

Most important things for leadership to focus on* to improve:

- Staff experiences in the workplace
- The experience, and ultimately outcomes, for all students

*As identified by Engagement Survey Focus Group participants

May 2021

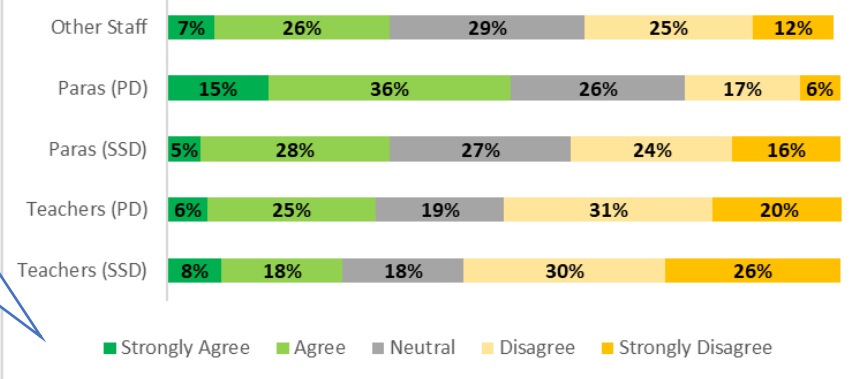
Relationship Building/ Sense of Belonging



“We have an amazing team at our school. It feels like a family.”

-Paraprofessional (SSD)

Among staff surveyed, there was limited agreement with the statement, "SSD leaders understand my professional needs."



“Being a para can be very rewarding on a good day. Good days are becoming few and far between...The risk of injury to paras is high. Paras are often punched, kicked, bitten, spit on and cursed to by the students we are helping. Who is caring for the caregivers?”

-Paraprofessional (Partner District)

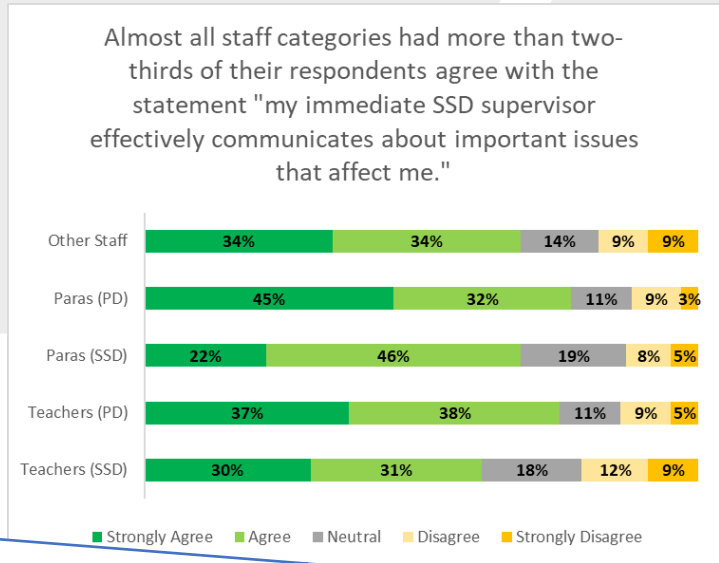
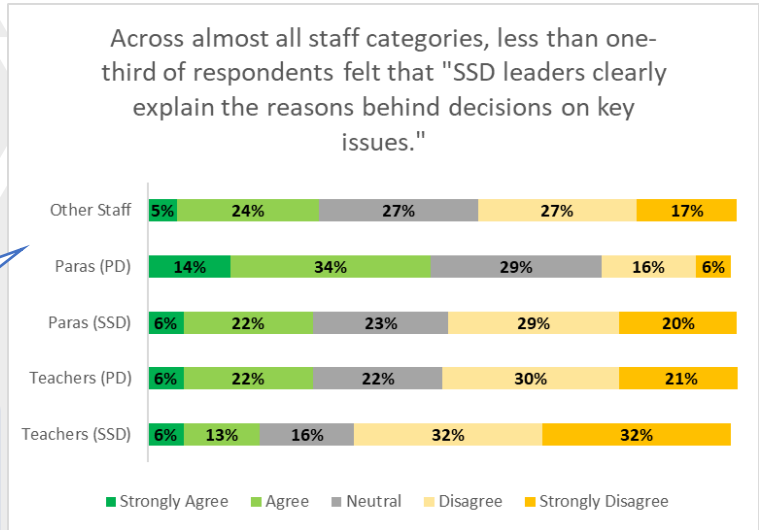
Staff emphasized the importance of having leaders who:

- Understand their day-to-day experience
- Encourage and invest in their professional growth
- Celebrate and include *every* role
- Acknowledge the specialized skillsets of staff
- Are involved in the work
- Have facetime with staff (i.e., check-ins, lunches, get in touch via calls/texts/videos, visit schools beyond orientation)
- Provide positive feedback/recognition
- Build relationships with students and staff

Paraprofessionals expressed a need for the following work environment supports, which may contribute to a greater sense of belonging:

- A designated space to store their belongings/materials during the workday
- Computer/internet access to check their work email
- Plan time with colleagues, opportunity to provide input for IEPs, and permission to communicate directly with parents

Transparency/ Clear Communication



"I get just enough info to know that I don't know much. I get the info but I don't know what it means... there are new positions but I don't know their responsibilities or what has been replaced."
-Administrator

"There is a little more transparency this year than previous years. But we are getting the same information from 10 different people- all the same general message and then some new details. Which one do I follow?"
-Teacher (SSD)

Administrators were most focused on gaining a better understanding of the rationale for changes made. This includes:

- An explanation of the purpose of the change and the intended outcome
- Clear district-wide communication
- Providing the opportunity to seek clarification
- Demonstrating that staff input was considered in the decision-making process

Instructional staff echoed the need to understand why decisions are made, but also raised concerns about their immediate supervisor's ability to effectively relay district decisions, often citing a disconnect with district communication or an altogether lack of awareness of the updates being made.

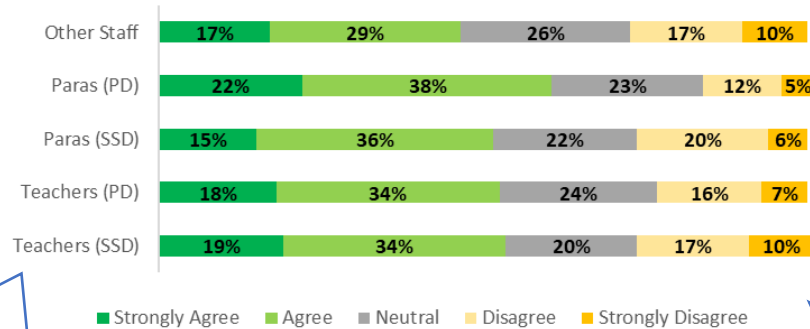
Administrators admitted they struggle to explain district leadership decisions to staff and would like more guidance on how to appropriately pass down new information and explain what it will mean for particular staff groups.



Role/ Career Growth

The 'other staff' category includes administrators, interpreters, maintenance, clerical and technology support, and transportation.

Approximately half of the employees surveyed in practically every job category agreed with the statement, "I see professional growth and long-term career opportunities with SSD."



"For many of us this is actually our second career. Many of us have left the workforce to care for child that has a disability. Coming back into the workforce, careers with SSD are a natural extension of what we have been doing around the clock for years. We have a wealth of knowledge, hands on experience and perspective that you can't learn in a classroom."

-Paraprofessional (SSD)

"There needs to be growth opportunities for programs and staff that are non-certified."

-Administrator

Career growth was most notably listed as a recommended area of focus by paraprofessionals, and to a lesser extent, operational staff.

Paraprofessionals would like their role to be seen as a career choice, not a pathway to somewhere (e.g., teacher). Accordingly, they mentioned the need for:

- Professional learning/skills development
- Leadership opportunities/roles*
- Being seen as an integral part of the education team (which includes collaboration*)
- Acknowledging the experience/expertise paraprofessionals bring from their previous careers/life experience that often includes caring for children with disabilities
- Autonomy*

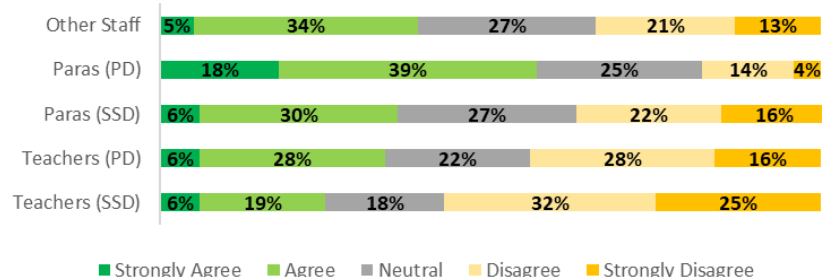
*Teachers mentioned needing the same supports in their own role

Operational staff would like training and growth/leadership opportunities, expressing a specific interest in leadership training and more relevant performance reviews.

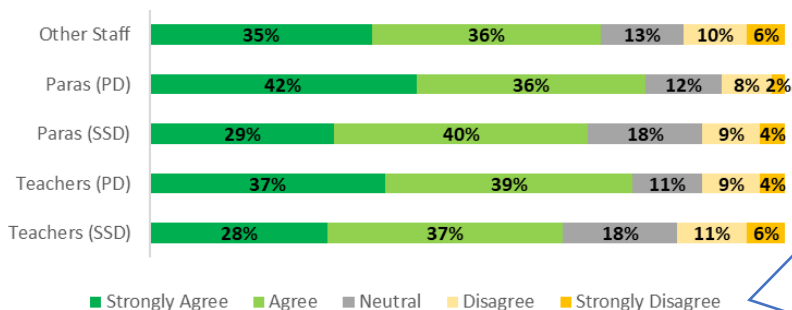


Consistency

The vast majority of staff groups surveyed indicated lower levels of agreement (<40%) with the statement, "SSD leaders' actions are consistent with their words."



Staff perceptions of their immediate supervisor are much more favorable with the majority surveyed affirming that their immediate SSD supervisor's actions are consistent with their words.



"I would like for our leadership to not be people pleasers. They need to make one decision and stay firm. Not to go and talk to one person and agree with them, then change your mind when you talk to another, and believe it or not there could be a couple more changes."

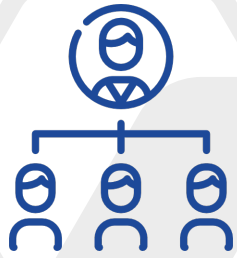
-Teacher (SSD)

Consistency was an area of focus raised by all staff categories that participated in focus groups. **Calls for greater consistency across buildings and districts were typically raised in connection to meeting students' needs.** Examples listed include:

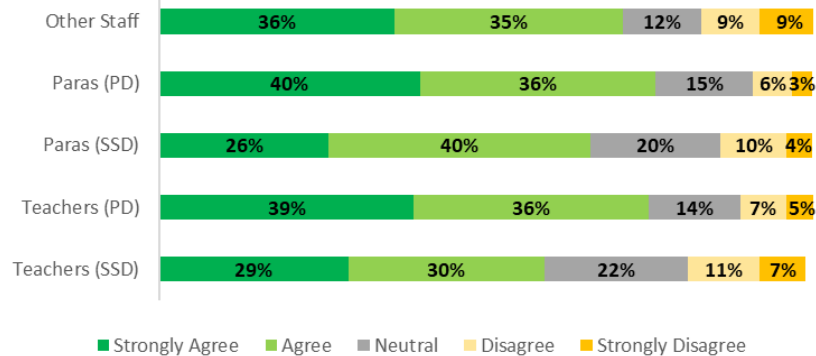
- Consistent staffing
- Availability/Access to services
- Alignment between leaders' actions and words
- Upholding decisions made
- Consistent messaging around policies, practices, and expectations
- Providing written procedures

Administrators/Operational staff expressed a sense of **fear, anxiety, and uncertainty due to the number of changes** that have been, and continue to be, introduced.

Distinct Needs/ Equity



The majority of staff surveyed agreed with the statement, "my immediate SSD supervisor implements policies fairly in my school or Department."



"If equity is valued, we must have systems that ensure accountability in creating and sustaining inclusive practices and representing all students and families. We can't shy away from the truth and/or engage in performative actions that result in no outcome."

-Administrator

Staff stressed that students and staff have different experiences dependent on their location (geographical, organization-level/department).

At least one representative from each job category raised distinct needs/equity concerns as a priority for leadership.

The **"other staff"** job category wanted leadership to:

- Understand the specific/differing needs of each department.

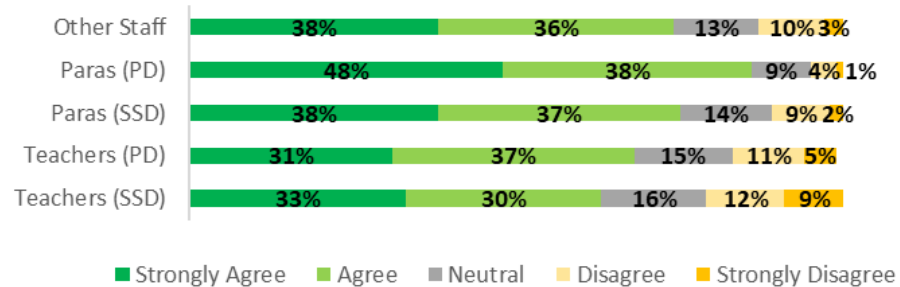
While **instructional staff** highlighted:

- Different needs (type and severity) across partner districts
- The ease with which some partner districts, as compared to others, can access special education services/supports/curriculum
- A need for tailored messaging (e.g., SSD vs. PD)/clarification as to whether the content applies to their role



Workload

With the exception of teachers, more than three-quarters of staff surveyed within each job category agreed with the statement, "I am motivated to contribute more than what is expected of me."



"We often hear, 'it will only take a few minutes'...but if you take 50 tasks that only take a few minutes, it is a LOT of minutes. So many things are repetitive, duplicate info, just checking boxes and jumping through hoops."

–SSD Teacher (Partner District)

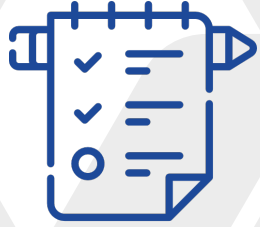
"We are already asked to do way more than is required of us...so how do we even interpret this question?"

–Teacher (SSD)

Teachers raised concerns about their workload and the negative impact it is having on their ability to provide effective instruction.

Those citing workload concerns felt leadership should focus on the following:

- Streamlining paperwork
- Reducing the number of initiatives rolled out (i.e., "the extra stuff")
- Considering time requirements vs. available time before making additional requests
 - Taking something off their plates before adding something new

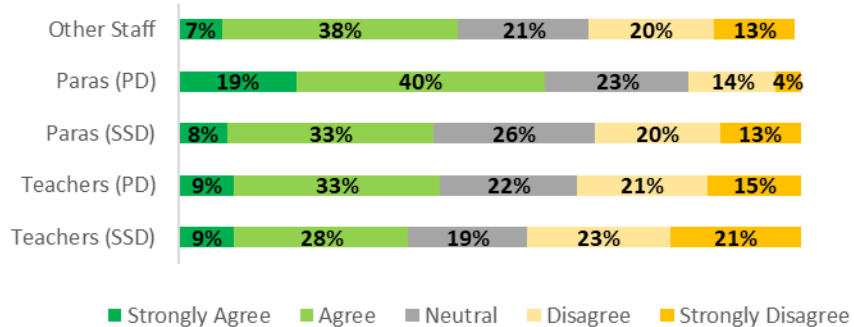


Staff input

Administrative concerns

Life beyond school/work

With the exception of paras working in partner districts, less than half of staff surveyed in each job category agreed with the statement, "SSD leaders encourage employees to share ideas to improve performance."



Some employees do not feel that there is a way for them to share their ideas about how to define the role or share how to improve.

-Operational Staff

Input:

- Teachers indicated that they work with students everyday and therefore leadership should provide opportunities to consider their thoughts
- Leadership needs to demonstrate that something is being done with the input gathered to-date
- Build trust that staff can share their opinions/concerns without repercussions

Administrative concerns:

- Improve the paraprofessional pay structure (e.g., 24 pay period, pay rate, equivalent wage during ESY/USS)
- Teacher paperwork was one of the main factors listed as negatively impacting the work environment

Life beyond school/work:

- More focus on preparing students for life after school
- Work-life balance