

DISTANCE LEARNING SURVEY, Fall 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prince George’s County Public Schools (PGCPS) started the 2021 school year on August 31, 2020 with all students participating in distance learning. After five weeks, the Executive Cabinet wanted to check-in with students and families to see how they were doing. Toward that end, the Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) was instructed to administer a survey to parents and students. Students in grades three through twelve received a link to the survey via their PGCPS e-mail accounts. The Office of Communications and Community Engagement invited parents to participate by sending a link to subscribers of the emergency alert list, as well as posting the link on social media, the PGCPS Distance Learning webpage and in the weekly newsletter, *Engage PGCPS*. The parent survey was available in English, Spanish and French. The survey administration window opened on October 5th and closed on October 18th. Response rates are shown in the table below.

	Sample Size	# of Respondents	Response Rate
<i>Students</i>	100,483	4,672	5.6%
Elementary School (grades 3 – 5)	30,769	1,211	3.9%
Middle School (grades 6 – 8)	31,274	2,036	6.5%
High School (grades 9 – 12)	38,440	2,394	6.2%
<i>Parents</i>	89,043	10,972	12.3%

Communication

- Parents who responded to the survey indicated that the best way to stay in contact with them is through e-mail and text messages.
- They are generally satisfied with communication from the district. They reported a lower level of satisfaction with communication regarding accessing special education services or extra academic help.

Technology

- Most families are using district-issued devices for their students. Those that are not have a family computer, laptop or tablet for their students. Very few need to rely on smart phones to participate in distance learning.

- Nearly all families have an internet connection in their homes. Parents report that the connection is reliable and adequate at higher rates than students do. Those that do not have a home-based internet connection either use a district-issued mobile hotspot or go to someone else’s home to participate in distance learning.

Distance Learning Experiences

- Nearly 70% of parent respondents believe the distance learning services their students are receiving are at least “Good”, with more than one-quarter rating them as “Excellent”.
- Both parents and students are struggling with distance learning, while acknowledging everyone is doing their best in this difficult situation.
- Some things that are going well from the parents’ perspective include:
 - Having their students kept safe from the virus
 - Effective communication from teachers about learning expectations
 - Students participating in face-to-face lessons each day school is in session
 - The many digital resources available to parents to support their students’ learning
- Some difficulties parents have include:
 - Keeping their student engaged
 - Supervising multiple students in different grades with different schedules
 - Providing support for their special needs student
 - Managing working from home or outside the home while trying to keep on top of their students education
- Some things that students like about distance learning include:
 - Staying healthy/not worrying about getting sick at school
 - Being able to go over work at their own pace
 - Having the help and support of a parent when needed
- Some difficulties students have include:
 - Staying focused and interested in virtual classes
 - Problems with technology
 - Missing the social interaction with friends and teachers
 - Not really understanding the work and having trouble asking questions or connecting with their teachers
 - Having too much work, too many independent assignments

- Middle and high school students report having more adverse emotional issues due to distance learning than elementary school students do.

Returning to In-person Instruction

- More than two-thirds (68.1%) of parents who responded to the survey said they were uncomfortable returning their students to school for in-person instruction, while only about one-fifth (21.8%) said they were somewhat or very comfortable doing so.
- Their concerns include:
 - Keeping a medically vulnerable student or family member safe
 - The ability for the district to keep up with cleaning and sanitizing surfaces and poor air ventilation in school buildings, especially older ones
 - The ability for students to adhere to safety protocols such as mask-wearing
- Many parents expressed a desire to have the option to continue with all distance learning when schools begin to re-open.
- Parents also indicated that a transparent and comprehensive safety plan would need to be made public before they could decide whether to send their student back to school.

Limitations

- The survey was distributed electronically and respondents were not required to identify themselves.
- While distance learning has required families to become more digitally connected, some families were likely unaware of the survey or unable to participate.
- To broaden the pool of respondents, outreach at the school level is recommended.