



Findings from the 2024 Springfield Youth Health Survey

Prepared by the Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts in collaboration with
the Springfield Youth Health Survey Initiative Planning Team



Our Health Equity Statement

A history of social, economic, and environmental inequities, such as racism and gender-based discrimination, are embedded in societal institutions and result in poor health. These unjust inequities affect communities differently with some bearing a great burden of poorer health. These inequities can influence health more than individual choices or access to health care. The Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts recognizes its responsibility to dismantle these injustices by promoting health through policies, practices and organizational systems that benefit all.



About the Survey Initiative

What is the Springfield Youth Health Survey?

- Administered to eighth-grade students every 2 years since 2015
- Based on the [MA Youth Health Survey](#), modified locally
- Broad health focus areas such as:
 - Nutrition and physical activity
 - Mental health and substance use
 - Sexual health
 - Violence and Injury prevention
 - Gambling
- Part of the larger [Springfield Youth Health Survey Initiative](#) that includes surveying tenth and twelfth grade students

Who is involved?

The planning team includes representatives from Springfield Public Schools, Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts, Springfield Department of Health and Human Services, Stop Access Springfield Coalition, Youth Mental Health Coalition, and the Massachusetts Gaming Commission.

In 2024 we received funding from the MA Gaming Commission to support the survey.



Why do we survey?

The survey provides critical, local data to support action to improve the health of youth in Springfield.

It has been used to inform programming and initiatives, support advocacy and policy changes, assess current and ongoing needs, and apply for funding.

Methods

Survey Design and Administration

The survey is a modified version of the MDPH Youth Health Survey, adapted by the Planning Team based on local needs and priorities. The survey consisted of a set of core questions and two modules. All students completed the core questions and were then randomized to one of the two modules.

The survey was administered in October and November (10/15/24-11/14/24) to 8th grade students enrolled in Springfield Public Schools. Students took the survey online during school hours using Alchemer. The schools had the discretion to determine when to administer the survey within a given time frame. Some schools chose to administer the survey on a single day and others chose to administer over multiple days. Guardians were able to opt out through a passive consent process. Students also had the ability to opt out of the survey on the day of administration. Some students were absent during the survey period which may bias the results if these students are significantly different from their peers.

Data Cleaning

The survey results presented in this document have not been evaluated for logical consistency. Logical consistency means that responses to related questions - such as drinking behaviors - match or make sense logically. For example, if a student reported never drinking in the last 30 days in the core module, they should have also reported that they did not engage in binge drinking in the last 30 days in the module. Results presented are based on how the students responded and may include inconsistent reporting.

Identity Data Definitions

- LGBTQ+: participants were categorized as “LGBTQ+” if they reported that they identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, asexual, or pansexual. We acknowledge that transgender experience and sexual orientation are separate experiences, but have combined them due to similarity in responses and to improve sample size.
- Nonbinary or Questioning: participants were categorized as non-binary or questioning if they reported that they identified as nonbinary, questioning, or identified some other way.

Suppression

In order to protect the identities of individual respondents, questions with less than 30 responses overall or less than 20 respondents in any category have been suppressed.

HOW HAS DATA BEEN USED?



Advocacy & Education

- Springfield Public Schools (SPS) has:
 - Incorporated data into health curriculum.
 - Used it for education of SPS nursing.
 - Used data to facilitate the adoption of the Second Step Program (SEL) in the district
 - Teacher trainings about LGBTQ inclusive environments.
- Local tobacco use rates, gathered through these surveys, were used to successfully advocate for the passing of Tobacco 21 first in Springfield and then statewide.

Grant Writing & Reporting

- SPS: SBIRT Grant, Teen Pregnancy grant
- Live Well Springfield: Transforming Communities Initiative grant
- Springfield Health and Human Services: Substance Abuse Prevention Collaborative grant

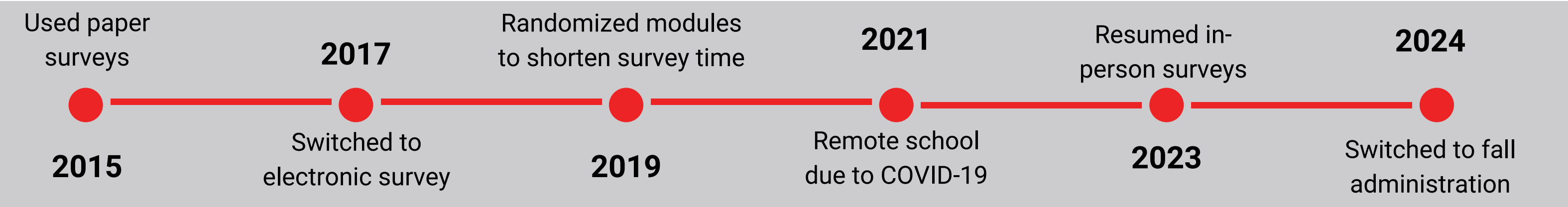
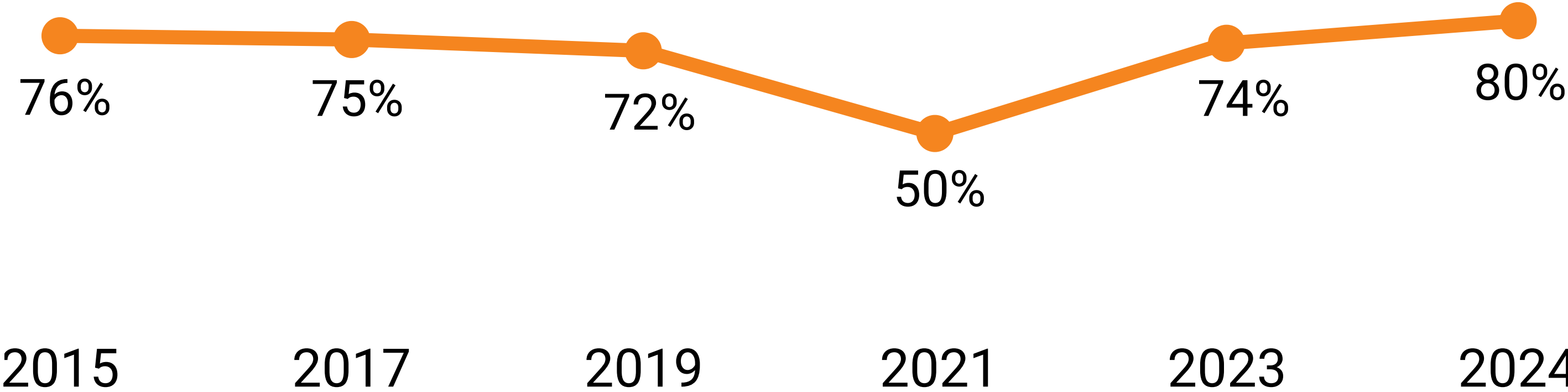
Program Planning & Evaluation

- Live Well Springfield has used data for evaluation purposes, to look at impact.
- Stop Access Coalition uses it for developing work plans and evaluation activities.

AND SO MUCH MORE!

Eighth Grade Participation Rates Over Time

(% of eighth grade students that completed the survey out of all enrolled eighth grade SPS students)



A note about this slide deck



The data in these slides is the same as what is presented in the [data tables](#) for the 2024 Springfield Youth Health Survey. These slides are meant to be a more accessible way to take in the Springfield Youth Health Survey data, **not** to provide additional analyses and interpretation.



Who took the survey?

- **80% (1,208) of eighth grade students** enrolled at Springfield Public Schools participated
 - Highest response rate ever received on the SYHS!
 - This data gives us a good sense of the experiences of the student population as a whole
 - It may not tell us about everyone - for example, students with chronic absenteeism (who may not have taken the survey) may be more at risk for certain health behaviors than students who are not chronically absent
- Demographic distribution was aligned with SPS population (DESE)
- Where possible, responses have been compared to statewide MYHS results from 2023



Survey topic areas:

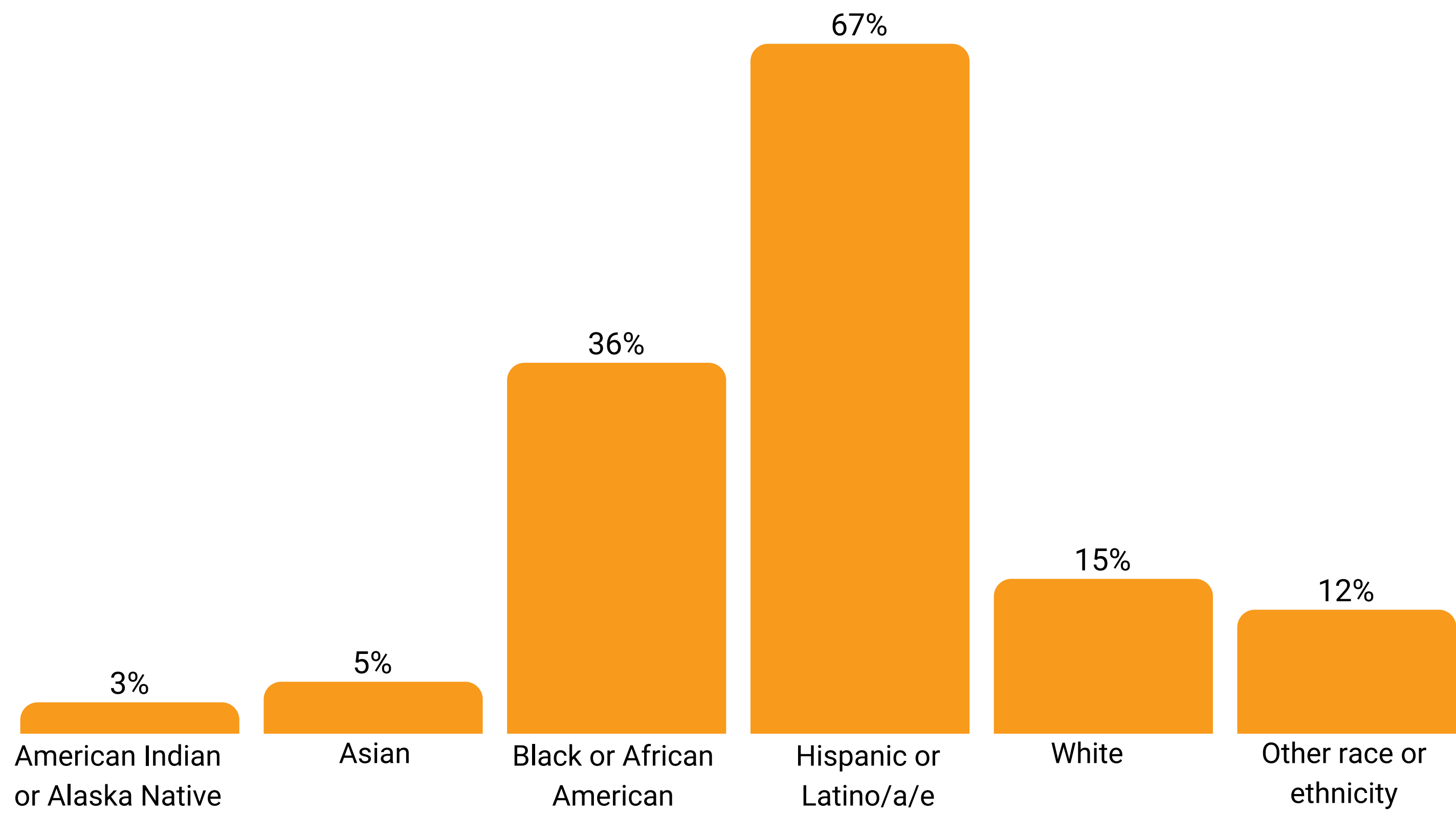
All students were shown a set of core questions. All students received a core set of questions. Additionally, students were randomized to one of two modules in order to reduce survey length. Please see the frequency tables for more information on our methods. Click the text to navigate to the section.

- Demographics - slide 10
- Diet and physical activity - slide 15
- Belongingness - slide 21
- Mental health - slide 24
- Gambling - slide 39
- Sexual activity - slide 44
- Sexual violence - slide 48
- Social media and news - slide 51
- Violence - slide 59
- Lifestyle - slide 64
- Substance use - slide 68

Demographics



What is your race/ethnicity? (Select all responses that you identify with.)

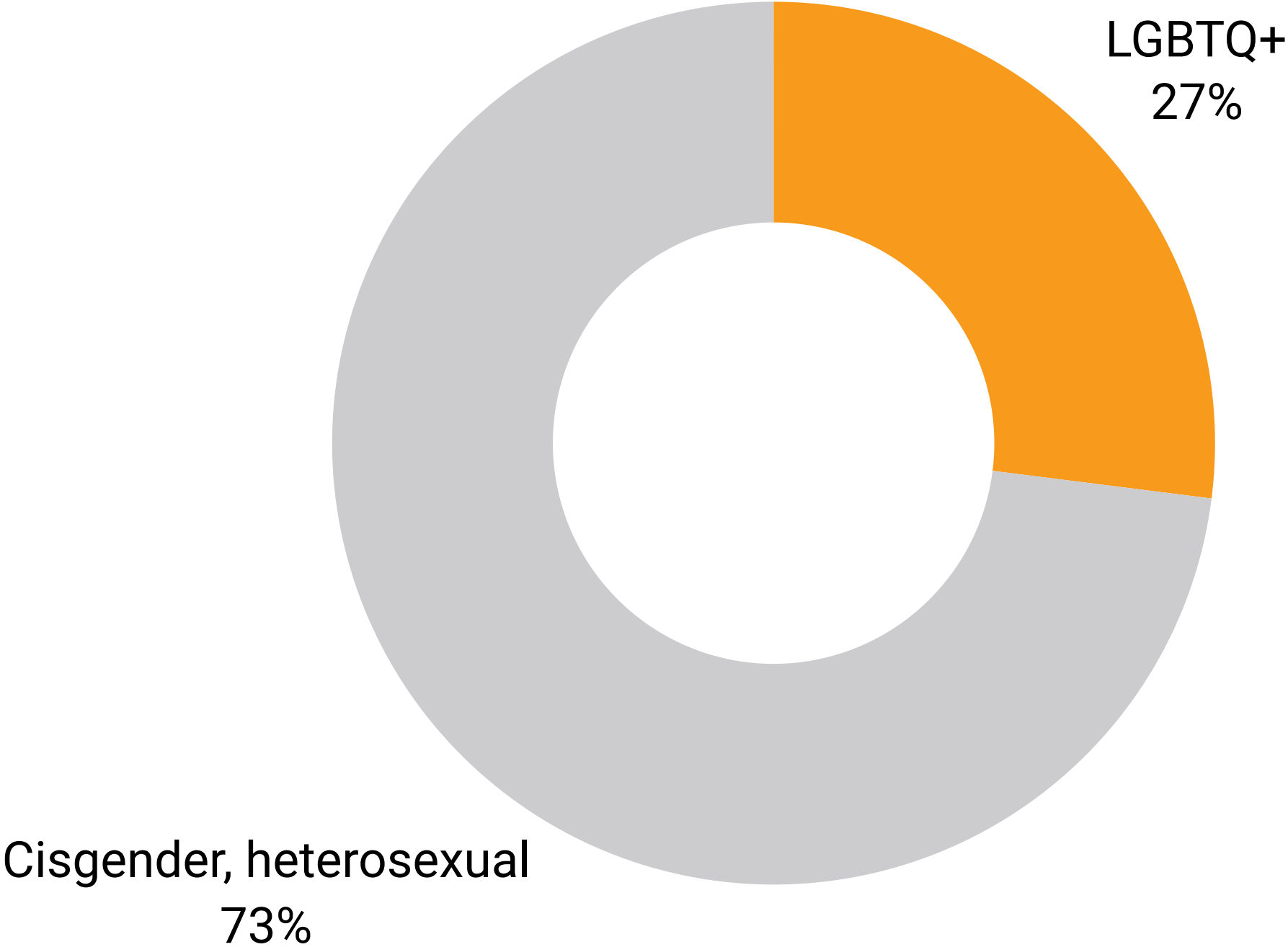


*These percentages do not add up to 100 because students were able to select more than one option.



Demographics: Sexual orientation

One in four (27%) of participants identified as LGBTQ+. The remaining 73% identified as cisgender and heterosexual.



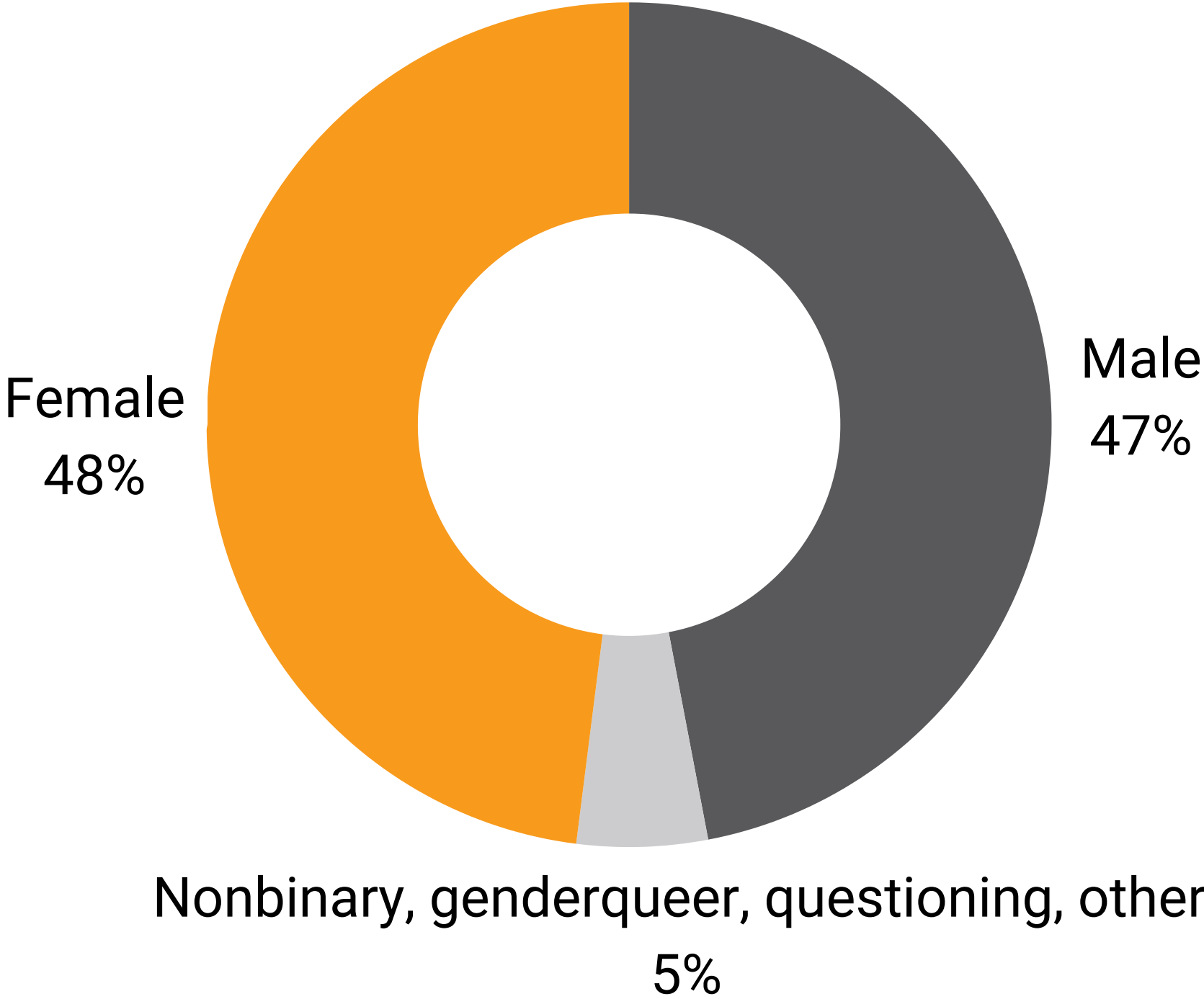
Sexual orientation of LGBTQ+ participants:

- Asexual: 3%
- Bisexual: 12%
- Gay or lesbian: 3%
- Pansexual: 3%
- Questioning or not sure: 3%

Derived from: This question asks about sexual identity. Which of the following best describes you? AND Some people describe themselves as transgender, an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity and expression does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth. Are you transgender? AND What is your current gender identity? Responses for students who selected “Queer” or “I describe my sexual identity in some other way” are not reflected here due to a small number of responses.



Demographics: Gender identity

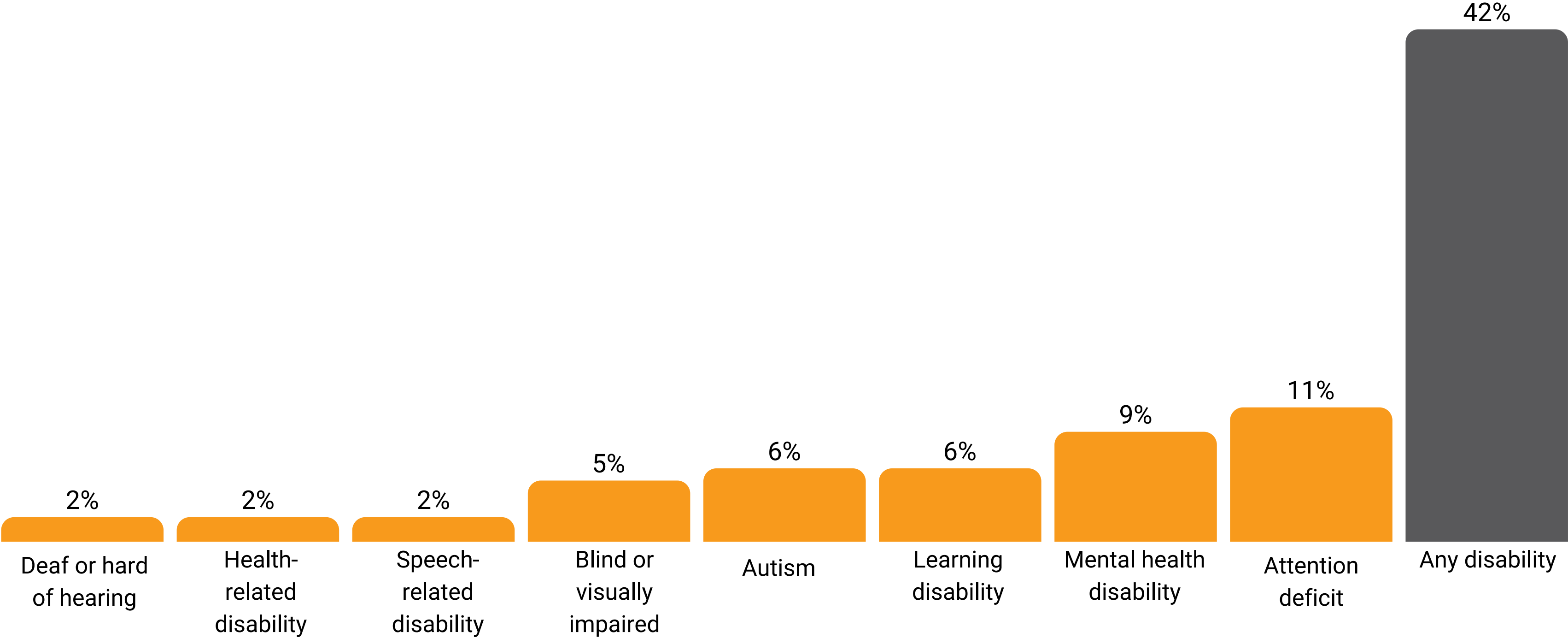


2%
**of students identified
as transgender**

Derived from two questions:
What is your current gender identity?
Some people describe themselves as transgender, an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity and expression does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth. Are you transgender?



Do you have any of the following disabilities or chronic conditions? Select all that apply.

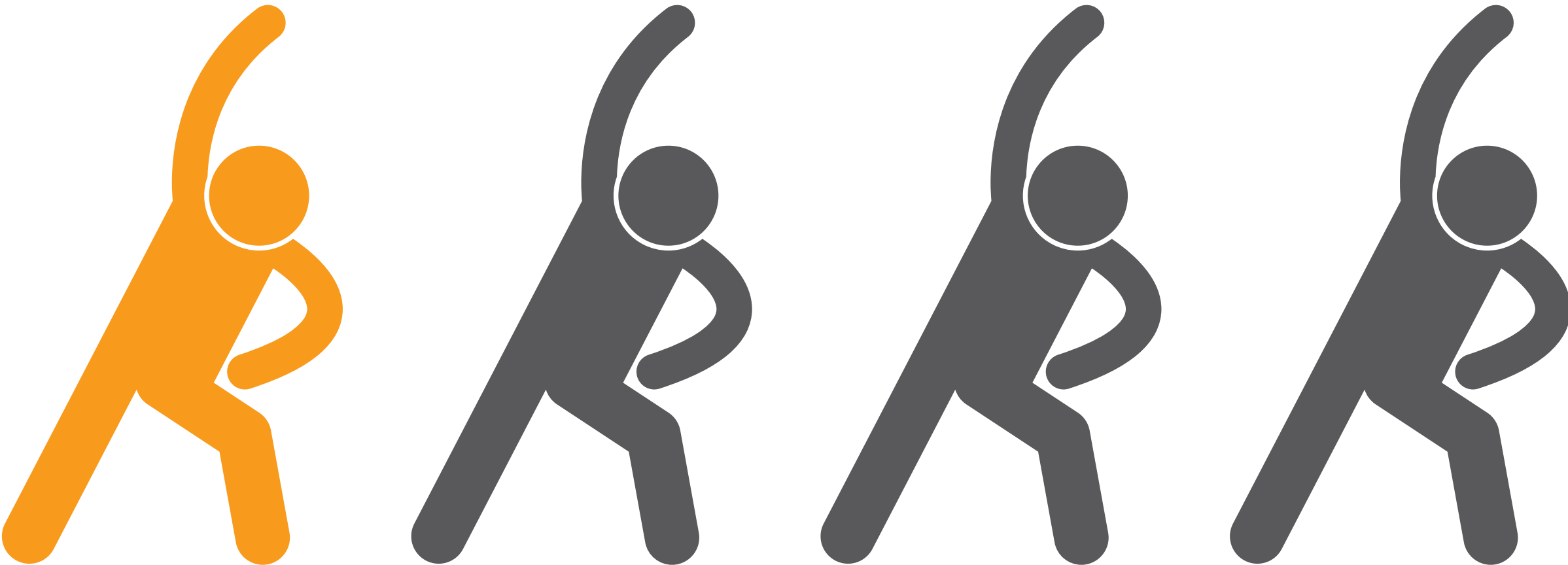


These percentages do not add up to 100 because students were able to select more than one option. Students were able to write in an “other” response for this question. These responses are not reflected here.

Diet and physical activity



One quarter (26%) of students reported being physically active for a total of 60 minutes all 7 days in the past week.



Statewide: 23%
[CDC guidelines for physical activity](#) recommend that all children and adolescents aged 6-17 are physically active at least 60 minutes per day.
Derived from: During the past 7 days, on how many days were you physically active for a total of at least 60 minutes per day?



Roughly three in ten (32%) students ate vegetables 2 or more times in the past day.



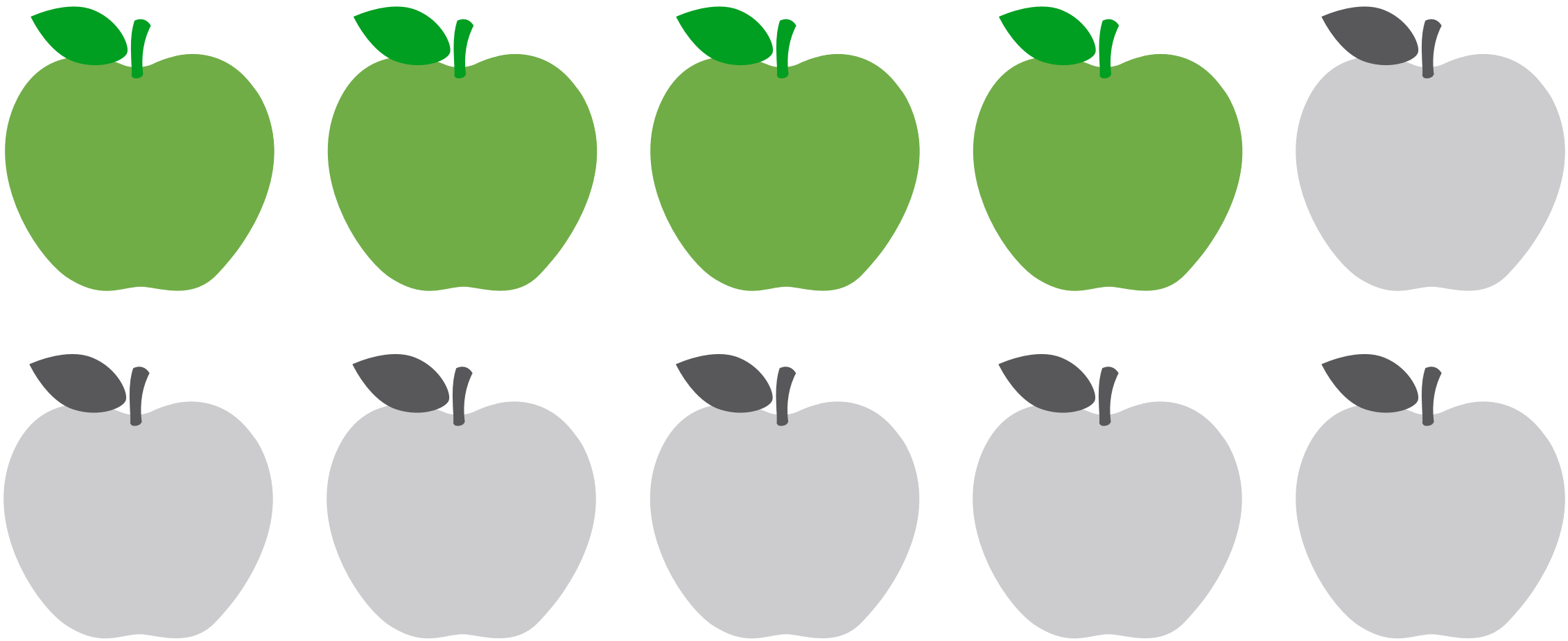
Statewide: 49%

[General recommendations for vegetable consumption](#) by age suggest between 2.5-4 cups of vegetables per day, dependent on sex.

Derived from: Yesterday, how many times did you eat vegetables?



Four in ten (40%) students ate fruit two or more times in the past day.

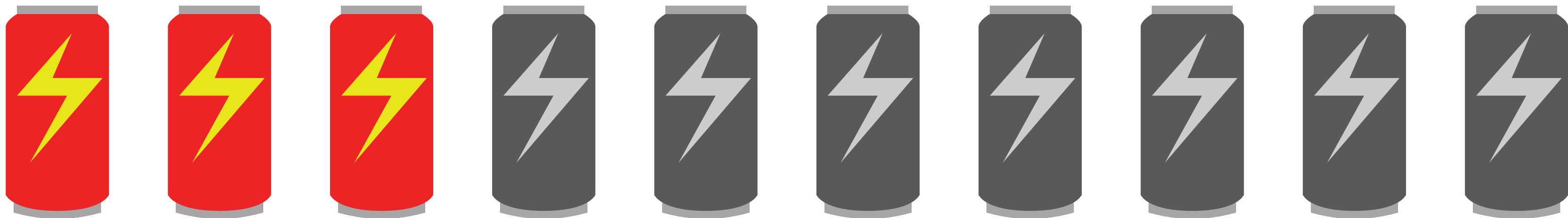


Statewide: 51%
General recommendations for fruit consumption by age suggest between 1.5-2.5 cups of fruit per day, dependent on sex.
Derived from: Yesterday, how many times did you eat fruit?

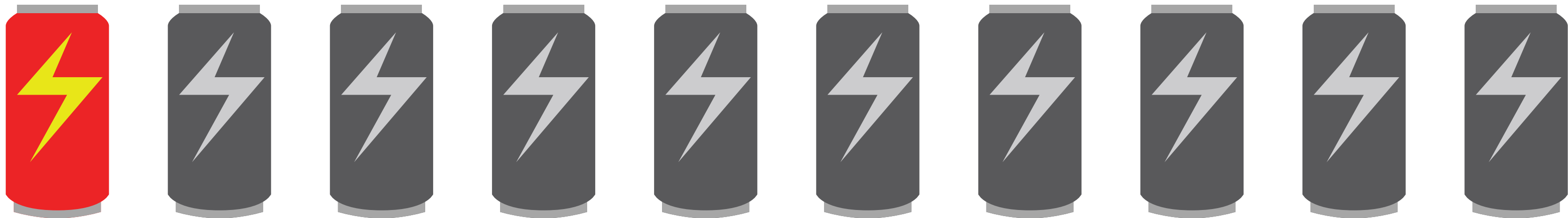


In the past 7 days, how many times did you drink a can, bottle, or glass of an energy drink?

Three in ten (33%) students reported consuming energy drinks in the past week.



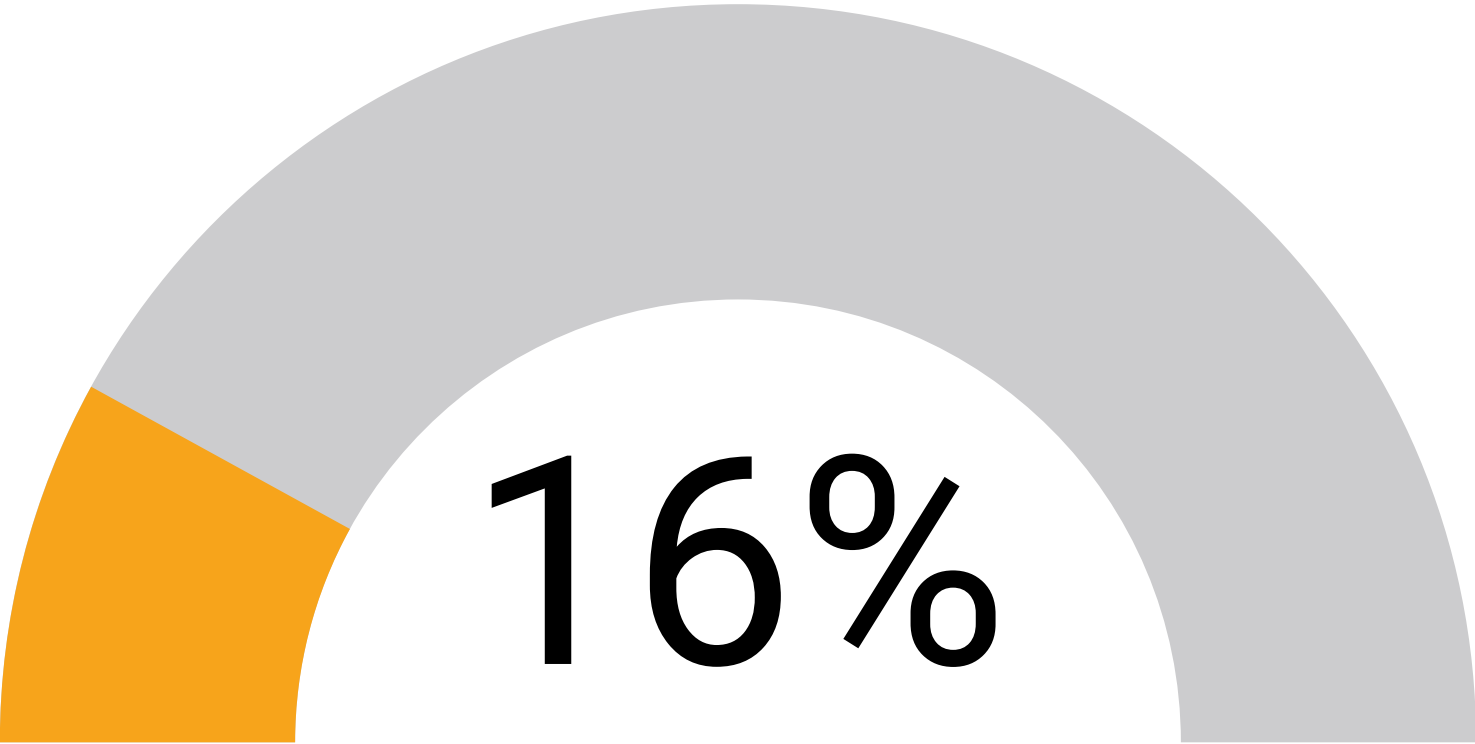
One in ten (10%) students reported consuming energy drinks **one or more times per day** in the past week.



Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question.



Nearly two in ten students reported going to bed hungry ‘sometimes’, ‘most of the time’, or ‘always’ in the past 30 days because there was not enough food in their home.

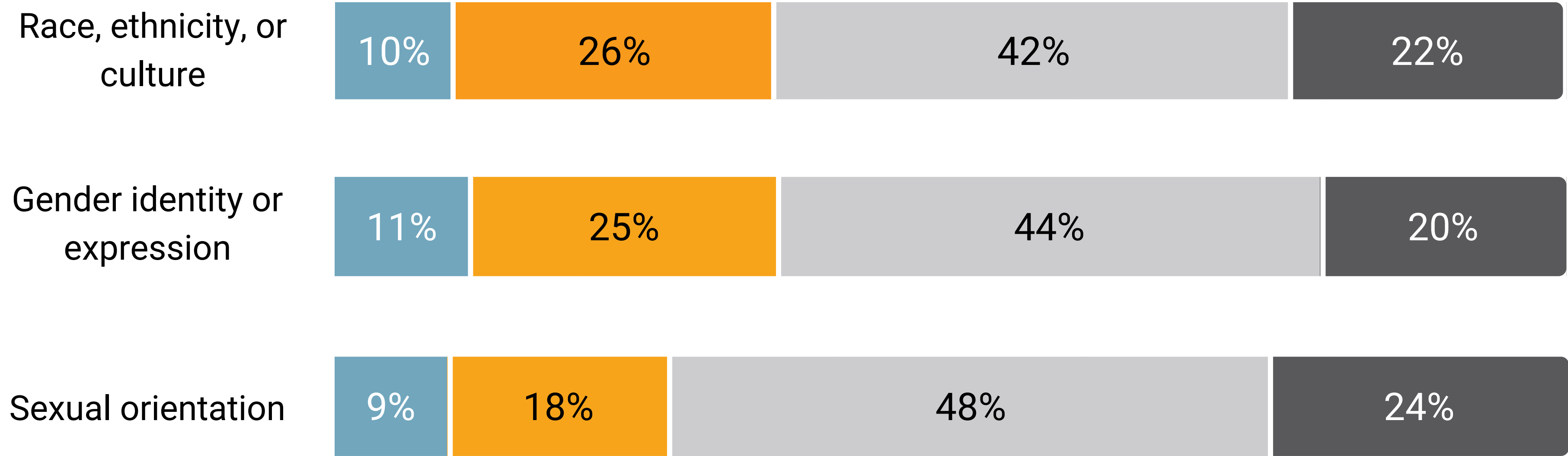


Belonging



**The next set of questions ask how you think students are generally treated at school.
How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school?
Students are treated differently due to their...**

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

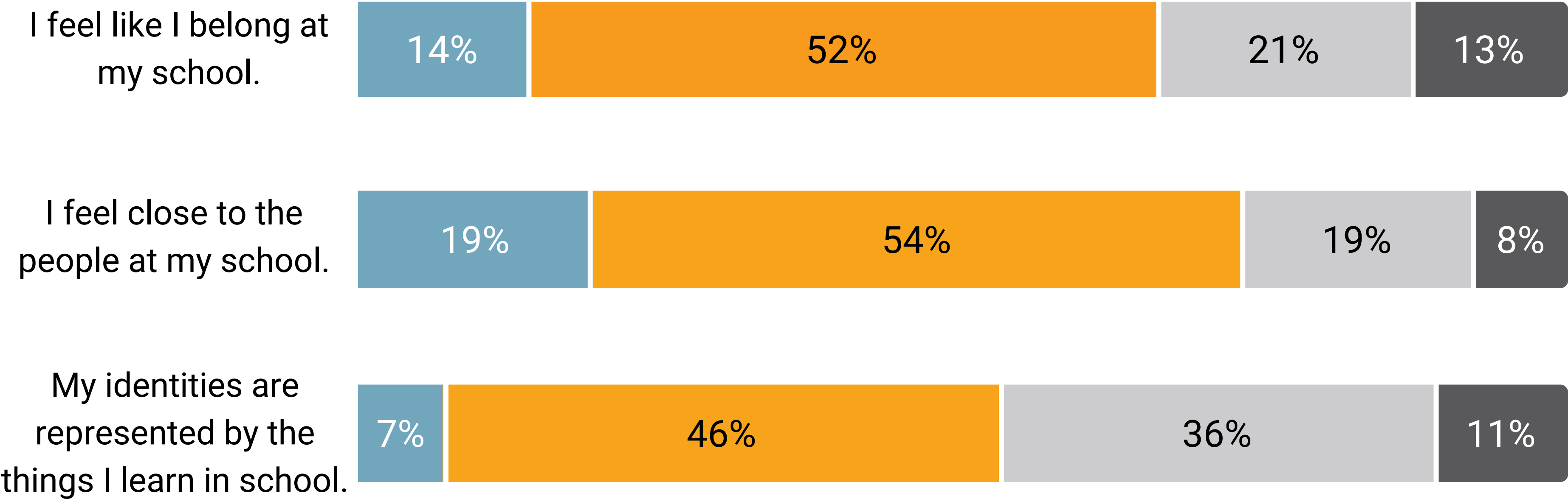


Note: No statewide comparison is available for these questions.



The next questions ask about feelings of belonging at school. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school?

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

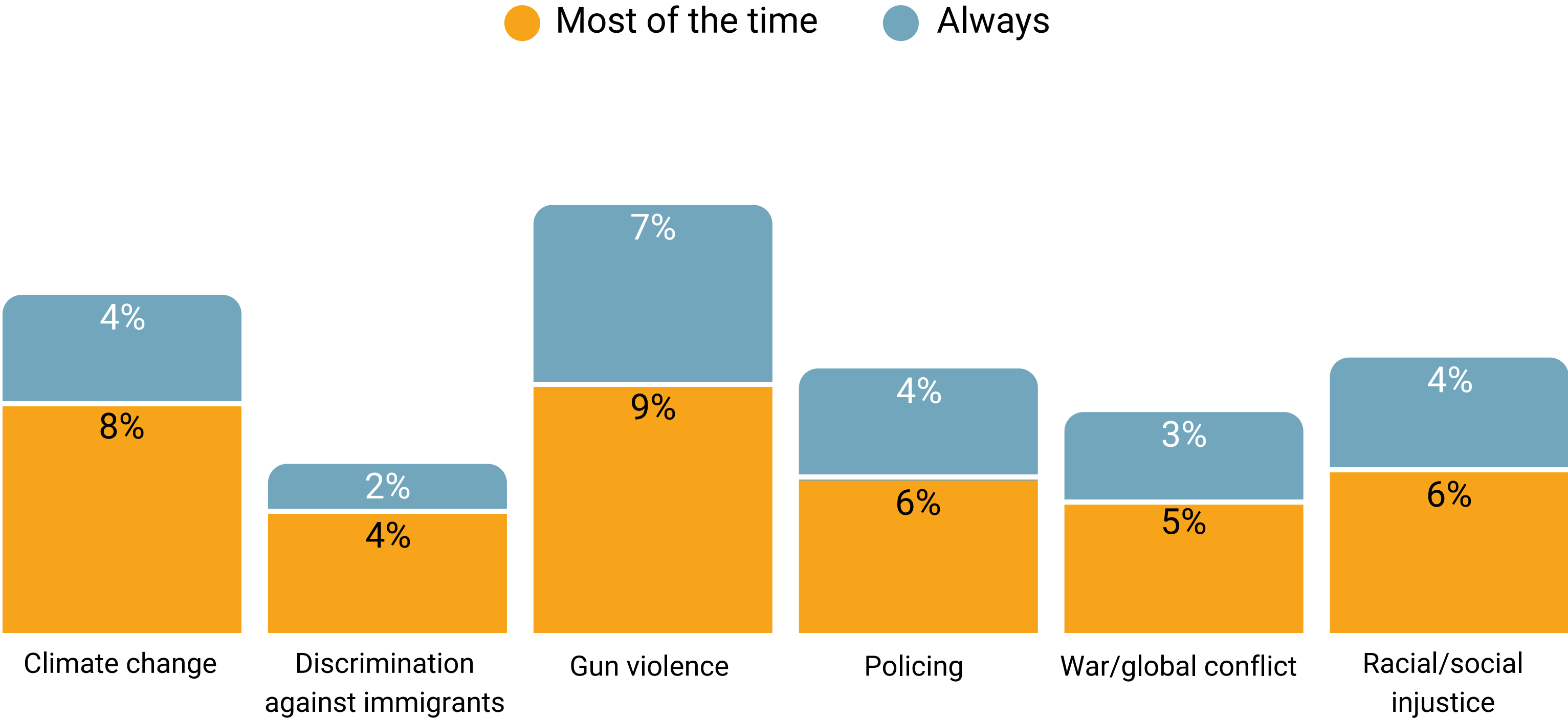


Note: No statewide comparison is available for these questions.

Mental health



During the past 12 months, how often were you so worried about each of the following issues that you could not sleep at night?

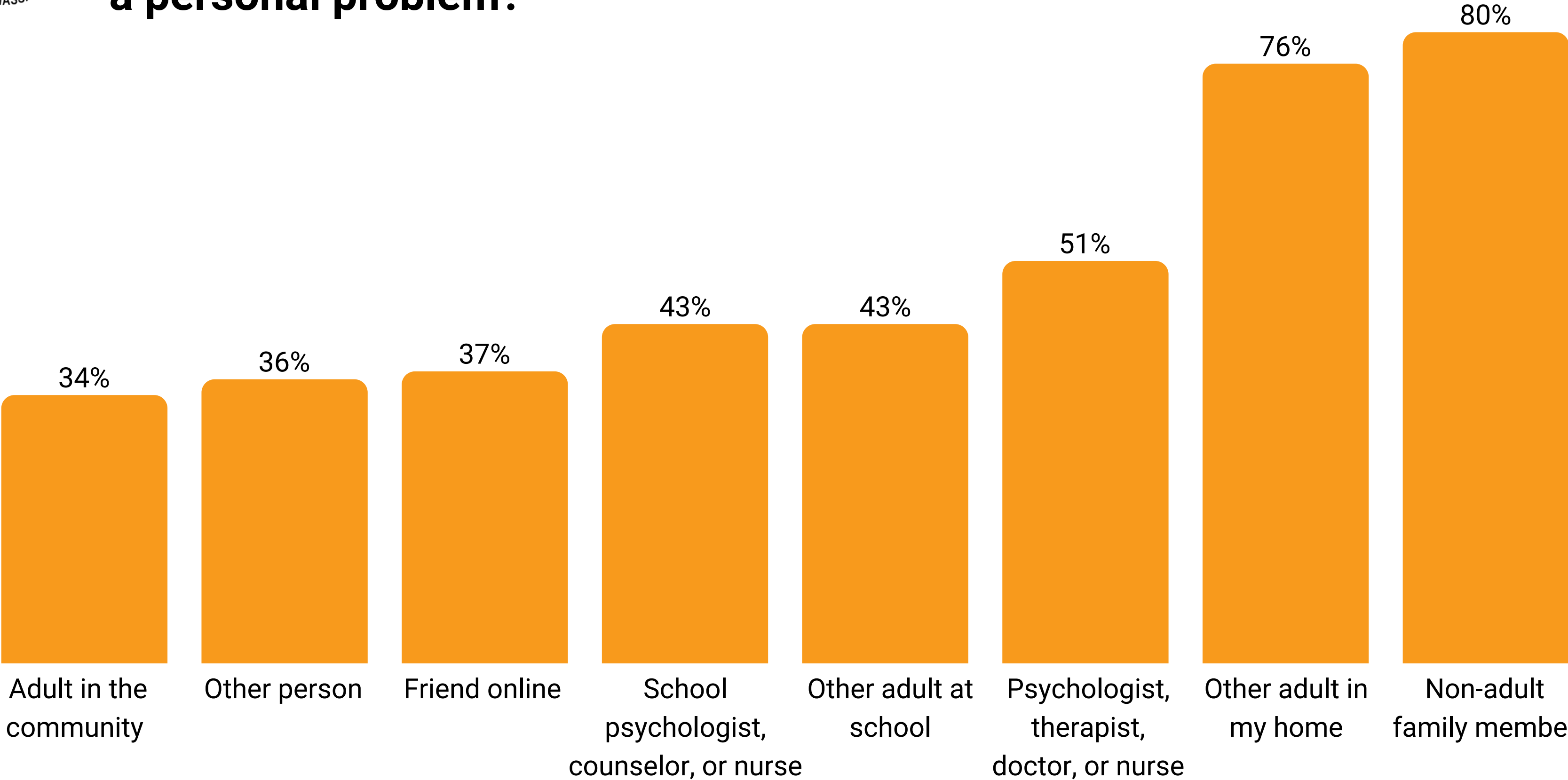


Note: In this question series, participants were also given an open response option. These write-in responses are not reflected here

Note: No statewide comparison is available for these questions.



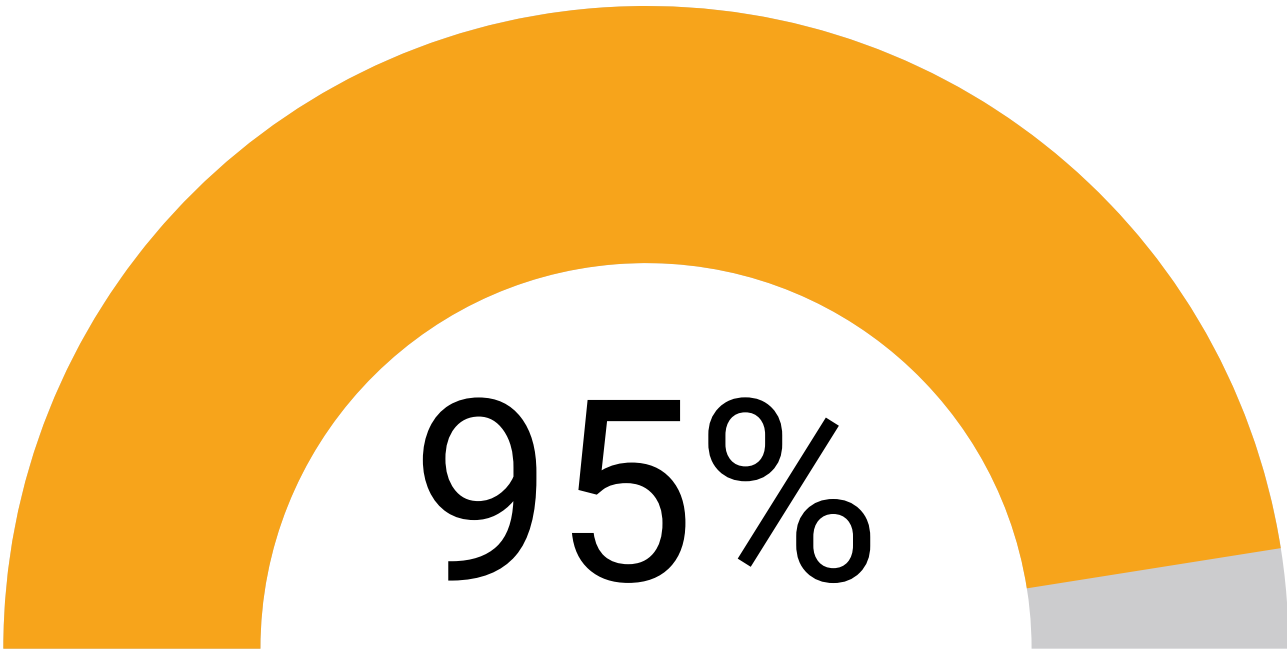
Do you feel like you could talk to the following people if you needed help with a personal problem?



Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question



Most students felt they had someone to turn to if they needed help.

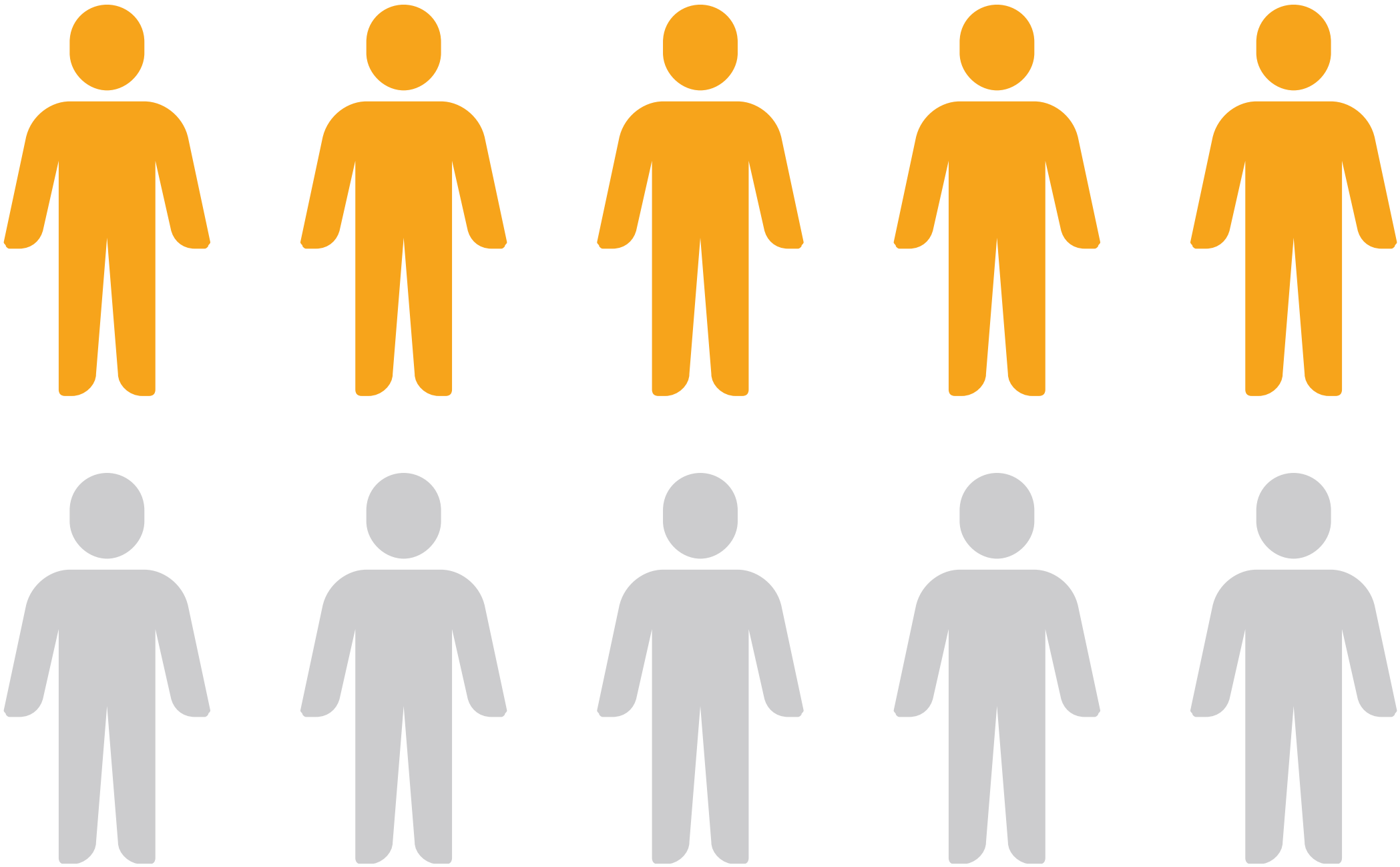


The percentage of students overall who feel like they have someone to talk to if they need help with a personal problem

Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question
Derived from: Do you feel like you could talk to the following people if you needed help with a personal problem?

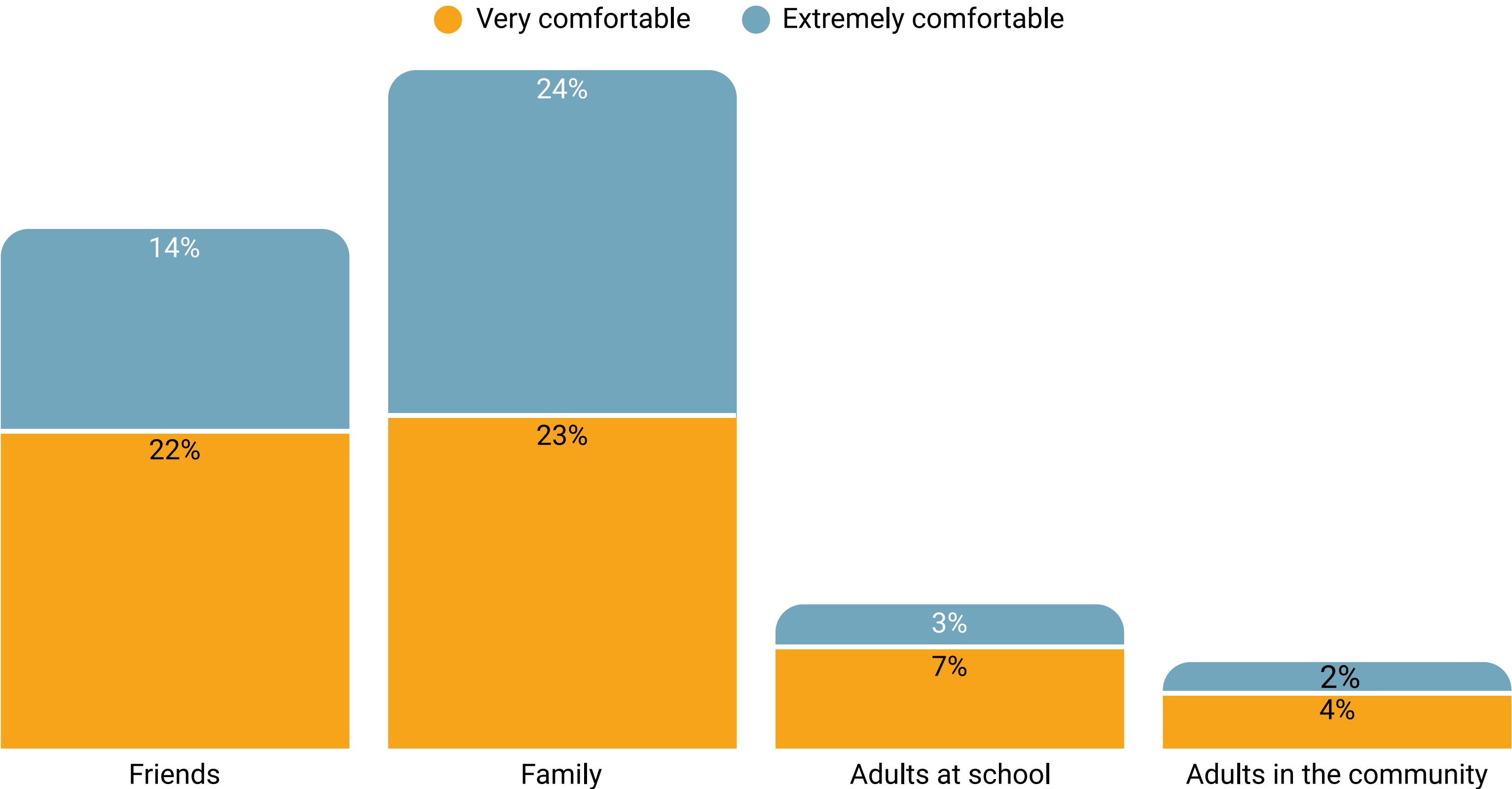


About half of students (53%) needed someone to talk to.





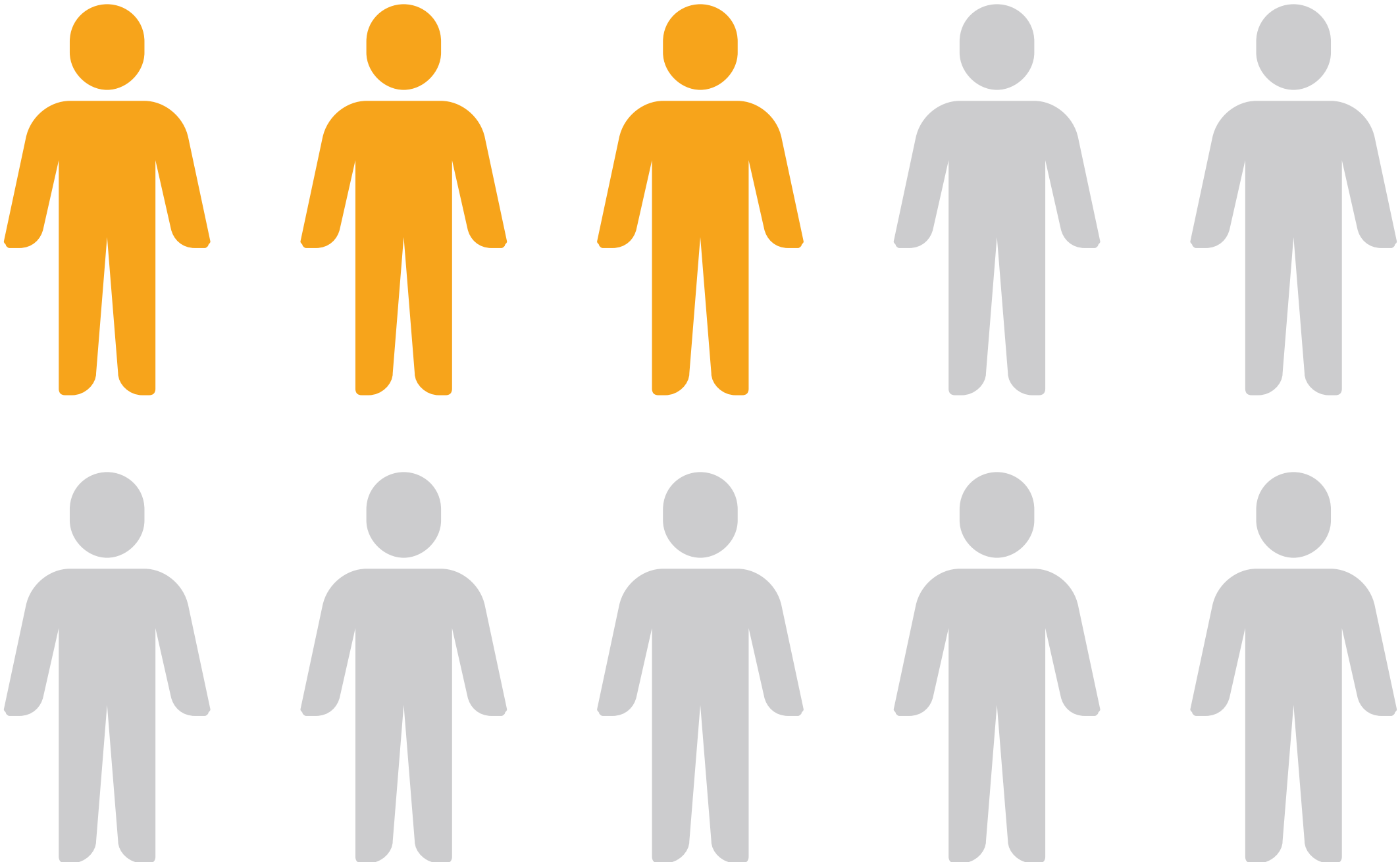
How comfortable would you be talking about your mental health and emotional wellbeing with each of the following?



Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question



Three in ten (30%) eighth graders reported feeling lonely “most of the time” or “always” in the past year.

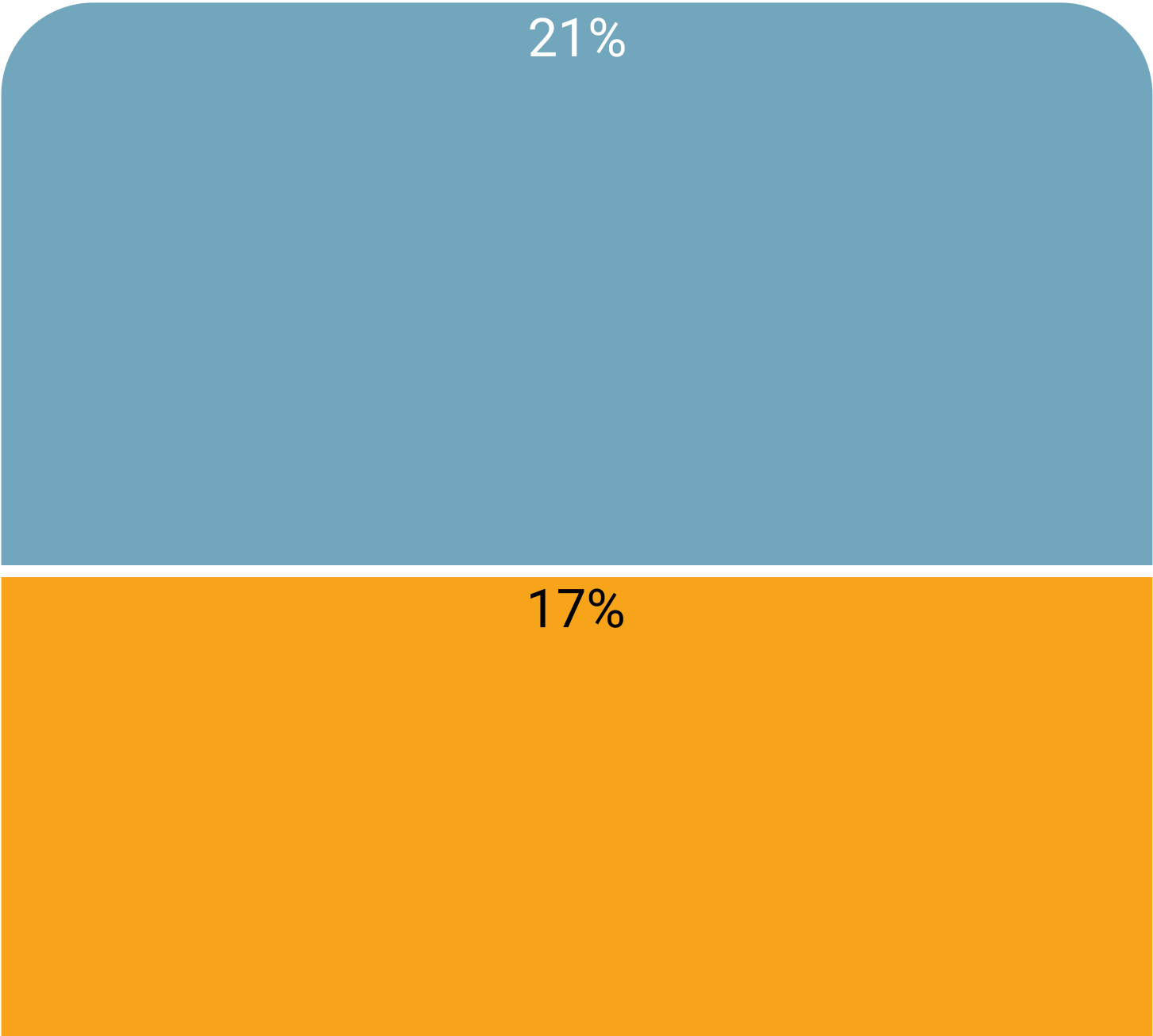


Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question
Derived from: During the past 12 months, how often did you feel lonely?

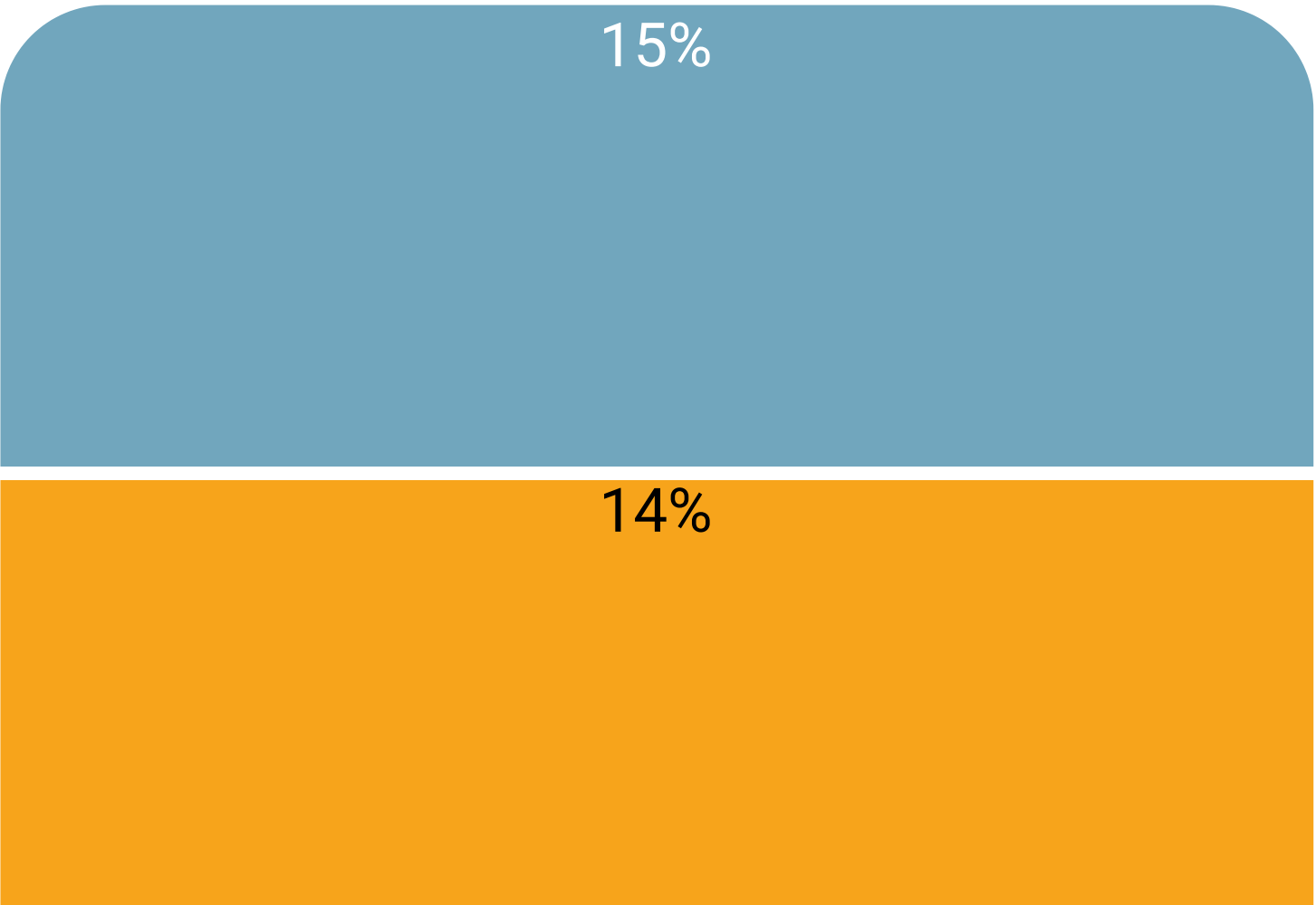


How often over the last 2 weeks, were you bothered by:

● More than half the days ● Nearly every day



Feeling anxious, nervous, or on edge

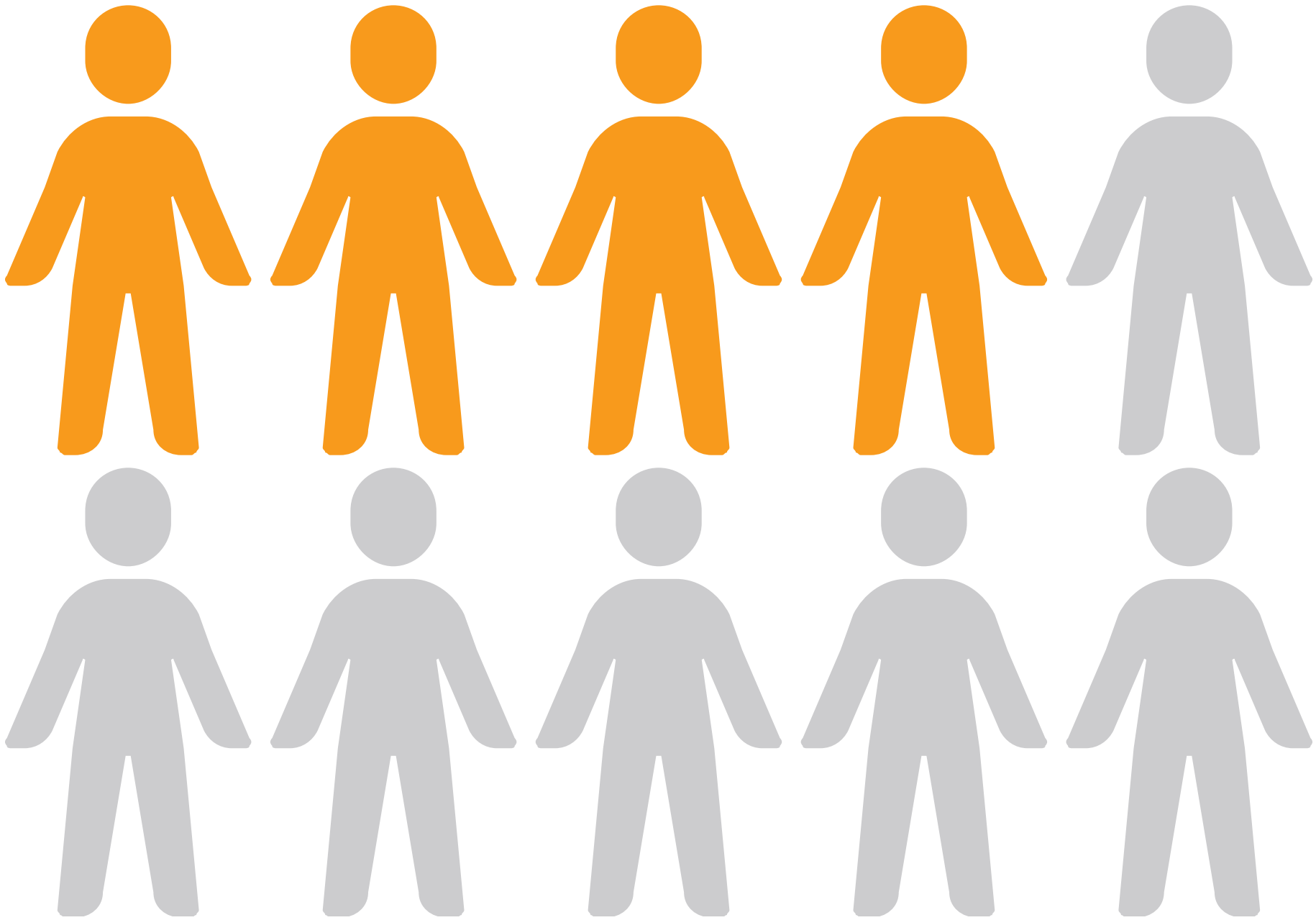


Not being able to stop or control worrying

Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question



Four out of ten (37%) students reported feeling so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more that they stopped doing some usual activities.*



Statewide: 28%

*Note: Students who answered “yes” to this question may benefit from a more in-depth evaluation for major depressive disorder

Derived from: During the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities?



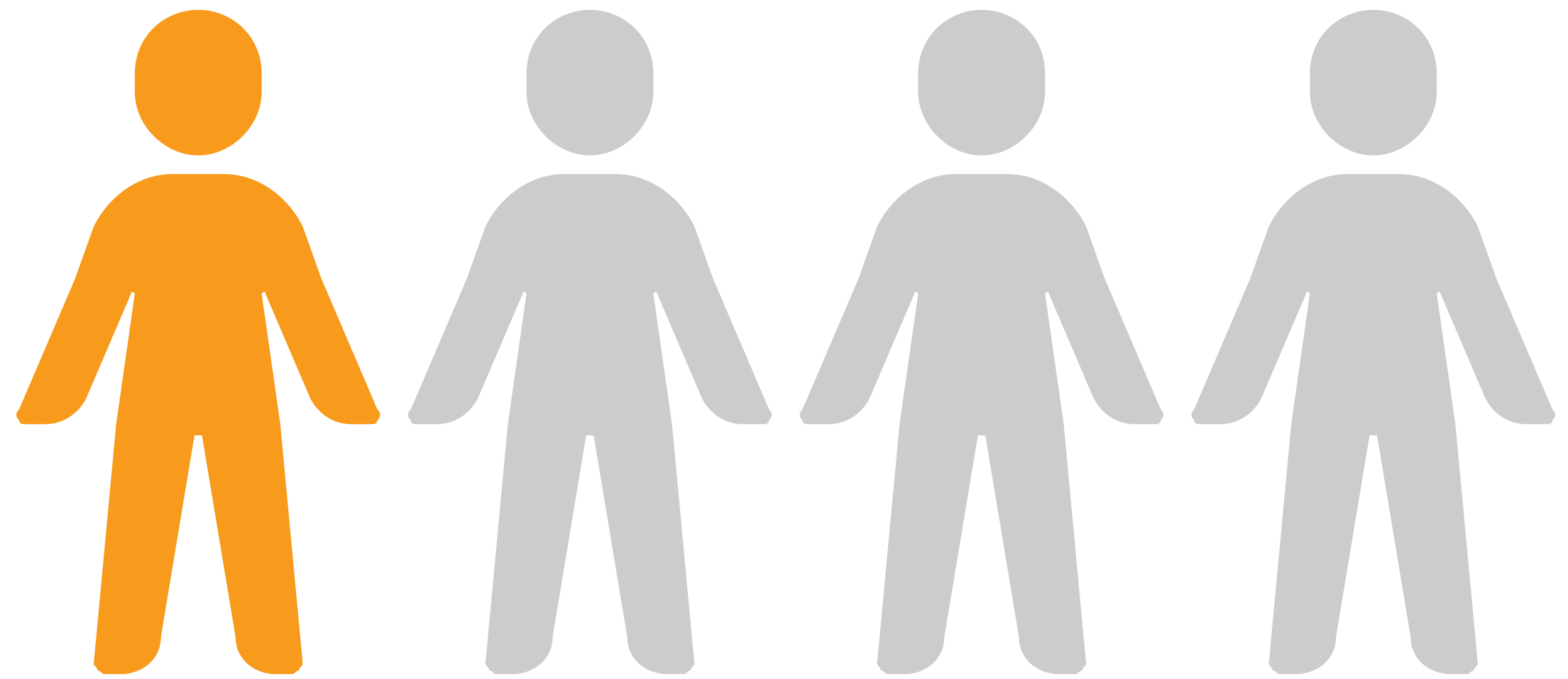
Seven out of ten (68%) students “strongly agree” or “agree” that they tend to bounce back and recover quickly after hard or stressful times.



Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question
Derived from: Rank your agreement with the following statement. ‘I tend to bounce back or recover quickly after hard or stressful times.’



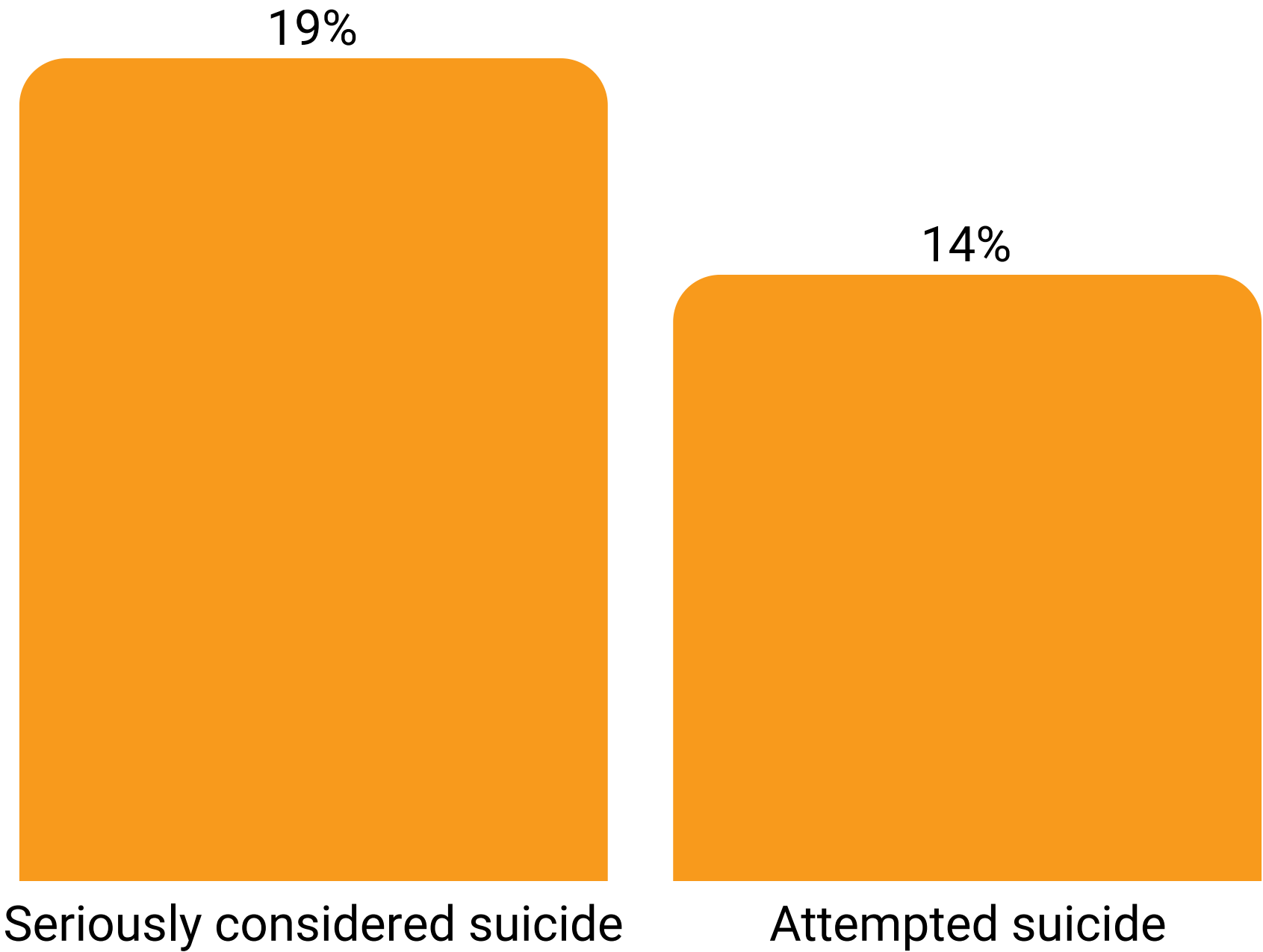
One in four (27%) students reported self-harm in the past 12 months.





During the past 12 months, did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide?

Nearly two in ten (19%) participants reported seriously considering suicide in the past twelve months, while 14% reported attempting suicide.



Statewide: 12% reported seriously considering suicide in the past twelve months; 9% reported attempting suicide in the past 12 months.
“Attempted suicide” derived from: If yes, how many times did you actually attempt suicide?



Three in ten (28%) students who reported attempting suicide in the past 12 months reported an injury, poisoning, or overdose that had to be treated by a doctor or nurse.



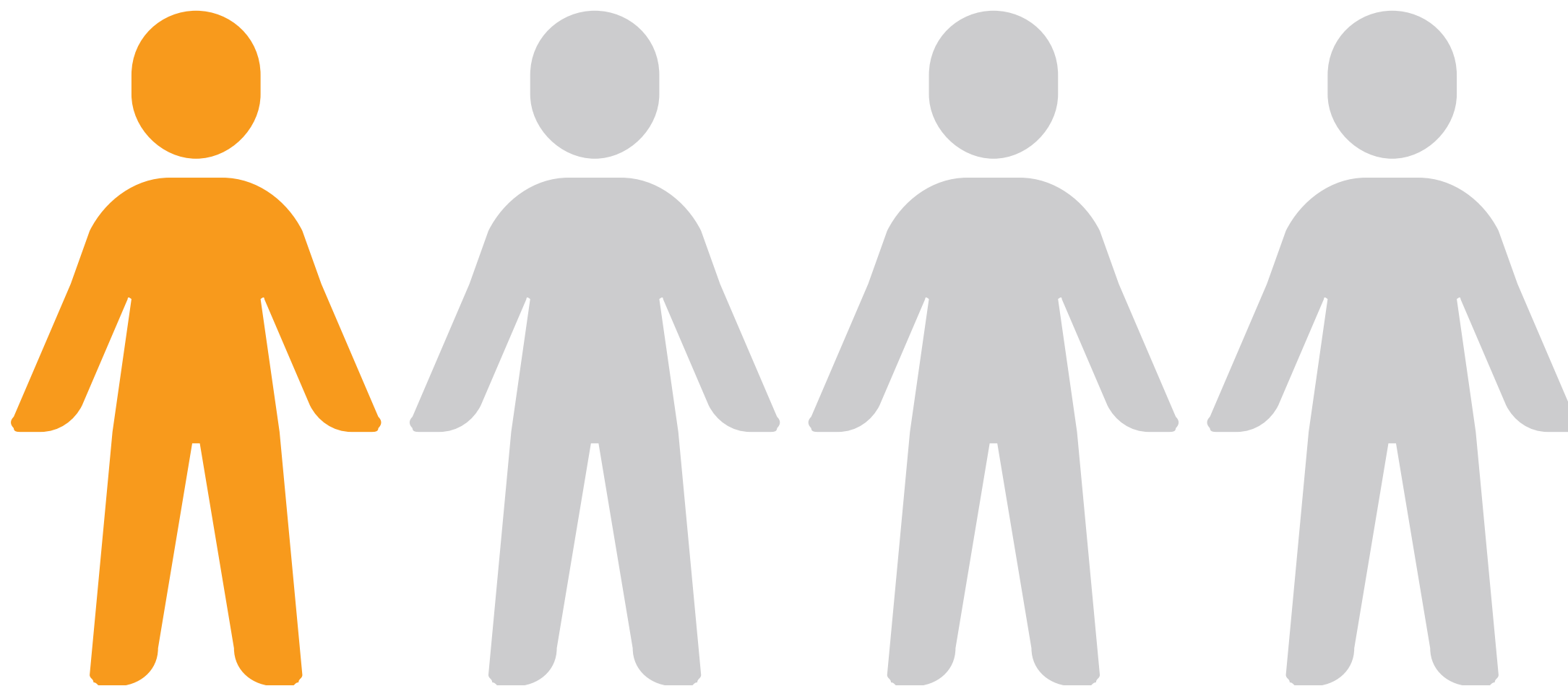
Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question

Derived from: If you attempted suicide during the past 12 months, did any attempt result in an injury, poisoning, or overdose that had to be treated by a doctor or nurse?



Findings from the 2024 Springfield Youth Health Survey of Eighth Graders

One in four (26%) students experienced bullying at or on the way to school in the past 12 months.



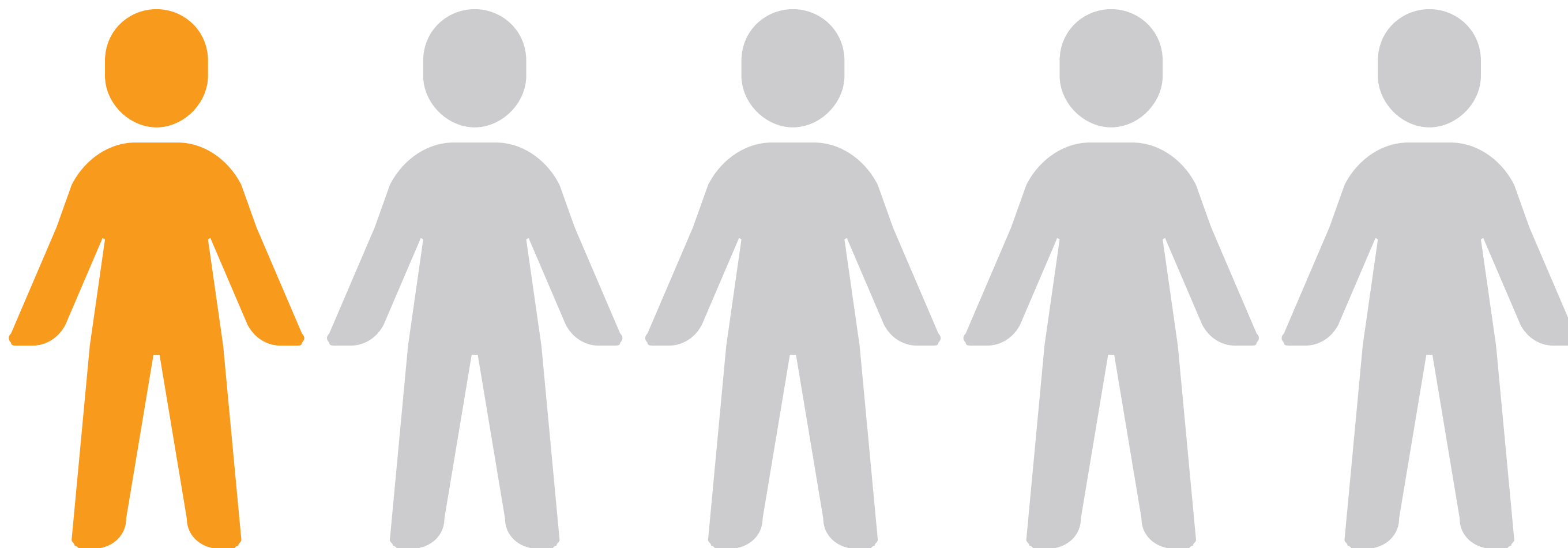
Statewide, 37% of students reported having been bullied at school one or more times.

Note: These questions are not asked in the same way at the state level as in our survey.

Derived from: During the past 12 months, have you ever been bullied at school or on your way to or from school?



One in five (18%) students have experienced bullying electronically (texting, online gaming, or social media) in the last twelve months.



Statewide, one in five (18%) have experienced cyberbullying in the past twelve months.

Note: These questions are not asked in the same way at the state level as in our survey.

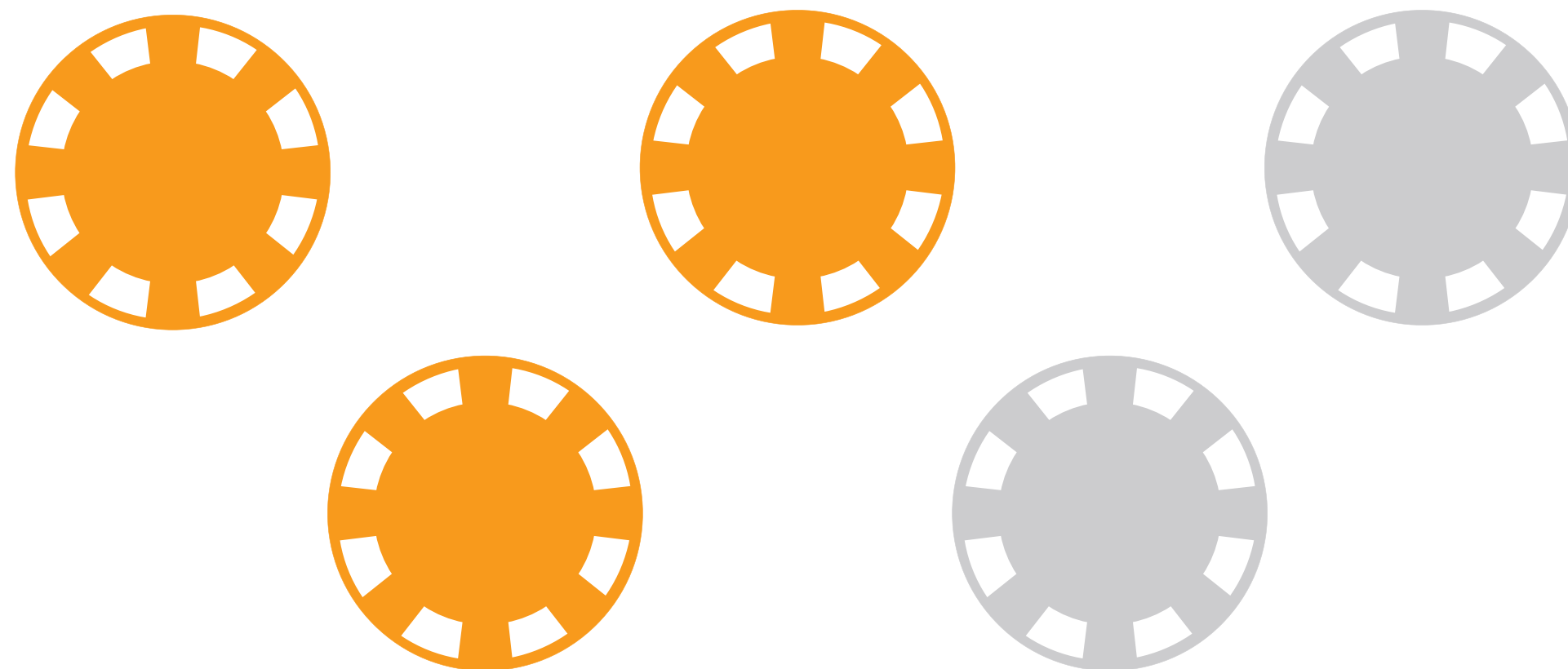
Derived from: During the past 12 months, have you ever been electronically bullied? Count being bullied through texting, online gaming, Instagram, Facebook, or other social media.

Gambling



Findings from the 2024 Springfield Youth Health Survey of Eighth Graders

Nearly three out of every five eighth graders (58%) have gambled* in the past year.



Derived from “In the past 12 months, how often have you...[type of gambling]?”

Gambling includes: purchasing lottery tickets, betting on sports (in person or online), playing or betting on fantasy sports, playing card games for money, betting money on games of skill, playing gambling-type games online without using money, gambling online, betting money on horse races, playing bingo for money, or playing slot machines/table games

Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question



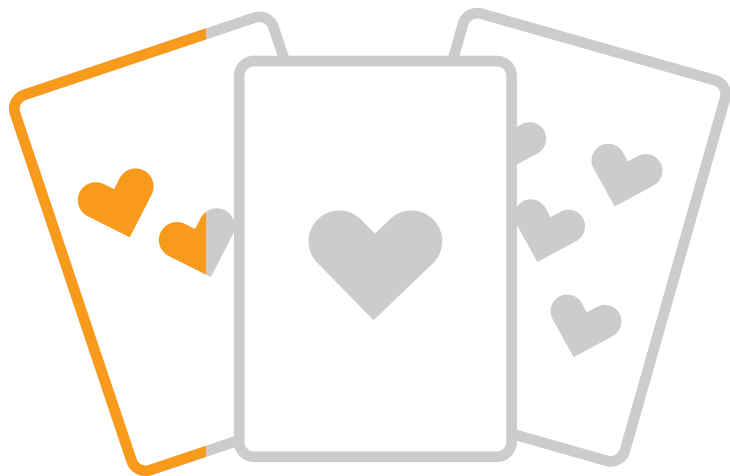
Most common forms of gambling



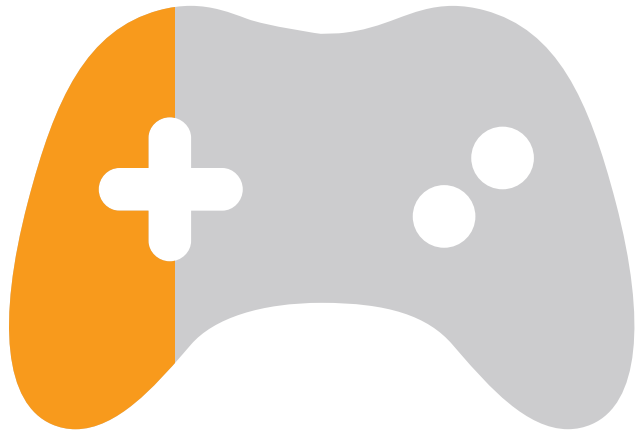
Opening **loot boxes** in video games (31%)



Any **sports gambling** (28%)



Playing **card games for money** with friends or family (25%)



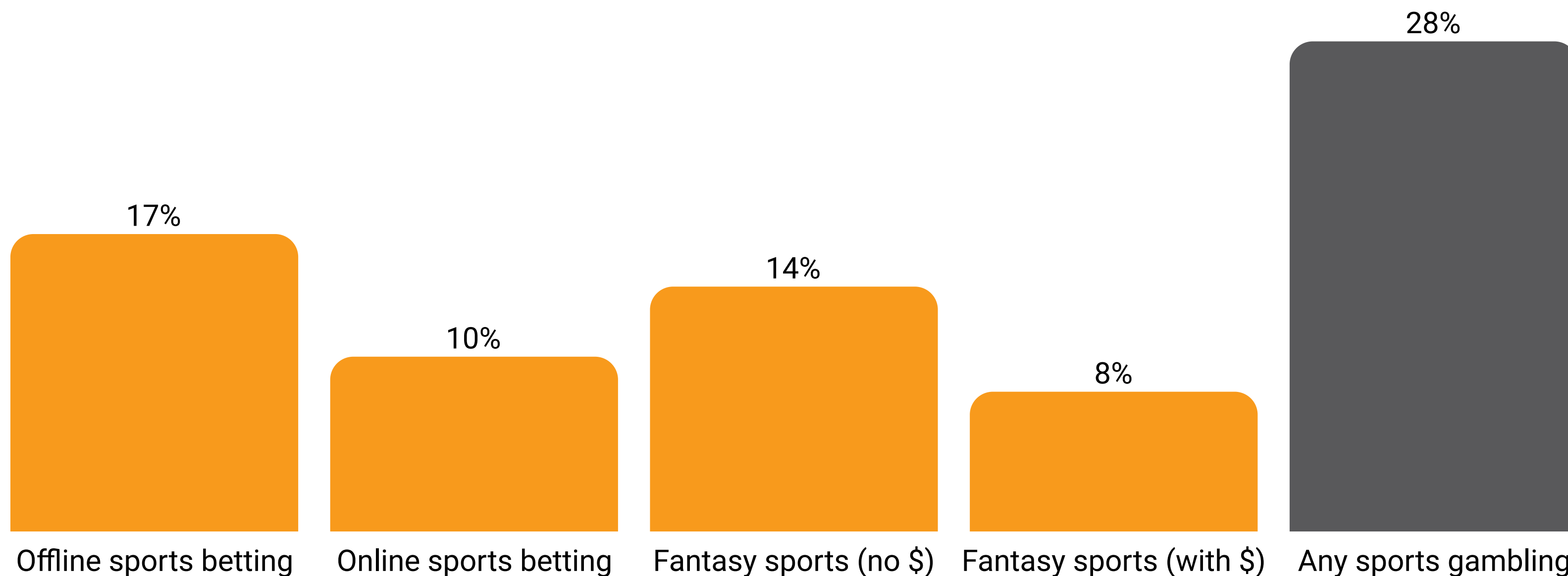
Games of skill such as **pool** or **video games** (21%)

Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question
Derived from “In the past 12 months, how often have you...[type of gambling]?”
Gambling includes: purchasing lottery tickets, betting on sports (in person or online), playing or betting on fantasy sports, playing card games for money, betting money on games of skill, playing gambling-type games online without using money, gambling online, betting money on horse races, playing bingo for money, or playing slot machines/table games



Sports gambling, 2024

The percent of students who reported engaging in the following gambling behaviors in the past year:

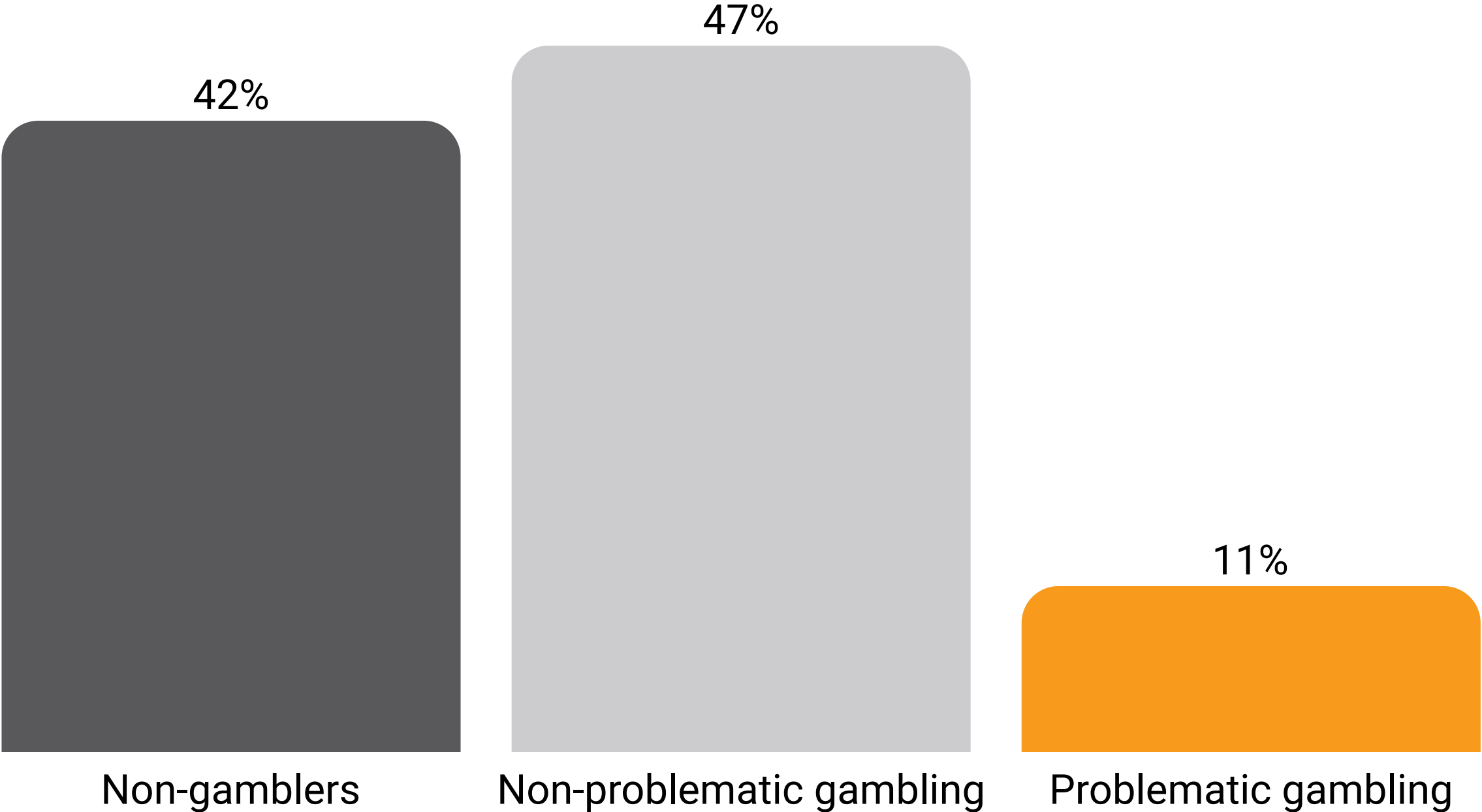


Omitted "Don't know" responses

Note: Previous to 2024, sports betting was captured in one question; this is the first time sports betting has been broken out with specificity



1 in 10 students (11%) screened positive for problem gambling behavior as assessed by the NLCLiP screening questionnaire.*



*The [NLCLiP](#) is a 3-part screening questionnaire used to assess for problematic gambling. Students were considered gamblers if they reported any gambling behavior in the past 12 months (purchasing lottery tickets, betting on sports (in person or online), playing or betting on fantasy sports, playing card games for money, betting money on games of skill, playing gambling-type games online without using money, gambling online, betting money on horse races, playing bingo for money, or playing slot machines/table games).

Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question

Sexual activity



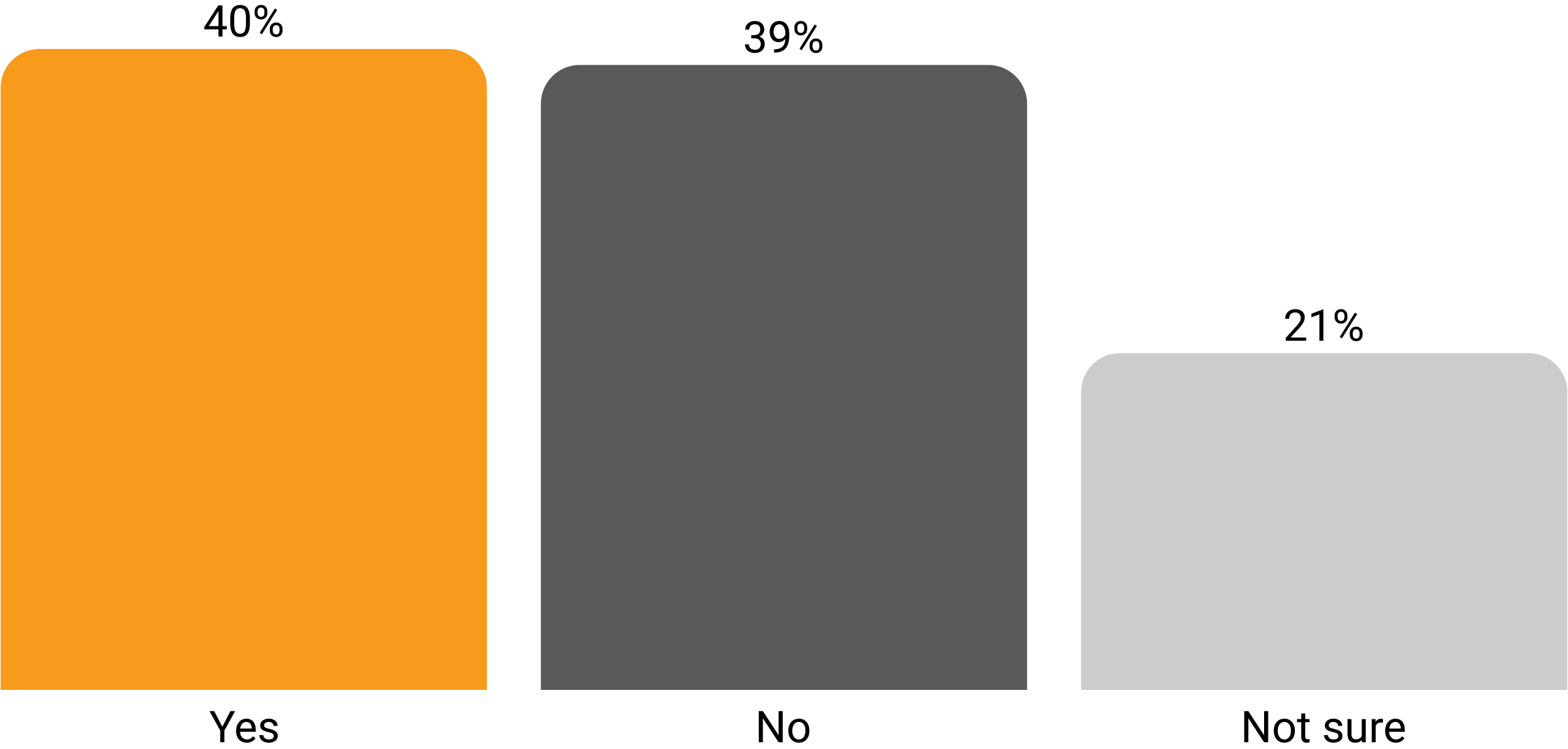
Nine out of ten participants (89%) reported that they have never had sex.



Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question
Derived from “How old were you when you had sex for the first time? (If you have never had sex, select “I have never had sex”).”



Have your parents, guardians, or other adults in your family ever talked to you about what they expect you to do or not to do when it comes to sex?

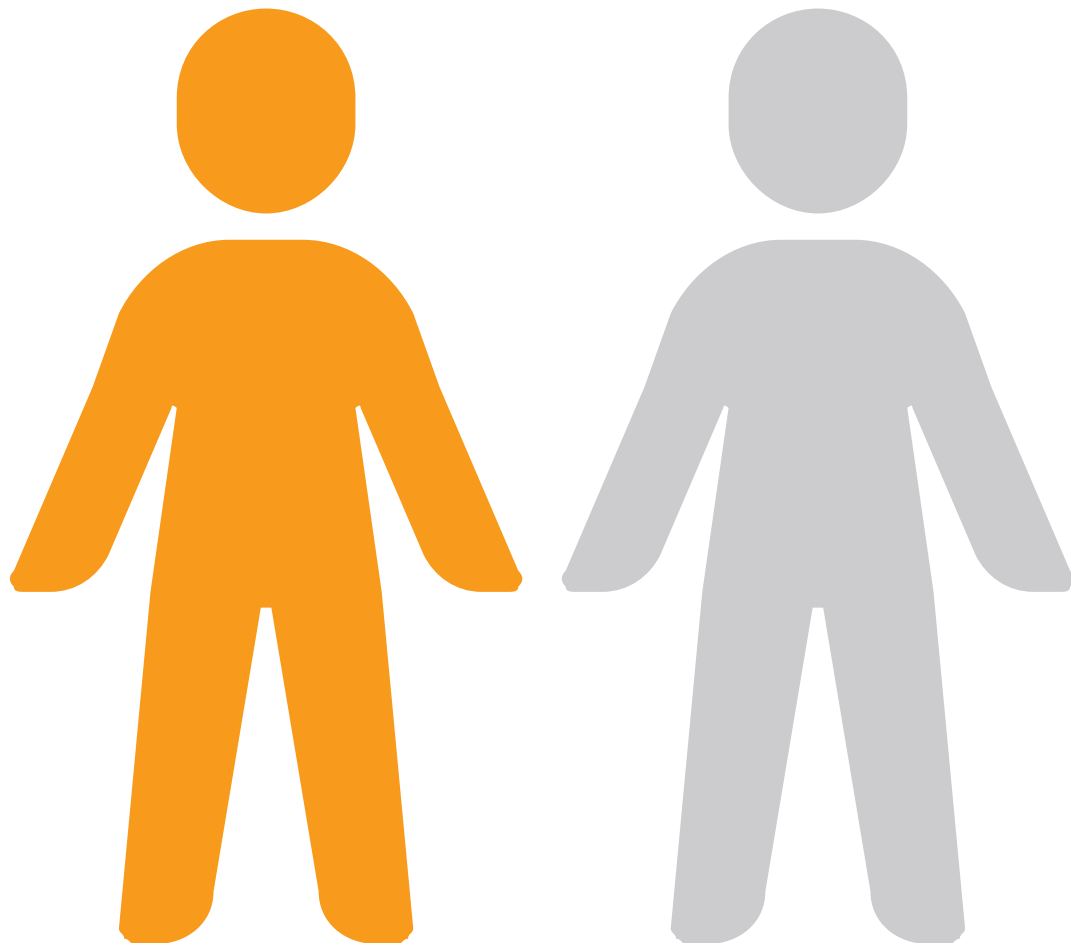


Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question



Have you dated or gone out with anyone during the past 12 months?

Half of students (50%) reported dating or going out with someone in the past twelve months.

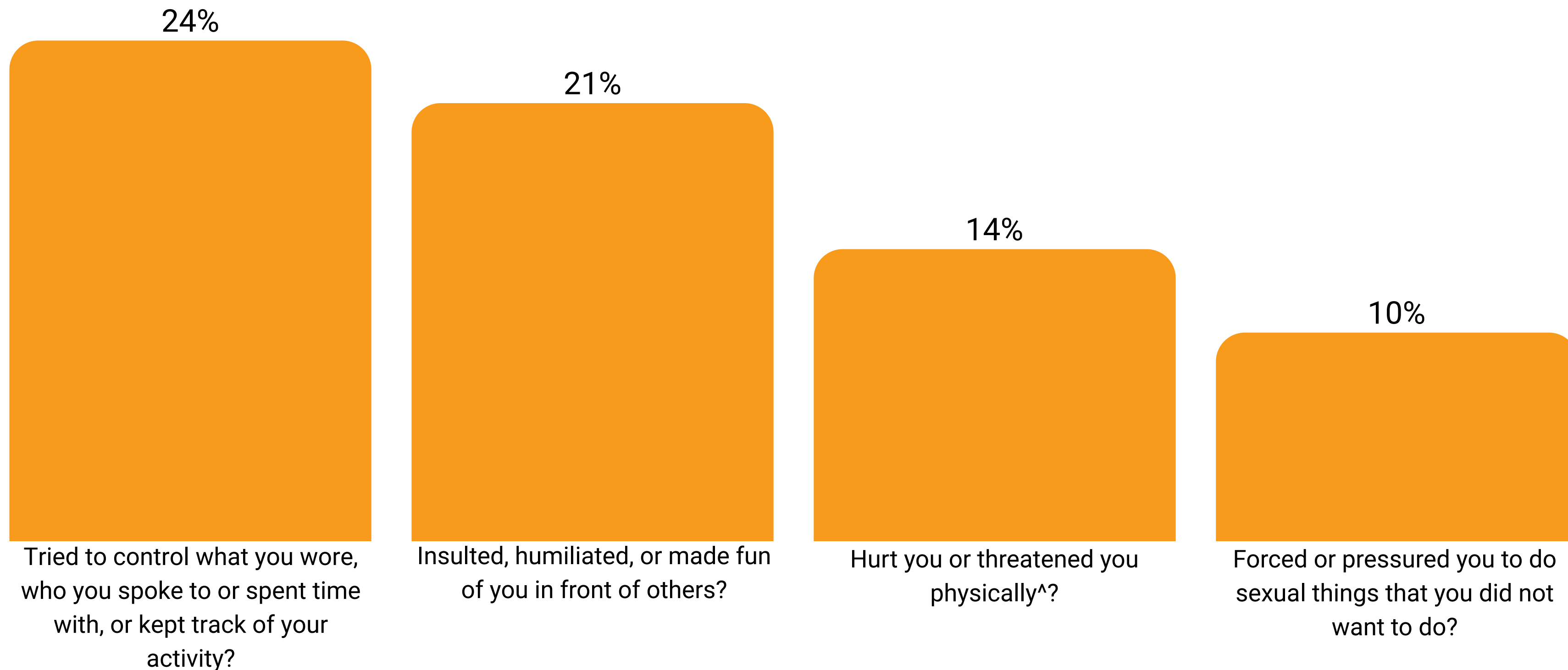


Sexual violence



Findings from the 2024 Springfield Youth Health Survey of Eighth Graders

In the past 12 months, has someone you were dating or going out with* ever...



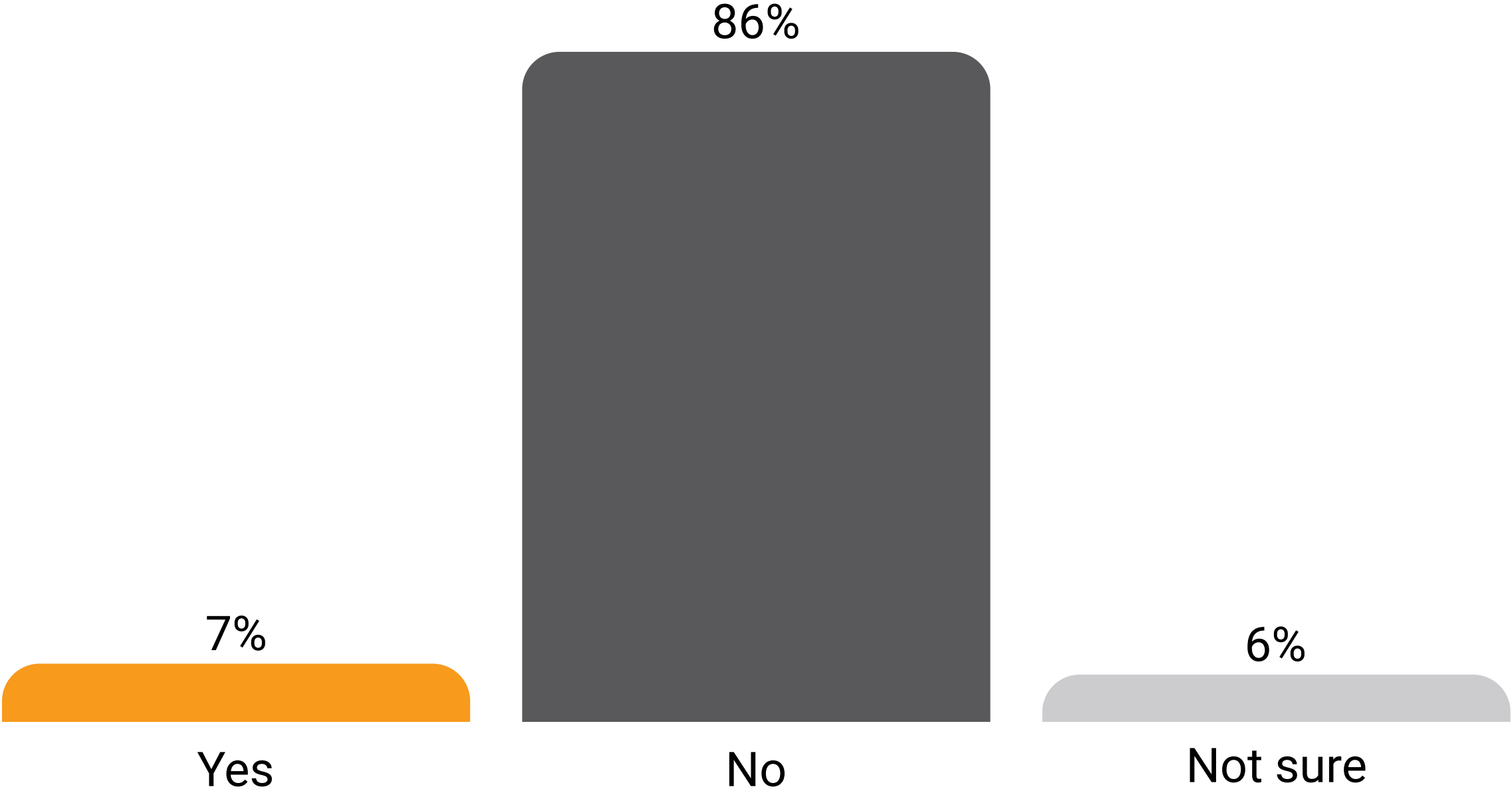
* These questions were asked of students who reported having dated or gone out with anyone in the past 12 months

Note: no statewide comparison is available for this question

^Full text: Slapped, pushed, shook, punched, kicked, beat you with an object, choked, burned you intentionally, threw something at you to hurt you, or used or threatened you with any sharp object or weapon? 49



Have you ever been physically forced, pressured, or coerced to have sex or engage in other sexual activities when you did not want to?

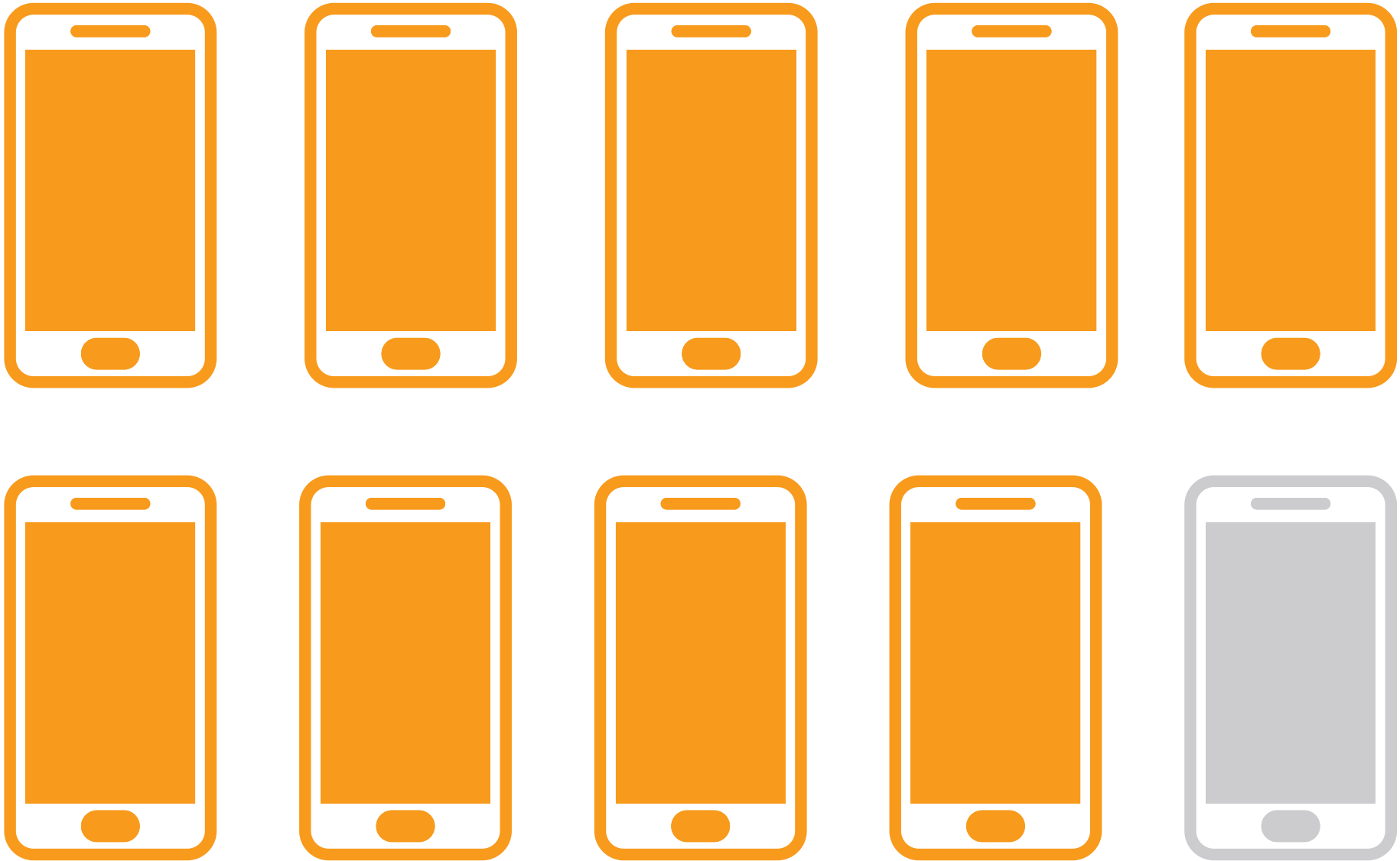


Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question

Social media and news



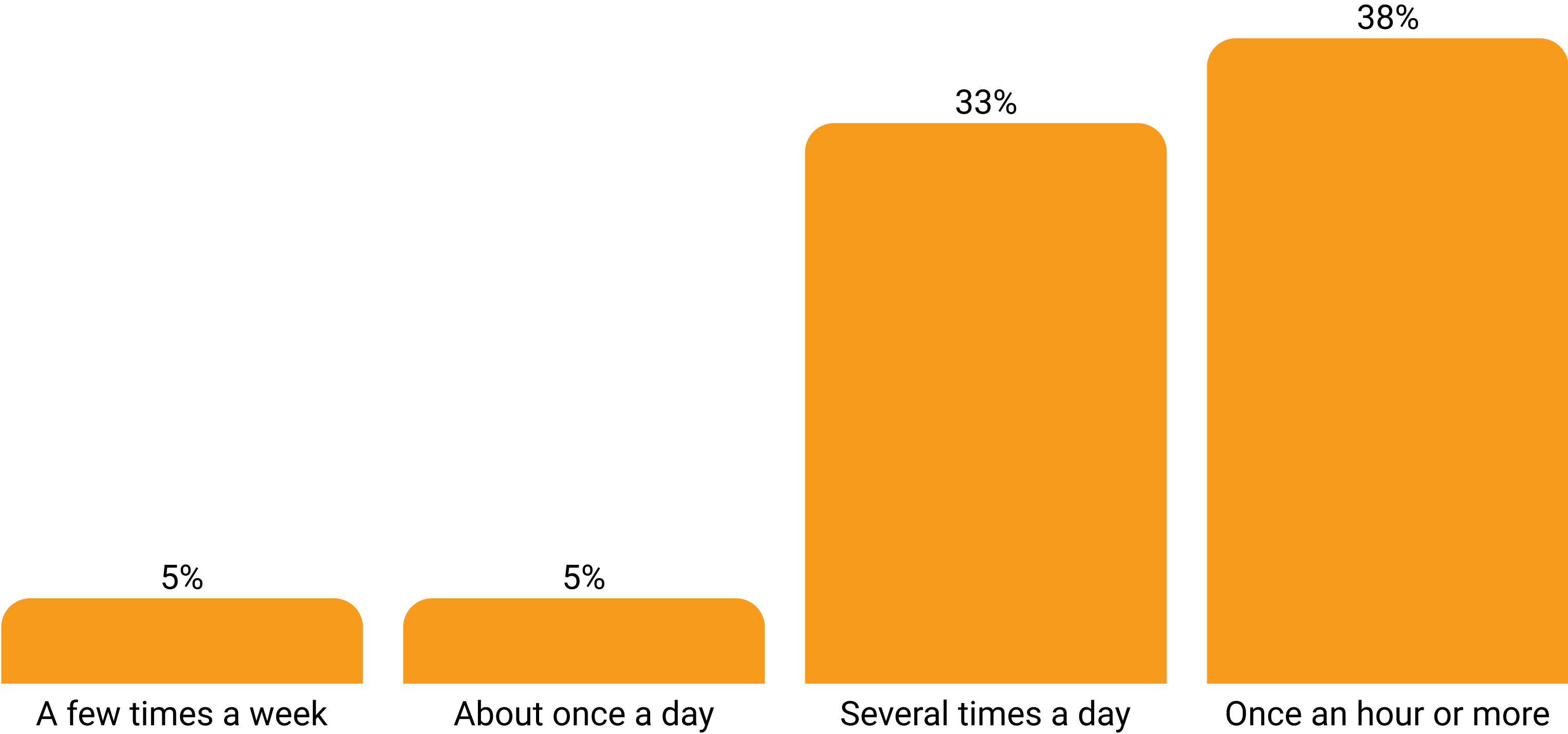
Nine out of ten (88%) of participants reported using social media.



Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question
Derived from “How often do you use social media such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and Tiktok?”



How often do you use social media such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and Tiktok?



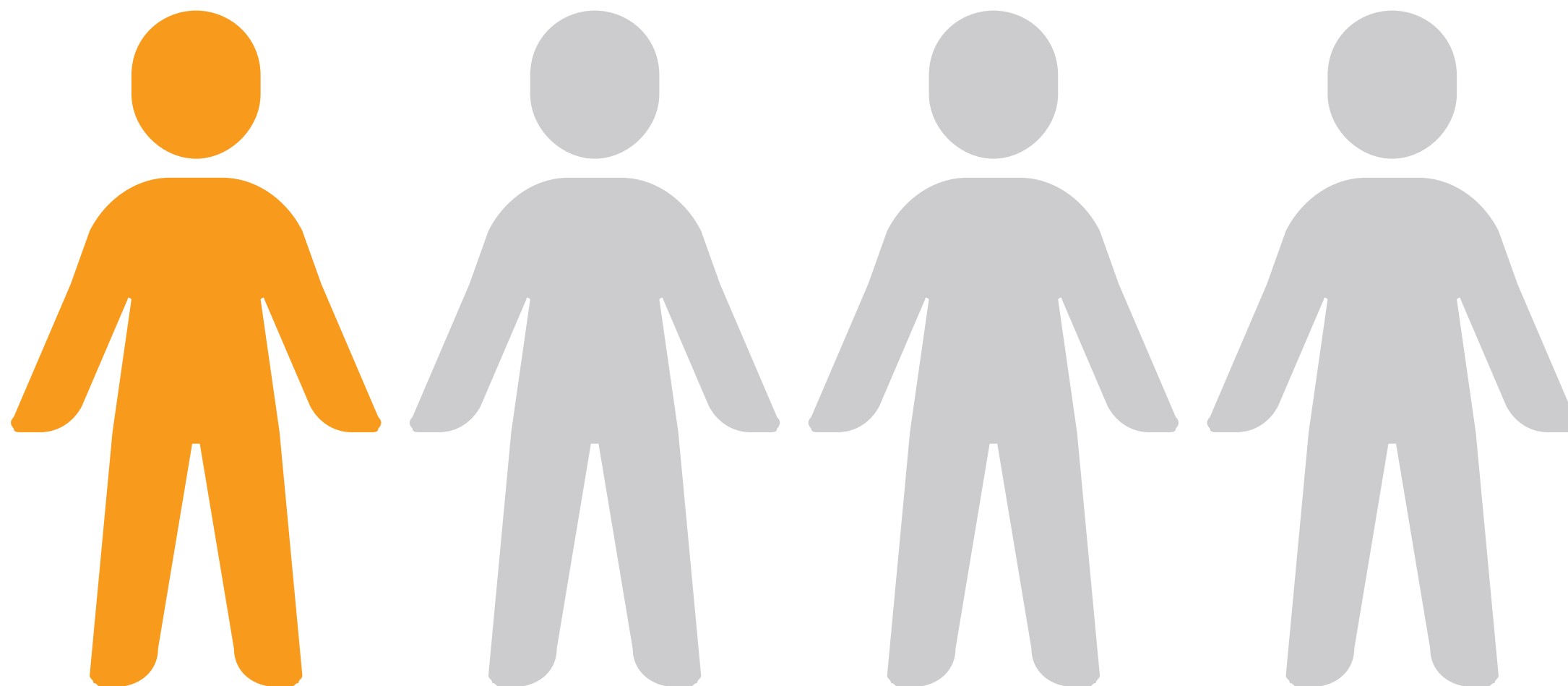
Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question



Findings from the 2024 Springfield Youth Health Survey of Eighth Graders

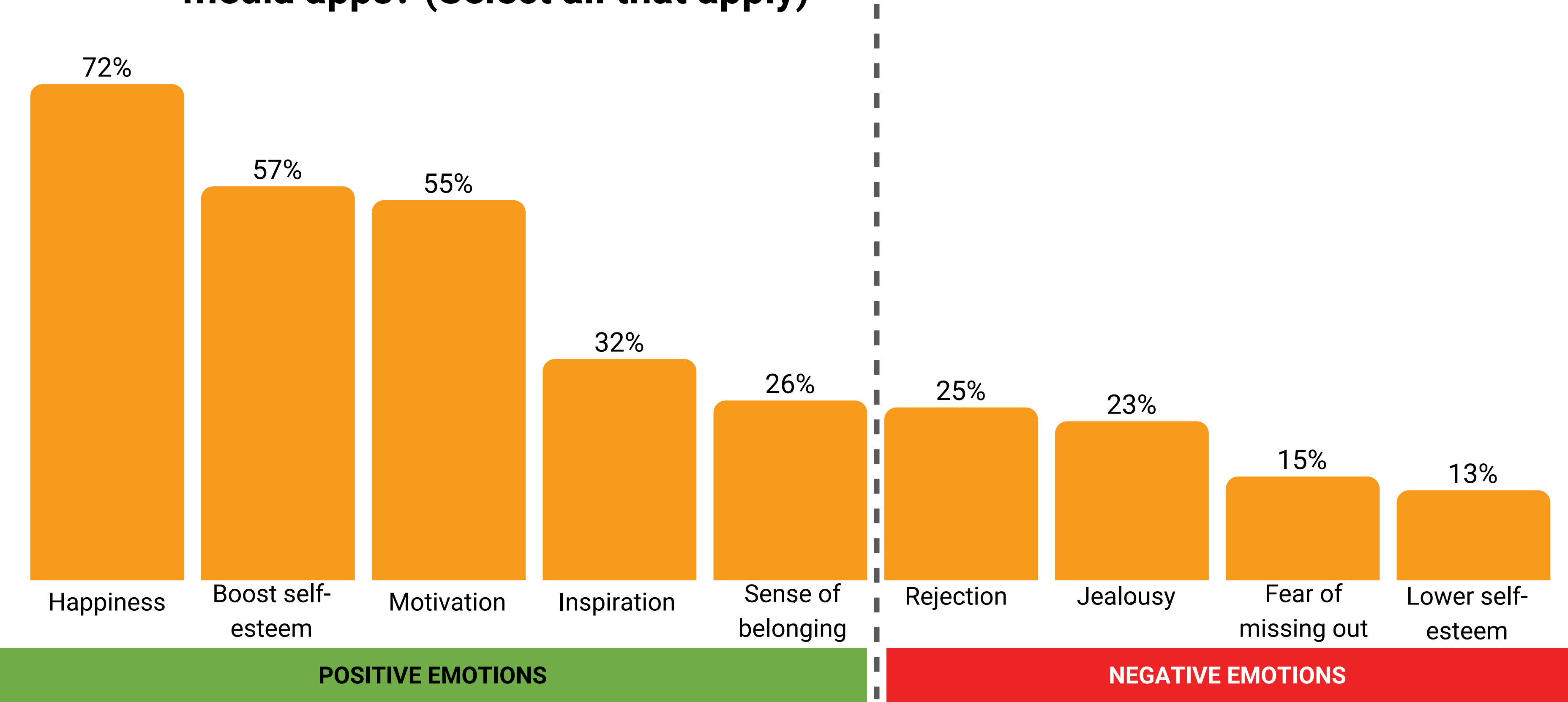
Have you ever found yourself in a risky/unwanted situation because of information you shared electronically?

One in four (26%) participants reported finding themselves in a risky or unwanted situation because of information they shared electronically.





What emotions do you experience when using social networking/social media apps? (Select all that apply)

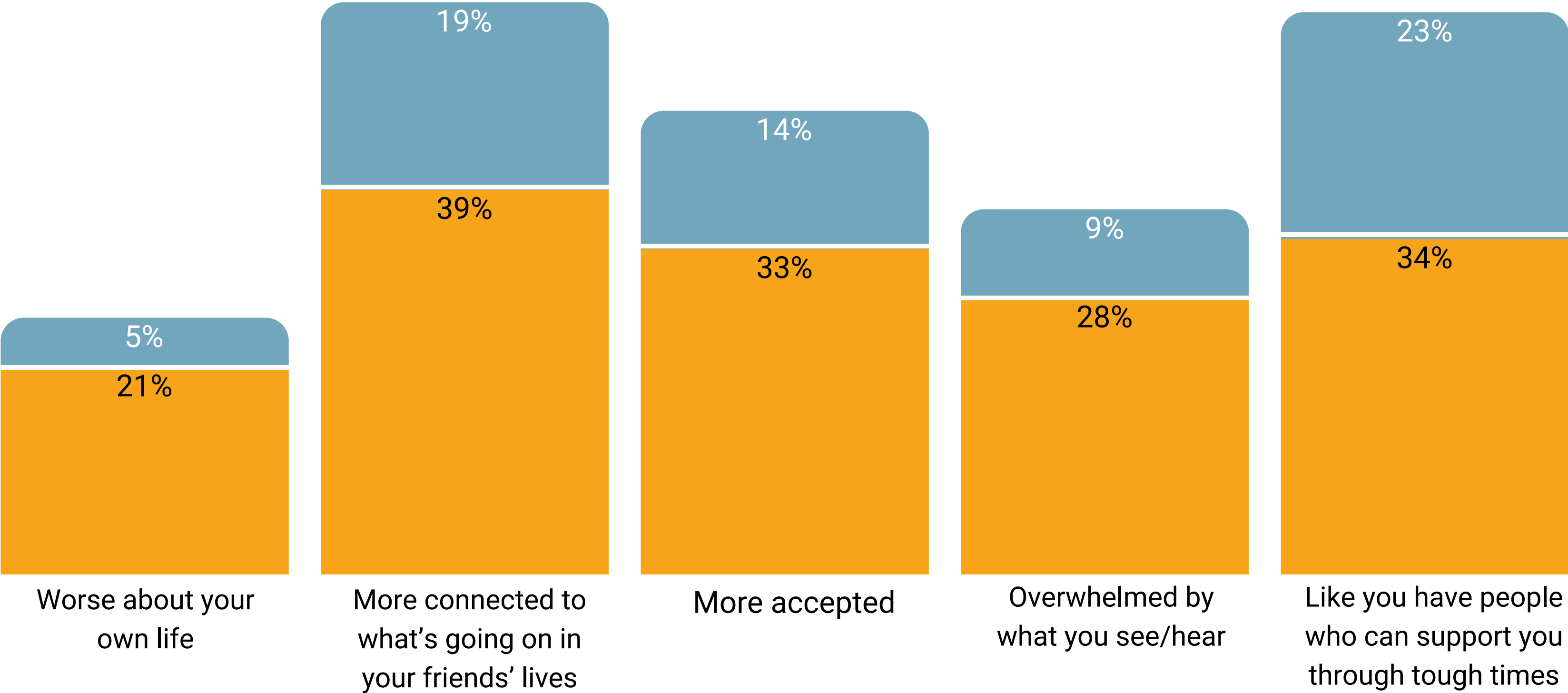


Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question
Note: These percentages do not add up to 100 because students were able to select more than one option.



In general, does what you see on social media make you feel...

● Yes, a little ● Yes, a lot



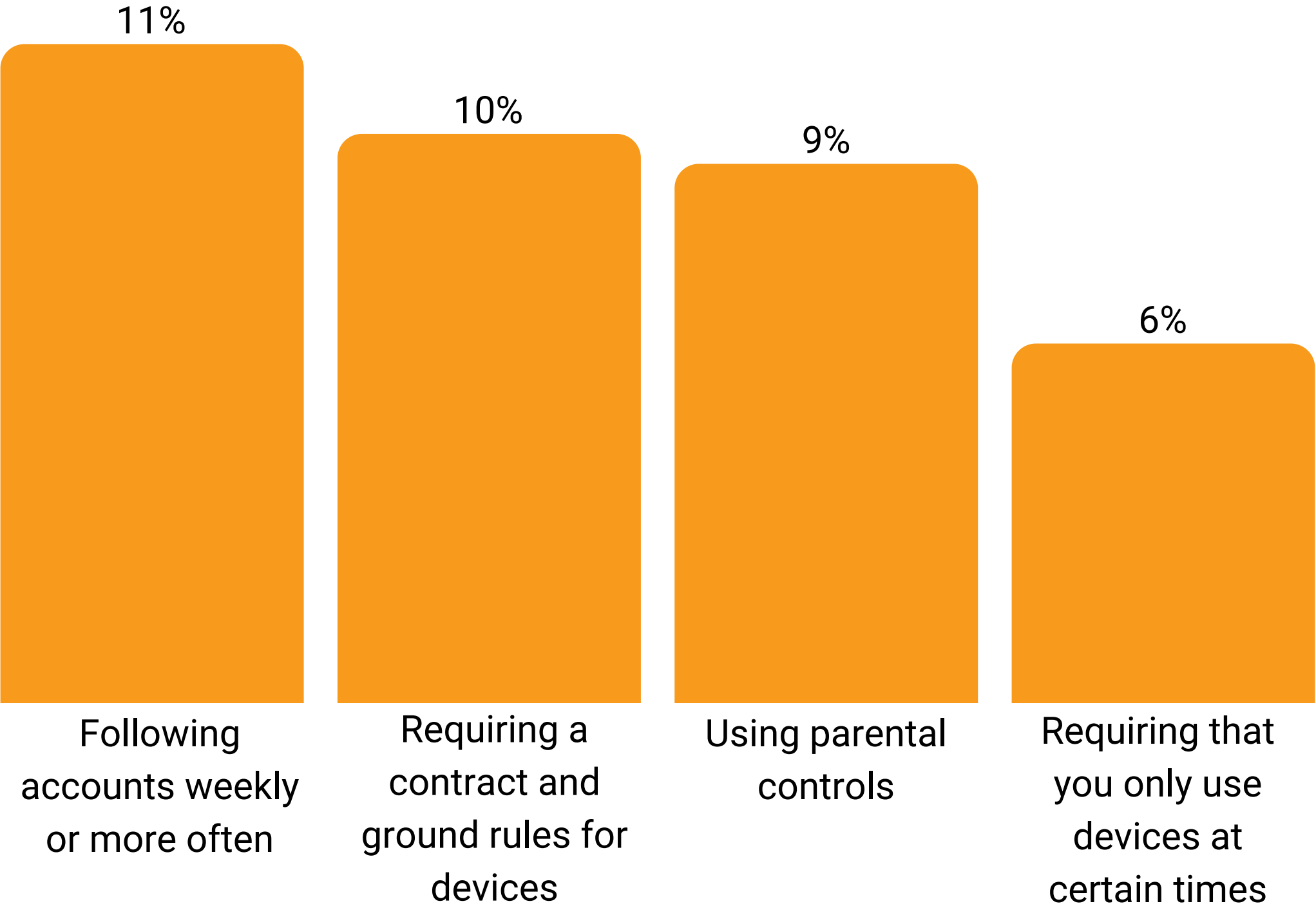
Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question



How do your parents or guardians monitor your social media accounts or how you use social media? (Select all that apply)

Top methods of monitoring social media use:*

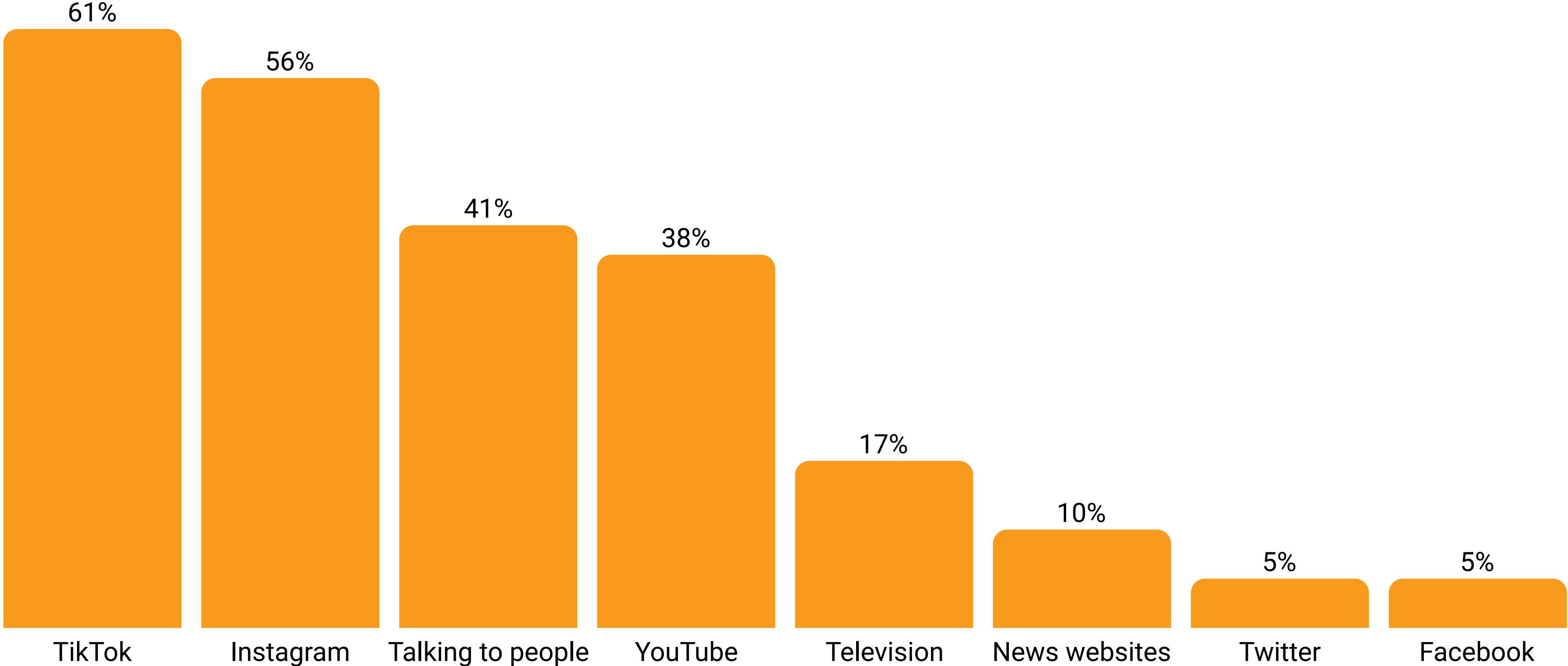
71%
of participants reported that their parents do not monitor their social media use*



* These percentages do not add up to 100 because participants were able to select more than one option.
Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question



How do you usually get your news or learn about what's going on? Select your top three.



Note: these percentages do not add up to 100 because participants were able to select more than one option (up to three).
Sources less than 5% of students reported using for news are not captured here.
Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question

Experiences of violence



Have you ever witnessed someone being physically harmed in your neighborhood (for example with a gun, knife, or other weapon, or in a physical fight)?

Just over six out of ten students (63%) had never witnessed violence in their neighborhood, while the remaining four in ten (37%) reported having witnessed this.



Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question



During the past 12 months, did you witness violence in your family?

Just over one in ten (15%) students reported witnessing violence in their family in the past twelve months.

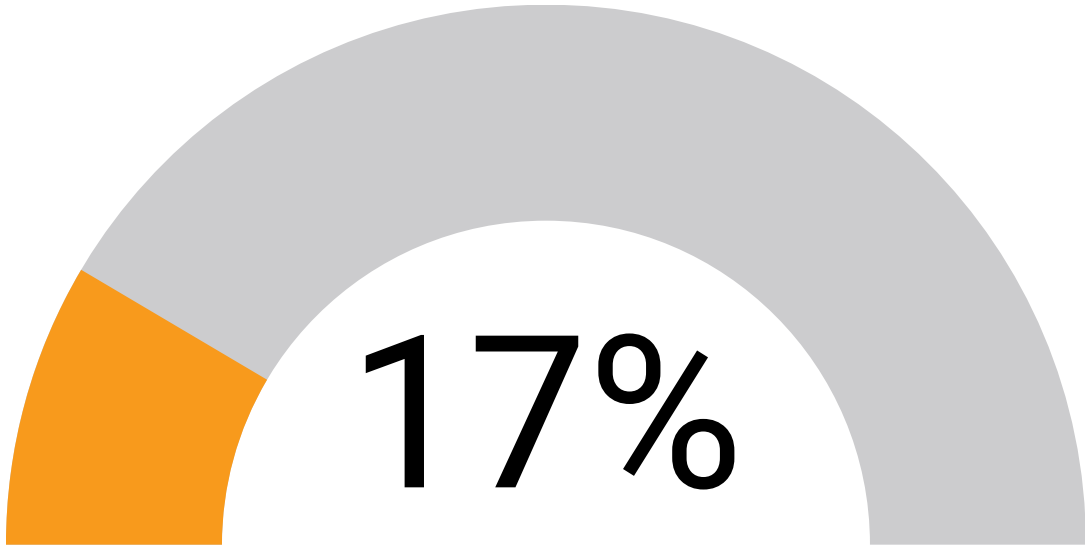


Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question



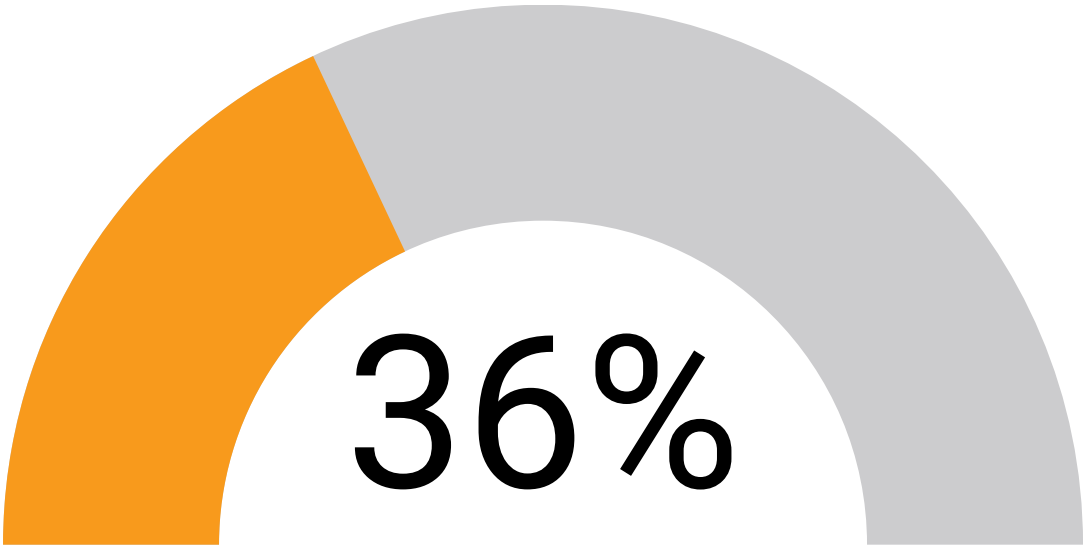
During the past 12 months, did a parent/guardian, adult caregiver, or other adult relative do any of the following to you?

Physically harm you:



17% of respondents reported physical harm from a parent/guardian, adult caregiver, or other adult relative.

Emotionally harm you:



36% of respondents reported emotional harm from a parent/guardian, adult caregiver, or other adult relative.



How safe from crime do you consider your neighborhood to be?

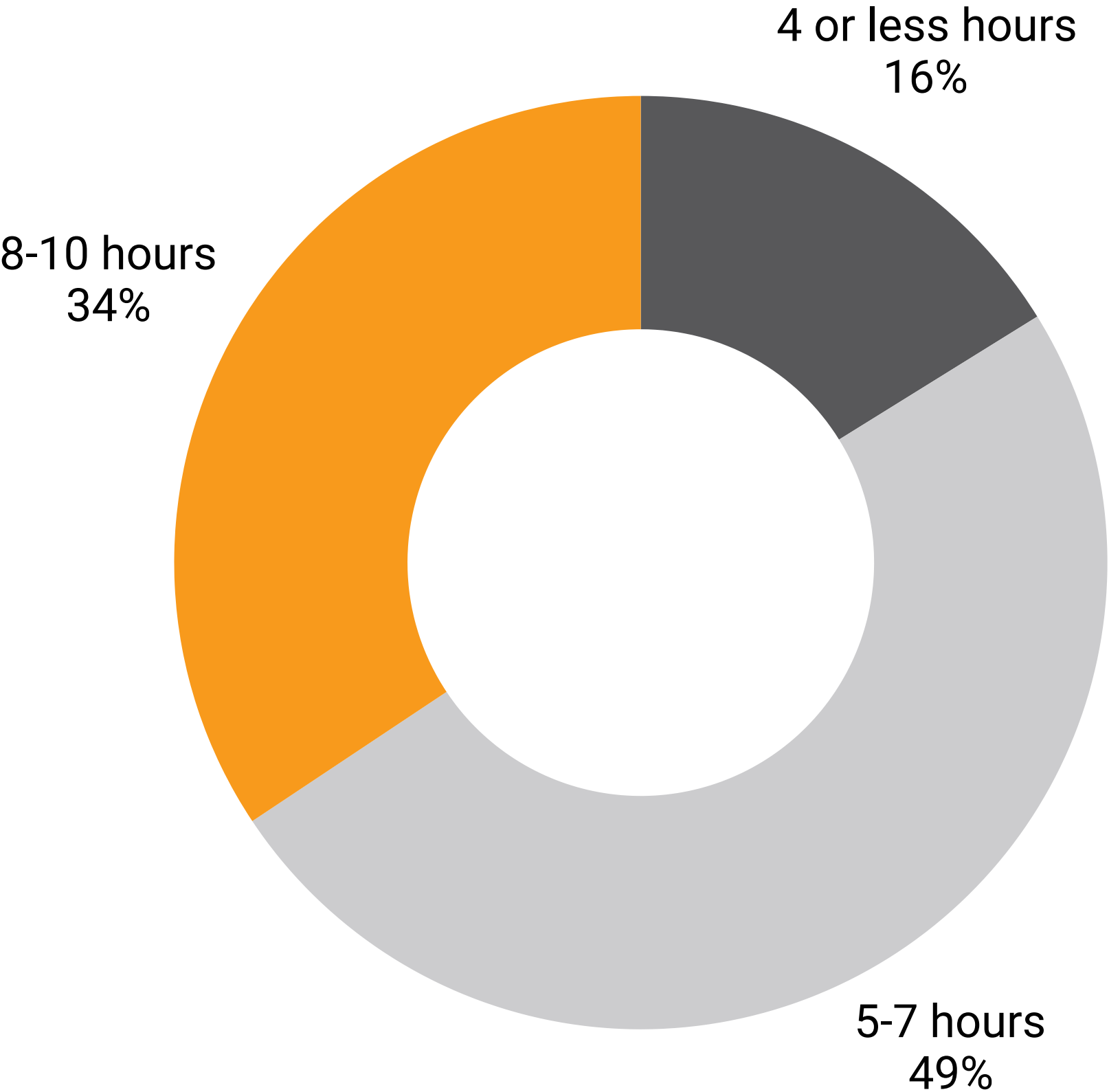
Seven out of ten (70%) students reported that their neighborhood is safe or extremely safe.



Lifestyle



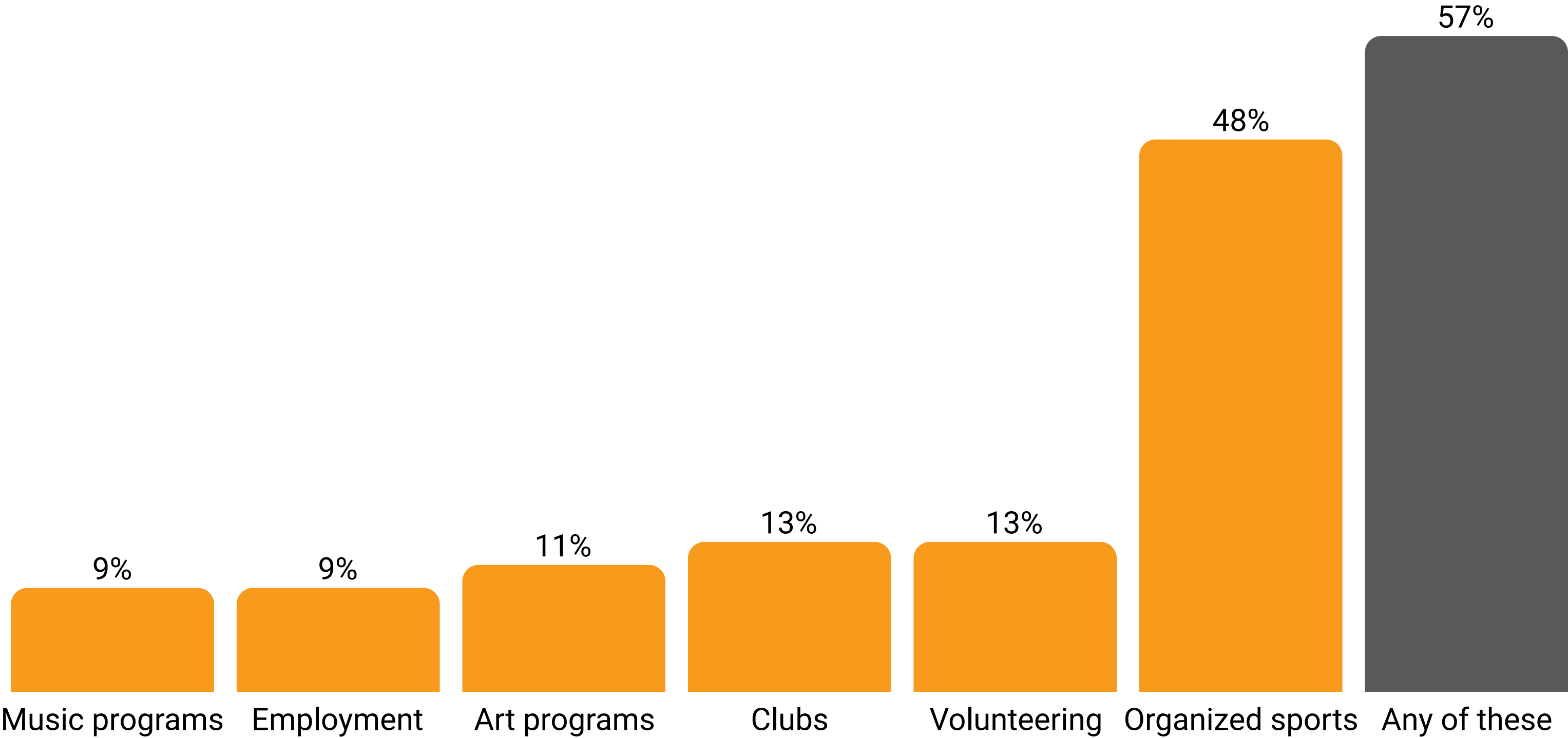
On an average school night, how many hours of sleep do you get?



Statewide:
4 or less hours: 6%
5-7 hours: 52%
8-10 hours: 42%



Do you participate in any of the following activities after school OR on the weekends?

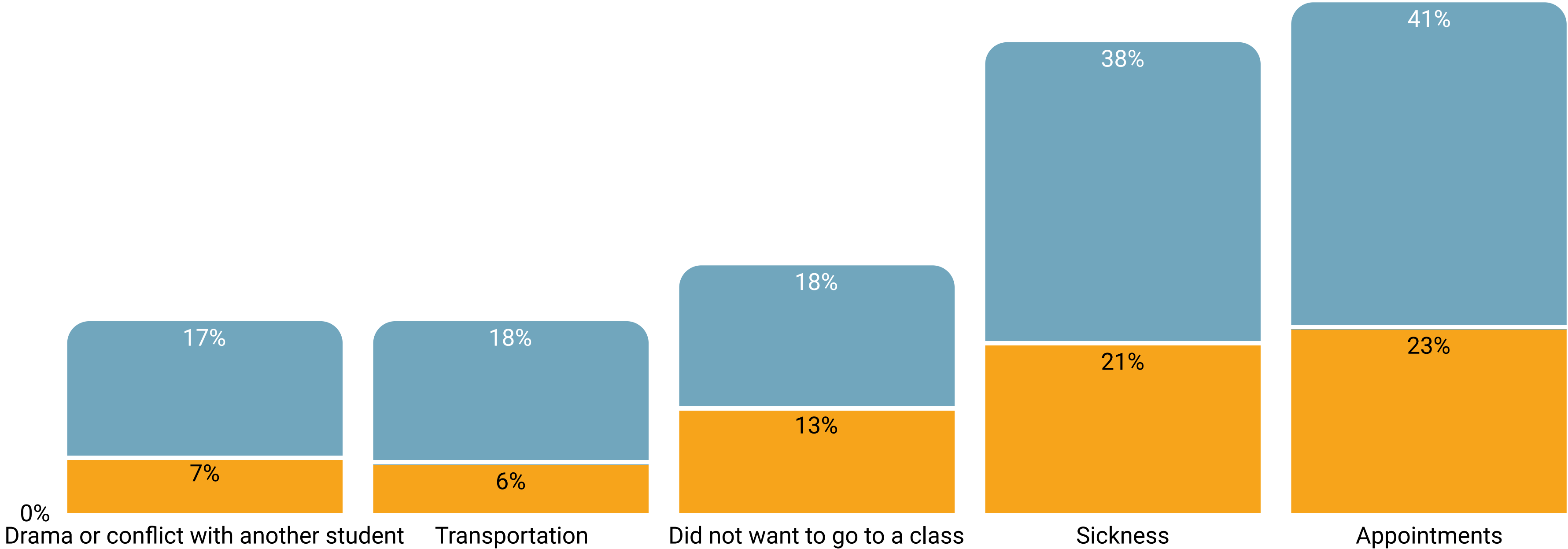


Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question
These percentages do not add up to 100 because students could select more than one answer.



Top five reasons for missing school:

Usually Sometimes



Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question
Derived from: Please rate each statement as being Never, Rarely, Sometimes, or Usually the reasons you miss school.

Substance use



Nine out of ten students (87%) have never smoked a cigarette.



Statewide: 95%
Note: These questions are not asked in the same way at the state level as in our survey.
Derived from “How old were you when you first smoked a cigarette, even one or two puffs?”



Findings from the 2024 Springfield Youth Health Survey of Eighth Graders

One out of five students (19%) that reported any cigarette use have smoked at least one day in the past 30 days.



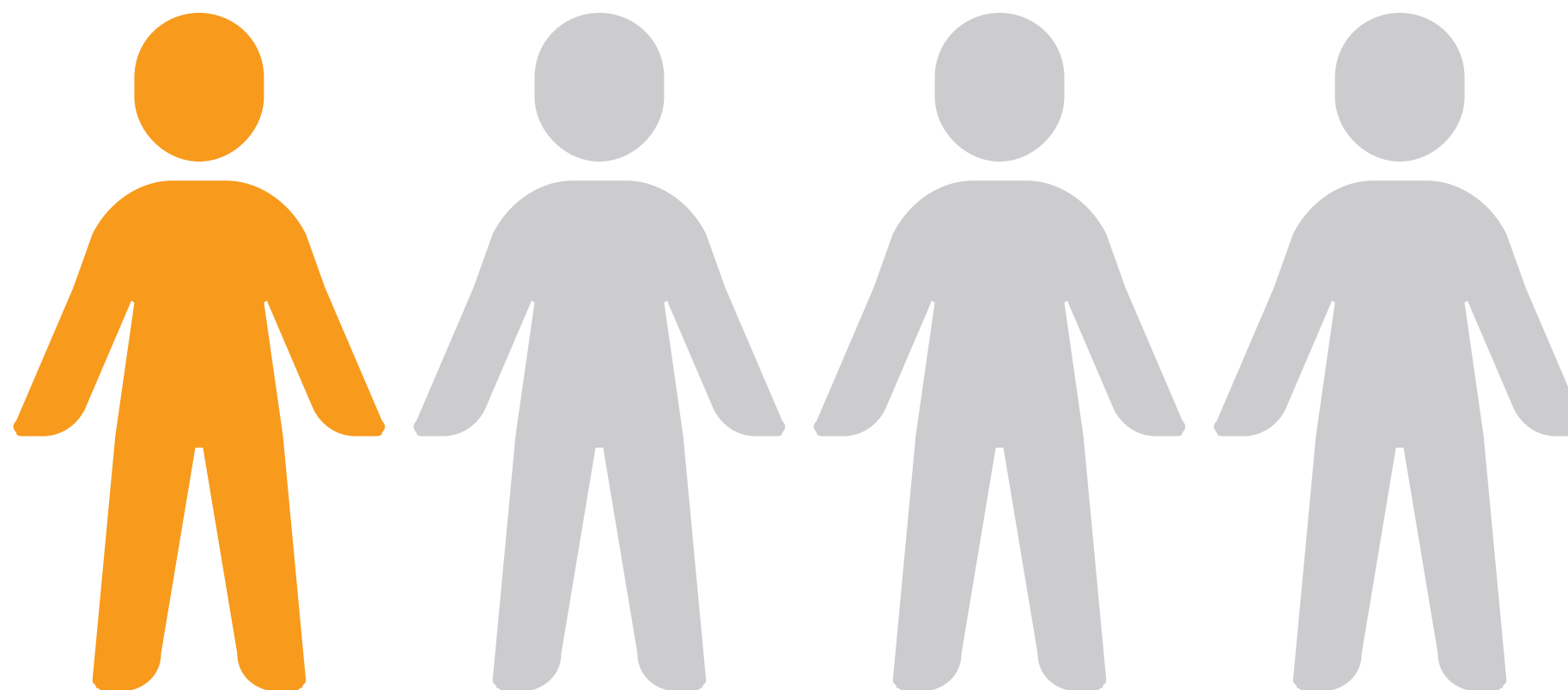
Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question
Derived from “During the past 30 days, on how many days did you smoke cigarettes?”



Findings from the 2024 Springfield Youth Health Survey of Eighth Graders

Have you ever used an electronic nicotine vapor product, such as JUUL, Vuse, NJOY, Puff Bar, blu, or Bidi Stick?

One in four (24%) students reported ever using an electronic nicotine vapor product.



Statewide: 15%

Note: These questions are not asked in the same way at the state level as in our survey.



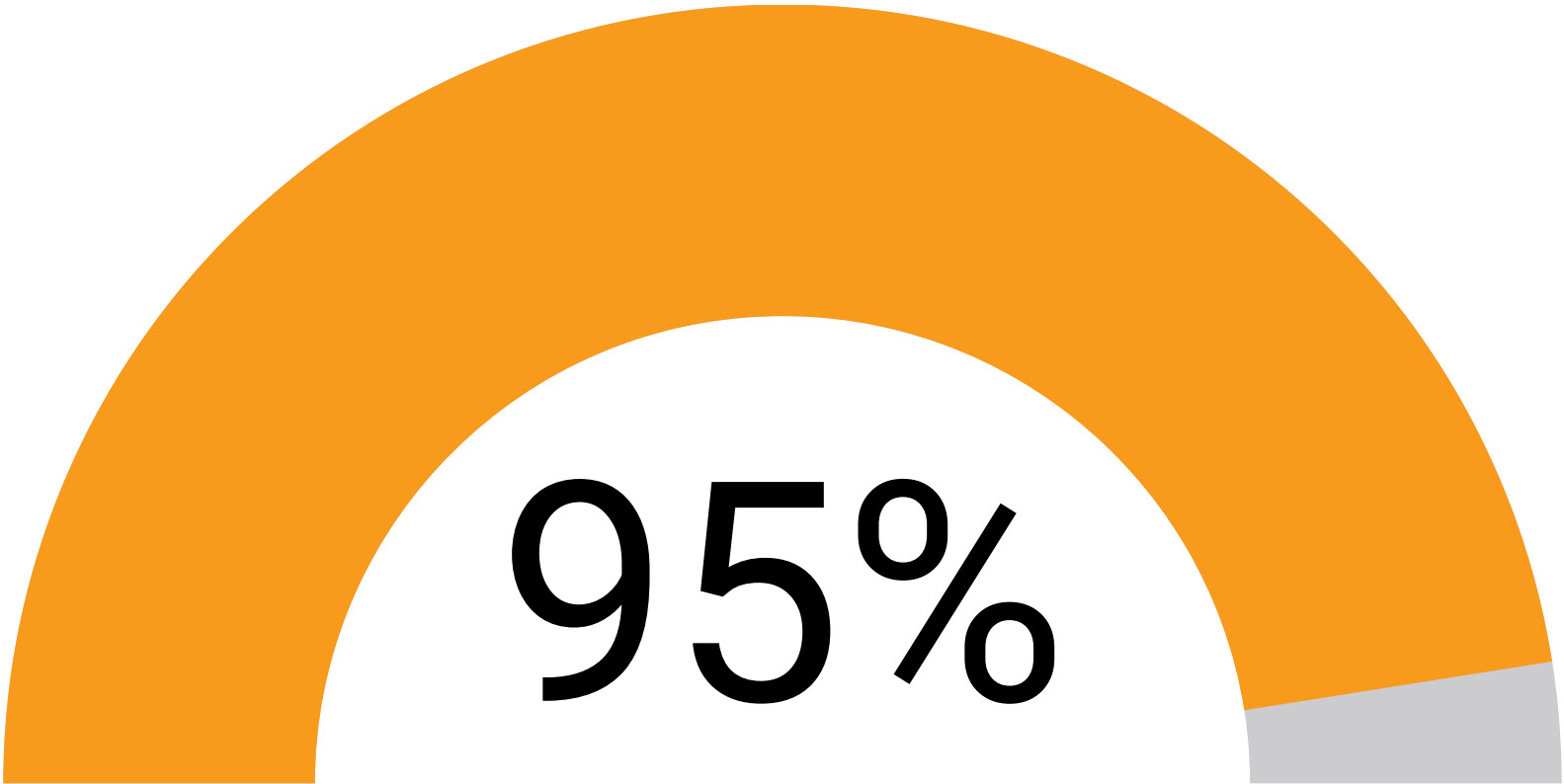
One half of students (48%) that reported any e-nicotine use have used at least one day in the past 30 days.



Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question
Derived from “During the past 30 days, on how many days did you use an electronic nicotine vapor product such as JUUL, Vuse, NJOY, Puff Bar, blu, or Bidi Stick?”



Most students have not used dissolvable tobacco products in the past 30 days.

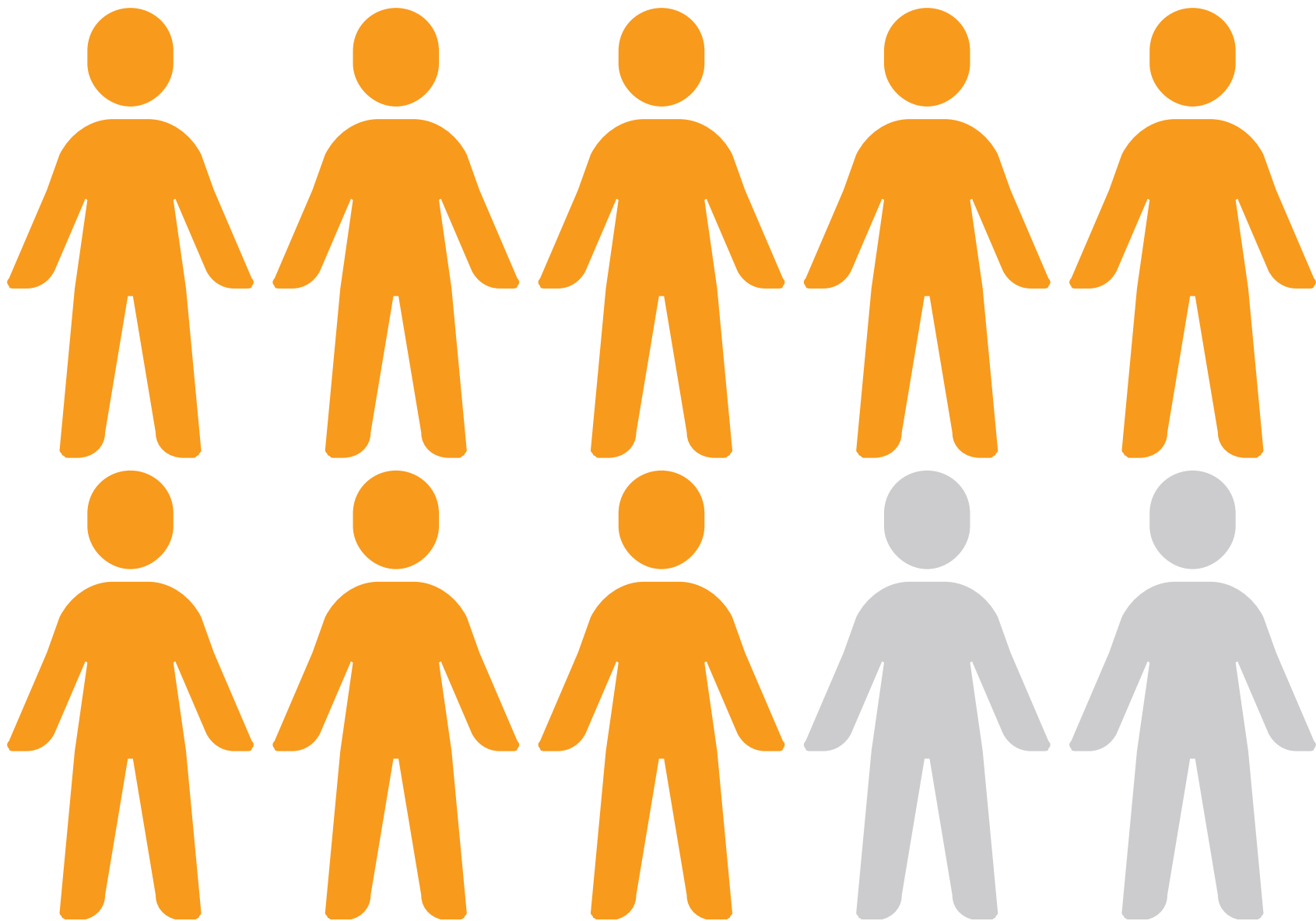


The percentage of students who have **NOT** used pouches, snus, or dissolvable tobacco products in the past 30 days

Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question
Derived from “During the past 30 days, on how many days did you use nicotine pouches, snus, or dissolvable tobacco products such as Zyn, Copenhagen, Grizzly, Skoal, Camel Snus, on!, or Velo?
(Do not count any electronic vapor products).”



Eight out of ten (78%) students have NEVER had a drink of alcohol.



Statewide: 78%
Derived from “How old were you when you had your first drink of alcohol other than a few sips?”



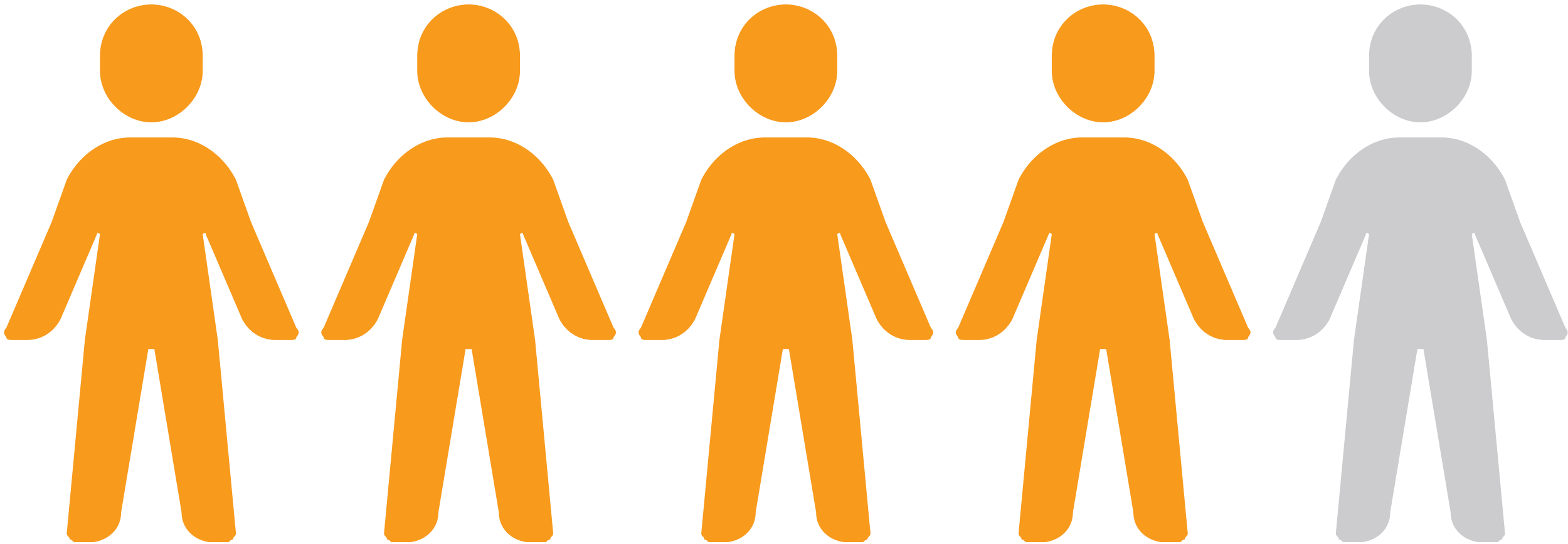
Three out of ten (30%) students who reported any alcohol use have had at least one alcoholic drink in the past 30 days.



Note: No statewide comparison is available for this question
Derived from “During the past 30 days, how many days have you had at least one alcoholic drink?”



Four out of five students (82%) have NEVER used marijuana.

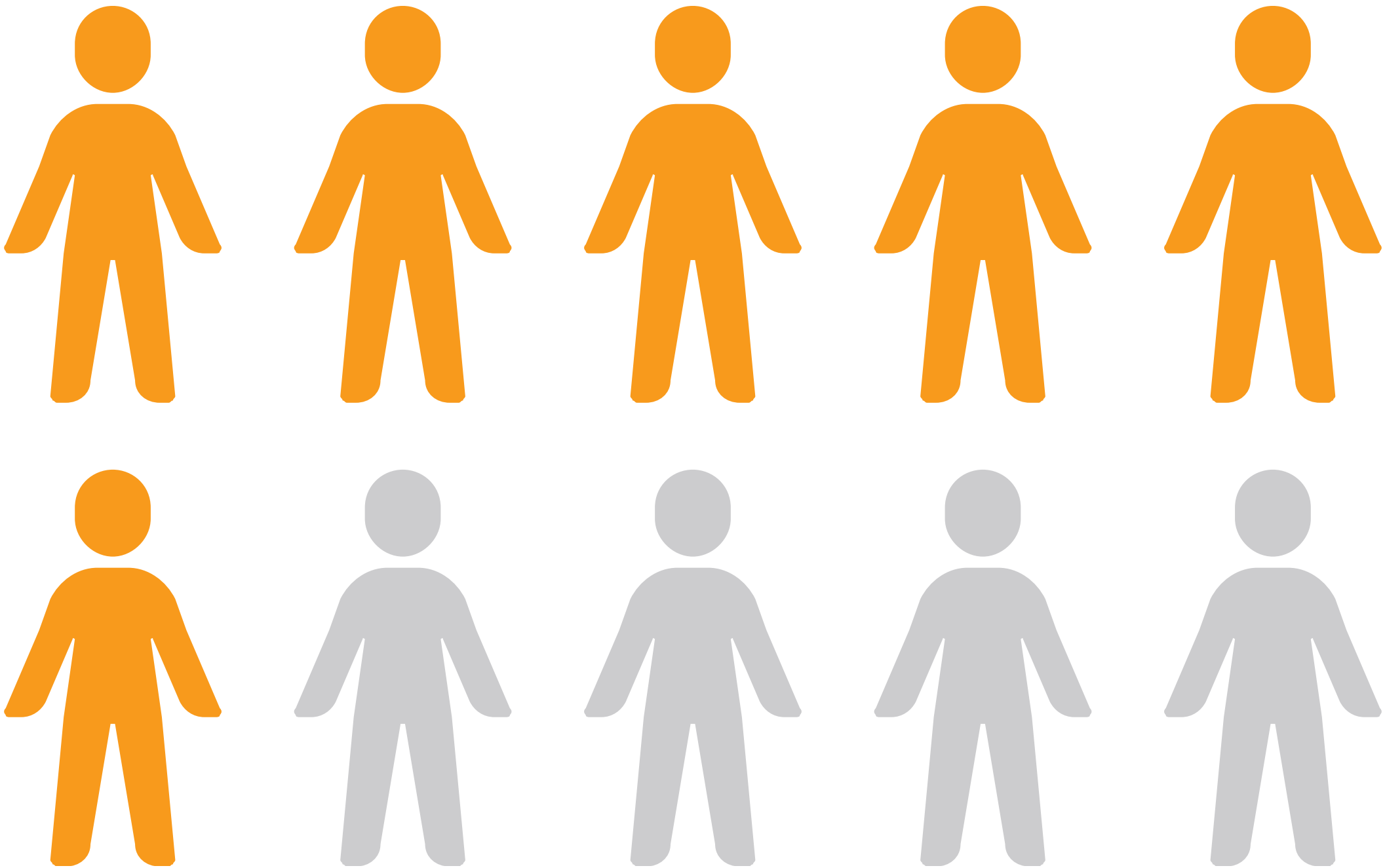


Statewide: 86%
Derived from “How old were you when you tried marijuana for the first time?”



During the past 30 days, how many times did you use marijuana or cannabis products?

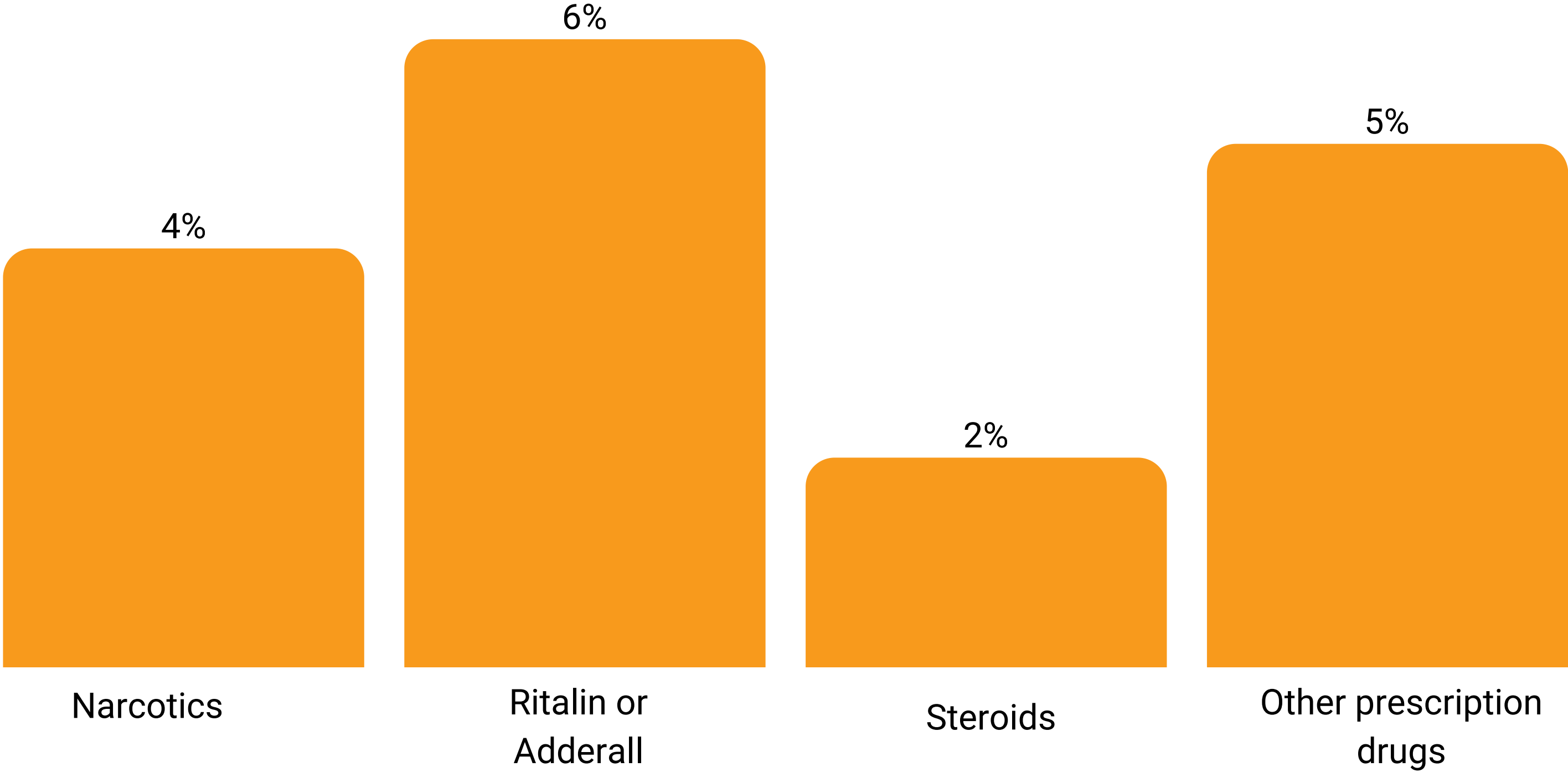
Six out of ten students (61%) who reported any marijuana use have used cannabis products at least once in the past 30 days.





During the past 30 days, have you taken any of the following prescription drugs that were not your own OR used your own prescription drugs in a way that your doctor did not prescribe (such as taking more than directed)?

Percentage of students that have taken prescription drugs that are not their own or used their own drugs in a way that was not prescribed in the past 30 days:



RESOURCES

Youth Mental Health Roadmap

In 2024, the Public Health Institute of Western MA released the Western MA Youth Mental Health Roadmap with a focus on mental health wellness promotion and prevention of mental health conditions.

[Learn more!](#)



Five key focus areas to support the mental wellbeing of young people in our region:



Destigmatizing
and Normalizing
Mental Health



Strengthening
Social
Connections



Building Social
Emotional
Learning Skills



Promoting
Healthy and
Safe Social
Media usage



Supporting
Community-
Clinical
Linkages

Thank you!

Learn more about the Springfield
Youth Health Survey Initiative

Download responses to all questions