EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- There was a record number of respondents ($N = 908$) this year
  - The highest response rate—at 51%—since its inception
- The vast majority of respondents (95%) completed the survey online
  - Hard-copy responses decreased by 41% from last year
  - Based on the increasing participation in online surveys and the higher costs associated with printing, mailing, and administration of the hard copies, it is recommended that the district only offers the survey online next year
- The overall climate (i.e., percentage of positive responses to the survey items) was up this year by about 1.5%
  - The percent of positive responses (70.1%) was within the historical range
- There was a large difference (nearly 40%) in positive response percentages between the highest (Budget/Finance – 88.1%) and the lowest (Warehouse – 49.8%) positions.
- Subgroups of positions were identified regarding overall trends from the past 8 years
  - **Negative** group: negative trend in climate scores over the past 8 years
    - Construction, Early Childhood Education, and Warehouse workers
    - *Communication, Trust & Morale, and Work Conditions* were identified as factors influencing their negative trend
  - **Recent Negative** group: positive change in climate responses, but in the past 2 to 3 years, there was a negative shift in the trend
    - Building Custodians and Maintenance Operations workers
    - *Communication, Trust & Morale, and Work Conditions* were also identified as factors influencing the negative trend
  - **Flat** group: no change in climate scores over the past 8 years
    - Administrative / Secretarial Support, Nutrition Services, and Paraeducators / Educational Assistants
    - *Communication* and *Program Support* were identified as possible factors to attend to in order to increase climate for this group
  - **Positive** group: positive change in climate scores over the past 8 years
    - Budget / Finance, Campus Monitor, District Security, Information Technology, Pickens Technical College, and Transportation workers
    - The main components that seem to set the *Positive* group from the other three groups are *Communication* and *Work Conditions*
- There were two subscales that were identified, almost ubiquitously, across all four of the groups: *Communication* and *Work Conditions*
  - To increase climate perceptions within Classified Staff, it is recommended to attend to components of these two subscales
**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

This year marked the 12th administration of the Classified Staff 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. In addition, hard copies were made available throughout the district. With the hard copies, employees were asked to complete them and send them to the Department of Accountability and Research. All data from both surveys were kept confidential. One new question was added to the survey last year regarding the APS 2020 Strategic Plan.

Survey questions were originally developed in 2007. The questions were developed with input from the Classified Employees Council, staff focus groups, district leadership, and the former Division of Accountability and Research. The questions were designed to obtain attitudes on clarity of APS’s vision, communication, morale, program support, trust, and work conditions.

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 919 employees having taken the survey. In addition, at 51%, the response rate was the highest it has ever been. Table 1 presents the response rates from the past seven survey cycles.

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<tr>
<td>N Responses</td>
<td>893</td>
<td>836</td>
<td>787</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>809</td>
<td>919</td>
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<td>1817*</td>
<td>1830*</td>
<td>1928*</td>
<td>1818*</td>
<td>1973*</td>
<td>1803</td>
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<td>% Response Rate</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>41%</td>
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Note.* Number of employees for these years was calculated post-hoc from the number of responses and the response rate per each year.

As stated earlier, the Classified Staff Climate Survey was distributed by two media: an online survey tool and hard copies were distributed throughout the district. Of the 919 surveys completed, 47 (5%) were hard copies. The majority of these employees
were Nutrition Services (55%), followed by Paraeducators (16%), Building Custodians (14%), Transportation (11%), and Administration / Secretarial Support (5%). The number of hard copies significantly decreased from last year’s rate (12%), $\chi^2(N = 1728, df = 1) = 25.84, p < .001$. This suggests a marked shift in the preference of the type of survey media—employees overwhelmingly prefer the online survey tool, and in addition, employees who prefer the hard copy version declined at a large rate this year. If this rate continues into next year, about 20 hard copy surveys can be expected to be completed. More than likely, if given a choice, there will always be a small percentage of employees who prefer the hard copy. However, it is also likely that if given only the option of completing the survey online, many of the employees who prefer the hard copy will make the change. Indeed, for each of the positions that comprised the hard copy of the survey, a greater percentage were completed online. That is, the majority of people with those same positions were able to complete the online version.

In Figure 1, the number of responses, the number of Classified Staff, and the response rate over the past 6 years is illustrated. These numbers are relatively flat for classified staff, with a slight declining number of staff over the past 6 years (about 13 per year less) and a steady response rate.

![Figure 1. Historic Classified Staff response trends.](image-url)
Of the 869 responses to the item which asked of the employees position (50 chose to not specify their position), over half were Paraeducators ($n = 340, 39\%$) and Administrative or Secretarial Support ($n = 166; 19\%$). On the following page, Table 2 provides the full breakdown of respondents. Finally, there currently is no item which asks about the length of employment in APS on the Classified Staff Climate Survey. Because of the differences found on the Admin/PT Climate Survey related to length of employment, it is recommended to add a similar item to the Classified Staff Climate Survey next year.

![Figure 2. Number of respondents by position.](image-url)
Survey Results

Over the past 8 years, the overall percentage of items with a “Positive” response (i.e., “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”) has fluctuated between 67% and 70% of the items on the Classified Staff Climate Survey. The rate for the current year (70.1%) was up from last year (68.5%) but still within the historical range. Each of the subscales of the survey also reflect this slight uptick in “Positive” item response percentages from the previous year, as well (see Figure 3).

![Percentage of positive responses on Classified Staff Climate Survey subscales over the past 8 years.](image)

In order to show a more succinct representation of changes in Classified Staff Climate, the following figure (Figure 4) provides three data points for each of the subscales. The first is the average “Positive” response percentage for the previous 5 years—this can be used to illustrate a robust estimate of historical ratings for the subscales. The second is the “Positive” response percentage for the previous school year (i.e., 2017-18), and the third is the percentage for the current year. In general, the results of the current year suggest a slight increase over the previous year and the previous 5 years for each of the subscales, with the exception of Program Support, which has historically been rated higher.

Overall “Positive” response percentages were further investigated by differentiating among the Classified Staff positions (see Figure 5). There was a difference of nearly 40% in “Positive” response percentage, comparing the highest (Budget/Finance – 88.1%) and the lowest (Warehouse – 49.8%) positions. It appeared that different positions have varied perspectives regarding Staff Climate. Thus,
Figure 4. Percentage of positive responses on Classified Staff Climate Survey subscales, including an average for the previous 5 years, results from last year, and for the current year.

Figure 5. Positive overall response percentages, differentiated by Classified Staff positions.
further analyses sought to identify insight into these differences.

Looking to further investigate if there were differences among the various classified positions, overall agreement over the past 8 years was plotted for each position, and four distinct trends were revealed: (1) Negative Overall Change, (2) Recent Negative Overall Change, (3) Flat Overall Change, and (4) Positive Overall Change—see Figure 5. Construction, Early Childhood Education, and Warehouse workers comprised the Negative Overall Change (Negative; \( n = 75 \) for 2018-19). Building Custodians and Maintenance Operations workers were in the Recent Negative Overall Change group (Recent Negative; \( n = 86 \) for 2018-19). Respondents who have had Flat Overall Change (Flat; \( n = 568 \) for 2018-19) were Administrative / Secretarial Support, Nutrition Services, and Paraeducators / Educational Assistant staff members. Finally, the positions with Positive Overall Change (Positive; \( n = 140 \)) were Budget / Finance, Campus Monitor, District Security, Information Technology, Pickens Technical College, and Transportation. Also in the figure below is the overall district trend line of the percentage of positive responses (i.e., either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”) on the Climate Survey, which has increased about two percentage points over the past 8 years.

Figure 6. Positive responses to the Trust subscale across seven school years, by position and tenure.
Although graphing each of the groups in Figure 6 for all of the Classified Staff Climate Survey subscales would provide additional insight into these positions, space and redundancy is a limiting factor for this report. Nevertheless, these 20 charts were plotted, and the general interpretations are presented in this report. Before exploring the positions further, there are two aspects from Figure 5 that are worth noting. First, in the 2012-13 school year, these groups had very different viewpoints on the Climate, as evidenced by the large amount of variation among the overall positive response percentages for that year (about 18% difference between the Positive and Negative groups). This variation has steadily decreased over time, and for the current year, there is only about 5% difference in overall positive agreement on the Climate survey between the Positive and Recent Negative groups (i.e., the top and bottom groups).

For the Negative group, each of the subscales had a similar trend over the past years as can be seen in Figure 5—that is, from 2017-18 to the current year, a slight increase was present in Climate subscale agreement percentage for each of the subscales. This indicates that even though there is a negative trend over the past 8 years for these positions, changes in the past year might have positively affected them (regarding Climate). Another item of note is that for the Positive and Flat groups, the percentage of items with a “Neutral” response was higher than the percentage of items with a “Negative” response (i.e., “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree”). This was the same for several of the subscales for the Negative group—Clarity of Vision and Program Support subscales had this response pattern. However, Communication and Trust & Morale subscales had similar percentages of “Neutral” and “Negative” responses—indicating that perhaps these two subscales are key Climate components to work on with the positions classified within the Negative group. Additionally, the Work Conditions subscale has converging “Neutral” and “Negative” response percentages, indicating that perhaps this may be another component that is negatively affecting this group.

The second set of positions that was investigated further was the Recent Negative group. The main subscales that seem to be driving the negative downturn in recent years for this group are: Clarity of Vision, Communication, Program Support, and Trust & Morale. Using the same logic as in the above paragraph to distinguish between “Neutral” and “Negative” responses, the Communication subscale seems to be the most salient factor for this group of employees, as the percentage of “Negative” item responses was actually higher than the percentage of “Neutral” item responses—this was the only instance across all groups and subscales. Trust & Morale and Work Conditions had similar percentages for “Neutral” and “Negative” responses. Thus, key climate components to work on for this group are Communication, Trust & Morale, and Work Conditions.

For the positions that comprised the Flat group, there was no distinguishing trend across the subscales regarding “Positive”, “Neutral”, and “Negative” responses. However, there was variation among the subscales in terms of the amount of agreement. Clarity of Vision (76.5%), Work Conditions (71.3%), and Trust & Morale
(70.5%) subscales had the highest amount of “Positive” response percentages. Communication (65.9%) and Program Support (64.1%) had lower “Positive” response percentages.

The subscales with the highest amount of “Positive” response percentages for the Positive group were: Clarity of Vision (80.6%), Work Conditions (74.8%), and Trust & Morale (74.3%). As with the Flat group, Communication (68.1%) and Program Support (69.0%) had lower “Positive” response percentages. Interestingly, though, the Communication subscale had the second-highest rate of increase for “Positive” response percentages, increasing about 2.6 percentage points per year over the past 8 years. The Work Conditions subscale had the highest rate of increase for “Positive” response percentages, increasing about 3.1 percentage points per year over the past 8 years.
Conclusion and Recommendations

There was a record number of employees who completed the Classified Staff Climate Survey ($N = 908$) this year, achieving the highest response rate—at 51%—since its inception. The vast majority (95%) completed the survey online, through a link sent to their emails, and only 47 completed the hard copy version of the survey. It was also noted that, for each of the positions comprising these 47 employees, a larger percentage of employees from the same positions completed the survey online. Additionally, the percent of hard-copy responses decreased by 41% from last year, and it is reasonable to assume that more employees are preferring the online version. Thus, it is recommended for next year, that the district only offers the online survey. However, in addition to sending to employees directly through email, efforts should be made to also provide a link on the district website that will allow the employees to access the survey on either mobile devices or computers.

The overall climate (i.e., percentage of positive responses to the survey items) was up this year about 1.5%, although the overall percent of positive responses (70.1%) was within the historical range. This indicates that although the overall climate is slightly better this year than last, as a whole, the climate has been relatively flat over the past 8 years.

The various positions of employees who completed the Classified Staff Climate Survey was also analyzed, and there was a large difference (nearly 40%) in positive response percentages between the highest (Budget/Finance – 88.1%) and the lowest (Warehouse – 49.8%) positions. This prompted further analysis to try to differentiate among the 14 Classified Staff positions. Indeed, there were groupings of positions who had positive overall change over the past 8 years, negative overall change, no change, and recent negative change, regarding overall positive responses to the items on the survey. This analysis also illustrated a trend in the variability of positive response percentages among these groups—namely that these groups have more similar overall response percentages now than they did 8 years ago. One possible reason for this trend is that there is more consistency in the perceptions of the district climate now than there was 8 years ago.

These results notwithstanding, further investigation revealed several key takeaways from the four groupings of Classified Staff positions. First, for the group that has had a negative trajectory in climate over the past 8 years, there is some indication that their climate perceptions have become more positive, comparing this year to last year. Yet, for the Negative group, analysis of the Communication and Trust & Morale subscales suggested that these two components of climate may be particularly salient regarding the negative trend in their scores over the past 8 years. Additionally, analysis of the Work Conditions subscale also suggested that this aspect of climate may be salient, although to a lesser extent. Again, the positions that comprised this group were: Construction, Early Childhood Education, and Warehouse workers.
Second, there was a group of positions that showed positive change in climate responses, but in the past 2 to 3 years, there was a negative shift in the trend. Interestingly, the same subscales that were identified in the Negative group also seem to be key factors of the Recent Negative group. These factors, Communication, Trust & Morale, and Work Conditions, suggested that the climate scores for the positions in the Recent Negative and the Negative groups might improve, if given attention to these components. The positions in the Recent Negative group were: Building Custodians and Maintenance Operations workers.

The way the subscales were identified within the two previous groups was unique to those groups—the Flat and Positive groups did not have similar variations among the “Positive”, “Neutral”, and “Negative” percentage of item agreement. However, for the Flat group, two subscales had noticeably lower “Positive” rates of agreement than the other subscales: Communication and Program Support. The positions identified in the Flat group were: Administrative / Secretarial Support, Nutrition Services, and Paraeducators / Educational Assistants.

Finally, the Positive group was identified as those positions which showed a trend of increasing climate percentage scores over the past 8 years. The positions within this group were: Budget / Finance, Campus Monitor, District Security, Information Technology, Pickens Technical College, and Transportation workers. Similar to the Flat group, Communication and Program Support were the lowest rated subscales in the Positive group. However, the difference between these two groups seems to be that there has been an increase in Communication and Work Conditions subscales over the past 8 years. Thus, the main components that seem to set the Positive group from the other three groups are that their perceptions of communication and work conditions have been on the rise.

There were two components that were identified, almost ubiquitously, across all four of the groups: Communication and Work Conditions. For the Positive group, these two subscales set them apart by having the highest rates of increase over the past 8 years. For the Flat group, Communication was identified as one of the lower-rated subscales (along with Program Support). For the Negative and Recent Negative groups, both Communication and Work Conditions were identified as possible factors influencing their overall negative trend in climate over the past 8 years. For these latter two groups, Trust & Morale was also identified, but perhaps this factor might change with increased attention to Communication and Work Conditions.
References


