The Ontario Student, Parent, and Educator Survey

Official 2017 Report
Acknowledgments

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Foreword

The Ontario Student Trustees’ Association - l’Association des élèves conseillers et conseillères de l’Ontario (OSTA-AECO) is the official representative of 2 million students in Ontario. As a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, we work with the Ministry of Education and other major stakeholders in education, advocate on behalf of students at a provincial level, and provide comprehensive professional development opportunities for Student Trustees from Ontario’s school boards.
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Executive Summary

The results indicate clear areas of concern, as well as surprising points of agreement between students, parents, and educators.

In response to the first survey question, a large majority of students, educators, and parents disagreed or strongly disagreed that financial literacy knowledge and skills related to money are taught sufficiently to students from grades 7-12.

On the second survey question, students were almost undecided on whether uniforms were beneficial, with only a slight majority agreeing or strongly agreeing, while parents and educators overwhelmingly supported uniforms. Most students, parents, and educators agreed or strongly agreed with the third survey question that technology is used effectively for learning at their schools. However, on the fourth question, while a majority of students, parents, and educators agreed that students are sufficiently taught about the different levels of government and the roles they play, a substantial minority of students and educators disagreed.

Although a majority of students, parents, and educators agreed with the fifth survey question that there are adequate mental health resources and supports in their schools, a substantial minority of each of these three groups believed there are opportunities for improvement. On the sixth question, opinions were more convergent, with a majority of students, educators, and parents agreeing that student voice has a meaningful impact on decision-making in their schools.

Results from the seventh survey item were also affirmative, with most students, most parents, and almost all educators agreeing or strongly agreeing that there are enough extracurricular activities at school. Many students and parents expressed gratitude for the dedication of the teachers who organize and supervise extracurricular activities.

Results related to the eighth survey question were also characterized by convergence, with a majority of students, educators, and parents agreeing that homework noticeably improves students’ understanding of class material. A majority of students and parents, and almost all educators, agreed or strongly agreed on the ninth survey question that their schools care about students’ health and well-being as well as their academic success. On the tenth and final survey question, a majority of students, parents, and educators agreed or strongly agreed that all students in their schools are treated fairly regardless of their race, sexual-orientation, gender, or religion. However, a substantial minority of students who disagreed or strongly disagreed that students are treated equally in their school self-identified as minorities.
The report's findings include the following key highlights:

1 in 5 students do not believe that their peers are all treated fairly in their school.

1 in 3 students believe the mental health resources and supports at their school are inadequate.

1 in 3 students feel student voice has no impact on decision-making in their school.

40% of these students self-identify as a minority.

1/3 of these students self-identify as a minority.

40% of these students self-identify as a minority.

70% of students believe financial literacy education is insufficient.

42% of students believe they are NOT sufficiently taught about the different levels of government.

1 in 4 students feel their school doesn’t value student health and well-being.
Introduction

We recognize that the education system exists to serve its students, therefore student consultation is imperative in the creation of policies and practices that shape our educational experience. We created this survey as a step towards maximizing student involvement in the education system. These results encompass a variety of perspectives about education in Ontario. We hope they will not only inform our stances as the official representative of students in Ontario, but also the positions of all stakeholders in education.

Since its inception in 2000, the Ontario Student Trustees’ Association-l’Association des élèves conseillers et conseillères de l’Ontario (OSTA-AECO) has remained committed to ensuring that all students across Ontario have the opportunity to speak out about the issues that matter to them and to have their questions, ideas, and concerns heard and addressed.

One way we ensure that students’ voices are heard is the Ontario Student, Parent, and Educator Survey, which provides quantitative and qualitative results to better inform policy decisions. This survey was first conducted in 2010 and has been conducted four times since. These results have been used to review and revise current policy in order to improve student learning and wellbeing.

Each survey, from 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014, and now 2017, is distinct and tailors its questions to the most important issues in education at the time of release. Taking an entirely student-driven approach, the survey ideas and questions are proposed and selected by students from across the province.

With the help of Student Trustees and school boards across the province, we aim to elucidate any discrepancies between the vision underlying our education system and the reality experienced by students, parents, and educators. While many of our students successfully graduate from elementary and secondary school, few have the opportunity to provide feedback about their school years. The results outlined in this report ought to be used by stakeholders in education and youth services to create the best possible education system for our students. We hope the information that follows will encourage discussion and thoughtful reflection amongst all who are passionate about improving education in the province of Ontario.
1) Financial literacy (the knowledge/skills relating to money) is taught sufficiently to students from Grades 7-12.

Yes – 30.0%
No – 70.0%

2) It is beneficial (more positive than negative) for students to wear school uniforms.

Yes – 49.0%
No – 51.0%

3) Technology is used effectively for learning at my school.

Yes – 85.3%
No – 14.7%

4) Students are sufficiently taught about the different levels of government and the roles they play.

Yes – 59.9%
No – 42.2%

5) There are adequate mental health resources and supports in my school.

Yes – 65.3%
No – 34.8%

6) Student voice has a meaningful impact on decisions made in my school.

Yes – 60.9%
No – 39.1%

7) There are enough extra-curricular activities at school for students to get involved in what they desire.

Yes – 80.2%
No – 18.8%

8) Homework noticeably improves students’ understanding of class material.

Yes – 73.8%
No – 26.2%

9) My school cares about students’ health and well-being as well as their academic success.

Yes – 76.2%
No – 23.8%

10) Students in my school are all treated fairly, regardless of their race, sexual-orientation, gender, or religion.

Yes – 82.0%
No – 18.0%
Quick Fact Sheet
2016 Ontario Parent Survey

1) Financial literacy (the knowledge/skills relating to money) is taught sufficiently to students from Grades 7-12.

Yes – 26.6%
No – 73.4%

2) It is beneficial (more positive than negative) for students to wear school uniforms.

Yes – 83.8%
No – 16.2%

3) Technology is used effectively for learning at my school.

Yes – 71.4%
No – 28.6%

4) Students are sufficiently taught about the different levels of government and the roles they play.

Yes – 63.8%
No – 36.1%

5) There are adequate mental health resources and supports in my school.

Yes – 52.5%
No – 47.5%

6) Student voice has a meaningful impact on decisions made in my school.

Yes – 50.4%
No – 49.6%

7) There are enough extra-curricular activities at school for students to get involved in what they desire.

Yes – 70.7%
No – 29.4%

8) Homework noticeably improves students’ understanding of class material.

Yes – 66.1%
No – 33.9%

9) My school cares about students’ health and well-being as well as their academic success.

Yes – 79.4%
No – 20.6%

10) Students in my school are all treated fairly, regardless of their race, sexual-orientation, gender, or religion.

Yes – 85.6%
No – 14.4%
Quick Fact Sheet
2016 Ontario Educator Survey

1) Financial literacy (the knowledge/skills relating to money) is taught sufficiently to students from Grades 7-12.
Yes – 27.5%
No – 72.5%

2) It is beneficial (more positive than negative) for students to wear school uniforms.
Yes – 84.2%
No – 15.7%

3) Technology is used effectively for learning at my school.
Yes – 81.3%
No – 18.7%

4) Students are sufficiently taught about the different levels of government and the roles they play.
Yes – 76.4%
No – 23.5%

5) There are adequate mental health resources and supports in my school.
Yes – 56.1%
No – 43.8%

6) Student voice has a meaningful impact on decisions made in my school.
Yes – 72.5%
No – 27.5%

7) There are enough extra-curricular activities at school for students to get involved in what they desire.
Yes – 91.0%
No – 9.0%

8) Homework noticeably improves students’ understanding of class material.
Yes – 78.0%
No – 22.1%

9) My school cares about students’ health and well-being as well as their academic success.
Yes – 94.6%
No – 5.4%

10) Students in my school are all treated fairly, regardless of their race, sexual-orientation, gender, or religion.
Yes – 95.4%
No – 4.5%
**Finding 1:**

Is financial literacy (the knowledge/skills relating to money) taught sufficiently to students from Grades 7-12?

Many students noted that financial literacy is taught in optional courses such as business electives, but that many students do not enroll in those classes. A number of students commented that they would like to see financial literacy become a part of the required curriculum for all students. Students recommended that the proposed financial literacy instruction include topics such as mortgages, practical money management, and taxes, and many emphasized that financial literacy instruction needed to have a practical focus, treating day-to-day money management rather than accounting principles and economics.

While many students indicated that required financial literacy instruction should be practical, they did not feel that it should all be rudimentary. A number of students commented that they wanted to be taught about more advanced subjects such as investments, as a means of preparing them to plan their financial futures. Another financial literacy topic that several students expressed an interest in learning more about at school was financial planning for their university educations.

**Comments by Students:**

“Students need more skills taught pertaining to daily budgeting, household expenses, mortgages, loans, interest and investing. Students are leaving school with none of these skills. Especially if they are taking higher level maths in high school. These skills are not emphasized. I think it is very important and needs to be taught so students can make a better educated decision on they type of future they want for themselves. They can make better choices if they know the cost of living before making choices for university, college and career choices.”

“I believe personal finance should be a required course. At least some information on budgeting, bill paying, and credit should be taught in secondary school.”

“I think the board should look into supplying curriculum including information that will help prepare students for after they graduate. This can include more substantial information regarding how to apply for bursaries, loans, receive financial aid for post-secondary education, or simple things for everyone, regardless of if they will be continuing their education at a university or college, such as how to open a bank account, balance a checkbook, information about insurance, taxes, and other vital knowledge that will help prepare students for their future as an adult and citizen in their community.”
Finding 1:

Is financial literacy (the knowledge/skills relating to money) taught sufficiently to students from Grades 7-12?

Most parents disagreed or strongly disagreed that financial literacy is adequately taught to students. Many parents expressed a strong interest in increasing the amount of financial literacy instruction in their children’s schools, recommending that the curriculum include material about loans, budgets, discretionary spending, credit card debt, mortgages, living expenses, and credit standing, among other topics. Several parents suggested that students’ financial literacy would be bolstered by an increased focus on teaching the fundamentals of arithmetic.

Many parents expressed a desire to see students undergo practical financial training in schools that would include exercises in developing budgets, balancing checkbooks, and setting money aside in the form of savings for the future. While a few noted that financial literacy is taught in some optional courses, they expressed the perception that many students do not take these courses, and recommended that financial literacy be part of the required curriculum for all students.

Comments by Parents:

“I think every student needs a mandatory life skills financial literacy class. How to manage their money, reading their bank statements, credit card management, etc., investing, saving, careless spending and the impact on their financial situation in the future etc.”

“The basic fundamentals are not taught i.e. adding, subtracting etc. Children are encouraged to use a calculator in class.”

“There is no financial management taught to kids, and it should start as early as Grade 1 and go right up through to the end of Grade 12. It should be mandatory, not just incorporated into business electives.”
Finding 1:

Is financial literacy (the knowledge/skills relating to money) taught sufficiently to students from Grades 7-12?

A majority of educators either disagreed or strongly disagreed that financial literacy is adequately taught to students. Some educators who believed in the need for more financial literacy noted that greater inclusion of this subject in the curriculum would allow students to acquire important life skills, and cited the practical value of students’ learning to work competently with budgets, taxes, interest rates, mortgages, credit card charges, loans, leases, and investments.

Educators noted that financial literacy is taught in some optional courses, but pointed out that not all students enroll in those classes. A few educators also referred to the discretion they are given to provide students with extracurricular instruction, but they reported that other priorities rarely left sufficient time for financial literacy to be incorporated into lessons.

Comments by Educators:

“Unless specific courses are taught in this area it’s hardly taught to students, and is up to the individual teachers to decide if they wish to include simple financial literacy skills in their class.”

“A course in financial literacy should be compulsory.”

“Many applied and essentials classes get basics in buying cars, getting mortgages, paying credit cards etc., but the academic classes should learn about this valuable information as well, especially regarding taxes.”
Finding 2:

Is it beneficial (more positives than negatives) for students to wear school uniforms?

Students were almost undecided on whether uniforms were beneficial, with only a slight majority agreeing or strongly agreeing. Students who thought uniforms were not beneficial expressed concerns about the limitations uniforms place on their self-expression, about the high cost of uniforms, and about the amount of time (often class time) teachers have to invest in enforcing the dress code.

Many students who agreed that uniforms are beneficial referred to the equality a uniform dress code imposes on students, and to the effect this equality has on reducing bullying and competitiveness related to clothes. Students who believed that uniforms are beneficial also frequently referred to the time they save every morning because they do not have to choose an outfit.

Comments by Students:

“Going to a school where uniforms are mandatory, I agree they are beneficial because people do not get bullied for what they wear (everyone is wearing the same thing), and as a student, I don’t have to worry about what I’ll wear each day. However, the uniforms are very expensive and some can’t afford them, so they will buy, for example, plain black dress pants, and end up in trouble because they are not the uniform brand.”

“Students find many ways to trying to personalize their uniform (unbuttoned shirts near the neck, pants tucked in socks, vibrantly colored bras under white shirts). Non-uniform sweaters are popular among students at my school...I would hope to think uniforms help us prepare for the workforce where rules, regulations, and conformity are prominent and equally weighted with individuality and creativity.”

“Uniforms give students limited clothing options that often are uncomfortable during warmer weather. Also, some students like to express themselves through their clothes (ex. Wearing bright colors), thus uniforms eliminate part of their self expression. Furthermore, uniforms are expensive and can cost much more for some families than buying a couple new outfits every year.”
Finding 2:

Is it beneficial (more positives than negatives) for students to wear school uniforms?

A large majority of parents agreed or strongly agreed that it is beneficial for students to wear uniforms. Many parents cited the value of uniforms in maintaining a disciplined mindset in students and in teaching students to take pride in their appearance. Parents also referred to the tendency of uniforms to hide socioeconomic inequalities between students, such that bullying and shaming of disadvantaged students is reduced, and the resentments that might otherwise emerge from the competition among students to out-dress their peers are eliminated.

Some parents suggested that all schools should require students to wear uniforms, although a few indicated that uniforms are too expensive. Parents who reported that they have children in more than one school, however, indicated that it is less expensive to clothe the children who wear uniforms than to clothe the children who do not. Most of the small number of parents who expressed the belief that uniforms are not beneficial cited the perceived importance to students of being able to express themselves freely in their clothing choices.

Comments by Parents:

”It is less drama (worry of bullying/ harassment) to get dressed and there is a sense of pride to put it on. Also, more respect in general in a uniform!”

”Yes, especially for the older students, it eliminates the issues of inappropriate wardrobes and excessive time spent deciding what to put on each morning.”

”Better for parents financially and for kids not to compete in the word of designer outfits. In addition, wearing a school uniform and wearing it with pride (versus the sloppy manner in which most wear it) provides them with a sense of self-discipline and hopefully teaches them how to carry themselves properly.”
Finding 2:

Is it beneficial (more positives than negatives) for students to wear school uniforms?

Almost all educators agreed or strongly agreed that it is beneficial for students to wear uniforms, citing a range of benefits that are derived from the practice. Educators noted that disparities in the socioeconomic status of different students within the same school are made less visible when a uniform is required, such that disadvantaged students are less likely to be singled out by their peers. When uniforms are not required, competition among students to display the most popular and expensive brands of clothing can lead to conflict and division in a school. A uniform, most educators believed, eliminates this competition and promotes a more harmonious and respectful educational environment.

Uniforms also assist educators in maintaining safety and security in their schools, by allowing them to easily identify any non-students who may have entered the premises. Some educators believed that students’ academic performance and behavior are improved by the mindset of dedication to scholarship that uniforms both encourage and signify. The minority of educators who reported the belief that uniforms are disadvantageous tended to feel this way because of the perceived difficulty of enforcing the dress code and of persuading resistant students and families to adopt the uniform.

Comments by Educators:

“[A uniform] lessens bullying due to low socioeconomic status.”

“Unfortunately a majority of students do not see the benefits of a uniform and taking the time to address non-uniform items on a daily basis impacts our job and adds some level of stress when we are required to ‘defend’ or enforce the uniform.”

“Creates a sense of unity as well one of safety. Our students are easily recognized.”
Finding 3:

Is technology used effectively for learning at your school?

Most students agreed or strongly agreed that technology is used effectively for learning in school. A number of students commented that technology is used effectively both to teach them about the technology itself and to teach them a variety of course material. Many students reported that their schools have adequate technology, and mentioned with particular approval their teachers’ websites, which make additional learning resources readily available. Several students also noted that technology makes the presentation of curriculum more versatile, so that students with different learning styles are able to learn effectively.

A number of students who expressed concerns about the use of technology in their schools commented specifically on social and recreational uses of technology by students. A few students felt that social uses of technology (such as access to social networking sites) should be unrestricted, because this gives them a means of expressing themselves and connecting with others. Other students felt, though, that social uses of technology, particularly cell phones, are disruptive to learning and should be curtailed. Other concerns mentioned by some students included obsolete technology, slow Internet connections and the disruptive effects these have on web-based presentations of class material, and the limited accessibility of some school-owned devices.

Comments by Students:

“I found that technology was used effectively at my school for learning and educational purposes. Computers, tvs, tablets, and such, were all used for the needs of the students to accommodate all of our learning needs. Examples such as accounting, Excel worksheets on the computers were used and tablets were used in class rooms for students to research in classroom settings when the computer rooms were full.”

“Teacher websites, which provide students access information to class material and resources, give students another way to catch up in class. Furthermore, learning through technology gives another medium to learn on, combining visual, auditory and hands-on learning through smartboard presentations and apps.”

“Technology is used a lot in our board, from smart boards and Projectors in every classroom as well as laptop for every high school student. Sometimes though having this technology is a hindrance to the classroom though as with the amount of time it takes for students and teachers to prepare to use technology sometimes is quite long. Additionally, the technology at our board is all internet based, teachers computers are internet based as well as all of the grade 9’s with the chrome books. In the event that the internet is down students and teachers are left scrambling to find a different route, and almost always disrupts the teacher’s lesson plans.”
Finding 3:

Is technology used effectively for learning at your school?

Most parents agreed that technology is used effectively for learning. Many parents distinguished, however, between the use of technology in schools for educational purposes and the use of technology by students in a social or recreational capacity. A number of parents recommended that cell phones not be allowed in schools, or that the devices be collected at the beginning of each class and then returned to the students when class ended. Many parents also cited the importance of close supervision of students’ technology use, to ensure that all use is educationally legitimate.

Most parents believed that the technology in their children’s schools is adequate, but a number of parents expressed concern that technology might replace face-to-face instruction, or, alternatively, that their children are engaging with technology only in a superficial way, and that students need more in-depth instruction in skills such as coding. A few parents also indicated that they have compatibility issues between the technology used in schools and the technology available to them at home, and that these issues hinder their children’s completion of Web-based assignments.

Comments by Parents:

“it seems they do a lot of projects on the computer which is hard to access from home, for homework, or it seems like a lot of wasted time logging into Google documents.”

“3-d printing and automat has been very beneficial for our child.”

“Androids and iPhones should be banned under the building and wi-fi strictly used for in class research. Any other recreation/communication place [i.e., website] should be blocked, just as in any big company.”
Finding 3:

Is technology used effectively for learning at your school?

Most educators agreed or strongly agreed that technology is used effectively for learning at their school. Technology was seen as beneficial to both teachers and students, provided that certain conditions were met. Technology was seen as beneficial to teachers because it provided them with another way of presenting the curriculum to students, and as beneficial to students because its versatility allowed it to appeal to a variety of learning styles.

In order for the benefits of technology in the classroom to be fully realized, however, educators believed that it was necessary for classrooms to be adequately supplied with up-to-date devices, for teachers to be sufficiently trained in using and instructing students to use those devices, and for students to be carefully supervised. Some educators noted that technology can become detrimental to instruction when students begin to use the available devices for inappropriate purposes, such as messaging and playing games. Support from administration was therefore seen as necessary, to ensure that classrooms are adequately equipped with technology and that teachers are empowered to enforce its proper use.

Comments by Educators:

“’We are making huge advances with tech (i.e. Google Read and Write, new apps, etc.) but technology could be much more effective if there were more computers/laptops/ipads (not phones) accessible for all students. Unfortunately, when trying to implement phones creatively in the classroom, students remain off-task and text instead of using them for school related tasks, which makes this integration difficult and ineffective.”

“’In all the years that I have worked in a school library setting, the most efficient implementation and use of the technology occurred with Google Apps for Education. Board purchased Chromebooks are also used on a daily basis and provides access as a mobile cart to all classrooms. For proficient users of technology, GAFE still presents many limitations but for the purposes of collaboration it is the easiest and most efficient way to share work/work load.”

“’It depends on a lot of factors. Teacher experience, infrastructure and the group of students.”
Finding 4:

Are students sufficiently taught about the different levels of government and the roles they play?

While most students agreed or strongly agreed that they are taught sufficiently about government, a substantial minority disagreed. Many students referred to the mandatory grade 10 civics course as a thorough and useful treatment of the subject, and several pointed out that elective courses are available to students who wish to extend their knowledge beyond the material covered in the civics class.

A number of students expressed strong concern, however, that requiring students to take only a single, half-semester course on civics does not give them a sufficient grounding in the material. While a small number of students reported that they are not interested in learning about government, other students reported that expansions of their knowledge of the subject had prompted them to take a greater interest. Students who expressed concerns about the adequacy of civics instruction in their schools recommended the addition of more required civics courses, as well as a greater emphasis on civics instruction with practical applications, such as material that would teach students how to make their voices heard in local and national politics.

Comments by Students:

“Students are sufficiently taught about the different levels of government and the roles they play. A huge emphasis is put on this in the grade 10 mandatory calls Civics. This half a credit course deals with our government, the role it has in our society and even different types of government all over the world. There are also other non-compulsory classes available relating to the government like Canadian and International Law and World Issues.”

“There is only one class that ‘teaches’ students about the government, which is Gr. 10 civics. However, this is not enough. Students interested in learning about their government should not have to wait until university to have a broader range of law-related courses. In addition, civics only lasts for one-half a semester. This is not enough, and should instead last five months to go more in-depth for students.”

“The Civics Curriculum must be revised in order to reflect the current needs and circumstances of Ontario Students. Young students need to become more involved in the political process by learning specifically about how their voice/opinion can make an impact on government and society. I do not believe the curriculum is meeting that at the present moment.”
Finding 4:

Are students sufficiently taught about the different levels of government and the roles they play?

A majority of parents agreed that students are sufficiently taught about the different levels of government and the roles they play. Many parents expressed concerns about civics instruction, however, including the perception that the classes rely too heavily on rote memorization rather than on practical applications, and that teachers inappropriately express their personal political views or discourage expressions by students of views with which they disagree. A few parents reported as a further concern that their children seem well-versed in U.S. political systems, but comparatively ignorant of the structure of the Canadian government.

Several parents expressed the perception that civics instruction is improving in schools at a sufficiently rapid rate that their younger children are markedly better informed than their older children were. Parents also cited with approval the Vote and elections projects associated with civics classes, as well as the visits classes make to Parliament and municipal offices. Several parents also commented favorably on the sense of civic responsibility that current civics instruction instills in students.

Comments by Parents:

“Getting better, not far enough. Make it more creative, applicable to daily events.”

“The teacher shouldn’t put their political views into the mix.”

“Learning by rote here rather than by experiential means.”
Finding 4:

Are students sufficiently taught about the different levels of government and the roles they play?

While most educators agreed or strongly agreed that students are sufficiently taught about the different levels of government and the roles they play, a number of educators disagreed or offered only qualified agreement. In general, educators approved of the civic education that is currently provided to students, but suggested that students’ present level of exposure to the subject could be beneficially extended, for example by introducing a review and expansion of the existing curriculum into the standard instruction for higher grade levels.

Educators who believed that the current curriculum might be improved tended to believe that students’ retention of civics instruction was inadequate, but that students would be more likely to remember the material if an effort were made on the part of educators to make the lessons more interesting and relevant. Some educators also suggested that civics instruction is currently provided to students who are too young to fully appreciate the significance of the material, and that it should be reserved for older students who can bring a more mature perspective to the subject.

Comments by Educators:

“This is taught several times - in grade 5 social studies and again in grade 10 civics. The problem is that such information is rarely maintained unless students engage in politics."

“Grade 5 is too young for students to understand about how government works. It is too far removed from the age they can actually vote to have any relevance. Students in grades 7 or 8 would be more developmentally prepared to understand the levels of government and the roles they play."

“Canadians more than ever do not understand Canadian politics, administration, and the role the government plays in our day to day lives. And for Ontario the least, a half semester course is not sufficient for students.”
Finding 5:

Are there adequate mental health resources and supports in your school?

Most students agreed that mental health resources and supports in their schools are adequate, but a substantial minority disagreed. Many students expressed gratitude and appreciation for the supports that are available in their schools. These students cited a variety of resources, including guidance counselors, nurses, resource offices, extra-curricular activities that include emotional support, Child and Youth Workers, chaplains, and awareness-building initiatives such as posters in the hallways and school-based activities related to mental health support.

Concerns mentioned by students who disagreed that mental health resources are adequate included the challenges of gaining access to overbooked mental health support staff, the focus of mental health awareness initiatives on anxiety and depression (at the expense of other mental health issues), and the need to build awareness among students of the available resources and supports. Students suggested assigning full-time mental health support staff to all schools, advertising available resources more effectively, and working to build a more supportive culture in schools in order to raise awareness and eliminate stigma.

Comments by Students:

“We strongly advocate for mental health. We have a stigma walk annually. We also have a child and youth worker in our building; additionally our guidance, resources and student success offices are extremely helpful.”

“Resources are provided effectively. I feel the only issue lies in students being incapable of reaching out to supports not because they aren’t there but rather the students aren’t comfortable to contact them.”

“The school I currently attend has a psychological counselor and nurses. They’re all very helpful, and understanding, but reasonable. You don’t see people run into the health center for pointless things. You see people actually being helped. I’m very pleased with the health support at my current school.”
Finding 5:

Are there adequate mental health resources and supports in your school?

A slight majority of parents agreed or strongly agreed that there are adequate mental health resources and supports in their schools. Overall, parents felt that existing resources are helpful, but that there are opportunities for improvement. Some parents referred approvingly to the climate of openness about mental health issues in their children’s schools, while others believed that the topic is not addressed with sufficient candor. A few parents recommended that basic self-care topics related to mental health, such as mindfulness and coping skills, should be taught to all students, regardless of whether or not those students need additional supports.

Some parents also pointed to a perceived need for additional mental health specialists on the full-time staff of schools, as well as for administration-led efforts to keep students and teachers informed of available supports and to combat any stigma that might be associated with using them. A few parents suggested that mental health resources are spread too thin, and that these supports would be more beneficial if they were focused on the comparatively small number of students who have an urgent need for them.

Comments by Parents:

“Although it is spoken about regularly I do not believe kids know who to really turn to.”

“Stigma being the deterrent here for students to seek supports.”

“Resources are there but some parents choose to deny that their kid needs mental care.”
Finding 5:

Are there adequate mental health resources and supports in your school?

As with parents, a slight majority of educators agreed or strongly agreed that there are adequate mental health resources and supports in their schools. Overall, educators believed that their schools have made great improvements in providing mental health resources and supports to students, but that further improvements are needed. Educators approved of the availability of trained personnel to assist students with mental health concerns, but felt that the culture in their schools may not allow mental health to be addressed with sufficient openness to ensure that students receive an optimal level of support. Additionally, many educators felt that the resources currently dedicated to supporting students should be augmented.

While educators believed that the Child and Youth Workers assigned to their schools are helpful to students, a few suggested that each school should have a full-time CYW on its permanent staff. Some educators also felt that the current mental health resources and supports are adequate for students who are in crisis, but that students who are not experiencing a crisis may not be receiving adequate support. This perceived deficit in support for some students might be addressed to some extent, a few educators suggested, through administrative efforts to make teachers and students better informed about available resources. Some educators also perceived a need for more mental health resources and supports for educators themselves.

Comments by Educators:

“There are [adequate resources] for the extremely mentally disabled- but aside for counselors there’s no immediate assistance in which students can access services offered by the school board. Such appointments take days, weeks, months- pending on demand.”

“A full-time CYW is needed and we should also have access to a social worker and psychologist; there is a growing need for this type of service.”

“There are many supports but not all teachers are familiar with them or how to use them.”
Finding 6:

Does student voice have a meaningful impact on decisions made in your school?

A majority of students agreed or strongly agreed that student voice has a meaningful impact on decision-making in their schools, but a substantial minority disagreed. Students who disagreed that student voice has a meaningful impact cited concerns that student leaders do not reach out sufficiently to other students, that student opinions are not solicited frequently enough by teachers and administrators, and that school authorities may disregard student opinion even after making efforts to ascertain it.

Many students referred to student councils as effective and meaningful expressions of student voice, and others noted that extra-curricular activities offer leadership opportunities to students with a variety of interests and strengths. Students also commented favorably on the surveys that are administered in their schools to give students a voice, and on the positive influence many individual students are able to exert through their supportive relationships with staff members.

Comments by Students:

“Students in my school do play a major and meaningful role in each decision made in my school. We have a student council available at our school that speaks for the students and are a voice of the majority and minority.”

“Our school is very good with student opinions however they can be sometimes just swept aside and not considered. Some of our students are able to talk to student council however student council could be better at reaching out and talking to more students for opinions and ideas.”

“I feel like as kids we need to be given the chance to speak out and give our opinion. That we are not always ready to speak up and trying to get the attention of others on our own. I think that at our school administrators and student leaders need to give the student body more chances to voice our opinions and show that they are more ready to listen. If we aren’t shown that, then we’ll be discouraged from sharing ideas or opinions.”
Finding 6:

Does student voice have a meaningful impact on decisions made in your school?

Parents were almost evenly divided on the question of whether student voice has a meaningful impact on decisions made in their children’s schools, with only a slight majority agreeing or strongly agreeing. Parents who felt that student voice does not have a meaningful impact cited perceptions that all levels of school authorities, from classroom teachers to school boards, do not take student input sufficiently into consideration when making decisions, even when student input is actively sought.

A number of other parents cited their children’s experiences as evidence that student voice has an impact on decision-making in their schools, commenting favorably on the effectiveness of student governments and student activism. Some parents noted that the impact of student voice depends on the receptiveness of administrators, such that the impact can vary greatly between schools, and between successive principals in the same school.

Comments by Parents:

“My child is on his student council and works very hard promoting mental health issues, organizing relay for life, working with new grade 9 and organizing many supportive assemblies for the student body.”

“I find that a student voice isn’t taken consideration whatsoever. Example: students wanted no uniforms but that consideration wasn’t taken.”

“I would like to think so. [Not listening to student voice] would be akin to running a business and not listening to your customers. Feedback and recognition is paramount.”
Finding 6:

Does student voice have a meaningful impact on decisions made in your school?

While a majority of educators believed that student voice has a meaningful impact on decisions made in their schools, many noted that this impact is contingent on several factors. The meaningful impact of student voice depends in part on the quality of student representatives. Educators felt that overall the quality of student representatives is high, but a few noted that this quality can vary from year to year. Secondly, the meaningful impact of student voice depends on administrative support and cooperation. Administrators need to be willing to listen to student representatives and take their recommendations into consideration, some educators stated.

Thirdly, the impact of student voice was seen as dependent on where students’ opinions come from and on how those opinions are expressed. Some educators felt that teachers have too much influence on student representatives, while other educators felt that student voice often affects school-based decisions via parent voice, with students influencing their parents at home.

Comments by Educators:

“This does depend on the administration and whether or not they are willing to participate in the process.”

“Students are directed by teachers, too often, in my opinion, in specific directions.”

“Parent voice...has an overwhelming impact on the decisions made in my school and often this might reflect the student voice.”
Finding 7:

Are there enough extra-curricular activities at school for students to get involved in what they desire?

Most students agreed or strongly agreed that there are enough extra-curricular activities at school. Many students described the wide variety of clubs and teams at their schools, citing extra-curricular activities related to athletic, artistic, and academic interests, as well as clubs devoted to social or leisure interests, ethnic identity, social activism, and LGBTQ identity. Many students also referred favorably to the power their schools give them to start new extra-curricular activities, provided that they can find a faculty sponsor.

Most students who disagreed that there are enough extra-curricular activities referred to the emphasis in their schools on athletic clubs, and to a corresponding shortage of clubs devoted to scientific or artistic interests. A few students referred to the barriers that transportation issues and the necessity of finding a faculty sponsor can present to students wishing to join or found a club.

Comments by Students:

“There are a wide range of extra-curricular activities accessible to students including clubs according to their interest and sports according to their abilities. It’s a student’s choice whether they want to participate but there are so many options and things to get involved with there should be no reason to say you have no interest in any clubs because it’s even possible to START a club about what you enjoy to get common people together, the only thing you need is a teacher representative and it’s possible.”

“We have many different clubs at our school. It can range from the Arts: Drama Guild, Junior/Senior Band, Jazz Band, and Arts Club; Technology: Robotics Club, Science Club, etc; Religion: Hindu and Sikh Student Association, Muslim Student Association, etc; Athletics: Middlefield Athletic Council, Ping-Pong Club, Table Tennis, Softball team, Basketball team, Badminton Team, Soccer Team; Awareness: Students Advocating Female Equality Club, Mental Health Awareness Club, LGBTQ Club, etc; Business: Accounting Club, Future Business Leaders of America Club, Mock Trial Team, etc; and much more!”

“There is a wide variety of extracurriculars at my school, but most of them are sports. The arts are often pushed to the side, and sports are the main focus, which means that the athletes tend to be satisfied, while people who aren’t into sports aren’t.”
Finding 7:

Are there enough extra-curricular activities at school for students to get involved in what they desire?

Most parents agreed or strongly agreed that there are enough extra-curricular activities at school, with many expressing gratitude for the dedication of the teachers whose support makes these activities possible. Many parents cited benefits their children have derived from extra-curricular activities, including improved social skills, increased physical fitness, and a more positive attitude. Some parents cited student apathy, the cost to families of travel related to sports tournaments, the competitiveness of athletics programs, and lack of teacher support as barriers to satisfactory extra-curricular activities, however. A few parents believed that extra-curricular activities put too much emphasis on athletic ability, and recommended creating more activities for students who have other strengths.

Comments by Parents:

“A wide variety has been offered out of the goodness of our teachers’ hearts. They give up their own time to enrich the lives of our children.”

“Yes, but sometimes the costs may cause some families to think twice.”

“My son is involved in many after school activities (maybe too many) it's contributed to his social growth, physical conditioning, teamwork and positive attitude ....thanks for making these programs available.”
Finding 7:

Are there enough extra-curricular activities at school for students to get involved in what they desire?

Almost all educators agreed or strongly agreed that there are enough extra-curricular activities at school for students to get involved in what they desire, with nearly half of educators strongly agreeing. While most educators felt that a wide range of activities is available, some pointed out that student participation in extra-curricular activities depends on administrative support, on teacher support, and on student willingness.

Teachers with excessive workloads are less likely to volunteer to promote extra-curricular activities, educators believed, so administrative support is needed to ensure that teachers have sufficient time to conduct the desired activities. A few educators suggested that student willingness to take advantage of activities might be enhanced by requiring students to participate in a certain number of activities per semester, and by creating sports teams that are not focused on competitive play, such that students of all levels of athletic ability will feel comfortable participating.

Comments by Educators:

“"All too often school sports are only for the best and strongest athletic kids. Not enough opportunity for the average athletic kid. Need more support for house leagues."

“"I find some students NEVER participate in extracurricular, regardless of all the options. I believe, like in some other countries, there should be an extracurricular activity requirement (i.e. 1 sport or 1 organization per semester/year)."

“"Each school differs on what the staff can offer, especially concerning the arts and/or how small the school staff population is."
Finding 8:

Does homework noticeably improve students' understanding of class material?

A majority of students agreed or strongly agreed that homework noticeably improves their understanding of class material. Many students who believed that homework is beneficial qualified their agreement in their comments, however, by noting that the benefits of homework are reduced or eliminated when the amount of homework becomes excessive. A number of students cited their many work, family, extra-curricular, physical self-care, and social obligations as reasons for keeping the homework load minimal, and several students indicated that excessive homework can leave insufficient time for sleep.

Students who disagreed that homework improves their understanding of class material cited two reasons for their opinion. Some students felt that too much of their homework involves “drilling,” or exercises designed to reinforce skills through repetitious practice, and that this work is often redundant or excessive. Other students believed that teachers may use homework as a means of teaching skills, and that this is problematic when students need clarification from an instructor while trying to acquire knowledge independently. Students who expressed this concern indicated that homework should reinforce skills learned in class, not supplement lecture content with new material.

Comments by Students:

“I am having a very successful year because I complete homework regularly. This helps me to complete assignments and tests with great success. I also helps me to pinpoint any areas that I have difficulty with.”

“...In addition to the hours spent at school, there is just so much work that needs to be done every day...One of the biggest issues with this is that no student can reasonably balance their physical needs (especially exercise and sleep), their emotional needs (social connection and stress-free bonding with friends and family), [and] time for play (not “leisure time” but actual time devoted to playing and feeling free, and extracurriculars that are done for passion and true interest rather than for resume-building).”

“Although many students see homework as a tedious chore, homework is practice, and practice makes perfect. Without sufficient exercise of the brain in the subjects studied at school, no connections will be made in the brain and students will lack the much needed ability to have healthy learning habits and the ability to learn and grasp concepts more easily.”
Finding 8:

Does homework noticeably improves students' understanding of class material?

While most parents agreed that homework noticeably improves students' understanding of class material, a substantial minority disagreed. Parents who perceived homework as beneficial to students cited the value of practicing and reinforcing the skills learned in class, but some parents who believed in the benefits of homework expressed concern that it may be used to shift the burden of teaching onto parents, that homework is not consistently collected or graded, and that adequate support may not be available from teachers to assist students with homework questions.

Many parents recommended that consequences for failure to complete homework be imposed more consistently at school, and some also suggested that teachers communicate with parents more consistently when homework is not being turned in. A number of parents expressed the opinion that more homework should be assigned. Parents who disagreed that homework improves students' understanding suggested that family- and free time are more important, and that “drill” assignments should be confined to class, where the teacher can offer support.

Comments by Parents:

“Some homework definitely improves students' understanding, however if the child is not completing their homework there should be consequences. As of right now when my child does not complete her homework I don’t find out about it until it’s too late.”

“It has to be reasonable. Too much and students will hate the subject. But homework that is quick and like a review would be helpful.”

“If the student does not understand what is being taught in class then the teacher should spend more time on it. Having homework after 7 hours of school time is more stress on students and does not allow for family time or other activities.”
Finding 8:

Does homework noticeably improves students' understanding of class material?

A majority of educators believed that homework is not only beneficial but essential to students' understanding of class material, citing their observation that students who neglect homework tend to perform poorly on classwork and tests. While affirming the importance of using homework to reinforce skills learned in class, a few educators also indicated that homework should take no more than one to two hours per night.

Some educators noted that students who do not complete in-class assignments during school hours may be required to finish the work at home, such that effective time-management during class can help students to keep their homework loads manageable. A few educators also suggested that students perform better on homework when parents are available to provide some assistance.

Comments by Educators:

“Practicing their skills at home, reviewing material or just reading a chapter ahead greatly improves their understanding. Sometimes in the classroom there are too many distractions for students to really gain a deep understanding, taking a second look at home is beneficial.”

“Students have time in class to work on these tasks. Time management would decrease the amount of homework for many students.”

“It is clear every semester that the students who do poorly/fail are the ones who do not complete their homework. Reinforcement is essential.”
Finding 9:

Does your school care about students’ health and well-being as well as their academic success?

Most students agreed or strongly agreed that their schools care about their health and well-being as well as their academic success. Students cited the availability of a variety of extra-curricular activities, the caring staff, and the mental health resources at their schools as ways in which their health and well-being are supported. Many students expressed gratitude for the emotional support they had received from guidance counselors and other school personnel, and for the accommodations and assistance they had received from teachers while they were ill or otherwise in need of support.

While most students felt that their schools are doing enough to ensure their well-being, some felt that school itself is a significant source of stress, and that the resources educators provide to improve students’ well-being should be reinforced by alleviations of school-related stressors, such as excessive homework loads. A few students also expressed concerns about the consistency with which prescribed accommodations are made available to students with learning deficits or health issues.

Comments by Students:

“We have many guidance counselors and mental health workers ready to help anyone in need. There are also frequent stress-relieving activities such as therapy dogs, yoga and time to spend alone in the school chapel for some personal reflection. The staff themselves are also very friendly, understanding and helpful.”

“In theory it does, and I’m sure the actual teachers/Admin/other people in the school care about students’ health and well-being, but the expectations expressed to students about how much work should be done everyday and what should be prioritized doesn’t reflect that at all. Teachers always say that we should get more sleep or not stress so much, but they never seem to question their own actions/expectations when we’re unable to do the hours of work assigned to us every night.”

“I believe that my school is great at giving second and third and fourth chances to students, that our school is willing to work with students of all capabilities until they find success. The administrators are very understanding of the students’ needs.”
Finding 9:

Does your school care about students’ health and well-being as well as their academic success?

Most parents agreed or strongly agreed that their children’s schools care about students’ health and well-being as well as their academic success. Parents who expressed satisfaction with the care schools took of their children’s well-being noted the extraordinary efforts of many teachers to connect with and support students.

A few parents expressed concerns or recommended ways in which schools could improve students’ well-being. These parents suggested that healthier options should be added to cafeteria menus, that teachers should make more efforts to reach out to parents, and that school administrators should work harder to address substance abuse on campuses and to maintain a culture of openness and support with respect to mental health and disabilities.

Comments by Parents:

“I really appreciate the teachers and staff at his school. They all are friendly, converse openly with everyone.”

“I believe the school as a whole wants this. But, there are individual staff members who could use some sensitivity training in being more aware of a student’s emotional/mental state.”

“All staff take a genuine interest in each child’s wellbeing. The kids thrive as a result.”
Finding 9:

Does your school care about students’ health and well-being as well as their academic success?

Almost all educators agreed or strongly agreed that their schools care about students’ health and well-being as well as their academic success. Educators cited examples of schools’ caring for the whole child that included guidance and chaplaincy supports, committees and clubs, assemblies dedicated to disseminating information about wellness, breakfast programs, and the caring attitude of staff.

Comments by Educators:

“Solid guidance and chaplaincy supports, school masses, committees and clubs, assemblies based on wellness.”

“Educators in general are caring. Speaking personally, I work in the education sector because I hope to be able to support students in their efforts for academic and personal success.”

“Our administration and staff is interested in the whole child.”
Finding 10:
Are students in your school all treated fairly, regardless of their race, sexual-orientation, gender, or religion?

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A large majority of students agreed or strongly agreed that all students in their schools are treated fairly regardless of their race, sexual-orientation, gender, or religion. Many students cited their own experiences and the experiences of their peers as evidence that students and educators treated all students fairly. In offering examples of ways in which equality is actively promoted in their schools, students referred to awareness initiatives and to clubs devoted to social justice or the celebration of ethnic and other identities. Some students expressed concerns about student-to-student bullying and discrimination, however, and a few indicated that educators do not always address these concerns adequately.

Comments by Students:

“"There’s a wide range of students of different races and religions in my school and everyone does a good job of treating everyone equally. There are visible differences of people who are of different gender and religion and race but the way that most schools work regarding dress codes and means of education covers racism and segregation because everyone is categorized as students instead of by their religion or race.""

“"My school is full of people from different races, religions, backgrounds, ethnicity and so much more. We have programs in order to make students feel comfortable, like the multicultural dinner where we bring food from our culture to share with others and we have a club in order to let members of the LGBT have a voice.""

“"Fairness from the teachers always seems to be equal to all individuals, but fairness between the actual students is sometimes a challenge. There is still some bullying and negativity between the students themselves.""
Finding 10:

Are students in your school all treated fairly, regardless of their race, sexual-orientation, gender, or religion?

Most parents agreed or strongly agreed that students in their children’s schools are all treated fairly regardless of their race, sexual-orientation, gender, or religion. A majority of parents who commented indicated that treatment of all students in their children’s schools is fair, and a few cited their children’s experiences as evidence that student-to-student bullying and discrimination is not tolerated by teachers and administrators.

Parents who mentioned concerns referred to acceptance of students with learning deficits and acceptance of students of all sexual- and gender-orientations as potential areas for improvement. Some parents also suggested that nondiscriminatory treatment of all students is dependent on educators’ leading by example.

Comments by Parents:

“Very friendly and positive atmosphere.”

“From everything I have seen, this is the case.”

“Yes this is done well at my child’s school.”
Finding 10:

Are students in your school all treated fairly, regardless of their race, sexual-orientation, gender, or religion?

Educators overwhelmingly agreed that students in their schools are all treated fairly regardless of their race, sexual-orientation, gender, or religion, with more than half of educators strongly agreeing. While educators felt strongly that school staff treat students fairly, some felt that greater efforts can be made to teach nondiscriminatory attitudes and behaviors to students. Another area in which improvements might be made, according to a few educators, is in ensuring that students’ concerns about bullying due to race, gender, religion, or sexual-orientation are heard and promptly acted on.

Comments by Educators:

“From a staff perspective this is true. However from a student to student perspective more can be done to support understanding and acceptance of different races, sexual orientation, religion, etc.”

“By teachers, I would say yes, but I would say some students do not have a vast understanding of different race, sexual orientation, gender, religion, etc given our geographic location and perhaps lack of cultural diversity.”

“There is absolutely no discrimination of any kind especially from staff. Children are taught that in God’s eyes we are all the same. We foster a fair, caring, and inclusive environment where all feel safe, equal, and valued.”
Methodology

The Ontario Student, Parent, and Educator Survey was conducted by the Ontario Student Trustees’ Association – l’Association des Élèves Conseillers et Conseillères de l’Ontario (OSTA-AECO) between April 1st, 2016, and May 31st of the same year. There were 4,233 student respondents from 69 school boards across all the regions of the province. We received engagement from 508 parents, as well as 295 teachers, with participants from English Catholic, English public, French Catholic, and French public boards.

The survey question ideas were generated by students in the Data and Research Committee of the Association. The Committee looked at “hot-topic” and recurrent issues in the education system. The questions created were then reviewed to ensure they were worded appropriately by members of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) in addition to People for Education. The survey was then conducted online on SurveyMonkey. It was distributed via social media (Facebook and Twitter), school board websites, partner websites, and through a separate collection method hosted by Yconic. Students who completed the survey were eligible to win one of ten $100 gift cards.

Students were asked ten (10) questions, with the opportunity to add comments for each response. Each question had the option of four responses (only one could be selected): “Strongly Agree,” “Agree,” “Disagree,” and “Strongly Disagree.” Our rationale for providing only four options without a neutral respond was to require individuals to think of a position that would accurately reflect their experience with the education system. In this report, we included some of the comment responses for each question, along with an analysis of the overall sentiment reflected in these comments.

Many students took the time to comment on their responses, which adds considerable depth to the report this year as it allows OSTA-AECO to look beyond raw data to understand students’ perspectives on educational issues. To analyze the patterns in the comments, the anonymized results were reviewed by Precision Consulting LLC. In the report, we include information about the comments and a general amount of how many students and parents commented on that trend. From this, each of the analyzers created a results summary, which touched on all the trends in the comments and the apparent differences between the three stakeholder groups’ results.

We protect the students’ and parents’ personal information and adhere to all legislative requirements with respect to protecting privacy. All data was collected anonymously and will remain so; there is no way to identify individual students who participated in this survey. The only data that is displayed about students and parents in the quotes is their respective District School Board and gender.
Demographic Information

Students

Grade of Student

School Board of Student

Parents

Grade of Parent's Child

Educators

Role of Educator

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Conclusion

The Ontario Student, Parent, and Educator Survey has identified various deficiencies in Ontario’s education system. From a necessary refresh of the financial literacy curriculum to improved access to mental health resources, the government must note the multitude of demands to ameliorate the quality of education being received. The key stakeholders in our system have highlighted a need to improve the overall learning experience in our schools. The data collected in this report can be used to target these areas of potential improvement. We look forward to the implementation of measures that will truly make a difference.
Partners

Thank you to the following organizations for their valuable contributions to the creation and execution of the Ontario Student, Parent, and Educator Survey:

yconic.  CIVIX  SCHOLARSHIPS CANADA.com  phea

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