

2023-2024 School Climate Survey: Frequently Asked Questions

Why are we doing this survey?

The Ministry of Education requires that boards do school climate surveys at least every two years (*Education Act*, S. 169.1 (2.1)). Schools use the results to plan for their school year, and to see if there have been any changes in students' experiences over time. The goal is to improve the school climate for all students.

What will the survey be used for and who will see the information?

School Climate Surveys are designed to be used both by individual schools and the board to better understand student experiences and to respond with effective policies and programs. Each school will receive its own results to use in their own planning and monitoring. The Research Team, Equity Team, Program Team, and the Senior Staff at the board office will have access to both school level and board-wide results, while school administrators and their teams will have access limited to their own school(s). Only the Research Team will be able to see students' individual answers: everyone else will see group (aggregate) information.

This year, students have the option to complete a survey module provided by KFL&A Public Health. Answers to the questions in this module will be shared with the School Programs Team at KFL&A Public Health. The data shared with public health will not be connected with students' other responses to the School Climate Survey, and responses will be grouped by school and division (e.g. Grade 4 to 6).

Why are you sharing information with KFL&A Public Health?

Under the Ontario Public Health Standards (2018), public health units must provide services in schools to help teach students about nutrition, mental health and substance use, physical health, and more. One of the requirements under the Standards is for boards of health to collect and use data to deliver, monitor, and evaluate their programming, and to better understand population health. Right now, there is no reliable school-level or board-level data available to KFL&A Public Health that meets their needs. We have a data-sharing agreement with the Public Health that sets out the rights and responsibilities of each organization. The school board owns all data collected in this survey and will be sharing only information relevant to KFL&A Public Health's work in schools.

The information shared with public health will not be connected to students' other responses to the School Climate Survey, and responses will be grouped by school and division (e.g. Grade 4 to 6). Students can choose not to participate in this or any part of the survey, and families can inform the school that they do not want their student(s) to receive the survey.

Where is the survey data stored?

The survey data is stored in ThoughtExchange on Canadian servers. Downloaded data is stored in LDSB's Microsoft OneDrive on a secure internal server.

Who will be able to see the survey data?

Only the LDSB Research Team will be able to see individual student responses. Administrators will be able to see analyzed grouped results specific to their school. They can share that information with their staff, parent councils, and community partners who work in their school. Central board staff will be able to see analyzed grouped results that are relevant to their jobs. Analyzed group results may also be shared with community partners who work in schools to help guide their programming.

Can a student be identified in the survey results?

It is not likely, but there is a small risk. The survey is anonymous, which means that students' names and student numbers are not needed. However, we are also asking demographic questions that - depending on the size and population of a school - may make it possible to identify a student indirectly when looking at the results. To protect student privacy, schools will not be able to see any demographic information for a group with fewer than 3 students. This threshold was developed by the Research Team and administrators of smaller school sites after the 2021-2022 School Climate Survey to ensure they could still use the information being collected while protecting student privacy.

The risk of identifying a student goes up if they share identifying information in the open text questions, which students are asked not to do. The only people reading individual student answers are the two members of the Research Team, who do not work with students directly. It is their job to make sure that none of the information shared back with schools can identify students.

What will happen to the results of the open text question about belonging?

Answers to this question will only be attached to a student's school and grade and will be stored separately from their other answers to the survey. The Research Team will read all responses and remove any staff or student names or position titles before sharing the results with schools. This is called de-identifying. Schools will be able to see students' de-identified responses to help them understand students' experiences in their own words.

Some of the questions are not appropriate for grades 4 to 6. Are all students being asked the same questions?

No. Certain questions (specifically those about graduation from high school, mental health programming, and substance use) are being asked of grades 7 to 12 only. Some students will also see certain questions based on their previous responses (for example, those who say "yes" to having been bullied will receive more questions than someone who does not).

How are you preparing students for this survey?

Teachers will get a slide deck with definitions, a video version of the letter of information for students, as well as this Frequently Asked Questions document. They will also receive a list of definitions in three formats (a slide deck, a link, and a printer-friendly PDF) to help explain some of the terms in the survey.

Some of the terms used in the survey are complex. Will students see definitions?

Yes. There is a link to a list of definitions in the introduction to the survey that students are asked to keep open while they complete the survey. Teachers will also be provided with a slide deck of the definitions, and a printer-friendly list of the definitions.

What if a student prefers to have the questions read to them? Does this survey work with Google Read and Write?

Yes. The survey has been tested with Google Read and Write by both the Research Team and Educational Services Staff. Students can also respond to open text questions using Google Read and Write's Talk & Type feature.

How can students access the online survey?

There are two ways for students to access the online survey. We have posted a URL and a QR code to the board's online learning platform Minds Online: students can use whichever they prefer. We have also provided a poster with the QR code to put around the school so students can access it if they miss their in-class opportunity. We have also supplied paper copies (English only for now) to administrators, which are available upon request.

How have you considered ELL students and families?

We hope that having the survey available in several languages and in multiple formats will allow more English language learners (ELL) to participate than in the past. The electronic version of the survey can be translated on demand into any language available through Google Translate, which covers almost all languages used in Limestone. Unfortunately, there are still a few languages that are not available for translation (e.g. Dari). We are still working on solutions for future surveys. Communications to families will include a link to all the survey materials in a Smore, which can be translated on demand. This is for preview purposes only and does not replace the survey itself. Families who prefer to read the materials in a language other than English should be directed to the Smore.

Can I see a full question list?

Yes. A PDF version of the questions (which is also the paper copy of the survey) is available on the board website. Communications to families will include a link to all the survey materials in a Smore, which can be translated on demand. This is for preview purposes only and does not replace the survey itself. Families who prefer to read the materials in a language other than English should be directed to the Smore:

- [Grade 4 to 6 Survey Questions](#)
- [Grade 7 to 12 Survey Questions](#)

Do students have to participate?

No. The survey is voluntary. Families are asked to let their school principal know if they want to opt their student out of the survey process. **An opted-out student may still be able to access the online survey, so please be sure students know that they are not supposed to do it.** A student can choose

not to participate on their own and can stop participating at any time once they have begun the survey (though the answers they have already given will be recorded).

Is parental consent required for students to participate in the survey?

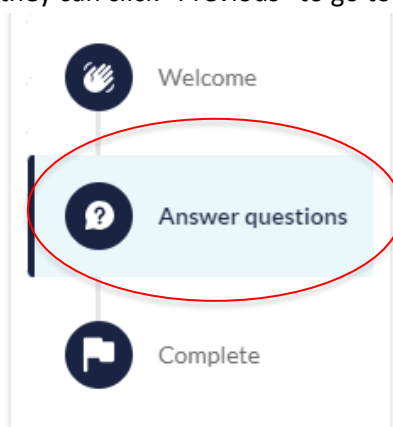
No. Under [Ontario privacy and education laws](#), parental consent is not required for school boards to collect information from students. However, families must be notified that information is being collected. At that time, families can choose that their student(s) not receive the survey. Families are asked to contact their school principal to opt their student(s) out. Students can also choose not to participate in the survey at any time.

Can students skip questions they do not want to answer?

Students can select “I prefer not to answer” to any question or close the survey at any time to stop participating.

What if a student wants to change an answer after they have submitted the survey?

Students can click on the “Answer Questions” icon on the left of the screen, which will take them back to the final question. Then, they can click “Previous” to go to the question they want to change.



How long will the survey take?

The survey should take between 20 and 30 minutes but may take more or less time.

When does the survey close?

The survey closes May 3, 2024. You can complete the survey any time between April 22 and May 3, 2024.

What about students who miss class on the day we do the survey? How will they complete it?

Students who are not in class for the survey can log onto Minds Online any time to complete it on their own or use the QR code on one of the provided posters or slides. We are also asking for help from LDSB support staff and community partners where appropriate to help reach students who are not typically in class.

It looks like you're asking about students' identities twice. Why?

There are two questions in the Human Rights and Equity section ask about negative treatment based on parts of students' identities. What that question explores are the *perceptions, thoughts, and beliefs* of others can lead to systemic negative treatment. The later question about identity asks students to select the terms they use to describe *themselves*. Any difference in how students self-identify versus how they describe being treated by others can give us a better understanding of how to identify (and eventually repair) harms caused by systemic bias.

Why are you not using the same identity questions you used on the Student Census?

We do not need to go into as much detail in the School Climate Survey as we did the Student Census. We learned from our Student Census experience that it is sometimes more appropriate to work with larger categories of people than small specific ones. For example, it may be enough for our purposes to know more about the experience of a student who identifies as somewhere on the 2SLGBTQQA+ umbrella rather than knowing their specific sexual orientation. This is especially important when we consider smaller schools that have very few students. If our categories get too small, we may be able to identify students and we do not want to do that. We already have detailed information about students' individual identities from the Student Census. Since we cannot cross-reference anonymous School Climate data with confidential Student Census data, we do need to ask high level identity questions to get a sense of how students' identities intersect with school climate.

In the identity section, why are "Black and racialized" combined? Why is "Black" listed on its own whereas other groups are not?

There are two reasons. Firstly, Black is listed separately because there is a growing movement to better acknowledge the unique history of Black Canadians whose ancestors arrived in Canada after being enslaved. This is a similar movement to that which distinguishes the specific histories of Indigenous Peoples.

Secondly, we have grouped all racialized students together to better protect their privacy. Because this survey is anonymous, and because racial diversity varies across schools and communities, it is better to group students in an aggregate category (i.e., racialized) instead of specific racial categories (e.g., South Asian) so that individual students cannot be identified. Grouping students together in this way will also allow us to share more information with schools. In other circumstances, like in the Student Census, grouping students in this way would not be the practice because different racial groups may have significantly different experiences and we would not want to mask them by combining them as one group.