

2022 SURVEY REPORT

Crisis Communication and Safety in Education

Concerns, Challenges & Planning for the
2022–2023 School Year



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Table of Contents

- 03** Introduction
- 04** Key Findings
- 06** K-12 Schools
 - 07**Crisis Communication Challenges
 - 09**Planning for the 2022–2023 School Year
 - 16**Emergency Communication in K–12 Schools
- 20** Higher Education
 - 21**Crisis Communication Challenges
 - 23**Planning for the Fall and Spring Semesters
 - 30**Emergency Communication on Higher Education Campuses
- 34** Conclusion and Methodology
- 35** About Rave Moblie Safety

The 2021–2022 school year was another challenging time for both K-12 schools and higher education institutions. Students, faculty, staff, parents and broader communities continued to deal with challenges — a new fast-spreading variant, hybrid learning models, scheduling uncertainty, staffing difficulties and more — brought on by the pandemic. Maintaining positive, safe and effective learning environments was no easy task.

Though COVID-19 safety is still a top priority, it's clear that the pandemic has taken a heavy toll on students, parents, faculty and staff alike. After two hard years, people are exhausted, and campus leaders are concerned about how that will present itself going forward if the right resources and safety measures aren't in place.

To better understand how K-12 and higher education staff members are thinking about school safety in the coming academic year, Rave Mobile Safety fielded its second annual national survey of over 400 K-12 employees and over 380 higher education staffers in February 2022. COVID-related safety measures are the highest safety concern for respondents in higher education (71%) and the second-highest safety concern for K-12 (52%). However, the survey's findings demonstrate that leaders are beginning to refocus on other dimensions of school safety beyond implementing social distancing, mask-wearing, daily health checks and other COVID-related measures. Managing mental health and violence on campus are two clear top priorities for the 2022–2023 school year, as well as figuring out how to communicate crises across campuses when emergency situations do arise.



Key Findings

Student mental health is the top safety concern for the 2022-2023 school year for K-12 respondents (61%) and the second-highest concern for higher education respondents (59%).

Faculty and staff mental health is the third-highest safety concern for respondents from both K-12 schools (52%) and higher education institutions (44%).

Concerns about active assailants on campus rose dramatically year-over-year for both K-12 respondents (+14%) and higher education respondents (+15%).

K-12 survey respondents also shared increased concern about cyberbullying compared to 2021 (+12%), while higher education administrators expressed increased anxiety regarding crime (+20%) and severe weather events (+19%).

To address these concerns, respondents on both the K-12 (43%) and higher education (39%) fronts are investing more heavily in mental health resources.

In terms of crisis communication challenges, K-12 respondents indicated room for improvement in reaching staff (23%), and students and parents/guardians (26%), while higher education respondents had somewhat less concern in reaching staff (16%), and students and parents/guardians (15%).



Read on to learn the challenges K-12 schools, colleges and universities experienced in the past year, as well as their concerns for 2022-2023 and ways their schools plan to address them.



K-12 Schools

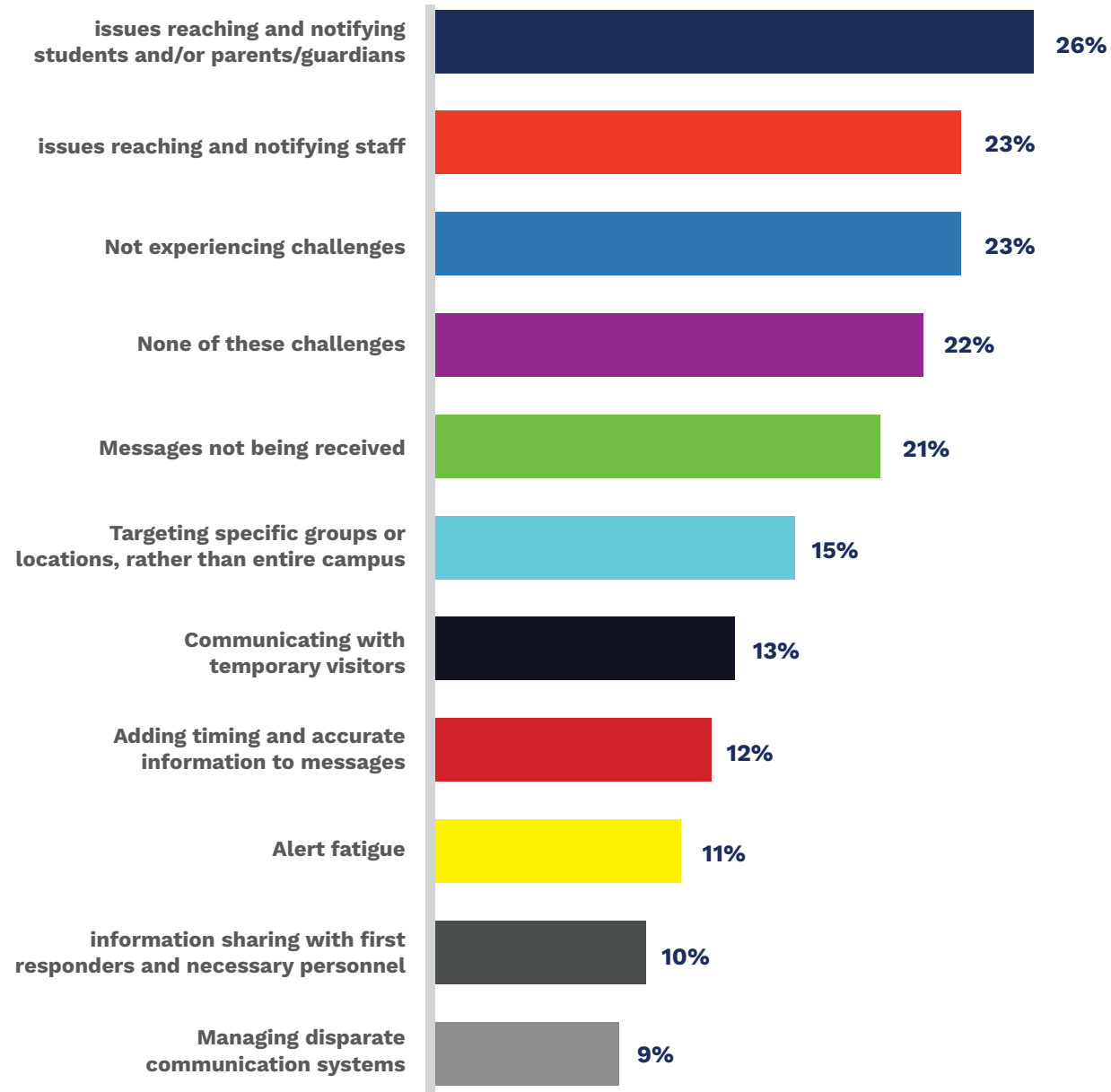
K-12 schools continued to navigate disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the 2021-2022 school year. Many schools chose to maintain some form of remote or hybrid learning, while others returned to classrooms full time, albeit with safety measures in place. During such an unstable period, clear communication between school administrators, staff, parents and students was paramount and will continue to be moving forward.



Crisis Communication Challenges

For the second year in a row, many K-12 respondents acknowledged that they struggled to communicate effectively with all key parties. Though COVID-19 concerns are easing, crisis communication will still be important, especially as those tasked with campus safety address growing mental health and safety concerns. Survey respondents confirmed that there is still room for improvement when it comes to reaching students, parents and guardians (26%), as well as staff members (23%), when unforeseen issues arise.

What crisis communication challenges have you experienced in the past 12 months?



(Respondents selected all that applied.)

To overcome these crisis communication challenges, respondents plan to add more communication modes in their mass notification system, increase frequency of drills and expand engagement with students and parents/guardians.



Planning for the 2022-2023 School Year

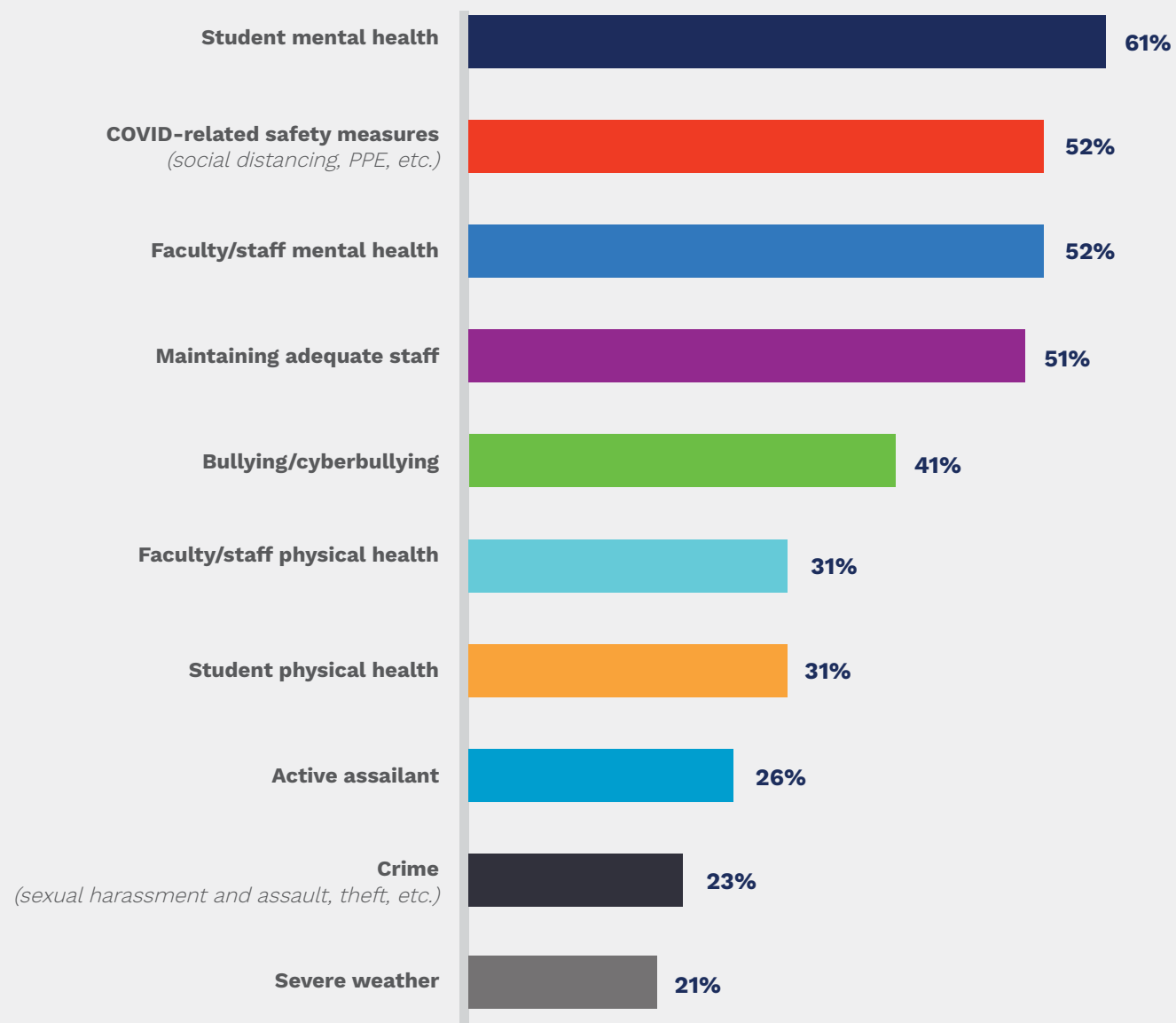
Though COVID-19 will have a lesser direct influence over K-12 schools in the 2022-2023 school year, there are still major challenges ahead. Administrators anticipate that mental health support needs will increase dramatically for students, faculty and staff. Meeting these needs will be essential for maintaining safe and secure learning environments for all.

According to the survey results, two of the top three safety concerns for respondents are student (61%) and faculty/staff (52%) mental health. Understandably, implementing COVID-19-related safety measures is still a top priority for many (52%), though the share of respondents who marked this concern decreased significantly year-over-year (-19%). Anxiety around potential situations involving an active assailant saw a major rise (+14%), as did cyberbullying (+12%) in the last year.



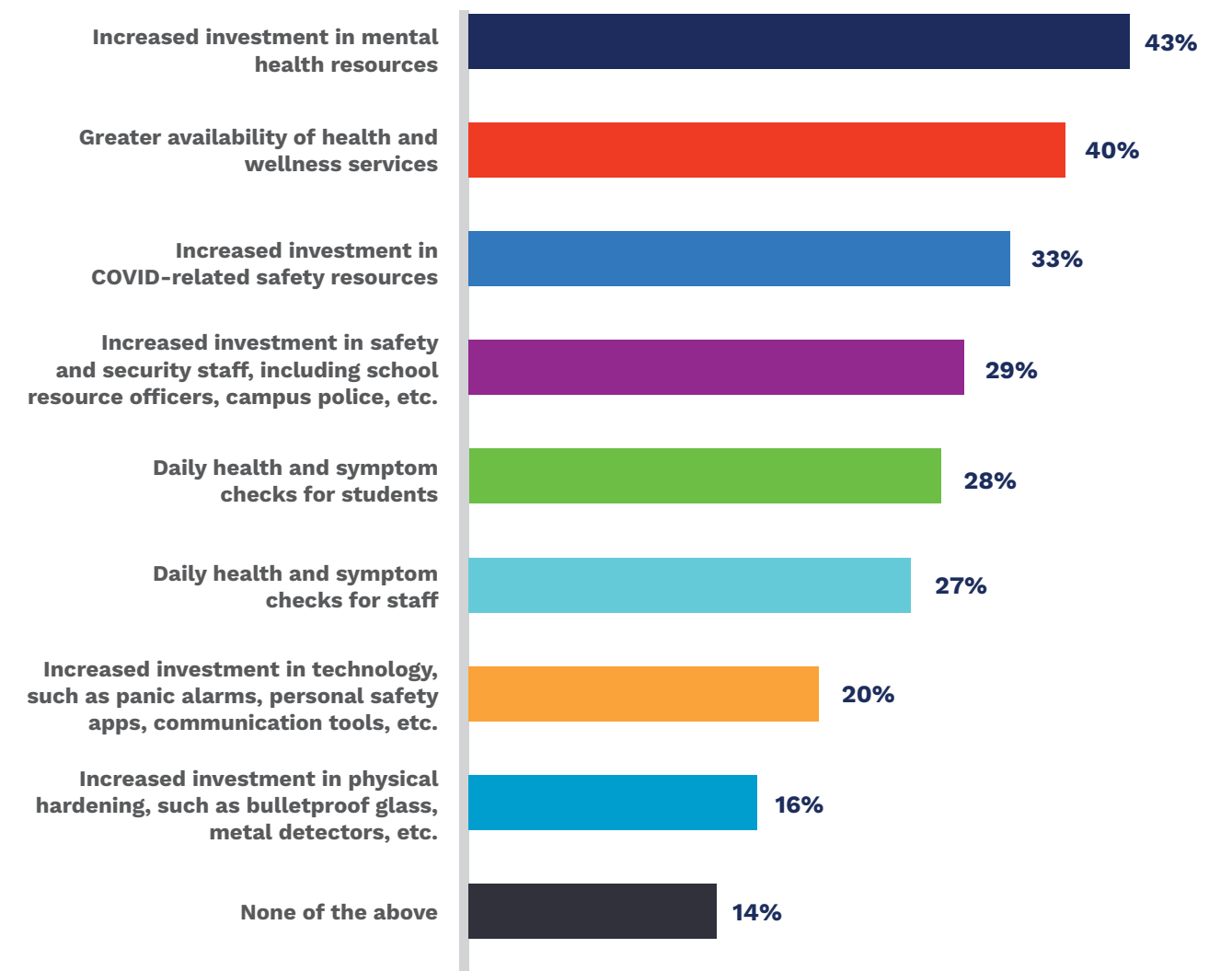
Unsurprisingly, investing more in mental health resources (43%) emerged as the top intervention for next year. **The number of respondents pushing for more mental health support rose 8% year-over-year, while daily health and symptom checks dropped by roughly half.** K-12 schools are also investing more broadly in health and wellness services (40%).

What are your top safety concerns for the next school year?



(Respondents selected all that applied.)

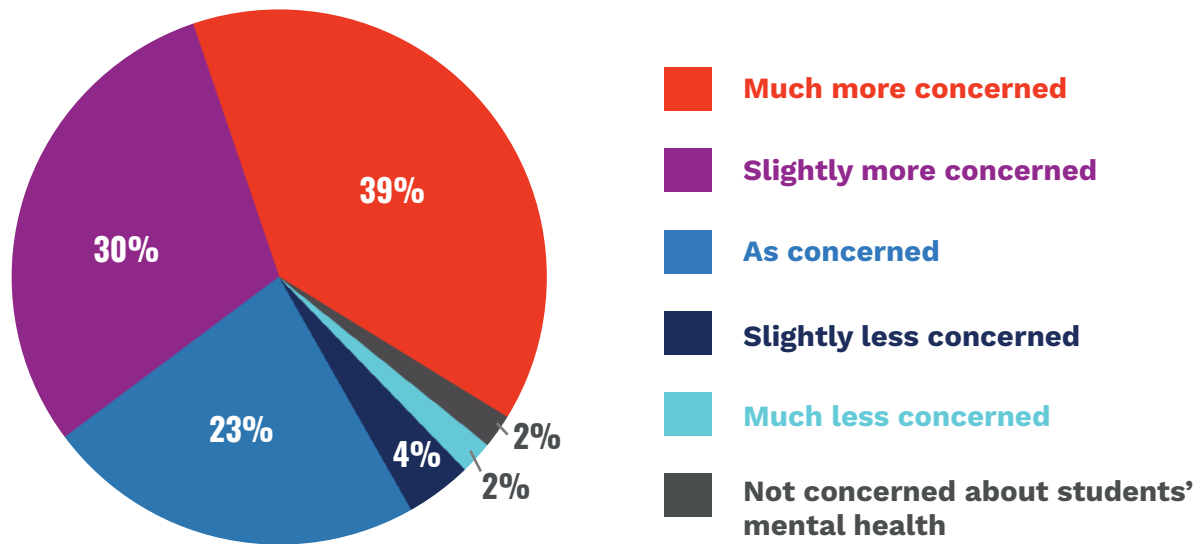
How do you plan to address these safety concerns?



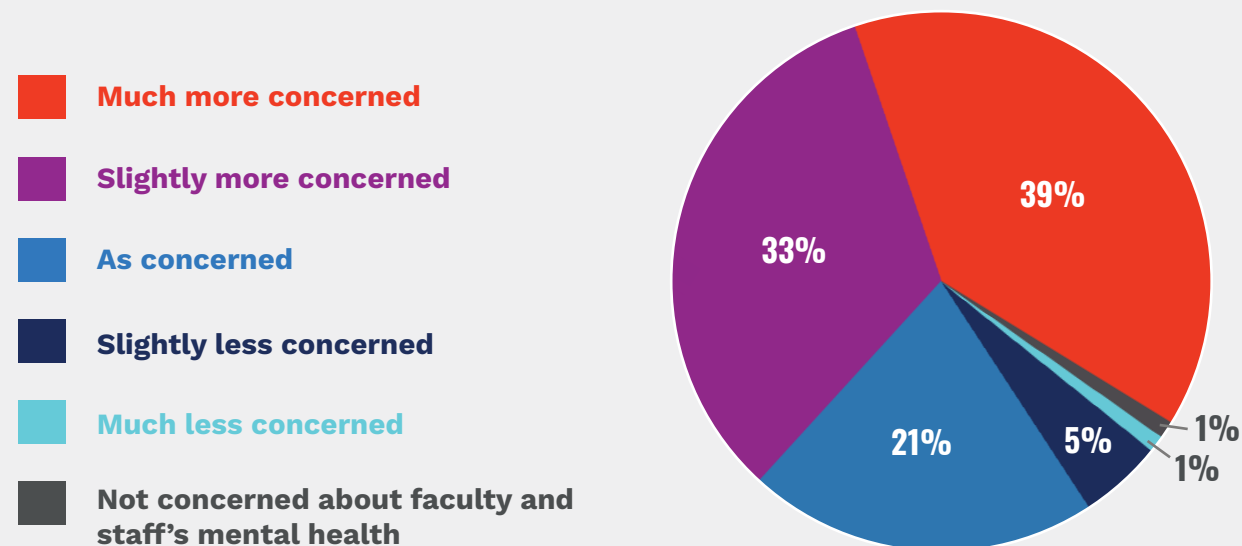
(Respondents selected all that applied.)

The rise in mental health support in schools aligns with concerns over the last year. Nearly 60% of respondents were much more or slightly more concerned about student mental health than they were a year ago. Over 70% of respondents were more concerned for faculty and staff mental health than they were during the last school year.

How would you describe your concern for the state of students' mental health compared to a year ago



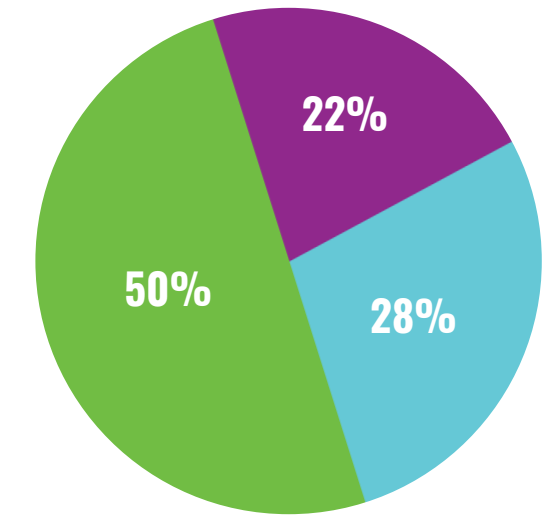
How would you describe your concern for the state of faculty and staff's mental health compared to a year ago?



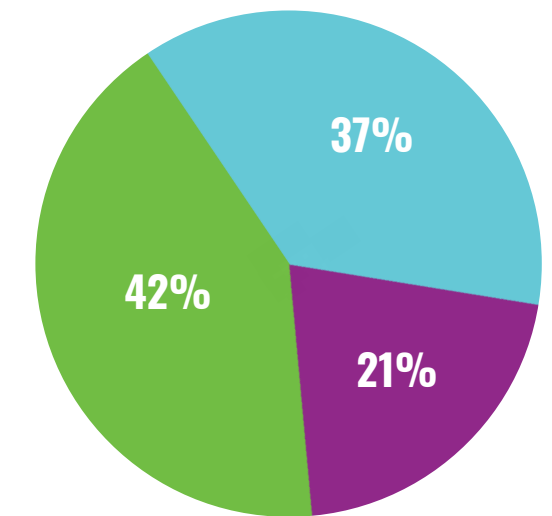
The urgency around mental health also stems from where K-12 schools are today. **Only 50% of schools believe they have adequate mental health resources to support students.**

Less than half (42%) of respondents reported the same on the faculty and staff side. Fortunately, there is optimism for next year. **Twenty-two percent of respondents believe their school will have the appropriate mental health resources to support students in the next 6-12 months,** while 21% believe they will have what they need to support faculty and staff mental health in 6-12 months.

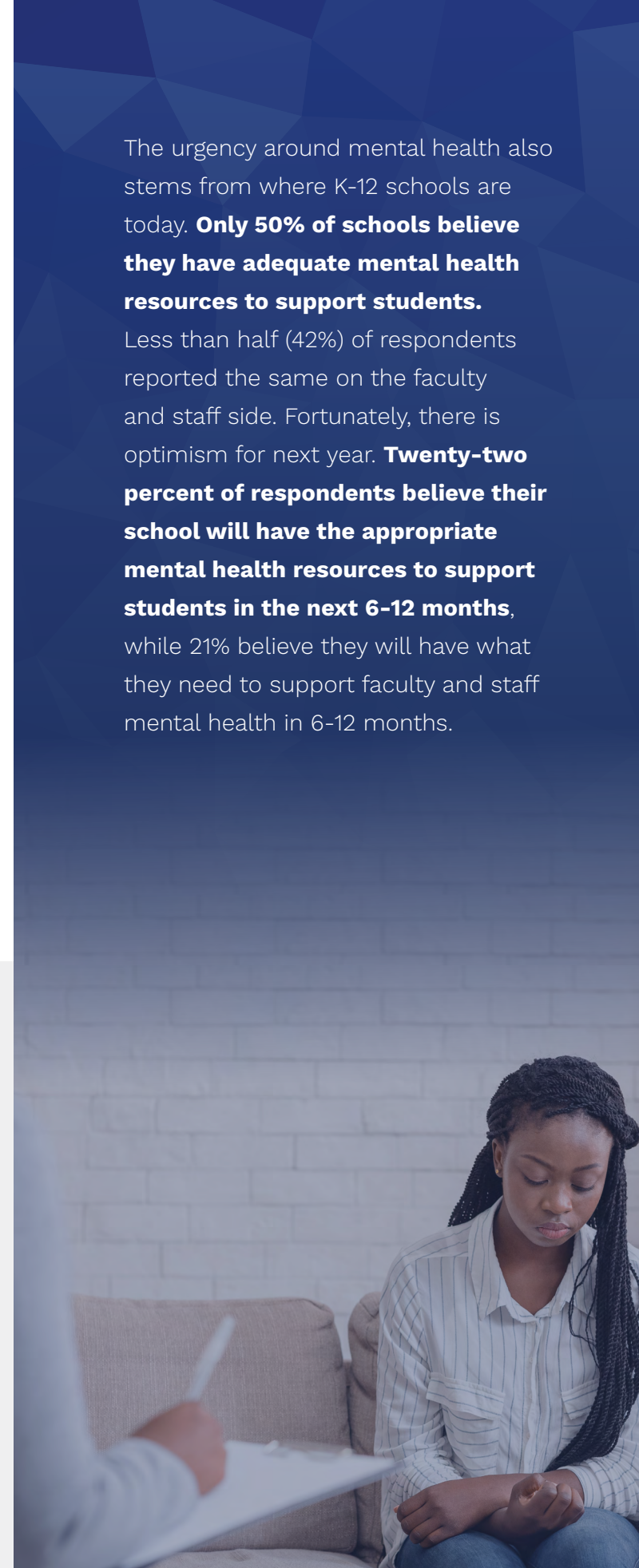
Do you believe your school has the appropriate mental health resources to support students?



Do you believe your school has the appropriate mental health resources to support faculty and staff?



■ Yes ■ No
■ Not currently, but we will in the next 6-12 months

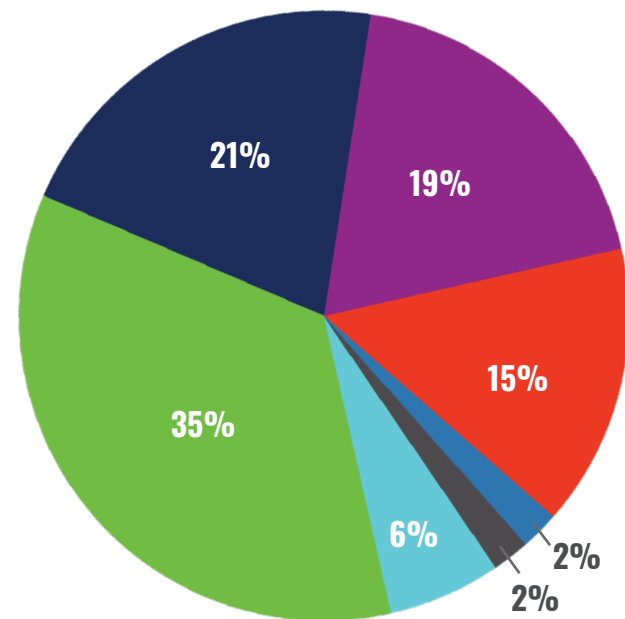


One area of concern that grew dramatically this year was the potential for future violent situations on campuses. More than half of respondents (55%) are more concerned about active assailants than they were before the pandemic. Social media is also complicating matters, as many respondents are following how recent waves of threats on TikTok and similar platforms are affecting schools. Nearly 80% of respondents acknowledged that these occurrences have contributed to their concern for campus safety.



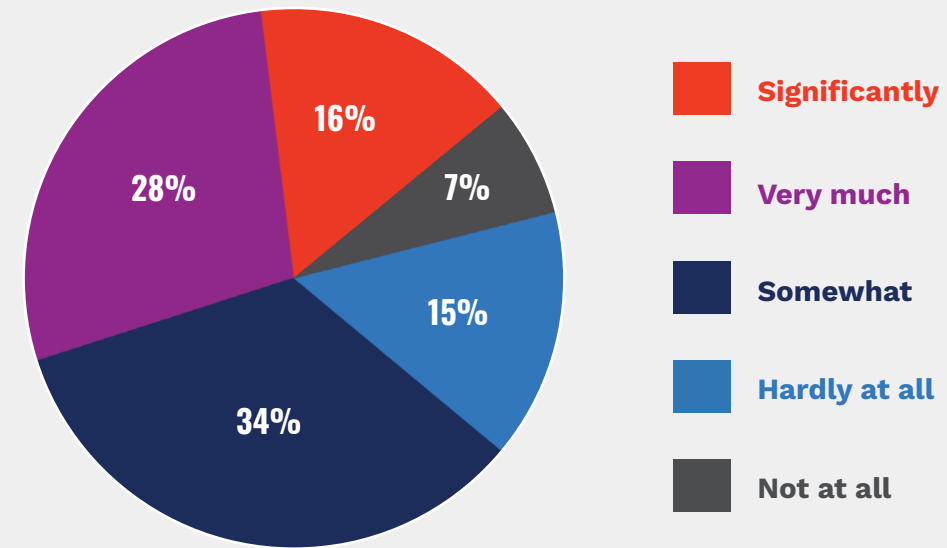
More than half of respondents (55%) are **more concerned about active assailants** than they were before the pandemic.

How has your level of concern changed, if at all, about active assailants and violence on campus compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic?



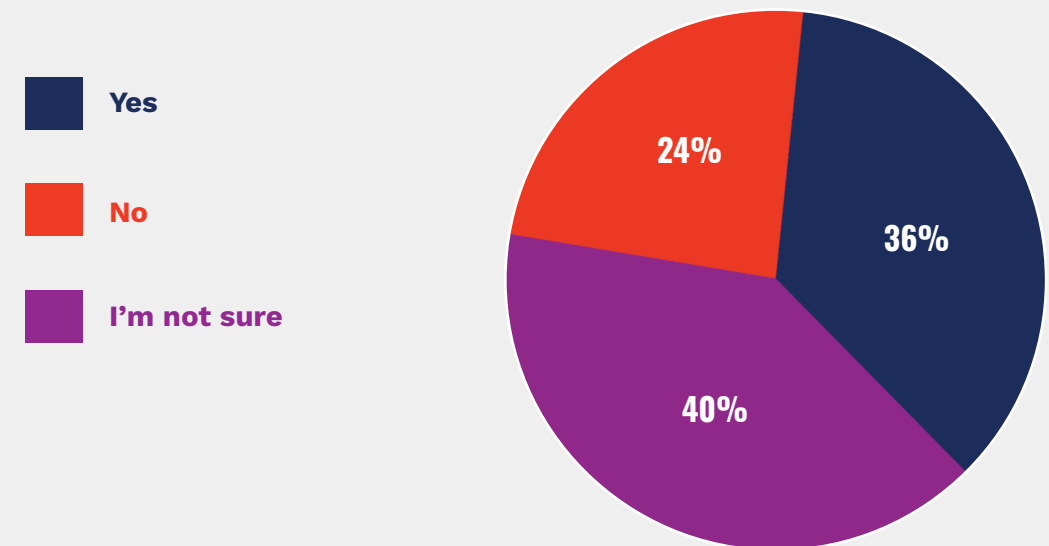
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- Somewhat more concerned
- Slightly more concerned
- As concerned
- Slightly less concerned
- Somewhat less concerned
- Significantly less concerned

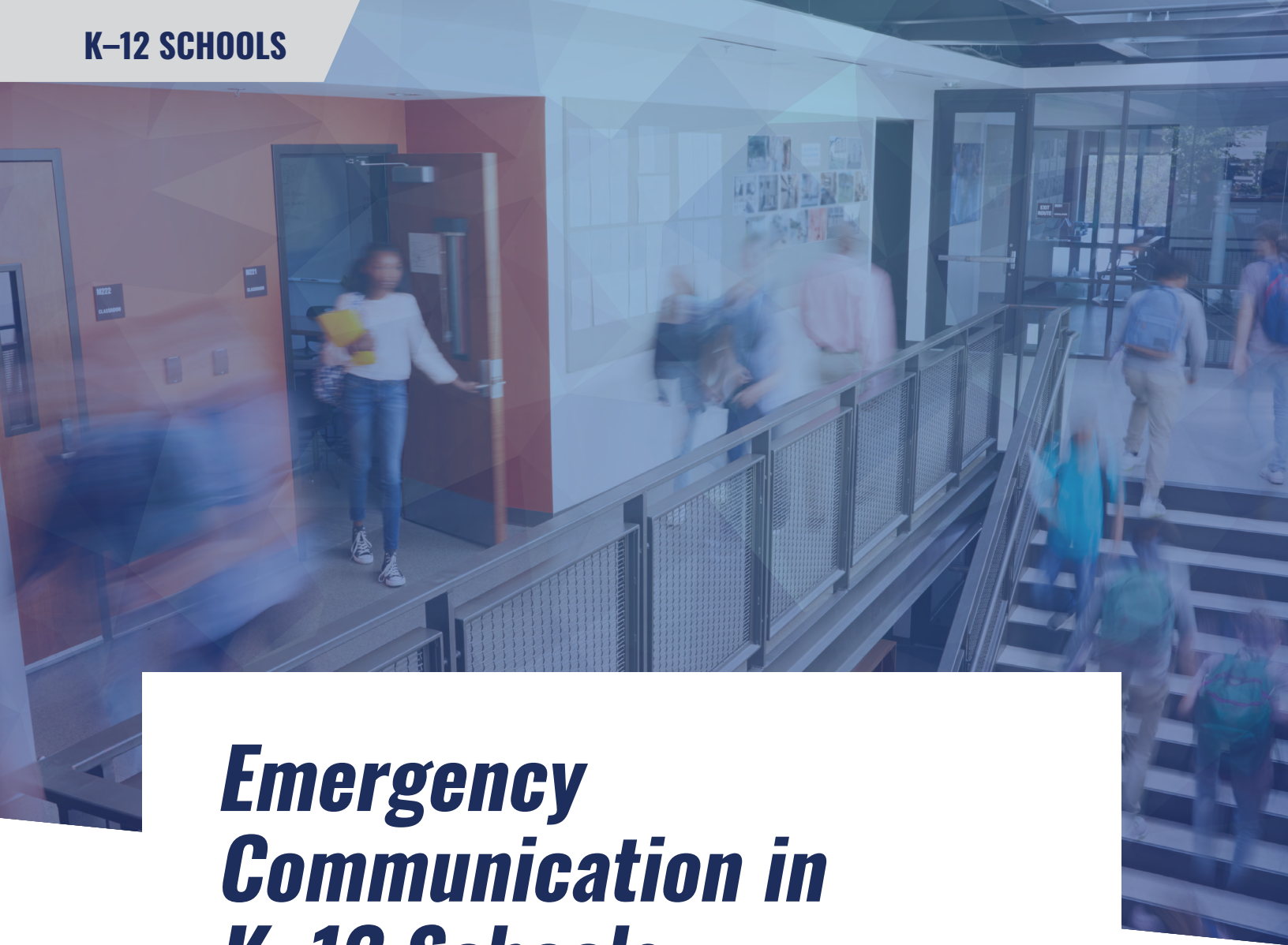
How much has the rise of school safety threats, like the recent wave of TikTok threats to schools and bomb threats at multiple Ivy league universities, contributed to your concern for campus safety?



Today, just over **a third of respondents report their school has access to funding to ensure appropriate safety measures** are in place for the next school year.

Does your school have access to funding to ensure appropriate safety measures are in place for the next school year?



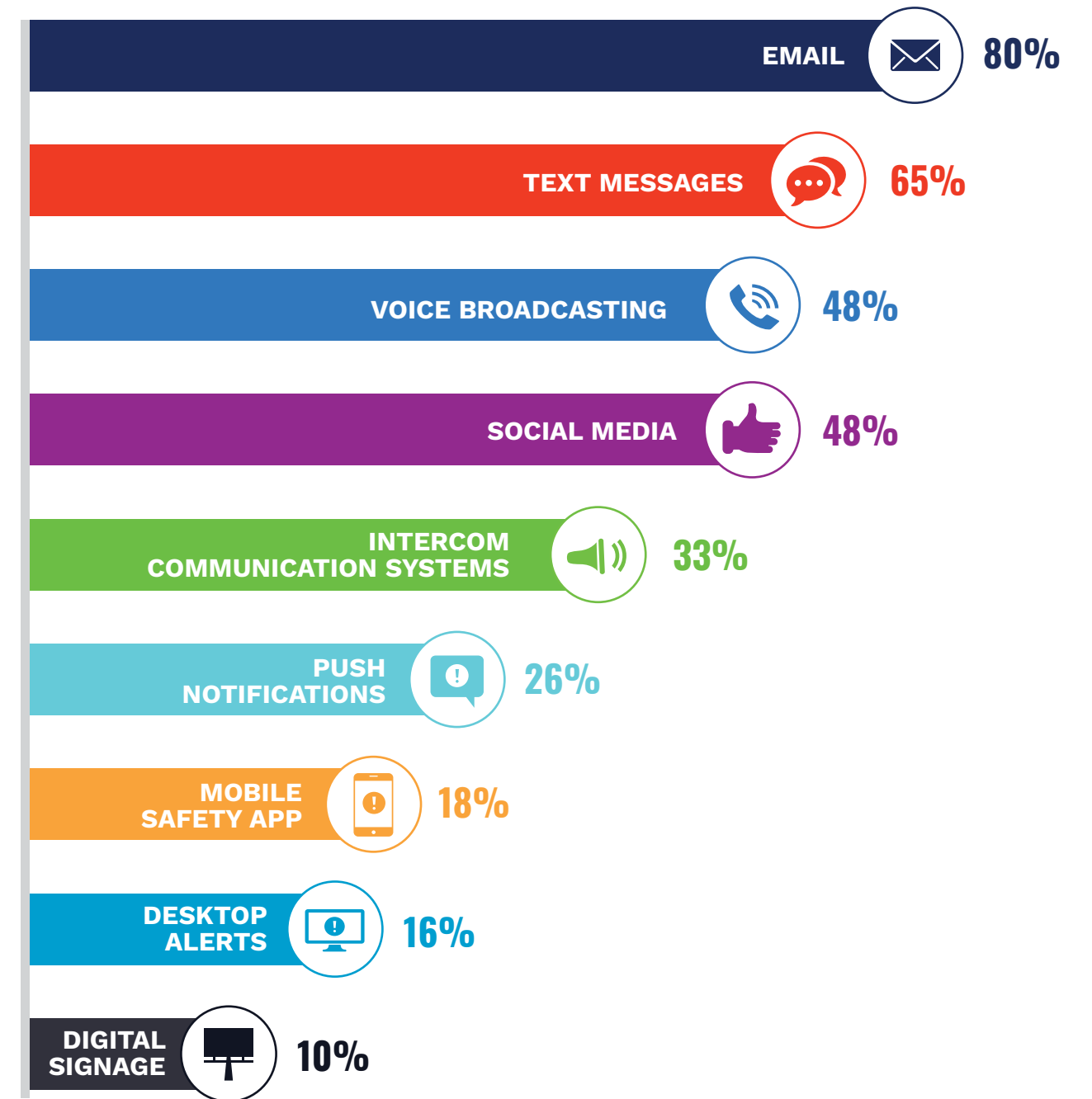


Emergency Communication in K-12 Schools

Emergency communication plans and protocols have been under heavy scrutiny over the last few years. K-12 leaders are more aware than ever for the need to communicate clearly and intentionally across multiple channels. They are also more attune to the fact that different channels can have varying purposes depending on the severity of the emergency.

Going into the 2022-2023 school year, email is still the most widely used form of communication in K-12 schools in a crisis, followed by text messages, voice broadcasting and social media.

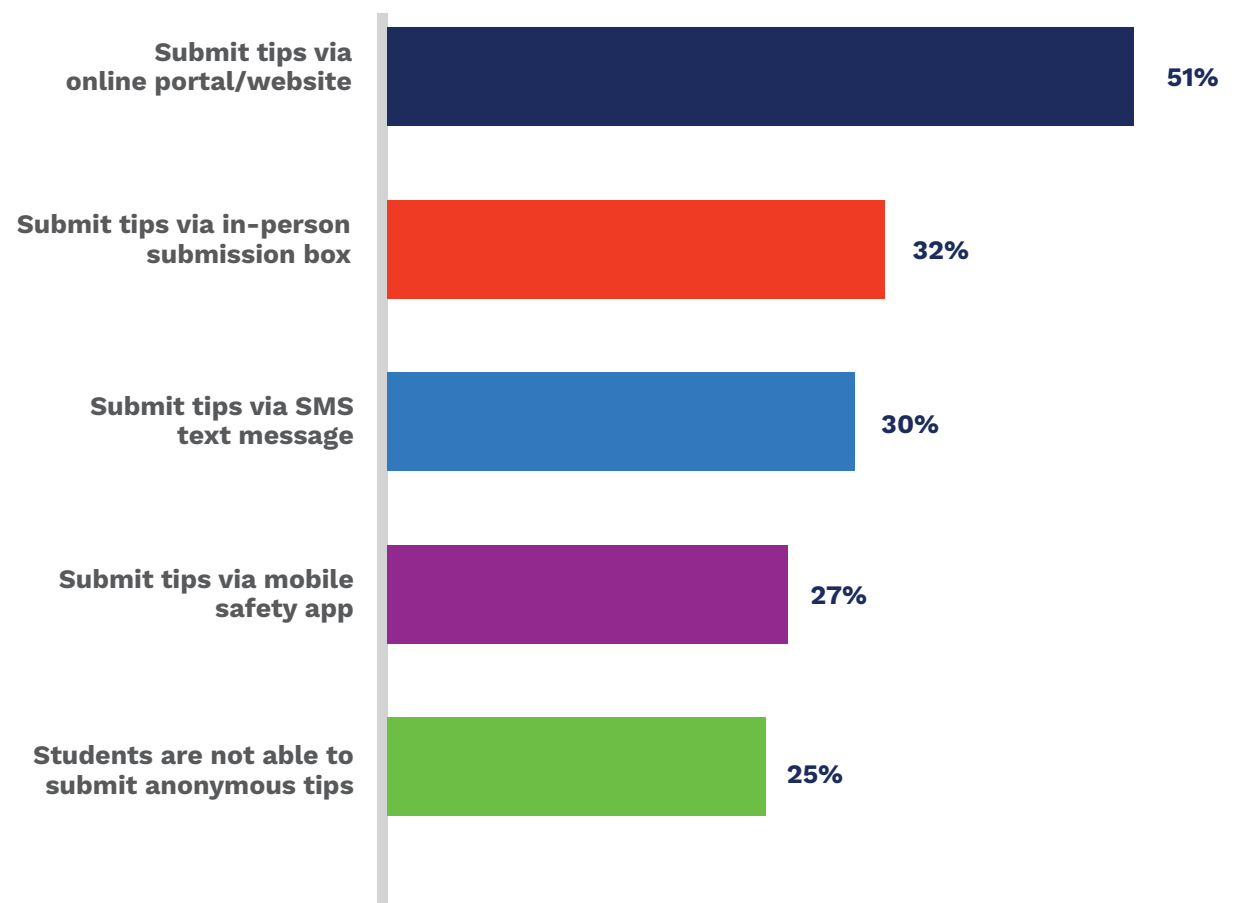
What communication channels are you currently using to reach your school community in a crisis?



(Respondents selected all that applied.)

Recognizing the importance of engaging their school community, many K-12 schools offer ways for students, faculty and staff to share their concerns anonymously about others on campus. Seventy-five percent of respondents indicated that people can submit tips in some form, with online portal (51%) as the top method. However, one-fourth said students still can't submit anonymous tips, a concerning 7% increase over last year.

How, if at all, are students, faculty and staff able to submit anonymous tips impacting school safety?

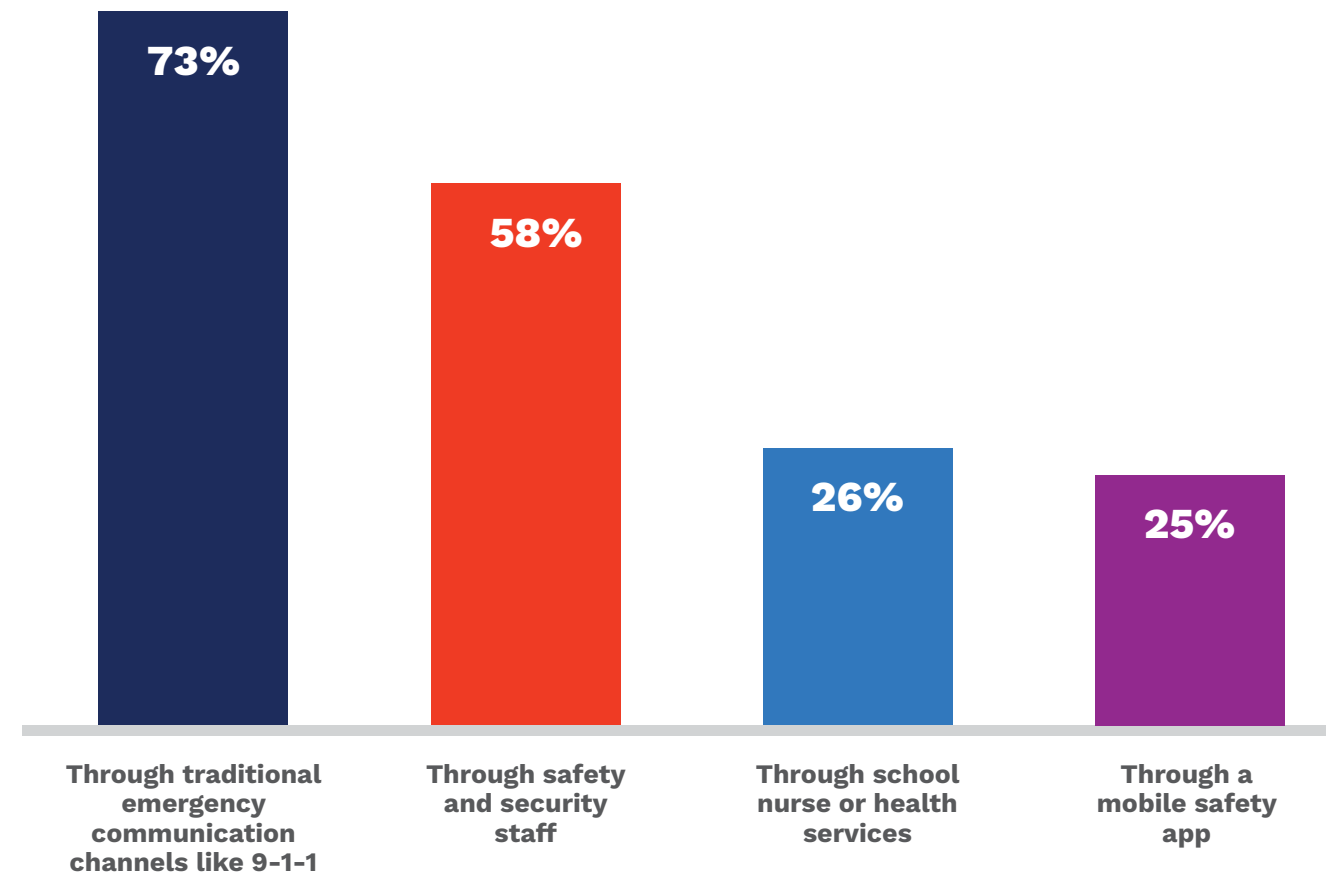


(Respondents selected all that applied.)



In the event of an emergency, most K-12 respondents (73%) still rely on traditional emergency communication channels, like 9-1-1. Only 25% use mobile safety apps today.

If an emergency occurs on campus, how does your school communicate with first responders?



(Respondents selected all that applied.)



Higher Education

Higher education institutions share many of the same concerns and priorities as K-12 schools going into the 2022-2023 school year. Colleges and universities have also dealt with uncertainty and disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and administrators anticipate we will see issues emerge as a consequence of the stress that students and faculty have been under since March 2020.

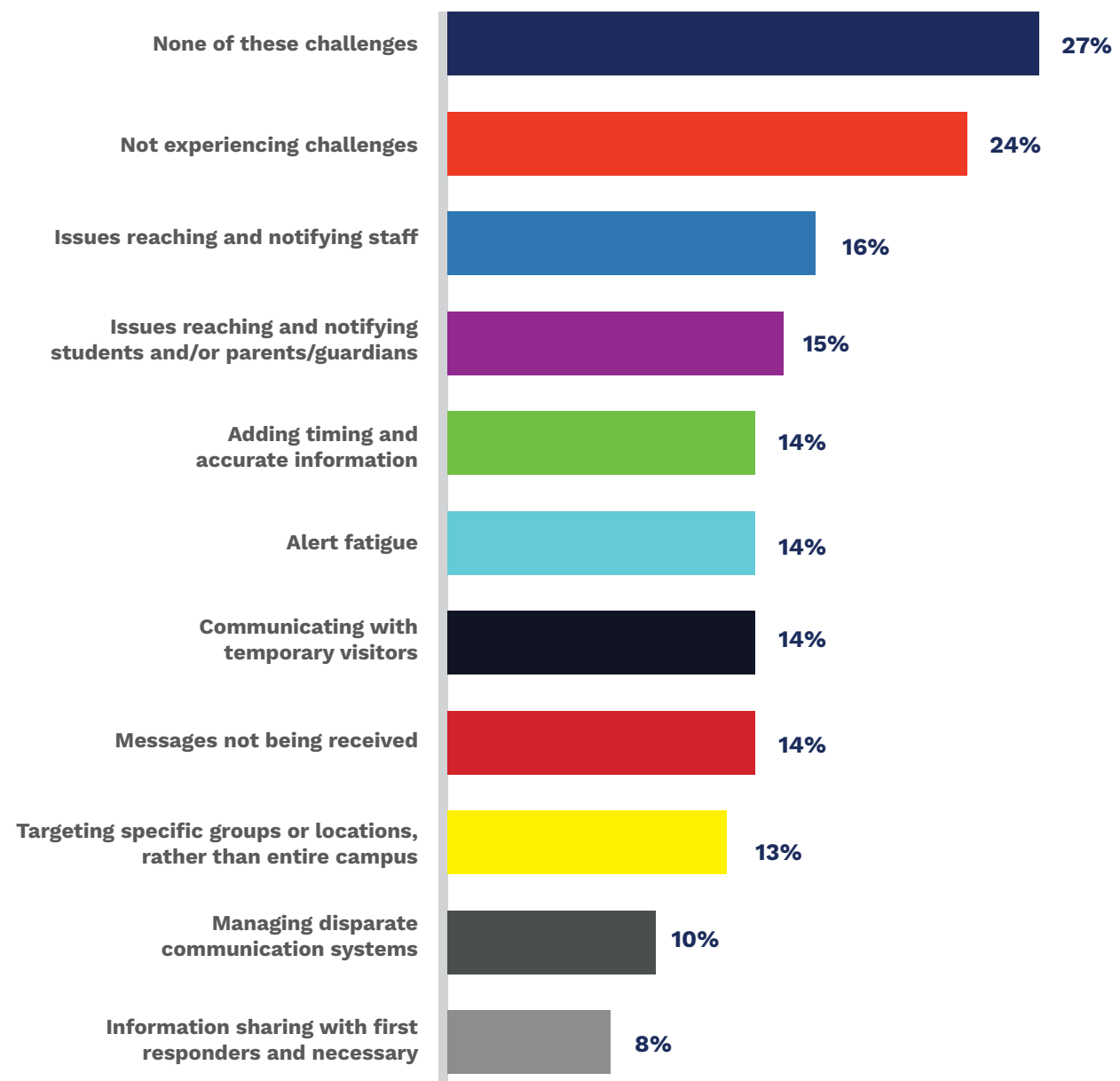
What makes communicating during crises and emergencies more complex in higher education is that learning environments are often much larger and dispersed across multiple campuses. Getting alerts out, sharing updates and making sure everyone is apprised of what's happening remains a challenge, but a challenge that technology can help address.



Crisis Communication Challenges

Respondents in higher education are experiencing fewer challenges than their K-12 counterparts. However, 16% still have a hard time reaching staff, and 15% struggle to reach students, parents and/or guardians amid crises.

What crisis communication challenges have you experienced in the past 12 months?



(Respondents selected all that applied.)

To address emergency communication challenges, respondents are extending the use of their mass notification system with more communication modes and expanding engagement efforts to students, guardians/parents and staff.



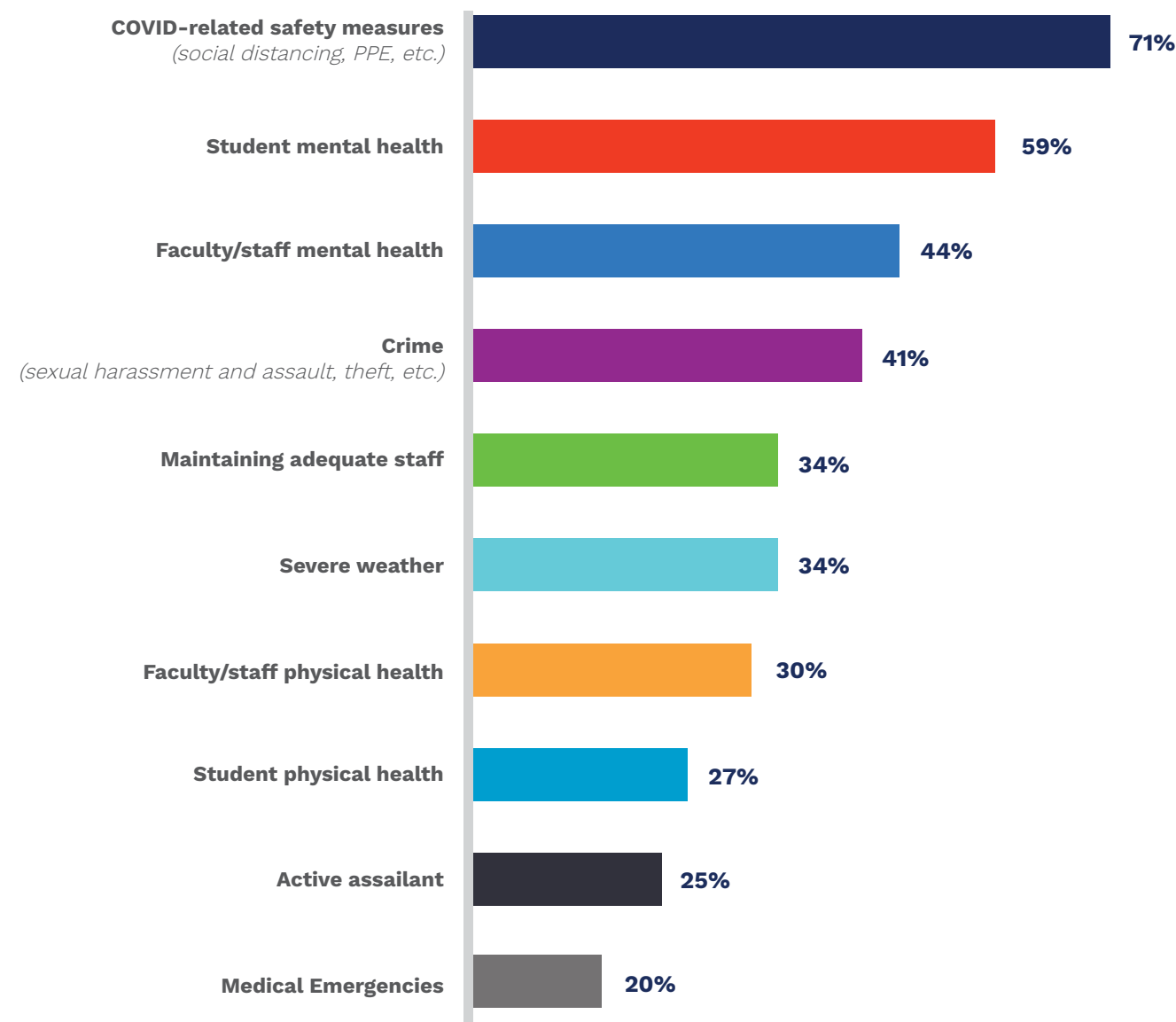
Planning for the Fall and Spring Semesters

More so than K-12 schools, institutions of higher education still list COVID-19-related safety measures as the top concern for next year (71%), followed by student mental health (59%) and faculty/staff mental health (44%). Additionally, concerns over crime increased by 20% year-over-year, and concerns over active assailants increased by 15%, both of which are likely related to the anticipated uptick in mental health needs next year. Concerns about severe weather also increased significantly (+19%), as administrators pay closer attention to the effects of severe weather events.



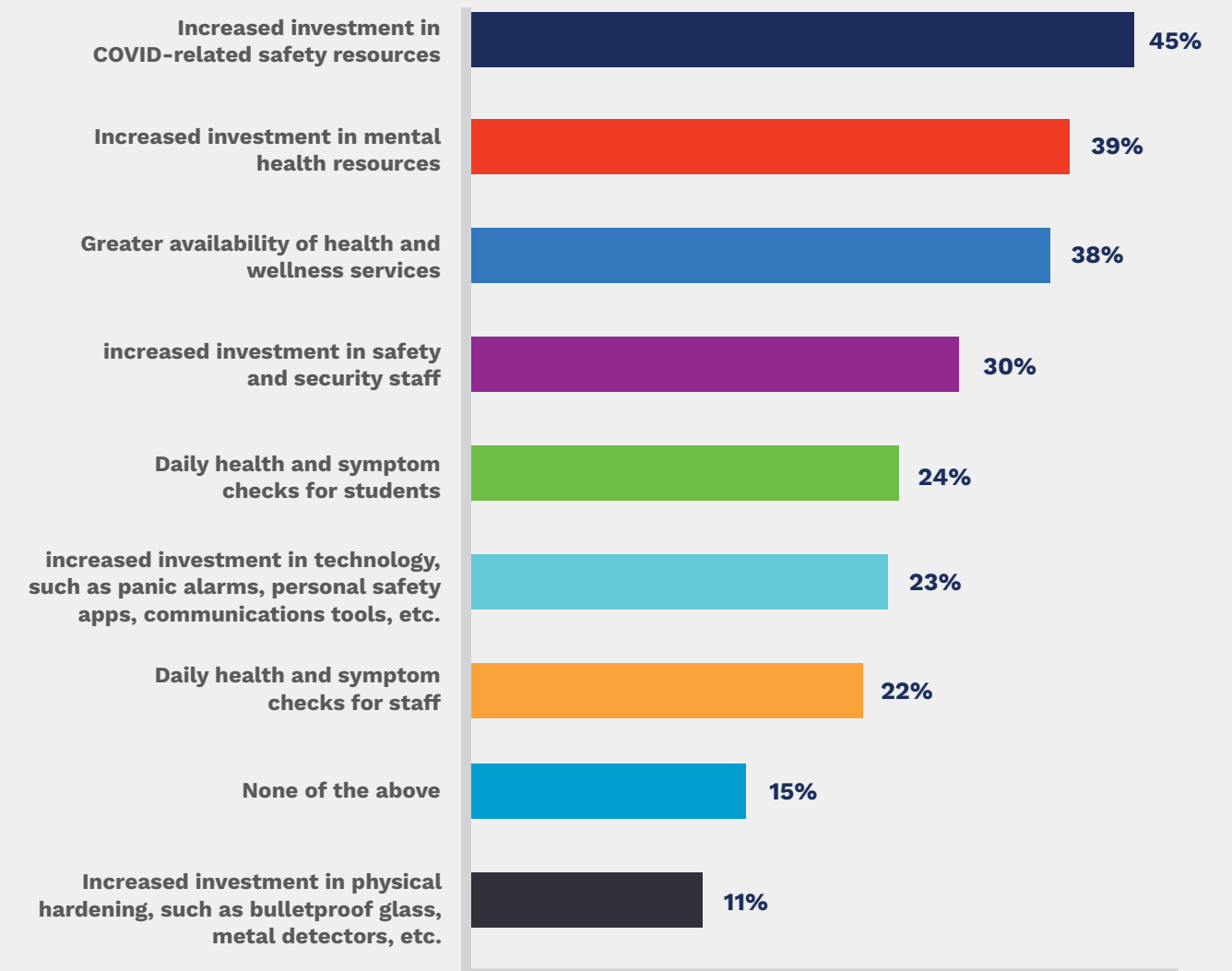
To address leading safety concerns, higher education institutions are investing further in COVID-19-related safety resources (45%) and mental health resources (39%). They are also **putting more energy into general health and wellness services and ramping down certain activities, such as daily health checks for students.** As we transition to a post-pandemic world, these trends are likely to continue.

What are your top safety concerns for the 2022–2023 school year?



(Respondents selected all that applied.)

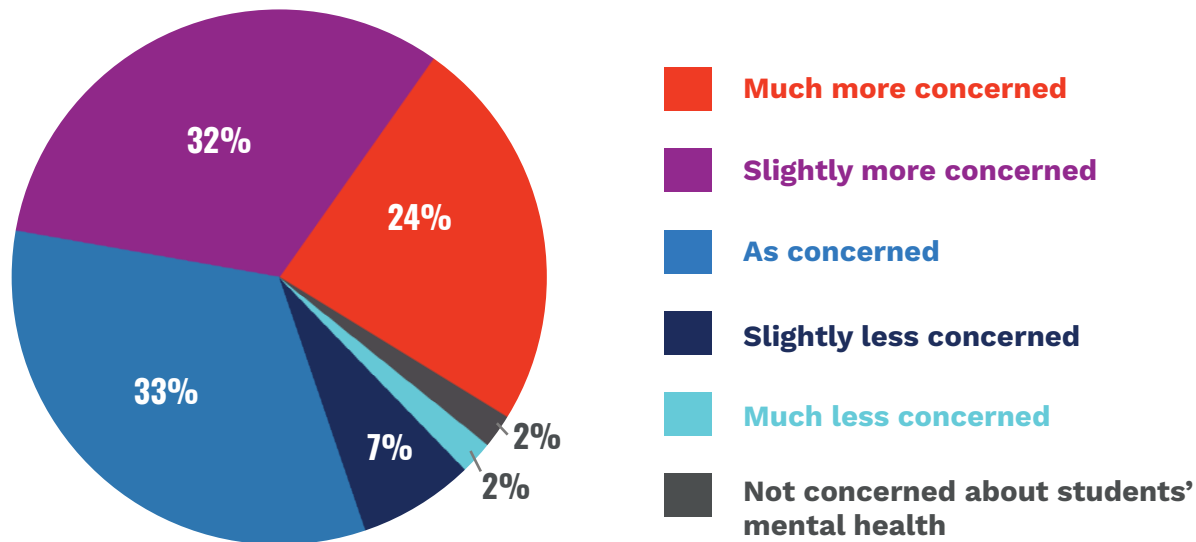
How do you plan to address these safety concerns?



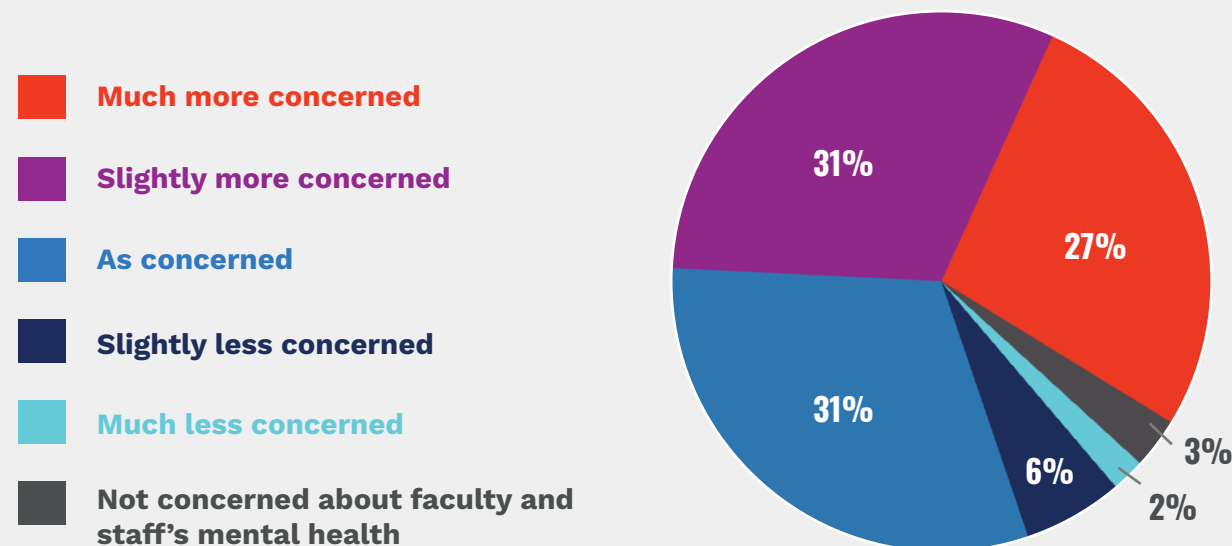
(Respondents selected all that applied.)

Overall, survey respondents are more concerned about the mental health of students and faculty than they were a year ago, similar to what K-12 leaders reported. Fifty-six percent of respondents were much more or slightly more concerned about student mental health than they were a year ago. Fifty-eight percent of respondents were much more or slightly more concerned for faculty and staff mental health than they were during the last school year.

How would you describe your concern for the state of students' mental health compared to a year ago

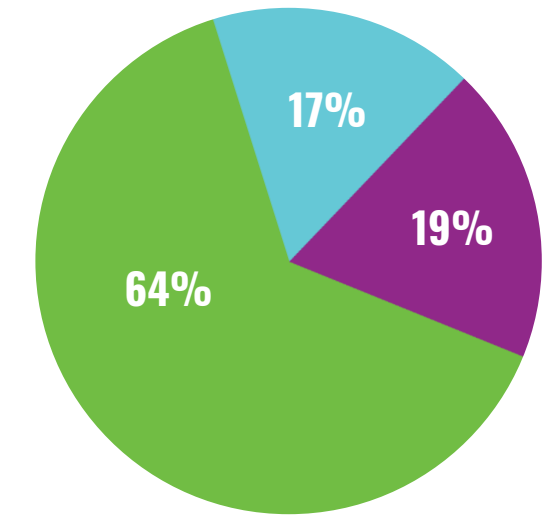


How would you describe your concern for the state of faculty and staff's mental health compared to a year ago?

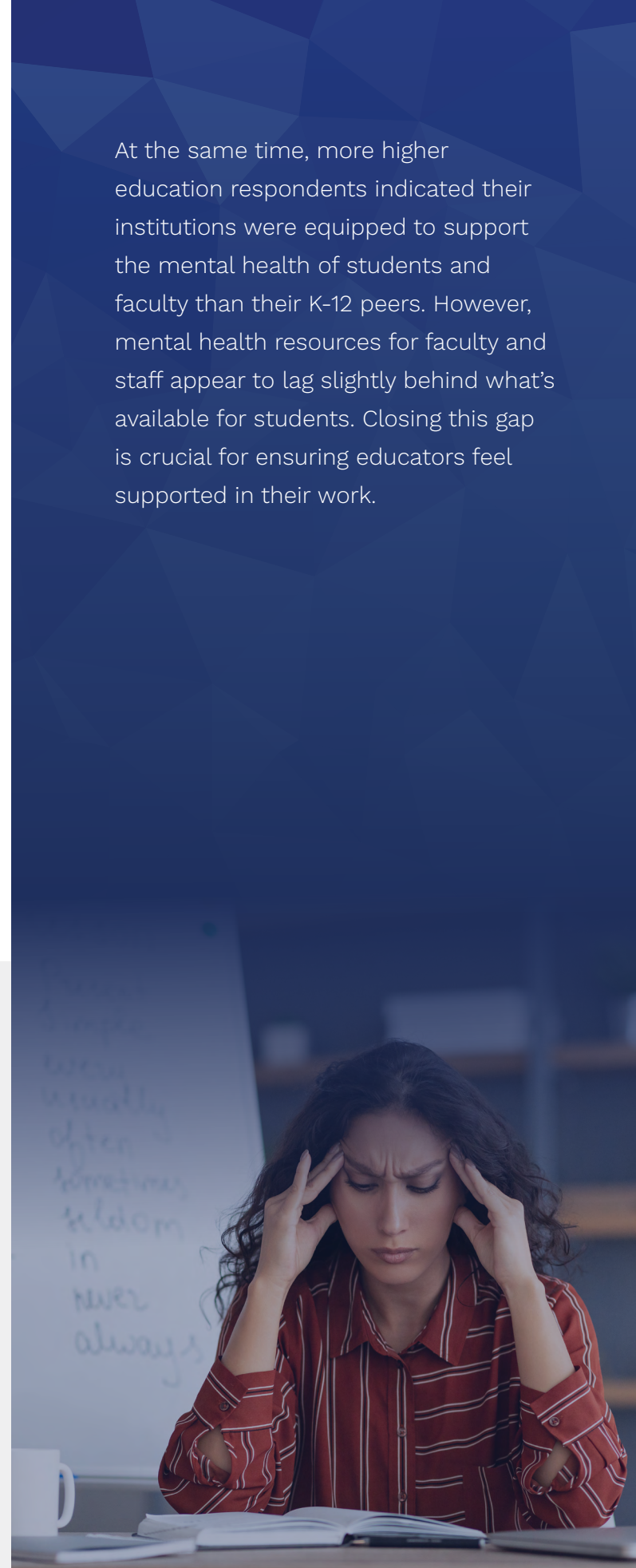
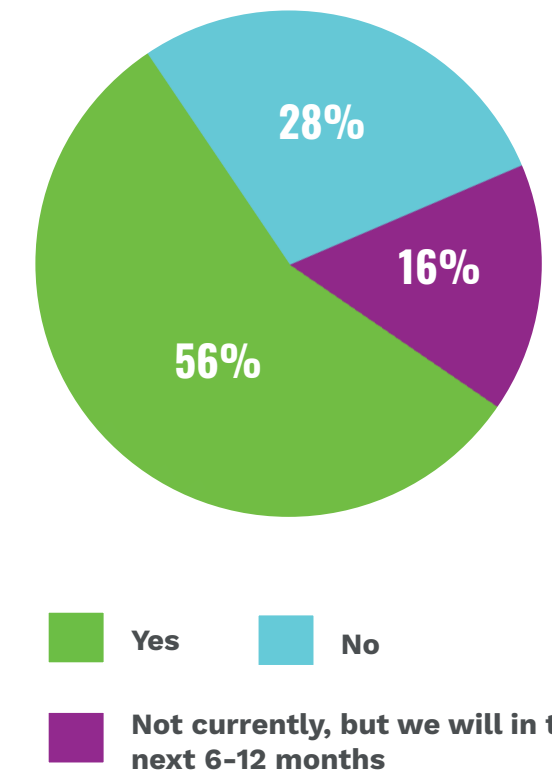


At the same time, more higher education respondents indicated their institutions were equipped to support the mental health of students and faculty than their K-12 peers. However, mental health resources for faculty and staff appear to lag slightly behind what's available for students. Closing this gap is crucial for ensuring educators feel supported in their work.

Do you believe your school has the appropriate mental health resources to support students?



Do you believe your school has the appropriate mental health resources to support faculty and staff?



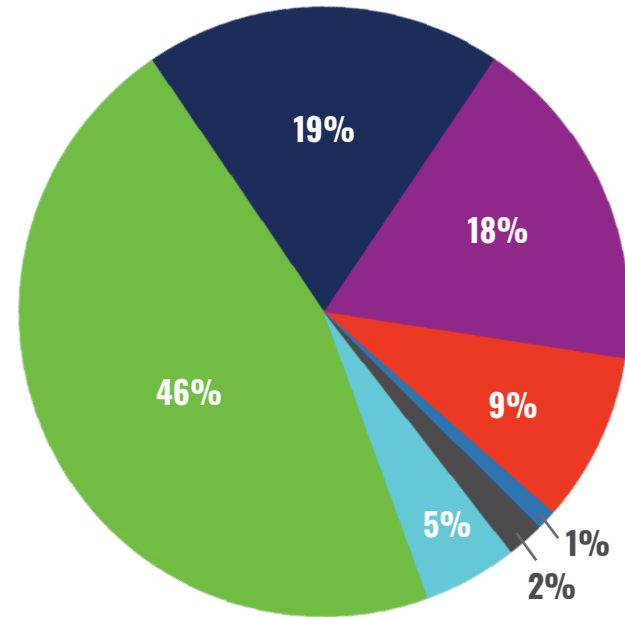
As mentioned previously, more respondents from higher education were worried about violence on campus in the 2022-2023 academic year. Nearly half of survey takers (46%) are more concerned about active assailants and violent acts than they were prior to the beginning of the pandemic. Another 46% are still as concerned as they were previously.

Again, social media muddies the waters and appears to increase general anxiety about violence. Threats on social media platforms have contributed meaningfully to how survey respondents (79%) think about campus safety. Learning how to mitigate safety risks borne on social media will only become increasingly important, as more people join today's most popular platforms.



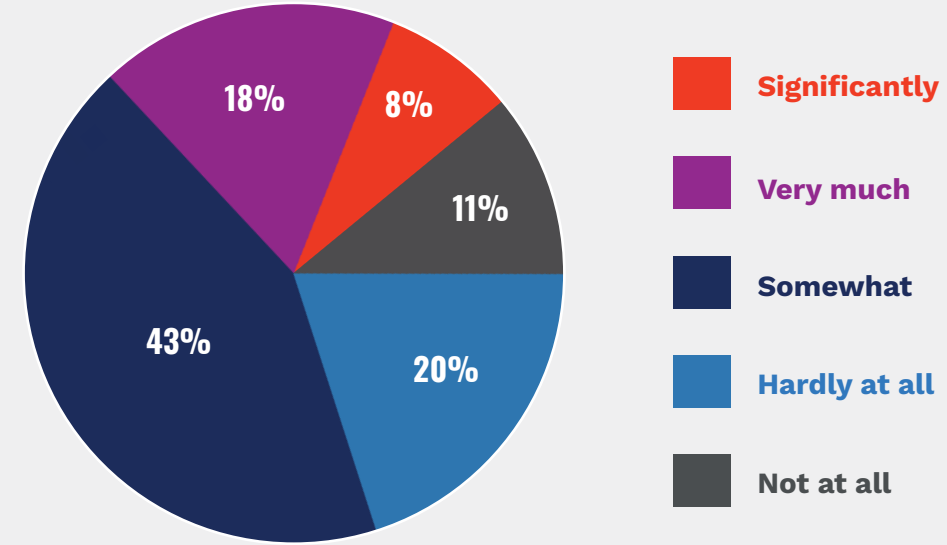
Nearly half of respondents (46%) are **more concerned about active assailants and violent acts** than they were prior to the pandemic.

How has your level of concern changed, if at all, about active assailants and violence on campus compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic?



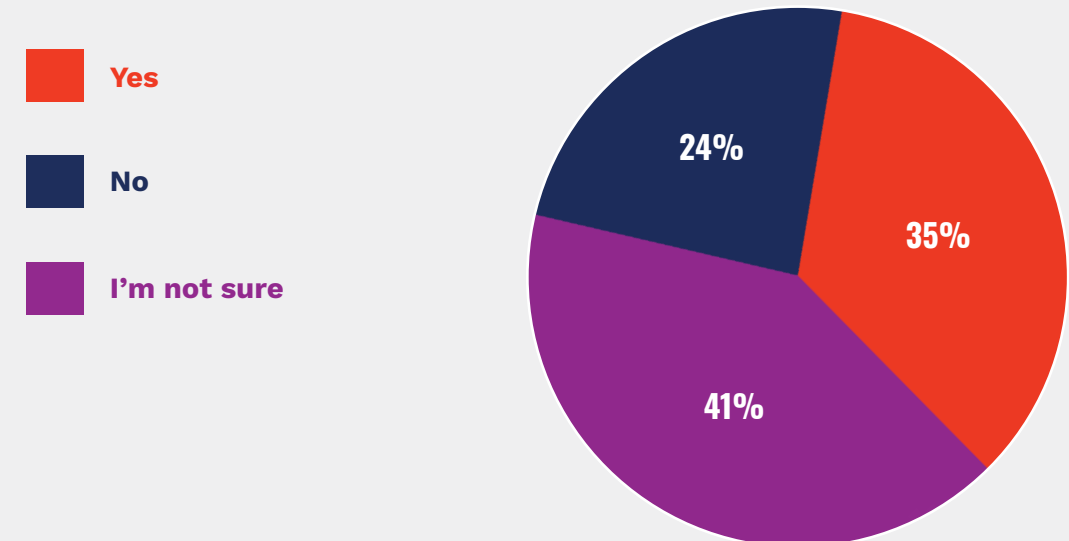
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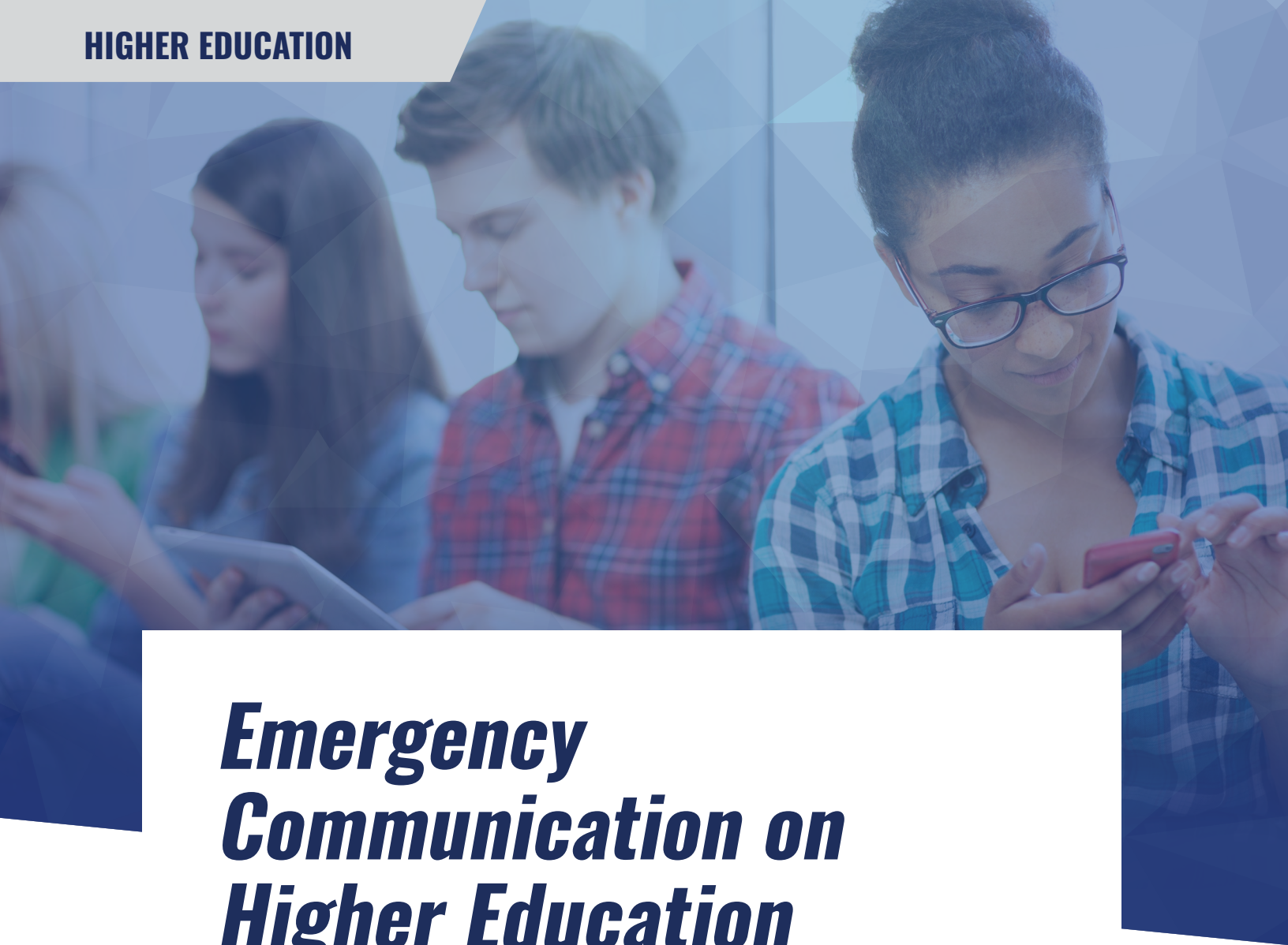
How much has the rise of school safety threats, like the recent wave of TikTok threats to schools and bomb threats at multiple Ivy league universities, contributed to your concern for campus safety?



Fortunately, **more than a third of survey respondents have access to funding to pursue their safety goals** for the fall and spring semesters.

Do you have access to funding allocated to ensure the appropriate safety measures are in place for the next school year?



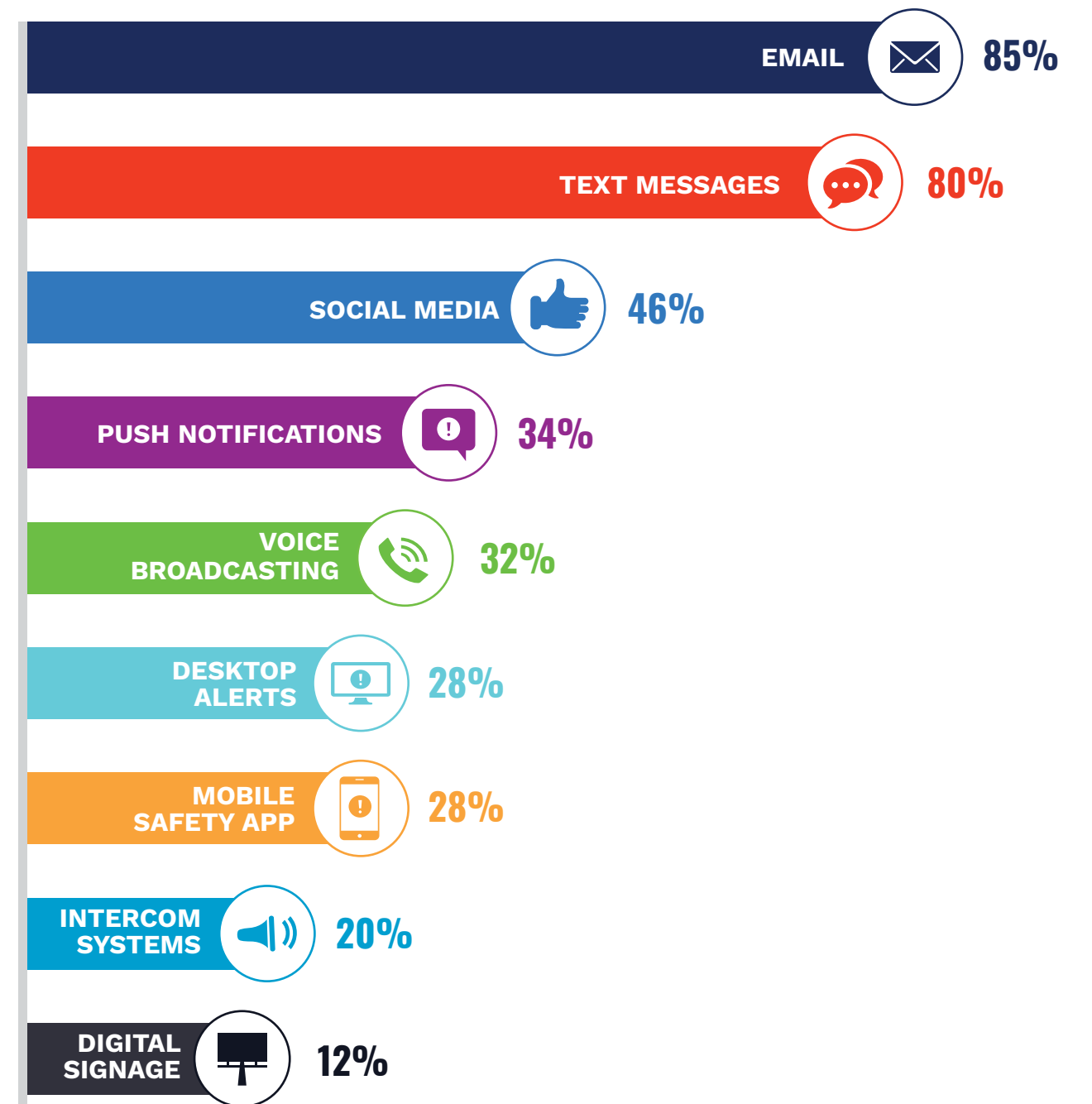


Emergency Communication on Higher Education Campuses

Given the spread of students, faculty, staff and visitors across higher education campuses, communicating effectively in emergency situations can be harder and more stressful for all parties involved, which is why administrators must evaluate their protocols carefully.

According to higher education respondents, email and text messages are still the dominant communication channels used for disseminating information during crises. It's not surprising that these channels are more popular at the higher education level, given that more students are likely to have mobile devices for accessing relevant notifications.

What communication channels are you currently using to reach your school community in a crisis?

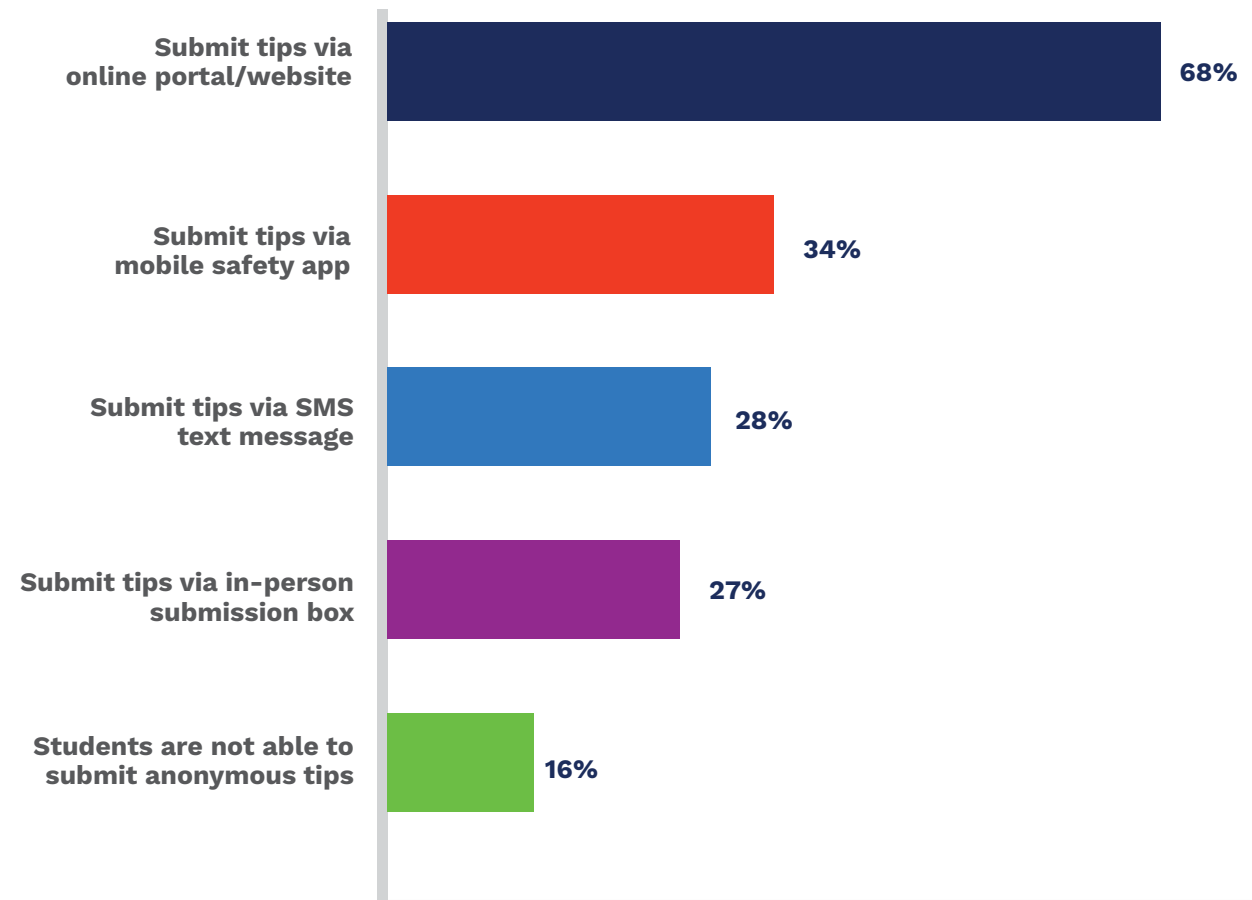


(Respondents selected all that applied.)



On top of getting emergency alerts to students, faculty and staff, all individuals should be able to share information that could be helpful for preventing emergencies or mitigating their consequences. Fortunately, most higher education respondents indicated that people could submit tips anonymously in a number of ways, with online portal (68%) as the top method and mobile safety app (34%) as the second.

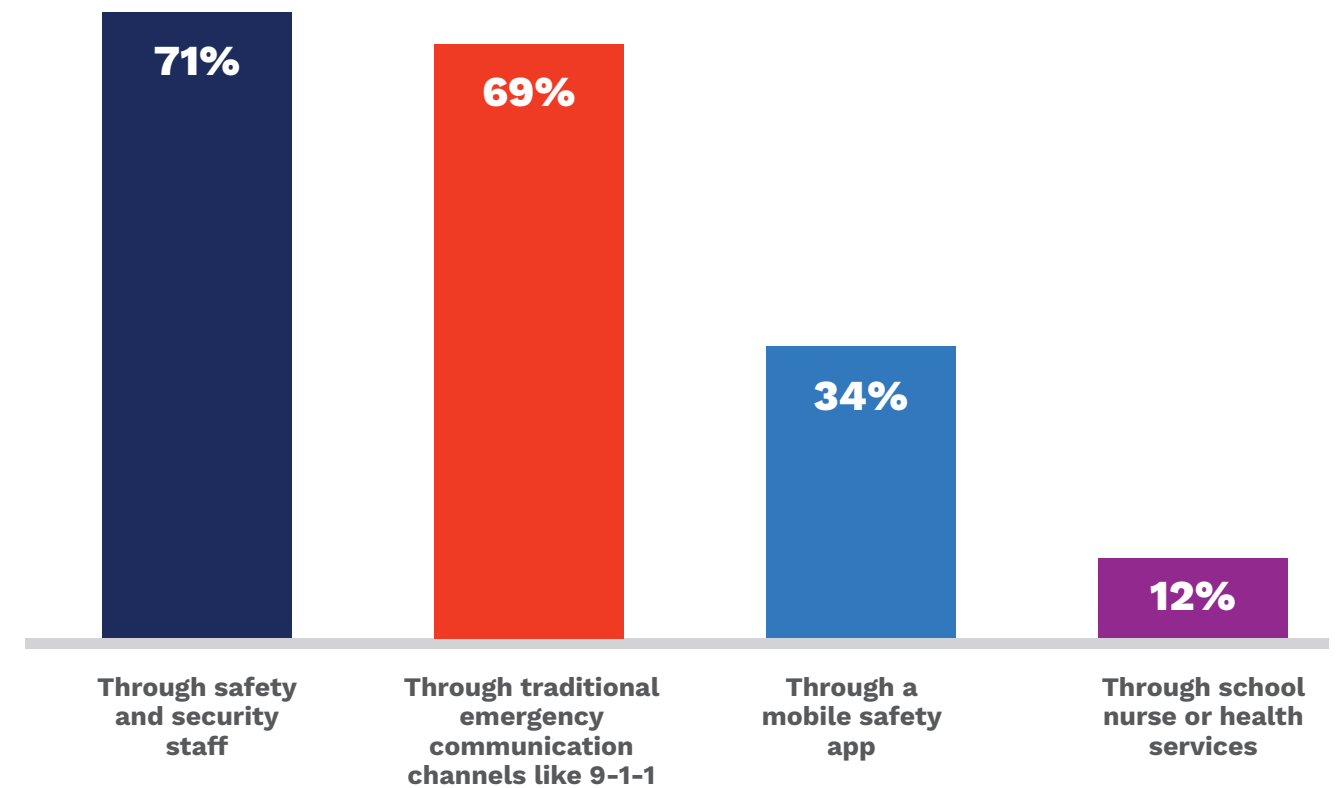
How, if at all, are students, faculty and staff able to submit anonymous tips impacting school safety?



(Respondents selected all that applied.)

Compared to K-12 schools, higher education institutions reach first responders more through security staff than they do through traditional emergency communication channels. Interestingly, the traditional emergency communication channel grew by nearly 10% from 2021, based on our survey results.

If an emergency occurs on campus, how does your school communicate with first responders?



(Respondents selected all that applied.)

Conclusion

In the 2021-2022 school year, COVID-19 had a significant impact on how K-12 schools and higher education institutions operated daily. However, as we turn our sights to next year, it's the nonviral effects of the pandemic — stress, anxiety, isolation and more — that will make the 2022-2023 school year challenging in different ways. Mental health is top of mind for administrators, which means crisis communication, scenario planning and emergency protocols will need to evolve. More than ever, communicating effectively, quickly and consistently will be valuable for everyone in the school community — students, faculty, staff, parents and guardians — who are all recovering from the heavy toll of COVID-19.

Methodology

This survey was conducted by the independent research firm Researchscape. Respondents were nearly 800 employees working in the K-12 and higher education industries in administration, emergency management, facilities and operations, IT services, marketing and communications, safety and security and student services. Responses were collected in February 2022.

About Rave Mobile Safety

Rave Mobile Safety is the leading provider of critical communication and collaboration technology used to save lives, manage crisis incidents and increase resiliency. From major disasters and crisis events to everyday emergencies and operational incidents, the Rave platform enables critical data sharing, mass notification and emergency response coordination. Over 8,000 first responder, emergency management, 9-1-1 and federal, state and local agencies — as well as corporations, healthcare organizations, universities and schools — all rely on Rave to prepare better, respond faster, recover quicker and mitigate anticipated critical incidents. Founded in 2004, Rave's award-winning software solutions are backed by leading growth equity firm TCV. Let Rave enable you to do all you can today® to keep everyone safe. For more information, visit <https://www.ravemobilesafety.com>, read our company [blog](#), and follow us on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), and [Facebook](#).

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can today.®**

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