



ANALYSIS OF THE 2023-2024 INCLEMENT WEATHER RESPONSE SURVEY

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINAL RESEARCH REPORT

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BOARD OF EDUCATION OF HARFORD COUNTY

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Acknowledgement

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Thanks to all contributors who played a crucial role in providing survey for the survey development and in shaping this report. Special appreciation goes to HCPS staff members from the Department of Research and Program Evaluation and other staff who provided invaluable assistance, support, and guidance throughout the research process for the 2023-2024 HCPS Inclement Weather Response Survey. Their involvement was instrumental in survey drafting, data collection, data analysis, and the development of key findings and recommendations in this report.

Sincere appreciation is extended to the following individuals:

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The HCPS Department of Research and Program Evaluation collaborated with Hanover Research to collect, analyze, and consolidate the outcomes of the open-ended section of the 2023-2024 HCPS Inclement Weather Response Survey. The HCPS Office of Research and Program Evaluation crafted the survey instrument and summarized and synthesized the results and findings from the closed-ended responses in the 2023-2024 HCPS Inclement Weather Response Survey. Meanwhile, Hanover Research provided the support needed to summarize and synthesize the findings derived from sample comments in the open-ended responses.

HCPS aims to recognize and express gratitude for the substantial collaboration and partnership with Hanover. The final reports published by HCPS will integrate many of the findings provided by Hanover, albeit with modifications.

Table of Contents

Contents

Acknowledgement	2
Acknowledgement Table of Contents Background Methodology	3
Background	4
Methodology	4
Overview: Closed-Ended Question Survey Results for HCPS Teachers and Staff Members	
Overview: Closed-Ended Question Survey Results for Parents/Guardians and Community	5
Notes	
Analysis of Survey Open-ended Comments	6
Teachers and Staff: Asynchronous Learning	6
Teachers and Staff: Access and Equity	6
Teachers and Staff: Closing Schools and Offices	7
Teachers and Staff: Leveraging Technology and Resources	8
Teachers and Staff: Mental Health Benefits	
Parents and Community Members: Traditional Snow Days	
Parents and Community Members: Virtual Learning	
Parents and Community Members: Balanced and Flexible Learning	
Parents and Community Members: Impact on Parents and Staff	
Appendix A: Closed-Ended Survey Results for Teachers and Staff Members	
Appendix B: Closed-Ended Survey Results for Parents and Community Members	

Background

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is opening a pathway for local education agencies (LEAs) to repurpose certain days as virtual school days in the 2023-2024 school year. To ensure meaningful and equitable virtual instruction during these days, under the Superintendent's authority under Education Article §2-303, a process and attestations have been established to seek approval to repurpose certain days as virtual school days.

School systems in Maryland will have the opportunity to use a total of eight (8) days as virtual school days for the described purposes. The days may be synchronous or asynchronous; however, no more than three (3) of the eight (8) days may be used as an asynchronous day. HCPS adopts the following definitions for synchronous and asynchronous learning:

Asynchronous Learning: Instructional content is designed so a student will engage in the materials on their own without live, direct instruction from the teacher.

Synchronous Learning: Students will virtually attend class sessions at the same time as their teachers and classmates.

The 2023-2024 HCPS Inclement Weather Response Survey was distributed to all Harford County Public Schools (HCPS) teachers, staff members, parents/guardians, and community members to gather their preferences regarding the use of virtual instruction on inclement weather days. HCPS leaders will utilize the survey data in their decision-making for developing a 2024-2025 calendar and in their planning for the inclement weather response. Respondents indicating they were parents/guardians of current HCPS students were required to provide authentication, such as a student ID, before completing the survey (Notes).

Methodology

This report provides the results of the survey's closed-ended questions on page 2 (overview), on Appendix A (Teachers and Staff Members) and on Appendix B (Parents/Guardians and Community Members). This report also provides a digestible summary of responses to the survey's open-ended questions. Each survey respondent was asked the following open-ended prompt:

• If you have additional comments, notes, or feedback, please utilize this space.

Due to the expeditated timeline and amount of data, a sample (20%) of responses from staff and parents respectively were taken to analyze and distill key findings for the open-ended question. Blank, irrelevant, or repeated open-ended responses were removed during data cleaning. Inappropriate answers and answers that appeared redundant or submitted multiple times by an individual (e.g., based on survey start/completion time, Al/chatbot-generated responses) in favor of responses that share meaningful data and appropriately answer the survey question.

The research team believes utilizing a random sample of 20% of responses offers a robust sample. It should be noted, however, that the analysis provided depth of understanding about the particular question rather than statistical significance or generalizable conclusions. The key themes were developed using cleaned, relevant response content. Both human and AI tools were utilized to develop themes and key findings. The following figure details the total open-ended survey responses, the total cleaned survey responses, and the total coding sample for both phases of the analysis.

Figure 1: Total Number of OE Survey Responses, Cleaned Responses, and Coding Sample			ample		
RESPONDENT GROUP	OE QUESTION	TOTAL SURVEY ENTRIES	TOTAL SURVEY OE RESPONSES	TOTAL CLEANED SURVEY OE RESPONSES	TOTAL CLEANED RESPONSES IN OE SAMPLE (20%*)
Staff and Teachers	If you have additional comments, notes, or feedback, please utilize this space.	2353	522	499	100
Parents/Guardians and Community Members	Same as above	4148	1010	917	183
Total	-	6501	1532	1416	283

Overview: Closed-Ended Question Survey Results for HCPS Teachers and Staff Members

There were 2,353 survey responses received from HCPS teachers and staff members as shown in the table below.

Role	Number of Respondents
Classroom Teacher	1,307
School-based Staff	762
School-based Administrators	71
Central Office Staff	167
Central Office Administrator/Supervisor	46
Total	2,353

Figure 2:Total Number of Staff Respondents

As shown in Appendix A, a total of 1,753 HCPS teachers and staff members (**75 percent**) indicated their preference for HCPS to conduct **virtual instruction** while 600 teachers and staff members (25 percent) wanted HCPS to close all schools and offices in the case of an inclement weather event that prevents safe transportation to schools.

Of the 1,753 HCPS teachers and staff members who indicated their preference for virtual instruction, 1,432 teachers and staff members (**82 percent**) indicated they would like the virtual instruction to be **asynchronous only**. Of the remaining staff members who prefer virtual instruction, 268 staff members (15 percent) indicated they would like both asynchronous and synchronous; 35 staff members (2 percent) indicated they would like synchronous only; and 18 staff members (1 percent) selected 'Other' as their choice for virtual instruction. *See definitions of asynchronous and synchronous at the beginning of this report*.

Overview: Closed-Ended Question Survey Results for Parents/Guardians and Community

As shown in Appendix B, there were **4,149** responses received from parents/guardians of current HCPS students and community members as shown in the table below.

Role	Number of Respondents	
Parent/Guardian of a Current HCPS Student	4,048	
Community Member	101	
Total	4,149	

Figure 3: Total Number of Parental/Community Members Respondents

A total of 2,242 parent/guardians and community members (**54 percent**) indicated their preference for HCPS to conduct **virtual instruction** while 1,907 (46 percent) wanted HCPS to close all schools and offices in the case of inclement weather event that prevents safe transportation to schools. Of the 2,242 parents/guardians and community members who indicated their preference for virtual instruction, 1,288 (**57.5 percent**) indicated they would like the virtual instruction to be **asynchronous only**. Of the remaining parents/guardians and community members who prefer virtual instruction, 694 (31 percent) indicated they would like both asynchronous and synchronous; 235 (10.5 percent) indicated they would like synchronous only; and 25 (1 percent) selected 'Other' as their choice for virtual instruction.

Notes

- Of the 4,048 respondents who selected the 'Parent/Guardian of a Current HCPS Student' option in the survey, 3,926 (97 percent) provided valid and verifiable student IDs.
- The remaining 122 respondents (3 percent of all parent/guardian respondents) with invalid student IDs had the following preferences for virtual instruction:
 - 35 preferred asynchronous only.
 - 24 favored both asynchronous and synchronous.
 - 10 preferred synchronous only.
 - 53 selected 'Other.'
- It is important to note that the 122 responses with invalid student IDs did not significantly impact the overall results.

Analysis of Survey Open-ended Comments

An analysis of open-ended survey responses yields the following themes and findings related to perceptions of and suggestions during the 2023-2024 school year. Key themes are organized by respondent type, teachers and staff, and parents and community members. All *sample quotes* in this report are transcribed verbatim from the responses given by survey respondents.

Teachers and Staff: Asynchronous Learning

- **Teachers and staff demonstrate a preference for Asynchronous Learning.** The majority of staff responses indicated a preference for asynchronous learning during inclement weather days. This method allows students to complete work at their own pace and schedule, accommodating potential family or weather-related obligations.
- Teachers and staff also noted that asynchronous learning allows staff to remain safe at home in the case of dangerous weather and provides flexibility for those who are also parents to care for their children.

Figure 4: Benefits	of Asynchronous	Learning

SAMPLE QUOTES	
"I believe an asynchronous lesson provides for more educational opportunities . Students could study the weather in their 6th-grade science course. Students could calculate the profits of shoveling snow which involves both math and economics. Lastly, PE by actually going out to shovel . Students could collaborate with each other to assist community members in need." - Teacher	"Asynchronous because you do not know the family/property obligations that the weather may cause. It's better that they can complete it on their own schedule . It is also easier to make up in the event of no wi-fi or electricity ." - Teacher
"12-month employees should have the same opportunity to work from home , not have to report to buildings when it is unsafe to do so due to inclement weather." – Staff	"As a teacher with young children, I will not be able to do live teaching effectively - that's why I chose asynchronous" - Teacher

Teachers and Staff: Access and Equity

- Some staff have concerns about the lack of access to reliable internet for virtual instruction in some households, particularly in rural areas where weather can disrupt connectivity. Some suggest distributing Wi-Fi hotspots to socioeconomically disadvantaged families to ensure equitable access to virtual instruction.
 - Some suggest providing printable snow day packets for younger learners as a practical alternative to virtual instruction. There is a call for equity in decision-making, acknowledging that not all students have a stable environment for virtual learning.
 - Asynchronous learning is preferred over synchronous learning due to the flexibility it offers to families and students who may have other obligations during inclement weather or lack of reliable internet access.
- There are also concerns about the additional workload on teachers to prepare for virtual instruction and the potential inequity for staff who may not be able to work from home due to childcare or other responsibilities.

SAMPLE QUOTES	
"I would like the students to have asynchronous lessons. I don't think the work should be due right away, though, in case someone doesn't have Internet or power . Give the students a few days once they return to turn the work into their teachers ." – Teacher	"Looking through a lens of equity, it is hard to assume that every child has reliable internet and or a stable environment that would allow them to participate in virtual instruction." - Teacher
"I prefer asynchronous learning for snow days. I think it is the best option, and the easiest to meet all the needs of all students. I would not be against synchronous; however, I do not feel it would be well received, and it would be hard to hold the students accountable. This would also be hard to teach. Live instruction, especially something that will be taught virtually needs to be planned out. We would have better chances of having quality and meaningful instruction if it were asynchronous." - Teacher	"My reasoning for [choosing 'closed'] is because many parents still need to go to work and students will need an opportunity to complete the expected virtual work. This may not be possible for elementary students if parents need to make arrangements for someone to look after their child . The child may or may not have internet access to complete the work, causing additional dilemmas for the family. Safety on snow days should be the priority ." - Teacher

Figure 5: Access and Equity

Teachers and Staff: Closing Schools and Offices

- Some teachers and staff express strong sentiments for preserving traditional snow days for students and staff to enjoy and make memories, as well as for mental health breaks. Additionally, there is a call for safety considerations for all personnel, not just teachers and bus drivers, during inclement weather.
- Concerns were raised about the feasibility and equity of virtual instruction during inclement weather days, particularly due to inconsistent and unreliable internet access among students. Virtual instruction is seen as particularly challenging for younger students, special education students, and those requiring alternative caretakers, with a preference for take-home packets for elementary students.
- The additional workload for teachers in preparing for virtual instruction was highlighted, as well as the potential for students to forget devices, leading to catch-up work. Some staff members, particularly those with young children, may not be able to provide instruction or attend meetings during inclement weather days.
- There is a suggestion to use asynchronous lessons prepared in the previous year for inclement weather days. A proposed solution is to have a mix of traditional snow days and virtual learning days, with virtual instruction being the last resort to avoid extending the school year.

SAMPLE QUOTES		
"Students and teachers need time to spend with their families and enjoy a beautiful snow day." - Teacher	"[Closing schools addresses] safety concerns with being on the roads during inclement weather." - Staff	
"While I work to provide special education instruction for the virtual school, I will not have childcare available on inclement weather days . If the roads aren't safe for school buses, then they aren't safe for my babysitter, either. I will not be ignoring my young children at home to provide instruction on inclement weather days." - Teacher	"Virtual instruction at the elementary level is not a viable option. Many young students still struggle to log in on their own . Navigating virtually will be something an adult would have to do with the child. A take-home packet is a more practical approach for elementary to utilize during inclement weather days." - Teacher	

Figure 6: Benefits of Closing Schools

Teachers and Staff: Leveraging Technology and Resources

- Respondents highlight the various resources and technology the district can leverage to make the most out of snow days. Staff suggests that students are comfortable with using key technologies, such as computer devices and virtual learning platforms, so transitioning to occasional virtual learning could be feasible.
- Teachers and staff emphasize the value and importance of utilizing the asynchronous materials they have created in previous years. Respondents also emphasize the importance of planning for asynchronous inclement weather days before the winter. There are also suggestions to increase the limit of virtual instruction days from 3 to 5, in anticipation of a colder winter with more precipitation.
- There is a call for trust in educators to conduct virtual snow days, especially given the investment in training and resources during the COVID-19 pandemic.

SAMPLE QUOTES	
"We have a fantastic virtual platform, so we should absolutely make use of it! Teachers should have guided asynchronous lessons posted to Canvas for their students in cases of inclement weather. This way, tested courses will not lose an instructional day and students with unreliable internet can download assignments, complete them with or without internet access, and eventually share them back with the instructor." - Teacher	"With the level of technology available today, it is possible to have students meet the objectives of the lesson. After Memorial Day, it is often very hard to keep students engaged. I see the vast majority of the students leave each night with their student laptops. There are schools that have practiced this and have found that virtual asynchronous days are effective. The only way teachers can become effective on this platform is to have the opportunity to use it." - Teacher
"Students already transport devices back and forth on a daily basis. We are behind many other school districts that have been using virtual inclement weather days for many years. Let's take advantage of the 1:1 we have in place!" - Teacher	"We had the opportunity to prepare virtual instruction during the 2020-2021 school year , and we were trained on the process, so there is no reason we should not continue to use what we have learned. Colleges use this type of instruction for many of their classes now." - Teacher

Figure 7: Leveraging Technology and Resources

Teachers and Staff: Mental Health Benefits

- Teachers acknowledge the need for balance between maintaining educational continuity and allowing children to enjoy snow days as a mental health break. The use of familiar and accessible technology, such as laptops, can facilitate virtual instruction during snow days, but there are concerns about students forgetting or misusing devices.
- Respondents emphasize the importance of allowing children to enjoy and interact with fresh snow, suggesting that this experience is a crucial part of childhood. The text suggests that students should be allowed to enjoy at least one traditional snow day before moving to asynchronous learning. Asynchronous learning is favored as it allows students to enjoy the snow while continuing their learning at a time that suits them and their families.

Figure 8: Mental Health and Family Time

SAMPLE QUOTES		
"Asynchronous would allow students the time to enjoy the snow while continuing with learning at a time they and their families deem appropriate. It helps working parents of multiple children time to complete the work in the afternoon/evening. It helps balance make-up time because adding at the end of the year ends up being wasted with family vacations, time after senior leave, etc." - Teacher	"One of the joys of snow is the ability to enjoy and interact with it when it is fresh. Allow children to be children - encourage them to experience the event. Also concerned about unequal access and workspace for various students - would put them at a greater disadvantage. Teaching virtually requires a different set of lessons and set up - the additional work burden on teachers is not measurable and cannot be accurately forecast by the teachers." - Staff	
"I liked the plan that was in place for asynchronous instruction during snow days last year. At the elementary level, students received 20 minutes of reading, 20 minutes of math, and 20 minutes of special areas. I felt like this was a good compromise that allowed us to minimize make-up days at the end of the year while allowing students time to experience the snow and allowing parents to be available to support multiple students since instruction didn't take the full length of the day." - Teacher	"Close [schools because] not everyone has access at home for virtual instruction (my grandchildren do not). [Also] allow staff to enjoy snow time with their family and make memories - mental health break. Thank you for considering our thoughts!" - Staff	

Parents and Community Members: Traditional Snow Days

- Some parents and community members believe that traditional snow days allow for mental health days for students and staff alike. Others believe that the magic of snow days that they experienced in childhood should be preserved for current students. Parents worry that forcing children to engage in virtual learning these days accelerates their maturation and deprives them of valuable experiences.
- Some respondents believe that virtual instruction may not be as effective as in-person instruction. Parents worry about the amount of time on the screen their students would be expected to spend. Other respondents suggest that virtual learning may not be accessible or beneficial for students with learning disabilities and that it can be difficult for parents to ensure their children are completing their work.
- Worries about access and equity also influence parents' opinions of virtual learning. Some families do not have reliable internet access and worry that these gaps could put students at risk of falling behind.

SAMPLE QUOTES		
"I encourage that not ALL inclement weather days be handled as virtual . A balance between virtual (whether synchronous or asynchronous) instruction and NO instruction is welcomed." - Parent	"Parents who work from home find the additional tasks of being part teacher/part tech support for a young elementary student incredibly difficult to sustain while trying to keep an excited child on task and WORK from home simultaneously." - Parent	
"Many of the families at our school do not have reliable internet at home and I feel that they would struggle to get online and participate. I also feel that moving forward with learning would lead to students falling further behind ." – Community Member	"Virtual school has not proven to be effective. If anything, it creates more stress on families than anything else. Especially if it's a snow day allow kids to be kids and play in the snow rather than being stuck inside sitting in front of a computer all day which is not healthy for young growing minds." - Parent	

Figure 9: Benefits of Traditional Snow Days

Parents and Community Members: Virtual Learning

- Parents and Community members suggest that virtual learning during inclement weather days is a more acceptable and feasible solution to avoid extending the school year. Virtual learning during inclement weather days can provide families with flexibility and help maintain the planned length of the school year.
- Many parents appreciate the flexibility of virtual learning strategies that can ensure continuity of instruction. One parent emphasizes the need for continuity for students taking Advanced Placement (AP) classes who cannot afford to miss instruction due to bad weather.

Figure 10. Virtual Learning Panofite

Figure 10. Virtual Learning Benefits		
SAMPLE QUOTES		
"Students taking AP classes cannot sacrifice missed instruction due to inclement weather. Having asynchronous instruction would allow for these students to get the content they need for the AP exams in May ." - Parent	"While I understand the value of a snow day, there is little to no meaningful instruction occurring once June hits - students are hot and done. Teachers are hot and done and everyone wants summer break. It makes so much sense to have asynchronous instruction on those days with a flexible due date." - Parent	
"Depending on the number of consecutive days then I would like some synchronous instruction [after asynchronous days]." - Parent	"These computers were handed out for COVID and were supposed to be used for inclement weather or other reasons. Why are we not using these computers the way they intended to be used? Not in the classroom but outside the school." - Parent	

Parents and Community Members: Balanced and Flexible Learning

- Parents and community members suggest putting in place flexible options for inclement weather days. Some believe that snow days could still be utilized depending on the severity of the weather. After an agreed-upon amount of time, if students are out of school for too long, then virtual learning can be utilized. Parents suggest allowing teachers oversight to determine the type of virtual learning that is utilized based on the situation.
- **Respondents worry about losing summer vacation days due to snow days.** Many focus on offering balanced solutions, mainly relying on a combination of closed and virtual days, to limit the days students must make up class at the end of the year.
- Parents raise a few logistical considerations for virtual learning. These included the need for lighter devices or the option to use home devices for asynchronous work, the potential for power or internet outages during severe weather, and the challenge of managing multiple children's online learning in households with more than one child. Some parents also suggested that half-days of virtual learning could be a good compromise.

Figure 11: Balance and Flexibility

SAMPLE QUOTES	
"Teachers have spent extensive time creating asynchronous lessons (last year and this year) in order to prepare for possible inclement weather days. Using any synchronous or asynchronous weather days *should* avoid using weather days in June 2024. It would be disappointing if we used these virtual days and still used the planned weather days We haven't had snow in years- if we have a winter with extensive snowfall, please use the virtual days effectively for parents and staff." - Parent	"I know many people have argued that these kids should have snow days "like we did in the good old days," but isn't it so great that we have made advancement, and our kids no longer have to miss school and make it up in the summer when they actually want to be outside? Most of our snow days aren't even playable snow. I believe that's a lousy excuse to not want virtual learning." - Parent
"A combination option would be best like Cecil County will close for the first few inclement weather days. And only after 2 closings will they utilize virtual instruction. First asynchronously then synchronous if went end up having more than 4/5 days weather prevents students from getting safely into their schools." - Parent	"I would like the option for my child to get work done and have live instruction IF NEEDED . They can finish at a decent time and enjoy their snow day. It also won't count as an actual snow day which is great. Our kids desire a full summer. " – Parent

Parents and Community Members: Impact on Parents and Staff

- Parents highlighted the challenges of managing their children's online learning while also handling their work responsibilities. Some parents worry about the burden virtual learning could have on parents and caregivers, who may struggle to supervise and assist their children with online assignments while managing their work responsibilities. The stress and challenges are amplified for families with multiple children or those with children who require a structured learning environment, such as those with specialized needs.
- Respondents also express a desire for clear communication and planning around virtual learning on inclement weather days. They want to know exactly what virtual learning would entail and how it would be managed. Some parents suggest that the school should provide tutorials or sessions on how to manage virtual learning before it is needed.

Figure 12: Impact on Parents and Staff

SAMPLE QUOTES	
"Even if school is closed for inclement weather my work still expects me to put in a full day on-site or remotely . With one kid in elementary and one in middle school, I don't want to have to teach them and get my own work hours in . Furthermore, the value of instruction they will be getting is very low given this is an asynchronous lesson plan the teacher had to create at the last minute just in case school closed; the actual learning would be minimal." – Parent	Virtual learning is like a living, breathing nightmare. It requires constant attention from a parent or caregiver to ensure that the student is staying on task and completing their work. That becomes a burden on the parent or caregiver who may not be equipped or available to devote time to such a task. Thankfully I only have one child to worry about, I can't imagine the struggles of having multiple children to supervise. Virtual learning is extremely frustrating on our end, and not worth the stress and inevitable arguments that will occur between parent and child because virtual learning is a nightmare. Think of all the ADHD children out there, who need that sterile school environment to focus and do their work. They will be too distracted at home. Virtual learning is not a guaranteed ideal learning environment for all families considered. I vote a resounding NO!" - Parent
"In person will be more beneficial even if that means making up a day . Having students jump into virtual after never doing it (K students mainly) is not going to be beneficial for the students and just more work for the teachers ." - Parent	"I'm also a teacher. Managing the work my students complete, plus helping my own child cancels out the benefit of a virtual inclement weather day. "- Parent

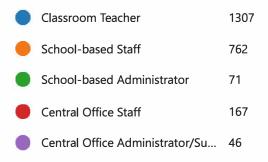
Appendix A: Closed-Ended Survey Results for Teachers and Staff Members

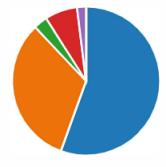
This section of the report provides the results of the closed-ended questions of the 2023-2024 Inclement Weather Response Survey **For HCPS Teachers and Staff Members**.

2023-2024 Inclement Weather Response Survey For HCPS Teachers and Staff Members



1. I am completing this survey as:



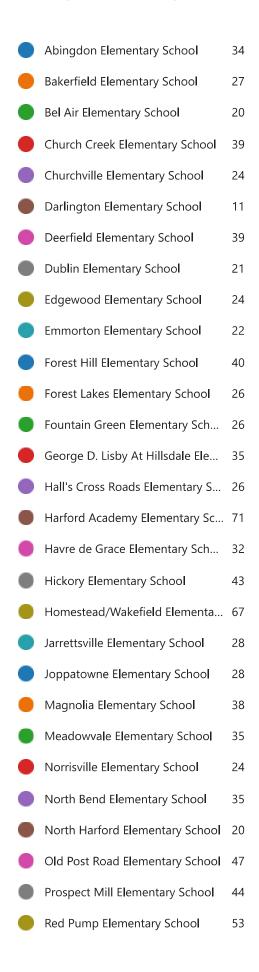


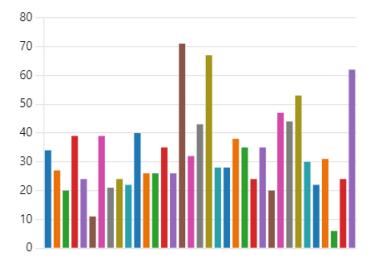
2. Select your school level





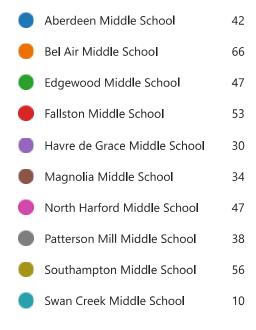
3. Select your elementary school

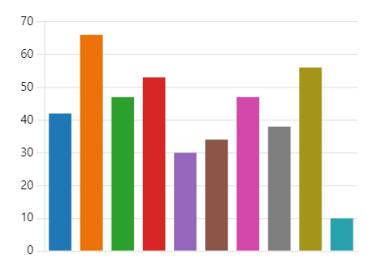




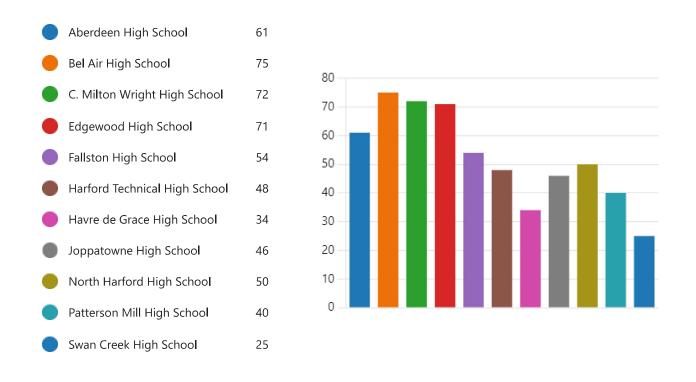


4. Select your middle school





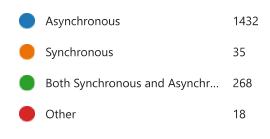
5. Select your high school

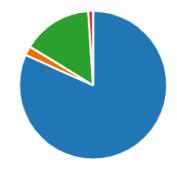


6. In the case of an inclement weather event that prevents safe transportation to schools, I would like HCPS to do the following: (please choose one option)



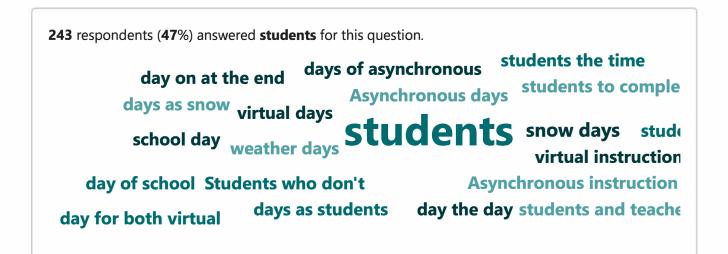
7. I would like virtual instruction to be: (please choose one)





8. If you have additional comments, notes, or feedback, please utilize this space.

522 Responses

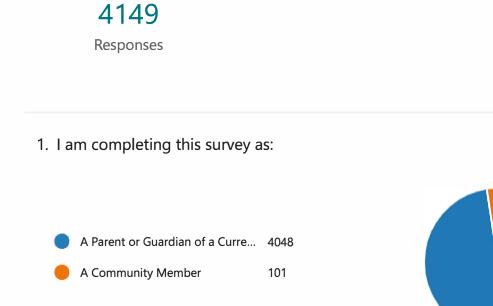


Appendix B: Closed-Ended Survey Results for Parents and Community Members

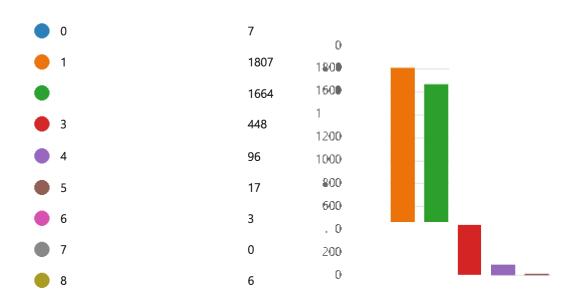
This section of the report provides the results of the closed-ended questions of the 2023-2024 Inclement Weather Response Survey For Parents/Guardians and Community Members.

Please note that identifiable information, such as student IDs and names or email addresses, provided by parents and community members are removed from this report.

2023-2024 HCPS Inclement Weather Response Survey (FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS)



2. How many children do you have who currently attend Harford County Public Schools?



3. Please enter your child's valid student ID.



4. Please enter your first and last name.

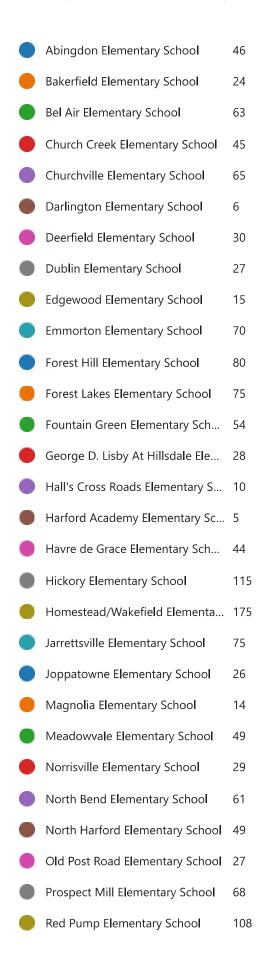
108 Responses

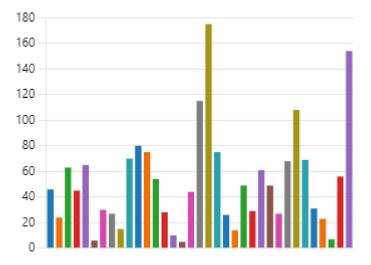
5. Please enter your email address. For Example: john smith@gmail.com

108 Responses 6. Select your child's school level/your community school level.



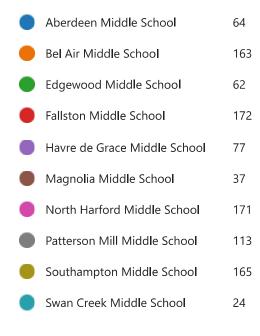
7. Select your child's elementary school/your community school.

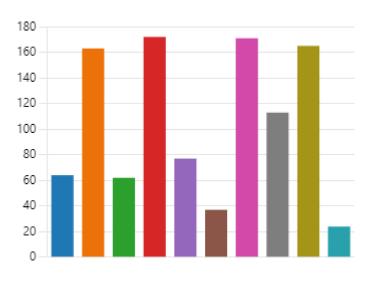




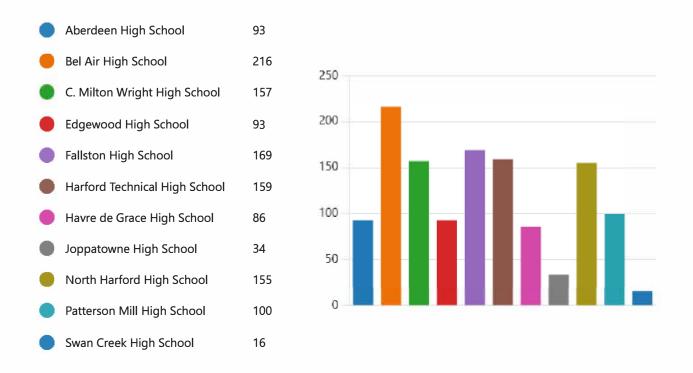


8. Select your child's middle school/your community school.

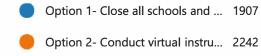




9. Select your child's high school/your community school.



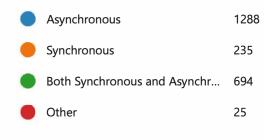
10. In the case of an inclement weather event that prevents safe transportation to schools, I would like HCPS to do the following: (please choose one option)

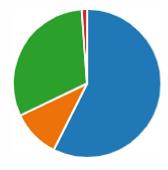


Option 2- Conduct virtual instru... 2242



11. I would like virtual instruction to be: (please choose one)





12. If you have additional comments, notes, or feedback, please utilize this space.

