School Implementation of COG-RA: Personal Mobile Devices Policy: Fall 2022 Principal Survey Results and Website Review

May 2023

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Shared Accountability
Applied Research and Evaluation

Background & Study Purpose

In May 2022, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) updated Regulation COG-RA, which governs using Personal Mobile Devices (PMDs) that can send or receive voice, video, or text data in school or on school property. All schools were required to review COG-RA, develop or update their school-level guidelines, share them with their communities, and post them on their websites. This report assesses the implementation of COG-RA and provides a summary of the feedback from school administrators and review of school websites.

Methods

In December 2022, an online survey of principals was conducted to review the status of COG-RA implementation at the school level. In addition, school websites were reviewed to see if local school PMD guidelines were posted. One hundred forty-six principals (72%) responded to the survey, representing 97 out of 137 elementary schools, 33 out of 40 middle schools, and 16 out of 26 high schools.

Key Findings

- Local school PMD guidelines were developed or updated with input from various stakeholders according to principal survey respondents. Elementary, middle, and high school leadership teams were the most frequently mentioned groups (49%, 94%, 94% respectively). At least one-quarter of elementary, middle, and high school respondents reported school administrators with input from teachers and staff (37%, 52%, and 44%) and school administrators (42%, 39%, and 25%) provided input. Some schools also obtained input from parents and student leaders or MCPS central office staff (19%, 9%, 13%).
- Respondents' schools used various methods for sharing COG-RA and school-level PMD information, including staff meetings, back-to-school nights, and newsletters. Schools regularly conducted staff meetings, emailed reminders to students, and provided weekly electronic communications to students and parents to ensure clarity and compliance with the upgraded policy and practices.
- In line with regulation COG-RA, the respondents reported that their local school PMD guidelines adopted a universal approach to ensure that all practices were consistent for all students and classes. In open-ended responses, principals indicated that if necessary, their schools made exceptions for students with Individualized Educational Plans (IEP) /504 plans, health reasons, special events, emergencies, and teacher discretion, mainly for instructional use.
- While half of middle and high school survey respondents said their school's PMD guidelines were on the school website, a website review found lower percentages (24% for middle schools, 28% for high schools). Only 18% of elementary respondents reported posting their guidelines, but a website review found 15% had posted them. Many elementary schools elaborated through comments that their guidelines were included in other documents or shared them through electronic communications, suggesting different interpretations of the mandate to post on the website.
- The majority of elementary and middle school respondents indicated that regulation COG-RA was well received by their school communities, that staff felt comfortable implementing it, and that students were cooperating with local school-level PMD guidelines. open-ended comments and feedback from staff praised and highlighted that the updates to COG-RA helped to clarify and standardize PMD use in schools, and reduce paperwork such as permission slips.

Conclusion

Schools are implementing COG-RA as expected, although room for improvement exists with respect to posting PMD guidelines to school websites exists and sharing guidance regarding PMD use during assessments. To gain a comprehensive understanding of how the new guidelines are being experienced by teachers, students, and parents, additional data is necessary to identify what is working well and what, if anything, requires improvement.

Evaluation Scope

All MCPS principals were required to review the May 2022 updated Regulation COG-RA with staff and then revise their school-level guidelines to align with the revisions, 2) inform teachers, staff, students, and parents of the new guidelines, and 3) post local school guidelines on the school website homepage. As part of a broader study to elicit information on the implementation of COG-RA, a survey of principals and a review of school websites were conducted.

Purpose of Evaluation

To gather initial feedback about school-level practices implemented in response to the revised Regulation COG-RA through :

1) A survey of principals and

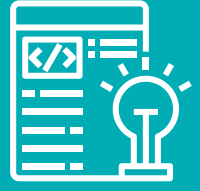2) A review of school website homepages

Research Questions

1 To what extent is the Regulation COG-RA being implemented as intended?

2 How was the updated Regulation COG-RA communicated with stakeholders (staff, students, families)?

3 What initial feedback have school administrators received from staff, students, and families?

Shared Accountability - May 2023

Program Description

MCPS updated Regulation COG-RA in May 2022 (MCPS, 2022a; MCPS, 2022b). Several updates have been made to this regulation since it was introduced in 1992. PMDs include any device not issued by MCPS that can be used to send or receive audio, video, or text messages.

Goal of Regulation COG-RA

To establish procedures for possession and use of personal mobile devices by students who are on Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) property or engaged in MCPS-sponsored activities.

Regulation COG-RA Components

Regulation COG-RA outlines the specific guidelines and protocols that must be followed regarding the possession and utilization of PMDs by students who are either on MCPS premises or participating in school-sponsored activities (MCPS, 2022c). The updated COG-RA:

- Uses an expanded range of modern personal mobile technologies (e.g., smart watches, phones, E-readers)

- Allows exceptions for school-time use that allow for student learning accommodations and differentiated use based on the grade level of the student

- Specifies how it aligns with computer, electronic information, and network security guidelines that are specified in MCPS Regulation IGT-RA Responsibilities for Computer Systems, Electronic Information, and Network Security

Permitted Variations in the Use of PMDs

Under the revised Regulation COG-RA, students are permmited to have PMDs on school premises and during school-sponsored activities. However, the independent use of PMDs is restricted to after-school hours (MCPS, 2022b; 2022c). To ensure uniformity within and across all schools, MCPS expects each school to adopt a universal approach to the use of PMDs. To provide clarity regarding the use of PMDs during school hours, this page presents a summary of exceptions that apply to all students, as well as any variations by school level.

All schools

- Students with an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan for special needs, learning differences, or disabilities may use a PMD to support or provide an accommodation, service for the student's special need.

- Principals, in coordination with school staff, may authorize the use of a PMD to provide an accommodation to students without an IEP.

Middle schools

- Teachers may allow the use of PMDs for instructional purposes if this is the agreement of the leadership team in designing their local school implementation policy.

- Middle school students may use PMDs during lunch. This should be discussed with the school leadership team to inform the decision.

- Device usage is prohibited between classes or during transitional time.

High schools

- Teachers may allow the use of PMDs for instructional purposes, if this is the agreement of the school leadership team in designing their local school implementation policy.

- High school students may use PMDs during lunch.

- Use between classes/transitional time is permitted with Principal's discretion. This should be discussed with the school leadership team to inform the decision.

A principal survey was used to gather feedback about school-level practices implemented in response to the revised Regulation COG-RA. A review of school websites was conducted to determine whether schools had followed the requirement to post their local school PMD guidelines on their websites.

Implementation Methods

Data and Measures

1. The principal survey collected data on:
   - Actions taken to implement COG-RA at the school-level
   - Principal perceptions regarding school-level PMD guidelines
2. Number of schools that had posted the PMD guidelines on their websites

Data Collection Methods

Principal Survey: Web-based surveys were distributed on December 13, 2022. Three reminders were sent. The survey window was 20 days.

School website review. School websites were reviewed in December 2022 to check if the guidelines were clearly posted.

Sample and Response Rate

The target population was principals in all MCPS elementary (ES) (N=137), middle (MS) (N=40), and high schools (HS) (N=26). A total of **146 (72%)** completed the survey.

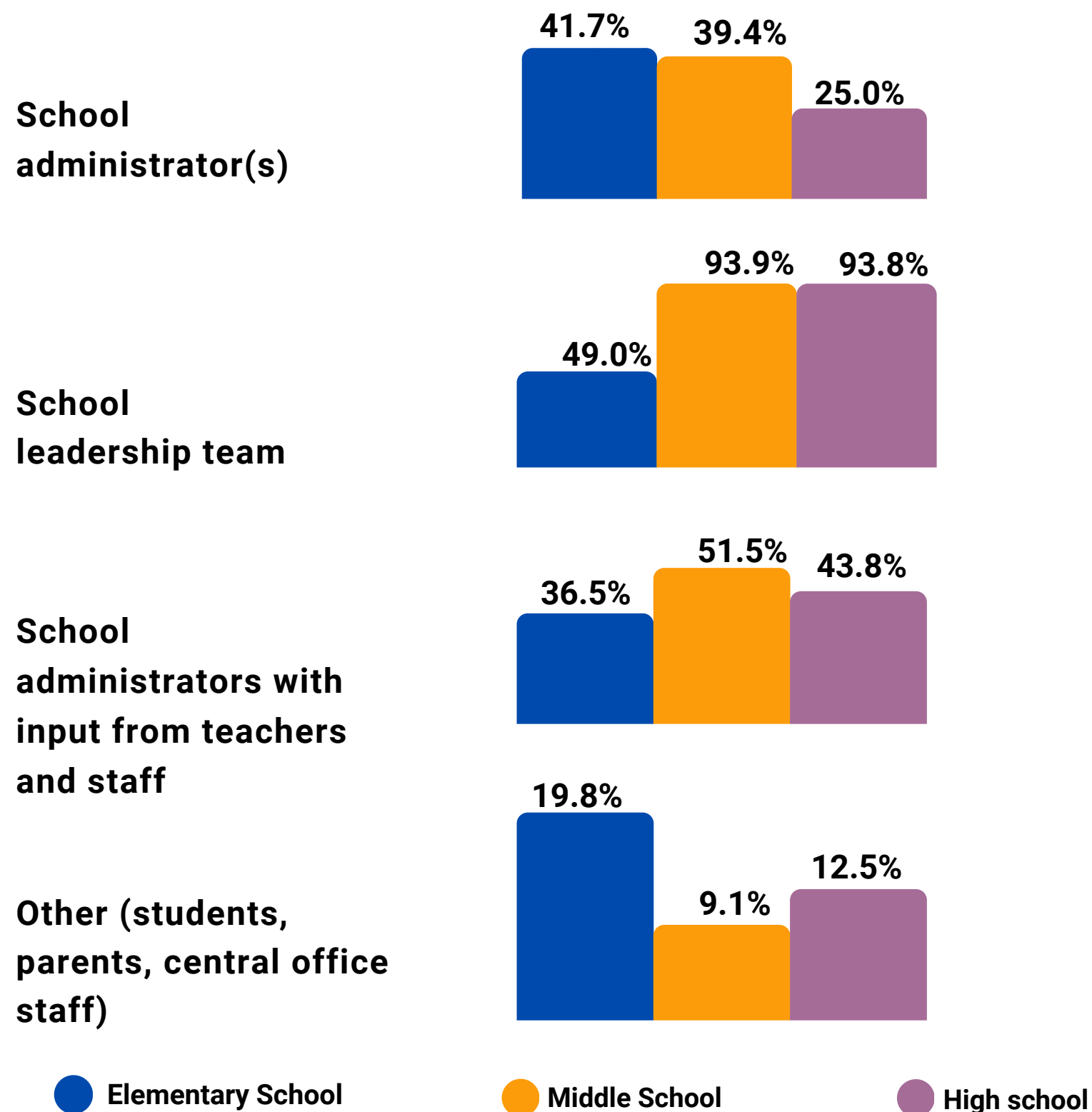| Level	MS	ES	HS	Total
Target	40	137	26	**203**
# Responses	33	97	16	**146**
Response rate	**82.5%**	**70.8%**	**61.5%**	**72%**

Analysis Procedures

Descriptive summary statistics were used to analyze 1) the close-ended survey items as well as 2) the number of schools that posted school-level PMD guidelines on their websites. Open-ended question survey responses were analyzed, summarized, and reported by themes.

Percent of principals reporting involvement of various stakeholders in developing local school PMD guidelines

- School administrator(s): Elementary School 41.7%, Middle School 39.4%, High school 25.0%
- School leadership team: Elementary School 49.0%, Middle School 93.9%, High school 93.8%
- School administrators with input from teachers and staff: Elementary School 36.5%, Middle School 51.5%, High school 43.8%
- Other (students, parents, central office staff): Elementary School 19.8%, Middle School 9.1%, High school 12.5%

Legend: ■ Elementary School ■ Middle School ■ High school

Findings

- According to principal survey respondents, local school PMD guidelines were developed or updated with input from various stakeholders. Elementary, middle, and high school leadership teams were the most frequently mentioned groups (49%, 94%, and 94%).

- A varying percentage of respondents from elementary, middle, and high schools (37%, 52%, and 44% respectively) reported that their local school PMD guidelines were created through a collaborative effort between school administrators and teachers/staff. Furthermore, 42% of elementary, 39% of middle, and 39% of high school respondents stated their guidelines were developed by school administrators. Additional feedback from "Other" (19%, 9%, 13%) highlighted that certain schools sought input from parents, student leaders, or staff from the MCPS central office.

- For some, open-ended comments further specified that the MCPS policy was adequate for their schools, and they simply shared it without any modifications.

School Level Guidelines
Extent of Variation by Grade and Class

Percent Respondents (y-axis)

Categories: Same for all, Vary by grade*, Vary by classes, Teacher discretion, Other**

- Same for all: Elementary School 94.8%, Middle School 87.9%, High school 62.5%
- Vary by grade*: Elementary School 4.2%, Middle School 3.0%
- Vary by classes: Elementary School 1.0%, Middle School 6.1%, High school 18.8%
- Teacher discretion: Elementary School 2.1%, Middle School 24.2%, High school 81.3%
- Other**: Elementary School 3.1%, High school 6.3%

Legend: ● Elementary School ● Middle School ● High school

Note. * No data or responses from High school respondents; **No responses from Middle school respondents

Findings

- More than four-fifths of elementary school (95%) and middle school (88%) respondents reported that all students and classes at their school follow the same PMD guidelines.

- Most (63%) of high school principals said the local school guidelines apply to all students and classes.

- Although most respondents indicated that PMD guidelines were consistent for all, among high school respondents, 81% also reported that their teachers had the authority to make decisions regarding use of PMDs in their classes, while only 24% of middle school respondents and 2% of elementary school respondents reported the same. This observation aligns with the COG-RA guidelines, as they allow for slight variations in exemptions based on school. Notably, high schools have the highest level of flexibility (page 4).

Settings Where PMDs are Allowed

Findings

% Responding Yes

Before school
- Elementary: 78.4%
- Middle: 96.9%
- High School: 100%

Instructional or class use
- Elementary: 6.1%
- Middle: 15.2%
- High School: 37.5%

Lunch
- Elementary: 1.4%
- Middle: 36.4%
- High School: 100%

Between classes/transition periods
- Elementary: 1.4%
- Middle: 6.3%
- High School: 100%

After school
- Elementary: 86.5%
- Middle: 96.9%
- High School: 100%

Unique circumstances
- Elementary: 36.1%
- Middle: 60.6%
- High School: 68.8%
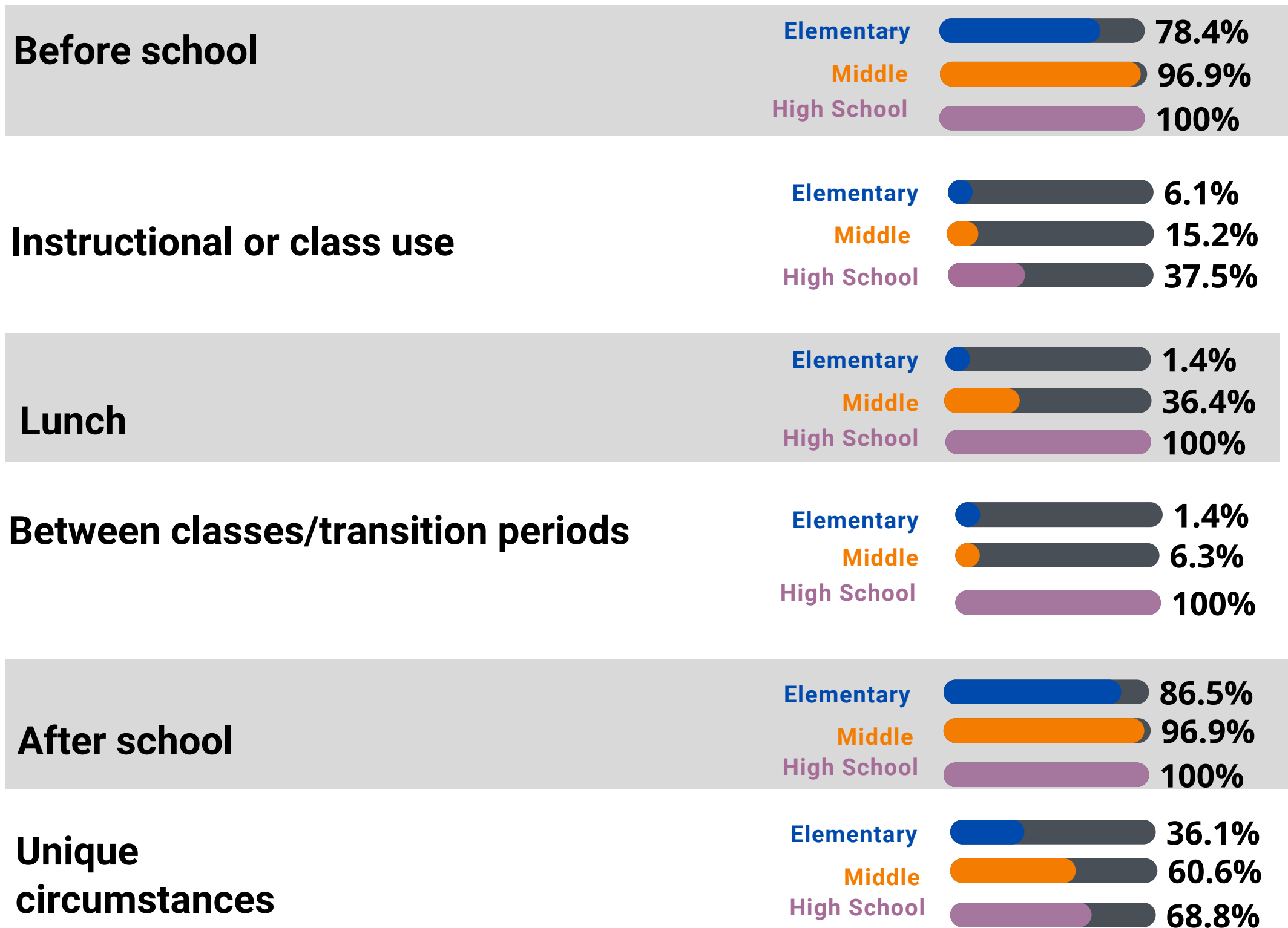
- The results indicate that the settings where the use of PMDs was allowed followed the guidelines set out in Regulation COG-RA. A large majority of elementary principals indicated that the use of PMDs was permitted before and after school (78% and 87%). Additionally, 36% of elementary school principals reported that their school-level guidelines allow PMDs in certain unique circumstances.

- Among middle respondents, 97% of principals reported their schools allowed students to use PMDs before and after school. At the same time, 61% of middle school principals reported that their local guidelines made room for use in unique circumstances. Some middle schools also allowed PMD use during lunch (37%) and for instructional or class use (15%).

- In alignment with Regulation COG-RA, high school principals reported greater flexibility in their school-level PMD guidelines. All high school principals who responded allowed the use of PMDs before school, during lunch, between classes, and after school. Moreover, 68% of high schools permitted PMDs in unique circumstances, and 37.5% permitted use of PMDs for instructional or class use under the discretion of teachers.

Unique Circumstances Where Use of PMDs was Allowed

Findings

Illustrative Comments of Unique Circumstances

Principals say...

> Student with diabetes using a device to monitor blood levels.

> Teachers have the discretion to allow the use of cell phones for instructional purposes only within their classrooms.

> An emergency took place

> Teacher approved activity like Yearbook for school events or elective classes when they need the camera feature.

> Accommodations for students with IEPs and/or 504 plans

> Family emergency communication needs/situations

> Used for translation or instructional use

> To contact parents when they have not yet been picked up from school.

> Calls are made to the parent in an urgent matter using the school phone, but nobody answers.

Along with the implementation of a universal policy regulating the utilization of Personal Mobility Devices (PMDs), schools granted exemptions in different situations, which primarily included health-related concerns and special events.

Unique circumstances where PMDs were/may be allowed include:

- Teacher discretion for instructional use only
- IEP/504-related needs
- Personal or school-wide emergency situations
- Health situations/grieving students/music therapy
- Diabetic students/using devices to monitor blood levels
- To reach parents when they do not pick up calls from school phones
- Yearbook/TV Club members
- Permitted use during special events such during as Award ceremonies and Field trips

A few principals brought attention in their open-ended responses that the use of PMDs during assessments needed clarification.

Have Local School Practices Changed as a Result of Updated Regulation COG-RA?

Percent Respondents

Elementary	Middle	High
20.6%	45.5%	31.3%
79.4%	54.5%	68.8%

■ Changed   ■ Same as before

Findings
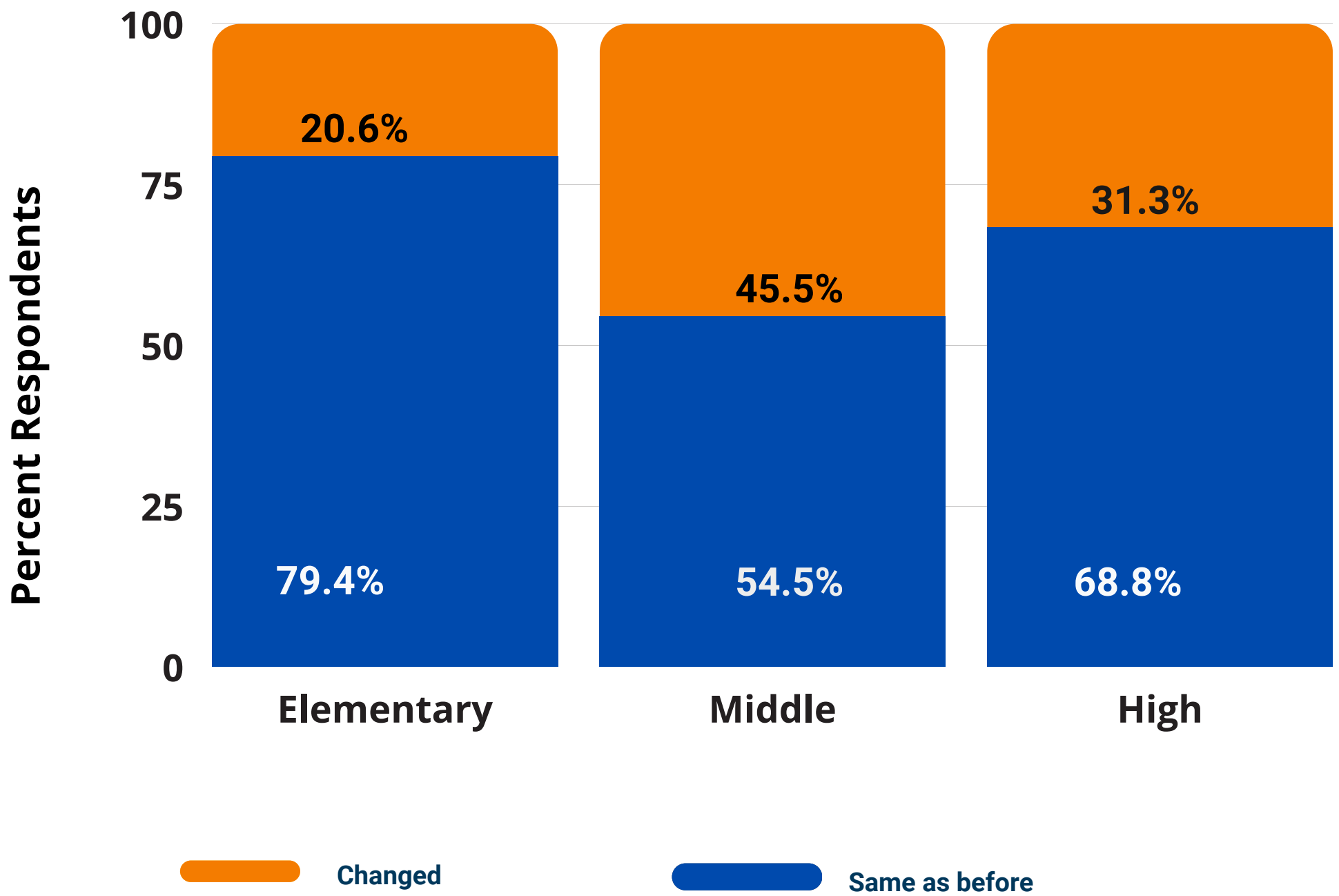
- The responses to whether local school practices changed as a result of updated COG-RA relative to previous years varied across elementary, middle, and high schools. Among elementary schools, 20% reported changes in practices, while middle schools had a higher percentage at 46%. However, only 31% of high schools reported that their practices changed. This suggests that the updated COG-RA regulation impacted middle school-level practices more than elementary and high schools.

- Conversely, 79%, 55%, and 69% of elementary, middle, and high schools respectively stated that their practices remained unchanged from previous years.

- The respondents who provided comments conveyed that they now have clearer and more consistent guidance on using PMDs in their schools. Additionally, some schools went further and created protocols for teachers or acquired technology to eliminate the need for reliance on PMDs.

Level of Allowed Independent Use of PMDs Compared to Previous Years

Percent Respondents

Category	Less	Same	More
Elementary	8.2%	84.5%	5.2%
Middle	51.5%	36.4%	12.1%
High	56.3%	31.3%	6.3%

Legend: Less, Same, More

Findings
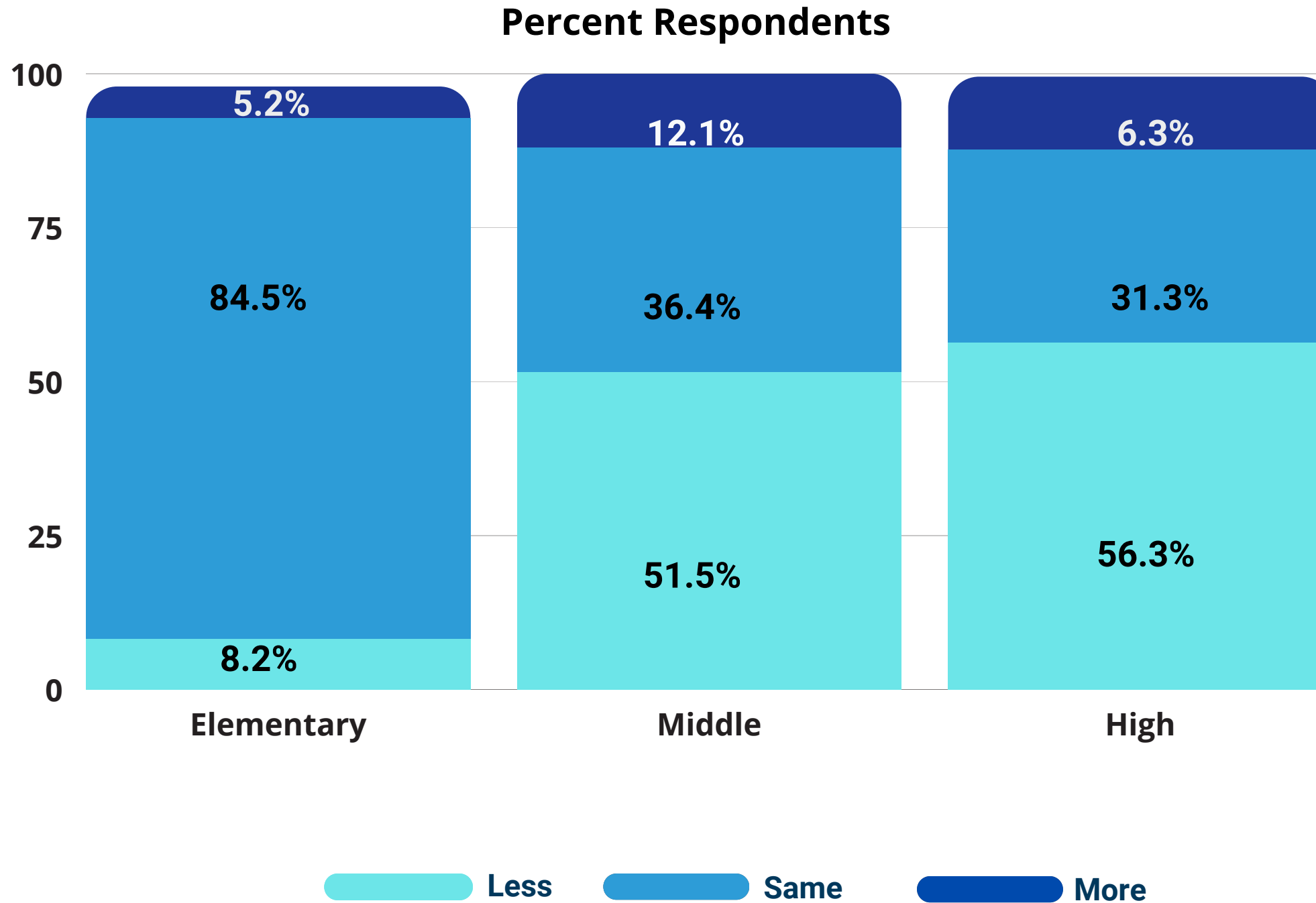
- When asked about their students' permitted PMD usage in school under their new guidelines, 85% of elementary school principals stated that the permissible use of PMDs remained unchanged from previous years, even after implementing the updated COG-RA. However, only 36% of middle school principals and 31% of high school principals reported that their students' allowable use of PMDs had remained the same.

- The majority of middle (52%) and high (56%) school principals reported a decrease in the allowable independent use of PMDs compared to previous years.

- Only a small percentage of respondents from elementary (5%), middle (12%), and high schools (6%) reported that their students have more independent use of PMDs under the current guidelines.

Informing School Community About Guidelines
Most Commonly Used Approaches

% Responding Yes

Methods	COG-RA			School-level PMD Guidelines		
	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS
Staff meetings	90.5	97.0	100.0	87.8	100.0	100.0
Back to School Night	60.7	81.8	75.0	60.0	62.5	62.5
Letter/email sent to parents	60.7	81.8	75.0	62.2	75.0	62.5
Letter/email sent to students	10.7	51.5	68.8	11.1	46.9	56.3
School newsletter	67.9	81.8	75.0	74.4	84.4	68.8
Homeroom	19.0	81.8	68.8	16.7	62.5	68.8
Other (PTA, Connect-ED messages, socail media)	11.9	51.5	25.0	10.0	50.0	25.0

Note. ES=Elementary School; MS=Middle School; HS=High School
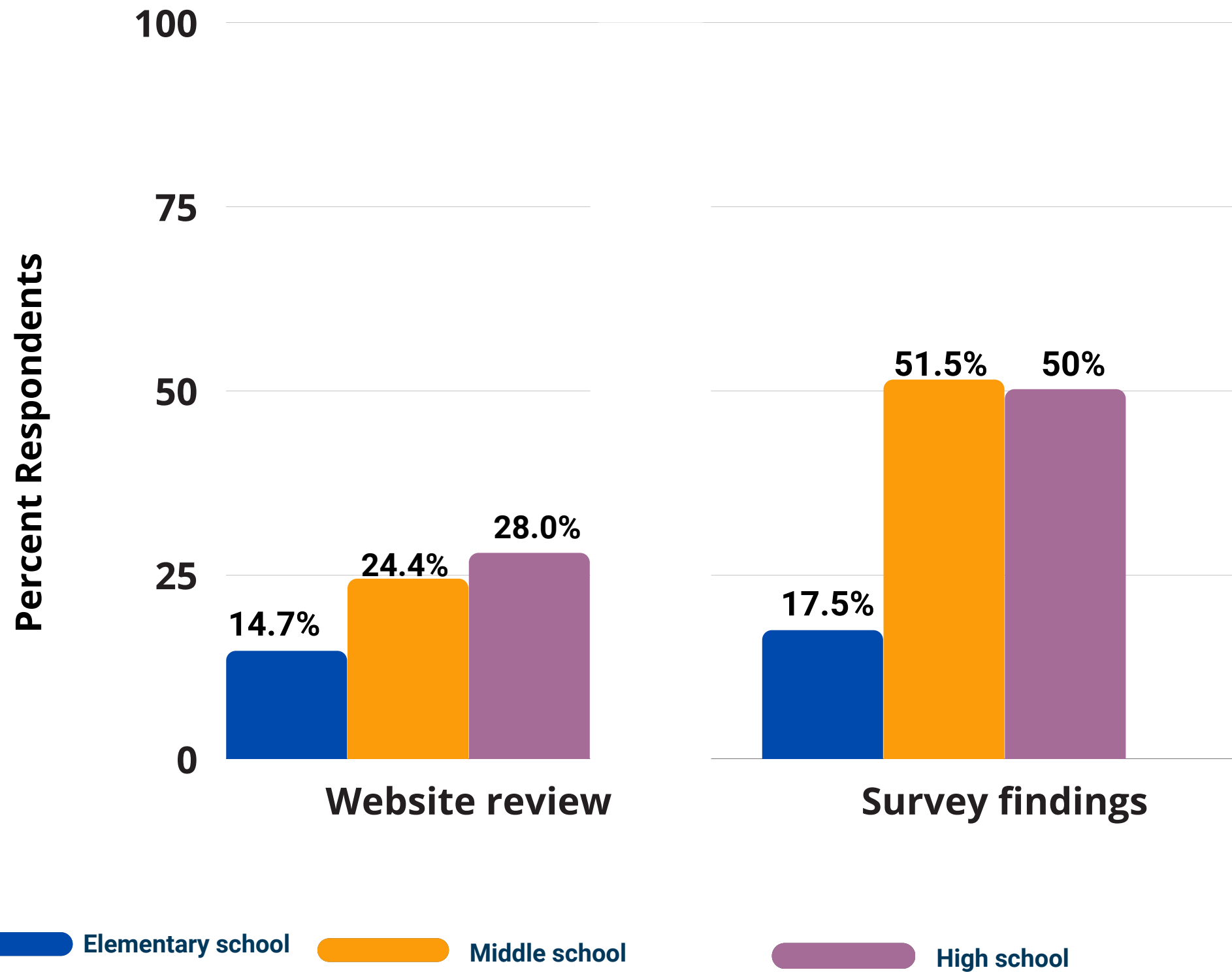
Findings

- Schools used a variety of approaches to inform their larger school communities about COG-RA. Across school levels, most survey respondents reported using staff meetings (88% to 100%) to share information about the COG-RA and school-level PMD guidelines.

- Elementary school respondents reported sharing information during Back-to-School Nights (61%), through school newsletters (68%), and through letters or emails to parents (61%).

- Most (>50%) of middle- and high-school respondents indicated that information was shared through parent emails/letters, school newsletters, and homeroom announcements.

- Many schools also used their Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), the Parent and Staff Handbook, Connect-Ed messages, social media, and electronic communication between parents and teachers to relay the information.

Are PMD Guidelines Posted on School Websites?

Percent Respondents

- Website review
  - Elementary school: 14.7%
  - Middle school: 24.4%
  - High school: 28.0%
- Survey findings
  - Elementary school: 17.5%
  - Middle school: 51.5%
  - High school: 50%

Legend: ■ Elementary school ■ Middle school ■ High school

Findings

- Out of the middle (52%) and high school (50%) principals who provided responses, half reported that their school's PMD guidelines were posted on the school website. However, a review of the websites, found that only 24% of middle schools and 28% of high schools had actually posted the guidelines.

- For elementary schools, the numbers were even lower, with only 18% of respondents reporting that their PMD guidelines were posted on their website, and a website review revealed that only 15% had posted them.

- Many elementary schools explained in their open-ended comments that they had included the guidelines within other documents on their website, like newsletters or handbooks. They also shared the guidelines through periodic electronic communications.

- It appears that schools may have interpreted the requirement for posting information related to local school PMD guidelines on their websites differently than intended.
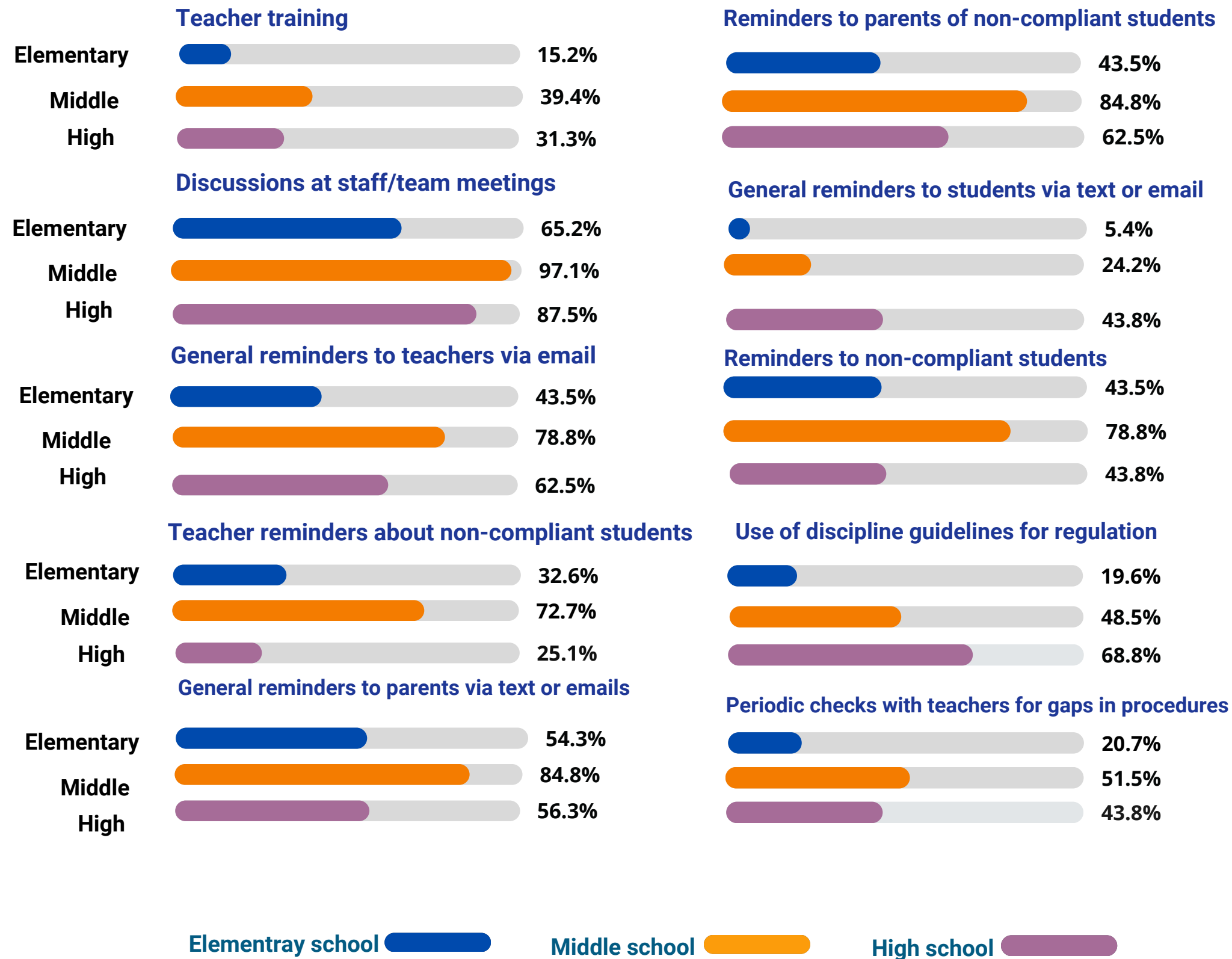
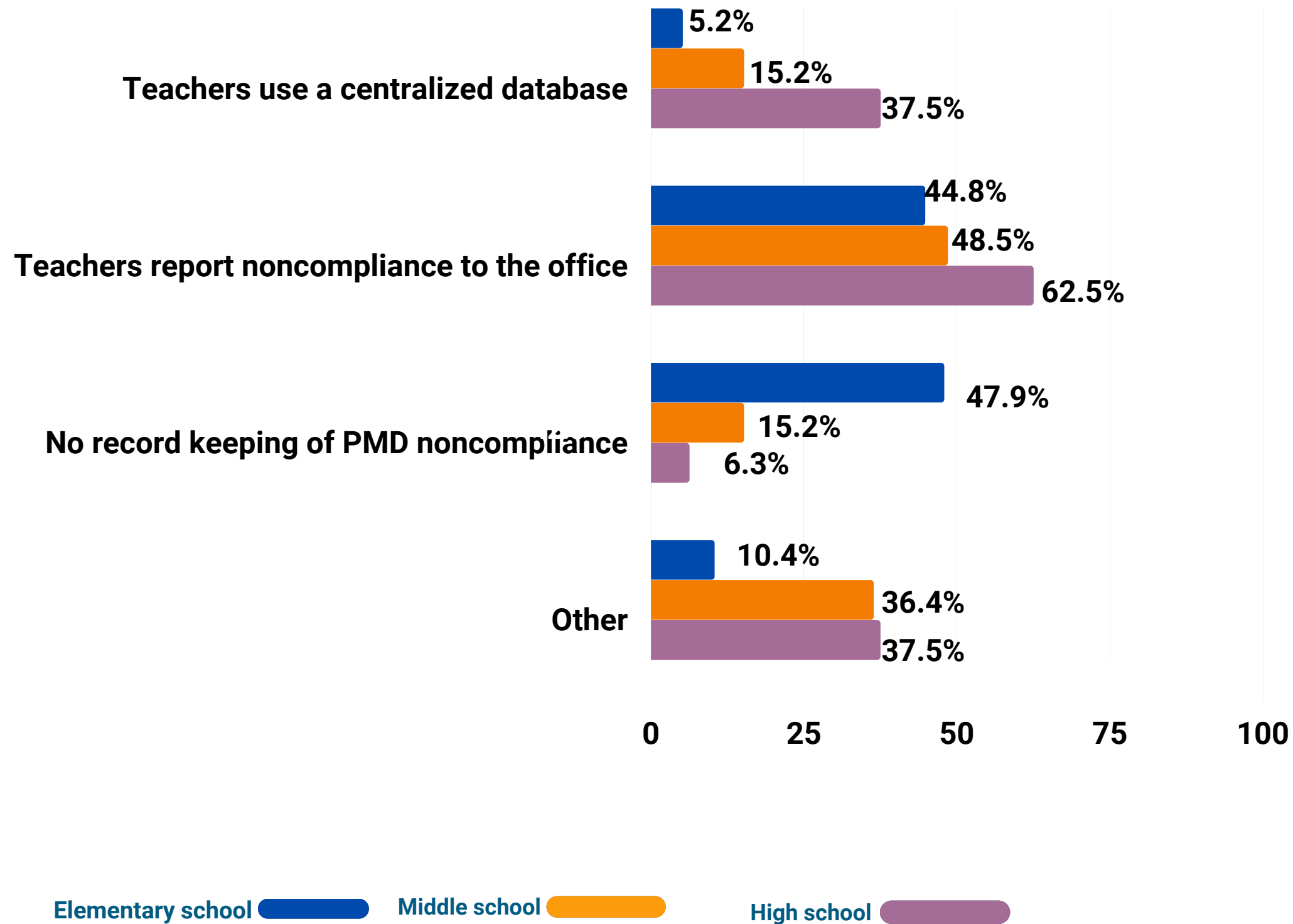# Steps Taken to Support Compliance with PMD Practices

Findings

- Schools took a variety of approaches to increase clarity and promote compliance with COG-RA standards. In elementary schools, the most frequently mentioned steps to increase compliance were discussions with teachers at staff/team meetings (65%) and general reminders to parents via text or email (54%).

- More than 70% of respondents at the middle school level reported the following steps to support compliance: staff/team meetings (97%), reminders to parents of noncompliant students (85%), general reminders to parents via texts (85%), teacher to reminders to noncompliant students (79%).

- High schools used staff meetings (88%), discipline guidelines (69%) and reminders to parents of noncompliant students (63%) to support compliance with COG-RA.

Teacher training
- Elementary: 15.2%
- Middle: 39.4%
- High: 31.3%

Discussions at staff/team meetings
- Elementary: 65.2%
- Middle: 97.1%
- High: 87.5%

General reminders to teachers via email
- Elementary: 43.5%
- Middle: 78.8%
- High: 62.5%

Teacher reminders about non-compliant students
- Elementary: 32.6%
- Middle: 72.7%
- High: 25.1%

General reminders to parents via text or emails
- Elementary: 54.3%
- Middle: 84.8%
- High: 56.3%

Reminders to parents of non-compliant students
- Elementary: 43.5%
- Middle: 84.8%
- High: 62.5%

General reminders to students via text or email
- Elementary: 5.4%
- Middle: 24.2%
- High: 43.8%

Reminders to non-compliant students
- Elementary: 43.5%
- Middle: 78.8%
- High: 43.8%

Use of discipline guidelines for regulation
- Elementary: 19.6%
- Middle: 48.5%
- High: 68.8%

Periodic checks with teachers for gaps in procedures
- Elementary: 20.7%
- Middle: 51.5%
- High: 43.8%

Elementray school ● **Middle school** ● **High school** ●

Monitoring Compliance

Teachers use a centralized database
- 5.2%
- 15.2%
- 37.5%

Teachers report noncompliance to the office
- 44.8%
- 48.5%
- 62.5%

No record keeping of PMD noncompliance
- 47.9%
- 15.2%
- 6.3%

Other
- 10.4%
- 36.4%
- 37.5%

0   25   50   75   100

Elementary school   **Middle school**   **High school**

Findings

- Only 5% of elementary and 15% of middle school respondents reported that their teachers used a centralized school database to keep a record of PMD use noncompliance for their students, compared with 38% of high school respondents.

- Nearly half of elementary and middle school principals (45% and 49% respectively) and the majority of high school principals (63%) stated that non-compliance is usually reported by teachers to the office.

- Nearly half of elementary (48%), 15% of middle, and 6% of high school respondents said that their school did not maintain a formal record of PMD noncompliance. According to comments from respondents, the majority of elementary students neither utilize nor possess PMDs at school. This finding implies a reduced necessity for heightened vigilance in monitoring PMD usage among these students.

- In their comments, a few elementary school principals (n=4) also noted that Apple watches offer unique features that make them stand out, implying nuanced guidelines for their use may be needed. Others observed several incidents of noncompliance by students on school buses, away from direct supervision.

Feedback from: Staff

Findings

% Responding Yes

Initial feedback from staff	Level		
	ES	MS	HS
School's PMD practices are working well	87.2	81.3	21.4
Staff are comfortable with implementing school PMD guidelines	65.1	81.3	28.6
Staff report that most students are cooperating	55.8	87.5	64.3
Staff expressed need for more clarity about school PMD practices	1.6	6.3	21.4
Staff report students are not clear about school PMD practices	1.6	0.0	0.0

Note. ES=Elementary School; MS=Middle School; HS=High School

- In response to an item asking what feedback they had received from their staff about local school PMD guidelines, the majority of elementary and middle school respondents said their school's PMD guidelines were working well (87% and 81%, respectively); staff were comfortable with the guidelines (65% and 81%), and reported that most students cooperated with the policies (55% and 88%).

- Two-thirds of the 16 high school principals (67%) who responded to the survey indicated they had not received any feedback from their staff about COG-RA.

- Of the one-third of high school respondents who had received feedback, 21% reported their school PMD guidelines were working well and 29% indicated their staff members felt comfortable implementing the policies. Most (64%) said that reports from staff indicated that students were cooperating with their school's PMD guidelines.

Feedback from Parents or Guardians

Findings

% Responding Yes

Initial feedback	Level		
	ES	**MS**	**HS**
Parents/guardians have responded positively to the PMD practices in place at our school.	97.8	93.8	80.0
Families have expressed a need for more clarity about the school PMD guidelines.	4.4	6.3	0.0
Families have expressed dissatisfaction with the PMD practices.	6.7	3.1	30.0
Families have expressed a desire to have the ability to reach their children at all times during school hours, if needed.	6.7	18.2	10.0

Note. ES=Elementary School; MS=Middle School; HS=High School

- Nearly all of the elementary (98%), middle (94%), and high school (80%) respondents reported that parents/guardians had responded positively to PMD practices instituted at their schools.

- Few elementary (4%) and middle (6%) and no high school families were reported to express a need for clarity or a desire to have the ability to reach their children at all times during the school day (<18%). At the elementary and middle levels, few parents (<7%) expressed dissatisfaction with PMD practices to the principals.

- However, at the high school level, 30% of the principals who provided responses said their families had expressed dissatisfaction with the PMD guidelines.

Principal Reports of Students Feedback

Findings

% Responding Yes

| Initial feedback	Level		
	ES	**MS**	**HS**
Students have responded positively to the PMD practices instituted in our school	58.3	63.6	50.0
Most students are cooperating with our school PMD practices.	58.3	84.8	71.4
Students have expressed a need for more clarity about the school PMD practices.	1.7	6.1	0.0
Students have expressed dissatisfaction with our PMD practices.	6.7	33.3	42.9

Note. ES=Elementary School; MS=Middle School; HS=High School

- At least half of elementary (58%), middle (64%), and high school (50%) respondents stated that their students had responded positively to their schools' PMD practices. In addition, hardly any respondents reported that their students had expressed a need for more clarity about their local school's PMD guidelines (<7%).

- A total of 7% of elementary, 33% of middle, and 43% of high school respondents noted that their students had expressed dissatisfaction with local school PMD practices.

- Notably, the majority of elementary (58%), middle (85%), and high school (71%) principals who provided responses reported that most of their students were cooperating with their schools' PMD practices on a regular basis.

Conclusions
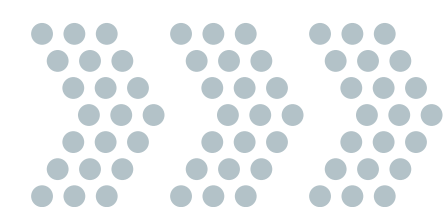
Key Findings

- School staff collaborated with various constituents (leadership team, PTAs, staff, and other administrators) at the school level to develop school-level practices aligned with COG-RA and shared information as needed with their school community.
- After updating the school-level PMD policies to align with COG-RA, 46% of middle schools, 31% of high schools, and 8% of elementary schools reported that their guidelines reflected a reduction in the allowable amount of independent use of PMD. As such, 85% of elementary schools maintained the same level of allowable PMD use, compared to only 36% and 31% of middle and high schools.
- Less than one-third of schools had posted their guidelines on their website, even though one-half of middle and high school principals reported they had. This suggests that the mandate to post the PMD guidelines on the website may have been interpreted differently than intended, and schools may need clearer guidance on complying with this requirement.
- Based on the feedback from school communities, the PMD guidelines were well-received by both families and staff. The majority of staff members reported feeling comfortable implementing PMD practices, and most students were cooperating with the guidelines at their school.

Discussion

Survey responses and a review of school websites revealed that schools had implemented COG-RA consistently and had local school PMD guidelines in place. While the majority of schools did not explicitly post the local PMD guidelines on their websites, principals reported guidelines were embedded within documents accessible online. In order to effectively institutionalize COG-RA, there are two specific areas that require follow-up, as mentioned in comments. The first area pertains to smart watches that possess distinctive features similar to PMDs. The second area concerns handling incidents of noncompliance by students on school buses, where direct supervision is limited. Ensuring proper follow-up in these areas will ensure optimal institutionalization of COG-RA. With regard to clarity about use of PMD in assessments, familiarity with the Test Administrator and Test Coordinator manuals can clarify and explicitly guide the use of PMDs during tests and assessments in general and for students for whom PMD use is permitted for their learning (Maryland State Department of Education, 2023).

Since the pandemic, issuing students with 1-1 Chromebooks has virtually eliminated the need for PMDs for instructional purposes, apart from photography. Consequently, it is foreseeable that future instances of PMDs being used for instructional purposes, even at teachers' discretion, will decrease. It is unclear, not just in terms of the COG-RA exception, but in terms of learning opportunities in general, to what extent some students with IEP/504 plans rely on non--MCPS devices to optimize their learning. Using PMDs exclusively without alternatives for those without PMDs could hinder equitable learning opportunities for students.

Recommendations

1 **Provide clarification on the appropriate use of PMDs during district and classroom assessment and testing.**

Although allowances for instructional use have been addressed, the application of COG-RA to assessment situations (MCPS, 2022a) remains unmentioned. However, the testing manual provides clear stipulations that PMDs, except for auditory devices, should not be utilized during state assessments (MSDE, 2023). When referring to the policy, it is unclear how and when exemptions for PMDs should be granted in non-state test scenarios, such as tests, exams, and assessments.

2 **Emphasize to schools the imperative of strict adherence to the mandate for posting the PMD guidelines on their school websites.**

Parents and families should be able to readily access school PMD policies with no more than two clicks from a school web site (for example: click on a school policies link, followed by a PMD policy link). It is necessary to remind schools to comply with the mandate of clearly posting local school PMD guidelines on their website, even if they have already included them in other forms of communication to the school community.

Shared Accountability - May 2023

References
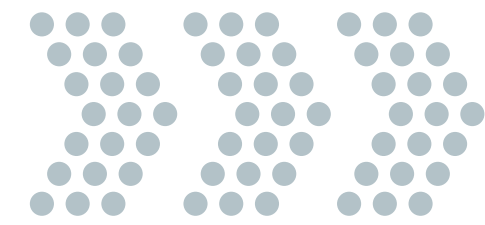
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Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), 2022b. Memorandum to All Principals regarding COG-RA Regulation Updated, Schools will align local school policies and Student Code of Conduct to new regulation and inform staff, students, and parents (June 23, 2022).

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Appendix

Unique Circumstances

Verbatim Comments of Where Local School Guidelines Allowed for exceptions

Elementary School Respondents

- Used for translation or instructional use
- Contact parents when they have not yet been picked up from school.
- I have 2 parents who require their kiddos to have PMD devices as GPS devices. I allow them to be on all day.
- Call parents due to missed bus
- If the student has a number for a parent the school does not have we allow the student to call the parent through the cell or smartwatch in our presence.
- In the likelihood, the school has called the parent in an urgent matter, and no one has picked up. Then, we may use the student's phones as parents are inclined to respond to their children immediately.
- Need to contact the parent for illness (etc), and the parent is not answering calls from the school.
- Contact a parent usually after school. When problem-solving an online bullying situation.
- Accommodations for students with IEPs and/or 504 plans
- Students who are suffering from the loss of a parent and feeling comforted by having the PMD on as a connection to the remaining parent.
- Field trips
- An emergency took place...
- Family emergency communication needs/situations
- Students with diabetes who use their phones as a monitoring tool for their blood sugar levels.
- After school, which includes when on the bus - the bus is considered an extension of school.
- Before and after school, outside of the building.
- If teachers decide to use it for instruction.
- Teacher approved activities like Yearbook for school events or elective classes and TV Studio or Yearbook class when they need the camera feature.
- If there is an educational purpose/need. For example, in one class, students made a project and asked the teacher to take a picture of the finished project. The teacher agreed.
- Some staff may allow phones at certain times during class
- Students may use technology for instructional purposes only when a staff member directly instructs a student to use it. Technology must, then, be put away while in class.
- Teachers have the discretion to allow the use of cell phones for instructional purposes only within their classrooms.

Middle School Respondents

- All classrooms start out as no, but if a teacher wants to use them for educational purposes, then they can.
- Classroom lessons that teachers allow for devices to be used. Instructional purposes only.
- Teachers may decide to let students use their phones for instructional purposes.
- Instructional or class use is very limited and specific.
- During instruction at the teacher's discretion.
- Special events during the school day- assemblies, awards, etc.
- Wildcat wellness days are when students are allowed to participate in non-instructional activities.
- During our advisory period...where students can participate in 'mindfulness' activities.
- We allow 7/8 students to use phones at lunch. 6th-grade students are not allowed to have phones at lunch.
- Parent Contact
- School-wide contests with administration
- Middle Years Program (MYP)
- We have discussed allowing usage for incentive days.
- If the student needs to contact a parent during the school day along with the support of an adult.
- Need to communicate directly with a parent.

High School Respondents

- Some staff may allow phones at certain times during class.
- Students may use technology for instructional purposes only when a staff member directly instructs a student to use it. Technology must, then, be put away while in class.
- Teachers have the discretion to allow the use of cell phones for instructional purposes only within their classrooms.
- If the teacher approves during instruction but we suggest that this is a rare case and that teachers are to enforce the no cell phone rule during instruction.
- Upon direction or permission from the teacher.
- With teacher approval to engage in the lesson
- During our advisory period...where students can participate in 'mindfulness' activities.
- Need to communicate directly with a parent
- To monitor health-related illnesses.
- Cell phones are not allowed in class unless the teacher directs students to take out their phones or if they allow them for a specific purpose. Teacher discretions for a special circumstance...mom has surgery and waiting for a text from Dad to say she is okay.

Verbatim Comments of Others Ways Schools Have Shared PMD Guidelines With School Community

Comments Related to Posting School-Level PMD Guidelines on School Homepage

Elementary School Respondents

- As a K–2 school, this is not a huge issue.
- Embedded in our welcome back to school information
- Has not been an issue with any students so far this year.
- In our back-to-school information
- In our parent handbook
- Not yet
- Students do not use them because this is an elementary school
- The MCPS practices and guidelines are posted. We do not have a school policy.
- The parent handbook is on the website.

Middle School Respondents

- They are in the digital handbook which is on our website
- We keep it in our monthly newsletter that is sent to families weekly in our Sunday call and email
- Yes, in our handbook but could be more prominent.
- It is listed in the student and parent handbooks.
- Newsletter posted on the website with PMD details

High School Respondents

- Not on the homepage but is on the page used to share back-to-school resources over the summer.
- Not sure... we try to keep the site current, so they might have been posted at the start of the year and removed. We have a great webmaster that I can check with if needed.
- There was a document generated by ILT as a resource for parents that teachers could post on their Canvas pages that provides parents with access to the PMD policy, the grading policy, and the attendance policy.