



# Results from FCFT's Distance Learning Mental Health Survey

## Purpose

The purpose of this survey is to assess the impact of the school closure and distance learning on staff mental health and staff perceptions of how the closure and distance learning has impacted student mental health. The survey also assesses staff perceptions of the needs for mental health support for students when we return to school and how FCPS might best meet those needs.

## Key Findings

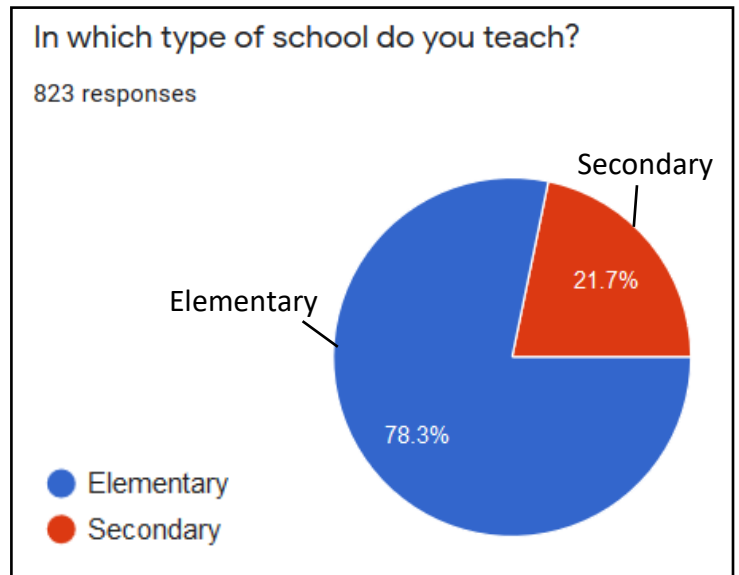
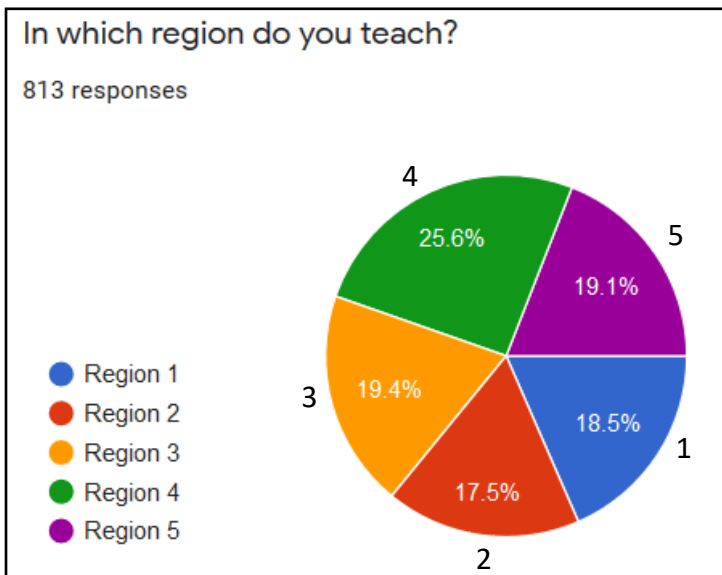
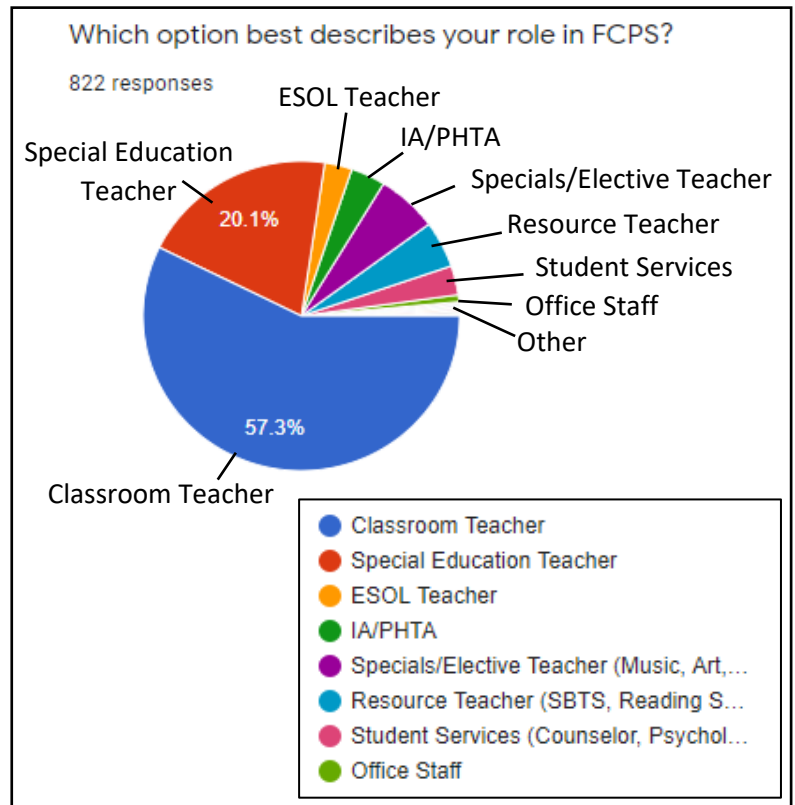
- 825 FCPS staff members responded to the survey. Responses are provided from a representative sample of roles within FCPS and are evenly distributed across FCPS regions.
- 91% of respondents reported that their personal level of stress around their job has increased since the start of distance learning compared with the level of stress they experienced in their job before the closure. 64% of those reported that their stress level has significantly increased.
- 55% of respondents reported that they perceive their students' mental health to have deteriorated since the school closure. 6.8% of those report that they perceive significant deterioration in their students' mental health.
- 81% of respondents believe that FCPS' current staffing and supports for mental health will fall short of meeting the mental health needs of students and staff throughout the closure and after school resumes in person. 38% of those responded that current staffing would fall significantly short of meeting the need.
- Respondents chose school counselors to have the highest positive direct impact on student mental health and social emotional needs, followed by social workers, psychologists and parent liaisons.
- Respondents reported a significant increase in their personal stress level around their jobs since the start of distance learning with the highest contributing factors including:
  - Technological failures (93% of respondents)
  - The learning curve of adjusting to new technology (87% of respondents)
  - Lack of communication from FCPS leadership (82% of respondents)
  - Unrealistic expectations from administration and parents (77% of respondents)
- 372 respondents wrote recommendations for how FCPS can best meet the increased mental health needs of students and staff. The most common trends in suggestions include:
  - Increase staffing and programs to support student mental health
  - Increase accessibility of mental health resources for staff
  - Reduce teacher and staff workload and unrealistic expectations placed on staff
  - Increase instructional staffing, especially in special education, and reduce class sizes
  - Demonstrate respect and trust of staff by including them in the decision-making process and providing fair compensation

## Research Method and Sample

- The survey was created by members of the FCFT Mental Health Task Force, comprised of current FCPS staff members including teachers, IA's, and student services staff.
- The survey was conducted for 2 weeks between April 23, 2020 and May 7, 2020.
- The survey was distributed by email and social media.
- We received responses from 825 FCPS staff members.
- Respondents are representative of the population of FCPS staff in distribution across regions and staff roles.
- When asked what type of school they teach in, 644 respondents reported working in an elementary school, 179 reported working in a secondary school, and 2 declined to answer.

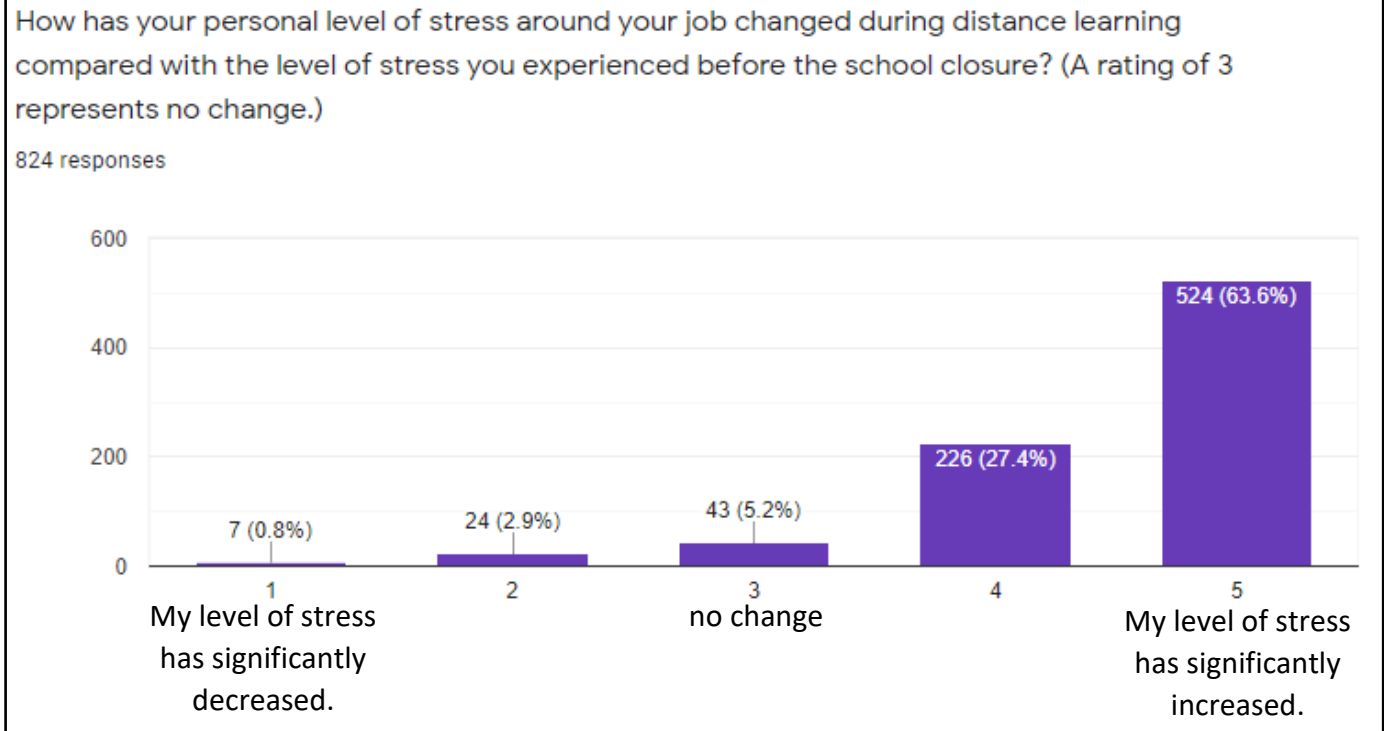
<b>Responses by Role Within FCPS</b> 822 responses for this question*		
Role	Number of Participants	Percentage of Total Participants
Classroom Teacher	471	57.3%
Special Education Teacher	165	20.1%
Specials/Elective Teacher	51	6.2%
Resource Teacher	40	4.9%
IA/PHTA	29	3.5%
Student Services	25	3.0%
ESOL Teacher	23	2.8%
Office Staff	6	0.7%
Other	12	1.5%

\* 3 respondents declined to answer.

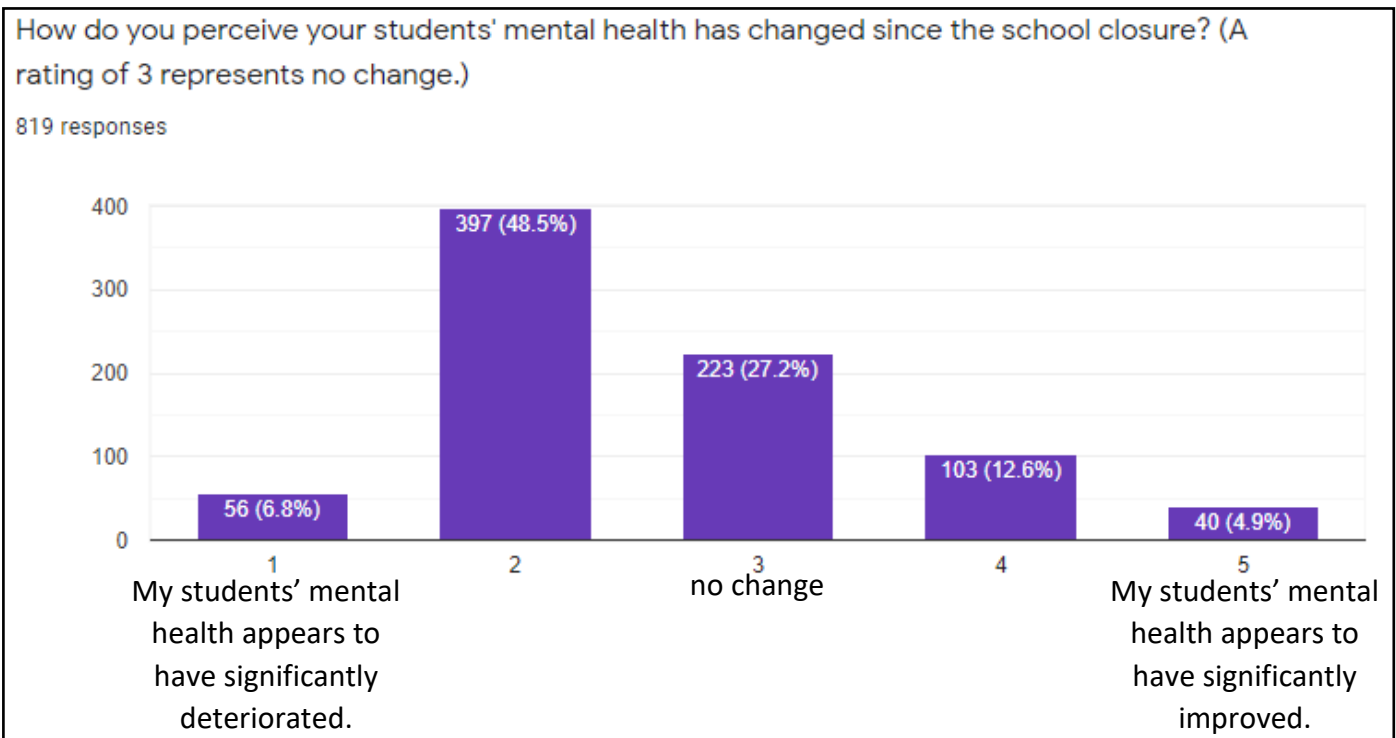


## Changes in Staff and Student Mental Health Since the School Closure

91% of participants responded that their **personal level of stress** around their job has increased since the start of distance learning compared with the level of stress they experienced in their job before the closure. 64% of those report that their stress level has significantly increased.

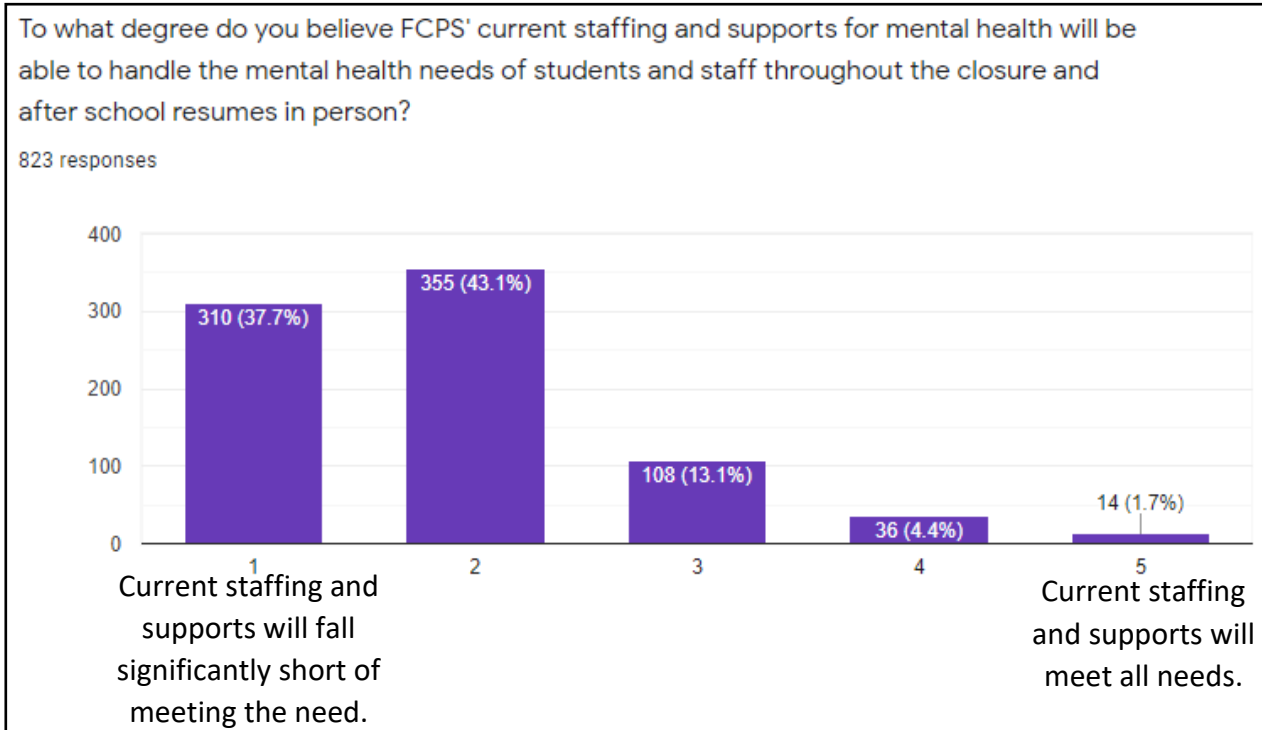


55% of participants responded that they perceive their students' mental health to have deteriorated since the school closure.



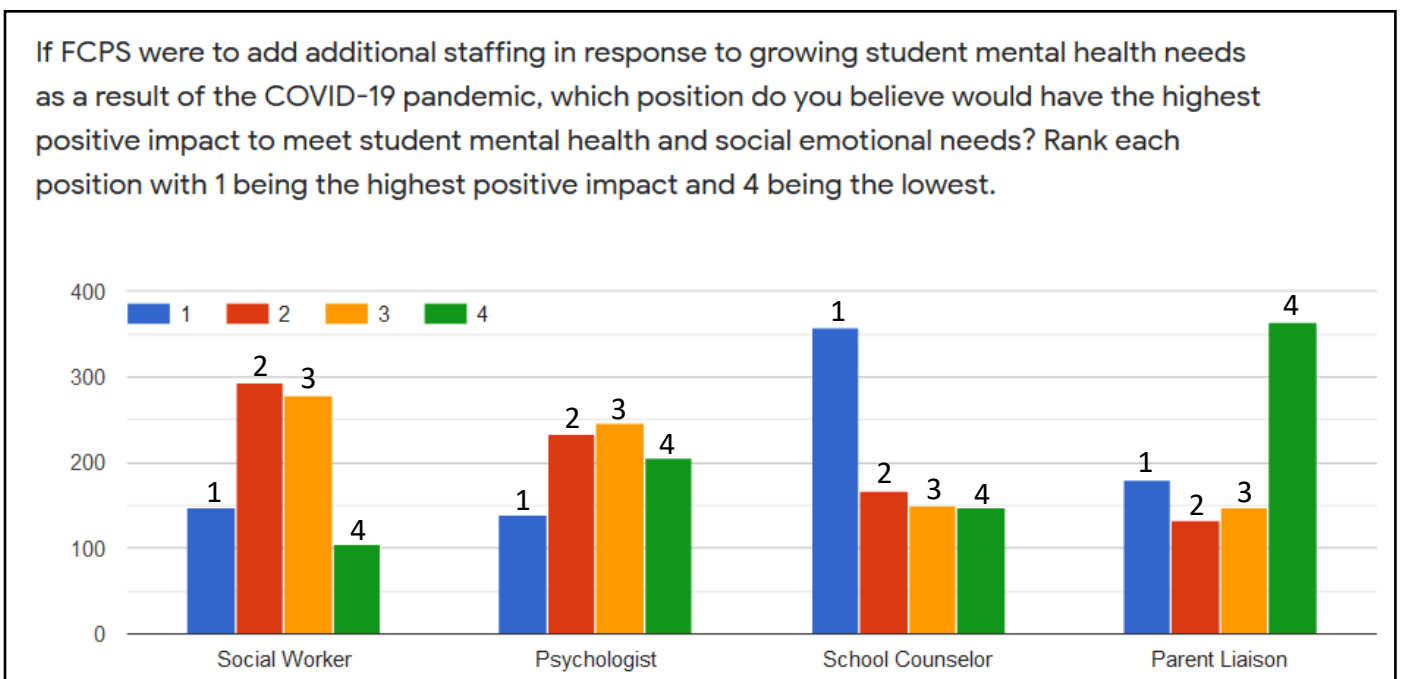
### Staffing Needed to Address Increased Mental Health Needs

81% of respondents believe that current staffing and supports for mental health will fall short of meeting the mental health needs of students and staff throughout the closure and after school resumes in person. 38% of those responded that current staffing would fall significantly short of meeting the need.



Respondents chose school counselors to have the highest positive direct impact on student mental health and social emotional needs, followed by social workers, psychologists and parent liaisons.

Average Rating for Each Position			
School Counselor	Social Worker	Psychologist	Parent Liaison
2.11	2.41	2.63	2.84

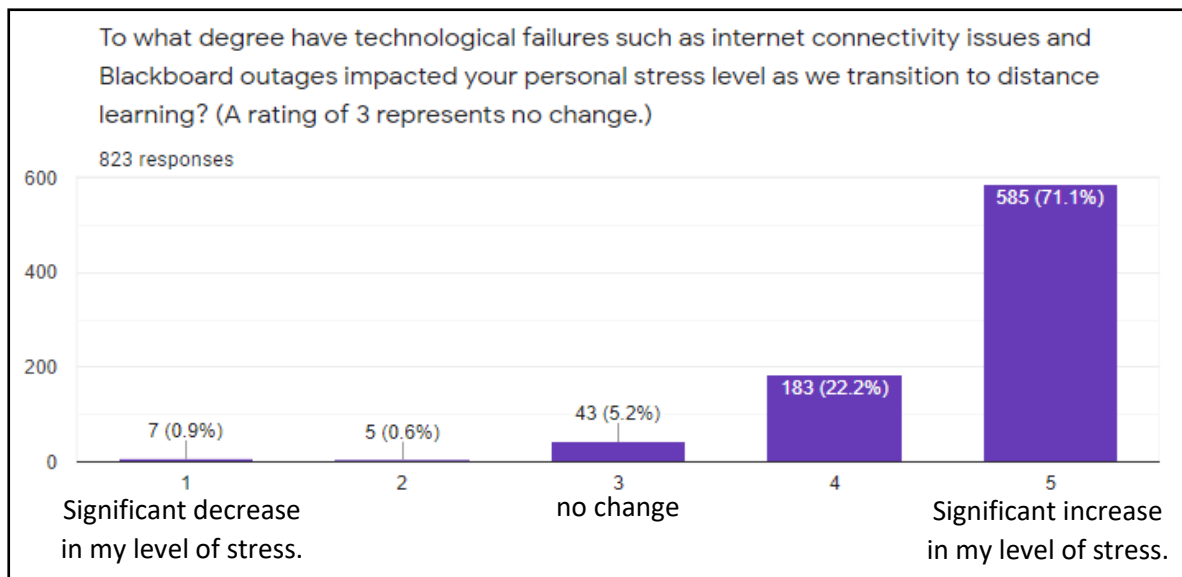


## Factors Impacting Staff Mental Health in the First Weeks of Distance Learning

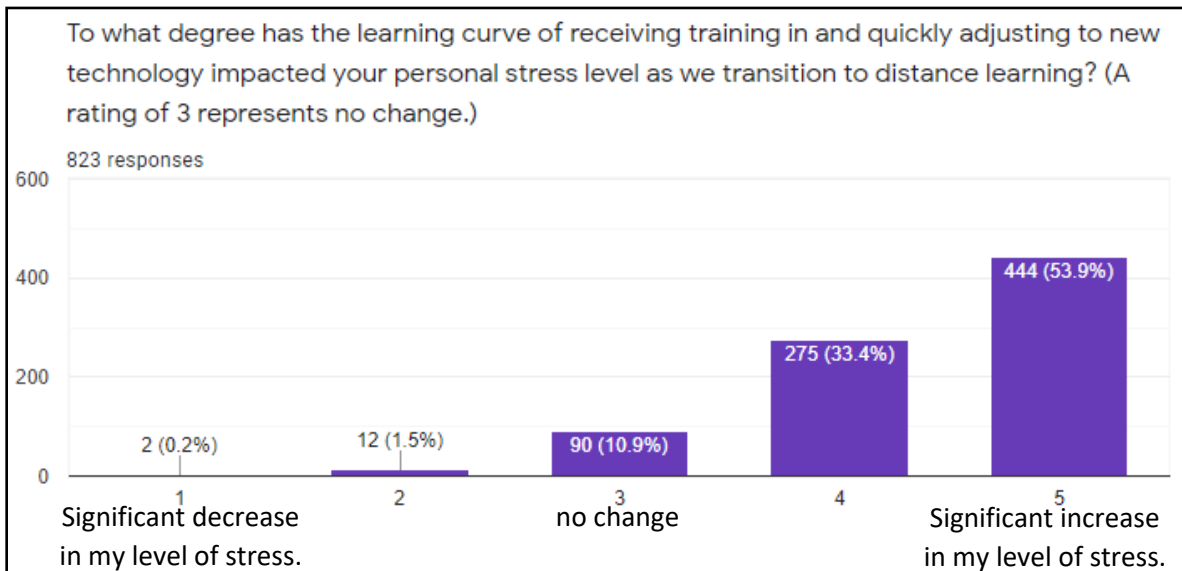
Respondents were asked about how various factors impacted their personal stress level around their job. Respondents rated the following factors on a 1-5 scale, with 1 representing a significant decrease in the respondent's stress level, 5 representing a significant increase, and 3 representing no change.

Factor	Average Rating
Technological Failure (Internet connectivity issues, Blackboard outages)	4.62
Learning Curve of Receiving Training and Adjusting to New Technology	4.39
Lack of Communication from FCPS Leadership	4.26
Unrealistic Expectations from Administration and Parents	4.18
Language Barriers and other Barriers to Communicate with Families	3.77
Lack of Clarity on Grading Practices	3.66
Class Distractions in BBCU	3.52
Personal Lack of Access to Technology to do the Job	3.37

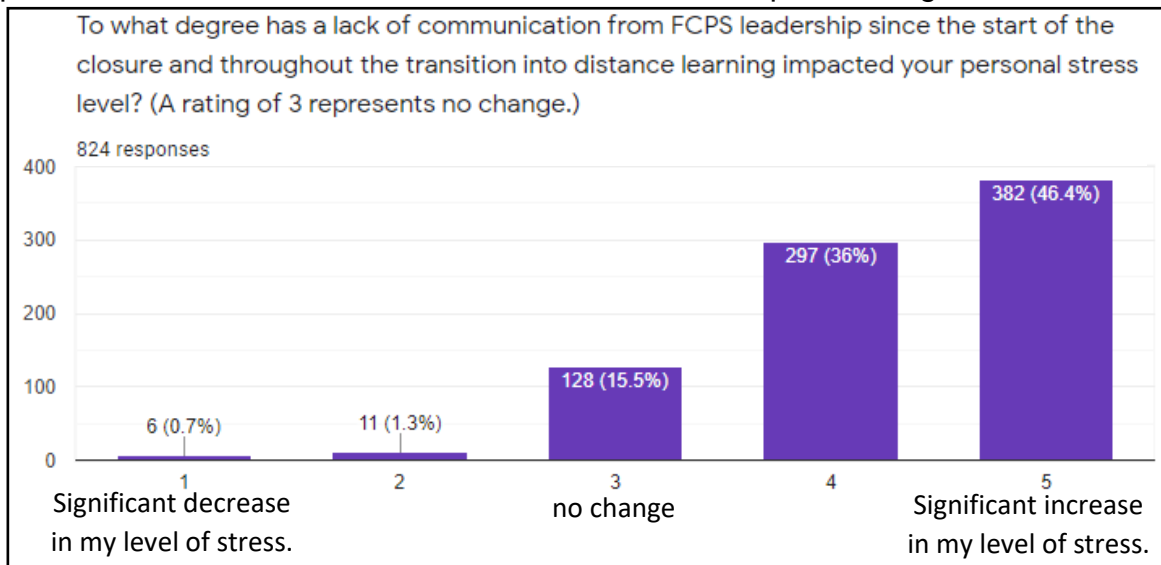
93% of respondents reported an increase in stress from technological failures such as internet connectivity issues and Blackboard outages. 71% of those reported a significant increase in stress.



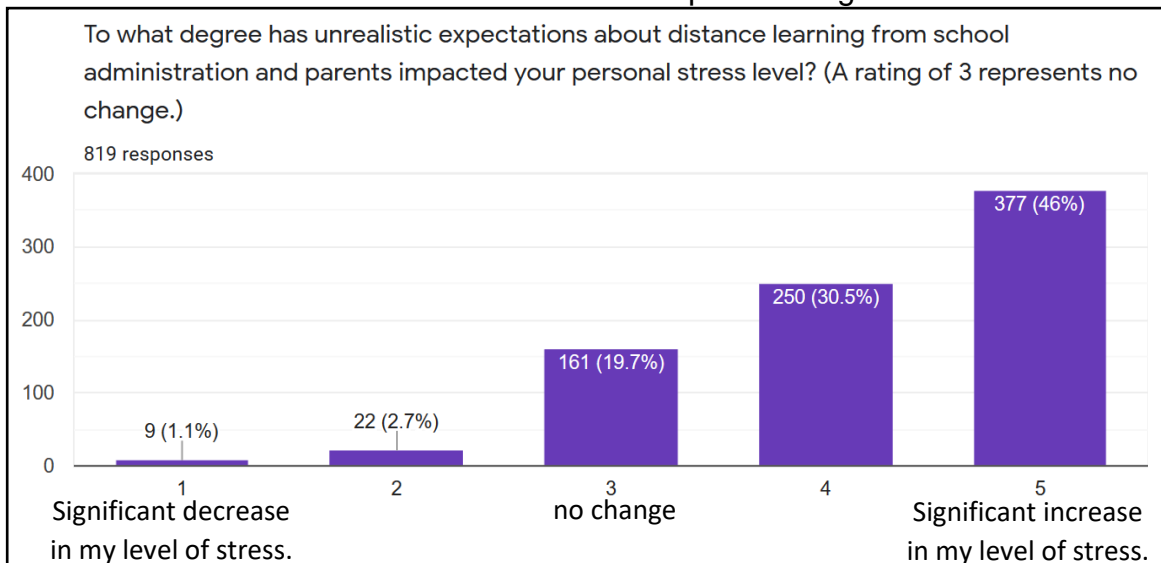
87% of respondents reported an increase in stress from the learning curve of receiving training in and adapting to new technology. 54% of those reported a significant increase in stress.



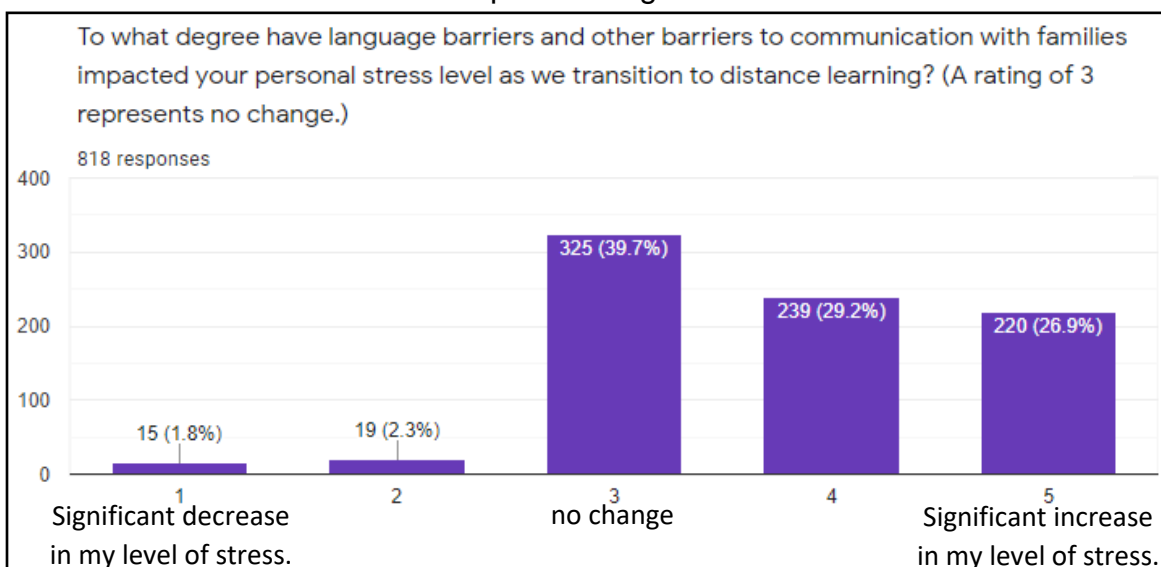
82% of respondents reported an increase in stress from a lack of communication from FCPS leadership since the start of the school closure. 46% of those reported a significant increase in stress.



77% of respondents reported an increase in stress from unrealistic expectations about distance learning from administrators and families. 46% of those reported a significant increase in stress.

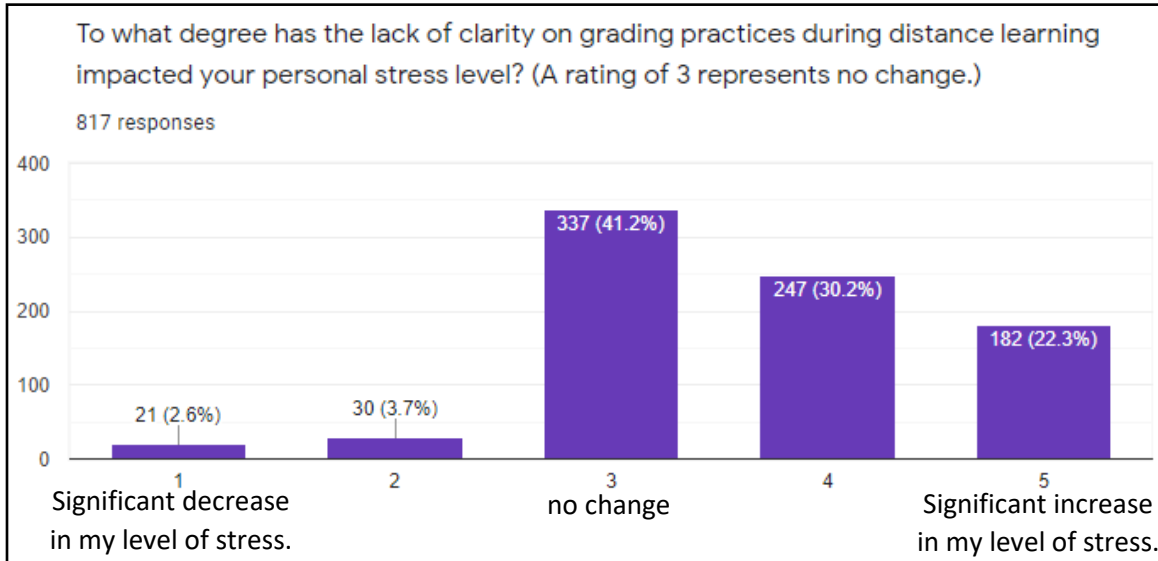


56% of respondents reported an increase in stress from a language barrier and other barriers to communicate with families. 27% of those reported a significant increase in stress.



53% of respondents reported an increase in stress from a lack of clarity on grading practices during distance learning. 22% of those reported a significant increase in stress.

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### Main Themes and Selected Comments

Respondents were asked “What additional supports do you believe FCPS will need to put in place to support student and staff mental health throughout the closure and after school resumes in person?” 372 respondents provided suggestions. From these suggestions, 8 common themes emerged. Below are the themes and some representative quotes from the comments we received.

#### 1. Student Services Staffing and Supports: Hire more student services staff (counselors, psychologists, social workers), and offer more mental health programs and services to students and families. (106 comments)

“There needs to be more access to support for staff, both personally and professionally. We need help dealing with what we are going through so we can help the kids when we go back. A school of over 750 will not make it with 1 1/2 counselors.

“More support and presence from mental health professionals ([school] counselor). Possible lessons in how students can cope with their anxious/stressful feelings of the uncertainty and break in routine.”

“FCPS needs to listen to their teachers when we say that things are not going well! We need a research based emotional and social skills program for our counselors to follow to teach our students how to manage their emotions, feelings, and how to act towards others. Ask the [school] counselors what they need, too!”

“Lots of emotional support will be needed for all staff, students, families for many years to come. ... This is going to be a huge problem for everyone returning, and all positions are critical to help with the trauma for years to come.”

“Even before the closure, we lacked enough of the staffing you listed. I hated to have to rank, but we need more of all of them!”

“Mental health based reasonable accommodations will need to be easier to ask for during distance learning. Health conditions are magnified right now, so the support that schools are legally required to offer needs to be magnified as well.”

“We need more counselors in schools. The amount of emotional and mental health needs was already high and counselors were overworked before the closure. When we return, kids will need support readjusting to school and will most likely require support regulating their emotions.”

**2. Staff Mental Health: Provide additional services and supports to protect staff mental health and make these supports more accessible to staff. (58 comments)**

“I know that multiple supports exist for staff, but it is often up to us to find these resources online. It would be nice to have someone who reaches out with these resources in person and gets them out there to the people who need them instead of employees having to ask for help or search. That is so hard for many people to do.”

“They need to check in with teachers and really care how we’re doing. Right now, the only message we hear is you’re failing. Not providing mental health support to elementary during this time is so WRONG! These kids need it just as much as the middle and high school kids. ... If anything, we will all need increased mental health support when returning to school because we are all struggling right now.”

“More visible and REAL support for Teachers. If Teachers aren't well, we can't teach the students well.”

**3. Workload and Expectations on Staff: Reduce staff workload and ease unrealistic expectations on teachers and staff. (46 comments)**

“There needs to be a culture shift within the county that teachers don’t need to work themselves to the bone to succeed. .... It needs to be ok to take a sick day and not feel guilty. Mental health was a problem before this virus, and it will continue to be if we don’t start changing the culture.”

“There is NO work life balance right now. My students are suffering, my families are suffering, I am suffering, and it seems like FCPS’s response is always, “Let’s give them more work.””

“ Give us time to take care of ourselves and our families. Let us find our "new normal" again gradually, celebrating a new time and allowing time for us to "let go" of the changes and crisis during COVID 19.”

“This has been exceptionally taxing on teachers. My hope is that when school resumes, we aren't tasked to go longer hours and extend further into the summer.”

**4. Instructional Staffing and Class Size: Hire more staff members to provide academic support, particularly in special education, to allow for reduced class sizes for our populations with the highest need. (39 comments)**

“Understand that we were already at 100% effort so we cannot “make up” the time lost next school year without additional support.”

“More special education support. The gap our students already experience will have widened significantly during distance learning. We will have behavioral issues to address as well as these students transition back to the school environment.”

“At the elementary level, staffing formulas for Special Education must be changed to hire more teachers, create Department Chair positions, and cut in half our caseloads for the coming school year, as the needs of our students will require more time than we can provide under current staffing models, with each teacher managing caseloads of 15-20 students. We have to be able to do our jobs well or we will lose amazing Special Educators at the elementary level to burn out.”



**5. Respect and Trust: Respect and trust teachers and staff, include them in the decision-making process, and fairly compensate them. (36 comments)**

“Remove all required high stakes testing. Allocate more time for social emotional engagement and peer connection. Have more staff available to work with high needs and traumatized students. Realize that teachers also have suffered trauma, and are exhausted and stressed, too.... We teachers are not going to accept more work and a pay freeze because “we knew we wouldn’t get rich teaching”.”

“Let teachers have a seat at the table since we’re on the front line and are the ambassadors for FCPS.”

“Clear accountability for administration, school board, and others by the teachers and students. We need to feel like we are being heard or have the option to be heard by someone who will listen and not pass the blame/workload down the pipe.”

“Less meetings. More appreciation and treating staff like professionals.”

**6. Relax Academic Pressure: Relax academic pressure to provide time to support students’ mental health and well-being first. (32 comments)**

“My fear is leadership will fold the missed curriculum into the next year-end making an already dense curriculum totally unmanageable. Leadership needs to prioritize mental wellness of staff and students.”

“Allowing teachers to focus more on social-emotional well-being instead of academic rigor and standards. We should be showing students that we are here for them in these horrible times.”

“Support for mental health sick days, training in trauma-informed practice and actual time to support students with trauma-informed interventions. Meaning, remove administrative tasks that take up the majority of our time so we can focus on student wellness programming.”

**7. Safety Precautions: Ensure the safety of students and staff by providing PPE, allowing options for immunocompromised students and staff to stay home, and ensure that we have sufficient custodial staff to properly clean the buildings. (23 comments)**

“Only bring us back when it’s safe. We need people to think about teachers lives too as some of us live with immunocompromised children or parents.”

“Respect for individuals who have a fear of returning or of an age where it could be harmful if they contracted the virus. What will be in place for older teachers who don't want to lose their job?”

“How will you keep the teachers safe? As a preschool special education teacher, I constantly am exposed to germs; but without subs and due to the type of work, it's impossible to take sick days.”

**8. Training: Provide school staff with training to provide trauma-informed instruction and address the social-emotional needs that students will return with. (14 comments)**

“I did Mental Health First Aid training several years ago, but it was never implemented at my school. I think there needs to be widespread training in this program at each school for any and all teachers, coaches, counseling staff, and administrators who are willing and able to handle it because we need as many resources for students and staff as possible.”

“I think PD on trauma sensitivity or mental health first aid will also be important for staff.”

“Additional training for teachers on supporting socioemotionally health and wellness, more staff for group counseling and social skills. Additional SPED teachers for smaller caseloads and more focus on reteaching students with a larger teacher to student ratio.”