

# Strengths and Limitations of School Sustainability Rating Systems (SSRSs)

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# Example SSRs



# Why SSRSs Matter

Already guide sustainability efforts at many schools

Have potential to:

- Help schools understand and communicate their performance, set goals, and measure progress
- Enable schools to learn from and collaborate with each other
- Create incentives for continuous improvement
- Raise profile of sustainability efforts

# Past Research on SSRSs

- Krnel & Naglic (2009) - slightly higher environmental knowledge; no difference in awareness or behavior.
- Kadji-Beltran (2002) - slight improvements in behavior but no difference in environmental cognition
- O'Mahony & Fitzgerald (2001) - higher levels of environmental behavior and opinion leadership but minimal differences in environmental knowledge.

# Best practices for rating systems

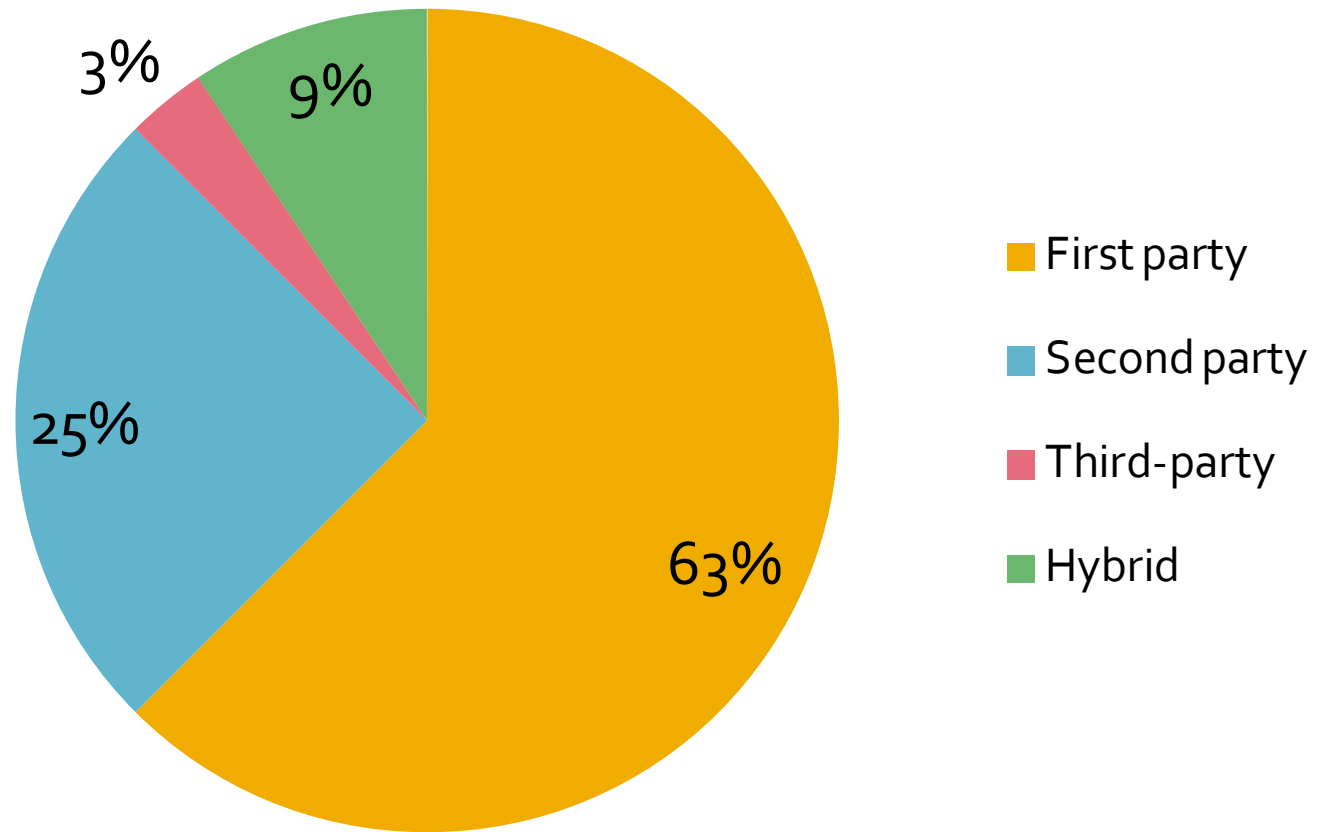
- Strong accountability mechanisms
- Performance-focused criteria
- Comprehensive topical scope
- Open governance processes
- Multiple levels of achievement
- Public reporting of submissions
- Transparent criteria and methodology

# Sample

- 32 English-language sustainability rating systems for primary and secondary schools
  - 63% administered by non-profits; 37% managed by government agencies
  - 84% based in the United States; 13% based in Canada; 3% based in Australia
  - 25% focus on schools in a specific city or county; 44% focus on the state or provincial level; 3% focus on multiple states; 25% are national in focus; 3% is unspecified,

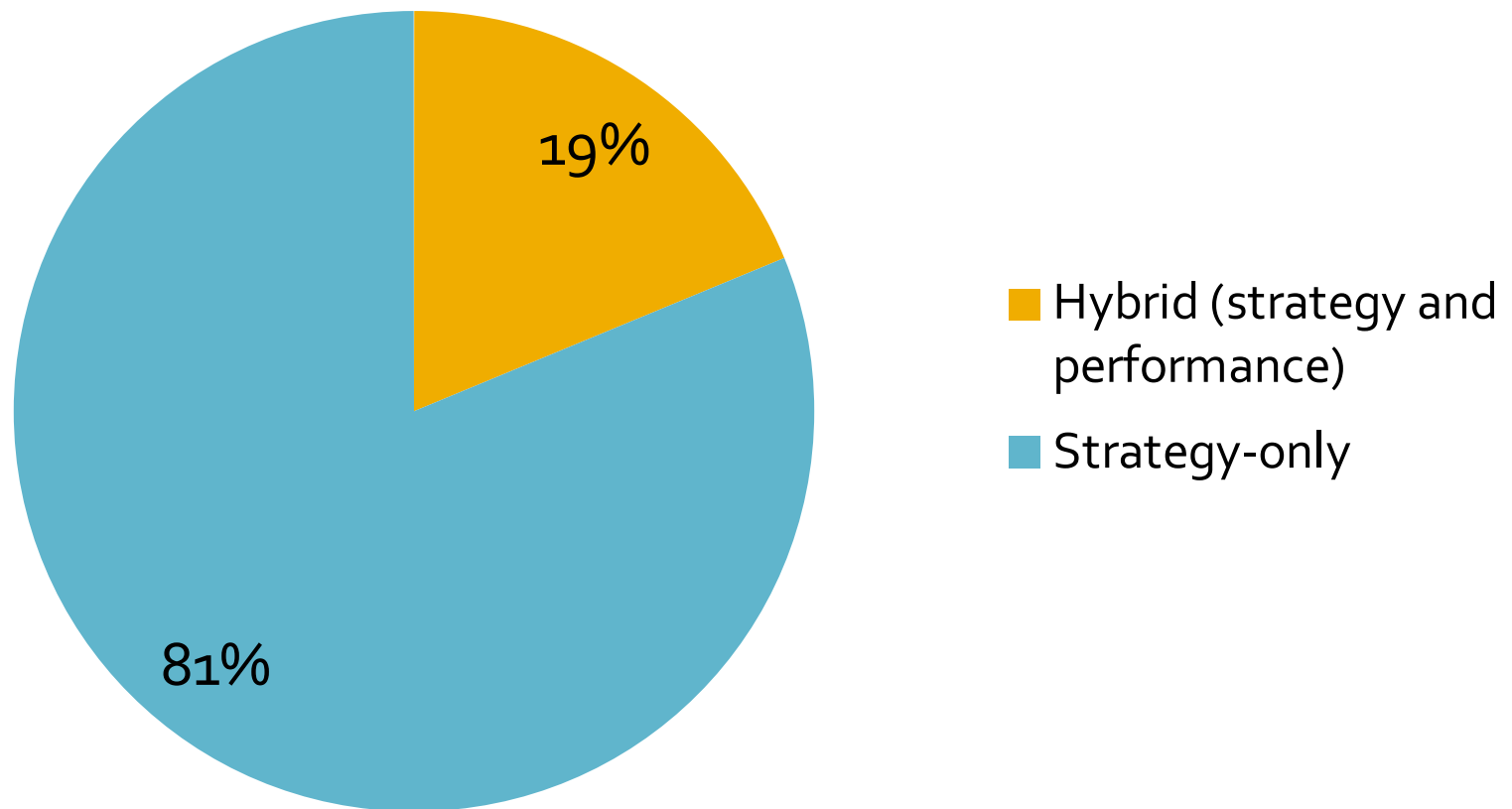
# Accountability Mechanisms

Most systems lack strong accountability mechanisms.

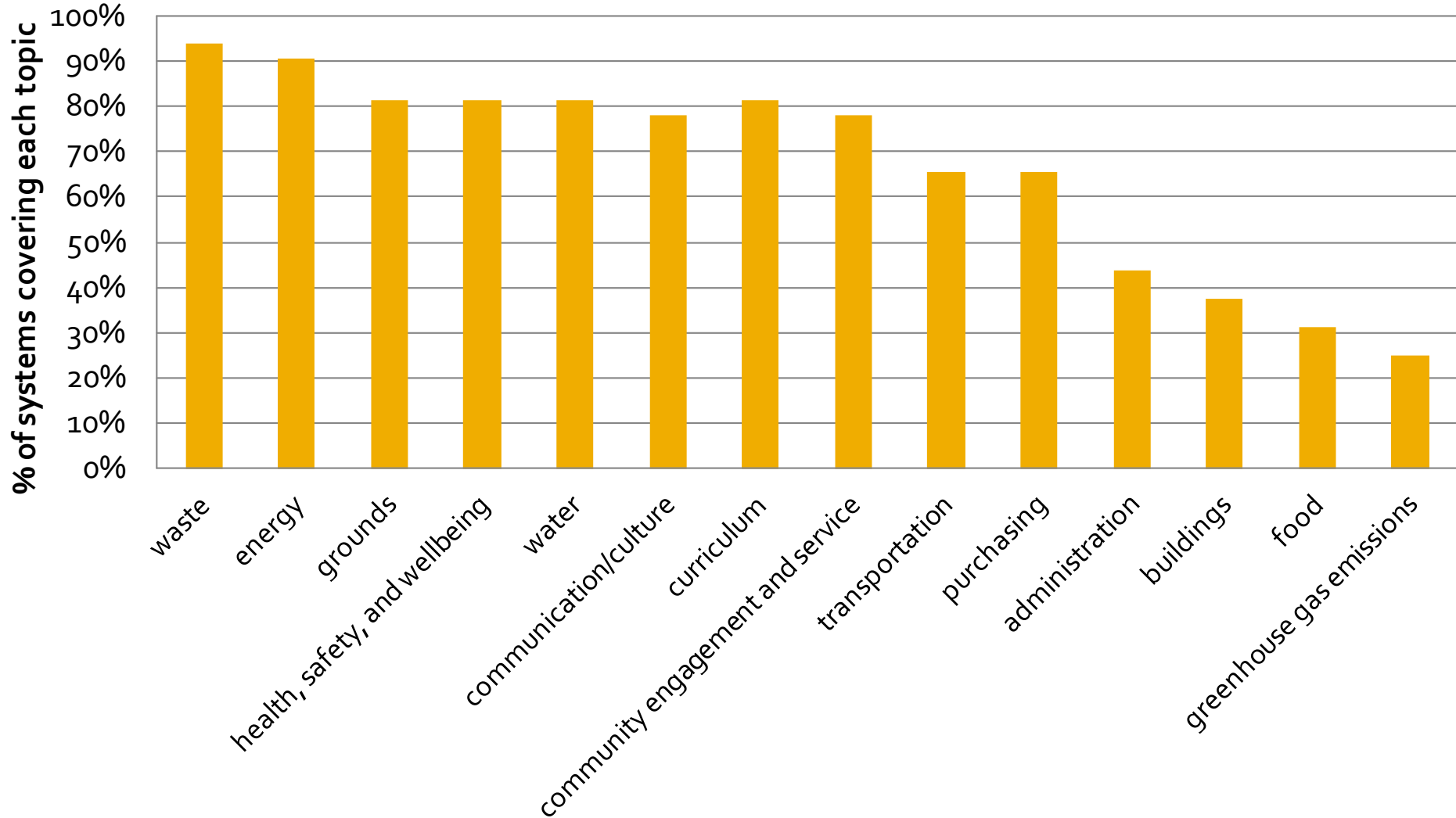


# Criteria Focus

Most systems are based purely on practices and/or processes and do not require achievement of performance standards.

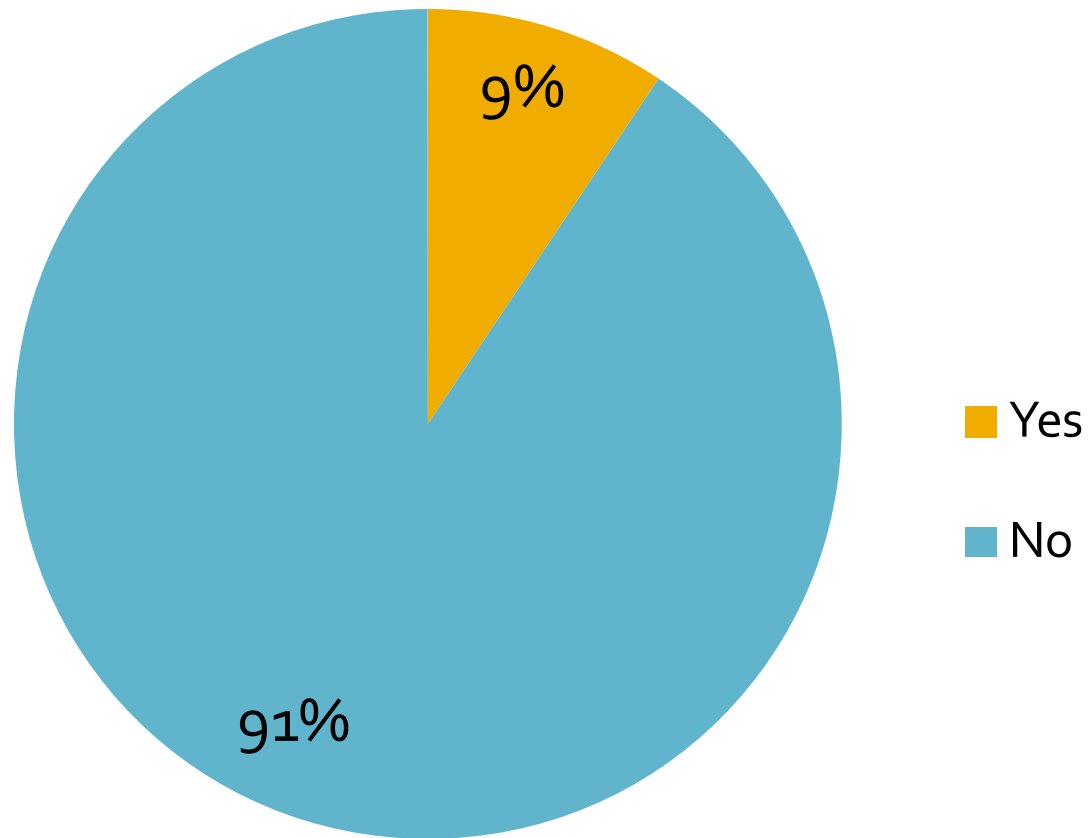


# Comprehensiveness



# Governance Processes

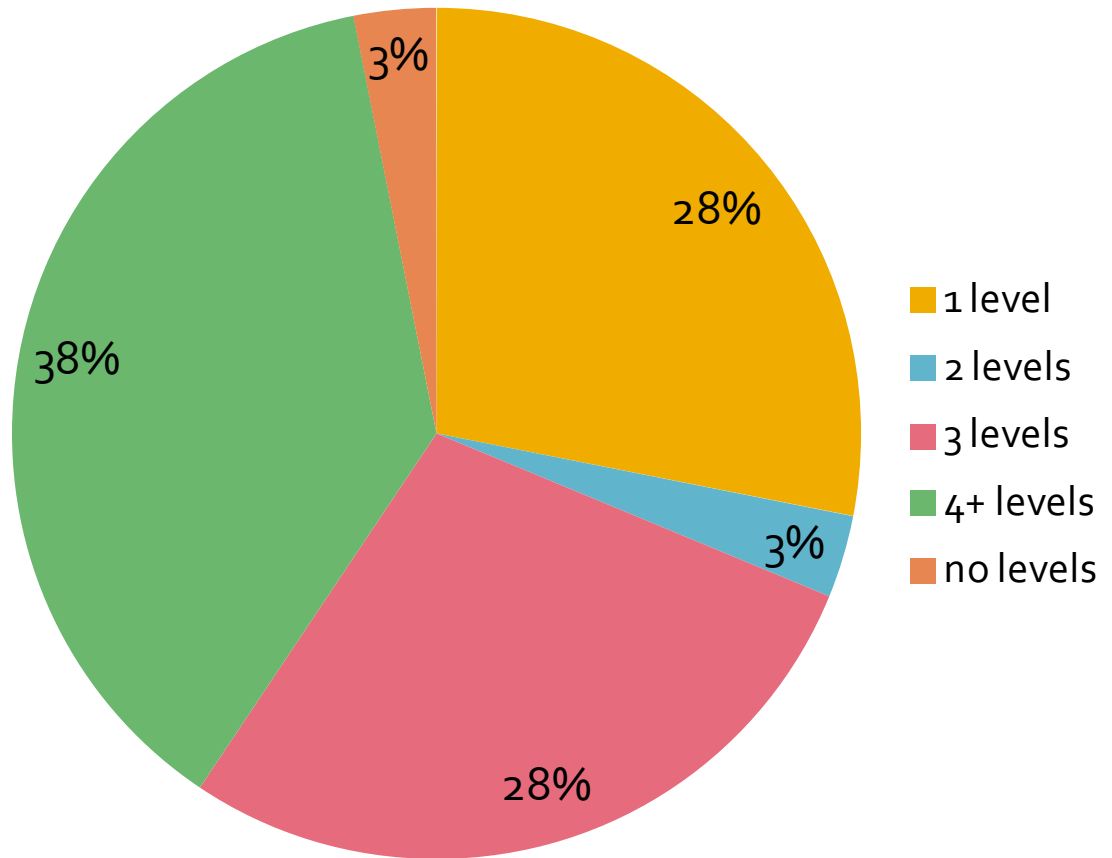
Most systems have closed governance processes.



# Levels of Achievement

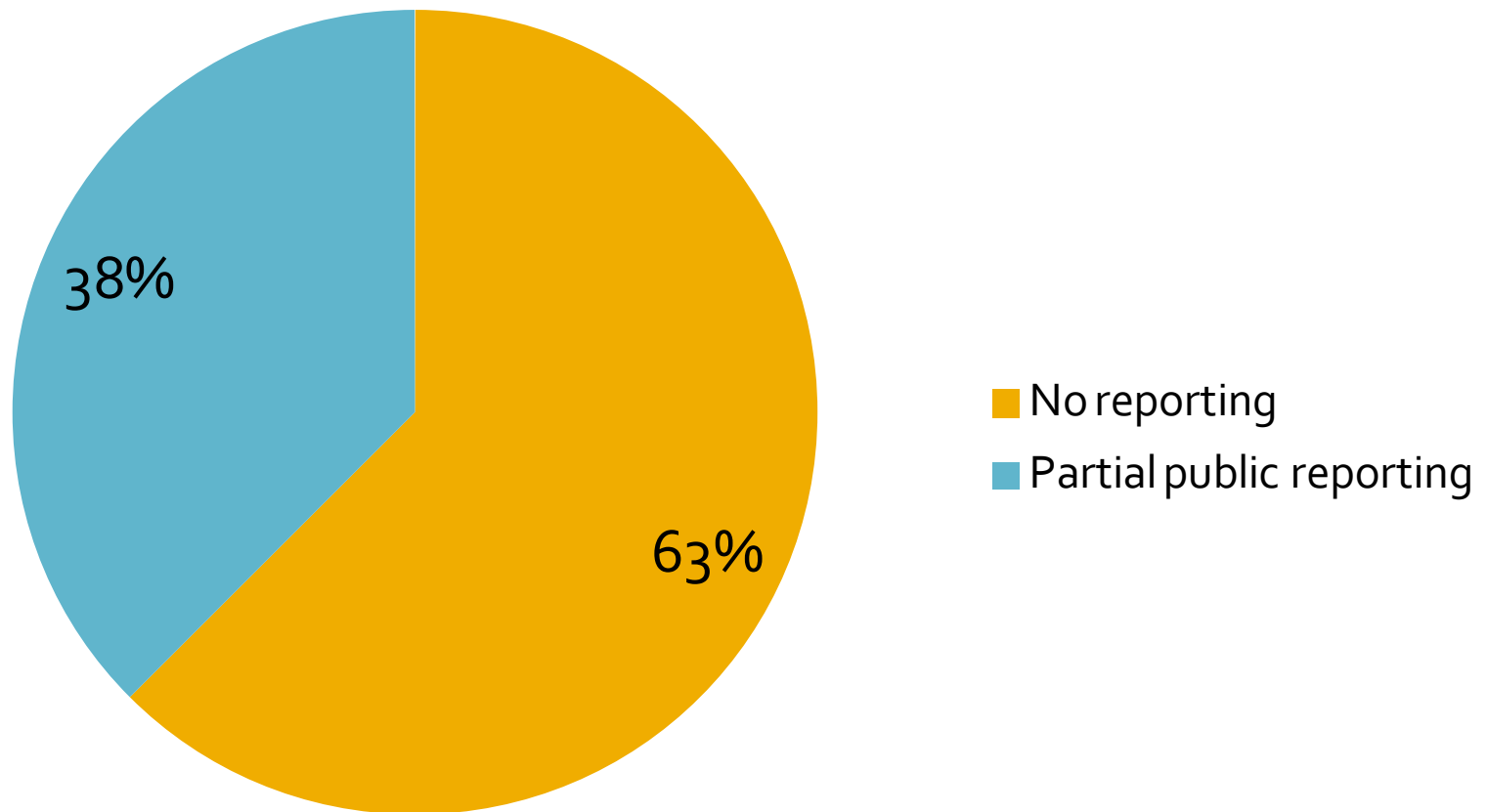
Most systems provide multiple levels of recognition.

Requirements to earn the highest level of recognition are often fairly weak and all fall short of “true sustainability.”



# Public Reporting

None of systems make submissions publicly available.



# Transparency

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All systems make their criteria transparent!

# Summary

## Strengths

- Transparent criteria
- Multiple levels of recognition

## Weaknesses

- Weak accountability mechanisms
- Minimal focus on performance; weak requirements
- Limited topical scope
- Closed governance processes
- No public reporting

# Consolidation: A way forward?

- Existence of so many systems contributes to the weaknesses.
- Benefits of consolidation
  - Greater brand recognition
  - Improved benchmarking and information sharing
  - Improved allocation of resources

# Cautionary note on Green Ribbon

- Limited number of winners
- No tiers; not accessible to beginners
- Standards vary by state; only some participate
- No public reporting
- Closed governance process
- Vulnerable to politics