



every
STUDENT COUNTS
SURVEY

**YRDSB Every Student Counts Survey
Research Brief:
Students' In-School Activities**

**Research and Assessment Services
December 2021**



Title: YRDSB Every Student Counts Survey Research Brief. Students' In-School Activities

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Introduction

This research brief highlights the York Region District School Board's 2018 Every Student Counts Survey findings on several in-school experiences of students such as their participation in arts, music, sports, cultural group(s), leadership group(s), school club(s), student council, publication(s), and special event(s) at school. This research brief also examines students' perceptions on whether their schools offered in-school activities that aligned with their interest(s). In so doing, we examined associations between students' out-of-school experiences and whether they perceived their school to offer in-school activities that were of interest. Additionally, since ethical leadership is a key tenet of the [Director's Action Plan](#), a more in-depth examination of students' desire to engage in leadership activities at school was carried out.

By examining the rich experiences of participating students both in and out-of-school, our aim is to better understand, appreciate and integrate in schools students' funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), that is, any culturally rooted knowledge found within communities. The knowledge that we can acquire through this type of research can support in informing professional practice, particularly the implementation of intentional interventions and strategies that aim to close opportunity gaps among various identity groups. The aim of this research brief is to also prompt critical dialogue amongst education stakeholders regarding any common assumptions held in relation to students in and out-of-school experiences, with the intent of better serving students.

This research brief aims to prompt critical dialogue toward positive social change for underserved groups of students as well as aims to illuminate systemic barriers certain groups of students may be facing and continue to face both in and outside school, particularly regarding their in-school activity experiences. It is important for us to emphasize, once again, that these experiences be viewed through an asset, not a deficit lens.

Anti-Oppression Note

This research brief aims to prompt critical dialogue toward positive social change for underserved groups of students as well as aims to illuminate systemic barriers certain groups of students may be facing and continue to face at schools, particularly regarding their perceptions of school climate: inclusive learning experiences and school safety. It is important for us to emphasize that the opportunity gaps found within this report are attributed to the social inequities perpetuated by systems of power, which requires steps toward positive social change for underserved groups of students (Oluo, 2018) and are not at all a reflection of deficits within students and families. As such, it is importance to review these findings within this report through an Anti-Oppressive Framework. Before reading any further, we encourage readers to read the anti-oppressive prompts listed below and to keep them front and center when engaging with the findings of this report

Engaging with ESCS Data through an Anti-Oppressive Framework

The following questions are intended to support readers of this report in using an anti-oppression framework to review the ESCS findings:

- What do you notice about the data? What stands out for you?
- How does your social location influence how you interpret the data?
- How will you shift or maintain your focus on looking at systems and structures (e.g., school practices, school environment, school board practices) rather than attributing students' experiences and outcomes to deficits within students and families?
- What does the data suggest about the experiences of students and their families?
- What assumptions or inferences might you be making about students and their families based on the data?
- Whose voices may not be represented in the data?
- In what ways are the data similar to, or different from, other data sources (e.g., municipal, community agencies, other school boards)?
- What additional data sources are needed to understand both complementary and divergent perspectives regarding educational experiences?

Research Questions

In this research brief, we focused on answering the following research questions:

1. What do we know about participating students' overall in-school activities, interest in these activities and leadership involvement?
2. What are the trends in participating students' overall in-school activities, interest in these activities and leadership involvement by grade and emotional well-being?
3. What are the trends in participating students' interest in weekly activities offered at school by grade, gender, special education needs, racial and Indigenous identity?
4. What connections (if any) are found between participating students' interest in weekly activities offered at school and their out-of-school extra-curricular participation?
5. What are the trends in participating students' leadership involvement by grade, gender identity, special education needs, and family income?

Key Findings and Implications

This research brief illuminates several key findings that have important implications for future research and practice. These key findings most especially warrant the use of a mixed methods study design with intersectionality analyses and frameworks in order to further explore and understand the perceptions and experiences of marginalized groups. This intersectional approach in addition to a more transparent dialogue that makes visible multiple interpretations of lived experiences will further contextualize information about students' lives and enrich the study's findings (Goswami & Rutherford, 2009). Several other implications for research and practice linked to several notable findings include:

School special events, school publication activities and cultural groups were among the least popular in school activities across grade panels. Students would benefit from schools providing greater opportunities for students to engage in such unpopular activities just as much as they would benefit from engaging in the more popular ones (e.g., music and arts in Grades K to 8 and school clubs and sports in Grade 9 to 12, closely following music and arts). In so doing, students can learn about a wide range of activities as well as critique both the popular and not so popular ones at school.

Since there were no notable differences regarding students' emotional well-being across in-school activity types, our findings suggest that students' emotional well-being may not be significantly impacted when schools provide greater opportunities for students to engage in a wider range of activities at school. However,

school publication(s) and school events for students in Grades 7 to 8 and school publication(s) and the arts for students in Grade 9 to 12 being among the activities with the highest rates of negative emotional well-being may be worth consideration for future research and practice.

A quarter of the survey respondents (strongly) disagreed that their in-school activities were in alignment with their interests. These respondents were more likely to feel lonely and less likely to feel overall positive emotions compared to those who (strongly) agreed that their in-school activities and interest were in alignment. Thereby, students would benefit from additional activities offered by schools that better align with all students' interests, most especially for students who either self-identified as Two-Spirit across the grade panels or who self-identified as Latino/a/x (multiple race) in Grades 7 to 8 and Black (multiple race) in Grades 9 to 12, as these groups of students reported the highest rates of disagreement that their in-school activities and interests were in alignment.

Further research is required to better understand why the highest rates of feeling nervous/anxious and sad/depressed were reported by students whose in-school activities were in alignment with their interests.

Further research is also required to better understand the groups of students who did not disclose their racial identity, yet were among the highest rates of disagreement alongside Latino/a/x (multiple race) in Grades 7 to 8 and Black (multiple race) in Grades 9 to 12 regarding their school offering in-school activities of interest.

Students who took part in individual sports outside of school, especially students in Grade 7 to 8, reported the highest rate of disagreement that their school offered in-school activities that were of interest to them; thereby, students may benefit from schools integrating more sports-oriented activities at school to pique this group of students' interest(s).

Ten percent of students in Grades 7 to 8 and 12% of students in Grade 9 to 12 reported that they never got involved in leading an activity, but would like to, and 10% of students in Grades 7 to 8 and 16% of students in Grades 9 to 12 reported that they never got involved in leading an activity but were not interested in doing so. With the intention of exposing students to a wider range of in-school activities, schools may benefit from providing greater opportunities for these groups of students to lead activities at school, "not necessarily so that they acquire . . . [these skills] but so that they learn about them" (Gee, 1989, p. 25). For increased participation in such activities at school, benefits may be derived from defining what these leadership activities may look like

for students and schools to pique their interest(s). In fact, partnering together to define these leadership activities in terms of what students' and schools' involvement would entail may support in encouraging more students to have a desire towards participating in such activities.

The finding that students who self-identified as Questioning across grade panels as well as students who self-identified as Gender Fluid, Gender Nonconforming, Non-Binary, and Woman/Girl in Grades 9 to 12 were more likely to never lead an activity, yet have the desire to do so is also worth consideration for further investigation and intervention strategies.

Across grade panels, students who responded "never, but I'd like to" for leading an activity also had higher rates of feeling nervous/anxious compared to feeling like they mattered to people at school. These findings indicate that by offering these group of students more opportunities to get involved in leadership activities, students may experience positive changes to their emotional well-being,

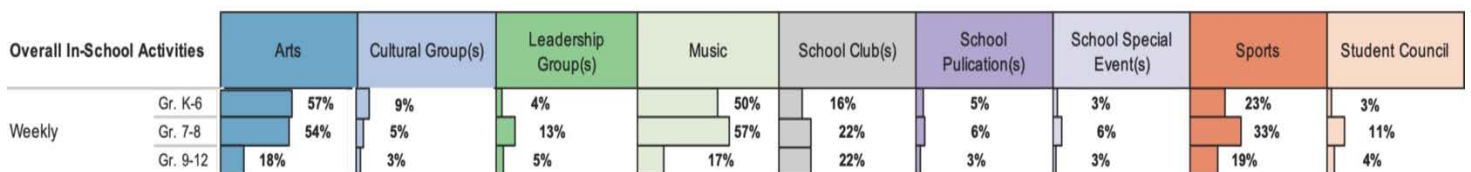
specifically to these emotional well-being categories examined in this research brief.

What do we know about student's overall in-school activities?

This section reports on the overall student participation in specific activities at school on a weekly basis: arts, music, sports, cultural group(s), leadership group(s), school club(s), student council, publication(s), and special event(s) Survey participants were asked, "In a typical school year, how often do you take part in these school activities?" and included the following response scale: weekly, monthly, a few times a year, never or they decided not to answer the question. This section only reports of those participants who selected "weekly" to indicate their level of participation in these activities.

This section first reports on the weekly participation for in-school activities by grade, followed by disaggregating the data by emotional well-being.

Figure 1. Overall Students' In-School Activities by Grade Panel (weekly)



Participation in Weekly In-School Activities by Grade Panel

Figure 1 shows the overall student participation rates in activities at school on a weekly basis across three grade panels: Grades K to 6, Grades 7 to 8 and Grades 9 to 12.

Several notable findings include:

Music and the arts were the two most popular in-school activities for students in Grades K to 8.

School clubs (22%) and sports (19%) were the two most popular in-school activities for students in Grades 9 to 12, closely following arts (18%) and music (17%).

Participation in special events at school, school publications, cultural groups, and student council were among the least popular activities across grade panels.

What are the trends in students' overall in-school activities by grade and emotional well-being?

This section reports on student participation for the in-school activities described previously and their mental health and well-being. The prompt used to examine students' mental health and well-being was, "How often do you feel ..." and we explored four different feeling categories: (1) nervous/anxious (2) lonely, (3) sad/depressed, (4) happy, (5) positive about the future, (6) good about themselves, and (7) like they matter to people at school. This section only reports on those survey respondents that selected "all the time" and "often." This section also only reports on those survey respondents that selected "weekly", to the previously described prompt: "In a typical school year, how often do you take part in these school activities?"

Figure 2. Student's In-School Activities (weekly) by Mental Health & Well-Being (all the time/often)

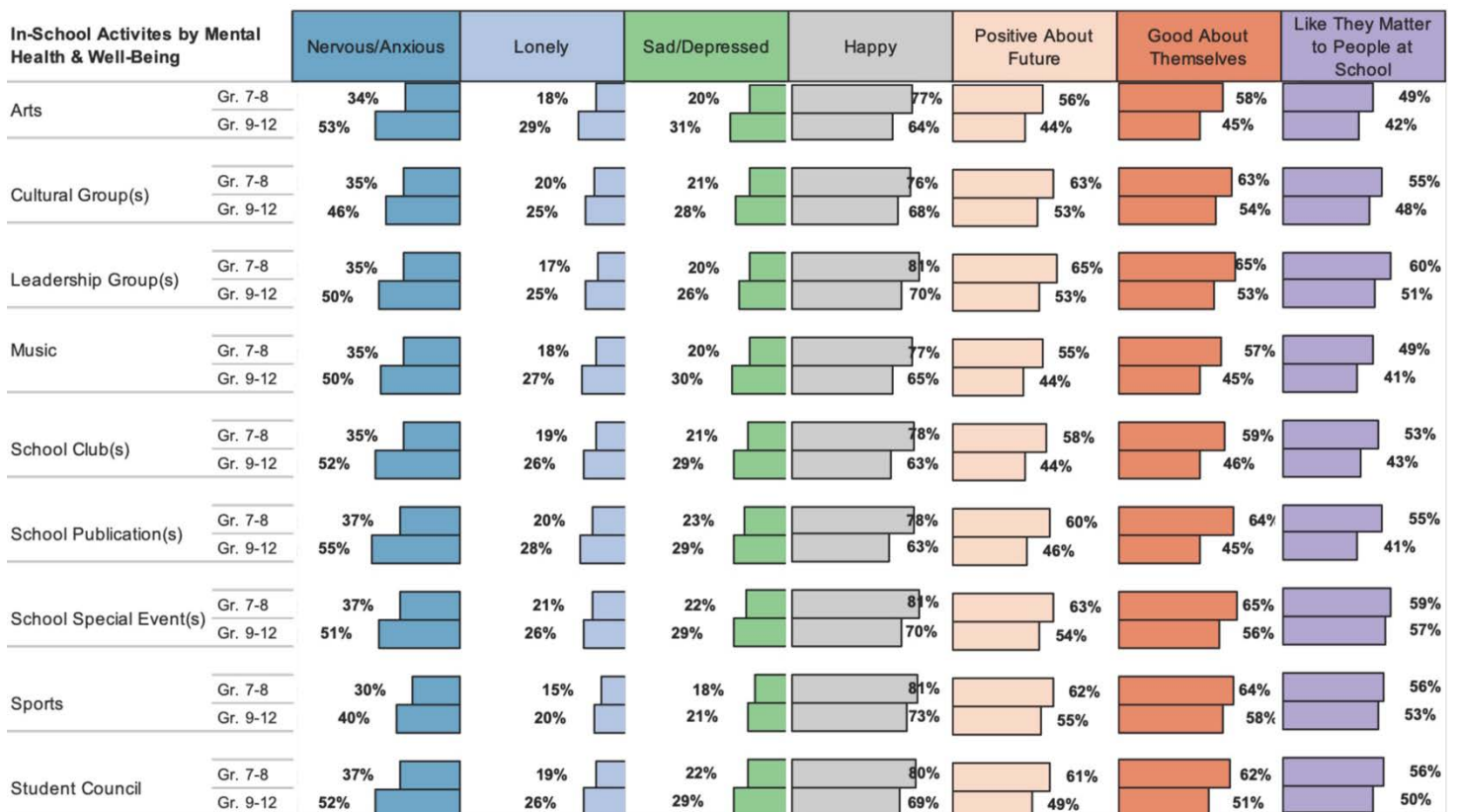


Figure 2 shows in-school activities by students' emotional well-being across two grade panels: Grades 6 to 7 and Grades 9 to 12. Responses for "all the time" and "often" regarding the emotional well-being prompts were combined. Additionally, this section only reports of those participants who selected "weekly" to indicate their level of participation in these school activities.

The notable findings regarding in-school activities of interest and students' emotional well-being were:

Regardless of the activity type, a greater percentage of students reported positive emotional well-being than negative emotional well-being.

Participation in leadership group(s), sports and school special event(s) were among the activities with the highest rates of positive emotional well-being.

Participation in school publication(s) and special event(s) were among the activities with the highest rates of negative emotional well-being for students in Grades 7 to 8; and participation in school publication(s) and the arts were among the activities with the highest rates of negative emotional well-being for Grades 9 to 12 students.

What do we know about student’s overall interest in activities offered at school?

This section reports on the in-school activities of interest. Survey participants responded to the following prompt, “My school offers extra-curricular activities that I am interested in” using the following response scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, not sure or participants decided not to respond to the question.

This section first reports on the overall in-school activities of interest, followed by disaggregating the data by gender, indigeneity, race and emotional well-being. This section concludes by examining any connections between students’ interest in weekly activities offered at school and their out-of-school extra-curricular activities.

Figure 3. Overall Students’ In-School Activities of Interest

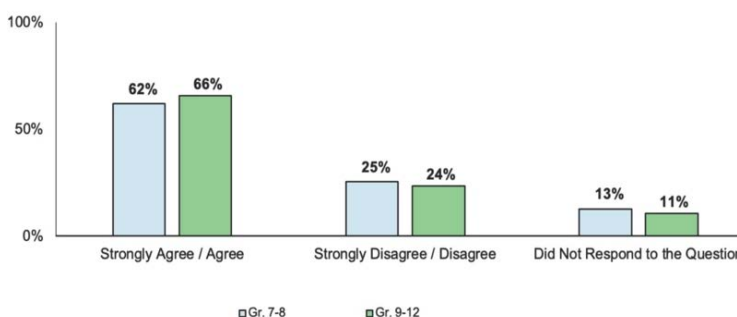


Figure 3 shows the overall interest in activities offered at school across two grade panels: Grades 7 to 8 and Grades 9 to 12. Responses for strongly agree and agree were combined and responses for strongly disagree and disagree were also combined. The notable findings regarding the overall in-school activities of interest include:

Majority of the survey respondents, regardless of the grade panel, (strongly) agreed that their school offered in-school activities that aligned with their interest.

Figure 4. Students’ In-school Activities of Interest by Gender Identity (Strongly Disagree/Disagree)

In-School Activities of Interest by Gender Identity		Gender Fluid	Gender Nonconforming	Man / Boy	Non-Binary	Questioning	Transgender	Two-Spirit	Woman / Girl	A Gender Not Listed
		Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Gr. 7-8: 25%	16%	26%	39%	35%	41%	46%	23%
	Gr. 9-12	22%	29%	24%	29%	42%	38%	45%	22%	36%

Twenty five percent of respondents in Grades 7 to 8 and 24% of respondents in Grades 9 to 12 (strongly) disagreed that their school offered in-school activities that were of interest.

What are the trends in students’ interest in weekly activities offered at school by grade and gender identity?

Figure 4 shows participating students’ interest in activities offered at school by gender identity, and also only reports on those survey respondents that selected “strongly disagree” and “disagree”, which were grouped together.

Several notable findings include:

Across grade panels, students who self-identified as Two-Spirit (45% - 46%) reported the highest rates of disagreement that their school offered in-school activities that were of interest.

In Grades 7 to 8, students who self-identified as Gender Nonconforming (16%) reported the lowest rate of disagreement, followed by students who self-identified as Woman/Girl (23%).

In Grades 9 to 12, students who self-identified as Woman/Girl and Gender Fluid (22% each) reported the lowest rate of disagreement, closely following students who self-identified as Man/Boy (24%).

What are the trends in students’ interest in weekly activities offered at school by grade and special education needs?

Table 1 shows participating students’ interest in activities offered at school by special education needs, and also only reports on those survey respondents that selected “strongly disagree” and “disagree”, which were grouped together.

Table 1. Students' In-School Activities of Interest by Special Education Needs (Strongly Disagree/Disagree)

Special Education Needs	Gr. 7-8	Gr. 9-12
Autism	37%	22%
Behavioural	33%	29%
Blind and Low Vision	NR	NR
Deaf and Hard of Hearing	24%	36%
Developmental Disability	12%	14%
Giftedness	26%	19%
Language Impairment	16%	24%
Learning Disability	24%	28%
Mild Intellectual Disability	16%	17%
Physical Disability	39%	26%
Speech Impairment	NR	NR
No Exceptionality	26%	23%

Several notable findings include:

In the Grades 7 to 8 panel, students who were identified with a Physical Disability reported the highest rates (39%) and students with a Developmental Disability reported the lowest rates (12%) of disagreement that their school offered in-school activities that were of interest.

In the Grades 9 to 12 panel, students who were identified with a Deaf and Hard of Hearing exceptionality reported the highest rates (36%) and students identified with a Developmental Disability reported the lowest rates (14%) of disagreement that their school offered in-school activities that were of interest.

What are the trends in students' interest in weekly activities offered at school by grade and racial and Indigenous identity?

Table 2 shows the in-school activities of interest by student Indigenous and racial identity, and only reports on those survey respondents that selected "strongly disagree" and "disagree", which were, once again, grouped together.

Several notable findings regarding the in-school activities of interest for the Indigenous and racial groups include:

Table 2. Student’s In-School Activities of Interest by Indigenous and Racial Identity (Strongly Disagree/Disagree)

Indigenous and Racial Identity	Gr. 7-8	Gr. 9-12
Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, Inuit)	23%	28%
Black (SR)	20%	23%
Black (MR)	25%	28%
East Asian (SR)	27%	22%
East Asian (MR)	31%	25%
Latino/a/x (SR)	25%	24%
Latino/a/x (MR)	36%	25%
Middle Eastern (SR)	25%	26%
Middle Eastern (MR)	29%	28%
South Asian (SR)	19%	22%
South Asian (MR)	24%	26%
Southeast Asian (SR)	24%	23%
Southeast Asian (MR)	29%	27%
White (SR)	27%	25%
White (MR)	31%	27%
A Racial Category Not Listed (SR)	32%	25%
A Racial Category Not Listed (MR)	36%	28%
No Race Selection	25%	24%

Grades 7 to 8 students who self-identified as Latino/a/x (multiple race) as well as those students whose racial identity was not listed (multiple race) reported the highest rates (36% each) of disagreement that their school offered in-school activities that were of interest.

Grade 9 to 12 students who self-identified as Black (multiple race), Middle Eastern (multiple race) as well as those students whose racial identity was not listed (multiple race) reported the highest rates (28% each) of disagreement.

Across grade panels, students who self-identified as South Asian (single race) reported the lowest rates (19% in Grades 7 to 8 and 22% in Grade 9 to 12) of disagreement.

What are the trends in students’ interest in weekly activities offered at school by grade and emotional well-being?

This section reports on the in-school activities of interest by mental health and well-being. As described in the earlier section, the prompt used to examine students’ mental health and well-being was, “How often do you feel ...” and we explored four different feeling categories: (1) nervous/ anxious (2) lonely, (3) sad/depressed, (4) happy, (5) positive about the future, (6) good about themselves, and (7) like they matter to people at school. This section only reports on those survey respondents that selected “all the time” and “often.” This section also only reports

on those survey respondents that selected “strongly agree/agree” or “strongly disagree/disagree”, to the initial prompt: “My school offers extra-curricular activities that I am interested in.”

Figure 5 shows the in-school activities of interest by mental health and well-being and grade panel.

Several notable findings regarding the in-school activities of interest by mental health and well-being include:

Students across grade panels who (strongly) agreed that their school offered in-school activities of interest reported much higher rates of overall positive emotions (happy, positive about the future, good about themselves and like they matter to people at school) compared to students who (strongly) disagreed

Contrary to these findings, students across grade panels who (strongly) agreed that their school offered in-school activities of interest reported much higher rates of two specific negative emotions (nervous/anxious and sad/depressed) compared to students who (strongly) disagreed.

Students across grade panels who (strongly) disagreed that their school offered in-school activities of interest reported higher rates of feeling lonely compared to students who (strongly) disagree.

What connection (if any) are found between students' interest in weekly activities offered at school and their out-of-school extra-curricular participation?

This section reports on the in-school activities of interest by out-of-school extra-curricular activities. The prompt used to examine students' out-of-school extra-curricular activities was: "How often do you take part in these activities outside of school?" and we explored six different out-of-school extra-curricular activities. These six activities were: (1) arts, (2) music, (3) individual sports (4) team sports, (5) youth programs, clubs or organizations, and (6) cultural group, faith/religious activities. This section only reports on those survey respondents that selected "weekly" in terms of how often they took part in these out-of-school activities. This section also only reports on those survey respondents that selected "strongly disagree" and "disagree" to the initial prompt: "My school offers extra-curricular activities that I am interested in."

Figure 6 shows the overall in-school activities of interest by out-of-school extra-curricular activities.

Several notable findings regarding the overall in-school activities of interest by out-of-school extra-curricular activities include:

Across grade panels, students who took part in individual sports outside of school reported the highest rates of disagreement that their school offered in-school activities that were of interest.

Across grade panels, students who took part in youth programs, clubs or organization reported the lowest rates of disagreement that their school offered in-school activities that were of interest to them, closely following students who took part in cultural group(s), faith/religious activities.

Regardless of the various out-of-school experiences children took part in outside of school (arts, music, individual sports, youth programs, clubs or organizations, cultural group, faith/religious activities), a higher percentage of students in Grades 7 to 8 (strongly) disagreed that their school offered in-school activities of interest compared to students in Grades 9 to 12 across the various out-of-school activities.

Figure 5. Students' In-School Activities of Interest by Mental Health and Well-Being (All the Time/Often)

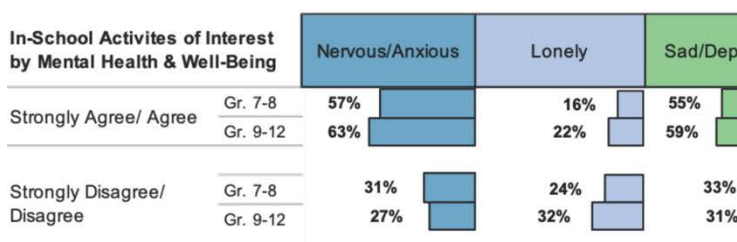


Figure 6. Overall Students' In-School Activities of Interest (Strongly Disagree/Disagree) by Out-of-School Activities (Weekly)



Upon further analysis, there were no notable differences when disaggregating by family income.

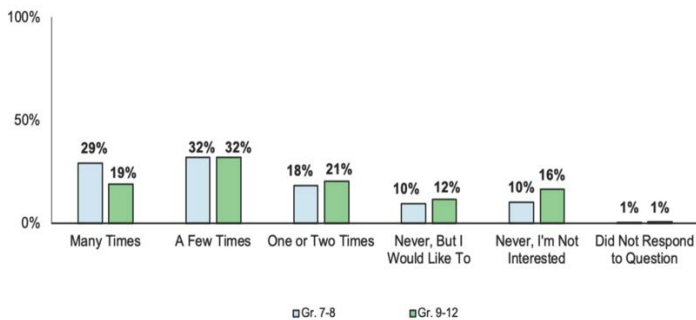
What do we know about student's overall engagement in leadership activities at school?

This section reports on students' in-school involvement of leadership activities by gender and income. The survey question to examine students' leadership involvement asked, "At school, how often have you been involved in leading an activity (for example, school group work or project, sports team, club)?" and

provided the following response scale: many times, a few times, one or two times, never, but I would like to, never, I'm not interested or they decided not to respond to this question.

Figure 7 shows several notable findings regarding students' overall in leadership activities at school are as follows:

Figure 7: Overall Students' Involvement in Leadership Activities



Ten percent of students in Grades 7 to 8 and 12% of students in Grades 9 to 12 reported that they never got involved in leading an activity, but would like to, and 10% of students in Grades 7 to 8 and 16% of students in Grades 9 to 12 reported that they never got involved in leading an activity but were not interested in doing so.

Majority of the survey respondents were involved in leading an activity at school a few times across the two grade panels (32%).

Upon further analysis, no notable differences were found regarding students' in-school involvement in leadership activities and family income.

What are the trends in students' engagement in leadership activities at school by gender identity?

In order to provide an in-depth examination into those survey respondents that reported interest in leading an activity, but never having the opportunity to do so, this section only reports on those survey respondents that selected "never, but I'd like to" to the leadership involvement prompt described previously.

Figure 8 shows this response by gender identity.

Several notable findings regarding students' involvement in leadership activities at school by gender identity include:

Across the two grade panels, students who self-identified as Questioning (15% in Grades 7 to 8 and 13% in Grade 9 to 12) reported the highest rates of no involvement in leadership activities, but a desire to participate.

Several gender identity groups across grade panels also reported the same rates (13% each) as Grade 9 to 12 students who self-identified as Questioning, including those students who self-identified as Gender Fluid, Gender Nonconforming, Non-Binary, and Woman/Girl in Grades 9 to 12 as well as those whose gender identity was not listed for students in Grades 7 to 8.

Figure 8. Students' Leadership Involvement by Gender Identity (Never, But I'd Like To)

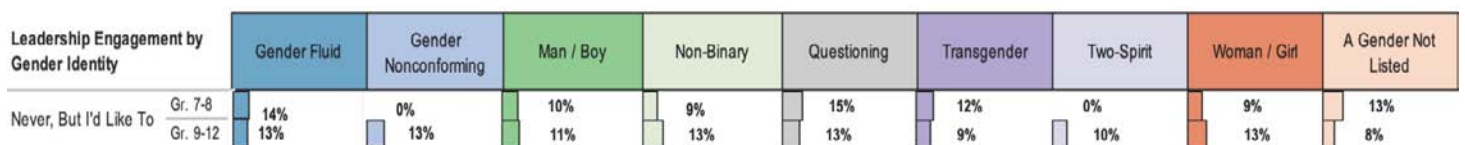


Table 3. Students' Leadership Involvement by Special Education Needs (Never, But I'd Like To)

Special Education Needs	Gr. 7-8	Gr. 9-12
Autism	15%	14%
Behavioural	20%	11%
Blind and Low Vision	NR	NR
Deaf and Hard of Hearing	3%	9%
Developmental Disability	12%	21%
Giftedness	8%	7%
Language Impairment	16%	13%
Learning Disability	12%	12%
Mild Intellectual Disability	7%	16%
Physical Disability	13%	13%
Speech Impairment	NR	NR
No Exceptionality	9%	12%

What are the trends in students' engagement in leadership activities at school by special education needs?

Table 3 shows the same response to this question by special education needs.

Several notable findings regarding students' involvement in leadership activities at school by special education needs include:

In the Grades 7 to 8 panel, students identified with a Behavioural exceptionality reported the highest rate (20%) and students identified with Deaf and Hard of Hearing reported the lowest rate (3%) of no involvement in leading an activity, but a desire to participate.

In the Grades 9 to 12 panel, students identified with a Developmental Disability reported the highest rates (21%) and students identified with Giftedness reported the lowest rate (7%) of no involvement in leading an activity, but a desire to participate.

What are the trends in students' engagement in leadership activities at school by grade and emotional well-being?

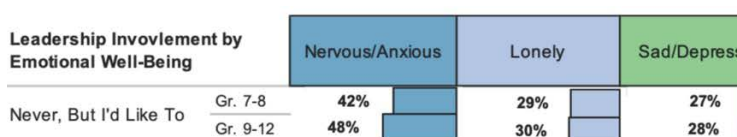
As shown in Figure 9, there were several notable findings regarding students' involvement in leadership activities at school and their emotional well-being include:

Despite not getting involved in leadership activities, yet having the desire for involvement in such activities, respondents reported higher rates of overall positive emotions compared to lonely or sad/depressed across the two grade panels.

In Grades 9 to 12, respondents who selected "never, but I'd like to", had higher rates of feeling nervous/anxious (48%) compared to positive about the future (43%) good about themselves (43%) and like they matter to people at school (34%).

In Grades 7 to 8, these respondents had higher rates of feeling nervous/anxious (42%) compared to feeling like they matter to people at school (33%).

Figure 9. Students' Leadership Involvement (Never, But I'd Like To) by Mental Health & Well-Being



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Contact Us

In efforts to best collaborate and hear the voices of community members, we welcome any feedback on this research brief or any suggestions for next steps regarding the current and ongoing reporting structures. If desired, you may contact research.services@yrdsb.ca with your feedback

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