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Beyond Ready Youth Survey 2025

Key findings from a national survey of 1,126 youth conducted online
August 6 – 20, 2025

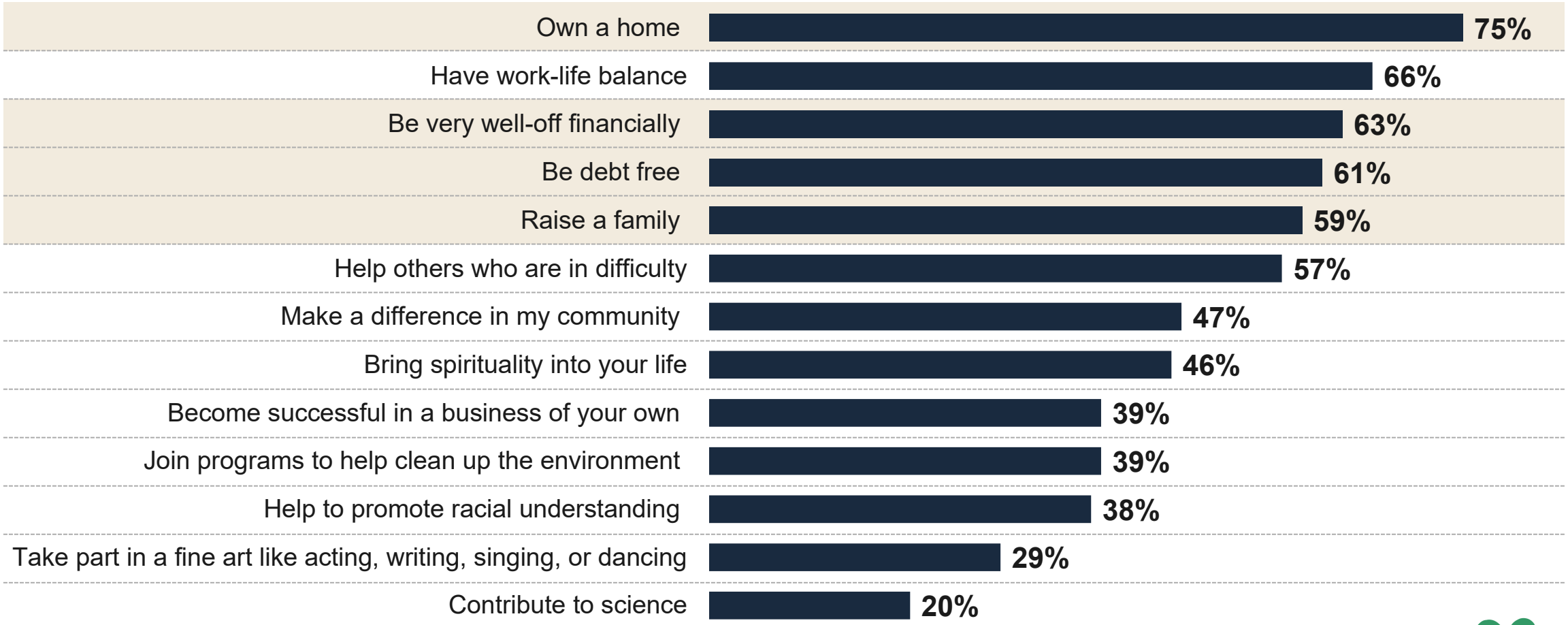


Young Americans feel confident about their futures, are thinking about them a lot, and are looking for more support from parents and educators to prepare for life after school.

Overall, youth feel positive about most aspects of their lives and are especially confident about their future careers, with eight in ten expressing optimism. Their major life goals and the factors guiding their post-high school decisions center on achieving a comfortable, financially secure life. To reach that goal, young people recognize the need for life skills, such as critical thinking and leadership; and work skills, like data analysis and writing.

Many young Americans believe they can achieve their lifelong goals like owning a home, having financial security, and raising a family.

Thinking about my career and life goals, I want to do this and believe I can:



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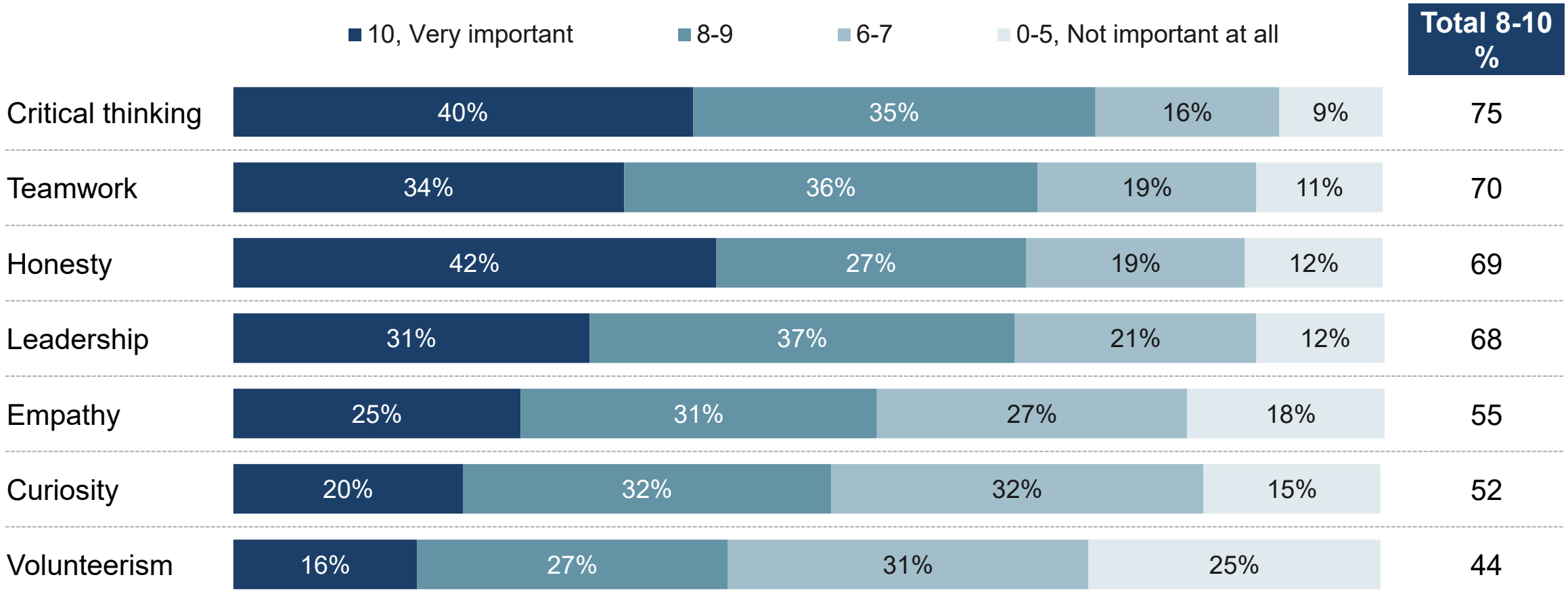
Young people say critical thinking, teamwork, honesty, and leadership are most important for success in career and life.

How important on a 0 to 10 scale is this character quality?



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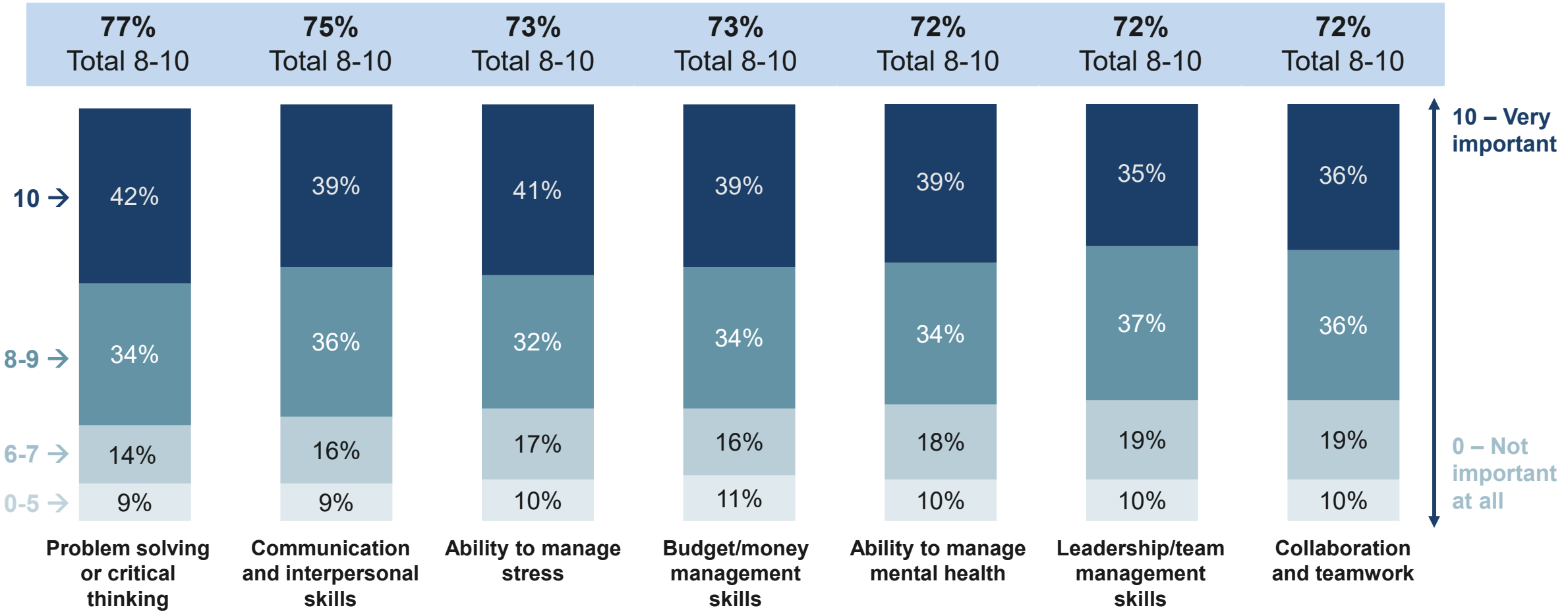
Life skills are seen as very important for succeeding in life.

How important on a 0 to 10 scale is this for succeeding in your career and life?



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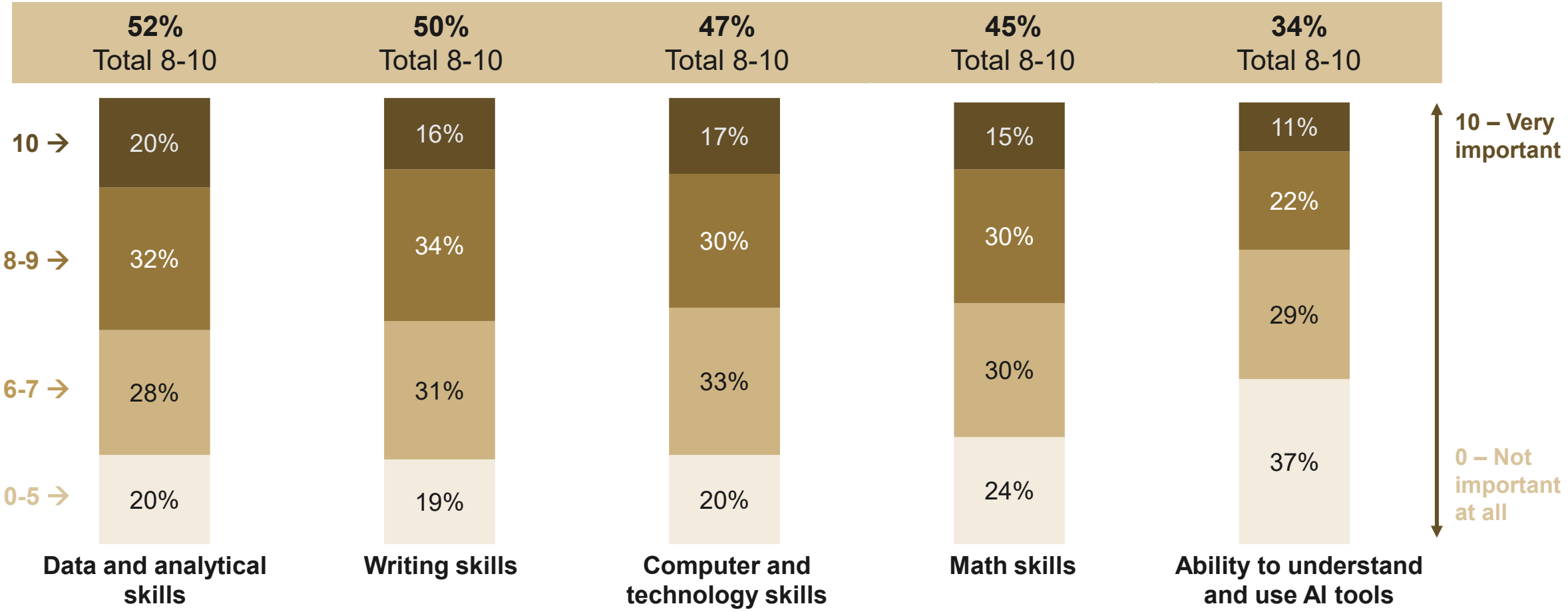
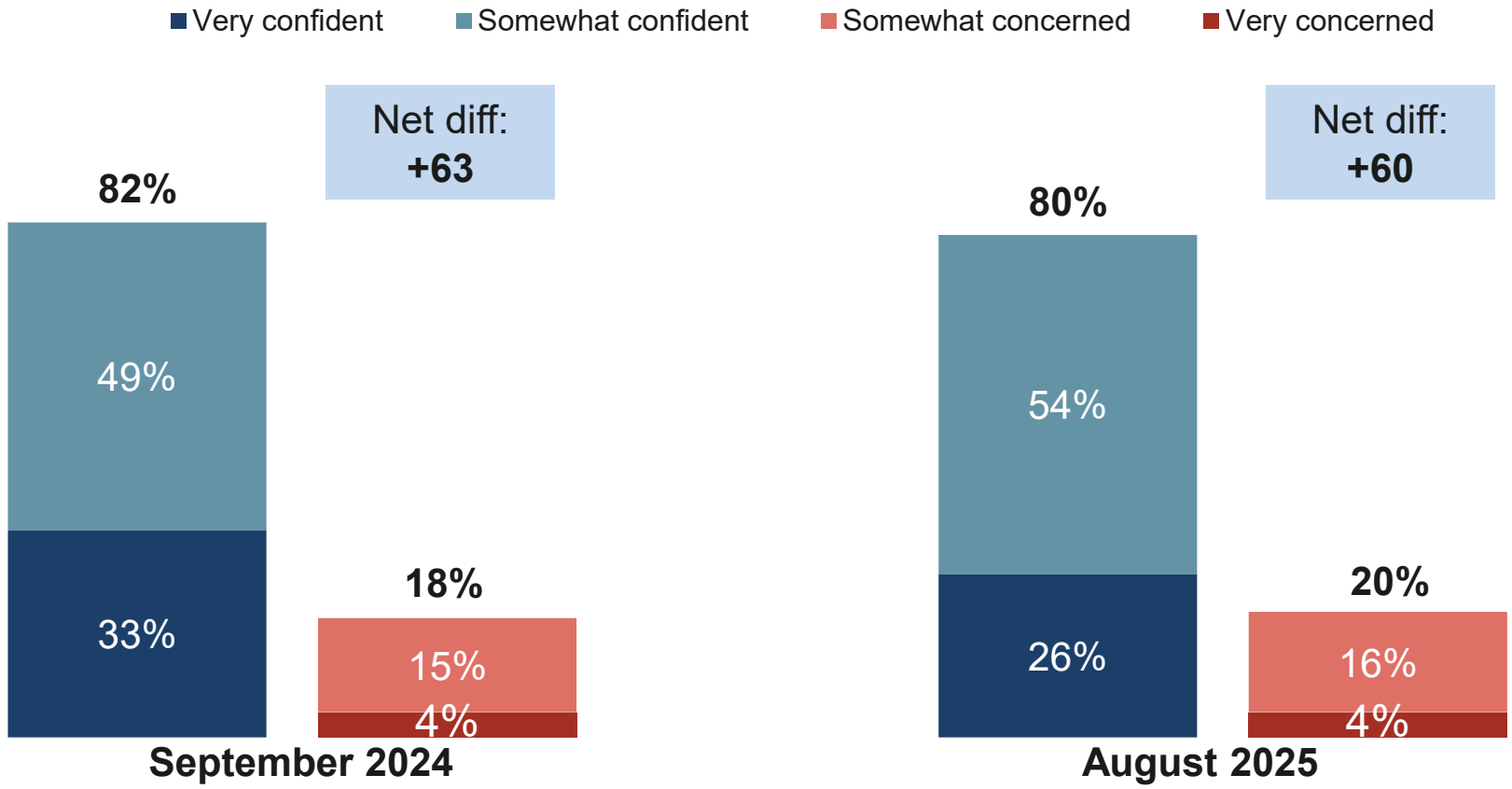
Youth place lower value on the importance of work skills – AI literacy is rated the lowest.

How important on a 0 to 10 scale is this for succeeding in your career and life?



Youth are optimistic about their future, though a little less so than last year.

When it comes to being able to achieve your career and life goals later in life, do you feel…?

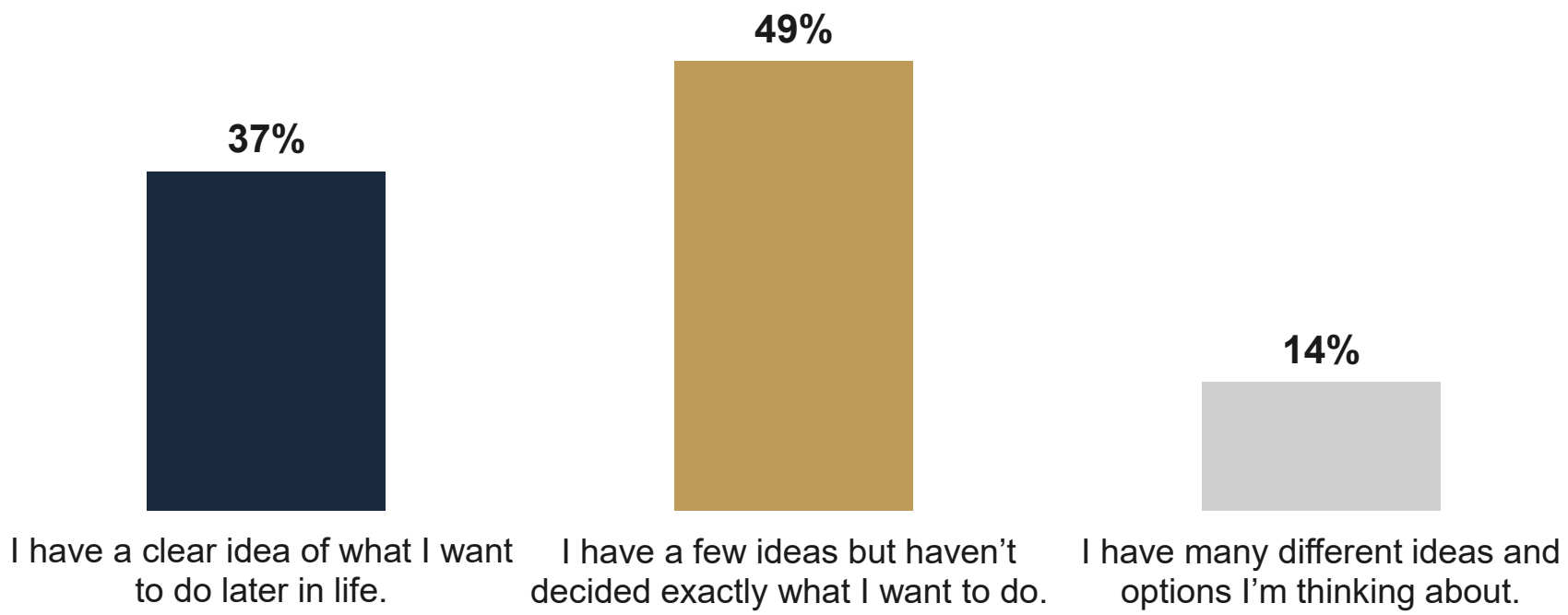


Even as young people are hyper-aware of what they need to succeed, they do not see a clear path to get there and know they need help to feel “beyond ready.”

A majority do not yet have a clear vision for their future careers, even as most plan to attend college after high school. Young people are looking for more guidance from educators, mentors, and parents as they plan for their futures. Even as young people understand the importance of life, work, and financial skills, far fewer feel prepared to use these skills in a real work environment today. There is a clear and significant gap between the importance youth place on these skills and their confidence in applying them now.

Most youth are not yet clear on what they want to do.

Which of these best describes you right now?



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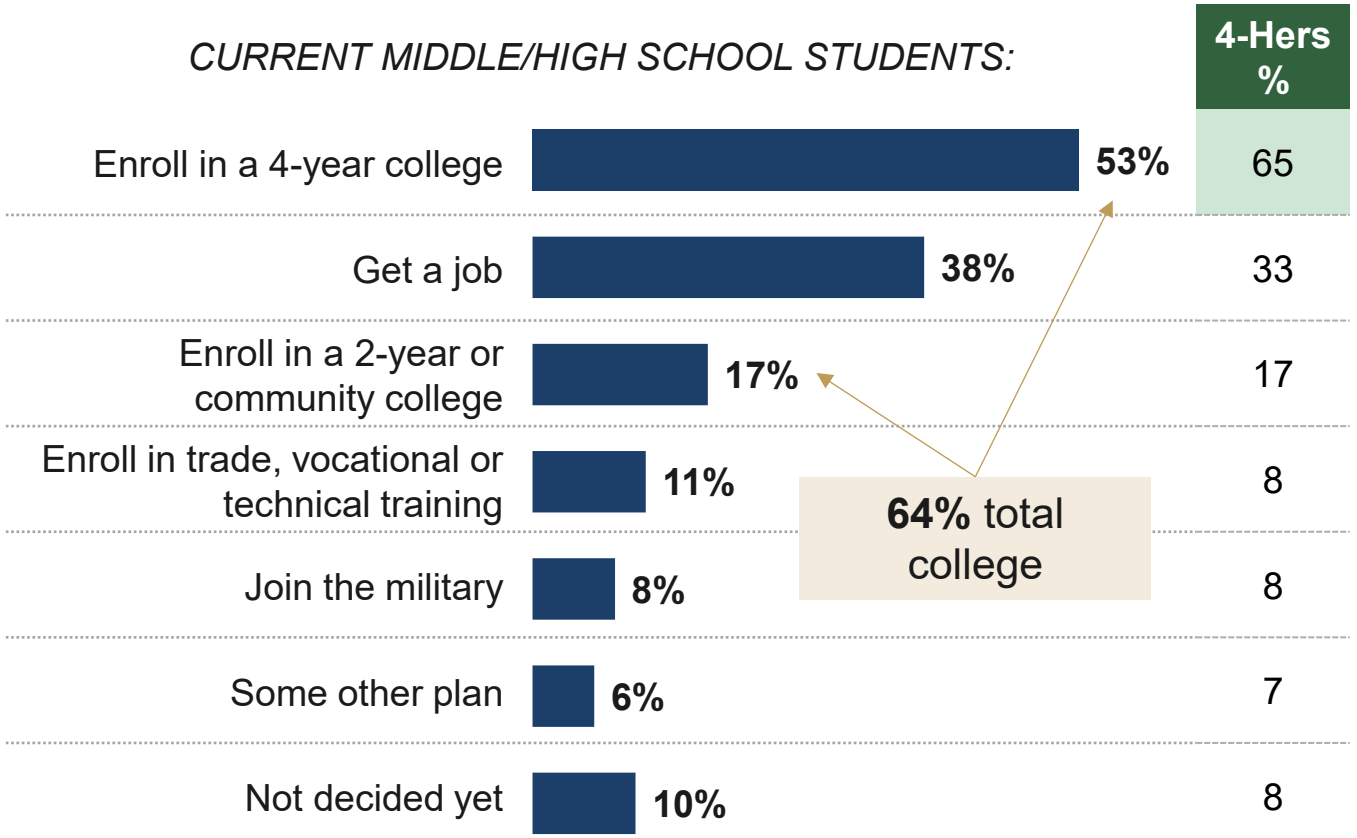
Pursuing a degree is the most common path young people plan to take. 4-Hers are more likely to plan to get a 4-year degree after high school.

As of right now, what are your plans immediately after high school? (Multiple answers acceptable)



Highest degree plan to earn…	All degree seekers* %
Trade, vocational or technical diploma	8
2-year or community college	10
4-year college	44
Graduate or professional degree	35

**Degree seekers include all young people who say they plan to enroll or have already enrolled in vocational or technical training, 2-year or community college, and/or 4-year college.*

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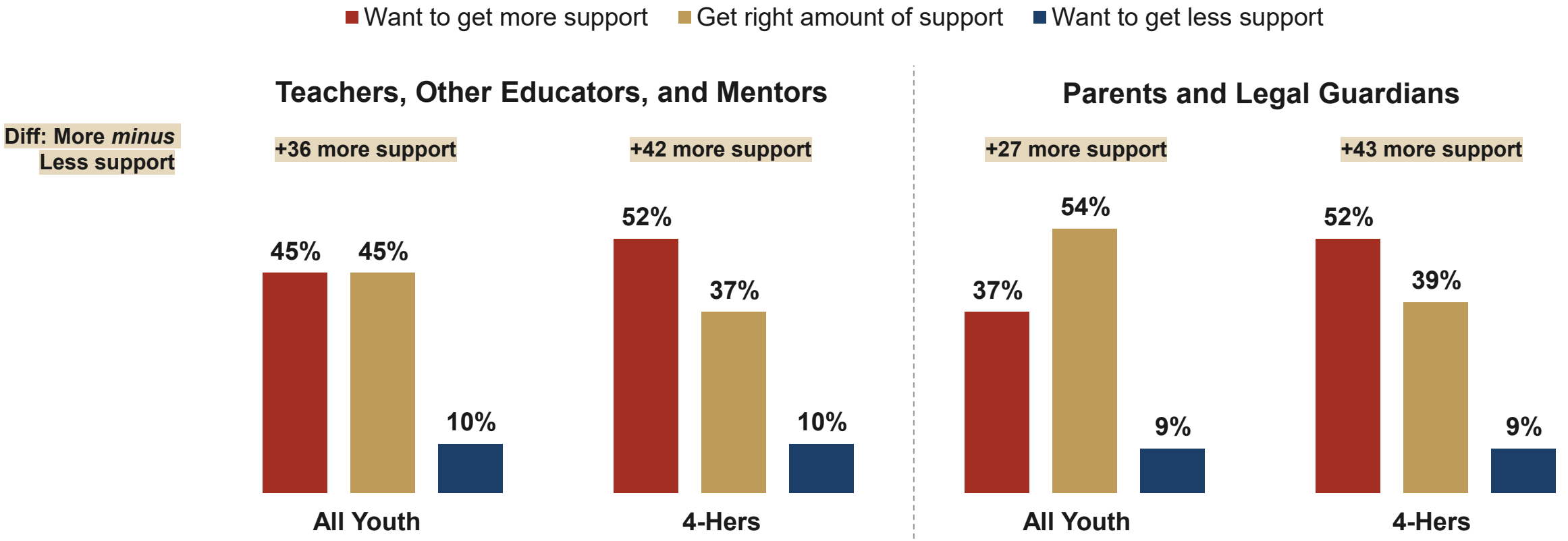
74% of 4-Hers in middle and high school say they plan to enroll in a 2-year and/or 4-year college.

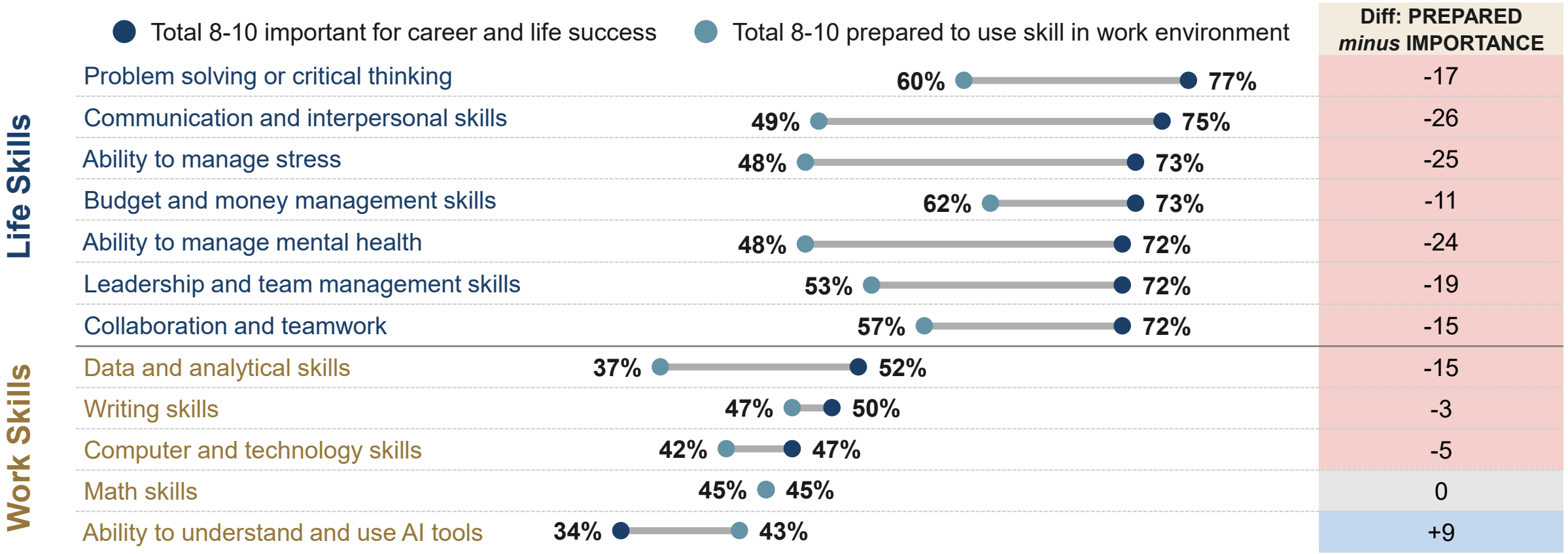
Young people are looking to get more rather than less support from educators and parents. 4-Hers are even more likely to feel this way.

When it comes to your future career and life, how do you feel about the support you are getting from…?



Youth rate life skills as very important for career and life success, but they feel less prepared to apply them—showing a much wider gap than for work skills.

Skills by Importance and Preparation to Apply:



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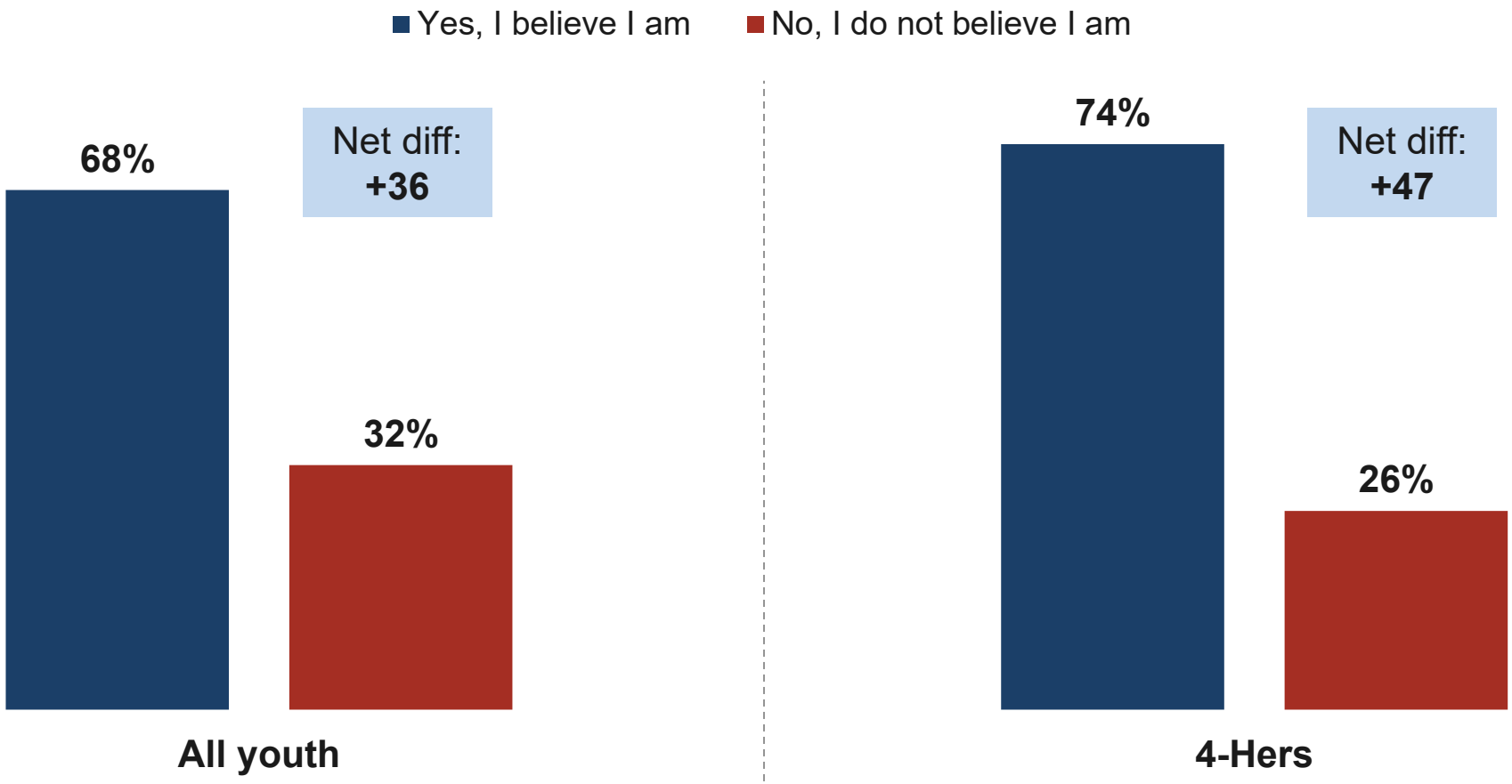
Extracurricular programs like 4-H are essential for providing life skills. Young people believe these programs are more helpful in gaining life skills than just what they experience in the classroom.

While most young people say school helps them develop work skills, those involved in programs like 4-H report gaining the most important skills for success—such as self-confidence, critical thinking, resilience, and the ability to handle setbacks—outside the classroom. These programs *could* also play an important role in teaching financial skills that many youth want to feel more confident in.

Most young Americans believe that the skills they are learning in school give them what they need to be successful in career and life.

Do you believe you are learning the skills needed to be successful in career and life in school?



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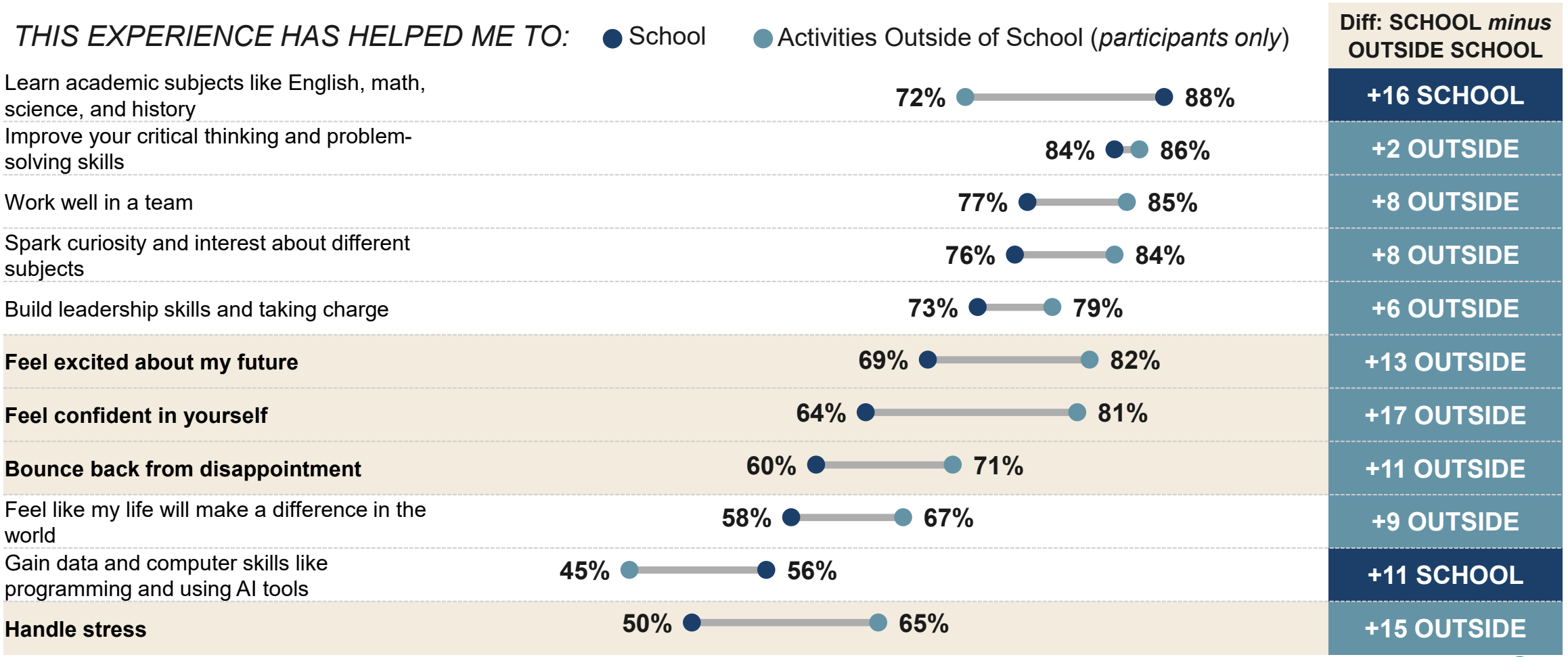
Extracurricular activities like 4-H are more likely than school to be seen as a space to build confidence, manage stress and handle setbacks.



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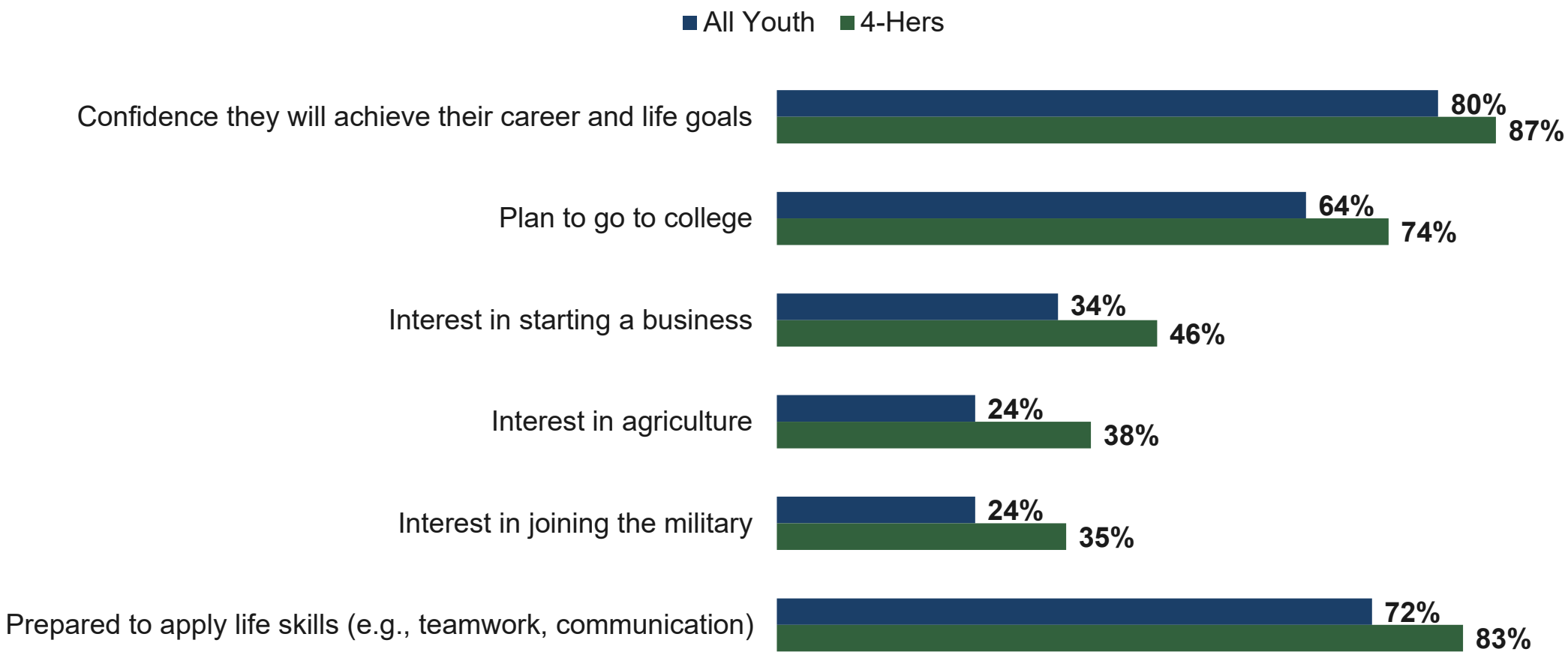
Youth who participate in 4-H are already feeling more beyond ready, surpassing youth overall in several key measures.

- 4-Hers feel more confident they will achieve their life and career goals.
- 4-Hers are more likely to plan to go to college, especially a 4-year college.
- 4-Hers express more interest in starting a business.
- 4-Hers report greater interest in agriculture and service-oriented careers.
- 4-Hers feel more prepared to apply life skills in their future careers.

4-Hers are more likely to feel confident in achieving goals, interested in agriculture + service, and feel more prepared to apply life skills.



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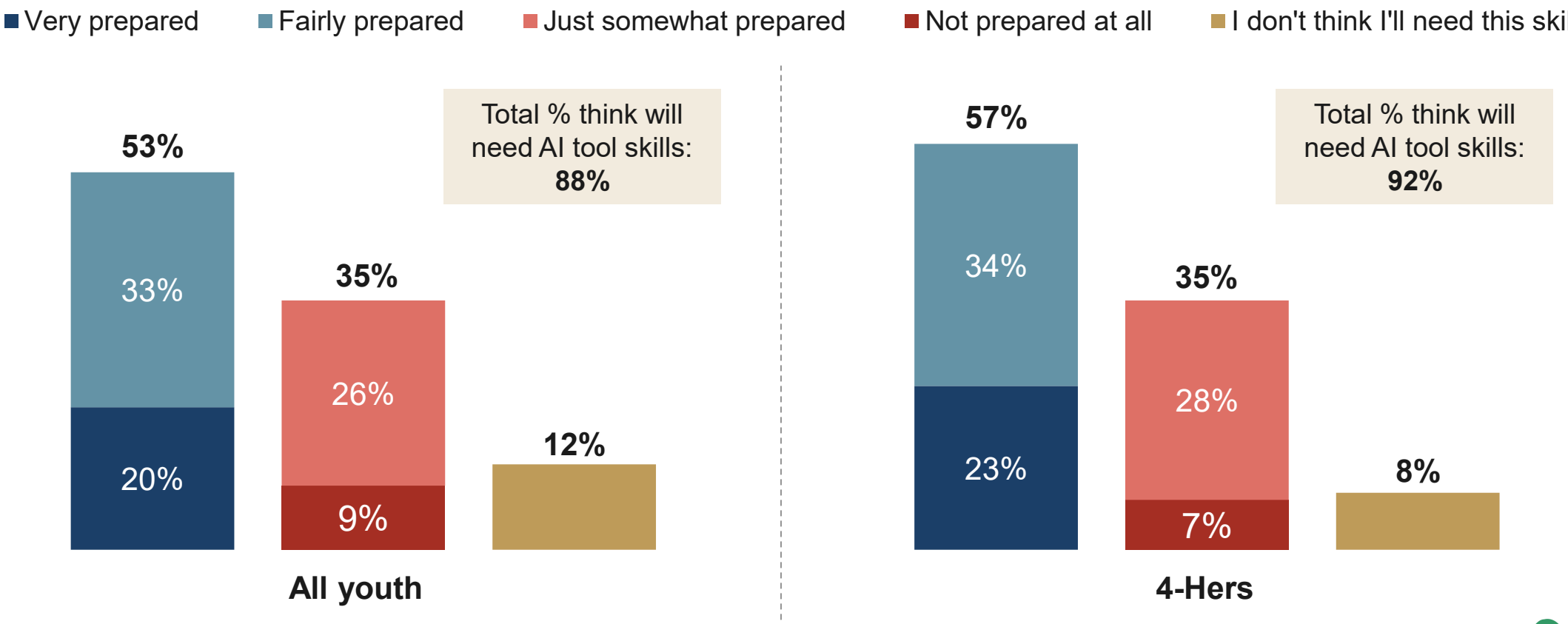
Young people recognize they will need to use artificial intelligence (AI) tools in their future careers, yet many feel far from prepared to do so.

A majority of young people feel ready to apply AI in their chosen career fields — but many do not. It is clear that young people view understanding and using AI tools as an essential career skill, but a significant portion still feel unprepared to put that knowledge into practice today.

Most young people recognize they will need AI skills in their future work, though many feel less prepared to apply them.

When you think about the kind of work you want to do in the future, how prepared do you feel you are to use tools like artificial intelligence?

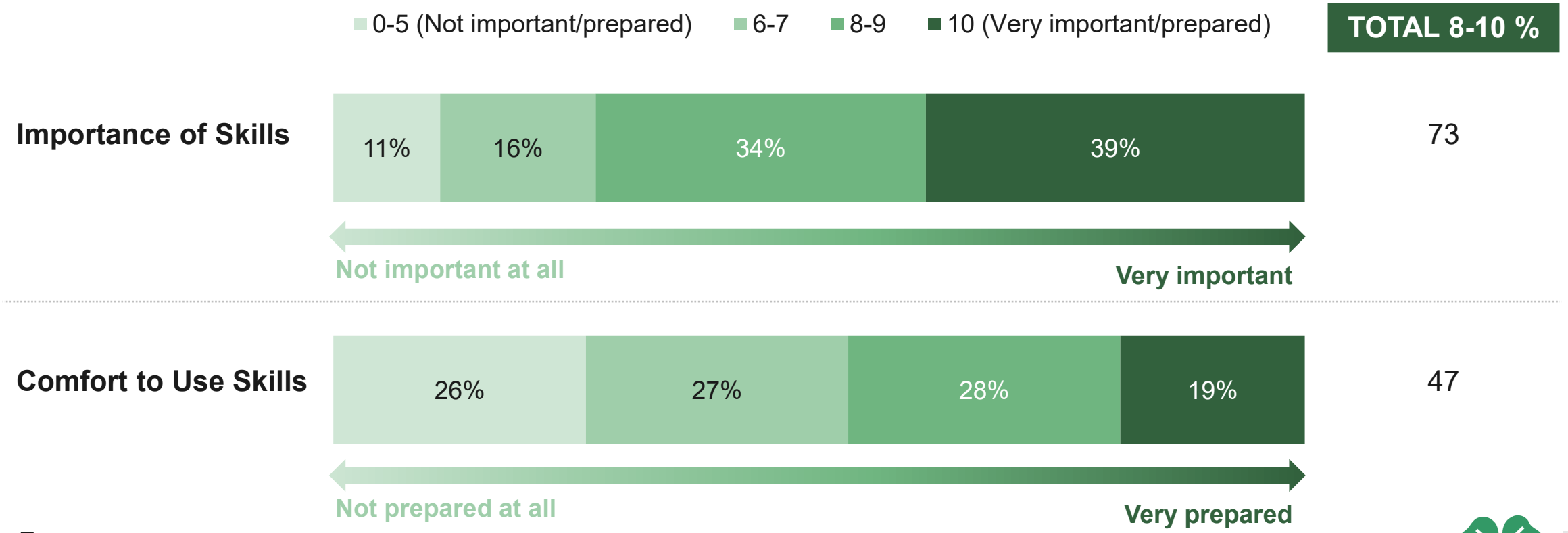


Young people are looking for more direction in financial-related skills.

Budgeting, money management, and other financial skills are seen by young Americans as essential life skills, yet many feel unprepared to apply them in the real-world. Youth are looking for more guidance from adults on how to increase their financial literacy, especially in areas like saving money, investing, and filing taxes.

More than 7 in 10 young people say budget and money management skills are very important for success, but less than half say they are very prepared to use these skills right now in work.

*On a 0 or 10 scale, how important do you think **budget and money management skills** are for success in career and life? And how comfortable would you feel using these skills right now in a work environment?*



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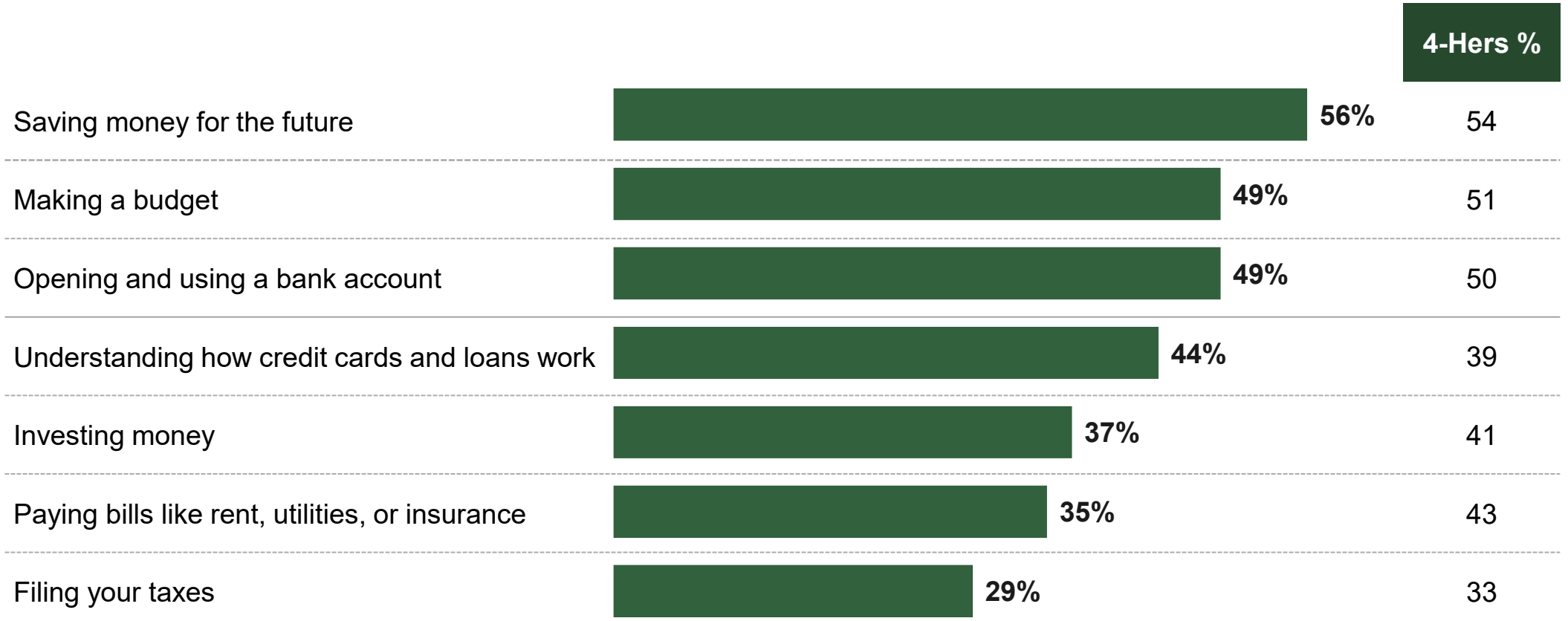
Young Americans say they are less comfortable with financial skills than life or work skills.

TOTAL 8-10 on 0-10 scale of comfort doing each of the following money- and financial-related tasks right now:



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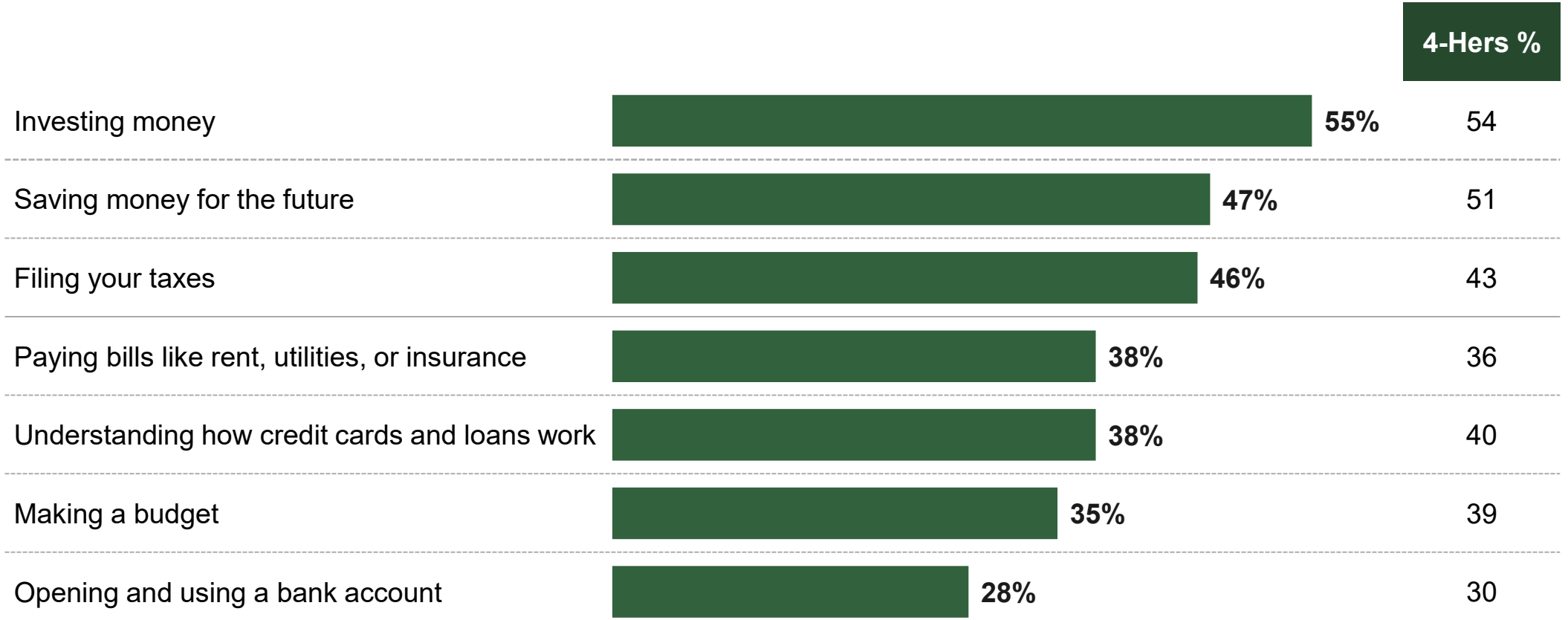
Young Americans are most interested in learning more about investing, saving money, and filing taxes.

Which THREE money and financial-related tasks would you be most interested in learning how to do?



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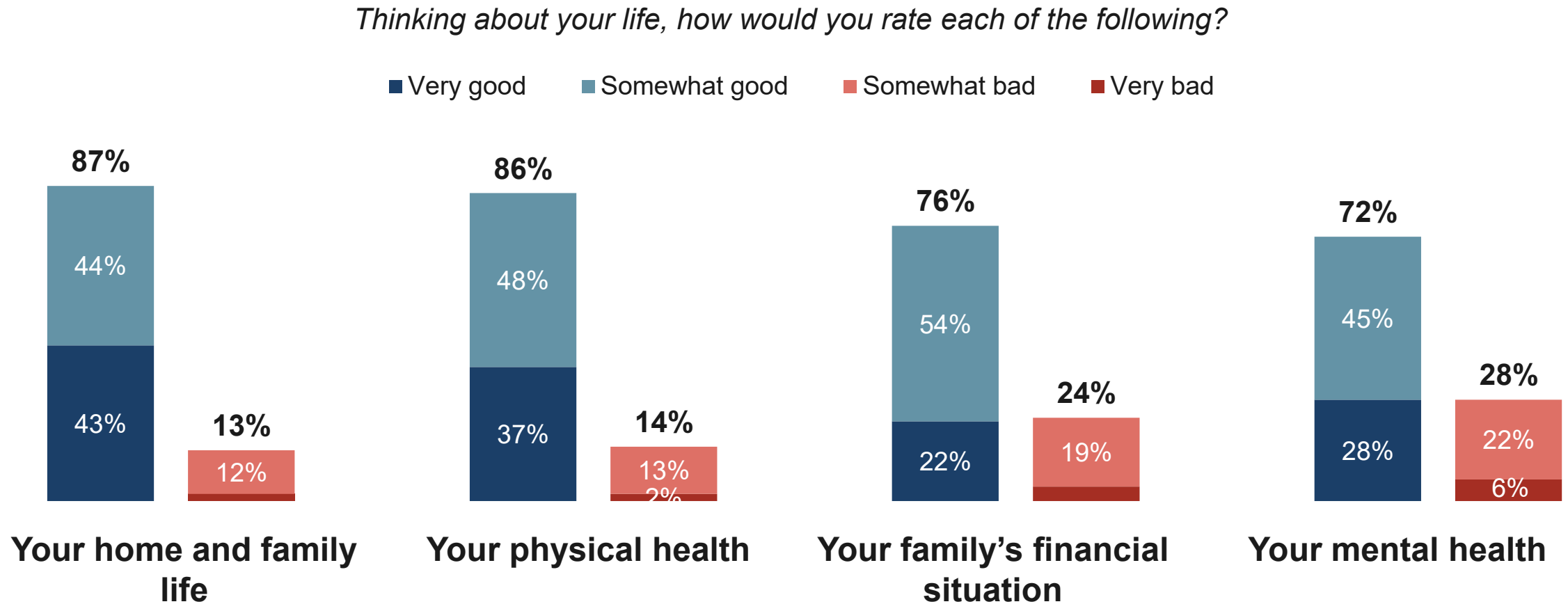
Youth are also looking for more help in managing their mental health and stress.

Young people recognize that mental health and stress management are important, yet many feel less prepared to handle both in a work environment. While a little over one in four youth rate their mental health as very good, most describe it as only somewhat good or even bad. Developing self-confidence—whether through school or outside experiences—is seen as the most valuable skill to learn. This highlights the need for greater support in helping young people build resilience and effective strategies for managing their mental health.

Young people rate their life situation well but provide the lowest ratings for mental health.



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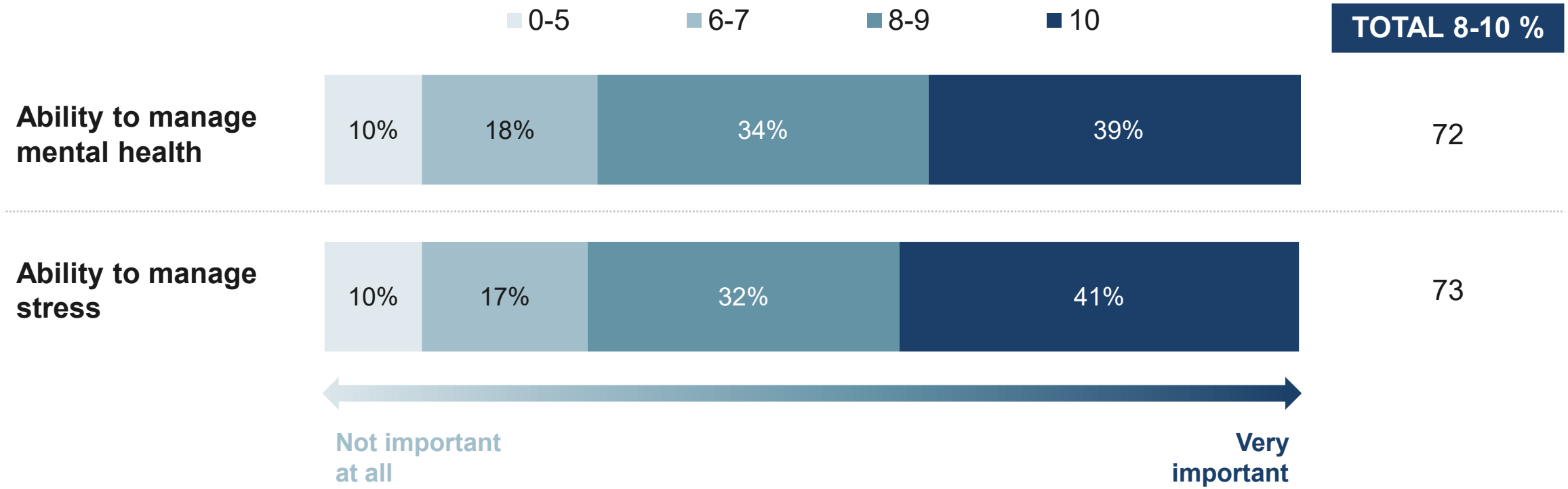
More than 7 in 10 young people believe it is very important for success to manage mental health and stress.

*How important on a 0 or 10 scale is the **ability to manage mental health and stress** for success in career and life?*



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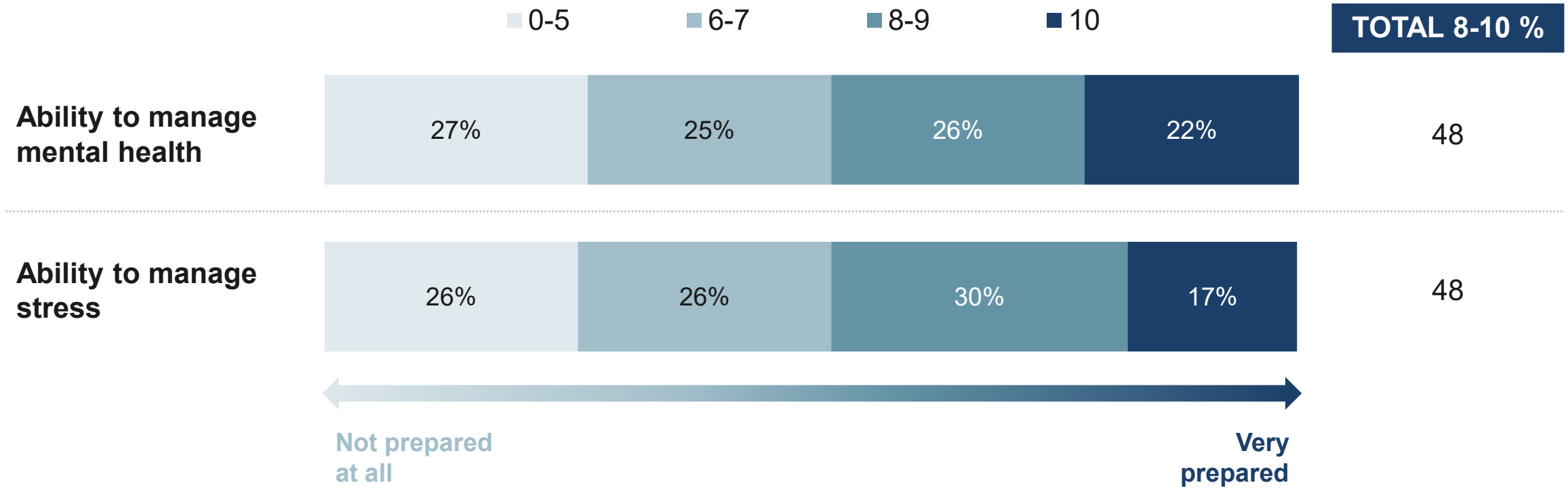
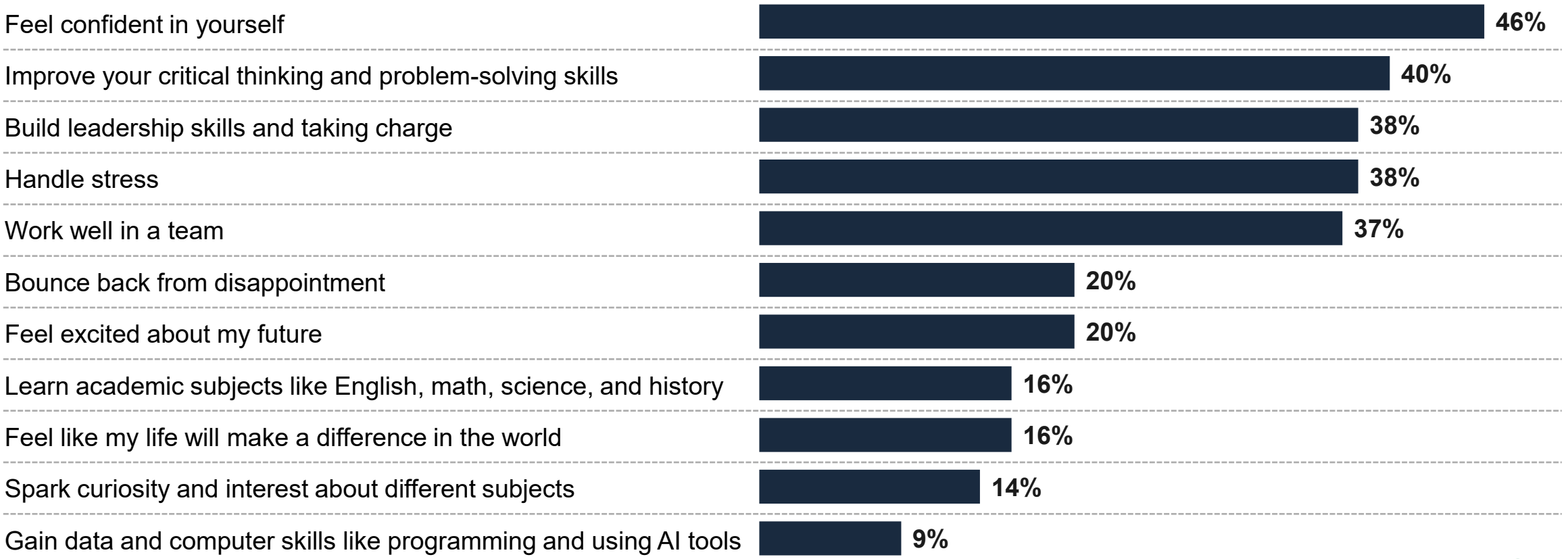
But less than half of young people say they are very prepared to manage mental health and stress right now in work.

*How comfortable on a 0 or 10 scale would you feel in the **ability to manage mental health and stress** right now in a work environment?*



Experiences that are most important in career and life success center on feeling confident in yourself and improving life skills.

Which THREE do you think are the most important for success in career and life?



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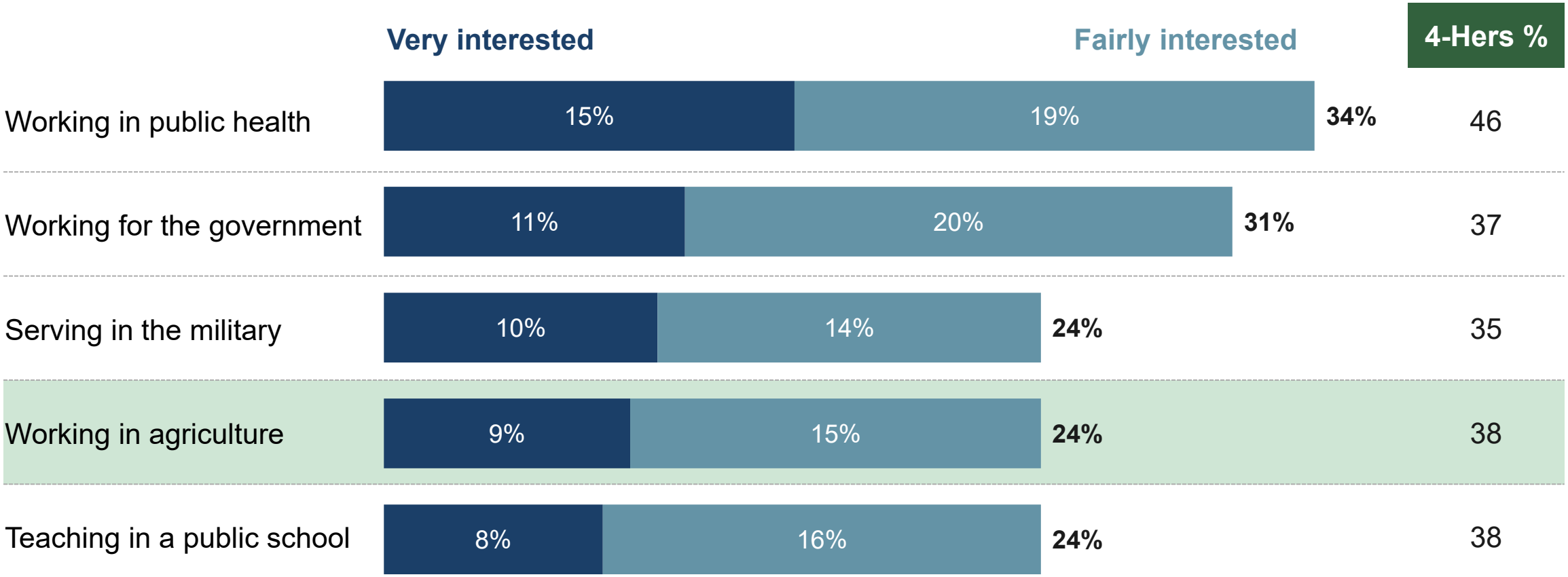
Many young people are interested in working in agriculture, and interest is higher when young people hear about specific agriculturally-related jobs.

One in four young people across the country are interested in working in agriculture. Interest is high no matter the type of area, with young Americans in cities reporting the highest interest. When young people are presented with specific jobs in ag, interest is even higher, with young people most interested in agricultural engineers, inspectors, and business managers.

One in four young Americans are interested in working in agriculture, on par with teaching and serving in the military.

TOTAL interest in job or career after graduation:



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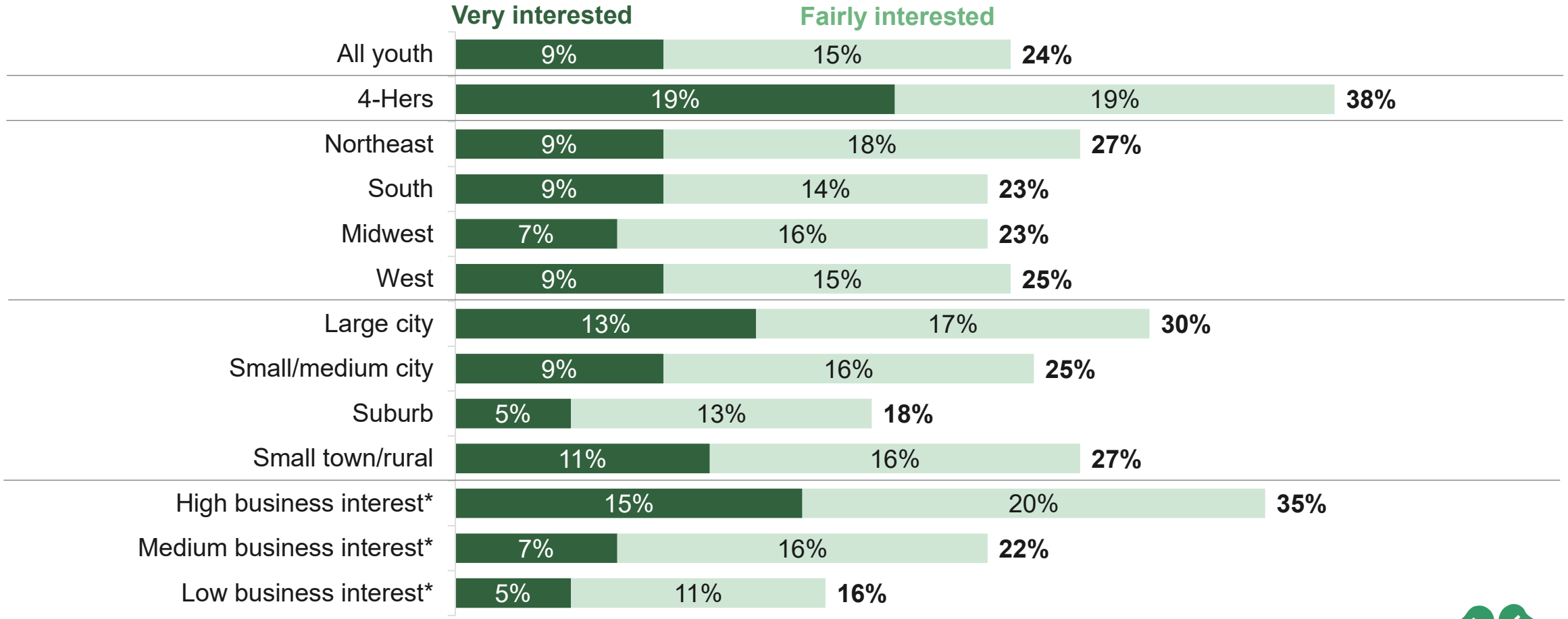
4-Hers are more interested than youth overall in these jobs and careers in service, including in public health (+12 points higher interest), military (+11), agriculture (+14), and public-school teaching (+14).

Interest in agriculture is fairly stable across many demographic groups, including many living in cities, as well as 4-Hers.

*TOTAL interest in **working in agriculture** after graduation:*



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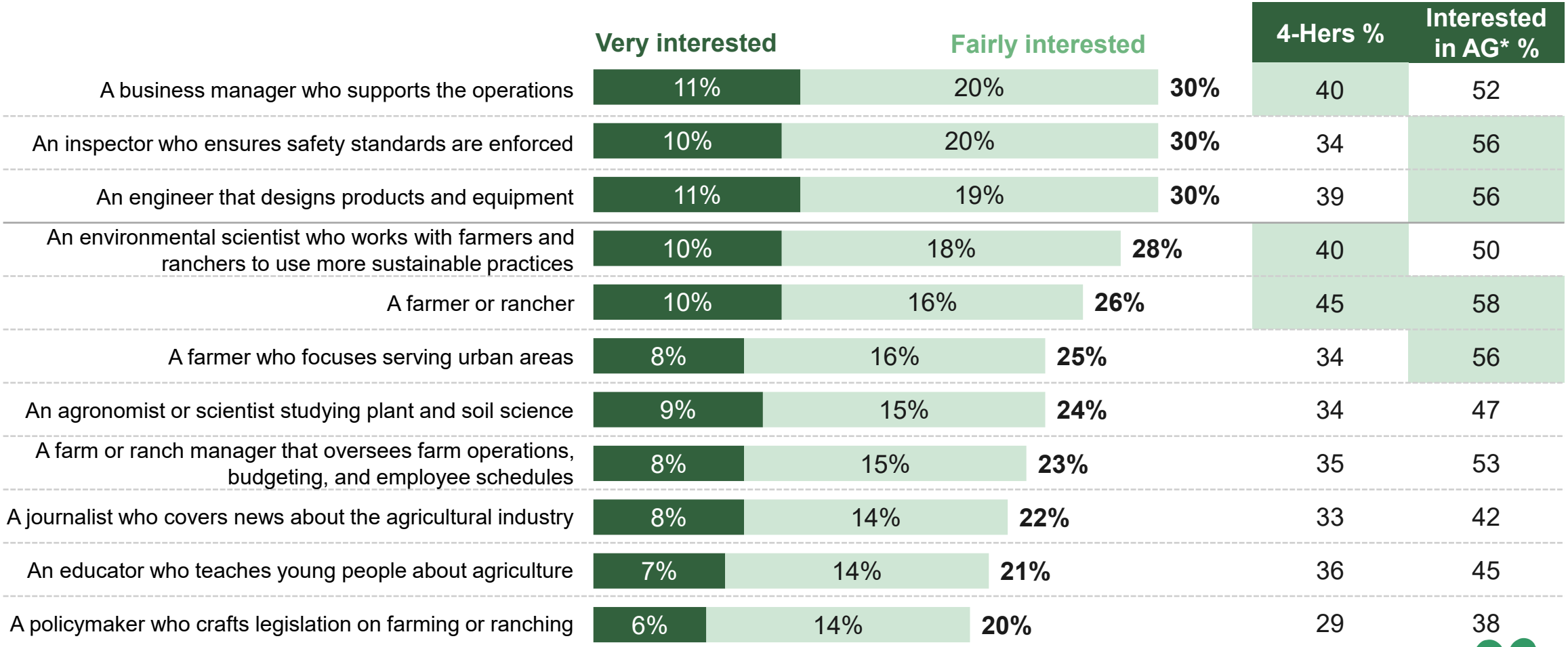
** On a 0-10 scale, interest in starting a business or becoming an entrepreneur as an adult: High=8-10; Medium=6-7; Low=0-5.*

When presented with specific jobs in agriculture, interest for many is high: engineers, inspectors, and business managers lead the way.

Total interest in job or career in agriculture after graduation:



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** Very or fairly interested in working in agriculture after graduation*