



# 2024 HCPS BLUEPRINT FEEDBACK IMPLEMENTATION PLAN SURVEY ANALYSIS

HARFORD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## FINAL RESEARCH REPORT

Prepared by

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The Department of Research and Program Evaluation values its collaboration with Hanover Research. This final report integrates some findings from the Hanover Report on open-ended response analysis, albeit with some modifications by HCPS.

## INTRODUCTION

Harford County Public Schools (HCPS) continues to prioritize feedback on its Blueprint for Maryland's Future. In 2020, HCPS developed its implementation plan for the 2020 Blueprint for Maryland's Future. Plan development brought together central office staff, school-based staff, and community members to discuss what that implementation should look like. The discussions focused on early childhood education, college and career readiness, career ladder, student support, and budget.

After the completion of the Blueprint Feedback Survey, the HCPS Department of Strategic Initiatives partnered with the HCPS Department of Research and Program Evaluation and external researchers to synthesize and analyze participant feedback, sharing findings and recommendations to inform HCPS' Blueprint Implementation Plan. Now, in 2024, the district has once again administered its Blueprint Feedback Survey to central office staff, school-based staff, and community members to collect feedback. Approximately 200 responses were collected. This report provides a complete analysis of the four open-ended response questions included in the survey.

In this report, current and past results will be used to conduct a longitudinal analysis to track how responses have changed over time, if at all.

## METHODOLOGY

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

- **Q1: What is exciting about what HCPS is working on to implement the Blueprint requirements?**
- **Q2: What is challenging about what HCPS is working on to implement the Blueprint requirements?**
- **Q3: What aspects of Blueprint implementation is HCPS demonstrating exemplar progress?**
- **Q4: What aspects of Blueprint implementation does HCPS need to improve planning for better progress?**

To ensure findings are relevant for HCPS decision-making, blank and invalid responses were removed during data cleaning, along with responses like "not applicable" (N/A) that do not provide meaningful perceptions or adequately address the survey questions. However, responses such as "not sure" or "none" were retained, as they may reflect uncertainty about the plan or overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction with its elements. Key themes were developed based solely on the remaining cleaned and relevant response content.

It should be noted, however, that the analysis provided depth of understanding about the particular question rather than statistical significance or generalizable conclusions. Both human and AI tools were utilized to develop themes and key findings. The findings are segmented into two core respondent groups including employees (e.g., school-based staff, central office staff, board members) and community members (e.g., parents, community or business partners). The following figure details the total *cleaned* survey responses used in the analysis.

**Figure A: Number of Coded Responses by Subgroup and Aggregate**

Survey Question	Number of Cleaned Open-Ended Responses			
	Aggregate	Employees	Community Members	Other/Prefer Not To Say
Question 1: What is exciting about what HCPS is working on to implement the Blueprint requirements?	147	89	53	5
Question 2: What is challenging about what HCPS is working on to implement the Blueprint requirements?	165	97	63	5
Question 3: For which aspects of Blueprint implementation is HCPS demonstrating exemplary progress?	114	66	44	4
Question 4: For which aspects of the Blueprint implementation does HCPS need to improve planning for better progress?	138	78	56	4

## OPEN-ENDED SURVEY QUESTION ANALYSIS

An analysis of open-ended survey responses yields the following themes and findings related to perceptions of the 2024 Blueprint Implementation Plan. Key themes are organized by each Blueprint pillar, and where applicable, will report longitudinal trends with the 2023 Blueprint Implementation Plan open-ended response analysis. Key themes from the 2024 survey are prevalent across respondent groups; however, where applicable, key themes within respondent groups may be featured within the selected sample quotes.

## Pillar #1: Early Childhood Education

### Longitudinal Findings – Comparing 2023 and 2024 Survey Results



Respondents across both surveys consistently underscore the importance of investing in early childhood education and pre-kindergarten.

- **Key Finding from 2023:** *“Engage stakeholders in discussions regarding the logistics of expanding Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs. In general, stakeholders are very excited about the potential for accessible, high-quality ECE but feel they are not privy to the logistics of implementation. Staff and parents are concerned about the resources needed for implementation, raising questions about staffing, physical space, and materials. Community or business partners express concern regarding the impact of programming on the community, including the private workforce.”*

### 2024 Blueprint Feedback

- **Excitement About Pre-K Expansion (Q1):** Respondents express significant enthusiasm about the increased focus on kindergarten readiness, especially with the expansion of access to Pre-K education. Many view this as a crucial step in addressing early learning gaps and providing more resources for families and students.
- **Exemplary Progress in Early Childhood Education (Q3):** Respondents commend the expansion and improvement in early childhood and Pre-K programs, which are seen as beneficial for student development.
- **Limited Challenges:** Few respondents, if any, have negative feedback regarding HCPS’s planning and progress within this Blueprint pillar. Those who do mention challenges speak about the challenges of funding, resource allocation, and the actual implementation of expanded Pre-K programs.

**Figure 1: Early Childhood Education**

SAMPLE QUOTES	
<i>“Increasing access to Pre K is important if the goal is to address foundational deficits many children have entering kindergarten”</i> - Parent	<i>“More students will have access to Pre-K Programs allowing for a successful transition to kindergarten.”</i> - HCPS School-Based Employee
<i>“I’m excited to see Pre- k offered to all students.”</i> - Community or Business Partner	<i>“I am glad early interventions at pre k levels are being provided so all students have an opportunity to be immersed in educational settings at a young age.”</i> - HCPS School-Based Employee

**Note:** Please note that the quotes included in this report are provided **verbatim** to ensure accuracy and authenticity. No changes have been made to the original wording.

## Pillar #2: Elevating Educators

### Longitudinal Findings – Comparing 2023 and 2024 Survey Results



2024 survey respondents still highlight Elevating Educators as an exciting Blueprint element while also naming challenges and areas of improvement.

- **Key Finding from 2023:** *“While identifying areas of improvement, both stakeholder groups view supporting teachers and leaders as exciting and important for Blueprint implementation. Twenty-eight percent of all respondents feel excited that the plan supports teachers and leaders, and 19 percent feel HCPS is demonstrating exemplary progress in this area. This theme is aligned with the pillar, Elevating Educators, which emphasizes the importance of hiring and retaining effective teachers for all students. Stakeholders highlight the importance of valuing educators through adequate compensation, professional development, and teaching resources. Equity is a component of many themes referenced in responses, including equitable practices for hiring and compensating teachers. Some respondents feel HCPS could improve its efforts to recruit staff with diverse backgrounds and identities. Additionally, several respondents feel the district provides support for new hires but lacks support for current teachers.”*

### 2024 Blueprint Feedback

- **Excitement About Teacher Advancement and Support (Q1, Q3, Q4):** Respondents appreciate efforts to increase teacher salaries and provide career advancement opportunities through initiatives like the Career Ladder. Many also positively perceive the focus on professional development and incentives for teachers to improve their skills; the National Board Certification incentives are often mentioned as positive steps towards competitive teacher compensation and recognition.

Respondents recommend HCPS continue to improve its career ladder opportunities, professional development, and recognition for all staff, not just teachers. There is also a call for improved support for conditionally certified teachers.

- **Progress in Diversity Initiatives Amidst Mixed Perception (Q1-Q4):** Several responses indicate a positive view of HCPS's efforts to promote diversity and inclusion within the educational system, including increasing diversity among new hires and supporting students with language barriers. There has been a notable increase in the diversity of new hires, with a significant percentage increase in teachers of color (although some raise concerns about the persistent lack of diversity among teachers). Some respondents highlight a need to increase diversity among school leadership and participants in programs like the Future U Teacher Leadership Academy. Strategies are being devised in collaboration with the Office of Equity, Recruitment, and Retention to address this.

However, some respondents express general concerns about the Blueprint's focus on diversity potentially overshadowing merit and skill-based education. There are mixed feelings about the focus on diversity and equity, with some parents and staff members concerned that it might lead to hiring based on “checkboxes” rather than qualifications.

- **Challenges with Staffing and Support (Q2):** Respondents note some challenges with teacher retention, recruitment, and support. The feedback indicates a need for more trained, qualified

teachers and support staff to handle increasing class sizes and to provide more individualized attention to students. There is also a call for better support for teachers, including professional development and recognition, especially for those working in special education classrooms and with Pre-kindergarten students.

**Figure 2: Elevating Educators**

SAMPLE QUOTES	
<p><i>"We should be raising salaries sooner rather than later. It's required by the blueprint anyway so the sooner we raise salaries we can keep the better teachers.."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>- Other/Prefer Not to Say</i></p>	<p><i>"I appreciate that educators who go above and beyond will have recognition and financial incentives."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>- School-Based Employee</i></p>
<p><i>"Exemplar progress is demonstrated through steps being made to increase diversity among HCPS staff."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>- Parent</i></p>	<p><i>"It is exciting that HCPS is looking to elevate educators and provide a higher level of quality education, but where is the support and recognition for the team members beyond classroom teachers."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>- School-Based Employee</i></p>
<p><i>"Statements such as 'teachers of color to more closely align with student population and to improve student outcomes...' I understand what is trying to be said, but I feel it's an EXTREMELY discriminatory statement. As a parent... I want the best qualified professional for the job regardless of their color. It's an embarrassment that a statement like this is even in our blueprint. "</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>- Parent</i></p>	<p><i>"Changing roles of specialists and coaches in buildings to allow for more student facing time and classroom impact is a significant transition. Leadership must consider scheduling challenges and how to intentionally assign co-teaching support within their buildings. The coming year will be one of transition and with that also comes the challenge of staff anxiety about what this will look like."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>- Central Office Employee</i></p>



## Pillar #3: College and Career Readiness (CCR)

### Longitudinal Findings – Comparing 2023 and 2024 Survey Results



HCPS stakeholders remain excited about College and Career Readiness initiatives, but the 2024 survey reveals a new concern of pushing students into college preparation tracks too early.

- **Key Finding from 2023:** *“Stakeholders are most excited about the increase in educational opportunities for students, specifically highlighting two related Blueprint pillars: College and Career Readiness (CCR) and Student Support. Thirty-three percent of respondents highlight exciting elements related to “College and Career Readiness (North Star),” such as career pathways and dual enrollment... Respondents do highlight the challenge of building an equitable and respectful environment within the overall plan of improving both CCR and Student Supports. Examples include ... adjusting the accessibility of programs (e.g., dual enrollment). Both employee and non-employee stakeholder groups express excitement about these topics, especially for pathways that prepare students for postsecondary options other than college.*

### 2024 Blueprint Feedback

- **Excitement About New Career Programs (Q1-Q3):** HCPS’s focus on career readiness (alongside college preparation) and the introduction of new initiatives such as apprenticeships, trade opportunities, dual enrollment, and career programs have been well-received by respondents. Respondents highlight the implementation of the Middle School Innovation and the North Star CCR opportunities as exciting developments.
- **Exemplary Progress in CCR (Q3):** Several respondents note exemplary progress in the implementation of career paths, career readiness programs, and partnerships that enhance career and college preparedness among students. Many also praise the increase in opportunities for students to earn college credits (e.g., through dual enrollment), particularly benefiting those in financial need.
- **Concerns with Educational Focus (Q2-Q4):** Some respondents raise concerns about the appropriateness of pushing college-level courses on high school students who may not be ready. The general push towards early college can be perceived as detrimental to students' emotional and social development, especially if students miss out on their “traditional” senior year experience. Suggestions include holding college classes on high school campuses to maintain student involvement in school activities.
- **Mixed Perceptions of Testing (Q4):** While some respondents stress the need for more direct instruction to meet state testing standards, others criticize the heavy reliance on standardized testing in general.
- **Curriculum and Instruction Challenges (Q2, Q4):** Again, some concerns were raised about the push for early college enrollment and the lack of preparation for students. Some respondents perceive the introduction of college-level classes as premature and insufficient support for students with disabilities is concerning. Some raise doubts about the appropriateness of the curriculum and insufficient supports for students, particularly for lower-performing students, young students, or students with disabilities.

Additionally, some respondents perceive a lack of focus on special education and recommend improving the Blueprint plan to better reflect the needs of students.

Finally, some respondents suggest integrating more real-life skills, such as financial literacy and vocational training, into the curriculum.

**Figure 3: College and Career Readiness**

<b>SAMPLE QUOTES</b>	
<p><i>"When looking at the college readiness, Dual enrollment and Career paths schools and educators need to address the lack of options for seniors. While I am excited for the dual enrollment, there are limitations when certain classes are not offered in person and or all times of the day. It appears that seniors are being pushed out of the door earlier and forced to take half days. I feel we forget that seniors are seniors in high school not college."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>- Parent</i></p>	<p><i>"A lot of it is being pushed too soon without preparing the students. I have a lot of students who really struggled and failed out of HCC classes because they just weren't ready. I don't think it should be pushed SO hard. It is an opportunity but not one that makes sense for all kids."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>- School-Based Employee</i></p>
<p><i>"Pillar 3 [College and Career Readiness] shows that there is a serious focus on what public school lacks currently, and that's progress in the right direction."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>- Community or Business Partner</i></p>	<p><i>"The many opportunities for high school students to focus on career programs. It is refreshing to see that we are moving in a better direction for students who do not attend four-year universities."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>- School-Based Employee</i></p>
<p><i>"[The most exciting elements of the Blueprint are] the Innovations being made in Middle School. "</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>- Other/Prefer Not to Say</i></p>	<p><i>"[Exemplary progress is being made in] College/career readiness: career coaches, apprenticeships."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>- Central Office Employee</i></p>

## Pillar #4: Student Supports

### Longitudinal Findings – Comparing 2023 and 2024 Survey Results



The 2024 survey results reveal more challenges with the Student Supports pillar.

- Key Finding from 2023:** *“Stakeholders share positive perceptions that the plan increases various student services and supports. Stakeholders also highlight how the plan leverages community resources through partnerships to support families and students (e.g., mental health services). For example, one non-employee respondent states, “There are schools that do a great job of including the community and have reciprocal supports.” Related are comments about the community school model and its positive impact in increasing access to opportunities and support structures. Notably, employees respond more frequently within this theme (31%) than non-employees (13%).”*

### 2024 Blueprint Feedback

- Renewed Focus on Student Supports (Q1, Q3, Q4):** Respondents highlight the continuous need for more comprehensive student support services as a lack of necessary mental health support persists for students and teachers. However, respondents appreciate the renewed attention HCPS has given to student mental health support and wellness, including the enhancement of behavioral and social-emotional supports. They emphasize the role of school nurses and health services in improving educational outcomes.
- Diversity and Equity (Q1):** Some respondents also appreciate the focus on equity and diversity, citing initiatives to assist students with language barriers and efforts to recruit a diverse staff.
- Class Size and Behavior:** Several respondents call for smaller class sizes to better support students and manage behaviors.

**Figure 4: Student Supports**

SAMPLE QUOTES	
<i>“I am excited that Special Education is listed as a student support (although last to be listed).”</i> – Parent	<i>“[Exemplary progress is being made in] Student Supports - examples: Care Solace, HOPE training.”</i> – School-Based Employee
<i>“Class sizes, student behaviors, lack of parental involvement, other socio-economic factors will remain a challenge.”</i> – Community or Business Partner	<i>“How are the mental health aspects of children in poverty and primary children being addressed? These populations seem to be the most traumatized as they come to school after Covid.”</i> – School-Based Employee
<i>“All initiatives seem to serve all aspects of the educational system in a positive and upward way. I’m specifically happy to see more support in the areas of diversity and inclusion which support students with language barriers and hiring staff of color. ”</i> – Parent	<i>“Student supports-- there are simply not enough special educators, paras, assistants.”</i> – Central Office Employee

## Pillar #5: Budget and Accountability

### Longitudinal Findings – Comparing 2023 and 2024 Survey Results



Budget and Accountability has remained the most concerning area of the Blueprint, with lingering questions around budgets and implementation.

- **Key Finding from 2023:** *“The most frequently reported areas of challenge and improvement relate to the “Accountability/Foundation” Blueprint pillar. Respondents highlight concerns with the specific resources and implementation elements of the plan, including funding, staffing, and alignment/accountability. Respondents express concerns that the district will be able to carry out all aspects of the plan and hold staff and leaders accountable for the changes. The question of whether HCPS has sufficient funding is a frequent concern, as stakeholders feel the plan has a wide and ambitious scope.*
- *“For example, stakeholders worry whether there will be sufficient staffing and physical space to support various Blueprint initiatives, such as the new ECE programming. In addition, respondents cite teacher compensation as an important limitation in recruiting and retaining high-quality educators and remain concerned about attainment of the desired outcomes. Many stakeholders seek better alignment with desired practices that meet student and staff needs. Notably, non-employee respondents are more concerned regarding alignment and accountability as they indicate receiving fewer details on plan implementation.”*

### 2024 Blueprint Feedback

- **Mixed Perceptions of the Blueprint and HCPS Accountability (Q1):** While some respondents express satisfaction with the direction HCPS is taking, others are critical, viewing the Blueprint as lacking in substance or disconnected from the needs of the community. These reservations often include concerns about its complexity, potential for inequity, and potential inability to meet the needs of students and the economy. Some raise doubts about the feasibility of implementing the initiatives and the impact on HCPS's budget.
- **Budget, Resource Allocation, and Operational Concerns (Q2-Q4):** Respondents express significant concerns about budget cuts, lack of funding, and mismanagement of funds. Many discuss the impact of budget cuts on various aspects of education, including class sizes, teacher salaries, and the availability of resources for special education and advanced programs. Some feedback points to excessive spending on administrative positions at the expense of teaching roles. They desire more transparent and effective use of resources as well as better planning to manage growing student populations and maintain quality education.
- **Implementation and Planning (Q2):** Many respondents feel that the Blueprint is being implemented too quickly without adequate preparation, comprehensive training, or consideration of the unique needs of different student populations—especially amidst population increases in Harford County. While respondents understand the challenge of making systemic changes, they also perceive a disconnect between the Blueprint's goals and actual school implementation.

Some respondents remain skeptical about the feasibility of the plans due to financial constraints and unclear futures, including the fact that the Blueprint is an unfunded mandate.

- **Communication and Community Involvement (Q2, Q4):** Several respondents perceive the Blueprint to be overly complex and not well understood by the public. Respondents call for simplification, better explanation to the public, and more detailed planning to ensure smoother implementation.

Respondents also emphasize the need for more community involvement so educational reforms can be better aligned with student needs. They highlight the need for better communication from HCPS administration to parents and the community. Additionally, several respondents agree that teachers should be more involved with decision-making processes.

**Figure 5: Budget and Accountability**

SAMPLE QUOTES	
<p><i>"It is complex and we don't seem to have the budget to implement all of it."</i></p> <p>- Parent</p>	<p><i>"Not having adequate staff to implement the changes, misunderstandings about the nature of Blueprint's funding sources."</i></p> <p>- School-Based Employee</p>
<p><i>"Exciting and both challenging is building the work around developing and sustaining Blueprint. Because of this first time work we have been learning, succeeding, failing, growing and regressing all at one time it seems. The bright part to this is that we can see the light at the end of the tunnel knowing that it isn't another train coming full speed at us!"</i></p> <p>- Community or Business Partner</p>	<p><i>"How fast it gets implemented. We can't expect funding to increase on such a drastic scale in such a short period of time. I don't think it was fair for the state to push so many different initiatives all at once and make individual counties pay for it."</i></p> <p>- School-Based Employee</p>
<p><i>"HCPS must engage with the community more to advocate for increased funding and higher level of support from Harford County government to meet the demand for quality education in this county, especially for diverse populations and special education programs, as housing development across the county continues which will only contribute to rising enrollment."</i></p> <p>- Parent</p>	<p><i>"Funding issues will greatly impact implementation and success of the Blueprint goals."</i></p> <p>- Central Office Employee</p>