

## TDSB RETURN TO SCHOOL SURVEYS: PARENTS, STUDENTS & STAFF

During the month of June, three system-wide online surveys were distributed to TDSB staff, students (Grades 7 to 12), and parents (current and future). The surveys were designed collectively in order to gauge perspectives of both the remote learning experience and the potential return to school in September. These surveys asked respondents questions about their mental health and well-being, experiences with remote learning, teaching and/or working, concerns related to COVID-19, and considerations for planning for September. Please see Table 1 for response rates for completed surveys.

**Table 1: Response Rates (as of July 6, 2020)**

Survey	Response Rate
<b>Parent</b>	43,180 / 17%
<b>Student</b>	15,374 / 15%
<b>Staff</b>	12,611 / 30%

While a detailed analysis of the degree of representation that these samples have to the TDSB’s entire system is not yet complete, the initial analyses demonstrate levels of participation across a few indicators.

**Parent Survey:**

- 80% of parent responses are from the elementary panel, providing an overrepresentation of this perspective;
- Parents of elementary students attending schools with fewer external challenges, as indicated by the LOI, were overrepresented by 4 times than parents of elementary students attending schools with greater external challenges;
- Similarly, parents of secondary students attending schools with fewer external challenges, as indicated by the LOI, were overrepresented by 10 times than parents of secondary students attending schools with greater external challenges; and
- Although representation is disproportionate across LOI groupings, there is participation across the city (see map in Appendix A).

### **Student Survey:**

- There appears to be acceptable representation among the student sample by grade, as 35% of responses are from the elementary panel (i.e., Grades 7-8) and 63% are from the secondary panel;
- Two thirds of student respondents identified as female, providing an overrepresentation of this perspective;
- Representation across student respondents' racial identities was comparable to the system, as indicated by the 2017 Student Census; and
- In general, the student sample was overrepresented by students attending schools with fewer external challenges, as indicated by LOI groupings.

### **Staff Survey:**

- While the response rate represents only 30% of the entire TDSB staff, approximately 70% of this sample are secondary and elementary teachers and school leaders. The overrepresentation of school-based educators provides an important 'within school perspective'.

This summary integrates multiple choice questions with the open text response. It is focused on the immediate areas of relevance in relation to building plans for the re-opening of schools this September through a set of specific concerns, ideas, or areas as follows:

- Perspectives about September and a return to schools
- Options for models of school re-opening
- Perspectives on working and learning remotely in September
- Concerns about health and safety and addressing health and safety of students and staff
- Concerns about mental health and well-being and strategies and practices to address well-being
- Information needs for September
- Reflections on remote learning and summer school plans

Key findings across some of these areas are highlighted below (see Figure 1).

Please note that this summary does not include a breakdown of findings by any socio-demographic (e.g., geographic area, racial identity, gender identity), academic (e.g., grade panel, ISP) or employee group factors. This will be addressed in a subsequent report.

A more thorough analysis of the remote learning experience is also underway that involves a more detailed understanding about equity and lack of resources for some parts of the TDSB. This analysis will also examine student engagement and disengagement in remote learning in order to inform the TDSB's ongoing support of students and communities in Toronto.

FIGURE 1. INFOGRAPHIC REGARDING KEY AREAS



# Return to School Survey Results: Staff, Parents/Guardians and Students

## FEELINGS ABOUT SEPTEMBER

**Most parents** plan to send their children to school in September and **most students** feel comfortable about returning. **Fewer staff** feel comfortable about returning to work.



**Two-thirds (66%)** of families are likely to send their children to school in the fall.



**Almost three-quarters (73%)** of students feel comfortable returning to school in the fall.



**Less than half (41%)** of staff are comfortable with returning to their workplace.

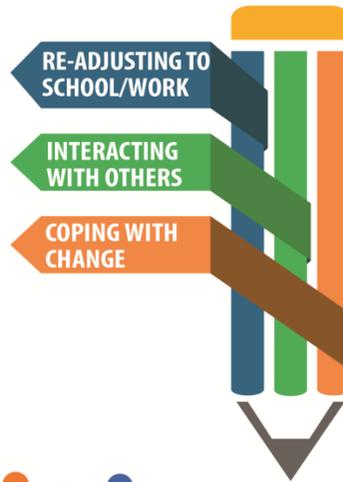
## SCHOOLING MODELS

Given the two choices of what school may look like in the fall - **“every other day”** or **“every other week”** – both elementary and secondary **students & families** were more likely to **choose the “every other day”** model.



## CONCERNS RELATED TO MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

**Parents, students, and staff** shared similar mental health & wellbeing concerns related to:



**60%** of **families** were concerned about their children **not** being able to **interact with** their **friends** like they used to.

## PREPARING FOR REMOTE LEARNING OR WORKING FOR SEPTEMBER



Approximately **two-thirds of students (68%)** feel they have what they need to continue with remote learning.

Approximately **half (59%) of teaching staff** feel comfortable to move forward with real-time teaching and learning in the fall.

## REMOTE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

**About half of students** reported being worried that there might be too much work to catch up on (**46%**) or that they might be behind in their work (**45%**).



Approximately **two-thirds (66%) of families** feel their children are ready for the next grade level.



Nearly all (**87%**) **teaching staff** are concerned about students falling behind in their learning.

## PERSPECTIVES ABOUT SEPTEMBER AND A RETURN TO SCHOOLS

### **Parents:**

Approximately two-thirds (66%) of families are likely to send their children to school in the fall, while 14% are unlikely and 20% are unsure. This breakdown is fairly consistent across the grade panels. One (1) in 10 families noted that there is nothing the TDSB could do to make them feel safe about sending their children back to school in the fall.

In the larger comments, parents shared that they are ready for their children to return to school and feel any further delay is detrimental to their academic, physical, mental and emotional well-being. Many parents want the return to school to be as normal as possible and do not want students/educators burdened with too many new protocols. On the other hand, parents who choose to not send their children to school in the fall do not want to be penalized. They want online/home schooling options available and guarantees that their child's spot in school or in a specialized program will be held until the child can attend in-person.

### **Students:**

Many students miss the way things were before the pandemic and had a frustrating experience with learning remotely and finding the motivation to do so. For others, remote learning meant they could work at their own pace and devote time to behaviours and activities that support their mental health and well-being. Some students shared their fears about catching COVID-19 at school, returning to school prior to a vaccine becoming available, and taking public transportation to school.

Most students, almost three-quarters, reported feeling very comfortable (34%) or somewhat comfortable (39%) about returning to their school building, and are looking forward to seeing their friends (87%), returning to normal activities (77%), and getting better assistance from teachers (71%). However, 1 in 10 students said that there is nothing that would make them feel comfortable about coming back to school.

### **Staff:**

Less than half (41%) of staff respondents are somewhat to very comfortable with returning to their workplace. In the larger comments, staff shared their fears about returning to work too early and possibly contracting the virus.

## OPTIONS FOR MODELS OF SCHOOL RE-OPENING

### **Parents:**

Given the two choices of what school may look like in the fall – “every other day” or “every other week” – both elementary (53%) and secondary (55%) families were more likely to choose the “every other day” model for their children. About half (47%) of families with secondary students prefer the semester course option over non-semester (18%) and quadmester (17%) options.

Although families tended to choose the “every other day” schooling model, more often comments noted that families want students to return to school full time. To allow for this in conjunction with the cohort groups of 15 students, families asked the Board to consider the use of outdoor spaces for learning as much as possible. Also a consideration, if children will not be attending school every day of the week there needs to be coordination of learning schedules for families with multiple children, especially if they are at different schools so parents are not overburdened.

In terms of planning for services for families in September, overall 60% of those eligible for transportation are unlikely or unsure if they would use the school bus. Similarly, 55% of families with children in intensive French programs are unlikely or unsure if they would use the school bus next year. If school bus transportation is reduced or suspended, 10% of families using buses would not have any other way to send their children to school.

With regards to childcare, half of families (54%) are unlikely or unsure if they would send their children to before and/or after care this fall. Families asked that considerations be made for working parents who cannot easily afford/arrange childcare for students on the days/weeks they would not be attending school.

### **Students:**

Similar to families, the largest percentage of students prefer the option of attending every other day (46%) and this was consistent across grades. Secondary students favoured semesters (51%) and this was also consistent across grades. Students suggested other schooling models, such as splitting cohorts by grade (e.g., Grades 9 and 10 on Day 1 and Grades 11 and 12 on Day 2), two week cycle and early dismissal. Irrespective of schooling model, students wished to be grouped with their friends.

### **Staff:**

School-based staff appear mixed about the various schooling options for elementary and secondary students and scheduling options for secondary students.

## PERSPECTIVES ON WORKING AND LEARNING REMOTELY IN SEPTEMBER

### **Parents:**

If remote learning continues in the fall, approximately half of families tended to feel that 1 hour or less per day online was ideal for JK/SK students, while for Grade 1 to Grade 3 students they noted the hours online could increase to 1 to 2 hours a day, and for Grade 4 students onwards - hours could increase to 2 to 3 hours per day. A small number (7%) of families noted they would not be participating in remote learning next year.

### **Students:**

If remote learning continues in some form in the fall, approximately two-thirds of students (68%) feel they have what they need to continue with remote learning. However, student feedback indicated that engagement with remote learning was low; less than half of students (42%) reported being interested in their studies and almost half of students (47%) said they were not enjoying learning at home. While students were grateful for technology provided by the TDSB, some still experienced issues with access. Students expressed dissatisfaction with Brightspace in contrast to Google Classroom and identified a need for a consistent learning platform across all courses. Upon the re-opening of schools, students requested a transition period to ensure students feel comfortable and to re-adjust to routines and workload.

### **Staff:**

One quarter of teaching staff stated that almost all of their students have engaged in remote learning since school closures. Slightly more than half (59%) of teaching staff feel very to somewhat comfortable to move forward with synchronous/real-time teaching and learning but will require support with Brightspace, Google Classroom, Google Meet, and Google Drive if they need to continue remote learning in the fall. School and central leadership staff indicated they will need similar technology support for the fall. To prepare for the return to school in the fall, teaching staff stated they need:

- Continued resources to support remote learning;
- Additional instructional planning time.

In addition, teaching staff requested additional technology and digital learning supports and resources, curriculum support, opportunities to collaborate and share best practices with others, effective tools to assess remote learning, additional planning and prep time to adjust to remote learning, support from administration. Teaching staff also mentioned more equitable workload distribution going forward and suggested leveraging rotary and prep teachers for support.

Across employee groups, between half and three quarters of respondents feel they have the resources they need to continue teaching/working remotely in the fall if required. However,

respondents appealed for financial support or a stipend for incurring internet related costs associated with working remotely.

## **CONCERNS ABOUT HEALTH AND SAFETY**

### **Parents:**

Half or more of families tended to be most concerned about how schools would implement COVID-19 related health and safety precautions (e.g., ability to practice physical distancing at the school; a lack of disinfecting supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE) at schools for staff and students; the school not being properly disinfected according to Toronto Public Health guidelines; and Toronto Public Health preventative measures not being followed). Eighty percent (80%) or more of households noted that they do not have a family member considered to be at-risk with regards to COVID-19.

Within the larger comments, many parents have concerns about the physical spaces in their schools, for example, concerns about capital repairs that need to be done to address issues with school and classroom ventilation and/or sanitation such as repairs to windows, A/C or washroom facilities. A large number of parents also expressed concerns about the cleanliness of schools prior to COVID-19 and were unsure how schools would be able to improve their sanitation practices over the summer.

### **Students:**

About half of students were concerned about getting used to the idea of wearing a mask (51%), trying to keep a safe distance from others (48%), and were afraid they might get sick (45%). About one-third of students were concerned about the school not being cleaned (37%), getting to school (29%), and getting used to the idea that adults might be wearing masks (28%).

In the general comments, students cited skepticism over the Board's ability to properly disinfect schools and provide basic facilities, such as soap and toilet paper, given their experiences prior to COVID-19. Some students also questioned their peers' ability to comply with public health guidelines like physical distancing.

### **Staff:**

Leading safety concerns that staff have about returning to their school/workplace are physical distancing practices not being implemented in schools, classrooms and/or work places; going back into work too early and possibly contracting the virus; and lack of availability of disinfecting materials or PPE for staff and/or students. Leading professional concerns staff have about returning to their school/workplace include completing their work with physical distancing measures in place; being in contact with multiple students or staff during the day; and enforcing adherence to Toronto Public Health COVID-19 preventative measures. Approximately half of staff respondents indicated

that they or someone in their household are (45%) or care for someone who is (40%) considered to be part of an "at-risk group" regarding COVID-19.

Other concerns staff shared included contracting COVID-19 at work and exposing their family to the virus. Some respondents acknowledged concerns about the safety of occasional teachers who work in multiple schools as well as the health and vulnerability of adult students.

## **ADDRESSING HEALTH AND SAFETY OF STUDENTS AND STAFF**

### **Parents:**

To address their health and safety concerns, many families would like to see enough soap, hand sanitizer, and PPE available for staff and students (80%); increased sanitizing and disinfecting protocols (76%); and teaching and ensuring basic hygiene (72%).

In the larger comments, parents cited wanting clear information as soon as possible on COVID-19 related protocols for the fall. Along similar lines, parents want to know how schools will be held accountable for enforcing whatever policies and procedures are laid out by the Board. Many parents want to see capital repairs to improve ventilation and washrooms at many schools addressed prior to re-opening schools as well as ensuring adequate supplies of soap, water, paper towels, sanitizer, adequate caretaking staff at schools, and age-appropriate conversations about safety/COVID-19 happening in schools.

Families were mixed in their comments about children wearing masks in the fall. A small number of families will not be sending their children to school if masks are required. As well, a small number of parents favoured frequent rapid testing for COVID-19 in schools rather than symptom and temperature checks or screening.

### **Students:**

Over half of students said the following would make them feel more comfortable coming back to school: having hand soap and hand sanitizer readily available (72%), knowing that teachers and school staff are keeping areas clean (57%), having face masks readily available (53%), and students following physical distancing rules (52%).

Some students commented that individuals in schools should be subject to frequent COVID-19 testing. There were mixed feelings about masks among students; some preferred a mandatory mask policy while others didn't feel they could wear masks all day long.

### **Staff:**

Most (84%) staff indicate that working remotely is somewhat to very important to reduce risk of infection due to COVID-19. Leading practices or supports related to COVID-19 that staff would like

to see in place for September are: ensuring enough soap and hand sanitizer are available for staff and students; increased sanitizing and disinfecting protocols at schools and work locations; and providing PPE to staff who need it (only one quarter (24%) of staff indicated that they could provide all of their own masks). Leading strategies school-based staff believe would support modifications to the school week if required in the fall include focusing on one or two subject areas (per term or semester) and team teaching.

To address their COVID-19 related concerns, staff recommended the Board provide training, and ensure implementation, compliance and accountability regarding public health guidelines and sanitizing protocols. Respondents suggested smaller class sizes and use of closed classrooms to maintain physical distancing. Staff requested that the Board provide PPE (including masks, gloves, and face shields), sufficient hygiene and sanitizing supplies, and plexiglass barriers around workspaces to maintain physical distancing. Some respondents also noted that ventilation should be improved in schools and administrative buildings. Staff also explained that the ability to continue working remotely and to be afforded flexible start/end times are important to addressing their COVID-19 related concerns.

## **CONCERNS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

### **Parents:**

Specifically related to children's well-being, many families were concerned about students not being able to interact with their friends like they used to (59%); their ability to cope with the new reality of school (49%); and re-adjusting to school life (45%).

Within the larger comments, some parents are concerned that new safety protocols/procedures may create a more stressful school environment which may exacerbate their child's pre-existing mental health conditions as well as negatively impact extra-curriculars/sports/clubs, which is a much needed outlet for many students. Some parents are concerned about teachers becoming overwhelmed if remote learning continues without improvement/additional supports for educators and families. Lastly, some parents want to ensure any anti-Asian racism/discrimination as a result of COVID-19 is addressed in schools.

### **Students:**

About half of students were concerned about getting used to school routines again (51%). About one-third of students were concerned about getting used to in-person interactions with teachers and peers (35%), not being able to interact with friends like they used to (35%), and coping with their fears or anxiety (30%). Within the larger comments, it would seem that mental health concerns were exacerbated for international students, students with special education needs or IEPs, students facing discrimination, students with ill family members, etc.

A fair number of students expressed how the pandemic has affected their mental health where they reported feeling more stressed, losing motivation not just to do work but for everyday activities, and feeling increasingly isolated. Some students really wanted to return to school to see their friends and have a sense of routine; others were nervous about social connection once schools reopen.

For students who had experienced discrimination, bullying or anxiety at school, these students described an improvement in their well-being since the onset of remote learning. For others, students reported higher well-being levels because remote learning gave them the time to get adequate sleep, exercise, and focus on hobbies. A small number of students talked about being bullied in virtual classrooms (i.e., students being called names in Google Classroom or ELL students being bullied by their peers). And lastly, some East-Asian students cited worries about returning to school due to Anti-Asian racism with respect to COVID-19.

### **Staff:**

Common personal concerns that staff have about returning to their school/workplace included having in-person interactions with others and coping with this new reality. Respondents shared concerns regarding securing childcare and the challenges associated with returning to work while their children attend school in a hybrid or fully remote learning model.

## **STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES TO ADDRESS WELL-BEING**

### **Parents:**

To address these concerns, many families noted that activities that include social emotional learning (71%); developing school routines (68%); and supporting resilience and reducing stress would be beneficial for their children (59%).

Within the larger comments, families also requested extra support with time management and clearer expectations/guidelines for families if remote learning must continue; intensive teacher/administrator training well before schools open in any new safety protocols but also in how to support students without increasing stress; and lastly, extra staff in schools to support any changes to school routines/procedures, i.e., if class sizes are smaller, students are organized into small cohorts, etc.

### **Students:**

One-quarter to one-third noted that the following would help them feel more comfortable at school: having a relaxing and calming space to go to in the school if feeling overwhelmed (42%), support for re-developing school routines (30%), support with social emotional learning skills (23%), additional information to support their mental health and well-being (21%), and the support of a Social Worker, Psychologist, Guidance Counselor, or Child and Youth Worker (21%).

Reflecting on the mental health supports sourced by the TDSB during the spring, students noted these were not helpful as they wanted more tangible supports (e.g., mental health counsellors in students' school space). Some graduating students (both in Grade 8/Grade 12) requested a need for closure where they could have opportunities to see their classmates/celebrate their graduation in some way in the next school year (i.e., trips, goodbyes, graduations, and other such events which were cancelled).

### **Staff:**

To prepare for the return to school in the fall, teaching staff stated they need: classroom lessons on social emotional learning skills; support for re-developing school routines for students; and informal group activities to support student resilience and reduce stress/worry to support student well-being.

Other supports requested by school-based staff to support students' mental health and well-being included additional and readily accessible social workers, guidance counsellors and psychologists, professional learning and resources, and a transition period for student adjustment. Similarly, staff also requested mental health supports for themselves as they prefer more specific and concrete support and resources beyond the general mental health and well-being messages and resources from the Board. Staff also expressed the importance of compassion, reasonable expectations and flexibility towards staff as they juggle personal and professional obligations.

## **INFORMATION NEEDS FOR SEPTEMBER**

### **Parents:**

To prepare children for returning to school, many families would like communication about re-opening plans for September sent throughout the summer (79%); information about how the TDSB will monitor student and staff health come September (75%); details about TDSB cleaning protocols for September (70%); stories and videos on what the school day will look like (64%); and, information on how the TDSB will follow current recommendations regarding PPE (64%).

Parents strongly feel that communication between families and the school board must be ongoing and frequent throughout the summer (e.g., online sessions about re-opening FAQ and new protocols/procedures; sharing the evidence/research behind policy decisions with families; how will schools ensure children do not remain afraid of germs or have lasting trauma from whatever new rules/regulations are enforced to prevent COVID-19; what resources/supports will be available to staff in schools?). Families were also interested in knowing how teachers will make up for lost teaching time and how students in transition years will be supported.

### **Students:**

Students would like clear information about how September will operate.

## **Staff:**

To prepare for returning to work in the fall, staff have requested the following information and resources related to COVID-19: information about what returning to work would look like; response protocol for staff if a co-worker or student tests positive for COVID-19; and response protocol for staff/students who exhibit symptoms during the school/work day, among others. Above all, respondents requested that the Board provide proactive and timely communication that clearly outlines expectations, guidelines and protocols for returning to work in September.

## **REFLECTIONS ON REMOTE LEARNING AND SUMMER SCHOOL PLANS**

### **Parents:**

Approximately two-thirds (66%) of families feel their children are ready for the next grade level. This result is consistent across grades. Seventeen percent (17%) of families feel their children will need summer support; similarly, 17% of families noted their children will be participating in summer school.

Within the larger comments, many parents noted being unhappy with their remote learning experience thus far (e.g., parents providing the support and instruction, hiring private tutors, etc.). If remote learning must continue in the fall, they suggested it must be improved with more engaging work, live connections, and more feedback. The general consensus in parent comments is that it has been difficult for full time working parents to support their children during the remote learning in the spring. There were some concerns about learning loss this year, especially from parents with children in French Immersion and those with high school age students.

### **Students:**

About half of students reported being worried that there might be too much work to catch up on (46%), or that they might be behind in their work (45%). Over one-quarter of students (29%) indicated that they are planning to participate in summer school.

Within the larger comments, students talked about inconsistent experiences with educators; while some had positive experiences that made remote learning a fantastic experience, many also had negative experiences. Students experienced working longer hours and classes that lacked many necessities they needed. Students asked for:

- coordination among teachers in terms of assignments;
- meaningful feedback; one on one instruction and/or real time collaboration - especially in math and science;
- predictable routines;
- accommodations for students with special education needs;

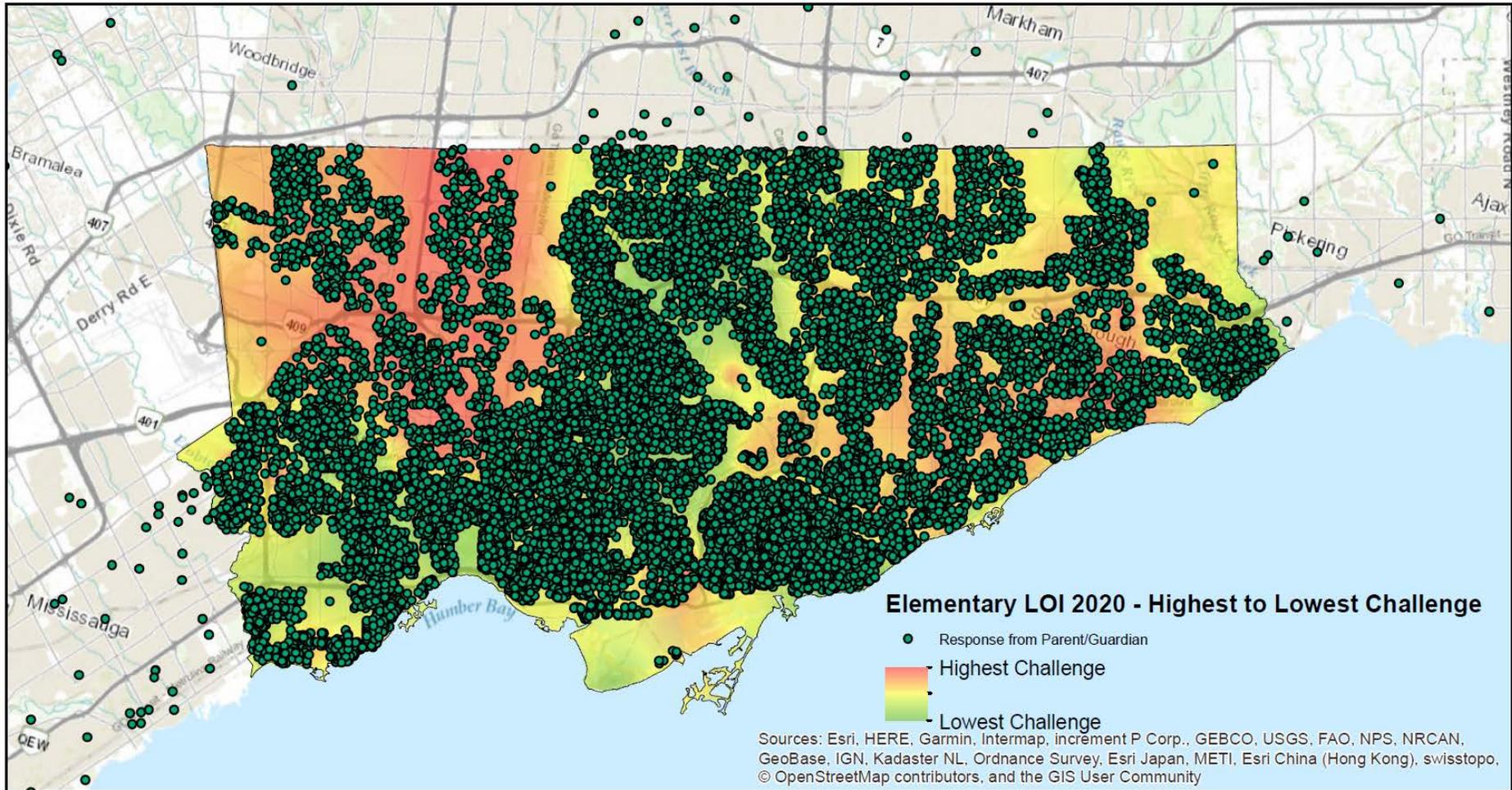
- engaging, meaningful, supportive, and relevant content (e.g., Black Lives Matter conversations);
- alternative assignments that are not on a screen; and
- consistent expectations across classes where educators are held accountable for their implementation of remote learning.

Some students found remote learning helped them boost their marks, while others expressed concerns about losing marks or even failing at times.

**Staff:**

Nearly all (87%) teaching staff are concerned about students falling behind in their learning. A number of educators requested supports, direction, or messaging on how classes will address learning gaps come September.

# APPENDIX A: PARENTAL RESPONSE TO THE RETURN TO SCHOOL SURVEY AND THE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES INDEX, 2020



Projection: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 17N  
Date: July 2020

Produced by: Research and Development  
Sources: TDSB; ESRI; DMTI