



COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (PUBLIC)
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Student Learning Update: Student Engagement and Well-Being

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PURPOSE:

1. To provide an update on student attendance, suspensions, and perceptual data, as aligned with direction provided from the Ministry of Education to monitor student engagement and well-being.

STRATEGIC LINKS:

2. Student learning, well-being, and engagement are strongly interconnected. Setting the conditions for learning to enhance student success is guided by the goals and objectives set forth in the [Strategic Plan](#). The strategic plan articulates the importance of student well-being as one of the three key pillars, and identifies desired outcomes such as improved mental health supports/resources and enhanced safety. The data in this report serves as evidence of student engagement and well-being, including students' sense of belonging at school and feelings of safety at school.

CONTEXT:

3. In 2023, the Ministry of Education introduced the Student Achievement Plan (SAP; Appendix A) to guide school boards in prioritizing student success. This comprehensive plan provides a common structure for school boards, outlining priority areas of focus. These priority areas include: improving core academic skills, preparing students for future endeavors, and fostering student engagement and well-being.

The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) has undertaken annual reports on each priority area, in addition to completion of the Ministry SAP reporting template at the end of the year. Regular reporting on student outcomes provides evidence of progress and informs next steps towards achieving

OCDSB's short and long-term goals. This report focuses on student engagement and well-being.

Table 1. Outline of OCDSB Report Timing.

Report Timing	Priority Area
February 2025	Achievement of Learning Outcomes in Core Academic Skills
March 2025	Student Engagement and Well-Being
May 2025	Preparation of Students for Future Success

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

4. Indicators for Student Engagement and Well-Being

This report is part of our reporting responsibility to the Board, its strategic plan, and the Ministry of Education. The Ministry has provided a framework that includes goals for each priority area and specific and measurable indicators for each goal. For engagement and well-being, the SAP focuses on three main metrics: student attendance and suspension (as indicators of student participation in class time and learning); and awareness of mental health supports (as an indicator of student well-being). These metrics are reported in Appendix B.

In addition to overall tracking, the OCDSB uses this data to monitor the progress of identified groups and inform efforts to reduce disproportionalities. Student identity data is based on information available from our student information system and from the Valuing Voices Survey. Disaggregation of data, including disproportionalities indices, are included in Appendix B. When disaggregating data, it is important to consider participation rates and how low counts can contribute to fluctuations in percentages. Additionally, it is important to consider how a group is identified; for example, through self-identification, formal assessment, or records from Statistics Canada. Note that students with special education needs include those with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and/or those who have been identified through the Identification and Placement Review Committee (IPRC), and excludes students identified as gifted.

5. Student Attendance

To monitor student attendance, the Ministry-defined metric is based on the proportion of students in Grades 1 to 8 who are present for at least 90% of the instructional days in a given year. Note that the calculation considers missed instructional time, regardless of the reason (i.e., is inclusive of excused absences). Attendance data is based on two sources: Ministry reports and internally-calculated rates. Due to variations in methodology, Ministry rates are not replicable and therefore each data source is useful for a distinct purpose. The Ministry data provides meaningful context, and allows for comparisons between

the OCDSB and the province, while internal data allows for disaggregation by identity to calculate disproportionalities.

Based on the most recent provincial data on attendance (2022-2023), the OCDSB attendance rate was higher than the province (59% compared to 55% of elementary students meeting the 90% threshold). Across the elementary grades, attendance gradually increases from Grade 1 to 3, then declines with the lowest rates in Grade 8.

Based on internal data, OCDSB attendance rates increased by 15% from 2022-2023 (41% to 56%). Although there are external factors which can influence attendance, this increase represents an increase in instructional time for these students. When accounting for 'excused' absences (e.g., holy days, inclement weather, school closures, medical reasons with documentation, field trips, or school-orchestrated sports trips), we see the increase in attendance remains strong (from 59% to 67%). Differences were observed in attendance rates based on student identity data, in particular for students who identify as Indigenous, as reported in Appendix B.

6. **Student Suspensions**

The suspension metric focuses on suspensions of students Grades 4-12, as outlined in the Ministry SAP, following a regulation introduced in 2020 which removes the principal's discretion to suspend students enrolled in Kindergarten to Grade 3. The suspension rates used for tracking purposes are based on the number of students in Grades 4-12 who were suspended at least once in that academic year, relative to the student enrolment for those grades¹.

Based on the most recent provincial data on suspensions (2022-2023), the OCDSB suspension rate was slightly lower than the province (2.87% compared to 4.06% of students Grades 4-12 being suspended at least once). Based on internal data, OCDSB suspension rates have increased slightly from 2022-2023 to 2023-2024 (from 2.8% to 3.2%). The increase in suspensions is driven by mandatory suspensions, which are issued when a student engages in activity that poses a significant safety concern. Suspension data is explored based on suspension type, length of suspension, frequency of suspensions, and student identity. Differences based on student identity data show that although rates have slightly increased, some progress has been made in reducing disproportionalities, in particular for students who identify as Indigenous.

Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) 141 requires school boards to provide students with programming if they have been suspended for six days or more. While boards are not required to provide programs for students who have been suspended for fewer than six days, boards are expected to provide homework

¹ In 2023-2024, there was a single suspension of a student in Kindergarten to Grade 3, which was not included in this reporting.

packages for these students to help ensure that they do not fall behind in their school work. OCDSB schools provide homework packages for students suspended for a short period of time, and the OCDSB offers longer term programming at two Support During Suspension Program (SDSP) sites. Students attending SDSP work through curriculum provided by the home school and are supported by teachers and educational assistants (EAs). Note that while this program is offered to all students who are suspended six days or more, not all students accept the program.

7. Awareness of Mental Health Supports and Services

EQAO Questionnaires introduced a question about student awareness of mental health supports for Grades 6, 9, and 10 (OSSLT) for the first time in 2023-2024. This represents baseline data for future monitoring over time, and allows for comparisons to the provincial results. Overall, OCDSB students' awareness of mental health supports are closely aligned with overall provincial results, which show greater awareness of students in older grades. Disaggregation by identity-based data shows that students who identify as Indigenous and/or students with special education needs (excluding gifted) are less likely to report awareness of mental health supports. Additional analysis by identity is reported in Appendix B.

8. School Climate Data

In Spring 2024, the OCDSB administered the Valuing Voices Student Survey which consisted of school climate questions. This survey was completed by parents/caregivers on behalf of students in Kindergarten to Grade 6 and by students in Grades 7 to 12. The participation rate for the school climate portion of the survey was 57% and therefore this analysis reflects data from that subset of the population.

For most topics, favourability ratings² were used to assess the data. Higher favourability ratings indicate an area of strength (more favourable or agreeable responses) and lower favourability ratings indicate areas that may be of concern (less favourable or agreeable responses). Most domains (compared to the 2022 student survey and the 2023 parent/caregiver survey), saw an increase in favourability, with the largest increases in opportunities for extracurriculars and perceptions of school discipline. This suggests an overall improvement in engagement and well-being in recent years, although the timing of the surveys (especially as we move further away from the pandemic) is important to take into consideration. Across most topics, ratings were most favourable for students in the primary division (Kindergarten to Grade 3) and least favourable for students in the intermediate division (Grades 7-8).

² The average level of agreement across all items (questions) within a topic. Scores are reported as the percentage of respondents answering favourably (e.g., *strongly agree, agree*), and are calculated using an average weighted proportion across all items within a topic.

When examining responses by identity-based data, patterns showed less favourable experiences, including more frequent bullying and discrimination, for students from communities identified as underserved (e.g., students who identify as transgender, non-binary and/or gender diverse; students who are racialized and/or from a community or group that has historically been minoritized, such as Black, Jewish or Indigenous; students with a disability). The full disaggregation of results for various identity characteristics, including disproportionality indices, is found in Appendix B.

9. **Using the Data to Inform Strategies**

Data on student outcomes informs our planning at multiple levels: for the District; for schools; and, for students. To equip school administrators and their teams with the knowledge and tools needed to better understand their school data, staff continue to use a Data Support Model wherein research staff work directly with school principals. This partnership supports principals in their work understanding their student population, achievement trends, and school climate, and supports the research team by putting faces on the data and adding important contextual factors to the data conversations. Together, this facilitates data-driven decision-making and evidence-informed practice.

In support of student engagement and well-being, the research team produces School Climate Dashboards (following each survey administration) which help school administrators understand the perceptual data from their students, parents/caregivers, and educators. In addition, the research team creates Suspension Dashboards, which allow administrators to filter and disaggregate suspension data down to the student level to better understand school-level patterns in student suspensions. Together, these dashboards serve as key tools for superintendents and administrators to collaboratively explore data and develop strategies to support student learning and address areas of need.

An important component of this work is ensuring intentional focus on the students in each school who are in the greatest need. The interactive nature of this data exploration is leading to greater precision and more timely interventions as administrators regularly monitor school and student level data. This includes a consideration of the school demographics. At the school level, the data can be explored in meaningful ways, such as single versus consecutive absences, single versus repeat suspensions, and/or reasons for absences and suspensions. This allows for school-level strategies to support the students in need.

10. **Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plans**

Last year, our revised [Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan](#) (BPIP) was developed and released to schools and communities. Schools have an individual plan that is based on the BPIP but identifies a specific goal the school is working towards each year. It also identifies activities and strategies that the school has

been implementing to date. These individual plans will be available to the public on school websites.

11. **Professional Learning and Support**

Professional learning is critical to ensure staff, students and families are equipped with the knowledge required to effectively support student mental health and well-being. Training sessions this year focused on Restorative Practices, Creating Mentally Healthy Schools & Classrooms, Suicide Prevention and Intervention Training, Trauma Informed Practices, Roots of Empathy, Assessment of Risk to Others (ARTO) Training, as well as the ongoing support and roll out of the Ministry's Mental Health Literacy Modules.

12. **What Continues to Guide our Work?**

The new OCDSB Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy (2023-2027; Appendix C) aims to support students by ensuring that schools and classrooms foster connections rooted in authentic and reciprocal relationships, engage in active collaboration with students, staff, and families and pursue meaningful coordination with service providers. The Strategy has three pillars that reflect a commitment to ensure that every student feels they **belong** in their schools and classrooms, where we **build** and bolster skills when necessary and where we **bridge** students and families to more intensive services as required.

The following list provides a sampling of the work and initiatives that have been actioned this year as part of the student engagement and well-being pillar of the SAP:

- Hosted a symposium for Student and Staff Well-Being Champions and support was provided for school-based youth led mental health initiatives;
- Rolled out Leading Mentally Healthy Schools to system administrators;
- Delivered a wide range of programs including Kids Have Stress Too, Wellness Matters, Healthy Relationships, STRONG, AFFIRM, etc.;
- Rolled out Ministry's Mental Health Literacy Modules to Careers Studies educators;
- Developed and distributed educator toolkits to key staff members in every school;
- Established a Central Attendance Strategy Committee to enhance student attendance and re-engagement efforts;
- Partnered with Program Services and Parents Lifeline of Eastern Ontario (PLEO) to provide a re-engagement program for children and families with attendance related concern; and
- Co-developed and delivered presentations and resources related to student attendance to parents/caregivers in collaboration with community partners.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

13. All expenses for this work are funded through existing District funds and Ministry of Education grants.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

14. The information presented in this report is an important component of District level monitoring and accountability to the community. The data also provides important context for schools, as administrators work with central departments such as the Research, Evaluation, and Analytics Department (READ) and Safe Schools to have more in-depth and tailored conversations about their school-level data.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

15. The following questions are provided to support the discussion of this item by the Committee:
 - What questions arise from the data?
 - How do we anticipate gains in the area of well-being will translate to improvements in achievement?
 - What are our next steps to further improve student attendance rates?
 - How can we ensure that the needs of underserved students are further supported in our ongoing work?

FOR DISCUSSION

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
Appendix B
Appendix C