



Salisbury University's
PRESIDENTIAL CITIZEN SCHOLARS PROGRAM

PCS WHITEPAPER

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS & ASSETS SURVEY

LAURYN DENNIS, JUNIOR

NEILA HENRICE, JUNIOR

TYLER HUMMER, JUNIOR

ZAINAB JABEEN, JUNIOR

DAGMAWIT KEBEDE, JUNIOR

JODY KIEFFER, JUNIOR

ASHLEY MARCUM, SENIOR

MICHAEL OGBONNA, JUNIOR

JAHNAIYA SUTHERLAND, JUNIOR



MEET THE SCHOLARS



LAURYN DENNIS

Major: Political Science

Minor: Law, Justice, and Advocacy

Grad year: Spring 2026

Leadership/involvement: Clarke Honors College, House Ambassador, Resident Assistant, Peer Health Educator, German Club President, Mock Trial Team Captain, Student Government Association Senator, Pi Sigma Alpha, Shore Corps/AmeriCorps, member



NEILA HENRICE

Major: Nursing

Grad year: Spring 2026

Leadership/involvement: Clarke Honors College, Fellowship House Ambassador, Omicron Delta Kappa member, Caribbean Student Association Event Coordinator, Orientation Leader, member, CAMP Alumni, TRIO, member, Gilman Program Aumni, Shore Corps/AmeriCorps, member



TYLER HUMMER

Major: Psychology

Grad Year: Spring 2026

Leadership/Involvement: Clarke Honors College, President of Club Ultimate Frisbee, Powerful Connections Mentor, Shore Corps/AmeriCorps, member

MEET THE SCHOLARS



ZAINAB JABEEN

Major: Biomedical Science

Minor(s): Chemistry & Sociology

Grad Year: Spring 2026

Leadership/Involvement: President of South Asian student Association, Vice President of Salisbury University Multicultural Alliance, Powerful Connections Mentor Coordinator and Mentor, Marketing Employee for the Office of Diversity and Inclusion



DAGMAWIT KEBEDE

Major: Data Science

Minor(s): Mathematics

Grad Year: Spring 2026

Leadership/Involvement: Secretary of the Sociology Front, Secretary of the Salisbury University Multicultural Alliance



JODY KIEFFER

Major: Communication

Minor(s): Marketing & Nonprofit Leadership

Grad Year: Spring 2026

Leadership/Involvement: Clarke Honors College, Student; University Host; Best Buddies at SU, Vice President and Treasurer; Alpha Sigma Tau Sorority, Phi Kappa Phi and Lambda Pi Eta Honor Societies, Member

MEET THE SCHOLARS



ASHLEY MARCUM

Major: Early Childhood and Elementary Education

Grad year: Spring 2025

Leadership/involvement: Delta Alpha Phi Honors Society, Kappa Delta Phi Honors Society, Chi Alpha Sigma Honors Society, Salisbury Womens Swim Team, Cru Club, Relay for Life Club, Shore Corps/AmeriCorps, member



MICHAEL OGBONNA

Major: Information Systems

Grad Year: Spring 2026

Leadership/Involvement: Clarke Honors College, Powerful Connections Mentor, ShoreCorps/Americorps,



JAHNAIYA SUTHERLAND

Major: Mathematical Data Science

Minor(s): Computer Science, Business Administration & Africana Studies

Grad Year: Spring 2026

Leadership/Involvement: President of Salisbury NAACP, President of SU Multicultural Alliance, Powerful Connections Mentor Coordinator and Mentor, Honors College Ambassador, 2025-26 SGA President

PROJECT MISSION

In collaboration with the Wicomico County Local Management Board, the Somerset County Local Management Board, the City of Crisfield, and the City of Salisbury, our primary objective was to investigate the assets and strengths of communities in Somerset and Wicomico Counties through an IRB-approved anonymous survey (SU IRB Protocol #375).

PURPOSE

The most recent community survey was conducted prior to the pandemic, and the communities have since undergone significant changes. Our strengths-based survey reflects communities today, empowering them as opposed to criticizing them. Responses from community members predominantly highlight positive experiences in Somerset and Wicomico Counties, reinforcing the value of a strengths-based perspective. Our data and analysis will mobilize community leaders and inform future civic projects in Somerset and Wicomico Counties.

SURVEY COMPONENTS

Our survey was available to anyone over the age of 18 who lived in Wicomico, Somerset, or Worcester Counties (MD). Additionally, our survey was translated from English into Spanish, Haitian Creole, and Korean, assuring our work would include the diverse populations of the region.

Our survey consisted of 10 questions. Questions 1-7 were quantitative and asked participants to rank their communities' access to assets such as schools, nonprofit organizations, housing, transportation, extracurricular activities, and more. To measure these rankings, we used a scale that ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," allowing participants to indicate their perspective on how well their communities provide crucial resources.

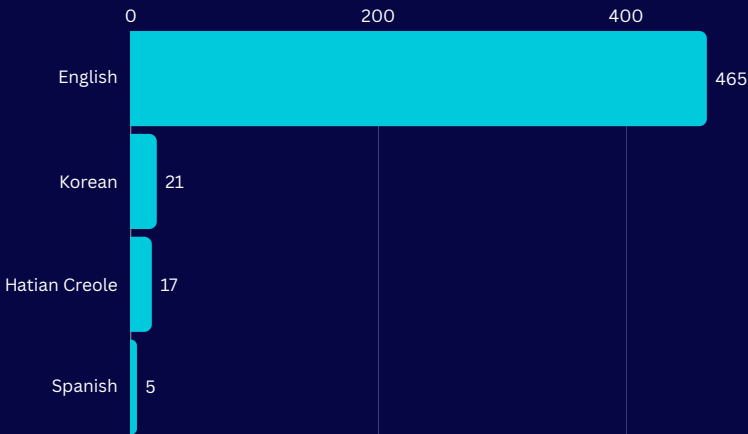
Questions 8-10 were qualitative and allowed participants to provide greater detail about the strengths of their communities, the gifts and talents of people in their communities, and what their communities could use more of respectively.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS,
RESEARCH AND DATA
COLLECTION

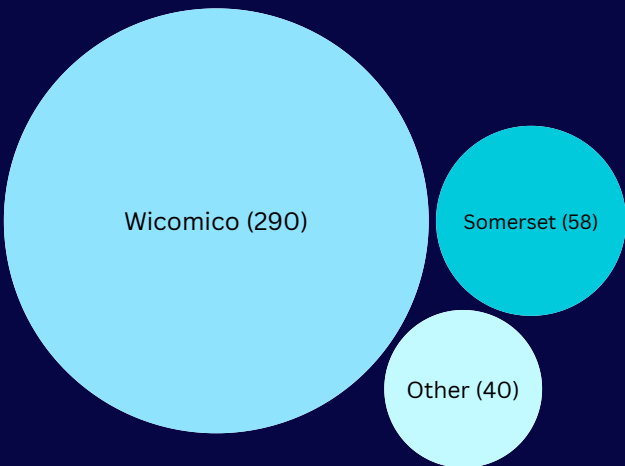
In the beginning of the data collection process, we leaned on community partners and social media to publicize our community-based, IRB-approved research project with the public. We emailed community leaders, businesses, politicians, and anyone we thought had the most reach in the Wicomico and Somerset Counties. We quickly realized that we weren't getting as much interaction as we'd hoped and pivoted to an in-person approach. We attended events like the Maryland Folk Festival, Third Friday, local fall festivals, churches, and news stations, and found that our responses increased dramatically. We closed the survey for data collection on Thursday, February 6, 2025, with a total of 508 responses across four languages.



Survey Responses by Language



Survey Responses by County



Community Strengths & Assets Survey



DATA COLLECTION IN SOMERSET COUNTY

Data was collected in Somerset County by going to a local event during the winter, where families gathered for activities, alongside dropping survey flyers at stores all over Somerset County. Data was collected during events by setting up a table and going around requesting people to fill out the survey. We also worked closely with community partners who are nonprofit leaders, librarians, and elected officials to distribute the survey.



ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE SOMERSET COUNTY

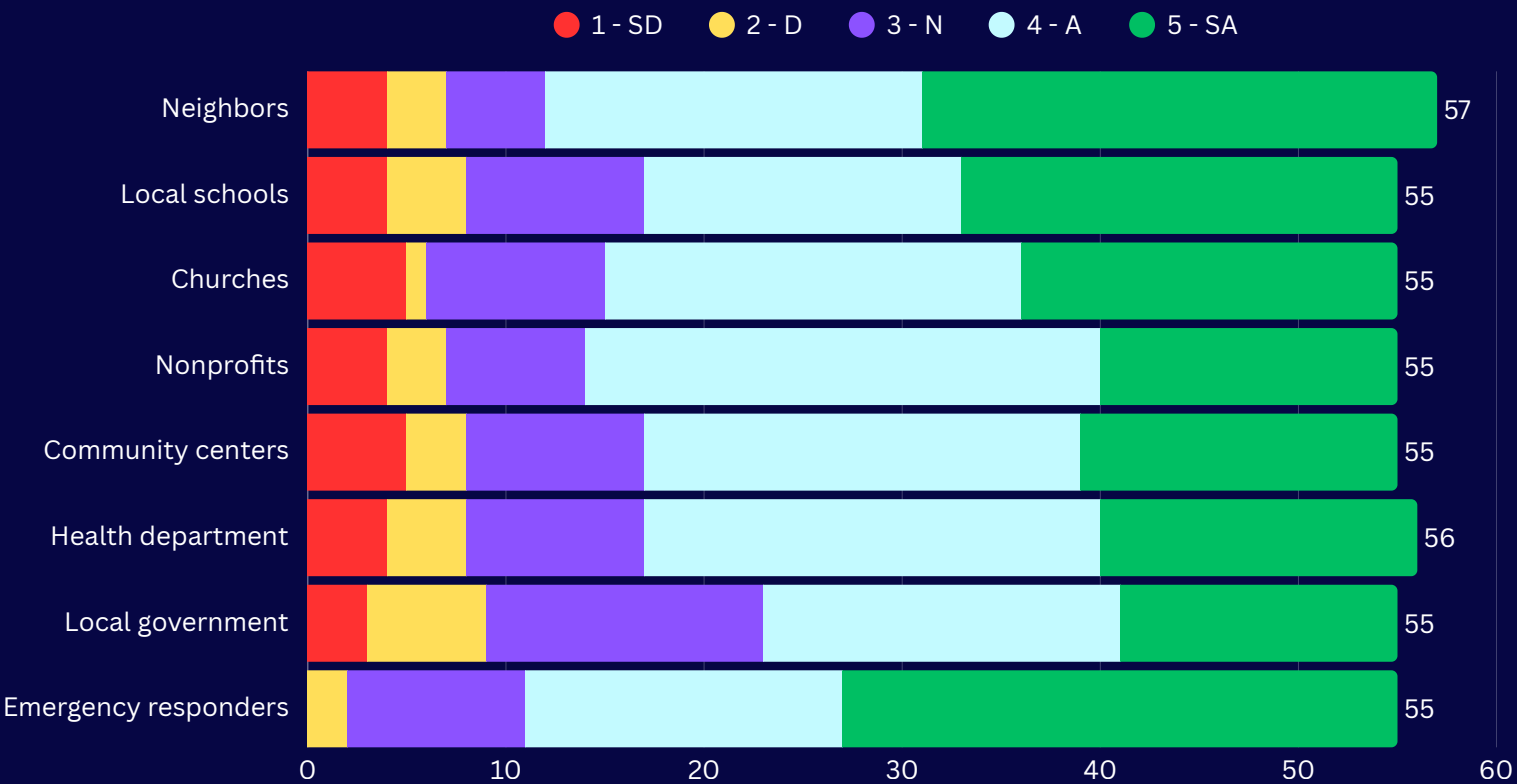
For Somerset County, the qualitative data reflects a tight-knit, supportive community with strong ties to churches, neighbors, and small-town values. However, residents expressed concerns about limited resources, especially in areas like affordable housing, healthcare access, public transportation, and youth programming. A lack of local services—such as nearby medical care and gathering spaces—was a recurring theme.



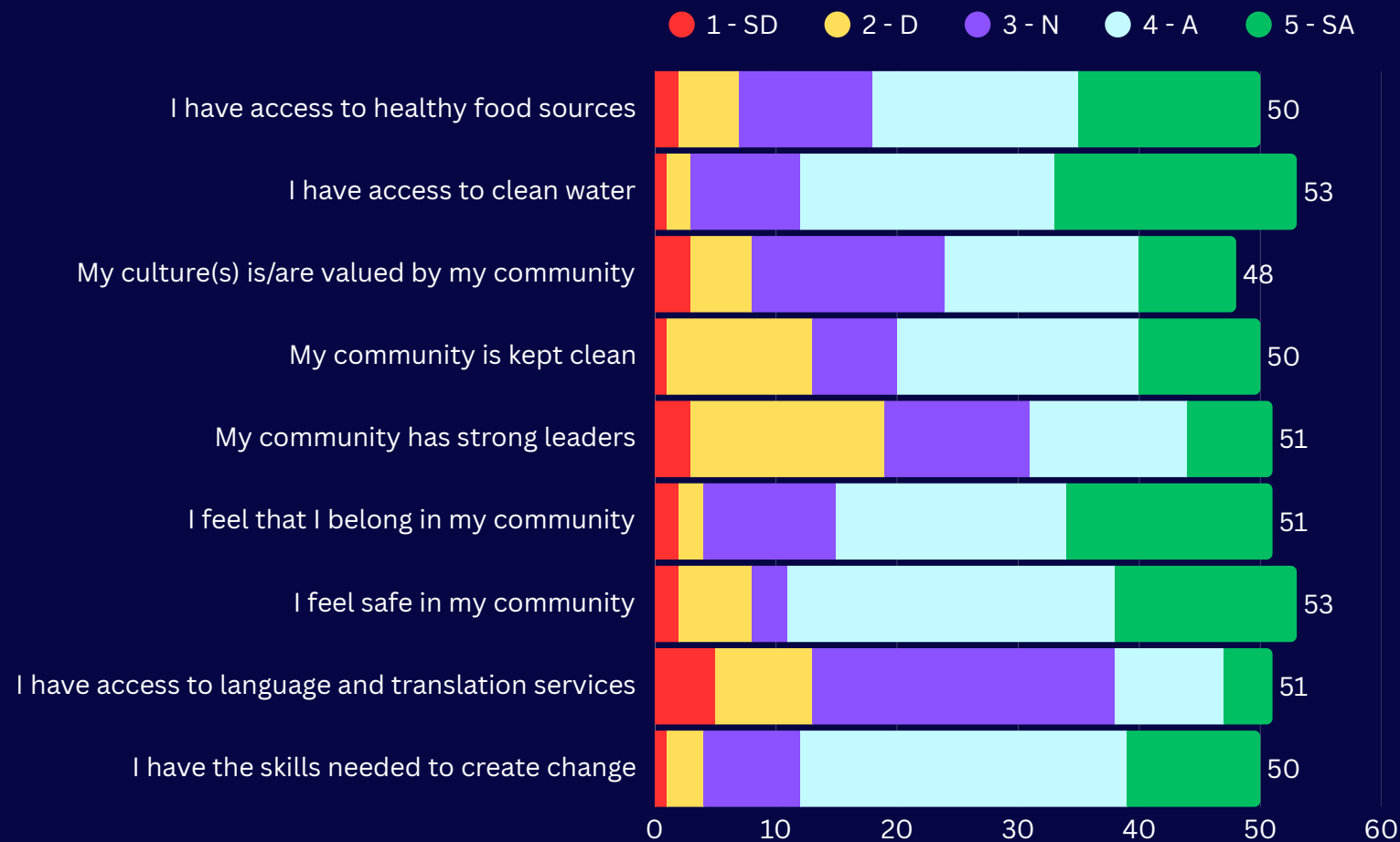
Community Strengths & Assets Survey

SOMERSET QUANTITATIVE DATASET

Q5 - To what level do the following groups or organizations make a difference in the well-being of your community?



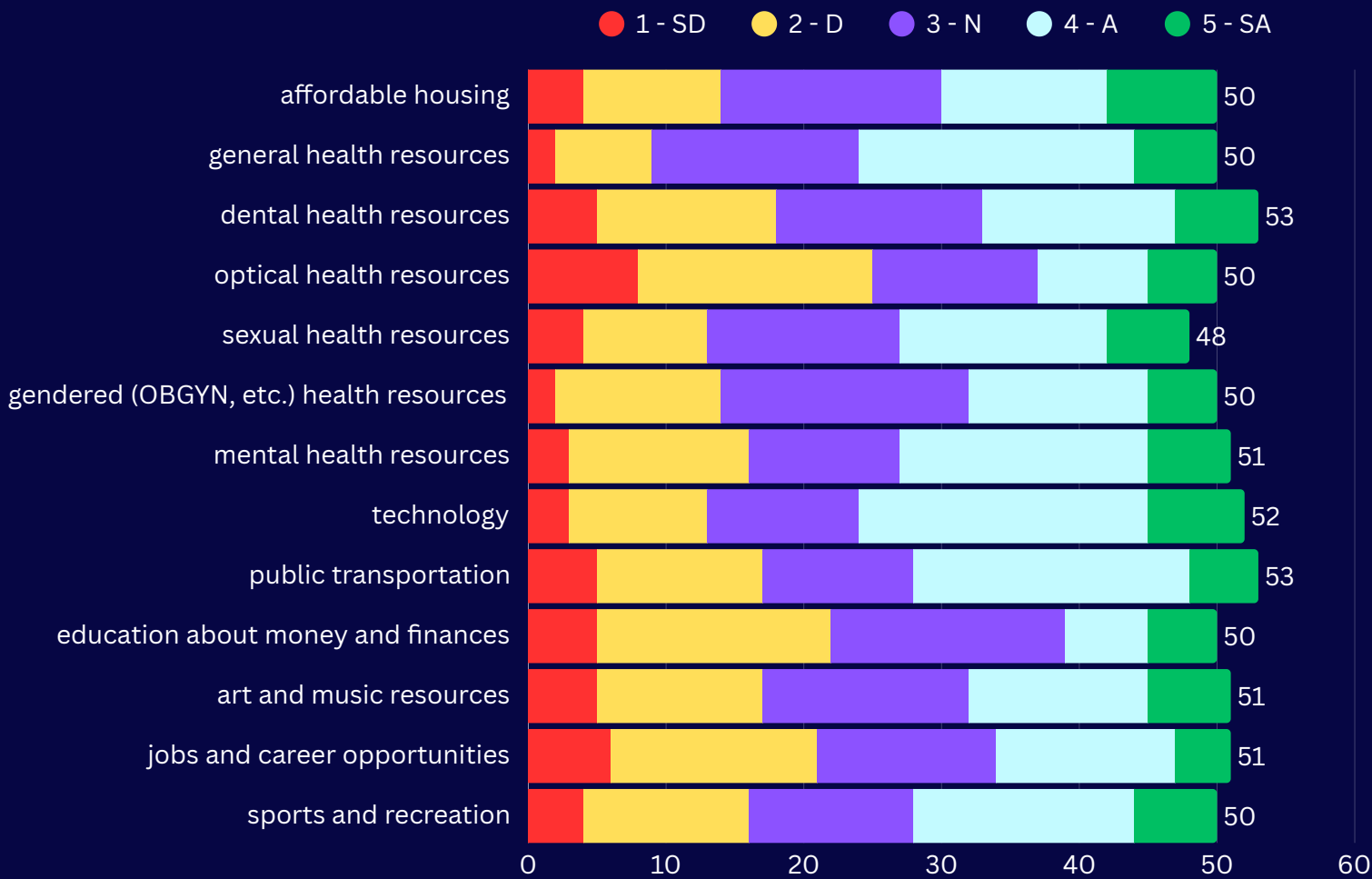
Q6 - These statements are more personal about your life and community.



Community Strengths & Assets Survey

SOMERSET QUANTITATIVE DATASET

Q7 - People in my community have access to...



Q7 - People in my community often join together to work on problems...



Community Strengths & Assets Survey

EDUCATION DATA

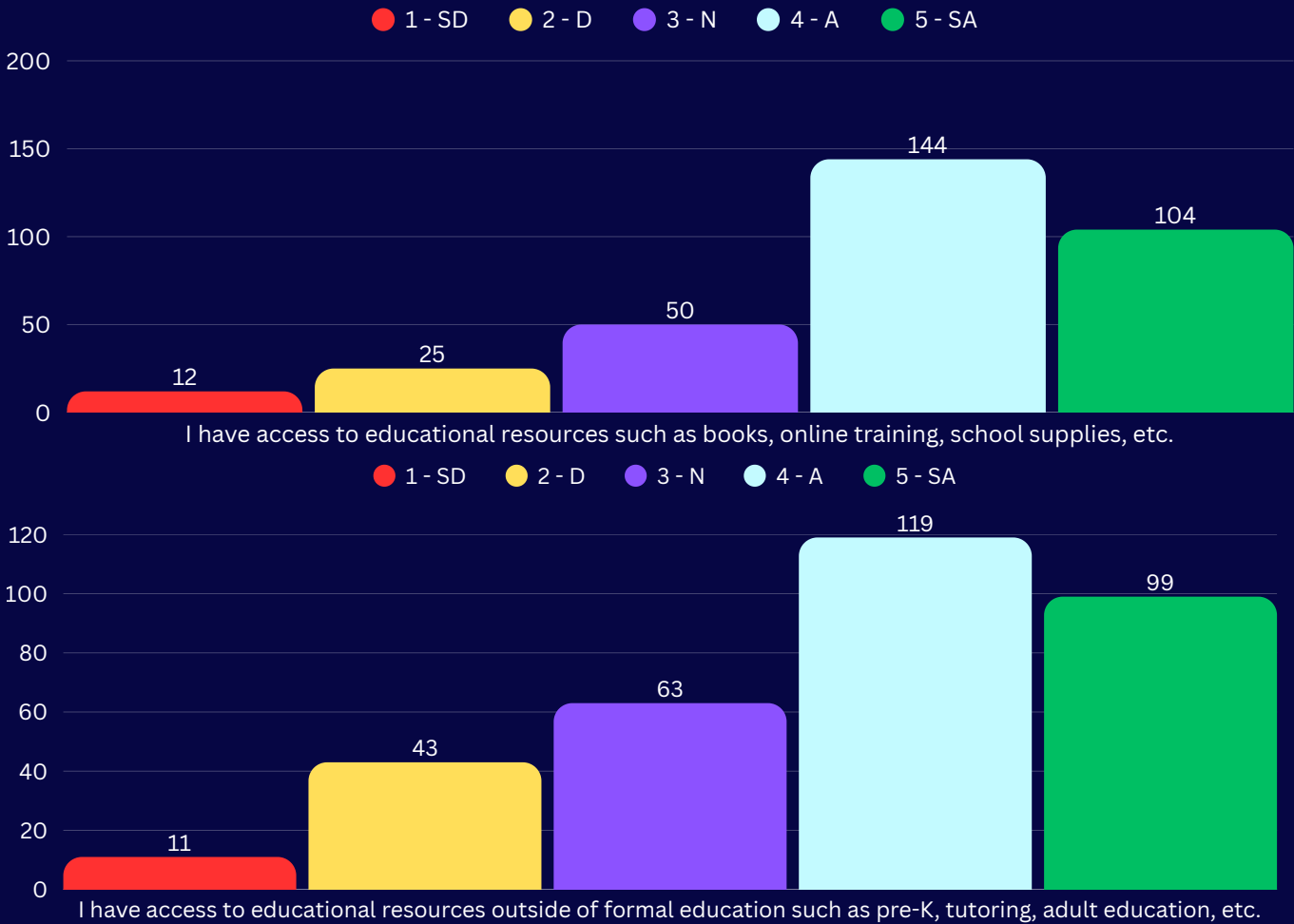
This response highlights what many community members saw as a lack of in public education and resources that they would like to see added to their communities.

One response to Q10, expressed: “We could use political leaders who are willing to fund public education. We need universal pre-K, school renovations to deal with overcrowding, more teachers, more field trips, more special projects, and the most important thing is funding for special education.”

Other responses from Q10 revealed that many community members want teen specific youth programs, strong leadership, and career learning.

Based on this data, we decided to collaborate with Wicomico County Public School on a potential PCS project to launch a non-partisan Youth Service Institute pilot program. This program would connect high school students to career, internship, and leadership opportunities. Unfortunately, we were not able to get this project off the ground due to time restrictions, but we hope to pass it on to future PCS cohorts.

Q6 - Focus on Education



Community Strengths & Assets Survey

EDUCATION DATA

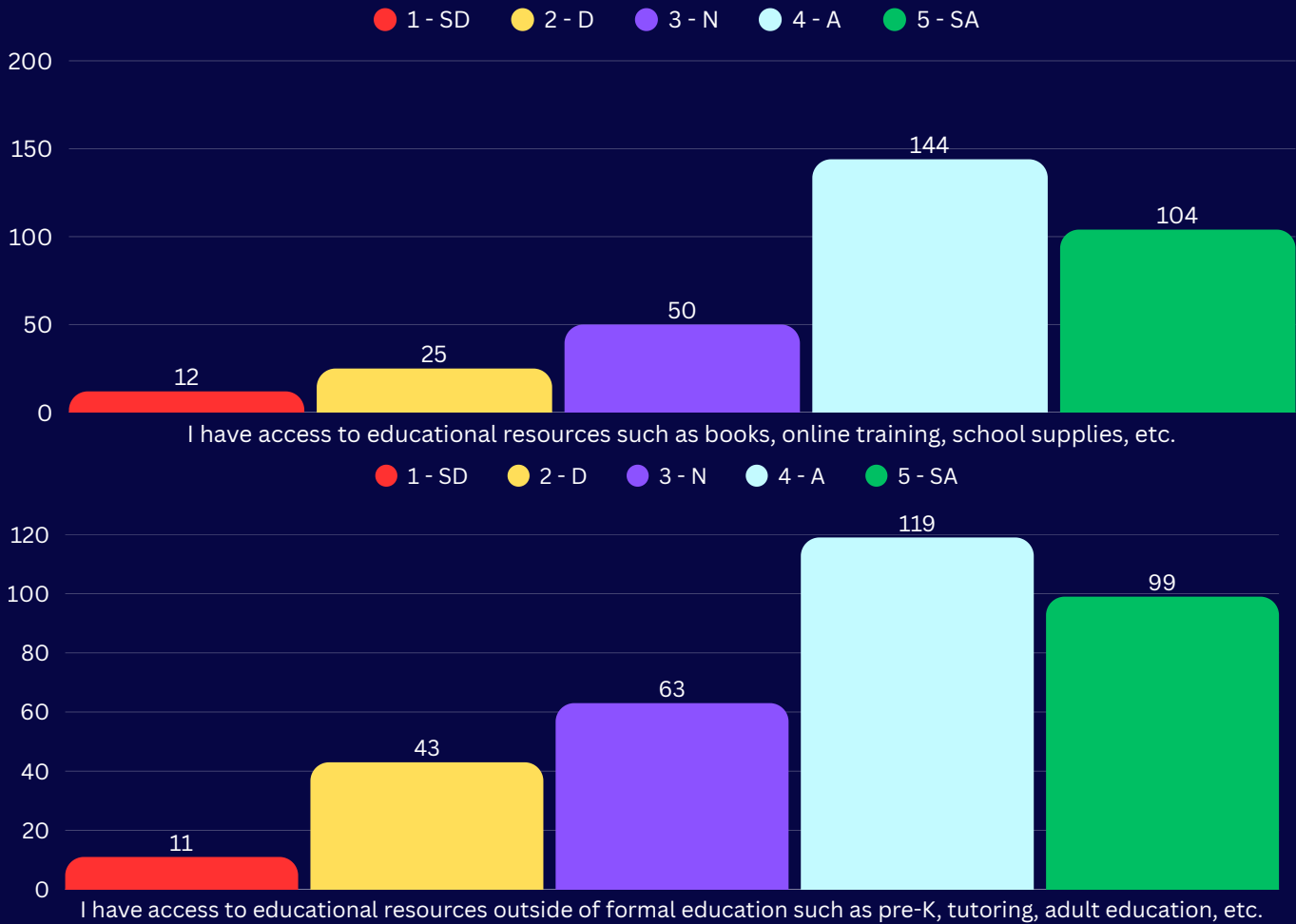
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Q6 - Focus on Education in Wicomico



ANALYSIS OF QUANTITATIVE WICOMICO DATA

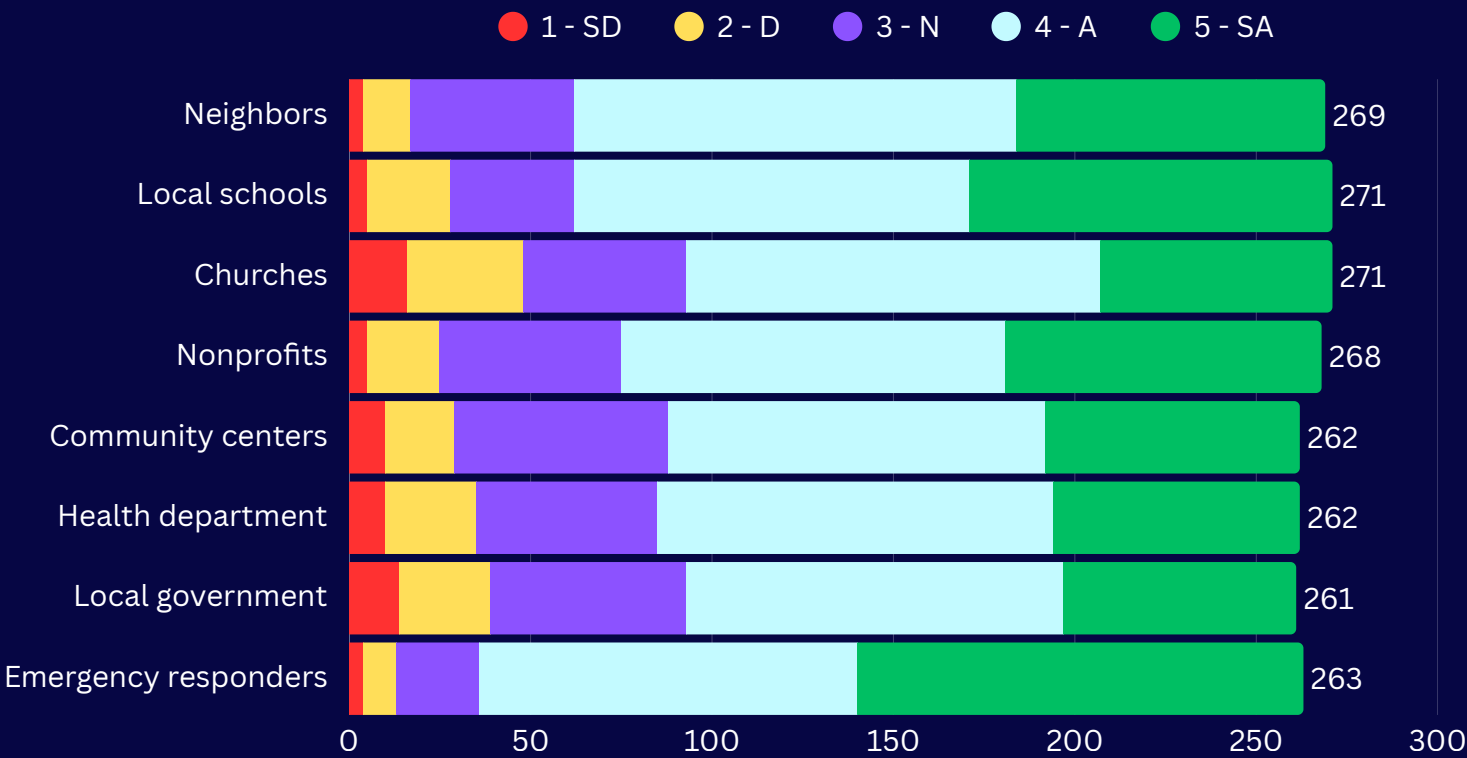
The data reflected a strong sense of civic identity, with most respondents affirming the positive impact of neighbors, churches, emergency services, and nonprofits. Many felt a sense of belonging and reported access to essentials like clean water, healthy food, education, and public health services.

However, concerns emerged around affordable housing, mental health care, and transportation, highlighting areas needing further attention.

ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE WICOMICO DATA

We received 200+ responses from Wicomico County residents to our qualitative questions 8-10, and there were clear themes present throughout the responses. Among the consistent **strengths** in Wicomico County are unity/volunteerism, arts/music, nonprofits, formal education, and first responders. The consistent **gaps** include access to affordable housing, public transportation, specialty health resources, and age-based community programs.

Wicomico Q5: To what level do the following groups or organizations make a difference:

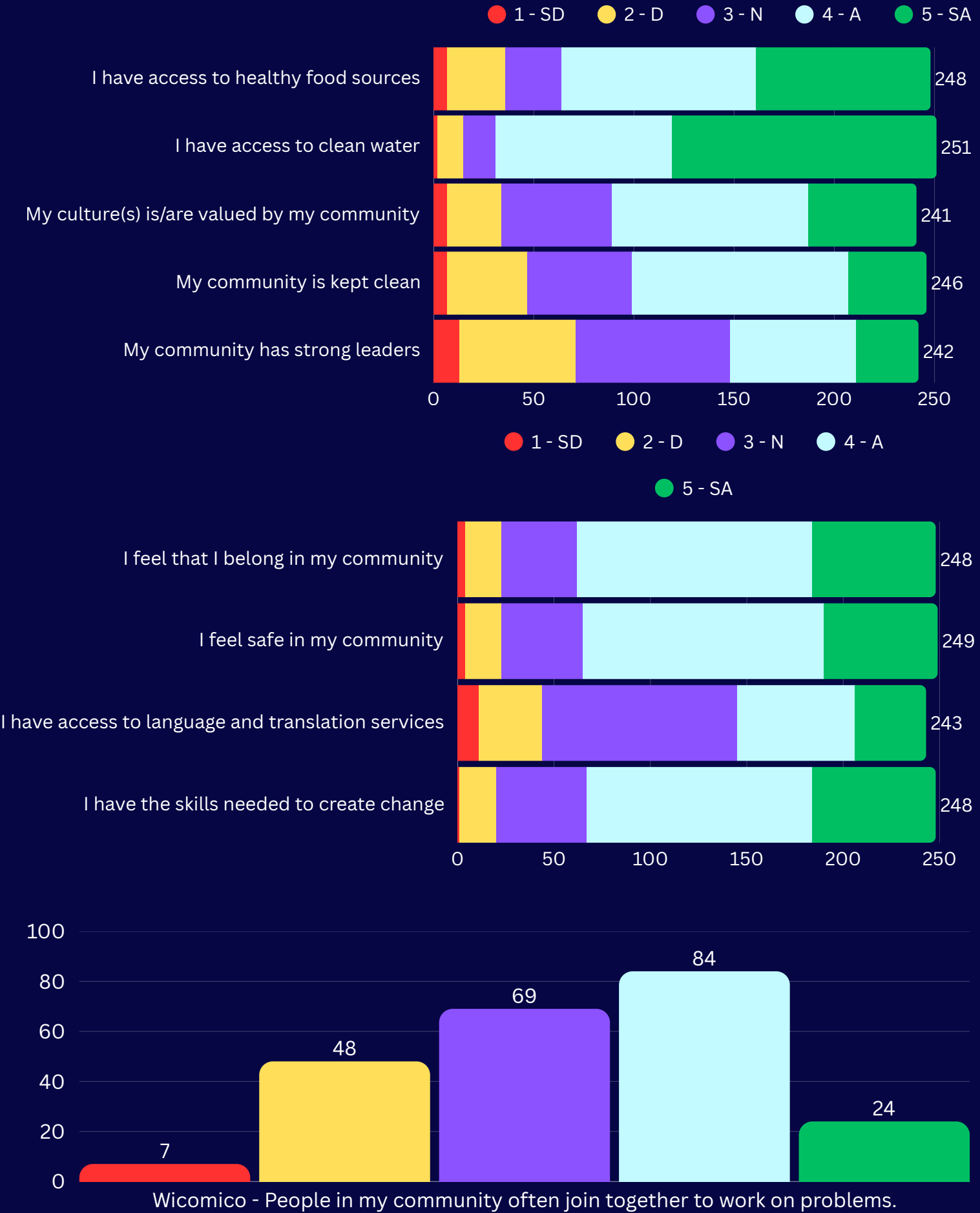


Q7: People in my community have access to...



Community Strengths & Assets Survey

Q7 - These statements are more observational about your community. Focus on Wicomico...





ANALYSIS OF SOMERSET QUANTITATIVE DATA

Over 50 Somerset County residents responded to qualitative questions 8 through 10, and several clear themes emerged from their input. Residents consistently highlighted strengths such as a strong sense of community, access to the arts, and the value of the local library. At the same time, they identified several gaps within the county, including limited medical resources, inadequate transportation, a lack of academic and recreational programs for youth, and insufficient affordable housing. These responses offer valuable insight into both the assets and the needs of the Somerset County community.

ANALYSIS OF SOMERSET QUALITATIVE DATA

We received 50+ responses from Somerset County residents to our qualitative questions 8-10, and there were clear themes present throughout the responses. Among the consistent strengths in Somerset County is as followed: good community, the arts, and the local library. The consistent gaps found in Somerset County are medical resources, transportation. academic and recreational programs for the youth, and affordable housing.

ANALYSIS OF WORCESTER/ETC. QUANTITATIVE DATA

Although Worcester County was not a central focus of the PCS 2025 Community Strengths & Assets Survey, it was included with Wicomico and Somerset counties as an option for question 2, which captured 20 responses. While the sample size was smaller, responses from Worcester residents still provide valuable insight into regional trends.

Though fewer responses came from Worcester County, participants echoed regional trends. They cited strong community ties through churches and nonprofits and generally felt safe with access to basic needs. However, concerns about affordable housing, mental health services, and transportation were consistent with broader challenges across the Lower Shore.

ANALYSIS OF WORCESTER/ETC. QUALITATIVE DATA

Residents across Worcester and nearby counties highlighted their communities for strong neighborly support, active churches, nonprofits, and a shared sense of togetherness. Diversity, artistic talent, and local institutions like Salisbury University were seen as valuable assets.

Key concerns included the lack of affordable housing, public transportation, and healthcare access. Many called for more youth programs, community spaces, and responsive leadership to better serve all residents.





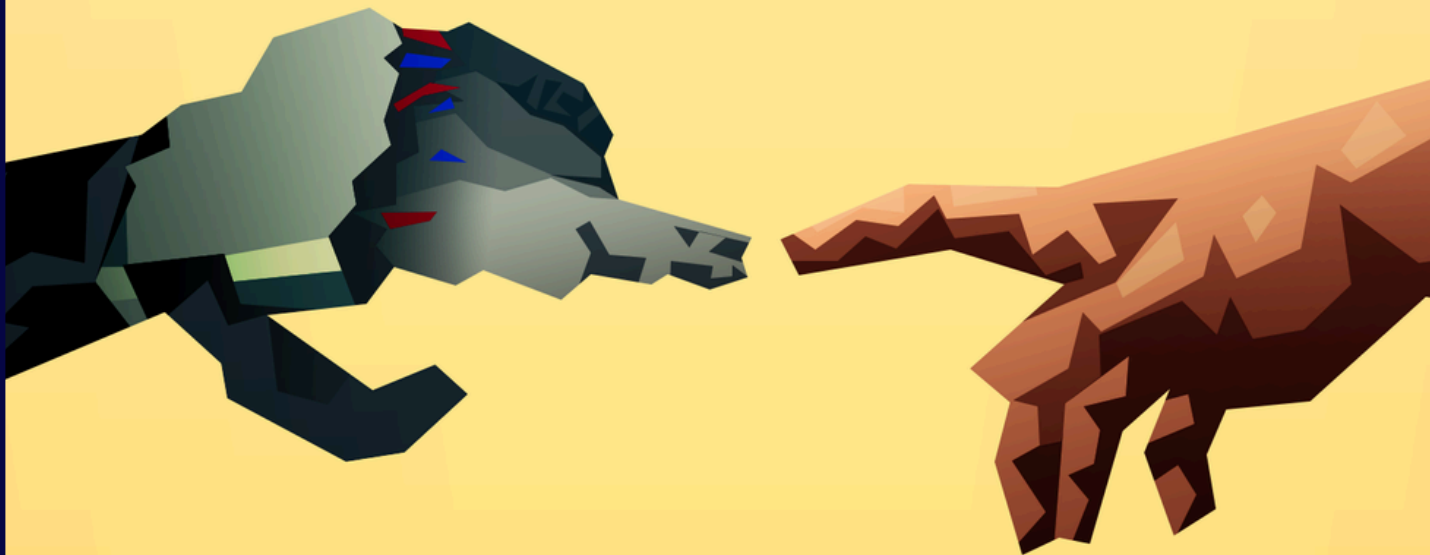
FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Our project lays a foundation for sustainable, student-led civic research at Salisbury University and beyond. By conducting a strengths-based, multilingual survey in Somerset and Wicomico Counties, we have created a model that future students and researchers can adapt, expand, and replicate.

This survey is to serve as a stepping stone for future PCS capstone scholars. Because the survey centers assets rather than deficits, it shifts the narrative around these communities, encouraging leaders to build upon what is already working rather than focusing solely on what is lacking. This project is not an endpoint; It is a beginning.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Throughout our journey, we had the opportunity to share our findings at several conferences, such as Posters on the Bay, where we presented to Governor Wes Moore and other State and local officials. Next, we presented at the PACE Showcase and the Office of Undergraduate Research and Creativity Activity (OURCA).



TECHNOLOGY LITERACY

LESSON PLANS

by Michael Ogbonna

PROJECT MISSION

The mission of my Presidential Citizen Scholars (PCS) Capstone Civic Engagement Project is to implement a digital literacy mentoring program at the Newton Street Community Center (NSCC) with grant funding support from the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) in collaboration with the City of Salisbury.

With funding from the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, I am creating a technology literacy program, with the goal of increasing technology literacy among adults in Salisbury. This program has been created as a result of technology and financial literacy identified as an area of need in local communities through the 2025 PCS Cohort's IRB-approved research.

FUTURE GOALS

The goal of this program would be to increase financial literacy in at least 50 students, training 10 students each month beginning using grant-funded laptops at the Newton Community Center. The improvement in literacy will be taken through a basic assessment on topics taught during the course.

IMPLEMENTATION

(1) Build a program to mentor adults in technology literacy:

In collaboration with Rachel Manning and the Newton Street Community Center, we plan on building a 4-week program focused on increasing technology literacy among adults. The lessons plans provided in my book will be the foundation of the future program.

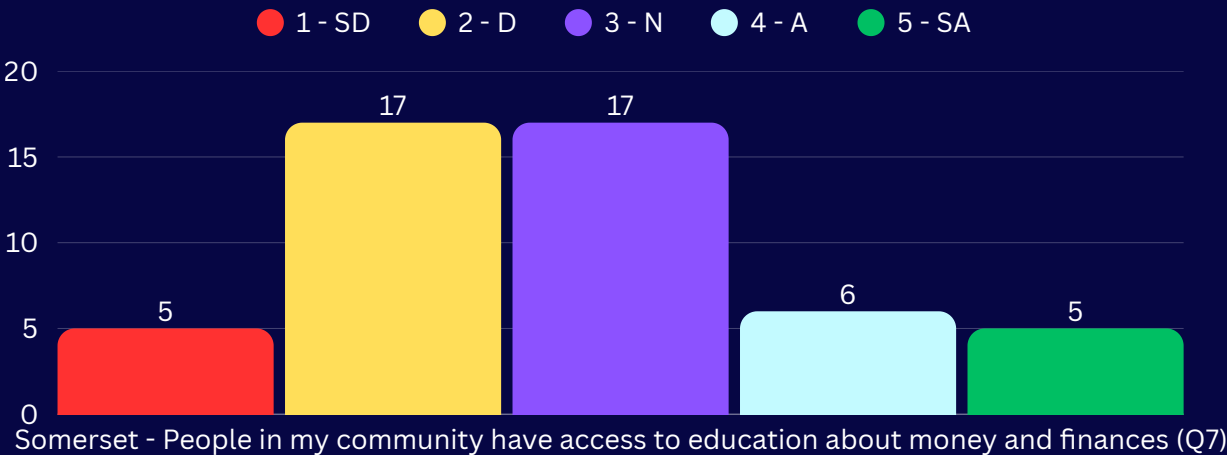
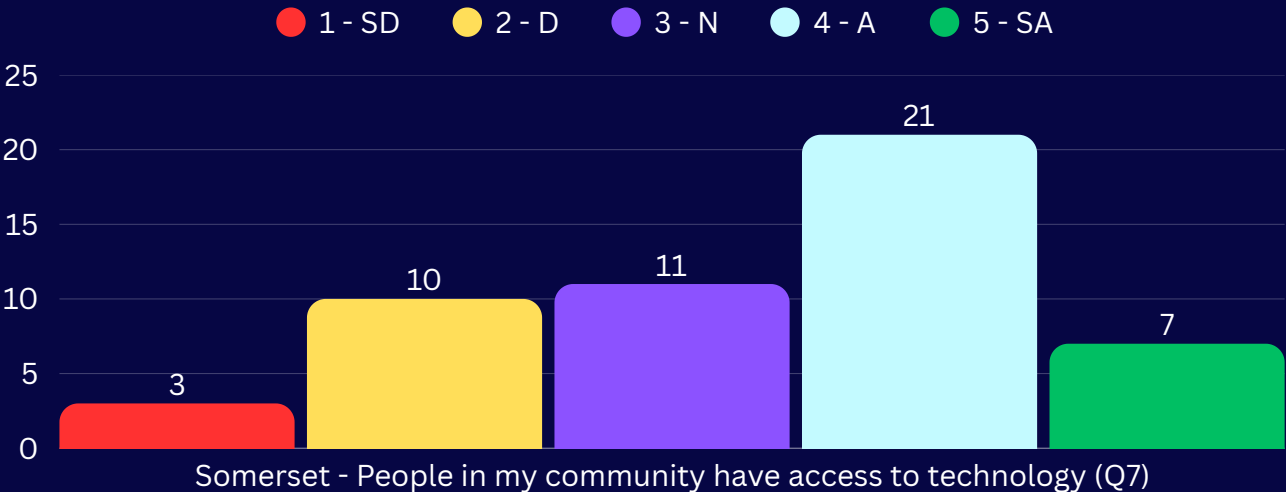
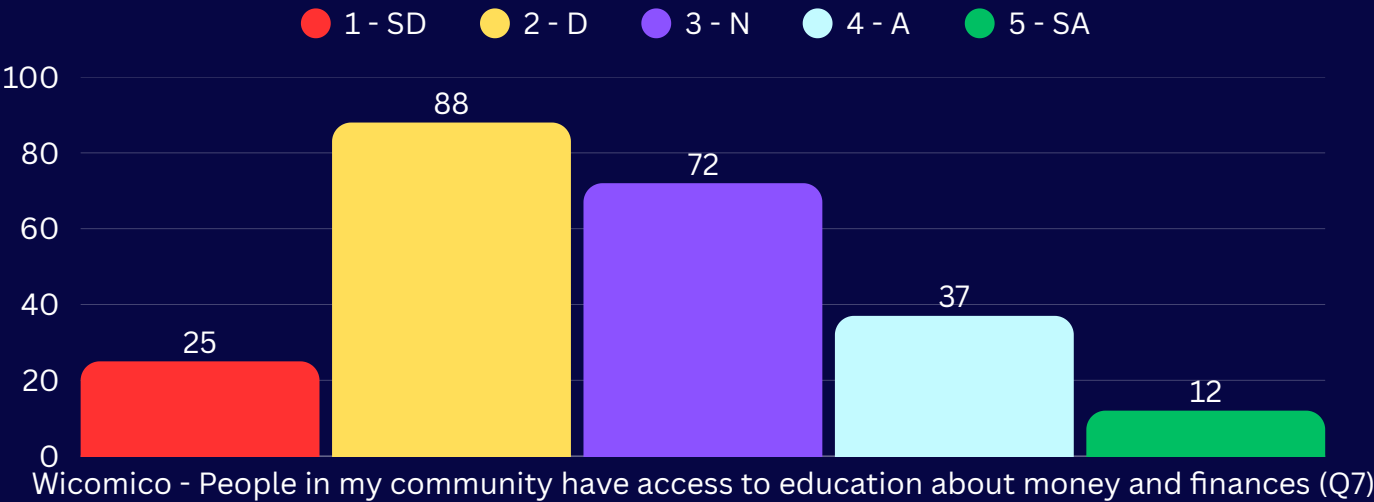
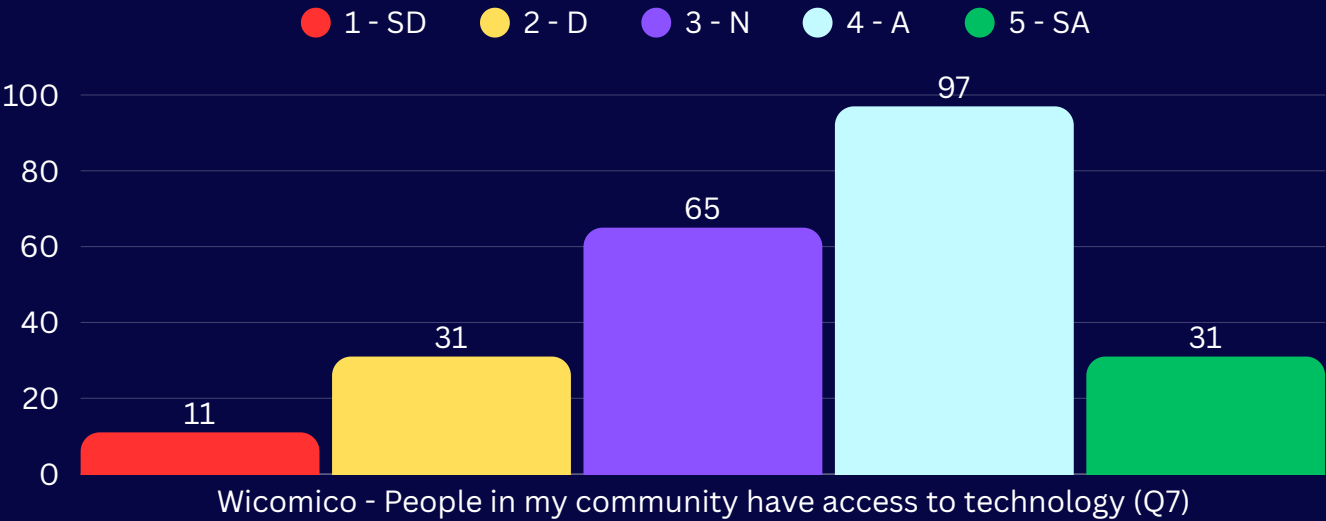
(2) Teach technology literacy based on the Digital Inclusion Grant Program funding:

10 students will be taught each month using my book along with the help of other online resources. Over the course of 8 60-minute classes, students will follow and implement what they are learning on grant-funded laptops.

(3) Create a sustainability plan for the program at Newton Street Community Center:

In order to create long-term sustainability, the lessons will be included in a book. This allows any qualified instructor to teach the course with ease, whether it be a member of future PCS Cohorts or an experienced instructor.

Community Strengths & Assets Survey



Community Strengths & Assets Survey

THANK YOU!

Lauryn Dennis, Jody Kieffer, Jahnaiya Sutherland, Tyler Hummer, Michael Ogbonna, Neila Henrice, Zainab Jabeen, Ashley Marcum, and Dagmawit Kebede would like to extend our appreciation to the following people who have given significant time and energy to support our Presidential Citizen Scholars Capstone Project over the past three semesters. Thank you for your support and guidance!

COMMUNITY LEADERS

Monica Brooks
(President/Wicomico County Branch of the NAACP)
D'Shawn Doughty
(President/Salisbury City Council)
Dr. Deidra Johnson (VP for Strategic Initiatives and Community Engagement/Wor-Wic Community College)
Rachel Manning (Community Relations Manager/City of Salisbury)
Megan Outten (Policy Manager/Maryland Energy Administration)
Dr. Kimberly Purvis
(President/Princess Anne Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.)
Vernon Spriggs
(Director/Somerset County Local Management Board)
Mayor Darlene Taylor
(Mayor/City of Crisfield)
Shelley Johnson (Vice President/Princess Anne Town Commission)

SU CAMPUS LEADERS

Robby Chin
(Representative/Office of Diversity & Inclusion, SU)
Michele Garigliano
(Staff/Salisbury University)
Tara Gladden (Director of Cultural Affairs/Salisbury University)
President Carolyn Lepre
(President/Salisbury University)
Dean Maarten Pereboom
(Dean/Fulton School of Liberal Arts, SU)
Dr. Sandy Pope (Director/PACE, Salisbury University)
Eric Stewart
(Communications/President's Office, SU)
Prof. Weaver
(Professor/Salisbury University)
Sara Heim (Assistant Director ShoreCorps, AmeriCorps at Salisbury University)
Judy McClure (Program Specialist ShoreCorps/AmeriCorps at Salisbury University)

REFERENCES

Blake, L.; Cioccio, Z.; Cooper, J.; Evans, L.; Gischel, T.; Green, J.; Habib, M.; Leon, H.; Planner, A.; Towers, J.; Weaver, R. “Newton Street Community Center: A needs-Based Assessment Ensuring Beneficial Programs.” Salisbury University, 2020

First Nations Information Governance Centre. Strength-Based Approached to Indigenous Research and the development of Well-Being Indications. (Ottawa: 2020). 36 pages.

Alberi, S., James, L., and Herman, A. “Road Safety and Transportation Equity on Salisbury’s West side.” PCS Salisbury University, 2024.



The Institute for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement (PACE) is a resource center where the SU community, local government, nonprofit and public groups can access knowledge and information. PACE draws on the interdisciplinary expertise of SU faculty, students, staff, and community partners. As a nonpartisan contributor, the Institute organizes projects and programs that are customized to fit the particular needs of the Eastern Shore community. For more information about PACE, visit www.salisbury.edu/pace (or email PACE@salisbury.edu).



The PCS Program prepares students to be community leaders through civic scholarship and community action. Over three semesters, Scholars meet with members of the community to identify and research an issue that will culminate in a Capstone Project. Scholars are supported through Salisbury University's Institute for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement (PACE) and the Office of the President. SU's highest purpose is "to empower students with knowledge, skills, and core values that contribute to lifelong learning and active citizenship in a democratic society." This elite program builds on SU's highest purpose by offering students of all majors and disciplines the opportunity to engage in the life of the community, develop habits of democratic citizenship, and become experienced civic leaders. The PCS Program operates under the direction and guidance of Ryan Weaver, PACE/IDIS Lecturer (rvweaver@salisbury.edu).