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DJ Loerzel, DM
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The response rate (20.9%) was higher this year than was reported for all other previous years
  - 4,664 surveys were returned this year, nearly 1,000 more than the 2017-18 school year
  - This response rate was nearly double the response rate from 4 years ago

- The majority of surveys were completed in English (73%), with the remainder completed in Spanish (23%) and less than 1% completed in one of the nine other language options that was made available

- There was an under-representation of Hispanic and Black/African American respondents
  - The majority of respondents were also parents of children in elementary grades
  - Future survey cycles should make efforts to increase representation of these groups of parents in order to have a more balanced analysis

- A sizable proportion of the respondents (10.3%) marked an incompatible grade-level for the school in which they noted their child attended
  - For this report, these incompatible data were treated as careless responses
  - For future surveys, it is recommended to reformat items to minimize errors
  - It is also recommended to include an item in the future to identify careless responding

- The majority of the results pointed toward decreasing overall agreement by grade level
  - This was especially true for parents of children in grades beyond elementary (i.e., 6th -12th grade)
  - Increasing communication and opportunities to participate for parents of older children would most likely help to increase their overall satisfaction

- The current survey model for the Parent and Community Climate Survey is centered on information-gathering
  - By also treating the survey as a tool to help support parents, some of the problems that parents report could be addressed directly through the survey—on an individual level
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 14th iteration of the Parent & Community Climate Survey, which has traditionally been administered in the spring. The survey was designed to reflect attitudes related to student achievement, school environment, leadership/partnership opportunities, decision-making, assessment, evaluation, and planning.

- Last year (2017-18), revisions were made to the Parent & Community Climate Survey. Questions on how parents prefer to receive APS communications were removed, and two new questions were added related to the strategic plan’s objective that every student should have a plan for their future:

  1. I am aware that my student is creating a plan for his/her future with support from adults at school (counselors, teachers, or other school staff).
  2. How often have you talked to your student, a counselor, teacher or other school staff about your student’s plan for the future?

Last year, in an effort to provide data that can make more meaningful change, it was decided to change the survey window from the spring to the fall. In doing so, results from the climate survey can be utilized to enact changes within the same school year in which the data was collected. For the current year, no changes were made to the survey in order to provide stable comparison data from both 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years.

The survey was administered online, and communications were sent (via School Messenger) to parents on three occasions, notifying them about the survey—an announcement of the survey (along with corresponding links) was also listed on district websites. In addition, hard copies in English and Spanish were sent home with the oldest child from each household. Copies of the survey were also made available to families in nine of the other top-10 languages used in the district.

Student Characteristics

A total of 4,665 surveys were completed by parents/community members in the district (2,911 completed online [62%] and 1,754 [38%] completed on paper).

Table 1
Historical Response Rates for the Parent & Community Climate Survey

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># Attempt</td>
<td>2,616</td>
<td>2,676</td>
<td>3,308</td>
<td>3,668</td>
<td>4,664</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Household</td>
<td>23,782*</td>
<td>22,300*</td>
<td>21,422*</td>
<td>20,841*</td>
<td>22,303</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response Rate</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>+3.7%</td>
<td>+9.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * Actuals were unavailable. Data calculated from number attempted and response rate per each year prior to 2018-19.
Regarding the different language versions of the survey, 3,415 (73%) were completed in English, 1,210 (26%) in Spanish, and less than 1% \((n = 40)\) were completed in other languages. This was nearly identical to the rates from the 2017-18 school year.

The response rates by race/ethnicity of respondents’ children were also assessed (see Table 2). There was an over-representation of White respondents (5.9% difference), and an under-representation of Hispanic respondents (-5.8% difference). These numbers calculate to an over-representation within White respondents of 37% and an under-representation within Hispanic respondents of 10%. There was a marginal over-representation of Asian respondents (2.3% difference), and a marginal under-representation of Black respondents (-2.9% difference). It should be noted that the Difference score represents the variation of the percentage of the actual number of respondents compared to what would be expected, given October Count data, whereas the Over/Under Representation score gives an idea of the magnitude of that difference within each racial/ethnic group. Because these data suggest that there was a disparity in representation among the groups, future communications about the survey should emphasize the need for better representation.

### Table 2

**Distribution of Survey Responses by Respondents’ Children’s Ethnicity, Compared to Official October Count Numbers**

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survey Response %</strong></td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>50.1%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survey Response n</strong></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>613</td>
<td>2,153</td>
<td>934</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>October Count</strong></td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Difference:</strong></td>
<td>-0.2%</td>
<td>+2.3%</td>
<td>-2.9%</td>
<td>-5.8%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>-0.4%</td>
<td>+1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expected n</strong></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>2,404</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Over/Under Representation %</strong></td>
<td>-30%</td>
<td>+55%</td>
<td>-17%</td>
<td>-10%</td>
<td>+37%</td>
<td>-41%</td>
<td>+21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. For Difference Percentages, positive denotes an overrepresentation from a group; negative denotes an underrepresentation from a group. ** Difference score calculated from subtracting October Count from Survey Response rows. Over/Under Representation % calculated by dividing actual Survey Response n by Expected n. An additional 363 (7.8%) respondents did not indicate their child’s race/ethnicity; the null data are not reflected in the percentages presented in this table.*

The distribution of surveys returned, related to the respondents’ children’s grade level, was also assessed. In general, there was an over-representation of responses for parents of children in elementary grades and an under-representation for middle and high school grades (see Table 3). This is illustrated in Figure 1, in which the two lines represent (1) actual response numbers and (2) what would be expected, given October Count data. Also, and somewhat surprisingly, no surveys were completed for students in the 10th grade.
Table 3
Distribution of Survey Responses by Respondent’s Child’s Grade, Compared to Official October Count Numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>-2.0%</td>
<td>-42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>+6.0%</td>
<td>+82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Grade</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>+3.9%</td>
<td>+53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Grade</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>+2.6%</td>
<td>+35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Grade</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>+2.4%</td>
<td>+31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Grade</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>+3.1%</td>
<td>+37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Grade</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>+2.4%</td>
<td>+30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th Grade</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>+0.0%</td>
<td>+1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th Grade</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>-1.0%</td>
<td>-13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th Grade</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>-0.7%</td>
<td>-10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th Grade</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>-2.7%</td>
<td>-42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th Grade</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>-6.4%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th Grade</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>-3.2%</td>
<td>-50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th Grade</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>-4.4%</td>
<td>-62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. For Difference Percentages, positive denotes an overrepresentation from a grade level; negative denotes an underrepresentation from a grade level. ** Difference score calculated from Survey Response and October Count columns. An additional 415 (8.9%) respondents did not indicate their child’s grade level and 481 (10.3%) misattributed their child’s grade level (e.g., marked 11th grade for an elementary student); the null data are not reflected in the percentages presented in this table.

Figure 1. Survey response totals per grade level. Blue line represents the actual distribution, and the orange line represents what would be expected, given the district distribution for October Count.
As illustrated in Figure 1 and indicated in Table 3, a shift occurs between elementary and middle school grades regarding response rates and what would be expected. Although not presented in this report, response rates by grade level and school type (e.g., typical elementary, middle, & high schools, and K-8 schools). The shift in response rates occurred regardless of school type. In other words, parents of older children tend to take the survey at a lower rate than parents of younger children, and this occurs regardless of the type of school. In the future, it would be worthwhile to consider alternative approaches toward communicating about the survey for parents of older children.

There is one last note of importance regarding reported grade levels. There was a sizeable portion (10.3%) of respondents who misattributed their child’s grade. For example, a parent might have listed an elementary school for their child’s school – but then listed 11th grade for their grade level. Although this may not be the case for all of these respondents, this portion (i.e., 10.3% of the total) is similar to the number of careless responses typically seen in survey data (see Kurtz & Parish, 2001; Meade & Craig, 2012). For this report, these responses have been removed in order to “safeguard the integrity of research conclusions” (Meade et al., 2012, p. 17). In the future, online surveys should include built-in logic that relates the correct grade level to the chosen school type. However, it may be useful to also include a way to identify careless responses within the online survey—Meade and Craig (2012) offered several recommendations of items to use to help distinguish careless responders.
Survey Results

Overall agreement was down for the current year (86.1%) compared to last year (89.5%). To further identify why and where agreement was lower, overall agreement was calculated for each school type. Figure 1 shows the overall agreement percentages for 2016-17 through 2018-19 school years. There was a significant ($p < .01$) decrease in total agreement scores for the current school year (about a 2.5% decrease). This was the same pattern for Pre-K schools (with a 14.5% drop from the previous year) and for middle schools (an 8% drop from 2017-18). K-8 and Virtual schools also had a decrease in agreement scores, comparing the current year to 2017-18 (by about 3.5% and 4.5%, respectively). There was no difference across years for elementary schools, but high schools increased about 2%. One noticeable trend across all school types is that comparing the current year to data from 2 years ago is that, with the exception of traditional high schools, there were no other school groupings that showed increased agreement over this timeframe.

![Figure 2. Overall Agreement by School Type and Year](image)

Overall Agreement was also assessed per grade level (see Figure 3). With the exception of parent responses for 5th and 12th grade students, overall agreement rates were lower for each grade level compared to last year. Including all grade-level data, for the 2017-18 school year, there was an average decrease in overall agreement of about 1.6% per grade level (linear equation: $y = -0.016x + 0.987$). For the current year,
although the data suggested lower overall agreement on the survey items, the decreasing trend was slightly less steep, with an average decrease in overall agreement of about 1.4% per grade level (linear equation: y = -0.014x + 0.950). There could be several factors that attribute to these differences between the current and previous school years. First, the relatively higher overall agreement across high school grades (especially for the parents of 12th grade students) might have influenced the trend for the current year. Second, lower overall agreement across the elementary grades might have also affected the difference for the current year. Nevertheless, the grade-level data suggest that the major decline starts at around 6th grade, and it may be worthwhile to work towards reversing the negative grade-level trend through addressing the needs of parents of older children (i.e., 6th – 12th grade).

![Graph showing overall agreement by grade level and year.](image)

Figure 3. Overall Agreement by Grade Level and Year. No data were returned for parents of 10th grade students for the current school year.

Investigating further into the subscales of the survey, data for the current school year assessed parents’ perceptions of (1) Student Achievement, (2) Leadership / Partnership Opportunities, (3) Environment, and (4) Assessment, Evaluation, & Planning, as well as two (5) Additional items that were combined together. The following two figures show variations in subscale agreement within (Figure 4) and across (Figure 5) each school type. The data are the same, but graphed differently to illustrate these differences. Overall, Assessment, Evaluation, & Planning was rated the lowest across all school types; however, it is generally rated higher in Elementary (including Pre-K schools), 6-12, and Virtual schools.
Figure 4. Agreement by School Type and Subscale

Figure 5. Agreement by Subscale and School Type
The overall subscale agreement rates were also analyzed across grade levels, and a similar pattern emerged. In Figure 6, the straight, bold lines illustrate the estimated average trend for each subscale. The remainder of this report will address the three lowest subscales seen in Figure 6 (Assessment, Evaluation, & Planning; Student Achievement; and Leadership, Partnership Opportunities) in order to try to present actionable insight about these three topics.

For the Assessment, Evaluation, & Planning subscale, there are only two items—one asks parents of their knowledge of the Unified Improvement Plans (UIP) and the other about involvement in the planning at their child’s school. Compared to last year, there was a decrease in the UIP item by about 7% in overall agreement, suggesting that parents this year are reporting less awareness of UIPs. In addition, there was a decrease of about 4% in overall agreement for the item that states: “I can be involved in school improvement planning and decision-making at my child’s school” compared to last year. For both of these items, the decrease appeared to be related to elementary (PK was excluded from the elementary grouping due to the overall high agreement rates across all subscales) and middle school grade-levels, as parents of high school children responded similarly to these items over the past 3 years. Thus, given that these items had lower rates of agreement from previous years—and that this was driven by parents of younger children—it is recommended that the district may consider additional outlets for educating parents about UIPs and how they can be involved in the schools.
Unlike the Assessment, Evaluation, & Planning subscale, little differences were found comparing the past several years of responses for the Student Achievement subscale—that is, overall agreement rates for this subscale did not vary from previous years. However, there was an overall decrease from elementary to middle school by about 10%, and subsequently, about a 2% decrease to high school for the Student Achievement subscale. Figure 7 shows the overall agreement percentages for each grade-level group and for each item. There are a few items that are worth discussing. Starting with the lowest-rated item (i.e., “The school communicates to me and my child what we need to do to prepare my child for college, career, and success in life after high school”), it is not unreasonable to assume that it should increase from middle school to high school, but because this item is specifically related to Goal A of the APS Strategic Plan, it may be worth further pursuing why this item had the lowest overall agreement on this subscale. Also, there was some variation among the different school types (e.g., Elementary, K-8, etc.), but at the high school level, the variation was very small. For elementary grades, a steady decline in agreement rates occurred from traditional elementary schools (74%) to K-8 (68%) and Charters (55%). For middle schools, the
school type with the highest agreement percentage was the 6-12 model (72%). This was followed by K-8 schools (61%), traditional middle schools (55%), and Charters (46%).

Regarding the item with the second-lowest overall agreement rate (i.e., “I have received information on opportunities offered for children in need of additional support with their learning (after-school tutoring, homework clubs, parks/recreation activities”), the same pattern of agreement as the previous item was apparent for both elementary and middle school groups, classifying them by the various school types. However, there was a large variation in overall agreement for high school grades, but the sample size for comparison was too small to present the results or make recommendations. Because these two items from the Student Achievement subscale seem to have generated similar responses across grade levels and school types, it may be worth addressing them as a combined issue to focus on these aspects of parents’ perspectives on the survey.

The Leadership & Partnership Opportunities subscale also did not show any year-to-year trends—the overall agreement percentages have largely been stable across the past few years. In general, the items on this subscale have similar declines among the grade-level groups (see Figure 8), but there were no discernible differences among school types for these items. Thus, the only recommendation related to these items would be to increase parental communication, especially in middle and high school grades.

![Figure 8. Percentage of overall agreement for Leadership & Partnership Opportunities subscale items, differentiated by grade-level groups.](image)
**Conclusion and Recommendations**

First, there are a few items to note regarding the distribution of the survey. There was an under-representation of Hispanic and Black/African American respondents. Future survey cycles should make efforts to increase representation of these groups of parents in order to have a more balanced analysis. In addition, the majority of respondents were parents of children in elementary grades. Increased emphasis should be placed on increasing the response rate of parents of older children.

Within the demographic analysis, it was also found that a sizable proportion of the respondents (10.3%) marked an incompatible grade-level for the school in which they noted their child attended. This can be because of several factors. (1) The survey directions state for the parent to complete the survey for their oldest child—the parent might have misunderstood the directions and completed a survey for several children. (2) The parent might have accidently selected an incorrect grade or school. (3) They incorrectly marked the grade and/or school for their child. (4) For the paper surveys, it is possible that an error was made during data input. Nevertheless, this error rate coincided with researched rates of careless responding, reported in Kurtz and Parish, (2001) and in Meade and Craig (2012). For this report, these incompatible data were treated as careless responses, but for future surveys, it is recommended to reformat them to minimize errors. Additionally, it is also recommended to include an item which would help to identify careless responding. Thus, if such an item were included in the climate surveys, then the reported data would be more reliable and robust.

Regarding the analysis of the response data, the majority of the results pointed toward a decreasing overall level of agreement by grade level. This was especially true for parents of children in grades beyond elementary (i.e., 6th-12th grade). Increasing communication and opportunities to participate for parents of older children would most likely help to increase their overall satisfaction.

Finally, and related to the previous topic, the current survey model for the Parent and Community Climate Survey is centered on information-gathering. For parents who feel that they have a lack of information regarding their child’s school, the survey does little to directly mitigate their problems. However, by also treating the survey as a tool to help support parents, some of the problems that parents report can be addressed directly through the survey—on an individual level.

For example, one of the lowest-rated items (“The school communicates to me and my child what we need to do to prepare my child for college, career, and success in life after high school”) could be used in this manner. If a parent responds to this item negatively, then a corresponding statement can be placed at the end of the survey to ask them if they would like more information regarding how they can prepare their child for college, career, and success in life after high school. To make the survey more relevant toward their individual needs, we can ask them to indicate their child’s school and a way to contact them to help provide them with this information. Their responses
on the survey and their contact information, although linked, would remain confidentially separated from each other, and when the survey is closed, we can send a list of contacts to each school for the follow-up items so that they can directly contact the parents regarding their requested information.
References


