

West Virginia DROPOUT PREVENTION SUMMIT EVALUATION REPORT

Executive Summary

In 2005-06, the Average Freshmen Graduation Rate for West Virginia was 78%.¹ As part of an effort by America's Promise Alliance to increase graduation rates across the country, on July 14, 2009 more than 270 people² from a diverse range of sectors attended the West Virginia Dropout Prevention Summit.

This report presents information from two sources: the conveners and local partners who planned the event,³ and those who attended the summit.⁴

The West Virginia summit convener reported highlights from the event, including the following:

- Key leaders such as the Governor and First Lady, State Board of Education Superintendent, and a representative from America's Promise Alliance participated in the summit.
- Adult and youth presenters provided stories of dropping out of school and the important role the Five Promises can have in keeping young people in school.
- Participants made personal commitments by signing their name in a pledge book along with their intended commitment.
- The summit provided the opportunity for community leaders to connect and increase overall awareness of the dropout problem and the need for change.

In addition, summit attendees overwhelmingly provided positive feedback on the quality and impact of the summit. Highlights from summit attendees include:

- 93% of attendees felt their experience at the summit would positively affect the work they do.
- 84% of survey completers thought the summit was of "excellent" or "very good" quality.
- 80% of attendees thought the summit would lead to change in their communities.

This report summarizes both the value of the West Virginia summit as reported by attendees and the degree to which the summit has strengthened partnerships and community commitment to improve

¹ Average Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) is an estimate of the percentage of an entering freshman class graduating in four years. It equals the total number of diploma recipients in 2006-07 divided by the average membership of the 8th-grade class in 2002-03, the 9th-grade class in 2003-04, and the 10th-grade class in 2004-05 (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2010313>).

² An estimate reported by the summit convener immediately after the summit.

³ Community Readiness Assessment and Attendee Registration Information provided by summit convener.

⁴ Post-summit Attendee Survey results.

education. Subsequent reports will include a review of the post-summit action plan and activities to determine the continued impact of the summit.

Summit Planning and Partner Engagement

Strengthening collaboration among organizations concerned with dropout prevention is a primary strategy of the Dropout Prevention Summit Initiative. To facilitate this, America’s Promise Alliance has encouraged summit conveners to engage a broad array of partners in summit planning and implementation, including the business community and other Alliance partners.

Table I presents the organizations the summit convener engaged in the planning and implementation of Dropout Prevention Summit-related activities. This list provides a snapshot of the convener’s efforts to build a partnership inclusive of local community organizations, the diversity of the community, Alliance partners, the business community, and parallel local efforts.

Table 1

West Virginia Dropout Prevention Summit Planning Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• CHARLESTON ECONOMIC COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION• CHILDREN'S HOME SOCIETY OF WV• COLLEGE OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND EDUCATION• COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS• GEAR UP AND P-20 INITIATIVES• GOVERNOR'S OFFICE• HOPE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORORATION• HOUSE OF DELEGATES• JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT WV• LINCOLN CO. SCHOOLS COUNSELING PROGRAM & GEAR UP• MINERAL COUNTY SCHOOLS• OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS• OFFICE OF TECHNICAL & SECONDARY PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT• STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION• STATE FARM• THE EDUCATION ALLIANCE• TYLER CONSOLIDATED HIGH SCHOOL• VISTA MEMBER• VOLUNTEER WEST VIRGINIA• WEED & SEED PROGRAM• WEST VIRGINIA ADOLESCENT HEALTH INITIATIVE• WEST VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

- WEST VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION & THE ARTS
- WEST VIRGINIA HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY COMMISSION
- WEST VIRGINIA NATIONAL GUARD FAMILY PROGRAMS
- WEST VIRGINIA PREVENTION RESOURCE CENTER
- WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY
- WVPASS

Source: Dropout Prevention Summit Partner Planning List

Dropout Prevention Summit: Attendee Survey

Feedback from the participants in the Dropout Prevention Summit provides useful information about the overall quality of the event and the potential for improving the community's approach to addressing the dropout crisis. Each summit convener was asked to submit basic information about summit attendees, including email address, upon completion of the summit. Within a few days of the summit, invitations to complete an online survey were sent by email to all individuals whose email addresses were provided. Three reminder emails were sent to encourage participation in the survey.

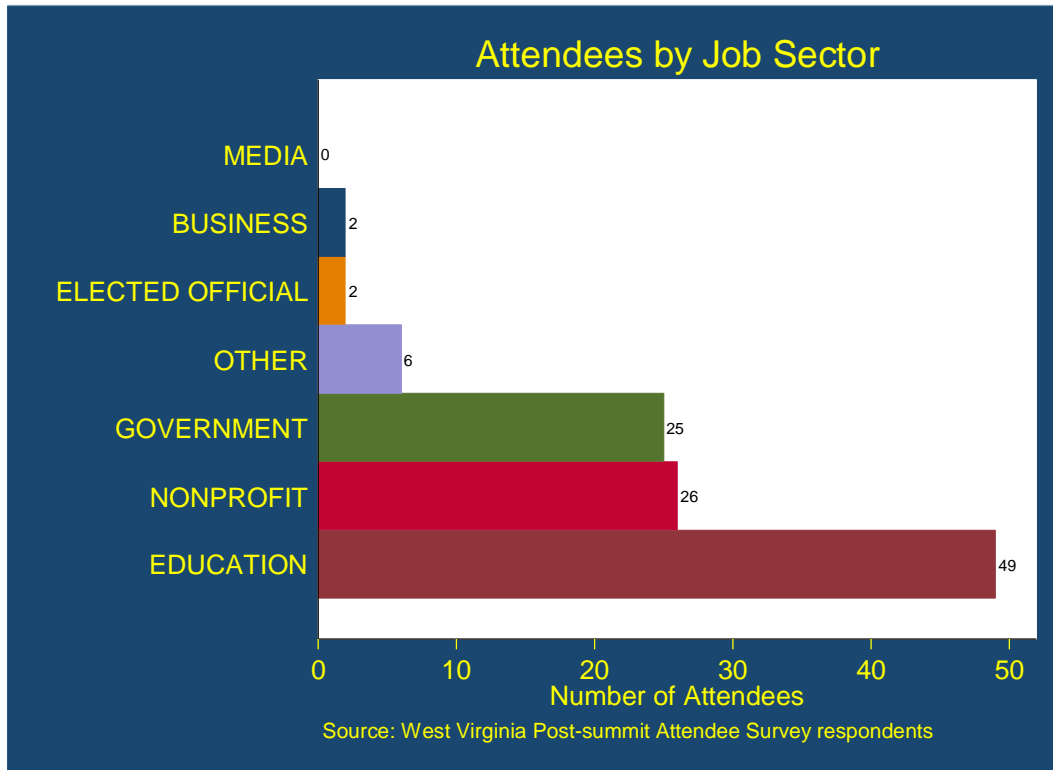
Out of the 256 registered summit attendees⁵, 160 provided valid email addresses; these individuals were invited to complete the survey. There were 98 completed surveys received, for a response rate of 38% of overall attendees and 61% of the individuals who were surveyed.

These individuals represented a variety of sectors. Sectors were collapsed into seven categories for analytic purposes: business, education, elected official, government, media, nonprofit, and other (see Figure 1).⁶

⁵ As reported in Attendee Registration Information provided by the summit convener.

⁶ Summit attendees had the option of choosing more than one sector.

Figure 1



Summit Quality and Information

Dropout Prevention Summit attendees were asked to rate overall summit quality as well as the usefulness of the materials and information presented. Of those West Virginia participants who responded to the survey, 84% said the summit was “excellent” or “very good.” An additional 15% reported that the summit was “average.” Only 1% said that the summit quality was “poor” (see Figure 2).⁷

When asked about specific aspects of summit quality, 82% reported that they learned something new and useful about the local dropout problem, 77% said that they learned of new local initiatives, and 87% said the conference materials provided valuable information (see Figure 3).⁸

⁷ Percentages in this report may not equal 100 due to rounding.

⁸ We have combined response options “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” throughout this report.

Figure 2

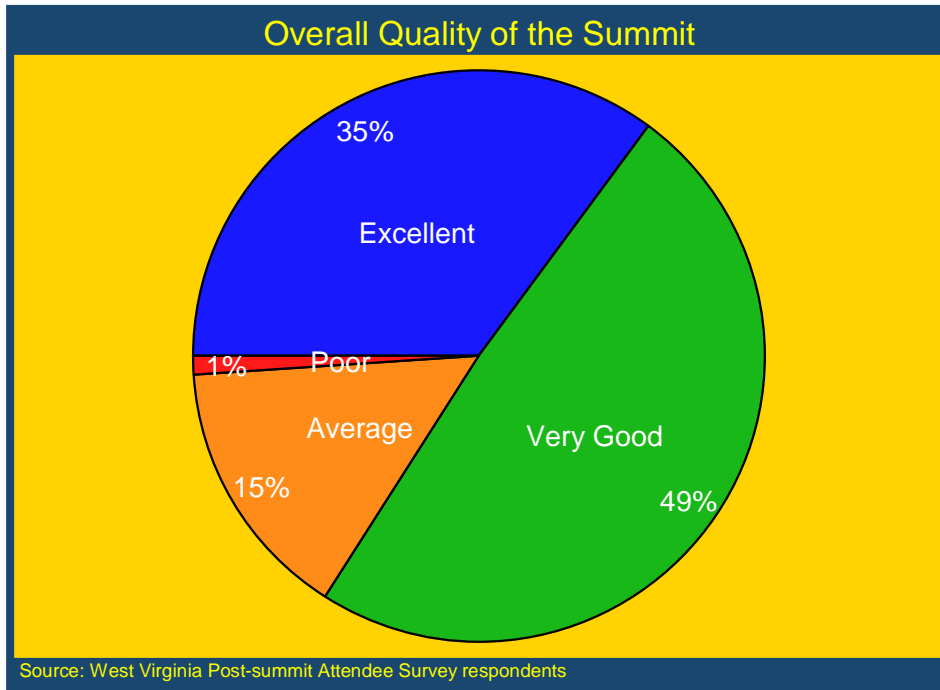
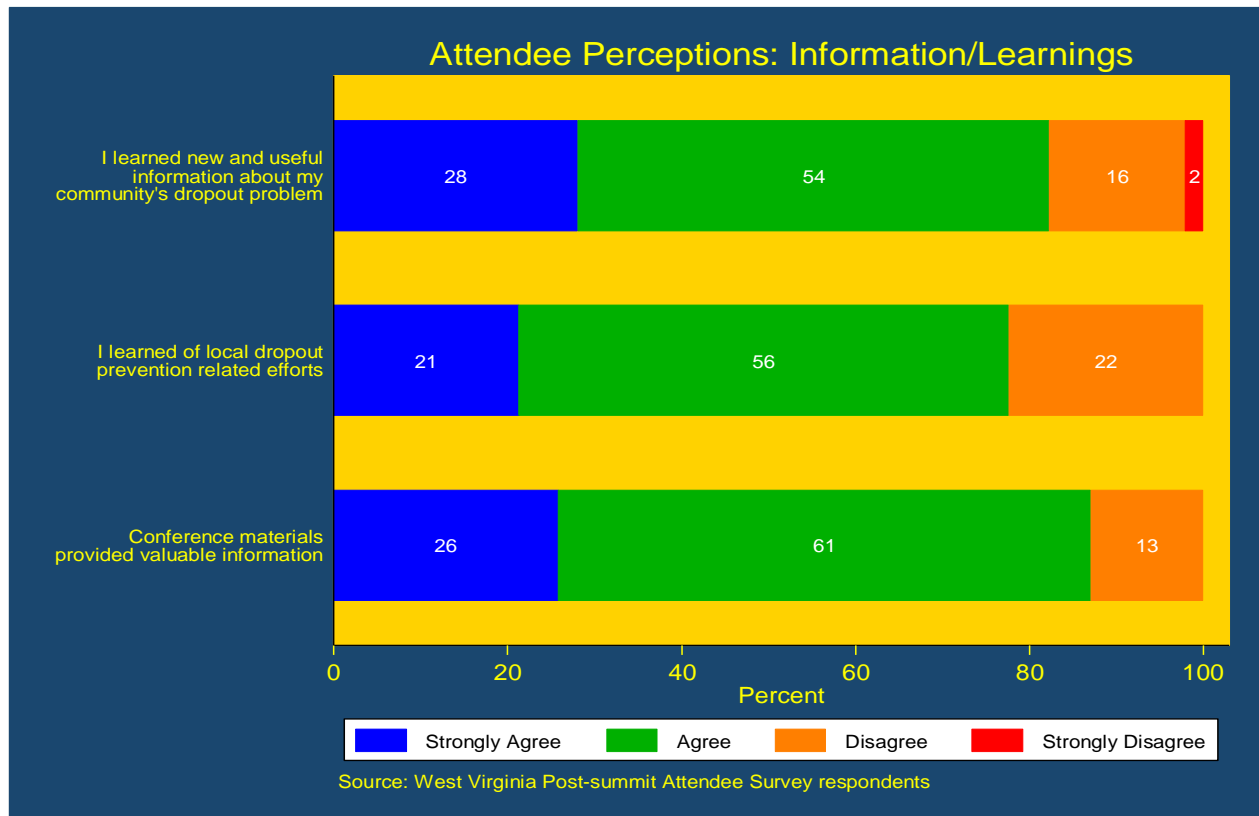


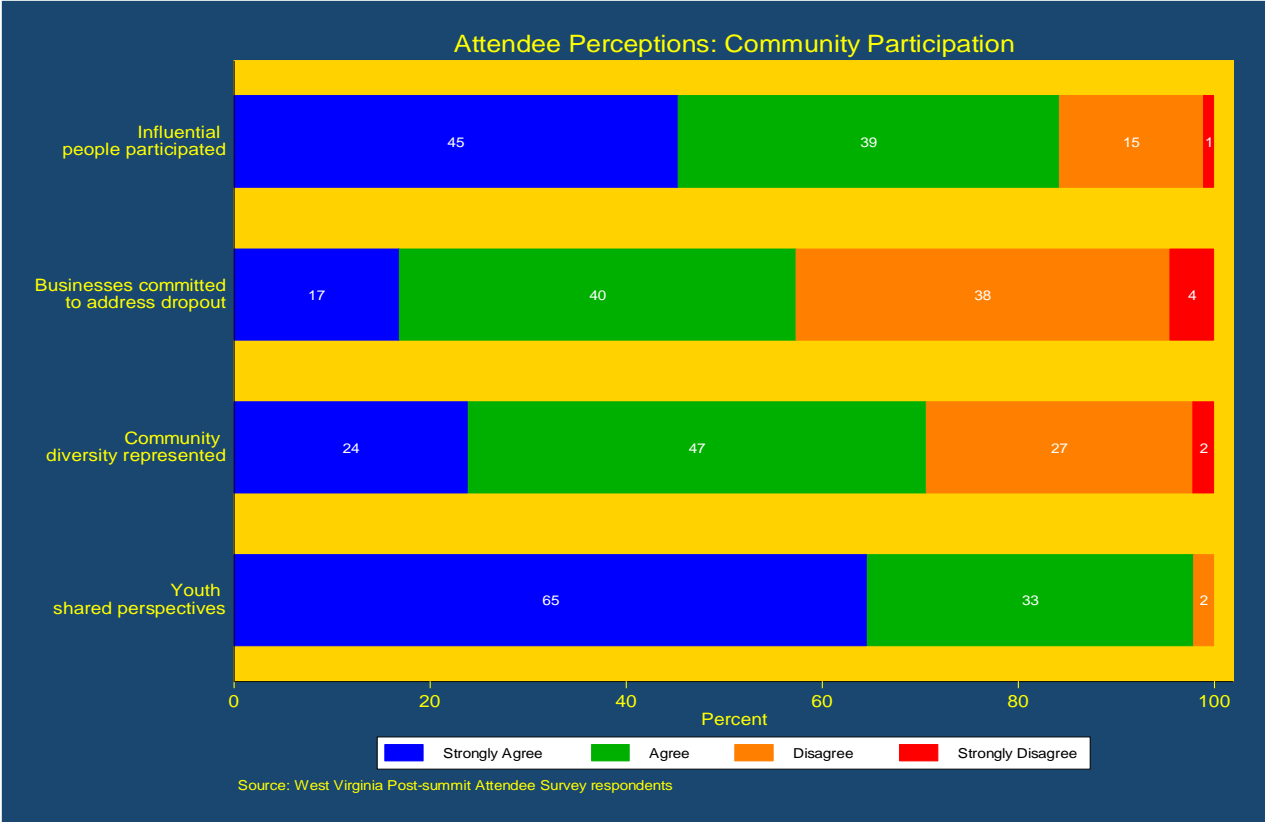
Figure 3



Community Participation

Summit attendees were asked their perceptions of how well stakeholder groups were represented in summit-related activities. Of those who responded, 84% said that influential people from the community participated in the summit. Fifty-seven percent of respondents believed that the business community demonstrated a commitment to addressing the local dropout issue. Seventy-one percent responded that the diversity of their community was represented at the summit and 98% believed that “youth had the opportunity to share their opinions on the dropout issue” (see Figure 4).

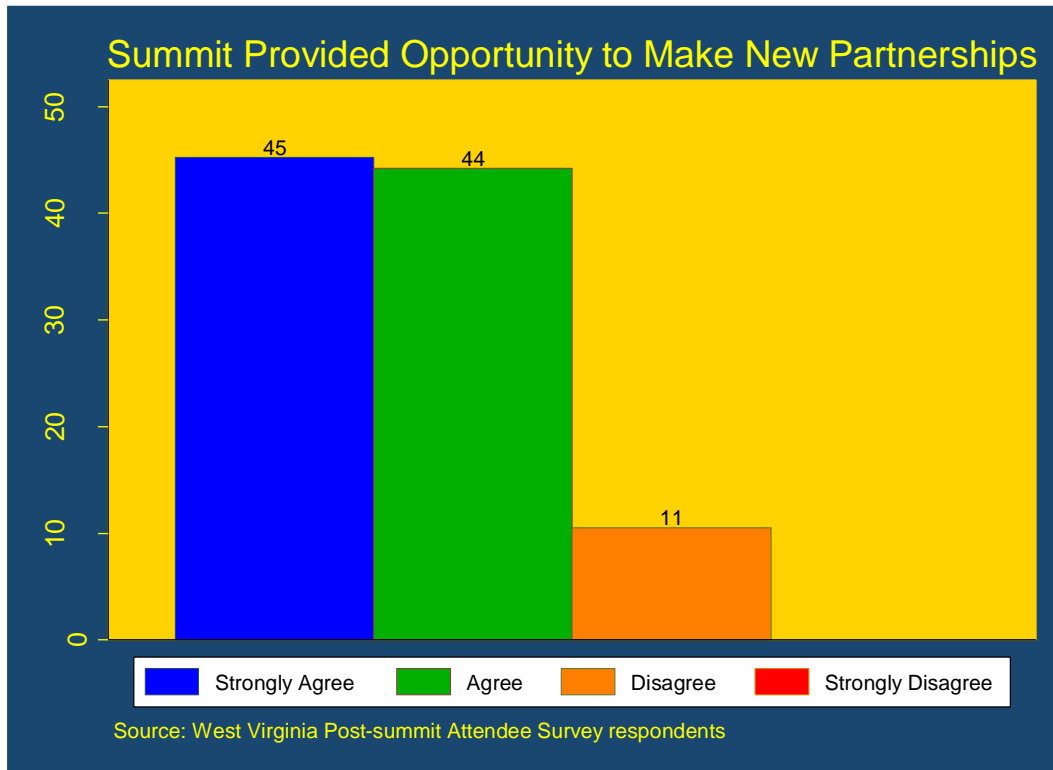
Figure 4



Partnership Development

A primary emphasis of the Dropout Prevention Summit Initiative is building stronger partnerships and collaboration. Reflecting this emphasis, 89% of survey respondents reported that the summit provided the opportunity to develop new partnerships or connections (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

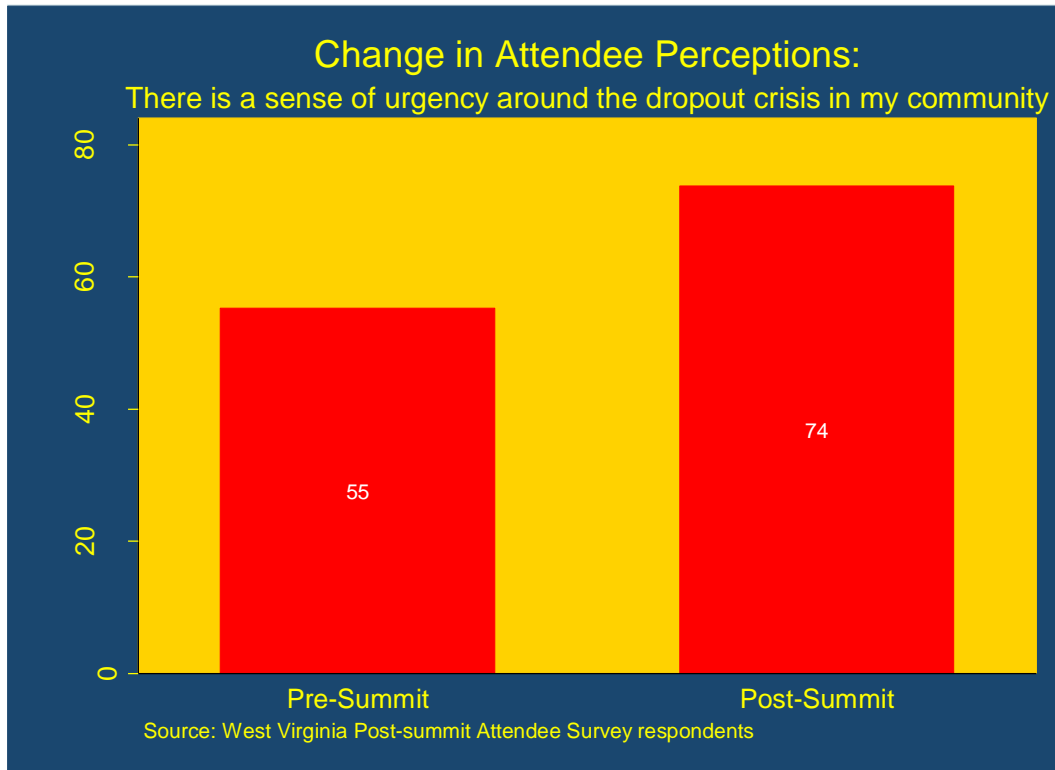


Summit Impact

A central premise of the Dropout Prevention Summit Initiative is that these summits across the nation can plant the seeds of change and commitment to action within the communities that host them, on both the community and the individual level. By creating a sense of urgency around the dropout crisis, America's Promise hopes to inspire communities to collaborate in new ways and improve outcomes for youth. Summit attendees were queried in a variety of ways to assess whether and how they felt the summit would affect their own work and the broader community.

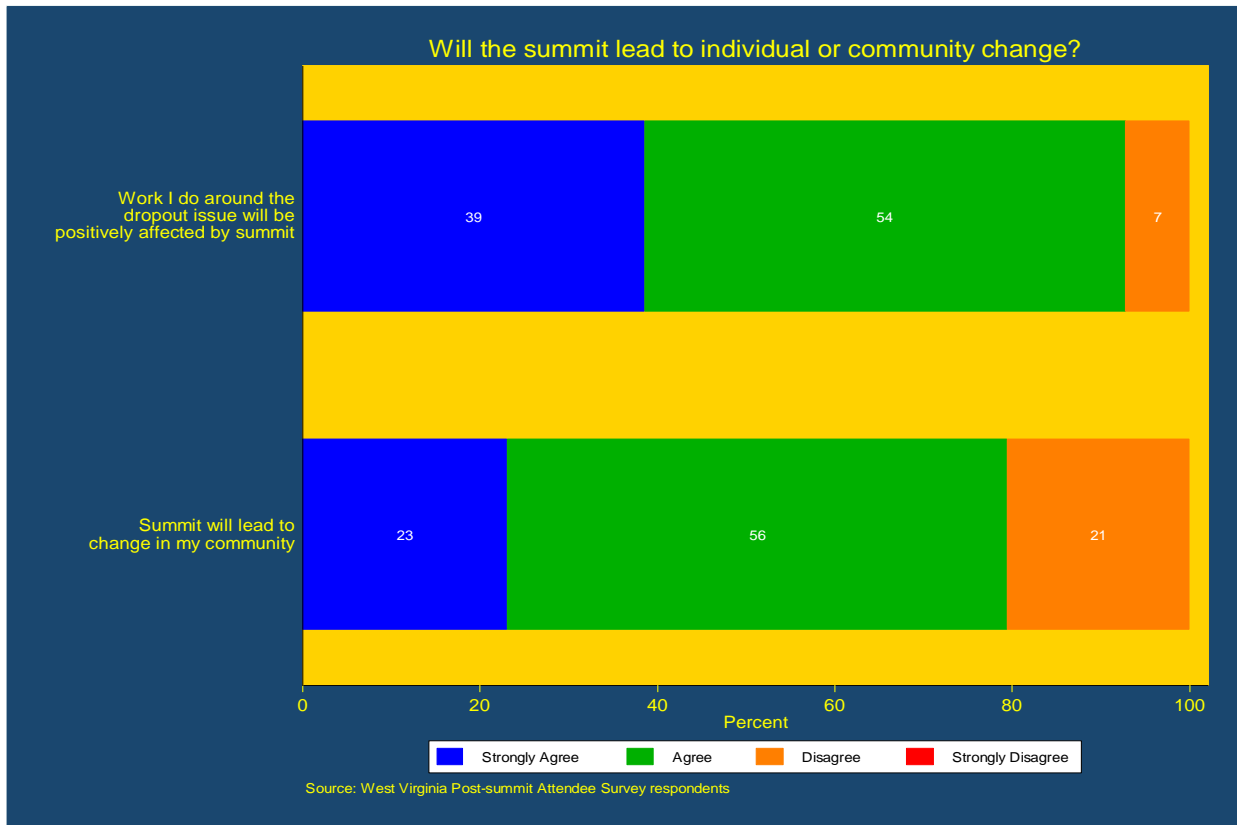
Summit survey respondents were asked to recall their thoughts on the dropout issue prior to attending the summit, and how they felt after attending the summit. Seventy-four percent of West Virginia Dropout Prevention Summit survey respondents said they felt a stronger sense of urgency about the dropout issue in their community after the summit, compared to 55% before the summit (see Figure 6).

Figure 6



The survey went on to explore whether summit attendees believed the Dropout Prevention Summit would positively affect the work they do around the dropout issue and whether the summit would lead to change in their community. Ninety-three percent of the West Virginia respondents stated they thought the summit would positively affect the work they do around the dropout issue, and 79% thought it would lead to change in their community (see Figure 7).

Figure 7



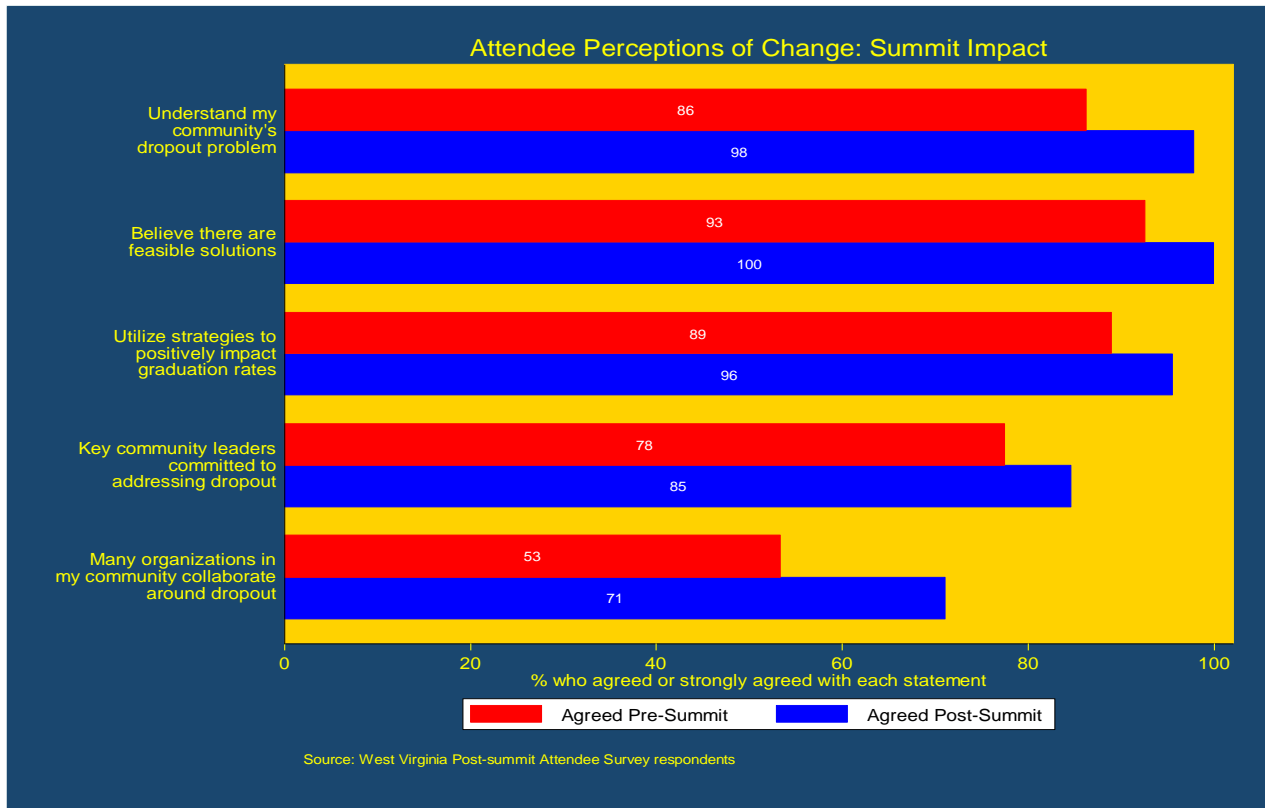
The degree of impact that these summits have is one measure of their success. Reflecting this, the attendee survey asked several follow-up questions to identify in what ways the summit might produce impact. The survey asked the respondent to identify their pre-summit and post-summit level of agreement with a variety of statements regarding the high school dropout issue (see Figure 8).

Impact on Perceptions/Knowledge: The percentage of survey respondents who agreed that they had “a good understanding of the dropout problem in my community” increased from 86% to 98% from pre- to post-summit. Ninety-three percent of West Virginia respondents believed “there are feasible solutions to the dropout issue” before the summit, and 100% believed so after the summit.

Impact on Individual Action: The percentage of people who said they were using strategies at work to help improve the graduation rate changed from 89% to 96%.

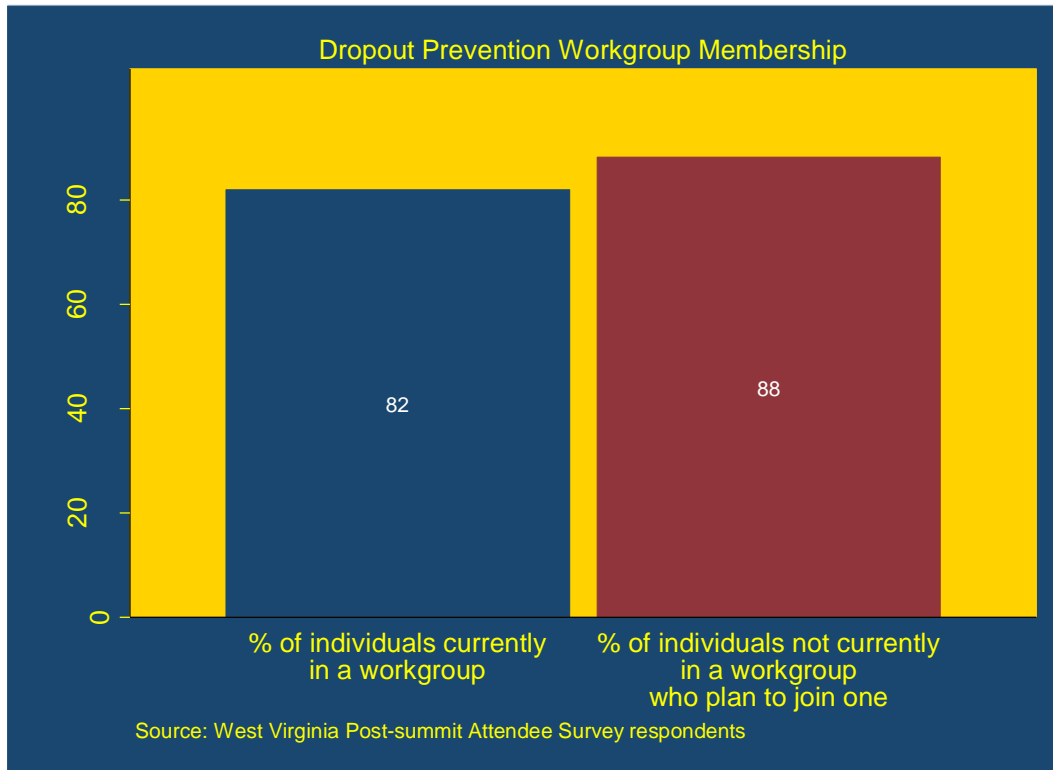
Impact on Community: Attendees were asked the degree to which they believed the summit had an impact on the community. The percentage of individuals who agreed that “key community leaders are committed to addressing the dropout issue” changed from 78% to 85%. The pre-to post-summit level of agreement that “organizations in my community collaborate around the dropout issue” went from 53% to 71%.

Figure 8



To determine whether the summit opened doors for attendees to become more involved in the dropout issue, we asked 1) if the attendee is currently participating in a workgroup or organization that focuses on the dropout issue, and if not, 2) if the attendee plans to participate in such a workgroup or organization after the summit. Among individuals who were not currently workgroup members, 88% planned to start working with a group focused on the dropout issue (see Figure 9).

Figure 9



Why Students Drop Out and What to do About it: Attendee Perceptions

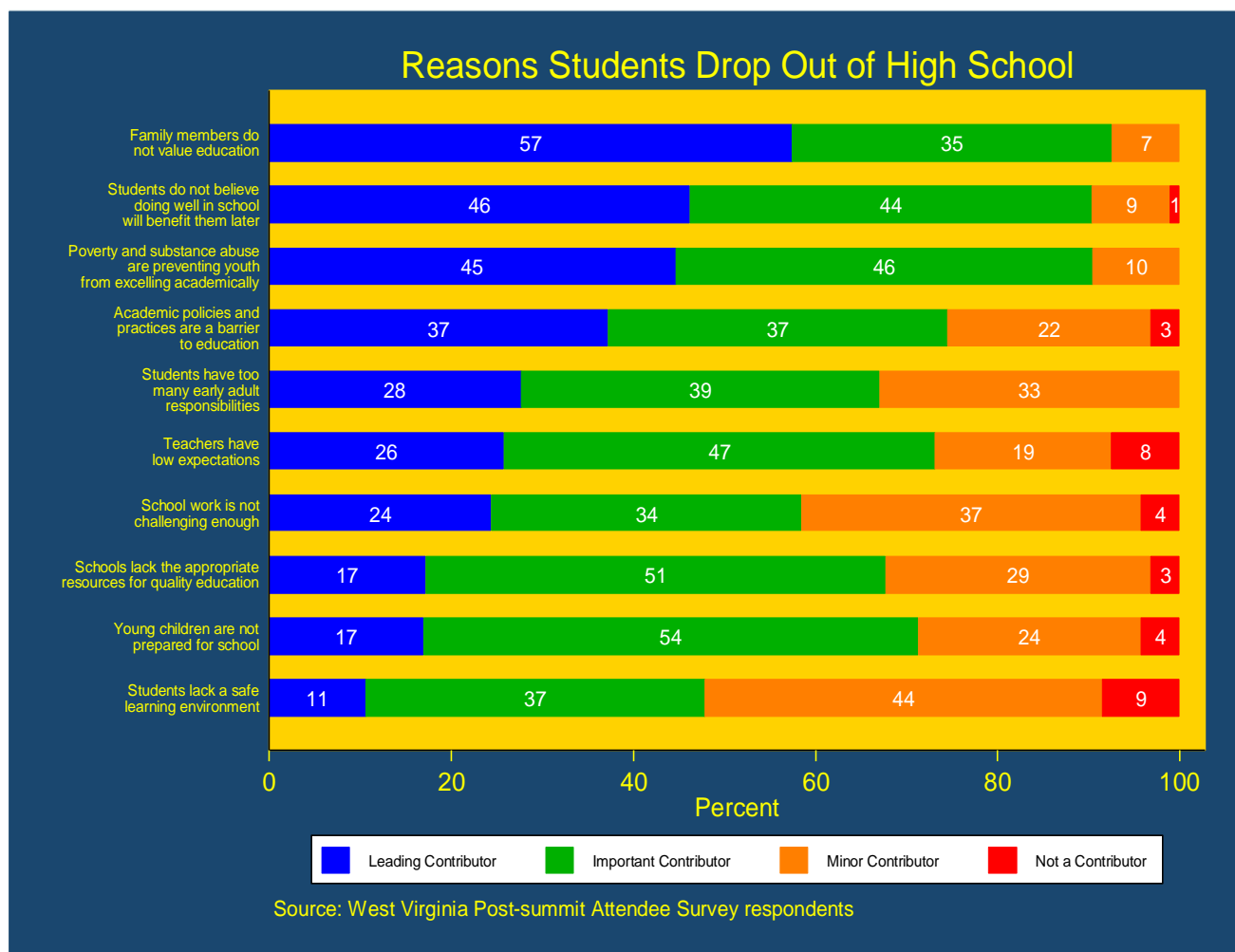
Summit attendees were asked to review a list of 10 commonly cited reasons that students drop out of high school and to identify which reasons they thought were the primary contributors to dropping out (see Table 2). Similarly, the respondents were presented with a list of 11 commonly cited solutions to the dropout crisis and asked to identify which of them would be most effective in their community (see Table 3).

"Family members do not value education" was identified as the main contributor of high school dropout among West Virginia survey respondents, with 57% of respondents identifying this as a "leading contributor." "Students do not believe doing well in school will benefit them later" was the next most commonly identified reason students drop out of high school, with 46% of survey completers saying this is a "leading contributor." This was followed by "poverty and substance abuse," chosen by 45% of the respondents (see Figure 10).

Table 2

REASONS STUDENTS DROP OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL	
•	Schools lack the appropriate resources for quality education.
•	Young children are not prepared for school.
•	Family members do not value education.
•	Students lack a safe learning environment.
•	Academic policies and practices are a barrier to education.
•	Teachers have low expectations.
•	Students do not believe doing well in school will benefit them later.
•	Students have too many early adult responsibilities.
•	School work is not challenging enough.
•	Poverty and substance abuse are preventing youth from excelling academically.

Figure 10

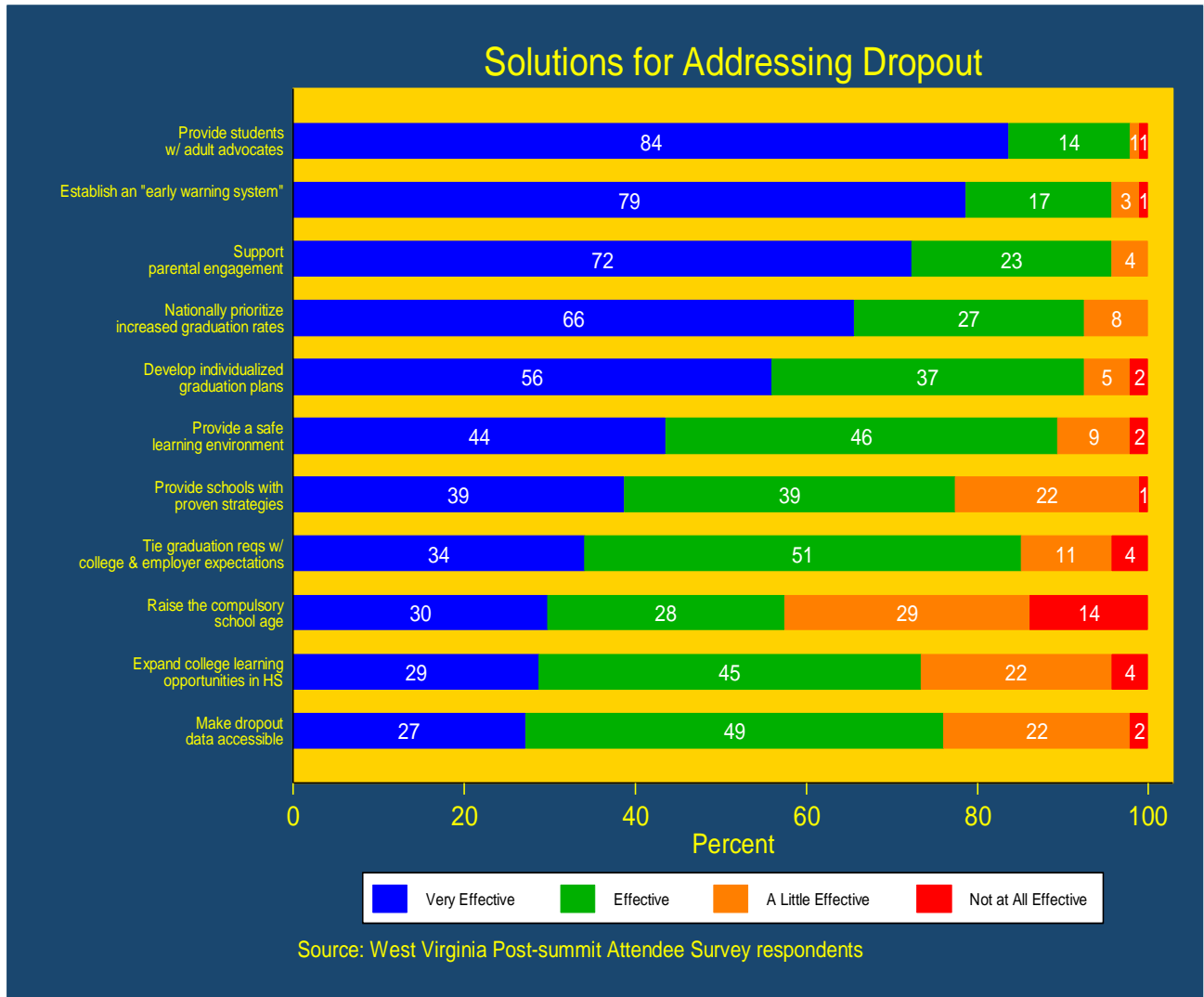


When weighing the primary strategies for confronting the dropout crisis, West Virginia survey completers chose "provide students with adult advocates" most frequently, with 84% identifying it as a "very effective" strategy. "Establish an 'Early Warning System'" was the next most commonly identified strategy, chosen by 79% as "very effective." This was followed by "support greater parental engagement," which was chosen by 72% of respondents (see Figure 11).

Table 3

SOLUTIONS FOR ADDRESSING DROPOUT
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make accurate graduation and dropout data readily available.• Tie high school graduation requirements to the expectations of colleges and employers.• Support greater parental engagement in their children's education.• Provide students with a safe learning environment.• Raise the compulsory school age requirements under state law.• Give schools information about scientifically proven strategies to improve education.• Make increasing high school graduation and college/workforce readiness a national priority.• Develop individualized graduation plans for each student.• Establish an "Early Warning System" that identifies youth who are struggling academically early.• Expand college level learning opportunities in high school.• Provide students with adult advocates who help identify academic and personal challenges early and get students the support they need.

Figure 11

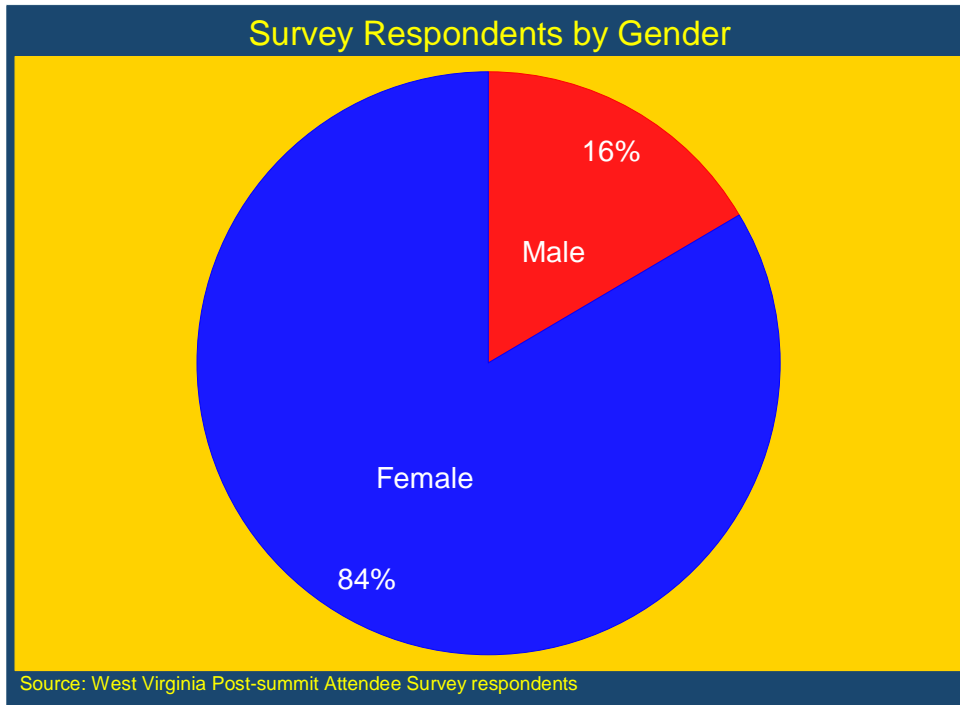


Additional Respondent Demographics

Survey respondents were asked to submit basic demographic information, including gender, race/ethnicity, and if they currently have a child (or children) in the school system.

Out of the 98 respondents, 84% were female and 16% were male (see Figure 12).

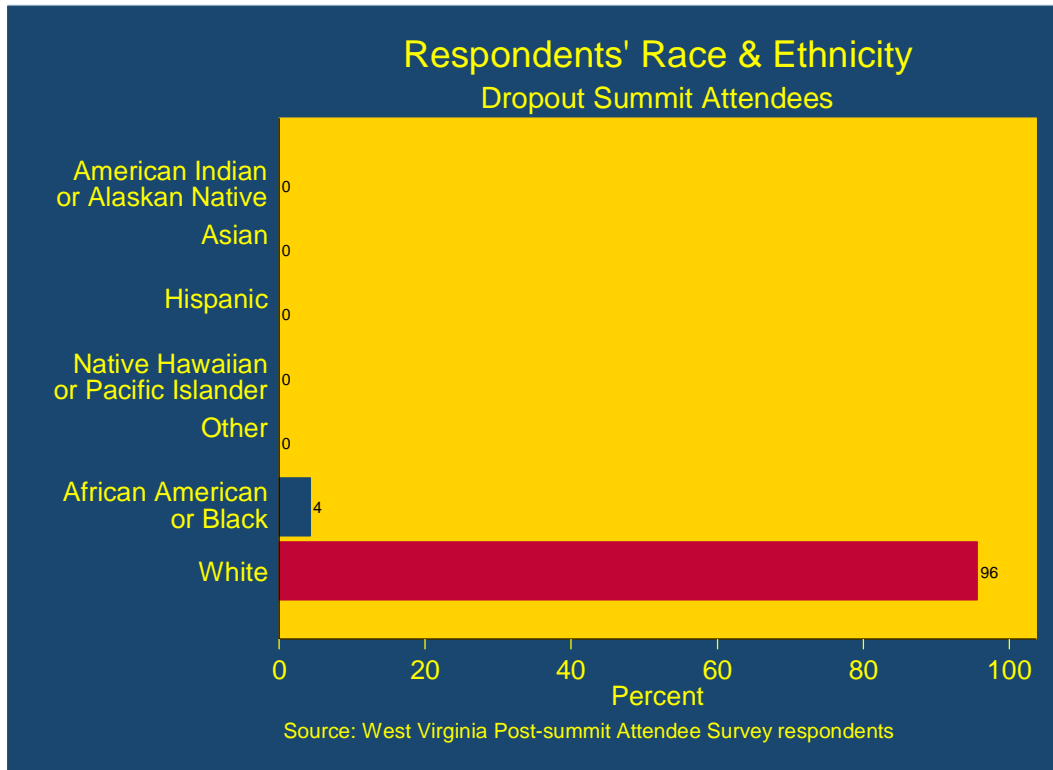
Figure 12



The race/ethnicity of the survey respondents is as follows:

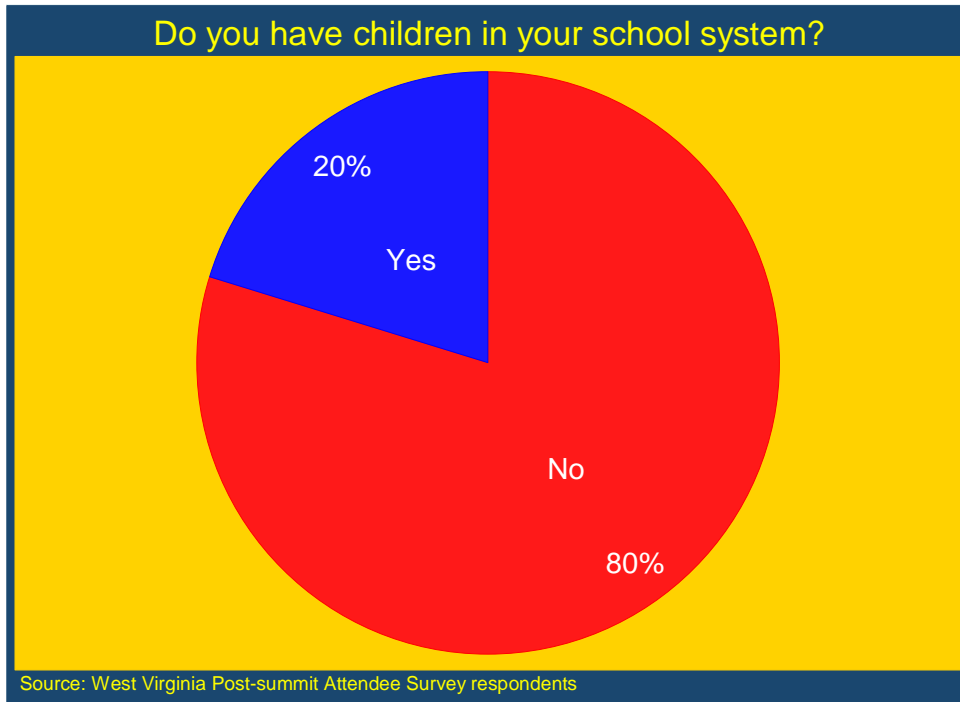
- 4% were African American.
- 0% were American Indian or Alaskan Native.
- 0% were Asian.
- 0% were Hispanic.
- 0% were Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.
- 96% were White.
- 0% listed Other.

Figure 13



Individuals were also asked whether they currently have a child (or children) in their local school system. The percentage of individuals with one or more children in their local school system was 20% (see Figure 14).

Figure 14



Conclusions

The West Virginia summit was part of a nationwide effort to raise awareness around the dropout crisis and to mobilize communities to address the issue. By hosting a summit, your community has demonstrated its commitment to this important issue. While important work occurred at the summit and in the months leading up to the event, your community efforts to reduce the nation's dropout rate and prepare youth for college must continue.

Recognizing this, America's Promise Alliance has requested that each community that hosted a Dropout Prevention Summit develop a "post-summit action plan." This plan will outline community goals, priorities, collaborations, and next steps toward reducing the dropout rate. The evaluation will continue to collect data and observe progress over the next several years as this crucial work continues.