Learning in 2020-2021:

Student and Family feedback through *Thoughtexchange*

Title: Learning in 2020-2021: Student and Family feedback through Thoughtexchange

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Executive Summary

In January 2021, YRDSB invited elementary and secondary families and secondary students to participate in online consultations through the Thoughtexchange platform. Approximately 5,150 families and students shared 5,700 thoughts that received over 72,000 star ratings. Families shared a variety of comments and suggestions regarding student learning experiences from the first term/semester of the 2020-2021 school year. Overall, feedback indicates that across all learning models, participants were appreciative for diverse learning model options and staff commitment. Several challenges associated with learning during a pandemic were also noted, including impacts on student socialization and mental health.

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Inviting voice, participation and an exchange of thoughts.

Over 5,000 Participants answered questions, and rated the responses of others.

Introduction

Circumstances associated with the pandemic have made the 2020-2021 school year one of the most challenging for students, families, and staff. To continue to support students and families and better understand their experiences, YRDSB has been consulting with school communities in a variety of ways including: formal and informal communications with teachers; school-based feedback (e.g., surveys); conversations with internal school supports (e.g., guidance, CYWs, etc.) and Board Supports (e.g., social workers); as well as school principals and Board staff. In January, 2021[1], YRDSB invited students and families to participate in online consultations through the Thoughtexchange platform to better understand student and family experiences of learning during the 2020-2021 school year. Information from these exchanges will be used alongside other feedback to inform Board and Ministry planning for the 2021-2022 school year[2].

We asked students and families the following questions:

1. What successes have you/your child experienced this school year?

2. What supports do you feel will increase your/your child's learning and engagement experiences?

3. Please provide any comments or suggestions you feel may help us when considering the improvement of you/your child's learning experiences.

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[1] Three Thoughtexchanges occurred from January 11, 2021 to February 13, 2021. This time period was selected to align with the completion of a full semester in secondary schools and the end of term 1 in elementary schools. Over this period, approximately 5,150 students and families participated. In addition to English, families participated in 15 additional languages. Students shared thoughts in English and nine additional languages.

[2] We recognize that the number of participants in the Thoughtexchange consultation reflects only a small sampling of our system population and that that many families and students did not participate and did not share their ideas.

In this report, we outline key findings from the student and family consultations through Thoughtexchange. The report is organized into four main sections:

1. Thoughtexchange: Process and Participation
2. Findings: Elementary Family Thoughtexchange
3. Findings: Secondary Family Thoughtexchange
4. Findings: Secondary Student Thoughtexchange

In each Thoughtexchange session, participants were invited to engage in three steps:

Share Thoughts: In response to the questions, participants were asked to share their thoughts with other participants.

Star Participant Thoughts: Participants were asked to review and rate other thoughts based on the relevance to their experiences using a 5-star scale (5 stars indicated strongly agree; 1 star strongly disagree).

Discovering What Matters: Participants were able to explore the thoughts based on the ratings of other participants.

Thoughtexchange: Process and Participation

Families and students were asked to share their ideas, consider other participants' comments, and rate comments from 1 through 5 stars depending on how strongly they agreed or disagreed with these thoughts. As outlined in Table 1 below, for these three exchanges, there were 5,150 participants who shared over 5,700 thoughts. Overall, these thoughts received 72,505 ratings.

Table 1: Participation Summary

Total Participants	Participants	Thoughts	Ratings
Elementary Family Participants	2,794	3,236	39,003
Secondary Family Participants	1,152	1,701	18,950
Secondary Student Participants	1,208	763	14,551
Total	5,154	5,700	72,505

Elementary Family Thoughtexchange

Participants: 2,794

The information below shows the number and breakdown of elementary family participants. While the selected audience for the elementary Thoughtexchange was parents/guardians, 4% of respondents identified themselves as students.

		2,794 Participants
		3,236 Thoughts
		39,003 Ratings

PARTICIPATION
Breakdown of Participation

Q1. You are:

%	👤	Answer
96%	(2598)	■ a) a parent/guardian
4%	(96)	■ b) a student
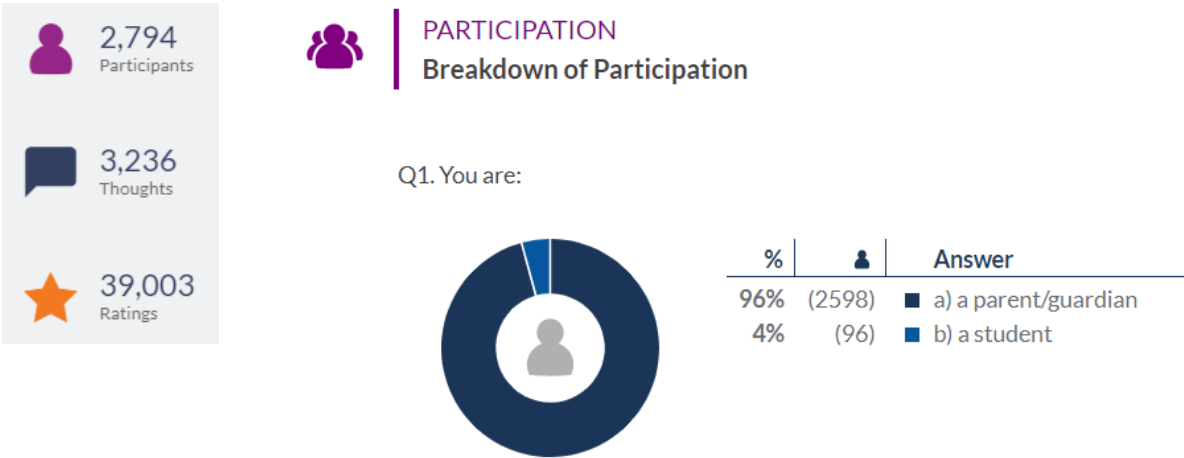
Thoughts Exchanged: 3,236

Figure 1 below indicates the frequency of themes that emerged from **2,258** thoughts rated 3.0 (out of 5.0) or above.

Figure 1- Elementary Family Themes
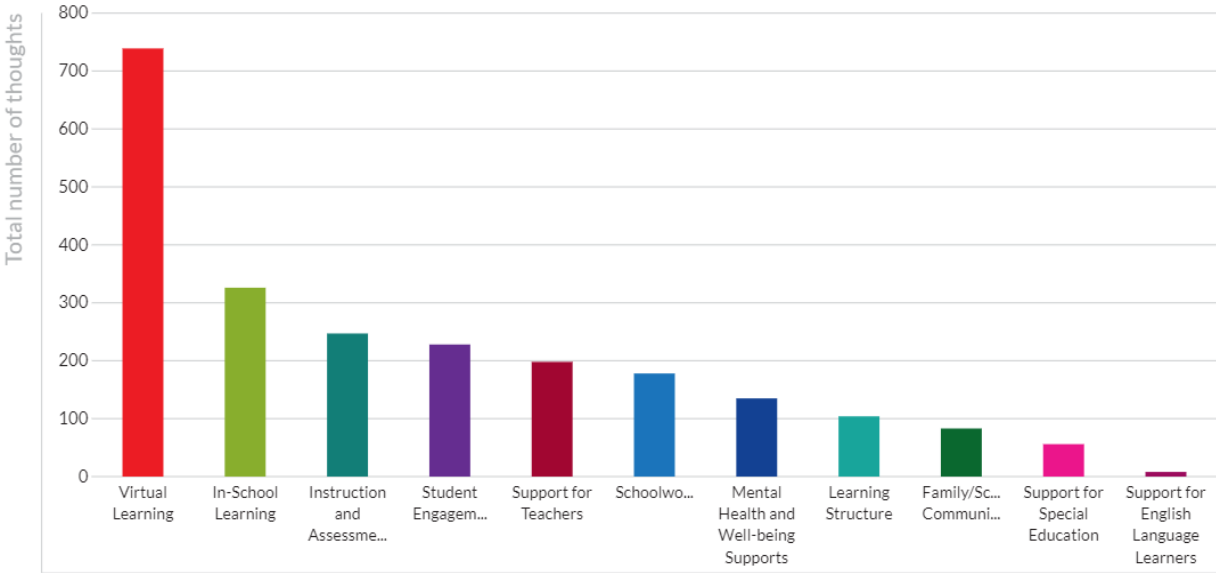
Sample differences

The image below shows areas where participant perspectives were similar or differed. Some participants shared different perspectives about virtual learning, while a commonly held perspective was that teachers were highly valued.

DIFFERENCES
[516 | 366]

👤 516   366 👤

Side A

Virtual learning provides learning in a safe environment In my opinion schools play a big role in spreading the virus. So staying home and learn is the wisest choice.

★ 4.8   ★ 1.1

I believe until all Canadaians get the vaccine, the virtual learning should continue. Safer environment, better results.

★ 4.7   ★ 1.4

Side A/B Common (high)

My child's teacher checks in each morning to ask how they're feeling and why. It's another platform to share feelings other than just me checking in all the time. Maybe trusts teacher.

★ 4.4   ★ 4.7

It's my clear my children's teachers' have been working very hard and going out of their way to make sure the students are supported. Teachers are often undervalued by the general public. They should be recognized for the flexibility and adaptability.

★ 4.8   ★ 4.8

Side B

Please allow students to go back to school

★ 1.6   ★ 4.8

My daughter is missing human interactions and has become VERY clingy to me since I am the only one she sees. It would be nice for the kids to have some time online to chat socially to each other.

★ 2.0   ★ 4.8

Word Cloud: Elementary Families

The word cloud below shows the most common words across all rated thoughts.

WORDCLOUD
Top Rated
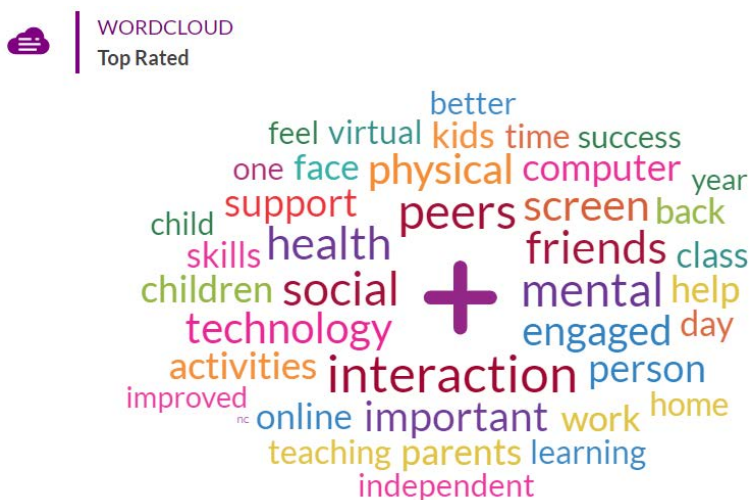
Findings: Elementary Families

Virtual Learning

It would be nice to add more social virtual activities, such as virtual games, virtual field trips, or other fun group activities. *I believe this is important to mitigate the feeling of isolation and the lack of social interaction that the kids are getting at this time.*	4.2
My child is missing social connections with her friends. It is not the same on screens and in breakout rooms. *The lack of social connections is affecting children's mental health.*	4.1
Social isolated *My kids need socialization with their peers especially my kindergartener. It is really tough for my kinder to sit in front of a computer so long*	4.1

Many parents/guardians reported several successful experiences associated with virtual learning either through the Elementary Virtual School model or during the government-issued school closures that led to temporary periods of remote learning for students who were previously learning in schools. Families in both models noted that their children felt isolated. Parents/guardians with children learning in the virtual schooling model reported that this model provided an opportunity for greater involvement in their child's learning and supported increased family time. These parents/guardians also identified continuity of learning outside of school and sense of protection from Covid-19 as beneficial outcomes of learning at home. Several parents/guardians identified an increase in independence, time management, and technological proficiency (e.g., keyboarding and computer skills, navigating applications, virtual interaction etiquette) as successful outcomes of learning at home.

Parents/guardians also expressed concern about the amount of screen time, limited social interaction and reduced physical movement and outdoor activity associated with virtual learning. Some requested that programming increase opportunities for social and physical activities. A few participants also commented on the impact of prolonged screen time on engagement and physical health (e.g., difficulty sustaining attention, eyestrain). In addition,

while many parents/guardians reported that their child enjoys the independence associated with virtual learning, others requested more opportunities for their child to connect virtually with classmates to develop social connections and reduce feelings of isolation. Some suggested that teachers and students turn their cameras on during online classes, suggesting this will help to enhance student engagement and connections between students and teachers.

Many families appreciated the challenges facing educators as they worked to engage students through virtual learning, particularly given the larger class sizes in some virtual classrooms. Some reported that their child finds virtual learning engaging, while others have observed that it is difficult for their child to remain engaged through this learning model. While many parents/guardians whose children have been learning at school expressed gratitude for the virtual learning model as a means of learning continuity for students during the government issued school closures, some of these parents also indicated that their child learns best in person at school.

2 Findings: Elementary Families

In-School Learning

Need to get back to in-person schooling ASAP.

I am hoping the kids can return to school by Family Day and no later than March Break

4.3

Kids need to get back to class. I'm starting to see negative impact even thought we focus on routine at home.

There's no way to fully control the situation. Children's mental, physical health is at risk now.

4.2

Being in the classroom gave my child an opportunity to safely socialize with other students and this lead to far greater happiness in her v. isolation.

Kids need that interaction. In person teaching is more effective. Schools have been safe. Let's get them back there ASAP.

4.1

A few parents/guardians with children learning at school identified smaller class sizes and being able to see peers and teachers as beneficial outcomes of in-school learning this year. A few parents/guardians identified their child's sense of safety at school as a successful outcome of health protocols implemented in schools. Many parents/guardians who shared feedback through this Thoughtexchange during the government issued lockdown suggested that schools need to re-open to support their child's learning needs, noting that they feel their child learns best in person at school. Some commented on the importance of schools continuing to follow health protocols to ensure the health and safety of students and staff.

3

Instruction and Assessment

	Average Star Rating
Projects that require parental involvement should be kept to a minimum. *Parents may not be available and this causes undue stress for both parent and child.*	4.0
I would love to see virtual presentations for dance, music, mental health, art, etc. for different ages. *I think our children would benefit from having different presenters and novel experiences. Offer some workshops/ presentations/ extra-curricular.*	4.0
Additional resources that were available in the classroom were obviously not available during the school closure.	4.0
In person interaction with teachers. *One on one in person schooling is also mentally beneficial.*	3.8
Online virtual field trips and guest speakers. *Guest speakers could help to support mental health in a fun and engaging way. Virtual trips are fun because they can experience them with their peers.*	3.8

Families from both the virtual and in-person learning models offered perspectives about instruction and assessment. While families commented on their child's learning growth, including observed positive developments in their child's academic success, some were looking for increased opportunities to collaborate with peers and resources for learning in specific subject areas. A few requested more "hands-on" activities, as well as increased opportunities for students in French Immersion programming to communicate in French. Some families emphasized the importance of ensuring that students with special education needs and students requiring support for English language learning receive support, whether learning virtually or in person at school. Families whose children are learning virtually and with students receiving special education support requested additional opportunities for "hands-on" learning and more direct support from staff. A few parents/guardians requested more frequent feedback on their child's schoolwork and learning progress.

Findings: Elementary Families

4

Student Engagement

	Average Star Rating
Positive relationship with the teacher. *It makes my child happy.*	4.2
Would love to see specialist teachers for EVS - art, music, PhysEd. *Teachers doing their best but a specialist would really engage students in these areas.*	4.1
I would like to see more opportunities for the students to work with their peers, and more peer interactions. *Both my children are really struggling socially. They need to play with their peers.*	4.0
Kids also need time for 'small talk' that has nothing to do with actual topic of learning, just keep in touch and be social. School is not only study. *Every human needs this conversations for mental well been. Childhood is time to learn social skills and our kids need space to practice.*	4.0
I really enjoy school when I get to go into breakout rooms with my friends and work especially because it's online. *I think this is important because in online school we don't really get to interact with people and be social and people say they need social skills.*	4.0

Parents/guardians from both the virtual and in-person learning models offered feedback about student engagement. Some parents/guardians reported that their child is engaged in learning, while others indicated their child is having difficulty in this area. A few participants noted their preference for virtual learning, while others reported their preference for face-to-face learning at school. Some families with children learning virtually recognized the challenges facing educators as they work to promote engagement and learning and requested support for educators in this area. Some parents/guardians offered suggestions for improving student engagement, including increased opportunities for virtual peer interactions and activities.

Secondary Student Thoughtexchange

Participants: 1,208

The information below shows the number and breakdown of secondary student participants by grade.

%	👤	Answer
24%	(270)	■ a) Grade 9
22%	(241)	■ b) Grade 10
27%	(305)	■ c) Grade 11
27%	(300)	■ d) Grade 12
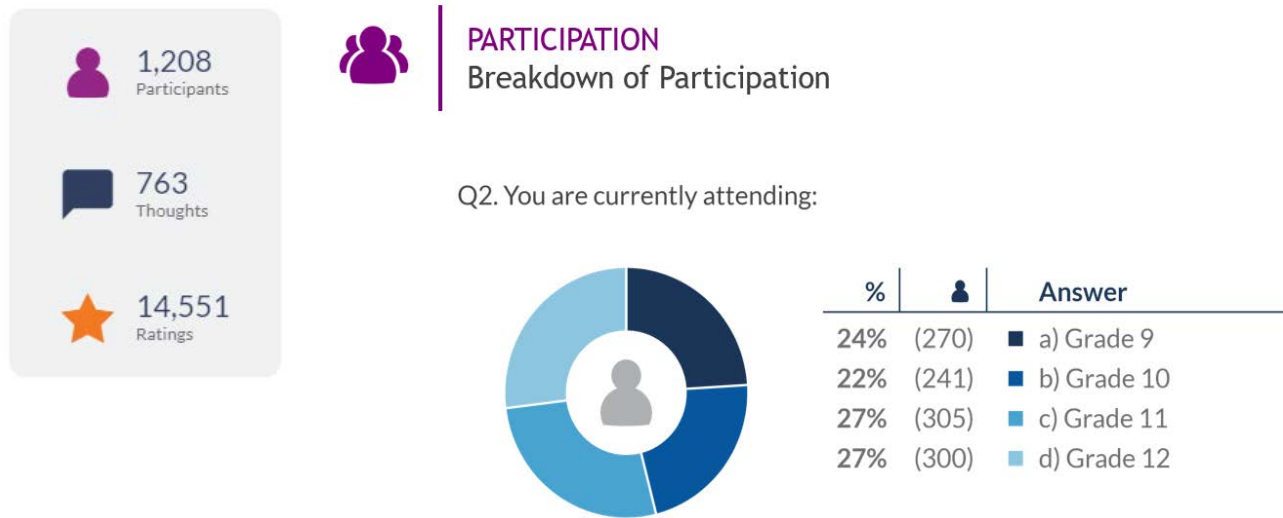
Thoughts Exchanged: 763

The graph below indicates the frequency of themes that emerged from **763** thoughts rated from 1 to 5.

Figure 2- Secondary Student Themes
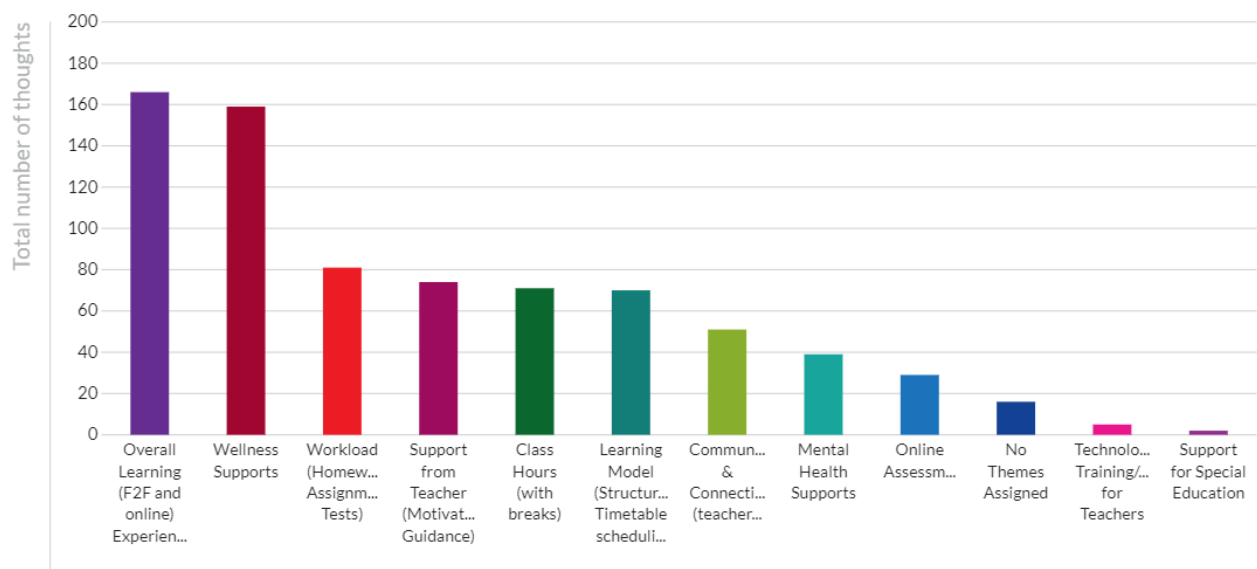
Technology Availability

The information below shows the number and breakdown of student technology access.

PARTICIPATION
Breakdown of Participation

Q3. Technology Access - Your are currently using a device (e.g., tablet, laptop or computer) provided by:

%	👤	Answer
94%	(1036)	■ Your family
6%	(69)	■ The Board

Secondary Students: Identified differences

The image below shows areas where participants had differences as well as similarities in their perspectives. Some students believed that learning virtually was negatively affecting their grades, while others noted it had positive effects. Participants with both these views held common thoughts that learning online, using the adaptive schedule of 150 minutes for one class posed challenges and that learning virtually was affecting their mental health.

DIFFERENCES
[170 | 130]

👤 170   130 👤

Side A

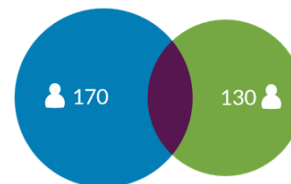My mental heath is declining due to not being in school. i miss seeing friends and my teachers. Im too isolated at home. You are not helping us kids but making it worse. The fallout will be huge because of this and my grades are declining. Teachers not engaging online

★ 4.9   ★ 2.0

Side A/B Common (high)

morning classes are too long to be on goggle meet, classes are too much instruction periods. its hard for your mental health, its not good for your eyes, and its harder to learn, and you have to take after school hours to do your work

★ 5.0   ★ 4.8

You need to even out the times of the online classes This is important because if we have a 2.5hr class then a break and then we have 2.5hrs of 3 classes you should make each class 75 minutes instead.

★ 4.9   ★ 4.8

Side B

I find it's easier to do research on a topic while attending online class It's important because it can help me learn more on topic, which can allow me to do better on work

★ 1.5   ★ 4.5

I have been getting amazing grades this year and have been really enjoying learning from my computer. This is important because I am learning what I need to know while being safe at home.
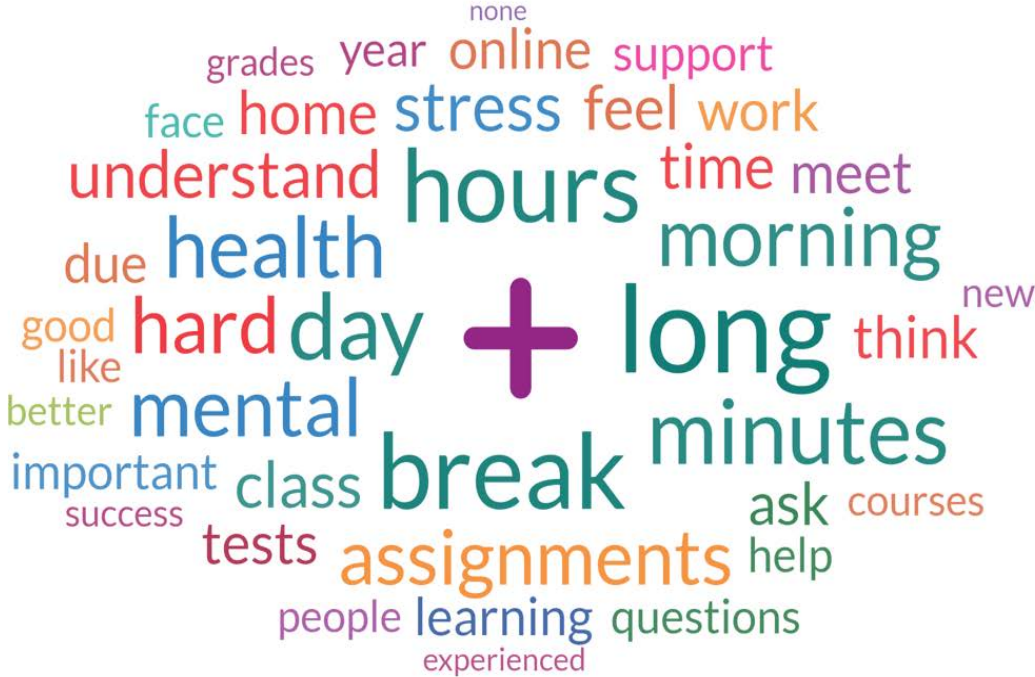
★ 1.7   ★ 4.4

Word Cloud: Secondary Students

The word cloud below shows the most common words across all rated thoughts.

Secondary Programs

Slightly over two-thirds (67%) of participants were from the Adaptive Model and one-third (33%) were from the Virtual Model.

Adaptive Learning Model: Students learning in the Secondary School Adaptive Model typically attend school on alternating days. On the days they attend school, students will have 150 minutes of face-to-face in-class learning at the start of the school day in one course, and three 50-minute periods of online learning in the afternoon. This learning model of in-person and online learning time is aligned with other adaptive school boards in the province. Each afternoon learning period includes live, online (synchronous) learning with their teacher.

Virtual Learning Model: Students learning in the Secondary Online Model can expect a daily schedule or timetable that includes 300 minutes (4 periods, 75 minutes per period) of learning opportunities, with a combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning activities. Programming is based on the full Ontario curriculum and it includes opportunities for guided instruction, large-and small-group learning, synchronous check-ins, and asynchronous independent work.

Thoughts Exchanged: This report emphasizes the perspectives of Secondary students on their overall learning experiences from both Adaptive and Virtual learning models. We acknowledge that the findings generated from all participants do not represent the entire student population; however, additional comments and suggestions provided by the participants from this Thoughtexchange will be helpful to improve the learning experiences of our secondary students.

Findings: Secondary Students

Mental Health

Students are being given way too much work. We are going to sleep at […] hours and rarely have time to do everything else we need to do in our days.

Giving students time for outside of school activities is extremely necessary for their mental health.

4.4

Students are being exposed to too much screen time and not enough physical activity.

In the morning and afternoon, we sit and stare at a {computer}. From afternoon to night, we continue for homework, assignments, and studying.

4.4

I have no idea what kind {of} support you can provide other than cut us {students} some slack.

All my teachers do is acknowledge the mental health of students. Simply acknowledging is not enough. We're alone all the time it's depressing and the heavy loads of homework and test dates don't help.

4.4

This year has been difficult in terms of achieving academic success due to poor mental health of students and constantly being online with school work.

Something that can help is limiting required homework time and making it less than an hour/course, as we spend a minimum of 10 hours online each day.

4.2

Many students emphasized the importance of mental health in both learning models. While some students in virtual learning shared that being able to manage their own time provides more opportunity to sleep and rest, students in both models raised concern about decreased socialization with peers. Suggestions included motivational speakers and increased classroom conversations that address mental health issues would help students to stay motivated in good mental health and well-being. Some students also expressed concern about the impact of prolonged screen time and lack of physical activity on their health, suggesting improvement strategies such as reducing schoolwork, more breaks and extra-curricular activities to socialize with peers.

	Average Star Rating
Need to shorten online learning. It is very long and is hard to grasp the information given to us. *It is important to shorten online learning because it is very stressful at looking into a screen for half the day. Unable to focus as well*	4.3
I found it very difficult to focus and learn properly this year. *This is important to note since my grades have gone down since last year, and I do believe it has something to do with school being online this year.*	4.3
It feels like it is just about turning in assignments and meeting due dates, I feel like I haven't learned or absorbed any information this semester. *We have been receiving an excessive amount of projects all due within the same time period. It doesn't give me time to*	4.3
In terms of assessments. I believe that students should be able to redo a test or assignment. which shows better understanding if they improved *If teacher tells student to do better on the next assessment, doesn't help because if I did bad on a thing I should be tested on the same thing again*	4.2

In both learning models, some students enjoyed the flexibility of learning from home during the closure. Other students expressed concern about the online version of the Adaptive model. Specifically, they noted that 150 minutes of online screen time without a break was mentally draining and hindered their ability to stay focused.

Some students in the Adaptive model indicated that 40 to 50 minute periods in the afternoon has been effective and successful. Suggestions also included more stretch breaks during classes and longer breaks for lunch to allow for increased movement and to be better focused for classes.

Many students in the Adaptive Model reported that face-to-face learning was more effective for their learning and indicated a preference to return to in-person learning. Many

students said that they learn and communicate better when they are face-to-face with their teachers and peers. Some students expressed concern that virtual learning was difficult for students with an IEP.

Some students from the Adaptive model recommended modifying the daily schedule wherein one day students are in class for the full day and the following day students participate in asynchronous learning for the full day on a rotating basis. Students suggested this modified model would help with productivity and time management.

3 Findings: Secondary Students

Workload

Students are being given way too much work. We are going to sleep at {long} hours and rarely have time to do everything else we need to do in our days.

Giving students time for outside of school activities is extremely necessary for their mental health.

4.4

School is giving too many assignments and work at once.

4.4

Since teachers do not have as much awareness of how their class is feeling, they tend to assign lots of homework.

However, they need to understand that students, unlike teachers, cannot pump out content as fast as the assignments get posted.

4.3

Need more understanding from teachers, especially with the workload

The curriculum and lessons do not account for challenges faced by students during Covid and social distancing time

4.2

Many students expressed concern about the volume of school work they were asked to complete. Some students reported that their workload was heavy at times and suggested less homework and assignments, fewer tests, and flexible assignment due dates. Students in the Adaptive Model noted that due to the closure their online block one period was too long.

Many students indicated that they would appreciate more communication among staff to understand the individual student workloads based on their courses and subjects. Some students asked for flexibility on school work requirements and the extension of due dates on assignments and projects.

Findings: Secondary Students

Support and Understanding

4

Flexibility with timelines/deadlines in classes, supports for student motivation, more guidance, and help with university supplementary applications.	4.3
Teachers should make sure to get a sense of how their class is actually feeling (maybe by using polls more often) *They can't see the class so they don't know if people are paying attention and it would help them see how they should be teaching that day.*	4.2
I really wish Covid was over and that there more opportunities to meet new people and gain friendships. *Online has been hard on my mental health and ability to find friendships.*	4.1
I feel we need more teacher support because during this pandemic it has been difficult for us to get that certain one-on-one support. *It's important because it helps us especially in our studies and it gives us more encouragement to build our education higher up.*	4.0
There needs to be more opportunities for interaction between teachers and students. Online communication is difficult and teachers' emails are swamped *The thing I miss most is talking to teachers after class. More opportunities to interact with teachers instead of leaving the call immediately.*	4.0

Many students from both Adaptive and Virtual schools praised teachers and staff for being supportive, understanding and caring. Many students were challenged to meet new peers and interact with friends to collaborate and socialize. Some students also said they would benefit from additional motivation and guidance and more opportunities to communicate with their teachers and peers. Students also emphasized the importance of understanding accommodations in an online learning environment.

Secondary Family Thoughtexchange

Participants: 1,152

The information below shows the number of and breakdown of family participants and the school learning model of their children.

1,152 Participants	
1,701 Thoughts	
18,950 Ratings	

PARTICIPATION
Breakdown of Participation

What Learning Model best describes your child's learning in first Term / Semester from October through January? (Please choose one only)

%	👤	Answer
27%	(288)	■ a) Secondary Virtual School
73%	(793)	■ b) Secondary Adaptive (Face-to-Face)
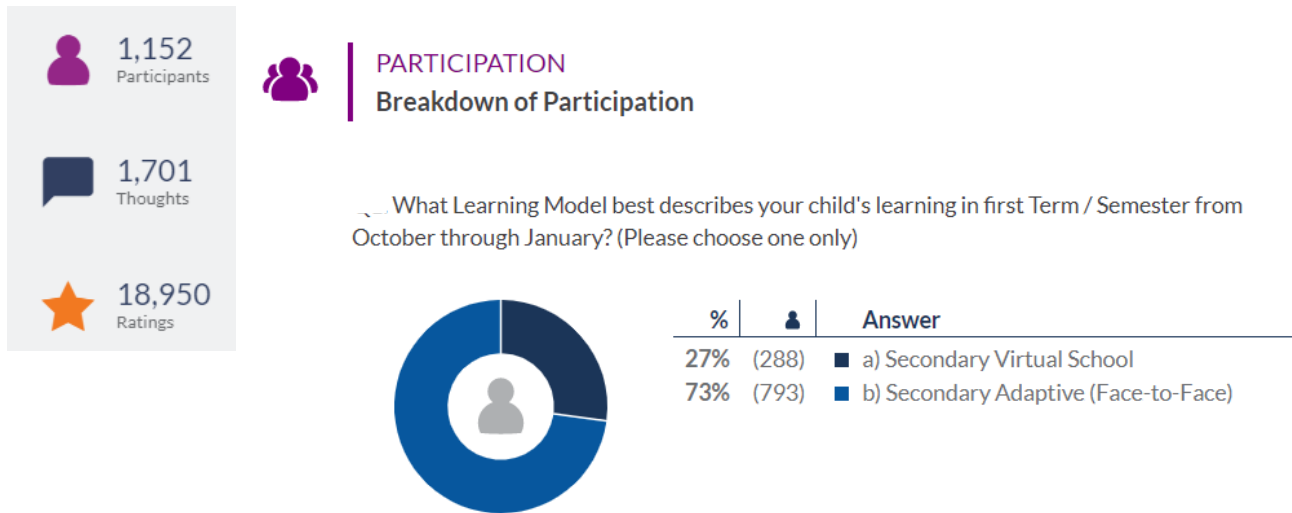
Thoughts Exchanged: 1701

The graph below indicates the frequency of themes that emerged from **1,701** thoughts rated from 1 to 5

Figure 3- Secondary Family Themes
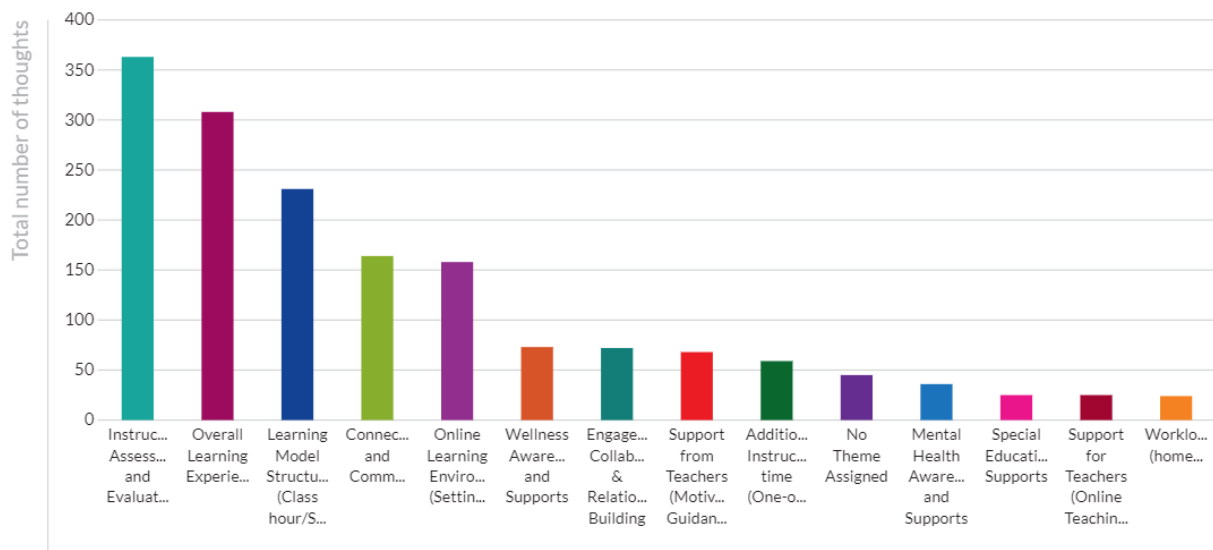
Student Grades

The information below shows the number of and breakdown of student participants by grade.

PARTICIPATION
Breakdown of Participation

Q2. Your child is currently attending:

%	👤	Answer
30%	(313)	■ a) Grade 9
25%	(266)	■ b) Grade 10
27%	(286)	■ c) Grade 11
18%	(193)	■ d) Grade 12

Technology Availability

The information below shows the number of and breakdown of student technology access.

PARTICIPATION
Breakdown of Participation

Technology Access – Your child is currently using a device (e.g., tablet, laptop or computer) provided by:
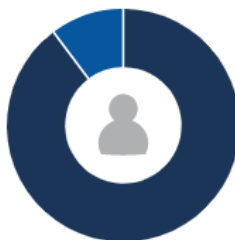
%	👤	Answer
90%	(947)	■ a) The family
10%	(106)	■ b) The Board

Word Cloud: Secondary Families

The word cloud below shows the most common words across all rated thoughts.

Findings: Secondary Families

Learning Experiences

1

	Average Star Rating
After the pandemic is over, in-person lessons are still preferable. *At home, students are used to being more relaxed, so sometimes don't pay attention. Other family members' plans conflict. Also Wi-Fi sometimes cuts out*	4.2
For student who are independent and organized they will succeed, students who aren't get lost and feel hopeless causing them to drown. *Material can sometimes be overwhelming - LOTS of written instructions - some students cannot handle this. Need more small groups or 1-1 time*	4.1
Attending face to face school in small class sizes. *It gave my child a sense of normalcy, connections to peers and connections and a better learning experience from teachers.*	4.0
Attending class every other day provided better learning opportunities and interaction amongst students and teachers. *Students need to interact to remain engaged, ask questions and learn from each other the teacher. Social connection is also important for mental health.*	4.0

Families indicated that their children have made a good effort to keep up their school work. Students have quickly adapted and accepted the challenges to new ways of engaging and learning. A number of families recognized that their children demonstrated resilience and growth in transitioning during the closures and to both learning models.

Many parents/guardians appreciated the great support from teachers and staff during this challenging time. Families reported a variety of successful learning experiences for their children including: adapting to a new learning environment, improved technology skills, better time management, accountability, and independent learning. Families also indicated the human interaction and routine associated with in-person learning is important for their child's learning needs, overall mental health and well-being.

2

	Average Star Rating
Students need more feedback (seeing corrected test not just the mark) and they need more discussion/ opportunity to ask questions with peers/teacher. *You need to know what your mistakes are to try not to repeat them and to learn. Extra help or ability to ask questions and peer mentoring is lacking.*	4.3
Not all teachers give immediate feedback to students with their homework. Some teachers do not also reach out to parents for missed homework. *Can parents receive course outline that include expectations and schedule of exams/quizzes and homework due dates - this will be helpful to parents.*	4.3
Lessons need to be recorded for students to revisit later as they complete assignments. Some students have difficulty hearing due to poor internet *connections, technology issues or because the teacher was moving too fast trying to fit everything into a smaller period*	4.2
Have consistency from school to school for how the same course is evaluated, esp with gr 12 courses. *Not fair if 1 school has no summative component for a university required course like gr 12 math, and another does.*	4.2

In both models, families noted differences in instructional approaches that students appeared to be more challenged and spending more time on school work than in previous years. Some families shared that their child would appreciate additional information on the expectations and rubrics associated assignments/projects. Families noted that many children were seeking fewer tasks and/or increased spacing between feedback and submission dates. Of note, families expressed workloads across both models and sought more manageable timelines for evaluations.

Families acknowledged that removing exams was very helpful at reducing their child's overall stress, others families felt that additional culminating tasks were substituted for

exams. Families recommended that the Board and educators explore and provide learning of new assessment practices that are reflective of student learning needs. Specifically, they recommended opportunities to integrate feedback into future demonstrations of learning and multiple and varied opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills acquisition. Families also noted the importance of their children receiving timely feedback that can be received and incorporated into assignment revisions.

3 Findings: Secondary Families
Learning Model

	Average Star Rating
I would like to see the second semester start with 75 minutes of each class every day *As we may be online for an extended period of time (past March break), a return to a 'normal' schedule will get some routine in their day*	4.2
The 2.5 hour periods in the morning online during the extended closure after the break we're difficult to sustain focus and motivation. *Building rapport with students is the most important aspect of teaching. It helps encourage and empower students. Students need more frequent contact.*	4.1
150 min is too long on line and 40 min is too short. Why can't we have 4-75 min periods until such time we return to in person learning. BALANCE *His teachers are rushing through concepts and there is no time to figure it out before they move on. 75 min would be better. With time for breaks!*	4.1
All considering, the first few months went well. The feedback I rec'd was the first period was way too long, and very hard to stay focused. *If the class is too long (2.5 hours) or the teacher isn't engaging, kids are going to lose focus and won't learn.*	4.2

Across both the Adaptive and Virtual learning models, families identified several successes associated with their chosen learning models. Families in the Adaptive learning model pointed to benefits of this model for their child(ren) including: small class sizes, the balance of in-person and virtual learning, and social interactions with peers and teachers. Some also commented that increased school-family communication has been effective.

Families in the Virtual learning model identified several successful outcomes for their children including: not having to commute to school, fewer social distractions during learning periods, improved time management, developing online etiquette and technical proficiency, decreased social anxiety, improved independence and research skills,

increased comfort to ask questions and share perspectives, increased motivation, and decreased stress.

As this Thoughtexchange occurred during Ontario's January lockdown, families with children in the Adaptive Learning model shared that their children struggled to sustain focus and motivation for the 2.5 hour online learning block. For some courses, families noted that their children found this block challenging given its length and pace, especially for learners with special education needs.

4 Findings: Secondary Families
Connections

Our son really misses interacting with teachers and students as well as extracurricular activities like debate, DECA etc.

Human to human communication and interaction is so much better for growth individually, learning to communicate and being involved in a community.

4.2

Lack of social interaction is affecting the mental health and well-being of kids.

There needs to be more emphasis on creating connections and a sense of belonging to a school or group of students.

4.1

Online education has allowed my child to focus on studies, which is great, but the social aspect of their development is now lacking.

Interactive and social activities could be lead by virtual Clubs, Student Council or Peer Mentors so as not to add more work to the instructors.

4.1

Face to face, the opportunity to connect and socialize. Teachers are very welcoming and learning was an inspiration, in the past always a challenge

Important to make connections and the state of mind is a positive factor when having the ability to interact, make friends, etc.

4.1

I would like my kids will be taught by his home school teachers and have their friends as his classmates.

I think that it makes my son feel more engaged with learning. This is so important to us, that's why we choose to go with face-to-face next semester.

4.1

Families appreciated having the option to choose learning models that met their preferences. They noted the evolution of their child's learning as teachers and students became more familiar and developed proficiency with technology and associated programs. Families from both models found that technology increased their awareness of their child's learning and provided opportunities to connect directly with staff.

Many parents/guardians from both learning models noted that schools were challenged to increase social interactions for students (both in-person and virtual), and indicated that their children would benefit from opportunities to interact both within and beyond the classroom through peer groups, structured breaks and study groups, increased extra-curricular clubs, virtual field trips and structured activities. A few parents/guardians also recommended an increase in communication to students and families, particularly regarding feedback on student work and overall progress.