

## Hillsborough County Families' Perspectives on School Funding

The stress from the multiple pandemics of the 2020-21 school year has made it challenging to meaningfully engage families and to finance the relief and recovery needed for students' learning and wellbeing. Families' voices are critical to ensure that school budgets reflect a community's needs and priorities for our students.

This year, Hillsborough County Council PTA partnered with National PTA as part of an initiative to more authentically listen – and respond – to the questions and concerns of families regarding school funding. What do families know about school funding in Hillsborough County Schools? What areas do they feel are adequately or inadequately funded? And how do families think about the differences in per-pupil funding in the community?

Specifically, Hillsborough County Council PTA helped conduct virtual listening sessions and distribute surveys with families (October-December, 2020) to reveal local community priorities and contribute to a nationwide study around education finance. 34 participants attended virtual listening sessions facilitated by National PTA staff. See appendix for table of demographics for parents participating.

This document provides a high-level summary of what Hillsborough County Council PTA learned from families participating in these listening sessions, as well as recommendations for education decision-makers in Hillsborough to respond to families interests and concerns.

### Key Learnings

1. **Families do not feel confident in their understanding of school budgets and they are not sure where to go to find information.** Only 32% of Hillsborough County participants agreed that they have a general understanding of how their child's school district uses its funding and only 27% agreed that they knew where to find information on school funding in their community.

*"I really don't know much about where the school funding comes from. I want to say property taxes and things like that."*

*Recommendations:* Help families understand how they can be more engaged in the budgeting process in Hillsborough County Schools. Establish and publicize a point of contact who families should reach out to if they have questions about how money is being spent

2. **Families value educational equity and prefer for schools to receive funding based on need.** 79% of participants shared they believe schools should receive funding based on need, compared to 30% who shared they believed schools should get the same amount of funding.

*"I like that Title 1 or Renaissance schools get extra resources. I think that's needed, because they don't have the families with income that's able to contribute to a PTA."*

*Recommendations:* Provide more transparency about how funds are spent and why.

3. **Expenses related to core school operations are supplemented by the PTA and/or other fundraising.**

Families noted that Hillsborough County PTAs provided funding for a variety of needs including purchasing supplies for the school nurse, technological devices, online resources, and other school supplies.

*"I don't think there are enough supplies because as a PTA we provide most of them to the teacher and this COVID season parents all collaborated in helping the teachers with the supplies. We had a signUpGenius for that."*

*Recommendations:* Consider further analysis of what expenses PTAs most often supplement and how the district can contribute in these areas.

4. **Families believe schools need more funding and identified Teachers & Teachers Aides, Tutoring, Afterschool and Summer Programs, and Counseling services & Counselors as priorities.** About half (53%) of Hillsborough County participants believe their child's school does not receive enough funding. In addition, families noted priorities for increased funding for:

- **Teachers & Teachers Aides.** 53% of families chose Teachers & Teacher's Aides as one of their top priorities for more funding. They reported that district needs to hire more teachers and teacher's aides, particularly to accommodate for the challenges brought on by COVID-19.
- **Tutoring, Afterschool and Summer Programs.** 50% of Hillsborough County families chose Tutoring, Afterschool and Summer programs as one of their top priorities for more funding. While participants did not comment specifically on these out of school time programs, they did express the need for more robust extracurriculars including music, arts and sports activities often found in these settings. In particular, parents found that extracurricular activities, like music, were cost-prohibitive.

*"My daughter has an IEP that she's on, and right now she can't get the extra learning that she needs because they just don't have the teachers for it."*

*"In the high school, [there is a] lack of certain classes due to shortages in staff because of the pandemic."*

*"Being a part of a music program is cost prohibitive. If kids want to join but their parents aren't able to give the money or the band boosters doesn't raise enough money, then that child can't participate."*

*"A French horn, which is what my daughter played, they start at about 10 grand. She was playing a broken French horn. There's never going to be enough funding for all those instruments, but I don't think the school gave them anything."*

- **Counseling Services.** 47% of participants chose Counseling Services as one of their top priorities for more funding. Families shared that the needs to hire more counselors. They noted a lack of services available, particularly to virtual learners, and long wait times for appointments.
- **During the listening sessions, families also highlighted issues related to lack of funding for specialized services.**

*“I really think we need more counselors and psychologists and social workers at the schools. You have one social worker for 2,000 kids, and you have one psychologist for 2,000 kids, and that’s just not enough.”*

*“There’s never been enough counselors and psychologists at any school I’ve been to. Going back to first grade when kids had to be tested for one reason or another, sometimes you were waiting six months for the psychologist to get you in.”*

Recurring concerns included a lack of individualized support and necessary supplies. Participants also highlighted that there needs to be more support for English language learners and bilingual families, particularly during the pandemic.

- **If forced to make spending cuts, Hillsborough families noted the following priorities** for decreased funding: District Central Office Roles (79%), Security & School Resource Officers (24%), Music & Arts (21%), School Facilities (21%), Library Services (21%) and Gifted & Talented Services (21%). Note: While Music & Arts was listed as a potential area to cut, conversations during the listening sessions also indicated that music and arts were already underfunded.

*Recommendations:* Provide resources to help families learn to advocate for increased funding on the local level, and from the state and federal government. Prioritize investments in staffing including teachers, aides, specialists and counselors. Create additional supports for bilingual families that includes more robust assistance with distance learning.

## Contact Us

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## Appendices

### Appendix A – Demographic Information of Hillsborough Participants

Race/Ethnicity					Income			Gender		Education	
White or Caucasian	Latino/a or Hispanic	2 or more races	African American or Black	Asian or Pacific Islander	Less than \$50k	\$50-100k	\$100k+	Female	Male	High School Degree or higher	Bachelor’s degree or higher
21%	44%	12%	21%	3%	47%	26%	26%	88%	12%	100%	65%