

# Summary Memo on Data Request 618 Regarding Report Cards

The Office of Educational Accountability | April 2022

## Summary

On January 12th, 2022, the Assembly Committee on Education asked the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to generate accountability results for 2020-21 using the 2018-19 report card business rules as opposed to the rules in effect for the 2020-21 report card. This data request (hereafter referred to as DR618) fulfills the committee's request for clarification around the similarities and differences between 2020-21 report cards and 2020-21 results using 2018-19 business rules. The data files produced for this request can be found on the [Data Request 618 page](#). This memo summarizes the findings of DR618 and compares high-level results of district and school ratings from DR618 to those released in the 2020-21 report cards. In short, the distribution of school and district ratings are similar between the 2020-21 report cards and DR618.

## About the Data

The school and district report cards released in November 2021 are the state accountability results for the 2020-21 year. They reflect statistically sound metrics and are the result of years of technical work and engagement with schools, districts, and other education stakeholders to improve score stability and usability for continuous improvement efforts. **DR618 should not be used to draw conclusions about school and district performance in the 2020-2021 year.**

The performance data used in DR618 is mainly from the 2020-21 school year; a year in which the COVID-19 pandemic impacted learning environments, test participation, and other areas of education. Importantly, analysis of this request does not include any assumptions about data DPI does not have, including from students who did not test during the pandemic. **Please use caution when interpreting scores and ratings.** DPI recommends careful reference to the official school and district report cards available on [DPI's public app](#). Additional resources explaining report card features and calculations are also posted on the [OEA Accountability Resources page](#).

## Background

Starting in 2019, the Office of Education Accountability (OEA) worked with an accountability advisory group of diverse educational stakeholders from across the state - including leaders from public, choice, and charter schools - to make improvements to report cards. The changes included:

- A report card visual redesign with more graphs and fewer tables to make the report cards more appealing and user friendly.
- The replacement of the Closing Gaps priority area of the report card with the Target Group Outcomes priority area to make the measure of gap closure more reliable, inclusive, and actionable.
- Course participation information on postsecondary preparation and arts courses for schools and district report cards with grades 9-12.

A complete list of improvements can be found in the [What's New for the 2020-21 School and District Report Cards?](#) document.

Prior to receiving the assessment data that are on the 2020-21 report cards, OEA worked with a Technical Advisory Committee, a group of national experts on accountability systems, to establish updated cut scores. OEA needed to revise the cut scores for ratings due to technical changes to the calculation of the overall score, largely a result of the change from the Closing Gaps priority area to the new Target Group Outcomes priority area. The Technical Advisory Committee recommended using an equipercentile linking methodology to set the new cut scores as opposed to other standard setting methods made unachievable by the gap in assessment data resulting from the pandemic. Equipercentile linking methodology is a strictly mathematical approach that emphasizes preserving the distribution from the previous cut scores.

The rating category cut score adjustment allowed schools, districts, and the public to make more accurate, though still complicated by the pandemic, cross-year rating comparisons despite the modifications to the report card business rules between 2018-19 and 2020-21. As a reminder, report cards are released in the fall of the following school year, and DPI did not issue report cards for the 2019-20 school year per [state statute](#) resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Without the cut score update, ratings for schools and districts would not be in alignment with, nor comparable to, prior years' ratings.

### Data Request 618 Findings

The Assembly Committee on Education was interested in how the changes between the 2020-21 and 2018-19 business rules impacted 2020-21 school and district report cards (RCs) and asked DPI to apply the 2018-19 business rules to the 2020-21 report card data, a process referred to throughout the rest of the document as Data Request 618 (DR618).

After implementing the 2018-19 business rules on 2020-21 data for DR618, differences between the 2020-21 Report Cards and DR618 were assessed by comparing the distribution of district- (Fig. 1) and school-level (Fig. 2) ratings. As a reminder, scored report cards have overall ratings and corresponding stars (Table 1).

<i>Accountability Rating Category</i>
Significantly Exceeds Expectations - ★★★★★
Exceeds Expectations - ★★★★★☆
Meets Expectations - ★★★★★☆
Meets Few Expectations - ★★☆☆☆
Fails to Meet Expectations - ★☆☆☆☆

**Table 1** - Report card ratings and corresponding stars.

The distribution of district- and school-level star ratings is similar between the 2020-21 RCs and DR618. Likewise, both the 2020-21 RC and the DR618 distributions were similar to the 2018-19 RC star rating distribution, suggesting that OEA's efforts to improve the usability of the report cards while maintaining system-wide continuity of the results were successfully achieved.

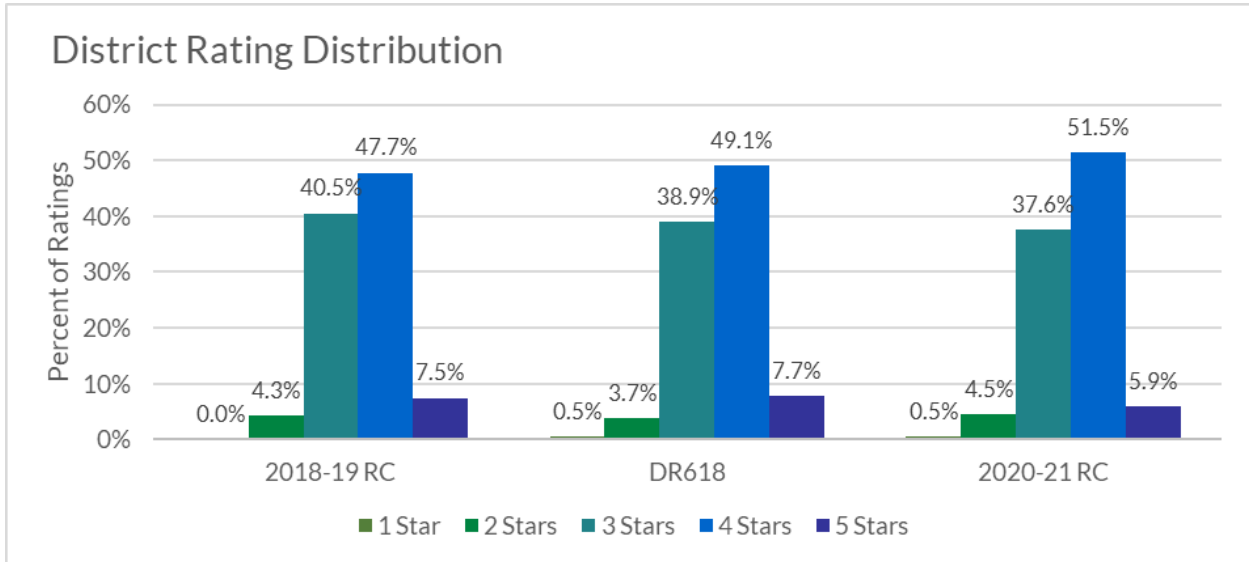


Fig. 1 - The percentage of districts statewide receiving a one- to five-star rating in three cases. Left, the 2018-19 report cards; Center, Data Request 618; Right, the 2020-21 report cards.

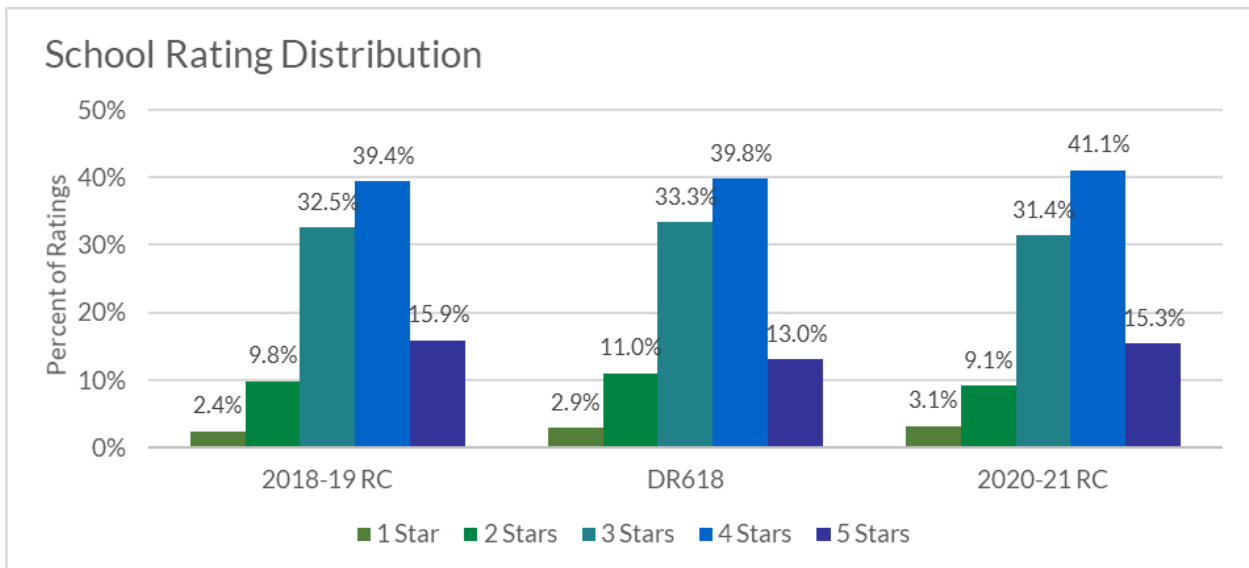
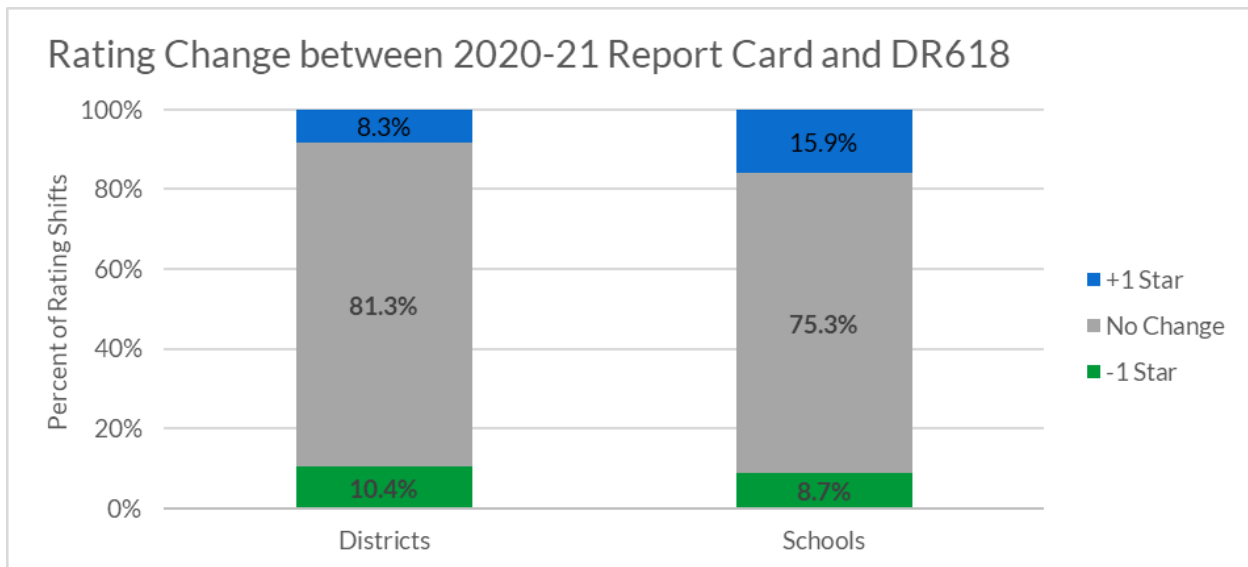


Fig. 2 - The percentage of schools statewide receiving a one- to five-star rating in three cases. Left, the 2018-19 report cards; Center, Data Request 618; Right, the 2020-21 report cards.

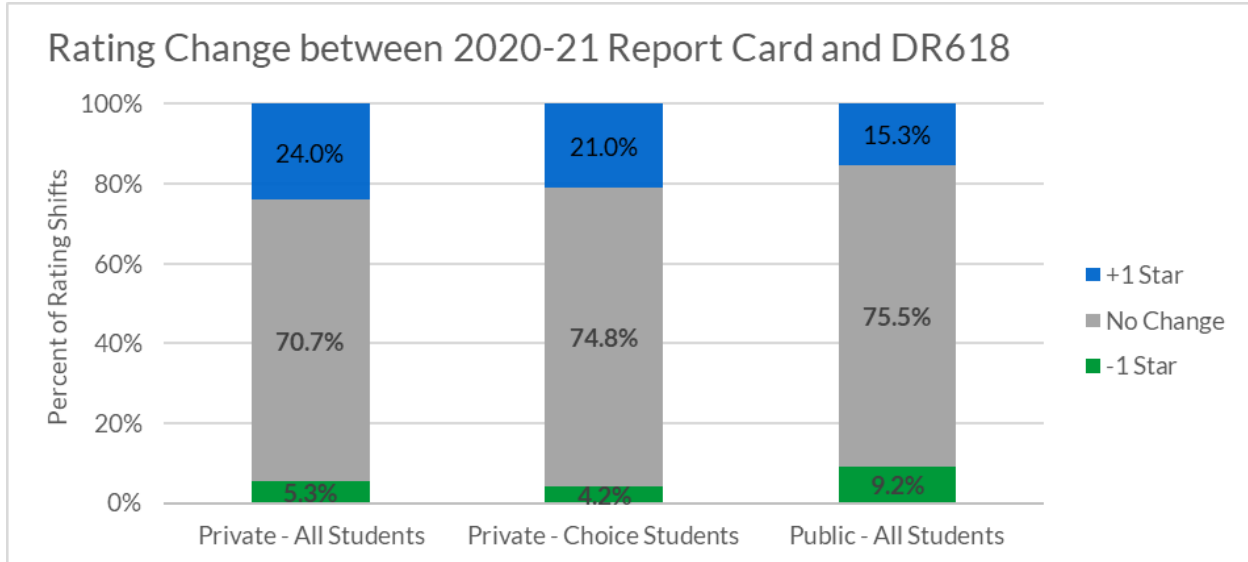
Next, star rating differences for individual districts and schools between the 2020-21 RCs and DR618 were assessed. In this section, a positive star rating shift is defined as a district or school receiving one star more on the 2020-21 RCs compared to DR618 and a negative rating shift is defined as a school or district receiving one star fewer on the 2020-21 RCs compared to DR618. Ratings differed by no more than one star between the 2020-21 RCs and DR618, and over 75% of districts and schools had no rating change. While there were slightly more negative than positive star rating shifts for districts, there were more positive than negative star rating shifts for schools (Fig. 3). In addition, private schools for both choice and all student report cards had more positive rating shifts and fewer negative rating shifts compared to public schools (Fig. 4).

Finally, to understand the scale of the star rating shifts above, star rating shifts between 2020-21 RCs and DR618 were compared to star rating shifts between the 2017-18 RCs and the 2018-19 RCs. Between 2020-21 RCs and DR618, 24.6% of schools had a rating change (Fig. 3). However, this change is modest compared to the 40.7% of schools that had a rating change between 2017-18 RCs and 2018-19 RCs. Additionally, individual rating shifts were larger between 2017-18 RCs and 2018-19 RCs, with 3.5% of school ratings increasing or decreasing by 3 stars. While the switch to the 2020-21 RC business rules did affect ratings, the impact is more modest than that of year-to-year fluctuations in accountability data seen in prior years.

In summary, the distribution of district and school ratings is similar between 2020-21 RCs and DR618. While most districts and schools had no rating shift, schools were more likely to have a positive than a negative rating shift due to 2020-21 RC business rules. This positive shift for schools is more prominent in private schools in both choice and all student calculations. Furthermore, the percentage of schools shifting at least one rating category between the 2020-21 RCs and DR618 is lower than the percentage of schools that shifted between the 2017-18 and 2018-19 report cards. In all, 2020-21 RC business rules had a modest impact on district and school ratings.



**Fig. 3** - The percentage of districts and schools statewide with a rating difference between the 2020-21 report card and DR618. A rating difference of +1 indicates a school scored one star higher on the 2020-21 report card than DR618.



**Fig. 4** - The percentage of schools statewide with a rating difference between the 2020-21 report card and DR618, with schools broken into three categories. *Left*, private choice schools that elect to receive an “all students” report card. *Center*, all private choice schools on the choice students only report card. *Right*, all public schools. A rating difference of +1 indicates a school scored one star higher on the 2020-21 report card than DR618.

### 2018-19 Outcomes Applied to the New Report Card Calculation

An additional data request was made to OEA on a set of specific school-level outcomes. Included in the requested data set were calculated overall and priority area scores from the final public 2018-19 report cards, and newly-calculated overall and priority area scores using 2020-21 business rules with 2018-19 data. In general, schools had modestly lower overall scores using the 2021 business rules, when compared to 2018-19 results, reinforcing the need for updated rating category cut scores. The data files produced for this request can be found on the [Data Request 618 page](#).

### Conclusion

When comparing the 2020-21 report cards to DR618, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The distribution of school and district ratings is similar between the 2020-21 report cards and DR618.
- There were more positive rating shifts than negative rating shifts for schools between the 2020-21 RCs and DR618 (Fig. 3), with this effect being more pronounced among private choice schools than public schools (Fig. 4).
- The percentage of schools shifting at least one rating category between the 2020-21 RCs and DR618 is lower than the number of schools that shifted between the 2017-18 and 2018-19 report cards.

## Discussion

There are two primary reasons for the similarity in rating distributions between the 2020-21 report cards and DR618.

First, a mathematical equipercentile approach was used to determine new cut scores after development of the new Target Group Outcomes (TGO) priority area. The new TGO priority area subscore was found to be lower than the Closing Gaps priority area subscore by an average of 11 points lower for districts and 8 points lower for schools. Considering that the change to TGO would result in lower scores despite having similar input data, on 03/02/2021, OEA consulted a Technical Advisory Committee which recommended using an equipercentile approach to adjust the report card cut scores in a manner consistent with the impact of the new TGO priority area, or in other words, in roughly equal percentages as the previous business rules. This equipercentile approach was approved by the DPI Cabinet on 3/23/2021. Cut scores were set in advance of 2020-21 assessment data being available and were adjusted solely for the impact of the new, lower TGO subscores compared to the old Closing Gaps subscores. In summary, part of the similarity between ratings in 2020-21 RCs and DR618 is due to the equipercentile adjustment of the cut scores that accounts for the impact of the new TGO priority area.

Second, part of the similarity between the 2020-21 RCs and DR618 is also due to similar underlying business rules between the two systems. While the TGO and Closing Gaps areas result in substantially different subscores, their impact on overall scores is relatively small compared to the sum total of all priority areas. Both TGO and Closing Gaps contributed, at most, 25% each to the final scores on the 2020-21 RCs and DR618, respectively. Although there were several other business rule changes, including changing the way that absenteeism is scored in the 2020-21 RCs, the majority of measures (including both the Achievement and Growth priority areas) are unchanged between the 2020-21 RCs and DR618 resulting in similar ratings in the two systems.

The similar distributions of ratings between the 2018-19 RCs and DR618 are also notable (Figs. 1, 2). An explanation is the use of multi-year averaging. In Wisconsin's report card index, previous years' data accounts for a large portion of the current year's report card score. This multi-year averaging decreases variability and increases stability of report card ratings, dampening the effect of any potential single-year fluctuation in data.

[Statewide assessment participation](#) was lower in 2020-21 than 2018-19 or previous years, which may influence score rating differences between the 2018-19 RCs and either 2020-21 RCs or DR618. Although assessment data on the report cards is representative of actual student performance in typical years, assessment data on 2020-21 RCs and DR618 may not be representative due to limited participation in 2020-21. OEA cannot determine how non-tested students would have scored on a 2020-21 assessment and for that reason cannot determine how star ratings would have been distributed in a hypothetical full-testing scenario. Furthermore, since the growth priority area uses normative calculations based on statewide assessment participation, even districts and schools with high 2020-21 assessment participation may have unexpected irregularities in a star rating. Therefore, OEA has cautioned and continues to caution against drawing conclusions about a district or school's performance from a star rating alone.

Ultimately, the 2020-21 report card changes were implemented to enhance reliability and utility of the report cards for parents and educators. Careful consultation with experts and public and choice school leaders over several years maximized the feasibility of these changes and made

meaningful impacts to the state report cards. State and federal policy has long entrusted DPI with the authority to make decisions on how best to report accountability data and calculations, and the agency has been responsive and serious in carrying out this authority in every instance.

### **Resources**

Please visit the [OEA Accountability Resources page](#) to find additional resources on school and district report cards. You can also contact the OEA team with questions at [reportcardhelp@dpi.wi.gov](mailto:reportcardhelp@dpi.wi.gov).