

FINAL RESEARCH REPORT

2024 SURVEY ON RACISM, IMPLICIT BIAS, AND OTHER FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Introduction

In April 2024, Harford County Public Schools (HCPS) launched its second survey on racism, implicit bias, and discrimination to gather student insights. The HCPS Department of Research and Program Evaluation, in partnership with the Office of Equity and Cultural Proficiency, and Hanover Research, analyzed the closed-ended and open-ended responses received from the survey. A qualitative analysis of a random sample of the survey's open-ended comments was conducted, yielding key findings and recommendations. This research report supports district leaders in making proactive decisions to address racism, implicit bias, and discrimination.

Background:

In May 2020, then Student Member on the Board of Education (SMOB) of Harford County, Christian Walker, and incoming SMOB, Phoebe Bailey-Probst, approached the Superintendent of Schools Sean Bulson, Ed. D. to suggest conducting a survey to learn about student perceptions of racism, implicit bias, and other forms of discrimination within HCPS. Dr. Bulson encouraged Mr. Walker and Ms. Bailey to work with Mr. Yakoubou Ousmanou, manager of Research and Program Evaluation, and Dr. Paula Stanton, supervisor of Equity and Cultural Proficiency, to review and refine the proposed survey questions and administer the first HCPS Survey on Racism, Implicit Bias, and Other Forms of Discrimination.

HCPS remains committed to effectively addressing racism, implicit bias, and other forms of discrimination. Since the implementation of that initial survey in 2020, Madina Sabirova, current SMOB, in collaboration with Dr. Stanton and Mr. Ousmanou, revised the 2020 survey questions. After the revision of the 2020 survey questions, HCPS invited students in **grades 5-12** to participate in a follow up survey in April 2024. The results will help HCPS assess progress since 2020 and understand how these issues affect students, guiding improvements in policies, curriculum, and student experiences. Student participation in the 2024 survey was voluntary. All students were encouraged to answer honestly. To the greatest extent allowed under law, survey answers submitted by students will remain anonymous and respondents' identities are kept confidential. It took most students approximately 10 minutes to complete the survey, which was open from Wednesday, April 3, 2024, until Friday, April 19, 2024, at 11:59 p.m.

HCPS received **7,536** responses from students in **grades 5-12**. The results of the closed-ended questions are included at the end of this report. Over 5,000 open-ended comments were received for each of the three open-ended questions included in the 2024 survey. The HCPS Department of Research and Program Evaluation collaborated with appropriate staff to review these comments to ensure confidentiality and remove inappropriate content, as well as blank, irrelevant, or repetitive responses.

This research report presents key findings and recommendations, including sample comments from the survey responses. HCPS teachers and staff are encouraged to review this report and collaborate with the Office of Equity and Cultural Proficiency, along with all stakeholders, to effectively address student needs.

Methodology

This report provides a digestible summary of responses to the survey's closed-ended questions and the following open-ended questions. Each survey respondent was asked the following open-ended prompts:

- **Question 1: Please share your thoughts, comments, and experiences, on the issues of racism, implicit bias, and/or discrimination in HCPS.**
- **Question 2: Please share your suggestions on how to improve the issues of racism, implicit bias, and/or discrimination in HCPS.**
- **Question 3: How would you like the current and/or future Student Member of the Board of Education (SMOB) to advocate for you on the issues of racism, implicit bias, and other forms of discrimination?**

In Phase I, a sample (15%) of responses was taken to analyze and distill key findings for Questions 1 and 3. Questions 1 and 3 were analyzed in this phase to align with the questions asked in the prior 2020 survey.

In Phase II, Question 2 was analyzed using a sample (15%) of responses. This question was only asked in the 2024 survey. Phase 1 of the analysis includes survey responses up through April 19, 2024.

Before analyzing the open-ended responses, blank, irrelevant, or repeated open-ended responses were removed during data cleaning. Inappropriate answers: “I don’t know,” “no comment,” and similar responses; or answers that appeared redundant or submitted multiple times by an individual (e.g., based on survey start/completion time, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and/or chatbot-generated responses) were removed in favor of responses that share meaningful data and appropriately answer the survey question.

Utilizing a random sample of 15% of responses offers a robust sample from which to provide the requested Phase I and II information. It should be noted, however, that the analysis provides depth of understanding about the particular question rather than statistical significance or generalizable conclusions.

Top key themes were developed using cleaned, relevant response content. To complete this analysis, both human and AI tools were utilized to develop themes and key findings. The following figure details the total survey responses, the total cleaned survey responses, and the total coding sample for Phase I and II of the analysis.

Figure 1.1: Total Number of Survey Responses, Cleaned Responses, and Coding Sample

PHASE	OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS	TOTAL SURVEY ENTRIES EXCLUDING BLANKS RESPONSES	TOTAL CLEANED SURVEY RESPONSES	TOTAL CLEANED RESPONSES IN THE SAMPLE (15%)
I	Please share your thoughts, comments, and experiences, on the issues of racism, implicit bias, and/or discrimination in Harford County Public Schools.	5,385	3,775	587
II	Please share your suggestions on how to improve the issues of racism, implicit bias, and/or discrimination in Harford County Public Schools.	5,688	3,410	511
I	How would you like the current and/or future Student Member of the Board of Education (SMOB) to advocate for you on the issues of racism, implicit bias, and other forms of discrimination?	5,167	2,432	363

Recommendations

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

- I. **Continue to educate students and staff members about the impact of language, the history of racism/sexism, and the importance of celebrating multiple perspectives, identities, and cultures within HCPS.**
Open-ended comments indicate some prevalence of racism, sexism, implicit bias, and discrimination on the basis of personal characteristics (such as race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, or cultural practices) that manifests as slurs, jokes, or favoritism. Close-ended responses align with this finding; nearly three-quarters of students at the middle and high school level this year indicate that they have heard a classmate or peer make a racist comment or joke either to or about another student. Additionally, only half of middle and two-thirds of high school students this year say they feel comfortable talking to friends or peers about racism, and fewer than half of students at either the middle or high school level say they feel comfortable discussing racism with teachers. Open-ended comments also mention a need for increased education and proactive measures, such as increased awareness and representation of the many cultures in HCPS, including flexibility regarding attendance for common holidays. Supporting increased conversation about and appreciation for multiple perspectives, identities, and cultures within HCPS will also help to promote belonging, which arises in the close-ended results as another area for improvement; less than half of middle and high school students this year indicate that they feel a sense of belonging at school.
- II. **Pair increased education and awareness campaigns with a strict enforcement of the HCPS bullying, harassment, and intimidation policy, and continue to equip staff members to appropriately address issues that arise, ensuring that reports of discriminatory conduct do not go unanswered.** Some open-ended comments mention a perceived lack of response from some school administrators after issues are reported, indicating that current measures are not sufficiently addressing issues that arise. Additionally, comments indicate that staff members' responses to reported issues are not consistent and that the disciplinary consequences for engaging in discriminatory conduct are not always clear. Additionally, less than half of students at any school level in either 2020 or 2024 say they are aware of initiatives in HCPS aimed at addressing racism. In working to address these areas for improvement, HCPS can lay out clear policies regarding how students and staff can report issues, how issues will be acknowledged, and how the district (and its schools) are prepared to respond once issues are reported.
- III. **Continue to empower students to speak up and ensure there are safe, responsive environments available for them to do so, whether through anonymous/confidential reporting systems, open forums, or dedicated support personnel.** The open-ended analysis indicates that many students do not feel their voices are being heard or that teachers/staff believe what they say; this finding indicates a need for increased validation and acknowledgment of students' perspectives and voices. Additionally, only about half of middle and high school students say this year that they feel comfortable approaching their educators for additional assistance or to ask questions. Responses also indicate that increasing representation at the staff level (i.e., hiring more teachers of color) may be impactful; for instance, less than half of middle and high school students say they feel adequately represented in their school by teachers, administrators, and staff members. HCPS should work to provide students with appropriate avenues to communicate with staff members, aim to increase representation among its staff, and work to help students find and cultivate community within their schools.

Responses To Recommendations

The **Response to Recommendations** listed below in bullet points provides some of the actions already being taken by the HCPS Office of Equity and Cultural Proficiency, Human Resources, Talent Pathways, and other offices to address the recommendations.

EDUCATE STUDENTS AND STAFF ABOUT THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE, THE HISTORY OF RACISM/SEXISM, ETC...	
RECOMMENDATION # 1	RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION # 1
Continue to educate students <u>and</u> staff members about the impact of language, the history of racism/sexism, and the importance of celebrating multiple perspectives, identities, and cultures within HCPS.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Student completion of Bullying, Harassment, and Intimidation modules (student created) as a proactive measure ○ Staff workshops on topics that help create a sense of belonging for all students and staff ○ Monthly Diversity 365 Highlights, showcasing ways that schools honor multiple cultures and identities
STRICT ENFORCEMENT OF THE HCPS BULLYING, HARASSMENT, AND INTIMIDATION POLICY, EQUIP STAFF TO ADDRESS ISSUES THAT ARISE, ENSURING THAT REPORTS OF DISCRIMINATORY CONDUCT ARE ANSWERED.	
RECOMMENDATION # 2	RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION # 2
Pair increased education and awareness campaigns with a strict enforcement of the HCPS bullying, harassment, and intimidation policy, and continue to equip staff members to appropriately address issues that arise, ensuring that reports of discriminatory conduct do not go unanswered.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Collaborate with the Director of Middle School Innovation to engage all middle school students in Bullying, Harassment, and Intimidation Policy awareness ○ Provide annual professional learning for faculty and staff members to ensure that the procedures outlined in the Bullying, Harassment, and Intimidation policy are followed. ○ Develop an awareness campaign which includes universal programs or activities for all youth to prevent bullying, harassment, and intimidation in our schools ○ Engage the Superintendent’s Task Force on Equity and the Equity Team to identify strategies to increase education and awareness of bullying, harassment, and intimidation, and address these matters appropriately.
EMPOWER STUDENTS TO SPEAK UP AND ENSURE THERE ARE SAFE, RESPONSIVE ENVIRONMENTS AVAILABLE FOR THEM TO DO SO, WHETHER THROUGH ANONYMOUS/CONFIDENTIAL REPORTING SYSTEMS, FORUMS, ...	
RECOMMENDATION # 3	RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION # 3
Continue to empower students to speak up and ensure there are safe, responsive environments available for them to do so, whether through anonymous/confidential reporting systems, open forums, or dedicated support personnel.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Educate students about how to report instances of bullying, harassment, intimidation reporting through the HCPS reporting form ○ Use restorative supports to prevent and respond to instances of bullying, harassment, and intimidation ○ Engage in measures to increase the confidence and trust of the targeted students and any witnesses. They shall be informed that any information discussed and recorded will be confided to a “need to know” status ○ Continue efforts to increase staff diversity through collaboration between HCPS Human Resources, the Office of Equity and Cultural Proficiency, and Talent Pathways

Key Themes from Question 1

- **Question 1: Please share your thoughts, comments, and experiences, on the issues of racism, implicit bias, and/or discrimination in HCPS.**

Survey responses for the above first open-ended question of the analysis yields the following themes and findings related to comments, perceptions, or experiences of racism, implicit bias, and discrimination.

Instances of Racism, Implicit Bias, Discrimination, and Sexism

- **A significant number of respondents report instances of racism, implicit bias, and discrimination in Harford County Public Schools, often manifested as racial slurs, jokes, or favoritism.** Some respondents report witnessing or experiencing racist jokes or comments, often directed at specific students. These comments are sometimes dismissed as humor or not addressed by school authorities. A few respondents also mention the overuse of racial slurs, particularly the N-word, in school environments.
- **Opinions vary among respondents, with some believing racism and discrimination are not significant issues in their schools, whereas others feel these issues are prevalent.** Some respondents believe that their schools do not have issues with racism, implicit bias, or discrimination, either because they have not personally experienced it or because they believe the schools are effectively managing these issues.
- **A few respondents mention experiencing or witnessing discrimination based on factors other than race,** such as sexual orientation, disability, religion, or cultural practices, suggesting a need for greater cultural representation and understanding in schools.

Figure 1.2: Instances of Racism, Implicit Bias, Discrimination, and Sexism
Sample Quotes

SAMPLE QUOTES	
<i>"Some people say the n-word religiously and passionately and think it's okay but it really is not."</i>	<i>"I don't think racism is a problem at "MS"."</i> <i>Note: school name was removed</i>
<i>"I think that people from different cultures aren't being given the respect they deserve, and are being bullied by other people."</i>	<i>"There is not a lot of racism stuff going around but people are being sexist and rude to girls for no reason."</i>

Note: All sample quotes (comments provided by survey respondents) in this report were reproduced nearly verbatim, with only minor edits to correct typos when necessary.

School Administration and Teacher Bias

- **There is a perceived lack of adequate response from some school administrators to issues, as reported by some respondents.** Some respondents express frustration with the lack of action taken by school authorities in response to reported incidents of racism or bias. Moreover, some respondents express a desire for more proactive measures to address racism in school or harsher repercussions for racist behavior, suggesting that current disciplinary measures may not be sufficient to deter such behavior.
- **A few respondents indicate instances of teacher bias, favoring certain students over others.** A few respondents mention instances of favoritism or bias by teachers, with some teachers allegedly promoting certain students over others.
- **Some respondents express a desire for more diversity among school staff,** suggesting that having more teachers of color could help address issues of racism and bias.

Figure 1.3: School Administration and School Bias Sample Quotes

SAMPLE QUOTES

"I feel that there are too many white teachers in this school for there to be so many kids of color. If I had to guess, I'd say nearly 50% of the school is Black, which is a lot. Black students need more Black teachers who understand us instead of ones who don't."

"Some teachers do not believe what I say and believe others and treat others better"

"When people at my school are Racist and think they are superior to Hispanics, Africans, Asians, etc, they should be sent into the office and taken to a room where they would be severely punished for the rest of the day. And staff should take more action instead of giving the student a piece of paper to write down their wrong. Reflection sheets are useless and nothing will change, the person will probably keep being racist until they are suspended or something."

"In media the teacher makes me feel like only white people get what they want like she always calls on them and never gives them warnings on brr's but with the black people they always get warnings and/or brr's we never have a class without a black person getting a warning and/or a brr."

Note: brr means Behavior Reflection Record

"This school is doing nothing to fix racial problems. I have had many experiences with people (black and white) using the N-word as a way to address people. I have also experienced racism at this school. As a result, [m]y parents went to the principal, vice principal, and counselor, about the situation, and they failed to give consequences that changed the person's mindset. Harford County is not going to get better about racism, if we stand here and pretend that this Harford County isn't biased about different ethnicities. Some of the racism at this school is a habit, that the schools are doing nothing to fix. Racism is a HUGE problem in Harford County."

Note: All sample quotes (comments provided by survey respondents) in this report were reproduced nearly verbatim, with only minor edits to correct typos when necessary.

Call for Proactive Measures

- While experiences and perceptions of racism, implicit bias, and discrimination vary among respondents, there is a clear call for more education, diversity, and proactive measures to address these issues in HCPS. Respondents indicate the need for schools to increase education about these issues and promote diversity and cultural representation.
- A few respondents express a desire for more open and honest discussions about racism and bias in schools, suggesting that these issues may be under-addressed or ignored in current school curriculums. Moreover, some respondents advocate for more education on racism and implicit bias, suggesting that many students may not fully understand these concepts.

Figure 1.4: Call for Proactive Measures Sample Quotes

SAMPLE QUOTES	
<i>"I think there are some stereotypes, overall it's not that bad but I feel like we need more representation of different cultures. I also feel like HCPS should close schools on Eid ul Fitr which is a Muslim holiday because there are many Muslim students that have to miss a day of school to celebrate their holiday."</i>	
<i>"Students racist over blacks, not enough talk about the black experience."</i>	<i>"A lot of kids are racist and don't understand how mean they are. Kids will call people racist words and act like it's nothing. Kids are also just mean in general. They are always mean and never encourage anybody..."</i>
<i>"I feel like my school should teach more about racism and why it's bad."</i>	<i>"I feel like people should not be racist, and I think there should be more lessons about it so yeah."</i>

Note: All sample quotes (comments provided by survey respondents) in this report were reproduced nearly verbatim, with only minor edits to correct typos when necessary.

Key Themes from Question 2

- **Question 2:** Please share your suggestions on how to improve the issues of racism, implicit bias, and/or discrimination in HCPS.

Survey responses for the above second open-ended question of the analysis yield the following themes and findings related to student suggestions and recommendations for addressing racism, implicit bias, and discrimination.

Consequences and Accountability

- **A significant number of respondents flag the importance of clear and consistent consequences for racist, discriminatory, and biased behaviors.** Students wish for more accountability from their peers and staff for harmful behaviors. Some emphasize the need for the district and students to better understand the severity of their actions.
- **Students emphasize the need for real consequences when it comes to racist, discriminatory, and biased behaviors.** They believe that without accountability, such detrimental behaviors will continue. To achieve this, they advocate for actual disciplinary actions, including suspension or detentions as ways to effectively combat racism and ensure a safer environment.
- **Respondents express a strong desire for enhanced staff intervention in instances of discriminatory conduct.** A prevalent sentiment from students is that educators and administrators should adopt a more assertive stance in tackling issues of racism and bias. This may require engaging in earnest conversations with those who make racist or prejudiced remarks, reinforcing the gravity of their actions. Others recommend adding more staff in the halls to monitor and address incidents of racism and discrimination.

Figure 2.1: Consequences and Accountability Sample Quotes

SAMPLE QUOTES	
<i>"You need to discipline students and teachers that are racist, or things will never change."</i>	<i>"Teachers and principals need to do better with racism and biased situations, and they need to sit with the teachers and students who like to say those things and make sure they take it seriously, and if not give the accountability towards their actions. If the student pledge is to be accountable it applies to everyone and make sure they are more responsible and accountable."</i>
<i>"Actual punishment and repercussions for saying [slurs] in a school setting [could help improve the issues of racism, implicit bias, and/or discrimination], and a historical rundown on why it's offensive and why it shouldn't be said."</i>	<i>"Punish the racist people by suspension."</i>

Note: All sample quotes (comments provided by survey respondents) in this report were reproduced nearly verbatim, with only minor edits to correct typos when necessary.

Education and Awareness

- Many students suggest that education about racism and implicit bias should be increased within the school system, with lessons on the impact of racism, the importance of respecting different cultures, and the consequences of racist behavior. Some respondents suggest that school curriculums should include more about diverse histories and cultures, including the celebration of different racial histories and religious holidays.
- Students encourage the district to continue to nurture open and safe environments where students feel empowered to speak up against racially offensive remarks or actions. This could be facilitated through structured discussions, workshops, or peer-led initiatives that foster a culture of respect and inclusivity.

Figure 2.2: Raising Awareness and Educating Sample Quotes

SAMPLE QUOTES	
<i>"We need to take the experiences of other students more seriously. We need to provide greater education on issues of racism in our county. Students need to realize the strength of the things they are saying."</i>	<i>"My suggestions are for teachers to teach a lesson on how kids [should] not be racist because they only really get "one" class which is history, which only talks about slaves and slavery. But that's not a real lesson of racism, which causes kids to think that it's okay. So, I think that schools should inform kids and make a lesson about racism."</i>
<i>"I think a small lesson about racism, implicit bias, and/or discrimination could at least help dial it down a bit. More lessons centered on racism and discrimination"</i>	<i>"Teaching the kids to speak up if anyone has said anything racially offensive."</i>

Note: All sample quotes (comments provided by survey respondents) in this report were reproduced nearly verbatim, with only minor edits to correct typos when necessary.

- Respondents emphasize the need for greater acknowledgment and validation of student experiences. Many advocate for a more serious approach to addressing racism and discrimination faced by students. Some suggest that this could be achieved through the establishment of clear channels for reporting incidents and ensuring prompt and responsive action. Recognizing the impact of students' words and actions on the school community is crucial for students to feel validation from the district.
 - Note from the authors: HCPS has well-established channels for reporting incidents of bullying and harassment; however, many students may not be aware of these tools. The HCPS Office of Equity and Cultural Proficiency is collaborating with schools and offices to educate students about these reporting mechanisms.

Engagement and Open Conversations

- **Several respondents believe that issues of racism and bias should be addressed more openly in the district.** Students suggest utilizing assemblies, meetings, or one-on-one conversations with students as potential forums for these discussions and to bring awareness of students' experiences. Some also believe that education about racism and bias should start at an early age, indicating a belief in the importance of early intervention.

Figure 2.3: Engaging and Open Conversations Sample Quotes

SAMPLE QUOTES	
<i>"I think teachers and principals should have more conversations with students and parents about the racism and implicit bias that goes on during school and after school in Harford County Public Schools."</i>	<i>"Continuing to give equal opportunity to everyone is a must. Personally, sports and clubs bring me very close to all kinds of students. All different ages, backgrounds, gender, race, religion, looks, etc. More promotion of groups, sports, or other clubs would be a good opportunity for students to experience getting to know others. The more you get to know others, the more you become open to others and their differences in my opinion."</i>
<i>"If a school is unlike [mine] and doesn't openly talk about racism or implicit bias, they should. They should openly talk about it with students."</i>	<i>"I think that there should be an extracurricular activity for people of many different races to get together and talk about their perspectives and their heritages."</i>

Note: All sample quotes (comments provided by survey respondents) in this report were reproduced nearly verbatim, with only minor edits to correct typos when necessary.

- **Respondents highlight the need for more encouragement of open dialogues.** Students express a strong desire for more open and honest conversations about racism, discrimination, and bias within the school environment. They believe that addressing these issues directly can lead to better understanding and change.
- **Engaging students about diversity, inclusion, and belonging can happen outside of the classroom.** Students call for including a wider range of perspectives in discussions about racism and bias. Respondents suggest promoting more extracurricular activities that allow people of different races and backgrounds to share their experiences and heritages, fostering a more inclusive environment.

Staff and Teacher Training

- **To enhance staff effectiveness in addressing racism and implicit bias, respondents recommend improving training programs.** Students emphasize the importance of providing teachers and staff with increased access to professional development opportunities. These opportunities would enable them to better identify and address racist and discriminatory behaviors while fostering understanding and respect for cultural differences.
- **Students expect teachers and staff to take responsibility for addressing racist, discriminatory, and biased behaviors effectively.** This accountability applies to both students and staff members, promoting a healthier school environment for everyone. Some students propose that if staff members (teachers, administrators, bus drivers, etc...) make inappropriate comments or jokes they should face consequences, including the possibility of termination.

Figure 2.4: Staff Professional Development Sample Quotes

SAMPLE QUOTES	
<i>"[I suggest] giving teachers [access to] courses on implicit bias and what they should avoid saying. [And promote more] diversity within the staff."</i>	<i>"I think teachers need to put more effort into dealing with racist comments."</i>
<i>"More training for teachers, mainly substitute teachers, [is needed to address racism and bias], and maybe a lesson with students."</i>	<i>"My suggestion on improving the issues of racism is education. We need to educate the students and teachers on what is racism and how to not be racist. Many people tend to be racist because of the lack of education they have on the subject. Race tends to be a less talked about topic that parents tend to shield from their children. By having this conversation in schools, it would break down that awkwardness surrounding that subject."</i>

Note: All sample quotes (comments provided by survey respondents) in this report were reproduced nearly verbatim, with only minor edits to correct typos when necessary.

Reporting Mechanisms

- **Many respondents believe that encouraging consistent reporting is essential to addressing racism and discrimination.** Students emphasize the importance of motivating and empowering their peers to report incidents of racism and discrimination. Creating a supportive environment that takes such reports seriously is crucial for students to feel they belong and are safe. When students feel empowered to share their experiences, it contributes to a more inclusive school community.

Figure 2.5: Reporting Encouragement Sample Quotes

SAMPLE QUOTES	
<i>"Teaching the kids to speak up if anyone has said anything racially offensive."</i>	<i>"It's difficult to make suggestions on how to improve racism and other implicit biases. Most of it comes from internalized beliefs that are difficult to erase and reset. Additionally, these biases can be hard to spot, and hard to report if you experience them yourself."</i>
<i>"Maybe if you hear something you can anonymously put it on a paper and what classroom it happened in."</i>	<i>"Have lectures about [racism, implicit bias, and discrimination] and encourage kids to tell staff members if they hear of this behavior, and if so, the racist student is punished."</i>

Note: All sample quotes (comments provided by survey respondents) in this report were reproduced nearly verbatim, with only minor edits to correct typos when necessary.

- **Respondents advocate for the implementation of anonymous reporting systems.** These systems would allow students to report incidents without fear of retaliation or embarrassment. By ensuring anonymity, more students may feel comfortable coming forward with their experiences. Providing confidential channels for reporting can help address issues promptly and protect those who speak out.
 - **Note from the authors:** To the greatest extent allowed under law and per HCPS policy, student reporting from the existing [HCPS Bullying, Harassment, and Intimidation Form](#) will remain private.

- **Other students express a desire for clear channels through which they can report incidents directly to teachers or other trusted adults within the school.** This highlights the need for fostering trust between students and staff, facilitating a smoother reporting process.

Encourage Diversity and Belonging

- **Promoting diversity and inclusion in schools is essential to students’ experiences of belonging.** Respondents advocate for more robust celebrations of different cultures and religions. This could involve organizing events for Hispanic Heritage Month, granting a day off for the Muslim holiday of Eid, or educating students and teachers about Ramadan and its significance. Additionally, there’s a strong call to include more African American history in the curriculum, moving beyond slavery to foster a more comprehensive understanding of our shared past.
- **Some students emphasize the need for a more diverse teaching staff as a strategy to combat racism and promote a more inclusive school environment.** Students suggest that increasing the number of teachers of color could make the school feel more diverse and inclusive, highlighting the importance of representation among school staff.
- **Students emphasize the importance of respecting all identities, including sexual orientation and gender identity, suggesting that schools should be more mindful of these aspects of student lives to prevent discrimination.**

Figure 2.6: Celebrating Diversity Sample Quotes

SAMPLE QUOTES	
<i>"[I suggest] more diversity teachers in the school, and more celebration of color or other races."</i>	<i>"Put African American history in each school, [so students] learn about the history and not just about slavery."</i>
<i>"I believe that there is a lot of negative preconceptions towards Latinos, at least in my school... Maybe we could do something similar to Black History Month during Hispanic Heritage Month where we are taught about the good things Hispanics provide... I think that we need to ingrain from early on that we are all equal."</i>	<i>"I feel as if the Muslim Holiday of Eid should be represented more in school via maybe a day off. I also think that schools should mention and educate people on Ramadan and why Muslims do it."</i>

Note: All sample quotes (comments provided by survey respondents) in this report were reproduced nearly verbatim, with only minor edits to correct typos when necessary.

Key Themes from Question 3

- **Question 3: How would you like the current and/or future Student Member of the Board of Education (SMOB) to advocate for you on the issues of racism, implicit bias, and other forms of discrimination?**

Survey responses for the third open-ended question of the analysis yield the following themes and findings related to student suggestions and recommendations for how the Student Member of the Board of Education (SMOB) could advocate for students.

Advocacy, Representation, and Voice

- **A significant number of respondents want the SMOB to directly address racism, implicit bias, and discrimination, including with the Board of Education.** Many respondents would like for the SMOB to address racism and discrimination more directly and proactively, with some suggesting stricter enforcement and consequences for racist behavior. However, some students feel that current efforts are sufficient, while others do not see a need for advocacy on these issues.
- **Many respondents advocate for more education about different cultures, histories, and the impact of racism and discrimination.** A few respondents express the desire for the SMOB to advocate for a more diverse curriculum and more opportunities for students of different backgrounds. Moreover, some respondents seek more representation of different races and cultures among teachers and staff.
- **A few respondents suggest a need for more opportunities for students to voice their experiences and perspectives.** Some respondents indicate the need for more representation of diverse cultures on the school board. A few respondents also express the desire for the SMOB to advocate for them, while others do not feel the need for advocacy.

Figure 3.1: Advocacy, Representation, and Voice Sample Quotes

SAMPLE QUOTES	
<i>"The SMOB should address it to the board of education and they should take action more explicitly."</i>	
<i>"Just add more education to history about different countries."</i>	<i>"They should be able to garner enough respect among the board members that they can present data and experiences discovered through research like this and share it effectively and possibly bring change."</i>
<i>"I would like them to advocate for me by talking about how bad racism is."</i>	<i>"I do not feel I need to be advocated for. But in the nearest future possible, it would be pleasant to have more teachers/educators/ staff members that are of color, just for the sake of a little more diversity than it is now."</i>

Note: All sample quotes (comments provided by survey respondents) in this report were reproduced nearly verbatim, with only minor edits to correct typos when necessary.

Collaboration, Inclusion, and Respect

- Respondents propose the need for more open discussions about issues and the creation of a more inclusive environment. Some respondents suggest that the SMOB should work closely with students and teachers to understand and address the issues at hand.
- Some respondents emphasize the need for more respect and kindness among students. Responses reflect a call for increased awareness and education about the consequences of racism and the importance of respect for all races and cultures.

Figure 3.2: Collaboration, Inclusion, and Respect Sample Quotes

SAMPLE QUOTES	
<i>"Well I believe it would be a good idea to have groups in middle schools and high schools where everyone feels welcome no matter their skin color, race, what they look like, and what they like."</i>	
<i>"Talk about how to be nice to everyone."</i>	<i>"Be inclusive of everyone. And DON'T repress any rights of anyone for any reason. While racism isn't that big here, I can see homophobic sentiments are more widespread."</i>
<i>"I would like the SMOB to encourage people to speak up if they see this happening, and to make sure everybody feels welcome in schools."</i>	<i>"To meet with me and talk about the issues."</i>

Note: All sample quotes (comments provided by survey respondents) in this report were reproduced nearly verbatim, with only minor edits to correct typos when necessary.

Analysis of Closed-Ended Responses

Methodology

In this section of the report, closed-ended responses are compared from the 2020 and 2024 surveys. Within this report, a light narrative on the high-level results of the surveys, along with accompanying data visualizations, are included.

Two issues that could affect survey comparisons were observed: sample size and question format. The 2024 sample is substantially larger than that of 2020, with significant increases among elementary and middle school students. In addition, whereas the 2020 survey utilized a 5-point Likert scale for Agree/Disagree questions, the 2024 survey utilized a 3-point Likert scale. This report includes combined percentages of both “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” responses from the 2020 survey and percentages of “Agree” responses from the 2024 survey.

Figure A.1: Sample Sizes for Closed-Ended Questions

Grade Band	2020 Sample Size	2024 Sample Size
Elementary School	176	1,797 (24%)
Middle School	1,581	4,178 (55%)
High School	2,155	1,561 (21%)
Total	3,912	7,536

Note: Percentage on 2024 indicates percent of respondents.

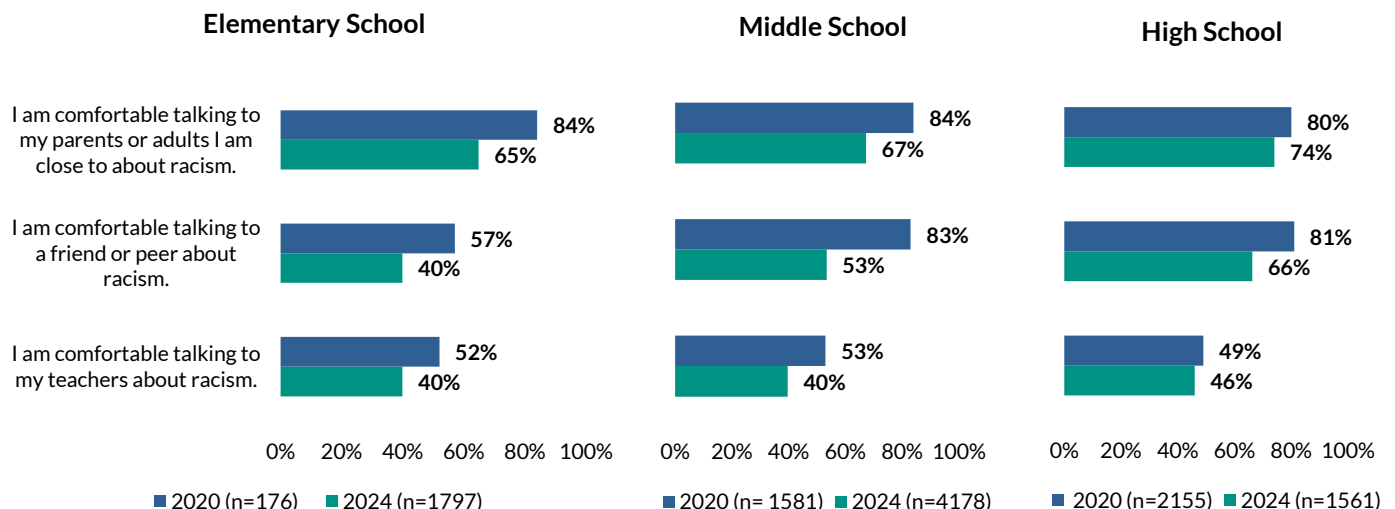
Comfort and Experiences Discussing Racism

The closed-ended survey analysis indicates that respondents across grade bands were most comfortable discussing racism with parents or other trusted adults, followed by friends or peers. Notably, fewer than half of students in each grade band agreed that they felt comfortable discussing racism with their teachers. A higher proportion of high school students reported feeling comfortable discussing racism with parents (74%), friends/peers (67%), and teachers (46%) than middle or elementary school respondents. Elementary students generally indicated the least comfort with discussing racism with parents (65%), friends/peers (40%), and teachers (40%).

However, the survey analysis revealed declines in respondents’ comfort in discussing racism in all three grade bands. From 2020 to 2024, the proportion of respondents who agreed that they were comfortable talking to parents or trusted adults about racism declined by 19 percentage points among elementary school students, 17 percentage points among middle school students, and 6 percentage points among high school students. Similarly, the proportion of respondents who agreed that they were comfortable talking to friends and peers about racism declined by 17, 20, and 15 percentage points among elementary, middle, and high school students, respectively, and the proportion who agreed that they were comfortable discussing racism with teachers declined by 12 percentage points among elementary school students, 7 percentage points among middle school students, and 3 percentage points among high school students.

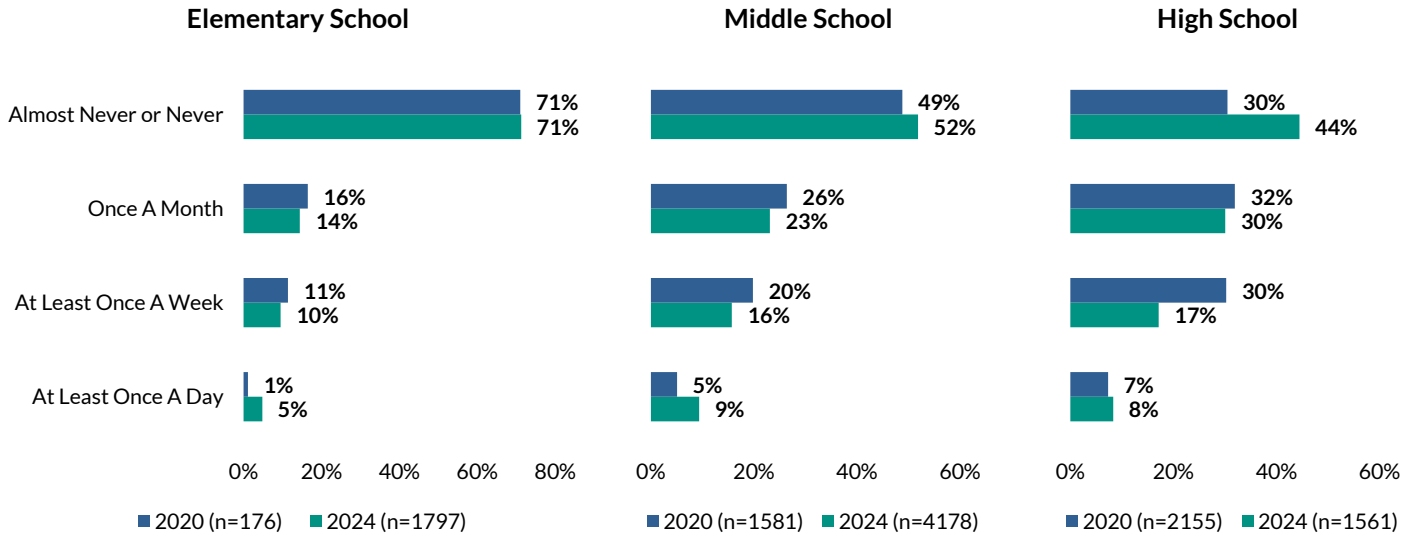
Please say how much you agree or disagree with the following statements: *Discussing Racism*

2020: %Agree + %Strongly Agree; 2024: %Agree



The closed-ended survey analysis also indicates overall declines in the frequency with which respondents reported experiencing situations in which they directly discuss racism. Whereas the proportion of elementary school students who reported “almost never or never” directly discussing racism remained even at 71 percent from 2020 to 2024, the proportion of middle school students who reported “almost never or never” directly discussing racism slightly increased from 49 percent to 52 percent, and the proportion of high school students who reported “almost never or never” directly discussing racism increased from 30 percent to 44 percent. The proportion of respondents who reported directly discussing racism “once a month” slightly decreased by 2–3 percentage points among respondents in all three grade bands. However, the proportion of respondents who reported directly discussing racism “at least once a day” slightly increased across grade bands.

How often do you find yourself in a situation where you are talking with people directly about racism?



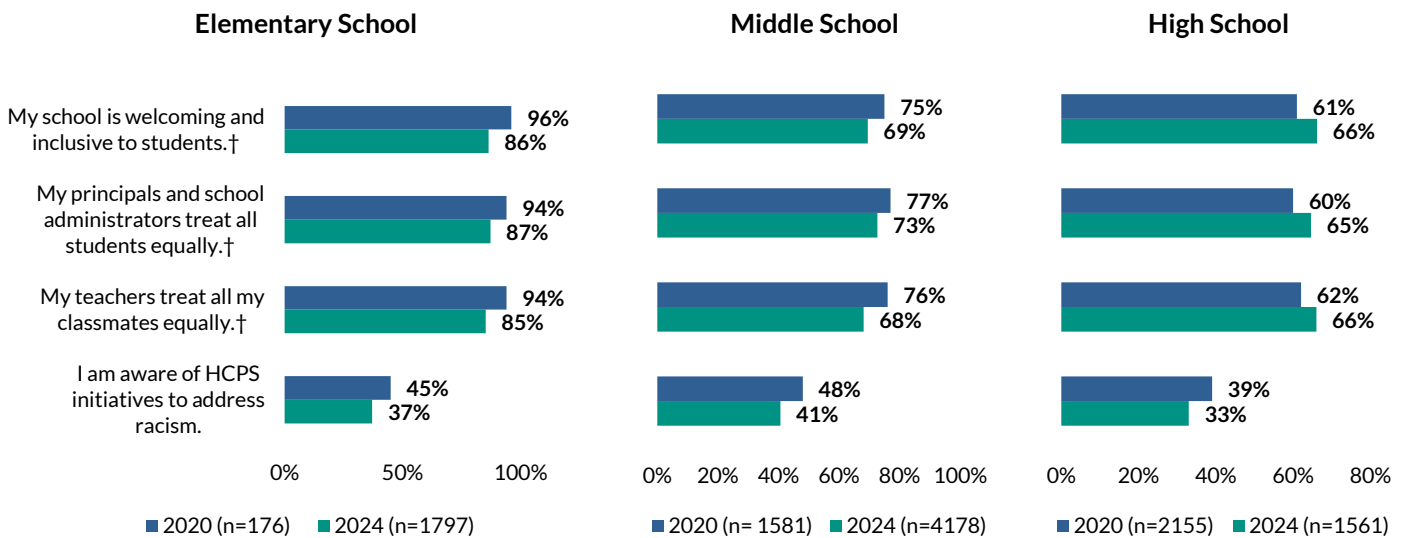
Perceptions of School Environment

The closed-ended survey analysis indicates declines in respondents' positive perceptions of the school environment among elementary and middle school students, although higher proportions of both respondent groups reported more positive perceptions than high school students. In contrast, there were increases in positive perceptions among high school students. Specifically, the proportion of elementary and middle school students who reported that their school is "welcoming and inclusive to students of all skin colors, cultures, religions, and other personal traits" declined by 10 and 6 percentage points, respectively, whereas the proportion of high school students increased by 5 percentage points. Whereas the proportion of elementary and middle school students who reported that their "principals and school administrators treat all students equally, regardless of their skin color" declined by 7 and 4 percentage points, respectively, the proportion of high school students increased by 5 percentage points. Similarly, whereas the proportion of elementary and middle school students who reported that their teachers treat all "classmates equally, regardless of their skin color" declined by 9 and 8 percentage points, respectively, the proportion of high school students increased by four percentage points. Further, this year only 61 percent of elementary, 46 percent of middle, and 40 percent of high school students agree that they feel a sense of belonging at school.

However, the proportion of respondents who reported being aware of HCPS's initiative to combat racism declined by 6 to 8 percentage points across all three grade bands. Additionally, most students in both 2020 and 2024 say they feel safe talking to and interacting with students of different skin colors, cultures, religions, or other personal traits. Though there has been a slight decline in the percentage of students who agree with this statement since 2020 (across school levels), no fewer than 81 percent of students in either year in elementary, middle, or high school agree that they feel safe talking and interacting with students who have different personal traits than they do.

Please say how much you agree or disagree with the following statements: *School Environment*

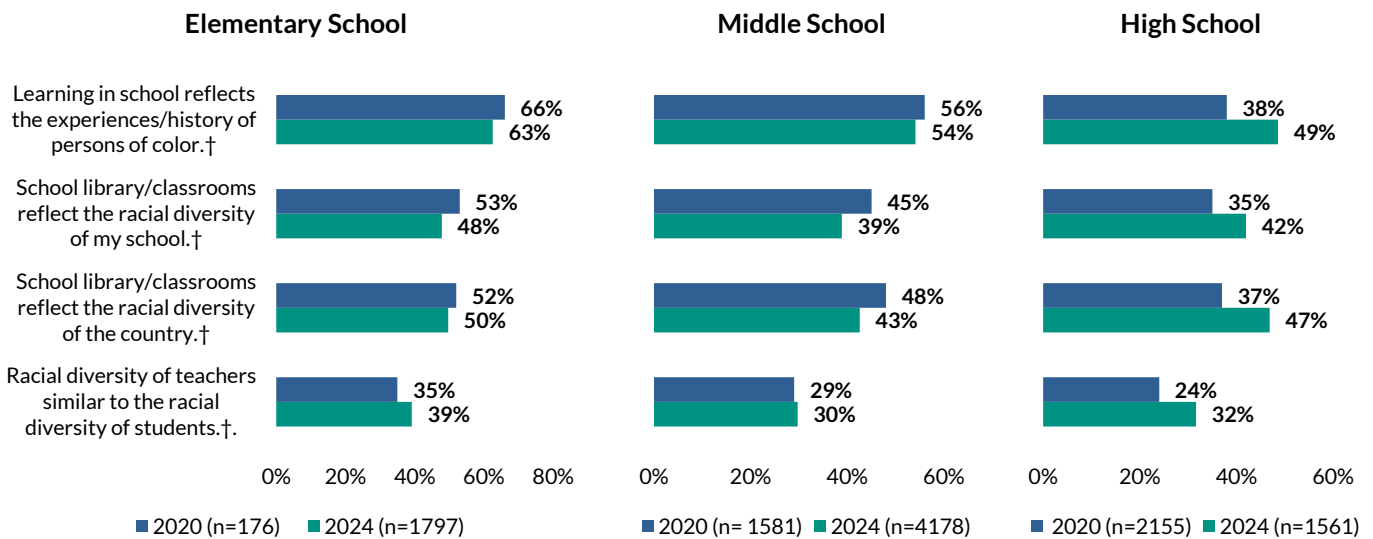
2020: %Agree + %Strongly Agree; 2024: %Agree



Note: A dagger symbol “†” designates an abbreviated statement. Question text and answer options marked with † are truncated for clarity and brevity.

The closed-ended survey analysis reveals slight declines in the proportion of elementary and middle school respondents who agreed that racial and ethnic diversity is represented in learning activities and the texts encountered in school libraries and classrooms. Specifically, the proportion of students who agreed that “I believe what I learn in school reflects the experiences and history of persons of color” decreased by 3 percentage points (from 66% to 63%) among elementary school students and 2 percentage points (from 56% to 54%) among middle school students. Similarly, the proportion of elementary and middle school students who agreed that “the texts (books, media, etc.) in my school library and classrooms reflect the racial diversity of my school” decreased by 5 and 6 percentage points among elementary and middle school students, respectively. The proportion of respondents who agreed that “the texts (books, media, etc.) in my school library and classrooms reflect the racial diversity of the country” decreased by 2 and 5 percentage points among elementary and middle school students, respectively. In contrast, the proportion of high school students who agreed that their learning reflected the experiences of people of color increased by 11 percentage points (from 38% to 49%), and the proportions who agreed that their texts reflected racial diversity at school and in the country rose by 7 and 10 percentage points, respectively.

Please say how much you agree or disagree with the following statements: *Representation in the Classroom*
 2020: %Agree + %Strongly Agree; 2024: %Agree



Note: A dagger symbol “†” designates an abbreviated statement. Question text and answer options marked with † are truncated for clarity and brevity.

Overall, lower proportions of middle school respondents agreed that school library and classroom texts reflected racial diversity compared with other grade bands, whereas a lower proportion of high school respondents agreed that their learning reflects the experiences or history of persons of color.

Additionally, this year about half of elementary school students indicate that they feel adequately represented in their school by teachers, administrators, and staff members (45%). Fewer proportions of both middle (37%) and high school (38%) agree with this statement, and many students across school levels indicated that they “neither agree nor disagree” (i.e., feel neutral) about the extent to which they feel adequately represented.

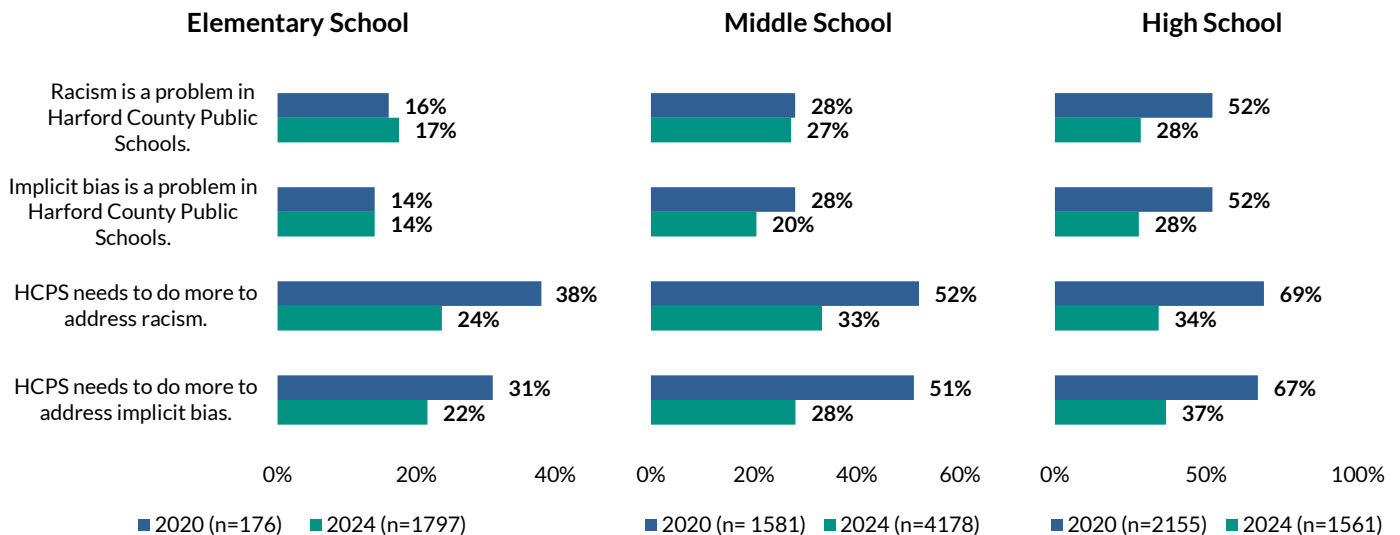
Perceptions and Experiences of Racism and Implicit Bias at HCPS

The closed-ended survey results indicate mixed findings concerning perceptions of racism and implicit bias in HCPS. Less than 20 percent of elementary school respondents agreed that racism (17%) and implicit bias (14%) were problems in HCPS, and less than 30 percent of middle school (27% and 20%, respectively) and high school (28% and 28%, respectively) respondents agreed that racism and implicit bias were problematic.

Larger proportions of high school students agreed that racism and implicit bias at HCPS were problematic compared with other grade bands. However, this group evinced the sharpest decreases in the proportion of respondents who agreed that racism and implicit bias were problems in the district (from 52% to 28% for both racism and implicit bias). Whereas the proportions of middle and high school students who agreed that racism and implicit bias were problems at HCPS declined from 2020 to 2024, the proportions of elementary school students who agreed remained even (implicit bias; 14%) or slightly increased (racism; from 16% to 17%).

Survey results reveal substantial decreases in the proportions of respondents who agreed that HCPS needs to do more to address racism and implicit bias in all three grade bands. For example, the proportion of elementary school students who agreed that HCPS needs to do more to address racism decreased by 14 percentage points (from 38% to 24%) from 2020 to 2024, and the proportions of middle and high school students who agreed fell by 19 percentage points (from 52% to 33%) and 35 percent (from 69% to 34%), respectively.

Please say how much you agree or disagree with the following statements: *Racism and Implicit Bias*
 2020: %Agree + %Strongly Agree; 2024: %Agree

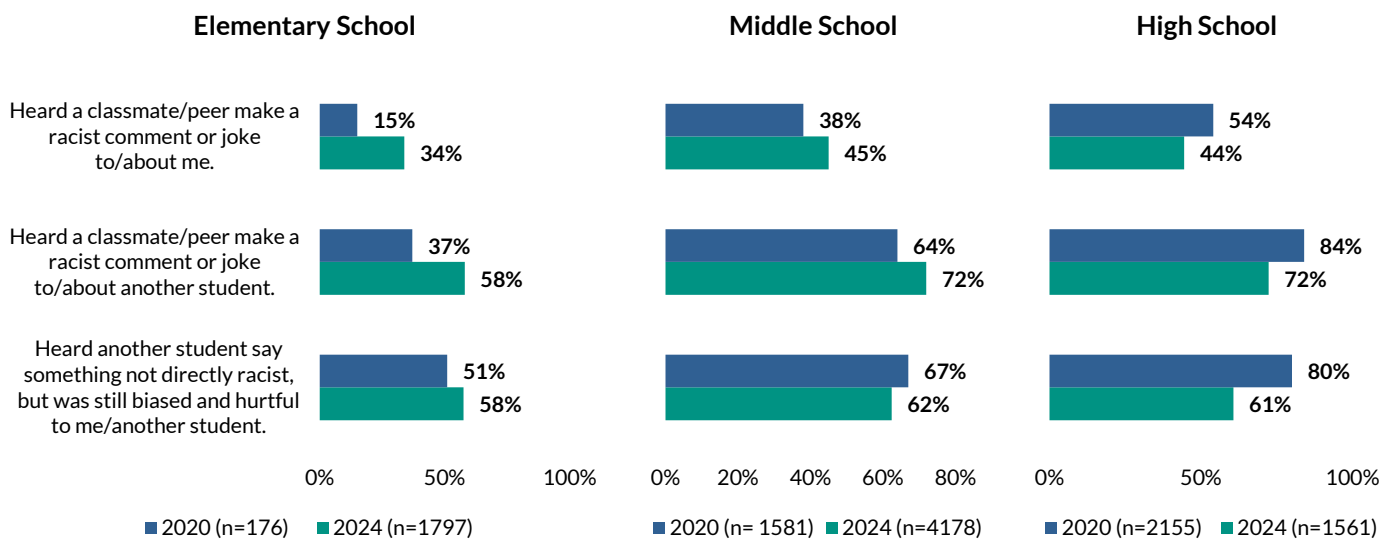


Survey results broadly indicate increases in elementary and middle school respondents' exposure to racist comments by peers from 2020 to 2024. At the elementary school level, more than a third of respondents reported hearing peers make racist comments about themselves, and over half reported hearing peers make racist comments about other students. Specifically, the survey reveals a 19 percentage point increase among respondents who reported having “heard a peer or classmate make a racist comment or joke to/about me” (from 15% to 34%), a 21 percentage point increase in those who reported hearing a peer or classmate make a racist comment or joke to or about another student (from 37% to 58%), and an 8 percentage point increase in those who reported hearing a peer say something that “may not have been directly racist, but was still biased and hurtful to me or to another student” (from 51% to 58%).

At the middle school level, over 40 percent of respondents reported hearing peers make racist comments about themselves, and nearly three-quarters reported hearing peers make racist comments about other students. Specifically, the survey indicates 7 and 8 percentage point increases in respondents who reported hearing a peer or classmate make a racist comment or joke about them or another student, respectively; however, the proportion who reported hearing a peer say something that “may not have been directly racist, but was still biased and hurtful” decreased by 5 percentage points (from 67% to 62%).

In contrast, high school survey responses suggest substantial decreases in student respondents' exposure to racist comments by peers from 2020 to 2024. Specifically, the proportion of high school respondents who reported hearing a peer or classmate “make a racist comment or joke to/about me” fell from 54 percent to 44 percent, and the proportion who reported hearing a peer or classmate make a racist comment or joke to or about another student declined from 84 percent to 72 percent. The proportion of high school students who reported hearing a peer say something that “may not have been directly racist, but was still biased and hurtful to me or to another student” fell by nearly 20 percent (from 80% to 61%) from 2020 to 2024. Nonetheless, over 40 percent of respondents reported hearing peers make racist comments about themselves, and nearly three-quarters reported hearing peers make racist comments about other students.

Please answer the following statements with a Yes or No: *Peers/Classmates*
%Yes

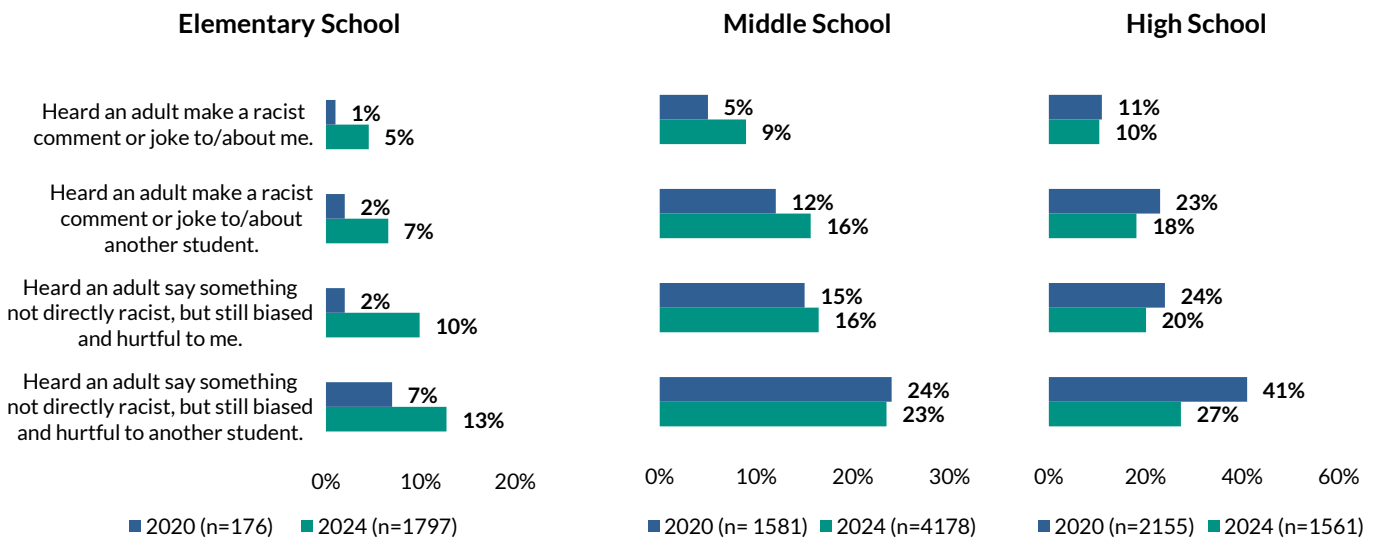


The closed-question survey results indicate increases in students' exposure to racist comments by adults at the elementary and middle school levels, although overall rates remained low. Specifically, the proportion of elementary school respondents who reported hearing an adult make racist comments or jokes to/about themselves increased from 1 percent to 5 percent, and the proportion who heard an adult make racist comments or jokes to/about another student rose from 2 percent to 7 percent. The proportion of elementary school respondents who reported hearing a peer make "not directly racist, but biased and hurtful comments" to "me" or "another student" increased by 8 and 13 percentage points, respectively.

The proportion of middle school respondents who reported hearing an adult make racist comments or jokes to/about themselves increased from 5 percent to 9 percent, and the proportion who heard an adult make racist comments or jokes to/about another student rose from 12 percent to 16 percent. However, although there was a slight increase in the percentage of middle school respondents who reported hearing an adult make "not directly racist, but biased and hurtful comments" to "me" (from 15% to 16%), there was a slight decrease in those who reported hearing an adult make "not directly racist, but biased and hurtful comments" to another student (from 24% to 23%).

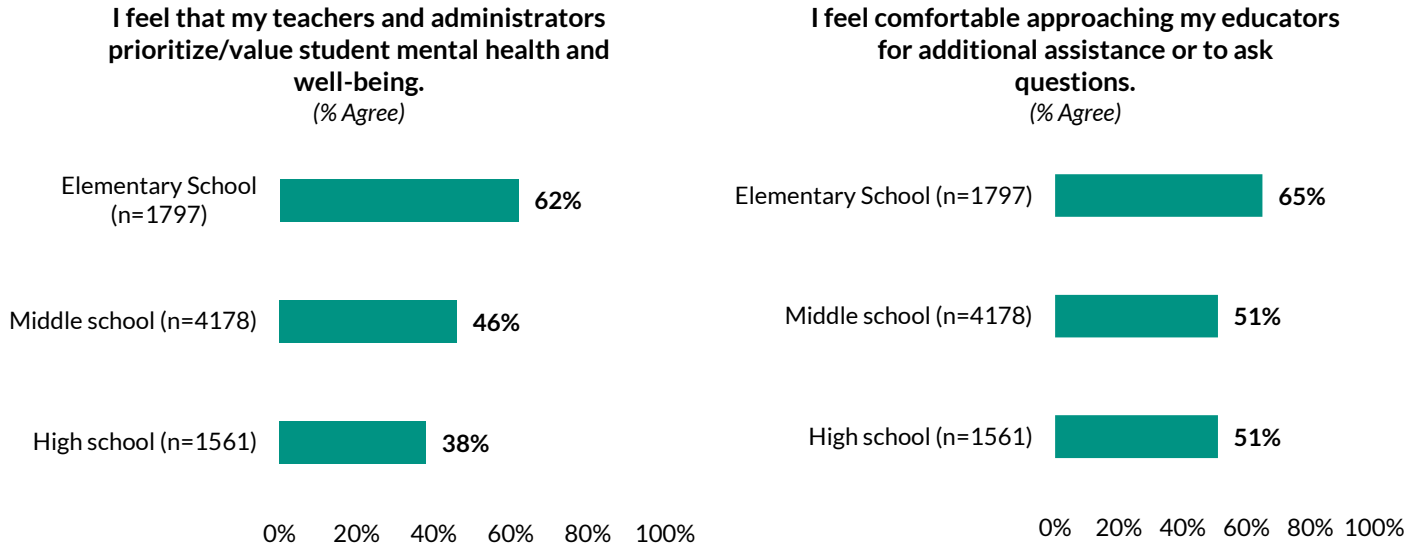
At the high school level, survey results reveal slight decreases in the proportions of respondents who reported hearing an adult make racist comments or jokes to/about themselves (from 11% to 10%), and the proportion who heard an adult make racist comments or jokes to/about another student (from 23% to 18%). The proportion of high school respondents who reported hearing a peer make "not directly racist, but biased and hurtful comments" to "me" or "another student" decreased by 4 and 14 percentage points, respectively.

Please answer the following statements with a Yes or No: Adults
%Yes



Perceptions of Overall Support

More elementary school students than middle and high school students agree that their teachers/administrators prioritize or value students' mental health and well-being (62% vs. 46% and 38%). The same is true of students' responses across school levels regarding whether they feel comfortable approaching educators for additional assistance or to ask questions; while two-thirds of elementary school students say they feel comfortable doing so, only about half of middle and high school students say the same (both 51%).



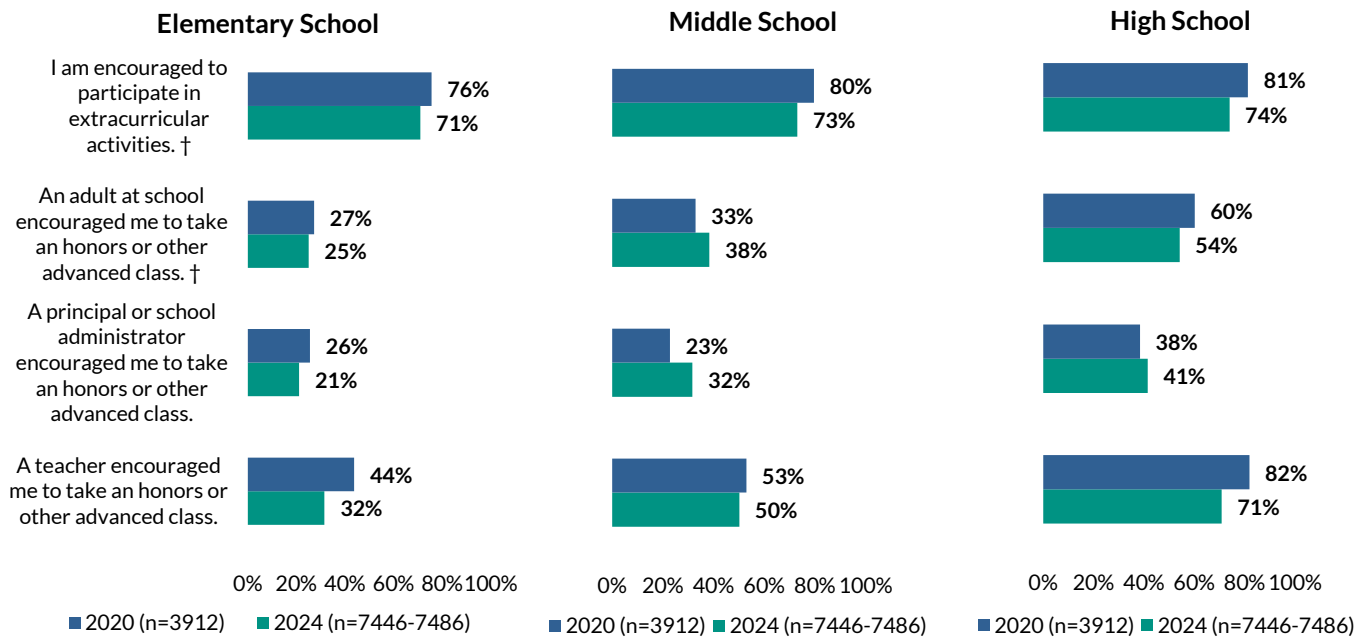
Perceptions of Enrichment/Honors and Course-Taking

Most students at each school level in both 2020 and 2024 say that they are encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities. Though the percentage of students who say they are encouraged to participate is slightly lower this year than in 2020, responses still indicate that most (approximately three-quarters or more) students are encouraged to engage in extracurriculars.

Fewer students at the elementary and middle than high school levels indicate, across years, that school staff members encourage them to take honors or advanced classes. Additionally, compared to 2020, this year more middle school students say that principals or school administrators (32% vs. 23%), as well as other adults at their schools (38% vs. 33%), encourage them to take challenging classes. This year slightly more high school students indicate that a principal or school administrator encouraged them to take an honors or other advanced class, as well (41% vs. 38%), while fewer high school students this year indicate that teachers are encouraging them to take challenging/advanced classes (71% vs. 82%). Additionally, this year many middle and high school students indicate either neutral or positive feelings regarding the availability of course options. Specifically, more than a third of students at each level selected the neutral option when asked if they felt satisfied with the range of course options available/offered to them (37% and 32%), while about half (52% at each level) responded positively.

Only about half of middle (49%) and high school (52%) students this year indicate that they feel supported or encouraged by their counselors in exploring various post-high school options. Elementary school students agree even less, though this is to be expected given that they have several years of education remaining before such exploration becomes relevant.

Please answer the following statements with a Yes or No:
%Yes



Note: A dagger symbol “†” designates an abbreviated statement. Question text and answer options marked with † are truncated for clarity and brevity.