

Survey Report Executive Summary– COVID-19 Workforce Assessment Submitted by: Katie Torres

Purpose:

The pandemic challenged the workforce. The County was interested in learning more about the employee experience during COVID and how the County could support employees. As a result, in the Fall of 2020, the C-19 Workforce Assessment Survey was launched.

Research Questions:

The report highlights the key findings of the COVID-19 Workforce Assessment based on the four initial research questions posed:

- 1. How are employees managing during COVID-19?*
- 2. What are employees' primary concerns and challenges?*
- 3. What do employees need to overcome the challenges associated with working during the pandemic?*
- 4. How well is the County of Santa Barbara doing as an employer responding to the needs and safety of employees during the pandemic?*

Overview of Respondents:

The survey was distributed to all county employees with specific sections aimed at parents, caregivers, and managers/supervisors. We kept the survey short to ensure as many employees would complete it and spend the time needed on each question.

We had 1,848 respondents and over 3,000 written comments were provided throughout which enriched the data and feedback.

- 22% (n = 408) of the respondents are managers/supervisors.
- 42%(n = 783) of the respondents have children ages 0-18 whom they care for and live in their home.
- 22% (n = 409) of the respondents have caregiving responsibilities for someone in or outside their home (e.g. an elder, family member, or adult with special needs, etc. other than traditional child care). Note: throughout this report, the term caregiver is used to refer to a person who fits this description.
- 68% of respondents identify as female, 30% male, and 1% other. Within the larger population of all County employees, 55% are female and 45% are male thus women's voices are more represented in these survey results.
- 35% of survey respondents live in South County and 31% live in North County whereas more than 55% work in South County.
- Approximately two-thirds of survey respondents (n = 1339) work in the office at least 50% of the time and only 22% (n = 415) telework 76-100% of the time.

There was a strong overall response rate of 38% with good representation from all departments which was consistent with the overall percentage of employees from each department.

Key Takeaways:

While there was a lot of valuable data, here are a few key takeaways:

- Based on employee responses, we know close to 50% of respondents are neither better or worse however, employees who have childcare and/or caregiving responsibilities reported doing worse or much worse (37%) now compared to when the pandemic started.
- Productivity is the same if not better. Managers and Supervisors reported that the majority of their staff (83%) are equally or more productive now compared to before the pandemic started.
- The majority of employees with childcare and/or caregiving responsibilities have not considered quitting their jobs due to the pandemic.
- Respondents have many concerns. 70% of respondents' greatest concern/challenge is the health impacts of COVID-19 on them personally, their friends, and family members. Followed by social isolation (24%) and child care (22%) and caregiver (19%) responsibilities.
- Respondents feel the County has done several things to support employees and many have benefitted from teleworking (41%), and flexible work schedules (19%) to name a few. However, many respondents indicated they have not benefitted from any of the options provided.
- 67% of respondents feel the County is doing well in response to the pandemic. Followed by 14% of respondents who don't feel good about the County's response and finally, 14% don't feel the County is proactive in providing information and setting up guidelines for employees during the pandemic.

Recommendations:

The report identifies the following recommendations for the next steps:

- 1.) Ensure consistent and uniform policies to create equitable implementation of safe policies.
- 2.) Support employee wellbeing during COVID-19 by developing innovative strategies to manage employee stress and reset expectations about County operations.

- 3.) Engage managers to implement creative, consistent policies, address employee concerns, and to advocate for their own needs during the pandemic (and afterwards)
- 4.) Address child care and caregiving challenges of employees during COVID-19.
- 5.) Explore, and create a plan to invest in long-term child care and caregiving support strategies.
- 6.) Distribute the survey at least quarterly to track changes in employee perceptions, stress levels, needs, and other benchmarks.

Based on the recommendations above, CoHR and others have identified strategies to help alleviate the enormous stress employees are under while creating sustainable and equitable workplace solutions that promote health and safety during the pandemic while also ensuring the quality of County services is sustained. Below are a few strategies that have been implemented:

- Guidelines regarding employee notification of a potential COVID-19 exposure in the workplace have been established which address employees' concerns and fears of exposure to COVID-19 at work.
- CoHR has established a one-stop intranet site for resources related to COVID matters.
- In May a virtual wellness fair will be available to support employees based on topics identified throughout the survey and open comment sections.
- During the month of March, several virtual COVID-19 Workforce Assessment information sessions will be offered where employees will be presented the survey findings and can participate in discussions regarding the survey results.
- Resources are being sought to facilitate the ongoing collection of employee feedback through pulse surveys on very specific topics identified throughout the Covid-19 assessment survey.
- For the 2022 plan year, the Benefits & Wellness Division is researching potential vendors who can provide the workforce childcare support and/or resources.
- The Organizational and Talent Development Division will contract for management training specifically related to building competencies in remote worker supervision and building resilient teams.

There is more work to be done, and CoHR and others will continue to implement strategies to support its employees. For more insight please read the full Covid-19 Workforce Assessment Report.

County of Santa Barbara

COVID-19 Workforce Assessment



Conducted by:
Eileen Monahan and Holly Goldberg, PhD

COVID-19 Workforce Assessment Survey

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Purpose

The County of Santa Barbara's Human Resources Department and CEO launched this survey to assess the needs of employees during the COVID-19 pandemic in October 2020. Across the nation, employees are struggling to adapt to the workplace, societal changes, and isolation due to the pandemic. Many have lost income due to an inability to work or the loss of a family member's job. Resources that were relied upon are no longer available or are in short supply. And the overarching concern of contracting the virus adds to the stress.

For those with young children, there is added complexity and pressure. Child care in Santa Barbara County was at a premium before the pandemic began. The pandemic caused many child care programs to close due to low enrollment as parents adhered to the Stay At Home orders and then began to work from home. Many programs struggle to operate and could not reopen open due to financial challenges caused by COVID-related restrictions on the number of children allowed to be served as well as increased staffing and cleaning requirements. Additionally, as elementary and secondary schools closed and transitioned to online learning, parents working from home and those required to be in their place of work faced another layer of difficulty. A County employee child care survey was conducted earlier in the pandemic that provided valuable information and referrals directly to open child care programs for the relatively small number of families needing care. However, a deeper dive and update was deemed necessary to understand changing needs and impacts.

For employees with caregiving responsibilities (e.g. an elder, family member, or adult with special needs, etc. other than traditional child care), either ongoing, or due to the pandemic, the extra demands and stresses are like those of employees with children. In "normal" times, caring for someone either inside or outside the home requires a sustained level of time, emotional strength and financial resources. During the pandemic, employee caregivers are also juggling the demands and changes of the workplace during COVID -19 while learning and implementing high level care and safety precautions, sometimes while also juggling child care responsibilities. Isolation and quarantine guidelines for exposure to the virus add to caregiving and child care challenges, often with little time to plan.

For all employees, this survey also took a broad look at challenges being faced which the County may be able to address, and asked employees to reflect back to the County their assessment of the responsiveness of the County to employee needs during COVID-19.

Research Questions

1. How are employees managing during COVID-19?

Goal of this section: To broadly determine how employees are faring (degree of challenges/ease) overall in their lives during COVID-19. This section will generate benchmark data regarding employee's response to the pandemic.

2. What are employees' primary concerns and challenges?

Goal of this section: To determine what work challenges are faced by all employees, parent/guardian employees, employees with caregiving responsibilities, and managers.

3. What do employees need to overcome the challenges associated with working during the pandemic? To identify solutions that could help employees overcome these challenges at work.

4. How well is the County of Santa Barbara doing as an employer responding to the needs and safety of employees during the pandemic.

Goal of this section: Determine how the County of Santa Barbara's response and decisions to COVID-19 in the workplace are impacting employees, from an employee perspective. This section will generate benchmark data that can be tracked over time.

Methodology

Survey questions were formatted keeping in mind the intent to redistribute the survey on a regular schedule, so the County can keep up with employee needs and to allow for adjustments in procedures as things change.

- Target Study Population: The survey was distributed to all County employees with specific sections aimed at parents, caregivers, and managers.
- Survey Length: The goal was to keep the survey short to ensure many employees would complete it and spend time on each question. Less time was required for those employees who do not supervise others, who do not have children, and/or do not have caregiving responsibilities. The time to complete the survey ranged from 5-20 minutes.
- Confidentiality: No identifying information was collected to protect employees' identity and anonymity.
- Data Collection Process: A survey announcement was sent to employees prior to the survey launch and reminders during the survey period to encourage a high survey response. Employees completed the survey on SurveyMonkey during a 7-day data collection period at the end of October 2020. (October 29 through November 4)
- Data Analysis Process: Survey data was analyzed within Survey Monkey and Excel, with reports for both provided to the County in addition to this written report.

Recommendations

With this survey, the County of Santa Barbara has the opportunity, and is being called to enact, bold and creative strategies during this extraordinary time. Employees are challenged to adapt to the myriad of changes that must take place because of the virus, both at home and at work, and the County is in a unique position to support their wellbeing and the wellbeing of those they care for.

The survey responses reflect a variety of workplace situations, rather than one consistent set of policies for all employees. This is understandable, as different positions serve different roles in County operations, and employees have varied needs. The County is interested in consistent, unique, innovative, truly supportive solutions to employee challenges.

The following are recommendations, based on survey results, to help alleviate the enormous stress employees are under while creating sustainable and equitable workplace solutions that promote health and safety during the pandemic while ensuring the quality of County services is sustained. In addition to the report, it is recommended that County leadership read through the text responses from the survey. Many employees took the time to provide some very thoughtful responses, and although it is difficult to quantify them, the statements themselves are informative and powerful (Questions 8, 10, 12,16, 18, 22, 23, 25, 31, 32,35, 36, 41). Some are listed in the data section of this report, in light blue boxes.

- 1. Ensure consistent and uniform policies to create equitable implementation of safe policies.**
- 2. Support employee wellbeing during COVID-19 by developing innovative strategies to manage employee stress and reset expectations about County**
- 3. Engage managers to implement creative, consistent policies, address employee concerns, and to advocate for their own needs during the pandemic (and afterwards)**
- 4. Address child care and caregiving challenges of employees during COVID-19.**
- 5. Explore, and create a plan to invest in long-term child care and caregiving support strategies.**
- 6. Distribute the survey at least quarterly to track changes in employee perceptions, stress levels, needs, and other benchmarks.**

Overview of Survey Respondents

1,848 of the 4,925 County employees completed this Workforce Assessment survey, representing a 38% response rate.

- 22% (n = 408) of the respondents are managers/supervisors.
- 42% (n = 783) of the respondents have children ages 0-18 whom they care for and live in their home.
- 22% (n = 409) of the respondents have caregiving responsibilities for someone in or outside their home (e.g. an elder, family member, or adult with special needs, etc. other than traditional child care). Note: throughout this report the term caregiver is used to refer to a person who fits this description.
- 68% of respondents identify as female, 30% male, and 1% other. Within the larger population of all County employees, 55% are female and 45% are male thus women’s voices are more represented in these survey results.
- 35% of survey respondents live in South County and 31% live in North County whereas more than 55% work in South County.
- Approximately two thirds of survey respondents (n = 1339) work in the office at least 50% of the time and only 22% (n = 415) telework 76-100% of the time.

Net Promoter Score

<i>How likely is it that you would recommend working at the County to a friend or colleague?</i>						
Detractors (0-6)		Passive (7-8)		Promoters (9-10)		Net Promoter Score
26.86%	444	32.73%	541	40.41%	668	13.55
					Answered	1653
					Skipped	195

The Net Promoter Score for those employees who participated in the survey resulted in a score of 13.55. It should be noted that 195 employees did not answer the question, which may affect the true score.

NOTE:

The Net Promoter Score is a customer loyalty system. When used with employees, it can help an organization measure employee engagement, which impacts both culture and bottom line. Scoring can land anywhere between -100 and 100. Any score above zero can be considered a "good" score, since that implies that there are more promoters than detractors. Between 10 and 30 is generally considered good. The question selected for the Net Promoter Score should be asked on a regular frequency: monthly, quarterly, or annually. Further, responses must be anonymous to gather the most honest feedback.

Department Participation

There was a strong overall response rate (38%), with a good representation from all departments. In addition to the relatively high survey response rate, the distribution of the responses across the departments was generally consistent with the overall percentage of employees from each department.

	Percent of Survey Respondents by Department	Overall percent of County Employees by Department
Agricultural Commissioner/Weights and Measures	1.5%	1%
Auditor-Controller	1.5%	1%
Behavioral Wellness	9.5%	9%
Board of Supervisors	0.3%	1%
Child Support Services	2.6%	1%
Clerk-Recorder-Assessor	2.5%	3%
Community Services	2.7%	4%
County Counsel	1.3%	1%
County Executive Office	1.3%	1%
Court Special Services	0.1%	0%
District Attorney	3.7%	3%
Fire	2.5%	7%
First 5 Children & Families Commission	0.3%	0%
General Services	3.0%	3%
Human Resources	1.5%	0%
Other	1.5%	0%
Planning & Development	3.1%	2%
Probation	8.0%	7%
Public Defender	2.2%	2%
Public Health	15.0%	12%
Public Works	6.1%	6%
Sheriff	9.8%	17%
Social Services	19.1%	16%
Treasurer-Tax Collector	1.3%	1%

Note: 0% = (less than 1%)

Overview of Working Parent/Guardian Respondents

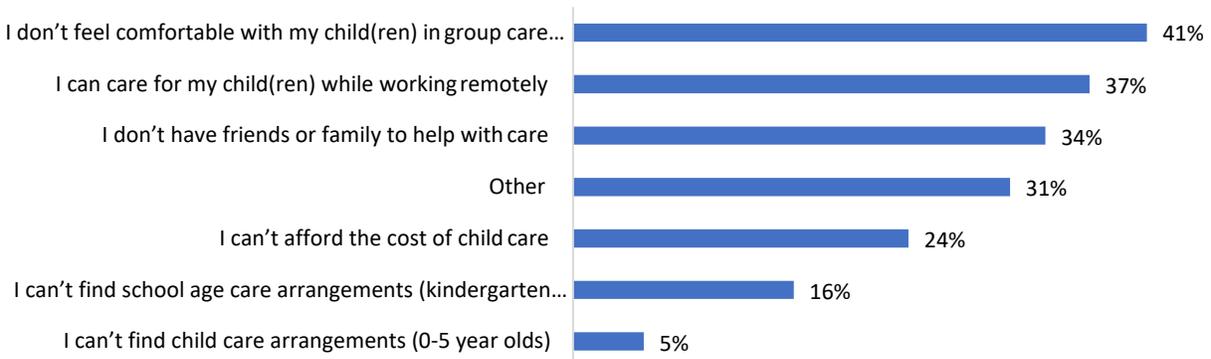
Forty-two percent of all respondents (n =783) have children ages 0-18 whom they care for and live in their home. The total number of children accounted for by these respondents is 1,121. Most are school age children, who due to school closures and hybrid models of learning require care while their parents work:

- 374 children are 13-18-year olds (33%)
- 398 children are 6-12-year olds (36%)
- 172 children are 3-5-year olds (15%)
- 177 children are 0-2-year olds (16%)

The large majority of the working parent respondents (82%, n = 638) do not expect to have any more children in the next five years whereas 15% expect to have 1-2 more children. This would account for approximately 130 more children. However, this is likely a very low estimate as non-parent/guardian employees were not asked this question, and over half of all County employees did not respond to the survey.

About two thirds (66%, n = 513) of respondents who have children typically rely on their children being in child care outside the home and/or in school in order to work. Of these 513 respondents, more than half (59%, n = 460) do not currently have care for their children. The primary reason these working parents do not have care for their children is because they are not comfortable placing them in a group setting during the pandemic (41%, n = 130). Another reason selected is that they are working from home, so they are able to care for their children while they are working (37%, n = 117), albeit the majority of parents expressed within the open comment sections that this is a very challenging task that they are struggling to do in such a way in which they don't feel their children are getting the short end of the stick.

Lack of comfort in group setting during COVID-19 is the number one reason respondents do not have care for their child(ren).



Survey question 31: Please select the reason(s) you do not have care for your child(ren). Select all that are true to you.

Of the 31% (n = 99) of respondents who wrote in other explanations for not having their child in care outside of their home, the primary reason was that their children are old enough to be left home alone. However, many noted they are not comfortable leaving their child alone yet have no other choice.

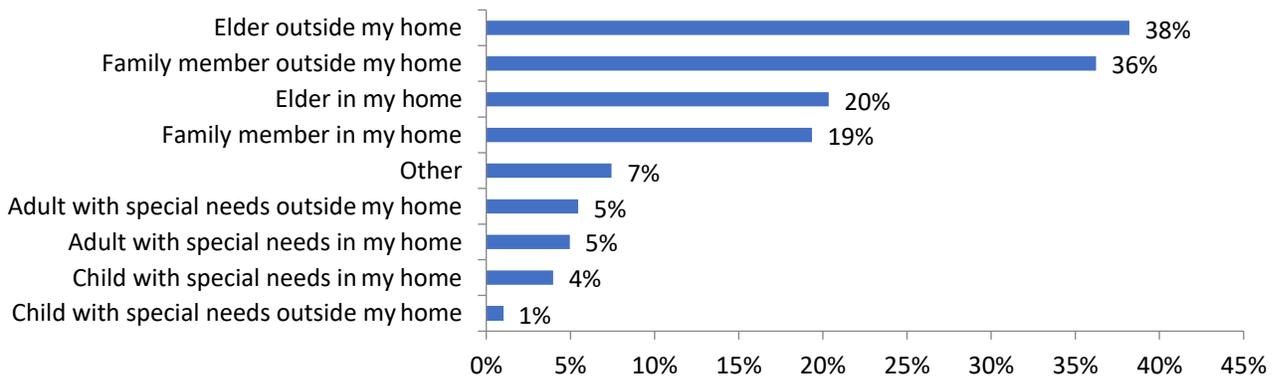
Parent/guardian respondents ranked the most difficult aspects of their child care responsibilities as follows:

1. Helping my child(ren) with remote learning
2. Finding care that I feel comfortable with during COVID-19
3. Paying for the cost of child care
4. Finding child care that is close to my current work site

Overview of Respondents with Caregiving Responsibilities

Nearly a quarter of respondents (22%, n = 409) have caregiving responsibilities for someone in or outside their home (e.g. an elder, family member, or adult with special needs, etc. other than traditional child care) and more than a third (38%, n = 155) of these respondents expect to have new caregiving responsibilities in the next three years.

74% of caregivers are responsible for family members and elders outside of their home.



Survey question 36: For whom do you provide care? Select all that apply.

Caregiving responsibilities have changed for more than 71% (n = 287) of these respondents since the COVID-19 pandemic started. Within the open comment sections, respondents discussed the added stress and demands (emotional and financial) this has created for them, including extra responsibilities and fear of bringing COVID-19 home to those who are vulnerable.

"My concerns are that I will be exposed to COVID-19 due to my work responsibilities and therefore expose the elderly family members in my home."

Respondents ranked the most difficult aspects of caregiving as follows:

1. Lack of in-home caregiving support
2. Buying groceries and running errands
3. Lack of connections to community caretaking resources

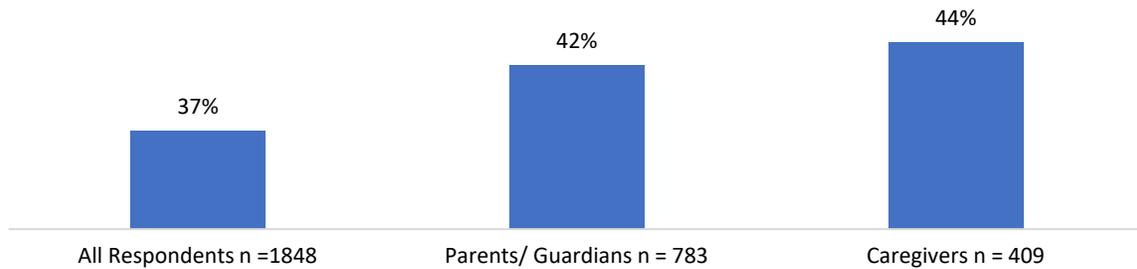
"I provide the oversight of care for my senior age mother. It has been difficult to access her, her apartment, and doctors due to challenges created by the pandemic."

How are Employees Managing During the Pandemic?

More than a third of respondents (37%, n = 690) are doing worse or much worse now compared to prior to COVID-19, whereas 14% report doing better, and nearly half (49%) are neither better or worse. The volumes of comments throughout the survey emphasized the enormous stress, overload, and struggle employees are having to manage at this time and their need for these stressors to be acknowledged and supported.

The subgroup of caregiver and parent/guardian respondents were more likely to report doing worse or much worse compared to the larger sample of respondents.

Caregivers and parents/guardians were more likely to report doing worse or much worse compared to all employees.



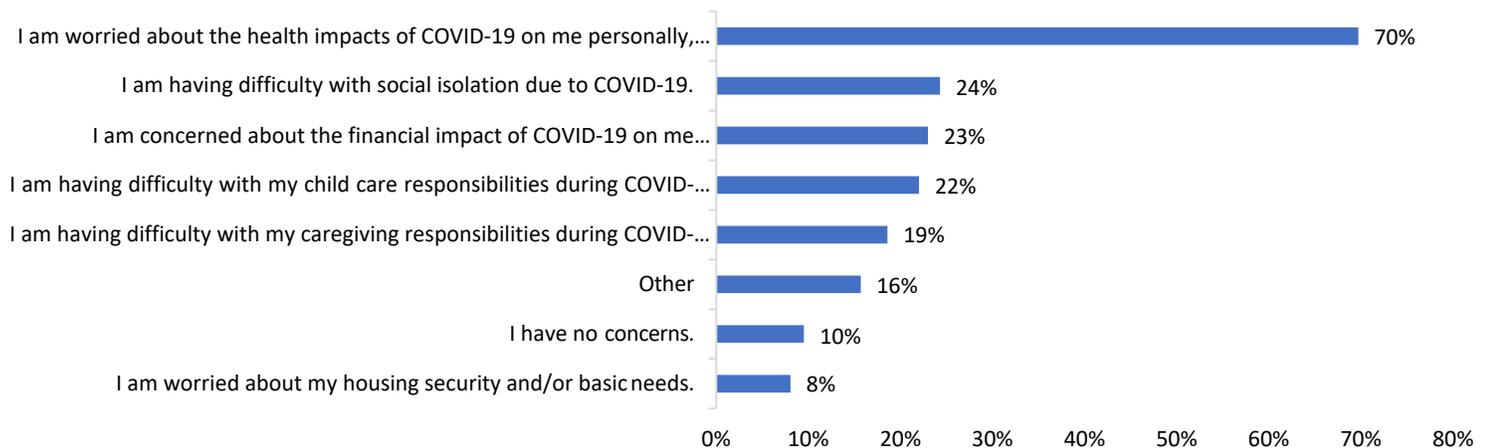
Survey question 7: Please rate how you are doing overall (all aspects of your life) now compared to how you typically were doing prior to COVID-19?

What are Employees' Primary Concerns and Challenges During the Pandemic?

Employees are Concerned about the Health Impacts of COVID-19

Respondents were asked to indicate all of their greatest concerns in regard to COVID-19. The majority of respondents selected *worry about the health impacts on themselves personally, their friends, and/or family*. This fear was significantly repeated throughout the survey's open comment sections as well.

70% of respondents' greatest concern/challenge in regard to COVID-19 is worry about the health impacts.



Survey question 8: *At this time, which of the following are your greatest concerns/challenges in regard to COVID-19? Select all that apply.*

For parents/guardian respondents, *worry about the health impacts of COVID-19* was also a top concern (70%, n = 574). Notably, throughout the survey's open comment sections countless parent/guardian respondents expressed that their primary concern is that their children are suffering because they cannot give them what the need due to their work responsibilities. In other words, when faced with the competing responsibility of their parenting and work responsibilities, parent/guardian respondents are compromising their children's needs in order to not jeopardize their job responsibilities. These comments align with employee and manager/supervisor reports about productivity remaining high during these challenging times. Working parents are overwhelmed with worry regarding their children's emotional well-being, academic progress, isolation, and how they are faring with distancing learning, while also exhausted from juggling the logistics of balancing the demands of work and parenting responsibilities. Additionally, nearly half of the respondents who are parents/guardians (47%, n=369) reported difficulty with child care responsibilities as their top concern/challenge in regard to COVID-19.

"My personal greatest concern/challenge is the impact the pandemic has and will continue to have on my child."

"Being a single mom and having the pressure to support both my daughter and my job is very overwhelming. I have found myself with more depression and stress since COVID has begun."

Employees Struggle with Added Stress at Work, Fear of Exposure (to the virus), and Mental Health Impacts

Respondents expressed their top concerns/challenges throughout the survey's open comment sections which included:

- **Additional stress at work** - Respondents discussed how work expectations have increased yet capacity and staffing have decreased thus creating extra demands and pressure.

"I am worried about the work expectations/productivity placed on me/coworkers in a time when we are experiencing increased difficulties in attendance by clients/families" and "Being requested to take on more duties with increased stressors despite working an essential position with severe risk to physical and mental health."

- **Fear of exposure to COVID-19 at work** - Respondents are concerned that health and safety guidelines are not being followed (even by managers) and there are no repercussions thus putting staff at risk. Employees discussed how much this interferes with their mental-emotional well-being and ability to perform their job responsibilities.

"I often see people out of their cubicles, and near other people without their masks, wearing them incorrectly, or wearing the wrong kind mask (with exhalation valve for example). This is a big source of stress, as it makes me feel unsafe."

Many commented about the lack of transparency and communication when someone tests positive as well as the lack of health and safety compliance from managers.

- **Impact on mental health and isolation** – Respondents struggle with the added stress of the pandemic.

"Background anxiety is taking a slow, steady toll on my health."

Many relate this to the added pressures of work, financial hardship, child care and caregiving responsibilities, and the toll of the pandemic. Some comments included the toll on family/friends who are caring for their children, and the fatigue for that group.

Employees are Concerned about Having Limited Leave Time Available

About a quarter of respondents (24%, n = 385) do not feel confident they will have enough leave time available for their needs within the next 6 months. This concern was more pronounced for the subgroup of parent/guardian respondents (27%, n = 193) and caregivers (27%, n = 97) compared to the larger group of all employee respondents. Throughout the survey's open comment sections all respondents emphasized the need for more sick time and PTL that was flexible and available to everyone for diverse reasons (not just for those with dependents).

In the open comment sections, managers/supervisors repeatedly expressed concern about this struggle.

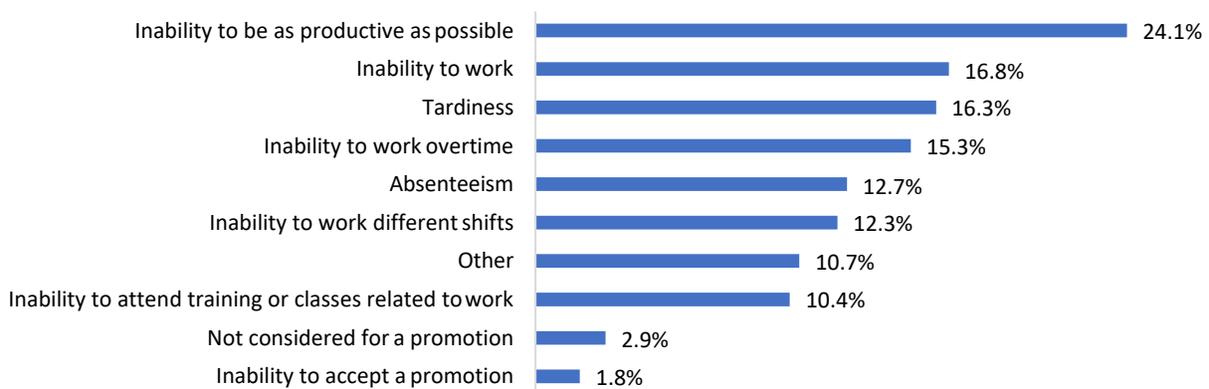
"I am concerned with how to best support my staff who have young children but have used up all of their PTL and are concerned about their welfare."

It should be noted that according to County Human Resources, only 25% of employees have used their leave time during the pandemic.

Child Care Responsibilities Negatively Impact Work Performance During COVID-19

More than half (58%, n = 448) of parent/guardian respondents indicated that they have experienced at some point their work being negatively impacted by their child care responsibilities during COVID-19 as follows:

A quarter of respondents have experienced an inability to be productive as possible as a result of their child care responsibilities during COVID-19.



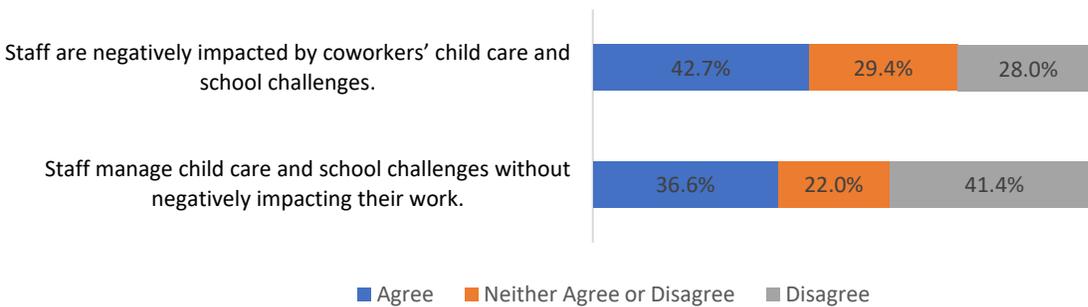
Survey question 32: Which of the following, if any, have you experienced as a result of your child care responsibilities during COVID-19? Select all that apply.

One fifth of respondents who have children (n = 149) have considered quitting their job during the COVID-19 pandemic due to child care challenges. Female respondents were twice as likely as males to report that they have considered quitting their job.

In the open comments many respondents noted that they can no longer work full time, and/or their partner/spouse no longer is working thus their household income has decreased due to their child care responsibilities. Challenges around financial hardship were expressed due to this loss of income.

Child care challenges also impact co-workers. Almost half of all respondents (44%, n = 613) report that their work is negatively impacted by the child care, school, and/or caregiving responsibilities of their co-workers. Supervisors/managers concur; almost half (43%) of supervisors/managers report that staff are negatively impacted by coworkers' child care and school challenges and 35% report that the staff they oversee are negatively impacted by coworkers' caregiving responsibilities.

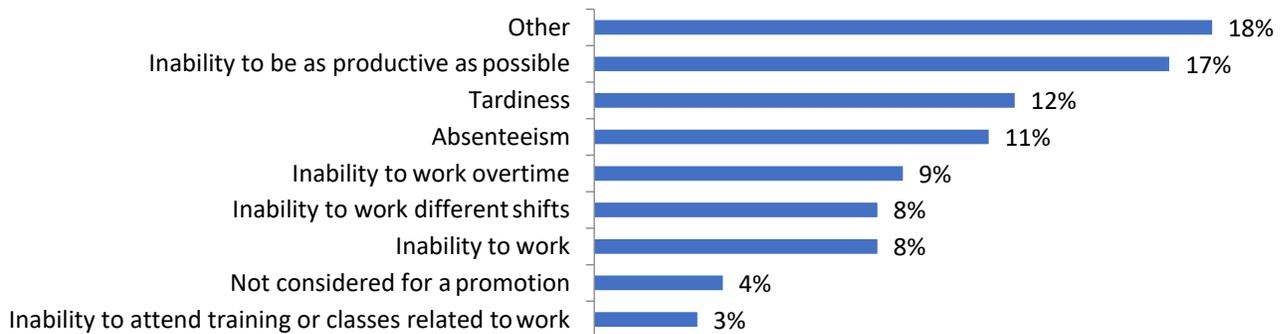
Supervisors/managers report that CHILD CARE responsibilities are negatively impacting staff and coworkers.



Caregiving Responsibilities (other than child care) Negatively Impact Work Performance During COVID-19

Nearly half of the respondents who have caregiving responsibilities (49%, n = 201) report that they have experienced impacts to their work due to their caregiving responsibilities, with the inability of being as productive as possible as the most common response. Of the 18% (n = 72) employees who commented in the other option, the majority noted they are exhausted and stressed and have to work extra hours to make up time when they have to attend to their caregiving demands.

Caregiving responsibilities impact employees' work during COVID-19.

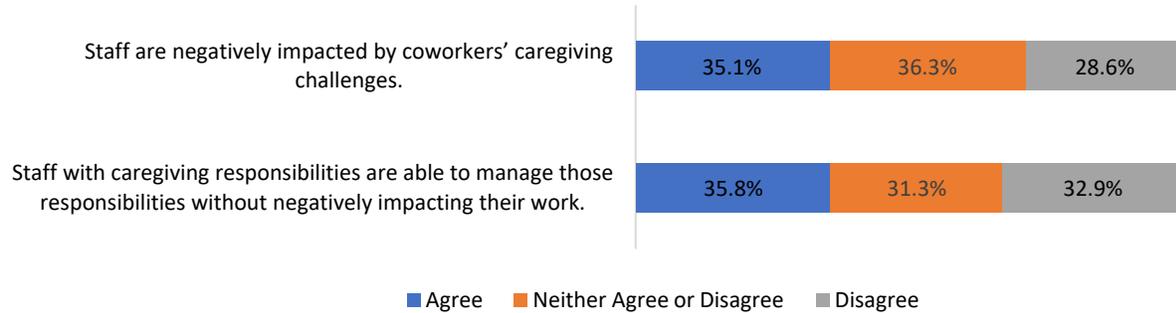


Survey question 37: *As a caregiver of an elder, family member, or adult with special needs, etc. (other than traditional child care) which of the following, if any, have you experienced as a result of your caregiving responsibilities during COVID-19? Select all that apply.*

Nearly one fifth of respondents with caregiving responsibilities (18%, n = 71) have considered quitting their job during the COVID-19 pandemic due to caregiving challenges. Female respondents were slightly more likely to have considered quitting compared to male respondents (18.1% versus 14.6%).

As with child care, caregiving responsibilities can impact the workplace. Almost half of all respondents (44%, n = 613) report that their work is negatively impacted by the child care, school, and/or caregiving responsibilities of their co-workers. Supervisors/managers concur; 35% report that the staff they oversee are negatively impacted by coworkers' caregiving responsibilities.

Supervisors/managers report CAREGIVING responsibilities are negatively impacting staff and coworkers.



Survey question 21: In your observations as a manager/supervisor, please share what you know about the effects of child care and caregiving challenges on the staff you oversee during COVID-19.

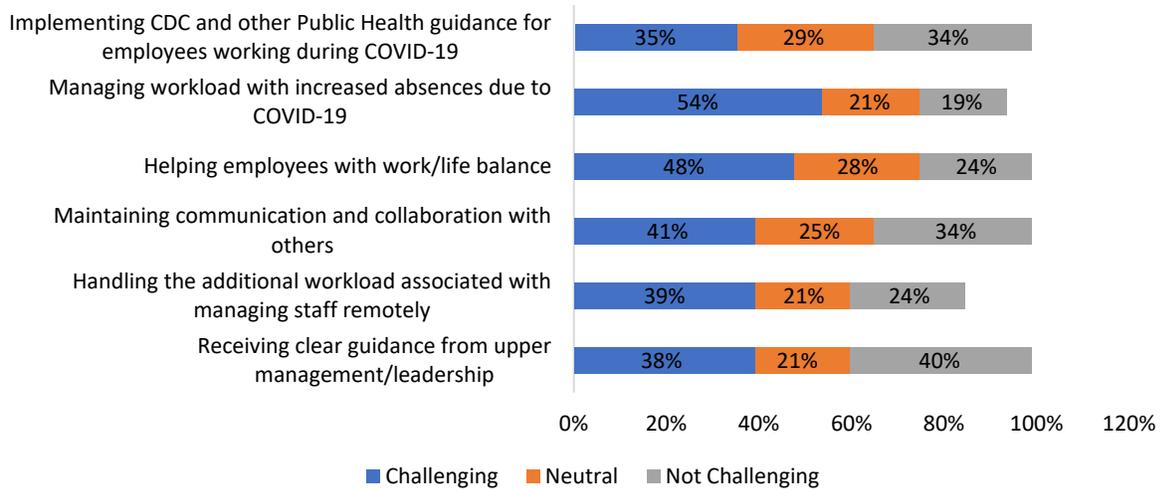
Child Care, Caregiving and Productivity – the story through survey responses

When asked if they feel productive at work, 83% of ALL employee respondents noted that they agreed or strongly agreed. On a separate survey question, respondents who have child care and/or caregiving responsibilities noted that they have experienced an inability to be as productive as possible at some point during COVID-19 (24% and 17% respectively). According to respondents' comments those with child care and/or caregiving responsibilities are doing everything in their power to get their job done and are very loyal and committed to their job so their work is not negatively impacted even if it is at the expense of those they care for. Parent and caregiver respondents noted in the open comment section that this is a source of stress and overwhelm for them and they are concerned about how this is impacting their children

Managers/Supervisors Face Unique Challenges

According to managers/supervisors, the greatest challenge they personally face is managing workload with increased absences due to COVID-19 (54%, n=208, reported very to somewhat challenging) followed by helping employees with work/life balance (48%, n=185).

Managing workload with increased absences due to COVID-19 is the greatest challenge for managers/supervisors.

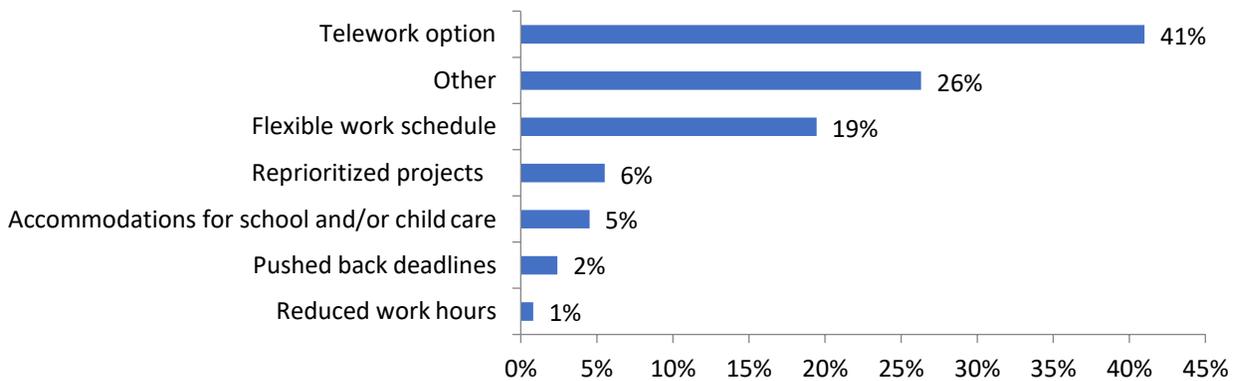


Survey question 24: *As a manager/supervisor, please select how challenging the following are for you at this time.*

What Do Employees Need to Overcome the Challenges Associated with Working During the Pandemic?

When asked what the County has done so far in response to COVID-19 that has been most helpful the top response was teleworking; however, 26% (n = 448) of respondents commented in the other category and the majority noted that they have not benefitted from any of the listed options.

The option to telework has been the County's most helpful response to COVID-19 so far.



Survey question 16: What has the County done in response to COVID-19 that has been most helpful for you so far? Select one.

Employee Input on the Solutions that are Needed During COVID-19

Above and beyond the current policies and adaptations that the County has already put in place in response to COVID-19, respondents indicated that the following would be the most beneficial in managing work responsibilities:

1. Arranging for a more flexible work schedule
2. Reprioritizing projects and/or pushing back deadlines
3. Performance reviews that take into account the impact of COVID-19

However, it is important to note that teleworking was not included as a response option to this question since it was assumed that it was already put in place where applicable. In fact, employee respondents reflected that teleworking is not available for all employees who need it. When given the opportunity to explain their top-rated solutions, 775 employees provided input and strongly emphasized the importance of telecommuting, flexible work schedules, and child care assistance.

Based on survey responses about productivity from both managers/supervisors and all employees, it appears that teleworking is not negatively impacting productivity overall. Most employee respondents (84%, n = 1347) report that they feel productive at work. Similarly, 83% of managers/supervisors respondents (n = 323) report that the staff they oversee are equally or more productive now compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic started. Further analysis could be done to sort the responses by percentage of time teleworking and/or by department to further understanding.

Other suggestions from the open comment sections included increased sick time and more PTL so employees could stay home when they are symptomatic and to take care of other responsibilities.

Child Care Assistance is Needed

Parent/guardian respondents indicated that one of the most beneficial adaptations/policies the County could do in response to COVID-19 would be to *help address the challenges associated with child care*. Nearly half of manager/supervisor respondents (41%, n = 159) concur and indicated that child care assistance would assist the employees they oversee manage their work responsibilities.

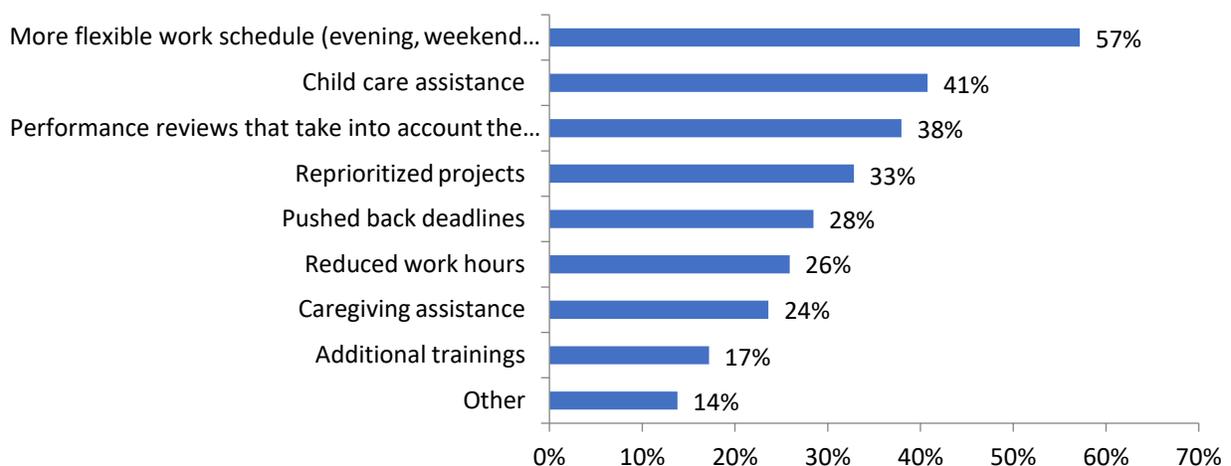
When asked what is the one thing the County can do to support employees with child care/school and caregiving needs during COVID-19, 239 employees responded with suggestions, which were echoed throughout the survey comments:

- County-sponsored child care and/or tutors
- Individualized, flexible work schedule
- Telecommuting
- Additional paid time off

Manager/Supervisor Input on the Solutions that are Needed During COVID-19

Managers/supervisors were asked how the County can help the employees they oversee with work responsibilities during COVID-19 in addition to what is already in place. The top solutions were more flexible work schedules and child care assistance. Teleworking was not included as a response option to this question because it was understood that if County employees could telework, that option was already made available. However, this does not seem to be the case as teleworking came up consistently and strongly as a requested and needed option within the open comments sections. Of the 14% of manager/supervisor respondents (n =54) who wrote in other solutions, many noted teleworking as has been expressed by respondents throughout the survey.

More flexible work schedules and child care assistance were selected by managers/supervisors as the top ways to help employees manage their work responsibilities.



Survey question 23: *How can the County help the employees you manage with their work responsibilities during COVID-19? (Reminder: the County is seeking input but will not be able to implement all suggestions.) Select all that apply.*

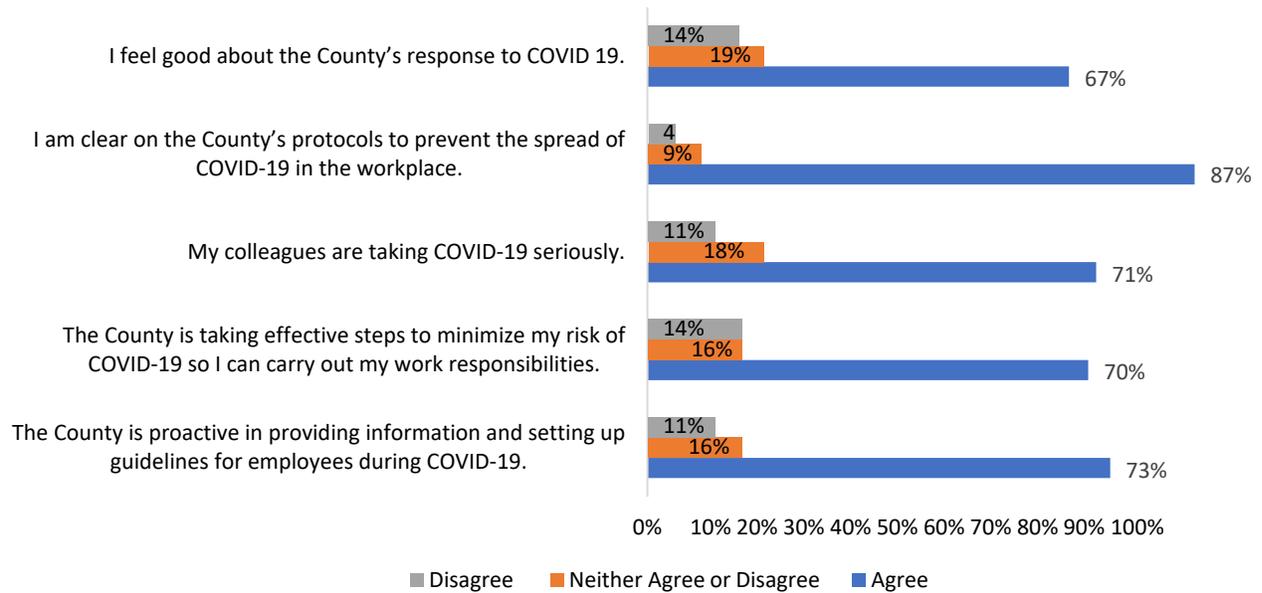
Manages/supervisors also suggested self-care options to help address mounting stress. Similarly, employee respondents discussed how they are “burning the candle at both ends” and their need for more self-care and support to sustain the overwhelming and competing demands they face. They also mentioned how morale is low and there is a need for the County to provide additional support.

“I check in with my staff more regularly to see how they are doing as far as the stress of the pandemic, whatever that might look like for each. Zoom school has been a stressor, especially for small children, so we discuss and vent and try to come up with ideas together. I think providing a supportive environment for my staff wherein they can vent about this pandemic life, is helpful.”

How well is the County of Santa Barbara Doing as an Employer Responding to the Needs and Safety of Employees During the Pandemic?

The majority of employees feel the County is doing well in response to the pandemic. However, 14% of employees don't feel good about the County's response to COVID-19 and 14% don't feel the County is proactive in providing information and setting up guidelines for employees during COVID-19.

The majority of employees feel the County is responding well to their needs and safety during COVID-19.



Survey question 15: How do you feel the County is doing as an employer responding to the needs and safety of employees during COVID-19? Please select your degree of agreement/disagreement with each of the following statements.

Mixed Input Regarding Support from Management

Although the majority of respondents feel supported and heard by management, 21% do not (n = 354). This sentiment was slightly more pronounced among employees with caregiving responsibilities (24%, n = 91).

Managers/supervisors were split on how challenging receiving clear guidance from upper management/leadership is with 40% reporting that it is not challenging and 38% reporting that it is challenging.

Lack of Consistency in the County's COVID-19 Policies Creates Challenges

In the comments sections, respondents noted concerns and complaints about who is permitted to telework and flex their schedule, and who is not, thus suggesting the need for more clear, consistently implemented, and equitable policies throughout all County departments. Respondents were very much

in favor of increased teleworking and flexible schedule options and suggested ways to make this more feasible for a greater number of employees, such as increased distribution of work laptops.

Concerns about the consistency and enforcement of COVID-19 health and safety protocols as well as transparency in reporting COVID-19 cases within the workplace was frequently expressed throughout the survey comments. Respondents mentioned how unsafe they felt because their managers were not following the guidelines and consequently were setting a “bad example” and permission for others to follow suit.

“I feel like I have had to fight every step of the way to have a safer working environment, flexibility to work from home or different schedules, and to get the support we need to do our work safer.”

A contingent of respondents expressed a disbelief in the severity of COVID-19 and their opposition to the health and safety guidelines. They commented about the over-reach of employers and the government and the inappropriateness of placing restrictions on their personal lives, thus suggesting the need for outreach and education efforts.

Next Steps

It is recommended that the County redistributes this survey at least quarterly, in order to track and respond to the changing needs and impacts of the pandemic on the workforce. Each subsequent survey should build upon the data, lessons learned, and policies/adaptations made from the previous survey, using relatively small modifications to eliminate those parts that prove to be less meaningful to employees and the County. Through that process, trends, gaps and successes can be seen. And, as the County now has a baseline of information, the survey can be shortened by prioritizing just those questions to be tracked, reducing the time commitment for both employees and Human Resources.

The following changes are some suggestions for next steps between this survey and subsequent rounds:

- Create a simple process that can be repeated after each survey round:
 - Share the survey results with employees and leadership
 - Get additional input from employees and leadership through focus groups and conversations.
 - Make decisions on policy and process changes by selecting from the recommendations in this report and create a Framework for the focus on employee wellbeing during COVID.
 - Implement the selected policy and process changes.
 - Decide on the benchmark questions from the first survey that will be repeated on all future surveys.
 - Make small modifications to update the survey based on what has been learned (eg: remove questions no longer needed, add or remove an option in a question, slightly rephrase or add a new question). It will be important to keep the benchmark questions as consistent as possible, to allow for comparison with future surveys.
 - Re-send the survey to learn changes in employee need and impacts of policy and process changes.
- Review the survey questions, and based on the framework created:
 - Determine which questions will remain. Review each question and determine to keep, edit or delete based on the value of the information produced and the degree to which they are in alignment with the County's selected COVID-19 strategies and broader County goals.
 - Identify about which topics the County wants the most input from employees. Consolidate open comment questions into just 2 or 3 at key intervals in the survey, directed towards those topics. Note: it is recommended to always have an open text box at the end of the survey for anything missed. This should be included in the 2-3 open comment questions.
 - Determine the most essential data elements needed from more lengthy questions (e.g. questions 13 and 14) and refine the format of questions (eg: shift from Likert Scale to drop-down) and number of multiple choice options to create shorter, less time-consuming questions.
 - Consider which questions within the specified employee sub-groups (ie. parents/guardians, caregivers, managers) could be applicable and useful to ask all respondents. For example, the questions about employees' 5-year projections about adding children to their family and having additional child care or caregiving responsibilities would be most informative for planning purposes if all employees have the opportunity to respond.

- Consider more deeply investigating topic areas such as:
 - Break down the elements of productivity and identify those most related to County quality service or other benchmarks. Ask employees how these most important productivity elements may be impacted positively or negatively by teleworking and other solutions.
 - Further explore where and how teleworking is needed, any specific barriers, and ways in which it can be adapted for all, given the confines of County operations. Include telework response options to questions 17 and 28.
- Should the County decide to implement strategies to address child care and/or caregiving needs of employees, a more specific survey is required, such as the one distributed by First 5 near the beginning of the pandemic and previous County child care surveys. The survey should, include all strategies the County is willing to consider offering employees, to identify the best approaches based on employee interest.

Conclusion

In this complicated and unusual time, all employers are affected, and most are concerned about their employees and the services they offer. The County has adapted to the ever-shifting guidances and community needs, as can be seen through employee comments, and in this survey project itself. The hope for this, and future surveys, is that the County addresses the evolving needs of employees during the COVID-19 pandemic in consistent, yet increasingly sophisticated and tailored, ways through the survey, and resulting policy and practice changes. The impact will be increased effectiveness and loyalty from employees and will improve the mental and physical health of not only employees but their loved ones as well. This is both an awesome responsibility and a grand opportunity for the County. The energy and intentions displayed from County staff through this first survey have been extraordinary and predict a cohesive, successful effort through the pandemic and beyond.

The representatives of Eileen Monahan Consulting have been honored to support the County in this effort. We will make ourselves available for any role the County desires in subsequent surveys and/or the design and implementation of resulting policies.