

## ARLINGTON, TEXAS DROPOUT PREVENTION SUMMIT EVALUATION REPORT

### A. Executive Summary

In 2002, the graduation rate for the Arlington, Texas Independent School District was 59.9 percent.<sup>1</sup> As part of an effort supported by the America's Promise Alliance to increase graduation rates across the United States, on November 1, 2008, the Mayor's office of Arlington in collaboration with local partners hosted "Success in School Summit: A Dialogue on Dropout Prevention". Over 200 people from a diverse range of sectors attended this event that focused on creating a community-wide action plan.

The following report presents information from two sources: the conveners and local partners who planned the event, and those who attended the summit.

Highlights from the Arlington summit include:

- 93 percent of attendees believe that the work they do around the dropout issue will be positively affected by the summit.
- 90 percent of attendees believe that the summit will lead to change in their communities.
- The City of Arlington and the Arlington Independent School District are developing an umbrella organization to continue the work started at the Dropout Summit and focus on delivering the America's Promise Alliance five promises.

This report summarizes both the value of the Arlington summit as reported by attendees and the degree to which the summit has strengthened partnerships and community commitment to improve education. The next report will include a review of the post summit action plan and activities to determine the continued impact of the summit.

### B. Summit Planning and Partner Engagement

One of the primary strategies the America's Promise Alliance Dropout Prevention Summit initiative employs in its efforts to increase high school graduation rates, is to strengthen collaboration and partnerships among organizations concerned with dropout prevention and youth education. To facilitate this, the Alliance has encouraged summit conveners to engage a broad array of partners in summit planning and implementation, including the business community and other Alliance partners.

The organizations the summit convener engaged with in the planning and implementation of Dropout Prevention Summit related activities are presented below in Table 1. This list provides

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<sup>1</sup> This estimate is based on Chris Swanson's cumulative promotion index. Calculations were produced by the Urban Institute. Data were retrieved from School Data Direct <http://www.schooldatadirect.org/>

a snapshot of the convener’s efforts to build a partnership inclusive of local community organizations, the diversity of the community, Alliance partners, the business community, and parallel local efforts.

Table 1

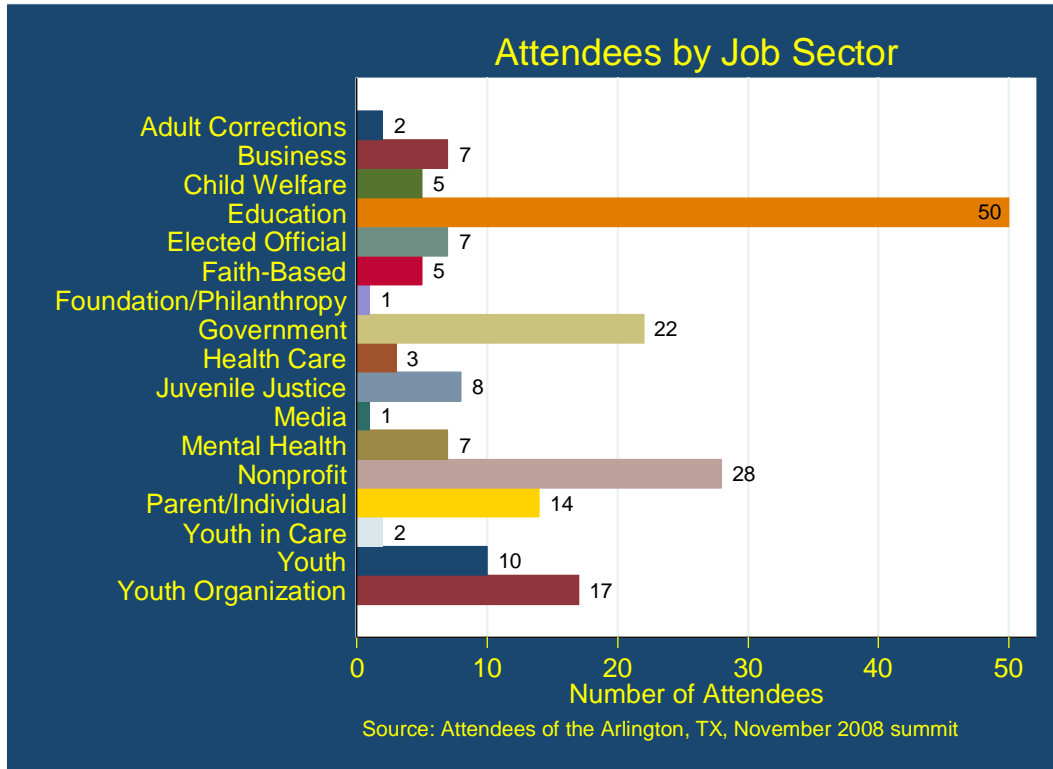
ARLINGTON, TEXAS DROPOUT PREVENTION SUMMIT PARTNERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Arlington Chamber of Commerce</li><li>• Arlington Alliance for Youth</li><li>• Arlington Coalition for Education</li><li>• Arlington ISD</li><li>• AT&amp;T</li><li>• City of Arlington - Mayor's Office</li><li>• City of Arlington - Office of Communication</li><li>• City of Arlington Library</li><li>• City of Arlington Parks</li><li>• City of Arlington Police</li><li>• Fielder Road Baptist Church</li><li>• Kennedale ISD</li><li>• Mansfield Independent School District</li><li>• United Way of Arlington</li><li>• UTA - School of Education</li></ul>

**C. Dropout Prevention Summit: Attendee Survey**

Feedback from the participants in the Dropout Prevention Summit provides useful information about the overall quality of the event and the potential for impact on the community’s approach to addressing the dropout crisis. Each summit convener was asked to submit basic demographic information on summit attendees, including email address, upon completion of the summit. Within a few days of the summit, invitations to complete an online survey were sent by email to all individuals for which email addresses were provided. Two reminder emails were sent to encourage participation in the survey. Out of the approximately 200 summit attendees, there were 132 surveys completed for a response rate of 66 percent.

These individuals represented a variety of different sectors (See Graph 1).

Graph 1



#### D. Summit Quality and Information

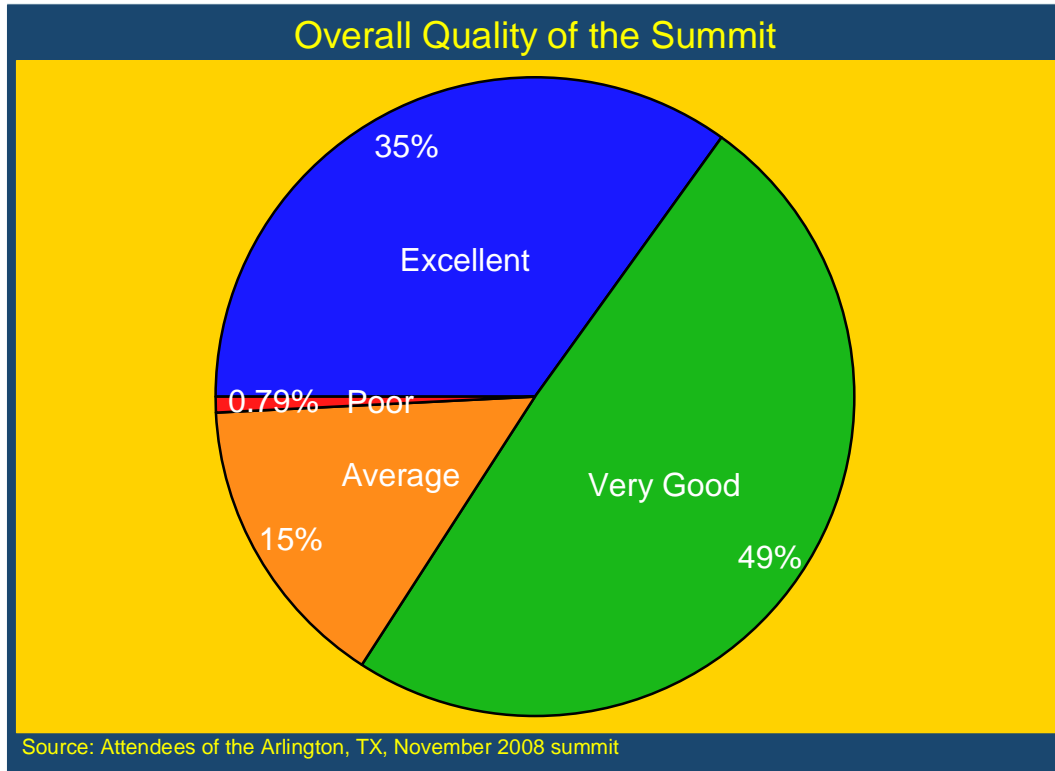
Dropout Prevention Summit attendees were asked to rate overall summit quality as well as the usefulness of the materials and information presented. Eighty-four percent of Arlington summit attendees responded that the summit was “excellent” or “very good”. An additional 15 percent reported that the summit was “average”. Only one percent said that the summit quality was “poor” (See Graph 2).

When asked questions about specific aspects of summit quality, 87 percent of attendees reported that they learned something new and useful about the local dropout problem, 84 percent said that they learned of new local initiatives, and 85 percent felt the conference materials provided valuable information (See Graph 3).<sup>2</sup>

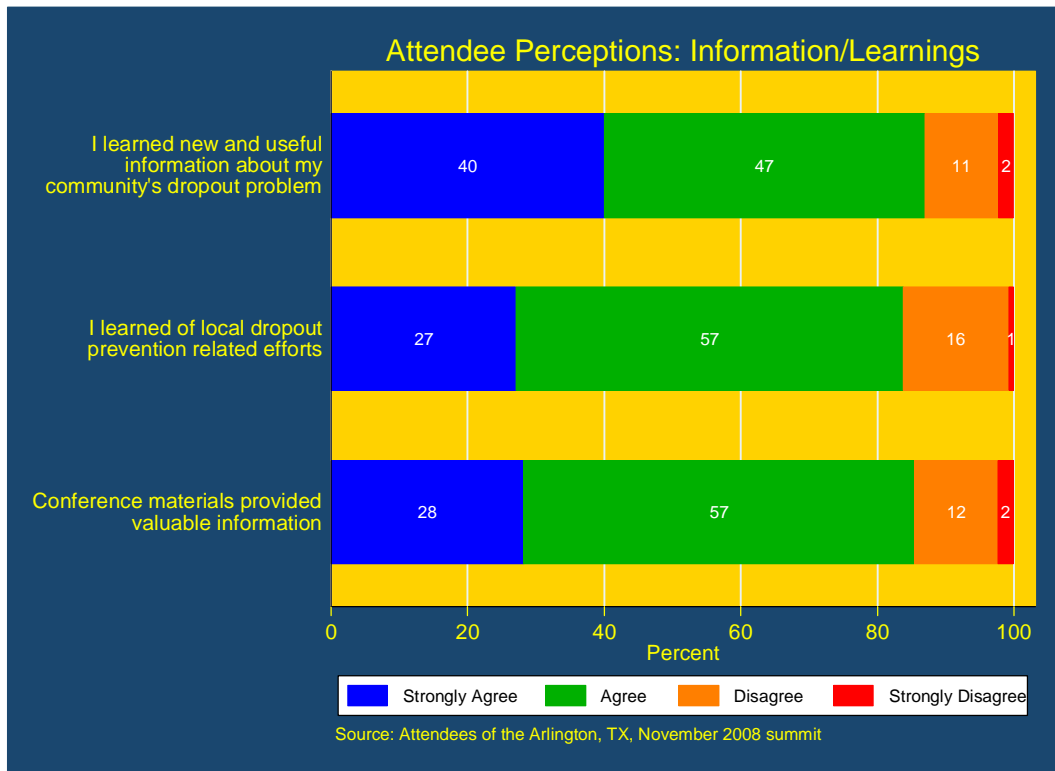
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<sup>2</sup> We have combined response options “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” throughout this report.

Graph 2



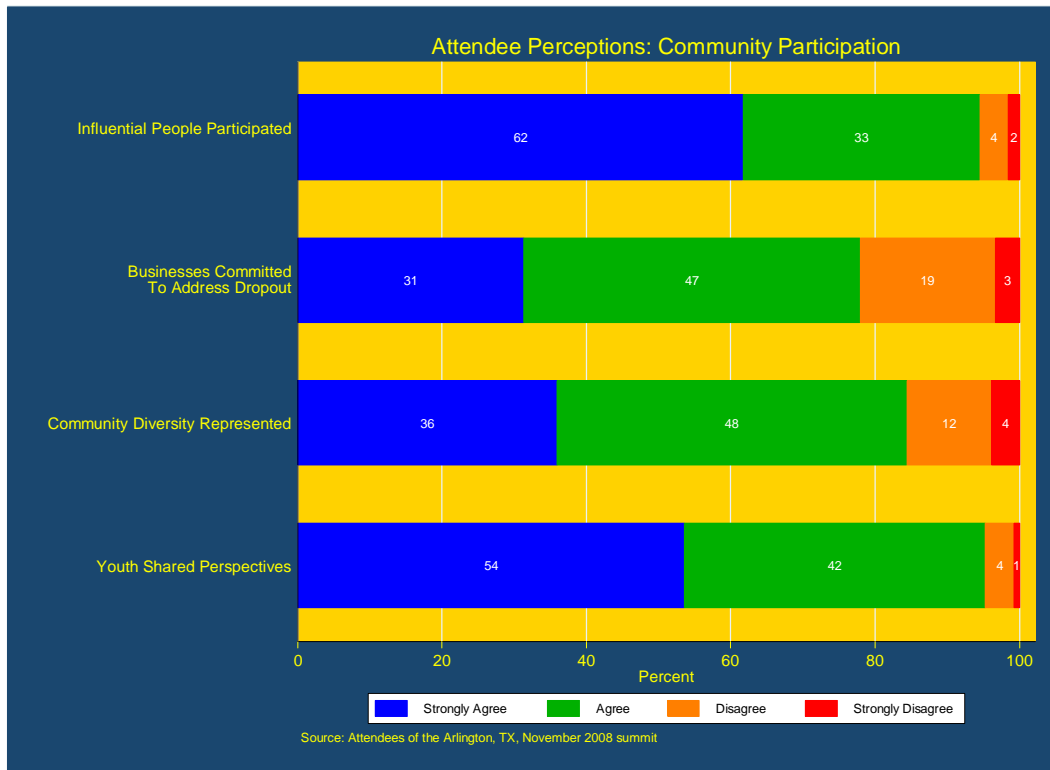
Graph 3



## E. Community Participation

Summit attendees were asked their perceptions of how well represented important stakeholder groups were in summit-related activities. Ninety-five percent felt that influential people from the community participated in the summit. Seventy-eight percent of respondents believed that the business community demonstrated a commitment to addressing the local dropout issue. Eighty-four percent responded that the diversity of their community was represented at the summit. Ninety-six percent believed that “youth had the opportunity to share their opinions on the dropout issue” (See Graph 4).

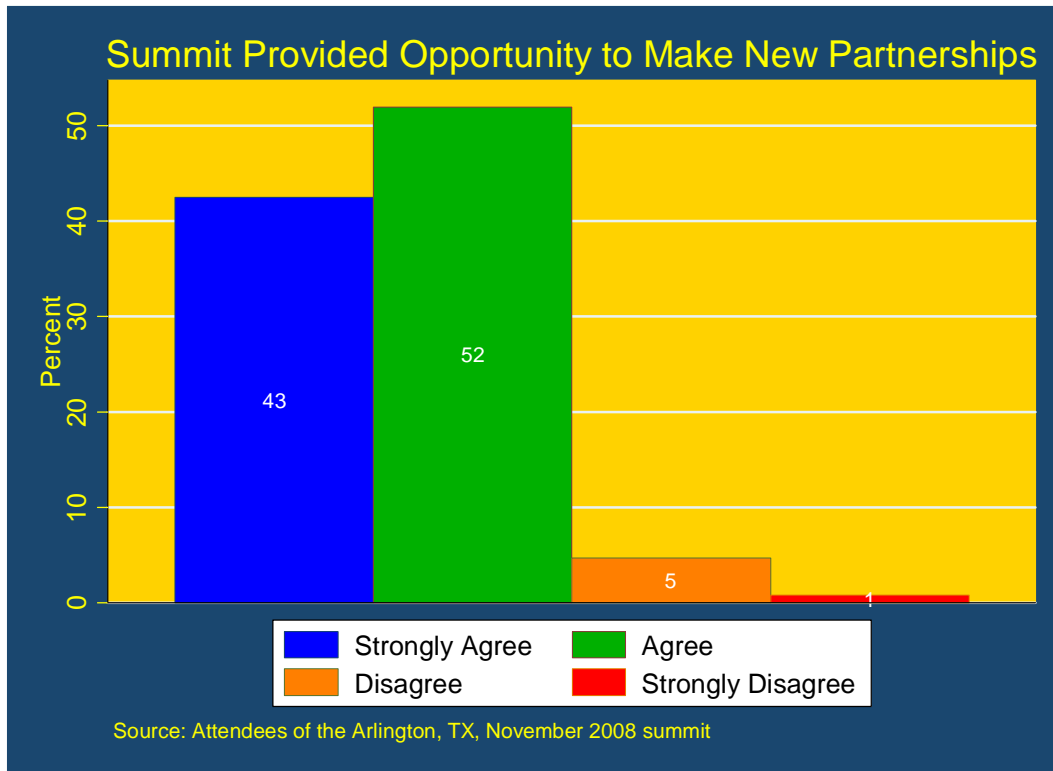
Graph 4



## F. Partnership Development

A primary emphasis of the Dropout Prevention Summit initiative is building stronger partnerships and collaboration. Reflecting this emphasis, 95 percent of survey respondents felt that the summit provided the opportunity to develop new partnerships or connections (See Graph 5).

Graph 5

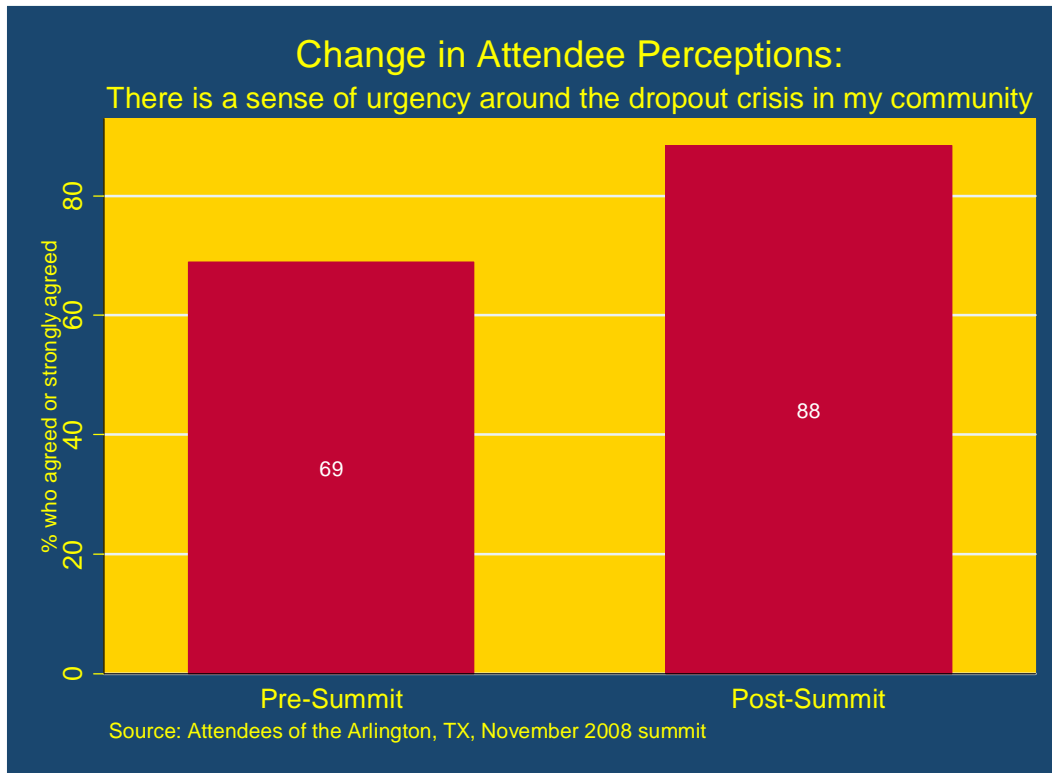


### G. Summit Impact

A central premise of the Dropout Prevention Summit initiative is that these summits across the nation can plant the seeds of change and commitment to action around dropout prevention within the communities that host them, on both the community and individual level. By creating a sense of urgency around the Dropout Crisis, America's Promise hopes to inspire communities to collaborate in new ways and improve outcomes for youth. Summit attendees were queried in a variety of ways to assess if and how they felt the summit would impact themselves and the broader community.

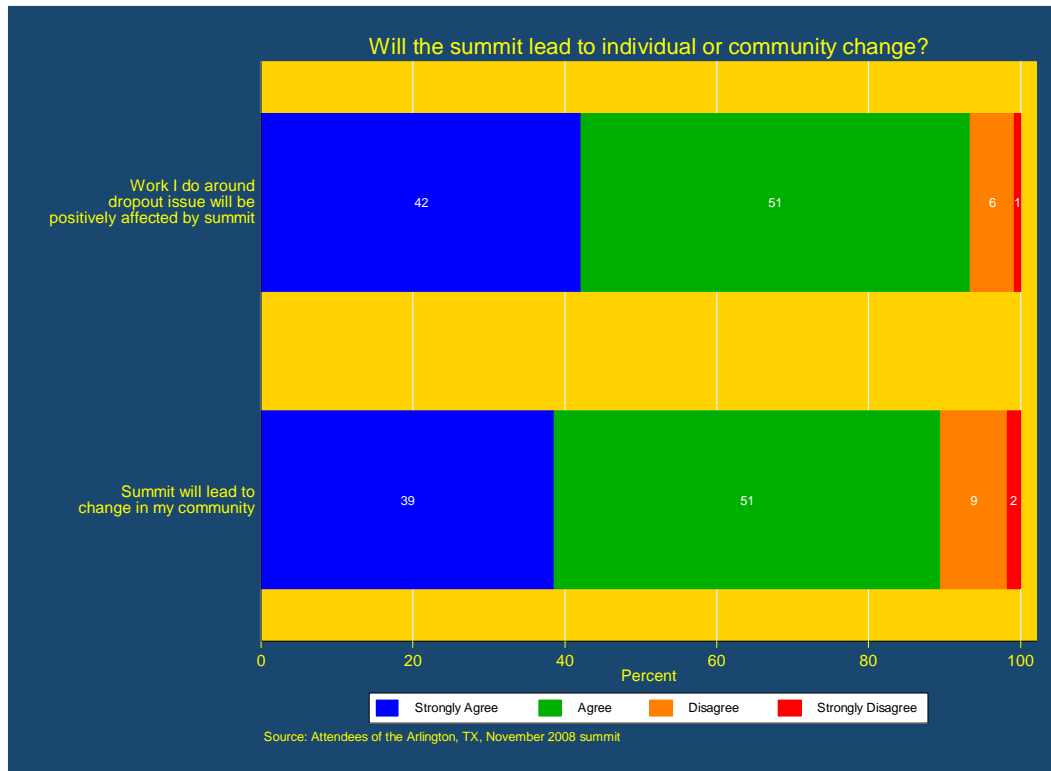
Eighty-eight percent of Arlington Dropout Prevention Summit survey respondents felt that there was a shared sense of urgency about the dropout issue in their community after the summit, compared to 69 percent before the summit (See Graph 6).

Graph 6



The attendee survey went on to explore whether summit attendees believed the Dropout Prevention Summit would positively affect the work they do around the dropout issue, or lead to change in their community. Ninety-three percent of the Arlington respondents stated they thought the summit would positively affect the work they do around the dropout issue, and 90 percent felt it would lead to change in their community (See Graph 7).

Graph 7



The degree of impact that these summits have is one measure of their success. Reflecting this, the attendee survey asked several follow-up questions to identify in what ways the summit might produce impact. The survey asked the respondent to identify their pre-summit and post summit level of agreement with a variety of statements regarding the high school dropout issue (See Graph 8).

*Impact on Perceptions/Knowledge:* The percent of survey respondents who said they agreed that they had “a good understanding of the dropout problem in my community” increased from 77 percent to 96 percent from pre- to post summit.<sup>3</sup> Ninety-four percent of Arlington respondents believed “there are feasible solutions to the dropout issue” before the summit and 99 percent believed so after the summit.

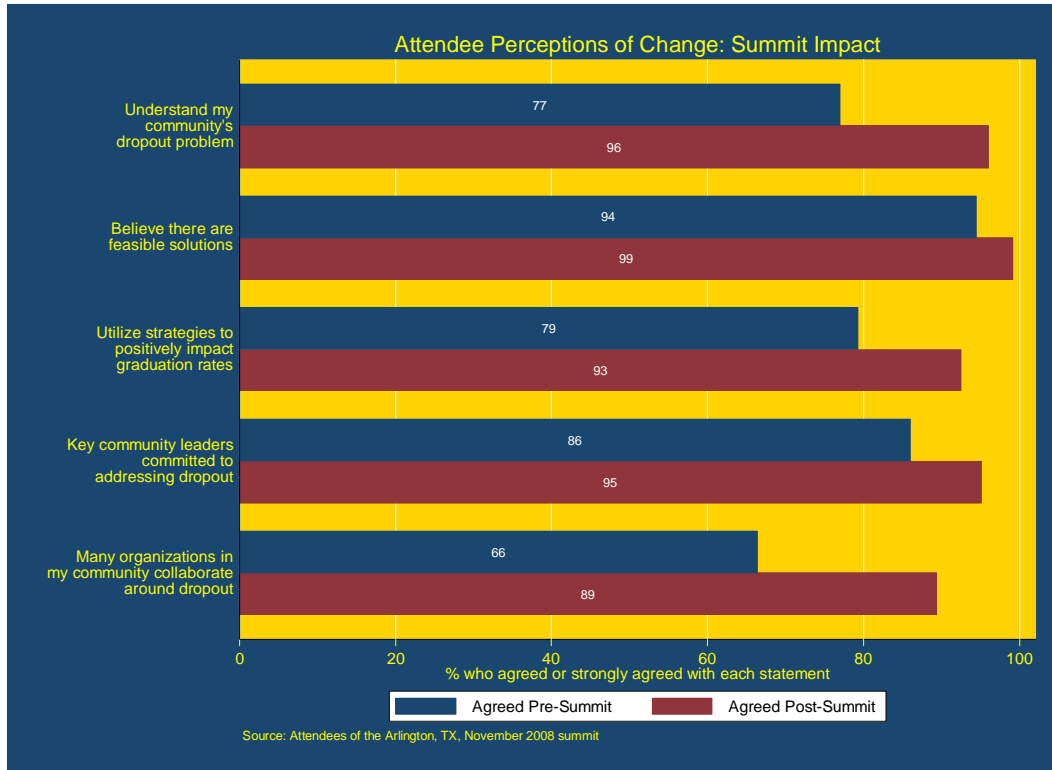
*Impact on Individual Action:* The percentage of people that believed they were utilizing strategies at work that were positively impacting the graduation rate changed from 79 percent to 93 percent.

*Impact on Community:* Attendees were asked the degree to which they believed the summit had impact on the community. The percent of individuals who agreed that “key community

<sup>3</sup> This value does not reach statistical significance ( $p < .05$ ) due to the relatively small number of respondents or the relatively small amount of change.

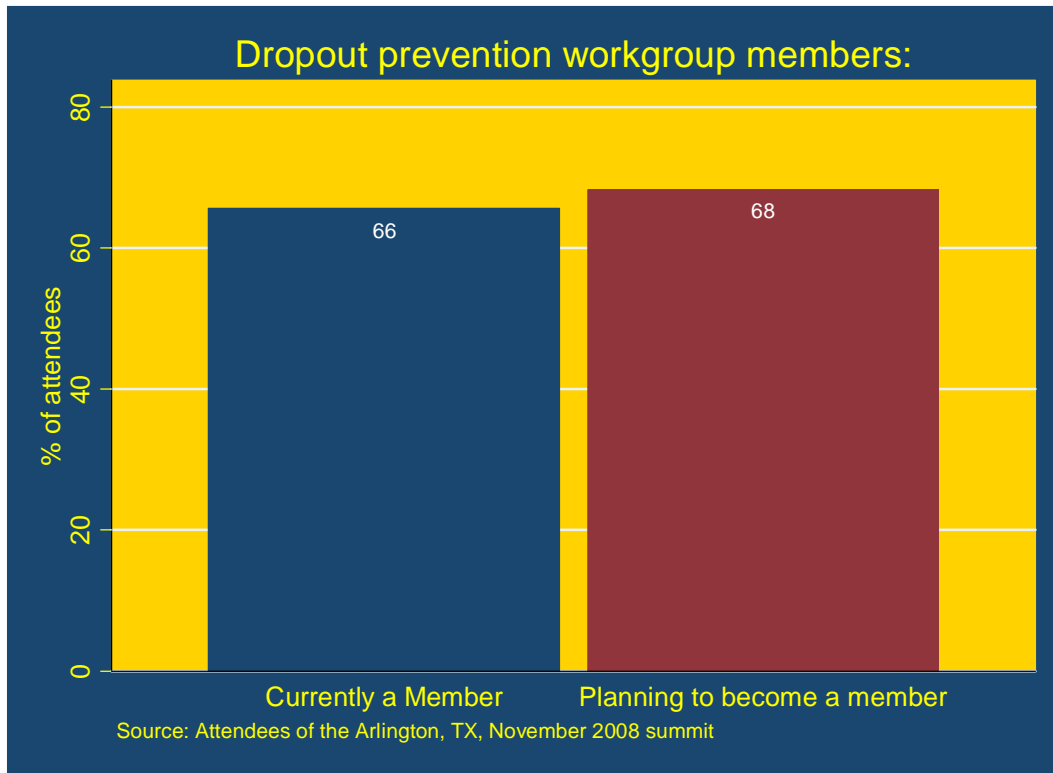
leaders are committed to addressing the dropout issue” changed from 86 percent to 95 percent. The pre-to post summit level of agreement that “organizations in my community collaborate around the dropout issue” went from 66 percent to 89 percent.

Graph 8



To determine if the summit opened doors for attendees to become more involved in the dropout issue, we asked 1) if the attendee is currently participating in a workgroup or organization whose focus is dropout, and if not 2) if the attendee plans to participate in such a workgroup or organization after the summit. Among individuals who were not currently workgroup members, 68 percent planned to start working with a group focused on dropout prevention (See Graph 9).

Graph 9



#### H. Why Students Drop Out and What To Do About It: Attendee Perceptions

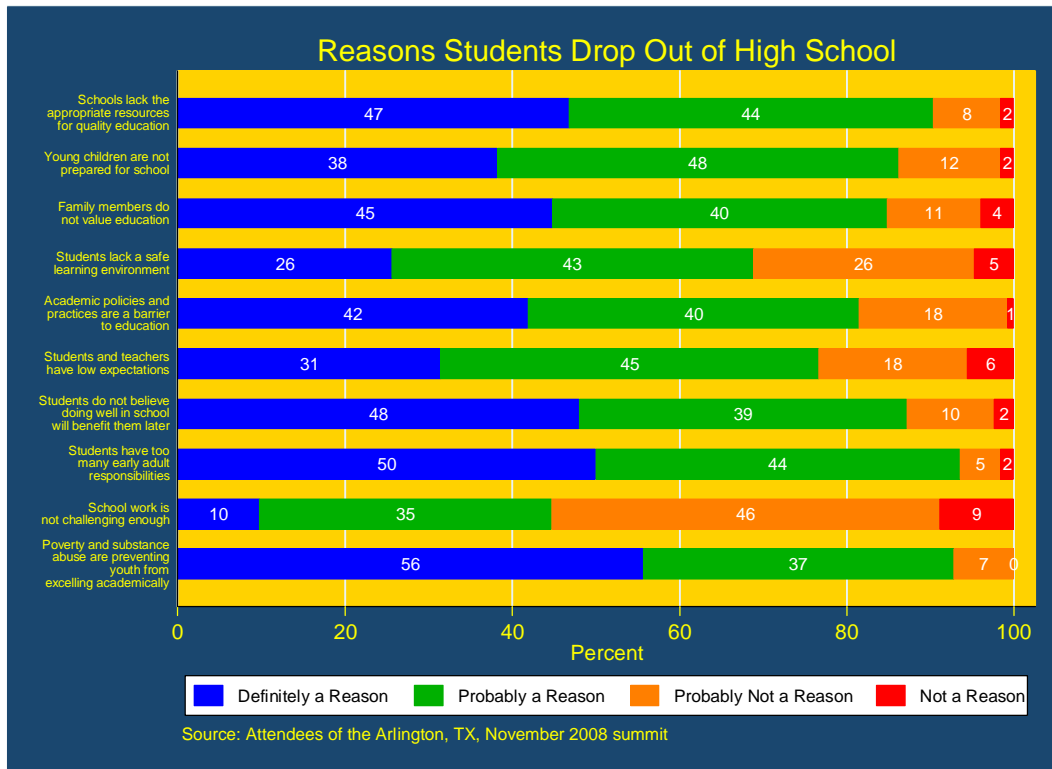
Summit attendees were asked to review a list of 10 commonly cited reasons that students drop out of high school (see Table 2) and identify what they felt were the primary contributors to high school dropout. Similarly, the respondents were presented with a list of 11 commonly cited solutions to the dropout crisis (Table 3) and asked to identify what they thought would be most effective in their community.

"Poverty and substance abuse" was identified as the lead cause of high school dropout among Arlington survey respondents with 56 percent of respondents identifying this as "definitely a reason". "Too many early adult responsibilities" was the next most commonly cited reason students drop out of high school, identified by 50 percent of survey completers as "definitely a reason". This was followed by "students do not believe doing well in school will benefit them" chosen by 48 percent of the respondents (See Graph 10).

Table 2

REASONS STUDENTS DROP OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL	
•	Schools lack the appropriate resources for quality education.
•	Young children are not prepared for school.
•	Family members do not value education.
•	Students lack a safe learning environment.
•	Academic policies and practices are a barrier to education.
•	Students and teachers have low expectations.
•	Students do not believe doing well in school will benefit them later.
•	Students have too many early adult responsibilities.
•	School work is not challenging enough.
•	Poverty and substance abuse are preventing youth from excelling academically.

Graph 10



When weighing the primary strategies for confronting the dropout crisis, Arlington survey completers chose "provide students with adult advocates" most frequently, with 75 percent identifying it as a "very effective" strategy. "Improve parental engagement" was the next most commonly cited strategy, identified by 72 percent as "very effective". This was followed by

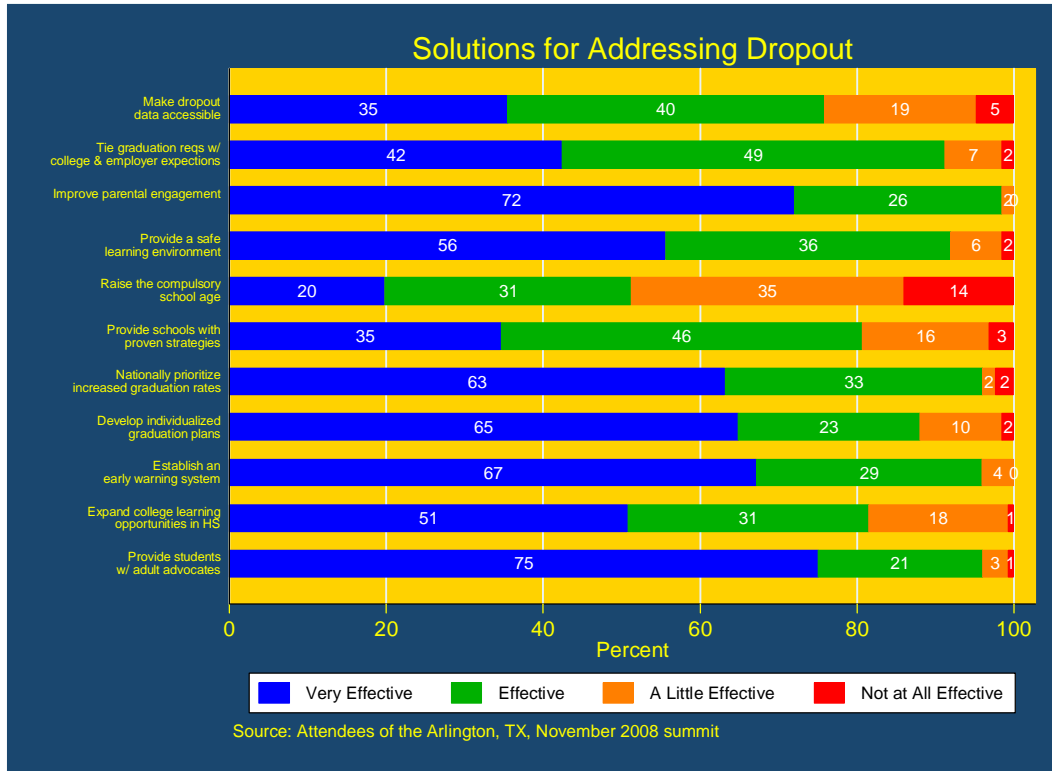
"establish an early warning system" which was chosen by 67 percent of respondents (See Graph 11).

Table 3

### SOLUTIONS FOR ADDRESSING DROPOUT

- Make accurate graduation and dropout data readily available.
- Tie high school graduation requirements to the expectations of colleges and employers.
- Support greater parental engagement in their children's education.
- Provide students with a safe learning environment.
- Raise the compulsory school age requirements under state law.
- Give schools information about scientifically proven strategies to improve education.
- Make increasing high school graduation and college/workforce readiness a national priority.
- Develop individualized graduation plans for each student.
- Establish an "Early Warning System" that identifies youth who are struggling academically early.
- Expand college level learning opportunities in high school.
- Provide students with adult advocates who help identify academic and personal challenges early and get students the support they need.

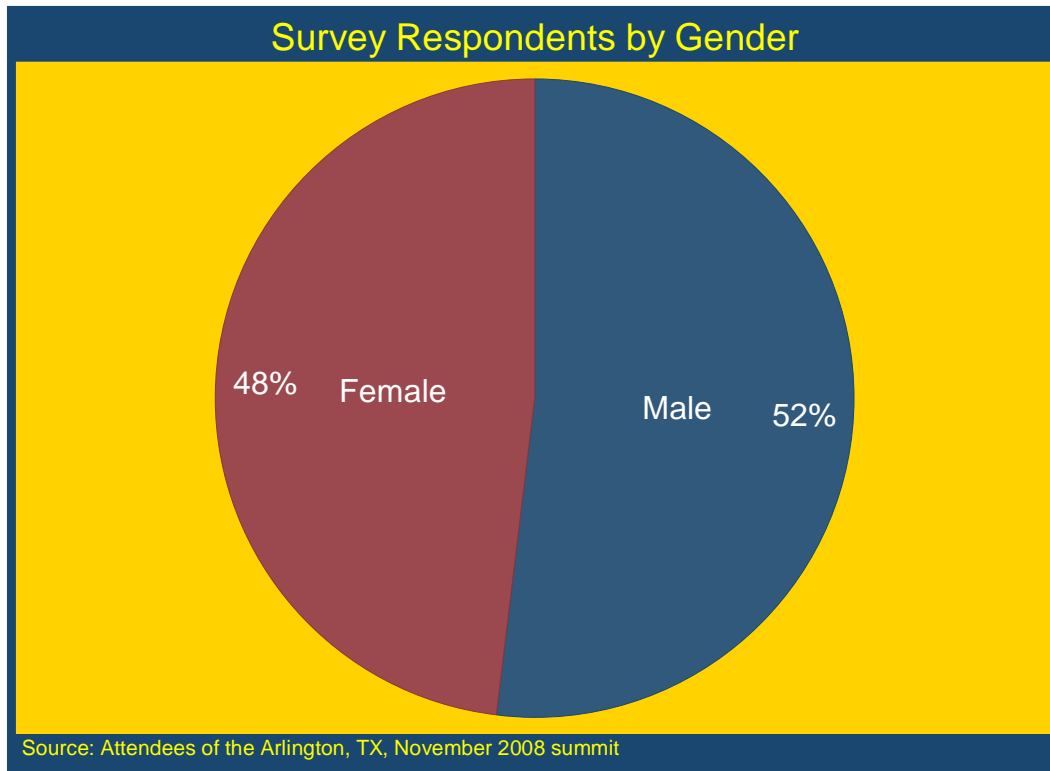
Graph 11



### I. Additional Respondent Demographics

Survey respondents were asked to submit basic demographic information, including gender, race/ethnicity, and if they currently have a child (or children) in the school system. Out of the approximately 132 respondents, 48 percent were female and 52 percent were male (See Graph 12).

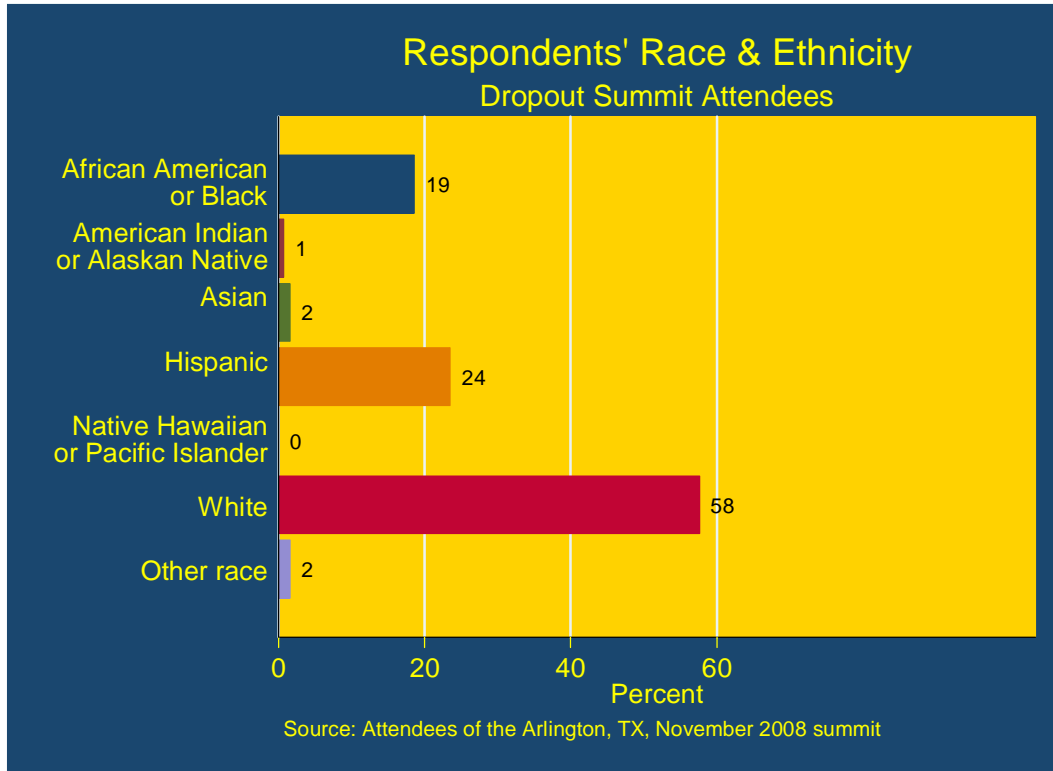
Graph 12



The race/ethnicity of the survey respondents is as follows:

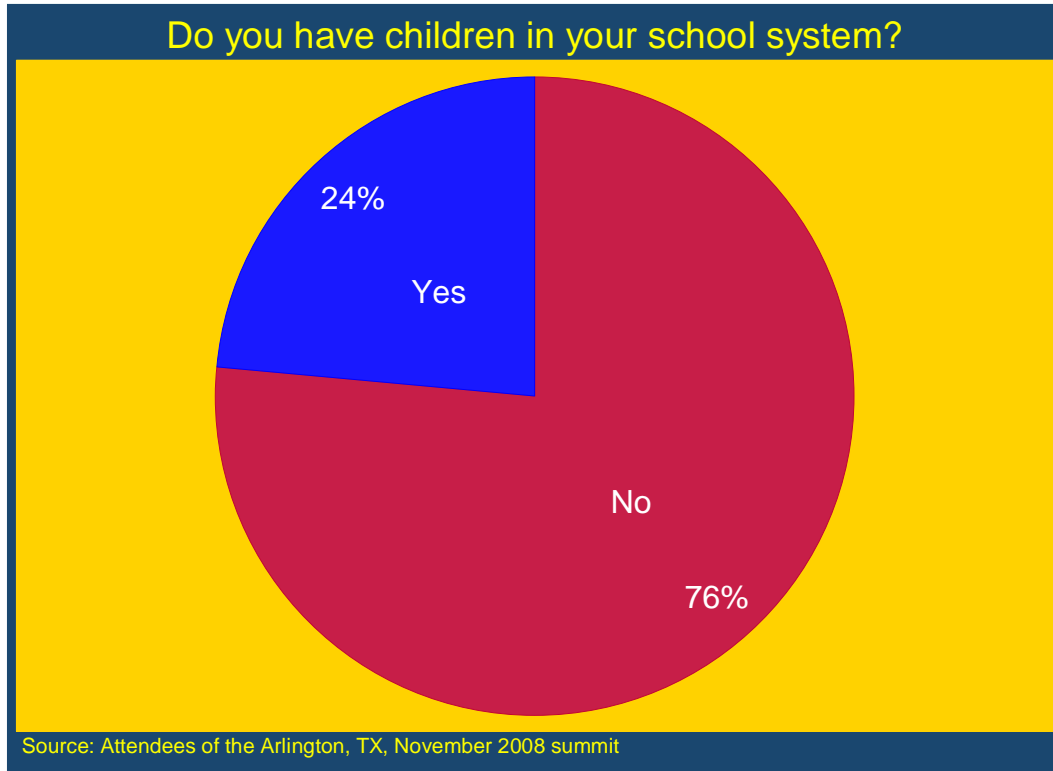
- 19 percent African American
- 1 percent American Indian or Alaskan Native
- 2 percent Asian
- 24 percent Hispanic
- 0 percent Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- 58 percent White
- 2 percent listed Other

Graph 13



Individuals were also asked if they currently have a child (or children) in their local school system. The percentage of individuals with one or more children in their local school system was 24 (See Graph 14).

Graph 14



#### J. Post Summit Partnerships and Commitments

As part of the summit planning process summit conveners were asked to form a post summit action committee, plan dates for meeting, and identify resources for post summit work. At two weeks post summit the Arlington summit convener reported that they had identified a post summit action committee, meeting dates, and identified resources for post summit work.