

Census Portraits

Understanding Our Students' Ethno-racial Backgrounds



Research & Information Services

Aboriginal Students

Black Students

East Asian Students

Latin American Students

Middle Eastern Students

South Asian Students

Southeast Asian Students

White Students



Census Portraits: Understanding Our Students' Ethno-racial Backgrounds

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The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) has the world's most racially diverse student population. While earlier TDSB studies have shown diversity *among* racialized groups, there is also great diversity *within* racialized groups, as each is made up of sub-groups from varied cultural, linguistic and/or religious backgrounds or countries of origin. The *Census Portraits* examine the unique characteristics of these sub-groups. The purpose is:

- to provide a better understanding of the similarities and differences within each racialized group; and
- to target interventions to ensure the needs of all students are addressed effectively and equitably.

Content

The Census Portraits folder contains individual portraits for the following groups represented in the TDSB's student population:¹

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------|
| • Aboriginal | • Middle Eastern |
| • Black | • South Asian |
| • East Asian | • Southeast Asian |
| • Latin American | • White |

Each portrait describes the background, experiences, and achievement levels of the major ethno-cultural sub-groups within each racialized group² under the following sections:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| • Historical Context ³ | • Life in School |
| • Ethno-racial/Family Background | • Student Success |
| • Life Outside of School | • Highlights of Census Findings |

Data Sources

The findings generated in these portraits are based on data combined from three internal sources - *2006 Student Census*, *2008 Parent Census*, and the Board's central academic achievement databases. Information on students' cultural backgrounds is derived from the Board's Census data and is based mainly on their parents' country of birth. For more information about the *2006 Student Census* and *2008 Parent Census*, refer to the TDSB website: www.tdsb.on.ca/studentcensus.

Acknowledgements

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- Aboriginal – Catherine Pawis, Aboriginal Education, TDSB
- Black – Dr. Carl James, Professor, Faculty of Education, York University
- East Asian – Maria Yau, Research & Information Services, TDSB
- Latin American – Dr. Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, Assistant Professor, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), & Cristina Guerrero, Graduate Student, OISE, University of Toronto
- Middle Eastern – Dr. Sarfaroz Niyozov, Associate Professor, OISE, University of Toronto
- South Asian – Sangeetha Navaratnam, Graduate Student, OISE, University of Toronto
- Southeast Asian – Maria Yau, Research & Information Services, TDSB
- White – Lisa Rosolen and Dr. Rob Brown, Research & Information Services, TDSB

¹ Students identifying as having a Mixed racial background were not included in the analysis because the varied combinations within this group were so great that it was not possible to identify a few major sub-groups for comparison.

² For Aboriginal students, no sub-group breakdown is provided due to the small number of students who identified themselves as Aboriginal in the *Census*. Therefore, the Aboriginal portrait compares the findings for Aboriginal students as a whole with those of the overall population.

³ Historical background is provided for a better understanding of the various racial groups and does not imply causality of student experiences and academic achievement.



Census Portraits

Middle Eastern Students

Aboriginal • Black • East Asian • Latin American • Middle Eastern • South Asian • Southeast Asian • White

Some Historical Context

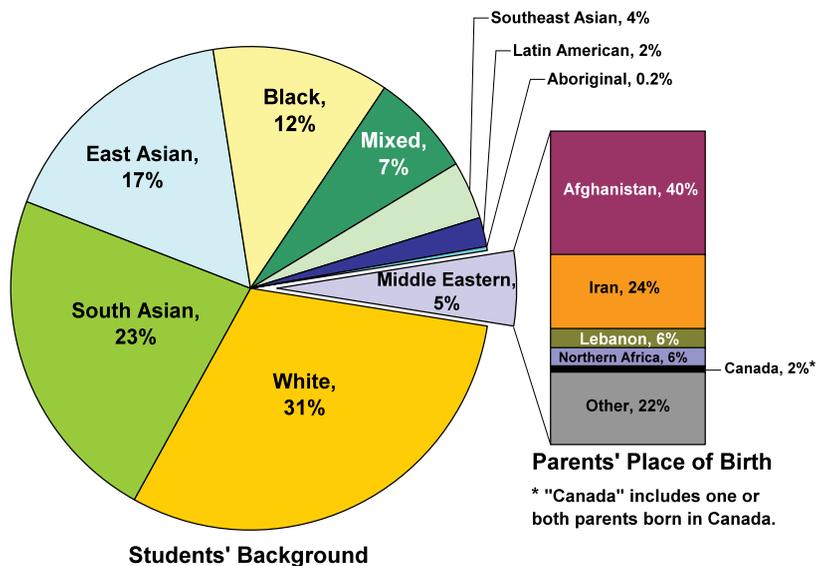
In this portrait, the term Middle Eastern is used broadly to describe students with origins as far as Central Asia and North-West Africa. As such, it is recognized that Afghanis and Iranians often consider themselves Central and Western Asians respectively.

Middle Eastern presence in Canada stretches back more than a century. Lebanese and Syrian immigrants first came to Latin and North America in the late 19th century, during the Arab Renaissance. Middle Easterners' immigration to Canada has always been influenced by a confluence of factors: political, economic, cultural, and familial/personal. In any case, migration was insignificant in number terms until the 1960s. However, as a result of the Multiculturalism Policy of 1971 and the Immigrant Act of 1976, in the 1970s significant numbers of Middle Eastern immigrants came to Canada. These immigrants included a large educated class, skilled labourers, and graduate students (visa students).

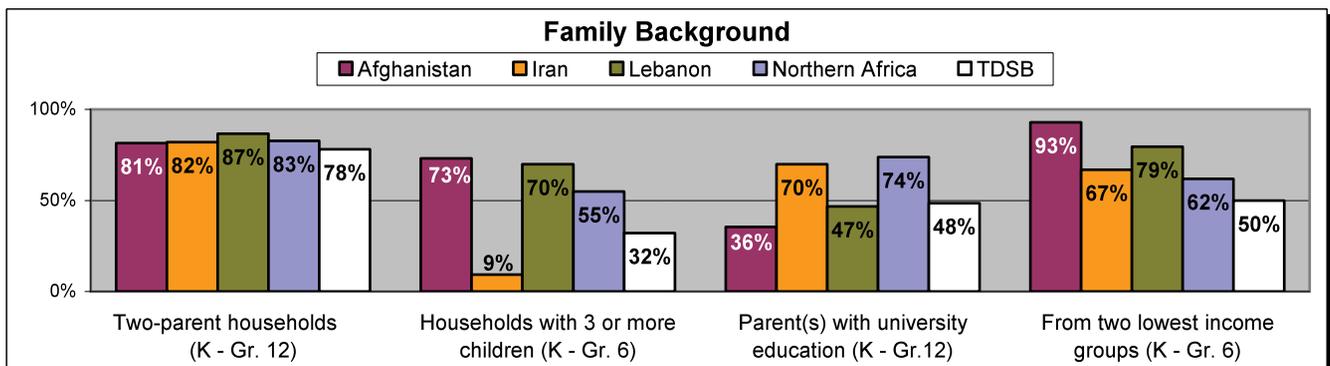
In the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, significant numbers of Palestinian, Iranian, Afghani, and Iraqi immigrants arrived in Canada as political refugees, due to conflicts, invasion, and wars in their homelands. In 2006, the approximate number of Canadian Arabs constituted around half of a million, with 90,000 Iranians and about 50,000 Afghanis. Most of these Middle Easterners are settled in Southern Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, and Alberta. Today, the Lebanese are the largest group within the Arab-Canadian community, comprising about 40% of all Arabs. Egyptians are about 12%, Syrian, Moroccan, and Iraqis each around 6-8%, while Algerians and Palestinians comprise about 4-5% of the Arabs in Canada. The Middle Eastern population in Canada is tremendously diverse in terms of ethnicity, language, religion, and social backgrounds.

Ethno-racial and Family Background

- Middle Eastern students make up 5% of the Toronto District School Board's (TDSB) population (about 13,200 students).
- Most of their parents are from Afghanistan (40%), Iran (24%), Lebanon (6%), and Northern Africa (6%). Just 2% have one or both parents born in Canada.
- Most students (70%) of Lebanese background were born in Canada. However, the majority of students from Iran (70%), Afghanistan (64%), and Northern Africa (e.g., Egypt, Sudan, and Morocco) (53%) were born outside of Canada.



- Compared to the overall population:
- more students of Lebanese background live with two parents (this includes those living with step-parents or living half-time with each parent);
 - Middle Eastern students are much more likely to have multiple siblings, except for those of Iranian background;
 - Afghani parents are less likely to have university degrees, while Iranian and North African parents are more likely;
 - far more Middle Eastern students are in the two lowest income groups (i.e., with annual household incomes of less than \$30,000 or between \$30,000-\$49,999), especially those of Afghani background.

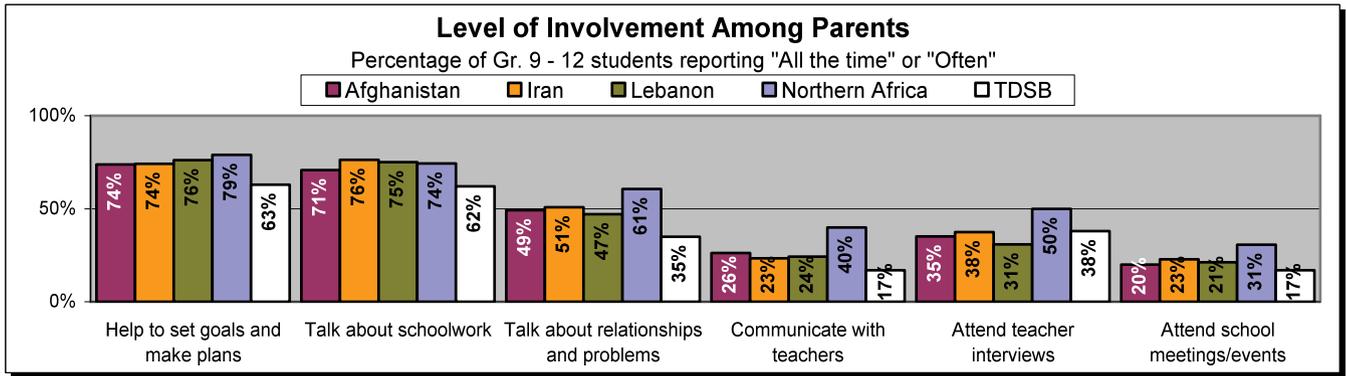


Life Outside of School

Parent Involvement In and Outside of School

Compared to the overall population:

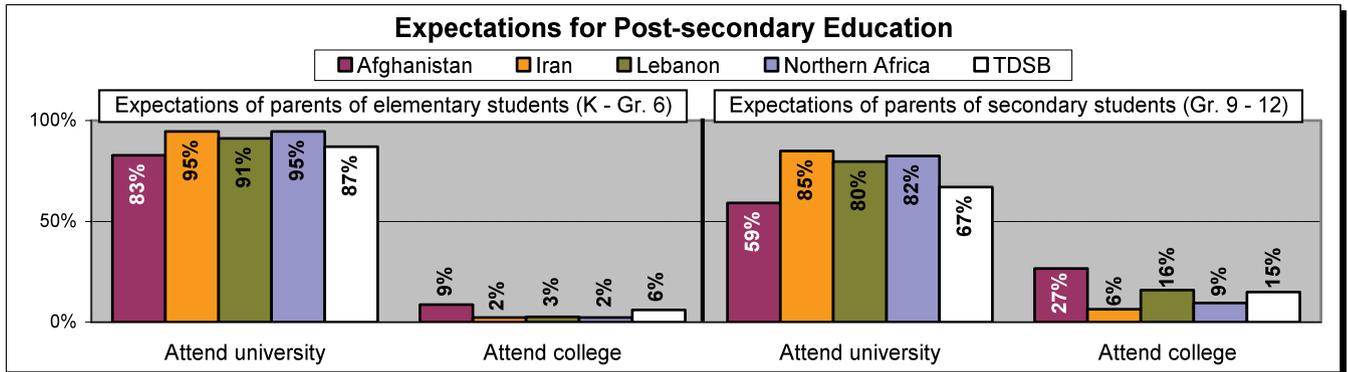
- Middle Eastern parents are more involved in their children's education both in and outside of school. This is especially so for parents from Northern Africa.



Post-secondary Expectations

Compared to the overall population:

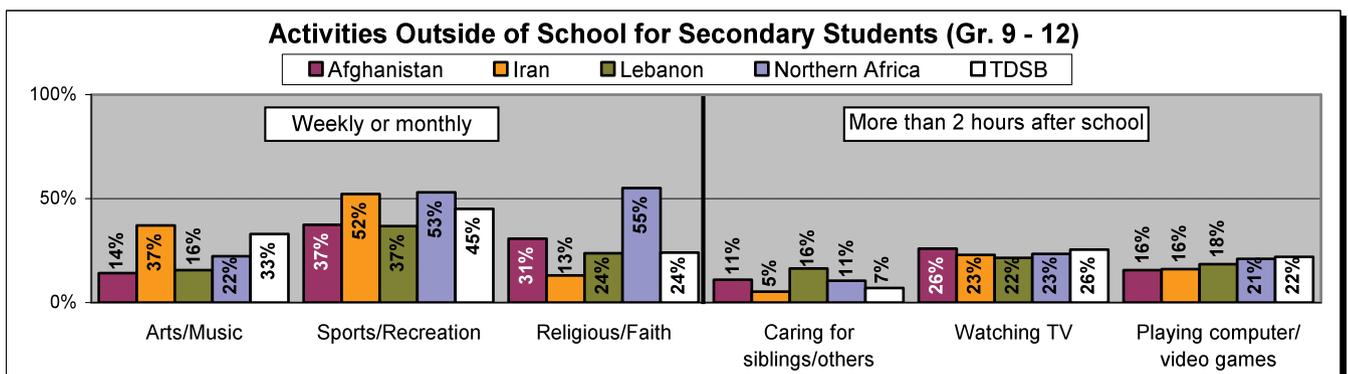
- Middle Eastern parents are generally more likely to expect their children to go to university, except for Afghani parents;
- Afghani parents are more likely to expect their children to go to college.



Activities and Opportunities Outside of School

Compared to the overall population:

- fewer Middle Eastern students – except those of Iranian background – participate in arts or music;
- more students of Iranian and North African background participate in sports and recreation, while fewer students of Afghani or Lebanese background do;
- students of Afghani and North African backgrounds, in particular, are more involved in religious activities, while students of Iranian background are less involved;
- Middle Eastern students, except for those of Iranian background, are more likely to spend time looking after siblings, especially those of Lebanese background;
- students of Afghani and Iranian background spend less time playing computer/video games;
- secondary school students of Afghani and Lebanese background spend the same amount of time per week on homework and studying (12 hours), while students of North African and Iranian background spend more time (15 and 14 hours respectively).

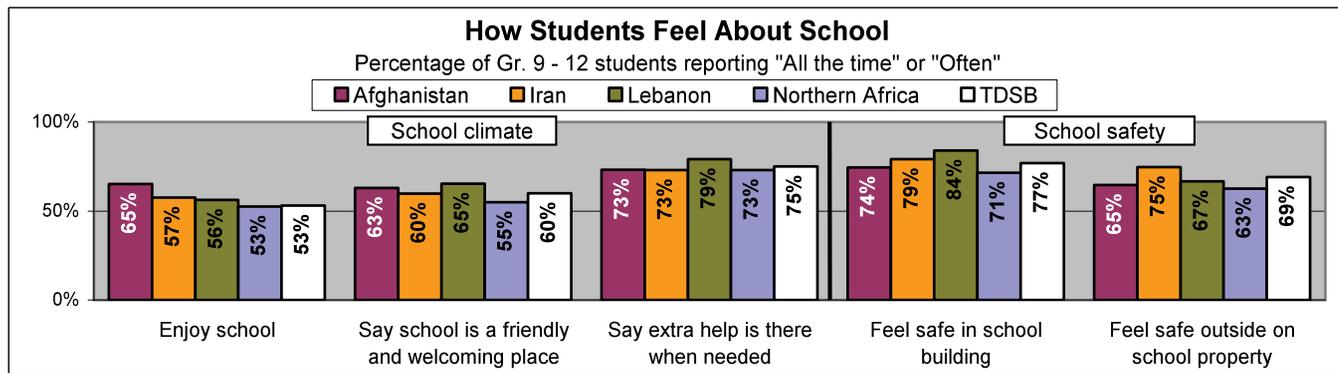


Life in School

School Climate and School Safety

Compared to the overall population:

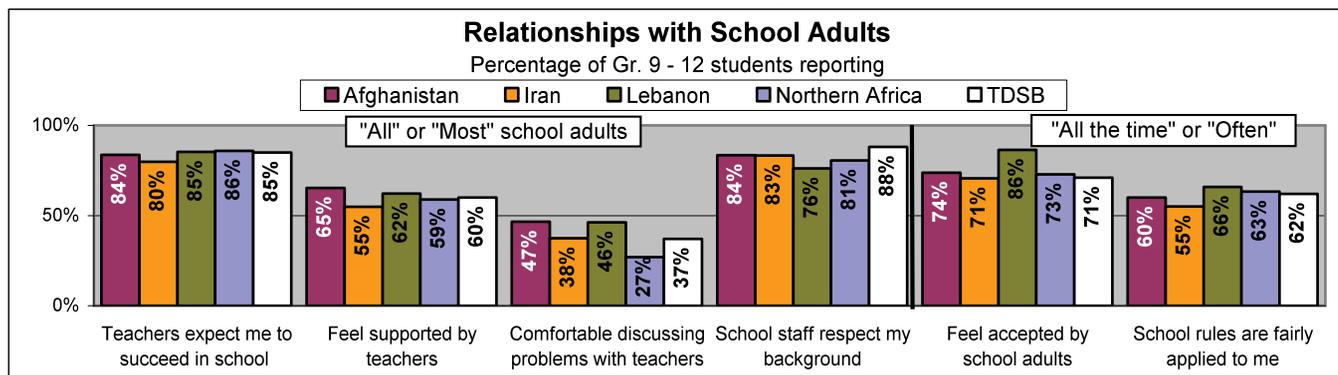
- Middle Eastern students generally feel as positive about school, especially those of Afghani background who are more likely to enjoy school, and students of Lebanese background who are more likely to feel their school is friendly and safe;
- students of North African background are less likely to feel safe at school or to find school a friendly and welcoming place.



Relationships with School Adults

Compared to the overall population:

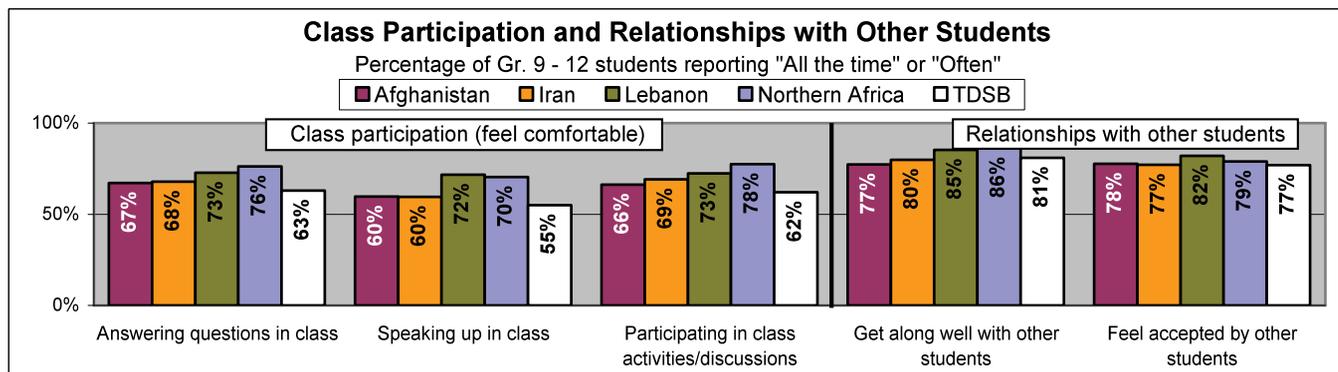
- Middle Eastern students are generally less likely to feel that school staff respect their background;
- more students of Afghani background feel supported and encouraged by teachers and are comfortable discussing problems with teachers;
- students of Iranian background generally feel less positive about school adults and school rules;
- students of Lebanese background are more likely to feel comfortable discussing problems with teachers, and to feel accepted by school adults;
- students of North African background feel less comfortable discussing problems with their teachers.



Class Participation and Relationships with Other Students

Compared to the overall population:

- Middle Eastern students – particularly those of Lebanese and North African background – are more likely to feel comfortable answering questions, speaking up and participating in class;
- all Middle Eastern students feel positive about their relationships with other students.



Learning about One's Culture/Race

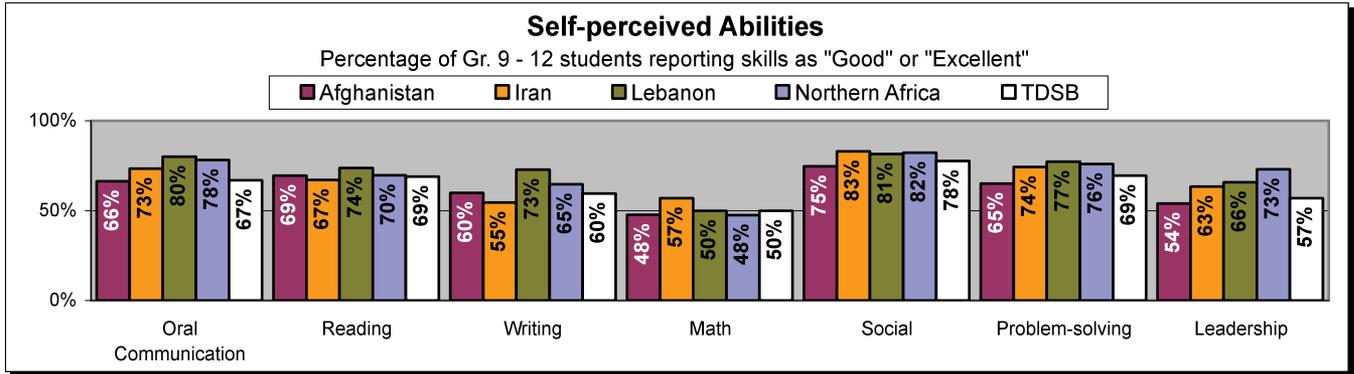
The majority of Middle Eastern students say that learning more about their own culture would make their learning more interesting (77%), help them enjoy school more (67%), and help them do better in school (60%).

Student Success

Self-perceived Abilities

Compared to the overall population:

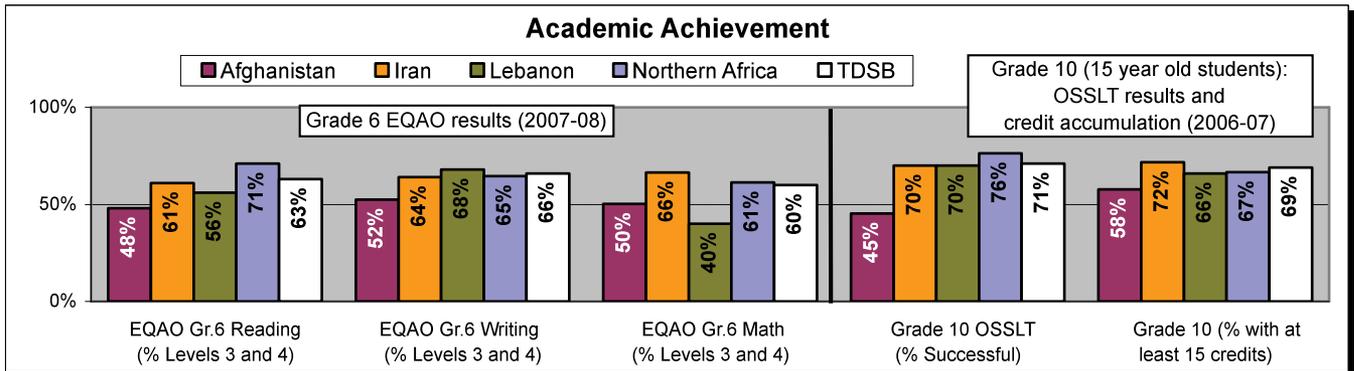
- all Middle Eastern students feel as or more confident about their abilities in different areas; this is especially true of students of Lebanese and North African background;
- students of Afghani background feel less confident about their problem-solving skills.



Academic Achievement

Compared to the overall population:

- students of Iranian background perform as well academically, and better on the Gr. 6 Education Quality and Accountability (EQAO) Math test;
- students of Lebanese background perform as well on the Gr. 6 EQAO Writing test and on the Gr. 10 Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), but they have lower achievement on the Gr. 6 EQAO Reading and Math tests
- students of North African background also perform as well, and do better on the Gr. 6 EQAO Reading test and in the Gr. 10 OSSLT
- students of Afghani background are the most at-risk in all academic areas – EQAO Gr. 6 Reading, Writing, and Math tests, the Gr. 10 OSSLT, and in terms of Gr. 10 credit accumulation.



Highlights of Census Findings

The four main sub-groups of Middle Eastern students share several commonalities. Compared to the overall population:

- they are more likely to come from larger families (except Iranians) and from the two lowest income groups;
- despite their challenges, their parents are more involved in their children's education, and they are more likely to expect their children to attend university (except for Afghani parents, who are less likely);
- they are more likely to participate in class and to feel confident about many of their abilities.

There are also some differences among the sub-groups. For example:

- Parents of Iranian and North African background are more likely to be university educated, and to attend meetings and events in their children's school. Their children are active in sports and recreation, and spend more time on homework and studying. In general, both groups perform well academically.
- Students of Iranian descent are much more active in arts and music, better in math, but are less positive about school adults and school rules; while students of North African background are much more involved in religious activities, perform better in literacy, but feel less safe in school.
- Students of Lebanese background are generally less active outside of school, and are more likely to spend time looking after siblings. They have positive attitudes towards school, school adults, and other students, and they feel confident about their reading and writing abilities, although fewer are successful on EQAO Reading and Math tests.
- Students of Afghani background are less active outside of school, except in religious activities. They are more likely to enjoy school, and have positive attitudes towards school adults; however, fewer are successful academically.

Census Portraits

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