

2022-2023 HCPS WELLNESS NEEDS ASSESSMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REPORT

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors of this report would like to express their gratitude and appreciation to **Dr. Sean Bulson**, the Superintendent of Schools, **Dr. Eric Davis**, the Chief of Administration, and **Mr. Bernard Hennigan**, the Executive Director of Student Support Services. The authors highly appreciate their vision and dedication towards promoting the mental and physical well-being of all students in Harford County Public Schools (HCPS).

HCPS expresses its gratitude to all those who made a valuable contribution to this report by providing feedback and comments. HCPS staff members from the Department of Research and Program Evaluation, Student Support Services leadership team, school counselors, teachers, and school staff are all acknowledged for their assistance, support, and guidance throughout this needs assessment research process. They played a crucial role in conducting the wellness needs assessment, gathering data, creating analytics and data dashboard to display results, analyzing data, and developing the key findings and recommendations outlined in this report.

The authors express their sincere gratitude to the school-based staff and administrators of HCPS, as well as the staff and administrators of the central office, for their leadership, valuable insights, and feedback. They have played a crucial role in various aspects of this research project, including the design of the wellness needs assessment, data collection and analysis, and reviewing and editing both this executive summary and the final comprehensive reports. The authors highly appreciate their contributions to the project

- **Yakoubou Ousmanou**, *Manager of Research & Program Evaluation, Lead Researcher, contributing author, dashboard designer*
- **Bernard Hennigan**, *Executive Director of Student Support Services, contributing author & significant contributions to this project*
- **Christina Alton**, *Mental Health Services Specialist, contributing author, made significant contributions to this project*
- **Kay Malone**, *Former Supervisor of School Counseling, made significant contributions to this project*
- **Joe Harbert**, *Director of Health, and Wellness, made significant contributions to the redesign of the wellness needs assessment*
- **Joshua Stenger**, *Budget Analyst, made significant contributions for the development of the data dashboard*
- **LaWanda Brown**, *Supervisor of School Counseling, made significant contributions to the wellness needs assessment project*
- **Katie Phipps**, *School Psychologist, contributed to the development of the 2022-2023 wellness needs assessment*
- **Tia Johnson**, *School Social Worker, contributed to the development of the 2022-2023 wellness needs assessment*
- **Terry Knight**, *School Counselor, contributed to the development of the 2022-2023 wellness needs assessment*
- **Christy Renzulli**, *School Counselor, contributed to the development of the 2022-2023 wellness needs assessment*
- **Lindsay Bilodeau**, *Innovation Specialist, assisted with the edits of this research report.*
- **Stephanie Wall**, *Innovation Specialist, helped with the design/layout of this report.*

During the implementation of the 2022-2023 Wellness Needs Assessment for students in grades 1-12, the HCPS Office of Research and Program Evaluation worked with the HCPS Department of Student Support Services leadership team and to review the scope of work, research questions, and implementation plans.

The HCPS Office of Research and Program Evaluation summarized and combined the results and findings of all the responses, both closed-ended and open-ended, using the 2022-2023 Wellness Needs Assessment Data Dashboard. The HCPS Office of Research and Program Evaluation summarized and synthesized the results and findings of all the closed-ended and open-ended responses via the 2022-2023 Wellness Needs Assessment Data Dashboard.

To analyze sample comments from the wellness needs assessments, the HCPS Office of Research and Program Evaluation partnered with Hanover Research.

HCPS intends to acknowledge the efforts of Hanover's researchers and express gratitude for their significant collaboration and partnership. The final reports that HCPS publishes will incorporate many of the findings provided by Hanover, but with some changes. The leadership team of the HCPS Department of Student Support Services provided the responses to the recommendations presented in this report.

INTRODUCTION

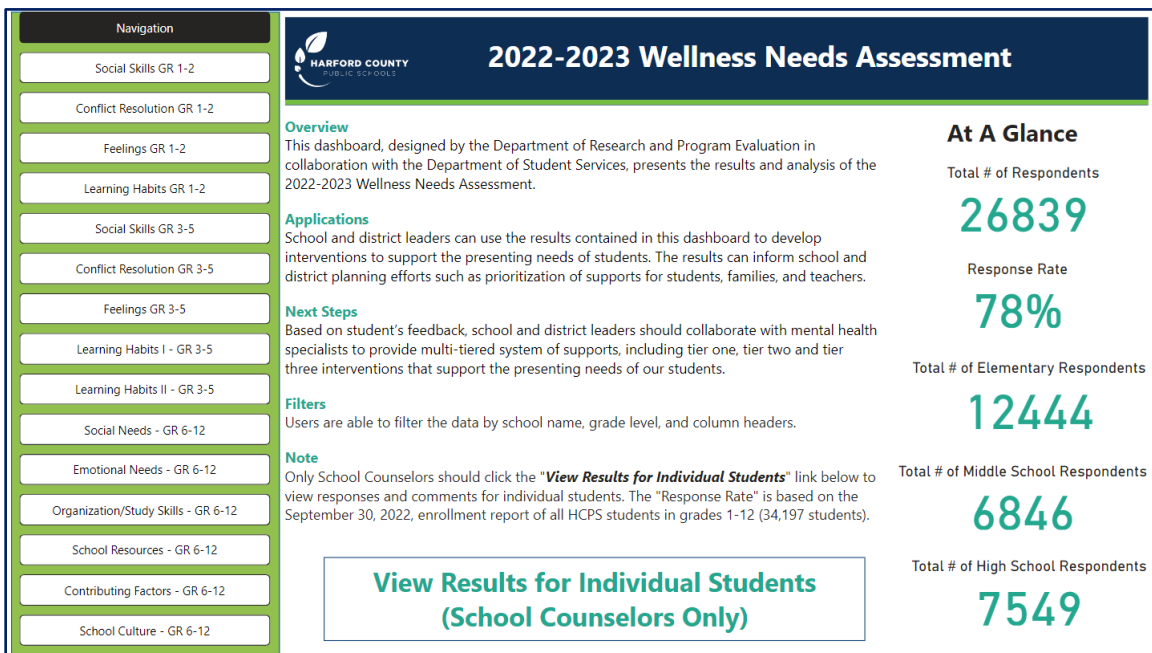
OVERVIEW

The purpose of this needs assessment is to help school and district leaders develop interventions that support the specific and presenting needs of students and to effectively allocate mental health resources to schools based on their data.

The Harford County Public Schools (HCPS) division of Student Support Services is committed to addressing the wellness of its students and has collaborated with the Department of Research and Program Evaluation to conduct a Wellness Needs Assessment for Grades 1-12 during fall 2022-2023.

The 2022-2023 Wellness Needs Assessment received a total of **26,839** responses, which represents a significant response rate of **78%**. Included in those responses were **2,710** open-ended comments from students in Grades 6-12. The assessment results will aid in planning support for students, families, and instructional staff at the school and district levels. The Department of Research and Program Evaluation has provided real-time responses and analysis of the closed-ended responses through the 2022-2023 Wellness Needs Assessment Data Dashboard.

See the picture below for the home page of the Data Dashboard.



The HCPS Department of Research and Program Evaluation partnered with researchers, school counselors, and staff to analyze open-ended question responses. Grades 6-12 students were given an "other (please specify)" option for two multiple-selection questions and one standalone comment question. These are the questions:

- I frequently have a difficult time managing my... (check all that apply)
- I would like help with the following factors (check all that apply)
- Share any additional concerns or needs that were not mentioned in this needs assessment. Please see a school counselor for immediate concerns or needs.

School counselors are the only school staff with access to individually identifiable student responses and reviewed and analyzed each comment as needed. For the purpose of this report, researchers coded a sample of responses from the three open-ended questions to aid HCPS in developing a holistic understanding of student wellness needs.

This executive summary report presents recommendations and key findings from the analysis.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This analysis of open-ended responses addressed the following research questions:

- Beyond the closed-ended options provided (e.g., stress, anger), what additional factors do students most often report having difficulty managing?
- Beyond the closed-ended options provided (e.g., lack of stable/reliable housing, incarcerated family member), with what additional factors do students most often report wanting help?
- What are the most frequently mentioned additional concerns and needs students name regarding their wellness?
- In what ways do the findings for the first three research questions differ by school level (i.e., middle versus high school)?

METHODOLOGY

Researchers eliminated blank and invalid responses and excluded responses like "unsure" and "none of the above." Responses indicating positive perceptions of students' wellness needs, such as "I do not need help" and "I feel fine," were retained. Only cleaned and relevant content was used to develop themes.

Open-ended responses were manually coded to identify frequently discussed topics. Core themes and sub-themes were identified and counted for frequency. Themes were not mutually exclusive, so calculated percentages may sum to over 100 percent. Findings should be interpreted as a reflection of the sample, which may not necessarily align with the perceptions of the population as a whole.

Researchers provided key findings by school level group and feeder pattern (e.g., Bel Air, North Harford, Aberdeen) to pinpoint district¹ needs. A random sample of cleaned responses was manually coded due to the large number of responses for each question.

Figure 1 shows information for all manually coded open-ended responses in the needs assessment.

Figure 1

NEEDS ASSESSMENT QUESTION	Responses Before Data Cleaning (without blanks)		Cleaned Open-Ended Responses		Coded Responses for Analysis (20% sample)		
	MS	HS	MS	HS	MS	HS	TOTAL
Question 1: I frequently have a difficult time managing my... Other (please specify)	924	1240	533	450	106	90	196
Question 2: I would like help with the following factors... Other (please specify)	3422	5002	437	303	88	61	149
Question 3: Share any additional concerns or needs that were not mentioned in this needs assessment.	4259	5837	591	394	118	79	197

¹ Researchers drew information about school feeder patterns from [this HCPS resource](#). In cases where a given elementary school appeared within multiple high schools' feeders, for the purposes of this analysis, we assigned it to the feeder of the high school with which it shares a [pupil services office](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on findings included in this report, HCPS should consider the following recommendations: **The Response To Recommendations listed below was provided by the HCPS Department of Student Support Services.**

INCORPORATE THE TOPICS IDENTIFIED FROM THE CURRENT STUDENT RESPONSES INTO FUTURE WELLNESS NEEDS ASSESSMENTS.	
RECOMMENDATION: 1	RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION: 1
<p>Integrate response themes into next year's Wellness Needs Assessments.</p> <p>HCPS Department of Student Support Services leadership team and other stakeholders (school counselors, etc.) can compare the themes identified through this closed-ended and open-ended response analysis against the current 2022_2023 instrument and the revised (2023_2024) instrument. Through this comparative exercise, HCPS can identify which topics may not be adequately covered—such as academic support or peer relationships—in the current needs assessment (2022_2023) and which topics may not be necessary to include in future iterations of the Wellness Needs Assessment.</p>	<p>A multi-disciplinary work group, formed by the HCPS Department of Student Support Services, will address this area of need in the summer of 2023.</p>
SHARE THIS REPORT WITH STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES STAFF TO INFORM FACILITATED DISCUSSIONS.	
RECOMMENDATION: 2	RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION: 2
<p>Share this report with HCPS Department of Student Support Services staff to encourage discussions about the results.</p> <p>Discussing the results with school and district personnel can support future decision-making about student mental and physical health and counseling services. The discussions can inform current practices and resource allocation to better meet student needs. The HCPS Department of Research and Program Evaluation can create a discussion guide if desired.</p>	<p>School counselors, principals, and other appropriate staff were able to access closed-ended and open-ended results (only school counselors were able to access open-ended comments provided by students) in the dashboard to help facilitate discussions and meet the presenting needs of students. Additionally, this report will be shared with stakeholders within and outside the HCPS organization.</p> <p>District personnel will provide the following data review on annual basis:</p> <p>A review of school specific data at School Performance and Assessment (SPA) meeting.</p> <p>A review of district data at professional development for administrators (school-based and central office) and HCPS Department of Student Support Services staff (nurses, school psychologists, social workers, pupil personnel workers and school counselors).</p>

- **FORM A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY WORK GROUP TO IDENTIFY THEMES THAT NATURALLY ALIGN WITH EXISTING OPERATIONAL DATA, SUCH AS DISCIPLINE AND VIOLENCE, AND CONDUCT A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS.**
- **THE WORK GROUP COULD EXAMINE THE CONCENTRATION OF STUDENT-REPORTED NEEDS BY SCHOOL, OR FEEDER PATTERN.**

RECOMMENDATION: 3	RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION: 3
<p>Create a work group to identify patterns correlating with operational data monitored by HCPS, such as violence and discipline, and conduct a quantitative examination.</p> <p>Examine if the trends in the needs assessment results match the trends in operational data, prioritizing by school level and feeder pattern. Identify urgent priorities and mismatches in operational data using the “2022-2023 Wellness Needs Assessment Data Dashboard.”</p> <p>Additionally, an HCPS work group could also examine the concentration of student-reported needs by school and/or feeder pattern.</p> <p>Share disaggregated data with leaders overseeing different feeder patterns, programs, and schools for analysis and planning. Analyze whether district resources are being allocated according to the needs represented in the data and discuss how to engage more students in using school resources. Develop changes, goals, and action steps for a more equitable distribution of resources next school year.</p>	<p>Discuss best practices and the use of the data Dashboard to inform interventions that support student wellness.</p> <p>The HCPS Department of Student Support Services will continue to discuss the best practices and the use of the data Dashboard to inform interventions that address the specific needs of each student, ultimately supporting their overall wellness.</p> <p>Annual presentation of districtwide data at a monthly leadership meeting with school administrators and central office staff.</p> <p>The HCPS Department of Student Support Services will ensure that districtwide data is presented annually at the monthly leadership meeting with school-based and central office administrators and staff. The goal is to encourage collaboration and knowledge-sharing among attendees in order to optimize the use of the Dashboard and enhance the wellness support provided to students across the district. This will allow us to review and analyze the performance of the district as a whole and identify areas that require improvement. It will also help us to make data-driven decisions and allocate resources effectively to support student achievement and success.</p>

KEY FINDINGS

The following key findings are based on the findings from the analysis of the results of the Wellness Needs Assessment.

- 1. Students experience the most difficulties with managing their time and school-related responsibilities.** In both Questions 2 and 3, at least one-quarter of students express needs related to schoolwork, tests, classes, and/or post-secondary success. Additionally, 20 percent of respondents in Question 1 specifically mention “time” as something they have difficulty managing.
 - **By stakeholder group:** Although there were fewer high school respondents total, the top themes of time- and school-related responses across all three questions had a higher proportion of **High School Students** than **Middle School Students**. This suggests time management and school-related concerns are especially pressing at the high school level.
 - **By feeder pattern:** Students from the **Edgewood feeder** pattern report struggling with time and academic concerns at consistently high rates. When researchers segmented results by feeder pattern groups across each needs assessment question, **Edgewood** students remained within the top two feeder school groups that responded with the themes *Time* (Question 1) and *School-Related Concerns* (Questions 1, 2, and 3). Other feeder patterns with frequently high responses within these themes include **Patterson Mill**, **Southampton**, and **Aberdeen**.
- 2. Students highlight mental health as a priority across all three Wellness Needs Assessment questions.** Topics frequently identified as support needs include managing depression; coping with death, grief, or the fear of death; and improving school counseling services. Notably, many of the responses in Question 3 indicate that many students either do not know who their school counselor is or do not find them helpful. Many of the respondents stressed the importance of continuing to raise awareness of mental health and wellness needs not only among students, but also among their families and the broader community.
 - **By stakeholder group:** Both **Middle School Students** and **High School Students** respond within this theme at similar rates, suggesting that their concerns and support needs can be addressed with districtwide policies and practices.
 - **By feeder pattern:** Across all three questions, respondents from the **Southampton**, **North Harford**, and **Edgewood** feeder patterns most consistently name mental health and wellness as a top concern or struggle. However, students in the **Bel Air** and **Magnolia** patterns report the highest response rates within this theme on Question 2 (“I would like help with...”) and Question 3 (“Share any additional concerns...”), respectively.
- 3. Students highlight student behavior and bullying as a concept that the Wellness Needs Assessment did not cover.** Twenty percent of students take the opportunity in Question 3 to highlight concerns regarding other students’ behavior, most notably bullying and harassment as well as vaping. Many report frustration at staff responses to these incidents, both immediately after witnessing an incident and when following up on a student report. Students also provide examples of this unsafe activity occurring specifically in the school bathrooms.
 - **By stakeholder group:** Notably, more than twice the number of **Middle School Students** express concerns with student behavior than **High School Students**, suggesting that middle school campuses may need additional resources to support student safety and positive student conduct.
 - **By feeder pattern:** **Southampton**—specifically its middle school building—has the highest proportion of concerned students. **Aberdeen**, **Patterson Mill**, and **Fallston** feeder patterns follow behind Southampton, while the **Havre de Grace** and **North Harford** schools have the lowest proportion of concerned students.
- 4. A smaller, but still substantial, group of students indicate struggling with creating routines and regulating the emotions that affect their focus and motivation at school.** Across all three questions, between 5 and 17 percent of students identify difficulties managing their attention span or establishing healthy sleep patterns as factors affecting their capacity to maintain interest and participation in school. Additionally, students also mention difficulties in managing emotions via the Wellness Needs Assessment’s closed-ended response options (e.g., “stress”) as well as in their write-in comments (e.g., “impulsiveness”). **Middle School Students** indicate having more trouble with regulating their emotions than **High School Students** do, but neither school level nor feeder pattern exhibits a substantial pattern related to maintaining focus and motivation. Rather, there appears to be a relatively consistent pattern districtwide.

5. **Many students used the open-ended response option (“Other”) to explicitly share their *lack* of wellness needs.** For example, a significant percentage of students attempt to refute the given Wellness Needs Assessment question by answering that they do *not* have difficulty managing anything (Question 1), do *not* need help with anything (Question 2), and do *not* have any additional concerns or needs (Question 3). In fact, because nearly half of all responses for Question 3 did not provide substantive answers with null responses like “No additional concerns,” researchers removed these from analysis, including only those responses that shared explicitly positive affirmations of wellness (“I’m fine, I don’t need help”) in the final analysis.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

During the summer of 2021, a multidisciplinary workgroup developed this Wellness Needs Assessment to better identify the mental wellness of our students across the system in grades 1-12. It was also intended to provide system leaders and school-based teams with data that could be used to best deploy the appropriate resources for students based on their responses. This needs assessment underwent a series of revisions for the 2022-23 school year and a Dashboard was created to better capture the data for district and school-based staff. As HCPS continues to make refinements, the Wellness Needs Assessment will undergo more changes for the 2023-24 school year. The most notable changes include the addition of questions that assess the physical wellness of students, the decision to only administer the needs assessment to grades 3-12, and more varied response options for several of the questions.

Given the capabilities of the new Dashboard, HCPS Department of Student Support Services staff as well as administration have full access to their schoolwide data and can run a myriad of reports by grade level, gender, concerning issues, etc. Only the school counselor in each school has the capability to see data that is student specific. Leaders at the district level are able to see similar reports for the entire system as well as data disaggregated by school. District leaders are not able to access student specific data. These reports may also be shared by district leaders with stakeholders across the county who work and are invested in the area of physical and mental wellness.

The next step in this process is to develop a report that details the best ways to access data on the Dashboard and best practices for how to use this data at the district and school levels. Professional development is being planned to share this with school-based student support services staff as well as building administrators. Once this is complete, this training will be made available for new staff who are hired into these positions so that they are well equipped to access the Dashboard and use the data to guide the wellness interventions and programs in their buildings.

APPENDIX: SAMPLE COMMENTS FROM SECONDARY STUDENTS

This Appendix has sample quotes from the 2022-2023 Wellness Needs Assessment's comment section. These quotes are almost verbatim from secondary students who took the needs assessment. The quotes are unchanged to show the HCPS students' experiences and views. They are included for more context and insight into the experiences and perspectives of the HCPS students who took the Wellness Needs Assessment.

Below are ways in which concerning quotes were addressed by schools:

- HCPS school counselors and staff identified alarming responses and took immediate actions to address them. Responses and/or comments that contained information describing alleged abuse/harm/neglect to a minor were reviewed by school counselors who took the appropriate steps to report to any outside agencies, such as the Department of Social Services, if deemed necessary. In some cases, parents/guardians were notified to inform them of the concerns.
- Each school counselor at the school level also reviewed and investigated comments that suggested that students might require assistance for their mental and/or physical well-being, such as anxiety, depression, etc...

Theme Frequency: Top 5 Themes Regarding Students' Management of Their Difficulties

Theme/Sub-Theme	Sample Responses	
Time	<p>"Schedule and work." - HCPS Middle School Student</p> <p>"Time." - HCPS Middle School Student</p>	<p>"Time/accountability." - HCPS High School Student</p>
Mental Health	<p>"Depression." - HCPS Middle School Student</p> <p>"Grief." - HCPS Middle School Student</p>	<p>"My mindset, I always think bad about myself." - HCPS High School Student</p> <p>"Mental illness." - HCPS High School Student</p>
Focus, Organization, Routines, and Motivation	<p>"ADHD." - HCPS Middle School Student</p> <p>"Fidgety side, like [being] bored." - HCPS Middle School Student</p>	<p>"[My] desire to come to school." - HCPS High School Student</p> <p>"Tiredness." - HCPS High School Student</p>
Regulating Emotions	<p>"Cursing." - HCPS Middle School Student</p> <p>"Impulsiveness." - HCPS Middle School Student</p>	<p>"Being annoyed." - HCPS Middle School Student</p> <p>"Everything." - HCPS High School Student</p>
Positive Student Responses	<p>"I don't have any problems managing anything." - HCPS Middle School Student</p> <p>"None! I used to have anger but I controlled that now." - HCPS Middle School Student</p>	<p>"I usually can manage my stress." - HCPS High School Student</p> <p>"Nothing, I am fine." - HCPS High School Student</p>

Theme Frequency: Top Six Themes Regarding Additional Student Support Needs

Theme	Sample Responses	
School-Related Needs	<p><i>"Sometimes I can't read and understand things even if I go over it again and again I still don't understand then [because] the words don't make sense.."</i> – HCPS Middle School Student</p> <p><i>"Grades and homework."</i> – HCPS Middle School Student</p>	<p><i>"What job I want to do with the major I want to take."</i> – HCPS High School Student</p> <p><i>"Staying on top of my school work."</i> – HCPS High School Student</p>
Mental Health	<p><i>"Self-confidence, liking myself, and not getting upset over a minor inconvenience."</i> – HCPS Middle School Student</p> <p><i>"Getting over a death."</i> – HCPS Middle School Student</p>	<p><i>"Mental health awareness."</i> – HCPS High School Student</p>
Regulating Emotions	<p><i>"i would like help with my emotions."</i> – HCPS Middle School Student</p> <p><i>"Managing my anger."</i> – HCPS Middle School Student</p>	<p><i>"Stress management and better coping skills."</i> – HCPS High School Student</p> <p><i>"Learning self-control."</i> – HCPS Middle School Student</p>
Positive Student Responses	<p><i>"I always have help with everything."</i> – HCPS Middle School Student</p>	<p><i>"Nothing, I am doing good on my own."</i> – HCPS High School Student</p>
Focus, Organization, Routines, and Motivation	<p><i>"My mind never stops working, to the point where it's bad. I can't sleep sometimes because my mind is going at the speed of light."</i> – HCPS Middle School Student</p>	<p><i>"Organization."</i> – HCPS High School Students</p> <p><i>"Work Ethic/Effort."</i> – HCPS High School Student</p>
Peer or Family Relationships	<p><i>"Help getting along with my sister."</i> – HCPS Middle School Student</p> <p><i>"Being more open and out there."</i> – HCPS Middle School Student</p>	<p><i>"Drug addict parent."</i> – HCPS Middle School Student</p> <p><i>"Talking to people."</i> – HCPS High School Student</p>

Theme Frequency: Top 5 Themes Regarding Additional Student Concerns

Theme	Sample Responses	
School-Related Concerns	<p><i>"For me to do better at tests and not lying to my parents about tests coming up and not studying."</i> - Bel Air Middle School Student</p>	<p><i>"I would really like if there was like a study hall after school. I have a hard time getting schoolwork done at my house on my own. If I had a space and maybe a person I could ask questions to I might get my schoolwork done and turned in on time. I really don't want my grade to suffer from not completing my schoolwork."</i> - Patterson Mill High School Student</p>
Student Behavior and Discipline Concerns	<p><i>"I'm concerned that if I am harassed or teased this school year- the perpetrators do not receive a harsh enough consequence that completely stops them from repeating the same offense."</i> - Edgewood High School Student</p> <p><i>"People getting into fights often, and people smoking in the bathroom gets annoying especially when they offer you to vape."</i> - Aberdeen High School Student</p>	<p><i>"I stopped eating breakfast and other stuff because i get bullied for eating a lot."</i> - Aberdeen Middle School Student</p>
Suggestions for Policy and Resource Improvement	<p><i>"One meal does not fill me i am STARVING at lunch and i do eat at home even breakfast but i am somehow still hungry and eat 4 meals at lunch."</i> - C. Milton Wright High School Student</p> <p><i>"I freeze in school, it's so cold in here and it makes learning very un-enjoyable and stressful because I'm worrying about how I'm so cold all day."</i> - C. Milton Wright High School Student</p>	<p><i>"I or most other kids would love a resource for those who have family in addiction recovery."</i> - Patterson Mill High School Student</p> <p><i>"Communication of tests such as the PSAT, and SAT. The emails go to the parents where in some situations the students are the ones who check their email. Many kids didn't realize the tests were coming up because nobody else communicated about it."</i> - C. Milton Wright High School Student</p>
Positive Student Responses	<p><i>"I'm fine, thank you :D."</i> - Aberdeen Middle School Student</p>	<p><i>"This is the best school in Harford county."</i> - North Harford High School Student</p>
Mental Health Concerns	<p><i>"Depression/family not understanding how I feel/no friends. My family does not believe in any mental issues."</i> - Swan Creek Middle School Student</p>	<p><i>"I have really bad anxiety so during fire drills and stuff I start to get nervous even though I know it won't hurt me. I don't know how to set up an appointment with my counselor."</i> - Havre de Grace Middle School Student</p>