

Census Portrait

Students with Disabilities

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 12% (1,204) of all G.E.C.D.S.B students who completed the Census have a disability, chronic health condition, or exceptionality. 8% of students said they were not sure, 4% said they prefer not to answer, 2% did not understand the question and 75% of students do not have a disability.

The breakdown for types of disabilities students identified having is as follows:

- Addictions 1%
- ADD/ADHD 5%
- Autism Spectrum 2%
- Blind or low vision 0.3%
- Brain injury 0.3%
- Chronic health condition 2%
- Deaf or hard of hearing 0.5%
- Developmental disability 1%
- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum 0.03%
- Learning disability 3%
- Mental health disability 4%
- Mobility disability 0.4%
- Neurodivergent 2%
- Chronic or episodic pain 0.5%
- Severe allergies 1%
- Speech impairment 1%
- Other physical disabilities 1%
- I prefer not to answer 0.5%

Students with disabilities come from a variety of backgrounds and identities.

Demographic Data

Racial Identity

The breakdown for racial identity among students with disabilities is as follows:

- Black 8%
- Middle Eastern 6%
- East Asian 4%
- South Asian 4%
- Latino/Latina/Latinx 3%
- Southeast Asian 2%
- White 74%
- Prefer not to answer 6%

Sexual Orientation

The breakdown for 2SLGBTQ+ identity for students with disabilities is as follows:

- Straight / Cisgender 49%
- 2SLGBTQ+ 42%
- Not sure / I don't understand this question / Prefer not to answer 9%

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 students with disabilities 62% were on track for graduation, while 38% 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, students with disabilities 57%, all students 69%
- Grade 3 EQAO Writing, students with disabilities 62%, all students 67%
- Grade 6 EQAO Reading, students with disabilities 66%, all students 80%
- Grade 6 EQAO Writing, students with disabilities 63%, all students 78%
- O.S.S.L.T, students with disabilities 69%, all students 74%

SUSPENSIONS (Grades 4-12)

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

For students with disabilities 74% had no suspensions while 26% 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, students with disabilities 53%, all students 69%
- For Math, students with disabilities 48%, all students 63%
- For science, students with disabilities 54%, 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 students with disabilities, always and often 53%, sometimes 29%, rarely and never 18%
 - 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 students with disabilities, always and often 54%, sometimes 28%, rarely and never 18%
 - Of all students, always and often 69%, sometimes 22%, rarely and never 9%
- When asked if students feel accepted by adults at school
 - Of students with disabilities, always and often 63%, sometimes 25%, rarely and never 12%
 - 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 students with disabilities, always and often 12%, sometimes 22%, rarely and never 67%
- 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 74% of students with disabilities felt they had one or more trusted adults they could go to, while 26% 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 students with disabilities is as follows:

- Bullied physically by being physically hurt 29%
- Bullied physically by having their things damaged or stolen 24%
- Bullied verbally 55%
- Bullied socially 52%
- Bullied electronically 28%
- Bullied racially / ethnically 18%
- Bullied by being called racial slurs 13%
- Bullied because of their appearance 37%
- Bullied because of their weight 26%
- Bullied because of their gender expression or perceived gender presentation 19%
- Bullied because they are out, or have been outed, as being 2SLGBTQIA+ 16%

Input from Consultations

In order 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:** Parents were concerned that data from the Student Census tells only part of the story of the experiences of students with disabilities. The data does not include students who are excluded from writing EQAO tests. In addition, some parents may not know the full experiences of their children and might feel ill-equipped to answer questions on their behalf.
- **There is still a need for specialized programs:** Parents shared that specialized programs for students with disabilities are highly effective for some and that the need for these programs continues.
- **Parents need access to complete, accurate information:** Parents shared that they could benefit from more complete and accurate information about the programs offered by the G.E.C.D.S.B and the options for their students after secondary school. They also shared that they lacked information about community-based resources and services available to children and youth with disabilities.
- **Parents need to continue to be strong advocates for their children:** Parents reported that they must strongly advocate for their children throughout their time at the G.E.C.D.S.B. But they don't always feel that their concerns are heard when raised.
- **Stigma attached to specialized programs:** Some parents shared that the stigma associated with certain specialized programs for students with disabilities makes them hesitant to place their children in these programs.

"I didn't want to put my child in the GAINS Program. It felt like I was giving up on her. I wanted to avoid these classrooms at all cost. But now I'm so thankful for the program. She is thriving there."

- **Staff shortages and turnover:** The shortage of Educational Assistants coupled with staff turnover impacts students with disabilities and the supports they receive in class. It also impacts their ability to form relationships with staff and disrupts their routine and

structure. These issues may also impact whether and how Individual Educational Plans are implemented.

- ***Disproportionate impact of school policies and practices:*** Parents were concerned that some standard school policies and practices may have a disproportionately negative impact on some students with disabilities, yet accommodations are not always provided to mitigate this impact.
- ***Need to act urgently:*** Given the significant amount of time students with disabilities spend at school and the impact this has on their futures, parents felt that the board must act with urgency to address the above issues.

“I want my child to have access to the education she deserves and that she has a right to.”

Recommendations

- Provide more complete and more accurate information about the program options for students with disabilities while at the G.E.C.D.S.B and after secondary school.
- Provide additional professional learning and resources for school-based staff and school administrators on ableism and special education.
- The G.E.C.D.S.B could advocate with the government for more community-based services for children with disabilities.
- Make accommodations for students with disabilities when school policies or procedures negatively impact them.
- Maintain specialized programs for students with disabilities.