



AI Readiness in U.S. Schools

For IBM

— SEPTEMBER 2026

Methodology and Sample Audiences

This survey was commissioned by IBM and conducted by Morning Consult in July 2026 among 2,048 U.S. adults, split into two mutually exclusive cohorts consistent with the banner tables: 1,019 K-12 educators and 1,029 parents of K-12 children.

K-12 educators include classroom teachers, school-and district-level leadership, curriculum and instructional specialists, and non-classroom K-12 professionals. Educators qualified via their K-12 role. Parents qualified as primary or shared decision-makers with a child enrolled in grades K-12.

Some respondents qualify as both an educator and a parent, however, each is assigned to a single primary cohort, ensuring the two cohorts do not overlap and sum to the full sample.

Interviews were conducted online. Results are weighted using the study weight variable (wts); base sizes (n) shown throughout are unweighted respondent counts. The margin of error is +/- 3% for both K-12 educators and K-12 parents.

Sample Audience	Unweighted n	Margin of Error
Total sample	2,048	+/- 2%
K-12 educators	1,019	+/- 3%
Classroom teachers	626	+/- 4%
Elementary educators	351	+/- 5%
Middle school educators	357	+/- 5%
High school educators	261	+/- 6%
K-12 parents	1,029	+/- 3%

KEY FINDINGS



There is an AI preparedness gap; where educators feel more equipped to teach students than parents think they are.

- K-12 educators report greater familiarity with AI than parents (94% vs 81%) and have more experience using AI tools (84% vs 65%). Consequently, educators are much more inclined to think AI literacy should be an elective course (59% vs. 40% of parents). As AI becomes more common in schools, educators themselves are developing their own literacy, perhaps more so than parents.
- K-12 educators are also more confident in their students' understanding of AI than parents (+20%) and have more confidence in their own preparedness to teach AI literacy (83%), than parents (66%).



Middle school is emerging as the starting point in developing students' AI literacy.

- Middle school educators are seeing that students are already developing AI literacy by grades 6-8; having the highest confidence of any educators in their students' ability to understand AI (63%), as well as the ability to identify AI-generated content (58% vs just 44% for educators overall).
- There is stronger support for AI as an elective course among middle school educators than among any other age group in K-12, and they are significantly more likely to see it as a formal expectation of their role than the average educator (37% vs 24%). Educators are eager to teach AI literacy, but their top concerns are their students' potential dependency on the technology and using it to cheat or plagiarize.



Parents want more transparency, and a voice, in how AI is taught to their children at school.

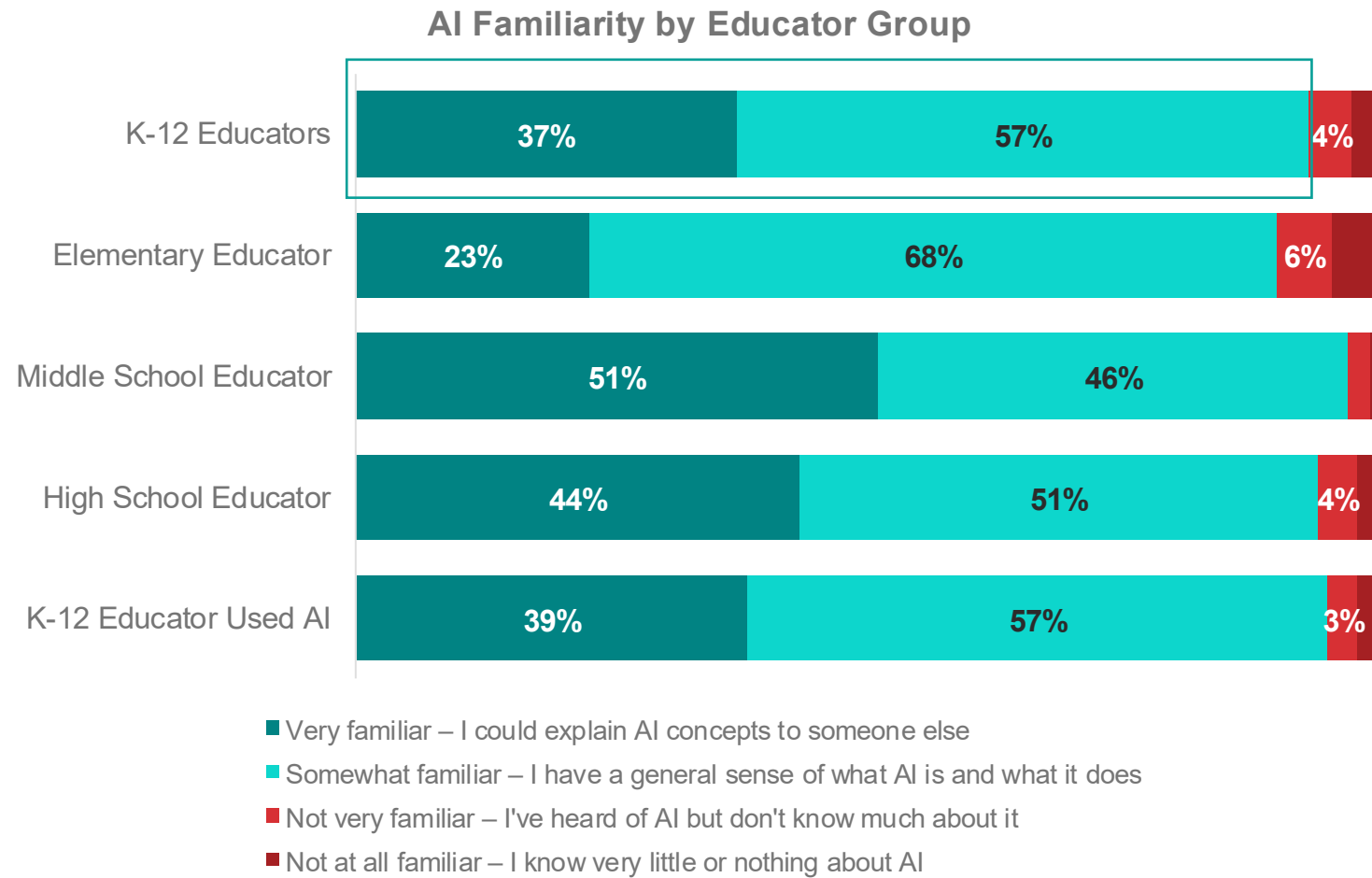
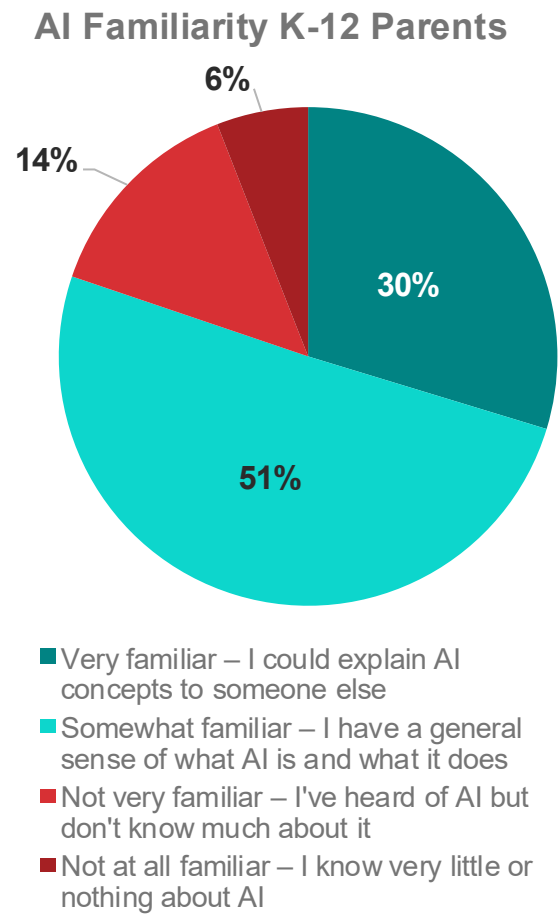
- Just 40% of parents say that AI literacy should be offered in schools (either as a required or elective course), and they have less confidence than educators in their children knowing what AI is (20%). Only 16% of parents say that schools are adapting well to AI, and they are more likely to see it as decreasing the value of a college degree than increasing it.
- Parents indicate that there needs to be an effort to involve them in a dialogue about AI literacy in the classroom; just 20% report having clear guidance about how it's being taught. In contrast, parents overwhelmingly believe they should have a hand in how AI is being taught to their children (77%).

SECTION 1

AI Familiarity & Use Among K-12 Parents & Educators

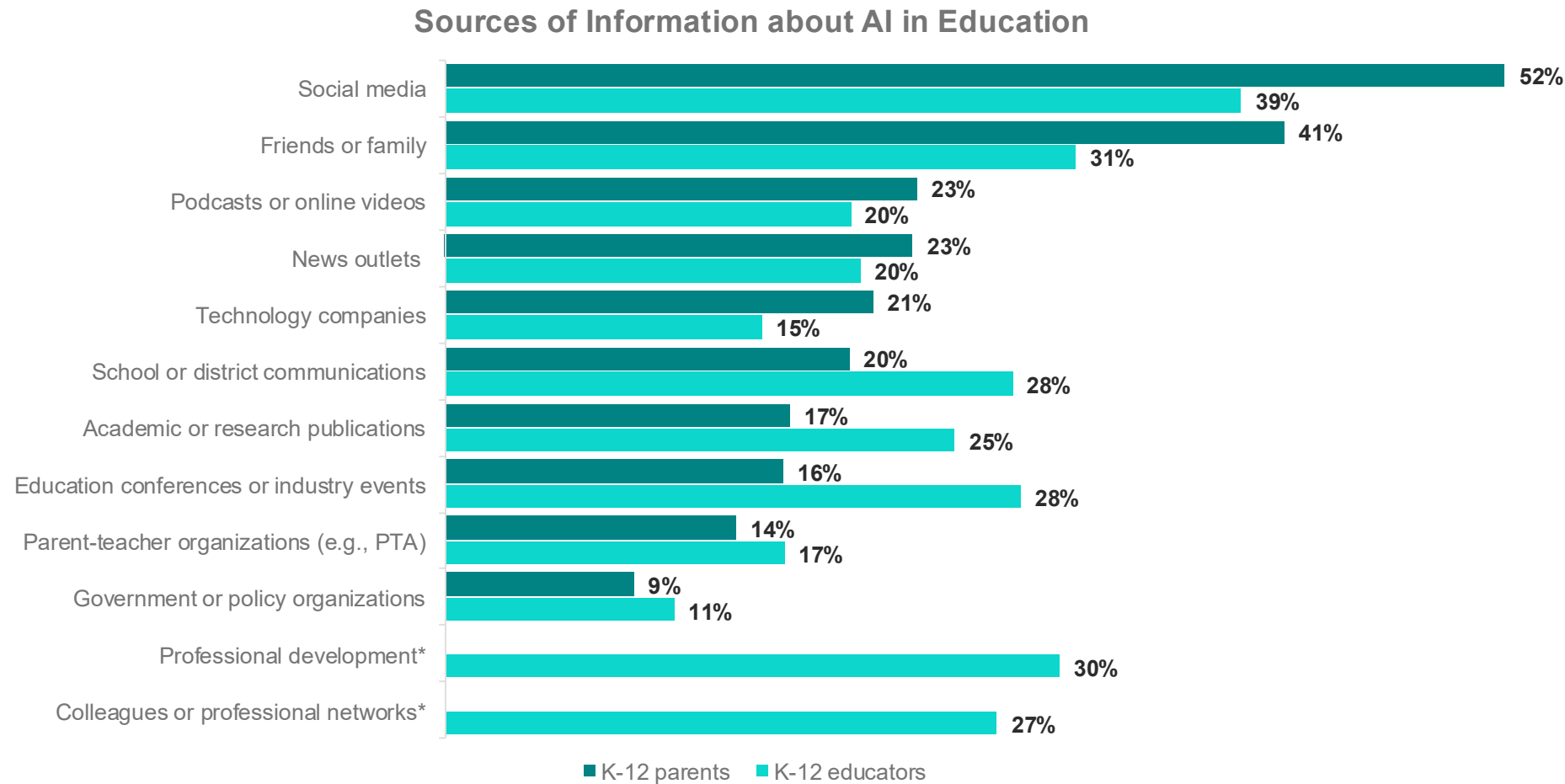
AI FAMILIARITY & USE AMONG K-12 PARENTS & EDUCATORS

Educators have more familiarity with AI than parents: 94% are at least somewhat familiar with AI, versus 81% of K-12 parents



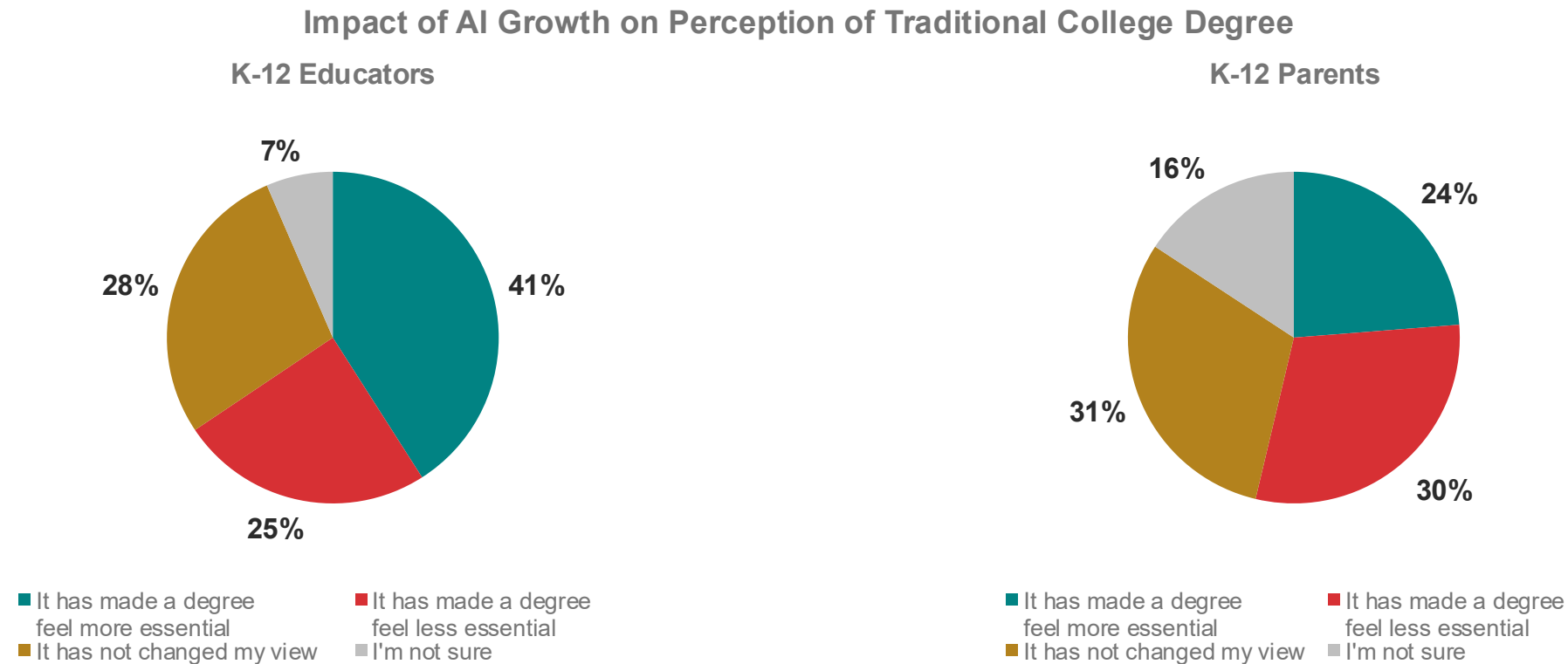
AI FAMILIARITY & USE AMONG K-12 PARENTS & EDUCATORS

Parents and educators get AI information from different channels: parents rely heavily on social media and friends/family while educators draw from a variety of academic and professional resources



AI FAMILIARITY & USE AMONG K-12 PARENTS & EDUCATORS

Educators are much more likely to view AI as increasing the value of a 4-year college degree than parents (41% vs 24%). A higher percentage of parents report feeling that a college degree is less essential (30%).

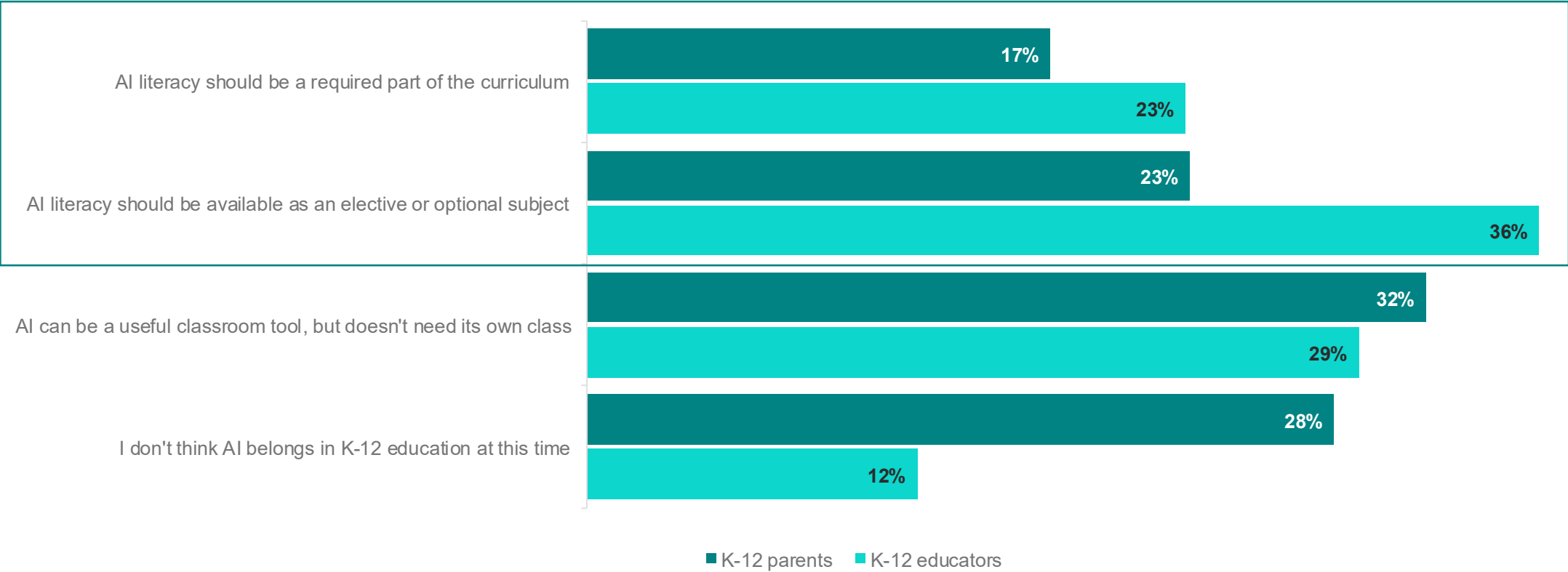


High school teachers are more likely to say that AI growth has made a four-year college degree feel more essential for students (53%).

AI FAMILIARITY & USE AMONG K-12 PARENTS & EDUCATORS

59% of educators think AI literacy should either be required OR offered as an elective, compared to just 40% of parents. Conversely, parents are more than twice as likely as educators to say AI doesn't belong in K-12 education (28% vs 12%)

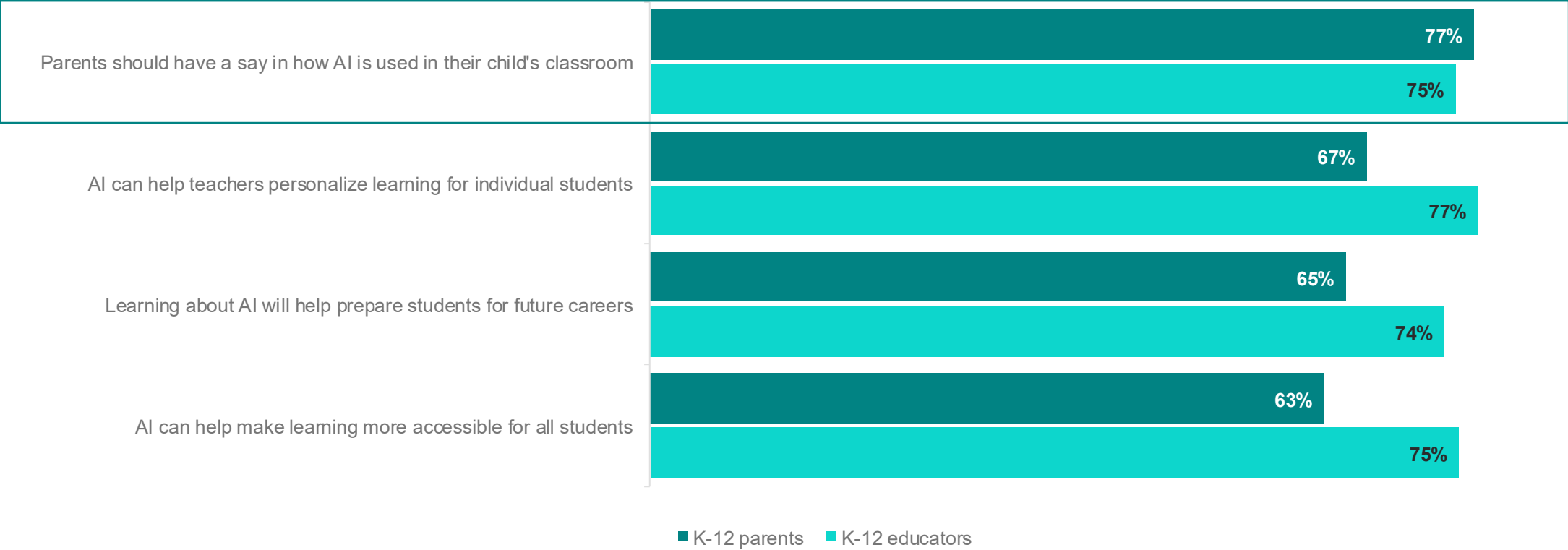
Views on AI Being Part of K-12 Education



AI FAMILIARITY & USE AMONG K-12 PARENTS & EDUCATORS

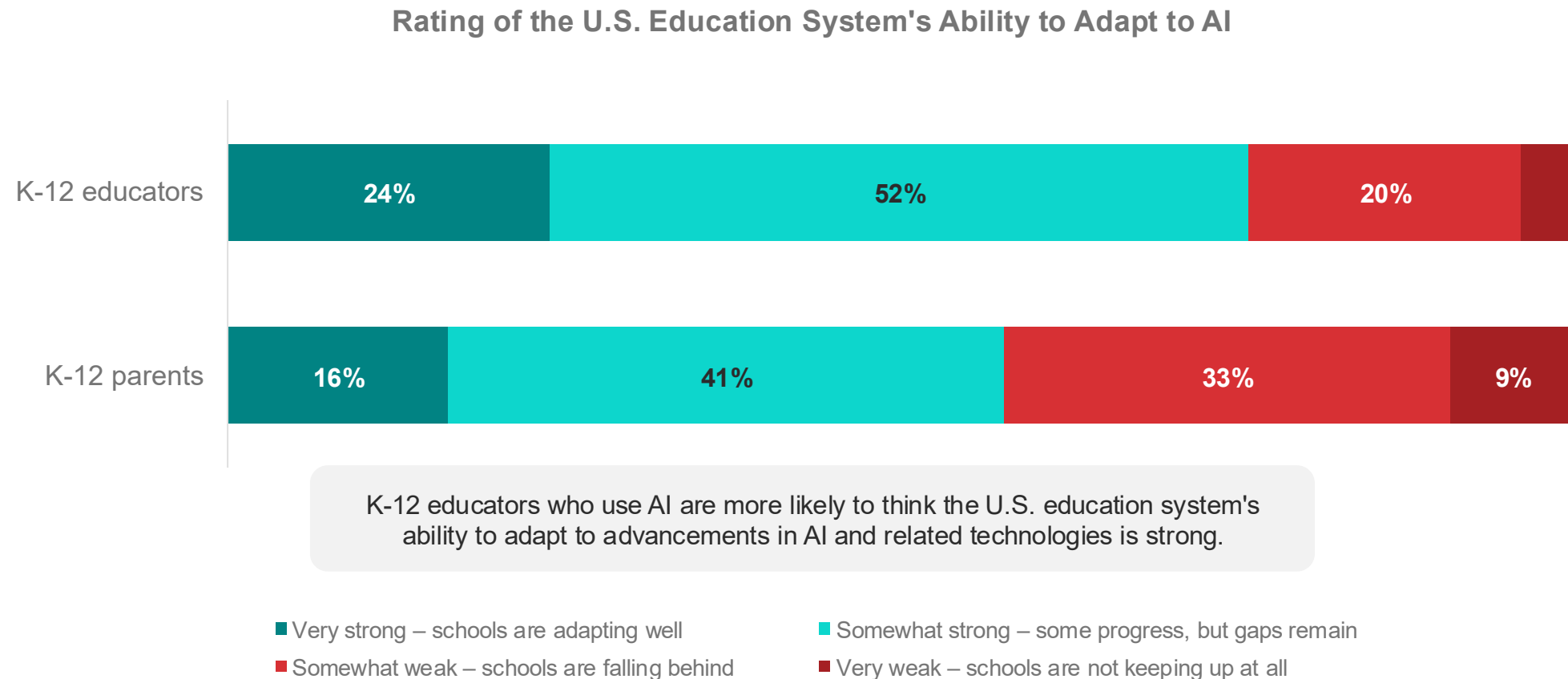
Educators agree with parents that they should have a say in how AI is used in the classroom; educators are more likely to also see the benefit of AI in personalized learning, career prep, and accessibility

Attitudes Toward AI in Education (Top-2-Box Agreement)



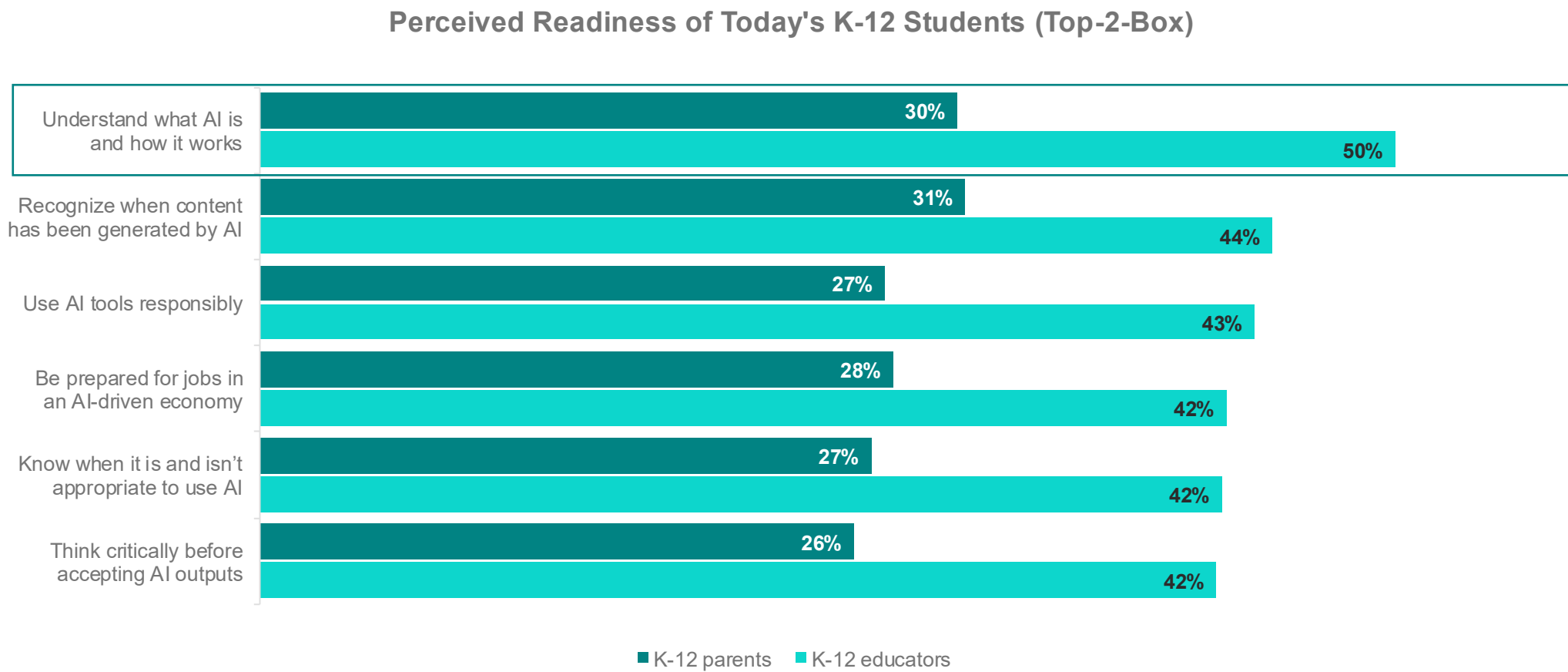
AI FAMILIARITY & USE AMONG K-12 PARENTS & EDUCATORS

Most educators and parents see progress on AI adoption, but few parents believe schools are adapting well



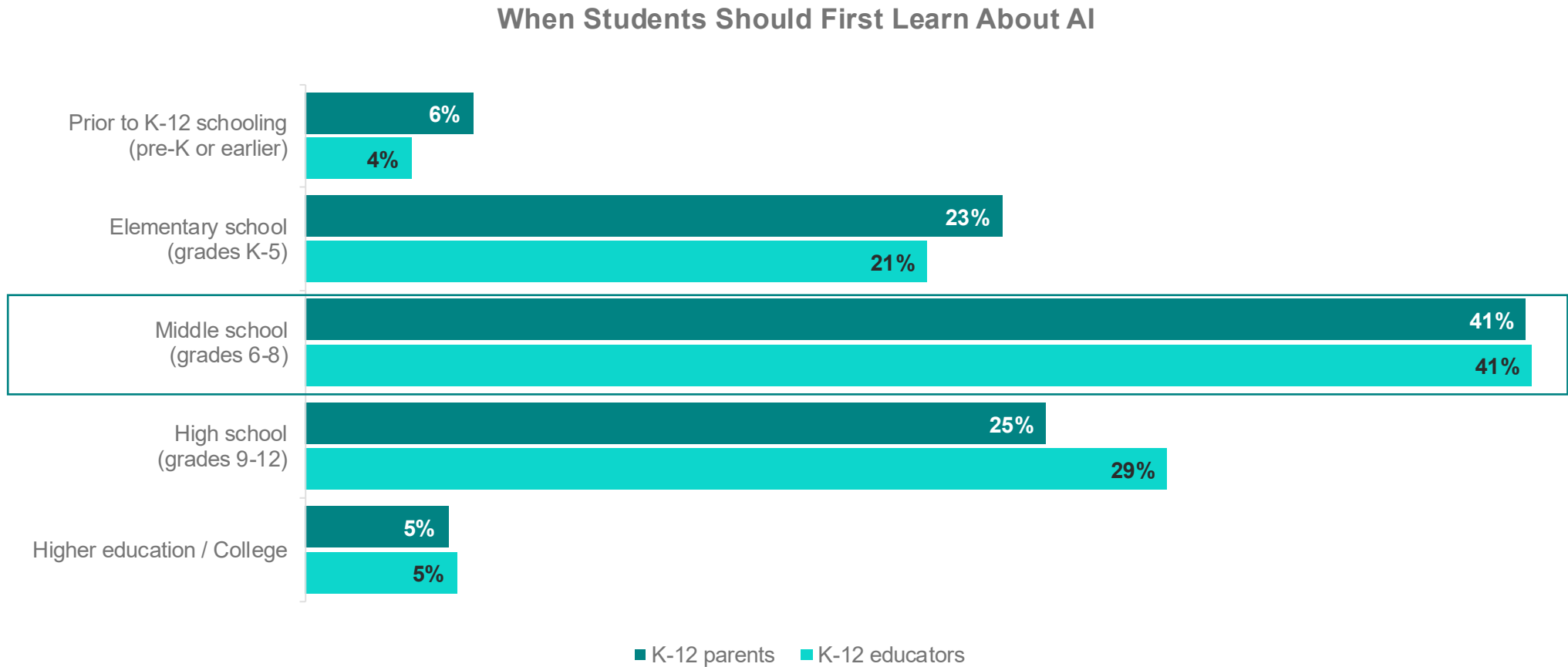
AI FAMILIARITY & USE AMONG K-12 PARENTS & EDUCATORS

The readiness gap persists, with half of educators (50%) saying their students understand what AI is, compared to just 30% of parents



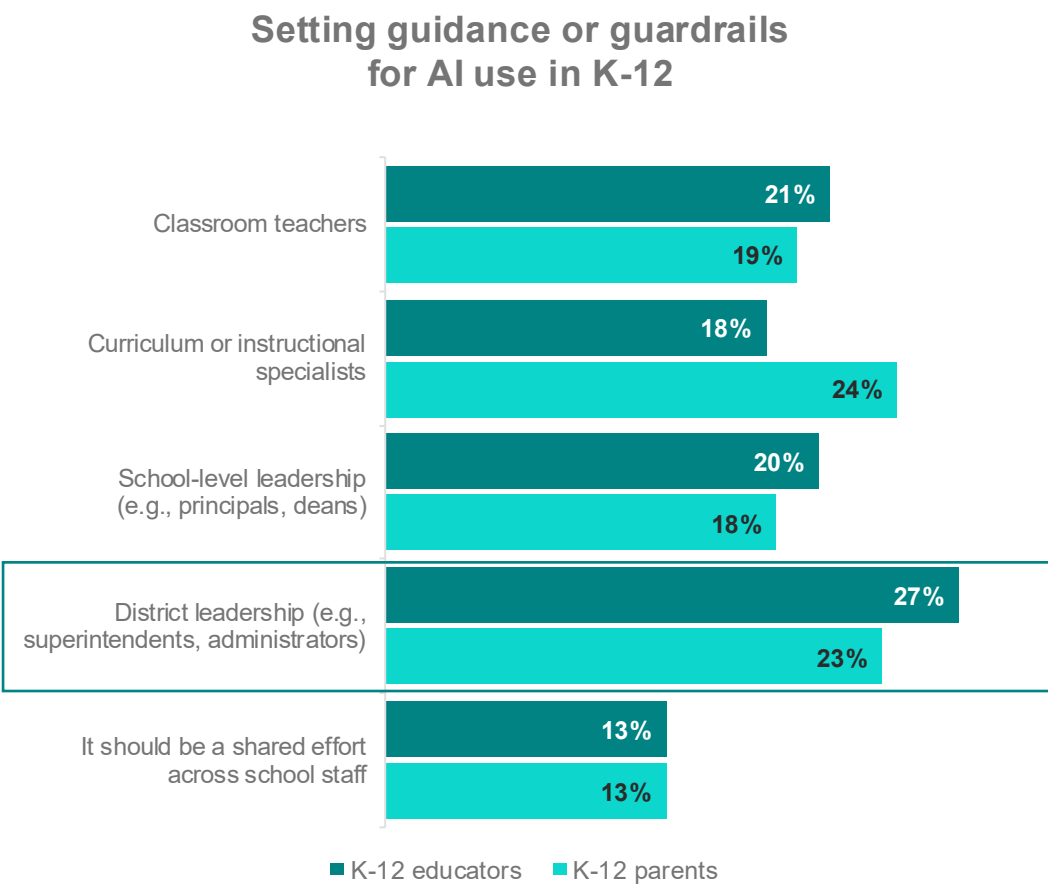
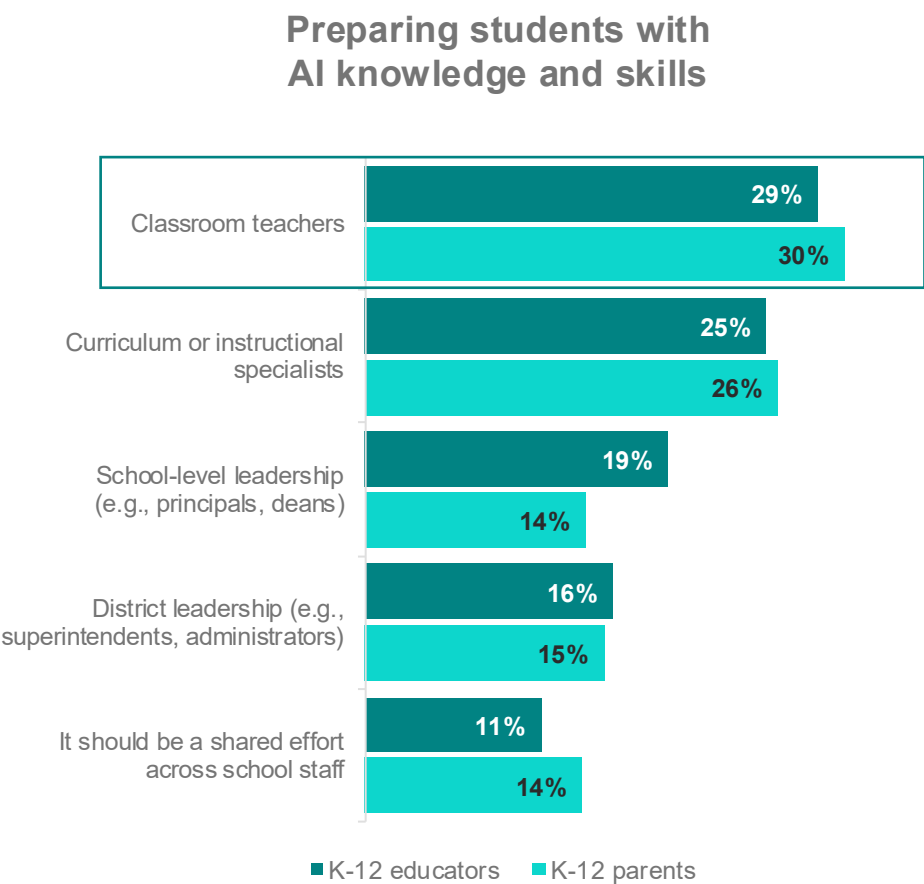
AI FAMILIARITY & USE AMONG K-12 PARENTS & EDUCATORS

Middle school is the agreed starting point for AI literacy: 41% of both parents and educators say students should begin learning about AI in grades 6-8, and less than 30% of both parents and educators think children should be learning it before or after then



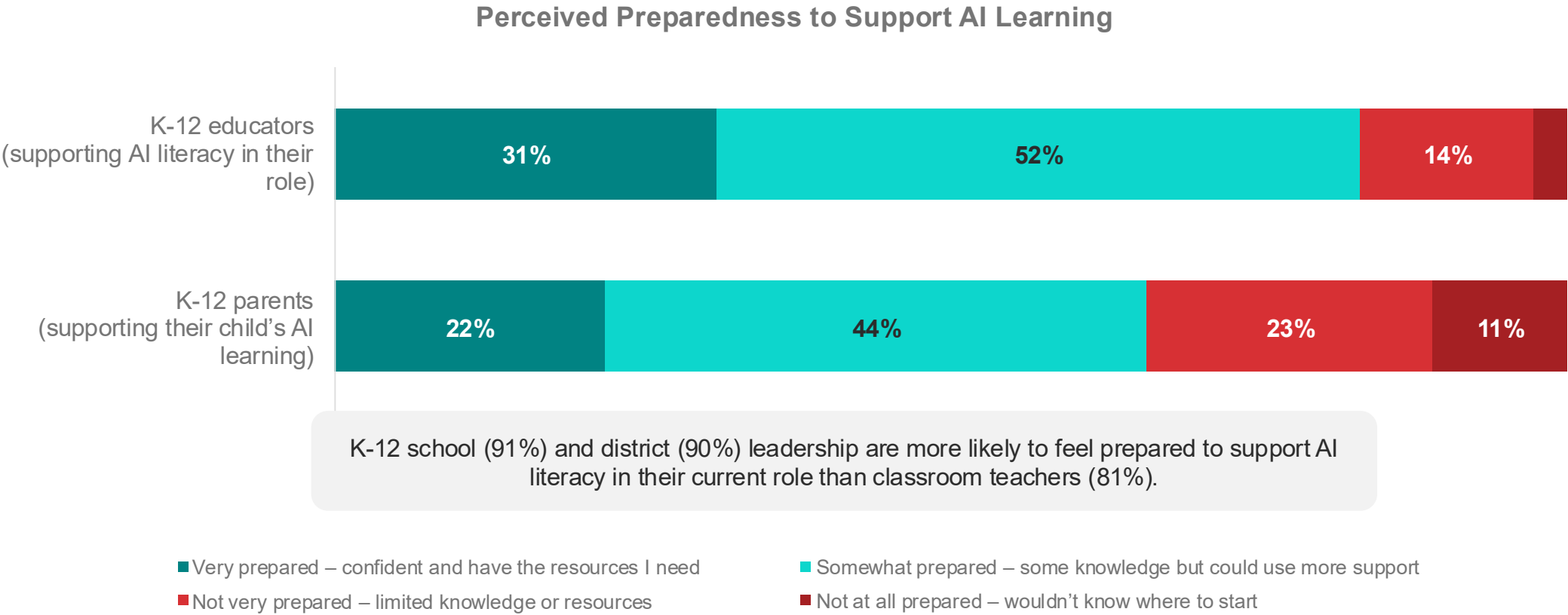
AI FAMILIARITY & USE AMONG K-12 PARENTS & EDUCATORS

Parents and educators agree: teachers and instructional specialists should lead AI instruction, while district leaders should set the guardrails



AI FAMILIARITY & USE AMONG K-12 PARENTS & EDUCATORS

Only 31% of educators feel very prepared to support AI literacy, while just 22% of parents feel confident they have the resources to support their child’s AI learning, underscoring a need for training and school system guidance



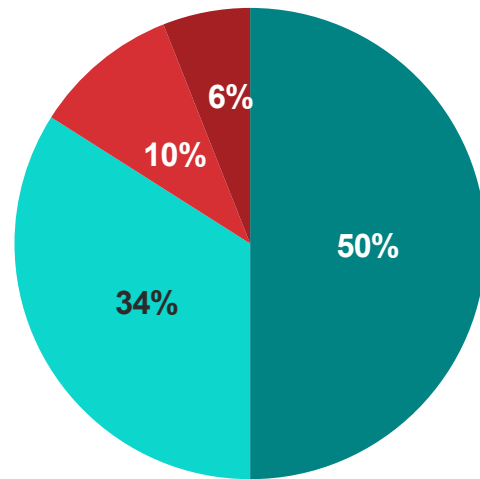
SECTION 2

K-12 Educators

K-12 EDUCATORS

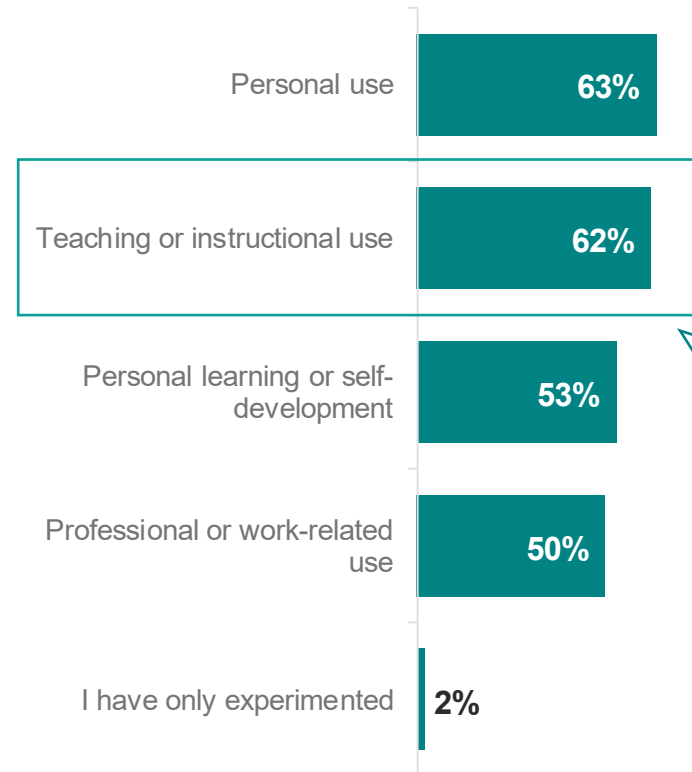
About two-thirds of Educators use AI tools for teaching/instructional use; these tools are most helpful in developing classroom materials (67%) and support lesson planning (62%)

Experience with AI Tools

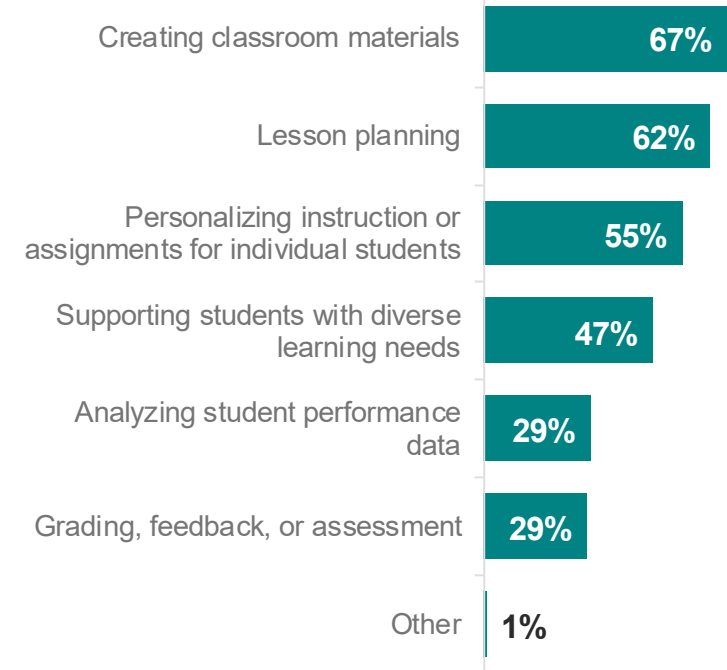


- I use AI tools regularly (> few times a week)
- I use AI tools occasionally (a few times a month)
- I've tried AI tools once or twice
- I've never used an AI tool

Uses of AI

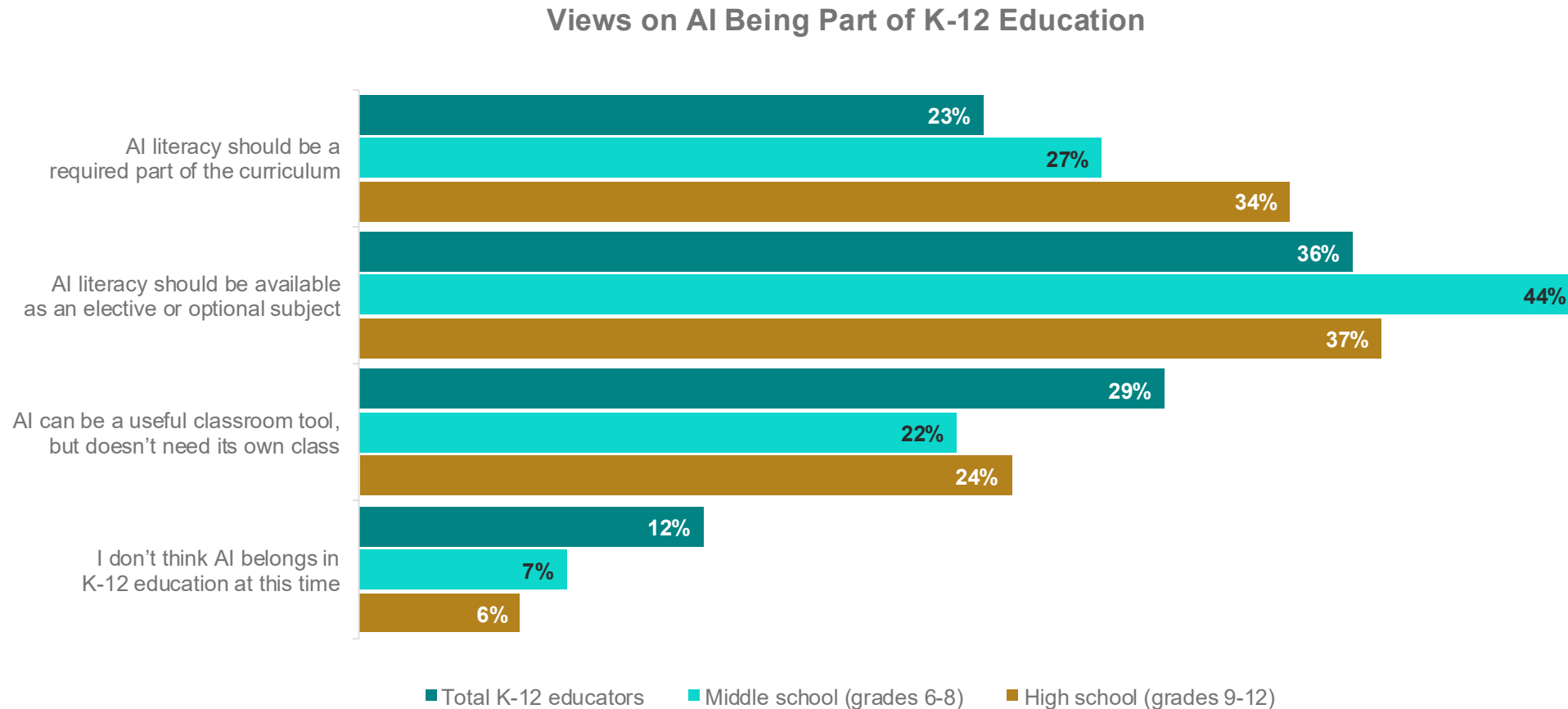


Ways Educators Have Used AI in Teaching



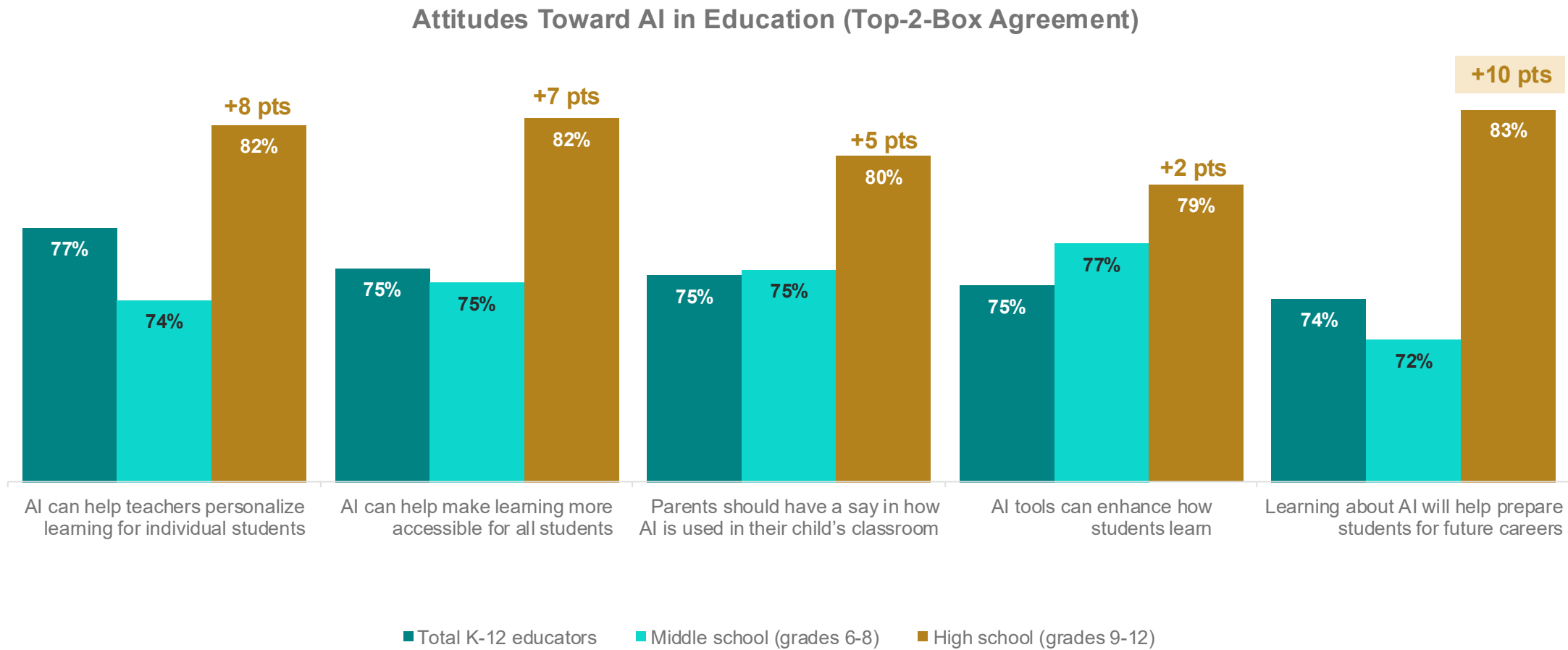
K-12 EDUCATORS

Most educators believe AI literacy belongs in the curriculum, with 71% of middle and high school educators supporting it as a required or elective subject and high school educators most likely to favor a requirement



K-12 EDUCATORS

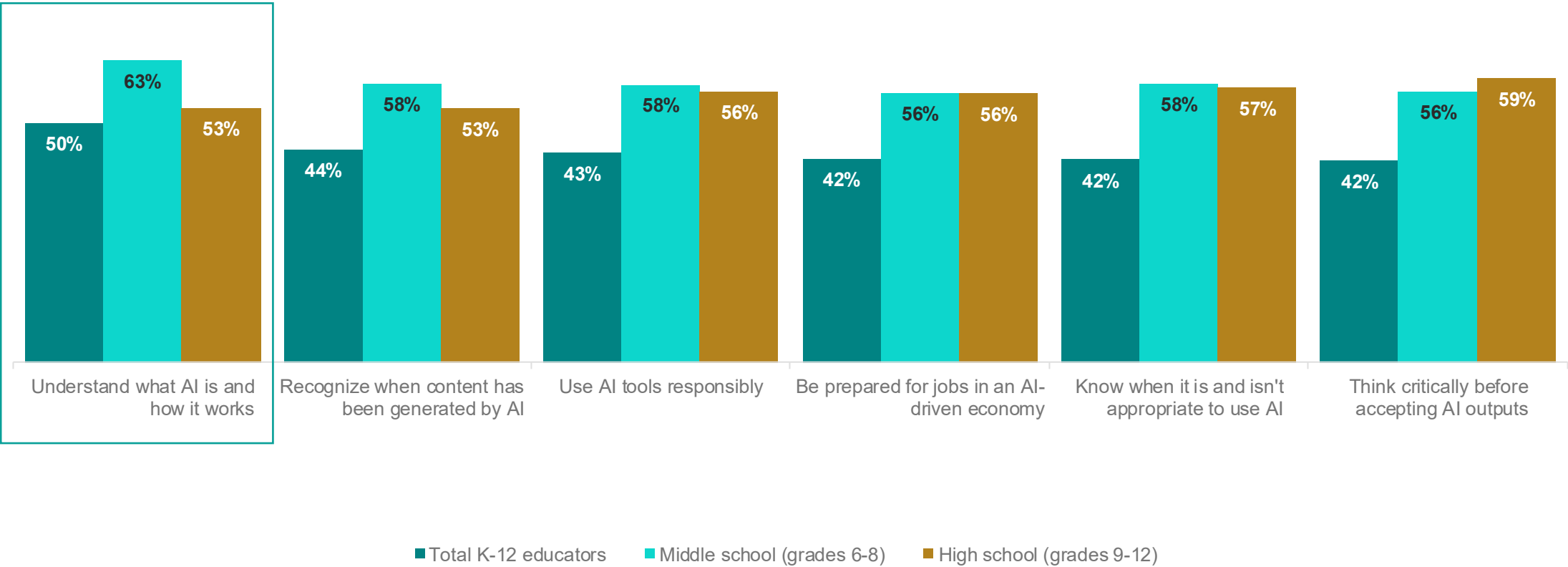
Most educators see the value of AI in education across use cases, especially in personalized learning; high school educators are significantly more likely than middle school educators to recognize the benefit of AI in career preparation



K-12 EDUCATORS

Half of educators say today’s K-12 students understand what AI is and how it works, with middle and high school educators reporting even stronger confidence in students’ readiness across key AI skills

Perceived Readiness of Today's K-12 Students (Top-2-Box)



K-12 EDUCATORS

Educators' greatest concerns about AI in the classroom are around how it could create dependence and cheating. Administrators have similar fears but are significantly more worried about a lack of proper AI-related training (7% more than educators).

Classroom EDUCATORS

Concern	%
Students becoming overly dependent on AI	52%
Students using AI to cheat or plagiarize	47%
Reduced development of critical thinking skills	36%
AI producing inaccurate or misleading information	26%
Student data privacy and security	21%
Unequal access to AI tools across schools/districts	20%
Insufficient teacher training on AI	19%
Bias in AI systems or outputs	17%
Lack of clear school or district policies on AI use	16%
Cost of AI technology and tools	11%
No major concerns about AI in education	2%

School & District Administrators

Concern	%
Students becoming overly dependent on AI	37%
Reduced development of critical thinking skills	28%
Students using AI to cheat or plagiarize	26%
Insufficient teacher training on AI	26%
AI producing inaccurate or misleading information	26%
Cost of AI technology and tools	22%
Bias in AI systems or outputs	22%
Student data privacy and security	21%
Lack of clear school or district policies on AI use	21%
Unequal access to AI tools across schools/districts	20%
No major concerns about AI in education	4%

K-12 EDUCATORS

Middle school educators are significantly more likely to point to school systems as responsible for preparing students and setting guardrails around AI, showing the importance of this critical age in helping students develop AI literacy

K-12 Parents

	Preparing students	Setting guardrails
K-12 school systems	42%	34%
Parents / guardians	26%	27%
Federal or state government	8%	16%
No one entity; it's a shared responsibility	23%	22%
Other	1%	1%

K-12 Educators by grade level taught

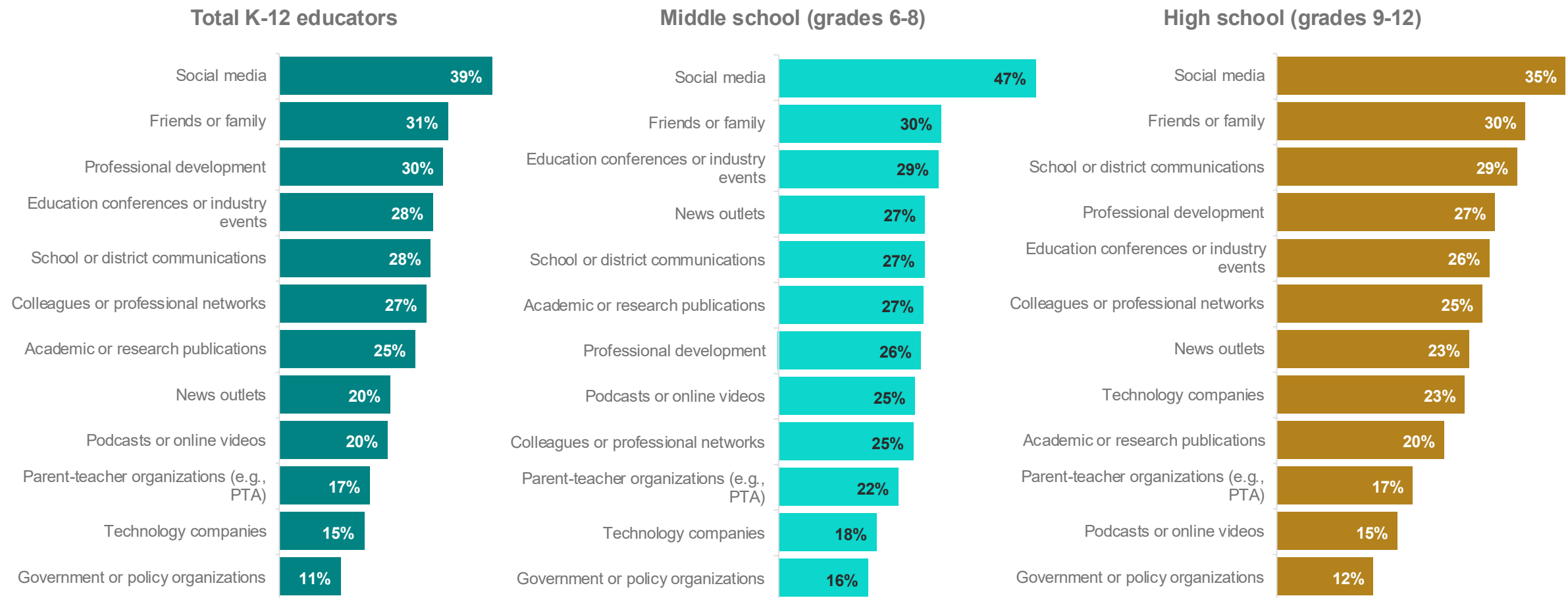
	Preparing students			Setting guardrails		
	K-12 Educators	Middle School	High School	K-12 Educators	Middle School	High School
K-12 school systems	46%	53%	40%	42%	47%	37%
Parents / guardians	18%	20%	22%	22%	22%	24%
Federal or state government	19%	22%	27%	23%	25%	27%
Other	2%	1%	0%	3%	3%	0%
No one entity; it's a shared responsibility	15%	4%	10%	10%	3%	12%

Middle school educators are more likely than high school educators to look to K-12 school systems for preparing students and setting guardrails.

K-12 EDUCATORS

Middle school educators (47%) are much more likely to learn about AI through social media than high school educators (35%), who get info from a balanced variety of sources.

Sources of Information about AI in Education

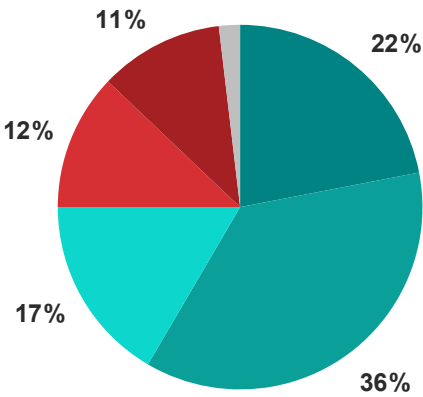


K-12 EDUCATORS

AI is becoming a routine in secondary classrooms: 76% of middle school and 73% of high school educators use it at least weekly, versus 45% in elementary; nearly half of high school educators are using AI in the classroom daily (45%)

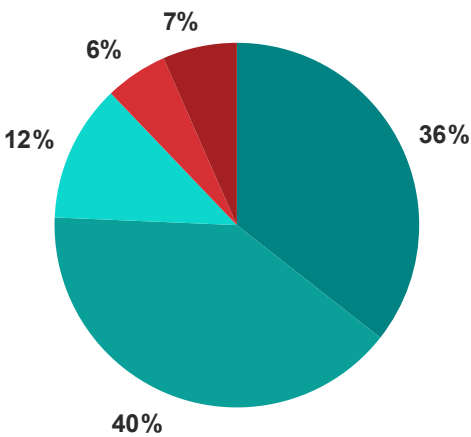
Frequency of AI Classroom Usage

All K-12 classroom teachers



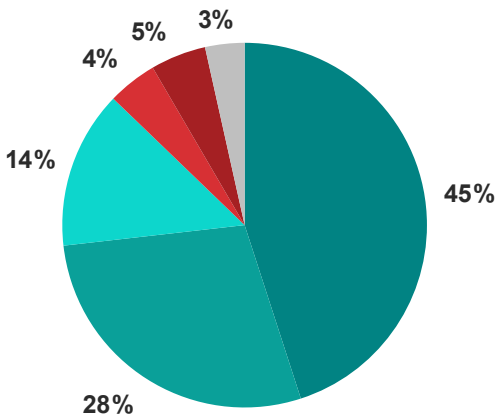
- Daily or almost daily
- A few times a week
- A few times a month
- Rarely (a few times a year or less)
- Never
- I'm not sure

Middle school (grades 6-8)



- Daily or almost daily
- A few times a week
- A few times a month
- Rarely (a few times a year or less)
- Never
- I'm not sure

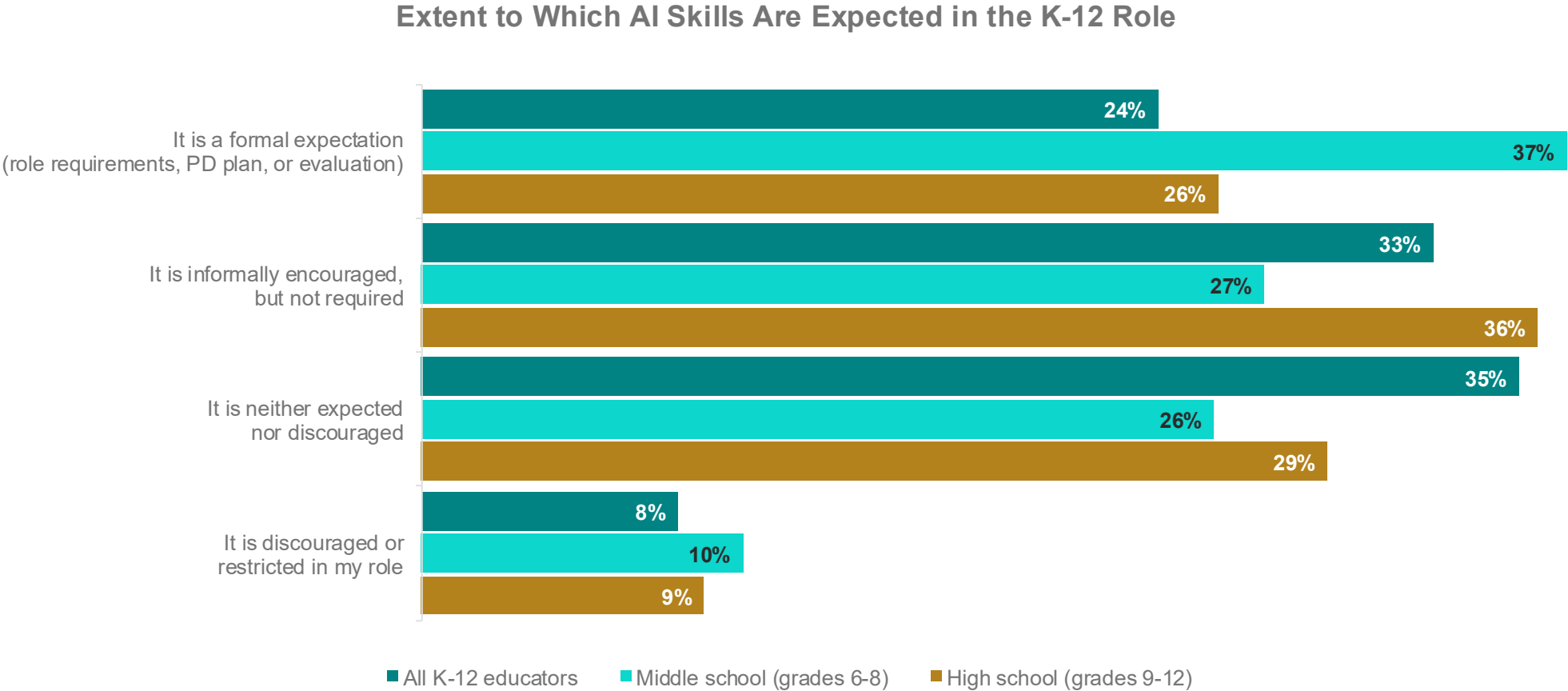
High school (grades 9-12)



- Daily or almost daily
- A few times a week
- A few times a month
- Rarely (a few times a year or less)
- Never
- I'm not sure

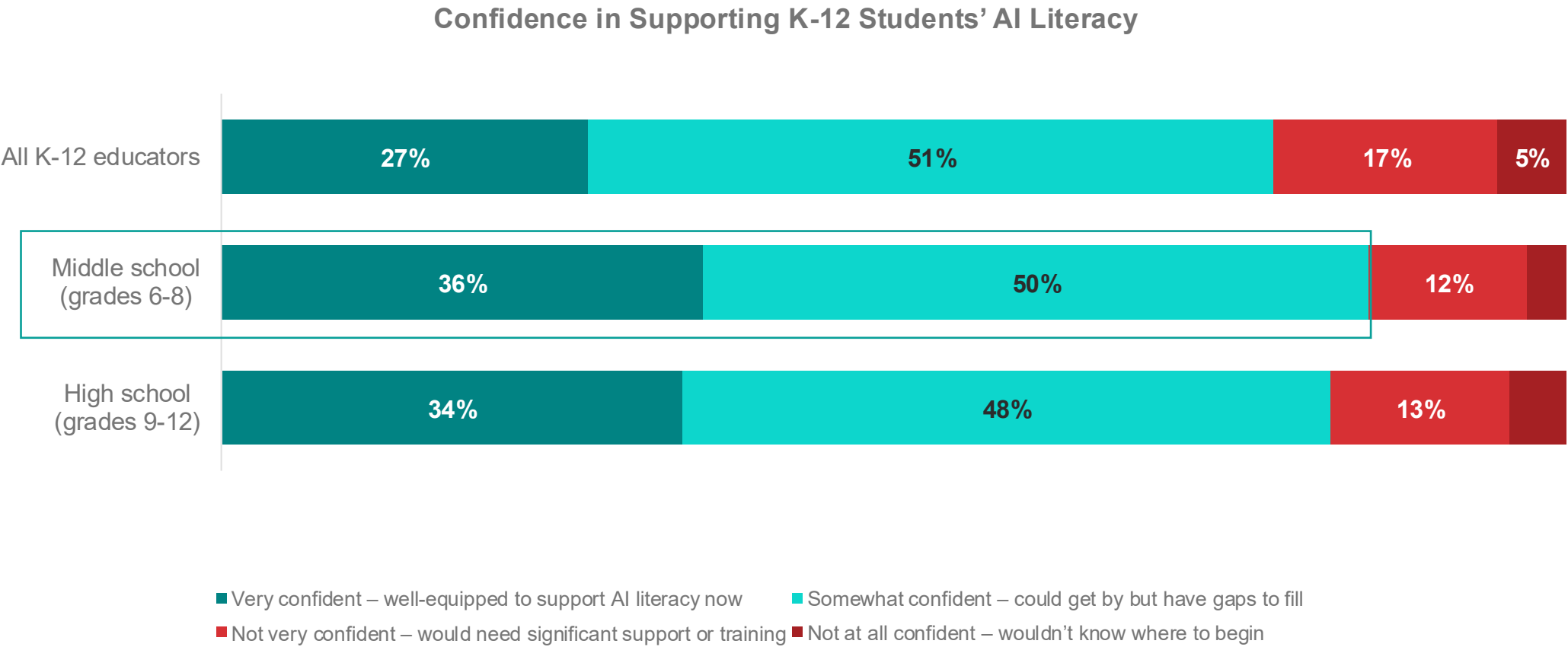
K-12 EDUCATORS

Middle school educators are the most likely to view AI-related knowledge as a formal expectation of their role (+13%), reinforcing the importance of grades 6-8 as a critical period for developing AI literacy



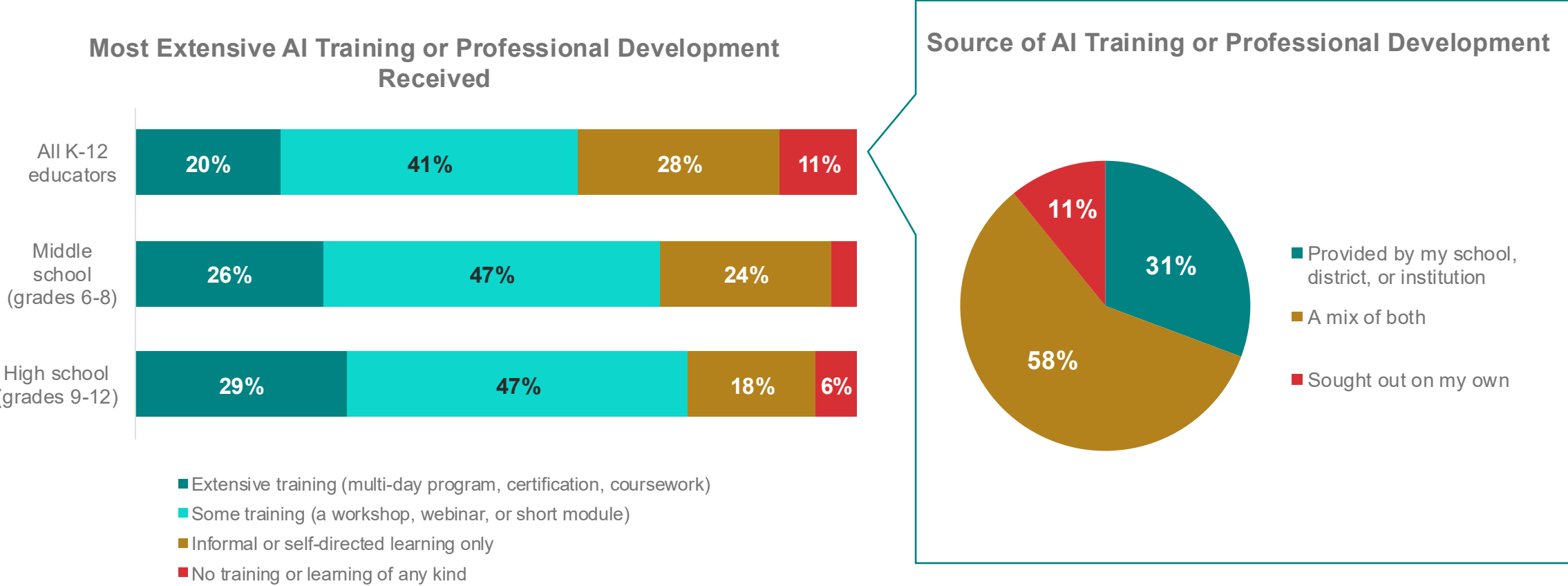
K-12 EDUCATORS

Confidence in the ability to at least somewhat support students' AI literacy is highest among middle school educators (86%), but less than half of educators at any grade level feel very confident or “well equipped” to support AI literacy today



K-12 EDUCATORS

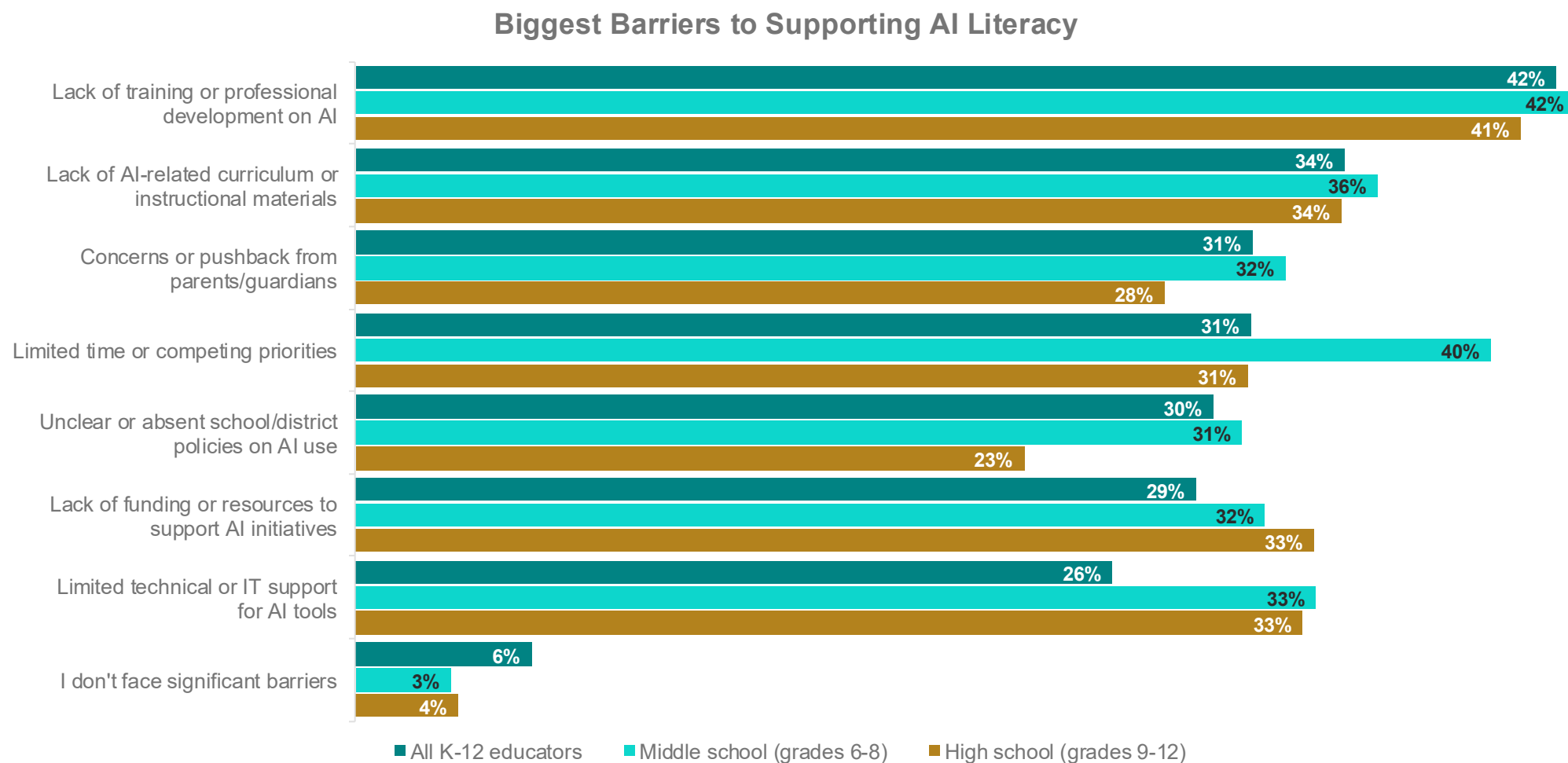
AI training is widespread, but often limited: fewer than 30% of middle and high school educators report extensive training, and just 31% say their school system provided all of it



IBM17: Which of the following best describes the most extensive training or professional development you've received on AI for K-12 education? Select one.
Sample size: K-12 Educators =1019n, Middle School Educator =357n, High School Educator =261n
IBM17a: Was your K-12 AI-related training or professional development provided to you, or did you seek it out on your own?
Sample size: K-12 Educators who received any AI-related training =666n

K-12 EDUCATORS

Barriers to supporting AI literacy are concrete and fixable, led by a lack of training (42%) and limited access to AI curriculum and materials (34%)

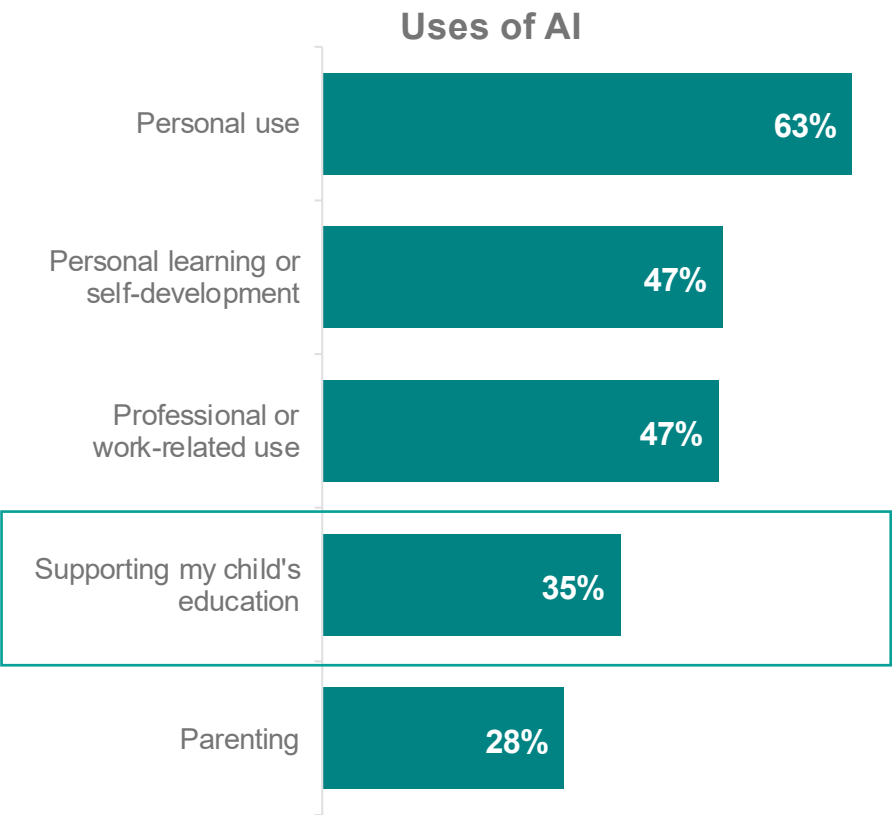
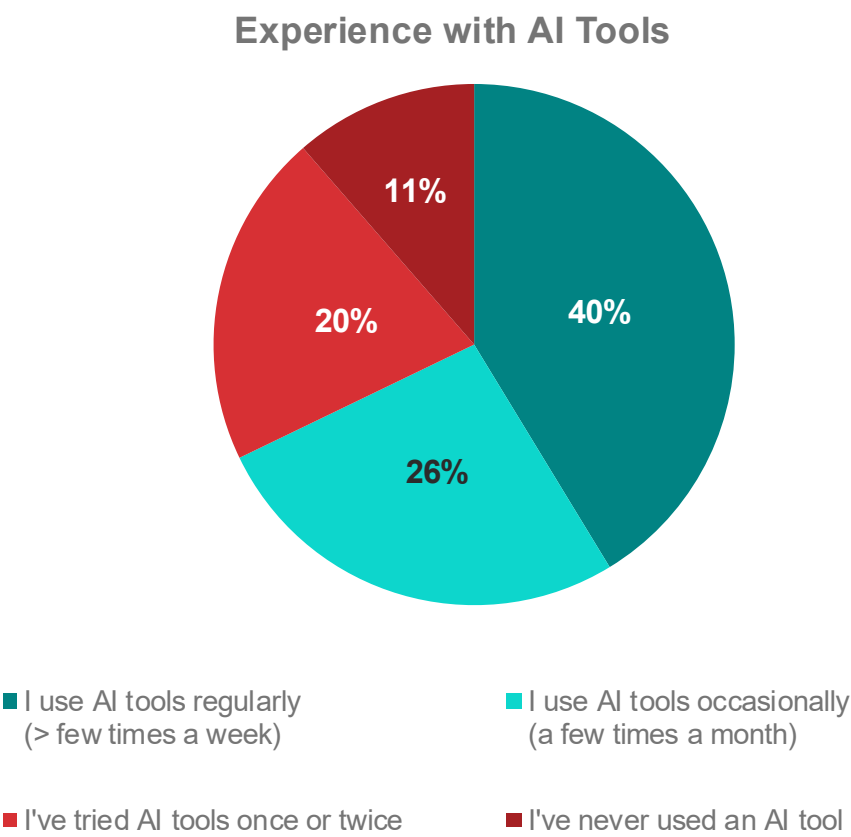


SECTION 3

K-12 Parents

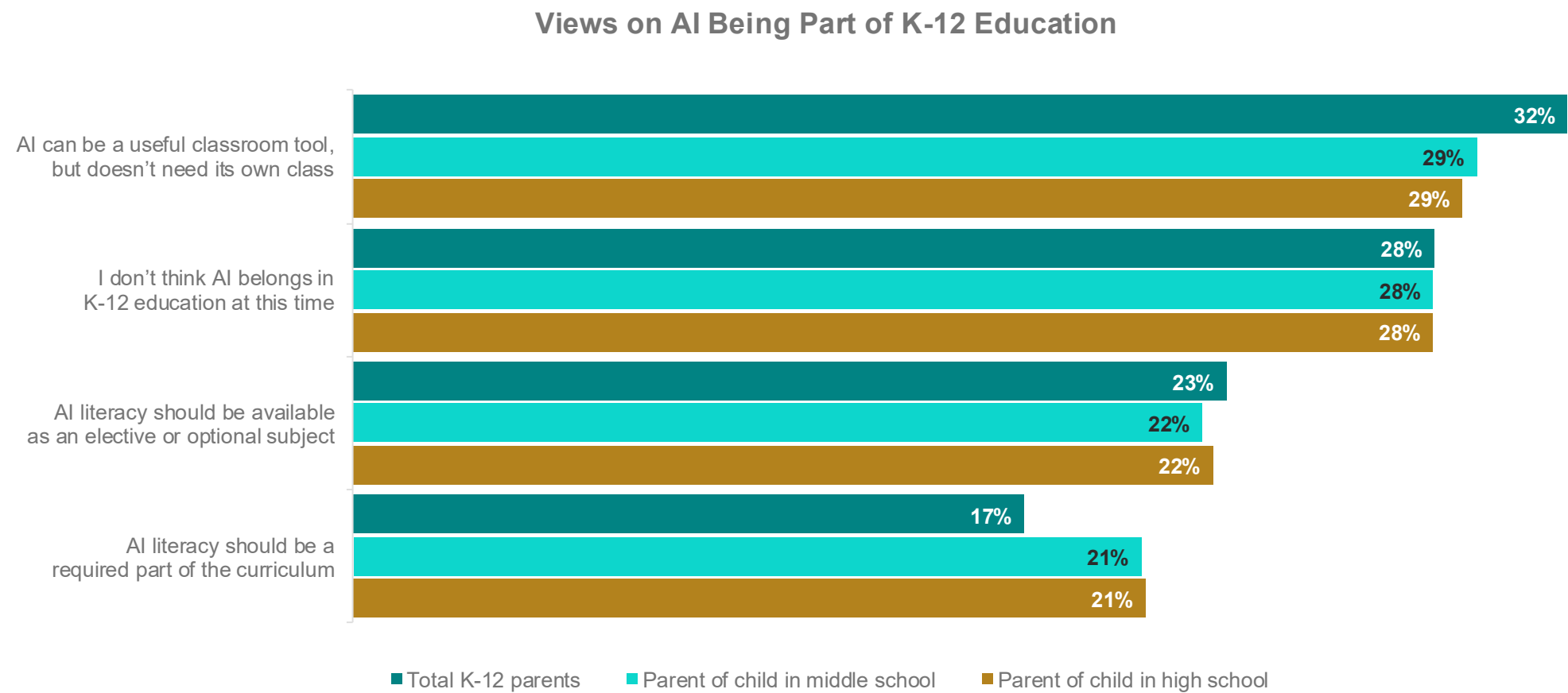
K-12 PARENTS

Parents use AI regularly at a lower rate than educators, and while they readily use AI for themselves for personal use (63%), only about a third (35%) have used it to support their child’s education.



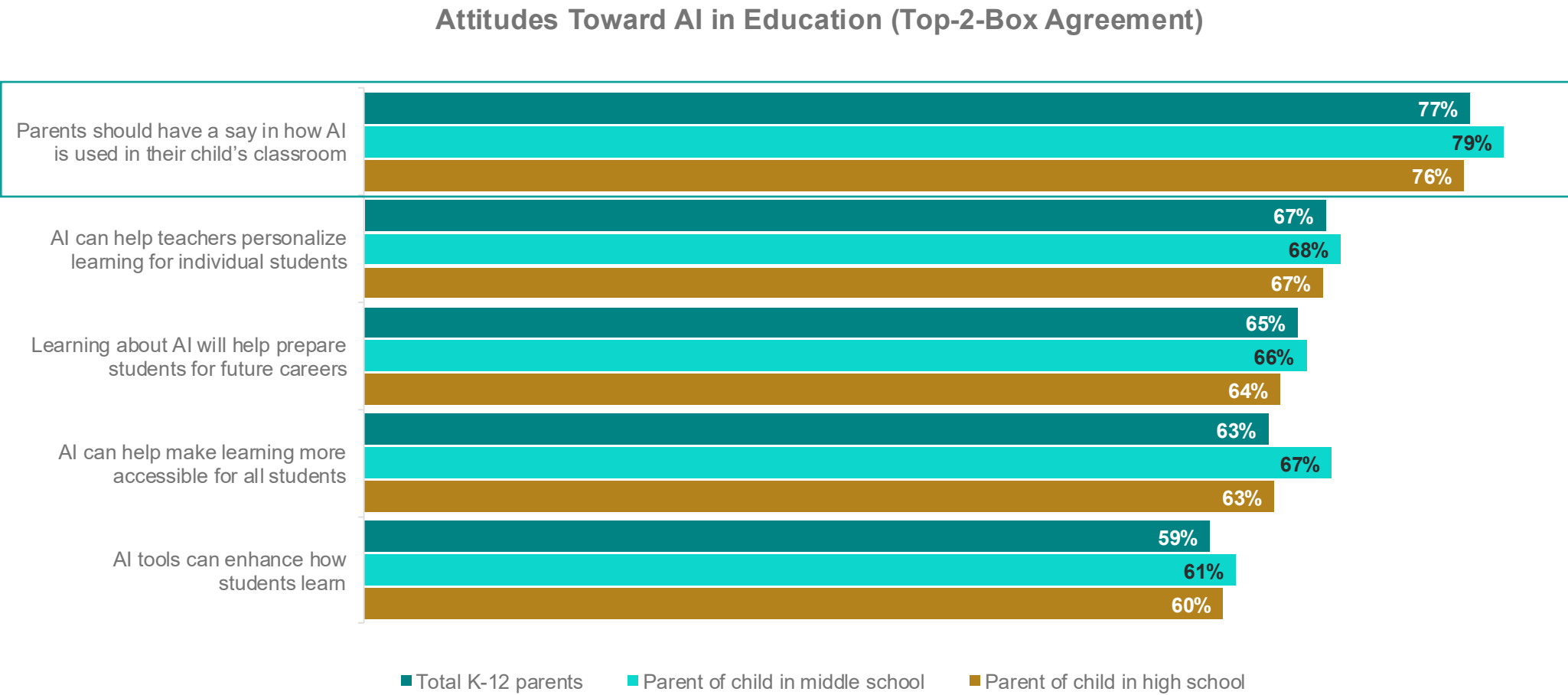
K-12 PARENTS

Parents of middle and high school students are somewhat more likely to think that AI should be a required part of the curriculum, but sentiment is otherwise consistent



K-12 PARENTS

Parents' top priority is having a say: 77% want input on how AI is used in their child's classroom, while other perceived benefits of AI remain broadly consistent across student age groups



K-12 PARENTS

Parents' top concerns are consistent regardless of AI use: dependence (54-56%), critical thinking (43-45%), and cheating (40%) lead the list. Whether parents have used AI or not, they're wary of its impact on their child's education.

K-12 Parents

Concern	%
Students becoming overly dependent on AI	54%
Reduced development of critical thinking skills	43%
Students using AI to cheat or plagiarize	40%
AI producing inaccurate or misleading information	31%
Student data privacy and security	27%
Insufficient teacher training on AI	14%
Cost of AI technology and tools	11%
Lack of clear school or district policies on AI use	10%
Bias in AI systems or outputs	9%
Unequal access to AI tools across schools/districts	8%
No major concerns about AI in education	7%

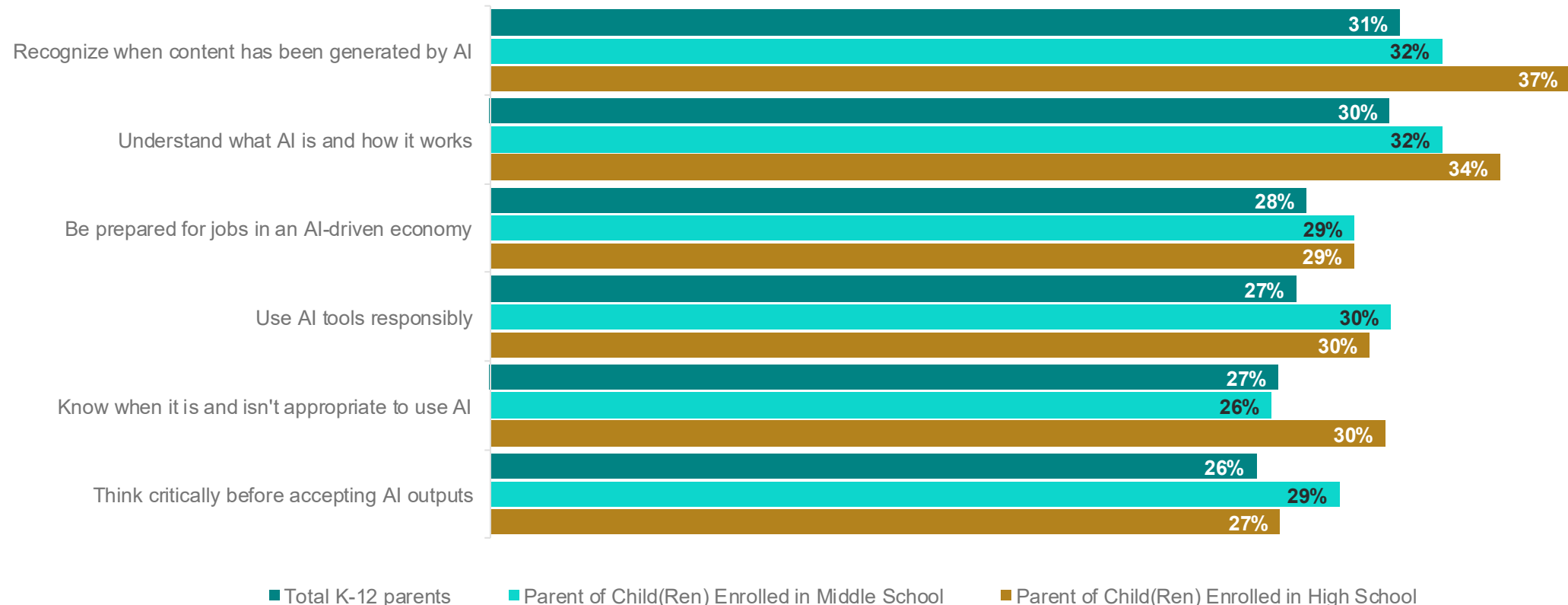
K-12 Parents Used AI

Concern	%
Students becoming overly dependent on AI	56%
Reduced development of critical thinking skills	45%
Students using AI to cheat or plagiarize	40%
AI producing inaccurate or misleading information	32%
Student data privacy and security	27%
Insufficient teacher training on AI	15%
Cost of AI technology and tools	13%
Lack of clear school or district policies on AI use	11%
Bias in AI systems or outputs	10%
Unequal access to AI tools across schools/districts	8%
No major concerns about AI in education	5%

K-12 PARENTS

Parents of high school students are more confident in their children's ability to recognize AI-generated content (37% vs 31% total), However, sentiment around AI-readiness is still 13-19% lower than that of educators across the board (see slide 11).

Perceived Readiness of Today's K-12 Students (Top-2-Box)

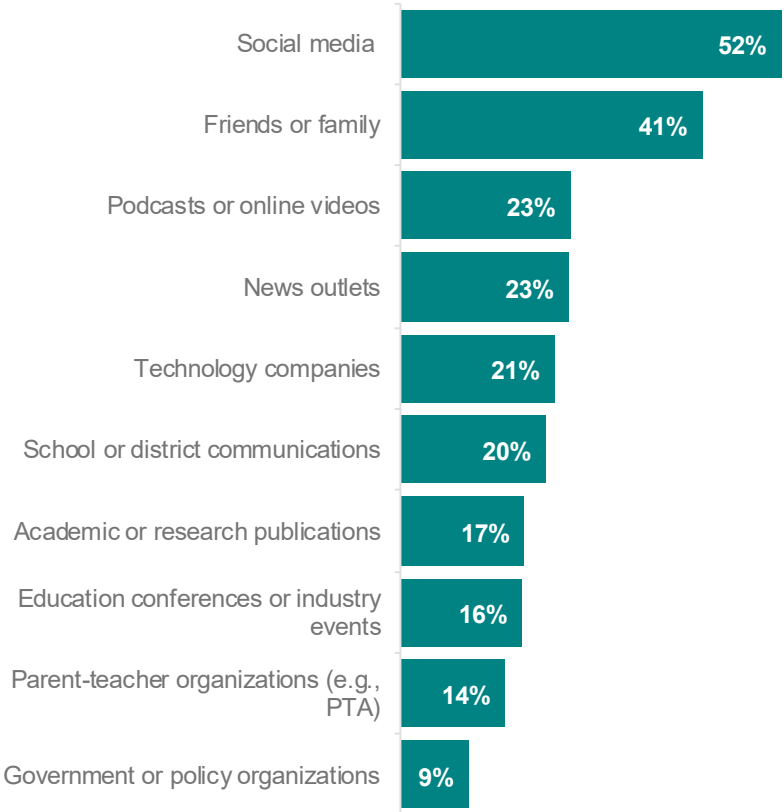


K-12 PARENTS

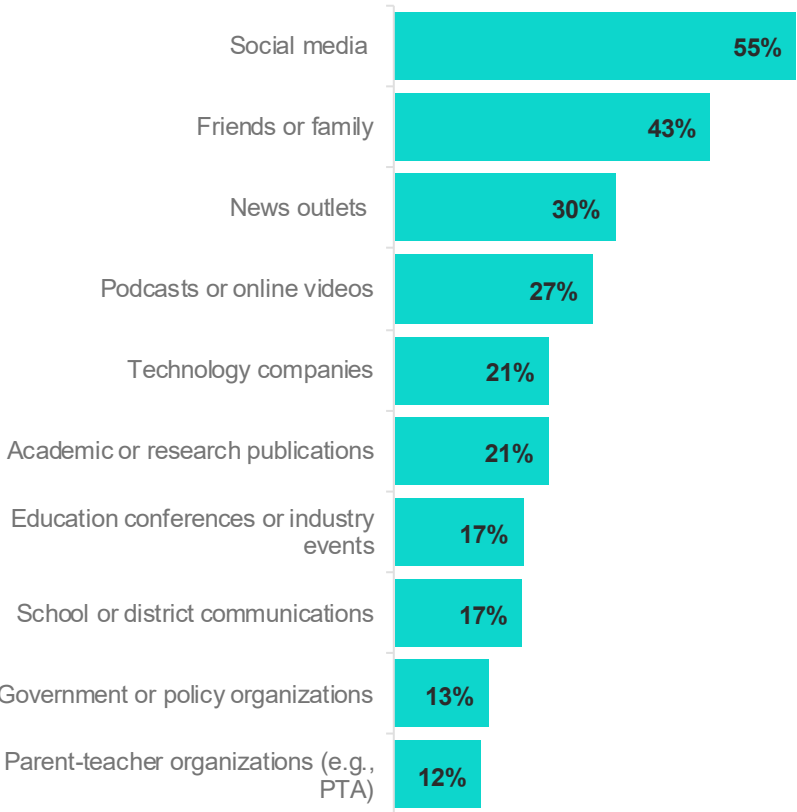
Parents lean on informal channels for AI news: social media (52%) and friends/family (41%) far outpace school communications, while middle school parents consume nearly all information sources at higher rates

Sources of Information about AI in Education

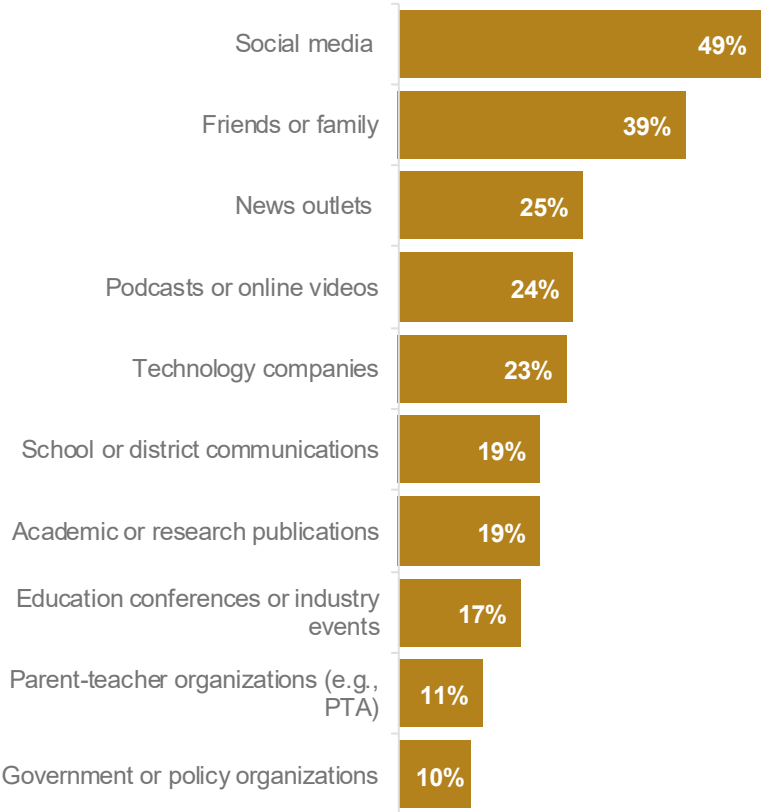
Total K-12 parents



Parent of Child(ren) Enrolled in Middle School

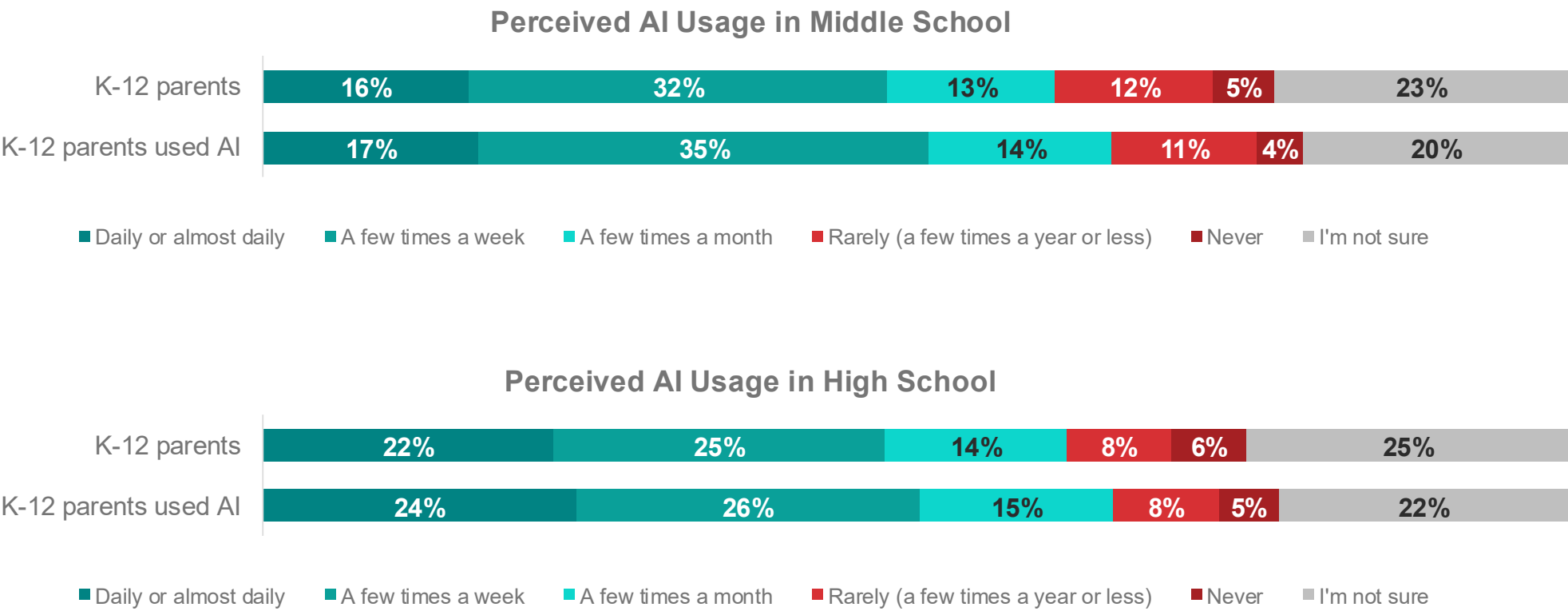


Parent of Child(ren) Enrolled in High School



K-12 PARENTS

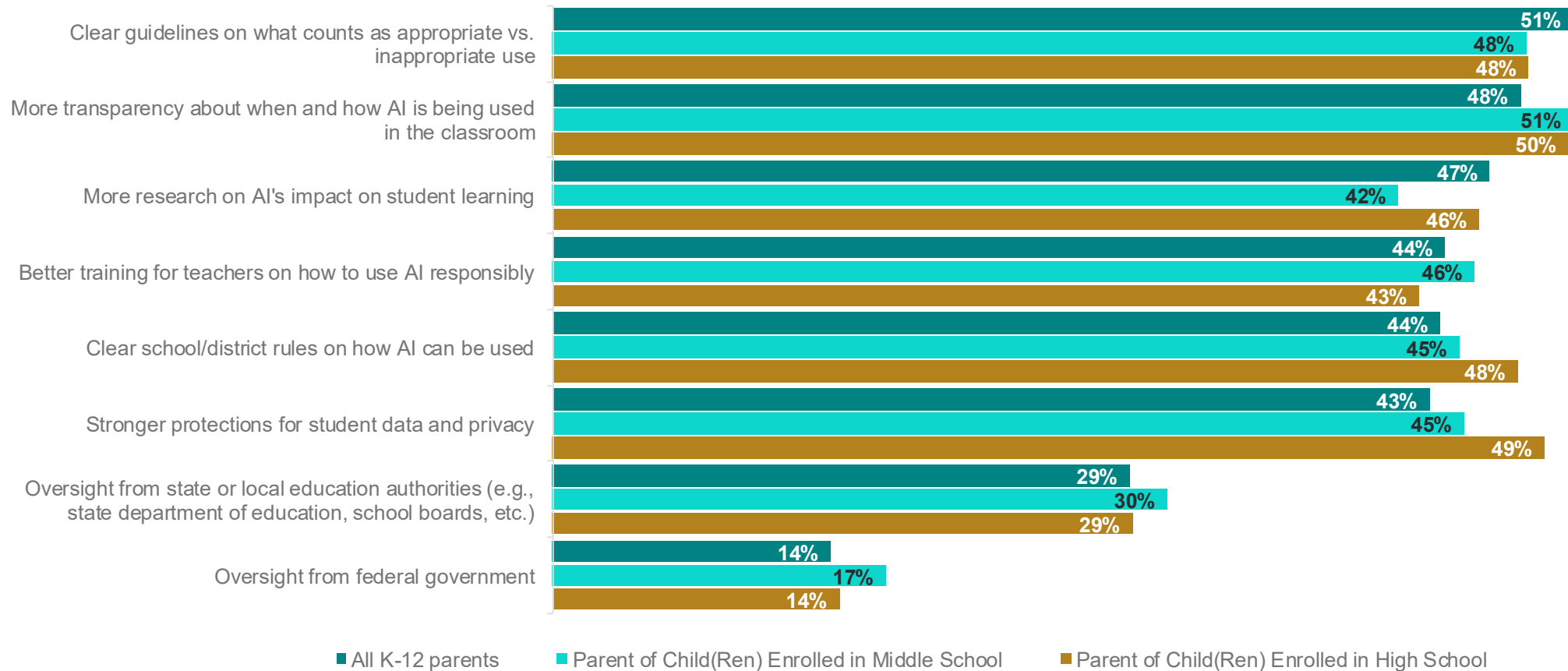
Parents who've used AI themselves are somewhat more likely to report seeing it reflected in their child's curriculum, however, only about half of parents say AI is being used in their child's education on a weekly basis



K-12 PARENTS

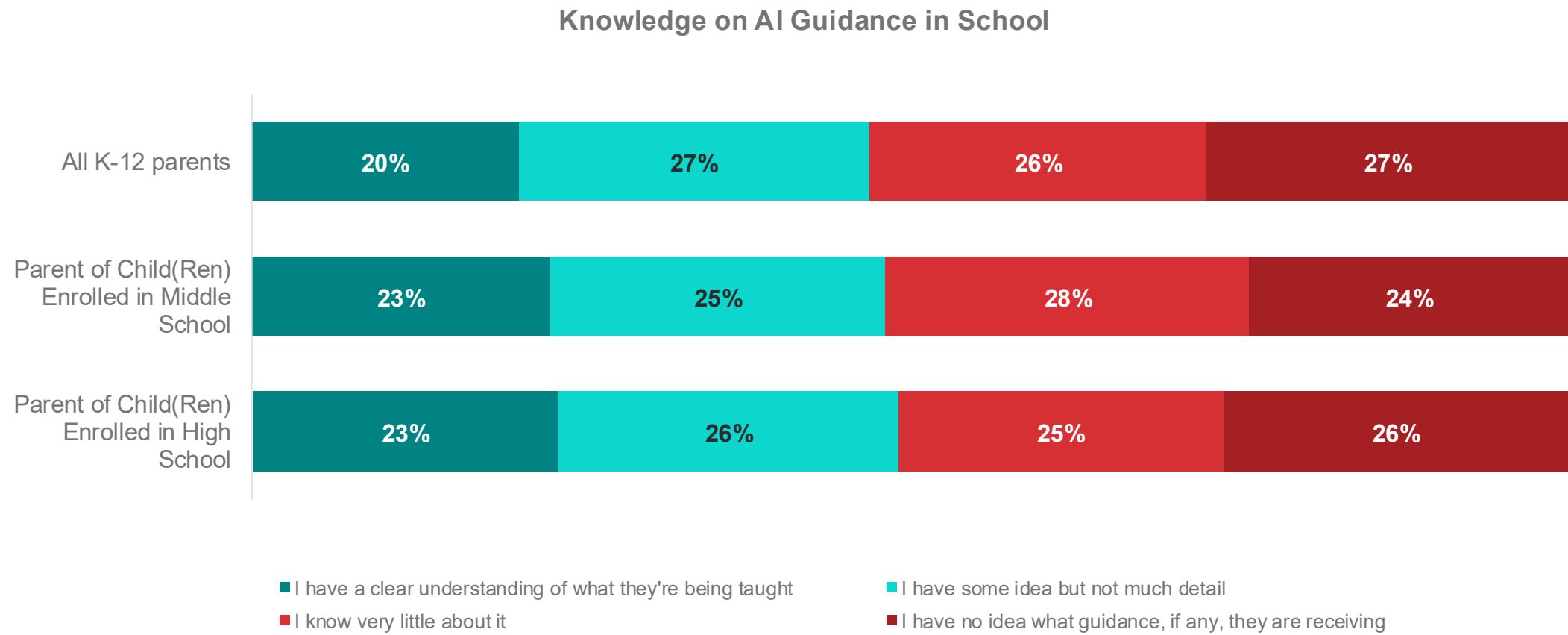
Establishing confidence is key: clear guidelines (51%) and transparency about classroom AI use (48%) top parents' list of confidence-builders. Parents of high school students are notably more concerned with stronger protections for student data and privacy.

What Would Increase Parents' Confidence in School AI Use



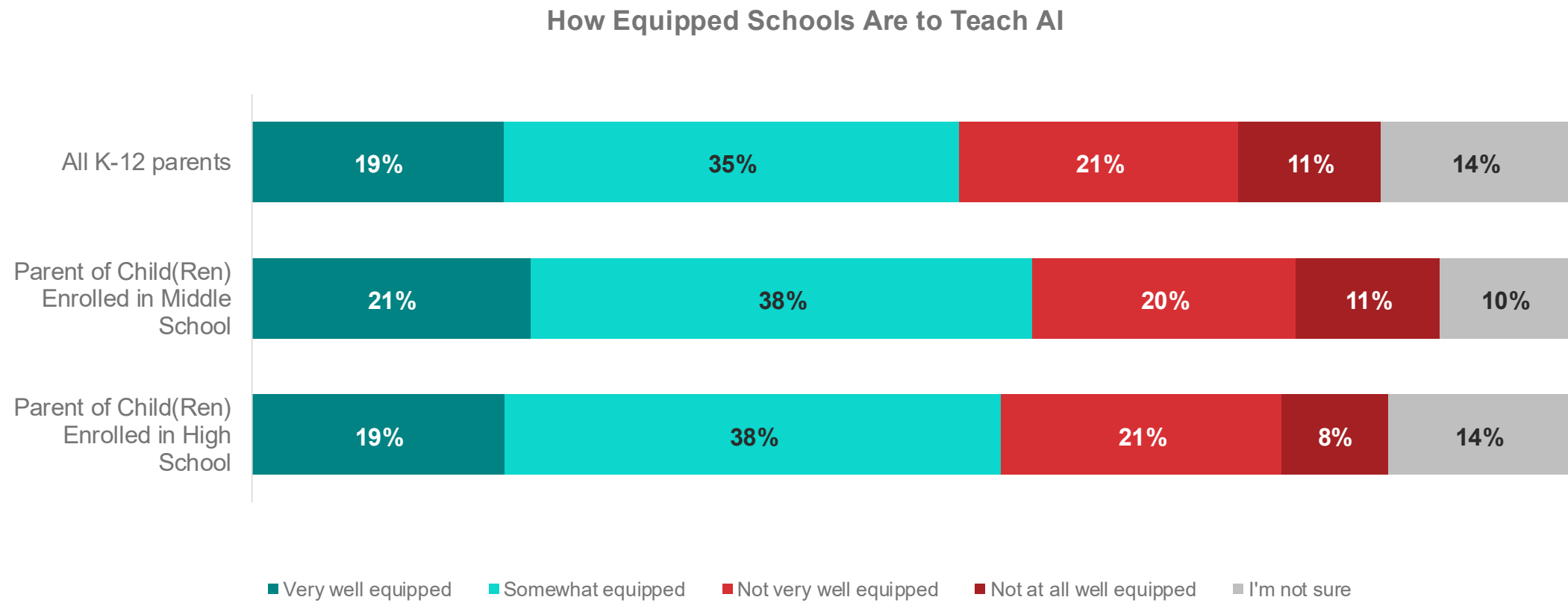
K-12 PARENTS

Just 20% of parents clearly understand the AI guidance their child receives at school, while 53% know very little or nothing at all; this knowledge gap is consistent for all parents regardless of the age of their children



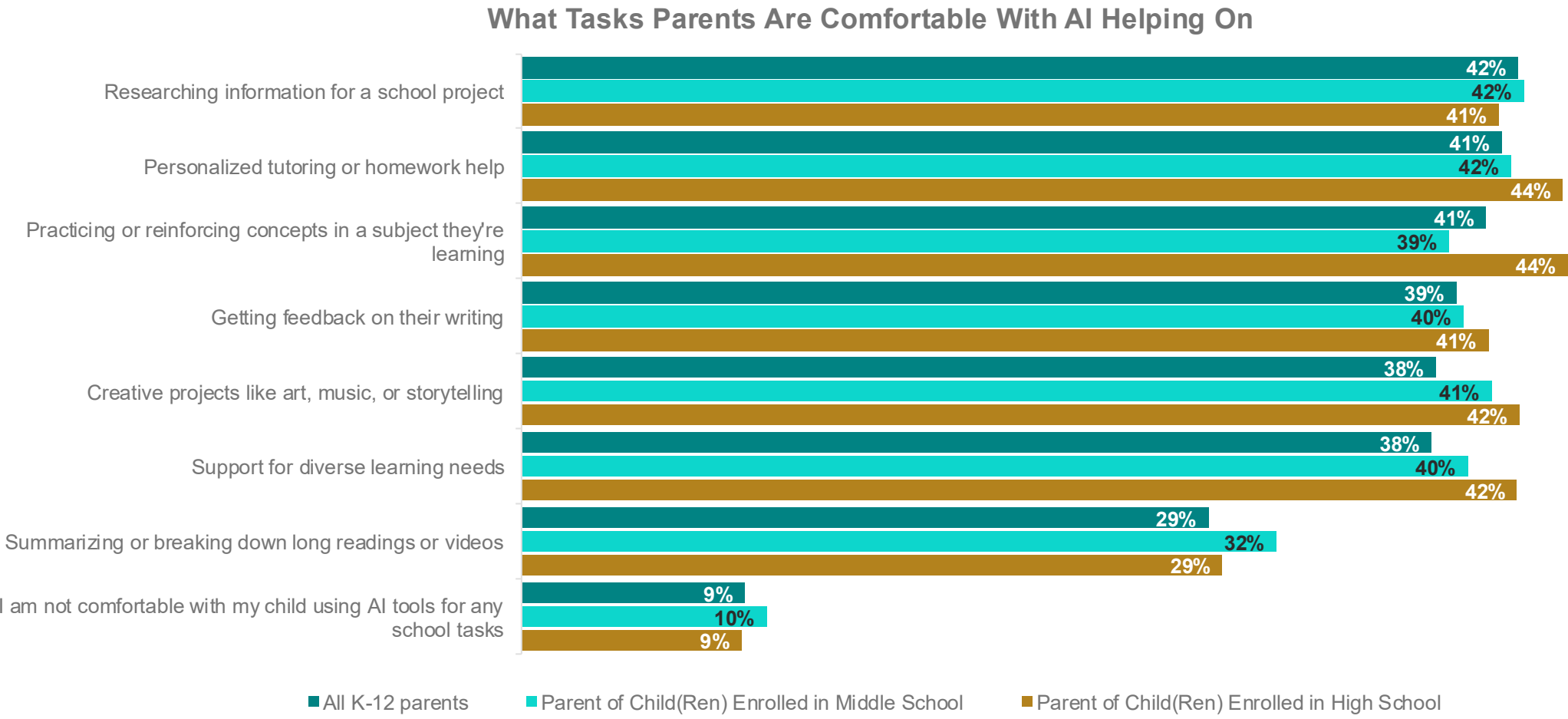
K-12 PARENTS

54% of parents say their child's school is at least somewhat equipped to teach AI; parents of middle school children are a bit more confident in how equipped their children's schools are (59%)



K-12 PARENTS

Parents of high school students are more comfortable with their children using AI across nearly every task, particularly for personalized learning(44%); all parents see its value for research and tutoring at roughly the same rate

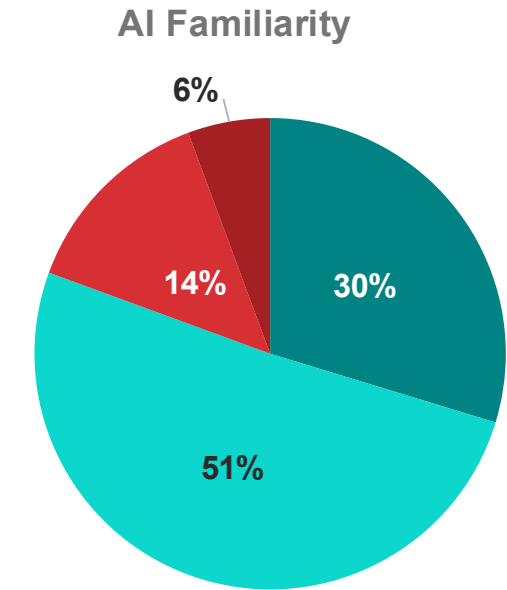


SECTION 4

Appendix

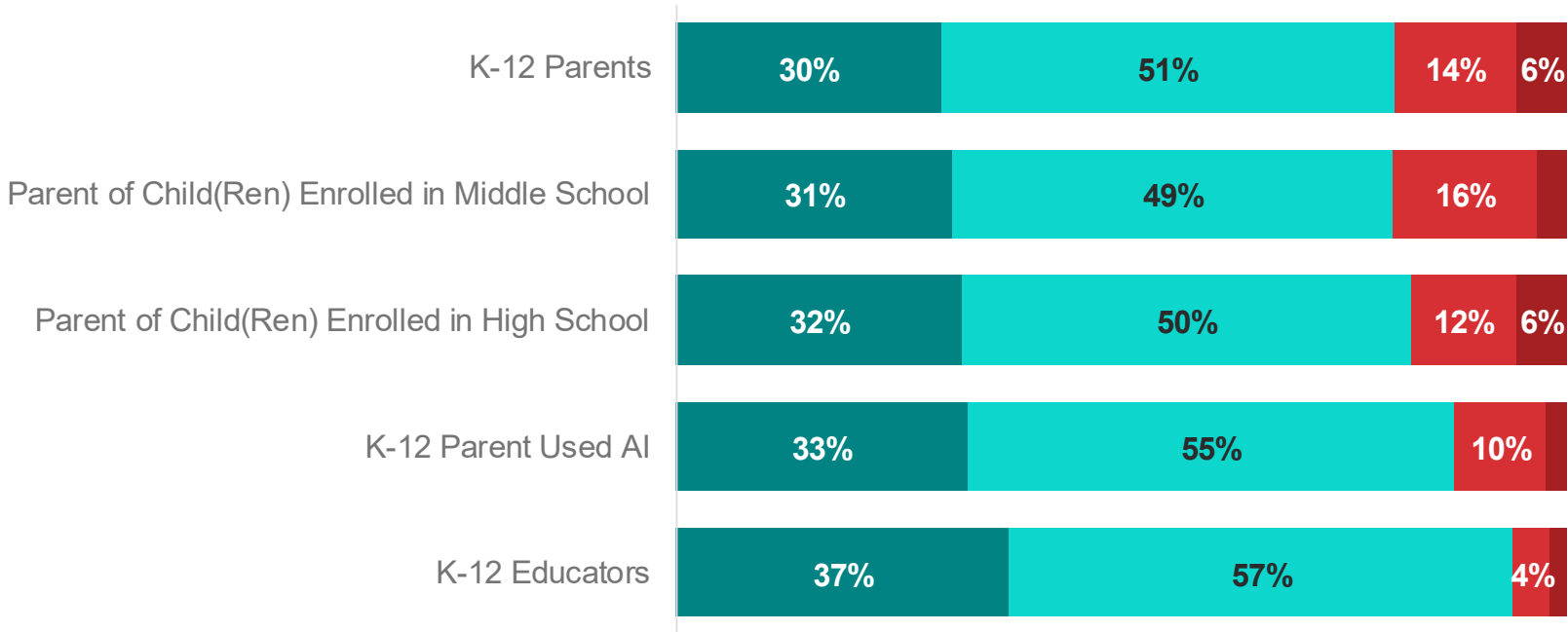
K-12 PARENTS

Parents are largely familiar with AI with 81% at least somewhat familiar; AI familiarity is consistent across grade levels



- Very familiar – I could explain AI concepts to someone else
- Somewhat familiar – I have a general sense of what AI is and what it does
- Not very familiar – I've heard of AI but don't know much about it
- Not at all familiar – I know very little or nothing about AI

AI Familiarity by Group



- Very familiar – I could explain AI concepts to someone else
- Somewhat familiar – I have a general sense of what AI is and what it does
- Not very familiar – I've heard of AI but don't know much about it
- Not at all familiar – I know very little or nothing about AI

K-12 PARENTS & EDUCATORS

Both parents and educators look to K-12 school systems first to prepare students for AI and set guardrails around its use

K-12 Parents

	Preparing students	Setting guardrails
K-12 school systems	42%	34%
Parents / guardians	26%	27%
Federal or state government	8%	16%
Other	1%	1%
No one entity; it's a shared responsibility	23%	22%

K-12 Educators

	Preparing students	Setting guardrails
K-12 school systems	46%	42%
Parents / guardians	18%	22%
Federal or state government	19%	23%
No one entity; it's a shared responsibility	15%	10%
Other	2%	3%

