

Results from Thoughtexchange: Students, Parents and Community

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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?

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