

# BLUEPRINT FEEDBACK ANALYSIS

KEY FINDINGS FROM HCPS STAKEHOLDERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN SMALL FOCUS GROUPS TO DISCUSS WHAT IMPLEMENTATION SHOULD LOOK LIKE.

## FINAL RESEARCH REPORT

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT .....	2
INTRODUCTION.....	4
BACKGROUND INFORMATION .....	4
Overview.....	4
Key Objectives .....	4
Methodology.....	5
RECOMMENDATIONS .....	6
KEY FINDINGS .....	6
ANALYSIS: STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK.....	8
Early Childhood Education .....	8
Career Ladder.....	13
Student Supports.....	16
College and Career Readiness.....	21
Budget .....	26

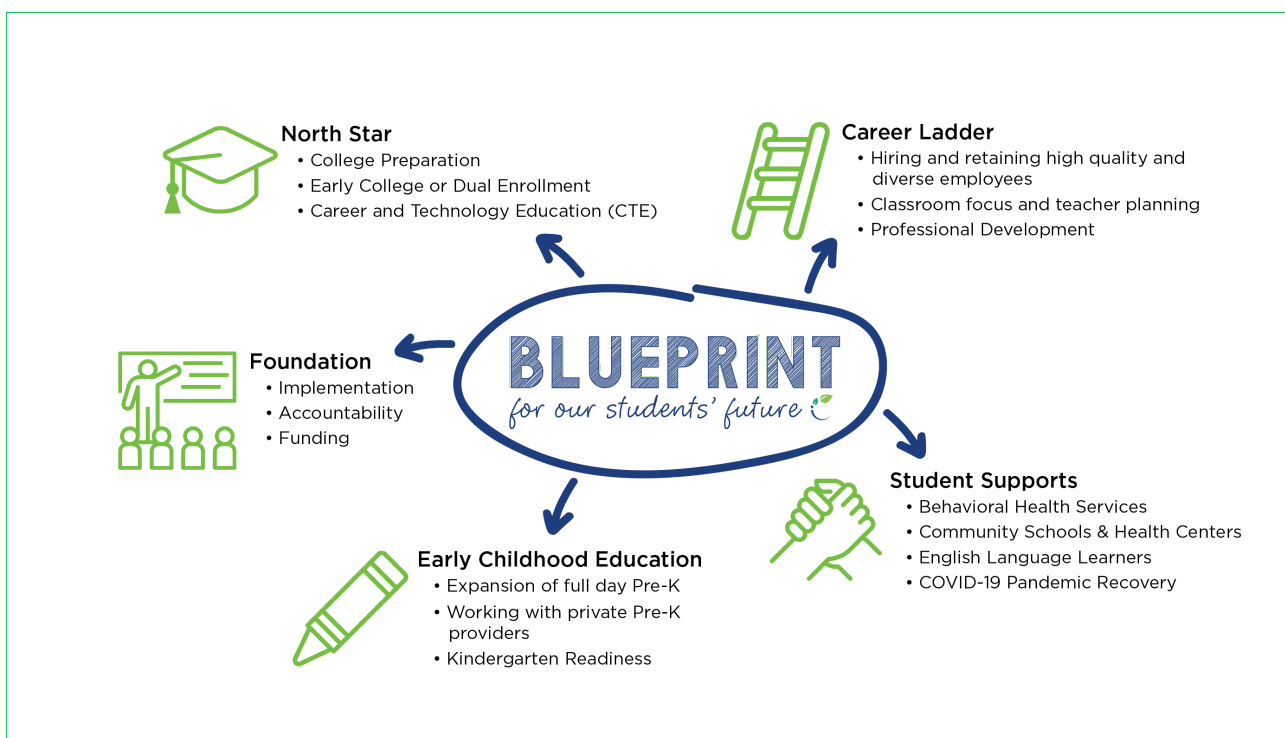
# INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Kirwan Commission was created to make recommendations on improving Maryland’s education system both fiscally and for performance. The Maryland General Assembly passed the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future in 2020, as an education reform bill based on Kirwan recommendations. In February 2021, the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future became law.

## OVERVIEW

Harford County Public Schools (HCPS) is currently developing an implementation plan for the 2020 Blueprint for Maryland’s Future. In the fall and winter of 2021, HCPS brought together stakeholders from its Central Office, schools, and community to participate in small focus groups to discuss what implementation can look like. These discussions focused on the following areas: Early Childhood Education (ECE), College and Career Readiness (CCR), Career Ladder, Student Support, and Budget, as represented in the graphic below. The HCPS North Star initiative, which was introduced in the spring of 2019 to help ensure every student will graduate ready for success in college, career, and life, aligns well with the Blueprint focus areas.



The HCPS Office of Strategic Initiatives has now collaborated with the HCPS Office of Research and Program Evaluation to synthesize and analyze stakeholder feedback, and the findings and recommendations in this report will help inform HCPS’ Blueprint Implementation Plan.

## KEY OBJECTIVES

Through an analysis of open-ended responses, this report addresses the following research questions:

1. What do stakeholders find exciting about the Blueprint?
2. What do stakeholders find challenging or concerning about the Blueprint?
3. On what aspects of the Blueprint has HCPS already made progress?
4. On what aspects of the Blueprint does HCPS need to focus?

## METHODOLOGY

In this document, researchers present findings from an analysis of open-ended responses to the HCPS' Blueprint Stakeholder Meetings Survey and comments made in HCPS-led focus groups. To keep the findings as salient as possible for HCPS' future decision-making, researchers first removed blank, invalid, or irrelevant responses and then developed themes using the cleaned data only.

Researchers reviewed the open-ended responses to identify the topics most frequently discussed by participants and then identified key themes by the following segments:

- Focus areas, including **Early Childhood Education, College and Career Readiness, Career Ladder, Student Support, and Budget**; and
- Stakeholder groups, including **Central Office Staff, School-Based Employees, and Community Members**.

*The findings of this report should be interpreted with caution due to the small sample sizes. The analysis reflects the perceptions of the sample focus group members who completed the survey forms but may not reflect the perceptions of HCPS' community as a whole.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- I. **Develop and/or enhance a communication strategy about the Blueprint.** Several participants—particularly those outside of the Central Office—had questions about the Blueprint and chose to not respond to some questions because they felt as though they had insufficient information. Using an enhanced district-wide communication plan will ensure everyone is informed about current and future progress. Members of the community focus groups indicated their concern in not having a clear understanding of where to get information, and/or how to access resources related to any program. This group also mentioned a significant disconnect from teacher level communication and district level communication.
- II. **Address concerns related to funding and staffing across all Blueprint focus areas.** Many participants noted that resource allocation, funding, staffing, and time present challenges for even current programming. To successfully launch new initiatives outlined by the Blueprint, participants believe the district must first carefully evaluate the short- and long-term costs and staffing needs that will make each program sustainable.
- III. **Continue to provide opportunities for all stakeholders (Central Office, school-based, and community) to remain part of the planning, implementation, and feedback.** Allow stakeholders to remain part of the Blueprint conversation, have a seat at the table, and keep sharing their perspectives. Each group felt that their perspectives were critical and valuable, and felt that if they didn't have a seat at the table, then we would not meet our goals.

## KEY FINDINGS

1. **Across all focus groups, participants were most excited for the district's renewed investment in students and staff.** Stakeholders from each focus group shared an overall perspective that the Blueprint is a positive, thoughtful initiative that will result in improved outcomes for K-12 students. Additionally, responses from Central Office staff or school-based employees frequently included appreciation for how the Blueprint aligns with current HCPS initiatives, such as North Star and expanded full-day pre-kindergarten offerings.
2. **Participants of all focus groups most frequently highlighted logistics and implementation as concerns with the Blueprint.** Responses referencing various logistical challenges and implementation concerns occur across all focus groups and stakeholder segments. For example, school-based employees referenced staff capacity as a challenge for both the Early Childhood Education and Student Supports Blueprint initiatives. Notably, participants, when responding to the second survey question (i.e., "What do stakeholders find challenging or concerning about the Blueprint?"), tended to ask follow-up questions about Blueprint details, which may indicate that participants needed more information before drawing conclusions.
3. **Stakeholders in the ECE focus group most frequently referenced their excitement about increasing high-quality ECE opportunities.** Many believed pre-kindergarten should be universally offered to families to increase all students' readiness to learn, and the Blueprint presents a path towards achieving this goal. Stakeholders also agreed that much of the framework necessary to create a successful ECE program through the Blueprint already exists within HCPS, primarily due to current efforts to expand full-day pre-kindergarten. However, stakeholder groups tended to differ in their greatest concerns and improvement areas for the Blueprint. While Central Office staff questioned the district's ability to manage the quality of care provided at private daycares, school-based employees questioned the impacts expanded in-school ECE programs will have on current staff capacity. On the other hand, community members requested improvement in parent engagement and communication about ECE offerings and enrollment processes.
4. **While stakeholder responses related to Career Ladder were more varied and infrequent than other focus groups, the available feedback consistently recommends HCPS develop better internal structures that will allow the Blueprint to succeed.** For example, several participants mentioned logistical challenges, such as finding classroom coverage while teachers prepare for National Board Certification (NBC), designating planning time for teachers, presenting classroom opportunities to administrators, and changing the culture of career advancement while simultaneously negotiating with the teachers' union. However, although only the

Central Office staff provided clear answers for the current HCPS progress towards the Career Ladder Blueprint, participants from all stakeholder groups shared excitement around the Blueprint's attempt to elevate the teaching profession and employ high-quality teachers through promoting professional growth.

5. **Participants in the Student Supports focus group generally expressed excitement about the district's renewed focus on enhancing the school system via community schools and related student supports, particularly mental and behavioral supports for secondary students. However, they also raised questions around the logistics of implementing the Blueprint (e.g., funding, staffing).** Some of the implementation concerns and areas of improvement came from the school-based employees. They highlighted a historical gap between the district's plans for student supports and the actual implementation and delivery of said supports. Notably, Central Office staff participants were much less likely to identify specific areas of improvement around student supports than either school-based employees or community members.
6. While Central Office staff highlighted logistical challenges about implementing the Blueprint as it currently stands, **both school-based employees and community members shared concerns about moving forward with all aspects of the Blueprint in its current form.** These groups emphasized their concerns about the potential negative effects of placing and tracking students in career and academic pathways, particularly the undue pressure placed on students to commit to a pathway at a young age. In this way, many participants recommended optimizing the student career pathway experience, particularly for students in middle school, to focus more on career "exploration" and communicate the flexibility of career pathways with both students and parents. Additionally, **stakeholders clearly recognized which areas of the CCR Blueprint that HCPS has already achieved**, including providing a rigorous CCR program of studies, offering dual enrollment at Harford Community College, and employing supportive teachers.
7. **Participants do not have a clear vision of the logistics behind HCPS' budget for the Blueprint, but they expressed excitement for the opportunity for increased state funding to provide more equitable educational supports for students.** Stakeholders seek better guidance and clarity from the state about the duration of funds, restricted uses of the funds, and the subsequent sustainability of programs outlined in the Blueprint.

# ANALYSIS: STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

The following section provides a summary of the stakeholder feedback captured in the HCPS' Blueprint Stakeholder Meetings Survey following participation in HCPS-led focus groups. Each subsection is organized by Blueprint focus area as well as individual survey questions. Where possible, researchers also segmented the analysis by stakeholder group. The numbers in the table below represent the number of focus group members who completed the survey portion of the discussion. All members of the focus groups (focus area) were given the opportunity to complete the survey form but some members chose not to complete the form.

FOCUS AREA	CENTRAL OFFICE STAFF	SCHOOL-BASED EMPLOYEES	COMMUNITY MEMBERS	TOTAL SURVEY RESPONSES IN FOCUS GROUP
Early Childhood Education	11	6	6	23
Career Ladder	14	4	2	20
Student Supports	5	5	7	17
College & Career Readiness	7	6	3	16
Budget Office	2	-	-	2
<i>Total</i>	<b>39</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>78</b>

## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

### QUESTION #1



What do stakeholders find exciting about the Blueprint?

Stakeholders from all groups most frequently referenced their excitement about increasing high-quality ECE opportunities. Many believed pre-kindergarten should be universally offered to families, and the Blueprint presents a path towards achieving this goal.

- Central Office staff:** Nine out of eleven Central Office participants expressed excitement around expanding high-quality ECE programming by increasing the number of programs and expanding capacity to serve more students in the community. Additionally, seven out of 11 Central Office participants referenced the expected benefits of expanded ECE programming on young students' overall readiness to learn (e.g., elasticity, ability to learn and apply new information). These participants mentioned the positive impact of ECE on students' success in kindergarten through high school.

Three Central Office employees also look forward to involving the community (e.g., Early Childhood Advisory Council).

- School-based employees:** Five out of six school-based employees were excited about the increase in program accessibility and the subsequent academic/social-emotional learning benefits ECE has on students' school readiness. Only one participant referenced the positive impact they expect to see through collaborating with the community providers.
- Community members:** Four participants were excited about expanding accessibility to ECE programs to help prepare students for school. Specifically, two community members expressed that the Blueprint may bring the district closer to providing full-day pre-kindergarten options for all students.



## QUESTION #2



What do stakeholders find challenging or concerning about the Blueprint?

**Stakeholder groups differed in their most significant concerns about the Blueprint.** Each stakeholder group focused on concerns that directly affect their work or experience. For example, while school-based employees focused on the impacts of the Blueprint on staff capacity, community members focused on parent engagement. Additionally, some participants remain confused about the enrollment process and the tiered system.

- Several **Central Office staff** participants questioned the Blueprint's ability to effectively manage private daycares, particularly around the quality of care provided and ensuring that private daycares align with the Maryland Common Core standards. Eight out of 11 participants expressed concerns about the logistics of private providers and the logistics related to capacity (e.g., both facilities and staff) and enrollment (e.g., vouchers, tiered systems), and professional development. Multiple participants found funding and implementation unknowns challenging.
- **School-based employees** were most concerned about the ECE offered at in-school programs. Five out of six participants had questions about logistics, such as the impact more students will have on staff capacity, facilities, and even transportation protocols (e.g., walker boundaries, mixed ages on school buses). Unlike the Central Office group, only one participant expressed concern over the private ECE providers' quality of care and alignment to standards.
- Three out of five **community members** found parent engagement to be the most challenging Blueprint area. Because this stakeholder group shared excitement about the increased accessibility of ECE programs, they also showed concern about the Blueprint's ability to properly connect parents to the programs, particularly those in most need. Two also showed concern over not having enough staff and resources to provide the high-quality ECE outlined in the Blueprint.

## QUESTION #3



On what aspects of the Blueprint has HCPS already made progress?

**Stakeholders agreed that much of the framework necessary to create a successful early childhood education program already exists within HCPS.** Notably, Central Office staff and school-based employees were much more knowledgeable of the internal district progress than community members. As such, the former groups offered positive feedback around current efforts to expand full-day pre-kindergarten and communicate the importance of ECE, while community members focused on their positive experiences with current teachers.

- Over half of the 11 **Central Office staff** participants strongly applauded the existing efforts of HCPS to expand quality full-day pre-kindergarten at many schools. Four Central Office staff also mentioned how the current relationships HCPS has with community daycare providers will continue to grow in time (e.g., Early Childhood Advisory Council, Thrive by Five). A few participants also pointed out benchmarks and standards from the Blueprint that align with HCPS' current efforts and initiatives to expand ECE (e.g., cross-group initiatives, enrollment expectations, Social-Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children)
- **School-based employees:** Four participants echoed the Central Office staff's sentiments and mentioned the current efforts to expand full-day pre-kindergarten. All six participants expressed satisfaction with the expanded conversation about ECE and its importance, particularly through the North Star initiatives.
- While some **community members** felt they did not have enough information about current HCPS operations and progress toward the Blueprint goals, three out of six participants praised the current teachers in pre-kindergarten programs and teachers throughout the district.

## QUESTION #4



On what aspects of the Blueprint does HCPS need to focus?

**Stakeholders held less consensus around the aspects HCPS needs to focus on compared to other survey questions.**

- **Central Office** employees' perceptions were the least cohesive, as few participants shared similar views. Some recommended the district provide more professional support to private ECE providers to ensure the HCPS and private provider experiences are comparable (e.g., professional development, coaching, funding, staffing). Other recommendations focused on solidifying the long-term plan for HCPS ECE (e.g., how many programs are needed and implemented; capacity to provide regional special education programs if the goal is to expand pre-kindergarten access).
- **School-based employees** focused their recommendations more on the district's capacity to deliver high-quality instruction. Two participants described current situations where large class sizes and/or a lack of differentiated materials prohibits teachers from meeting each student's academic and social-emotional needs. These occurrences underscore many employees' hope that the expansion of pre-kindergarten programs will improve students' readiness to learn. A few participants mentioned that the district needs to offer sufficient pre-kindergarten programs, either through private or HCPS programs.
- All six **community members** described situations in which HCPS could improve communication. They presented questions around class sizes, funding, pre-kindergarten enrollment options, and the overall benefit of the Blueprint on families and ECE. Recommendations included posting information at local community sites (e.g., grocery stores, pharmacies) or on a specific FAQ district website.

## SAMPLE RESPONSES – EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The table on the following page highlights sample responses from every stakeholder group for each survey question related to Early Childhood Education.

Sample Responses from Survey Feedback: Early Childhood Education

THEME	SAMPLE RESPONSES		
	Central Office Staff	School-Based Employees	Community Members
What is exciting about the Blueprint?	<i>"The opportunity to provide additional, high-quality PreK education for young children in Harford County. This work has been the focus of the Early Childhood Advisory Council and will provide the resources to increase the number of children entering school ready to learn."</i>	<i>"We have seen the positive impact when young children attend pre-school. Recently we have seen the negative impact of when young children do not attend pre-school. Early intervention in regard to early identification of special education services are pivotal for student success. Early childhood education has the potential to positively impact early intervention."</i>	<i>"It was exciting to hear the direction early childhood education is going in to make things more accessible and available."</i>
What is challenging or concerning about the Blueprint?	<i>"I think it is a challenge to monitor and regulate private daycares and pre-schools. From my work in the past with early learning grants, we planned several PD opportunities with private daycares and attendance was not very good. I think the curriculum and instructional practices being provided to students in private daycares and in our HCPS preschools should align to Maryland College and Career Ready Standards so that students have a solid program and experience in early literacy, numeracy and social/emotional learning."</i>	<i>"I am concerned that some private pre-schools will be funded that are not effective, successful or do not teach the curricula framework for Prekindergarten students (Maryland Common Core State Curriculum Framework)."  "Staffing issues, class sizes, impact on school personnel, modes of transportation – how to best mix in three- and four-year-olds with 11 and 12-year-olds? Radius of walker boundaries, especially for three- and four-year-olds."</i>	<i>"The ability to reach those in need the most, reaching parents to ensure awareness, and missing some students due to resource constraints."  "As of right now just finding out what the income bracket will be."</i>
On what aspects of the Blueprint is HCPS ahead?	<i>"We already have 9 full day Pre-K programs in our system and 14 half day programs. We already collaborate some with our daycare facilities. (Much more collaboration will be required potentially)."</i>	<i>"Having North Star initiatives already laid out will serve as a foundation for us to build upon. Many of our schools have some variation of preschool and are familiar with the needs. However, we need to be cautious when setting realistic goals for Pre-K."</i>	<i>"Without knowing where others are in the process, it is premature to answer this question. However, HCPC seems to have a workable plan in place and has captured inputs from the community."  "Great teachers."</i>

THEME	SAMPLE RESPONSES		
	Central Office Staff	School-Based Employees	Community Members
On what aspects of the Blueprint does HCPS need to focus?	<i>"While we have done some work (professional learning/partnering) with our private providers, I think this is an area that needs to be more intentional and deliberate."</i>	<i>"[HCPS should focus on] school sizes to accommodate additional classes, staff and students."  "Focused support and oversight. Purposeful alignment and seamless integration with clear expectations into all schools will ensure success."</i>	<i>"More engagement is needed to get the word out about the Blueprint and how it benefits students, parents, HCPS, and the community as a whole."  "Need to communicate what is a grant opportunity vs. sustained funding. Need campaign or full communication plan."</i>

**Important Note:**

- Please note that sample responses/quotes (comments provided by members of the focus groups) are reproduced nearly verbatim with few edits to correct typos when needed.

## CAREER LADDER

### QUESTION #1



What do stakeholders find exciting about the Blueprint?

In general, **stakeholders were most excited about the Blueprint's attempt to elevate the teaching profession.** At least one participant in each stakeholder group shared the perspective that the Career Ladder will improve teacher retention and positively impact students.

- The two **community members** shared excitement around the overall future impact the Blueprint will have on both the teaching profession and HCPS students.
- **School-based employees** and **Central Office staff** also appreciated HCPS' effort to invest more in its teaching staff and the quality of instruction. School-based employees tended to focus more on the impact on current HCPS employees. They were excited about the dual mission of the Blueprint: incentivizing more teachers to increase their qualifications while rewarding already accomplished teachers by increasing compensation. Two participants also highlighted how the Blueprint provides more opportunities for highly-qualified teachers to work in priority schools, which best supports students' needs.
- **Central Office** employees shared these perspectives on the anticipated impact on retention of current HCPS employees, but they also emphasized the Blueprint's additional focus on external recruitment efforts. Almost half of all Central Office participants mentioned the potential for the Blueprint to expand recruitment and hiring initiatives, particularly to attract diverse candidates.

### QUESTION #2



What do stakeholders find challenging or concerning about the Blueprint?

**Each stakeholder group identified different challenges with the Blueprint.**

- **School-based employees** focused on staffing challenges and the subsequent impact on students. Three out of four participants were concerned with the increased emphasis on teachers spending less time in classrooms as they move toward National Board Certified (NBC). They cited logistical challenges for covering teaching positions with administrators who work in other buildings as well as instructional impacts on students if schools consistently rely on substitutes for coverage.
- Like the school-based employees, **Central Office staff** also brought up concerns around logistics, including staffing, an "overemphasis" on NBC, and even financial concerns (e.g., once the Kirwan funding runs out). For Central Office staff, several expect changing teachers' perspectives on career advancement will be challenging, particularly when considering the negotiations that will need to be made with the teachers' union. They expected it will be difficult to incentivize tenured teachers to invest time into receiving certifications. Moreover, many Central Office staff expressed concern with changing the teaching culture at HCPS schools; they anticipate friction between younger teachers, who are incentivized to receive additional NBC certifications, and the tenured teachers, who believe in "doing their time."
- Lastly, although one **community member** appreciated the "lofty" goals the Blueprint sets, the participant foresees challenges with the amount of money and effort required to reach these goals. The other community member focused more on the parent experience with teachers, stressing that parent feedback and communication need to be at the forefront of teachers' successful career advancement.

### QUESTION #3



On what aspects of the Blueprint has HCPS already made progress?

Out of all stakeholder groups, only the **Central Office** staff had clear ideas on the progress HCPS has made on the Blueprint. Four participants out of 14 mentioned progress made with the current professional development offerings (e.g., coaching), particularly in terms of its value for new hires. Five participants pointed to the current starting salary as competitive with other districts in the state. Finally, four participants thought the district already has procedures in place for its diverse hiring initiative through the work of the Equity Office.

The other stakeholder groups did not share cohesive perspectives. Two out of four **school-based employees** do not think the district is ahead on any aspects of the Blueprint, while the other two find progress in the district's elevation of highly qualified NBC teachers through salary increases or opportunities to share their experiences with other teachers. One **community member** emphasized the district's "great" teachers, while the other did not feel equipped to provide an answer.

### QUESTION #4



On what aspects of the Blueprint does HCPS need to focus?

Of the 14 Central Office participants, only eight provided relevant answers to this question, and school-based employees and community members similarly had lower response rates within their respective groups. With that said, the broad trend is that **HCPS still has room to develop better internal structures that will allow the Blueprint to succeed**. Some suggestions include:

- *Requiring administrators to spend time teaching classes;*
- *Allocating additional planning time for teachers;*
- *Offering professional development for administrators;*
- *Using equity lens for internal promotions to increase diverse hiring;*
- *Establishing salary increases to compensate those who pursue career ladder; and*
- *Gathering parent feedback about teachers, along with celebrating teachers more often.*

Two Central Office staff participants noted areas of improvement—allocation of resources and distribution of information—but believed these to be outside the district's control.

## SAMPLE RESPONSES – CAREER LADDER

The table below highlights sample responses from every stakeholder group for each survey question related to Career Ladder.

Sample Responses from Survey Feedback: Career Ladder

THEME	SAMPLE RESPONSES		
	Central Office Staff	School-Based Employees	Community Members
What is exciting about the Blueprint?	<p><i>“The potential to expand career opportunities in the system, capitalize on employee expertise, and potential to expand recruitment initiatives.”</i></p> <p><i>“Incentives for best teachers to remain in classrooms and compensation to do so. Differentiated salaries and incentives for high needs schools”</i></p>	<p><i>“In theory, increasing salaries and training could be motivators to increase number of exemplar teachers in front of students.”</i></p>	<p><i>“I like the idea of supporting teachers and elevating the profession.”</i></p>
What is challenging or concerning about the Blueprint?	<p><i>“There will be numerous challenges, both financial and work completion. We will need to work closely with the unions and human resources to identify new leadership steps of the career ladders.”</i></p> <p><i>“Changing the entrenched belief about career paths in HCPS, and changing the belief that new teachers need to ‘do their time’”</i></p>	<p><i>“If more administrators are in the classroom, who will be able to pick up the workload? We already saw the negative impact of splitting administrators between two buildings, and reverted back to filling those positions”</i></p>	<p><i>“[The Blueprint] sets very lofty goals that will require a tremendous amount of money and effort to achieve.”</i></p> <p><i>“Need a standard expectation for communication from teachers to parents.”</i></p>
On what aspects of the Blueprint is HCPS ahead?	<p><i>The salary schedule is competitive (top 5 in the state) and on its way to the required \$60K. [The Blueprint] aligns nicely with North Star, and [HCPS is] already looking at diversity in our recruitment and retention work in collaboration with the Equity Office”</i></p>	<p><i>“Providing opportunities for teachers to share their experiences with becoming an NBC and inspiring others to do the same.”</i></p> <p><i>“Placing a premium on steering highly qualified teachers to low performing schools.”</i></p>	<p><i>“I’m really not sure, especially since I’m not aware of the schedule.”</i></p> <p><i>“Great teachers.”</i></p>
On what aspects of the Blueprint does HCPS need to focus?	<p><i>“In terms of career ladder, I think we are behind in structures that would allow new teachers to have additional planning time.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Requiring administrators to spend time teaching classes.”</i></p>	<p><i>“[HCPS] needs to celebrate teachers of the year in every school. Needs strong incentive program where parents also support the teachers and celebrate their work.”</i></p>

### Important Note:

- Please note that sample responses/quotes (comments provided by members of the focus groups) are reproduced nearly verbatim with few edits to correct typos when needed.

# STUDENT SUPPORTS

## QUESTION #1



What do stakeholders find exciting about the Blueprint?

**Participants from all stakeholder groups expressed excitement about the renewed focus on enhancing the school system and subsequent student supports.** Community members especially appreciated the inclusion of the community with the community school model. Three HCPS employees—representing both Central Office and school-based participant groups—expressed excitement around how the Blueprint seems to integrate well with many of the current strategies in place. They foresee a more efficient use of resources now that Blueprint and the HCPS North Star initiative are aligned, and this alignment of visions will only benefit students in the short- and long-term.

**Even more prevalent among most Central Office, school-based employees, and community members is the enthusiasm around increasing much-needed supports for students.** While all student support areas were mentioned by participants (e.g., academic, mental, physical, behavioral), the mental and behavioral supports are the most anticipated. Specifically, some community members mentioned excitement around trauma-informed instruction, and some school-based employees emphasized how secondary students especially need mental health support.

## QUESTION #2



What do stakeholders find challenging or concerning about the Blueprint?

**Participants in the Student Supports focus group generally raised questions about the logistics of implementing the Blueprint.** While the Central Office participants tended to question the district on their accountability and evaluation plans, school-based employees called the district to hire more personnel. Moreover, Central Office staff and community members shared concerns that the provided funding may not be enough to successfully implement all the supports outlined in the Blueprint.

- **Central Office staff:** Three participants had questions around accountability, data reporting, and evaluation. They stressed the importance of holding the district accountable for the plan’s goals, but they also see challenges around data reporting. Two participants questioned whether the district is adequately prepared to implement some of the initiatives, particularly those related to staffing and funding.
- **School-based employees:** Employees identified challenges with implementation and consistency in providing student support. One challenge school-based employees foresee is providing systematic support to all students, especially those facing certain barriers such as family mobility and poverty. Another participant questioned how these students will travel from one school to another and how the district will provide wrap-around services for all years (e.g., ECE to secondary grades). All five participants believed hiring more staff will allow the district and schools to better manage the implementation of the Blueprint.
- **Community members:** Two participants raised concerns over the program's cost, both in terms of time and effort, as well as long-term funds. One community member foresees a challenge in connecting parents across different communities to leverage expertise. Another community member did not provide specific examples of the “several challenges” they foresee, but said they would appreciate more clarity and details about the program, particularly as it relates to magnet schools and gifted and talented programs.



### QUESTION #3



On what aspects of the Blueprint has HCPS already made progress?

**At least one member from each stakeholder group expressed satisfaction with students' current academic and mental health supports.** Additionally, at least one member from each stakeholder group mentioned the progress HCPS has made toward establishing community schools.

- **Central Office** participants tended to focus their feedback on staffing and staff preparation. For example, of the five Central Office participants, two shared the perspective that HCPS has already made progress toward the Blueprint by increasing the professional training for staff on behavioral health and trauma-informed instruction. One of these participants also referenced helpful resources and programs currently in place, such as mental health coordinators and community schools. Another participant mentioned the progress HCPS has made in terms of developing an equity mindset and approach to decision-making and program planning.
- **School-based employees**, on the other hand, tended to focus more on the impact HCPS programs have on students. Three out of five participants referenced how current HCPS programs successfully support the mental health and academic learning of students, such as tutoring, summer school, the Behavior Health Service Coordinator, and School Health and Wellness teams.
- **Community members** instead emphasized the current progress toward community school programming, particularly current school events that involve the community.

### QUESTION #4



On what aspects of the Blueprint does HCPS need to focus?

**Central Office staff participants were much less likely to identify specific areas of improvement around student supports than either school-based employees or community members.** Indeed, almost all school-based employees pointed to an existing gap between the plans the district outlines for student supports and the actual implementation of said supports. Community members see room to improve parent communication about supports as well as the inclusivity of student supports.

- **Central Office Staff:** Notably, most Central Office employees did not offer any feedback around growth opportunities. Three out of the five participants indicated that they are still learning about the Blueprint and are unsure of areas in which HCPS needs to focus. The other two participants had various suggestions, ranging from continued work on supporting the whole child through an equity lens to hiring additional staff to assist with the increased cost of community schools.
- **School-based employees:** School-based employees offered significant areas of improvement for student mental health supports, unlike their Central Office counterparts. Four out of five participants highlighted a perceived disconnect between the district plans for student supports and the actual implementation and delivery of the supports. They tended to highlight a lack of consistency of the mental health and social-emotional learning supports offered across the student experience and noted a break in continuity between elementary and secondary supports. Additionally, one participant explained the current expectations of staff to support students exceeds their capacity. Another emphasized that English Language Learner (ELL) supports are still “emerging.”
- **Community members:** Community members emphasized various areas of improvement, but several identified parent communication as a desired district priority. With more community school programming in the future, these participants seek more thorough communication about available student supports, particularly for disengaged or hard-to-reach parents who may be unaware of the

Blueprint and its subsequent programming. Some suggestions included posting news or events at community centers rather than relying solely on electronic means.

Other community members highlighted room for improvement in ensuring all materials and program offerings are inclusive and beneficial to all students. Some explained how supports often cater to students in special populations, such as Gifted and Talented and Special Education, but not to students in the middle or in marginalized communities. Additionally, one participant noted the need for “local, safe places” for students to use without paying or being involved with an athletic program.

## SAMPLE RESPONSES

The table below highlights sample responses from every stakeholder group for each survey question related to Student Supports.

Sample Responses from Survey Feedback: Student Supports

THEME	SAMPLE RESPONSES		
	Central Office Staff	School-Based Employees	Community Members
What is exciting about the Blueprint?	<i>"Increased resources for students, parents, and schools to help address the mental and physical wellness of our community."</i>	<i>"The Blueprint strategies are very similar to supports already in place in Title I and Community Schools. It is exciting that the services being provided in Title I and Community Schools will support all school communities and students at all grade levels."</i>	<i>"The most exciting thing about the Blueprint is Harford County's effort to enhance the school system for the students and the community."</i>
What is challenging or concerning about the Blueprint?	<i>"Evaluating of the effectiveness of the resources and supports for grant reporting." "Having the appropriate staffing to address some of the initiatives."</i>	<i>"I hope that school-based personnel will be key in implementation to ensure that opportunities to assist our students are optimized. We often function as a system of schools instead of a school system. ALL students should have access to a predictable and continuous support system that is timely and efficient."</i>	<i>"Will there be enough funds to support this program once it takes off?" "There is not enough awareness of the Blueprint. Right now the plan is brief and I would like to know more about it."</i>
On what aspects of the Blueprint is HCPS ahead?	<i>"For the past few years, our system has undergone work supporting the whole child and focus more on decision making through an equity lens. While we have much work to do, we have at least started this shift." "Mental health coordinator has been in place for several years, community schools programs are up and running and moving in the right direction, increased training of staff in the area of behavioral health and trauma, increased mental health resources available to our students."</i>	<i>"HCPS already has many programs in place to support the academic learning of students (tutoring, summer school programs, enrichment programs) and the mental health of students (school Health and Wellness Teams, School-base mental health services)."</i>	<i>"Great community events at the school level." "Great support for students in Special Education. All students should get an individualized plan for achievement."</i>

THEME	SAMPLE RESPONSES		
	Central Office Staff	School-Based Employees	Community Members
On what aspects of the Blueprint does HCPS need to focus?	<p><i>"We need increased staffing to assist with the financial aspect of Community schools."</i></p> <p><i>"Still learning, not completely sure."</i></p>	<p><i>"We are behind on the student supports. We want to say that mental health is a priority, and we do say it. But, I truly do not feel our actions meet those words. We need to support our staff with prioritizing and alleviating some of the already overloaded expectations."</i></p> <p><i>"Considering SEL/Mental health needs of specifically middle school students; providing a continuum of ongoing services for students."</i></p>	<p><i>"I feel that [HCPS] needs to increase the awareness of the Blueprint and need to identify the placement of materials; ensure that the materials will be accessible for individuals that are e.g. deaf, blind, English as a second language, low literacy, etc; ensure that we have stakeholders that represent the community at the table."</i></p>

**Important Note:**

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# COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

## QUESTION #1



What do stakeholders find exciting about the Blueprint?

**While stakeholders in all groups find exciting aspects within the CCR Blueprint, each group tended to differ in what they value most.** However, all shared an appreciation for the Blueprint's investment in students' future outcomes through CCR initiatives.

- **Central Office staff:** Two participants are excited that the Blueprint is already aligned with current district goals and program offerings. Two other participants look forward to the new, more rigorous academic pathways for HCPS students throughout all grades. These participants highlighted the tracking system to monitor student progress, the Gifted and Talented and advanced academic pathways, and the district's overall college and career readiness work.

- **School-based employees:** In the focus group of six, more than half of all school-based employees expressed excitement around students' earlier exposure to new career pathways. These four participants believe earlier exposure to careers will help students develop interests that can shape their academic experience and post-secondary paths.

Two participants emphasized their excitement about the ability for students to earn college credits or a Career and Technical Education (CTE) certificate while in high school. They find the opportunity to earn these credits extremely valuable; one pointed out that 60 college credits are often the basis of an associate's degree.

Two participants also expressed appreciation for the structure that the Blueprint provides to develop measurable CCR standards as well as online education standards.

- **Community members:** Community members appreciate the investment in students' futures through CCR resources and the career readiness assessment. However, as mentioned in the next section, two participants differed in their perspectives about whether the Blueprint includes all students. One believed that the Blueprint approaches CCR with a holistic view of all students (i.e., not just high-achievers), but the other questioned if CCR class acceptance procedures may unintentionally exclude the students for whom CCR classes would be most beneficial.

## QUESTION #2



What do stakeholders find challenging or concerning about the Blueprint?

**While Central Office staff generally cited various logistical challenges about implementing the Blueprint, both school-based employees and community members emphasized their concerns about the potential pressures the Blueprint may place on students.** Participants noted the limitations of placing and tracking students in career and academic pathways, particularly the negative effects on students if they are placed too early.

- **Central Office staff:** Two participants mentioned staffing as a potential challenge to implementing the Blueprint. With the increase in teaching standards and robust program offerings, the district may find hiring staff challenging amidst a current teacher shortage. One participant, however, recommended looking into specialists to assist CCR offices with maintaining focused support.

Three participants anticipate a challenge with meeting the standards and requirements outlined in the Blueprint. Specifically, these participants mentioned challenges in achieving the Quality Online Education Standards, the requirement to have at least 45 percent of CTE opportunities be Work-Based Learning (WBL), and overall, a "common vision" of quality teaching and learning.

Two participants also foresee potential challenges with funding and implementation, although they also acknowledged not knowing the full details behind the funding allocation.

- **School-Based Employees:** Four participants expressed concerns over the proposed CCR tracking system for students, though for slightly different reasons. While many participants were excited about introducing career interests to younger students, some of these participants and others are concerned about forcing students into tracks before they are ready to consider making serious life decisions. One participant worries that students will feel pressure to choose between college and CTE rather than exploring both. Another questioned if students will have the possibility of changing their paths, if they should wish. Additionally, two of these participants brought up equity concerns around identifying Gifted and Talented students. Finally, one participant believes the tracking system will overwhelm an already stressed testing system and student body.

Two participants had basic questions about how the initiative will be funded.

- **Community members'** feedback primarily centered around the student and staff experience. For students, two out of three participants expressed concern that students might feel pressure to determine their future career path by middle school. The pressure primarily would arise from high school college and career readiness benchmarks or career counseling in middle school. Participants recommended that the middle school and even high school CCR experiences should be geared towards identifying and exploring interests, strengths, and development areas rather than making students choose one career pathway.

For staff, two participants highlighted the concern that CCR-related work will be added to current staff members' workload rather than hiring additional staff to manage the new work.

### QUESTION #3



On what aspects of the Blueprint has HCPS already made progress?

**All stakeholder groups highlighted different aspects of the Blueprint that HCPS has already made progress on, including providing a rigorous CCR program of studies, offering dual enrollment at Harford Community College, and employing supportive teachers.**

- **Central Office staff:** Of the seven participants, only four were able to describe areas of progress. These participants highlighted several areas of the Blueprint that HCPS has already made progress on, such as offering a rigorous CCR program of studies (e.g., CTE certification options, tracking as part of system accountability) and establishing a district- and community-wide vision.

- In a focus group of six, **school-based employees** universally agreed the district has already made progress on dual enrollment opportunities through the relationship with Harford Community College. These six also mentioned the district's progress on offering CTE programs.

- **Community members** unanimously agreed that HCPS employs caring, supportive teachers. All three participants in the focus group mentioned the teachers' communication and relationship-building skills with parents and their dedication to their students' success.

### QUESTION #4



On what aspects of the Blueprint does HCPS need to focus?

**While the stakeholder groups offered various areas for improvement, the participants tended to share a common recommendation for the district to optimize the student career pathway experience, particularly for students in middle school.** School-based employees anticipate that maintaining young students' engagement in

career exploration will be difficult as they grow older. Hence, several recommended that HCPS stay current with offering popular trades. Community members also emphasized the importance of including parents in students' career pathway conversations.

- **Central Office staff:** Notably, only four out of the seven participants could describe areas of improvement. While these participants offered various pieces of feedback, two shared the perspective that middle school career exploration and pathways should be one of HCPS' main focuses. Some additional recommendations from the individual participants include focusing on meeting WBL requirements, clarifying the tracking and support system for students, and sharing additional Blueprint details with staff to instill confidence in the plan.

- **School-based employees:** Several participants expressed concerns or questions about the way in which HCPS will introduce students to career exploration. Four shared a perspective that engaging students at a young age and maintaining engagement through graduation will be difficult, particularly if students are less motivated or if HCPS does not offer popular trades.

Additionally, a few recommended the district focus on logistical issues, such as the “mechanics” of dual credit enrollment, using virtual school to its fullest potential, and student transportation to CTE courses. One recommended expanding the CCR conversation to the whole community to further stress its importance.

- **Community members** shared feedback related to students' and parents' experiences of the CCR program. They unanimously emphasized the importance of HCPS communication about CCR to families, and they underscored the importance of including parents during career pathway identification conversations. Additionally, all three participants agreed that CCR programming should be visible and accessible to all students. In particular, options should be open for students at all levels—“not just high-achievers”—to explore careers based on skills and abilities, rather than grades.

## SAMPLE RESPONSES

The table on the following page highlights sample responses from every stakeholder group for each survey question related to College and Career Readiness.

Sample Responses from Survey Feedback: College and Career Readiness

THEME	SAMPLE RESPONSES		
	Central Office Staff	School-Based Employees	Community Members
What is exciting about the Blueprint?	<p><i>"Gifted and Talented and advanced academics pathways all the way through PK-12."</i></p> <p><i>"I am most excited about the new, more rigorous opportunities students will be getting as a result of the CCR work being done in HCPS. One of the best things that is listed is a tracking system to monitor students."</i></p>	<p><i>"Students will have the opportunity to experience meaningful learning that sparks individual interest in career or college exploration and may even direct some students into lifetime learning."</i></p>	<p><i>"I like the idea of the career readiness assessment, if effective. I also like that it is holistic view for all students, not just high achievers."</i></p> <p><i>"Additional resources to help focus on our children's futures."</i></p>
What is challenging or concerning about the Blueprint?	<p><i>"People. To build robust programs we need support. I also think about focus. When offices have multiple areas of focus, sometimes we lose the main point of the focus. Maybe taking this as an opportunity to look at specialists for these areas so they can support with great focus would be useful!"</i></p> <p><i>"In order to implement the CCR goals outlined in the plan, [HCPS must] create strong alignment of teaching practices between HCPS and HCC, establish a common vision and mission of what quality teaching and learning is needed among all staff, and understand the different types of learning opportunities that need to occur to prepare students for the CCR courses."</i></p>	<p><i>"I am concerned with the tracking of students and the possibility that students have to choose between college and CTE. I would hope they would have the opportunity to do both if they choose to do so. I'm also concerned about the identifying of students for gifted/talented and when this is done."</i></p> <p><i>"How are we capturing 'gifted and talented' students? Who's making those decisions? If students do not make a choice for a career or don't have an interest in college at an early age, are we just moving them to a trade? What happens when/if they change their minds? Where is the exposure for all students?"</i></p>	<p><i>"How is acceptance into technical programs or magnet schools determined? If determined based on academic performance, it may lead to unintended exclusion of students who may benefit most (i.e., students who are not performing well in the traditional setting but who may excel in a more specialized program of their interest)."</i></p> <p><i>"Need to make the effort and messaging engaging, and not stressful for students. Students should not have to figure out what they want to do in life in middle school or even starting high school."</i></p>
On what aspects of the Blueprint is HCPS ahead?	<p><i>"HCPS has a rigorous curriculum and instructional program with efforts already geared toward college and career readiness. Tracking is already part of our system accountability and SPA (school improvement) is framed to support students at all levels achieve goals."</i></p>	<p><i>"Dual enrollment opportunities. HCPS magnet schools and CTE programs."</i></p> <p><i>"Offering dual enrollment and early college to our students. Exposing them to pathways as a graduation requirement."</i></p>	<p><i>"The HCPS teachers I've encountered are passionate. They are genuinely concerned about their students, and want them to be successful. They communicate openly with parents when issues arise."</i></p>



THEME	SAMPLE RESPONSES		
	Central Office Staff	School-Based Employees	Community Members
On what aspects of the Blueprint does HCPS need to focus?	<p><i>"Just not knowing all of the details makes it difficult to feel confident in moving forward with plans."</i></p> <p><i>"Middle school pathways and advanced academics."</i></p> <p><i>"WBL requirements."</i></p> <p><i>"[HCPS should focus on developing] career exploration in the middle school and school leaders who are able to message and move the conversation at the school level."</i></p>	<p><i>"How are students going to be introduced and guided through these decisions at an early age?"</i></p> <p><i>"Expanding the conversation of North Star to the whole system community to educate people on the language and long term impact of CCR on income and access to things in life."</i></p> <p><i>"The ability to capture students who are less motivated and/or from less motivated homes/families."</i></p>	<p><i>"Parents need to be included in the pathway identification."</i></p> <p><i>"A menu of options is needed for all levels of students, not just high achievers. [HCPS] needs to do better for students who don't learn well in the traditional classroom."</i></p>

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## BUDGET

The views presented in the following section represent the perspectives of the Budget Office's survey responses.

### QUESTION #1



What do stakeholders find exciting about the Blueprint?

The two Central Office participants expressed widespread excitement for many aspects of the Blueprint outside their specific focus area of Budget. Related to Budget, **both participants are excited for the opportunity for increased state funding to provide more equitable educational opportunities and supports for K-12 students.**

### QUESTION #2



What do stakeholders find challenging or concerning about the Blueprint?

**The two Central Office participants had multiple questions about the Blueprint's funding, particularly the unknowns about the funding from year to year.** They seek better guidance and clarity from the state about:

- The duration of state funds and the sustainability of programs;
- The addition of Blueprint funds to current state funding;
- The funds as unrestricted or restricted; may need additional support for grants;
- The impact on projecting future revenues; and
- The impact on local funding.

One participant also mentioned potential challenges in changing the culture around how funds are spent now that HCPS is moving toward a community school model and will spend funds on initiatives outside the school buildings.

### QUESTION #3



On what aspects of the Blueprint has HCPS already made progress?

**Only one participant offered specific feedback around the budget progress: the high-quality health insurance at low employee cost already provided by HCPS.** The other participant instead focused on the progress HCPS has made in terms of communicating the Blueprint to its stakeholders via the North Star initiative.

### QUESTION #4



On what aspects of the Blueprint does HCPS need to focus?

**Both participants referenced the district's capacity to understand and manage the additional funds as development areas.** Additionally, they added that managing additional funds comes with monitoring and reporting the uses of funds, particularly with the new "buckets" of funding.

## SAMPLE RESPONSES

The table below highlights sample responses from the Budget Office’s.

**Sample Responses from Survey Feedback: Budget**

THEME	SAMPLE RESPONSES
	Central Office Staff
What is exciting about the Blueprint?	<i>"[I am excited for the] opportunity for increased funding from the State of Maryland. I have always felt HCPS has been shorted by the State when compared to other LEA's in MD. This funding, if ultimately received, will provide much needed supports for Pre-K through Grade 12 students. I am most excited about the focus on CTE, dual enrollment and Pre-K."</i>
What is challenging or concerning about the Blueprint?	<i>"The lack of guidance and support from MSDE, both fiscally and programmatically. The unknowns about funding from year to year and the sustainability of the programs to be implemented—will the state provide funding or will there be unfunded mandates? Additionally, with the shift to a community school model, there will need to be a significant effort to change the culture about how funds are spent." "Is the funding for these initiatives in addition to our "regular" State funding? Will these be restricted funds? If so HCPS will need to create a Grants Office, which provides support and expertise throughout the entire grants cycle. How are LEAs supposed to project future revenues when there is very little state guidance on what to expect? What happens if HCPS starts all of these new initiatives and then the funding dries up?"</i>
On what aspects of the Blueprint is HCPS ahead?	<i>"A lot of the substance of the Blueprint legislation has been communicated to HCPS through the North Star Initiative." "Teacher compensation. Notice I said compensation. A salary is just part of compensation. HCPS offers high quality health insurance at a very low employee cost. This must be taken into consideration when the State is going to mandate a minimum Teacher salary statewide."</i>
On what aspects of the Blueprint does HCPS need to focus?	<i>"The capacity to manage the additional funds and also comply with monitoring and reporting of the uses of funds." "Understanding the new funding formulas and all of the "buckets" of funding."</i>

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