

Early Childhood Educators: Advancing the Profession



With Gratitude for the Generous Support of the Research Sponsors

W.K. Kellogg Foundation

*Richard W. Goldman Family
Foundation*

Four Research Objectives

1. **Understanding** the attitudes and beliefs of current educators about the profession
2. **Identifying** factors that will be most helpful in encouraging educators to make the field a long-term profession
3. **Assessing** strategies for attracting new educators to join the field
4. **Developing** messaging to enhance public appreciation of, and support for, the work of early childhood educators

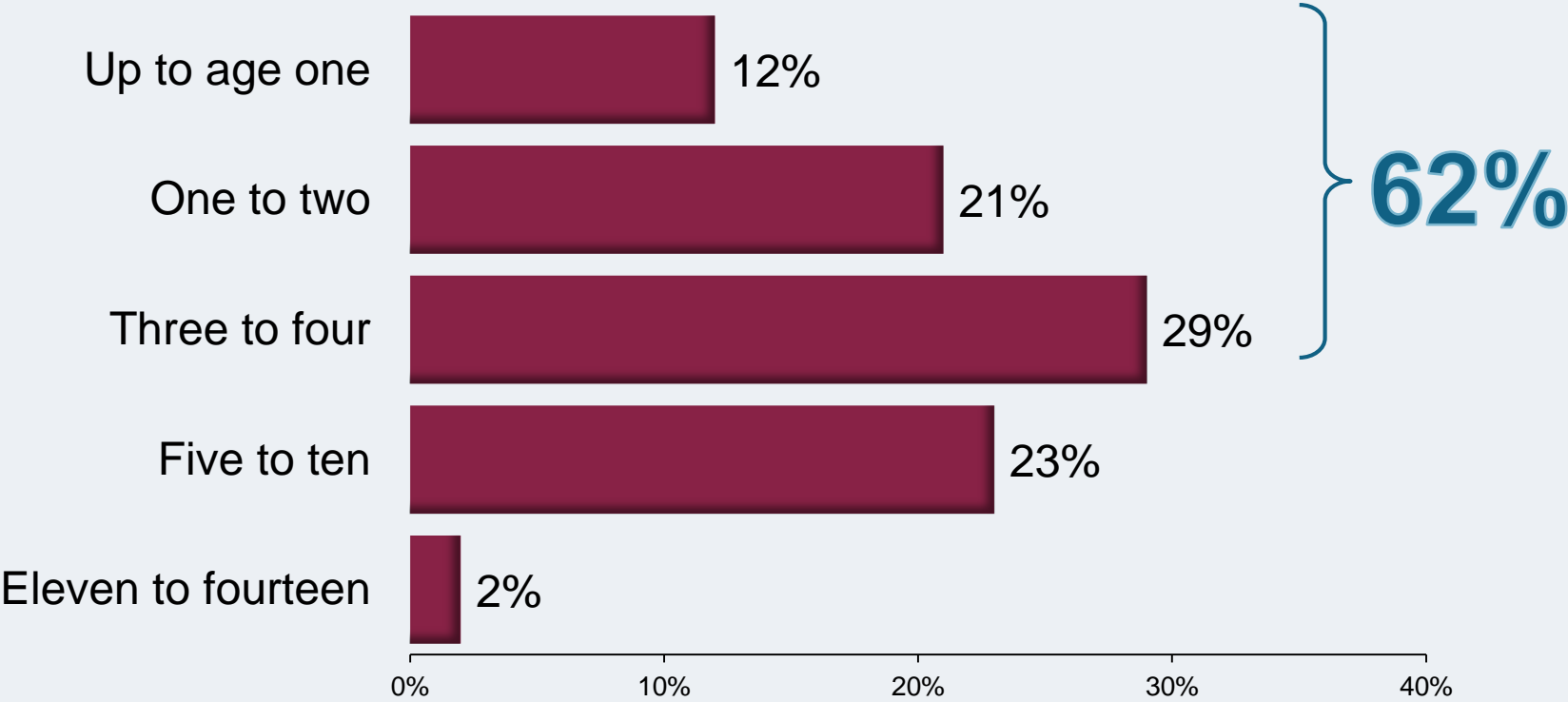
Four Phases to the Research

1. In-depth, **online qualitative interviews** with a sample of educators nationally
2. Quantitative **online survey** of 3,750 early educators
3. Four **focus groups** with current educators, and those interested in entering the field
4. National **survey of 950 voters**

The Image of the Profession

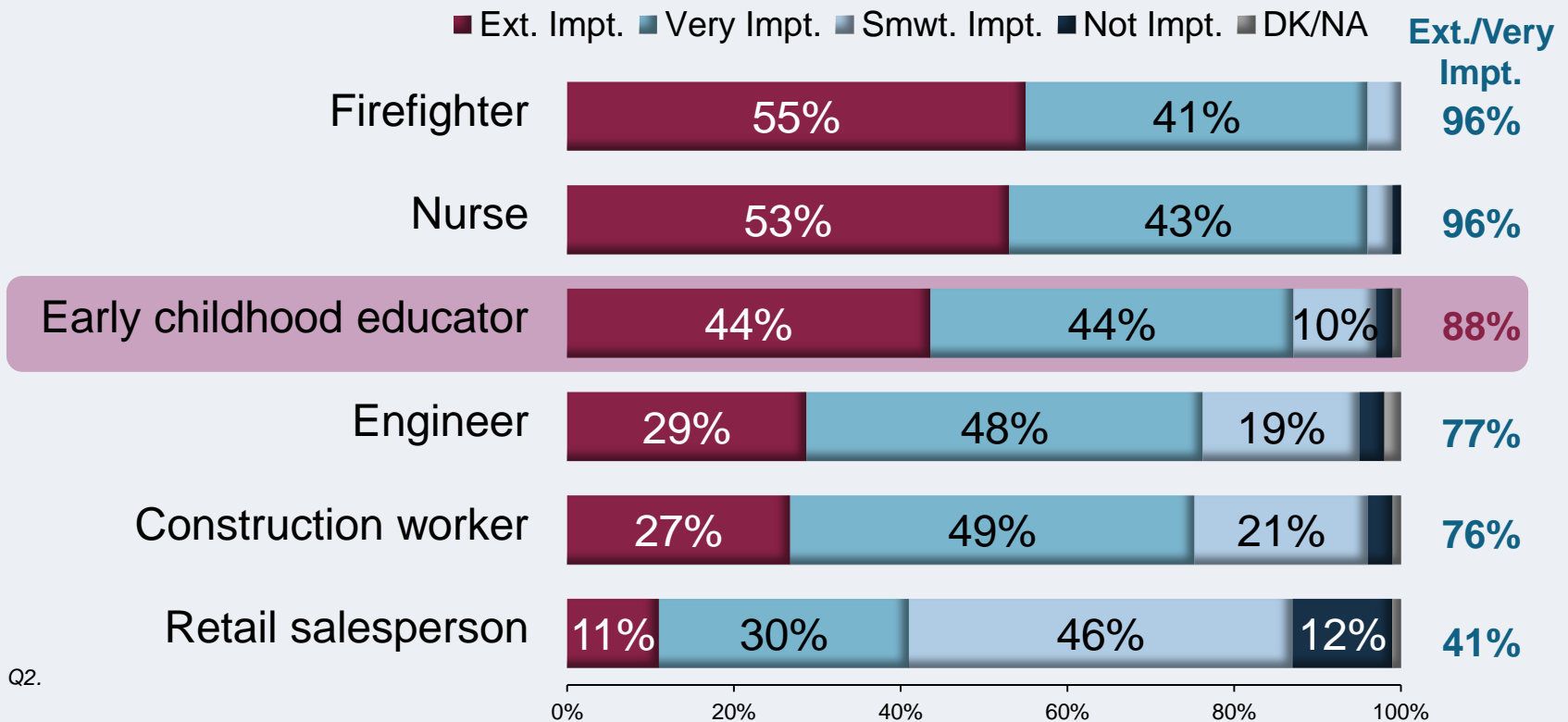
More than six in ten voters recognize the ages of birth to five as the most important time for child development.

What do you think is the most important age for developing a child's capacity to learn?



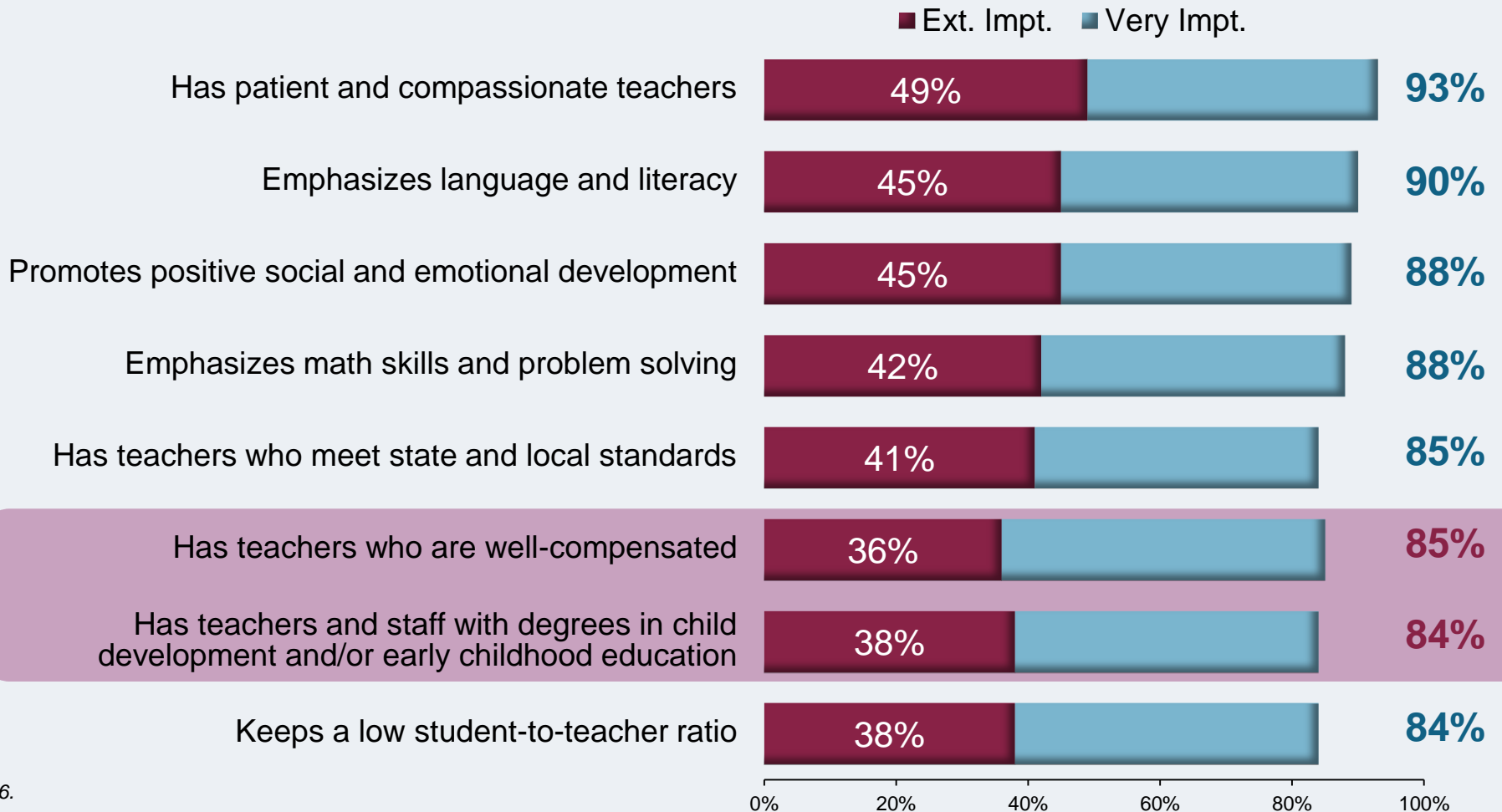
Voters view teaching young children as important work.

I'm going to read you a list of a variety of different kinds of workers that may be present in your community. Please tell me how you would rate the importance of each type of worker for your local community: extremely important, very important, somewhat important, or not important.



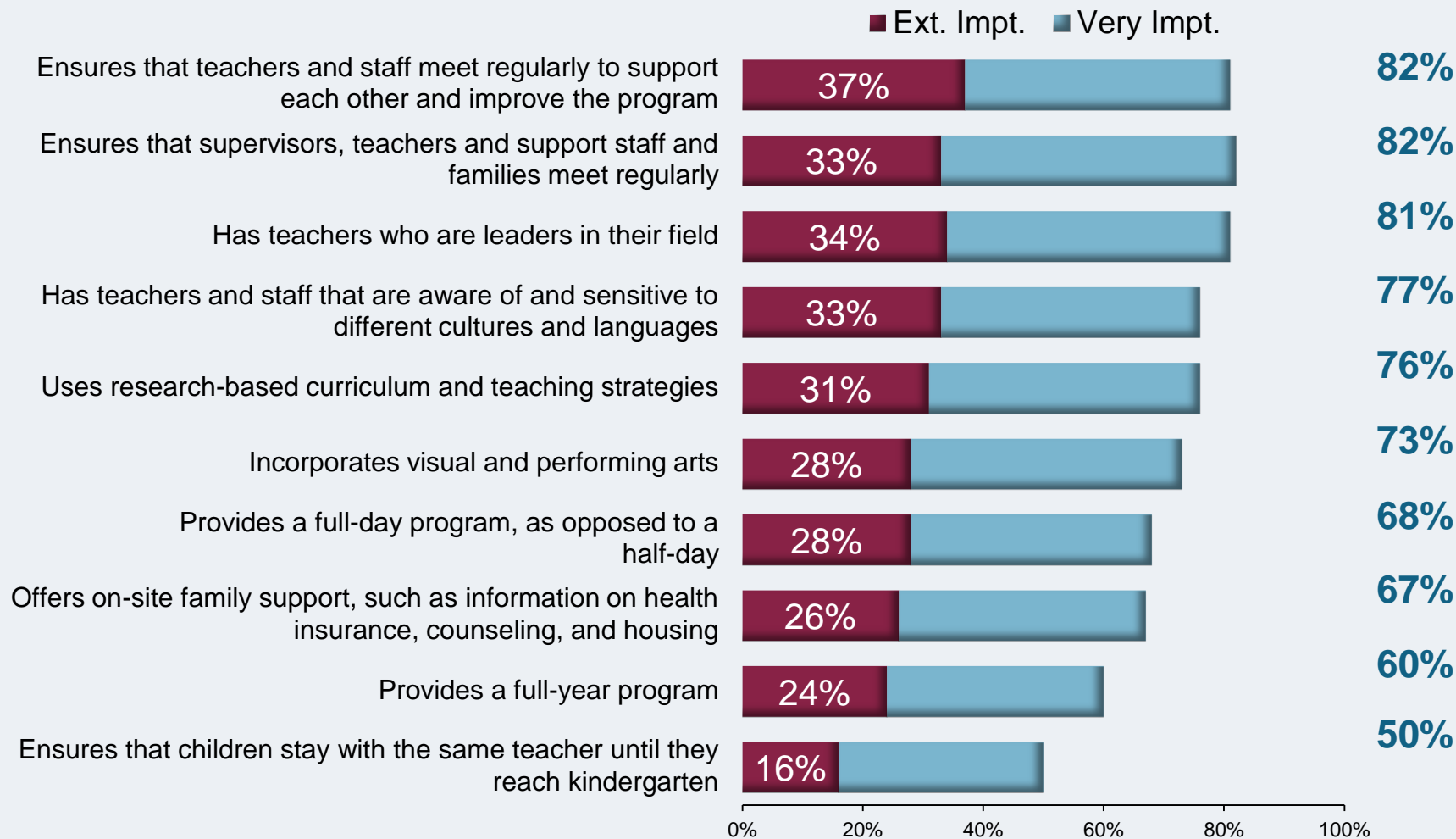
Voters recognize the connection between early childhood educators and quality – including compensation and degrees.

(% Rating Components of ECE Programs as Extremely/Very Important for Ensuring Quality)



Significant majorities view a range of teacher qualities and leadership as important to quality.

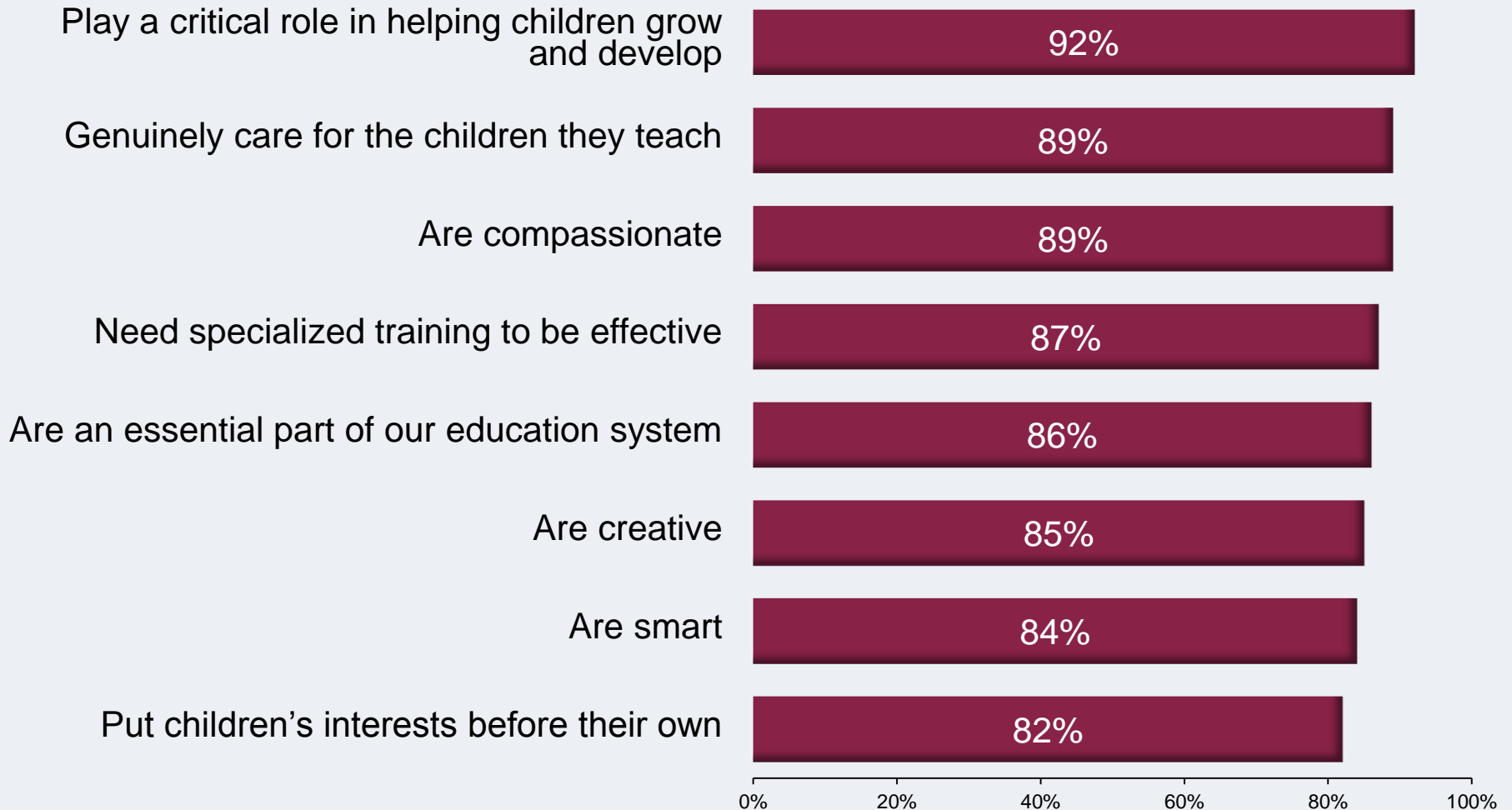
(% Rating Components of ECE Programs as Extremely/Very Important for Ensuring Quality)



Q6. I am going to read you a list of different components that some people might point to as indicators of a quality early childhood education program. Please tell me how important you believe it is for a quality early childhood education program to include each component: extremely important, very important, somewhat important, or not too important.

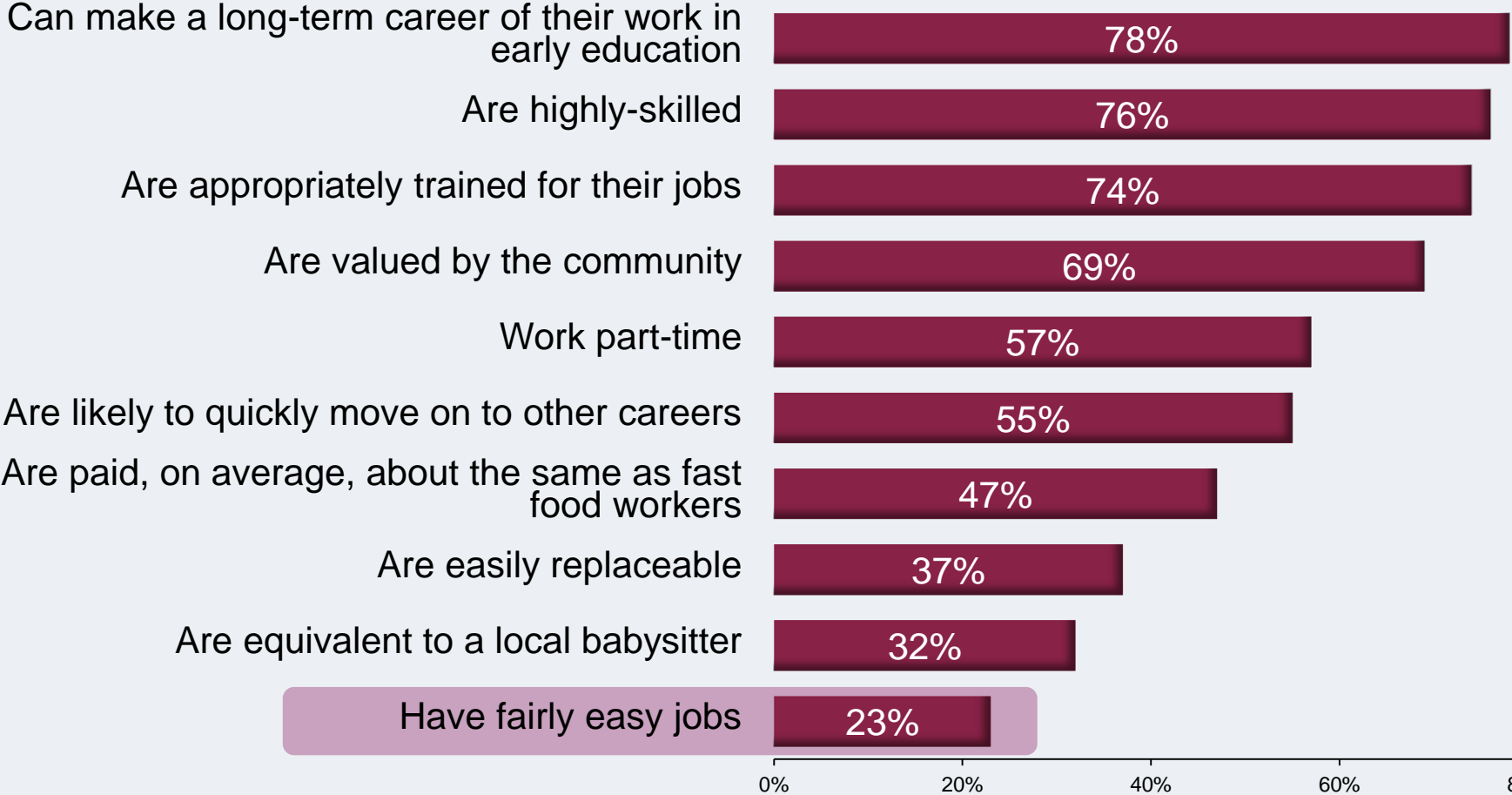
Voters recognize many positive attributes of early childhood educators and the role they play.

(% of Voters Saying Various Phrases are Accurate Descriptions of Early Childhood Educators)



Voters overwhelmingly *reject* the idea that early childhood educators have “easy jobs.”

(% of Voters Saying Various Phrases are Accurate Descriptions of Early Childhood Educators)



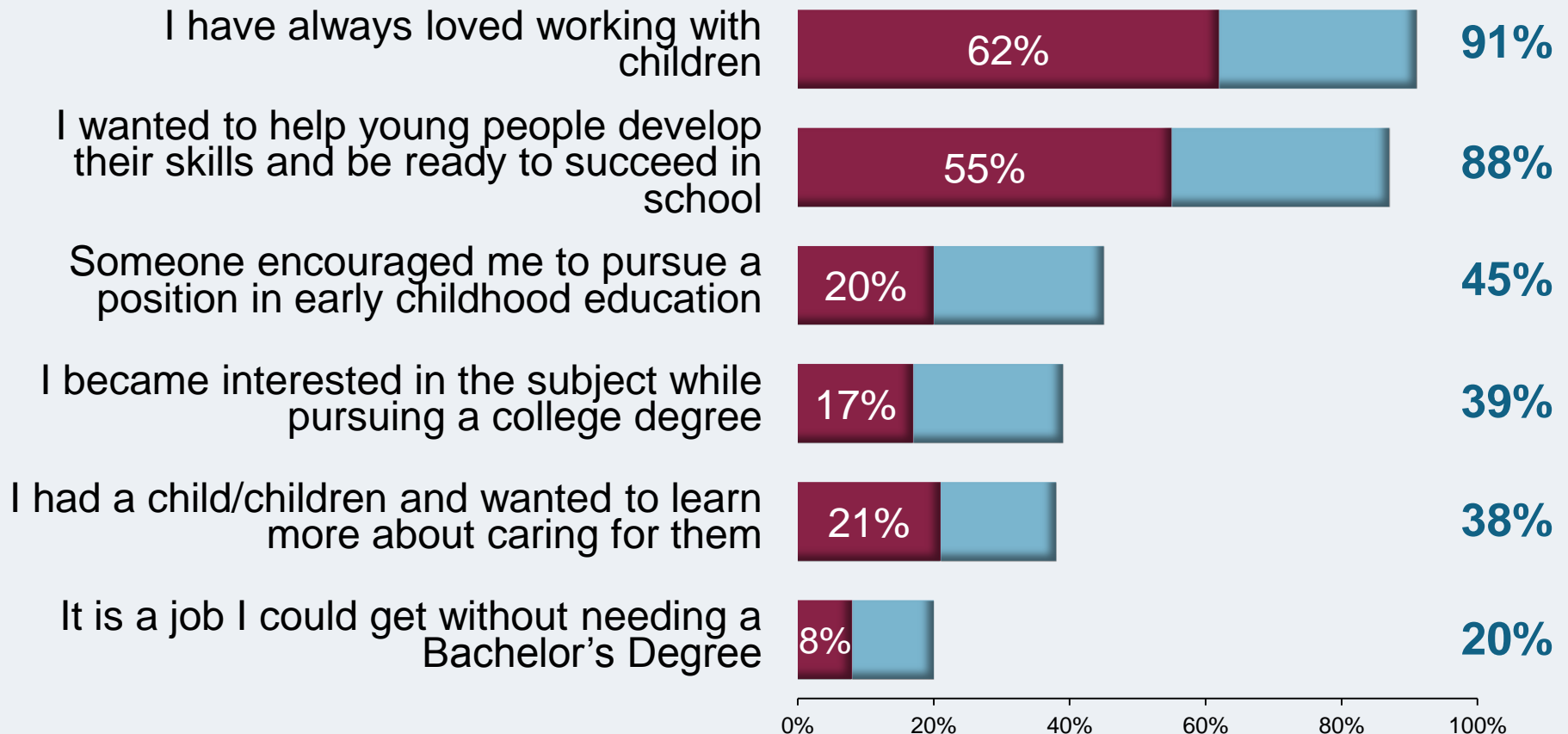
Q11. I'm going to read you a list of phrases that may or may not describe people who work as early childhood educators. Please tell me whether you feel each phrase is generally an accurate or an inaccurate description of early childhood educators.

Defining and Growing the Profession

Educators say the opportunity to work with children and help them succeed was what attracted them to the field.

For each of the following reasons, please choose how important they were for you in choosing to become an early childhood educator?

■ Ext. Impt. ■ Very Impt.



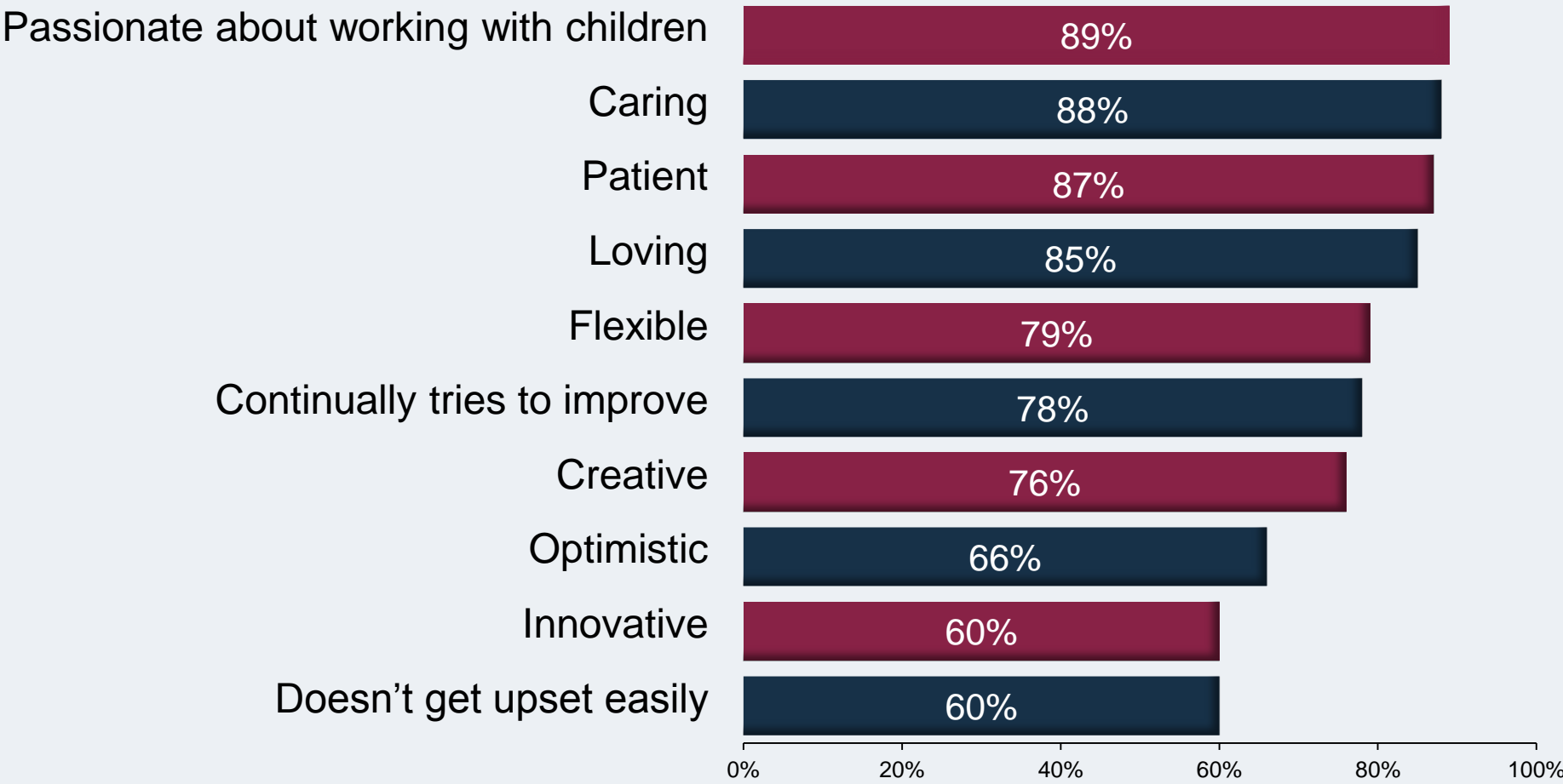
Educators recommend that others considering the field get training – and prepare for low pay.

What advice would you give to someone who was interested in becoming an early childhood educator? (Multiple responses accepted; Top responses shown)

Be educated/trained/get degree/experience	36%
Don't do it for money	34%
Need to enjoy/love children/families	30%
Challenging/hard work/takes commitment	18%
Be patient/caring/compassionate	15%
Rewarding/fulfilling/satisfying	11%
Be passionate/follow your dreams/heart	10%

Nearly all educators believe an “excellent” member of their profession is passionate, patient, caring and loving.

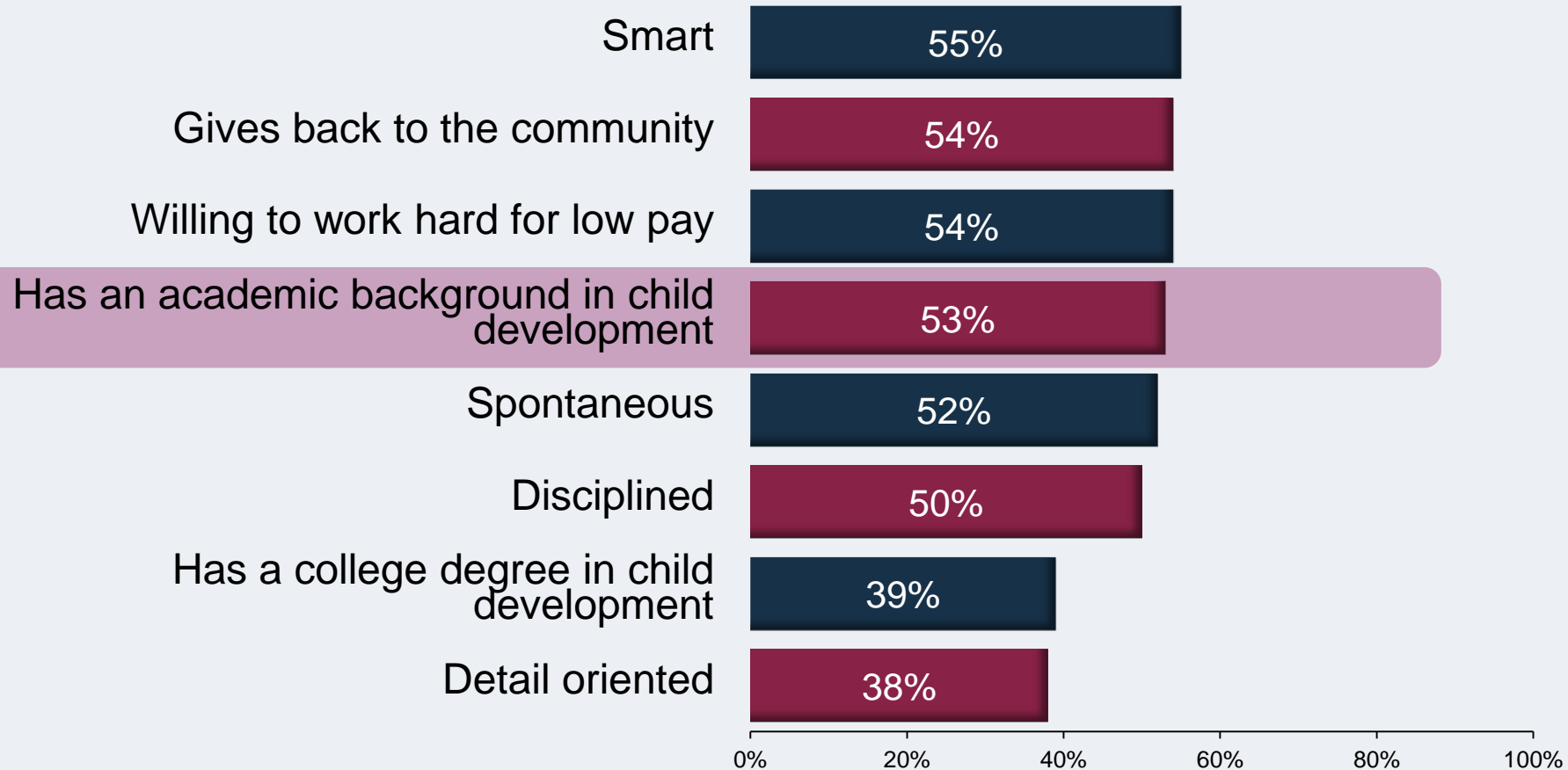
(% of Educators Saying Various Phrases Describe an “Excellent” Educator)



Q24. Please indicate how well you think each describes a person who would make an excellent early childhood educator. If you don't know enough to say whether one of these phrases describes them, select "don't know."

More than half of educators believe an excellent early educator has an academic background in child development.

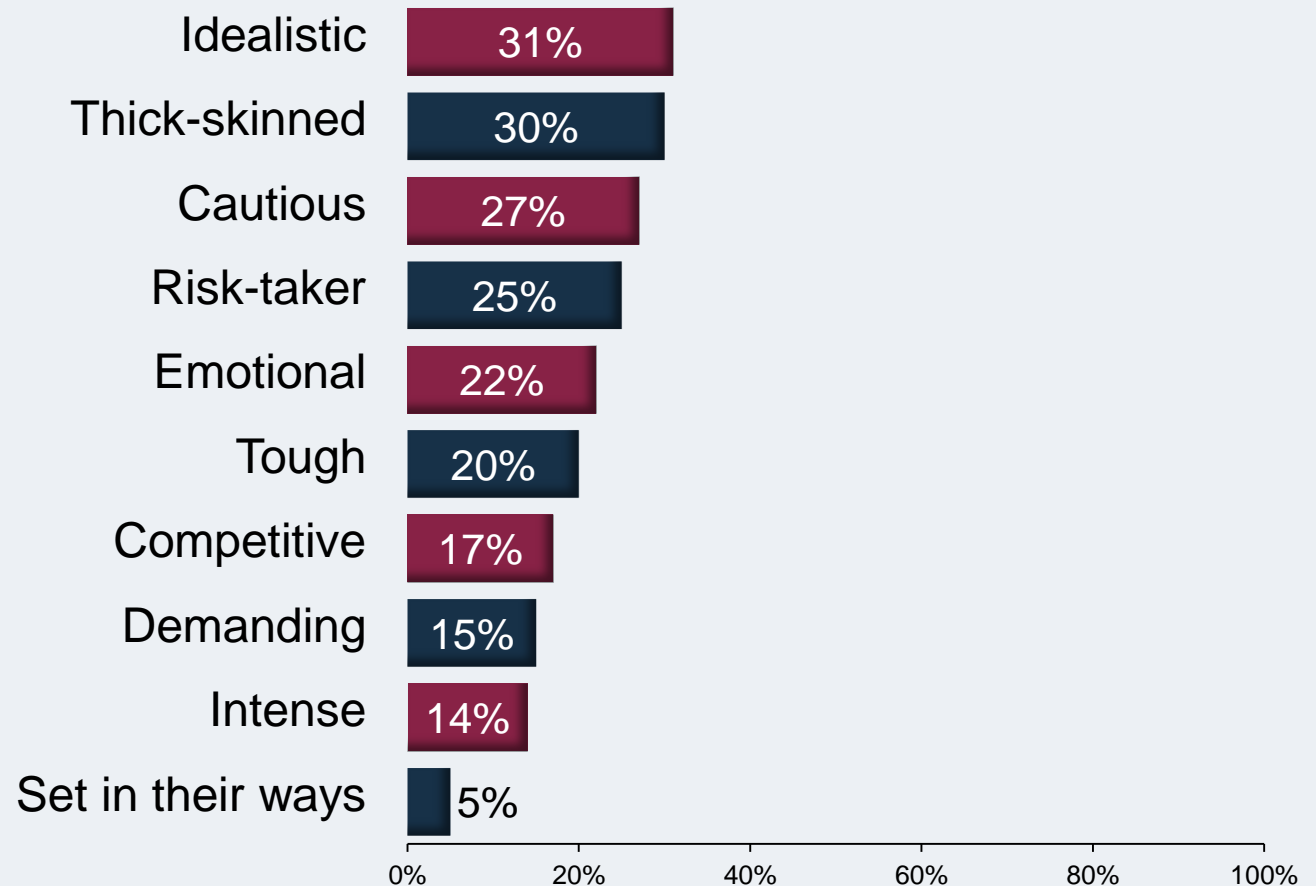
(% of Educators Saying Various Phrases Describe an “Excellent” Educator)



Q24. Please indicate how well you think each describes a person who would make an excellent early childhood educator. If you don't know enough to say whether one of these phrases describes them, select "don't know."

Educators are less likely to say that attributes such as “tough” or “competitive” are important.

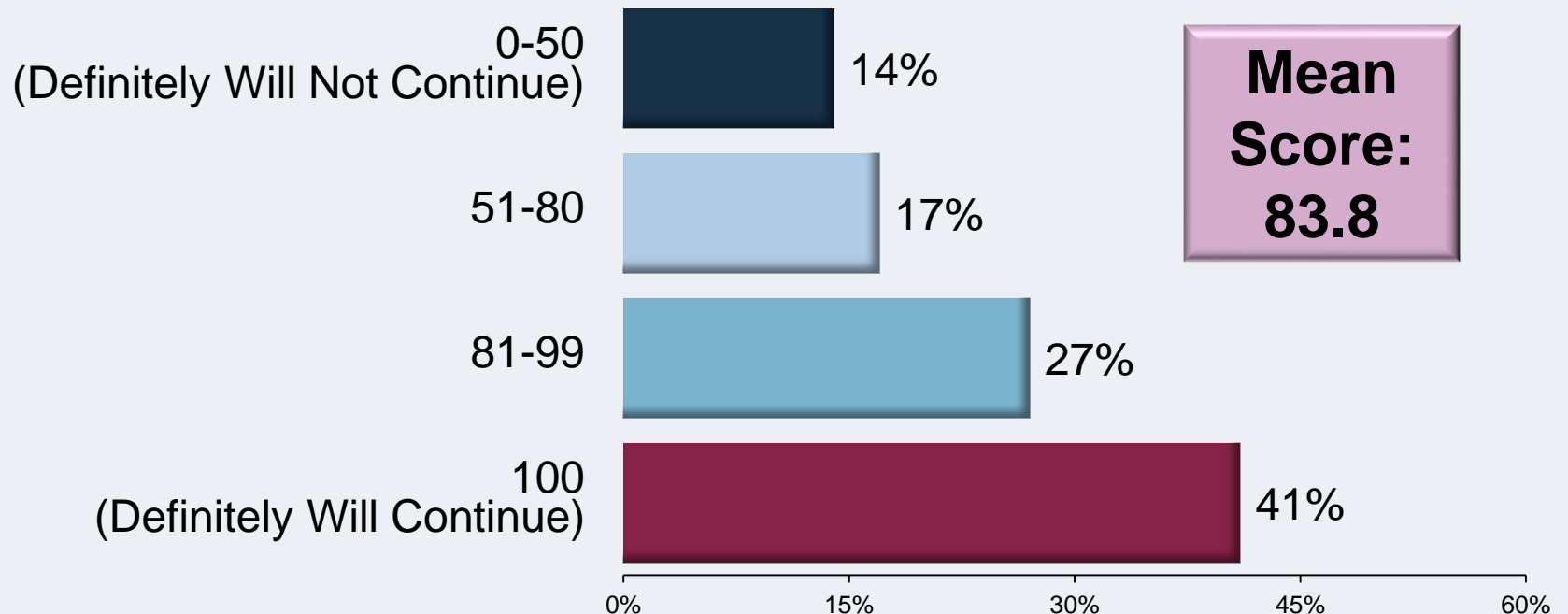
(% of Educators Saying Various Phrases Describe an “Excellent” Educator)



Q24. Please indicate how well you think each describes a person who would make an excellent early childhood educator. If you don't know enough to say whether one of these phrases describes them, select "don't know."

The vast majority of educators say they want to make early childhood education their long-term career.

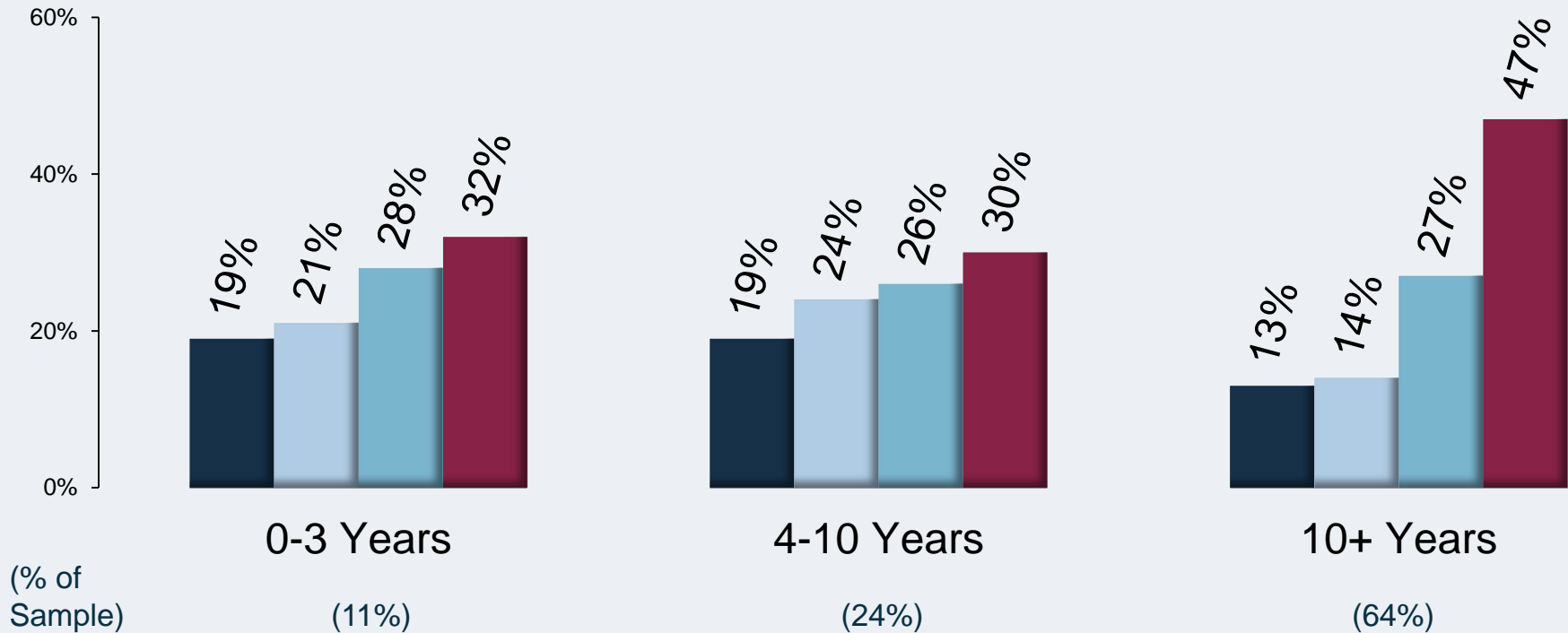
Do you plan to keep working for the long term as an early childhood educator serving children five or younger? Please rate the likelihood of early childhood education being your long-term career on a 0-100 scale, where 0 means you definitely will not continue in the field in the long term, 100 means you definitely will and 50 means you are unsure.



Certainty seems to increase significantly at the 10-year mark.

Interest in Continuing as an Educator, by Time in the Profession

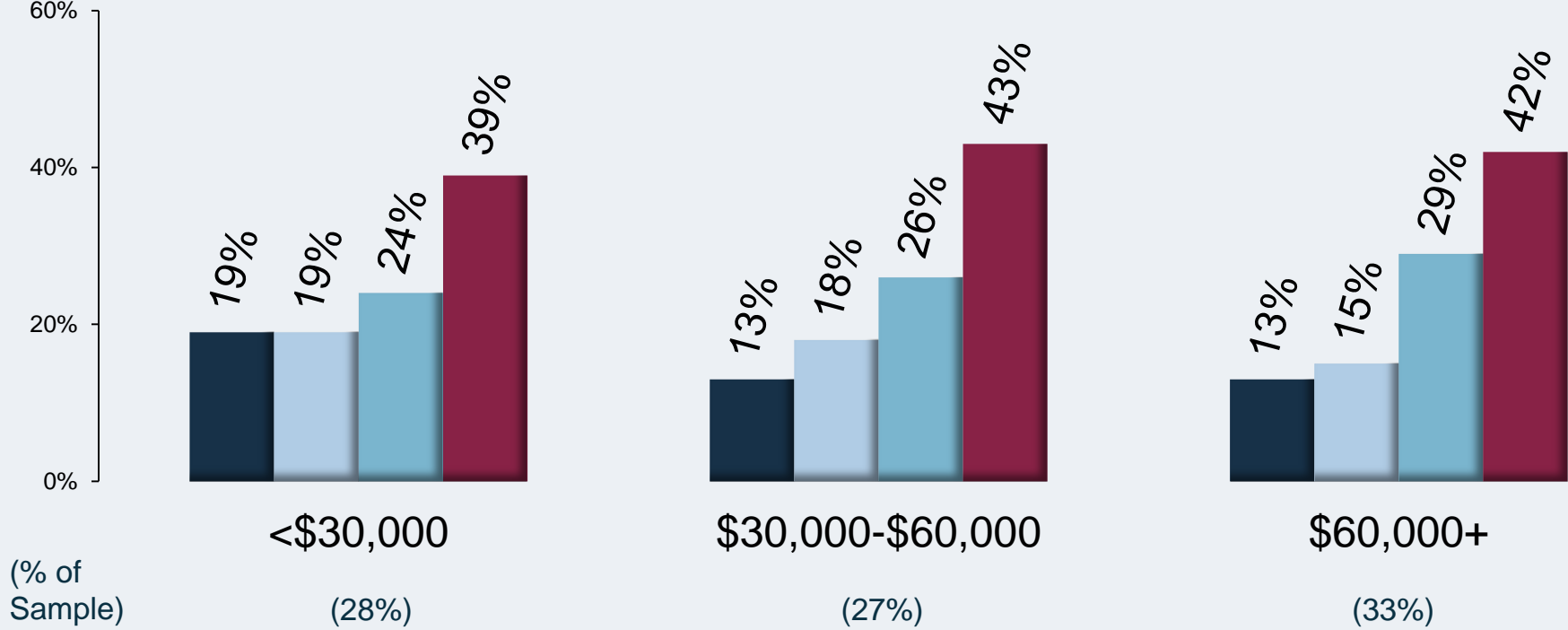
■ 0-50 (Definitely Will Not Continue) ■ 51-80 ■ 81-99 ■ 100 (Definitely Will Continue)



Educators with the lowest household incomes are somewhat more likely to expect to pursue other careers.

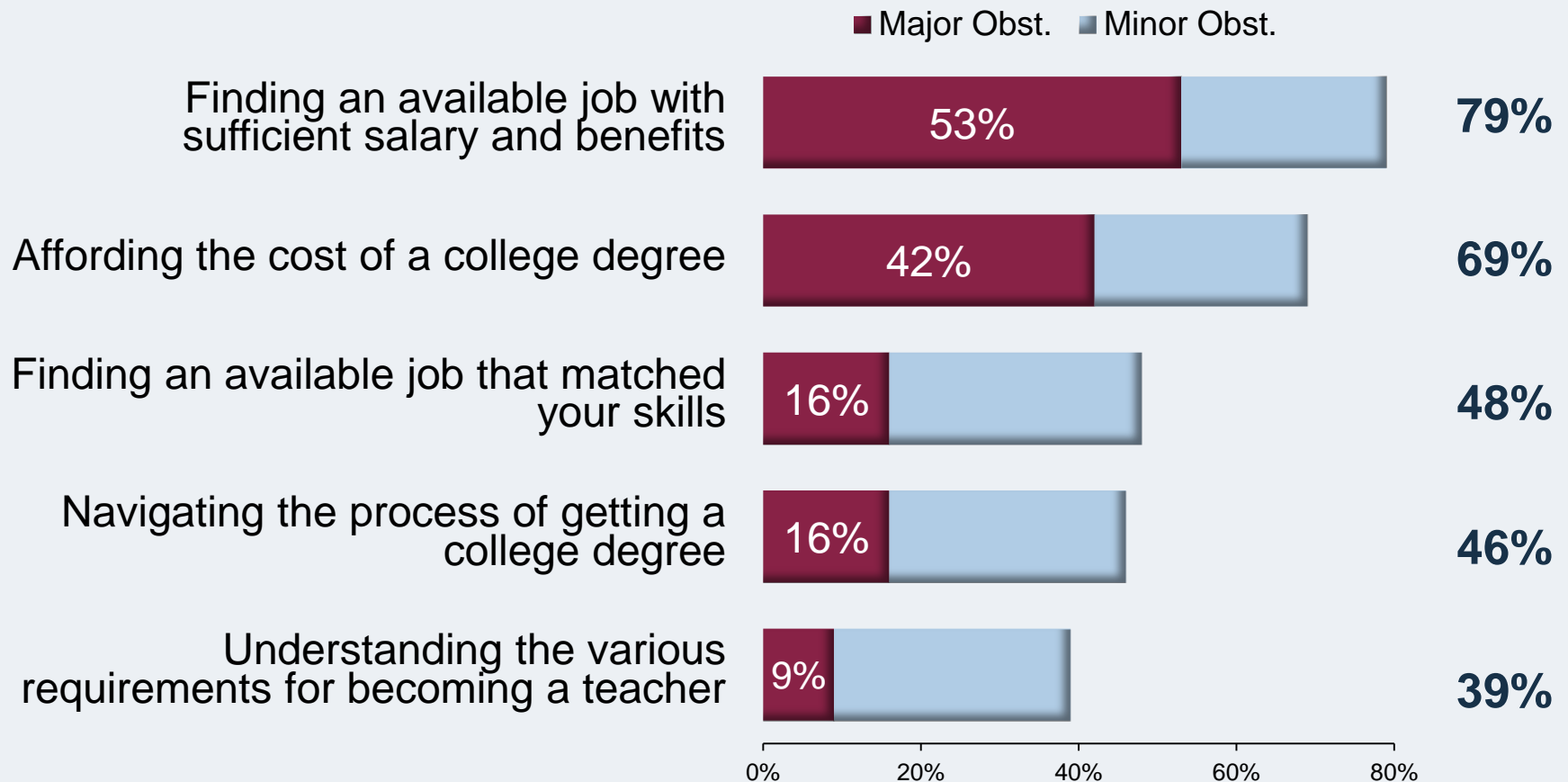
Interest in Continuing as an Educator, by Household Income

■ 0-50 (Definitely Will Not Continue) ■ 51-80 ■ 81-99 ■ 100 (Definitely Will Continue)



Educators say the lack of sufficient pay and benefits were the major obstacles to becoming an early childhood educator.

How much of an obstacle were each of the following challenges you faced in the process of becoming an early childhood educator? Would you say they were a major obstacle, minor obstacle, not an obstacle at all or you think it does not apply to you?



Educators of color were more likely to perceive a range of obstacles compared to whites.

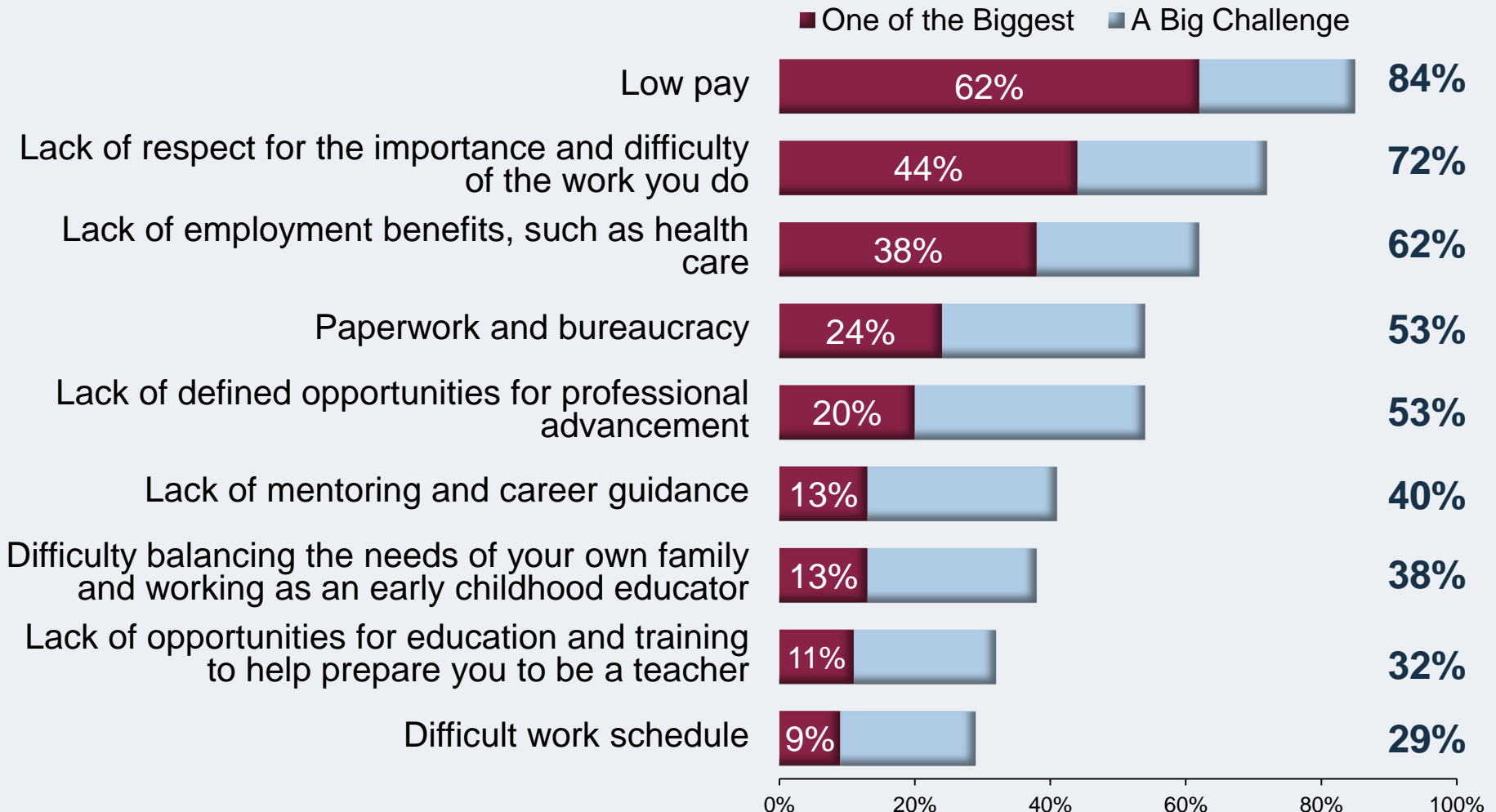
(% Labeling Each a “Major Obstacle”)

Program Characteristics	All Educators	Latinos	African-Americans	Asians/ Pacific Islanders	Whites	Educators of Color
Finding an available job with sufficient salary and benefits	53%	57%	56%	53%	53%	56%
Affording the cost of a college degree	42%	56%	51%	39%	37%	51%
Navigating the process of getting a college degree	16%	23%	27%	24%	13%	24%
Finding an available job that matched your skills	16%	20%	22%	24%	14%	21%
Understanding the various requirements for becoming a teacher	9%	15%	17%	15%	6%	16%

Q12. How much of an obstacle were each of the following challenges you faced in the process of becoming an early childhood educator? Would you say they were a major obstacle, minor obstacle, not an obstacle at all or you think it does not apply to you?

Low pay is seen as by far the biggest challenge facing current early childhood educators.

(% of Educators Labeling Factors a Challenge to Continuing in Their Profession)



Q23. Below you will find a list of things that some people consider to be challenges facing early childhood educators that have led some to switch to other professions. Please rate them in terms of how challenging they have been for you personally. The choices are: one of the biggest challenges, a big challenge, a small challenge, not a challenge at all.

Educators of color express more concern than do whites about mentoring and training.

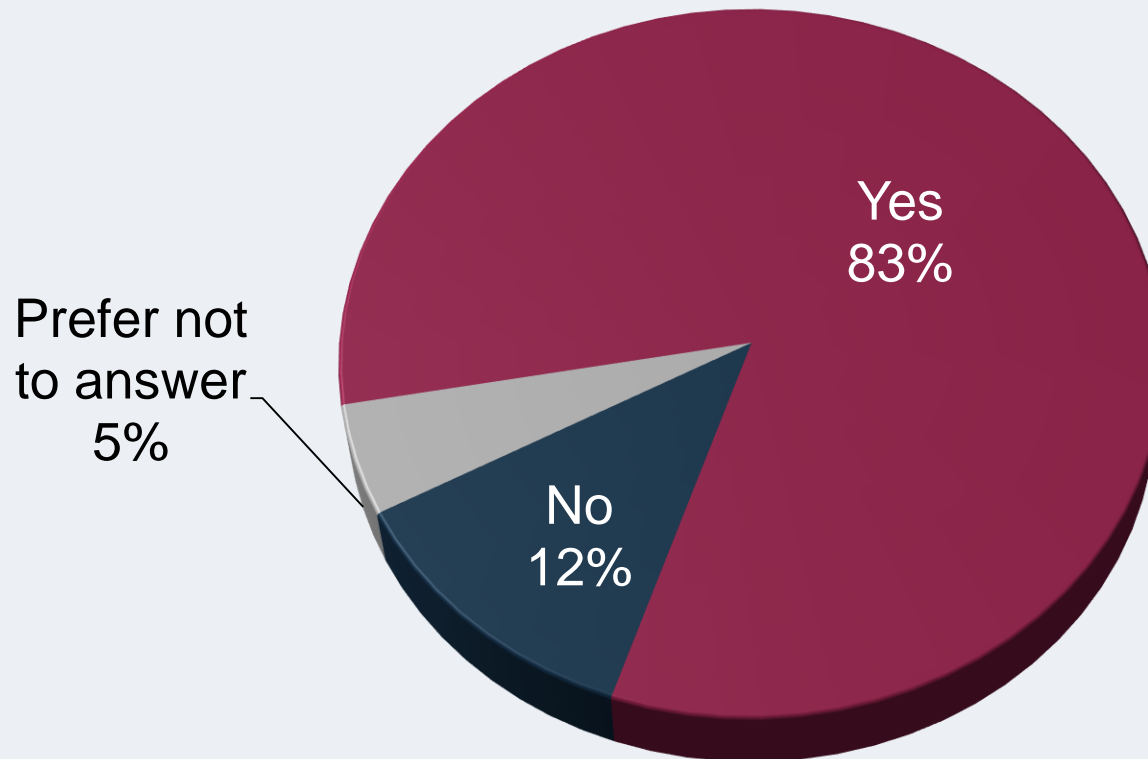
(% Labeling Each “A Big Challenge”)

Program Characteristics	All Educators	Latinos	African-Americans	Asians/Pacific Islanders	Whites	Educators of Color
Low pay	84%	85%	84%	86%	84%	85%
Lack of respect for the importance and difficulty of the work you do	72%	65%	68%	75%	74%	69%
Lack of employment benefits, such as health care	62%	65%	61%	60%	62%	62%
Paperwork and bureaucracy	53%	58%	52%	57%	52%	55%
Lack of defined opportunities for professional advancement	53%	59%	57%	64%	51%	59%
Lack of mentoring and career guidance	40%	50%	44%	56%	37%	48%
Difficulty balancing the needs of your own family and working as an early childhood educator	38%	40%	36%	46%	37%	39%
Lack of opportunities for education and training to help prepare you to be a teacher	32%	47%	41%	37%	27%	43%
Difficult work schedule	29%	31%	28%	42%	27%	31%

Q23. Below you will find a list of things that some people consider to be challenges facing early childhood educators that have led some to switch to other professions. Please rate them in terms of how challenging they have been for you personally. The choices are: one of the biggest challenges, a big challenge, a small challenge, not a challenge at all.

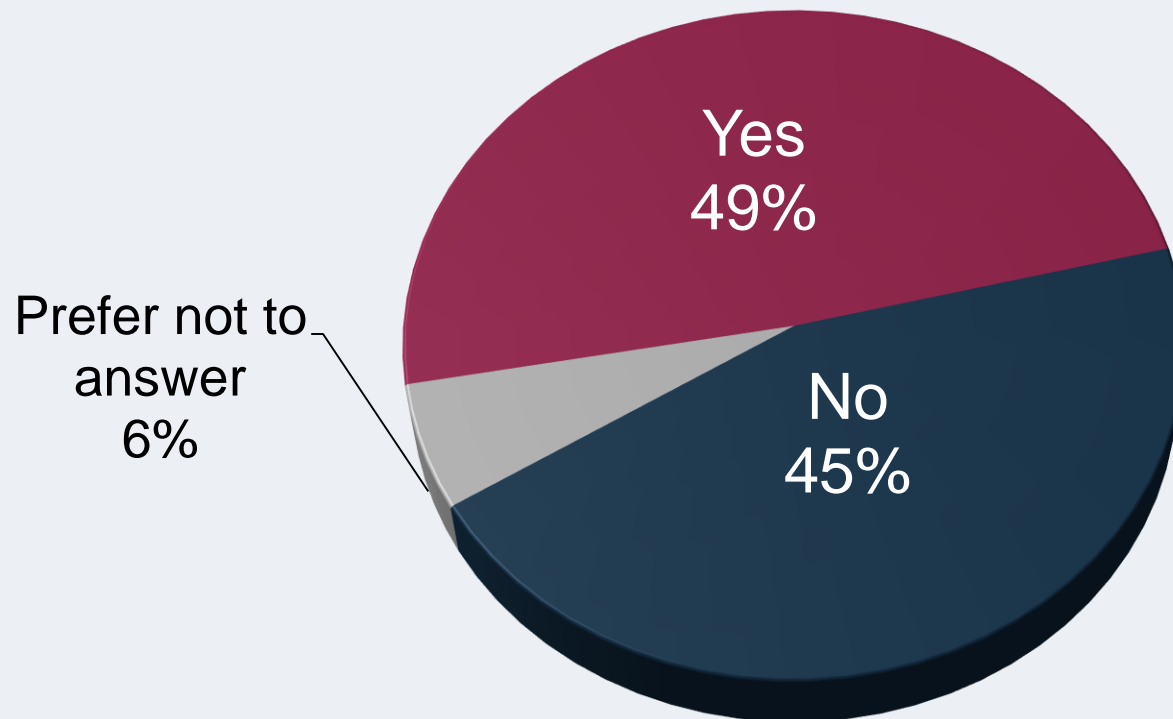
Educators are very open to the concept of increased requirements...

The government may increase funding for early childhood education, including increasing pay for educators. Do you think it is fair to require current and future early childhood educators to meet a baseline set of qualifications in order to receive this higher salary and benefits?



...but are split on specific *degree* requirements.

Some people believe that regardless of program type or the ages of the children they serve, the baseline qualifications for lead teachers should be a Bachelor's degree in child development and for assistant teachers/aides it should be an Associate degree with some course credits in child development. Do you agree with that idea?



Educators respond strongly to messages emphasizing their ability to make a difference in the lives of young children.

(% Very Convincing)

(REWARDING) Early childhood education is a very rewarding career. Educators have the ability to nurture, educate, and lay a foundation that will last a lifetime. Early childhood educators do not simply teach – they transform lives. **72%**

(ROLE MODELS) Early childhood educators are role models in the lives of the children they serve. Educators support children’s natural curiosity, help them solve problems, provide them with comfort, help them make new friends, follow rules, set boundaries, be an example in their lives and have fun. **71%**

(SCHOOL SUCCESS) Becoming an early childhood educator is an opportunity to lay the foundation for children’s school success. Studies routinely show that children who attend early childhood education programs with well-trained teachers enter kindergarten ready to learn, do better in school and have more productive lives. **69%**

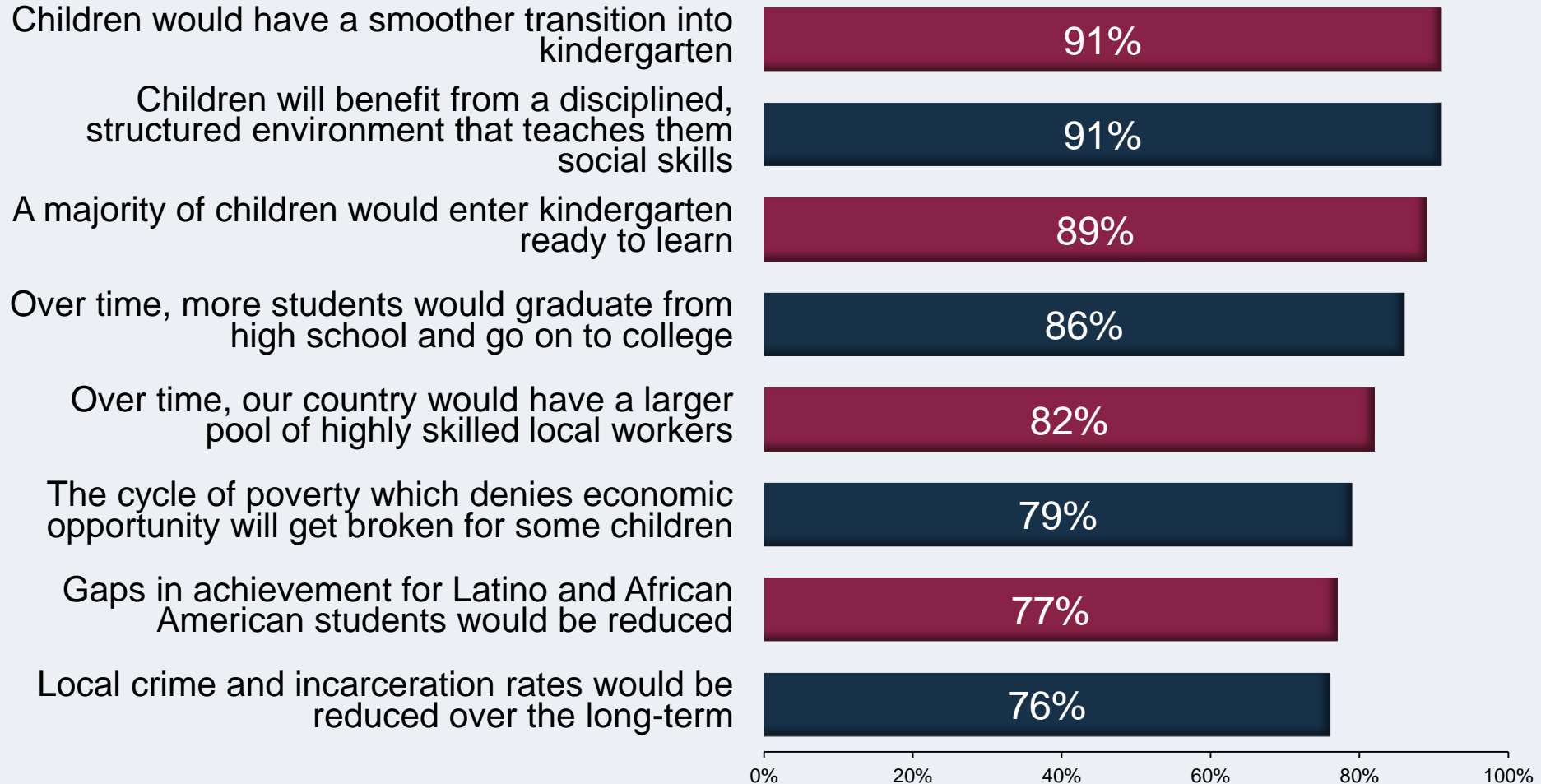
(MAGIC MOMENTS) Early childhood educators get to experience many magical moments every day when they see the pride on the face of a young child who has learned a new skill and they know they have made a difference in that child’s life. **67%**

Q29. Below are a series of statements encouraging people to consider a career as an early childhood educator. Please choose whether you find it very convincing, somewhat convincing, or not convincing as a reason to pursue a lifelong career in early childhood education. If you do not believe the statement, you can choose that also.

Investing in the Profession

Voters believe increased access to early education will have broad benefits for society.

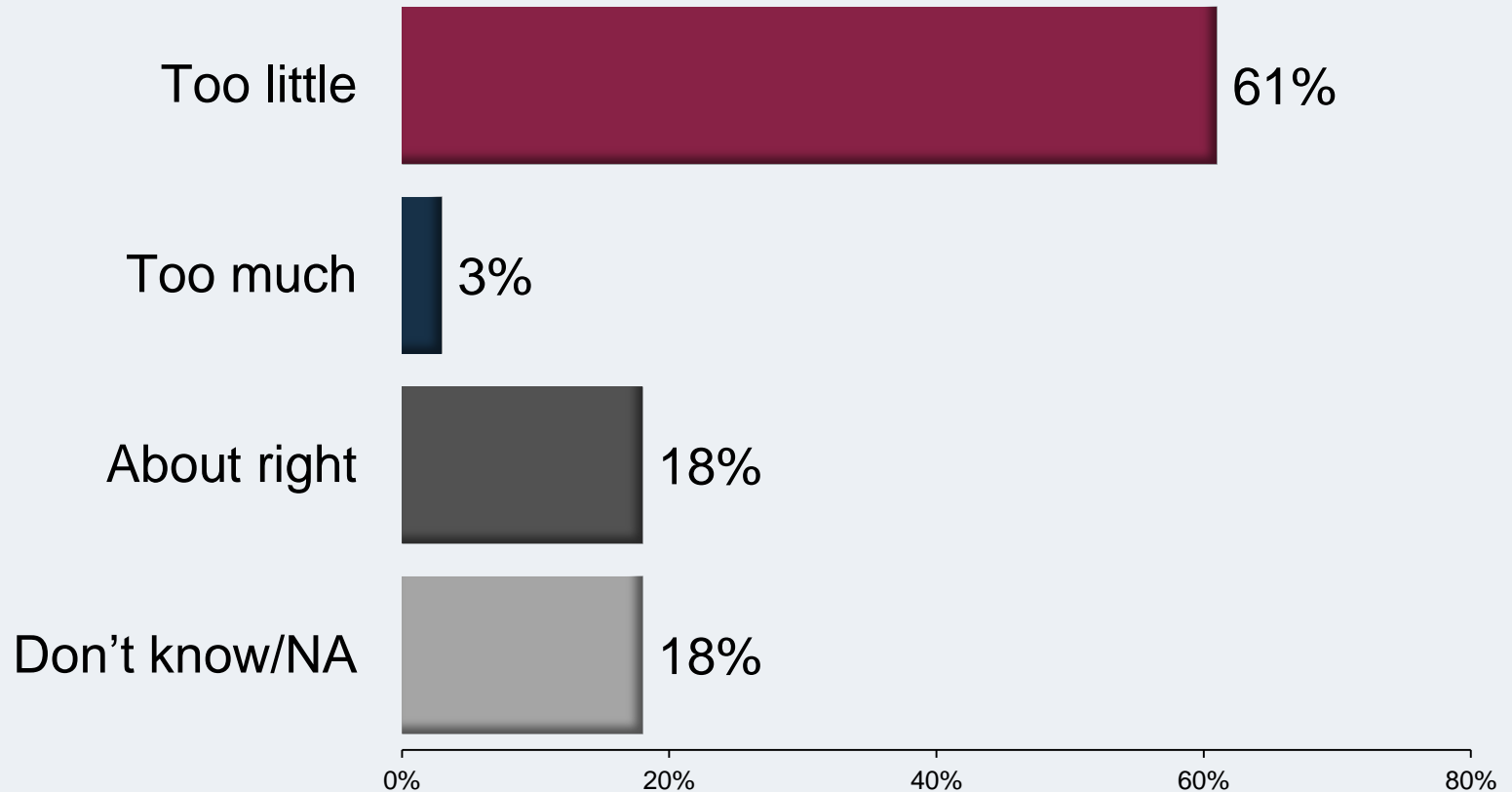
(% Believing Expanded Access to Early Education is Likely to Produce Each Benefit)



Q8. I'm going to read you a list of different outcomes that might be achieved by expanding access to early childhood education. For each one, tell me whether you think it would be likely or unlikely to happen if access to early childhood education were expanded.

Most voters believe that early childhood educators are paid too little.

Thinking of the early childhood educators who serve children in your community in the years before they enter kindergarten, do you think they are paid too little, too much or about right?



Voters are split on requiring degrees first or increasing pay first.

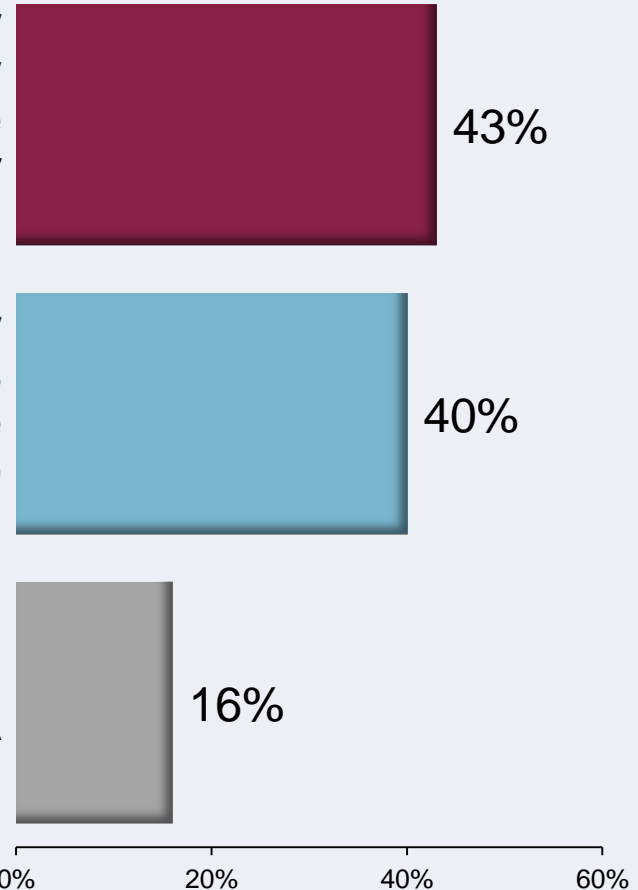
Which of the following statements about this idea comes closest to your opinion?

SOME/OTHER PEOPLE say we should **increase wages for early childhood educators before we require higher educational standards.** Talented people will never seek the education or training to be educators unless they know they can make a reasonable living at it.

OR

SOME/OTHER PEOPLE say we should **require higher educational standards for early childhood educators before we increase their wages.** We should be sure we have enough skilled and trained workers before we start to pay them more.

Both/Neither/Don't know/NA

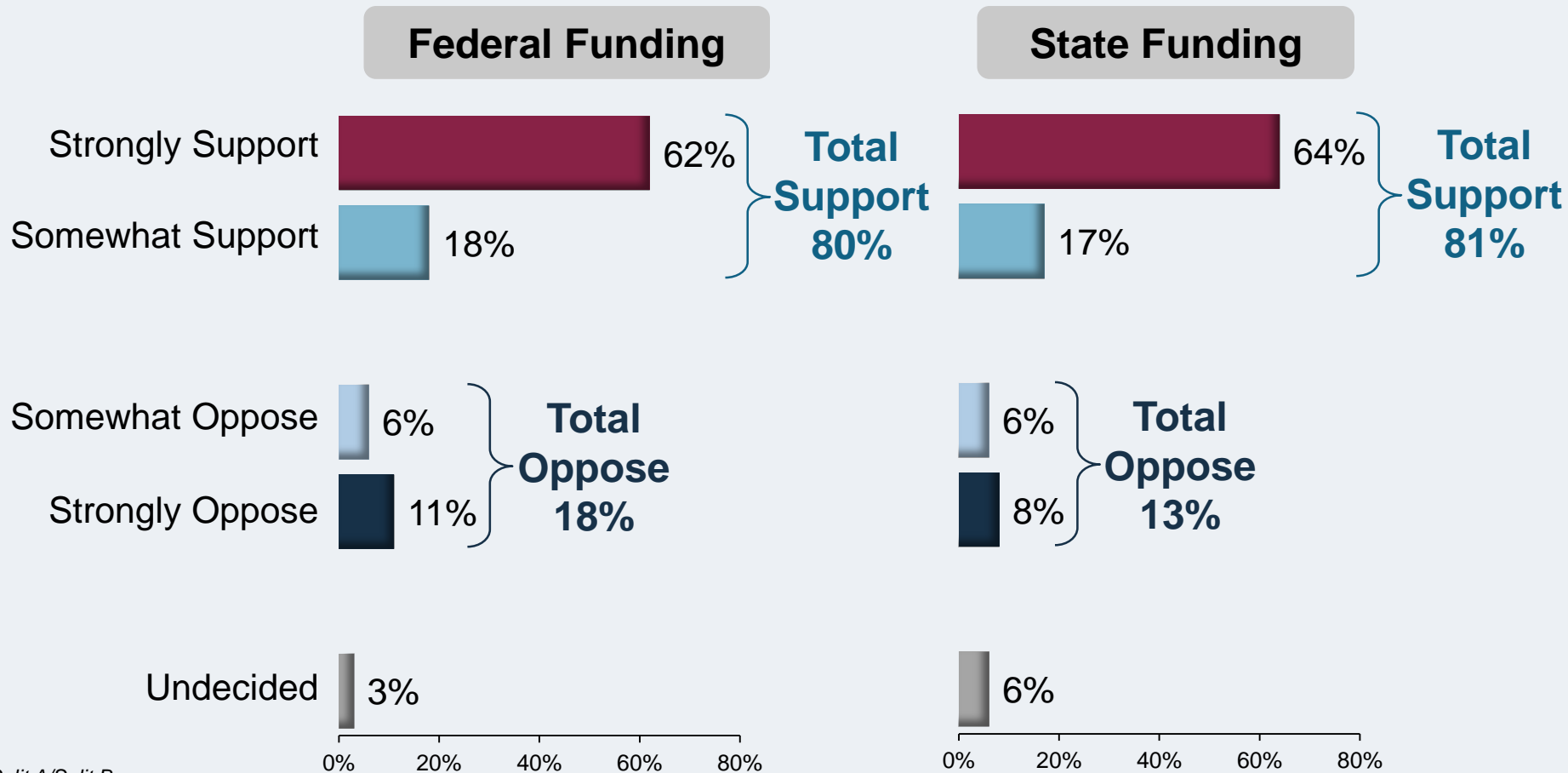


A number of demographic factors shape voters' responses to this tradeoff.

Demographic Group	Higher Education Standards First	Higher Wages First	Both/Neither/ DK/NA
Age			
18-49	37%	51%	12%
50-64	44%	40%	16%
65+	40%	35%	26%
Party			
Democrats	34%	51%	15%
Independents	42%	41%	17%
Republicans	47%	36%	17%
Household Income			
<\$60,000	36%	49%	15%
\$60,000+	45%	45%	9%
Census Region			
Northeast	49%	37%	14%
Midwest	39%	45%	15%
South	40%	43%	18%
West	34%	48%	18%

Voters overwhelmingly support increasing funding for ECE services.

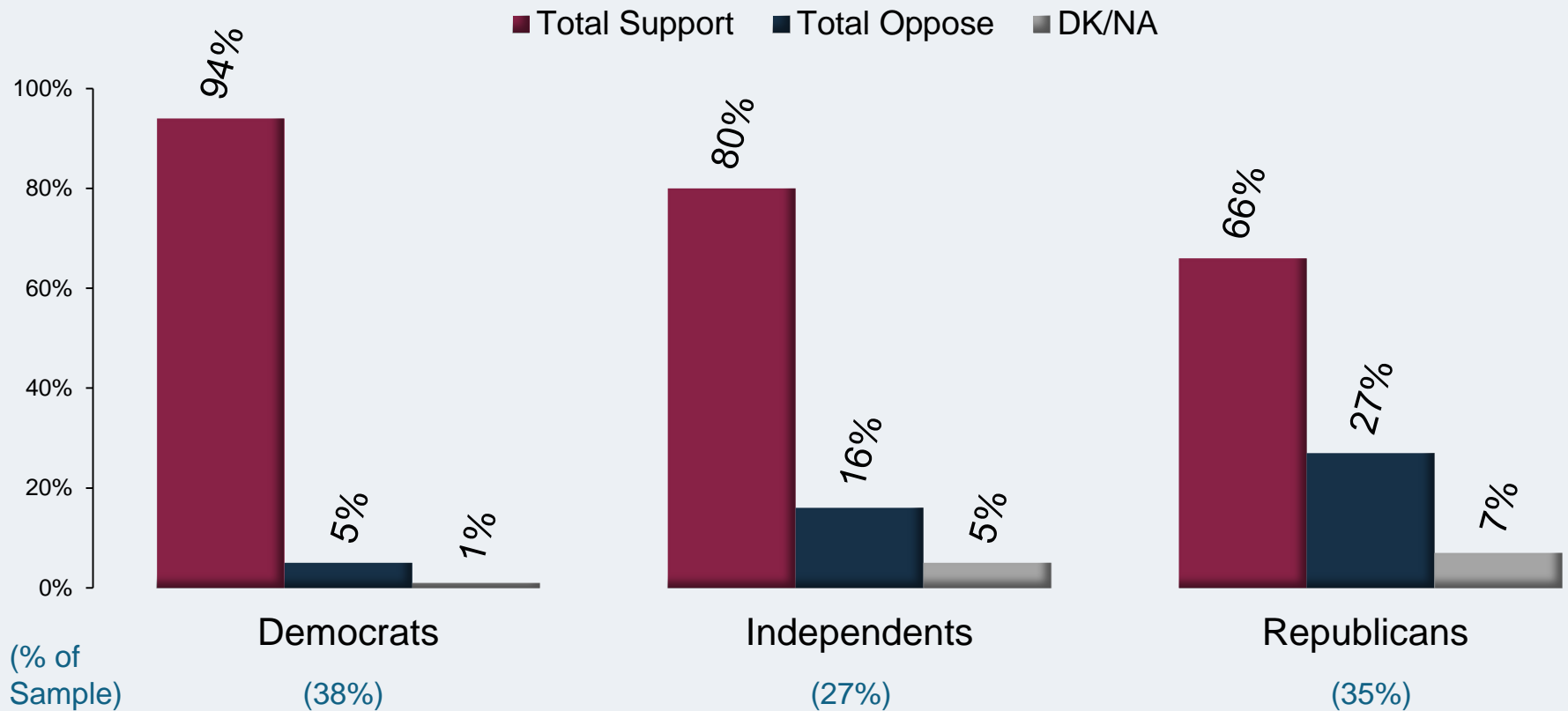
Some people have proposed increasing (**HALF-SAMPLE: federal funding**) / (**HALF-SAMPLE: state funding**) to support early childhood education services, and make high-quality, affordable early education more available to parents. In general, does this sound like something you would support or oppose?



Q7 Split A/Split B.

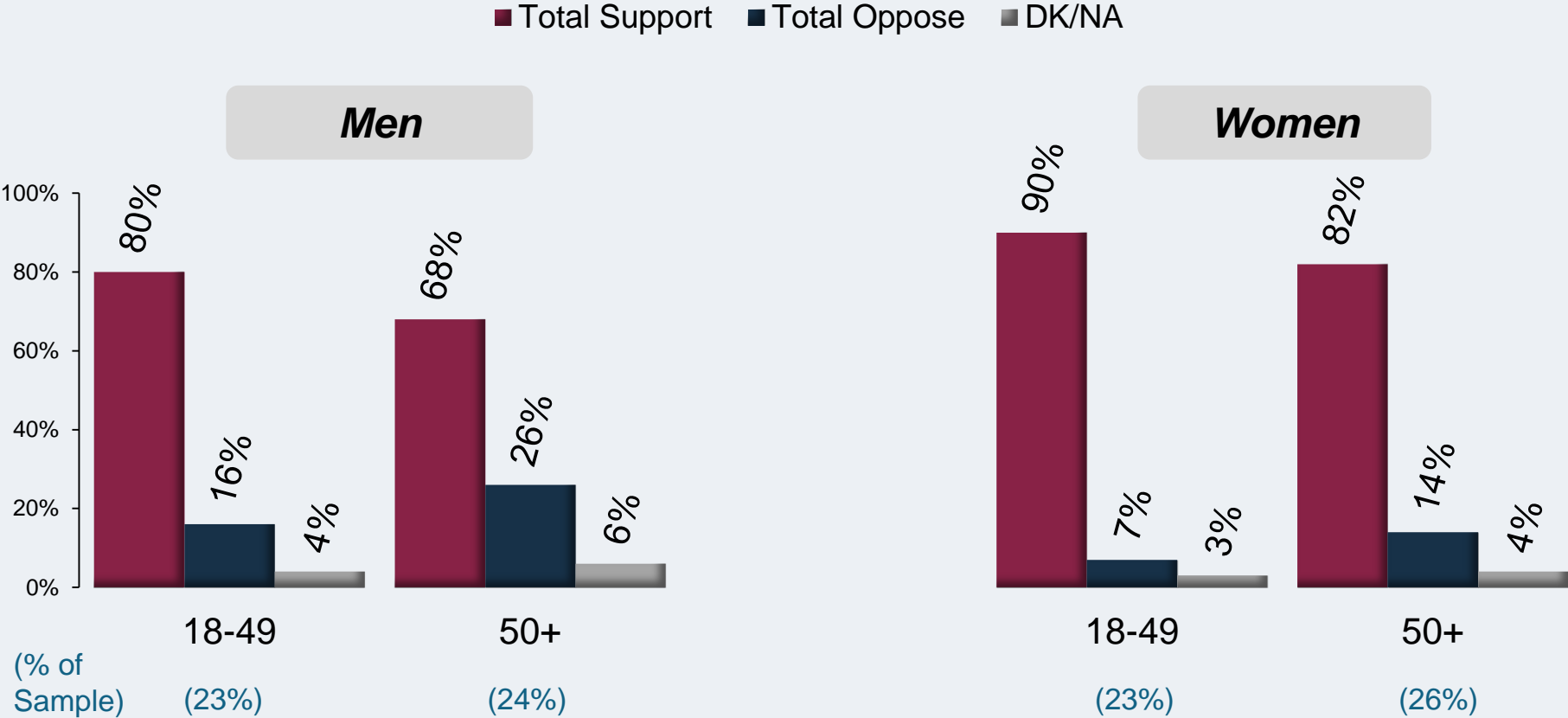
Majorities of Democrats, independents and Republicans support increased investment in early childhood education.

Support for Increased ECE Funding by Party



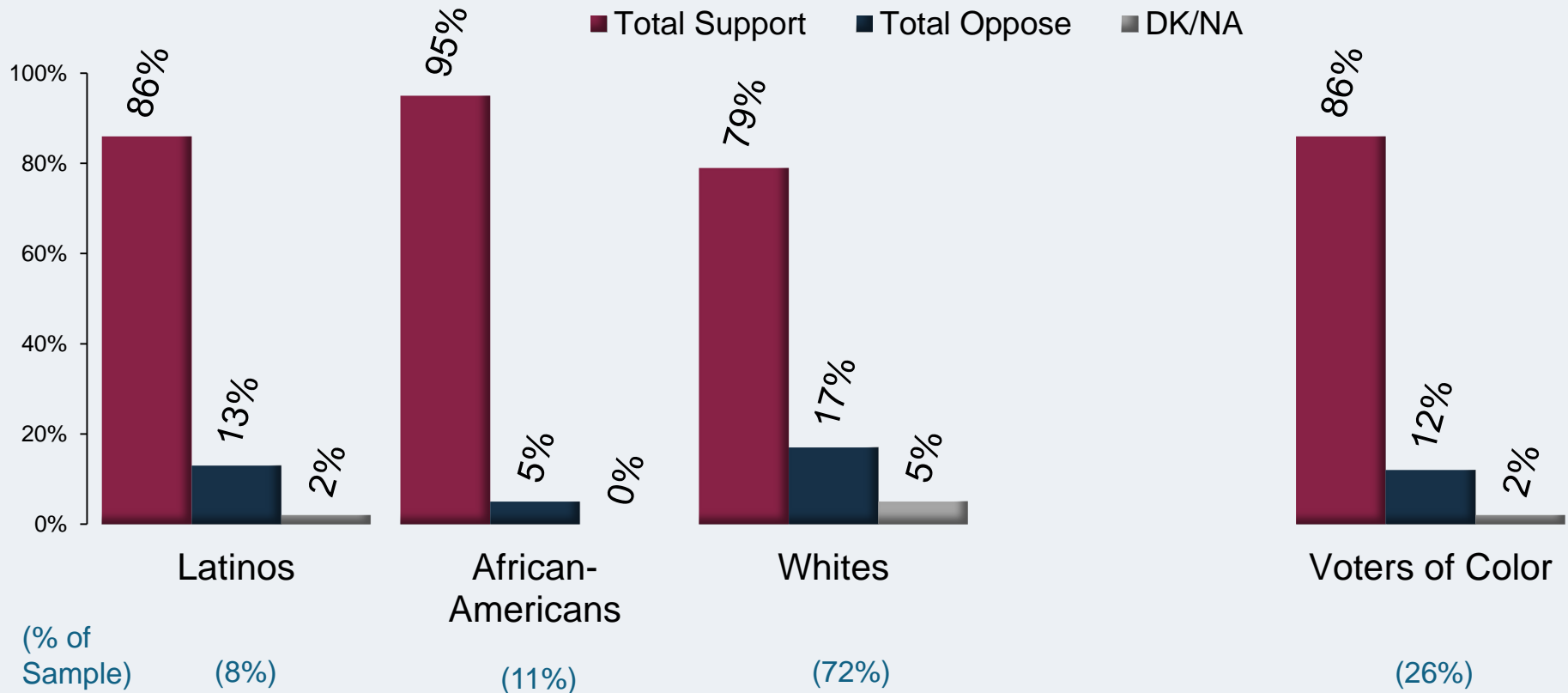
There is a pronounced gender gap, particularly among voters over age 50.

Support for Increased ECE Funding by Gender by Age



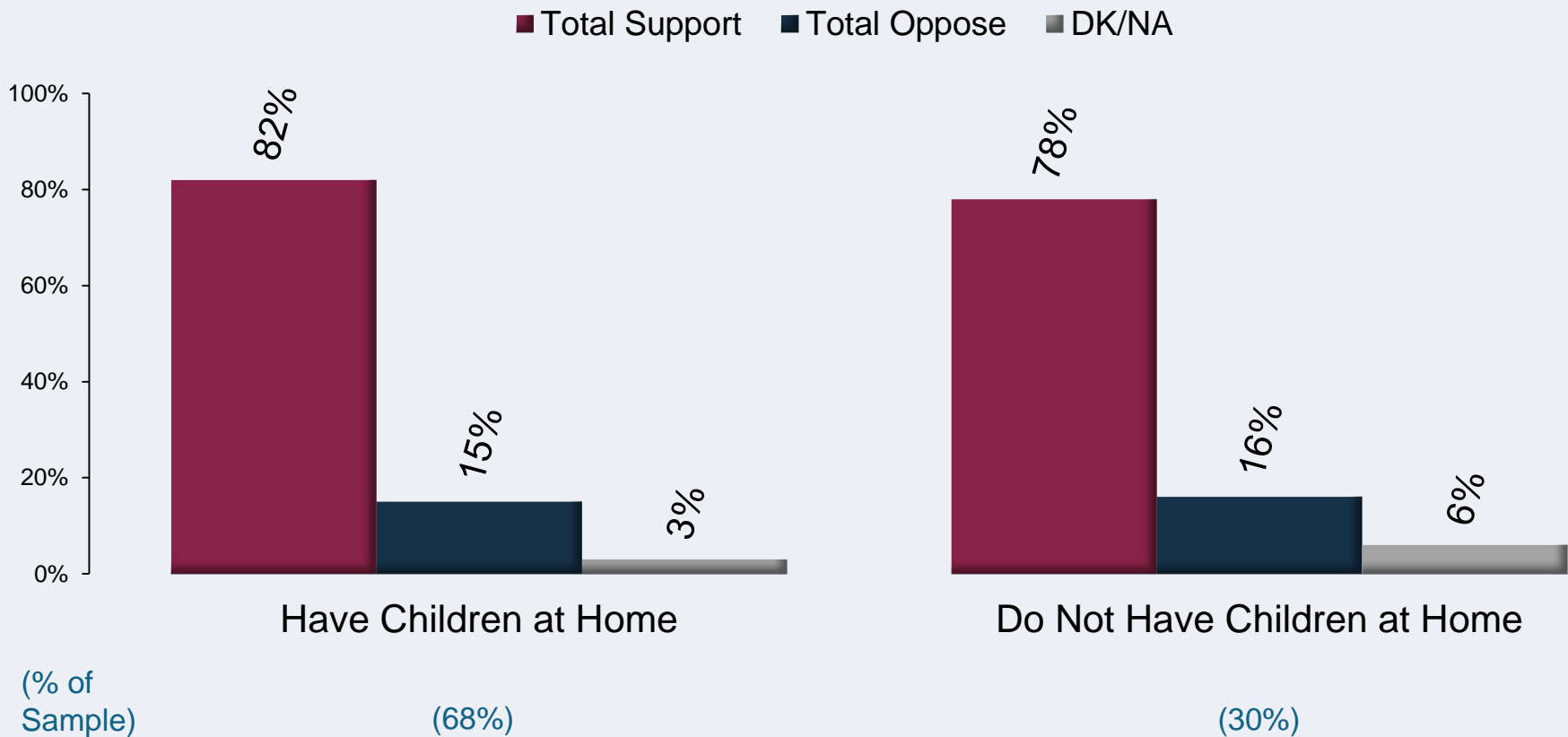
African-American voters are among the most supportive of an investment in ECE.

Support for Increased ECE Funding by Ethnicity



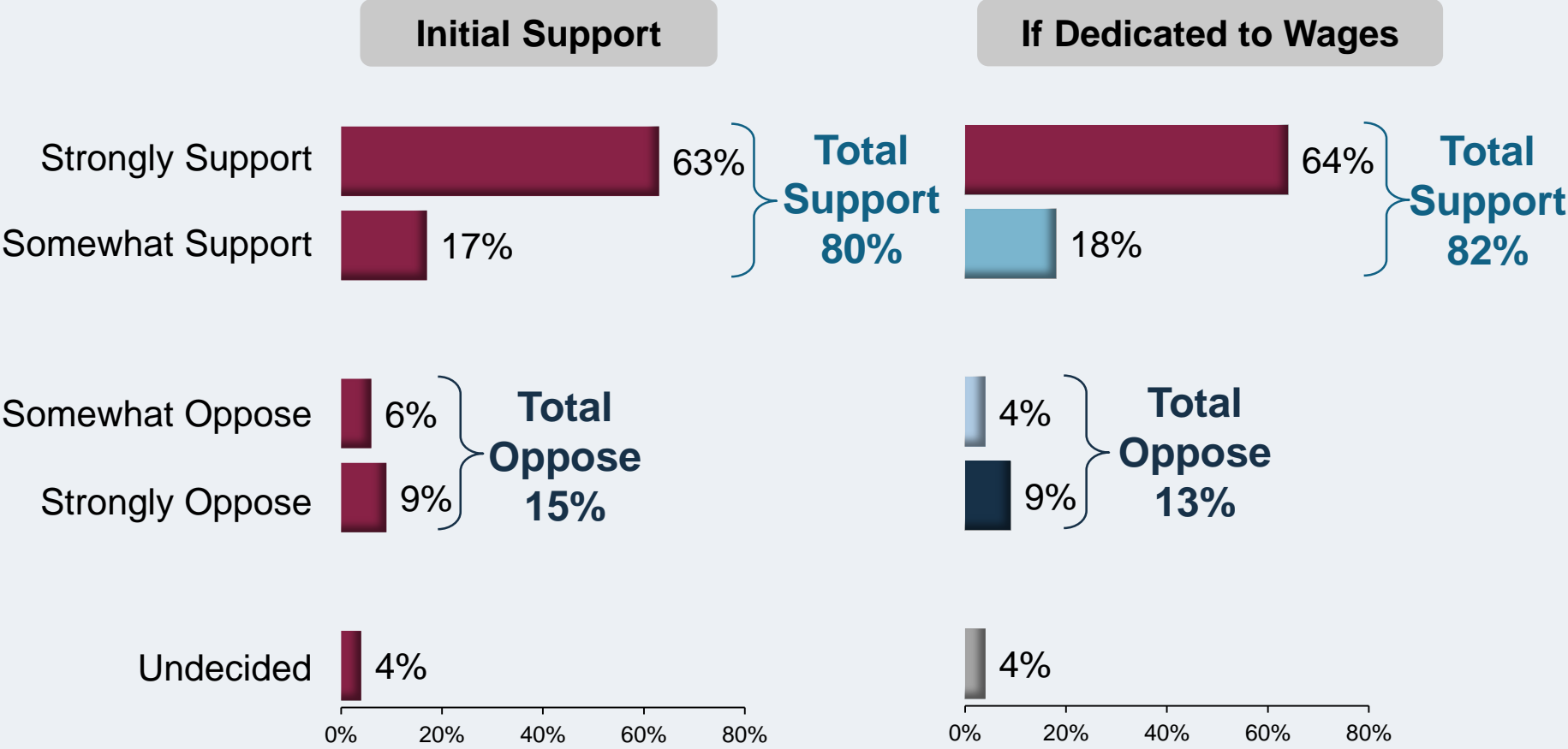
Interestingly, parents are only modestly more supportive than are non-parents.

Support for Increased ECE Funding by Parent Status



Voters continue to support an investment in ECE with the understanding that it would increase wages.

I'd like to return to the idea I mentioned a few moments ago, of increasing federal/state to support early childhood education services, and make high-quality, affordable early education more available to parents. Suppose you knew that this additional funding would be primarily dedicated to increasing wages for early childhood educators, with the goal of reducing turnover in the field and recruiting and retaining more highly-qualified teachers.

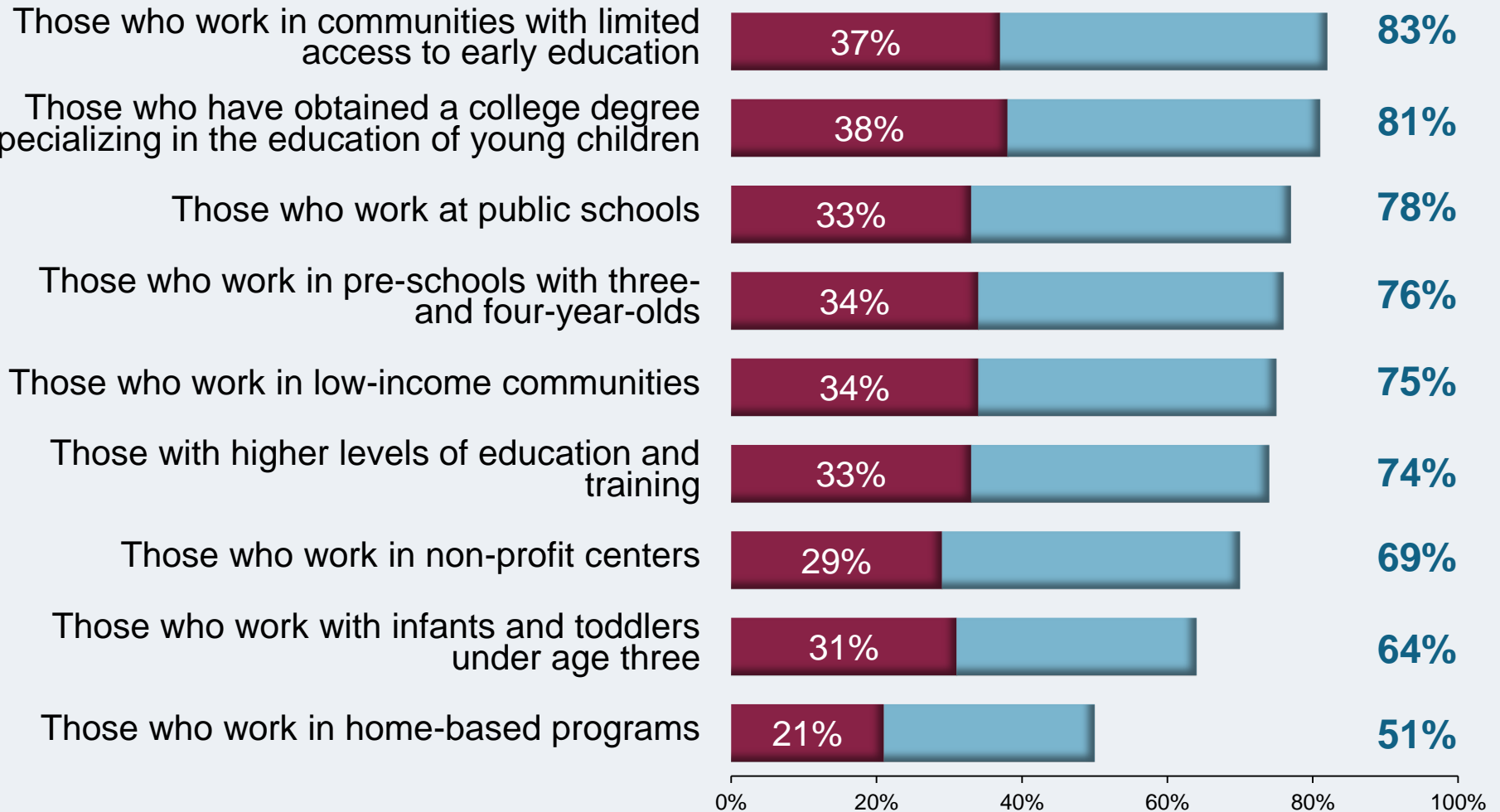


Q7 Total/Q12 Total. Would you support or oppose this proposal to increase funding for early childhood education?

Voters support *raising wages* for early educators in a variety of settings.

(% Rating it "Very Important" to Increase Wages for Each Type of Educator)

■ Ext. Impt. ■ Very Impt.



Voters see several compelling reasons to support wage increases for early childhood educators.

(% Very Convincing)

(BRAIN DEVELOPMENT) Research shows that a child's brain develops most dramatically during the first five years of life. This critical period is a window of opportunity to lay the foundation for all of the years that follow. It takes appropriate salaries and benefits to recruit and retain the best educators to work with our children during this critical period of their development.

61%

(ROLE MODELS) Early childhood educators are role models in the lives of the children they serve. Educators support children's natural curiosity, help them solve problems, provide them with comfort, help them make new friends, follow rules, set boundaries, be an example in their lives and have fun.

58%

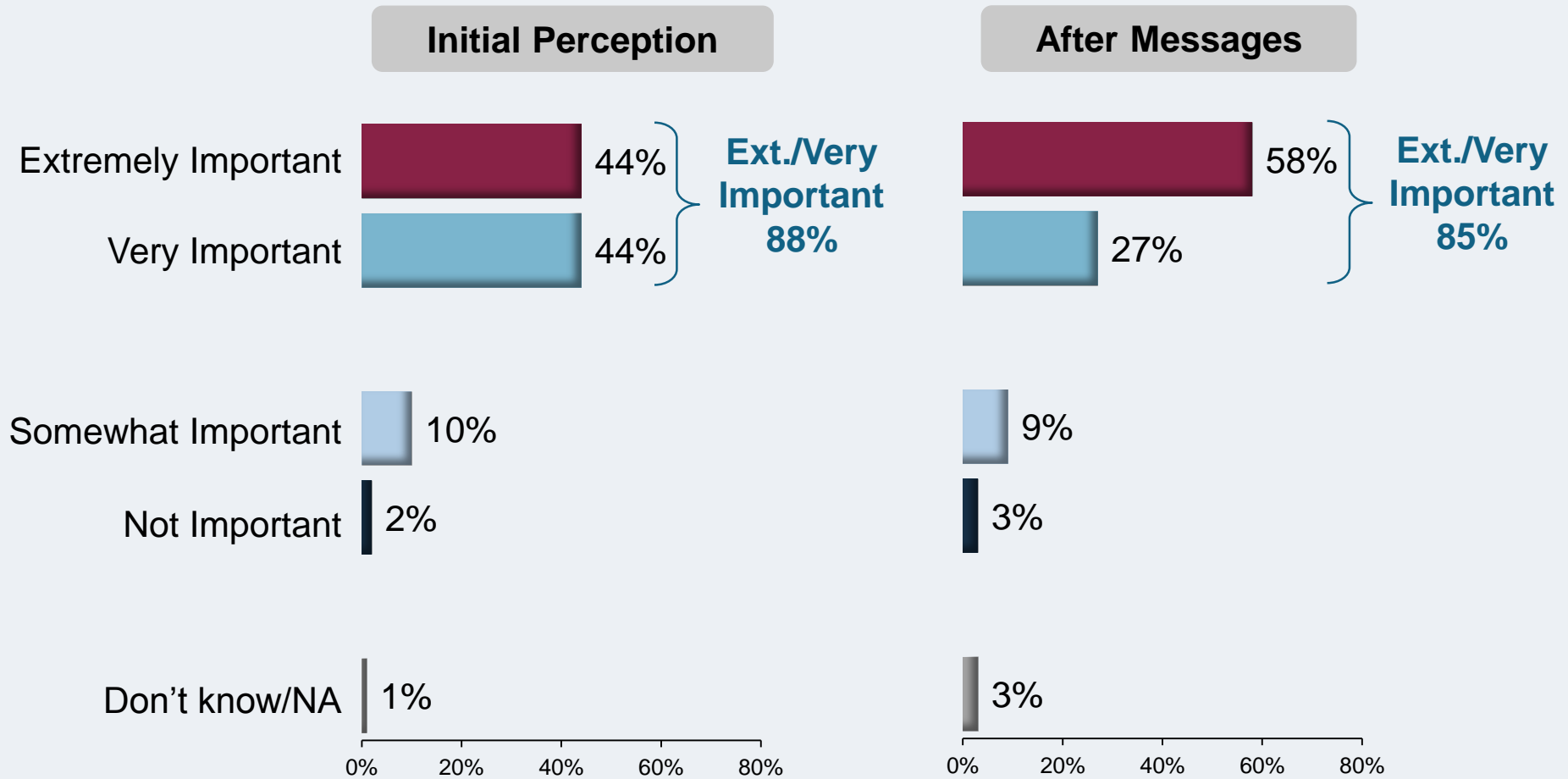
(SCHOOL READINESS) Paying our early childhood educators fairly will improve the quality of preschools, which will strengthen K-12 education. Studies show that kids who go to pre-school are better prepared to learn, more likely to read by the fourth grade and more likely to graduate and go on to college.

58%

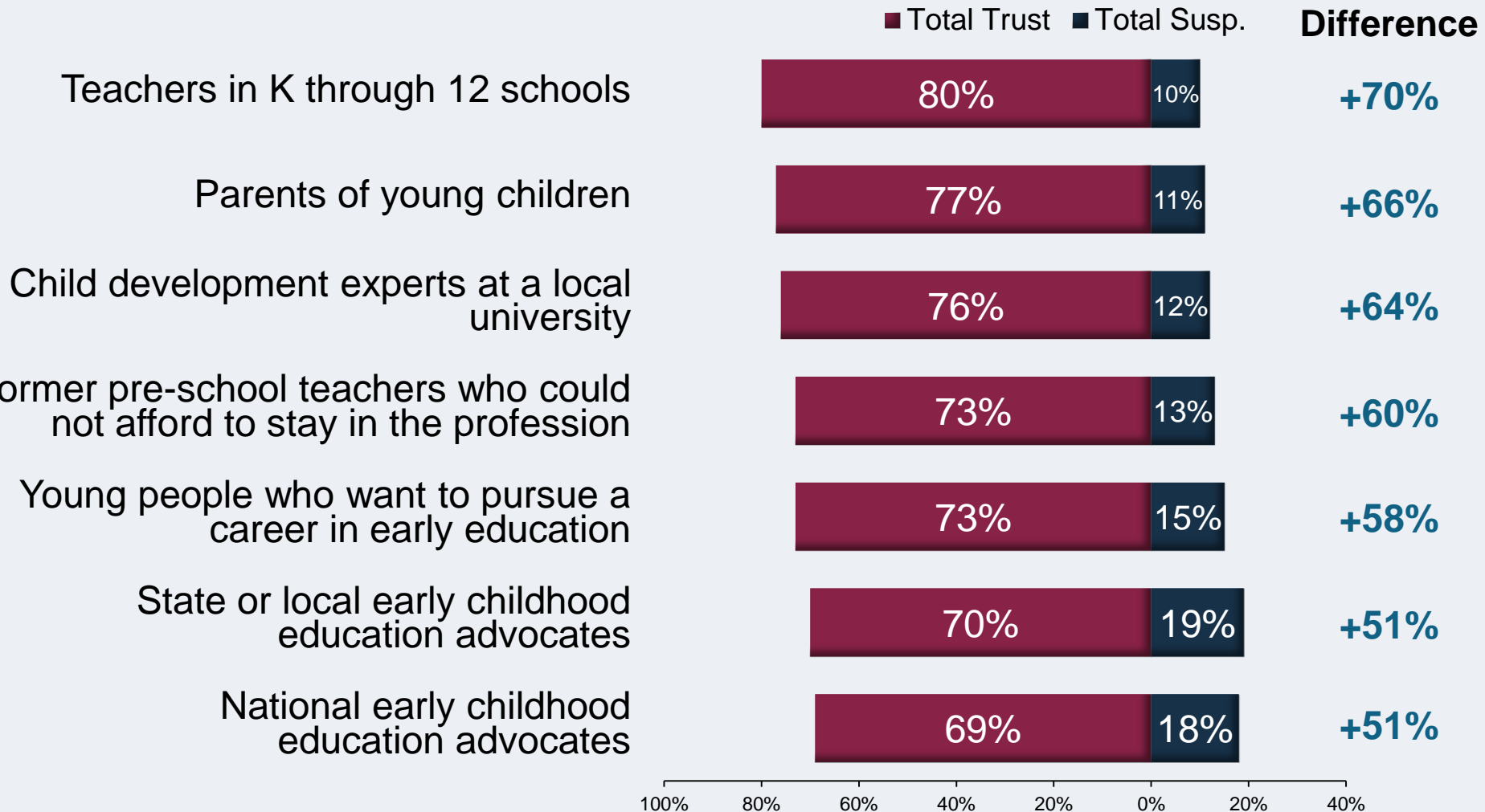
Q15. Here are a series of statements from people who support providing increased public funding to increase wages for early childhood educators. Please tell me whether you find it very convincing, somewhat convincing, or not convincing.

Voters are more likely to call early childhood educators “extremely important” after messaging.

How important would you say early childhood educators are to your local community?



Voters express high levels of trust for K-12 teachers, parents, early educators and child development experts.



Q21. Here is a list of people and organizations that take positions on issues related to funding for early childhood education. Please tell me if you would generally trust each person or organization's opinion on this issue, or if you would be suspicious of it.

Ten Key Takeaways

Ten Key Takeaways

1. Voters are **convinced of the value of early education**, and believe it will provide a wide range of benefits for the public.
2. Voters value early educators and their work highly, and **believe that they are underpaid**.
3. At the same time, **there are information gaps** – most voters do not recognize just how little educators are paid, nor that many are full-time and committed to early education as a career.
4. A **love of working with children and a desire to help them succeed** are the primary motivators for early childhood educators to work in the field – and is at the root of the most effective messages to encourage them to stay in the field.
5. Most **educators would like to continue a career** in the field for the foreseeable future – but not all are sure that they will be able to.

Ten Key Takeaways (Cont.)

6. Low pay and benefits are far and away the major obstacle to the recruitment and retention of early educators.
7. Secondly, there is also a sense among educators that the profession is not respected or appreciated to the degree it should be.
8. Voters strongly support additional investment in early childhood education – and are every bit as supportive when they know that money will fund competitive wages.
9. Messaging around brain development; the importance of educators as role models; and ensuring readiness for K-12 education are the best reasons to support increased compensation for educators.
10. The data show teachers, parents of young children, and academic experts on child development are highly trusted.

NAEYC's Commitment

Vision Statement

All young children thrive and learn in a society dedicated to ensuring they reach their full potential.

Mission Statement

NAEYC promotes high-quality early learning for all children, birth through age 8, by connecting practice, policy, and research. We advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession and support all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children.

The Profession

The early childhood education profession exemplifies excellence and is recognized as vital and performing a critical role in society.

A Three-Pronged Approach

