



RESEARCH+STRATEGY

Enhancing Local Voice: Public Consultations

May 2023 | Confidential

Executive Summary

The Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development conducted this research to gather input from the school community and enhance local representation in the education system.

The consultation consisted of two phases. In Phase 1, School Advisory Councils (SACs) were engaged, while Phase 2 expanded the engagement to a broader school community. Throughout the consultation, a total of 22 focus groups were conducted and 3,500 individuals participated in two online surveys. Additionally, two rounds of thought exchange generated 1,512 comments, which received a total of 27,410 ratings.

The following are some of the key findings from both phases of research:

Feeling Heard: The majority of respondents indicated that they did not feel heard when providing input or feedback. SAC's also felt that they had no say on various issues relevant to their schools, such as infrastructure/construction, boundary reviews, bussing, student achievement, student discipline, and pre-primary programs.

Key Findings

Impact: SAC members felt that they did not have the ability to create the impact they desire within their schools and the broader education system. The perception that feedback does not impact change was also shared in the feedback from the broader community. It was noted that this limitation may be partly due to the shift in focus brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Barriers and Challenges in Providing Feedback: Respondents highlighted various challenges in providing feedback, such as a lack of information about where to go, bureaucratic processes, personal fears, and concerns about negative reception. Access to resources, communication issues, and difficulties navigating the education system were also mentioned.

Communication Process: Participants expressed frustration with communication processes between schools, families, communities, and educational authorities. Lack of a clear point of contact, delays in response and resolution, and dissatisfaction with transparency in decision-making processes were mentioned.

No clear communication pathway: One of the most consistent findings across the consultation was the lack of a defined process for providing local voice feedback and receiving information. The school community reported feeling unsure about how to provide feedback and the expectation for receiving follow-up.

Key Findings

Role of School Boards: Participants felt there was value in having an entity that they felt existed to advocate on their behalf and that provided a single place to go to share concerns or feedback that was primarily focused on working to address issues.

Proactive engagement: The school community shared a desire for EECD to engage in more proactive communication. Prior to the pandemic, some SACs shared that they were more actively engaged by EECD to provide input for informing policies. However, others stated that their input has never been sought beyond their individual schools.

Transparent Processes and Consideration of Feedback: Participants wanted assurance that their feedback would be considered in policy development and decision-making. They expressed a need for more transparent processes to understand how their feedback is utilized within the school community.

Need for Equal Opportunities and Representation: A significant percentage of respondents, particularly from underrepresented groups, felt that there were not equal opportunities for diverse groups to provide feedback. Participants emphasized the importance of considering the needs and barriers faced by minority groups and newcomers.

Key Findings

Challenges for Underrepresented Groups and Newcomers: Participants identified several challenges faced by underrepresented groups and newcomers in providing local voice feedback, including language barriers, poor experiences within the education system, and limited technical skills and internet access. Addressing these challenges and ensuring inclusivity in feedback processes is important.

Variety and Accessibility of Feedback: Participants expressed a desire for a greater variety of opportunities to provide local voice feedback. They emphasized the importance of inclusive and accessible methods that cater to all groups within the school community.

Priority areas for feedback include student issues, infrastructure and school programming: The most common areas where SAC members focused their local voice input were student issues (e.g., well-being and safety) and infrastructure (e.g., school buildings and maintenance). They also provided input on topics related to school programming and specific concerns.

Importance of Community Engagement: Building community connections and partnerships were seen as crucial in increasing opportunities for providing feedback. Participants highlighted the success of informal interactions and community events in gathering feedback, particularly from students and parents.

Key Findings

Region-Specific Considerations: Participants stressed the need for considering the specific needs and differences between schools and regions when developing policies. They highlighted the importance of tailoring policies to best fit the local context.

Information Needs: A significant percentage (38%) of the school community expressed a desire for more information on various topics such as curriculum, health, available support, system changes or decisions, and extracurricular activities. This highlights the importance of addressing information gaps and providing comprehensive information to meet the needs of the school community.

Utilization of School Advisory Councils (SACs): Although the majority of respondents (66%) were aware of SACs, most of them (69%) had not taken their concerns, questions, input, or feedback to their SACs. This suggests that there is a potential underutilization of SACs as a channel for local voice feedback.

These findings provide a better understanding of the current challenges and highlight opportunities to enhance local voice within the Nova Scotia education system to bridge information gaps and create a more inclusive and accessible feedback environment that better serves the needs of students.

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INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

The purpose of this project was to seek input from the school community on **how local voice can be enhanced in Nova Scotia's education system.**

The goal of this consultation is to listen and better understand **what parts of the education system would benefit from enhanced local voice**, the **opportunities that exist for enhancing local voice**, as well as any **challenges that prevent local voice from being heard.**

This consultation was conducted in 2 phases. The first phase focused on engaging SACs for their feedback on enhancing local voice. Phase two included a broader engagement with the school community.

INTRODUCTION

LOCAL VOICE

Local voice refers to the values, opinions, beliefs, perspectives, and cultural backgrounds of the people in a school community—including students, school staff, parents/guardians, and local citizens.

Enhancing local voice means increasing and improving opportunities for school community members to provide meaningful feedback and input based on their unique experiences and needs; maximizing opportunities for this feedback and input to inform education policy and decision making to support student learning and well-being; and information sharing to ensure school communities understand what happens as a result of that feedback and input.

METHODOLOGY: PHASE 1

Phase 1:

In Phase 1, EECD hosted a series of engagement opportunities with SAC members in May and June 2022.

Five Regional/CSAP **focus groups** were held virtually over zoom with participants from SACs across the province. Focus groups allowed for an in-depth discussion on the experiences of SAC members in providing local voice, the barriers they've encountered, and the opportunities that exist for enhancing local voice.

An on-line **survey** was distributed to each SAC (and CSAP equivalent) chair to be filled out as an SAC (i.e., one survey response per SAC/CSAP equivalent). A total of 151 SACs (and CSAP equivalents) from across the province completed the survey.

An on-line **thought exchange** open to all SAC and CSAP equivalent members was also launched. The thought exchange asked participants to comment on one specific question related to enhancing local voice. Participants were then able to review and rate the comments of other participants.

METHODOLOGY: PHASE 2

Phase 2:

Phase 2 took place between December 2022, and February 2023. EECD hosted a series of engagement opportunities for the broader school community. Sixteen **(16) focus groups** were held virtually over Zoom or Teams with over 70 participants. Focus groups included regional education centre teachers, administrators and other school staff, as well as participants from the following committees: Ministers Student Advisory Council; Education Council for Disability Inclusion and Accessibility; Partners of Newcomer and Immigrant Families; Provincial Advisory Council on Education; Council on African Canadian Education; Schools Plus and; the Council for Mi'kmaw Education. Focus group recruitment also took place for teachers, administrators and school staff from Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP).¹

An on-line **survey** was distributed through the regional education centres and Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP). A total of 3,349 individuals from across the province completed the survey.

1. Due to low registration across the groups (3 participants), interviews were offered. Only one participant responded and an interview was conducted.

METHODOLOGY: PHASE 2

Phase 2

An online **thought exchange** was also launched. The thought exchange was open to members of the school community and asked participants to comment on specific questions related to enhancing local voice. Participants submitted public comments/responses and were then able to review and rate the comments of other participants. Ratings were measured by assigning 1 to 5 stars with higher ratings (i.e., more stars) indicating higher agreement among participants. A total of 1,401 participants posted comments and 25,625 ratings were provided on thoughts that were shared.

PHASE 1: SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCIL CONSULTATION



Key Findings

- 1. SACs Feel Unheard:** The School Advisory Councils (SACs) feel that their local voice is not currently being heard. They reported having no say on various issues relevant to their schools, such as infrastructure/construction, boundary reviews, bussing, student achievement, student discipline, and pre-primary programs.
- 2. SACs feel they have limited ability to impact change:** SAC members expressed their inability to create the impact they desire within their schools and the broader education system. This limitation has been partly due to the shift in focus brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 3. Proactive engagement from EECD has been reduced since the pandemic:** Prior to the pandemic, some SACs felt they were more actively engaged by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) to provide input for informing policies. However, others stated that their input has never been sought beyond their individual schools.

Key Findings

- 4. There is no clear communication pathway:** The most consistent finding was the lack of a defined process for providing local voice feedback and receiving information. SACs reported inadequate and unclear communication pathways, with variations in how, when, and what types of feedback were provided.
- 5. There are a variety of feedback channels:** SAC members commonly provided feedback and received information through the school principal, other school staff, or social media. However, feedback was also directed to the Regional Centre for Education (RCE), EECD, and the Minister of Education, depending on the issue, relationships, and system knowledge. Responses to feedback varied as well.
- 6. Priority areas for feedback include student issues, infrastructure and school programming:** The most common areas where SAC members focused their local voice input were student issues (e.g., well-being and safety) and infrastructure (e.g., school buildings and maintenance). They also provided input on topics related to school programming and specific concerns.

Key Findings

- 7. Challenges exist to increasing local voice:** SACs recognized several challenges hindering effective local voice feedback. These included the lack of a clearly defined feedback process, difficulty in soliciting feedback from the broader school community, low overall awareness of SACs, and a lack of diverse feedback and representation.
- 8. Need to create and promote a clear feedback process for sharing input:** To enhance local voice opportunities that are representative of the school community, SACs emphasized the importance of creating and promoting a clear process for sharing input and providing feedback.

PHASE 1: SURVEY RESULTS

Summary of Findings

- Most information is flowing through school staff (principals, teachers, other staff) and social media. Concerns and feedback are most commonly raised through the same sources.
- Utilizing local voice feedback to make an impact and inform decisions, engaging the school community to provide feedback, and the lack of a defined process for providing feedback were noted as the biggest challenges to hearing local voice input.
- The most common issues brought to SACs by members of the school community pertain to students (e.g., student well-being and safety), and infrastructure (e.g., school buildings and maintenance).
- Half of SACs surveyed raised concerns to the level of their RCE. Over 40% of these concerns were related to infrastructure. The majority (85%) received a response from their RCE, but only a third (32%) were satisfied with the response. Another third were somewhat satisfied and the remaining third were dissatisfied.
- Parents/Guardians and school staff make up the bulk of SAC memberships. Few SACs have student representation.

Q1. On a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being 'not at all important' and 7 being 'extremely important', what level of importance should be placed on enhancing local voice in the following areas:

n=151

Just over half (51%) of participants rated prioritizing needs for new school construction and upgrades/additions, student achievement and well-being at a school/regional level (54%), and providing input during a school boundary review (63%) as extremely important.

Participants reported local voice is the least important when it comes to the role of the RED position.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Decisions related to bussing (e.g., a parent/guardian requests to have their child bussed to school or modify a bus route)	7%	5%	11%	11%	19%	18%	30%
Prioritizing needs for new school construction and major upgrades/additions to existing schools	1%	1%	2%	9%	18%	18%	51%
Policy development/Input on provincial & regional policies (e.g., providing input on the development of a provincial extracurricular supervision policy)	1%	5%	8%	14%	17%	24%	32%
Input into the role of the Regional Executive Director (RED) position (e.g., skills and competencies required)	11%	12%	11%	16%	17%	11%	23%
Student achievement and well-being at a school/regional level (e.g., providing input on Regional Improvement Plans)	1%	3%	1%	7%	15%	20%	54%
Providing input during a school boundary review (i.e., determining a school catchment area)	2%	3%	2%	7%	10%	14%	63%
Informing decisions related to RCE budget and priorities in the annual business planning process	5%	5%	13%	13%	21%	15%	28%

Q2. In addition to the list above, are there any other areas where you feel local voice input should be enhanced?

The most frequently mentioned themes include allocations of resources (human & material) and health and safety. For example, school lunch programs, having a platform to address concerns, and input in programming/curricula.

Themes	% of members <i>n=85</i>
Allocation of resources (e.g., decisions about allocation of resources, more human/material resources in general, inclusion in the hiring process)	31%
Health and safety (e.g., student health and well-being, safety of school environment, input in school lunch programs)	21%
Platform for addressing concerns (e.g., reimplementing the school boards to enhance community voice, SAC members do not have direct contact with the RCE)	15%
Programming/curricula (e.g., input in programming, extracurricular activities, and course offerings)	14%
Composition of classes/schools (e.g., class size, reconfiguration of grades within schools)	12%
School closures (e.g., input in school closures based on weather, road conditions and power outages)	8%
Diversity, equity, and inclusion (e.g., need to be more inclusive)	8%
Scheduling/workload	6%
Connecting with other SACs/RCEs (e.g., would like a chance to connect with other SACs/RCEs to share experiences/lessons learned)	6%
Transportation (e.g., input on bus schedule, especially in rural areas)	5%
Technology (e.g., would more use of technology)	5%
Use of the school building (e.g., having a say in how the school building is used after hours)	2%
Other	11%

Q3. Please choose the top three areas (from both question 1 and 2) that you feel are priorities for local voice enhancement. Please choose only 3.

n=148

The top three areas that respondents felt are priorities for local voice enhancement include: achievement and well-being at a school/regional level (76%); prioritizing needs for new school construction and upgrades/additions (58%); and providing input during a school boundary review (54%).

Student achievement and well-being at a school/regional level (e.g., providing input on Regional Improvement Plans)	76%
Prioritizing needs for new school construction and major upgrades/additions to existing schools	58%
Providing input during a school boundary review (i.e., determining a school catchment area)	54%
Policy development/Input on provincial & regional policies (e.g., providing input on the development of a provincial extracurricular supervision policy)	36%
Decisions related to bussing (e.g., a parent/guardian requests to have their child bussed to school or modify a bus route)	32%
Informing decisions related to RCE budget and priorities in the annual business planning process	24%
Input into the role of the Regional Executive Director (RED) position (e.g., skills and competencies required)	6%
Other	12%

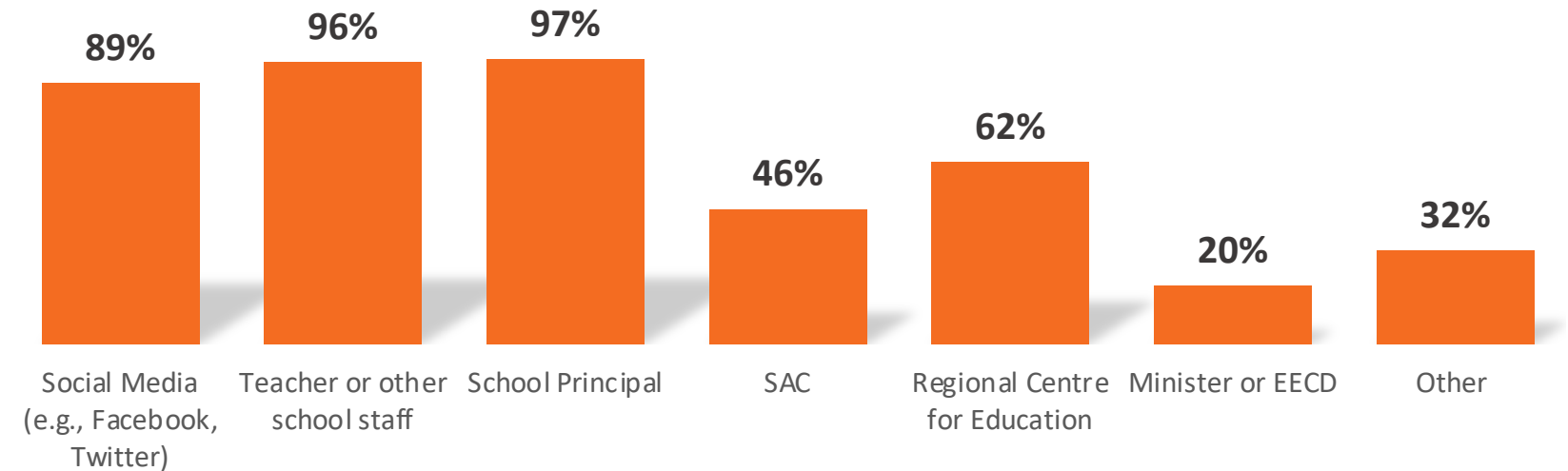
Note: May exceed 100% due to multiple response.

How Do You Find Answers to Questions?

The majority of respondents reported that people in their school community find answers to questions through the school principal (97%), the teacher or other school staff (96%), and social media (89%).

To your knowledge, how do people in your school community find answers to questions and/or stay informed?

(n=148)



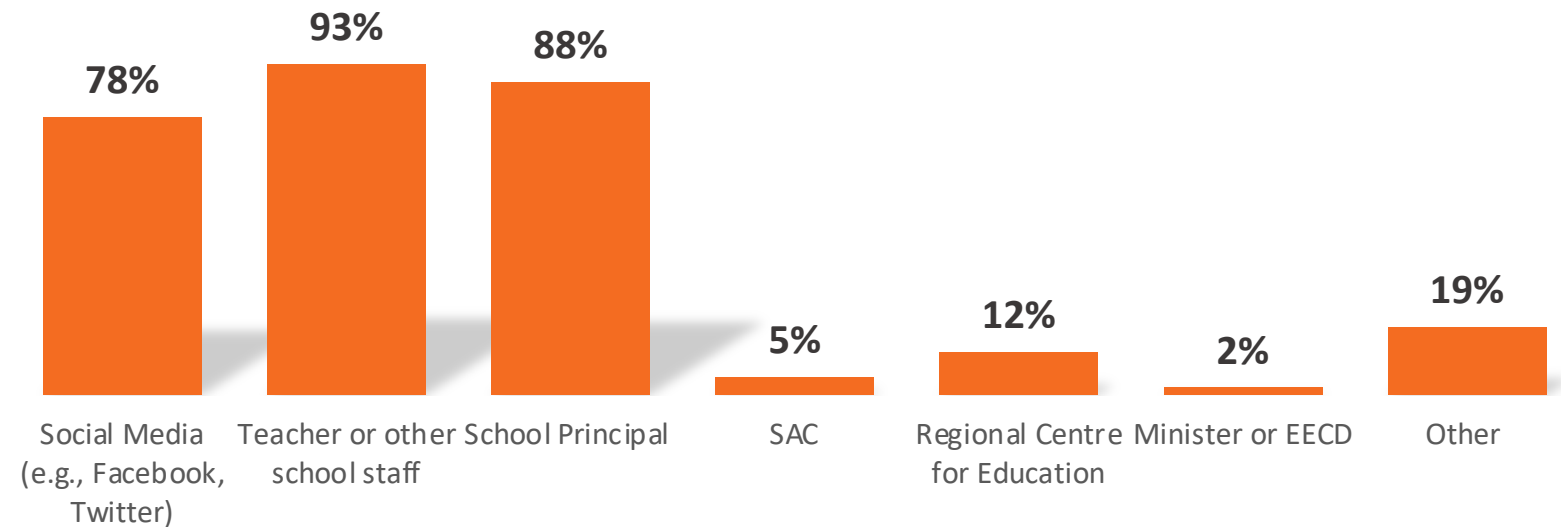
How Do You Find Answers to Questions?

Respondents most often chose social media (78%), teacher or other staff (93%), and school principal (88%) as the most common ways people in their community find answers to questions and/or stay informed about their school and education system.

Q5. Please indicate the three most common ways people in your school community find answers to questions and/or stay informed about their school and the education system.

Please choose only 3.

(n=148)

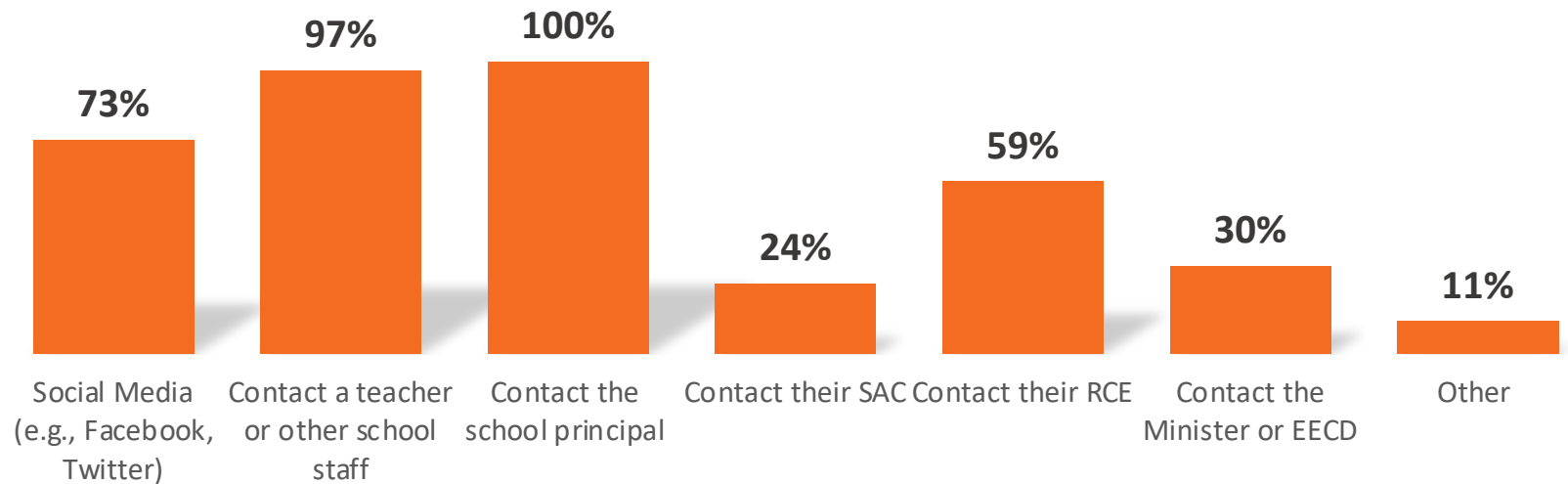


How Do You Raise Concerns?

Respondents most often chose social media (73%), teacher or other staff (97%), and the school principal (100%) as the way people in their school community raise concerns.

Q6. To your knowledge, how do people in your school community raise concerns?
Please check all that apply.

(n=148)

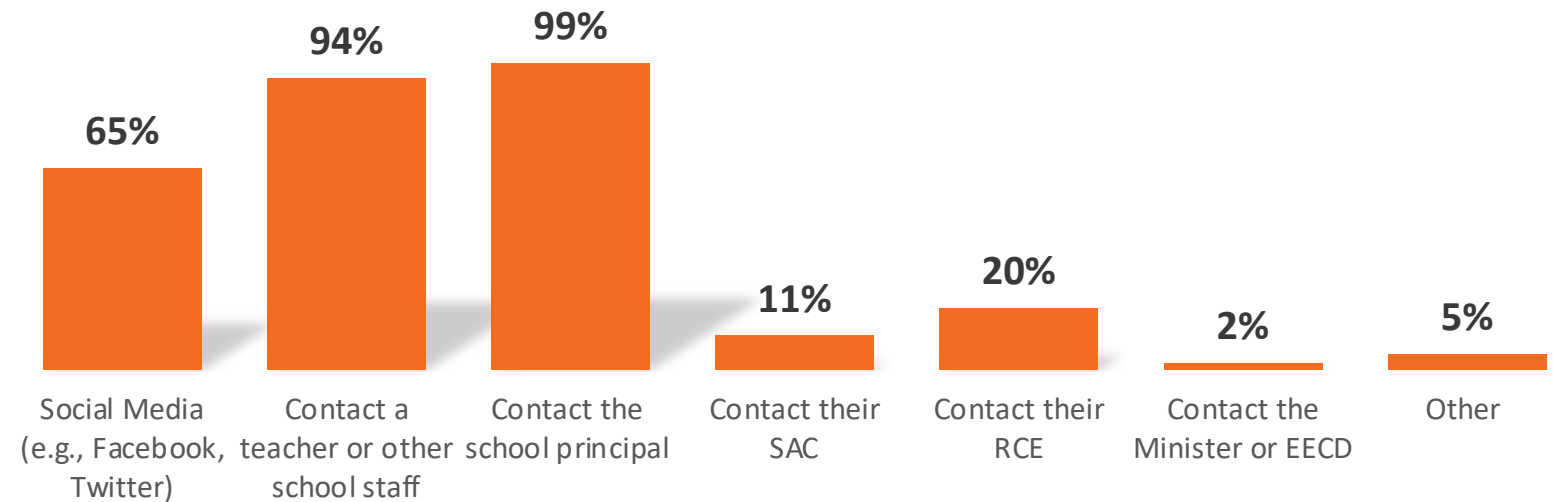


How Do You Raise Concerns?

Respondents most often chose social media (65%), teacher or other staff (94%), and school principal (99%) as the most common ways concerns are raised

**Q7. Please indicate the three most common ways concerns are raised (from question 6).
Please choose only 3.**

(n=148)



Q8: What is working well when it comes to hearing local voice?

n=144

The majority of respondents (63%) felt that communication was very open and easy. About one quarter of participants felt that their community's voice was included. Five percent of respondents felt that the local voice was not being heard.

School Events/Meetings (e.g., events are well-attended, SAC meetings happen regularly)	11%
Communication (e.g., good communication within their own school, good communication between home and school, good communication with community)	63%
Collaboration (e.g., work together to make decisions)	3%
Social media/website/newsletter/Powerschool	17%
Taking action/responsive (e.g., schools are very responsive and address concerns quickly)	7%
Surveys (e.g., use surveys as a tool for input)	3%
Community inclusion (e.g., community members/parents are included, the schools are responsive to community feedback)	24%
Local voice is not being heard (e.g., comments about local voice not being heard)	5%
Other	3%

Lack of impact on decisions/lack of local voice	20%
Lack of public participation/engagement	18%
COVID restrictions	16%
Unaware of communication process/Hesitant to contact	14%
Lack of representation	14%
No streamlined communication process	14%
Expressing concerns via social media	14%
Access to technology	5%
Rural-related issues	3%
Size of school	1%
No issues	1%
Do not receive responses/answers	3%
More focus on negative compared to positive	2%
Unaware of SAC	2%
Politics	1%
Other	9%

Q9. What do you see as current challenges to hearing local voice? (n=147)

Respondents most frequently felt that having a lack of impact on decisions/local voice, lack of public participation/engagement, and COVID restrictions are current challenges to hearing local voice.

Student mental/physical health/well-being/safety	29%
Maintenance/upkeep or building/grounds	26%
extracurricular/school activities	14%
Opportunities/resources	14%
Transportation	13%
Funding/budget	13%
Traffic/parking	11%
Student achievement/behaviour	9%
Inclusion/Cultural Diversity	7%
Community engagement	7%
COVID	6%
Class/school size	6%
Unaware of SAC's role	4%
Communication	4%
Rural	2%
None	8%
Other	10%

Q10. What are themes, issues, or opportunities that are most frequently brought to the SAC from the school community?

(n=141)

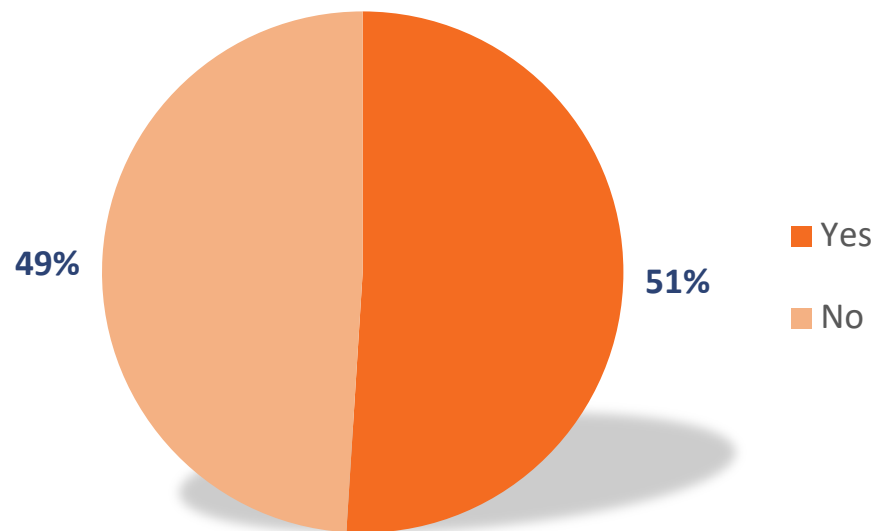
The themes, issues or opportunities that are most frequently brought to the SAC from the school community include student mental/physical health and well-being, and maintenance/upkeep of school buildings/grounds.

School Advisory Council

Just over half (51%) of respondents reported that their SAC raised concerns, questions, or opportunities with their RCE on behalf of the school community.

Q11. Has your SAC raised concerns, questions, or opportunities with your RCE on behalf of the school community?

(n=150)



School building/property maintenance	42%
Staffing	18%
Transportation	16%
Safety	14%
Programming	9%
School closures	7%
Food/nutrition/cafeteria	7%
Increased resources/support	7%
Accessibility/Inclusion	5%
Air quality	5%
Parking/traffic/cross guards	5%
Scheduling/start times	5%
Technology	4%
Mental health/Well-being	4%
Over crowding	3%
School cash app	3%
Other	11%

Q12. What concerns, questions, or opportunities has your SAC brought to the RCE on behalf of the school community?

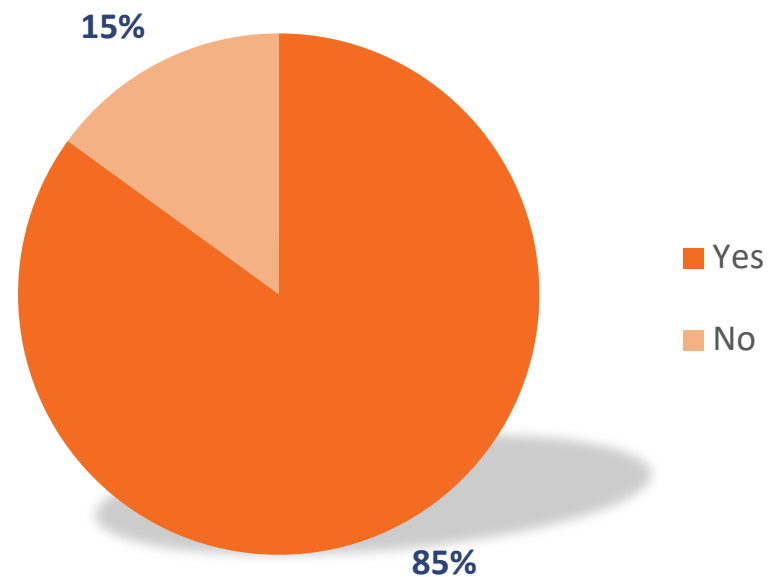
Respondents most often reported that their SAC brought concerns, questions, or opportunities about the school building/property maintenance, and lack of staffing to the RCE.

School Advisory Council

The majority (85%) of respondents reported that they have received a response from their RCE regarding the concerns, questions, or opportunities their SAC brought forward.

Q13. Has your SAC received a response from your RCE regarding the concerns, questions, or opportunities your SAC brought forward?

(n=150)

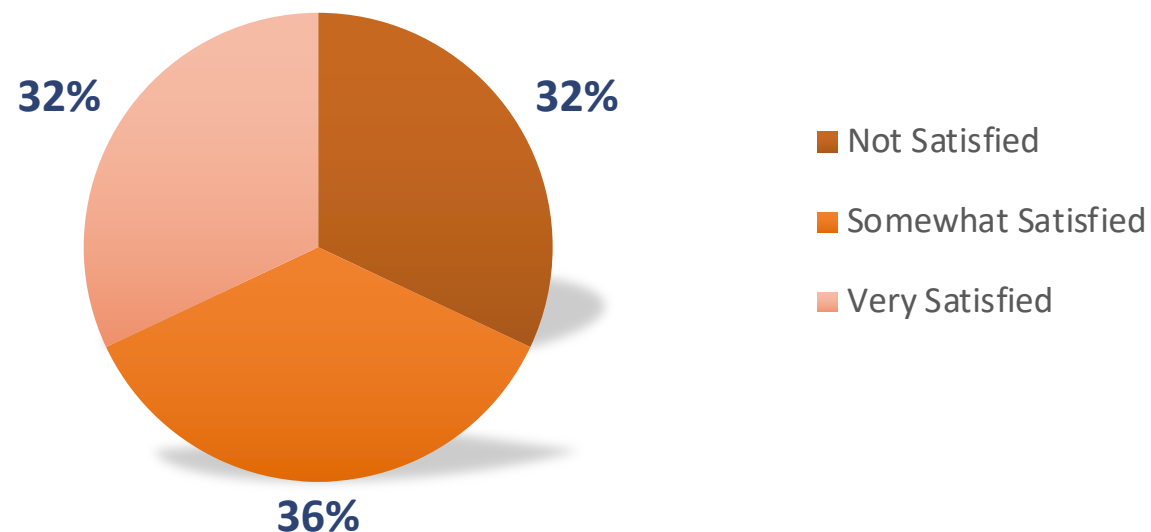


Satisfaction with RCE Responses

Slightly more than a third (36%) of respondents rated their level of satisfaction between 5-7 (i.e., somewhat satisfied). Thirty-two percent of respondents rated their level of satisfaction between 8-10 (very satisfied) and 1-4 (not satisfied), highlighting the variability in satisfaction among RCE responses.

Q14. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being 'not at all satisfied' and 10 being 'extremely satisfied', how satisfied is your SAC with your RCE's response to concerns, questions, or opportunities that your SAC has brought forward?

(n=150)



Q14. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being 'not at all satisfied' and 10 being 'extremely satisfied', how satisfied is your SAC with your RCE's response to concerns, questions, or opportunities that your SAC has brought forward?

Responses per RCE

RCE	Not satisfied (1-4)	Somewhat satisfied (5-7)	Very satisfied (8-10)
Cape Breton-Victoria RCE	11.8%	41.2%	47.1%
Chignecto-Central RCE*	55.5%	33.3%	11.1
Halifax RCE	37.5%	33.3%	29.2%
South shore RCE*	33.3%	44.4%	22.2%
Strait RCE**	25%	50%	25%
Tri-County RCE**	0%	0%	100%

* $n < 10$

** $n < 5$

About your SAC



Q15. School Advisory Councils (SACs) can represent one school or more than one school if several schools decide to partner. What school does your SAC represent?

n=150

- **99% of SACS represent one school**
 - The majority of participating SACs represented elementary schools (> 50%)
- **1% of SACs represent two schools**

Q16 & 17. What is the grade range at your school?

Grade Range	Frequency
Pre-primary - 1	1%
Pre-primary - 3	1%
Pre-primary - 4	4%
Pre-primary - 5	27%
Pre-primary - 6	17%
Pre-primary - 8	7%
Pre-primary - 9	3%
Pre-primary - 12	5%
Primary - 5	2%
Primary - 6	1%
5 - 8	1%
6 - 8	7%
6 - 9	2%
6 - 12	2%
7 - 9	6%
7 - 12	2%
8 - 12	1%
9 - 12	8%
10 - 12	4%

The majority of participating school's had a grade range from pre-primary to 5 or 6.

	Lowest Grade	Highest Grade
Pre-primary	65%	-
Primary	3%	-
Grade 1	-	1%
Grade 2	-	-
Grade 3	-	1%
Grade 4	-	4%
Grade 5	1%	29%
Grade 6	11%	17%
Grade 7	8%	-
Grade 8	1%	15%
Grade 9	8%	11%
Grade 10	4%	-
Grade 11	-	-
Grade 12	-	22%

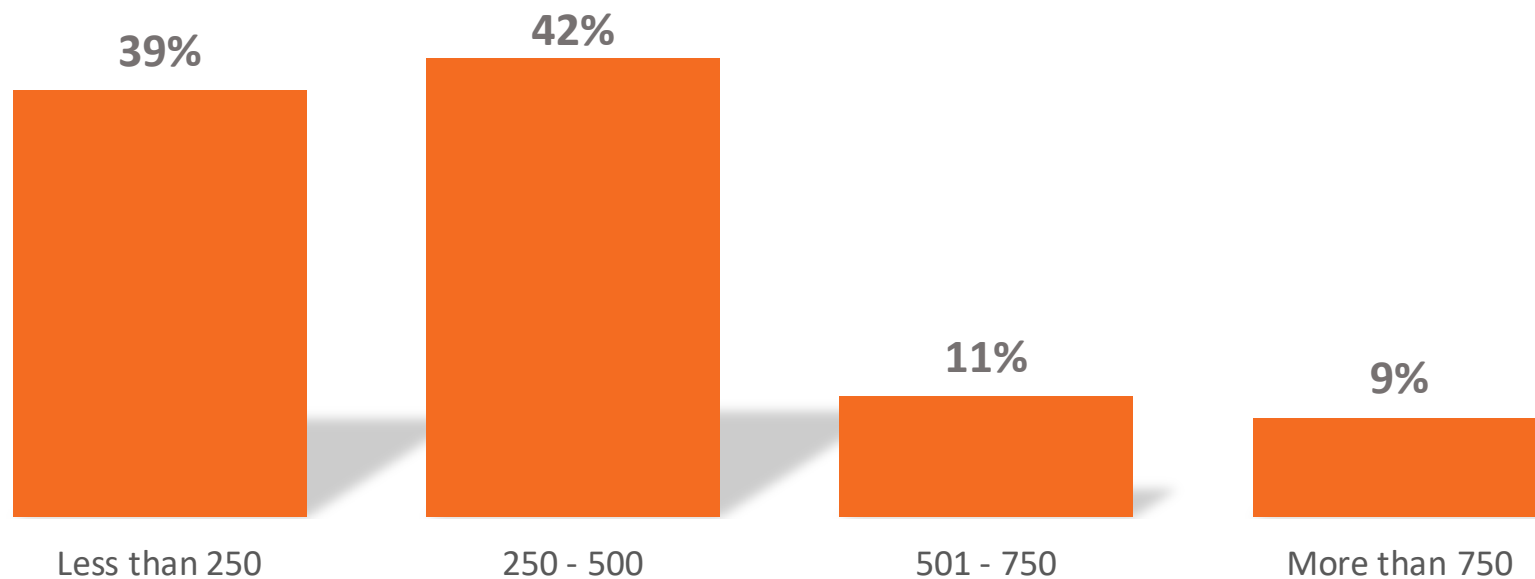
The majority of participating school's had a starting grade of pre-primary, and a highest grade of Grade 5

Size of School

The majority of respondents reported that there are 500 or less students in their school.

Q18. Approximately how many students are enrolled at your school?

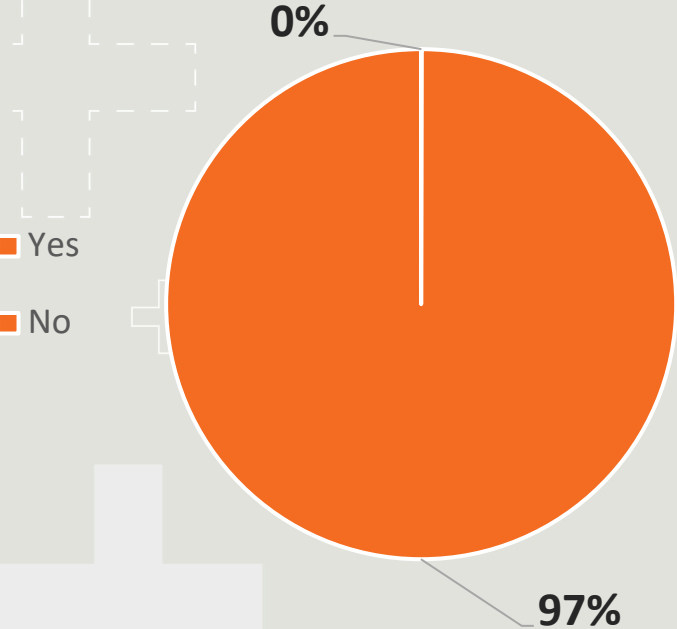
(n=150)



Nearly all (97%) respondents reported that their SAC does not represent a second school. The data of the four respondents who responded yes to Q19 is in the table.

Q19. Does your SAC represent a second school?

n=151



Q20. What other school does your SAC represent?	Q21. What is the lowest grade at your school?	Q22. What is the highest grade at your school?	Q23. Approximately how many students are enrolled at your school?
DRES	Pre-primary	Grade 5	Less than 250
Highbury Education Centre/Kings County Adult High School	Grade 8	Grade 12	Less than 250
Eastern Passage Education Centre, Seaside Elementary, and Horizon Elementary	Pre-primary	Grade 8	More than 750
Atlantic Memorial Terence Bay - Terence Bay site	Primary	Grade 5	Less than 250

Q24. Which Regional Centre for Education (RCE) does your school fall under?

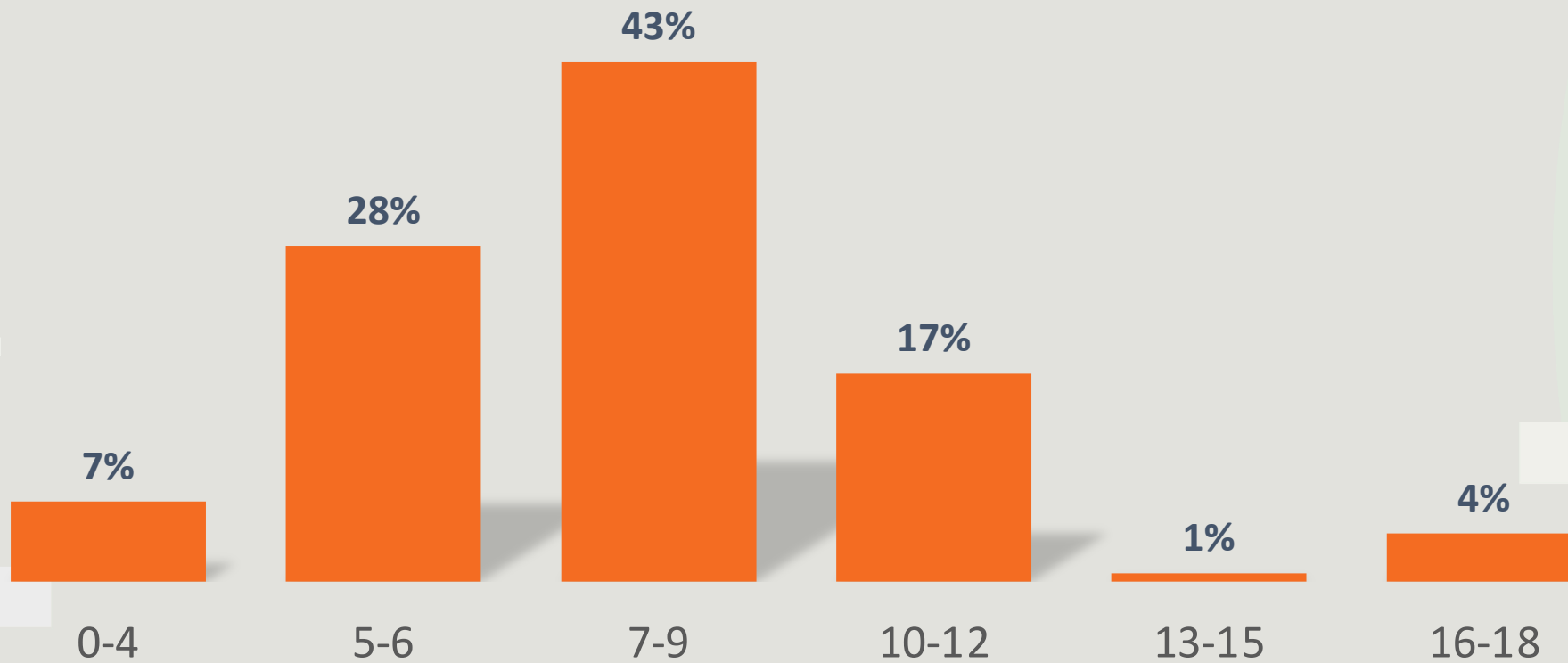
n=150)

Nearly half (47%) of respondents were from the Halifax Regional Centre for Education.

Region	
Halifax Regional Centre for Education	47%
Cape Breton-Victoria Regional Centre for Education	16%
Annapolis Valley Regional Centre for Education	11%
Chignecto-Central Regional Centre for Education	11%
South Shore Regional Centre for Education	7%
Strait Regional Centre for Education	5%
Tri-County Regional Centre for Education	1%
CSAP	1%

The majority of participating SACs have between 7 and 9 members.

Q25. How many of your SAC membership positions are currently filled (not including the principal)? Please indicate how many members your SAC currently has in each designated group.



Community member representation on SACs is lower as compared to parent/guardian and school staff representation. This is in line with focus group findings and reported difficulties around recruitment and retention.

- The majority (62%) of respondents reported that their SAC has 0 student members. This is to be expected as student on SACs only applies for grade 7 and up. The majority of participating SACs represent elementary schools and thus would not have a designated student seat.

Q26. Please indicate how many members your SAC currently has in each designated group.

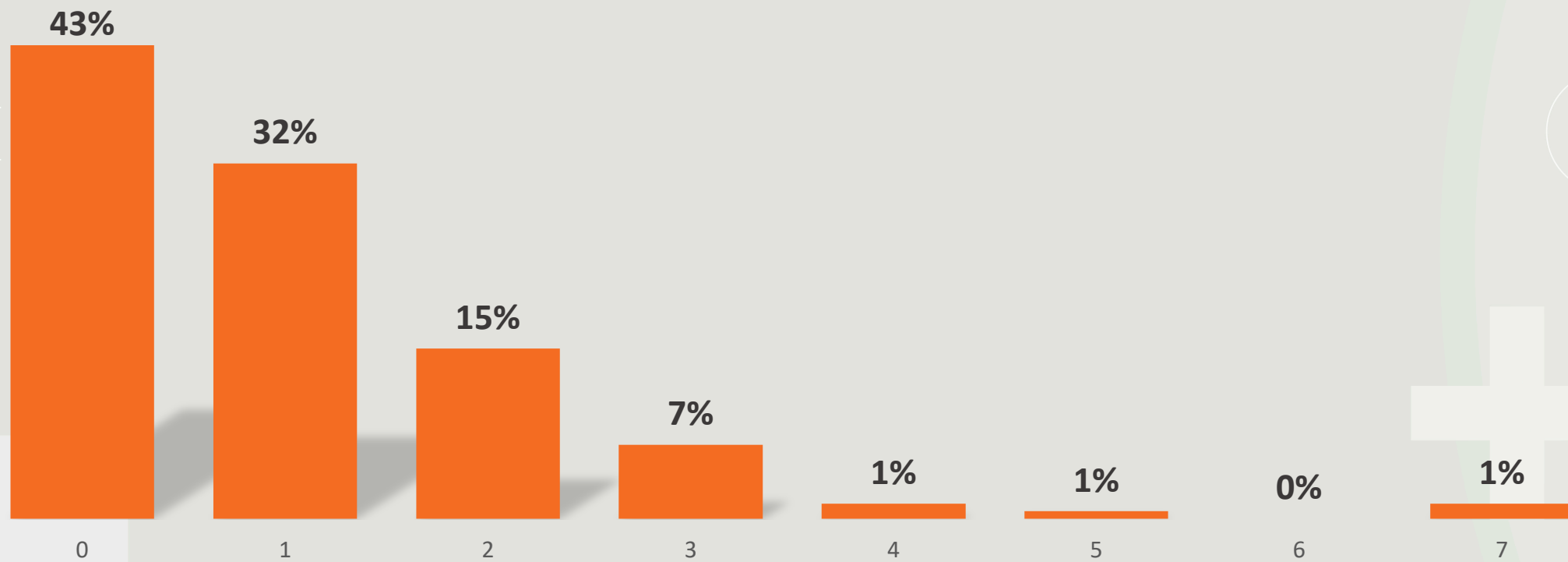
n=150

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Parents/Guardians	1%	6%	23%	44%	16%	7%	4%
School Staff	1%	7%	31%	39%	16%	3%	3%
Community Members	18%	41%	26%	12%	1%	1%	1%
Students	62%	8%	21%	5%	1%	1%	2%

The majority (75%) of respondents reported that either 0 or 1 SAC membership positions are currently vacant.

Q27. How many of your SAC membership positions are currently vacant?

n=150



While the majority of respondents reported that 0 vacancies were in each group, slightly over a third of respondents reported that 1 community member position is vacant.

Q28. If there are currently vacant positions on your SAC, please indicate how many vacancies are in each designated group.

n=150

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Parents/Guardians	90%	7%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%
School Staff	89%	9%	2%	0%	1%	0%	0%
Community Members	57%	35%	6%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Students	82%	11%	5%	1%	0%	0%	1%

Q29. If you reported vacancies, please indicate the reason for these vacancies, including any challenges you've encountered trying to recruit and retain members.

n=87

The most common reasons provided for vacancies were a lack of interest/difficulty in recruiting members (especially from the community), and COVID restrictions.

Hard to find volunteers/lack of interest	32%
Hard to find/engage community members	21%
COVID	21%
Lack of time/availability	18%
Staff/SAC membership changes	13%
Hard to find people who aren't parents or people who don't already have ties to the school	8%
Lack of awareness of the role of SAC	5%
Unaware they needed a student/don't require a student	3%
Other	9%

Q30. Please describe what, if any, plans your SAC has to help fill the vacant positions

n=90

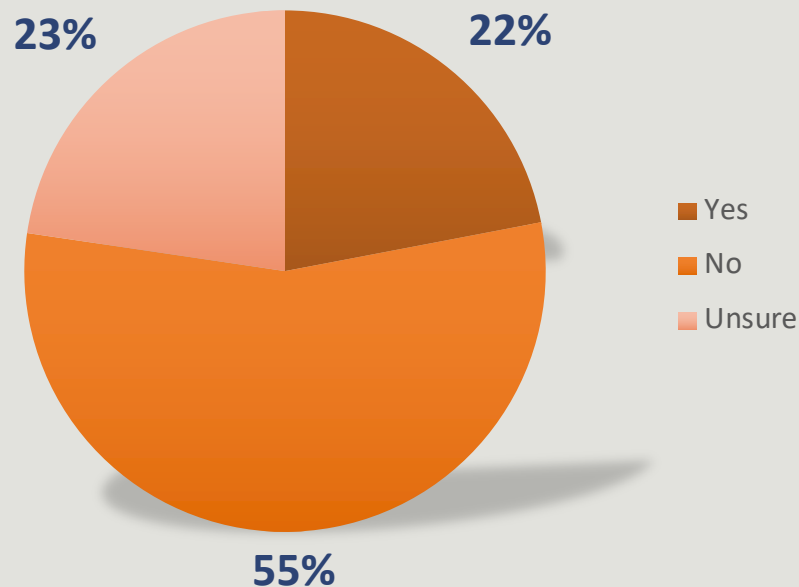
About half (48%) of respondents reported that they would make more advertisements for SAC positions via social media, website, newsletters, etc. Twenty-seven percent of respondents reported that they would personally reach out to recruit members.

General advertisements (e.g., social media/ newsletters/ emails/ website etc.)	48%
Personally ask/reach out	27%
Events	14%
Word of mouth	11%
No plans as of now	8%
Incentives	7%
More recruitment efforts	6%
Nominations/elections	4%
Get feedback	2%
Other	10%

Slightly over half (55%) of respondents reported that the funding has not helped their SAC recruit and support members. About 20% of respondents reported that the funding has helped, or were unsure if it helped.

Q31. Each SAC is allowed to use 20% of their budget to cover operational expenses, including encouraging and supporting member participation. Has this funding helped your SAC recruit and support members?

n=150



Thirty-one percent of respondents felt that SAC could benefit from increased awareness of the role of SAC members, some mentioned an easy-to-read infographic, or other materials, that can be distributed to the public. Twenty-four percent of respondents reported that they did not need any supports.

Q32. What additional support does your SAC require to recruit and support members?

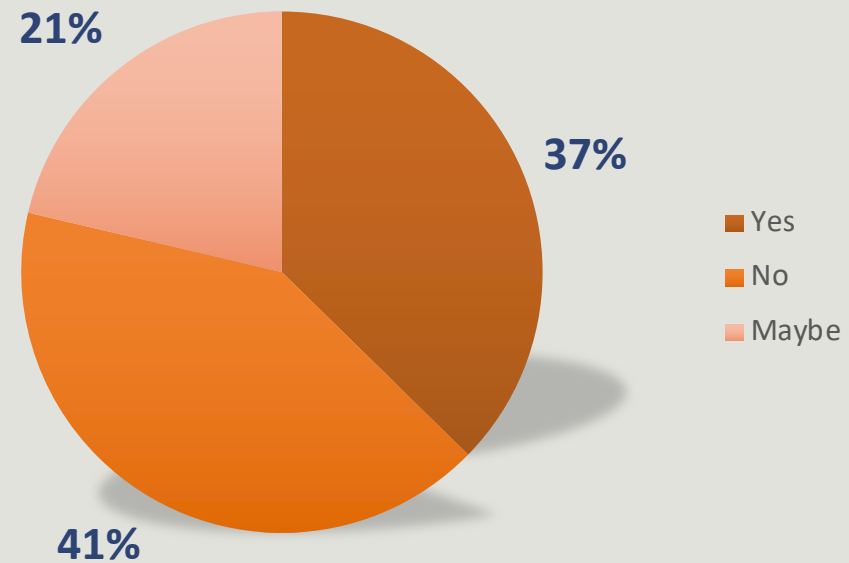
n=84

Increase awareness of SAC by advertising and informing people of the role and its impact	31%
No supports needed	24%
Incentives	13%
Orientation/training of members	6%
Advertisement	5%
Opportunities to share ideas	2%
Not sure	13%
Other	15%

A higher frequency of respondents felt that their SAC membership did not reflect the diversity of their school community compared to those who responded yes or maybe.

Q33. Does your SAC membership reflect the diversity of your school community?

n=150



Q34. Please explain your response to the previous question
n=148

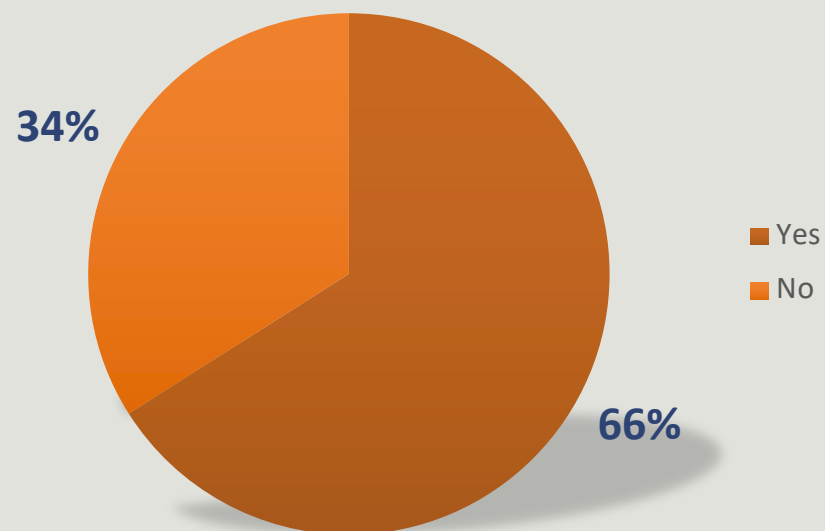
Thirty-four percent stated that their SAC was not diverse/representative. Thirteen percent specified that there was a lack of racial/ethnic/cultural diversity. 34% stated that their SAC was diverse/representative. Nine percent of respondents stated that their SAC was diverse in some areas, but not in other areas.

We are not diverse/representative	34%
We are diverse/representative	34%
Lack of racial/ethnic/cultural diversity on SAC	13%
Trouble recruiting/ Lack of awareness/Interest	12%
We are diverse/representative in some areas, not in others	9%
Efforts are being made to be more diverse/representative	9%
Lack of non-female members on SAC	8%
Would like to be more diverse/representative	7%
Non-diverse school community/small population	5%
Lack of socioeconomic diversity on SAC	3%
COVID	2%
Other	5%

Q35. Does your SAC Agreement allow for designated seats to reflect the diversity of your school community?

n = 150

Two thirds (66%) of respondents felt that their SAC Agreement allows for designated seats to reflect the diversity of their school community.



Twenty-seven percent of respondents reported that having designated seats was not in the agreement/bylaws. Another 27% stated that they do not have designated seats.

Q36. Please explain why you selected “No” to the question “Does your SAC Agreement allow for designated seats to reflect the diversity of your school community?”

n=51

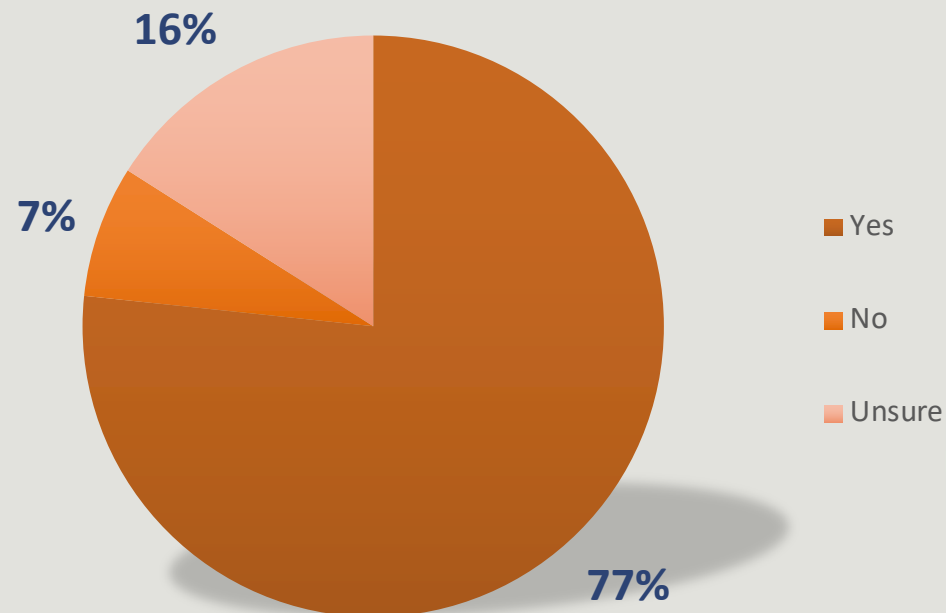
Not in the agreement/bylaws	27%
Do not have designated seats	27%
Small/non-diverse school	14%
Plans to allow for designated seats	14%
Has not been brought up/formalized	10%
Position was never filled	6%
Do not need a designated seat - already diverse	4%
Other	8%

The majority (77%) of respondents felt that their SAC has effectively delivered on this mandate.

Q37. Do you feel your SAC has effectively delivered on this mandate?

n=150

The mandate of the SAC is to advise their school principal and RCE on issues related to their school and the overall education system and developing policies that promote student achievement and safe and inclusive schools. Specifically, SACs have a role in advising their principal and RCE on policies, curriculum and programs, school practices, student support services, and parent-school communication as well as determining spending priorities for the provincial funds allocated to support their mandate.

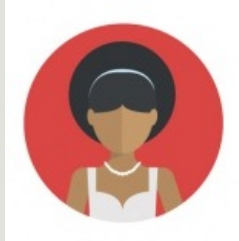


Q38. Please explain your response to the last question – no/unsure responses (23%)

Base = 23% respondents selected no/unsure	
Disrupted due to COVID	26%
Not involved in advising on policies	14%
Limited communication/involvement with RCE	14%
Need further direction & clarity on the mandate	11%
Feel as though SAC has limited voice/say in decisions	9%
Do not advise on curriculum	9%
Do not advise on student services	6%
Need to work on inclusion aspect	6%
Main focus is the budget	6%
Need to work on communication between SAC and school and community	6%

Q38. Please explain your response to the last question – yes responses (77%)

"We are actively participating in conversations about book selections that reflect the diversity in our school, budgeting priorities and student achievement. We have participated in seeking other funding opportunities through local grants."

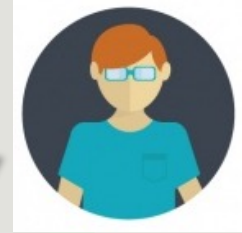


"We speak up on issues that are brought forth at meeting. The school staff and students know they have our full support, and we will ask the hard questions and seek answers and work towards solutions."

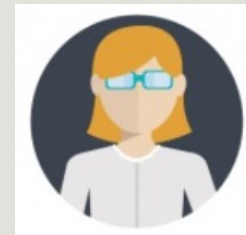
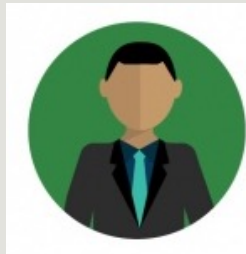


"Our SAC members are active in the community as well as the school. They bring a wealth of knowledge and support to the table."

"The SAC is aware of this mandate and our members are well versed in areas of need that exist at our school. Professional development in the future for SAC members could assist in ensuring better outcomes with respect to this mandate."



"Admin/school has successfully brought information to SAC and had great discussions. This allowed for a good action plan to be developed by the school and implemented."



"Yes, the SAC has been involved in policies, programs and capital expenditures that have improved student achievement."



"We are very effective."

"Our SAC has consistently advised the principal on policies, student achievement, etc."



Over 80% of respondents reported their SAC advised on school practises and initiatives, monitoring progress and improvement under the school improvement plan, and making recommendations to the School Principal. Respondents less often chose “advising/making recommendations to the local RCE” (35%).

Q39. Which of these areas has your SAC advised on in the past couple of years? Please check all that apply.

n=148

Providing advice on school practices and initiatives	89%
Monitoring progress and improvement under the school improvement plan	86%
Advising/making recommendations to the School Principal	85%
Advising on communication with school staff, parents, and the community	78%
Providing advice on policies that promote safe and inclusive schools	75%
Providing advice on policies that promote student achievement	69%
Planning school events	59%
Providing feedback on school budget	52%
Advising/making recommendations to the local RCE	35%
Other	9%

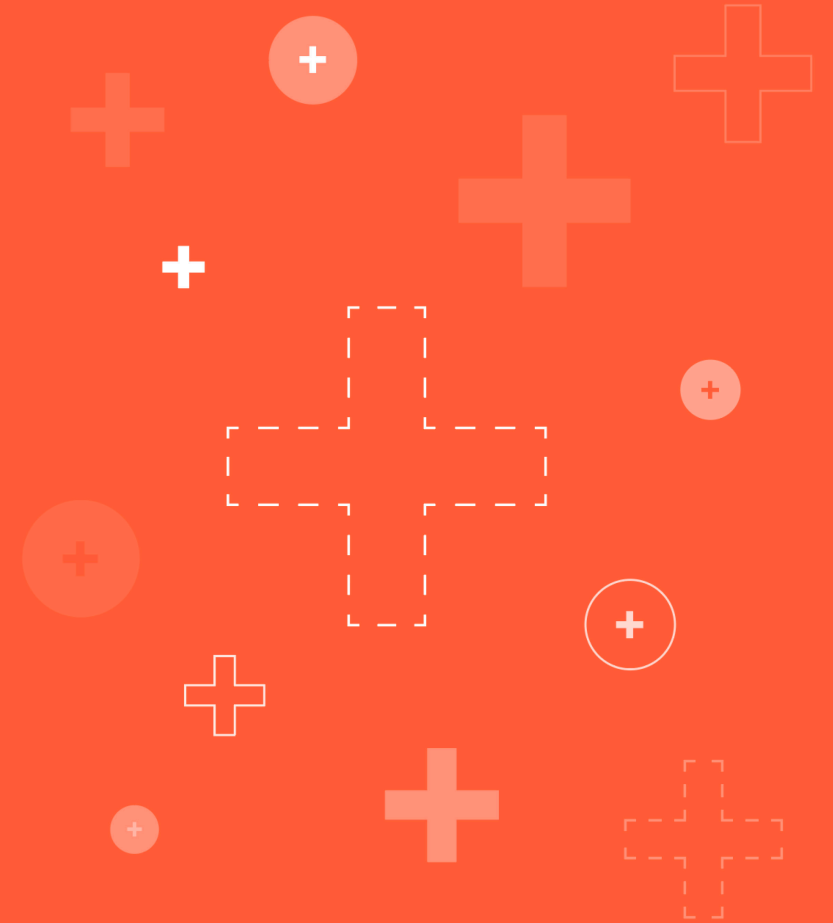
“Providing advice on policies that promote safe and inclusive schools” was most frequently identified as an extremely important area that SACs have a role in.

Q40. On a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being ‘not at all important’ and 7 being ‘extremely important’ how important is it that SACs have a role in the following areas:

n=150

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Providing advice on policies that promote student achievement	1%	1%	1%	8%	12%	21%	56%
Providing advice on policies that promote safe and inclusive schools	1%	0%	1%	4%	8%	22%	65%
Monitoring progress and improvement under the school improvement plan	0%	1%	2%	7%	17%	21%	51%
Providing advice on school practises and initiatives	1%	1%	3%	5%	16%	29%	46%
Advising on communication with school staff, parents, and the community	2%	2%	1%	7%	15%	19%	54%
Providing feedback on the school budget Planning school events	5%	5%	5%	13%	19%	20%	33%
Advising/making recommendations to the School Principal	0%	0%	2%	5%	12%	25%	55%
Advising/making recommendations to the local RCE	1%	5%	8%	12%	16%	13%	45%

PHASE 1: THOUGHT EXCHANGE RESULTS



Summary of Findings

The results of the thought exchange indicated that the three biggest challenges to providing local voice input are **engaging** the school community and recruiting volunteers to participate on SACs, having adequate **resources** to make the desired impact, and having **diverse** representation.

Additional support may be required to help SACs engage, recruit and retain members of the school community with a special focus on ensuring diverse and representative engagement.

Other notable comments suggest improvements are needed when it comes to:

- soliciting local voice and creating opportunities for local voice to be heard
- the process and pathways for providing local voice input. Ensuring the process is clear and the appropriate school and government audiences are accessible
- providing opportunities for different SACs to connect within and between regions
- using local voice feedback to inform decisions

Participant Demographics



128
Participants



111
Thoughts



1,785
Ratings



82

Participants shared
thoughts



79

Participants rated
thoughts

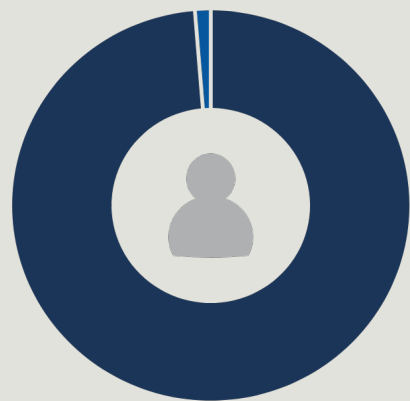


73

Participants explored
thoughts



I am a member of an SAC?




%		Answer
99%	(119)	■ Yes
1%	(1)	■ No

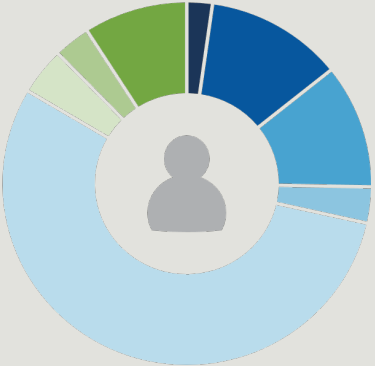
Which of the following best describes you? (Select all that apply)











117
Responses

%		Answer <i>(Multi-select)</i>
55%	(65)	Parent/Guardian
15%	(18)	Teacher/Staff
2%	(3)	Student Representative
17%	(20)	Principal
24%	(29)	Community Member

Which Regional Center for Education/ Conseil scolaire are you in?



%		Answer
2%	(2)	 Annapolis Valley Regional Centre for Education
12%	(14)	 Cape Breton-Victoria Regional Centre for Education
11%	(13)	 Chignecto-Central Regional Centre for Education
3%	(3)	 Conseil scolaire acadian provincial
56%	(65)	 Halifax Regional Centre for Education
4%	(5)	 South Shore Regional Centre for Education
3%	(4)	 Strait Regional Centre for Education
9%	(11)	 Tri-County Regional Centre for Education

Participation languages

Please indicate the ancestry with which you most identify.
Select all that apply.



%		Answer
95%	(122)	English
5%	(6)	French




%		Answer
9%	(11)	Acadian ancestry
3%	(4)	African ancestry (Black)
0%	(0)	Asian ancestry
74%	(85)	European ancestry/White
2%	(2)	Mi'kmaq or other Indigenous ancestry
3%	(3)	Middle Eastern ancestry
2%	(2)	Not sure
1%	(1)	Not listed above (please tell us)
6%	(7)	Other

What are the top areas where you feel local voice should be enhanced?



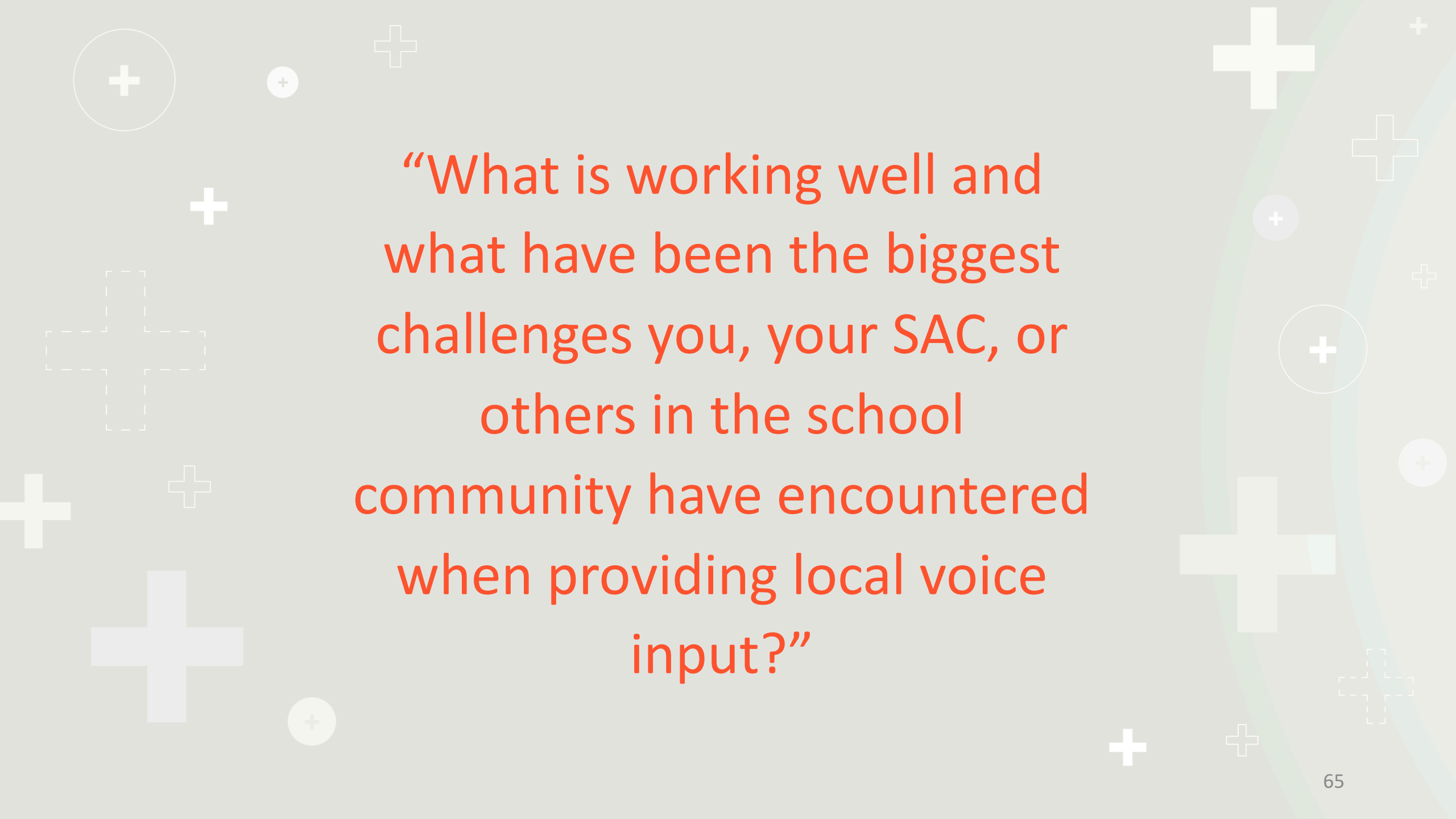
107
Responses

	%		Answer <i>(Multi-select)</i>
	39%	(42)	Decisions related to bussing (e.g., requests for bussing; modify a bus route; changes to bust stops)
★	66%	(71)	Prioritizing needs for new school construction and major upgrades/additions to existing schools
	44%	(48)	Policy development/Input on provincial & regional policies
	22%	(24)	Input into the Regional Executive Director (RED) position (e.g., skills & competencies required for position)
★	81%	(87)	Student achievement and well-being at a school/regional level (e.g., providing input on Regional Improvement Plans)
★	51%	(55)	Providing input during a school boundary review (i.e., determining a school catchment area)
	34%	(37)	Informing decisions related to RCE budget and priorities in the annual business planning process
	7%	(8)	Other

The processes and systems in place for considering local voice in your school are adequate



%		Answer
12%	(13)	Strongly Agree
37%	(39)	Somewhat Agree
27%	(28)	Neutral
13%	(14)	Somewhat Disagree
11%	(11)	Strongly Disagree

The background is a light gray gradient. It is decorated with numerous plus signs in white and light gray, some of which are enclosed in circles or squares. A prominent green wavy line curves across the right side of the slide. The text is centered in a bold, orange-red font.

“What is working well and what have been the biggest challenges you, your SAC, or others in the school community have encountered when providing local voice input?”

Top three rated comments

Increasing community input and getting volunteers to be on the SAC Every voice needs to be heard

I am SAC chair and our school runs and is amazing just the budget is to small to allow for all progress and student success needs to be enhanced and r We need more supports for a little school and need to be made more of a priority at board level

Making sure diverse representation is in place. All communities need a voice.

4.4 ★★★★★ (20 👤)

Ranked #1 of 111

4.3 ★★★★★ (26 👤)

Ranked #2 of 111

4.3 ★★★★★ (26 👤)

Ranked #3 of 111

Engagement

Resources

Diversity

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The top 25 rated comments as follows:

#1

Increasing community input and getting volunteers to be on the SAC

Every voice needs to be heard

4.4 ★★★★★☆ (20 🧑)



#2

I am SAC chair and our school runs and is amazing just the budget is to small to allow for all progress and student success needs to be enhanced and r

We need more supports for a little school and need to be made more of a priority at board level

4.3 ★★★★★☆ (26 🧑)



#3

Making sure diverse representation is in place.

All communities need a voice.

4.3 ★★★★★☆ (26 🧑)



#4

A variety of way and opportunities to ask for voice

Schools are part of the community and the community needs to be part of what happens relating to schools.

4.2 ★★★★★☆ (25 🧑)



#5

The current structure is a barrier without elected school boards (though not effective either)

there is now a gap. Appointed council (PACE) is not accessible, transparent. Need a more direct line to provincial department and clarity on process.

4.2 ★★★★★☆ (13 🧑)



#6

Getting diversity on the committee is a challenge.

We need all of our community reflected.

4.2 ★★★★★☆ (7)



#7

Disconnect between the Department of Education, Center for Education and Family of schools. Too political within the organization.

4.1 ★★★★★☆ (27)



#8

We provide opportunities for local voice input, however, participation is very low. We need to have more collaboration with the community.

Our school is very diverse and having a strong local voice would have more influence in decisions and impacts of decisions.

4.1 ★★★★★☆ (26)



#9

I feel that generally things in our school have been going well. Covid has been tough but our teachers are doing a good job of coping. I believe if our teachers are doing a good job most students will do as well as possible.

4.1 ★★★★★☆ (25)



#10

We are a silo. We have no communication with any of the other SACs.

It's important to have a network so we can share successes and learn from mistakes already made.

4.1 ★★★★★☆ (18)



#11

Our Principal is tremendous. Every time the SAC had a question or concern she tracked down the answer (even if the answer was disappointing)

It's important for the SAC to have a great working relationship with the school admin.

4.1 ★★★★★☆ (17)



#12

We were not consulted in any capacity when our grade 5s got moved to Portables - loss of classroom space due to pre-primaries

The addition of portables to a school community is a huge change and the community should have had an opportunity to voice their concerns

4.1 ★★★★★☆ (17)



#13

Meetings with our School Administrators have been excellent. Biggest challenge is achieving educational equity with the other schools in the region.

Our students deserve to have the same quality of curriculum delivery and infrastructure investment as our larger schools enjoy.

4.1 ★★★★★☆ (16)



#14

all input has been well received by those at the school

it is important to have all levels of voices heard in the school community

4.0 ★★★★★☆ (28)



#15

Collaborative approach

Values our voice

4.0 ★★★★★☆ (25)



#16

Our SAC is highly interested and committed to our school. They would welcome more decision making powers.

I think SACs deserve more of a say in the education system. They have valuable ideas and insight. They are stakeholders.

4.0 ★★★★★☆ (24)



#17

Input opportunities are limited. It would be nice to have knowledge of what we could provide input on - hours of the school? staffing?

Each school is different and a regional approach does not always work. It is important community has a say in their school.

4.0 ★★★★★☆ (23)



#18

Getting community to attend SAC meetings. Although we have community members on Council, the meetings are rarely if never attended by members of the public

Our meetings are public. Getting the word out about the needs and wants our schools is important. ie student enrolment, staffing issues, w

4.0 ★★★★★☆ (19)



#19

Local input is a challenge as there is no real forum/setting to provide this feedback. There may be valid opinions but not sure how to deliver message

When people do not know where/how to express their ideas, they become frustrated or indifferent.

4.0 ★★★★★☆ (18)



#20

Our bell times got moved to accommodate the bus company's schedule. Classes now start and end later. The SAC was not consulted in any capacity.

This is a major change to the school. The SAC, who in theory, represents the community should have had an opportunity to provide input.

4.0 ★★★★★☆ (17)



#21

The school is very responsive and easily accessible

Having access to school staff is very helpful when developing relationships with the professionals teaching our children

4.0 ★★★★★ (17)



#22

There is open communication between the school and the parents

It's important for everyone to be able to feel heard

4.0 ★★★★★ (17)



#23

Covid 19 pandemic and restrictions

have had to step away from inviting people into the school and building relationships with the community due to restrictions.

4.0 ★★★★★ (16)



#24

The biggest challenge is that local voice is not always considered when making policy changes and decisions are made without consultation

The local voice knows first hand what is best for a given school so it should be a key input

4.0 ★★★★★ (16)



#25

We have been meeting via Zoom which works well to keep things moving but it will be nice to be back to an inperson meeting.

It is easier to collaborate and share ideas in person

4.0 ★★★★★ (16)



PHASE 1:

FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

Summary of Focus Group Findings

- Providing Local voice input: All groups provided some input or feedback on topics such as school programs and specific concerns to their school principal.
- Feedback outcomes: While some members had positive experiences with providing feedback that led to positive outcomes, others felt ignored, with no action taken based on their feedback.
- Difficulties with recruitment and engagement: Every focus group expressed challenges in recruiting and engaging SAC members. This was attributed to a lack of awareness about the function of SACs and a perceived lack of power held by SACs. Some groups mentioned that the broader school community does not reach out to the SAC for input or feedback because they are unaware of this option.
- Communication channels: Some groups expressed a desire to establish communication channels between their SAC and the Regional Centre for Education/Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (RCE/EECD).
- Recommendations for enhancing local voice: SAC members suggested increasing awareness about the function of SACs and providing training to members to fulfill their mandate more effectively. They also expressed a desire to enhance the power of SACs/local voice, ensuring that their input is valued and considered when making decisions.

To date, have you or your SAC provided "local voice" input or feedback on a particular topic?

Some SAC members (Strait RCE, Cape Breton-Victoria RCE, and Chignecto-Central RCE) reported **they helped create/fund programs/activities/initiatives within their school**. These include a program to assist students with unique needs, a pre-primary program, creation of an outdoor classroom, a Cheetah Challenge jungle gym, a circular classroom, a girl power group, and prom/graduation events.

Some SAC members (Halifax RCE, Annapolis Valley RCE, Tri-County RCE, and South Shore RCE) **discussed providing feedback on policies**.

Other topics SAC members noted providing feedback on included **funding formula issues, capital equipment requests, capacity issues, dietary concerns, inclusion, bus loops, school expansion, and concerns about water tests**.

In the Chignecto-Central RCE focus group, a couple of members **met with the principal prior to SAC meetings to form the agenda** and ensure discussions were important and relevant.

Source of feedback, process for providing feedback, and response to feedback

When asked where the feedback stemmed from, two focus groups (that included members from Strait RCE, Cape Breton-Victoria RCE, and Halifax RCE) stated that it came from the SAC.

When asked about the process they follow to provide the feedback one focus group (with members from Annapolis Valley RCE, Tri-County RCE, and South Shore RCE) noted that if members of the community bring forward an issue, it is **done informally**.

When asked who they direct feedback to, three focus groups (containing members from Strait RCE, Cape Breton-Victoria RCE, Halifax RCE, Annapolis Valley RCE, Tri-County RCE, and South Shore RCE) stated that **they direct their feedback to the principal**. Other people mentioned **directing feedback to their minister and to local MLAs**.

Some members felt that the **experience of providing feedback was positive**, while **others reported that it was negative**. Some Halifax RCE members felt their issues were ignored and that they did not get very far.

One person pointed out that **before the pandemic, their experiences were positive**, however after the pandemic, they felt their experiences have been negative.

Some CSAP members **felt left out and uninformed** about the construction of a new school.

The **outcomes from providing feedback** for some members were **successful** (e.g., a program began and is succeeding) and they **felt as if they received a timely response**. **Others did not receive a response or any follow-up**.

What is working well? Where is local voice being heard?

When asked what is working well and where they feel their local voice is heard, some members (from Strait RCE, Cape Breton-Victoria RCE, Annapolis Valley RCE, Tri-County RCE, and South Shore RCE) **felt that their SAC did not have a local voice and that they do not have a say in capacity and boundary issues.**

Some felt they **had a say in smaller issues** (e.g., if problems arise with specific teachers).

One focus group (with members from Annapolis Valley RCE, Tri-County RCE, and South Shore RCE) felt that their **SACs could** effectively take over for the Parent-Teacher Association and **do fundraising, advertising, and school reviews.** They also felt that **posting SAC minutes is helpful.**

Parent navigation or community navigation could add value. Pathways is important but also adding in some navigation could really help.

What are the biggest challenges to providing local voice input?

The groups were asked about the biggest challenges or barriers to providing local voice feedback or input and if there are any specific areas in which they feel their local voice is not heard.

Almost every group (members from Halifax RCE, Annapolis Valley RCE, Tri-County RCE, South Shore RCE, CSAP, and Chignecto-Central RCE) felt that **recruitment/engagement of parents/community members was difficult** and that **many people do not know what the function of SACs are**.

A few members (from Halifax RCE, CSAP, Annapolis Valley RCE, Tri-County RCE, and South Shore RCE) mentioned that **they feel their voice is not being heard or valued** and that **they have little impact on issues/decisions**.

Some participants noted that SACs **lack inclusion and diversity**.

Others reported that there are **difficulties with communicating with other SACs**.

What are you hearing from the broader school community?

Some SAC members expressed that **they do not hear much from the broader school community** and issues are not often brought to them.

Some also felt that, due to the **lack of awareness of the SAC**, as well as **SACs' lack of power**, they are **not often thought of** when the broader community has issues.

A couple of members pointed out that the **community, parents/guardians, and staff may be afraid and/or uninterested in** reaching out to **provide feedback**.

Some issues that SAC members reported hearing about from the broader school community include **boundary reviews; equity, diversity, and inclusion; and attendance**.

What has their experience been trying to provide Input or feedback?

SAC members felt that they and the broader school community **would like to receive more information** in general.

They would like to have **clear communication channels** to the EECD and RCE. They expressed that they would like to know where their feedback is going and **where to direct their feedback**.

Currently, some feel that they are **not included in important decisions** and would like to know how decisions get made (i.e., **increased transparency**).

Some also felt that higher-ups should **consider the variation between school systems**.

A few members expressed that they would like to be included in hiring processes.

A couple of members felt that they, and the broader community, would like to know more information about what the **purpose and function of the SAC is**.

How can local voice input be enhanced?

SAC members provided some suggestions on how to enhance local voice. These include:

- **Educating students** on cultural differences and mental/physical disabilities
- **Collecting data** from SAC members to determine the SACs **diversity** and **representativeness**
- Offer ways for people to **voice their concerns** (e.g., concern box at events)
- Allowing SACs to **carry the same weight** as school boards did previously
- **Informing the public** of SACs function (e.g., more advertisements)
- Providing each SAC with an **expert to advise** on tackling projects
- **Offering workshops/training sessions** that help the SACs meet their mandate
- Creating a guide listing the **responsibilities and expectations for SAC members**
- **Expanding the eligibility criteria** for SAC membership
- **Including School Community Development Officers** in SAC
- Including SACs in **hiring processes**
- Including **one representative from each grade** that is **responsible for promoting** the SAC
- **Opening communication channels** between SACs (across the province) to share best practices, challenges, positive experiences, etc.

Aside from challenges related to providing input and feedback, have you, or your SAC, or others in the school community experienced challenges when it comes to receiving information, staying informed, or finding answers to questions about your school and the education system?

Most focus groups (that included members from Strait RCE, Cape Breton-Victoria RCE, Halifax RCE, CSAP, Annapolis Valley RCE, Tri-County RCE, and South Shore RCE) felt that **communication between their SACs, community, government, and other SACs is lacking.**

If they do get the chance to provide feedback, it is often **not valued.**

CSAP expressed that it is difficult to find services, documents, and publications that are in French and thus feel **French services are an afterthought.**

One focus group (that included members from Strait RCE and Cape Breton-Victoria RCE) felt that **families from different cultures** and with different dietary needs (e.g., vegetarians) **are not being accommodated.**

All the members of one focus group (Chignecto-Central RCE) expressed that their **SAC felt informed,** and they receive everything they need to know from their principal. They feel that **input and communication is strong.**

PHASE 2: PUBLIC CONSULTATION



Key Findings

1. **Feeling Heard:** The majority of respondents indicated that they did not feel heard when providing input or feedback.
2. **Barriers and Challenges in Providing Feedback:** Respondents highlighted various challenges in providing feedback, such as a lack of information about where to go, bureaucratic processes, personal fears, and concerns about negative reception. Access to resources, communication issues, and difficulties navigating the education system were also mentioned.
3. **Communication Process:** Participants expressed frustration with communication processes between schools, families, communities, and educational authorities. Lack of a clear point of contact, delays in response and resolution, and dissatisfaction with transparency in decision-making processes were mentioned.
4. **Transparent Processes and Consideration of Feedback:** Participants wanted assurance that their feedback would be considered in policy development and decision-making. They expressed a need for more transparent processes to understand how their feedback is utilized within the school community.
5. **Need for Equal Opportunities and Representation:** A significant percentage of respondents, particularly from underrepresented groups, felt that there were not equal opportunities for diverse groups to provide feedback. Participants emphasized the importance of considering the needs and barriers faced by minority groups and newcomers.

Key Findings

6. **Challenges for Underrepresented Groups and Newcomers:** Participants identified several challenges faced by underrepresented groups and newcomers in providing local voice feedback, including language barriers, poor experiences within the education system, and limited technical skills and internet access. Addressing these challenges and ensuring inclusivity in feedback processes is important.
7. **Variety and Accessibility of Feedback:** Participants expressed a desire for a greater variety of opportunities to provide local voice feedback. They emphasized the importance of inclusive and accessible methods that cater to all groups within the school community.
8. **Role of School Boards:** Participants felt there was value in having an entity that they felt existed to advocate on their behalf and that provided a single place to go to share concerns or feedback that was primarily focused on working to address issues.
9. **Importance of Community Engagement:** Building community connections and partnerships were seen as crucial in increasing opportunities for providing feedback. Participants highlighted the success of informal interactions and community events in gathering feedback, particularly from students and parents.
10. **Region-Specific Considerations:** Participants stressed the need for considering the specific needs and differences between schools and regions when developing policies. They highlighted the importance of tailoring policies to best fit the local context.

Key Findings

11. Information Needs: A significant percentage (38%) of the school community expressed a desire for more information on various topics such as curriculum, health, available support, system changes or decisions, and extracurricular activities. This highlights the importance of addressing information gaps and providing comprehensive information to meet the needs of the school community.
12. Utilization of School Advisory Councils (SACs): Although the majority of respondents (66%) were aware of SACs, most of them (69%) had not taken their concerns, questions, input, or feedback to their SACs. This suggests that there is a potential underutilization of SACs as a channel for local voice feedback.

PHASE 2: SURVEY RESULTS

Key Findings

1. Sources of Information: Teachers, social media, school websites, word of mouth, school principals, and the Regional Centres for Education (RCEs) are the top places the school community goes to find answers to questions. While there are slight group variations, such as students being more likely to seek answers through word of mouth, the top sources of information remain consistent across groups.
2. Information Needs: 62% of the school community is receiving the information they want, while 38% desire more information on topics such as curriculum, health, available support, system changes or decisions, and extracurricular activities.
3. Raising Concerns: Individuals primarily raise concerns through their local schools, speaking to teachers, other school staff, and the principal.
4. Feeling Heard: The majority of respondents indicate that they do not feel heard when providing input or feedback.
5. Equal Opportunities for Feedback: Only 22% of respondents agree that there is equal opportunity for diverse groups to provide local voice and feedback. A significant percentage of Black Nova Scotians (46%), Indigenous respondents (42%), and Acadian respondents (35%) disagree with this statement. Additionally, 63% of transgender, non-binary, or two-spirit individuals do not feel there are equal opportunities for diverse groups to provide feedback.

Key Findings

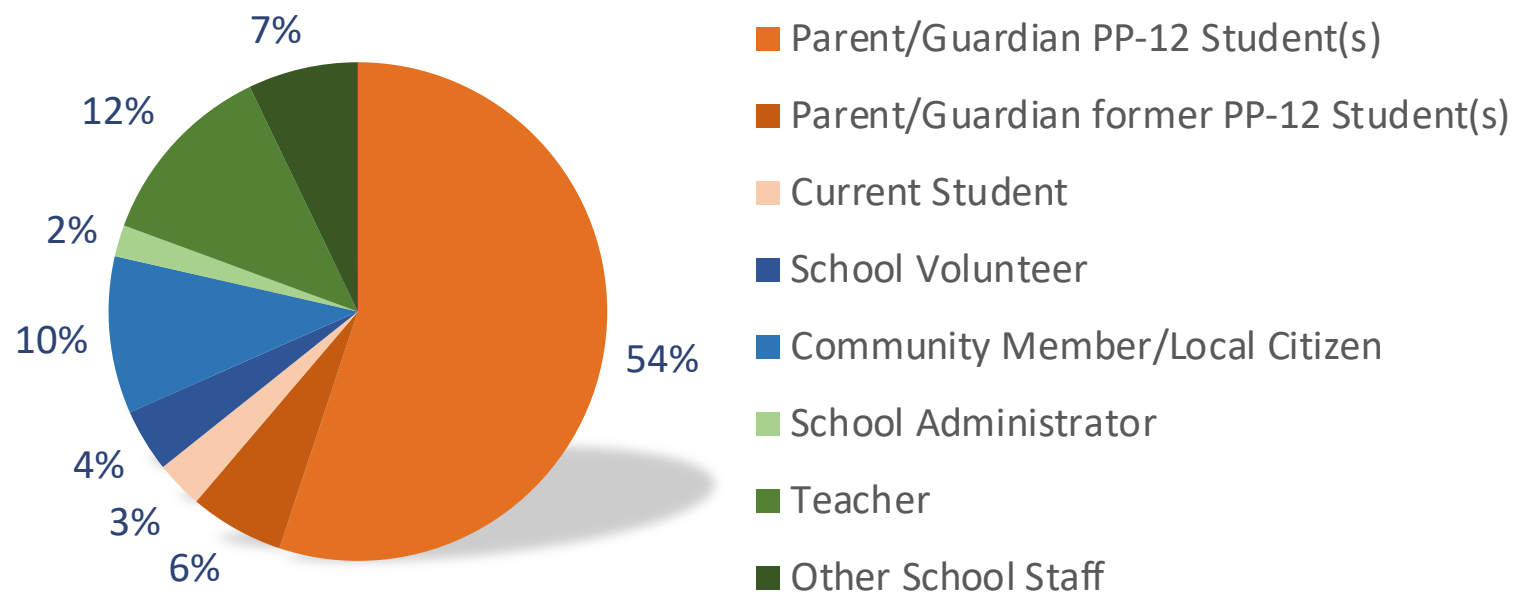
6. Challenges in Providing Feedback: Respondents highlighted various challenges, including system-level barriers like not knowing where to go to share concerns, a lack of staff, bureaucratic processes ("red tape"), and personal challenges like fear, a sense of not being heard, and concerns about negative reception or defensiveness towards their feedback.
7. School Boards: Respondents expressed that what worked well about school boards was having a single place to share concerns or feedback that was focused on addressing issues. Respondents felt that the boards provided an advocate on their behalf.
8. Awareness of SACs: The majority of respondents (66%) are aware of School Advisory Councils (SACs).
9. Utilization of SACs: However, most respondents (69%) have not taken their concerns, questions, input, or feedback to their SACs.

Public Participation

The majority of survey participants (54%) were parents of current students.

Which of the following best describes you?

(n=5,874)



Public Participation – Regional Education Centre

The below table illustrated the distribution of respondents by Regional Education Centre.

Which school community do you belong to?

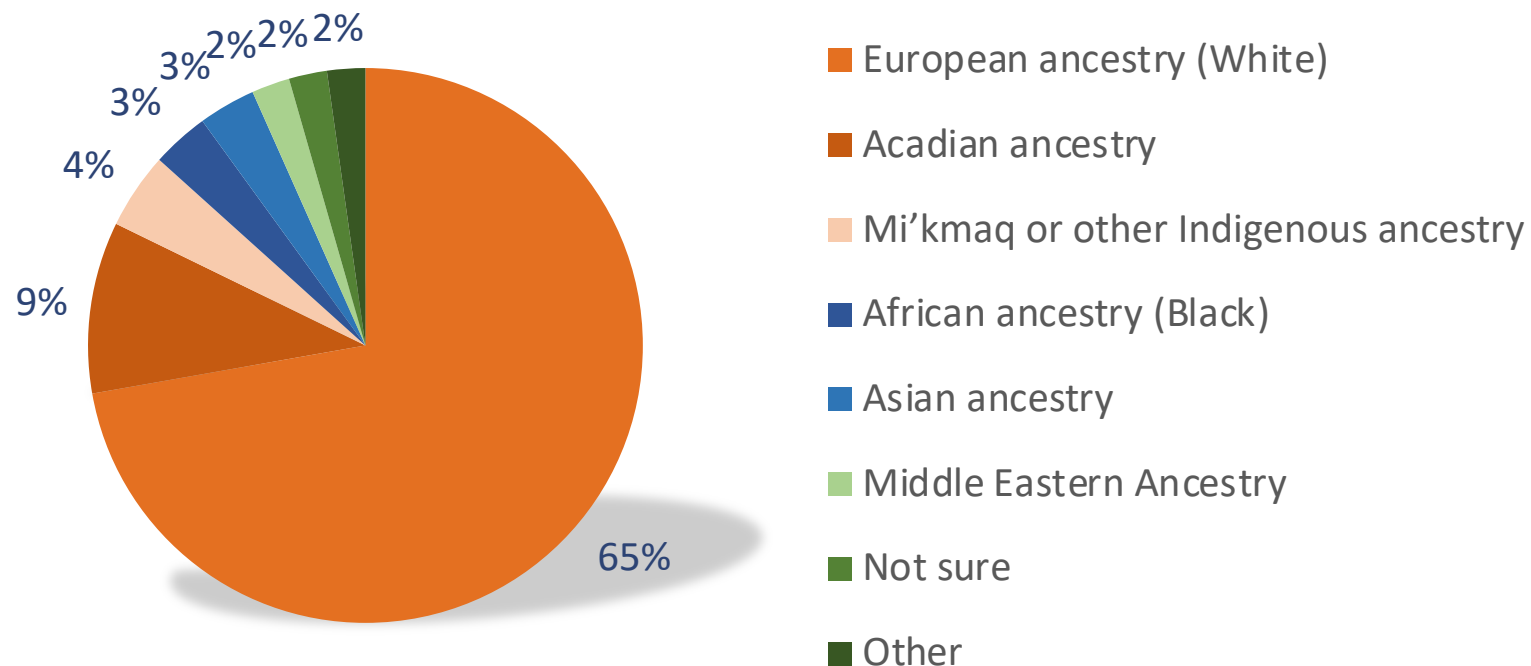
(n=5,839)

Halifax	54%
Chignecto-Central	13%
Annapolis Valley	10%
Cape Breton-Victoria	7%
Strait	6%
South Shore	4%
Conseil Scolaire Acadian Provincial	4%
Tri-County	3%

Public Participation - Ancestry

Please indicate the ancestry with which you most identify. Ancestry is defined as family background/origins.

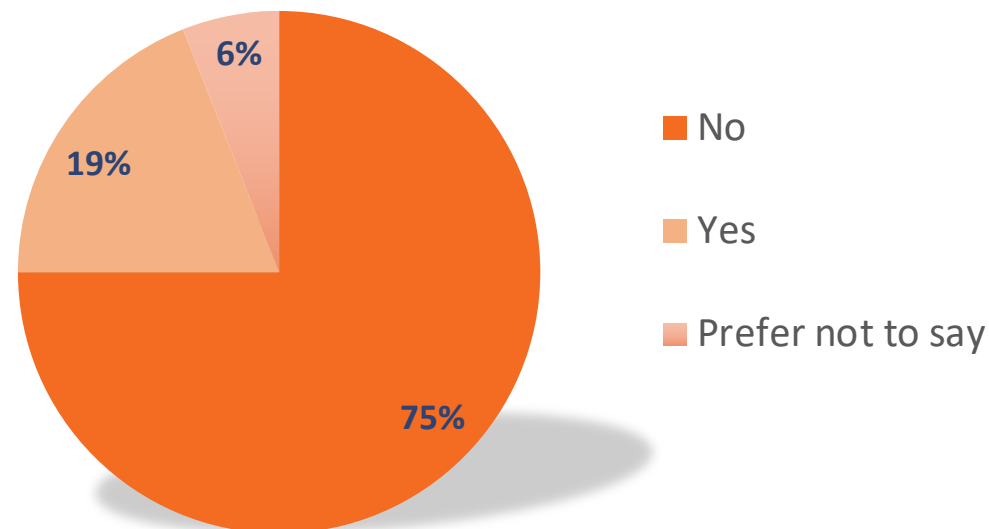
(n=5,874)



Public Participation – Disability

Seventy-five percent of individuals who responded to the survey reported that they were an individual with a disability or had a child with a disability. Seventeen percent of students who participated in the survey reported that they are students with a disability.

Do you have a disability or are you the parent/guardian of a child with a disability?
(n=5,785)

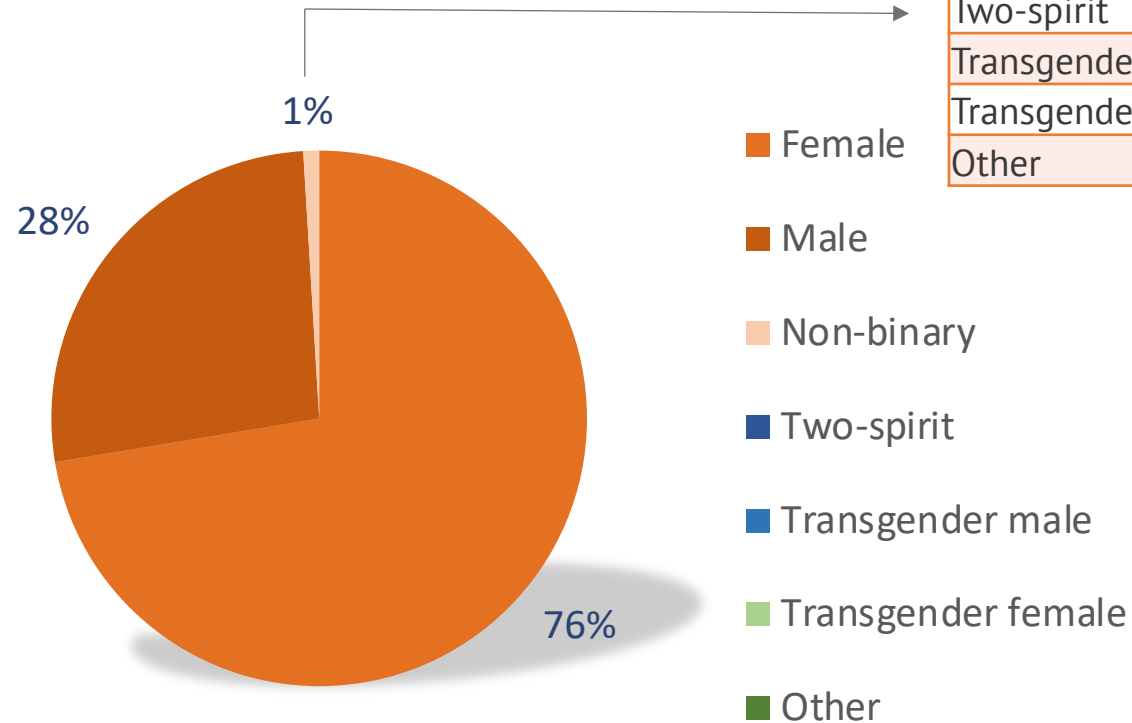


Public Participation – Gender

The majority (76%) of survey respondents identified as female.

Which gender do you most identify with?

(n=5,874)

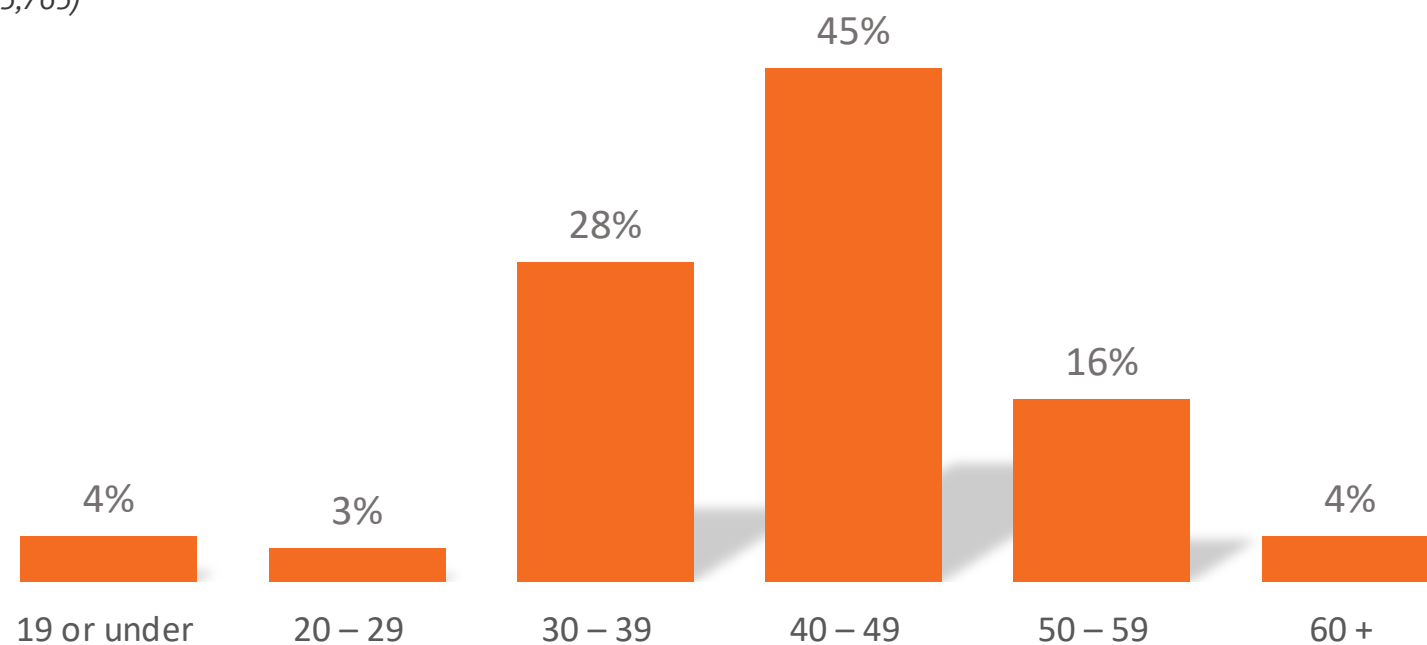


Public Participation – Age

Most (73%) individuals who responded to the survey were between age 30 and age 49.

How old are you?

(n=5,765)

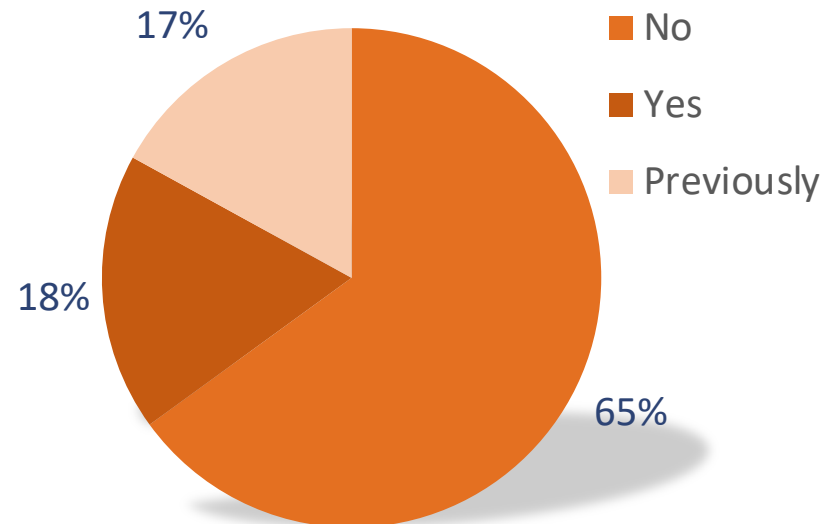


School Involvement

The majority of survey respondents were not involved with a school association committee or council. Of those who were involved, most reported being involved in some variation of a home and school association (parent teacher association/parent teacher organization, home and school association etc.). Student respondents were most often involved in student activity groups (e.g. student council, yearbook, clubs etc.)

Are you involved with any school associations, committees, councils, etc.?

(n=5,750)

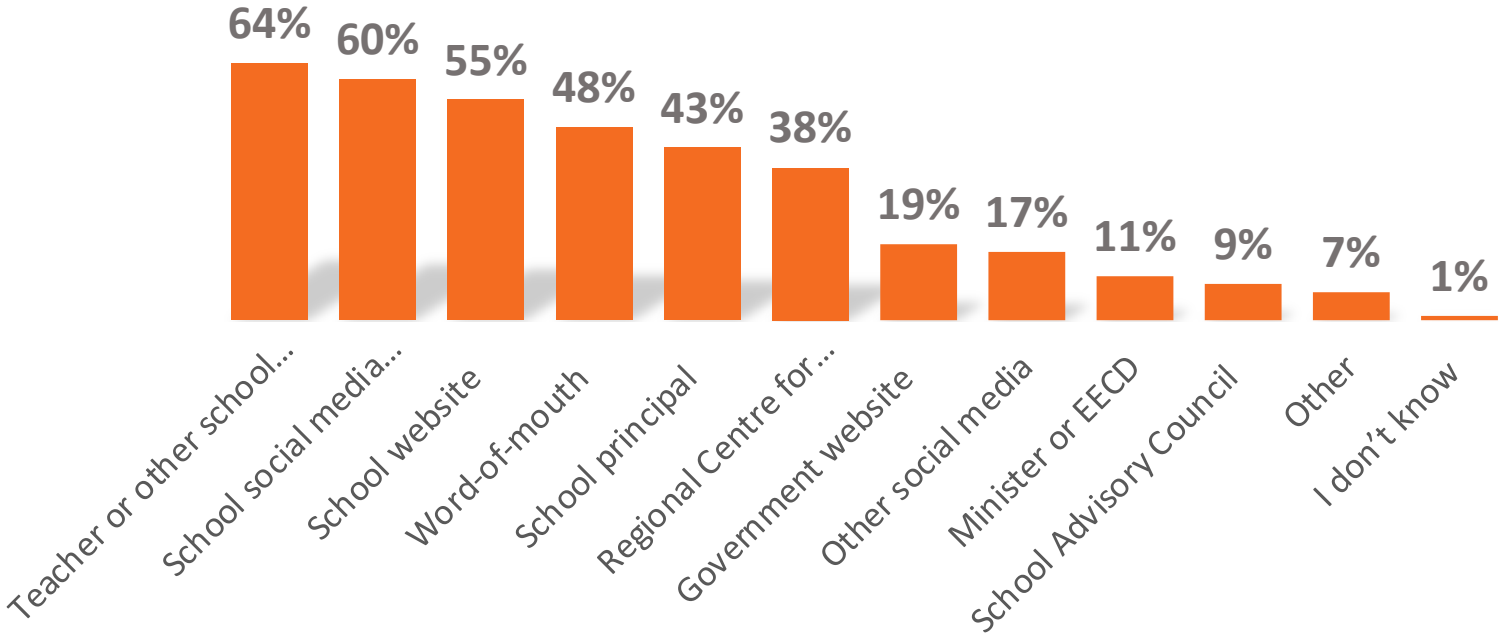


Other	%
Home and School/PTA/PTO	65%
OHS	11%
Student Group/Student Association	9%
SAC School Advisory Council	5%
Volunteer	3%
Fundraising/School Improvement	1%
Sport	6%
Union	1%
Other	3%
N/A	2%

Staying Informed

Teachers, social media, school websites, word of mouth, school principals and the RCEs are the top three places the school community go to find answers to questions. Some slight group variations exist in preference, for example, students are slightly more likely to seek answers through word of mouth but the top five or six sources of information generally remained the same across groups.

How do you find answers to questions and/or stay informed about the education system?
(n=5,242)

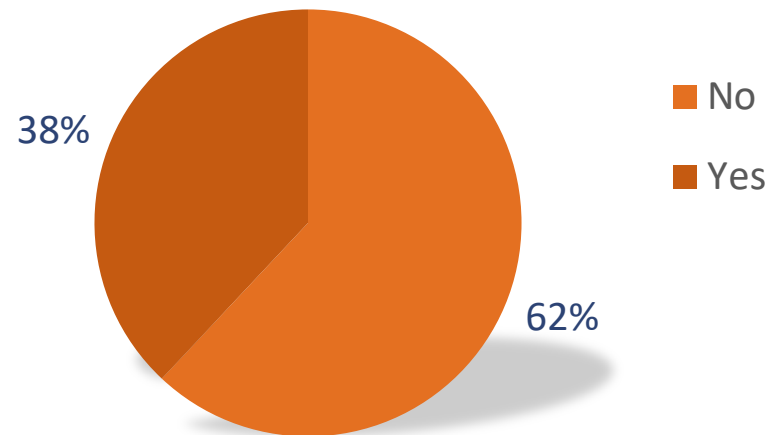


Information Content

The majority of the school community is receiving the information that they want, thirty-eight percent would like information on the education system that they are not currently receiving. The primary topics that individuals are seeking more information on are related to curriculum, health, available supports, changes in the system or decisions that are being made and extra curricular activities.

Is there anything related to the education system that you would like information on that you are not currently receiving?

(n=4,729)

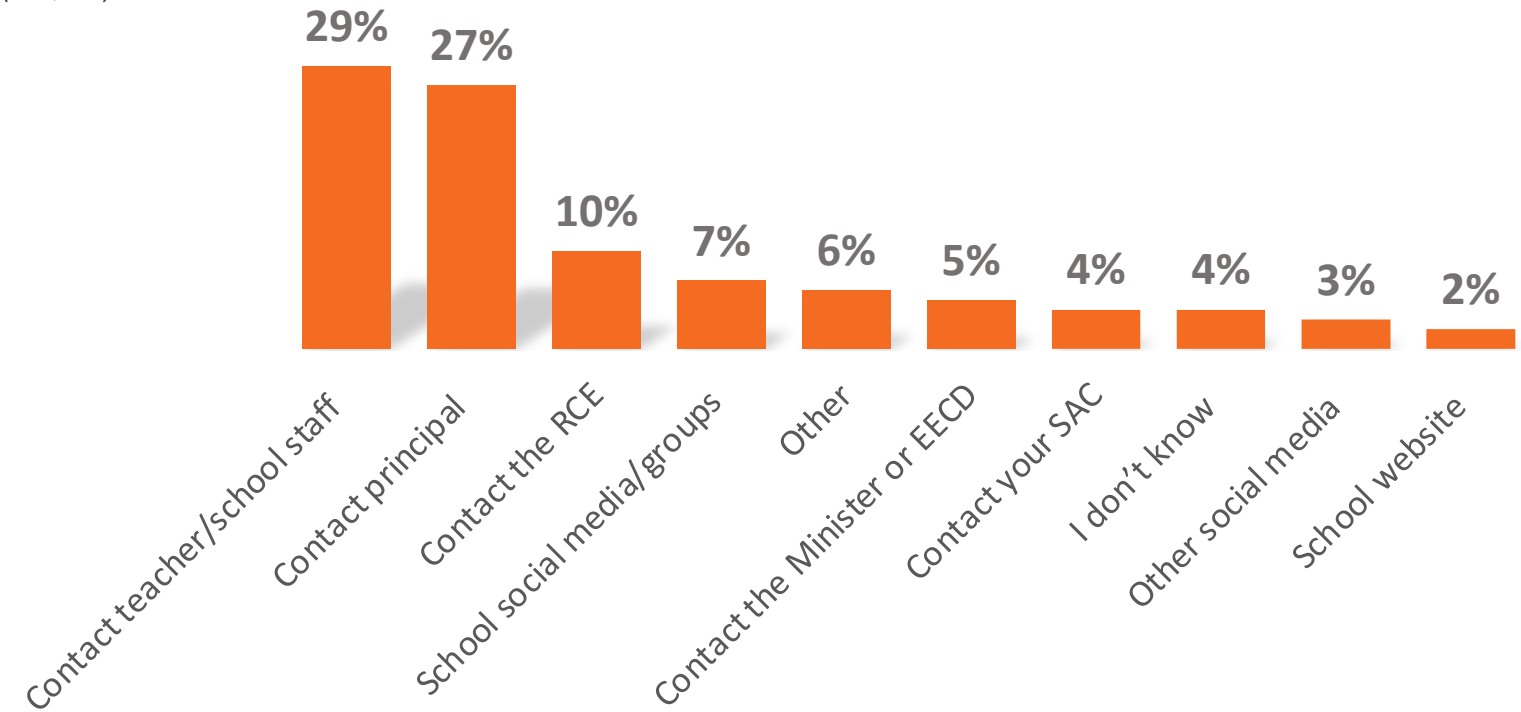


Raising Concerns

Individuals are primarily raising concerns through their local schools, speaking to teachers, other school staff and the principal.

How do you raise concerns about the education system?

(n=4,566)

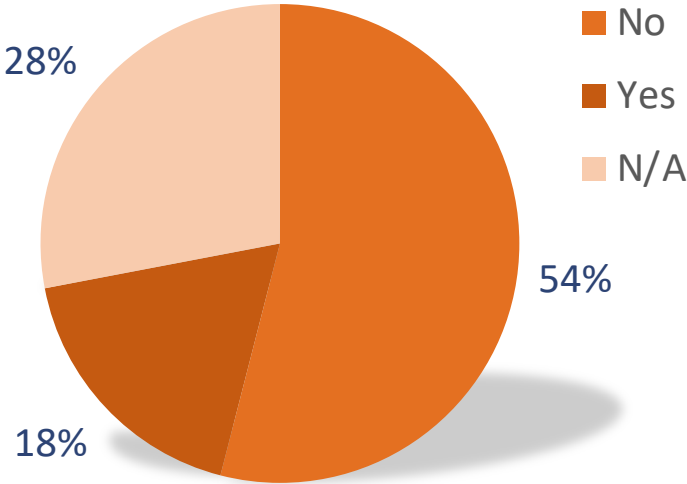


Feeling Heard

The majority of respondents indicated that they do not feel heard when they provide input or feedback. Indigenous respondents were more likely to indicate that they did not feel heard when providing local voice (54%). Asian respondents were least likely to report that they did not feel heard (38%).

When you provide local voice feedback and input do you feel heard?

(n=3,285)



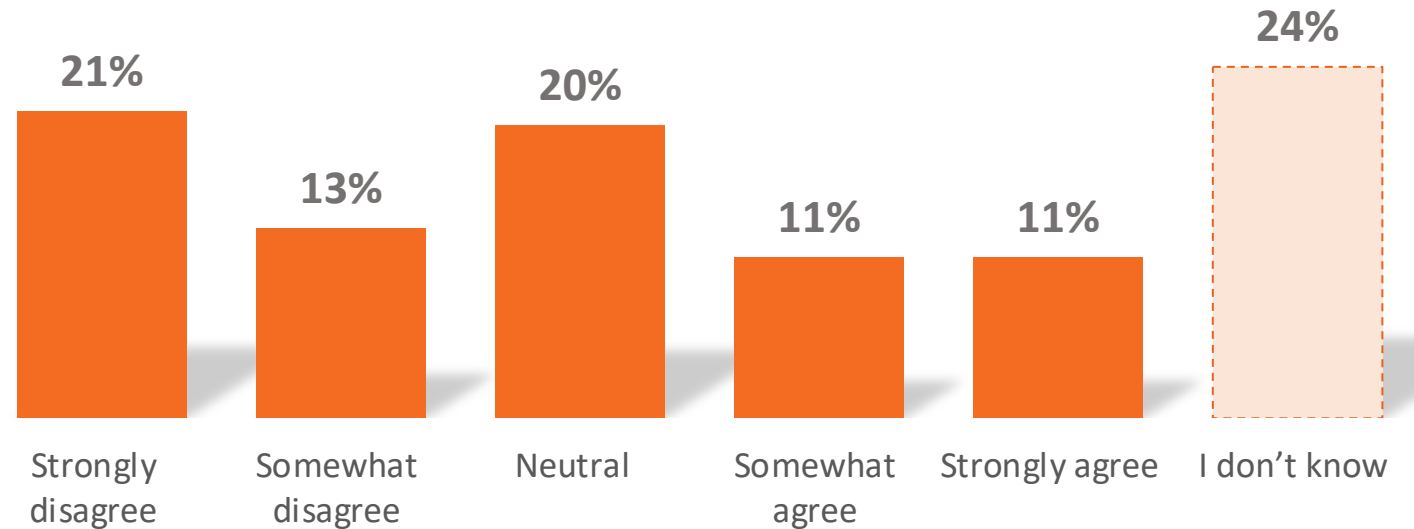
Ancestry	n	% Yes	%No	N/A
European (White)	2413	19%	53%	29%
Acadian	330	18%	56%	26%
Indigenous	153	14%	63%	23%
African (Black)	135	21%	43%	36%
Asian	112	25%	38%	37%
Middle Eastern	57	21%	46%	33%

Equal Opportunity

Although only 22% of respondents agree that there is equal opportunity for diverse groups to provide local voice and feedback. Forty-six percent of Black Nova Scotians, forty-two percent of Indigenous respondents and thirty-five percent of Acadian respondents disagreed with this statement. Of the thirty-five individuals who identified as transgender, non-binary or two-spirit sixty-three percent did not feel that there are equal opportunities for diverse groups to provide local voice and feedback.

There are equal opportunities for diverse groups to provide local voice feedback and input.

(n=3,344)



Current Barriers

What do you see as current challenges to providing local voice feedback and input?

Respondents shared a number of challenges ranging from system-level barriers such as not knowing where to go, a lack of staff, 'red tape' and simply not having an opportunity or being asked to personal challenges such as fear, a feeling of not being heard and a perception that the feedback would not be well received or would be received with defensiveness.

Challenges	
Unreceptive/Defensive	Improvements To Methods To Give Feedback
Not Being Heard	Accountability
Unsure Who to Speak to	Inequality/Diversity
Lack of follow through	Confidentiality/Anonymity
Not asked/No Opportunity	Fear
Logistics	Layers/Red Tape
Support of Administration/Union/RCE/Department	Lack of Staff
Transparency/Honesty	Centralized – too big

Making it Easier to Provide Local Voice

How could we make it clearer and easier to provide local voice feedback and input?

Making it Easier to Provide Local Voice		
Reinstate School Boards	Provide more feedback	Online sessions/zoom
Surveys/Online forms	Follow through	Accessible/Open dialogue
Listening/Responding	Go to where the people are	Consistency
Make it clear who to contact	Advertise	Prioritize minority voice
In-person meetings (town halls)	Local committees/SACS	Clear language
Ask/Create more opportunities	Have one-entity/contact	Short frequent questions
Social media or other online platforms	Transparency/honesty	Safe space
Emails/Newsletters	Spend more time in the classroom	
Create a culture that welcomes constructive criticism		

“Forums like this. People can participate without childcare/transportation challenges, these also accommodate varied work schedules”

“Show how input has actually resulted in changes. That would be encouraging”

“Include information within the schools (newsletter, website, social media etc. as to how to offer our voice (e.g. via an online form, email etc.)”

“There have to be regular opportunities for feedback, and those have to be better advertised. Such opportunities should allow for both digital and in-person options.”

School Boards

Respondents that shared more detail on why they would like school boards re-instated spoke about the value of having an entity that they felt existed to advocate on their behalf. Survey respondents shared the value of having a single place to go to share concerns or feedback that had a singular focus of working to address issues.

“Elected school board members whose sole job is to field questions and concerns from the public.”

“...having an independent body to communicate concerns can be more productive.”

“Reinstate school boards. Someone designated to go to, to feel heard on a local level such as a school board member.”

“Bring back school boards. Parents have no idea who to contact in the system for support.”

“School boards; at least feedback would be streamlined through one venue”

“Bring back school boards so we can have someone to be our voice”

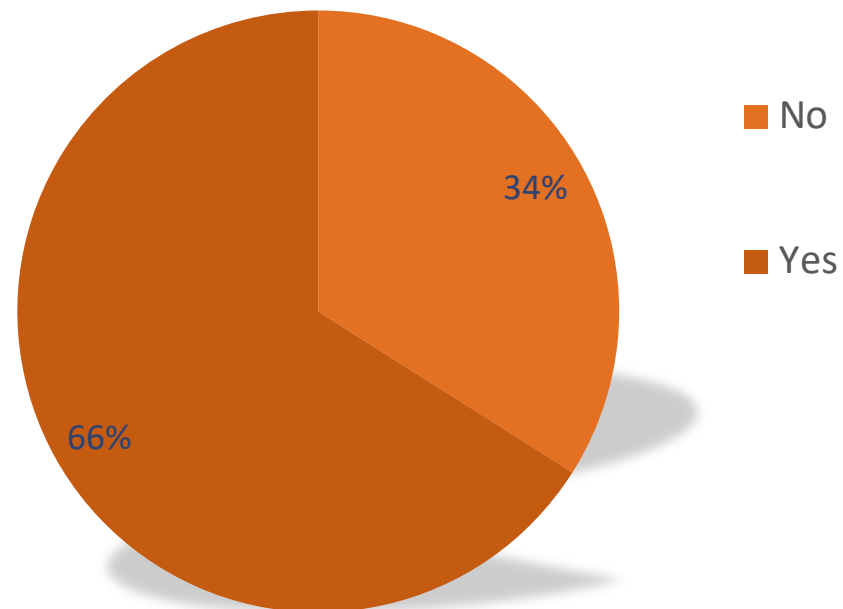
“Bring back school boards. Having info go straight from EECD to the RCE’s keeps decisions political and lessens local voice as RCE folks are the employees of EECD, so the hierarchy limits meaningful local feedback ”

Awareness of SACS

The majority (66%) of respondents are aware of SACs.

Are you aware of your school's School Advisory Council (SAC)?

(n=3,444)

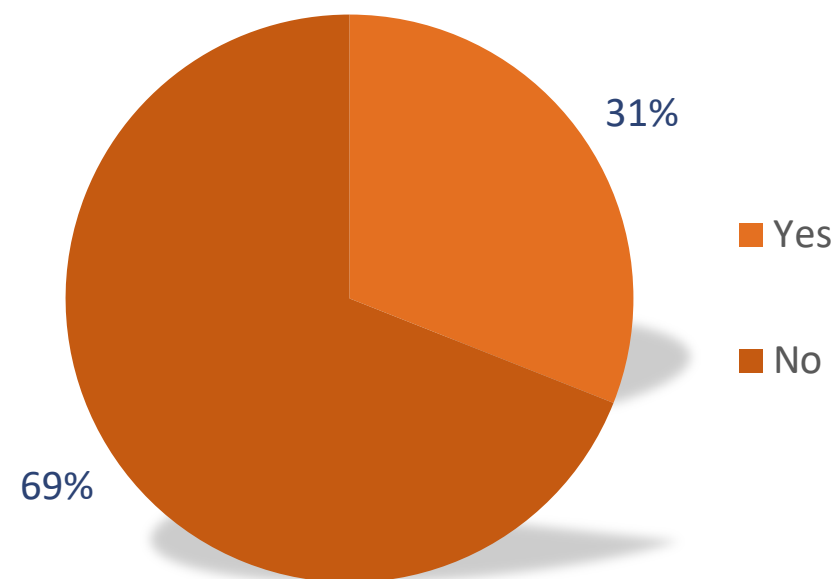


Participation in SACS

Most respondents (69%) have not taken concerns, questions, input or feedback to their SACs.

Have you ever taken concerns, questions, feedback, or input to your School Advisory Council (SAC)?

(n=2,272)

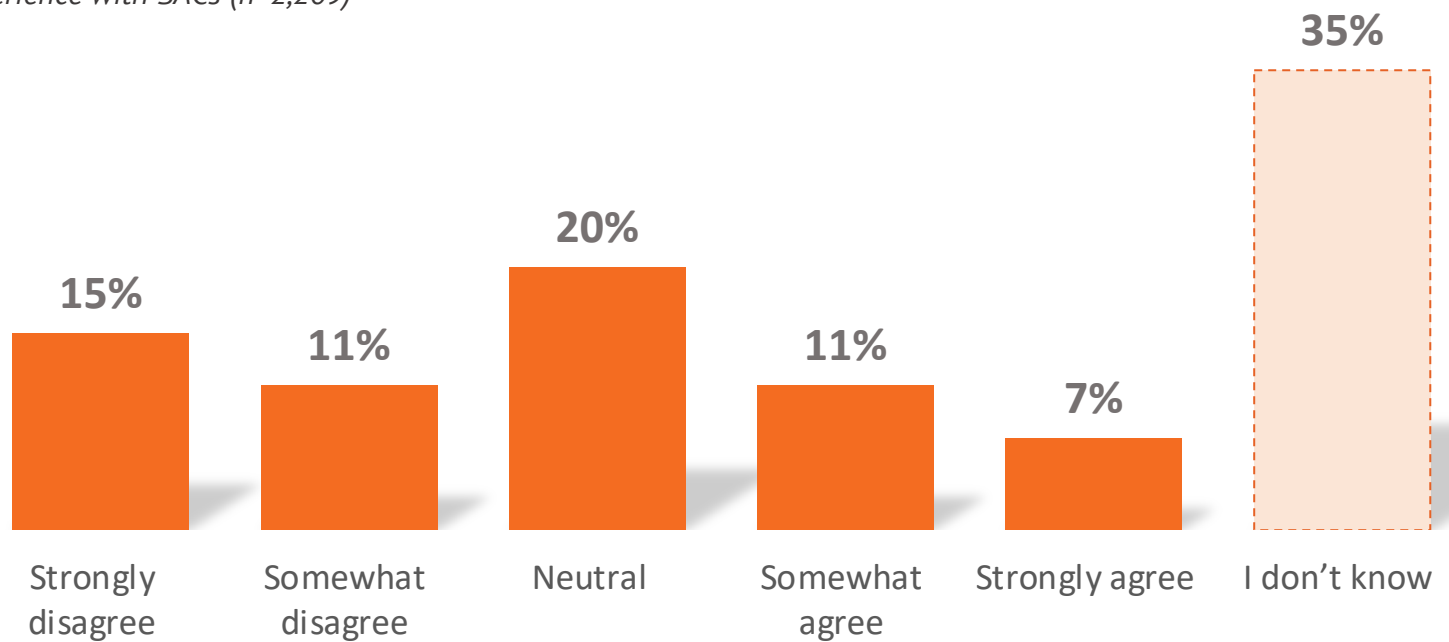


School Advisory Councils

The majority of respondents are not sure if their SACS operate effectively.

SACs operate effectively.

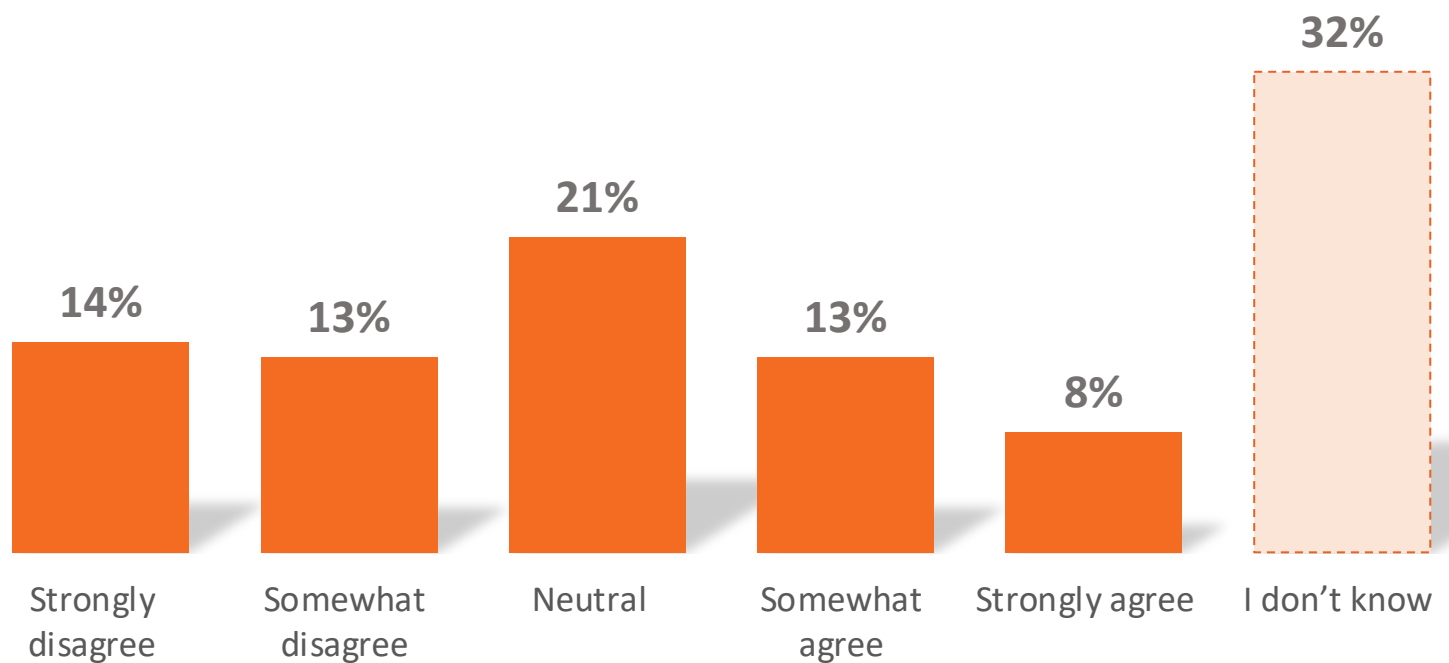
Please use the rating scale provided to indicate your agreement with the following statements based on your experience with SACs (n=2,209)



School Advisory Councils

SACs are well established.

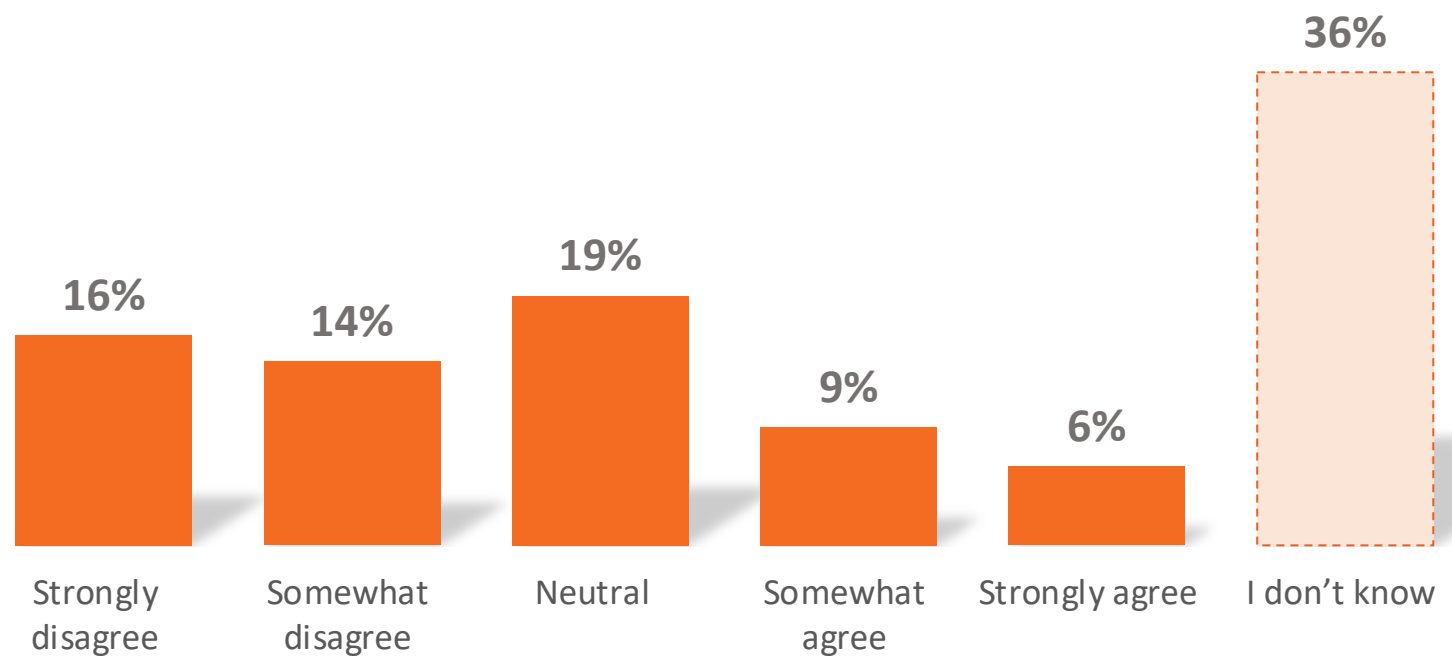
Please use the rating scale provided to indicate your agreement with the following statements based on your experience with SACs (n=2,209)



School Advisory Councils

SACs function as they should.

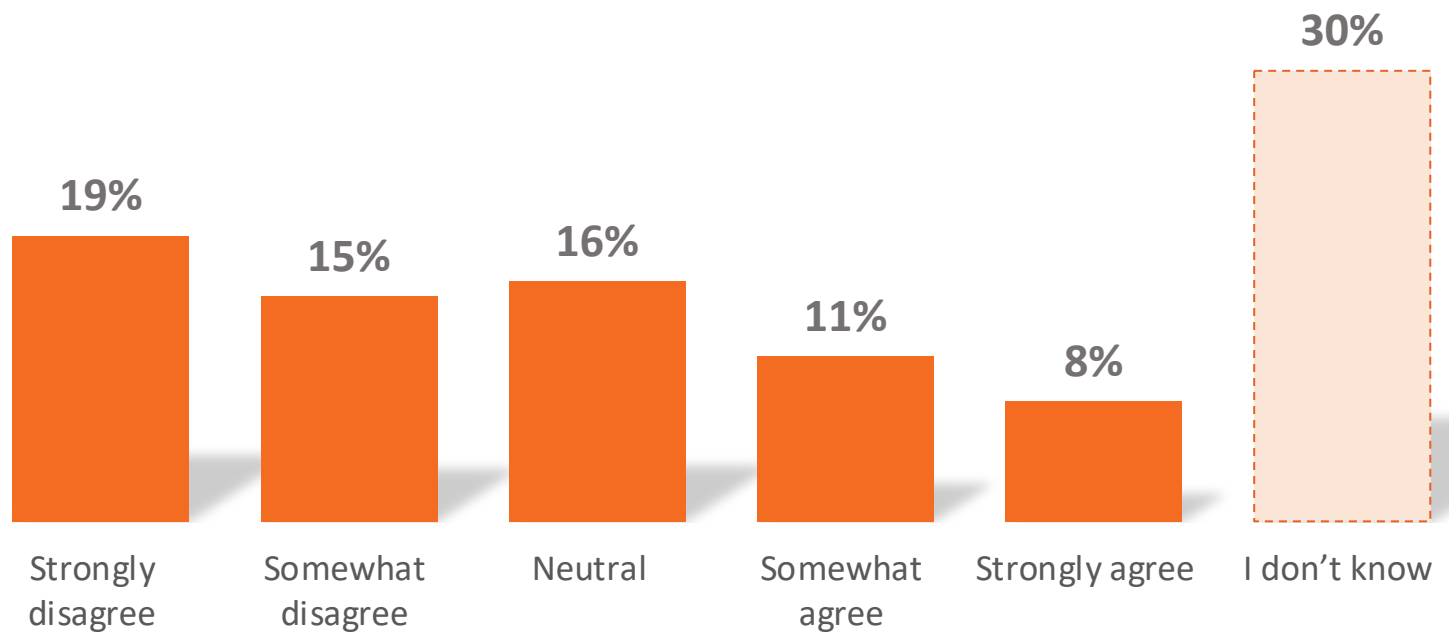
Please use the rating scale provided to indicate your agreement with the following statements based on your experience with SACs (n=2,209)



School Advisory Councils

SACs are a good avenue for providing local voice feedback and input.

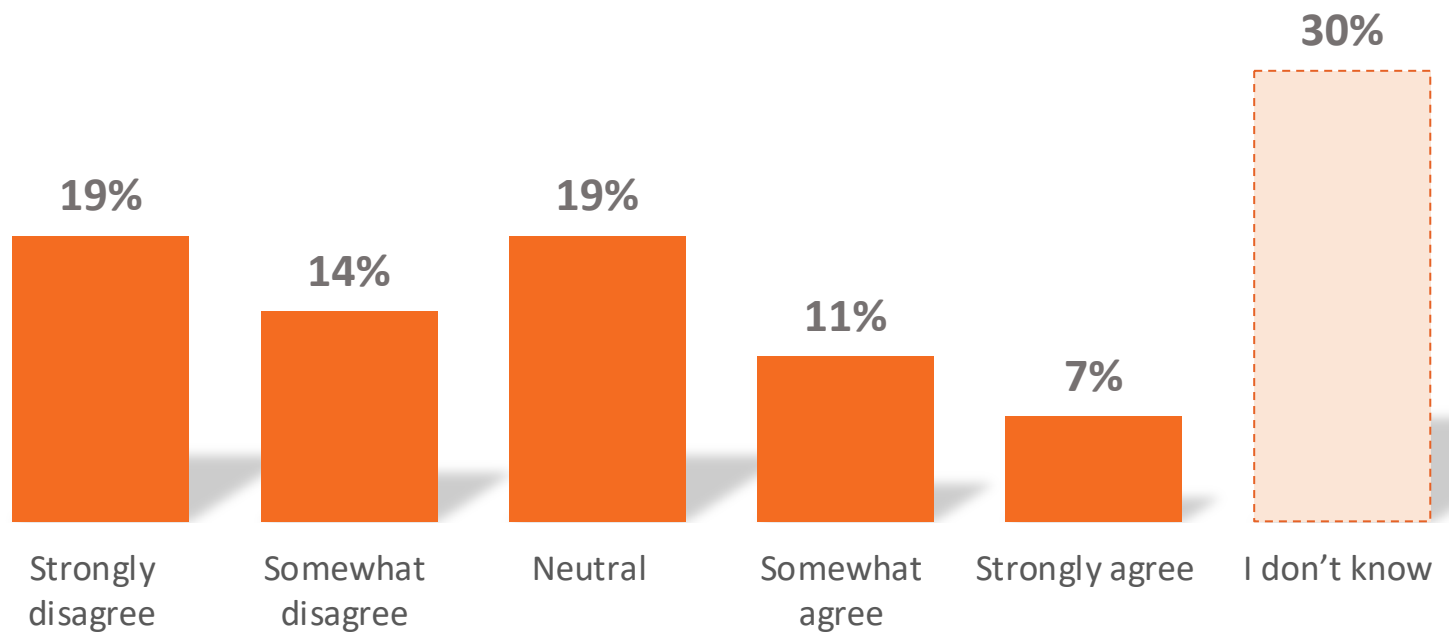
Please use the rating scale provided to indicate your agreement with the following statements based on your experience with SACs (n=2,209)



School Advisory Councils

SACs are a good avenue for getting information/answers to questions.

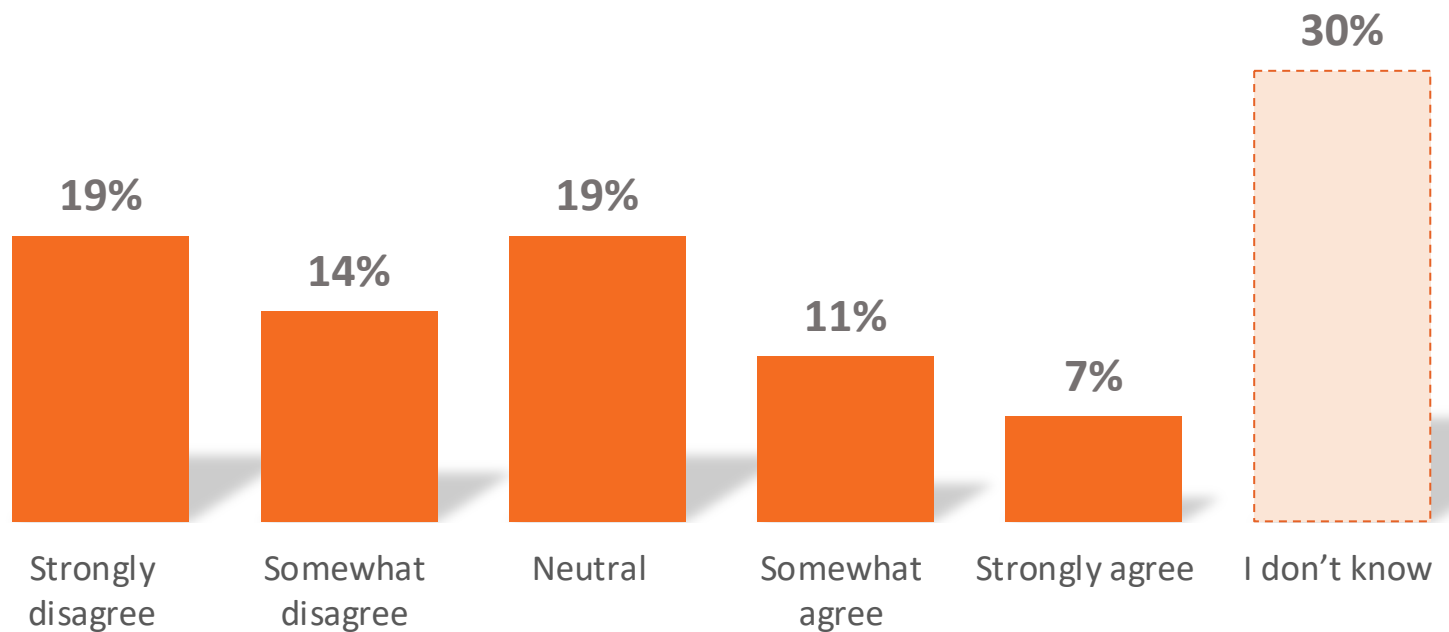
Please use the rating scale provided to indicate your agreement with the following statements based on your experience with SACs (n=2,209)



School Advisory Councils

SACs are a good avenue for getting information/answers to questions.

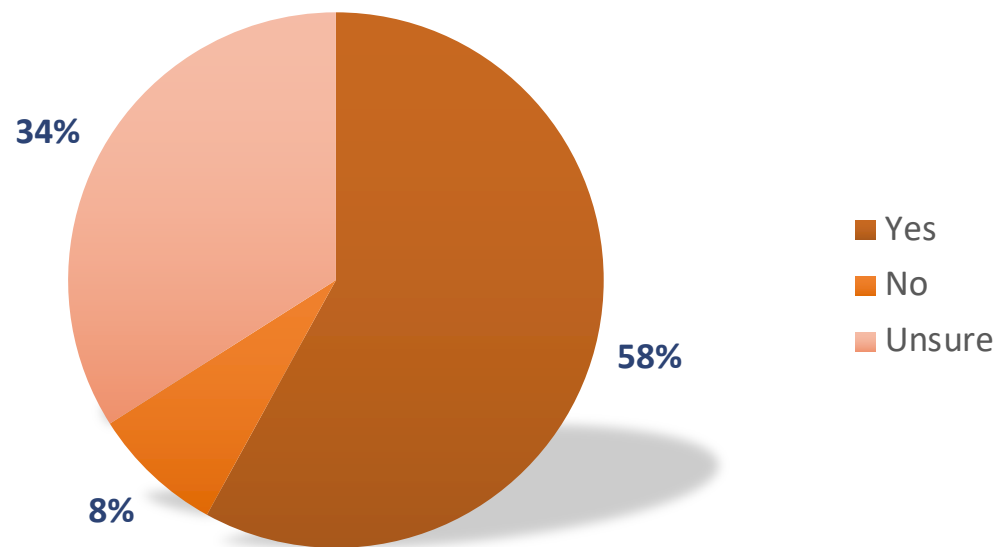
Please use the rating scale provided to indicate your agreement with the following statements based on your experience with SACs (n=2,209)



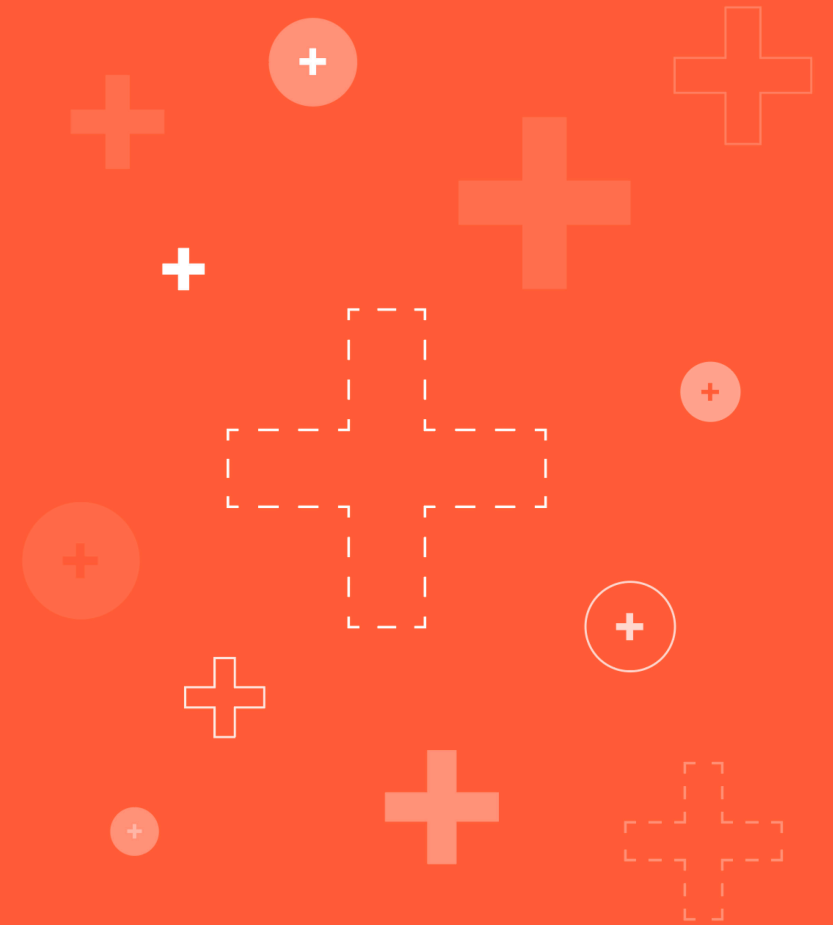
Local Voice - Participation

If you had access to a school-based group that works on student achievement and can provide input on policies and regional operations, would you use this group to provide local voice feedback and input?

(n=1,170)



PHASE 2: THOUGHT EXCHANGE RESULTS



Summary of Findings

The results of the thought exchange indicated participants want a greater variety of opportunities for providing local voice feedback, in ways which are inclusive and accessible to all groups in the school community. Participants want to know their feedback is being considered in policy development and decision-making, and want more transparent processes when it comes to policies and decisions within the school community.

Other notable comments include:

- Reducing barriers for providing local voice feedback
- Engaging the community and focusing on building community connections
- A desire to reinstate school boards (or some similar structure)

Participant Demographics



1,401
Participants



770
Thoughts



25,625
Ratings



605

Participants shared
thoughts



738

Participants rated
thoughts



636

Participants explored
thoughts




- Which of the following best describes you? Please select all that apply.



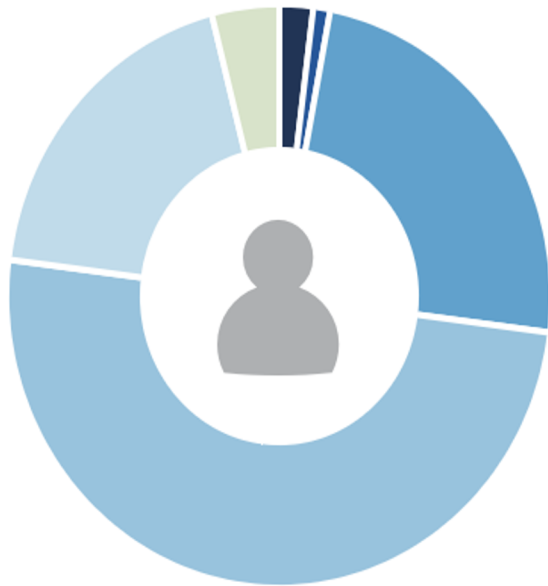
1189

Responses



%		Answer (Multi-select)
75%	(892)	Parent/Guardian of a current PP-12 school student(s)
10%	(123)	Parent/Guardian of a former PP-12 school student(s)
2%	(31)	Current student
7%	(93)	School volunteer
19%	(231)	Community member/Local citizen
2%	(35)	School Administrator (Principal/Vice Principal)
19%	(232)	Teacher
9%	(118)	Other School Staff (ECE, support staff, etc.)
4%	(59)	Other

- How old are you?



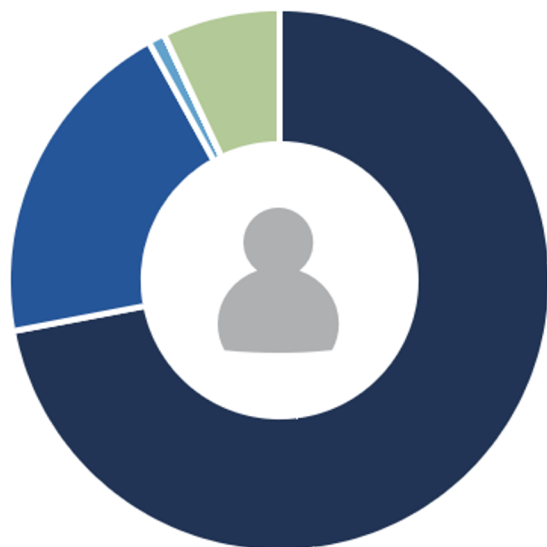
%			Answer
2%	(23)		19 or under
1%	(18)		20-29
24%	(268)		30-39
50%	(561)		40-49
19%	(211)		50-59
4%	(49)		60+

– Which school community do you belong to?



%			Answer
10%	(115)		Annapolis Valley Regional Centre for Education
7%	(79)		Cape Breton-Victoria Regional Centre for Education
11%	(133)		Chignecto-Central Regional Centre for Education
55%	(647)		Halifax Regional Centre for Education
4%	(48)		South Shore Regional Centre for Education
6%	(68)		Strait Regional Centre for Education
4%	(44)		Tri-County Regional Centre for Education
3%	(39)		Conseil Scolaire Acadian Provincial

– Which gender do you most identify with?



%			Answer
72%	(812)		Female
20%	(227)		Male
1%	(7)		Non-binary
0%	(1)		Two-spirit
0%	(2)		Transgender male
0%	(2)		Transgender female
7%	(76)		Prefer not to say
0%	(5)		Other

Participation languages



%			Answer
98%	(1,371)		English
2%	(19)		French
0%	(3)		Spanish
0%	(3)		Chinese Simplified
0%	(2)		Korean
0%	(1)		Arabic
0%	(1)		German
0%	(1)		Punjabi

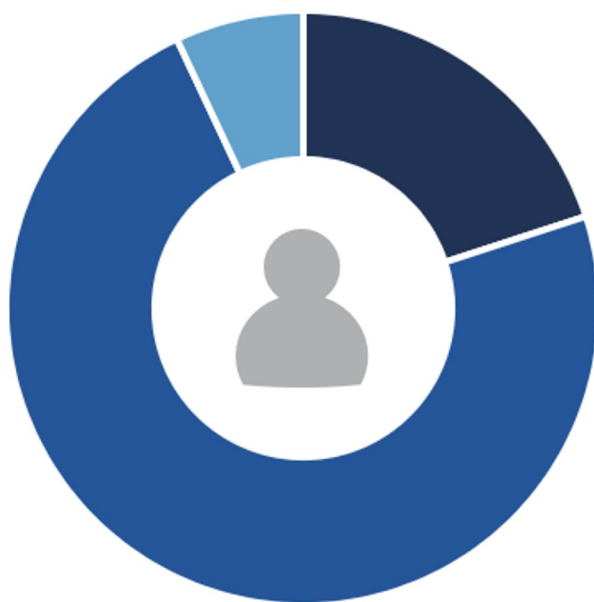
Please indicate the
ancestry with which you
most identify.
Select all that apply.

– Please indicate the ancestry with which you most identify. Select all that apply. Individual self-identification will not be made public. (Ancestry is defined as family background/origins.)



%		Answer (Multi-select)
8%	(100)	Acadian ancestry
3%	(35)	African ancestry (Black)
4%	(49)	Asian ancestry
72%	(820)	European ancestry (White)
4%	(48)	Mi'kmaq or other Indigenous ancestry
1%	(21)	Middle Eastern Ancestry
1%	(22)	Not sure
10%	(115)	Prefer not to say
3%	(45)	Other

- Do you have a disability or are you the parent/guardian of a child with a disability?



%		Answer
20%	(231)	Yes
73%	(843)	No
7%	(77)	Prefer not to say

- There are equal opportunities for diverse groups to provide local voice feedback and input.





%		Answer
10%	(117)	Strong agree
13%	(149)	Somewhat agree
16%	(173)	Neutral
20%	(221)	Somewhat disagree
22%	(241)	Strongly disagree
19%	(216)	I don't know

Main themes emerging from Thought Exchange

- Ask for more feedback, and provide the school community with various opportunities to provide open and honest feedback
- Bring back school boards (many participants shared thoughts about the benefit of elected members)
- Focus on community (building connections, engaging the community where they are)
- Engage more groups within the school community and listen to their feedback (such as teachers and students)
- Increase accessibility and reduce barriers for all groups to provide local voice feedback

Top three rated comments


By actually listening to what parents have to say. Why share feedback when it appears to be ignored. If you want feedback you have to show you are listening and willing to change.

 Comment  Action

4.5  (46 )
Ranked #1 of 770




More transparency in terms of what changes to policies and what decisions are being considered or potentially considered. We don't know what we don't know. How can we provide input on a topic when we aren't aware it's being discussed?

 Comment  Action

4.5  (46 )
Ranked #2 of 770



Until this document came up, I haven't been personally asked for feedback in an anonymous way. I've been teaching for over 15 years. People need to feel safe when providing feedback.

 Comment  Action



4.5  (46 )
Ranked #3 of 770




The top 25 rated comments as follows:

#1

By actually listening to what parents have to say. Why share feedback when it appears to be ignored. If you want feedback you have to show you are listening and willing to change.



 Comment  Action

4.5  (46 )
Ranked #1 of 770



#2

More transparency in terms of what changes to policies and what decisions are being considered or potentially considered. We don't know what we don't know. How can we provide input on a topic when we aren't aware it's being discussed?



 Comment  Action


4.5  (46 )
Ranked #2 of 770



#3

Until this document came up, I haven't been personally asked for feedback in an anonymous way. I've been teaching for over 15 years. People need to feel safe when providing feedback.



 Comment  Action


4.5  (46 )
Ranked #3 of 770



#4


Be sure to follow up on discussions like this in a thorough, honest, prompt and humble way. People want to know their feedback has been heard, considered and acted upon. And they appreciate leaders who can admit mistakes with grace.

 Comment  Action

4.5  (29 )
Ranked #4 of 770



Give teachers an opportunity to share. Actual teachers, who are in the classroom each and every day. Because they know what is lacking and what works.



 Comment  Action

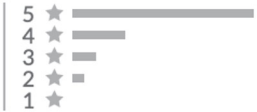
4.4  (46 )
Ranked #5 of 770





Listen without the bias of predetermined agendas. It is one thing to hear concerns. It's another to actually listen with a wide lens, with an open view point.



 Comment  Action

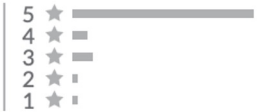
4.4  (46 )
Ranked #6 of 770





Be present in the classrooms, see, hear and feel what educators and students alike are experiencing. Ask them for their opinions, and act on them. Making decisions from an office, based on stats is not an accurate representation of what is actually happening in our schools.


 Comment  Action

4.4  (45 )
Ranked #7 of 770



Create space and listen So many decisions seem to be made by those who are not in classrooms. Classrooms have changed exponentially over the last 5-10 years. We need a change



 Comment  Action



4.4  (42 )
Ranked #8 of 770



#9

Ask the teachers and TA's who are in the classroom. They see first hand what is working and what the challenges are daily, as they are the ones with the children all day.



 Comment  Action



4.4  (41 )
Ranked #9 of 770



#10

Ease of access When families are looking for information to support their student there is a lack of clarity concerning who to speak to or how to be heard.



 Comment  Action


4.4  (39 )
Ranked #10 of 770



#11

Make sure feedback makes it to the people who can effect change

 Comment  Action



4.4  (39 )
Ranked #11 of 770



#12

Promote opportunities to participate in policy and decision making. As a parent and community member, I currently do not see opportunities to participate in these types of activities and therefore do not participate.


 Comment  Action

4.4  (37 )
Ranked #12 of 770



#13

Talk to people in the community. Maybe through a town hall type event. Literacy levels and internet access make this survey method inequitable.


 Comment  Action


4.4  (35 )
Ranked #13 of 770



#14

Give the opportunity - rarely is there ever an opportunity to provide feedback. Also, show evidence of when feedback has actually made a difference. It's important to show how thoughts shared have resulted in change - otherwise, why bother to share if it just goes nowhere.


 Comment  Action

4.4  (33 )
Ranked #14 of 770



#15

Demonstrate that if we speak, that you are listening. Our opinions currently have little value in the education system, so there is little inherent value in sharing them.


 Comment  Action



4.4  (30 )
Ranked #15 of 770



#16

Actually include disabled and neurodivergent students and their families in the conversation. Their education is important as anyone else's.


 Comment  Action



4.4  (28 )
Ranked #16 of 770



#17

Be more accessible, more open with communication A one size fits all approach doesn't work with a province of such geographic disparities. Rural and urban connections are different.

 Comment  Action

4.3  (47 )
Ranked #17 of 770



#18

Bring back elected school boards so stakeholders have a direct voice in who is making decisions that impact their community. Stakeholders have NO say, other than during a provincial election and everyone knows the Minister of Education is not working for the stakeholders.

 Comment  Action

4.3  (47 )
Ranked #18 of 770



#19

Develop a vehicle other than SAC's. With all the inertia at the Dept. of Ed. there is no chance that input will 'go anywhere'. The means of communicating with ed. leaders has remained the same for yrs.- minus elected sch. boards. What replaced the voice of elected reps? Nothing

 Comment  Action

4.3  (47 )
Ranked #19 of 770



#20

Improve teacher moral Piling on work takes away from the students and then you have terrible outcomes. You need feedback when things aren't working.

 Comment  Action

4.3  (47 )
Ranked #20 of 770



#21

More transparency in decisions made by the government Unless there is a major announcement to show off some spending we don't hear about anything going on.

 Comment  Action

4.3  (47 )
Ranked #21 of 770



#22

Talk to teachers! Give us a way to talk to the department or Center of education directly without going through the nstu We see the crisis schools are in every day. We see the issues that need to be addressed

 Comment  Action

4.3  (47 )
Ranked #22 of 770



#23

The fact that you ask is one thing, but people need to feel heard and valued in order to participate if people don't feel valued they won't participate. If you only serve political hot topic issues, why would others contribute?



 Comment  Action

4.3  (47 )
Ranked #23 of 770



#24

Communicate the process for providing local voice feedback, and the feedback cycle. Acknowledge feedback has been received. People don't want to feel like they are talking into a vacuum. Make it easy to know how to be heard, and what will be done with the feedback.

 Comment  Action

4.3  (46 )
Ranked #24 of 770



#25

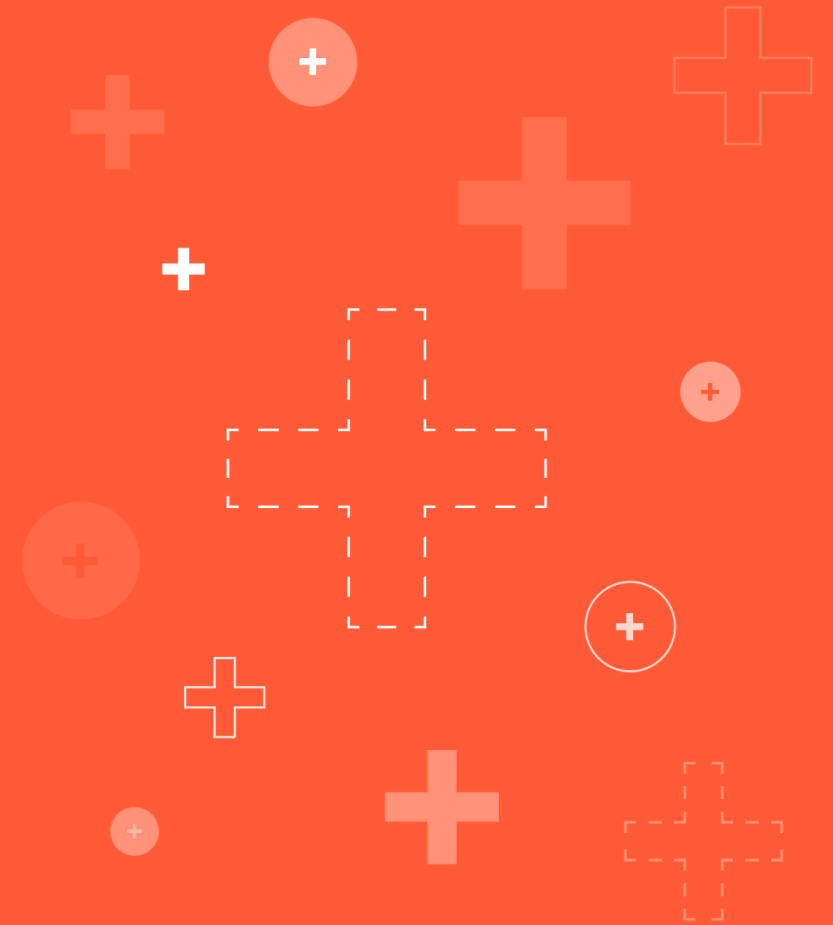
I think communication is most important. When concerns are brought up, it is imperative that government/administrators engage in dialog to address parents' concerns.

 Comment  Action

4.3  (46 )
Ranked #25 of 770



PHASE 2: FOCUS GROUP RESULTS



Summary of Findings

All groups provided comments on **local voice feedback within the broader school community**. Some participants felt their **experience with providing feedback was positive and elicited positive outcomes**, however, many **members felt their feedback was not taken into consideration, and no action was taken**.

Participants discussed what they felt was working well in providing local voice feedback in their schools and communities, and also brought forth challenges and concerns. As well, participants provided various suggestions as to ways in which to improve opportunities for both providing and using local voice feedback going forward.

Additionally, **individual groups (i.e., teachers, administrators, other staff, PACE members, and supporting organizations) provided unique comments** relating to the challenges, opportunities and solutions regarding local voice feedback; these comments were also summarized and provided.

Summary - Challenges

Participants **noted several challenges** in providing local voice feedback, including:

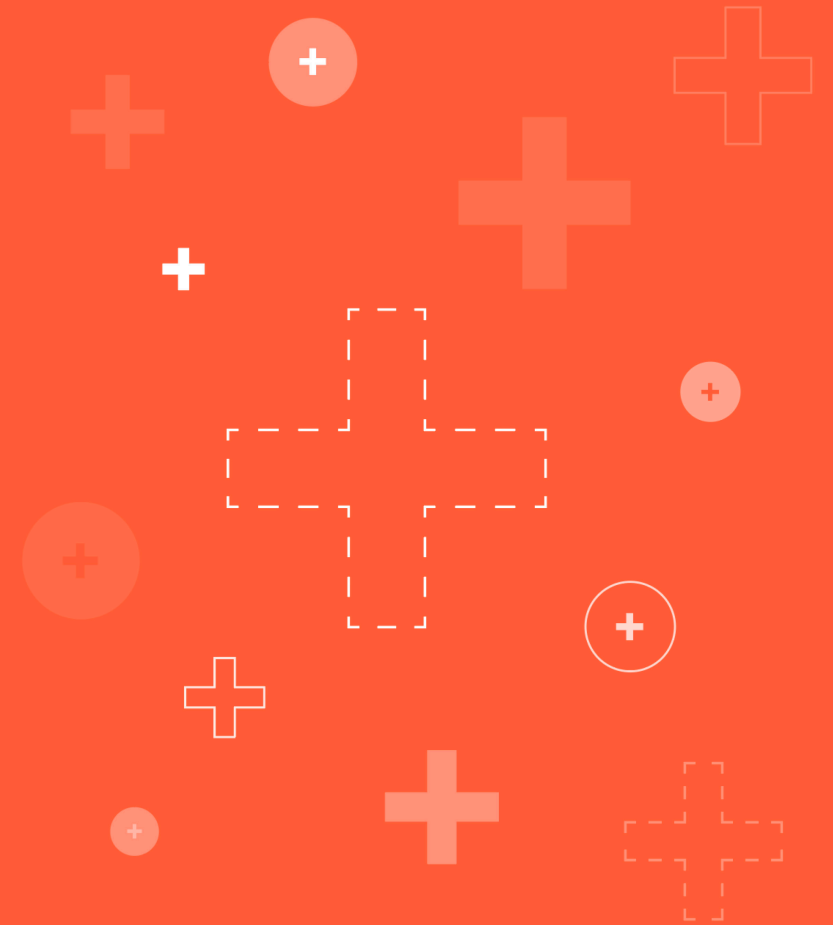
- An inability to find and access resources and information
- Challenges with the processes of providing feedback (e.g., who to contact, where to go)
- Communication and transparency concerns relating to the use of feedback in decision-making
- Lack of consideration for underrepresented groups, and potential barriers to providing feedback (e.g., access to technology, internet)
- Difficulty navigating the education system as a whole

Summary - Suggestions

To **improve local voice feedback**, participants suggested:

- Provide multiple avenues to gather feedback (including electronic and paper forms)
- Include and seek out diverse voices by going into communities, and improving minority families' access to resources
- Consider the intention of seeking feedback and be transparent in the process
- Develop community partnerships to increase opportunities for feedback
- Recognize the difference in needs based on region, community, and individual school
- Reintroduce a body with a communication-focused role between the school community and EECD
- Provide incentives for feedback and involvement with SAC groups or other feedback focused bodies

What is working well



What is working well to provide local voice feedback?

Participants noted that making a deliberate effort to provide **increased informal opportunities for students, teachers, and parents to interact with one another** (e.g., school breakfasts, sports games, other school and community events) has been successful in increasing opportunities for gathering feedback from students (and sometimes parents).

Additionally, **various groups and councils** (e.g., youth advisory councils, school advisory councils, provincial meetings) were also mentioned **as being good avenues to provide local voice feedback**.

Participants also identified **school and community programs and training** (e.g., IWK trauma training, mental health focus groups with staff) **as being beneficial opportunities for individuals to provide local voice feedback**.

Challenges

Challenge 1: Accessibility

Participants highlighted challenges with finding and accessing important resources as a major concern. **Broadly, participants felt it is challenging to navigate the education system overall, and inaccessible information has exacerbated those concerns.**

Participants felt many parents are unaware of what is happening in schools and are struggling to find the information they need.

While participants noted a **multitude of avenues for people to express concerns, participants were not sure who to go to when and how to know if their feedback was were heard and concerns were being addressed.**

Challenge 2: Lack of a point of contact

Participants commented that **most individuals , themselves and parents included, have difficulty trying to find the correct person to reach out to** when they have concerns or questions. A specific example includes **EECD contacts and its website**. Participants mentioned that they don't know who to contact and **information is not easily available or updated frequently enough on their website**.

Some participants felt school boards and other groups have been points of contact and ways for members of the school community to bring forth concerns. A few participants felt **the absence of school boards has led to a decrease in local voice**. As well, participants expressed concern that parents might feel with the absence of the elected school board official, that their voices are not being heard.

While **some participants were supportive of SACs and the use of anonymous surveys** to gather feedback from schools and the community and be a point of contact, **other participants were highly against the use of both tools** to acquire feedback.

Challenge 3: Communication processes

Overall, many participants **expressed frustration regarding communication processes** between schools, students and their families, the community, and RCEs/EECD.

Participants also noted that some parents have taken concerns directly to EECD or to social media, bypassing school staff, as a result of dissatisfaction with the timeliness of response and resolution when going through schools.

Challenge 4: Transparency and the use of feedback

- **Transparency in decision-making processes and the lack of feedback used in policy development** were concerns brought forth in many focus groups. Education providers generally felt their feedback had not been considered, and many stated they have not been asked to provide their feedback at all. Participants noted this is discouraging for individuals to provide feedback in future.
- Other participants noted there is likely a **disinterest** in providing feedback on policy development because many individuals feel their contributions will not make a difference.

Challenge 5: Challenges for underrepresented groups and newcomers

Participants highlighted several challenges for underrepresented groups and newcomers in providing local voice feedback, including:

- **Lack of English language skills** (e.g., newcomers with little to no experience speaking English)
- **Lower literacy levels** (e.g., individuals who face challenges in reading and writing)
- **less involvement or poor experiences in the education system** (e.g., parents who have not completed schooling, or have had poor experiences within the education system)
- **Poor technical skills** (e.g., lack of computer skills)

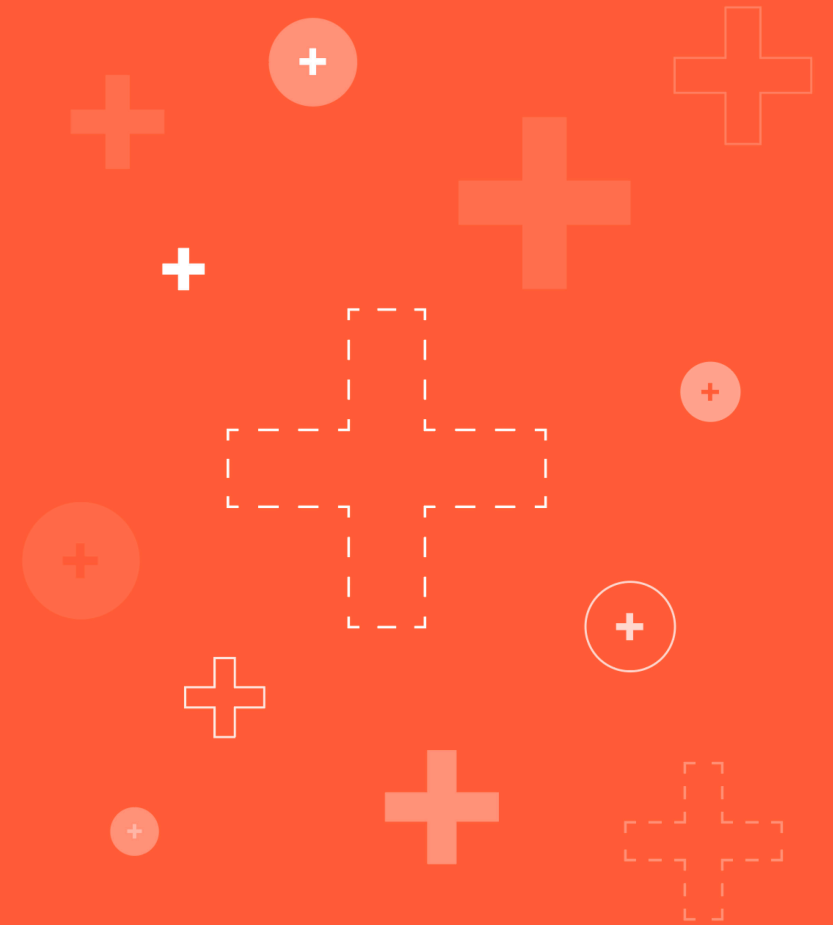
Challenge 6: Generalization of voices in the school community

There were concerns about the generalization of voices in the school community.

Several focus group participants felt the voices and opinions of a few individuals is applied to broader school and community populations, not considering the differences in experience and opinion of diverse groups.

There is a need for **increased and deliberate effort to ensure all diverse groups have equal opportunities** for providing local voice feedback.

Suggestions to improve local voice feedback



Suggestion 1: Offer more opportunities to provide feedback and develop clear points of contact

One of the ways in which participants suggested local voice could be improved was to **provide multiple ways to gather feedback**. Participants suggested to use phone calls, surveys, focus groups, in-person meetings, or **a mixture of these methods to better contact a wider range of individuals**.

Participants also noted sometimes the best feedback is gathered through informal conversations such as before meetings and during sports events. These opportunities enable people to feel comfortable and openly share their opinions.

Participants also **wanted clear points of contact**. Some participants felt there is a need for a known **point of contact and/or a communication body between** schools and school staff, RCEs, EECD, and students and their families.

Suggestion 2: Seek out diverse voices and improve access to tools

Participants stressed **the need to include and seek out diverse voices in terms of feedback**. They expressed that these diverse voices (e.g., parents of children with disabilities, Indigenous groups, newcomer families, African Nova Scotians) need to be included. They suggested intentional efforts to gather feedback from these groups.

Participants mentioned that it is also **important to improve access to ways to provide feedback for minority group families**.

Suggestion 3: Increase clarity on the intention of feedback

It is important to **consider the intention of seeking local voice feedback**, and to **be transparent in both the feedback collection process as well as regarding what feedback will be used for**.

Parents and students are **less inclined to provide feedback when they are not sure where it will go or if it will result in positive change**.

Suggestion 4: Build and/or improve community partnerships

- **Increasing community partnerships** was one way that student support staff and community organizations felt would **increase opportunities for providing local voice feedback** and would also contribute to **a more 'tight-knit' school community in general.**

Suggestion 5: Improve SACs, and consider reinstating school boards

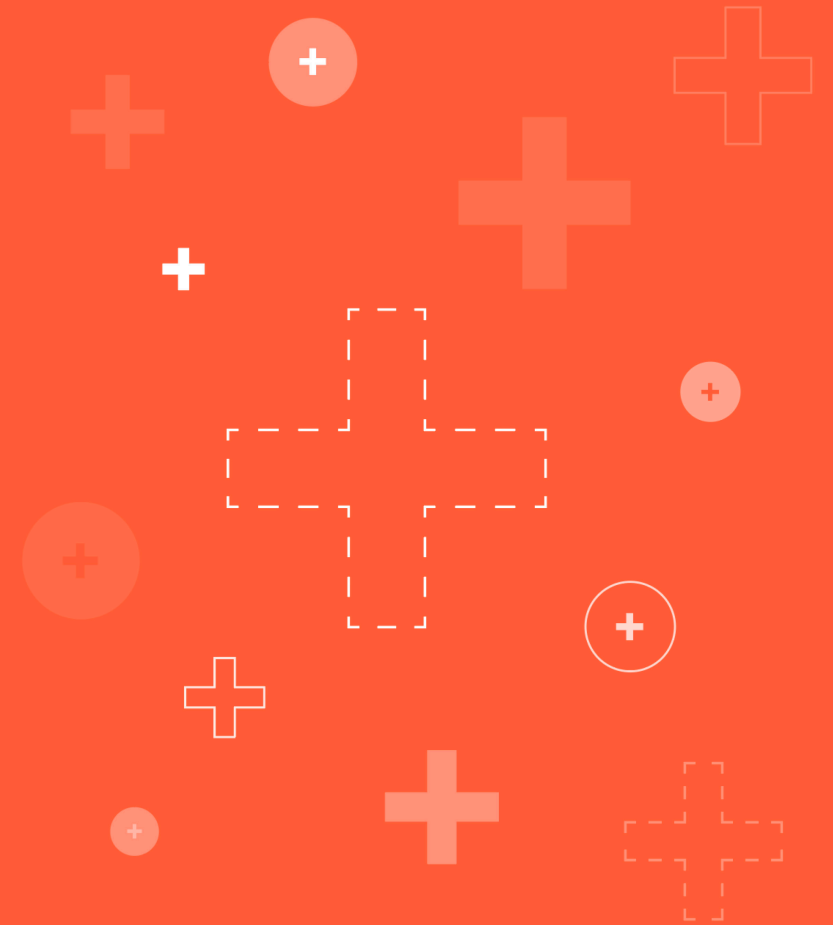
While the usefulness of SACs were a topic of contention amongst participants, some participants felt **SACs would be more useful if they had a larger number of volunteers. One solution brought forth to remedy this was for SACs to be paid positions or to provide incentives to people for participation.**

As well, **some teachers felt the province should bring back school boards and felt elected school board members would be the best approach to increase and enhance local voice feedback.**

Suggestion 6: Focus on region and school-specific considerations

- With respect to policies in schools, participants stressed there is a need for **more consideration regarding the school-and-region-specific differences between schools. Policies need to be appropriate and best fit the schools and regions in which they are implemented.**
- Regarding the use of school boards, Administrators **in rural NS felt school boards were not an effective model**, however, understood that these boards may have been **more useful in more densely populated communities**. Administrators based in rural regions felt that while school boards may have not been effective in all areas, they were a known point of contact for the community.

Group-specific comments
on challenges and
solutions for improving
local voice feedback



Teacher Comments on Local Voice Feedback

Teacher participants noted that formerly, **staff at EECD who were responsible for programs and courses were well known by teachers and provided in-services** for teachers relating to those programs and courses. These in-services occurred once or twice a year, and **provided teachers with an opportunity to network, share ideas, and discuss concerns.**

Teachers also **felt their perspectives need to be considered more at the decision-making table.** Throughout the pandemic, teachers were the first line of communication with students and their families. Teachers **felt the government should recognize this** and should **bring them to the table for discussions on policies**, instead of having the information trickle down through the department, school administrators and staff, then to teachers.

Teachers shared their concerns on their feedback not being considered, and a few noted they often felt **their concerns are “falling on deaf ears”**. They highlighted the top-down communication process (from EECD down to teachers), and felt they are not provided with the opportunity to discuss or share comments regarding decisions being made.

Teacher Comments on Local Voice Feedback – Cont'd

Teachers who participated in the discussions mentioned that **many of their colleagues often avoid providing feedback due to the fear of losing their jobs** for speaking out. Teachers stressed that **this fear is likely enhanced for teaching aids**.

Teachers also noted **they are overworked and often do not have time to provide feedback**. To combat this concern, teachers suggested **providing scheduled feedback time, built into their workdays**.

Teachers expressed **a desire to have meetings with other teachers (from various schools across the province) to discuss concerns**. Some teachers noted that in the past, there were meetings with teachers who taught the same subjects and/or the same grades to discuss curriculum and any concerns and challenges they were facing.

Teacher Comments on Local Voice Feedback – Cont'd

Participants also mentioned that **a barrier to teacher feedback is a substantial level of mistrust both in the classroom and from the Department of Education.**

Teachers felt that RCEs feel they are doing a good job in posting on social media to access families and share information; however, **they are failing to account for families which do not have access to social media**, who cannot read, or families who generally do not have the supports they need.

Participants explained they **feel they only have two avenues of providing feedback** or asking questions – either through **the Teacher's Union, or a Facebook group** called 'NS Teachers Supporting Teachers'. **Teachers were disappointed they had to avail of a Facebook group, instead of having the opportunity to discuss with their employer.**

Administrator Comments on Local Voice Feedback

Administrators offered unique comments regarding providing local voice feedback. Administrators reported **feeling like “middle-men” in the communication process**. They expressed concern that **they are often caught between the school and department**, and sometimes they are unable to address concerns. Administrators added that **sometimes feedback does not get passed along to them**, and **sometimes the department is not able to address concerns or take action, either**.

Some participants felt that administration staff are not efficient in relaying messages, and the lines of **communication are broken between teaching staff and administration staff**.

Administrators felt **it is important to increase opportunities and remove barriers for participation** and **provide local voice feedback, by way of providing childcare, food, and reimbursement for travel to any school board/SAC or other school group meetings**.

Administrators felt strongly that **parents do not know what they can provide feedback on in some cases**, and they **are often afraid to challenge what they may not agree with, fearing this may reflect on and/or impact their child negatively**.

Administrator Comments on Local Voice Feedback – Cont'd

As well, administrators **brought forth many other suggestions** for increasing and improving local voice feedback such as:

- Increasing funding to SACs – many felt \$5,000 is not enough.
- Ensure all regions have parent navigators, and make sure communities know how to reach these people.
- Increase the number of community events – good for both rural and urban regions, and will connect parents, teachers, students, administrators, and all other members of the school community. These events and other school activities provide informal opportunities for providing feedback.

Staff Comments on Local Voice Feedback

School staff participants noted **parent advisory groups have been less engaged since the Covid-19 Pandemic, resulting in fewer opportunities for feedback.**

They explain that in general, since the pandemic, **parents are more exhausted and have less time and capacity to be involved in various school groups.** They noted it is important to **re-evaluate the best approach to ensuring parents have the opportunity to contribute,** but in a way which works best for them.

Social media was also brought forth as an issue of contention. Staff explained that some **parents see social media as a quick route** when seeking solutions to problems, **instead of making contact with their school and staff.** **Some parents have taken** their thoughts and concerns to social media, putting pressure on the education system to resolve situations quickly. Participants felt this has tempted other parents to also attempt to bypass the systems currently in place for addressing comments and concerns.

Participants felt this is an issue which is **caused by a lack of efficiency in the current system** for addressing feedback but may also stem from **a lack of awareness of where to turn.** Student support staff felt **the point-of-contact is missing as people often do not know where to bring their concerns.**

Staff Comments on Local Voice Feedback – Cont'd

School support staff also felt there is a **disconnect at the provincial level**, and a **lack of consistency (e.g., funding) and accountability**, as well as a **lack of overall awareness of what is being done in different regions** of the province.

There is also **the opportunity to tap into pre-existing groups**, as it is increasingly **difficult to create new groups based on parents' and students' time constraints**. Conversely, another group of student support staff felt **creating a board specifically tasked with increasing local voice feedback could be beneficial**.

Supporting Organization Comments on Local Voice Feedback

Participants noted **IWK trauma and core competency training as a positive in ensuring those already in the school community (mainly teachers and administrators) are trauma-informed** and able to provide the most appropriate supports to newcomer students and their families

Participants commented that **the school community needs to be trauma-informed** and understand what is required in order to ensure newcomer students and their families can both adapt to and thrive within their new environment.

Additionally, a participant shared their **enthusiasm regarding a recent decision to “loosen up” permanent address requirements for registering for school** – now, especially after the influx of Ukrainian arrivals, students without a permanent address can still register for school.

Participants explained that **more general supports are also needed for newcomer students and their families, especially in rural regions** of the province.

Participants also identified **a need for education around the meaning of feedback** – by way of education sessions, and/or information shared (in appropriate languages) at home.

PACE Member Comments on Local Voice Feedback

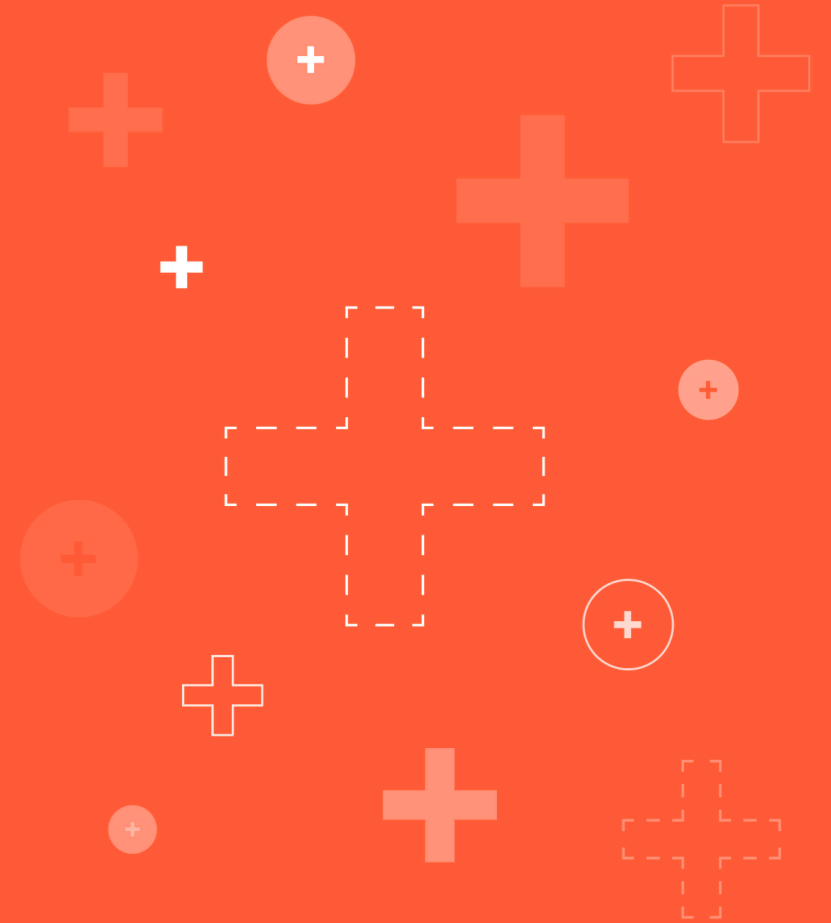
Many members were **not made aware that EECD had dismantled the group**. PACE members **did not have any insight as to what is going well** – two members (a former school principal and a psychologist who works a day a week in schools) noted they have only been made aware of challenges occurring in schools (such as a lack of teacher support for students who require more assistance than they can provide).

PACE members **wondered whether policies are shared once they are rolled out** – they felt there is **a lack of introduction of new or amended policies**, and these are just put on the department website, often in **places which are difficult to access**. They also felt there is **a need for better communication from EECD, from policy making to decision roll-out**.

PACE members **felt their presence is important for the school community** to be well-rounded and involve individuals beyond students and their families and school staff.

PACE members also noted **a new-student handbook would be beneficial to share with students and their families**, including all important dates, policies, and contact information. As well, some felt **a newsletter (in physical and electronic form) would help**. PACE members felt it is important to **ensure feedback is capturing the comments, opinions and concerns of all diverse groups** within the school community.

Opportunities



Opportunities

Provide a variety of ways to engage:

Recognizing that different stakeholders have unique needs and preferences, implementing a range of feedback methods, such as surveys, town hall meetings, online platforms, and informal interactions, will ensure maximum participation and engagement. By tailoring approaches to the specific context and audience, an inclusive feedback environment that accommodates the diverse voices within the school community can be created.

Proactive Engagement:

The school community wants to be informed and asked for feedback by continuing to embrace proactive engagement strategies such as regular communication, outreach programs, community forums, online platforms, partnerships, and targeted outreach, EECD can establish a stronger and more collaborative relationship with the community. These efforts will not only enhance the quality of feedback received but also demonstrate a genuine commitment to listening, understanding, and addressing the needs of the community within the Nova Scotia education system.

Opportunities

Dedicate resources to a single point of communication at the local level:

To address the lack of a clear communication pathway, a dedicated and easily accessible point of communication at the local level may be needed. By providing a consistent and reliable channel, stakeholders will have a clear path for voicing their concerns, receiving information, and seeking follow-up.

In lieu of an advocate, prioritize response policy or model/sharing feedback:

While recognizing the value of having an entity that advocates on behalf of stakeholders, it is also important to prioritize response policies or models that ensure timely and meaningful feedback. By focusing on establishing robust systems for acknowledging and addressing feedback, confidence can be instilled that input is valued and will lead to tangible outcomes. This shift in focus can provide an alternative approach in situations where a dedicated advocate may not be feasible.

Opportunities

Amplify diverse voices – incentives, dedicated safe space:

To address the need for equal opportunities and representation, it is recommended to amplify diverse voices within the feedback process. This can involve providing incentives for participation, creating dedicated safe spaces for underrepresented groups to share their experiences and concerns, and actively seeking input from minority groups and newcomers. By intentionally fostering inclusivity and ensuring that all voices are heard and valued, we can create a more equitable and representative feedback environment.

Create and communicate a culture of continued improvement/learning to promote acceptance of constructive criticism:

To promote a culture of continuous improvement, it is crucial to create an environment where constructive criticism is embraced and valued. This can be achieved by actively promoting the idea that feedback is essential for growth and development, and by communicating the actions taken based on feedback received. By fostering a culture that encourages and appreciates constructive criticism, stakeholders will feel more comfortable sharing their perspectives and ideas, ultimately leading to a more effective and responsive education system.