

PTAC/PDE Equity and Inclusion Initiative Suburban Teacher Survey



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Survey Notes

N = 307

All respondents indicated that they are current classroom teachers who work with students in public, suburban Pennsylvania schools.

Grade Levels Taught by Respondents (some teach more than one level)

Primary (K-2) = 53

Intermediate (3-5) = 66

Middle School (6-8) = 91

High School (9-12) = 145

PA Department of Education Equity Definition

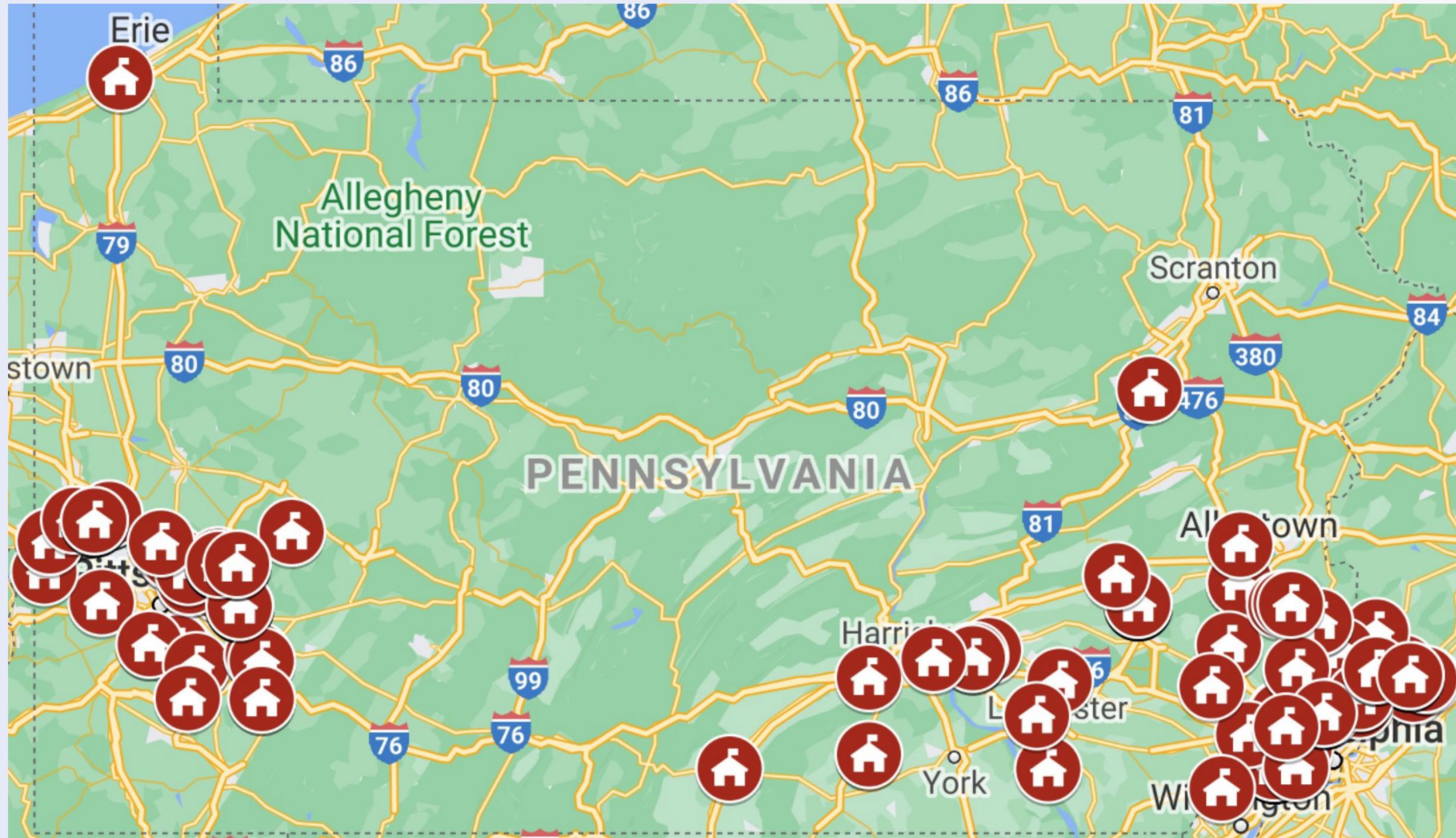
"Every student having access to the educational resources and rigor they need at the right moment in their education across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, family background and/or family income."



Map of LEAs Represented by Survey Data



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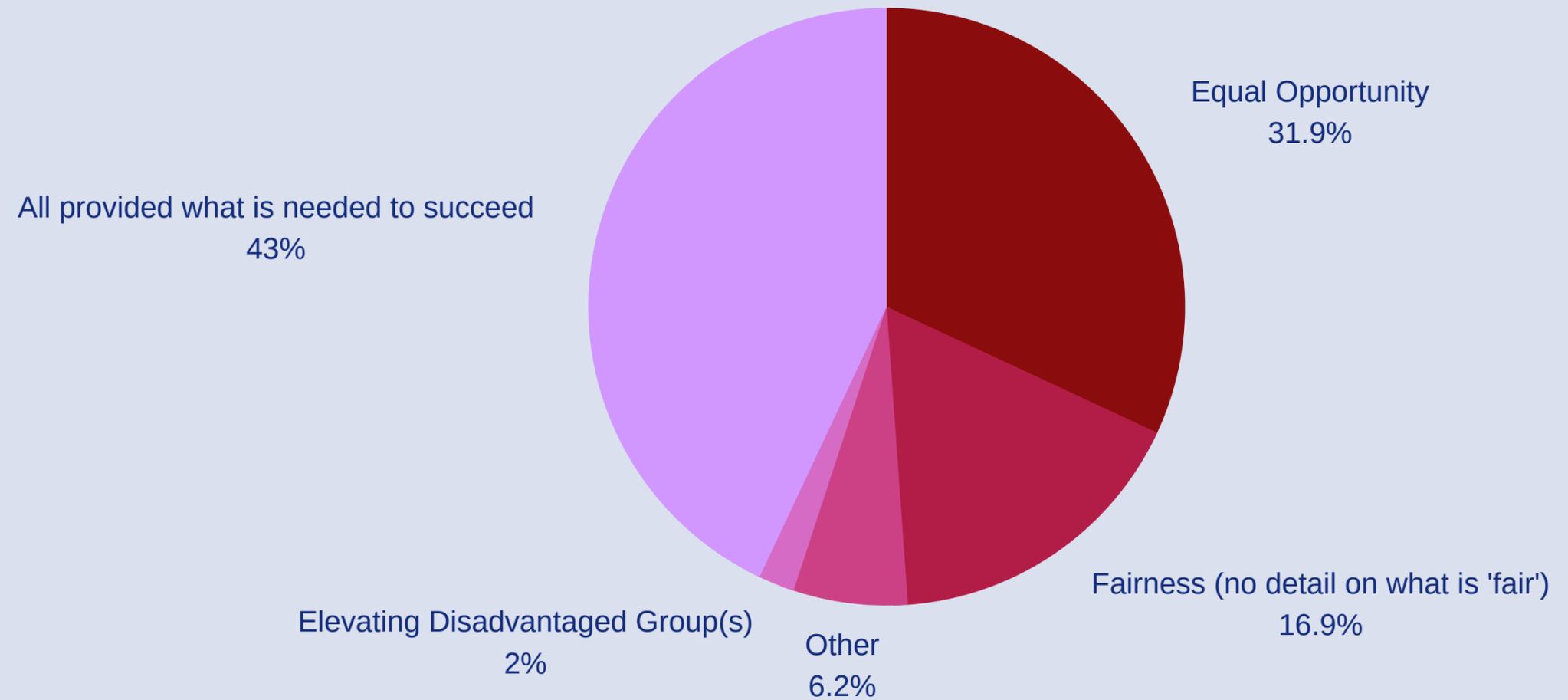


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Pennsylvania Teachers Advisory Committee
Survey of Suburban PA Teachers, May 2021

What is your personal definition of "equity?"

Most common responses fell into four categories

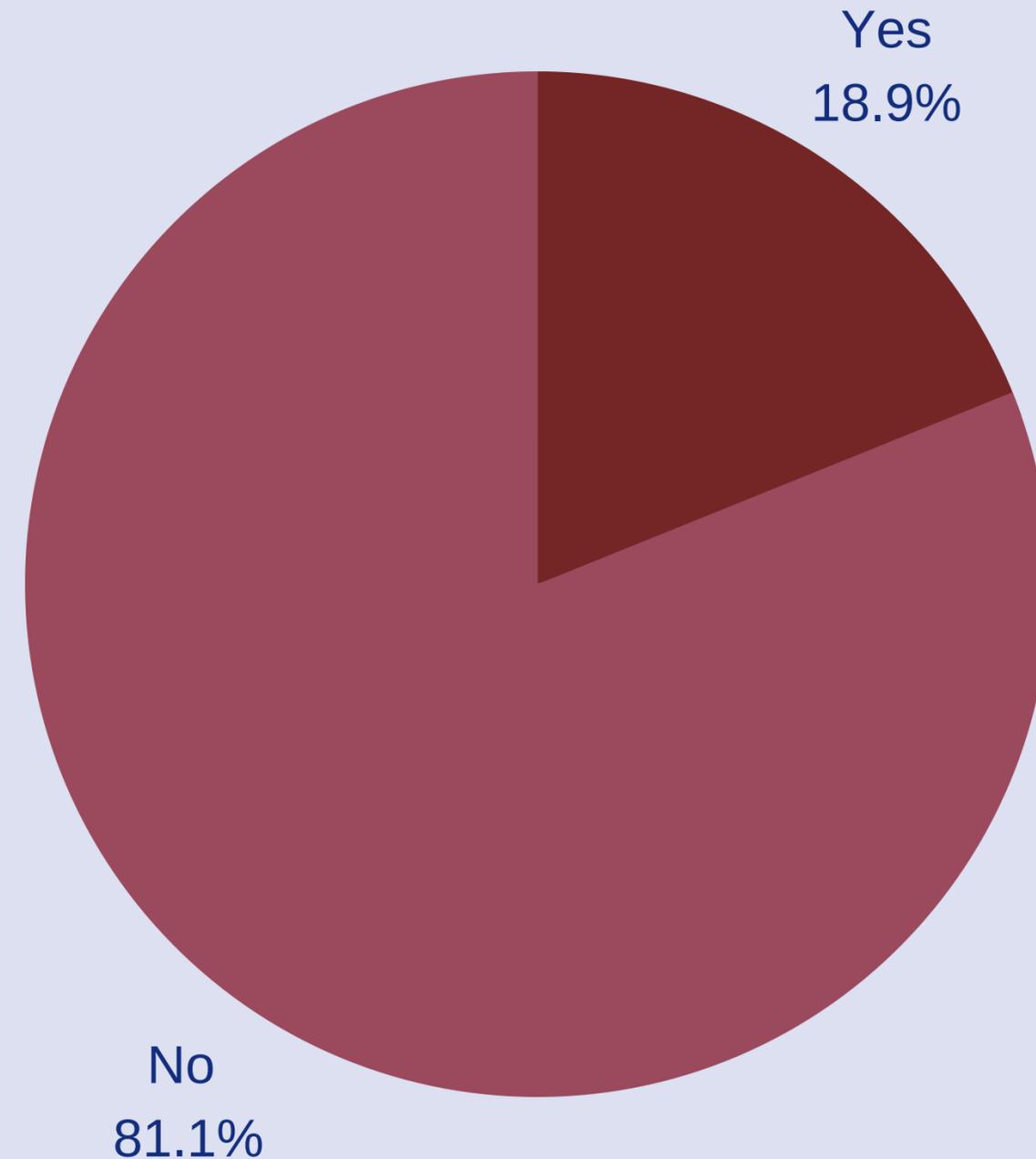




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Before taking this survey, were you familiar with the Pennsylvania Department of Education's published definition of "equity?"



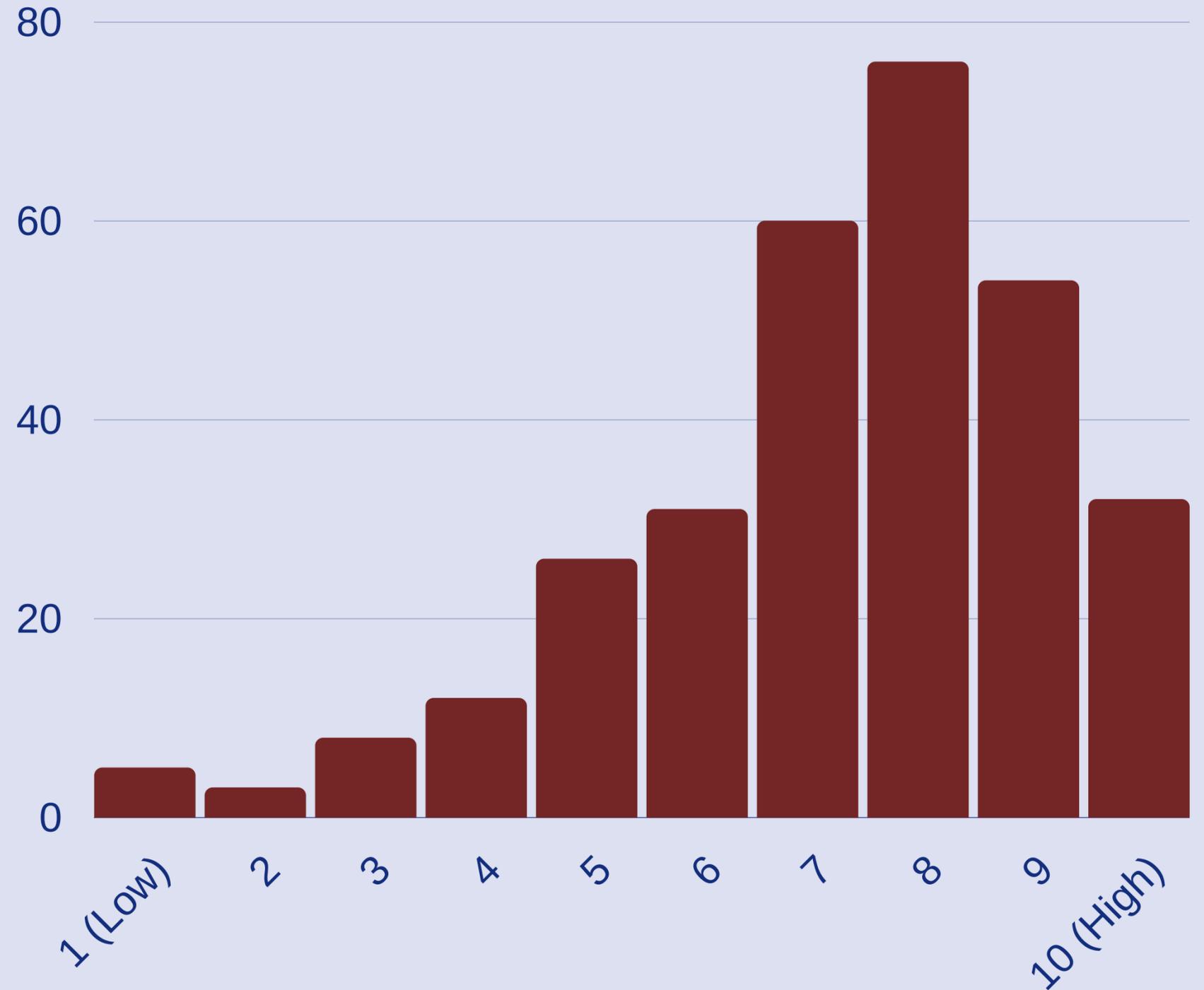


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How well informed do you feel about being able to promote equity (as defined by PDE) through your teaching practices?

Mean: 7.27

Median: 8.00



What do you wish those making educational decisions at the state level knew about educational equity and professional development?



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Selected representative responses

HS Social Studies Teacher, Southwestern PA

Equity is not just a buzzword, it is a real need for students in every district. When our school went virtual last year, many students did not have access to wifi. To succeed they needed to have access to the materials that other students had. When we returned to school in person, many students (for various legitimate reasons) chose to stay home and learn virtual. They needed textbooks, but many students did not have transportation. I ended up driving to students' houses on my own time so that they would have what they needed to be successful. Many of these students are underprivileged and part of our small minority demographic. By not making their materials accessible, we were merely contributing to stereotypes and statistics.

MS Social Studies Teacher, Southeastern PA

Discussions about equity cannot take place until there is adequate training and recognition of the impact of unconscious bias in education. Unfortunately, it's an awkward subject for many. However, it's the starting point for any discussion about achieving equity in our schools.

Elementary School Teacher, Central PA

Schools are community hubs that require broad support to ensure that our students have even a chance at an equitable education. We need funding that goes beyond "education " to social workers, to food insecurity, housing, counselors. So many things beyond teaching every single day impact equity.



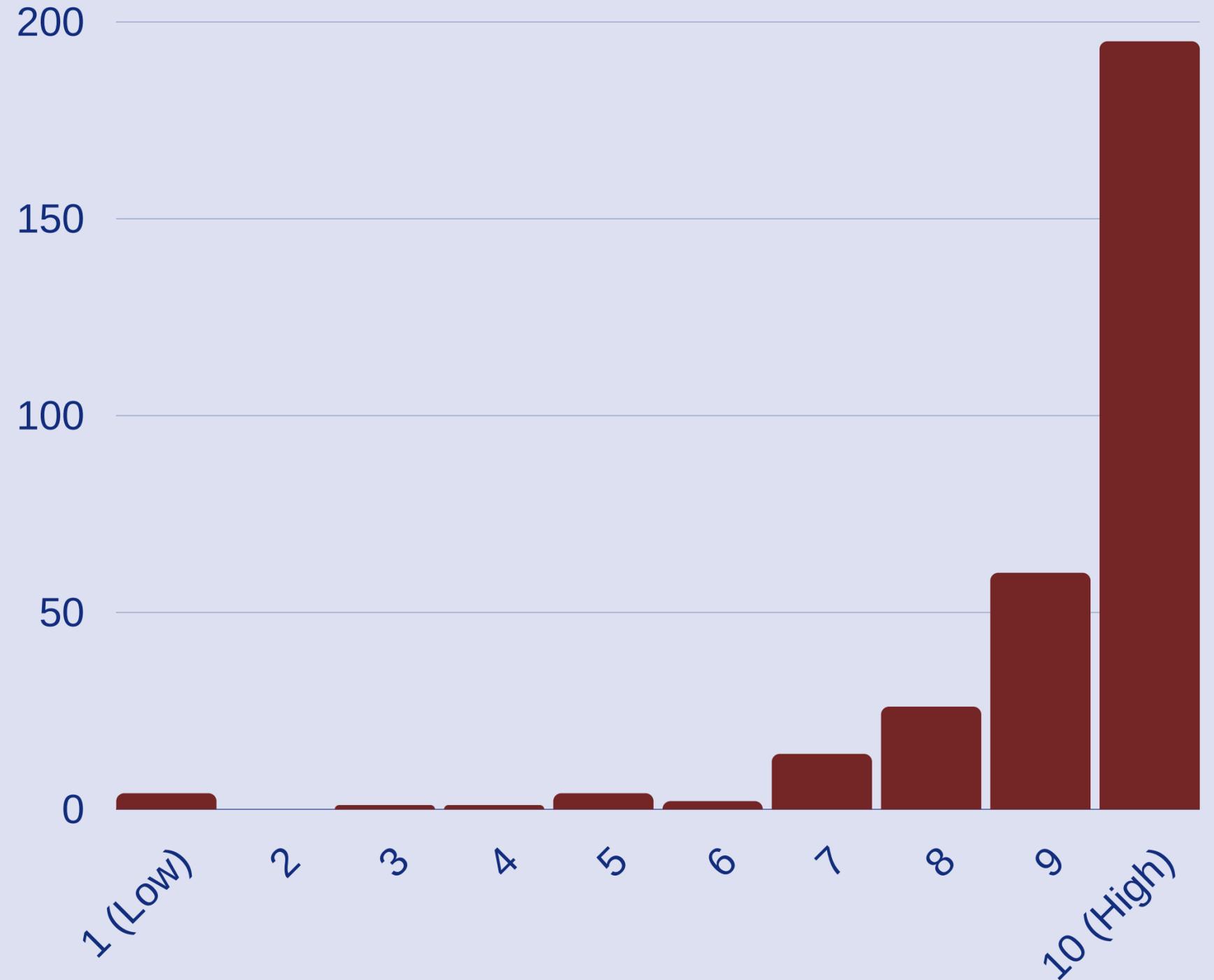
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Survey of Suburban PA Teachers, May 2021

How much value do you see in promoting equity (as defined by PDE)?

Mean: 9.25

Median: 10.00





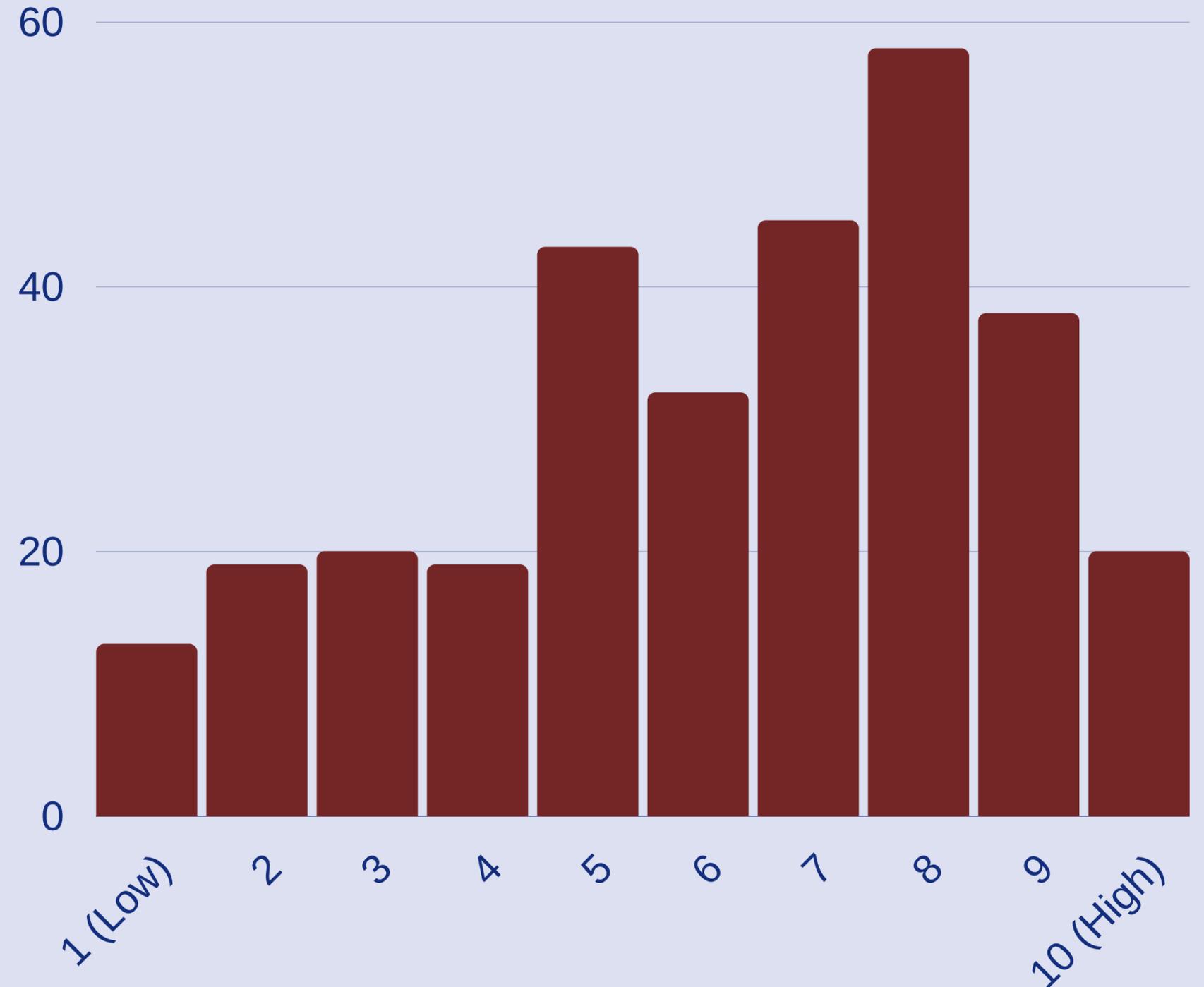
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During your planning and teaching practice, how much focus do you put on students understanding the experiences and perspectives of those with different "races, genders, ethnicities, languages, disabilities, religions, sexual orientations, gender identities, family backgrounds and family incomes?"

Mean: 6.23

Median: 7.00



What do you wish those making educational decisions at the state level knew about educational equity and professional development?



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Selected representative responses

HS Foreign Language Teacher, Southeastern PA

It was powerful when former students, many now working as professionals and educators themselves, discussed what it was like to be a minority in our school district. They didn't mince words, but they were more than fair. You cannot argue with their perceptions and experiences as they are unique and personal to them.

Some of our school leaders are naive at best and woefully unrealistic at worst when it comes to PD on issues of equity. For example, I have been directed to initiate a discussion on racial inequality in class. I am a Spanish teacher, so this isn't necessarily a part of the curriculum. Students pick up on this quickly and will sense that this is a "forced" lesson. Additionally, I have exactly ONE African American student in that class. How is this fair to this student? What must he/she be thinking? I am a white male, and although I feel that I have knowledge about racism and justice issues, in my entire 50 years I have not experienced a fraction of what that lone student in my class has. Who is the teacher here? Finally, because I am a realist, I know that I have at least 3 or 4 patently racist students who are going to challenge whatever is presented.

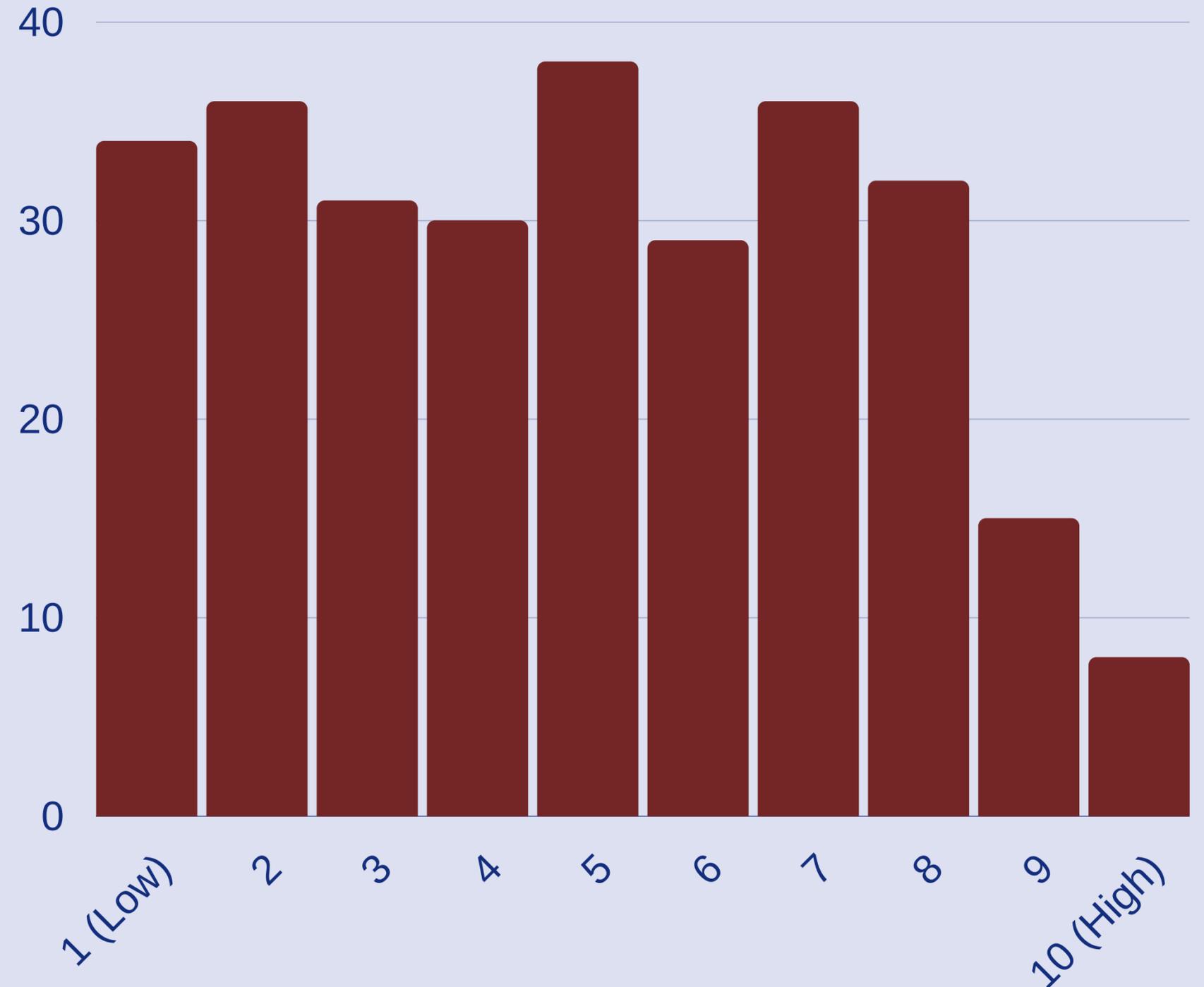
This is a truly a Powder keg! We must proceed, but with extreme caution.



In district/LEA provided professional development that you have participated in during the last 5 years, how much focus has been on students and/or teachers understanding the experiences and perspectives of those with different "races, genders, ethnicities, languages, disabilities, religions, sexual orientations, gender identities, family backgrounds and family incomes?"

Mean: 5.17

Median: 5.00



What do you wish those making educational decisions at the state level knew about educational equity and professional development?



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Selected representative responses

MS Mathematics Teacher, Southeastern PA

Professional development needs to do a better job of providing teachers with information regarding trauma and students. I should not be finding out that a student in my class was homeless three months after the student and his father lost their home. How can I expect that student to prioritize school or comprehend anything happening in my class?

High School Teacher, Southwestern PA

Our school is exceptionally diverse. However our teaching staff is predominantly (90%+) cisgendered and white. We need more diversity in our faculty. Our school seems to be very much dragging its feet with this.

MS/HS ESOL Teacher, Southeastern PA

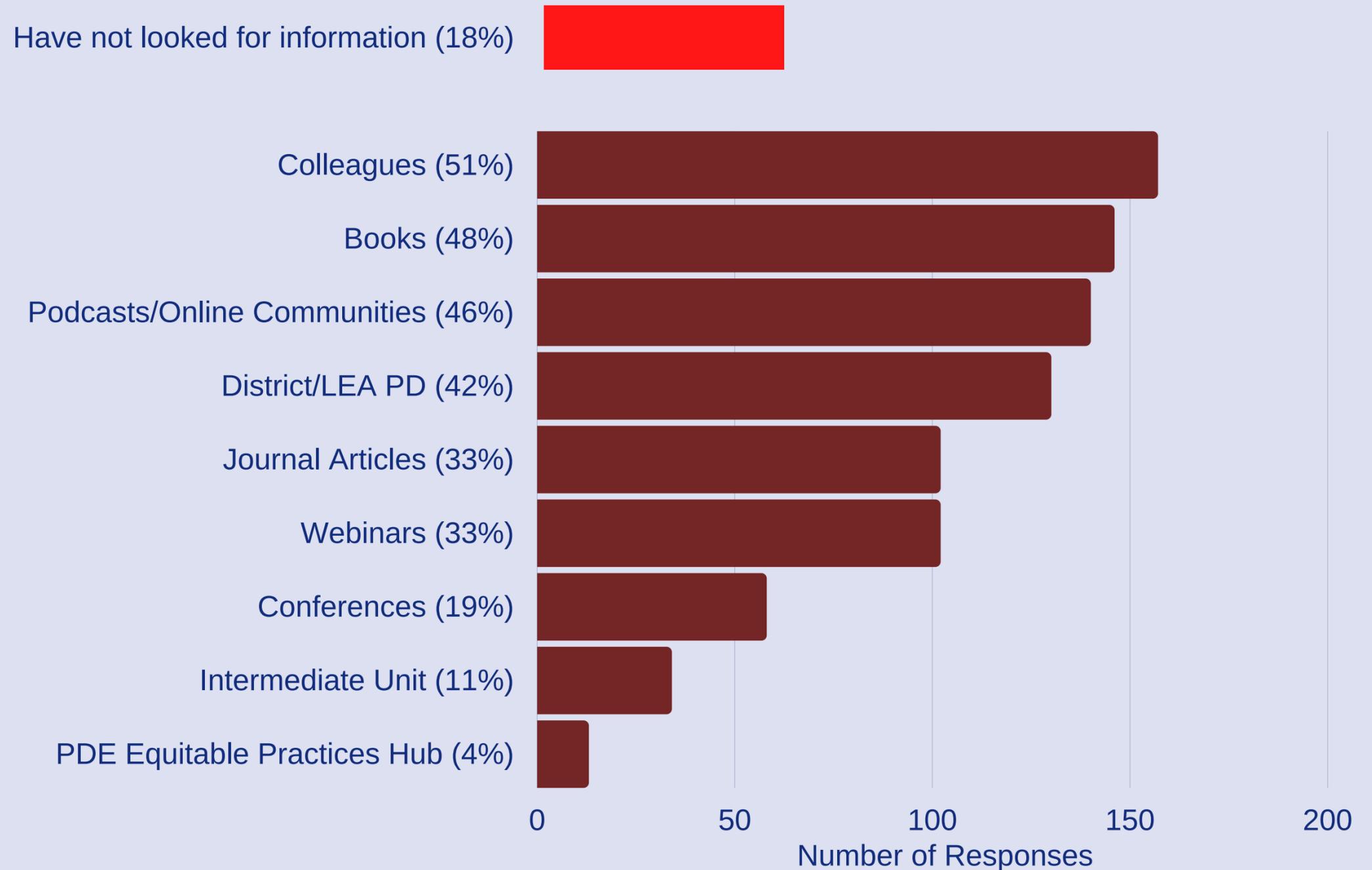
English learners should not be required to take standardized tests during their first year in the United States. These tests are not translated into their home languages. Students are entitled to a word to word glossary and an interpreter; however, the process of interpreting complex questions and answer choices in disciplines like Biology and Algebra is imperfect at best, leading to numerous discrepancies between translations and intended meanings of questions/choices, My most recent newcomers to the US took an average of 8 hours to complete their Biology Keystone. This is inequitable, damaging to students' sense of esteem, and an invalid measure of their proficiency in Biology.



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What resources do you use when looking for information about equitable education practices?

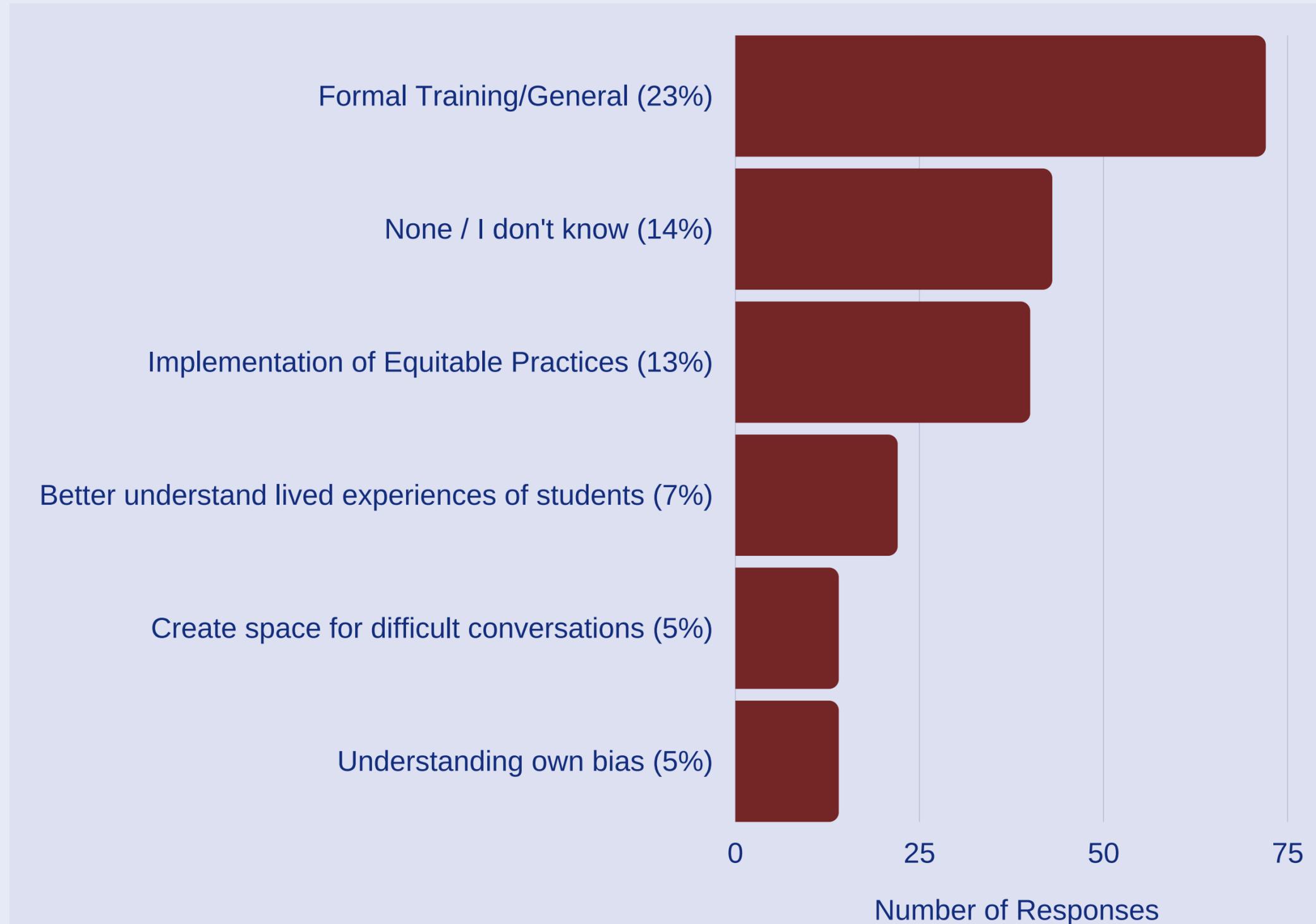




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What professional learning and development do you believe is necessary to promote equity (as defined by PDE)?

Most common responses. No other responses above 5%



What do you wish those making educational decisions at the state level knew about educational equity and professional development?



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Selected representative responses

MS English Teacher, Northeastern PA

Everyone needs to be involved in the equity process - all stakeholders need to be aware and involved in order for any program to be successful.

HS STEM Teacher, Southeastern PA

My district is now holding professional development to say they are focused on equity, but there has been little going on in the 4 years I have worked here to actually promote equity compared to my previous districts. Many administrators and staff do not wholeheartedly believe in equity and that is demonstrated in the things they say and do outside of PD. Improving in this area will require a shift in mindset and attitude.

HS Performing Arts Teacher, Southeastern PA

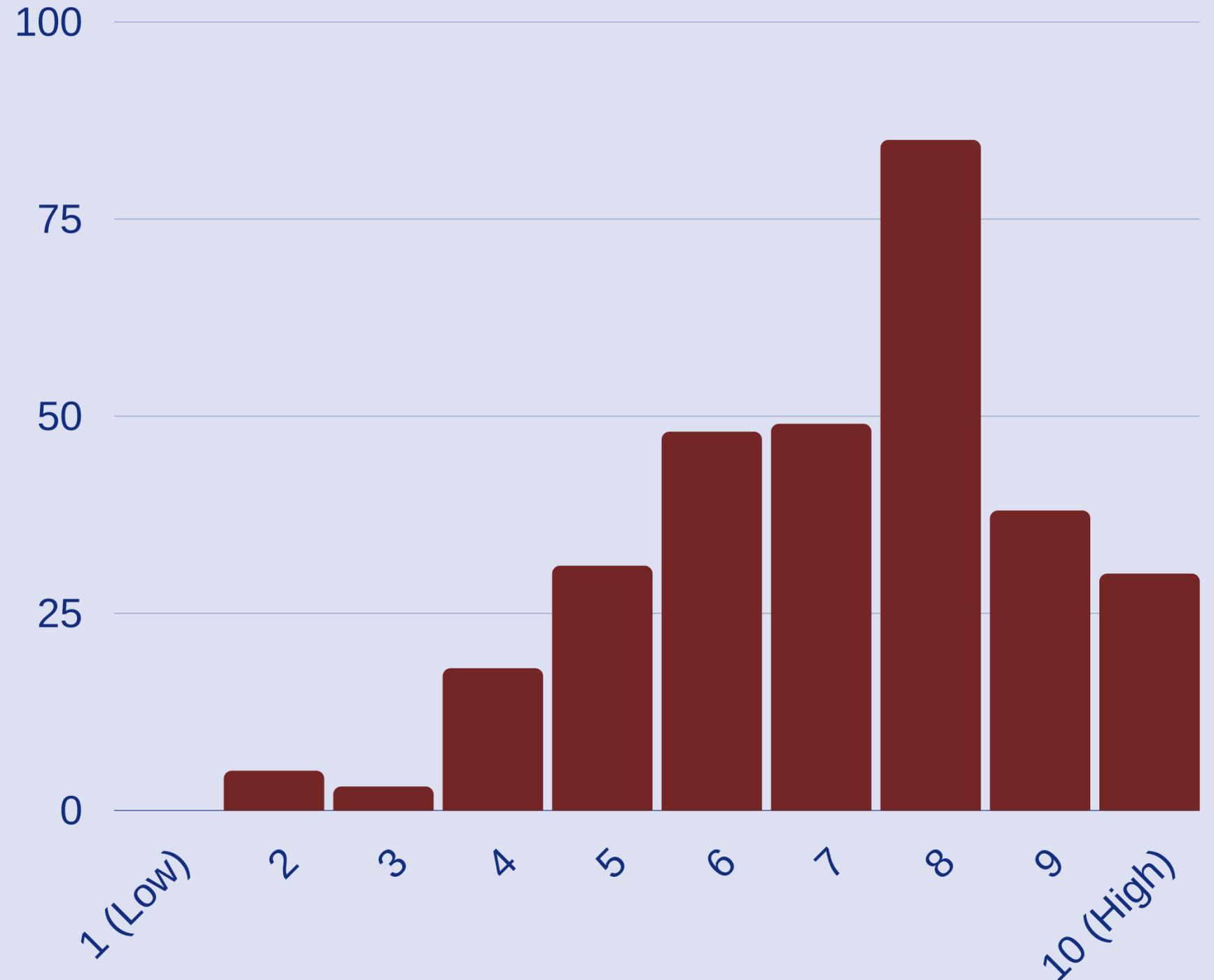
I know many teachers feel like they can't talk to their students openly because they're afraid they won't say the "right" thing. The answer to this isn't to force teachers to re-learn the right words to say, but to allow THEM the space to explore the root causes of the differences in outcome and give THEM the safe space they need to explore how to reach kids where they're at. When teachers feel safe and supported instead of blamed, they are free to take the risks and have the conversations that make a true difference in their students' lives. Parents, teachers, students, & administrators need to see each other as being on the same team. Right now, I'm not sure that's the case.



How well informed do you feel about understanding the experiences and backgrounds of students that are in your classes?

Mean: 7.16

Median: 7.00



What do you wish those making educational decisions at the state level knew about educational equity and professional development?



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Selected representative responses

Primary Teacher, Eastern PA

I wish educational decision makers were able to see that the academic success of young children correlates with the quality and quantity of their life experiences. Experiences in the lives of children give rise to essential conversations with others which in turn expose them to the nuances of language, social skills, and vocabulary.

When states impose inflexible inappropriate high stakes academic requirements, teachers find themselves teaching skills rather than children. This has dire consequences in terms of teaching and reaching the 'whole child'.

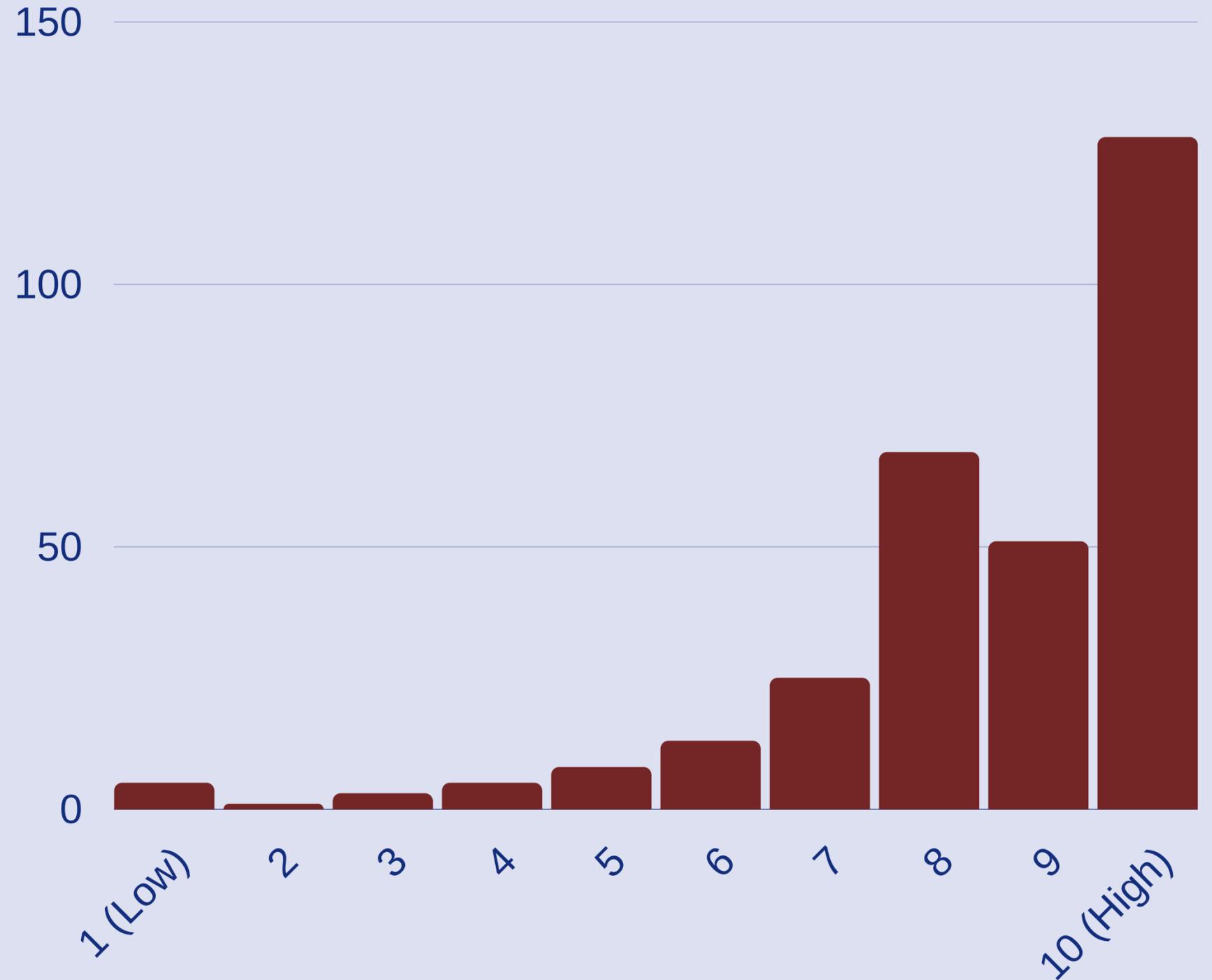
Equitable early learning opportunities are embedded in the development of real contextual and experiential learning. This becomes critical in the areas within suburban districts that have sizable concentrations of poor families with young children. Skills are more easily mastered and then measured when they are contextualized. Decision makers must not value only discrete measurable skills, especially during the early years, for it is the less visible aggregate of experience that facilitates the transfer of learning and the acquisition of skills.



How passionate are you about prioritizing educational equity (as defined by PDE) both inside and outside your school?

Mean: 8.50

Median: 9.00

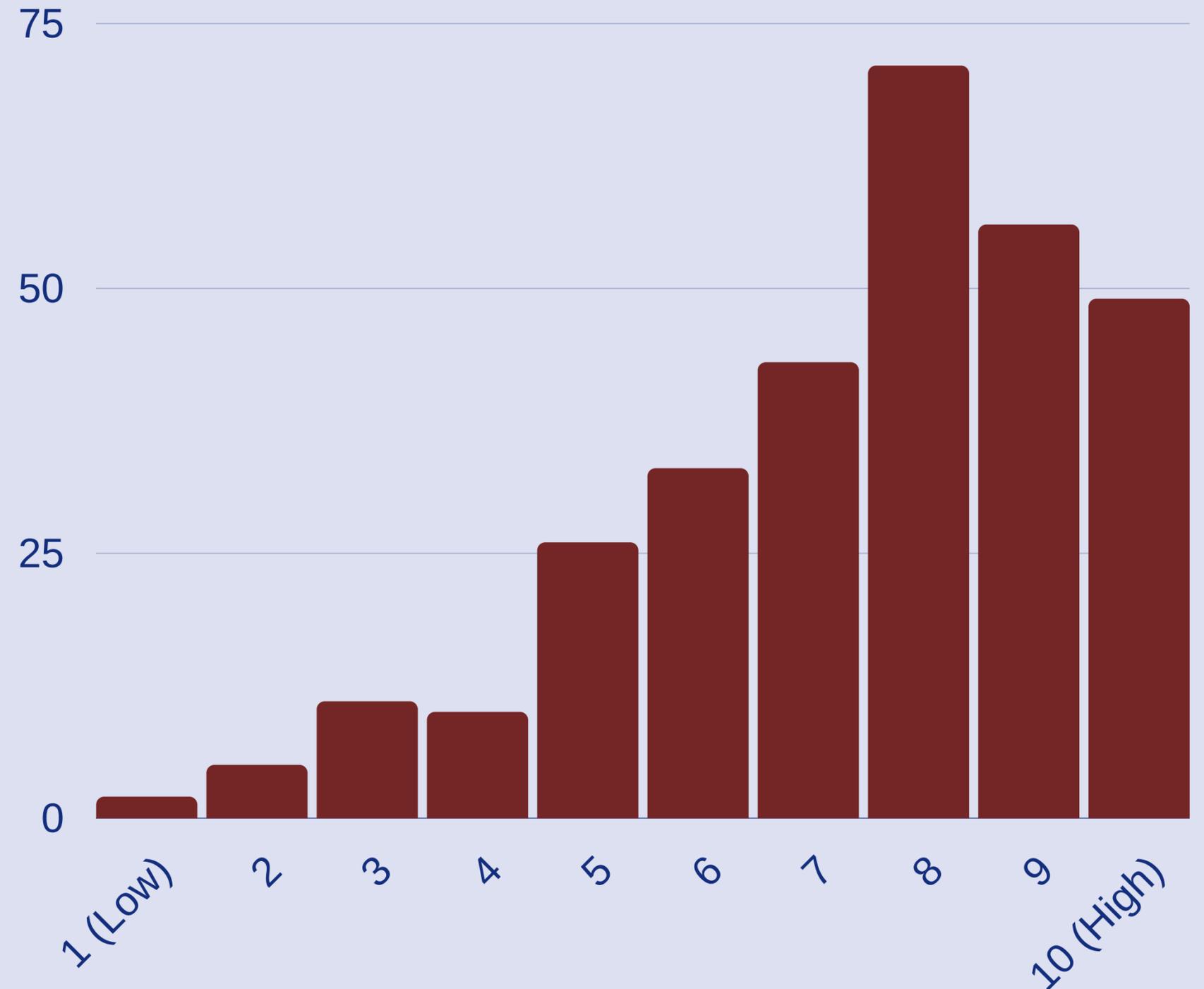




How competent do you feel about working for educational equity (as defined by PDE) both inside and outside your school?

Mean: 7.43

Median: 8.00



What do you wish those making educational decisions at the state level knew about educational equity and professional development?



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Selected representative responses

MS Business, Computer & Information Technology Teacher, Southeastern PA

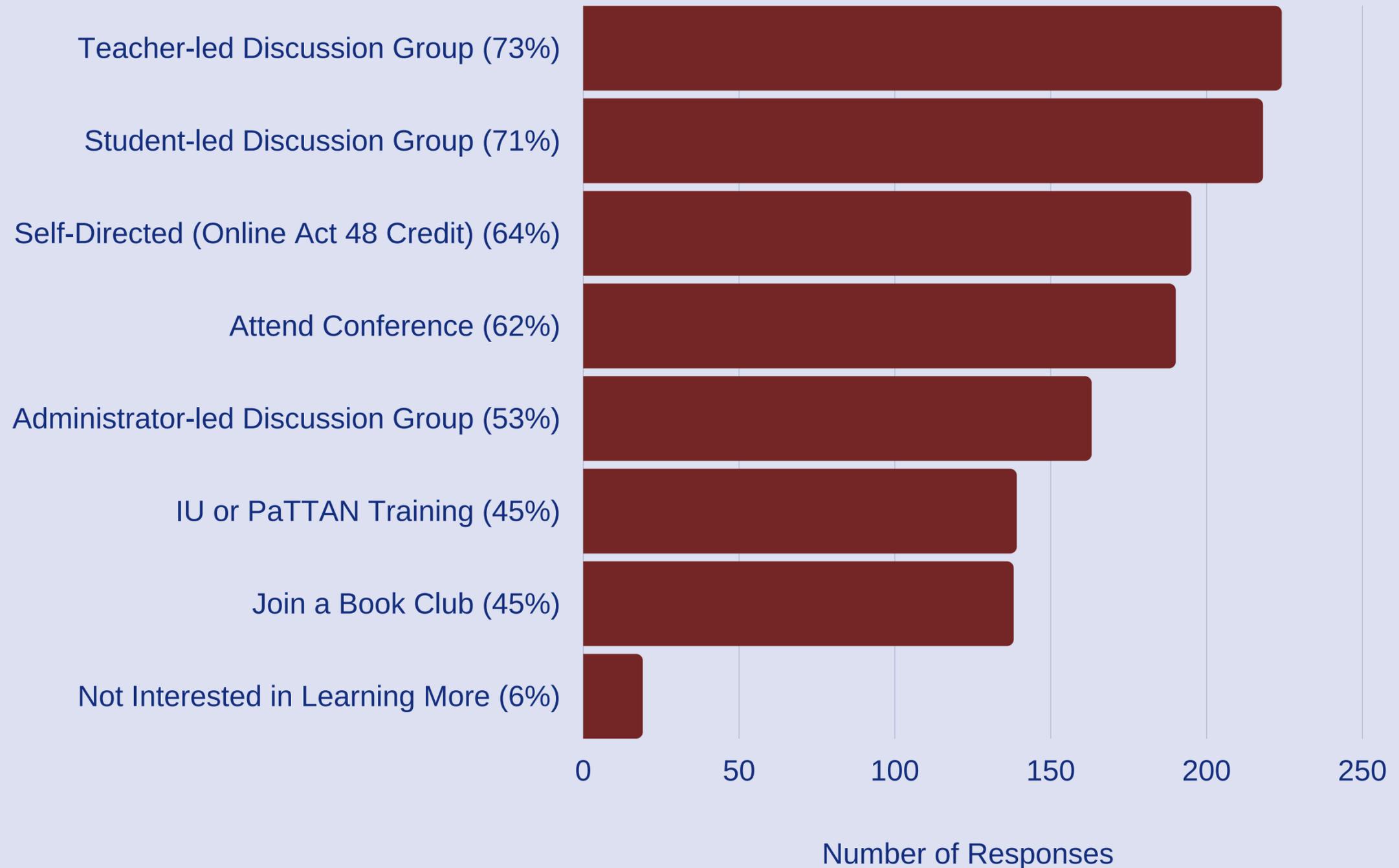
I'm concerned that addressing issues of educational equity is essentially a fad, and that as the racial and social justice protests of summer 2020 recede into memory, that institutional support will wane. As a classroom teacher, I feel like educational equity is a good, noble, and lofty goal, but honestly, at the end of the 20/21 school year, I'm feeling exceptionally worn down, and not particularly proud of how my year has gone.

I feel like there's a disconnect between the goal and the practical realities that need to exist as preconditions in order to get there. I personally may want equity for my students, but teaching in a politically heterogeneous district means that teachers here catch heat when they do anything that might vaguely be understood to have a political dimension to it. Our district administration routinely directs us to avoid and shut down classroom conversations about political hot topics. I comply, but realize that we are missing an opportunity (obligation?) to have trusted, informed, caring adults help students understand complex issues like those surrounding equity. It's not a safe space for teachers to risk engaging in this work. In fact, our district by it's actions and omissions has designed a culture of that stifles teacher risk-taking, despite lip-service to the contrary.



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Which of the following actions would you be willing to take to learn more about educational equity and inclusion?



What do you wish those making educational decisions at the state level knew about educational equity and professional development?



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Selected representative responses

HS Social Studies Teacher, Southwestern PA

We have had several racial and homophobic incidents which have not been addressed. Students have stayed home as a result of bullying. Administration has not taken action when presented with evidence of this harassment and bullying. The community in general thinks the push for equity is leftist propaganda.

MS Science & Social Studies Teacher, Central PA

I do not know if this goal is obtainable through professional development. In order for equity to be achieved there has to be systematic changes to every facet of our lives, the status quo is not acceptable. Any PD about equity without policy change is just for show and will not actually result in equity.

HS English Teacher, Southeastern PA

We need to be cognizant of the fact that sometimes our best intentions can have harmful outcomes. Several years ago, my school began an initiative to reflect more diverse voices through a building-wide reading initiative. In the first year, we used several books about interactions between Black teens and the police. It was an eye-opening experience for many of our students. One Black student, however, told me that it made him uncomfortable and that it was not something he wanted to spend his school time discussing because this was something he had to worry about constantly.



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About the Pennsylvania Teachers Advisory Committee (PTAC)

Mission:

**To ensure essential decisions
that impact students
are informed by expert teachers**

PTAC is a non-profit organization. Members are active K-12 classroom teachers who have been recognized for teaching excellence at the state, national, and/or international level representing every region of the state and every subject area. To learn more and apply for membership, visit our website.

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