

\*Disproportionality calculation for the Low-SES and Not Low-SES groups was updated on page 28 (Annex 2).  
All other data and interpretation remain unchanged.

## **Sense of Belonging in School**

### **Background**

Historically, results from provincial assessments and report card data have provided the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) with an overview of student academic performance. Equally important is the need to understand the extent to which students believe that they are accepted by their peers and teachers; feel safe - physically, emotionally, and culturally - within their learning space; and that their contributions in class are welcomed and appreciated. Perceptual data of this nature (e.g., student well-being, sense of belonging, and experience at school) has typically been collected from both students and parents through bi-annual School Climate Surveys, results of which have informed various programs and activities to improve the learning environment within OCDSB schools.

In 2019, the *Valuing Voices - Identity Matters! Student Survey* made it possible to collect additional perceptual data on sense of belonging, well-being, safety, extracurricular activities and other school experiences, alongside a comprehensive set of demographic data (i.e., language first spoken, Indigenous identity, ethnicity, racial identity, gender identity, religious identity/creed/spiritual affiliation, disability, immigration status, and household income). The richness of this data allows for enhanced reporting of student data through an equity lens to identify patterns and trends in student outcomes and experiences. Ultimately, these results serve as a basis for discussions with internal and external stakeholders to develop strategies aimed at eliminating systemic barriers and biases that may be contributing to inequitable opportunities and outcomes for students.

### **Why Sense of Belonging?**

Research has consistently found students' sense of belonging at school to be linked with academic outcomes, psychological adjustment, well-being, identity formation, and mental and physical health, and is, therefore, considered a fundamental aspect of development (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Pittman & Richmond, 2008; Allen & Kern, 2017; Arslan et al., 2020; Abdollahi et al., 2020; Demiroz, 2020). A sense of school belonging has been found to decline during adolescence - a time of transition and identity formation for students (Allen, 2016; Allen et al., 2018). Students who do not feel a strong sense of belonging within their school environment are frequently described as being alienated or disaffected (Willms, 2003). Improved sense of school belonging results in greater school engagement, which in turn fuels academic performance and achievement (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Neel & Fuligni, 2013; Allen 2021). Overall, research on this topic yields a consistent overarching message - a strong sense of school belonging leads to positive outcomes for students, while a limited sense of belonging leads to undesirable ones. By examining what influences a students' sense of school belonging, strategies can be targeted towards creating an inclusive, safe and caring environment for the students.

## What We Know about Sense of Belonging

The desire for social bonds and connections with others in the context of educational institutions has a long history in psychological research. A number of terms within educational research are used interchangeably with school belonging, including school connectedness, school attachment, and school engagement. The most commonly used definition, however, comes from Goodenow and Grady (1993) who describe school belonging as *"the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment"*.

In addition to the definition of school belonging, understanding the contributing factors can help policy-makers and school staff introduce new, or adjust existing, programs and activities that enhance school belonging. A meta-analysis across 51 studies identified 10 themes that influence school belonging at the student level: academic motivation, emotional stability, personal characteristics, parent support, peer support, teacher support, gender, race and ethnicity, extracurricular activities and environmental/school safety, with teacher support and positive personal characteristics emerging as the strongest predictors of school belonging (Allen et al., 2016). The study further emphasized the importance of involving parents and the wider community in the implementation of a whole-school intervention that addresses the individual and microsystem<sup>1</sup> level variables (peers, family and teachers). Home, school and community must work together to create a supportive atmosphere that emphasizes the importance of school belonging, as each facet has relevance and importance to student well-being.

Similarly, Korpershoek et al. (2020) conducted a meta-analytic review of 82 correlational studies published in peer-reviewed journals between 2000 and 2018. On average, results revealed a small positive correlation between sense of belonging and academic achievement, and small to moderate positive correlations with: motivational outcomes such as mastery goal orientations; social-emotional outcomes (e.g., self-concept and self-efficacy); and, behavioural outcomes (e.g., behavioural, cognitive, and agentic engagement). A small negative correlation was observed with absence and dropout rates. Another qualitative meta-analysis (Craggs & Kelly, 2018) yielded similar conclusions, with peer relationships; knowledge, understanding and acceptance of individual identity; in-group membership; and, safety/security identified as potential contributors to sense of school belonging.

More recently, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2021a) released its first international study that examined social and emotional skills and how they relate to individual, family and school characteristics. Results from this study shed a light on the role educators and schools play in helping to shape the social and emotional skills of students they serve. Key findings as they relate to school belongingness include:

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<sup>1</sup> The study argues that school belonging is not simply a phenomenon that exists within the individual, but is also affected by peers, families and teachers (i.e. the **microsystem**); the school's social and organizational culture and interactions with parents (i.e. the **mesosystem**); linkages across multiple micro-and mesosystems (i.e. the **exosystem**); broader policies, norms and cultural values (the **macrosystem**); and temporal aspects (the **chronosystem**).

- 15-20% of students in two cohorts (10-year-olds; 15-year-olds) indicated they did not feel they belonged at school;
- school belonging was lower for: girls in the older cohort compared to boys, and for socio-economically disadvantaged students compared to their more affluent counterparts;
- students' sense of school belonging was most strongly related to cooperation<sup>2</sup>, optimism<sup>3</sup>, and sociability<sup>4</sup> skills - a finding that was consistent across both age groups; the largest age differences were observed for assertiveness, curiosity, and self-control;
- students reporting more positive relations with teachers also tended to report higher social and emotional skills, particularly with respect to optimism<sup>5</sup>, curiosity<sup>6</sup>, and achievement-focused<sup>7</sup>.

These findings are equally true for the city of Ottawa, one of 11 jurisdictions participating in this study (OECD, 2021b).

Analysis of the *Valuing Voices - Identity Matters! Student Survey* data revealed that “feeling part of school”, “feeling respected at school”, “feeling accepted by students”, “feeling happy at school”, “feeling one’s identity is welcomed at school”, and “enjoying daily activities at school” are moderately correlated<sup>8</sup> with school belonging, underscoring their importance in any solution designed to improve a sense of school belonging for students.

### **Objective and scope of this report**

This report examines the degree to which students feel a sense of belonging at school, as reported by parents of students in JK to Grade 6 and students in grades 7 to 12 on the *Valuing Voices - Identity Matters! Student Survey* conducted in 2019-2020.

Information is presented by survey type (parents, students) and disaggregated for specific groups of students based on:

- (i) data contained in the Student Information System: historical reporting groups (i.e., students who identify as Indigenous, gender, English language learners, students with special education needs - excluding gifted, students residing in low-income neighborhoods).
- (ii) information collected through the *Valuing Voices* survey: select dimensions of identity -- indigenous identity, race, disability and gender identity.

Specifically, the report intends to address the following questions:

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<sup>2</sup> Defined as “Living in harmony with others and valuing interconnectedness among all people.”

<sup>3</sup> Defined as, “Positive and optimistic expectations for self and life in general.”

<sup>4</sup> Defined as, “Able to approach others, both friends and strangers, initiating and maintaining social connections.”

<sup>5</sup> Defined as, “Positive and optimistic expectations for self and life in general.”

<sup>6</sup> Defined as, “Interest in ideas and love of learning, understanding and intellectual exploration; an inquisitive mind-set.”

<sup>7</sup> Defined as, “Setting high standards for oneself and working hard to meet them.”

<sup>8</sup> Spearman Rank Order bivariate correlations were conducted on approximately 25,000 responses from the *Valuing Voices - Identity Matters! Student Survey* (JK-Grade 12). Correlation coefficients of at least 0.5 are considered to be moderate. Additional details can be found in the Annex 1..

1. How do OCDSB students rate their sense of school belonging in school?
2. How does a sense of belonging at school vary across demographic characteristics and identities?
3. What do students identify as being important for contributing to their sense of belonging at school?

### What We Heard

The focus group sessions with parents and students that were held in the spring of 2019 was a critical step in preparing for the collection, analysis and reporting of identity data. Participants were provided with an opportunity to share their experiences in the education system. The stories shared by participants reaffirmed how much a sense of belonging at school matters for student learning and wellbeing. The following quotes express participants' experiences about sense of belonging at school and its impact on identity:

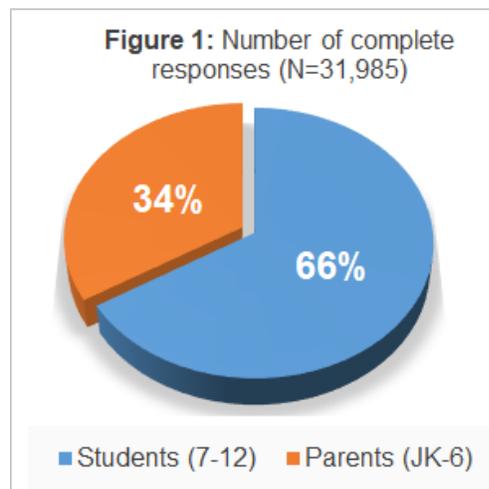
*“My child is not feeling in the classroom that he is as important as others. He cannot even make friends from the mainstream group.”*

*“The school system created an identity crisis in my children. They got confused whether they are black, Muslim, Canadian etc. The education system is biased. Colonies came here, but the curriculum is still the same. My daughter, grade 3, was so upset because the book that she had to read as part of the course had only one black student who was a budding rapper and stealing from others. I hope this data will help.”*

*“Students do not see themselves reflected and represented in the staff/adults in the building.”*

### Key Findings

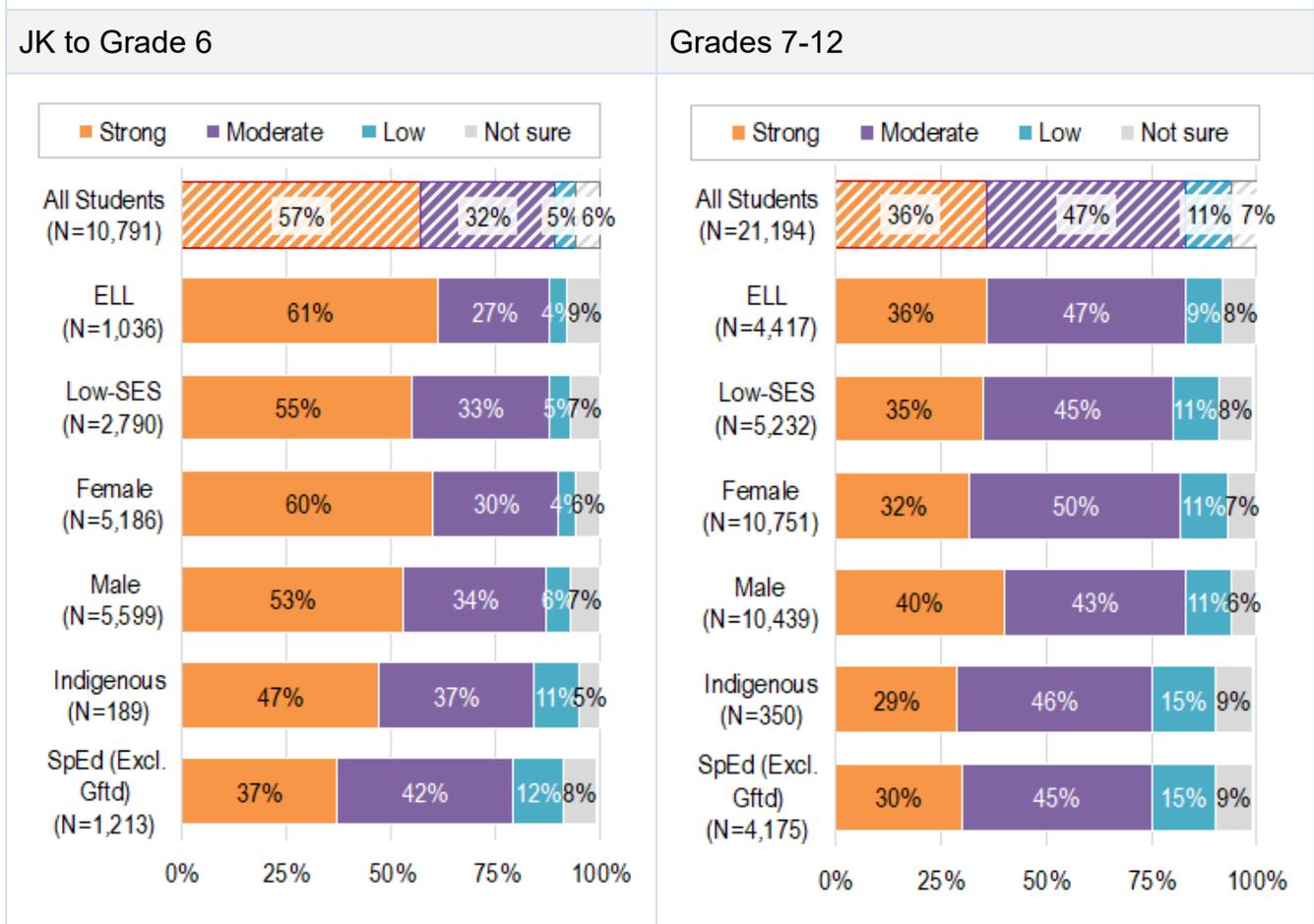
In the *Valuing Voices - Identity Matters! Survey*, parents (JK to grade 6) and students (grades 7 to 12) were asked the following question, “*To what extent does your child (you) feel a sense of belonging at school?*” and were presented with four response options: strong, moderate, low, and not sure. A total of 31,985 responses were received, representing 42% of the student population (75,817) -- 66% were from students (21,194) and 34% (10,791) were from parents.



**Part I: Sense of Belonging in School** (based on data from the Student Information System)

Across all demographic groups, a stronger sense of school belonging was reported for the younger cohort of students (JK-6) compared to those in grades 7-12 (Figure 2). The greatest difference in ratings was observed for females, where 60% of the younger cohort reported a strong sense of belonging compared to only 32% of the older cohort. A similar trend was observed amongst males, but was less pronounced (53% in JK-6 and 40% in Grades 7-12). In both cohorts, smaller proportions of students with special education needs (SpEd, excluding gifted) and those who self-identify as Indigenous reported a strong sense of school belonging. While some of this difference may be attributed to the perspective of those completing the survey (i.e. parents on behalf of their child), findings are consistent with studies that have found a sense of school belonging to decrease in adolescence, particularly among females (Gillen-O'Neel et al., 2013; Allen et al., 2016; Freeman, King, and Pickett, 2016; OECD, 2021a; OECD, 2021b).

**Figure 2: School belonging by student demographics** (source: student information system)

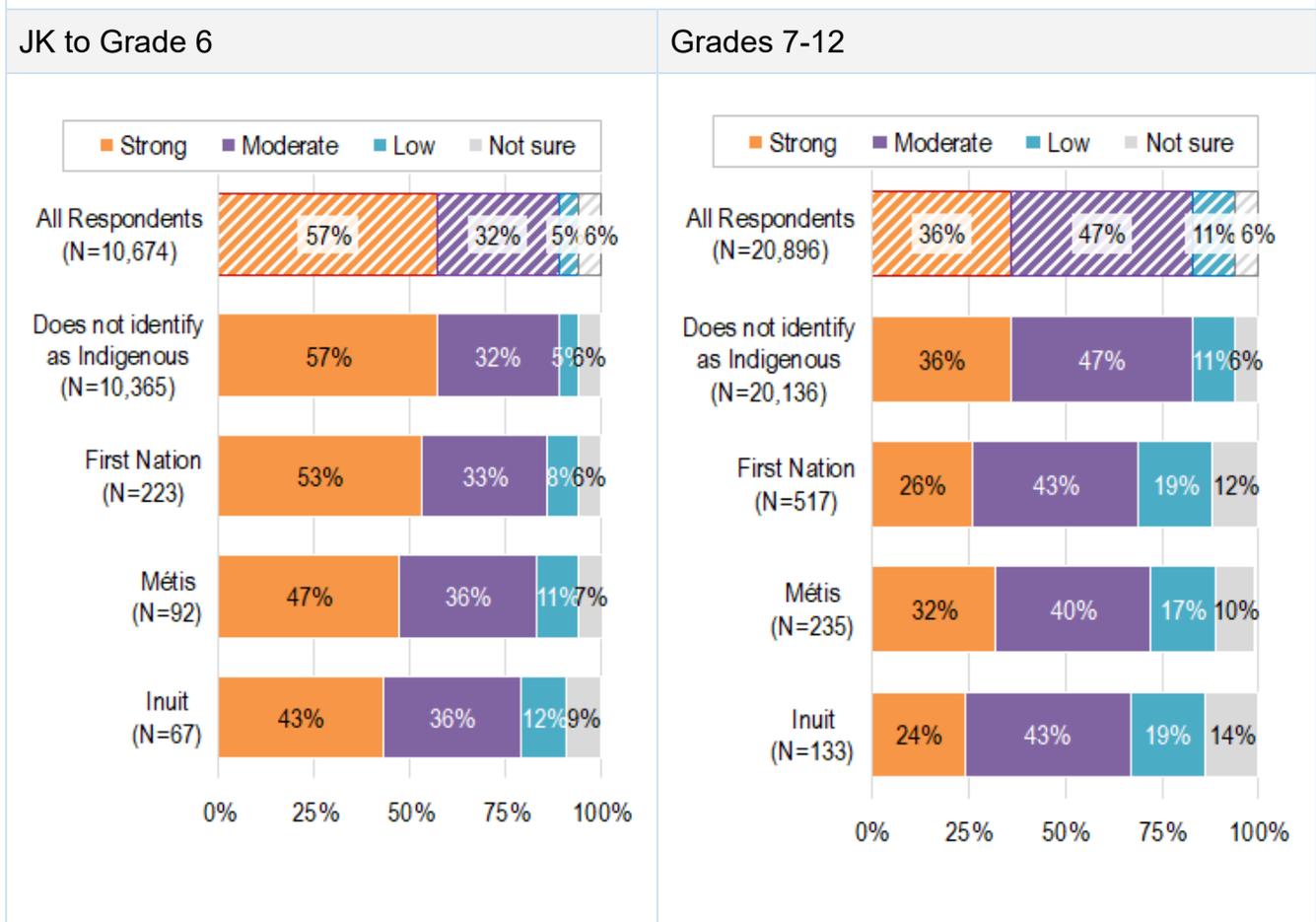


**Part II: Sense of Belonging in School** (based on *Valuing Voices - Identity Matters! Student Survey*)

**Indigenous identity**

In both cohorts, a lower sense of school belonging<sup>9</sup> was reported amongst students who self-identified as First Nation, Metis, and/or Inuit - a trend that was consistent with Trillium data. Students identifying as Inuit reported the lowest sense of school belonging amongst the three Indigenous communities, particularly in grades 7-12.

**Figure 3: School belonging among students who self-identified as Indigenous**



**Racial identity**

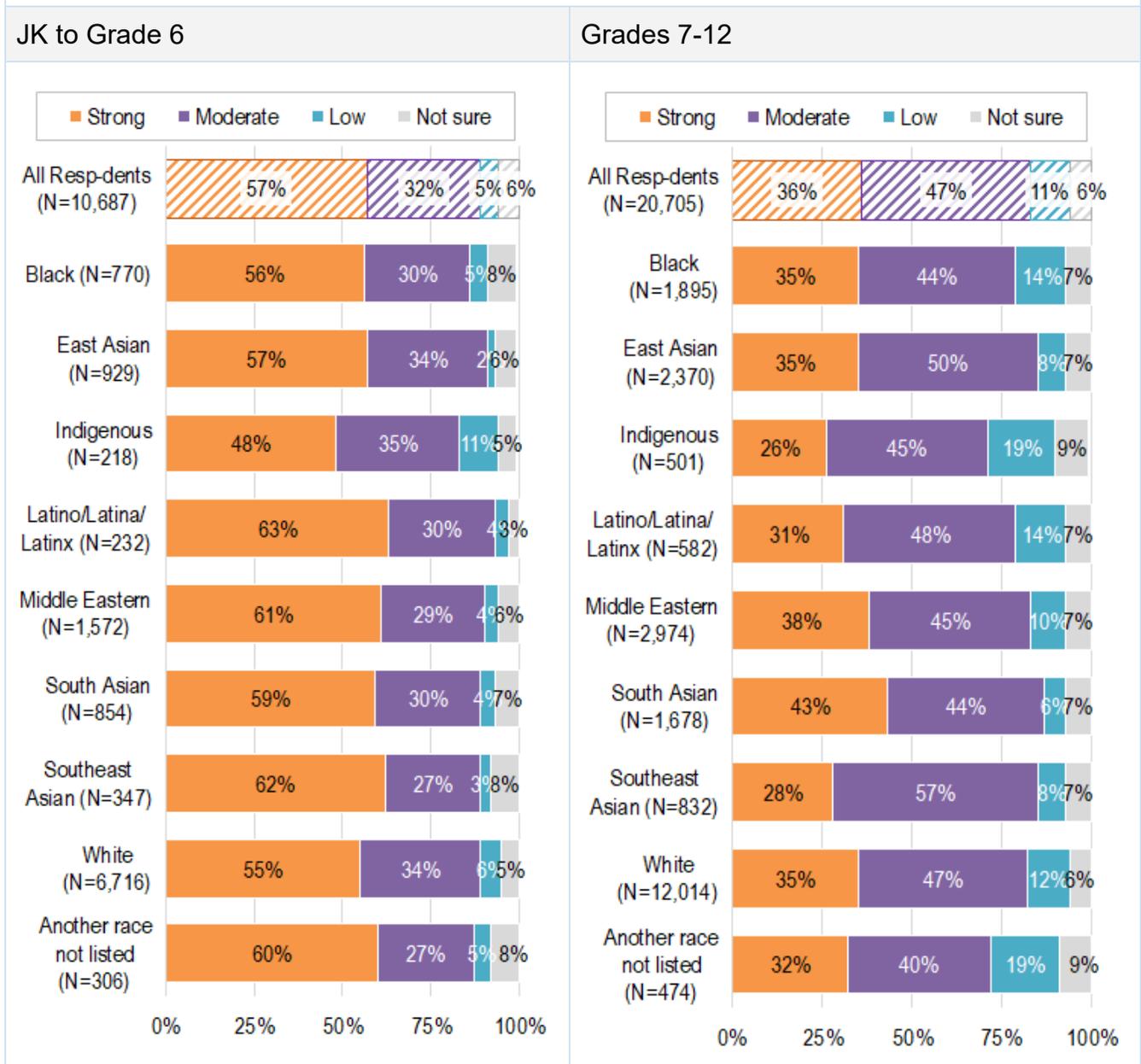
Smaller proportions of students who self-identified as Indigenous (JK-6 and grades 7-12), Latino(a)(x) and Southeast Asian (grades 7-12 only) reported a strong sense of school belonging. While students who identified as Southeast Asian were amongst those with the lowest sense of belonging in grades 7-12, they were amongst the highest in grades JK-6. Conversely, students identifying as Middle Eastern and/or South Asian

<sup>9</sup> Smaller proportions reported a strong sense of school belonging, while larger proportions reported a low sense of school belonging.

reported the strongest sense of school belonging in both cohorts. Ratings of school belongingness were similar across the remaining racial identities.

Research suggests that having more same-race/ethnic peers at school can promote positive socio-emotional outcomes in youth (Benner & Crosnoe, 2011; Goldsmith, 2004). Of particular note - the groups of students who reported a lower sense of belonging in school were those that accounted for 2% to 4% of the OCDSB student population.

**Figure 4:** School belonging based on self-reported racial identities.



## **Disability**

With a few exceptions<sup>10</sup>, students self-identifying with a disability reported a low sense of school belonging<sup>11</sup> - a trend that is consistent with observations made previously for students with special education needs (excluding gifted). In both cohorts, students reporting a mental disability, blindness or low vision, addiction(s), developmental disability and speech impairment were amongst the groups with the smallest proportions of students reporting a strong sense of school belonging.

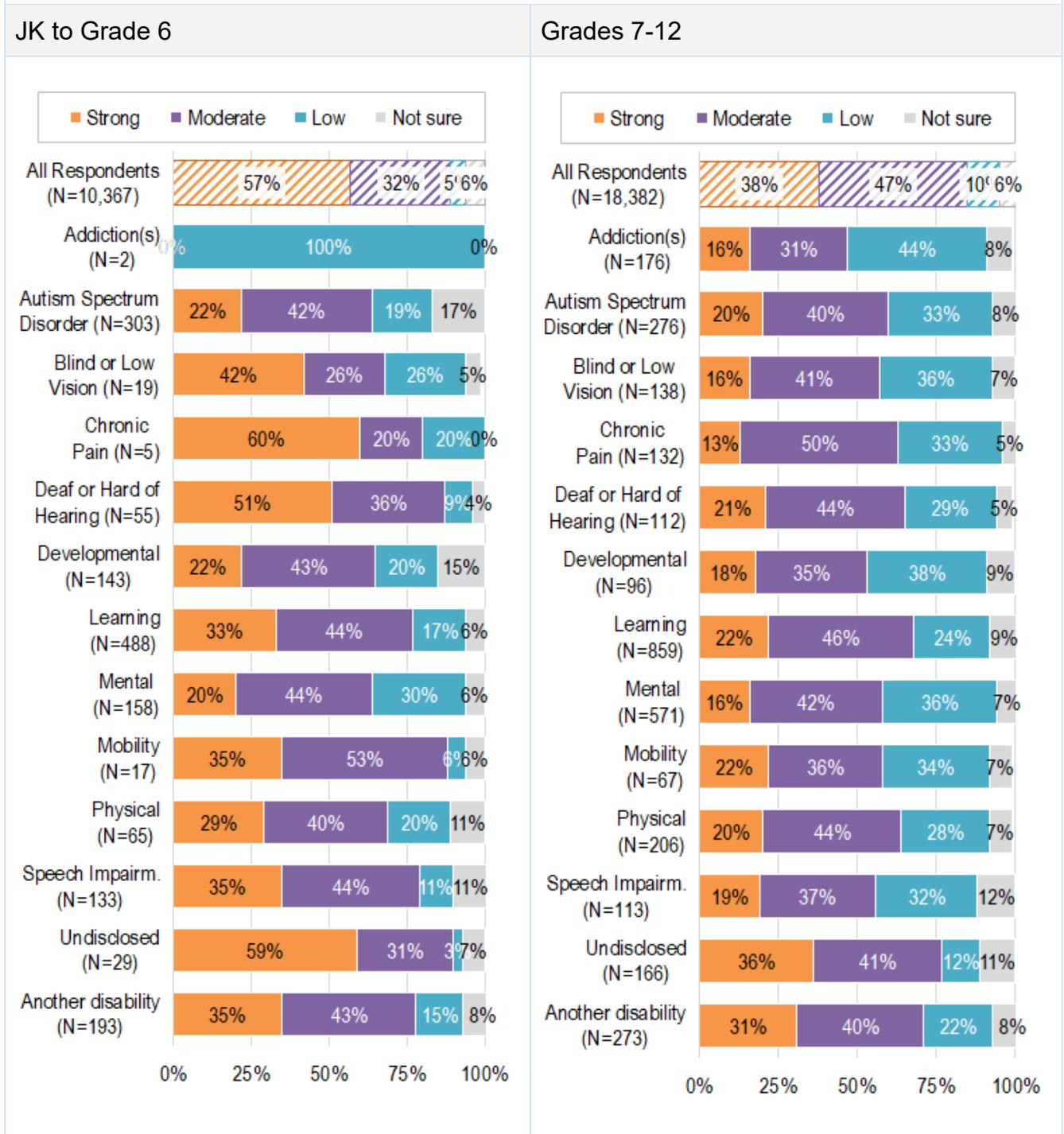
Research suggests that students with disabilities need to be in an accepting and supportive climate with individualized pedagogical arrangements. In contrast, poor school climate and lack of individualized support can prevent them from feeling that they belong. Reid et al. (2018) examined barriers to meaningful and inclusive education from K to 12 in Ontario and found that, among other factors, inclusion in particular can have a profound impact on the sense of school belonging amongst students with a disability(ies). Similarly, the Canadian Human Rights Commission (2016) reported that 35% of students with a disability aged 15 and older felt they were avoided or excluded at school, and 27% reported being bullied.

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<sup>10</sup> Students in the younger cohort identifying with chronic pain or an undisclosed disability.

<sup>11</sup> Larger proportions reporting a low sense of belonging in school, and smaller proportions reporting a strong sense of belonging.

**Figure 5: School belonging based on self-reported disabilities**



## **Gender Identity**

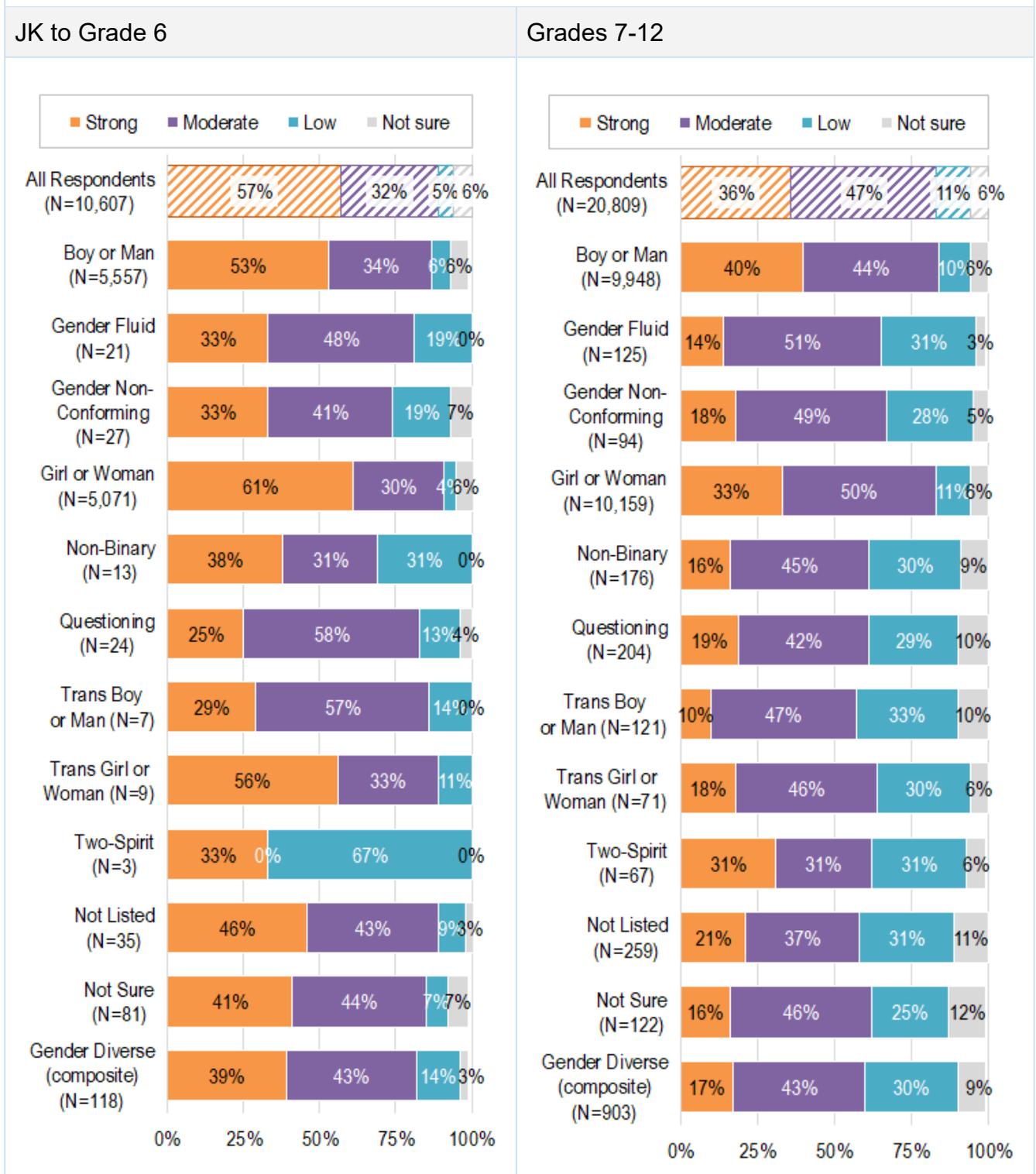
Smaller proportions of OCDSB students identifying as gender diverse<sup>12</sup> reported having a strong sense of belonging at school. Students in the older cohort that identified as transgender boy or man were amongst those with the lowest reported sense of belonging. Research indicates that gender diverse youth may face particularly hostile school climates, often reporting experiences of harassment, discrimination, and other negative experiences in school (Williams et al., 2005; Wolfe & Chiodo, 2008). In one Canadian study, nearly half of gender diverse youth indicated they did not feel like they belong, compared to only 3.5% of their non-LGBT youth counterparts (Taylor, 2011). The same study found over half of LGBTQ+ students did not feel accepted at school, and almost half felt they could not be themselves, compared to one-fifth of students who identified as straight.

Consistent with scholarly findings and results for males and females highlighted earlier in this report, higher proportions of female students in the younger cohort (and higher proportions of male students in the older cohort) reported a strong sense of school belonging.

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<sup>12</sup> Gender diverse includes the following gender identities: gender fluid, gender non-conforming, non-binary, questioning, trans boy or man, trans girl or woman, two spirit, a gender not listed, and/or not sure.

**Figure 6:** School belonging based on self-reported gender identities



**Part III: What contributes to a sense of school belonging for OCDSB students?**  
(based on *Valuing Voices - Identity Matters! Student Survey*)

A sense of school belonging is fundamental to overall student well-being and success. Students who feel accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment usually perform better academically and show more positive motivational, social-emotional and behavioural outcomes (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Pittman & Richmond, 2008; Allen & Kern, 2017; Arslan et al., 2020; Abdollahi et al., 2020; Demiroz, 2020; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Neel & Fuligni, 2013; Allen, 2021; OECD, 2021). It is therefore essential to understand what aspects of the overall student experience at school positively or adversely affect their sense of school belonging.

This section of the report focuses on the elements that respondents identified as contributing to their (or their child’s) sense of belonging at school. Specifically, respondents who reported having a “strong” sense of belonging were prompted with the follow up question -- “*What has helped to create a sense of belonging for you/r child at school?*”, while those who reported a “low” or “moderate” sense of belonging were prompted with -- “*What would create a greater sense of belonging for you/r child at school?*”.

Findings presented in this section of the report focus on “low” and “strong” ratings of sense of belonging. In doing so, elements that reportedly contribute to one’s sense of belonging that are similar across these groups, as well as those that may be unique, surface more readily. Of the 29,935 responses to these follow-up questions, 16,522 were analyzed for this report<sup>13</sup>; the number of comments included in the data analysis by survey type and question is presented in Table 1. Ultimately, the goal for the system is to identify strategies and next steps that will improve the learning conditions and experiences for students who report a lower sense of belonging at school, while maintaining and building on practices that are contributing to the experiences of students who already feel a strong sense of school belonging.

**Table 1:** Number of Comments Included in the Data Analysis by Survey and Question

Question:	JK to Grade 6 (Parents)	Grades 7 to 12 (Students)
<i>What has helped to create a sense of belonging for you/r child at school?</i>	6,108	7,525
<i>What would create a greater sense of belonging for you/r child at school?*</i>	534	2,355

<sup>13</sup> The remaining 13,413 responses were associated with respondents who reported a “moderate” sense of belonging at school.

## Analysis of Open-Ended Responses

A thematic qualitative data analysis was used to identify patterns in the open text responses (further described in the technical considerations section). This iterative process yielded 76 initial themes that reflected a variety of individual/personal, relational, systemic, conceptual, and tangible elements, which were then reduced to a final set of 17 themes (see Annex 3).

The top ten (10) themes that emerged from respondents who reported either a strong or low sense of belonging at school can be found in Table 3 (pg. 26). Data is disaggregated by survey type and rating of sense of school belonging, yielding four groups: JK-6 low, JK-6 strong, 7-12 low, and 7-12 strong. While the rank-order of themes differed across each reporting group, the following themes emerged amongst the top five for each<sup>14</sup>:

- support
- social interactions/interpersonal experiences
- learning experiences

Three of the four groups also frequently indicated “relationships” and “school staff” as contributing to one’s sense of belonging at school. For parents of children in JK to grade 6 who reported their child had a low sense of belonging at school, “diversity and representation” rounded out their top five list. While data has not been disaggregated below by identity category, quotes have been selected to highlight the voices of those students most marginalized by the system. An interactive dashboard will also be made available to the public to allow individuals to examine themes by identity group.

**Support** from educators, parents/family, and peers was identified as a key element in promoting a greater sense of belonging at school. Respondents acknowledged the importance of having opportunities to talk to educators to get support and encouragement for their learning and well-being, but also the importance of support from other students in the school, as reflected in the following comments:

*“Good friends who are supportive and care for each other. Teachers who care and try to make the environment a positive one for the kids, where they feel safe and respected and can be whomever they wish to be.”*

(Parent of a child with a strong sense of belonging)

*“The support shown by teachers and admin staff, the interaction and collaboration with other students (lunch monitors, playground activities, academic projects, extra-curricular activities such as Christmas choir, music, etc)”*

(Parent of a child with a strong sense of belonging)

*“Unsure, not enough social time (only lunch), the school becomes very empty after school. Most if not all teachers leave the school immediately after the bell*

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<sup>14</sup> For students in grades 7-12 who reported a low sense of belonging, the majority of comments received did not address the question posed, and were thus characterized under the theme of “unclassified”. For reporting purposes, this theme was excluded from the identification of top five themes.

*rings, making it only really possible to get help through lunch, which takes away from social time etc”*

(Student with a low sense of belonging)

*“Ability to signal when he is having difficulty (early) so he can get help/ clarification, and not feel "lesser than" in doing so. Positively acknowledging students for asking for help early. Provide more in-class support to assure real-time and proactive support.”*

(Parent of a child with a low sense of belonging)

*“The fact that I have a lot of caring friends that support me at school. They help me when I need advice or a helping hand...”*

(Student with a strong sense of belonging)

*“Direct supports for elementary student who identify as transgender, with an outline of services/supports applied equally across all schools in the board. In school access to a "safe adult" to come to with issues & that adult have BASIC training in supporting lgbtq elementary students. Gender-less bathrooms! Not forcing a student to use the staff/accessible washroom.”*

(Parent of a child with a low sense of belonging)

**Social Interactions/Interpersonal Experiences** at school were perceived to improve sense of school belonging through greater recognition, acceptance, respect, collaboration, tolerance, and equity, as described by the following respondents:

*“An ability to better connect with other children. This would include being able to form friendships and not being the target of social separation by other children.”*

(Parent of a child with a strong sense of belonging)

*“In my own personal opinion, the people at this school aren’t as inclusive. I do find myself in the back of the room, not talking to many people unless needed to (projects, group assignments, etc.). Not only the student, but the teachers as well...”*

(Student with a low sense of belonging)

*“Being able to connect more with like-minded peers who are respectful of each other, of diversity. Less bullying.”*

(Parent of a child with a strong sense of belonging)

*“The first thing that helped me to create a sense of belonging at my school are the students. Everybody was kind and welcoming. I was very nervous for the first day of school because I just moved from Montreal, I didn’t know anybody from that school and friend groups were already made. To my surprise, everything went very well. Some students came and sat next to me, we chatted, they told me how the school worked...”*

(Student with a strong sense of belonging)

*“Opportunities to participate in sports or physical activities at a younger age (perhaps pairing with older students). He has shown an increase in happiness/belonging since the addition of intramural activities during recess. Ways to connect with peers through physical activity.”*

(Parent of a child with a low sense of belonging)

**Learning Experience**, connected to instructional practices in classrooms such as teaching methodology, content, learning material, and evaluation, was also identified as being important in promoting a positive sense of school belonging. Some parents/guardians of JK-6 students also referred to “time in school” as an important element in transition and adjusting to the school environment. The following quotes help demonstrate the role learning experiences play in promoting a sense of school belonging:

*“Structured play or play based learning, intramural activities, teaching compassion for other people as well as empathy, dealing effectively with children who exhibit poor behaviour and not just having a “let’s all just get along” policy because it’s not realistic to expect every kid will be able to get along with every other kid, teaching respect, teaching discipline, involving parents before marks show up on report cards so that actions can be taken at home to assist with learning challenges, open dialogue with parents and educators...”*

(Parent of a child with a strong sense of belonging)

*“1. If the education system improved. The method of teaching has mildly improved over the past century. Even the information that is given out is outdated. 2. If The school hours changed. School starts too early I find the students around me look sleep deprived and straining to open their eyes. Many teachers stretch their period, they try to explain a point in long form instead of summarizing it to the smallest amount and giving a short description so students can learn more effectively/efficiently in a shorter period of time. 3. Improve Tests. In the real world we have resources but in school we are taught that using a phone or leaving your notes open in a test is considered cheating. 4. if we had more choices. Options are limited in school we can't choose the subjects that we want to learn until the last few years of high school...”*

(Student with a low sense of belonging)

*“Well first of all, diversity in all aspects. History classes, religious exposure and gender/sexual orientations. I feel that the school environment is very toxic and judgmental. I could think of more than 20 people who feel unsafe being who they are. Also, there is a huge division between IB and non IB [students enrolled in a district program and the rest of the student body] students thus furthering their fear of others. I think that more school spirited events and more civil conversations could help our school be more accepting towards others.”*

(Parent of a child with a low sense of belonging)

*“More acceptance of different cultures, languages. Teachers should understand every kid is diff and needs different kinds of support. Don't just send home poo(r)*

*results, send solutions, suggestions to help the child. Proactively communicate with parents. Listen to the kids concerns with respect and understanding”*

(Parent of a child with a strong sense of belonging)

*“... and also i as a student feel frustrated doing homework, i also feel like homework on the weekend gets me even more frustrated, and i also like doing my hobbies: video games, swimming etc and i don't have enough time for that, also keep in mind this is not a complaint just my opinion about making school better, i also would like if there is homework we can do it on my computer so people can do it at home and not lose the home work.”*

(Student with a low sense of belonging)

**Relationships** in this context refers to a feeling of connection or similarity with someone (i.e., friends, peers, educators, or admin staff) at school, based on a particular interest, background, or other trait. Respondents highlighted the crucial role relationships play in supporting feelings of connectedness in school and in promoting a strong sense of school belonging at school, as exemplified by the following quotes:

*“The teachers, assistants, principal, and other students communicate well with my daughter. She always feels she has someone to talk to and that her ideas and opinions matter.”*

(Parent of a child with a strong sense of belonging)

*“Organized activities at lunch so she has something to do. Cries cause she eats lunch alone sometimes and says she doesn't have friends. Identified this to teacher. Teacher offered to help her one day a week at lunch to work on school work which was really nice. This leaves four other days where my daughter is ostracized for some reason by her peers and is very sad and lonely at school because of it.”*

(Parent of a child with a low sense of belonging)

*“My friends have made an impact on me feeling like I belong because I know that I could be having a bad day or a test/project didn't go well. I can always talk to them. I also feel that my guidance counselor is always there for me if I need help as well as many of my teachers.”*

(Student with a strong sense of belonging)

*“If people were to accept me for who I am, I'm not like many other people, and I don't have a lot of friends, but I just need help. I don't feel like I belong.”*

(Student with a low sense of belonging)

**School Staff** (educators and support staff) were recognized as instrumental in creating an environment that promotes a positive sense of school belonging through communication, engagement, providing care, and creating a welcoming and inclusive learning environment in classrooms. The following quotes provide examples of the ways in which school staff foster this type of learning environment:

*“He has fantastic teachers who have taken the time with him to give him the support he requires. They are the reason he has been able to succeed in his time at school”*

(Parent of a child with a strong sense of belonging)

*“More teachers who are able to help kids with IEPs and understand how to explain things in about her way in which I am able to understand. If certain teachers explain work in another way, and don’t make me feel stupid I would feel more like I belong here”*

(Student with a low sense of belonging)

*“I think the love and care that she gets from the staff makes her feel that she belongs there”*

(Parent of a child with a strong sense of belonging)

*“Hire staff who do not abuse their power and do not abuse students with mental health issues. It is horrifying how some teachers ignore students with anxiety and depression. OCDSB needs to put more measures in place for mental health.”*

(Student with a low sense of belonging)

*“The teachers deal with him in a very good way which gives him the feeling of belonging. He receives the same opportunity of education, activity as other students. He builds a good and healthy relationship with other students”*

(Parent of a child with a strong sense of belonging)

**Diversity and representation** (i.e., presence of identity-based differences and uniqueness such as: ethnicity, religion, culture, tradition, race, gender, sexual orientation) was identified by respondents as an important element that would promote a greater sense of belonging at school. This theme also included acknowledgement/ recognition of, and respect for, various dimensions of one’s own identity (i.e., race, religion, gender identity, language etc.). The following quotes explain the ways diversity and representation contribute to a greater sense of school belonging:

*“The school focuses solely on Christian-based faith celebrations. As a secular school system I never understood this. I’m all for teaching children diversity and inclusion but spending month long Christmas celebrations and concerts is disproportionate to quickly mentioning other religious celebrations in class the day of. All must be given equal weight to ensure all students feel their identity is being recognized equally.”*

(Parent of a child with a low sense of belonging)

*“Mostly it’s the staff and the school environment and how they try all time to create a safe and happy environment for the students to feel comfortable sharing their ideas and to be able to make mistakes knowing there are many teachers there to help them grow and learn. I also think the school is very diverse and multicultural which has helped my child feel more belonging and more comfortable with herself.”*

(Parent of a child with a strong sense of belonging)

*“Organized Indigenous student body that can be city wide that offers social and cultural events with peers his own age. There are organized activities at the secondary level but none for primary or middle school grades.”*

(Parent of a child with a low sense of belonging)

*“My school has such a diverse group of people, and everyone is so accepting. So I think the other students and staff make me feel comfortable to express my individuality.”*

(Student with a strong sense of belonging)

*“If people (students and teachers) put in an effort to respect people regardless of: what they identify as, sexual orientation and stuff.”*

(Student with a low sense of belonging)

*“My son was super happy when he started the school in the September but now he doesn't want to go to the school every day. It worries us. He wears turban. It seems that other kids feel different about him. He is a normal kid. He says that he doesn't have any friend. We talked to his class teacher. I think teacher can play an important part to make sure that all kids are comfortable with each other.”*

(Parent of a child with a low sense of belonging)

*“More fair and equitable treatment, culturally competent and reflexive educators, more inclusive and diverse curriculum, black educators, resources, bus issues resolved”*

(Parent of a child with a low sense of belonging)

*“The current school has increased my child's sense of belonging by celebrating Inuit culture and including her in special indigenous events. We need so much more of this. Indigenous books in the classroom are still so outdated and filled with painful stereotypes. We need more gender diverse books, more indigenous written books, more art, more indigenous languages!”*

(Parent of a child with a low sense of belonging)

## Summary and Next Steps

The following summary highlights key findings from the analysis of OCDSB student data and associated academic research in relation to sense of belonging at school:

***A strong sense of school belonging contributes to student success*** in terms of academics, psychological adjustment, well-being, identity formation, and mental and physical health. At a fundamental level, students with a strong sense of school belonging enjoy being at school. They are happy to be at school because they feel accepted, not just interpersonally, but also from an overall physical school environment perspective. This positive association leads to overall higher engagement across different aspects of the school experience and ultimately leads to better outcomes. Conversely, students who do not feel a strong sense of school belonging tend to become disengaged and may experience isolation or estrangement, which can adversely affect their academic performance and overall wellbeing. While this report did not specifically analyze academic outcomes in relation to sense of school belonging, it

is important to consider that many groups of students that reported a lower sense of school belonging also experienced lower academic achievement (based on report card data and credit accumulation) and higher rates of suspension.

***Sense of belonging at school tends to decline in adolescence.*** A stronger sense of school belonging was reported for the younger cohort of students (JK-6) compared to those in grades 7-12. This trend was consistent across demographic characteristics and identity categories, and also with academic research that has found a sense of school belonging to drop slightly after Grade 6 and improve at some point in higher grades.

***A sense of school belonging at school may be experienced differently by students based on personal characteristics (i.e., how they identify, demographic characteristics).*** In the OCDSB, smaller proportions of students self-identifying from the following groups on the *Valuing Voices* survey reported a strong sense of school belonging:

- ***Indigenous identity:*** First Nations, Metis, and Inuit (both cohorts);
- ***Racial identity:*** Indigenous (both cohorts), Southeast Asian and Latino(a)(x) students (mostly in grades 7-12);
- ***Disability:*** mental disability, blindness or low vision; addiction(s), developmental disability and speech impairment (both cohorts);
- ***Gender Identity:*** two-spirit, transgender, questioning, non-binary, gender non-conforming, and gender-fluid (both cohorts); and

Similarly, sense of school belonging was lower for students with special education needs (excluding gifted, both cohorts), male students in the JK-6 cohort and female students in grades 7-12<sup>15</sup>. Indeed, the findings suggest that males and females experience school belongingness differently at different stages of their schooling. Specifically, although both groups reported a lower sense of school belonging in the older cohort, the difference was more pronounced for females (i.e., 60% of females in the JK-6 cohort, and 32% in grades 7-12, reported a strong sense of belonging, compared to 53% and 40% of males, respectively). This pattern is consistent with findings from the research, which also suggests that school belongingness tends to improve for both males and females by the time they graduate. Overall, students identifying with a disability(ies) and/or as a member of the gender diverse community reported a particularly low sense of school belonging, especially in grades 7-12.

***Sense of school belonging is affected by a complex set of factors*** (e.g., personal characteristics, support from family, peers and teachers, the social and organizational culture at schools, and the broader policies, norms and cultural values). The *Valuing Voices Identity Matters! Student Survey* data indicates a moderate correlation between a sense of school belonging and: peer acceptance, interpersonal respect, safety, happiness, identity acceptance, and engagement in daily activities (Annex 1). The qualitative findings highlight the importance of *support from educators/school staff and peers; healthy social interactions/relationships; inclusivity of the learning experience; and diversity/representation* in boosting a sense of school belonging.

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<sup>15</sup> Based on demographic data available in the Student Information System.

To promote a greater sense of belonging for students at school, the following actions will be important to consider:

**Building healthy student-teacher relationships.** Teachers often spend more face-to-face time with children than any other person and, by default, have become the most significant others in their students' lives and an important source of security and stability (Allen et al., 2021). This is especially true for students already burdened by a sense of rejection. Generally, a positive relationship is characterized by warmth, supportiveness, trust, involvement, and responsiveness, whereas negative relationships are characterized by mistrust, fear, and avoidance (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). Pedlar (2018) suggested the following strategies for building healthy student–teacher relationships:

- prioritize high-quality teacher–student relationships
- create a supportive and caring learning environment
- offer emotional support to students
- be sensitive to students' needs and emotions
- show interest in students
- try to understand students' point of view
- be respectful and provide fair treatment
- foster positive peer relationships and mutual respect among classmates to establish a sense of community
- engage in positive classroom management

Positive teacher-student relationships is foundational to the [Third Path Framework](#) which is a key strategy in the District's effort to promote a culture of caring and social responsibility. This framework highlights that these relationships must be developmental - those which are grounded in authenticity, attunement and responsiveness to the needs of students and where educators demonstrate empathy and care, taking time to truly know students both inside and outside of the classroom (Tranter, Carson & Boland, 2018).

**Creating opportunities for students to participate in group activities.** Activities that promote interaction among students (e.g. group work, collaborative assignments and projects, extracurricular activities, etc.) create opportunities for students to get to know each other better and has the potential to improve interpersonal relationships (Allen et al., 2016; Allen et al., 2018; Bouchard et al., 2017; Stalen et al., 2016). This was affirmed in what students and parents identified as being important contributors to their (or their child's) sense of belonging at school. The following quote from a student reporting a low sense of belonging helps illustrate this point: *"I do find myself in the back of the room, not talking to many people unless needed to (projects, group assignments, etc.)."* Some examples of concrete actions being taken by the OCDSB include:

- implementing the Rainbow Bridges Program to support 2SLGBTQ+ students transitioning to secondary in three secondary and feeder schools;
- rolling out the Youth Leading Youth workshops (digital and face-to-face), which are led by students from equity-seeking groups;

- establishing student leadership councils (Black, Muslim, 2SLGBTQ+, students with disabilities);
- conducting annual network events focusing on Indigenous knowledge, equity and human rights themes for students, staff, parents/guardians and communities (Date with Diversity and Speakers Series);
- establishing annual Muslim and Newcomer Youth Forums; and,
- establishing an annual Conference for Girls.

**Nurturing social and emotional competences in students.** Social and emotional learning can help students engage in more positive and thoughtful communication with each other and learn to respect diversity and identity expression, which in turn affects sense of school belonging (Allen et al., 2017b, Allen et al., 2018). Social and emotional skills are a key component of the [OCDSB Framework for Student Well Being](#) (2015) and are embedded within *The Third Path Framework* (Tranter, Carson & Boland, 2018). These skills are highlighted throughout materials provided from School Mental Health Ontario (SMH-ON) which are shared with educators across the district including mentally healthy classroom resources (i.e., lesson plans, virtual field trips and SEL videos for students). SMH-ON recognizes the need for culturally responsive social-emotional learning and continues to build and provide current resources and materials for all educators across Ontario. Providing opportunities for students to develop social and emotional skills such as cooperation, optimism, and sociability, in particular, may be a good place to start in light of input from parents and students responding to the *Valuing Voices* survey and the latest report released by the OECD (2021b).

**Taking deliberate actions towards addressing inequities in systems, structures, policies and practices.** Unjust or unfair treatment<sup>16</sup> may negatively impact one's sense of school belonging, especially in adolescence and beyond (Yang, 2004; Molinari & Mameli, 2018; Hassani et al., 2020), whereas fair treatment of all students can positively impact student success and well-being and build trust with students, families and communities. The [OCDSB Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Roadmap, 2020-2023](#) (2020) outlines several strategies, goals and milestones to be achieved over the next few years that will begin to tackle some of the institutional barriers that have prevented some students from feeling like they belong in school, including:

- developing and implementing an Equitable Recruitment Strategy;
- providing mandatory training modules for all staff on Diversity and Inclusion Fundamentals and Unconscious Bias (anti-racism and anti-oppression);
- providing training modules for all staff on Indigenous knowledge and rights, anti-racism, anti-oppression, and human rights; and
- developing and implementing Anti-racism, anti-Islamophobia, anti-transphobia and anti-homophobia communication campaigns.

**Celebrating and ensuring diversity and representation.** Research suggests that seeing more same-race/ethnic peers and school staff at school can positively contribute to one's sense of belonging through shared lived experiences. The survey data also

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<sup>16</sup> Fairness means the quality of treating people equally or in a way that is right or reasonable (Cambridge dictionary).

shows moderate correlation between ratings of sense of school belonging and “*my identity is welcomed at school*” and “*I feel represented at school*”. Similarly, parents of children with a low sense of school belonging frequently shared how diversity and representation would contribute to their child’s sense of belonging in school. Some specific actions and next steps in this regard, include:

- establishing a compulsory Grade 11 English: Understanding Contemporary First Nations, Métis and Inuit Voices across all pathways;
- including Indigenous, Black and minoritized, and 2SLGBTQI+ histories, contributions and perspectives in Social Studies, History and Geography, Grade 9-12 English curricula; and
- examining staff demographic data from the *Valuing Staff Voices Survey* conducted in the spring of 2021 in relation to student demographics to identify areas where service delivery could be improved through better workforce representation.

It is clear that sense of school belonging is influenced by a complex set of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. As an education system, we have a responsibility to ensure a safe learning environment for all students where they can interact and engage with staff and students in a positive and mutually respectful way.

## Technical Considerations

### Methodology

Data sources: This report used data from the *Valuing Voices - Identity Matters* survey collected in 2019 and the Trillium student information system.

### Analysis:

- **Descriptive statistics** to produce frequency tables and charts. To ensure that every single voice is heard, no data suppression has been applied in this report. Percentages and index values (disproportionality) are displayed for all reporting groups, regardless of their size (number of students/respondents) or the size of their reference group (total District/Respondent count). As a result, it is strongly advised that these values are interpreted in the context of the student/response counts from which they are derived as the weight of one student is much greater when reporting on small groups.
- **Correlation analysis**<sup>17</sup> (Annex 1) to test the relationship between sense of school belonging and other perceptual questions (i.e., if one variable increases (or decreases) the other variable also increases (or decreases), indicating a linear relationship). A table of correlation coefficients can be found in Annex 1.  
Interpretation of correlation coefficients: As an example, a correlation coefficient of 0.6 was obtained for the relationship between (a) **sense of school belonging** and (b) **feeling of being respected at school**, which can be interpreted as:
  - ❖ A sense of school belonging and feeling of being respected at school are *positively correlated*, which means that if the feeling of being respected at school improves (increases), the sense of school belonging also improves (increases). This also means that a decrease in one results in a decrease in the other.
  - ❖ The strength of the association is considered to be *moderate* according to the following general guidelines: very high correlation - 0.9 to 1.0; high correlation - 0.7 to 0.9; moderate correlation - 0.5 to 0.7; low correlation - 0.3 to 0.5; and coefficients less than 0.3 have little if any linear correlation.

Ranking the responses on the likert scale. Responses were ranked from low to high and coded in the dataset accordingly; the “Not sure” response option was excluded from the correlational analysis, to avoid making an assumption about why respondents may have selected this option (e.g., whether it reflected a “neutral” response (i.e. somewhere in the middle of the likert scale) or whether it reflected true uncertainty about where they fell on the scale provided to them). This is a common practice in data science (Krosnick et al., 2002; Reid & Allum, 2019).

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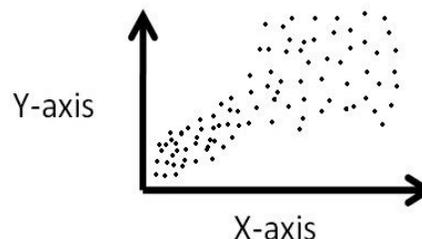
<sup>17</sup> Spearman rank-order correlation, a nonparametric measure of the strength and direction of association that exists between two variables measured on at least an ordinal scale (i.e. involving categorical data -- e.g. strong, moderate, low, etc), was conducted.

**Table 2: Criteria for ranking likert scale categorical variables**

Ranking (code)		Sense of School Belonging	Likert Scale Categories from other perceptual questions:			
<b>High</b>  <b>Low</b>	<b>5</b>			All the time	Never	
	<b>4</b>		Strongly Agree	Often	Rarely	Excellent
	<b>3</b>	Strong	Agree	Sometimes	Sometimes	Good
	<b>2</b>	Moderate	Disagree	Rarely	Often	Satisfactory
	<b>1</b>	Low	Strongly Disagree	Never	All the time	Needs Improvement
Treat as missing data		Not sure	Not Sure	Not sure	Not sure	Not sure

**Note:** frequency (i.e. All the time, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Never) is coded according to the unidirectional ranking indicating a desired outcome. For example, the desired outcome for bullying is never (coded as 5) but the desired outcome for feeling happy at school is all the time (also coded as 5). The coding was structured accordingly.

Scatterplots are often used to visually portray relationships amongst variables. The graph to the right shows a positive correlation between two variables. *It is important to note that correlation does not mean causation even if there is one.*



- **Disproportionality analysis** (Annex 2) to determine the extent to which particular groups of students are under- or over-represented in a particular program, service, or function - in this case, students who reported a strong sense of school belonging. The process was guided by the Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism (Ontario, 2018).

Interpretation of a disproportionality index: If a particular group of students accounts for 15% of the overall population of students and for only 13% of the sub-group of students with a strong sense of belonging, they are considered to be under-represented in the group of students reporting a strong sense of school belonging. The difference between 15% (population) and 13% (group with strong sense of school belonging) yields a disproportionality index of 0.87 ( $0.13/0.15=0.86666$ ). An index value equal to 1.0 reflects no disproportionality, a value greater than 1.0 reflects overrepresentation, and a value less than 1.0 reflects underrepresentation.

Units of Analysis. Most survey questions allowed for the selection of multiple responses, honouring the multidimensionality of identity. From an analytical point of view, this adds a layer of complexity. Analysis must be sensitive to commonalities and differences in experience and treatment among persons

reporting multiple responses. For example, Standard 27 (Primary Unit of Analysis) of the Data Standards describes the following considerations in terms of multiple race categories: “In some cases, it may make sense to count persons who report White and some other race according to the other race category selected. In other circumstances, it may be necessary and appropriate to aggregate or construct socially meaningful mixed-race categories. For example, a generic mixed-race category may be appropriate if there are insufficient or small numbers of individuals (fewer than 15) who select multiple race categories. If a generic mixed-race category might obscure significant differences, and sample sizes are sufficient, consider using specific combinations of race categories.” Based on ongoing conversations with the Technical Advisory Group (TAG), reporting is based on inclusive groups – all groups overlap with one another (e.g., the black category includes respondents who selected black either as a single response or in combination with at least one other race category).

- **Qualitative Data.** Responses to the open ended sense of belonging questions were analyzed using an iterative process of assigning codes and themes to the responses provided by participants. Keywords were generated from a thorough review of all responses and entered into *Qualtrics*<sup>18</sup> for the initial theming stage. Themes generated through this process were reviewed by multiple members of the READ team for verification purposes. That is, each response was examined to ensure that the themes and keywords adequately captured the information and were distinct from one another. Several themes were revised (separated or combined) and some additional themes were created.

Table 3 below shows the 10 most frequent overarching themes by survey type (i.e., JK-6 parents; grades 7-12 students) for low and strong sense of school belonging; the percentage of respondents whose comments fell into each theme are also presented. It should be noted that percentages do not add to 100% as some of the responses might have been tagged under multiple themes.

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<sup>18</sup> A survey platform that includes a text analysis tool designed to identify patterns and trends in open-ended responses by organizing responses under related themes based on the keywords entered.

**Table 3: The 10 most frequent themes emerging from survey respondents who reported either a low or strong sense of school belonging**

<b>JK-6</b>		<b>7-12</b>	
<b>low sense of belonging (N=534)</b>	<b>strong sense of belonging (N=6108)</b>	<b>low sense of belonging (N=2355)</b>	<b>strong sense of belonging (N=7525)</b>
Learning Experience (34%)	Support (51%)	Social Interactions/ Interpersonal Experiences (23%)	Relationships (53%)
Social Interactions/ Interpersonal Experiences (33%)	School Staff (49%)	Learning Experience (17%)	Support (32%)
Support (31%)	Relationships (39%)	Support (16%)	School Staff (28%)
Relationships (29%)	Learning Experience (28%)	School Staff (15%)	Social Interactions/ Interpersonal Experiences (27%)
School Staff (25%)	Social Interactions/ Interpersonal Experiences (21%)	Relationships (13%)	Learning Experience (22%)
Diversity & Representation (23%)	School Climate (19%)	School Structure & Organization (11%)	School Activities Clubs Events & Extracurriculars (18%)
School Safety (22%)	School Activities Clubs Events & Extracurriculars (18%)	School Safety (11%)	School Climate (15%)
School Structure & Organization (18%)	Engagement (14%)	Diversity & Representation (10%)	Engagement (9%)
School Climate (16%)	Personal Factors & Preferences (7%)	Engagement (8%)	Personal Factors & Preferences (7%)
Health & Well-being (13%)	Family Connection (7%)	School Activities Clubs Events & Extracurriculars (7%)	School Structure & Organization (6%)

## Annex 1: Correlation\* of Sense of School Belonging with other perceptual questions on the *Valuing Voices - Identity Matters! Survey*

*Interpretation: very high correlation - 0.9 to 1.0; high correlation - 0.7 to 0.9; moderate correlation - 0.5 to 0.7; low correlation - 0.3 to 0.5; and coefficients less than 0.3 have little if any linear correlation.*

	All Students		JK-6		7-12		Correlation legend:
	N	rho	N	rho	N	rho	
WB_Accepted_by_staff	28,510	0.4	9,799	0.4	18,711	0.4	
WB_Accepted_by_students	28,365	0.5	9,767	0.5	18,598	0.5	Moderate
WB_Complain_headaches	29,349	0.3	9,973	0.2	19,376	0.2	
WB_Enjoy_daily_act	29,588	0.4	10,030	0.4	19,558	0.4	
WB_Happy	29,700	0.5	10,101	0.4	19,599	0.5	
WB_Identity_welcomed	28,004	0.5	9,500	0.4	18,504	0.4	Low
WB_Irritable	29,477	0.4	10,009	0.3	19,468	0.3	
WB_Nervous	29,421	0.3	9,933	0.3	19,488	0.3	
WB_Not_want_school	29,510	0.4	10,027	0.4	19,483	0.4	Little if any
WB_Part_of_school	27,814	0.6	9,640	0.5	18,174	0.5	
WB_Respected_at_school	27,685	0.5	9,511	0.5	18,174	0.5	
WB_Same_opportunity	28,484	0.4	9,702	0.4	18,782	0.4	
WB_Tired	29,626	0.3	10,011	0.2	19,615	0.2	
Bullying_Cyber	28,107	0.2	9,198	0.2	18,909	0.2	
Bullying_Physically	28,144	0.2	9,239	0.3	18,905	0.2	
Bullying_Socially	28,106	0.3	9,196	0.4	18,910	0.3	
Bullying_Verbally	28,119	0.3	9,211	0.4	18,908	0.3	
Bullying_Worried_about	27,645	0.3	9,201	0.4	18,444	0.3	
Discrim_Appearance	25,832	0.3	7,788	0.4	18,044	0.3	
Discrim_Clothing	25,930	0.3	7,853	0.3	18,077	0.3	
Discrim_Disability	25,864	0.2	8,189	0.3	17,675	0.2	
Discrim_Ethnicity	25,638	0.2	7,914	0.2	17,724	0.2	
Discrim_FamIncome	25,848	0.2	7,878	0.2	17,970	0.2	
Discrim_FamStr	25,735	0.2	7,900	0.2	17,835	0.2	
Discrim_GenderID	26,131	0.2	8,107	0.1	18,024	0.2	
Discrim_GradesAch	25,854	0.3	7,677	0.3	18,177	0.3	
Discrim_INDG	25,432	0.1	7,976	0.1	17,456	0.1	
Discrim_L1	26,240	0.1	8,152	0.1	18,088	0.1	
Discrim_Other	9,720	0.2	2,679	0.3	7,041	0.2	
Discrim_Race	25,870	0.2	7,914	0.2	17,956	0.2	
Discrim_Rel	25,773	0.2	7,882	0.1	17,891	0.2	
Discrim_SexOrient	25,600	0.2	7,861	0.1	17,739	0.2	
EO_Academic_Diversity	29,083	0.3	9,910	0.3	19,173	0.3	
EO_Collaboration	29,351	0.3	9,963	0.4	19,388	0.3	
EO_Communication	29,303	0.3	10,007	0.3	19,296	0.3	
EO_Creativity	29,438	0.2	10,003	0.2	19,435	0.1	
EO_Critical_Thinking	29,179	0.2	9,910	0.3	19,269	0.2	
EO_Decision_Making	28,856	0.2	9,707	0.3	19,149	0.2	
EO_Digital_Fluency	28,857	0.1	9,586	0.2	19,271	0.2	
EO_Global_Awareness	28,450	0.2	9,550	0.2	18,900	0.2	
EO_Goal_Setting	28,997	0.3	9,749	0.3	19,248	0.3	
EO_Resiliency	29,049	0.3	9,864	0.3	19,185	0.3	
Opp_Express_identity	26,180	0.4	8,500	0.4	17,680	0.4	
Opp_identity_of_others	25,796	0.3	8,080	0.2	17,716	0.3	
Opp_Learn_identity	24,697	0.4	7,631	0.3	17,066	0.3	
Rep_Extra_curricular	23,868	0.3	7,287	0.3	16,581	0.3	
Rep_Learning_materials	24,411	0.4	7,772	0.3	16,639	0.3	
Rep_Lessons_curriculum	23,864	0.4	7,752	0.3	16,112	0.4	
Rep_Pictures_posters	23,919	0.4	8,131	0.3	15,788	0.3	
Rep_School_events_activities	23,412	0.3	7,570	0.3	15,842	0.3	
Safety_in_classroom	27,687	0.4	9,197	0.4	18,490	0.4	
Safety_in_the_neighbourhood	26,157	0.3	8,399	0.3	17,758	0.3	
Safety_on_school_bus	20,798	0.3	6,181	0.3	14,617	0.3	
Safety_on_school_property	27,009	0.4	8,881	0.4	18,128	0.4	
Safety_on_the_way	27,098	0.3	8,855	0.3	18,243	0.3	
Safety_other_parts_of_the_school	27,176	0.4	8,931	0.4	18,245	0.4	

\*All correlation coefficients in the table are statistically significant with p-values less than 0.0000.

Acronyms: **EO** - Exit Outcomes, **WB** - Wellbeing, **rho** - correlation coefficient, **Discrim.** - discrimination, **Rep.** - representation, **Opp.** - opportunities. Refer to the [Valuing Voices - Identity Matters! Survey Report](#) (pg. 37-56) for details on the specific wording of each question and response options available to respondents.

## Annex 2: Disproportionality Indices for Groups of Students Reporting a Strong Sense of Belonging at School

Disproportionality in this case means over-representation or under-representation of a particular group in the subset of students with a strong sense of school belonging, derived from the group's size (%) in the total population relative to its size (%) in the smaller sub-population of students with a strong sense of school belonging. **Interpretation:** Index values greater than 1.00 indicate over-representation, values less than 1.00 indicate under-representation and values equal to 1.00 indicate equal representation.

		N (All respondents)		N (Strong SSB*)		Disproportionality Index	
		JK-Gr6	Gr7-12	JK-Gr6	Gr7-12	JK-Gr6	Gr7-12
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS (Trillium)	Male	5,599	10,439	2,978	4,126	0.94	1.11
	Female	5,186	10,751	3,125	3,397	1.06	0.89
	ELL	1,036	4,417	628	1,604	1.07	1.02
	Not ELL	9,749	16,773	5,475	5,919	0.99	0.99
	INDG	189	350	88	103	0.82	0.83
	Not INDG	10,596	20,840	6,015	7,420	1.00	1.00
	SpEd (excl. gifted)	1,213	4,175	454	1,248	0.66	0.84
	SpEd Gifted + Not SpEd	9,572	17,015	5,649	6,275	1.04	1.04
	Low-SES	2,790	5,232	1,531	1,851	* 0.97	* 0.99
	Not Low-SES	6,492	13,159	3,716	4,699	* 1.01	* 1.00
INDIGENOUS STATUS	Does not identify as Indigenous	10,365	20,136	5,875	7,215	1.00	1.01
	First Nation	223	517	119	135	0.94	0.73
	Métis	92	235	43	75	0.83	0.90
	Inuit	67	133	29	32	0.77	0.68
	COMPOSITE - All Indigenous	334	805	172	221	0.91	0.77
RACE	Black	770	1,895	434	668	1.00	0.99
	East Asian	929	2,370	533	822	1.01	0.97
	Indigenous	218	501	105	131	0.85	0.73
	Latino/Latina/Latinx	232	582	145	181	1.10	0.87
	Middle Eastern	1,572	2,974	957	1,117	1.08	1.05
	South Asian	854	1,678	503	717	1.04	1.20
	Southeast Asian	347	832	215	233	1.09	0.79
	White	6,716	12,014	3,699	4,234	0.97	0.99
	Another race not listed	306	474	183	152	1.06	0.90
GENDER IDENTITY	Boy or Man	5,557	9,948	2,966	4,025	0.94	1.13
	Gender Fluid	21	125	7	18	0.59	0.40
	Gender Non-Conforming	27	94	9	17	0.59	0.51
	Girl or Woman	5,071	10,159	3,079	3,310	1.07	0.91
	Non-Binary	13	176	5	28	0.68	0.44
	Questioning	24	204	6	39	0.44	0.53
	Trans Boy or Man	7	121	2	12	0.50	0.28
	Trans Girl or Woman	9	71	5	13	0.98	0.51
	Two-Spirit	3	67	1	21	0.59	0.88
	Not Listed	35	259	16	54	0.81	0.58
	Not Sure	81	122	33	20	0.72	0.46
Gender Diverse (composite)**	118	903	46	157	0.69	0.49	
DISABILITY	Addiction(s)	2	176	-	29	0.00	0.44
	Autism Spectrum Disorder	303	276	67	55	0.39	0.53
	Blind or Low Vision	19	138	8	22	0.73	0.42
	Chronic Pain	5	132	3	17	1.04	0.34
	Deaf or Hard of Hearing	55	112	28	24	0.89	0.57
	Developmental	143	96	32	17	0.39	0.47
	Learning	488	859	160	187	0.57	0.58
	Mental	158	571	32	89	0.35	0.41
	Mobility	17	67	6	15	0.61	0.60
	Physical	65	206	19	42	0.51	0.54
	Speech Impairment	133	113	46	21	0.60	0.49
	Undisclosed	29	166	17	60	1.02	0.96
	Another disability not listed	193	273	67	84	0.60	0.82
	Does not having a disability	9,341	16,549	5,606	6,466	1.04	1.04

Index legend:

<1.00

>1.00

=1.00

\*revised

\*SSB - Sense of School Belonging

\*\* composite category consisting of: Gender Fluid, Gender Non-Conforming, Non-Binary, Questioning, Trans Boy or Man, Trans Girl or Woman, Two-Spirit, and Not Listed/Another gender identity.

### Annex 3. Themes Assigned to Open-Ended Sense of Belonging Questions

Theme	Theme Description
<b>Communication</b>	refers to presence (or lack of) communication between individuals (peer-to-peer, teacher-peer, parent-teacher, etc) or the school with parents to enhance the ability to support learning.
<b>Diversity &amp; Representation</b>	relates to acknowledgement, awareness, respect for, recognition of, representation/presence of differences/uniqueness that are identity-based (e.g., ethnicity, religion, culture, tradition, race, gender, sexual orientation) or other personal attributions whether self-described or assigned by others (e.g., physical appearance, ability/skill, background, personal preferences, or more generally).
<b>Engagement</b>	is presence of connection with school in various ways such as participation or involvement in school and outside school activities and motivation/interest in recruitment/engagement strategies.
<b>Family Connection</b>	is presence and influence of family in a student's life, whether in school (e.g., presence of siblings, parent engagement, family involvement) or at home through communication of family values/teaching and parent engagement/involvement in their child's learning and growth.
<b>Health &amp; Well-Being</b>	includes mental, physical, and social-emotional health and well-being of students.
<b>Learning Experience</b>	includes perceptions of the value of students' education, experiences related to students' adjustment/transition into/between school settings, instructional practices, learning preferences, and overall school workload.
<b>Personal Factors or Preferences</b>	includes self-esteem, aspirations, expressed interest in personal accommodations (e.g., allow for the use of personal devices; clothing choice), and other personal characteristics, histories or traits.
<b>Relationships</b>	is presence (or absence) of bonds between the self and others, which includes friendships, connections, and/or the ability to identify with someone else based on shared interests, background, or other personal characteristics.
<b>Resources and Services</b>	refers to allocation and management of financial, logistical, and educational resources and services for students and parents such as food, transportation, mobile devices, internet connection and guidance counselors, and services for parents/families including before and after school care (EDP).

Theme	Theme Description
<b>School Activities, Clubs, Events and Extracurriculars</b>	is linked to activities that are usually pursued in addition to regular classroom activities. These activities include school-wide activities (e.g., assemblies, celebrations, spirit days), class trips, community events/fundraisers, as well as other opportunities (incl. sports, clubs, committees) that are additional to regular classroom activities (i.e., during lunch/breaks, at recess, or before/after school extracurricular activities).
<b>School Climate</b>	refers to school culture or climate and sense of being welcome, the instructional environment, and behavioural expectations and discipline in both the school and classroom.
<b>School Safety</b>	includes presence/absence of bullying or discrimination, and feelings related to physical or emotional safety.
<b>School Staff</b>	refers to school-level staff, inclusive of administration (principals, vice-principals, office staff, custodial staff, support staff), classroom educators (teachers, early childhood educators, support staff), and other adults in the school (e.g., guidance counsellors, coaches).
<b>School Structure/ Organization</b>	refers to physical space (i.e., size and maintenance of structures and grounds), provision/availability of facilities (e.g., washrooms, cafeteria, playground, utilities), organizational structures (i.e., scheduling, class size and structure), as well as course and/or program offerings (e.g., electives, interest/specialized courses, program/streams).
<b>Social Interactions/ Interpersonal Experiences</b>	encompasses various social interactions; describes the character/nature of the relationship or interaction (e.g., acceptance, fairness, cooperation, respect), and/or the need/interest in more opportunities to interact with others
<b>Support</b>	is based on either the provision of or perceived availability of assistance and/or encouragement, whether personal, physical, emotional, financial, or educational (i.e., learning).
<b>Unclassified</b>	is a mutually exclusive group of responses whose content could not be described as falling under any of the other themes listed above. This includes those who stated that they did not understand the question, preferred not to answer, or provided a response that could not otherwise be defined/did not offer additional constructive information (incl. non-descriptive or unclear response, vulgarity, or random characters).

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