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# District School Board of Niagara 2012 Student Survey Official Report

*by the*

2011-2012 DSBN Student  
Trustee Senate

April 10, 2012

## RECOMMENDED MOTION

“That the District School Board of Niagara 2012 Student Survey Official Report be received by the Board.”



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## 2011-2012 DSBN STUDENT TRUSTEE SENATE

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Joelle Schonberg  
Evan Vassallo

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# DSBN 2012 Student Survey Official Report

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## MESSAGE FROM STUDENT TRUSTEES JOELLE SCHONBERG AND EVAN VASSALLO

Welcome to the District School Board of Niagara (DSBN) 2012 Student Survey Official Report. This document will cover every question included in the survey. On each question page, one can find results, comment analysis, some notable comments by students, and recommendations based on the question's results, comments made by respondents, and suggestions by the Student Trustee Senate and board staff. Some recommendations include ways of carrying out the recommendation that students find effective.

The DSBN Student Survey, modelled after the Ontario Student Survey administered by the Ontario Student Trustees' Association, consisted of ten yes-or-no questions. Survey-takers had the opportunity to comment on each question. All DSBN secondary school students were encouraged to take the survey.

The survey was conducted online using Checkbox survey software. Students were able to access the survey from February 1 to February 23, 2012. 4,074 students responded, making up 28% of the DSBN's secondary school student population. In total, over 9,000 comments were made.

The DSBN Student Trustee Senate is a group of motivated student leaders composed of representatives from DSBN secondary schools. Chaired by the DSBN Student Trustees, the senate meets monthly to discuss leadership, issues in education, and fundraisers for DSBN partner charities. All Senators were involved in creating and editing the questions, marketing the survey to their schoolmates, developing recommendations, reading every comment, and writing comment analysis.

Many people were influential in making the DSBN Student Survey successful. John Stainsby, Superintendent of Secondary Schools, and MaryLou Crevier, Administrative Assistant, worked diligently to consult with board staff, to adjust the content and wording of the survey questions and to promote the survey. The principals and staff of the DSBN's secondary schools allotted class time for students to take the survey and promoted the survey in their schools. Eleanor Novak and the DSBN Information Technology team set up the survey's online connectivity and helped us through two system crashes. David Moody created our impactful Student Survey logo. Christopher Pandza was involved in designing the visual components of this report. Senior board staff and trustees fully supported the survey campaign. Finally, the students of the DSBN took the time to complete this survey and use their opinions for good.

We sincerely thank all of these people for their efforts. Without them, this important project would not be possible.

If you have any comments or questions regarding this report, the Student Survey or the Student Trustee Senate, please contact [studentsurvey@dsbn.org](mailto:studentsurvey@dsbn.org).

Yours in Education,



Joelle Schonberg



Evan Vassallo

## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

1. Would/do you benefit academically from a daily hour-long study period (MSIP) as a part of your school day?  
Yes - 65.9%                      No - 34.1%
2. If you have a certain mark in a class (for example, an 85%), should you have the choice to be exempt from taking that final exam?  
Yes - 74.2%                      No - 25.8%
3. Would a later school day schedule (e.g. 10:00am-4:00pm) have a positive effect on your academic experience?  
Yes - 39.7%                      No - 60.3%
4. Do you think you would benefit from teachers posting lessons, notes, deadlines and classroom info online?  
Yes - 76.7%                      No - 23.3%
5. Have the new "Healthy Eating" options in your cafeteria stopped you from buying food at school?  
Yes - 47.3%                      No - 52.7%
- 6A. Do you think you have been properly prepared and informed about meeting course requirements for graduation by your guidance department? (Grade 9-11 students only)  
Yes - 77.3%                      No - 22.7%
- 6B. Do you think you have been properly informed about choosing post-secondary options by your guidance department? (Grades 12-12B students only)  
Yes - 67.6%                      No - 32.4%
7. Does your school offer enough extra-curricular activities (i.e. councils, arts, sports teams, and clubs)?  
Yes - 84.1%                      No - 15.9%
8. Do you feel that you have learned or experienced something positive while completing the mandatory 40 hours of community service?  
Yes - 66.9%                      No - 33.1%
9. Do you think enough steps have been taken in your school to prevent bullying amongst students?  
Yes - 60.5%                      No - 39.5%
10. Should you be educated about all sexual orientations in sexual education classes?  
Yes - 75.8%                      No - 24.2%

## RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

### Share of Respondents by Grade

Grade 9 - **24.6%** or 1,004 students  
Grade 10 - **24.4%** or 992 students  
Grade 11 - **24.5%** or 997 students  
Grade 12 - **22.8%** or 928 students  
Grade 12B - **3.8%** or 153 students

### Share of Respondents by Gender

Female - **52.1%** or 2,123 students  
Male - **47.9%** or 1,951 students

### Share of Respondents by Course Level

Academic - **70.5%** or 1,408 students  
Applied - **24.8%** or 495 students  
Essential - **3.8%** or 75 students  
School to Community - **0.9%** or 18 students

### Share of Respondents by Post-Secondary Destination

University - **51.3%** or 1,066 students  
College - **36.6%** or 761 students  
Workplace - **7.4%** or 155 students  
School to Community - **4.6%** or 96 students

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## QUESTION 1: MULTI-SUBJECT INSTRUCTIONAL PERIOD (MSIP)

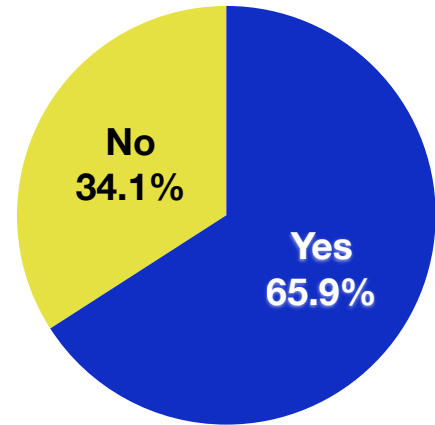
**Would/do you benefit academically from a daily hour-long study period (MSIP) as a part of your school day?**

2,685 students or **65.9%** of respondents answered yes

1,389 students or **34.1%** of respondents answered no

### Comment Analysis

Many students wrote that they could make use of an extra period during the day, especially when involved in extra-curricular activities. They also responded that it would help balance their workload more effectively. Other students saw MSIP as a way to directly review homework with and seek help from teachers. Respondents mentioned that a daily study period would be most effective before a test or an exam.



Many students who disagreed with the question admitted they would not focus as well in a school setting. They saw the home as a more relaxed, focused environment for school work. Several students reasoned that socializing with their peers would be distracting to their MSIP studies.

Of survey respondents enrolled in schools on an MSIP schedule, 85.4% said they benefit academically from this extra period. This is almost a 20% increase over the board-wide results.

### Comments from Students

“I do not think that MSIP would benefit myself as a student or our school. It shortens precious class time and just adds another day to exams at the end of the year.”

-Grade 11 student

“Due to the participation in after school activities, I do not always have enough time to complete homework. A study period would be perfect. I also know of students who skip class so they can finish homework for other classes, with the study period skipping would be decreased.”

-Grade 11 student

### Recommendations

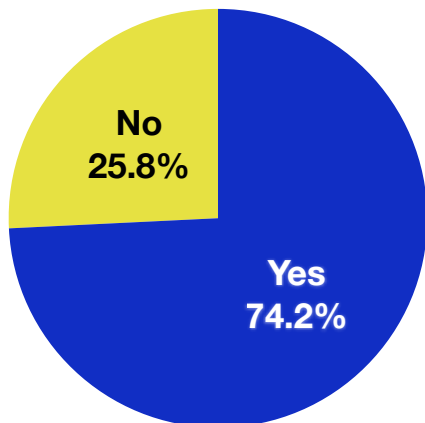
#### Senior Administration, Trustees:

- Consult principals and educators at MSIP and non-MSIP schools about their opinions on Multi-Subject Instructional Periods.
- Consider implementing MSIP schedules in more secondary schools.

## QUESTION 2: FINAL EXAM EXEMPTIONS

**If you have a certain mark in a class (for example, an 85%), should you have the choice to be exempt from taking that final exam?**

3,024 students or **74.2%** of respondents answered yes  
1,050 students or **25.8%** of respondents answered no



### Comment Analysis

Students who answered this question affirmatively reasoned that exams are about demonstrating one's true understanding of the course material. They concluded that students who achieved a high average would have already demonstrated this knowledge. Many students cited the final exam exemption as a positive incentive to earn high grades. Several respondents also feared that students' nervousness or unusual events on exam day could cause a much lower exam mark than the students' knowledge should reflect and

consequently, a much lower final mark than might be deserved.

Those who answered "no" thought that exams taught work ethic, encouraged strong study habits, and prepared students for high-pressure situations in post-secondary studies and in the adult world.

A few respondents suggested that students with higher grades could be offered an exam alternative (such as an essay or a project) instead of a total exemption.

73.2% of grade 11-12B students agreed that students earning a mark of over 85% should have the option of not writing a final exam. Even though most of these students are preparing for post-secondary studies, their views are in line with the other respondents.

### Comments from Students

"Final exams show what you really know and understand about the course. It's easy to get high marks on projects and assignments, etc throughout the semester. So exams should be done because you'll find out what a student really knows."

-Grade 11 student

"I think this would work very well and promote teens to work hard in their classes so they could obtain the certain mark, so they would be exempt from taking the final exam."

-Grade 11 student

### Recommendations

#### Senior Administration, Trustees:

- Consider introducing additional final exam exemption pilot projects at more secondary schools.

#### Senior Administration:

- Consult principals, educators and post-secondary students about final exam exemptions.

## QUESTION 3: DAILY START TIME

**Would a later school day schedule (e.g. 10:00am-4:00pm) have a positive effect on your academic experience?**

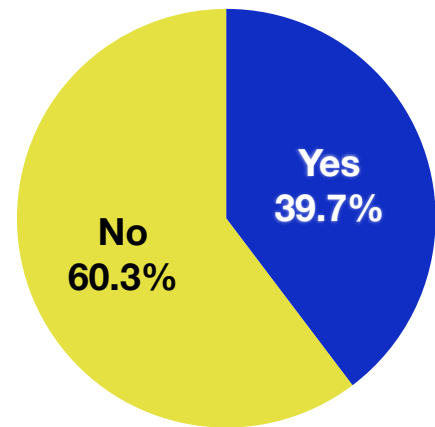
1,617 students or **39.7%** of respondents answered yes

2,457 students or **60.3%** of respondents answered no

### Comment Analysis

Commenters who responded “yes” believe that they would come to school with more energy and focus. They also noted they would have a greater capacity and desire to learn.

A larger number of students wrote the schedule shift would limit time available for extra-curricular activities and part-time employment. Several students also noted their peers would adjust their sleep schedules to the later start time, not resting any more than under an earlier schedule.



### Comments from Students

“No, its better for me to have an earlier start time because it allows me to get ready for after school events like cadets or a job. Also this would make it harder to continue with after school sports they would be running very late.”

-Grade 10 student

“Waking up early gives students a feel of what the real world is like. You can't expect to sleep in everyday when you have a job!”

-Grade 9 student

“I think that many students and teachers would benefit from a later school schedule. I believe this because sleep deprivation could not be used as frequently as an excuse for being late or not doing work, and students would be able to focus and concentrate on assignments much more efficiently if they could sleep in and start the school day later on in the day.”

-Grade 11 student

“So many people are sleep-deprived, and it would be a good opportunity to finish homework or to do extra-curriucular sports or teams before school!”

-Grade 9 student

### Recommendations

**Senior Administration, Trustees:**

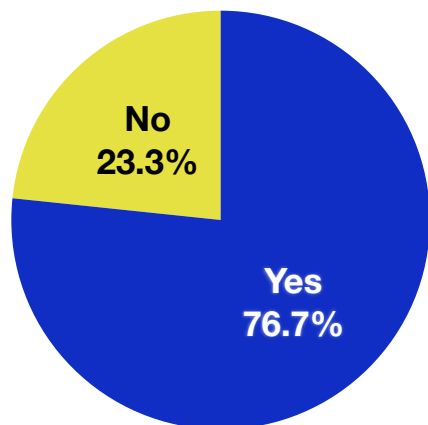
- Maintain current school day start times and end times.



## QUESTION 4: ONLINE RESOURCES

**Do you think you would benefit from teachers posting lessons, notes, deadlines and classroom info online?**

3,123 students or **76.7%** of respondents answered yes  
951 students or **23.3%** of respondents answered no



### Comment Analysis

The majority of commenters said online information would be useful, especially when they miss school or leave binders behind. Students also pointed out that parents can know more about what their children are learning.

Respondents who answered “no” cited online distractions, low student interest, weak computer abilities, or lack of Internet access as the basis behind their opinions.

Many students agreed that due dates and major assignments should be available online. However, respondents were conflicted whether posting notes online would be beneficial to the student.

Some think that students would not pay attention in class because the notes would be available online. They also feel this practice would leave them unprepared for post-secondary studies. Others believe online notes would enable them to concentrate fully on the teacher instead of focusing on writing notes.

### Comment from a Student

“As an active athlete, I miss school almost once a week during the competitive season. It's very helpful to log on to a teacher's website and see what was covered that day, and even print off a note so I'm not behind for the next day.”

-Grade 12 student

### Recommendations

#### Senior Administration:

- Hold information technology-focused professional development days. Advertise these workshops to teachers with relatively less technological expertise.

#### Principals:

- Encourage educators to post lessons, notes, deadlines, and classroom information online.

#### Teachers, Principals:

- Involve students in updating online resources.
- Use online resources to provide lessons, deadlines, notes, and other classroom information to students.
- Give students the option to hand in assignments online (e.g. through email, hand-in websites, or blogs).

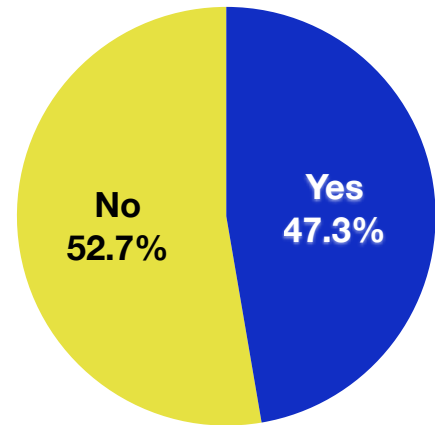
## QUESTION 5: HEALTHY EATING OPTIONS

### Have the new “Healthy Eating” options in your cafeteria stopped you from buying food at school?

1,927 students or **47.3%** of respondents answered yes  
2,147 students or **52.7%** of respondents answered no

#### Comment Analysis

The undesirable taste of cafeteria food was a major complaint amongst “yes” respondents. They were also unhappy with the recent increases in prices and decreases in portion sizes. Some of these respondents wrote that secondary school students are old enough to make their own choices and that both healthy and unhealthy choices should be provided.



Commenters lauded the introduction of salad and sandwich bars to school cafeterias. It was noted by several students that they provide choice, good taste, and nutrition.

Several students expressed their indifference towards the issue as they already leave the school to buy lunch every day.

#### Comments from Students

“The food in our cafeteria is a disgrace, I personally can't believe they make you pay for it. Also, they have been getting rid of the "non-healthy" foods... But I think as high school students, we should be able to make the choice of what we eat for lunch.”

-Grade 12B student

“The "Healthy Eating" options have encouraged me and a lot of others to eat well. I want to buy the food because it's healthier.”

-Grade 12 student

#### Recommendations

##### Senior Administration:

- Provide more options for students with dietary restrictions (e.g. vegetarian, kosher) and allergies.
- Lower prices and/or increase portion sizes.

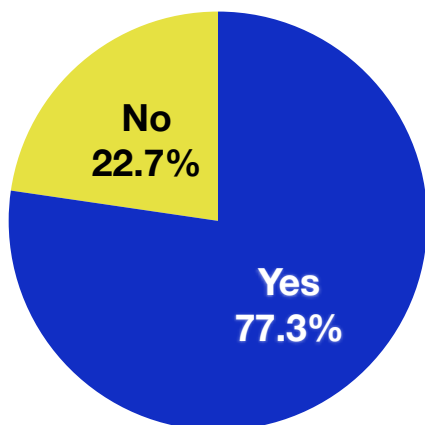
##### Principals:

- Provide nutrition facts and allergy alerts for each product.
- Allow students to make menu requests.
- Continue the implementation of salad and sandwich bars in school cafeterias.
- Post cafeteria menus one week in advance.

## QUESTION 6A: ACADEMIC GUIDANCE

This question was only asked to grade 9-11 students.

**Do you think you have been properly prepared and informed about meeting course requirements for graduation by your guidance department?**



2,314 students or **77.3%** of respondents answered yes  
679 students or **22.7%** of respondents answered no  
2,993 students answered this question

### Comment Analysis

Many students found that guidance staff would readily help students who ask for assistance. Otherwise, they were left to find information on their own. Some students felt that guidance staff were too busy to help students individually. Others felt they were better informed by their teachers than by guidance staff. A few respondents were upset that guidance staff would not let them take academic level courses.

A majority of commenters reported their guidance department made course and community service requirements for graduation well known to students. A large number of students exclaimed their appreciation for their guidance department.

### Comments from Students

“Although I'm only in grade nine, the guidance department seems to do a very good job trying to get students informed about their future. Actually, they do all they can for the students. Whether its contacting them personally or making announcements.”

-Grade 9 student

“I did a lot of my own research when applying to university, but our guidance department really helped me to now where to start with my research. They have also been very helpful with scholarship information. They gave us a few links to research scholarships and they also announce a few major ones, which is really great because if it was not for our guidance department I would not have had any idea where to go to research scholarships.”

-Grade 10 student

### Recommendations

#### Principals:

- Support guidance staff in carrying out question 6A and 6B recommendations.

#### Guidance Staff:

- Encourage students to schedule one-on-one appointments with guidance counsellors.

#### Students:

- Proactively schedule one-on-one appointments with guidance counsellors.

## QUESTION 6B: ACADEMIC GUIDANCE

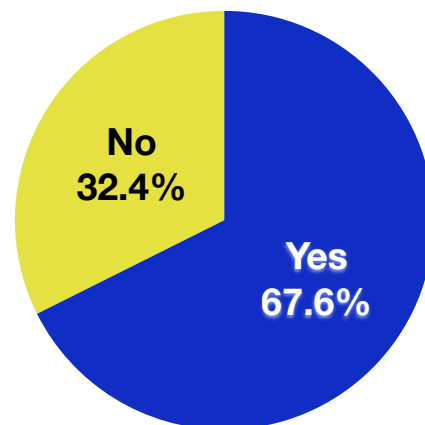
This question was only asked to grade 12-12B students.

### **Do you think you have been properly informed about choosing post-secondary options by your guidance department?**

731 students or **67.6%** of respondents answered yes

350 students or **32.4%** of respondents answered no

1,081 students answered this question



### **Comment Analysis**

Like their grade 9-11 counterparts, 6B respondents wrote that their guidance department would readily help students who ask for help but otherwise, students are left to find their own information. Students also exclaimed appreciation for their school's guidance department.

Several students preferred researching post-secondary options on their own to consulting guidance staff. Some students suggested that guidance staff provide more scholarship information to students.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Senior Administration:**

- Develop booklets describing out-of-province application processes. Distribute these booklets to students through guidance departments.

#### **Guidance Staff:**

- Offer access to post-secondary institution representatives to grade 11 students.
- Discuss scholarship opportunities with grade 11 students.
- Inform students about life as a post-secondary student.
  - Organize a panel of post-secondary students to answer questions from potential graduates. Panelists could give brief presentations about student life, such as scholarships, off-campus living, orientation week, etc.
- Hold at least one mandatory one-on-one meeting with graduating students.
- Encourage students to schedule one-on-one appointments with guidance counsellors.
- Educate students about post-secondary institutions and application processes outside of Ontario.
  - Hold in-school clinics for out-of-province information if enough interest exists.
  - Advertise out-of-school clinics more (e.g. Quebec and Atlantic Canada fairs at Ridley College, New York fair at Laura Secord Secondary School).

#### **Students:**

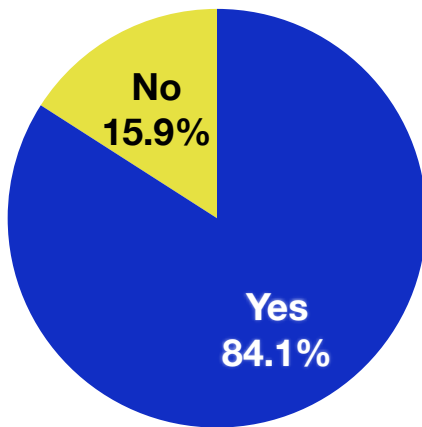
- Proactively schedule one-on-one appointments with guidance counsellors.
- Research post-secondary and scholarship information.
- Attend post-secondary institution information sessions offered by guidance staff and by outside organizations.

#### **Student Trustee Senate:**

- Present the above recommendations directly to guidance department heads and seek additional feedback.

## QUESTION 7: EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Does your school offer enough extra-curricular activities (i.e. councils, arts, sports teams, and clubs)?



3,425 students or **84.1%** of respondents answered yes

649 students or **15.9%** of respondents answered no

### Comment Analysis

The majority of students expressed their satisfaction with the offering of extracurricular activities at their schools. Some students even mentioned how much they enjoy participating in the activities.

Many respondents suggested new activity offerings for their respective schools. Most often, these comments mentioned the lack of technological or arts-based activities available.

Several commenters acknowledged that a wide variety of activities were available at their school before admitting that they were not well advertised to the student body. Some students noted that they were not involved in school extra-curriculars but thought their school had enough offerings.

### Comments from Students

“Not all teams are advertised or run yearly; lots get dropped due to lack of interest because nobody has heard about them.”

-Grade 12 student

“S.L.H.S. is widely known for their various activities from sports, clubs, after-school help, and the arts. Quite often you find yourself so involved, your time is almost unmanageable. Extra-curriculars help pass the year by quickly and with joyfulness.”

-Grade 12 student

### Recommendations

#### School Staff:

- Inform students of available extra-curricular activities at the beginning of the year.
  - Coordinate an “extra-curricular activity fair” where grade 9 students can view different club booths and ask for more information.
  - Advertise activities through announcements, posters, websites, social networking, and other school communications.
- Survey incoming grade 8 students and current students about what activities and sports they would like.
  - Provide space for students to suggest extra-curricular activities on their intention sheets.
  - If many students are interested in one activity, pursue a member of school staff or an outside volunteer to supervise activity.

## QUESTION 8: COMMUNITY SERVICE

**Do you feel that you have learned or experienced something positive while completing the mandatory 40 hours of community service?**

2,726 students or **66.9%** of respondents answered yes

1,348 students or **33.1%** of respondents answered no

### Comment Analysis

The students who responded “yes” to the question found that completing the community service hours was a valuable and uplifting experience. Many of those students have continued to dedicate their time and volunteer past the mandated forty hours of service.

Students who responded “no” often felt that completing the hours was a chore. They did not have a positive experience due to where and how they completed the hours, as well as the amount of time it took out of students’ personal schedules.

Some respondents said they were unaware of feasible volunteer positions that would be beneficial to their learning experience.

Students mentioned that completing the hours could be more constructive and memorable if the teachers and administration spent more time and effort advising students where and how to get involved in the community.

### Comment from a Student

“I met some of the best people I know doing my hours and had a blast, and I'm sure it taught me to be even MORE polite, adult, responsible and so forth as I was faced with dealing with other adults in a business manner.”

-Grade 12 student

### Recommendations

#### Senior Administration, Trustees:

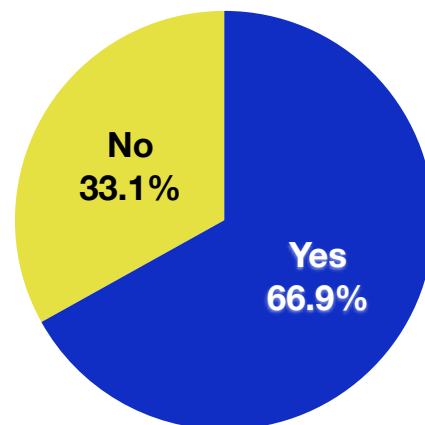
- Implement more board-organized volunteer opportunities.

#### Guidance Staff:

- Advertise a range of volunteer positions that address various interests, time commitments, and locations to students.

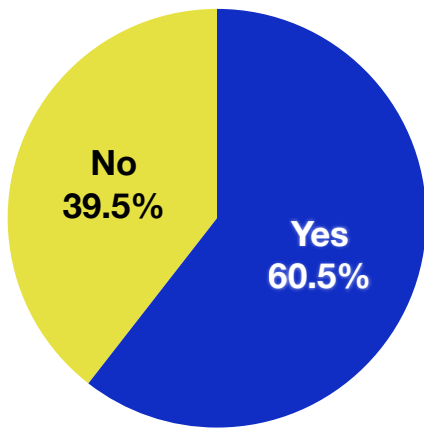
#### Students:

- Consult with guidance counsellors to find suitable volunteer positions in terms of responsibilities and time commitment.
- Research volunteer opportunities posted by the school and posted in online databases such as [niagara.cioc.ca/volunteer](http://niagara.cioc.ca/volunteer).



## QUESTION 9: BULLYING

**Do you think enough steps have been taken in your school to prevent bullying amongst students?**



2,466 students or **60.5%** of respondents answered yes  
1,608 students or **39.5%** of respondents answered no

### Comment Analysis

Almost all comments on this question referred to the amount of bullying the respondent noticed in his or her school.

About half of these comments reported no evident bullying occurring in their schools. While many students attributed this to a decline in bullying, others cited the rise of online bullying as the reason for less evident bullying on school property.

The other half believed that bullying was still prevalent in their schools. A significant share of these respondents were bullying victims themselves. They wrote they were bullied because of their sexual orientation, small stature, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status.

### Comments from Students

“The bullies aren't getting punished. The school is doing nothing to prevent bullying. And it has gotten to the point in which students transfer out of classes, students don't feel safe walking to class, and that students don't feel safe in their own school.”

-Grade 10 student

“Personally, I don't feel that bullying is an issue in my school, but there could be much that I am not affected by, or that goes by unnoticed by me.”

-Grade 11 student

### Recommendations

#### Principals:

- Continue to support bullying awareness programs and presentations in schools, especially those that inform students how to know when they are being bullied and how they can get help from anonymous and confidential sources.
- Introduce a system involving guidance counsellors, social workers, and local police to respond to reported cyber-bullying issues.
- Support the creation of anti-bullying and anti-discrimination groups.

#### Students:

- Maintain a supportive environment amongst fellow students.

## QUESTION 10: SEXUAL EDUCATION

### Should you be educated about all sexual orientations in sexual education classes?

3,089 students or **75.8%** of respondents answered yes

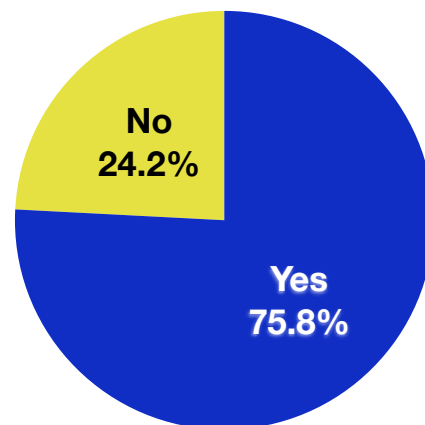
985 students or **24.2%** of respondents answered no

#### Comment Analysis

Most commenters believed that teaching about all sexual orientations would decrease bullying in schools and would make future generations more accepting.

Those who thought students should not be educated about all sexual orientations cited their religion as the foremost reason for their answer. Others feared that it would be a waste of time that would lead to more bullying because students already understood other sexual orientations.

Multiple commenters believed that discussing these topics in earlier grades (i.e. grades 4, 5, or 6) would foster acceptance in students who in turn would not find the topics abnormal. These students felt this practice would lead to safer school environments.



#### Comments from Students

“The reason why schools propose sexual education is to "educate" kids about this topic. However, on the realistic side of things, kids are only going to make a joke out of it and will use what they hear in that class as part of their vocabulary or offences to other students.”

-Grade 12 student

“The times have changed. Just because they don't follow the ordinary traditional male-female relationship, doesn't mean they shouldn't be properly informed.”

-Grade 9 student

#### Recommendations

##### Senior Administration:

- Investigate discussing sexual orientations not included in current curriculum briefly in younger grades (i.e. grades 4, 5, and 6).

##### Health and Physical Education Teachers:

- Ensure students can access information privately (e.g. through a school nurse or through trusted online sources).
- Allow students to ask questions anonymously.
  - Set up a question box where students can drop their written questions anonymously. Educators would answer submitted questions to the entire class.

##### School Administration:

- Invite teachers or other guest speakers to present about sexual orientations not included in current curriculum.