Toronto District School Board

COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery Plan

Since the initial school closure in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students at the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) have experienced ongoing closures and multiple transitions to online, remote learning. While these closures have impacted all students and families, we know that the experience has varied greatly from student to student depending on individual and family circumstances.

Since the pandemic has extended over the course of the full 2020-21 school year, concerns have been raised regarding the long-term impacts on student learning for all ages and grade levels as well as the impacts on students' mental health and well-being.

In particular, there is evidence that the students impacted in the most significant ways are those from lower socio-economic households. Additionally, the degree to which COVID-19 has impacted Indigenous, Black, racialized, 2SLGBTQI+ students is of critical concern to the TDSB.

For some students, there have been significant barriers to learning and personal or family circumstances that have impacted their ability to attend school, such as family financial stress, job insecurity, food insecurity, diverse housing needs, domestic abuse and increased levels of mental health concerns. During school closures, the supervision of underserved students has been reduced and access to a caring and safe adult has been limited for some students.

The Toronto District School Board's COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery Plan is a three-phase plan that will identify which groups have been most impacted, where interventions will be put in place, and initial outcomes that result from these interventions.

As per the Board motion, this is the first report in what will be a series of reports over the next two years (reporting back twice per school year). It includes information related to **Phase One** of the Board's COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery Plan, as outlined below:

Phase One

i. outline current learning outcomes and student/parent/staff feedback information that describes the school experience for both Virtual and In Person school environments. The report will look at demographic data of students and the degrees to which students from different socioeconomic backgrounds may have had different learning experiences and outcomes, including;

• Students with Special Education Needs
• English as Second Language Learners

• Students in various TDSB programs (i.e. Extended French and French Immersion, Alternative Learning programs, Caring and Safe Schools programs);

ii. evaluate whether and to what degree students have left the system to pursue work or dropped out of school;

iii. use current student surveys from January 2021 and climate surveys in the spring to gauge the perception of TDSB students concerning critical areas of mental health, well-being, school belonging, and learning experiences;

iv. use parent survey from January 2021, as well as concerns raised by the Parent Involvement Advisory Committee, the Special Education Advisory Committee and the Board's community advisory committees to gauge key concerns regarding post pandemic return to school;

Phase 2

(b) as phase two of the plan, implement targeted interventions after identifying which groups were most impacted in terms of learning loss;

(c) report back twice a school year, in the spring and fall, to the Planning and Priorities Committee, beginning in fall 2021;

Phase 3

(d) as phase three of the plan, complete the reporting back to the Board by spring 2023 and identify outcomes resulting from the recovery plan.

Learning During COVID-19: Student Perception and Learning Outcome Data

This report follows an initial preliminary analysis of student learning impact on March 31, 2021 (www.tdsb.on.ca/research/Research/School-During-the-Pandemic). It is the first in a series of updates to be provided on the TDSB's COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery Plan. The report consists of a more in-depth analysis of key student perception and learning outcome data. The analysis will include the following areas of learning:

- Student perceptions of their experiences in learning and relationships during the pandemic
- Grade 1 Reading
- Grade 1-8 Grades in Reading, Writing, Mathematics, and Learning Skills
- Secondary school credit course average
- Graduation Rate for 2019-20
- An analysis of learning outcome by a variety of demographic variables including race, parent education, family income, and parental presence.

The analysis provided informs the COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery Plan outlined in the subsequent section of this report. The next set of data and further details of the plan will be available in a report in fall 2021.

Within the Board motion, the following data/information was requested. Please refer to the list below to see which information is currently available and included within this report and which information will be provided in future reports:

- demographic data of students and the degrees to which students from different socioeconomic backgrounds may have had different learning experiences and outcomes, including;

- Students with Special Education Needs (Included in this report)

- English as Second Language Learners (Included in this report)

- Students in various TDSB programs (i.e. Extended French and French Immersion, Alternative Learning programs, Caring and Safe Schools programs) (Not included: Will be a topic of the next report in October/November)

- evaluate whether and to what degree students have left the system to pursue work or dropped out of school (Not included: Will be a topic of the next report in October/November)

- use current student surveys from January 2021 to gauge the perception of TDSB students concerning critical areas of mental health, well-being, school belonging,

and learning experiences (Included in this report);

- use parent survey from January 2021, as well as concerns raised by the Parent Involvement Advisory Committee, the Special Education Advisory Committee and the Board's community advisory committees to gauge key concerns regarding post pandemic return to school (Parent Survey Included; SEAC and PIAC Committee concerns will be a topic of the next report in October/November)

Table 1. 2020 Learning Opportunities Index (LOI) Clusters and Students' Ethno-Racial Background

Panel	Ethno-Racial Background	2020 Learning Opportunities Index (LOI) Clusters (Virtual School Students Mapped to Home School)		
		Low SES	Middle SES	High SES
Elementary	Black	24%	10%	4%
	East Asian	5%	19%	18%
	Indigenous	1%	1%	0%
	Latin American	2%	1%	2%
	Middle Eastern	7%	6%	4%
	Mixed	6%	7%	11%
	South Asian	40%	32%	12%
	Southeast Asian	6%	4%	2%
	White	5%	15%	42%
	Other	5%	4%	5%
Secondary	Black	27%	10%	5%
	East Asian	6%	17%	17%
	Indigenous	1%	0%	0%
	Latin American	4%	2%	2%
	Middle Eastern	6%	6%	6%
	Mixed	7%	7%	10%
	South Asian	27%	35%	8%
	Southeast Asian	11%	6%	4%
	White	8%	16%	46%
	Other	3%	2%	2%

The table above describes the sample of 34, 946 students who participated in the student check in survey conducted at the end of January. The sample is broken into three major clusters based on the school's Learning Opportunities Index for participating students' home schools. The three clusters in this instance serve to estimate participating students' demographic circumstances, or Social and Economic Status (SES). The table also shows the percentage of students by race for each of the three clusters of schools from which the participating students attend. The table shows disproportionately *high* percentages of Black and South Asian students and disportionately *low* percentages of White students in the low SES cluster of schools.

While the opposite is the case for the high SES cluster of schools in which there are disproportionately *low* percentages of Black and South Asian students and disproportionately *high* percentages of White students in the high SES cluster of schools.

Each cluster of schools is well represented in the survey with 6,026 students participating in the check in survey from the low SES cluster of schools, 14, 910 students participating from the middle SES cluster of schools, and 14, 010 students from the high SES cluster of schools.

Figure 1. Students' Well-being Before and During the Pandemic ("All the Time/Often")
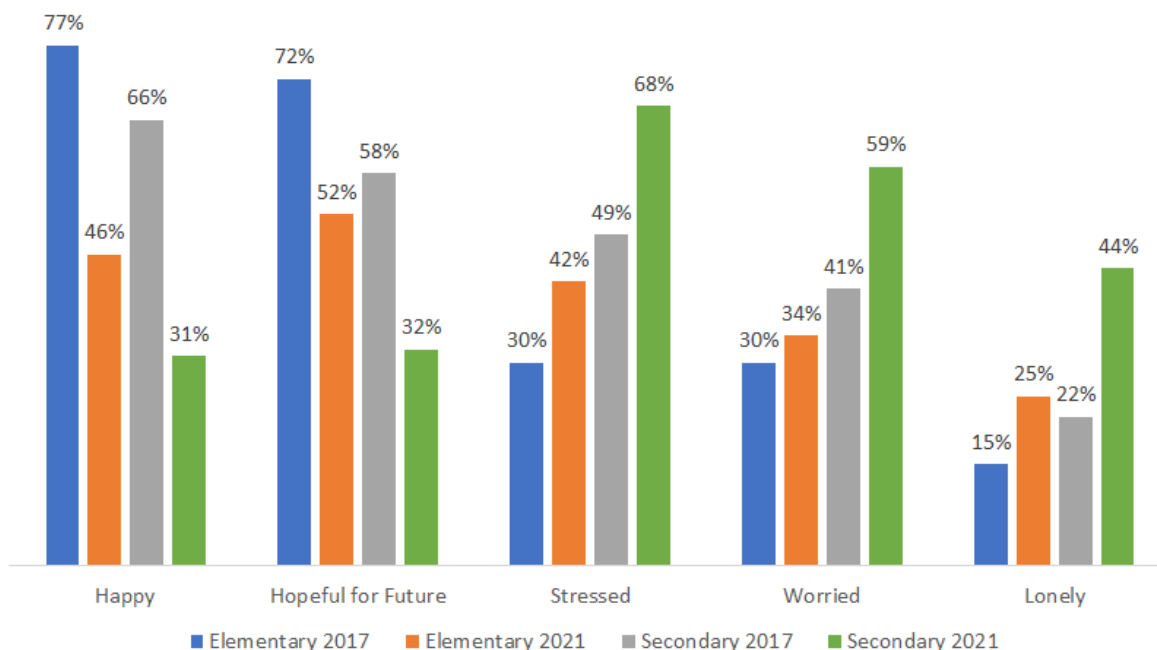

Figure 1 compares students' reported feelings associated with their well-being in relation to happiness, stress, worry, and hope before the pandemic struck to their reported feelings almost a year into the pandemic. When comparing these two very different moments for elementary and secondary school students, the full impact of the pandemic emerges. Student happiness for secondary students has declined by more than 35 percentage points. Worry and stress have increased by huge margins and hope has fallen at a similar rate as happiness. Comments such as the following were common:

"Absolutely hate it. Have never felt this demotivated, and really miss seeing my friends each day, even when we had a bit of in person time a couple months ago. I've never

done this badly at school, and never cared this little about how bad I'm doing. School doesn't feel like school, it just all feels like homework, which I absolutely hate.”
- Participating student

When school opens in person to everyone this September, bringing students back into a positive learning experience may be paramount for frustrated students. Areas like belonging, relationships, and general joy for learning might allow opportunities for students expressing this level of frustration to re-engage.

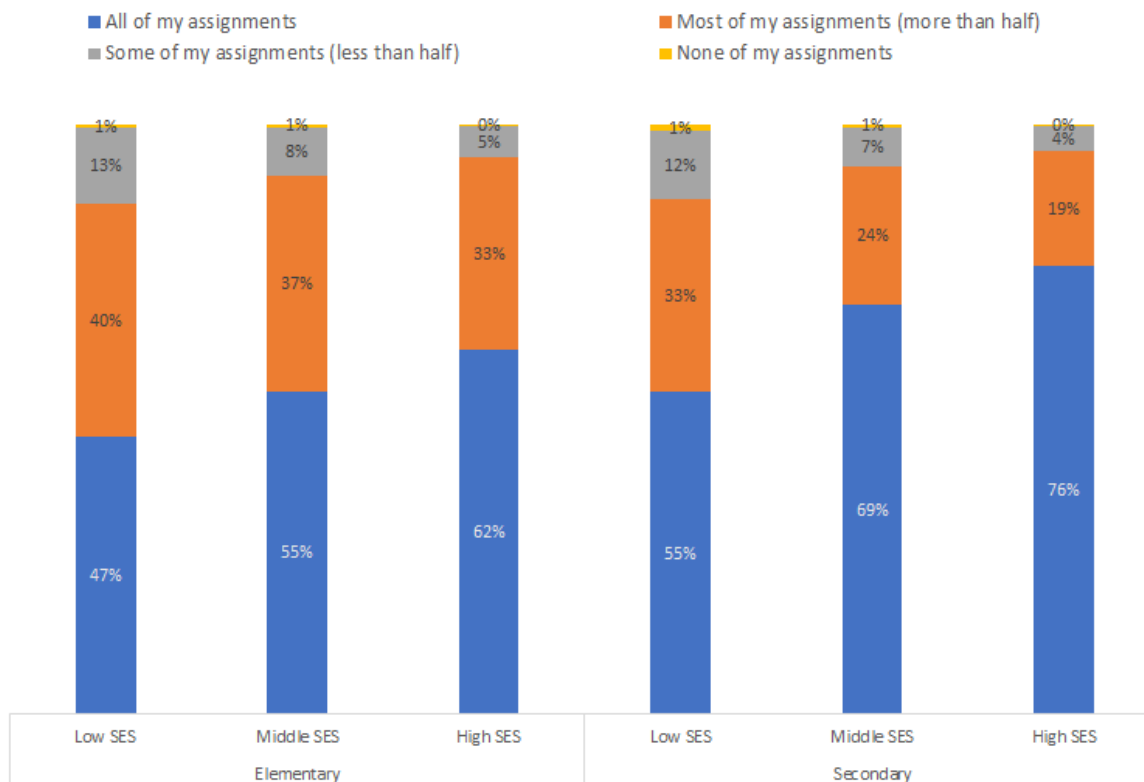Figure 2. Students' Feelings on School Experience and Effort
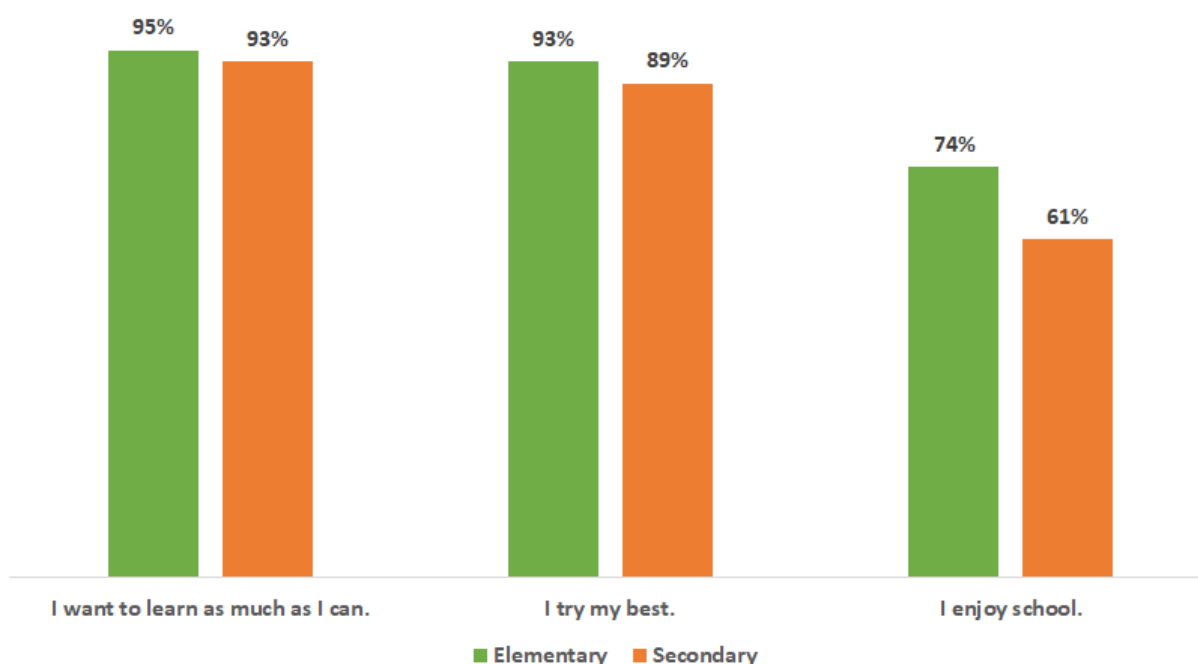
Despite the frustration and worry described in Figure 1, students in both elementary and secondary school report trying to extremely high degrees. As an example, almost all (95% elementary - Grades 6 to 8; 93% secondary - Grades 9 to 12) of participating students indicated that they 'want to learn as much as (they) can'. Valuing what students did, learned, and experienced - their prior knowledge - may be critical for students in successfully re-engaging in the learning process. Curricular representation of students' diverse identities and cultures will become even more critical for a successful partnership between educators and students.

Figure 3. Students' Ability to Complete Assignments

Legend:
- All of my assignments
- Most of my assignments (more than half)
- Some of my assignments (less than half)
- None of my assignments

Elementary

	Low SES	Middle SES	High SES
None of my assignments	1%	1%	0%
Some of my assignments (less than half)	13%	8%	5%
Most of my assignments (more than half)	40%	37%	33%
All of my assignments	47%	55%	62%

Secondary

|	Low SES	Middle SES	High SES
None of my assignments	1%	1%	0%
Some of my assignments (less than half)	12%	7%	4%
Most of my assignments (more than half)	33%	24%	19%
All of my assignments	55%	69%	76%

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

While students indicated trying their best to very high levels, their ability to turn in assignments frequently varied significantly between students from Low SES clusters of schools when compared to students from high SES clusters of schools. Aligned with the excerpt from a student above, while 76% of the students in the high SES school clusters indicated completing 'all' assignments, only 55% of the students in the low SES cluster of schools indicated the same. When looking more carefully at the students who indicated challenges in completing work, students from the low SES cluster of schools were twice as likely to have to share a computer and significantly more likely to indicate challenges associated with family and household responsibilities when compared to students in the high SES cluster of schools.

Figure 4. Students Report on Their Learning Progress
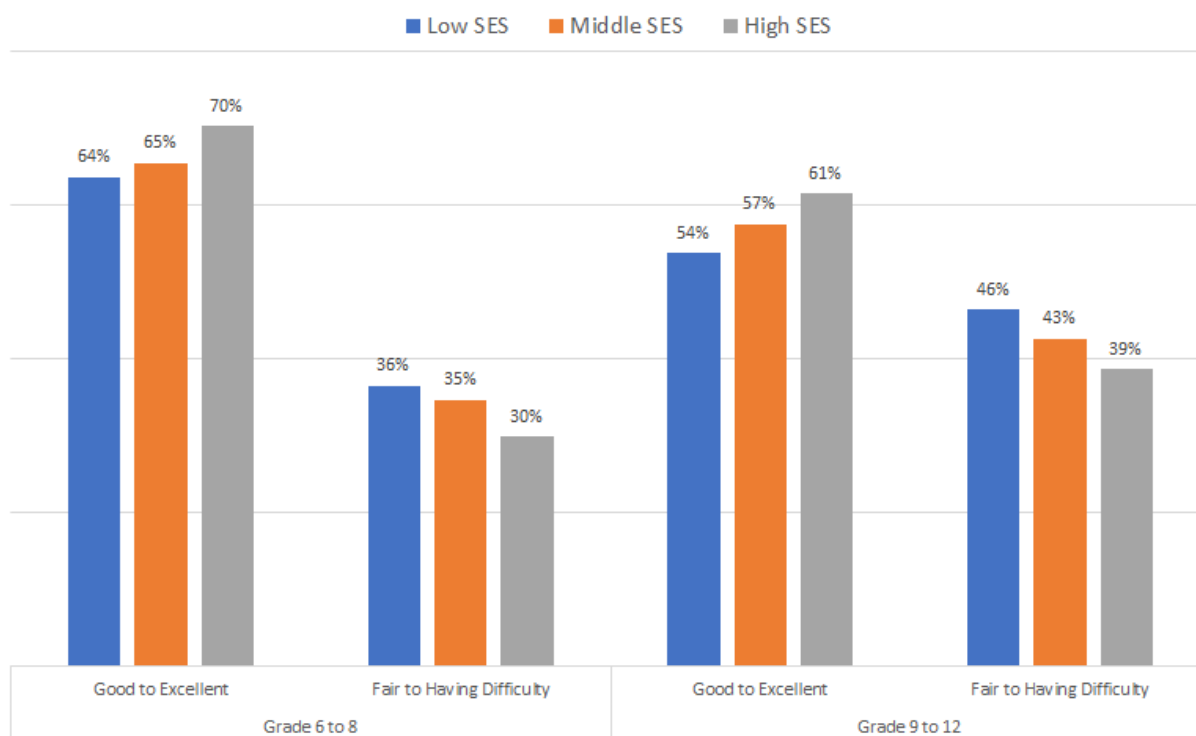
Following from the previous discussion on completing assignments, the degrees of progress that students indicated they made were also associated with the degrees of social and economic challenge that students may have experienced. As an example, secondary students from the high SES school cluster were more likely (61% compared to 54%) to report making good or excellent progress and less likely (39% compared to 46%) to report fair or difficulty in making progress than students from schools in the low SES cluster. These variations suggest that students will be coming back to school with a wide range of content understanding regardless of marks they received. The ability to work formatively with students in assessing student understanding may be more critical than it has been in any other year.

Analysis of Learning Outcomes for Elementary and Secondary Schools

Figure 5. Percentage of Grade 1 Students on Track to Meet Grade Level Reading Expectations by June
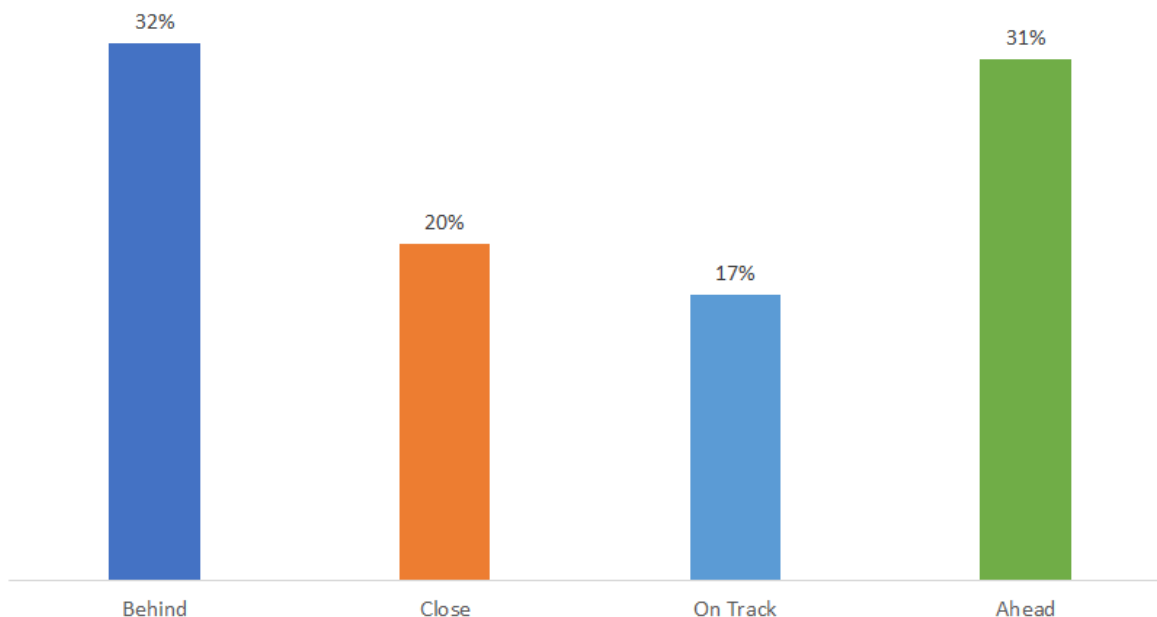
The following charts highlight a January 2021 reading assessment given to approximately 30% of Grade 1 students (N=4,491). The data show that almost ⅓ of the students in the sample are behind meeting their Grade 1 reading level expectations by June of this year. The critical nature of literacy in establishing a foundation for schooling success is well established across a myriad of research (citation needed). Early literacy supports subsequent successful moments for students in a cascading effect from early elementary right through to secondary school and beyond. While the relationship between early literacy and secondary school success is difficult to establish given the distance between these moments for students, the data does support closer indicators in time. For example, early literacy behaviours in Kindergarten are associated with success in provincial assessments in middle elementary years. And success in middle elementary years is associated with success in intermediate years of schooling etc. Attending to this area with increased focus could support positive effects across future years of schooling for these Grade 1 students. Equally, success in this January assessment seems also to be associated with SES circumstances as detailed in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6. Percentage of Grade 1 Students on Track to Meet Grade Level Reading Expectations by Estimated Income
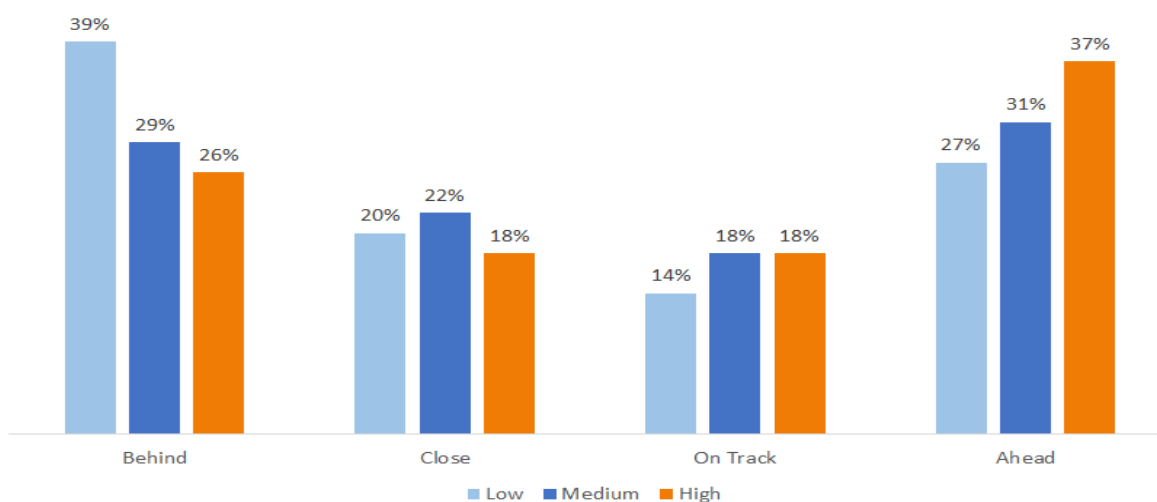

In line with other demographic variables, single parenting and language spoken at home, higher proportions of students from the low SES backgrounds are behind in meeting grade level expectations in reading when compared to students from high SES backgrounds (39% versus 26%). The opposite is also true in relation to percentages of students who are ahead of grade level reading expectations with 37% of students from the high SES backgrounds assessed as ahead of grade level reading expectations, compared to only 27% of students from high SES backgrounds.

Figure 7. Percentage of Students in Grades 1 to 8 Achieving Level 3 and above in Reading, Writing, Mathematics, and Learning Skills
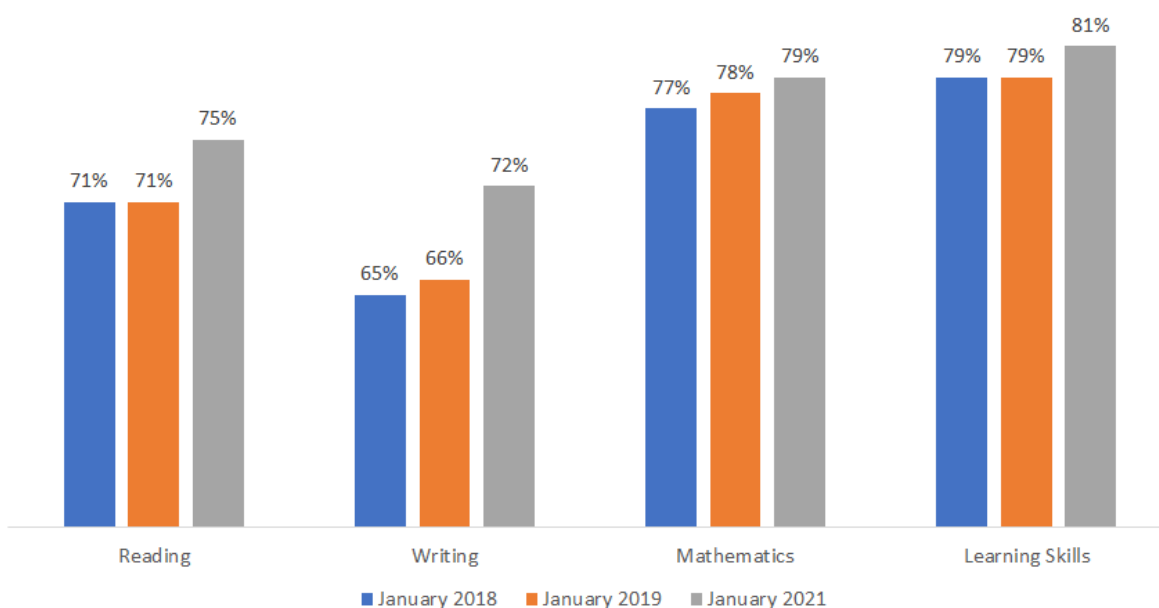
As reported in an analysis of elementary students meeting provincial standards of level 3 and above in this past March, significantly higher proportions of students are at or above Level 3 for all subject areas including learning skills across Grades 1-8 when compared to the same report card period before the pandemic in both 2018 and 2019. While Learning Skills shows the highest percentage (81%) of students getting an average of 'Excellent', for academic subjects, Mathematics shows the highest student percentage of meeting provincial standard (79%) while Writing shows the fastest growth rate with a 6 percentage point increase as well has the lowest proportion (72%) of students achieving at or above level 3.

Figure 8. Percentage of Students in Grades 1 to 8 At or Above Level 3 on Report Card for Reading by Demographic Factors
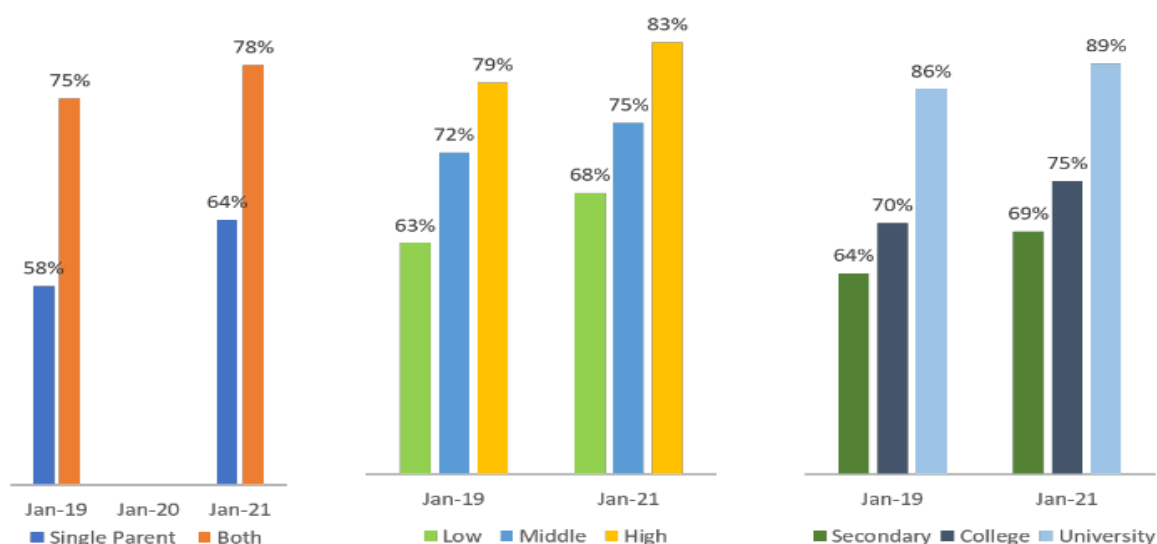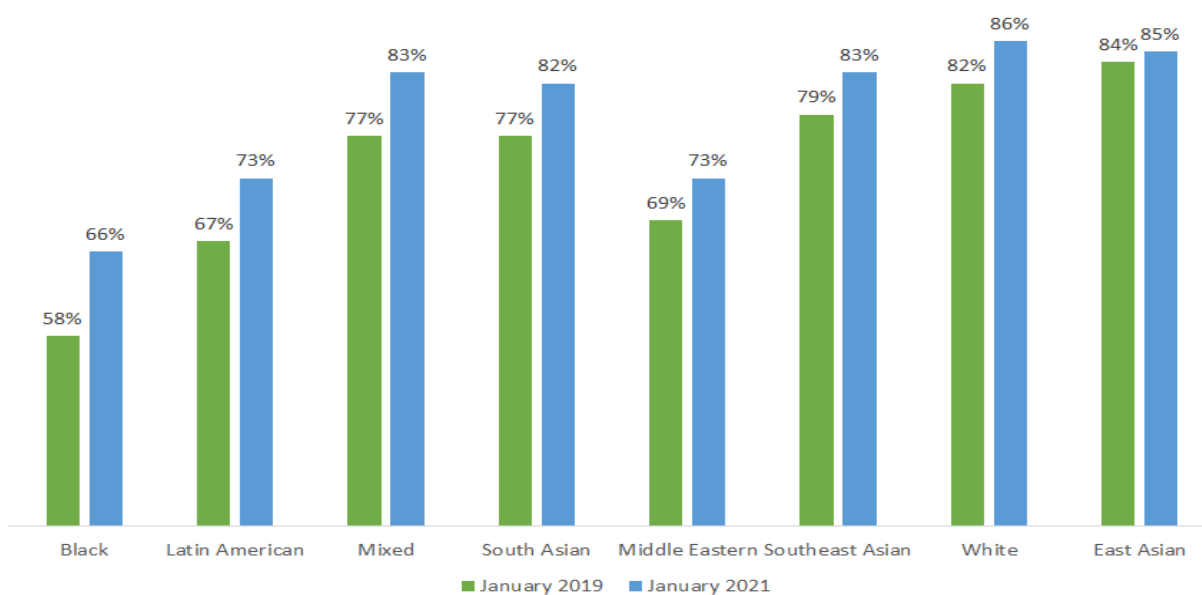

Figure 9. Students in Grades 1 to 8 At or Above Level 3 in Reading on January Report Card by Race

"I love the virtual school, teachers are nicer and way more supportive than my in-person school. They actually gave fair marks, unlike my day school teachers that just marks you randomly without even knowing how you progress and how comfortable you are with the subject. Also, my peers are way more friendly than in-person school, I actually can focus more online rather than in-person school, mostly because in my school there are a lot of bullying going on and my surrounding just kept on distracting me from learning and focusing. I hated it and I extremely DISLIKE my school, which is why I hope the virtual school can last longer." - TDSB Student

Both Figures 8 and 9 describe students at or above level 3 in Reading as a proxy for achievement across subject areas. When looking at students from different demographic experiences, the students who have historically struggled in demonstrating a level of learning success that aligns with their potential, have improved at significantly faster rates than students from higher SES backgrounds who have historically experienced relatively more success in the TDSB. As an example, when comparing students from pre to mid-pandemic report cards, Black students are improving at twice the rate of White students and eight times the rate of East Asian students.

While an argument can be made that at 66% of Black students achieving at or above level 3 in Reading (up from 58%) there is far more room to grow compared to, as an example, 85% of East Asian students reaching at or above level 3, there are other possibilities in explaining these improvements. Class sizes were more likely to be smaller for Black students going to schools in person -- given their over representation in schools that had much higher amounts (e.g. 46% of all students from MSIC schools registered for virtual learning) of students choosing to go to virtual schools this past year.

A Youth Action Research Project, sponsored by a partnership between Dr. Carl James, Jean Augustine Chair in Education, Community, and Diaspora and the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Success, in which educators and researchers partnered with Black secondary students in using applied research tools in order to study their and their peers experiences in secondary schools and establish recommendations for policy and practice that might enhance Black student engagement. One study described the energy Black students often have to exert in dealing with microaggression and other forms of racism by both other students and educators in day to day school experiences. The digital learning environment that characterized much of schooling during the pandemic and the separation of the social setting of schools may have provided different opportunities for Black students to succeed.

In support of these possibilities, there have been growing responses across the US (e.g. of similar phenomena in which Black families have opted out of in person learning for their children for a variety of potential reasons including, amongst others:

- having more influence of the immediate learning experience through the transparency of the digital medium between teacher
- learning in the homes digitally insulates students from the instance social spaces through which microaggressive and macro-aggressive racist behaviours occur in schools (e.g. racial profiling among other things).

Regardless, the improvement rates across the different populations of students that have struggled to be successful historically in the TDSB is an area that needs careful consideration in order to reinforce any positive conditions that may have occurred during this time through partnerships, collaboration, relationship building, and understanding of prior knowledge and experience of students coming back to school in person.

Figure 10. Credit Average Course Marks for a Cohort of Students in 2018-19, Semester 2, Before and During the Pandemic for Different Achievement Ranges and SES backgrounds
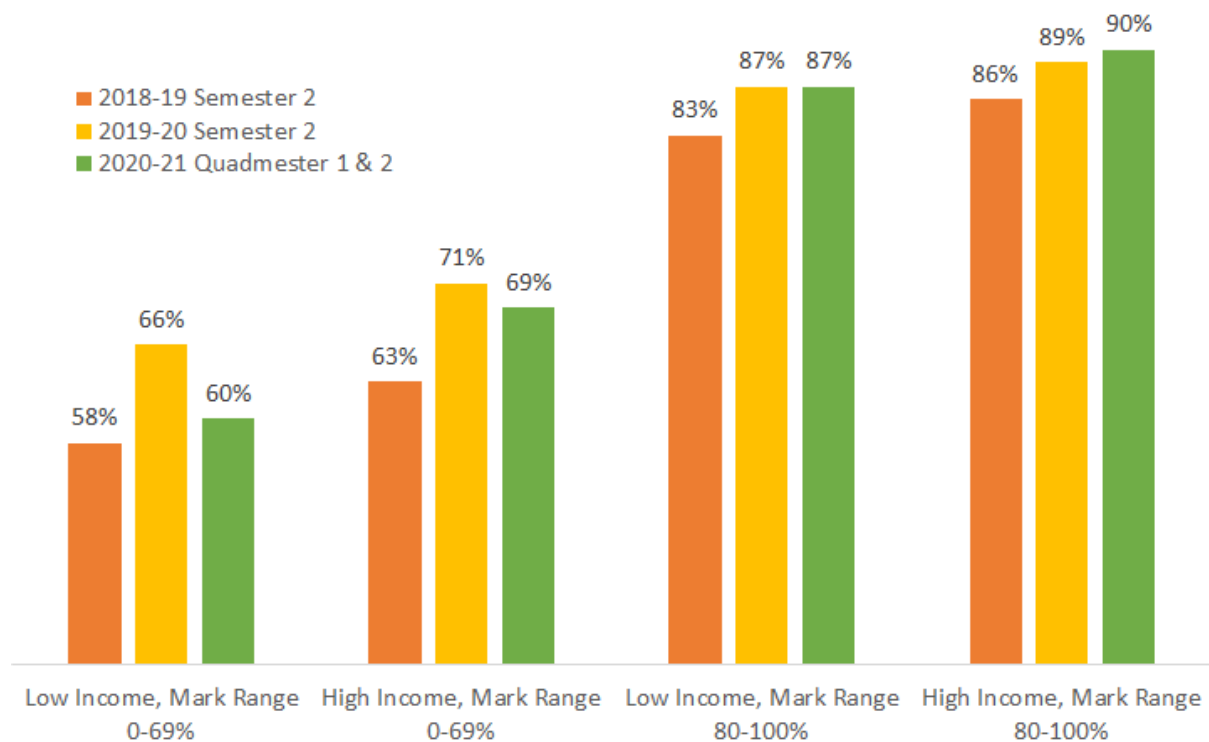
This analysis has detailed very interesting system level data that often seem to contradict or confuse some firmly held beliefs in relation to the connections between achievement and social and economic circumstances of students. Students who have experienced less success in school historically are improving at faster rates than students who have experienced more success. Near extreme levels of reported unhappiness and loneliness, and loss of hope from students is coupled with their reported continued persistence in their learning experience that is also coupled with system wide levels of improvement in almost all outcome measures available to evaluate.

That said, Figure 10, provides a system wide view of school outcome or achievement having a potentially more powerful predictor of success than demographic circumstances and varied life experiences. The chart shows relative growth during the pandemic as it pertains to two different student populations divided by their average credit course achievement before COVID-19 began. In comparing high achievers (80-100 course average) pre COVID-19 with middle or lower achievers (0-69 course average), achievement matters more in predicting future achievement than any socio-economic factors associated with these students.

At the outset of the pandemic, achievement rose across the system (the yellow bar in the chart) due to the suddenness of the onset of COVID-19 in March of 2020 and the commitment system-wide that this disruption would not harm students' ability to be successful. This changed subtly at the beginning of the following year as the program of learning in schools shifted, sometimes significantly, to deal with the new normal of operating in a pandemic.

The comparison between the first grade averages in the pandemic with the average of the first two quadmester cycles (green bar in chart) examines whether the system wide rise at the outset was maintained the following year. Figure 10 shows that the results are maintained for high achievers regardless of demographic factors and as the subsequent slide shows, race.

However, for middle achievers and low achievers in relation to course averages, the rise experienced at the outset of the pandemic is not maintained. For example, students that identify as Latin American and had a 69 and below course average dropped by almost 10 percentage points from the start of the pandemic to the second Quadmester reporting period in early 2021. The chart shows the importance of experiencing success in school as a predictor for future success as well as successful resilience in facing challenges. Together, the charts suggest the importance in focusing on thoroughly understanding prior knowledge and experience of students, re-building successful relationships, leveraging digital opportunities that the pandemic forged, and expanding capacity to use good formative assessment capacity in weaving existing learning with new learning experience.

Figure 11. Credit Course Average Change Throughout the Pandemic for Students Achieving credit averages of 69-0 and 80-100 by Race
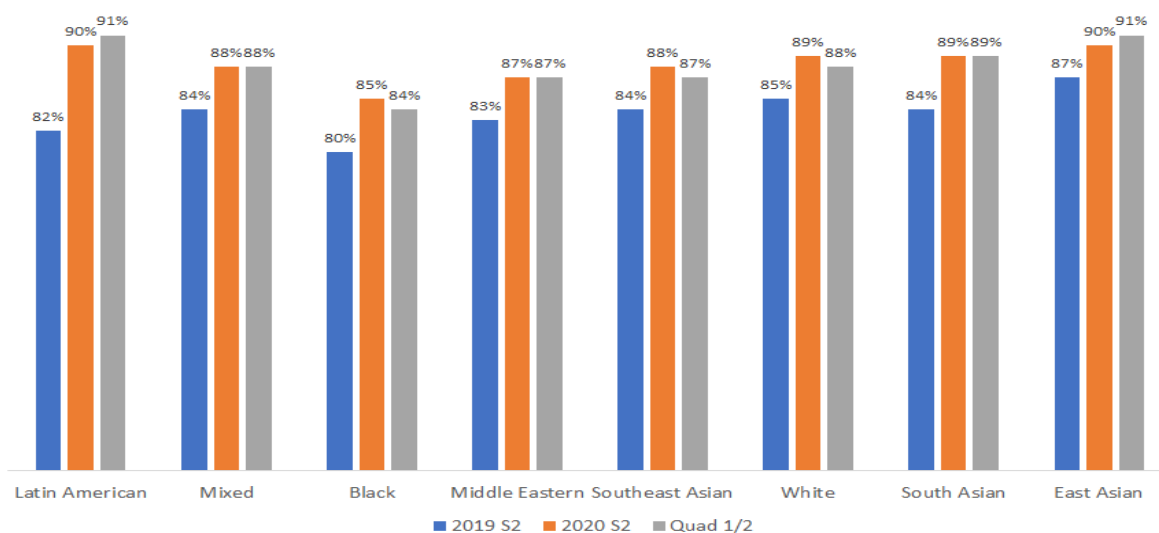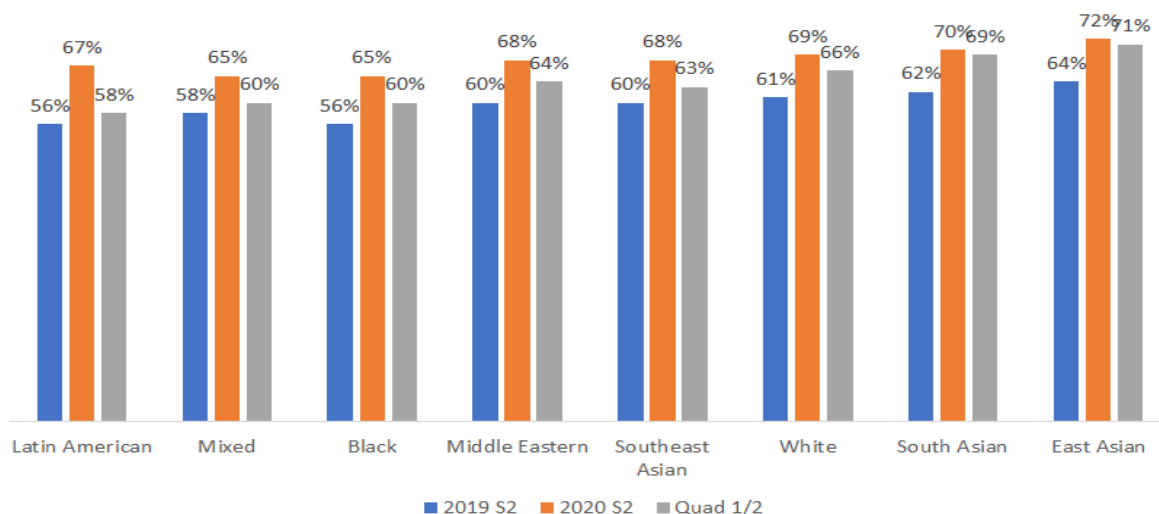
As per the discussion that precedes, the charts above show a similar dynamic of the value of high achievement in maintaining learning success in schools. Where students achieving at 80-100 before the pandemic were able to maintain the rise in course average, students achieving between 0-69 struggled to maintain the rise initially experienced. Work in Pathways starting at late elementary to start focusing on student success in late elementary seems critical.

Figure 12. Distribution of Accumulated Credits by Students in Year 4

Chart 1 (top): Distribution by student group, 2018-19 vs 2019-20

- Exceptionality Excluding Gifted: 2018-19 52%, 2019-20 54%
- IEP Only: 2018-19 61%, 2019-20 65%
- Students Without Special Education Needs: 2018-19 75%, 2019-20 78%
- Gifted: 2018-19 92%, 2019-20 94%

Legend: ■ 2018-19 ■ 2019-20

Chart 2 (bottom): Distribution by credits accumulated, 2018-19 vs 2019-20

- Under 7 credits: 2018-19 4%, 2019-20 4%
- 8 to 15 credits: 2018-19 4%, 2019-20 4%
- 16 to 22 credits: 2018-19 6%, 2019-20 5%
- 23 to 29 credits: 2018-19 14%, 2019-20 11%
- 30 credits or over: 2018-19 72%, 2019-20 76%
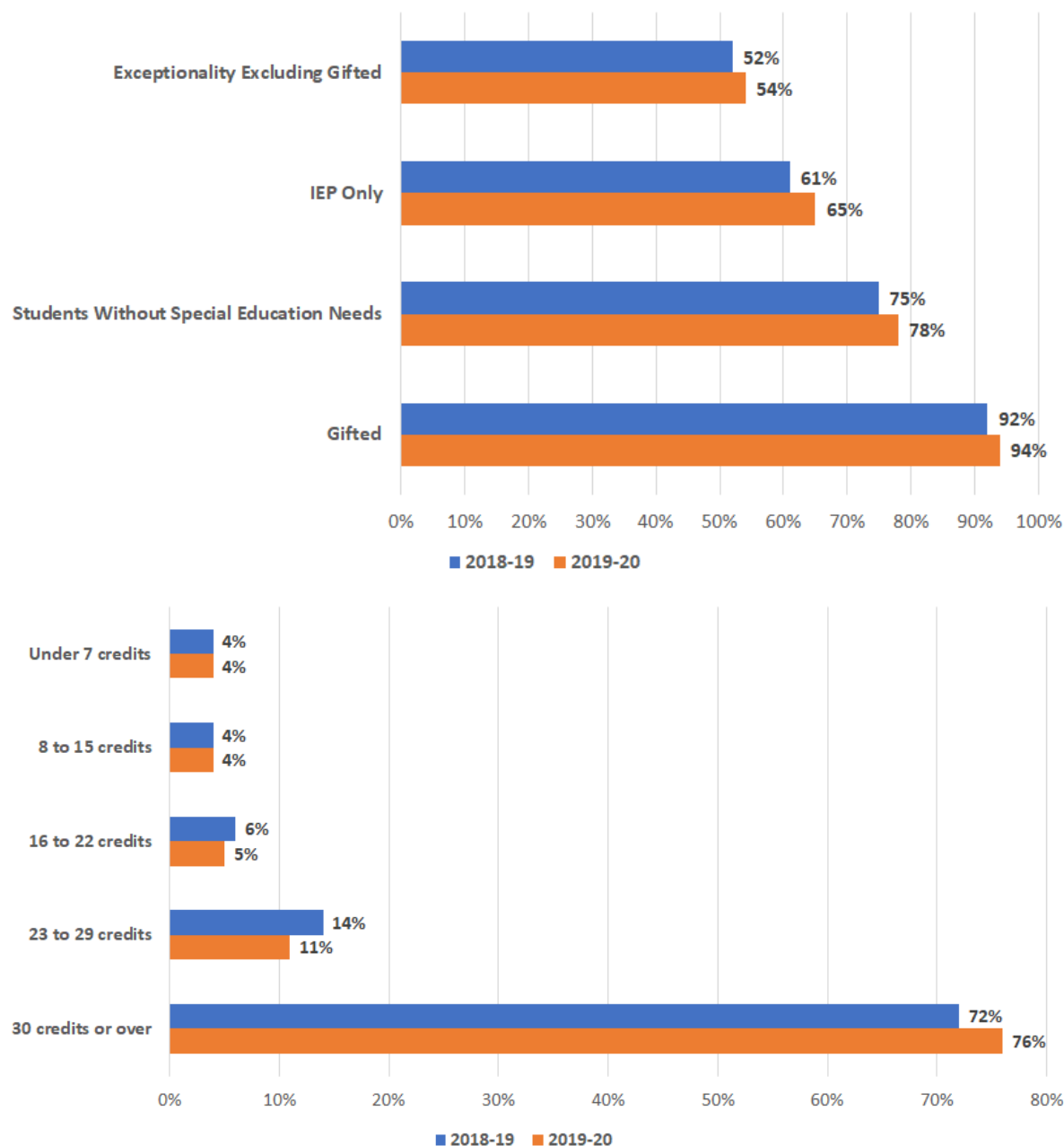
Legend: ■ 2018-19 ■ 2019-20

Figure 13 wraps up the system analysis by describing graduation. Similar to earlier discussions, the distribution of credits for four-year secondary school students is in line with other data that show the system-wide increase in percentages of students having higher rates of success. In this instance, while all students show some improvement, the student population with the largest improvement were the most historically marginalized in pre-pandemic schooling.

Preparation for September 2021 and Targeted Intervention Plans

The report has been divided into sections that address the areas of focus for the year ahead, based on the data provided above and where staff plan to implement targeted interventions. These areas are all interrelated and are key to the post pandemic back to school recovery plan.

- Building Relationships and Enhancing Belonging

- Use of Play/Outdoor Play

- Honouring Skills/Knowledge Gained During the Pandemic

- Assessment for Learning/As Learning

- Differentiated Supports for Those Who Have Had Greater Impacts from the Pandemic

- Staff Collaboration

- Digital Tools for Engaging Students/Families

- Virtual Learning 2021-2022

While this report outlines some of the important work that will be underway immediately in September, once staff and students are back together and connecting in-person, staff will have the opportunity to better understand where students are at in terms of their learning, mental health and well-being and in other areas. Based on this day to day interaction and ongoing evaluation throughout September and October, it will be important to remain flexible and acknowledge that these plans may need to shift or change. We must be prepared to adapt plans to address any newly identified gaps, changing circumstances and/or in response to emerging data.

Building Relationships and Enhancing Belonging

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

" ...most of my high school experience is getting washed away due to me not allowing to go back to school, I can't do sports, see my friends in person, make memories with the staff and students it feels like a complete mess." - TDSB Student

Following what has been a challenging period of time for many, it is important to begin building new relationships and to focus on rebuilding and strengthening existing relationships within the school community that may have changed over the course of the pandemic. This includes all relationships: student/student, student/staff, staff/staff, and schools/families/communities.

As staff, students, families and school communities begin the 2021-22 school year in September, everyone will be returning after being away for a period of time. For some it will have been a few months, while others will be returning after a more significant time away (e.g. virtual school staff and students).

Intentional planning for students with special education needs, students in French programs, and English Language Learners will be important. Providing an opportunity to meet with staff prior to school reopening will help with welcoming students and families back to school and establishing and enhancing belonging. Some students with special education needs, students in French programs, and English Language Learners may require additional support to re-learn and adjust to new routines associated with public health measures.

Educators, staff, students and families must work together to create a positive school and classroom climate that fosters the mental health and well-being of all students. Students must feel supported and integrated into a dynamic, responsive learning environment which validates their lived experiences. Educators must prioritize the rebuilding of positive relationships with students to understand their strengths, passions, and curiosities in order to identify effective teaching and learning strategies. A differentiated approach that honours their identities and lived experiences is instrumental in building and sustaining effective, responsive relationships.

Students will be returning to learning in a model that, although may be similar to the 2020-21 school year, is still unlike the typical environment that they are familiar with. Building a positive and welcoming school community means embedding the principles

of equity and inclusive education in all aspects of the learning environment. Intentional initiatives must also be designed at the system and school level that support the well-being and sense of belonging to the school community in direct response to the student, community and staff voice. Building a welcoming school environment requires an ongoing, comprehensive and collaborative effort on the part of everyone involved. All students should feel valued and connected to others, while educators and schools prioritize re-establishing relationships and building strong connections with students and their families in a positive manner.

The focus on mental health and well-being must be at the forefront of academic learning, especially during this time of consistent uncertainty. A positive, constructive, relevant and respectful classroom will contribute to mental health. In order to help reduce student stress, anxiety and fear, educators, staff and administrators need to be consistent in providing a welcoming, reassuring message of "hope" to all students. When students "see" and "hear" that adults have come together as a harmonized system, we are providing them with the reassurance that supports their sense of safety and well-being. Students will respond better to a planned re-entry with routines and structures in place. With young students, their ability to express emotion can help them to understand and articulate how they are feeling and make it easier to discuss.

Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy and practices will allow student voice and choice to drive instructional design. Centering student voice and identity in all curriculum areas is essential for creating conditions that foster well-being and belonging. Opportunities for meaningful integration across all subjects will support teachers with planning as well as students with making connections to big ideas and questions across the curriculum. As we return to school, seeing students as social beings and knowledge producers with rich histories is as important as ever.

Use of Play/Outdoor Play & Experiential Learning

"School to me is not a happy place anymore. It's more of a stressful environment no matter if you join clubs etc. It's almost like a burden because of everything going on right now. Nobody wants to do anything but because of course some of us are in Grade 12 we have to graduate to go to post-secondary school. Many people I know are sad, stressed out and bored and it keeps getting worse the longer we stay home. We don't feel like ourselves anymore and everything feels out of place." - TDSB Student

"*Teachers play a huge role in how students are feeling. My math and biology teachers were some of the best teachers I ever had because they had positive attitudes and actually cared for their students. They helped me be able to succeed in an accelerated course that takes 5 months to learn normally. They made virtual learning much more bearable and less stressful."*- TDSB Student

Play is a vehicle for learning and rests at the core of innovation and creativity. It provides opportunities for learning in a context in which children are at their most receptive. Play is an optimal context for enabling children to work out their ideas and theories and use what they already know to deepen their understanding and further their learning. Educators' planning and programming reflects the belief that all students are competent and capable of complex thinking, curious and rich in potential. Intentional play and inquiry are interconnected pedagogical approaches and are essential for children's learning from their pre-school experiences, and throughout elementary and secondary programs.

Play is typically described as student-directed, voluntary, internally motivated, and pleasurable. Play has mainly been associated with early years education (Ortlieb, 2010). However, educational researchers contend that play is not just for early childhood; it takes place in all classrooms. This includes classes in which students engage in discussions, group work, creative writing or critical thinking (Ortlieb, 2010). Play is not the exclusive domain of early childhood. It is dynamic and extends across development, beyond the early years. With the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic this past year, play opportunities are vital to helping children make sense of their experiences, problem-solve, reconnect with their peers, and promote their own well-being (Focus on Play, June 2020). And thus, play is important to consider with the opening of schools after COVID-19 (McNamara et al., 2021, as cited in Parrott & Cohen, 2021). In addition to developing a variety of cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills, play is important for the mental wellbeing of children at all ages. "As our world is constantly changing, play is significant for children to have a joyful channel to reduce their anxiety that comes with change" – such as COVID-19 and learning in a pandemic (Play Wales 2020, p.4).

The return to school in September will be an opportunity to capitalize on outdoor learning to explore creativity, inquiry and team building opportunities, and play while making deeper curriculum connected experiences.

Honouring Skills/Knowledge Gained During the Pandemic

"*Maths & Sciences are the hardest part since we don't actually learn anything, rather just do what we have to for the next assessment. Teachers give roughly 2 quizzes/week or a quiz & test/week, and that is mentally taxing, especially online without the same level of human connection to energize us. I'm not sure how I would optimize that so it's a fair balance, but I thought I'd let the reader know that this is a VERY common student struggle. Every student that I know who has a Math/Science course has the same issue.*" - TDSB Student

It is important to acknowledge that all students have had a wide range of experiences during the pandemic. Our focus during the 2021-22 school year will be to honour the skills and knowledge gained during the pandemic and to bridge learning experience and opportunities gained in different learning environments.

When educators get to know their students and build trusting relationships, they are better able to co-construct quality learning experiences that reflect an asset-based view of the student, the family and the educator. Students use their home language as a foundation upon which to build knowledge and skills in the new language. When the use of home language is encouraged by teachers and parents/guardians, students develop cognitive flexibility, making connections between what they know and what they are learning.

Similarly, for students in French language programs, it is essential to use French during classroom activities. For many students, exposure to French during class is the only contact with the target language. Educators employ effective scaffolding strategies to ensure understanding and develop proficiency, such as the use of visuals, graphic organizers, concrete materials, think aloud, and modeling.

Professional Support Staff will continue to work closely with schools and families in support of student learning. As part of school teams, they will continue to create connections between and amongst schools to support and strengthen student learning and a balanced positive mental health environment.

Knowledge Gained Through the Pandemic:

1. Family and community are key to the teaching and learning process and should be contributing members of their child's learning experience.

2. Responsive Relationships: Seeing students as competent and capable helps students feel a sense of belonging. Listening, observing and responding to student interests, strengths and curiosities provide students with voice, choice and agency.

3. Play-based Learning in a Culture of Inquiry: focusing on playful and experiential learning experiences that promote autonomy and choice and increased opportunities for student ownership of learning through inquiry.

4. Student Engagement, Voice and Choice: establishing learning opportunities that support self-directed learning based on strengths and areas of interest.

5. Small Group Instruction: intentional time for collaboration with a small number of students increases opportunities to co-construct learning and assessment.

6. The Learning Environment: students seeing themselves, their lived experiences and identities represented in their learning and in the materials and learning space is critical. The fluidity of learning must be honoured both indoors and outdoors.

7. Assessment Process and Pedagogical Documentation: students and families being contributors to documentation and being actively involved in the process of noticing and naming their learning and providing voice to their thinking.

8. Collaborative Learning Communities: extending beyond the class virtually to connect and share best learning practices with colleagues and interprofessionals to support student learning.

9. Leveraging Digital Tools and Assistive Technology: using tools to support instruction, teaching, communication and connecting.

10. Differentiating Transitions: recognizing that students require different time, space and materials as we support their transition and remembering that schools must be ready for students not students ready for school.

11. Create Conditions for Risk-taking: a supportive environment that promotes confidence and risk-taking in the target language and/or home language as skills are transferable.

Assessment *For* Learning/*As* Learning

"*I have learned how to communicate with parents that assessment is about the process of learning and not merely the product. I have learned how to adapt programming to give learners more of an opportunity to stay online and play/work with us (even during asynchronous times) so that we have more opportunity to engage with them and ask questions. I have learned how important it is to include time to showcase and notice and name the learning that is happening.*" - TDSB Educator

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

Assessment and instruction are inseparable actions. It is important to continue teaching through an asset-based approach and resist the urge to immediately reteach concepts that we feel students should have learned earlier. Rather than beginning the school year recapping prior knowledge that will take up a significant portion of instructional time, consider assessing and teaching prerequisite skills right before the related grade-level

content. This just-in-time approach helps to improve student learning, deepen students' conceptual understanding and provides an accessible entry point to grade-level learning (Boaler et al., 2020; NCTM & NCSM, 2020).

A focus on multiple opportunities for intentional assessment *for* and *as* learning to determine student learning and identify next steps in planning is essential in supporting students as they return to school and must be prioritized before engaging in tasks for assessment of learning. The tasks in which students engage can also be intentionally chosen to maximize accessibility. Open-ended questions with a "low-floor and high-ceiling" allow students to demonstrate what they know, whether it is at the beginning, middle, or end of a learning unit.

Teachers observe and listen to all students and then responsively shape instruction in ways that will foster and deepen students' understanding. Teachers can effectively program for students by differentiating their instruction and assessment practices. In doing so, all students gain access to questions and tasks, and develop preferences for learning in ways that individually make sense to them. Learning involves a continuous process of students making connections between what they already know and new material. The process is uneven and varied; most students grow their understanding in non-linear pathways. Regular feedback to students and communication with families on student progress remain essential in creating a positive and welcoming learning environment in the school and in the classroom.

The rate of progress during this school year has differed from previous years and students will be returning to school with a wide range of knowledge and experiences in non-traditional areas. When planning, it is important that we continue to respond with flexibility, compassion and understanding of the unique needs and situations of students and their families.

Differentiated Supports For Those Who Have Had Greater Impacts From the Pandemic

We recognize the uncertainty brought on by the pandemic, and that students may continue to experience transitions as they navigate the re-entry into school. Staff play a key role in welcoming and reassuring students, building trusting relationships, and connecting students to supports that are individualized to meet their needs, especially for those who have felt greater impacts of the pandemic.

Welcoming back and prioritizing mental health and well-being as we re-engage and integrate students who have been most impacted by the pandemic is essential. Intentional placement of Professional Support Staff in school communities, assessing needs throughout the school year for mental health and wellness supports and collaborating with school communities will strengthen school engagement.

All students can succeed given the appropriate support. Students have unique learning needs which may or may not have changed during the pandemic and educators and staff must work intentionally to create a class and school climate where students feel they belong and understand that learning happens on a continuum. Students learn best when instruction, learning environments and resources are reflective of their strengths, interests and areas of growth. The principles of Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy (CRRP) guides educators in cultivating equitable classrooms which recognize, respect and celebrate diverse identities and lived experiences.

Educators will lead with an equity lens and ensure the integration of anti-racism, anti-oppression and Indigenous perspectives in lessons, resources, and materials. They will collaborate to identify negative representations and elements that may cause harm to students, families and staff.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction are an integral part of all classrooms. Educators will use UDL to design learning experiences that offer multiple entry points and appropriate supports to ensure success for all students. We must consider what will be necessary for some but beneficial to all in terms of teaching practice. "While Universal Design for Learning provides the teacher with broad principles for planning, differentiated instruction allows teachers to address specific skills and difficulties." (Adapted from Raynal & Rieunier, 1998) Educators should consider the "what", "why" and "how" of learning within the UDL context. Building learner profiles is a helpful way to learn about and document information related to their learning styles, specific needs, interests and what motivates them. The planning of teaching and the time educators allocate to students' activities must be sufficiently flexible to provide real learning experiences for all students, regardless of their performance level.

Staff Collaboration

"*I appreciated the opportunity to come together as educators and learn from and with one another as well as dialogue about what we were observing in our classrooms. It was such a supportive environment.*" - TDSB Educator

Throughout this learning programs and mindset have shifted to support being flexible and responsive to the dynamic situation that we are experiencing. Staff across the TDSB have developed innovative ways to interact and collaborate in new and different ways as they connect across the system for professional learning opportunities, including online crisis support, mental health and well-being counselling and groups, to better support all students. Staff are encouraged to engage in professional dialogue, collaborate to share strategies and tools, and build capacity at the school level to respond to local needs and ensure that all learners are offered innovative and effective

learning opportunities that are engaging, appropriate and support their continued learning journey.

Educators will continue to enhance their knowledge by engaging in job-embedded learning, collaborative inquiry and reflecting on how their identities impact their practice. This will be supported by ongoing professional development opportunities with TDSB staff and external community partners.

Digital Tools and Assistive Technology for Engaging Students/Families

As schools and educators were invited virtually into student's homes during the pandemic, they gained a greater appreciation and deeper understanding of the wide range of contexts, relationships and opportunities that students experience in their home lives. Educators were able to scaffold this into learning experiences and build on relevant learning opportunities. They were also able to see firsthand the inequities that exist within our society and why the equity grounded work we are doing in the TDSB is essential.

The pandemic led to a considerable shift in educator practice and student engagement. As needs for learning and connection arose, new models of communication and collaboration have risen organically, driven by opportunities provided by digital tools and our need to support students, to make connections, and to create authentic and valuable experiences. For example, one exciting opportunity occurred at the Scarborough Outdoor Education School in Kearney where staff managed to bring the outside indoors and provided webinars reaching 100-700 students.

Students have gained a great deal of skills and knowledge related to the use of technology. This is not seen in only the ability to operate and manage systems but also in the way that they have been able to critically solve problems, analyse contexts and collaborate in virtual environments. As students and staff have worked with digital content, they have gained a deeper understanding of themselves as creators and consumers of information. Learning throughout the pandemic has meant that students, educators and families learned how to use new digital tools, improve their skills with tools they were already using, and/or use the tools in ways they never imagined! This now needs to be leveraged as we move into post-pandemic education and we must continue to capitalize on the use of digital tools in order to support the engagement of students and families in an equitable way.

Assistive technology is used to ensure that students have equitable access to the curriculum. Supporting students with the use of assistive technology devices and software is one of the ways in which we can make learning possible, more effective, and more efficient for learners. It is essential for some and beneficial for all. Many of the tools available to support learners in English (e.g. Read and Write Gold) are also

available for the FSL classroom. Tools like these have been invaluable for FSL, ESL, and students with Special Education Needs.

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of families as integral partners in the learning process. Educators have continued to engage families using a variety of tools such as Google Classroom/Brightspace, Zoom, email, digital newsletters, classroom websites/blogs and Twitter.

TDSB's Virtual Library also became a key resource during the pandemic not only for educators but for students and families. Prior to the pandemic, the Virtual Library provided resources that supported reading engagement and research for learners from K-12 as a complement to rich, school library collections and classroom resources.

During the pandemic, as libraries were closed and schools went entirely virtual, this tool stretched far beyond its original purpose and these licenced resources were used for wide ranging instructional and learning purposes. Teacher and student's use of these resources shifted from teaching about the Virtual Library to using it actively as a key source of content for instruction.

The Virtual Library continued to develop in response to the needs brought on during the pandemic, and as a result we added additional fiction and nonfiction titles, expanding the collections to include more books for reading engagement and pleasure reading, as well as, adding subject specific resources for staff, students, and families.

Moving forward, educators should continue to use these types of tools to strengthen relationships and foster collaborative relationships with families. In choosing tools, educators should consider the needs of the families in their local school community.

Virtual Learning 2021-2022

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

Throughout the 2020-21 school year, TDSB educators worked incredibly hard to adapt to virtual learning and to make the transitions between in-person and virtual learning as smooth as possible for all students. However, multiple pivots between the two learning models presented challenges and virtual learning is a new format that worked well for some students and has been more challenging for others.

As teaching and learning shifted online and required the use of new platforms and

digital tools to engage students and families, staff had the opportunity to work together to build professional practice and establish best practices. This knowledge will be invaluable as we move forward into the 2021-22 school year and beyond.

Virtual learning provided an opportunity for TDSB to reimagine ways to engage and have families actively participate in meetings (e.g. Identification, Placement Recommendation Committees) to accommodate their lived realities and experiences. In addition, in a virtual learning environment we must ensure that families have access to communication and full documentations electronically (e.g. Individual Education Plan (IEP) Parent Consultation Letters).

At the Virtual Secondary School, staff found a variety of ways to involve students both in and out of the classroom in a wide range of experiences. The establishment of 32 clubs and special interest groups connected students from across TDSB, in some cases both from VSS and brick and mortar schools. The structure of the organizations gave voice to many students who had previously been silent. It is the intent of many of the teacher sponsors of the groups to continue building on the foundation in the coming school year to enhance and extend the TDSB-wide student connections.

Innovation and re-imaging ways of doing things, occurred with our oldest to youngest students. Digital tools were used to engage students in large groups, small groups, and individually. Our youngest students used tools like 'Flipgrid' and 'Pear Deck' to express their thinking. Many students worked with various departments, like Outdoor Education and Music to engage in learning like they had never done before. Virtual field trips, working with an itinerant music teacher, working with their homeroom teacher and support staff, all shifted to a virtual platform. The learning never stopped as educators found new ways to teach and students found new ways to learn and engage with one another and their teachers.

Next Steps

This report is the first in a series of updates to be provided on the TDSB's COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery Plan. It includes the first set of data that has informed planning and preparation for the beginning of the 2021-22 school year.

As per Phase 2 of the Board motion, staff will report back twice a school year, in the spring and fall, to the Planning and Priorities Committee, beginning in fall 2021.