



# **Exceptional Student Services (ESS) Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP)**

Arizona Preschool and K-12 Special Education  
Trend Data  
2022-2026

September 15, 2026

# Acronyms

|       |                                                      |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------|
| A     | Autism                                               |
| DB    | Deaf-blindness (HI & VI)                             |
| DD    | Developmental delay                                  |
| ED    | Emotional disability (emotional disturbance)         |
| EDP   | Emotional disability public or private program       |
| HI    | Hearing impairment                                   |
| MD    | Multiple disabilities                                |
| MDSSI | Multiple disabilities with severe sensory impairment |
| MIID  | Mild intellectual disability                         |
| MOID  | Moderate intellectual disability                     |
| OHI   | Other health impairment                              |
| OI    | Orthopedic impairment                                |
| PSD   | Preschool severe delay                               |
| PPPSS | Parentally placed private school student             |
| RTC   | Residential treatment center                         |
| SID   | Severe intellectual disability                       |
| SLD   | Specific learning disability                         |
| SLI   | Speech or language impairment                        |
| TBI   | Traumatic brain injury                               |
| VI    | Visual impairment                                    |

# Federal Primary Disability Category

The primary disability as identified in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and for federal reporting purposes.

Memo released in 2024

Federal hierarchy:

- DD/PSD
- DB (HI & VI only)
- MD/MDSSI
- All other primary disability categories

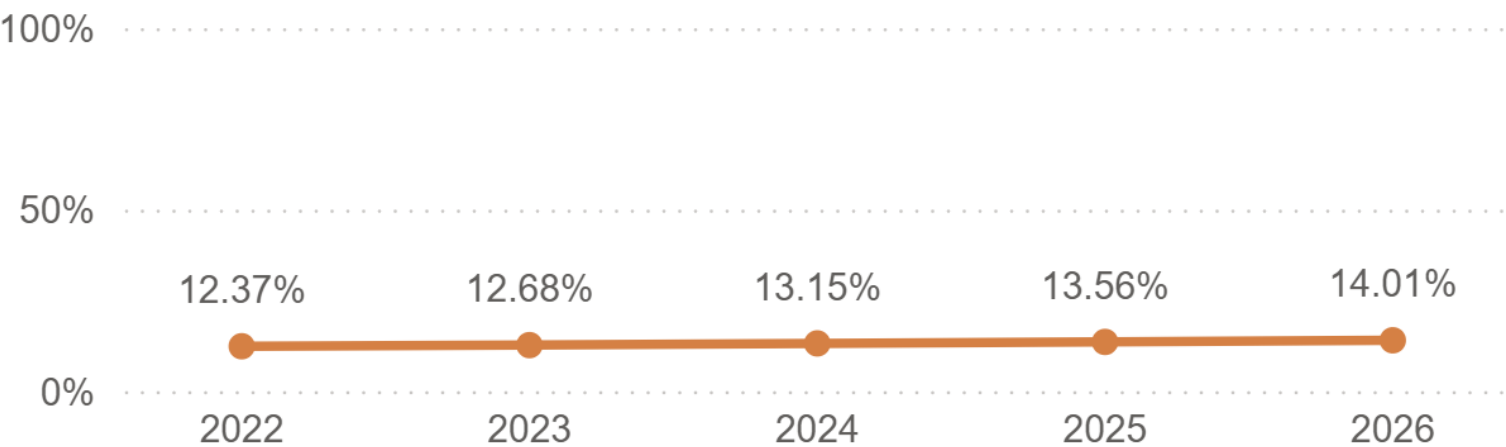


# **K-12 Special Education Trend Data**

**5-Year Trend for Students with Disabilities (SWD)**

**School Year (SY) 2025-26**

# 5-Year Trend, Count & % K-12 SWD



**Over the past 5 years:**  
Our student population is changing.  
While total enrollment is declining, the proportion of students requiring special education services is increasing.

| Fiscal Year | GenEd K-12 | SPED K-12 | % SPED |
|-------------|------------|-----------|--------|
| 2026        | 1,059,397  | 148,447   | 14.01% |
| 2025        | 1,085,455  | 147,148   | 13.56% |
| 2024        | 1,098,357  | 144,463   | 13.15% |
| 2023        | 1,112,224  | 140,987   | 12.68% |
| 2022        | 1,113,613  | 137,748   | 12.37% |

# More Students Identified for Special Education

Experts point to:

- Increased awareness and earlier identification
- Growth in autism diagnoses
- Better screening practices
- Increased identification of mental health and developmental needs

# What does this mean down the road?

- Future systems will need to balance declining enrollment with increasing service complexity.
- Staffing, inclusion practices, and service models may have implications.
  - More special education teachers
  - More paraprofessionals
  - More speech-language pathologists
  - More occupational and physical therapists
  - More school psychologists
- Enrollment declines reduce funding.
- Special education costs continue to rise.
- More students with complex disabilities may be served through regional programs, shared services, or centralized expertise.

# SY 2025-26, K-12 SWD by District and Charter

148,447 SWD served in K – 12

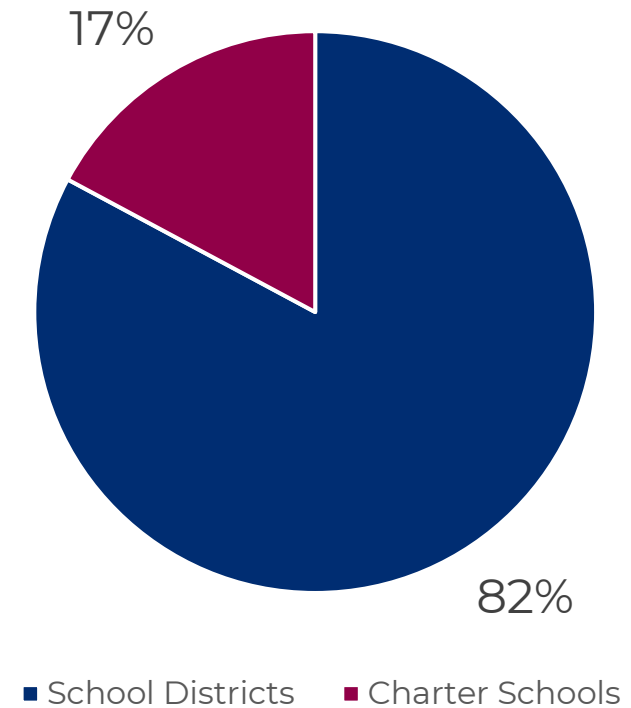
650 PEAs

234 – School Districts

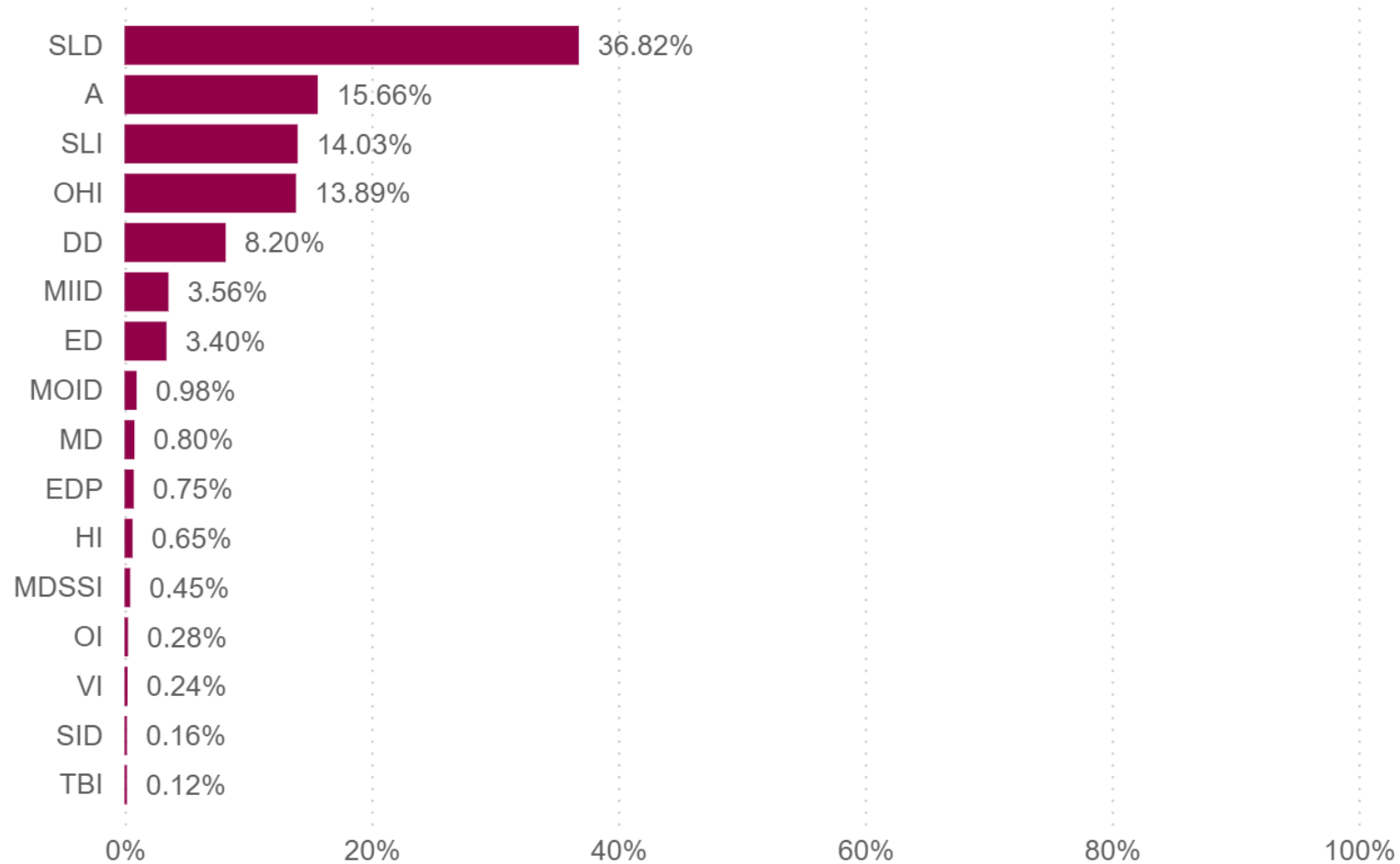
- Serve 82% of SWDs

404 – Charter Schools

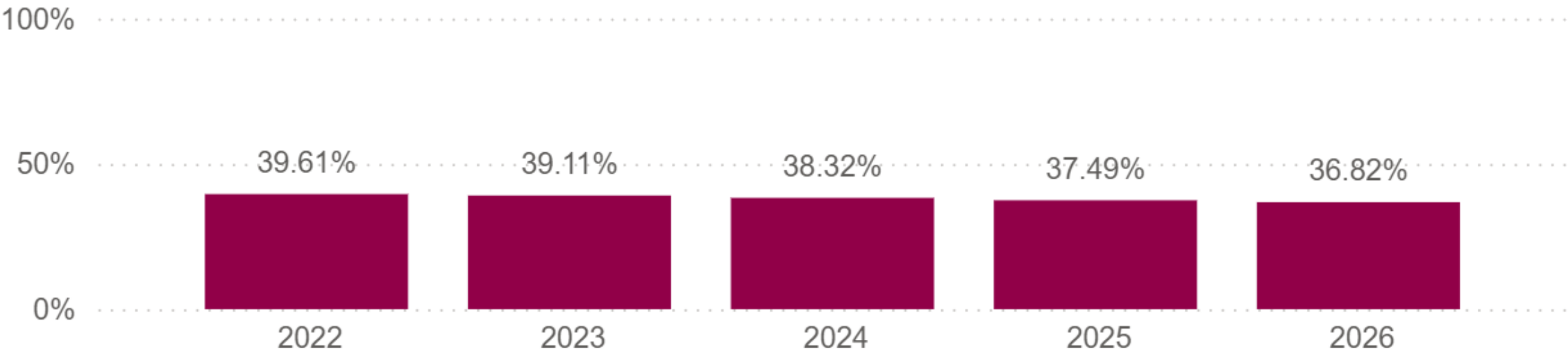
- Serve 17% of SWDs



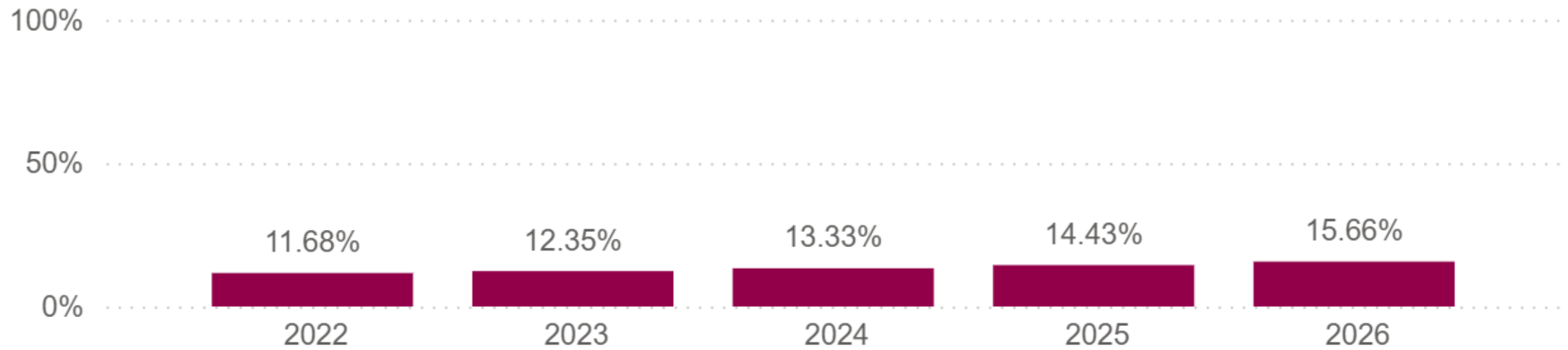
# SY 2025-26, % K-12 SWD by Primary Disability



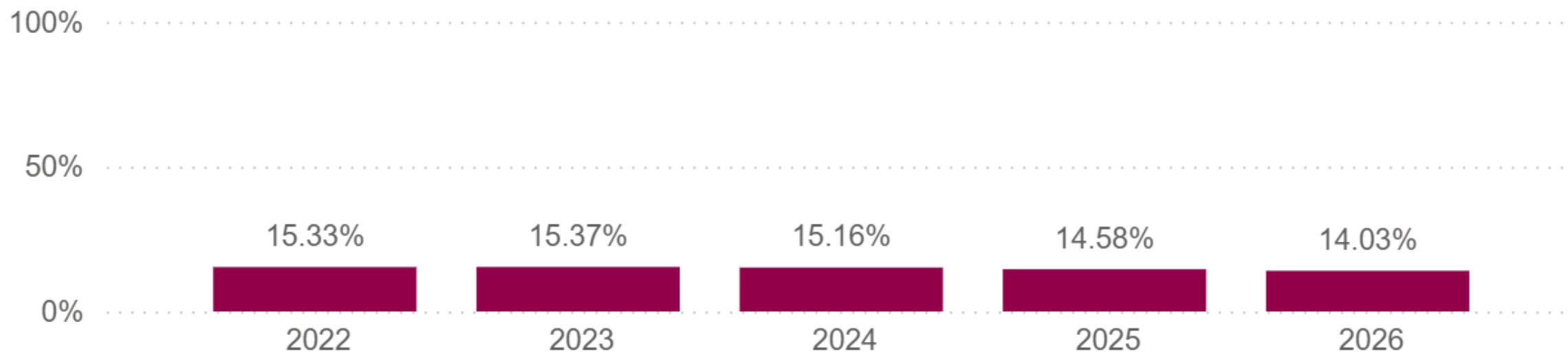
# 5-Year Trend, % K-12 SWD with SLD



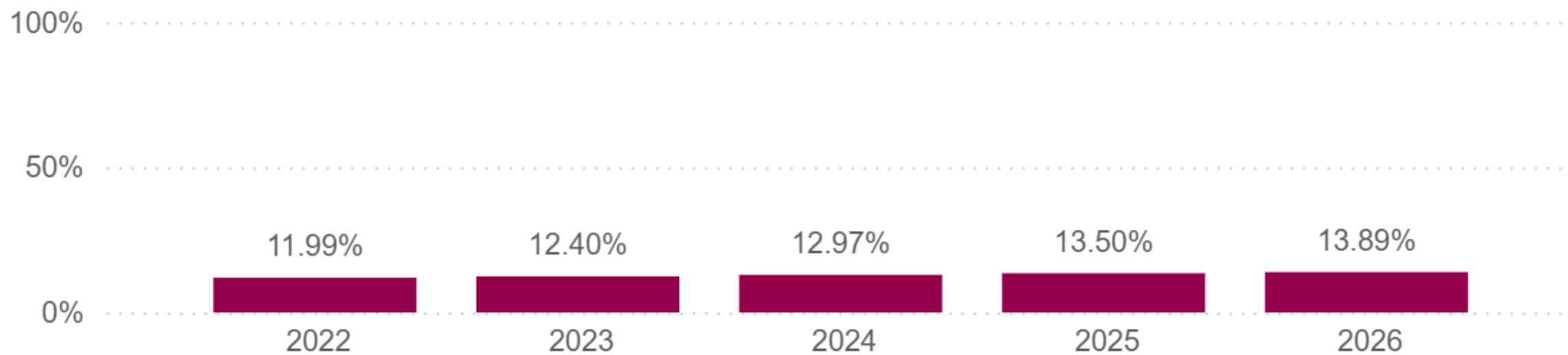
# 5-Year Trend, % K-12 SWD with A



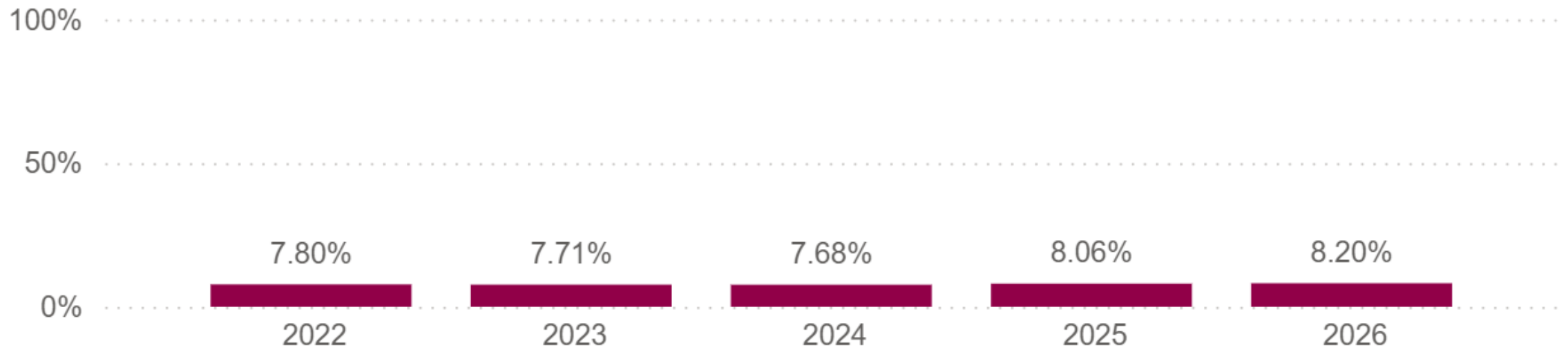
# 5-Year Trend, % K-12 SWD with SLI



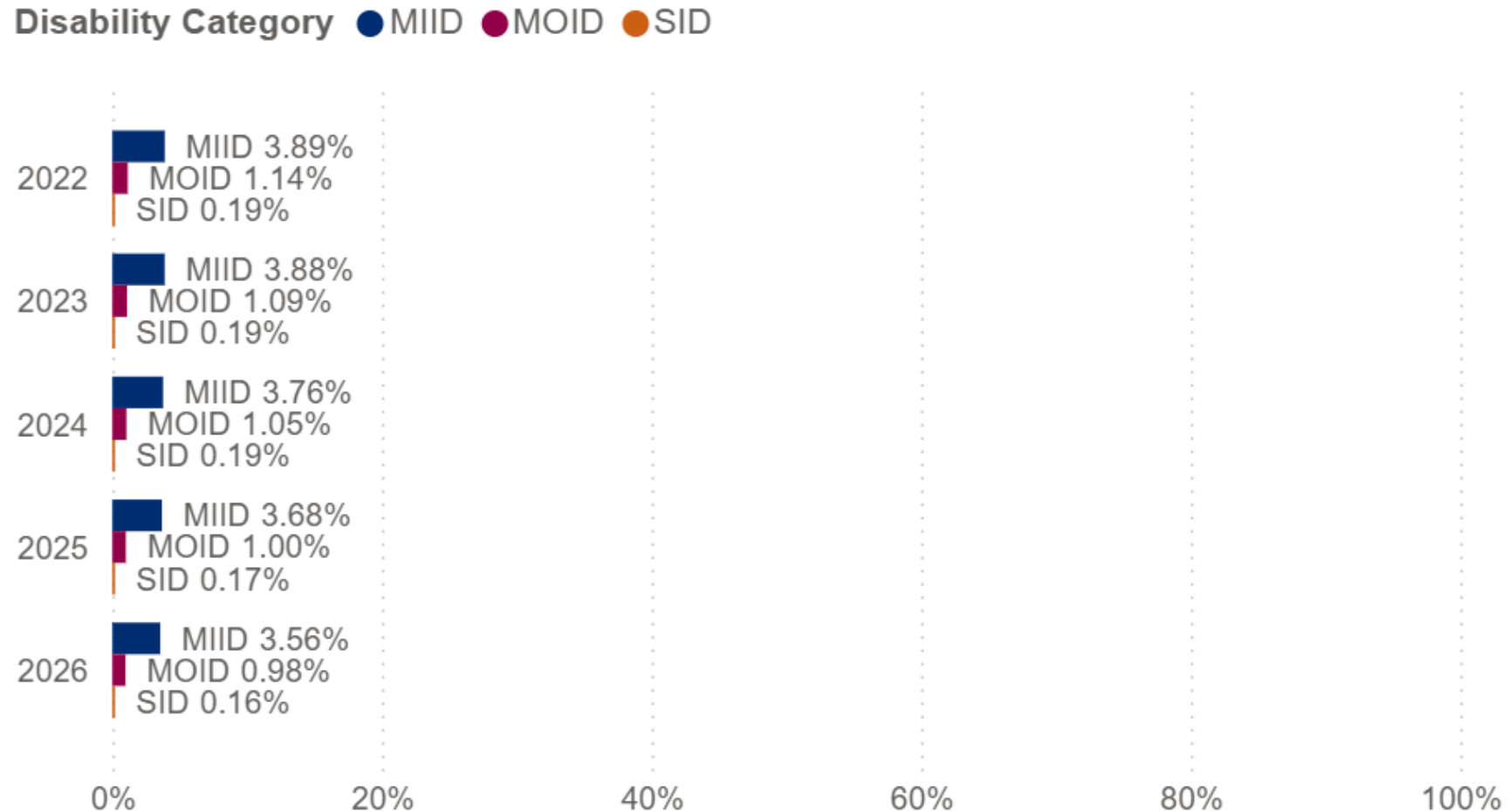
## 5-Year Trend, % K-12 SWD with OHI



# 5-Year Trend, % K-12 SWD with DD

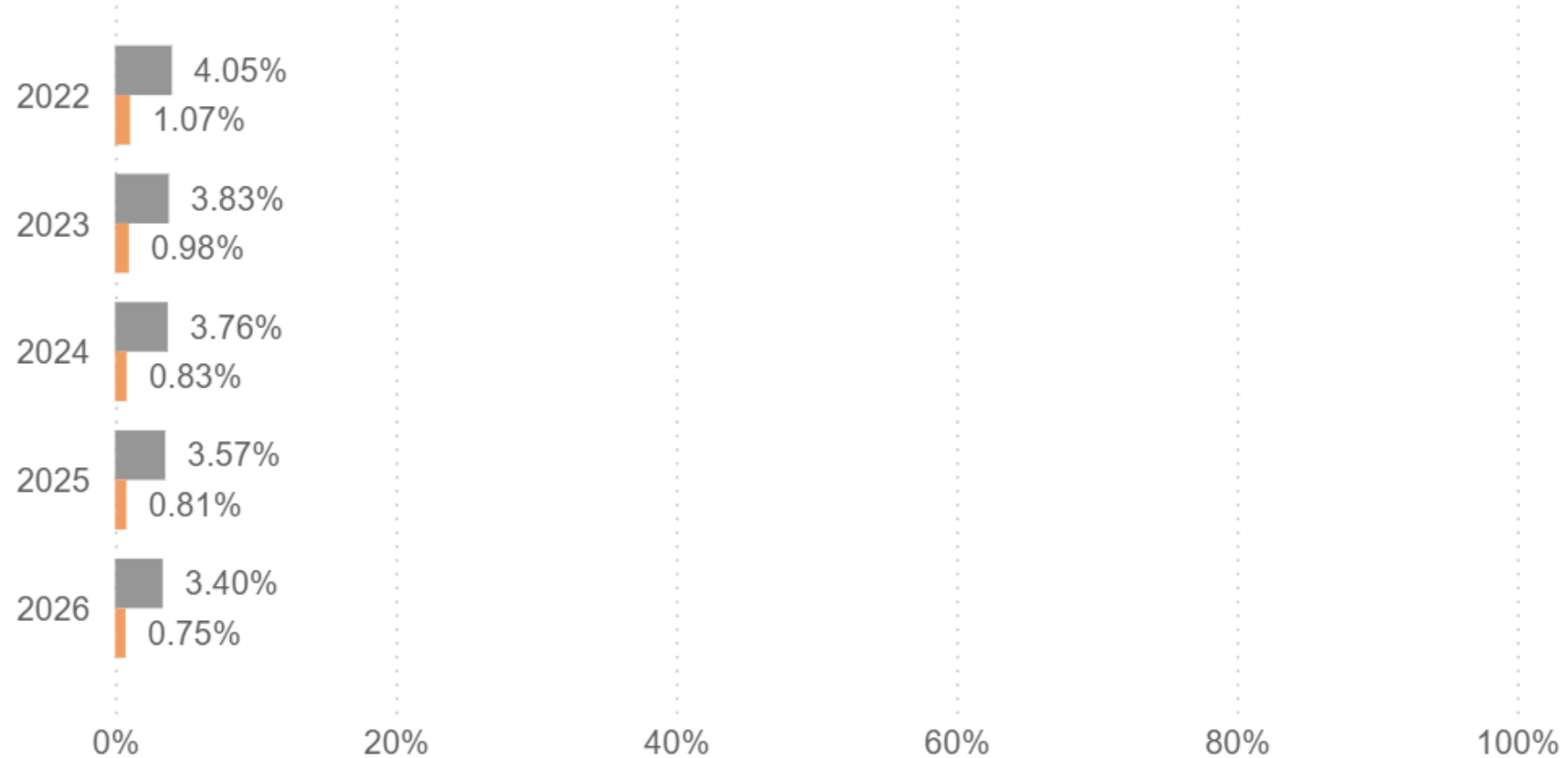


# 5-Year Trend, % K-12 SWD with MIID, MOID, or SID



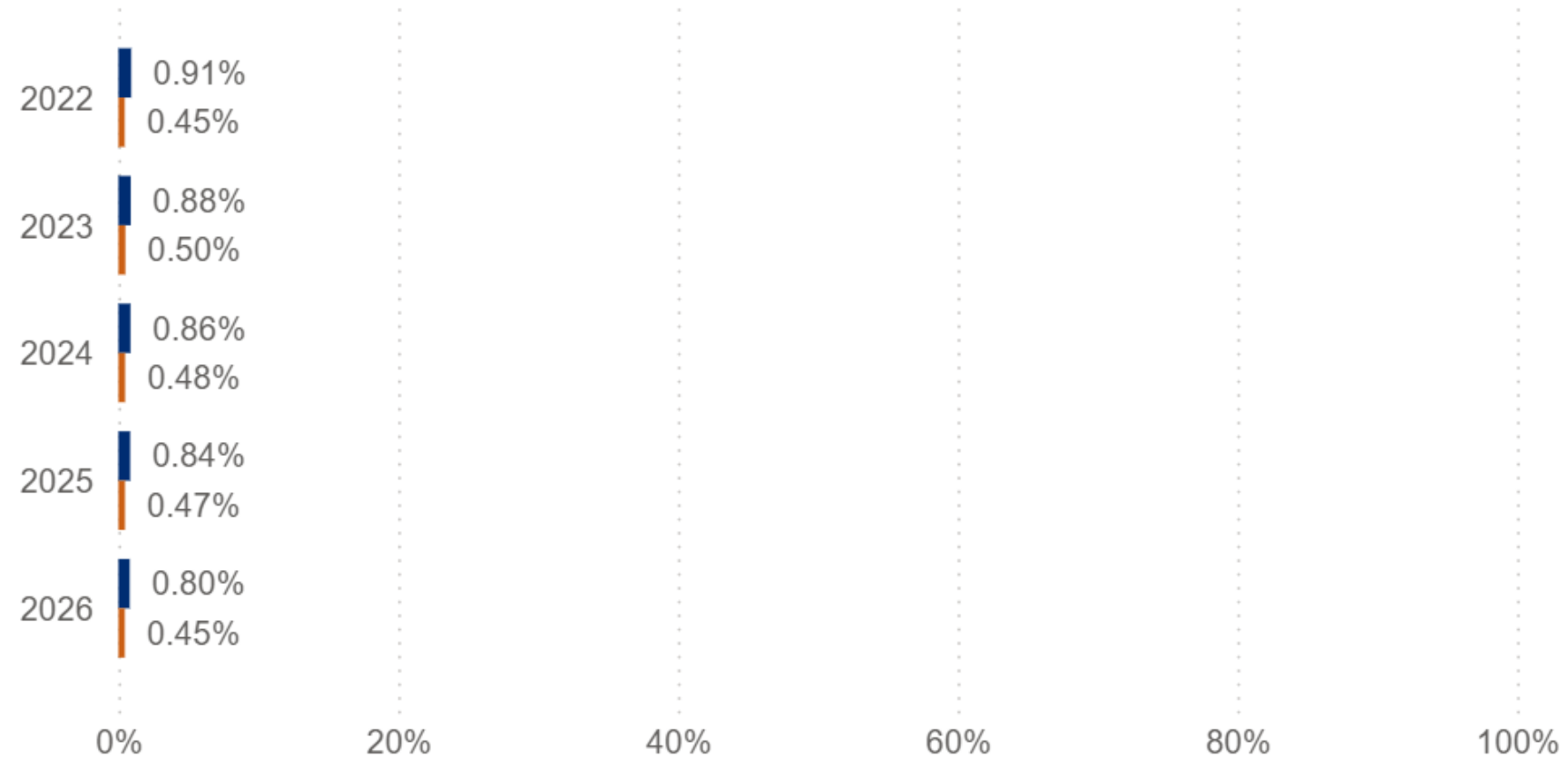
# 5-Year Trend, % K-12 SWD with ED or EDP

Disability Category ● ED ● EDP



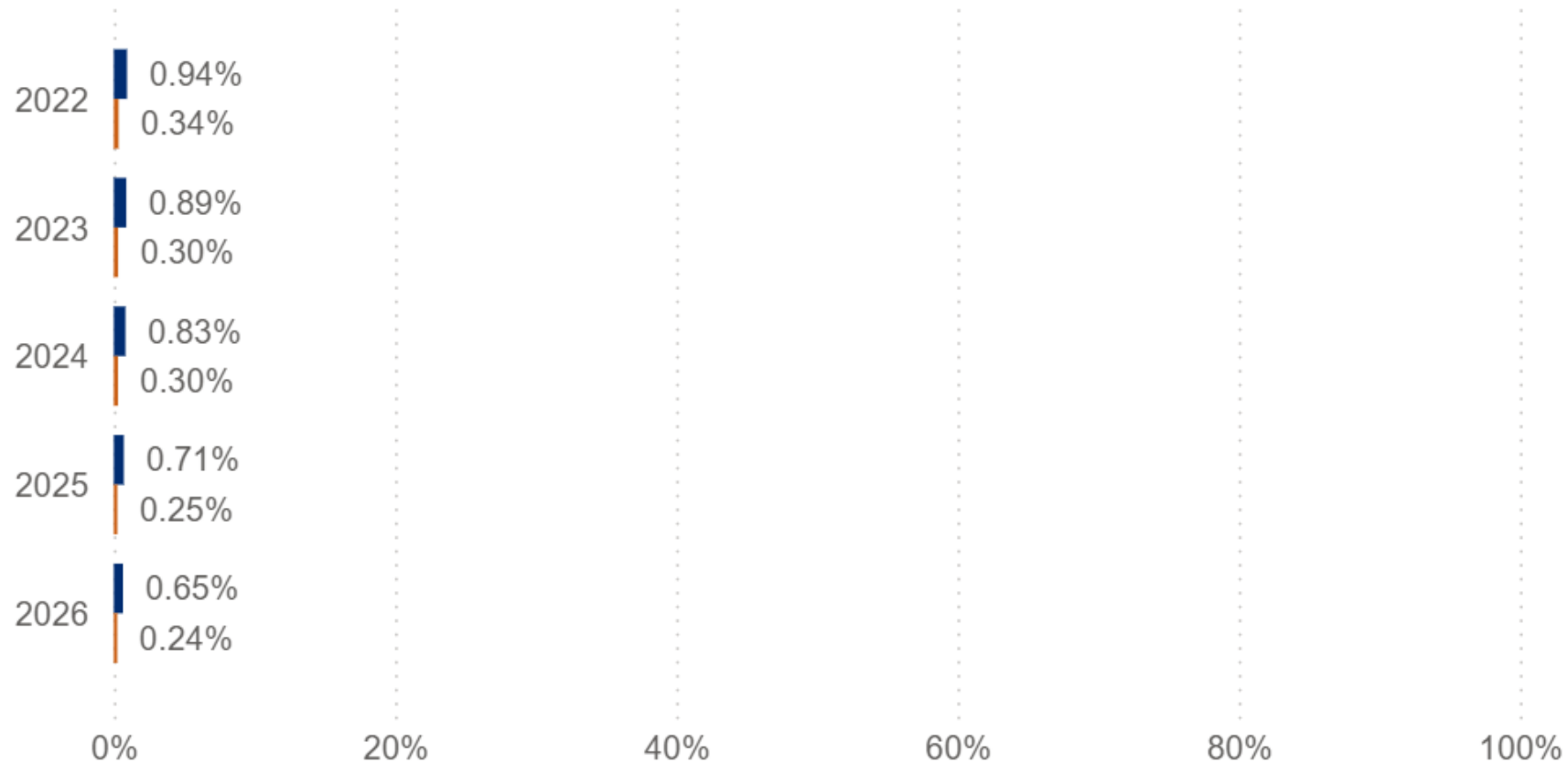
# 5-Year Trend, % K-12 SWD with MD or MDSSI

Disability Category ● MD ● MDSSI



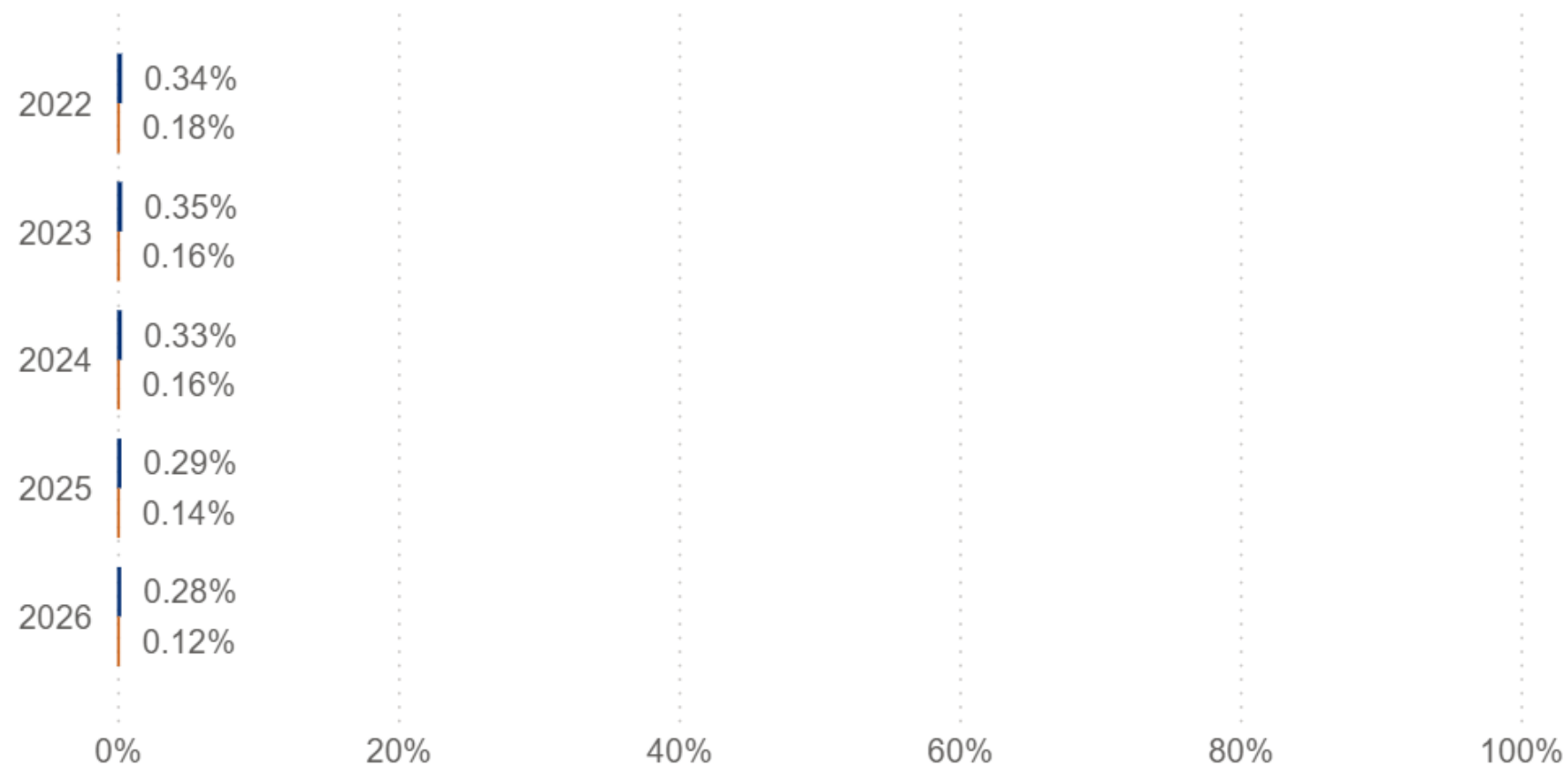
# 5-Year Trend, % K-12 SWD with HI or VI

Disability Category ● HI ● VI

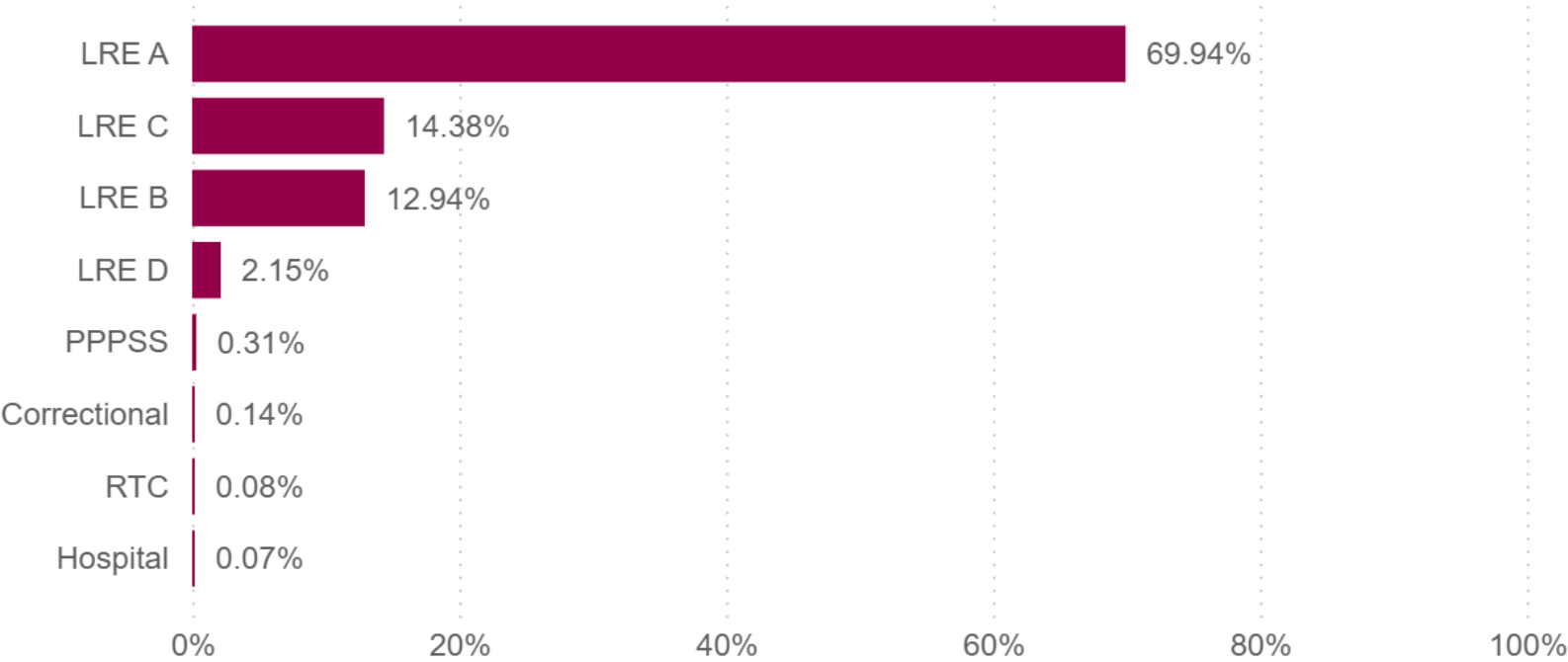


# 5-Year Trend, % K-12 SWD with OI or TBI

Disability Category ● OI ● TBI



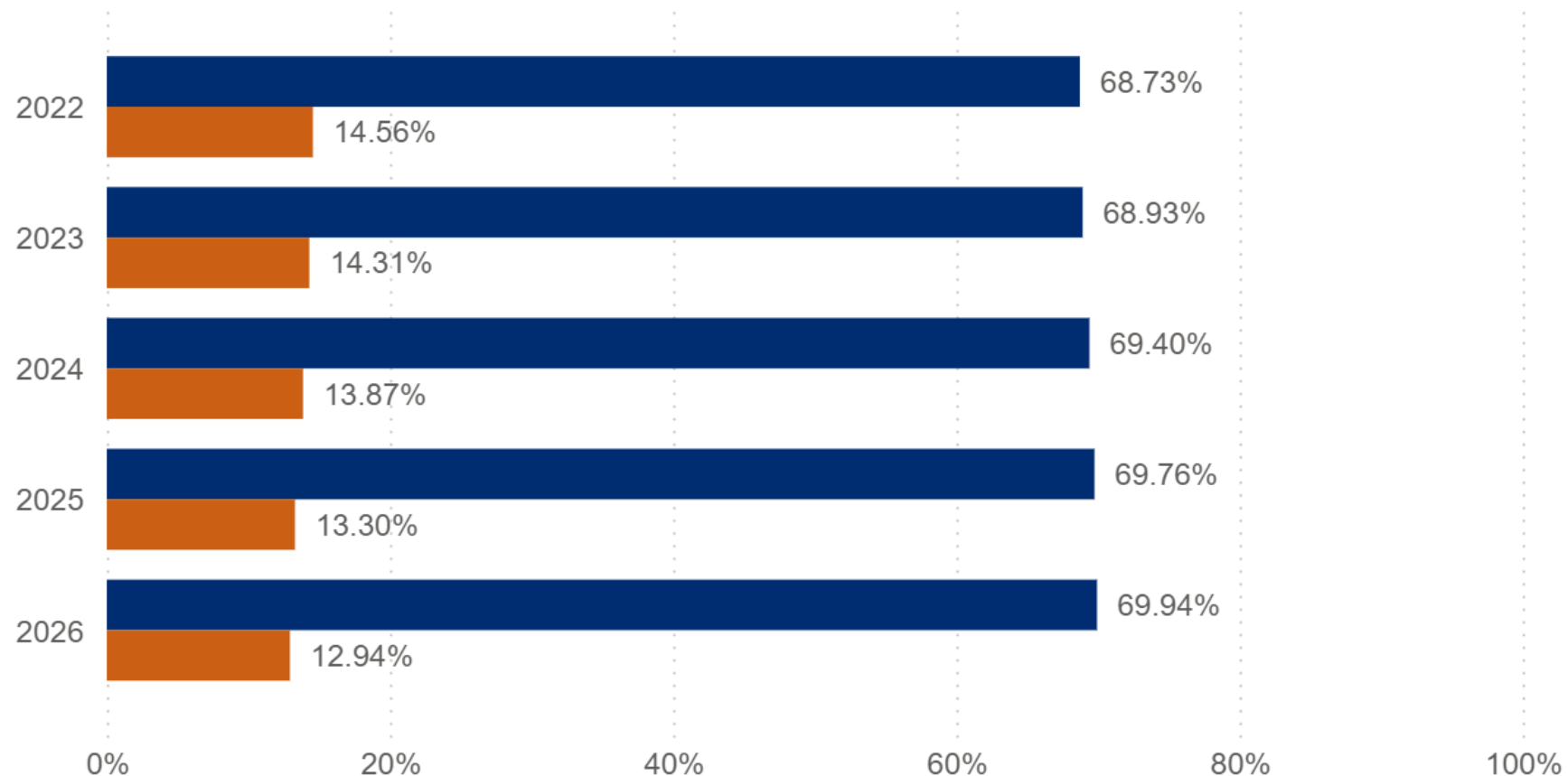
# SY 2025-26, K-12 SWD by Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)



|              | SPED Count |
|--------------|------------|
| LRE A        | 103,818    |
| LRE C        | 21,341     |
| LRE B        | 19,205     |
| LRE D        | 3,188      |
| PPPSS        | 456        |
| Correctional | 213        |
| RTC          | 117        |
| Hospital     | 109        |

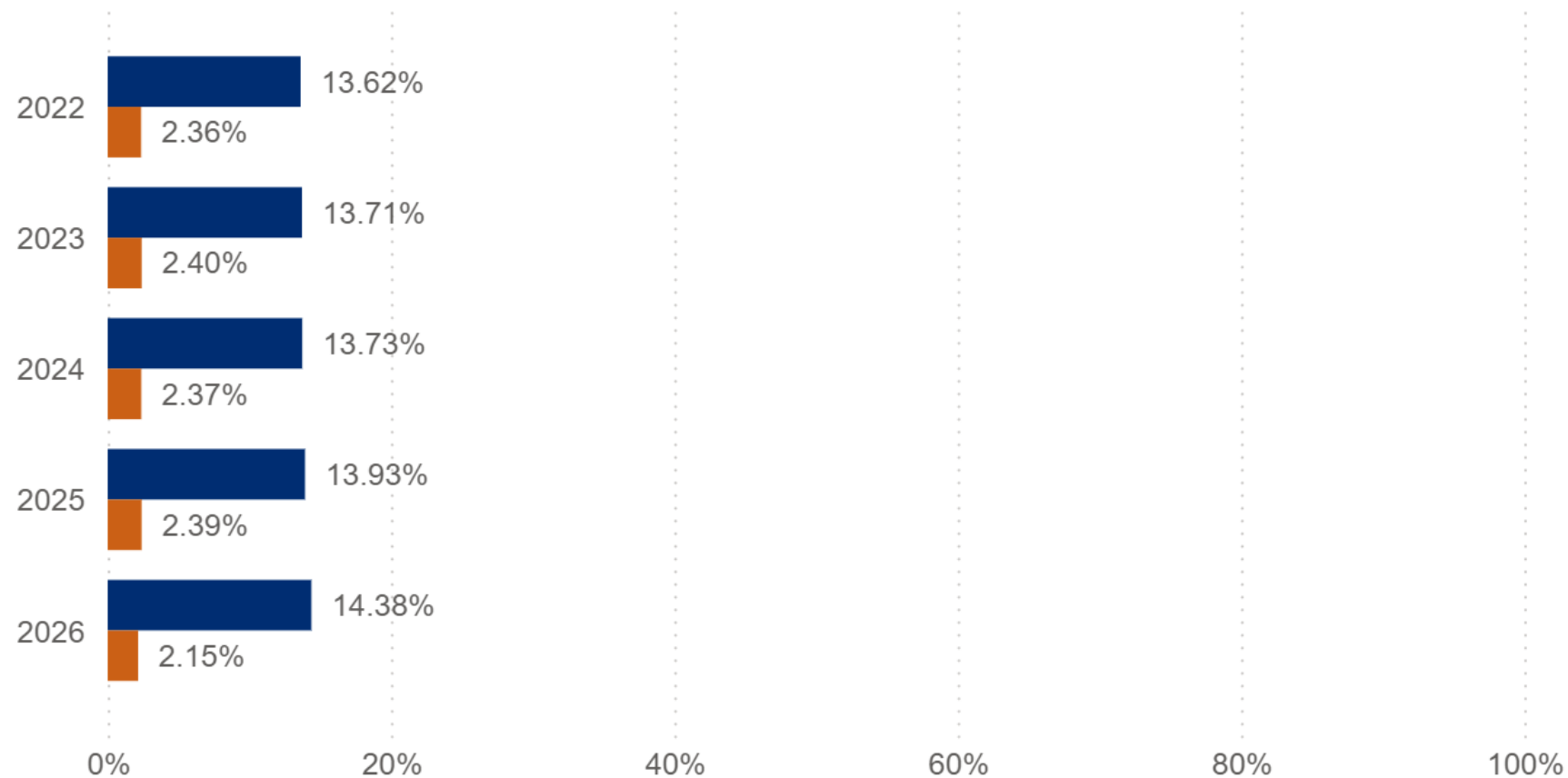
# 5-Year Trend, % K-12 SWD in LRE A or B

LRE ● LRE A ● LRE B

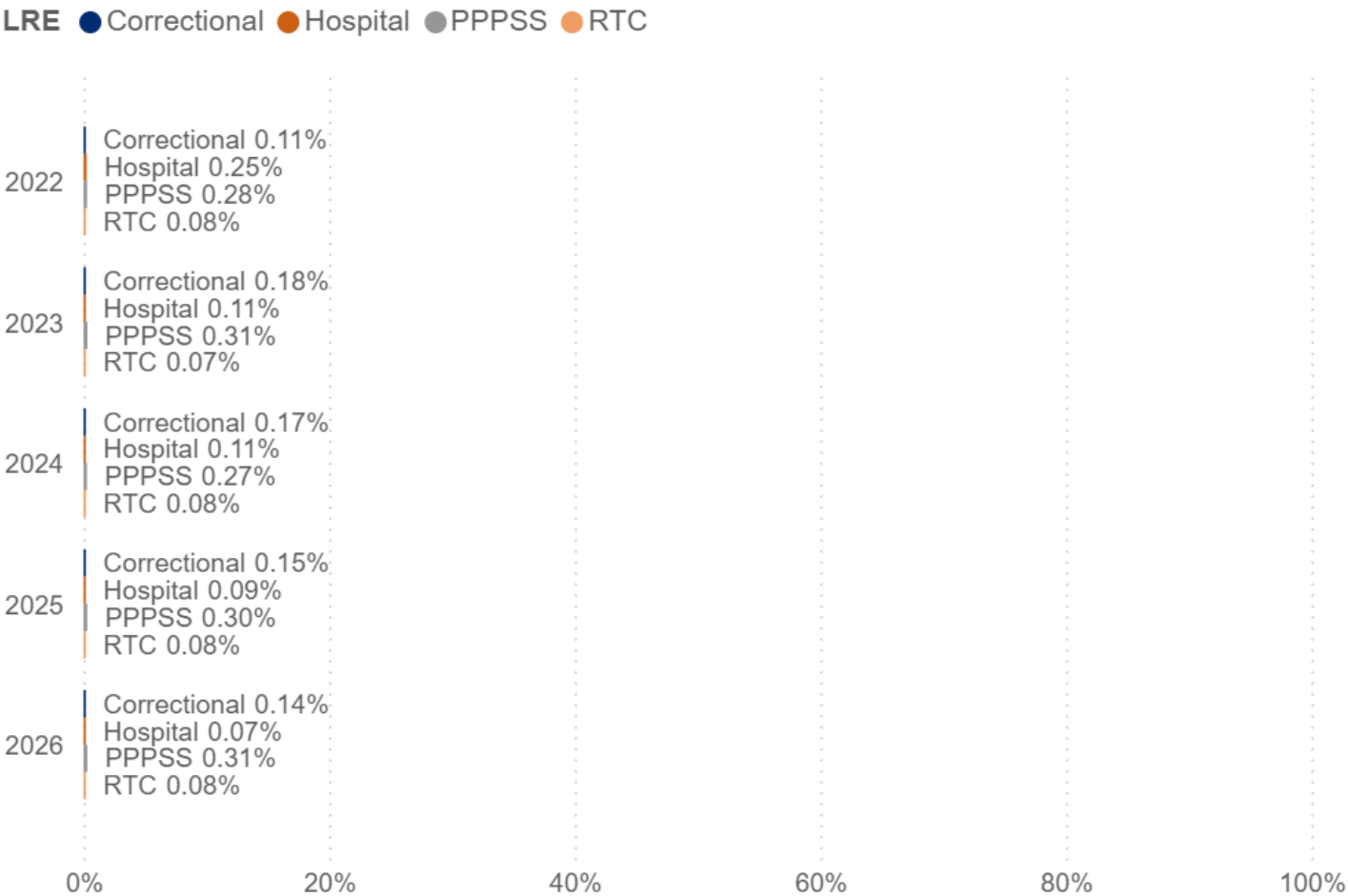


# 5-Year Trend, % K-12 SWD in LRE C or D

LRE ● LRE C ● LRE D



# 5-Year Trend, % K-12 SWD in PPPSS, Hospitals, Correctional Facilities, or RTCs



# Where is the growth occurring? K-12

| Disability Category  | 2022           | 2026           | Change         |
|----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Autism               | 16,085         | 23,247         | +7,162         |
| OHI                  | 16,511         | 20,621         | +4,110         |
| DD                   | 10,737         | 12,167         | +1,430         |
| SLD                  | 54,562         | 54,655         | +93            |
| MDSSI                | 613            | 675            | +62            |
| All other categories |                |                | -1,997         |
| <b>Total Counts</b>  | <b>137,587</b> | <b>148,447</b> | <b>+10,860</b> |

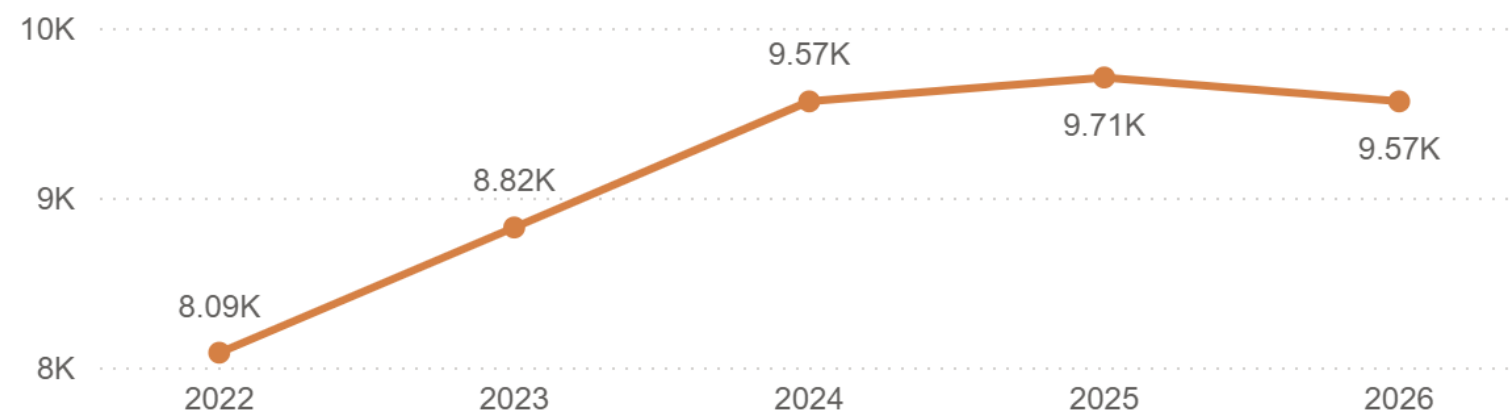


# Preschool Special Education Trend Data

## 5-Year Trend for Children with Disabilities (CWD)

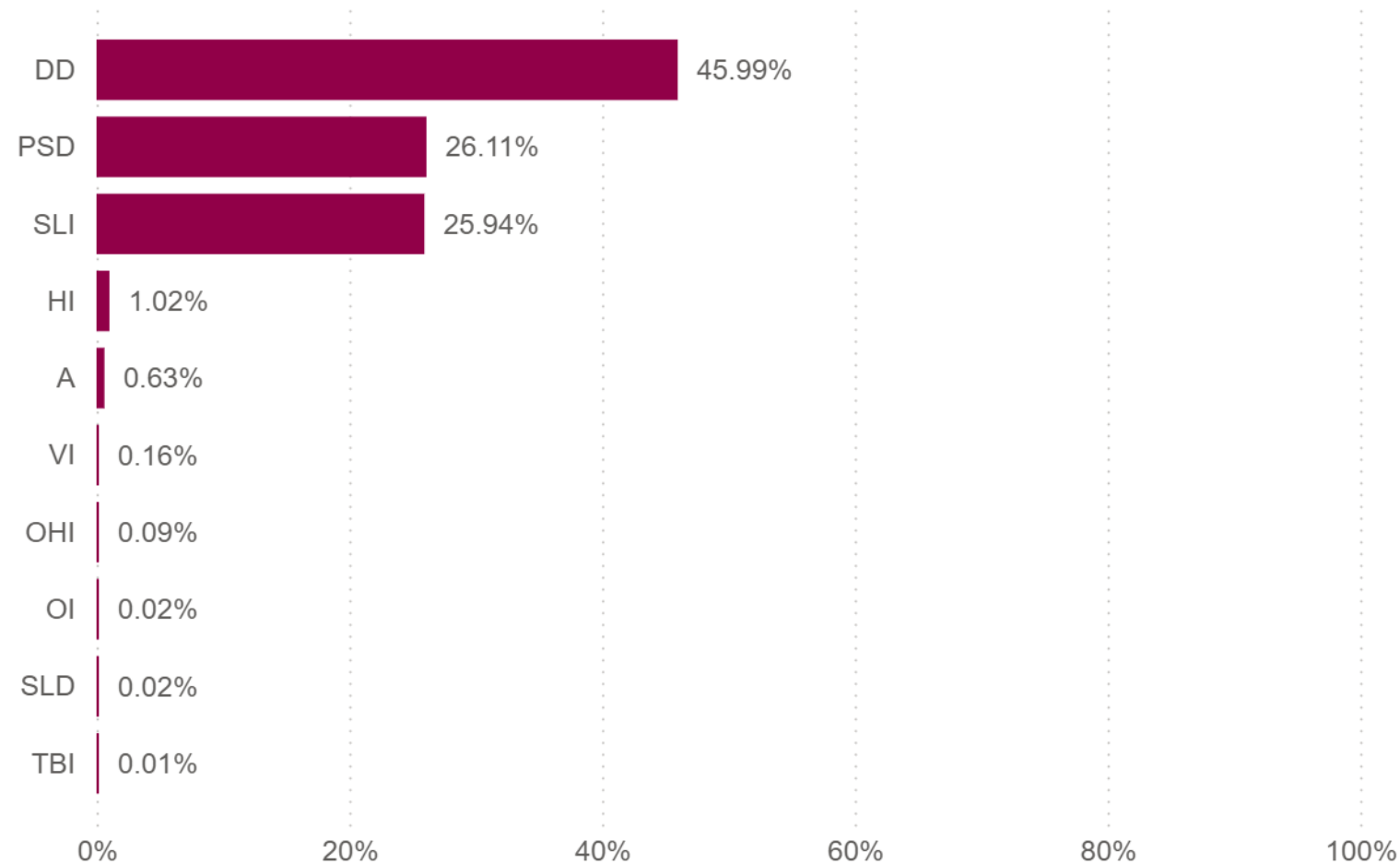
### SY 2025-26

# 5-Year Trend, Count of Preschool CWD

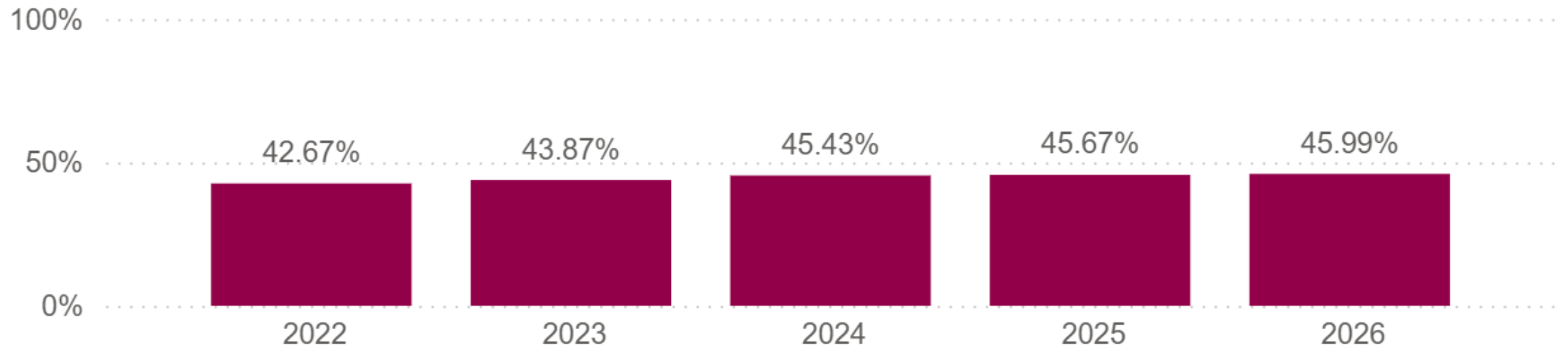


| Fiscal Year | SPED PS |
|-------------|---------|
| 2026        | 9,567   |
| 2025        | 9,708   |
| 2024        | 9,567   |
| 2023        | 8,824   |
| 2022        | 8,086   |

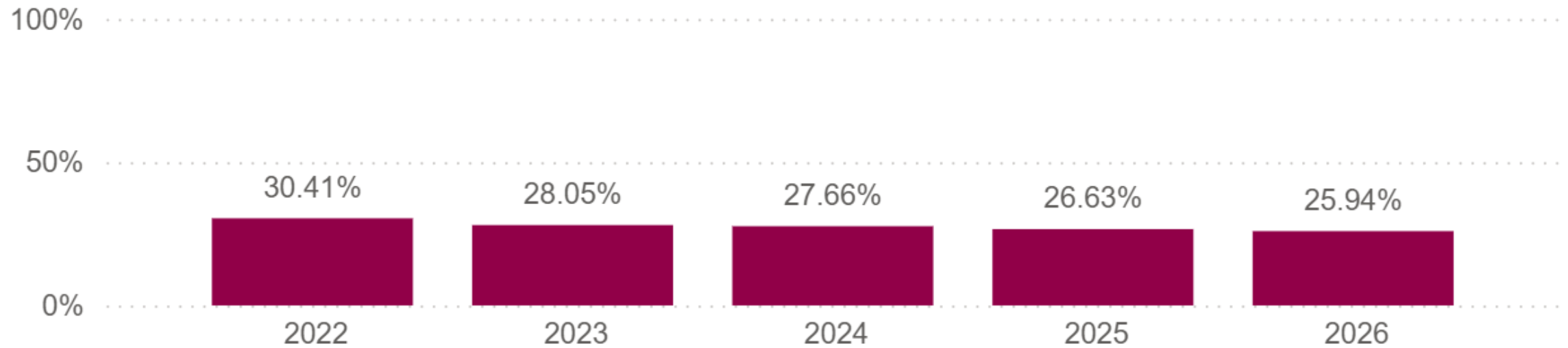
# SY 2025-26, % Preschool CWD by Primary Disability Category



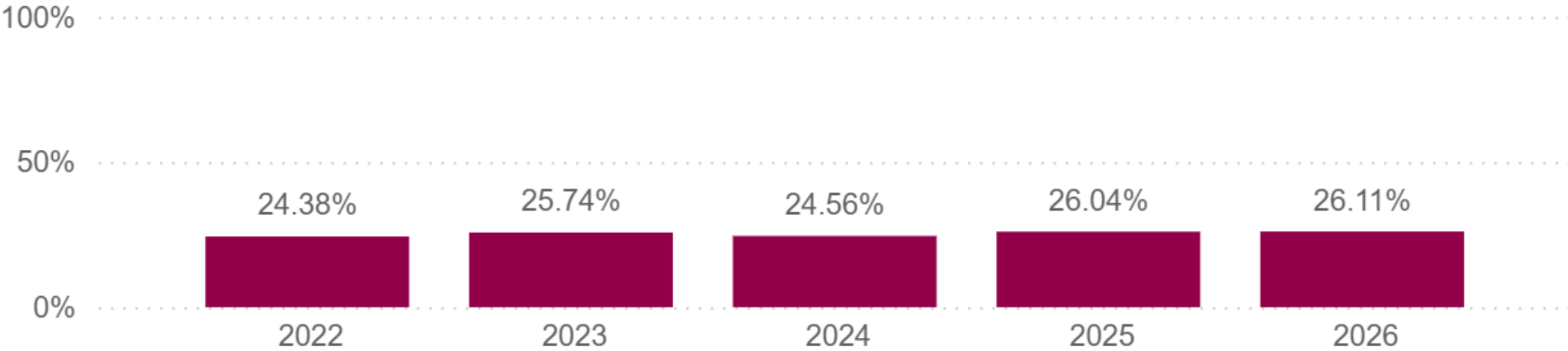
# 5-Year Trend, % Preschool CWD with DD



## 5-Year Trend, % Preschool CWD with SLI

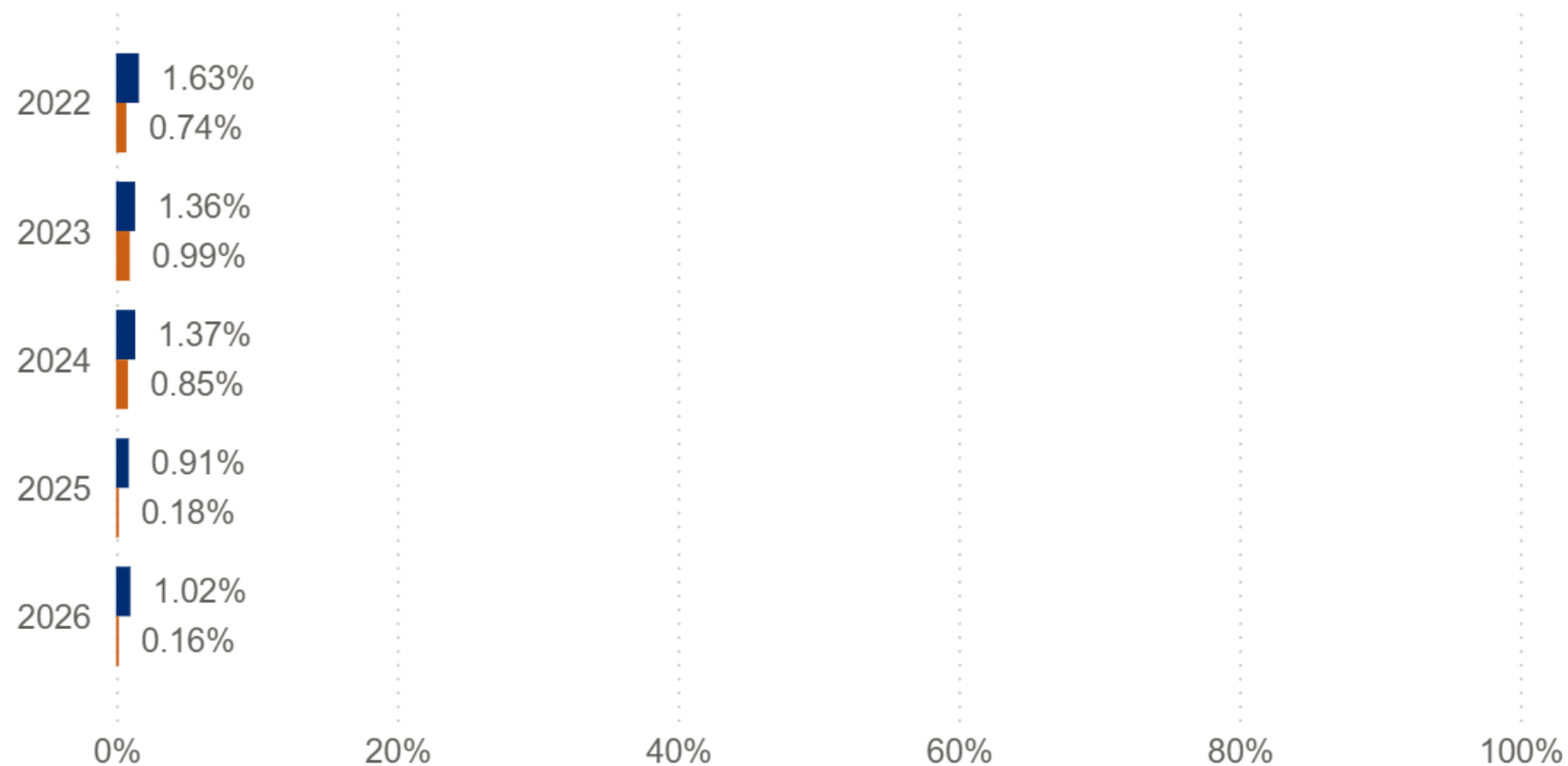


# 5-Year Trend, % Preschool CWD with PSD

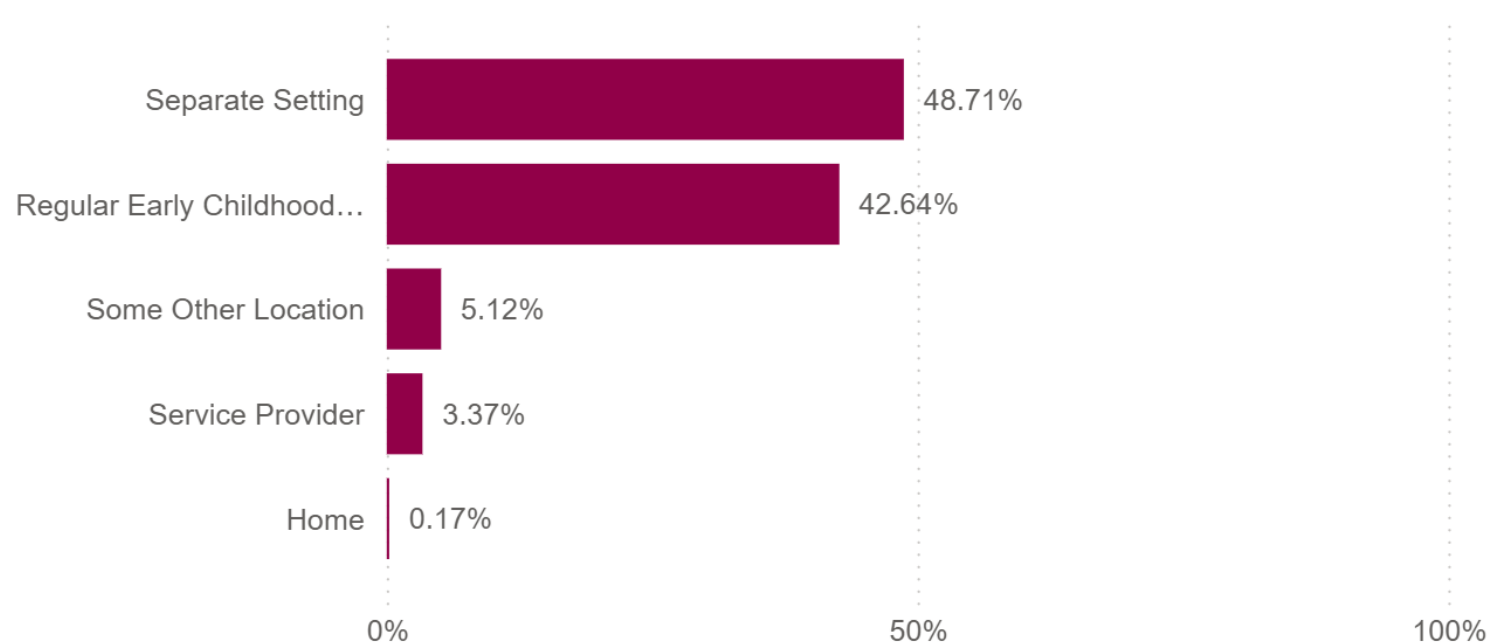


# 5-Year Trend, % Preschool CWD with HI or VI

Disability Category ● HI ● VI

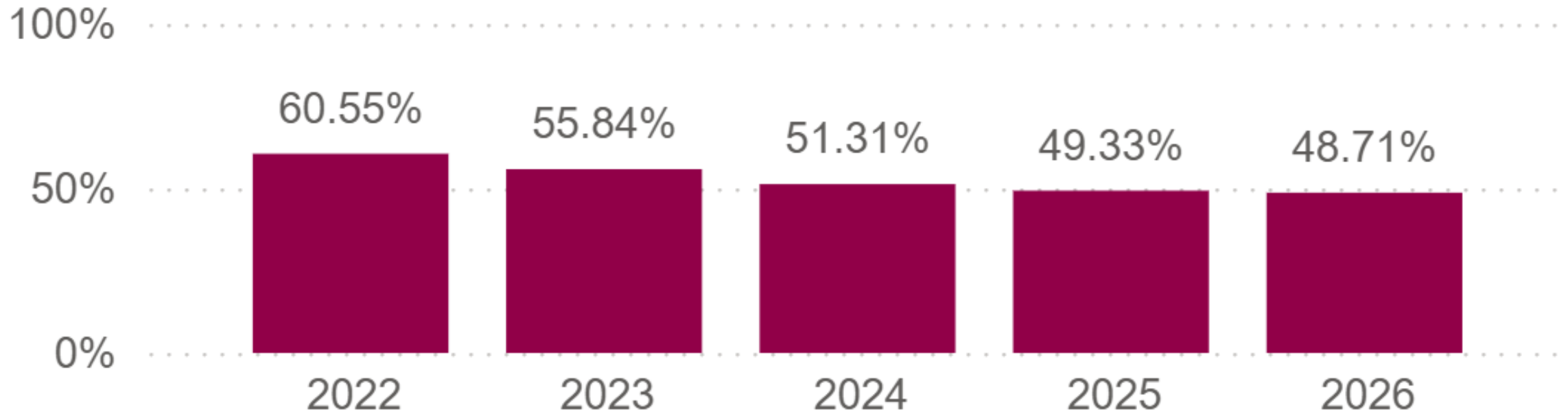


# SY 2025-26, Preschool CWD by LRE

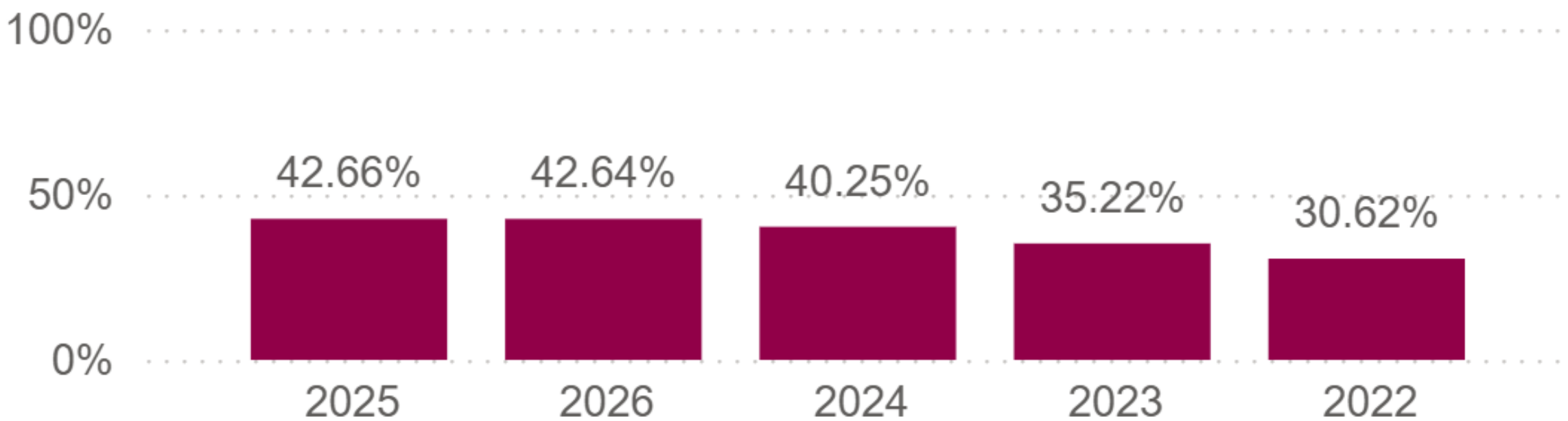


|                                        | SPED Count |
|----------------------------------------|------------|
| Separate Setting                       | 4,660      |
| Regular Early Childhood Program (RECP) | 4,079      |
| Some Other Location                    | 490        |
| Service Provider                       | 322        |
| Home                                   | 16         |

## 5-Year Trend, % Preschool CWD in a Separate Setting

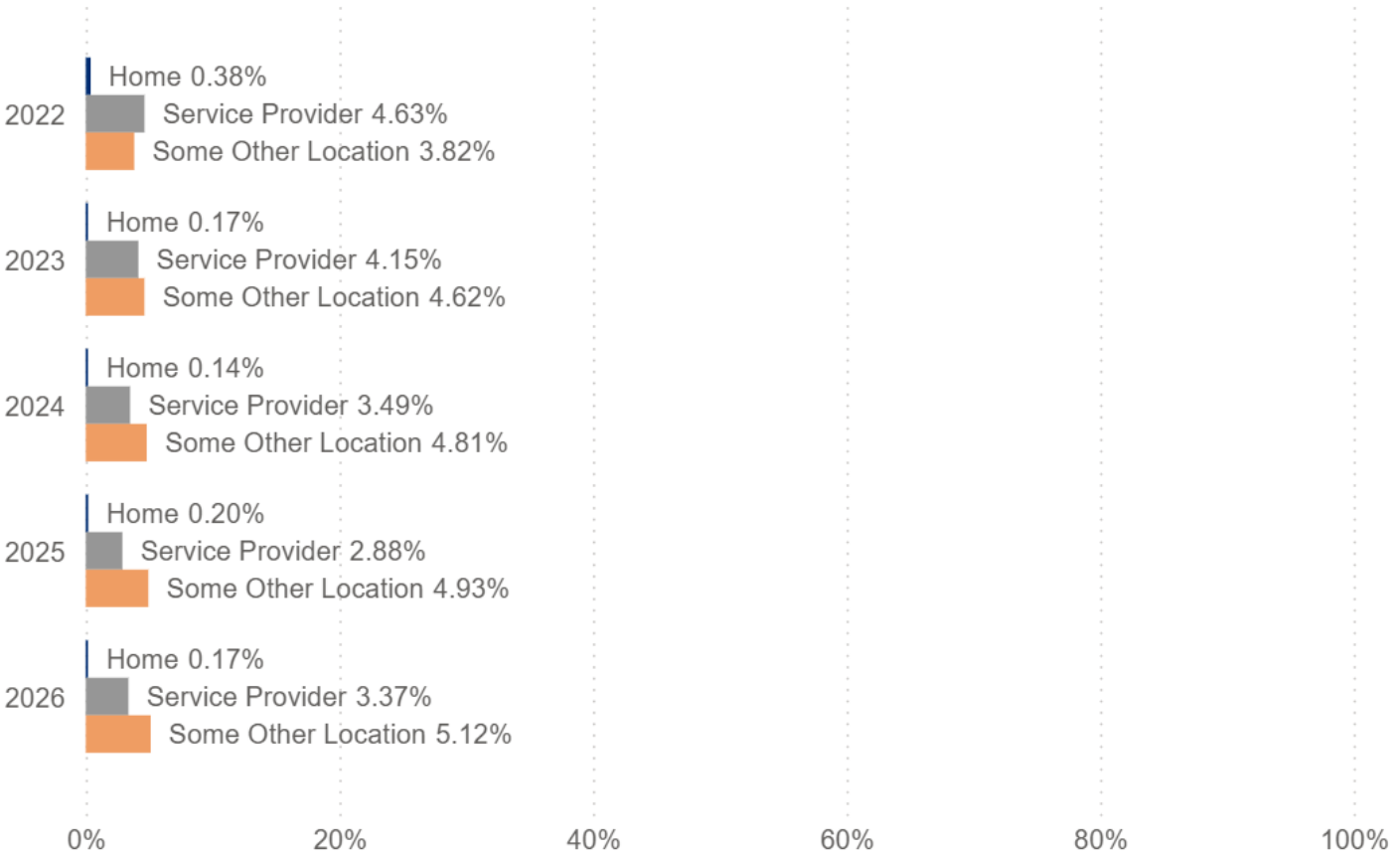


# 5-Year Trend, % Preschool CWD in Regular Early Childhood Program



# 5-Year Trend, % Preschool CWD in Some Other Location, Service Provider, or at Home

LRE ● Home ● Service Provider ● Some Other Location



# Where is the growth occurring?

## Preschool

| Disability Category | 2022         | 2026         | Change        |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| DD                  | 3,450        | 4,400        | +950          |
| PSD                 | 1,971        | 2,498        | +527          |
| A                   | 0            | 60           | +60           |
| SLI                 | 2,459        | 2,482        | +23           |
| OHI, OI, SLD, TBI   | 0            | 14           | +14           |
| HI & VI             | 192          | 113          | -79           |
| <b>Total Counts</b> | <b>8,072</b> | <b>9,567</b> | <b>+1,495</b> |

# PS and K-12

| Disability Category | 2022 PS      | 2026 PS      | Change        |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| DD                  | 3,450        | 4,400        | +950          |
| PSD                 | 1,971        | 2,495        | +527          |
| A                   | 0            | 60           | +60           |
| SLI                 | 2,459        | 2,482        | +23           |
| OHI, OI, SLD, TBI   | 0            | 14           | +14           |
| HI & VI             | 192          | 113          | -79           |
| <b>Total Counts</b> | <b>8,072</b> | <b>9,567</b> | <b>+1,495</b> |

| Disability Category  | 2022 K-12      | 2026 K-12      | Change         |
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## Contact Us

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# Questions