Toronto
District
School
Board

COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery Plan
Update: October 2022

The Toronto District School Board's COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery Plan is a three phase plan that identifies which groups have been most impacted, interventions put in place, and initial outcomes. The plan included a commitment to report back in 2021-22 and 2022-23 and the first update report was completed in March 2022. This document, *Pandemic Recovery Plan Update: October 2022*, is the first report back to the Planning and Priorities Committee for the 2022-23 school year. The final update will be shared in Spring 2023.
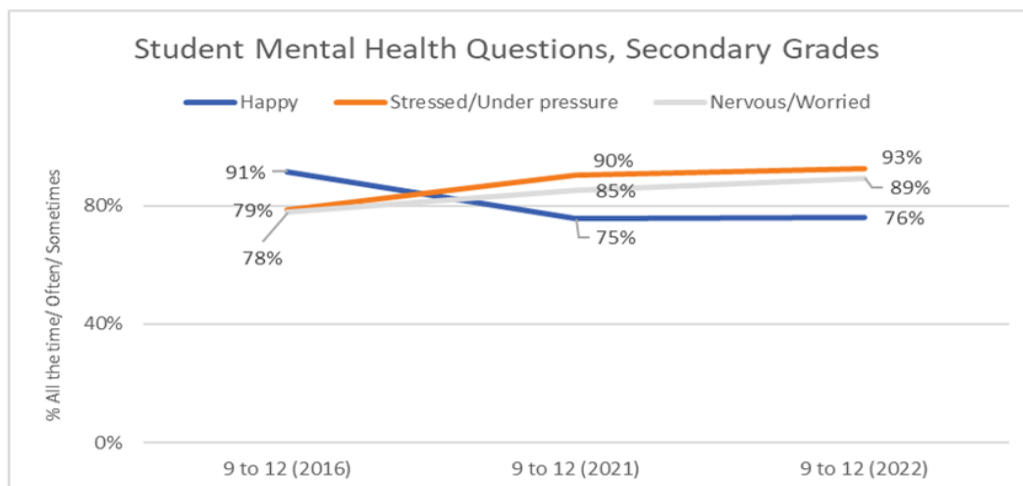
As we continue to move forward from the pandemic and the disruptions of the past few years, this report speaks to the ongoing, critical work underway across the TDSB. As a system, our work is centred around two overarching priorities: developing a sense of joy, engagement and belonging in every student and eliminating disproportionate outcomes for students. To do so, our own system data tells us that we must focus on the following:

- Student Mental Health and Well-Being
- Early Reading Enjoyment and Fluency
- STEM Achievement Trajectories from Grade 4 to Grade 9
- Pathways to Post Secondary Education
- Learning Recovery

Student Mental Health & Well-Being

Student Mental Health and Well-being

"I hated online learning in fact it destroyed my mental health. The pandemic destroyed my social life and it made me super depressed."- Grade 12 Student

Student Mental Health Questions, Secondary Grades

Happy — Stressed/Under pressure — Nervous/Worried

- 91% / 90% / 93%
- 79% / 85% / 89%
- 78% / 75% / 76%

9 to 12 (2016) — 9 to 12 (2021) — 9 to 12 (2022)

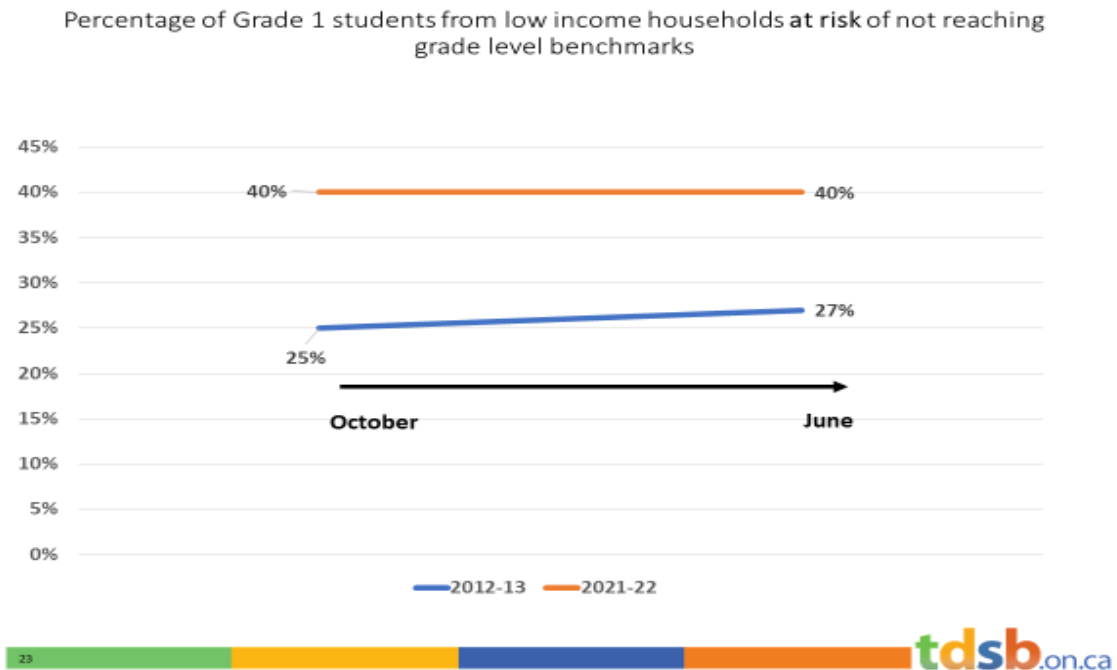% All the time/ Often/ Sometimes

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Building and sustaining mentally healthy school climates is central for the inclusion, belonging and mattering of all students. Enhancing joy within school communities is accomplished through relationship and trust building and intentionality, on the part of staff, in co-creating school climates that honour and reflect student identities. In comparison to our mental health and well being data in 2016, students report a decline in feelings of happiness especially throughout the pandemic. Additionally, they report increases in feeling of nervousness, worries, stress and pressure during this time period. To increase student wellness, mental health and well being need to be connected to knowledge from within school communities to create more equitable, caring and engaging spaces for all students. With such connections, learning, academic achievement and overall student success is strengthened which reduces stress, worries, nervousness and increases feelings of joy and belonging.

Focusing on early reading enjoyment and fluency, STEM achievement, pathways to post-secondary education and learning recovery will be greatly supported by centering daily mental wellness in school spaces. Creating conditions for positive mental health includes recognizing and nurturing the brilliance and self-love of students, families and communities. School staff co-creating mentally healthy school spaces with students requires centering mental health in equity. By centering equity, we learn the ongoing impacts of harm, racism and oppression on the mental health and well being of students. This allows understanding of how trauma and various oppressions can continue to impact student wellness and school engagement. Unfinished learning can induce anxiety and stress for students as well as for parents/guardians. Having access to various mental health and well being resources for students, staff and parents/guardians can support positive coping and stress management skills. Acknowledging the assets and the growth students have experienced throughout the pandemic will support success in unfinished learning. From a mental health and asset-based foundation, students will strengthen their confidence and esteem as they continue within their schooling journeys. Promoting school spaces that centres student voice and prioritises mental health and well-being helps to build circles of care for students and provide positive coping and stress management skills All of which supports a movement towards the elimination of disproportionate outcomes for students.

Prioritizing and supporting mental health and well-being in schools has been ongoing throughout the pandemic. Professional Support Services (PSS) Departments, such as Social Work, Child and Youth Services, Occupational/Physical Therapy, Speech-Language Pathology and Psychology staff continue to provide culturally responsive supports (brief counselling, conflict resolution, transitional supports, school consultations, community bridging, crisis supports, assessments and transformative socio-emotional learning. etc.) to students, staff, parents/guardians by centring equity, student/parent/guardian identities and voice, providing support to students with special education/complex needs and honouring lived experiences. In collaboration with school staff, PSS staff will continue to centre mental health and well being to support ongoing student achievement and success with unfinished learning.

View Appendix A to learn more about culturally responsive resources that support the creation of mentally healthy school spaces.

3

Early Reading Enjoyment and Fluency

Percentage of Grade 1 students from low income households **at risk** of not reaching grade level benchmarks

Reading fluency and early reading behaviours are critical to student success throughout a student's learning experience with the TDSB and in life. System data on reading fluency comparing pre-pandemic Grade 1 students from 2012-13 to last year (2021-22) show:

- Lower percentage change or movement towards reaching - 'at or above' -grade level benchmarks for all Grade 1 students.
- Disproportionate numbers of students in the pre-pandemic year who start closer to grade level reading benchmarks in reading as well as achieving grade level reading benchmarks in June compared to the 2021-22 school year.

As previously reported, diverse data across TDSB show that the environmental stress of learning in a pandemic for students has amplified learning impacts in the classroom in many ways. Our youngest learners have experienced their earliest formal schooling through a pandemic, which caused disruptions in student early learning, including reading development. However, it is imperative to also acknowledge the strengths and skills gained, both by young learners and early years educators. Whether virtual or in-person, early years educators worked diligently to emulate the integrity of the pedagogical approaches and learning conditions that all early learners require to learn and grow, despite the challenges presented. It is paramount to centre the Pandemic Recovery Plan and School Improvement Process at the core of continuous reflection, growth and improvement.

Students' use of their oral language to demonstrate their learning is key to the work involved in early reading enjoyment and fluency. It is important to acknowledge that oral language development in the target language is at the core of reading development in the Early French Immersion program. Therefore, intentional communication and oral language (and consistent exposure to the target language) introduce the child to rich and varied social interactions and experiences which in turn continue to shape and develop the child's oral language skills throughout his or

her life and support all learning. The continued growth and development of spoken language in the early years is key to the development of knowledge, symbolic thought, self-regulation, cultural identity, literacy, self-advocacy, life-long-learning, and reflection. Understanding the scope and sequence of oral language development and the intentional teaching of this becomes the foundation for early literacy development and reading fluency. It is this oral language strength that has been determined in early literacy data that educators must leverage, continue to develop, and build upon to help launch all students into reading and writing.

In addition, as reported in previous Pandemic Recovery Reports, the disruption to learning in reading fluency in the early years also allowed for some positive learning experiences to occur for many Black early years students. Parents of Black students indicated they appreciated access to the learning that was occurring online as it allowed for a more cohesive experience between home and school for their children. Equally, access to the books that their children connected most closely to in the home was referenced as positive in reading engagement and development for their children. Families felt that they had better access to the learning and were able to extend the learning at home through culturally relevant resources.

Enjoyment is an essential element for actively engaging children in the reading process. As children engage in reading experiences, they should feel a sense of joy and excitement. Visit Appendix A to learn more about how enjoyment is created in the reading process.

Fluency: The ability to read words accurately, quickly and with appropriate expression. Fluency develops through *accurate decoding* of words and repeated and *frequent reading practice* of varied texts. As word reading (decoding) becomes automatic, reading fluency develops. Visit Appendix A to read more about the actions taken to date.

STEM Achievement Trajectories from Grade 4 to Grade 9

Percentage of students from Grade 3 to Grade 9 achieving at or above a B - in Science by race
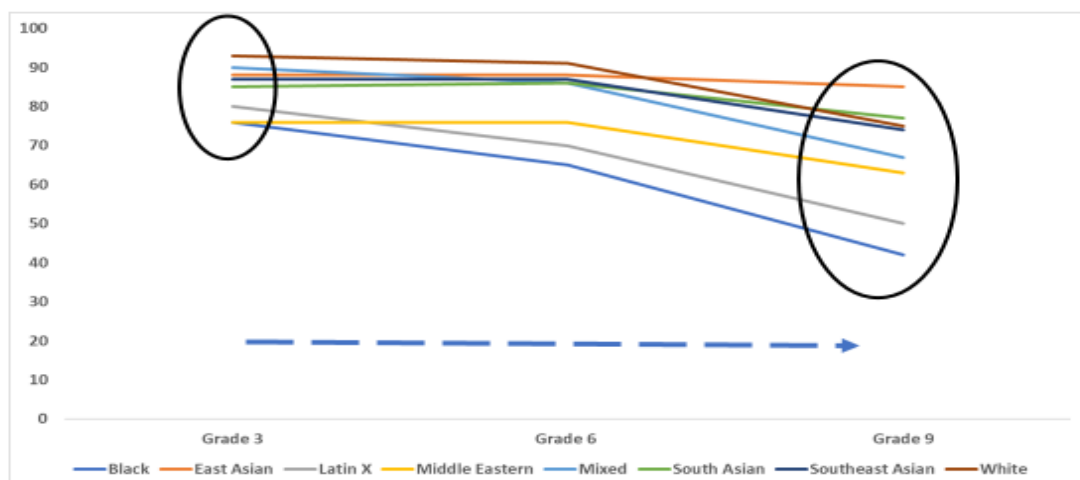
Purpose and Focus of STEM Education

Trajectory report card data for student achievement in mathematics and science across late elementary and early secondary school show disparities in student achievement:

- There is a significant drop in percentages of students reaching the same level of achievement in STEM subjects moving from Grade 3 through Grade 6 and entering high school.
- This discrepancy is most concerning with TDSB Black and Latina, Latino, Latin X students.
- Late elementary through to Grade 9 achievement and success in these areas of learning have a significant influence on students' access to post secondary education opportunities

STEM learning experiences for students have been taking place across the district for many years, however as of September 2022, STEM is now a required expectation of the Grades 1- 8 Science Curriculum and Grade 9 De-streamed Science Course. STEM education is the integration of subjects across Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics where students are provided opportunities to think, reason and transfer knowledge and skills from one subject area to another. As we engage in STEM learning across the district, resources have been shared to support educators and administrators in developing an understanding of STEM and how it can be implemented within their school.

As we return to hands-on, experiential learning opportunities, access to resources and experiences such as science kits, power tools training, skills competitions, digital tools and partnerships with STEM industry/sector partners will play an important role in building educator capacity.

Engaging in STEM Learning

As students engage in STEM learning experiences they develop transferable skills that will help them navigate the world of work and prepare them for jobs of the future. These skills include: critical thinking and problem solving; innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship; self-directed learning; collaboration; communication; global citizenship and sustainability; and digital literacy. Students begin to make connections to the world around them through the exploration of the "how" and "why" of concepts being presented. Participation in experiential learning/hands-on tasks, virtually or in-person, that challenge students to create, build, explore and make connections to the environment and nature, the arts and humanities, technology and skilled trades, and science and mathematics supports students to explore and enhance their understanding of the many ways to know and understand the world. Digital Tools and resources continue to support STEM learning experiences for students and provide opportunities to engage in real-world learning.

In order to reduce disproportionate outcomes for Black and Latinx students, as highlighted in the data above, and maintain high levels of STEM achievement reported in Grade 3 through to Grade 9 and beyond for all students, we must continue to create opportunities and foster engagement in STEM skills, which are the gateway to a multitude of career paths. Providing students with mentors who represent their identities and provide experiences that are identity affirming and support developing strong transferable skills is critical to students' post secondary opportunity and life chances moving into high school and proceeding out to their

post-secondary experiences. These areas of STEM learning require special attention in relation to securing interest and academic success in late elementary and transitions into high school.

Learner-centred experiences that are grounded in high expectations, nurture natural curiosity, and include relatable and representative role models through industry and educational partners are necessary to sustain enjoyment and excitement for STEM learning as students transition from elementary to secondary school. Connecting with nature through outdoor learning and engaging through art experiences provides students with an opportunity to engage in inquiry and experimentation while keeping joy, belonging and engagement within the learning experience.

Collaborating across departments (e.g., Science, Math, Technological Education, Experiential Learning, Global Competencies, Computer Studies and the Arts), central teams provide STEM support and resources to schools to ensure all students, in particular those who have been historically marginalized from STEM programming and careers, receive a rigorous and engaging learning experience.
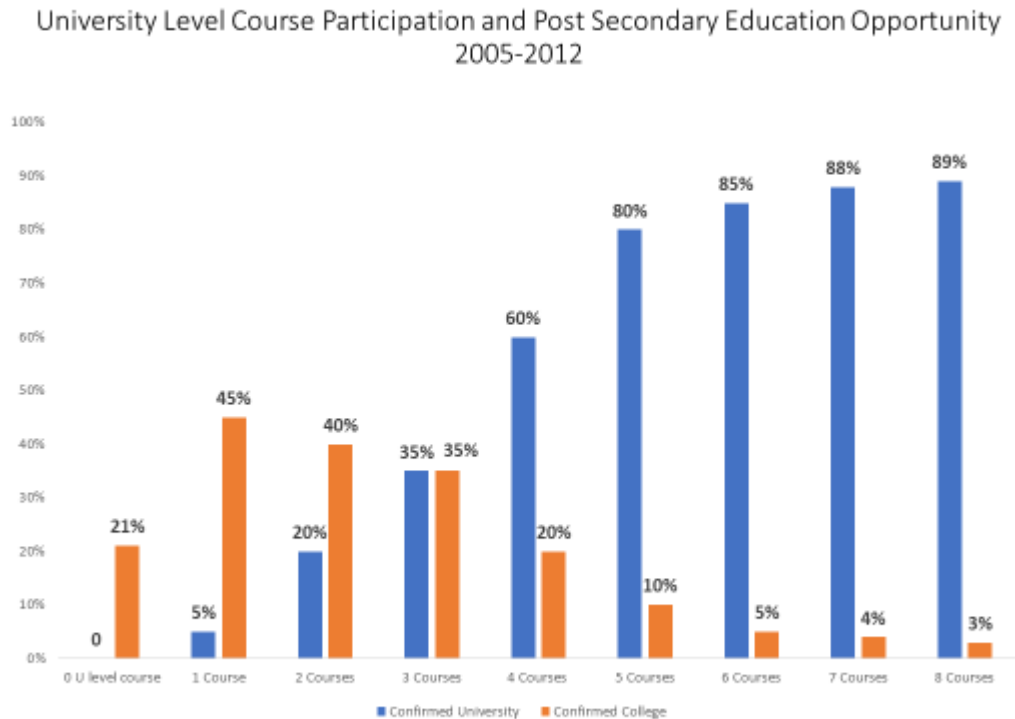
Visit Appendix A to read more about the actions taken to date.

Pathways to Post Secondary Education

Grade 9 Academic Performance
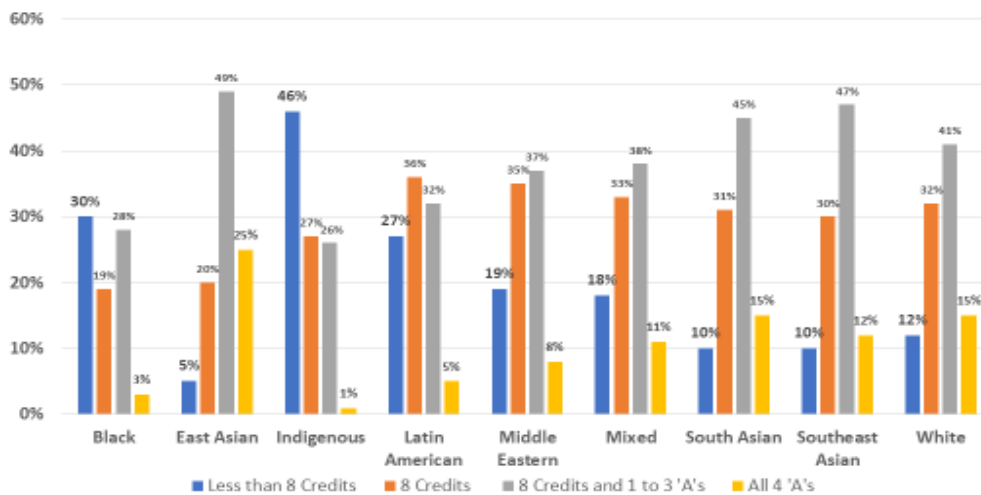
.Connections between University Level Course Participation and Post-Secondary Education

University Level Course Participation and Post Secondary Education Opportunity 2005-2012

The data shown above indicates a number of key areas of concern in relation to students' pathways to post secondary education opportunities:

● Achievement beyond receiving a passing credit in the Academic Program of Study at Grade 9 has a significant co-relationship with participating in University Level Courses, which in turn is associated with confirmation of both college and/or university attendance.
● Achievement varies considerably when broken down by various demographic factors of students. As an example, Black, Indigenous, and Latina, Latino, Latin X students have disproportionately lower representation in higher levels of Grade 9 achievement regardless of course type. This in turn leads to disproportionately lower representation of these groups of students in University Level course participation, and subsequent opportunities in post secondary education.
● While representing only a small population of secondary school students, learning opportunities within centralised secondary school programming are disproportionately represented by various demographic groups depending on type of program.

Since 2014, the Toronto District School Board has been dismantling the institutional process of streaming from kindergarten to Grade 12. Shifting special education programming and practices to promote greater inclusion and including all students in Grades 9 and 10 to Academic and destreamed programming are significant

structural changes that must be complemented with inclusive pedagogy. The document, Expected Practices - Academic Pathways, is being developed to provide guidance for effective and engaging practices in the classroom and school as a whole. These comprehensive guidelines will lead to students having more opportunities to choose from upon graduation. For some students this will mean opportunities that will lead to generational change.

Through a variety of strategies used in classroom and school environments the priorities of the board can be achieved. We recognize the importance of the feelings of connectedness that students have with their school as it gives a sense of belonging. Building relationships with students, affirming student identities through curriculum delivery and the use of these strategies will lead to engagement, belonging and joy. The goal of academic programming is to reduce disproportionate outcomes for students in all grades so that all students will have a full range of post secondary educational opportunities based on their interests and goals. The board focuses on engaging student voice and family choice in programming and placement. This has led to an increase in student environment in their homeschool and to support their choice in pursuing university courses in grade 11 and 12.

Visit Appendix A to read more about the actions taken to date and next steps.

Learning Recovery

Throughout the pandemic, much has been written internationally about the skills that students may not have developed because of disruptions during the pandemic and this has been referred to as learning loss, learning recovery or sometimes unfinished learning.

Unfinished learning refers to concepts or skills in any subject that students were in the process of learning but were unable to master, or never had the opportunity to learn due to disruptions in their learning. Compared to learning loss, unfinished learning takes a growth mindset approach which sends a positive message to students and families because it states that while student learning is incomplete, it will continue if it hasn't already. In other words, the process of learning and mastering new concepts is a continual process throughout education opportunities.

As a system, we are focussed on reducing disproportionate outcomes and increasing joy, engagement and belonging within the classroom and across the school. Unfinished learning offers the opportunity to build upon gains the student has made and accelerate learning. Centering this growth mindset approach means moving away from the idea of remediation to one of acceleration. Students prior knowledge is reactivated and upgraded in the context of the students current grade level learning. This approach centres student's positive self identity, inclusion, mental health and well being within the context of high expectations. Responding to unfinished learning begins prior to the start of the school year as schools and students prepare to transition back to a new grade, division or school through summer programming opportunities and experiences.

Despite the concerns expressed in the data shared throughout this report there are important signs of progress and success:

9

- TDSB is sending proportionally more students to post secondary opportunities than any other time in the past five years with 55% of all TDSB students who have 4 plus years in secondary school confirming placements in universities, colleges, and apprenticeship programs.
- This represents a 4 percentage point increase for TDSB Black students, a 7 percentage point increase for Indigenous students, and a 9 percentage point increase for Latina, Latino, and Latin X students over that period.
- Almost all, 86%, of students with 4 plus years successfully graduated high school in 2021-22, this is also the highest percentage achieved over the past five years.

Building relationships between the educator and student supports a sense of belonging in the classroom. As educators learn the identities and experiences of their students, they are better equipped to identify the learning strengths and needs of each student. In doing so, educators are able to shift the narrative of remediation to one of acceleration. Using assessment "for and as" learning to reactivate students' prior knowledge allows them to accelerate their learning as part of the renewal process in virtual and in-person classroom settings. Assessment practices must be grounded in anti-oppressive and decolonizing approaches while celebrating student identity, voice and wellbeing. Students are more engaged in learning and assessment, when they are included.

Addressing unfinished learning requires educators to balance the commitment to academic achievement and student success with an equal commitment to joy, wellbeing and engagement. To build a community of learners, students need to feel a sense of belonging. To experience success, students need support with their individual academic needs.

Tutoring allows students to continue their classroom instruction and addresses their individual academic needs, often in smaller groups. Given the unique situation of the pandemic, the Ministry offered funding for tutoring which began in Spring 2022 and is scheduled to end December 2022.

In the Spring and Summer, TDSB students had tutoring opportunities as part of the Learning Recovery Response. Some examples included:

- Continuing Education tutoring (Literacy and Math)
- Summer Camps (full day and half day)
- Summer tutoring (1-2 hours per day)
- Summer School Credit Course tutoring support
- Summer School – Elementary Program tutoring support
- Community organization tutoring programs (i.e., Beyond 3:30, YAACE, TAIBU)

This fall, students from K-12 will have continued opportunities for tutoring support (school, community and system-based) to strengthen literacy, math and foundational skills. These supports will be available in-person and virtually.

 The tutoring program delivery models at schools may include but are not limited to:

- Tutors in the classroom with the teacher present to work with a group of students
- Peer Tutoring
- Before, at lunch, or after school tutoring
- Collaboration with community organizations who have been engaged to provide tutoring programs and have signed agreements with the TDSB outside of class time
- Virtual Tutoring

Visit Appendix A to read more about the actions taken to date.