

2021-22 DIVISION FEEDBACK SURVEY

Division Summary

Strategic Division Supports
April 2023

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INTRODUCTION

The Division Feedback Survey (DFS) is a source of information to help assess, monitor and report progress on the Edmonton Public School Board's (EPSB) priorities, goals and outcomes. It is a way for students, staff and families to engage in sharing their views of the past year and contribute to setting direction for the future.

This report provides a qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses gathered from the 2021-2022 Division Feedback Survey contextualized within a quantitative perspective. The 2021-2022 Division Feedback Survey was developed to reflect the unique circumstances of the pandemic and address the three pillars of the Division's [2021-2022 Back to School Plan](#) which focused on safety, family choice and high quality teaching and learning. The results of the survey outlined in this report are intended to serve as one of many sources of information to measure progress, determine what worked well in the Division's response to the pandemic and help plan for the 2022-2023 school year.

In addition, the 2021-2022 DFS included extra questions to inform the development of the school year calendar and the development of the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan. A report summarizing the results from the calendar related questions can be found [here](#) and a summary of responses from the Strategic Plan related questions can be found [here](#). This report shares the results from the core questions of the 2021-2022 DFS focused on safety, family choice, and high quality teaching and learning.

2021-2022 School Year Context

An understanding of the unique circumstances of the 2021-2022 school year can help provide context for the responses to the DFS. In September 2021, the Division welcomed over 105,000 students back to school. Ninety-five per cent of students returned to in-person learning. Cohorts, physical distancing, and screening for illness requirements were identified as key strategies to slow down the spread of COVID-19 in classrooms. Division protocols around isolation aligned with provincial guidelines as classrooms were not required to quarantine in the case of students testing positive for COVID-19. All schools continued to follow cleaning guidelines for the year, however, as the year progressed masking requirements eased to reflect provincial expectations. Within the context of the pandemic, the Division recognized the need to give families a choice between in-class or online learning. Families were encouraged to pick a learning mode that best supported their sense of safety and well-being during two checkpoints in the year.

The 2021-22 school year also saw the introduction of the draft K-6 provincial curriculum and changes to the Alberta diploma examination weighting. In response to the disruptions to learning caused by the pandemic, Alberta Education offered students the option to opt-out of all diploma examinations scheduled in 2021 and reduced the weighting of all diploma examinations scheduled for 2022.

METHODS

Data Collection

A series of closed-ended and open-ended questions were asked in the 2021-2022 Division Feedback Survey, which was open for stakeholders to complete from April 4 to May 6, 2022.

Three separate surveys were administered to the following stakeholder groups:

- students from Grade 4 to 12 (40,459 respondents)
- families (3,724 respondents)
- staff (5,942 respondents)

In total, 50,125 respondents provided feedback through the DFS.

There were 15 open-ended questions across the three respondent groups. Students were asked four open-ended questions, staff were asked five and families were asked a total of six open-ended questions.

All stakeholders were asked:

- Is there anything you would like to share about how you (your child or family) are doing this year?
- In general, is there anything (that is being done differently this year or anything your school did differently this year) that you would like to see continue(d)?
- What are your hopes for next year?
- Do you have any additional comments?

Staff and families were asked:

- Is there anything else you would like to share about Edmonton Public Schools' pandemic safety measures?

Only families were asked:

- What additional information would have been helpful to choose between online and in-person learning?

In September 2022 Division leaders received the cleaned, open-ended raw data responses from the staff, students and families associated with their school or central decision unit. The cleaning consisted of removing people's names, and filtering out profanities. When there were fewer than six responses to a question, responses were not released in order to preserve anonymity.

Data Analysis

For the analysis of this data at the Division-level, a collaborative and iterative approach was undertaken to maximize rigour and quality in the identification of themes and findings. Due to the large volume of qualitative data, it was not feasible for all comments to be reviewed and themed. To ensure a wide range of comments were reviewed, a protocol was set in which every 20th student response and every 5th staff and family response was reviewed and themed. At least two researchers analyzed responses for each question.

The research team conducted an initial scan of the data to collaboratively cluster similar responses to each question. The identified common clusters formed a coding framework to guide the theming of the rest of the data. Periodic review and refinement of the coding framework was conducted throughout the theming process to ensure consistency across researchers and to reflect new themes as they emerged from the data.

Once theming was completed, the research team synthesized themes from across each question and stakeholder group to identify the key findings outlined in this report. This involved not only the identification of common themes across question responses and stakeholder groups but also the recognition of unique themes from particular stakeholder groups. Due to the broad nature of the open-ended questions in the DFS, common themes frequently emerged across different survey questions. As such, the report is structured based on the themes identified from the data across all questions, as opposed to being organized by themes for each question. In addition, quantitative results from the DFS have been woven throughout the report where relevant to provide further context for the qualitative findings.

WHAT WE HEARD

The nature of the open-ended questions allowed respondents to provide a variety of responses, including general comments about lived experiences, hopes for the future and specific comments pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic. Figure 1 provides an overview of the broad themes that emerged from student, family and staff responses. Each of these themes is discussed further in the sections below.

Figure 1. Overview of Broad Themes Emerging from Student, Family and Staff Open-ended Responses.



Engagement and Well-being

Figure 2a. Student quantitative responses for: How are you doing this year?

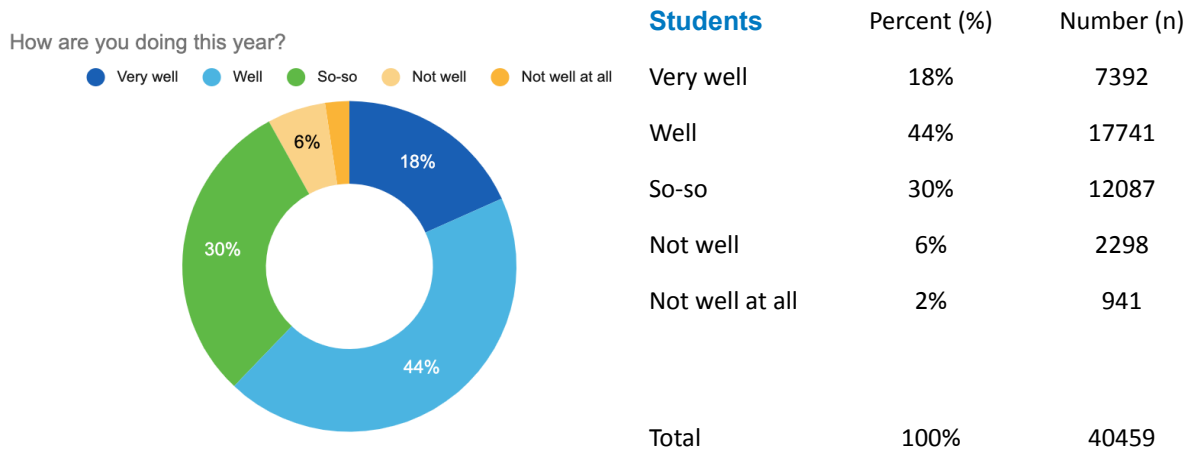


Figure 2b. Family quantitative responses for: How is your child doing this year?

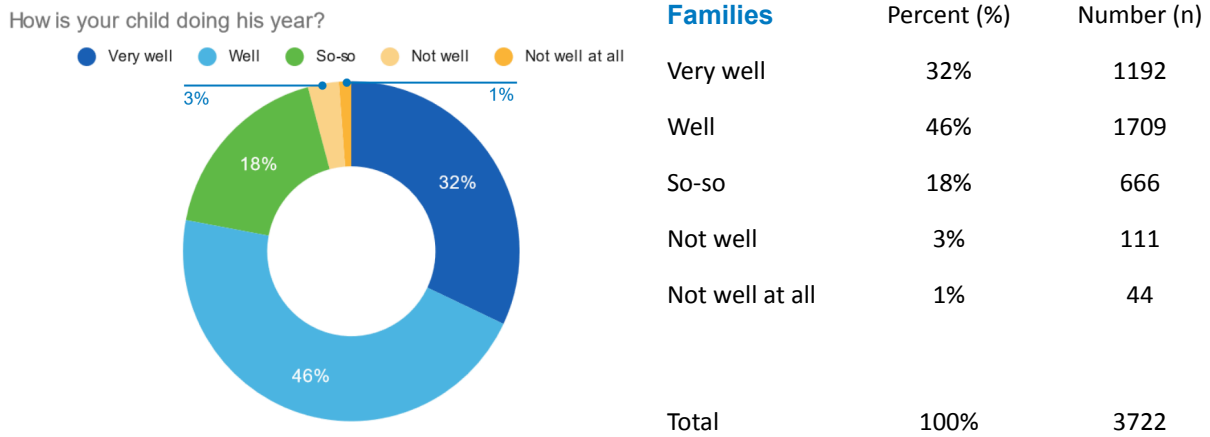
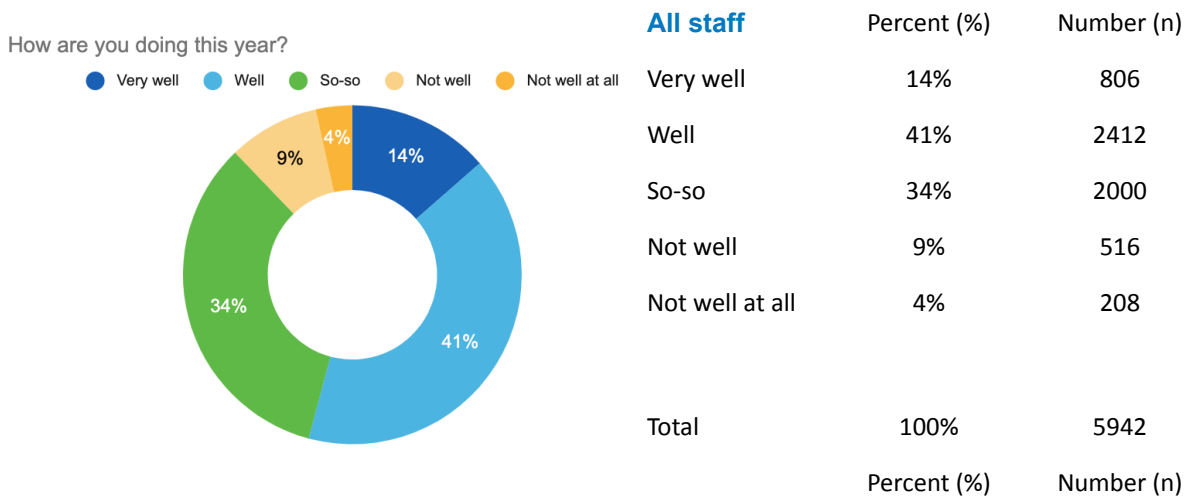
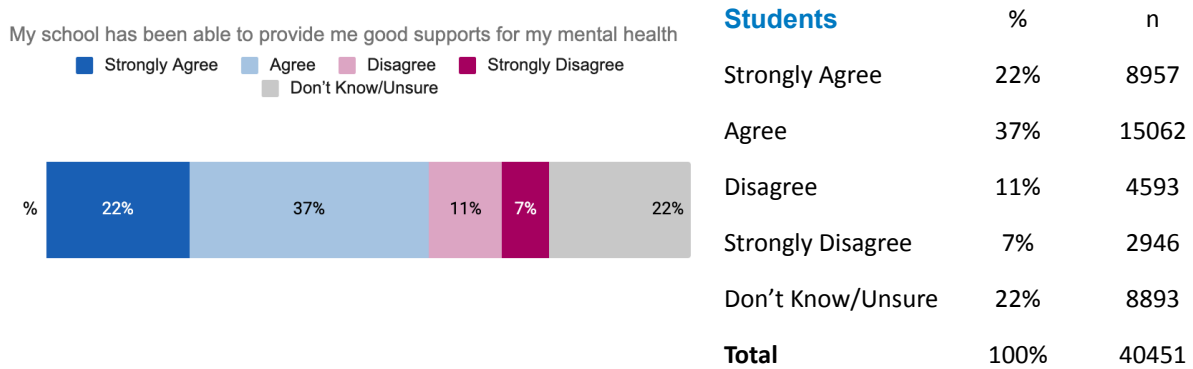


Figure 2c. Staff quantitative responses for: How are you doing this year?



Many responses from students, staff and families expressed gratitude towards the Division for the support and care shown during a school year heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents also expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share feedback and suggestions through the survey. Comments included the challenges faced during the school year because the pandemic changed and/or limited the engagement opportunities that were accessed prior to the start of the pandemic. The impact of these changes on mental health and well-being were also mentioned. Students generally commented on whether they were happy or frustrated and often tied their comments associated with well-being to the perceived strength of their friendships as well as their relationships with the adults (parents and teachers) in their lives. These responses helped to contextualize the closed-ended responses received from students (Figure 3a).

Figure 3a. Student quantitative responses for: My school has been able to provide me good supports for my mental health



Teaching Schedules

Many staff expressed feeling overwhelmed or experiencing burnout. They shared that their workload felt unmanageable without a spare or prep break. Responses which discussed teaching schedules with no prep time highlighted feelings of stress and unwellness. Lack of preparation time was a dominant theme particularly with high school staff.

Extracurriculars

Engagement was often discussed by students through the lens of extracurricular activities (e.g., the ability to join sports teams) and school events (e.g., school dances). Students expressed a desire for extracurricular opportunities to return, continue and/or expand. They wanted to form strong relationships within the school community (e.g., opportunities to make new friends). Alternatively, responses from staff often indicated feeling overwhelmed and burnt out when referencing extracurriculars. Some staff reported that extracurricular activities exacerbate staff workload, which often already included a full teaching schedule.

School Connection

Figure 4a. Student quantitative responses for: This year I am able to stay connected with other students during school

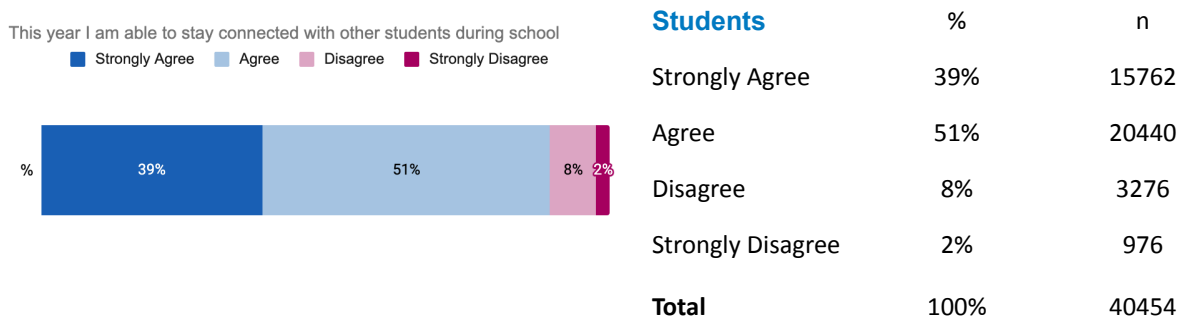


Figure 4b. Family quantitative responses for: My child had been able to build or maintain relationships with their school peers

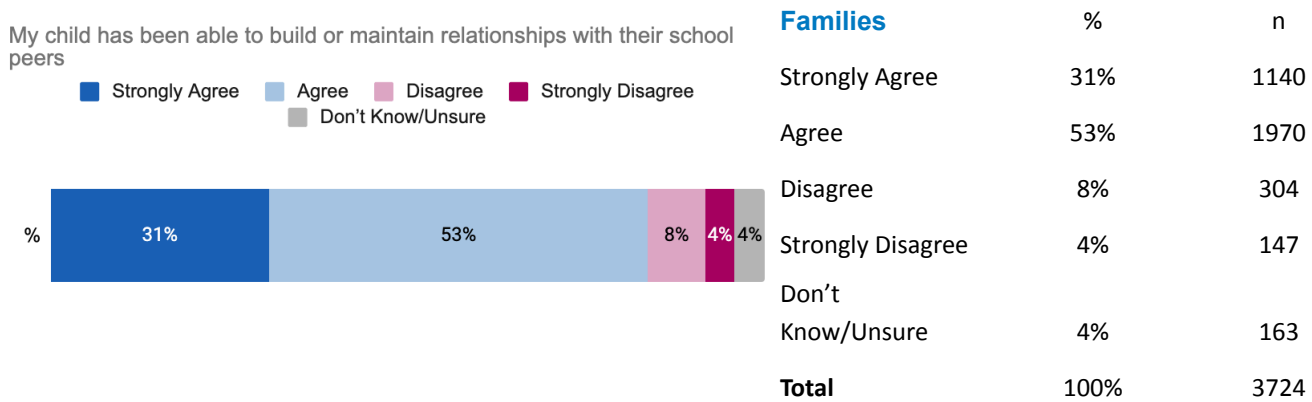
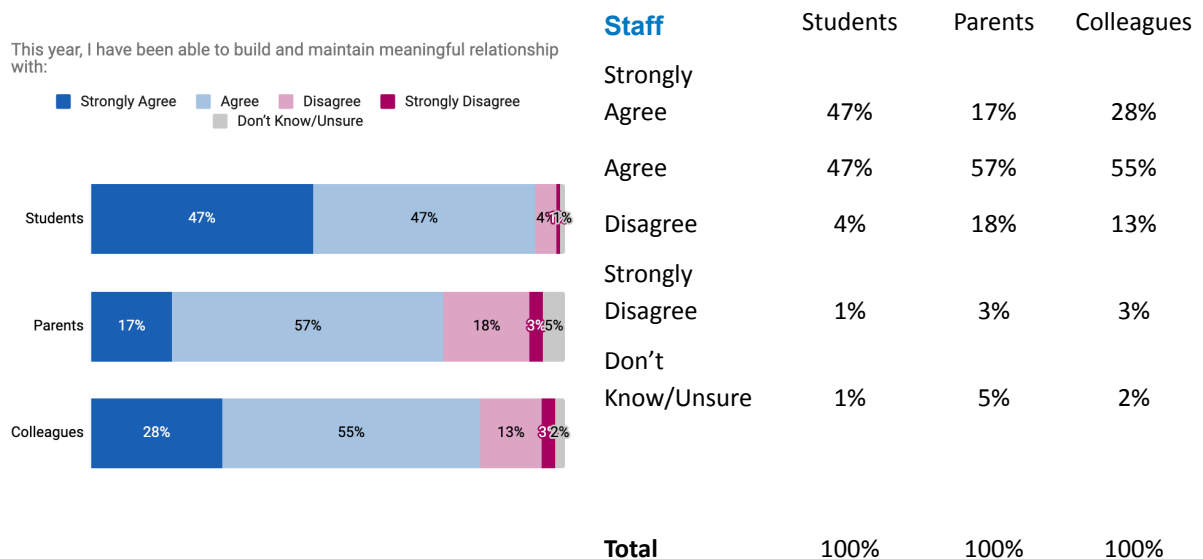


Figure 4c. Staff quantitative responses for: This year I have been able to build and maintain meaningful relationship with



Some families discussed feeling a sense of distance from the school community because pandemic measures prevented them from accessing the classroom. However, other staff and family responses expressed support for continued monitoring of visitor access. Beyond the physical isolation emerging from the pandemic, staff shared with hopes to strengthen a sense of connection by having time for

meaningful collaboration with their colleagues. On a similar note, student responses expressed a hope that they would be placed with their friends in the same classroom and/or have the opportunity to make new friends. As well, students commented on their relationships with their teachers, sharing personal stories around trust, fairness, and feeling heard in their classrooms.

Access to Resources

Figure 5a. Family quantitative responses for: My child has the supports and resources they need to be successful

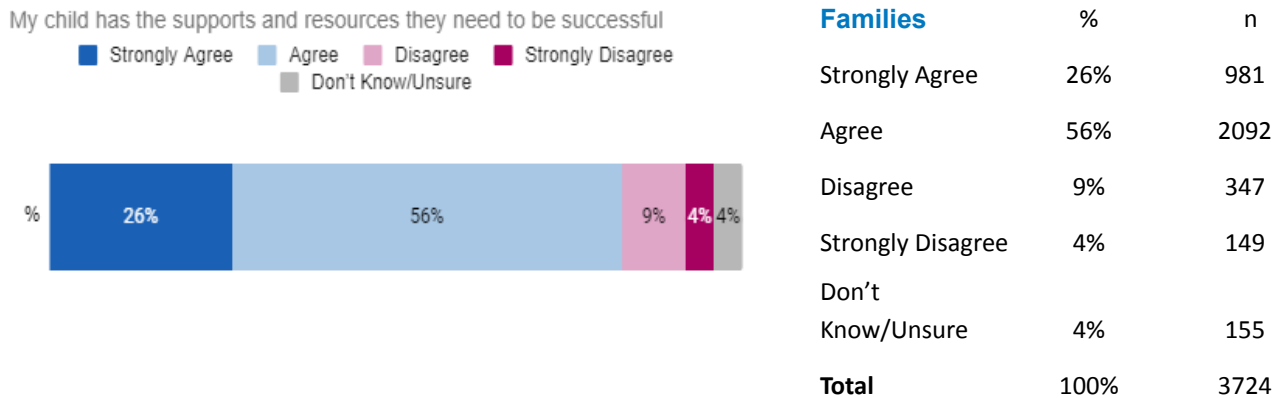
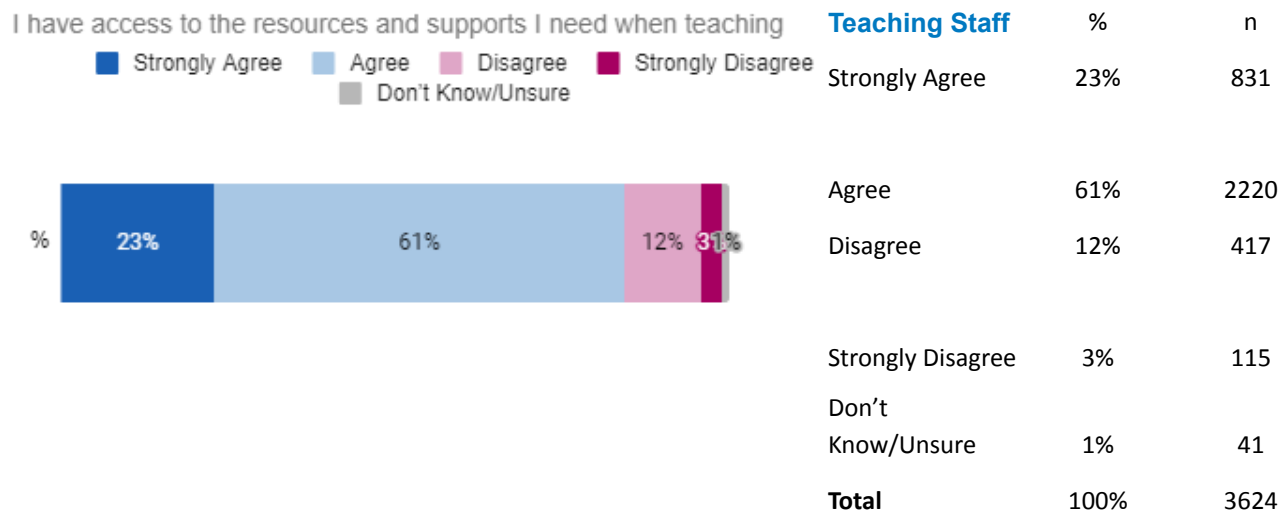


Figure 5b. Teaching staff quantitative responses for: I have access to the supports and resources I need when teaching



Staff and family quantitative responses showed that over 80% of respondents in both groups either strongly agreed or agreed that they had access to needed resources and supports. In the open-ended responses staff and family expressed the need for greater access to specialized resources in schools to support student learning, as well as to support the emotional and physical well-being of students and staff.

School Staff

Students expressed gratitude for their teachers and/or other caring adults. Additionally, they commented on challenges with homework and course material and suggested more opportunities for in-school help and tutoring. A recurring topic in staff responses was the need for support staff within the classroom (e.g., educational assistants, speech therapists, occupational health therapists) and specialized learning supports (e.g., ELL support). Challenges were often described in the context of large class sizes.

Physical resources

Staff and student responses discussed access to physical space, including access to school portables, comfortable learning spaces and additional safe spaces for students to regulate. Students also shared responses specifically related to shared lunch spaces, having access to the gym and having more opportunities to purchase food from school-run cafeterias and vending machines. Some staff and student responses also advocated for more gender neutral washrooms. Some student responses requested greater access to food (e.g., free lunches or cheaper alternatives, hot lunches).

Transportation

Some family qualitative responses shared concerns regarding inconsistent pandemic safety measures on buses as well as issues regarding pick up and drop off routines (i.e., safe zones and timing). Families shared challenges with driver shortages and expressed a need for more buses. In addition, some families shared instances of misbehaviours that occurred on buses and expressed a need for improvement around communication and coordination. Some families also reported challenges related to unreliable services, lengthy rides and long wait times due to late buses.

Anti-racism, equity and reconciliation

Equity

Some family comments expressed gratitude for the Division's effort towards anti-racism, equity and reconciliation, and shared appreciation for the representation of different cultures in the school community. As well, some students commented that they would like to see the celebration of cultural diversity continue (e.g., "diversity day"). Some staff shared their hopes for continued professional learning related to anti-racism and equity, noting that there are opportunities for more learning and teaching in this area.

Student responses related to perceived inequities, at a systemic level, centered on what they considered to be inequitable admission requirements for area schools. School calendars reflecting only Christian holidays were also viewed by some as unrepresentative. Several student and family responses

specifically advocated for the inclusion of Eid celebrations and/or the inclusion of the Eid holidays in the school calendar.

Hiring Practices

Many staff responses expressed gratitude for working in the Division, a desire to continue working for the Division and/or expressed hopes they would be able to obtain a permanent position within the Division. However, some staff also shared that greater transparency was needed for equitable hiring practices (e.g., selection of candidates) and discussed the inconsistent hiring practices they had either experienced themselves, or witnessed others experience.

Safety and Security

Figure 6a. Student quantitative responses for: I feel safe in my school

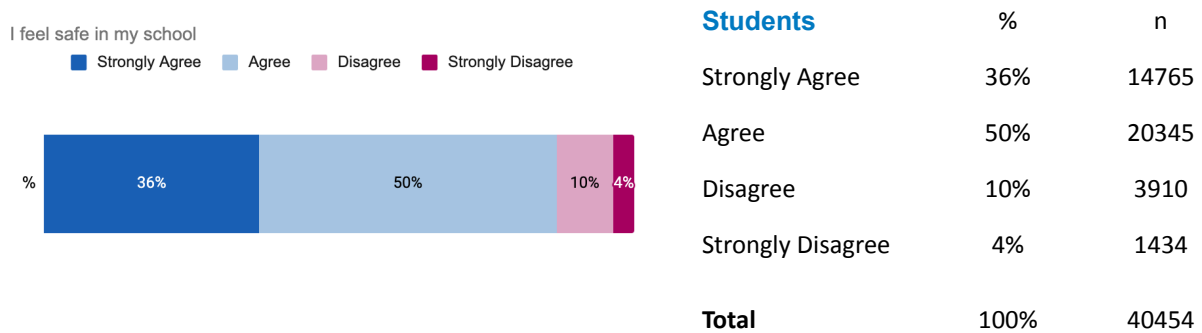
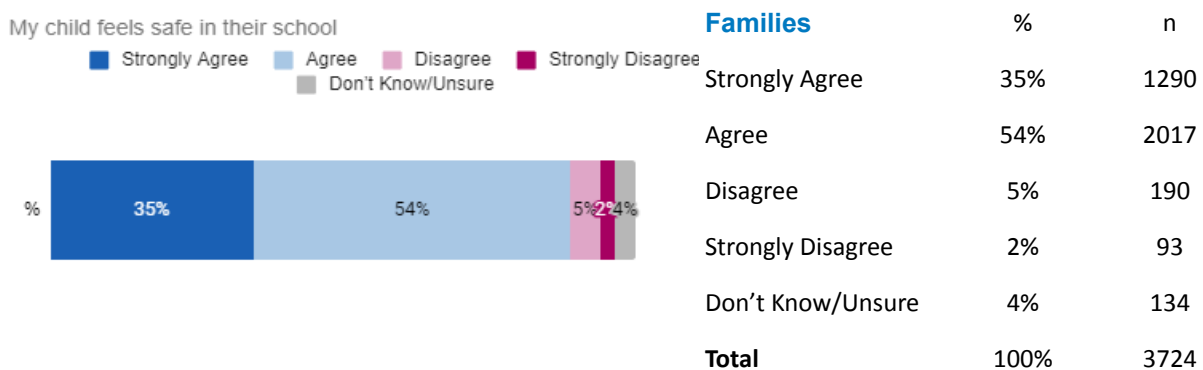


Figure 6b. Family quantitative responses for: My child feels safe in their school



In response to quantitative questions, 86% of students (Figure 6a) and 89% of families (Figure 6b) agree or strongly agree that they/their children feel safe in their school environment. Open-ended responses provide insight from families, students and staff who have identified issues with safety. Concerns were expressed regarding the frequency and severity of fighting in schools, as well as a perceived lack of

supervision. Experiences of bullying were repeatedly shared by families and students; some families and students also expressed not feeling supported when trying to address bullying incidents. Some parents commented that they appreciated online learning because their child no longer had to deal with being bullied.

Teaching and Learning

Responses from students, families and staff shared COVID-19 challenges, especially in regards to teaching schedules, classroom learning, assessments, specialized supports and/or progress reporting. While some of these responses focused on the changes that occurred as a direct result of pandemic safety measures, respondents also shared stories about general instruction and school structures that may remain past the context of the pandemic. These responses have been summarized at a high-level below.

Student learning and courses

Staff, family and student responses indicated the perception that some students are struggling to keep up with the curriculum due to pandemic related interruptions to learning. These stakeholders all indicated a need for greater academic support moving forward. Some students discussed the challenges that emerged from particular courses and expressed personal goals or hopes for improving their grades or skills in certain subjects. In addition, students shared a desire for more variety in teaching styles and ways of learning such as engaging with experiments and project work. Many student responses expressed concerns about the limited options available to them (e.g., Foods, Drama) and the desire to have the autonomy to select from a wider range of options for the term.

Assessments and reporting

Figure 7a. Student quantitative responses for: *The feedback I receive about my learning is helpful*

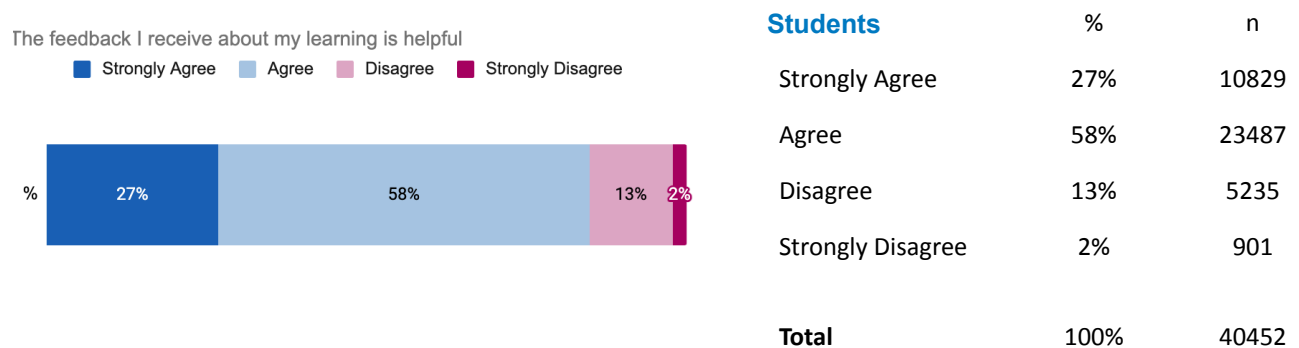


Figure 7b. Family quantitative responses for: The information I receive from my child's school tells me about their progress

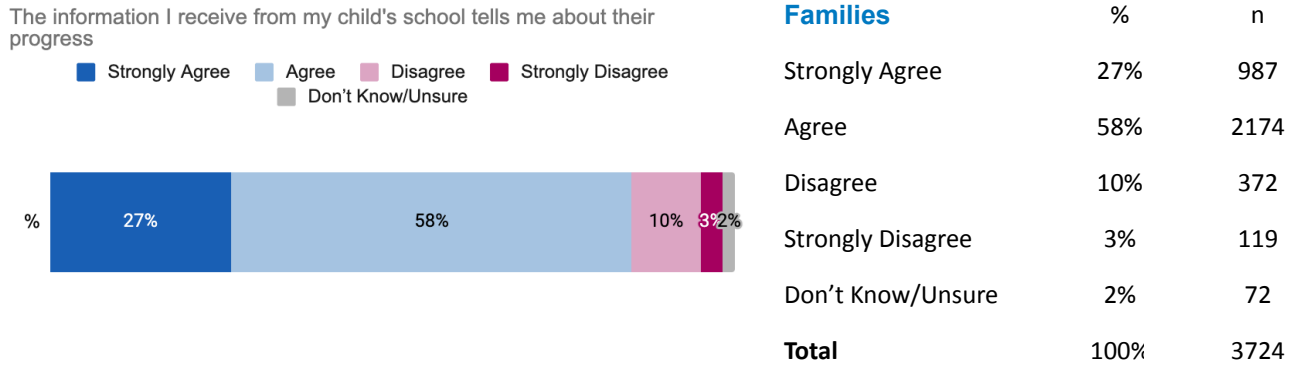
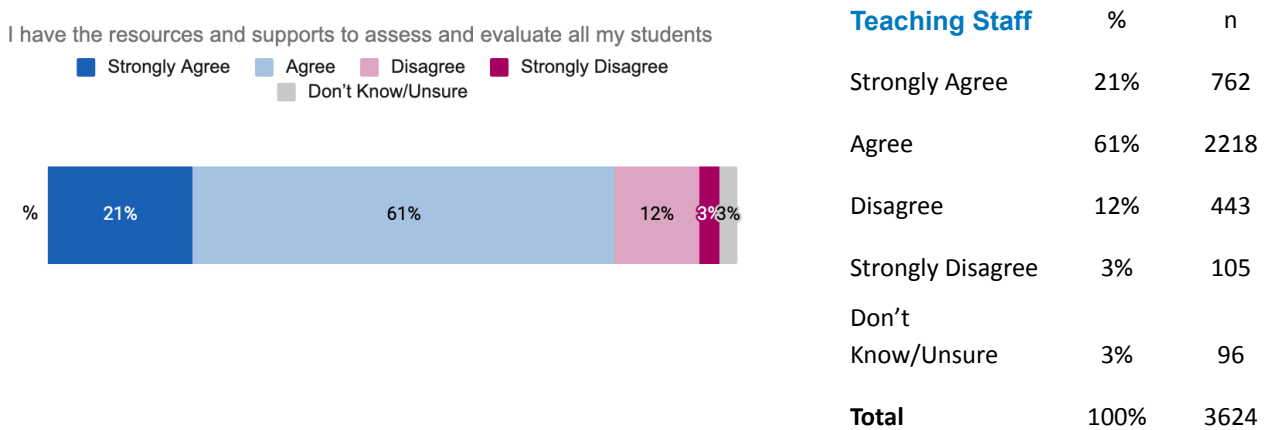


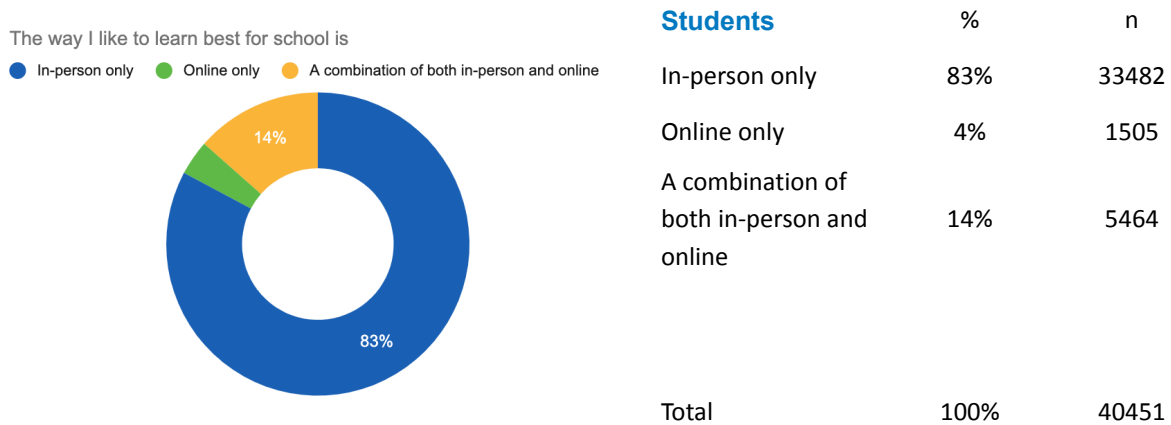
Figure 7c. Teaching staff quantitative responses for: I have the resources and supports to assess and evaluate all my students



Some open-ended responses discussed the challenges that emerged from the new quarterly schedule, especially around reporting. These concerns included difficulty with aligning the Individualized Program Plans (IPPs) with reporting periods and the frequent testing that was required. At the same time, some staff felt the shortened terms benefited student learning and were useful for reporting purposes. While it is beyond the scope of the Division, some students expressed concern regarding the inconsistent diploma examination weightings; this was specific to the optional diploma examinations made available throughout the first semester of the school year and the mandatory ten percent weighting in the second semester.

Pandemic-specific insights

Figure 8a. Student quantitative responses for: The way I like to learn best for school is



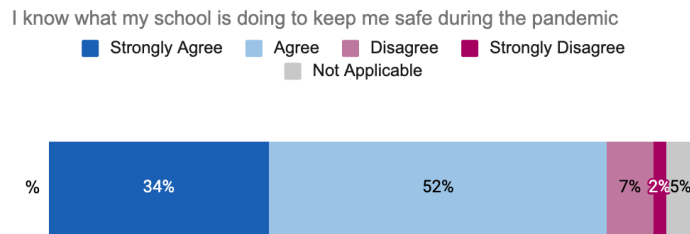
Student, staff and family responses shared a variety of personal, academic and/or professional insights that emerged from the pandemic. Many responses expressed a desire to continue new routines (e.g., cleaning and sanitizing) and flexible engagement opportunities (i.e., virtual learning and working environments). A broad overview of these themes is included below.

Flexible work arrangements and virtual opportunities

Staff, families and students expressed gratitude that virtual options were available to them. Students discussed the benefits of having virtual options for sick days and/or when collecting missed materials through Google Classroom. Staff responses expressed support for a hybrid working environment and/or work from home opportunities when feasible (e.g., teachers working from home during professional learning days) and for professional learning workshops and learning sessions to be offered virtually. Both staff and family responses expressed appreciation and support for the option to engage in parent-teacher conferences virtually.

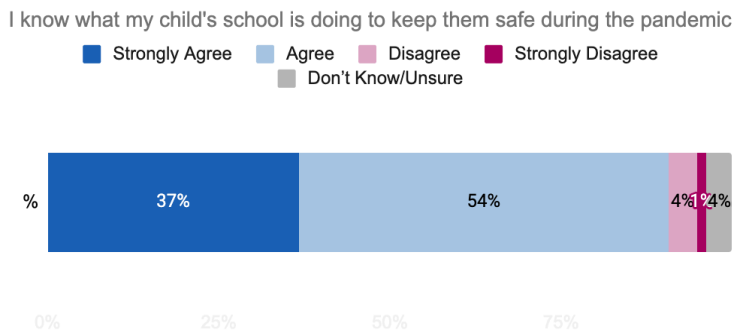
COVID-19 Protocols and health measures

Figure 9a. Student quantitative responses for: I know what my school is doing to keep me safe during the pandemic



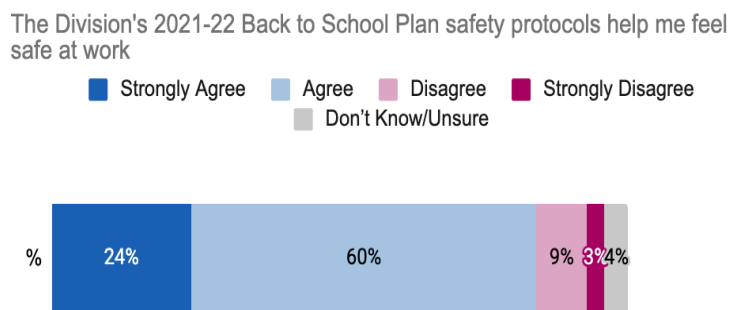
Students	%	n
Strongly Agree	34%	13789
Agree	52%	21164
Disagree	7%	2860
Strongly Disagree	2%	813
Not Applicable	5%	1828
Total	100%	40454

Figure 9b. Family quantitative responses for: I know what my child's school is doing to keep them safe during the pandemic



Families	%	n
Strongly Agree	37%	1337
Agree	54%	1967
Disagree	4%	151
Strongly Disagree	1%	51
Don't Know/Unsure	4%	138
Total	100%	3644

Figure 9c. Staff quantitative responses for: The Division's 2021-22 Back to School Plan safety protocols help me feel safe at work



Staff	%	n
Strongly Agree	24%	1405
Agree	60%	3481
Disagree	9%	507
Strongly Disagree	3%	181
Don't Know/Unsure	4%	236
Total	100%	5810

While quantitative results show positive perceptions of the measures taken to ensure cleanliness and provide physical safety in response to the COVID outbreak by the majority of respondents, there was not unanimous consensus on this topic. In open-ended responses, some respondents expressed appreciation for safety measures while some shared feelings of doubt regarding the need to cohort students and restrict movement; these concerns were often coupled with comments about the potential impacts the restrictions may have had on the mental health and well-being of students. The health measures listed below provide a broad overview of the most frequent comments around COVID-19 protocols and health measures.

- **Promotion of cleaning practices.** Some staff and students expressed their desire to continue with the thorough cleaning of common spaces such as classrooms and bathrooms.
- **Frequent use of hand sanitizer.** Student, family and staff responses expressed concern regarding the frequent use of hand sanitizers, especially in regards to skin sensitivity and irritation. Alternatively, many responses expressed support for the increased opportunities for hand-washing and sanitizing throughout the day.
- **Implementation of air filtration systems.** Some staff responses shared appreciation for the implementation of HEPA filters and supported having them in schools beyond the context of the pandemic.
- **Masking within schools.** Some staff and students felt masking requirements should be reconsidered, with some wanting masks requirements to be completely removed in schools, while others hoping that masking is optional and up to the discretion of individuals.
- **Stay-at-home expectations.** Some staff discussed the importance of continuing a “stay home” practice for anyone who is feeling ill or showing symptoms of illness. They felt a proactive approach supports the safety of both students and staff as it limits the spread of illness.

CONCLUSION

The Division Feedback Survey is one important way of engaging various key stakeholders. It is a key tool for hearing the voice of students, staff and families. While survey respondents conveyed a desire for a return to normalcy in terms of classroom instruction and school culture, the qualitative responses on the survey acknowledged the unique circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Repeatedly staff, students and families relayed that they were looking to engage positively and proactively with one another. The information gathered will be used to measure progress, reflect on what worked well in the Division’s response to the pandemic and help inform decision-making during the 2022-23 school year.

CONTACTS

For more information about this report, please contact the Strategic Division Supports Team (divisionsurvey@epsb.ca).