



HCPS PARENT ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINAL RESEARCH REPORT

Prepared by

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The authors of this report would like to express their gratitude and appreciation to Dr. Sean Bulson, the Superintendent of Schools, and Dr. Eric Davis, the Chief of Administration. The authors highly appreciate their vision and dedication to increasing family engagement and community partnerships to support student achievement in Harford County Public Schools (HCPS).

HCPS Manager of Family and Community Partnerships Mary Beth Stapleton expresses gratitude to all those who made a valuable contribution to this report by providing feedback and comments. HCPS staff members from the Department of Research and Program Evaluation, Parent Advisory Council 2022-2023 members, and other staff are all acknowledged for their assistance, support, and guidance throughout this HCPS Parent Engagement Survey research process. They played a crucial role in conducting the survey, gathering data, creating analytics to display results, analyzing data, and developing the key findings and recommendations outlined in this report.

The authors greatly appreciate the contributions of the following people:

- Yakoubou Ousmanou, Manager of Research & Program Evaluation, Lead Researcher, and author
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- Parent Advisory Council Members (2022-2023)

HCPS partnered with Hanover Research to gather, analyze, and synthesize the results of this research project. For example, the HCPS Office of Research and Program Evaluation designed the survey instrument and summarized and synthesized the results and findings of the closed-ended responses for this Parent Engagement Survey; Hanover Research summarized and synthesized findings from sample comments of the open-ended responses from the survey.

HCPS intends to acknowledge the efforts of Hanover's researchers and express gratitude for their significant collaboration and partnership. The final reports that HCPS publishes will incorporate many of the findings provided by Hanover, but with some changes. The leadership team of the HCPS Office of the Manager of Family and Community Partnerships provided feedback to the recommendations presented in this report.

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

Harford County Public Schools (HCPS) invited parents and guardians to participate in the 2022-2023 Parent Engagement Survey in March 2023.

The survey was designed to help HCPS comprehend the current involvement of parents in their child's education and provide an opportunity for them to express their opinions on HCPS's endeavors to engage parents and guardians. Survey participants were offered more than ten (10) closed-ended questions (see page 14) and one standalone open-ended question listed below:

- **In what ways, if any, could HCPS further support parent engagement? Please also use the space provided below to share any other comments you may have regarding parent engagement.**

The survey was made available on the hcps.org website, and parents were advised that it would take about 5-10 minutes to complete. The parents were requested to submit their responses by Friday, March 24, 2023.

The responses to this year's survey will serve as a baseline when coupled with additional district engagement data. HCPS intends to conduct this survey annually to track trends and to persistently search for ways to improve connections between school and home. All the responses to the survey will remain anonymous and confidential.

The HCPS Department of Research and Program Evaluation partnered with the Manager of Family and Community Partnerships and researchers to analyze the responses to the survey's closed-ended and open-ended questions. The analysis provided in this report will assist HCPS in developing a holistic sense of parents' engagement needs this school year.

This report details the results of that analysis and the results of all the closed-ended questions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Through an analysis of closed-ended and open-ended responses, researchers addressed the following research questions:

- **In what ways can schools and/or the district improve communication with parents to increase their comfort level and overall engagement?**
- **In what ways, if any, could HCPS further support parent engagement?**

METHODOLOGY

This document presents findings from an analysis of both closed and open-ended responses to HCPS' Spring 2023 Parent Engagement Survey. **The survey received a total of 4,876 responses including 1,895 open-ended responses after data cleaning by researchers.** To keep the findings as salient as possible for HCPS' future decision-making, researchers removed blank responses and invalid responses from each response pool of the open-ended responses. Researchers also removed responses such as "unsure" and "none of the above," in favor of responses that convey meaningful data and which meaningfully answer the survey question. Themes were developed using cleaned, relevant response content only.

Researchers manually coded the open-ended responses to identify the topics most frequently discussed by respondents, analyzed the open-ended responses by first coding them to identify core themes that emerged

within the data and refining those themes as analysis progressed. The research team also identified sub-themes that emerged within some of the main themes and counted the number of times each theme and sub-theme is coded to a response and calculated the frequency thereof. To note, themes are not mutually exclusive, so calculated percentages may sum to over 100 percent due to survey responses that contain more than one theme. For detailed coding information, please consult the accompanying data supplement. Findings should be interpreted as a reflection of the sample, which may not necessarily align with the perceptions of the population as a whole.

In addition to overall key findings and recommendations, researchers also reported key findings by school level group for *elementary school, middle school, and high school parents/guardians*.

Due to the large number of responses for each question, the Research Team randomized the cleaned responses and selected 20% percent of the randomized responses for manual coding. **Figure 1** provides information for all manually coded open-ended response questions in the survey.

Figure 1 – Total Open-Ended Survey Responses and Cleaned Coding Sample

SURVEY QUESTION	Responses Before Data Cleaning (<i>without blanks</i>)			Cleaned Open-Ended Responses			Coded Responses for Analysis (<i>20% sample</i>)			
	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS	TOTAL
Question 1: In what ways, if any, could HCPS further support parent engagement?	926	467	621	871	443	581	174	88	116	378

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings in this report, HCPS leadership should consider the following recommendations:

I. Bolster the quality and frequency of teacher-parent communications regarding student progress.

- Respondents' top suggestion for improving parent engagement is to increase and improve communication about students' academic and behavior progress.
- Elementary school parents requested individualized feedback from their child's teacher, regarding their child's progress.
- Many middle school parents struggle with the transition to middle school environments where students no longer have dedicated homeroom teachers.
- Parents suggested that classroom teachers at all school levels should provide more frequent informal student updates (phone calls, texts, email, ClassDojo).
- Classroom teachers should clearly explain formal student evaluations (standardized assessments, report card details) in layperson's language that is actionable.

II. Expand the type and number of school-based, in-person events and volunteer opportunities.

- Parents expressed a desire to become more involved with their students' school through family-friendly events, parent education classes, or classroom volunteer jobs.
- Many parents reported that family-friendly events are infrequent and that schools provided little advance notice of events.
- Despite the challenges of in-person events, involving parents at school buildings or classrooms can positively impact overall parent engagement levels.
- Remote classroom visits, livestreamed events, recorded content, and other digital options can supplement traditional means of engaging parents.
- Offering day and evening options accommodates a broader range of schedules.

III. Continue to create systematic means to gather and respond to parent feedback through the establishment of parent steering committees, community surveys, and town hall meetings.

- A large number of survey respondents indicated a high level of interest and a positive baseline level of parent engagement within the district.
- Many responses explicitly praised HCPS for seeking out parent perceptions.
- Others suggested that the district clearly incorporate parents' feedback in decision making processes.
- Communicating how the district uses feedback will support improved parent engagement and trust in HCPS.
- By establishing/enhancing district and school parent steering committees and/or town hall meetings HCPS can both send a clear message that parent voice is valued and have ready means of taking the pulse of the community.

KEY FINDINGS



Respondents most often indicate that parent engagement could improve by increasing the frequency and quality of communication between teachers and parents regarding students' progress in class.

Nearly one-third (thirty-two percent (32%)) of open-ended responses relate to this main theme. Parents identify opportunities for teachers to improve their communication with families, especially by more frequently and proactively reaching out to parents about students' academic or behavioral needs as these challenges emerge. Additionally, many respondents suggest HCPS schools host parent-teacher conferences and provide clearer messaging on report cards or Home Access Center (HAC).

- **By School Level:** In general, **Middle School Parents** are most concerned with improving the communication between parents and teachers. As many comments suggest, middle school parents tend to struggle with the transition from a hands-on elementary school environment with homeroom teachers to the more independent, decentralized middle school environment. Notably, each school level prioritizes different opportunities for specific teacher communication improvements. **Elementary School Parents** most often suggest the return of biannual formalized parent-teacher feedback. **Middle School Parents** most often request greater clarity in how student progress updates are presented (e.g., in report cards, on HAC), while **High School Parents** simply request more consistent responses and updates from teachers on the whole.



Almost thirty percent of all responses indicate a desire for more in-person opportunities for parent involvement. For example, respondents often highlight how family friendly events (e.g., American Education Week) that take place in school buildings can improve overall family engagement and connection to HCPS. Additional topics identified in this theme include providing more parent education classes (e.g., college prep, curriculum overviews) and more classroom volunteer opportunities (e.g., field trip chaperone). When planning these events, respondents suggest HCPS give more advance notice and more scheduling variations for events to best accommodate parents' schedules.

- **By School Level:** Overall, **Elementary School Parents** and **High School Parents** most frequently offered feedback tied to this main theme. These two groups also value volunteer classroom or school opportunities as a way to increase parent engagement. While **Elementary** and **Middle School Parents** similarly prioritize the importance of in-person school events, both **Middle** and **High School Parents** notably value parent education opportunities, too.



Some parents took the opportunity to share general climate and culture concerns that they perceive as barriers to their overall level of engagement. For example, many Elementary School and High School Parents shared concerns or questions around the current curriculum; as such, these respondents would appreciate greater parental involvement in HCPS academics. Other sub-themes include specific concerns about student safety, and the physical school environment (e.g., large class sizes).

- **By School Level:** Notably, more than twice the number of **Middle School Parents** respond with concerns about student bullying and safety than Elementary and High School Parent responses combined.



Respondents provide both actionable and positive feedback regarding school communication and district efforts to engage parents. **Fifteen percent of respondents propose multiple suggestions for improving school communication methods.** Consistent email communications, monthly newsletters, and virtual meetings were among the preferred communication modes for parents. Other modes that could use some improvement include updating online communications (e.g., social media, website), interactive apps (e.g., ClassDojo), and phone communication. Notably, twelve percent of all respondents provide generalized, positive feedback around parent engagement.

- **By School Level: High School Parents** most often respond with suggestions for communication improvement and have the fewest number of positive comments. Conversely, **Elementary School Parents** have the greatest number of positive comments and join **Middle School Parents** with relatively low response rates with suggestions for communication improvement.

OPEN-ENDED SURVEY QUESTION RESULTS

This section provides the analysis of the open-ended responses from the survey. All responses are quoted verbatim with minor modifications for clarity if needed. Researchers only reported themes with over 10% response frequency rates.

QUESTION 1



In what ways, if any, could HCPS further support parent engagement? Please also use the space provided below to share any other comments you may have regarding parent engagement.

Respondents most often mention how *parent-teacher communication* (32%) could be improved, specifically regarding updates on student progress. Within the broader theme of parent-teacher communication, respondents call for *more frequent and proactive teacher communication* (20%), a return to *parent-teacher conferences* (14%), and *clearer student progress updates and evaluations* (8%). In general, parents seek more frequent updates on their students' academic and behavior progress in class through parent-teacher conferences and informal email or phone communication. Responses often indicate that parents feel some dissatisfaction with the vagueness of quarterly report cards as well as how information is currently presented in Home Access Center (HAC). By the time parents receive notice of their students' academic or behavioral challenges, they often find it too late to make meaningful changes at home. **Middle School Parents** tend to highlight and struggle with an overall decrease in the frequency of teacher communication compared to elementary school, and **High School Parents** tend to reaffirm these notions as well. Respondents in the upper school levels desire more frequent teacher communication because they cannot rely on their students to bring back accurate information.

The second most-frequently cited theme is *provide more opportunities for in-person parent involvement* (29%). Most of the responses within this theme suggest specific opportunities HCPS could provide, such as *family-friendly in-school events* like American Education week (12%), *parent education* on college prep or homework assistance (8%), and *classroom volunteer opportunities* (6%). Additionally, respondents note that with any event or opportunity, HCPS schools must give enough *advance notice and accommodate working parents' schedules* (8%). Slightly more **High School Parents** request parent education events than other school levels.

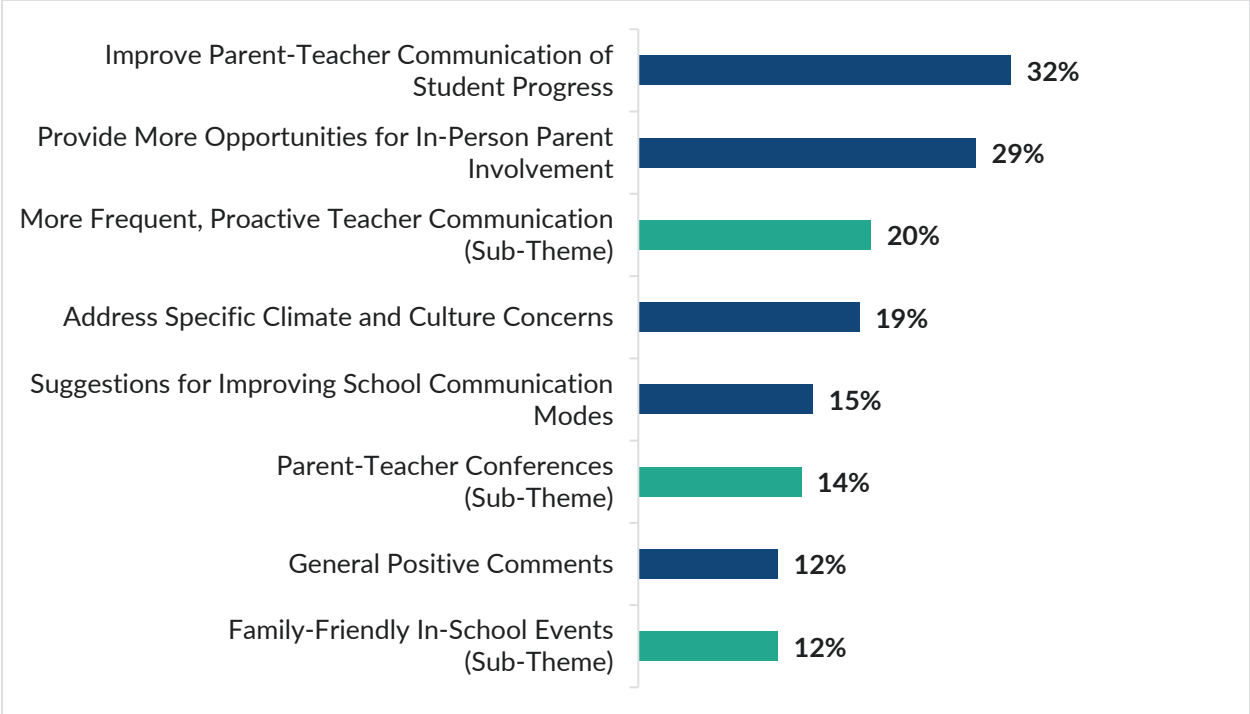
Nineteen percent of parents cite specific *areas of concern related to climate and culture* that currently act as barriers towards parent engagement. Some respondents highlight their desire to have *greater parental involvement with academics* (9%); many parents express questions over the current reading curriculum or concerns over low homework levels. Other topics addressed within this theme include *concerns about staff conduct and accountability* (5%), *concerns about student safety and bullying* (4%), and *suggestions for physical environment and resources improvements* (4%).

Respondents provide both actionable and positive feedback regarding school communication and district efforts to engage parents. Fifteen percent of parents highlight *specific communication modes* (15%) that they recommend HCPS schools prioritize using, including weekly and/or monthly *email newsletters* (4%) and *virtual meetings* (3%). Finally, twelve percent of respondents give general positive feedback to both school and district staff.

The remaining suggestions with lower response rates are as follows: *continue to seek and respond to parent feedback* (8%), *improve district communication and transparency* (6%), and *general negative comments* (4%).

The chart below highlights the most frequent themes and sub-themes for stakeholder survey responses to this question. When calculating percentages, researchers excluded miscellaneous and blank responses to highlight the most salient concerns. For more detailed response frequency rates, please visit the accompanying Excel data supplement.

Theme Frequency: Top Eight Themes and Sub-Themes Regarding Suggestions for Improving Parent Engagement



Note: This figure indicates the most frequently mentioned themes and sub-themes of the 378 coded open-ended responses. The navy bars indicate main themes, while the teal bars indicate sub-themes. Percentages sum to greater than 100% because some coded responses reference more than one theme.

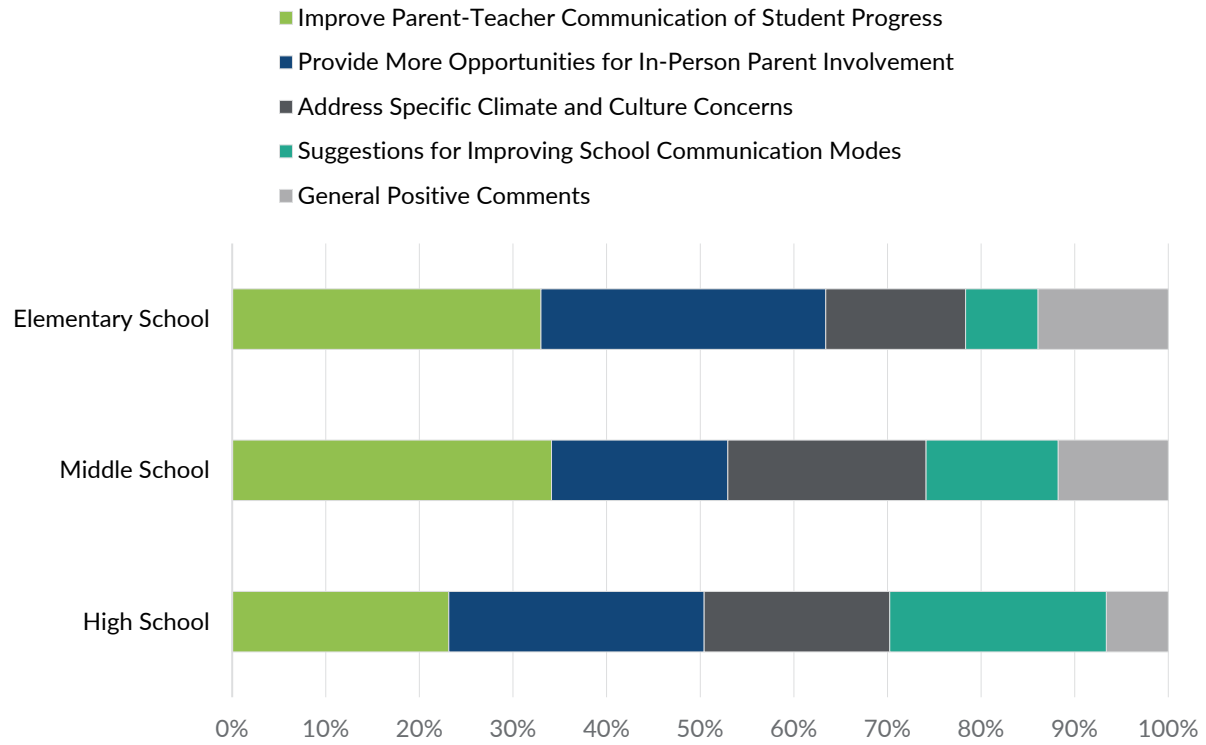
Theme Frequency: Top Five Main Themes Regarding Suggestions for Improving Parent Engagement

Theme/Sub-Theme	Sample Responses
<p>Improve Parent-Teacher Communication of Student Progress</p>	<p><i>“Parent teacher conferences provide the best opportunity to get feedback from my child's homeroom teacher; however, these are based on request only. Besides report cards, which are impersonal and vague, there is no standard for automatic feedback on academic growth. My child's teachers are extremely quick to reply when we send an email. But we feel bad when doing so as they already have 30 students/families to manage. I wish there was an easier way to understand how my child is doing in school.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">– HCPS Elementary School Parent</p> <p><i>“Aside from my child's homeroom teacher and the once or twice a year that we have IEP meetings teachers don't reach out. I've had issues and have emailed a teacher to not get a response. Middle school communication has been very disappointing compared to Elementary School.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">– HCPS Middle School Parent</p> <p><i>“Better communication on the smaller level. I do not know how to access my child's assignments or look at upcoming projects. I am unsure of what he is actually learning concept-wise. Often by the time I receive communication there's a problem.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">– HCPS Middle School Parent</p> <p><i>“As a parent, all we see is the grade in the online portal and we're not always getting information from our kids. I was never invited to attend a conference, or asked to come in for one because of grades. I was the one constantly reaching out to them and not that it isn't my responsibility to do so as a parent, but I feel like there could be something established so that the line of communication between parent and (specifically) high school teacher could be stronger.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">– HCPS High School Parent</p>
<p>Provide More Opportunities for In-Person Parent Involvement</p>	<p><i>“Bringing back in-person BTS Nights and Parent-Teacher conferences would be beneficial. As a teacher in the county, these events are stressful, but from the perspective of a parent, they are invaluable.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">– HCPS Elementary School Parent</p> <p><i>“Have events on different days of the week. I always have to work on days the events are held. Have more events where students and parents can meet and interact. Have more opportunities for parents to interact with teachers. The elementary school has more opportunities than middle and high.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">– HCPS Middle School Parent</p> <p><i>“High schools don't seem to engage parents as much as elementary schools. I would love to be invited more often to be present for my children's learning. I am active on social media and check email regularly. There could definitely be more available for parents other than attending sports events.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">– HCPS High School Parent</p>

Theme/Sub-Theme	Sample Responses
Address Specific Climate and Culture Concerns	<p><i>“The Principal has deemed my child as a bad kid and doesn’t make us feel welcomed. Is friendly and talkative to ALL of the other families and very friendly with other kids and barely even looks at us or speaks to my child..”</i> – HCPS Elementary School Parent</p> <p><i>“When bullying is happening, I would like to receive emails what was filed and notified how it was resolved. If it ever gets resolved! Major bullying and harassment issues.”</i> – HCPS Middle School Parent</p> <p><i>“Engaging in the community regarding curriculum. Listen and hear parents' concerns. I have found it impossible to find any actual curriculum to review. When I brought up a concern, I was treated poorly and made to feel stupid.”</i> – HCPS High School Parent</p>
Suggestions for Improving School Communication Modes	<p><i>“Allow for virtual participation in events to help those with younger children and babies to have more ease in participating.”</i> – HCPS Elementary School Parent</p> <p><i>“Middle school would be nice to have a weekly or bi weekly news bulletin about what is going on and events.”</i> – HCPS Middle School Parent</p> <p><i>“We need more information shared. The school's website is not always up to date and the one for the district is very difficult to navigate. I would love to know more about the parent academy but can't find anything.”</i> – HCPS High School Parent</p>
General Positive Comments	<p><i>“Elementary school administrators and teachers are very engaged with parents. They use school apps to communicate with me.”</i> – HCPS Elementary School Student</p> <p><i>“The auto calls are helpful! Keep those up please. I like accessing HAC to make sure my son is staying on track.”</i> – HCPS Middle School Parent</p> <p><i>“Maintain current efforts. You are doing a lot more than other schools we've attended and I'm happy with this school district and school.”</i> – HCPS High School Parent</p>

The following chart highlights the themes with which each school level is most concerned. For example, **Middle School Parents** demonstrate slightly more concern than **Elementary School Parents** with *teacher communication about students’ progress*. **Elementary School** and **High School Parents** desire more *opportunities for in-person events*. While **Elementary School Parents** demonstrate more *positive general perceptions* of their schools, **Middle School** and **High School Parents** more frequently highlight needs to *address various climate and culture concerns*.

RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF EACH THEME BY SCHOOL LEVEL- QUESTION 1



Note: Total response counts from middle school parents are significantly lower than the two other school level groups.

CLOSED-ENDED SURVEY QUESTIONS RESULTS

This page is blank. The following pages will include answers to close-ended questions included in the survey.

HCPS Parent Engagement Survey

4878

Responses

13:03

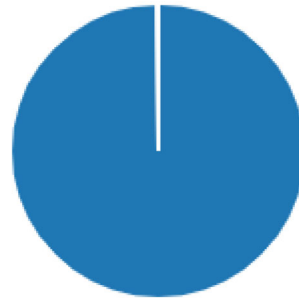
Average time to complete

Active

Status

1. Do you have a child currently attending a school in HCPS?

● Yes	4870
● No	8



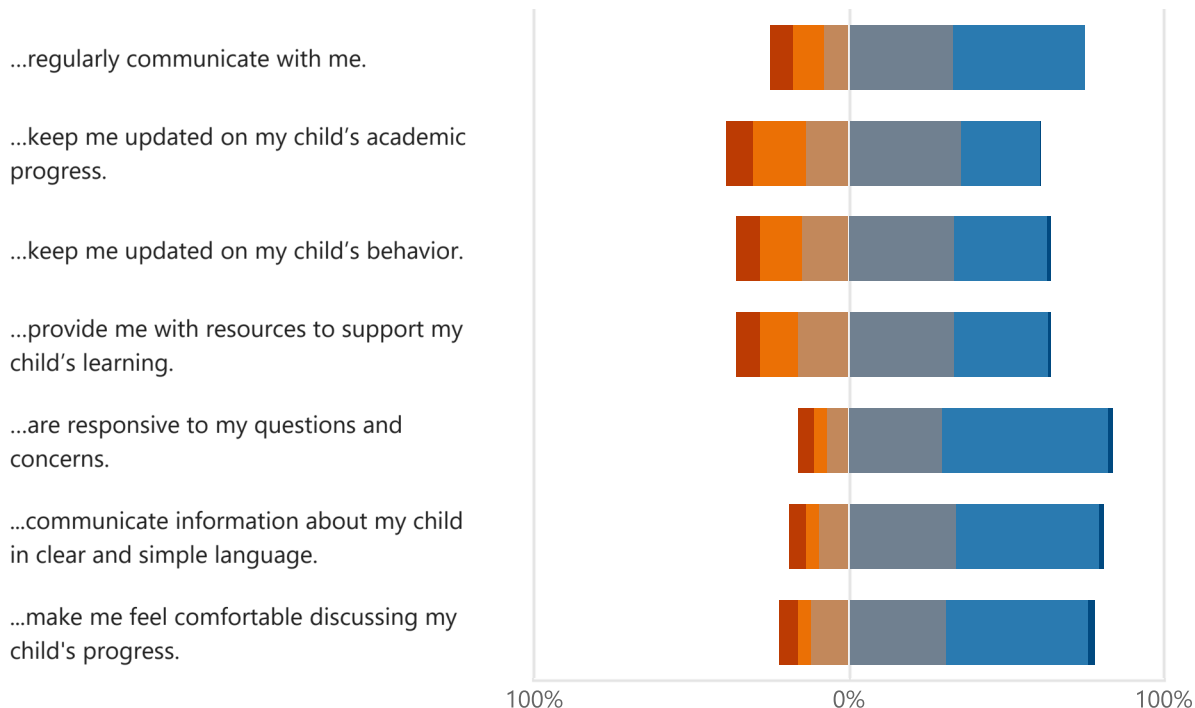
2. School Level

● Elementary School	2284
● Middle School	1117
● High School	1477



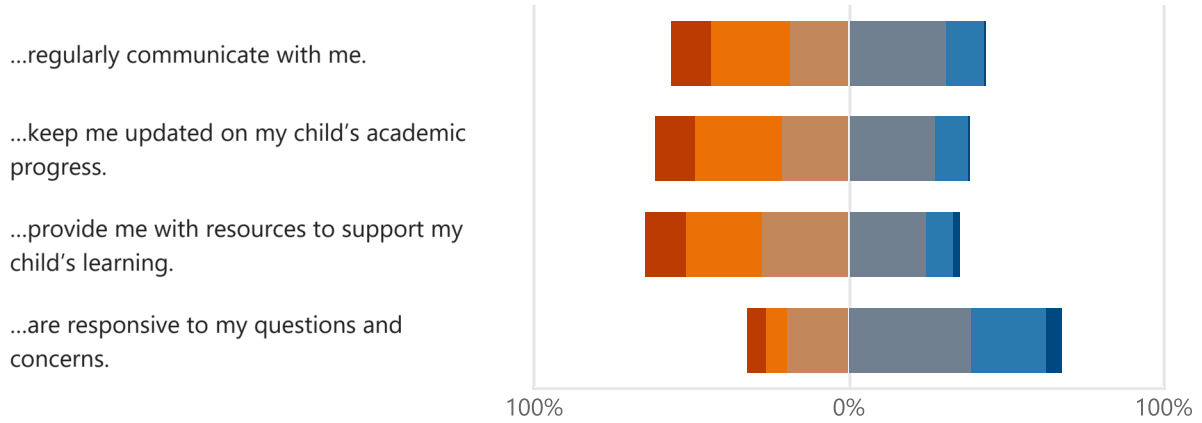
3. Please rate your level of agreement with each of the following statements: My child's teachers...

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neither Agree nor Disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree
■ Don't Know Not Applicable



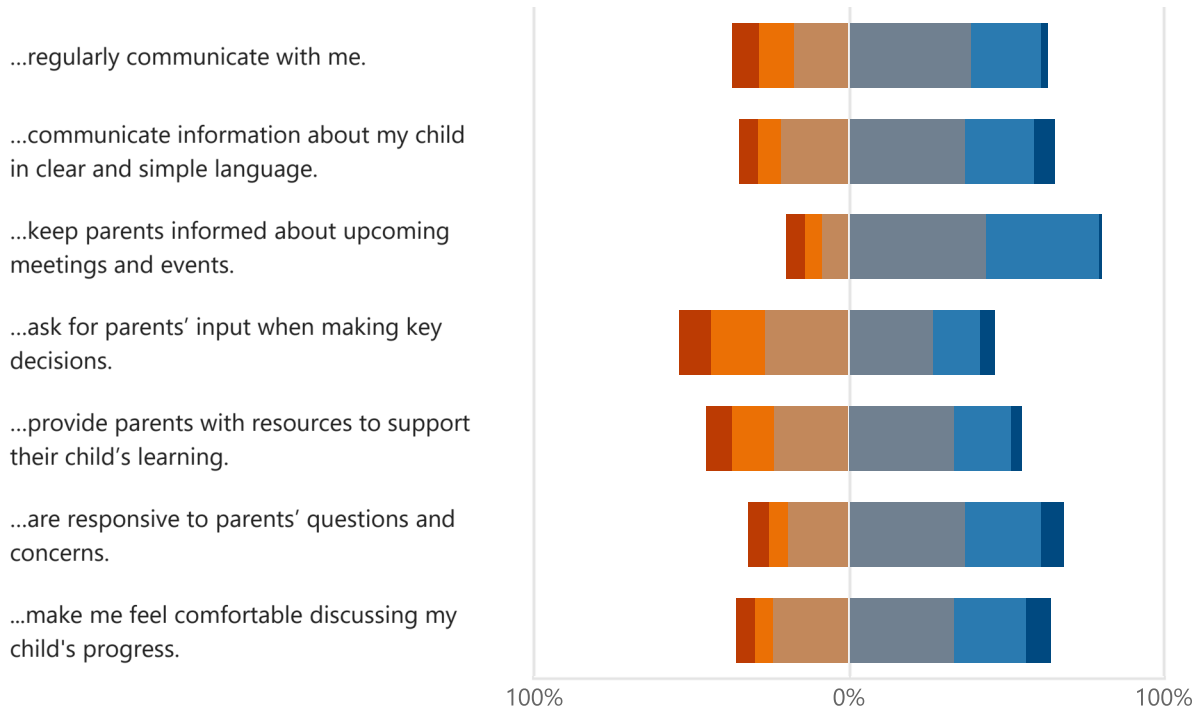
4. Please rate your level of agreement with each of the following statements: My child's teachers...

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
Don't Know Not Applicable



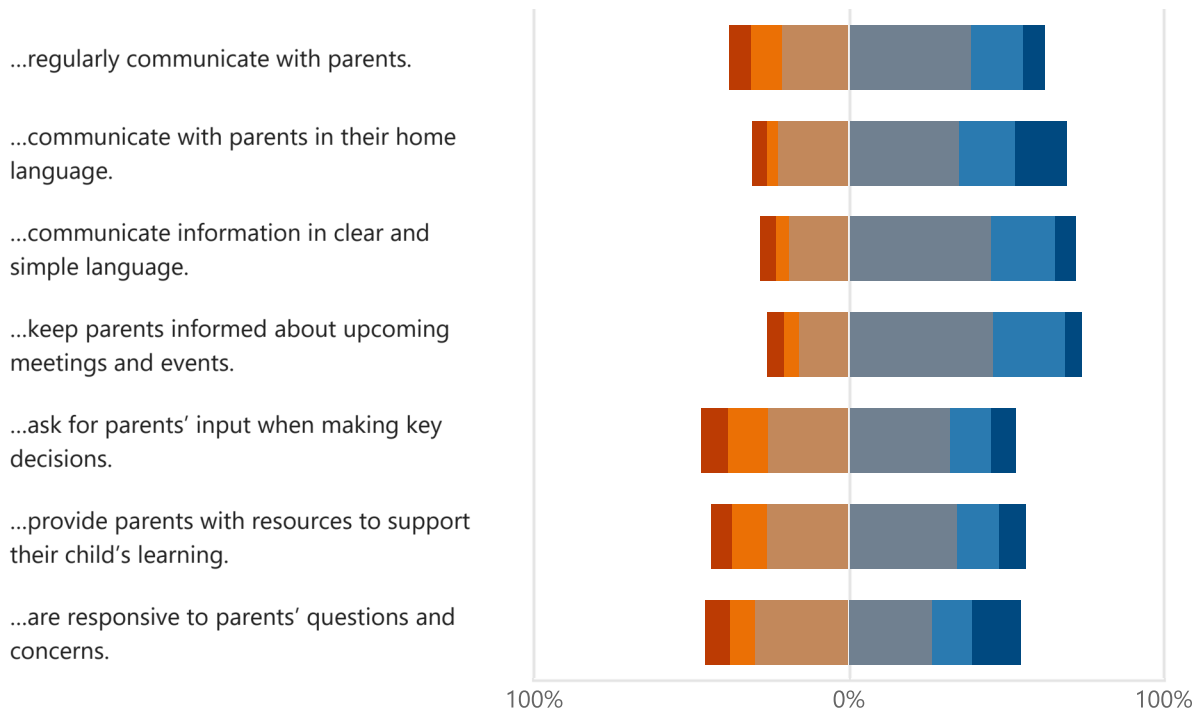
5. Please indicate how much you disagree or agree with the following statements: Administrators (principals, assistant principals, etc.) at my child's school...

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
Don't Know Not Applicable



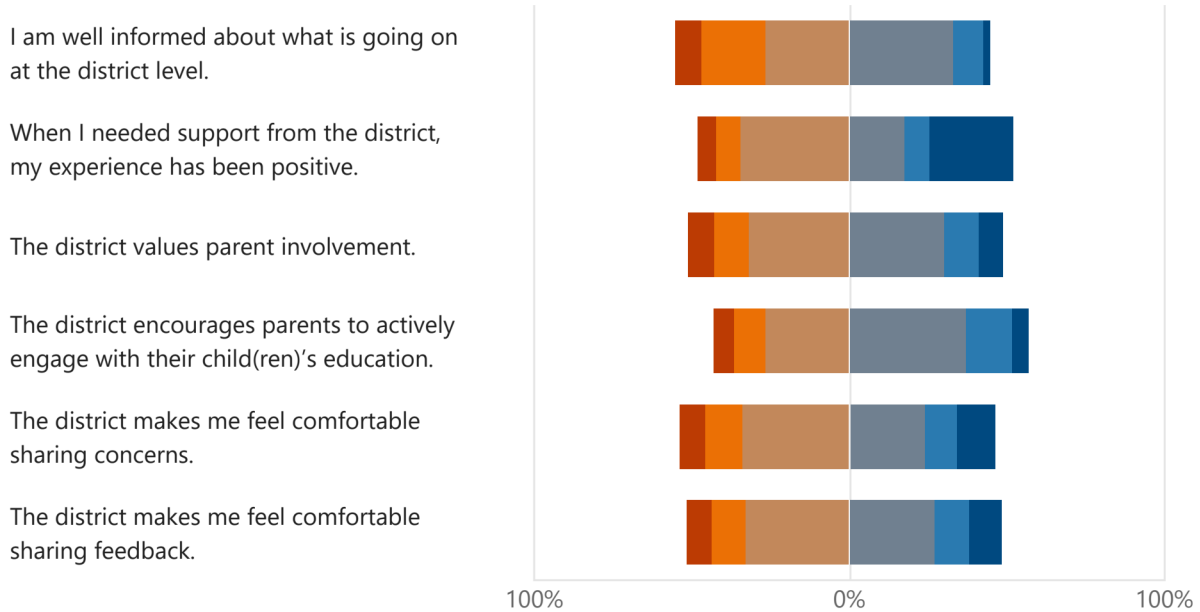
6. Please indicate how much you disagree or agree with the following statements: HCPS Central Office Leaders ...

■ Strongly Disagree
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Neither Agree nor Disagree
 ■ Agree
 ■ Strongly Agree
■ Don't Know Not Applicable



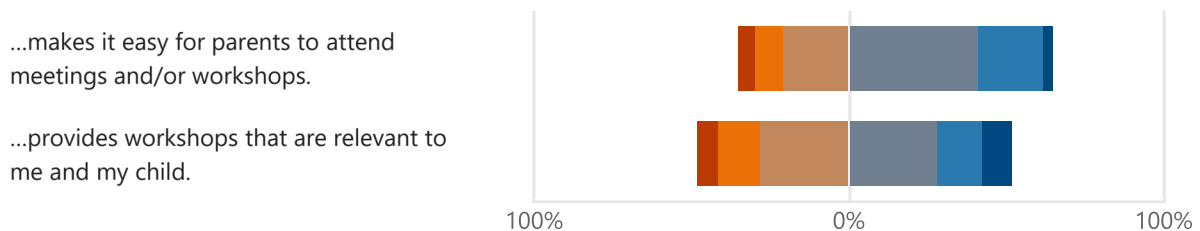
7. Please rate your level of agreement with each of the following statements. The word "district" below refers to Harford County Public Schools.

■ Strongly Disagree
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Neither Agree nor Disagree
 ■ Agree
 ■ Strongly Agree
■ Don't Know Not Applicable



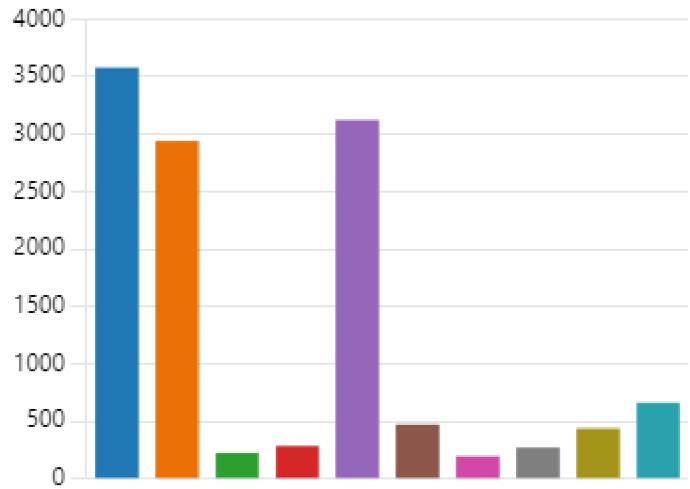
8. Please rate your level of agreement with each of the following statements: My child's school...

■ Strongly Disagree
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Neither Agree nor Disagree
 ■ Agree
 ■ Strongly Agree
■ Don't Know Not Applicable



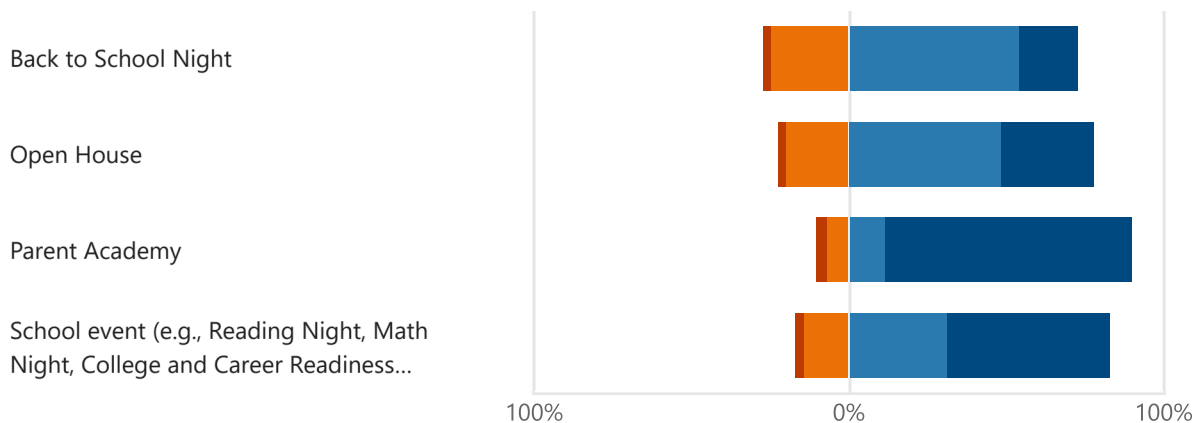
9. Have you attended any of the following meetings or events at your child's school this school year (2022-2023)? Please select all that apply.

● Back to School Night	3575
● Open House	2939
● Parent Academy Workshop (in p...	225
● Parent Academy Videos (online)	288
● School Event (e.g., athletic event...	3123
● Reading Night	471
● Math Night	195
● STEM Night	273
● I have not attended any meetin...	439
● Other	663



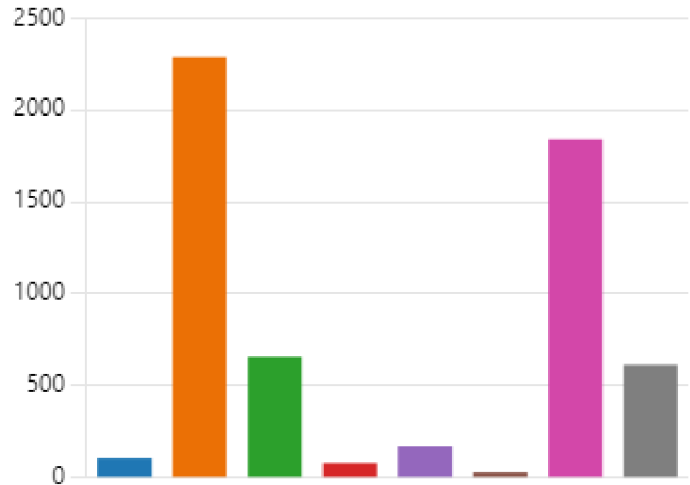
10. How helpful did you find the following meetings or events in terms of the information provided during the event?

■ Not at All Helpful
 ■ Somewhat Helpful
 ■ Very Helpful
 ■ Don't Know/Not Applicable



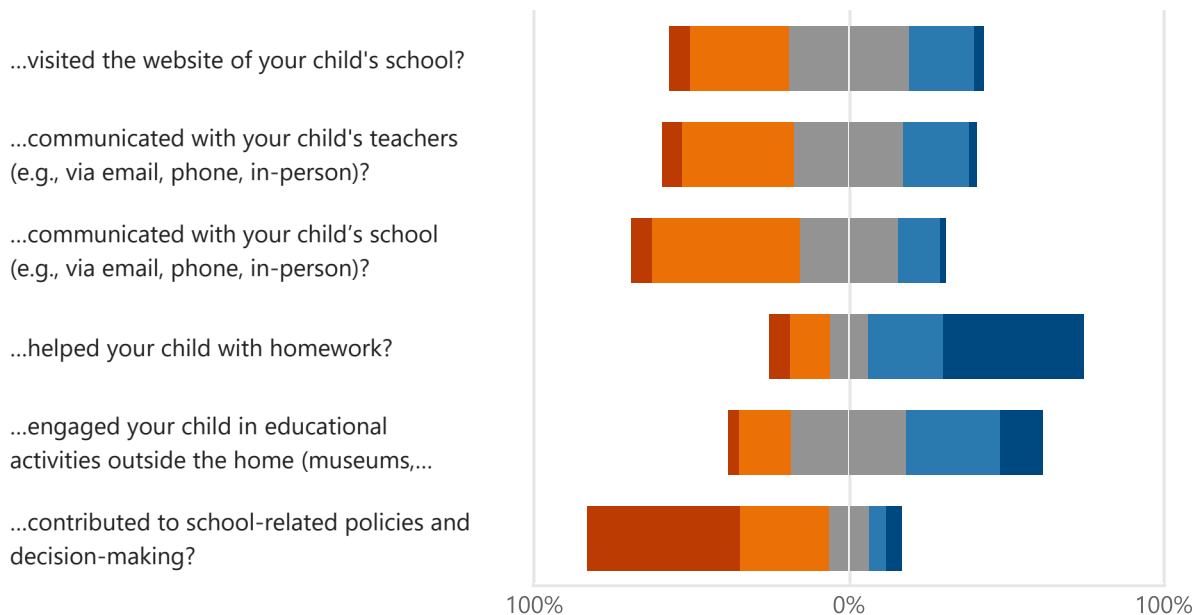
11. Which of the following reasons make it difficult for you to attend meetings or events at your child's school? Please select all that apply.

● Do not speak English well	106
● Work conflict	2288
● Lack of childcare	658
● Lack of transportation	80
● Do not feel welcome	172
● Internet/phone access	29
● Nothing prevents me from atte...	1840
● Other	614



12. During the current school year, how often have you...

■ Never
 ■ Less than Once a Month
 ■ Monthly
 ■ Weekly
 ■ Daily



13. In what ways, if any, could HCPS further support parent engagement? Please also use the space provided below to share any other comments you may have regarding parent engagement. *If you wish to remain anonymous, please do not include any personally-identifiable information.*

2016
Responses

Latest Responses
"middle SCHOOL TEACHER NEED BE MORE ASSCALBLE TO Par..."

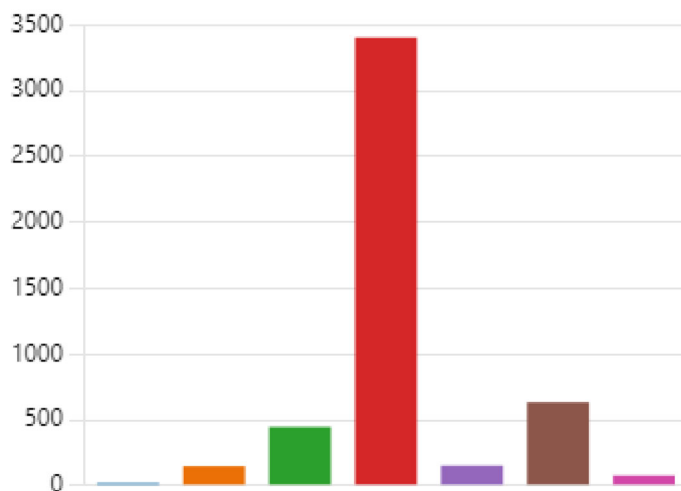
14. Are you Hispanic or Latino?

● Yes	294
● No	4119
● Prefer not to respond	465



15. Please select your race or ethnicity.

● American Indian or Alaska Native	19
● Asian	148
● Black or African American	446
● White	3401
● Two or more races	153
● Prefer not to respond	634
● Other	77



16. How did you first learn about this survey?

● HCPS website	625
● Scan QR Code	9
● Blackboard Connect5 call/email/...	1655
● Facebook post (Parent Academy)	51
● Newsletter/email from school (P...	1766
● Parent and Community Engage...	97
● Other	675

