



## **DRAFT - Summary of Staff Feedback Regarding School Closures and Return to Work**

Bellingham Public Schools sought feedback from staff, families, students and the community regarding the emergency school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, their experiences and checking in on possible scenarios for a return to school in the fall. The feedback forms were shared through a message from Superintendent Greg Baker on June 17 and a reminder sent on June 25. This message was emailed to staff, families and community, posted on the district and school websites and shared on social media. Feedback forms closed on Monday, June 29. A total of 675 staff responded to their feedback form.

Staff by union or association

- BEA: 415
- BASE: 157
- Non-represented: 57
- SEIU: 22
- BAO: 16
- Teamsters: 5

Of these respondents, 65.6 percent identified as certificated staff, 30.8 identified as classified staff and 3.6 identified as administrator.

### **Staff Feedback: Remote Learning and Experience During the School Closures**

**How would you describe your experience working during the COVID-19 school closures?**

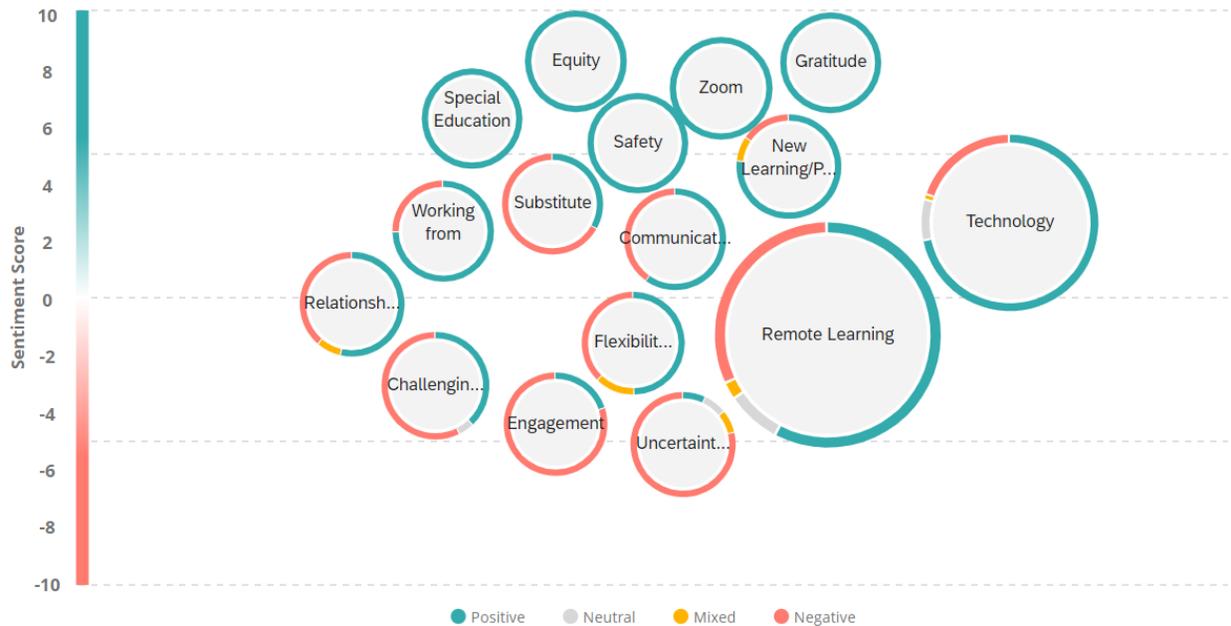
Staff reported 37.5 percent that the experience was “better than expected” or “much better than expected.” 43.0 reported “as expected” and 20.5 percent reported the experience as “worse than expected” or “much worse than expected.”

**Why would you describe your experience that way?**

516 staff members answered this question.

Common themes include:

- Appreciation for stance on equity and flexibility
- Many mentioned they were uncertain what to expect
- Substitutes were out of work and hope to have work in the fall
- Concerns about remote learning and keeping students engaged
- New learning of technology and programs both positive and challenging
- Staff missed social interactions with each other and students



### Representative comments:

*“I didn't know what to expect and was very happy with the district's focused priorities for staff and student wellness and safety.”*

*“I didn't know what to expect, so none of those responses work. Most of the work during the closure was a terrible experience. I often felt obsolete, worried, overwhelmed, pressured, confused, etc. I worked long, hard hours online, especially trying to find resources that would work without me there to help dependent learners. I felt very alone despite having support available. When I start to think back on it like this, it feels traumatic. I'm eternally grateful for the administration at my school and for all of my colleague/friends. They were patient and helpful beyond belief!”*

*“Distance learning cannot truly replace what a classroom teacher can provide in person, but I think everyone did the best they could under the circumstances. I'm grateful for that and how flexible everyone was.”*

*“I was proud to be working for Bellingham during this time. The learning menus and not requiring Zoom, really showed how we were valuing equity.”*

*“As with most of us - working virtually takes away from relationships. It was really hard to do my job and continue enjoying the work.”*

### **Have you worked onsite (at a school or district building) during the school closures?**

The majority of respondents reported that they did not work onsite at all during the school closures at 53.8 percent, followed up 41.3 percent that worked onsite “occasionally” and 4.9 percent that worked onsite “consistently.”

### **What has your experience been like working onsite? Please describe.**

This question was only asked of staff who worked onsite during the closures. 243 people answered this question.

These are the recurring themes:

- Most said they felt safe since the buildings were so empty but also that staff wore masks and practiced distancing (although a fewer amount commented that staff/families were not following health guidelines.)
- People commented that the buildings were quiet, eerie and lonely but also relief/happiness to be in their classroom or office
- Staff entered buildings to get materials they needed or to organize their classrooms
- Staff helped with the meal box distributions or at the Central Kitchen

### ***Representative comments:***

*“I enjoyed participating in food distribution, as I was able to see tangible results of my work and build positive relationships with coworkers and community. Appropriate PPE and distancing were employed.”*

*“We scheduled times to come into school to pack up our classrooms. There was hand sanitizer and masks available. I felt totally safe, though I missed my colleagues!”*

*“I was nervous the first time - we had quite a few things going on in the building like meal pickup and YMCA childcare - but apart from being quiet and kind of sad, I felt safe and productive.”*

### **What have been the best parts of working during the closures (e.g. new learning, new strategies)?**

510 staff members answered this question. Themes included:

- Learning new technology including Zoom, videos and more
- Using Zoom, video or Teams to stay connected with each other and students



### Representative comments:

*“Getting more comfortable using tech, making instructional videos, Seesaw, Zoom.”*

*“Watching students thrive and adapt to virtual learning. Seeing the benefit of instruction via Zoom and being able to monitor progress effectively for certain skills and goals. Becoming more proficient with technology and finding new resources to enhance instruction.”*

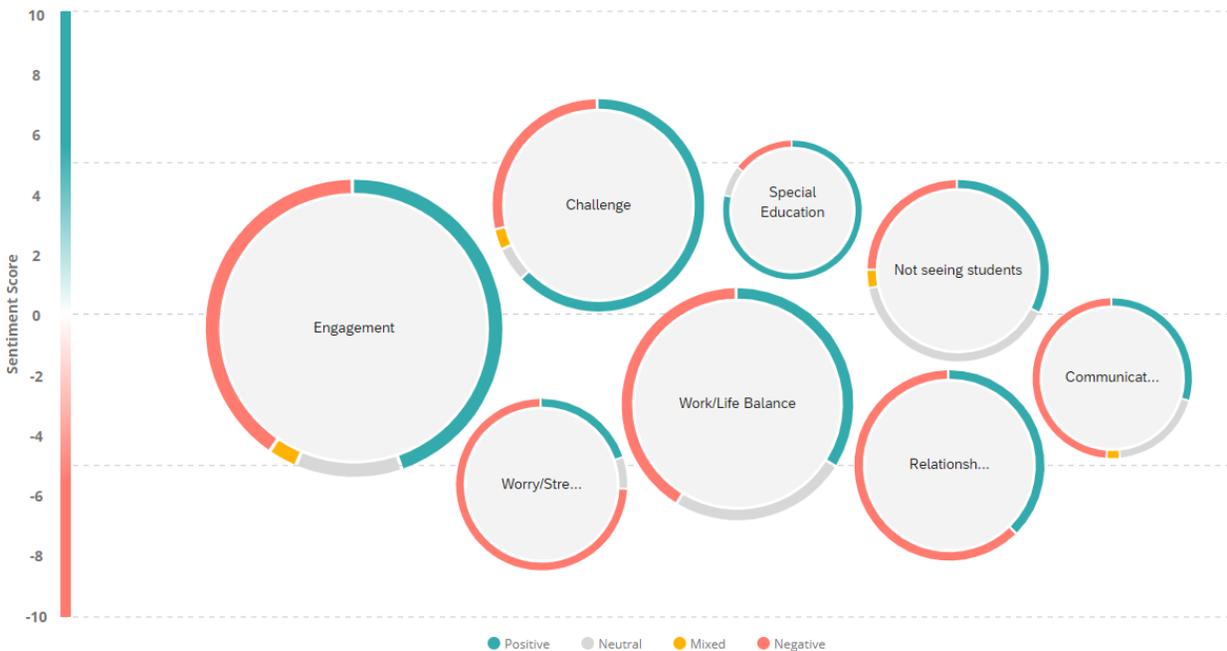
*“Collaborating with my colleagues. We were able to take time to align ourselves in our teaching. We communicated regularly. Being able to support my own children with their learning as they were trying to navigate remote learning.”*

*“More collaboration between colleagues in different buildings was great. It should be that way, if we're truly One Schoolhouse. New learning around technology that will serve me well in my work, even when things get back to normal.”*

### What has been most challenging for your work during the closures?

522 staff answered this question. Commons themes included:

- Staff expressed stress over work/life balance, either working too many hours or struggling to work and support their children at home without child care.
- Staff missed their colleagues but missed interacting and seeing students the most.
- Staff expressed general worry, concern or anxiety about the future



*“Not being able to be there for my students in the moment when they need me. Working with a small child at home and no child care.”*

*“I just hardly could manage my time with no child care. I felt like there was never time away from work and that I could not get accomplished what I needed to get done. I also found teaching straining when there was not a way to get feedback from students in the moment. Without face to face contact, the vast majority of students were hard to assess.”*

*“Multi-tasking, excessive amounts of time on the computer (teachers don’t have desk jobs) & not seeing my students. I really missed our school!!”*

*“The worry. The worry that my health, and the health of my children and students might not be the number one priority in the future. I think the unknown about next year, and whether I’ll be asked to go and teach in a building where I don’t feel safe is my greatest worry.”*

**How comfortable are you returning to work in the fall (e.g., in an office, outside of your home, or at a specific location)?**

Staff were mixed on their comfort level to return to work. 37.9 reported they would feel “extremely comfortable” or “comfortable” returning to work. 25.2 percent reported they would be neutral, with “neither comfortable nor uncomfortable” and 36.9 reported they would feel “extremely uncomfortable” or “uncomfortable.”

### **What actions would help you feel more ready or prepared to return to your worksite?**

This question was only asked of respondents who selected “uncomfortable” or “extremely uncomfortable” about returning to work.

Respondents equally selected “public health regulations being followed” and “maintaining social distancing protocols,” (169), followed by “knowing work spaces are cleaned/sanitized daily,” (166) and “cleaning sanitizing supplies are made readily available to all employees,” (164). “Knowing that mandatory symptom checks are required before entering the workplace,” (155) and “being provided personal protective equipment,” (151) were also highly selected. 33 respondents selected “there is nothing that will make me feel more comfortable,” and 101 selected “other.”

Many suggestions were provided, these are the recurring themes:

- Encourage education about the virus and its seriousness
- Provide sick leave to encourage staff to stay home, encourage families to keep students home when they are sick
- A vaccine is available or herd immunity
- Cases stop rising and/or lower rates of infection
- Realistic plans for social distancing and for young kids and students receiving special services
- Holding classes outside
- Questions about staff who are high-risk for various reasons
- Testing students, staff and/or anyone who enters the building for symptoms

### **What are your main concerns about coming back into the workplace?**

Respondents selected “public health regulations not being followed,” as their highest concern at (324), followed by “having in-person interaction” (255), and “other” (249). With 237 selections was “availability or disinfecting materials or personal protective equipment,” followed by “going back to the office too early,” (183) and “child care/care for family members or friends” (144). A total of 51 respondents reported they have no concerns about returning to work. Only three people selected “my commute,” as a consideration. For staff that selected “other” concerns ranged from being high-risk or having high-risk family members, concerns about having enough staff or subs, students and staff being able to safely social distance and concerns about students wearing masks.

### **What are you looking forward to about returning to your workplace?**

Most respondents selected “seeing students, families and colleagues,” at 27.8 percent, followed by “easier collaboration with co-workers,” at 17.3 percent and “better work/life balance,” at 14.0



percent. Only 0.92 percent of respondents selected “building perks.” 4.3 percent respondents selected “other.”

These are the recurring “other” themes:

- Connecting, teaching and interaction with students
- Being able to teach more effectively and work with students one-on-one
- Things getting back to normal
- Less screen time for everyone

### **If given the opportunity to continue to work remotely, would you be interested?**

Most respondents selected “yes” with 72.6 percent and fewer selected “no” with 27.4 percent.

### **What resources, supports or supplies do you need to get back to work?**

425 staff commented on this question. The most common needs and requests were:

- New learning or professional development
- Assurance of health and safety (classrooms/schools cleaned and disinfected, symptom checks or monitoring)
- Being provided personal protective equipment (face shields, gloves, masks, etc.)
- Need for child care (if continuing remote with younger children at home)
- Time for planning with colleagues
- Office equipment including scanners and printers

*“Proper PPE (I think teachers should have face shields so kids can see our faces). Child care if I am working when my school age children are not in school.”*

*“If I had to work at home I would have to have the double monitors and the printer capabilities. Not being able to phone other staff and the District was hard. All was done by email and sometimes it wasn't in a timely fashion.”*

*“If we go back to work within our school, I would like to make sure we have masks, hand sanitizer, gloves, disinfecting cleaner to use on counters, desks, computers, etc. And also good thermometers.”*

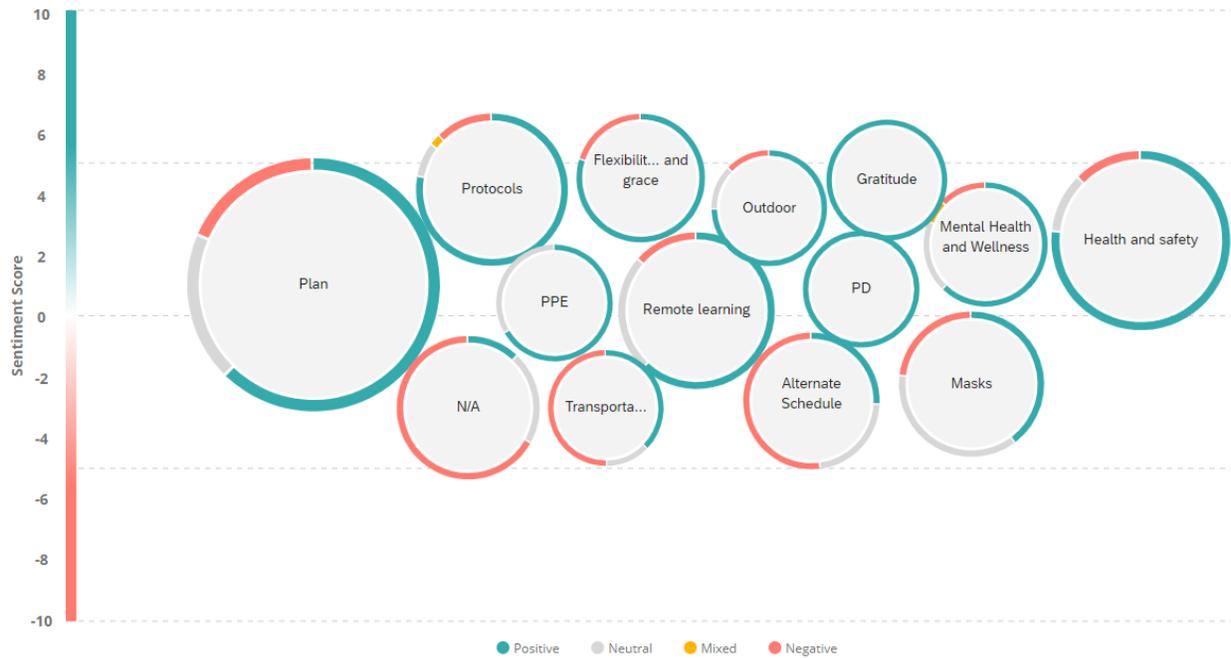
*“Paid time to plan with my content team. We are working towards having anti-racist curriculum and materials but it takes time to curate it all. Also, if students can't share supplies, we will need to order many more (ex: shared table supplies like glue sticks, pencils, markers, etc.).”*

### **Do you have any suggestions on how to make the transition back to work easier?**

This question was answered by 390 staff. Common themes included:

- Allow for flexibility and grace as continual changes are likely due to the pandemic
- Allow time for staff to plan, prepare and meet with colleagues before school

- Focus on health and safety including providing personal protective equipment, masks, sanitizer
- Focus on mental health and wellness including social-emotional learning
- Support for an alternate schedule, staggered schedule or holding classes outside when possible



### Representative comments:

*“There was a lot of talk in the beginning of quarantine around giving grace throughout this process. I think it would be helpful to remember that whatever form we're in in the fall and beyond, we will need to remember to give ourselves and each other some grace. Because even if we're back in our buildings in the fall, things will not be the same as they were.”*

*“Some information about what to expect, pictures of what it might look like, answers to questions that I'm getting from students and parents, confidence that we are collectively caring for each other through actions.”*

*“Don't push to reopen too early. When we do open, let teachers and schools focus on social emotional learning and needs. We will all need time to readjust (we'll have been gone at least "two summer's" of days as my son points out.). Remember that we will all need a lot of grace next year as well and help us out by lightening the load.”*

### Anything else that you would like us to know that was not covered already?

This question was answered by 319 staff. Common themes included:

