



AMERICAN MICROSCHOOLS: A SECTOR ANALYSIS

APRIL 2023



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

America's microschooling movement has emerged as one of the nation's resonant education narratives. This analysis by the National Microschooling Center explores prominent aspects of this fast-growing, nontraditional education sector, studying 100 currently-operating microschools and 100 prospective microschools preparing to open, located in 34 states. Findings describe a wide range of educational and operational aspects of these small, multifamily learning environments, illuminating important aspects of their work including the backgrounds of their founders, main motivating goals, educational approaches and intended outcomes, weekly schedules and funding sources. Details follow.

NATIONAL MICROSCHOOLING CENTER

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INTRODUCTION

Microschools

Microschools are innovative small learning environments, often created in permissionless ways outside of education systems. They are convened in commercial or nonprofit space, private homes, houses of worship, and countless other creative locations.

Microschools can be organized as learning centers supporting homeschoolers, private schools (accredited and unaccredited) and other ways. What many people feel offers microschooling its transformative potential is that these can be created around the needs of the particular learners they serve.

About America's Microschooling Sector



Accurate estimates of the size of America's present microschooling population are complicated by factors including the absence of universally-accepted definitions during what is broadly seen as this sector's early adoption phase. Researchers Paul DiPerna and Michael McShane estimate that between 1.1 and 2.1 million learners currently use microschools as their main provider of schooling.

The National Microschooling Center identifies three prevalent types of microschools: Independent microschools are small, multi-family learning environments which meet regularly, on either full-time or on hybrid schedules. Partnership microschooling forges

collaborations between host partners, such as employers, houses of worship or local government entities, and technical partners responsible for teaching and learning. Provider networks align local leaders with established organizations (such as KaiPod, Acton or Wildflower) and may help support launch and operations by adding capital, back office assistance, and other institutional assistance.

"Our particular area of focus is making sure each child reaches their full potential. We pride ourselves on tailor-made programs which are designed to help each child succeed."

- Microschool Founder

McShane, Michael Q. and Paul DiPerna, Just How Many Kids Attend Microschools, EdChoice, September 12, 2022, available online at: <https://www.edchoice.org/engage/just-how-many-kids-attend-microschools>

National Microschooling Center

The National Microschooling Center is the nation's preeminent nonprofit resource hub for pioneering small learning environments.

Launched in August 2022, with headquarters in Las Vegas, the Center works to advance its movement building mission for a thriving, diversified microschooling sector that lives up to its transformative potential.

The Center offers a dedicated program of supports and trainings for microschool leaders. Member microschools engage with the Center in dedicated movement-building and capacity-building activities, navigating statutory and regulatory frameworks, sharing professional growth through affinity groups and dedicated workshop sessions, and utilizing popular learning tools, including access to learning licenses at reduced costs and platform-specific coaching.



Methodology

This new original analysis by the National Microschooling Center examines 100 current microschools around the country, and 100 prospective microschool leaders working to open to serve students, from 34 different states.

The information was collected during the fourth quarter of 2022 and the first quarter of 2023.

PART I: CURRENT MICROSCHOOLS

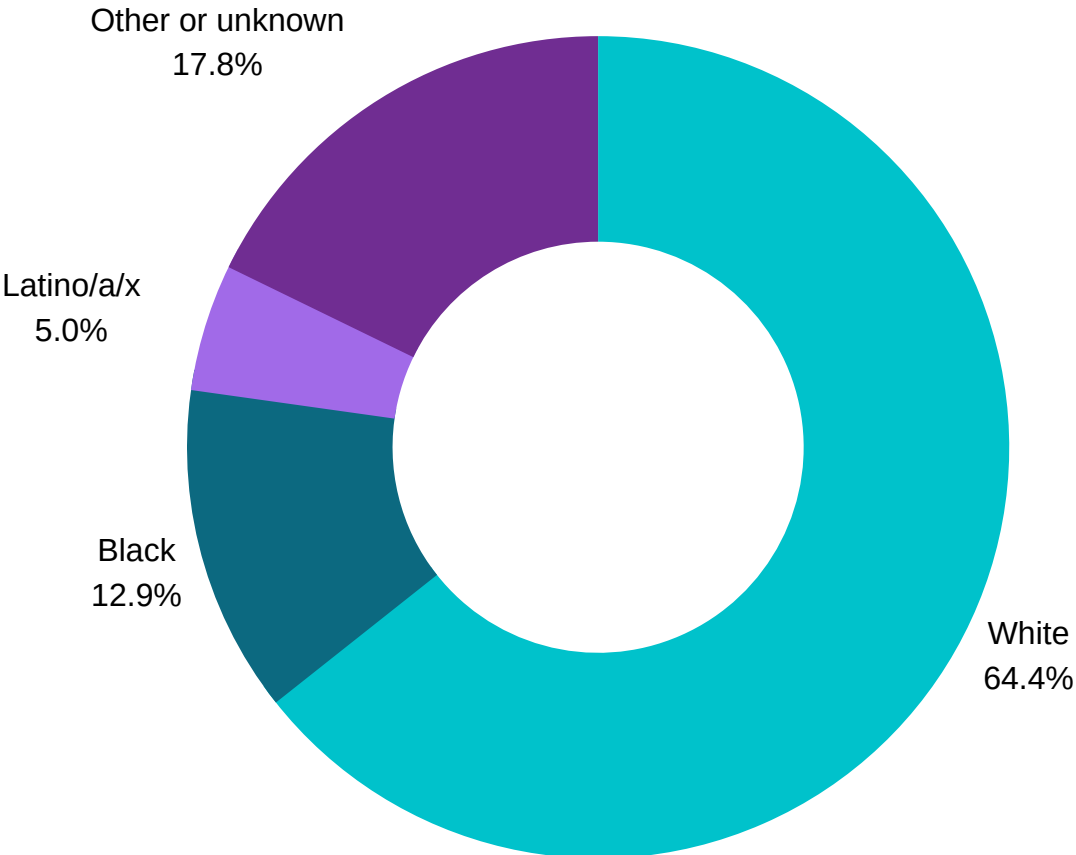
Current Leaders

Current leaders/founders surveyed were 64.4% White, 12.9% Black, and 5.0% Latino/a/x.

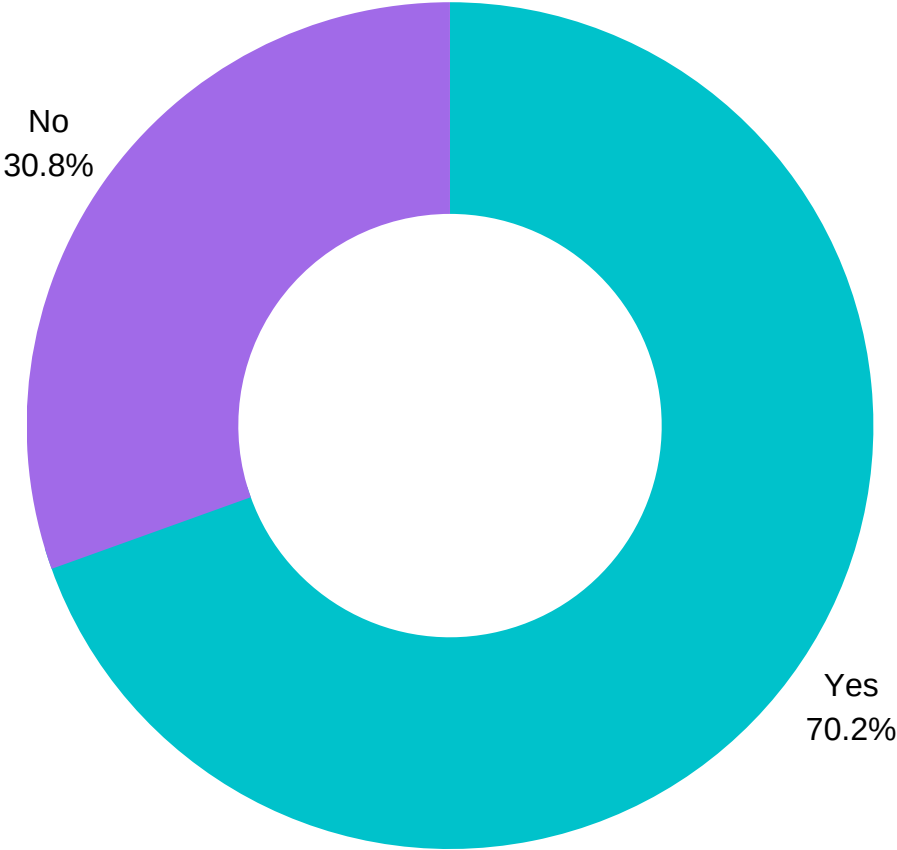
Two-thirds of lead instructors or founders are currently- or formerly-licensed educators.



What is the Racial/Ethnic Makeup of Microschool Founders?



Is the Lead Instructor, or Founder, a Currently or Formerly Licensed Educator?



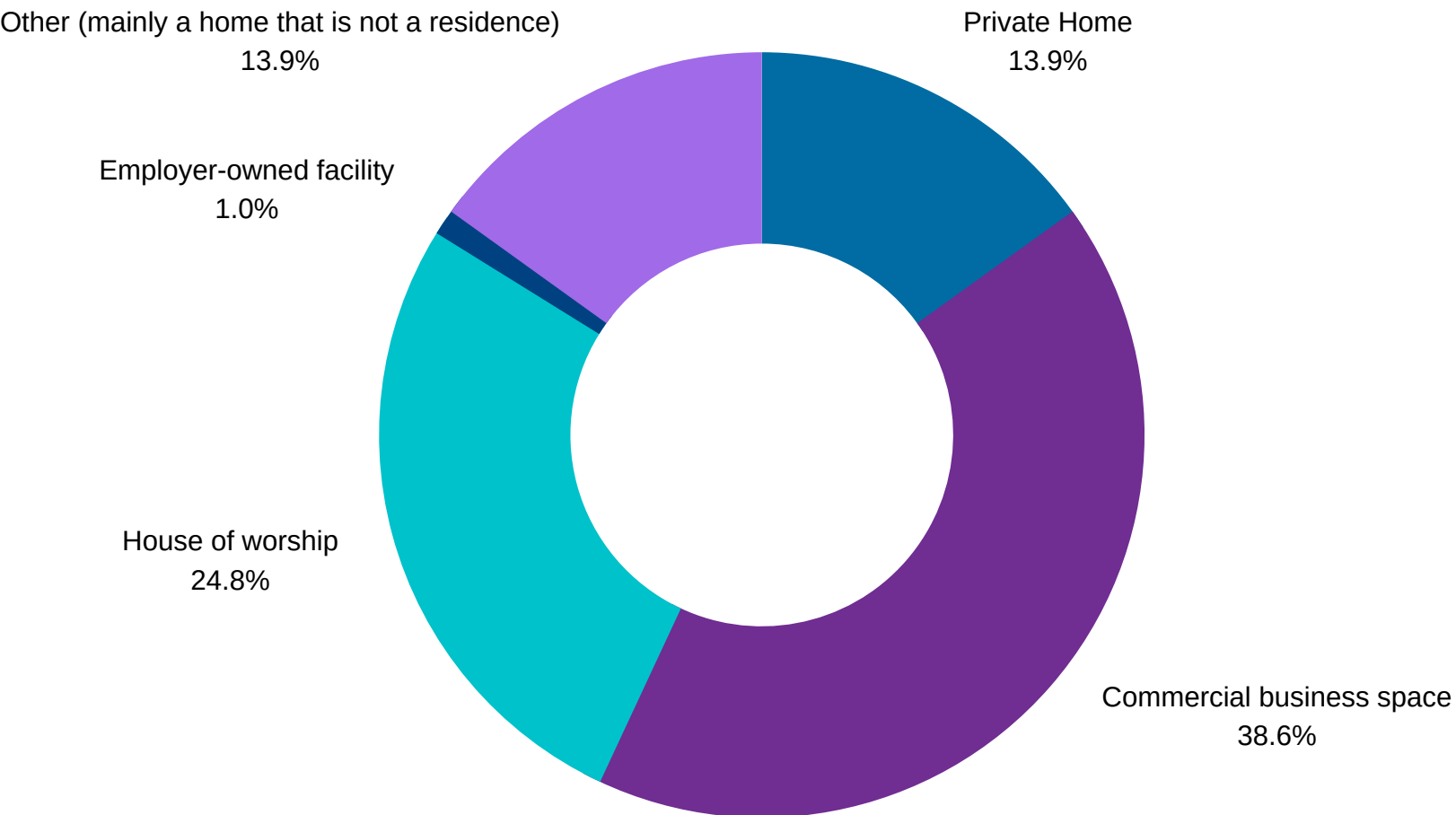


Operational Findings

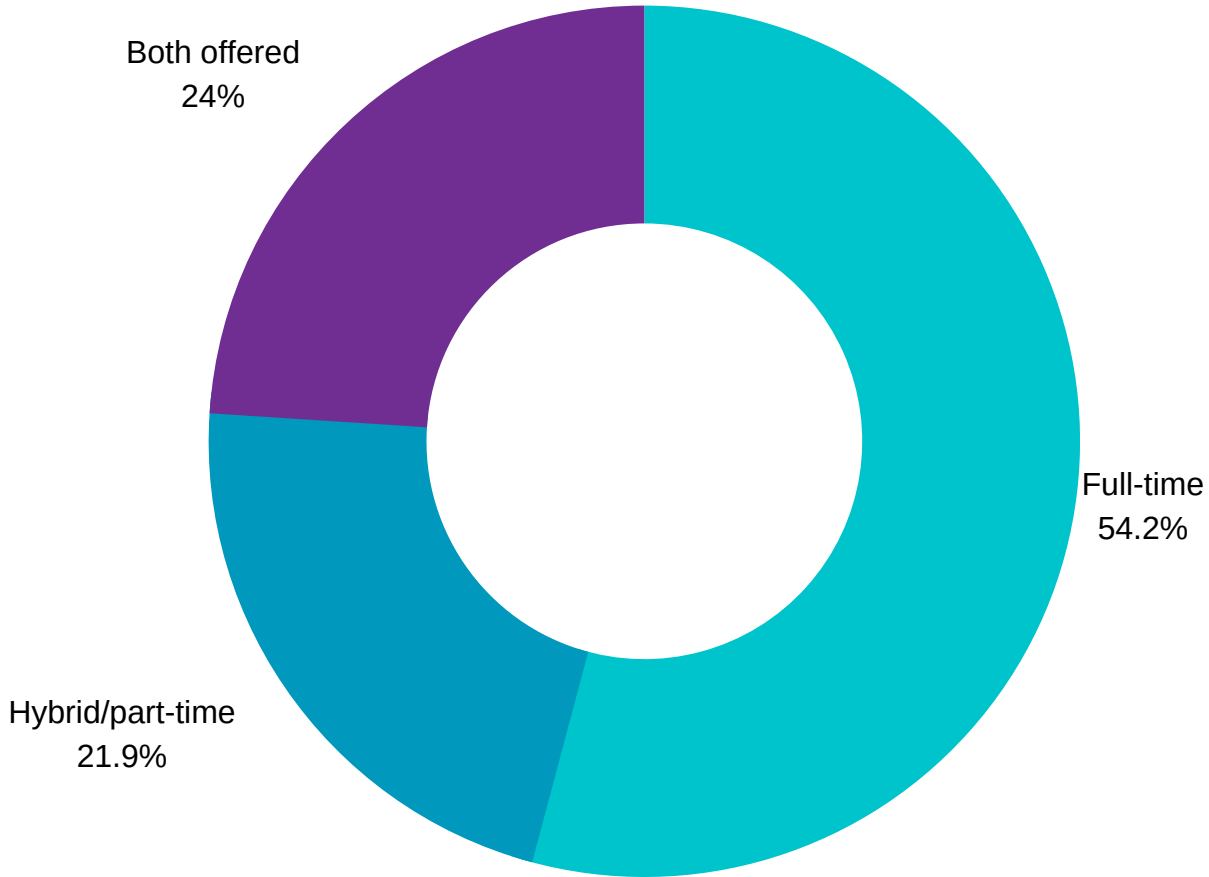
Commercial business space (39%) and houses of worship (25%) are the most common facility types used, followed by private homes (13.9%) and other, most commonly a home not currently serving as a residence (13.9%).

Half of microschools operate on a full-time calendar, as public schools do. While one in five run a hybrid or part-time school week, one in four offer families their choice of these schedule options.

What Facilities do Microschools Use?



What Schedules are Microschools Offering Families?



***Full-time: 4+ days a week, 4+ hours a day**

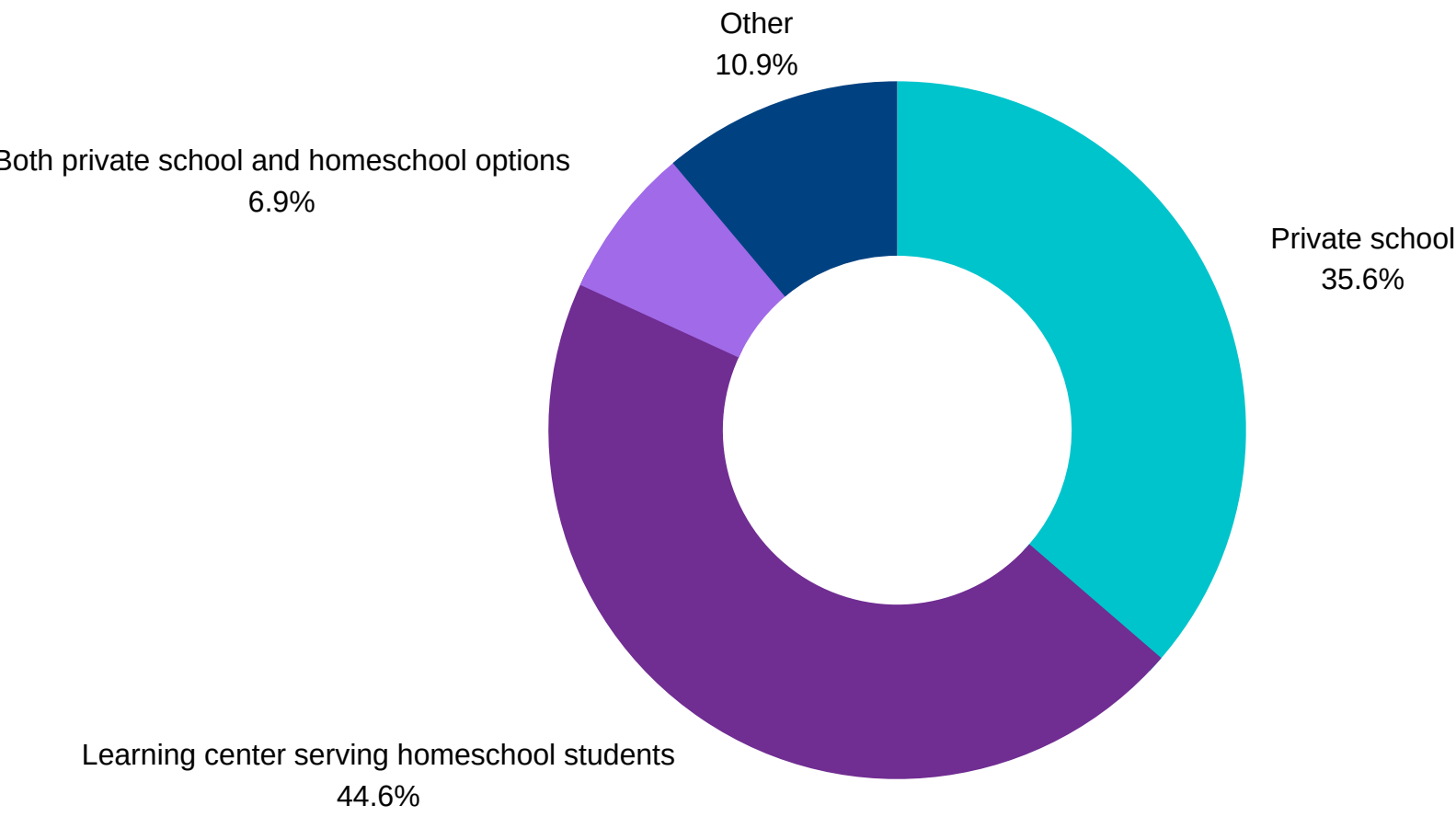
Business Structure

The most common organizing arrangement is as a learning center serving students following their state’s homeschool rules (45%). Microschools recognized by their states as private schools are also common (36%).

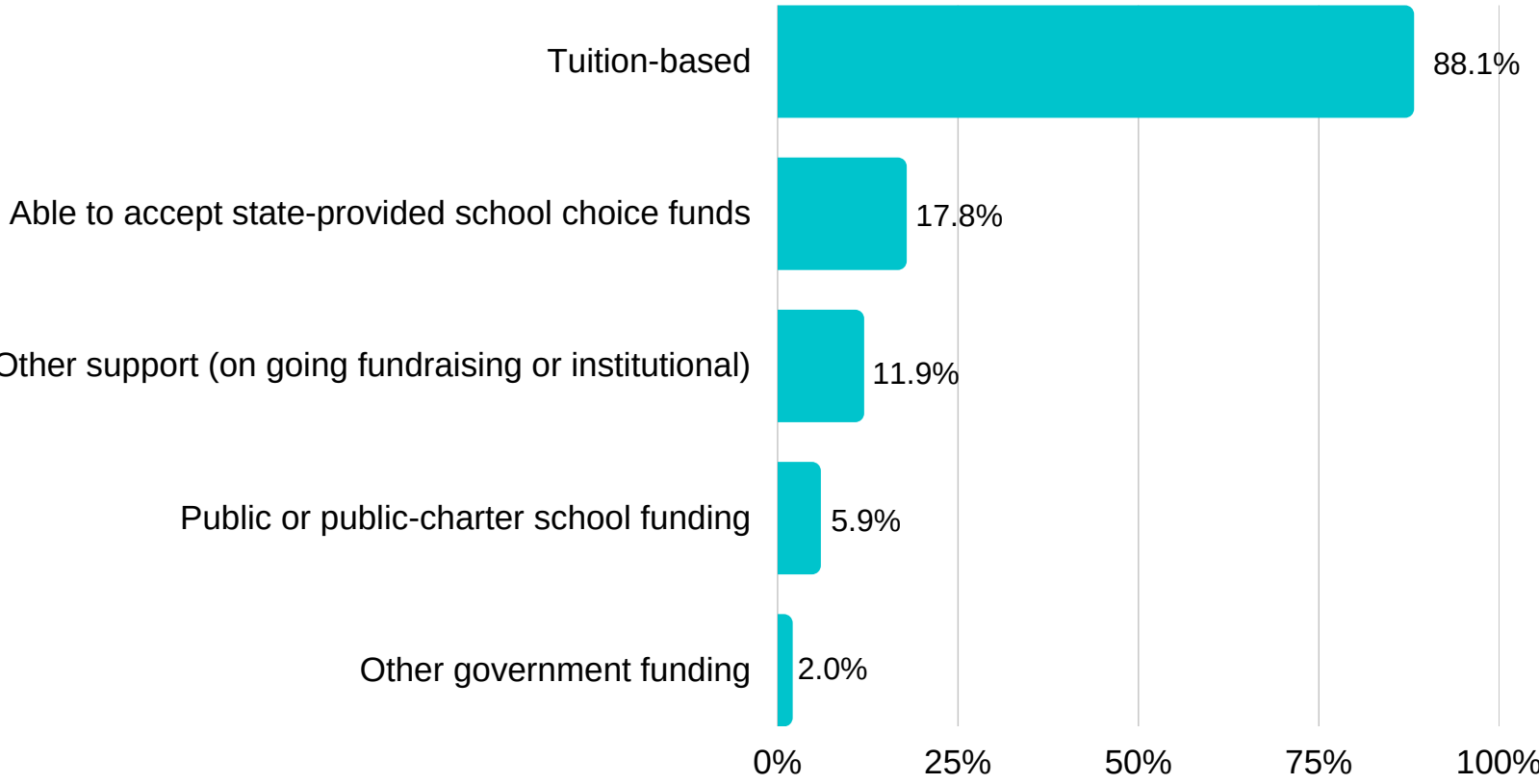
Tuition-based schooling is the primary source of revenue for 89% of microschools. Accessing state-provided school choice funds serves as a source of revenue for 18%. It is not uncommon for microschools to accept multiple funding sources.



How are Microschools Organized?



What are Microschools' Funding Sources?



Teaching and Learning

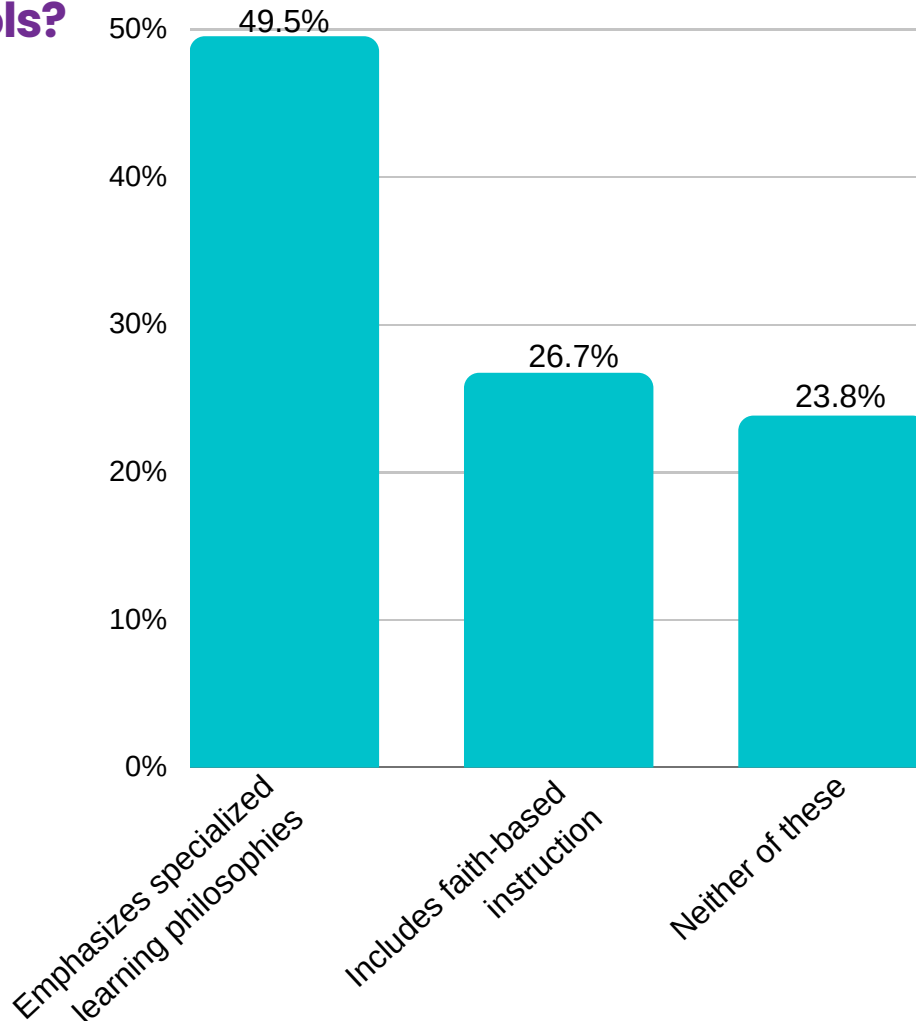


Half of microschoools surveyed emphasize specialized learning philosophies, including Montessori, Waldorf, or child-centered learning. Faith-based instruction is offered in 24%.

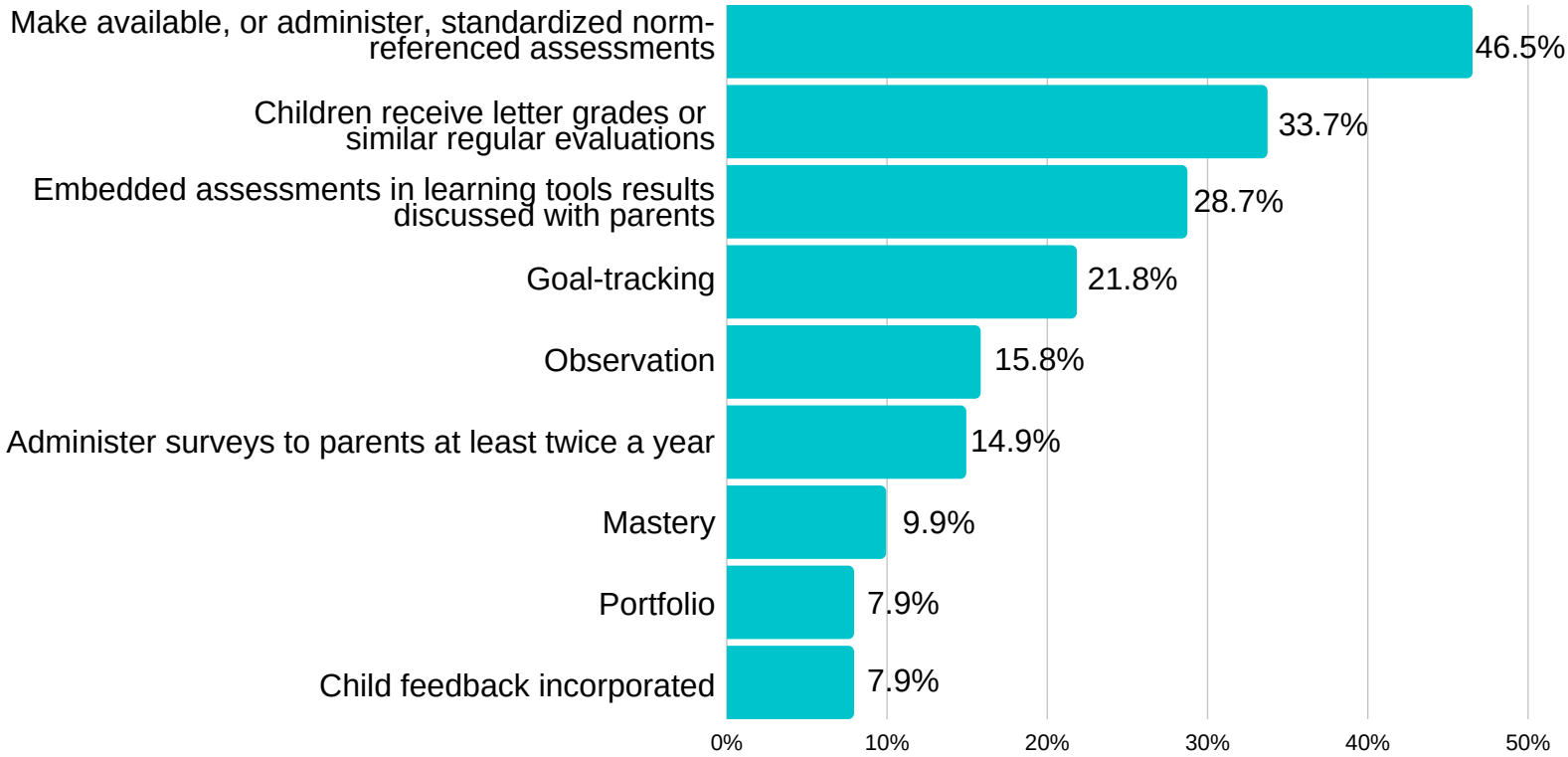
The most common ways microschoools measure and demonstrate their impact is through offering norm-referenced assessments, although at 47%, this remains relatively low compared with other schools of choice sectors. In many cases, these assessments are offered only if parents elect to have their children take them; they are not mandatory.

Letter grades, or comparable evaluations, are utilized in 34%, and 29% of microschoools emphasize performance on embedded assessments in digital learning content.

What are the Educational Approaches Utilized at Current Microschoools?



How are Microschools Showing Impact?



What Do Current Microschool Leaders Need?

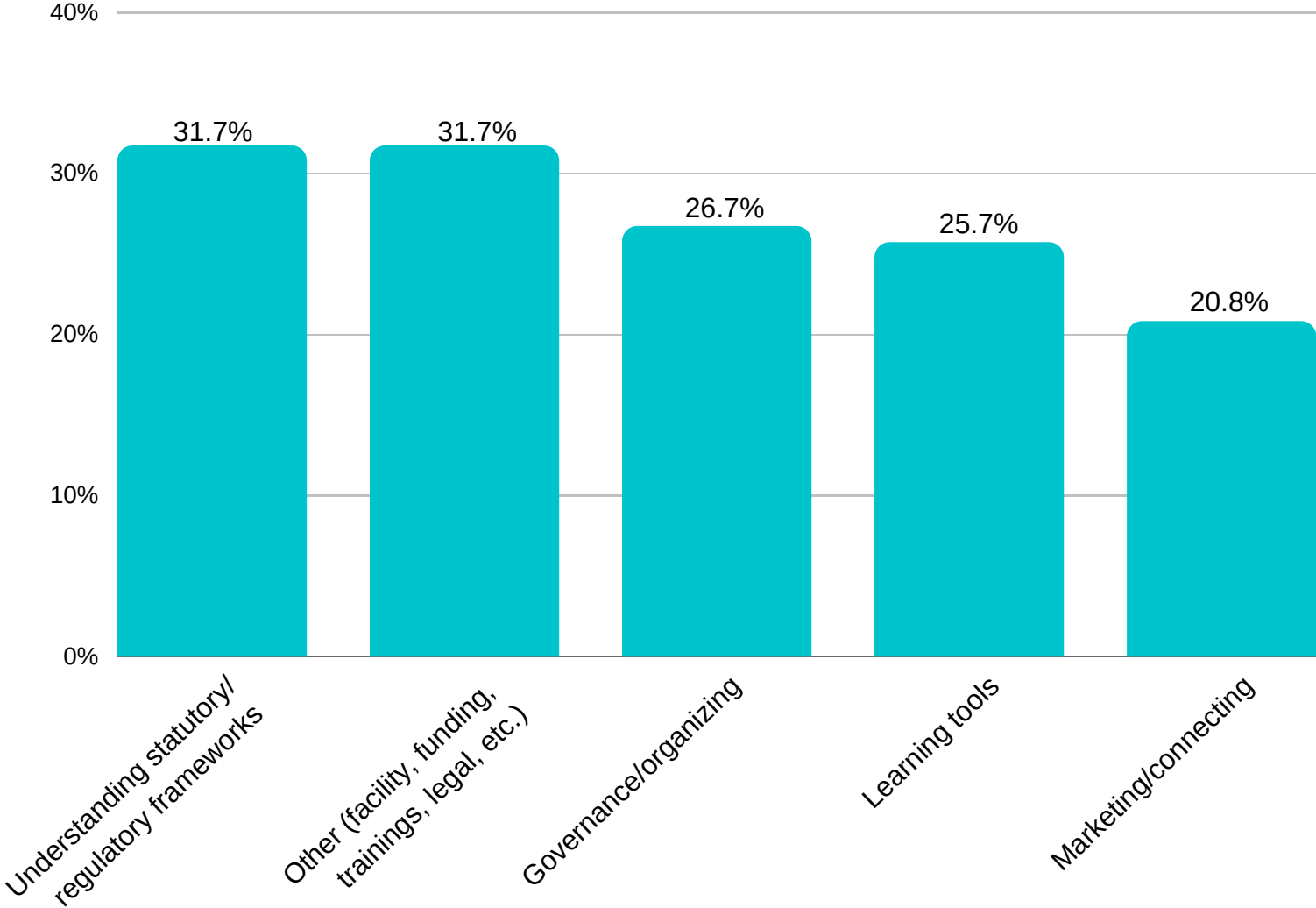
Microschool leaders sought help from Center staff on a broad range of topics, including:

- Understanding statutory and regulatory frameworks (32%);
- Other business matters, including facilities, generating revenue, personnel and trainings (32%);
- Governance/organizing (27%);
- Help selecting and implementing learning tools (26%);
- Marketing/connecting (21%).

**"I am having trouble understanding exactly how the law governs microschools in West Virginia. It would be so helpful to get a clear answer to this."
- Microschool Founder**



What Are Current Microschool Founders Seeking Help With?



"I am really in need of assistance with decisions on the business end of this endeavor. I know how to teach kids... I'm not well versed in the business world!"
- Microschool Founder



PART II: PROSPECTIVE MICROSCHOOLS



Prospective microschool leaders actively working to open microschools often contact the National Microschooling Center with questions or looking for assistance as they move toward launch.

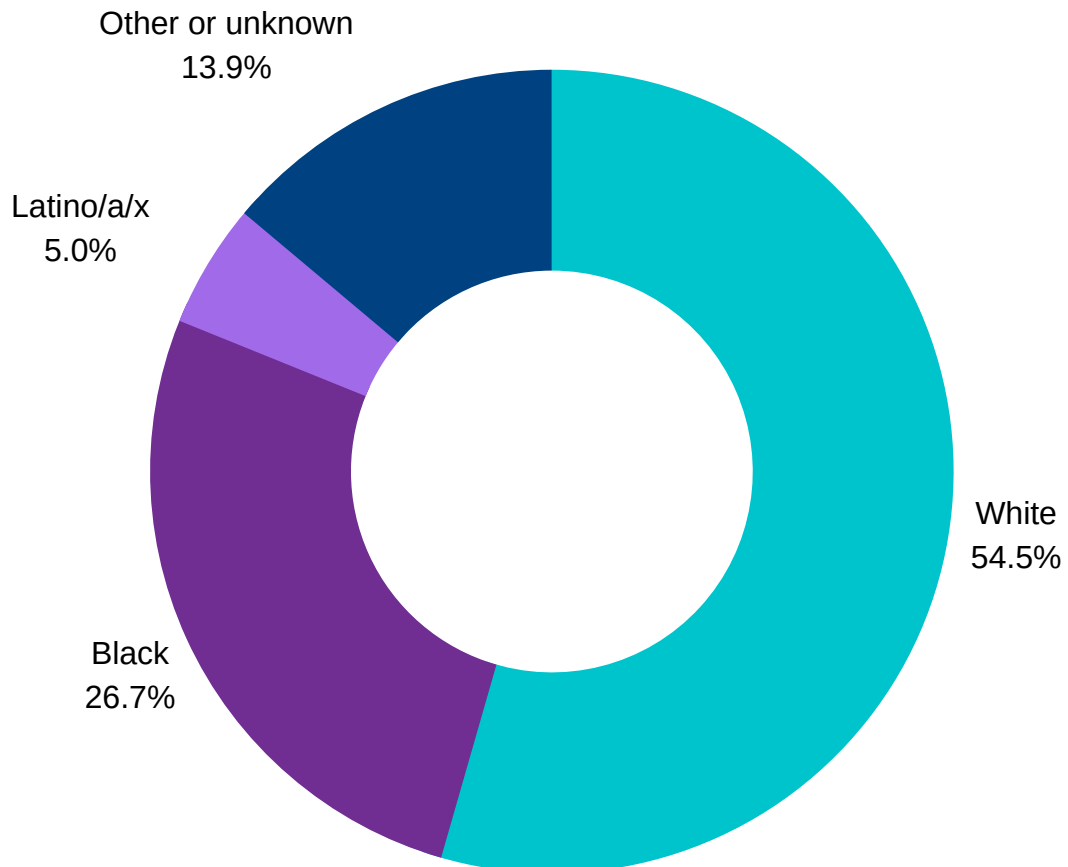
The vast majority of these leaders are looking to open their microschool at the start of the 2023-24 school year.

Prospective Microschool Founders

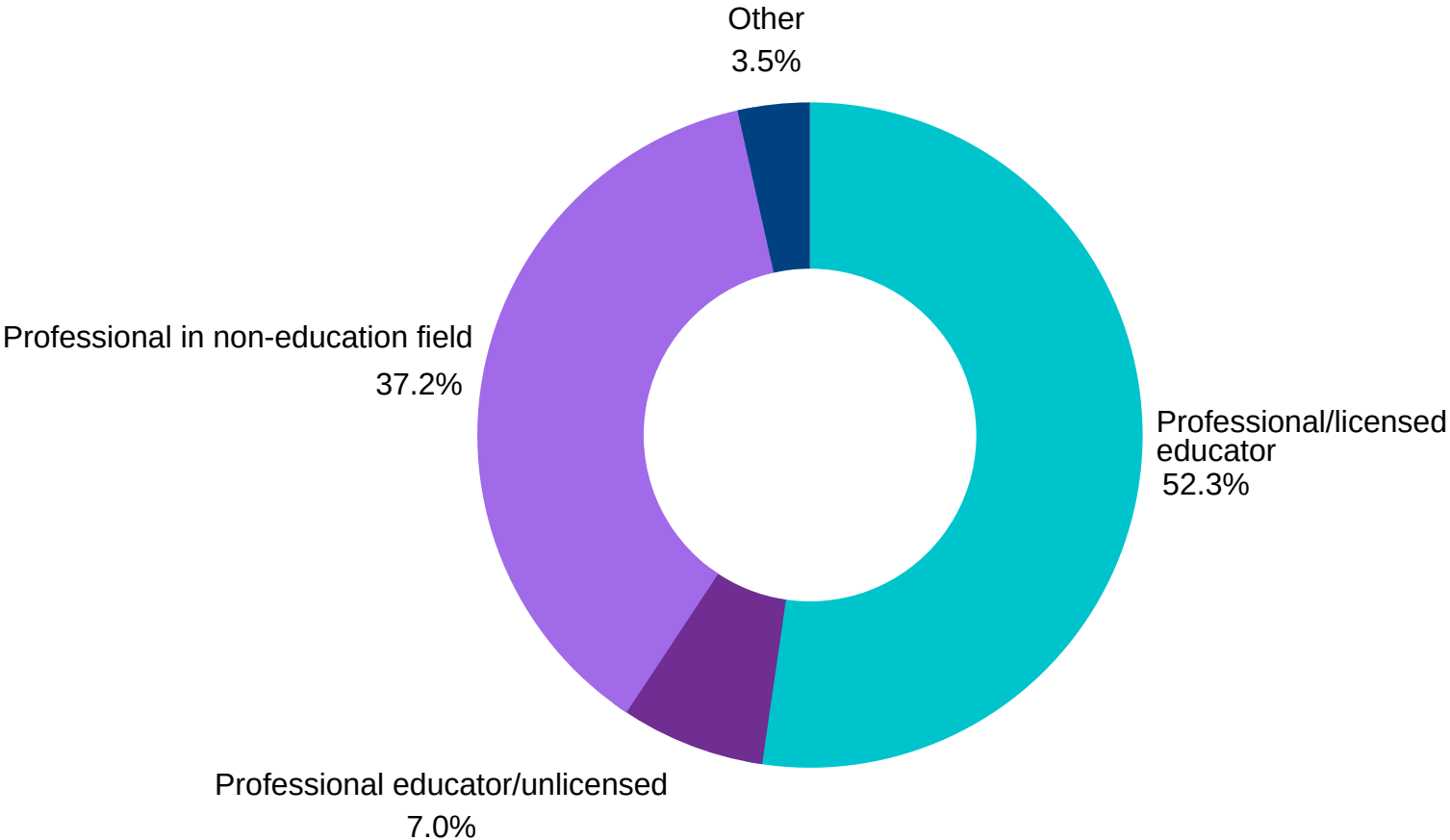
Prospective leaders/founders surveyed were 55% White, 27% Black, and 5% Latino/a/x.

More than half (52%) were professionally-licensed educators, 37% professionals from non-education fields, and 7% unlicensed professional educators.

What is the Racial/Ethnic Makeup of Prospective Microschool Founders?



What is the Professional Background of Prospective Microschool Founders?



**"I'm a teacher and entrepreneur wondering how [microschools] work and what they are."
- Prospective Microschool Founder**



Business Model



Prospective leaders plan to convene in:

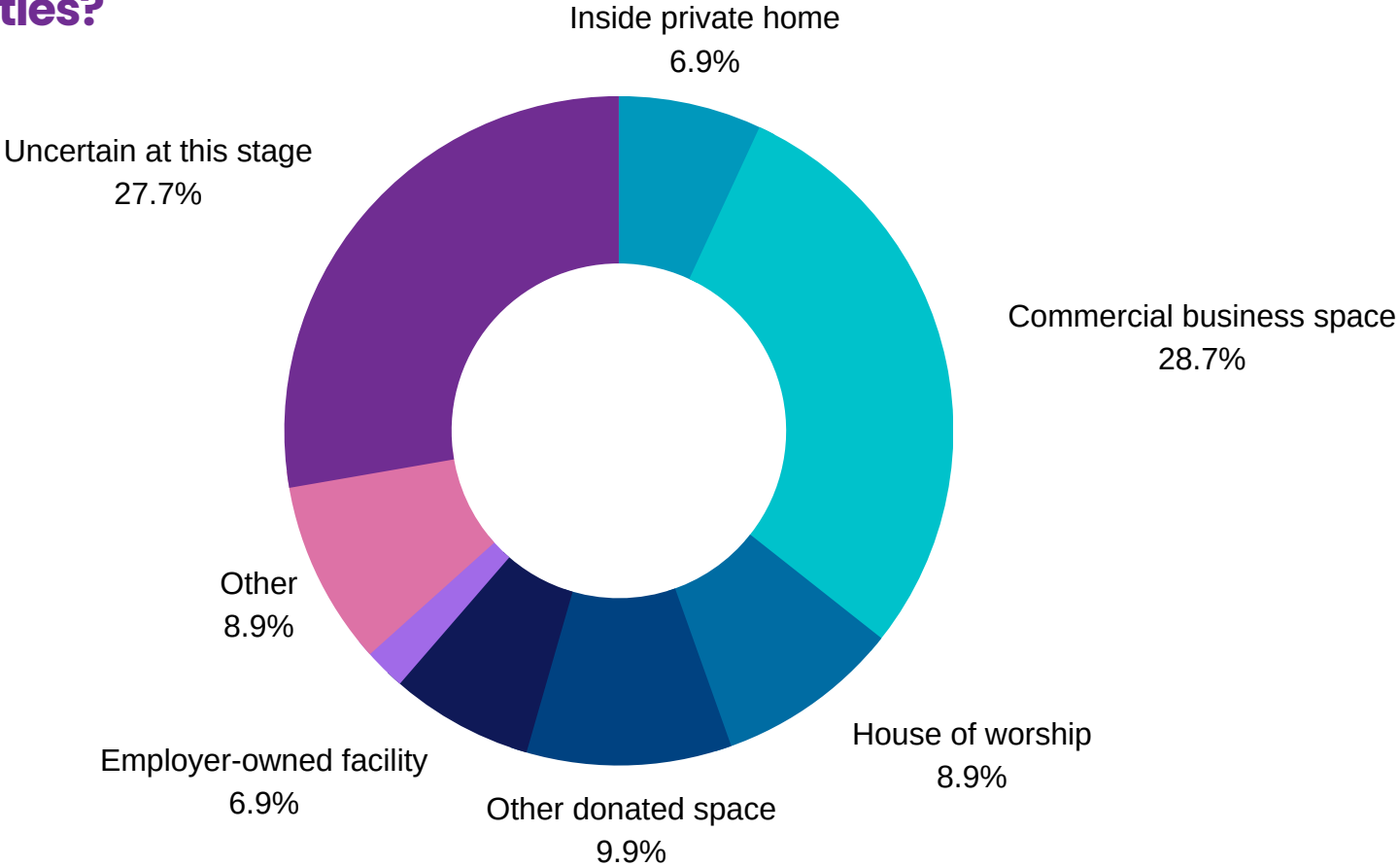
- Commercial business space (29%);
- A house of worship (9%);
- Other donated space (10%);
- Inside a private home (7%);
- An employer-owned facility (7%).

Prospective founders plan to fund their microschool with:

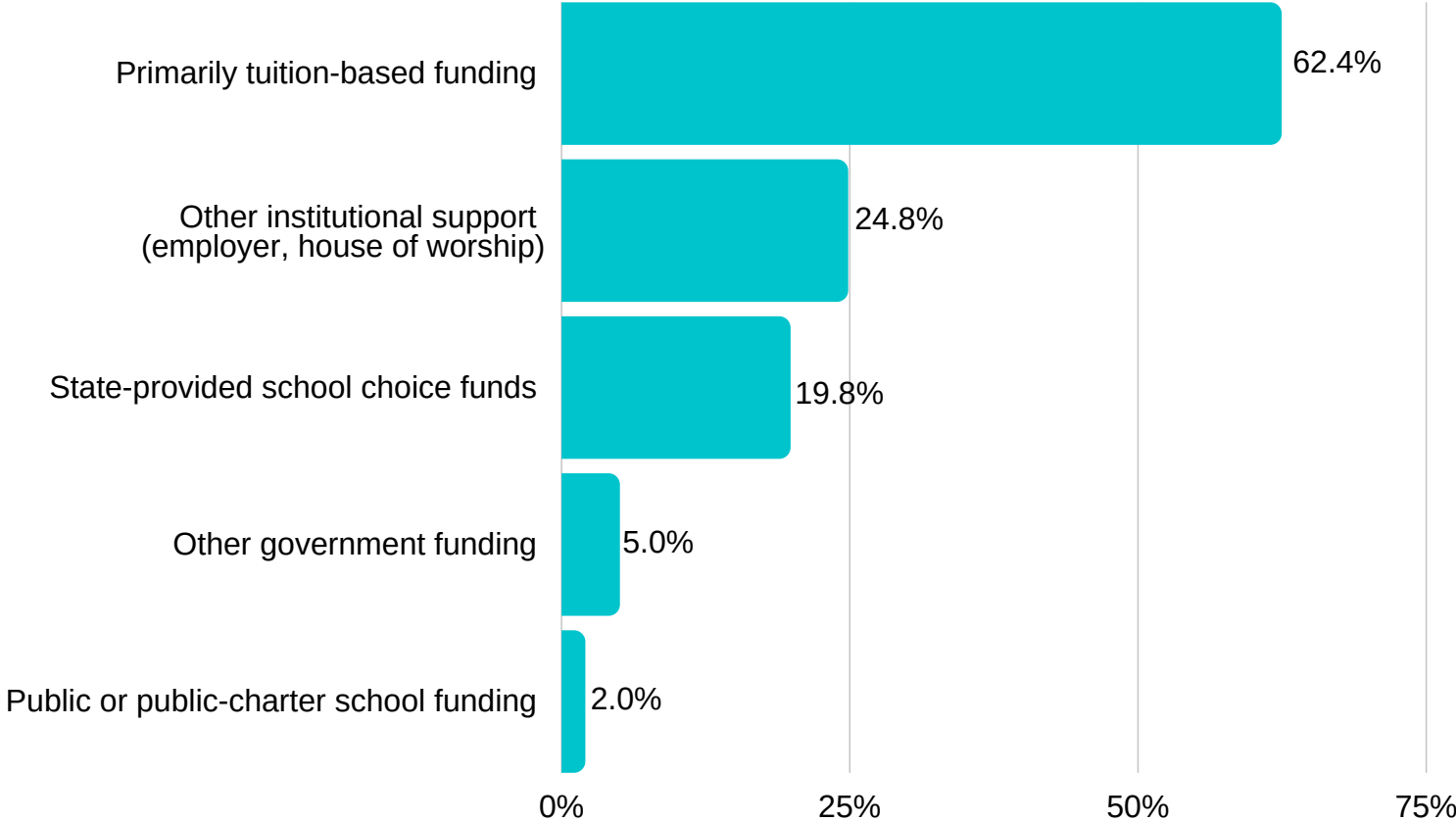
- Tuition-based revenue (62%);
- Other institutional support; employer, house of worship, etc. (25%);
- State school choice funds (20%).

The vast majority of prospective founders anticipate using more than one funding source.

What are Prospective Microschool Founders Considering for Facilities?



What are Anticipated Funding Sources for Prospective Microschool Founders?



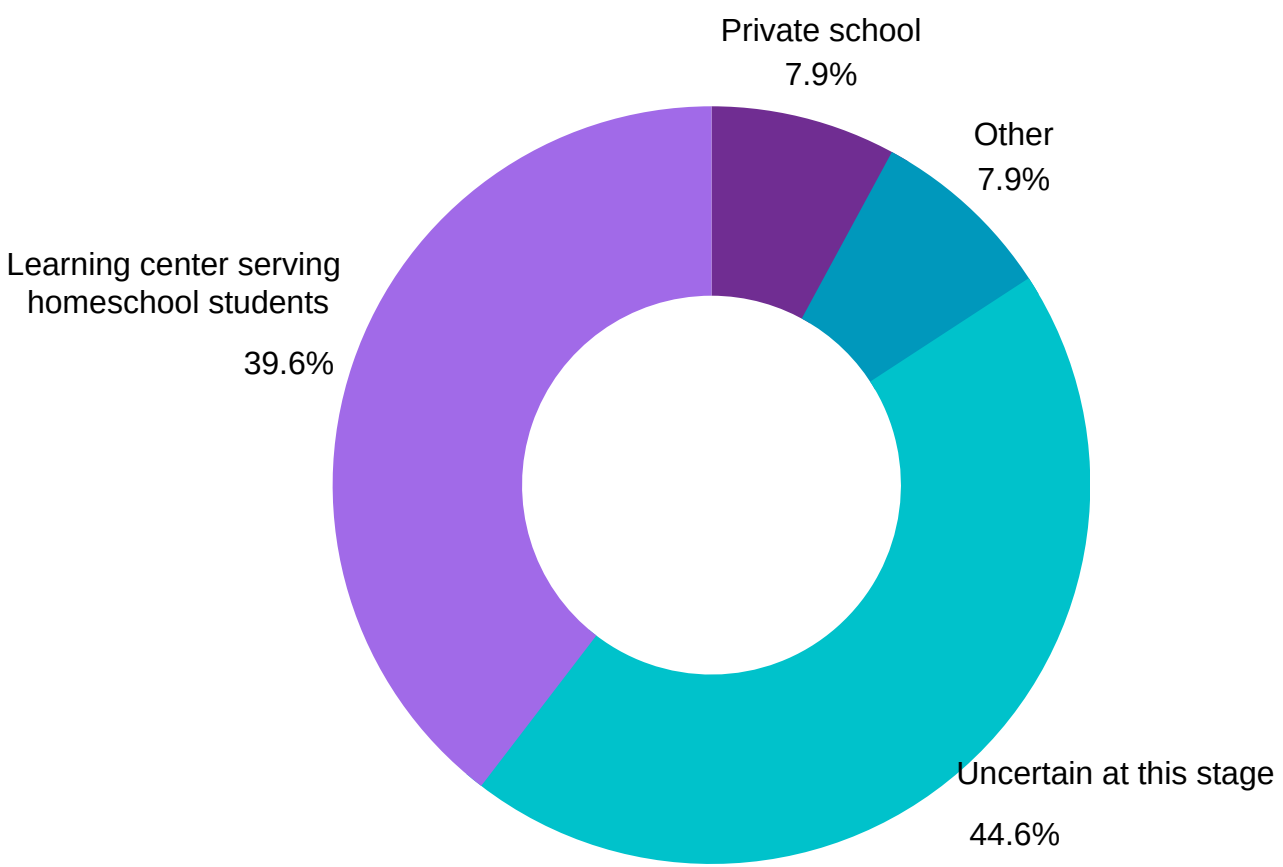
Prospective Operational Findings

Opening as a learning center serving families following their states' homeschool rules was the plan of 40% of founders. Uncertainty at the present stage of planning was common (45%), while 8% plan to open as private schools.

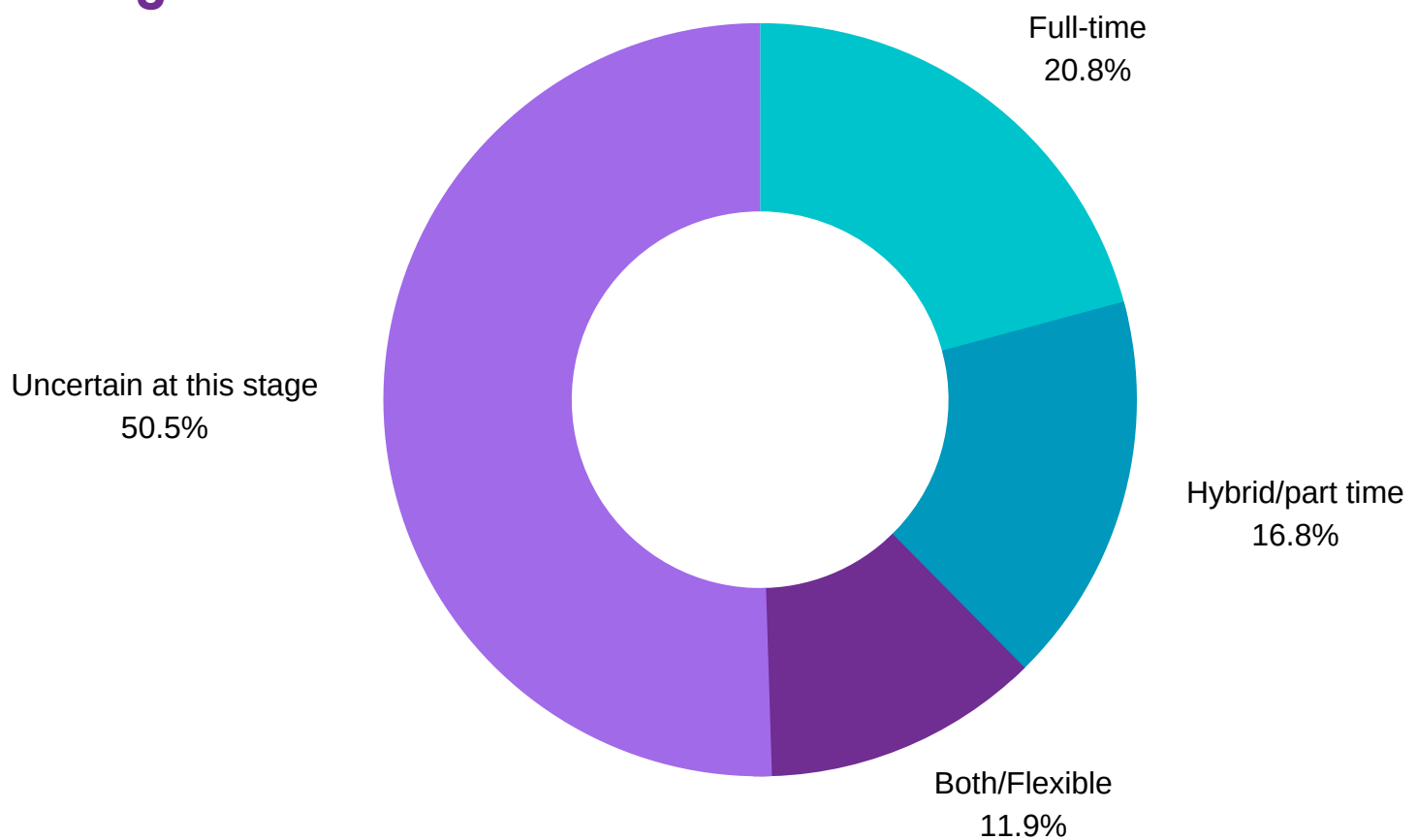
Half of prospective microschools are unsure at this stage as to what they plan to offer for a schedule. One in five are looking to offer families a full-time (at least 4 days a week schedule), while 16.8% are looking at offering a hybrid or part-time program.



How are Prospective Microschools Being Organized?



What Schedules are Prospective Microschool Founders Planning to Offer Families?



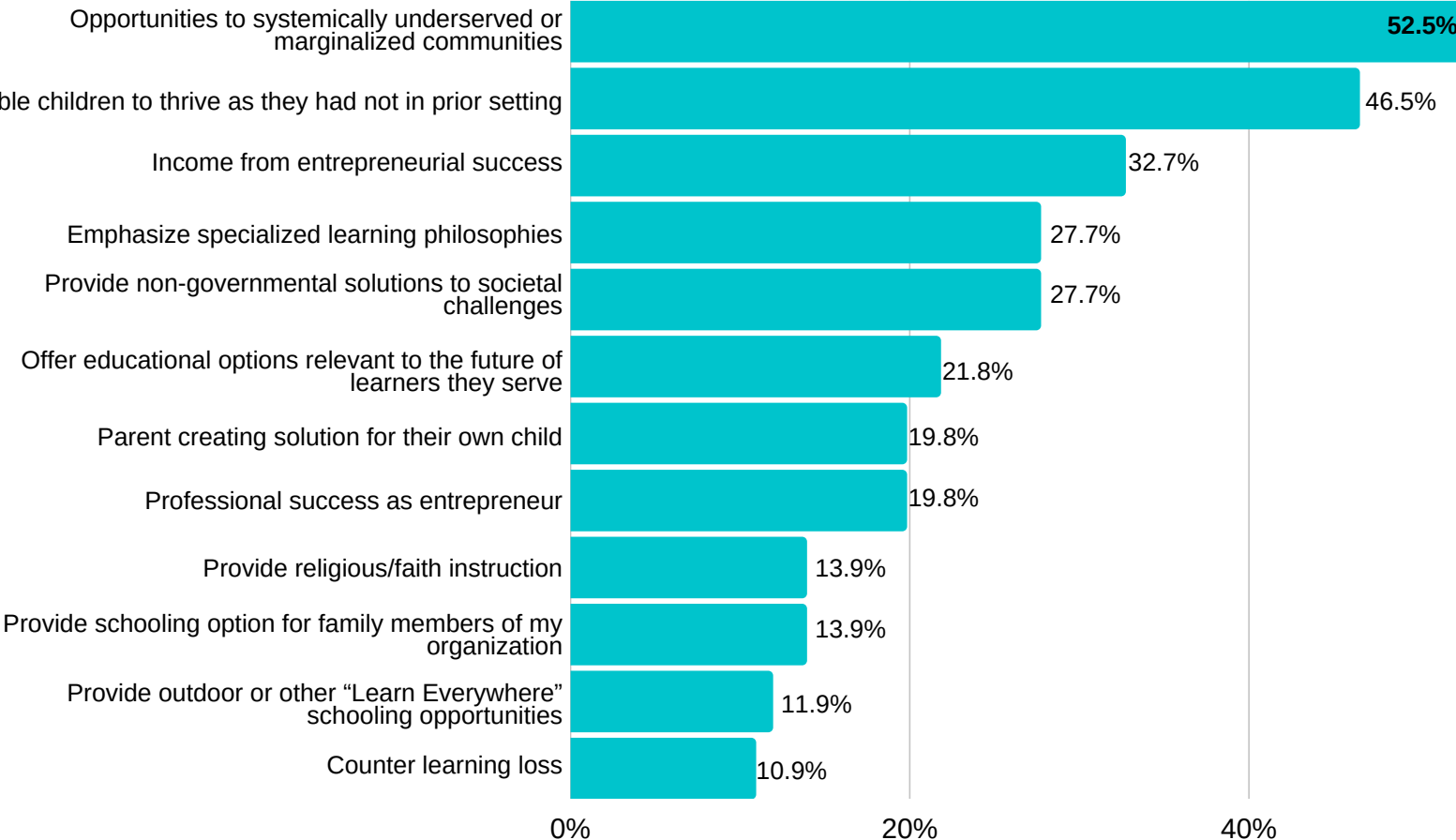
Prospective Microschool Founders' Main Motivations



Leaders' top main motivations for starting a microschool included:

- 53% Provide opportunities to systemically underserved or marginalized individuals;
- 47% Enable children to thrive as they had not in prior settings;
- 33% Income from entrepreneurial success;
- 28% Emphasize specialized learning philosophies;
- 28% Provide non-governmental solutions to societal challenges;
- 22% Offer education more relevant to futures of learners served.

What are the Main Motivators of Prospective Microschool Founders?



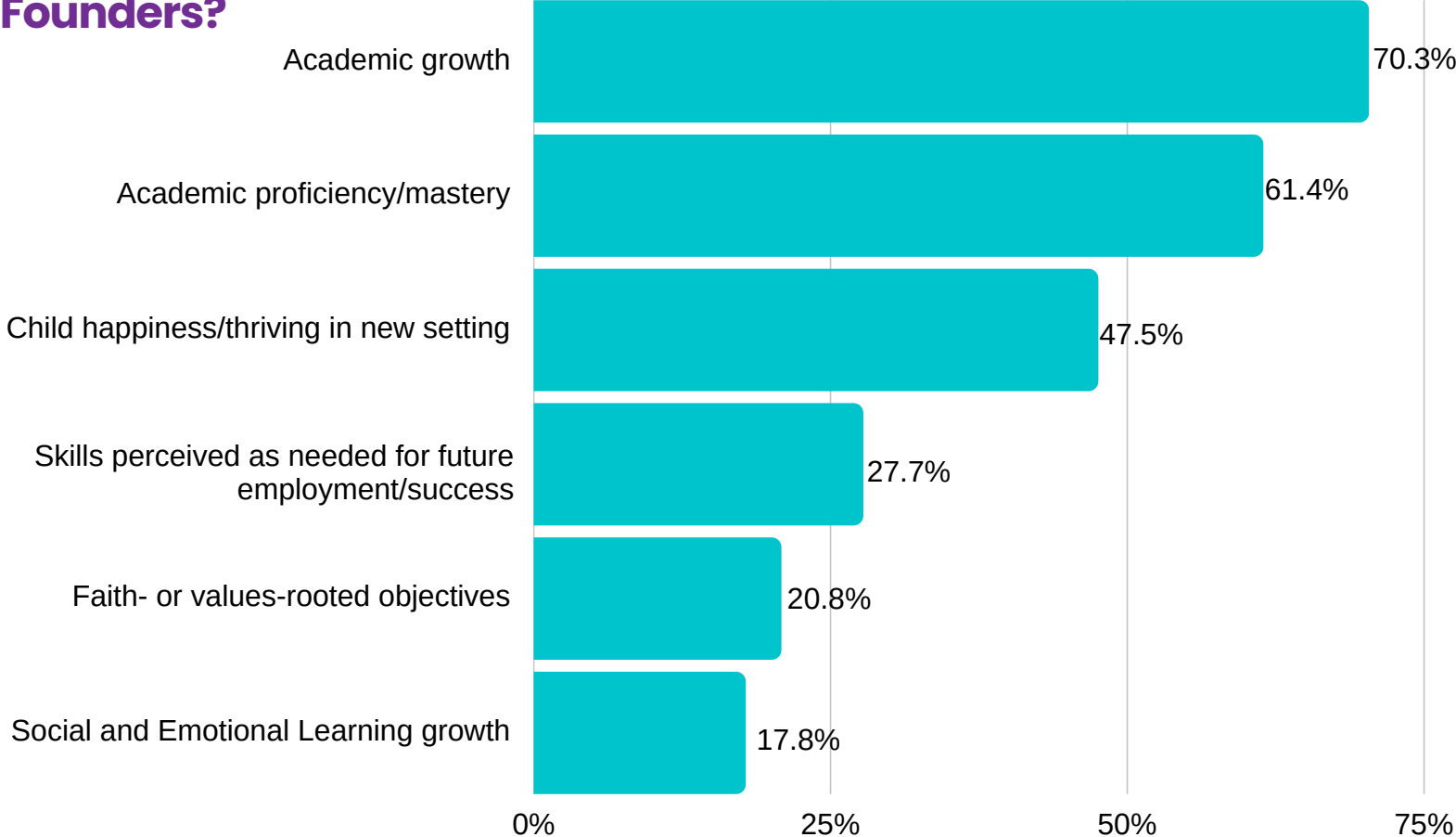
Planned Outcomes

Most important outcome types identified were academic growth (70%), academic mastery/proficiency (61%), children's happiness/thriving in a new setting (48%), and skills perceived as needed for future employment/success (28%).



**"We will be focusing on Neurodivergent scholars mainly those with Autism, Down Syndrome, Dyslexia, and reading disabilities."
- Prospective Microschool Founder**

What are the Most Important Outcomes to Prospective Microschool Founders?



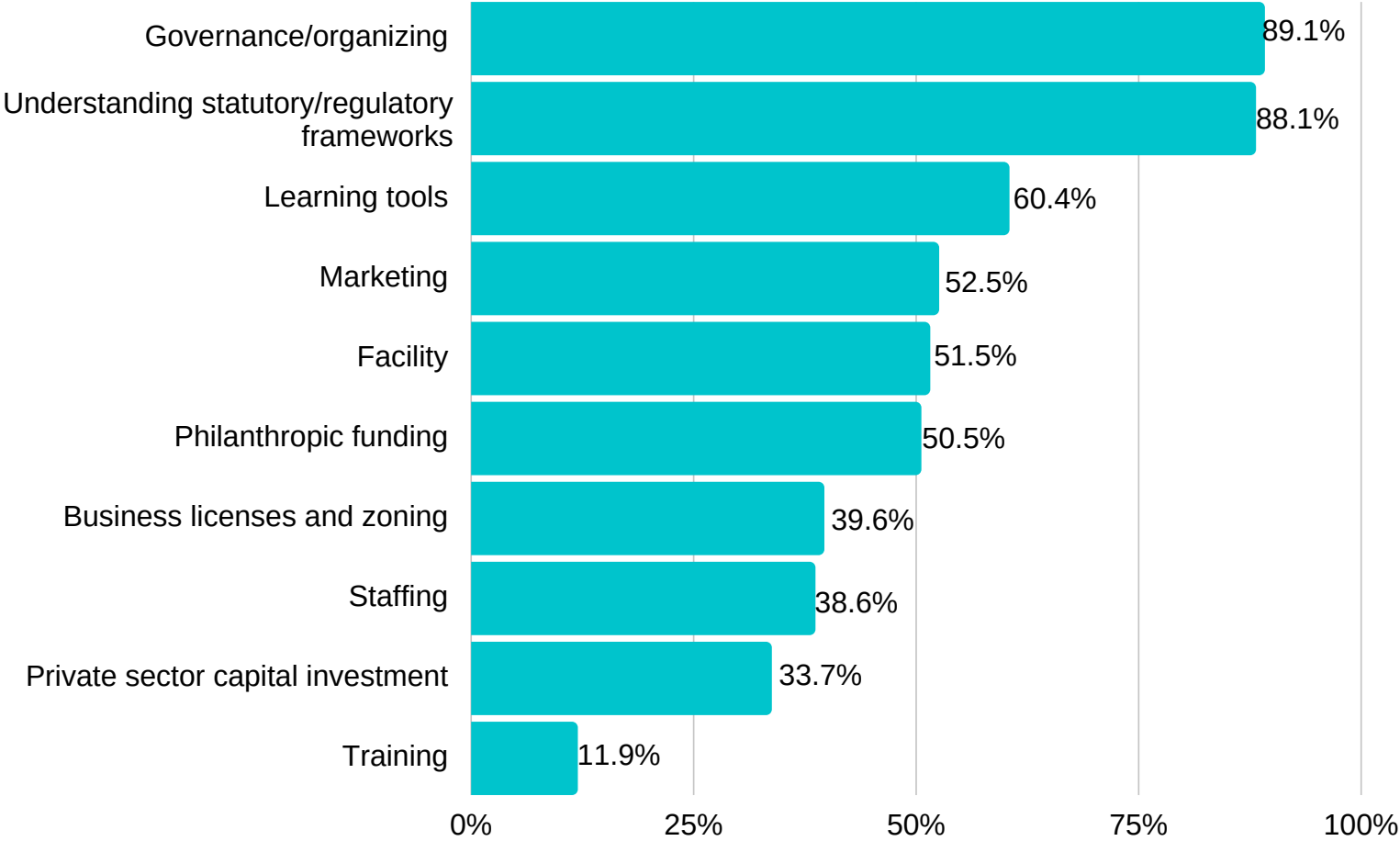
Prospective Microschool Founders' Needs



Prospective, pre-launch microschool leaders have sought help from the Center on a broad range of topics including:

- Governance/organizational (89%);
- Understanding and navigating statutory and regulatory frameworks (88%);
- Learning tools (60%);
- Marketing/connecting (53%);
- Facility (52%);
- Staffing (39%).

What are Prospective Microschool Founder Seeking Help With?



CONCLUSION

This original analysis demonstrates much of the profound diversification which contributes to making microschoooling such a compelling narrative within American education.

The ways microschoools measure and demonstrate impact, establish their weekly schedules, the spaces they utilize as facilities, and the professional backgrounds of leaders all embrace many different approaches, reflecting a profound pluralism within the sector.

Founders' main motivations for leading microschoools vary widely and offer substantive insight into this nontraditional sector. While these leaders can certainly be described as entrepreneurial educators, that fewer than one-third of current leaders cite income from business success as a main motivator is informative, compared with providing opportunities for systemically underserved or marginalized communities (53%), and enabling children to thrive as they had not in prior education settings (47%).

That the share of founders and lead educators with backgrounds as currently or formerly licensed educators declined from 70% for current leaders to 52% for prospective founders also seems indicative of a shift in the sector's leadership base.

The racial/ethnic composition of both current and prospective founders offer further insights into the sector. Current founders surveyed were 64.4% White, 12.9% Black, and 5.0% Latino/a/x. Prospective leaders/founders surveyed were 55% White, 27% Black, and 5% Latino/a/x. That the racial/ethnic composition of prospective new microschoool founders was less white and more black than current microschoool founders was not surprising, and represents an important shift. The relatively low incidence of Latino/a/x microschoool leaders represents an important opportunity, and a challenge, to this growing sector.

Microschoools' draw most of their operating funding from tuition-based models (88.1% for current microschoools, 62.4% for prospective microschoools). New and expanded state school choice programs in several states which are home to microschoools included in this report, including Florida, Arizona and Arkansas, seem to explain the increase in interest in accessing funding from these programs for microschoools.

**"My philosophy is to connect with each individual/family, then learn and grow without boundaries. All ages/abilities welcome."
- Microschoool Founder**





All photos in this report by Gina Danals.

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The National Microschooling Center is committed to advancing the growth, health, & evolution of the microschooling movement to encourage it to live up to its full potential.