Students' Voices

In late January 2021, students in Grades 6 to 12 were invited to complete an online survey about their mental health and well-being, supports and relationships, and learning experiences during the current school year. Approximately 35,000 students responded.

This is a summary of their comments and a sample of their stories.

Students' stories along a continuum of experiences this year

Teachers are accommodating students with less culminating tasks and exams.

Students feel safe in the online space - safe from in-person bullying, contracting COVID, and is easier to participate for some introverted students.

Students enjoy the freedom and independnace that comes with remote learning.

Students have shared how great their teachers have been this year - working hard to support and accommodate them.

Although many students have noted how much they want to return to in-person learning, for some virtual learning has been a positive experience.

Students are concerned about their grades this year. On one side, worried about the perhaps lenient assessment and reduced curriculum. On the other side, worried about the very full workload and rushed curriculum as part of the quadmester schedule.

Some students are experiencing educators' frustration with online technology, inconsistent digital fluency, increased anxiety, and burn out this school year.

Students are struggling with their mental health - experiencing a lack of motivation, increased stress and anxiety, increased boredom, are missing relationships with peers, teams, and teachers, and desire the connections and belonging that comes with being in a physical school space.

Technological issues, discomfort participating online for some students, frustration with multiple supported online learning platforms, frustration with 'camera on' policies, the amount of screen time required in a day, and dealing with multiple distractions in the home are all areas students' shared that are impacting their learning experience this year.
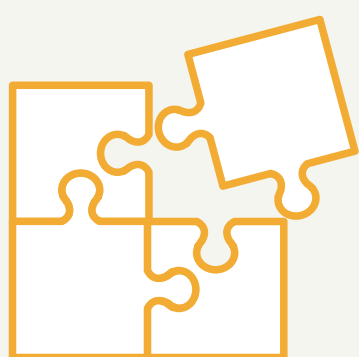
Students have had vastly different experiences this year. Although some have thrived, many have struggled and persevered. As we move into planning for September let us remember to leave space for healing and reconnecting.

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> Obviously, I prefer doing in school, which I'm not sure if I'm going back. Another thing that just irritates me is most of my high school experience is getting washed away due to me not allowing to go back to school, I can't do sports, see my friends in person, make memories with the staff and students it feels like a complete mess. Plus I have elderly family members and some with conditions where if I were to get Covid it would effect them greatly…

I really appreciate all the help I'm getting so far in both quads, however I do feel that I am learning less than I would in person since all the teachers are rushing to finish the curriculum. Being rushed makes me feel that school is less about learning and more about getting through with the school year.

It's really difficult to stay motivated and to work hard. I'm not very comfortable speaking in front of my classmate during class and it's hard to stay focus for around 4 hours online with not distractions.

Teachers have been empathetic and supported students from my perspective, and I personally enjoy virtual learning compared to in-person as less time is spent moving between classes, and more time to focus on the material.

Although this year is quite different, it's also a year for self-growth and understanding ourselves more. Although the quadmesters have been stressful in terms of the amount of work given, I feel like I am learning more.

School to me is not a happy place anymore it's more of a stressful environment no matter if you join clubs and etc. It's almost like a burden a because of everything going on right now.

Because high schools are now quads teachers are giving as much as 4 assignments per week and two courses combined that can make up to 8 assignments. I understand they are giving all this homework so that we can fit a year worth of education in 2 months, but this is just too much to handle especially since some students also have extra curricular activities it can get really stressful and in general just makes me very concerned about grades because I can't provide good quality in so little time and too much assignments.

This year was good but I miss my friends. I miss my school environment. I miss being happy. I miss high fiving teachers in the hallway. I miss smiling. As you can see I strongly dislike online school - if possible can we have in-person learning again.

There are teachers who make us feel welcome in their class and accommodate our needs and are always happy to help us in any way they can, they take frequent breaks and make sure that we feel ready to learn and probe us to participate to help us stay engaged and do better.

Because of the quadmester system, the teachers overwhelm as with a ton of work in an attempt to cover all the concepts in the syllabus in a very little time. I may be able to complete the work but not only does it cost tremendous stress but it has also resulted in my inability to actually retain the information being taught.

It's super hard for me to do simple tasks. I don't have any interest these days and I'm having too many intrusive thoughts. I'm continuously getting nightmares about school. Its all of my fault that I'm super behind I have tons of undone work. I join almost all of my classes but once I'm done my head can't let me think straight.

Since every class has been so rushed to fit under the quadmester schedule, in basically all of my classes, we have skipped a few chapters and units. Because of this, I am worried my lack of knowledge will negatively affect my results in the upcoming years of education. (Both high school and university) Some of my classes have also been extremely easier than if I were to be in in-person school, which also worries me since I realize my marks do not reflect what I would've gotten at school before COVID.

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> At times, connecting between my home school and virtual learning has been confusing, but reaching out has helped make everything clearer. I have had nice teachers and am comfortable in my classes. I would like to say people are making the best of things; quadmesters speed everything up, but I haven't felt as if my learning has been compromised.

Absolutely hate it. Have never felt this demotivated, and really miss seeing my friends each day, even when we had a bit of in person time a couple months ago. I've never done this badly at school, and never cared this little about how bad I'm doing. School doesn't feel like school, it just all feels like homework, which I absolutely hate.

I have enjoyed my online learning experience very much (a lot more than my in school experience) I feel much safer and included with virtual school and the access to different students and teachers has been a positive experience for me thus far.

I'm of the belief that at this point, it's more about passing than actually learning and sadly that contributes a great deal to my lack of motivation. I want to be able to recall all or most of what has been taught to me but that is almost impossible because even though I'm passing, I'm not retaining the information because as soon as I learn something, we've moved onto something else. No time to review….

It is no longer a time where if a student has good marks it is because of their academic excellence, now it just depends on how lenient and considerate the teacher is to allow the class to achieve high marks. This I believe is quite unfair since not all teachers have an open mind to the topic and are putting more pressure on students who might have the potential to earn the marks they want but cannot do so due to their teacher, whereas other students may be getting their desired mark without putting in any effort whatsoever.

I think that virtual learning is great. I am less shy and turn on my camera, mic when asking questions or giving answers.

There are teachers who make us feel welcome in their class and accommodate our needs and are always happy to help us in any way they can, they take frequent breaks and make sure that we feel ready to learn and probe us to participate to help us stay engaged and do better.

Breaks between classes, especially morning online classes, should be made mandatory. This allows for a mental break as well as physical rest for students' eyes after watching a screen for hours. This would make it easier for me to remain focused and learn better.

There are ALWAYS distractions at home. Unlike a classroom, I have siblings, a pet dog and cat, as well as 2 parents who are also working from home. During the test it can get difficult to concentrate.

I am a special needs student with autism. It is hard to find the assignments and the work when sometimes we use Brightspace and other classes we use google classroom…

I definitely feel more confident this year and more safe as my teachers are very open to any problems emotionally or any other problem will be available to listen and help. Because I have a baby brother and 1 coming on the way and a brother 2 years younger than me and my dad gets home late sometimes I don't have as much time and as much help as others do.

As a grade 11 student, I am definitely gonna be in trouble next year for courses like chem, functions, physics, English, pretty much all my courses because I realize that the current marks I have or have achieved this year are not a full representation of my knowledge and skill of the material in each course. Almost all courses have cut down their curriculum so all of the students are learning less than what they should.