2024 HCPS PARENT ENGAGEMENT SURVEY
KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINAL RESEARCH REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

The Harford County Public Schools (HCPS) Office of Family and Community Partnerships requested parents and guardians to participate in the 2023-2024 Parent Engagement Survey in early June 2024. The survey was open until Friday, June 28, 2024, at 11:59 P.M. and was made available on the hcps.org website and via email/social media, and parents were advised that it would take about 6-8 minutes to complete.

HCPS wanted to hear how well the school system is partnering with parents to help their child succeed.

The main objective of this survey research is to help HCPS comprehend the current involvement of parents in their child's education and provide an opportunity for them to express their opinions on HCPS's endeavors to engage parents and guardians. Parents and guardians were offered one standalone open comment question:

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

The responses to last year's survey (2023) will create a starting point or baseline for the school system's engagement data. HCPS intends to conduct this survey annually and did so in 2024, to continue to review the data and persistently search for ways to improve the connection between school and home. All the responses to the survey will remain anonymous and confidential.

The HCPS Department of Research and Program Evaluation partnered with the Manager of Family and Community Partnership and researchers to analyze the responses to the survey's 2024 closed-ended and open-ended questions. The open-ended coding analysis provided in this report will continue to assist HCPS in developing a holistic sense of parents' engagement needs this current school year.

This research report presents a comprehensive review and findings from an analysis of both the open and closed-ended responses to the 2024 HCPS Parent Engagement Survey.

The survey received a total of **1,543** responses including **602** open-ended comments.

A Data Dashboard was developed by the Department of Research and Program Evaluation to display the results and analysis of the 2024 and 2023 HCPS Parent Engagement Survey. Click here to access the HCPS Parent Engagement Data Dashboard.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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

- **What are areas of strength and areas for continued growth, as it relates to the following constructs:**
  - **Social/emotional**
  - **Learning skills and habits**
  - **Elementary climate and culture**
  - **Secondary climate, culture, support, and mental health**
  - **Physical health and activity**
  - **Personal care**
  - **HOPE**
- **What actionable recommendations can be made to address the area for continued growth?**

METHODOLOGY

In addition to overall key findings and recommendations, key findings by school-level groups for *elementary school, middle school,* and *high school parents/guardians* are illustrated below. In the following pages, findings from an analysis of open-ended responses to HCPS' 2024 Parent Engagement Survey are presented.

The survey received 542 open-ended responses after data cleaning. To keep the findings as salient as possible for HCPS' future decision-making, blank responses and invalid responses were removed from each response pool. Responses such as "unsure" and "none of the above" were also removed in favor of responses that share meaningful data and appropriately answer the survey question. Themes were developed using cleaned, relevant response content only.

The open-ended responses were manually coded to identify the topics most frequently discussed by respondents. The responses were analyzed by first coding them based on core themes that emerged within the data and refining those themes as the analysis progressed. Sub-themes that emerged within some of the main themes were also identified. The number of times each theme and sub-theme was coded to a response was counted, and the frequency thereof was calculated. To note, themes are not mutually exclusive, so calculated percentages may sum to over 100 percent due to survey responses that contain more than one theme. For detailed and/or additional coding information, please contact the HCPS Department of Research and Program Evaluation. Findings should be interpreted as a reflection of the sample, which may not necessarily align with the perceptions of the population as a whole.

In addition to overall key findings and recommendations, key findings were also reported by school-level groups for elementary school, middle school, and high school parents/guardians.

Figure 1 provides information for all manually coded open-ended response questions in the survey.

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

SURVEY QUESTION	Responses Before Data Cleaning *(without blanks)*			Coded Responses for Analysis			
	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS	TOTAL
Question 1: In what ways, if any, could HCPS further support parent engagement?	266	171	165	242	153	147	**542**

KEY FINDINGS/INSIGHTS ON PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT

Parents strongly value communication and desire more frequent and responsive information sharing from HCPS. A common concern is that their feedback is often overlooked in decision-making processes. They want more timely updates on their children's progress and school activities and suggest increasing accessibility by offering virtual and flexible meeting times. Many working parents feel that current schedules don't accommodate them well, and they advocate for meetings with advanced notice, possibly during weekends or outside of standard working hours to increase participation.

Parents also want more involvement in school activities beyond formal settings like PTAs. They suggest casual events, open conferences, and more volunteer opportunities. Additionally, they stress the need for better support of diverse learning needs, including students with IEPs and from various cultural backgrounds. They recommend inclusive curricula, co-taught classes across subjects, and after-school clubs to create a more supportive and diverse environment for students.

Parents value and desire more communication and information sharing from HCPS.
A recurring theme is the need for schools to be more responsive to parental feedback. Some parents feel that their input, whether given through surveys or other forms of communication, is often overlooked when decisions are made. Parents also express a need for more timely and consistent updates on their children's progress and school activities.

Many parents call for more accessible and inclusive meetings, suggesting options like virtual meetings to increase participation.
Many feel that current scheduling does not always consider working parents, and more flexible options could lead to greater involvement and input from a broader range of parents. Some believe that to enhance the inclusivity of meeting times, school events and parent-teacher meetings should be scheduled with ample notice and at times that are convenient for working parents. Additionally, some parents suggest offering meetings during weekends or outside of standard working hours could significantly increase the ability for more parents to engage actively with the school community.

Parents express a desire for more opportunities to be involved in school activities,
not just through PTAs or formal meetings but also in more casual and social formats that allow them to engage with the school community more directly. Suggestions include more open parent-teacher conferences and events where parents can participate actively. In addition to the desire for more involvement in school activities, parents also express interest in having more opportunities to volunteer directly in the school building, suggesting that with proper planning, this could be a valuable resource for schools. Furthermore, parents have indicated that they would appreciate more advance notice of events and meetings, as well as the provision of alternative dates and times, to accommodate their schedules and allow for greater participation.

Additional Findings On Inclusivity, Support, and Diverse Learning Needs

Parents utilized this survey to provide comments/feedback related to curriculum and staffing.

Some emphasize the need for schools to better support diverse learning needs, including those of students with IEPs and students from different cultural backgrounds.
Parents are advocating for more inclusive curriculums that recognize various cultural histories and more robust support for students who require additional help. Parents suggest increasing the number of co-taught classes across various subjects, not just in Math and English, to provide more comprehensive support in regular classrooms. There is also a call for the implementation of more after-school clubs and social groups that cater to diverse interests and needs, which could help students with different backgrounds and learning styles to thrive and connect with their peers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the analysis of the open-ended responses, the leadership of HCPS should consider increasing opportunities for parental involvement by engaging families in planning their participation through surveys and focus groups, offering opportunities in academic events, social activities, and volunteering. Flexible meeting options, including virtual meetings, should accommodate parents' schedules, and an inclusive parent organization should be developed to strengthen family voices in decision-making.

To improve communication, HCPS should align with families' preferences, provide translation services, and promote proactive, two-way communication. Regular updates on student progress and better scheduling practices for working parents are recommended. Additionally, HCPS should expand resources and support for diverse learning needs, including students with IEPs and mental health challenges, ensuring success for all students.

Increase involvement opportunities for parents.
Respondents express a desire for more opportunities to be involved in their children's education. To address this, HCPS could engage families in planning how they want to be involved in school through surveys and focus groups with parents. This could include academic events, social activities, and opportunities for parents to volunteer their skills and expertise to support the school. Survey parents about school climate, workshops and activities families are interested in, and best times to hold those events and activities. HCPS could strengthen family voice in decision making, supporting the development of an effective parent organization that represents all families. Additionally, HCPS should continue to offer more flexible meeting options, such as more virtual meetings, to accommodate varying schedules and increase participation from a broader demographic of parents.

Improve communication practices between the schools, the district, and parents.
Some respondents' express dissatisfaction with the current communication practices within HCPS, particularly regarding scheduling and notification of events. To improve this, HCPS could learn about and meet families' communication preferences, providing interpretation, translation, and accommodations when needed. HCPS could promote two-way communication that is proactive and timely, providing time, training and resources to support parent, teacher and school communication. Regular updates on students' progress could also be beneficial, helping parents support their children's learning more effectively. Furthermore, ensuring that school events and parent-teacher meetings are scheduled with ample notice and at times that are convenient for working parents could facilitate better planning and participation.

Provide additional support to address diverse learning needs throughout the district.
Respondents highlight the need for better support for students with special needs, including those with Individualized Education Program (IEPs) and those dealing with mental health issues. To address this, HCPS should continue to promote special education and mental health parent advocacy support, including Partners 4 Success, Care Solace, and parenguidance.org, exploring the feasibility of providing more resources and attention to these families. If feasible, this could help ensure that all students, regardless of their individual needs, can succeed in school.

HCPS Responses To Recommendations

The **Response to the Recommendations** listed in the bullet points below outlines actions that the HCPS Office of Family and Community Partnerships, Parent Advisory Committee members, and other offices are already taking or considering to address these recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION #1: Increase involvement opportunities for parents

HCPS RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION # 1

- Provide ongoing professional learning for Parent and Community Engagement (PACE) Liaisons and Community School Specialists in evidence-based parent and community engagement strategies, building capacity of families and educators to collaborate and support students' academic learning and wellness.
- Collaborate with Elementary Education Services to support parent teacher conferences for all elementary school students.
- Ensure parents' needs are assessed and they are provided resources and skills to support their students' learning, making sure virtual options are available for working parents.
- Develop resources and tools for parents to use in preparation for and monitoring of students' progress, including Academic Playbooks for parents of K-8th grade students.
- Promote Canvas for parents and continue to encourage parents to log into Canvas and engage with their child's learning daily. ("Countdown to Canvas How To" videos).
- Support every school to offer intentional transition/orientation events for parents of students transitioning into kindergarten and middle and high school.
- Learn with Me events in every elementary school.
- Collaborate with the Parent Advisory Council to share provide feedback and advice to the school system on parent engagement efforts related to the research-based PTA standards for family-school partnership.

RECOMMENDATION # 2: Improve communication practices between the schools, the district, and parents.

HCPS RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION # 2

- PACE Liaisons and Community School Specialists learn about and meet families' two-way communication preferences, using multiple communication outlets (newsletters, text messages/Class DoJo, email, language link, phone calls, social media).
- Identify new website support; PACE Liaisons and Community School Specialists work with schools to update the school calendar of events.
- Support PACE staff and Community School Specialist requests for interpretation and translation services for parent communication and parent events.
- Conduct a "welcoming walk through" to help schools create a welcoming environment and assess current communication practices.
- PACE Liaisons and Community School Specialists train colleagues in effective two-way parent-teacher communication, building relationships with every family.
- Enhance Family Friendly School Award program to ensure those awarded are honored and celebrated for following family engagement standards.

RECOMMENDATION #3: provide additional support to address diverse learning needs throughout the district.

HCPS RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION # 3

- o Partners for Success (P4S) Center is available for parents as a resource and information center. Specifically, HCPS will continue to share Partners for Success as a resource to assist families in resolving concerns and increase parental involvement in the special education decision making process. Information about Partners for Success is included in the documentation provided to parents following an IEP meeting. It is also included in the Maryland Procedural Safeguards Notice, which is distributed to parents at least annually. IEP team members are encouraged to inform parents about Partners for Success and are provided resources to support this communication through professional development experiences and in departmental newsletters.
- o The HCPS Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee hosts monthly meetings aimed at informing parents about resources in the community. Strategies to increase parental participation in these meetings include increased communication through social media and email, gathering parent input to topics and meeting structure, and on-going outreach at community events.

OPEN-ENDED SURVEY QUESTION RESULTS

In this section, open-ended responses from the survey are analyzed. All responses are quoted verbatim or minimally modified for clarity if needed. Only themes with over 10% response frequency rates are reported.

Open-Ended Question

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

Respondents share several recommendations (81%) to enhance parent engagement, emphasizing the need for increased involvement opportunities (24%), better support for special needs and mental health (13%), and more flexible meeting options (5%).
Parents express a desire for more virtual meeting options to accommodate varying schedules, which could lead to increased participation and engagement from a broader demographic of parents. Additionally, there is a call for more support for children with special needs, including those on the spectrum, by increasing resources and attention in regular classrooms and offering more co-taught classes across various subjects. Furthermore, respondents suggest that HCPS improves engagement by ensuring that school events and parent-teacher meetings are scheduled with ample notice and at times that are convenient for working parents, thereby facilitating better planning and participation.

Respondents express dissatisfaction with the communication practices within HCPS (49%), particularly regarding the scheduling and notification of events (21%).
Many parents feel that the notice given for events is often too short, sometimes only a week or a day in advance, which does not allow adequate time for planning and attendance. This issue is compounded by the inconsistency in communication across different schools and grade levels, leading to a sense of frustration and disengagement among parents. The lack of clear, timely, and proactive communication from the schools has left many respondents feeling undervalued and disconnected from the educational environment of their children. There is a strong call for the implementation of more reliable and accessible communication methods, such as an interactive calendar, to improve the scheduling and announcement of events, ensuring that all parents can participate fully in their children's education.

Parents share a range of sentiments regarding the personal care provided by schools and districts to students and parents, highlighting both positive and negative experiences (46%).
Many parents feel that the personal care aspect is lacking, particularly at the middle school level, where communication and support are seen as insufficient compared to elementary schools. Issues such as unreturned emails, infrequent updates, and a general lack of responsiveness from school staff have been sources of frustration for parents who are eager to support their children's education and well-being. On the other hand, some respondents have had positive interactions, praising specific schools and staff members for their kindness, understanding, and effective communication. Overall, there is a call for more consistent and meaningful engagement from schools to ensure that all students and parents feel supported and valued within the educational community.

Middle school respondents highlight a variety of feelings about their families' experiences with HCPS, accounting for 13% of the responses. However, when discussing climate and culture, 37% of the responses concentrate on issues of equity and inclusion.
For instance, some parents voice concerns about the lack of communication and support from the school system, particularly for students with special needs or those facing academic challenges. Some question the handling of IEP meetings and the lack of advanced notifications for these meetings. Others report feeling excluded or disregarded by school board members and call for more transparency and responsiveness from the school system. Concerns exist regarding the management of disciplinary issues and the perceived absence of robust discipline policies. Some parents report instances of bullying and express the sentiment that the

school system does not sufficiently address these issues. However, some parents praise the school system for its efforts to engage parents and have expressed satisfaction with the level of communication from certain schools.

When it comes to learning skills and habits, parents believe there are opportunities to improve (11%). Some parents worry about the transition from elementary to middle school, noting a "sink or swim" mentality that places a lot of responsibility on students without providing adequate support. Parents also mention the need for more robust support systems for students with diverse learning needs, including those with IEPs. Additionally, there are suggestions for more regular and individualized updates on students' progress to help parents support their children's learning more effectively.

The chart below highlights the most frequently discussed themes and sub-themes for participant responses to this question. When calculating percentages, miscellaneous and blank responses are excluded to highlight the most salient concerns.

Theme Frequency: Top Themes and Sub-Themes Regarding Parent Engagement
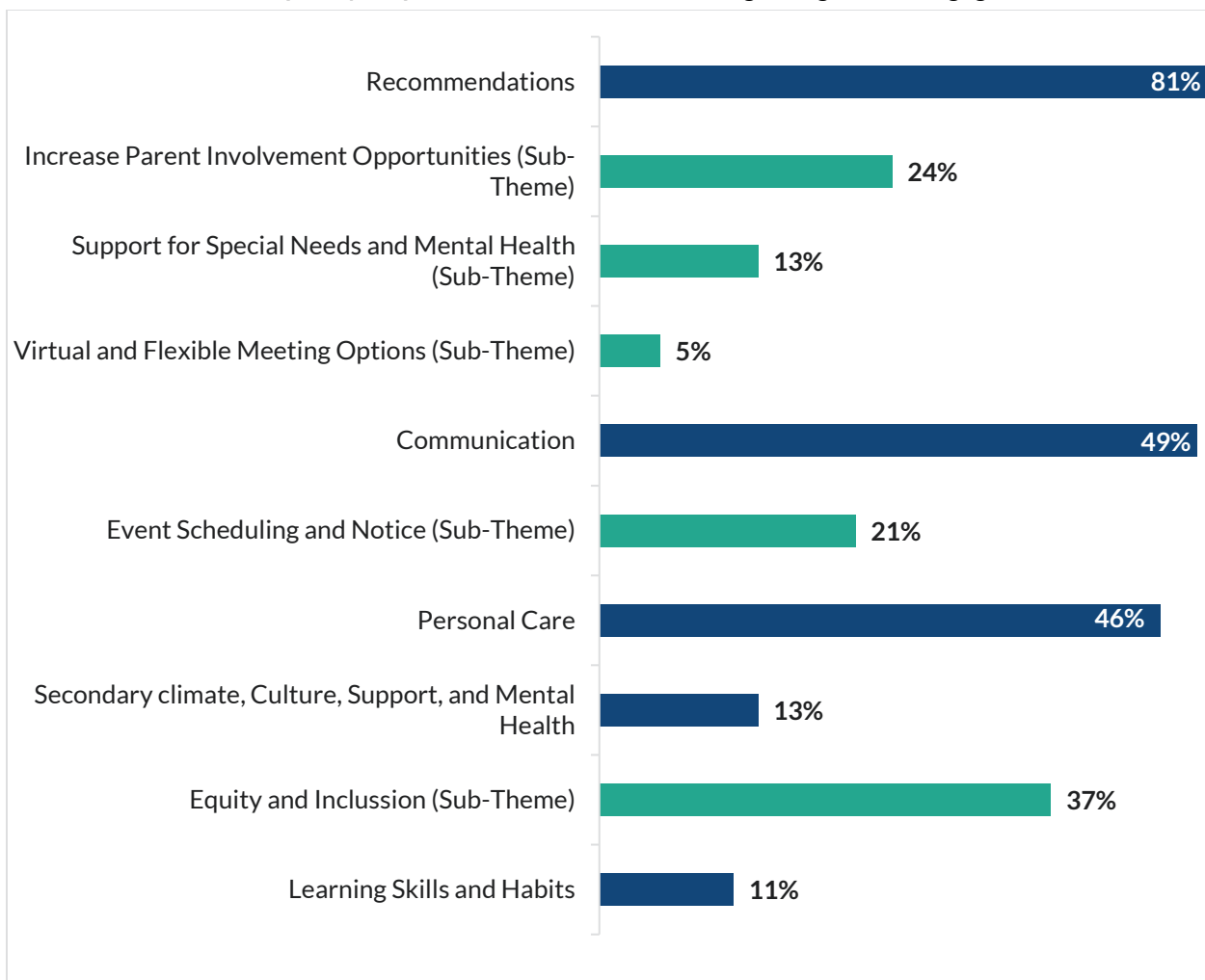
Note: This figure indicates the most frequently mentioned themes and sub-themes of the 542 coded open-ended responses. The navy bars indicate main themes, while the teal bars indicate sub-themes. Percentages sum to greater than 100% because some coded responses reference more than one theme.
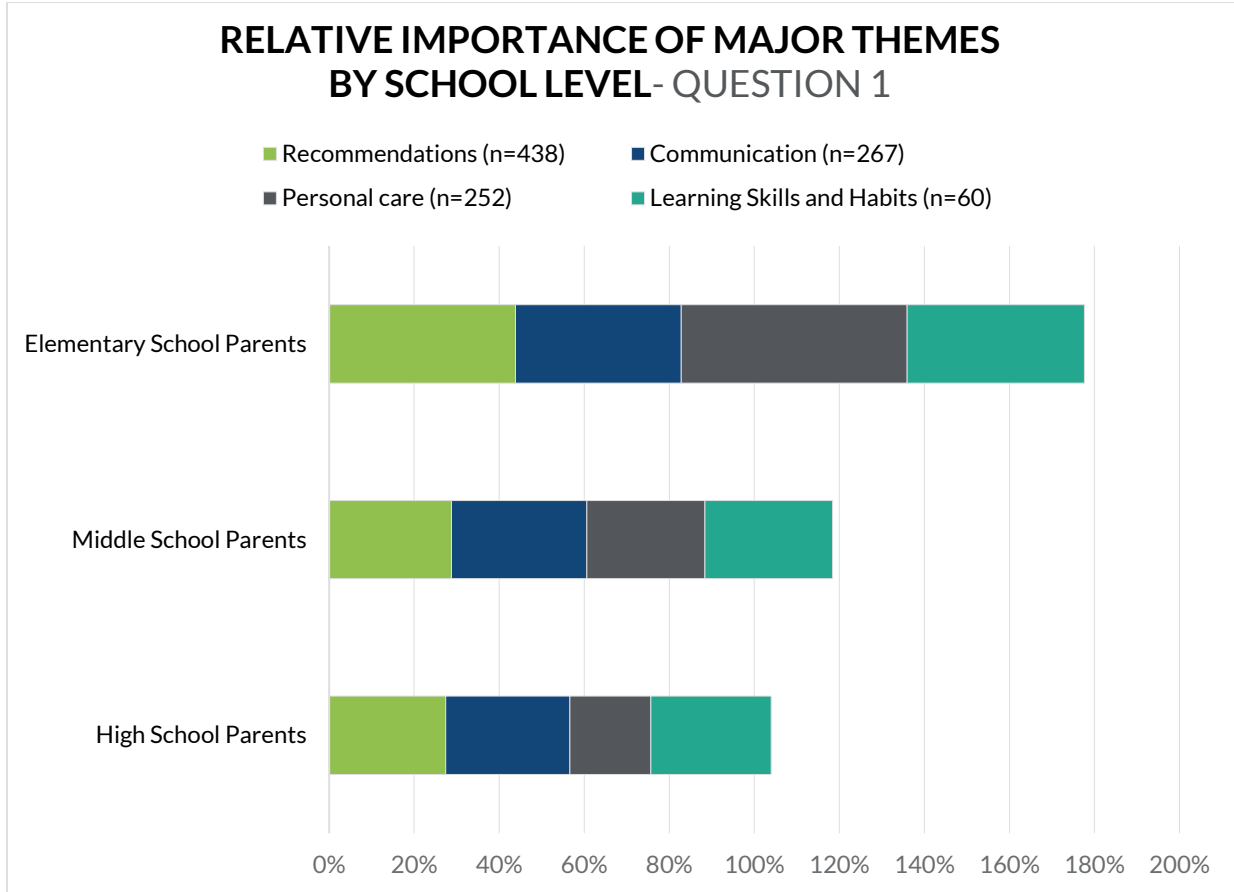
The following chart mostly highlights quotes from respondents that fit each of the main themes. For a more detailed list of responses and sample comments, please contact the HCPS Department of Research and Program Evaluation and/or the Manager of Family and Community Partnerships.

Theme Frequency: Main Themes Regarding Suggestions for Improving Parent Engagement

Theme	Sample Responses
Recommendation	*"Middle school is not very parent oriented. It is child focused. I was disappointed that our MS does not provide the same opportunities as other middle schools, such as the Friday night parties at the school."* – Middle School Parent *"I don't understand what my kids need to do to graduate and go to college and they have been in Harford county public schools since pre-k"* – Middle School Parent *"It would be helpful for teacher to meet with parents as a group or individually several times a year to discuss curriculum, kids progress, and concerns. The report card is not sufficiently informative."* – Elementary School Parent *"If some meetings, for care takers, could be held virtually I believe there would be more input and buy-in. It would allow for us to log-in, listen, participate, etc. from wherever."* – Elementary School Parent
Communication	*"The only somewhat useful resource I have found is the HCPS website to view my children's grade. The elementary school sends a weekly e-mail. I would like more standardized test scores proactively shared and a discussion on what they mean for my child. I feel left in the dark about what opportunities exist at the school."* – Middle School Parent *"Encourage more teacher communications and assist parents who have transportation needs so they may attend."* – High School Parent *"It seems like communication about events was better last year when there were emails from the principal. The timing of newsletters made it difficult to plan ahead."* – High School Parent *"There needs to be a bit more organization. I feel as though giving parents less than a month to attend school activities is difficult. There are work conflicts for many parents. These meetings/activities should be on the school calendar at the beginning of the year."* – Middle School Parent *"Give as much advance notice for parent-engagement activities as possible in order to arrange schedules, etc."* – Elementary School Parent
Personal Care	*"Make it more welcoming. [The district] has PTAs that aren't inclusive and make others not feel welcomed. Allow parents on more field trips and involved stop shutting them out. More after school activities /programs for elementary children at the school."* – Elementary School Parent *"Teachers need to be more proactive when they notice abnormalities in a student's grades and reach out to parents. If a parent reaches out for a follow up phone call, calling them back at 3pm and stopping after one attempt does not promote engagement and looks like they don't care."* – Middle School Parent *"Actually listening to what the parents have to say."* – High School Parent *"Better home room Teacher communication about kids progress"* – Middle School Parents

Theme	Sample Responses
Secondary Climate, Culture, Support, and Mental health	*"It's funny to say, but when our highschooler attends the events at our other children's elementary school, she often comments how she wishes her high school put on some of these similar events. Like activities were children and parents can do things together paint nights, family, dance nights Things like that things that get the entire family involved and are fun"* – High School Parent *"At times my children asked could they attend other schools due to not feeling safe at school and on the bus."* – Middle School Parent
Learning Skills and Habits	*"I want a safe space for my child to learn. While also learning different ideas with their right to decide for themselves."* – Elementary School Parent *"I find it completely unacceptable when I email a teacher with a question or concern, and I never receive a reply. My child has also found it difficult with some teachers to resolve a question or concern. Lastly, it is bothersome, and I am unable to see how my child is progressing through the semester when grades aren't uploaded to HAC in over a month."* – High School Parent *"My child didn't have a lot of homework. It was hard to know what my child was learning or even to prepare for studying. Weekly or even monthly teacher curricular updates of what is being taught or upcoming projects would be helpful to parents. I realize most things are on HAC or Canvas but it's nice to know what they are working on for units especially core academic areas: math, reading, science and social studies."* – Middle School Parent
Elementary Climate and Culture	*"I believe history/awareness months (I.e. - Black History, Jewish American, AAPI, etc.) should be more prominent in our children's curriculum."* – Elementary School Parent *"An option could be that they provide transportation, because in my case it is difficult for me to go to some of my daughter's activities due to transportation issues. Another is that when they call they could do it in the parents' native language, whether English or Spanish."* – Elementary School Parent *"Please continue to offer in person and virtual events for parents. I've really appreciated the ones around mental health topics. Please consider selecting presenters of color. Offering events that include the whole family could help with the childcare issue (i e. in-person events that have activities for all ages). Finally, please be diligent in including voices from the Edgewood and Joppatowne communities. HCPS does not do a good job seeking their voices and making them feel valued."* – Elementary School Parent
Support for Special Needs and Mental Health	*"Invite parents more often to engage in school environment. Let the parents know immediately that your child have difficulties not at the almost the end of school year. Let the parents know that your child is in special need class with special need students with difficulties before you actually put him in. I think parents have a right to know in which kind of environment or kid is learning. This will prevent a lot of other problems with our kids."* – Middle School Parent

The following chart highlights the themes with which each school level is most concerned. For example, **Elementary School Parents** demonstrate more concern than **Middle and High School Parents** with *learning skills and habits* in the district. **Elementary School** and **Middle School Parents** desire more *personal care* from their schools. While **Elementary School Parents** demonstrate more comfort in offering *recommendations*, **Middle School** and **High School Parents** highlight the need to *address communication* in the district.

RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF MAJOR THEMES BY SCHOOL LEVEL- QUESTION 1

■ Recommendations (n=438) ■ Communication (n=267)
■ Personal care (n=252) ■ Learning Skills and Habits (n=60)

CLOSED-ENDED SURVEY QUESTIONS RESULTS

Closed-Ended Questions

Please click the link below to access the Data Dashboard, where you can view the results and analysis of the closed-ended questions from the 2024 and 2023 HCPS Parent Engagement Surveys.

Additionally, in the Open-Ended Comments section of the Data Dashboard, you will find sample responses, grouped by school levels, from the open-ended questions in the 2024 survey.

Data Dashboard – Parent Engagement Survey Results

Link to Access The Data Dashboard: **Parent Engagement Survey - Power BI**

https://app.powerbi.com/groups/535b72aa-1912-44db-8d7f-fb64d6e07ff7/reports/86a5c85d-8e6a-4be2-a586-690847225611/2bf67abeaba0bcdbd489?experience=power-bi