



# Responding to the COVID-19 Crisis, Part III:

## A Survey of College and University Presidents

A study by *Inside Higher Ed* and Hanover Research  
June 2020



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# INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Inside Higher Ed partnered with Hanover Research to develop and disseminate a COVID-19 Perceptions and Response Survey to college and university presidents.

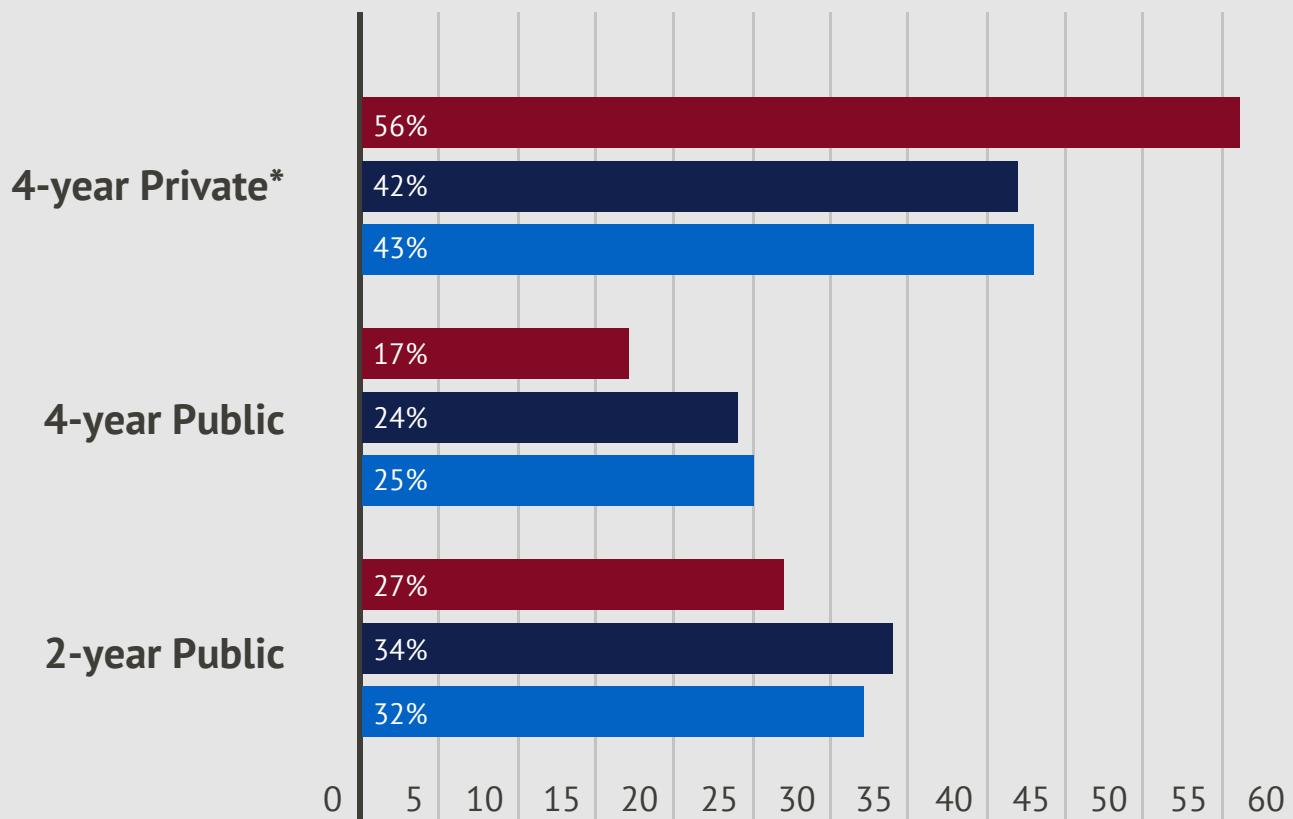
The survey was administered online in June 2020. The analysis includes a total of 97 respondents. Respondents were presidents or chancellors, currently employed at a four-year private, four-year public, or two-year public institution. Statistically significant differences (95% confidence level) between groups are noted with an asterisk (\*).

Similar surveys were conducted in March and April 2020 and all data provided where applicable.

## RESPONDENT PROFILE

Which of the following best describes your institution?

March (n=172) April (n=187) June (n=97)



\* Indicates a statistically significant difference between survey iterations.

# HIGH-LEVEL KEY FINDINGS

- Future enrollment and financial difficulties are at the top of respondents' current and potential concerns. Approximately 96% of respondents are currently somewhat or very concerned about unbudgeted financial costs related to COVID-19. Likewise, a large percentage of respondents report a high degree of concern with the potential decline in overall future student enrollment (91%) and overall financial stability (88%).
- Mental health remains an area of focus for institutions. At least 90% of respondents in each survey iteration are somewhat or very concerned about students' mental health. Moreover, only 17% of respondents to the June survey report they have been somewhat or extremely successful at ensuring students' emotional well-being.
- Institutions are increasingly reassessing their academic offerings. While 41% of respondents reported their institution was somewhat or very likely to reduce their academic program portfolio to cut costs in April, 55% report so in June. Furthermore, in the latest iteration 76% of respondents report their institution is somewhat or very likely to optimize their academic program portfolio to address enrollment concerns for the fall.

## CURRENT CONCERNS

As seen on the following page, respondents' current concerns include unbudgeted financial costs related to COVID-19, the disproportionate impact of the disease on students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and the mental health of students, with 90% or more of respondents reporting they are currently somewhat or very concerned with these matters in the June survey.

# CURRENT CONCERNS (cont.)

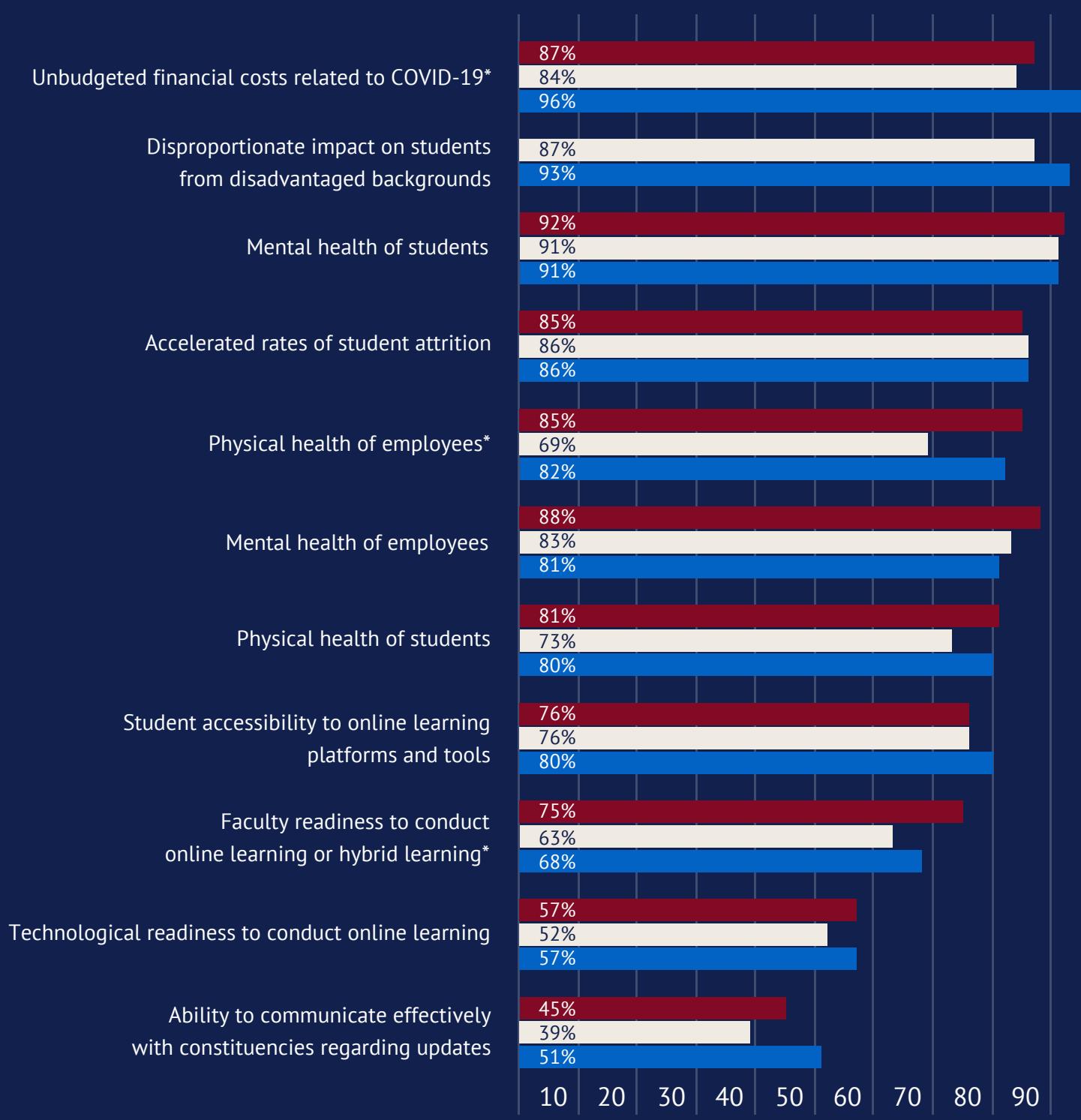
**How would you rate your current level of concern related to the following issues in regard to COVID-19?**

% Very Concerned + % Somewhat Concerned

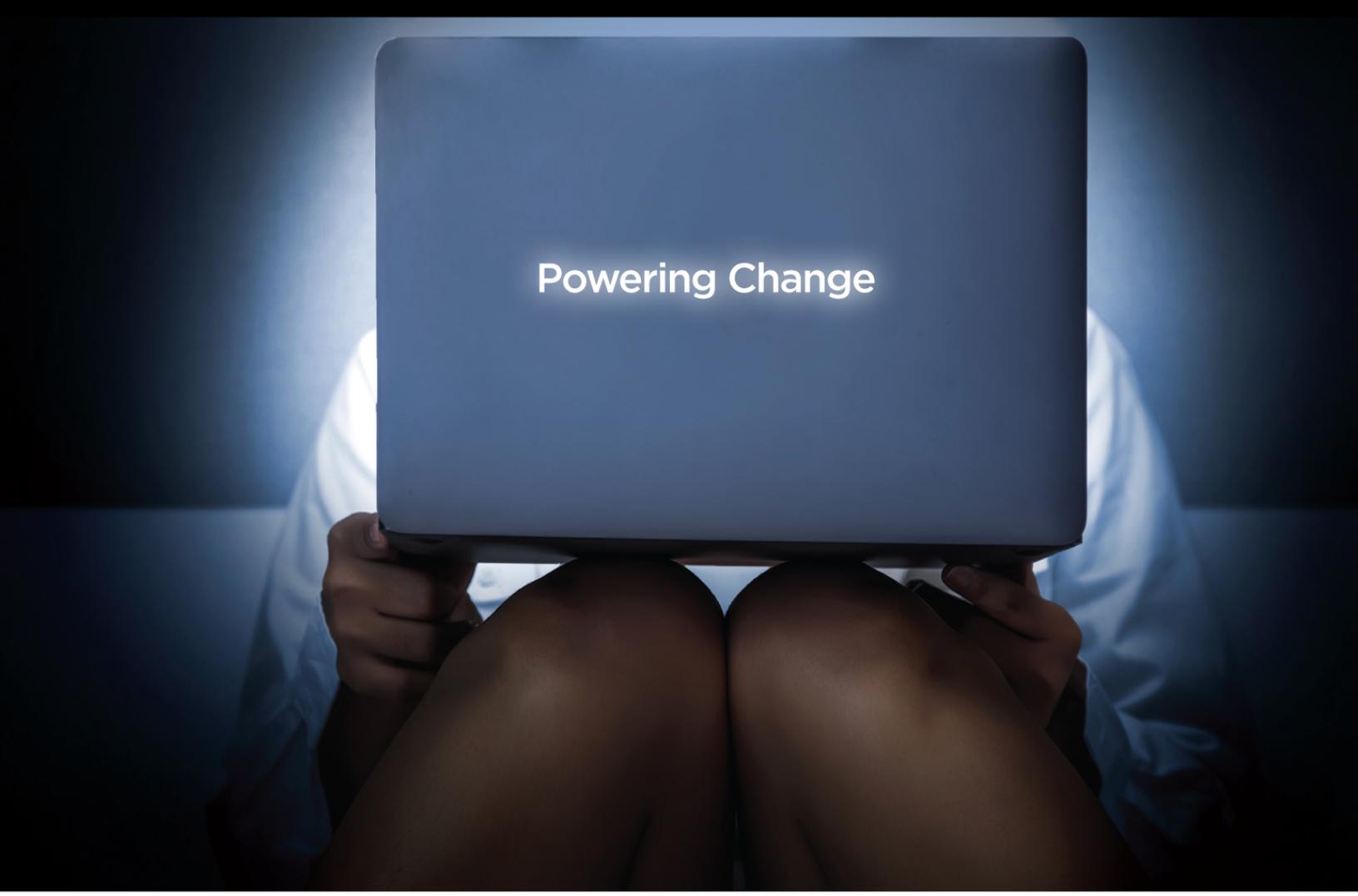
March (n=164)

April (n=183)

June (n=97)



\* Indicates a statistically significant difference between survey iterations.



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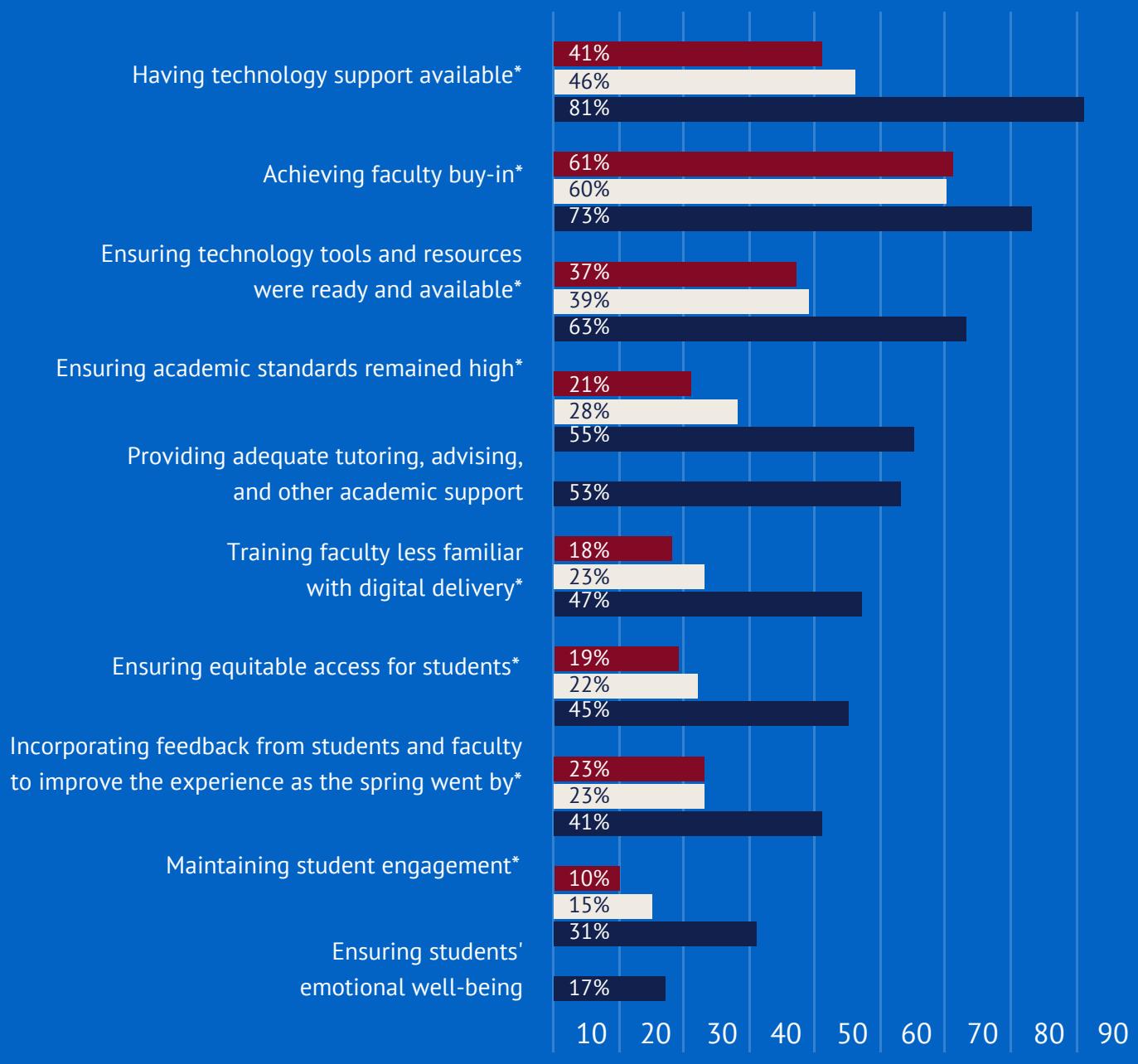
# ASSESSING THE SHIFT TO REMOTE LEARNING

Respondents believe their institutions have succeeded with technology support (81%) and faculty buy-in (73%). Institutions will need to make more improvements in maintaining student engagement (31%) and ensuring students' emotional well-being (17%).

## How would you rate the level of success at your institution associated with moving in-person classes to a remote or online setting this spring for the following activities?

% Extremely Successful + % Very Successful

March (n=144-158)   April (n=169-176)   June (n=92-93)



\* Indicates a statistically significant difference between survey iterations.

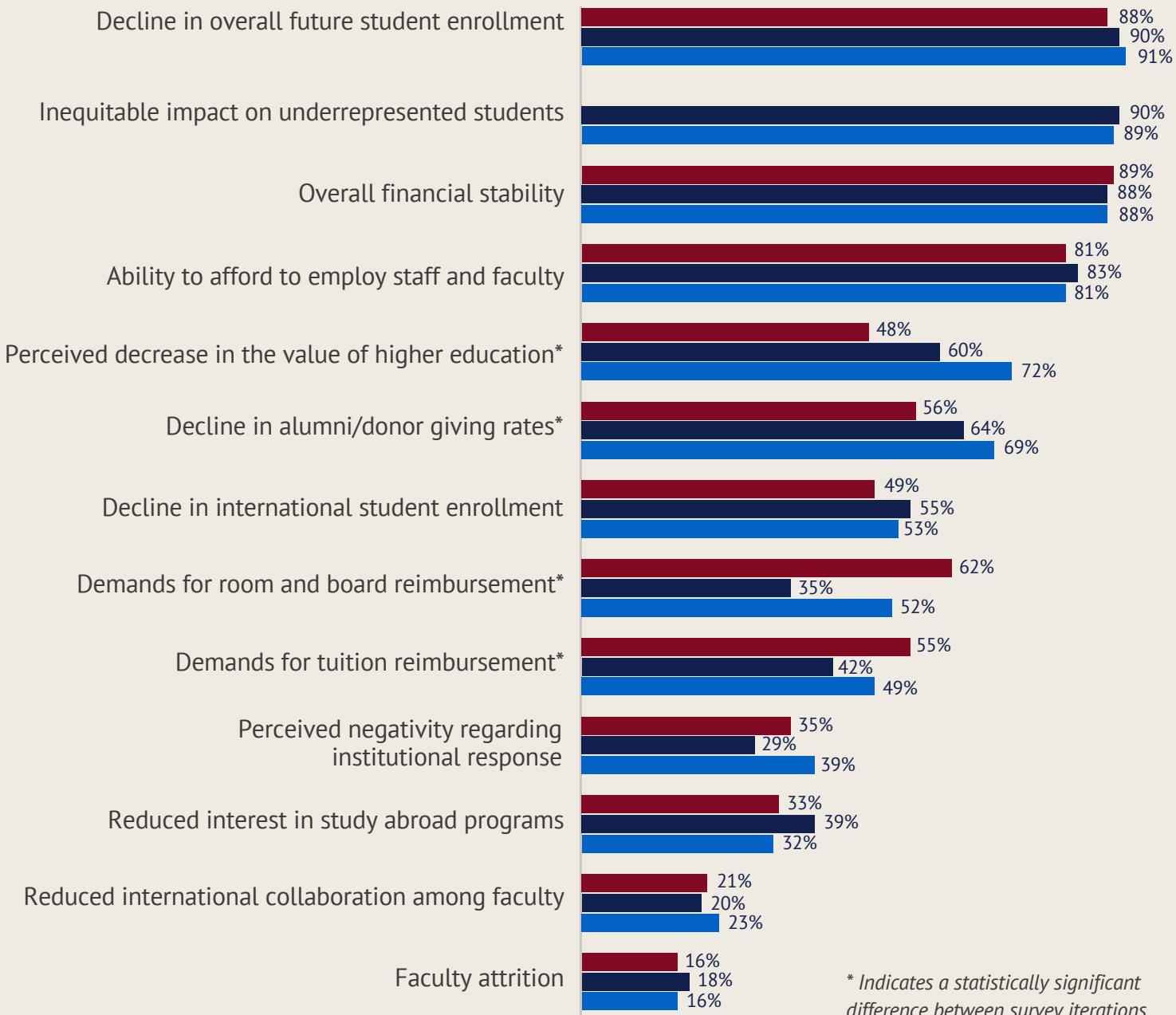
# POTENTIAL CONCERNs GOING FORWARD

Top potential concerns among respondents include decline in overall future student enrollment, inequitable impact on underrepresented students, and overall financial stability, with at least 88% of respondents in all three survey iterations rating themselves somewhat or very concerned with these issues.

**How would you rate your level of concern with the following potential issues at your institution, in regard to COVID-19 and the current recession?**

% Very Concerned + % Somewhat Concerned

March (n=160) April (n=179) June (n=90)

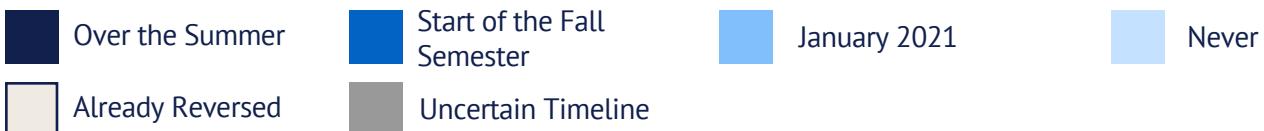


\* Indicates a statistically significant difference between survey iterations.

# REVERSAL OF COVID-19 RESPONSES

Respondents report their institutions will soon reopen student and staff spaces but are more uncertain about their timelines for resuming international travel and reversing budget decisions.

**Many institutions took the following actions as COVID-19 hit this spring.  
If your institution took these actions, when do you expect to reverse them by?**



Suspended international travel for students (n=74)

11%      15%      72%

Suspended international travel for faculty/staff (n=80)

9%      18%      69%

Instituted salary reductions (n=36)

14%      6%      14%      64%

Froze or reduced benefits (n=34)

9%      6%      29%      53%

Furloughed employees (n=45)

24%      18%      16%      40%

Reduced workforce (n=51)

14%      16%      25%      6%      39%

Invested in additional physical or mental health resources (n=57)

16%      11%      4%      35%      33%

Invested in emergency response resources (n=63)

30%      6%      5%      24%      33%

Moved campus tours online (n=85)

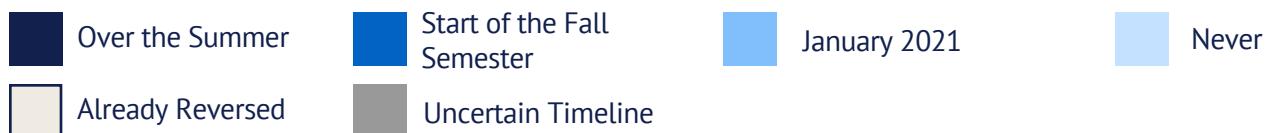
31%      15%      6%      4%      14%      31%

Suspended athletic programs (n=70)

16%      43%      4%      4%      30%

*Note: Respondents only saw actions that they indicated they had already taken.*

# REVERSAL OF COVID-19 RESPONSES (cont.)



Implemented work-remote policies for staff (n=91)



Revised admissions standards (n=31)



Moved the majority of all in-person classes online (n=89)



Moved admissions online (n=81)



Delayed admissions deadlines (n=56)



Closed academic buildings/faculty offices (n=85)



Closed administrative offices (n=72)



Invested in new, online learning resources (n=83)



Closed dining halls (n=74)



Suspended administrative operations (n=31)



Closed residential halls (n=51)



*Note: Respondents only saw actions that they indicated they had already taken.*

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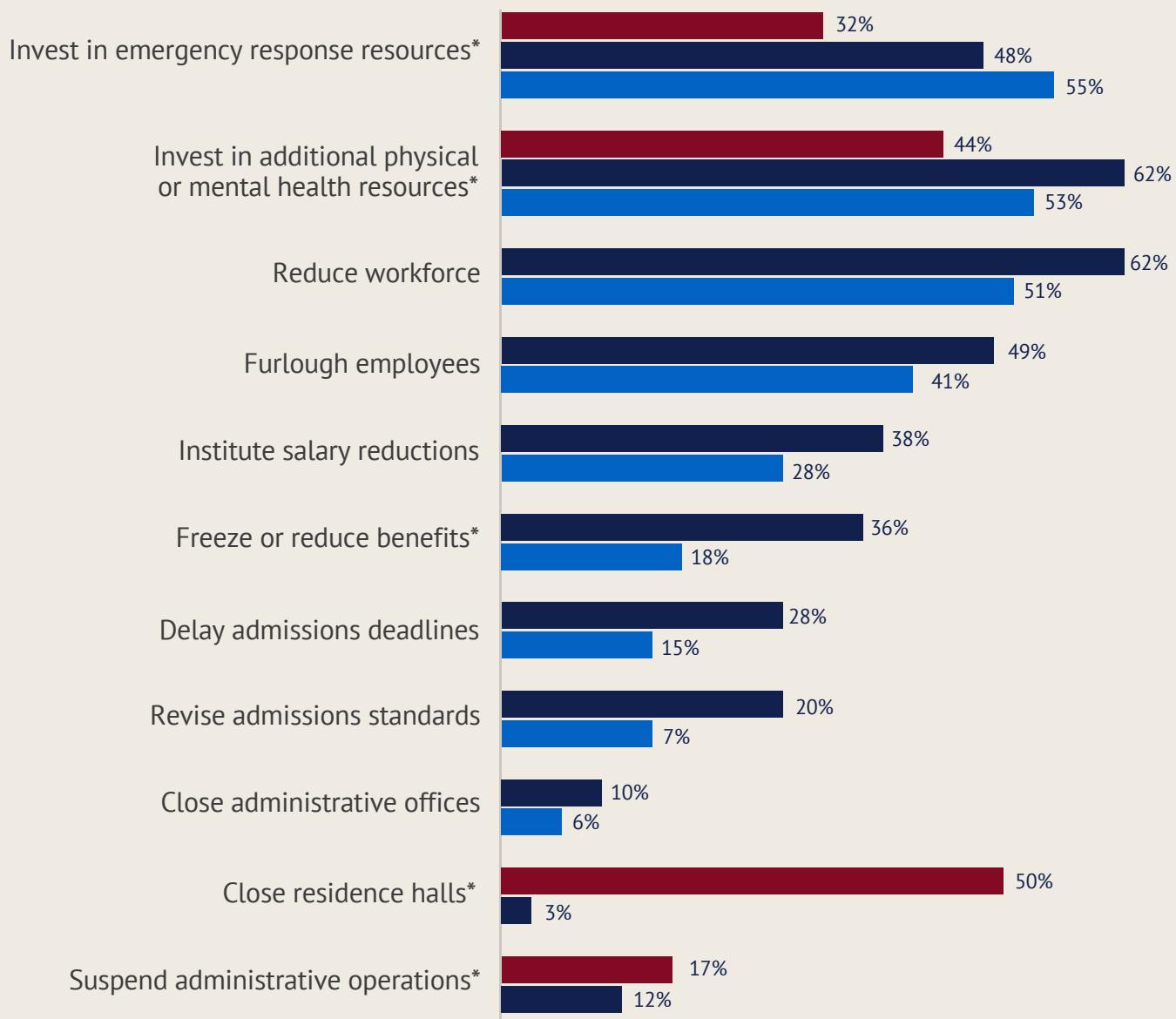
# FUTURE ACTIONS

Many institutions are still looking to make resource investments and workforce adjustments. More than 50% of respondents report their institution is somewhat or very likely to invest in emergency response resources (55%) and additional physical or mental health resources (53%) as well as reduce the workforce (51%).

## How likely is your institution to take the following actions in the future?

% Very Likely + % Somewhat Likely

March (n=72-133) April (n=39-154) June (n=11-54)



\* Indicates a statistically significant difference between survey iterations.

Data only include responses from those who said they had not already taken these actions.

# FUTURE REVENUE/COST-CUTTING MEASURES

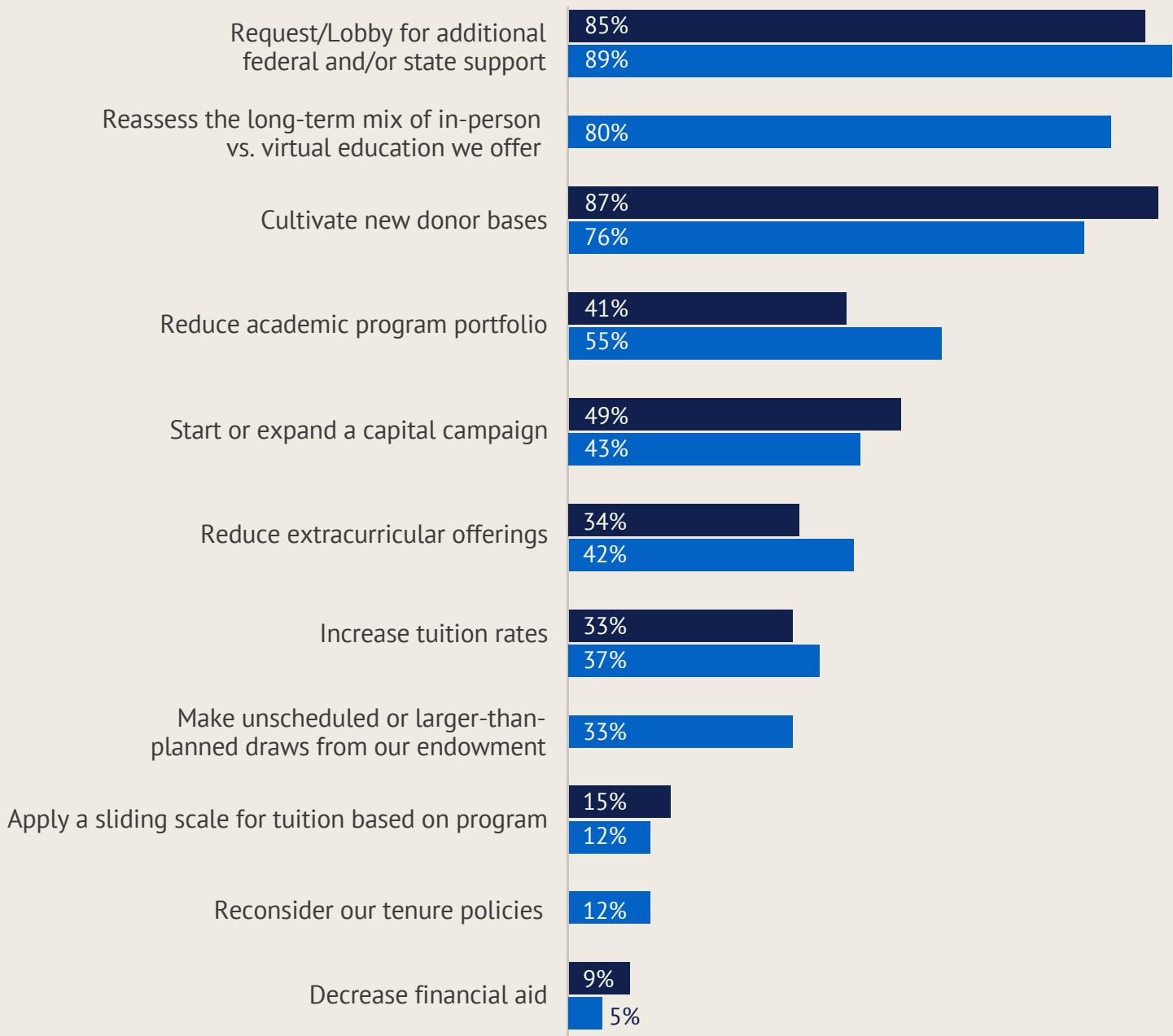
Respondents report their institution continues to seek additional federal/state support (89%).

Institutions are also likely to reassess the long-term mix of in-person vs. virtual education they offer (80%). Notably, there has been a significant increase in the number of respondents between April (41%) and June (55%) reporting they are somewhat or very likely to reduce their academic program portfolio.

## How likely is your institution to take the following actions in the future to increase revenue or cut costs?

% Very Likely + % Somewhat Likely

April (n=171-173) June (n=67-88)



# INSTITUTIONAL READINESS FOR FALL

Two-thirds of respondents say they are very or extremely confident their institution can provide flexible, high-quality learning this fall (66%). However, respondents are less optimistic that students will behave responsibly (29%) or feel sufficiently connected if remote (34%).

**Please rate your level of confidence for your institution going into Fall 2020 for the following items: *My institution...***  
% Extremely Confident + % Very Confident

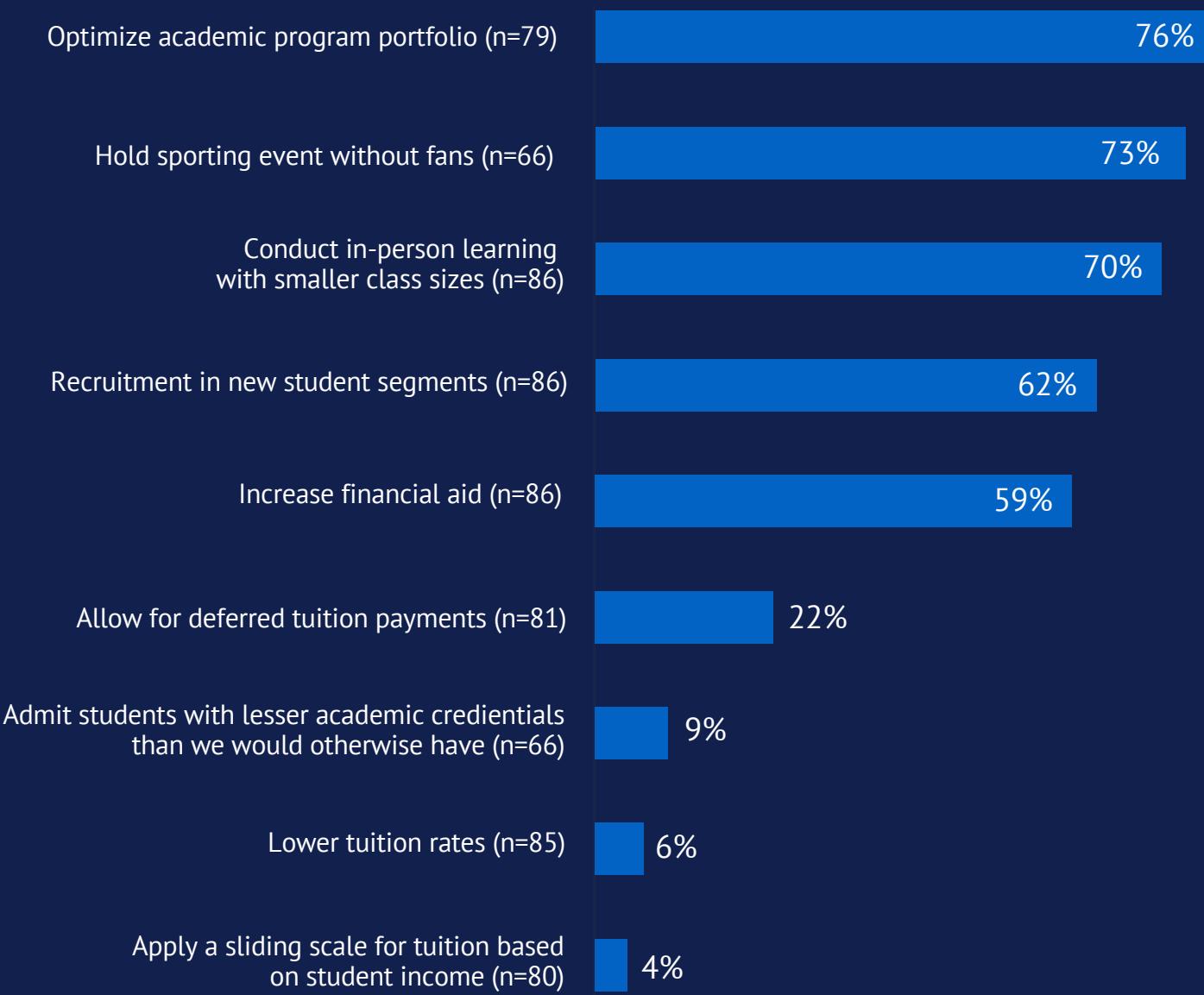


# FUTURE ENROLLMENT RESPONSES

Just over three-quarters of respondents report their institution plans to optimize their academic program portfolio (76%). Furthermore, reductions in in-person social and learning options will occur, with institutions holding sporting events without fans (73%) and conducting in-person learning with smaller class sizes (70%).

## How likely is your institution to take the following actions in the future to address enrollment concerns for the fall?

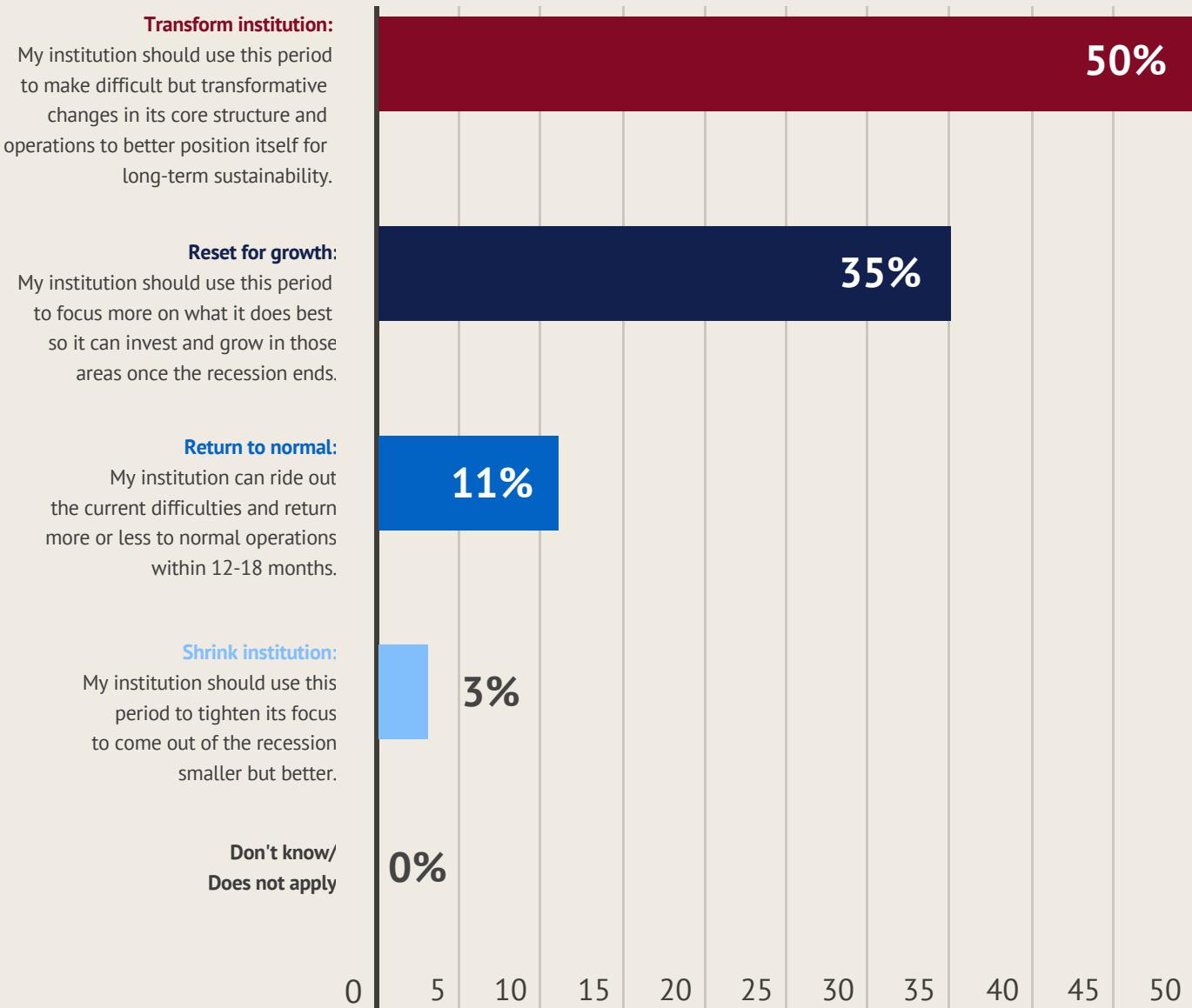
% Very likely + % Somewhat Likely



# INSTITUTIONAL TRAJECTORY

Respondents say their institutions are likely to use this period to transform their institution or reset for growth. Most report that their institution plans to use this time to make difficult but transformative change in their core structure and operations to better position themselves for long-term sustainability (50%), while a small but notable minority believe their institution should use this period to focus more on what it does best so it can invest and grow in those areas once the recession ends (35%).

**Which of the following most closely reflects your view of how your institution will respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and economic recession? (n=88)**

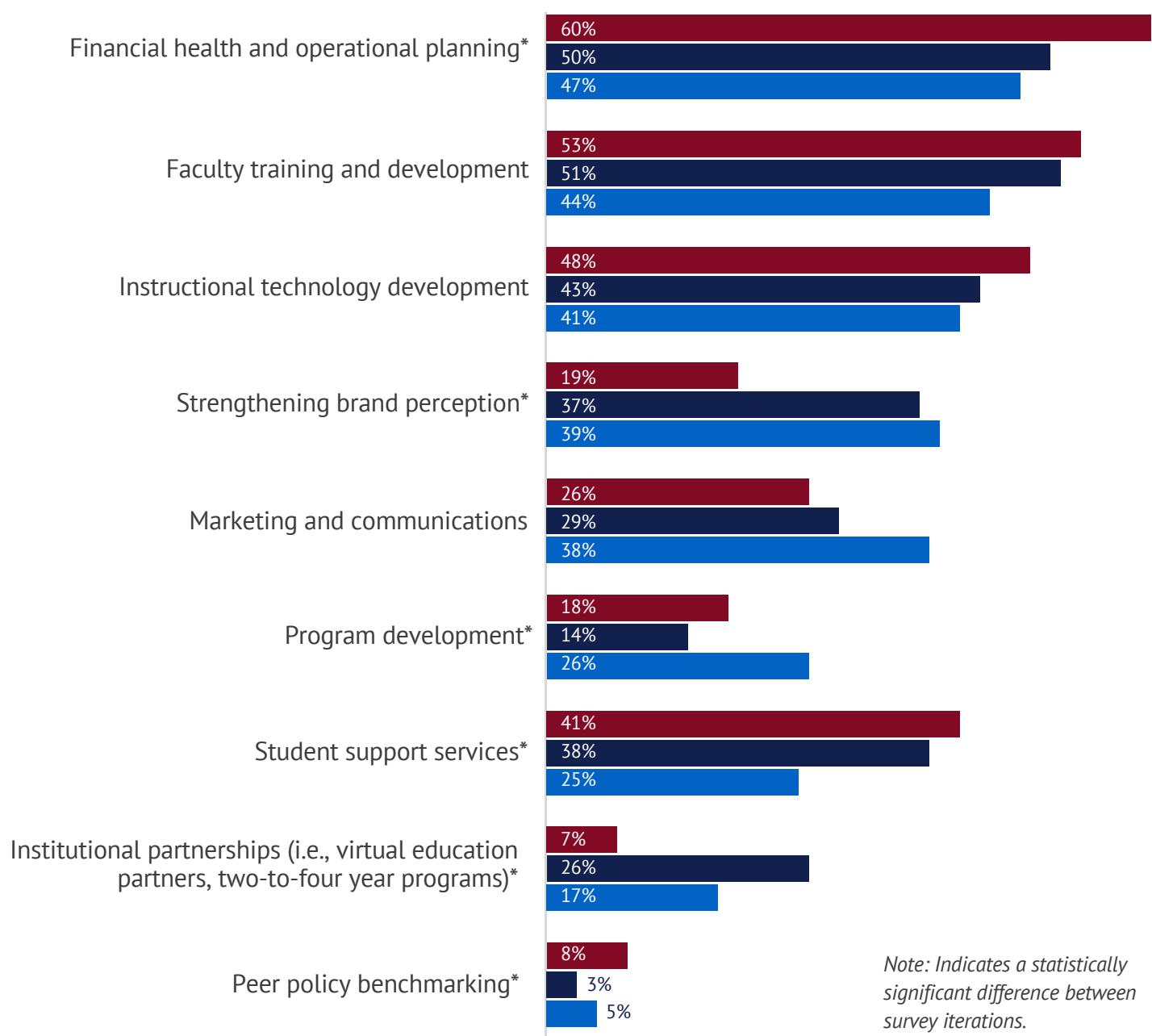


# OPERATIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS

Respondents still believe their institution needs support with financial health and operation planning. Though the percentage of responses has decreased since March (60%), 47% of respondents rank financial health and operational planning among their top three most desired areas of operational support while navigating the pandemic.

**Of the following areas, where do you feel your institution needs the most additional operational support to successfully navigate beyond the COVID-19 crisis? Select up to your top 3 options.**

March (n=159) April (n=173) June (n=88)



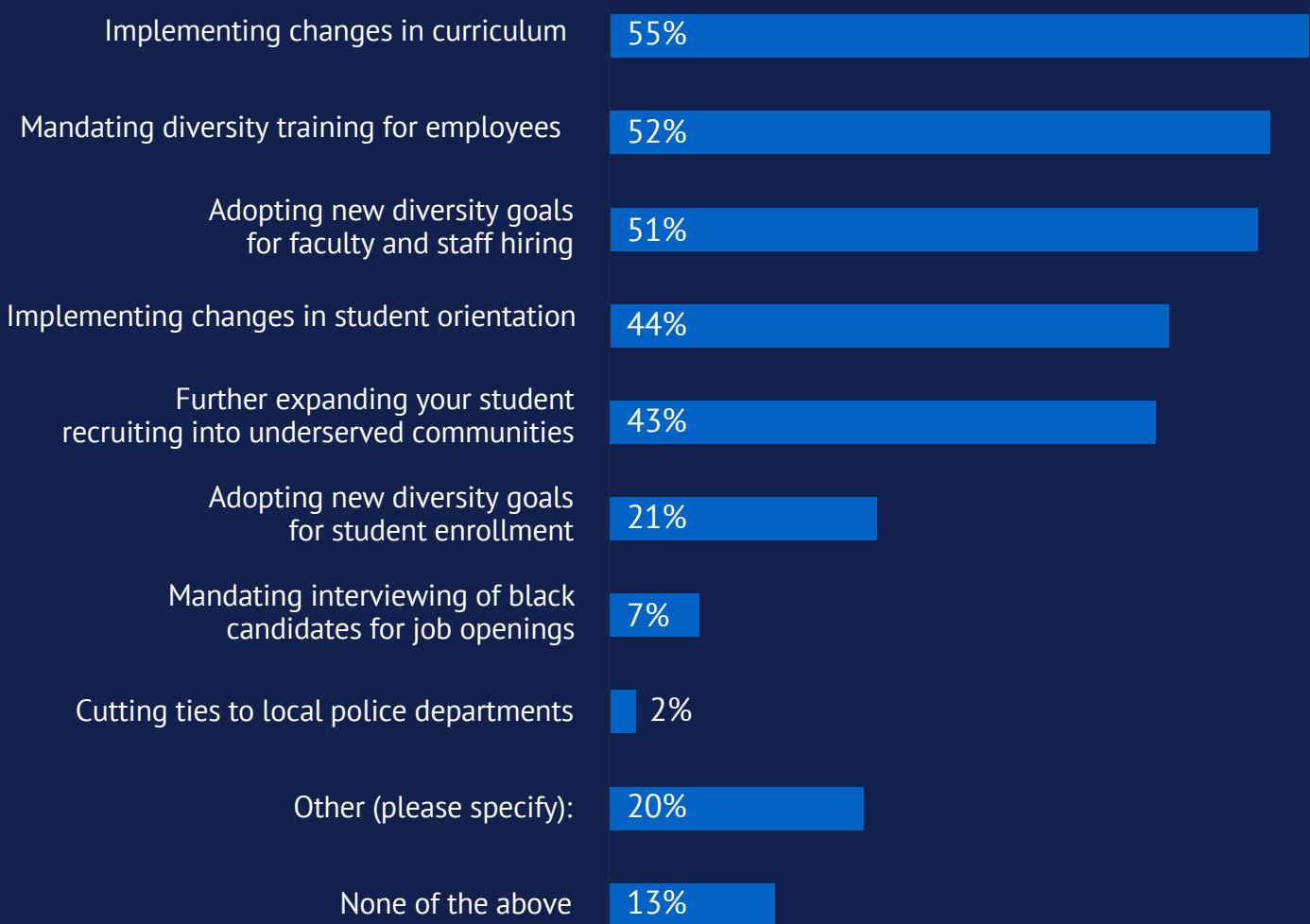
*Note: Indicates a statistically significant difference between survey iterations.*

# RESPONSE TO RECENT PROTESTS

Respondents' institutions are responding to nationwide protests primarily through curriculum changes, trainings and diversity goals in hiring. At least 50% of respondents state that their institution is implementing changes in the curriculum (55%), mandating diversity training for employees (52%), or adopting new diversity goals for faculty and staff hiring (51%) in response to concerns about longstanding structural racism in the U.S.

**The murder of George Floyd and other recent killings of black Americans sparked widespread protests in recent weeks and prompted many organizations to issue statements and adopt new policies and practices.**

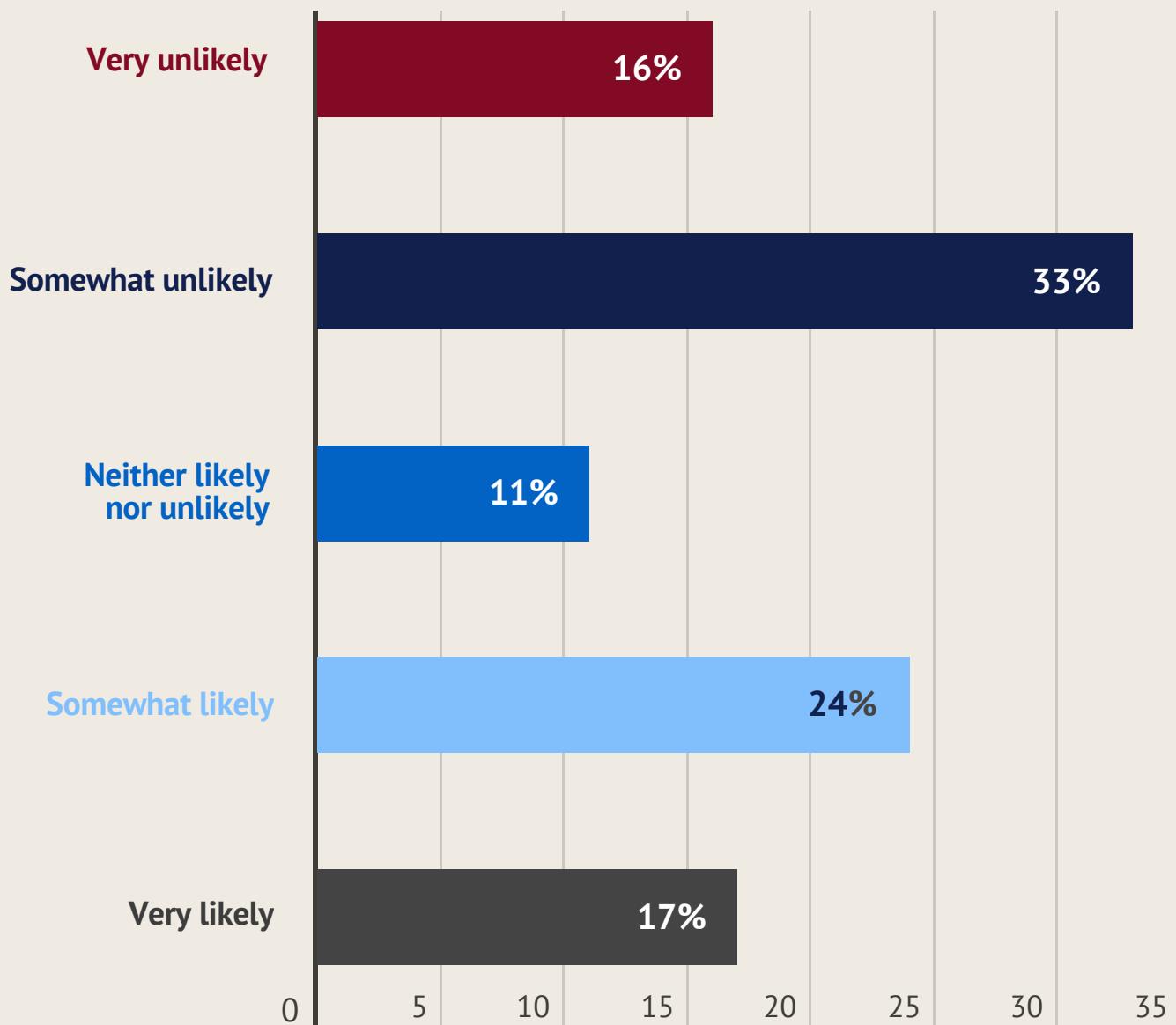
**Which of the following policies or structural changes has your institution taken adopted or considered taking adopting in response to concerns about longstanding structural racism in the U.S.? Please select all that apply. (n=87)**



# LIKELIHOOD OF PROTESTS ON CAMPUS

Some institutions anticipate protests related to racial inequality this fall. Results are about evenly split, with 48% of respondents rating the likelihood of protests on their campus as somewhat or very unlikely and 41% of respondents rating the likelihood somewhat or very likely.

How likely do you think there will be protests related  
to racial inequality on campus this fall? (n=83)



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