



MEMORANDUM

May 24, 2022
Regular Board Meeting

TO	Board of Trustees
FROM	Shauna Boyce, Superintendent
ORIGINATOR	Scott Johnston, Associate Superintendent Meg Miskolzie, Associate Superintendent
RESOURCE	Parkland School Division Students
GOVERNANCE POLICY	Board Policy 2: Role of the Board Board Policy 12: Role of the Superintendent
ADDITIONAL REFERENCE	BP 1: Division Foundational Statements BP 2: Education Planning and Programming BP 18: Role of the Student
SUBJECT	STUDENT ENGAGEMENT REPORT

PURPOSE

For information. No recommendation required.

BACKGROUND

The Board believes in, and supports, the inclusion of a student voice in its deliberations, and therefore enjoys opportunities to engage with students from across Parkland School Division through student engagement opportunities. The following report supports the Board's assurance element for Stakeholder Engagement, and contributes to the Board's consideration for Board Policy 18: Role of the Student.

REPORT SUMMARY

On May 10, 2022, The Board met with students in Grade Seven from across the Division. The following report highlights the summary from these engagements with respect to our students' perception of their learning environment, wellness and relationships.

Administration would be pleased to respond to any questions.

SJ:kz



PARKLAND
SCHOOL DIVISION

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT REPORT

Presented to the Board of Trustees, May 24, 2022

Scott Johnston, Associate Superintendent, Education and System Services
Dr. Meg Miskolzie, Associate Superintendent, Student Supports and Services

Our Students Possess the confidence, resilience, insight and skills required to thrive in, and positively impact, the world.

BACKGROUND

On May 10, 2022, Trustees met in-person with Parkland School Division students in the seventh grade. Three engagement events occurred across the Division; including:

- In Spruce Grove, at Woodhaven Middle School;
- In Stony Plain, at Stony Plain Central School; and
- In Duffield, at Duffield School, and featuring students from Duffield, Entwistle, Wabamun and Tomahawk schools.

Each engagement session enabled Trustees to speak with the full cohort of grade seven students. Specifically, we asked students to discuss the following with us:

1. We asked students to talk about their Learning Environment (their school) and how things are going this year;
2. We asked students to talk about the concept of “respect” and inquired as to why students may express that there are lower levels of peer respect; and
3. We asked students about healthy relationships.

Students in grades four, seven and ten are surveyed every year by Alberta Education. As the results summarized below, and included on page 2 demonstrate, Parkland School Division students self-assessed at a lower rate, on measures of respect, than other provincially surveyed students.

Measure	Top 2 Box (Agree / Strongly Agree)		
	Alberta	PSD	Difference
At school, I feel like I belong	74	69	-5
At school, students care about each other	67	60	-7
At school, students respect each other	67	58	-9
I am treated fairly by adults at my school	81	77	-4
I feel safe at school	84	79	-5
I feel safe on the way to and from school	88	86	-2
I feel welcome at my school	85	80	-5
My teachers care about me	81	82	+1
Other students treat me well	81	79	-2

JURISDICTIONAL AND PROVINCIAL MEASURES COMPARED

Learning Supports



W.1 Welcoming, Caring, Respectful and Safe Learning Environments (WCRSLE) Detail

Authority: 2305 The Parkland School Division

The percentage of teachers, parents and students who agree that their learning environments are welcoming, caring, respectful and safe.

Student - Grade 7-9

		N	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Don't Know %	Top 2 Box %
At school, I feel like I belong	2021	733	24	46	16	5	10	69
At school, students care about each other	2021	740	14	46	19	7	13	60
At school, students respect each other	2021	736	10	49	24	7	11	58
I am treated fairly by adults at my school	2021	734	31	46	10	6	7	77
I feel safe at school	2021	725	29	50	10	3	8	79
I feel safe on the way to and from school	2021	730	38	49	5	3	6	86
I feel welcome at my school	2021	737	34	46	9	3	8	80
My teachers care about me	2021	739	36	46	4	3	11	82
Other students treat me well	2021	734	23	56	10	4	7	79

Learning Supports



W.1 Welcoming, Caring, Respectful and Safe Learning Environments (WCRSLE) Detail

Province: Alberta

The percentage of teachers, parents and students who agree that their learning environments are welcoming, caring, respectful and safe.

Student - Grade 7-9

		N	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Don't Know %	Top 2 Box %
At school, I feel like I belong	2021	55,593	28	46	12	5	8	74
At school, students care about each other	2021	55,515	19	49	15	7	11	67
At school, students respect each other	2021	55,347	16	51	18	6	10	67
I am treated fairly by adults at my school	2021	55,678	31	50	8	4	6	81
I feel safe at school	2021	55,316	34	49	7	4	6	84
I feel safe on the way to and from school	2021	54,272	40	47	6	2	4	88
I feel welcome at my school	2021	56,004	37	48	7	3	5	85
My teachers care about me	2021	56,048	34	47	5	3	11	81
Other students treat me well	2021	55,530	25	56	8	4	6	81

CONTEXT AND CONSIDERATIONS

Our conversation with students focused on their school, their learning and on wellness and relationships.

Our students were able to find positive aspects through all of this change and they shared their narratives of day-to-day experiences in our schools with enthusiasm. Overall, students presented favourable opinions regarding their schools, and this supports the survey results received: students feel welcome, safe and respected by their teachers and school staff. Our students noted that our schools are safe places in which to learn, and that they enjoy their teachers.

Students demonstrated recognition that our schools are working to rebuild connections after several years of minimized contact due to the necessity of cohorting students. Where possible, mentoring connections between older and younger students helps to build respect. Students in all three engagement groups indicated a strong appetite to engage in larger, group-based cultural activities. Students indicated that their peers who were less connected to others, may miss out on socialization, and so this would support our adolescents' desire to engage in activities that provide more opportunities to generate friendships.

Students expressed that they are able to work through conflicts or negative interactions by discussing these events with a close friend. While the concept of "adolescent peer relationships" is well documented in literature and research, the impact of pandemic isolation on peer relationships is, as yet, not well researched. Leary and Katz (2005) note that "research indicates that the quality of children's friendships can provide contributions to children's well-being that is independent of their status in the larger context" (p. 125). Children who are well-connected to peers are, therefore, better able to weather negative peer interactions. When asked about peer interactions, students are eager to express a desire for clubs, activities and events that contain the possibility for strengthening peer relationships. During the student engagement, students expressed appreciation for after-school programs, sports, such as basketball, soccer and track and field, GSAs at lunch times, and opportunities for school culture events, such as staff vs. student hockey games.

Students indicated that there is a desire for humour, and that sometimes "talking back" is an attempt to gain laughter. In *Adolescent Humor and its Relationship to Coping, Defense Strategies, Psychological Distress and Well-Being*, Erickson and Feldstein note that "because adolescents are developing their strategies for how to manage various stressors, it is developmentally appropriate for early-mid adolescents to employ a variety of strategies in order to manage a host of stressors (p. 269).

One student noted:

"A lot of students try to break the rules because they think its funny and they are trying to entertain the kids."

Another added:

"The school and the teachers are great, but some of the behaviours of the students make it unenjoyable."

A third responded:

"Some students are nice and other students are not nice and talk in the gym when the teacher is talking."

The engagement conversations suggest that disruptive student behaviours may emerge as coping mechanisms for stress. The desire for laughter to break the tension may be well received by some, and not by others, depending on the context. If the desire is for amusement, without consideration of cost, then students may try to achieve stress diminishment improperly at the expense of others.

With respect to peer interaction, one student noted that “there is a difference between trying to break someone down with words, and joking.” The challenge is that the difference, in any situation, is a matter of perspective. The recipient of mean behaviour has to consider whether or not to go along with the joke, or risk losing social status.

Much of the student engagement conversations centered on activities and events that the students would like to see and in which the students can participate. There is a desire for more clubs and activities. Students noted that, for the most part, everyone gets along well, and most students have at least one good friend. Students acknowledged that school-life can be stressful, and access to counsellors and relational supports will be continually important in the future.

Consideration for Schools

The pandemic has had a detrimental impact on students’ ability to participate in activities. While future research will determine the value of the impact, it is evident that students have had diminished opportunities to develop and practice age-appropriate social skills. School staff and administration are reporting that there are evident impacts on the development of maturity among students; that behaviours typically rooted out in early middle years are still evident in later middle years.

It is sensible, therefore, that students are craving activities that promote socialization. Students are balancing moral development with stress, and as such, socialization, intended humour, and disruptive actions may be misplaced and misread by their peers. Students expressed that they have strong relationships with the adult staff (this is supported by the survey); this may correlate to the fact that many examples of “disrespect” were ones in which students were interrupting lessons or activities, and generally frustrating or aggravating the teacher during lesson provision.

As we emerge from the pandemic, it will not only be important to increase our students’ access to activities that promote socialization, but to also be intentional in teaching pro-social behaviours. This means that schools should intentionally plan for activities that:

- Provide clear expectations for behaviour;
- Demonstrate adults who model the behaviours that are expected; and
- Foster a caring community.

Leary and Katz. (2005). Observations of Aggressive Children During Peer Provocation and With a Best Friend. *Developmental Psychology*, V. 41 No. 1.

Erickson and Feldstein. (2007). Adolescent Humor and its Relationship to Coping, Defense Strategies, Psychological Distress, and Well-Being. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*, V. 37.