



## MEMORANDUM

April 11, 2023  
Regular Board Meeting

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**TO** Board of Trustees

**FROM** Shauna Boyce, Superintendent

**ORIGINATOR** Scott Johnston, 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**

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### 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 on specific student engagement topics. 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 March 21, 2023, The Board met with high school students from Connections for Learning, Memorial Composite High School and Spruce Grove Composite High School. The following report highlights the summary from these engagements with respect to the following engagement topics:

- Supportive Learning Environments,
- Learning Experiences, and
- Peer Relationships and Wellness.

This report summarizes the thoughts that our students shared with our Trustees.

Administration would be pleased to respond to any questions.

SJ:kz



# STUDENT ENGAGEMENT REPORT

Presented to the Board of Trustees, April 11, 2023

Scott Johnston, Associate Superintendent, Education and System Services

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

## BACKGROUND

On March 21, 2023 Trustees met in-person with Parkland School Division high school students at the Centre for Education in Stony Plain. The afternoon engagement involved student representatives from:

- Connections for Learning;
- Memorial Composite High School; and
- Spruce Grove Composite High School.

Each engagement session enabled Trustees to speak with a mix of students from the three schools. Specifically, we asked students to discuss the following with us:

1. We asked students to talk about the concept of a Supportive Learning Environment (reflecting on their school) and how things are going this year;
2. We asked students to talk about their learning experiences, and how these experiences might be improved; and
3. We asked students to discuss peer relationships and wellness.

Each year, students in grades four, seven and ten are surveyed by Alberta Education. Chair Stewart shared the results of last year's Assurance Survey (February – March of 2022-2023). Trustees discussed these results with students.

The specific results of the survey are presented below, noting the Top 2 results (agree/strongly agree | good/very good).

## ASSURANCE MEASURE RESULTS

Item (Good/Very Good)	%
Overall, how is the education you are receiving at school?	91%

Item (Agree/Strongly Agree)	%
It is clear what I am expected to learn at school	82%
My school work is challenging	77%
The core subjects (math, language arts, social studies, science) I am learning at school are useful to me	67%
My school work is interesting	61%

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## WELCOMING, CARING, RESPECTFUL AND SAFE SCHOOLS

Students in Grade 10 responded to a number of items. The percentages are the combined result of those who agree or strongly agree.

Item (Agree/Strongly Agree)	%
I feel safe on the way to and from school	86%
Other students treat me well	79%
I feel welcome at my school	74%
I am treated fairly by adults at my school	71%
I feel safe at school	71%
My teachers care about me	68%
At school, I feel like I belong	65%
At school, students respect each other	46%
At school, students care about each other	42%

Students were asked to reflect on their perception of the statement “at school, students care about each other.” Notably, the results from the previous year’s survey indicate that there is not strong agreement with statements about peer-to-peer respect and caring.

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## LEARNING ENGAGEMENT

Our Grade 10 student surveys shared, generally, how they perceive school to be useful and/or engaging. The percentages represented show the combined score of those who agree or strongly agree.

Language Arts	%
I understand how the language arts I am learning at school is useful to me	78
The language arts I am learning at school is interesting to me	59

Mathematics	%
I understand how the mathematics I am learning at school is useful to me	59
The mathematics I am learning at school is interesting to me	44

Science	%
I understand how the science I am learning at school is useful to me	77
The science I am learning at school is interesting to me	76

Social Studies	%
I understand how the social studies I am learning at school is useful to me	74
The social studies I am learning at school is interesting to me	68

## STUDENT ENGAGEMENT – OUR STUDENTS’ PERSPECTIVES

The summary below captures the themes and concepts that our students discussed with the Board of Trustees.

### ON SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

We asked our students to speak about their school, and to help us understand what has changed since their previous year?

#### Our students shared:

- Students appreciated having an opportunity to have a Transition Day before the school year started.
- Grade 10 students noted that they appreciated the size difference of the high schools. Students expressed that they were initially concerned about the high school transition (from grade 9), but that the schools are very welcoming; however, they also noted that the expectations on the students are greater at the high school level.
- With respect to grouping, some students have found their groups, but some have yet to connect with a group. They expressed that student groups change as students emerge into high school and there are more students from the variety of schools offering grade 9.
- Our students noted that the school staff truly values safety and well-being; they appreciated that their teachers and support staff have their best interests as a priority.
- Students also appreciated that there are systems in place to help keep them on track with their learning.
- Students noted that course streaming (i.e., 10-1, 10-2), increased their perception of education quality because they could learn at their level of ability.
- Our Connections for Learning students expressed an appreciation for program flexibility and therefore reduced stress overall. However, other students noted that there are times when school is too relaxed and that during these times other people can be distracting.

#### Our students noted some challenges and expressed a desire for improvements:

- Students desire a balanced approach; they acknowledge an understanding of the importance of school, but want this to be in alignment with the overall mental-load that students carry.
- Students noted that there are differences among the teachers with respect to understanding students’ work-loads and learning schedules. They would like to see teachers continue to improve in their understanding and application of learning for diverse learning styles.
- Students expressed that it is sometimes challenging to reach their parents’ expectations, given everything that they are tasked to do.
- Students discussed that there is an emphasis on “being mature,” but that this is not reality because kids are not always “mature” in their approach. That pressure sometimes causes stress and negative thoughts; however, they recognize the value of pressure to push students in the right way. They shared that there is a perceived, greater safety net in junior high.
- Our students expressed that social media can be concerning. Notably, they are perceiving that it is less enjoyable now, than even a few years back.

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## ON MEANINGFUL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

We asked students to talk about their learning. We connected our students to our Mission that speaks to providing meaningful learning experiences and asked for their perspective on our alignment to our Mission. We also asked students to share thoughts about how well we are preparing students for the world after school.

### Our students shared:

- Our students truly appreciate hands-on-learning. One strong example is with the Building Futures Program, where students conduct their learning while assisting with the construction of a home. Other examples provided included an enjoyment for Technical Theatre or Sports Medicine. Students appreciate when they are able to use creativity in their learning.
- Students spoke fondly about their schools and experiences; noting that teachers are caring and that they appreciate the diversity of learning options presented. They appreciate that courses are leveled to their learning ability. Students also expressed an appreciation for a wide-selection of extracurricular activities (sports, music, drama). One student expressed that, unfortunately, there is no extra-curricular activity for writing. A student from Connections for Learning noted the challenge of fewer extra-curricular activities, due to the nature of the school. Students also expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to travel internationally.

### Our students noted some challenges and expressed a desire for improvements:

- To truly prepare for the world beyond school, students expressed that the programs of study would need to better reflect the world of today.
- Students indicated that there are many resources that are “old-based”. For instance, they wondered why there is such a curricular focus on reading material from the 1700s, when the current world-views are now significantly different. They appreciate that the core subjects are important, but that they have not been significantly changed over time. They expressed an appreciation for optional learning and would like to see more choices available (for instance, options related to natural sciences). Students lamented that the *Provincial Programs of Study* are outdated – emphasizing that the world has changed.
- Students discussed Mathematics. They noted that there is no “in-between” with math, given that it is right-or-wrong. Students expressed that they find the formulas to be challenging, but some students appreciated opportunities for mathematically solving problems.
- Students expressed that they find memory-work to be challenging and that it is not synonymous with creativity. One student noted, “*you don’t ask someone with a disability to race against a sprinter,*” to contextualize the challenges of memorization. Our students noted that there are different learning styles and some approaches may not work for all students.
- Students expressed an appreciation for opportunities to review results more thoroughly, and that they hoped that greater review could be possible.
- Some students noted that their day starts very early, (when considering transportation) and our students wondered if there were ways to make the day start later.
- Students expressed a concern that some students may be viewed negatively when they do not perform to academic standards – that it is important to dig-in and help students so that they are not negatively labeled. They noted that it would be beneficial to have greater access to tutoring services – especially for those who learn in different ways.

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## ON PEER-TO-PEER RELATIONSHIPS AND WELLNESS

We asked students to tell us about friendships, generally, from what they have observed. Our intent in this conversation was to better understand our students' advice for school improvement. We asked students to discuss equity and our students' sense of an appreciation for diversity.

### **With specific regard to safety and respect, our students shared:**

- Students are able to control themselves, and this includes how they treat themselves and treat others, however students may not think about others in the moment of interaction. Students overhear arguments in the hallways and examples of disrespect. Our students noted that one consideration is that students may not have truly been taught how to apply respect to others – that they do not know what it looks like, feels like, or sounds like.
- Our students expressed that the Office is accessible for help, as needed, during conflicting situations.
- Students discussed global perspectives on gender differences and expectations.
- Students discussed the perspective of “self” vs. “other” and that those who are treated poorly may not want to say they are treated poorly. Cliques exist, although it is possible for students to change to a different group of peers – just not always easy for students to do. For instance, some groups are more challenging to join than others, and students expressed a fear of rejection.
- Students acknowledge that bullying should not happen; that it is abusive. However, they note that in high school it is easier to “drown out” the peer-to-peer interaction.

### **With respect to equity, our students shared:**

- It is sometimes challenging to be a visual minority in school. Students are exposed to “hate speech” and noted that more needs to be done to reduce overt discrimination and racial slurs.

### **Regarding action required for healthy relationships:**

- Students appreciate an opportunity to be heard; specifically, they noted an appreciation for an opportunity to speak directly with the Board, and that more opportunities like the Student Advisory Engagement would be appreciated.
- Some students expressed that they should be able to speak-their-minds more freely.
- Students appreciate increased access to counseling services and requested that access to counselors continue.

### **Students discussed our facilities:**

- One student noted that the gender-neutral spaces are closed off, and that sometimes students may use these spaces to vape because they are seen as private. Students appreciate the access to the washrooms, but note that there are a few students who use them for the wrong purposes.
- While vandalism occurs from time-to-time, students expressed that it is not generally appreciated and it is dealt with quickly.

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## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS RAISED

We asked students if they had anything else they would like to share, and in addition to our previous conversations.

Our students shared:

- Students and their peers are looking forward to each new year. Our schools are perceived as welcoming communities, and they noted that there can always be improvements to reduce negative social factors (violence, disrespect, negative habits). In particular, some students are looking forward to an opportunity to drive themselves to school (and other places).
- Students noted that those who do well are those who can keep a positive mindset and have confidence, while also knowing their limits. One student captured this as “be well-kept with yourself.”
- One student noted that there is a power dynamic between teachers and students and that it is necessary to be mindful that respect travels both ways.

At the conclusion of the event, Trustees engaged students to provide a perspective of how they experienced the afternoon’s conversation. Our students expressed a strong appreciation for the Student Engagement Event and that they would like to have more opportunities to speak to the Board.

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## FURTHER ENGAGEMENT

Nine students joined the Board of Trustees at the Education Planning Day on April 6, 2023 for further engagement. Insights on the April 6<sup>th</sup> Education Planning Day shall be presented at a later date.