

PGCPS COVID Impact

Key Findings

Attendance: An analysis of attendance rates for four key grade levels showed student attendance was down across the board from SY2020 to SY2021.

5th grade – -2.9%

8th grade – -6.5%

9th grade – -7.9%

10th grade – -5.5%

Grades: A similar analysis of grades for the same four grade levels found a marked increase in the percentage of students making Ds and Es in core academic subjects.

Enrollment: Analysis of enrollment data show a large decrease in new students entering PGCPS for the first time, especially at the Pre-K and K levels and for new immigrants.

The Covid-19 pandemic profoundly affected the Prince George's County Public School (PGCPS) community. Its full impact, which will be long lasting, is likely beyond measure. Still, the data presented in this brief begin to suggest its effect on PGCPS.

During Quarters 1, 2 and 3 of SY2021, PGCPS continued to provide synchronous and asynchronous instruction virtually for all students. During Quarter 4, PGCPS began to offer a hybrid model of instruction consisting of face-to-face and virtual instruction to students based on parental/family preference. The Departments of Monitoring and Accountability and Testing, Research and Evaluation prepared a study of PGCPS' teaching and learning efforts during the COVID 19 pandemic and analyzed data measuring student engagement and academic achievement during Quarters 1 through 4 of last year. Specifically, student attendance and grades from the previous school year (SY2020) were compared with similar data from SY2021. The findings of this analysis revealed key shifts in attendance and grading policies and procedures, impact of synchronous and asynchronous learning, as well as hybrid learning to determine their impacts on trend data and ultimately instructional outcomes. Moreover, COVID Implications also played a pivotal role in attendance and grades based on shifts in instructional mode and time.

The release of these analyses address the concerns locally, and at the state and national levels, that student performance may be lower during the current year, when virtual instruction is prevalent, than in past years when in-person instruction was the norm.

COVID Implications

Undoubtedly, the COVID pandemic compounded existing challenges to teaching and learning and exposed additional ones. There were factors that directly contributed to a decline in attendance rates and course grades, as well as factors that resulted in reduced district enrollment. The brief explanations that follow provide context.

Factors contributing to Lower Attendance and Grades from SY2020

- *Difference in Modes of Instruction*
Official attendance and grades for SY2020 were based only on days students were physically in the classroom. The transition to all virtual instruction for SY2021 was accompanied by challenges with technology in students' homes and maintaining student engagement virtually. Both factors likely contributed to the decline in grades and attendance from the previous year.

- *Difference in # of Days of Live Instruction*
During SY2020, students received five days of live instruction per week; in SY2021 live instruction occurred four days per week, with one day of asynchronous work. Confusion about how attendance was recorded on the asynchronous day may be related to the lower attendance rate for SY2021. In addition, fewer days of live instruction are likely related to the demonstrated decline in learning as measured by grades.
- *The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic*
Many PGCPS families were directly impacted by the pandemic, which includes coping with job-loss, sickness and death. The trauma of those experiences could certainly result in lower attendance and grades. Even among families not directly impacted by Covid, the isolation and fear that was prevalent combined with the stress of virtual learning cannot be discounted as contributing factors to declining attendance and grades.

Contributing Factors to a 4,304 Student Decline in SY2021 Enrollment:

- *Lack of New Enrollees*
Data show that fewer new students (i.e., students who had never been in PGCPS before) enrolled in PGCPS schools during SY2021 compared with the previous year. This is the case overall and at all individual grade levels. This could be due to a decrease in family mobility brought on by the pandemic, as well as families choosing to keep younger children (K and Pre-K) home especially if caregivers had lost their jobs. Furthermore, the number of students transferring in from foreign countries fell by more than 85% between SY2020 and SY2021. Preliminary data from SY2022 show that the number of transfers from foreign countries is up, but it is still 61% lower than SY2020's level.
- *Withdrawals and Transfers*
As the pandemic wore on, many families searched for alternatives for their students. Between the end of SY2020 and the beginning of SY2021, transfers to homeschooling more than doubled and withdrawals increased by 35%.
- *Promotion to Next Grade Level*
Virtual learning had a negative impact on student learning during SY2021, which caused a decrease in student grades as discussed earlier. As a result, the number of students who were not promoted to the next grade level increased.

Contributing Factors to a 2,703 Student Decline in SY2022 Enrollment:

- *Increase of New Enrollees*
The number of newly enrolled students increased by nearly 5,000 students from SY2021 to SY2022.
- *Withdrawals and Transfers*
The total enrollment declined from SY2021 to SY2022 because of the number of returning students falling by approximately 7,500. Transfers out of the school district were up significantly over the summer, compared to previous years. These increases were mainly driven by transfers to public schools in other counties in Maryland and in other states. Withdrawals also increased over the summer, compared to previous years.