



TO: D.C. State Board of Education Members
FROM: SBOE Staff
RE: **STAR Framework Principal Survey Report**
DATE: November 24, 2021

Executive Summary

This *STAR Framework Principal Survey Report* is the first in a four-part series of reports on input and feedback received from families, principals, teachers, D.C. residents, and experts on D.C.’s school accountability system (i.e., STAR Framework and Rating). The purpose of this report and survey was to understand principals’ experiences with the STAR Framework and Rating, as well as gather feedback on changes principals would like to see in D.C.’s school accountability system. Key highlights and their recommended changes to the D.C. school accountability system are provided below and are based on findings from the 2021 STAR Framework Principal Survey.

Principal Survey Key Highlights

The following are major themes and highlights from open-ended and multiple-choice Principal Survey items on the STAR Framework and Rating:

Definition of School Quality

Most principals describe school quality as encompassing a wide range of factors that they see as contributing to academic achievement as well as how schools “measure up” on various academic and school climate measures. For example, when asked to define the term *school quality*, principals raised issues like high-quality instruction, safety, responding to socio-emotional needs, a school’s ability to “help students reach their academic, social, and career goals.” 32 out of 37 principals (90%) described it as going beyond academic achievement and growth—towards responsiveness to student populations, staff satisfaction, and supporting the surrounding community.

Principals were roughly split on whether the STAR Rating is an “unfair” assessment of their school’s quality. About 54% of principals agreed that the STAR Rating provided a fair assessment of their school’s quality, 47% of principals disagreed. About 10% felt it was very unfair and none agreed that it was very fair.

Most principals don’t believe the STAR Rating tells the whole story of a school’s performance to families. Two thirds of principals (66%) believed the STAR Rating provided at least a somewhat incomplete picture of their school’s quality, and nearly two-thirds (29%) felt it provided a very incomplete picture. None felt it provided a very complete picture.



Impacts on School/Principals

Principals are more likely to provide negative examples of the impacts the STAR Rating has had on their ability to lead their schools, as well as actions, behaviors, and school policies, compared to those that described positive impacts. Out of 37 open-ended responses, 22 principals (59%) named negative impacts. For example, this group of principals said the STAR Rating shifted the school's focus *away from* desired whole child/holistic¹ areas of education and mostly towards academic achievement (38 percent); 27% of responding principals also reported that the STAR Rating put stress and pressures on them to increase or maintain their number of stars.

Out of 27 responding principals, 11 (41%) describing *negative* impacts the STAR Rating made on their school's *actions, behaviors, and school policies*, five (19%) cited added pressure to market their schools to communities and brace for enrollment issues. Only seven (21%) provided positive impacts like motivating staff to close opportunity gaps at their schools.

Most principals agreed the STAR Rating causes an excessive amount of attention to be paid to English language arts (ELA)/math than that of other subjects like art and social studies.² Most principals (40%) felt that an excessive amount of attention is paid to ELA/math test scores than other subjects (e.g., science, electives, etc.) or other student needs and only a few (8%) felt an appropriate amount of attention was paid to ELA/math test scores.

School Accountability Indicators

Most principals selected academic growth and non-academic achievement indicators³ over academic achievement indicators when asked what they generally wanted to see reflected in the STAR Framework and DC School Report Card. Of the indicators principals want to see included in the **STAR Framework**, *the top three most popular* were:

1. Academic growth on ELA/math (50%)
2. A measure of socio-emotional learning (46%)
3. Student safety (44%)

The *three least popular* indicators were:

1. Teacher/staff retention (12%)
2. Suspension rates (14%)
3. Students' SAT scores (19%)

¹ Throughout this report, the concept of a whole child approach to education will refer to school policies, practices, and relationships that ensure students are healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. The concept of a holistic approach to education is based on principals' responses describing balancing ELA/math proficiency with well-rounded education such as arts, science, physical education, and socio-emotional learning opportunities.

² The usage of *than* was a misprint in the original Principal Survey Question 12, and so could only be interpreted how it was displayed to participants. The survey item was intended to ask whether an excessive amount of attention is paid to ELA/math test scores *at the expense of* other subjects.

³ See Footnote 8 under Question 16 in Findings for a full list of indicators and distinction between academic and non-academic indicators.



Of the indicators principals wanted to see published in the **DC School Report Card** but not included in the STAR Rating, *the top three* were:

1. Student safety (72%)
2. Students' SAT scores (67%)
3. Teacher/staff retention (62%)

The *three least popular* indicators⁴ were:

1. 4-year graduation rate (33%)
2. A measure of a well-rounded curriculum (38%)
3. School climate indicator (42%)

Most principals said that non-academic STAR Framework indicators that focused on whole child education and student/family satisfaction would provide a more accurate picture of their school's quality. The following were *the top three indicators* that 20 responding principals said would accurately portray their school's quality:

1. Student-centered indicators (i.e., individual education plan (IEP) progress, language immersion, etc.) (50%)
2. Student/parent satisfaction (30%)
3. Resources and services available at the school (i.e., wraparound services, structural integrity of the building, etc.) (25%)

Among responding principals' indicators deemed most important in better serving specific student population/community, none fell under academic achievement. In an open-ended question asking principals to provide the most important indicators to include in the STAR Framework that would support the needs of specific student populations and/or communities, 23 responding principals provided the following *top three indicators*:

1. Student/family satisfaction and school climate metrics (52%)
2. Growth on academic assessments (48%)
3. Quality and training amongst school staff (22%)

Most principals pointed to academic achievement/proficiency as an indicator they felt detracted from supporting the needs of specific student populations and/or communities. Out of 26 responses 15 principals (58%) shared academic achievement indicators detracted from supporting the needs of specific student populations and/or communities; attendance and enrollment indicators were mentioned as well (19%).

⁴ Those chosen the least from a list of indicators.



School Support Systems

Most principals reported not receiving supports based on their schools 2019 STAR Rating. When asked whether they received supports (e.g., extra funding, teacher training, materials/supplies, tutors) based on their schools 2019 STAR Rating, 68% said they did not.

A majority of principals suggested either tying assistance to indicators or being more mindful of student sub-groups. Out of 21 principal responses, most (29%) suggested tying supports to STAR Framework indicators, rather than the STAR Rating itself, while 24% recommended using the STAR Framework student subgroups to identify areas of need.





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Principal Respondent Overview

A total of 42 principals completed the Principal Survey, and their responses have been analyzed below.⁵ In order for a principal's responses to be considered, participants needed to have at least 2 years of experience serving as a school leader in D.C.

Of the 42 respondents who fully completed the survey, elementary school principals, had the largest representation, making up over half of respondents (n=23). Nearly half of respondents serve at DC Public Schools (DCPS) (n=22), the other half serve at public charter schools (n=20). Most respondents (n=34) reported serving at Title I schools. Lastly, nearly half of respondents (n=23) had 5–10 years of experience leading schools in D.C. Table 1 below provides a demographic breakdown of principal respondents.⁶

Table 1– Principal Respondent Demographic Breakdown

Title I Status	# of Responses	% of Responses	STAR Rating Breakdown	# of Responses	% of Responses	Years Working as a Principal in DC	# of Responses	% of Responses
Title I	34	81.0%	1 star	2	5%	1 year	0	0%
Not Title I	8	19.1%	2 stars	8	19%	2 years	3	7%
School Type	# of Responses	% of Responses	3 stars	8	19%	3 years	5	12%
DCPS + DCPS Alternative	20	48%	4 stars	12	29%	4 years	6	14%
Charter + Charter Alternative	22	52%	5 stars	4	10%	5-10 years	23	55%
Ward	# of Responses	% of Responses	I do not recall	4	10%	11-20 years	3	7%
Ward 1	7	17%	Not applicable.	4	10%	20+ years	2	5%
Ward 2	2	5%	Grade Bands	# of Responses	% of Responses			
Ward 3	2	5%	Elementary School	23	55%			
Ward 4	9	21%	Middle School	9	21%			
Ward 5	5	12%	High School	5	12%			
Ward 6	3	7%	Education Campus	5	12%			
Ward 7	7	17%						
Ward 8	7	17%						

Findings

The following are findings from each of the 16 survey questions and reflect only those respondents who fully completed the survey (n=42 principals).

Question 9 – What does the term “school quality” mean to you?

Asked what school quality means to them, 32 out of 37 principals (90%) described school quality in terms of responsiveness to student populations, staff satisfaction, and supporting the surrounding community.

Sample Quotes

- *“School quality refers to the organization’s ability to serve its students, staff, and families as a healthy, joyful place of learning. High levels of school quality are indicated by happy students who are prepared academically, socially, and emotionally for the next steps, low attrition, financial stability, loyal staff, and a unified mission.”*

⁶ The State Board recognizes the limitations of this survey’s findings due to the overall sample size of responding principals and over/underrepresentation of principal groups responding to survey items. However, this report, as mentioned in the Executive Summary, will accompany three other reports based on feedback from educators, school accountability experts, general D.C. residents, State Board members, and further feedback from principals engaged in D.C. State Board of Education outreach events/public meetings.

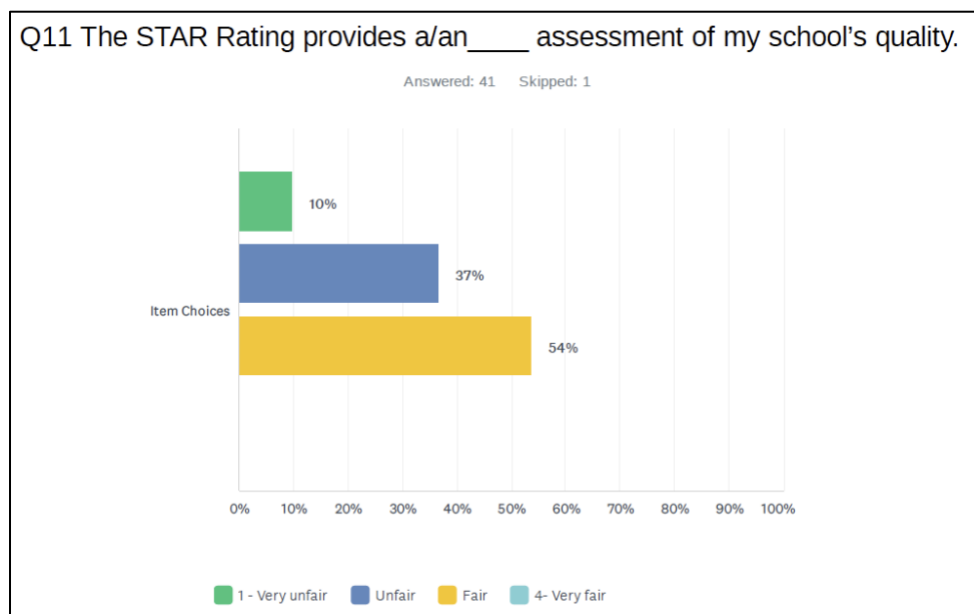


- “How strong our mission and educational philosophy is, and how well we engage, instruct, and support our students in line with that philosophy.”
- Schools that equip students to achieve academic and social-emotional success to their fullest abilities. They have teachers and leaders who demonstrate deep content and pedagogical knowledge to serve and equip their communities.”

Question 11 – Level of Fairness the STAR Rating provides as an Assessment of School Quality

About half of principals (47%) felt the STAR Rating provides an unfair to very unfair assessment of their school’s quality. No principals felt it was a very fair assessment of their school’s quality. (See *Figure 1* below).

Figure 1- Level of Fairness the STAR Rating provides as an Assessment of School Quality

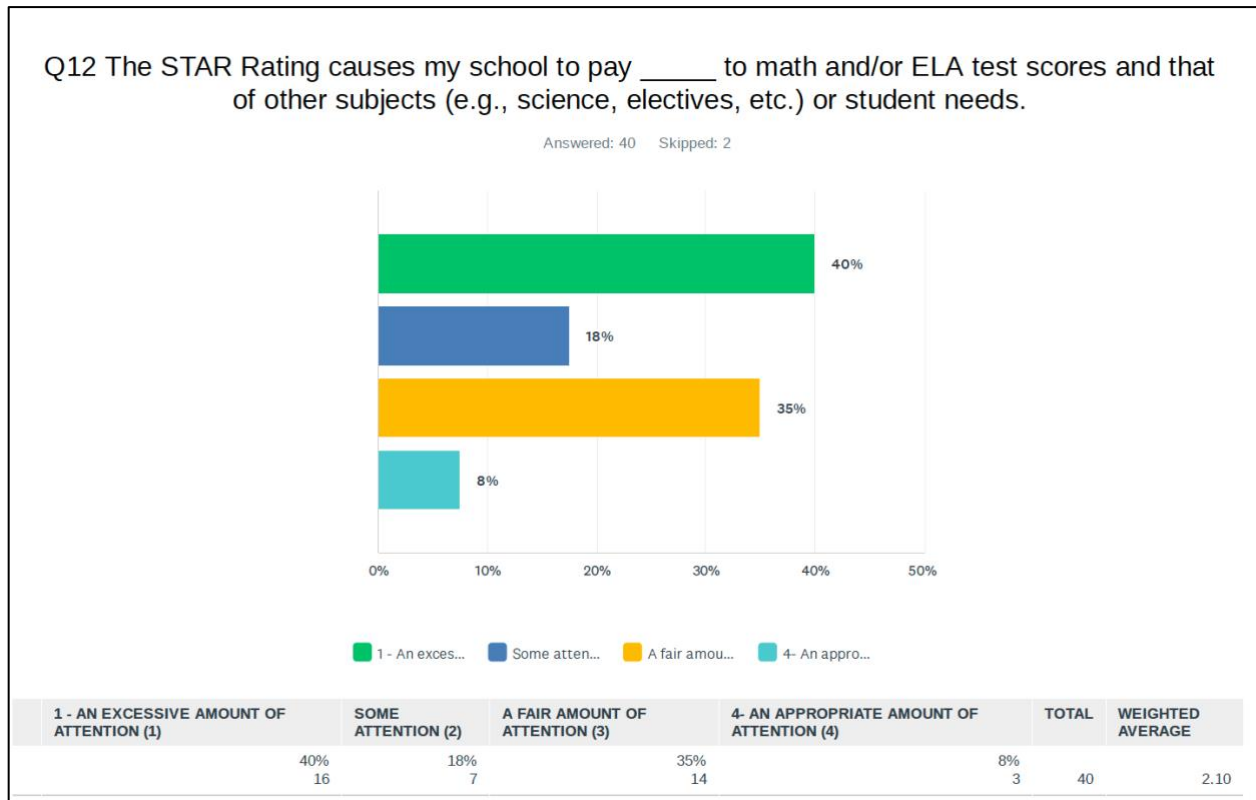




Question 12 – Amount of Attention Paid to ELA/Math Test Scores and That of Other Subjects (e.g., science, electives, etc.) or Student Needs⁷

A plurality of principals (40%) felt that an excessive amount of attention is paid to ELA/math test scores than other subjects (e.g., science, electives, etc.) or other student needs. Only a few (8%) felt an appropriate amount of attention was paid to ELA/math test scores (see *Figure 2 below*).

Figure 2- Completeness the STAR Rating Conveys to Families About Their School's Quality



⁷ See Footnote 2 in the Key Highlights section for an explanation of this survey question's wording.

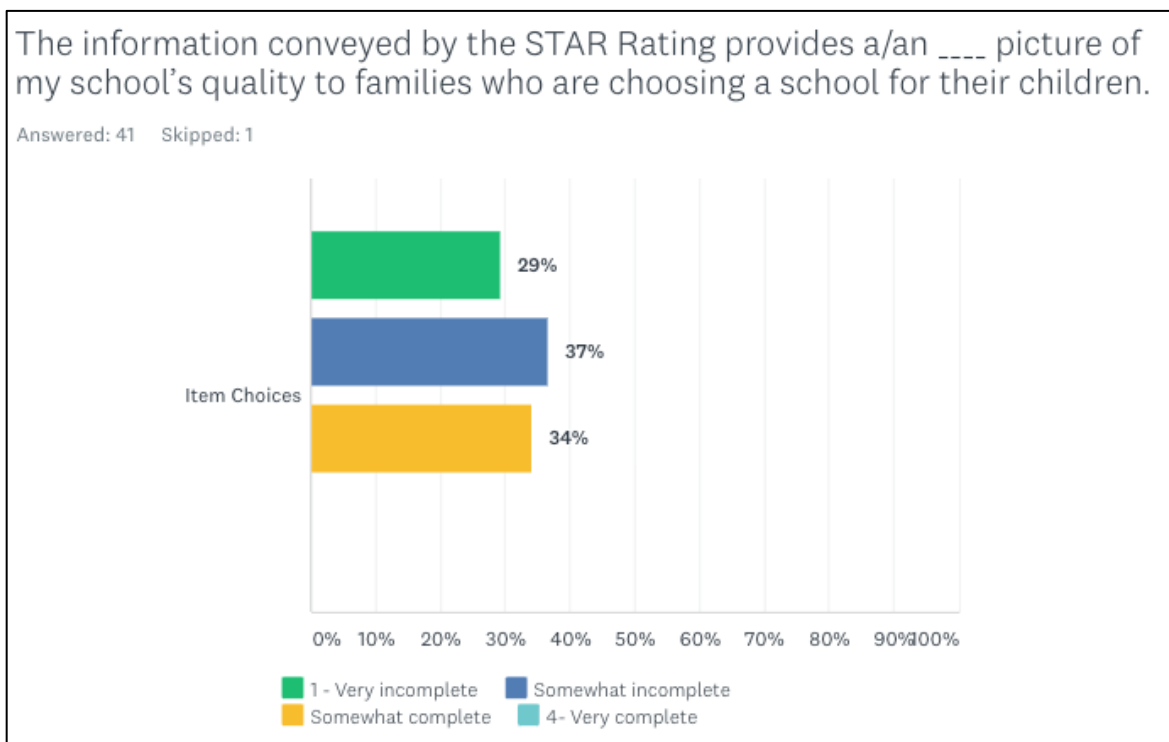




Question 13 – Level of Completeness the STAR Rating Conveys to Families About Their School’s Quality

Most respondents (66%) felt the STAR Rating provides at least a somewhat incomplete picture of their school’s quality to families who are choosing a school for their children; nearly a third of respondents (29%) said it provided a very incomplete picture of their school’s quality, while none said it provided a very complete picture. See *Figure 3* below.

Figure 3- Level of Completeness the STAR Rating Conveys to Families About Their School’s Quality

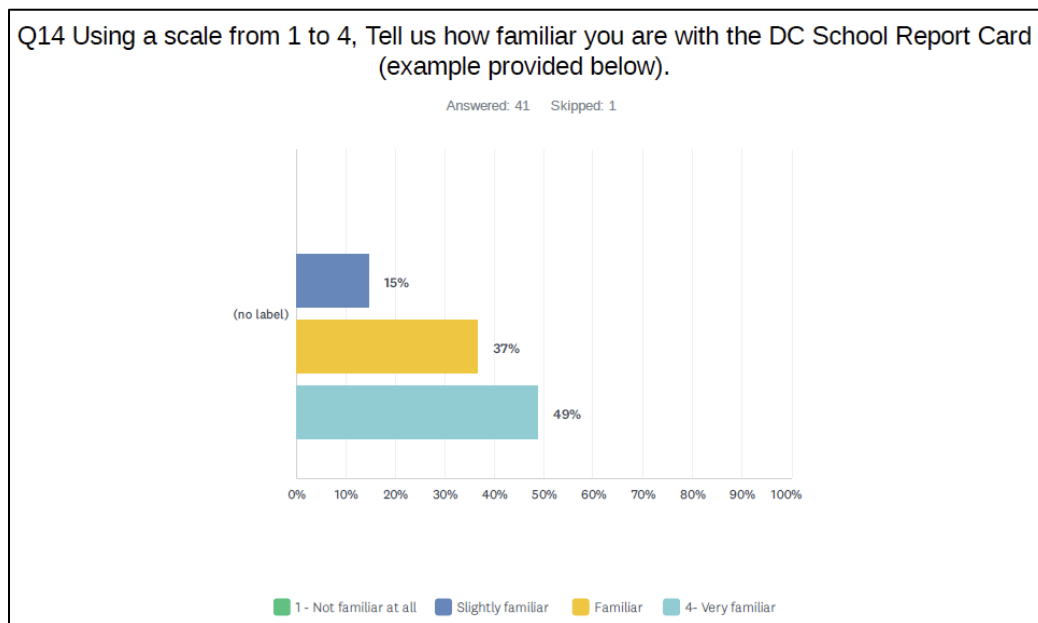




Question 14 –Familiarity with the DC School Report Card

All responding principals were at least slightly familiar with the DC School Report Card, with 20 principals (49%) saying they were very familiar with it (see *Figure 4* below).

Figure 4 - Question 14: Familiarity with the DC School Report Card



Question 15 – Impacts the STAR Rating has Made on Principal’s Ability to Lead at Their School

The STAR Rating made mostly negative impacts on principals’ ability to lead, with 22 out of 37 (59%) respondents providing negative experiences. Most comments categorized as negative described the STAR Rating as causing the school to shift away from whole child/holistic areas of education and mostly towards academic achievement (38%). Principals also reported the STAR Rating putting stress and pressures on them to increase or maintain their number of stars (27%).

Out of the five principals (14%) who shared positive experiences of the STAR Rating. Four principals (11%) said that it helped them use data to make decisions, especially for student subgroups.

The remaining 11 principals (30%) shared that the STAR Rating made little to no impact on their school—seven (7) out of these 11 principals belonged to public charter schools.

Sample Quotes

- *“The STAR Rating places an unfair amount of stress and demands on school leaders if their school is rated low. It takes the focus away from what matters the most and places a great demand on time spent dealing with matters that take away from instruction. Furthermore, the stress at a 1 STAR schools is overwhelming.”*



- “The STAR Rating leaves me feeling super vulnerable as a leader as I saw schools move up and down drastically over a year even though their academics remained the same. It does not take into account metrics such as incomplete funding, leadership development, shifting populations within the city, etc.”
- “The STAR Rating has further shined a light on PARCC as the defining measure of my school's quality. Because PARCC scores can vary so much from year to year, the STAR Rating can fluctuate as well, giving families and the public an incomplete perception about what to expect by choosing my school.”
- “The weight of student growth year over year is significant and should continue to be used to measure high quality schools, while also balancing that with strong outcomes for students, especially comparing those outcomes to outcomes for students of similar demographics in other schools.”

Question 16 – Indicators That Would Provide an Accurate Picture of School Quality

Asked to select indicators⁸ principals would generally want to see **included in the STAR Framework**, the top four were:

1. Academic growth on ELA/math (50%)
2. A measure of socio-emotional learning (46%)
3. Student safety (44%)
4. Growth in English-language proficiency (42%)

The four *least* popular indicators were:

1. Teacher/staff retention (12%)
2. Suspension rates (14%)
3. Students’ SAT scores (19%)
4. 4-year graduation rate (33%)

Asked to select indicators principals would generally want to see included in the **DC School Report Card but not the STAR Framework and Rating**, the top four were:

1. Student safety (72%)
2. Students’ SAT scores (67%)

⁸ Indicators that respondents could choose from were color coded, with blue text offering indicators currently used in the STAR Rating, and orange text offering indicators not currently used in the STAR Rating. *Blue text indicators* (featured in the current STAR Framework) included: The percentage of students who have reached “proficiency” on PARCC ELA/ and math assessments, Annual test score growth of students in ELA and math (ES/MS only), Growth in English language proficiency (for English Language Learners), Students’ SAT scores (HS Only), Progress of students most in need, Proportion of students who have re-enrolled at the school in the following year, Attendance rates, AP/IB participation and/or performance (HS only), 4-year graduation rate (HS only). *Orange text indicators* (not currently in the STAR Framework) included: Growth in reading achievement at 1st and 2nd grades, Suspension rate, A validated indicator of school climate, A measure of a well-rounded curriculum, including a curriculum rich in social studies, sciences, and the arts, Teacher/staff retention, Student safety, A measure of socio-emotional learning. Note that the first five *blue text indicators* were considered academic indicators, as well as the first *orange text indicator* listed.



3. Teacher/staff retention (62%)
4. The percentage of students who have reached “proficiency” on PARCC ELA/math assessments (60%)

The four *least* popular indicators were:

1. 4-year graduation rate (33%)
2. Student re-enrollment (35%)
3. A measure of a well-rounded curriculum (38%)
4. School climate indicator (42%)

Question 17 – Indicators That Should be Included in the STAR Rating or Publicly Reported That Would Provide an Accurate Picture of Their School’s Quality

Asked which indicators should be included in the STAR Framework and Rating that would provide an accurate picture of their school’s quality, 20 principals provided one, or a combination, of the following *top three indicators*:

1. Student-centered indicators (i.e., individual education plan (IEP) progress, language immersion, etc.) (50%)
2. Student/parent satisfaction (30%)
3. Resources and services available at the school (i.e., wraparound services, structural integrity of the building, etc.) (25%)

Sample Quotes

- *“I think the condition of the building should be of public record as well. Some schools have been modernized while others are waiting on the list. School environment matters.”*
- *“Quantitative measures are always an incomplete picture of human endeavors, like education. I am wary of checking the box to include any of these in a quantifiable STAR Rating because they inherently leave out part of the picture. Perhaps family feedback via Panorama survey could be valuable to add.”*
- *“I’m not sure how to capture this, but our school is a community school, and we provide significant services and supports through our wraparound partnership. This is invaluable to families. I do think leadership and teacher retention numbers are important. Having worked in charter and district schools, I see the major difference in schools that have a majority of teachers in the first three years of their career versus more diverse teams.”*
- *“A more thorough description of the school demographics, as well as qualitative descriptions of offerings, activities and outcomes.”*

Question 18 – Indicators that Help Principals Focus on Supporting Their School’s Specific Population/Community and their Needs

Asked specifically which indicators should be included in the STAR Framework and Rating that help principals focus on supporting the needs of their school and specific student populations/community needs, 23 respondents shared *the top three indicators*:

1. Student/family satisfaction and school climate metrics (52%)



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2. Growth on academic assessments (48%)
3. Quality and training amongst school staff (22%)

Sample Quotes

- *“I think there should be some measure for SEL growth and support. We are in a pandemic. We would be remiss if we did not seize this moment to measure how effective we are as educational practitioners if we do not measure our growth and effectiveness in SEL.”*
- *“Indicators around breadth of experiences, joy to be in school, supports available, would all be helpful.”*
- *“As long as PARCC remains the main indicator, it will be what my school is pressured to improve (at the expense of more holistic experiences). Including more metrics that focus on cross-curricular work, additional subjects, special subject areas, etc., will help push the district to align resources and accountability around those areas as well.”*
- *“Indicators that highlight the growth specific student groups are making—student A's growth from year 1 to 2, rather than comparing student A's growth in 2019 to student B's growth in 2020.”*

Question 19 – Metrics that Detracted from Helping Principals Focus on Focus on Supporting Their School's Specific Population/Community and their Needs

Out of 26 responses, 15 principals (58%) shared that academic achievement indicators detracted from helping them focus on supporting the needs of their school and specific student populations/community needs. Five principals (19%) shared attendance and enrollment indicators. Few other indicators were noted by respondents.

Sample quotes

- *“Overall, PARCC test scores are a frustrating metric. While important for the work we do as a school, it often is over-weighted in the public's view. It sends the wrong message to parents and is more reflective of socio-economic status than the work going on in the school.”*
- *“Test scores detract from overall quality of school view—some only concentrate on that metric—not improvement, not culture, safety, etc.”*
- *“Schools cannot control attendance, especially when students are in self-contained classes and miss the bus, or when parents often don't bring their elementary-age students to school. In addition, student re-enrollment should be removed as gentrification is a thing, and many families are being forced out their homes/neighborhoods. Lastly, teacher retention should be eliminated as teachers retire, change careers, and vision.”*

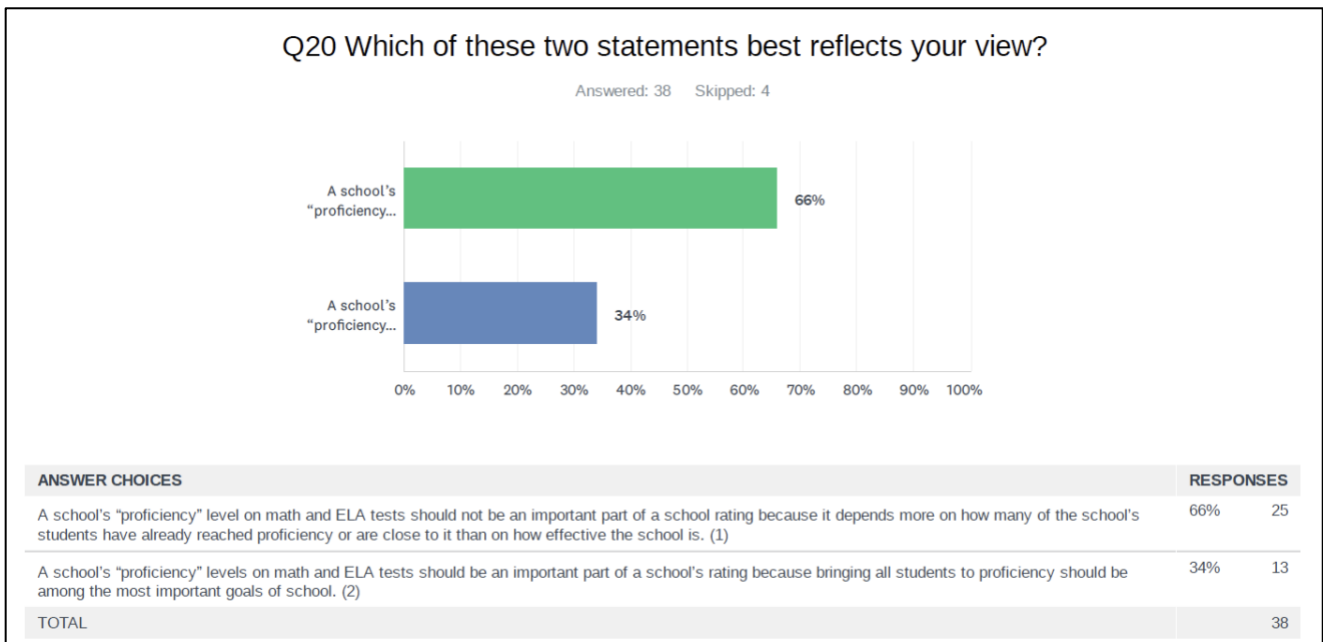




Question 20 – Weighting of Academic Proficiency Scores in the STAR Framework

A majority of respondents (66%) agreed that a students’ proficiency level⁹ on math and ELA tests should not be an important part of a school rating because it depends more on how many of the school’s students have already reached proficiency or are close to it than on how effective the school is. (see *Figure 5* below).

Figure 5 - Question 20: Weighting of Academic Proficiency Scores in the STAR Framework



⁹ Proficiency level, also known as academic achievement, is focused on test scores, rather than academic growth on test scores.

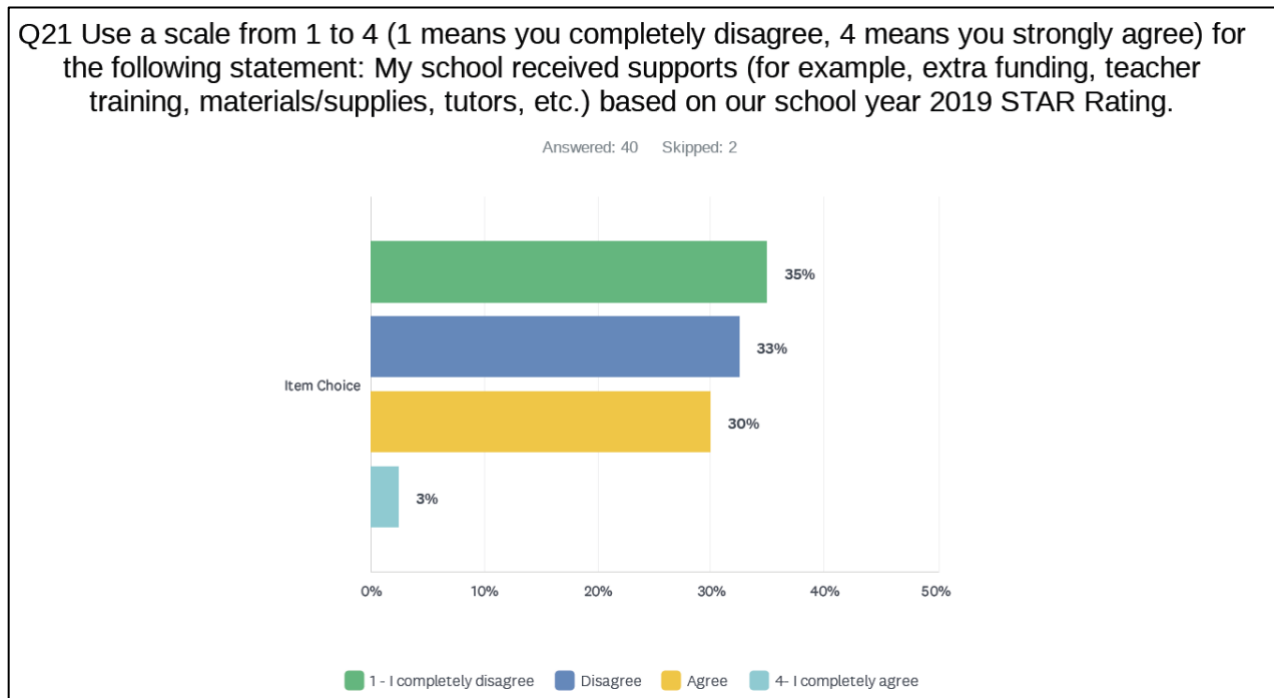




Question 21 – Supports Received Based on the 2019 STAR Rating

Most principals (68%) disagreed that their school received supports (e.g., extra funding, teacher training, materials/supplies, tutors) based on their schools 2019 STAR Rating. Over a third (35%) completely disagreed with this (see *Figure 6* below).

Figure 6 - Question 21: Supports Received Based on the 2019 STAR Rating



Question 22 – How, if at all, do you recommend connecting a school’s rating to its getting assistance?

Out of 21 responses, the top two themes that clearly stood out regarding tying a schools STAR Rating to assistance were:

1. Tying supports to indicators, regardless of the school’s STAR Rating (29%)
2. Use the STAR Framework student subgroups to identify areas of need (24%)

Sample Quotes

- “All schools should receive support based on areas that need support, not just schools with lowest overall performance.”
- “Excessive funding is often given to schools that receive a STAR Rating of a 1 and 2, and schools that perform well are left to figure it out with limited resources.”



- *“Our student population and demographics should be an indicator for supports. Because of our star rating, we did not receive additional funding to support other initiatives. We still need support in our special education department as well as with social emotional learning.”*
- *“Access to programmatic support in an area that a school may be struggling (ELL for example)”*

Question 23 – Please share any thoughts you have on creating a better connection between a school’s STAR Rating and the assistance it would get (from OSSE, the school’s LEA, etc.)

Out of 18 responses, the *top two themes* that clearly stood out regarding creating a better connection between a school’s STAR Rating and the assistance it would get were:

1. Decouple from the STAR Rating (22%)
2. Include input from school leaders, staff, and families (22%)

Sample Quotes

- *“Because the STAR Rating does not accurately reflect how a school serves its students, tying it to funding is extremely unfair.”*
- *“Individual schools need individual support.”*
- *“Support should look more like listening to school leaders and teachers and families to identify needs and truly understand the school community rather than outside support providers assigning compliance tasks that may not meet the needs of the community.”*
- *“The STAR Rating does not reflect the thoughts of Black and Brown families. Make a conscious effort to get their input.”*

Question 24 – What, if any, impact has the STAR Rating had on your school’s actions, behaviors, and/or school policies, if any, for better or worse. [Open-ended]

The STAR Rating mostly made little to no impact on a respondent principal’s school’s actions, behaviors, and/or school policies, according to 11 out of 27 respondents (41%), or negative impacts according to another 11 principals (41%). Five principals (19%) cited added pressure to market their schools to communities and brace for enrollment issues.

Seven out of 27 respondents provided positive impacts, including five principals (21%) sharing that it motivates their school to improve student achievement and close opportunity gaps.

Sample Quotes

- *“The STAR Rating has had the impact of putting additional pressure on the school, without any visible benefits.”*
- *“It tarnishes our community reputation. Who wants to attend a school rated as two star?”*
- *“Motivates us to receive five stars and pushes us to eliminate achievement gaps.”*
- *“I think it has offered families an opportunity to compare/rank my school with others, including [public charter schools], which has some positive effect. Otherwise, it hasn’t changed our actions or behaviors as a school community.”*



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Question 25 – Please note any thoughts you have and what, if anything, can be done to improve the STAR Rating or its use.

Out of 20 responses, the *top two themes* that stood out for improving the STAR Rating were:

1. Decrease weighting on academic achievement indicators (40%)
2. Include input from school leaders, staff, and families (20%)

Sample Quotes

- *“There is too much of an emphasis on PARCC scores as the ratings are calculated now.”*
- *“More balanced focus on things beyond test scores.”*
- *“More sessions to train families on how to use STAR rating as one set of data, combined with other information to understand a school community and how family priorities can fit in to the school selection process.”*
- *“There needs to be a parent opinion on the framework and one for the students”*
- *“Find a way to ensure that the label does not deter families near the schools from enrolling because of the rating.”*





Principal Survey Methodology

Surveys were distributed to DC Public School (DCPS) and public charter school principals in all eight wards via email on July 19, 2021; the survey closed on September 13, 2021. The email contained a link to a 25-question Survey Monkey Principal Survey.

Principal Respondent Demographics

School Level¹⁰

- Elementary school – 23 principals (55%)
- Middle school – 9 principals (21%)
- High school – 5 principals (12%)
- Education Campus – 5 principals (12%)

School Type

- DC Public School (DCPS) – 22 principals (52%)
- DC public charter school – 20 principals (48%)

Title I Status

- Title I school – 34 principals (81%)
- Non-Title I school – 8 principals (19%)

Ward

- Ward 1 – 7 principals (17%)
- Ward 2 – 2 principals (5%)
- Ward 3 – 2 principals (5%)
- Ward 4 – 9 principals (21%)
- Ward 5 – 5 principals (12%)
- Ward 6 – 5 principals (12%)
- Ward 7 – 7 principals (17%)
- Ward 8 – 7 principals (17%)

Years Experience as a Public School Principal in D.C.

- Two years – 3 principals (7%)
- Three years – 3 principals (7%)
- Four years – 5 principals (12%)
- 5–10 years – 23 principals (55%)
- 11–20 years – 3 principals (7%)
- 20+ years – 2 principals (5%)

¹⁰ Pre-K 3-4 grades was not an option in this survey.



Race/Ethnicity

- American Indian or Alaskan Native – none
- Asian – 1 principals (2%)
- Black or African American – 22 principals (54%)
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander – none
- White – 13 principals (32%)
- Preferred not to say – 3 principals (7%)
- Selected Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish origin – 2 principals (5%)

Gender

- Female – 29 principals (69%)
- Male – 10 principals (24%)
- Preferred not to say – 3 principals (7%)

2019 STAR Rating Status

- 1 Star – 2 principals (5%)
- 2 Stars – 8 principals (19%)
- 3 Stars – 8 principals (19%)
- 4 Stars – 12 principals (29%)
- 5 Stars – 4 principals (10%)
- Did not recall or not applicable – 8 principals (20%)

