The State of Employee Engagement in K-12 Districts

Results and Analysis

School Year: 2025-2026

Managed Research

A Note from the Sogolytics Managed Research Team

Engaged employees build the relationships and culture that support student success.

Employee engagement is a driver of district success. Engaged employees are more committed to their work, more likely to stay, and more likely to speak well of their workplace and profession. In K-12 education this matters even more, because the quality of interactions among educators, staff, students, and families shapes the learning environment every day.

Measuring engagement, as well as the factors behind it, helps district and school leaders understand the employee experience and build environments where staff can do their best work. A focus on engagement can strengthen morale, improve retention, and support a culture of continuous improvement during periods of change.

Engagement is shaped by many connected factors, including a shared sense of purpose, relationships with supervisors and colleagues, confidence in district leadership, opportunities to grow, meaningful recognition, clear communication, and the chance to provide input into decisions. Understanding how employees view these areas points leaders toward both their strengths and their best opportunities to improve the employee experience.

The Sogolytics State of Employee Engagement in K12 Districts report walks through employee perceptions on each of these factors in their place of employment and identifies areas most connected to employee engagement. These insights help district leaders prioritize points of celebration and areas of focus in their districts.

Survey Design

Sogolytics developed the Employee Engagement Survey to provide district leaders with insights into the factors within their schools that contribute the most to employee engagement, as well as prioritize areas of improvement.

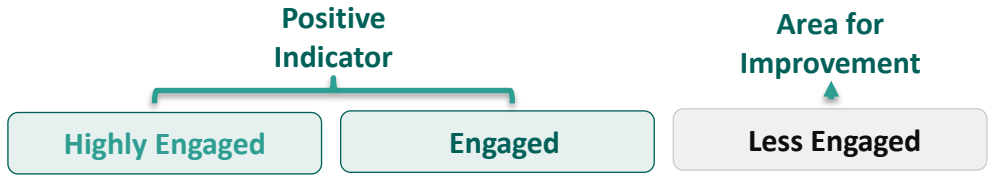
Goals of the Employee Engagement Survey

1. Measure the level of engagement of district employees
2. Classify employees as less engaged, engaged, or highly engaged
3. Identify where engagement and the workplace can be celebrated or improved

The Survey Consists of Two Parts

PART 1: Overall Engagement

Items measuring each employee's level of engagement on a five-point scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). Each participant is scored and classified as less engaged (below 3.5), engaged (3.5 to 4.5), or highly engaged (above 4.5).



PART 2: Engagement Drivers

Items influencing employee engagement, falling under seven dimensions:

- Strategic Planning
- District-level Leadership
- Site-level Leadership
- Recognition & Appreciation
- Career Growth & Development
- Colleague Interactions
- Work Environment

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About the Report

This report presents Employee Engagement results from districts that administered the survey during the 2025-2026 school year.

The results provide benchmarking data that lets districts compare their findings with peer districts nationwide and identify strengths and opportunities.

Survey administration varied by district, with most surveys open for about two weeks.

Surveys were distributed through unique email invitations and public links posted on district or school websites, and could be completed on computers, tablets, or smartphones. Staff could respond once for each site where they worked, and surveys were translated into selected languages when appropriate.

Figures and charts display average responses across all districts.

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Data labels below 5% are omitted from charts and graphs.

Summary of Methodology

Sogolytics Uses Census Sampling

Census sampling provides data reflective of all voices in the community. While all staff members within each district were invited to take the survey, not all participated. Statistical tests designed to infer the perceptions of a larger population from a smaller sample size are not appropriate; rather, descriptive statistics provide the most accurate representation of the data.

Types of Data Collection:

- Random Sampling: Involves selecting a representative subset of the population. It's practical for large populations but carries a risk of sampling errors.
- Census Sampling: Involves studying the entire population. It provides complete data without sampling error.

Census sampling can be more accurate and reliable than random sampling:

- Full Representation: Includes every individual in the population, ensuring that all subgroups are represented.
- No Sampling Error: Since every individual is surveyed, there is no risk of sampling error, leading to more accurate data.
- Granular Insights: Provides detailed information about the entire population, enabling analysis at macro and micro levels.
- Non-Response Bias: This can be minimized since the goal is to reach everyone in the population. Since every individual is included, there is no selection bias, which can occur in random sampling if the sample is not perfectly representative.

Key Findings and Insights

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STRATEGIC INSIGHT

Key Takeaway

Where is the gap between the leaders closest to employees and the leaders at the top?

Which items are both low-rated and most closely tied to overall engagement?

Where do employees separate their site leaders from their district leaders?

What already works well, and should be protected rather than changed?

Executive Summary

Key Findings from the 2025-2026 School Year

- **Employees are engaged in their daily work.** 95% of employees report being engaged in their work, 78% are proud to work for their district, and 80% are motivated to contribute more than what is expected of them.
- **Employees rate the leaders closest to them highly.** Just over three-quarters (77%) of employees view their principal or direct supervisor as making good decisions, keeping their word, communicating effectively clearly, and providing support when problems arise.
- **Confidence drops for district-level leadership.** Half of employees (50%) say district leaders make good decisions, 52% say leaders explain the reasoning behind decisions, and 53% say leaders value employee feedback. District leadership is the clearest opportunity to move engagement. These items are both lower-rated and among the most closely tied to overall engagement.
- **Feeling appreciated is the item most closely tied to engagement.** 65% of employees feel appreciated for their work. Appreciation is one of the strongest factors influencing employee engagement (.69).
- **Recognition follows the same pattern as leadership.** While 73% of employees feel recognized by their direct supervisor, fewer (62%) feel recognized by district leaders. Because district-level appreciation is closely tied to engagement (.62), this gap presents a key engagement risk.
- **Everyday work life rates highly, while employee voice lags.** Employees report a safe environment (92%), collaboration (82%), and mutual respect (80%), all strengths to protect. Fewer, 59%, say the district includes employee voice in strategic planning.

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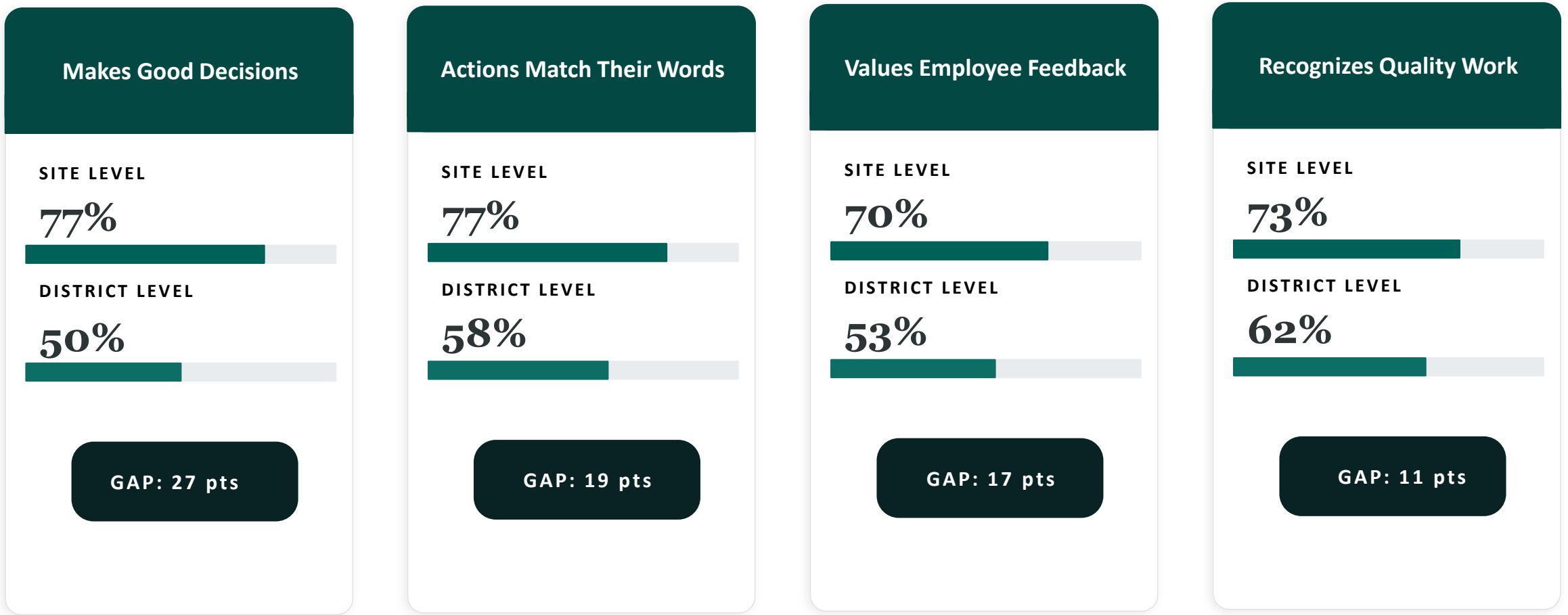
The Most Consistent Finding: Employees Trust the Leaders Closest to Them

On the same questions, site leaders are rated well above district leaders.



The issue is less about leadership effectiveness and more about the distance employees feel from district-level leaders.

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From Data to Action: Four Strategic Priorities

The most actionable implications from the 2025-2026 Employee Engagement benchmark

1 Close the District Leadership Trust Gap

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

The four lowest-rated, highest-correlation driver items sit in District-level Leadership.

HOW TO RESPOND

- Explain the reasoning behind district decisions
- Create visible ways for employees to give input
- Show where employee feedback changed an outcome
- Report decisions back with context

2 Make Appreciation a Practice, Not an Event

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

Feeling appreciated is the item most closely tied to engagement. District recognition trails supervisor recognition.

HOW TO RESPOND

- Build district recognition that reaches every role
- Ask employees what recognition is meaningful
- Make appreciation regular and specific

3 Protect Strong Site-Level Leadership

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

Site leaders rate highly on decisions, follow-through, communication, and support, and those items track closely with engagement.

HOW TO RESPOND

- Equip principals and supervisors to keep it up
- Share what effective site leaders do
- Protect the time and trust that make it work

4 Strengthen Employee Voice in Planning

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

Just over half of employees say the district includes their voice in strategic planning. Understanding priorities and having a say sit among the areas to improve.

HOW TO RESPOND

- Build structured input cycles tied to planning
- Communicate priorities clearly
- Show how employee input shaped the plan

Source: 2025-2026 Employee Engagement Survey

Engagement Drivers

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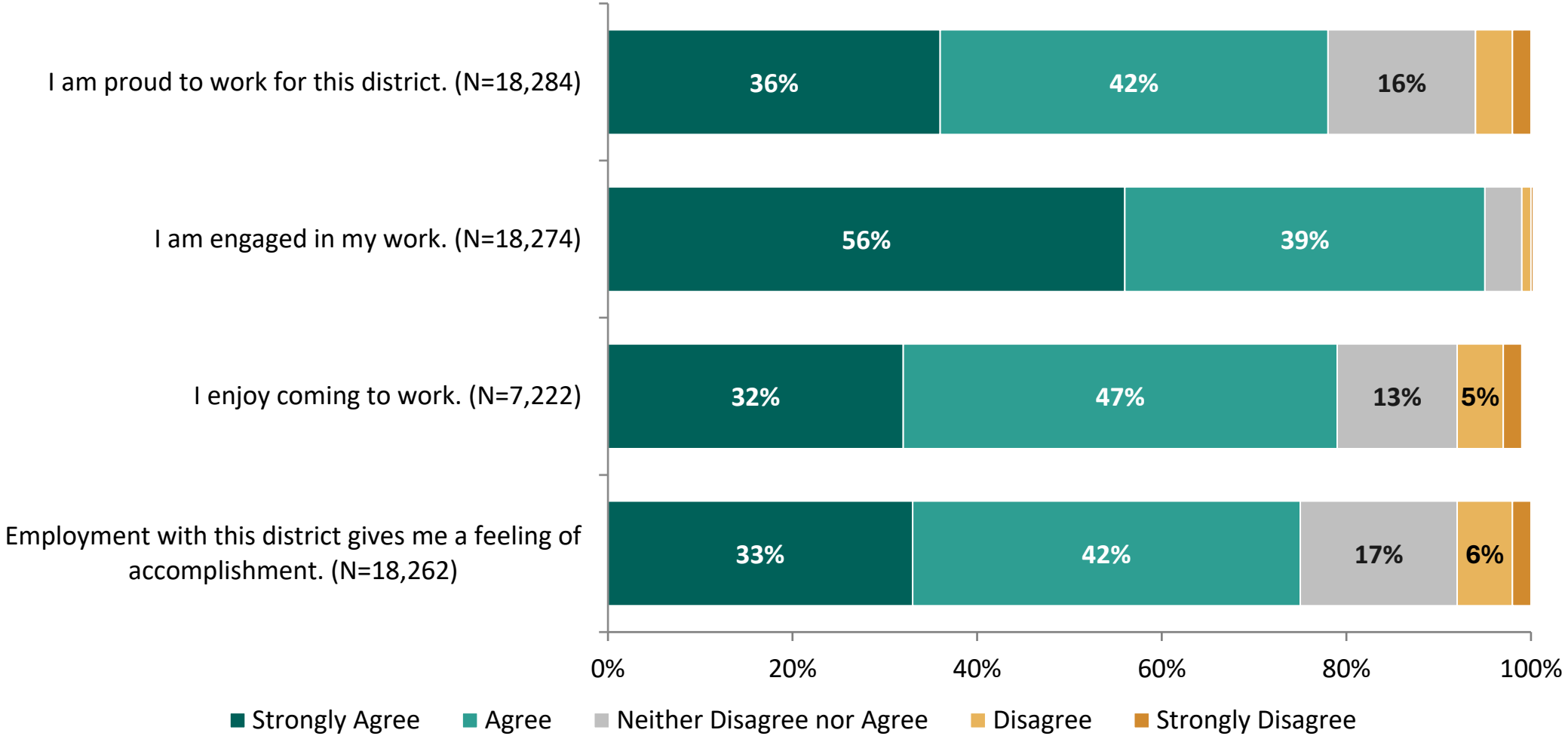
Overall Engagement

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



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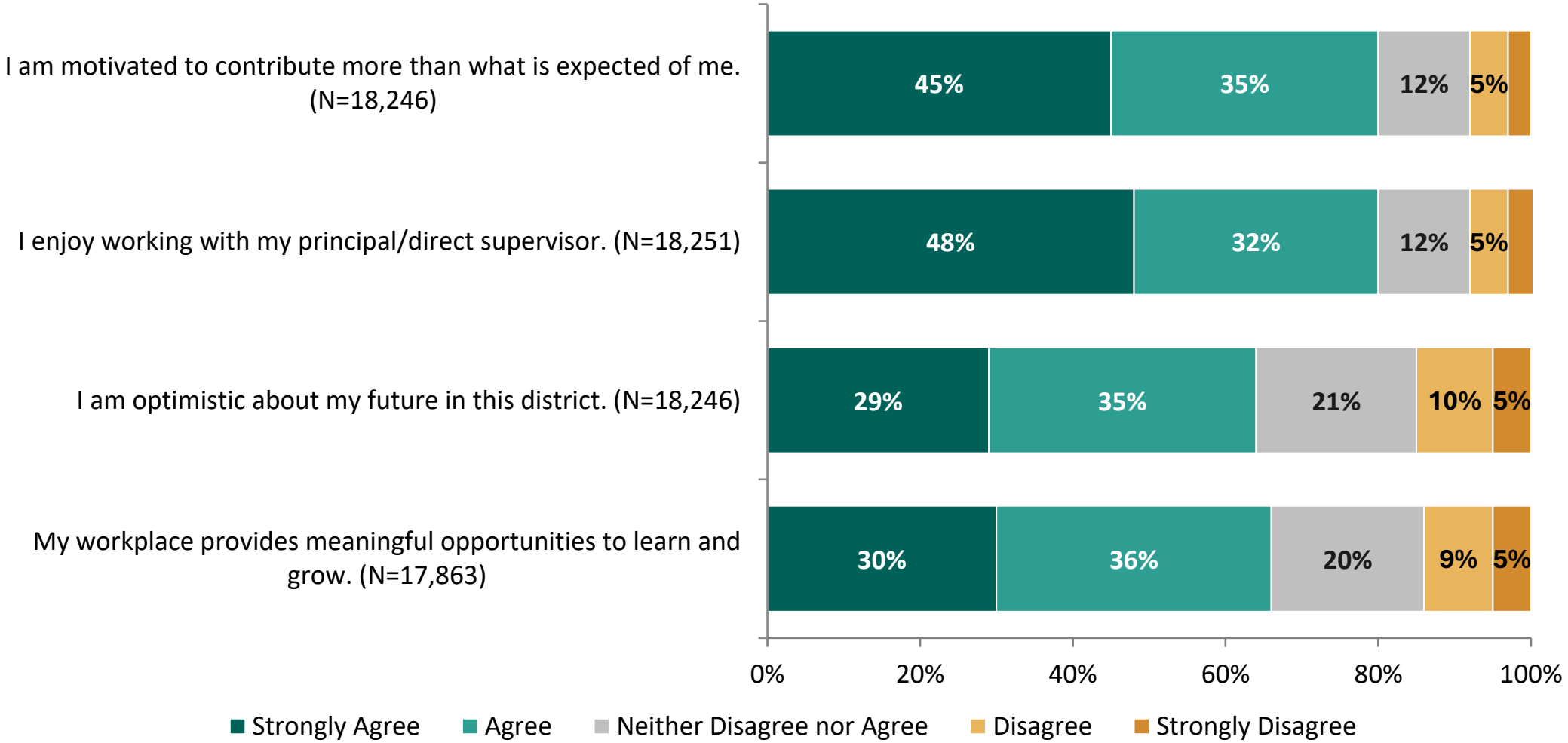
Overall Engagement (Continued)

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



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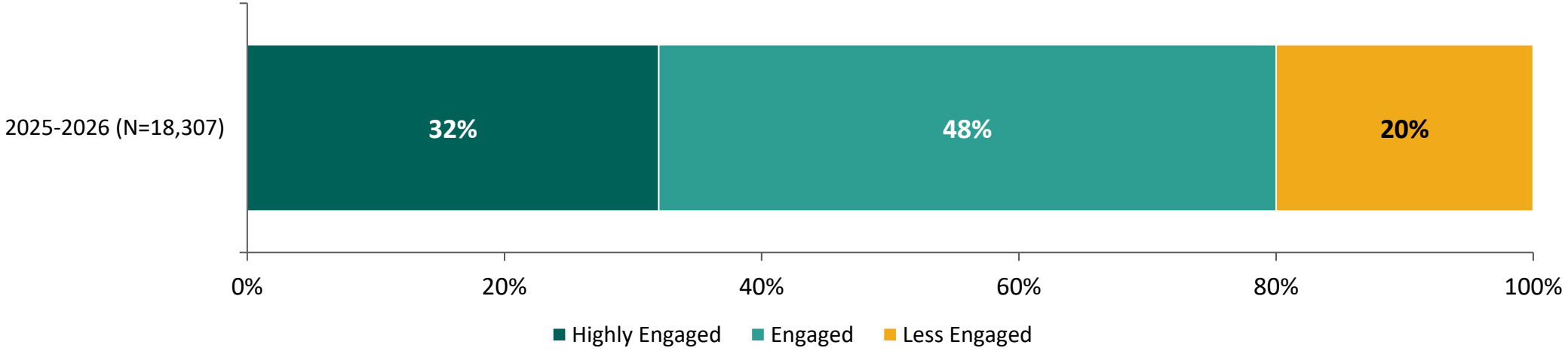
Overall Engagement Classifications

Each participant's engagement score was calculated as the average of their responses to the Overall Engagement items. To quantify responses, each Likert-scale option was assigned a numerical value as follows:

- **Strongly Disagree** = 1
- **Disagree** = 2
- **Neither Agree nor Disagree** = 3
- **Agree** = 4
- **Strongly Agree** = 5

Based on this average, participants were classified into one of three engagement levels:

- **Less Engaged:** Average score below 3.5
- **Engaged:** Average score from 3.5 to 4.5
- **Highly Engaged:** Average score above 4.5



Engagement Drivers

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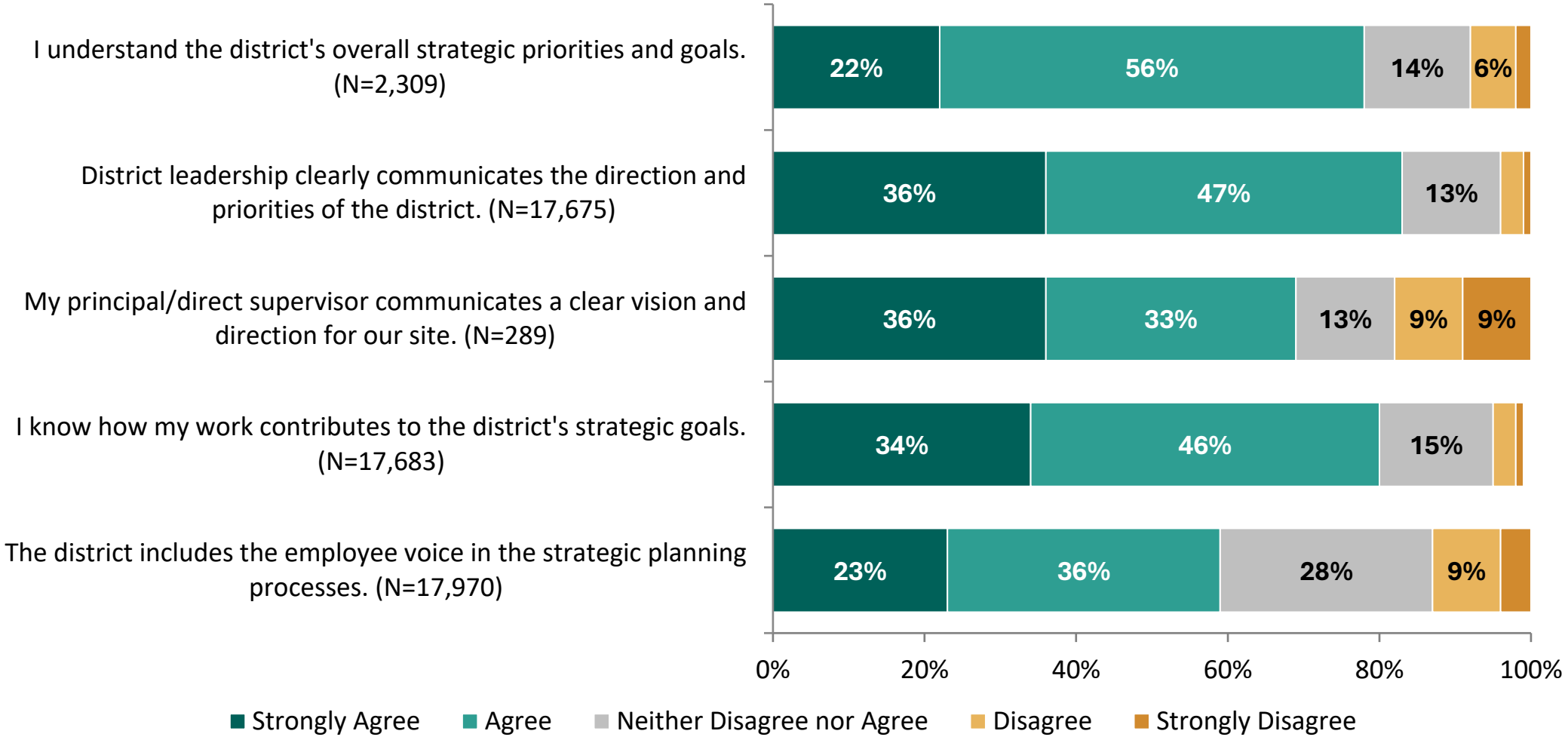
Strategic Planning

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



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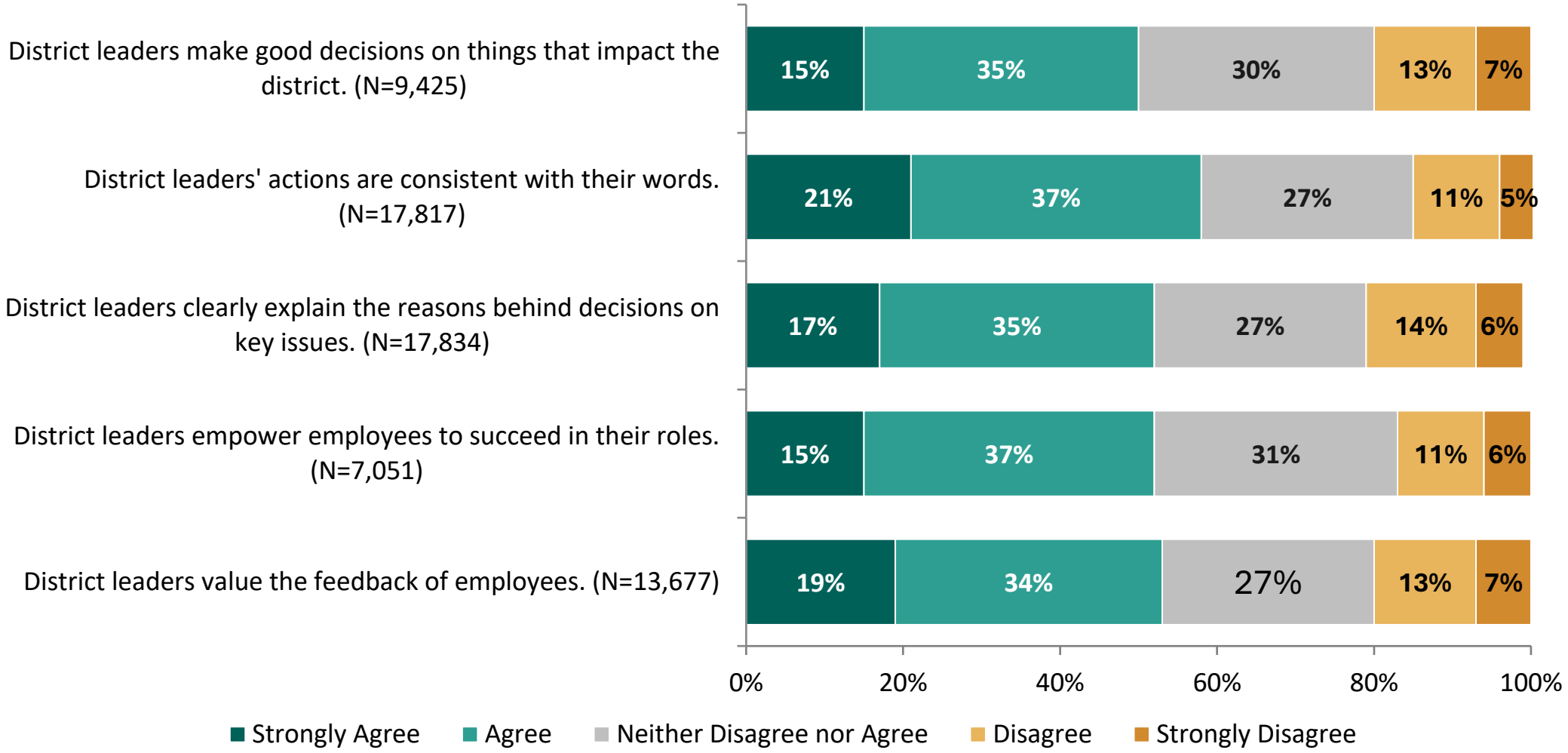
District-level Leadership

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



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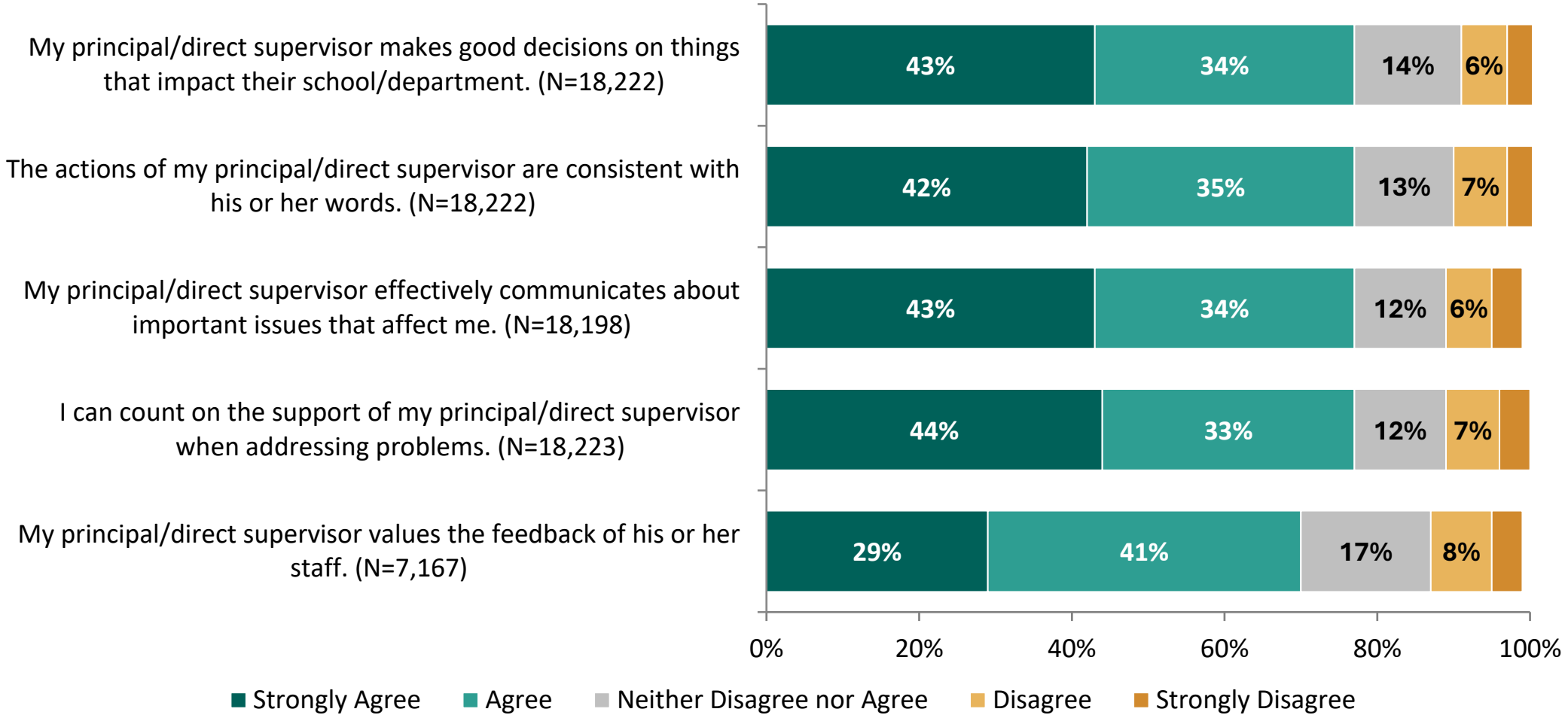
Site-level Leadership

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



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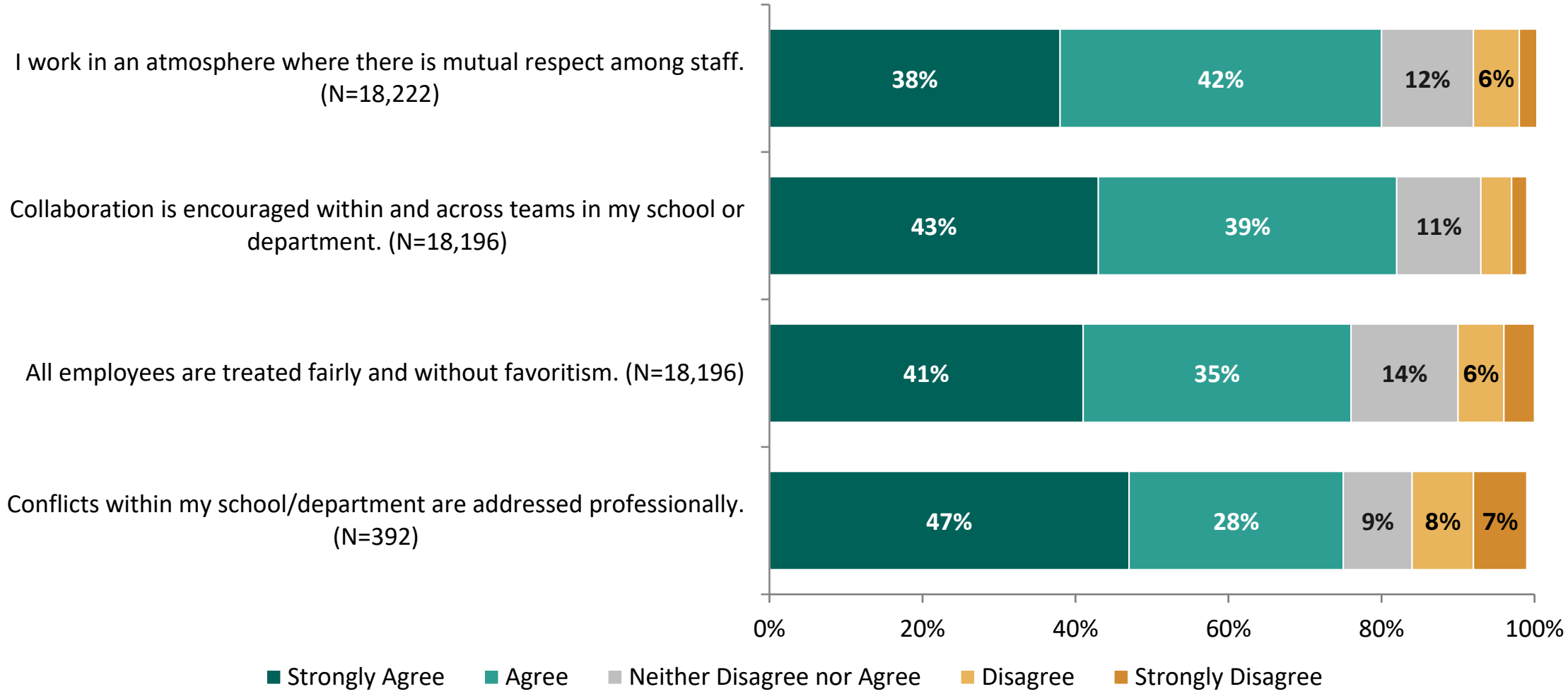
Colleague Interactions

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



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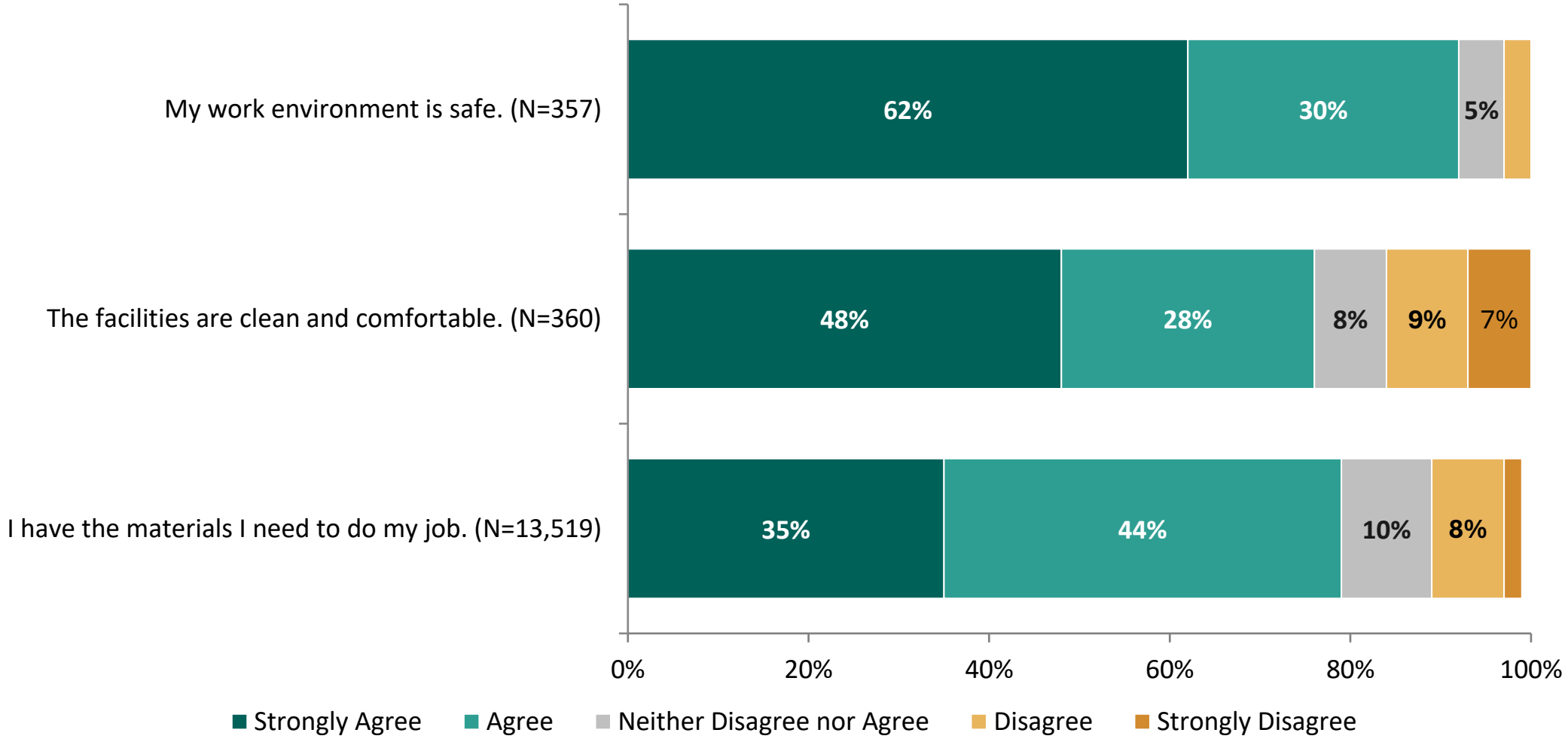
Work Environment

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



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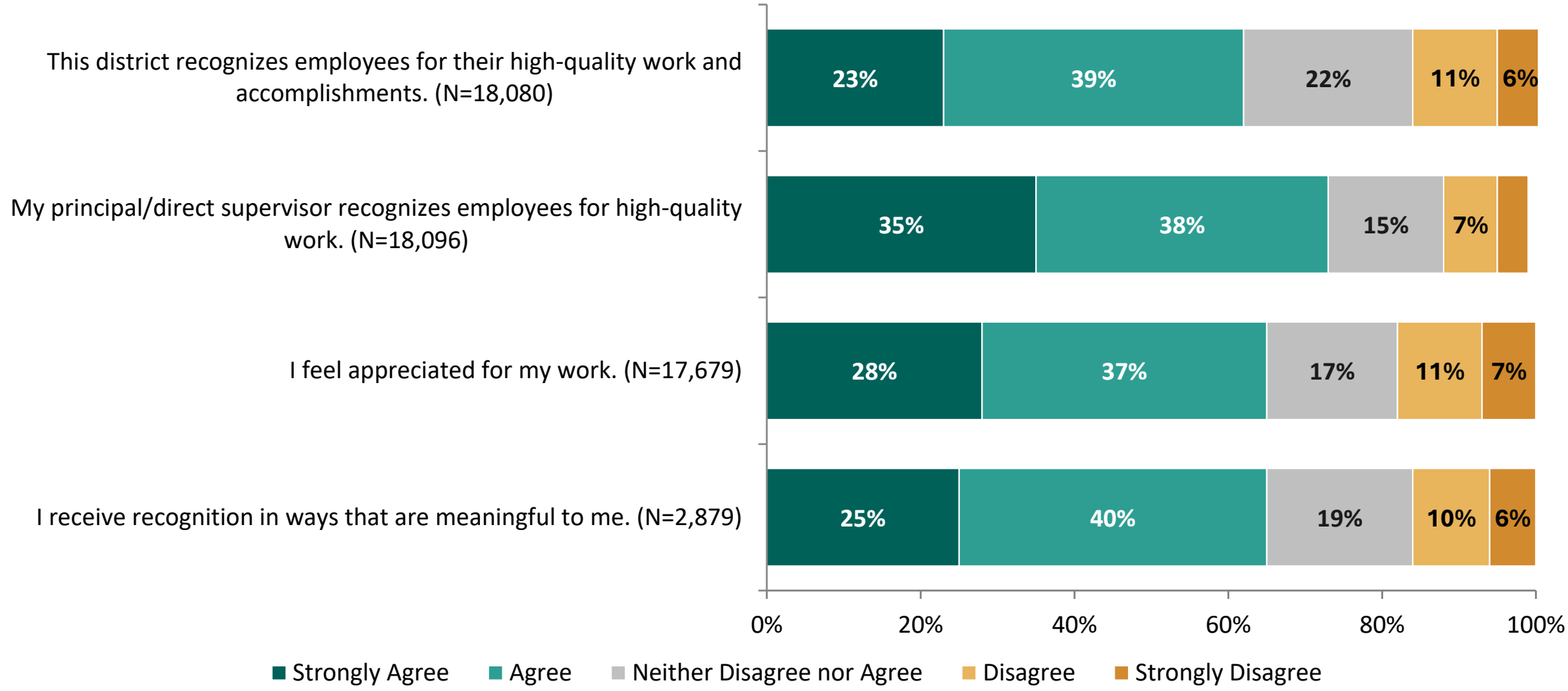
Recognition and Appreciation

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



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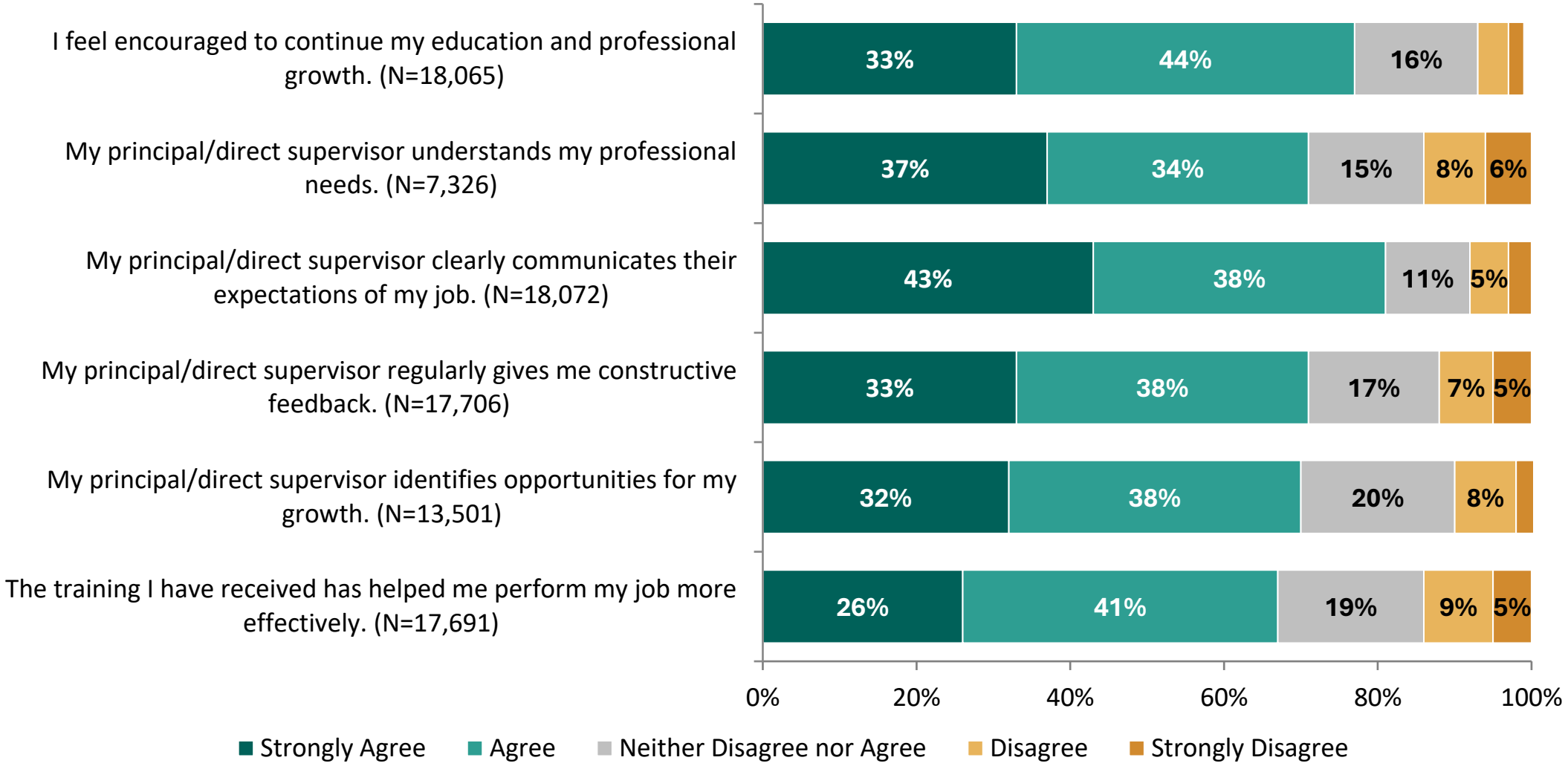
Career Growth and Development

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



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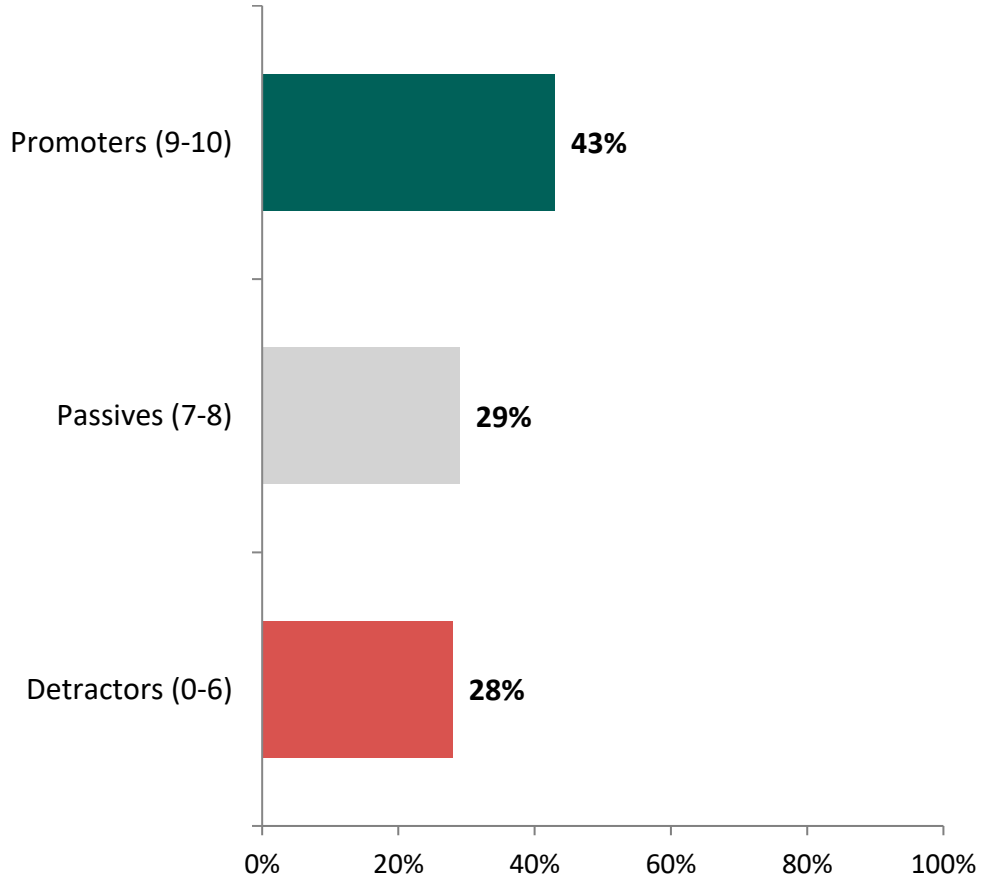
Net Promoter Score

School/Department – Net Promoter Score

If you knew someone in your professional network who was a fit for a position within your school/department, how likely would you be to recommend your school/department as a place to work? (N=14,776)



The Net Promoter Score® (NPS) is calculated by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters, giving a value between -100 and +100.

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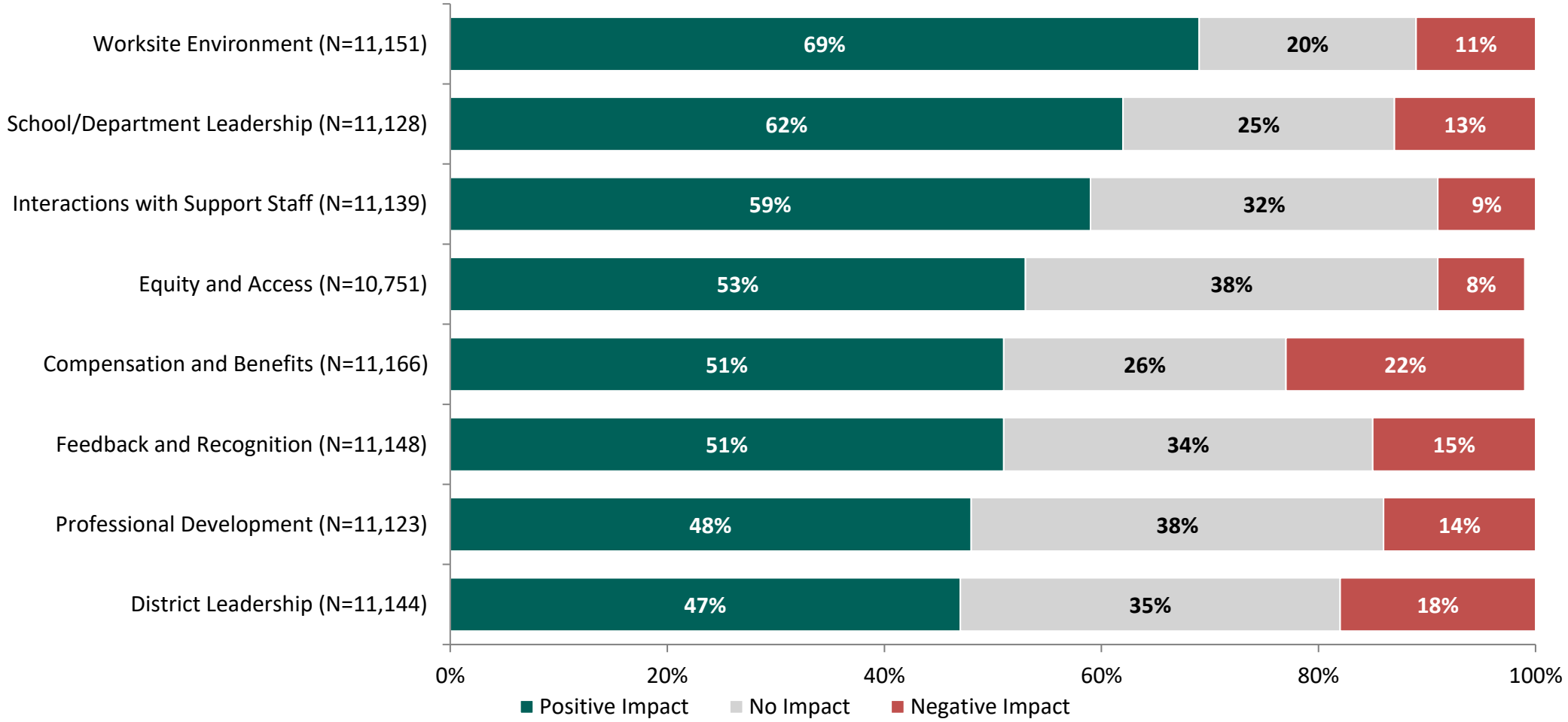
Impact on Recommendation

What type of impact do the following aspects of your school or department have on your score?



Not Applicable responses have been excluded from calculations.

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Focus Areas

Focus Areas to Increase Employee Engagement

How each engagement driver is prioritized for action.

The Engagement Drivers measure the workplace environment and point to opportunities for raising engagement. Each item is scored two ways.

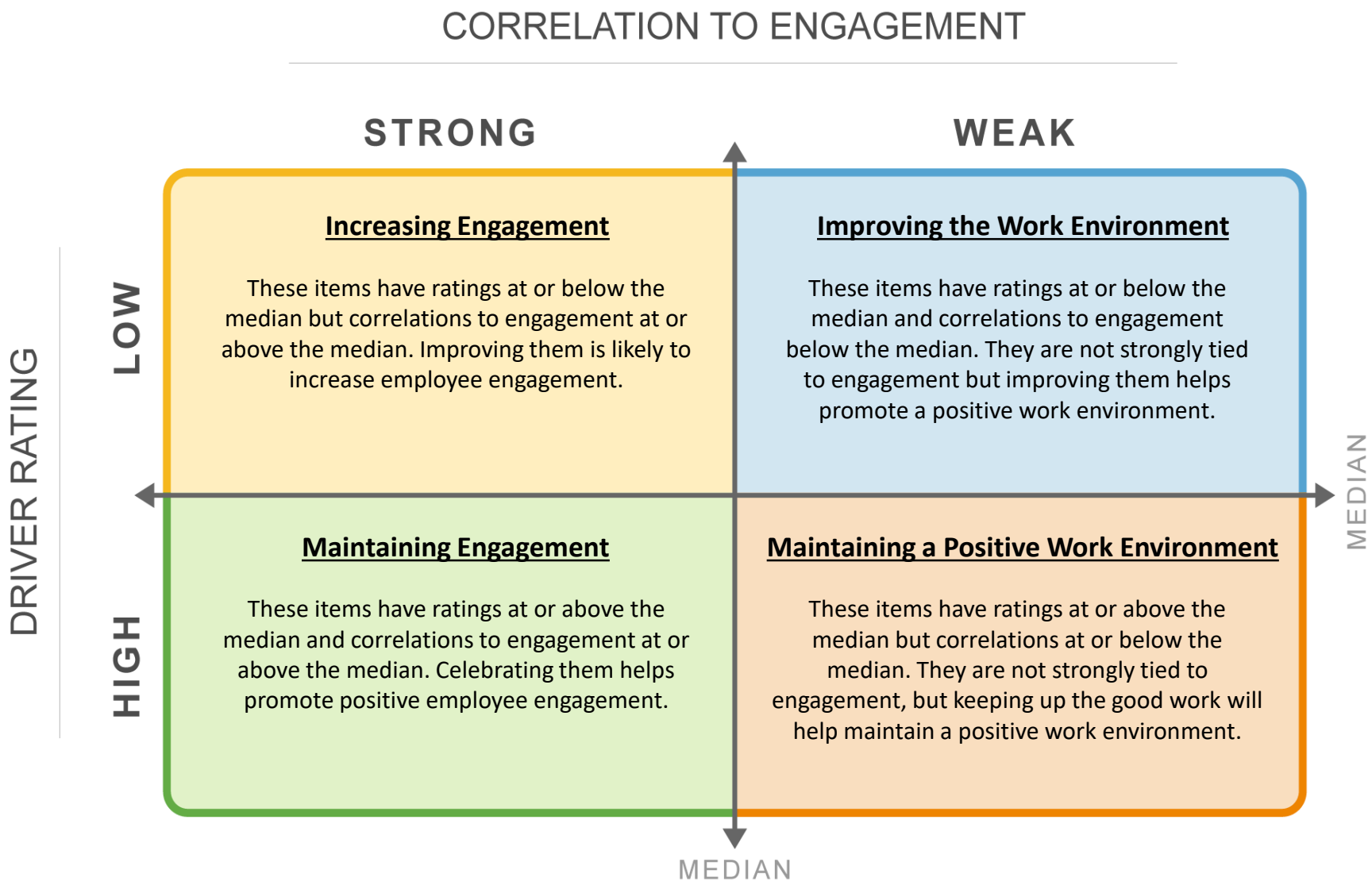
- The **driver rating** is the average response on the one-to-five agreement scale, so a lower rating means the item scored more negatively.
- The **correlation to engagement** measures how closely movement on an item tracks with overall engagement, so a higher correlation means improving the item tends to lift engagement more.

Each item is then classified high or low against the median driver rating (3.93) and strong or weak against the median correlation (0.60). Combining the two places every item into one of four focus areas.

The items that are both low-rated and high-correlation are the strongest opportunities, because they are underperforming and they move engagement at the same time. The items that are already high-rated and high-correlation are strengths to protect.

Medians	
Driver Rating	3.93
Correlation to Engagement	0.60

Focus Areas to Increase Employee Engagement (Continued)



Opportunities to Increase Engagement

Survey Item	Driver Rating	Correlation to Engagement
District leaders make good decisions on things that impact the district.	3.38	0.63
District leaders clearly explain the reasons behind decisions on key issues.	3.43	0.61
District leaders empower employees to succeed in their roles.	3.44	0.60
District leaders value the feedback of employees.	3.45	0.61
District leaders' actions are consistent with their words.	3.59	0.64
This district recognizes employees for their high-quality work and accomplishments.	3.63	0.62
I feel appreciated for my work.	3.68	0.69
The training I have received while working in this district has helped me perform my job more effectively.	3.74	0.60
My principal/direct supervisor communicates a clear vision and direction for our site.	3.77	0.62
My principal/director supervisor values the feedback of his or her staff.	3.84	0.61
My principal/direct supervisor understands my professional needs.	3.89	0.63

Opportunities to Maintain Engagement

Survey Item	Driver Rating	Correlation to Engagement
My principal/direct supervisor recognizes employees for their high-quality work and accomplishments.	3.93	0.61
The actions of my principal/direct supervisor are consistent with his or her words.	4.04	0.62
All employees are treated fairly and without favoritism.	4.04	0.61
My principal/direct supervisor effectively communicates about important issues that affect me.	4.06	0.60
I can count on the support of my principal/direct supervisor when addressing problems or issues.	4.07	0.62
My principal/direct supervisor makes good decisions on things that impact their school community/department.	4.07	0.64

Opportunities to Maintain a Positive Work Environment

Survey Item	Driver Rating	Correlation to Engagement
Conflicts within my school/department are addressed professionally.	3.99	0.59
I feel encouraged to continue my education and professional growth.	4.00	0.57
I have the materials I need to do my job.	4.01	0.50
The facilities are clean and comfortable.	4.02	0.35
I work in an atmosphere where there is mutual respect among staff.	4.06	0.52
I know how my work contributes to the district's strategic goals.	4.08	0.57
My principal/direct supervisor clearly communicates their expectations of my job performance.	4.13	0.58
District leadership clearly communicates the direction and priorities of the district.	4.14	0.56
Collaboration is encouraged within and across teams in my school or department.	4.18	0.56
My work environment is safe.	4.51	0.39

Opportunities to Improve the Work Environment

Survey Item	Driver Rating	Correlation to Engagement
The district includes the employee voice in the strategic planning processes.	3.65	0.58
I receive recognition in ways that are meaningful to me.	3.69	0.58
My principal/direct supervisor identifies opportunities for my professional growth and improvement.	3.87	0.58
My principal/direct supervisor regularly gives me constructive feedback to improve my performance.	3.87	0.57
I understand the district's overall strategic priorities and goals.	3.92	0.49

Participation

District Size Classifications

SMALL	MEDIUM	LARGE	VERY LARGE
Less than 10,000 students	10,001 – 30,000 students	30,001 – 80,000 students	More than 80,000 students
2 districts participating	**3 districts** participating	**2 districts** participating	**1 district** participating

District Size	Number of Districts Included	Count (N)	Percentage % of Total Responses
All Districts	8	18,182	100%
Small	2	540	3%
Medium	3	4,586	25%
Large	2	6,688	36%
Very Large	1	6,518	36%

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