



Making It Count

Update on the 2006 & 2008 TDSB Student and Parent Censuses

In 2006, TDSB students in Grades 7 to 12 and in 2008, parents of Kindergarten to Grade 6 students were invited for the first time to participate in a system-wide Census. Together, the two Censuses have provided the Board with a valuable source of information on its diverse student population, including their demographics, family background, self perceptions and in- and out-of-school experiences.

This Census data has offered the Board with hard evidence for:

- *Needs identification* – identifying achievement gaps and determining barriers to achievement
- *Programming and intervention* – reviewing and implementing effective systems, supports and initiatives across the system
- *Accountability* – establishing a baseline of data to measure improvement over time

As the TDSB prepares for the second Student and Parent Census in the 2011-12 school year, the following examples demonstrate how data from the first Census has informed practices at the school, system and community level and has ultimately led to improved student success.

School Level

At the school level, data has allowed staff to better target resources into initiatives that directly meet the needs of their unique student population. Some examples include:

- *At a senior public school*, the data led to the introduction of more student leadership initiatives, girls' groups and intermural activities. Participation in after-school programs increased and now shows a broad representation of students. In addition, the data informed staff of student perceptions of safety and bullying, leading to facility upgrades and bullying prevention workshops for all students.
- *At a junior middle school*, an overwhelming request for low-cost breakfast and lunch programs led to a revamped breakfast program and expanded hot lunch program. The school now feeds about half of the students healthy food each day.
- *At a community school*, the census helped staff realize their perceptions of the student population were different than the reality. This helped teachers better focus how they used special curricular materials (Model School Units) and how they connected with their students. Data has also helped inform programming choices with partner organizations such as Big Brothers and Sisters to better engage students.
- *At a secondary school*, the data showed that fewer students worked after school than commonly thought, leading to increased school work expectations. Data also showed that students felt safe in the school allowing resources to be directed elsewhere within the Family of Schools.
- *At another community school*, the data was used to select texts and materials that reflect the students' cultural and racial backgrounds and to offer more targeted workshops and after-school programs. The result has been increased student and parent engagement.
- *At a junior public school*, the census helped define the income levels of students' families. This helped identify a greater need to fundraise instead of asking parents to fund school activities. In addition, to further engage parents and families, the school created a community garden and family math night.
- *At another junior public school*, learning that most families were from a specific country urged staff to learn more about the culture. This knowledge helped them improve communication with families and the need to address issues such as weather conditions and financial aid.



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System Level

At the Board level, the data has provided the TDSB with concrete evidence to review, evaluate and implement system-wide strategies to better meet the needs of its diverse student population.

System-Wide Planning

The data has provided the TDSB with concrete evidence to inform its Board Improvement Plan. The data on student engagement, satisfaction, class participation, as well as out-of-school support and opportunities was particularly valuable in the Community, Culture and Caring section of the Plan.

To address these areas, some strategies that were used included:

- Focusing on mentoring and student leadership programs
 - introduced Women on the Move, which built on existing mentorship programs to develop a network of socially conscious young women and mentors
 - expanded Boys2Men, which connects boys to mentors who provide guidance in personal and school-related challenges
- Increasing Safe and Caring Schools initiatives
 - launched the Student Safety Line and online form as a way for students to report safety concerns
 - introduced School Resource Officers, a partnership with the Toronto Police Service, to further create school environments that are safe and healthy. During the first year of implementation, feedback indicated the program was well received and supported by students and staff in SRO schools.
 - developed and implemented anti-violence curricula and programs, including equity awareness, anti-harassment approaches and anti-bullying competencies

Policy Development

One example of how the Census impacted policy is the recent revision of the Homework Policy. The questions posed in the census regarding homework gave staff the opportunity to identify challenges and consider how to address them. The census allowed students and parents to really use their collective voice in a constructive way to express their experiences around homework and led to a more meaningful and relevant Homework Policy.

Resource Allocation

One of the key findings was that students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds not only lag behind in academic achievement, but also have fewer opportunities.

As a result, the value of the **Model Schools for Inner Cities** program, which benefits more than 50,000 students from diverse backgrounds in underserved communities, was confirmed. The data also helped improve resource allocation to address the specific needs of these students, and enabled the Board to advocate for funding for a number of critical programs that work to level the playing field, including:

- **Feeding our Future** – helped highlight the need for nutrition programs which led to an increase in private donations as well as updating funding criteria for student nutrition programs across the province
- **Vision and Hearing Screening** – helped identify students' critical needs which led to private sector funding as well as supporting advocacy with the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care
- **Beyond 3:30** – helped develop customized program plans for each school community to maximize student after-school experience and support their learning. As a result, there have been significant improvements in areas of attendance, confidence, self-esteem, academic performance and behaviour



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Community Level

At the community level, the data has allowed the TDSB to more strategically focus on the whole student outside of the classroom and how the local community can more directly meet their needs. Some examples of the data in action, include:

- Helping to identify a need for more health support led to the establishment of partnership programs, including a nursing student placement where students from Humber College and Ryerson University spend time in schools educating and engaging students on nutrition and physical activity.
- Sharing the data with Toronto and provincial organizations such as Toronto Public Health, Get Active Toronto and the Ministry of Education has not only strengthened our partnerships and collaboration with them, it has improved the programs and resources they offer to the community, which includes our TDSB families.
- Through the Board's sponsored community forums – such as Equity Parent Forums, a South Asian Symposium, and an East Asian Parent Conference -- the Census data has provided different community and parent groups with valuable information about the school experiences and needs of their children. This results in building a better understanding and stronger partnerships between the school system and the parent community groups in fostering long-term success for all students.