



## **Toronto District School Board, Student Interest Programs Policy: Community Consultation**

TITLE: Toronto District School Board, Student Interest Programs Policy: Community Consultation

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Cite as: Presley, A., Corso C., & Rosolen, L. (2022). Toronto District School Board, Student Interest Policy: Community Consultation. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Toronto District School Board

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LEARNINGS FROM STAKEHOLDERS	3
SECTION 1: ENGAGEMENT POPULATION	5
SECTION 2: ENGAGEMENT THEME SUMMARY	9
Should Choice Exist?	9
Positioning Local Schools	10
Communicating Choice as an Option	11
Streamlining System Processes	13
Communication	13
Application Process	14
Barriers to Accessing Specialized Schools and Programs	15
Admissions Criteria - Ability Versus Interests	15
Program, Course, and Learning Opportunities	17
Thinking to the Future	19
FURTHER ENGAGEMENT DETAILS	26
Public Consultation Sessions	26
Online Survey	26
Email Feedback	27

## LEARNINGS FROM STAKEHOLDERS

In the fall and early winter of 2021-22, over 3,600 community members provided feedback on the proposed Student Interest Policy/Specialized Schools and Programs Policy. The feedback provided diverse perspectives and experiences surrounding specialized schools and programs and highlighted the great diversity of opinion and contentious nature of the role of Specialized Programs and Schools within the TDSB.

Many TDSB families, staff, and students indicated the importance of school choice and of Specialized Schools and Programs within the TDSB, while others perceived school choice as pulling much-needed resources from “regular” schools, drawing students away from their local neighbourhood, and producing perceptions of a multi-tiered education system.

The ability for all students to have access to academic programming that may be outside of their catchment area is important to many respondents. However, many families are not aware that such options exist. Respondents commented that there is a consistent lack of access to information about Specialized Schools and Programs across TDSB neighbourhoods.

To increase access and opportunity, respondents indicated that Specialized Schools and Programs should be in all quadrants of the city; many respondents noted that there is a lack of specialized programming within racialized neighbourhoods. Many respondents supported the move to specialized local school programming as a solution to limited city wide specialized programming, but did question how this would become operationalized.

Both students and parents raised program boundaries and transportation as barriers to accessing Specialized Schools and Programs. Many students, families, and staff also noted that application fees and program fees may present significant barriers to families across Toronto.

With regards to the application and admissions process to Specialized Schools and Programs, responses ranged across a variety of opinions and concerns:

- Many families indicated they found the current process to be very stressful and complicated.
- While other respondents commented that the application to Specialized Schools and Programs should include some form of merit-based criteria.
- While still others believed that looking at the best fit for the student and their interests should come first.

There was also no clear consensus on the use of a lottery for admissions among any group.

Some noted that a “lottery-only” system is a barrier to potentially suitable candidates according to aptitude and program interest while others see it as a step towards equity.

The remainder of this document summarizes the engagement efforts and consultation themes from the Specialized Schools and Program Policy (SSPP) consultations. The document is organized in two sections:

- Engagement Population and Phase 2 Respondent Details
- Engagement Themes Summary

## **SECTION 1: ENGAGEMENT POPULATION**

The engagement components of the SSPP consultation are based on the TDSB's policy on community engagement (Policy P078), which was informed by effective existing practices within the area of community engagement as well as recommendations outlined in the Director's Response to the TDSB's Enhancing Equity Task Force (TDSB, 2018).

Two phases of consultation make up the public engagement efforts:

### **Phase 1, spring and summer 2020:**

- o Focused conversations with Community Advisory Committees
- o Online survey for parents (current and future), students, staff, and Trustees
- o In Phase 1 approximately **300** people participated. The majority (175) were current TDSB parents and students (81). Of the parent and student respondents, many had children attending a specialized school or program or attended one themselves.
- o Feedback from Phase 1 was taken into consideration and was important in informing the direction of Phase 2.

### **Phase 2, fall 2021:**

- o Multiple public engagement opportunities that reached a large number of communities and families from across the TDSB.
- o Online survey for parents (current and future), students (grades 5 to 12), staff, and Trustees (N=7,800).

Table 1 outlines who and how groups were engaged during Phase 2. Please see Appendix B for further engagement details and Appendix C for the online survey questions.

**Table 1: Engagement Details**

Engagement Methods	Population Details
Three Public Webinars: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● November 18, 7:00 to 9:00</li> <li>● November 22, 1:00 to 3:00</li> <li>● November 22, 7:00 to 9:00</li> </ul>	Approximately <b>700 attendees</b> made up mostly of parents and a small number of students and staff.
Online Survey: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Available from November 1, 2021 to December 21 (As per P001, 45 day consultation process).</li> </ul>	Showing interest, <b>7,800</b> community members accessed the survey. Note - not all participants completed all sections of the survey.  <b>3,688</b> respondents completed the survey: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Parents/Caregivers- 2,574 (97% current parents)</li> <li>● Students- 572 (48% elementary, 52% secondary)</li> <li>● Teachers- 365</li> <li>● Principals- 32</li> <li>● Other Staff and Trustees- 96</li> <li>● Other- 49</li> </ul>
Two Online Meetings with Community Advisory Committee Members (CAC):	CAC members were engaged prior to beginning Phase 2. Members advised staff on strategies to engage with the communities they represent. Members were also invited to a second meeting to comment on the policy and answer targeted questions.  Joint meeting with representation from: Alternative Schools (ASCAC), Black Student Achievement (BSACAC), French as a Second Language (FSLAC), Inner City (ICCAC), Parent Involvement (PIAC), and Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC).
Open feedback collected	Total number: Approximately <b>40 emails</b> .

<p>Focused Conversations</p>	<p>Additional meetings were held with the following groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Senior Team</li> <li>● Student Trustees</li> <li>● TDSB Community Support Workers</li> <li>● 3x community outreach pop-up meetings coordinated by TDSB's CSWs</li> <li>● 4x Learning Centre meetings</li> <li>● 2 School Council pop-ups [Shoreham and Brookview]</li> <li>● Secondary Guidance Counsellors and Secondary Advisory Committee</li> <li>● Middle Years Student Success Coaches</li> </ul>
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**Phase 2, Fall 2021: Respondents**

The webinars and surveys in Phase 2 had good representation across all TDSB's neighbourhoods (See figure 3, Appendix A).

There was representation from staff who work at Specialized Schools or Programs and those that do not as well as representation from both families and students who attend and do not attend a Specialized School or Program. This marks a distinct difference between Phase 1 and 2. In Phase 1, representation was largely based on participants who either attended or had children attending Specialized Schools or Programs.

**Table 2: Attendance at Specialized School and Programming\***

<b>Attendance at Specialized School or Program</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Staff - Does your school have a specialized program? Or Is your school a specialized school?.	52%	48%
Students - Do you attend a specialized program or school?	54%	45%
Families - Do you have a child(ren) attending a Specialized School or Program?	32%	68%



**Table 3: Familiarity of Specialized Schools and Programming**

<b>Of those that do not attend a Specialized school or program, familiarity of Specialized Schools and Programs</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Students - Are you familiar with TDSB’s Specialized Schools and Programs and/or their application process? Students	35%	65%
Families - Are you familiar with TDSB’s Specialized Schools and Programs and/or their application process?	34%	66%

\*Note, where parent/caregiver respondents reported that their child attends “Other ” specialized programs, it tended to include Gifted, French Immersion, or SHSM. These are not classified as “Specialized Schools/Programs” as per TDSB policies. As such, there is likely a substantial over estimation in the percentage of parents/caregivers who indicated they have children in Specialized School/Programs. See table 2 and 3. See Appendix A for more details.

## SECTION 2: ENGAGEMENT THEME SUMMARY

### Should Choice Exist?

Many TDSB families, staff, and students indicated the importance of school choice and of Specialized Schools and Programs within the TDSB, while others perceived school choice as pulling much-needed resources from “regular” schools, drawing students away from their local neighbourhood, creating competitions between schools, and creating a multi-tiered education system.

*It's really important that you keep specialized schools and programs. Disbanding them in the spirit of keeping everything equal is a very disheartening idea. Having something special for students to strive towards is super important- they learn a lot in the trying. Some will not get in, and that is just part of life, but they will learn in the process. Just because these programs can't accommodate everyone is not a reason to get rid of them. If that philosophy were applied elsewhere, there would be no med schools, no school of dentistry etc., etc. Specialization and selection are just part of life and growing up.*

– Current Parent, local school-

*In order to address systemic and historic barriers for children of colour - in particular Black and Indigenous children - admission process should consider broader student context beyond, for example, a portfolio. As we know from COVID data, racialized families are more likely to experience poverty, food and housing insecurity and other inequities, for example access to health and child care. These barriers limit participation in fee-based extracurriculars. Admission processes that address inequities will need to consider alternative approaches that meaningfully disrupt the status quo.*

– Current Parent, local school-

Feedback heard during the webinars emphasized the notion that Specialized Programming potentially undermines public perception and confidence in the “regular” programming that is available in local schools. A common concern shared through the webinars was that families feared that not being admitted into a Specialized School or Program would inhibit or limit access to related post-secondary opportunities. In a similar vein, it was heard that accelerated and enriched programming is being accessed as an alternative to Academic Pathways in our

Secondary school system. In these instances, notions of “Specialization” also conjures the notion of “better” and “elite”, when this should not be the case.

Some respondents suggested that specialization should start in high school, as opposed to elementary. Families cited negative effects of early streaming as rationale to end elementary specialized programs, and students cited the social stigma associated with attending specialized classes.

*The Board should work towards having excellent programs offered at all schools. All specialized schools in the elementary panel should be closed. It is too early to stream kids based on interest. These schools seem to stem from adults' interests. – Teacher, local school-*

*I believe that elementary programming should be similar to where it is at now, as social and other relationships can foster with people in ‘normal’ classrooms, especially at earlier ages. This also eliminates the bullying issues that may inevitably arise (e.g. ‘I GOT INTO <so-and-so> AND YOU DIDN'T! HAHA’).- Grade 8 student, not sure of high school plans-*

Within the comments, there was confusion as to whether French Immersion and Gifted programming is included within the Specialized Schools and Program Policy - some families believing the two should be included in the larger school choice narrative. Furthermore, some families also believed that Alternative schools should be included within this policy.

### **Positioning Local Schools**

Many respondents supported local schools as a grassroots solution to ensuring school programming is reflective of the desires of the local neighbourhoods. Families commented that in some cases students have to travel far distances to attend a Specialized School or Program. To this end, families and staff commented that there is a lack of Specialized Schools and Programs within racialized communities across the TDSB. Respondents noted that Specialized Schools and Programs should be in all quadrants of the city - spread within each Learning Centre or Network. Some families noted that they would prefer their child not attend a “specialized” separate program or school, but suggested a “community school” model with a standard core of

enrichment options (e.g., including Arts, Science/Math/Technology, languages, sports, etc.,) which all students could access locally.

While positioning local schools as a strategy to increase access to Specialized Schools and Programs for all students, there was concern that perhaps current Board wide programs will become local Specialized Programs or move to new locations. Other respondents questioned the criteria that will be used to determine whether a program will remain a Board wide program, and how enrollment and programs are configured across the system.

*Regardless of its intent, this fragmentation of Grades 9 and 10 into local specialized and non-specialized programming will lead to the same disproportionate representation and unequal outcomes as other academic streaming structures have had in the past. To assume that it will not or ignore this risk means we have not learned from similar actions of the past 60 years in Ontario schools.” – Central Administration, Professional Support Services, and Support Staff-*

### **Communicating Choice as an Option**

The ability for all students to have access to academic programming that may be outside of their catchment area is important to many respondents. However, many families are not aware that such options exist. Respondents commented that there is a consistent lack of access to information about Specialized Schools and Programs across TDSB neighbourhoods. As a way to create equitable access to academic options, respondents suggested ensuring promotion of school and pathway options to families is done in multiple ways – beginning in the classroom.

Parents and students both report that the most useful modes of communication are teacher emails and school newsletters (see Figures 1 and 2). Students reported that they had expected their teachers to tell them about the options available to them for Grade 9. As seen in Figures 1 and 2, families and students also find the TDSB webpage very useful (ranked #3 among both groups).

At the same time, many respondents complained that information was difficult to find – and often out of date – on the TDSB website. Suggestions included a user-friendly, “one-stop shop” website link to post information and key resources about the application process.

Figure 1: Most useful communication tools to parents/guardians  
(multiple answers per respondent)

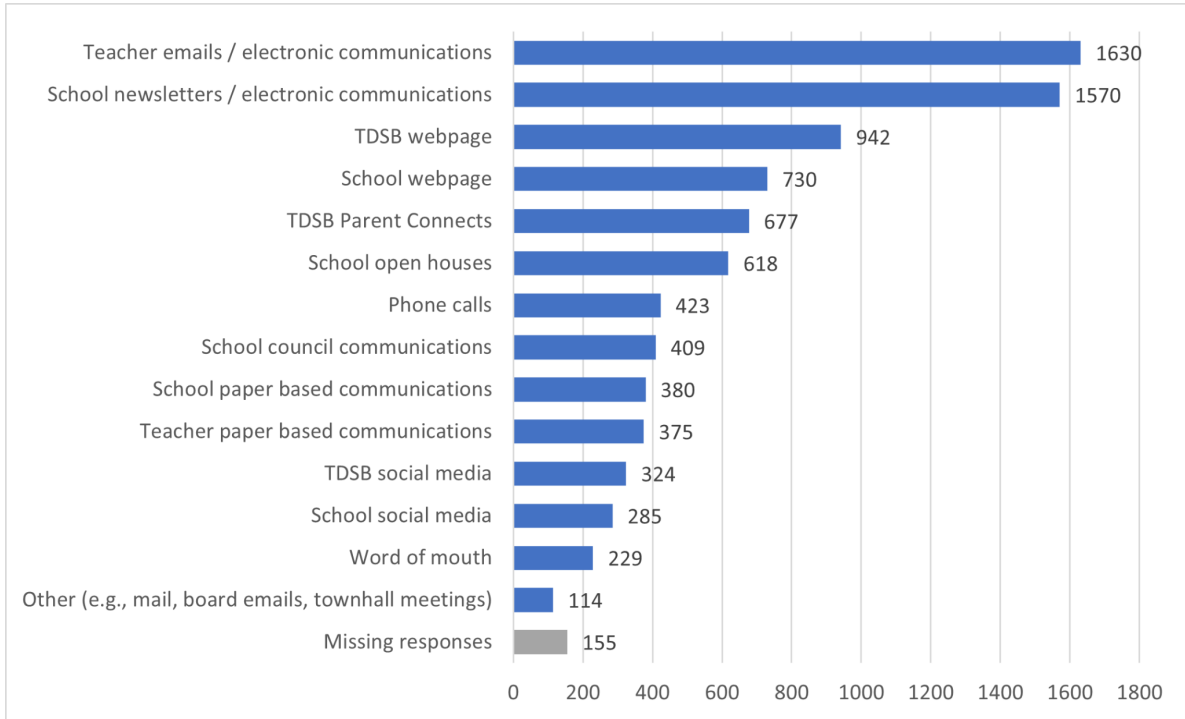
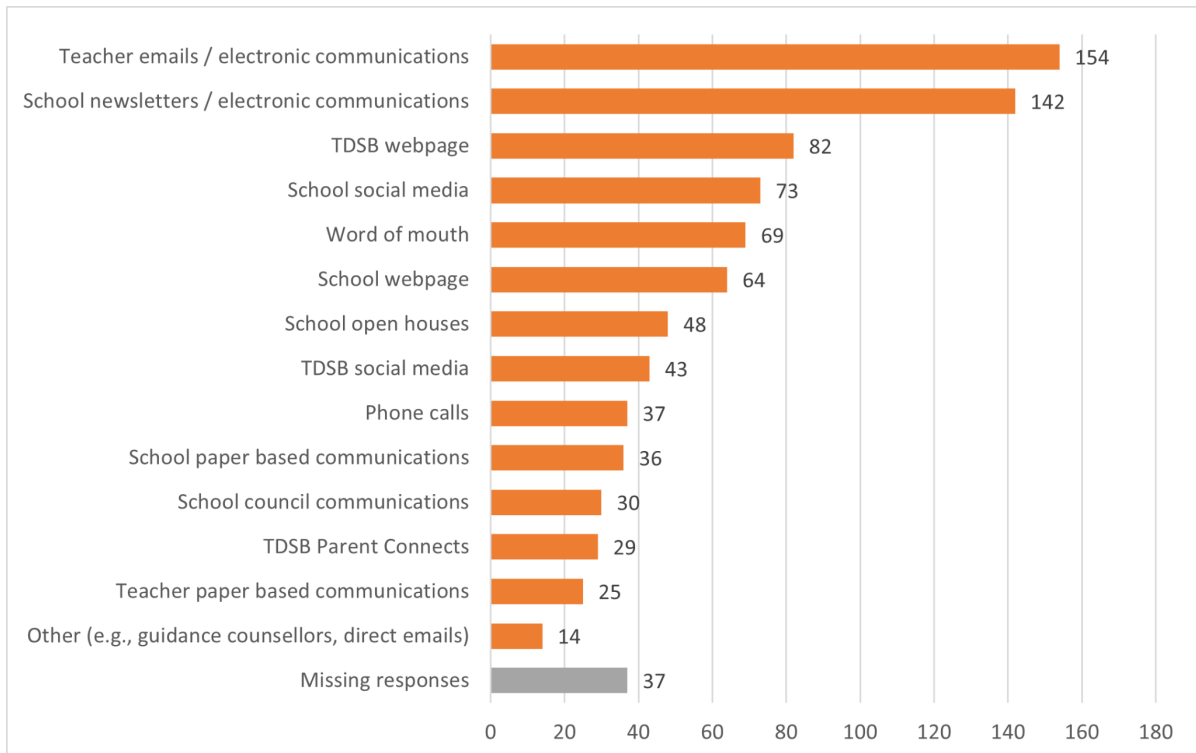


Figure 2: Most useful communication tools to students  
(secondary students only; multiple answers per respondent)



To support communication, some teachers asked for more clarity about TDSB’s Specialized Programs and Schools, indicating that classroom teachers’ knowledge about secondary school options may vary across the system. School staff also commented that more guidance counselors were needed for Grades 8 and 9 students to communicate pathway options and support students’ transition to high school – particularly within marginalized communities.

*[I] would suggest that deep board wide awareness of specialized programs among elementary educators is what will ensure greater diversity of population- Teacher, Intensive Support Program-*

*Guidance Counselors for 8-9 transitions have been removed. They helped students select these programs and provided staff/students/families with information about them. They are needed in our schools! - Teacher, local school-*

## Streamlining System Processes

### a. Communication

Respondents' comments on TDSB communication to them in relation to Specialized options varied widely with increased clarification being a central theme. Some asked for clearer communication about Specialized Programs and Schools and their respective applications using plain language and available in multiple languages. Some parents were very happy with the level of communication offered to them by the school board, and some hoped for information earlier so they could plan around upcoming deadlines. Other parents felt overwhelmed by the amount of information and did not want *more* communication, but to have information streamlined and accessible when needed.

*You used to produce something that I think was called Choices, outlining options, required courses by year and pathways that kids have available to them in high school. So helpful throughout high school. I still have them because it kept parents in the loop with a good overall picture.– Current Parent, local school-*

*Make a centralized site where students can upload and have a checklist for their programs of interest and deadlines! Webpages between schools and tdsb, ping pong the user back and forth without giving clear info. Programs are not all available equally in all regions. Information not updated regularly. – Current Parent, local school-*

*Have a page that provides information on school choices, options and pathways with subsections for each type of program that has information about how and where to apply as well as a brief description of the program.” – Grade 10 student, not familiar with Specialized Schools/Programs-*

*Currently we are inundated with communication. Though it is greatly appreciated, there should be some form of structure and timelines as to the roles and responsibility of each party i.e. the school teacher, the counselor, the student and the parent (who will do what, how and at what time).– Current Parent, local school-*

As illustrated in comments above, there is a desire from parents and students to have one core resource or website that houses information about all the Specialized Schools and Programs. Parents and students also recommend recording information sessions so they may be viewed asynchronously, and mobilizing teachers and guidance counselors to actively engage students in discussions about Specialized Programs and Schools. Some parents recommended text alerts and community outreach (e.g., posting flyers) to reach marginalized groups. Students further suggested sending emails to students rather than just parents and to mandate students learning about options for high school as a part of the curriculum.

*Bring in text message communication so that people that can't afford computers or internet in their home, can receive text messages. – Current Parent, local school-*

## **b. Application Process**

In many cases, families indicated they found the application process to be very stressful and complicated. Families, students, and staff shared improvement suggestions for the Specialized Schools and Programs application process. Beyond a centralized place for information, some families and students recommended using one centralized application form and consistent timelines with some flexibility for program-specific application questions/sections while others noted providing multiple application formats (e.g., online and in paper format) would be helpful. This would avoid duplication if applying to more than one program. Families also identified supports that would facilitate the application process such as:

- providing in-school support to students and families when applying,
- utilising more accessible formats (e.g., braille communications, large fonts, etc.); and,

- establishing consistent timelines.

*That the application process be as straightforward and easy to understand. As an English speaking, tech literate parent who is also an educator, I found the amount of information and different places to access information to be a lot. I can only imagine how challenging it may be for some families.– Current Parent, local school-*

*Make sure the application process is equitable (multiple ways to apply) and people are notified well in advance of the deadline.– Current Parent, French Immersion Program-*

Lastly, some families were concerned about limiting program choice to two selections which may limit the range of opportunities of being accepted or ensuring a “best fit” program according to individual needs.

### **Barriers to Accessing Specialized Schools and Programs**

Both students and parents raised program boundaries and transportation as barriers to accessing Specialized Schools and Programs. Parents were concerned not only about the cost and time associated with transportation, but also the safety of children traveling along via TTC. Some parents and students suggested that access to programs may be more equitable if they were administered virtually. Parents commented that requirements to attend in-person or synchronous events were also a barrier.

Many respondents – students, families, and staff – noted that application fees and program fees may present significant barriers to families across Toronto. However, some teachers expressed concerns about how costs would be covered for processing and evaluating applications without those fees.

### **Admissions Criteria - Ability Versus Interests**

The feedback regarding admissions criteria is mixed at best. Many respondents commented that the application to Specialized Schools and Programs should include some form of merit-based criteria. While others believed that looking at the best fit for the student and their interests should come first. Many principals/vice-principals (from both local and Specialized Schools) expressed a need to move away from strict merit-based admission criteria. Students who



currently attend a Specialized School are more likely to favour merit-based admissions than other students (although this position is not universally held). Some suggested using standardized tests across the TDSB in situations where academic achievement is a criterion for admission. There was also no clear consensus on the use of a lottery for admissions among any group. Some note that a “Lottery-only” system is a barrier to potentially suitable candidates according to aptitude and program interest while others see it as a step towards equity. However, if a lottery is to be used, respondents agreed that it should be a transparent process.

*Making sure the chosen students are completely random, so no discrimination – Grade 7 student, plans to attend high school outside their neighbourhood-*

*Some people love something but have no experience so if they love art but have never really had a chance to do it, that should be enough.– Teacher, Arts Focused Elementary School-*

*All barriers should be removed from the process. This includes testing, report cards, and fees. The application should just be an interest to go. – Principal, local school-*

But at the same time, others defend the need for some sort of evaluation process:

*you should remove the lottery system because it makes it unfair for students who worked really hard on an application – Grade 8 student, plans to attend high school outside their neighbourhood-*

*For specialized academic and arts programs I would think it is essential that auditions, portfolios and examinations continue. To admit students who are not prepared for a given program's demands is unfair to all, including the student. These specialized programs are designed for students who excel in a particular area. I am not sure how this would be demonstrated to a selection committee if there are not auditions, exams, report card submissions, etc. – Current Parent, STEM Program-*

*Taking away auditions or interviews would not work for these programs and would be unfair to teachers and students. I think that for the most part auditions are very welcoming, and very rarely the traditional ‘stand alone and sing’ format. We do a lot of interviews as part of our audition process, and it allows us to really get to know each individual student, and allow for any accommodations, without stigmatizing the students.– Teacher, Arts Focused Secondary School-*

Many acknowledge that change must happen, but there are few concrete suggestions about how to move forward. Some respondents presented inventive suggestions using quotas, tiered-ability testing policies, or a combination of admissions criteria and lottery systems. One

principal offered that perhaps a learning component could be included in interviews/auditions to better evaluate a student's potential rather than training.

*If the application process includes a test I think TDSB should make 2 different tests. One for students who have less education and one for students who have all years/hours of education– Grade 7 student, plans to attend high school outside their neighbourhood-*

*A single set of minimum requirements should be set for each type of specialised program and then a lottery should occur for admission. Examinations should be eliminated entirely. We found zero correlation to success in the program and results on the admissions exams. Programs that cannot demonstrate that they reflect their local neighbourhoods should be reviewed with the aim of them doing so.– Teacher, STEM Program-*

Lastly, respondents questioned how this policy addresses *equity - in action* - meaning, how will this new policy ensure that culturally appropriate admissions practices are embedded into admissions criteria; ensuring the movement away from colonial Eurocentric curriculum, expectations and criteria.

### **Program, Course, and Learning Opportunities**

Parents and students were asked about what type of programming they wished to see at their local elementary and high schools. Both students and parents suggested the continuation of existing programs, especially Arts Focused Schools and Math/Science/Steam/STEM (TOPS, MaCS, MAST, SATEC), as well as leadership, IB, technology/Cyber Arts, and other TDSB programs (Special Education, Gifted, SHSM, French). Many wanted to be able to access multiple types of enrichment opportunities at their own school simultaneously<sup>1</sup>.

*Why do we have to choose? Why can't we have full schools with Tech, Cyber, Art and French?– Current Parent, French Immersion Program*

The most common suggestions from elementary (Grade 5-8) student respondents were related to coding (e.g., “Scratch and Unity please for making games,” “Python, HTML, and CSS,” “robotics and engineering,” “computer science”). While many parents and high school students

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<sup>1</sup> There are no significant distinctions between preferences for programming in the elementary compared to the secondary panel, with the exception of some offerings only available for certain grade ranges (e.g., TOPS, MaCS, MAST, SATEC for high school students).

also suggested coding, cyber security, robotics, and computer science, it was a stand-out favourite for elementary students.

*I wish TDSB would extend the great work they do with the specialized high school programs. More locations are needed for STEM and ARTS focused, high quality secondary school programs.– Current Parent, STEM Program-*

Both parents and high school students recommended a greater emphasis on marginalized voices and histories, and an emphasis on Indigenous and Black-centred education. Similarly, many called for more social justice (including human rights) and climate justice education. Suggestions also underscored the need to include marginalized epistemologies, arts, and histories in the mainstream education system or in other specialized programs (e.g., including African drumming in arts programs or Indigenous epistemologies in Science). Parents and secondary students also suggested that programs should be responsive to local needs and should be developed in consultation with the community the schools serve, directly.

*Be mindful of marginalized communities and having programs that will be useful for those communities. Humanities based programs are nonexistent but would be incredibly popular amongst POC if they did exist. I would much rather learn about black and indigenous history than learn about only the world wars every year. – Grade 12 student, IB Program-*

Beyond Specialized Schools and Programs and emphasizing non-Eurocentric histories, parents and students want more extracurricular activities, clubs, sports, competitions, and experiential learning opportunities. Respondents also mentioned wanting more homework help/tutoring programs, special education services including Autism Spectrum Disorder interventions and programs, and before and after school programs.

Finally, many students and parents requested specific types of courses and hands-on learning opportunities. These included:

- Outdoor education, gardening and environmental stewardship
- Coding, robotics, and cyber security (particularly among elementary students, as mentioned above)
- Business development, entrepreneurship, marketing, financial literacy

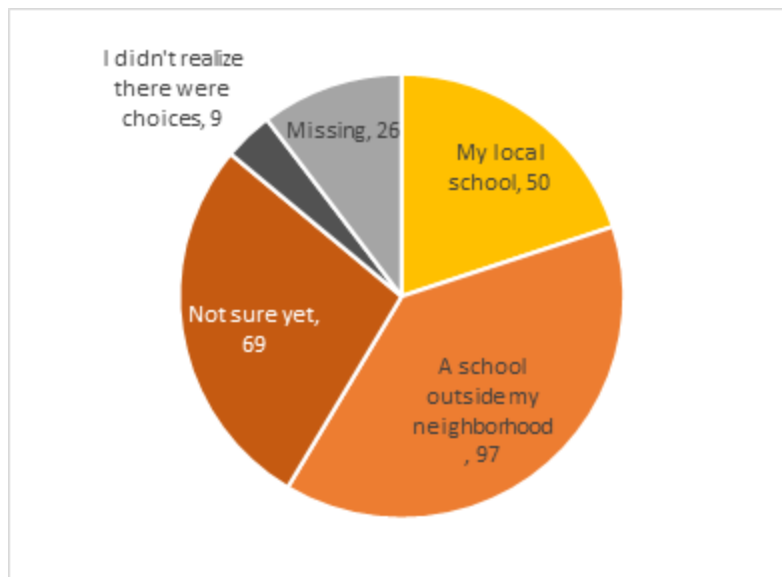
- Baking, cooking, home economics
- Pottery, woodworking, knitting, and other crafting activities (popular particularly among elementary students)

Generally, many families and students were grateful for the enrichment opportunities offered by the Specialized Schools and Programs and wanted to see more programs available in their local schools.

### Thinking to the Future

Elementary respondents reported their high school attendance plans. A slight minority (43%) say they will be attending a school outside their neighbourhood, compared to 22% who plan to attend their local high school (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Where elementary respondents want to go to high school (elementary students only)



There was not a substantial difference in the recommendations of elementary students who planned to attend local high school versus high schools outside the neighbourhood or in secondary students at specialized versus local schools. Elementary students planning on leaving their neighbourhood were more likely to suggest language learning opportunities (e.g., French, ASL, Spanish), while those who want to remain local skewed somewhat towards hands-on

programs (e.g., woodworking, baking). Secondary students in Specialized Schools/Programs tended to recommend continued expansion of programs. Regardless of pathways, students want STEM, arts, and advanced academic opportunities.

## Considerations

The following discussion highlighted the great diversity of opinion and contentious nature of the role of Specialized Programs and Schools within the TDSB - a school board that provides learning opportunities for nearly one quarter of a million Toronto residents. While many educators and community members were concerned with equity of opportunity and the degrees to which these programs offer enriched learning for a small number of the overall TDSB secondary student population; others expressed concern about the present nature of learning in Specialized Schools and Programs and the degrees to which attending to a broader population of students might negatively impact the specialisation of these schools and programs.

Given the relatively small numbers of students who attend Specialized Schools and Programs, as well as the difficulty in accessing these opportunities, work moving forward seems to need to address both opportunity of access as well as breadth of learning for all regardless of where that learning occurs in the TDSB.

PHASE 2 RESPONDENT DETAILS

Figure 1: Survey respondents by group

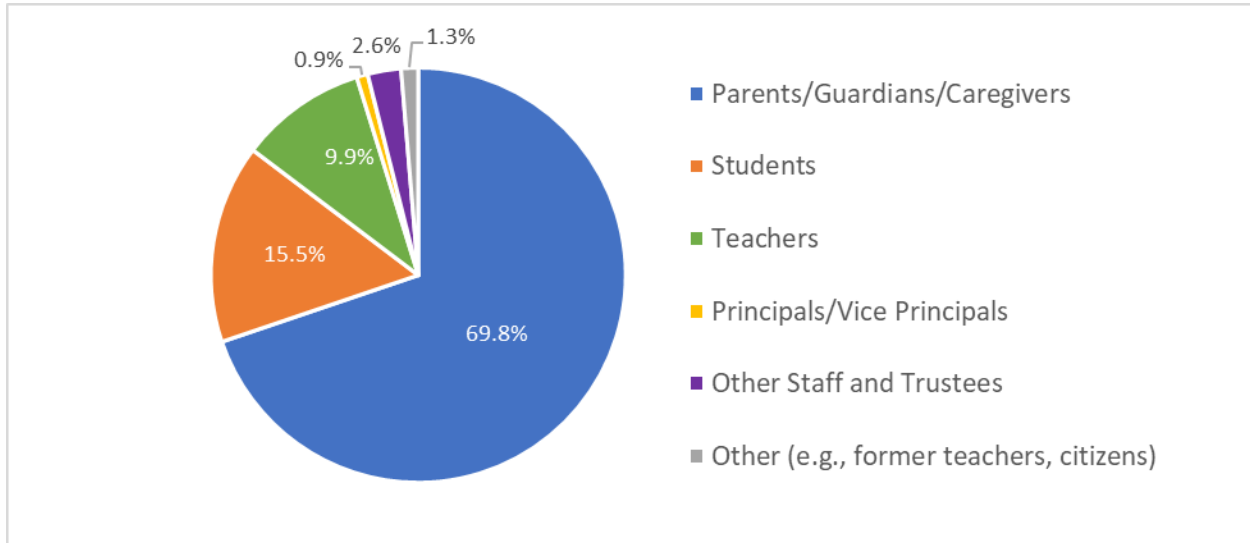


Figure 2: Grade level of child(ren) to parent respondents (current parents only, multiple answers per respondent)

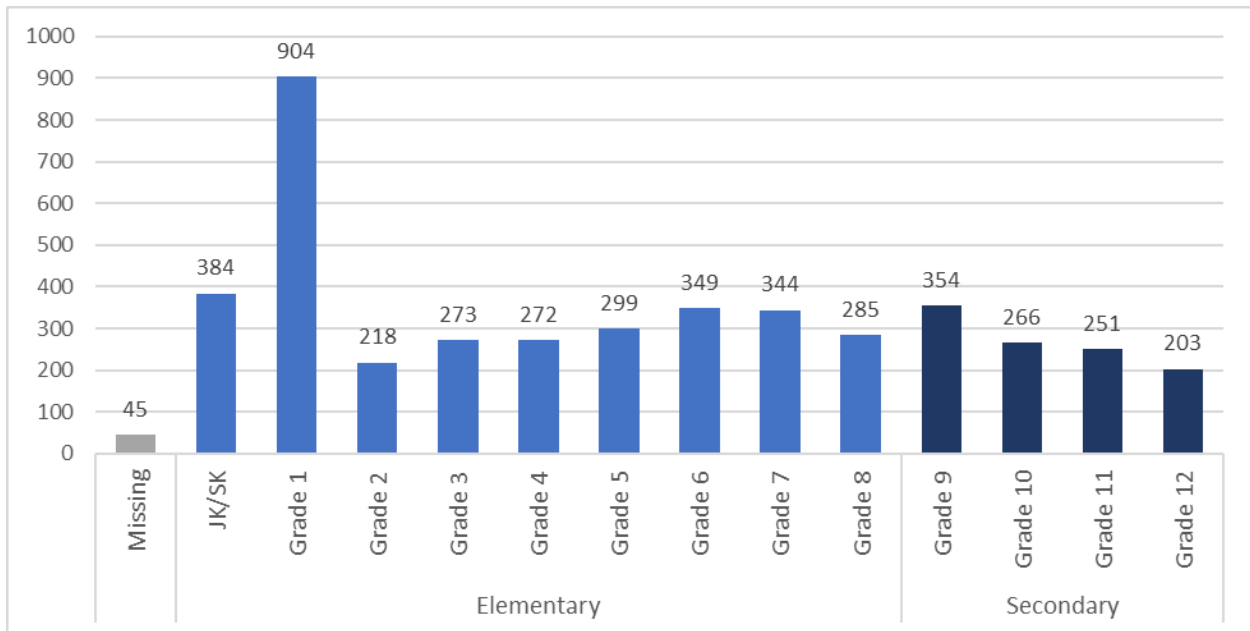
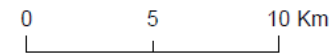
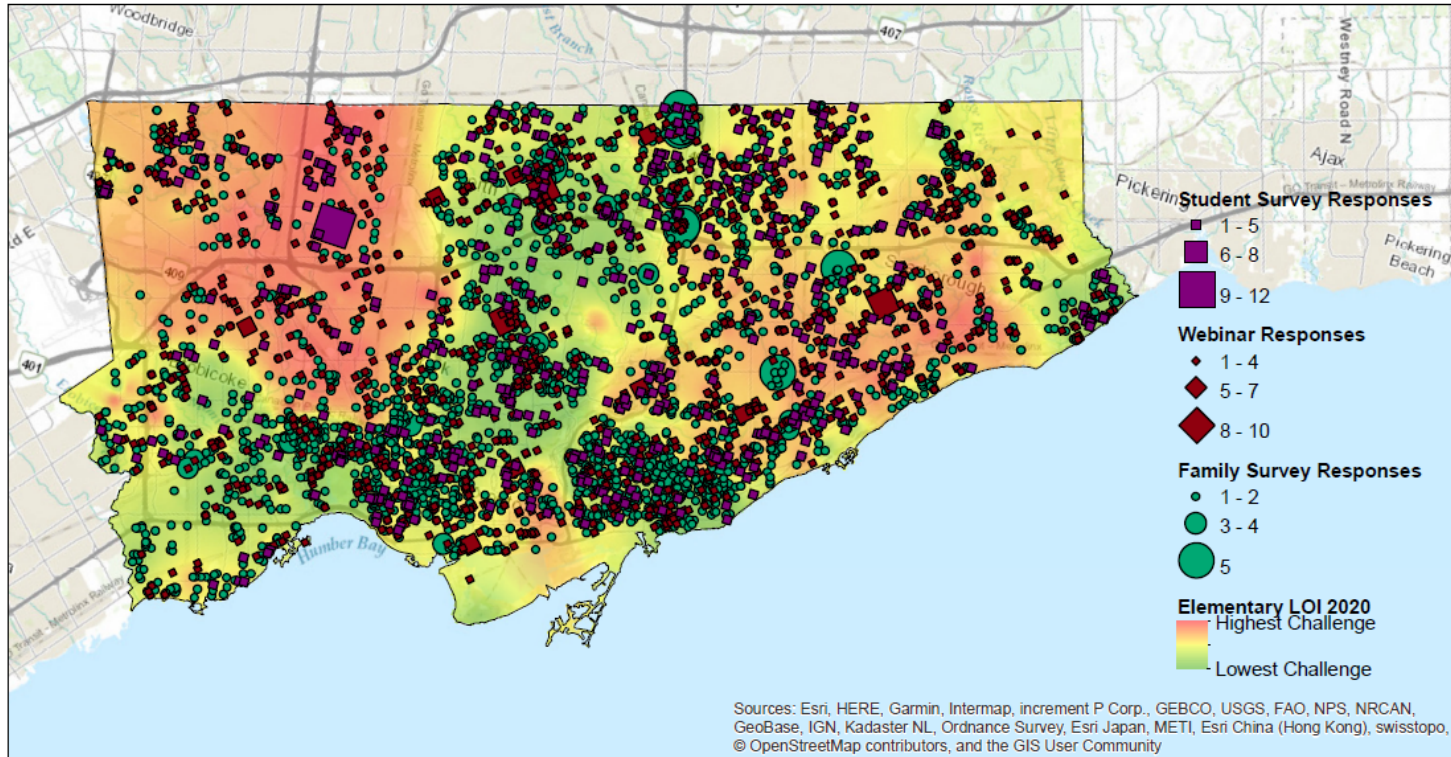


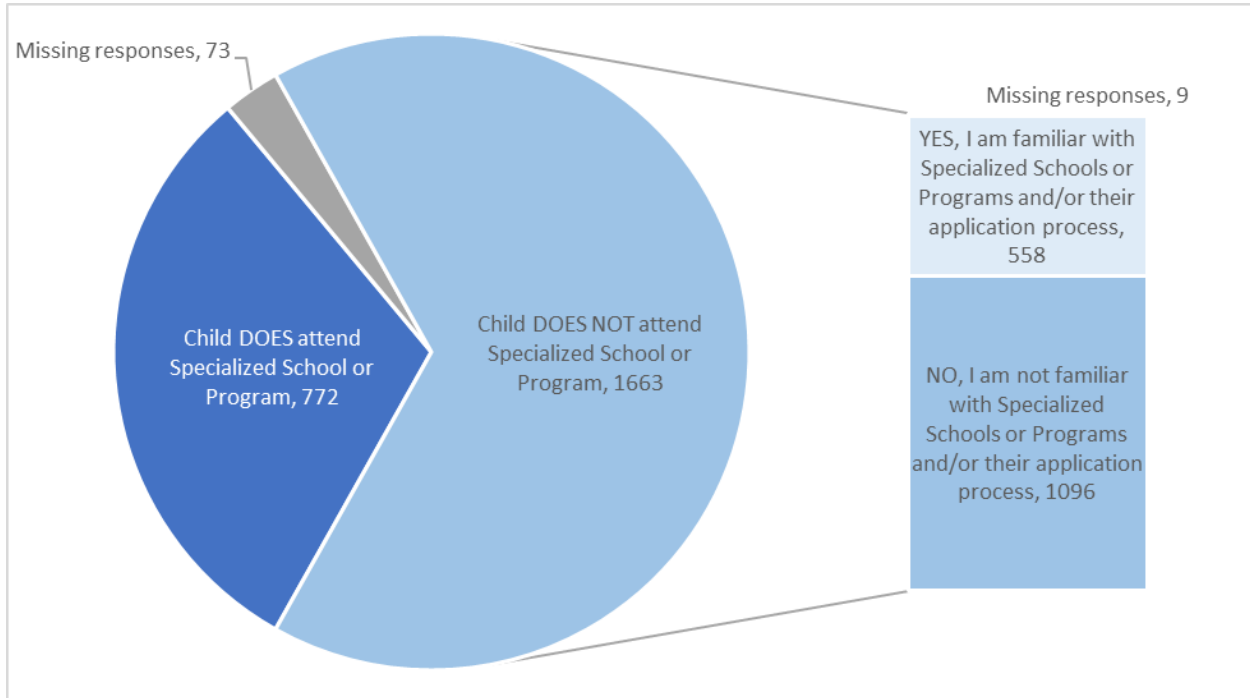
Figure 3: Postal Code of Respondents



### Specialized Schools and Programming - Survey and Consultation Responses



**Figure 4: Parents with child(ren) in Specialized School/Program or familiar with Specialized Schools/Programs (current parents only)**



**Figure 5: Focus of Specialized School/Program attended by child(ren) of parent respondents (parents with child/ren at Specialized School/Program only, multiple answers per respondent)**

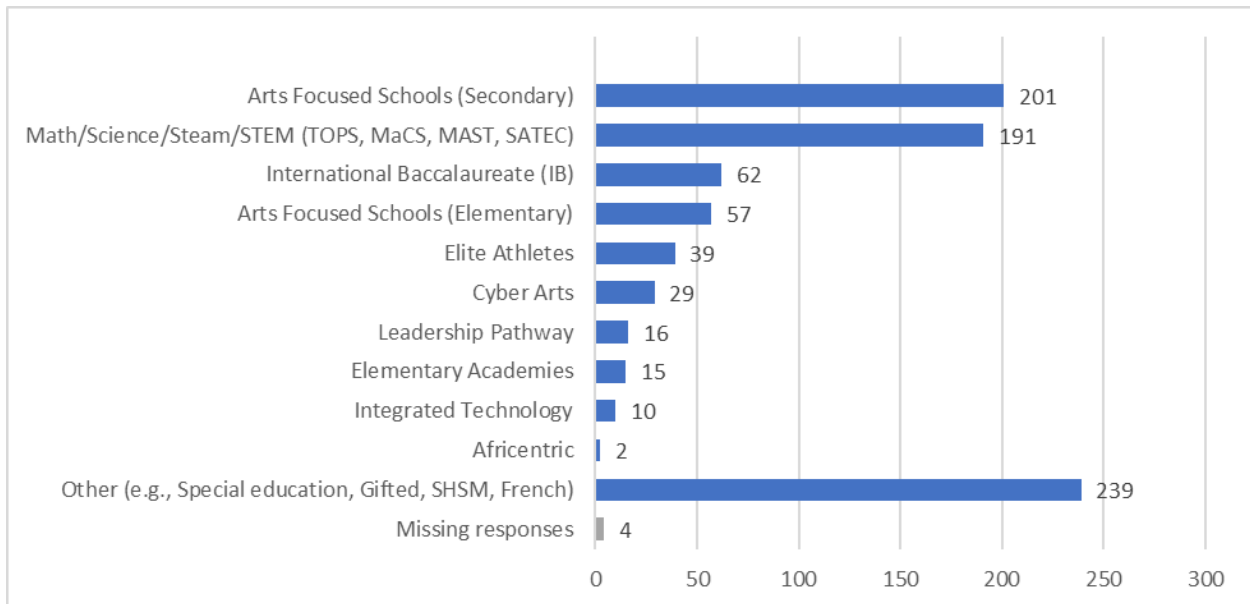




Figure 6: Student responses by grade

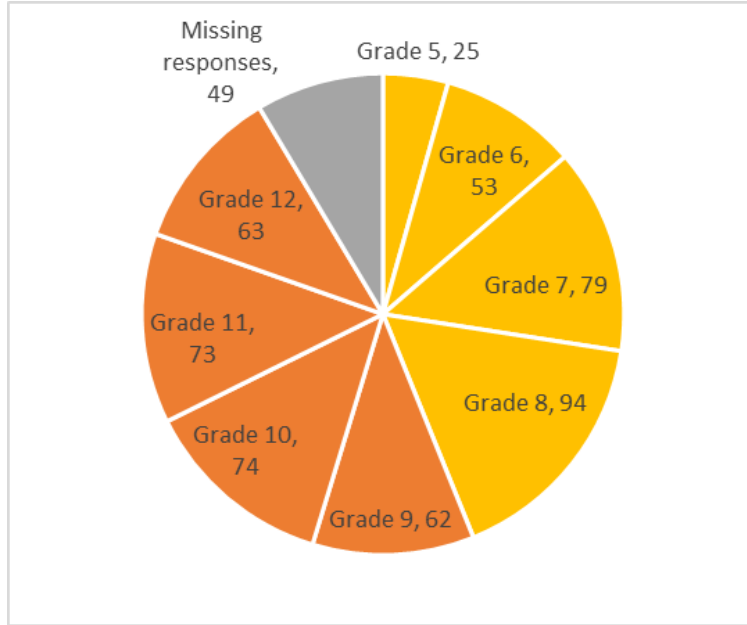
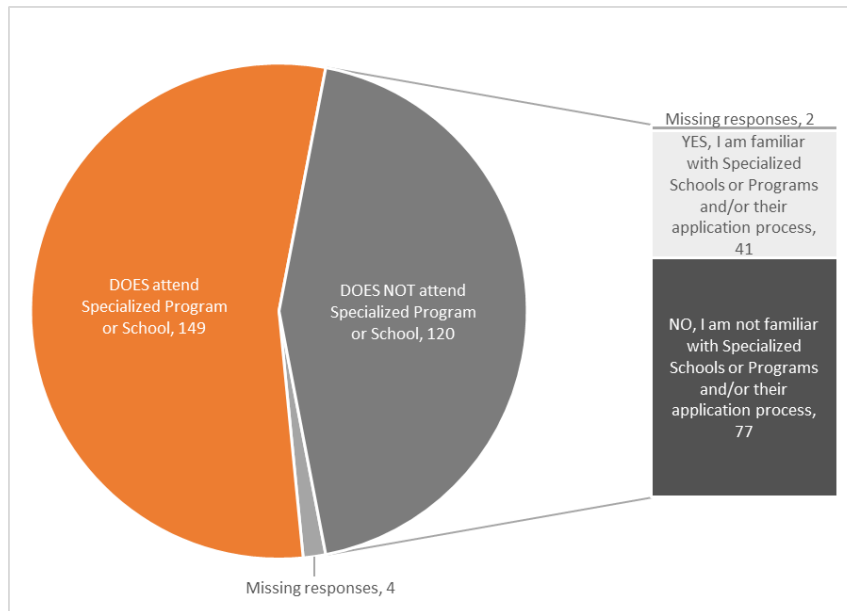
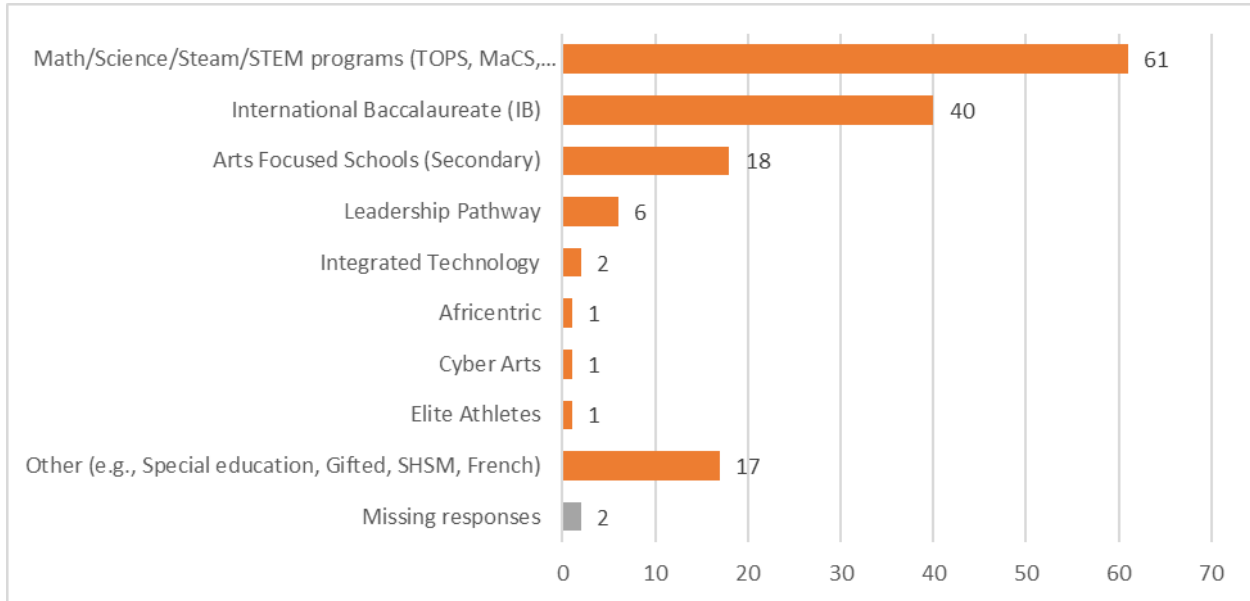


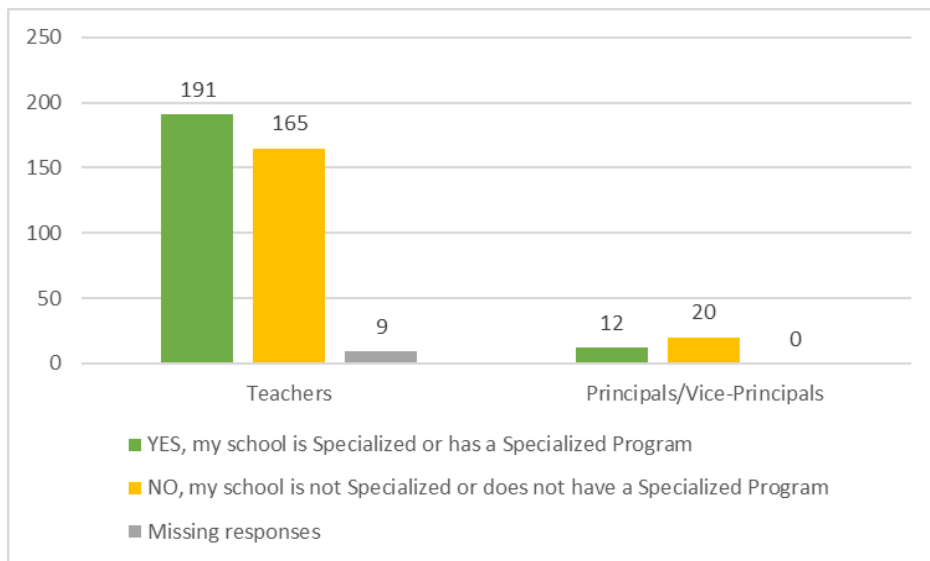
Figure 7: Students attending or familiar with Specialized Schools/Programs (secondary students only)



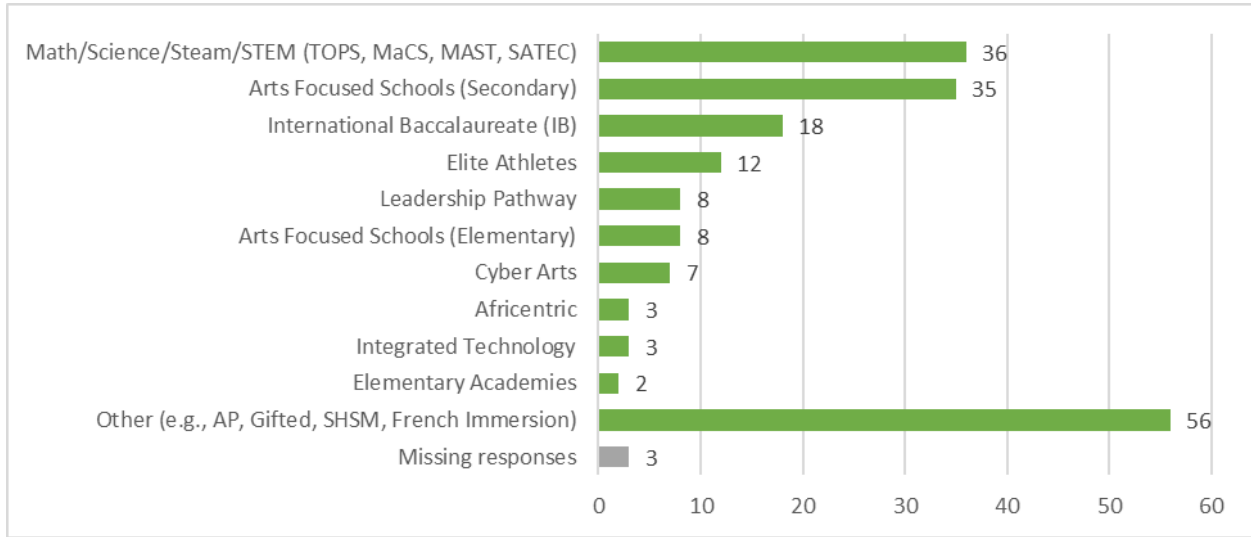
**Figure 8: Focus of student respondents' Specialized Program or School (those in Specialized Program/School only)**



**Figure 9: Teacher and principal/vice-principal respondents who work at/in a Specialized School/Program**



**Figure 10: Focus of teacher respondents' Specialized Program or School (teachers at Specialized School/Program only)**



## FURTHER ENGAGEMENT DETAILS

### Public Consultation Sessions

The three public webinars included an overview presentation about the Secondary Program Review, Specialized Schools and Programs at the TDSB, draft policy content, and a panel discussion with questions generated from participants. Translators were made available upon request.

Questions that were not answered during the webinar conversations were posted with answers on the [TDSB's Specialized Schools and Program website](#).

The presentation and recording from the first webinar can also be viewed online. [Link to view presentation and recording](#). Note, all webinars used the same presentation format.

### Online Survey

An online survey was developed which asked stakeholder groups to comment on elementary and secondary programming needs, communication needs for families, barriers to access and admissions in specialized schools and programs, and feedback on the consideration for local versus Board-wide specialized programs<sup>2</sup>. The survey was voluntary, and responses were anonymous. The survey was made available in 18 languages. Although the survey was online, school Principals were also provided with paper copies in case families requested hard copies.

Please see Appendix B for the list of survey questions.

Information inviting participation to the webinars and survey was distributed via Trustees Weekly, System Leaders Weekly, Direct Line, TDSB Connects (Parents and Staff), direct email, TDSBHub, and social media avenues. Schools were encouraged to put information in their

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<sup>2</sup> a) Local Specialized Program refers to a program within a school with a specific focus (e.g., the arts, athletics, skilled trades) that is available to students registered at that school. b) District-wide Specialized School/Program refers to a school/program with a specific focus (e.g., the arts, athletics, skilled trades, etc.) that is available to students from across the district.

school newsletters. Community Support Workers supported system efforts in engaging harder to reach communities.

### **Email Feedback**

Stakeholders were encouraged to contact [secondaryreview@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:secondaryreview@tdsb.on.ca) if they had comments, concerns, feedback, etc. All emails were read and feedback taken into consideration.

## Consultation Online Survey Questions

### For All Respondents

I will be completing this survey as: *[Current Parent/Caregiver/Guardian, Future Parent/Caregiver/Guardian, Student, Trustee, Superintendent, Central Administration, Professional Support Services, and Support Staff, Principal/Vice Principal, Teacher, School Support Staff, Other]*

### For TDSB Staff

Does your school have a specialized program? Or Is your school a specialized school?

Please indicate the focus of the specialized program or school you work at?

The TDSB is reviewing admission practices in all secondary schools and programs to ensure that the design, criteria and admission practices of Specialized Schools and Programs do not limit access of any individual or group.

What should we consider when building admission processes and criteria for **Local Specialized Programs**. / What should we consider when building admission processes and criteria for **Board-Wide Specialized Schools and Programs**.

Through TDSB program data, consultation with TDSB's Community Advisory Committees, stories from students and families, and researching best practice, barriers of access to TDSB's Specialized Schools and Programs have been identified. We have removed the following practices:

- Requesting reference letters from TDSB staff
- Denying IEP accommodations on entrance exams

We are currently reviewing the following:

- Difficult to navigate school and program websites
- Unclear application requirements and selection criteria for programs
- The submission of grade 7 and 8 report cards
- The charging of application fees
- Application requirements that advantage some students over others (auditions, examinations etc.)

Please use this space provided to include any feedback on the barriers of access that still exist and should be addressed.

Please use this space to provide any additional feedback, comments, or questions in relation to the Specialized Schools and Programs Policy.

## For Parents

What grade(s) does your child(ren) currently attend?

What is your postal code? This information will show us if families from all over the TDSB participated.

Do you have a child(ren) attending a Specialized School or Program?

If yes, please indicate the focus of the Specialized School or Program your child(ren) attends.

If no, are you familiar with TDSB's Specialized Schools and Programs and/or their application process?

What type of programming do you wish to see at your local elementary school?

What type of programming do you wish to see at your local secondary school?

The TDSB uses a wide variety of ways of communicating with students, families and the community about School choice, options and pathways. Which communication tools are most useful to you and your family?

The TDSB is reviewing admission practices in all secondary schools and programs to ensure that the design, criteria and admission practices of Specialized Schools and Programs do not limit access of any individual or group.

What should we consider when building admission processes and criteria for **Local Specialized Programs**. / What should we consider when building admission processes and criteria for **Board-Wide Specialized Schools and Programs**.

Through TDSB program data, consultation with TDSB's Community Advisory Committees, stories from students and families, and researching best practice, barriers of access to TDSB's Specialized Schools and Programs have been identified. We have removed the following practices:

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- Application requirements that advantage some students over others (auditions, examinations etc.)

Please use this space provided to include any feedback on the barriers of access that still exist and should be addressed.

Please use this space to provide any additional feedback, comments, or questions in relation to the Specialized Schools and Programs Policy.

### **For Students:**

What is your postal code? This information will show us if students from all over the TDSB participated.

What grade are you in?

Do you attend a specialized program or school?

If yes, please indicate the focus of the specialized program or school you attend?

If no, are you familiar with TDSB's Specialized Schools and Programs and/or their application process?

What type of programming do you wish to see at your local elementary school?

What type of programming do you wish to see at your local high school?

Do you know where you want to go to high school? (grades 5 to 8 students)

The TDSB is changing the application process for Specialized Schools and Programs. How do you think we can make this process fair for all students? (grades 5 to 8 students)

The TDSB uses a wide variety of ways of communicating with students, families and the community about School choice, options and pathways. Which communication tools are most useful to you and your family? (grades 9 to 12 students)

Please provide feedback on how to improve our communication with you about school choice, options and pathways. (grades 9 to 12 students)

The TDSB is reviewing admission practices in all secondary schools and programs to ensure that the design, criteria and admission practices of Specialized Schools and Programs do not limit access of any individual or group.

What should we consider when building admission processes and criteria for **Local Specialized Programs**. / What should we consider when building admission processes and criteria for **Board-Wide Specialized Schools and Programs**. (grades 9 to 12 students)

Through TDSB program data, consultation with TDSB's Community Advisory Committees, stories from students and families, and researching best practice, barriers of access to TDSB's Specialized Schools and Programs have been identified. We have removed the following practices:

- Requesting reference letters from TDSB staff
- Denying IEP accommodations on entrance exams

We are currently reviewing the following:

- Difficult to navigate school and program websites
- Unclear application requirements and selection criteria for programs
- The submission of grade 7 and 8 report cards
- The charging of application fees
- Application requirements that advantage some students over others (auditions, examinations etc.)

Please use this space provided to include any feedback on the barriers of access that still exist and should be addressed. (grades 9 to 12 students)

Please use this space to provide any additional feedback, comments, or questions in relation to the Specialized Schools and Programs Policy.