



SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, May 13, 2020, 7:00 pm

Zoom Meeting

		Pages
1.	Call to Order	3 mins
2.	Approval of the Agenda	2 mins
3.	Review of Special Education Advisory Committee Report	5 mins
3.1	11 March 2020	2
4.	Department Update	50 mins
4.1	Superintendent's Report	
	a. Cancellation of Summer Learning Programs	
	b. Update on Central Bargaining	
	c. Identification and Placement of Exceptional Pupils	
	d. Distribution of Special Equipment Amount (SEA) Equipment	
	e. Learning Support Services Support for Students and Educators	
	f. Results from Thoughtexchange Outreach: Feedback from Students, Parents and Community	14
	g. Mental Health Support for Students	
5.	New Business	
5.1	Current Challenges and Opportunities	25 mins
5.2	Planning for Return to School - Breakout Group Discussion	30 mins
6.	Adjournment	5 mins



SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

Wednesday, March 11, 2020

7:00 p.m.

Trustees' Committee Room

133 Greenbank Road

Ottawa, Ontario

- Members:** Christine Boothby (Trustee), Rob Campbell (Trustee), Chris Ellis (Trustee), Sonia Nadon-Campbell (Community Representative), Jim Harris (VOICE for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children), Susan Cowin (Community Representative), Rob Kirwan (Community Representative), Mark Wylie (Down Syndrome Association), Cathy Miedema (Association for Bright Children), Nicole Ullmark (Easter Seals Ontario), Dr. Maggie Mamen (Learning Disabilities Association of Ottawa-Carleton), Katie Ralph (Autism Ontario, Ottawa Chapter)
- Association Representatives (Non-Voting):** Susan Gardner (Ottawa-Carleton Elementary Teachers' Federation), Connie Allen (Professional Student Services Personnel), Nancy Dlouhy (Ottawa-Carleton Elementary Operations Committee), Jean Trant (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, SSP), Catherine Houlden (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Teachers), Daniel Bersniow-Naane (Student Senator)
- Staff and Guests:**
- Members:** Justine Bell (Trustee), Camille Williams-Taylor (Director of Education and Secretary of the Board), Mike Carson (Chief Financial Officer), Peter Symmonds (Superintendent of Learning Support Services), Christine Kessler (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Amy Hannah (System Principal Learning, Support Services), Rebecca Grandis (Senior Board Coordinator), Leigh Fenton

(Board/Committee Coordinator), Amanda Pelkola
(Board/Committee Coordinator)

1. Call to Order

Chair Nadon-Campbell called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. She acknowledged that the meeting is taking place on unceded Algonquin Territory and thanked the Algonquin people for hosting the meeting on their land.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Moved by Sue Cowin,

THAT the agenda be approved.

Mr. Kirwan requested to amend the agenda to discuss Report 20-019, Process for the Advisory Committee Review, presented at the Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting on 3 March 2020. Chair Nadon-Campbell placed this item under Review of Special Education Advisory Committee Report, item 5.4.

Moved by Sue Cowin,

THAT the agenda be approved, as amended.

Carried

3. Delegations

There were no delegations.

4. Presentations

4.1 2020-2021 Budget - SEAC's Priority Considerations

Superintendent Symmonds reported that on 8 January 2020, Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Carson attended a SEAC meeting to provide the committee with details on the process of developing the budget for 2020-2021. There are different cycles involved in budget planning and currently the Financial Services Team has provided a draft budget for academic staffing. SEAC is being consulted to examine further opportunities for support and services in special education programming.

System Principal Hannah led the presentation entitled "SEAC's Priority Considerations for the 2020-2021 OCDSB Budget". The committee was asked to anticipate key spending priorities, pair with another meeting participant to discuss opinions and share the ideas with the committee in a round table discussion.

When the committee convened, the following perspectives were shared:

- The focus in the classroom should be on educational support rather than behavioural support. More training is required to guide students and provide effective and structured learnings. Spending priorities should assume increased resources for the educational support of students;
- Develop overarching goals to address behavioural issues;
- There is a requirement for more assistive technology support training for students, parents and staff;
- There is a need for additional Educational Assistants (EAs). The inability to attract teaching professionals requires a compensation review. Appropriate salary increases will make these roles more attractive;
- There is a goal to provide parent education, engagement and empowerment to clarify the purpose of the Individual Education Plan (IEP);
- There is a need for additional support to assist in the transitioning of students, especially those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The implementation of a job shadowing/coaching program was suggested;
- When children are transitioning from elementary school to secondary school, some teachers are having issues servicing the needs of these students. Ideally resources could be allocated to allow for training in new school environments. It was suggested that the Designated Occasional Teacher (DOT) initiative could assist in these transitions;
- Formalize the process for knowledge transfers during succession planning;
- Access to interventions is not standardized across the District. More resources should be allocated for a standardization process;
- Measures need to be taken to ensure that students who have extended needs are assimilated and engaged;
- Set aside resources to implement the recommendations from the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Right to Read report;
- Hire full-time "mobile" EAs to work in different classrooms, akin to the DOT system;
- There is a need for staff working with junior and senior kindergarten students to receive professional development to identify the early signs of extended educational needs in children;
- Equity to Access is required across the district. There is a specific need to increase staff and specialized programs in rural communities to ensure that all students have the essential resources they require to succeed;
- The capacity needs to be available to build reliable metrics and to perform preliminary assessments of extended educational needs in children. Children become disengaged when the testing lead time is extensive;
- There is a need to promote programs and provide more training to parents whose extended need children are moving onto post-secondary opportunities to advise them of options, such as Storefront; and
- Strike a Mental Health and Well-being Committee

Peter Symmonds thanked CFO Carson for attending and listening to the concerns of the members of SEAC.

5. Review of Special Education Advisory Committee Report

5.1 12 February 2020

Moved by Jim Harris,

THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee report dated 12 February 2020 be received.

Carried

5.2 Review of Long Range Agenda

The long range agenda was provided for review.

As part of business arising from the minutes of 8 January 2020, Mr. Kirwan requested a further discussion period on the topic of transition with respect to a draft document entitled, "Provincial Transition Planning Framework - Transitional Planning for Young People with Developmental Disabilities" published in 2011 by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) and the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) to improve transition planning by better defining responsibilities. Chair Nadon-Campbell responded that placement of these subjects on a future SEAC agenda will be discussed at the upcoming agenda planning session and added that currently the item is listed under 'ongoing' on the long term agenda.

Under 'upcoming items', the committee requested the "Recommendations of the OCDSB Special Education Policy Ad Hoc Committee" be re-circulated for review.

Trustee Boothby inquired about the ability to track decommissioned body break rooms in schools and suggested that this item be added to an upcoming agenda in a meeting with all school principals. Superintendent Symmonds responded that he will approach the Planning Department to decide on ways to report on body break room usage.

Superintendent Symmonds noted that The Ontario Human Rights Commission's Right to Read Inquiry will remain on the long term agenda in anticipation of the formal report containing direction from the Ministry.

5.3 Motion/Action Tracking Report, Business Arising

The motion/action tracking report was provided for information.

5.4 Process for the Advisory Committee Review

Superintendent Symmonds reported that at the Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting on 3 March 2020, staff presented Report 20-019, Process for Advisory

Committee Review, outlining the process for a review and analysis of the District's advisory committees and their role in effective decision-making and community engagement. The following propositions were approved for recommendation to the Board of Trustees in the meeting of 31 March 2020:

- A review of Ottawa-Carleton District School Board advisory committees be undertaken;
- An ad hoc Advisory Committee Review Panel be established with a mandate to manage the advisory committee review process; and
- Two trustees be appointed to the Advisory Committee Review Panel: one trustee to act as the Chair of the Advisory Committee Review Panel and a second trustee as a member of the Advisory Committee Review Panel.

He explained the scope of the review will include gathering information on the current structures and processes within both the two statutory committees: The Special Education Advisory Committee and the Parent Involvement Committee. The following five special purpose advisory committees will also be a part of the review: Advisory Committee on Extended Day and Child Care Programs, Advisory Committee on the Arts, Alternative School Advisory Committee, Advisory Committee on Equity and Indigenous Education Advisory Council. The staff report did not specify that a final findings document be presented in October; however, there was an expectation that a progress report would be provided to COW in October 2020 and a final report at a later date. Superintendent Symmonds noted that prior to Report 20-019 being presented at COW, Manager Guthrie of Board Services contacted the Chairs of committees to advise them of the coming report and that it was likely that a panel would convene involving their membership for the proposed governance review.

Mr. Kirwan stated that SEAC members had not seen the report in advance of the presentation to COW, highlighting that SEAC is a committee regulated by government legislation. He expressed the view that though the review was necessary, SEAC should have been consulted. Superintendent Symmonds maintained that the goal of the review is to help support committees in their advisory roles to the board. When and if the ad hoc committee is established through Board approval on 31 March 2020, more information will be provided to SEAC and the other specified committees.

Report 20-019 will be provided to the members and that advisory committee review would be added to the SEAC agenda of 8 April 2020.

7. Action/Discussion/Information Items

Memo 20-003, Elementary Students with Individual Education Plans by Program

Your committee had before it Memo 20-003, Elementary Students with Individual Education Plans by Program, providing information regarding students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) stemming from Report 19-109, Status of the English with Core French Program.

Superintendent Symmonds noted that the data in the report included elementary students with an IEP who are part of the regular program. The report did not include the following students:

- those in a fully self-contained or partially integrated specialized program classes;
- those enrolled in a specialized program school (i.e. Clifford Bowey Public School or Crystal Bay Centre for Special Education); and
- students identified with Giftedness through an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC), regardless of placement.

In response to questions, the following points were raised:

- There is a high level of enrollment of students who have IEPs in the alternative schools across the District. It was suggested that further exploration is required for reasons the alternative way of learning is more appealing to parents whose children learn with an IEP;
- Ms. Allen shared the observation that in the French Immersion program the majority of IEPs are accommodated without the requirement of an Education Assistant (EA) in the classroom for safety reasons. The French Immersion programs do not require EAs, however the English programs prove to be more service intensive;
- Ms. Holden requested data on the number of secondary students with an IEP in academic classes be compiled and circulated. She suggested that this may be deduced from students attending adult high school who worked with an IEP and continue to show low levels of success. Superintendent Symmonds indicated that data could be collected from credit accumulation in the secondary grades;
- Dr. Mamen inquired whether statistics are collected for each student with an IEP who was placed by IPRC. She is interested in the comparisons between French immersion and the English program. Superintendent Symmonds noted this data would not be readily available but that this request would be reviewed. It was noted that approximately two thirds of children did not undergo an IPRC but have been provided with an IEP. In

- dual track schools, it is difficult to determine which students are enrolled in French or English programs due to how the information is captured;
- Superintendent Symmonds noted that it is a parent's right to request an IPRC;
 - Student Senator Bersyniow-Naane requested more information in regard to the manner in which the teacher becomes informed about a student's IEP and inquired who has the responsibility to ensure an IEP is being followed. Superintendent Symmonds explained that transition meetings occur in the spring of each year and the IEP information is communicated. Learning Support Teachers (LSTs) track each of the students to highlight their needs at the start of the school year. There is a thirty-day window in the fall for students enrolled in a special education program to have an IEP created and developed. In a secondary school setting, often an LST will visit the school and learn about these students in a formal way. The school is responsible to provide the supports outlined in the IEPs but students are encouraged to be their own advocates; and
 - Ms. Houlden noted that class lists identify students who have an IEP, and those students who have assistive technology needs.

7.2 Memo 20-026, Learning Support Services Operational Review Update

Your committee had before it Memo 20-026, Learning Support Services Operational Review which provided an update to trustees regarding the motion passed by the Board on 30 October 2018 where LSS was directed to undertake an operational review of the process for identification, needs assessment (including the use of tiered interventions as a support for all students, and as identification and placement evidence), and placement for all exceptionalities.

Superintendent Symmonds reported that the District has contracted external consultants, Optimus SBR, to undertake a series of eleven focus groups with stakeholders were scheduled for the week of 30 March 2020 but due to current labour sanctions, they cannot proceed at this time. Revised timelines have yet to be scheduled.

Ms. Miedema inquired about the number of parents the District plans to invite to complete the survey. Superintendent Symmonds replied that parents of students with an IEP will be notified of the formation of focus groups and participants will be randomly selected to gather in groups of 30 to 40 people.

Ms. Allen stated that many students have yet to receive LSS services and remain on the waiting list for assessments. She added, many special education resources are funneled to students who have had their needs identified through an IRPC or were informally identified as needing support. She asked that the groups surveyed incorporate a cross-section of parents whose children are waiting for services.

7.3 Memo 20-027, Specialized Program Class Planning 2020-2021

Your committee had before it Memo 20-027, Specialized Program Class Planning 2020-2021 to provide support to the proposed changes to specialized program classes as outlined in Report 20-024, Academic Staffing for 2020-2021.

Superintendent Symmonds clarified that the budgetary forecasts and the timeline for assessing student needs are not aligned. To help with class planning LSS makes requests to school staff for predictions on the number of referrals and where the students are being transferred from.

During the presentation and in response to questions, the following points were noted:

- The District currently operates 34 specialized program classes at the elementary level for Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD);
- There is a proposal for an additional 3 elementary ASD classes. These are noted as contingency staffing, as the need had not been confirmed;
- The District is experiencing issues accommodating the need for specialized program classes since many schools are fully occupied. This could become additionally problematic when students currently in elementary school transition to secondary school given that we have such a large number of specialized program classes at the elementary level. The schools that have capacity in the District are not necessarily in close proximity to all students. Options are being considered to remedy this issue;
- It was noted that the geographic model was created to ensure that special needs students feel a sense of belonging to their community;
- A secondary Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing (D/HH Program) program has been added and staffed by an elementary central position. The elementary FTE is being moved to be reflected as a secondary FTE;
- The DHH classes will be unaffected but there is an increase of 0.33 FTE to account for preparation time;
- Preparation time reflects an increase from 2.33 FTE to 2.66 FTE. The increase accounts for the salary differences in the secondary school;
- Alternative ways to support Learning Disability Specialized Intervention Program (LD SIP) are being explored;
- A Transition Coordinator role is under consideration;
- It was noted that Professional Student Services Personnel (PSSP) should be considered when adding new classes. Analyzing whether the full suite of assessments are necessary and whether a truncated list of sub-tests can be performed was recommended to address timeliness in assessment;
- Demands on support staff are having an effect on attrition;
- Ms. Miedema expressed disappointment on behalf of the Association for Bright Children of Ontario around the closing of two additional gifted classes and the fact that only one school remains serving grades 1 to 4. An investigation into the

reason behind drastically reducing gifted programs was requested. She maintained that there is a demand for gifted learning however parents are not fully aware of the program's availability.

7.4 Memo 20-029, Update to Storefront Program

Your committee had before it Memo 20-029, Update to Storefront Program providing further data on the status of the program. The memo acknowledged the gap in transition supports for many students with developmental disabilities as they transition out of the public education system the year in which they turn 21 years of age. After students reach the age of 21, guidance on pathways can be complex and it is clear that students and families benefit from increased levels of support.

Superintendent Symmonds reported that he and Director Williams-Taylor visited the Storefront site to interact with the young adults in the program to gather more information on their experiences and learning.

Trustee Ellis commented that there is evidence that the program is helpful in finding employment placement in the workplace for young adults in the program. He requested that in a future update more information be shared concerning the success stories from Storefront. For example, he attended Storefront's 30th anniversary celebration and he met a first-year Storefront graduate who is still working at MacDonal'd's where he earned a job upon graduation.

Superintendent Symmonds referred to undertaking a deeper exploration of transition needs and this is part of the work LSS intends to accomplish with the support of a transition coordinator.

8. Department Update

8.1 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Symmonds reported on the following items briefly:

- The Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO) has returned to the bargaining table. Further, the Ontario Education Minister Stephen Lecce has made a number of concessions, including changing the government's position on higher class sizes and mandatory e-learning for students. Students can now opt out of e-learning courses. Staff are hopeful for a resolution.;
- The public hearing on OHRC's Right to Read was held in Ottawa on 10 March 2020. Superintendent Symmonds and the LSS team along with central OCDSB departments including Program and Learning, Research, Evaluation and Analytics Division (READ) and the LSS team met with the Right to Read Inquiry team to review the submission that LSS had prepared and submitted as requested. He reported on some of emerging themes in the public hearing: the need for evidence based intervention, the benefits of the Empower

- program and parent testimonials of success using these resources, early screening and identification for students with learning needs, pre-service training standards to be examined to ensure a properly equipped teaching workforce, delivering support to on-the-job teachers, and private assessments. Recommendations are due to be presented in the fall of 2020 for the District to consider. The report will be included in a SEAC agenda package as it is made available; and
- The OHRC continues to conduct a survey to support the Right to Read inquiry and it is open until 15 May 2020. This survey will help them to understand and report on the experiences of students with reading disabilities in Ontario public schools as part of assessing whether they have meaningful access to education as required by the Ontario *Human Rights Code* (*Code*).

Dr. Mamen requested that a copy of the LSS written submission be forwarded to her in order to share the perspective with the Learning Disabilities Association of Ottawa-Carleton. Superintendent Symmonds was unsure if the document was available in format that was suited to being shared however he would attempt to extract an accessible version as LDAO would require the information within days to meet their deadline for submission.

Dr. Mamen noted that Decoding Dyslexia Ontario was present at the public hearing and she said that although dyslexia is prevalent it is not a diagnosis but rather a descriptor of a type of reading disability.

8.2 Special Education Plan (Standards)

a. Special Education Placements Provided by the OCDSB (Perusal)

System Principal Hannah reported that the special education placements by the District are updated annually based on the allocation of specialized program classes or sections. Different from elementary school where students attend one classroom in general, in secondary school, students are provided with eight sections of time within a year to attend a class.

System Principal Hannah highlighted that on folio 80 under "Student Program Placement Options" describes the LSS service delivery model and this section of the standard will be updated to provide greater clarity to families to foster a better understanding on the areas of placement mandated by the Ministry.

System Principal Hannah advised that the LSS team is finalizing the revisions from consultations. The 2019-2020 Special Education Plan will be a part of the SEAC agenda package in June for a motion to recommend to the Board. By the end of July the plan will be submitted to the Ministry of Education.

9. Committee Reports

9.1 Advisory Committee on Equity

Ms. Cowin reported that the Advisory Committee on Equity meeting of 27 February 2020 was cancelled due to inclement weather.

9.2 Parent Involvement Committee

Ms. Mamen reviewed the agenda of the Parent Involvement Committee meeting of 19 February 2020, however there were no items that pertained to SEAC specifically.

9.3 Board

There was no report on the Board.

9.4 Committee of the Whole

Mr. Kirwan noted that the Committee of the Whole discussion pertaining to SEAC on the Advisory Committee Review was reviewed earlier in the meeting.

9.5 Extended Day Program

Mr. Harris read an email from the SEAC representative on the Extended Day Program, Mr. Warner, who reported that his conversations with staff at the City of Ottawa regarding improvements to Extended Day Programs in Ottawa were promising.

10. New Business

Mr. Harris recognized that many discussions at SEAC involve the Clifford Bowey Public School and the Crystal Bay Centre for Special Education. As a member of the committee, he has not been exposed to the challenges and requirements within these schools. He showed a strong interest in arranging an after-hours site visit or alternatively to host a SEAC meeting at either of the schools. He encouraged the members to connect with him should they be interested in the proposal. Ms. Trant noted that much of the context is lost when the classes are not in session. Superintendent Symmonds suggested a visual connection to the physical layout of these buildings and the gymnasium would be beneficial. Chair Nadon-Campbell submitted that perhaps the principal can be approached to deliver a presentation to SEAC in advance of a tour.

11. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:21 p.m.

Sonia Nadon-Campbell, Chair, Special Education Advisory Committee

**BOARD****28 April 2020****Report No. 20-044****Results from Thoughtexchange: Students, Parents and Community**Key Contact: Michele Giroux, Executive Officer, michele.giroux@ocdsb.ca**PURPOSE:**


1. To better understand the experiences of students and parents with learning at home. We asked about challenges, success, questions and/or suggestions. Through a review of the feedback gathered, we can continue to tailor supports for families and make informed decisions as we navigate next steps.


SUPPORTING OUR STRATEGIC PLAN:


2. Through a Thoughtexchange, we elicited student and parent voice to help shape learning at home. By engaging with our stakeholders, and placing strong value the feedback received, we are continuing our work in building a Culture of Caring and a Culture of Social Responsibility. In addition, through thoughtful consideration of the feedback received, we adapt to the situation and modernize practices to continue building a Culture of Innovation during this unique time.

CONTEXT:

3. OCDSB parents, students, and community members were invited to participate in an online conversation through the interactive insight platform *Thoughtexchange™*. The exchange was sent via email to all parents with an email address on file, students in grades 7 to 12, and members of OCDSB Advisory Committees. Notice of the exchange was also posted to the OCDSB website and shared on social media. The exchange ran from Thursday, April 9 to midnight on Thursday, April 16. Participation in Thoughtexchange is a three-step process, where participants are asked to:

 **Share thoughts:** Participants respond to an open-ended question. They can share as many thoughts as they like, but each thought must be concise so that it is focused on a particular idea. All thoughts are shared with other participants, exactly as they are entered.

 **Star points of view:** Participants are asked to review the thoughts of others and rate them based on how much they agree (5 stars) or disagree (1 star). This helps to identify the ideas that are most important to the group.

 **Discover what matters:** Participants have the opportunity to learn about the group's shared values and priorities. They can view all thoughts, sorted by

overall rating, as well as 'hot topics' which capture different ideas that were rated highly by the group.

These three steps happen simultaneously, so participants are encouraged to check back in throughout an exchange to continue the conversation as others make contributions. During an exchange, a moderator frequently reviews thoughts to ensure the conversation remains respectful and does not include information that might identify individuals.

4. For this particular exchange, participants were divided into 5 groups based on whether they were a: (i) student in grade 7-8; (ii) student in grade 9-12; (iii) parent/guardian of a student in grade K-8; (iv) parent/guardian of a student in grade 9-12; or (v) community member/member of an Advisory Committee. Recognizing the unique needs and roles of those individuals, this allowed the conversations to focus on solutions and strategies tailored to that specific group. Those who belonged to multiple groups were invited to participate in each relevant conversation. All participants were asked the same question:
 - As we continue with learning at home, what are your challenges, successes, questions, and/or suggestions?

The feedback received is useful for consideration within the separate groups and across all participants as a whole.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

5. Through the share and star phases, we had 7021 participants share 8902 thoughts and assign 169,803 star ratings. On Friday, April 17 we were able to communicate key ideas with participants and direct them to the Discover webpages to explore the results. This timely response to the exchange demonstrated recognition of the importance of the feedback received.
6. Through the exchange, we heard a variety of insights. Appendix A provides an overview of key themes that emerged. Among the top rated themes, we heard about the following:

Challenges:

- Balancing Learn At Home with work, family obligations, life stresses, health concerns, etc.;
- Managing the volume of work and the need for more consistency;
- Staying focused and motivated while at home;
- Accessing technology;
- Missing contact from school and finding online learning difficult;
- Managing stress and anxiety during this difficult time;
- Practicing French in an Anglophone home;
- Ensuring equity for those with special needs;

Suggestions:

- More teacher-led learning;
- A more streamlined and unified approach to use of online platforms and resources;
- More consistent and clearer instructions to students and parents;

Questions:

- Need more clarity on assignments, assessment, and evaluation, particularly on how marks will be calculated and what will happen with exams;
- Seeking information about graduation and post-secondary plans;
- How to support hands-on learning such as science labs, art, shop class, etc.

Successes:

- Praise and appreciation for teachers and principals.

7. Further exploration of *All Thoughts*, *Top Thoughts*, and *Hot Topics* is accessible to the public through Discover webpages:
- [Students in Grades 7-8](#)
 - [Students in Grades 9-12](#)
 - [Parents/Guardians of Students in Kindergarten-Grade 8](#)
 - [Parents/Guardians of Students in Grades 9-12](#)
 - [Community/Members of Advisory Committee Meetings](#)

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

8. The use of Thoughtexchange™ as a platform was available under an existing contract with the OCDSB and so there was no additional financial cost at this time. The most significant resource for conducting this exchange was staff time, which is accounted for under existing portfolios.

The feedback received highlights necessary investments for supporting OCDSB families during the closure and transitioning back to school (whenever that may be). The insights gathered can be used to guide allocation and distribution of resources.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

9. This report provides an important summary of various experiences with learning at home. These results are being used to inform next steps. The results found in Appendix A have also been shared with the community and posted to the OCDSB website.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How can we respond to the key themes that emerged?
- What are the actionable items that we can address immediately vs. short-term vs. long-term?
- How do we demonstrate to participants that they were heard?

- How will we use this information to inform ongoing discussions?
- How can we continue to monitor student and parent/guardian experiences?

Michele Giroux
Executive Officer

Camille Williams-Taylor
Director of Education and
Secretary of the Board

Thoughtexchange™ Results


We asked students, parents/guardians, and community members:


As we continue with learning at home, what are your challenges, successes, questions, and/or suggestions?

How it works:


Participation in Thoughtexchange is a three-step process, where participants were asked to:


 Share thoughts: Participants responded to with their experiences. All thoughts were shared with other participants, exactly as they were entered.

 Star points of view: Participants were asked to review the thoughts of others and rate them based on how much they agree (5 stars) or disagree (1 star). This helped to identify the ideas that are most important to the group.

 Discover what matters: Participants have the opportunity to learn about the group's shared values and priorities. Even those who didn't participate in the previous steps can view the thoughts, sorted by overall rating, as well as 'hot topics' which capture different ideas that were rated highly by the group.

Participation Rate during Share and Star:

 7012 Participants

 8902 Thoughts Shared

 169,803 Star Ratings Assigned

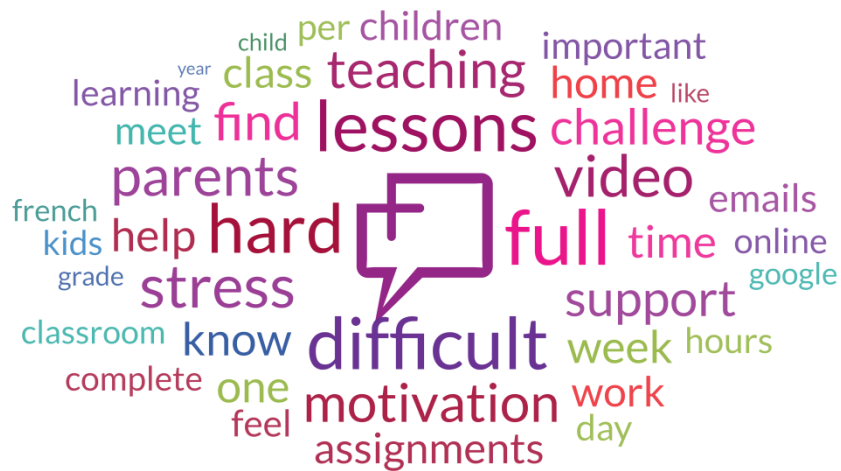
	Students 7-8	Students 9-12	Parents K-8	Parents 9-12	Community
Participants	774	2304	3162	731	41
Thoughts Shared	635	1923	5061	1260	23
Ratings Assigned	11,416	41,354	92,770	24,211	52

The Discover phase is ongoing, where feedback can be explored using the links below:

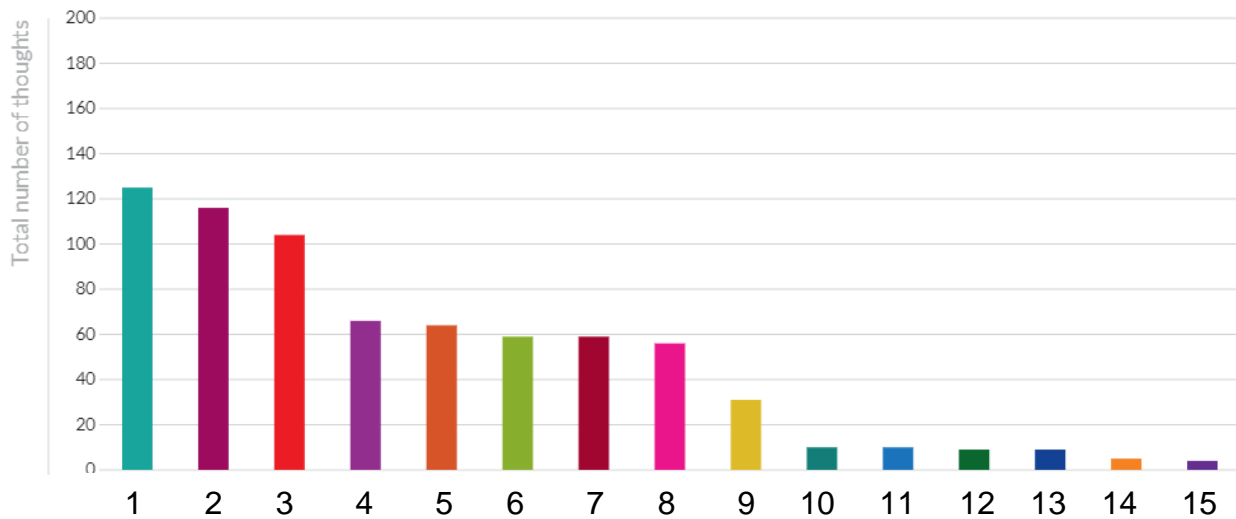
- [Students in Grades 7-8](#)
- [Students in Grades 9-12](#)
- [Parents/Guardians of Students in Kindergarten-Grade 8](#)
- [Parents/Guardians of Students in Grades 9-12](#)
- [Community/Members of Advisory Committee Meetings](#)

Thoughtexchange™ Results

What We Heard:



Common Themes, among thoughts rated 4.0+:



- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 – Family Stress/Life Balance | 9 – Stress/Anxiety |
| 2 – Hours/Volume of Work/Consistency | 10 – Equity |
| 3 – Need Teacher-Led Learning | 11 – Graduation/Post-Secondary |
| 4 – Hard to Focus/Be Motivated | 12 – Access to Technology |
| 5 – Online Platforms/Resources | 13 – French Immersion |
| 6 – Assignments/Evaluation | 14 – Positive/Successes |
| 7 – Need Contact/Online is Difficult | 15 – Hands-On |
| 8 – Need Instructions/Communication | |

Thoughtexchange™ Results

Family Stress/Life Balance

- Parents/guardians are finding it challenging to support their children while working from home or working essential jobs;
- Students are finding it challenging doing school work in a pandemic with part-time jobs and other responsibilities (i.e., helping with siblings);
- Both groups are busy caring for sick loved ones.

Hours/Volume of Work/Consistency

- Reports that the workload is too heavy, beyond the recommended hours;
- Teachers are inconsistent in their approach, classes/meetings scheduled at conflicting times;
- Desire for work to be staggered with longer deadlines; multiple suggestions for work to be communicated on Fridays with the weekend to prepare and then one week to complete.

Need Teacher-Led Learning

- Want video lessons with face-to-face teaching; if live, include the option to record for students who need flexibility;
- Requesting more interaction from teachers and/or virtual classroom;
- Reports of too much 'busy work' being assigned without enough teaching;
- Parents/guardians don't feel equipped to take on the role of the teacher.

Hard to Focus/Be Motivated

- Students find it very difficult to stay focused, motivated, and productive while at home;
- Lack of routine and distractions at home are challenging;
- Hard to be productive with the delay in responses to questions;
- Seeking meaningful and engaging work.

Online Platforms/Resources

- Multiple platforms/tools/accounts/passwords are creating significant frustration; requests for consistency and a single host platform;
- Frustration with the limited parent access to google classroom (parents want the student view);
- All online meetings should be recorded so students can watch again/at a different time;
- Too many online resources to navigate and determine what is useful.

Assignments/Evaluation

- Looking for further clarity, with examples, on how marks will be calculated (and more reassurance that marks will not go down);
- Questions about what will happen with final exams/summatives; concern that exams would be unfair; requests to cancel exams;
- Requests for marks to be pass/fail was met with mixed ratings;
- Group work is particularly challenging.

Need Contact/Online is Difficult

- Students miss being at school, seeing classmates and teachers; want to feel connected to school community;
- Concerns about too much screen time;
- Online learning is difficult; students are not truly learning by reading texts/slides; miss opportunities for clarification;
- It's motivating when teachers comment on work and give feedback.

Thoughtexchange™ Results

Need Clear Instructions/Communication

- Students and parents are seeking clarity on what students are supposed to be doing;
- Parents want to be copied in on communication to students so that they are in the loop, even for high school students;
- Communication needs to be streamlined, more consistent between teachers, in one place, and with concise, easy-to-follow instructions.

Stress/Anxiety

- Challenging for those with pre-existing mental health issues;
- Impact on everyone's mental health;
- Feeling stressed, lost, paranoid, frustrated, anxious, depressed, etc.

Equity

- Need help for students with Individual Education Plans;
- Concern for those in unsafe environments;
- Concern that the system rewards parents' abilities to teach and be organized, or a child's ability to access devices;
- Concern for English Language Learners.

Graduation/Post-Secondary

- Grade 12s are happy with the decision that marks will not decrease, but are feeling anxious and uncertain about the future (acceptances, scholarships, summer work).
- Seeking support from guidance counselors;
- Concerns about lacking knowledge that is needed for university courses (or next grade);
- Looking for more communication specific to grade 12s.

Access to Technology

- Allow flexibility in submitting work (e.g., photos of handwritten work);
- Some do not have wifi access, have unreliable wifi connection, or limited bandwidth for multiple people;
- Not all families have access to a computer, or must share a computer among multiple family members;
- Some are completing work on phones/mobile devices;
- Paper packages with worksheets would be great, but many lacking access to a printer.

French Immersion

- Not all homes have French speakers, so it is difficult to support students in French;
- Students need more time speaking French with teachers and classmates;
- Video chats are needed for practice.

Positive/Successes

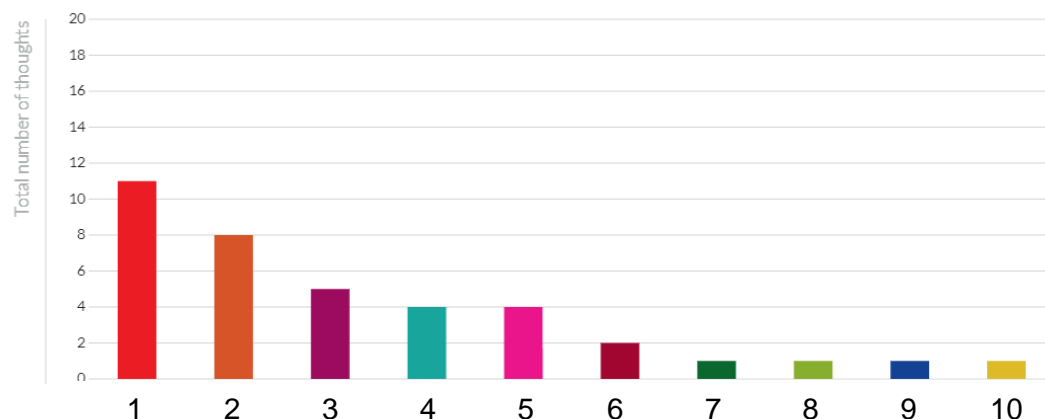
- Praise for specific teachers/principals;
- Appreciation for videos and check-ins;
- Parents appreciate the effort being put in.

Hands-On

- Students miss hands-on learning, such as science labs but have questions about materials for courses such as science, art, shop, etc.
- Opportunity to learn skills at home: fix the sink, cook, clean, change tires, etc.;
- Opportunity to learn coping skills, practice social and human values

Students - Grades 7 and 8

Common Themes, among thoughts rated 4.0+:



1 – Need Teacher-Led Learning	6 – Need Contact/Online is Difficult
2 – Online Platforms/Resources	7 – Access to Technology
3 – Hours/Volume of Work/Consistency	8 – Assignments/Evaluation
4 – Family Stress/Life Balance	9 – French Immersion
5 – Need Instructions/Communication	10 – Stress/Anxiety

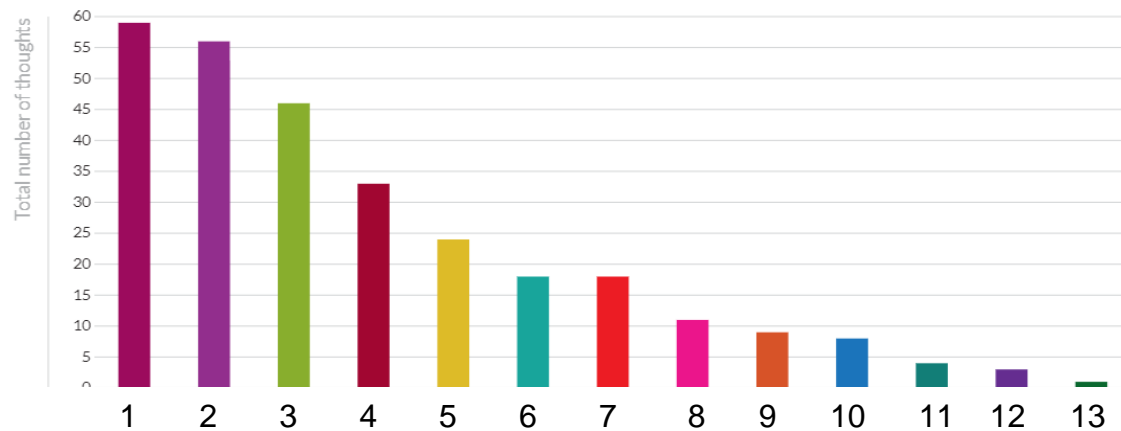
Top Thoughts, exactly as they were shared:

- 1) “Given teachers are still full time there is no reason the technology is not being better utilized for face to face teaching Get an understanding of children's needs. Identifying early when concepts are not understood.”
- 2) “There should be the same schedule each week To keep the routine.”
- 3) “Need supports for math and science Parents don’t have skill set to help and leads to frustration.”
- 4) “Education process highly depends on the individual teacher enthusiasm. There are no uniformed materials available covering each course.”
- 5) “I was just wondering if there was any way parents can be aware if the assignments given were received by the teachers. I was also wondering if novels or daily journals can be assigned. I am glad to do it myself, it just makes it more official if done by a teacher.”
- 6) “It’s hard for people to do online classes who does not have a computer at home. The kids should be provided with the computer.”
- 7) “It’s very difficult doing maths with my son things I don’t remember back in the days , needs to understand the equations and needs someone to explain how do math problem,it’s really important he keeps asking for help and I feel helpless.”
- 8) “Either instruct teachers to sit in front of a camera in a "Zoom" meeting for 6 hours a day or end the school year. We are not equipped to teach our kids from home. We do not have the background, materials or time to do so. We rely on educators for that role.”
- 9) “more teacher-led lessons via Google Meet not enough teacher-led lessons via Google Meet, kids not clear on what to do.”
- 10) “It would be good to have a set time to hear/get tasks from teachers So parents can sit down with kids at the beginning of the day or week to set goals and timelines for the week and make sure kids stay on track.”

Note: Several thoughts in this exchange were evidently shared by parents, but unless removal was requested by a student, the thoughts were retained.

Students - Grades 9 to 12

Common Themes, among thoughts rated 4.0+:



1 – Hours/Volume of Work/Consistency
 2 – Hard to Focus/Be Motivated
 3 – Assignments/Evaluation
 4 – Need Contact/Online is Difficult
 5 – Stress/Anxiety
 6 – Family Stress/Life Balance
 7 – Need Teacher-Led Learning

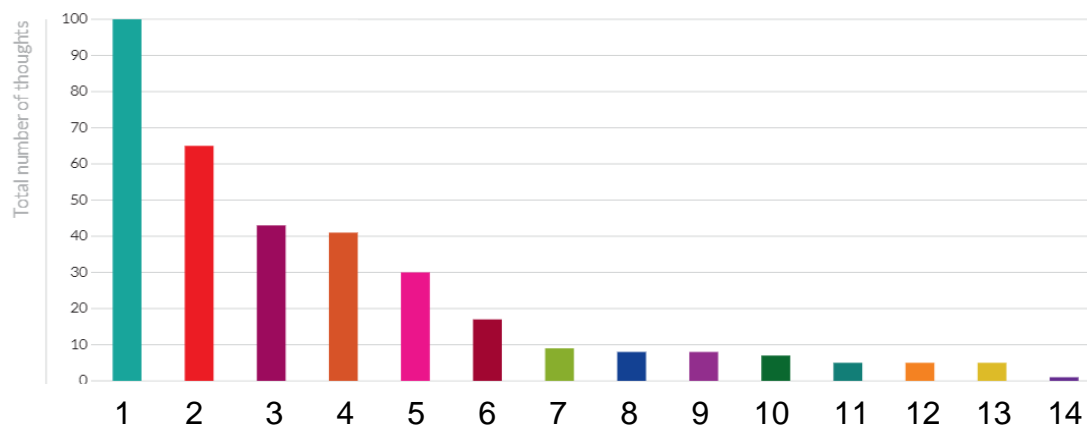
8 – Need Instructions/Communication
 9 – Online Platforms/Resources
 10 – Graduation/Post-Secondary
 11 – Equity
 12 – Access to Technology
 14 – Hands-On

Top Thoughts, exactly as they were shared:

- 1) "I feel that students who are essential workers are not being considered/properly supported in regards to schoolwork and assignment due dates. Not always having time to complete all of my assignments on time makes me worry about my grades and whether I will be able to graduate."
- 2) "I find it very hard to stay focussed and motivated when I'm at home This makes it very hard to complete work that is of good quality."
- 3) "It is very difficult to find motivation to learn and get work done while not in a classroom environment This is making it difficult to learn new material, it is a constant struggle to keep up."
- 4) "Online school is more stressful. It's harder to navigate through due dates and homework/assignments. It's challenging to be motivated to work and learn when everyday feels like a weekend."
- 5) "I'm actually missing being in a building Sitting right in front of your teachers and friends feels so much more natural than what's going on now."
- 6) "One challenge I have is the homework assigned when there's a new unit. students don't Know what to do because they're teaching themselves the course. It's important because when there's a test, the students won't know what to do because the curriculum is everywhere right now and it's confusing."
- 7) "Please get teachers to push deadlines later in the day. It's important because some of us are still working and others tend to sleep in for morning deadlines."
- 8) "the main challenge im having at the moment is staying motivated and organized. some of my teachers are assigning more than 3 hours per week and the wo rkload is more than i can mentally deal with right now. because were not in class i have no sense of routine anymore. i feel zero motivation or focus."
- 9) "Not letting Senior's grades drop was a good decision made by the board. These are stressful times. Students should not loose their acceptances or scholarships because of the unfortunate circumstances."
- 10) "Please explain in simple English how our final marks will be calculated There is a lot of speculation and confusion among the student body on how they will be calculated. The email sent explains it but not simple enough."

Parents/Guardians – Kindergarten to Grade 8

Common Themes, among thoughts rated 4.0+:



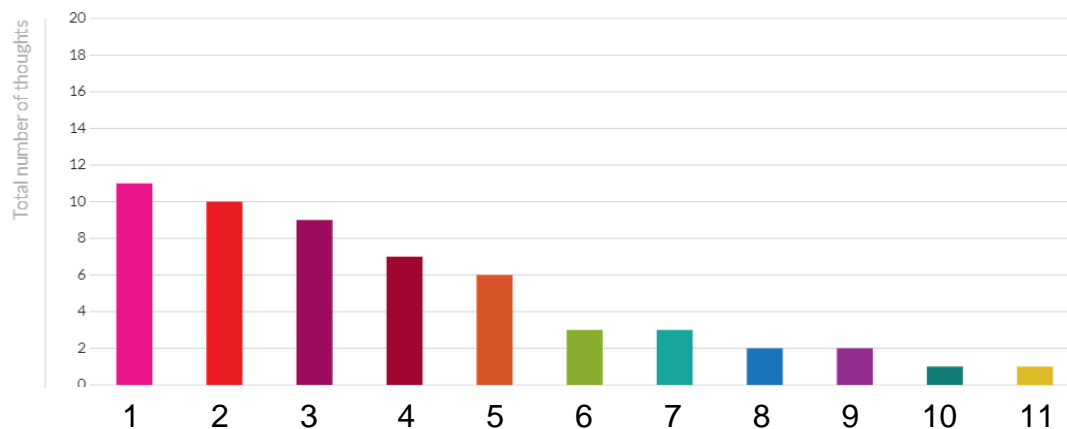
1 – Family Stress/Life Balance	8 – French Immersion
2 – Need Teacher-Led Learning	9 – Hard to Focus/Be Motivated
3 – Hours/Volume of Work/Consistency	10 – Access to Technology
4 – Online Platforms/Resources	11 – Equity
5 – Need Instructions/Communication	12 – Positive/Successes
6 – Need Contact/Online is Difficult	13 – Stress/Anxiety
7 – Assignments/Evaluation	14 – Hands-On

Top Thoughts, exactly as they were shared:

- 1) “I find it challenging to be of much support to my kids during the school / work day because I’m also working full time, from home. I feel that there are many other parents who are in the same situation. Our full work day continues even though are children are at home.”
- 2) “I would appreciate more interactions with the teachers. I enjoy receiving work and guidance from teachers, but I think my child would benefit from a virtual class room experience.”
- 3) “Our main challenge is the struggle to work from home for our regular jobs while coordinating school lessons and associated technology for our kids For the younger grades, they are completely reliant on myself or my husband to logon to a computer, navigate google classroom and manage their work.”
- 4) “It would be helpful if teachers could coordinate so that all work is in one place with at most one password Saves time and frustration.”
- 5) “My partner and I both work full time from home. We do not have the time to navigate through hundreds of links to find learning content. School boards and teachers need to make this easier on parents, we are not teachers, we do not know what is critical and relevant. We need more help.”
- 6) “Not every parent can dedicate time for their child's learning daily. It's important to be flexible on deadlines and demands.”
- 7) “its great when the teachers comment on the kids work, they find it super motivating and want to send messages back Connection and motivation are important (and motivating can be extra hard at home).”
- 8) “5 hrs of teacher led instruction should be teacher led (make use of video technology) not just a list of suggestions for parent led teaching It is important because video continues the connection between my child and their teachers and peers. It also fosters the skills of communication.”
- 9) “Allow flexibility in submitting work. Allow photos of handwritten work, or typed work at the student's option Some families only have a phone accessible for uploading work.”
- 10) “I like the work that is assigned over a week, not a day It permits us to manage our own schedules and gets us mentally prepared for the week.”

Parents/Guardians - Grades 9 to 12

Common Themes, among thoughts rated 4.0+:



1 – Need Instructions/Communication	7 – Family Stress/Life Balance
2 – Need Teacher-Led Learning	8 – Graduation/Post-Secondary
3 – Hours/Volume of Work/Consistency	9 – Hard to Focus/Be Motivated
4 – Need Contact/Online is Difficult	10 – Equity
5 – Online Platforms/Resources	11 – Stress/Anxiety
6 – Assignments/Evaluation	

Top Thoughts, exactly as they were shared:

- 1) "All video class mtgs should be recorded so students can watch later if home computer is being used, or re-watch if they did not understand what was being taught can review the material."
- 2) "Not all teachers are as accessible as others. Consistency of communication is important."
- 3) "Having an on line appointment or class is good for the students in structuring their day. It's good to see the teacher for the class period. Seeing the teacher helps to encourage the student - the more direct contact online, the better."
- 4) "It would be nice if everyone used the same platform, which includes e-mail notifications for when a teacher posts new information."
- 5) "Teachers need to post videos or links on where to learn the subject matter. Posting only homework isn't helpful. These students need instruction on how to deal with the subjects in the homework."
- 6) "Weekly check ins with students and teachers are helpful This is a time that gives students and teachers to touch base and go over what is happening. It calms the feelings of "What am I supposed to do?"
- 7) "I thought with this e-learning there would be some teaching via google meet with the teacher. I am finding my daughter is just getting pages and pages of information and then a list of questions to answer. There is no learning and no help. Teachers should be using google meet to teach."
- 8) "Even though they are in high school, make sure parents are receiving all messaging. What homework do you have? Nothing. If parents received all messaging going to students, it would make it easier to communicate, get work done."
- 9) "Learning online poses a challenge for those who may need verbal interactions and feedback For students that are audio learners, without the additional support of video (or in person) teaching, it is made doubly difficult."
- 10) "My son is taking grade 12 chem, bio and calculus. Notes are provided online by the teachers but a lot of the material is simply not being taught. Gr 12s need the knowledge for university courses next year."

Community - Members of Advisory Committees

Top Thoughts, exactly as they were shared:

Note: No thoughts in the Community Member exchange received a star rating of 4.0+

Other thoughts were shared within the exchange, but did not receive enough star ratings to rank.

- 1) "May I suggest we do not give marks to Primary students."
- 2) "I worry about bandwidth and equitable access to technology. We have high expectations for immediate connectivity. Some families by finances, circumstance or geography do not have modern highly compatible tech."
- 3) "Special Education students need their specialized teaching Parents can only do so much for their special education students. They are not educators."
- 4) "Schooling at home is different then homeschooling These are exceptional times, people weren't expecting to do this /want to do this , parent or child! I think schooling at home should be voluntary!"
- 5) "I worry about boredom, sluggish routines and loss of momentum There is a rhythm of school that keeps students and staff engaged. Without bells or structure, most people lose track of time, and life slows down."

What's Next?

We are currently using this feedback in the following ways:

- To inform decision-making about next steps for supporting students and families;
- Working with principals to bring clarity to our practices;
- Doing some research to better understand some of the issues raised;
- Updating our FAQs to ensure parents and students have the answers they are looking for; and
- Sharing the key themes and trends as we work with our education partners so that we all benefit from this collective insight.