

STUDENT CENSUS GRADES 7- 12: SYSTEM OVERVIEW

BACKGROUNDER TO THE RESEARCH

A. INTRODUCTION

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) has long been committed to supporting student success through vigorous policy and program initiatives tailored to student needs. The TDSB accomplishes this by focusing our strategies on continuous school improvement, innovative school leadership, high quality instruction, enhanced support for students who find school challenging, on promoting inclusive school environments, and on building strong partnerships with parents and communities.

We have used and continue to use student data to help us sustain this effort. However, we have lacked comprehensive data about our students and their lives in school and outside of school to help drive us towards higher levels of system performance and student success.

We have now taken a giant step in that direction with this initial report entitled: The Student Census, Grades 7-12, System Overview. This report gives us information about our students that we have never had before! This report is the first of several reports which will drive future decision-making at all levels of the system to affect policies and practices which promote student success.

B. BOARD DECISION ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

On December 14, 2005 the Board made the following decision:

“That data on race, ethnicity, disability and other factors for all from JK to Grade 12 students be collected through a combination of parent surveys (JK-Grade 6 and student surveys (Grades 7-12)”

This decision came following consideration of a report of the Advisory Committee on Student Achievement, which had been established by the Board to advise the Board on the value of gathering this data. The Advisory Committee recommended that this research be conducted.

C. RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

The Board’s motivation to conduct such research came almost one year earlier on November 17, 2004 when the Board requested staff to consult with educational experts “to develop research proposals that identify factors within the school system which may

inhibit student achievement. Such factors should include, but not limited to differences in gender, race, ethnicity, mother tongue, income and place of residence”.

The Board further decided in November 2004 that “the results of such research and its ensuing recommendations be used to assist the Board in implementing strategies to help all students achieve their fullest potential for success in our schools”.

This decision reflected both Board and community concerns that some demographic groups of students were achieving consistently lower rates of school success than others. The Board’s own “cohort” studies connecting student achievement data to demographic data at the secondary level, confirms the existence of an educational achievement gap.

Since the Board’s stated mission is to “enable all students to achieve high levels of success”, the closing of this achievement gap reflects a critical agenda for the TDSB.

D. USE OF THE DATA

This data collected in the Student Census will help the TDSB to do the following:

- Assess the effectiveness of existing programs and services in order to determine what is working for students and what is not. The ability to match our student census data with student achievement data will facilitate this assessment process;
- Provide more effective programs to help our students, especially our most vulnerable students. The data will tell us much more about what our students need in order to be successful. The data will also help us to improve our own teaching practices and support services;
- Identify and remove any systemic barriers that may limit the achievement of specific groups of students, particularly students who see themselves outside of the socio-cultural mainstream of the school. The data will help us work more closely with parents and communities to address barriers that may exist outside of the school environment;
- Allocate our resources to where they are most needed in our system. We already do that to a significant extent through existing program decisions using tools such as the Learning Opportunities Index (LOI). This research will enhance our ability to make more informed resource allocation decisions; and
- Advocate more effectively for resources to support students. We will use this data to build partnerships of support with the private and public sector to help students, and where possible to help shape public policy through such advocacy and partnerships.

E. SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

The Board’s intention was to complete both the student survey and the parent survey in the 2006-07 school year. The student survey was planned for November 2006 and was implemented at that time. The parent survey was scheduled to take place in the spring 2007. However, the enormous complexity of the planning issues for the parent survey

including appropriate consultation with parents on the content of the parent survey made the spring 2007 timeline unrealistic. The parent survey is scheduled to be conducted in spring 2008.

F: NEXT STAGES

This Student Census 2006, Grades 7-12, System Overview provides an important transition point for continuing research, study, planning and decision-making on behalf of students. The work to follow will require the input of a resource committee of internal and external persons to provide advice on the effective use of this data.

While this System Overview data is important for an understanding of the overall environment of our schools as students experience it, the disaggregation of this data and its correlation with student achievement data will provide the critical analysis needed to realize the objectives of this research. TDSB Research and Information Services staff will develop the models for further research in consultation with the Research Advisory Committee.

TDSB Research and Information Services staff will also provide sub-sets of the system data to enable various levels within the organization to discuss the data as it pertains to their areas, so that this research can be integrated into all the appropriate areas of the Board's operations.

Research staff will provide school and Family of Schools profiles of this data to facilitate school administrator and Superintendents of Education discussion on what this data means for their schools and communities. These local profiles will help focus local stakeholder collaboration on areas for possible school improvement planning and student support.

Similarly, the system data will permit central staff to develop strategies for integrating their functions and services more effectively in order to maximize support for students and schools. Central staff will align this data and its analysis with their current work in policy, program, and services to ensure that this data is used in the most productive ways possible.

STUDENT CENSUS, GRADES 7-12, SYSTEM OVERVIEW EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Student Census, Grades 7-12: System Overview represents the aggregate System Overview of students in this grade range. This System Overview describes how students identify themselves in terms of specific demographic categories, and how they perceive their relationship to specific aspects of their school environment and their environment outside of school. The student information in each category is presented in aggregate percentages of the whole system.

This report does not contain any cross-tabulations between any of sections of the data. It does not contain any correlations between any of this Student Census data and any other student data which the TDSB currently maintains. That research will follow in the coming months.

This System Overview represents a system-wide “snapshot”, taken during November 6 – 10, 2006, of the perceptions of 105,440 students in Grades 7-12 (86% of the total enrolment). Any disaggregations or correlations of data beyond this system overview will be released in subsequent reports.

DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

The Student Census, Grades 7-12 consisted of 50 questions: 15 questions on students’ backgrounds and 35 questions on students’ perceptions of their experiences in school and outside of school.

The survey was completed during class time with a teacher present. Instructions were provided to students and staff to ensure confidentiality of the individual student’s information during completion of the survey. This confidentiality is maintained throughout the data processing, analysis, access and maintenance stages. Surveys were returned in sealed envelopes directly to the Research and Information services Department of the TDSB.

Each survey contained the student’s Identification Number. This Identification Number permits the linking of each student’s Census information with available school achievement information collected for that student. About 97% of the students returned their surveys with valid student Identification Numbers intact.

DATA VERIFICATION

Each individual survey form was scanned into a computer. Rigorous verification procedures were used to ensure the reliability of the data presented in this report. These procedures included: forms verification, entry verification; database verification, matrix sampling verification, internal consistency check, cross-checking against other data sources, and inter-reliability check. Survey forms that did not meet the standards required by these verification procedures were excluded from the process. The data in this research is therefore considered very reliable.

KEY FINDINGS

A. EXPERIENCES IN SCHOOL (responses reflect “all the time” or “often”)

School Climate

- 81% of Grade 7-8 students feel that they get along well with other students in their school and 76 % feel accepted by their peers (81%, 77% of Grades 9-12);
- 68% of Grades 7-8 students feel that their school is a friendly and welcoming place (60% of Grades 9-12);
- 64% of Grades 7-8 students say that they enjoy school (53% of Grades 9-12);
- 72 % of Grades 7-8 students feel comfortable participating in classroom activities and discussion (62 % of Grades 9-12);
- 69% of Grades 7-8 students feel comfortable answering questions in class (63% of Grades 9-12); and
- 59% of Grades 7-8 students feel comfortable giving their opinions in class (55% of Grades 9-12).

Relationship with Adults

- 92% of Grades 7-12 students feel that their teachers expect them to succeed (85%, Grades 9-12);
- 93% of Grades 7-8 students feel that their teachers respect their backgrounds (88% Grades 9-12);
- 79% of Grades 7-8 students are satisfied with the ways their teachers teach them (61%,Grades 9-12);
- 77% of Grades 7-8 students feel supported and encouraged by their teachers (60 %,Grades 9-12);
- 84% of grade 7-8 students felt that they are treated the same as everyone else, by school adults (82% Grades 9-12)
- 48% of Grades 7-8 students feel comfortable discussing a problem with their teachers (37%, Grades 9-12); and
- 24% of Grades 7-8 students feel comfortable discussing personal problems with guidance counsellors, 27% with teachers and 20% with principals and vice principals (20%, 19% and 12% respectively for Grades 9-12).

School and Community Safety

- 91% of Grades 7-8 students feel safe in the classroom while 72% feel safe on school property areas outside the school building (89% and 69% of Grades 9-12);
- 70% of Grades 7-8 students feel safe in their neighbourhood (73% of Grades 9-12);
- 73% of Grades 7-8 students feel safe when communicating on the internet (81% of Grades 9-12);
- 16% of Grades 7-8 students say that they experience physical bullying by an individual all the time or often or sometimes; and 10% bullying by a group or gang all the time or often or sometimes (10% and 7% respectively of Grades 9-12);
- 67% of Grades 7-8 students feel that school rules have been fairly applied to them (62% of Grades 9-12); and
- Body image (38%), grades or marks (17%), and cultural/racial background (11%) were listed by Grades 7-8 students as the three most frequent reasons why they were bullied (27%, 12%, 14% respectively of Grades 9-12 students who were bullied).

Inclusive School Experiences

- 43% of Grades 7-8 students say that they have learned about different racial and cultural groups (46% for Grades 9-12);
- 49% of Grades 7-8 students say that they have learned about aboriginal people (21% of Grades 9-12);
- 12% of Grades 9-12 students say that they learn about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender people;
- 71% of Grades 7-8 students learned about different people in the topics they studied in class, and 69% said that learned about different people in the materials used by teachers (67% of Grades 9-12 for both classroom topics and curriculum materials);
- 49% of Grades 7-8 students felt that learning more about their culture and racial background helped them to do better in school and 58% of them felt that such learning made school more enjoyable for them (45% and 55% of Grades 9-12); and
- 72% of Grades 7-8 students said that learning about their culture or racial background would make learning more interesting for them (69% of Grades 9-12).

School Activities

- 40% of Grades 7-8 students participated in extra-curricular music activities on a weekly basis, 38% in sports activities, 28% in visual arts/drama/dance, and 10% in leadership activities (16%, 25%, 16% and 7% respectively, of Grades 9-12);
- 25% of Grades 7-8 students say they receive awards/certificates/recognition for sports, 24% for academics, and 16 % for leadership (20%, 30%, 12% for Grades 9-12); and
- 45% of Grades 7-8 students say they are selected to lead activities, groups or teams at least sometimes (42% of Grades 9-12).

B. EXPERIENCES OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

Homework

- Grades 7-8 students spend an average of 10 hours per week on homework; 12 hours for Grades 9-12;
- 61% of Grades 7-8 students received help with homework from parents and caregivers, 31% also received help from friends (36%, 37% of Grades 9-12);
- 16% of Grades 7-8 students receive no help with home work (30% of Grades 9-12); and
- For Grades 7-8 students, and Grades 9 –12 students, the most frequent barriers to completing homework are spending time with friends, and difficulty of the homework.

After-School Activities

- 30% of Grades 7-8 students spend more than 2 hours a day watching TV, 26% spend more that 2 hours a day on the internet, and 26% spend more than 2 hours a day playing video or computer games (26%, 35% and 22% respectively for Grades 9-12);
- 56% of Grades 7-8 students use the computer everyday at home and 3% use the computer everyday at school (72%, 14% respectively for Grades 9-12); and

Home Support

- 79% of Grades 7-8 students who said that they needed advice about schooling received such advice from parents and caregivers, and 37% received such advice from friends (75%, 49% respectively for Grades 9-12);

- 44% of Grades 7-8 students say that their parents and caregivers talk with them all the time or often about their relationships and problems (35% of Grades 9-12);
- 25% of Grades 7-8 students say that their parents or caregivers communicate all the time or often with their teachers (17% of Grades 9-12); and
- 65% of Grades 7-8 students say that they feel comfortable discussing personal problems with their parents or caregivers all the time or often, and 64% with their friends all the time or often (55%, 69% respectively of Grades 9-12).

Eating Habits, Eyesight and Hearing Tests

- 56% of Grades 7-8 students said that they eat breakfast every day, 79% have a daily lunch and 89% a daily dinner (41%, 58%, 83% respectively of Grades 9-12);
- 30% of Grades 7-8 students have a daily snack during the day (27% of Grades 9-12); and
- 75% of Grades 7-8 students have had their eyesight tested by a doctor; 31% have had their hearing tested by a doctor (this information was not asked of Grades 9-12 students).

Self Assessments, Goals and Aspirations

- 74% of Grades 7-8 students say that their parents and caregivers help them to set goals and make plans (63% of Grades 9-12);
- 22% of Grades 7-8 students rated their school progress as excellent, and 51% rated it as good (17%, 49% respectively of Grades 9-12);
- 76% of Grades 7-8 students rated their social skills as excellent or good (77% of Grades 9-12);
- 67% of Grades 7-8 students rated their reading skills as excellent or good (69% of Grades 9-12);
- 62% of Grades 7-8 students rated their math skills as excellent or good (50% of Grades 9-12);
- 52% of Grades 7-8 said that they will definitely complete high school and 38% said that they think that they will (72% and 22% respectively of Grades 9-12);
- 56% of Grades 7-8 students have an expectation of going to university or college; 19% were not sure of their post secondary plans (60%, 14% respectively for Grades 9-12);

- 32% of Grades 7-8 students said that they have decided on their future careers while 56% said they have been thinking about it (33%, 55% respectively of Grades 9-12); and
- 67% of Grades 7-8 students said that their parents and caregivers gave them career advice, while 17% received such advice from their teachers and counsellors, 21% said that they received career advice from no one (62%, 20% and 23% respectively for Grades 9-12 students).

C. STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

- 52% of TDSB students are males: 48% are females;
- 30 % of Grades 7-8 students were born outside of Canada (42% of Grades 9-12). Main regions of origin are East Asia, South Asia, Europe, Africa, Caribbean, South/Central America;
- 70%, of all Grades 7-12 students have both parents who were born outside of Canada;
- Of the Grades 7-8 students, 31% identified their racial background as White, 21% as South Asian, 16% as East Asian 15% as Black; 6% as Mixed Racial Background, 5% as Middle Eastern, 2% as Latin American, and 0.3% as Aboriginal;
- Of the Grades 9-12 students, 33% identified their racial background as White, 20% as East Asian, 19% as South Asian, 12% as Black, 5% as Middle Eastern, 5% as Mixed Racial Background, 3% as South East Asian, 2% as Latin American, and 0.3 % as Aboriginal;
- 92% of Grades 9-12 students identified themselves as heterosexual; 8% students identified themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual transgender, two-spirited, queer, questioning. (Sexual orientation data was not collected for Grades 7-8 students);
- 8% of Grades 7-8 students reported a disability assessed by a doctor or by the school (6% of Grades 9-12). (Please note that students attending Special Education schools who are physically or developmentally challenged were not included in the Student Census as they would have had difficulty completing the survey on their own);
- 78% of Grades 7-8 students live with both parents (74% of Grades 9-12). This includes students living with step-parents and in shared custody arrangements. 17% of Grades 7-8 students live with their mother only, and 2% with their father only (18% and 3% respectively for Grades 9-12);
- 34 % of Grades 7-8 students reported that their mothers completed university and 40% of them said that their fathers completed university (37% and 47% for their mothers and fathers completing university respectively, for Grades 9-12);

- 39% of Grades 7-8 students did not know their parents' education levels (23% , 24% of Grades 9-12 did not know their mothers' and fathers' education respectively);
- For Grades 7-8 students 49% of mothers were employed full-time, and 74% of fathers (57% of mothers were employed full time, and 81% of fathers, Grades 9-12); and
- Over half (54%) of all Grades 7-12 students are represented by the two higher Socio-Economic Status (SES) groups (professional/senior management and semi-professional and middle management). About one quarter (26%) are in the lower middle category (skilled/semi-skilled clerical and trades); about 17% are in the lowest SES groups (unskilled clerical and trades, and non-remunerative).