



Division of Accountability & Research

Licensed Staff Climate Survey Executive Summary 2009

Research has shown that the professional climate of an organization influences its outcomes. Climate can be defined as behaviors within a workplace or learning environment that can influence whether an individual feels personally safe, listened to, valued and treated fairly and with respect. In order to help evaluate the professional climate in the Aurora Public Schools as perceived by employees, a survey was administered to the licensed staff in January of 2009.

Methodology

A 48 item climate survey was presented to all APS licensed staff in January 2009. The survey questions were originally developed in the spring of 2007 by a volunteer group of teachers, administrators and professional/technical staff in conjunction with the Aurora Education Association. For 2009, six additional questions were added to the survey in order to provide perception data on several VISTA 2010 initiatives. At the time of the survey, 2,047 licensed staff were employed by APS. A total of 1,775 staff completed the survey for a completion rate of 87%.

The items that are new in the 2009 survey include:

- 1) District administration/supervisors share the information I need to perform my job – was split into two questions asking about the district administration and supervisors separately.
- 2) I understand the roles and responsibilities of the APS Board of Education.
- 3) There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within APS – was split into two questions asking about: a) trust and respect between administrators and staff and b) trust and respect among teachers in the building.
- 4) I am kept informed of the buildings school improvement plan.
- 5) Rules for student conduct are consistently enforced – was split into two questions asking about: a) enforced by administration and b) enforced by teaching staff.
- 6) I believe the level of support for library media programs and other areas of special interest has increased in my building.

In addition to new items, eight questions were reworded slightly to provide clarification based on staff feedback from the 2008 survey.

Summary of Results

Results of the survey are grouped into six areas:

- Clarity of Purpose
- Communication
- Trust and Respect
- Work Environment
- Morale
- Support for Programs

Responses were analyzed both at the district and school levels. In addition to agreement/disagreement percents, changes to percents are reported by question for differences from the previous survey of greater than or equal to 5%.

Clarity of Purpose. For clarity of purpose of work, agreement percents continued to be the highest for all areas of the survey. Staff responded positively that they understood the long-term vision of APS (87% agreed) and that they support the educational direction of APS (72% agreed; +11%). In addition staff responded that they know how their work relates to the district's goals and priorities as stated in the VISTA 2010 Strategic Plan (76% agreed) but were less certain in their response to believing that APS has set a clear direction for improving student achievement (64% agreed, 17% neutral).

Communication. Agreement rates changed from +2.8% to -8.8% for internal communication in APS. This area overlaps with trust and respect, and is still noted as a general area of challenge with less than 50% agreeing with the statements, "I am encouraged to provide district level suggestions on ways to improve programs or services" (39% agreed, -9%; 38% disagreed) and "I am comfortable in stating my opinions about APS programs even if I disagree with an approach being taken" (34% agreed; 48% disagreed). Staff agreed more often with the statement, "Administrators and supervisors share the information I need to perform my job" (66% agreed) and "Performance evaluations are fair in my school" (66% agreed).

Trust and Respect. Trust and respect was an area of the survey that recorded significant improvement in agreement rates (3.1% to 28.5%). Regarding an overall atmosphere of trust and mutual respect, 57% (+14%) agreed that there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect between building administrators and staff at their school and 71% agreed there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect among teachers in their building. These questions both use the single question about trust and climate in the building from 2008 as their baseline percent. For trust and mutual respect within overall APS, 40% of staff agreed with the statement (+9%; 27% neutral). Staff frequently disagreed that they are able to influence decisions that are made by the district (56% disagreed) but were positive about decisions made at their site (53% agreed, +9%/30% agreed).

Staff provided mixed responses to a question on trusting other staff who make decisions that affect them at the district level (32% disagree/31% neutral/37% agreed) and were more positive on trusting staff who make decisions that affect them at the school (57% agreed, +10%; 26% disagreed). A majority of staff agreed with the statement that they were trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction (68% agreed) and agreed less with the statement “There’s a positive relationship between my association and the district” (59% agreed; 30% neutral).

Work Environment. In the area of work environment, gains in agreement percents were also noted (.6% to 11.0%). The majority of staff responded that they work in a school environment that is clean and well maintained (86% agreed) and that staff work in a school environment that is safe (85% agreed; +11%). Other relative strengths in the area of overall work environment were noted for having sufficient access to instructional materials/resources (75% agreed), having sufficient access to instructional technology (75% agreed; +5%), and receiving both district and building professional development that provided strategies that staff could incorporate into instruction (district 58% agreed/school 64% agreed).

In regard to decision making, more respondents agreed than disagreed that decisions both at the district and school level are based on adequate student data and information (55% agreed; 24% neutral; 22% disagreed for the district: 65% agreed, +8%; 18% neutral; 17% disagreed for school sites). Staff also agreed more often than disagreed that decisions made at their site are based on the best interests of students (60% agreed, +9%) and that they had opportunities to participate in school planning and decision making (71% agreed; +12%).

Mixed responses were noted for schools having an effective process for making group decisions and solving problems (52% agreed, +11%; 26% disagreed). Staff also gave mixed responses to statements that they are empowered to help solve problems (57% agreed, +11%; 25% disagreed), and that there is consistent enforcement of rules for student conduct by administration (57% agreed, +10%; 29% disagreed) and teaching staff (54% agreed, +7%; 28% disagreed).

Morale. Significant improvement in the agreement percents were also seen on statements intended to reflect morale in APS (7% to 11%). These statements included: “I would encourage someone to work for APS” (55% agreed, +7%; 26% were neutral); “I feel appreciated for the work I do” (62% agreed, +8%; 16% were neutral); “There is a spirit of teamwork and cooperation at my site” (64% agreed, +12%; 16% were neutral); and “There is a professional atmosphere for staff working at my site” (75% agreed, +11%; 13% were neutral).

Support for Programs. Five new questions were added to the survey under support for programs in 2008. Overall, a large percentage of respondents answered ‘neutral’ to these questions indicating they either had no opinion or did not believe they had enough information to answer the questions. For the 2009 survey, most of

the questions were changed slightly asking about support for programs at their site. For ELL students and programs in the district, 50% agreed (+13%) that the district has become more effective in meeting the needs of ELL students while 26% responded neutral. At the school level, results were similar, with 53% agreeing (+7%) and 23% responding neutral. For Art programs, significantly more staff agreed (41%, +16%; 37% neutral) that the level of support for the programs has increased. For increased support to Music programs, 41% responded agreed (+18%) and 39% responded neutral. For the Physical Education program, 40% responded neutral and 41% agreed (+12%) that support for the program has increased. For a new question asking about support for library/media/other specialist areas, 41% agreed to increased support and 40% responded neutral.

Conclusions

The perceptions held by all stakeholders can influence school outcomes. It is generally accepted that the opinions and perceptions held by staff have the greatest impact on professional climate. The results presented in this report should be viewed with caution as perceptions (of causes) typically are developed over time and can require a significant period of time to change.

With a third year of the climate survey administration, overall positive change in the perceived climate within APS was noted. Increase in the percent of staff agreeing to statements was recorded for all but four questions. Significant increases (+5%) were noted on 26 of 48 questions. The greatest agreement rates continue to fall in the areas of clarity of purpose, work environment and morale.

While positive aspects of professional climate were reported, there are specific areas of professional climate that continue to need monitoring and follow-up. These include but are not limited to: Trust that staff can state opinions either for or against current policies/programs; trust in the process and in the people who are making both district and school level decisions; empowering staff to be a part of an effective process for making group decisions and problem solving; and consistency in the enforcement of rules for student conduct.