**Successful Children and Youth Policy Team**

**February 3, 2021, Meeting Summary**

Key decisions and actions are in **bold**.

SCYPT Members in Attendance:

Kimberly Adams, Sarah Allen, Leslie Atkins, George Becerra, Michael Becketts, Bob Bermingham, Michelle Boyd, Telaekah Brooks, Karla Bruce, Judith Dittman, Alicia Doe, Kelly Henderson, Brendan Hooke (for Dave Rohrer), Victor Hoskins, Frances Ivey, Chris Leonard, Rodney Lusk, Megan McLaughlin, Dalia Palchik, Stella Pekarsky, Fahemeh Pirzadeh, Jeffrey Platenberg, Sloan Presidio, Deb Scott, Ashley Shuler, Daryl Washington, Jenna White, Lisa Williams

Administrative Item:

**One administrative item was presented as a consent agenda, which was unanimously approved by the SCYPT:**

- **The SCYPT charter was amended to add one new member, who will also join the Executive Committee: the Chief Academic Officer of Fairfax County Public Schools.** Sloan Presidio, who serves in that position, immediately joined the SCYPT as a member.

Discussion Item – How Kids and Families Are Doing Right Now

The SCYPT, and guests attending the meeting, engaged in extensive conversation on the theme of "how children, youth, and families are doing right now." Conversations were centered around four topic areas: early childhood, connections, academic achievement, and behavioral health. Summaries of the discussions are attached. The SCYPT Executive Committee will use these discussions to help guide any necessary revisions to SCYPT priorities.

There were a number of key themes that ran through each of the conversations:
1. The impacts to many of our children and youth are deep, complex, and severe.
2. The impacts to many of our children and youth are wide-ranging, across many domains and settings. All kids are susceptible, but people of color, special education students, and English language learners are most affected.
3. We should be rethinking what it means for children and youth the be "successful," across multiple domains and settings.
4. All of these issues intersect. You can't discuss academic achievement without discussing mental health, for example.
5. We cannot support our kids if we don't also support their families, teachers, and other providers.
6. We should be rethinking how we deliver all of our services. Anything we do needs to be equity-informed, trauma-informed, and done collaboratively.

7. Despite the challenges of the past year, there have been some successes. We need to learn from what has worked and figure out how to apply it moving forward.

Several SCYPT members expressed support for the Executive Committee to review the team's membership composition, structure, meeting schedule, and priorities.

Public Comment

Norm Hall, of the Fairfax County Special Education PTA (SEPTA), stated that a priority should be child care for school-aged children, and that a plan for re-implementing School Aged Child Care (SACC) classrooms is essential. Without SACC, there will be a crisis when schools reopen. He recommended that FCPS enhance and expand the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program. And he emphasized that the SCYPT should be considering the needs of special education students and should consider adding a seat on the SCYPT for SEPTA.

Jorge Figueredo, of the non-profit organization Edu-Futuro, state that students are struggling because they have too much homework. He mentioned that some of the online virtual school platforms are still troublesome. He noted that data on how many English language learners are failing, and what FCPS is doing to support them, can be helpful moving forward. He also suggested that data on per-pupil costs of educating students in FCPS can be helpful.

**SCYPT Discussion: How are kids and families doing right now?**

*Question 1: How are kids and families doing right now, with respect to **EARLY CHILDHOOD**? Consider things such as access to child care, pre-k, and other services; the quality of such services; and the extent to while kindergarteners this year and next year are or will be ready for school. How have racial disparities been affected?*

Anne-Marie Twohie, Director of the Fairfax County Office for Children, shared data and information with the full SCYPT before members and guests engaged in conversation in breakout rooms. Ms. Twohie shared the following:

> Many early childhood programs remain closed. Currently, 78% of early childhood programs in Fairfax County (86% of family child care homes and 56% of child care centers) are open; this is comparable to the statewide average. In Fairfax, families of 1,427 children are currently receiving Child Care Assistance and Referral services (child care subsidy), a 33% decline from last year. FCPS is serving 1,537 children virtually in its pre-k program (they are set to return in-person later this month), a 16% decline from last year. A similar decline has been seen statewide. And FCPS kindergarten enrollment is 17% lower than last year; it's down 13% statewide.

> Many families are dealing with dual crises: loss of income and unexpected costs of child care, as schools and programs have closed or gone virtual. Providers, too, are experiencing significant income loss due to lost revenue and unexpected health and safety costs. County and state grant programs have been able to provide some limited relief.

> Kids and families are experiencing high levels of stress due to housing instability, income loss, health problems, domestic violence, food insecurity, and other issues. Providers are dealing with the same impacts personally, while also having to adapt their services and support the kids and families they serve. All of these issues disproportionately impact low income people and families, people of color, and women.

> The good news is that vaccinations are underway for teachers and child care providers. And those working directly with kids report that many kids are demonstrating great resiliency, which gives us all hope.

The following is a summary of the discussions in the breakout rooms:

> Child care and other early childhood service providers are facing serious issues. At the same time, the crisis may give us the opportunity to make changes and increase access. There is a high level of awareness now. People and employers who have not had to struggle with child care issues before are now dealing with them. People see just how much the economy relies on accessible child care. We may have lessons learned about how to use technology to boost access, and about other strategies that have let so many providers reopen or stay open (even things as simple as how to provide and adapt to using PPE).

> This is the time to be bold and creative, to expand access, to fix weaknesses in the system, and to ensure that those in the field have the supports and business skills to remain viable. We can

do all this through an equity lens, prioritizing the populations in greatest need and recognizing past and current traumas and how inequities were likely exacerbated during the pandemic.

We need to ensure child care providers get vaccinated quickly.

Disruption and lack of services will have a lasting impact. Kids and families that could benefit from, but don't receive, early intervention services are more likely to have negative impacts later on. The achievement gap begins in early childhood, so it is likely to widen. Additionally, when children are not in group care, they can be less likely to be made aware of or referred to other services.

Families who struggled pre-pandemic are more vulnerable now. Many are struggling with employment, housing, and the capacity to support their kids in school.

Technology access is also a concern for families with young children. Virtual learning may not be developmentally appropriate for the youngest children. There are lots of challenges keeping young kids engaged in virtual learning, even by professional early care and education providers. Some programs provide devices, but not all. And many families struggle to access quality wifi and internet access.

Declining kindergarten enrollment is likely due to a number of factors. Some understand why others would not want their children beginning school in this environment. Unanswered questions include what this means for next year: What are the implications of a larger kindergarten class? Will it result in bigger class sizes? Parents want to know now what the plan is for next year so they can make decisions and begin planning.

Many older children (even more than usual) have been required to provide child care for their younger siblings, resulting in worsening school attendance rates. Even elementary school students are being required to supervise younger siblings.

Reports of child abuse and neglect have been down, but that doesn't mean abuse is down. Once schools and programs open up more broadly, and more caring adults are able to report what they see/hear, it is likely reports will rise.

All of these issues are taking a toll on the mental health of even the youngest kids. Kids are tuned in to their parents' stress, and existing chronic stressors are likely exacerbated. Respite care for parents and caregivers is essential, but hard to access. Limited contact with others means parents don't get help with child care like they normally would from friends and relatives.

It's incredibly hard to access school-based behavioral health and special education supports in a virtual environment. And teachers cannot be expected to assume all of the burden.

SCYPT members were invited to also share thoughts via a survey that was available from about two weeks prior to the meeting until the week following the meeting. These are the unedited responses from the survey:

- Many parents have opted out to have their kids in pre-k because of COVID. How will that affect the kids socially, emotionally, and academically?
- Children of vulnerable populations are not doing well during the pandemic because of loss of kindergarten enrollment, reduction in State K-3 funding and closing of many daycare facilities.
- COVID-19 has adversely affected access to many services including childcare and pre-K which has reduced their readiness for school. The negative impacts are greatest for those that are children of color.
- Very challenging -- access has been disrupted, continuity displaced, quality remains variable and cost has escalated to become out of reach for many -- indeed -- very challenging
- This is not really my area of expertise but I know that our parenting youth have had huge difficulties in accessing child care. In some respects, at least early on, it didn't matter too much because all the youth had lost their jobs as well. In the long run, I believe, this time will have a negative impact on our children as they have lost a year of learning and socialization and I'm sure our impacted by the increased stress in their already stressed households.
- I am deeply concerned about our youngest learners, particularly those who don't have access to resources. Certainly we should be sensitive to communities disproportionately impacted by COVID.
- Poorly. Foster, adoptive and kinship families tend to have older kids but we hear from a few EC/PS/K families that the missed social and academic opportunities are worrying them. Parents and caregivers are struggling to balance child care demands including largely full time support and supervision of young children during virtual learning, and their own employment and social emotional wellbeing.
- I'm not sure I have much insight into this question. I do know that several families I know of in the Centreville/Chantilly community have either homeschooled their Kindergartner or decided to send them a year late/next year instead.
- There are numerous issues:
  - Virtual learning is harder for younger and special needs children, especially those who may not have as much support at home as students in more affluent communities.
  - Lack of child care has had a disproportionately large impact on women with significant job losses coming from women who have had to quit their jobs to take care of them
  - Pre-K not available or has limited availability
  - Those with socioeconomic privilege, power, status are accessing private schools for in-person. A lot of private schools have been fully operational since the fall, if not the very start of the school year.
  - Children need to be around other children in order to fully develop socially and emotionally. Without the engagement in a classroom students are losing opportunities for full development. Fortunately, there are some outlets still available such as sports, church or neighborhood playmates, but not all children get to experience extra-curriculars in a safe environment outside of school. School closure is truly detrimental for some and only increases the gap between the haves and the have nots.
  - Some families with economic means are moving out of Fairfax County to neighboring jurisdictions where children are in-person to some degree, or have the plans to do so.
  - Kindergarten enrollment is down.
  - Virtual learning has brought out a lot of the inequities in our district, especially in special education who are not able to access virtual education due to disabilities

- economically disadvantaged families are affected more since one or both parents work and small children need adults with them when they are learning
- inequities in local school systems because of a lack of funding, technology or parental involvement are exacerbated by schools that have remote learning
- The inequity is even more stark between public and private schools. Many smaller private schools with large campuses or big buildings have the ability and resources to spread students out in classrooms. Many regions report a run on private school applications.
- Although gaps have narrowed since the spring, Black and Hispanic households are still less likely than white households to have reliable access to devices, and less likely to have reliable access to the internet
- The working-class kids are much more school-dependent to get the skills for a knowledge-based economy
- In preparing for fall 2020, educators will likely need to consider ways to support students who are academically behind and further differentiate instruction,
- Beyond access and quality of instruction, students must be in a physical and emotional state that enables them to learn. The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on families, leaving many children in precarious situations. Feeding America notes that one in four children is at risk of hunger during the pandemic. The number of children who are housing-insecure has risen as families struggle to pay rent. Parental supervision and support may be more difficult in families in which both parents need to work outside the home, or in which the parents are English-language learners and cannot directly support their child's learning.

**Question 2:** *How are older kids, older teens, and young adults doing right now, with respect to* **CONNECTION TO SCHOOL AND/OR EMPLOYMENT**? *Consider things such as access to supports and opportunities; future orientation; the quality of services; and the extent to which grads will be ready for an able to access college or a quality career. How have racial disparities been affected?*

Jorge Figueredo, Executive Director of Edu-Futuro, shared data and information with the full SCYPT before members and guests engaged in conversation in breakout rooms. Mr. Figueredo shared the following:

> Edu-Futuro, a non-profit providing after-school and family programs primarily targeted to immigrant families, has provided direct emergency assistance to 552 families in Fairfax County during the pandemic. Among them, 87% have experienced job loss, 78% have struggled with paying rent, and 72% needed assistance with utilities, medicine, or other basic needs. Edu-Futuro surveyed their 303 middle school and high school after-school participants about the challenges they are facing. Among the most common responses were internet connection/wi-fi issues, and laptop and other technology problems. Adjusting to distance learning has been the most prominent issue. Students report being assigned too much work, having difficulty focusing during class, feeling like they have to learn the material themselves, and having difficulty reaching teachers and counselors for help. Some report having to study from 8 am to 8 pm each day just to keep up. Many students feel isolated and stressed out. They find it hard to ask questions, to explain to their teachers what they are confused about and what they need help with.

> High school seniors have found it hard to keep up with college applications, reporting that requesting documents from teachers and counselors has been difficult.

> Many students report difficulty in balancing their school and home lives while distance learning. Some have to take care of their siblings and help them with school, all while attending school themselves. In sum, just keeping up is tough, and it's difficult to find and maintain meaningful connections to school.

The following is a summary of the discussions in the breakout rooms:

> Inequity in digital access has deep and wide-ranging impacts. It creates a sample bias on surveys (people with limited digital access are less likely to respond to online or emailed surveys), so data collected online may be skewed. People with limited access may be less likely or less able to self-advocate or report concerns. When combined with all of the other time-consuming burdens imposed by the pandemic, it becomes even harder for parents to contact schools or other potential supports. Reliance on online access and services may be even harder for kids and families who aren't fluent in English.

> Likewise, virtual learning has a variety of impacts. While many students are struggling with virtual learning, some are actually thriving and do not want to return in person; are there lessons we can learn from this to provide better or a broader variety of services in the future? The downsides to virtual learning, though, are numerous. It can hide what is really going on in a home or what a child is experiencing; teachers may only find out true circumstances once they are able to talk to the students or parents at greater length. It is difficult to truly connect with peers and adults. Older students are questioning if college is worth it if there won't be the

7

"typical" college experience. It's harder for students, particularly students of color, to access programs and services that help prepare them for college. Additional family financial strains may further push college out of reach for some students.

The supportive relationships kids need to thrive are harder to develop and maintain in a virtual environment. Individualized supports and even just general checking-in are less available, not just regarding academics, but in all contexts. Other adults, such as counselors, mentors, and health aids, are expanding their roles. Youth sports coaches, for example, are recognizing the vital role they play and have requested resources to better help support their players' mental health. We will need to continue to be creative in finding and enhancing ways for kids to connect with adults and peers, in both virtual and safe in-person settings.

Having the time to connect is another hurdle. Many kids are finding themselves overburdened with school work. Others have had to find employment to help make up for lost family income, often as essential employees, and often full-time. These responsibilities take away from time to otherwise connect with friends and family. For those working, it may be particularly difficult to reengage with them once there is more economic stability. Will they return to school? Are there creative options to meet their needs? Many youth in this situation are English language learners, making the response even more complex.

Among youth who had jobs prior to the pandemic, many have lost their jobs (75%, according to one member).

Juvenile Court is seeing increased referrals due to chronic school absenteeism. And youth referred to court for any reach are experiencing months-long waits before their cases are heard, adding additional layers of anxiety for the youth and their families.

Many out of school time programs have closed or reopened in limited or virtual ways. Without these connections, many youth are more isolated. Lots of youth and families are hesitant to reenroll in in-person programs, due to the health risks. At the coldest time of year, when being outside is less common, the lack of connection grows even more. Additionally, participation in these activities is, for many kids, a key part of their identity. When that gets taken away, the kids can be at even greater risk for poor behavioral health outcomes.

The stressors youth and families are facing are quite complex. And kids sense their parents' stress, further burdening themselves. Any response must take the entire family into consideration.

SCYPT members were invited to also share thoughts via a survey that was available from about two weeks prior to the meeting until the week following the meeting. These are the unedited responses from the survey:

- Older kids are isolated at home and missing their friends and personal interactions. Internships are limited, and the ones that are available are virtual, so a much less fulfilling experience. Less opportunities for kids of different racial backgrounds. Most parents are incredibly stressed out and that creates an uneasy home atmosphere.

- Students in career and technical programs have faired better than most but vulnerable high school students have replaced their parents as "essential workers" and are losing out on instruction.
- Some older LatinX and African American kids and teens are struggling in the current virtual school setting. The fact that many are not making passing grades requires that we think about ways to help them catch-up. This may include summer school or other remediation programs offered during the normal school year. We should also consider assessment tools and orientation programs that can be used to identify a student's interest in the trade/apprenticeship program. Those students that are seeking to go to college will need help.
- This is a difficult time for teens. For many lower income teens, access to technology is an issue. It is difficult for some to remain motivated for online learning.
- Also, a major challenge that has been difficult to address given the context -- we are loosing many and not succeeding with most -- and even more so with those without resources and without "privilege."
- Youth served by our programs were already struggling. In our residential programs before entering our programs they were homeless and the fact that the are trying to stay in school or find employment speaks to their resilience. 70% of the youth in our residential programs lost their jobs early in the pandemic. Many of them have tried to find alternate employment -- as nannies and working for places like door dash.     In our Community Based Programs, we serve low income youth primarily Hispanic. Many are recent immigrants. They were struggling in school and to learn a new language prior to the pandemic. Things are even harder now. Our staff is trying to help them and their parents navigate digital learning. The buildings in which they live are not wired for cable and block the signal of wifi connections. Many of these youth are falling even further behind in their studies. Food insecurity is a huge issue.   100% of the youth in our Community Based Programs are youth of color. 55% of the youth in our Residential Programs are black and 26% are Latino/a. They struggled with the issues that engendered the Black Lives Matter movement and continue to do so.
- I would offer the same thought as expressed in question 2. [I am deeply concerned about our youngest learners, particularly those who don't have access to resources. Certainly we should be sensitive to communities disproportionately impacted by COVID.] I suspect we will have a better sense of how the disruption impacted their readiness for future opportunities as they are able to re-engage.
- Poorly. Older kids and young adults are missing key social connections, valuable direct instruction, and supports for high school to post-secondary settings. Those who have graduated high school or college cannot find job opportunities. Many who are living with family are providing child care of younger children, particular in lower income and families of color. Delays and backlogs in courts, social services as well as complete shut down of on-site career training/work site experiences are impacting many families raising older children and those w special needs.
- I feel like (fortunately and unfortunately) my HS students have been working more- some because they want to, and some because they are now supporting their families (and these tend to be my Hispanic and Latinx students). My seniors have been feeling good about applying to school and receiving support from our Student Services department despite the distance. I know FCPS has been working diligently on this piece, too.

- Teachers are doing tremendous work of seeking to establish relationships with students, school system is seeking to meet basic needs by delivering food, school supplies, and library books. Nonetheless, older students are at risk of missing school due to economic challenges in the family, child care responsibilities, or lack of supervision. This affects lower income families disproportionally.
- There are numerous issues:
  - Senior year is typically the high point of a student's high school career. Seniors this year are worried about being able to graduate. They're worried about being able to qualify and be fully prepared for college admission. They're aware that many colleges and universities that have shut down and wonder how this will affect their own future plans.
  - If schools remain closed for the rest of the spring, students in their senior year will likely forfeit their last shot at a sports season, miss their last chance to perform with the choir or never get to perform in the play they've been rehearsing for so long.
  - Seniors also face the possibility of missing out on milestone experiences including attending the senior prom and walking across the stage at commencement
  - Many adolescents have jobs at local restaurants, stores, movie theaters, gyms or other businesses that have closed, reduced the services being offered or reduced their hours of operation. The young people working at these establishments count on their pay checks to help with household expenses, to pay for things that are important to themselves (e.g. clothes, music, activities), to provide for transportation (e.g. gas, car insurance, car payments), or to save for college or other future endeavors. If their parent(s) or other members of their family have lost jobs or income due to closures, the student may feel even more stress over losing their ability to contribute to the family's financial situation.
  - Planning for college comes with even more uncertainty for the seniors, who can't predict what Covid-19 infection rates will be like next year.
  - Students who are falling behind on grades during their senior year worry that it will haunt them for the rest of their lives.
  - 58% of the juniors and seniors polled said they were more likely to take out a student loan to pay for college. The survey of 1,000 U.S. teens ages 13 to 18 who are not currently enrolled in college was conducted April 8-14 by Wakefield Research. That may mean community college or a public school instead of a private one, or taking a gap year between high school and college. Prospective students may also be taking into account the fact that college campuses may still be closed in the fall. More than 70 percent of high school seniors reported concern about their personal and family financial situations, with higher levels of concern expressed by students of color. 90 percent reported concern about personal health and well-being. One in three reported concern about going to college far away from home as a result of COVID-19. More than 80 percent said they were concerned about taking college courses online. Fewer than 10 percent planned to delay college enrollment altogether; Black, white or those who had the highest levels of financial need were the most likely to say they planned to wait. (Reference: https://www.ucdavis.edu/news/survey-highlights-strain-among-high-school-seniors-pandemic-uncertainty/)

**Question 3:** *How are children and youth doing right now, with respect to **ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**? Consider things such as access to supports and opportunities; ability to fully participate in school; the quality of teaching and supportive services; and the extent to which students are able to learn and keep up. How have racial disparities been affected?*

Sloan Presidio, the FCPS Chief Academic Officer, shared data and information with the full SCYPT before members and guests engaged in conversation in breakout rooms. Dr. Presidio shared the following:

> There are significant attendance and engagement concerns. Overall, there has been 5% decline in student enrollment (equivalent to 9,000 students) compared to projected enrollment. FCPS has been unable to determine where all of the students ended up. Among those who are enrolled, many experience attendance challenges. Over 3,000 students have missed more than 20% of school days. Among them, about 1,500 are English language learners and 1,200 are in special education. About 7,000 students did not show up for the first day of school. FCPS has reached out to all of them, and continues to try and connect with students who are not attending.

> National data point to significant mental health challenges for youth during the pandemic. FCPS has referred about 10,000 students to community-based supports so far this year, an increase of about 2,000 over this time last year. Students overwhelmingly report that virtual learning isn't working for them. It's causing loss of relationships and connections with teachers and peers. Students used to relying on friends to help them understand material don't always have those connections anymore. These impacts are affecting all types of students. Dr. Presidio mentioned one senior who takes AP classes and is already admitted to MIT,  but is failing several classes because of hardships with school and at home.

> Failure rates after the first quarter were significantly higher than last year, and English language learners and special education students are disproportionately affected. Among English language learners, 35% were failing at least two courses, up from 17% in 2019-2020. Nineteen percent of special education students were failing at least two courses, up from 9% last year.

The following is a summary of the discussions in the breakout rooms:

> The data on absenteeism and course failure are troubling, because they are major predictors of graduation. The disparities for English language learners and students with disabilities have continued to grow. At the same time, we need to think about how we define success. Are we using the right metrics? How can we really assess how things have changed since pre-pandemic? We also need to recognize that there isn't a clear "successful vs. struggling" dynamic for our kids. It's much more complex than that. And some students are doing well in school. So there are lessons learned for what works, in addition to what can be improved. We should reconsider what "appropriate" future goals are. Is college the right thing for everyone? How do we prepare all students for success?

> Along the same lines, we need to begin to think about our transition back to in-person schooling and, long-term, how our education system works.

> Teachers have been flexible, but there are still many failures. Many students do not have the appropriate supports to fully prepare in class. Opening up about their social emotional needs

can be difficult, especially in a virtual environment. The compounding traumas (in multiple areas, including health, economic, and racial traumas) and stressors kids are facing all contribute to their struggles.

It's important to note that things won't go back to normal when schools open back up. We need to have realistic expectations and be prepared to fully support kids and families in a systemic way. Transitions themselves can be hard for kids. The full response needs to be trauma-informed and include ways to screen students for academic, mental health, and other needs, and to connect students and families to services. We need to ensure Juvenile Court doesn't become an answer. A whole-child, two-generation approach will be most effective.

We also need to be concerned about our teachers, who have experienced traumas themselves. How do we support them? How do we ensure teacher retention doesn't become a problem?

Even typically high performing students are struggling. How should we reconsider how the system educates and serves all kids? We will need a plan to address the gaps created or exacerbated by the pandemic. Will students be prepared for the next grade level after the summer? As we anticipate needs, we must employ a cross-sector, cross-system approach that is well-organized and takes into account where there are existing gaps in service. How can we promote consistent messages and ensure people are aware of resources and what's happening in different settings and sectors? Collaborations across disciplines will be necessary; some existing ones can provide key lessons learned.

A driving factor in growing disparities is the ability to access out-of-school supports. Families that had been supported by in-home services may have had to go without. Finding tutors and technology to support learning is easier for people with means.

Children with disabilities, and their families, have had especially hard times. Virtual settings are not conducive to the communications needs of many kids.

Out of school time programming is another key consideration. It needs to be developed to align with schools and support students so they can be successful in school. Do we know if existing programs are effective? Programs that support students during the school day can face challenges, with students in multiple classes at the same time. Can new models of virtual tutoring and mentoring be established to support students in any setting?

SCYPT members were invited to also share thoughts via a survey that was available from about two weeks prior to the meeting until the week following the meeting. These are the unedited responses from the survey:

- I've heard many parents say their kids were high achievers in school but very unmotivated to do work virtually.
- Vulnerable students are not doing well as measured by their participation in and completion of online instruction, particularly in math. HS dropouts will increase.
- I am very concerned about the impact that distance learning is having on our minority populations. These students are unfortunately falling behind and their grades are suffering. We need to develop remediation programs that can assist these students in staying on grade level.  This may include summer school or other methods.

- Online learning is difficult for many students. It is hard to be engaged. Virtual after school programs have had technology limitations. Families are not ready for in person programs because of COVID fears.
- Remote and virtual learning does not work for all -- I am fearful that we losing a cohort will fail to thrive
- The answer to this one is the same as all of the above.  With the youth Second Story works with the pandemic has set them back educationally.  We have had laptop drives and used supplemental grant funding to try and provide as many laptops and chrome books as is possible.  We have tried to help children and youth connect to the school system when they struggle.  We are encouraging youth to continue to attend classes on line but for many children in our Community Based Programs trying to find somewhere quiet to study is almost impossible.   The racial and economic disparities are stark here.  As I talk to friends who have children in school I hear about how they have hired on-line tutors.  Purchased better computer equipment.  Set aside a special "education" room in their house and supervised their children's classwork.  They have enrolled their children in special on-line summer enrichment programs and things like yoga classes and Chinese language instruction.   By contrast, the young people served by our programs receive none of this.  They struggle to find a good internet connection.  They have no where quiet to study or participate in classes.  Their laptops are not state of the art and they don't receive on line tutoring.  They are falling further behind and this will impact their ability to obtain higher education and a well paying job in the future.
- I don't know, but have heard informally that teachers are being encouraged to go easy on students as far as assignments and grades, which if true may be masking achievement issues.
- We know that students who are school dependent are having a challenging time right now. If black, brown and indigenous students were faced with limited learning opportunities before the interruption, we should not assume that condition remitted.
- Teachers are really trying given the circumstances. Many limitations and delays for special education referrals, evaluations impact students of all ages. Many students with disabilities cannot attend for the length of time required by virtual class, esp at middle and high school. Instruction aides and other staff who should be supporting individuals or small groups of students are often poorly prepared, moved frequently and inconsistently between students. Foundational relationships are not established or maintained well and many trauma-impacted children and youth simply cannot be available to learning without a connection/relationship.
- I believe that educators have never worked harder to ensure the quality of teaching and supportive services, especially in this virtual environment- yet, there are still some students who have not been reached- and for me, seeing these students in person is what will allow me to more effectively meet their needs (luckily, all of my most at-risk students are returning to school F2F as of right now). I'm not sure we will ever know the true extent to which our youth have been affected by all that has occurred in our country this past year, but I hope we will meet and greet them where they are in the future (in the fall, etc.) and not falsely accuse them of being "behind".
- I'm still hearing a lot about kids who don't have reliable wifi connections despite the huge efforts to provide mifi devices. Some students in low income areas have to watch siblings and missing class.  Huge attendance issues which the county is working to address, making thousands of phone calls and other outreach.  This is an opportunity to look at attendance

from a trauma informed lens and continue nontraditional approaches to connect with hard to reach families. The quality of teaching has been high in my experience, but the potential for teacher burnout and leaving the profession is also high, we need to look at meaningful supports for educators, including building in time and staff to support teachers processing and offloading stress.

- There are numerous issues:
  - Academically many are struggling and will need remediation in summer or might have to repeat the year
  - Learning and development have been interrupted and disrupted for students.
  - Reduced learning time has likely impeded student learning and also affected the development of the whole child.
  - The pandemic has exacerbated well-documented opportunity gaps that put low-income students at a disadvantage relative to their better-off peers.
  - One of the most critical opportunity gaps is the uneven access to the devices and internet access critical to learning online.
  - The pandemic has exacerbated the limitations of standardized tests, which reward a narrow set of skills and more affluent students who have access to specialized instruction.
  - Lack of Student Interaction & engagement in virtual learning environments - virtual students are not receiving the same valuable social knowledge as their in-person peers. Lack of interaction can hinder children's development and cause social withdrawal.
  - Black and Hispanic or Latino families are more likely to live in remote-only school districts, but the least likely to have the resources to help their children to navigate online education.
  - Parents of color are less able to work from home to stay with children; less likely to be able to afford child care; and have lower rates of access to the internet or a computer. Online learning has also been shown to have the greatest negative impact on students with lower levels of prior academic attainment.
  - Because of systemic racism, families of color are disproportionately managing COVID-19 risks; Black and Hispanic or Latino adults are more likely to have underlying health conditions that complicate illness, less likely to have health insurance, and more likely to work jobs that put them at risk of infection.
  - Working-class kids are much more school-dependent to get the skills for a knowledge-based economy

**Question 4:** *How are children and youth doing right now, with respect to* **MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE***? Consider things such as access to preventive and clinical services; the quality of such services; and how current situations are impacting their well-being. How have racial disparities been affected?*

Bethany Koszelak, FCPS Mental Wellness Specialist, shared data and information with the full SCYPT before members and guests engaged in conversation in breakout rooms. Ms. Koszelak shared the following:

> PRS CrisisLink, which manages the local crisis hotline/textline, reports there has not been a significant shift in calls by youth, but that calls for 18-24 year-olds are way up and that young adults are expressing significant and complex concerns. Child Protective Services and Community Services Board referrals have been down this year, but both expect the numbers will rise, possibly rapidly, once school opens, as schools are the primary referral source. National data show that youth mental health-related visits to the hospital have been up; however, there is a possibility this data is skewed, as, for a while, that was the only place many people could seek in-person support.

> Many youth have experienced over the past year. FCPS requires a trauma awareness training for instructional staff (and has other non-mandatory training opportunities) and has developed a tip sheet for a trauma-informed return to school.

> Of course, mental health needs are not new. The 2019-2020 Fairfax County Youth Survey (administered in the fall of 2019) showed that 30% of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders reported depressive symptoms and 36% reported high stress levels. We know that building protective factors in kids works, helps them become more resilient. If we focus on building protective factors, even in the face of the pandemic, we'll be better off.

The following is a summary of the discussions in the breakout rooms:

> We need to ensure we're hearing all voices on this, and other topics, not just those of people with the most resources to make themselves heard.

> For many, mental health is the top priority; students will not be able to fully return to learning if their social and emotional needs are not met.

> A key protective factor for youth behavioral health is positive relationships with adults. But when kids haven't been able to engage in in-person activities, they lose many of those connections.

> Multiple stressors and factors have contributed to youth's mental health problems. Many experience high stress from an abundance of homework. Many families are struggling with basic needs. Extracurricular activities have been canceled. For those who were struggling before the pandemic, the uncertainties of the past year have only increased stress. People trying to make ends meet must weigh earning an income with staying at home and avoiding exposure. Kids feel cut off from their peer and caring adult networks. And many parents and caregivers are struggling with their own mental health.

It is likely that there will be a surge of identified mental health needs when kids return to school. Beyond ensuring capacity to support students, the response needs to be guided by key principles. We should take an strengths-based approach that builds on and tries to develop kids' assets. We need a family-centered approach that recognizes family needs and circumstances are directly related to kids' well-being. Allow families a say in what health, success, and safety mean to them. A trauma-informed approach would recognize behavior as communication; everyone interacting with kids needs a trauma-informed and equity-informed lens. Acknowledge kids learn in different ways and experience different barriers to being learners. Services need to be interdisciplinary, integrated, cross-system, and designed to recognize and address gaps. We may need to triage the most complex and severe issues.

Universal screenings will help identify students with mental health needs and connect them to resources. Referral systems need to be effective. The initial drop-off in Community Services Board referrals has been replaced by pre-pandemic levels. But Child Protective Services referrals still reflect the lack of in-person learning. Police and youth sports coaches have expanded their roles in recognizing when kids have mental health needs and connecting them to help. Ensuring effective and direct referral processes will be critical. Chokepoints in the existing system are likely to become even more burdened if we maintain a centralized referral process once schools reopen.

Exposure to domestic violence and child abuse and neglect are significant issues. We need to be able to better recognize when kids have experienced these and be able to support them.

Teachers' and other providers' mental health is also of concern. We need to be able to address their emotional well-being too.

Coordinated efforts to communicate resources and information are integral to successfully reaching everyone.

We need to look at how behavioral health services are delivered. Significant numbers of youth are taking advantage of teletherapy. When it's effective, telehealth can be a key piece to expanding access overall. When psychiatric hospitals are shut down due to COVID, there is nowhere for teens to go. This has an immediate impact on them, and increases the load on emergency departments. Peer groups and other group-based services can also be effective and we should be looking at ways to expand them. Community schools can be an effective structure for increasing the reach of services.

SCYPT members were invited to also share thoughts via a survey that was available from about two weeks prior to the meeting until the week following the meeting. These are the unedited responses from the survey:

- Presumably mental health issues are more likely now than ever for all children.
- We have not paid enough attention to social and emotional learning as strategy to deal with mental health and substance abuse issues.
- We have a very significant mental health issue with some of our children and young adults here in Fairfax, one that has been exacerbated by COVID-19. It would be helpful for the County to develop a mental health questionnaire that could be given to all students to identify those that are experiencing a mental health or substance abuse issue. If a student

has a mental health or substance abuse issue we should have a plan to connect them to services.

- Students are missing connections with friends. It is hard to maintain contact virtually. I am struck by how quiet neighborhoods in low income areas are.  Children are not playing outside because of COVID fears.
- An area requiring more focus and significantly more resources
- I'm not sure how to answer this one.  I don't know that substance abuse has increased among our young people.  I do know that mental health is an increasing issue.  Many of the young people we serve struggled with anxiety and depression prior to the pandemic.  The isolation they have experienced has exasurbated that.  We have increased our use of video counseling and mental health supports but access to in person clinical services is very limited.  In addition, the stress of having to make decisions about choosing to go to work when you don't believe proper precautions are being taken or not going to work and losing your job and your reference take a mental health toll.   I think income as much as racial disparities may play a factor here.  If you have sufficient funding or good insurance, you can access private mental health support.  If you can't afford to pay out of pocket for a therapy session -- you do without.
- There is much concern about the mental health of children and youth but little data yet.  Home-based schooling has resulted in a great decrease in the number of referrals to the CSB.  To some extent it reduces the traditional stresses of school - attendance, performance and behavior - which often drive mental health referrals.  The more subtle effects of isolation and loss may take longer to manifest themselves.
- We are seeing increases in suicides across the country hence concern for mental health should be a shared concern.
- We hear from families a great deal of frustration re: access to mental health services. For ex, even when and where affordable and available, telehealth does not work well for many younger children or those with disabilities.  The impact of traumatic stress is evident across a much larger group of children and families. For those families who were living with the realities of systemic inequities, past and ongoing traumas, and disability PRIOR to the pandemic are at even greater risk with the compounded impact of the health and economic crisis coupled with a lack of buffering primary and social supports.
- To be honest, my students have been struggling. I have spent more time communicating with counselors this year than ever, and have made it my priority to know my students as individually as possible during conferences, with snail mail- just trying my best to let them know they are cared for as people (and I know many FCPS teachers and staff have been doing the same). At the same time, they show their glorious resilience as well. I'm sure racial disparity exists, but I have seen stress and mental health issues across all races in my classes. Those who tend to already suffer from anxiety and other mental illness are suffering the most.
- Children at increased risk of unaddressed mental health conditions, some children experiencing toxic stress without the benefit of a buffering caregiver.  There are a lot of buzzwords flying around about trauma, mental health and social emotional learning but not a real understanding of a trauma response vs experiencing something difficult and a comprehensive understanding of the physiological and neurological impacts of trauma. Children are also witnessing domestic violence at home, something we know increases their ACE score and the potential for future negative health and behavioral outcomes.
- There are numerous issues:

- Many reports of depression resulting from social isolation being reported by both parents of teens/adolescents and students in FCPS
- increased Stress & Anxiety, alongside the lack of social interaction, online class structure has affected teens and adolescents in a number of ways: heightened anxiety about keeping up to date with their school work and other teens are experiencing difficulty concentrating or staying focused while at home.
- Virtual learning has inevitably increased the amount of time students spend on digital devices everyday. This has a potential negative impact on sleep and adverse health impacts from altered sleep cycles. Increased digital use can affect student's physical and mental health.
- Online learning has also affected the physical activity levels of students. Not walking between classes has made some students stationary for hours on end in front of their computers.
- Many students said that their days are morphing into each other; they've lost motivation to finish piles of homework
- Negative impact on seniors etc. because they feel like they are losing milestone moments.
- Students said they feel exhausted to look at their laptops for extended periods of time.
- Negative Impact on academics
- High schoolers are more susceptible to mental health, substance abuse etc.
- A loss of routine for many students, social isolation, and feelings of loneliness increase the risk of mental illness.
- An increase in domestic violence and abuse during this pandemic further exposes adolescents to risks of developing mental health problems.
- closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic has taken away the protective layer of school-based mental health support. Closure of community agencies makes the situation even harder.
- The last few months have seen social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, Reddit, and TikTok flooded with COVID-19 materials. Trending of information on these social media sites is due to the "likes" and "shares," and any misinformation leaves adolescents exposed to associated vulnerabilities. The social media infodemic has been linked to anxiety, feeling powerless, and catastrophizing situations. Further, COVID-19–themed jokes and memes circulating on social media can lead to pandemic issues not being taken seriously, which increases the risk of infection and associated distress and trauma.
- Uncertainty, fear of getting the virus, sleep problems, and worries about the future are some of the common mental health issues impacting adolescents in the face of the pandemic. Increased incidence of mental health problems, including stress-related disorders, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse, have been described in adolescents during a pandemic.
- The proportion of children's visits to emergency departments for mental health reasons surged from April through October, with increases of 24% for children ages 5 to 11 and 31% for children ages 12 to 17, according to a report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- Example Story: My eighth-grade daughter is an exceptionally bright girl, happy and active. She has always done very well in school. She was in AAP at XXX ES and then moved on to the AAP center for MS. In March when everything went virtual, she had straight As. She was saved by the fact that her grades would not change with the shift to

virtual school, because in spring 2020 her engagement fell drastically. She became sad and reclusive. When school started in the fall it became much worse. She is depressed and in counseling, she has Ds in Science and Math, and a C in English--her best and favorite subject. I'm in tears writing this because I don't know what to do for my daughter. Beyond access and quality of instruction, students must be in a physical and emotional state that enables them to learn. The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on families, leaving many children in precarious situations. Feeding America notes that one in four children is at risk of hunger during the pandemic. The number of children who are housing-insecure has risen as families struggle to pay rent. Parental supervision and support may be more difficult in families in which both parents need to work outside the home, or in which the parents are English-language learners and cannot directly support their child's learning.