

# Comparing virtual and in-person implementation of a school-based sexual health promotion program in high schools with large Latino populations

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## Background

Drawing on positive youth development, El Camino was developed as goal-setting teen pregnancy prevention curriculum designed for use particularly with Latino youth. The school-based program consists of eleven 45-minute lessons that encourage youth to set goals, make informed reproductive health choices, and have healthy relationships. Evaluation of the program began in February 2021 with a randomized controlled trial in nine high schools serving large Latino, including Spanish-language populations. In each school, two groups of students were randomized to receive either El Camino or a leadership development curriculum of the same length. To date, El Camino has been delivered in 17 classes (5 in English and 12 in Spanish); 16 classes have received the control curriculum.

## Implementation Setting

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, implementation of both curricula was held virtually via Zoom in spring of 2021 while the school system was using remote learning. Additional cohorts were held in-person in summer of 2021 and fall of 2021 once the schools re-opened for in-person instruction.

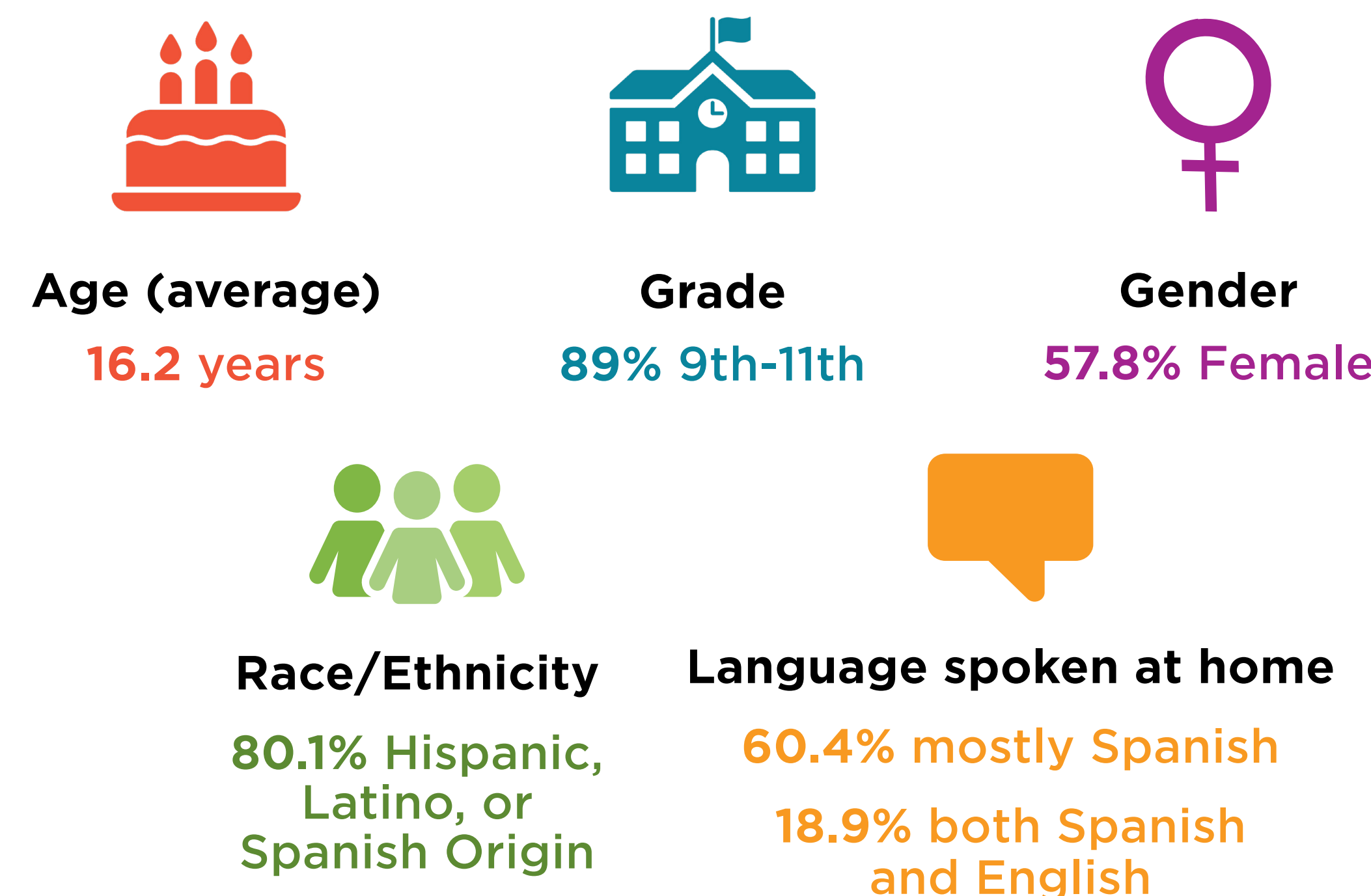
## Data Collection

Data were collected from all three cohorts at baseline prior to randomization and post-test immediately following implementation of the program. Students were asked about their experiences of the program and program facilitators.

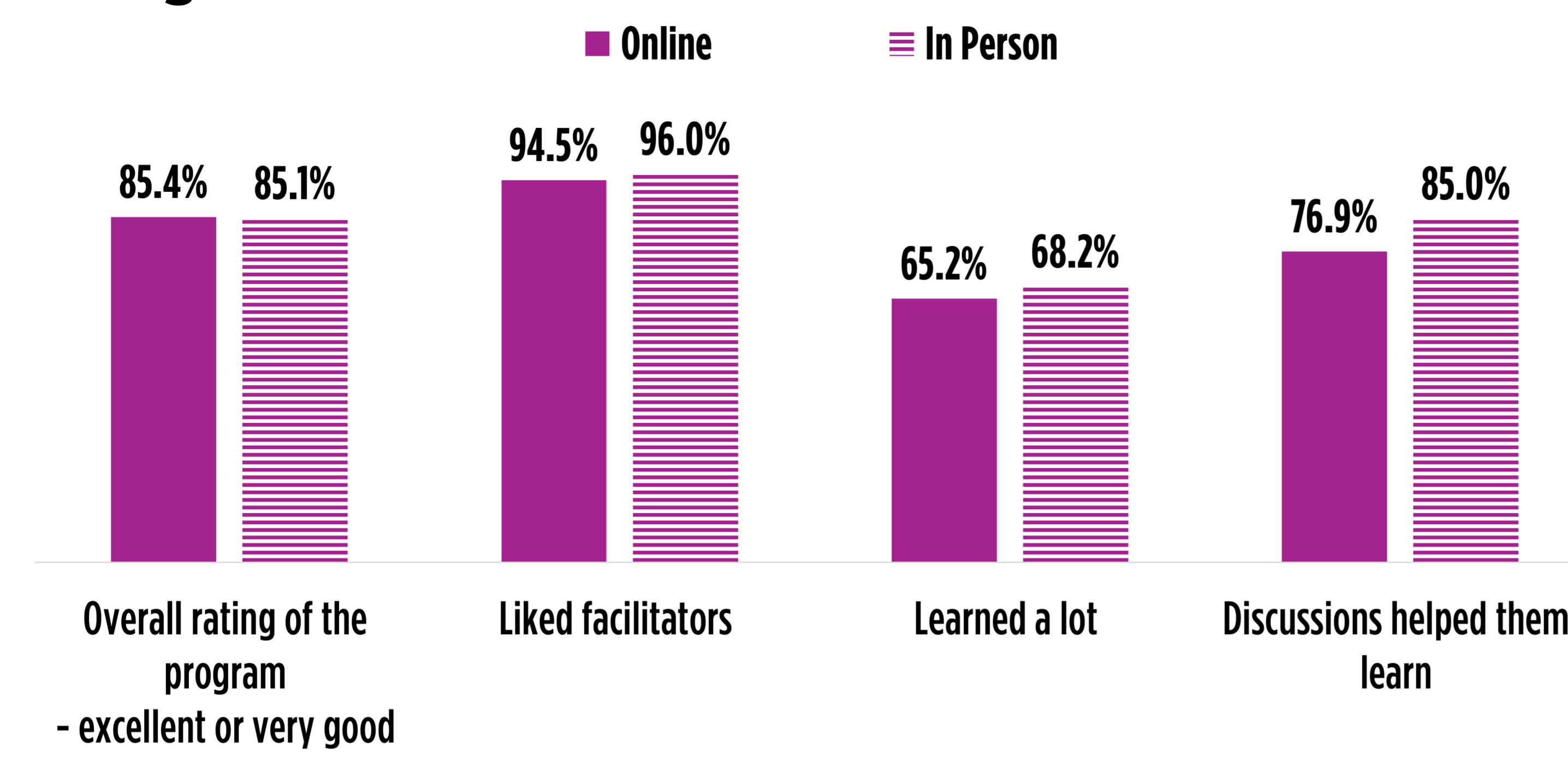
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## Preliminary Results

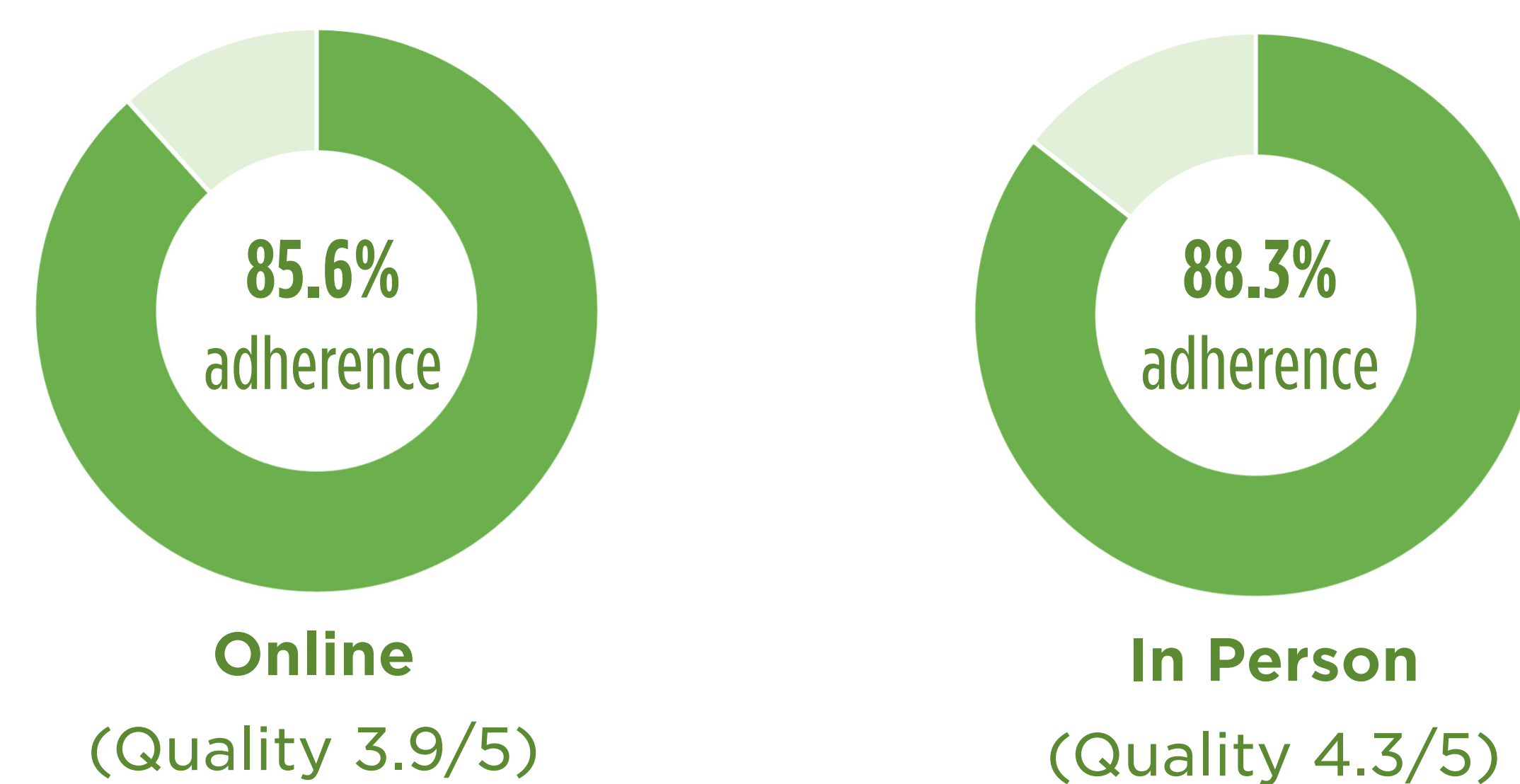
Most students are females of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin that speak mostly Spanish at home (n=375).



Students in both groups had similar experiences in the program. Both groups gave El Camino high quality ratings.

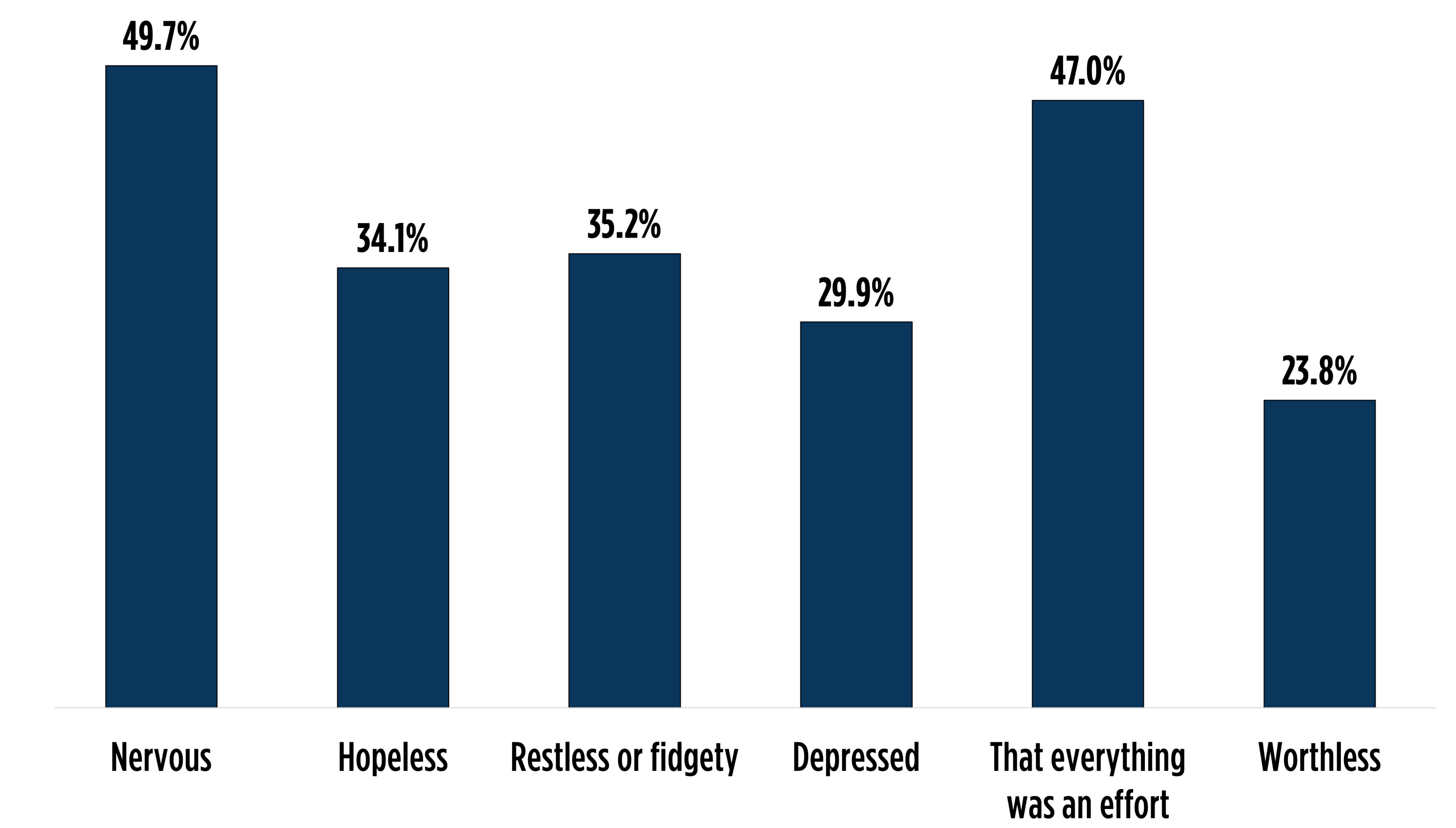


Observer quality ratings remained consistent across implementation groups.

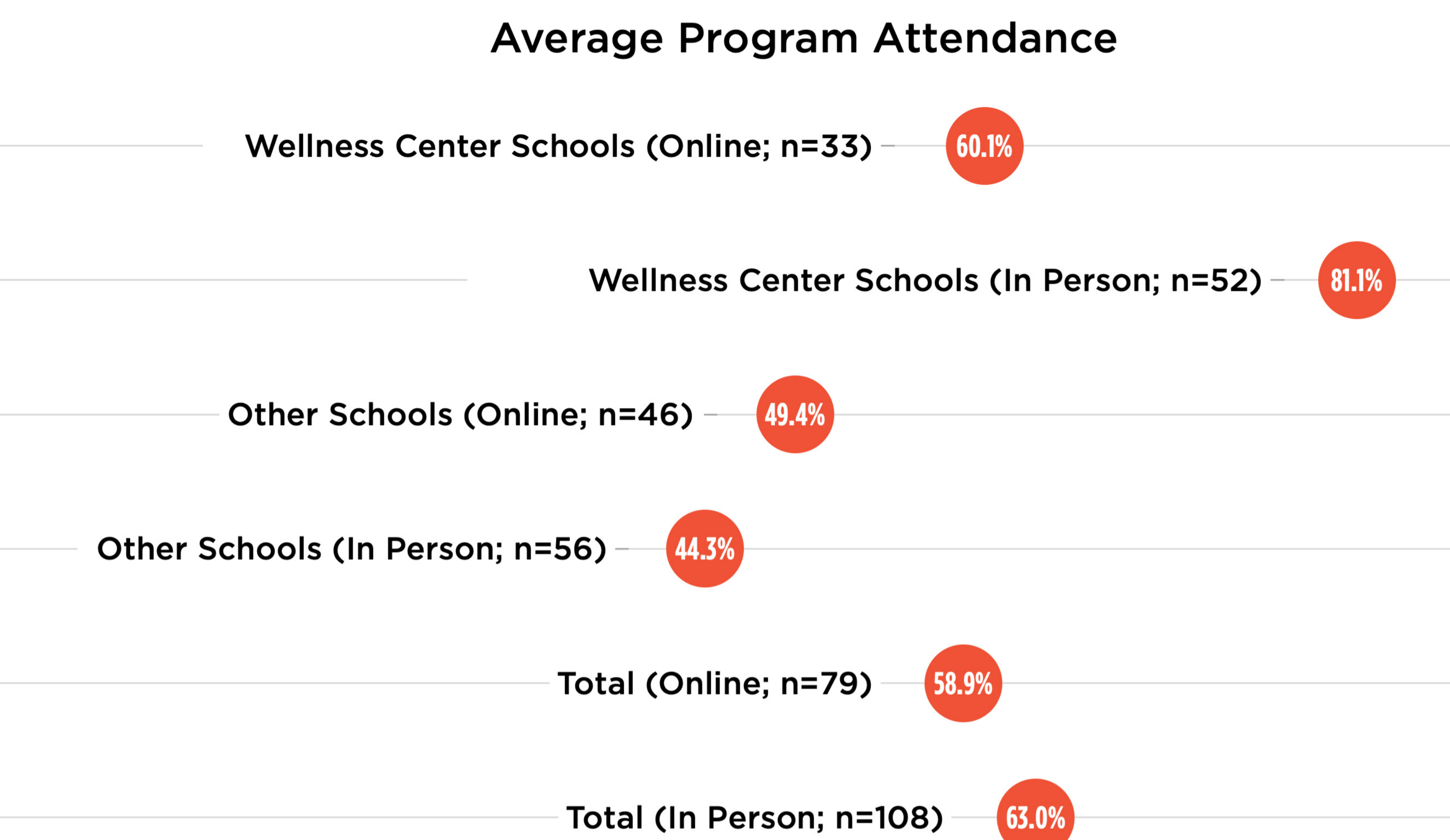


Students in both groups reported mental health challenges.

Percent who felt the following emotions some of the time, most of the time, or all of the time



Program attendance was substantially higher in-person in wellness center schools\* but was counter-balanced by lower in-person attendance in other schools.



\* Wellness Center Schools are schools that already have established relationships and programming led by Identity, Inc., our implementation partner. Other Schools do not have established programming and Identity is not well known by the student population.

## Discussion

**Mental Health.** Students' responses on the mental health scale reflect the challenges they have faced during the pandemic and the importance of fostering a program environment where students feel supported and engaged. Facilitators should take students' life experiences into account when implementing a program like El Camino.

**Student Experiences.** We found that students who participated in El Camino online and those who received it in person had similar experiences and ratings of the program, based on survey responses.

**Attendance.** While attendance increased slightly in the transition between online and in person implementation, this masked an overall 21 percentage point increase among students attending wellness center schools that was counter-balanced, in part, by a 5 percentage point

decline in attendance in other schools. This reflects, in part, the shift to virtual implementation for several schools at the end of the in-person implementation.

**School Differences.** Wellness Center schools had higher attendance than other schools. We expect that this is because Wellness Center schools had established positive relationships with students and programming was built into the established services. Other schools did not know about the implementation partner, Identity, and did not have as much buy-in to the program from the student population.

**Student Engagement.** The team encountered challenges in engaging and retaining students. But, through the process of adapting El Camino, we identified strategies to encourage engagement and provide a positive program experience in a virtual setting.

## Adapting El Camino for virtual implementation

Child Trends collaborated with multiple partners to adapt, pilot test, and make curriculum revisions while preserving the core components of the in-person curriculum. Child Trends allocated five months for the curriculum adaptation process, which included a five-week pilot. The process was iterative and continued while full implementation was underway. We made small adaptations to

the curriculum as we learned more about how students were responding to and engaging with the curriculum in a virtual setting.

