



# Statewide Virtual Conversation Regarding Reopening Schools

Individual BOCES Reports:  
Focus on Nassau BOCES  
June 2020

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## Introduction

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, public school districts in Nassau County began closing school buildings due to positive cases the week of March 8, 2020. On March 16, Governor Andrew Cuomo announced that all public schools would be closed for in-person instruction for two weeks. He continued to extend the closure until May 1 when he announced that schools would be closed for in-person instruction until the end of the school year.

Schools turned to remote instruction for Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, including students in special education and English as a New Language. Instruction was provided in a number of ways, ranging from academic paper packets to live virtual instruction.

Many families were impacted by the building closures. In addition to continuity of instruction, school districts provide families with childcare and meals. School districts stepped up to offer solutions to all of these issues, providing remote instruction, pre-packaged breakfasts and lunches, as well as resources for childcare for essential workers.

There was an equity issue regarding distance learning. Capacity for delivering instruction was on a continuum from very low to very high. Two factors most often defined the continuum – the wealth or location of the district.

The Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) – which were created by the New York State legislature to provide shared educational programs and services to school districts within their boundaries – created a statewide online virtual conversation to understand the thoughts and concerns of community members and staff regarding reopening school buildings. There are 37 BOCES throughout New York State, each led by a District Superintendent who represents not only the BOCES and its component school districts but also serves as liaisons to the New York State Commissioner of Education. The District Superintendents believed that a survey-like virtual conversation would help to gather the information needed to build credible and realistic reopening plans.

## Executive Summary

The BOCES used the virtual conversation tool Thoughtexchange to crowdsource thoughts and ideas regarding how community members feel about returning to school in the fall or whenever it is possible. The question – “What ideas and thoughts do you have as you think about a return to in-person schooling?” –gathered thoughts from more than 60,000 participants, of which 18% or 10,923 were from Nassau County.

After a participant shared their thoughts, they were encouraged to rate at least 30 of the thoughts submitted by other participants. This way, the thoughts that resonated with the most participants would rise to the top. Statewide more than 80,000 thoughts were shared, resulting in more than 2.2 million ratings. The exchange is the largest in Thoughtexchange’s history. In Nassau County, participants shared nearly 15,000 thoughts and rated more than 400,000 thoughts.

Because the exchange was anticipated to be large, it was released slowly over a number of days, and was open from May 15 to May 29. Nassau BOCES asked its 56 component school districts to share the exchange and encourage participation. Each participant was asked to identify their BOCES so that the data could be sorted by region. This report focuses only on the data collected for Nassau BOCES.

The statewide report analyzed the top 300 thoughts for each BOCES. In this report for Nassau BOCES, the top 1,500 thoughts or 10% of the responses.

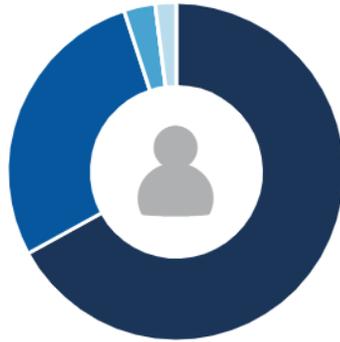
Like much of the state, thoughts from Nassau County residents call for returning to in-person schooling in the fall. The theme “In-person instruction important” received 24% of the 1,500 thoughts. This was followed closely by the theme focused on “Cleaning/disinfecting/hand sanitizer,” which received 22% of the thoughts. The third-highest theme in Nassau County focused in the pros and cons of remote learning, which received about 12% of the thoughts.

<b>Question: “What ideas and thoughts do you have as you think about a return to in-person schooling?”</b>	
<b>10,923 Participants</b>	The participant count includes people who took part in one or more of the following exchange activities: reading the introduction, sharing thoughts, rating thoughts or exploring thoughts.
<b>14,872 Thoughts</b>	Thoughts are the ideas shared by participants.
<b>412,400 Ratings</b>	Participants were asked to rate about 30 thoughts. Thoughts are rated on a five-star scale – one star being the lowest rating and five being the highest, in terms of importance or agreement. Throughout the report, the term “star rating” is referring to the average rating a thought received by participants. The participants self-identified which BOCES they lived in. Participants were only able to view and rate thoughts from their BOCES.

# Survey Questions

Participants were asked to complete four survey questions before participating in the exchange.

What is the MOST IMPORTANT role you play related to public education?



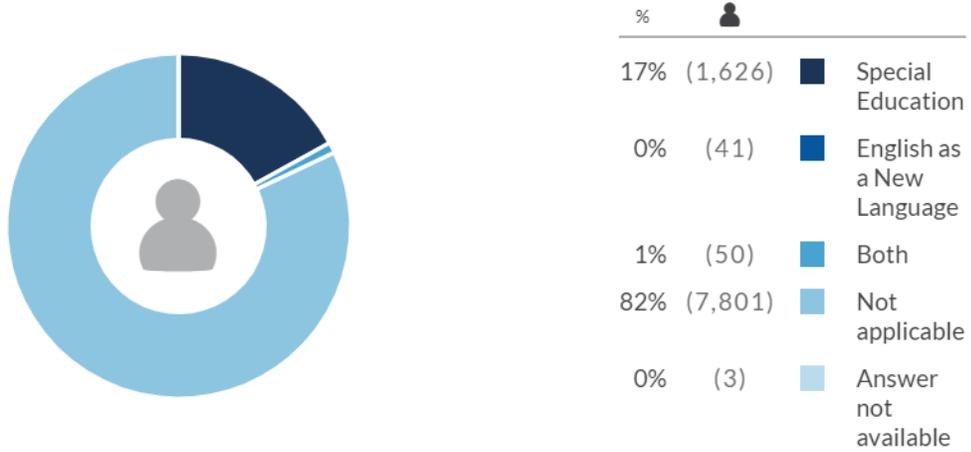
%	Person Icon	Role
67%	(6,544)	Parent/Guardian of current student
28%	(2,740)	Faculty/staff
3%	(226)	Administrator
0%	(21)	Board member
2%	(190)	Other

What school level do you primarily associate yourself with?

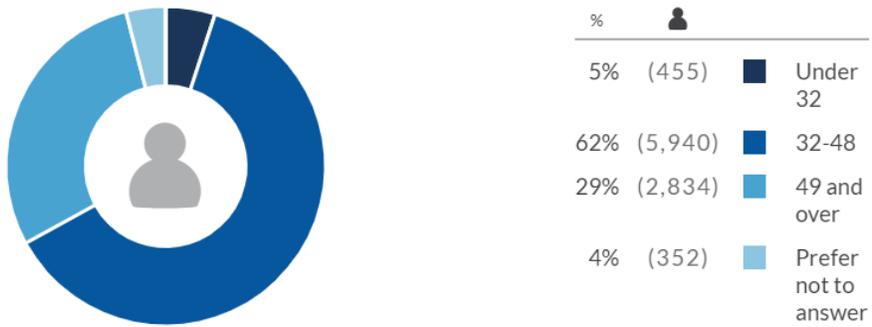


%	Person Icon	School Level
46%	(4,429)	Elementary School
15%	(1,433)	Middle School
29%	(2,812)	High School
10%	(1,002)	Districtwide

· If you are a parent, is your child receiving services in the following programs?



· What is your age range?



## TOP THEMES

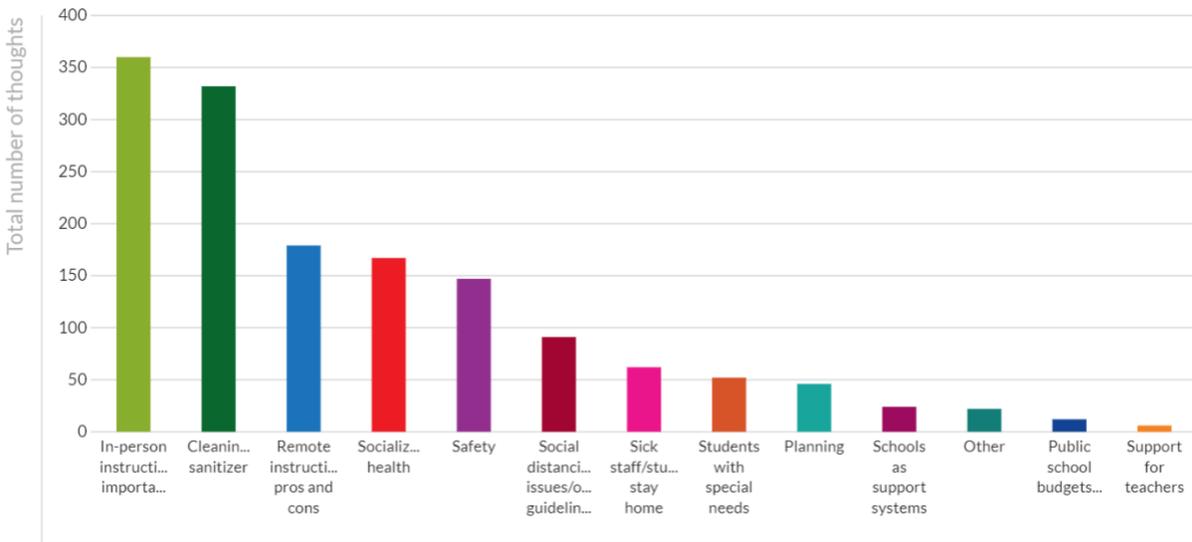
After an exchange closes, the exchange leader reviews the top responses to determine the “Themes” that have emerged from the conversation. Those themes are used to sort the thoughts and make it easier to spot trends in the data. Think of the themes like a system of buckets that you can use to sort like data. Some thoughts mention multiple themes. In this case, the person conducting the theming places it in the theme that receives the most emphasis in the thought. This exchange was themed by the exchange leader and two Thoughtexchange customer success managers, who specialize in theming and analytics.

Statewide, 13 themes emerged from the data. A 14th category – Other – was created for thoughts that did not fit into one of the 13 themes. These themes were created based on the statewide data and are being used for individual BOCES reports so that the data can be compared to state and regional results. The data below represents the number of Nassau BOCES thoughts for each theme and the star rating earned in this BOCES.

- Cleaning/disinfecting/hand sanitizer (332 thoughts, 4.3 star rating, 22.13%)
- In-person instruction important (360 thoughts, 4.2 star rating, 24%)
- Other (22 thoughts, 4.2 star rating, 1.47%)
- Planning (46 thoughts, 4.2 star rating, 3.07%)
- Public school budgets/funding (12 thoughts, 4.3 star rating, 0.8%)
- Remote instruction pros and cons (179 thoughts, 4.3 star rating, 11.93%)
- Rural/suburban/urban differences (0 thoughts, N/A star rating, 0%)
- Safety (147 thoughts, 4.2 star rating, 9.8%)
- Schools as support systems (24 thoughts, 4.2 star rating, 1.6%)
- Sick staff/students stay home (62 thoughts, 4.3 star rating, 4.13%)
- Social distancing/mask issues/other guidelines (91 thoughts, 4.2 star rating, 6.07%)
- Socialization/mental health (167 thoughts, 4.3 star rating, 11.1%)
- Students with special needs (52 thoughts, 4.3 star rating, 3.47%)
- Support for teachers (6 thoughts, 4.2 star rating, 0.4%)

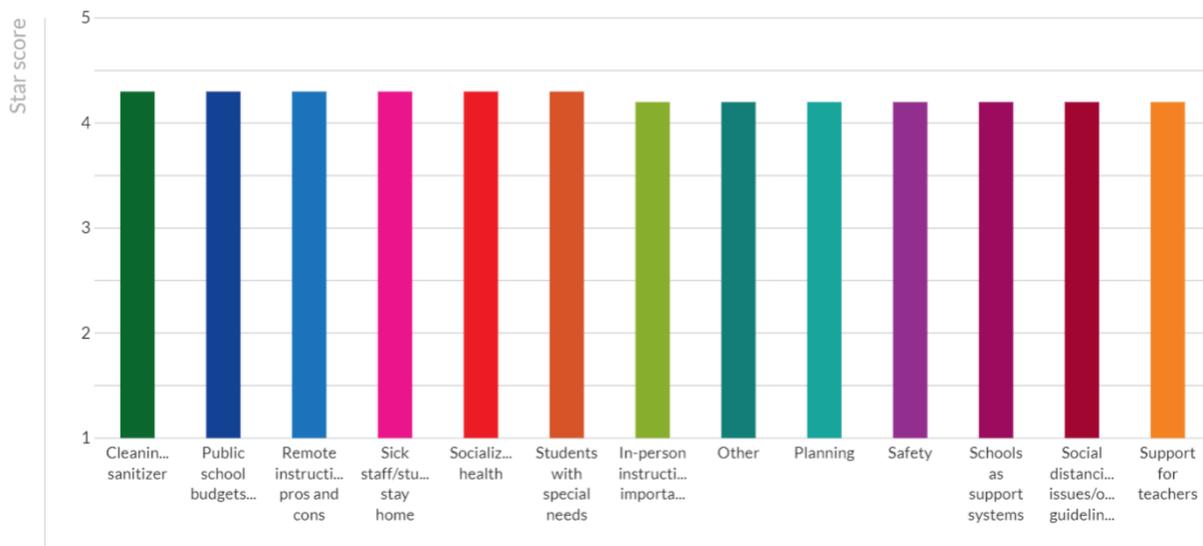
Two of the themes are very small. Statewide, “Rural/suburban/urban differences” has 11 thoughts and “Support for teachers” has 15 thoughts. These themes received almost no responses in Nassau County. The exchange data team debated eliminating these themes and putting the thoughts in “Other.” They decided against this because the thoughts in these themes received such high star ratings in other areas of the state.

## Top themes based on number of thoughts



In Nassau County, the “In-person instruction important” theme received the most thoughts with 360 of the 1,500 thoughts placed in this category. This represents about 24% of the themed thoughts. Conversely, “Rural/suburban/urban differences” did not receive any thoughts.

## Top themes based on star ratings



Six themes tied for the highest star rating at 4.3 stars, showing that there was a high agreement regarding the importance of these themes. The six themes were “Cleaning/disinfecting/hand sanitizer,” “Public school budgets/funding,” “Remote instruction pros and cons,” “Sick staff/students stay home,” “Socialization/mental health” and “Students with special needs.”

## Top 3 thoughts from each theme

### Cleaning/disinfecting/hand sanitizer

- Thorough sanitation before and after school which includes disinfectant. Schools & all workplaces have allowed relaxed actions over the years. To ensure cleanliness
- Elimination of Water Fountains faucets and only allowing Water Bottle Refill Stations will eliminate the transfer of germs by using faucets and water only being deposited into bottles
- Cleanliness of school buildings classrooms will need to be disinfected every single day to kill any possible lurking virus, in general, classrooms are cleaned in a very basic manner

### In-person instruction important

- I think we need to get students and teachers back into the school buildings and classrooms. School is not just about book learning. There is a social learning that takes place as well a bond that forms between the teacher and student.
- Students need to get back in the building. I have an elementary aged child, a middle schooler and I teach high school. This is terrible for learning. Children are struggling academically, emotionally and physically. A lack of effort academically has been displayed and our kids are depressed and anx
- In-person classroom instruction is essential to the success of public education. Students are more attentive and responsive when teachers are available to address their thoughts and answer their questions in real time.

### Other

- Limit adults entering facilities to just teaching and admin professionals and take temperatures daily with non-contact thermometer If someone has a fever you will be limiting all contact with children
- Outside Air – the buildings HVAC systems should increase outside air as much as can be accomplished Increasing the amount of outside air and reducing the amount of air recycled inside of the building, will reduce circulation of contaminants
- My concern is for the knowledge lost during the shutdown of in person school. It is important that the students receive extra support when school resumes.

### Planning

- We as teachers have figured what works best for us individually. Why is there no continuity between schools? Learning platforms and content Ask the teachers what works best, don't higher outside business or companies to make educational decisions. They only know their bottom line
- I am very concerned about who is making the decisions as to when are schools will open, and how they will operate when they do. Elected officials will use this as a platform for their agenda. They should consult educators, parents, physiologists NOT Bill Gates and Google.

- What happens if there's a second wave and students are home again? Schools need to arm children with what they need in the event of another school closure due to COVID-19.

### **Public school budgets/funding**

- No cuts in school funding Schools need funding for proper cleaning, smaller class sizes, to maintain social distancing, and teacher training
- Schools more than ever need financial support and aid To strip schools now, during this horrific time is barbaric to say the least. More necessary supplies are needed as well as staff to attend to needs.
- The fiscal burden on districts is impossible. School districts are cash strapped as is - who is going to pay for all these changes when the governor is saying he is cutting our state aid?

### **Remote instruction pros and cons**

- How do we grade the students' work? What criteria is used? Will regents exams be given? Instruction is NOT the same virtually as in person, difficult to ensure that every student is engage and keeping up
- If virtual teaching is to continue better platforms that can withstand bandwidth is needed for all. IEP mandates must be considered.
- Virtual learning is not a replacement for in person learning. It is unhealthy to be behind a screen for hours on end.

### **Rural/suburban/urban differences**

No thoughts

### **Safety**

- Schools need to take all precautionary measures to keep a safe environment As it's important to return to school buildings, schools need to evaluate usage of space properly so as to allow proper social distancing
- If students do return, obviously things will be different. Again, safety first. Our children's health and safety.
- The health and safety of all stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, staff, administrators, community) MUST be the priority upon return. People can get sick and die if we disregard appropriate health and safety protocols.

### **Schools as support systems**

- Sanctuary Not every child has a wonderful home life filled with love. Some regard school as the safest, happiest place to be. They make connections/friends here
- Kids rely on school as a safe place to interact with adults who care for them so they can feel safe. This will allow for face to face feedback from teachers in all areas, not just in the classroom to help the child engage and be motivated to learn.

### **Sick staff/students stay home**

- There needs to be an emphasis on not coming to school sick Faculty and students have continued to do this, and now it is more dangerous.
- Parents should not send their children to school if they are sick in ANY WAY and the 24-48 hour fever free ruling needs to be strictly enforced, Children who are compromised could continue to have classes online.
- Socialization/mental health Educate parents. Do not send kids to school sick. Practice safety measures. Students with special needs

### **Social distancing/mask issues/other guidelines**

- How can you fit 30 students into a classroom with Social distancing
- Practicing social distancing in a preschool class is going to be extremely difficult especially in the beginning of the school year. At this age they are learning social skills and are a little emotionally.
- How will social distancing be done? Will teachers be responsible for students' health? Will children be tested as they enter school? Will all people including parents, visitors, teachers, custodians, delivery personnel, etc, be tested when entering the building?

### **Socialization/mental health**

- We need to account for the mental health issues we will encounter as this was an event that has effected every single person in various ways
- Teachers social emotional well being Vital role in students life
- I think socialization and being in a school setting is better for students than remote learning on so many levels. Children need to engage with other students and need physical education, art, and their teachers.

### **Support for teachers**

- Special education- these kids are suffering the most They need to have in person instruction
- Services for those special education students deserve to receive the same structured services as always These are the students and families can not be ignored or left out
- For my special education student, in person interaction necessary for social emotional learning My son has autism spectrum disorder and difficulties with social cues and peer interaction. Remote learning cannot meet his social needs.



## Differences example

### Side A

I would like the kids to go back to school and have a regular full day 5 days a week like they normally would. I feel like they are not absorbing the same as they would in a regular classroom. They do not like the only learning.

★ 4.9 ★ 1.3

Open normally in sept this is ri

★ 4.7 ★ 1.1

We **MUST** open buildings, conduct face-to-face instruction in September 2020. We MUST provide all programs and extra-curricular activities to all children as we have always done.

★ 4.9 ★ 1.1

Open schools. **Nothing is ever safe.** We can improve safety, but nothing is safe

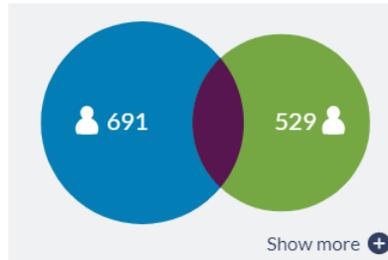
★ 4.7 ★ 1.1

We should return to school in person in September. All kids, all day, every day. Exceptions would be children with comprising conditions.

★ 4.9 ★ 1.2

Socialization is a major part of the mental health of children and that is learned in a actual school setting not virtual! We cannot let our governor Hold us hostage for his own agenda, I feel that if these children do not get back to a school environment they will decline in health and never reach

★ 4.8 ★ 1.8



### Side B

No in person schooling until there is a true vaccine or effective biologic therapy There are few things worth dying for...Algebra and Recess are not one of them. Don't get me started on graduation...its also not a reason to congregat

★ 1.2 ★ 5.0

I am concerned about sending children back to school in September. Making blanket statements that all children should return to school is dangerous!! We now see a potentially severe and deadly side affect in children all of whom either tested positive for Covid19 or have antibodies.

★ 1.5 ★ 5.0

Not safe Until a vaccine is mandatory to all

★ 1.1 ★ 4.9

Continue virtual learning until Jan 2021. To play it safe and allow for things to settle down and feel more confidant about the facts of this virus.

★ 1.1 ★ 4.7

I do not feel safe sending my children back to school until there is a vaccine/cure /treatment for Covid19. Both of my children have asthma (high risk) Their health comes first. Covid 19 has proven to be deadly for all ages. I will not put my kids at risk!

★ 1.3 ★ 4.8

How safe will it be for children and staff to return to school? How can a school that may

### Side A/B Common (high)

Safety Safety of students and staff

★ 3.9 ★ 4.9

Hand sanitizer dispensers used to be placed on our classroom walls when the H1N1 virus was prevalent, but they were removed in recent years. Hand sanitizers and dispensers should be readily available throughout school buildings.

★ 4.7 ★ 4.4

Let Laura Curran know that now us not the time to raise taxes. In fact they should be reduced or frozen the next couple years. Families are struggling

★ 4.9 ★ 4.1

Custodians Disinfection of schools should be ramped up throughout the school day and especially after school is over.

★ 4.5 ★ 4.7

Daily disinfecting of classrooms Children can be silent carriers of COVID

★ 4.0 ★ 4.6

## Differences

The Thoughtexchange system also provides the ability to look at the polarization and commonalities that manifested in the conversation. An example is provided on page 12. This helps to identify areas of division and areas of agreement throughout the exchange. In the example, the system analyzed the starring pattern/behavior of two groups, placing these thoughts into two different groups: “Group A” and “Group B.” At the top of the screen is a bar graph showing the approximate size of each sub-group (Group A and Group B). Below each thought is the average rating assigned to it by each sub-group, Group A scores are on the bottom left and Group B scores are on the bottom right.

**Here is an example of one of the primary groupings identified in the report's algorithm:**

Please see first thought on the left column (under “Side A”):

- THOUGHT – “I would like kids to go back to school and have a regular full-day 5 days a week like they normally would. I feel like they are not absorbing the same as they would in a regular classroom. They do not like only the learning.”

Group A (Side A) rated this thought high (Avg 4.9)

Group B (Side B) rated this thought low (Avg 1.3)

Please see first thought on the right column (under “Side B”):

- THOUGHT – “No in-person schooling until there is a true vaccine or effective biologic therapy. There are few things worth dying for ... Algebra and Recess are not one of them. Don't get me started on graduation...it's also not a reason to congregate.”

Group A (Side A) rated this thought low (Avg 1.2)

Group B (Side B) rated this thought high (Avg 5.0)

The Common ratings show a list of thoughts that the sub-groups rated the same (either high or low). These thoughts show agreement.

## **Top thoughts by demographic**

There are many similarities in the responses between those who identify themselves as parents/guardians in general to those who identify themselves as parents of students with special needs or students for whom English is a new language. In the top five responses for each category, returning to in-person learning and cleaning processes are emphasized.

### **Top five thoughts by those who identified themselves as a parent/guardian**

- Having hand sanitizers in all classroom and common areas. Practice hygiene guidelines.
- Distance learning is not nearly as effective as the education that takes place in person. Children learn from the relationships that develop between a teacher and student.
- School bathroom need to automate Faucets, soap dispensers etc. need to be automatic. Faucets where you need to hold them open while washing are not hygienic and may spread disease.
- Safety I just want the entire school to be safe; teachers, students etc.
- I feel it is very important for children to be in the classroom for school learning Children need to have face to face interaction in order to learn effectively

### **Top five thoughts by parents of students with special needs**

- I believe it is imperative for our kids to return to in-person schooling. Kids need to be around other kids. They need direction from an adult, and teachers usually get a different response than parents from their children.
- Teachers need the ability to connect with students. Teachers understand the social & emotional needs of every child. They need to see them to be able to nurture these needs. They cannot do that online.
- What measures will be taken to disinfect the school during the school day and each evening? Disinfecting the building during the day and each evening should be a priority
- I am hoping that special education children would get special attention. These kids are already behind and not continuing with normal education will have a huge negative impact on their lives.
- I feel it is very important for children to be in the classroom for school learning Children need to have face to face interaction in order to learn effectively.

### **Top five thoughts by parents of student with English as a new language**

- Continue distance learning until there is a vaccine or effective treatment.
- Only have a 4 day week on the 5th day have school sterilized
- I don't think that it should be rushed Kids need socialization.

- Absolutely should return back to school immediately interaction and having the students respond to the teachers questions is key to education.
- Kids need to go back to ok school in September 2020. Need structure, social interaction.