

Profile of a School Communicator

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Introduction

The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) has long conducted a membership survey in order to identify important and emerging trends and issues in the school public relations industry. As the leader in school communication, NSPRA serves more than 2,800 members who work primarily as communication directors in public school districts and education organizations throughout the United States and Canada. In addition to providing relevant, high-value benchmarking data about school public relations professionals and the field, survey results also serve to inform association leaders of the professional goals and outlooks of school communicators. Findings help to guide NSPRA's professional development and resource offerings for the coming years to best meet the increasing demands of the school communicator role in alignment with the four primary goals of the association's strategic plan:

- Be known as the leader in school communications
- Grow and retain membership
- Ensure efficient, effective and up-to-date systems
- Deliver relevant, high-impact programs

This year's survey was expanded to include questions relevant to the ever-changing landscape of the school communications field and evolving role of a school public relations professional. In addition, a number of questions from previous years' surveys were either revised or eliminated from the 2022 survey as part of a meticulous review process to ensure meaningful data was collected and analyzed.

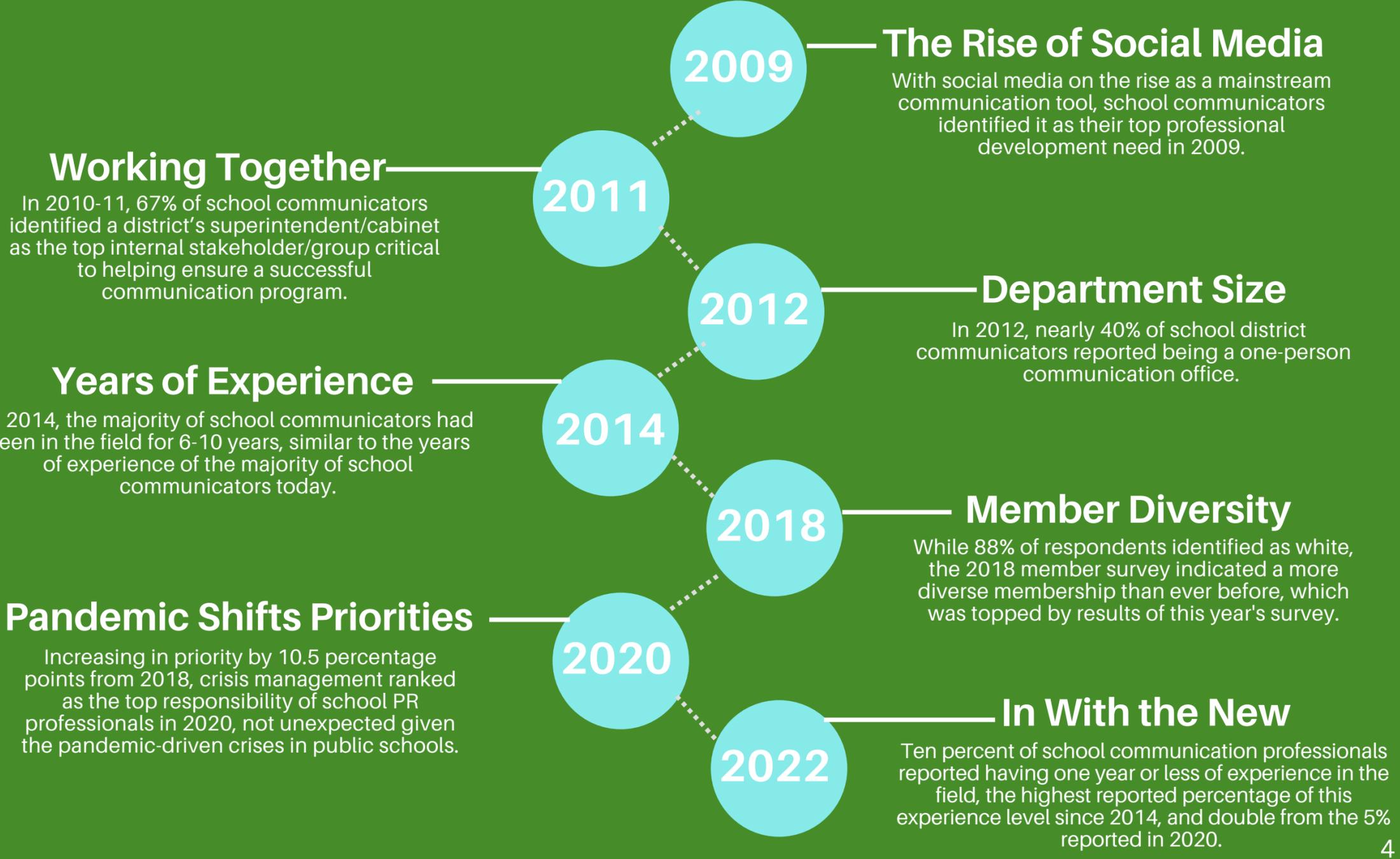
METHODOLOGY

NSPRA administered the online Membership Profile Survey to all 2,544 members from Nov. 8 – Nov. 23, 2022. A total of 499 surveys were fully completed with 63 surveys partially completed. The survey report represents responses from 22% of NSPRA's total membership as of November 2022. Results of the survey have a margin of error of +/- 4% with a 95% confidence level.



10+ Years of Insights

NSPRA has conducted member surveys for decades in an effort to better understand the roles and responsibilities of school communicators. Over the years, NSPRA has expanded the surveys to collect data designed to also identify further trends and issues in the industry. Highlights from the last 10+ years include:



Who Responded?

The 2022 survey was sent to all 2,544 NSPRA members; 499 surveys were fully completed with 63 surveys partially completed.

Geographically, respondents spanned all seven NSPRA regions. Two respondents indicated they were located outside of the United States or Canada.

NSPRA Regions

Mideast (DC, IN, KY, MD, MI, OH, VA, WV)

North Central (IL, IA, MN, NE, ND, SD, WI, Manitoba, Northwestern ON)

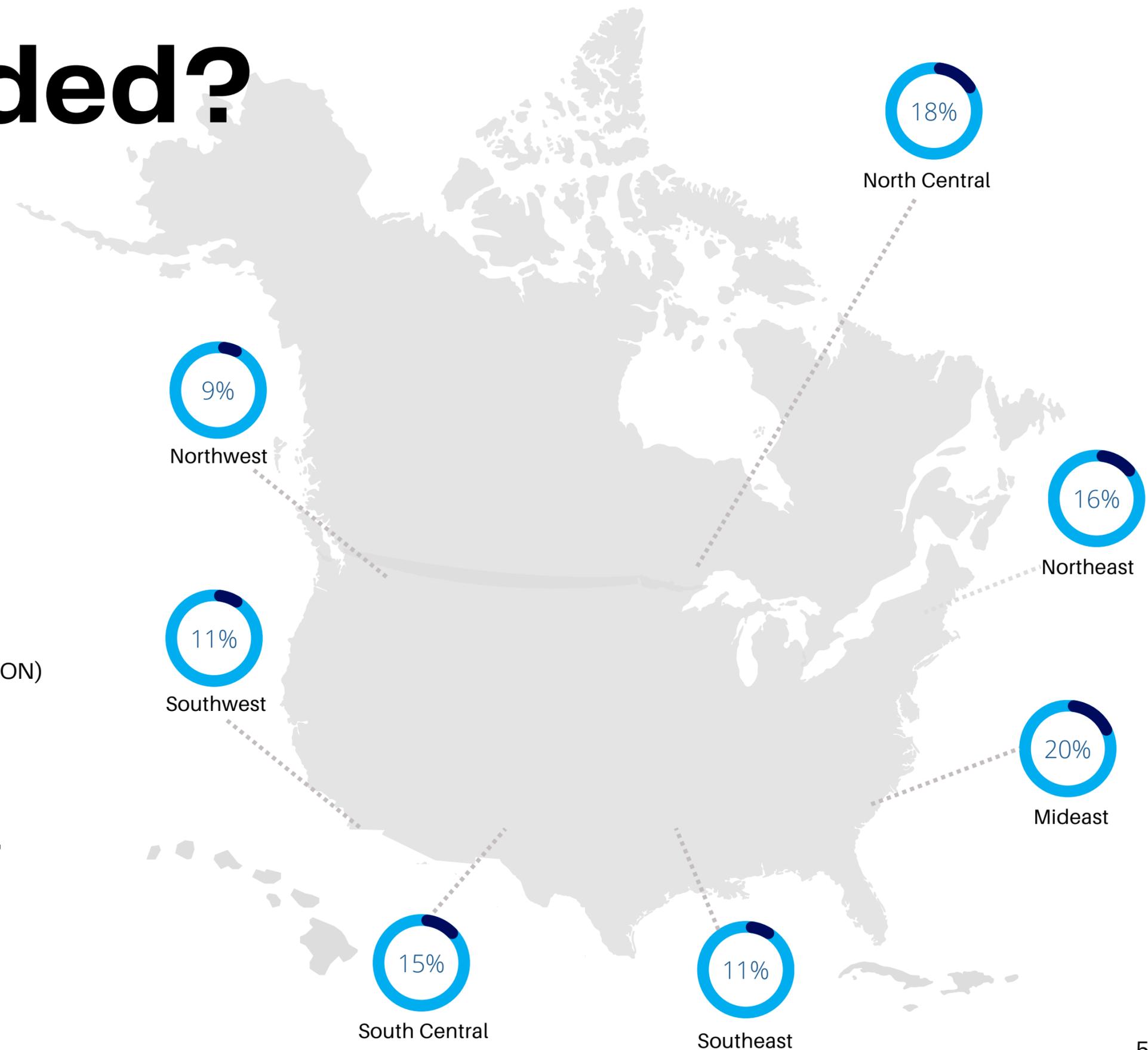
Northeast (CT, DE, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Eastern ON, Prince Edward Island, Quebec)

Northwest (AK, ID, MT, OR, WA, Alberta, BC, Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan, Yukon)

South Central (AR, KS, LA, MO, OK, TX)

Southeast (AL, FL, GA, MS, NC, SC, TN, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands)

Southwest (AZ, CA, CO, HI, NV, NM, UT, WY)



Executive Summary

In the ever-evolving world of both education and communications, the roles, responsibilities and demographics of a school communicator are changing.

In this year's survey, 10% of school communication professionals reported having one year or less of experience in the field, the highest reported percentage of this experience level since 2014, and double from the 5% reported in 2020. The mid-career school communicator remains strongly represented, with a third of school communication professionals reporting 5–10 years of school public relations experience.

For the first time since 2018, the top five responsibilities of a school communicator has shifted. While crisis communications was the top reported priority in both 2020 and in this year's survey, the number of respondents who indicated it as a top-five responsibility decreased to 58% from 69% in 2020. Community relations/public engagement broke into the top five responsibilities of a school communicator this year at #4 while it ranked #7 in 2020 and #6 in 2018.

The size of school district communication departments experienced subtle but significant shifts from both 2020 and 2018. The percentage of school communicators who reported being a one-person communication department remained largely unchanged this year (37%) as compared to 2020 (39%) and 2018 (39%). Notable, however, is that more respondents this year reported a department size of 2–4 (41%) than any other department size, the first time a one-person communication department was not the most-reported department size over the last decade. While department sizes of 5–7 decreased from the percentage of respondents reporting that department size in 2020 and 2018, more respondents reported department sizes of 8–15 and 15+ in this year's survey than in both 2020 and 2018.

Continued →

Executive Summary

Other important data from this year's survey include:

- Sixty-seven percent of school communicators are considered a member of their district's cabinet and/or leadership team, an increase from both 2020 (59%) and 2018 (58%).
- Ten percent of school communicators report being employed by a district with an enrollment of fewer than 2,000, the largest percent of school communicators working for a district of this size since 2009. Causes for the steady increase of school communicators employed by a district of this size could be due to any number of factors, including the possible decrease of overall enrollment in smaller districts. Another possibility is that school districts with an enrollment of less than 2,000 could have been steadily adding communication-specific roles to their staff over the last 10+ years.
- As might be expected, one-person communication offices are most likely to be employed by districts with an enrollment of fewer than 2,000. This represents a shift, however, from 2020, when one-person communication offices were most likely to be employed by school systems with an enrollment of 2,000–4,999. Based on the significant increase of NSPRA membership from 2020 to 2022, it could be reasonable to consider one such factor of this shift to be that smaller school districts that did not previously have a communications-specific position added one over the last two years.

As you'll see in the report, these trends and other data points in this survey suggest the value of a school communicator is more recognized than ever before. NSPRA would like to thank the association members who participated in this year's survey. Their continued participation in this research is deeply appreciated and makes this report possible.

More school communicators have a seat at the leadership table.

67%



of school communicators are considered a member of their district's cabinet and/or leadership team, an increase from both 2020 (59%) and 2018 (58%).

Profile of a School Communicator

The profile of a school communicator is shifting. For example, the percentage of school communicators who are in the first year of their job has doubled since 2020 to 10%, the highest reported percentage of this experience level since 2014.

The mid-career school communicator remains strongly represented, with a third of school communication professionals reporting 5–10 years of school public relations experience.

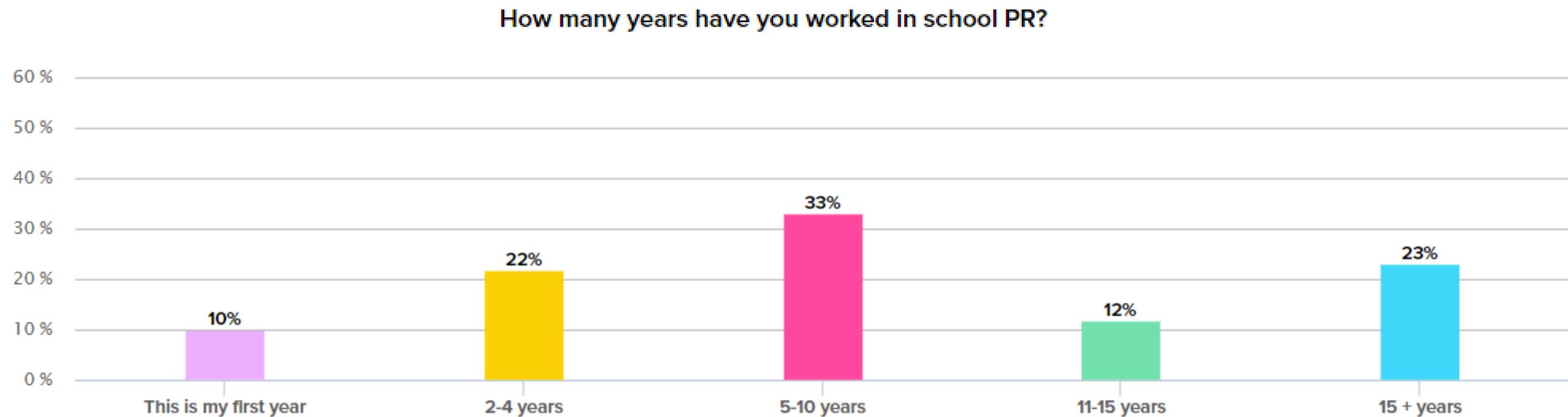


Profile of a School Communicator

Time in School Public Relations

Percentage of School Communicators in Their First Year Doubles From 2020

Ten percent of school communication professionals report having one year or less of experience in the field, the highest reported percentage of this experience level since 2014, and double from the 5% reported in 2020. The percentage of school communicators with 2–4 years of experience (22%) remained relatively steady from both 2020 (22%) and 2018 (24%). The percentage of mid-career professionals (5–15 years of experience) has seen a slight but steady increase from both 2020 (42%) and 2018 (41%) to 45% in 2022.



Profile of a School Communicator

Gender and Race and Ethnicity

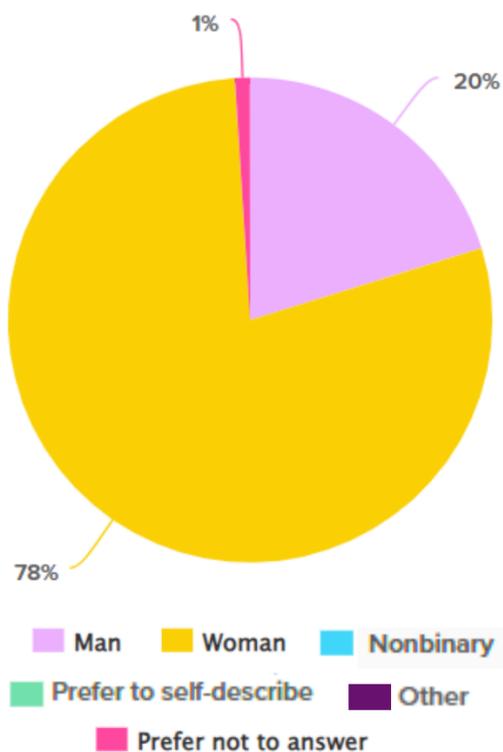
Women Continue to Dominate the Profession

As has been the case for decades, the majority of this year's respondents identified as a woman, with a slight increase to 78% in 2022 from 75% and 76% in 2020 and 2018, respectively.

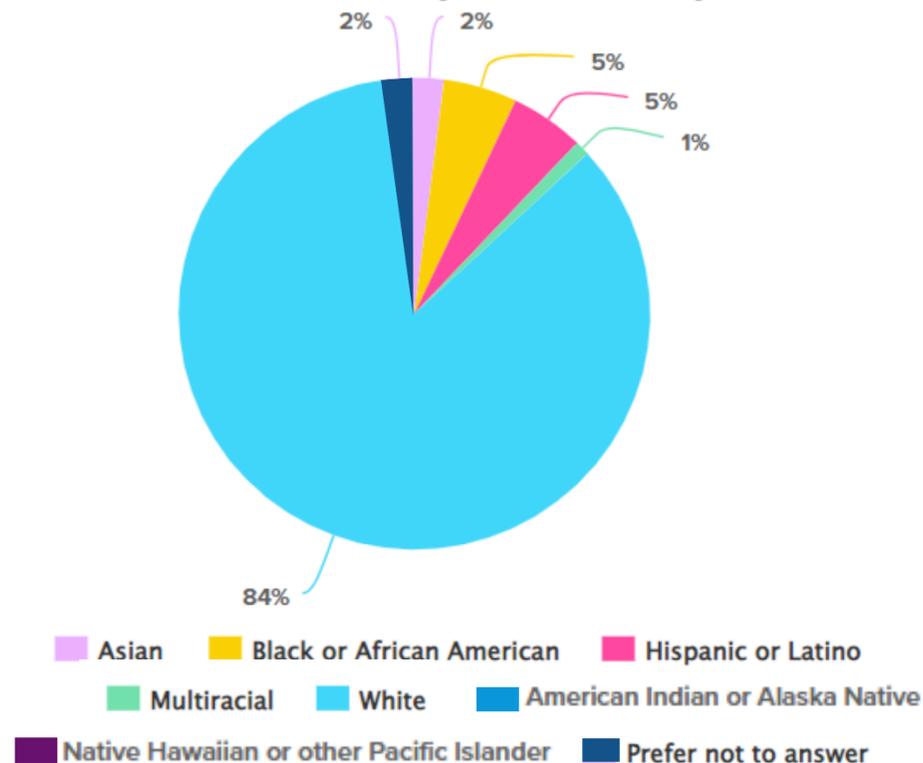
Making Strides Toward a More Diverse Profession

While the overwhelming majority of school communicators identify their race/ethnicity as white, the racial/ethnic diversity of the profession has continued to make incremental strides forward over the years. The percentage of school communicators who identified their race/ethnicity as other than white in this year's survey (16%) is up from both 2020 (11%) and 2018 (12%)—and is the highest percentage reported in NSPRA history.

Gender: How do you identify?



Which race or ethnicity best describes you?



Men Continue to Out Earn Women in School Public Relations*

While respondents who identified as a woman represented more than 3.5 times the number of respondents who identified as a man, data indicates that men significantly out earn women in the school public relations field. Half of men (50%) reported earning an annual salary of more than \$100,000, but only 38% of women reported the same. The 12% gap is slightly larger than the 11% reported in 2020, but smaller than the 18% reported in 2018.

On the lower end of the pay scale, 14% of women reported earning less than \$60,000, while only 8% of men reported the same.

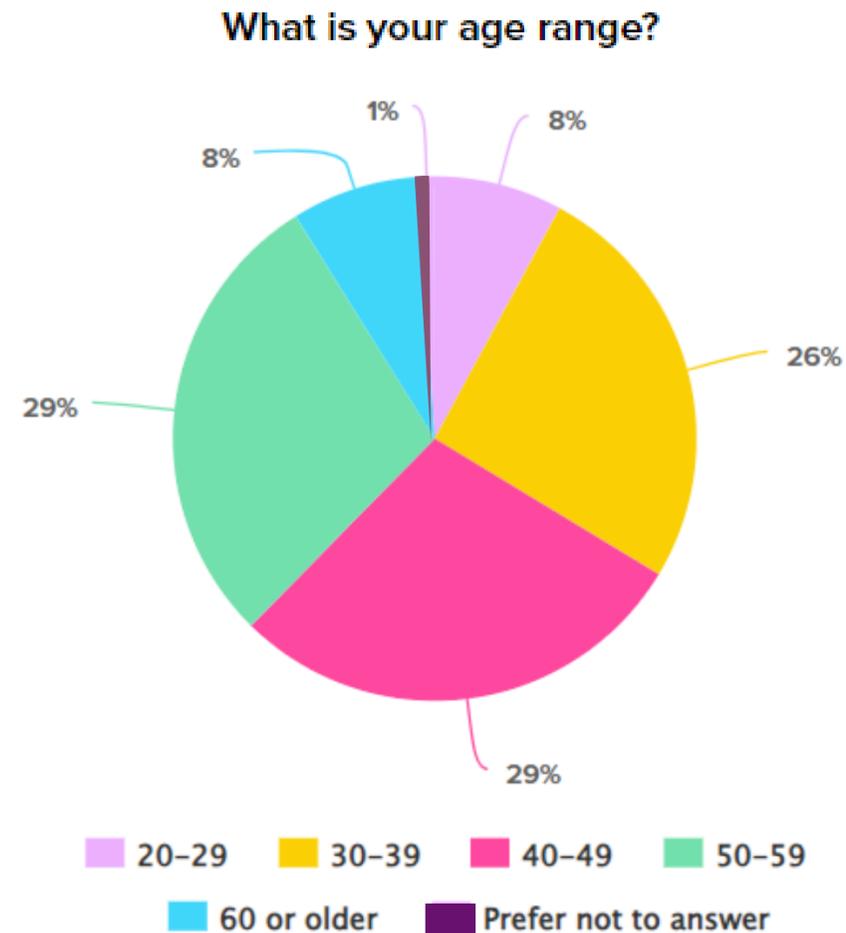
* It should be noted that only two survey respondents identified as nonbinary, with one nonbinary respondent reporting an annual salary of more than \$120,000 and one reporting an annual salary of \$70,000-\$79,000.

Profile of a School Communicator

Age

A Shift in the Age Range of School Communicators

Two age groups share the top spot for the most represented age range of school communicators, with 29% of respondents reporting an age of 40-49 and the same percentage of respondents reporting an age 50-59. In both 2020 and 2018, 40-49 represented the largest age group, followed by 50-59 in 2020 and 30-39 in 2018. Also notable is the increase of the youngest age group of respondents (20-29) to 8% in this year's survey, the highest since 2012.



District and Department Size and Structure

Notable in this year's report is the percentage of school communicators employed by a district with an enrollment of fewer than 2,000 at 10%, the largest percentage of school communicators working for a district of this size since 2009. Causes for the steady increase of school communicators employed by a district of this size could be due to any number of factors, including the possible decrease of overall enrollment in smaller districts. Another possibility is that school districts with an enrollment of less than 2,000 could have been steadily adding communication-specific roles to their staff over the last 10+ years.

As might be expected, one-person communication offices are most likely to be employed by districts with an enrollment of fewer than 2,000. This represents a shift, however, from 2020, when one-person communication offices were most likely to be employed by school systems with an enrollment of 2,000–4,999. Based on the significant increase of NSPRA membership from 2020 to 2022, it could be reasonable to consider one such factor of this shift to be that smaller school districts that did not previously have a communications-specific position added one over the last two years.



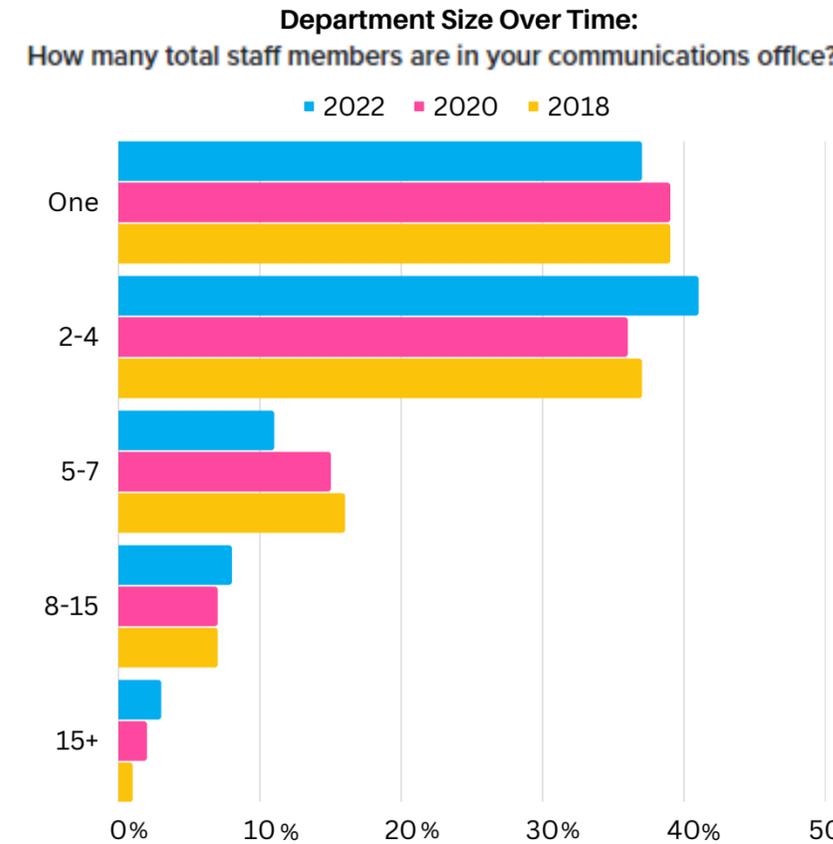
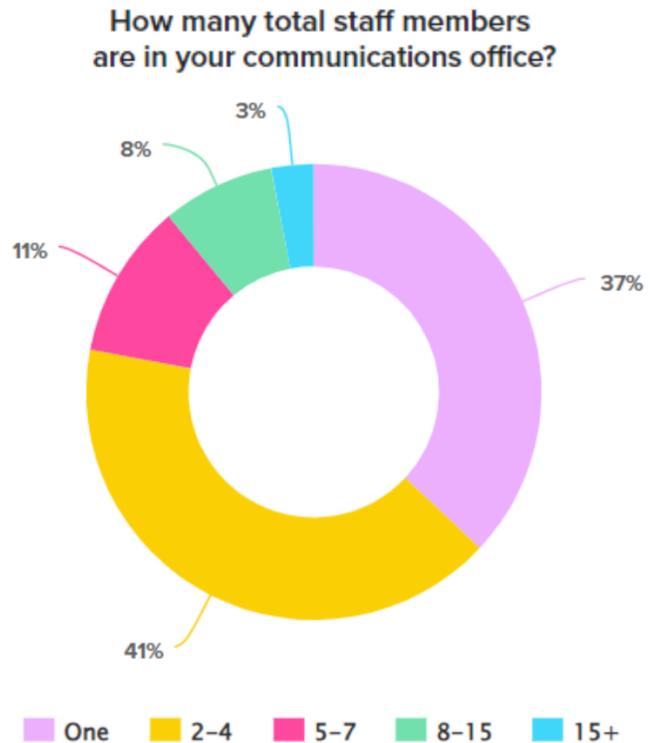
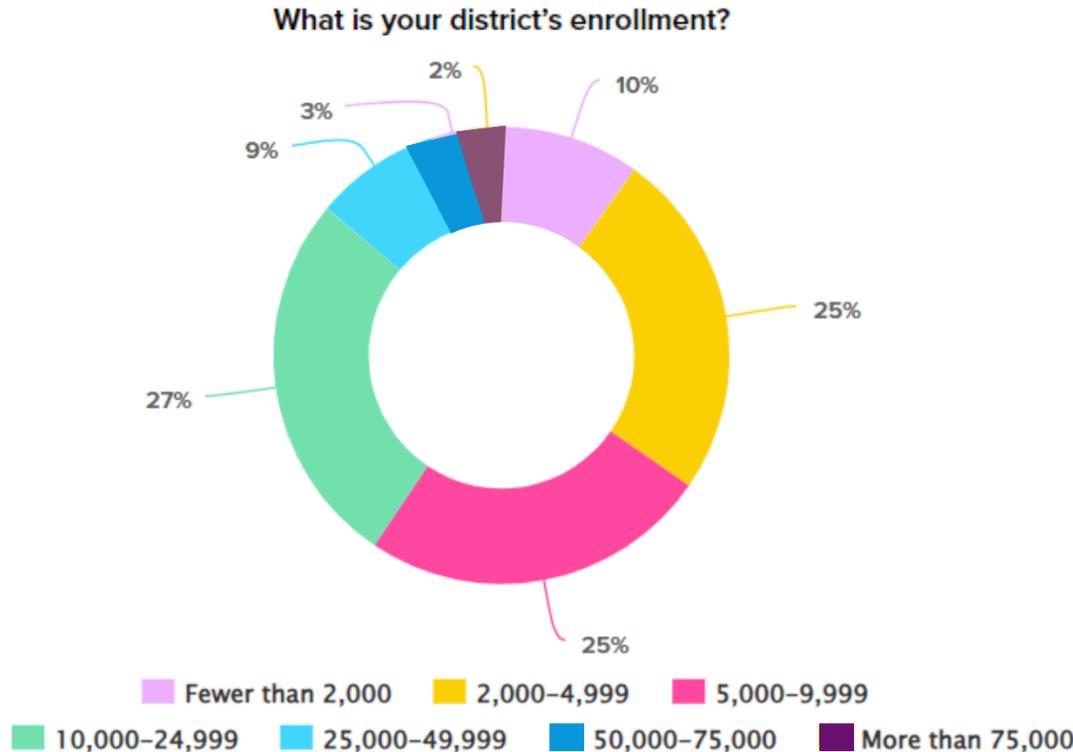
Enrollment and Department Size

Sizes of Districts Where School Communicators are Employed

Of respondents employed by a school district, more than a quarter (27%) reported their district's enrollment as 10,000–24,999, up from the percentage of respondents who reported this as their district size in both 2020 (23%) and 2018 (24%). Only 2% of respondents reported their district enrollment as more than 75,000, while 3% reported the same in 2020 and 4% reported the same in 2018. Notable is the percentage of school communicators employed by a district with an enrollment of fewer than 2,000 at 10%, the largest percent of school communicators working for a district of this size since 2009.

Communication Department Sizes

The size of district communication departments experienced subtle but significant shifts from both 2020 and 2018. The percentage of school communicators who reported being a one-person communication office remained largely unchanged this year (37%) as compared to 2020 (39%) and 2018 (39%). Notable, however, is that more respondents this year reported a department size of 2–4 (41%) than any other department size, the first time a one-person communication office was not the most-reported department size over the last decade, suggesting that districts that previously had one-person communication offices may have increased their department size over the last two years. While department sizes of 5–7 decreased from the percentage of respondents reporting that department size in 2020 and 2018, more respondents reported department sizes of 8–15 and 15+ than in both 2020 and 2018.

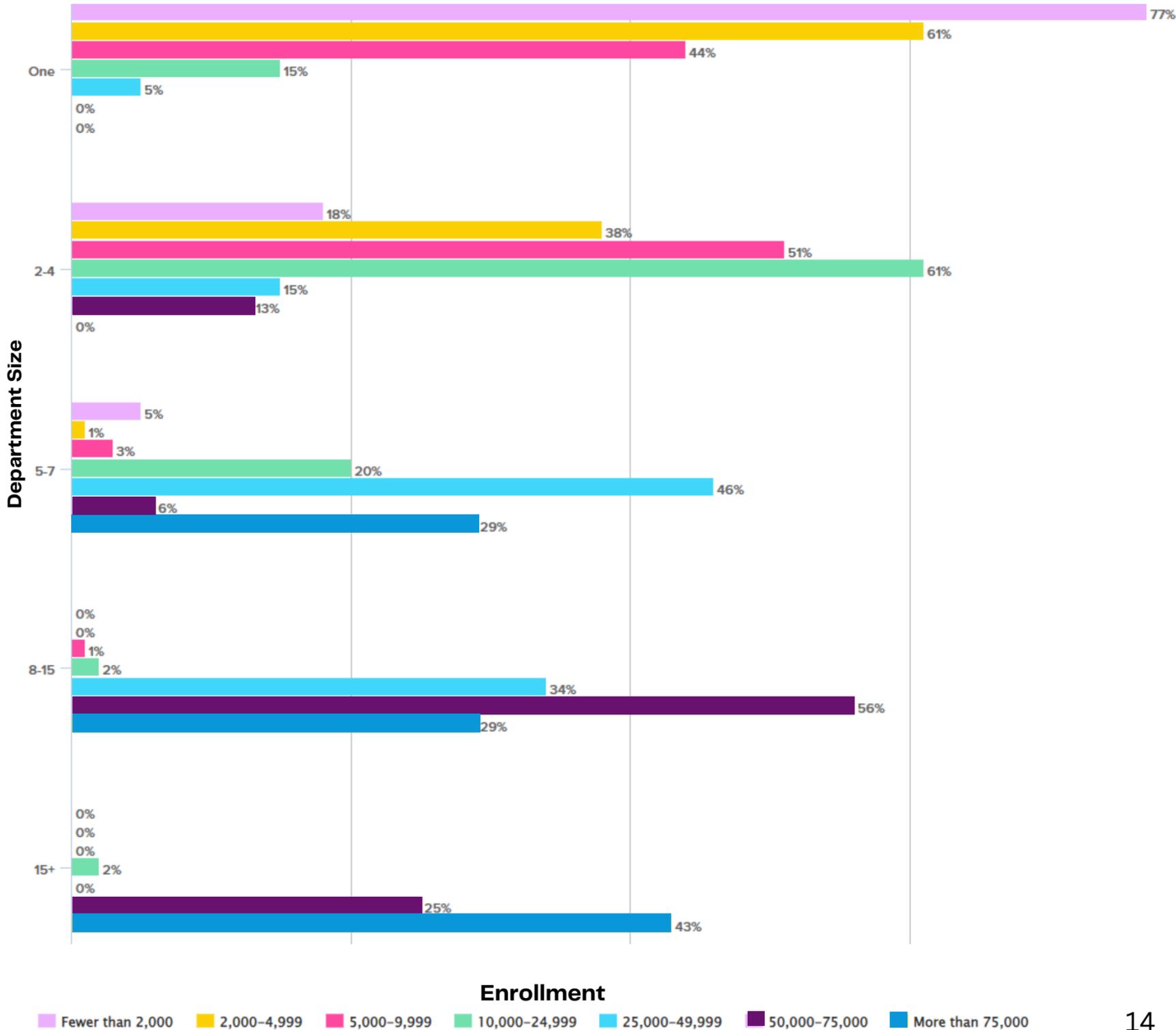


Department Size and Enrollment

As might be expected, one-person communication offices are most likely to be employed by districts with an enrollment of fewer than 2,000. No one-person communication offices reported being employed by a district with an enrollment of 50,000–75,000 or 75,000+.

Similarly, communication offices of 15+ are most likely to be employed by districts with an enrollment of 75,000+, followed by districts with an enrollment of 50,000–75,000.

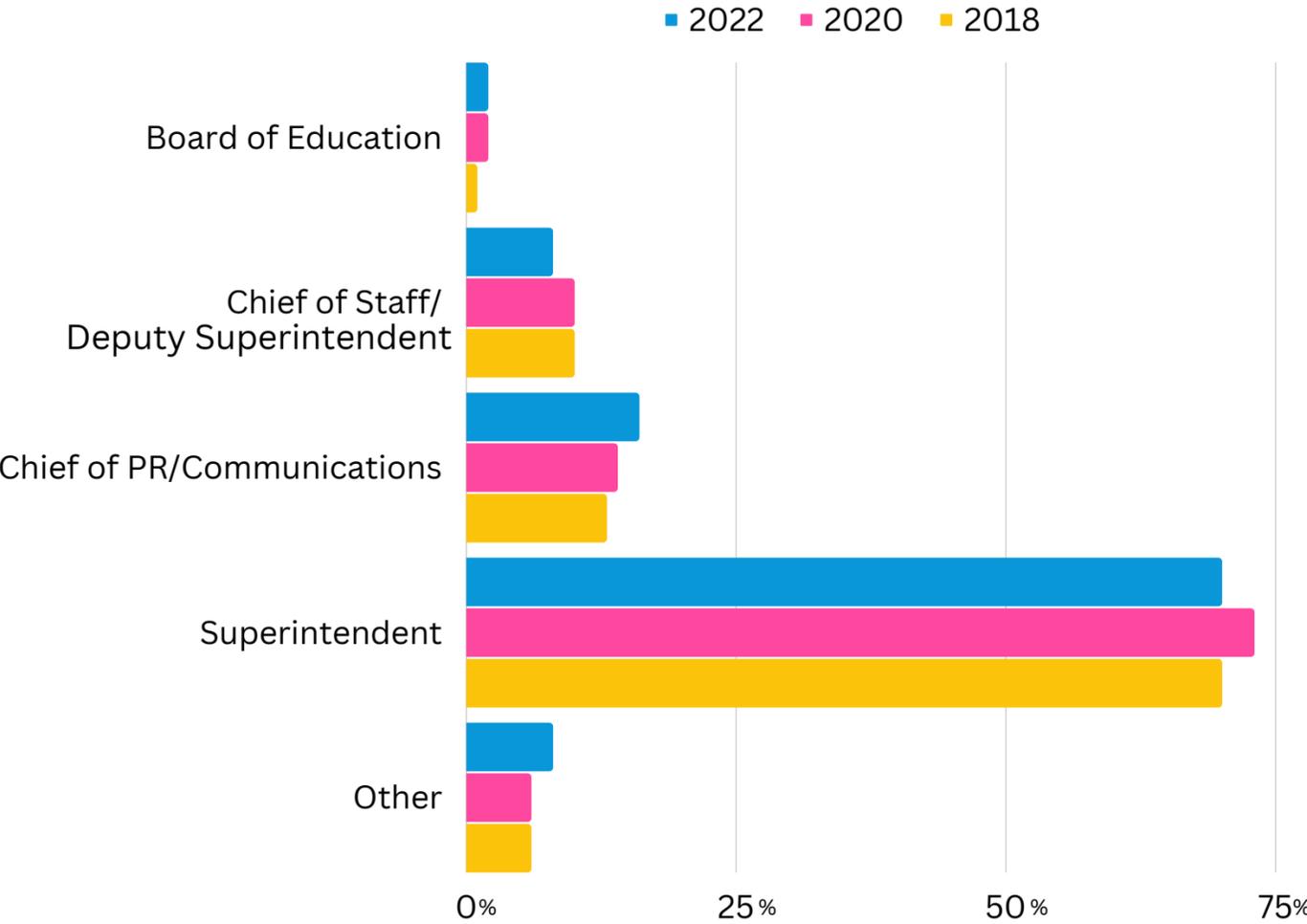
Department Size by Enrollment



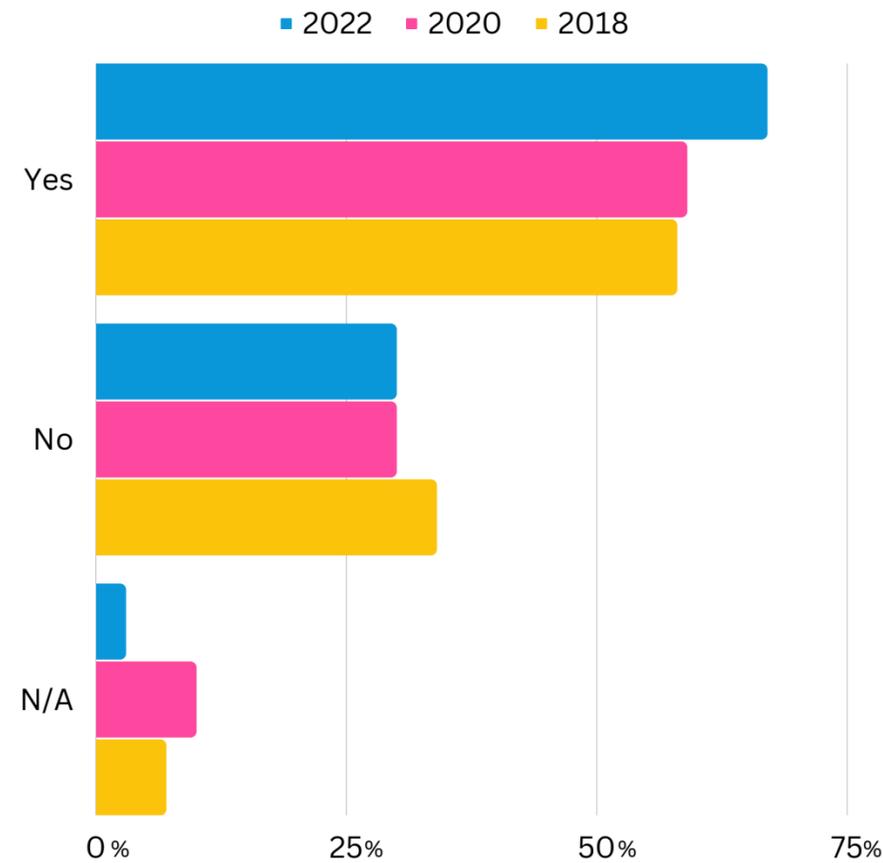
Department Structure

As in years past, the majority of school communicators (70%) report directly to their superintendent. Notable, however, is the increase of school communicators who are considered a member of their district's cabinet and/or leadership team (67%), up from both 2020 (59%) and 2018 (58%).

To whom do you report?



Are you considered a member of your district's cabinet and/or leadership team?



Roles and Responsibilities

For the first time since 2018, the top five responsibilities of a school communicator have shifted. While crisis communications was the top reported priority in both 2020 and in this year's survey, the number of respondents who indicated it as a top-five responsibility decreased to 58% from 69% in 2020.

Community relations/public engagement broke into the top five responsibilities of a school communicator this year at #4 while it ranked #7 in 2020 and #6 in 2018.



Roles and Responsibilities

New to the 2022 survey was the addition of the following responsibilities for school communicators to rank: external communications, internal communications, family engagement, public records requests, safety and security, foundation and fundraising.

Identifying Trends

As was the case in 2020, crisis communication remained the top priority of a school communications professional in 2022. Notable, however, is the decrease in the number of respondents who indicated it as a top-five responsibility in this year's survey (58%) from 69% in 2020. With the 2022 survey distinguishing external communications from media relations, external communications took the #2 spot this year with media relations falling to #5 from #2 in both 2020 and 2018.

Community relations/public engagement broke into the top five this year at #4 while it ranked #7 in 2020 and #6 in 2018. Other notable shifts from years prior include writing/editing falling to #9 this year (down from #5 in 2020 and #4 in 2018) and strategic communications planning falling to #8 in this year's survey (down from #4 in 2020 and #5 in 2018), the latter of which could possibly be attributed to the increase of practitioners new to the field and/or districts that had not previously had a communications-specific role adding one in recent years.

What are the top five responsibilities in your current position?

