



Preventing Sexual Violence Among Adolescents in Middle Schools



Avanti Adhia, ScD
Assistant Professor
University of Washington
School of Nursing



Nikki Van Wagner, MA
Program Consultant
Office of Superintendent of
Public Instruction

Question for the Viewers



How would you describe your familiarity with your state's efforts to address sexual violence in schools?

- A. Very familiar
- B. Somewhat familiar
- C. Not familiar
- D. Other (please type in chat)

Background



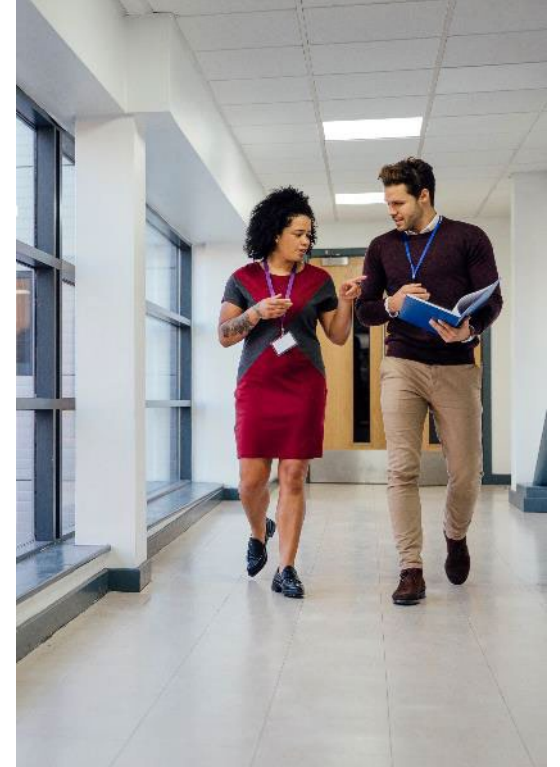
Youth-Centered Environmental Shift (YES!) Program



Needs & Attitudes: Data from Staff & Students



Perspectives of School District Leaders



Background



Project Team & Funding



Northwest Center
FOR PUBLIC HEALTH PRACTICE

Betty Bekemeier, PhD, MPH, RN

Fred Rivara, MD, MPH

Avanti Adhia, ScD

Megan Rogers, MS

Ann Richey, MPH student



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Nikki Van Wagner, MA

Laurie Dils, MSW

Funding:

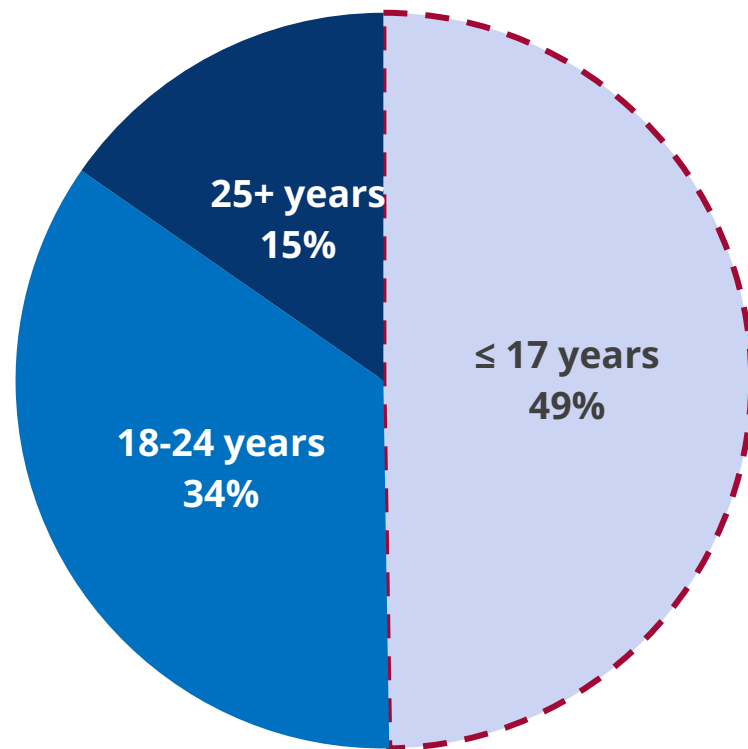


Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention

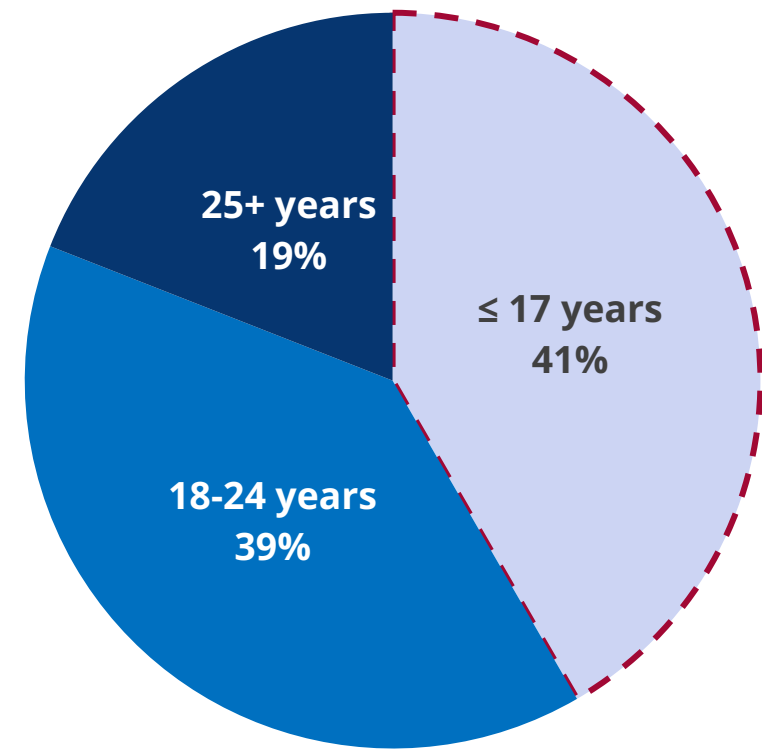
Sexual Violence

Sexual violence (SV) is prevalent and includes a range of behaviors

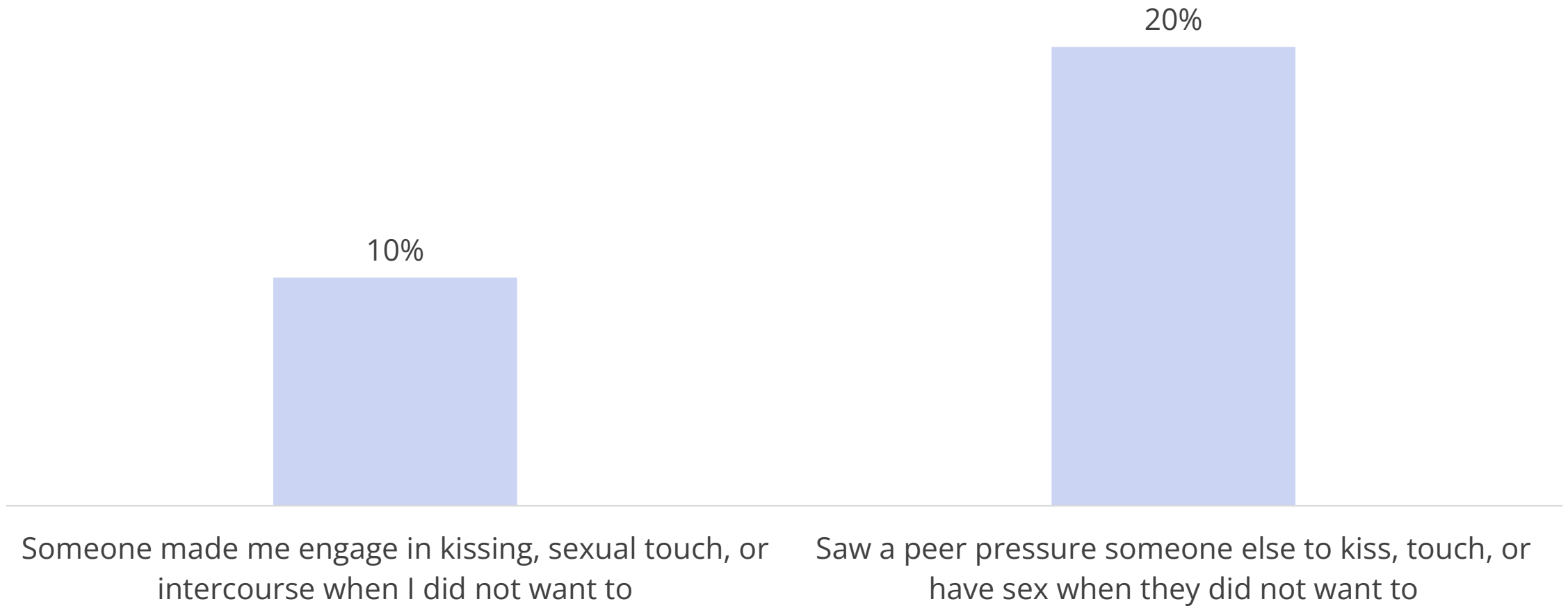
Age at First Victimization: Women



Age at First Victimization: Men



Sexual Violence among 8th Grade Students in Washington



Consequences of Sexual Violence

Health consequences of SV can be severe and long-lasting:



Mental health



Physical health



Reproductive health



Unhealthy behaviors

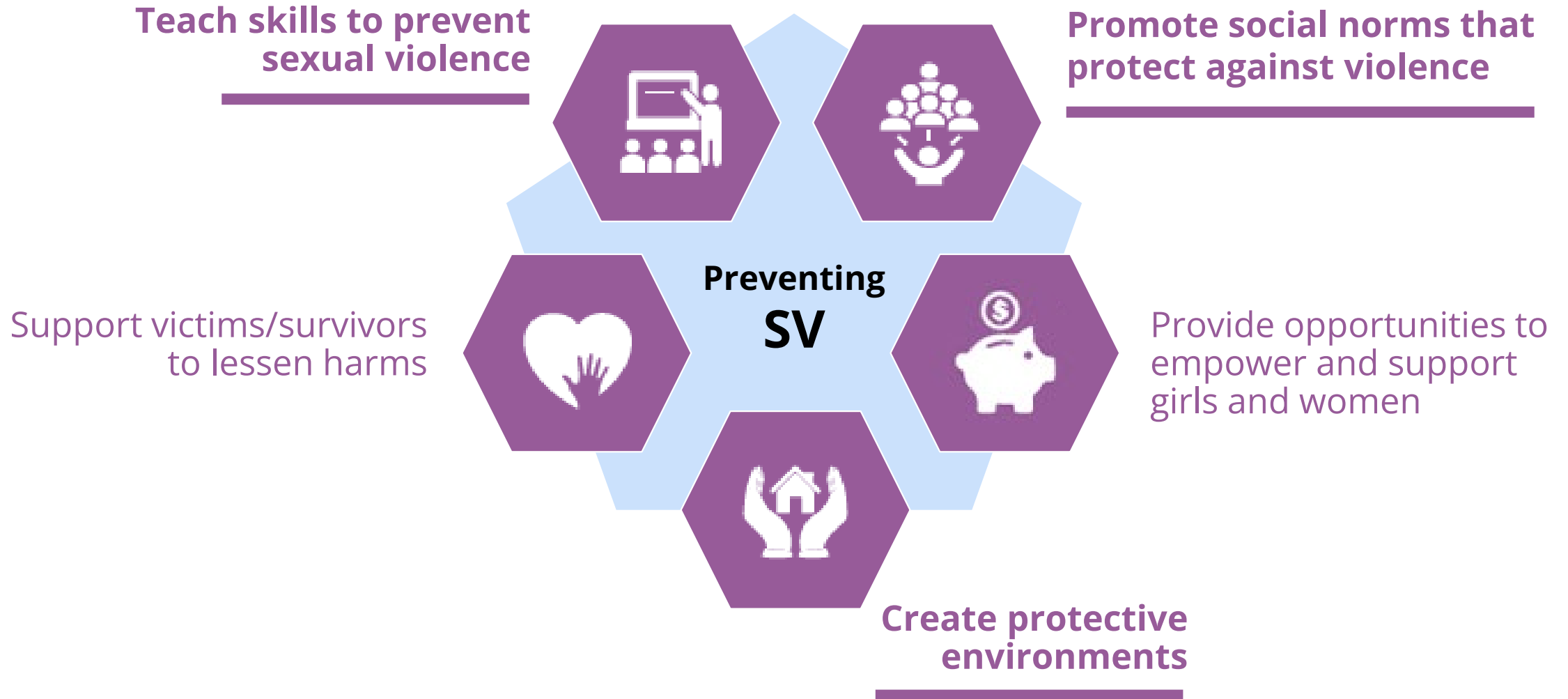


Death



Societal costs

Evidence-Based Strategies for Preventing Sexual Violence



Sexual Violence & Schools



- School environments offer an influential context to prevent SV
- System-level interventions (e.g., focused on school policies and procedures) for primary prevention of SV are critically needed in schools
- Starting interventions earlier (e.g., middle school) may be beneficial for primary prevention

Youth-Centered Environmental Shift (YES!) Program



Mission: To create a school culture where students are emotionally and physically safe, supported, and free of abuse, specifically Sexual Violence.



Youth-Centered Environmental Shift (YES!) Program

Program Components

**School Support Team
(SST) Development**

**School Climate and
Environmental Shift**

**Policy and Procedure
Revision and
Implementation**

Program Activities

Identifying SST members

Youth listening sessions

Identify policies and
procedures to review

Training of SSTs

Environmental shift
assessment

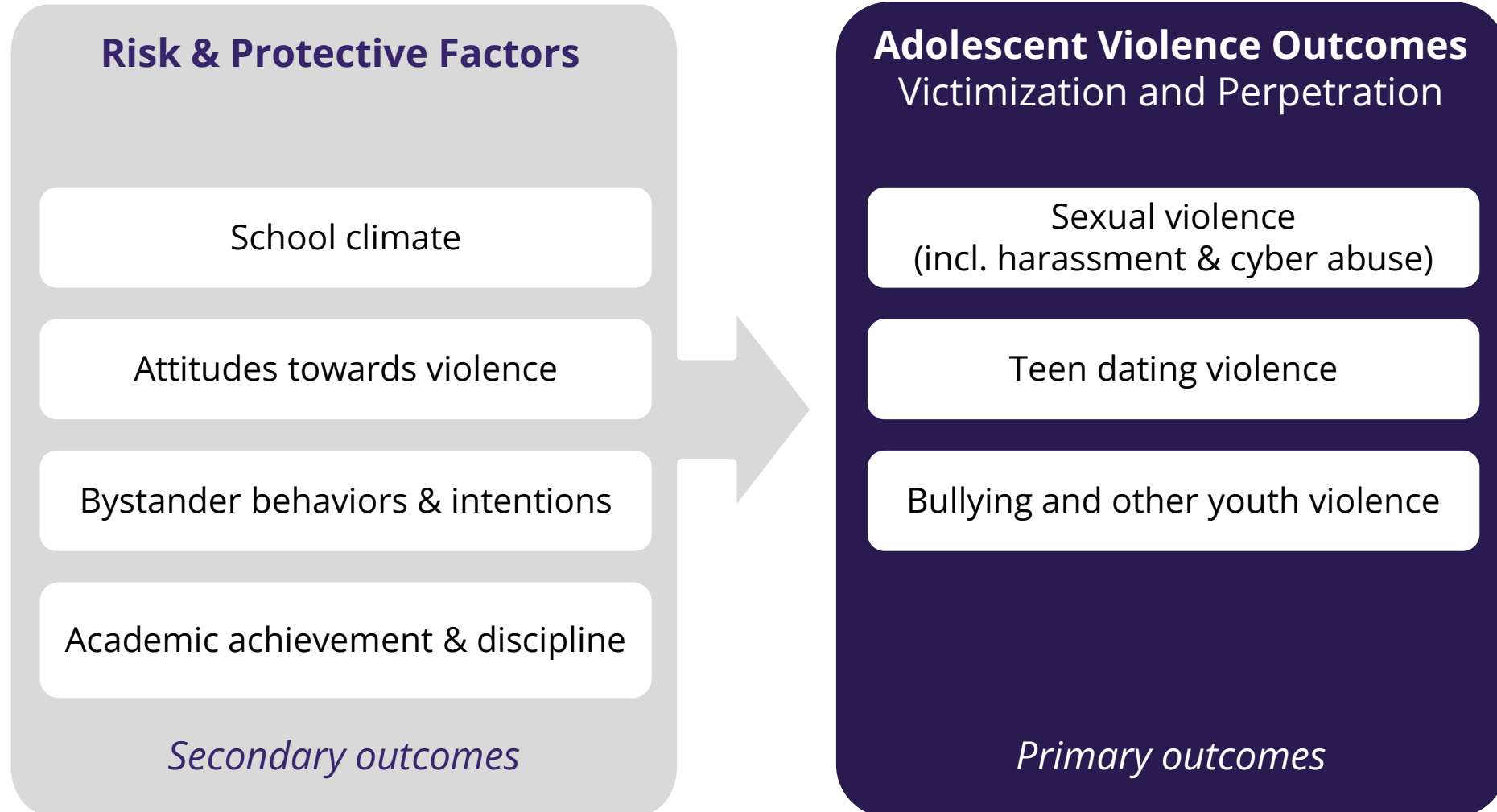
Revision of policies and
procedures

Coordinate SST cohort

Social norms campaign

Implementation of building
protocols and plans

YES! Outcomes of Interest



Hot Spot Mapping: Safety in School Environment

56% of students agree on and/or can identify at least one safe area or safe person at their school. School spaces identified as “safe” have these characteristics:



Open

bright, many exits

Trusted adults

supervision

Calming aesthetic

music, books peaceful

Clear expectations

enforced rules

Familiar people

Quiet

private, uncrowded

Gender affirming

Protective School Environments

Address community-level risk through environmental approaches

- Adult monitoring and presence in hotspot areas
- Designate certain areas for a particular class grade (e.g., “6th grade only hall”)
- Implement awareness weeks, social challenges, and trusted adult appreciation days
- Post easy-to-read infographics reminding student of their rights in “hot” locations
- Display student art/posters promoting healthy relationships, mental health, anti-bullying
- Create “trusted adult”/“safe space” signs or pins to put up in your classroom and office

Youth-centered Strategies: Being a Trusted Adult Ally

Violence between students is not always obvious and can often be hidden or overlooked.

Teachers can indirectly contribute by **joking about it** or dismissing a student's **boundaries**.

Just because a teacher asks the right questions **does not mean a student will feel comfortable** answering honestly.



Question for the Viewers



How would you describe the level of engagement that your organization has with your local school communities?

- A. High level
- B. Moderate level
- C. Low level
- D. Other (please type in chat)

A photograph of a library or study area. In the foreground, a young boy in a blue shirt is sitting at a desk, reading an open book. Behind him, other students are also reading at their desks. A staff member in a white shirt is standing in the background, holding books. The scene is well-lit and organized.

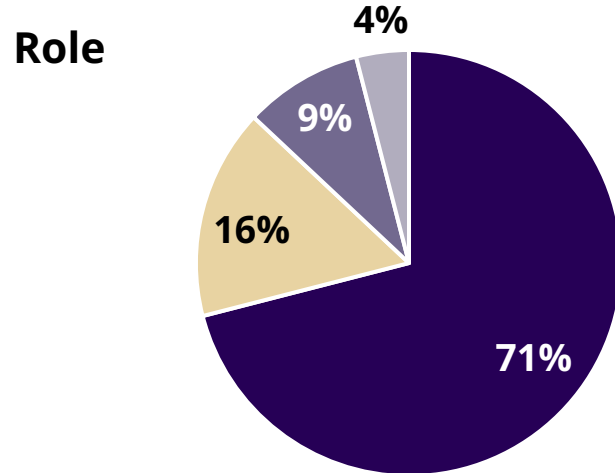
Needs & Attitudes: Data from Staff & Students

Staff & Student Surveys across 3 Middle Schools

Staff (n=110)

Survey Topics:

- Knowledge and attitudes
- School policies and practices
- Intervening in situations of SV



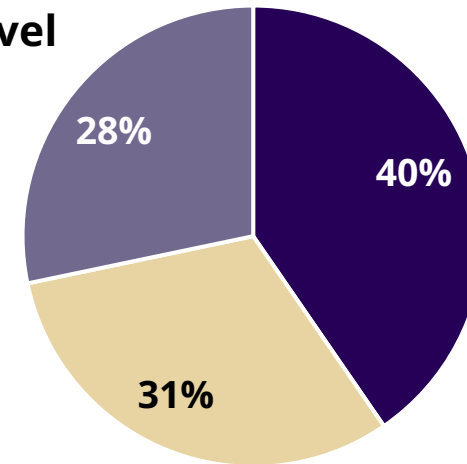
■ Administrator or teacher ■ Classified and support
■ Counselor ■ Other

Students (n=337)

Survey Topics:

- Perceptions of school climate
- Perceptions of abusive behaviors
- Experiences of SV

Grade Level

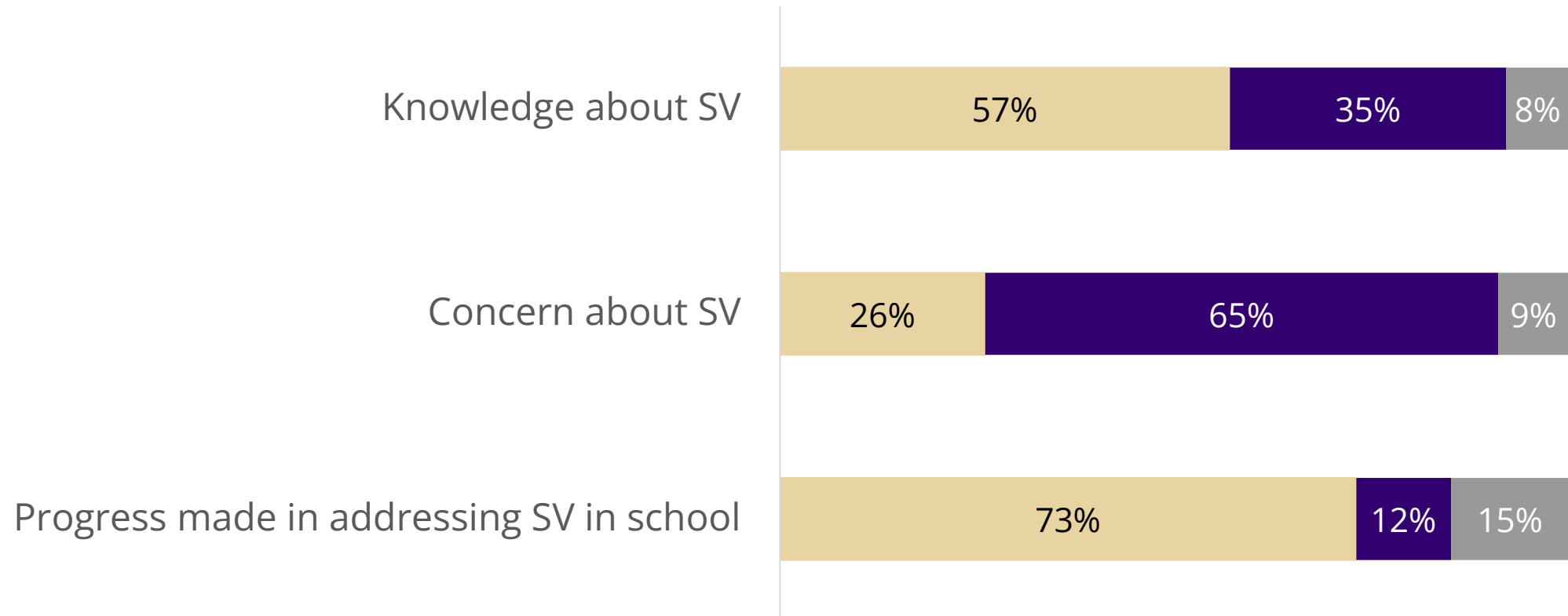


■ 6th ■ 7th ■ 8th

Staff Survey: Knowledge & Attitudes about Sexual Violence

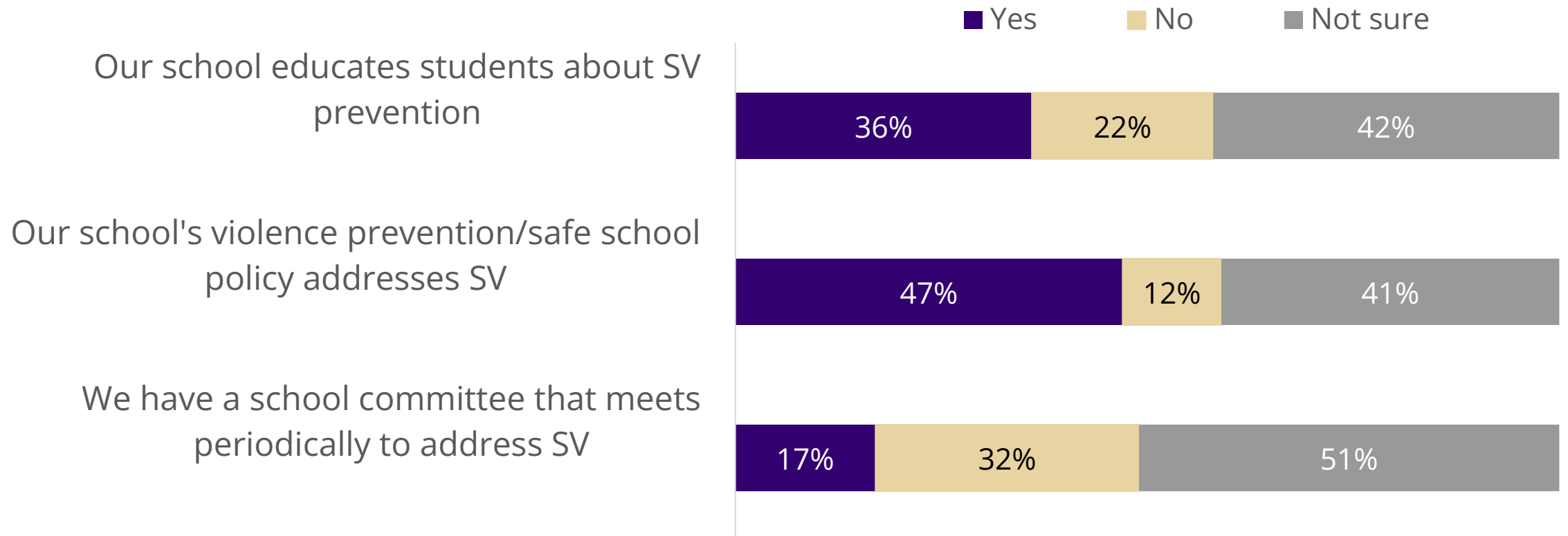
Mixed knowledge about SV and concern about SV, but challenges with planning and progress toward addressing SV at the school

■ None/A little ■ A moderate amount/A lot ■ I don't know enough to answer



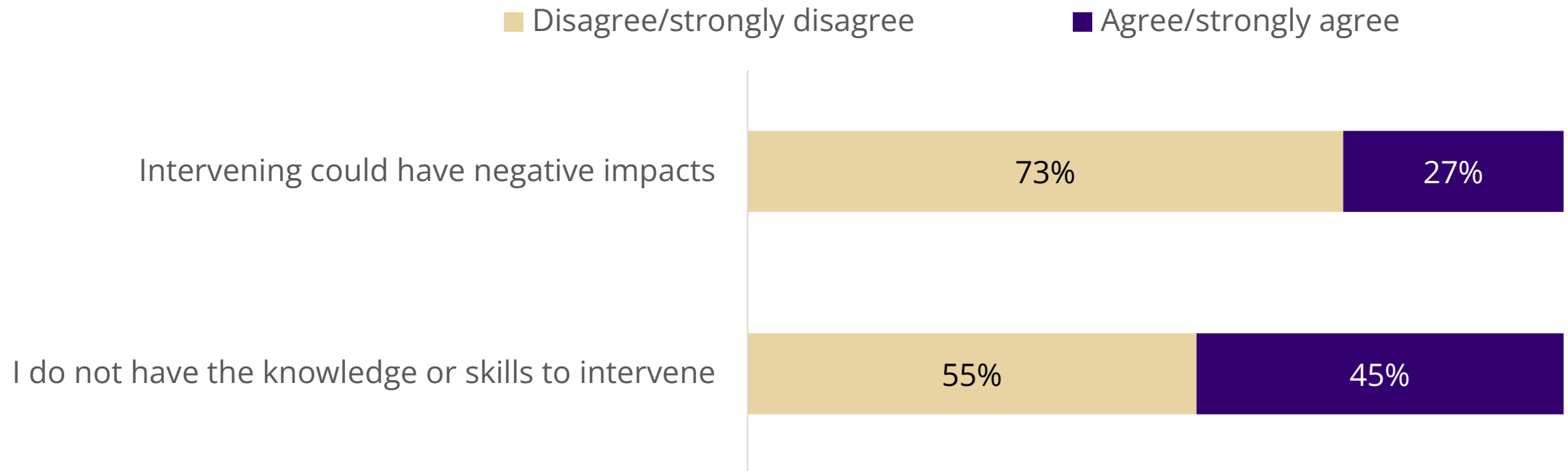
Staff Survey: School Policies & Practices for Sexual Violence

General lack of knowledge about student education about SV, where to report, or if there was a school policy to address SV



Staff Survey: Intervening in Situations of Sexual Violence

97% of staff feel responsible to intervene but have some concerns about the negative impacts and not having the knowledge or skills to intervene



Student Survey: School Climate & Culture



Students agree or strongly agree that...

- Teachers treat them with respect (**73%**)
- School is a place they feel safe (**64%**)
- They feel successful at school (**60%**)
- Students are frequently recognized for good behavior (**44%**)

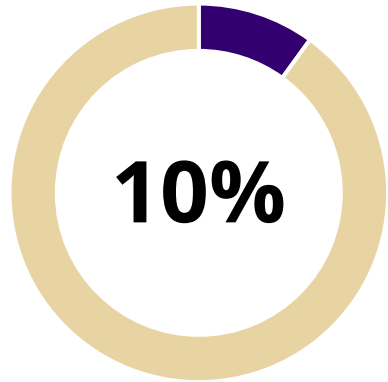
Student Survey: Perceptions of Abusive Behavior



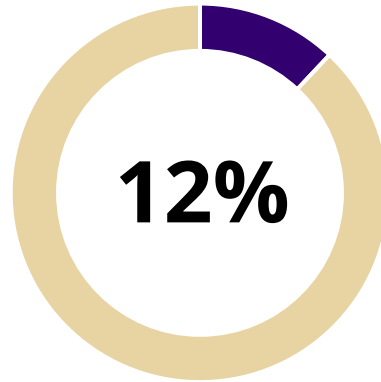
Behaviors rated abusive or extremely abusive...

- Pressuring them not to break up with them **(72%)**
- Telling them which friends they can and can't see or talk to **(68%)**
- Telling them what to do all the time **(53%)**
- Telling them they're ugly or stupid **(46%)**
- Name calling or insulting them **(32%)**

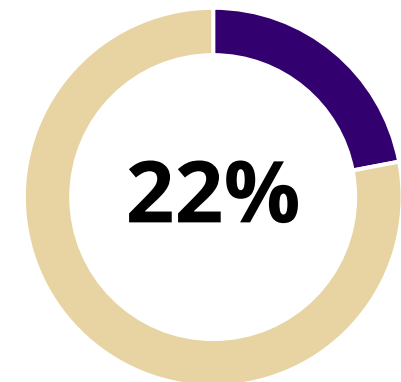
Student Survey: Sexual Violence Victimization



Report being touched in an unwelcome or unwanted sexual way



Report seeing someone their age pressure someone else to kiss, touch, or have sex when they didn't want to



Report having someone make unwelcome sexual comments, jokes, gestures or looks towards them

Perspectives of School District Leaders

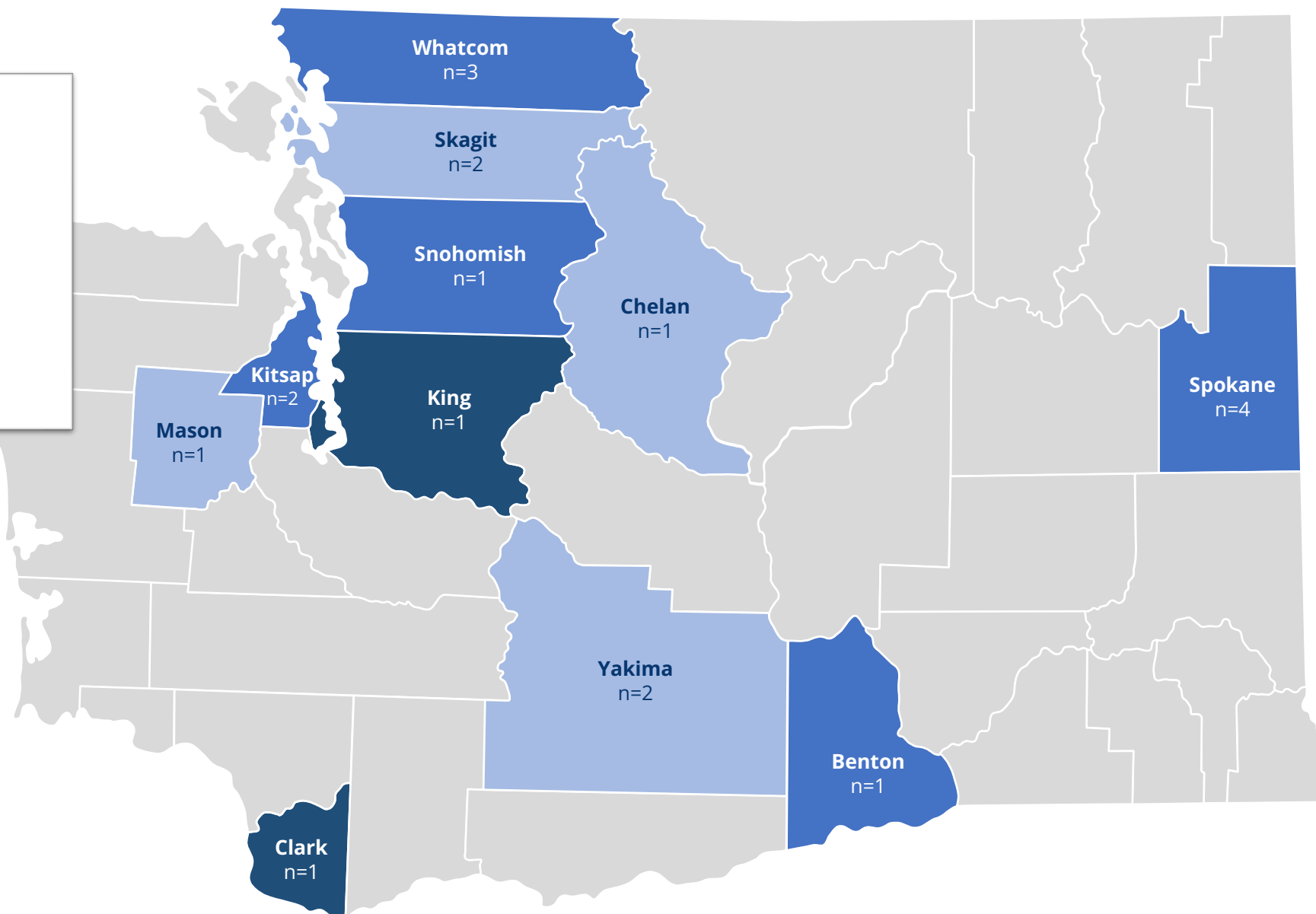
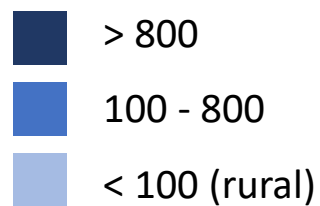


Evaluation Challenges

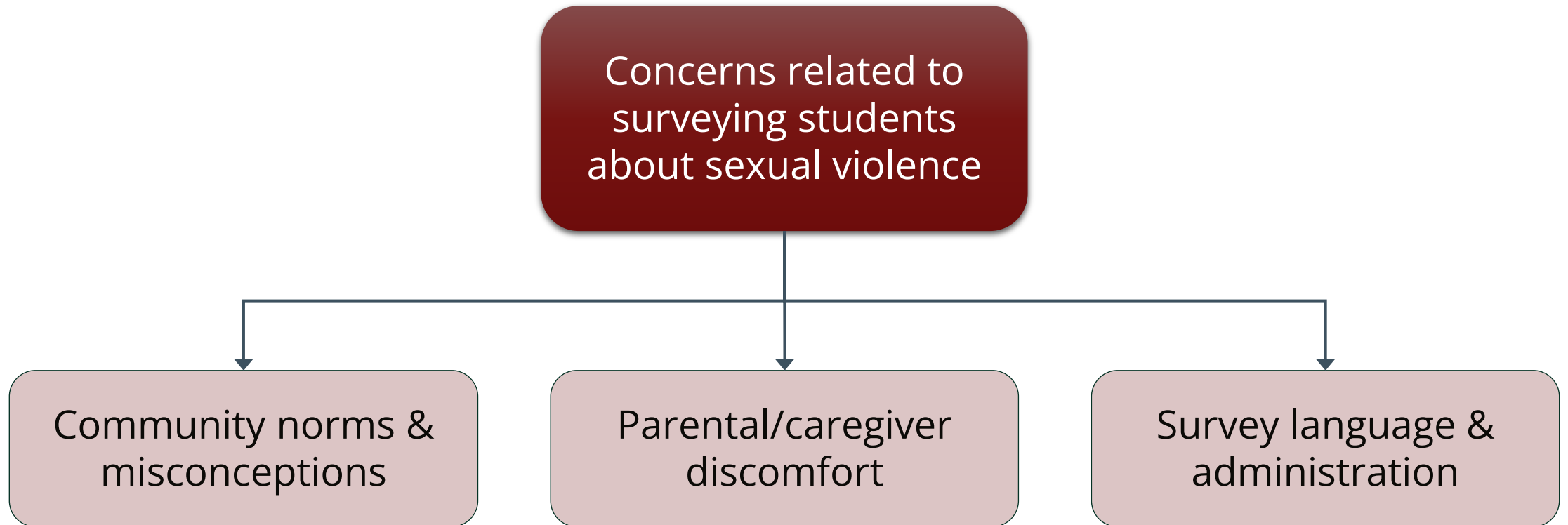
Purpose:

Explore concerns related to surveying students about sexual violence & identify ways to mitigate these concerns

Population density (persons per mile²)

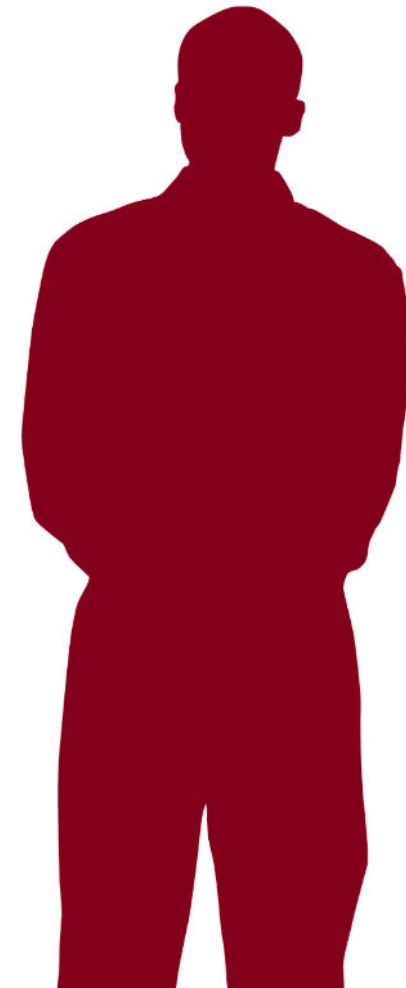


School District Leader Concerns




Community Norms & Misconceptions


...There's a bit of an environment, particularly in conservative faith communities, that this is introducing things or teaching kids how to have sex way too early or indoctrinating kids into LGBTQIA lifestyles or identities



Parental/Caregiver Discomfort

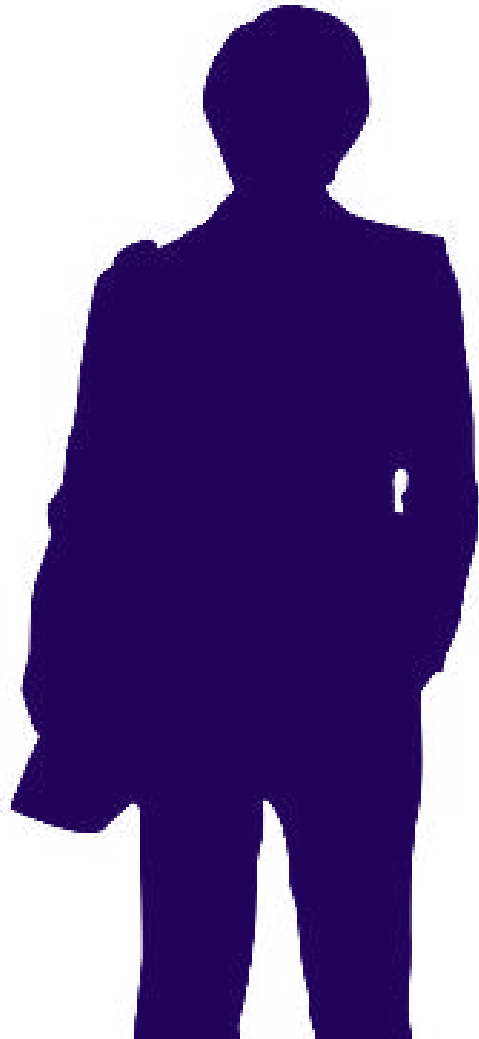
A grey silhouette of a man standing, facing forward. A dark teal speech bubble is positioned above his head, pointing towards him.

I think parents start to become defensive and upset when they feel like their ability to lead this important conversation got pulled out from under them

A green silhouette of a woman standing, facing forward. A green speech bubble is positioned above her head, pointing towards her.

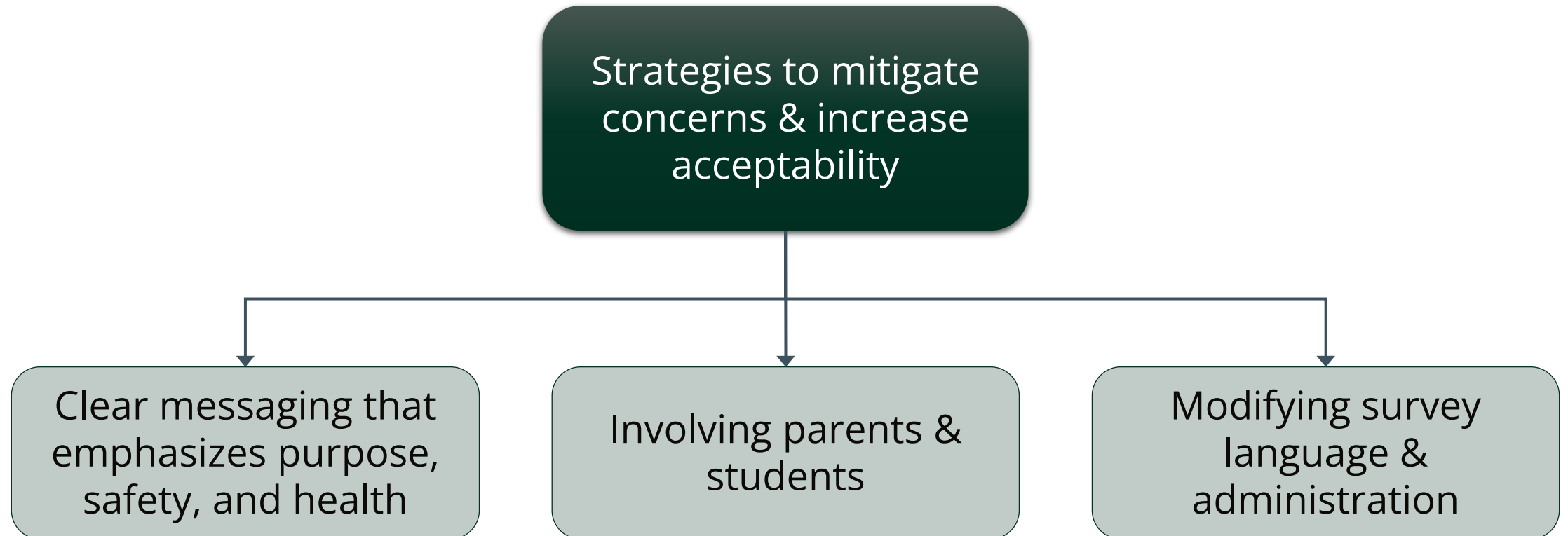
...In our community, I think they see 11-15 year olds...as being very vulnerable and very young. And that talking about these kinds of issues, we are scaring them. We're talking to them about things that they don't need to know about yet

Survey Language & Administration



...if we put questions like this
in front of a child who has been abused
sexually and is already dealing with that personally
and in their family and maybe beyond what we
might know about as a school, that's a very
uncomfortable and inappropriate
position to put that student in

Potential Solutions



Clear Messaging

... I would encourage reflecting:

“Here's what we are hearing from students. Here's what we understand from the surveys we do. Here's what we know from our own population and this is important to us because your kids being safe is important to us. And one of the ways that we can help them be more safe is having a real picture of what they're experiencing. And that's what this survey is going to help us understand”



Involving Parents & Students



What would really value [students'] time is for them to have the opportunity to see what a difference taking the survey meant, what you did with the results and whether you used it to advocate for certain things ... to see what the results were and then what next steps you are taking

Modifying Survey Language and Administration

Definitely don't ask these in the fall...of any grade because the kids have all been home with their parents over summer. Maybe the spring of seventh grade especially...if these topics have already been talked about [in sex education]... then asking these questions I think really is valuable to us because, did we get through to the kids or not?



Implementation Challenges



- School/staff capacity
- Competing priorities
- Participatory research was not desired by all schools
- Turnover
- Decision-making structure

Key Takeaways

- ✓ Sexual violence is common and starts early
- ✓ Schools can play an important role in preventing and responding to SV
- ✓ Current tensions and political climate have led to more pushback around addressing sexual violence in schools
- ✓ Important to engage school community, build trust, and align with existing school efforts to ensure acceptability

A Chat with Avanti Adhia and Nikki Van Wagner



Sue
Grinnell



Avanti
Adhia



Nikki
Van Wagner

QUESTIONS?

To ask a question, please click the



icon in the Zoom toolbar to open your Q&A Pod.

Resources

Sexual Violence Prevention Resource for Action - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/SV-Prevention-Resource_508.pdf

Sexual Violence (Overview) - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/index.html>

About Sexual Assault (FAQ included) - Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs

<https://www.wcsap.org/help/about-sexual-assault>

Sexual Violence Prevention - Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

<https://ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/health-safety/sexual-violence-prevention>

National Sexual Assault Hotline - Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network

<https://rainn.org/about-national-sexual-assault-telephone-hotline>

National Sexual Violence Prevention Center - Prevention (Resources)

<https://www.nsvrc.org/prevention>

love is respect - A project of the National Domestic Violence Hotline

<https://loveisrespect.org>