

D/R/E/A/M COLLABORATIVE

City of **Somerville**



School Construction Advisory Group
SUMMER 2025 SURVEY
RESULTS & ANALYSIS

prepared for the **Somerville School Construction Advisory Group (CAG)**
and **Mayor Katjana Ballantyne**

by **DREAM Collaborative**

OCTOBER 2025

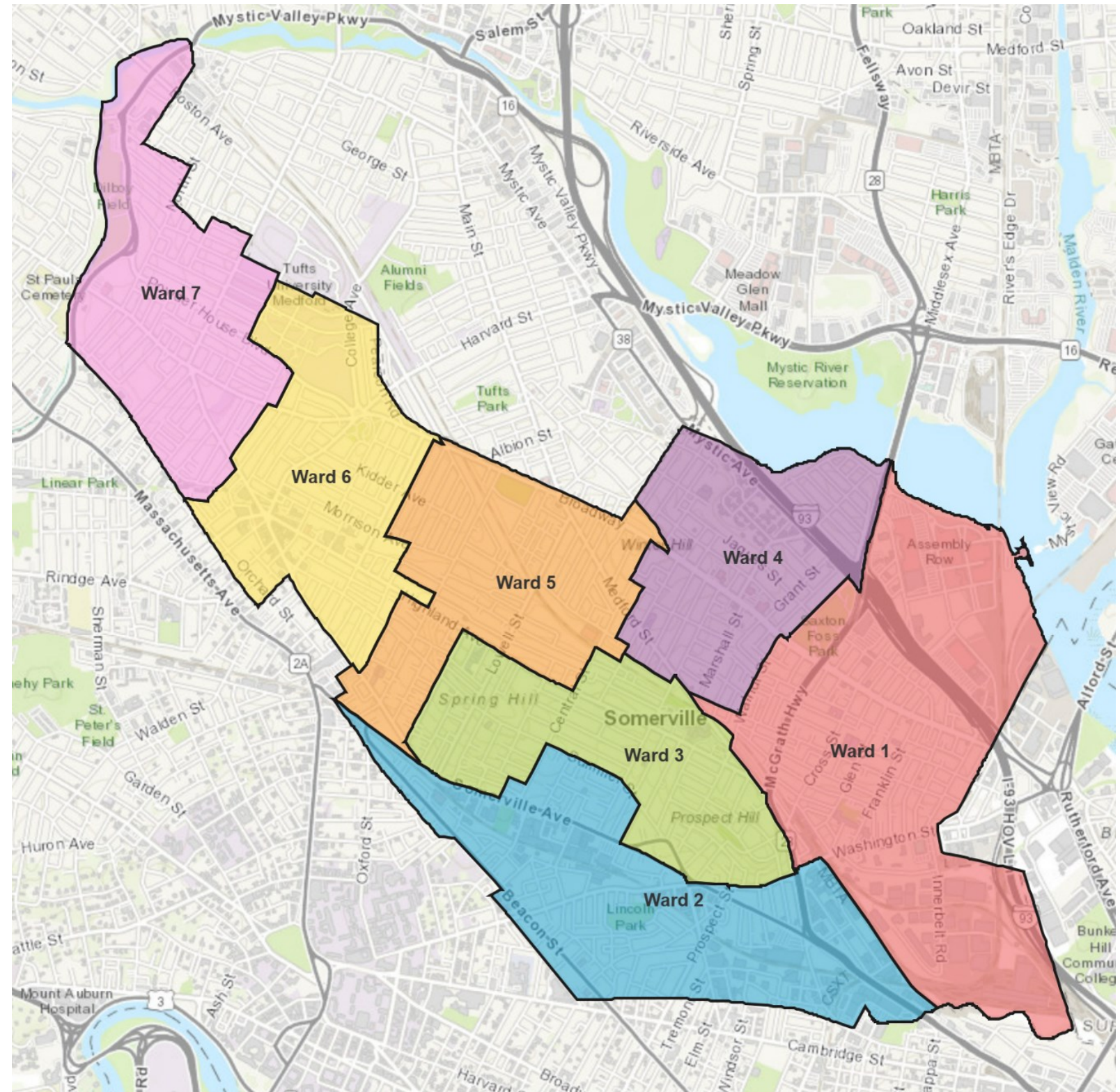
SURVEY OVERVIEW

Background

The City of Somerville is planning to build a new PK-8 school building to address the needs of the Winter Hill School. The City must decide whether to also address Brown School needs within this project and where the new school building should be located. Somerville's Mayor Katjana Ballantyne convened a Construction Advisory Group (CAG) made up of parents, elected officials, and other community members to develop a recommendation on these questions. To help inform this recommendation and the City's decision, the City engaged DREAM Collaborative, an urban planning and architecture consulting firm, to work with members of the CAG to create a survey to gauge public opinion.

Parameters

The survey was open from August 7 to September 22, 2025. With extensive promotion and publicity from the City and other parties, the survey received 2,429 responses, largely via the online format, as well as from paper surveys. The survey was available in both formats in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Nepali, and Traditional and Simplified Chinese.



Somerville Wards (source: <https://arcg.is/OK1a91>)

Sample & Representativeness

The survey achieved representation in 73 of 81 demographic categories, including typically underrepresented groups like lower-income and non-English-speaking households. However, for Somerville's population, the sample does over- and underrepresent some groups, including overrepresenting ages 35-54, parents, homeowners, high-income households, women, long-term residents, and certain Wards; and underrepresenting children under age 13, families that homeschool, households earning under \$10,000, and veterans. **In drawing conclusions from results, it is important to consider the responses of different demographic groups, in addition to the overall response.**

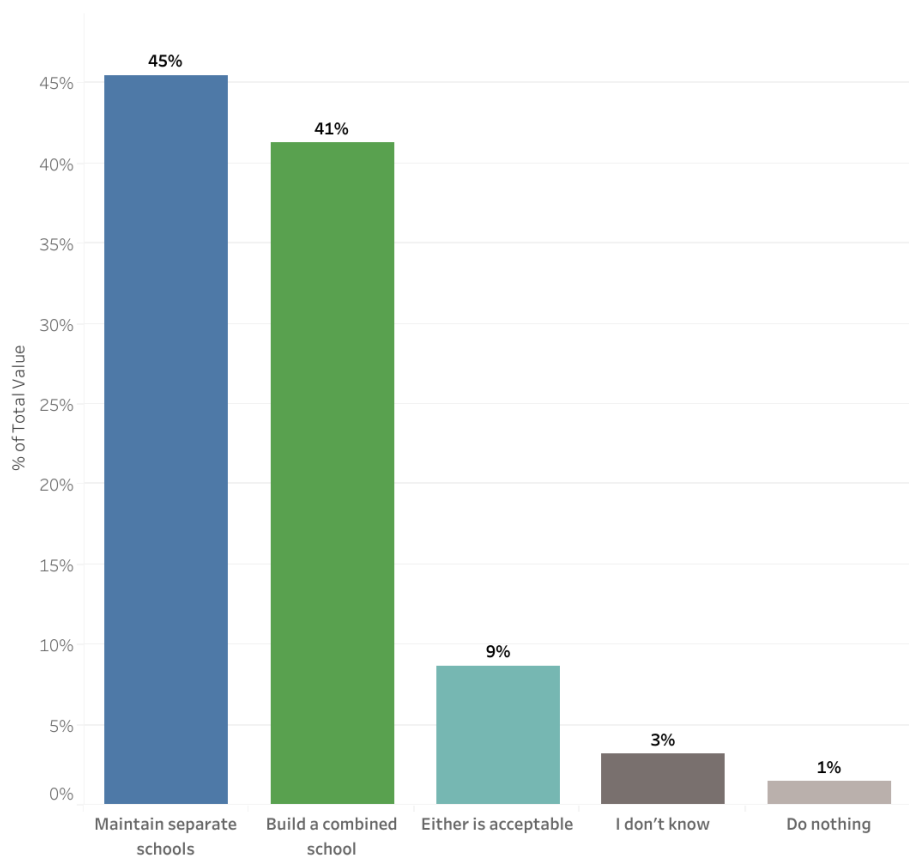
Overall Results

Based on Question 1, survey respondents are largely split, with a slight preference for maintaining two separate schools over a new combined school.

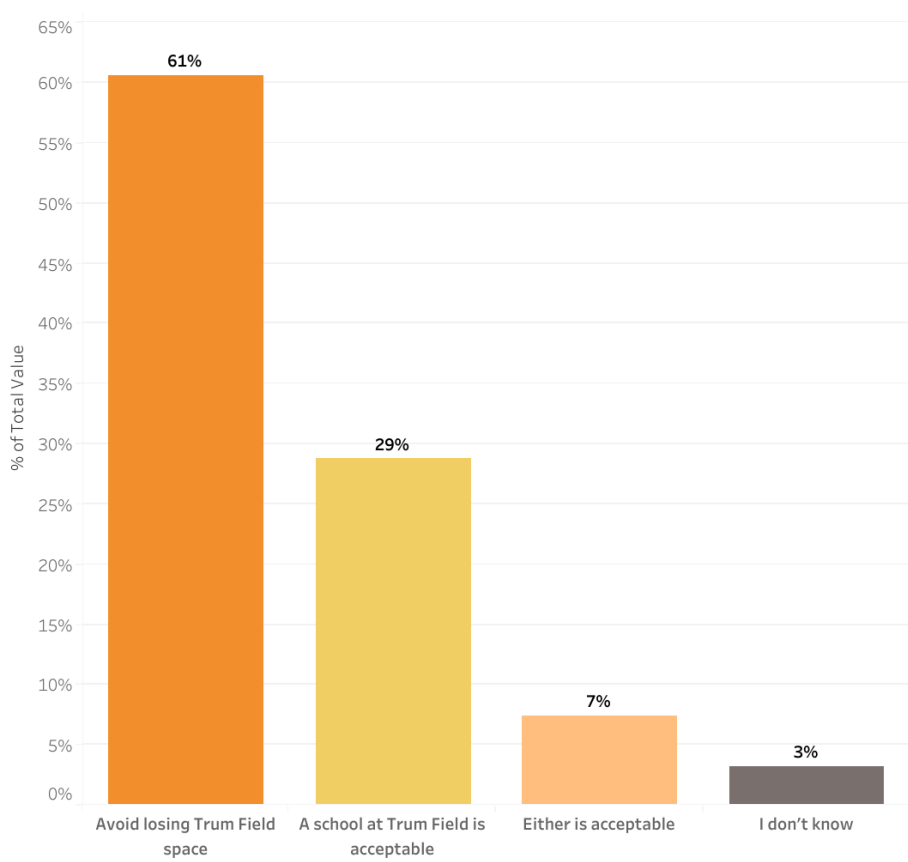
Question 2 shows a clear and strong preference to NOT use Trum Field for a new combined school.

Question 3 results reinforce the conclusion that respondents are divided, and that Trum is the least popular option. For Question 3, the largest number of respondents (1,077) chose Option 1, maintaining two separate schools; however, the *total* number of respondents that selected one of the locations for a combined school is larger (1,161, the total of 781 for Sycamore and 380 for Trum).

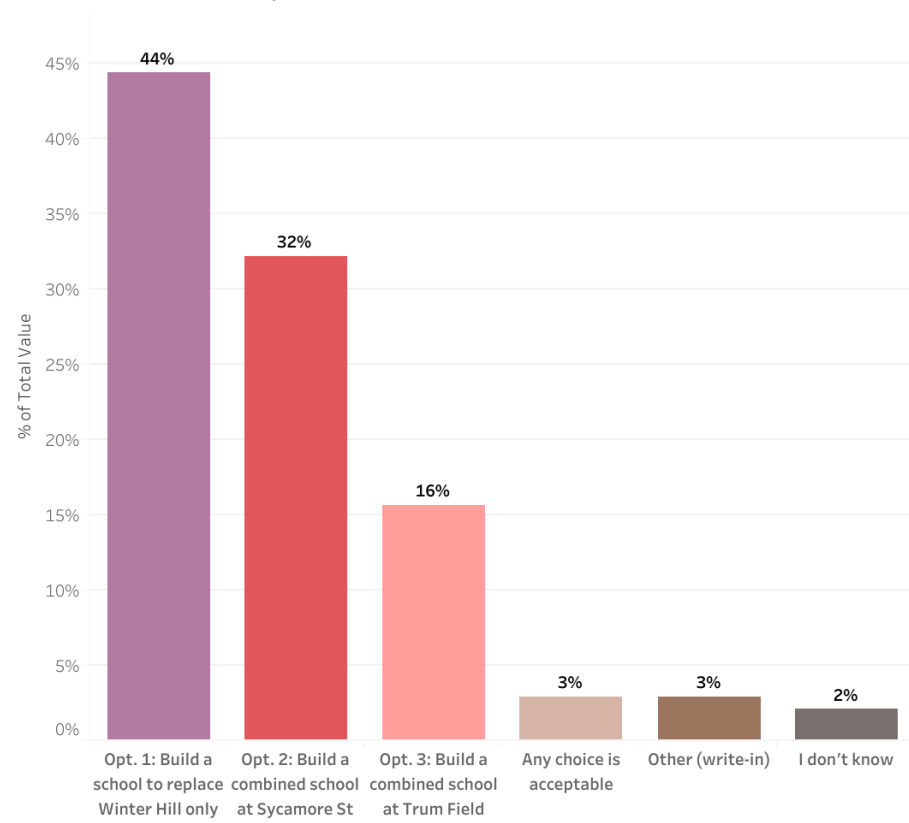
Question 1: Plan for the Winter Hill and Brown Schools



Question 2: Location for a new school



Question 3: Best overall option



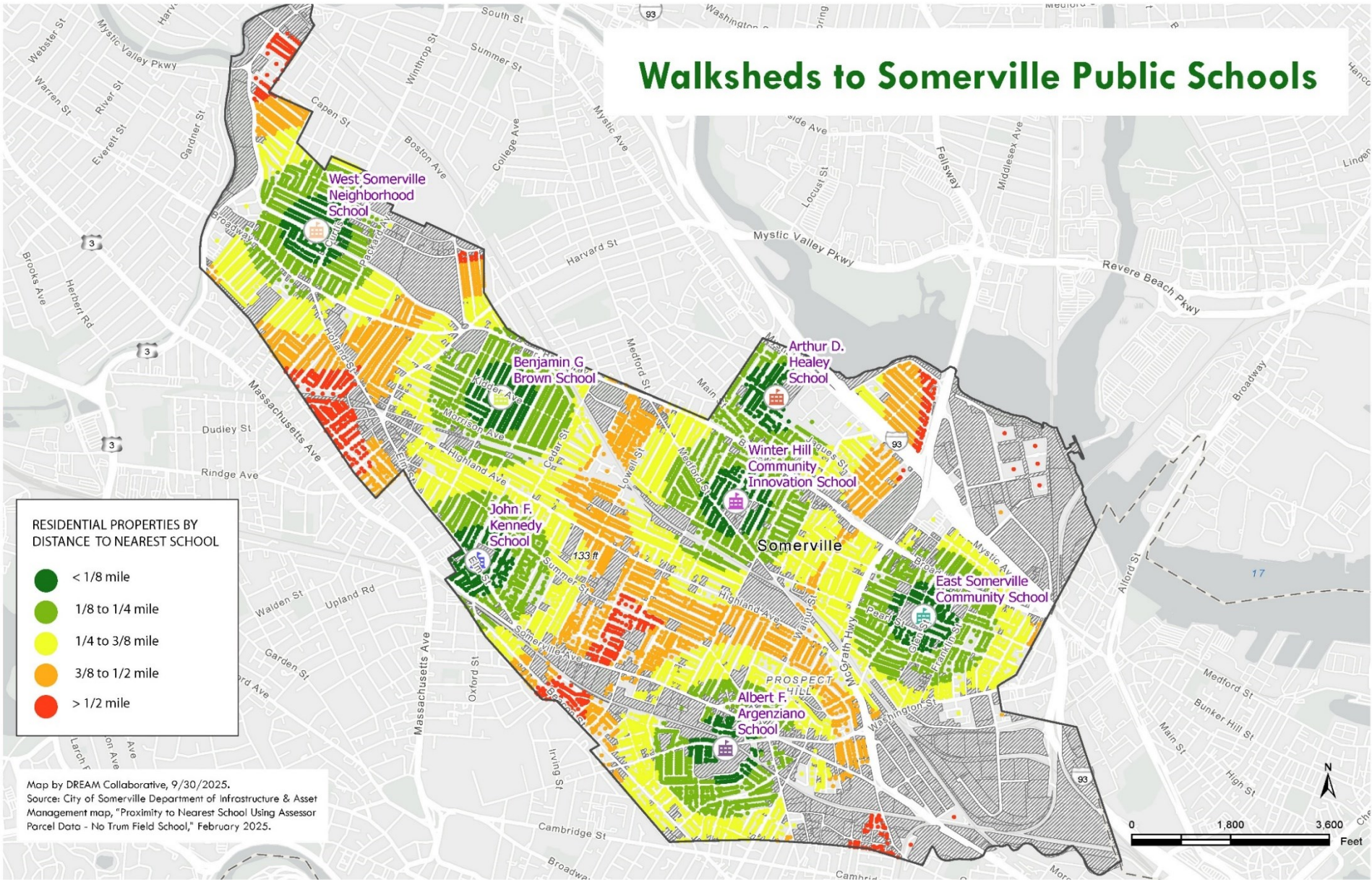
Awareness of Issue

Most survey respondents (87% of over 2,400 responses) were familiar with the need for a new Winter Hill School prior to taking the survey. This group tends to somewhat prefer maintaining separate schools (47% versus 41% for a combined school).

Another 163 respondents are somewhat familiar with the need, and strongly prefer a combined school (47% versus 30%). Those who were not familiar with the issue (148 respondents) are evenly divided between separate schools and a combined school.

Putting Results in Perspective

An important consideration in evaluating survey results is how much stock to put in the feedback from groups that responded to the survey in the largest numbers, versus the sometimes-differing feedback from other groups that did not take the survey in as high numbers. **The CAG might gain additional insights for its deliberations by giving greater consideration to some subgroups for equity reasons. Similarly, the CAG might consider whether it is better to prioritize the preferences of the neighbors in the Wards most directly affected by these schools, or whether a Citywide weighting that takes everyone’s preferences into account is more appropriate.**



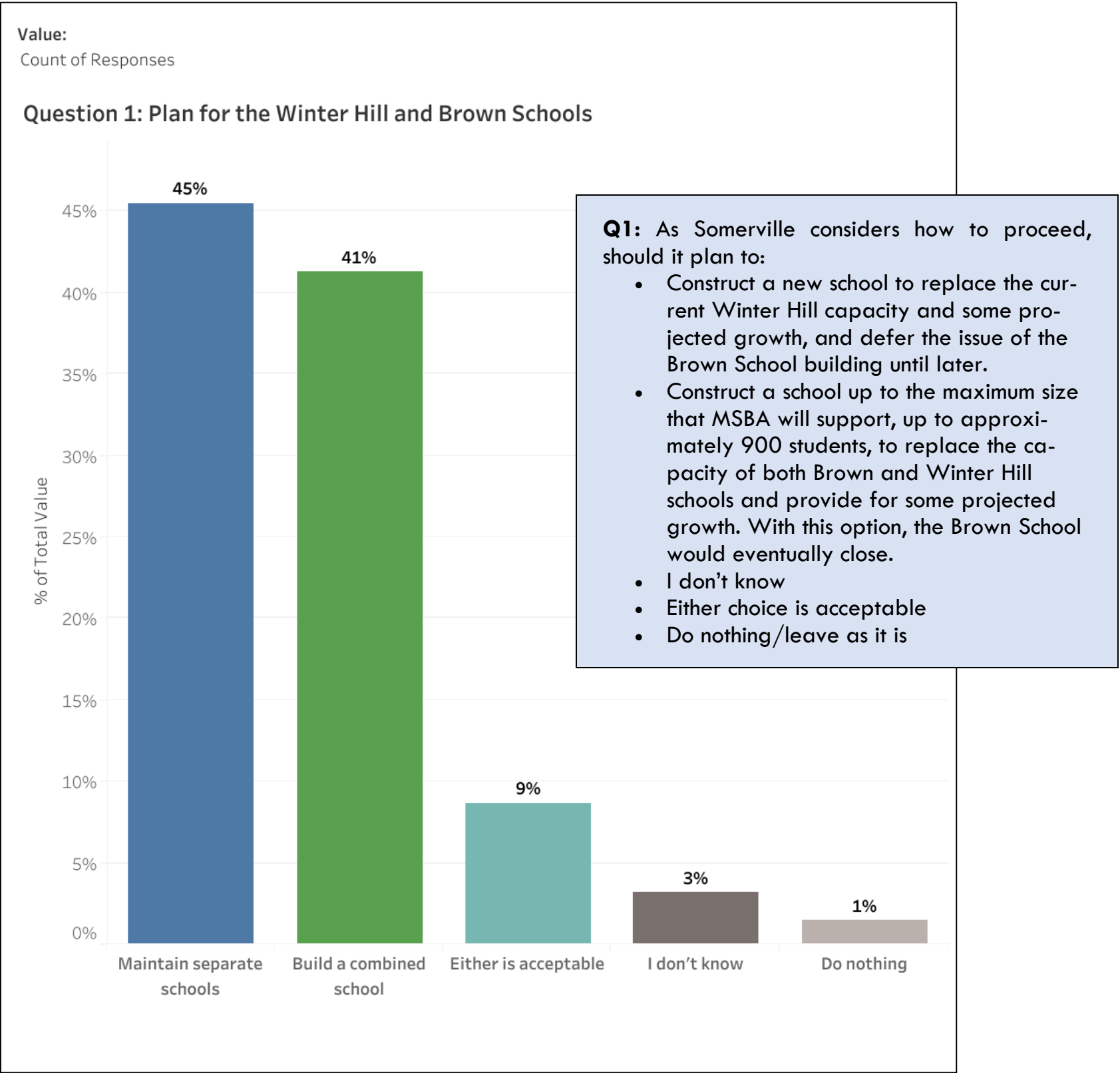
Location of existing K-8 public schools in Somerville. The color rings indicate bands of walking distances to each school. While many families in the City elect to send their children to schools across the City, rather than to their “proximity” schools, the locations of these schools are currently spread fairly evenly across the city, with the result that most residential areas are within a half mile of a school. Survey results indicate that people prioritize “walkability” above all else, regardless of what choice of school location and size they picked. Map by DREAM Collaborative.

REVIEW OF INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

Question 1, Separate or Combined Schools

Question 1 asked for respondents’ preferences for rebuilding a new Winter Hill School and deferring a solution for Brown until later (in effect, maintaining two separate schools) or creating a new, larger combined school now. Question 1 did NOT ask about particular sites for a combined school.

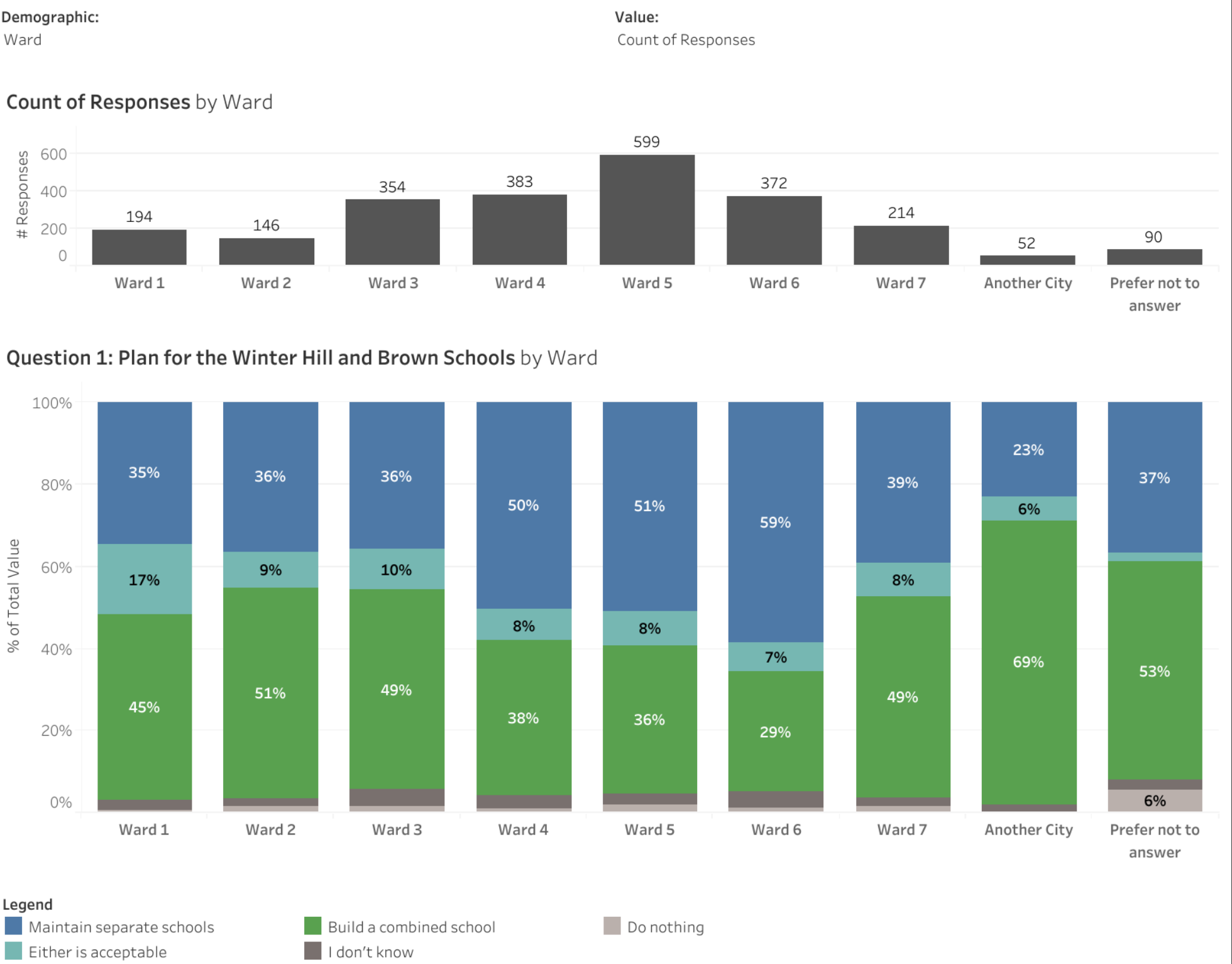
OVERALL PREFERENCE: Based on all responses, the overall preference from Question 1 is to maintain separate schools – but only by a small margin over a combined school (45% to 41%). The following section discusses the most important factors related to this choice. While most groups across various demographic comparisons tended to agree with the overall preference to maintain separate schools, **the following subgroups prefer a combined school:** City staff (54% for combined versus 30% for separate, with 69 responses), Somerville Public Schools staff (65% for combined versus 32% for separate, with 194 responses), and students (a category that includes both those under age 18 and college and graduate students); and to a lesser degree, renters, non-binary respondents, and people who have lived in Somerville the least amount of time (up to 3 years).



Q1: EFFECT OF WARD

Survey respondents' location, expressed by Ward, was an important predictor of their choice on Question 1. The Wards that responded to the survey in the highest numbers are: Ward 4 (which includes Winter Hill's Sycamore Street location), Ward 5 (Trum Field), and Ward 6 (Brown School). **Wards 4, 5, and 6 all clearly prefer separate schools**, with Ward 6 (Brown School) the most in favor of separate schools.

Residents of all other Wards did not take the survey in as high numbers, but survey **respondents in these other Wards (1, 2, 3, and 7) clearly prefer a combined school**.



Q1: EFFECT OF INCOME

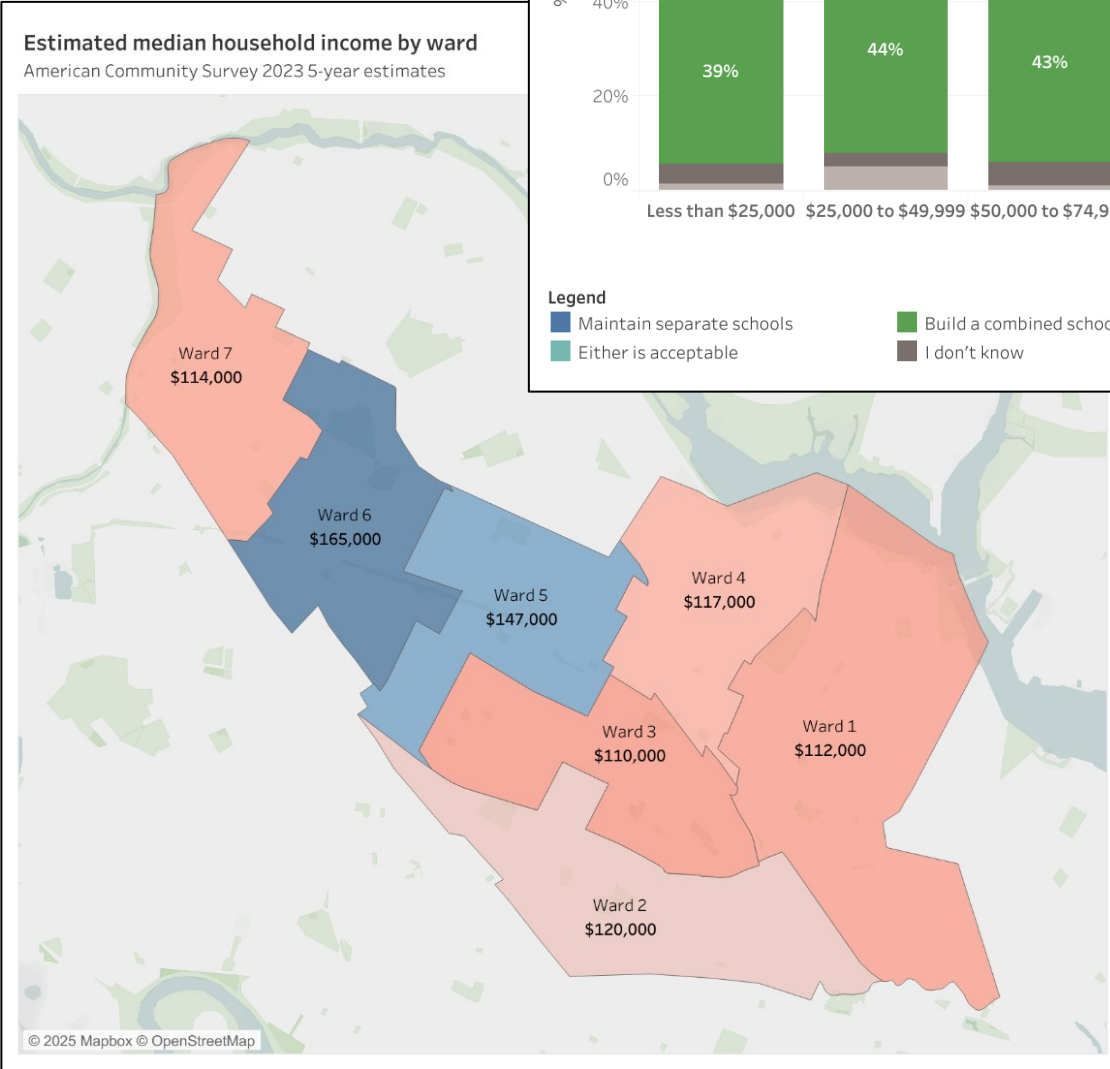
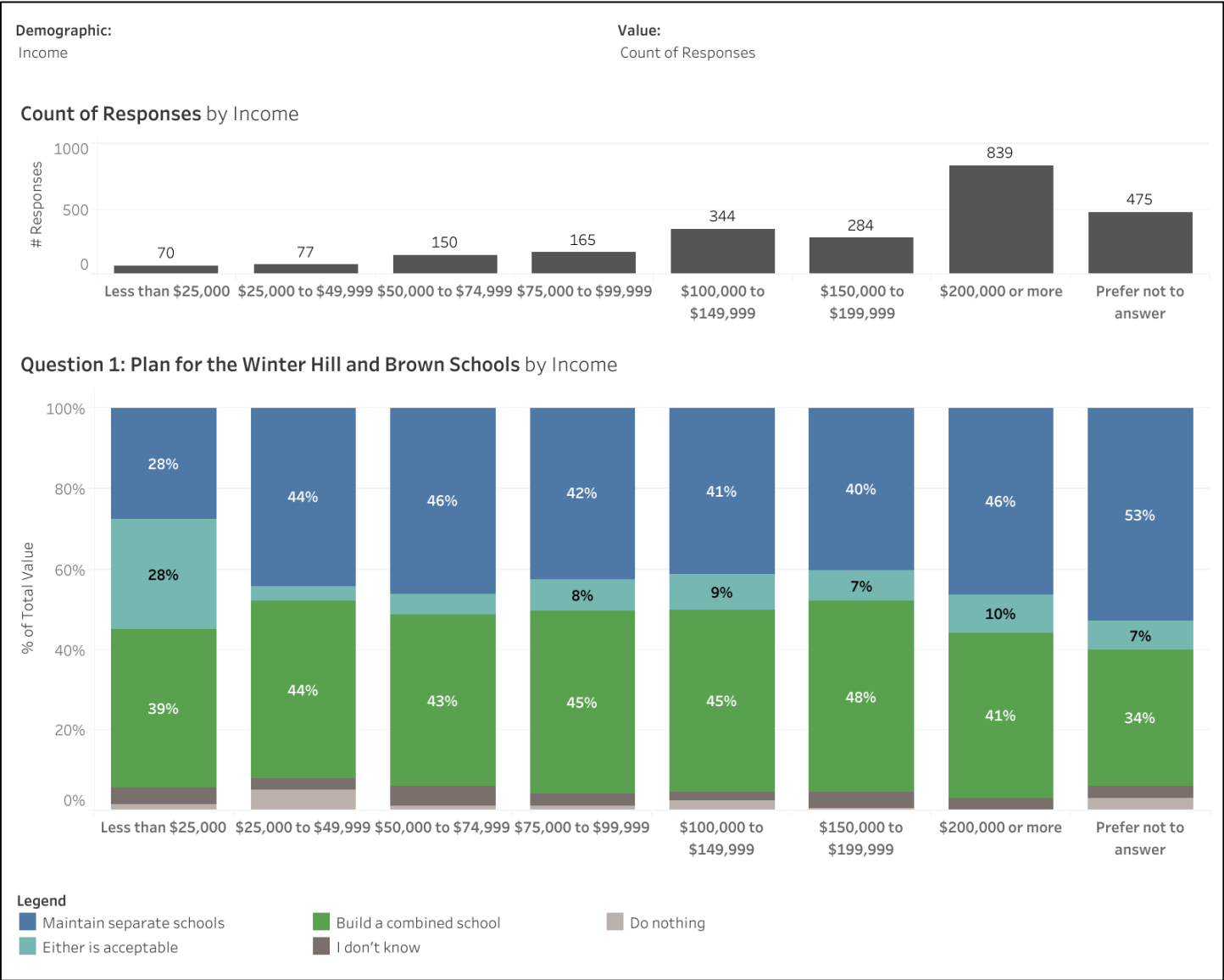
Household income is related to preferences in Question 1. Around 35% of survey respondents (839 out of over 2,400 total) were in the very highest household income bracket (\$200,000 and up) and had a slight preference to maintain separate schools. An additional 20% of survey respondents (475 of over 2,400) did not want to divulge their income; this group was more strongly in favor of maintaining separate schools.

In contrast, most of the 46% of survey respondents in income brackets below \$200,000 favored a combined school, both individually within their income range subgroups and collectively.

For perspective, Somerville’s median household income (meaning half of households have incomes above and half have incomes below this figure) is about \$122,000¹. Wards 5 and 6 are above the Citywide median income, as shown in [the map at right](#).

One interesting footnote to the above patterns is the share of responses in all income categories who said that “either choice is acceptable.” This could be interpreted as a means to effectively “break a tie” by lumping these responses in with one of the two choices.

¹ Source: 2019-2023 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, Somerville at a Glance, <https://public.tableau.com/shared/JF9CQHFDQ>



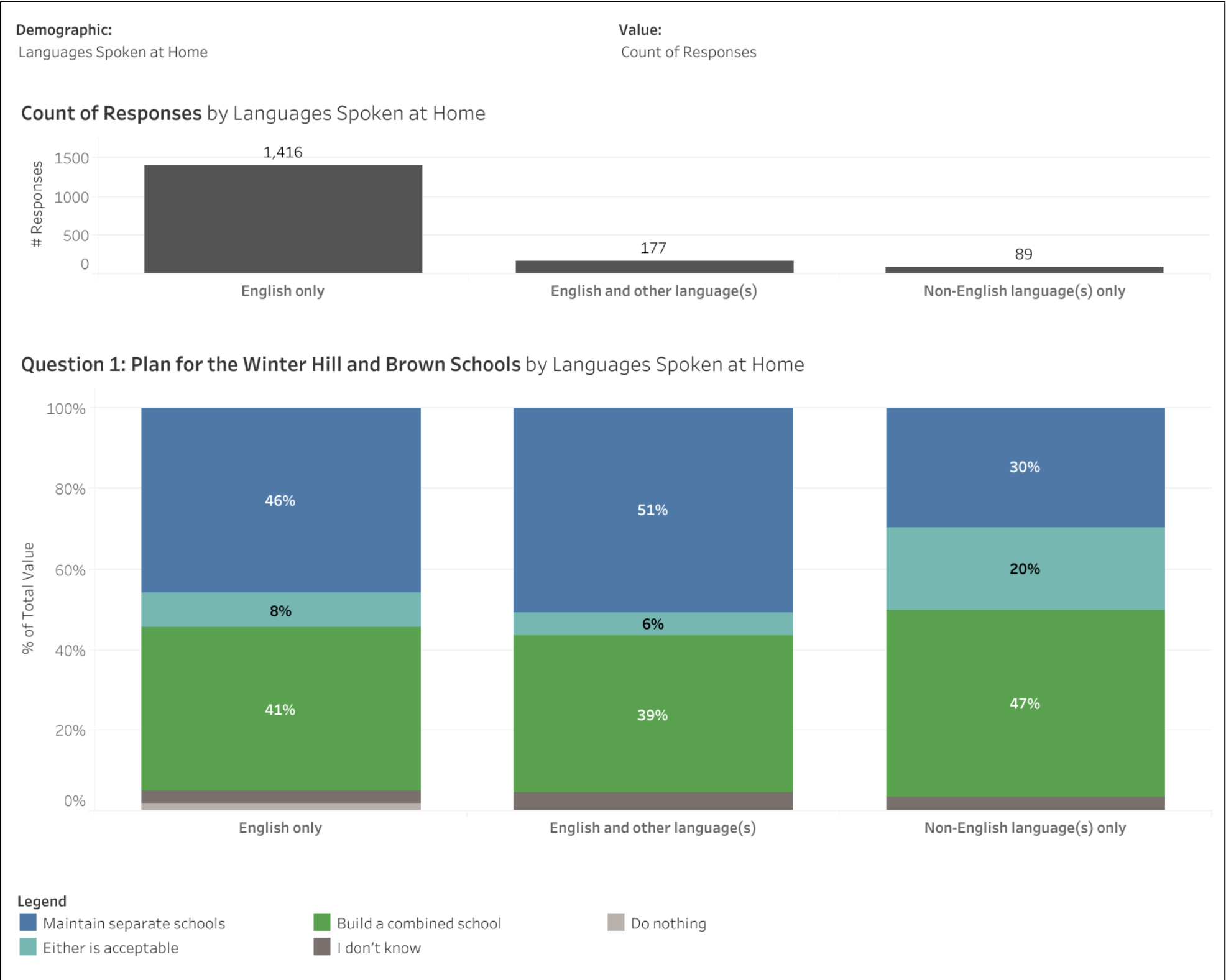
Median Household Income by Ward

Ward 1:	\$112,000
Ward 2:	\$120,000
Ward 3:	\$110,000
Ward 4:	\$117,000
Ward 5:	\$147,000
Ward 6:	\$165,000
Ward 7:	\$114,000

Q1: EFFECT OF LANGUAGE & IMMIGRANT STATUS

In looking at language spoken at home, the majority of respondents speak only English, or English plus another language, at home; both these groups slightly prefer to maintain separate schools.

However, those who do not speak any English at home (89 of over 2,400 responses) prefer a combined school (47% in favor, versus 30% for separate schools). Similarly, immigrants (259 of over 2,400 responses) slightly prefer a combined school.



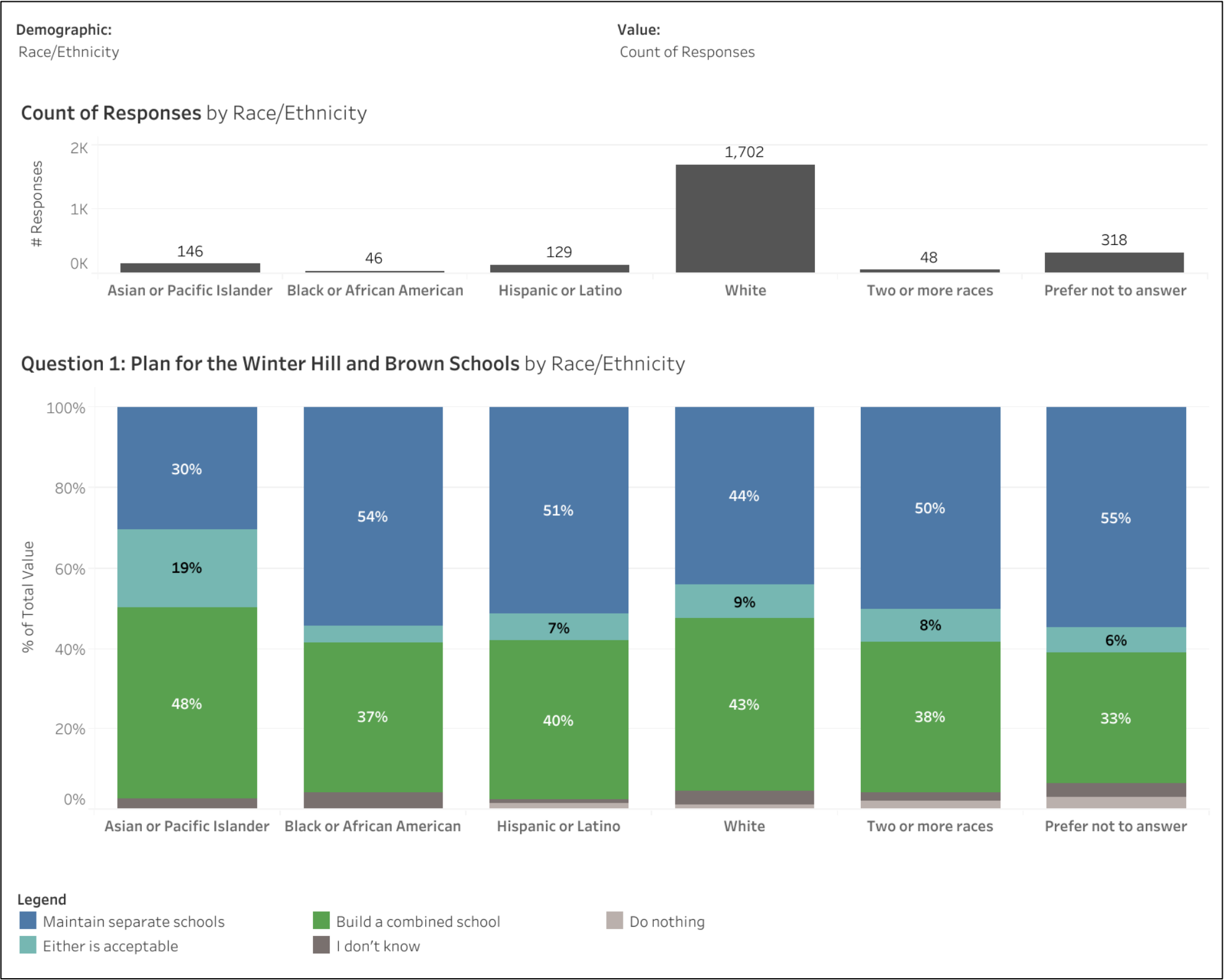
Q1: EFFECT OF RACE

The influence of race on survey choices is mixed.

A total of 70% of survey respondents were White (similar to American Community Survey ACS Census data reporting that Somerville is approximately 66% White)². **White respondents are nearly evenly split on preferences for maintaining two separate schools or creating a combined school.**

The responses in the Asian, Black, Hispanic, and 2+ races categories comprised 15% of survey responses (roughly one-half of the City’s ACS Census totals of 34% for these groups³). **Respondents that are Black / African American, Hispanic / Latino, and of two or more races favor maintaining separate schools. Asian respondents favor a combined school and are the least in favor of separate schools.**

The remaining survey respondents did not disclose their race or ethnicity.



² Source: Somerville at a Glance, Race and Ethnicity Distribution (2023), from ACS B03002 Hispanic and Latino Origin by Race, 5-year, Somerville MA, <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/cityofsomerville/viz/shared/JF9CQHFDQ>

³ The share of the Citywide population by race includes White (66%), Asian (12%), Hispanic (11%), Black / African American (5%), people of two or more races (5%), and those of another race alone (1%).

Q1: EFFECT OF PARENTAL STATUS

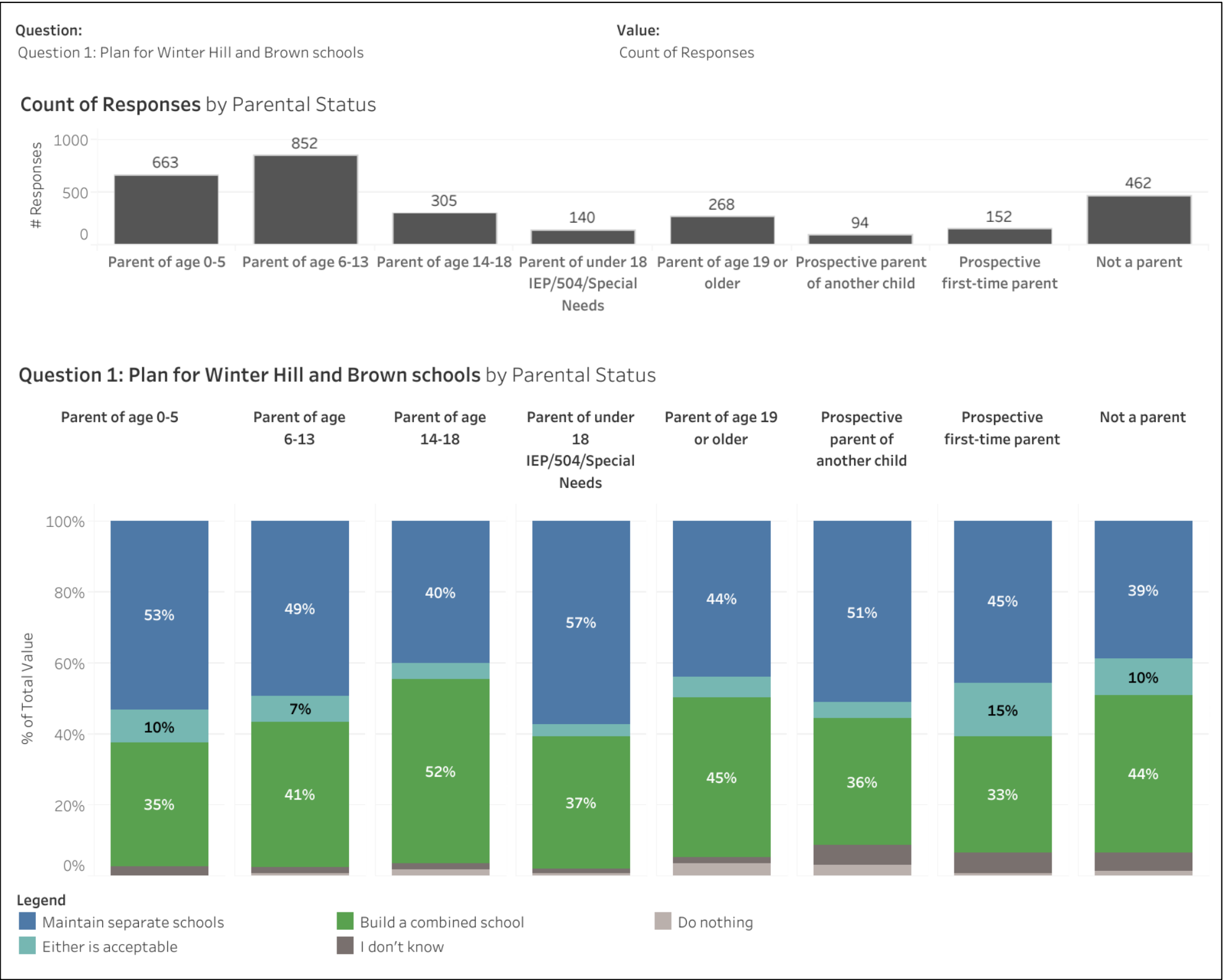
One survey demographic question asked whether respondents are parents, intend to become parents, or are not parents. For Question 1, **parents of children age 0 to 13, prospective parents of a first or an additional child, and parents of children under age 18 with IEPs tend to prefer maintaining separate schools.**

On the other hand, parents of high school-aged children, and people who aren’t parents, prefer a combined school. For high school parents, perhaps this is due to the accumulated perspective from their children’s years at SPS, or because of direct and positive experience at the large new high school. Non-parents may be motivated by wanting something that is more cost-effective.

Parents of older than high school-aged children are evenly split between separate schools and a combined school.

For perspective, 14% of households in Somerville have children under age 18 at home. Of approximately 35,000 total households in Somerville, only about 4,800 households have children under age 18 at home.⁴

⁴ Source: US Census Bureau, 2023 5-year American Community Survey estimates, Table B11003, Family Type by Presence and Age of Own Children Under 18 Years

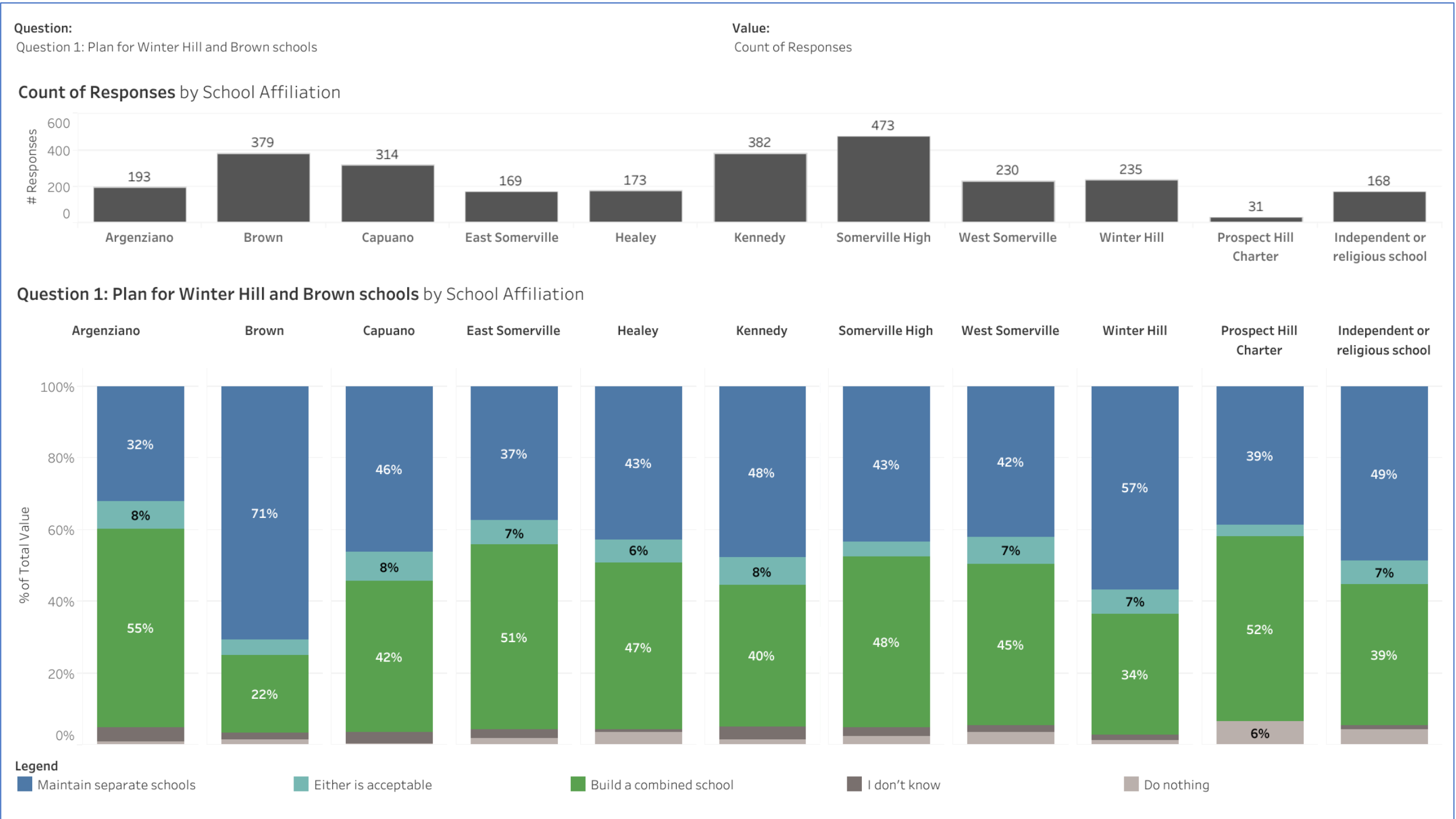


Q1: EFFECT OF SCHOOL AFFILIATION

One survey demographic question asked whether respondents were affiliated with a particular school, either now or in the past. For Question 1, responses varied by school affiliation.

Brown and Winter Hill-affiliated respondents strongly prefer separate schools. Similarly, respondents affiliated with Kennedy, and to a lesser extent those affiliated with Capuano (whose families tend to come from across the City), as well as those affiliated with independent and religious schools, also prefer separate schools.

Respondents affiliated with the other public schools (Argenziano, East, Healey, Somerville High, West, and Prospect Hill Charter) **prefer a combined school**, to varying degrees.

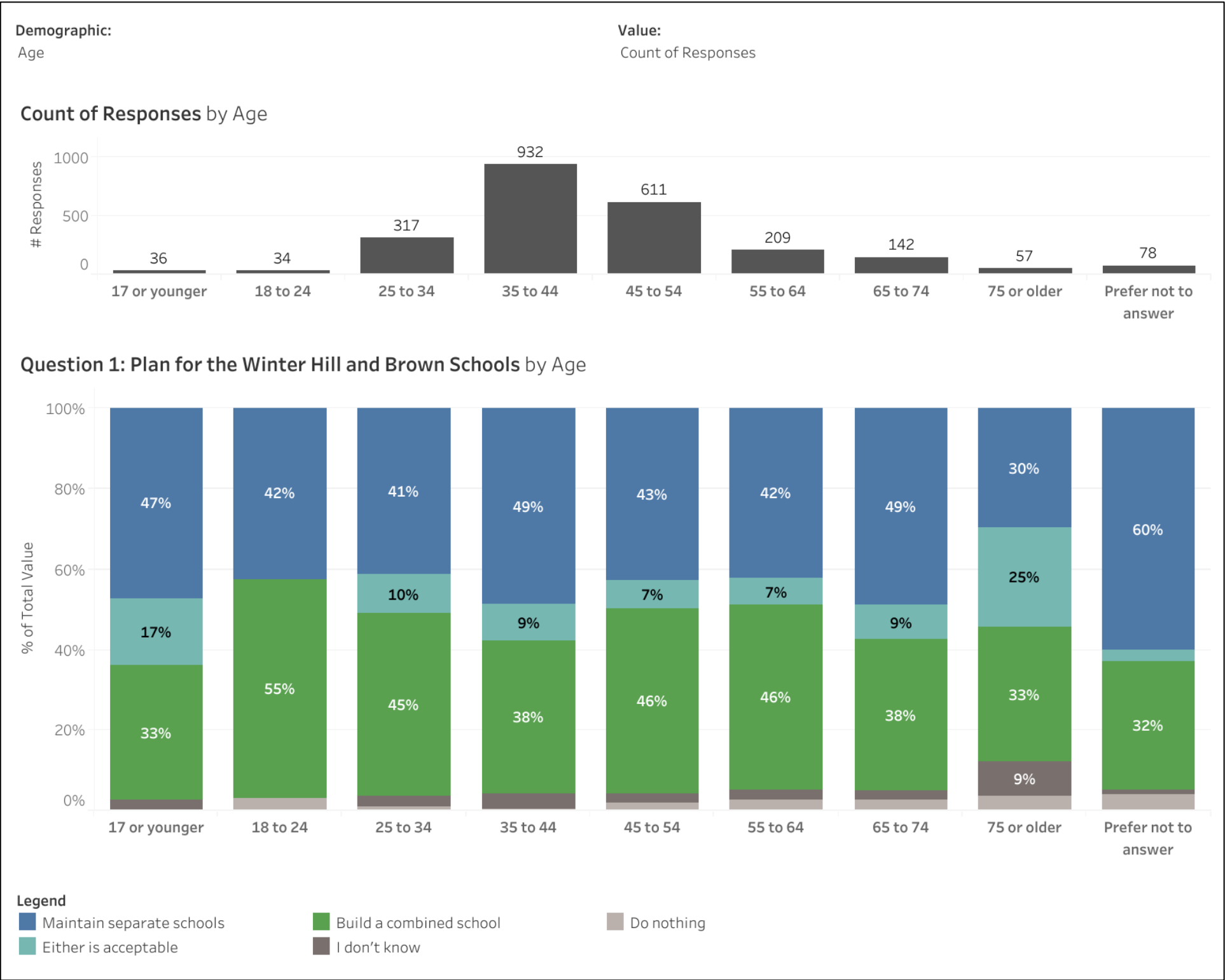


Q1: EFFECT OF RESPONDENT AGE

Responses to Question 1 by age of respondent varied in a way that likely relates to direct and recent experience with the school system.

The respondents in age groups 35 to 44, as well as children who took the survey, prefer separate schools. Adults of ages 35 to 44 are within the age band most likely to have school-aged children, and this group also took the survey in the highest numbers. The respondents between ages 65 and 74, as well as respondents who did not wish to disclose their age, also preferred to maintain separate schools.

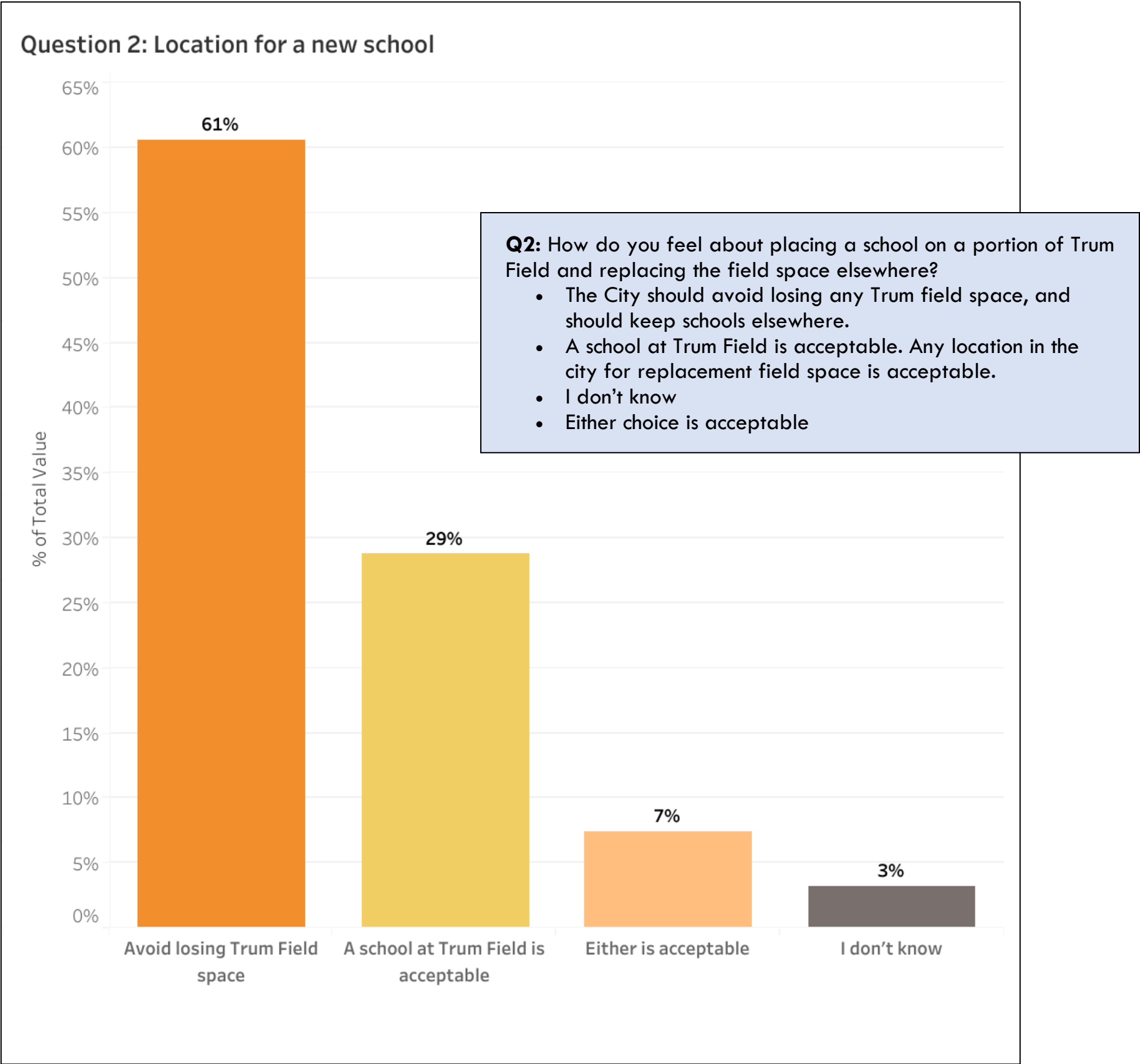
The other age groups – who could be loosely described as not currently in the school system – were either closely divided in preference between separate schools and a combined school, or somewhat more in favor of a combined school. These age groups likely include those who do not yet have children, those with high school-aged or grown children, or those with no children.



Question 2, Use of Trum Field

OVERALL PREFERENCE: Across all Wards, as well as all demographic and other characteristic subgroups, every category preferred to not use Trum field for a school. Only about 30% of respondents found the use of Trum field for a school acceptable. Although this percentage varied somewhat across demographic categories, no Ward populations or demographic categories clearly preferred the use of Trum field for a school.

Note that the first Question 2 choice, to avoid Trum and keep schools elsewhere, is worded clearly, and results reinforce the conclusion that a strong majority prefers to avoid using Trum for a school. However, it is possible that some respondents interpreted the second choice for Question 2, “a school at Trum is acceptable,” to mean “either Trum or another location is acceptable,” that is, a selection of this choice is not necessarily a clear indicator of a strict “yes” to the idea of a school *only* at Trum field.

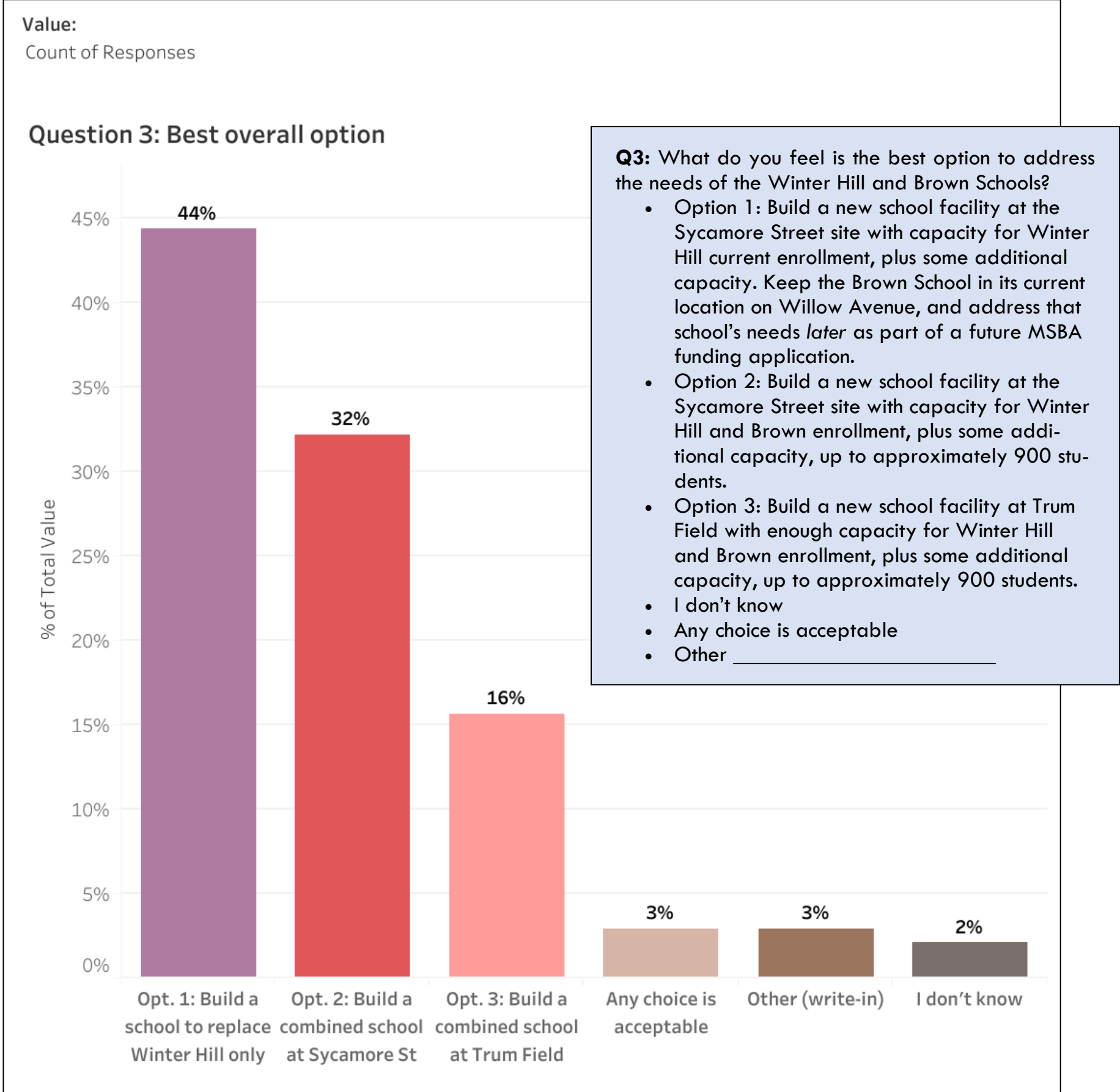


Question 3, Preference Among Three Choices

OVERALL PREFERENCE: For Question 3, the highest number of respondents reported that a new separate facility at Sycamore Street was their preferred option, followed by a combined school at Sycamore, then by a combined school at Trum Field. While the largest number of respondents (1,077) chose Option 1, which maintains two separate schools, the total number of respondents that selected one of the locations for a combined school is larger (1,161, the total of 781 for Option 2 and 380 for Option 3). Thus, the results for Question 3 align with the overall preferences of Questions 1 and 2, indicating that respondents are divided between preferences for separate and combined schools, and that Trum is the least popular option.

While Question 3 forced people to pick one choice, some survey respondents noted in their write-in comments in Question 5 that they would have liked to be able to pick two of the three options as acceptable. With this in mind, and taking into account the results from Question 2 indicating majority support for avoiding use of Trum Field for a school, it is interesting to consider if the people who picked Trum Field in Question 3 would pivot to support Option 2, a combined school at Sycamore, if Trum was removed as an option. If so, the votes for a combined school could be higher than the votes for keeping separate schools.

Across different demographic subgroups, the response patterns from Question 3 tend to align with those seen within those groups for Question 1.



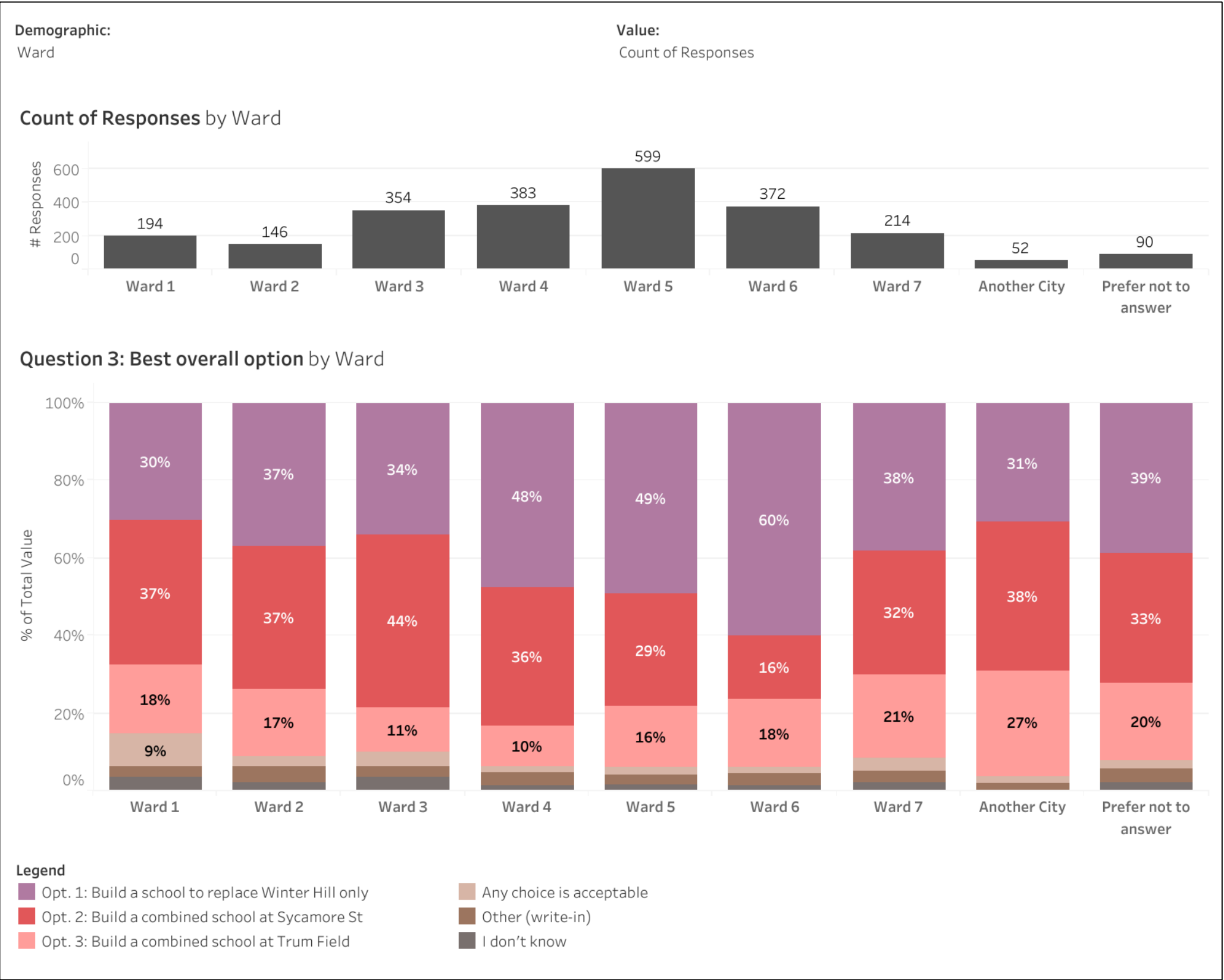
Q3: EFFECT OF WARD

The most significant predictor of preferences for Question 3 was what Ward the respondent lived in.

As with responses to Question 1, **Wards 4, 5, and 6 favor separate schools.** Wards 4 and 5 list a combined school at Sycamore as the second most popular option, while Ward 6 (Brown) is split between Sycamore and Trum for those who did not choose the separate schools option.

As with responses to Question 1, **Wards 1, 2, and 3 (at the eastern end of City) prefer a combined school at Sycamore rather than maintaining separate schools.** Respondents from another city (such as teachers or others who work in Somerville, but do not live here) also preferred a combined school at Sycamore.

Question 3’s results reinforce the general views by Ward on separate versus combined schools that were shown in responses to Question 1. In Wards 4, 5, and 6, the preference for maintaining separate schools remains higher (but not by as pronounced a margin) than the total support for some location of combined school (Sycamore or Trum). **In Wards 1, 2, 3, and 7, the preference for some location of combined school (Sycamore and Trum locations) is higher than the preference for maintaining separate schools.**

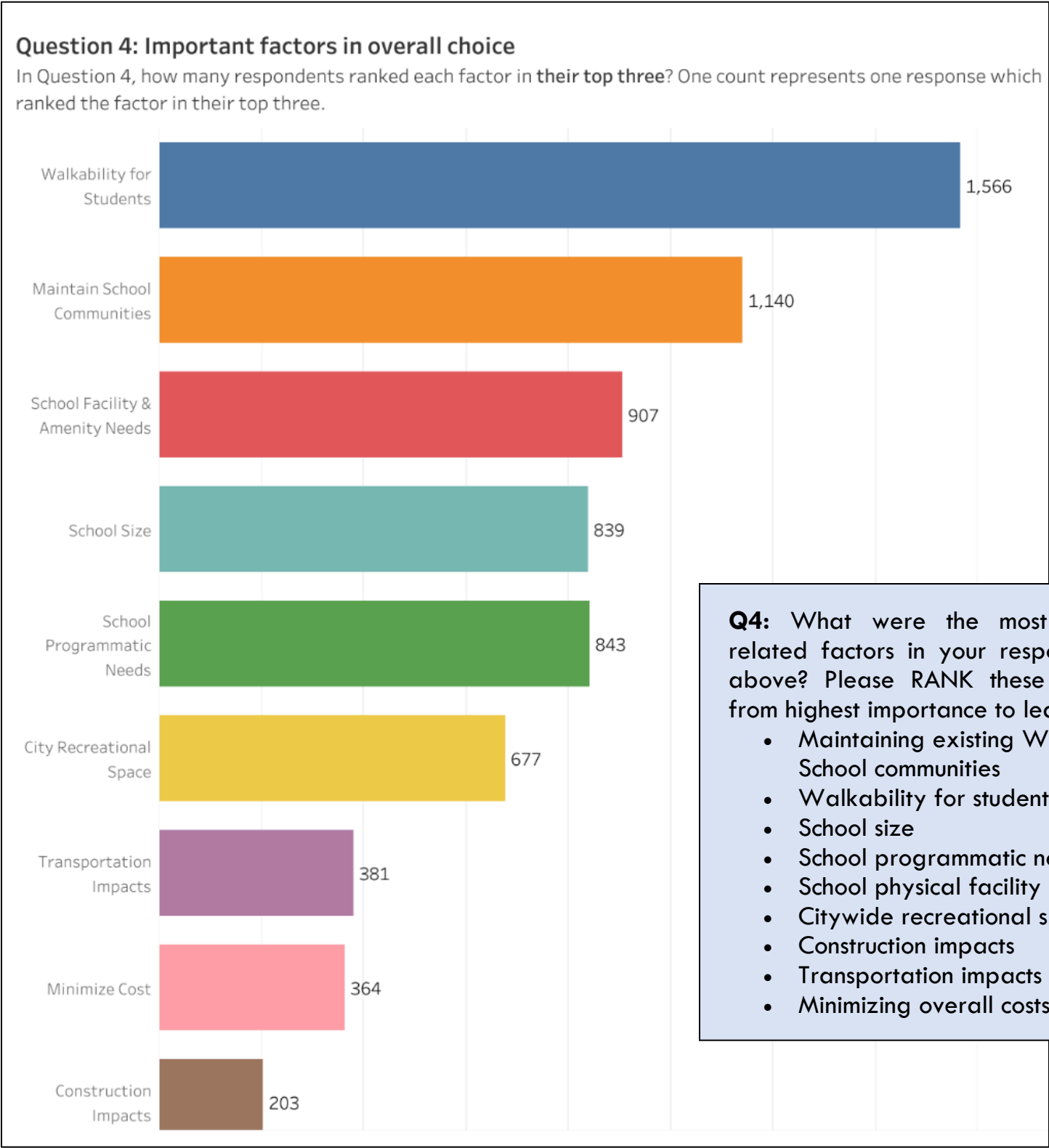


Question 4, Factors for Decision

The responses to Question 4 indicate the number of times that a factor⁵ was in a participant’s top three choices. For example, while Walkability is at the top of results, it doesn’t mean it was the *number one* factor for the most respondents, but rather that it was the factor that was most often included in people’s top three choices.

OVERALL PREFERENCE: Across the City as a whole, respondents selected “walkability” most often as one of the top three reasons for their choice, even when they chose a combined school. Even those respondents located far from the possible sites in question – as indicated by Ward – still felt that walkability was an important factor. Furthermore, walkability was the most common reason for all income groups, from lowest to highest.

⁵ The factors were listed in the same order for each participant. If a respondent did not re-order any of the factors, it was assumed they skipped the question, and their response was dropped. This was the case 120 times.

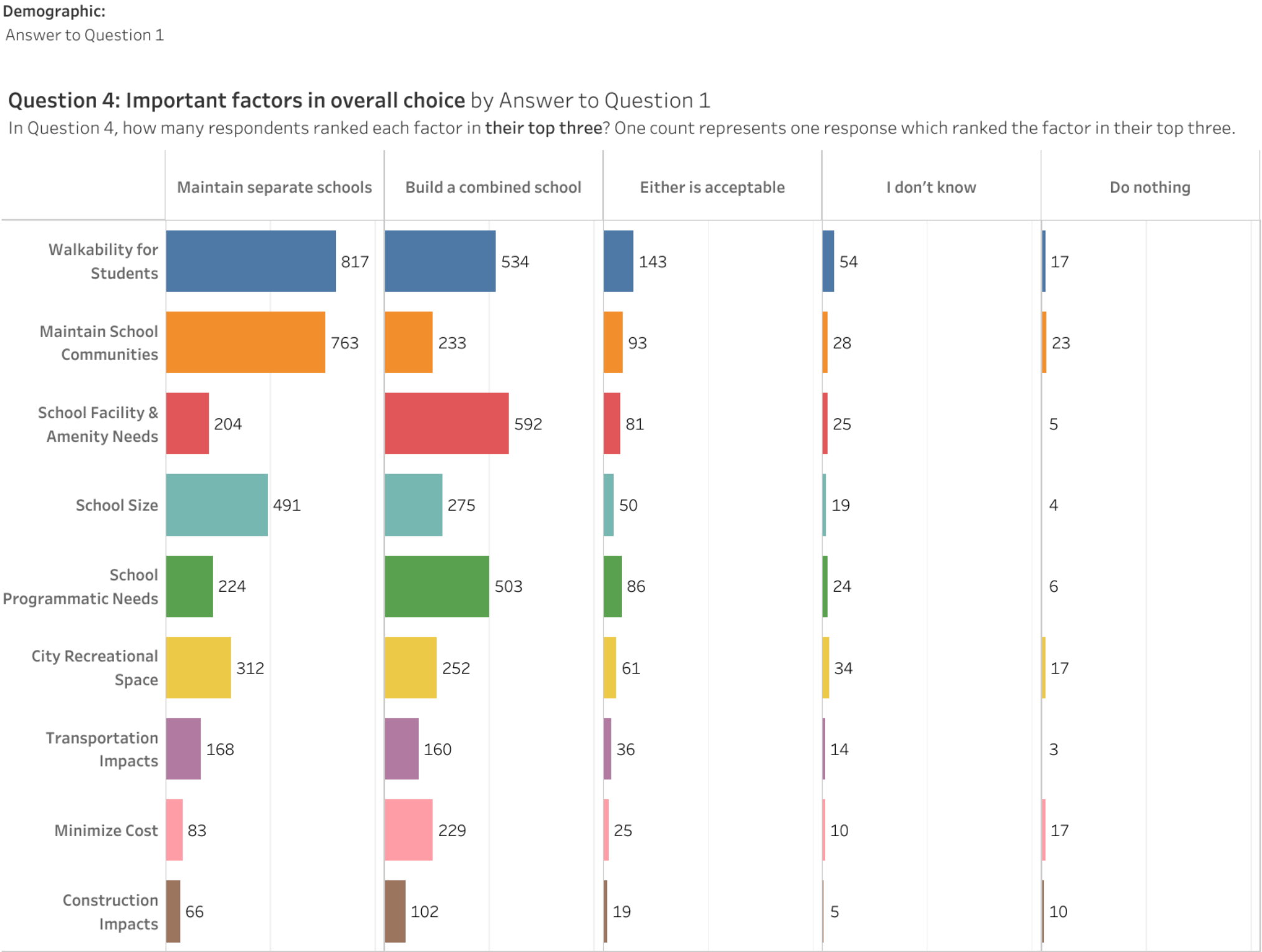


QUESTION 4: EFFECT OF QUESTION 1 CHOICE

Responses to Question 4 can also be evaluated in terms of how people answered Question 1.

The groups that preferred to maintain separate schools in Question 1 seemed to feel that smaller schools would be better for students, and wanted to maintain local neighborhood schools. The top three reasons this group gave were, in order, “walkability for students,” “maintain school communities,” and “school size.”

The groups that preferred to build a combined school in Question 1 seemed motivated by perceptions that a combined school could offer more opportunities to its student population. The top three reasons given were, in order, “school facility & amenity needs”, “walkability for students,” and “school programmatic needs.” Although not in the top reasons, these respondents also selected “minimize cost” and “construction impacts” as reasons at a much higher rate than people who favored two separate schools.



Question 5, Additional Comments

Over 1,000 respondents wrote in comments (often lengthy and impassioned) with opinions and perceptions on Question 5. The respondents' sentiments reflect broad agreement on the urgency of making a decision, and in the goal of preserving Trum Field, but **deep divisions on the remaining scope. It seems clear that the final decision will face significant pressure and scrutiny due to deep, conflicting priorities regarding the size and community structure of schools.** Four major themes in responses are highlighted next.

THEME 1: A UNIFIED OPPOSITION TO USING TRUM FIELD

The single clearest consensus is the strong, sometimes vehement, rejection of using any part of Trum Field for new school construction. Comments describe it as an "irreplaceable" green space and a "community gem." Opponents cite its critical role in city-wide recreation and youth sports, along with concerns about how a school here would increase traffic congestion on Broadway, raise safety concerns in crossing the intersection of Broadway and Medford Street,

and be at risk due to the proximity to frequent machinery and vehicular traffic and hazardous chemicals from the DPW facility, and the likely soil contamination at Trum Field.

THEME 2: FRUSTRATION WITH TIMELINE AND URGENT DEMAND FOR ACTION

Comments reflect widespread concern over the project's pace, with repeated demands for the City to make a decision and expressions of frustration with the time frame of the state's MSBA process. Some respondents note that most current Winter Hill students, already displaced for over two years, will graduate before a new school is completed, and call the current situation unacceptable.

THEME 3: THE CORE CONFLICT OF CONSOLIDATION VS. SEPARATE SMALL SCHOOLS

The core debate pits ideas of efficiency and equity against the value of maintaining smaller community-focused schools. Recurring arguments for both sides are summarized next.

In Favor of Maintaining Separate Schools

Supporters of maintaining two smaller, separate schools argued that this option would:

- **Preserve neighborhood identity and community.** Many respondents – from both Brown and Winter Hill communities – highly value the unique, "small, close-knit" communities of their schools. They say that keeping the schools separated would preserve long-standing traditions, parent networks, and sense of heritage that are built around the physical location of these vital neighborhood anchors.
- **Better reflect an educational philosophy that smaller is better.** Many respondents said that a 900-student "mega-school" is simply too large for children, makes it easier for students to "fall through the cracks," and compromises the learning environment. Brown's small size was cited as a key factor in its historically-high academic performance and rankings, and proponents of keeping Brown argued that the city should aim to replicate this successful model, not dismantle it in the name of cost efficiency. Some comments focused on how closure of Brown, the only "small school" option, might lead some fami-

lies to leave the public school system or move out of Somerville. Parents of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or other special needs also expressed concern that the size and density of a combined school would be overwhelming and detrimental to children's stability and learning environment.

- **Maintain walkability and accessibility.** Because Somerville does not provide universal bussing, many felt that keeping schools local would ensure more students can walk or bike safely to and from school, a major draw for families choosing to live in the city. Similarly, respondents felt that merging two school populations in one facility would be detrimental, forcing many more families to drive long distances, leading to traffic congestion and safety issues at drop-off and pick-up times. Moving a school too far from its original neighborhood was also portrayed as an equity issue, placing a greater burden on low-income families who may lack reliable transportation options.

In Favor of a New Combined School

Supporters of a combined school highlighted that this option would:

- **Provide the most fiscally-responsible path,** maximizing State MSBA funding. Many respondents emphasized that trying to fund a second, separate, school project (for Brown) is far less likely to receive additional state funding, and would therefore be likely to place a large burden solely on Somerville taxpayers.
- **Address equity concerns by integrating the Brown School community with the Winter Hill population.** Respondents repeatedly refer to Brown as a highly-resourced community serving a disproportionately affluent, less diverse student body compared to other schools like Winter Hill. Some said that consolidating these two communities – a chance to "bridge East and West Somerville" – could help to create a truly diverse learning environment for all children in one building, including those with physical disabilities or specialized learning needs.

- **Create superior facilities and shared resources.** Respondents stated that a new "mega-school" can be designed with modern facilities and shared common spaces, such as large gymnasiums, dedicated cafeterias, auditoriums, and specialized classrooms for music, art, and technology. Comments mentioned that a larger student population could support a wider range of high-quality specialized teachers and programs (such as gifted programs, language tracks, and robust special education services) more efficiently than two smaller, separate schools.

THEME 4: DEDICATED MIDDLE SCHOOL OPTION AT NEW SCHOOL

A frequent option from commentors is to abandon the City's K-8 system and create a city-wide middle school (grades 6-8 or 7-8). This would free up space at existing K-8 schools, allowing them to become smaller, walkable, neighborhood elementary (K-5) schools. For these respondents, a separate middle school is seen as "better developmentally, socially, and academically" for pre-teens and paving a smoother transition to high school.

Question 6, Funding Priorities

Overall results indicate that top Citywide funding priorities are community facilities, affordable housing, and open space / parks.

Other analysis, not shown in the chart here, reveals subtle differences. When evaluated by Ward, Ward 5 chose Community Facilities most often, followed by Open Space. Ward 6 (Brown School) chose Open Space most often, closely followed by Bike/Ped Safety and then by Community Facilities and Affordable Housing (the last two nearly tied). In Ward 4 and in other Wards, Community Facilities and Affordable Housing were the most common choices.

When reviewed Citywide by income band, the very highest-income households (income over \$200,000) chose most frequently Bike/ Ped Safety and Accessibility, then Community Facilities (libraries), then Open Space (Parks). Nearly all other income groups listed Affordable Housing most frequently, followed by Community Facilities (Libraries), and with other factors farther behind.

