** Teachers and staff are highly dedicated, working hard to provide a good education, and genuinely care about their students' education and well-being.
- **Student-Centered Focus:** Staff strive to put students first, focus on their success, and work to meet their emotional and academic needs.
- **Specialized Support:** The district has notable layers of education for students with special needs, including gifted, inclusion, resource room, and self-contained programs.
- **Positive Learning Environment:** Staff members foster strong, supportive relationships with students, and the district is praised for having a loving, caring, and personable atmosphere.

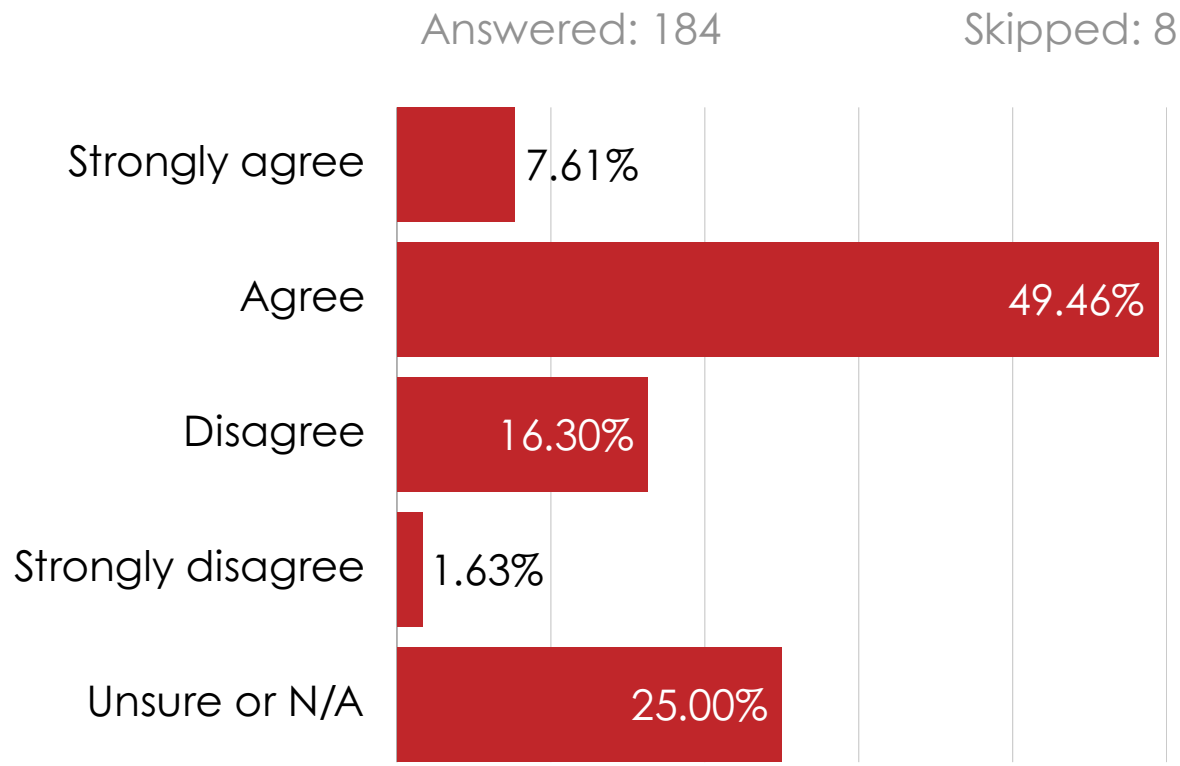
Areas for Improvement and Concern:

- **Academic Opportunities:** The high school needs to offer more diverse, high-level, and career-focused classes (like STEM/robotics) on campus to keep students from having to leave for college credit or work-study, which is perceived as "robbing them of their high school experience."
- **Lack of Resources and Funding:** Teachers feel they work with very little resources and low funding for classroom consumables. Spending on curriculum is considered inefficient, as new, unwanted programs (especially online curriculum that overtaxes the unstable internet) are purchased and pushed by administration.
- **Curriculum and Intervention:** There is a lack of consistency in curriculum implementation across grade levels, outdated science and social studies materials, and a need for better training for new staff. A functioning Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is largely non-existent, resulting in a reactive model where support for struggling students (especially low readers) is often delayed until they fail.
- **Student Support Accountability:** A need exists for teachers to consistently follow student IEPs and accommodations, as well as a call for increased academic rigor and accountability for students and parents.
- **Technology for Learning:** The need for a modern, reliable technology system is paramount, including stable internet/Wi-Fi and the implementation of one-to-one devices like Chromebooks instead of old, inadequate iPads.

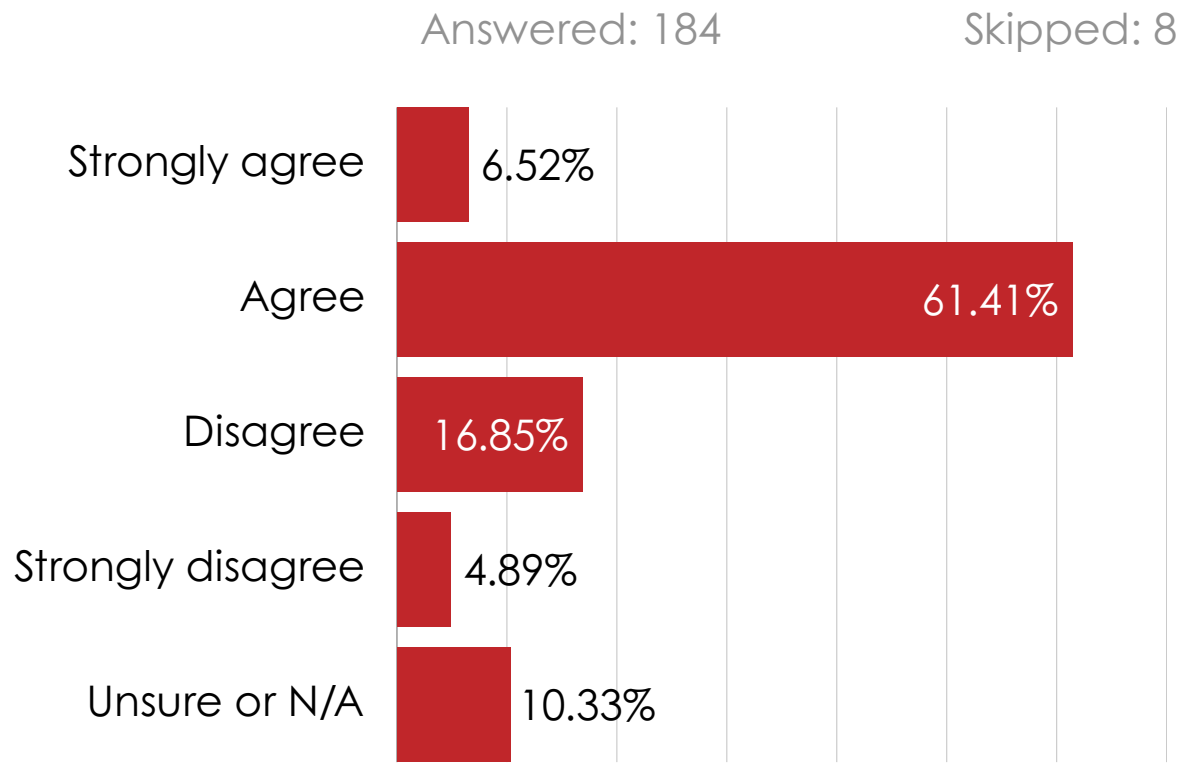
Q15 The district provides appropriate programming and resources for students with special needs.



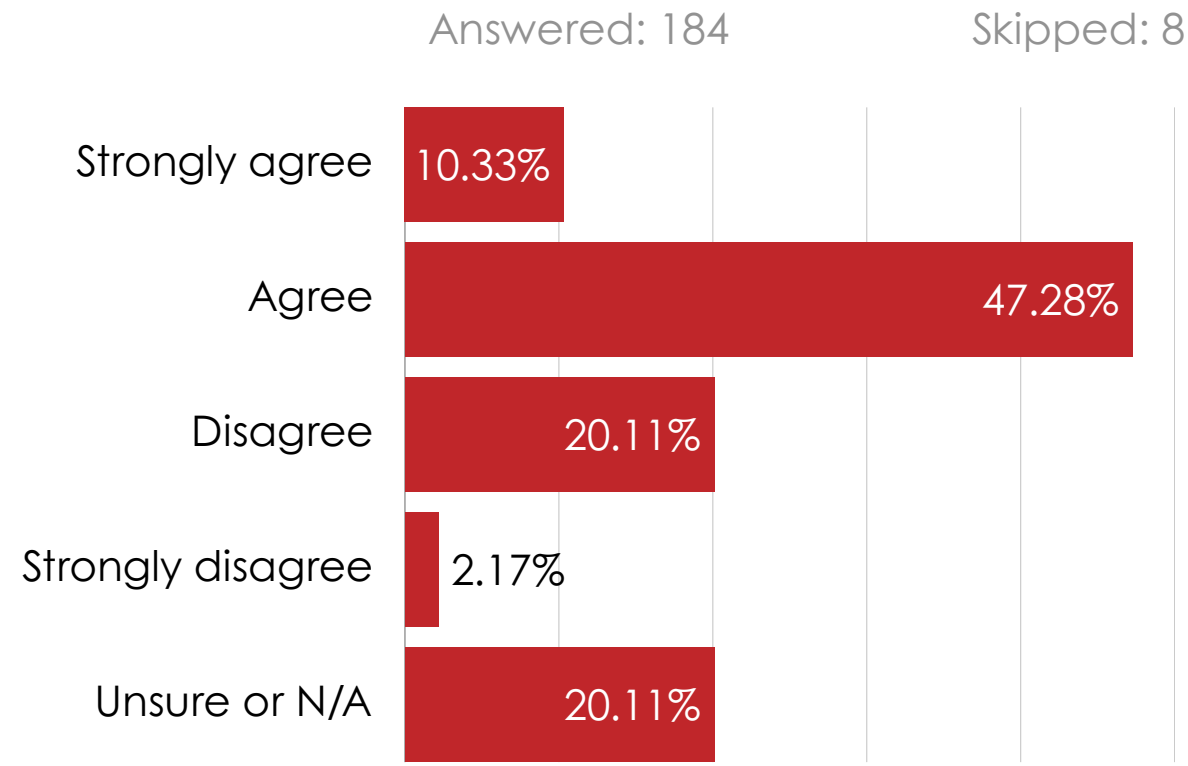
Q16 The district provides appropriate programming and resources for gifted students.



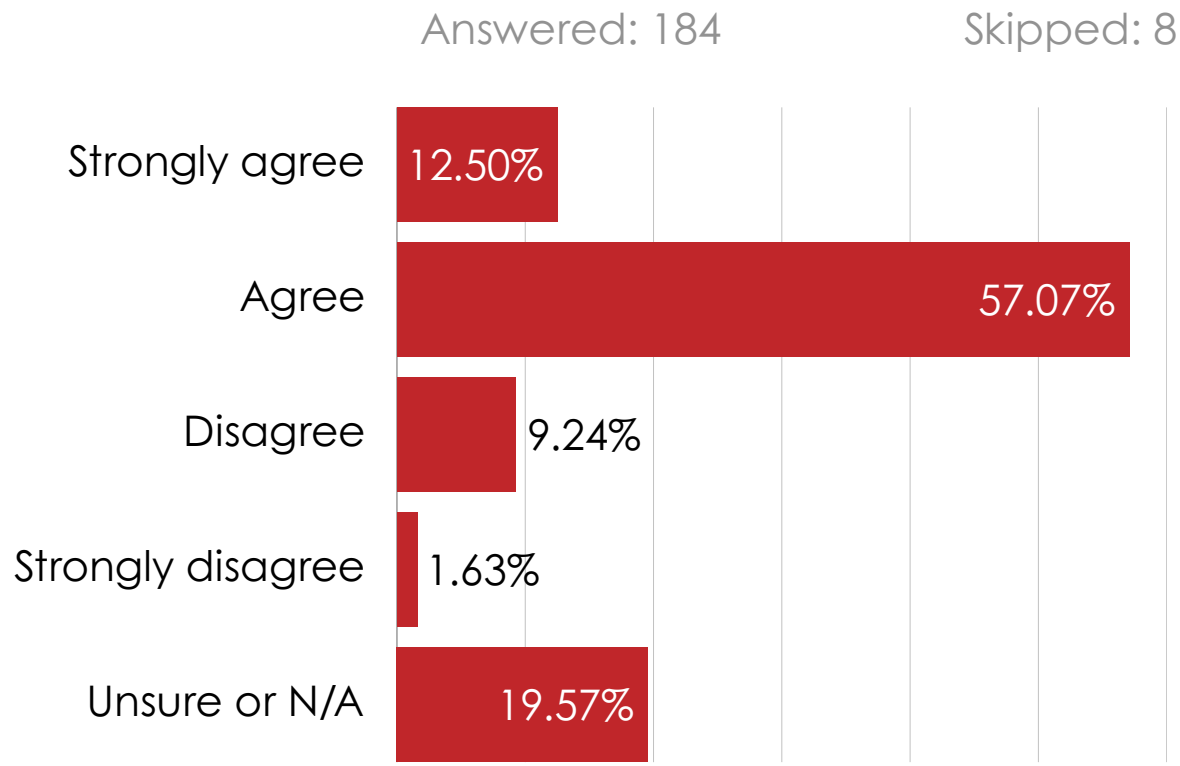
Q17 The district provides support to address the mental wellness, behavioral, and social-emotional needs of all students.



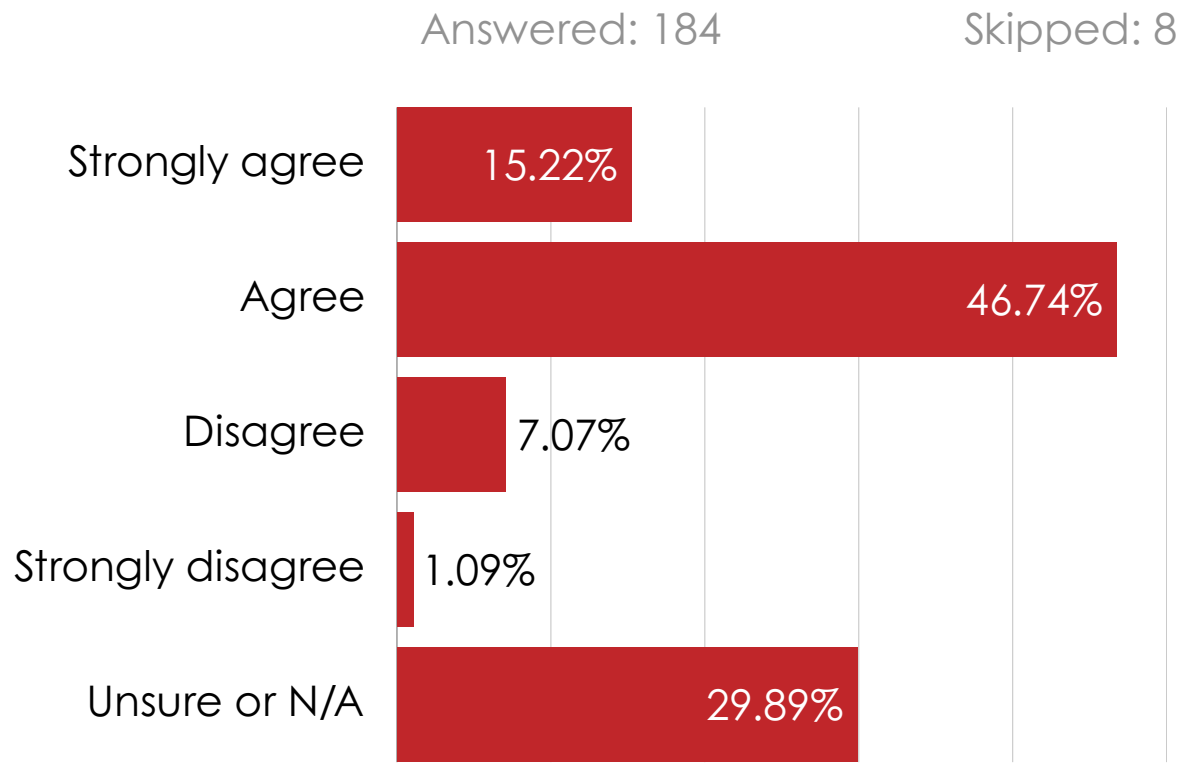
Q18 The district prepares students to succeed in college or other educational opportunities beyond high school.



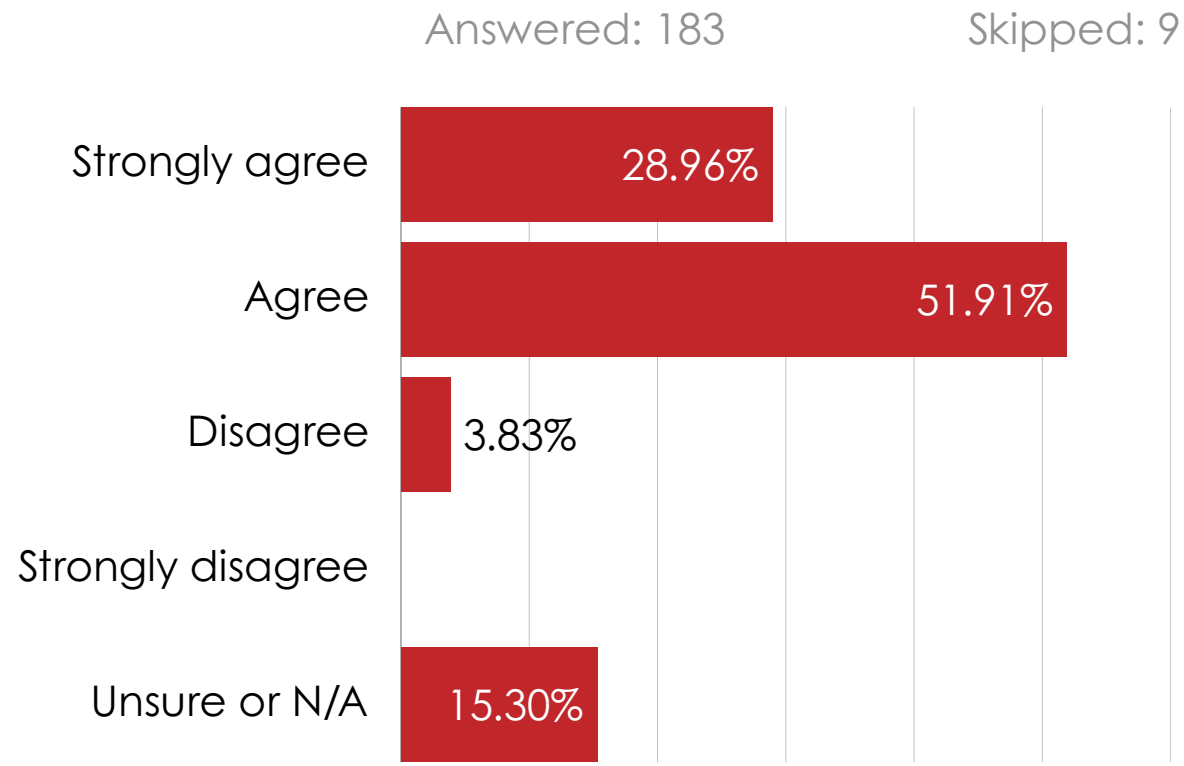
Q19 The district prepares students to succeed in the workforce, trades, and/or military.



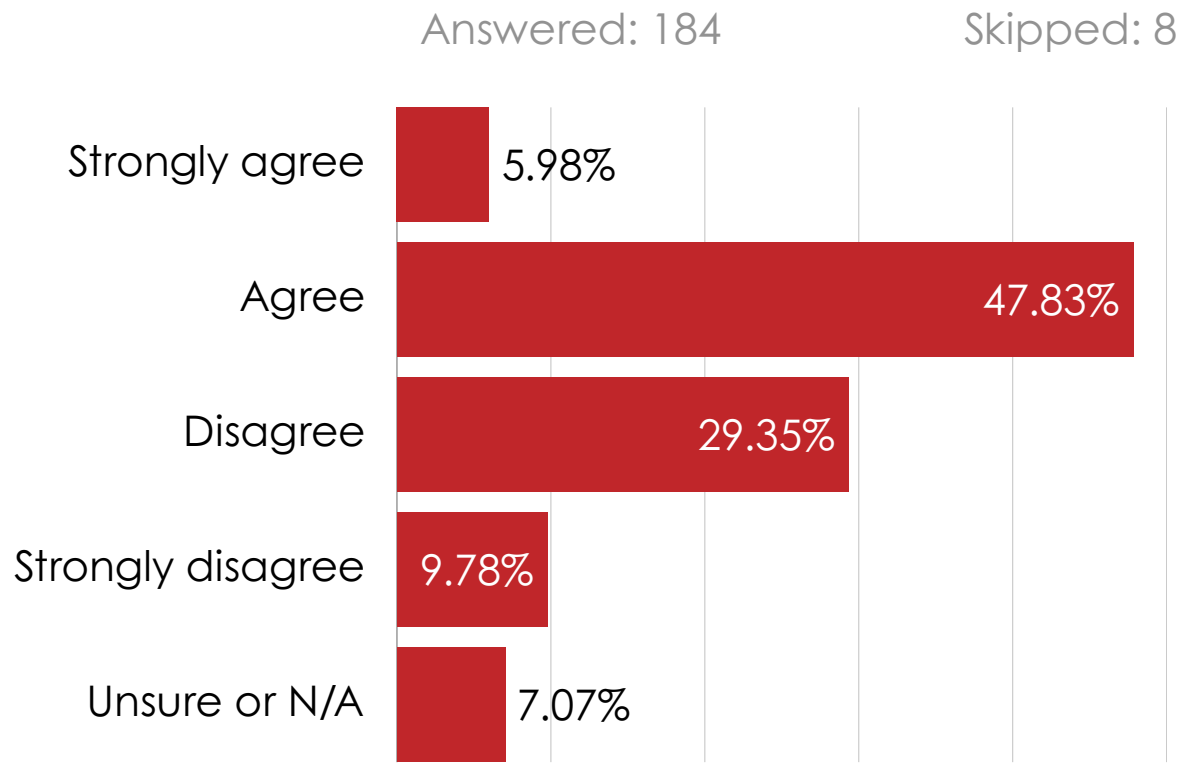
Q20 The district offers an excellent opportunity for students through College Credit Plus (CCP) courses.



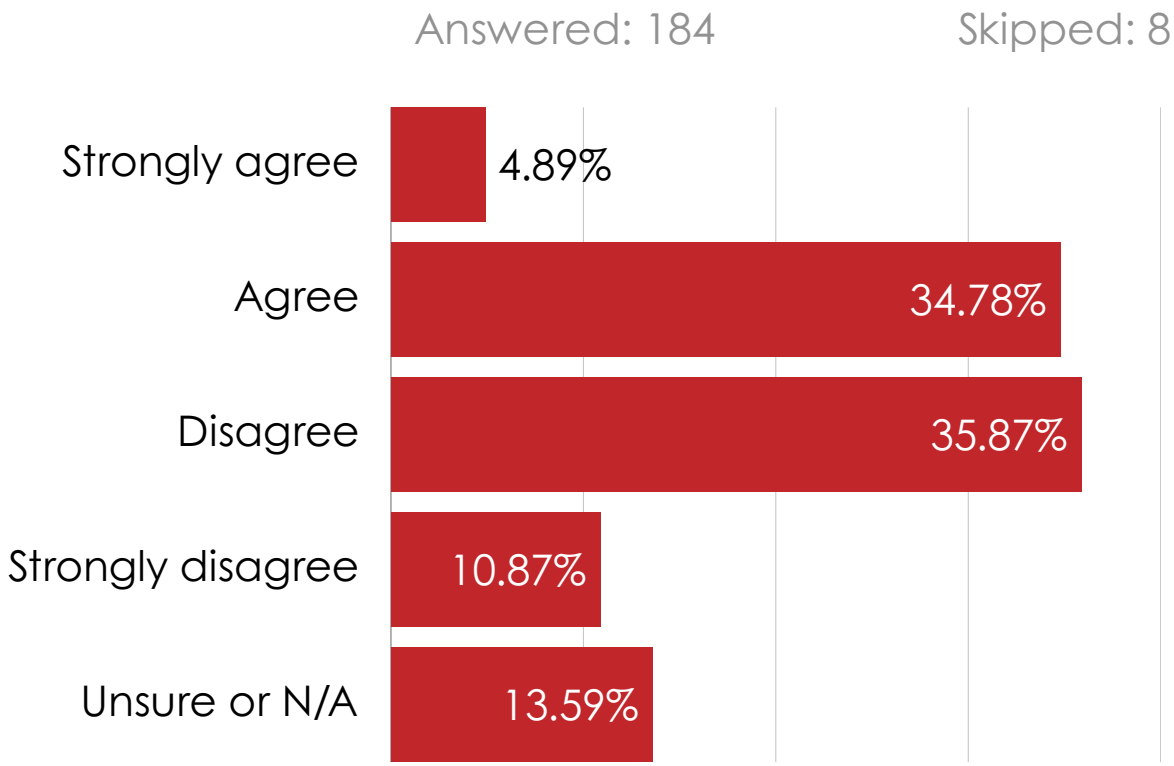
Q21 C-Tec and the Knox County Career Center and North Fork Schools provide comprehensive career and trade educational opportunities for students.



Q22 The district has clear discipline policies.



Q23 The district implements discipline policies consistently and fairly.



Q24 Please use this space to provide feedback regarding Student Support in the North Fork School District.



Answered: 88 Skipped: 104

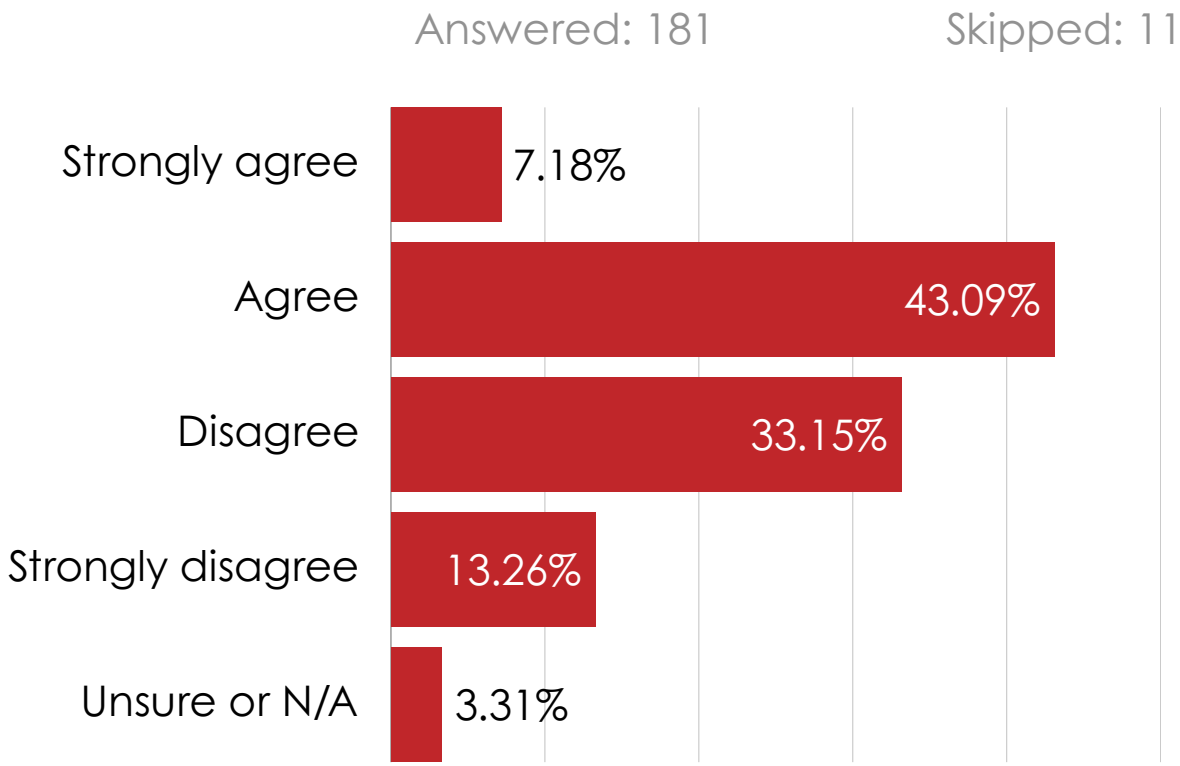
Strengths:

- **Dedicated Special Education and Gifted Programs:** The district is noted for its ability to meet the academic needs of students and offers a commendable "layers of education" for special needs, including gifted, inclusion, resource room, and self-contained classes.
- **Career and Military Focus:** The district is generally viewed as doing a good job preparing students for post-high school life in the workforce and military.
- **Emotional and Mental Health Focus:** There are efforts to take children's mental health seriously, and the counseling department is praised for doing a "great job" (though resources are perceived as limited).
- **Staff Commitment:** Many staff members feel supported and believe that the amount of student support provided by the district is "amazing."

Areas for Improvement and Concern

- **Inconsistent Discipline and Accountability:** This is the most significant concern, with multiple reports of district discipline policies being "not followed consistently" and being "overridden at an unfair and inconsistent basis by administration" when parents complain. This is seen as undermining teachers and contributing to high student behavior issues.
- **Lack of Behavioral and Mental Health Resources:** There is a perceived lack of behavioral support staff (e.g., social workers, RBTs) to address social-emotional and behavior issues, especially in the middle and high schools. The middle school in particular is seen as being understaffed to service its student population's needs.
- **Inadequate Bullying Enforcement:** Bullying is described as a "real issue" that is often "ignored" or "swept under the rug," and the stated "0 tolerance rule" is not consistently enforced.
- **IEP/Intervention Process Flaws:** The process for identifying struggling students (MTSS/IEP testing) is described as too long and not clearly defined, causing students to fall behind. Additionally**, existing IEPs are sometimes written with unrealistic accommodations that the staff cannot fully meet due to a lack of personnel.**
- **Limited High-Level Academic Offerings:** The high school is criticized for a lack of rigorous, high-level courses (like AP or more electives), which may not adequately prepare students for college and results in a high number of juniors and seniors taking college-credit-plus (CCP) classes off-campus.
- **Technology for Future Readiness:** The district's technology, particularly the use of iPads over devices like Chromebooks or laptops, is seen as failing to prepare students for college and future workforce expectations.

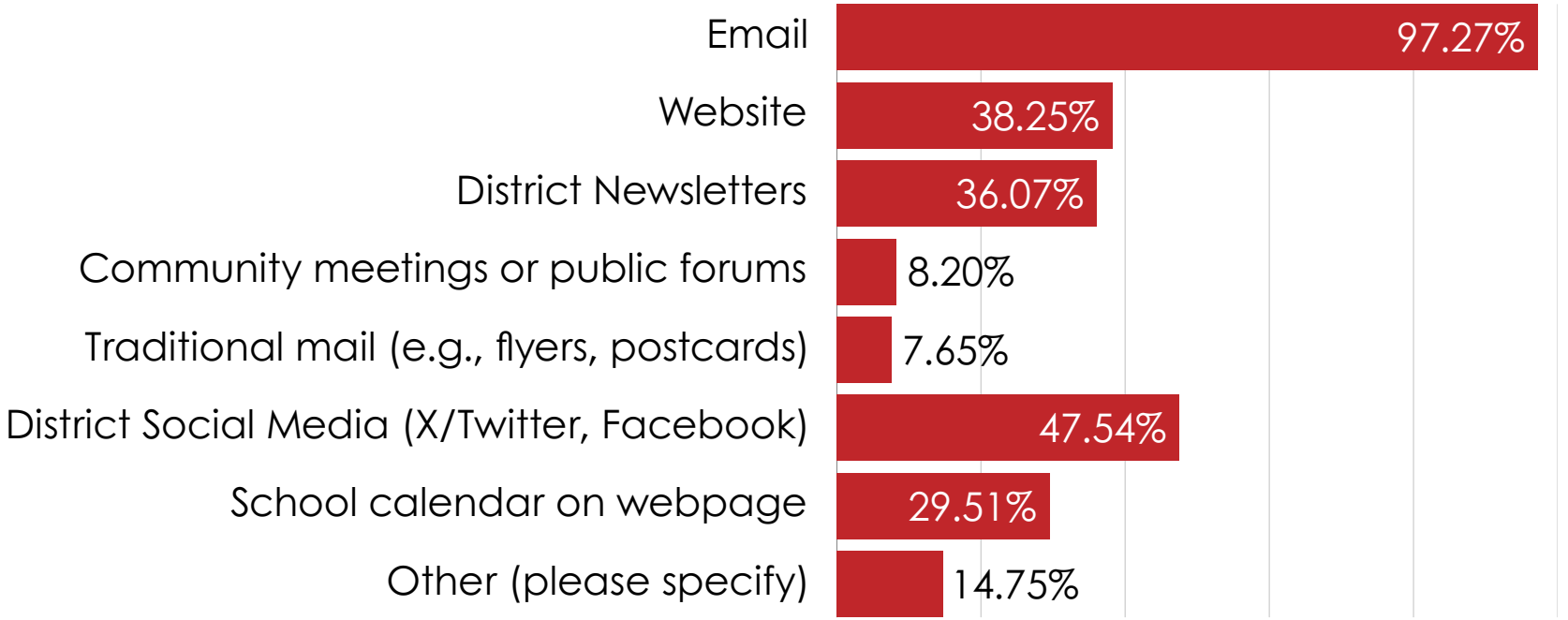
Q25 The district keeps staff informed with timely, transparent communication updates.



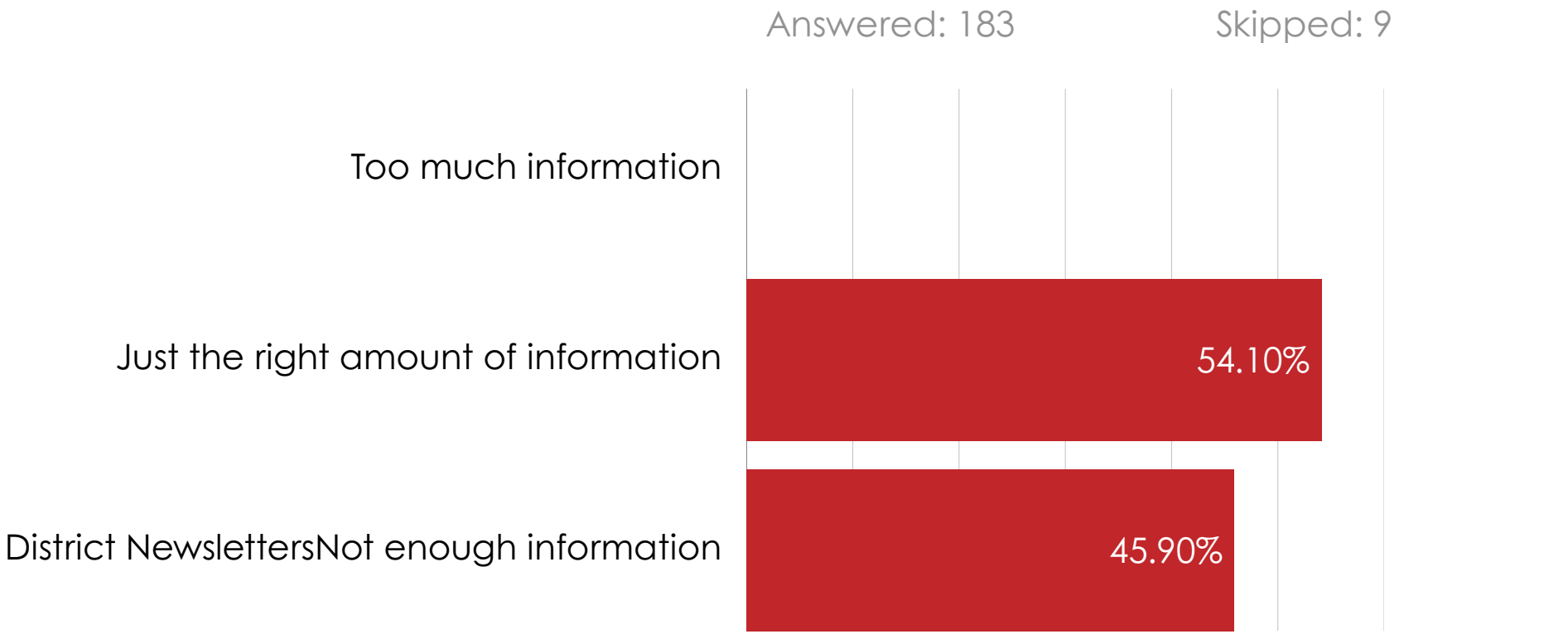
Q26 How do you currently receive information regarding the district? [Select all that apply]



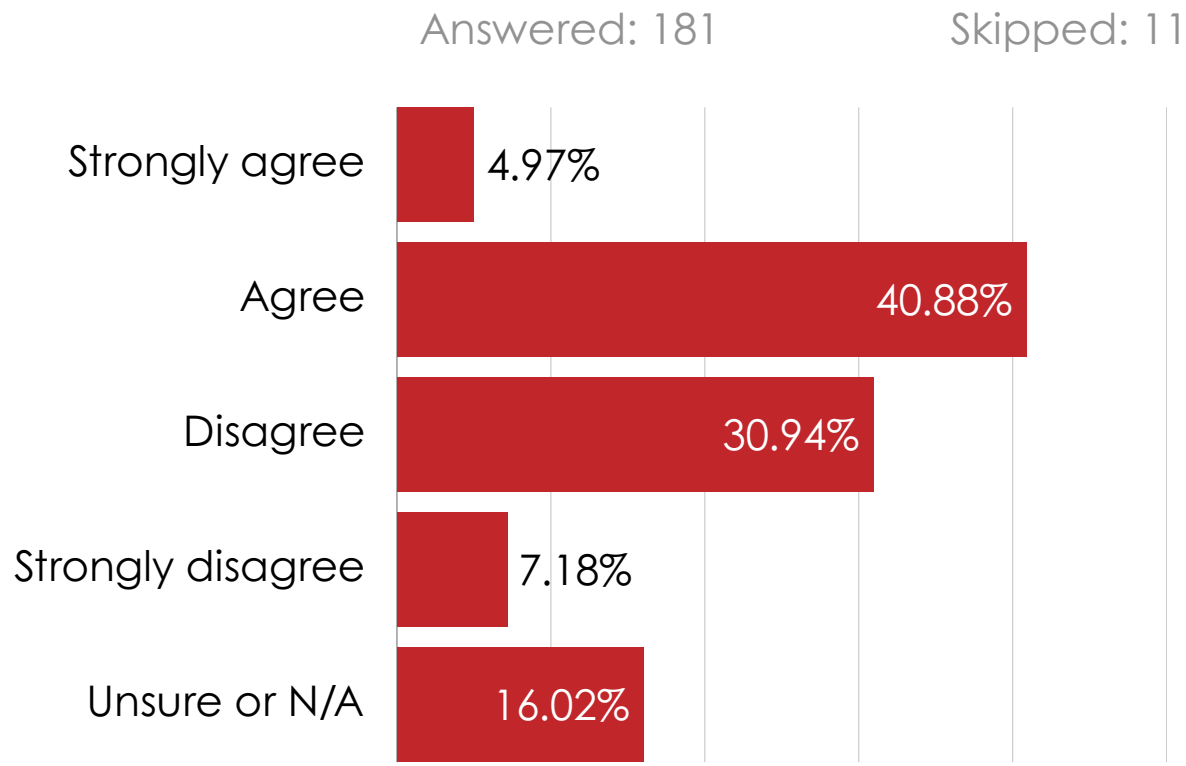
Answered: 183 Skipped: 9



Q27 The frequency with which I receive communication from the district is



Q28 The district provides staff members with meaningful opportunities to learn and grow.



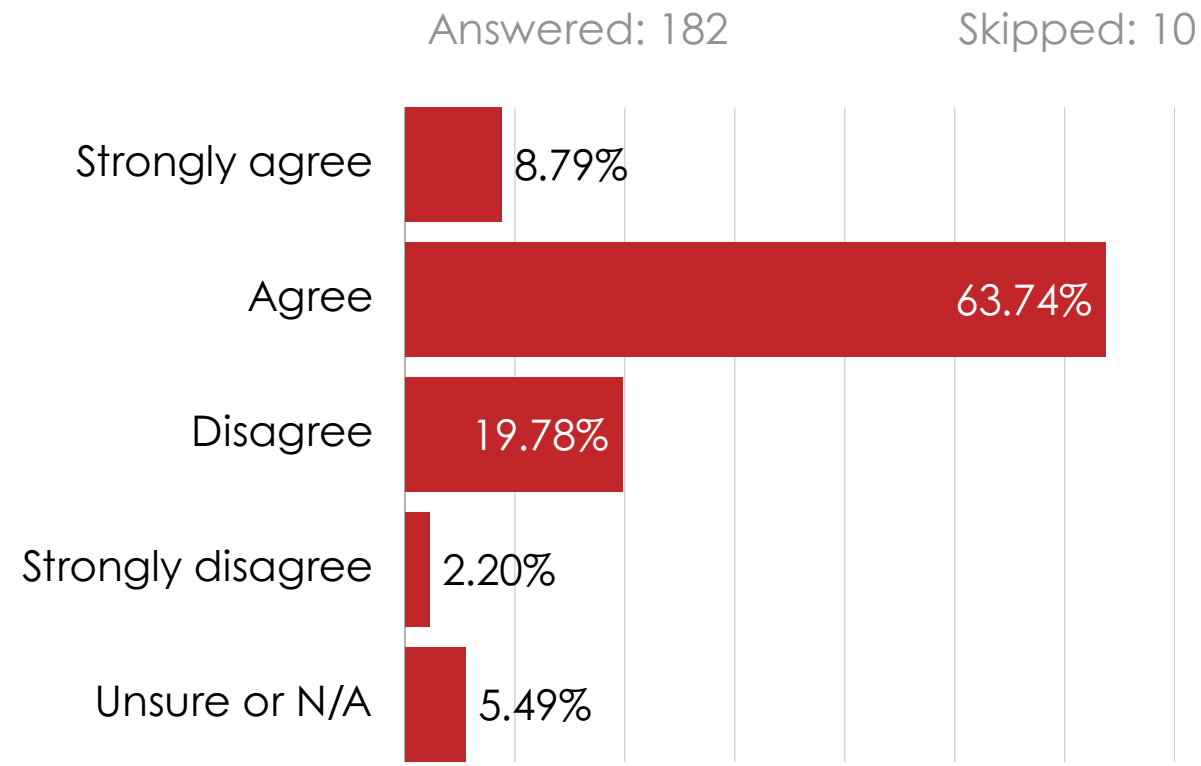
Q29 What are some topics that you are interested regarding professional development?



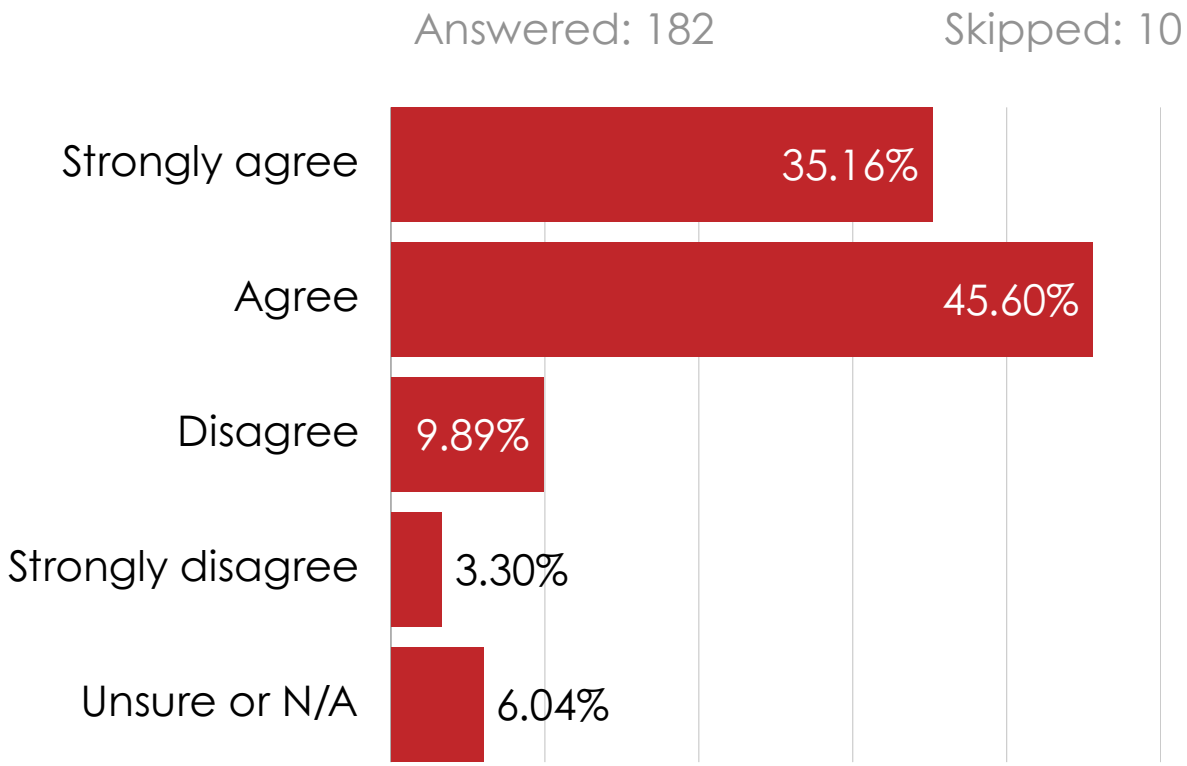
Answered: 110 Skipped: 82

- **AI, Technology, and 21st-Century Tools:** A major interest in AI integration, virtual reality, Microsoft 365, EduClimber, and project-based learning. Staff want hands-on training that helps them apply technology effectively—not just theoretical overviews.
- **Behavior Management & Tiered Interventions:** Strong demand for training on Tier I, II, III behavioral supports, de-escalation, trauma-informed practices, PBIS, MTSS, and consistent discipline strategies that align across buildings.
- **Literacy, Reading Science & Academic Interventions:** Teachers seek deeper, practical PD on Science of Reading, phonics programs (FUNdations, SPIRE, Wilson, Benchmark), and strategies to reach struggling readers and twice-exceptional students.
- **Differentiation, Inclusion & Special Education:** Requests for training on differentiated instruction, co-teaching, IEP implementation, accommodations, and inclusion practices that meet the needs of all learners—gifted, neurodivergent, and special ed.
- **Social-Emotional Learning & Staff Wellness:** Interest in PD covering mental health awareness, SEL strategies, trauma-responsive classrooms, teacher self-care, and staff morale. Many want real tools to prevent burnout and support emotional resilience.
- **Practical, Relevant, and Consistent PD Delivery:** Desire for fresh, meaningful PD that isn't repetitive or "check-the-box." Staff ask for time to practice new curricula, collaboration time within teams, and consistent training across all schools.

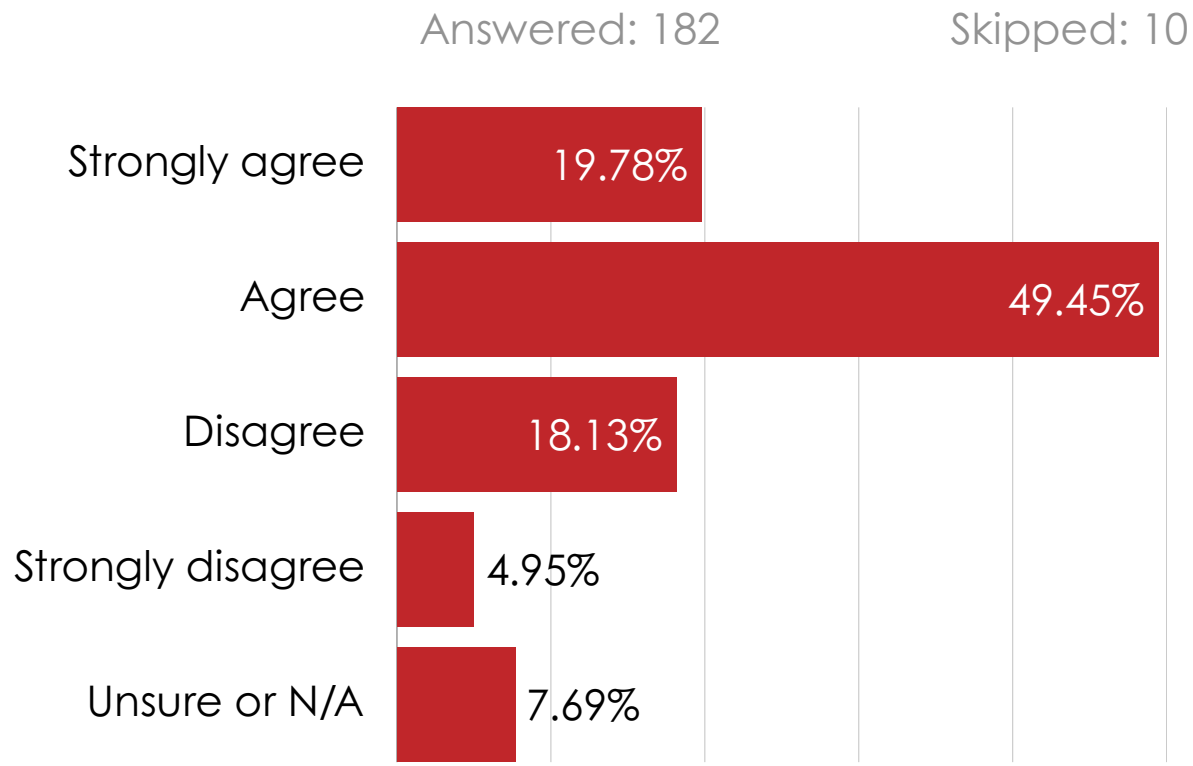
Q30 The district sets high expectations for all staff.



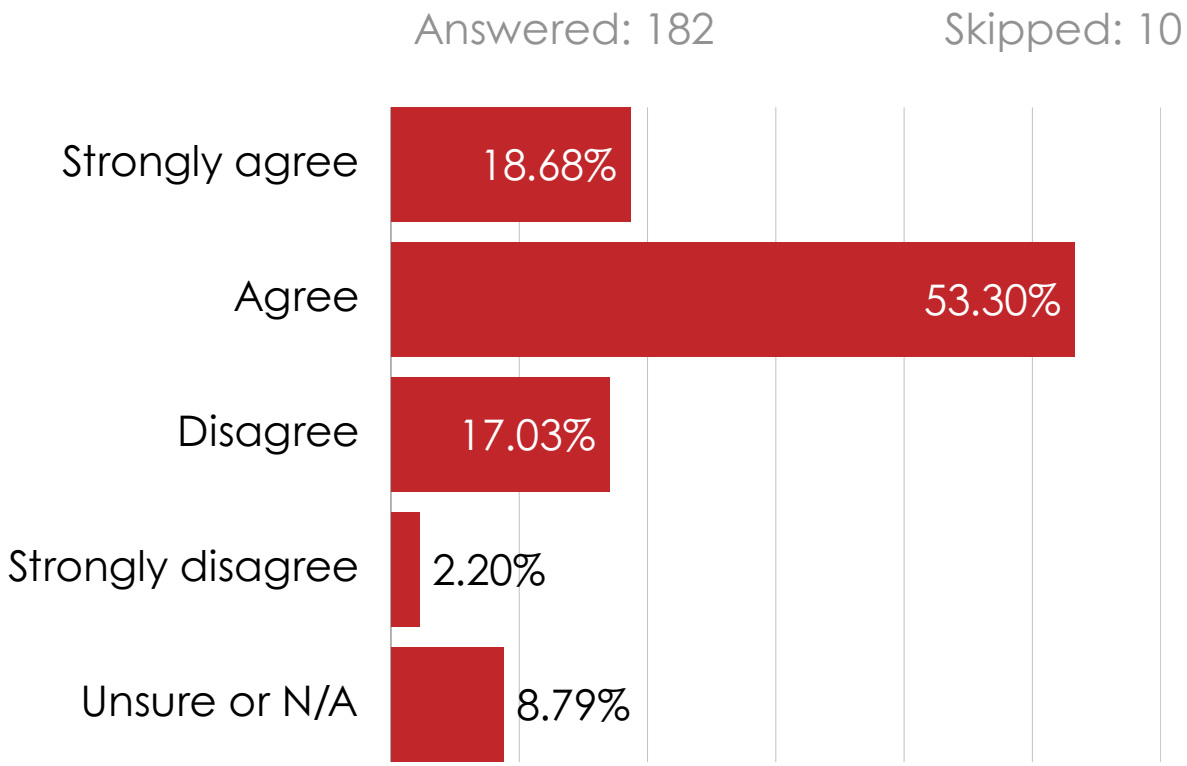
Q31 I feel safe bringing concerns to my immediate supervisor.



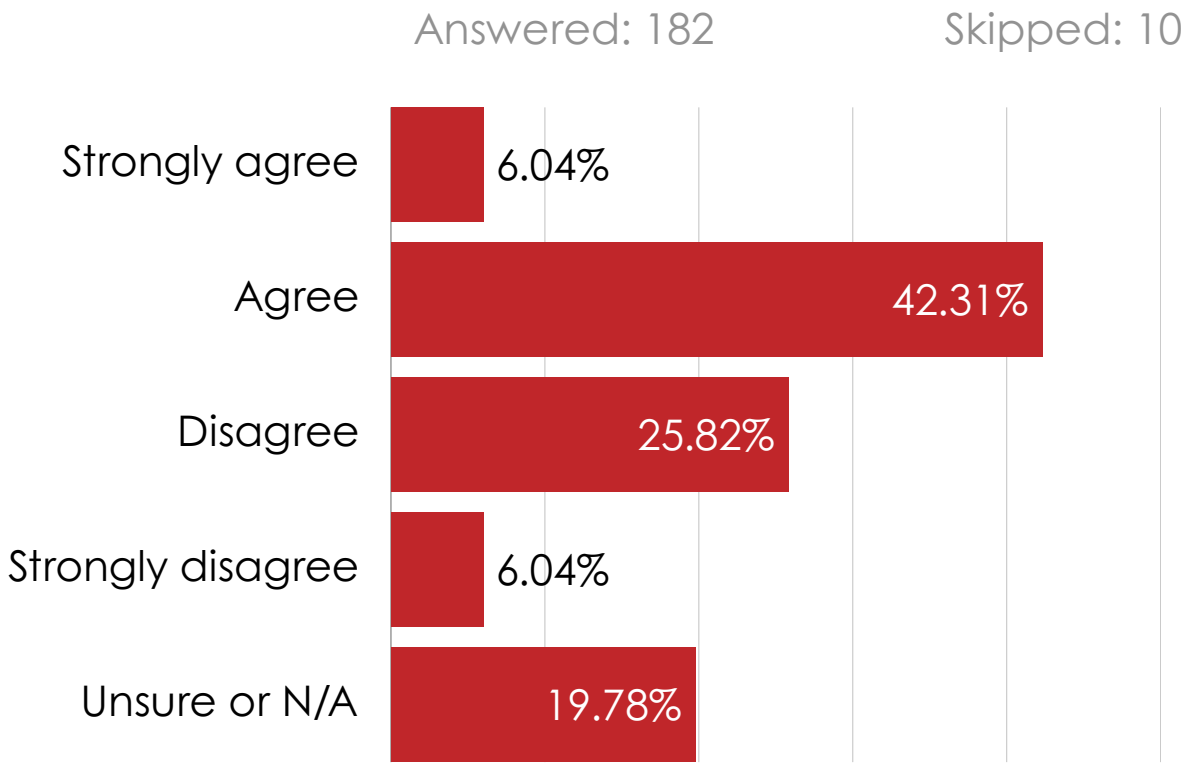
Q32 I feel respected by those in leadership positions.



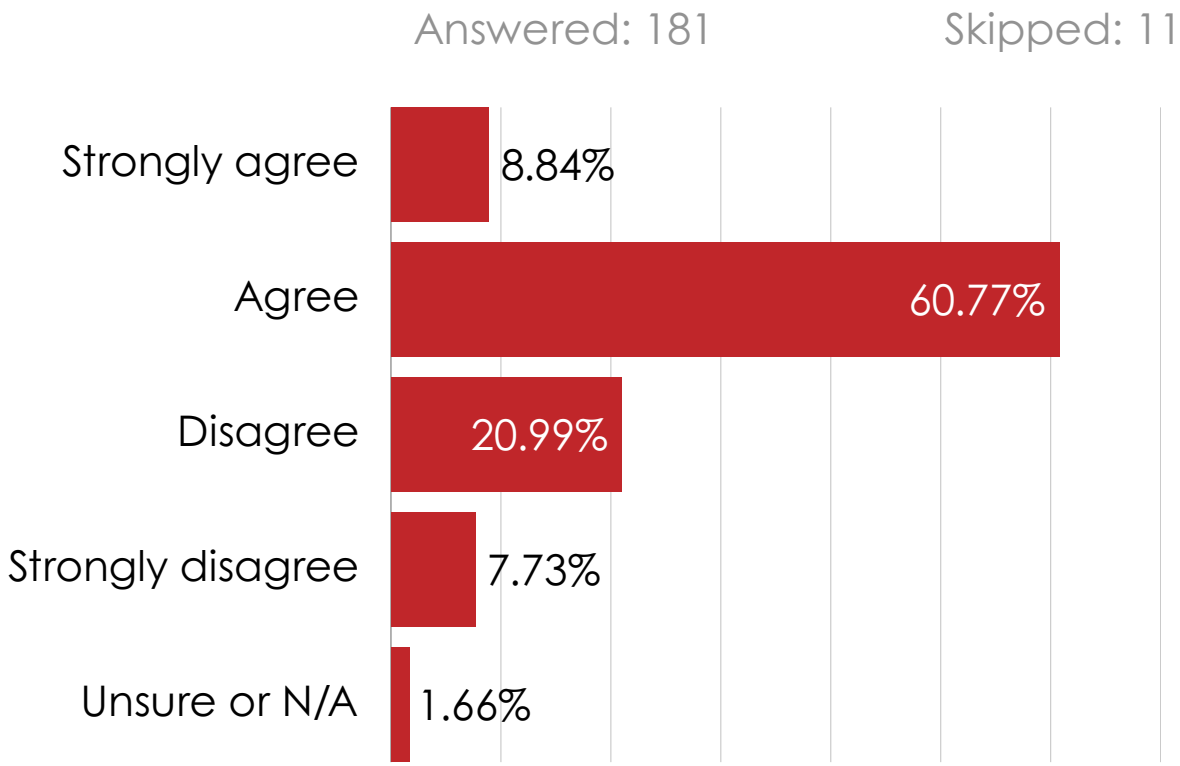
Q33 I feel as though there are opportunities for meaningful two-way communication between myself and those in leadership positions.



Q34 The district is committed to supporting wellness opportunities for staff.



Q35 I have the tools and resources to do my job effectively.



Q36 Please use this space to provide feedback regarding Communication and Staff Development in the North Fork School District.



Answered: 108 Skipped: 84

Poor and Untimely Communication: This is the most significant theme. Communication from district-level administration is frequently criticized as "unacceptable" and "sporadic."

- Staff often learn about important changes (like schedule changes, new policies, or student incidents) from social media (Facebook) or parents, rather than from their supervisors.
- There is a lack of timely responses to staff emails from higher-level administration.
- A demand for more transparency, including an explanation of the reason why major decisions and mandates are being made.

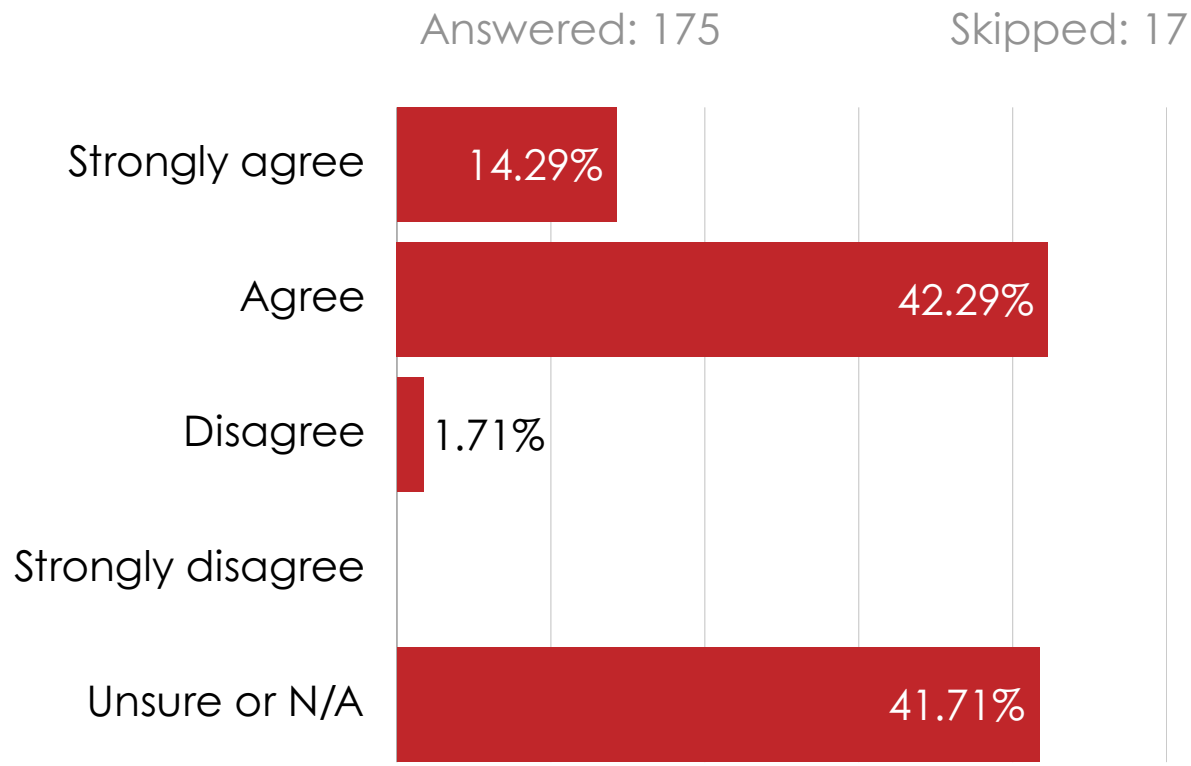
Inadequate Professional Development (PD): Staff feel there is a shortage of effective and meaningful professional development.

- PD is often viewed as monotonous, lacking focus or purpose, and consisting of reviewing information staff already know.
- There is a clear desire for PD that provides practical strategies for implementing new programs, working with diverse learners (e.g., IEPs), and integrating technology with limited resources.
- The reduction in dedicated PD days is a source of frustration, contributing to burnout and the inability to fulfill duties during contracted hours.

Lack of Respect and Support from Leadership: Many staff members feel undervalued and unheard, particularly by district-level administrators and some board members.

- Concerns about a lack of mutual respect, with some staff feeling intimidated or that their professional opinions are not welcome, especially if they offer negative feedback.
- A perception that administration is "nonexistent" or inaccessible, leading to a feeling that "issues often fall on deaf ears."
- A desire for administration to prioritize building relationships with staff and to show appreciation for hard work and commitment.

Q37 The Utica Elementary School facilities are safe and conducive to learning.



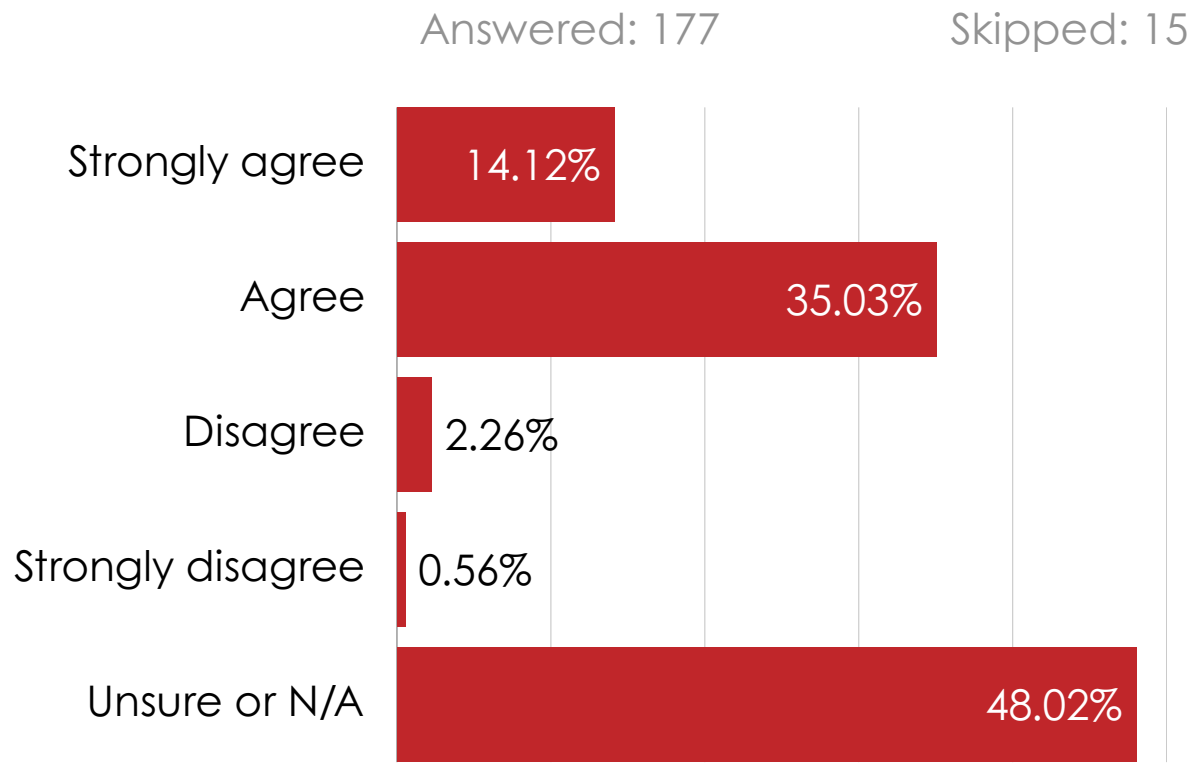
Q38 Why did you answer the last question regarding Utica Elementary facilities as you did?



Answered: 114 Skipped: 78

- **Modern and Well-Maintained Facility:** Utica Elementary is frequently described as the "newest building in the district" and is considered to be in "good shape," well-maintained, and clean, especially compared to the older buildings.
- **Strong Safety and Security Protocols:** The building is viewed as safe, with effective security measures in place, including locked doors during school hours, monitoring, and a secure entryway that requires visitors to check in.
- **Positive Learning Environment:** The environment is seen as conducive to learning, organized, and a "happy place for kids to be," with positive decorations and a focus on keeping students safe.
- **Minor Maintenance/Environmental Concerns:** A few staff members mention isolated concerns, such as rumors of mold, classrooms being "very warm and humid," and a need for more frequent updates/repairs to items like bathroom door locks.

Q39 The Newton Elementary School facilities are safe and conducive to learning.



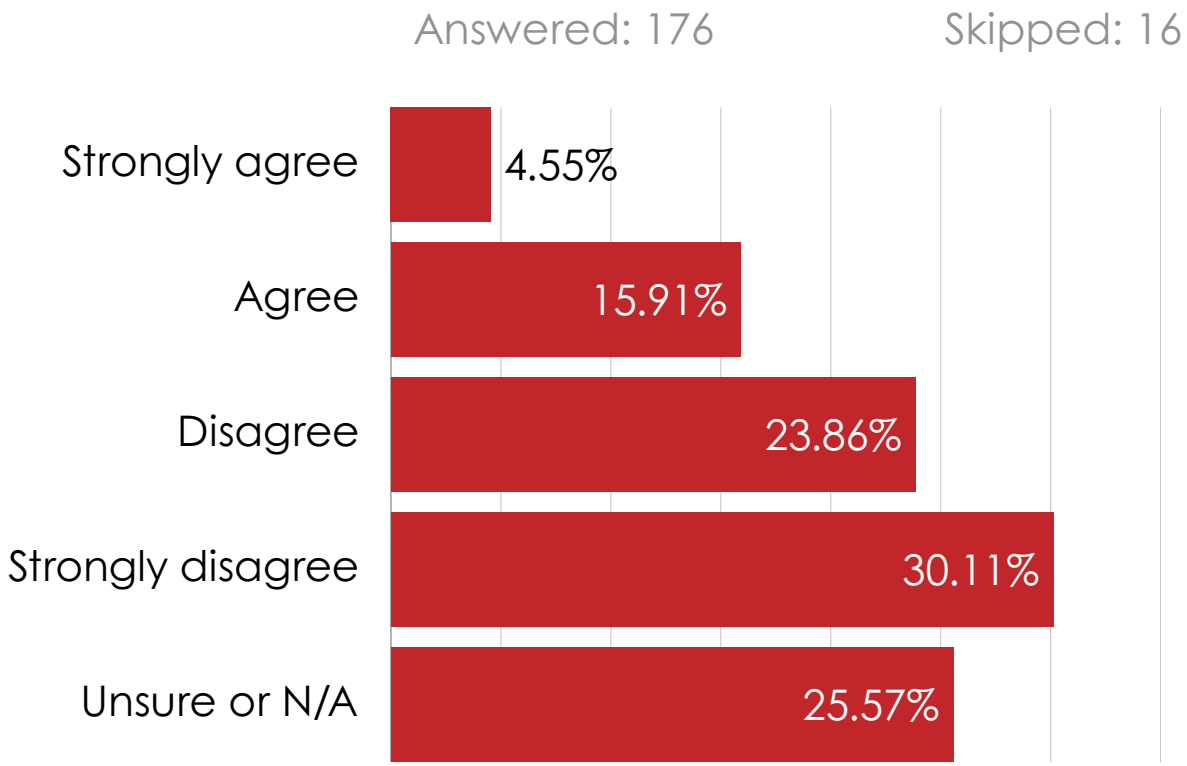
Q40 Why did you answer the last question regarding Newton Elementary facilities as you did?



Answered: 103 Skipped: 89

- **Newer and Well-Maintained Facility:** The building is consistently described as a newer, updated facility that is in "good shape," "nice," and "well maintained," especially in comparison to the older junior high.
- **Strong Safety and Security:** Staff affirm that the school is safe, highlighting features like locked exterior and classroom doors and classroom doors, a secure entryway that requires visitors to check in, and specific safety tools, such as walkie-talkies and staff training.
- **Positive Staff and Leadership:** Employees at Newton Elementary are described as kind, considerate, and hardworking, keeping the building safe and quickly submitting work orders for necessary repairs. The school has a "Great Leader" and a new principal who is perceived as a "good and fair person."
- **Conducive Learning Environment:** The classrooms are noted for being "colorful," having a "variety of seating arrangements," and the building is considered a "nice work and learning environment" with staff focused on putting "Kids are always put first."

Q41 The Utica Middle School facility is safe and conducive to learning.



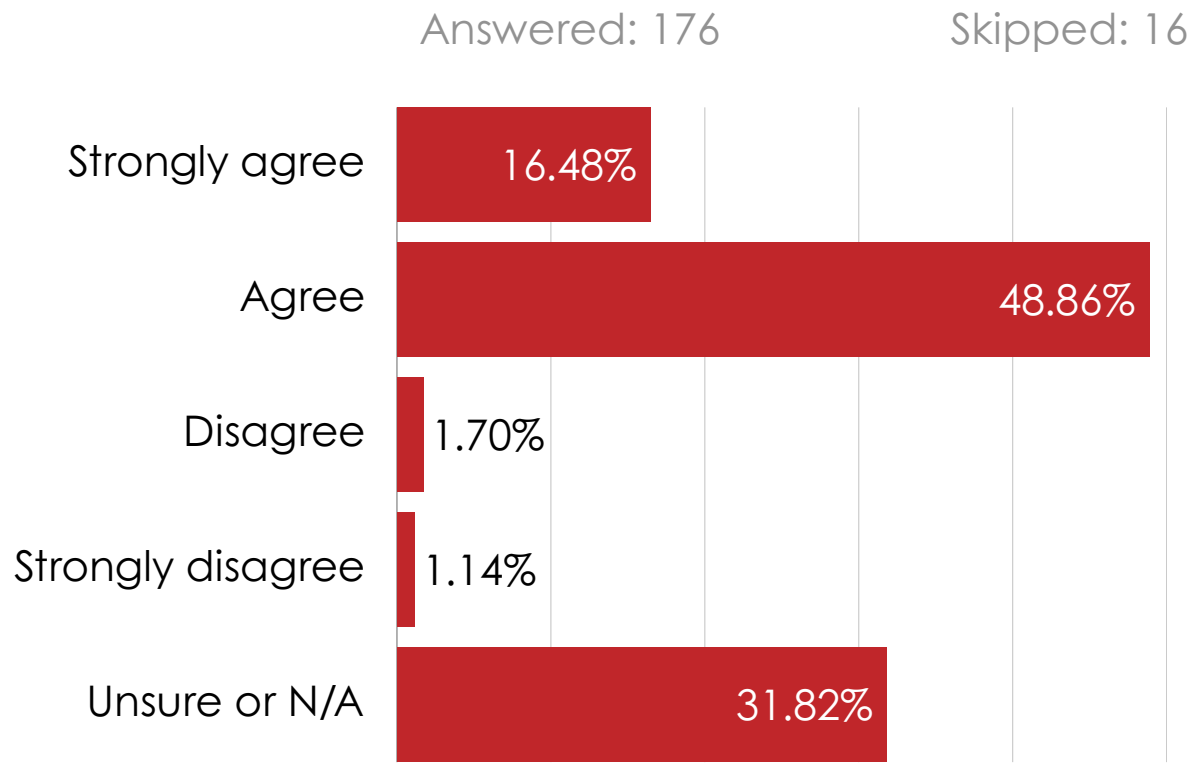
Q42 Why did you answer the last question regarding Utica Middle School facility as you did?



Answered: 123 Skipped: 69

- **Extreme Deterioration and Age:** The building is consistently described as "falling apart," "crumbling," "decaying," and "very old," with comments noting that the facility is the same one used by previous generations.
- **Severe Environmental and Health Hazards:** Staff report serious issues including mold and asbestos, water issues (leaking, flooding, lack of hot water), and insects in building.
- **Inadequate Climate Control:** The building lacks central air conditioning, leading to classrooms being excessively hot and miserable in warm months, which is considered "not conducive to learning."
- **Outdated Infrastructure:** The facility is "outdated" and "not sufficient for technology," with reports of unreliable internet, non-functioning outlets, and old equipment (lockers, tables, chairs).
- **Major Safety and Security Flaws:** Concerns about the school's layout include an unsecured visitor entry and open and/or unlocked doors.
- **Overwhelming Need for Replacement/Upgrade:** There is a near-unanimous opinion that the building either needs to be completely replaced with a new school or undergo a massive structural renovation. Staff believe it is a waste of money to continue patching the old facility.

Q43 Utica High School facility is safe and conducive to learning.



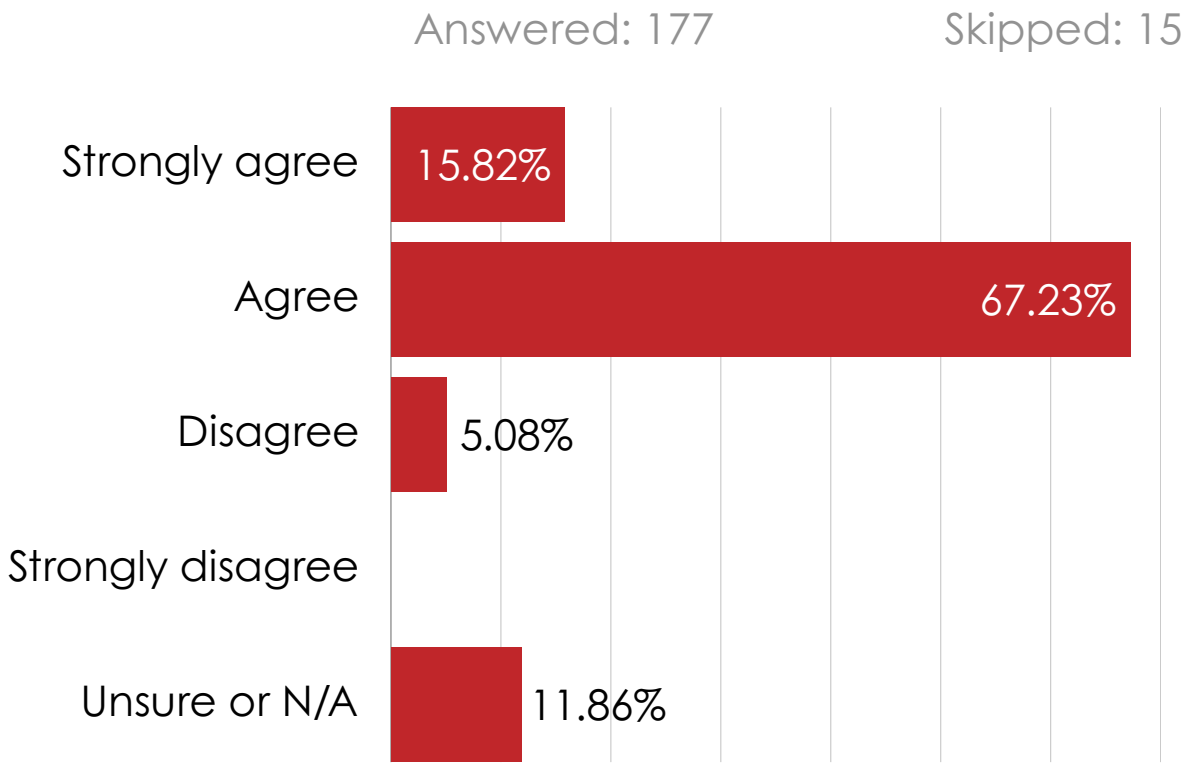
Q44 Why did you answer the last question regarding the Utica High School facility as you did?



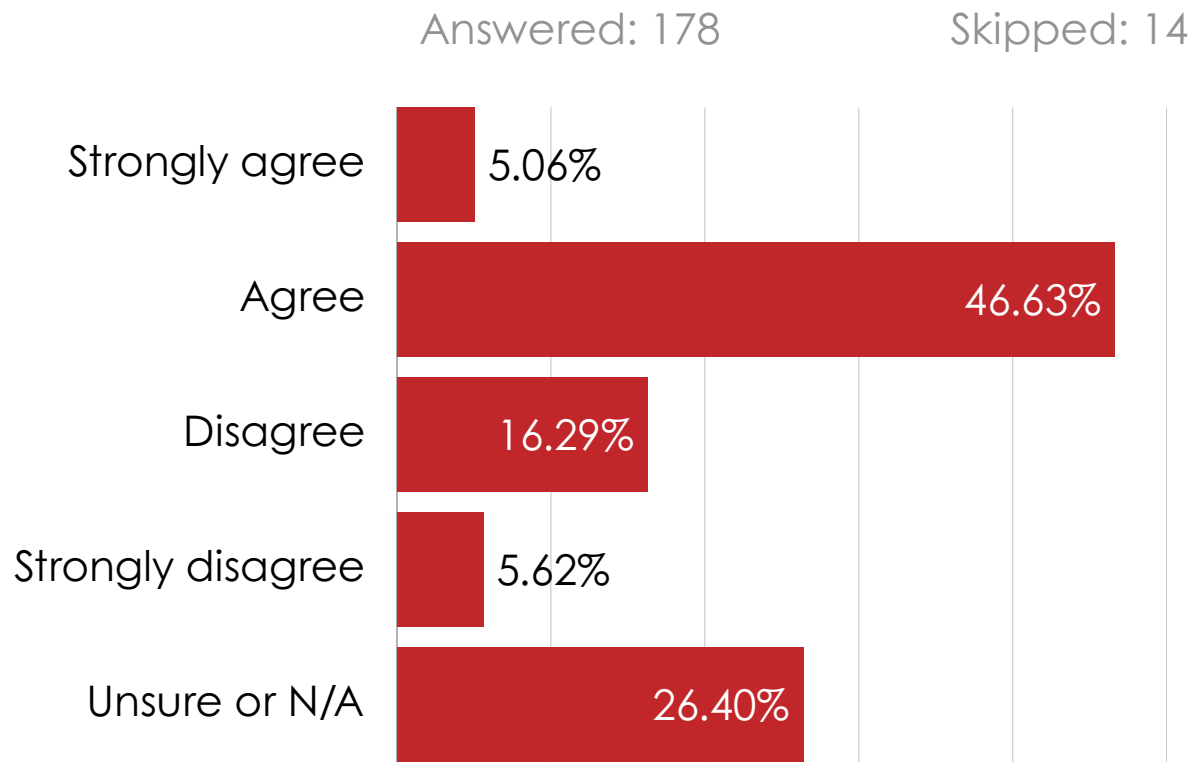
Answered: 99 Skipped: 93

- **Modern and Well-Maintained:** The facility is generally viewed as a newer building that is well-maintained, clean, and in good shape, especially when compared to other older buildings in the district.
- **Strong Safety and Security:** Staff consistently feel the high school is safe and secure, noting locked doors, clear safety policies, and an engaged administration that monitors the building.
- **Missing Key Amenities:** A repeated theme is the lack of major dedicated facilities, specifically a library and a large auditorium.
- **Aesthetics and Learning Environment:** While safe and clean, some respondents feel the building is plain, drab, and lacks color or artwork, suggesting updates could make the environment more conducive to modern learning.
- **Space Limitations:** There is a specific concern about the lack of adequate and safe space for extracurricular activities (sports and clubs) to practice and meet.
- **Emerging Wear and Tear:** A few staff members noted that the "newer" building is beginning to show early signs of wear and tear (e.g., water damage, cracks) and that specific areas like the Ag room need to be updated or enlarged.

Q45 The district provides safe, reliable, and on-time transportation services.

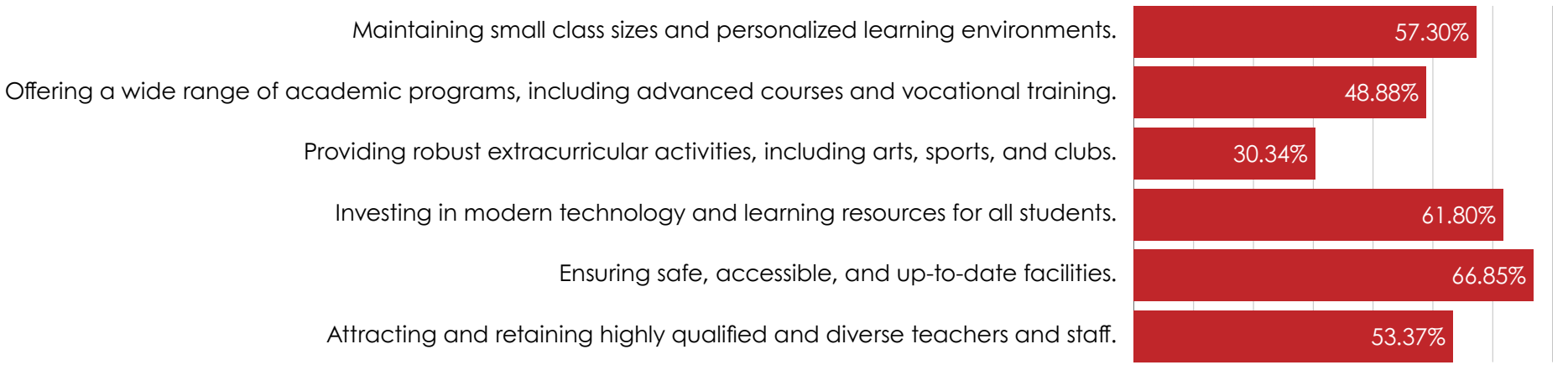


Q46 The district manages finances to meet the learning needs of students.



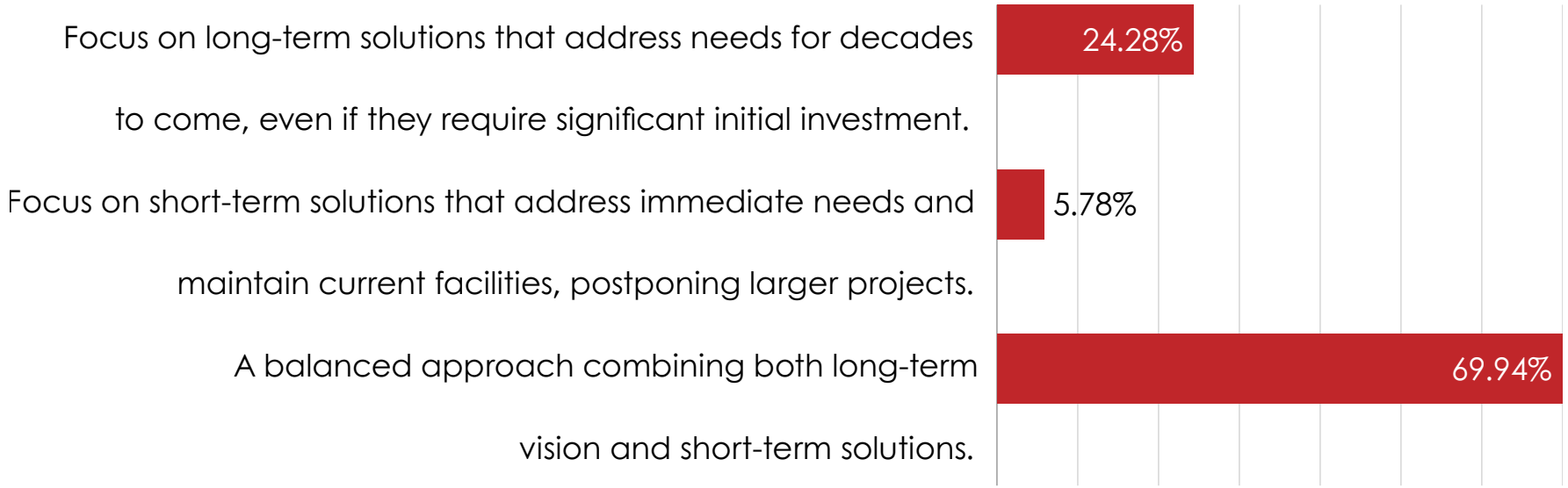
Q47 Which of the following aspects are most important to you when evaluating the quality and future direction of our school district? (Select up to three.)

Answered: 178 Skipped: 14



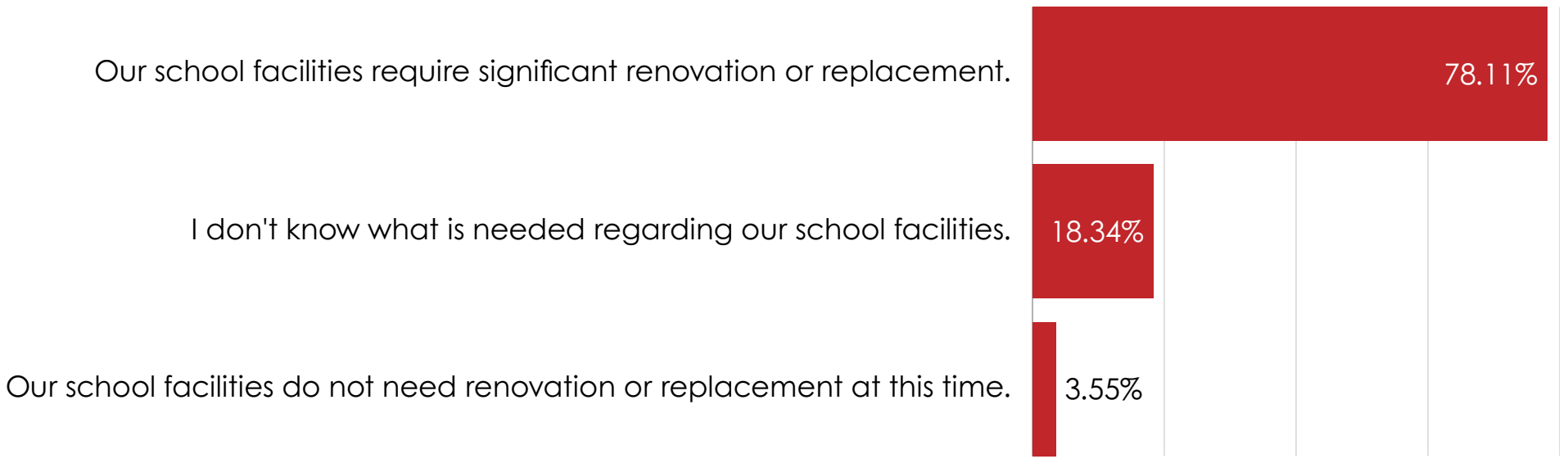
Q48 In planning for the district's long-term facilities needs, which approach do you prefer?

Answered: 173 Skipped: 19



Q49 Regarding our school facilities, which statement best describes your current perspective on their condition and future needs?

Answered: 173 Skipped: 19



Q50 Please provide feedback about the following: What direction would you like the district to take for future facilities? Please consider in your comments: Adding district-led early learning/preschool and expanding capacity; building a field house and/or community center to expand facility access; purchasing land for intentional future expansion to address long-term needs; temporary solutions to address middle school needs quickly, using portable classroom spaces or repurposing space in current buildings.



Answered: 120 Skipped: 72

- **New or Renovated Middle School is the Top Priority:** This is the single most urgent and frequently mentioned facility need. The majority of responses stress that the current middle school building is structurally inadequate, unsafe, and unhealthy, with a widespread call to either tear it down and build a new one or perform major, large-scale renovations immediately.

- **New Field House/Community Center:** A strong secondary theme is the need for a multi-purpose field house or community center. This is desired to provide additional space for athletics, community events, performing arts, and a new auditorium to alleviate sharing issues.

- **Purchasing Land for Future Growth:** There is a common call for the district to be proactive and purchase land for future expansion to address long-term enrollment growth and potentially create a new, consolidated school campus; some prefer renovating existing buildings first.

- **Temporary Solutions for the Middle School:** Short-term, immediate fixes for the middle school are suggested, with some proposing the use of portable classrooms until a permanent new building can be constructed, although this idea is met with strong resistance and safety concerns from others.

Continued...

Q50 Please provide feedback about the following: What direction would you like the district to take for future facilities? Please consider in your comments: Adding district-led early learning/preschool and expanding capacity; building a field house and/or community center to expand facility access; purchasing land for intentional future expansion to address long-term needs; temporary solutions to address middle school needs quickly, using portable classroom spaces or repurposing space in current buildings.

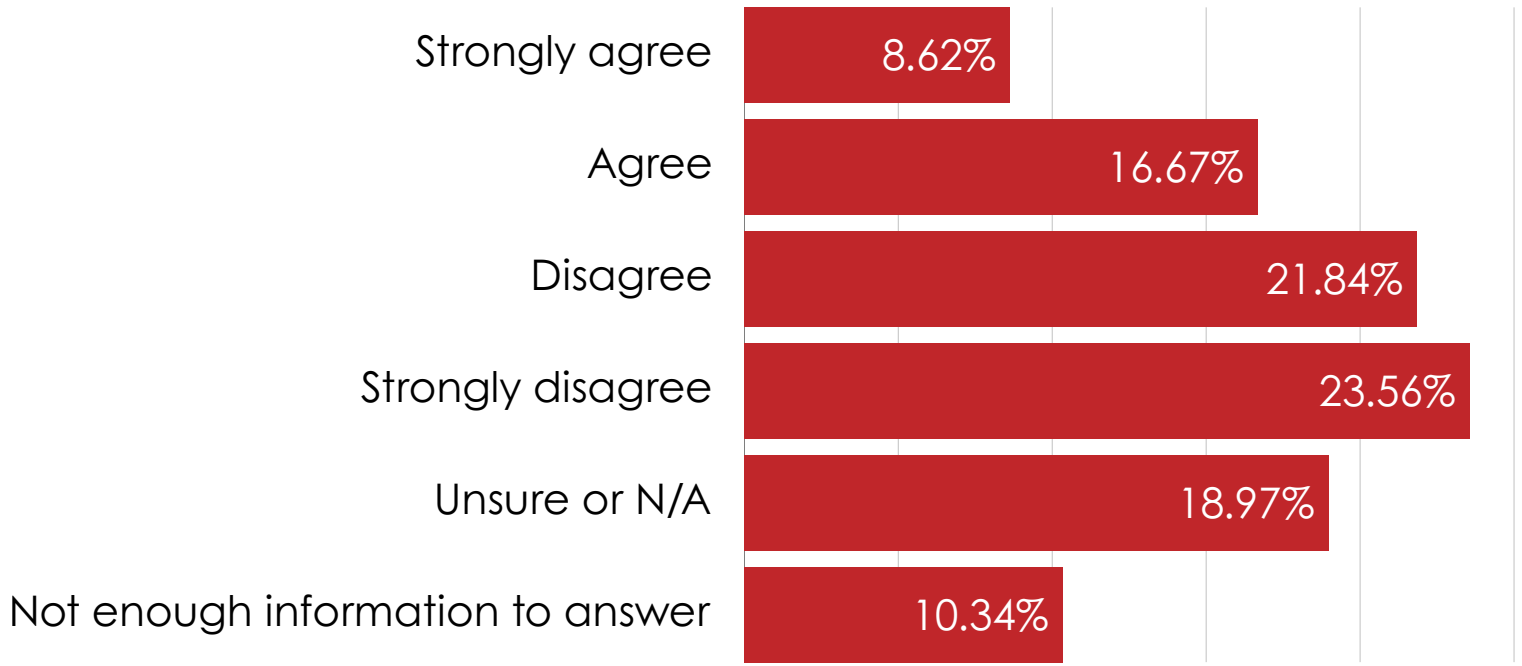


Answered: 120 Skipped: 72

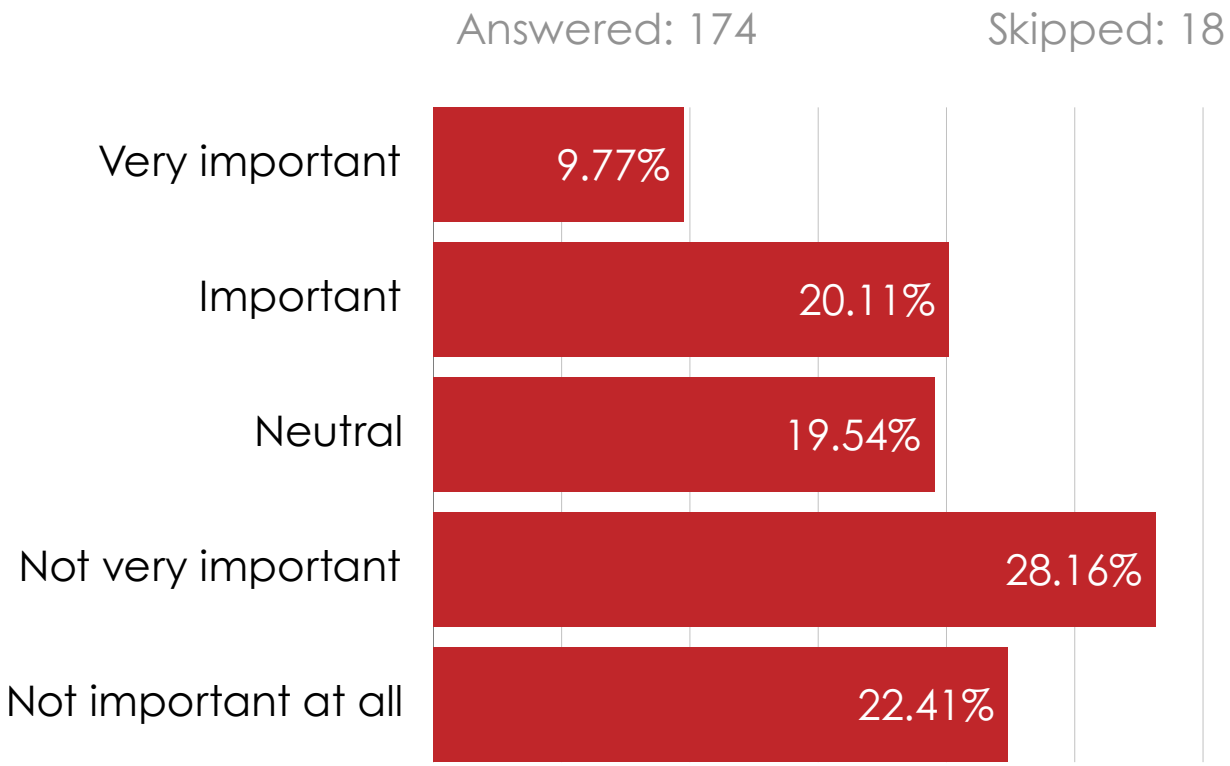
- **District-led Early Learning/Preschool:** Many staff members support adding a district-led early learning or preschool program to better support families, provide early intervention, and set students up for success.
- **Core infrastructure & technology:** System upgrades across buildings: HVAC, plumbing, electrical, windows, classroom tech capacity, and reliable connectivity to support instruction.
- **Funding, phasing & engagement:** Emphasis on a phased, transparent plan that pairs immediate fixes with long-term solutions, stronger community buy-in/levy strategy, and pursuit of grants to finance improvements.
- **General Athletic Facility Upgrades:** Beyond the field house, staff desire upgrades to sports facilities such as new baseball and softball fields to be located near the high school, upgraded stadium (AC, turf, scoreboards, locker rooms), and a renovated, air-conditioned middle school gymnasium.

Q51 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the district continuing to make ongoing repairs to existing school buildings to maintain their usability, as opposed to pursuing new construction or major renovations.

Answered: 174 Skipped: 18



Q52 How important is it to our community to invest in building a field house or community center (e.g., adjacent to the weight room) as a priority project, separate from other major school repair or construction projects?



Q53 Explain your answer to the previous question.



Answered: 131 Skipped: 61

The overwhelming theme in the responses is that a new facility for sports and community use is seen as a secondary priority to the immediate and urgent need to address the middle school facility.

- **Primary Priority is the Middle School:** The construction of a field house or community center should not take precedence over fixing or replacing the "falling apart" middle school, which is considered a matter of student safety and a conducive learning environment.
- **Concerns over Educational Value and Equity:** Many feel that allocating funds to a field house is a "mistake" or a "waste of money" because it:
  - Only benefits a portion of the students (athletes/extracurriculars), not the entire student body or academics.
  - Does not directly contribute to a student's core education (reading, math, science, college readiness).
  - Sends a message that the district prioritizes athletics over academics.
- **Perceived Public Relations Risk:** Staff noted it would be difficult to sell the project to the community, stating, "it would look to the community to have a brand new field house with a school that is literally falling apart."
- **Potential Benefits of New Facility (as a Secondary Goal):** Supporters view the facility as a worthwhile investment that would:
  - Be useful for a variety of programs and help teams that are "out of space" to grow.
  - Help to attract and retain students and coaches who leave for other districts with better facilities.
  - Provide a place for community events and help bridge parent partnerships.
- **General Sentiment:** While many agree that a field house or community center would be an "asset," a "massive benefit," or "great" in theory, the consensus is that it is "not a priority at this time" and must wait until the middle school issue is resolved.

Q54 As you think about the future of the North Fork School District, what is a hope/wish for the children of our community that you would like to see become a reality?



Answered: 125 Skipped: 67

- **Safe, Modern Facilities:** Widespread hope for a new or renovated middle school and well-maintained, secure buildings that make students feel safe, proud, and ready to learn.
- **Academic Excellence & Equity:** Desire for rigorous, relevant academics, smaller class sizes, and equal access to resources for all learners—from intervention to gifted.
- **Technology & Innovation:** Requests for reliable 1:1 laptops, strong connectivity, and future-focused tools that prepare students for a tech-driven world.
- **Arts, Athletics & Activities:** Calls to strengthen fine arts, athletics, and extracurriculars to build connection, pride, and motivation across all grade levels.
- **Belonging & Mental Health:** Focus on creating inclusive, respectful environments where students feel safe, supported, and free from bullying.
- **Valuing Staff:** Staff want better pay, respect, and consistent support—recognizing that thriving teachers lead to thriving students.
- **Community Trust & Pride:** Vision for stronger community partnerships and pride in Utica schools through transparency, collaboration, and modern facilities.

Q55 Please use this space to share additional comments you would like to share that will help the district as it creates its next strategic plan.



Answered: 58 Skipped: 134

- **Clear Vision & Follow-Through:** Staff want a transparent, actionable strategic plan—not just talk. They stress communicating priorities clearly, completing one initiative before starting another, and publicly sharing progress.
- **Middle School = Priority:** Rebuilding or renovating the middle school remains the top issue across responses, tied to both student safety and district credibility.
- **Leadership, Trust & Communication:** Calls for stronger board unity, respect for roles, and consistent messaging. Several mention distrust, micromanagement, and social media negativity eroding morale and public confidence.
- **Staff Voice & Support:** Employees want to be included in decisions, treated as professionals, and fairly compensated. Many cite low pay, unclear expectations, and poor morale from lack of recognition and transparency.
- **Academics Over Athletics:** Repeated requests to focus on education first—curriculum updates, special education consistency, career/technical and early learning expansion—before large athletic investments.
- **Community Perception & Pride:** Respondents highlight the need to repair community relations through positive storytelling, visible progress, and celebrating both academic and extracurricular success.
- **Funding & Resource Alignment:** Staff question financial priorities and oversight, urging the district to invest in core instructional needs, technology, and facilities rather than short-term fixes or "band-aid" spending.

Q55 Please use this space to share additional comments you would like to share that will help the district as it creates its next strategic plan.



Answered: 58 Skipped: 134

- **Highly Dedicated Staff:** The staff are consistently praised as caring, hardworking, collaborative, and genuinely committed to the well-being and success of students, despite limited resources.
- **Strong Community Bonds:** A powerful sense of "small school," "close-knit" community and tradition is a major source of pride, with local families and parents providing strong support in times of need.
- **Critical Need to Replace Utica Middle School:** There is an overwhelming, non-negotiable demand to replace or perform major, immediate renovations due to its severe age, structural decay, and health hazards.
- **Poor Administrative Communication:** The single largest complaint is the inconsistent, non-transparent, and untimely communication from district-level administration to staff. Staff often learn important news from social media or parents first.
- **Lack of Resources and Fair Pay:** Compensation for teachers and coaches is viewed as near the bottom for the area, and teachers report a significant lack of resources, including adequate substitute teachers, classroom supply funding, and support personnel.
- **Outdated Technology:** The network and technology infrastructure are frequently described as unreliable and outdated, with a push for the district to transition to 1:1 modern devices (like Chromebooks/laptops) over old iPads to prepare students for college and careers.
- **Need for Academic Rigor:** There is a strong desire for more diverse, rigorous, and high-level academic course offerings at the high school to keep students engaged on campus and better prepare them for post-secondary education.
- **Discipline Inconsistency:** Staff express deep frustration with the inconsistent enforcement of student discipline policies, feeling that administrators often undermine teachers' authority when parents complain.
- **Inadequate Intervention and Support:** There are concerns that the intervention process (MTSS) is too slow and not clearly defined, causing students to fall behind academically, and that there is a lack of behavioral support staff to address social-emotional needs.
- **Prioritize Academics/Safety:** The overwhelming sentiment is that any new spending must first and foremost address the middle school crisis, with the community's focus and funding priorities perceived to be disproportionately placed on athletics and FFA over core academics and essential facilities.



PARENT & COMMUNITY SURVEY

SPRING 2025

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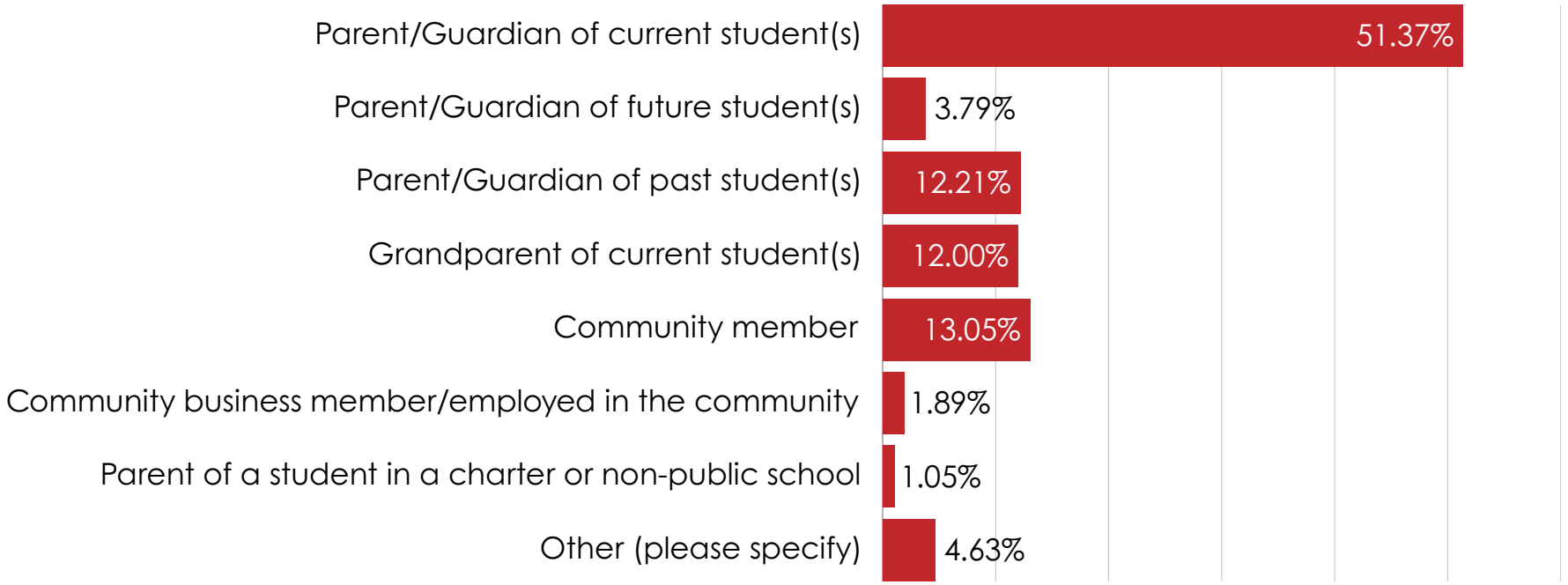
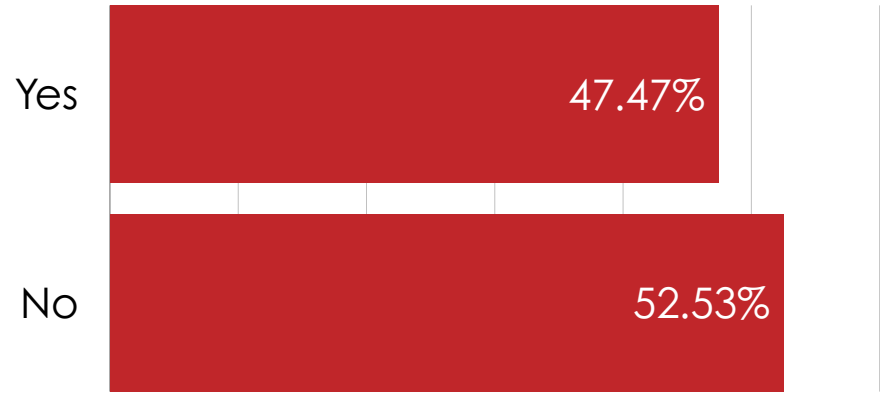
Q1 What category best describes you?

Answered: 475 Skipped: 4



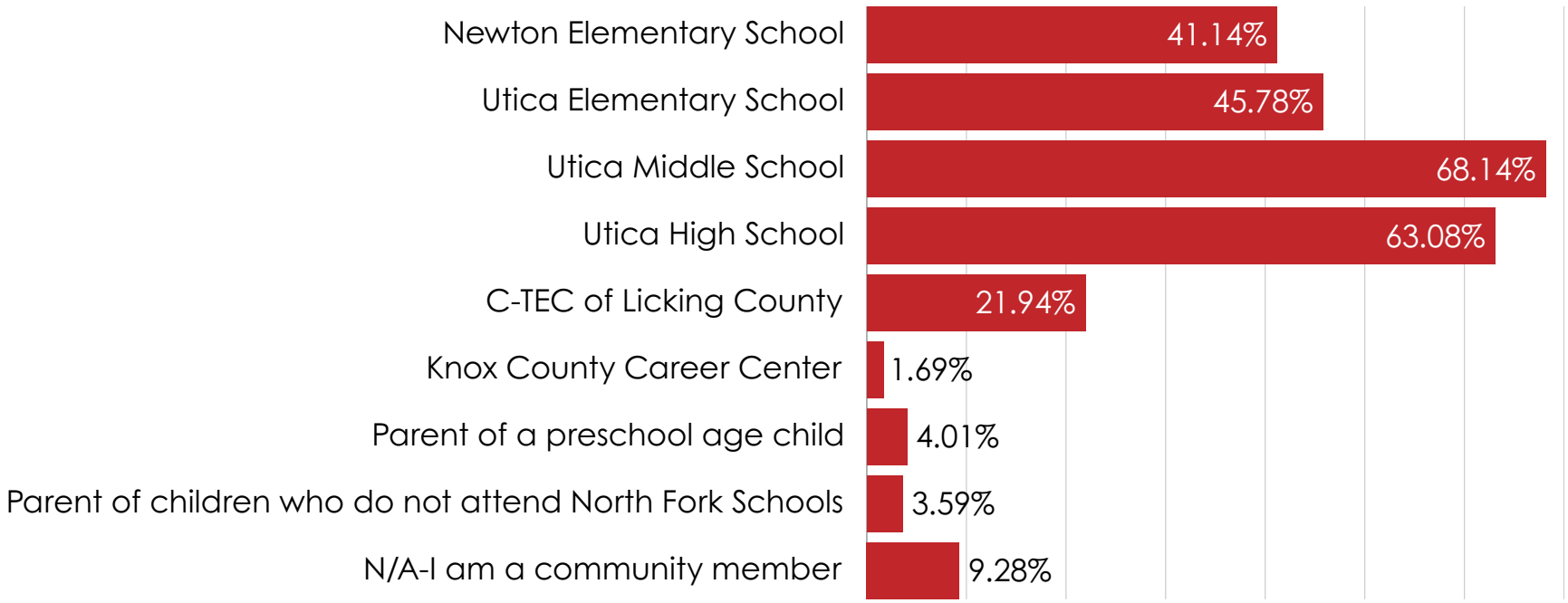
Q2 Are you an alumnus of Utica?

Answered: 474 Skipped: 5



Q3 What school(s) do, or did, your children attend?

Answered: 474 Skipped: 5



Q4 What are the greatest strengths of the North Fork Schools? What makes you proud?



Answered: 317 Skipped: 162

- **Strong Sense of Community:** The most prominent theme is the close-knit, small-town community atmosphere, which includes community pride, involvement, and a culture of rallying around families in need.
- **Dedicated and Caring Teachers/Staff:** Many responses highlight the staff, especially teachers, for being welcoming, caring, dedicated, and going above and beyond to support students' academic and social/emotional needs. Staff living within the district is also noted as a strength.
- **Small School Environment:** The benefits of a small school are frequently mentioned, including smaller class sizes, better student-to-teacher ratios, and the opportunity for staff to be more in tune with individual students.
- **FFA Program Excellence:** The Future Farmers of America (FFA) program, particularly the Utica chapter, is repeatedly cited as a major strength, often described as having excelled, exploded in success, and being top-tier.
- **Support for Special Needs Students:** The amount of work and dedication dedicated to students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and other special needs is noted as a strength, along with the thoughtfulness of intervention teachers.
- **Strong Elementary Schools:** Utica Elementary School is frequently singled out as an overall wonderful school with a great atmosphere, dedicated staff, and effective communication. Newton Elementary is also mentioned positively.
- **Athletics and Electives:** Good athletic programs, strong community support for sports, "Redskin Pride," and the addition of various electives/courses (including college credit opportunities and C-tec preparation) are mentioned as positive elements.

Q5 From your perspective, what are some areas for improvement?



Answered: 356 Skipped: 123

- **Facilities and Infrastructure:** The most urgent and frequently mentioned issue is the condition of the Middle School building, with many demanding it be replaced or renovated due to being "desperate for an upgrade," having "asbestos," and general poor conditions. Poor athletic facilities and a lack of a new middle school despite past levies are also noted.

- **Communication and Transparency:** There is a strong call to strengthen and unify communication among schools, families, and the community. Parents desire more timely, transparent communication, especially regarding important changes and events, and a unified system (fewer apps/methods) for teachers and sports teams. Greater financial transparency from the district is also requested.

- **Bullying and Discipline:** Multiple responses call for a zero-tolerance policy on bullying at all schools, a more proactive administration in stopping it, and a demand for increased overall student behavior expectations, accountability, and discipline.

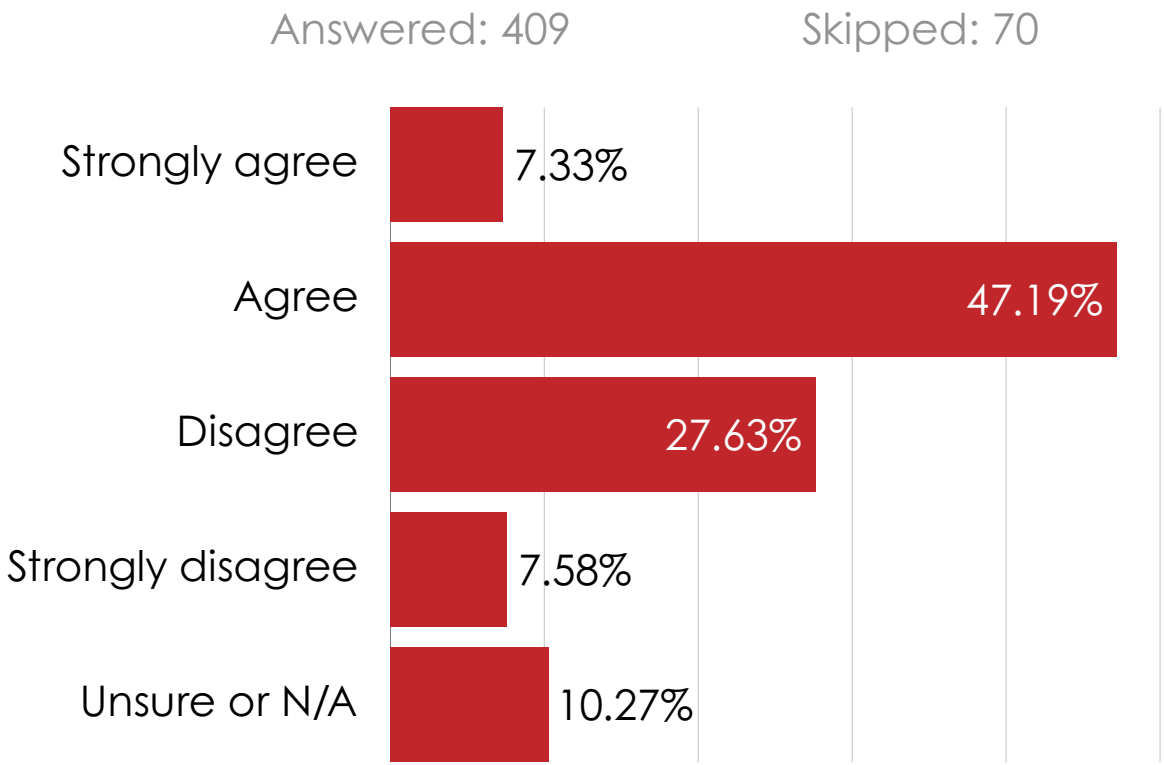
- **Academics, Curriculum, and Staffing:** Areas for improvement include updating technology (e.g., one-to-one devices), a perceived stagnation or lack in the curriculum, increasing staffing, and issues with teacher retention and compensation compared to other districts. There are also calls for more accessible college and trade course offerings at the high school.

- **Administration and Leadership**: Several comments express disappointment with district leadership, including calls for a change in the Superintendent, a need to hire more staff from outside the district to bring in new perspectives, and frustration over a perceived "good old boy mentality" or a lack of accountability and response from administrators.

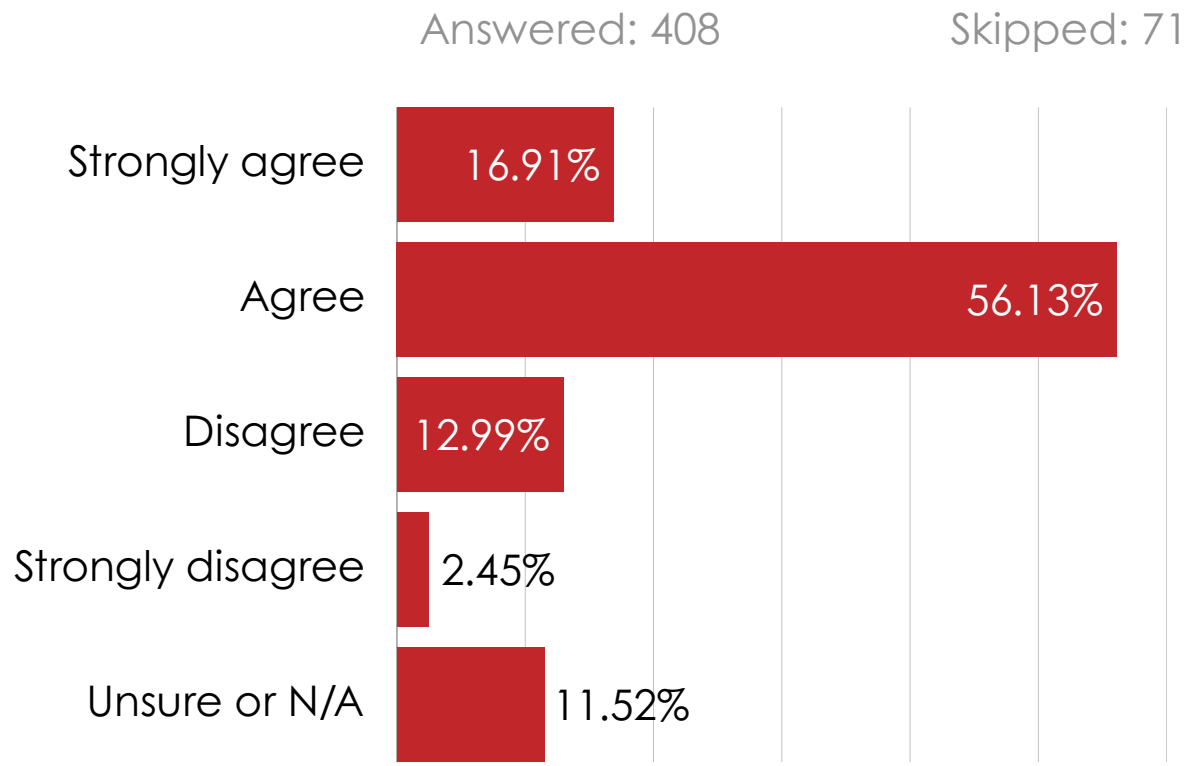
- **Athletics and Coaching:** The district is seen by some as having too much focus on sports over education. Specific criticism is directed at certain coaching staff and athletic programs or being poorly run, lacking commitment, and for creating a negative environment.

- **Community Support and Finances:** A need for the community to get on board to pass a levy is mentioned, along with better financial budgeting, to address the facility and staffing issues.

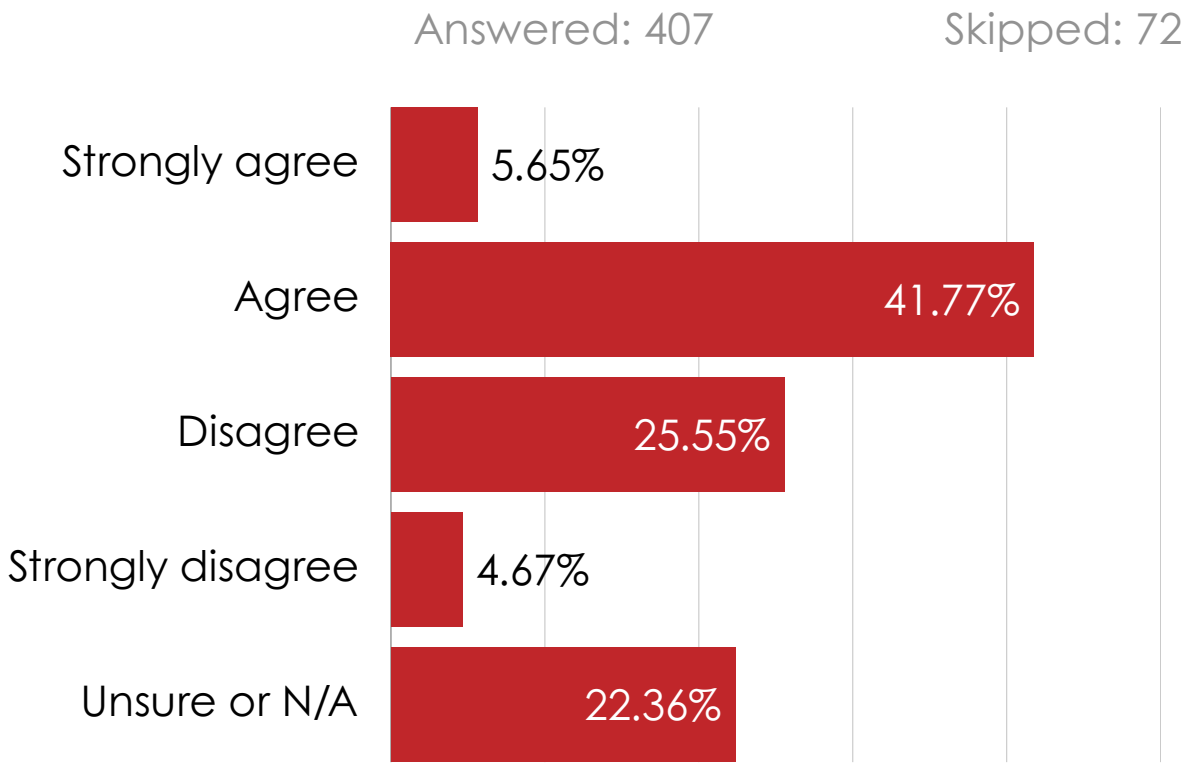
Q6 The district provides a high-quality education.



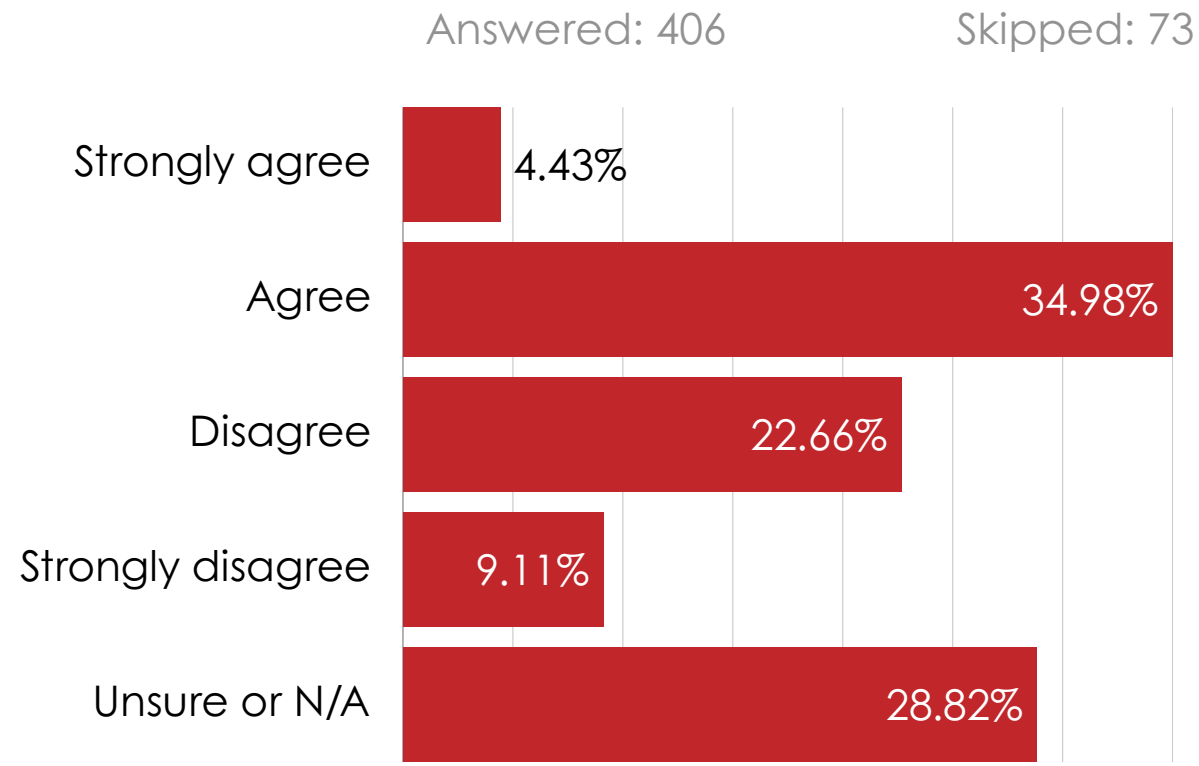
Q7 The elementary schools provide a high-quality education.



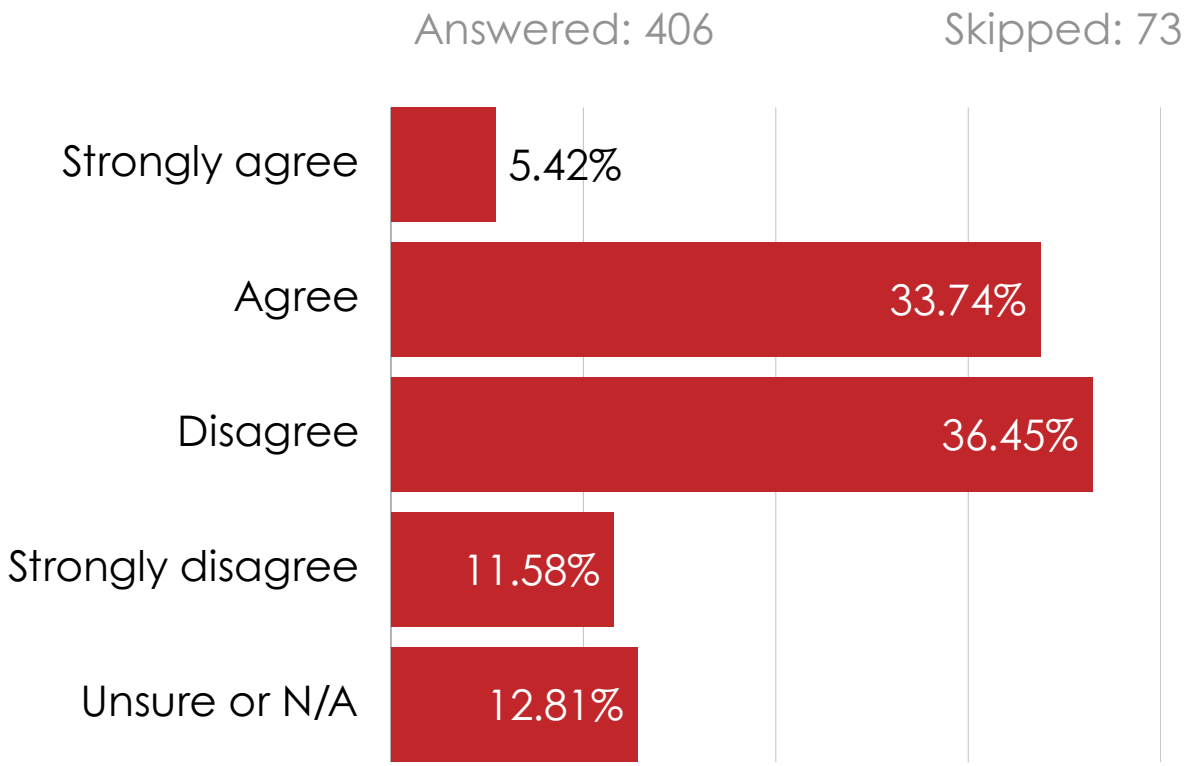
Q8 The middle school provides a high-quality education.



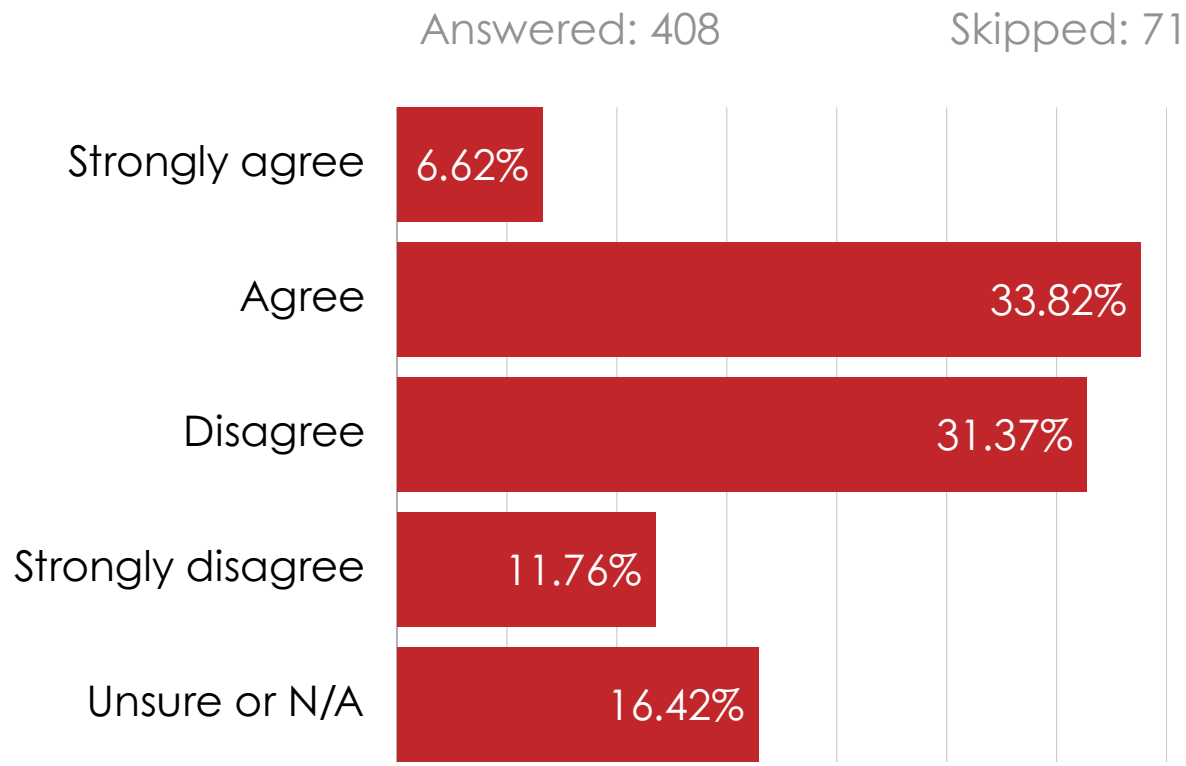
Q9 The high school provides a high-quality education.



Q10 The district sets high expectations for all students.

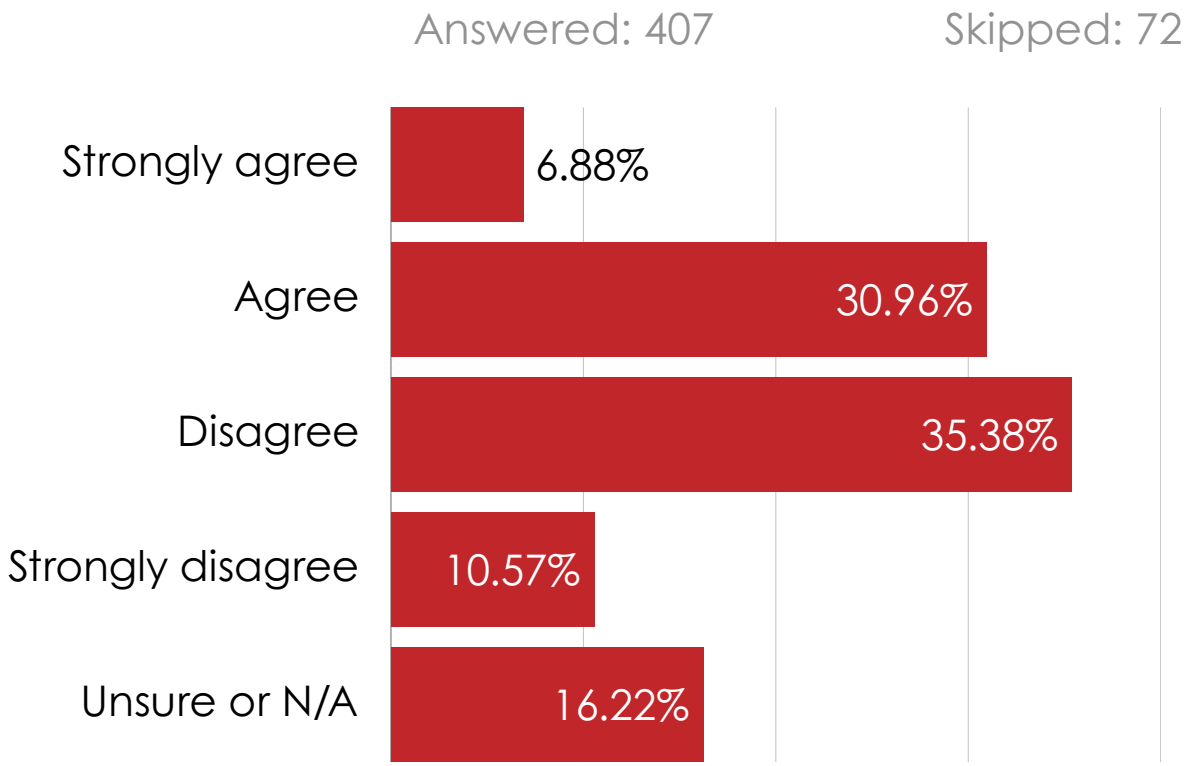


Q11 The district offers learning opportunities that meet students' varied career and personal interests.

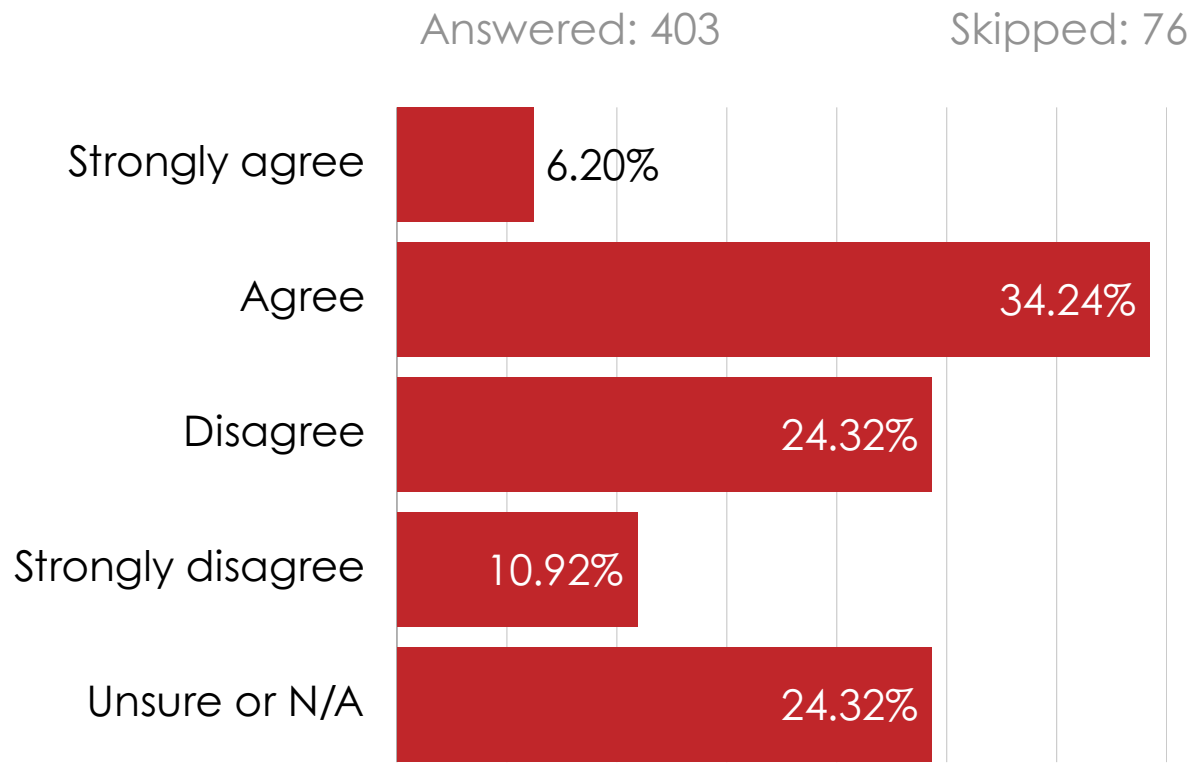


Q12 The district helps students develop the right balance of skills, knowledge, and character education to help them succeed in the ever-changing world when they leave the North Fork School District.

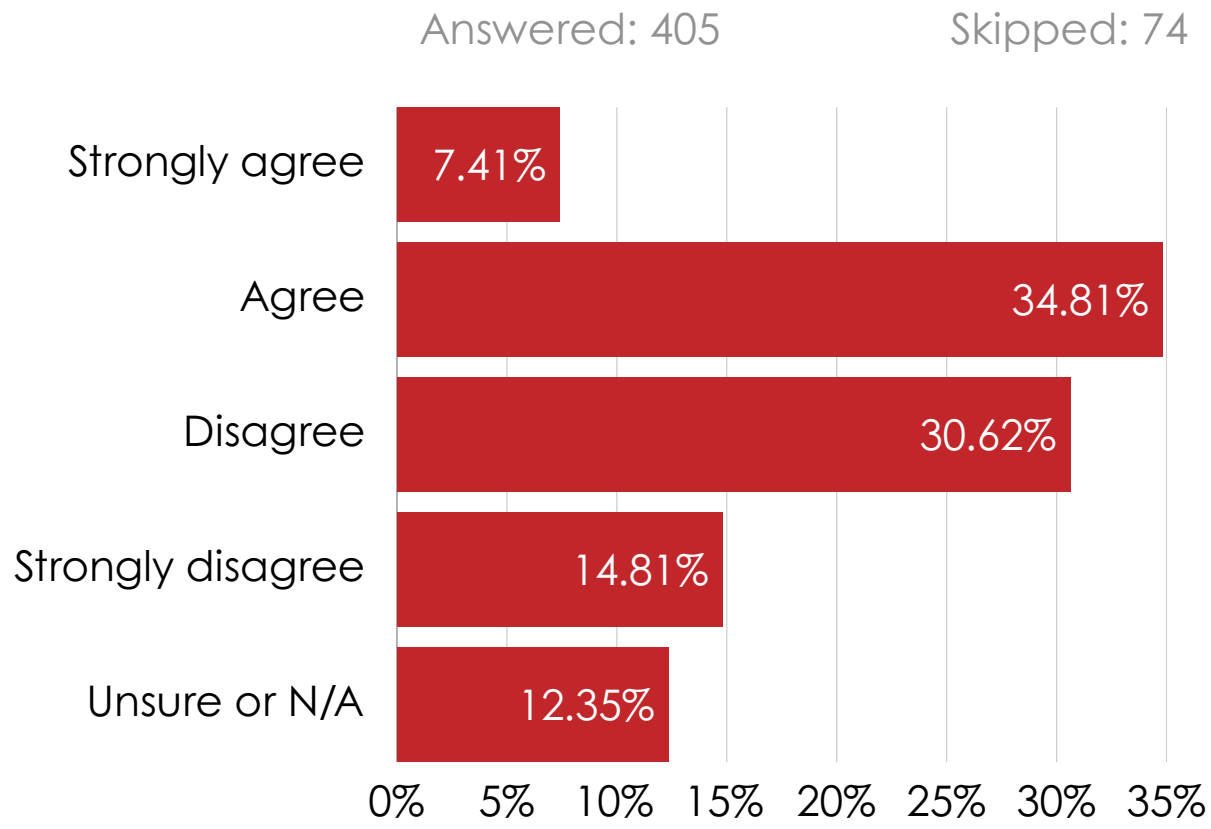




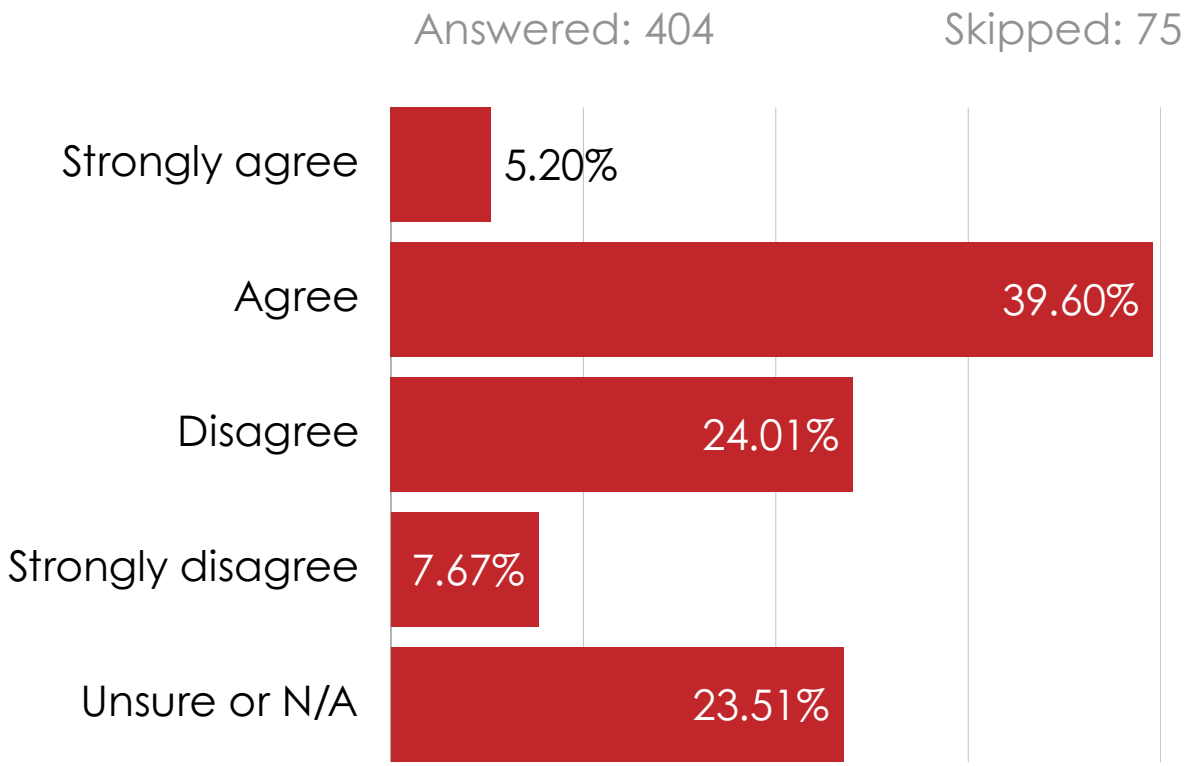
Q13 The district provides high-quality performing arts programs (band, choir, and drama).



Q14 The district provides high-quality athletic programs.



Q15 The district provides high-quality extracurricular activities and opportunities (clubs, academic competitions, etc.).



Q16 Please use this space to provide feedback regarding *Teaching and Learning* in the North Fork School District.



Answered: 179 Skipped: 300

- **Curriculum Gaps and Lack of Rigor:** There is a concern that the curriculum, particularly in the middle and high schools, is not challenging enough and that the district is consistently lower-tier compared to neighboring schools. There are limited advanced/AP classes, only one foreign language is typically offered, and many class options are lacking, causing students to seek options like C-TEC or leave the district.

- **Need for Real-World/Life Skills:** Many respondents desire a return to teaching practical life skills, such as home economics (cooking, sewing), financial literacy (balancing a checkbook, taxes, credit), and basic mechanical skills (changing oil/tires), which are perceived as missing from the current offerings.

- **Teacher Quality, Retention, and Hiring Practices:** A significant theme is the loss of high-quality teachers to other districts due to low salaries and the district's inability to retain them. There are complaints about hiring practices favoring applicants with certain "last names" or family ties over the most qualified candidates, leading to a number of mediocre teachers who are just "going through the motions."

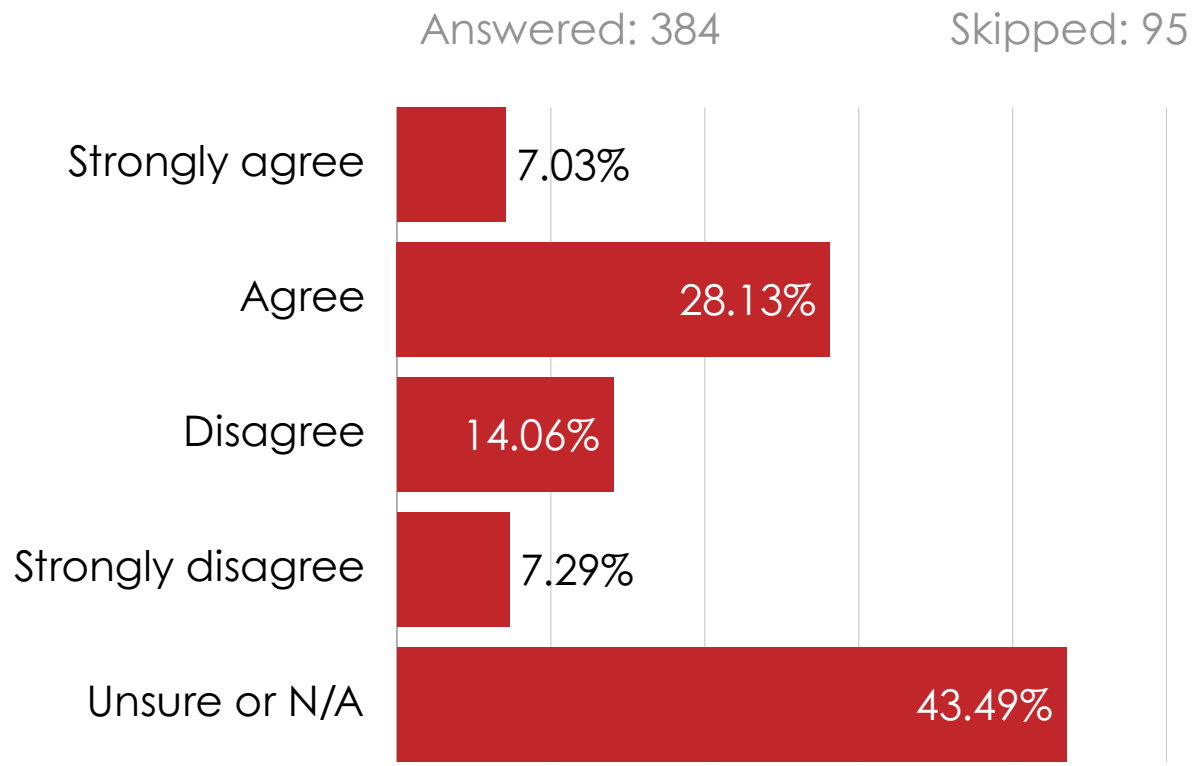
- **Elementary School Strength vs. Higher Grades Weakness:** The elementary schools are frequently praised for their educational quality, dedicated staff, and involvement, but the high-level learning is seen as lacking in the middle and high schools.

- **Inadequate Support for Struggling Students:** There is a feeling that students who struggle or need extra help (including those on IEPs and 504 plans) are often overlooked, not given enough support unless parents strongly advocate for them.

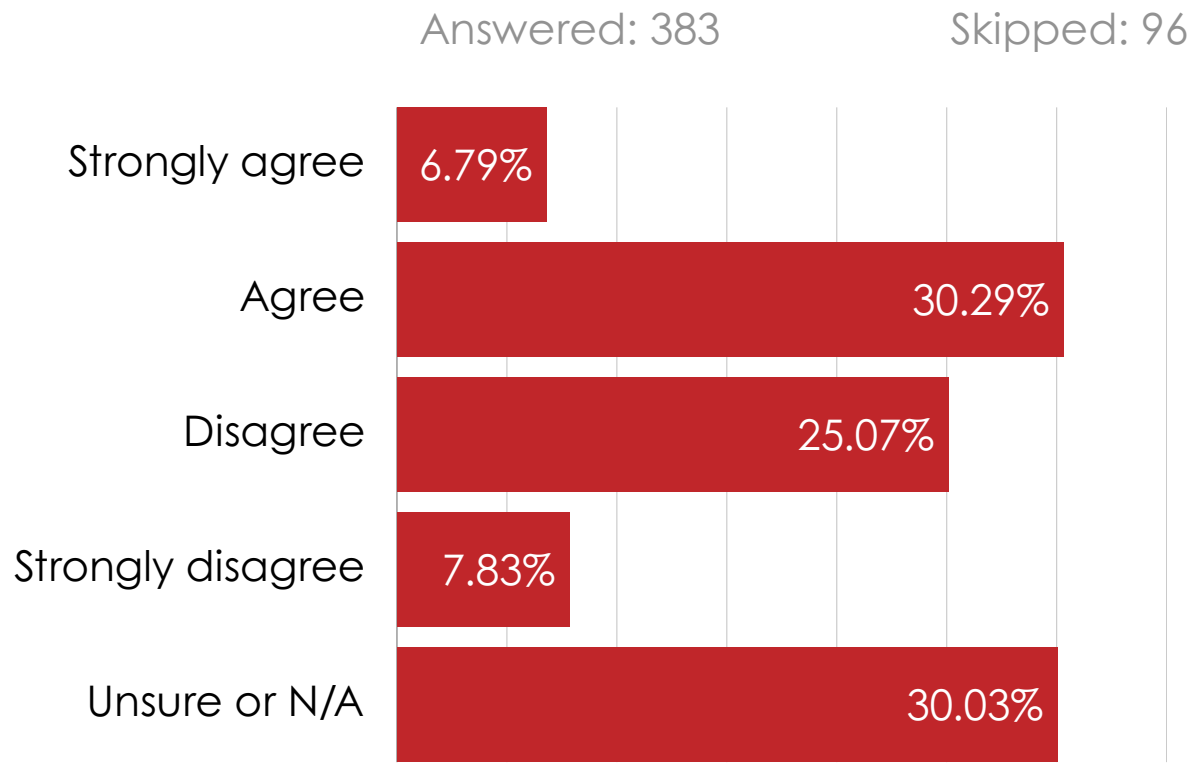
- **Athletics and Academics Imbalance:** A number of parents feel that too much emphasis, and sometimes favoritism, is placed on athletic programs and certain student-athletes, which comes at the expense of adequately supporting academic needs for all students.

- **Limited Extracurriculars:** Besides the exceptional FFA program, there is a perceived lack of variety and limited opportunities in other extracurriculars like band, choir, art, and academic clubs, which have dwindled over the years.

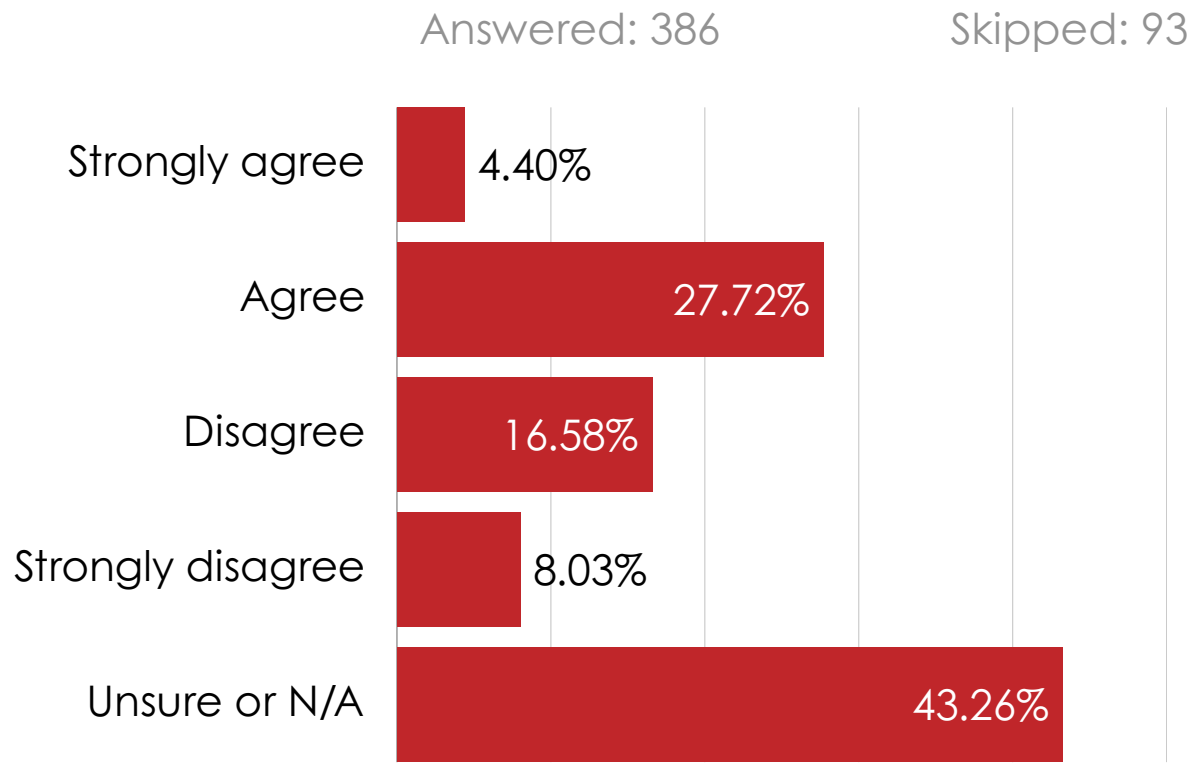
Q17 The district provides appropriate programming and resources for students with special needs.



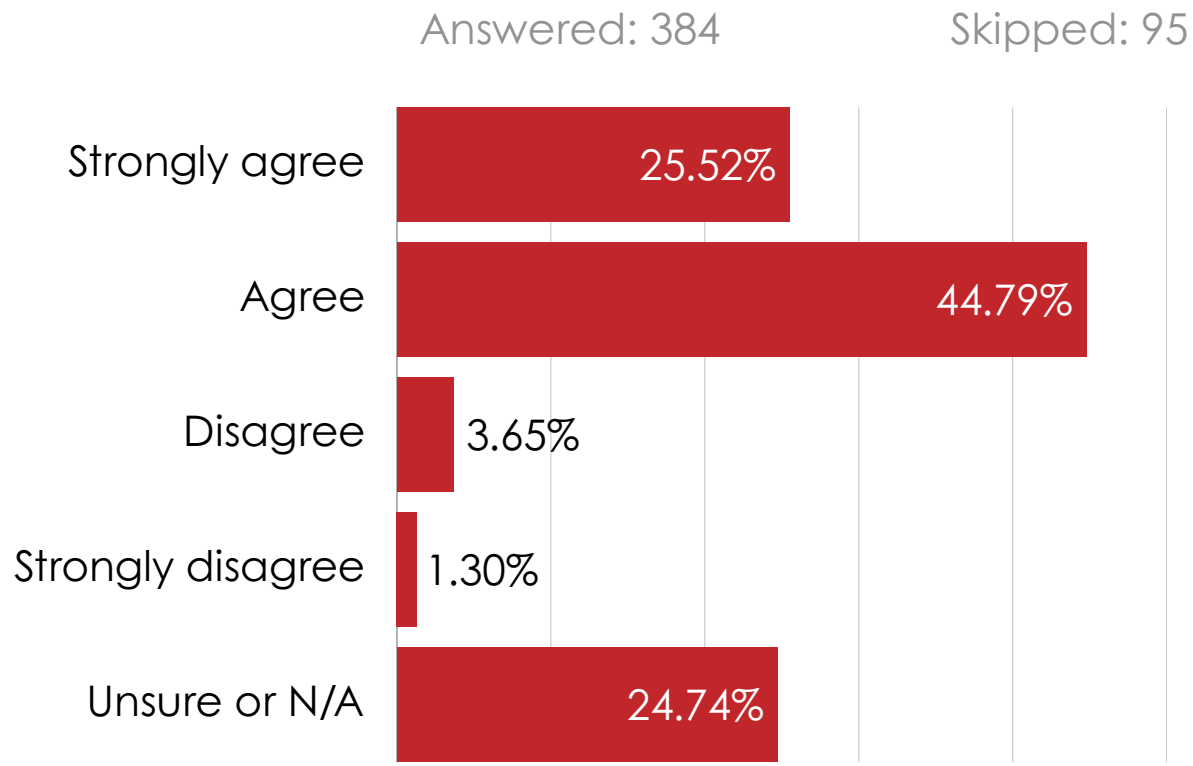
Q18 The district provides intervention services for students who need additional academic support.



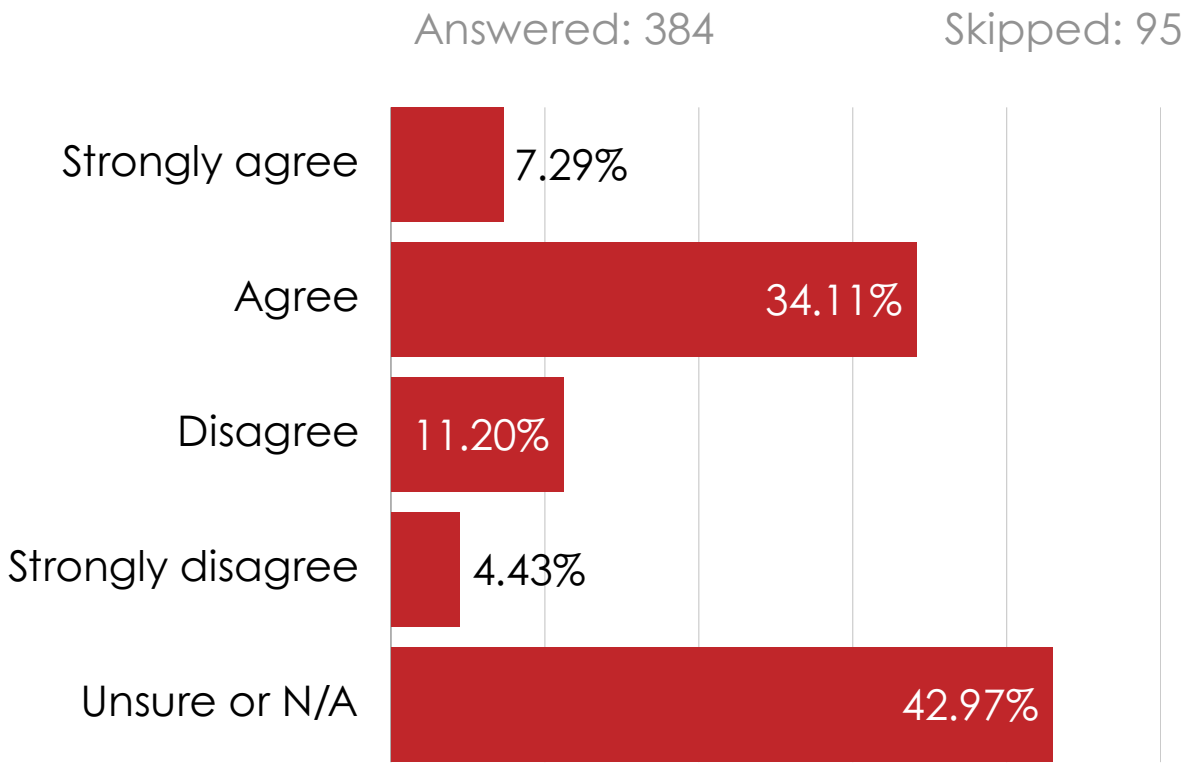
Q19 The district provides appropriate programming and resources for gifted students.



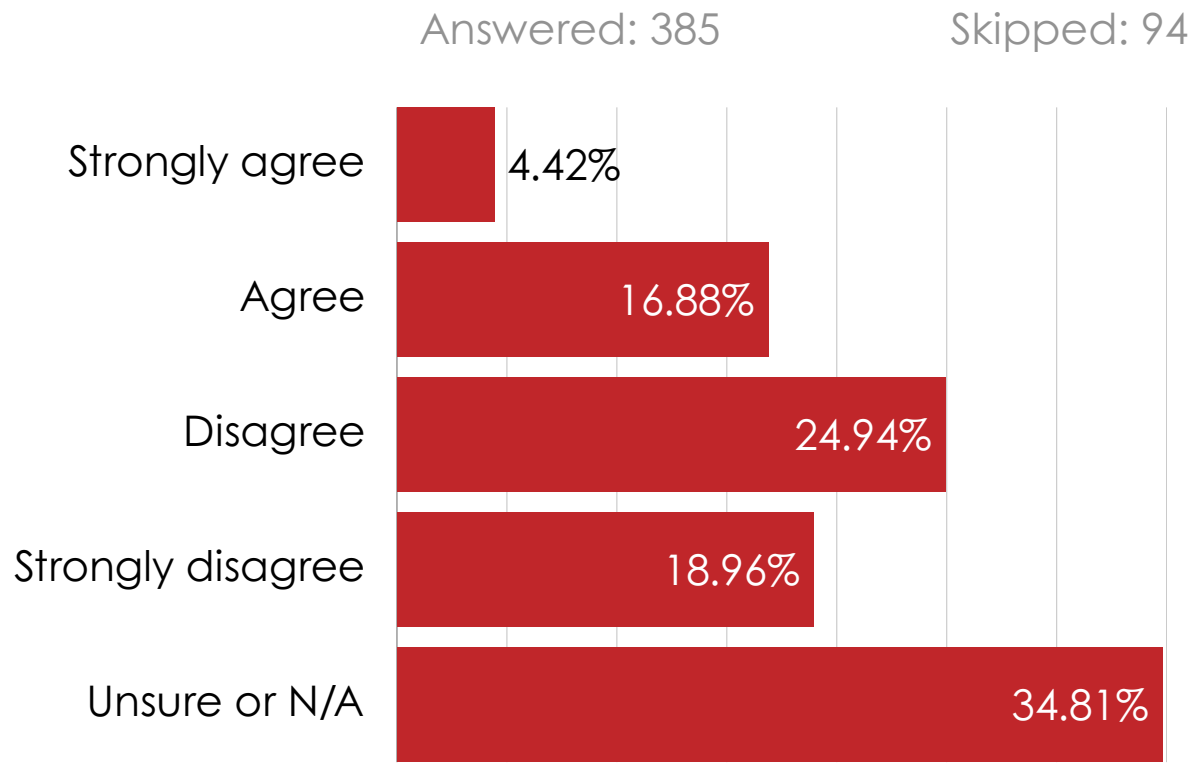
Q20 The Knox County Career Center and C-TEC, along with North Fork Schools, provides comprehensive career and trade opportunities for students.



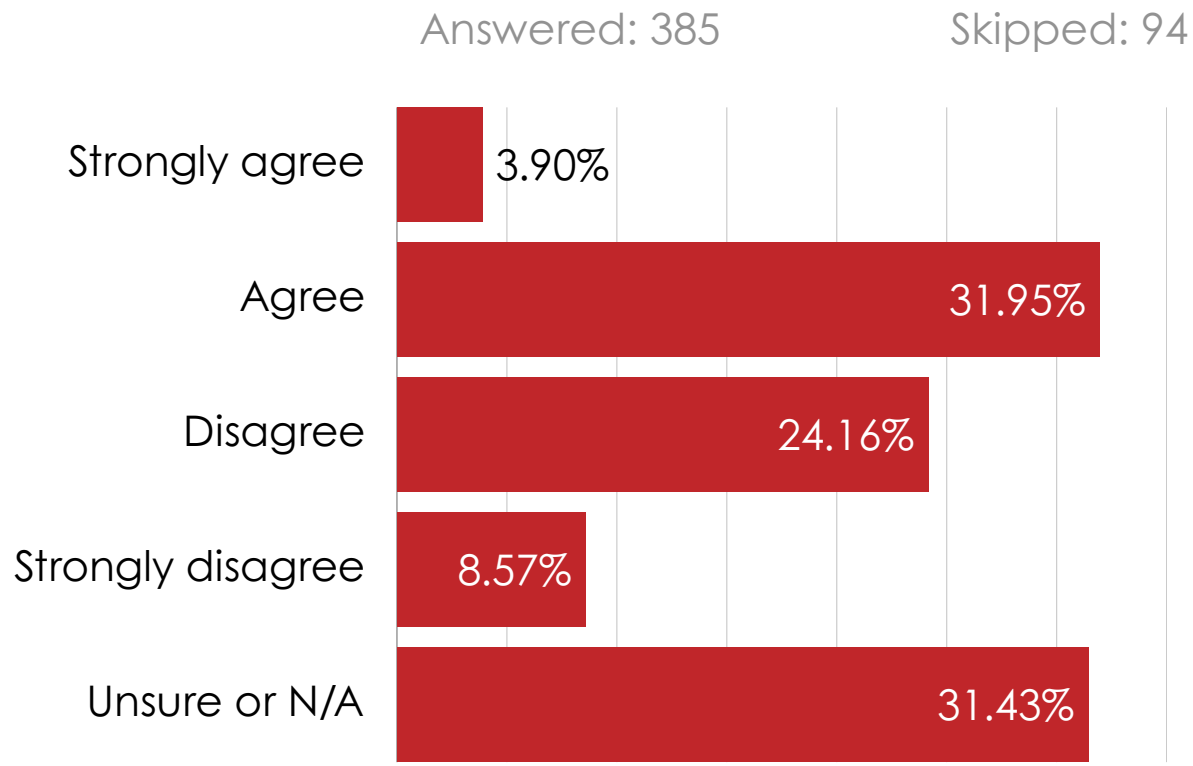
Q21 The district provides appropriate College Credit Plus (CCP) information and guidance for students.



Q22 The district provides support to address the mental health, behavioral, and social-emotional needs of all students.



Q23 The district prepares students to succeed in the workforce, trades, and/or military.



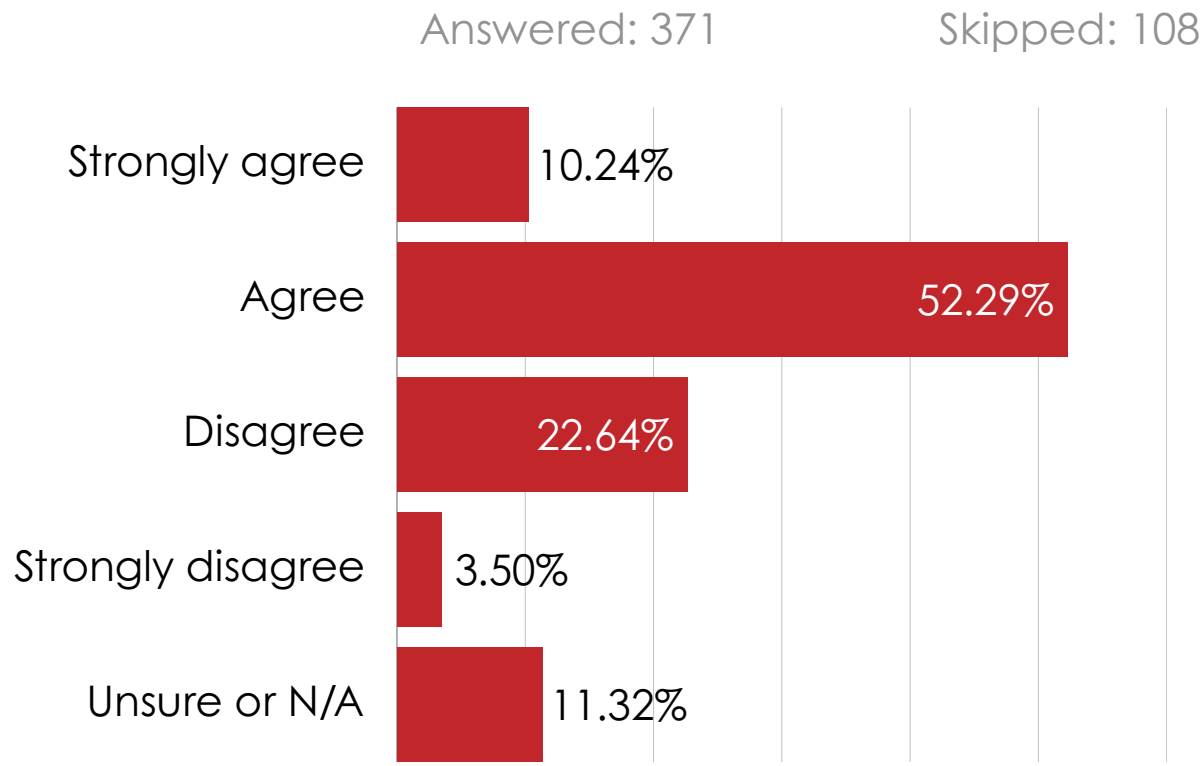
Q24 Please use this space to provide feedback regarding Student Support in the North Fork School District.



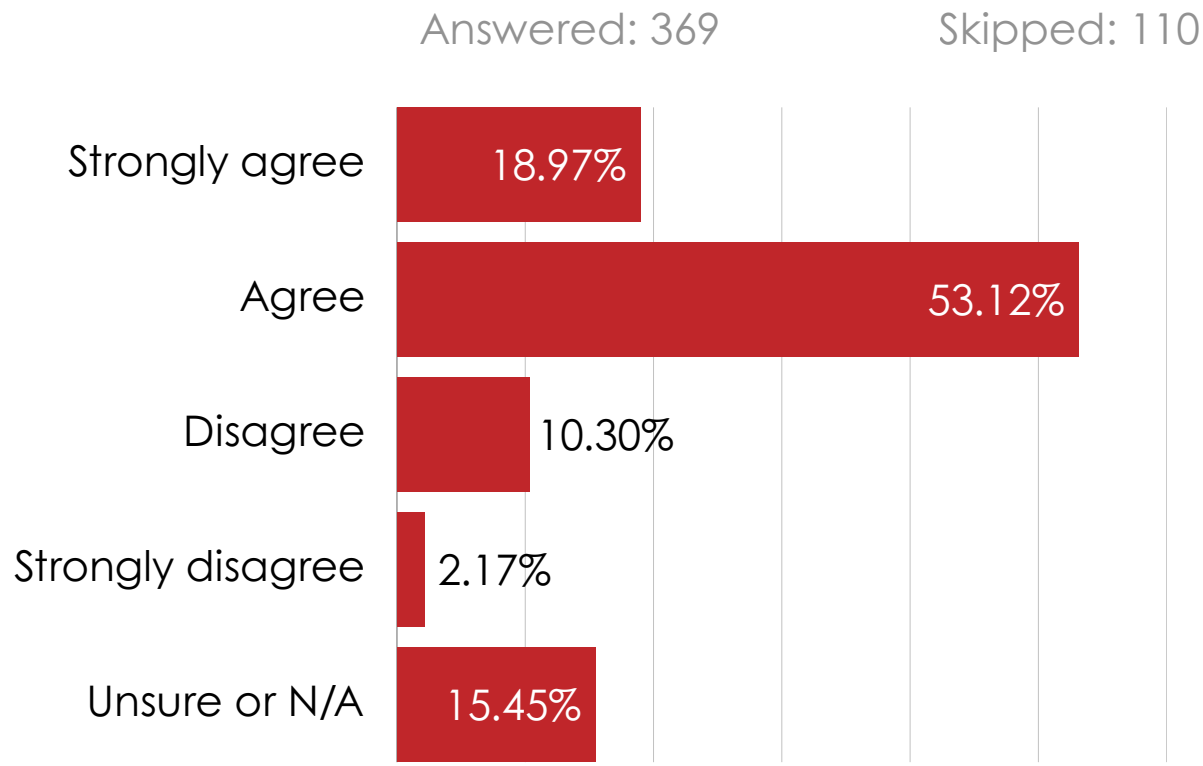
Answered: 136 Skipped: 343

- **Pervasive Bullying and Safety Issues:** Bullying is described as a major, ongoing problem that is "out of hand" and often goes unaddressed, leading to a feeling of "injustice from the administration." Some parents express a belief that there is no real consequence for bullies, and victims are afraid to speak up.
- **Insufficient Mental Health and Social-Emotional Support:** There is a strong, repeated call for more emphasis on students' emotional needs and mental health, particularly in the wake of COVID and a tragic suicide incident mentioned by respondents. Many feel students are not supported emotionally and that available mental health resources are poorly advertised or ineffectively handled by staff.
- **Concerns with Special Education (IEP/504) and Gifted Services:**
  - IEP/504: Parents express dissatisfaction with limited intervention time, IEP reviews feeling like a "check a box" exercise, and a lack of staff expertise or adherence to student plans. Support is sometimes seen as inconsistent or only effective when parents "push for it."
  - Gifted: There is a widespread feeling that the gifted program is inadequate, with generic plans (WEPs) and a lack of challenge in the curriculum, leading to the perception that the "Gifted" title is meaningless.
- **Lack of "Real World" and College Preparation:** Many respondents feel the curriculum does not prepare students for life after high school, specifically citing a need for life skills classes (e.g., finance, taxes, budgeting, home economics). Support and guidance for the College Credit Plus (CCP) program are criticized as insufficient, with students being left to figure out the process on their own.
- **Inconsistent Communication and Staff Quality:** Communication between teachers/counselors and parents, especially in higher grades, is reported as lacking. There are concerns about staff being uninvested, a high turnover of counselors, and a feeling that some personnel are unqualified or "unprofessional."
- **Inequity of Support:** A recurring theme is the perceived imbalance in student support, with some feeling that support is primarily directed toward athletes or students from families with "a name," while others (especially those with emotional or academic needs) are marginalized or "taken care of the least."

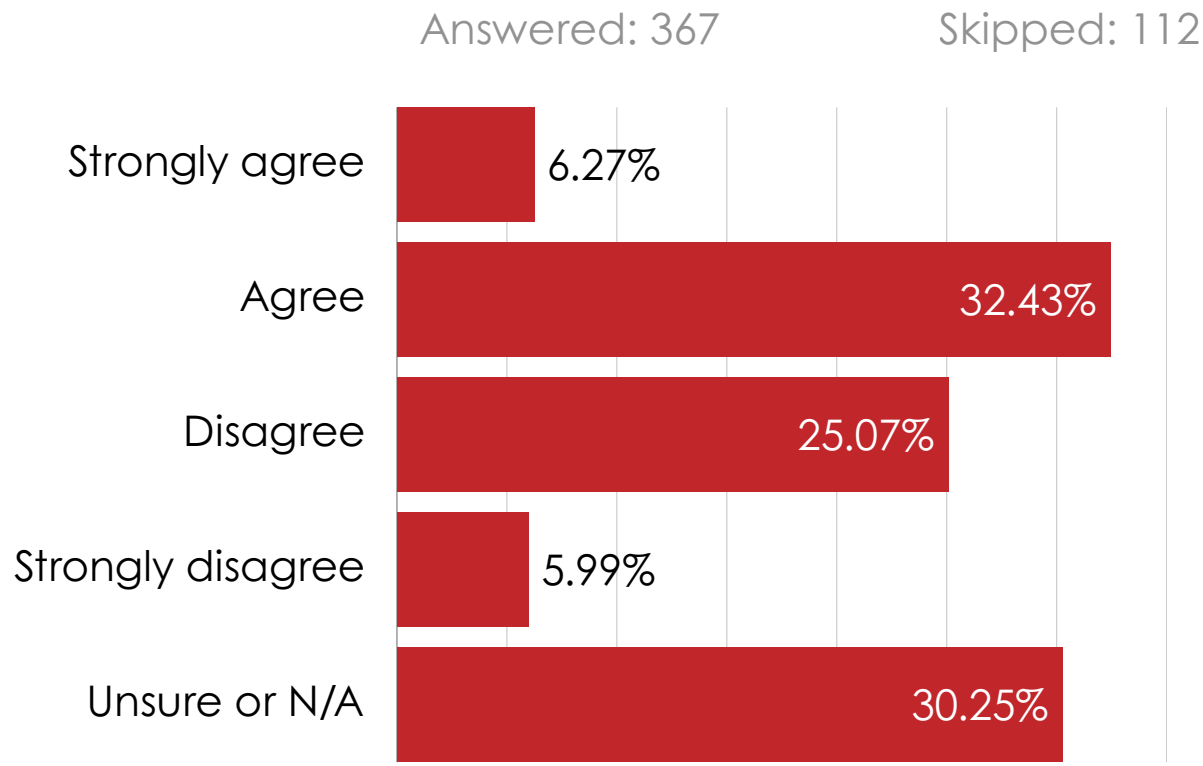
Q25 The district provides opportunities for parents/guardians to be involved in the schools.



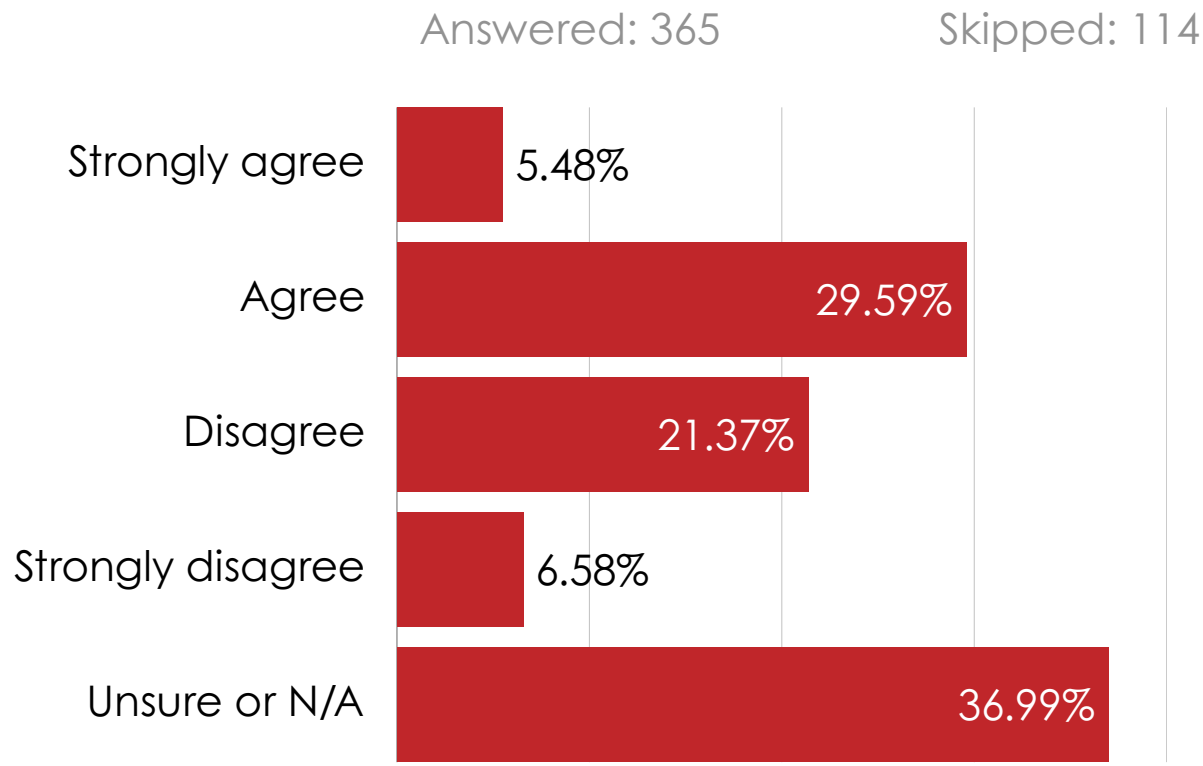
Q26 The district provides opportunities for parents/guardians to be involved in the elementary schools.



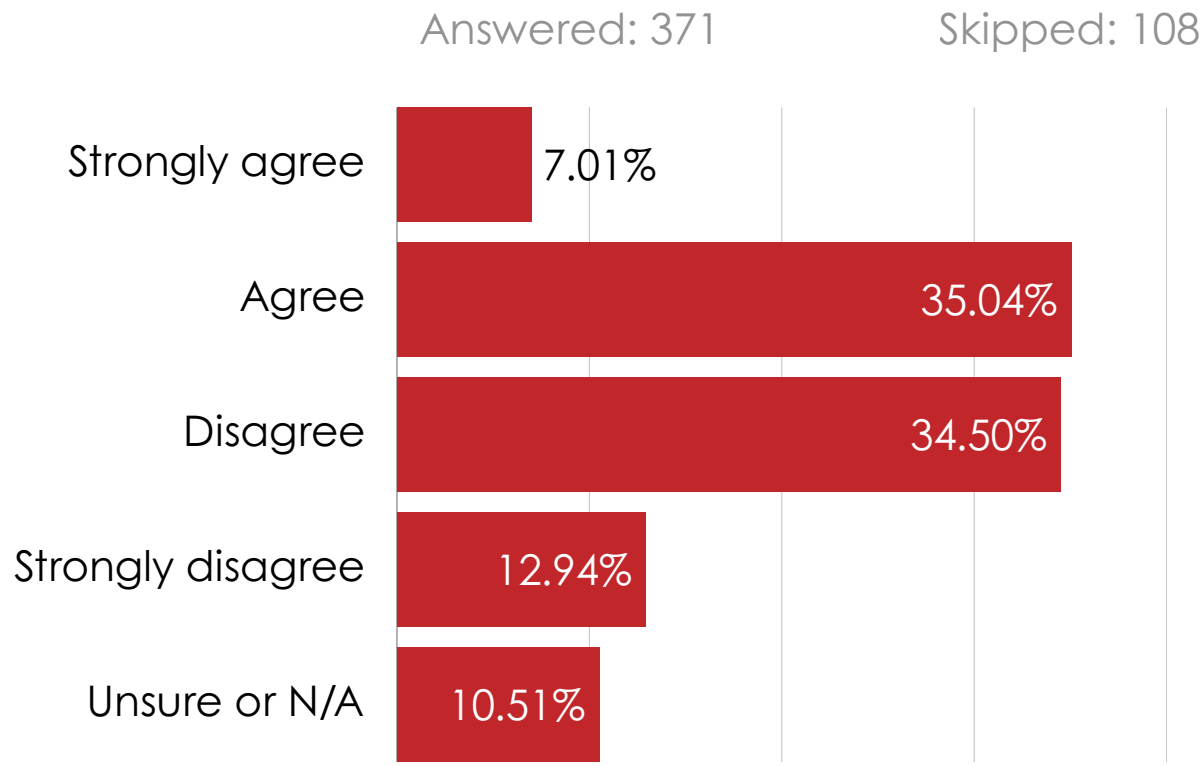
Q27 The district provides opportunities for parents/guardians to be involved in the middle school.



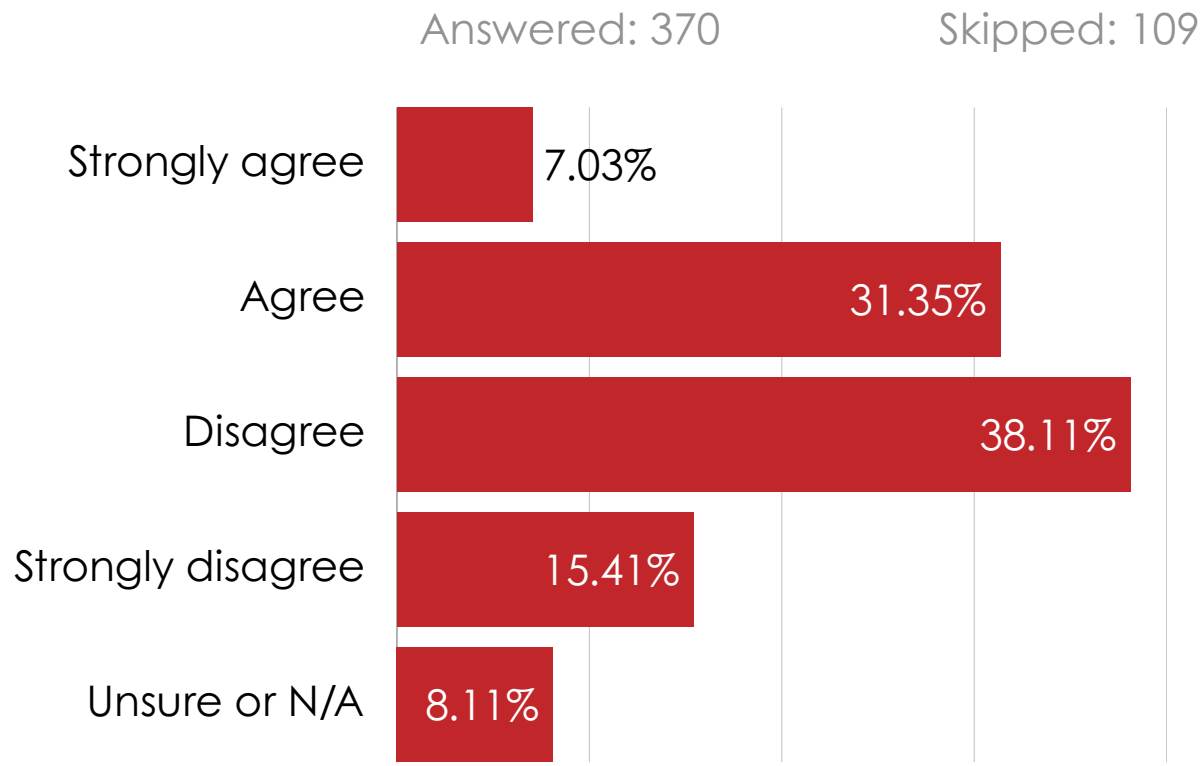
Q28 The district provides opportunities for parents/guardians to be involved in the high school.



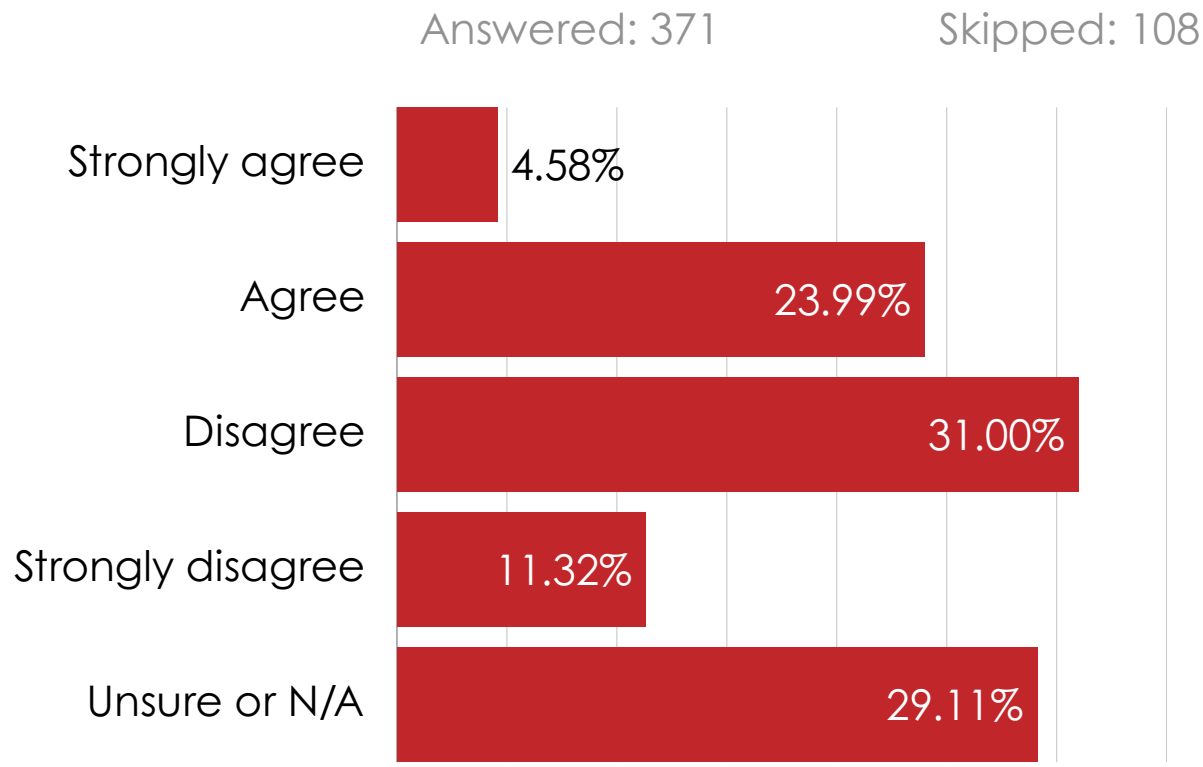
Q29 The district keeps parents/guardians informed of important matters impacting the community and schools.



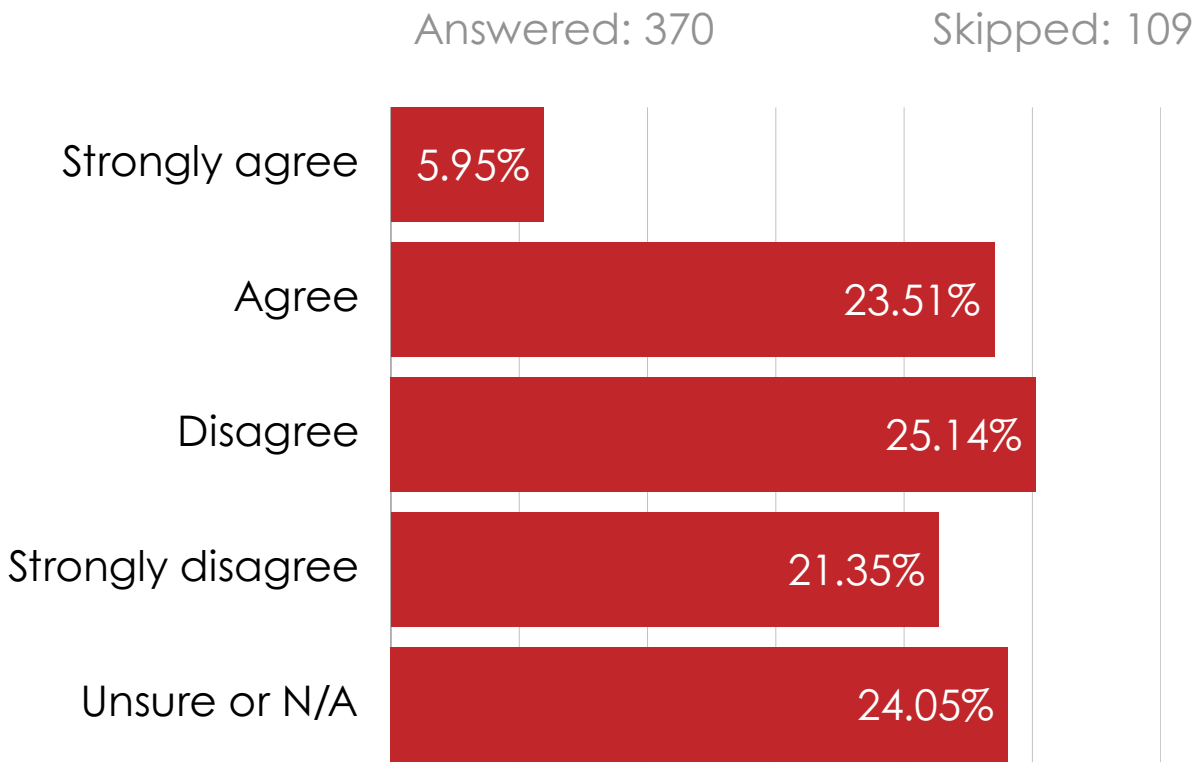
Q30 The district informs the community of important matters impacting the community and schools.



Q31 The district partners with the community to provide additional student resources and opportunities.

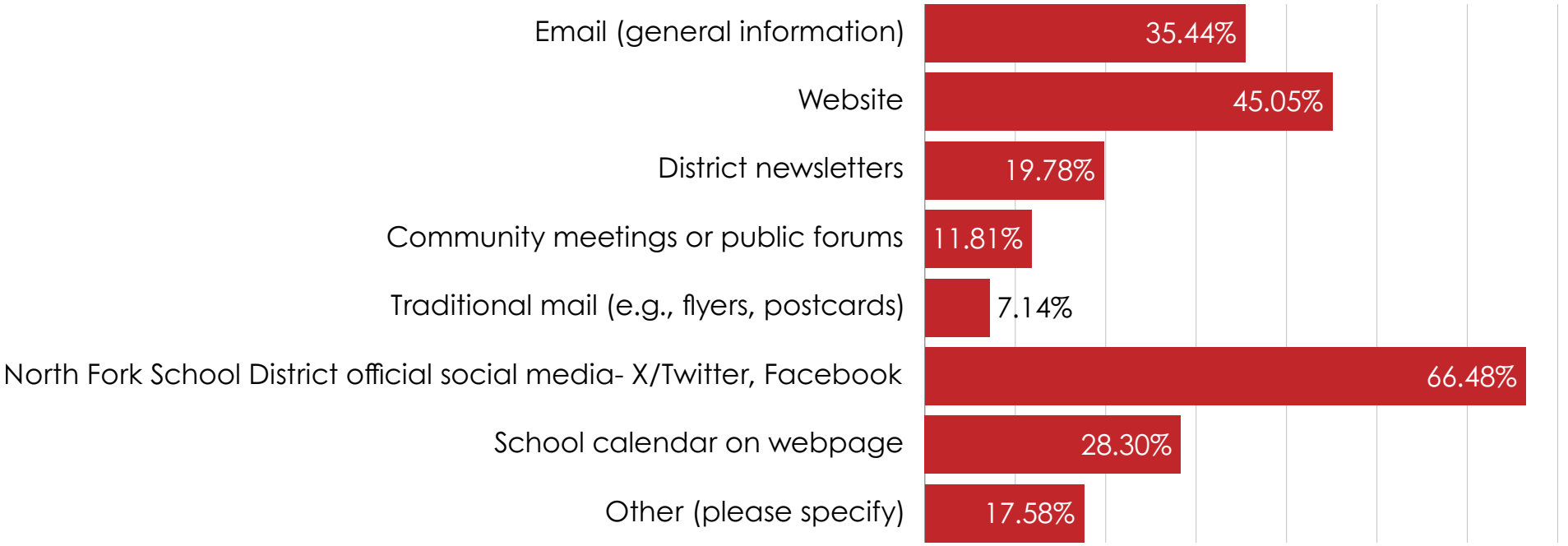


Q32 The district is transparent in sharing financial information with the community.

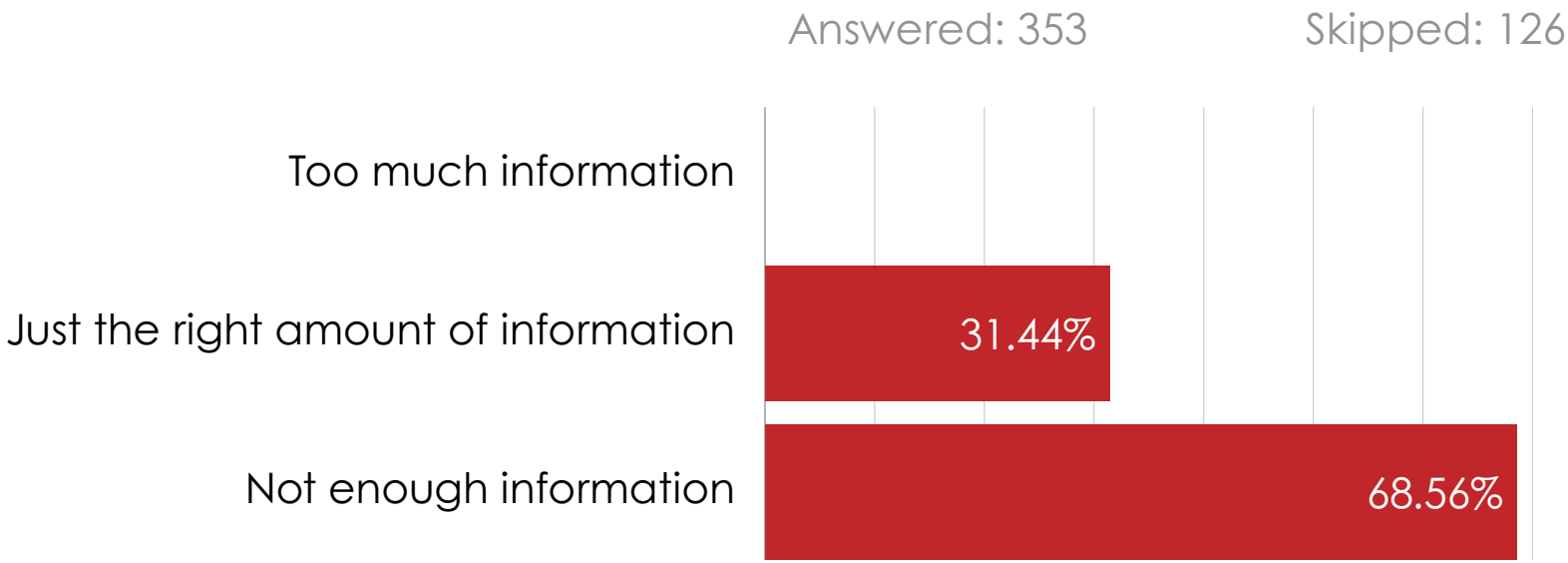


Q33 How do you currently receive information regarding the district? [Select all that apply]

Answered:364 Skipped: 115

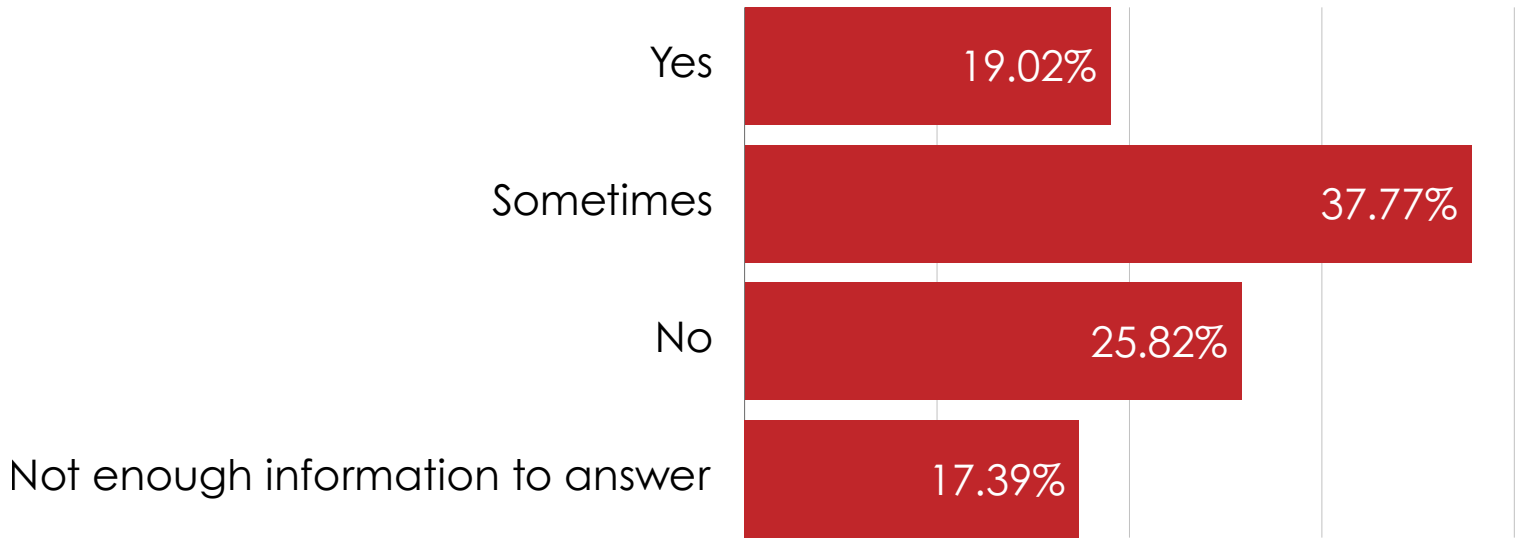


Q34 The frequency with which I receive communications from the district is:



Q35 Do you believe the school board is effective and works in the best interest for the district?

Answered: 368 Skipped: 111



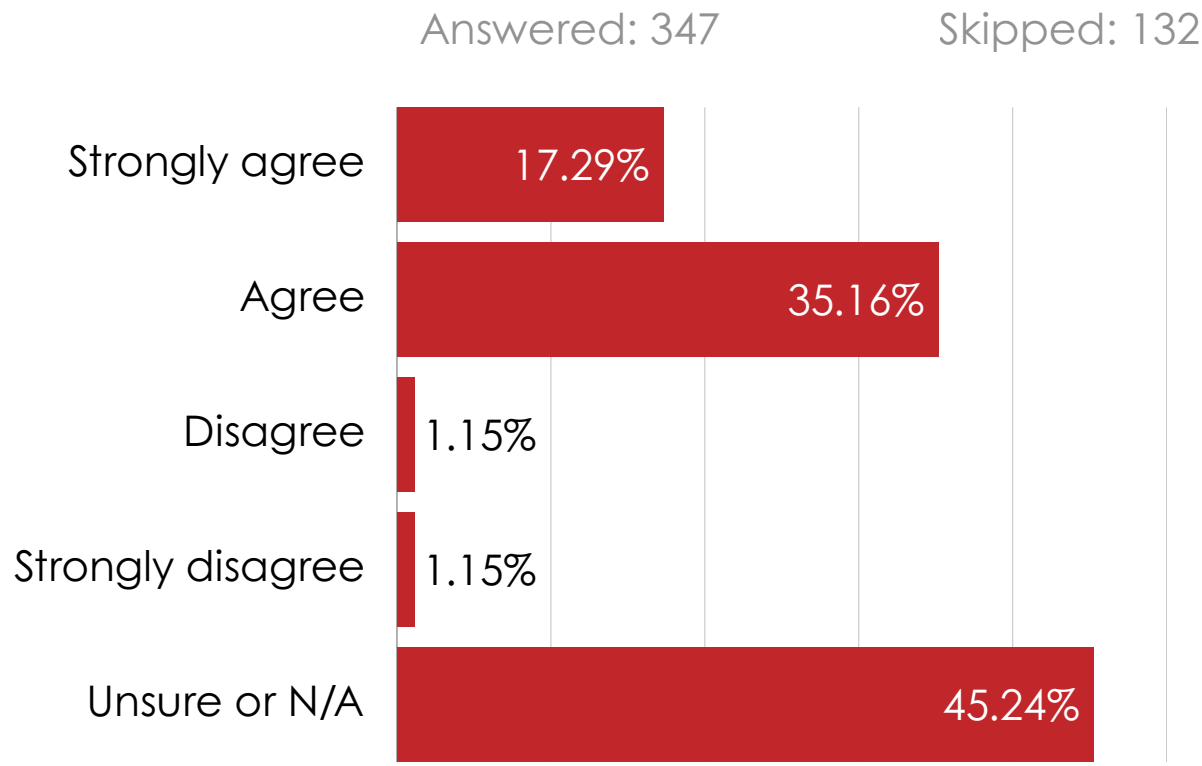
Q36 Please use this space to provide feedback regarding Communication and Community Involvement in the North Fork School District



Answered: 117 Skipped: 362

- **Lack of Communication and Transparency:** There is a pervasive feeling that communication from the district office is lacking, inconsistent, and often slow. Respondents believe the administration and school board "hide lots of stuff," including employee misconduct and financial details. Many feel there is a general lack of transparency regarding important decisions and the use of taxpayer money.
- **Need for a Centralized, User-Friendly Information Source:** The district website is criticized as "difficult to navigate" and "not up to date." Parents and community members lack a single, reliable source of truth and feel forced to follow "dozens of individual social media pages" to stay informed. Many prefer and request communication via traditional methods like email, flyers, or a regular newsletter.
- **Crisis and Timely Communication Failures:** Important information, particularly concerning student safety (threats, lockdowns) or essential logistics (bus schedules, school time changes), is often received late, sometimes hours or days later, or only through unofficial social media, raising serious safety concerns for parents.
- **Issues with School Board Effectiveness and Trust:** Many community members feel the school board and administration are ineffective, resistant to change (due to "lifers" and the "good old boy club"), and focus on personal agendas rather than the best interest of the whole district. This has led to a major "trust" issue, particularly when it comes to supporting a new levy.
- **Declining/Uneven Parent and Community Involvement:** Parent involvement, especially outside of the elementary PTO, is perceived to have noticeably decreased since COVID. Parents feel opportunities to participate are minimal, and some new members feel unwelcome due to an established "clique" or "good ol' boys system." School board meeting times are also noted as inconvenient for working parents.
- **Inadequate Levy Communication:** The district is criticized for doing an "inadequate job communicating with and educating the community on the need and facts about a levy," leading to taxpayer refusal to pass it without guaranteed transparency on how the funds will be used.

Q37 Newton Elementary facilities are safe and conducive to learning.



Q38 Why did you answer the last question regarding Newton Elementary facilities as you did?



Answered: 187 Skipped: 292

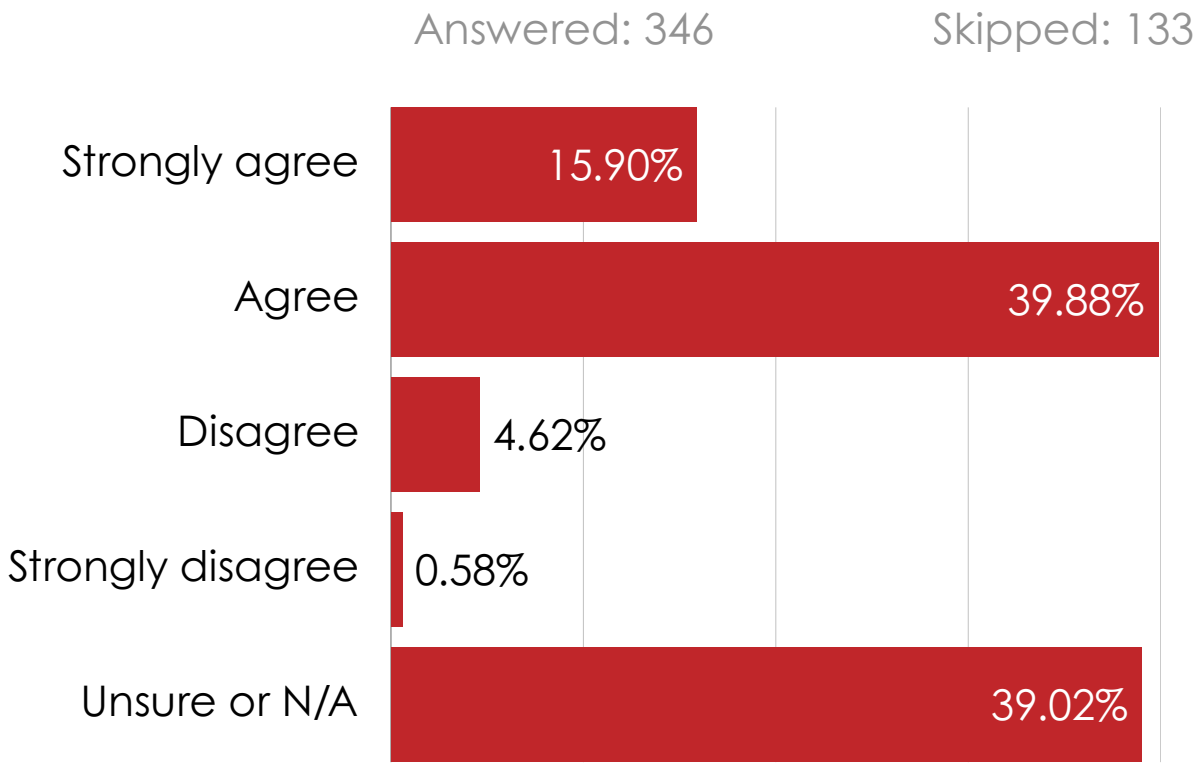
- **Modern and Well-Maintained Facility:** The strongest theme is the perception that the building is newer, clean, well-maintained, and in good shape. This is frequently cited as the main reason for a positive view of the facilities. The building is described as being up to code and conducive to learning, with mention of a recently upgraded playground.

- **Positive Security Measures and Active Principal:** Many parents feel the school is safe and secure due to modern measures like locked doors, a check-in process for visitors, and the principal being highly visible and engaged with building checks and student duty.

- **Safety and Bullying Concerns:** Despite the positive security comments, a recurring concern is the need for greater security, including a desire for a resource officer/police presence and suggestions for features like shattered-proof windows. Additionally, there are mentions of bullying being tolerated or unaddressed by the administration, which compromises the feeling of safety for some.

- **Positive Staff Experience:** Some responses indirectly praise the facilities by mentioning caring teachers who create an inclusive environment and are attentive to student needs.

Q39 Utica Elementary facilities are safe and conducive to learning.



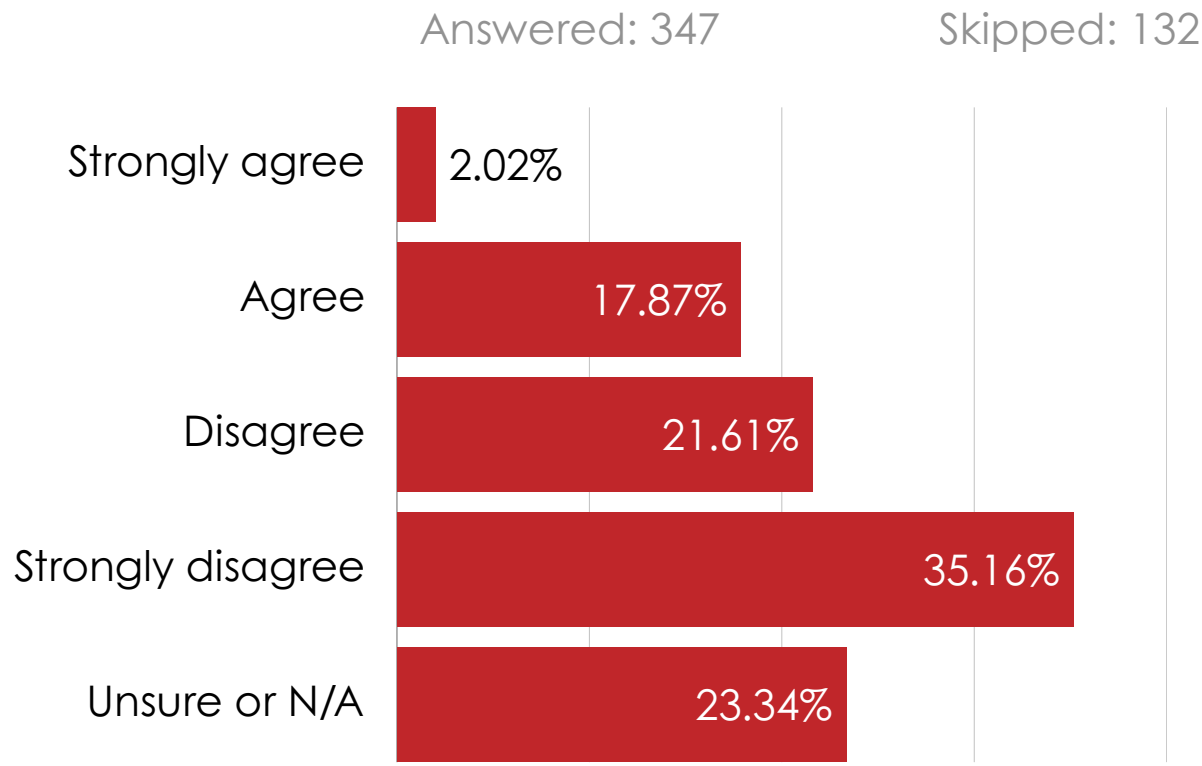
Q40 Why did you answer the last question regarding Utica Elementary facilities as you did?



Answered: 162 Skipped: 317

- **Newer and Well-Maintained Building:** The facility is frequently described as a newer, nice, or beautiful building that is clean, well-maintained, and appears to be safe and conducive to learning.
- **Strong and Communicative Leadership:** The principal is consistently highlighted for being very involved, having great follow-through, and communicating well with staff and parents. Staff and office personnel are also noted as supportive, welcoming, and friendly.
- **Need for Enhanced Security/Safety:** While many feel the building is safe due to locked doors and a buzzer system, a major, recurring concern is the lack of a School Resource Officer (SRO)/police presence. There are also concerns about the single, shared drive-in and out access point, which is seen as a safety and congestion issue, especially during emergencies or peak times.
- **Space and Logistical Concerns:** Some respondents noted that the building may not be large enough for the growing population and mentioned issues with limited parking and the overall design feeling "built in haste."

Q41 Utica Middle School facilities are safe and conducive to learning.



Q42 Why did you answer the last question regarding Utica Middle School facilities as you did?



Answered: 210 Skipped: 269

- **Dilapidated and Unsafe Facility:** The overwhelming consensus is that the building is extremely old, outdated, falling apart, and needs to be demolished and replaced. It is repeatedly described as a "disgrace," "shambles," "pit," and "borderline unsafe" for students and staff.

- **Major HVAC and Temperature Failures:** A critical and recurring theme is the failure of the climate control systems, specifically the severe lack of air conditioning and issues with heating/the boiler. This results in the building being "crazy hot," "uncomfortable," and not conducive to learning.

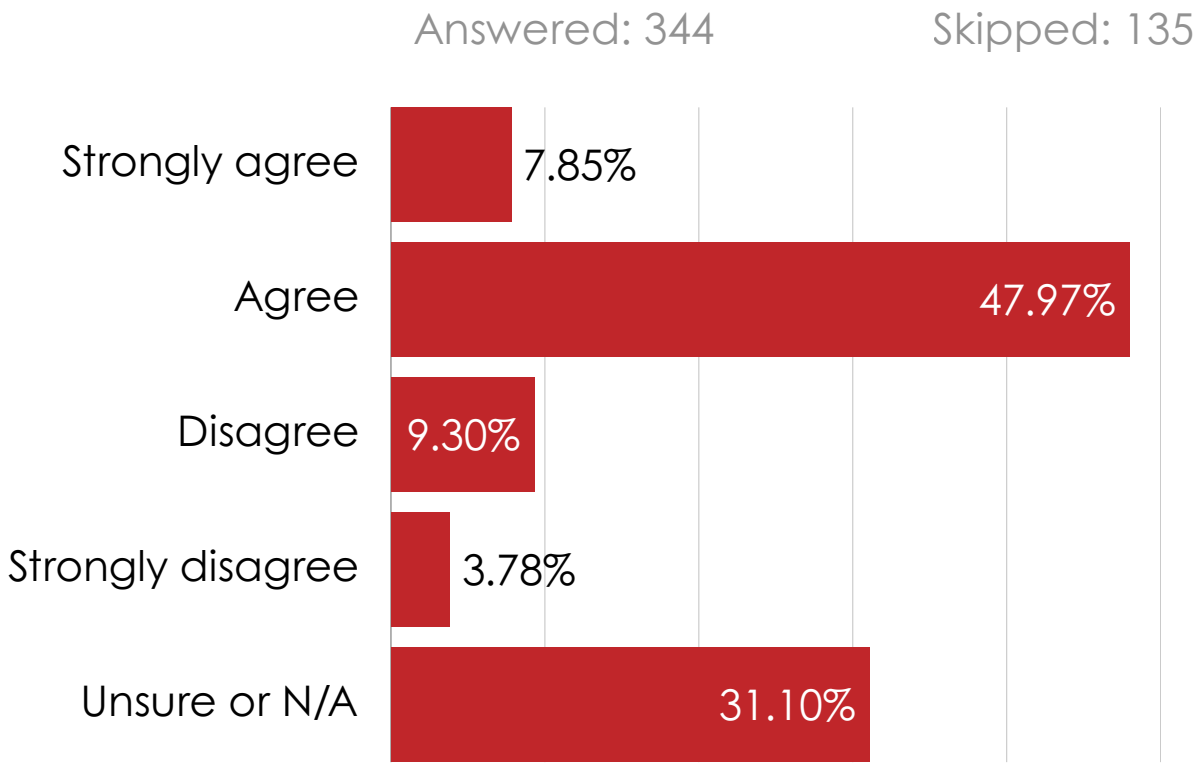
- **Health and Environmental Hazards:** Respondents expressed serious health concerns due to the presence of mold, asbestos in the gym ceiling, cockroaches, bats (thousands seen emerging from the boiler room), and poor air quality/ventilation.

- **Plumbing and Water System Issues: T**he aged infrastructure leads to frequent problems, including broken/leaking pipes, water main failures requiring service shutdowns, and the back hallway flooding when it rains.

- **Outdated Interior and Security:** Interior features are noted as outdated, including a gymnasium that is literally "falling apart" (with peeling paint/particles) and restrooms that lack dividers or are in terrible condition. Security is a concern, with mentions of poor lighting and insufficient control over entry points and propped-open doors.

- **Negative Impact on Learning and Staff:** The poor facility conditions—including the heat, mold, and general disrepair—are seen as creating a toxic and miserable learning environment that makes it difficult for students to learn and for the district to retain top-level staff.

Q43 Utica High School facilities are safe and conducive to learning.



Q44 Why did you answer the last question regarding Utica High School facilities as you did?



Answered: 133 Skipped: 346

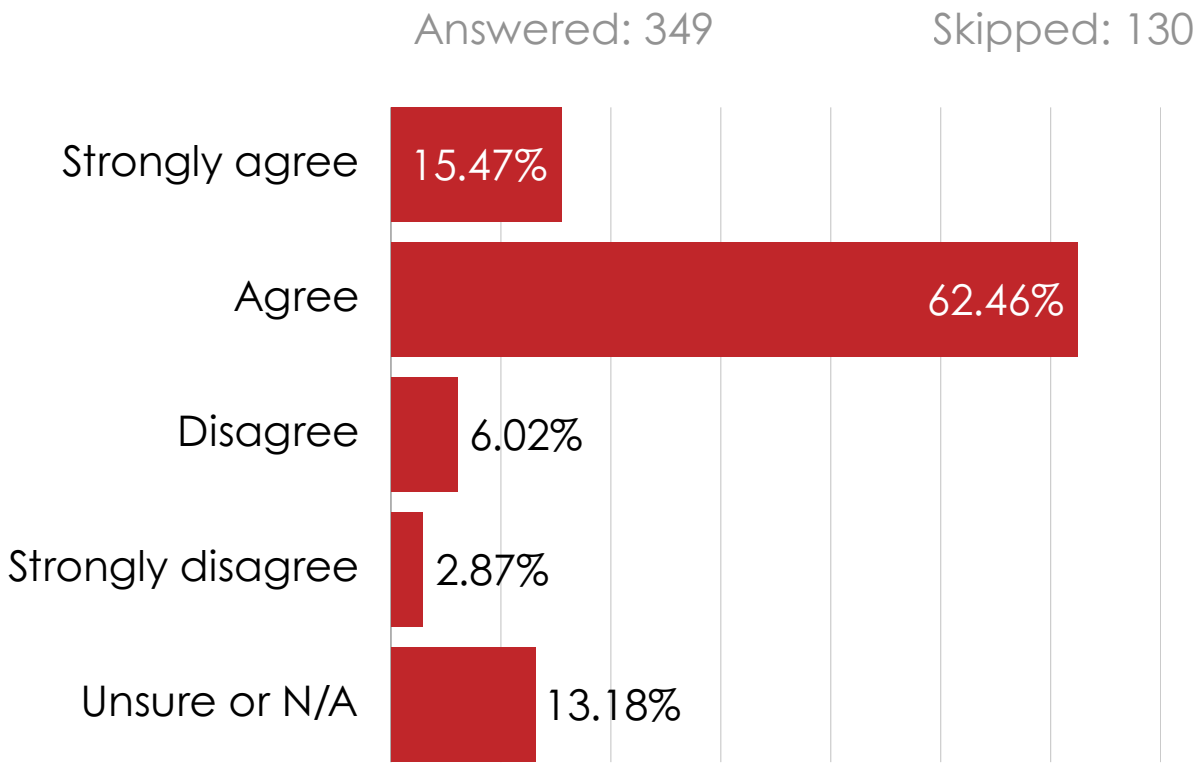
- **Generally Newer and Adequate Condition:** Many respondents describe the high school as a newer building that is clean, well-maintained, and in good shape. It is frequently noted as being significantly better than the middle school facility.

- **Concerns with Safety and Security Presence:** While security systems (locked doors, visitor check-in) are acknowledged as up to date, there is a recurring, strong desire for a dedicated School Resource Officer (SRO)/police presence. Some specifically noted that people "come and go as they please" or that propped doors compromise security.

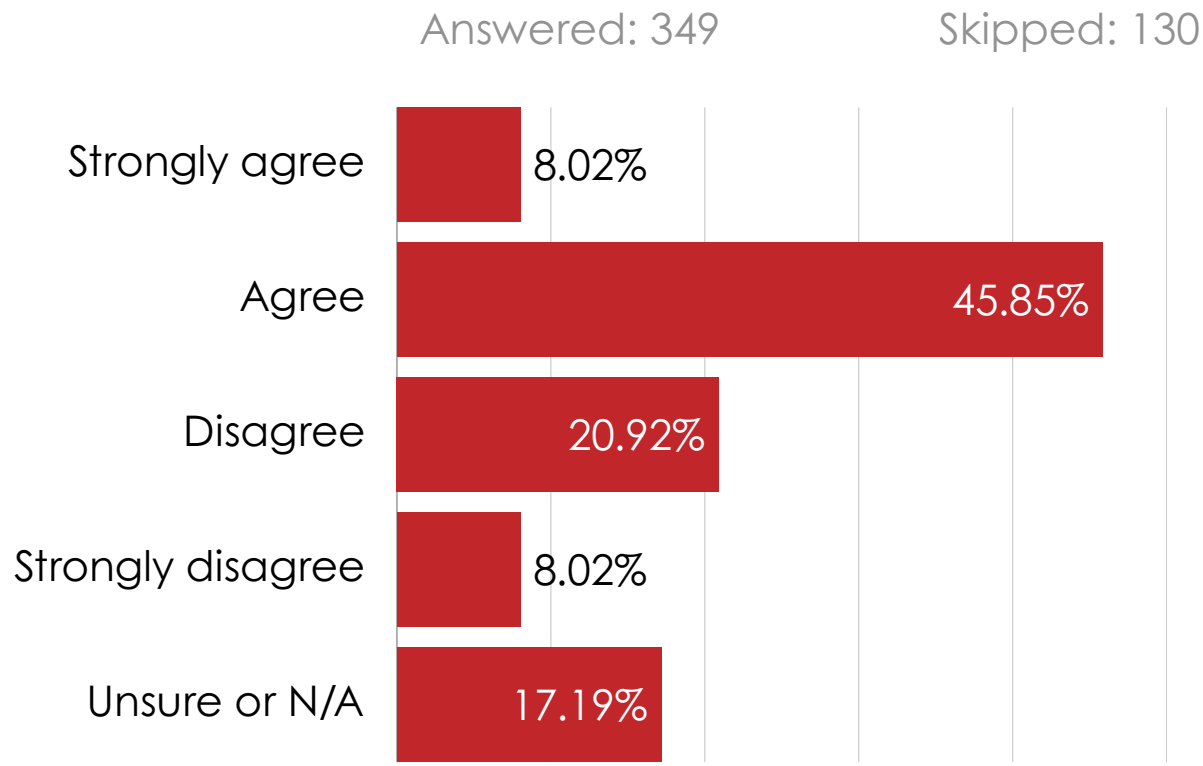
- **Need for Updates and Maintenance:** Despite being newer, many feel the building is beginning to age and needs updates/upgrades. Specific maintenance issues mentioned include a lack of air conditioning in the gym and the need for more timely repairs.

- **Problematic Connection to the Middle School:** The facility's connection to the older middle school is cited as a problem, which allows issues like cockroaches to "spill over" and forces students to use the older section for some classes.

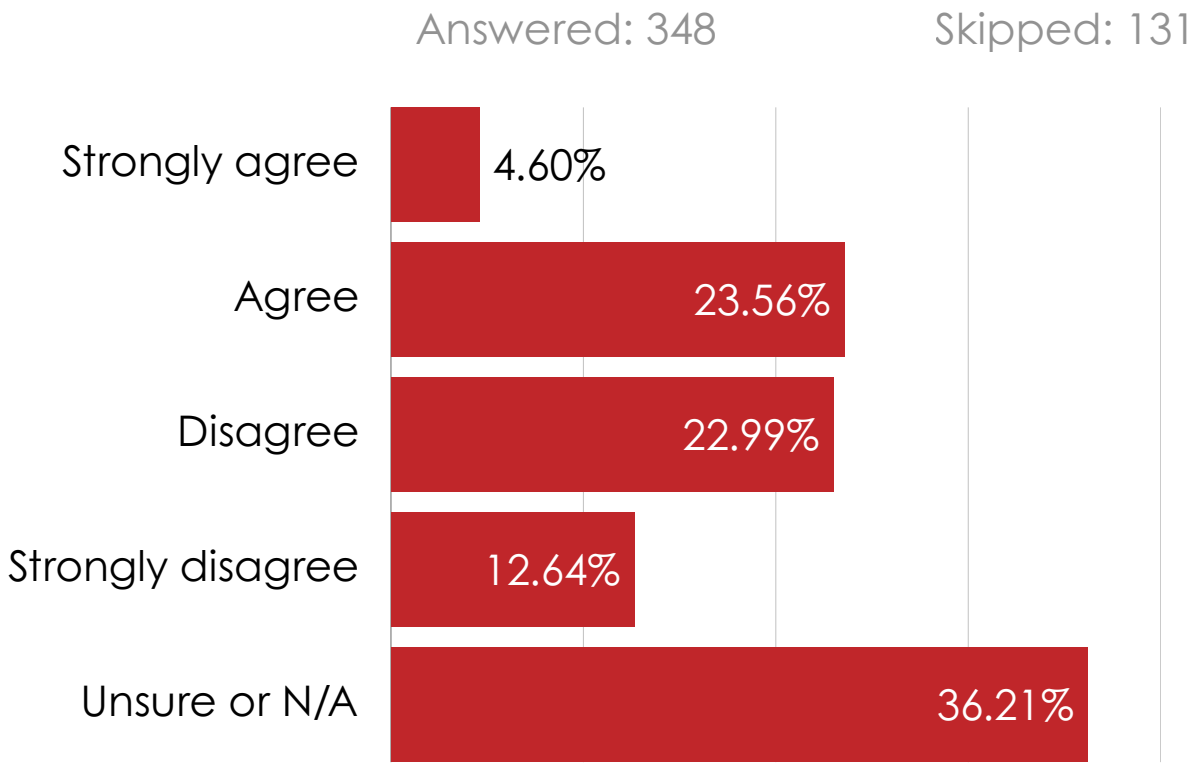
Q45 The district provides safe and reliable transportation services.



Q46 The district provides nutritious food options.

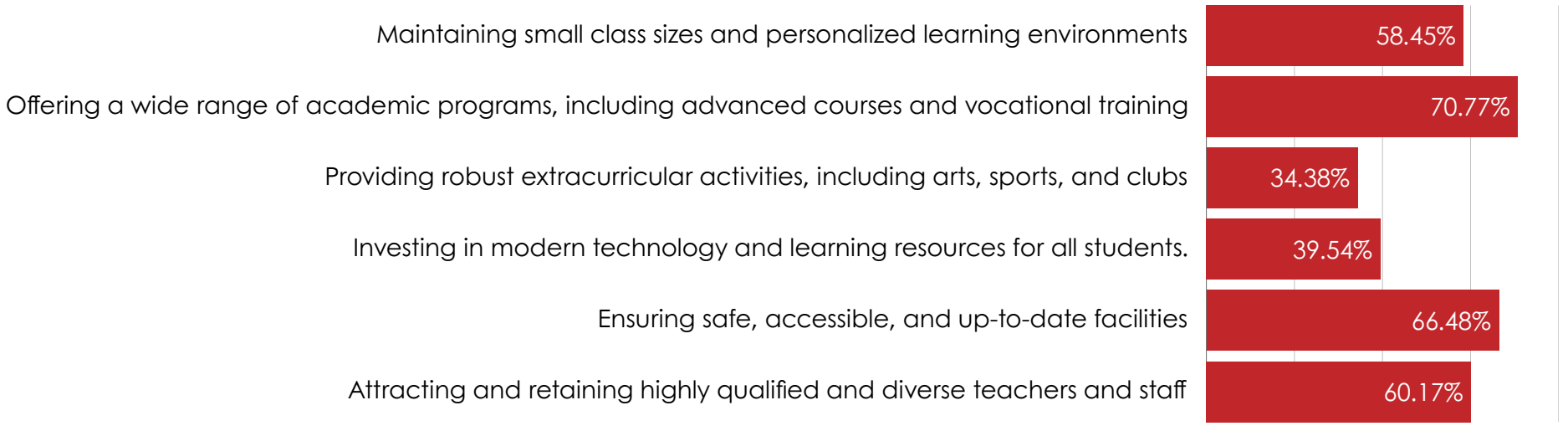


Q47 The district manages finances to meet the learning needs of students.



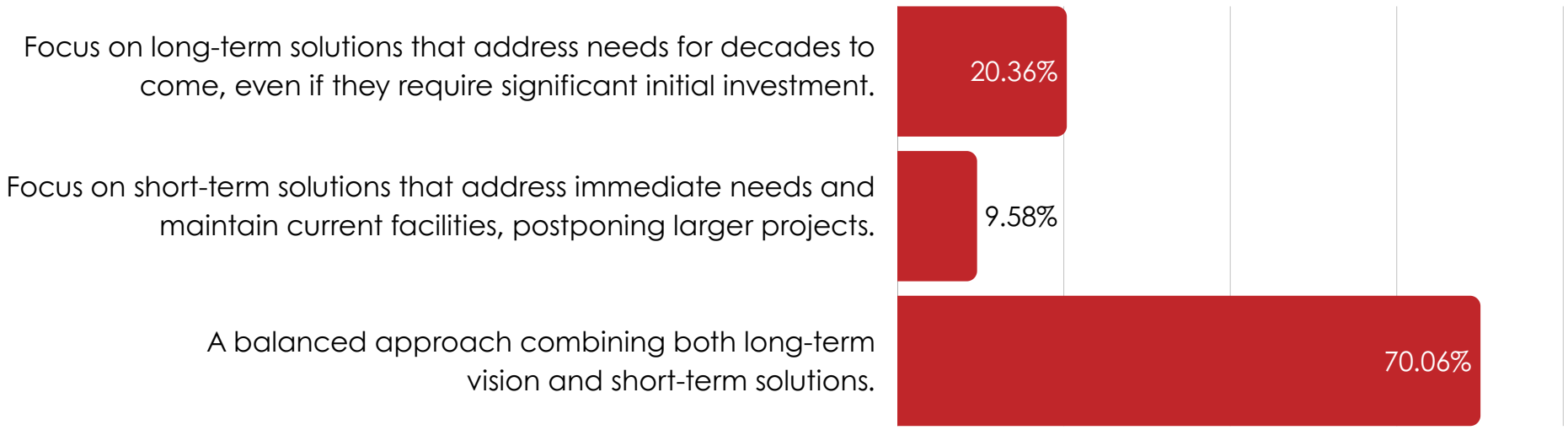
Q48 Which of the following aspects are most important to you when evaluating the quality and future direction of our school district? (Select up to three)

Answered: 349 Skipped: 130



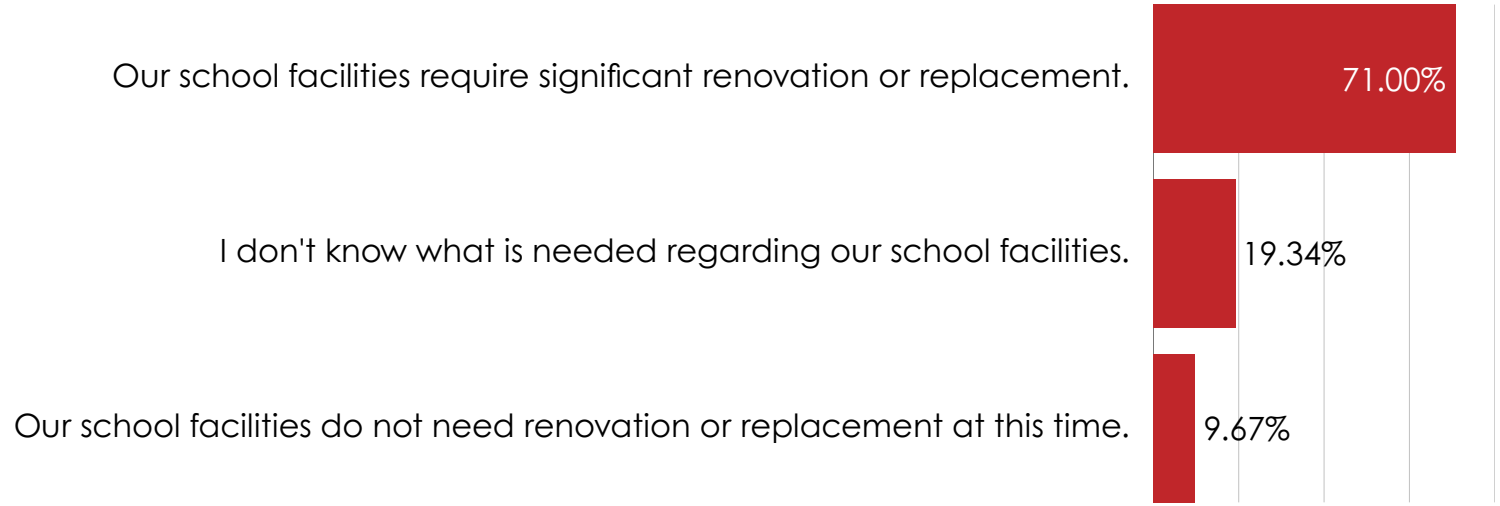
Q49 In planning for the district's long-term facilities needs, which approach do you prefer?

Answered: 334 Skipped: 135



Q50 Regarding our school facilities, which statement best describes your current perspective on their condition and future needs?

Answered: 331 Skipped: 148



Q51 Please provide feedback about the following: What direction would you like the district to take for future facilities? Please consider in your comments: Adding district-led early learning/preschool and expanding capacity; building a field house and/or community center to expand facility access; purchasing land for intentional future expansion to address long-term needs; temporary solutions to address middle school needs quickly, using portable classroom spaces or repurposing space in current buildings



Answered: 198 Skipped: 281

Immediate and Overwhelming Priority: Middle School Replacement

- The most frequently and emphatically stated need is the immediate demolition and replacement of the current middle school building, which is considered unsafe and not conducive to learning.
- Respondents repeatedly stress that this must be the top priority above all other projects.

Temporary Solutions for Middle School:

- There is a significant number of people who advocate for using portable classrooms as a temporary fix to get students out of the current building immediately while a new facility is being planned and constructed.
- Other short-term suggestions include repurposing space in existing buildings or using the high school as a temporary middle school.

Long-Term Expansion and Land Acquisition:

- Many support purchasing land for intentional future expansion to address long-term needs, especially with the community's anticipated growth.
- The goal for this land often involves creating a unified campus that houses all facilities (elementary, middle, high school) in one central location.

Continued...

Q51 Please provide feedback about the following: What direction would you like the district to take for future facilities? Please consider in your comments: Adding district-led early learning/preschool and expanding capacity; building a field house and/or community center to expand facility access; purchasing land for intentional future expansion to address long-term needs; temporary solutions to address middle school needs quickly, using portable classroom spaces or repurposing space in current buildings



Answered: 198 Skipped: 281

Support for Early Learning/Preschool:

- There is a strong desire for the district to add an early learning/preschool program to expand options, give more children a head start, and better prepare them for kindergarten.

Controversy Over Non-Academic Facilities (Field House/Community Center):

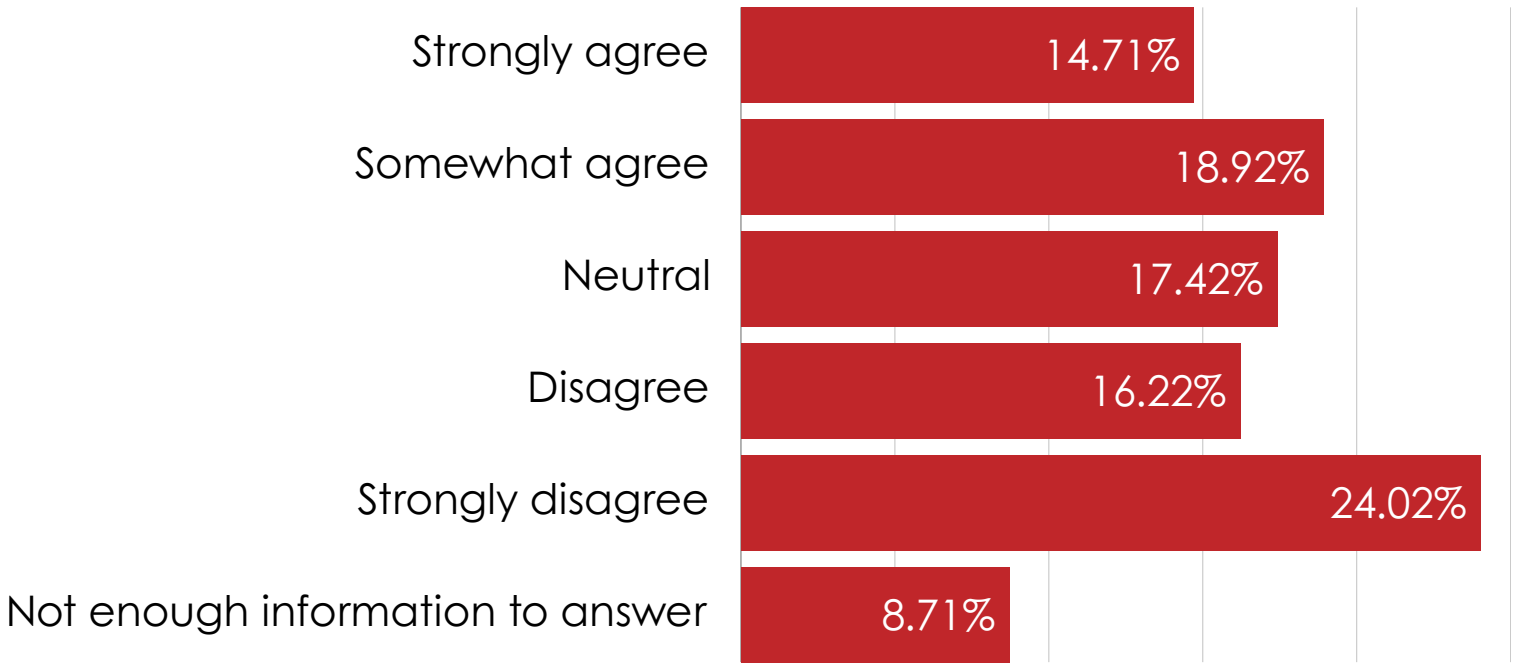
- A significant division exists regarding a field house and community center. Many believe these are unnecessary and a waste of money that should not be prioritized over the middle school or educational needs.
- Conversely, others see them as "nice to have" additions that would expand facility access and could potentially help garner support for a levy.

Focus on Wise Financial Planning:

- Community members expressed general weariness over tax increases and an explicit demand for transparency and accountability, urging the district to make wise investments and to stop mismanaging taxpayer dollars.

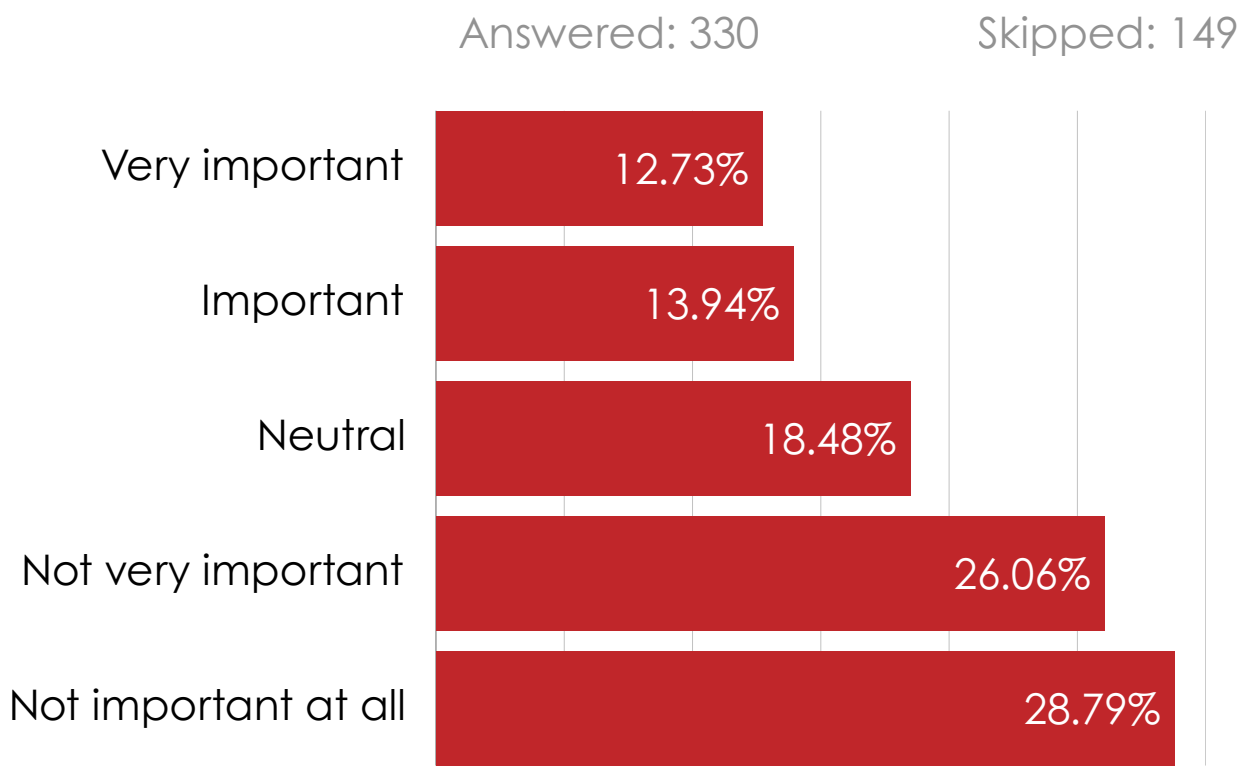
Q52 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the district continuing to make ongoing repairs to existing school buildings to maintain their usability, as opposed to pursuing new construction or major renovations.

Answered: 333 Skipped: 146



Q53 How important is it to our community to invest in building a field house and/or community center (e.g., adjacent to the weight room) as a priority project, separate from other major school repair or construction projects?





Q54 Explain your answer to the previous question.



Answered: 214 Skipped: 265

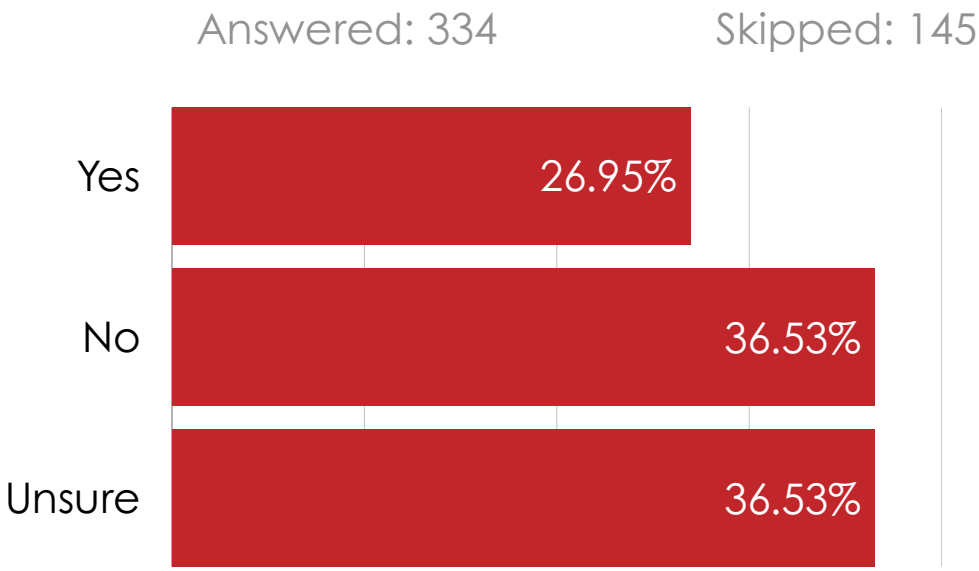
- **Overwhelming Priority for Educational Facilities:** The dominant theme is that the construction of a field house or community center should not be a priority and must come after the replacement or complete renovation of the existing Middle School. Many respondents state that focusing on this project first would signal that the district prioritizes athletics over academics and student safety.

- **Concerns Over Cost and Funding:** There is strong resistance to spending taxpayer money on the project, with many calling it a "waste of money," a "luxury," or an "extra." Several comments suggest that any such project should be funded through donations or outside vendors, not through a levy or district income tax funds.

- **Perceived as a Non-Essential "Want":** Many view the field house as a "want" for a select group (athletes) rather than a "need" for the entire student body or the core educational mission of the school.

- **Conditional Support for Athletics and Community:** Support for the project is generally conditional. Arguments in favor focus on:
  - Providing a much-needed facility for all-weather training and year-round preparation for various sports.
  - Allowing the district to remain competitive with facilities in surrounding schools.
  - Offering a potential community health asset or a way to host events for fundraising.
  - Suggestions that it could be leveraged for additional classrooms or be part of a larger, long-term athletic complex plan.
-

Q55 In general, do you believe the North Fork School District is headed in the right direction?



Q56 Please use this space to share additional comments you would like to share that will help the district as it creates its next strategic plan.



Answered: 104 Skipped: 375

- **Prioritize Academics and Essential Needs Over "Frills":** The district is urged to focus on quality education, preparing students for the future, and addressing core facility needs. There is strong opposition to spending money on non-essential projects like a Field House, Community Center, or Auditorium before the Middle School is fixed.
- **The Middle School is the Top Priority:** Fixing or replacing the dilapidated middle school facility is consistently named as the number one focus, to be dealt with immediately, as its condition is a major safety and financial concern.
- **Demand for New Leadership and Board Transparency:** A significant number of comments call for a change in top administration and a "clean slate" of school board members, accusing the current leadership of being stagnant, out of touch, having personal agendas, and lacking transparency.
- **Reform Hiring Practices and End the "Old Guard" Mentality:** There is an explicit demand to stop hiring and promoting people based on "last name" or alumni status. The district must prioritize hiring the best-qualified teachers and coaches, including looking for talent from outside the district, to introduce new ideas and drive change.
- **Improve Levy Communication and Community Engagement:** The district must be more transparent with the public, hold board meetings at times working parents can attend, and do a better job educating the community on the need for a levy, debunking misinformation to secure the necessary funding for facilities.
- **Focus on Staff Retention and Compensation:** The district needs to raise teacher salaries and offer competitive compensation to attract and retain high-quality teachers, as the current turnover rate is a serious issue.
- **Retain High School Students:** The district is asked to create more robust, rigorous in-house offerings (AP or CCP classes) to challenge students and give them a high-quality high school experience, preventing "the best and brightest" from leaving for CTEC and other colleges.
- **Serve All Students Equitably:** Comments stress that the focus must be on what is "best for the students" as a whole, rather than appearing to prioritize only student-athletes or the interests of a select group.

NORTH FORK

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