

Department of Accountability and Research
2018-19 Administrative and Professional/Technical Staff Climate Survey



Prepared by:

Peter D. Marle, PhD and
DJ Loerzel, DM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The number of responses this year ($N = 287$) was higher than previous years
 - This year's rate (74.1%) matched the average rate of previous years
- There has been a trend of increasing climate perceptions over the past 3 years
 - The current year reached 67.9% "Positive" responses
 - The Trust subscale had the lowest rate of "Positive" responses
- Administrators reported the highest percentage of "Positive" responses on the *Trust* subscale, followed by Principals, and then Professional / Technical and Assistant Principals
- Respondents with longer lengths of employment within APS had considerably lower rates of agreement (22% lower) on the *Trust* subscale than less tenured employees
 - This same pattern was seen across five other subscales (with the exception being responses on the *Safety* subscale)
- A noticeable momentary 'dip' in *Trust* subscale "Positive" responses was revealed for respondents with about 10 to 11 years of employment in the district
 - Addressing needs of this group of employees may be beneficial towards the overall climate in the district.
 - Other subscales generally had this same pattern
- For *Morale* subscale responses, there was generally no change across years of tenure
 - Again though, a momentary dip was also present for employees with about 10 years of employment within the district
- It may be worth pursuing how to increase trust among district employees
- Recognizing 10-year employees and addressing their needs should help to ameliorate the reported dip in climate perceptions
- The Classified Staff Climate Survey provided some other analyses that may be relevant to both groups of employees.
 - *Communication* and *Work Conditions* subscales were highlighted within four groups of Classified Staff who had shown different patterns of change in responses on the climate survey over the past 8 years.
 - These two subscales were identified as perhaps being the most critical to address for Classified Staff
- Combining results from the two surveys, working toward addressing gaps in communication and creating better work conditions should help to positively impact employee climate perceptions. In addition, increasing trust, especially for Admin/PT employees, should also help. Finally, seeking out the needs of and recognizing employees who have been employed for 10 years in the district should also help long-term employee climate.

Introduction

Most research studies suggest that school climate is positively correlated with academic achievement – that is, aspects of school climate related to safety, teaching and learning, relationship-building capacity, and school environment have been shown to foster greater student achievement when properly cultivated (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). School climate can even be a protective factor for students with less than ideal family environments, moderating the relationship between possible negative burdens the students have and their academics (O'Malley, Voight, Renshaw, & Eklund, 2014), and although it may be perceived differently from one student to the next, climate has been argued to be “a measure of community that is thus reflected in the collective experience of students and their interactions with peers and school adults ... [and] ought to be researched at the school level” (i.e., in a multi-level model research design) (Wang et al., 2014).

Research has also shown that increasing staff climate can have multiple impacts on both staff and students' outcomes.

- Better climate has been linked to increased staff, faculty, and student performance (Freiberg, 1998)
- “Research shows that school climate can affect many areas and people within schools. Consequently, research suggests that positive interpersonal relationships and optimal learning opportunities in all demographic environments can increase school achievement levels and reduce maladaptive behaviors” (McEvoy & Welker, 2000; as cited in Tubbs & Garner, 2008, p. 18)
- Students who attend safe schools are more likely to be academically engaged and are less likely to exhibit problem behaviors such as drug use or violence. Students are less likely to drop out of safe schools (Bekuis, 1995; Bryk & Thum, 1989; Greenberg, Skidmore, & Rhodes, 2004; Osher, Dwyer, & Jimerson, 2005)
- “The organization's climate is reflected in its structures, policies, and practices; the demographics of its membership; the attitudes and values of its members and leaders; and the quality of personal interaction” (Tubbs & Garner, 2008, p. 19)
- “Evaluation is necessarily only one step in an ongoing process of learning and school improvement” (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009, p. 205)

In short, survey measurement and analysis is the beginning of a change process. The safety, challenge, support, and social emotional learning aspects of the survey reported within this paper should be used to provide a meaningful start of a performance management strategy in APS schools.

Administration of the Survey

The questions for the Admin/PT staff survey were originally developed in 2008 with input from the School Executives Association (SEA), staff focus groups, district leadership, and the Division of Accountability and Research. The questions were designed to reflect attitudes related to clarity of vision, communication, morale, program support, trust, and work conditions. This year marked the 11th administration of the Admin/PT Climate Survey. The survey was sent to employees via email from an online survey tool (i.e., Survey Monkey), and reminders were sent weekly for three weeks leading up to winter break. Two new questions were added to the survey last year regarding the APS 2020 Strategic Plan.

In addition, the survey window changed from the spring semester to the fall last year, with the survey opening in November—this year, no major modifications were made to the survey in order to maintain fidelity with the change in the survey window and the changes to the survey from last year. The reason for the change was to provide results from the survey to leadership within the same school year. Although last year experienced a slight dip in the response rate, this was not true of the current year, and thus, the change does not appear to have affected the number of responses. More information about the response rates follows in the ‘Staff Characteristics’ section.

Staff Characteristics

For the current school year, the number of responses was at an all-time high—with 287 employees having taken the survey. However, response rates have fluctuated from year to year. Table 1 presents the response rates from the past seven survey cycles. Of note, for 2012-13, the response rate was particularly high, and calculating the number of employees, given the 96% rate and the 215 responses, it is possible that the rate was calculated differently that year. However, from 2013-14 to the current year, the responses have, generally, fluctuated around the 73-74% average across the 6 years. Another item to note about the employee data is that there has been a steady increase in the number of Admin/PT employees over the past 7 years. This information is graphed in Figure 1, as well.

Table 1. Historic Admin/PT Response Rates from 2012-13 to 2018-19 School Years.

	2012- 13	2013- 14	2014- 15	2015- 16	2016- 17	2017- 18	2018- 19
N Responses	206	220	216	284	271	257	287
N Employees	<u>215*</u>	<u>293*</u>	<u>332*</u>	<u>351*</u>	<u>347*</u>	<u>383*</u>	<u>390</u>
% Response Rate	96%	75%	65%	81%	78%	67%	74%

*Note.** Number of employees for these years was calculated post-hoc from the number of responses and the response rate per each year.

In Figure 1, the top line is the number of employees per school year, and the equation estimates that there has been an increase of about 18 Admin/PT employees per year over the past 6 years. The middle line represents the number of responses, which has increased by about 13 per year. Finally, the bottom line shows the response rate, with a very slight decrease per year (less than .06%) and an average of 73.59% over the past 6 years. For the current year, the response rate matched the 6-year average.

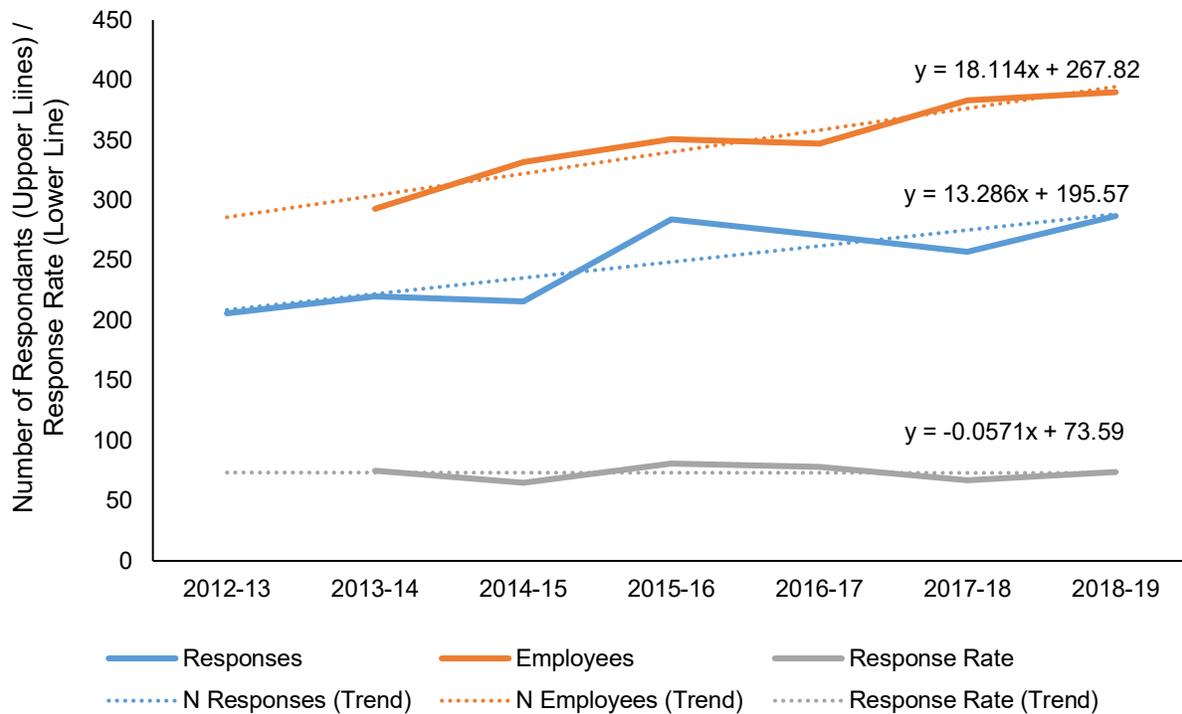


Figure 1. Historic Admin/PT response trends.

Of the 287 respondents, 129 were Professional/Technical (45%), 42 Principals and Assistant Principals (15% each), 64 Administrators (22%), and only 3% of the respondents did not indicate their position. Interestingly, the number of ‘Null’ responses to this item has steadily decreased from 19% in 2014-15 to the current rate of 3%. This might be an indication of a building of trust among the employees and leadership. In other words, with fewer employees feeling the need to skip this item, it may be in relation to a greater feeling of trust that their responses are indeed confidential.

The distribution of respondents regarding how many years they have been in APS is similar to that of last year. With about 30% of employees in the district for up to 3 years (15.5% each for first year and 2-3 year employees), with 22.6% being in the district for 4-6 years, 15.5% for 7-10 years, 26.8% for 11-20 years, and 4.5% reported being in the district for 20 or more years. However, for the current year, one slight alteration was made to this item, allowing for a more detailed analysis of the distribution of the respondents' tenure. Instead of providing a pre-selected tenure grouping (e.g., 2-3 years, 4-6 years, 7-10 years), participants were asked to just state how long they have been in APS. The distribution of respondents is illustrated in Figure 2. With this change, the average tenure of respondents also could be ascertained ($M = 8.14$ years, $SD = 6.65$), as well as the median (6 years)—further indicating the expected skew that can be seen in Figure 2.

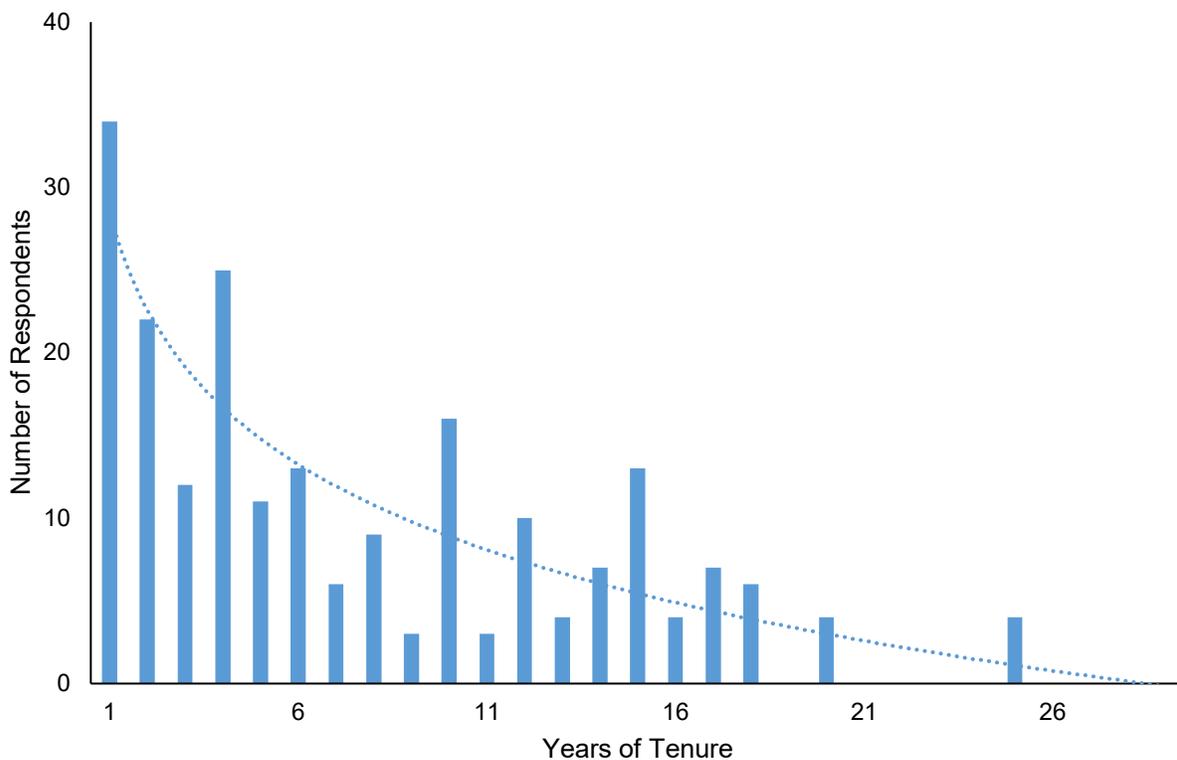


Figure 2. Respondents' years of tenure. Note that any column with only one response has been masked to protect confidentiality. This also does not include non-responses to this item ($n = 67$)

Survey Results

In line with last year’s results, a declining trend of overall responses of “Strongly Disagree” or “Disagree” was continued in the current year. In 2016-17, the overall percentage of these negative responses was 24.2%, which decreased to 18.2% last year, and this year’s rate was 14.4%. Further, the overall percentage of positive responses has been increasing over the past 3 years. In 2016-17, the percentage of positive responses was 56.0%, increasing to 62.0% last year, and reaching 67.9% this year. In other words, negative responses are down about 10% and positive responses are up about 12% over the past three school years.

For most of the Admin/PT Climate Survey subscales, this trend was also apparent (see Figure 3). With the exception of the *Safety* subscale, all other subscales have increased over the past three school years. There are two additional points to note from the figure below. First, although *Safety* subscale scores decreased over the past three school years, it still has the highest agreement percentage, compared with the rest of the subscales. Second, although scores on the *Trust* subscale have been increasing over the past three years, it has the lowest agreement percentage. Additionally, the agreement rates within the Trust subscale have historically fluctuated more than any other subscale. Further analysis within this subscale also follows.

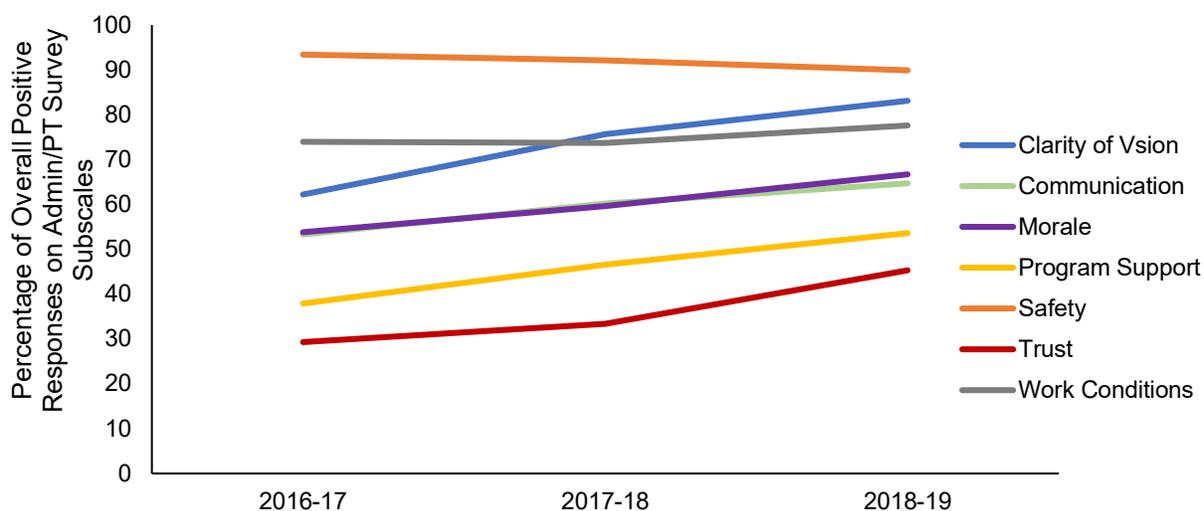


Figure 3. Changes in the percentage of positive responses on the seven Admin/PT Climate Survey subscales.

Because the Trust subscale was continually rated the lowest out of the seven subscales, further analyses of this subscale was conducted, investigating differences in position and tenure. Figure 4 shows positive Trust response percentages over the past 7 years for each of the four Admin/PT positions. In general, Administrators have higher Trust subscale responses than Assistant Principals, Principals, and Professional /

Technical employees over the past three years. Additionally, the figure below illustrates a decline in *Trust* subscale “Positive” responses starting in the 2013-14 school year, with a low point in 2016-17, and increasing again to the current school year. It should be noted that a similar trend was found across all seven subscales for the past 7 years, although the focus here is only on the *Trust* subscale. The data in Figures 3 and 4 suggest that the direction and leadership in the district has had a positive impact over the past three school years, and efforts should be made to sustain this momentum.

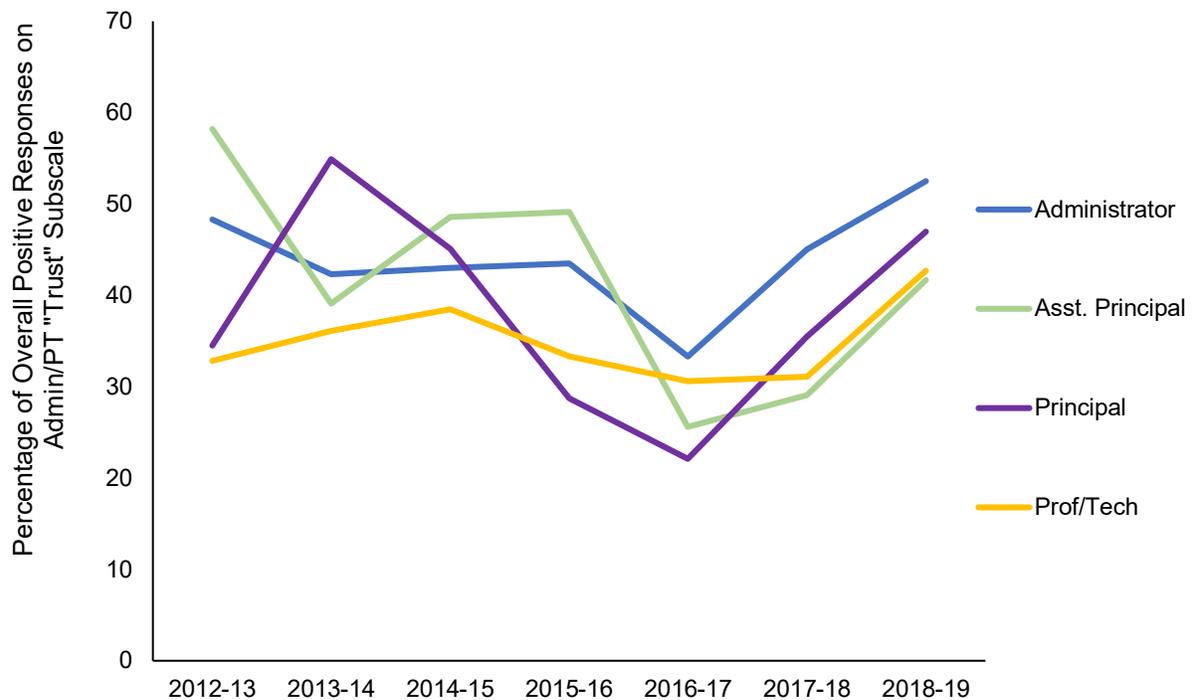


Figure 4. Positive responses of the Trust subscale across seven school years and four Admin/PT positions.

Another relevant component of further investigating the *Trust* subscale is that of tenure. Because the tenure data is skewed, comprised of more employees with less tenure, a median split of this variable was used for analysis in Figure 5. Thus, Figure 5 shows the same positions as in Figure 4, but separated by whether the employees have been with APS for 1 to 6 years or for 7 or more years. In general, a similar pattern (as in Figure 4) emerges. However, particularly in recent years, the two tenure groups (i.e., 1-6 years and 7+ years) are clustered together, with employees with 7 or more years of tenure positively responding to the *Trust* subscale items about 22% less than employees with less tenure. In other words, employees with 1 to 6 years of tenure positively responded to Trust subscale items 59.4% of the time whereas employees with 7 or more years of tenure positively responded 37.8% of the time (see also Figure 6).

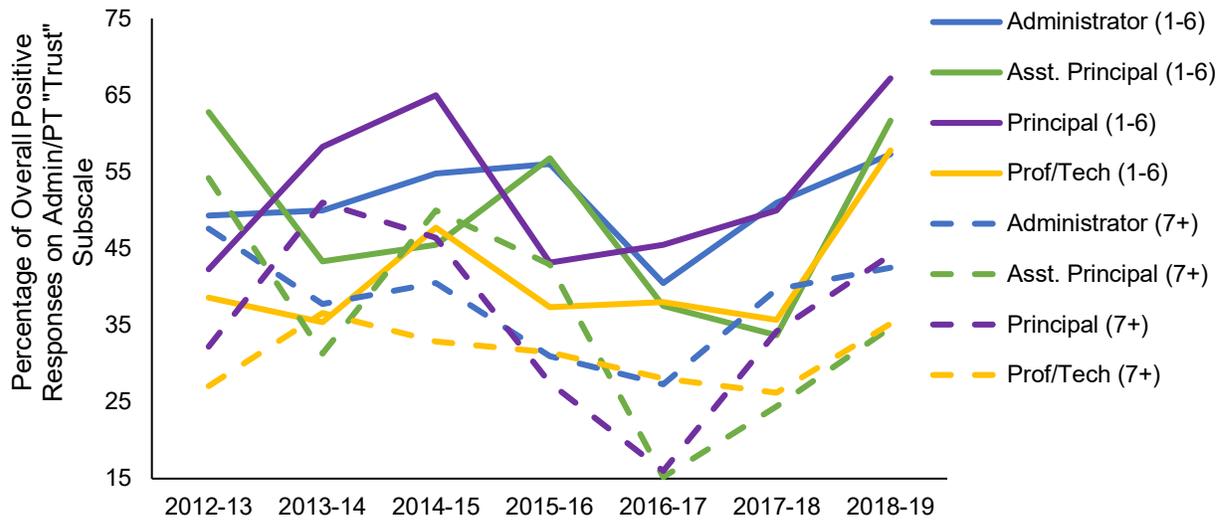


Figure 5. Positive responses to the Trust subscale across seven school years, by position and tenure.

Figure 6 shows the differences in the two tenure groups across all seven Admin/PT Climate Survey subscales for the current school year. With the exception of the *Safety* subscale, employees with more tenure had less positive responses. The subscales with the highest difference between the two tenure groups were *Trust* (21.6% difference) and *Program Support* (19.2% difference). A second set of subscales had a smaller, but still large difference between the two groups: *Communication* (13.9%) and *Morale* (9.4%). The third set of subscales had marginal differences between the two groups: *Clarity of Vision* (5.5%), *Safety* (4.6%; 7+ year group was higher), and *Work Conditions* (4.5%).

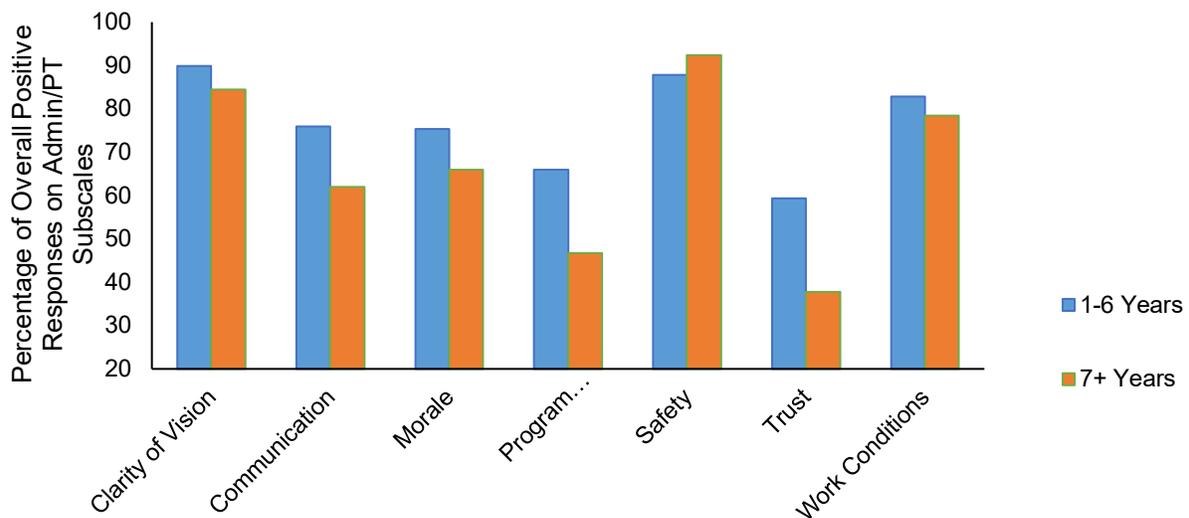


Figure 6. Difference in percentage of positive responses on the seven Climate Survey subscales for 2018-19 school year.

Another analysis was conducted to investigate the *Trust* subscale more fully. Because there was a large difference between the two tenure groups regarding the percentage of positive responses on the *Trust* subscale items, Figure 6 removes the tenure grouping and illustrates the percentage of positive responses on the *Trust* subscale for each year of tenure. It should be noted that with more tenure, there are less data points (see Figure 2), so after about 20 years, columns with only one respondent were removed. The dotted line illustrates a calculated logarithmic average of the percentage of positive responses across the years of tenure. There are a few aspects of Figure 6 that are worth mentioning. First, there is a sharp decline from the 1st year of employment to about the 6th year (about a 24% decline). Second, although it is not apparent in the figure, there is actually an increase of about 1% every 2 years of tenure in the percentage of positive responses, starting with the 7th year of employment. This third point is perhaps most significant: at around 10 years of employment, there is a noticeable ‘dip’ in Trust subscale “Positive” responses. Because we made a slight change to the way we record tenure this year, we are able to differentiate all years (as in the figure below); unfortunately, we cannot look into the past years to investigate this dip more fully. There are two likely scenarios that are causal of this decrease in *Trust* subscale rates from 10 to 12 years of employment. First, it could be related to attaining 10 years of employment in the district and having a subsequent ‘slump’ in *Trust* subscale responses (as well as other Climate subscales) for a few years. Second, it could be related to a specific cohort of employees, and this group of employees has experienced something that is unique to them and has caused this lower rate of positive responses on the *Trust* subscale items. If it is the first scenario, then this dip will stay centered around 11 years of tenure, and if it is the second scenario, then the dip will move with the cohort in subsequent years.

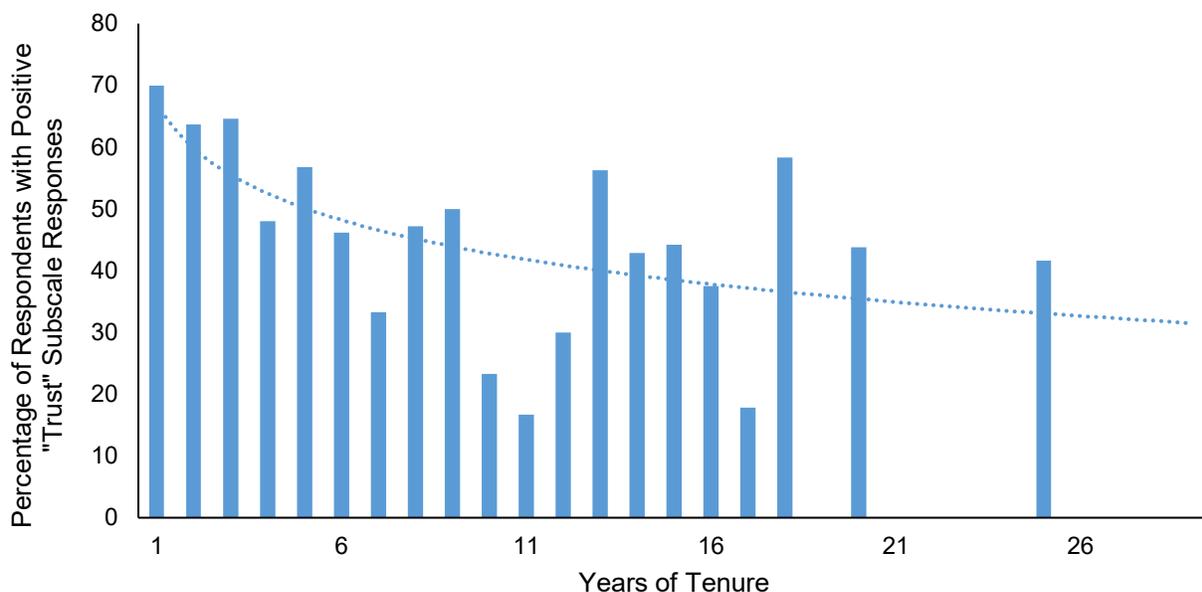
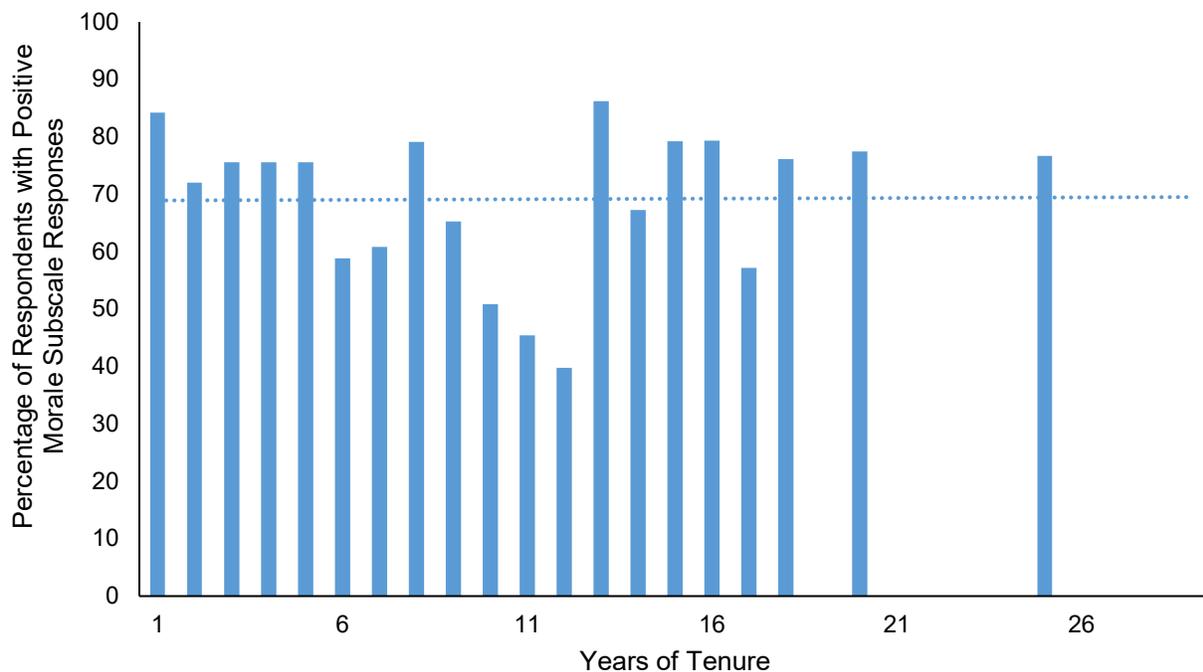


Figure 7. Percentage of respondents who marked "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" to Trust subscale items, by year of tenure.

This same general pattern was present within each of the other subscales—with the exception of the *Safety* (which had higher levels of agreement with the higher tenured group) and *Morale* (which was relatively consistent across years of tenure) subscales—that is, a decrease in agreement occurs as years of tenure increases, as well as a dip in agreement around the 11th year of employment. However, *Trust* was the subscale with the greatest decline, as well as having the greatest dip around 11 years of tenure. While investigating the other subscales, the *Morale* subscale presented data that is also worth mentioning. Notice in Figure 8 that instead of a decreasing rate of agreement, the dotted line is flat and maintains a consistent rate of around 70%. Also, although there is some variation in percentage of agreement for each year of tenure relative to the average line, you will notice that the most apparent departure starts at the 9th year of tenure, decreasing to the 12th year, and a regaining of *Morale* subscale “Positive” responses in the 13th year of tenure. In all, there is a decrease in *Morale* subscale agreement of nearly 40% from the 8th year to the 12th year of tenure, and then a subsequent increase of 46%.



Conclusion and Recommendations

The number of responses has steadily increased for the Admin/PT Climate survey over the past 7 years, and the number of responses ($N = 287$) was higher than any other previous year. However, this increase is in conjunction with an increasing number of Admin/PT employees in the district over the past 7 years. The typical response rate over this timeframe has been around 73-74%, and this year's rate (74.1%) matched this historical average.

One slight alteration to this year's Admin/PT survey is how we assessed years of tenure. In the past, the years were pre-grouped, and respondents selected the group that they would be classified within. For the current year, we asked participants to notate the number of years that they have been employed. This allowed for a more detailed analysis of climate and tenure. As would be expected, the majority of respondents had fewer years of tenure, with a median of 6 years.

Starting with overall "Positive" response percentages on the survey, there has been a trend of increasing climate perceptions over the past 3 years, with the current year reaching 67.9% "Positive" responses, overall. This pattern was also apparent within six of the seven Climate Survey subscales, with the only exception being the *Safety* subscale. Also, historically, the *Trust* subscale has shown the lowest percentage of "Positive" responses, which was also true of the current year.

Analysis of the different positions revealed that Administrators reported the highest percentage of "Positive" responses on the *Trust* subscale, followed by Principals, and then Professional / Technical and Assistant Principals—with these last two positions having similar rates of agreement. Regarding tenure, respondents with longer lengths of employment within APS had considerably lower rates of agreement on the *Trust* subscale than less tenured employees—a difference of 22% between 1 to 6 year employees and employees of 7 or more years. This same pattern was seen across five other subscales (with the exception being responses on the *Safety* subscale)—in that employees with less tenure rated items on the subscales more positively than more tenured employees.

Because the *Trust* subscale had the lowest percentage of "Positive" responses compared to the other subscales, further investigation with tenure followed. In general, there was a declining rate of agreement with items on the *Trust* subscale with higher years of tenure, but perhaps more importantly, there was a noticeable momentary 'dip' in this trend surrounding respondents with about 10 to 11 years of employment in the district. Although it would be impossible to know from the current data if the dip is following a specific cohort of employees—or if the dip historically occurs around the 10 year mark—addressing needs of this group of employees may be beneficial towards the overall climate in the district. Other subscales generally had this same pattern, and the *Morale* subscale was also included to illustrate this same dip. However, for *Morale* subscale responses, there was generally no change across years of tenure. The

notable exception, again though, was that a momentary dip was also present for employees with about 10 years of employment within the district.

In general, Admin/PT climate is on the rise. However, there are a few items that may be worth addressing. First, as the *Trust* subscale has been continually rated the lowest of the Climate Survey subscales, it may be worth pursuing how to increase trust among district employees. Second, Admin/PT climate seems to suffer around the 10-year mark. Recognizing these employees and addressing their needs should help to ameliorate this dip.

General Recommendations from Classified and Admin/PT Climate Surveys

In addition to working toward increasing trust among employees, as well as recognizing and addressing the needs of employees with 10 years of employment in the district, the Classified Staff Climate Survey provided some other analyses that may be relevant to both groups of employees. In the report presented to the district regarding the Classified Staff Climate Survey, two additional subscales were recommended as needing to be addressed by the district. The two subscales, *Communication* and *Work Conditions*, were identified within four groups of employees who had shown different patterns of change in responses on the climate survey over the past 8 years. For employees who have shown decreasing climate scores and employees who have had no change in their climate scores, these two subscales were identified as perhaps being the most critical to address. In addition, these two subscales were identified as having the most improvement in the past 8 years within the group of employees that have had positive change in their climate scores over the past 8 years.

Thus, combining results from the two surveys, working toward addressing gaps in communication and creating better work conditions should help to positively impact employee climate perceptions. In addition, increasing trust, especially for Admin/PT employees, should also help. Finally, seeking out the needs of and recognizing employees who have been employed for 10 years in the district should also help long-term employee climate.

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