

The 2018 BCPS High School Capacity Study Focus Groups

Nine Focus Groups were conducted by the Sage/GWWO study team over four days to gauge how the community believes BCPS should handle a prospective shortage of high school seats. These were conducted at Catonsville HS, Pikesville HS, and Dundalk/Sollers Point HS as well as at central office.

By 2027, Baltimore County Public Schools stand to be 1,700 high school seats short of the minimum required for its scholars.

There are a number of ways to deal with this, including new construction, redistricting, and a variety of innovative techniques.

The study team showed focus group participants a set of potential capacity solutions and then allowed them to respond to each one . . .

Focus Group Central Themes I

❖ Smaller is better

- A majority (58%) of focus group participants said the optimal size of a high school should be between 1,000 and 1,400 students.
- Small school sizes render schools safer and better position faculty and staff to form constructive relationships with students.

❖ Magnet and CTE programs in demand

- Many stakeholders indicated a desire to expose students to more occupational possibilities than are presented through standard curricula.
- School choice is generally viewed favorably, but not if it comes at the expense of community schools
- Transportation to schools offering magnet programs represents a major concern.

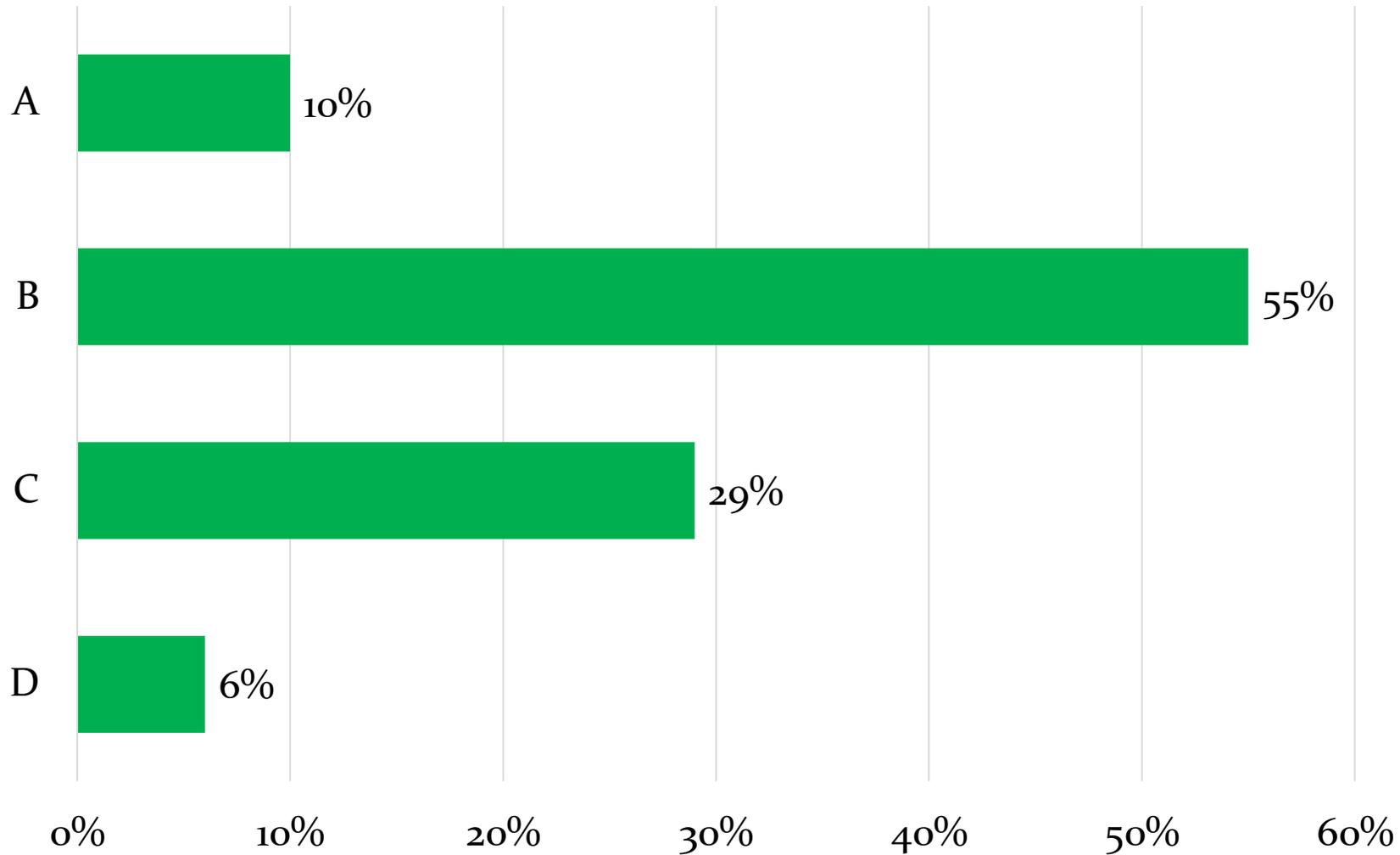
Focus Group Central Themes II

- ❖ Keep neighborhoods together.
 - A plurality (43%) of focus group participants said they understand the need for redistricting.
 - Redistricting efforts should emphasize feeder patterns that sustain neighborhood integrity.
 - Announcing redistricting many years in advance offers significant benefits, including to prospective home purchasers.
- ❖ Quality, not just quantity.
 - Many focus group participants were concerned that proposed capacity solutions implemented at certain schools (e.g. expansions or replacements) would potentially leave poor building quality issues unaddressed at others.

❖ Willingness to Pay

- 90% of focus group participants would be willing to accept some increase in property taxes to fund an optimal capacity solution.
- Clear majority (55%) would be willing to accept an increase between 10 and 20 cents.

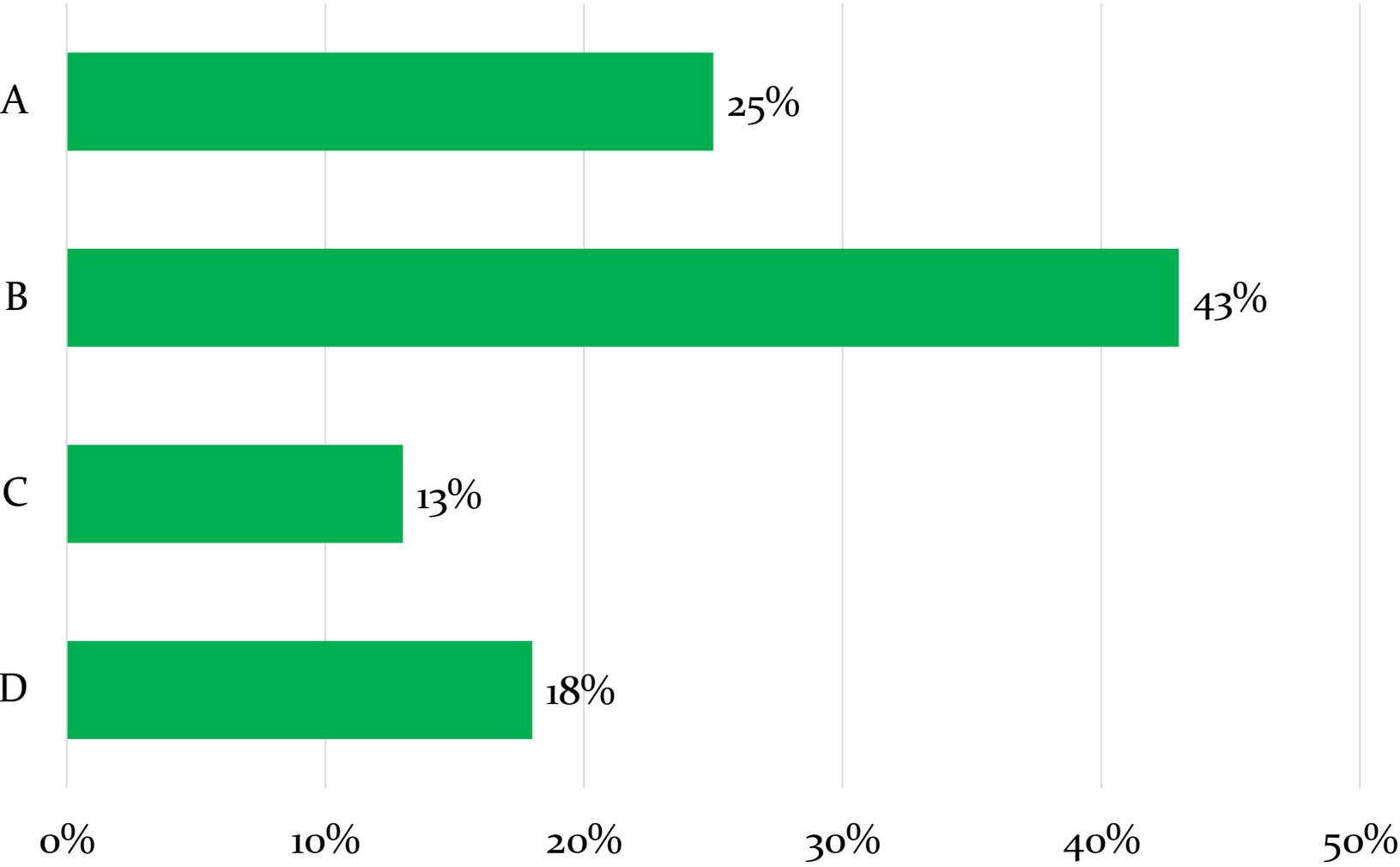
Survey Question 1: The current Baltimore County property tax rate is \$1.10/\$1,000 of assessed value. What level of tax increase would be acceptable to you to permit BCPS to meet its capacity need?



- A. No Increase
- B. An increase of no more than 10 cents.
- C. An increase of between 10 and 20 cents.
- D. An increase of greater than 20 cents.

Total Respondents: 62

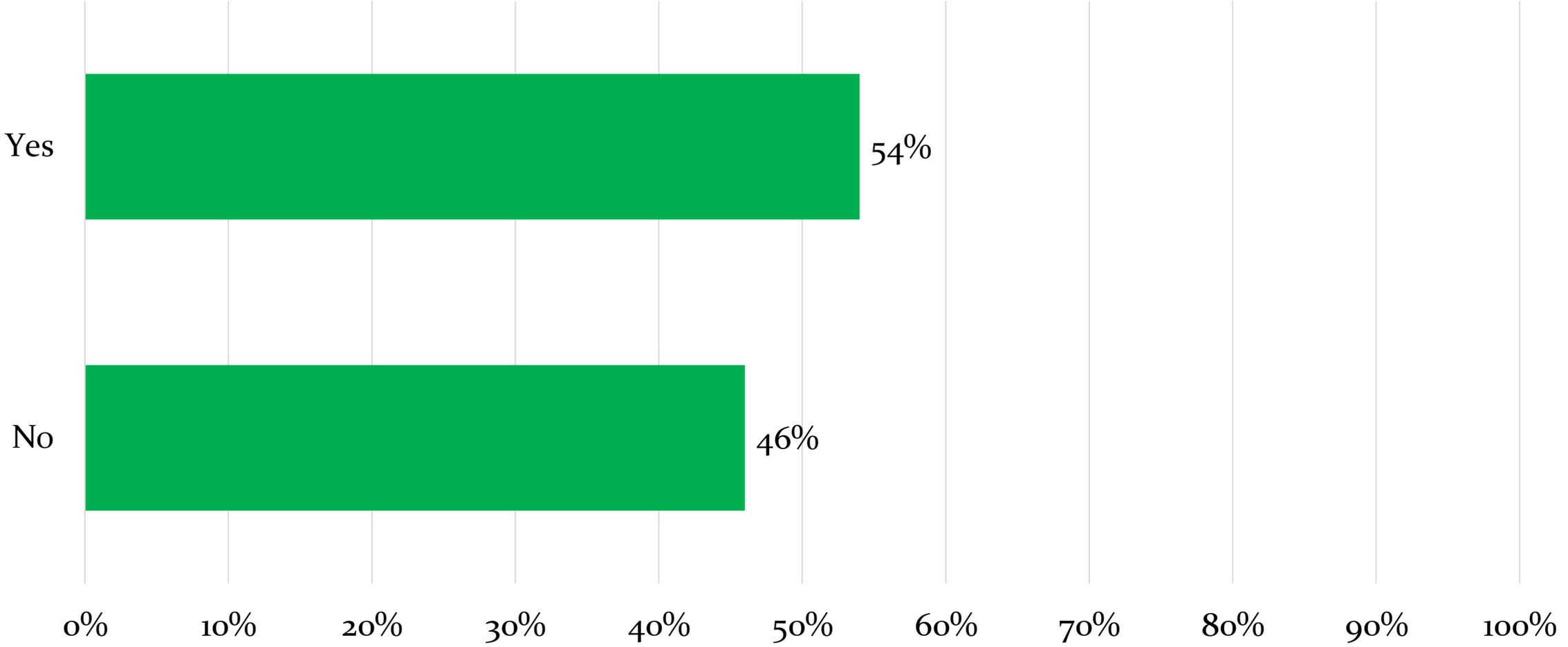
Question 2: How would you best characterize your willingness to allow a boundary change process impacting the school with which you are most closely affiliated?



- A. Extremely unwilling.
- B. Somewhat reluctant, but understand the potential need.
- C. Not concerned one way or another.
- D. Hopeful that such a process will take place.

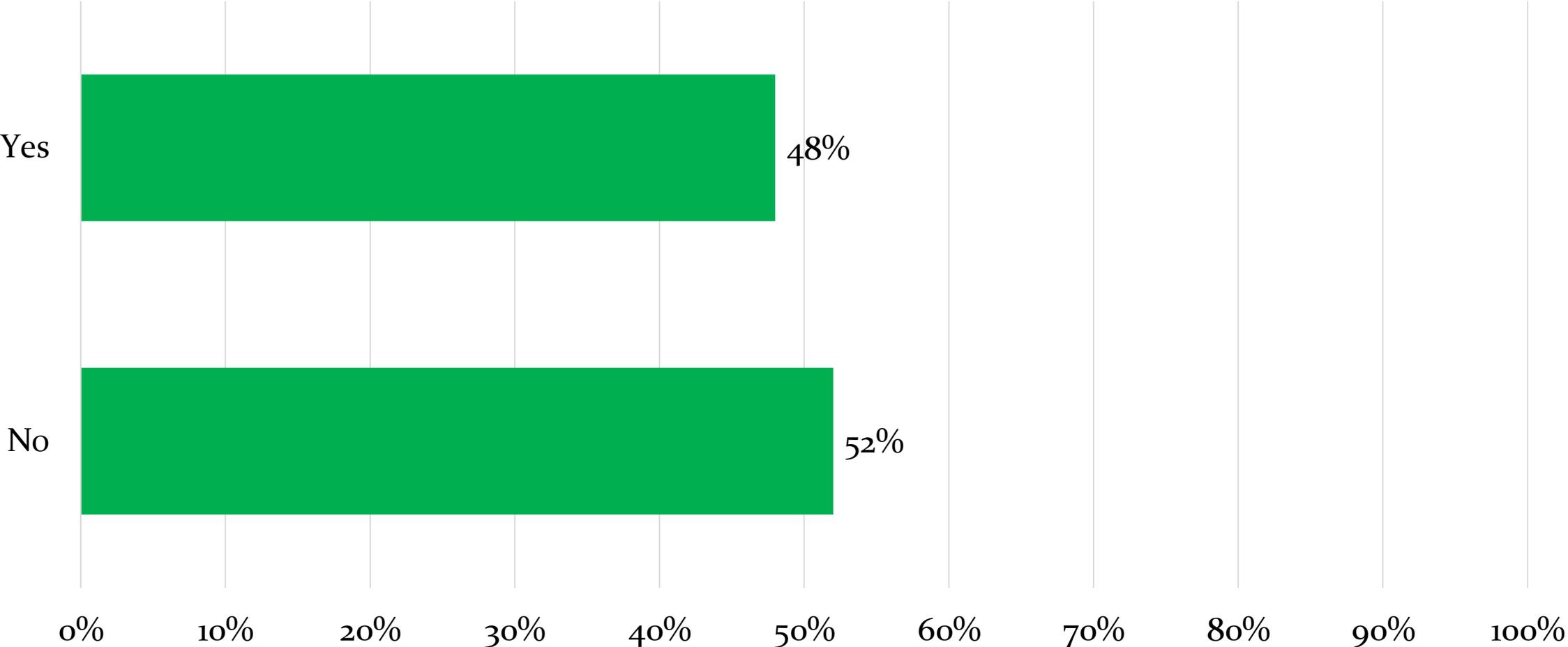
Total Respondents: 60

Question 3: Agree (Yes) or Disagree (No) – We have too few magnet programs in the county.



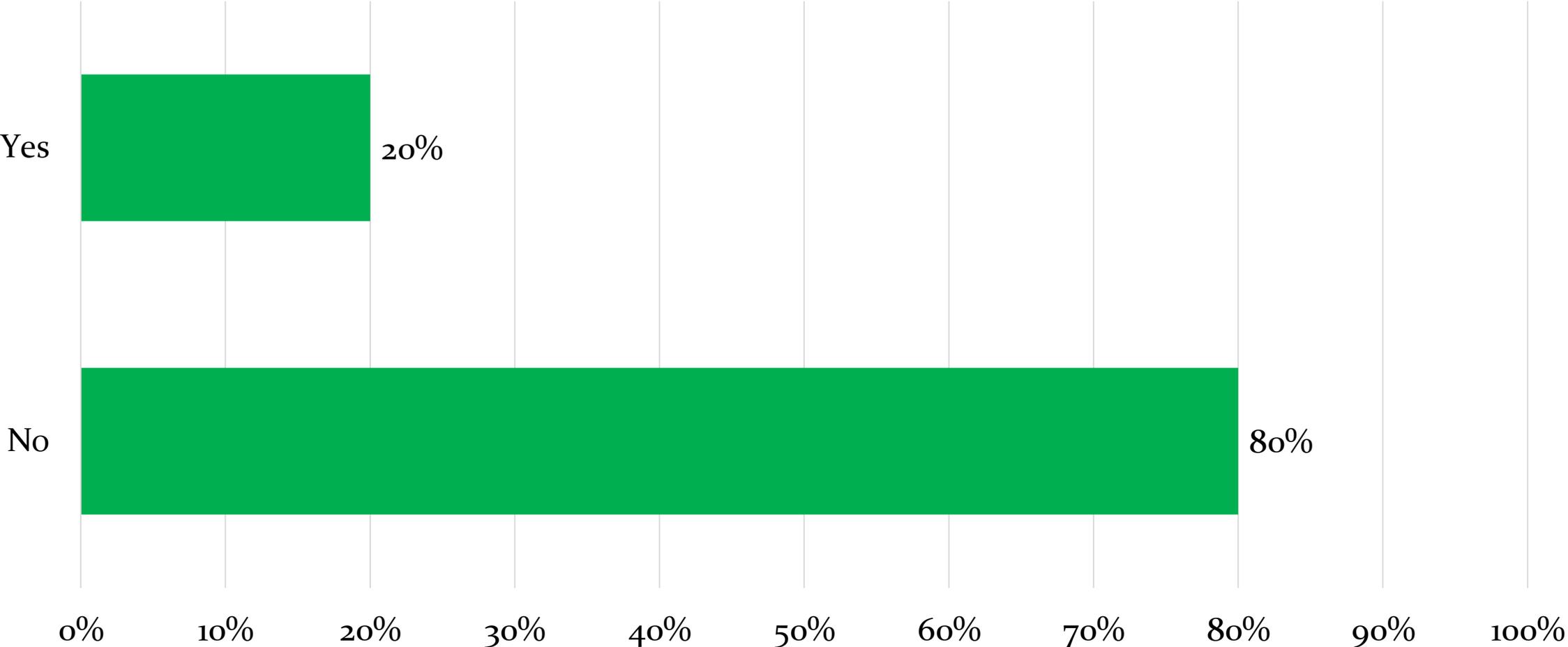
Total Respondents: 61

Question 4: Agree (Yes) or Disagree (No) – There is too much focus on magnets these days, and not enough on standard curricula.



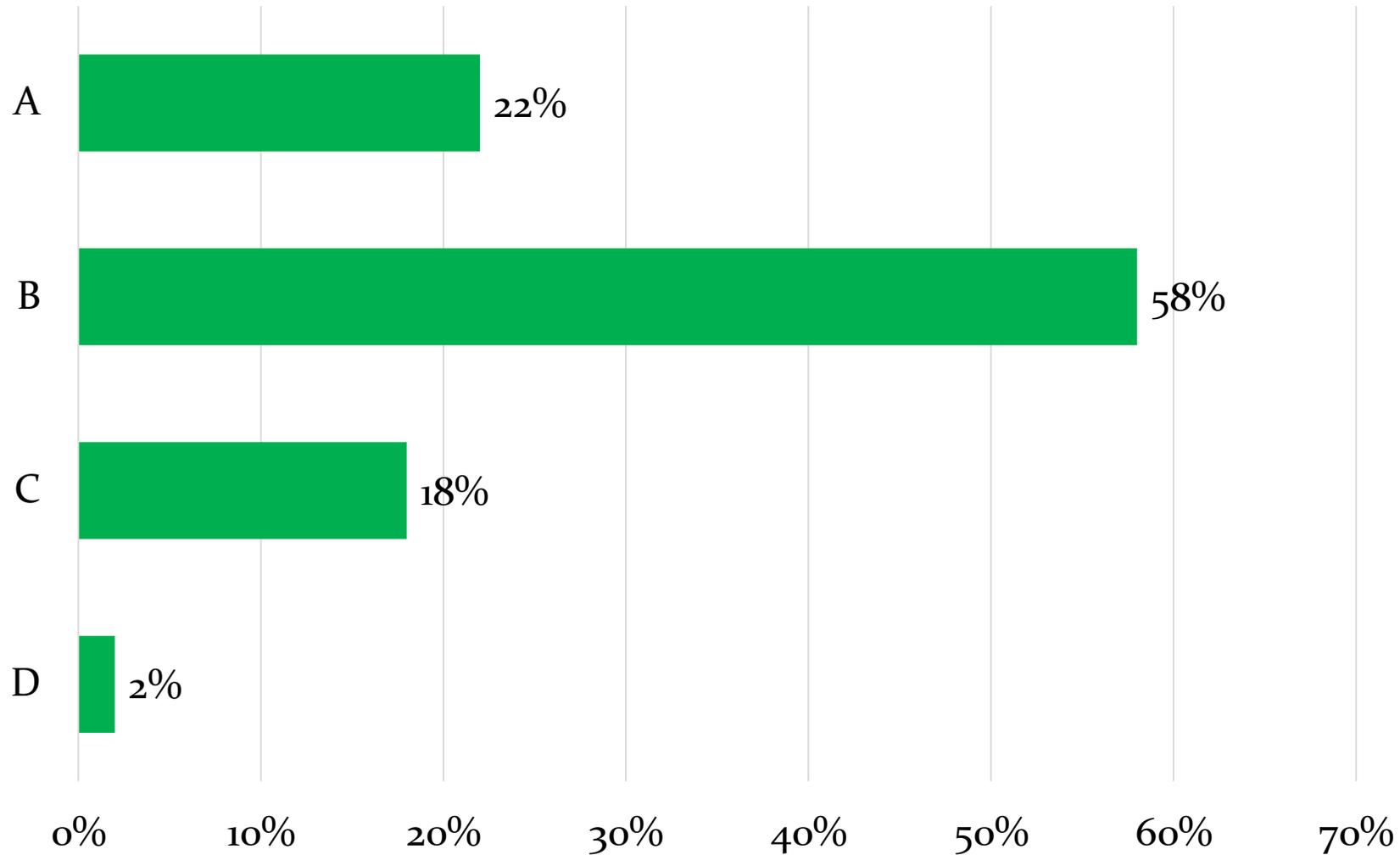
Total Respondents: 50

Question 5: Agree (Yes) or Disagree (No) – We need more magnet programs, but only in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) related categories.



Total Respondents: 61

Question 6: What do you view as the optimal size of an individual high school?



A. Fewer than 1,000 students.

B. Between 1,000 and 1,400 students.

C. Between 1,400 and 1,800 students.

D. Greater than 1,800 students.

Total Respondents: 60

Conclusion

The public engagement process continues. BCPS will be hosting a series of gallery walks (public information gatherings) in both July and September. There will also be an online survey on the BCPS website.

The study team will be delivering its final analyses, implications, and recommendations in late-2018.

The focus groups reveal that people are passionate about BCPS high schools, are willing to help fund their ongoing improvement, and believe that scholars deserve high quality buildings with enough room for students to move around and to grow intellectually.