



School Climate Surveys 2020-2021

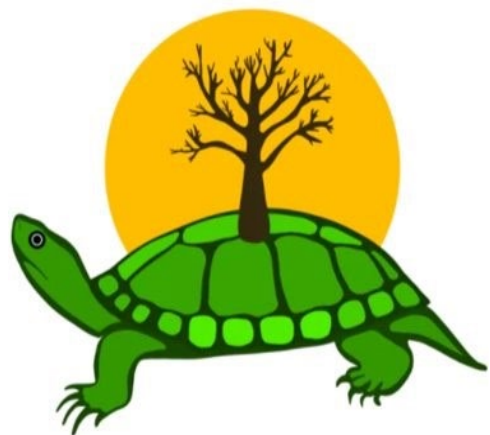
Executive Summary

Findings from YRDSB 2020-2021 Student and Family Surveys

YRDSB Research and Assessment Services

December 2021

Land Acknowledgement



Source: Turtle Island emoji designed by Chief Lady Bird (Nancy King) is an Anishinaabe artist based in Toronto. Her work is also seen across the city as public murals.

We affirm that we are all treaty people and acknowledge that the York Region District School Board is located on the lands of two treaties. These treaties have been signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the First Nations of the Williams Treaties who are: the Mississaugas of Alderville, Curve Lake, Hiawatha, Scugog Island; and the Chippewas of Beausoleil, Rama, and Georgina Island who is our closest neighbour and partner in education.

To honour this agreement, we will take up our responsibility to be respectful of their traditions, knowledge and inherent rights as sovereign nations.

We will respect their relationship with these lands and recognize that our connection to this land is through the continued relationship with these First Nations, and we acknowledge our shared responsibility to respect and care for the land and waters for future generations.



Title: Executive Summary: Findings from YRDSB 2020-2021 Student and Family Surveys

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

See [Full Report \(PDF\)](#).

A: Introduction: YRDSB Student and Family Surveys 2020-2021

During the 2020-2021 school year, circumstances associated with the COVID-19 pandemic led to substantial and unprecedented changes to learning environments around the world. In Ontario, emerging research on the impacts of the pandemic points to increased stress for families, particularly in its initial stages (Offord Centre, 2020). In addition, pre-existing inequities, disparities, and systemic barriers within school systems and the broader social context were intensified (Ciuffetelli & Conversano, 2021; OECD, 2021).

Understanding how York Region District School Board (YRDSB)’s students and families experienced learning in the context of the pandemic offers an important opportunity to continue to support students, especially those who are systematically underserved within YRDSB (i.e., students who are historically and currently marginalized within education systems).

YRDSB routinely consults with students and families in a variety of ways to understand their perspectives on, and experiences of, learning environments. To further understand students’ and families’ experiences of learning (face-to-face and virtual) during the 2020-2021 school year, YRDSB’s Research and Assessment Services department implemented two online surveys in May, 2021.

The *2021 YRDSB Student Survey* and the *2021 YRDSB Family Survey* were designed to achieve several objectives including:

- responding to students and families based on the impact of the pandemic on student learning and well-being;
- meeting Ministry-mandated requirements to conduct school climate surveys at least once every two years;
- meeting the requirements of [PPM164](#), which instructed school boards to assess perceptions of remote learning; and
- monitoring YRDSB’s [Multi-Year Strategic Plan](#) (MYSP) and [Director’s Action Plan](#) (DAP) goals.

This report includes key findings from these surveys related to the following topics:

- student well-being and mental health;
- safe, equitable, and inclusive learning environments;
- student engagement and learning; and,
- remote learning, technology, and learning tools.

Importantly, these findings provide insight into student and family experiences and perceptions during an unprecedented learning context that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. This report can also be used to understand trends in perceptions among YRDSB students and families over time. Findings also offer important information to support school, department, and system planning and intervention strategies that aim to better serve students and raise the learning outcomes and well-being of students who are systemically underserved within YRDSB.

Using Perception Data to Support School, Department, and System Planning with Data Literacy and an Anti-Oppression Framework

Data play a critical role in supporting school, department, and system planning. Findings in this report represent perception data, which is one of several types of data used at YRDSB to inform decision-making regarding policies, programs, practices, and procedures that aim to achieve YRDSB’s [DAP](#) goals (see Figure 1).

Introduction

YRDSB Director’s Action Plan Goals

To raise the achievement and well-being of our students who are underserved, we will:

Foster Well-Being and Mental Health:

We create safe, healthy and inclusive learning and working environments.

Champion Equity and Inclusivity:

We develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to remove barriers in support of all learners.



Build Collaborative Relationships:

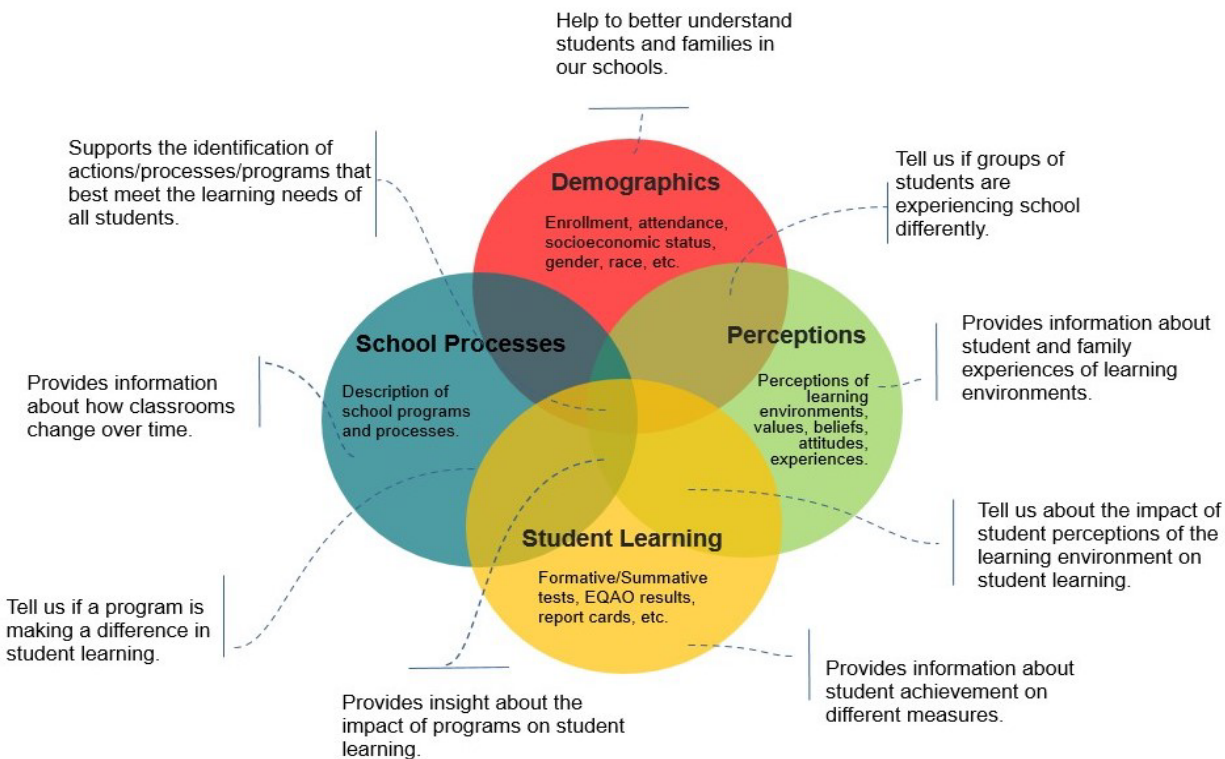
We build trusting relationships based on respectful and responsive communications.

Empower Ethical Leadership:

We lead ethically by focusing on students and upholding our value.

Using perception data alongside multiple and diverse data sources (e.g., student learning data, school programs and processes data, and demographic data) is an important part of school, department, and system planning and monitoring processes (see Figure 2). Together, multiple sources of data can be used to develop an understanding of the areas of strength and need within YRDSB, as well as the strategies and actions required to support all students, especially those who are systemically underserved at YRDSB.

Multiple and Diverse Sources of Data for Planning and Monitoring



Source: Adapted from Bernhardt V. L. (2013). *Data Analysis for Continuous School Improvement (3rd ed)*. New York: Routledge, p.17.

Data can also play an important role in advancing the goals of equity and social justice (Garcia et al., 2018) and can support YRDSB’s goal to raise the achievement and well-being of students who are underserved. At the same time, care must be taken to ensure that data are collected, interpreted, reported, and used in ways that do not harm individuals or groups that the data represent. Developing Data Literacy and applying the principles of Anti-Oppression help to ensure that data are not used in ways that stereotype, marginalize or stigmatize social groups, or promote deficits perspectives towards students and families.

As outlined in this report, findings from the student and family surveys point to disparities in schooling experiences of different groups of students depending on their identities such as Indigenous identity, racial identity, sexual orientation, and gender identity. YRDSB recognizes that these disparities are

the result of inequities within and beyond schools and school boards and are not a reflection of deficits within students and families. As such, it is important to review findings in this report with the understanding that:

- Differences in student experiences and perceptions reflect systemic inequities;
- Individual and systemic biases and barriers must be examined to ensure that students, families and communities are not further marginalized or stigmatized in reviewing and interpreting data; and
- Responses to differences in student experiences and perceptions must focus on strategies and initiatives to promote equitable institutional structures and practices to enable all students to achieve their highest potential.

Below are guiding questions that can support readers in reviewing and using data in ways that promote equitable experiences and outcomes for students and families:

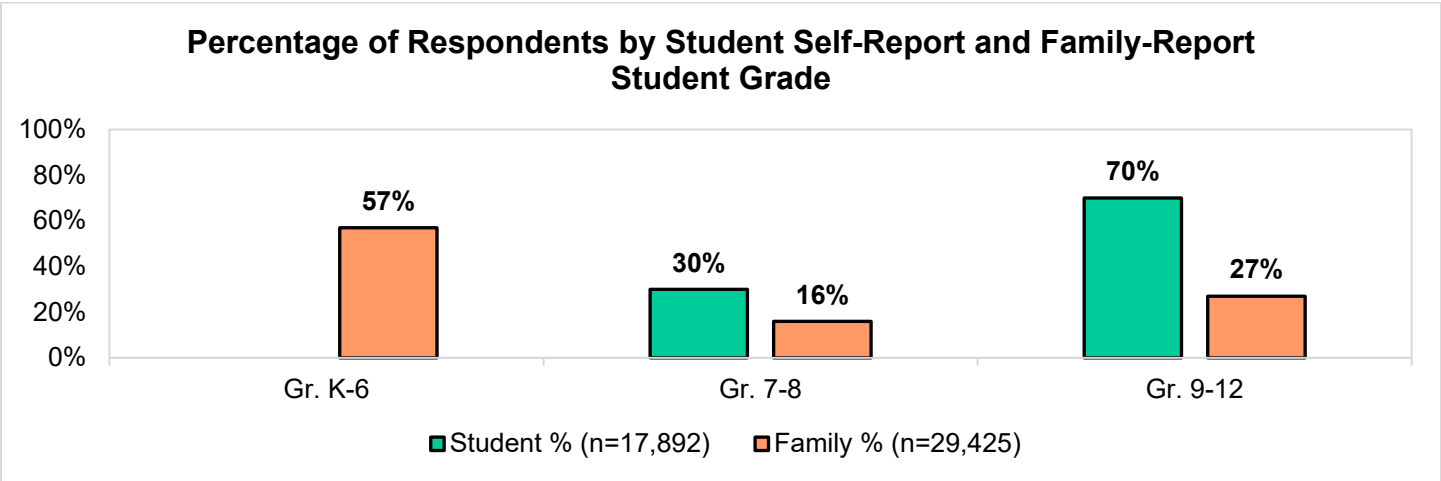
- What do you notice about the data? What stands out for you?
- How might your social location influence how you interpret the data?
- What assumptions might you be making about students and families based on the data? How might biases be shaping these assumptions?
- What additional data sources are needed to understand both complementary and divergent perspectives about students' and families' experiences and perceptions?
- How will you shift or maintain your focus on what the data suggest about educational structures and practices (e.g., school practices and environments, Board policies and practices, etc.) rather than attributing perceptions and experiences to deficits within students, families, or social groups?
- How will you use the information in this report to change practices in ways that raise the achievement and well-being of students who are underserved?

Survey Methodology and Response Rates

Students in Grades 7-12 were invited to complete the *YRDSB 2021 Student Survey*. Families of students in Grades K-12 were invited to complete the *YRDSB 2021 Family Survey*. The surveys were available online between May 26 and June 29, 2021, through a third-party data collection tool. Surveys were designed to take approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete and were available in the following 13 languages: Arabic, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Farsi, Gujarati, Hebrew, Korean, Punjabi, Tamil, Turkish, Russian, Urdu, and Vietnamese, which are the most commonly spoken languages in YRDSB households. Surveys were anonymous and confidential, and participants could skip any questions they did not want to answer. Survey questions were developed in consultation with numerous subject matter experts across YRDSB.

In total, 19,879 student surveys were completed, for an overall approximate response rate of 33%. A total of 31,480 family surveys were completed, for an overall approximate response rate of 21%. Most student surveys were completed by students in Grades 9-12, and most family surveys were completed by families of students in Grades K-6. Figure 1 details the percentage of responses by student self-reported grade and family-reported student grade.

Figure 1: Student Self-Reported Grade and Family-Reported Student Grade



Source: School Climate Student Survey 2021
Notes: Not all respondents indicated a student grade.

Data Analysis and Reporting

The analyses undertaken for this report are *descriptive* in nature, meaning that they are intended to summarize participants’ responses to the survey. Qualitative analysis involved identifying key themes, categories, and patterns in the responses to three open-ended questions in the student survey that asked about the successes and challenges associated with remote learning. Quantitative analysis involved identifying the number and percentage of respondents who selected response options to each survey question. In this report, for all questions in which a participant could select only one response category, “n” refers to the number of *respondents* who selected that response category. For questions in which a participant could select more than one response category, “n” refers to the number of *responses* to a particular survey item. In this report, Figures include data for select response categories (e.g., Strongly Agree/Agree, Always/Often, etc.).

In alignment with the commitment to anti-oppression, which calls attention to the role of institutions in shaping power, privilege and oppression, disaggregate findings by student identities in this report are included only for questions that emphasize the role of educational structures, practices, and environments in shaping students’ and families’ experiences of learning. The Pearson Chi-Square significance test was conducted for all questions that were disaggregated by student self-identified race, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Notably, findings for these questions were found to be statistically significant ($p<.05$), and while statistical analyses such as significance testing have no inherent or superior value in research inquiries, such analyses can be used to advance social justice and equity goals (Garcia et al., 2018). Here, the results of our statistical significance testing are treated as further evidence of the importance of examining and improving educational structures and practices in ways that support equitable experiences and outcomes for students.

Introduction

In this report, findings are presented in the following four main sections:

- student well-being and mental health;
- safe, equitable, and inclusive learning environments;
- student engagement and learning; and
- remote learning, technology, and learning tools.

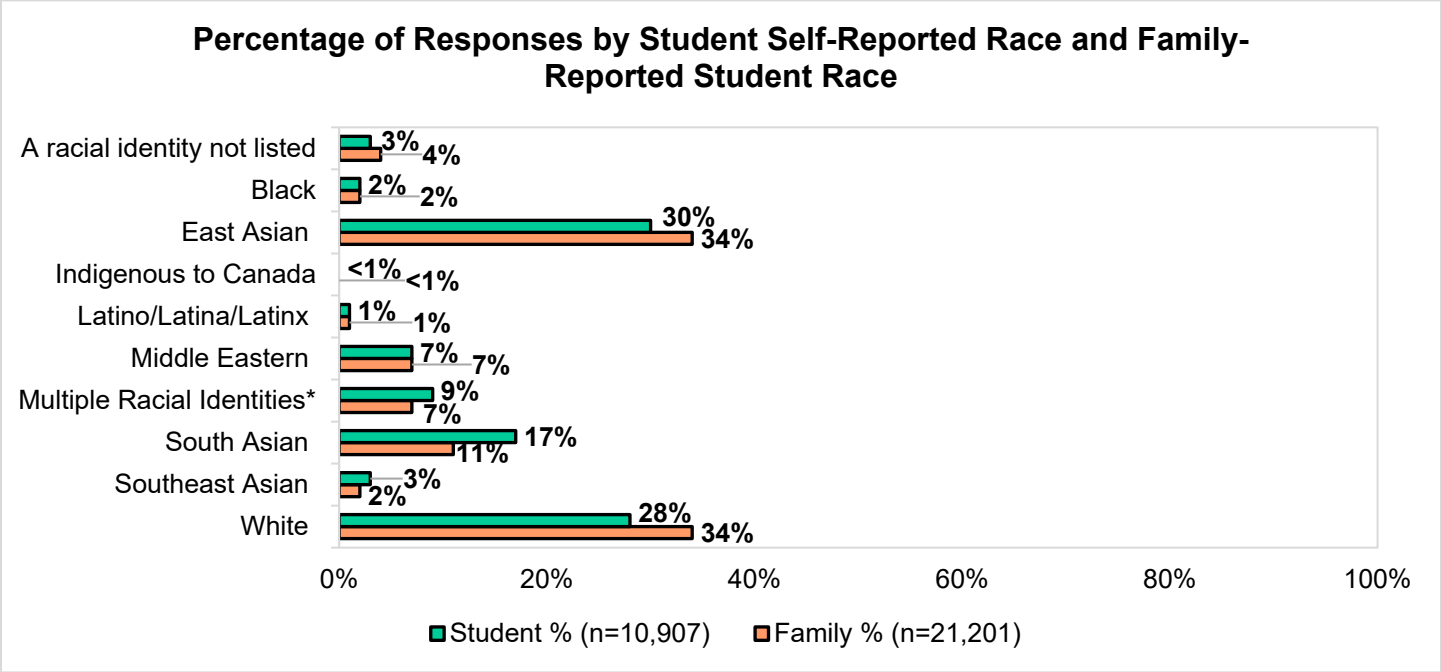
About the Survey Participants

To carry out the survey objectives and understand how various identity groups experienced the 2020-2021 school year, the *YRDSB 2021 Student Survey* and the *YRDSB 2021 Family Survey* included identity-based demographic questions. Collecting identity-based data is an important part of identifying and removing systemic biases and barriers to equitable learning experiences, opportunities, and outcomes for students who are historically and currently marginalized within education systems, and for establishing equitable practices that support the achievement and well-being of all students.

There are, however, inherent challenges associated with the collection of identity-based data as identities are not necessarily captured by fixed categories, and the ways in which people describe themselves are diverse and may change over time ([Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2009](#)). For these surveys, identity-based questions follow the Ministry of Ontario’s [Anti-Racism Data Standards](#) (2018) which provide guidance on data collection requirements to support the identification of systemic inequities and disparities in the public sector.

Figures 2 to 5 and Tables 1 and 2 provide an overview of responses to the identity-based data collected in the student and family surveys. Data in this section reflect both student self-reported identity data as well as family-reported identities of their child. Note that for questions about race, gender identity, and sexual orientation, participants could select more than one identity category.

Figure 2: Student Self-Reported Race and Family-Reported Student Indigenous and Racial Identities

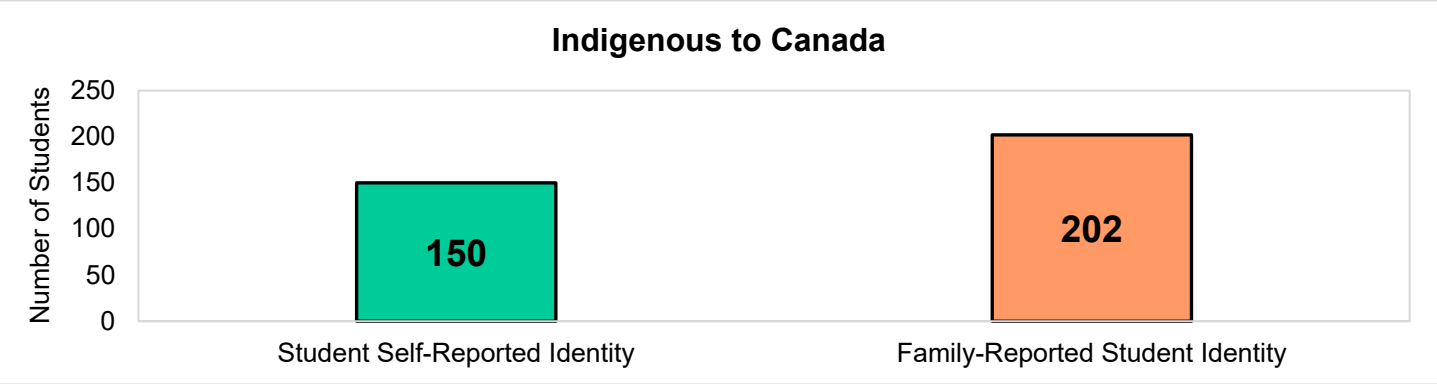


Source: School Climate Student Survey 2021

Notes: (*) Respondents could select more than one racial identity from the list provided. The “multiple racial identities” category includes the percentage of respondents who selected more than one race category from the list provided. The category entitled, “a racial identity not listed” includes the percentage of respondents who indicated that their racial identity was not listed in the options provided. Where percentages are less than 0.5%, “<1%” is shown

In this survey, students were invited to indicate Indigenous identity as a self-reported race category (see Figure 2), as well as in a separate question that asked if students are Indigenous to Canada. A higher number of students and families responded to the question on Indigenous to Canada, therefore, in this report, numbers representing Indigenous students are from the question that asked students if they are Indigenous to Canada (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Student Self-Reported and Family-Reported Student Indigenous Identity



Source: School Climate Student Survey 2021

Table 1: Student Self-Reported and Family-Reported Student Gender Identity

Gender Identity	% Student Grade 7-12 (n=11,232)	% Family K-12 (n=22,368)
A Gender Identity Not Listed	<1%	<1%
Gender Fluid	1%	<1%
Gender Nonconforming	<1%	<1%
Man/Boy	35%	52%
Multiple Gender Identities*	4%	1%
Non-Binary	1%	<1%
Questioning	1%	<1%
Transgender	<1%	<1%
Two-Spirit	<1%	<1%
Woman/Girl	58%	46%

Source: School Climate Student Survey 2021

Notes: (*) Respondents could select more than one gender identity from the list provided. The “multiple gender identities” category includes the percentage of respondents who selected more than one gender identity category from the list provided. Where percentages are less than 0.5%, "<1%" is shown.

Table 2: Student Self-Reported Sexual Orientation

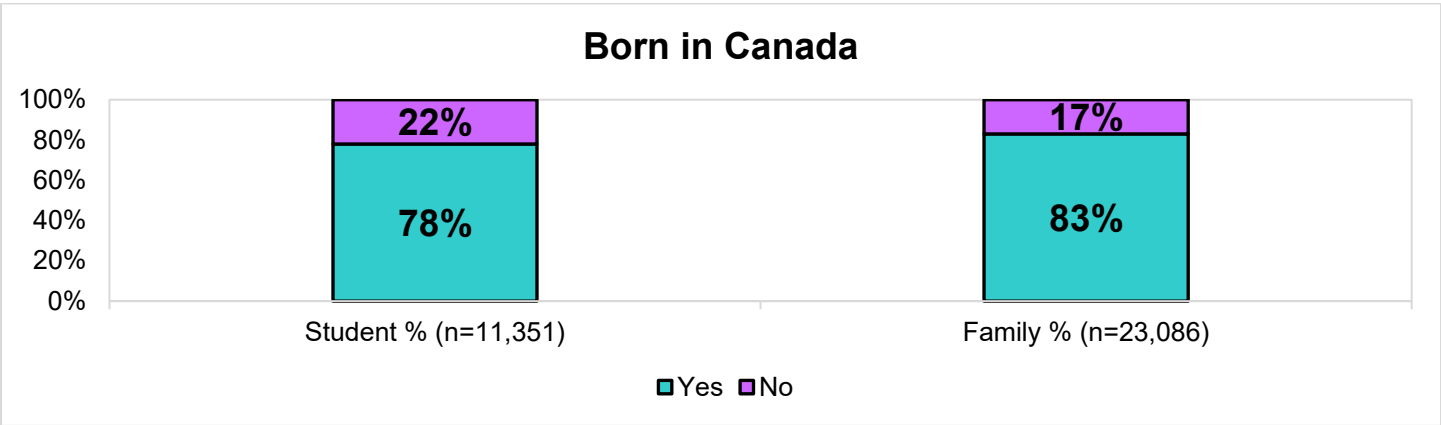
Sexual Orientation	% Students Grades 7-12 (n=11,313)
Asexual	4%
A Sexual Orientation Not Listed	<1%
Bisexual	6%
Gay	<1%
Lesbian	1%
Multiple Sexual Orientation Identities*	7%
Pansexual	2%
Queer	<1%
Questioning	3%
Heterosexual	62%
Two-Spirit	4%

Source: School Climate Student Survey 2021

Note: (*) Respondents could select more than one sexual orientation identity from the list provided. The “multiple sexual orientation identities” category includes the percentage of respondents who selected more than one sexual orientation identity category from the list provided. Where percentages are less than 0.5%, "<1%" is shown.

As indicated in Figure 4, of the 11,351 students who answered this question, most (78%, n=8,903) reported that they were born in Canada, and among the 23,086 families who answered this question, most (83%, n=19,049) reported that their child was born in Canada. This percentage aligns closely with that in the YRDSB Student Information System (SIS) wherein data indicates that 82% of YRDSB students are born in Canada.

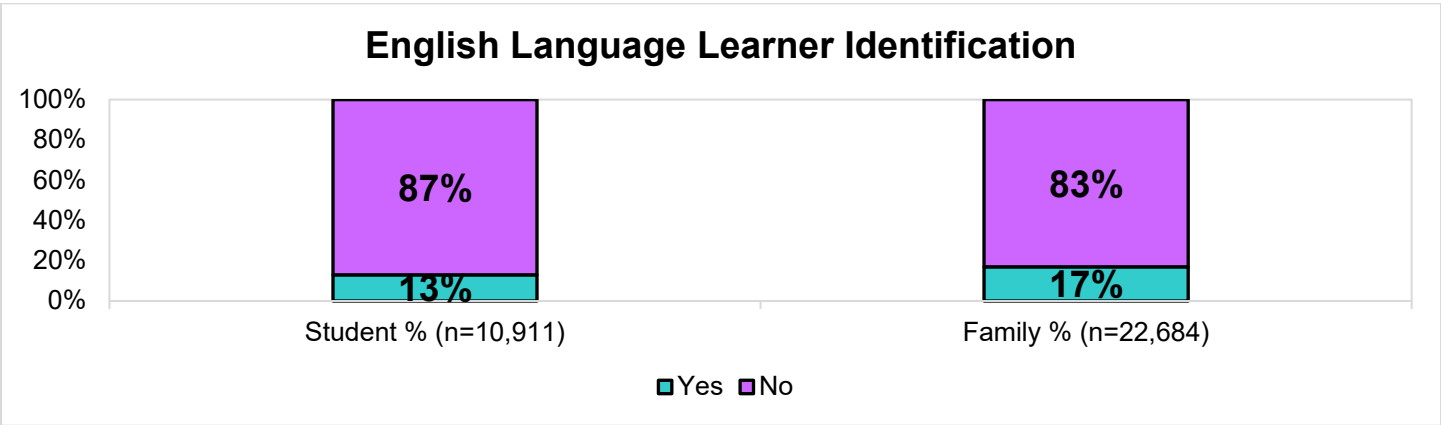
Figure 4: Student Self-Reported and Family-Reported Born in Canada



Source: School Climate Student Survey 2021

Indicated in Figure 5, of the 10,911 students who answered this question, 13% (n=1,466) self-identified as an English Language Learner (ELL). Seventeen percent of family respondents (n=3,748) identified their child as an English Language Learner. Notably, student self-identified English Language Learners in this survey are underrepresented compared to the broader YRDSB population, wherein English Language Learners make up 26% of all YRDSB students as identified in YRDSB’s Student Information System. This underrepresentation may be due to a low response rate among students with an ELL identification or to the possibility that students with an ELL identification did not indicate this in the survey.

Figure 5: Student Self-Reported and Family-Reported English Language Learner Identification



Source: School Climate Student Survey 2021

Summary of Survey Findings

B: Highlights - Student Well-Being and Mental Health

YRDSB aims to support student well-being and mental health by building safe, healthy, and inclusive learning environments wherein students feel they matter and belong. Students' perceptions of their well-being and mental health and families' perceptions of their child's well-being and mental health provide important information that can be used to support efforts to achieve these goals.

Findings from the 2021 surveys suggest that the pandemic context has negatively impacted student well-being and mental health. An analysis of student perceptions across surveys also indicates that since 2017, there has been a substantial increase in the percentage of students who report feelings related to negative well-being and mental health (e.g., anxious, socially isolated) and a substantial decrease in the percentage of students who report feelings related to positive well-being and mental health (e.g., happy, positive about the future).

There has also been a decrease in the percentage of students who report feeling like they matter to people at school. While overall, there has been an increase in the percentage of students who report that there is at least one caring adult at their school who supports them, there are differences across racial, gender, and sexual orientation identities. Survey results indicate that students who identified as Indigenous, Latino/Latina/Latinx, those who selected multiple racial identities, and those who selected 2SLGBTQ+ gender and sexual orientation identities were less likely than their peers to report feeling supported by a caring adult at their school during the 2020-2021 school year.

Below is a summary of key findings related to student well-being and mental health from the *2021 YRDSB Student Survey* and the *2021 YRDSB Family Survey*, as well as a summary of data trends in perceptions of student well-being and mental health between 2017 and 2021 using the *2017 School Climate Survey for Students*, the *2018 Every Student Counts Survey*, and the *2021 YRDSB Student Survey*.

What we were told about student well-being and mental health in 2021:

- A higher percentage of secondary students reported feelings related to negative well-being and mental health than elementary students (e.g., 50% of Grades 9-12 students reported feeling lonely compared to 35% of Grades 7-8 students).
- Among both elementary and secondary students, less than half reported experiencing feelings related to positive emotional well-being and mental health (i.e., happy [Grades 7-8, 42%; Grades 9-12, 30%], positive about the future [Grades 7-8, 35%; Grades 9-12, 28%], good about themselves [Grades 7-8, 40%; Grades 9-12, 33%]) all the time or often during the 2020-2021 school year.
- A higher percentage of both elementary and secondary students reported feeling nervous or anxious (Grades 7-8, 45%; Grades 9-12, 62%), socially isolated (Grades 7-8, 36%; Grades 9-12, 55%), and like they are running out of time so that they cannot do anything fun (Grades 7-8, 44%; Grades 9-12, 64%) compared to other feelings related to negative well-being and mental health.
- Students who identified as Indigenous to Canada (Grades 7-8, 65%; Grades 9-12, 75%), Latino/Latina/Latinx (Grades 7-8, 74%; Grades 9-12, 77%), students who selected multiple racial identities (Grades 7-8, 81%; Grades 9-12, 78%), those who identified with 2SLGBTQ sexual orientation (e.g., Bisexual [Grades 7-8, 67%; Grades 9-12, 75%] and Lesbian [Grades 7-8, 64%; Grades 9-12, 71%] and gender identities were less likely to report feeling supported by and cared for by adults at their school.
- Family reports of their child's well-being and mental health are consistent with student self-reports, with a higher percentage of families of secondary students reporting that their child experienced feelings related to negative well-being and mental health than families of elementary students (e.g., 25% of families of Grades 7-8 students reported their child feeling nervous or anxious compared to 35% of families of Grades 9-12 students).
- Among families of students in all grades, a higher percentage of respondents indicated that their child felt lonely (families of Grades 7-8 students, 40%; families of Grades 9-12 students,

Student Well-Being and Mental Health

45%) and socially isolated (families of Grades 7-8 students, 43%; families of Grades 9-12, 50% students) than other indicators of negative emotional well-being (i.e., sad or depressed, nervous or anxious, angry, running out of time, pushed to do too much).

Trends in perceptions about student well-being and mental health since 2017:

- There has been a substantial increase in the percentage of students who report feelings related to negative well-being and mental health.
- There has been a substantial decrease in the percentage of students who report feelings related to positive well-being and mental health.
- There has been a decrease in the percentage of students who report feeling like they matter to people at school.
- There has been an increase in the percentage of students who report that there is at least one caring adult at their school who supports them.

Moving forward: Strategies and Actions to Support Student mental Health and Well-being in YRDSB’s Multi-Year Strategic Plan and Director’s Action Plan

To support the achievement and mental health of students and to remove barriers to meaningful education for all students we will continue to:

- implement the [ABCs of Mental Health Lesson Series for K-12 \(Acknowledge, Bridge, Connect\)](#), which is designed with an anti-oppressive framework and identifies and challenges oppressive ideologies such as pathologization, universalism, and deficit thinking.
- place the individual student at the centre of our actions.
- ensure active family and student voice in the proactive planning to support students.
- enhance the *Student Mental Health and Addictions Newsletter* with emphasis on tips for families and encouraging dialogue with schools in efforts to provide accessible communications for families (e.g., encouraging participation in web events, and drop-ins for families and youth).
- provide culturally relevant and responsive mental health care.
- centre intersecting social identities for students in affirming practices in programming, services and supports.
- continue to build collaborative relationships with external organizations and agencies that provide culturally, racially, and linguistically relevant mental health services.
- enhance and extend student leadership for mental health initiatives in tandem with student leaders and other stakeholders.

C: Highlights - Safe, Equitable, and Inclusive Learning Environments

The York Region District School Board (YRDSB) is committed to student achievement and well-being by working to ensure equitable access and outcomes through accessible and inclusive learning and working environments ([YRDSB Indigenous Education and Equity Strategy](#)). Understanding student and family perceptions and experiences related to safe, equitable, and inclusive learning environments plays an important role in identifying systemic barriers to student success and, in turn, creating more equitable and inclusive school environments.

Findings from both the student and family surveys suggest that overall, most students feel safe at their school, that their school is a welcoming place, that they are treated with respect at their school, and that school rules are applied to them in a fair way. However, findings also indicate that there are differences across student social identities with respect to experiences of safety, equity, and inclusion at school. Specifically, findings suggest that students with marginalized racial, gender, and sexual orientation identities are less likely than their peers to report feeling safe at school, like they belong at their school, and like school rules are applied to them in a fair way. These students are also more likely to report experiences of racism, bullying, discrimination, and harassment.

With respect to safe, equitable, and inclusive learning environments, most students reported that they know how to report if bullying, cyberbullying, racism, discrimination, or harassment happen at their

Safe, Equitable and Inclusive Learning Environments

school. In addition, in 2021 most students indicated that they are encouraged to think or learn about human rights/social justice issues. An analysis of student perceptions across surveys indicates that since 2017, there has been an increase in the percentage of students who report that they are encouraged to think or learn about human rights/social justice issues related to Indigenous peoples of Canada, race, and poverty.

Below is a summary of findings related to safe, equitable and inclusive learning environments from the *2021 YRDSB Student Survey* and the *2021 YRDSB Family Survey*, as well as a summary of data trends in student perceptions between 2017 and 2021 using the *2017 School Climate Survey for Students*, the *2018 Every Student Counts Survey*, and the *2021 YRDSB Student Survey*.

What we were told about safe, equitable and inclusive learning environments in 2021:

- Most students reported that they feel safe at their school (Grade 7-8, 84%; Grade 9-12, 87%), and most families reported that their child feels safe at their school (families Grade K-6, 90%; families Grade 7-8, 89; families Grade 9-12, 88%). Most students reported that their school is a welcoming place (Grade 7-8, 83%; Grade 9-12, 82%), that they are treated with respect at their school (Grade 7-8, 81%; Grade 9-12, 83%), and that school rules are applied to them in a fair way (Grade 7-8, 83%; Grade 9-12, 87%).
- Students who identified as Indigenous to Canada (Grade 7-8, 78%; Grade 9-12, 85%), Latino/Latina/Latinx (Grade 7-8, 67%; Grade 9-12, 83%), Lesbian (Grade 7-8, 55%; Grade 9-12, 71%), Queer (Grade 7-8, 50%; Grade 9-12, 65%), Non-Binary (Grade 7-8, 54%; Grade 9-12, 59%) and Transgender (Grade 7-8, 44%; Grade 9-12, 54%) are less likely to report that they feel safe at school.
- Overall, a low percentage of students reported that they feel like they belong at their school (Grade 7-8, 69%; Grade 9-12, 66%). This finding is even lower for students who identified as Black (Grade 7-8, 65%; Grade 9-12, 55%), Latino/Latina/Latinx (Grade 7-8, 37%; Grade 9-12, 55%), Indigenous to Canada (Grade 7-8, 52%; Grade 9-12, 61%), Bisexual (Grade 7-8, 48%; Grade 9-12, 55%), Lesbian (Grade 7-8, 36%; Grade 9-12, 48%), Pansexual (Grade 7-8, 45%; Grade 9-12, 47%), Queer (Grade 7-8, 50%; Grade 9-12, 46%), Gender Fluid (Grade 7-8, 53%; Grade 9-12, 56%), Non-Binary (Grade 7-8, 27%; Grade 9-12, 50%), Questioning (Grade 7-8, 36%; Grade 9-12, 43%), Transgender (Grade 7-8, 22%; Grade 9-12, 43%), multiple gender identities (Grade 7-8, 44%; Grade 9-12, 48%) and a gender identity not listed (Grade 7-8, 13%; Grade 9-12, 28%). Note that responses for students who identity as Gender Nonconforming and Two-Spirit were suppressed due to low numbers.
- Students who identified as Indigenous to Canada (Grade 7-8, 42%; Grade 9-12, 70%), Latino/Latina/Latinx (Grade 7-8, 61%; Grade 9-12, 86%), Gender Fluid (Grade 7-8, 58%; Grade 9-12, 86%), Non-Binary (Grade 7-8, 61%; Grade 9-12, 74%) and Transgender (Grade 7-8, 51%; Grade 9-12, 64%) are less likely to report that school rules are applied to them in a fair way.
- Most students reported that they are encouraged to think or learn about human rights/social justice issues related to Indigenous peoples of Canada (Grade 7-8, 94%; Grade 9-12, 85%), race (Grade 7-8, 90%; Grade 9-12, 85%), and ethnicity and culture (Grade 7-8, 87%; Grade 9-12, 82%).
- A higher percentage of students who identified as Black (Grade 7-8, 16%; Grade 9-12, 17%), Indigenous to Canada (Grade 7-8, 20%; Grade 9-12, 21%), Latino/Latina/Latinx (Grade 7-8, 18%; Grade 9-12, 9%), Multiple Racial Identities (Grade 7-8, 19%; Grade 9-12, 11%), and Southeast Asian (Grade 7-8, 19%; Grade 9-12, 10%) reported that they experienced racism since the start of this school year compared to students who selected other racial identities.
- A higher percentage of students who identified as Indigenous to Canada (Grade 7-8, 27%; Grade 9-12, 25%), Multiple Racial Identities (Grade 7-8, 20%; Grade 9-12, 12%), Bisexual (Grade 7-8, 28%; Grade 9-12, 13%), Gay (Grade 7-8, 42%; Grade 9-12, 25%), Lesbian (Grade 7-8, 36%; Grade 9-12, 25%), Queer (Grade 7-8, 36%; Grade 9-12, 22%), Gender Fluid (Grade 7-8, 47%; Grade 9-12, 23%), Non-Binary (Grade 7-8, 36%; Grade 9-12, 28%) and Transgender (Grade 7-8, 45%; Grade 9-12, 37%) reported that they experience discrimination since the start of this school year compared to students who indicated other social identities.

Safe, Equitable and Inclusive Learning Environments

- Most students reported that they know how to report if bullying, cyberbullying, racism, discrimination, or harassment happen at their school (i.e., 81%-88% of Grades 7-8 students and 78%-82% of Grades 9-12 students).

Trends in perceptions about safe, equitable and inclusive learning environments since 2017:

- Student and family perceptions of safety at school have remained consistent, with most students reporting that they feel safe at school, and most families reporting that their child feels safe at school.
- There has been a decline in the percentage of students who indicate that they feel like they belong at their school.
- There has been an increase in the percentage of students who report that they are encouraged to think or learn about human rights/social justice issues related to Indigenous peoples of Canada, race, and poverty.

Moving forward: Strategies and Actions in YRDSB’s Multi-Year Strategic Plan and Director’s Action Plan:

To support the achievement and well-being of students and to remove barriers to meaningful education for all students we will continue to:

- Select/use texts and learning resources that represent diversity of social identities, experiences and world views in identity-affirming ways that do not limit choices of possible selves.
- Co-construct learning, knowledge and spaces that affirm students’ identities and incorporate multiple ways of knowing.
- Build learning environments that encourage students to question existing power dynamics and take action against oppression and discriminatory elements in society.
- Name and respond effectively to acts of harm and incidents of identity-based hate, discrimination or bullying.
- Engage in partnership with students and families to incorporate and value multiple community funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) that decenter euro-centric ways of knowing and doing.
- Analyze data (including student and community voice) using an anti-racist and anti-oppressive framework to actively seek information about students who have been marginalized to inform program planning and instructional practice. Safe, equitable, and inclusive learning environments are key to ensuring equitable experiences and outcomes for students. Using data from multiple sources can help to identify and eliminate barriers to equitable experiences and outcomes, and improve student achievement and well-being (YRDSB Indigenous Education and Equity Strategy).

Below is a summary of key findings related to safe, equitable, and inclusive learning environments from the *2021 YRDSB Student Survey* and the *2021 YRDSB Family Survey*, as well as a summary of data trends in perceptions related to these topics between 2017 and 2021.

D: Highlights - Student Engagement and Learning

YRDSB aims to provide effective instruction and assessment that reflects students’ identities, lived experiences, strengths, needs and interests (YRDSB DAP Goal 3). Understanding student and family perceptions of student engagement and learning opportunities is one of several data sources that can be used to measure progress towards this goal.

Findings from the student and family surveys suggest that student engagement has been challenging in the pandemic context. Overall, findings suggest that compared to students in Grades 7-8, secondary students are less likely to report that they have learning opportunities related to student engagement (e.g., opportunities to assess their learning, share thoughts about how they learn best, etc.). In addition, an analysis of student perceptions across surveys indicates that there has been a decrease in the percentage of students who report that they have opportunities related to student engagement at their school.

With respect to the relevance of instruction, findings suggest that there are differences across student social identities with students with marginalized racial, gender, and sexual orientation identities being less likely to indicate that the instruction they receive is relevant and has real-life connections. In addition, families of secondary students are less likely to perceive the instruction their child receives as being relevant and having real-life connections compared to families of elementary students.

With respect to ESL/ELD support, less than half of students reported that the support they received helps their learning, and less than half of families indicated that this support helps their child with learning. Similarly, with respect to special education programming, less than half of students and families indicated that this programming supported their, or their child’s strengths, needs, and interests.

Below is a summary of key findings related to student engagement and learning from the 2021 YRDSB Student Survey and the 2021 YRDSB Family Survey, as well as a summary of data trends in perceptions of student engagement and learning between 2017 and 2021.

What we were told about student engagement and learning in 2021:

- Compared to secondary students, a higher percentage of students in Grades 7-8 indicate that they have opportunities to: share how they learn best (Grades 7-8, 65% vs. Grades 9-12, 54%), set and follow through on learning goals (Grades 7-8, 74% vs. Grades 9-12, 72%) ; demonstrate and assess their learning (Grades 7-8, 82% vs. Grades 9-12, 78%); learn from mistakes (Grades 7-8, 83% vs. Grades 9-12, 77%); and give, receive and use feedback to improve their work (Grades 7-8, 76% vs. Grades 9-12, 59%).
- A lower percentage of families of secondary students agreed that the instruction their child receives is relevant and has real-life connections (53%), compared to families of students in Grades K-6 (74%) and Grades 7-8 (62%).
- Nearly two-thirds of students in Grades 7-8 (65%) and just over half of secondary students (56%) indicated that the instruction they receive is relevant and has real-life connections.
- On average, three-quarters of families reported that their child’s school recognizes them as a partner in their child’s learning and well-being (Grades K-6, 79%; Grades 7-8, 76%; Grades 9-12, 71%).
- Fewer than half of students (Grades 7-8, 66%; Grades 9-12, 48%) and families (Grades K-6, 37%; Grades 7-8, 40%; Grades 9-12, 44%) report that the support they or their child received for English as a Second Language (ESL) or English Literacy Development (ELD) helped them with their learning.
- Fewer than half of students (Grades 7-8, 39%; Grades 9-12, 50%) and families (Grades K-6, 37%; Grades 7-8, 44%; Grades 9-12, 47%) report that the special education programming they or their child received supported their strengths, needs, and interests.

Student Engagement and Learning

Trends in perceptions about student engagement and learning since 2017:

- Among students in Grades 7-8, there has been a decrease in the percentage of students who indicated that they have opportunities to set goals for their learning and follow through on those goals, show what they have learned in a variety of ways, learn from their mistakes, give and receive feedback on their schoolwork with peers, and use feedback to improve their work.
- Among students in Grades 7-8, there has been an increase in percentage of students who indicated that they have opportunities to assess their learning and share thoughts about how they learn best.
- Among secondary students, the percentage of students who indicate that they have opportunities to assess their learning has remained consistent.
- Among secondary students, there has been a decrease in the percentage of students who indicate they have opportunities to set goals for their learning and follow through on those goals, show what they have learned in a variety of ways, give and receive feedback on their schoolwork with peers, and share their thoughts about how they learn best.

Moving forward: Strategies and Actions in YRDSB’s Multi-Year Strategic Plan and Director’s Action Plan

To support the achievement and mental health of students and to remove barriers to meaningful education for all students we will continue to:

- Reflect on the ways in which social identities, lived experiences, power and privilege, biases and assumptions intersect with planning, instruction and assessment and seek to decentre dominant perspectives.
- Cultivate students’ mindsets that promote risk-taking, build sustained engagement in deep learning, and value mistakes as learning opportunities.
- Co-construct learning opportunities that involve student collaboration and voice, invite choice, and reflect the diverse identities, strengths, needs and interests of students.
- Co-construct learning opportunities that are innovative, experiential, reflective of and connected to the communities from which students come and the diversity of Canadian society.
- Co-construct learning so that problem solving, inquiry and student agency are central to the development of fundamental concepts and skills.
- Differentiate learning and provide multiple entry points in order to ensure all students have access to learning.
- Increase use of effective questioning, accountable/equitable talk, prompting, and feedback as instructional strategies.
- Use observations, conversations, and products/representations to document evidence of learning over time and understand students as learners.
- Engage students in the assessment and learning processes through co-constructing success criteria, self-assessment, and providing feedback to their peers.

E: Highlights - Remote Learning, Technology, and Learning Tools

The COVID-19 global pandemic led to unprecedented changes to YRDSB learning structures as well as student and family experiences of learning. During the 2020-2021 school year, in-school learning was voluntary and students who were not learning in person at schools were expected to learn remotely. Due to government-issued school closures, however, all YRDSB students experienced periods of remote learning during the 2020-2021 school year.

Findings from both surveys indicate that the majority of YRDSB students had access to reliable internet and electronic devices to support them during periods of remote learning, and that they were comfortable using virtual learning devices and virtual learning tools on their own. Many families did report, however, that their child needed support for remote learning, with families of elementary students being more likely to indicate this than families of secondary students. In addition, most

Student Engagement and Learning

students reported that they had the materials they needed to complete assignments and were able to access school staff for support when they needed it. However, less than half of students indicated that they were able to stay motivated in their classes.

On average, half of students indicated that overall, online learning worked for them. Qualitative feedback from students also suggests that not all students experienced remote learning in the same way. That is, the characteristics of remote learning that worked well for some students did not work well for others. Overall, findings point to a continuum of student and family experiences of remote learning during the 2020-2021 school year.

Below are findings related to remote learning, technology, and learning tools from the 2021 YRDSB Student Survey and the 2021 YRDSB Family Survey. Questions related to remote learning, technology, and learning tools were developed to understand learning experiences in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and are new to these surveys; therefore, no trend data are available.

What we were told about remote learning in 2021:

- Most students reported that they had access to reliable internet (Grades 7-8, 94%; Grades 9-12, 93%) and electronic devices (Grades 7-8, 96%; Grades 9-12, 97%), and the majority of families also reported that their child had access to reliable internet (Grades K-12, 95%) and electronic devices (Grades K-6, 88%; Grades 7-8, 94%; Grades 9-12, 96%) to support remote learning.
- Most students reported that they were comfortable using virtual learning devices (Grades 7-8, 92%; Grades 9-12, 94%) (e.g., a computer, laptop, Chromebook, Assistive Technology, electronic refreshable braille device, hearing receiver) and virtual learning tools (Grades 7-8, 91%; Grades 9-12, 92%) (e.g., Google Classroom, video calls, Jamboard, Google Chat) on their own. Most families also reported that their child was comfortable using virtual learning devices (Grades K-6, 86%; Grades 7-8, 95%; Grades 9-12, 96%) and virtual learning tools on their own (Grades K-6, 83%; Grades 7-8, 93%; Grades 9-12, 92%).
- Approximately three-quarters of families of students in all grades reported that their child needed support for remote learning all the time or often during the 2020-2021 school year, while 68% reported that they were very comfortable or comfortable to support their child with remote learning.
- Most students reported that they had the materials they needed to complete assignments (Grades 7-8, 85%; Grades 9-12, 83%) and that they were able to get help from teachers and other staff when needed (Grades 7-8, 82%; Grades 9-12, 77%).
- Less than half of students in Grades 7-8 (44%) and slightly more than one quarter (28%) of secondary students reported that they were able to stay motivated in their classes.
- Less than half of families reported that their child was able to stay motivated in their classes.
- Approximately half of students in Grades 7-8 (51%), and just over 40% of students in Grades 9-12 reported that overall, online learning worked for them.
- On average, approximately 43% of families reported that overall, online learning worked for their child.

Moving forward: YRDSB Strategies to Support Students Learning Remotely and their Families

To support the achievement and mental health of students and to remove barriers to meaningful education for all students we will continue to:

- Ensure families with no or limited access to devices are provided with devices for virtual learning;
- Provide appropriate accommodations and modifications and technological supports in a virtual learning environment;
- Engage in continuous two-way communication between YRDSB and community to ensure students' and families/guardians' needs are being met; and
- Promote student engagement through community building initiatives.

Student Recommendations for Improving Online Learning in the Future

Students were invited to share recommendations for improving remote learning by responding to the following open-ended question: “Here’s what I would suggest to improve online learning in the future...”. Below is a list of key recommendations from students:

Technology


- Support educators’ use of technology
- Provide support for technology use (e.g., tech support, faster internet, better devices)

Workload & Class Structure

- Shorten classes and provide longer breaks between classes
- Create learning opportunities that involve less screen time
- Create more opportunities for students to collaborate in small groups
- Ensure appropriate workload (e.g., reduced number of tests/assignments, flexible deadlines)
- More opportunities to connect with teachers for feedback, support, extra help, and check-ins

Student Engagement & Well-Being

- Consider student voice in remote learning programming
- Create more opportunities for students to connect with one another
- Consider individual student preferences for use of camera during lessons
- Promote student engagement (e.g., engaging discussions, less repetitiveness, interactive activities, virtual clubs, leveraging technology tools)
- Increase support for student well-being (e.g., psychological support)
- Remove online learning



Student Voices

From the 2021 School Climate Survey

The thing about online learning that worked well for me was:

“All information was always posted in one place and was easy to find.” -Secondary Student

“Being able to work around my own schedule was beneficial, as it helps me develop more organizational skills and responsibility. In addition, it allows me to take breaks when I feel like my mind needs one, so it has also benefitted my mental health.” -Elementary Student

The thing about online learning that didn't work for me was:


“At times it was very hard to stay motivated and I really missed having face to face interaction with my friends and teachers. I also extremely missed music, phys-ed, science experiments, live drama and other hands-on activities.” -Elementary Student

“Distractions are everywhere at home, while in school provides an easy-to-concentrate environment.” -Secondary Student

To improve online learning in the future:

“Access to more interactive activities, and less textbook work.” -Secondary Student

“Allow students to get to know their classmates better, its hard learning in an environment where you don't know anyone.” -Secondary Student



Explanation of Terms

Anti-Oppression Framework: An approach that places equity and human rights at the forefront of actions by intentionally identifying, addressing and changing the values, structures, policies, attitudes and practices that result in discrimination against individuals or groups. The framework promotes an understanding of how power, privilege and oppression operate within institutions.

Anti-Racism Data Standards: Anti-Racism data standard were established by the Government of Ontario to help identify and monitor systemic racism and racial disparities within the public sector in order to create an inclusive and equitable society for all Ontarians. The standards establish consistent, effective practices for producing reliable information to support evidence-based decision-making and public accountability to help eliminate systemic racism and promote racial equity.

Asexual: Asexual refers to a person who does not experience sexual attraction.

Bisexual: Bisexual refers to a person who experiences attraction to both male-identified and female-identified people.

Data: “Data is defined as facts, figures, and statistics objectively measured according to a standard or scale, such as frequency, volumes or occurrences. Data does not include information like reports or manuals.” (Government of Ontario, 2021).

Data Literacy: “Data literacy is the ability to ask and answer real-world questions from large and small data sets through an inquiry process, with consideration of ethical use of data” (Wolff, 2016).

Disaggregate Data: “Disaggregated data is broken down into component parts or smaller units of data for statistical analysis. In the context of race-based data, this means breaking down the composite (i.e., aggregate grouped) “racialized” category into its component parts such as Black, South Asian, East/Southeast Asian, Latino, Middle Eastern, White, etc.” (Government of Ontario, 2021).

Discrimination: Discrimination is the distinction between individuals not based on legitimate terms; refers to arbitrary bias for or against an individual or a group, or the unjust and inequitable treatment of an individual or group. Discrimination can be based on age, birth, socioeconomic class, colour, creed, ability, ethnicity, familial status, gender, gender identity, language, marital status, political or other opinion, race, religion or faith belief, sex, or sexual orientation.

English as a Second Language (ESL) or English Language Learners (ELL): “ESL [/ELL] programs, are for students whose first language is [a language] other than English or is a variety of English significantly different from that used for instruction in Ontario schools. Students in these programs have had educational opportunities to develop age-appropriate first-language literacy skills” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

English Literacy Development (ELD): “ELD programs are for students whose first language is [one] other than English or is a variety of English significantly different from that used for instruction in Ontario schools. Students in these programs are most often from countries in which their access to education has been limited, and they have had limited opportunities to develop language and literacy skills in any language. Schooling in their countries of origin has been inconsistent, disrupted, or even completely unavailable throughout the years that these children would otherwise have been in school. As a result, they arrive in Ontario schools with significant gaps in their education” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

Equity: Equity refers to “the systemic fair treatment of all people. It results in equitable opportunities and outcomes for everyone. It contrasts with formal equality where people are treated the same without regard for ... differences” (Government of Ontario, 2021).

Ethnicity: Ethnicity refers to ethnic groups have a common identity, heritage, ancestry, or historical past, often with identifiable cultural, linguistic and / or religious characteristics.

Gay: Gay refers to a person who experiences attraction to people of the same sex and / or gender. Gay can include both male-identified individuals and female-identified individuals or refer to male-identified individuals only.

Explanation of Terms

Gender Fluid: Gender fluid refers to a person whose gender identity or expression changes or shifts along the gender spectrum.

Gender Identity: Gender identity is a person's internal and deeply felt sense of being a man, a woman, both, neither, or having another identity on the gender spectrum (i.e., gender fluid, gender nonconforming, non-binary, questioning, transgender, two spirit). A person's gender identity may be different from the sex assigned at birth (i.e., female or male).

Gender Nonconforming: Gender nonconforming refers to a person not being in line with the cultural associations made in a given society about a person's sex assigned at birth.

Harassment: Harassment is "engaging in a course of comments or actions that are known, or ought reasonably to be known, to be unwelcome. It can involve words or actions that are known or should be known to be offensive, embarrassing, humiliating, demeaning or unwelcome" (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2013, p. 58).

Heterosexual: Heterosexual refers to "people whose enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction is to people of the opposite sex. (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2013, p. 62).

Identity-Based Data: "Identity-based data refers to information about various aspects of students' identities (e.g., racial / ethnic background, and sexual orientation). In the educational context, students from historically and currently marginalized communities face systemic barriers through policies, programs and practices that create or maintain disadvantages for these students. Collecting identity-based data is important for evaluating how well programs, resources and practices support students, and identify the groups of students who may be underserved in order to develop and revise programs, strategies, policies and teaching practices, as well as allocate resources and supports to improve school environments and help students succeed. The Ontario Human Rights Code permits and encourages the collection and analysis of identity data for the purposes of identifying and removing systemic barriers, preventing discrimination, and promoting equity and inclusivity" (Government of Ontario, 2021).

Indigenous: "Indigenous people identify as being descended from the Original Peoples of what is currently known as Canada. In this context, Indigenous peoples include people who may identify as First Nations (status and non-status), Métis and/or Inuit and any related identities" (Government of Ontario, 2021).

Learning Disability: The Ministry of Education defines learning disability as one of a number of neurodevelopmental disorders that persistently and significantly has an impact on the ability to learn and use academic and other skills (as cited in York Region District School Board, 2021a).

Lesbian: Lesbian refers to a female-identified person who experiences attraction to female-identifies people.

Marginalization: "Marginalization is a long-term, structural process of systemic discrimination that creates a class of disadvantaged minorities. Marginalized groups become permanently confined to the fringes of society. Their status is perpetuated through various dimensions of exclusion, particularly in the labour market, from full and meaningful participation in society" (Government of Ontario, 2021).

Non-Binary: Non-binary refers to a person whose gender identity does not align with the binary concept of gender such as man or woman.

Oppression: Oppression refers to the "a situation in which people are governed in an unfair and cruel way and prevented from having opportunities and freedom" (dictionary.combridge.org, 2021).

Pansexual: Pansexual refer to a person who experiences attraction to people of diverse sexes and/or genders. The term pansexual reflects a desire to recognize the potential for attraction to sexes and/or genders that exist across a spectrum and to challenge the sex/gender binary.

Power: Power is defined as "access to privileges such as information/knowledge, connections, experience and expertise, resources and decision-making that enhance a person's chances of getting what they need to live a comfortable, safe, productive and profitable life (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2013, p. 61).

Explanation of Terms

Privilege: Privilege is defined as “unearned power, benefits, advantages, access and/or opportunities that exist for members of the dominant group(s) in society. Can also refer to the relative privilege of one group compared to another” (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2013, p. 61).

Queer: Queer refers to some members within LGBTQ communities, particularly youth, as a symbol of pride and affirmation of diversity. This term makes space for the expression of a variety of identities outside of rigid categories associated with sex, gender or attraction. It can be used by a community to encompass a broad spectrum of identities related to sex, gender or attraction, or by an individual to reflect the interrelatedness of these aspects of their identity.

Questioning: Questioning refers to a person who is unsure about their own sexual orientation.

Race: “Race is a term used to classify people into groups based principally on physical traits (phenotypes) such as skin colour. Racial categories are not based on science or biology but on differences that society has created (i.e., “socially constructed”), with significant consequences for people’s lives. Racial categories may vary over time and place and can overlap with ethnic, cultural or religious groupings” (Government of Ontario, 2021).

Racism: “Racism includes ideas or practices that establish, maintain or perpetuate the racial superiority or dominance of one group over another” (Government of Ontario, 2021). These ideas and practices are maintained when racial prejudice is so often backed by systems of power (Oluo, 2018)

Sexual Orientation: Sexual orientation is a personal characteristic that forms part of who you are. It covers the range of human sexuality and is different from gender identity.

Social Identity: Social identity refers to a person’s sense of who they are based on the social groups the person was born into and belongs to. People can identify or be identified by others on the basis of their social identity (and their intersections). This aspect of an individual’s self-conception is not based on their personal qualities (e.g., skills and abilities).

Social Location: Social location refers to one’s position relative to others in society. A person’s social location is shaped by broader power structures that lead to hierarchies and social inequities. Social location influences both *what people experience* and *how they interpret* their and others’ experiences. It is therefore important to consider how social location might influence interpretations of data (Anthias, 2012).

Statistical Significance Testing: Significance testing is a set of procedures used to determine whether the differences between two groups or models are unlikely to arise solely from chance (APA Dictionary of Psychology).

Stereotype: A stereotype can be understood as a quality that is “...ascribed to individuals or groups that are based on misconceptions, false generalizations, and/or oversimplifications that potentially result in stigmatization. A race-based stereotype is a quality ascribed to individuals/groups related to race. Stereotypes can perpetuate racism and racial discrimination and give rise to racial inequalities.” (Government of Ontario, 2021).

Stigma: Stigma is defined as a harmful negative stereotype (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2021).

Students with Special Education Needs: “Students who have been formally identified by an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC), as well as students who have an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Students whose sole identified exceptionality is giftedness are not included” (EQAO, 2019, p.38). Special education needs refers to a classification of students for school to provide specialized or intensive programming and support. It is closely associated with Program of Study (Brown & Sinay, 2008; Brown & Parekh, 2010) or “streaming” and is widely considered to be strongly connected to postsecondary access.

Systemic Barriers: “Systemic barriers are policies, programs and practices that result in particular groups of students receiving inequitable access to opportunities or being excluded in a way that creates or maintains disadvantages for these marginalized groups” (Government of Ontario, 2021).

Transgender: Transgender refers to a person whose gender identity differs from the one associated with their birth-assigned sex.

Explanation of Terms

Two-Spirit: Two-spirit refers to an Indigenous person whose gender identity, spiritual identity or sexual orientation includes masculine, feminine, or non-binary spirits.

2SLGBTQ+: 2SLGBTQ+ is an acronym used in this report to refer to two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning. 2SLGBTQ+ is an acronym often used as an umbrella term to encompass a much wider range of identities and experiences related to sex, gender and attraction that fall outside the dominant norms of heterosexual and cisgender. In this report, the “T” for transgender is not included when the acronym is used in reference to sexual orientation. Transgender is included under gender identity.

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