Summary of Feedback from School District of Philadelphia Central Office Staff about the District-Wide Survey, Spring 2020

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Background

Since spring 2015, the Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) has administered a comprehensive annual District-Wide Survey (DWS) to students, teachers, parents/guardians, and principals of District and Charter schools.[1] The majority of the questions on all four surveys (different versions for different stakeholders) relate to five key topics: Instruction, Leadership, Parent/Guardian Community Ties, Professional Capacity, and School Climate.[2]

In early 2020, a complementary survey was administered to Central Office staff for the first time. This Central Office Survey asked Central Office-based School District of Philadelphia (SDP) employees to provide their feedback on the same five topics and share if and how they use results from the District-Wide survey in their work.

What types of questions were included in the Central Office Survey?

The Central Office DWS survey has two main parts. First, respondents were asked to reflect on a series of statements about schools organized according to the five District-Wide Survey topics: Instruction, Leadership. Parent/Guardian Community Ties, Professional Capacity, and School Climate. Then, the survey asked questions to gather information about if and how Central Office staff use the results of the District-Wide survey as a source of data to help make decisions as part of their work.

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[1] For more information about Philadelphia's District-Wide Survey program, see www.philasd.org/dws.

[2] Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Easton & Luppescu (2010) identified five essential supports for school improvement: school leadership, parent/guardian-community ties, professional capacity, school climate, and instruction. Schools that are strong in all of the essential supports (as measured by stakeholder survey responses) saw the greatest improvements in achievement. In contrast, schools that had a low score on one or more of the essential supports had a less than ten percent probability of improving. SDP surveys were modeled after the surveys developed in Chicago and administered in the Chicago Public Schools since the 1990s.

Survey Administration and Response Rate

The Central Office survey was open for two weeks in February – March 2020. The survey link was posted on ORE's website and was sent to all Central Office staff via email. At the end of the two-week window, there were 527 responses from 16 District divisions (Table 1). The three divisions with the most respondents were the Office of Academic Supports (n=153, 29%), the Office of Student Support Services (n=71, 13.5%), and the Office of Operations (n=48, 9.1%).

Table 1. Number and percent of survey responses by Central Office division

Central Office Division	Number of Respondents	Percent of Total Respondents
Office of Academic Supports	153	29.0%
Office of Student Support Services	71	13.5%
Office of Operations	48	9.1%
Office of Finance	45	8.5%
Office of Talent	42	8.0%
Office of Information Technology & Data Management	38	7.2%
Office of Evaluation, Research & Accountability	36	6.8%
Chief of Schools Office	24	4.6%
Other (please specify)*	17	3.2%
Office of the General Counsel	12	2.3%
Office of School Safety	10	1.9%
Charter Schools Office	9	1.7%
Office of Facilities & Capital Planning	9	1.7%
Office of the Superintendent	8	1.5%
Blank	4	0.8%
Office of Communications & External Relations	1	0.2%
Total	527	100%

*Respondents who selected "Other" provided the following specifications: Printing Services (N=2), Office of the Board of Education (N=2), School District of Philadelphia, CSN Floating Nurse, Music Teacher, family, Network, Office of the Inspector General, Training Center, Bache Martin, JROTC, school, Private Schools, Parent.

About forty percent of the 527 respondents indicated that they primarily spend their time working with Central Office staff and another 36.6% reported working primarily with school-based staff (Table 2).

Table 2. Most survey respondents primarily work with Central Office or school-based staff

How do you spend the majority of your time at work?	Number	Percent
Working with Central Office staff	213	40.4%
Working with school-based staff (i.e., teachers, principals, counselors, etc.)	193	36.6%
Working with others who are not employed by SDP	34	6.5%
Working with students	33	6.3%
Working with parents/families	23	4.4%
None of the above	21	4.0%
Blank	10	1.9%
Total	527	100%

Key Findings

Questions about the District-Wide Survey Topics

The survey was designed so that respondents would only be asked questions about the topics that were relevant to their work. Therefore, at the beginning of the survey, respondents were asked to indicate which of the five survey topics relate to the work that they do in SDP (respondents could select all that apply). Skip logic was used so that the subsequent questions on the survey corresponded to the topics selected. For example, a respondent that reported that their job relates to the topics of Instruction and School Climate was only asked questions about Instruction and School Climate, and not questions about Leadership, Parent/Guardian Community Ties, or Professional Capacity. Respondents that only selected Other (n=96, 18.2%) or None (n=102, 19.4%) skipped all the questions about the five topics (Table 3).

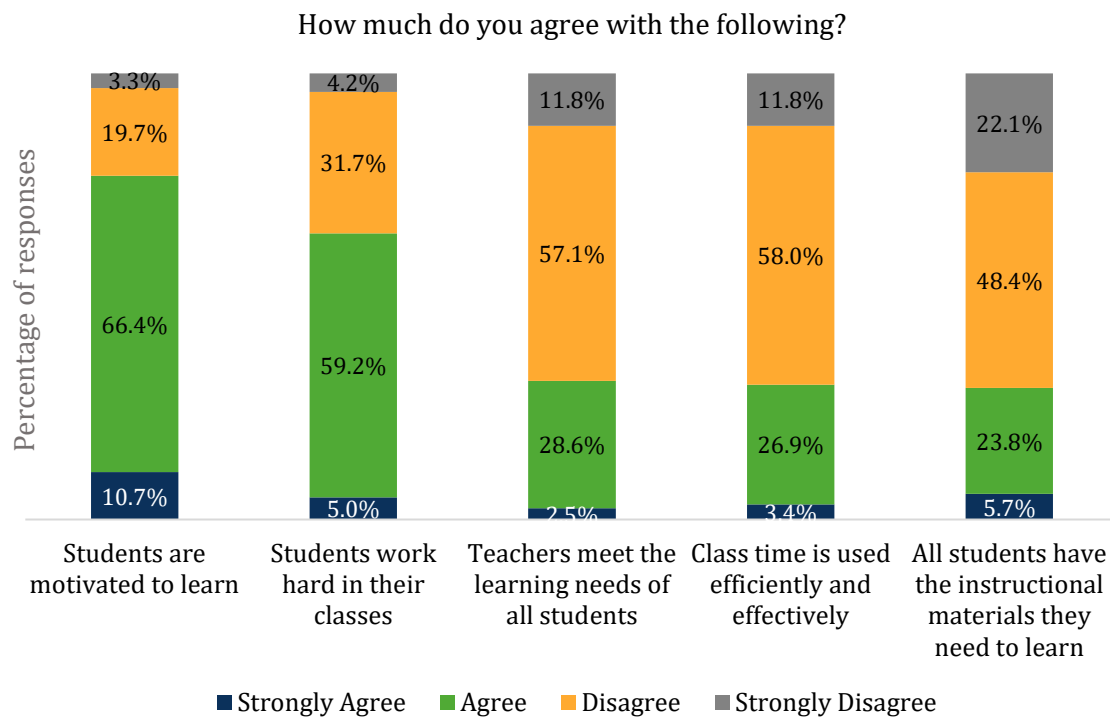Table 3: Number and percent of respondents that reported that the five survey topics related to their job

Survey Topic	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Instruction	169	32.1%
Leadership	170	32.3%
Parent/Guardian-Community Ties	112	21.3%
Professional Capacity	202	38.3%
School Climate	157	29.8%
Other	96	18.2%
None	102	19.4%

Note: Respondents could select more than one topic

Instruction

Of all respondents (N=527), about a third answered questions about Instruction. Of the respondents that answered questions about any of the five survey topics (N=329), 51% answered questions about Instruction. The majority of these respondents *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* with three of the five statements related to Instruction on the survey (Figure 1). Almost a quarter of respondents *strongly disagreed* that all students have the instructional materials they need to learn (gray portion of far-right stacked bar). However, respondents were more positive about the two statements relating to students. Over 75% *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that students are motivated to learn, and about 65% *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that students work hard in their classes (blue and green portions of first and second stacked bars).
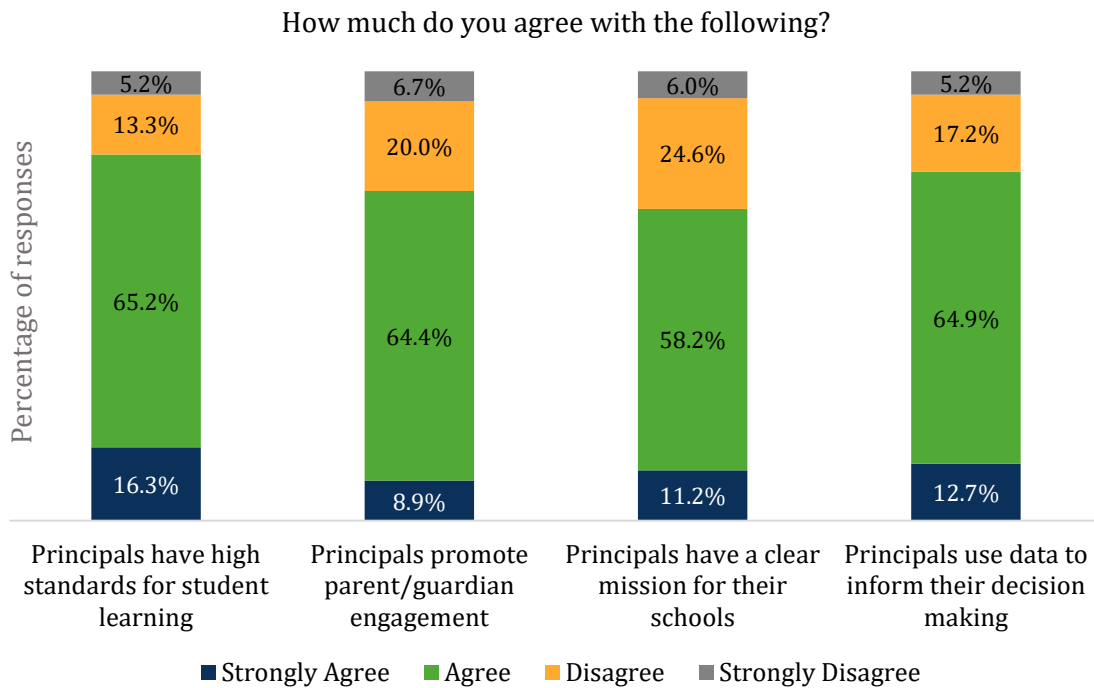
Figure 1. Central Office staff perceptions of Instruction (n=169)

How much do you agree with the following?

Leadership

Respondents who indicated their work relates to Leadership were asked how much they agree or disagree with four statements about school leadership (Figure 2). Of the four statements about Leadership, the one with the highest rate of agreement was "Principals have high standards for student learning," with about 82% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing (blue and green portions of the first stacked bar). In contrast, about a third of respondents _disagreed_ or _strongly disagreed_ that principals have a clear mission for their school (yellow and gray portions of the third stacked bar).
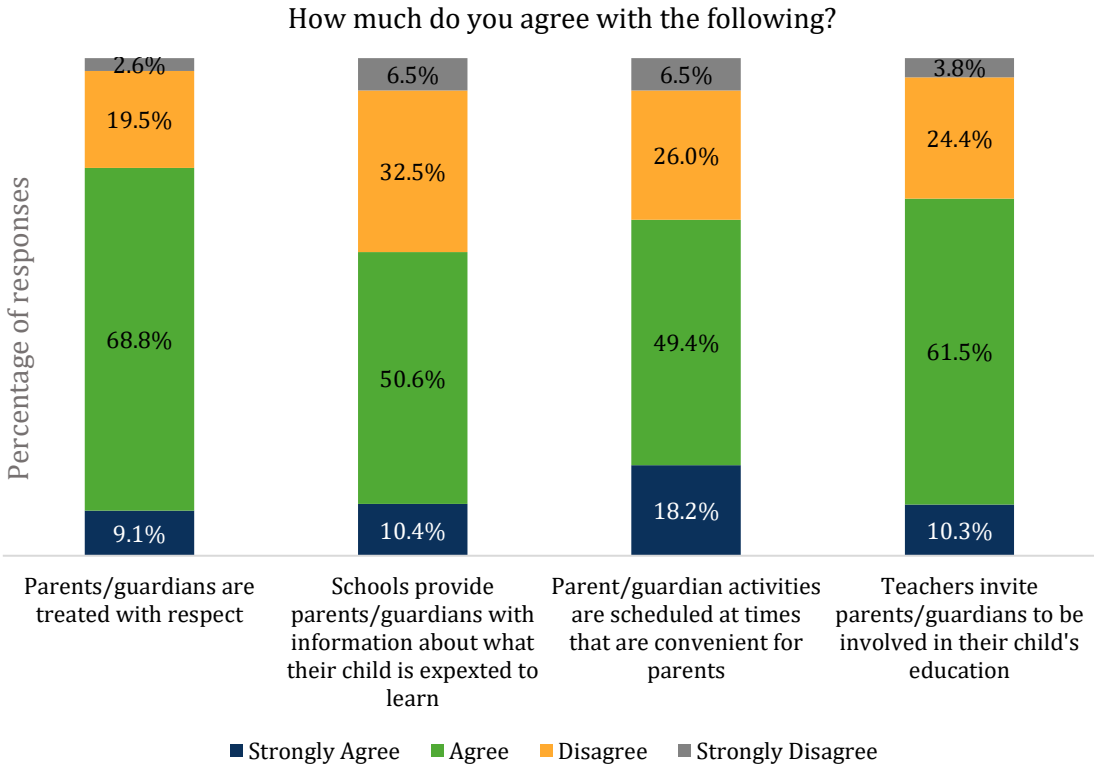
Figure 2. Central Office staff perceptions of School Leadership (n=170)

How much do you agree with the following?

Parent/Guardian-Community Ties

Respondents who indicated their work relates to Parent/Guardian-Community ties were asked how much they agree or disagree with four statements (Figure 3). Most respondents agreed with the four statements about Parent/Guardian-Community Ties. The statement with the highest rate of agreement (78%) was "Parents/guardians are treated with respect" (blue and green portions of first stacked bar). The statement with the lowest rate of agreement (61%) was "Schools provide parents/guardians with information about what their child is expected to learn" (blue and green portions of second stacked bar). While almost 20% of respondents *strongly agreed* that parent/guardian activities are scheduled at times that are convenient for parents (the highest rate of strongly agree across the four statements), 33% *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* with this same statement (third stacked bar).
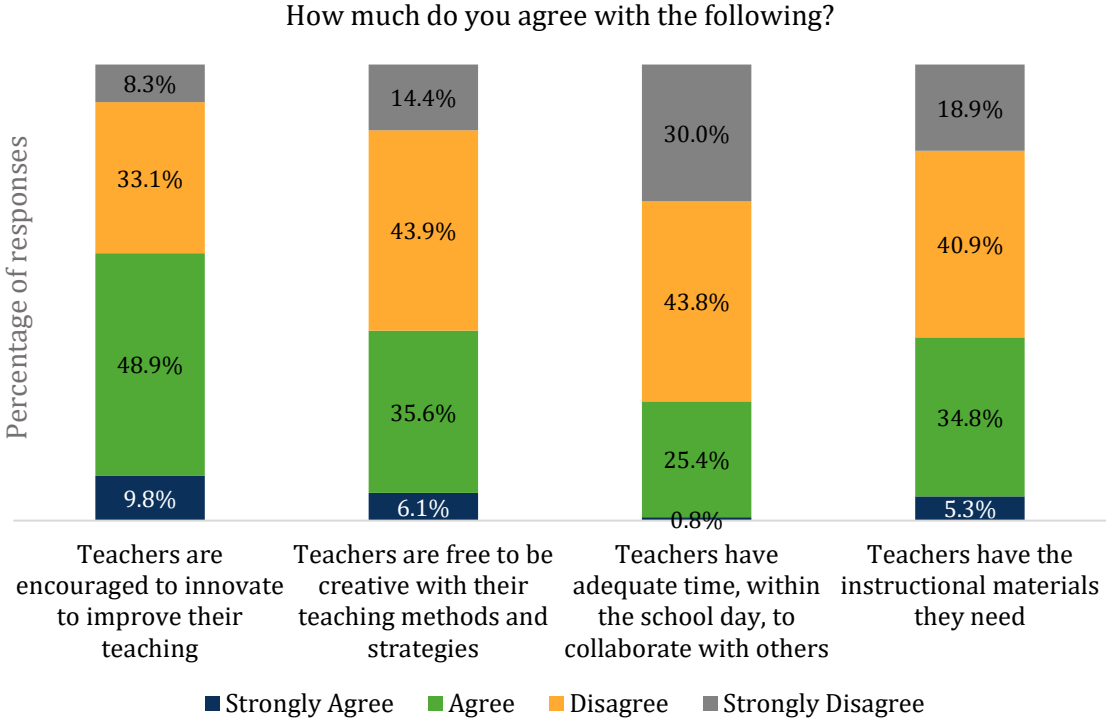
Figure 3. Central Office staff perceptions of Parent/Guardian Community Ties (n=112)

How much do you agree with the following?

	Parents/guardians are treated with respect	Schools provide parents/guardians with information about what their child is expected to learn	Parent/guardian activities are scheduled at times that are convenient for parents	Teachers invite parents/guardians to be involved in their child's education
Strongly Disagree	2.6%	6.5%	6.5%	3.8%
Disagree	19.5%	32.5%	26.0%	24.4%
Agree	68.8%	50.6%	49.4%	61.5%
Strongly Agree	9.1%	10.4%	18.2%	10.3%

■Strongly Agree ■Agree ■Disagree ■Strongly Disagree

Professional Capacity

Respondents who indicated their work relates to Professional Capacity were asked how much they agree or disagree with four statements (Figure 4). About 40% of all respondents indicated that their work related to Professional Capacity. When considering only the respondents that answered questions about any of the five survey topics, 61% indicated their work related to Professional Capacity. Of those that answered the Professional Capacity questions, most respondents (59%) *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that teachers are encouraged to innovate to improve their teaching (blue and green portions of first stacked bar). However, almost 75% *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* with the statement "Teachers have adequate time, within the school day, to collaborate with others" (yellow and gray portions of third stacked bar). Less than half (40%) of respondents also *agreed* or *strongly disagreed* that teachers have the instructional materials they need (blue and green portions of fourth stacked bar).
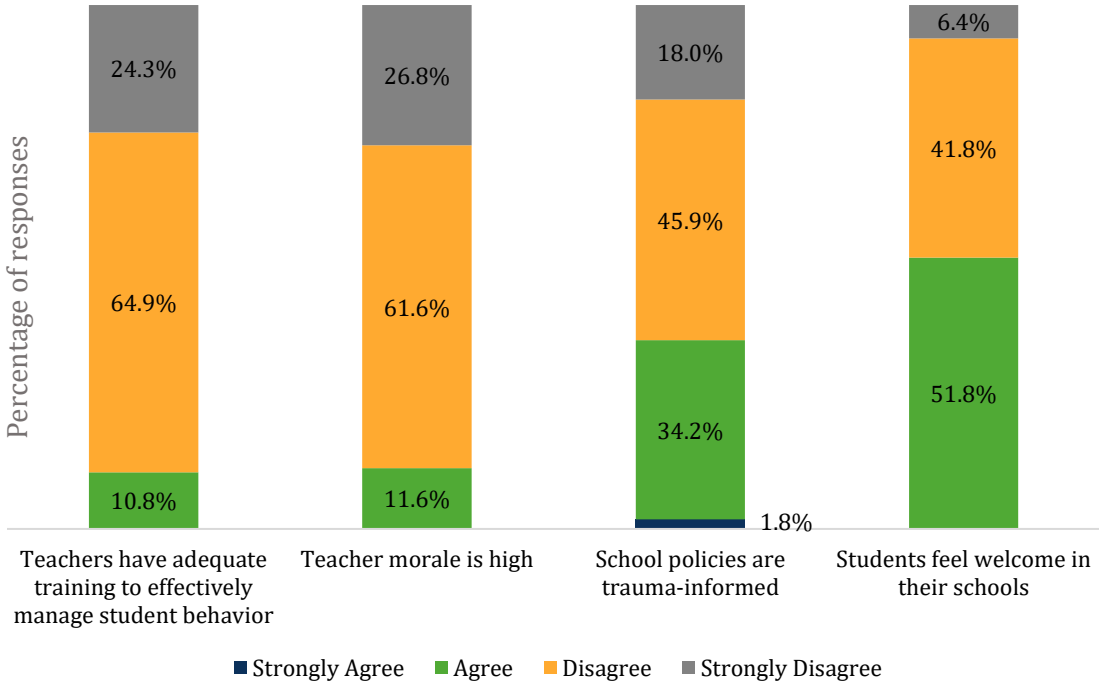
Figure 4. Central Office Staff Perceptions of Professional Capacity (n=202)

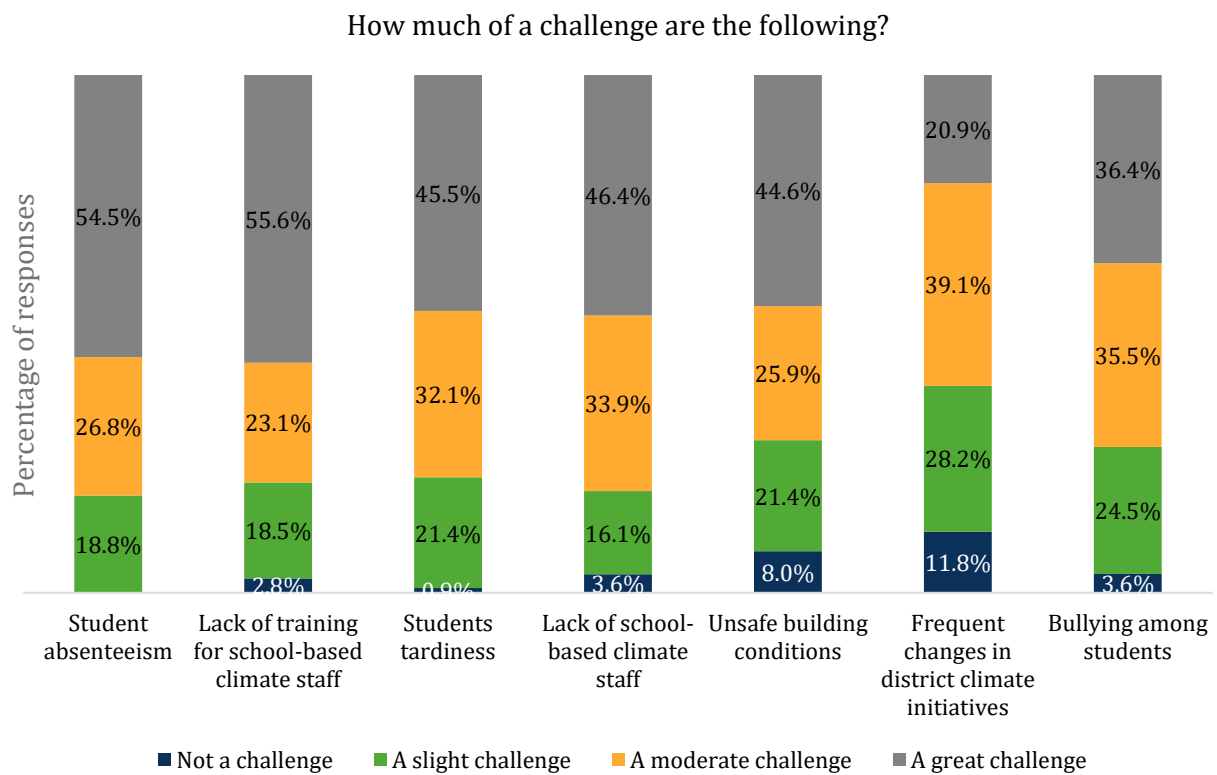How much do you agree with the following?

School Climate

Eight questions were asked of respondents who indicated that their work relates to School Climate. First, respondents were asked how much they agree with four statements (Figure 5). Few to no respondents *strongly agreed* with any of the four statements. Of the four statements, the one with the highest percentage of respondents disagreeing was "Teachers have adequate training to effectively manage student behavior," with 24% or respondents strongly disagreeing and another 65% disagreeing (first stacked bar). Most respondents also *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* with the statements "Teacher morale is high" (88% represented by yellow and gray portions of second stacked bar), and "School policies are trauma-informed" (64% represented by yellow and gray portions of third stacked bar).

Figure 5. Central Office Staff Perceptions of School Climate (n=157)

Respondents who indicated that their work relates to School Climate were asked four additional questions. These additional questions asked respondents to rate potential climate-related challenges from *a great challenge* to *not a challenge* (Figure 6). Between 21% and 56% of respondents rated any of the seven challenges as *a great challenge*, with all of the seven being rated as *a great challenge* or *a moderate challenge* by the majority of respondents. Over half of respondents rated student absenteeism and lack of training for school-based climate staff as *a great challenge* (55% and 56%, respectively) (first and second stacked bars). Additionally, around 45% of respondents rated student tardiness, lack of school-based climate staff, and unsafe building conditions as *a great challenge* (third, fourth, and fifth stacked bars).

Figure 6. Central Office staff perceptions of challenges to School Climate
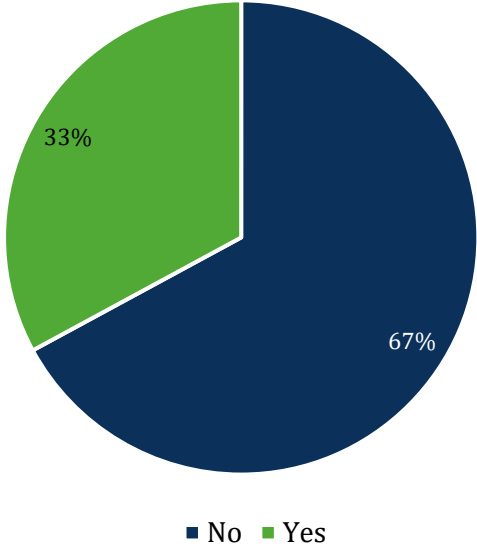
How much of a challenge are the following?

Questions about Use of the District-Wide Survey Data

The next set of questions prompted respondents to reflect on their use of District-Wide Survey (DWS) data. When asked if they ever used DWS data, a third of all respondents said yes (Figure 7).

Figure 7. One third of respondents reported that they used DWS data as part of their job (n=527)

Do you ever use District-Wide Survey results as part of your job?

■ No ■ Yes

If respondents said they did not use DWS data, they were asked to indicate why. Of the 300 respondents that said they do not use DWS results as part of their job, a third reported that none of the questions on the DWS are useful to their work. Few (n=6) selected results not being available in time as a reason for not using the data.

Table 4. Reasons why Central-office staff do not use DWS results

Reason	Number of Respondents
None of the questions on the survey are useful to my work	100
I don't know where to access the results	95
I'm not sure how to incorporate the survey results into my work	88
The results are not available in time	6

Note: Respondents were allowed to select all that apply

If respondents indicated that they **do** use DWS results in their work, they were asked to explain how. There were 96 open-ended responses explaining how Central Office Staff use DWS data that fell into eight major themes (Table 5) including: using data to develop and progress monitor school-level plans, using data around teacher professional development (PD) to inform future PD programming, using the data in evaluations of programs and initiatives, using parent/guardian responses with parents/guardians, using the data to understand student perspectives and needs,

using it to inform decisions at the district- and school-levels, using data to improve instructional practices, and creating data visualizations to make data accessible to others.

Table 5. Themes from open-ended responses about how DWS data is used by Central Office Staff

Themes summarizing how Central Office Staff use DWS data	Number of Responses Related to Theme	Example Responses
Develop and progress monitor school-level plans	25	*For setting goals in our Office to guide our work* *I help principals understand and use the results from the District-Wide Survey in their annual School Improvement plans*
Inform future PD programming	21	*We use it to inform us on which topics to cover when developing PDs and contracting with outside companies for professional development* *identifying areas of needed professional development*
Evaluate programs and initiatives	19	*I use District-wide survey data for evaluation* *I work on research and evaluation projects that use both individual and school-level DWS results (for example, developing predictors of on-track status using various DWS measures as one of many possible factors)*
Drive parent/guardian communications and programming	8	*I use it as part of parent meetings* *I use the parent surveys to plan, schedule and execute workshops and initiatives for parents and community members*
Understand student needs and perspectives	8	*We encourage students to complete the survey to get more feedback about ways to improve the quality of our programs* *The responses inform our Office about student attitudes towards their current school and help us determine if the accelerated school programs are meeting students' needs*
Inform decision making	9	*To help inform decisions made by the Board of Education* *To improve financial support and services to schools*
Improve instruction	6	*Working with and giving teachers and staff strategies* *To improve my instructional practices*
Create data visualizations that allow survey data to be analyzed and used	6	*To generate data reports for schools to understand their results* *Creating graphs, tables and school profiles*

Note: Some responses were coded as related to more than one of the eight themes. Additionally, there were six comments that did not fall into any of the themes, and were coded as "other."

A second open-ended question asked for suggestions for increasing the usefulness of the District-Wide Survey. There were 57 responses to this question. After reviewing these comments, five overarching themes were identified: suggested changes for the Central Office Survey, suggestions for adding and/or modifying questions on the existing surveys, comments about increasing the availability and accessibility of the data, suggestions for ways to analyze the data, and suggestions for improving communication about when survey data is available and where and how to access it (Table 6).

Table 6. Themes from open ended responses for suggestions on how to increase the usefulness of the DWS

Themes from suggestions for increasing usefulness	Number of Responses Related to Theme	Example Responses
Edits and additions to the Central Office Survey	18	*Central office survey should include questions about working at 440. Questions should gather information on workplace, engagement, culture, etc. in the same way that we survey school-based staff* *I think it would be worthwhile to survey central office staff about our morale and the culture of the central office. This would be a good way to identify opportunities to improve work conditions, which could improve productivity*
Edits and additions to the District-Wide Surveys	10	*Include athletics specific questions regarding athletic directors, coaches, trainers, etc.* *Ask how instruction might be improved, how teachers at neighborhood schools can be given more time to collaborate and more autonomy, how leadership can do more than critique teachers, quality programs to improve instruction for all students, etc. The questions in the survey are inadequate*
Making the survey data more accessible and available	10	*Increase availability* *Email the results directly*
How the data is analyzed and used	10	*Consider additional student subpopulations, ex: disaggregate by general ed, special ed and/or other populations. Their responses might differ* *The results of the surveys could be a tool to start a dialog discussed during PD's with staff, students' meetings, and SAC in an effort to address their concerns which could be used to improve the operations of the school if any*
Improved communication around when data is available and how/where to access it	7	*Increase push and communication of results available in Qlik* *Consider a awareness campaign... My guess is that the vast majority of Central Staff have limited awareness of the Survey, much less how to put the results to work for us...*

Note: Some responses were coded as related to more than one of the five themes. Additionally, there were six comments that did not fall into any of the themes, and were coded as "other."

The final open-ended question on the Central Office Survey provided space for respondents to add any additional comments about the District-Wide Survey. The 29 responses to this question fell into four categories: suggestions for changes to the Central Office survey, suggestions for the District-Wide Surveys, feedback pertaining to a specific program office, and other (Table 7).

Table 7. Additional open-ended comments

Themes from open-ended responses	Number of Responses Related to Theme
Suggestions for changes to the Central Office Survey	10
Suggestions for the District-Wide Surveys	11
Feedback about a program office	3
Other	6

Note: Each response was coded as related to one theme.

Summary

For the first time, in 2019-20, the Office of Research and Evaluation designed and administered a survey to Central Office staff that asked for their feedback around the key focus areas on the District-Wide Surveys. The Central Office Survey also asked if, and how, staff use results from the District-Wide Survey in their work.

Overall, Central Office staff who responded to the survey provided primarily negative responses to the Instruction and School Climate questions, revealing awareness that there is room for improvement in these areas. Responses to the Professional Capacity questions were mixed, while the Leadership and Parent/Guardian-Community Ties responses were primarily positive.

Central Office staff who completed the survey reported that the three most common uses of DWS data are in the development and monitoring of school-level plans, informing professional development, and evaluating programs and initiatives. When asked for suggestions on how the District-Wide Surveys could be more useful, three prevalent themes were modifications to the Central Office Survey, modifications to the existing District-Wide Surveys, and making the survey data more accessible and available.