

Census Portrait

Middle Eastern Students

Academic Achievement and Well-being

As required by the Ministry of Education and the Anti-Racism Act, the Greater Essex County District School Board (G.E.C.D.S.B) conducted its first Student Census in the 2023-2024 school year. The analysis of the data will help the Board understand the experiences of students who have been historically underserved by the education system and put programs in place to close any gaps in academic achievement and well-being.

Of the almost 36,000 students in the G.E.C.D.S.B in 2023-2024, parents/guardians completed the Student Census for 18% of students in JK-Grade 8, while 58% of students in Grades 9-12 completed the Student Census.

The data shows that 14% (1,466) of all G.E.C.D.S.B students identify as Middle Eastern. 51% of these students were born outside of Canada.

There is a good deal of diversity among students who identify as Middle Eastern.

Demographic data

Ethnic Origins

The top 10 ethnic origins for Middle Eastern students are:

- Syrian 25%
- Lebanese 25%
- Iraqi 15%
- Palestinian 14%
- Canadian 9%
- Turkish 5%
- Egyptian 3%
- Persian 2%
- Yemeni 2%
- English 2%

Language first spoken

The top 10 languages first spoken as a child for Middle Eastern students are:

- Arabic 68%
- English 47%
- Turkish 4%
- French 3%
- Farsi 3%
- Kurdish 2%
- Persian 1%
- Urdu 1%
- American Sign Language 1%
- Spanish 1%

Disability

The breakdown for disability among Middle Eastern students is as follows:

- Yes 5%
- No 84%
- Not sure / I don't understand this question / Prefer not to answer 11%

Religious identity

The breakdown for religious identity for Middle Eastern students is as follows:

- Christian 5%

- Muslim 87%
- Other religions 1%
- No religious affiliation 4%
- Not sure / I don't understand this question / Prefer not to answer 3%

Sexual Orientation

The breakdown for 2SLGBTQ+ identity for Middle Eastern students is as follows:

- Straight / Cisgender 83%
- 2SLGBTQ+ 5%
- Not sure / I don't understand this question / Prefer not to answer 12%

Academic Achievement

CREDIT ACCUMULATION

A student is considered to be on track to graduate within four years if they have accumulated at least 16 credits by the end of Grade 10.

For Middle Eastern students 69% were on track for graduation, while 31% were not on track. This is compared to all students, of which 72% were on track for graduation, while 28% were not.

LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT

EQAO scores assess a student's reading and writing skills against provincial standards. The breakdown provides the percentage of students who met or exceeded the provincial standard on the Grade 3 and 6 EQAO reading and writing tests as well as the O.S.S.L.T.

The breakdown is as follows:

- Grade 3 EQAO Reading, Middle Eastern students 64%, all students 69%
- Grade 3 EQAO Writing, Middle Eastern students 64%, all students 67%
- Grade 6 EQAO Reading, Middle Eastern students 76%, all students 80%
- Grade 6 EQAO Writing, Middle Eastern students 75%, all students 78%
- O.S.S.L.T, Middle Eastern students 67%, all students 74%

SUSPENSIONS (Grades 4-12)

Percentage of students who have been suspended at least once between Grades 4 and 12.

For Middle Eastern students 81% had no suspensions while 19% had at least one suspension. This is compared to all student, of which 80% had no suspensions while 20% had at least one.

ACADEMIC COURSES IN GRADE 10

Percentage of students who have taken academic level English, Math, and Science, which allows them to go on to university.

- For English, Middle Eastern students 84%, all students 69%
- For Math, Middle Eastern students 74%, all students 63%
- For science, Middle Eastern students 77%, all students 68%

Well-Being

Sense of belonging at school

Students were asked questions about their well-being in school. They could answer always and often, sometimes or, rarely and never. The breakdown is as follows:

- When asked if students feel like they belong at school
 - Of Middle Eastern students, always and often 71%, sometimes 20%, rarely and never 10%
 - Of all students, always and often 67%, sometimes 22%, rarely and never 11%
- When asked if students feel accepted by other students at school
 - Of Middle Eastern students, always and often 76%, sometimes 17%, rarely and never 7%
 - Of all students, always and often 69%, sometimes 22%, rarely and never 9%
- When asked if students feel accepted by adults at school

- Of Middle Eastern students, always and often 77%, sometimes 17%, rarely and never 7%
- Of all students, always and often 75%, sometimes 17%, rarely and never 7%
- When asked if students felt that adults at school treat them differently (worse than) other students
 - Of Middle Eastern students, always and often 11%, sometimes 19%, rarely and never 70%
 - Of all students, always and often 10%, sometimes 16%, rarely and never 74%

Trusted School Adult (Grades 4-12)

Students were asked, do you feel that there is an adult at school who they feel comfortable to go to for personal support, advice, or help?

In response 62% of Middle Eastern students felt they had one or more trusted adults they could go to, while 38% said there were no trusted adults at school. In comparison 70% of all students said they had one or more trusted adults they could go to, while 30% said there were no trusted adults at school.

Experiences of Bullying (Grades 4-12)

Students were asked since September have you experienced bullying? The breakdown gives the percentage of students who indicated any level of bullying to the categories provided.

The breakdown for Middle Eastern students is as follows:

- Bullied physically by being physically hurt 19%
- Bullied physically by having their things damaged or stolen 14%
- Bullied verbally 35%
- Bullied socially 33%
- Bullied electronically 18%
- Bullied racially / ethnically 23%
- Bullied by being called racial slurs 16%
- Bullied because of their appearance 21%
- Bullied because of their weight 18%
- Bullied because of their gender expression or perceived gender presentation 6%
- Bullied because they are out, or have been outed, as being 2SLGBTQIA+ 4%

Input From Consultations

To help understand the data, input was sought from students, parents/guardians, staff, and community members. The following summarizes the main themes from these consultations and the recommendations made.

- **Data from the Student Census tells only part of the story:** Those we consulted with were concerned that many newcomer Middle Eastern parents may not have completed the Census. The completion of the Census could have been impacted by language barriers, access to technology, and access to the internet. In addition, some parents may not have fully understood the purpose of the Census and the importance of completing it. Those who did complete it may not know the full experiences of their children and might feel ill-equipped to answer questions on their behalf.
- **Lack of communication and trust between the G.E.C.D.S.B and Middle Eastern and Muslim communities:** Many felt that the Board must better engage with Middle Eastern and Muslim communities. This includes sharing information about the education system and the curriculum to counter the misinformation being shared within the community, which sometimes results in parents moving their children to other school boards or to private schools.
- **Negative perceptions from educators and staff:** Concern was also raised about the negative perceptions G.E.C.D.S.B educators have about Middle Eastern and Muslim students, families, and communities. These negative perceptions impact how students and families are treated and how educators and schools engage with them.

“The cultural community outside of school helps foster a strong sense of belonging among Middle Eastern students.”
- **Lack of cultural responsiveness:** Students want to see themselves and their rich cultures reflected in the classroom and school systems. Additionally, students who don’t

celebrate Christmas feel pressured to participate in Christmas activities, while their cultures and religions go unacknowledged.

- ***Fear of reprisal for raising issues:*** There was concern that Middle Eastern and Muslim students and families are afraid to speak up when issues arise. As such, the responses to the Census may not accurately reflect the experiences of students. In addition, participants may not have reported concerns related to students experiencing bullying or other inappropriate behaviours.

“There is fear of reporting issues, especially if they are immigrants. Students don’t feel they will be heard. In reality, we are not heard. Excuses are made.”

Recommendations

- Set clear goals to increase the number of Middle Eastern educators and staff.
- Provide more information to parents/guardians to help them understand and navigate the G.E.C.D.S.B.
- Provide ongoing professional learning for educators, staff, school administrators, and system leaders to increase their understanding of Middle Eastern students and cultures.
- Better equip all staff to foster inclusive learning environments and address racism and Islamophobia when they do occur.
- Reflect Middle Eastern people and their cultures in the curriculum.
- Support Middle Eastern and Muslim staff who experience racism in the workplace.
- Increase engagement and communication with Middle Eastern communities, in particular to address misinformation.
- Provide opportunities for Middle Eastern students, parents/guardians, and staff to share concerns anonymously.