

**STAFFING GROUPS  
THOUGHT EXCHANGE:  
RESULTS SUMMARY**

**TITLE:** Staffing Groups: ThoughtExchange: Results Summary

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# INTRODUCTION

All Toronto District School Board (TDSB) staffing groups were emailed an invitation to participate in three ThoughtExchanges during the week of December 7, 2020. These exchanges asked three different questions that had been identified through consultation with Union and Federation leaders.

1. **Mental Health and Well-being:** What are some specific ways the TDSB can help to reduce stress at work and support your mental health and well-being?
2. **Health and Safety:** What can the TDSB do to help you feel safe and supported at work?
3. **System Operations:** As we continue to manage the impact of COVID-19, what are the most important things we need to do to keep everyone connected, engaged, and well supported?

This summary document presents the following information:

- Who participated?
- What did participants say?
- Staff concerns and suggestions
- Next Steps
- Appendices: Survey detailed responses

## Who Participated?

The three Exchanges had varying levels of participation, with mental health and well-being engaging the greatest number of staff. See Table 1.

Table 1: Exchange Participation Details

Exchange	Total Participants
Mental Health and Well-being	3,232
System Operations	1,477
Health and Safety	1,424

Elementary and secondary teaching roles as well as CUPE Unit C (office, clerical, tech., EAs, food services, music instructors and school support staff, etc.) had the highest participation numbers in the exchanges. However, it is important to note that these groups are the largest staffing groups within the TDSB. At an overall level, elementary and secondary teachers and Administrators are slightly over-represented in these exchanges. Participation across the grade divisions was split.

For details of the breakdown of participation by staffing group, see Table 2.

For a breakdown by grade division, see Table 3.

**Table 2: Staffing Groups' Participation by Exchange**

Staffing Group	Mental Health and Well-being	System Operations	Health and Safety
Elementary Teacher/Occasional Teacher – In Person	922	350	474
Elementary Teacher/Occasional Teacher – Virtual School	369	175	91
Principal/Vice Principal/Centrally Assigned Principal – In Person	180	134	82
Principal/Vice Principal/Centrally Assigned Principal – Virtual School	30	16	13
Secondary Teachers/Occasional Teacher – In Person	617	285	268
Secondary Teachers/Occasional Teacher – Virtual School	158	76	62
Adult Day Teachers	15	14	8
Schedule II, Levels 1 to 12	161	86	61
Senior Team	22	6	7
Unit A, OSSTF (e.g., CYWs, CYCs, SEPAs, OTs, PTs, etc.)	124	40	47
Unit B, CUPE 4400 (adult learning instructors)	32	10	8
Unit C, CUPE 4400 (e.g., office, clerical, tech., EAs, food services, music instructors and school support staff)	444	182	215
Unit D, CUPE 4400 (e.g., caretaking, warehouse, fleet drivers, etc.)	87	70	53
Unit E, (e.g., maintenance, construction, and skilled-trades)	18	10	11
Other Staff	53	23	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,232</b>	<b>1,477</b>	<b>1,424</b>

*\*Note re: in some cases, adult day teachers have been captured in secondary/occasional teachers.*

**Table 3: Grade Division Participation, By Exchange**

Grade Division	Mental Health and Well-being	System Operations	Health and Safety
JK/SK	232 (8%)	90 (7%)	104 (8%)
Grade 1 to 3	354 (12%)	149 (11%)	153 (12%)
Grade 4 to 6	290 (10%)	110 (9%)	111 (9%)
Grade 7 and 8	187 (7%)	89 (7%)	97 (8%)
Mixed Grades	221 (8%)	85 (7%)	96 (8%)
Grade 9 to 12	780 (28%)	363 (28%)	320 (26%)
Daily Occasional Teacher	49 (2%)	24 (2%)	24 (2%)
Not Applicable	721 (25%)	393 (30%)	344 (27%)

# What Did Participants Say?

Staff answered questions giving insight into their working conditions and experiences during the first part of the 2020-21 school year.

These results do not represent all TDSB staff as only approximately 10% participated in these exchanges. However, there are resounding and consistent comments from the staff that participated.

Staff are experiencing very different working environments depending on their role - staff working in-person in schools, teaching virtually, and those working remotely.

Here's what was said:

## Mental Health and Well-being

### Staff are stressed.

Staff reported feeling stressed and anxious as a result of their job. Many respondents expressed that problems at work have kept them up at night, and that they have little energy left at the end of the day. Less than three out of ten staff members noted that they can predict the amount of work to do on any given day. And finally, only a small portion of

**73%** of staff have felt burnt out and anxious as a result of their job.

staff specified that they are coping well during this time.

Generally, teaching staff and administrators had higher percentages of respondents reporting not coping well, emotionally drained, feeling anxious, staying awake at night, not having energy at the end of the day, and not being able to predict their amount of work.

Many staff had not accessed TDSB's mental health resources or did not feel they were useful.

### Staff feel underappreciated.

The stressful working experience was exacerbated by feelings of under appreciation from leadership and a lack of support from management when adapting to COVID-related changes.

When comparing staffing groups to each other, staff working in the virtual schools and staff respondents in Unit D (caretaking, warehouse, fleet staff, etc.) were less likely to feel supported by their immediate supervisor and feel their employer values their commitment and passion to their work.

### COVID has shaped a new work environment.

In the previous Staff Census and Well-being survey (2017), staff were 10% more likely to strongly agree that they have time and energy left at the end of the day; and, 20% more likely to strongly agree that their employer values their commitment and passion to their job.

## Health and Safety

### Staff do not feel safe.

Very few staff members reported feeling safe from contracting COVID-19 at their work site. Similarly, few were satisfied with the COVID-19 related procedures in place to control health and safety hazards as well as the rationale and communication processes behind these protocols. Many staff wanted more information on how these decisions were made and who was responsible. Lastly, few staff members agreed they had the equipment, tools, and training they needed to do their job well and safely.

**21%** of staff agree they feel safe from contracting COVID-19 at work.

About half of all staff respondents noted that their supervisor responds appropriately when health and safety concerns are raised.

When comparing staffing groups, elementary and secondary in-person teachers and Unit D staff (caretakers, warehouse, fleet drivers, etc.) were less satisfied with the current COVID-19 related practices and procedures in place than others. Similarly, elementary in-person teachers and Unit D staff were the least likely to agree to feeling safe from contracting COVID-19 at work.

Central/Administrative staff (e.g., Schedule II, Unit C, Principals, etc.) were more likely to agree they understood what was expected of them and that they had the equipment/tools/training they needed to do their job well and safely - when compared to in-school staff.

Conversely, most staff did feel they understood what is expected of them in maintaining a healthy and safe work environment.

### Staff are taking on more.

Staff were taking on more cleaning responsibilities – 8 out of 10 staff members reported taking on additional sanitization tasks at work. In-person elementary teachers and Unit D staff were more likely to agree that they have had to take on additional cleaning tasks.

### Staff want to continue to work remotely.

When asked *“I am satisfied with my current work arrangement (e.g., online teaching, working from home, being on site, teaching online and in-person simultaneously, etc.)”* Schedule II staff were the most positive with 94% of respondents being satisfied with their current working arrangement.

## System Operations

### Staff need resources.

Many staff expressed that they did not have the resources they need to work effectively. Seven out of ten staff reported that they could not access the necessary tools and resources for their job nor could they access adequate professional learning in a timely manner.

### Staff want more information.

Staff were not satisfied with the current flows of information and communication channels. Many staff reported that they felt senior leadership did not do a good job of sharing COVID-19 job related information nor did staff feel they were kept informed of important changes in a timely manner.

### Room for improvement in workplace culture.

Staff reported a lack of trust in the workplace. Only three out of ten staff agreed that employees and management trust each other. Similarly, few staff agreed their workplace effectively handles issues and conflicts between employees.

**66%** of staff are concerned about the continuity of leadership at the TDSB.

### Staff are having different experiences.

Across all the areas within *System Operations*, teaching staff (particularly in virtual schools), principals, and Unit D staff (caretakers, warehouse, fleet, etc.) reported slightly lower agreement levels to the already low levels of agreement to the themes noted above.

When comparing current results to the previous Staff Census and Well-being survey (2017) results, it is evident that working and reacting

to COVID-19 has produced drastically different working experiences across the TDSB.

In 2017, staff were 15% more likely to strongly agree to being informed about important changes at work in a timely manner. And, 11% more likely to agree that employees and management trust one another.

## Staff Concerns and Suggestions

The responses to the exchange questions produced several ideas and suggestions from staff to improve current work experiences. Across all three exchanges, similar themes emerged and were not necessarily specific to the theme of the exchange (e.g., mental health and well-being, health and safety, system operations). As such, the table below groups staffs' concerns and suggestions for all three exchanges by focus area.

Focus Area	Summary of Suggestions and Concerns
<b>Workload and Expectations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decrease the workload and/or reduce working expectations for staff. Comments noted the current workload is unsustainable given the continued changes brought about by COVID-19.</li> <li>• Educators suggested only focussing on the basics this year – no new initiatives, fewer curriculum expectations, no School Improvement Planning, clearer expectations for report cards, etc.</li> <li>• Many staff, but educators specifically, are feeling overworked and overwhelmed by changing learning models and COVID-19 policies communicated within short time frames.</li> <li>• Many staff feel underappreciated by TDSB leadership for the hard work they are doing under the challenging and reactive circumstances.</li> </ul>
<b>Mental Health Supports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff suggesting providing more tangible supports for employee mental health (i.e., supply staff so employees can take time off when needed, paid sick leave for all positions at the Board, mental health days, clear communication/policies around what staff should do if they need to self-isolate, etc.).</li> </ul>
<b>COVID-19 Policies/ Procedures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff noted that COVID-19 safety policies and procedures should be consistently enforced across school and administrative sites.</li> <li>• Educators, specifically in-school staff suggested the following:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provide adequate PPE for all staff and students in school and administrative buildings (i.e., child-sized masks, hand sanitizer, cleaning wipes and cloths, etc.).</li> <li>○ Continue to address issues with ventilation in old school buildings.</li> <li>○ Consider introducing rapid testing in schools to identify asymptomatic COVID-19 cases.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Many in-person educators feel that they do not have a safe space to eat their own lunch and are also concerned about being in their classrooms while their students eat lunch unmasked.</li> <li>• Many in-person educators asked for a reduction in class sizes to allow for adequate physical distancing.</li> </ul>



<b>Caretaking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support caretakers with adequate staffing and PPE to enable them to meet the demands of deep cleaning and enhanced cleaning procedures at school and administrative sites.</li> </ul>
<b>Staying Connected</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow for more connection and collaboration time for all staff across the board. Educators suggested increasing release time, particularly for increased professional learning opportunities.</li> <li>• Ensure administrators and managers have clear, consistent, up-to-date information and are regularly connecting with and checking in on their staff.</li> <li>• Work to facilitate and strengthen connections between virtual educators and in-person educators, i.e., shared resources, more collaboration with colleagues.</li> </ul>
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen to educators when considering new learning models and switch dates. Teaching staff want to be included in this conversation.</li> <li>• Improve Board-level communication of important information related to learning models and policy changes by streamlining the message and decreasing the frequency of emails sent to staff. Staff commented that it is stressful and difficult to keep up with the emails when they are sent out on Friday afternoons or on weekends.</li> <li>• Provide as much notice as possible before changes are expected to be implemented.</li> <li>• Improve communication with in-person administrators and particularly educators around positive COVID-19 cases in their schools and classrooms.</li> <li>• Improve communication between virtual administrators and educators.</li> </ul>
<b>Learning Models</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educators requested eliminating synchronous in-person and virtual classroom-based learning – in-school educators do not feel able to properly support both groups of students simultaneously.</li> <li>• Educators requested eliminating asynchronous attendance tracking for virtual educators.</li> <li>• Consider schedule changes to reduce screen time for students and educators in virtual learning environment- complaints about headaches, eye pain, wrist and back injuries, etc. due to prolonged time online.</li> <li>• Staff, in some cases, do not understand how equity and anti-oppression principles might apply to teaching within a virtual space. For virtual elementary educators, some staff noted that the inability to mandate cameras on during synchronous virtual learning makes connecting with students very difficult.</li> </ul>

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**Classroom Supports**

- Provide more resources and classroom support for all teachers (in-person and virtual):
  - most notably, more prep time and/or release time for all teachers;
  - increase the budget for school supplies as they cannot be shared between students;
  - and adequate staffing of support roles, i.e., EAs, SNAs, etc.
- Some educators are concerned that students' Special Education Needs are not able to be properly addressed in either the in-person or virtual environment (i.e., due to lack of supports, physical distancing, etc.).
- Virtual educators suggested a reduction in class sizes to allow them to better address individual students' needs.

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**Remote Working**

- Continue to promote/allow working from home for all employee groups whenever possible to reduce exposures (including in-person teachers when they have prep times or meetings that are not face-to-face).
  - Support working from home by providing better access to or budget for technology, internet and other necessary office supplies like desk chairs, monitors, printers, headsets, etc.
  - Provide easier access to IT support.
  - Staff noted that the remote working/schedule flexibility should be continued even after COVID-19.
  - Generally, employees whose role currently permits working from home felt satisfied that their health, well-being, and safety needs were being addressed.
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## Actions and Next Steps

- ✓ Consider unpacking results with key departments and building action items from participants' main concerns and suggestions.
- ✓ Consider steps to report back Union and Federation groups.
- ✓ Consider steps to report back to staff.

# Appendix A

## Survey Items

### Mental Health and Well-being

Figure 1: Coping During COVID-19

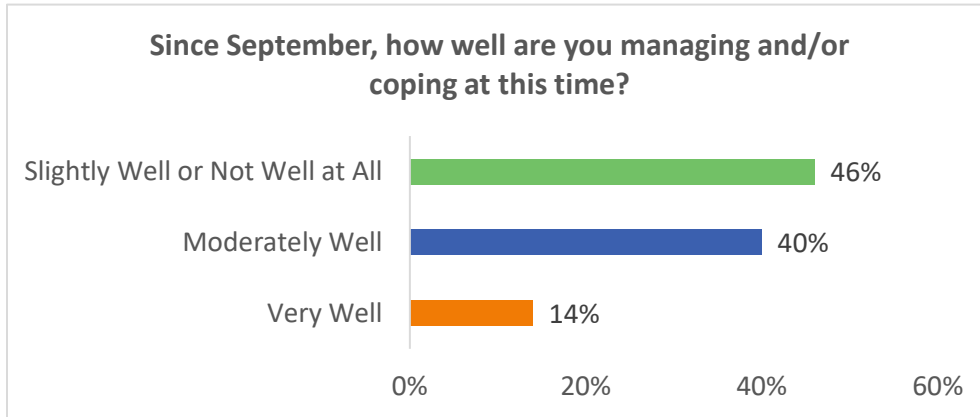
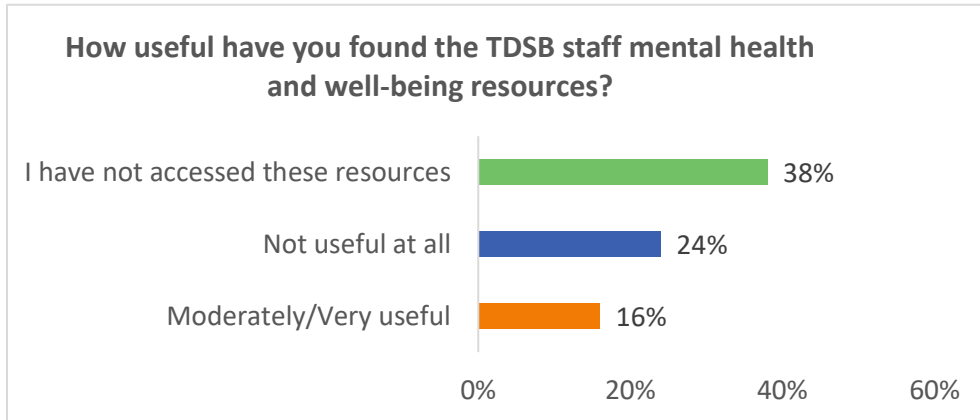
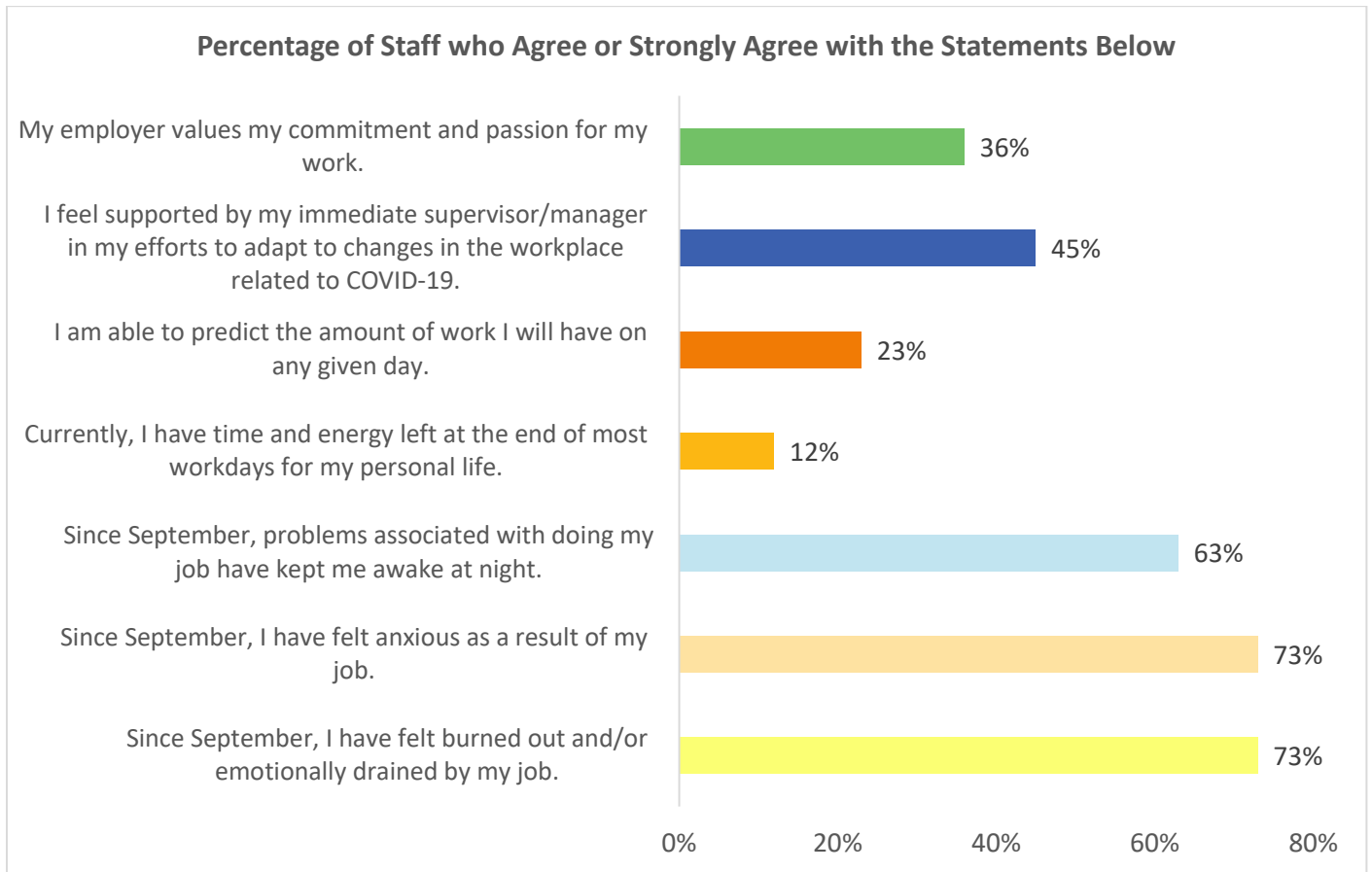


Figure 2: Mental Health Resources



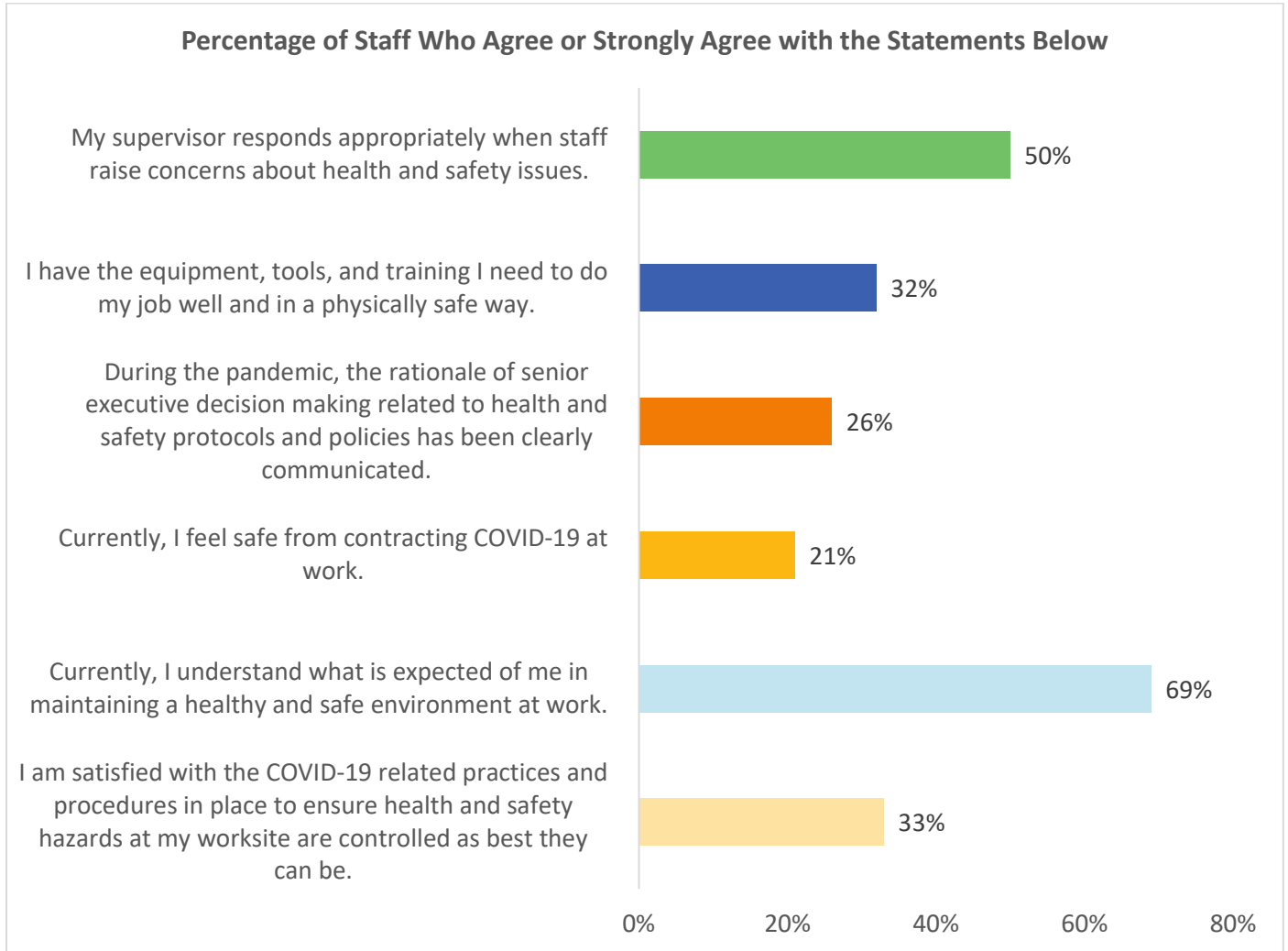
**Figure 3: Agree Statements, Mental Health and Well-being**



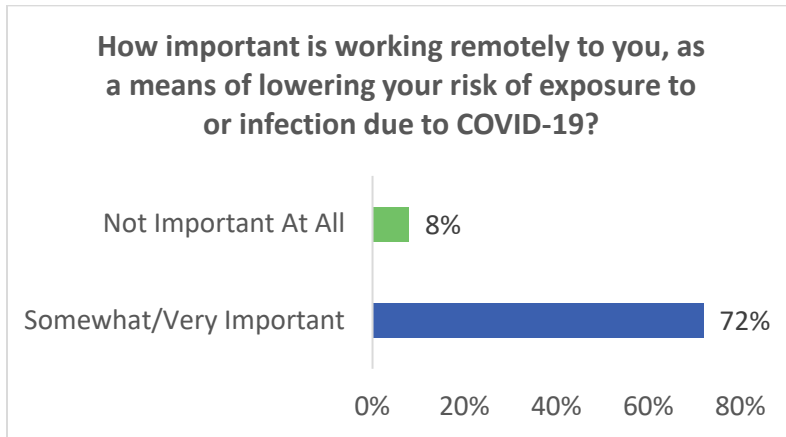
## Survey Items

### Health and Safety

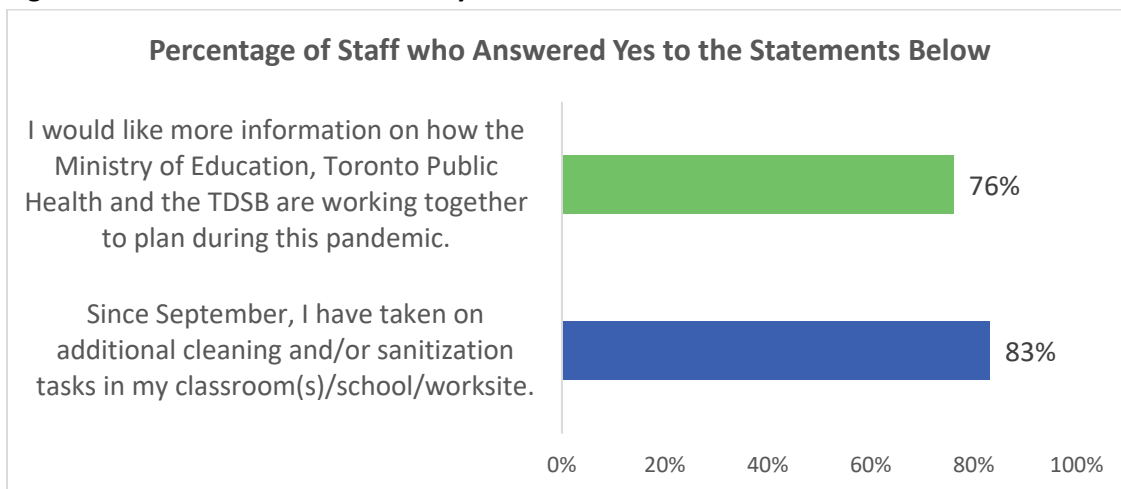
Figure 4: Agree Statements, Health and Safety



**Figure 5: Working Remotely**



**Figure 6: Additional Health and Safety Questions**



## Survey Items

### System Operations

Figure 7: System Operations Questions

