



**every**  
**STUDENT COUNTS**  
**SURVEY**

**YRDSB Every Student Counts Survey**  
**Research Brief**  
**Student's Out-of-School Experiences and**  
**Screen Time**

**Research and Assessment Services**  
**November 2021**



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## Introduction

Over the years, education researchers have devoted increasing attention to students' out-of-school learning experiences, recognizing that "real learning is rarely quiet, seated and controlled [or bound to instructional settings]" (Matthews, 2021, para 6). Rather, learning happens everywhere! As Matthews (2021) posits, "It is messy, affective, embodied, participatory and interpersonal" (para 6). It is socially and culturally bound and involves the whole person (Matthews, 2021). For this reason, students' mental health and well-being, including perceptions of self, may be impacted when students' out-of-school experiences, which are known to provide situated and embodied experiences for learning (Gee, 2009; Vasquez, 2003), are devalued by institutional structures such as schools (e.g., Rogers et al., 2004).

Matthews (2021) also urges us to consider that pre- COVID-19 pandemic, less screen-time was recommended or, at the very least, hotly debated. During the pandemic, we were at a time where students were predominantly learning during school hours through screens at home due to school closures. Once schools transitioned to remote learning in March of 2020 across the globe due to the pandemic, many media outlets cautioned parents, educators and various other education stakeholders of "learning loss," arguing that students, particularly those without access to in-person instructional time and reliable technology, could "fall behind" (Matthews, 2021, para 3). However, as Matthews (2021) so eloquently points out, this "learning loss" perspective suggests that instructional time in contexts such as schools is the only path to education and well-being, yet we know this perspective has been successfully contested.

Such harmful perspectives about how young people learn and grow must be critically examined, questioned and resisted in order to move towards systemic change. This includes critically questioning "calls to return to 'normal,'" in the educational arena (Matthews, 2021, para. 2) as schools return to in-person learning, because as Matthews (2021) points out, such calls to 'normalcy' within the field of education are, have always been, and will continue to be, regressive, especially since there continues to be seismic social change brought on by global health crises, climate change and even the increased production of technology and new

media. Additionally, it is no secret that such calls for "normalcy" are "bound up with producing, reproducing and maintaining unequal arrangements of power" (Tett et al., 2012, p. 2). In the face of continuously (re)imagining what constitutes learning, we must prioritize students, their families, communities of colour and educators as partners and leaders where they can "collectively serve as decision makers and designers of educational possibility." (Matthews, 2020, para. 13). Learning about students' out-of-school lives is a big step toward this goal.

This research brief highlights YRDSB's 2018 Every Student Counts Survey findings on some of students' out-of-school experiences including, certain extra-curricular (e.g., individual or team sports, music, etc.) and other leisure activities (e.g., screen time, spending time with friends) as well as students' work experiences (e.g., paid as well as volunteer work) and family responsibilities (e.g., household chores). By examining these rich out-of-school experiences of YRDSB students, our aim is to better understand and appreciate students' funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) -- any culturally rooted knowledge found within communities -- to inform professional practice for the implementation of intentional interventions and strategies that aim to close opportunity gaps among various identity groups at YRDSB. Students' identity-based information was collected from the ESCS survey or the Student Information System. For family income, this information was collected from Statistics Canada.

In this research brief, we focused on answering the following research questions:

1. What do we know about participating students' overall out-of-school extra-curricular activities?
2. What do we know about participating student's employment and volunteer work experiences?
3. What do we know about participating student's family responsibilities?
4. What are the trends in daily screen time and other leisure activities by grade, gender identity, special education need, and emotional well-being?

### Anti-Oppression Note

This research brief aims to prompt critical dialogue toward positive social change for underserved groups of students as well as aims to illuminate systemic barriers certain groups of students may be facing and continue to face both in and outside school, particularly regarding their out-of-school experiences. It is important for us to emphasize, once again, that these out-of-school experiences be viewed through an asset, not a deficit lens.

### Key Findings and Implications

This research brief illuminates several key findings that have important implications for future research and practice. These key findings most especially warrant the use of a mixed methods study design with intersectionality analyses and frameworks in order to further explore and understand the perceptions and experiences of marginalized groups. This intersectional approach in addition to a more transparent dialogue that makes visible multiple interpretations of lived experiences will further contextualize information about students' lives and enrich the study's findings (Goswami & Rutherford, 2009). Several other implications for research and practice linked to several notable findings include:

- Out-of-school extra-curricular participation rates declined as students entered high school, with the exception of team sports and youth programs, clubs and organization, thereby it may be beneficial to further investigate why this may be so as well as to engage in curricular planning that affords more opportunities for students to engage in a broad range of extra-curricular activities both in and out of school.
- There was a positive association found across grade panels regarding no exposure to social media and lower rates of feeling lonely and sad/depressed; thereby school spaces may benefit from engaging in critical reflective dialogue with students about potential reasons why this appears to be so as well develop coping strategies that may support students in building resiliency toward online events that may trigger any of these negative emotions.
- The finding that more Grade 9 to 12 students engaged in social media practices may also be worth consideration for any future planning and intervention strategies,

especially since social media being “a magnet for social pressure, anxiety and bullying is no secret” (Walker, 2021, para. 3).

- Video gaming and other popular culture activities are found to provide situated and embodied experiences for learning (Gee, 2009), yet students reported that they spent less time on digital devices such as video games as they got older, thereby it would be important to consider the implications of these findings for meaningful learning both in and out of school as students age.
- The finding that women/girls were least likely to engage with video games may also be worth consideration. It may be beneficial for school spaces to leverage the knowledge and skills students develop when engaging in digital literacy practices such as video gaming (see for e.g., Gee, 2005a; 2005b), most especially as students enter high school. In so doing, high school students may experience more positive emotional well-being considering that this grade panel was more likely than the Grade 7 to 8 panel to have higher rates of feeling positive emotions when having at least 1 hour or more exposure time with video games. Incorporating students' funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) into the curriculum in such ways has important implications for students' school success.
- Students across grade panels reported higher rates of positive emotions and lower rates of negative emotions when they spent more time with friends outside of school; thereby school spaces would benefit from infusing a greater degree of team activities that which focus more on process-oriented over product-driven tasks.
- Students across grade panels reported higher rates of negative emotions when spending more time reading for pleasure, which may, more often than not, be carried out as an isolated solitary literacy activity, particularly for Grades 7 to 12 students; thereby school spaces may benefit from infusing a greater degree of literacy tasks that are more collaborative, embodied and situated and that do not view such tasks as isolated, to be carried out independently.



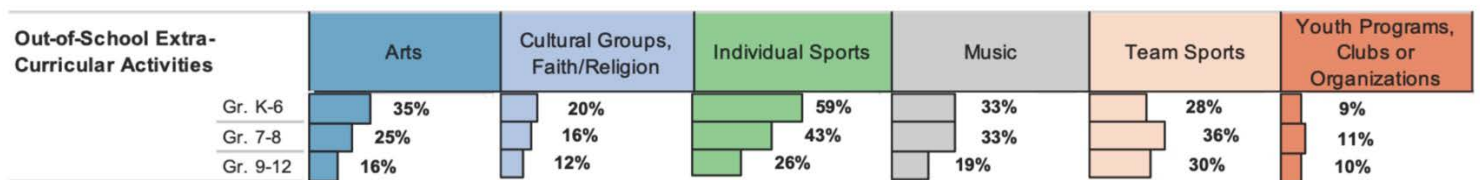
## What do we know about student’s overall out-of-school extra-curricular activities?

In this section, we studied overall student participation in out-of-school extra-curricular activities in Kindergarten to Grade 12 on a weekly basis. The data is disaggregated by three grade panels: Kindergarten to Grade 6, 7 to 8 and 9 to 12. The extra-curricular activities analyzed pertain to: (1) arts, (2) cultural, faith/religion, (3) individual sports, (4) music, (5) team sports, (6) youth programs, clubs or organizations.

Participants were asked to select a single option in response for each out-of-school activity from the following scale: (a) Weekly, (b) Monthly, (c) A few times a year, (d) Never.

When examining the student’s overall out-of-school extra-curricular activities, we found (See Figure 1):

**Figure 1. Overall Students’ Out-of-School Extra-Curricular Activities by Grade Panel (% Weekly)**



Source: Every Student Counts Survey 2018

- Further analysis showed no notable differences in terms of students’ out-of-school extra-curricular activities and family income.

## What do we know about student’s employment and volunteer work experiences?

In addition to the overall out-of-school extra-curricular activities, Grades 7 to 12 students were asked about how many hours per week (including weekends) do they spend on part-time employment and part-time volunteer work.

When we examined the results for the Grades 7 to 8 and Grades 9 to 12 panels, the following findings emerged (see Figure 2):

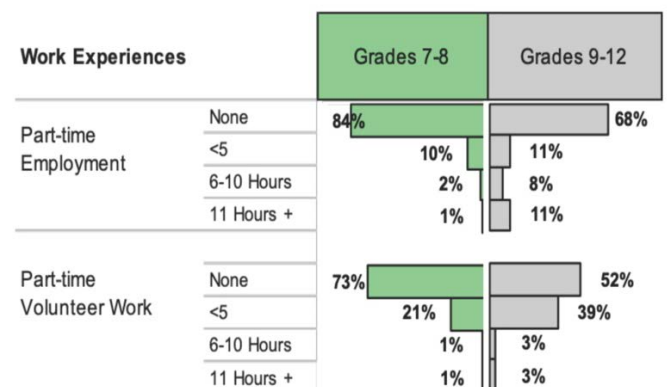
- The proportion of students who engaged in part-time employment and volunteer work increased as students moved from Grades 7 and 8 to Grades 9 to 12.
- Higher percentage of Grades 9 to 12 students (39%) participated in volunteer work for less than 5 hours compared to students in Grades 7 and 8 (21%), while almost the same proportion of students

- There were noticeable differences between students’ participation in different types of extra-curricular activities outside of school.
- The out-of-school extra-curricular participation rates declined as students got older, with the exception of participation in team sports and youth programs, clubs or organizations.
- For team sports, students in Grade 7 and 8 reported the highest participation rate (36%) compared to those in Kindergarten to Grade 6 (28%) and in Grades 9 to 12 (30%).
- Individual sports were the most popular extra-curricular activity for students in Kindergarten to Grade 6 and in Grades 7 and 8.
- For students in secondary school, team sports were the most popular extra-curricular activities

worked part-time for less than 5 hours in Grades 7 and 8 and Grades 9 to 12.

- Upon further analysis, no notable differences were found regarding students’ work experiences and family income.

**Figure 2. Students’ Work Experiences by Grade Panel**



Source: Every Student Counts Survey 2018-

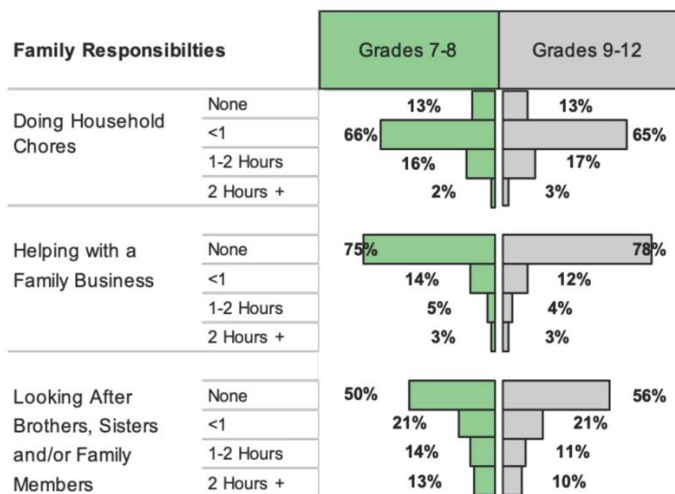
## What do we know about student’s family responsibilities?

Figure 3 reports on the percentage of students’ who reported they engaged in family responsibilities on a daily basis disaggregated by the two grade panels: Grades 7 to 8 and Grades 9 to 12. The family responsibilities

analyzed pertains to: (1) household chores, (2) helping with a family business, (3) looking after siblings and/or other family members. The following notable findings emerged:

- Overall, there were no noticeable differences in the amount of time spent on family responsibilities on a daily basis between students in the two grade panels.
- While more than 60% of students reported spending less than 1 hour per day on household chores across grade panels, the majority of students did not spend any time helping with a family business or looking after family members (e.g., brothers, sisters).
- Thirteen percent of students in Grades 7 to 8 and 10% of students in Grades 9 to 12 spent more than 2 hours per day looking after family members compared to only 3% of students in the two grade panels who spent more than 2 hours helping with a family business.
- Further analysis showed no notable differences in terms of students' engagement in family related responsibilities and family income.

**Figure 3. Students' Family Responsibilities by Grade Panel**



Source: Every Student Counts Survey 2018

## What are the trends in daily screen time and other leisure activities by grade, gender identity, special education need, and emotional well-being?

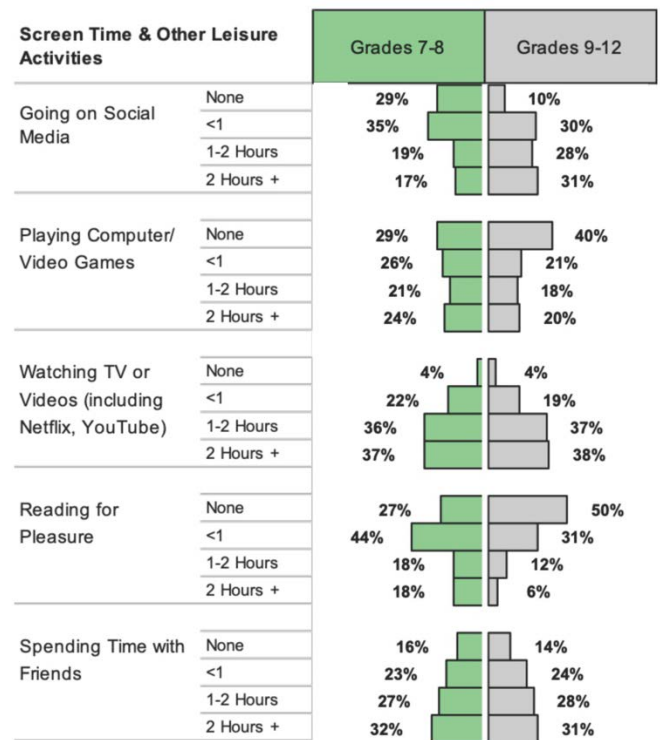
This section reports on daily screen time and other leisure activities disaggregated by students' grade panel, gender identity, special education need, and emotional well-being.

Figure 4 shows the percentage of students who spent time on screen or other leisure activities

daily disaggregated by grade panel. The screen time and other leisure activities analyzed pertains to: (1) going on social media, (2) playing computer/video games (3) watching T.V. or videos (including Netflix, YouTube), (4) reading for pleasure, and (5) spending time with friends. The exposure categories are: (1) none, (2) less than 1 hour, (3) 1-2 hours, and (4) more than 2 hours.

## Screen Time and Other Leisure Activities by Grade Panel

**Figure 4. Overall Students' Screen Time & Other Leisure Activities by Grade Panel**



Source: Every Student Counts Survey 2018

Some notable findings were:

- There was a noticeable difference between students in Grades 7 and 8 (17%) and Grades 9 to 12 (31%) who reported going on social media for 2 hours or more.
- The percentage of students who did not play computer/video games daily increased from Grades 7 and 8 (29%) to Grades 9 to 12 (40%).
- Across grade panels, students spent a similar amount of time watching TV or videos.
- In general, students tended to spend more time watching TV or videos compared to other screen time activities.
- Fifty percent of the survey respondents in Grades 9 to 12 did not spend any time reading for pleasure daily compared to 27% of students in Grades 7 and 8.

- Students in Grades 7 and 8, tended to spend more time reading for pleasure daily compared to their peers in Grades 9 to 12.
- There were no noticeable differences across panels for how much time students spent with friends - most students reporting that they spent some time with friends between less than an hour to more than 2 hours.

### Screen Time & Other Leisure Activities by Gender Identity

Tables 1 and 2 reports on screen time and other leisure activities for more than 2 hours daily disaggregated by the two grade panels (Gr. 7 to 8 and Gr. 9 to 12) and gender identities. The no gender selection category was created to reflect those survey respondents who were either not sure, did not understand the gender question or decided not to respond. The following notable findings emerged:

- Students who self-identified as Transgender or questioning in Grades 7 and 8 (35%) and those who self-identified as Woman/Girl in Grades 9 to 12 (37%) reported the highest rates of spending time on social media.
- Overall, in Grades 7 and 8, the highest rates of playing computer games for more than two hours (53%) as well as the highest rates of watching TV (62%) were reported by students who self-identified as Transgender.
- In Grades 9 to 12, the highest rates of playing computer games for more than two hours (38%) as well as the highest rates of

watching TV (48%) were reported by students whose gender identity was not listed as an option in the survey question.

- Across both grade panels, students who self-identified as Woman/Girl spent the least amount of time playing computer/video games (7%-10%) compared to other screen time activities.
- Students who self-identified at Two-Spirit in Grades 7 to 8 (9%) and those who self-identified as Gender Nonconforming in Grades 9 to 12 (21%) reported the lowest rates of going on social media for more than two hours a day.
- Students who did not indicated their gender identity in Grades 7 to 8 (36%) and those who self-identified as Gender Nonconforming in Grades 9 to 12 (27%) also reported the lowest rates of watching TV or videos for more than two hours a day.
- Overall, across both grade panels, students who self-identified as Man/Boy spent the least amount of time reading for pleasure compared to other leisure activities.
- Students who self-identified as Gender Nonconforming in Grades 7 to 8 (21%) and Non-Binary in Grades 9 to 12 (18%) reported the highest rates of reading for pleasure for more than two hours a day compared to their peers in their respective grade panels.

**Table 1. Overall Students’ Screen Time & Other Leisure Activities by Gender Identity-Grades 7-8 (% More than 2 hours)**

Student Self-Identified Gender Identity, Gr. 7-8	Screen Time: Going on Social Media	Screen Time: Playing Computer Games	Screen Time: Watching TV or Videos	Other Leisure Activities: Reading for Pleasure	Other Leisure Activities: Spending Time with Friends
Gender Fluid	31%	34%	44%	14%	37%
Gender Nonconforming	32%	47%	47%	21%	21%
Man/Boy	12%	36%	37%	6%	32%
Non-Binary	19%	19%	61%	13%	23%
Questioning	35%	31%	58%	15%	27%
Transgender	35%	53%	62%	15%	29%
Two-Spirit	9%	27%	46%	9%	27%
Woman/Girl	22%	10%	37%	11%	33%
A Gender Identity Not Listed Above	23%	43%	50%	13%	30%
No Gender Selection	16%	28%	36%	13%	31%

Source: Every Student Counts Survey 2018

**Table 2. Overall Students' Screen Time & Other Leisure Activities by Gender Identity-Grades 9-12 (% More than 2 hours)**

Student Self-Identified Gender Identity, Gr. 9-12	Screen Time: Going on Social Media	Screen Time: Playing Computer Games	Screen Time: Watching TV or Videos	Other Leisure Activities: Reading for Pleasure	Other Leisure Activities: Spending Time with Friends
Gender Fluid	35%	28%	45%	9%	23%
Gender Nonconforming	21%	14%	27%	13%	16%
Man/Boy	25%	32%	38%	4%	31%
Non-Binary	35%	27%	46%	18%	30%
Questioning	28%	21%	46%	17%	21%
Transgender	35%	20%	46%	12%	25%
Two-Spirit	24%	32%	32%	8%	36%
Woman/Girl	37%	7%	38%	7%	31%
A Gender Identity Not Listed Above	26%	38%	48%	12%	29%
No Gender Selection	24%	29%	35%	8%	26%

Source: Every Student Counts Survey 2018

- Students who self-identified as Gender Fluid (37%) in Grades 7 to 8 and those who self-identified as Two-Spirit in Grades 9 to 12 (36%) reported the highest rates of spending more than two hours a day with friends.

### Screen Time & Other Leisure Activities by Special Education Need

Tables 3 and 4 reports on screen time and other leisure activities for more than 2 hours daily disaggregated by the two grade panels (Grades 7 to 8 and Grades 9 to 12) and special education needs.

- Students who were identified with a Physical Disability in Grades 7 and 8 (22%) and those who were identified with a Behavioural exceptionality, or a Learning Disability in Grades 9 to 12 (34%) reported the highest rates of going on social media.
- In Grades 7 and 8, the highest rates of playing computer games for more than two hours was reported by students who were identified with Autism and those who were

identified with a Behavioural exceptionality (41%).

- Students identified with Deaf or Hard of Hearing in Grades 7 and 8 reported the highest rates of watching TV or videos for more than two hours a day (53%).
- Overall, in Grades 9 to 12, students who were identified with Autism reported the highest rates of playing computer games (41%) or watching TV and videos (49%) for more than two hours.
- Overall, across both grade panels, students who were identified as Gifted reported the lowest rates of spending time on screen daily, with the exception of students who were identified with Autism in Grades 9 to 12 that reported the slightly lower rates for going on social media.
- Students identified with Autism in both grade panels reported the highest rate of spending time reading for pleasure daily compared to their peers in their respective grade panels.



**Table 3. Overall Students' Screen Time & Other Leisure Activities by Special Education Need- Grades 7-8 (% More than 2 hours)**

Student Special Education Need, Gr. 7-8	Screen Time: Going on Social Media	Screen Time: Playing Computer Games	Screen Time: Watching TV or Videos	Other Leisure Activities: Reading for Pleasure	Other Leisure Activities: Spending Time with Friends
Autism	13%	41%	46%	12%	28%
Bahavioural	21%	41%	50%	6%	40%
Blind and Low Vision	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
Deaf or Hard of Hearing	9%	32%	53%	9%	26%
Developmental Disability	9%	26%	42%	9%	19%
Giftedness	6%	12%	20%	11%	14%
Language Impairment	15%	37%	44%	6%	32%
Learning Disability	18%	36%	47%	6%	38%
Mild Intellectual Disability	20%	37%	49%	3%	33%
Physical Disability	22%	26%	43%	9%	39%
Speech Impairment	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
No Exceptionality	17%	22%	36%	9%	32%

Source: Student Information System

Note: NR in tables denotes there were less than 15 students in a particular group and therefore the resulting figure is Not Reported (NR) to preserve the privacy of the students.

**Table 4. Overall Students' Screen Time & Other Leisure Activities by Special Education Need- Grades 9-12 (% More than 2 hours)**

Student Special Education Need, Gr. 9-12	Screen Time: Going on Social Media	Screen Time: Playing Computer Games	Screen Time: Watching TV or Videos	Other Leisure Activities: Reading for Pleasure	Other Leisure Activities: Spending Time with Friends
Autism	18%	41%	49%	9%	21%
Bahavioural	34%	26%	45%	5%	34%
Blind and Low Vision	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
Deaf or Hard of Hearing	28%	17%	32%	7%	24%
Developmental Disability	20%	30%	42%	4%	17%
Giftedness	19%	16%	29%	6%	17%
Language Impairment	30%	33%	47%	2%	39%
Learning Disability	34%	32%	48%	5%	43%
Mild Intellectual Disability	33%	27%	42%	6%	43%
Physical Disability	24%	24%	45%	4%	29%
Speech Impairment	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
No Exceptionality	31%	18%	37%	5%	30%

Source: Student Information System

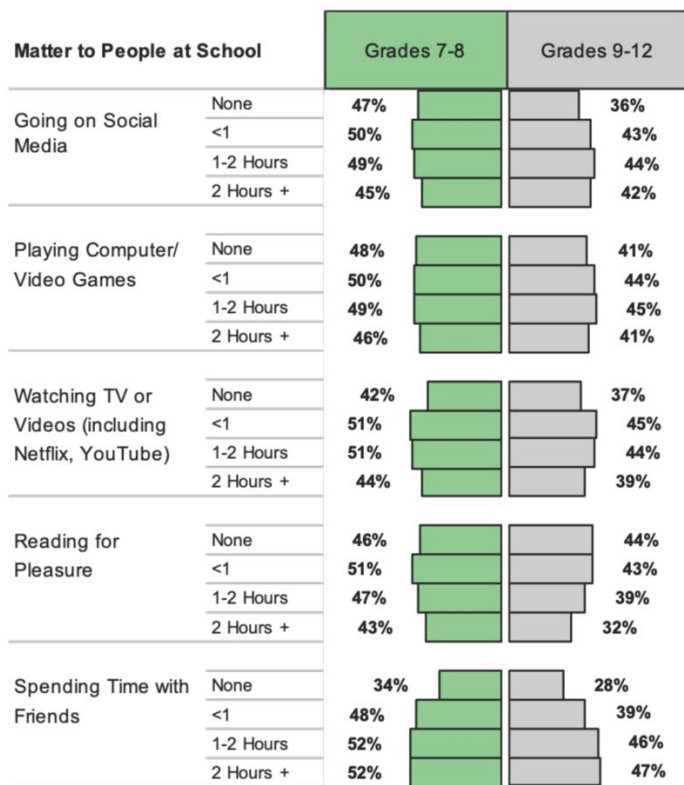
Note: NR in tables denotes there were less than 15 students in a particular group and therefore the resulting figure is Not Reported (NR) to preserve the privacy of the students.

- Students in Grades 7 and 8 identified with a Behavioural exceptionality (40%) and those in Grades 9 to 12 identified with a Learning Disability or a Mild Intellectual Disability (43%) reported the highest rates of spending more than two hours a day with friends.
- Students who were identified with a Mild Intellectual Disability in Grades 7 and 8 (3%) and those who were identified with a Language Impairment in Grades 9 to 12 (2%) reported the lowest rates of spending two hours or more on reading for pleasure.
- Overall, across both grade panels, students who were identified as Gifted and those in Grades 9 to 12 who were identified with a Developmental Disability reported the lowest rates of spending time with their friends compared to their peers in their respective grade panels.

## Screen Time & Other Leisure Activities by Emotional Well-Being

### Feeling Like You Matter to People at School

**Figure 5: Screen-time, Leisure Activities and Feeling Like They Matter to People at School (% All the Time or Often) by Grade Panel**



Source: Every Student Counts Survey 2018

As shown in Figure 5:

- In Grades 7 and 8, students who spent less than an hour daily on the screen time activities and reading for pleasure as well as those who spent 1 hour or more with friends reported the highest rates of feeling like they matter to people at school within each activity type.

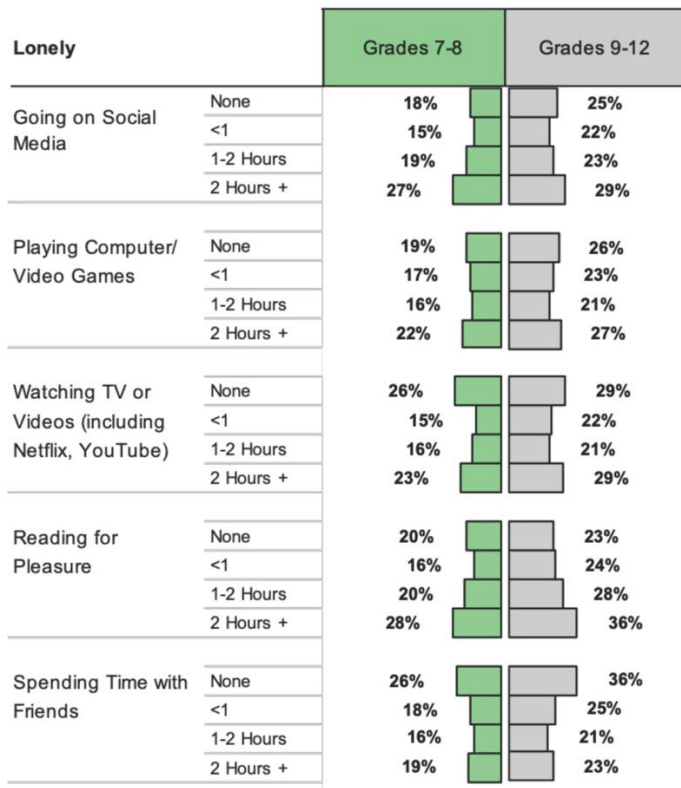
- In Grades 9 to 12, students who did not have a daily exposure to screen time activities and those who spent more than two hours on these activities reported the lowest rates of feeling like they matter to people at school all the time or often.
- Students who spent less than an hour to two hours on daily screen time activities across both grade panels reported higher rates of feeling like they matter to people at school compared to those who spent no time or more than two hours on these activities.
- Across grade panels, students reported feeling like they matter to people at school the more they spent time with friends.
- The students who spent more than two hours to read for pleasure across grade panels reported the lowest rates of feeling like they matter to people at school all the time or often, while those who read for pleasure for less than an hour daily in Grades 7 and 8 and those with no exposure to reading for pleasure in Grades 9 to 12 reported the highest rates of this feeling all the time or often.

### Feeling Lonely

As shown in Figure 6:

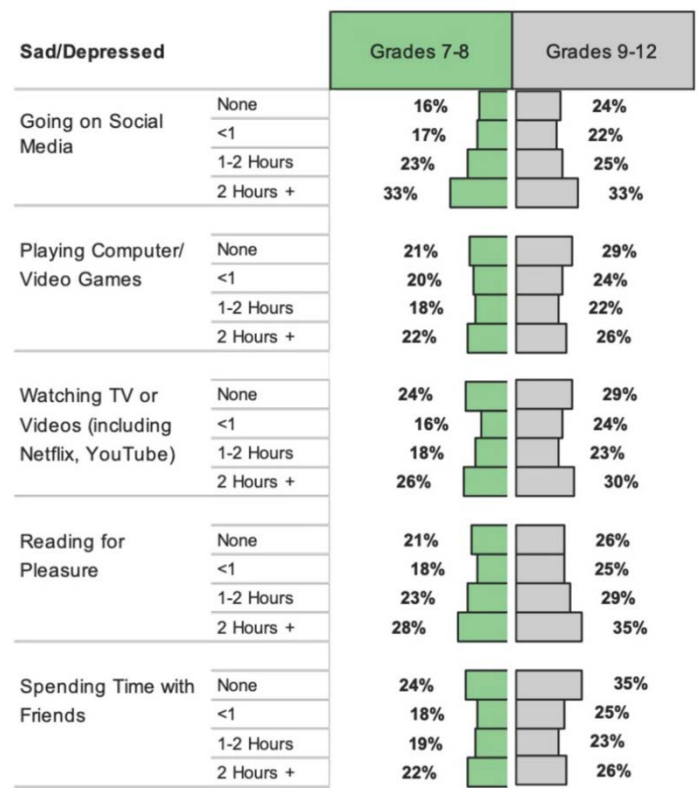
- Across grades panels, students reported the highest rates of feeling lonely all the time or often when they spent two hours or more on social media, playing computer and video games, or reading for pleasure on a daily basis within each activity type.
- Overall, students who spent less than an hour to two hours on daily screen time activities across both grade panels reported lower rates of feeling lonely compared to those who spent more than two hours on these activities.
- Across grade panels, students who spent more than two hours to read for pleasure daily reported the highest rates of feeling lonely all the time or often compared to their peers.
- In Grades 7 and 8 students who spent less than an hour to read for pleasure daily (16%) and those who spent 1 to 2 hours with friends (16%) reported the lowest rates of feeling lonely within each activity type.
- In both grade panels, students who did not spend any time with friends on a daily basis reported the highest rates of feeling lonely, while those who spent between one to two hours seemed to feel less lonely.

**Figure 6. Screen Time, Other Leisure Activities and Feeling Lonely (% All the Time or Often) by Grade Panel**



Source: Every Student Counts Survey 2018

**Figure 7. Screen Time, Other Leisure Activities and Feeling Sad/Depressed (% All the Time or Often) by Grade Panel**



Source: Every Student Counts Survey 2018

### Feeling Sad or Depressed

As shown in Figure 7:

- Overall, in Grades 7 and 8 students who spent more than two hours daily on screen time activities reported the highest rates of feeling sad or depressed all the time or often.
- In Grades 9 to 12, students who spent more than 2 hours daily on social media, or watching TV or videos reported the highest rates of feeling sad or depressed all the time or often
- Across grade panels, a lower percentage of students reported feeling sad or depressed when they spent less than an hour to two hours daily playing video games or watching TV or videos.
- Students in both grade panels reported the highest rates of feeling sad or depressed all the time or often when they spent time to read for pleasure for more than two hours compared to those who spent less than an hour reading for pleasure who indicated the lowest rates of feeling sad or depressed.
- Across grade panels students who spent less than an hour to two hours daily with friends reported the lowest rates of feeling sad or depressed all the time or often.

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## Contact Us

In efforts to best collaborate and hear the voices of community members, we welcome any feedback on this research brief or any suggestions for next steps regarding the current and ongoing reporting structures. If desired, you may contact [research.services@yrdsb.ca](mailto:research.services@yrdsb.ca) with your feedback.

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