EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

• The response rate (20.1%) maintained a similar rate compared to last year (2018-19 rate: 20.9%)
  o 4,552 surveys were returned this year, nearly 1,000 more than the 2017-18 school year and about 100 less than 2018-19
  o This response rate was nearly double the response rate from 5 years ago

• The majority of surveys were completed in English (76%), with the remainder completed in Spanish (24%) and less than 1% completed in one of the 10 other language options that was made available
  o Increased efforts need to be made to increase participation from non-English and non-Spanish speaking parents

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

• The survey was reformatted this year to reduce respondent errors regarding reporting children’s grades
  o It is also recommended to include an item in the future to identify careless responding

• Overall agreement was lower this year (84.8%) compared to last year (86.1%), continuing a downward trend
  o This was especially true for parents of children in middle school grades (i.e., 6th -8th grade)
  o Increasing communication and opportunities to participate for parents of these 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
  o 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 15th 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.

- In 2017-18, revisions were made to the Parent & Community Climate Survey. Questions regarding 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?

Also in 2017-18, 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 for the previous two years.

The survey was administered online, and communications were sent (via School Messenger) to parents on four 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 10 of the highest-usage languages spoken in the district.

Student Characteristics

A total of 4,552 surveys were completed by parents/community members in the district (2,992 completed online [66%] and 1,559 [34%] completed on paper). This was a slight change from last year in which 62% of the surveys were completed online (38% on paper).

Table 1

| Historical Response Rates for the Parent & Community Climate Survey |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| # Attempt                   | 2,616    | 2,676    | 3,308    | 3,668    | 4,664    | 4,552     |               |               |
| # HH                        | 23,782*  | 22,300*  | 21,422*  | 20,841*  | 22,305   | 22,630    |               |               |
| Response Rate               | 11%      | 12%      | 15.4%    | 17.2%    | 20.9%    | 20.1%     | -0.8%        | +9.1%         |

Note. * Actuals were unavailable. HH Household. Data calculated from number attempted and response rate per each year prior to 2018-19.
Regarding the different language versions of the survey, 3,448 (76%) were completed in English, 1,071 (24%) in Spanish, and less than 1% (n = 32) were completed in other languages (Amharic, Arabic, Burmese, French, Nepali, Somali, Swahili, and Vietnamese). The rates of non-English survey participation were lower than last year. In addition, Karen and Karenni were offered, but no surveys were completed in these languages. We made an effort this year to make all versions easily accessible online, in which parents could open any language version of the survey from an online link that was sent to them via School Messenger; however, more effort must be made to ensure equitable participation from non-English and non-Spanish speaking parents.

The response rates by race/ethnicity of respondents’ children were also assessed (see Table 2). There was an over-representation of White respondents (4.1% difference), and an under-representation of Hispanic respondents (-6.8% difference). There was a marginal over-representation of Asian respondents (1.1% difference), and a marginal under-representation of Black respondents (-2.1% difference). 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*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey Response %</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Response n</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>1,990</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Window %</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference:</td>
<td>+0.0%</td>
<td>+1.1%</td>
<td>-2.1%</td>
<td>-6.8%</td>
<td>+4.1%</td>
<td>-0.1%</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 the district race/ethnicity distribution percentages (calculated from active student families during time of survey administration) from Survey Response percentages. 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 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 district grade distribution of active students during the survey window.
Table 3
*Distribution of Survey Responses by Respondent’s Child’s Grade, Compared to Active Student Grade Distribution during the Survey Window.*

<table>
<thead>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>-4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>-0.3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Grade</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Grade</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>-0.6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Grade</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>-0.7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Grade</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>-2.2%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Grade</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>-2.4%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th Grade</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>-17%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th Grade</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>-17%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th Grade</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>-23%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th Grade</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th Grade</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>-3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th Grade</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>-6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th Grade</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>-32%</td>
<td></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 Survey Distribution columns. 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 during the survey window.
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. Last year, grade-type analyses (e.g., K-8, traditional elementary and middle schools) were conducted to investigate if grade level participation was an effect of the grade type of schools, and it was found that 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 (especially middle school-aged children).

Last year, 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 have been 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). The online surveys for the current year included built-in logic that related 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 (84.8%) compared to last year (86.1%). 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 2017-18 through 2019-20 school years. K-8 schools show a steady decline in overall agreement for the past 3 years, as do combined MS-HS schools, and virtual schools. Additionally, middle schools dropped in overall agreement last year, and they maintained the lower rate for the current year. Pre-K schools increased from last year, as did high schools (although the former was the highest agreement rate type and high schools have lower agreement rates).

Overall Agreement was also assessed per grade level (see Figure 3). With the exception of parent responses for 7th and 11th grade students, overall agreement rates were similar for each grade level compared to last year. Including all grade-level data, for the 2018-19 school year, there was an average decrease in overall agreement of about 1.4% per grade level (linear equation: y = -0.014x + 0.950). 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 1.2% per grade level (linear equation: y = -0.012x + 0.927). In other words, across Pre-K to 12th grade, we can predict that overall parent climate survey agreement
drops about 17%. However, if Pre-K – 5th grade and 6th – 12th grade are differentiated, two distinct trajectories emerge, suggesting that there is a shift in middle school grades in which parent climate agreement decreases, but does not recover through 12th grade. 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), especially in middle school grades.

Figure 3. Overall Agreement by Grade Level and Year. No data were returned for parents of 10th grade students for the the 2018-19 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. Similar to last year, 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. There is a continually lower rate of agreement (and thus, higher rates of disagreement and responses of “Don’t Know”/“Does Not Apply”) on the UIP item. There were also 18% of respondents who marked that they “Did not know” that they can be involved in school improvement planning and decision-making at their child’s school. Thus, given that these items had lower rates of agreement from the previous year, it is recommended that the district may consider additional outlets for educating parents about UIPs & school improvement planning and how they can be involved in the schools.

Analyzing the past 3 years of responses on the Assessment, Evaluation, & Planning subscale, parent agreement has decreased an average of 10.5%—for parents of children in middle school. The item with the most precipitous drop was: 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. For parents of middle school children, the
agreement rate for this item in 2017-18 was 70.9%, but it has decreased to 54.8% for the current school year. Two other items had large decreases (again, related to parents of middle school children):

- The school has provided me with the opportunities to learn about helping my child with school work (decreased 13.4% over the 3-year period)
- The school has provided me information on the state standards for my child’s grade level (decreased 13.2% over the 3-year period)

It is also worth noting that the item with the lowest decline (6.3%) for parents of middle school children was lower than any other decline for parents of elementary and high school children (3.2%). Figure 7 shows the overall agreement percentages for each grade-level group and for each item.

![Figure 7](image-url)

*Figure 7. Percentage of overall agreement for Student Achievement subscale items, differentiated by grade-level groups.*

The Leadership & Partnership Opportunities subscale also suggested downward trends for parents of middle school children. The item with the largest decline in agreement, *If needed, the school provides me with information on local agencies and...*
other community support services that I can use, had a 85.0% agreement rate in 2017-18 and 71.3% this year (a 13.6% drop). Two other items had large drops for parents of middle school children:

- The school provides me with the opportunity to give input on the school’s programs and goals (decreased 9.3% over the 3-year period)
- The school provides me with many opportunities to plan and participate in the school’s activities (decreased 8.2% over the 3-year period)

However, for parents of high school students, agreement rates increased for every item in this scale, and for elementary school students, agreement rates have decreased, but only marginally.

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

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

The number and percentage of participants was similar to last year, maintaining a rate of over 20% (although the current year saw a slight 1-year decrease of 0.8% in participation). This rate is nearly double that of participation from 5 years ago—in 2014-15, the participation rate was 11%. The majority (76%) of surveys were completed in English, followed by Spanish (24%), and less than 1% of surveys were completed in other languages. Although few non-English and non-Spanish speaking parents participated, it is not recommended to remove these language versions of the survey.
Rather, we must ensure that we better promote the survey to these parents in the future.

First, there are a few items to note regarding the representation of the survey participants. There was an under-representation of Hispanic (nearly 7%) and Black / African American respondents (over 2%). Future survey cycles should make efforts to garner equal representation of all parents in order to have a more balanced analysis. In addition, the majority of respondents were parents of children in elementary grades, with lower representation of parents of middle-school and 12th grade students and expected rates within parents of 9th-11th grade students. Increased emphasis should be placed on increasing the response rate of parents of older children.

Last year, it was 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. In order to correct this issue for the current year, the online survey was reformatted to only allow parents to select a grade that coincided with the school they selected. However, it may be worth incorporating a quality-check item in the survey next year. For the current year, an item designed to identify careless responding (see Meade & Craig, 2012) was embedded within the Admin/PT and Classified surveys, and it was used to help clean up the data for those surveys (making the reported data more reliable and robust) as well as identify groups that may need additional supports.

Regarding the analysis of the response data, the majority of the results pointed toward a decreasing overall level of agreement by grade level, with the current year’s overall agreement at 84.8%. This was especially true for parents of children in middle school grades (i.e., 6th -8th grade). Increasing communication and opportunities to participate for parents of these older children would most likely help to increase their overall satisfaction.

Finally, 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


