MEASURING PROGRESS ON ENGAGEMENT
Report No. 16-114

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (PUBLIC)   **15 November 2016**

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Engagement Objective - By 2019, the District will increase opportunities for engagement with and among our students, staff, families and broader community.

The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board identified engagement as one of five key priority areas for the 2015-2019 strategic plan. In the plan, engagement for the District is described as "a culture which actively encourages involvement in public education to support positive outcomes". The objective states: "By 2019, the District will increase opportunities for engagement with and among our students, staff, families and broader community". The strategies to support this objective are:
- "Develop tools to support parent involvement in learning and well-being"; and
- "Develop strategies to enhance communication and dialogue with and among staff, students, families and community partners to improve the delivery of public education".

To feel engaged, the community has to have confidence in the organization, have relationships of trust, have interesting opportunities for engagement/participation in decision-making, and feel recognition for their perspective and opinion. These same factors are true for effective staff engagement - there must be confidence in decision making, positive relationships with supervisors and co-workers, interesting and challenging work, a sense of autonomy in their work supported by opportunities for personal and professional growth, and recognition for work well done. These factors are considered to be highly influential for engagement, and help to define the kind of organizational culture that we must work to create for our families and staff.

In this report, we look at measurement of our work in engagement. The engagement triangle, depicted on the following page, is helpful because it groups these factors into three areas which are measurable. Specifically, our work aims to help inform decisions, build capacity, and strengthen relationships. This report reflects on some of the key work undertaken which can be measured against these goals.
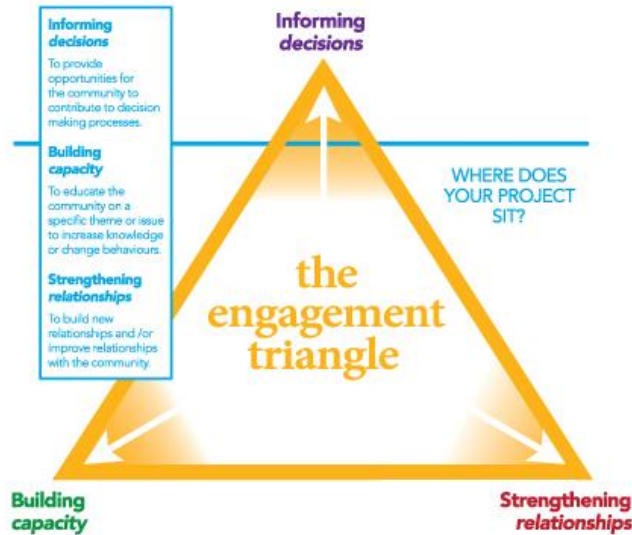
Figure 1. The Engagement Triangle (Capire Consulting Group, 2015)

Measures

Recent work serves as qualitative evidence for the progress being made increasing opportunities for engagement. This includes:

- New school websites (to strengthen relationships);
- A parent conference (to build capacity); and
- Stakeholder voice in consultation processes (to inform decisions); as well as
- Engagement initiatives funded through Ministry of Education's Parents Reaching Out (PRO) Grant (serving all three goals).

Furthermore, the following quantitative measures provide evidence of progress on the engagement objective:

- Metrics from Constant Contact and SynreVoice;
- Response-rate to the Our School Parent Survey;
- Our School Parent Survey responses; and
- EQAO Questionnaire responses.

New school websites

School websites are a foundational tool for all home-school communications. New websites have been created and rolled out to all schools to improve the way in which schools engage parents through their website. The new websites meet AODA Legislation and have increased usability and functionality. The translation feature of these websites allows for increased reach to stakeholders who want to access materials in a language other than English. Also, under the new design, central staff is able to better support all schools with their websites, which improves consistent communication and equity across schools. Furthermore, the new websites are a foundation for future direction as we develop a parent portal to further increase communication with parents and improve parent access to student information.

Parent Conference
The first OCDSB Parent Conference (initiated by the Parent Involvement Committee, with the support of the OCDSB, the Special Education Advisory Committee, and the Ministry of Education's Parents Reaching Out Grant) was held in January 2016 and was extremely successful. The conference was developed to help parents learn about bridging the gap between home and school, and included lunch and child care. The provision of free child care was an important aspect of the conference to ensure equity of access for parents. The initial registration for the conference attracted 600 individuals; registration was later confirmed for 366; with the final headcount on the day of estimated at about 300 people. Although 300 attendees are indicative of great success for a first-time event, the discrepancy between those who initially registered and those who attended requires consideration. Worth noting is that the vast majority of those who initially registered did so in mid-December, and may have had limiting factors come to their attention over the holidays. Furthermore, weather conditions on the day of the conference were not ideal which may have also impacted attendance. As such, the time of year for the conference has been re-considered and the 2016-2017 Parent Conference will be held November 19, 2016.

Feedback from the 2016 Parent Conference was overwhelmingly positive, with the majority reporting that:
- the conference was 'extremely organized' (69%, with 100% reporting that it was 'organized');
- the keynote speaker was 'extremely engaging' (72%, with 98% reporting that she was engaging while the other 2% stated they did not attend the keynote address);
- the information provided by the keynote speaker was 'extremely useful' (66%, with 97% reporting that it was 'useful', and again 2% stated they did not attend the keynote address);
- the workshops were 'engaging' (89%);
- the workshops were 'useful' (78%);
- they felt 'comfortable' asking questions (90%);
- that the workshops provided 'valuable' information to help with their child's learning (85%); and
- they were, overall, 'extremely satisfied' with the conference (55%, with 97% being 'satisfied').

As the first of its kind, the conference was clearly a great success. It gave parents the opportunity to interact with trustees as well as board staff, including the Director and Superintendents. Staff hosted a debriefing session following the conference so that delivery again in the future can be continuously improved.

Stakeholder voice in consultation processes
One way in which parents, students and staff are engaged in district initiatives and decision-making is through participation in consultations. Stakeholder feedback is a critical component of any important decision; gathering this feedback allows decision-makers to gather insight from stakeholders and make decisions which are not only

grounded in their expertise and scientific evidence, but are also informed by the various perspectives. The OCDSB supports and encourages participation in decision-making processes, as demonstrated by stakeholder representation on standing committees; parent participation in principal selection processes; our consultation policy; our Lead the Way initiatives; our student survey and staff census; engagement in the strategic planning process; etc.

In February 2016, district-wide decisions were made to revise the delivery of kindergarten and primary French. Prior to making this decision, extensive consultation was held with the parent and staff community, including online surveys. The very high participation in the online surveys demonstrates impressive engagement from both parents and staff: the first survey yielded 2958 parent/public responses and 883 staff responses; and the second survey yielded 3769 parent/public responses and 1087 staff responses. The ability to consider such a large sample of parent and staff voices in the decision-making process highlights the benefit of engaging stakeholders, and therefore high levels of participation will be a continued goal for the OCDSB.

Experience with consultations on specific initiatives has highlighted the need to consider, in more detail, the range of consultation methods being employed across the district. Furthermore, recent consultations have prompted a discussion about the best consultation method(s) for a given topic, which vary based on audience, timeline, and issues at hand. Different consultation methods serve different needs and a shotgun approach to consultation will only serve to frustrate stakeholders and quickly result in consultation fatigue.

In preparation for the Multi-Year Plan for Student Learning and Accommodation Planning, staff identified the need for additional consultation methods which facilitate consultation amongst stakeholders, and between stakeholders and the district. This type of methodology is more in line with the Board's strategic priorities. The plan refers to the development of strategies to "enhance communication and dialogue with and among staff, students, families, and community partners to improve the delivery model of public education". The Thoughtexchange™ interactive insight platform was chosen for this consultation because it is designed to create dialogue *among* stakeholders. This provides the opportunity for stakeholders to not only share their thoughts, but also consider and learn from the thoughts of others. The district now has a license agreement with Thoughtexchange™ which will allow for use of this engagement tool over the next few years.

Thougthexchange™ has proved to be a valuable tool thus far in 2015-2016, Year One of the Multi-Year Plan Accommodation Reviews. Using this tool, the OCDSB is currently consulting with parents, students, staff, and the broader community, who have invested interest in the areas affected by the reviews. Participation rates in the first phase of the consultation were very high, as presented in Table 1, and phase two is now underway.

Table 1. Number of participants in the first phase of the online consultation for the Eastern Secondary and Western Area Accommodation Reviews.

Parents	Students	Staff	Other/Unknown	**Total**
1,360	241	250	46	**1,897**

For both large-scale consultations mentioned above (French instruction and the Multi-Year Plan), specific attention was given to staff voice. Staff engagement in these processes is an important component given the unique perspective they are able to offer. In both consultations, staff members were provided with a staff-specific venue for sharing their feedback (note: they were also welcome to participate in the parent/public consultations and be part of those conversations as well). By creating a designated space for staff to share their thoughts, staff engaged in the consultation processes through their unique lens.

Engagement initiatives funded through the Ministry of Education's PRO Grant
According to the Ministry of Education, "Ontario's PRO Grants are designed to support parents in identifying barriers to engagement in their own community and to find local solutions to involve more parents in support of student achievement and well-being"[1]. There are two types of grants: one for schools and another for regional/provincial projects. OCDSB school councils have been repeatedly successful securing these grants to fund initiatives such as: parent math night, mental health workshops, sessions on nutrition and healthy lifestyles, family fitness workshops, social networking safety, LGBTQ parent education, science for families, and many others.   The graphs below demonstrate a spike in 2012-2013, followed by a drop and then a gradual increase in the number of school councils receiving grants and the total funds received. Furthermore, for each of the past five years, the OCDSB has received a regional grant ranging from $10,500 to $22,500.
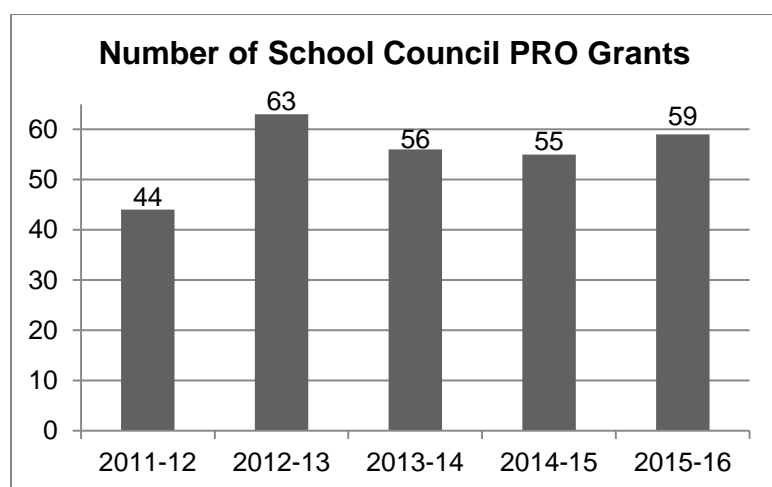

Figure 2. Number of School Councils to secure PRO Grants over the years.

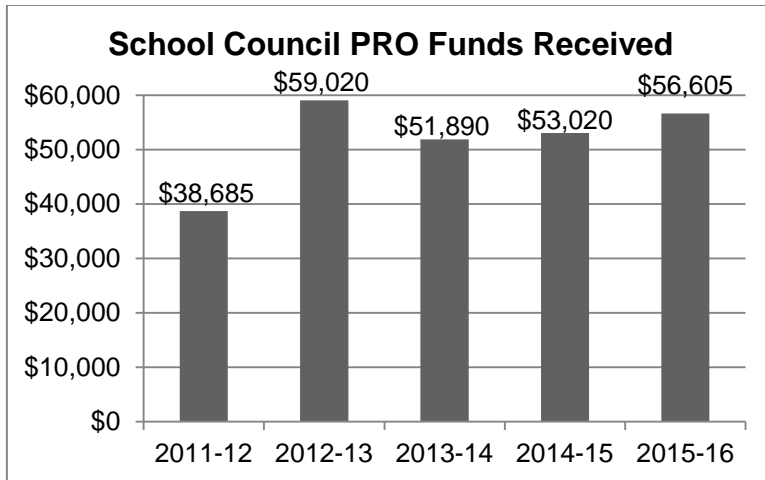[1] http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/reaching.html

Figure 3. Total funds School Councils received in PRO grants over the years.

Metrics from Constant Contact and SynreVoice

OCDSB communicates information to stakeholders in a variety of ways. Most frequently information is communicated at the school level through the principal; however recent tools have been put in place to allow for district-wide communication as well. Constant Contact and SynreVoice/School Connects (soon to be School Messenger) are two tools that the OCDSB uses to send emails to large groups.

In 2015-2016, regular district-wide communication began through Keeping You Connected, a newsletter developed within the SynreVoice platform to share information with all parents of OCDSB elementary and secondary students. This list was used to communicate with parents on over the course of the school year, and contained information on multiple events/updates. This tool was particularly useful for announcing the Parent Conference held in January 2016 (as discussed below). Statistics from SynreVoice tell us that the announcement was successfully sent to over 40,000 valid parent email addresses.

Constant Contact also provides metrics on emails sent to parents. This platform is used to manage multiple email lists, such as the School Council Newsletter, Advisory Committees, Board Meetings, etc. Among these lists, the School Council Newsletter has the highest subscription rate with over 1200 recipients. The newsletter is sent on a weekly basis and contains information about upcoming events, awards, tips for parents, and more. Statistics for 2015-2016 show that approximately 40% of recipients read the email. Of interest, nearly half of those who do tend to do so on a mobile device. This is useful information when thinking about how to best communicate with the parent community.

Our School Parent Survey

One goal for the 2015-2016 school year was to increase parent participation in the Our School survey since the last time it was administered (2013-2014). This goal was achieved with an increase of 73% (i.e., 5112 responses in 2013-2014 and 8843 in 2015-2016). This increase is evidence of increased engagement as it represents an

increasing number of parents willing to take the time to engage with the child's school/the District to provide feedback based on their child's school experience.

Many of the questions from the Our School survey yield further evidence for measuring progress on the engagement objective. Questions were presented on a five-point scale and ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Responses were converted to a 10-point scale, with 0 indicating strong disagreement, 10 indicating strong agreement, and 5 being neutral. The responses to these questions, for the two years of administration of the parent survey, are outlined below.

Overall, parents tend to report feeling welcome at their child's school with an average score of 7.2 out of 10. The average is slightly down from the 2013-2014 year, which was 7.3. This score is based on parents' responses to statements such as: "I feel welcome when I visit the school"; "It is easy for me to talk with my child's teachers"; and "Teachers listen to concerns I have", as listed on the left in the graph below.
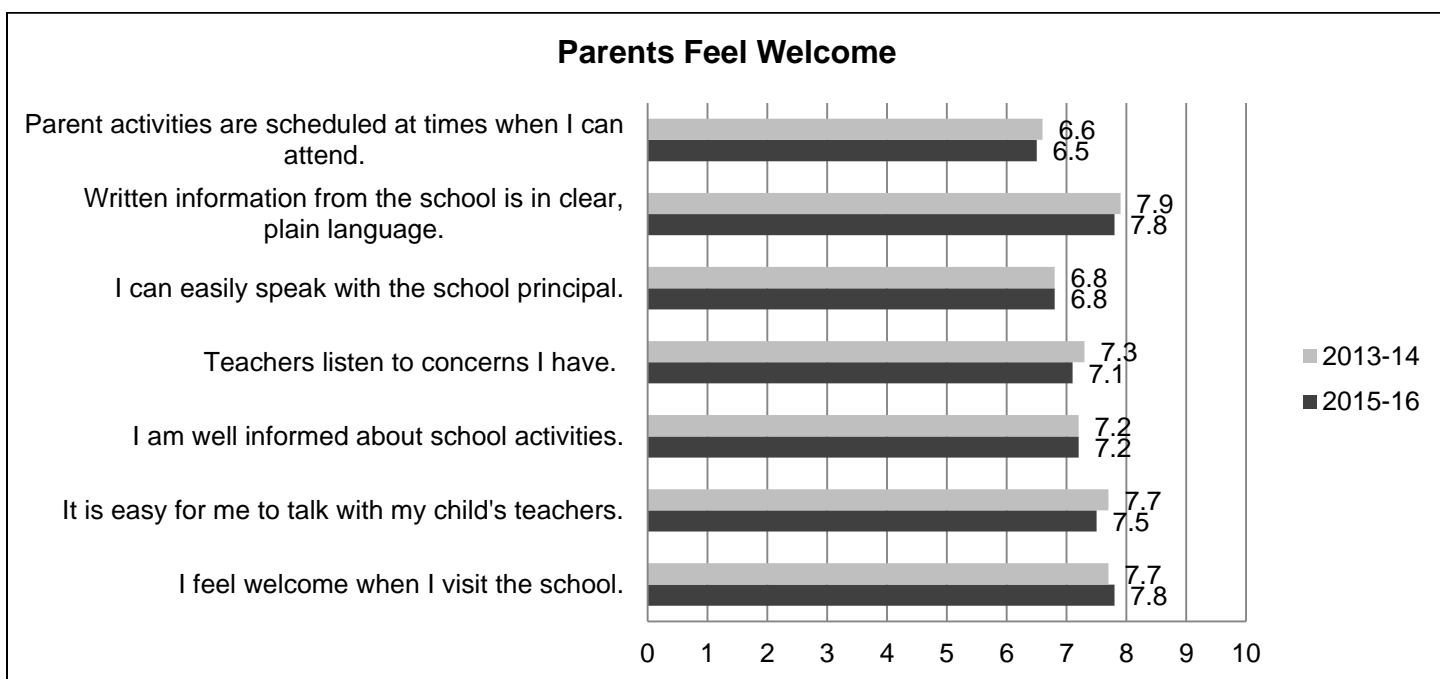

Figure 4. Parent responses to individual statements about feeling welcome (Our School Survey).

The summary score for parents being informed is lower than that for feeling welcome. The average score for parents' reports of being informed is 6.4 out of 10, which is once again lower than the previous year which was 6.7. This score is based on parents' responses to statements such as: "I am well informed about my child's progress on school subjects"; "I am informed about opportunities concerning my child's future"; and "I am informed about my child's behaviour at school, either positive or negative".

Parents Are Informed

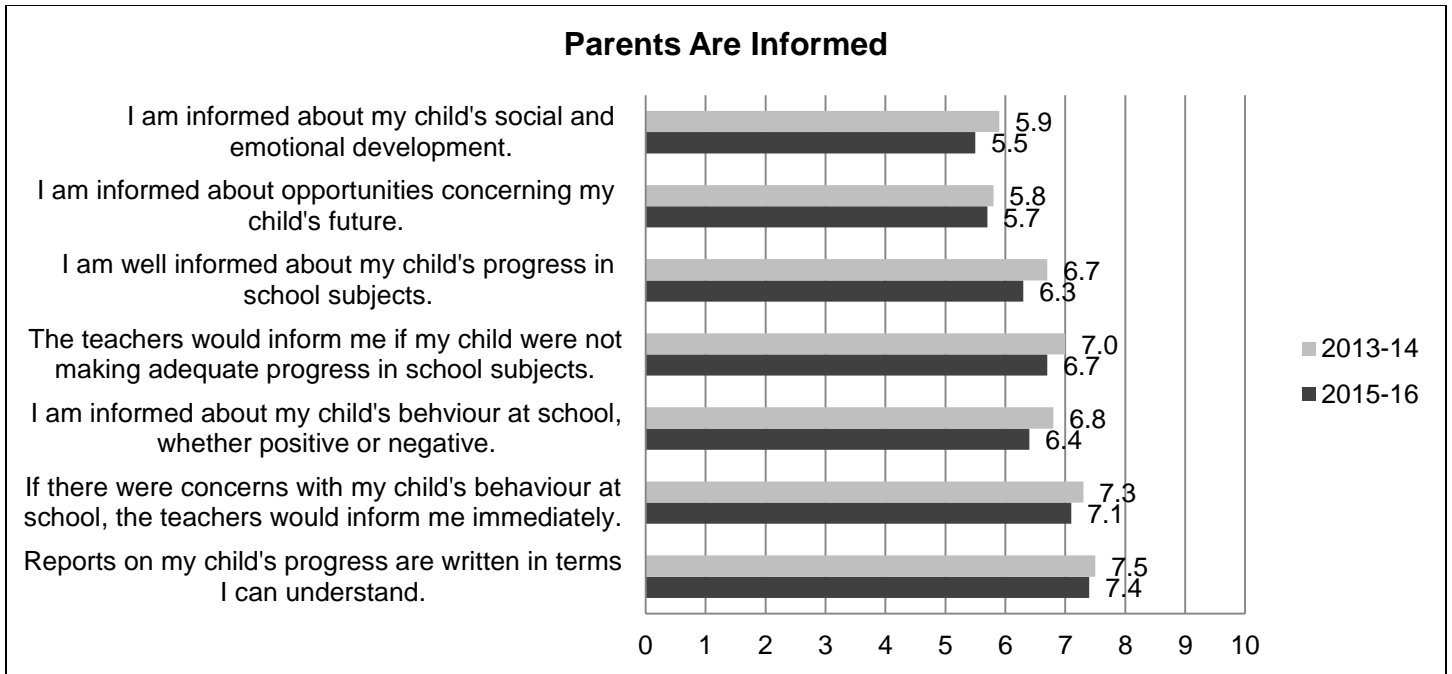| Statement	2013-14	2015-16
I am informed about my child's social and emotional development.	5.9	5.5
I am informed about opportunities concerning my child's future.	5.8	5.7
I am well informed about my child's progress in school subjects.	6.7	6.3
The teachers would inform me if my child were not making adequate progress in school subjects.	7.0	6.7
I am informed about my child's behviour at school, whether positive or negative.	6.8	6.4
If there were concerns with my child's behaviour at school, the teachers would inform me immediately.	7.3	7.1
Reports on my child's progress are written in terms I can understand.	7.5	7.4

Figure 5. Parent responses to individual statements about being informed (Our School Survey).

Parents were also asked how many times they talked with their child's teacher. Overall, they reported talking with the teacher less frequently in 2015-16 than in 2013-14, dropping from 78% to 71% who reported a frequency of two or more times. Parents also reported attending meetings less frequently in 2015-16 than in 2013-14, dropping from 76% to 70% who reported a frequency of two or more times. Finally, the proportion of parents who are involved in school committees also dropped from 18% to 15%.
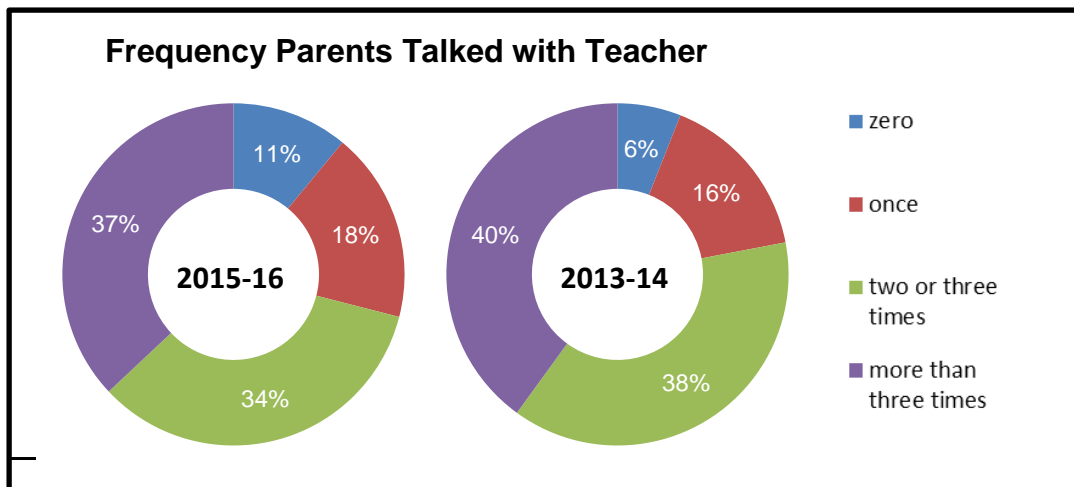
Frequency Parents Talked with Teacher

2015-16: zero 11%, once 18%, two or three times 34%, more than three times 37%

2013-14: zero 6%, once 16%, two or three times 38%, more than three times 40%

Figure 6. Number of times parents talked with their child's teacher (Our School Survey).

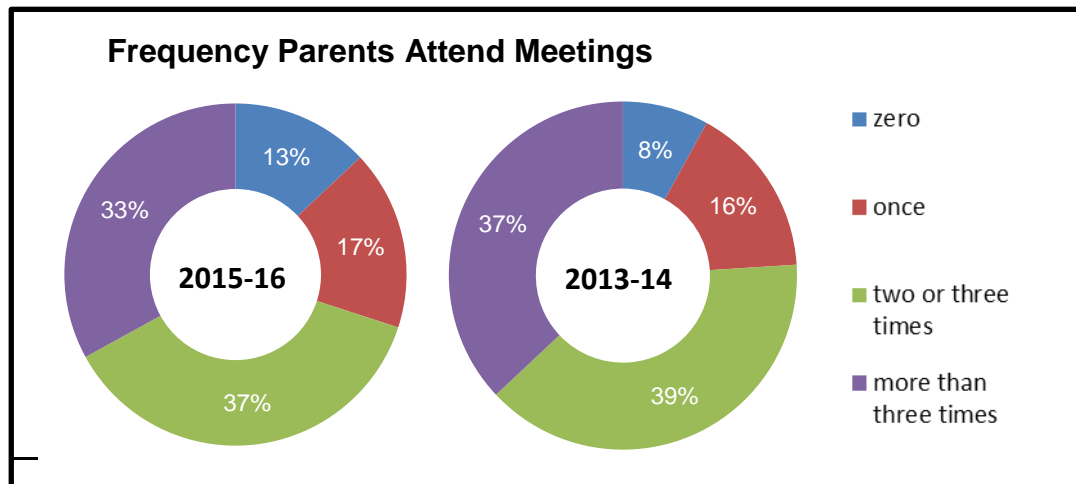**Frequency Parents Attend Meetings**

Figure 7. Number of times parents report attending meetings at their child's school (Our School Survey).

Important contextual information to consider when interpreting this data is the labour disruption that took place in 2015-2016. Although the direct effect of the labour disruption on parents' responses is unknown, it is expected that it would have had a negative impact on parent-teacher communication. Furthermore, the substantial increase in participation demonstrates greater representation of the population; therefore, apparent changes over time could be the result of improved accuracy.

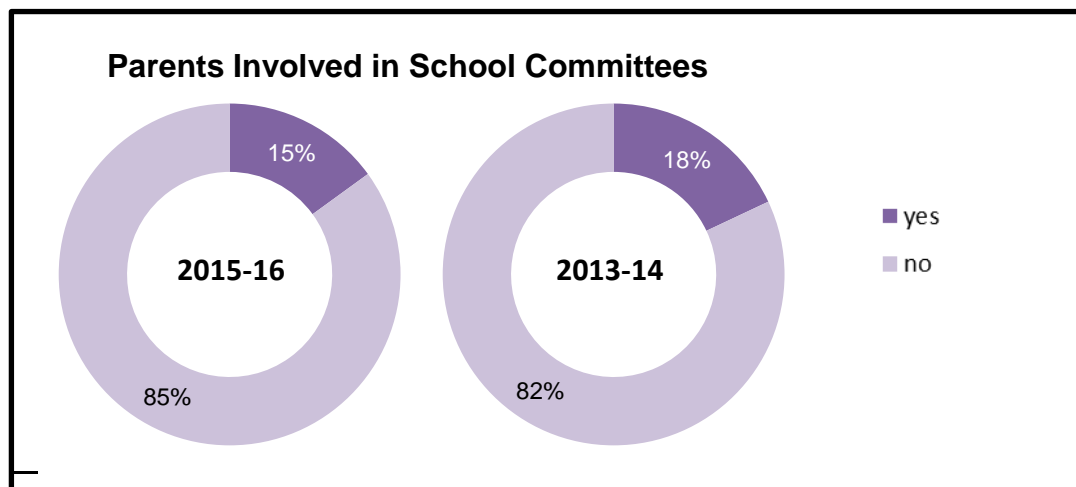**Parents Involved in School Committees**

Figure 8. Number of parents involved in school committees (Our School Survey).

The graphs above present some key data about parent involvement in their child's education. However, there are many forms of parent engagement not captured by meetings with the teacher or participation in school meetings. Participation in a formal setting does not appeal to all parents; for many parents, involvement in education happens at home and in the community supporting a child's learning and development. The Our School survey asks a subset of questions aimed at measuring this type of engagement, for which the average score was 6.5 out of 10. As was seen for the other

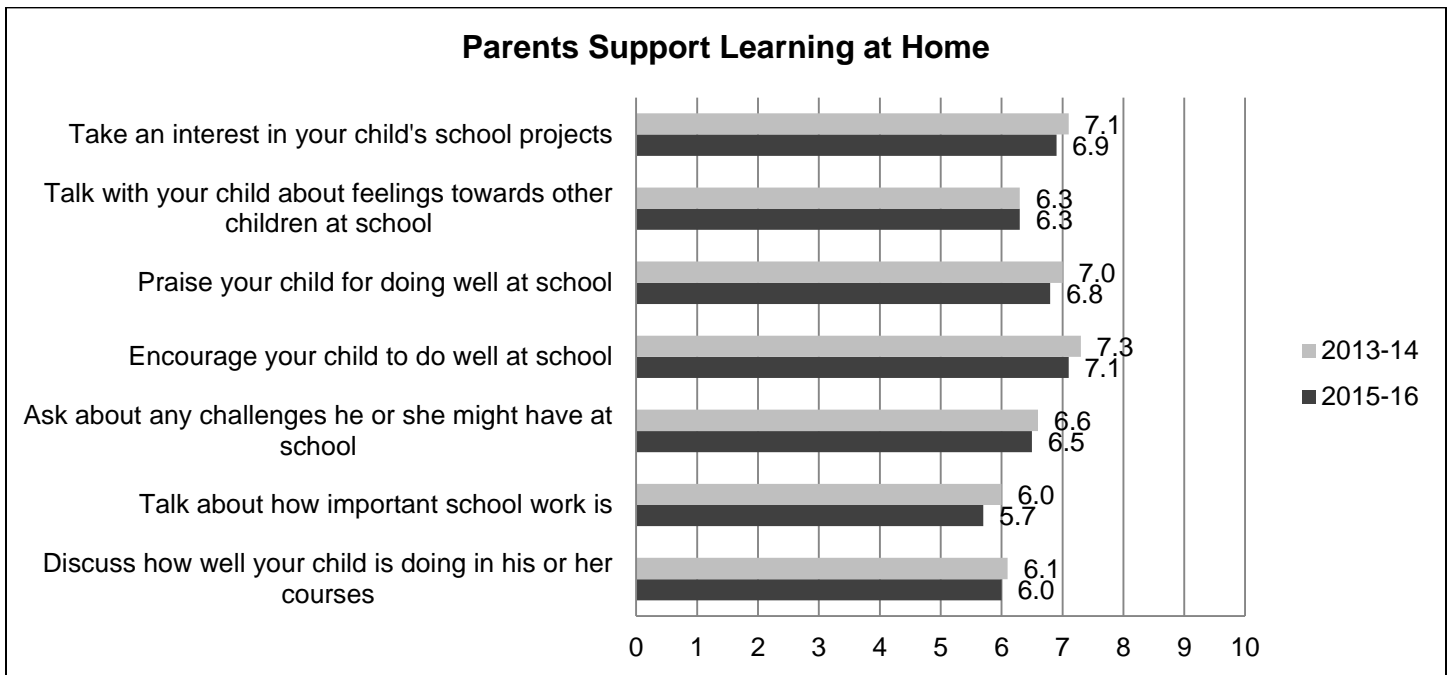types of involvement, this is down from the previous administration for which the average score was 7.2.

Parents Support Learning at Home

Statement	2013-14	2015-16
Take an interest in your child's school projects	7.1	6.9
Talk with your child about feelings towards other children at school	6.3	6.3
Praise your child for doing well at school	7.0	6.8
Encourage your child to do well at school	7.3	7.1
Ask about any challenges he or she might have at school	6.6	6.5
Talk about how important school work is	6.0	5.7
Discuss how well your child is doing in his or her courses	6.1	6.0

Figure 9. Parent responses to individual statements about supporting learning at home.

EQAO Questionnaire[2]

The EQAO Questionnaire also yields data about the support provided to students by their parents at home. Questions related to parent engagement are asked on the grade 3 and grade 6 assessments. The graphs below depict the proportion of students who responded 'every day or almost every day' to the various statements about parent engagement. Responses demonstrate that OCDSB reports of engagement tend to be lower than the province. Comparisons over the years demonstrate increases in response to the statements "We talk about the mathematics work I do in school" and "We read together" but decreases in "We talk about the reading and writing work I do in school" and "We look at my agenda together".

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[2] Note: EQAO data for 2014-2015 is unavailable. Furthermore, in 2010-11 and 2011-12 questions about reading/writing and math were alternating. Therefore the 3-year averages for reading/writing statements are based on 2010-2011, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014. The averages for statements about math are based on 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014.
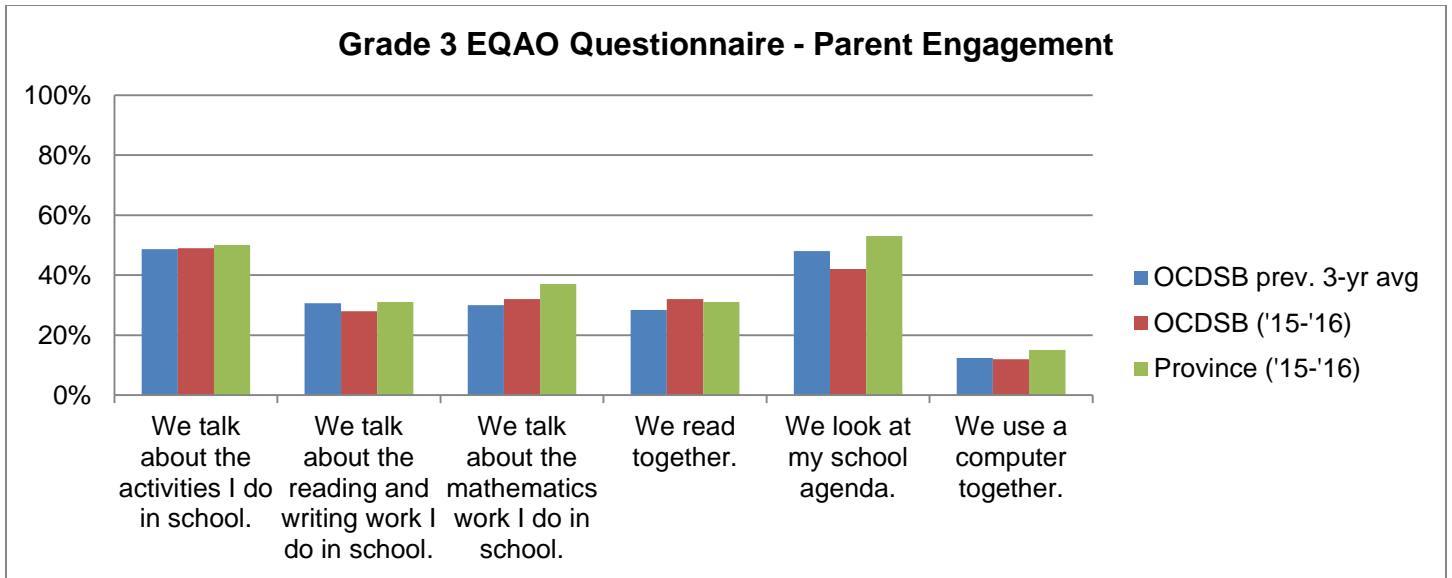
Grade 3 EQAO Questionnaire - Parent Engagement

Figure caption:

Figure 10. Student responses to questions about parent engagement (Grade 3 EQAO).

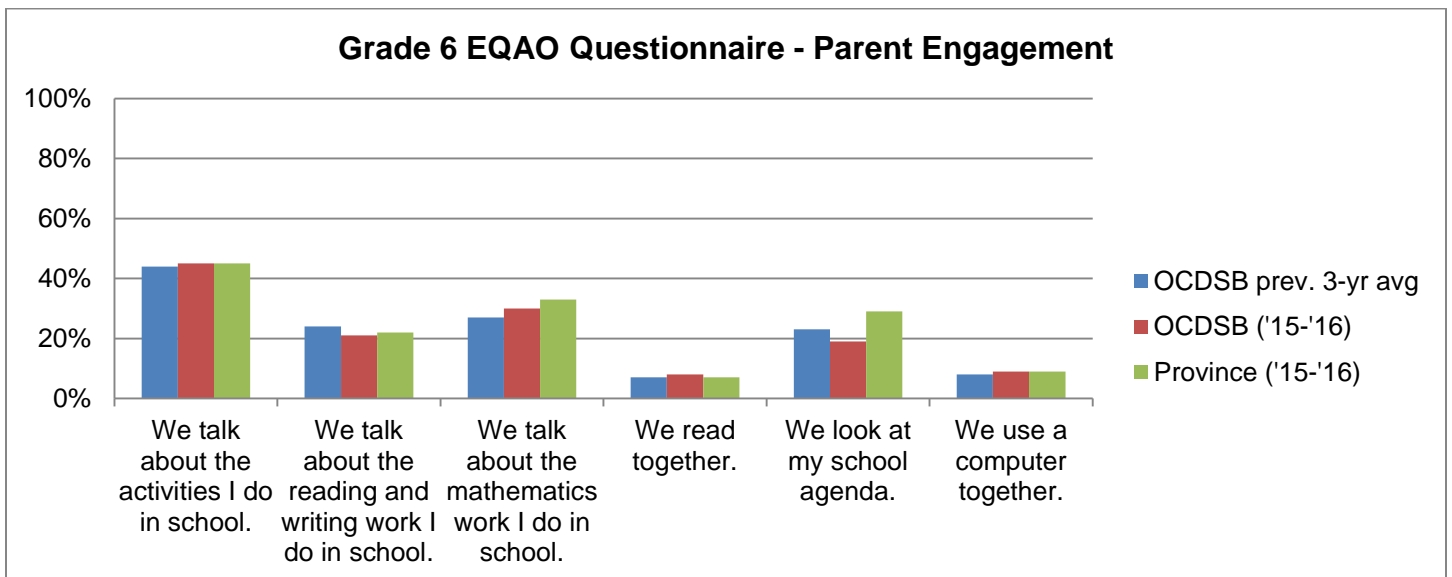**Grade 6 EQAO Questionnaire - Parent Engagement**

Figure 11. Student responses to questions about parent engagement (Grade 6 EQAO).

The EQAO Questionnaire also asks questions about student engagement. The graphs below depict the proportion of OCDSB students who responded 'most of the time' in 2015-2016, in comparison to both the province and the average across the three previous years. Responses demonstrate that OCDSB students tend to be more engaged than their provincial counterparts in reading, writing, and grade 6 math. Grade 3 responses about math are similar to those reported provincially. Compared to previous years, OCDSB students are less engaged in reading in both grades 3 and 6, with no clear trends for writing or math.
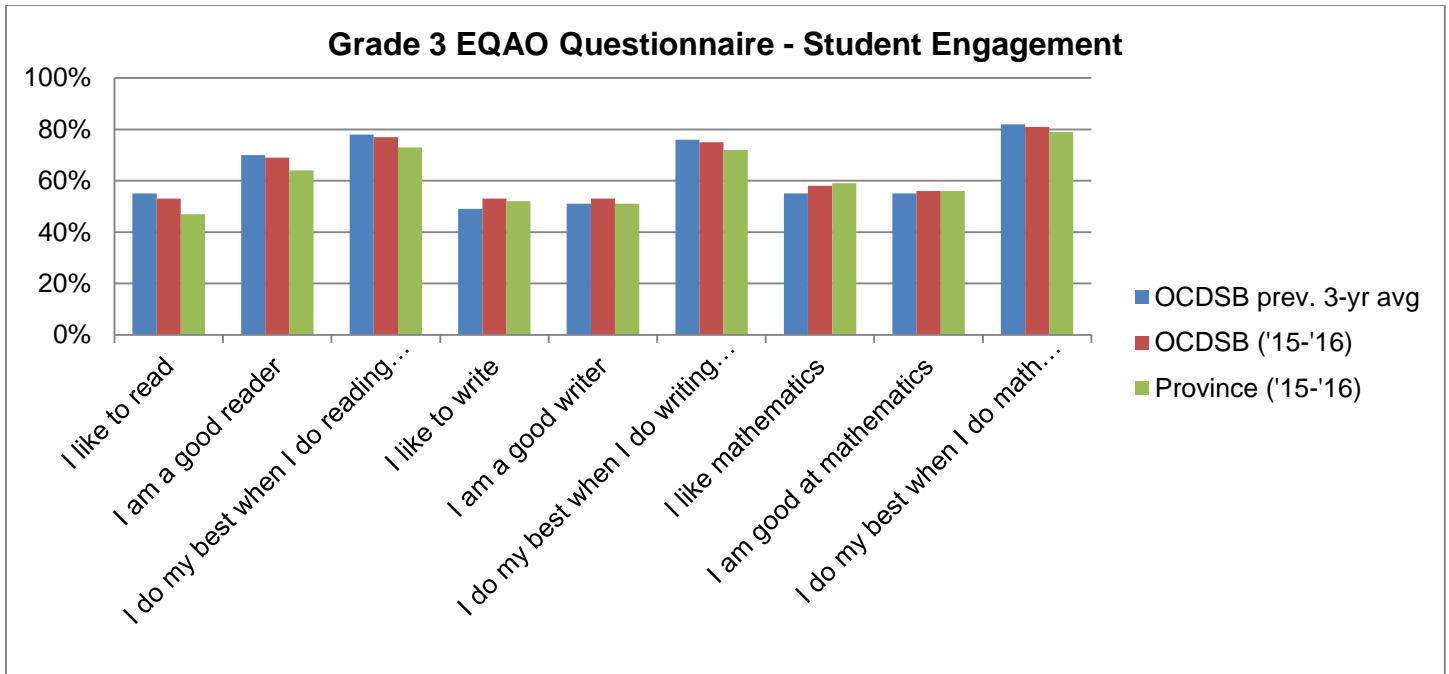
Grade 3 EQAO Questionnaire - Student Engagement

Figure 12. Student responses to questions about engagement (Grade 3 EQAO).

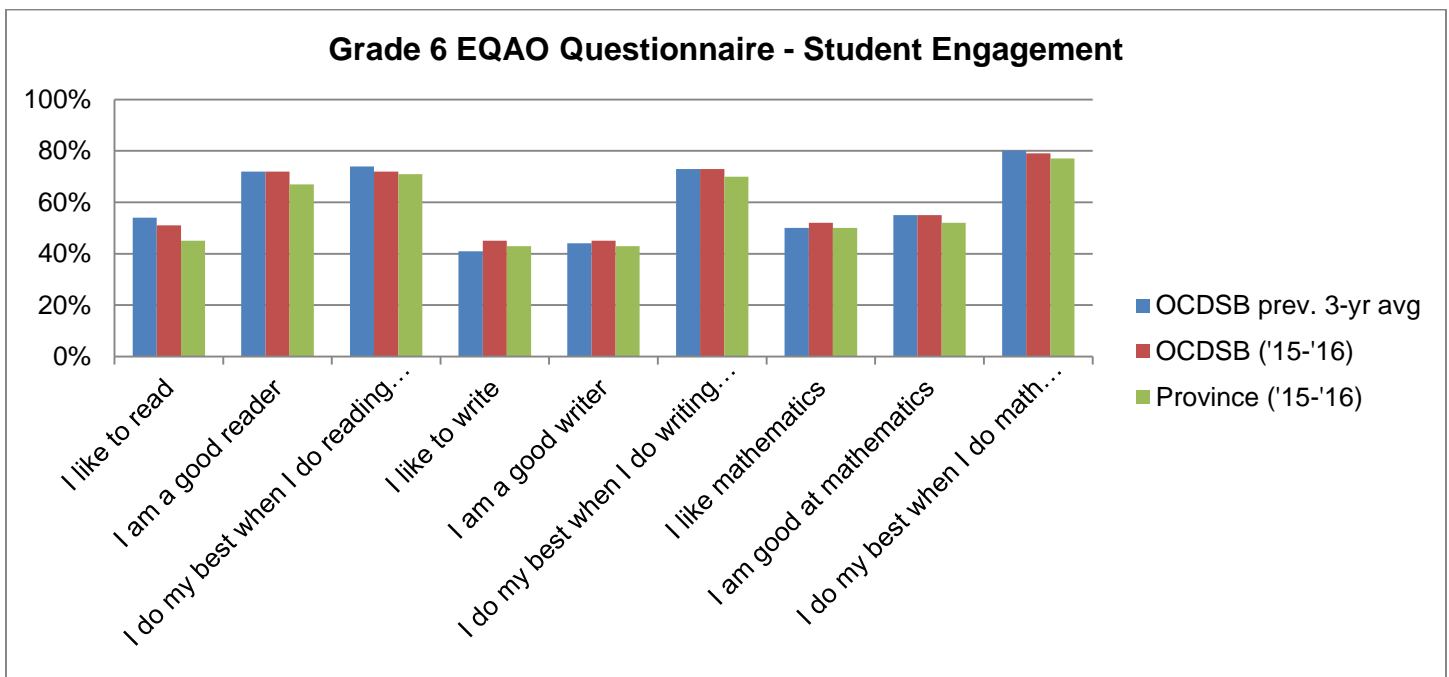**Grade 6 EQAO Questionnaire - Student Engagement**

Figure 13. Student responses to questions about engagement (Grade 6 EQAO).

The grade 9 EQAO assessment also poses questions about student engagement in mathematics. The proportion of students who responded 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to a series of statements are graphed below, separated by math course (Applied vs. Academic). Based on these results, there is a decrease in the proportion of students who say they try their best, as compared to previous years, for both groups. Differences are also evident between the two groups, with those in the Academic math

course demonstrating greater engagement in mathematics. Engagement at the OCDSB is similar to that reported provincially.
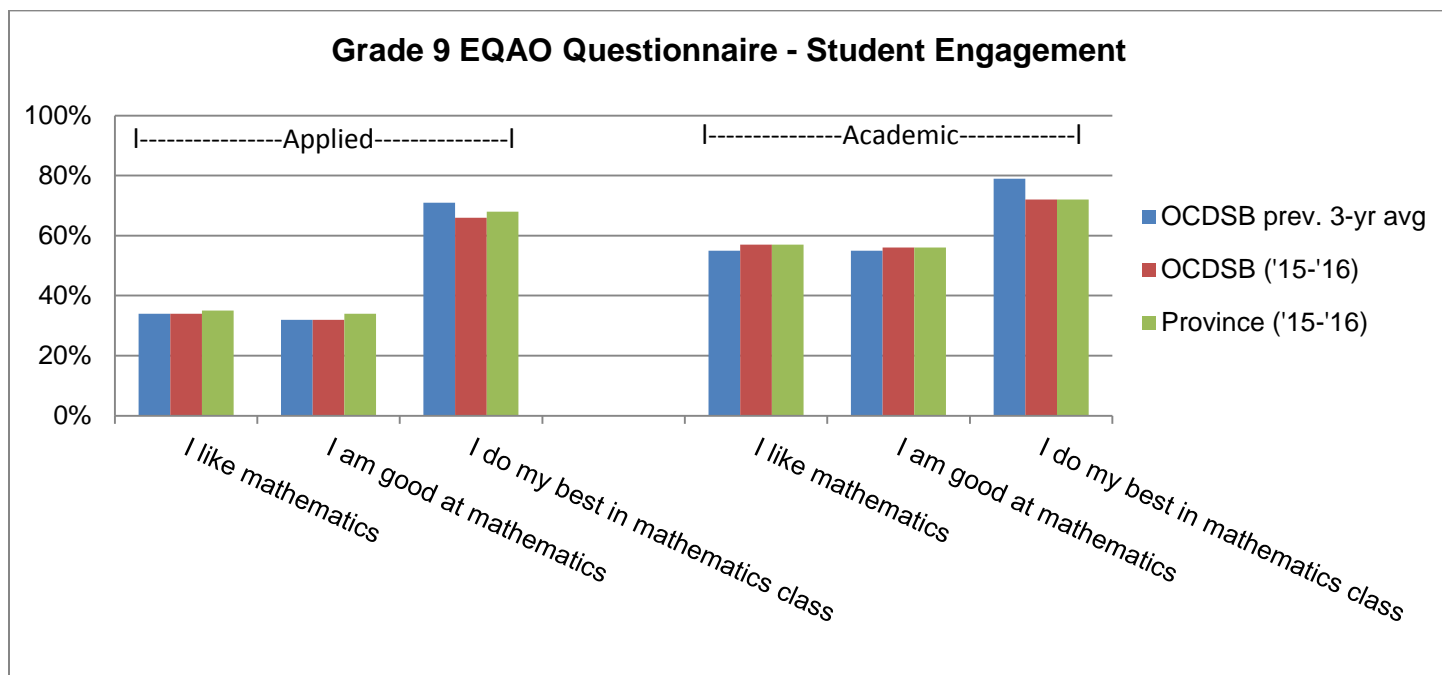
Grade 9 EQAO Questionnaire - Student Engagement

Figure 14. Student responses to questions about engagement (Grade 9 EQAO).

Next Steps

Work in the area of engagement is a journey not a destination.   There is no point in the journey when the work is done - success comes in the ongoing commitment to engaging in a way that recognizes both the shared and varied needs of all stakeholders in their relationship with the organization. Two key strategies essential to the engagement journey are communicating with stakeholders and listening to stakeholder feedback. These strategies inform our next steps in the work with our three primary stakeholder groups.

Parents: Over the past several years, the District has invested in a number of improvements to our infrastructure in order to facilitate communication channels with parents including SynreVoice, school websites, newsletters, social media, and survey instruments. In addition, we have established a regular feedback mechanism from parents on issues relating to school climate. Our next steps include an expansion of work in these areas. In terms of communications channels, the District will be migrating the district and school websites to a new platform which is easier to use and more responsive to parent need. This work is foundational to the construction of a parent portal. In addition, data from the Our Schools survey provides important feedback from parents and this year, work is being done with school administrators to ensure the timely and effective use of data to inform decision making. The most recent survey data demonstrates that one area of need is ensuring that parents feel more informed. Our work in enhancing communications infrastructure should support this issue.

Students: Student engagement occurs in a variety of ways and at multiple levels: with the teacher, in the classroom, at the school, and with the District. One area where the District is looking to increase opportunities for student engagement is through the implementation of an Exit Outcomes self-assessment rubric. This tool provides a mechanism for students to reflect on their own development of the skills and characteristics identified by the OCDSB as the outcomes desired for graduates. Student participation in this project, as well as the data yielded from the tool, will speak to the OCDSB's progress in this domain. This data will also be informative for helping shape the School Learning and Well-being Plans, as it will provide insight on the student perspective. Based on the data currently available on student engagement, from the EQAO Questionnaire, there is evidence of a decline in engagement in reading for grades 3 and 6, as well as a decline in engagement in math in grade 9. Moving forward, these can be areas of focus.

Staff: Data on staff engagement is very limited – making data collection in this area an important next step. Although participation in consultation processes suggests that staff is highly engaged, data on staff engagement is needed to better understand the challenges and barriers staff experience. A staff survey is planned for later this year to address this need. Traditionally, a survey of staff engagement would ask employees to rate their confidence in senior management, relationships with coworkers, autonomy, opportunities for professional growth, etc. Engagement, however, is not a stand-alone construct and, as discussed in previous measurement reports, intersects with the other priorities outlined in the 2015-2019 strategic plan. Therefore, rather than a traditional engagement survey, staff is considering a tool that would look at four components of total health – physical, mental, work and life – and the impact of these factors on engagement and productivity. Measurement of these organizational health factors will provide a broader picture of both engagement and well-being and the potential risk factors.

Guiding Questions

The following questions are provided to support the discussion of this item by the Committee:

- How does the data presented inform our progress on the engagement objective?
- How does work in the area of engagement also support the other strategic objectives?
- How do we continue to improve our understanding/awareness of the barriers which impact the engagement of parents, students, and staff?
- How can we support engagement for our identified groups (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students/parents; English Language Learners; students with special needs; and students residing in lower-income neighbourhoods)?
- How can we better understand and measure informal mechanisms for engagement?

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