



The Institute for Education Leadership  
L'Institut de leadership en éducation



Leading Safe and  
Accepting Schools

# THE ONTARIO INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATION LEADERSHIP'S

## *Leading Safe and Accepting Schools Project*

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2014 Survey Results and Views from the Field

March 2015



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## BACKGROUND

### **Institute for Education Leadership (IEL)**

The IEL brings together representatives from Ontario's Principals' Associations, the Supervisory Officers' Associations, Councils of Directors of Education, the Council of Senior Business Officials and the Ministry of Education in a unique collaborative partnership. It advances and advocates for tri-level leadership (school, district and system). The Institute explores leading edge thinking on education leadership and applies that expertise to develop high-quality resources and learning opportunities for school and system leaders.

### **The Leading Safe and Accepting Schools' (LSAS) Project**

The survey results and views from the field outlined in this executive summary are a component of the second phase of a multi-phase Leading Safe and Accepting Schools' project being led by the Institute for Education Leadership (IEL).

The goal of the second phase was to elicit views from school and system leaders across Ontario School Board Districts to understand the progress of implementation of safe and accepting schools' initiatives and to determine leaders' ongoing needs.

As part of the first phase of the LSAS project, the IEL's Leading Safe and Accepting Schools section of the website includes "A Comprehensive Toolkit for Safe, Inclusive and Accepting Schools: Strategies from the Thames Valley District School Board" which was launched in 2012.

## THIS REPORT

The report is divided into two distinct parts:

**Part I:** Leading Safe and Accepting Schools Survey Results

**Part II:** Views from the Field - Interviews with Diverse Safe and Accepting Schools' Stakeholders

### **Part I - The Survey - Building on Experience**

At the outset of the second phase of the IEL Leading Safe and Accepting Schools' Project, the Project Advisory Group, composed of Safe and Accepting Schools' Leads from across Ontario, provided input that formed the basis of the survey. The information gathered was used to develop the thirty-three survey questions in the survey. The survey results are intended to lead to a better understanding of school and system leaders'

challenges and achievements experienced in implementing, aligning, evaluating, and sustaining a safe and accepting schools' approach in districts and schools. Specifically, the themes of the questions focused on:

1. Leading Safe and Accepting Schools' section of the IEL website [www.education-leadership-ontario.ca](http://www.education-leadership-ontario.ca);
2. programs and practices that districts are using to support the implementation of safe and accepting schools;
3. obstacles and challenges that districts have faced; and
4. resources and strategies required to support capacity building and implementation.

The online survey was made available to all 72 districts' Safe and Accepting Schools Leads who were encouraged to involve their Safe and Accepting Schools team in the survey completion. The survey took about 30 to 45 minutes to complete. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected beginning with demographic questions. The survey included closed-ended questions such as rank ordering, agreement and frequency scales, along with open-ended items.

### **The Results - A Snapshot**

The survey results are a snapshot of school and system leaders' perceptions in Ontario in the fall of 2014.

### **Who responded?**

- 65 percent or 47 of the 72 school districts across Ontario completed the online survey in the Fall of 2014.
- 12 Francophone and 35 Anglophone districts completed the survey representing a 100 percent and 58 percent completion rate respectively.
- An individual rather than a team of respondents completed approximately 75 percent of the surveys; 33 surveys were completed by a member of the senior administrative team.

### **What School and System Leaders are saying about the LSAS website:**

- Many of the respondents were unaware of the website, possibly reflecting the soft launch approach and limited communication and marketing of the site.
- Respondents indicated limited website use, but reported moderate satisfaction with the content of the website.
- Identified improvements to the website include: a more aesthetically appealing homepage to entice viewing, a

more concise menu, and a reduction in the number of clicks needed to access resources.

### **Building and sustaining positive school climates – what school and system leaders reported:**

- 70 percent of districts reported being in partial (12 districts) to full implementation (11 districts).
- Results show that there is a need for more support for implementing the safe and accepting schools' strategies as only 9 school districts have reached sustainability.

### **Factors Cited as Important to Implementation and Sustainability**

1. **Strong Communication** – communicate within the school, the district and beyond with stakeholders and partners, build awareness, share information and successful strategies.
2. **Partnerships** – work with external agencies and community partners, engage in consultations with stakeholders in all steps of the process from vision and planning to implementation.
3. **Strategic Alignment** – develop a consistent approach across the district and system level with a clear framework for changing practices and ensuring alignment of mental health/wellness and equity/inclusive education initiatives.
4. **Whole School Approach** – develop respectful and caring relationships and inclusivity among all members of the school community and work toward a common vision integrating the approach across school culture.
5. **Cohesive Team** – develop a team comprised of representatives from all policy areas, stakeholder groups; work collaboratively on a plan for implementation.
6. **Evidence-based Research** - create and implement effective practices and develop innovative material.
7. **Vision** – develop a clear framework of goals and outcomes; positive school climates should stem from a need established by the school; create a team vision supported by senior administration, and a school champion; articulate the congruence to staff; provide time, and support to embrace change rooted in a common vision.
8. **Systemic Approach** - develop a global system across the entire district; evenly and systematically distributing resources and information across the district.

### **Reported Barriers to Implementation and Sustainability**

#### **1. Resources and Time**

- a. Difficult and expensive to release staff, few resources in place for teacher professional development, time needed

for knowledge, collaboration and in-servicing.

- b. Lack of adequate personnel to deliver the resources, lack of leadership and few system leaders who are eager to take charge of projects; difficult to scale up.
- c. Too many ministry initiatives at the same time for principals who have a heavy administrative load.

#### **2. Strategic Alignment**

- a. Develop a system that is consistent across all schools.
- b. Support collaboration and communication
  - information is not always communicated quickly enough between members of the districts and the Safe Schools team, difficult to engage all members.

#### **3. Data Collection and Analysis**

- a. Over half the districts report limited to intermediate capacity in their ability to analyze data.
- b. Barriers include properly trained personnel, effective and concise measurement tools, and adequate time and resources to survey broadly.
- c. Software for data processing as well as personnel with a background in data analysis and interpretation were cited as supports in aiding in data capacity.

For details about the programs districts report using and capacity building challenges and supports refer to Part 1 of the report. See pages 17 and 26 respectively.

## **PART II - VIEWS FROM THE FIELD**

In addition to information received through the survey, the LSAS Project Lead and Coordinator met with Safe and Accepting Schools' stakeholders in 2014. The stakeholder groups included representatives from the Ministry of Education, policy advisors and academics from a wide range of community organizations, which had links to the school districts.

The key themes identified by these stakeholders as important in the Safe and Accepting Schools' policy implementation process included:

1. inter-organizational and interpersonal relationships;
2. support for initiatives;
3. unique student needs;
4. an aligned vision;
5. positive school climate; and
6. effective communication.

The above themes are closely aligned with the survey responses cited by school and system leaders as important to implementation and sustainability, with unique student needs emerging as an additional theme.

# CONCLUSIONS

## A Snapshot

The survey is a snapshot of Ontario school and system leaders' perceptions of progress, best practices and challenges to implementing safe and accepting schools' initiatives in their districts.

### Commitment and Experience

The high survey completion rate and trends reflected in the qualitative data demonstrate school and system leaders' strong commitment, expertise and extensive experience in building and maintaining positive school climates at the school and district levels across Ontario.

### Capacity Building Priorities

Survey findings and the information gathered during discussions with stakeholders point to a number of priorities for capacity building. Themes that emerged include support for:

1. strategic alignment of related safe and accepting schools initiatives at the district and system levels;
2. strategic planning, setting priorities, and aligning resources with the flexibility to make local choices; and
3. data collection and analysis for decision making and improving practice.

Few respondents were aware of the LSAS website which likely reflects the use of a soft launch approach that was accompanied by limited website marketing.

- Survey results will inform the next step LSAS website enhancements to make it more appealing and increase its practical value for those who access it.

## Next Steps

The IEL will continue to collaborate with school and system leaders with a focus on addressing challenges faced by schools and districts, support capacity building, and ongoing sharing of evidence-based and promising practices across the province.

Next steps include:

1. an Ontario LSAS Bilingual Summit for school and system leaders in the Fall of 2015. The summit conference will be developed by school and system leaders and build on the capacity building areas identified in the LSAS survey results;
2. a Leaders' Learning Network that will be launched as part of the summit to allow ongoing discussion and networking, thus leading to a sustainable process for progress in the area of safe and accepting schools and continued development of positive climates for student achievement and well-being; and
3. an Enhanced LSAS website that supports leaders' access to relevant and current resources, supporting the sharing of evidence-based and promising practices, upcoming events and ongoing networking.

# FINAL REPORT

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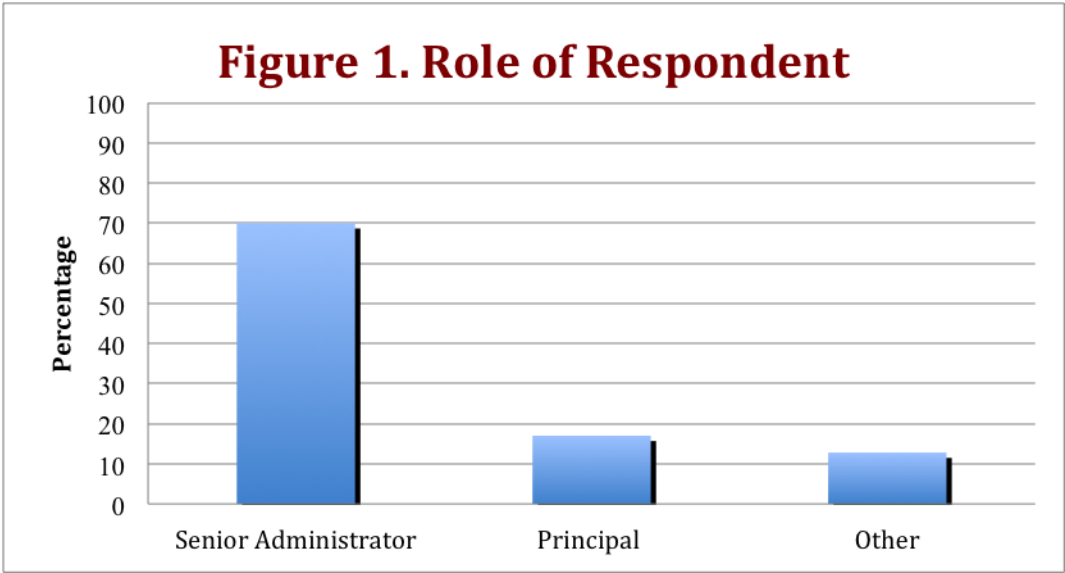
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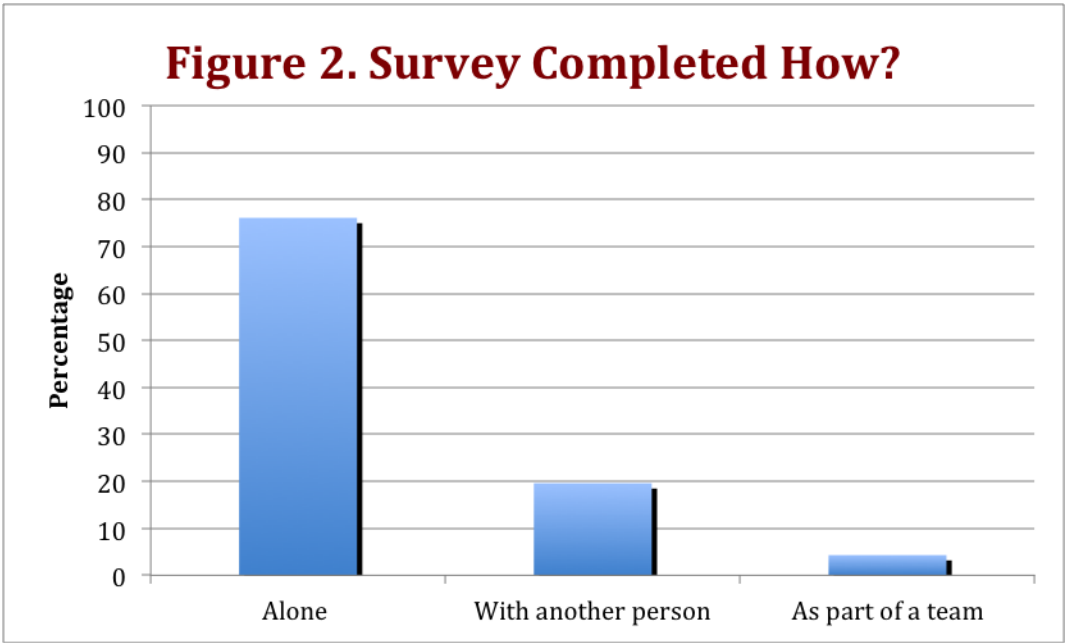
# DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

**Participants:** A total of 47 districts across Ontario completed the IEL's Leading Safe and Accepting Schools Project Survey. Roughly 70% of those who responded identified as senior administrator followed by principal. Frequencies of main respondent are:

- Senior Administrator: 33
- Principal: 8
- Other: 6



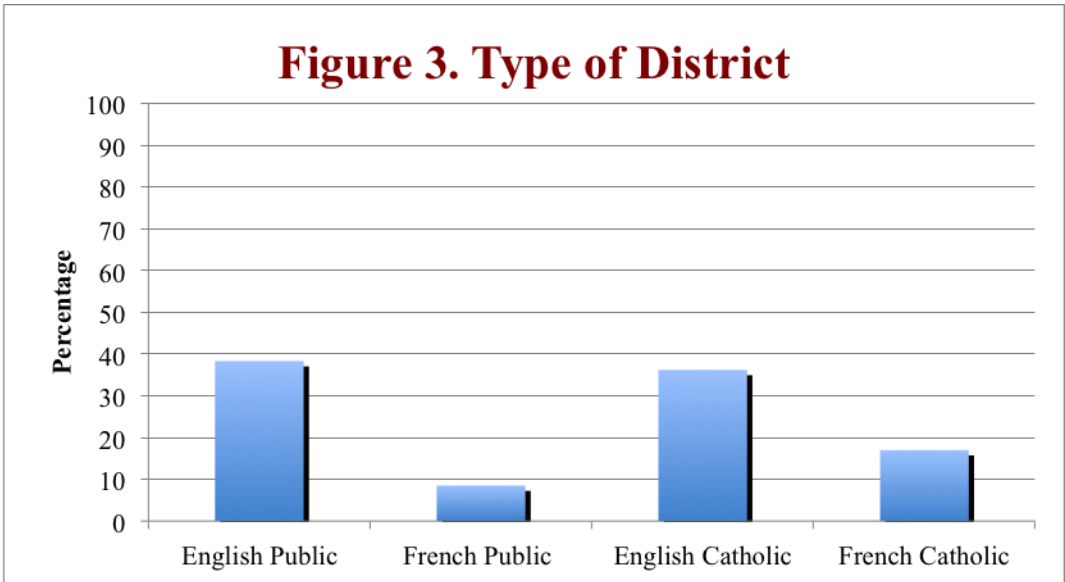
Most respondents completed the survey alone, with only a small percentage completing the survey with another person or as part of a team.



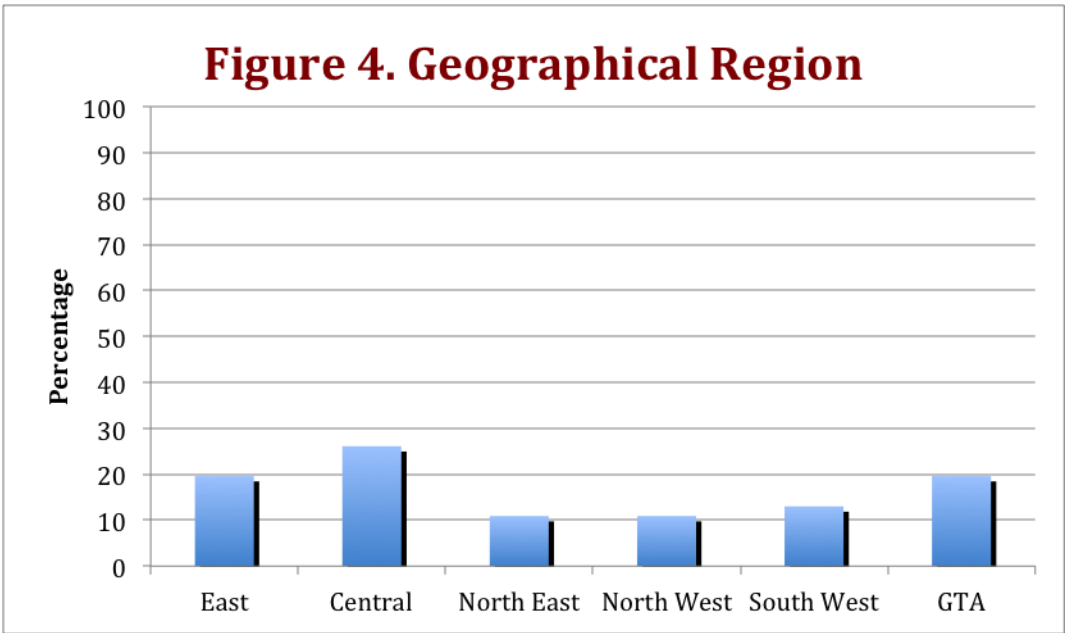


Type of District: English Public districts represent the largest proportion of those who responded, followed closely by English Catholic districts. French Catholic and French Public districts make up less than one-third of the total responses, however the French districts had a 100% response rate. Below are the frequencies of each district type:

- English Public: 18
- French Public: 4
- English Catholic: 17
- French Catholic: 8



There is quite a large spread in the number of schools each district oversees. The average number of schools per district is 58.



**Geographic Region:** Finally, respondents selected which geographical area best represented their locale. The largest proportion of districts is located in the Central region. The GTA and Eastern regions represent the next region with the most respondents. One district did not specify their geographical region. Below are the frequencies of each geographical region:

- 12 Central
- 9 East
- 9 GTA
- 5 North East
- 5 North West
- 6 South West

Table 1. Total number of districts and total number of respondents

Total Districts						Total Respondents				
	PE	PF	CE	CF	Total	PE	PF	CE	CF	Total
Central	8	0	7	0	15	6	0	6	0	12
East	5	1	4	2	12	4	1	2	2	9
GTA	5	1	5	1	12	4	1	3	1	9
North East	4	2	4	2	12	0	2	0	3*	5
North West	4	0	4	1	9	2	0	2	1	5
South West	5	0	5	1	11	2	0	3	1	6

*Note. PE = Public English; PF = Public French; CE = Catholic English; CF = Catholic French*

*\* One district is not listed on school district region and address document*

**Correspondence:** All respondents prefer email communication as the most effective way to gather and share information. This is followed closely by teleconferences (35%) and face-to-face or regional meetings (25%). The same patterns are seen for preferred methods of communication and providing feedback.



# LEADING SAFE AND ACCEPTING SCHOOLS

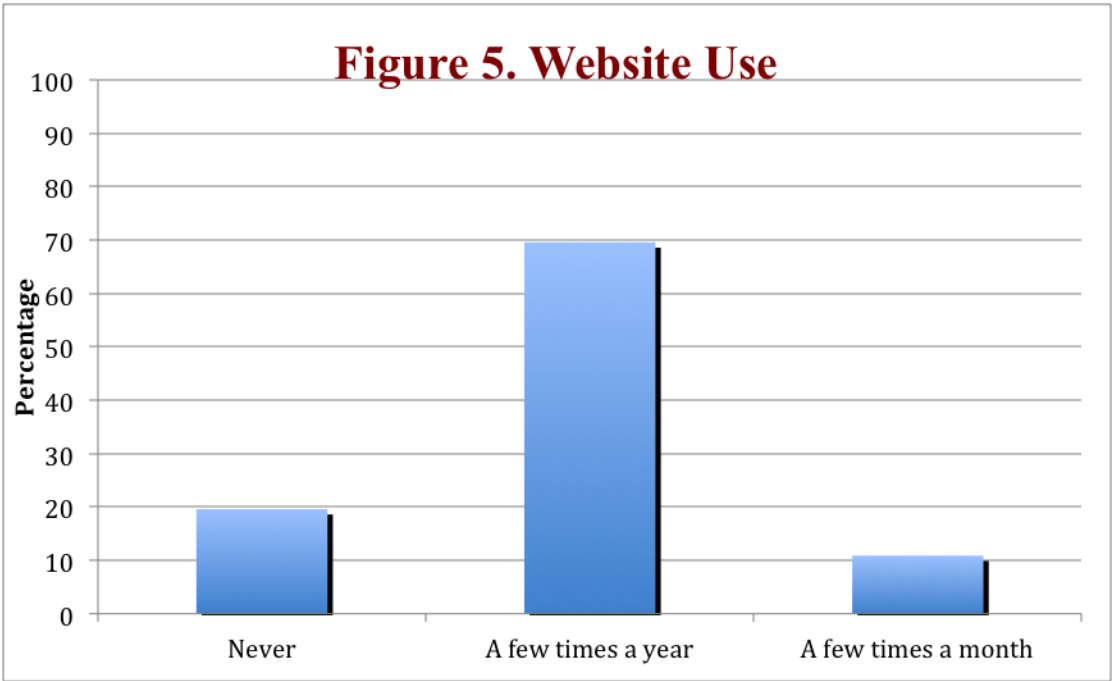
## PHASE 1 – WEBSITE

**Website Use:** The website is only used by districts a few times a year as 32 respondents chose this level. This finding is consistent across region and type of district. Notably, a substantial minority of respondents say that they never use the website as reference material. This is especially true for the French Public and French Catholic districts as well as those districts located in Northern and Western Ontario.

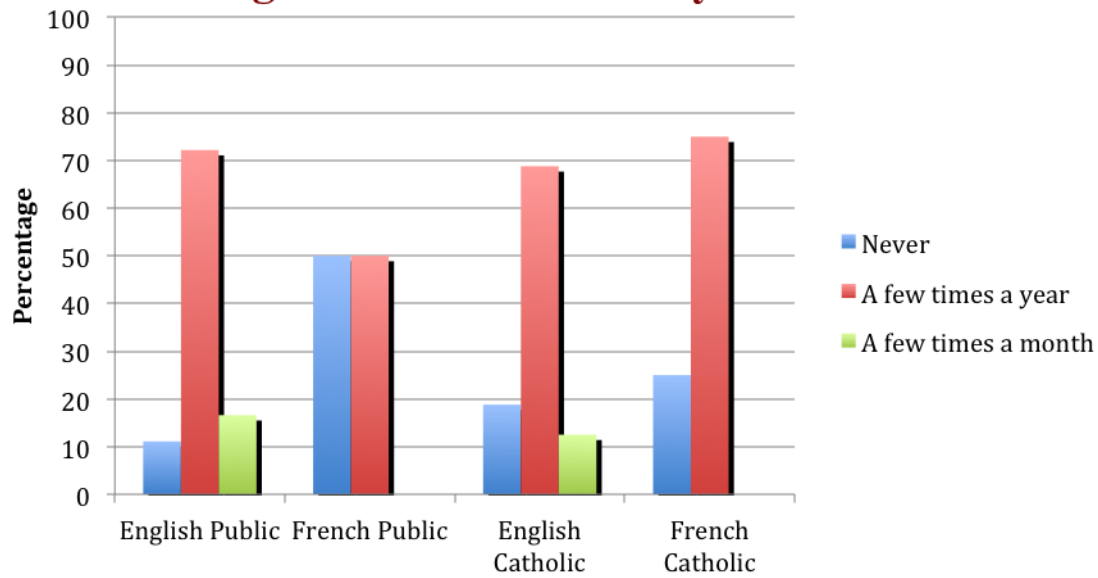
There are a few common themes across districts for the lack of traffic to the website. These are:

- many are unaware of the resource or they have only recently come across it;
- several respondents point to a lack of time and numerous other priorities that take precedence over visiting the website;
- many say that they do not consider the website a great source of information or that it is lacking in new and/or relevant information. Instead these respondents go elsewhere for their bullying intervention needs, thus rendering the website unnecessary;
- similarly, the layout of the website has equally received criticism for having scattered resources and the difficulty involved in finding evidence-based sources quickly.

*Most of the material I receive in other formats/places.  
Not necessary to go there.  
Many supports exist already at our board.*

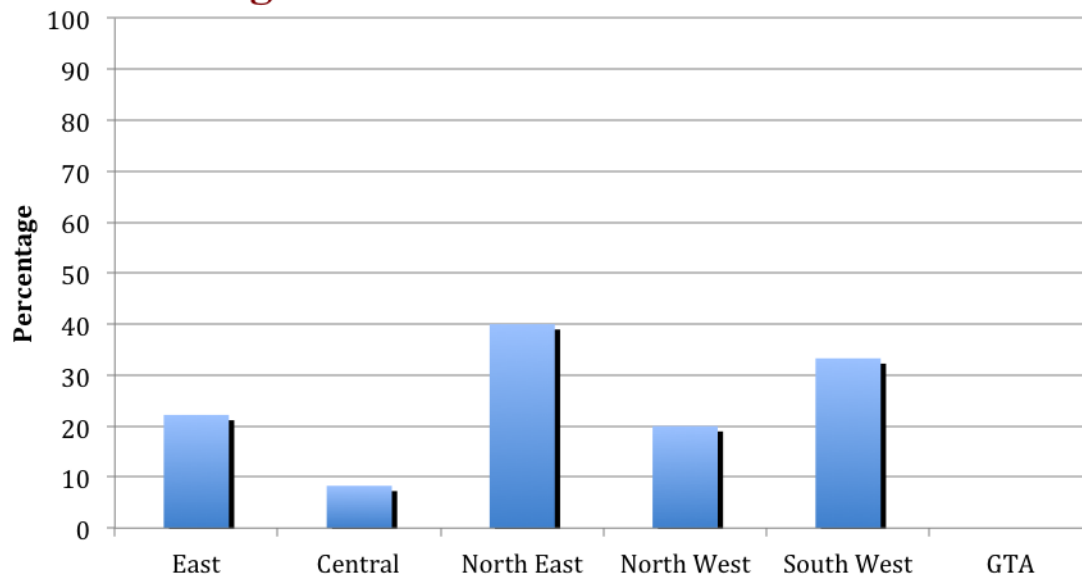


### Figure 6. Website Use by District



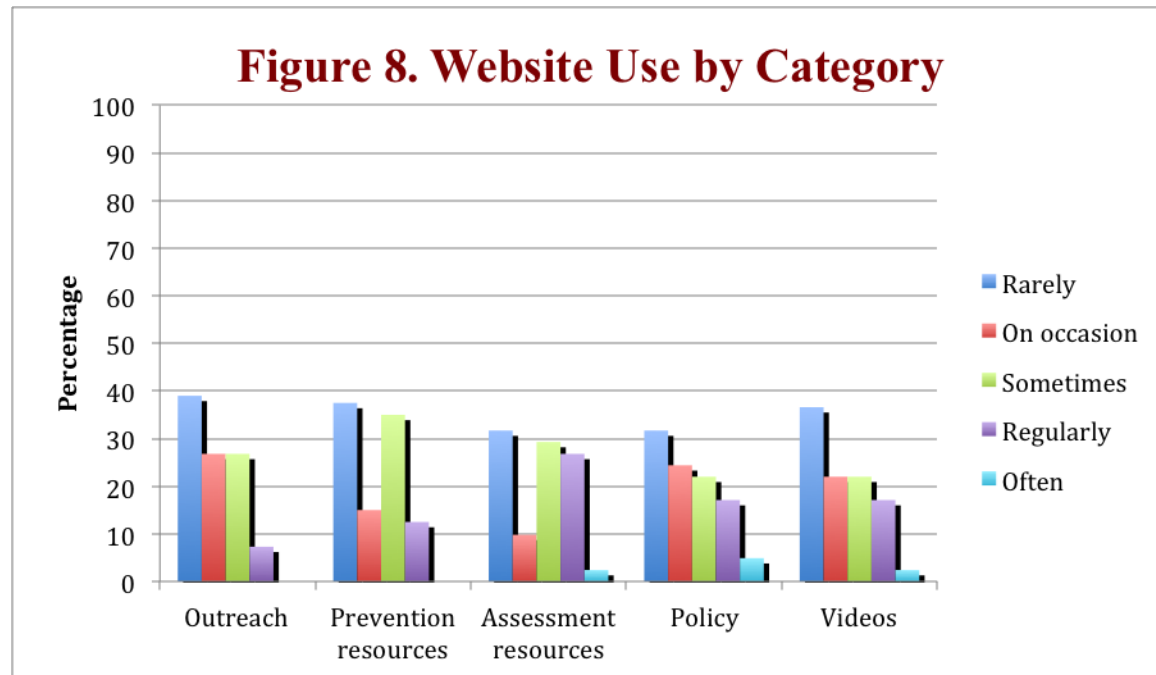
Note: 18 English Public, 4 French Public, 17 English Catholic, 8 French Catholic.

### Figure 7. Districts Never Use Site



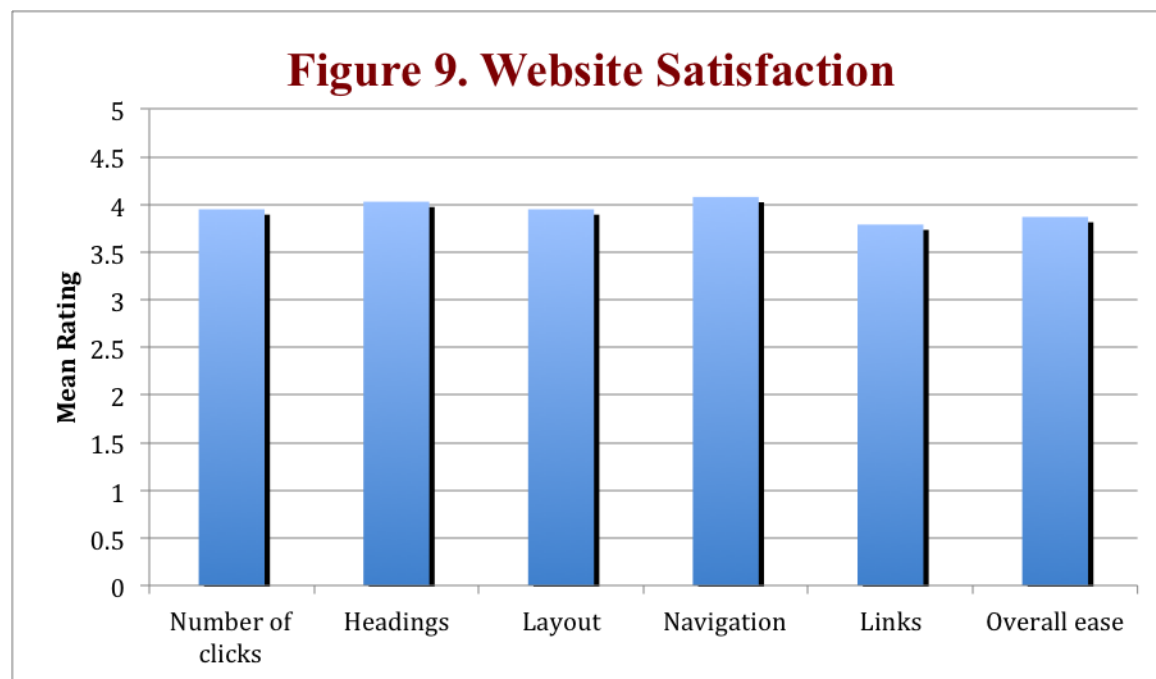
Note: 9 East, 12 Central, 5 North East, 5 North West, 6 South West, 9 GTA

**Website Use by Category:** When looking more closely at the percentage of website use by resource, we notice that regardless of the resource tool all respondents *rarely use the website* as this was the option with the highest percentage in all cases.



**Website Satisfaction:** Even though the website receives little traffic, respondents are relatively satisfied with all aspects. Nearly all aspects of the website reached a mean rating of “somewhat satisfied”. The only comments made with regard to improving the website by both English and French districts are:

- the number of *clicks could be reduced*, as navigation is time consuming. Some suggest that examining templates of other websites may be useful in organizing material according to age level and category of resources;
- the homepage does not give any indication of what resources are available and the information presented on the *homepage is not concise enough*;
- the layout could be improved in order to be more attractive or *visually appealing*. As of now, the website does not entice views.



**Website Suggestion:** Several suggestions were also made for improving the quality of the website and the types of information that should be highlighted. A number of themes emerged from both English and French districts corresponding to:

- **Research:** specifically evidence-based research that is exclusive to Ontario so that districts have a better sense of what is working within their region. Moreover, research presented on the website should attempt to be as up to date and current as possible. Finally, respondents would like additional research on mental health, school climate, and equity/inclusion.
- **Logistics:** information on legal implications, policy and practice, and upcoming professional development sessions should be more visible on the website. Furthermore, respondents would like a section on the structure of districts and a Safe Schools contact page for future feedback.
- **Resources:** categorization of the resources on the site needs to be cleaned up and made more concise. Principals would like quick links for resources to direct teachers toward. The French districts would also like to see more resources geared specifically to French youth. Finally, resources should include self-regulation, mindfulness, and mental health.

*Best practices on how districts have combined Safe Schools, Equity & Inclusion, and Mental Health as one umbrella... like Positive School Climates.*

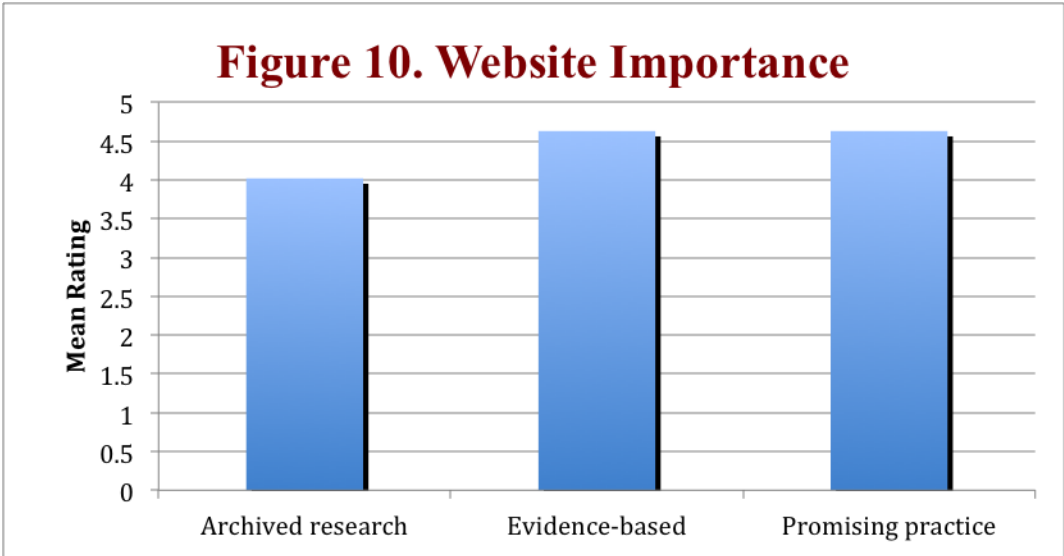
**Additional information:** Respondents suggest that the website can benefit from:

- Purpose of the site/mission statement or *vision*;
- Collaborative and interactive question and answer section to create a *professional network* of those encountering similar problems.

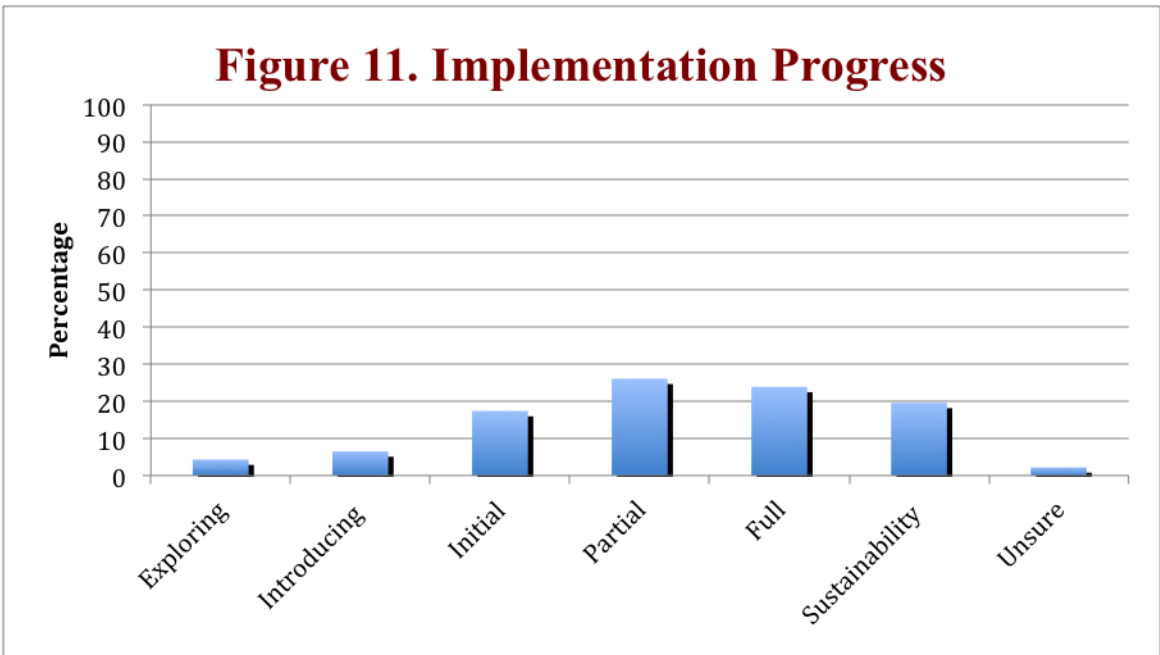
Respondents also rated the importance of several website categories and all received an average rating of somewhat important or greater, indicating that the three categories below should remain focal points of the website.

**Added Links:**

- Canadian safe schools events page
- Cyberbullying articles and resources
- Alerts when new material
- Provincial Mental Health Strategy

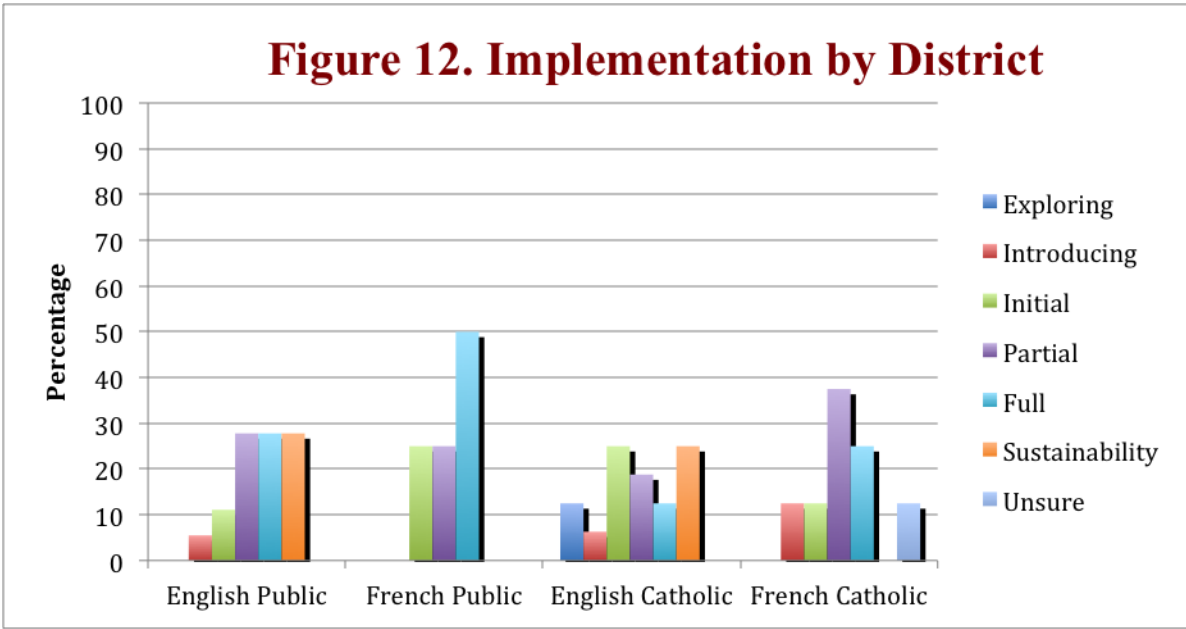


# CURRENT PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS



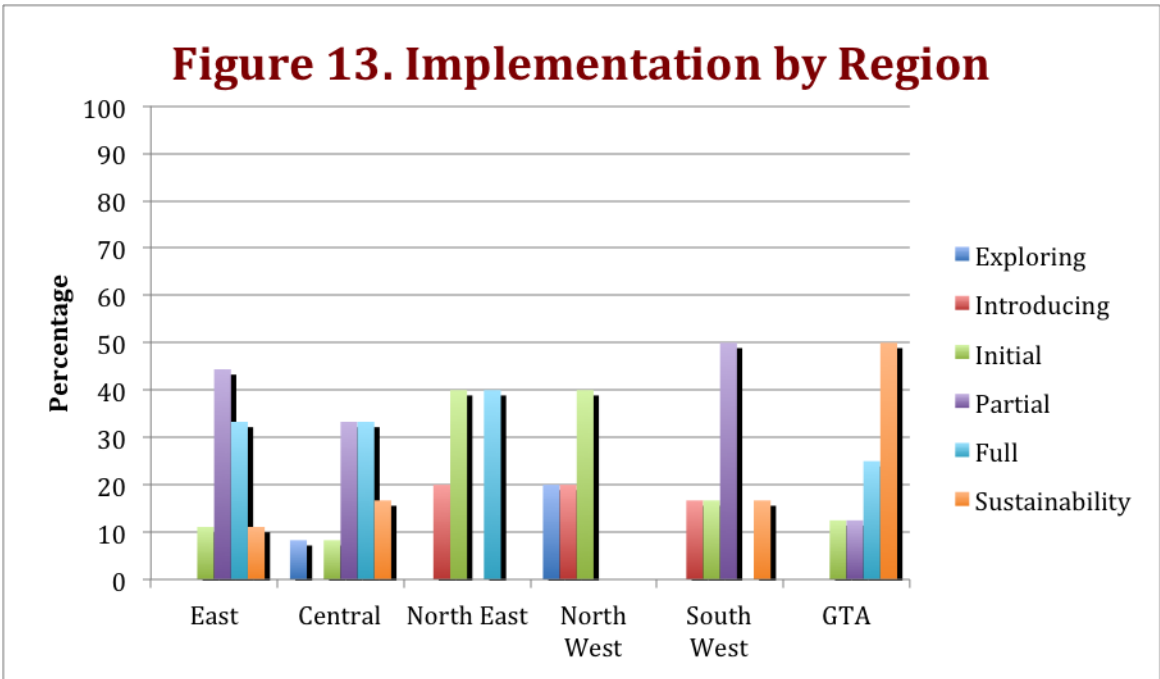
**Level of Progress:** Partial implementation is the level of progress that received the most responses at 12, followed closely by full implementation and initial implementation with 11 and 8 districts respectfully. It is important to note that none of the French language districts have reached the level of sustainability and only 9 English language districts have reached sustainability. These districts are mostly in the GTA and central regions. In the online survey, the response categories were described in the following way:

- Exploring** – reviewing the literature, talking with colleagues, scanning the work of others.
- Introducing** – mobilizing people, getting approvals, vetting drafts.
- Initial Implementation** – piloting in a few places, trying out parts of the activity, circulating first versions.
- Partial Implementation** – revising based on initial feedback, piloting in more places, communication.
- Full Implementation** – scaling up to district level, final version, district communication.
- Sustainability** – embedded in district culture, part of practice, extended to special populations.



*Note: 18 English Public, 4 French Public, 17 English Catholic, 8 French Catholic.*

When further examining the 9 districts that have reached sustainability, the GTA represents the region with the greatest number of school districts self-reporting sustainability. The 4 GTA districts reporting sustainability have 46, 130, 149, and 250 schools respectively.



Note: 9 East, 12 Central, 5 North East, 5 North West, 6 South West, 9 GTA

**Success of Implementation:** It is promising to see that most districts are either in partial or full implementation mode of Safe and Accepting Schools policies. Respondents give several reasons for their success in this initiative. These are organized according to the themes below:

- **Communication:** This includes communication within the school, to the district and beyond to include communication with stakeholders and partners. Communication also includes information sessions about policies and implementation, professional development workshops for staff and team strategic planning meetings. Moreover, meeting with representatives who can speak to their successful strategies provides an additional support for implementation. Finally, cooperation and collaboration with all those involved leads to successful implementation.
- **Partners:** Partnering with external agencies and community partners leads to effective implementation. Respondents indicated that consultation with stakeholders in all steps of the process results in more succinct implementation. There is also the importance of having school level champions.
- **Funding:** In order to achieve the level of impact desired, many respondents highlight the importance of Ministry funding to support their implementation.
- **Alignment:** Success involves alignment with policies and legislation.
- **Support:** Some respondents mention the support and knowledge from senior and key contact people as being critical in their success.
- **Vision:** A final key to successful implementation is having a clear framework of goals and establishing the specific accomplishments that the district wishes to reach.

None of the French language districts have reached sustainability.  
Of the 72 districts, only 9 districts have reached sustainability.



The French language districts, while having many of the same sources for successful implementation also have a unique factor that contributes to their success.

- **Systemic Approach:** Having a global system and systemic approach across the entire district is crucial. Also evenly and systemically distributing resources and information across the district is helpful for implementation. There is also a structure in place for aligning several initiatives and dividing responsibilities equally.

*Team planning with our equity partners to ensure we have a well rounded approach to our whole school approach work.*

**Sustaining Positive School Climate:** Creating or sustaining a positive school climate can be challenging work. Positive school climate can be defined as:

“A positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, included, and accepted, and actively promote behaviours and interactions. Principles of equity and inclusive education are embedded in the learning environment to support a positive school climate and a culture of mutual respect. A positive school climate is a crucial component of the prevention of inappropriate behaviour.” Policy/Program Memorandum No. 145

Respondents from French and English districts spoke about several mechanisms that help create and maintain a positive school climate.

- **Team:** This involves having the best team possible by providing professional development and attending Safe Accepting Schools Team (SAST) workshops to review school climate surveys. Also important is the collaboration of departments and coming together for a yearly team-planning day or more often if possible. Moreover, it is helpful to engage school teams in projects that are close to their hearts. Finally, it is important to have a team vision supported by senior administration.
- **Alignment:** It is important to have a consistent approach across the system and a clear framework for changing practices. Alignment should include a consistent approach across the school and the board. Creating a positive school climate should stem from a need established by the school. Finally, alignment with the mandate of the school that emphasizes mental health/wellness and equity/inclusion is important.
- **Evidence-based research:** It is important to create and implement practices that are sustainable and that support a positive impact. Having research-based practice is essential as well as a whole school approach.
- **Development:** Creating new and innovative material and media to engage students is important. It is also important to have students create well-being goals for themselves each year. Finally, integrating the approach into the culture of the school is vital for creating a positive school climate.

Some key factors to sustaining a positive school climate:

- consistent approach across the system
- implementing of evidence-based research
- alignment of inclusiveness with our Catholic faith
- providing evidence of positive results of implementation

*The primary challenges include funds to release teams, or other methods, to work on school level plans, interpret available data and receive quality, evidence based professional development.*

**Personal or Systematic Barriers to Positive School Climate:** As the respondents state, it is not easy to implement a positive school climate. There are several barriers to this goal and they are outlined in a number of themes.

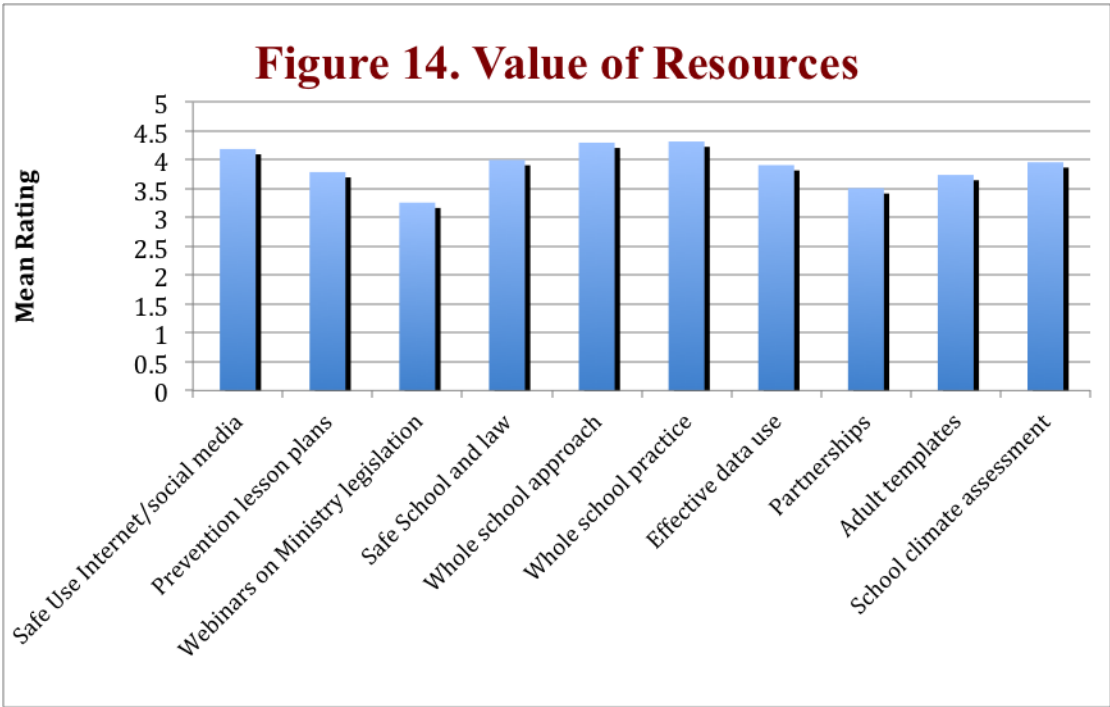
*Some barriers include: staff time availability for professional development, and balancing the many other important initiatives being delivered by multiple departments within the Board...*

- **Teacher professional development:** Many identify the difficulty in releasing a teacher for the day in order to attend a professional development session. Not only does it cost approximately \$250 per teacher according to one respondent, but there are also very few resources in place for teacher professional development.
- **People power:** Another barrier is the lack of adequate personnel to deliver the resources. There is a lack of leadership and few system leaders who are eager to take charge of projects. Finally, it is difficult to scale up the intervention in districts that have numerous schools.
- **Consistent approach:** It is difficult to develop a system that is consistent across all schools. Potential solutions include establishing a department that brings together Safe Schools, mental health, and attendance. Also, developing a system of bullying protocol that can also be school specific can present a barrier.
- **Measurement:** It is difficult to monitor the impact of the approach, measure progress, and long-term effects. There is also a barrier with finding and utilizing evidence-based research especially for mental health resources. Finally, there is a barrier with the interpretation of data.
- **Lack of time:** There needs to be time for sharing of knowledge and collaboration as well as time for in servicing.
- **Collaboration and communication:** It is difficult to communicate the link among school climate, equity/inclusion well-being with student success. Information is not communicated quickly enough between members of the districts and the Safe Schools team. Sometimes, it is difficult to engage all members in creating a positive school climate.
- **Too many ministry initiatives:** Principals have a very heavy workload and the large number of initiatives makes it difficult to effectively implement all of them simultaneously.
- **Difficult to understand:** Some elements of a positive school climate are hard to describe clearly in writing so communication about this concept can be difficult.



# PROMOTION, PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PROGRAMS/PRACTICES

**Value of resources:** When examining the value of resources used for creating a positive school climate, many respondents rated a whole school approach and a whole school practice as the most valuable. This was closely followed by safe use of Internet/social media resources and school climate assessment. Webinars on Ministry legislation received the lowest value at slightly above a neutral rating.



## Whole School Programs or Initiatives:

### Restorative practice (mentioned 14 times) – evidence based

Social science that *integrates a variety* of disciplines including psychology, education, sociology, and social work in order to build healthy communities and positive social relationships. Restorative practices focuses on *repairing the harm* done in relationships rather than punishing offenders.

### Roots of Empathy (mentioned 6 times) – evidence based

A classroom program that has shown significant effects in reducing aggression while raising social and emotional competencies and increasing empathy. The program spans from kindergarten to grade 8. The program focuses on *emotional literacy, building empathy, and a curriculum* divided into nine themes. Roots of empathy values culture and caring, respect, participatory democracy, inclusion, and an anti-bullying message among others.

### WITS (mentioned 4 times) – evidence based

The program brings together schools, families, and communities to deal with bullying. The program stretches from kindergarten to grade 6. The acronym stands for *Walk away, Ignore, Talk it out, and Seek help*. The program includes resource materials, program books, lesson plans, student pledges, and disciplinary code of conduct.

**Community Threat Assessment** (mentioned 4 times) – evidence based

The goal is to remove or *reduce any threats* to the safety of students, parents, and school staff. The program focuses on support from community partners to prevent traumatic events. The key approaches of the program are sharing of relevant information, investigating mind-set, building capacity, and program review.

**Friends for Life** (mentioned 4 times) – evidence based

The program encourages students to make healthy decisions and ask for help when they need it. The program focuses on behaviours and issues that can put the *youth at risk* and it will serve as a way to report fellow students who have been victimized. You can *report victimization* through a hotline, website, text message, or live chat.

**Red Cross resources** (mentioned 3 times) – evidence based

Helping to promote healthy relationships in schools. The website has valuable *resources for teachers and students* alike about the consequences of bullying and intervention techniques.

**Second Steps Program** (mentioned 3 times)

The program strives to *foster social and emotional skills in students*. This is supported by videos, music, and take-home activities. The program is available for students from kindergarten to grade 8.

**Programs differ in French language districts. The whole-school practices used most often are:**

- Program SCP (mentioned 4 times);
- Partnership with the Greater City of Sudbury police services. The goal of the program is to have mediation and intervention available to all elementary schools through the use of police officers as mediators. Referrals from principals and officers are made, then the referral is assigned a mediation officer who has received professional development in mediation. The officer sets up a meeting with both parties and their parents to have a mediation session;
- Mental Health services/partnerships/resources (mentioned 4 times);
- Youth teams, high school students helping elementary students, task forces (mentioned 3 times).

**Additional Values:**

- *Affordability*: One of the key values in implementing policies is having access to appropriate resources. Certain areas are dependent on the resources available to the individual school district.
- *Provincial directions*: There is a lot of information and it is not being filtered down in an effective manner to provide a clear provincial framework.
- *Catholic values* need to be part of the focus.



# DATA COLLECTION/ANALYSIS

An important aspect in evaluating any intervention practice is collecting data and having the capacity to analyze the results. Respondents provided answers on how their district collects data through four primary sources: assessment tools, ministry sample school climate survey, other school climate surveys, and bullying reporting tools. Non-ministry school climate surveys are interpreted as an alternative form of assessment tool and therefore are grouped with the assessment tool category. Responses are presented according to frequency of data collection tool.

## Assessment Tools and Non-Ministry School Climate Surveys:

1. Tell Them from Me survey (mentioned 10 times)
2. Suspension/expulsion data (mentioned 7 times)
3. Positive School Climate Survey (mentioned 6 times)
4. Safe School Survey (mentioned 4 times)
5. Violent Incident Report data (mentioned 3 times)
6. Observational/anecdotal data (mentioned 2 times)
7. Attendance (mentioned 2 times)
8. In-service feedback (mentioned 2 times)
9. Student Voice (mentioned 2 times)

*Beginning this year, all schools will be conducting a self-assessment of School Effectiveness Framework 2.5 and 3.1 which will then inform the development of a school improvement plan focus.*

Several surveys were only mentioned once, however they provide another piece of information. These include, EGALE and CAMH.

## Responses varied for French language districts in both assessment tools and school climate surveys:

1. Student behaviour (mentioned 3 times)
2. SCP (mentioned 2 times)

Certain tools were mentioned only once, however as there are fewer French language districts these tools were included: School Climate Survey, Trillium data, suspension data, RDP and survey monkey results.

## The French language districts mentioned three alternative surveys and each one was only mentioned once:

1. Survey on well being/security
2. Alternative education survey
3. Pilot study by Dr. Rawana Lakehead University

Popular among respondents is the Tell Them From Me survey that was mentioned 10 times in the English language districts. The tool was developed to help schools use their data to increase student engagement. The research-based online survey measures academic achievement and other outcomes that were designed and tested to give reliable data.

*Based on feedback received after using the Ministry survey and in consultation with outside support a school climate survey was designed.*

## Ministry Sample School Climate Survey:

1. Own version (mentioned 3 times for English districts and 3 times for French districts). Many districts highlight using the Ministry school climate survey as a foundation for creating their own survey which addresses the specific needs of the district, however these are much shorter
2. School Climate Survey (mentioned 3 times for English districts and once for French districts)
3. Ministry web-based survey (mentioned 2 times)

**Non-Ministry School Climate Survey:** Most districts report using a survey based on the Ministry survey and adapted to highlight the specific needs of the district. The surveys are usually adapted to align with the community values of those that use them or with Catholic values. Also the surveys are shortened as parents and students found the Ministry version too time-consuming.



### **Bullying Reporting Tools:**

1. Link on the website/online reporting tool (mentioned 8 times)
2. Reporting forms in schools (mentioned 3 times for English districts and once for French districts)
3. Reporting to a trusted adult (mentioned 2 times for English districts and once for French districts)

*The anonymous Bullying Reporting Tool on our board's website is being used and allows principals to be responsive based on the reports.*

Other potential tools include: Trillium, Crime Stoppers, Tip-off app, incident reports, and student tracker.

The French language districts also mention using a profile on student behaviour, RDP and SCP data in addition to the above.

Other possible tools include the use of social worker reports and referrals, cyberbullying initiatives, and Our Voice, a student led conference to seek input on bullying.

### **Data Use:**

- *Development:* The data is used by the school and the district to plan future bullying intervention and prevention methods. The data is also used to guide future development opportunities.
- *Share:* The data is shared with schools to inform their SIP planning. It is also shared with staff, parents, and communities as well as being reported back to the students. The information is shared with stakeholders and trustees in a public session.
- *Planning:* The data is used for both school planning and district planning. It influences plans for improving school safety and inclusivity. Finally, it helps to create yearly goals.
- *Support:* The data supports schools in seeing the connection between student well-being goals and student achievement goals.
- *Identify:* The data helps to identify the areas of strength and needs in order to create strategies accordingly. The information helps to understand how best to address the needs of each school and create a school profile. Finally, data is used to measure the impact of the approach already in place.
- *Allocation:* Informs the allocation of resources. It can also be used to plan resources for professional development days.

*The data collected is used to inform our next steps. This happens at the board and school levels. It also becomes part of the data we use for the Board Strategic Plan, Board Improvement Plan and the school improvement plans.*

### **Obstacles in Data Collection:**

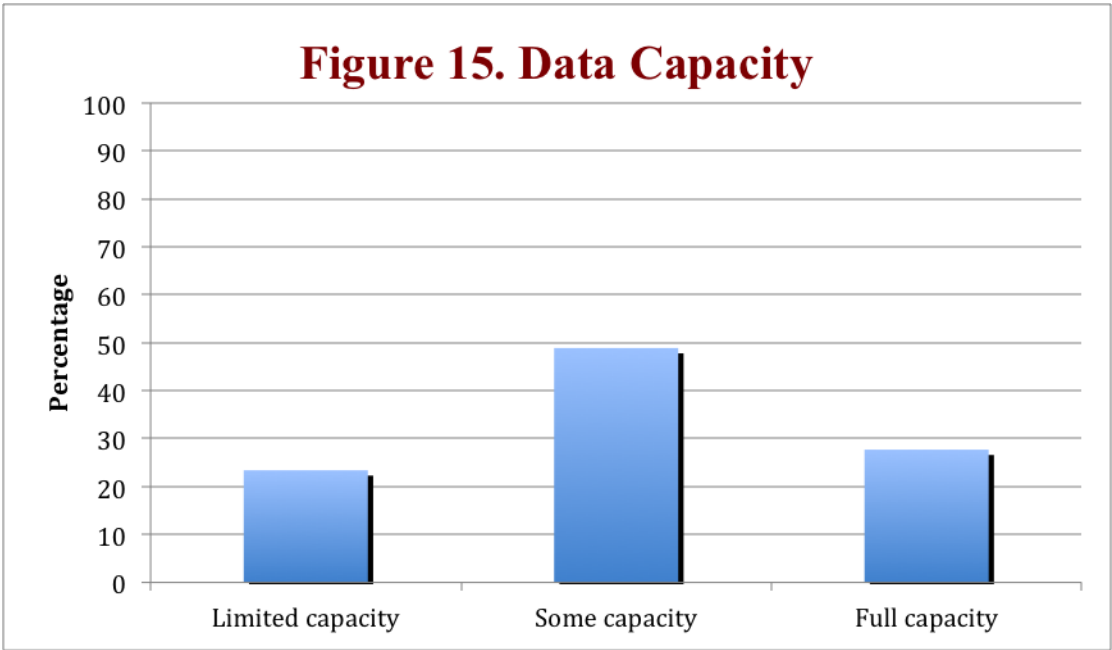
- *Quantity:* It is a challenge to collect data from larger secondary schools, as there are a large number of surveys that have to be mass administered all at once.
- *Time and personnel:* There is a large amount of data to examine in such a short timeframe and there is a lack of staff to help with this undertaking.
- *Tools:* It is a challenge to find the appropriate measure for surveying the staff. There is also a lack of technology for adequate surveying.
- *Low participation:* Parental participation is low as well as voluntary teacher participation. Staff responses are also low. Finally, there is no control over who answers the surveys or how many responses are received, potentially leading to an unfair representation of the school.
- *Survey saturation:* Schools are inundated with a large number of surveys from various initiatives. This leads to survey fatigue.
- *Cost:* There are numerous expenses required to collect data and a lack of funding.

*As we continue to work with the school climate survey we are getting a larger sample size from our parents and community members yet we still have work to do in this area.*

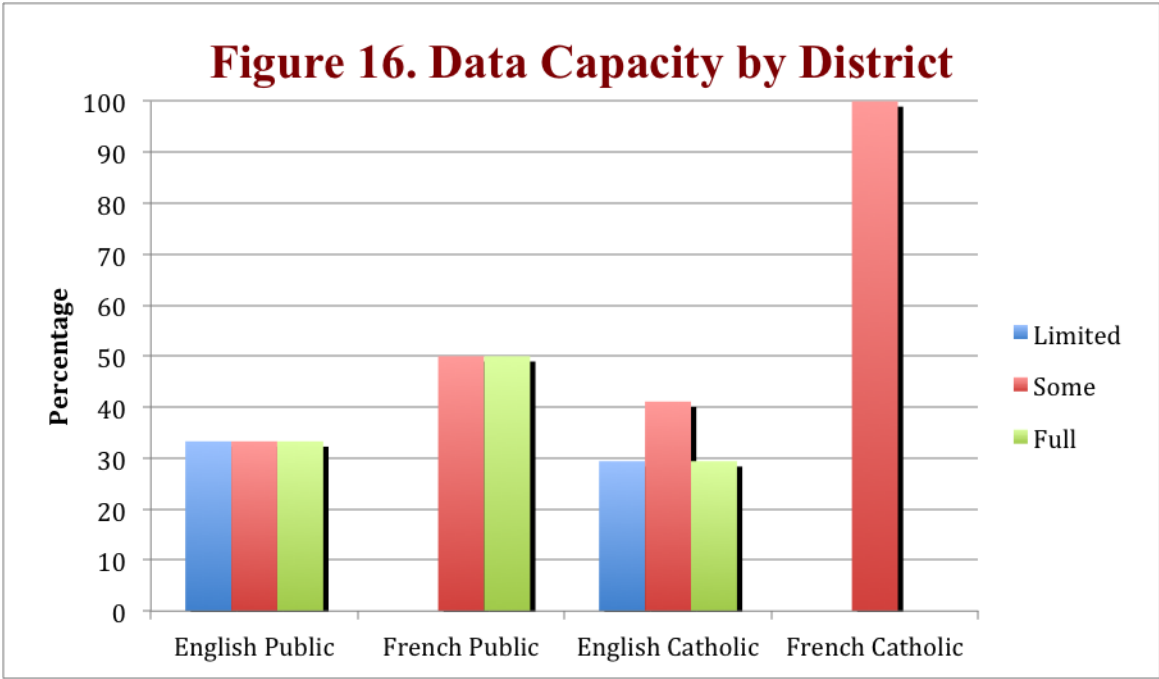
**French language districts also report unique obstacles to collecting data. Their major themes are:**

- Validity: It is difficult to find accurate questions that tap into the information sought by the school.
- Methods to obtain summary data.
- Younger students are difficult to survey accurately.

**Data Capacity:** The capacity of a district to collect and analyze data significantly affects future planning and decision making for improving practices. The majority of respondents rated their capacity at the *intermediate level*, with 24 districts in this category. Notably, there are roughly an equal percentage of districts with either no capacity or full capacity for data collection with 12 and 13 districts respectfully.

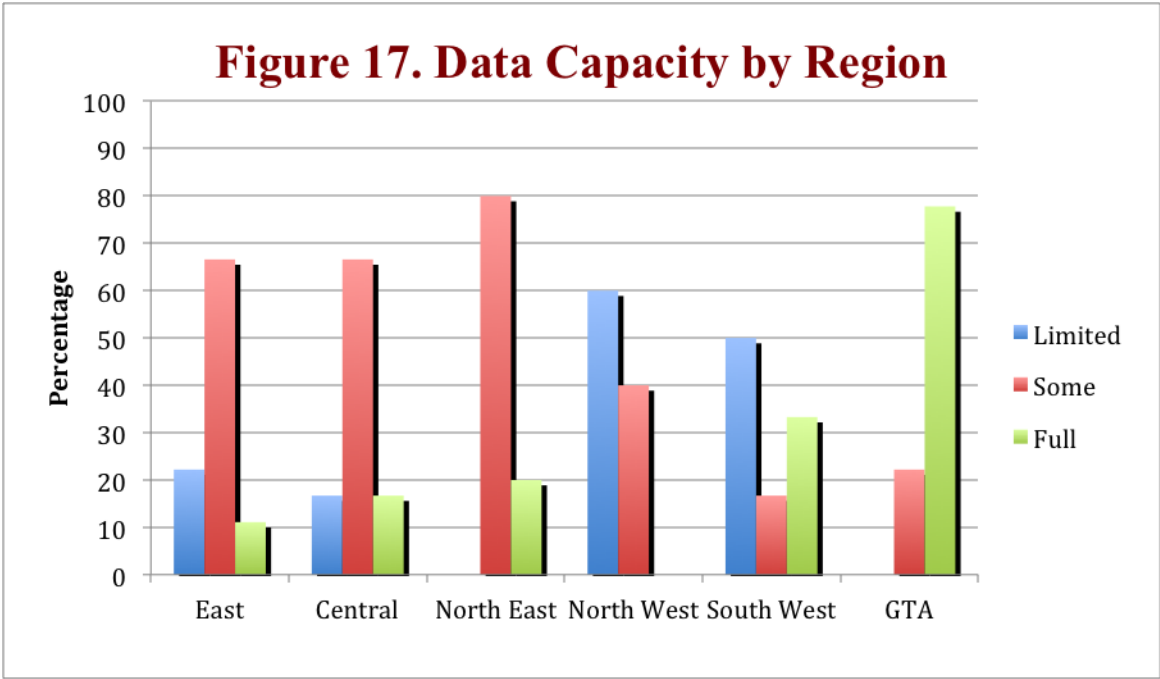


Only those in the English system report limited capacity in their ability to collect and analyze data. All French language districts have moved past limited capacity.



*Note: 18 English Public, 4 French Public, 17 English Catholic, 8 French Catholic.*

When further breaking down these results by region, the GTA reports the highest amount at full capacity. All other regions appear to have some capacity, however the Western regions are struggling the most with data capacity with at least 50% reporting limited capacity.



Note: 9 East, 12 Central, 5 North East, 5 North West, 6 South West, 9 GTA

**Support for data collection:**

- *Personnel:* Those with a background in data analysis and interpretation can interpret data in a meaningful way. Respondents suggest that funding to access a research analyst would be a great support for professional development to become more knowledgeable and experienced with data analysis techniques.
- *Programs:* Having programs in place for collecting data and sorting/ processing it in an efficient manner. It would also be helpful to have software to generate reports in a user-friendly manner.
- *Lack of time:* Superintendents have limited time and many responsibilities; therefore the process needs to be less time-consuming.
- *Funding:* The creation of a Ministry funded version of the *Tell Them From Me* survey or funding for smaller districts to purchase products such as that.
- *Survey Exemplar:* A better example of the Ministry School Climate Survey would assist districts.

*Research support. We do not have a research team at the system level to support collection, analysis and interpretation of data.*

**French language districts also express unique supports, different from the English language districts that would be beneficial to them. These are:**

- *Connections:* Making ties with GIARE or other initiatives to share data. Merging data from various sectors in order to see the larger picture of what the results imply.
- *Provincial Scale:* The creation of provincial criteria to measure the quality of the data. There needs to be some mechanism in place to compare the data.
- *Shorter version:* A shorter version of the School Climate Survey that is both more compact and complete.





# PARTNERSHIPS

Respondents rated partnerships as being relatively successful, with all but one partnership rated as at least somewhat successful on average. Equity/inclusion agencies within the community were the only category rated on average as neither successful nor unsuccessful.



## Largest Partnership Contribution:

- Partnerships add *support and alignment* of resources as well as additional clinical support for students if needed. The partnerships offer support to schools for emergency response and professional learning for students and staff.
- Successful partnerships foster a *deep relationship* between the school and the partner, so that work is seamless and helps ensure a safe and accepting school. It is the interdependence that is significant in improving the lives of children, families, and clients.
- Working *collaboratively* to share plans, ideas, and resources.

*Partnerships with any group that adds value to our work is critical. For example, having an Equity lead in a district is critical to the work in that portfolio. Ideally, there would be a well-being lead provided to every district by the Ministry to lead the Safe and Accepting Schools' piece of the well-being agenda.*

## The French language districts provide some novel insight into their successful partnerships. These include:

- The mental health council that helps to *build well-being*;
- Community partnerships help *instil and maintain* a positive school climate;
- Partnering specifically with *other French programs* helps with the progress of implementing the SCP.

## Successful Partnership Outcome Factors:

- Goal setting:** Having clear outcomes, common goals, clarity of focus and purpose is essential in a successful partnership. Meeting and working together to support and complement each other is also important. This also includes collaboration and building relationships where open and honest communication is possible. Those in the French language districts mention the importance of being able to communicate in French.
- Availability and flexibility:** of partners.
- Funding:** Ensuring that the resources are affordable and accessible to all those who need them.
- Frontline contact:** The involvement of stakeholders at the ground level is also an element of success.

# OBSTACLES/CHALLENGES AND SUPPORTS

**Obstacles:** The English language districts and the French language districts rated their challenges in different ways. While the French language respondents ranked their top 5 challenges, the English language respondents rated the level at which each option was a challenge.

**Table 2. English Language Districts Challenge Rating**

*Note: 1 = greatest challenge; 5 = least challenging*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
How much of a challenge is competing initiatives?	34	1	5	2.06
How much of a challenge is which practice to choose?	33	1	5	2.88
How much of a challenge is setting priorities?	33	1	5	3.03
How much of a challenge is communication with the district?	33	1	5	3.18
How much of a challenge is communication with the ministry?	33	1	5	3.00
How much of a challenge is access to equitable resources?	33	1	5	2.85
How much of a challenge is lack of time?	33	1	5	2.18
How much of a challenge is access to expertise of data analysis?	33	1	5	3.09
How much of a challenge is expertise in policy?	33	1	5	3.42
How much of a challenge is educator climate?	33	1	5	3.09
How much of a challenge is sustainability?	33	1	5	3.03
How much of a challenge is capacity building?	33	1	5	2.85
How much of a challenge is number of professional development sessions?	33	1	5	3.00
How much of a challenge is past practice?	33	1	5	3.27
How much of a challenge is degree of change?	33	1	5	3.58
How much of a challenge is partnerships?	33	1	5	3.73

**Challenges of English Language Districts:** All options were rated as being somewhat of a challenge. The aspect that had the lowest average rating and therefore the most challenging was competing initiatives. In comparison, the aspect with the highest average rating and therefore the least challenging was establishing partnerships.

**Challenges of French Language Districts:** The rank order of the challenges in French language districts are as follows:

1. Competing initiatives
2. Lack of time
3. Determining which practice and expert data
4. Number of professional development sessions
5. Degree of change



### Overcoming Challenges:

- **Support:** Respondents suggest providing support for teachers, using a fair process so teachers understand why the changes are taking place and to make change as smooth and easy as possible. Further suggestions involve, scheduling time so that educators are working in their specific school communities and having team meetings and a team approach.
- **Links:** Linking with other initiatives and aligning with Safe School initiatives as well as other priorities at the system level to support schools are seen as ways to overcome challenges. Furthermore, integration of all services and school climate under one umbrella is helpful.
- Having **positive personal relationships** with community partners is also crucial.
- Utilizing **experts in data analysis** and forming a connection to those with expertise in other departments. Moreover, building data collection and analysis capacity needs to be overcome.
- Distributing **resources** to those who require them the most. Trying to provide manageable and consistent steps for schools, which involve a redistribution of duties and responsibilities, would assist in the implementation of the positive school climate initiative.

### Helpful Supports:

1. Funding for whole school approach
2. Mental health support
3. Support for special needs
4. Support for academic needs
5. Support for students with social and emotional needs

### Focus to Build Capacity:

1. Alignment with related initiatives (53.5% rated it as top focus)
2. Equity of resources and funds (20.9% rated it as second focus)
3. Data analysis *tied* with school climate support (20.9% rated these as third focus)

# ALIGNMENT



Working toward alignment entails **including the people** involved in each initiative in regular meetings and sharing the information among stakeholders. It also includes working as a team with the stakeholders in these areas.

**Strong communication** within the school and across the district. All of these groups come together to plan in-service for our school teams. There is a great deal of collaboration involved. Coordinators work together and present together and use the same frameworks. Alignment can be challenging for school teams that have many superintendents responsible for many portfolios.

The key is **articulating the congruence** of all of the above to staff and providing them with time, pressure and support to embrace change rooted in the common mission and vision.

*We do attempt to align these priorities in our board improvement plan - all in relation to student achievement and the ministry priorities - achievement, well-being, equity and public confidence.*

## PART II - SUPPLEMENTARY FIELD NOTE SUMMARY

### BACKGROUND

Between March and November 2014, the IEL's Leading Safe and Accepting Schools (LSAS) Project Lead and Project Coordinator held meetings with several stakeholders and policy actors who had connections with the Leading Safe and Accepting Schools Project. In addition, they attended conferences and workshops in order to network with individuals and groups involved in work and initiatives related to safe and accepting schools. The intent of these linkages was to get a sense of the key issues related to safe and accepting schools from the perspectives of a diverse range of individuals and groups in order to supplement the information that would be gained through the analysis of the LSAS survey data in Part I of this report.

The stakeholder groups included personnel from several Ministry of Education branches, representatives of the Accepting Schools Expert Panel, university faculty members, school and district administrators including representatives of the Minister's Principal Reference Group and candidates in the Principals' Qualification Programs, teachers and teacher organizations from the four sectors of the province. As well, input was sought from stakeholder groups in the community at large. This group included representatives from mental health organizations such as the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, psychologists, social workers, police and security organizations, youth justice workers, youth support organizations, and lawyers. Finally, the youth voice was represented, as over fifty members of the Minister's Student Advisory Council provided their responses regarding the strengths and needs related to Safe Schools' issues in Ontario schools.

Input gathered from these various policy actors on topics related to safe and accepting schools' issues could be grouped according to six themes that were apparent in the ideas that were shared. The themes could be summarized as follows:

1. Relationships/Partnerships
2. Support/Professional Development/Data Capacity
3. Student Characteristics
4. Vision/Alignment
5. School Climate
6. Communication

### RELATIONSHIPS/PARTNERSHIPS

The most common theme underlying the feedback received over the past several months was the theme of relationships. Woven throughout all of the input from the various stakeholders was the underlying emphasis on the need for people and groups to work together in order to address the issues that have arisen in relation to the topic of Safe and Accepting Schools. Some of the connections were inter-organizational in nature, such as would be created when partnerships were formed between school districts and community agencies or research groups. Others could more accurately be described as interpersonal, such as those related to connections between teachers and students or involved in the creation of a positive, interactive school climate.

Students who participated in the Minister's Student Advisory Council emphasized the important role that teachers, administrators, and school support staff played in ensuring that a safe, inclusive and caring environment existed in the school community. It was apparent, from the descriptions they provided of their diverse school experiences, that the adults in their schools could make or break their time at school. They also emphasized the important contribution that clubs made in creating a sense of community.

Stakeholder groups from a variety of backgrounds shared similar views about the value of relationships. Some spoke of the importance of partnerships with parents, health care and support workers, police, community volunteers, universities and colleges. Others mentioned that they tried to ensure that broad input was sought on initiatives from stakeholders within and outside of education.

Connecting with another of the key themes, that of support for the initiative, the topic of resources that became available because of the partnerships was discussed as a positive outcome of these relationships. As an example, some districts worked in conjunction with organizations such as the Boys and Girls Clubs to access buildings and materials for their programs. Networking opportunities that came about as a result of the inter-organizational partnerships helped to advance knowledge and support for district initiatives and to increase awareness of district strengths and needs among the broader community.



## **SUPPORT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND DATA CAPACITY**

Support and professional development, when combined, constituted the second most frequently cited theme among the individuals and groups that were consulted. The importance and content of pre-service professional development for new educators was mentioned several times. The recommended focal points for professional development of new and experienced teachers included mental health, media literacy, behaviour as curriculum, and professional development in safety and emergency response.

Students who were members of the Minister's Student Advisory Council indicated that they felt that the availability and use of Safe and Accepting Schools' resources constituted strength of this aspect of their educational experience. Having said that, they indicated that teachers often did not know how best to support students who were having difficulty in this area and students were often unaware as to where they should go to get the support that they needed. Students in the Council were divided in their views as to how well educators used the supports available to them in the areas of mental health, cultural diversity and LGBTQ issues. The general consensus among the group seemed to be that the ability to deal with the unique needs of students differed from region to region, with effective response being more prevalent in districts where the issues were brought forward on a more regular basis and plans and protocols were created to assist in addressing student needs.

Closely linked to the feedback on support and professional development was the theme of research and its importance to Safe and Accepting Schools. Perhaps due, in some part, to the backgrounds of the individuals who were consulted in the early stages of the project, research was the third most frequently cited aspect of Safe Schools Policy implementation during visits. The need to use assessment tools to determine next steps in planning was emphasized by several stakeholders. The importance of having up-to-date and relevant research, to which educators could refer, was also emphasized. One respondent spoke of the need to strike a balance between the actual experience and rigorous research. Again, it was suggested that different needs existed in different regions. For example, some rural districts did not seem to have the capacity to carry out a thorough analysis of data that they collected and were seeking support with this part of their Safe Schools planning. Some researchers, focusing on the same point from a different angle, expressed an interest in being involved in this

type of work, but found that districts would not always offer them this opportunity. The challenge appeared to be how to go about linking the districts with researchers, thus bringing the discussion back to partnerships.

## **STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS**

Student characteristics, both the skills they possess and the needs that they often have, comprised the next most frequently referenced theme among those who were consulted. Characteristics possessed by those who typically succeed in an educational setting, or sought by those hoping to succeed, were summarized. The list put forward included good physical health, resiliency, self-worth, self-awareness, and strength of character. Respondents spoke of programs, such as youth mentoring, which focused attention on creating an emotional bond of trust and respect, thus leading to opportunities to provide guidance. They also spoke of the need to reinforce positive behaviours. Again, these ideas linked back to healthy relationships.

Many of the needs that were cited in the area of student characteristics directly correlated with unique aspects of some students' characters. In the views of many of the individuals who were consulted, schools appear to effectively respond to the needs of the majority of students, but often fail the minority. At times, schools fail to appropriately serve students with unique needs. Inequity, or perceived inequity, would then lead to problems for some youth in school. Examples of the uneven playing field that resulted from inequities related to socio-economic status, diverse cultural backgrounds, mental health, special education issues and LGBTQ gender issues were mentioned when failures to meet Safe and Accepting Schools' needs for some students were discussed.

## **VISION AND ALIGNMENT**

As had been suggested by the project advisory group at the outset, alignment of initiatives with a view to establishing a clear, consistent and realistic vision was emphasized by many stakeholders. The need to accurately define the over-riding term "well-being" was raised. The challenge that districts and schools face in aligning various related initiatives to ensure a cohesive and manageable response was stressed. There is awareness among stakeholders that the mandate of Safe and Accepting Schools is multi-faceted, dynamic and complex. In the next stage, leaders and planners must determine how best to approach it, in a way that will be sustainable.

## CLIMATE

Climate and communication were of equal importance to the people who were providing input. As with so many of the other themes, these two underlined the importance of relationships. Many of the stakeholders spoke of the importance of using a Whole School Approach, with the entire community working collaboratively, to address Safe and Accepting Schools' issues. They emphasized the important role of the teacher in the process and the inter-connection between well-being, safety and success.

In looking at school climate, the members of the Minister's Student Advisory Council spoke of the importance of positive spirit, safe spaces and celebration. They also cautioned against leniency in cases where rules were broken, suggesting very strongly that a positive school climate was not one in which all were able to do as they pleased.

## COMMUNICATION

Communication speaks to the importance of interaction between all stakeholders. Respondents discussing this area talked about the importance of feedback loops, to allow decision-makers to hear from those on the front lines in the schools, including students. They stressed the importance of working collaboratively and sharing information. Even, or perhaps especially, in working with a student who has violated a Safe Schools' rule, they saw the importance of communication, stressing education over punishment. They talked about how important it was to have a good mediator involved in any discussion around Safe Schools' issues. Students emphasized the importance of awareness events and they underlined the importance of student feedback when decisions are being made on policies and practices to be changed.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the information collected in the visits that were carried out over a nine month period, it is evident that there are several universal themes that must be considered in the next phase of the Leading Safe and Accepting Schools Project.

According to the field notes gathered, the key themes are:

- relationships;
- support;
- student needs;
- an aligned vision;
- positive school climate; and
- effective communication.

When combined with the feedback received in the province-wide survey, it is hoped that these suggested areas of focus will provide some direction for the project team as they seek to address the challenges districts and schools face in implementing Safe and Accepting Schools' policies.

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**March 2015**