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Student perception of preparedness for college: Does parent education level have an impact?

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Student Perception of Preparedness for College: Does Parent Education Level Have an Impact?

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Introduction

-In recent years, higher education leadership in the US has increased focus on helping students integrate and apply their learning (Schneider, 2018). Budwig & Jessen-Marshall (2018) highlight how the American Association of Colleges and Universities' LEAP Challenge was designed to enhance students' practice with engaged learning, in part because less than a third of all college students reported such experiences (Gallup, 2014).

-While we know that high school graduates perceive themselves as inadequately prepared for college, especially first-generation students (Griffith, 2016; Scevak, 2015), we do not know how well prepared these students feel for engaged learning described above.

Current Study

-As part of a larger study on student preparedness at colleges working on the LEAP Challenge, the current study focuses on first year college students' self-perceptions regarding their high school preparedness. We asked two questions:

1. How prepared do college students at LEAP Challenge schools feel for engaged learning experiences based on their learning experiences in high school?
2. Does student sense of preparedness for engaged learning differ by parent education level?

Methods

Participants: The study is part of a larger investigation which involved first year college students. The students were drawn from four colleges working with The American Association of Colleges and Universities building curricular pathways for integrative and applied learning.

Survey: Drawn from a larger anonymous survey completed by the students, two questions were examined: a question about student preparedness and one on their parent's highest attained education level.

Procedure: Administrators at four participating institutions distributed a link to an anonymous survey to first-year undergraduate students. Students had the option to enter a raffle for a gift card.

Analysis: Responses for the question "How well do you feel your high school prepared you for engaging in project-based work in college" were tallied based on students' responses: 1 (very well prepared) and 5 (not very well) and coded in terms of the demographic question about their parents' education level (BA and above and below a BA). A chi-squared test was performed, and an analysis of trends at individual schools was also carried out.

Results: Overall

- Figure A illustrates that the students were split between the two extremes, with 38% of the students reporting they felt not very well prepared for project-based work in college and another 35% of first year college students reporting that they felt very-well prepared for project-based work in college.
- A Chi-square test of independence was conducted and found that there was no significant difference between students' self-rated high school preparation for engaged learning in college and their status as a first-generation college student. ($\chi^2(2, N = 273) = 2.8, p = .25$)

Q18: How well do you feel your high school education prepared you for engaging in project based work in college?

Perception of preparation for project based work in college by parent education level (PEL)

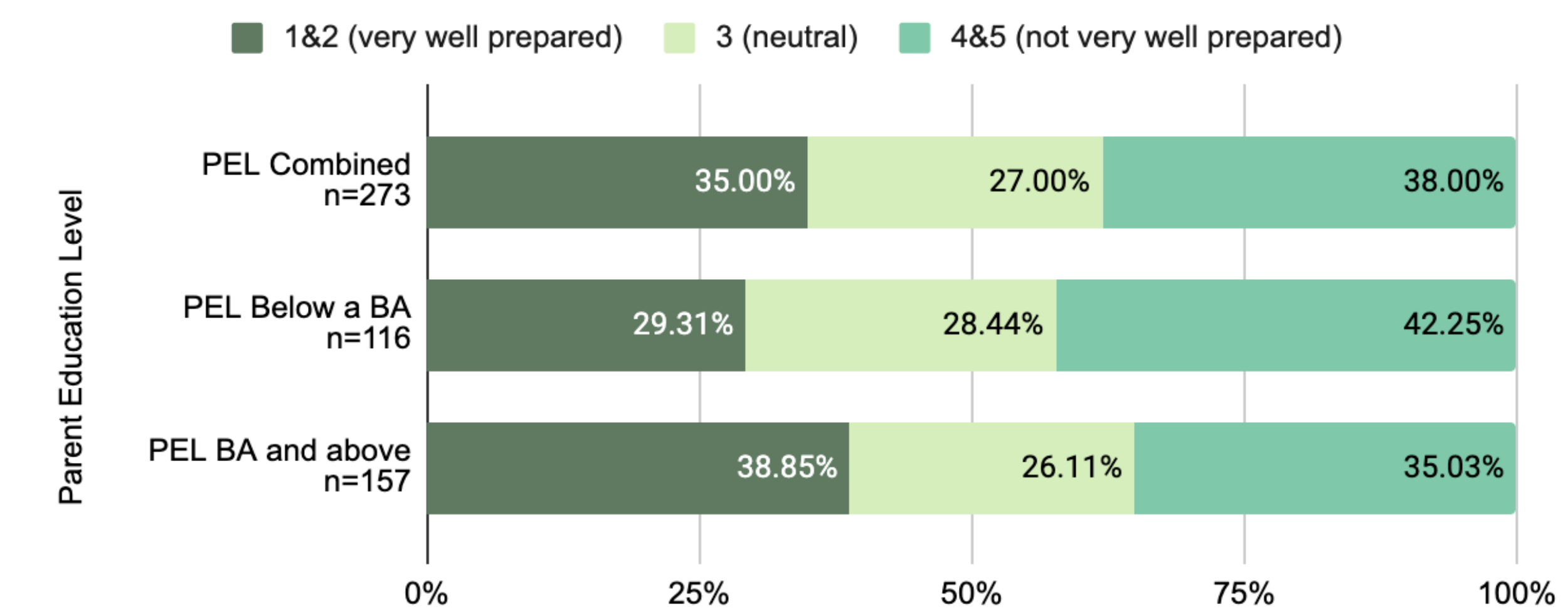


figure. A, Total Schools Percentage of individuals who ranked their preparation for project based work

Results: Individual School Variation

Q18: How well do you feel your high school education prepared you for engaging in project based work in college?

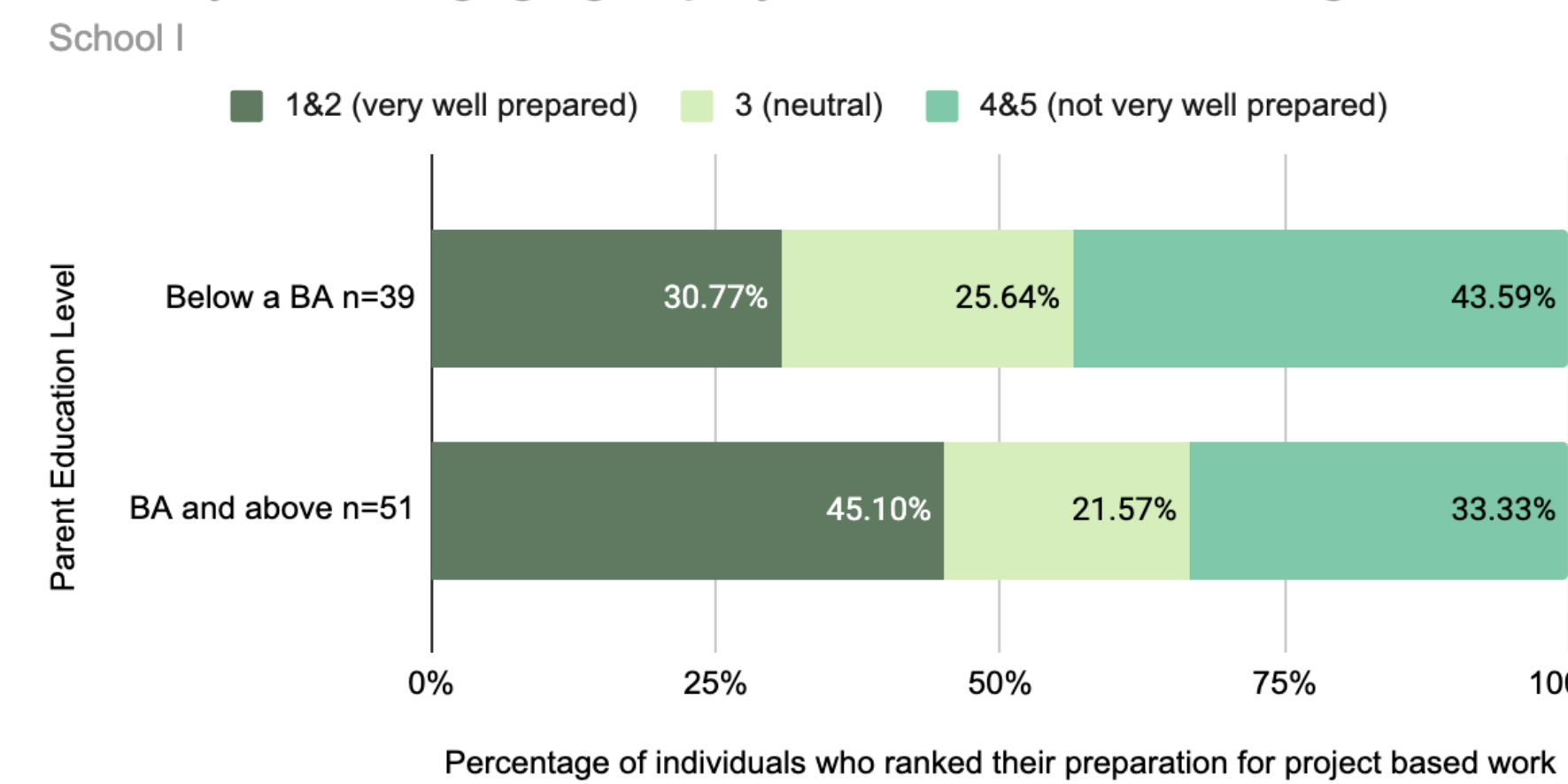


figure. B, School I

Q18: How well do you feel your high school education prepared you for engaging in project based work in college?

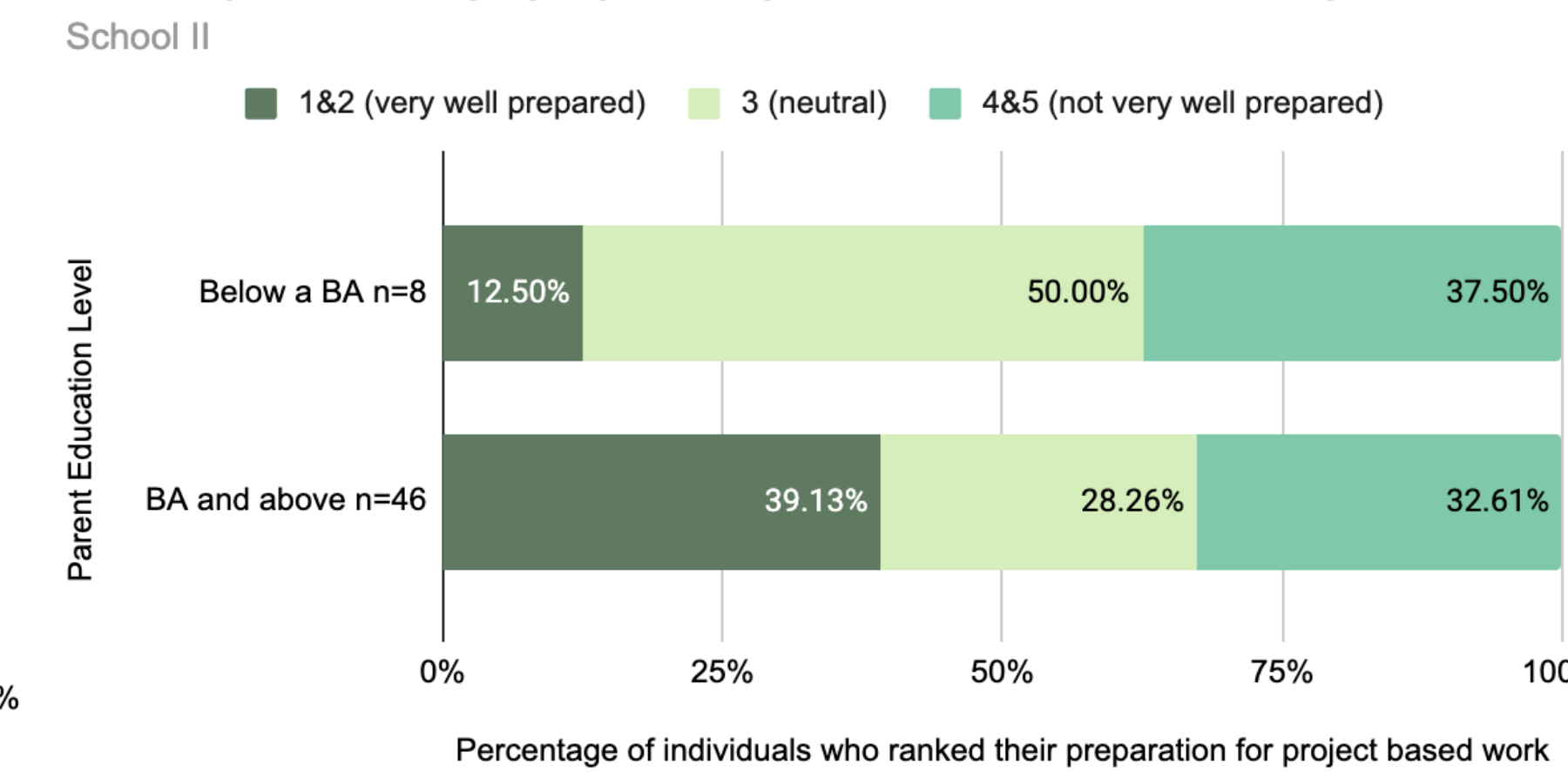


figure. C, School II

Q18: How well do you feel your high school education prepared you for engaging in project based work in college?

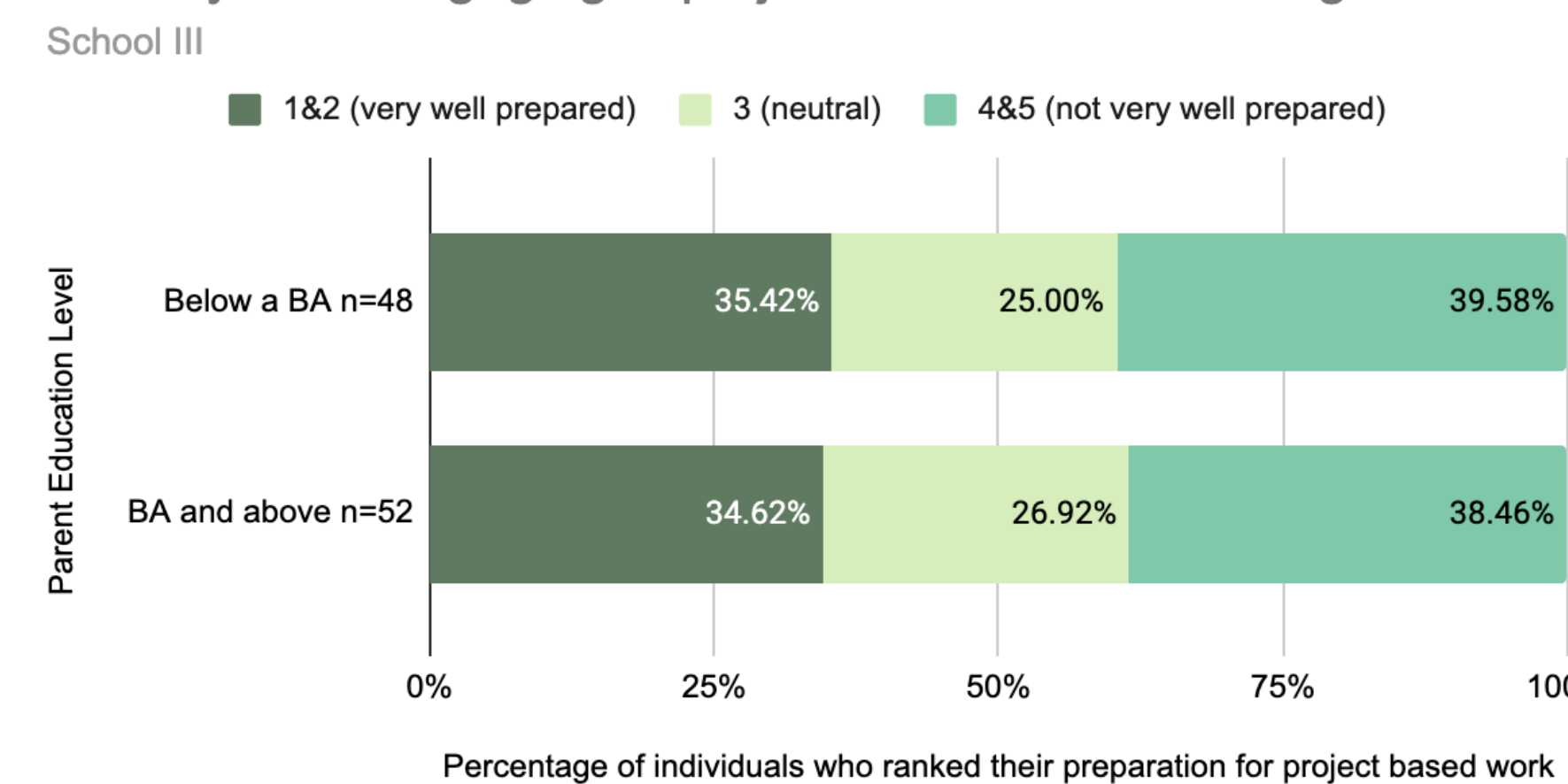


figure. D, School III

Q18: How well do you feel your high school education prepared you for engaging in project based work in college?

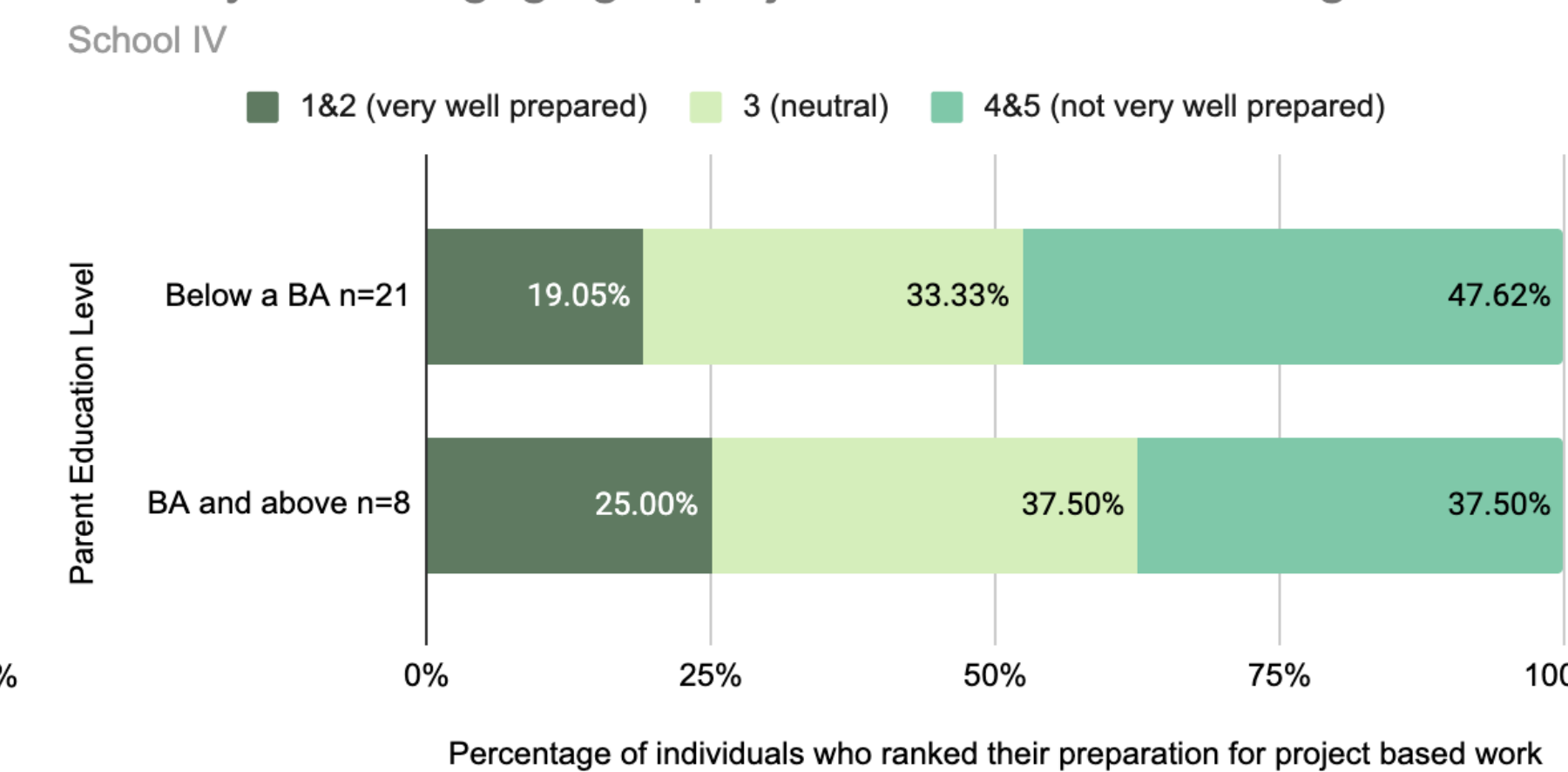


figure. E, School IV

- Despite no significant difference across schools, individual schools showed unique patterns. School II showed a trend suggesting parent education level was related to sense of preparedness, while at School III this did not seem to be the case.

- More specifically, at School II a greater number of non-first generation students reporting feeling "very well prepared" in comparison to first generation students, while at School III, students, regardless of parent education level, were roughly divided in thirds across their reported preparedness (see figures C & D).

Discussion

- Our analysis highlights that overall most students do not feel prepared for engaged learning. But, there were some individual differences between schools.

- Future work should aim to study whether and why schools might differ and also should attract a more equal balance of student participants in terms of parent education level.

- Further qualitative research is warranted to interview students about their perceptions of their engaged learning preparation.

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