

Census Portraits

Understanding Our Students' Backgrounds

Ethno-Racial Series: Middle Eastern Students Report

Aboriginal

Middle Eastern

Black

South Asian

East Asian

Southeast Asian

Latin American

White



Toronto District School Board 2011–12 Student and Parent Census

Research & Information Services

Toronto District School Board

June 2015

Report No. 14/15-18



Ethno-Racial Series

Gender

Sexual Orientation

Socio-economic Status

Students with Special Education Needs

tdsb.on.ca



TDSB's 2011-12 Student & Parent Census

Having recognized the value of the Board's very first *Student Census* (2006) and *Parent Census* (2008), the TDSB conducted its second *Student and Parent Census* in 2011-12.

The *Census* data has offered the Board hard evidence for:

- **Needs identification**
identifying achievement gaps and determining barriers to achievement;
- **Programming and intervention**
reviewing and implementing effective systems, supports, and initiatives across the system; and
- **Accountability**
establishing a baseline of data to measure improvement over time.

Data Sources

The findings generated in this series of *Census Portraits* are based on data combined from three sources – *TDSB's 2011 Student Census* (103,000 students in Grades 7-12), *TDSB's 2012 Parent Census* (90,000 Kindergarten-Grade 6 parents), and the Board's central academic achievement databases.

Information on students' cultural backgrounds is based mainly on their parents' country of birth derived from the Board's *Census* data. For more details about *TDSB's 2011-12 Student Census and Parent Census*, refer to the TDSB website: www.tdsb.on.ca/Census

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About the Census Portraits

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) has one of the world's most culturally and demographically diverse student populations. While earlier TDSB studies have shown diversity *among* student identities and family backgrounds, there is also great diversity *within* these groups. Each group is made up of sub-groups from varied ethno-racial backgrounds (cultural, linguistic and/or religious backgrounds or countries of origin), gender identities, sexual orientation, and family socio-economic status. Additionally, differences are explored among students with Special Education Needs.

The *Census Portraits* examine the unique characteristics of these sub-groups.

The purpose is:

- to provide a better understanding of the similarities and differences within each sub-group; and
- to target interventions to ensure the needs of all students are addressed effectively and equitably.

Content

Each *Census Portrait* describes and compares the background, experiences, and achievement levels of the students of each sub-group under the following sections:

- Context (including group description or historical factors)
- Family Background
- Life in School
- Life Outside of School
- Student Health and Wellness
- Self-Perceived Abilities and Academic Achievement

Historical Context

In this portrait, the term Middle Eastern is used broadly to describe students with origins as far as Central Asia and North-West Africa. As such, it is recognized that Afghanis and Iranians often consider themselves Central and Western Asians respectively. Middle Eastern presence in Canada stretches back more than a century.

- Lebanese and Syrian immigrants first came to Latin and North America in the late 19th century, during the Arab Renaissance. Middle Easterners' immigration to Canada has always been influenced by a combination of factors: political, economic, cultural, and familial/personal.
- Migration to Canada was insignificant in number terms until the 1960s. However, as a result of the *Multiculturalism Policy of 1971* and the *Immigrant Act of 1976*, significant numbers of Middle Eastern immigrants arrived in the 1970s. These immigrants included a large educated class, skilled labourers, and graduate students (Visa students).
- In the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, significant numbers of Palestinian, Iranian, Afghani, and Iraqi immigrants arrived in Canada as political refugees, due to conflicts, invasion, and wars in their homelands.

In 2006, the approximate number of Canadian Arabs constituted around half of a million, with 90,000 Iranians and about 50,000 Afghanis. Most of these Middle Easterners settled in Southern Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, and Alberta. Today, the Lebanese are the largest group within the Arab-Canadian community, comprising about 40% of all Arabs. Egyptians are about 12%, Syrian, Moroccan, and Iraqis each around 6-8%, while Algerians and Palestinians comprise about 4-5% of the Arabs in Canada. The Middle Eastern population in Canada is tremendously diverse in terms of ethnicity, language, religion, and social backgrounds.

Ethno-Racial and Family Background

Middle Eastern students were one of the smaller visible minority groups in the TDSB. About half of the students (51%) had parents with university degrees, but most of their families were in the two lowest income brackets.

Self-identified Middle Eastern students made up 5% (about 13,400 students) of the Toronto District School Board's (TDSB) population.

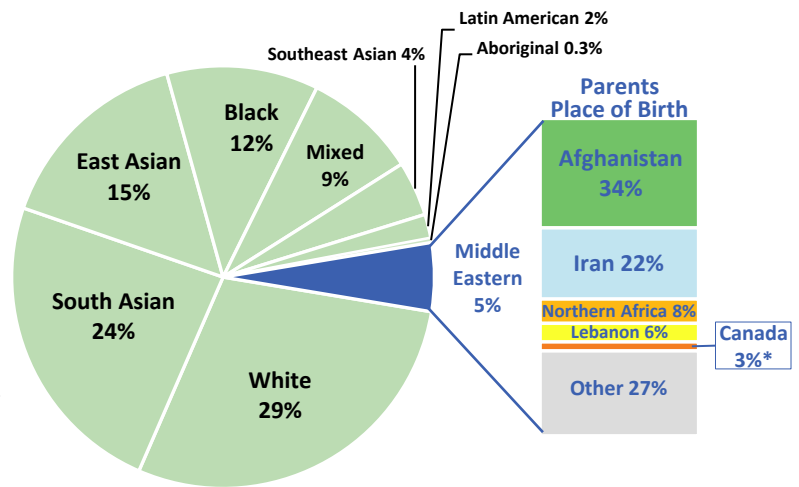
- One third (34%) of the Middle Eastern students had their parents originating from Afghanistan, 22% from Iran, 8% from Northern Africa, and 6% from Lebanon. Just 3% had one or both parents born in Canada while 27% were from other countries.
- Most students with parents from Lebanon were born in Canada (74%), compared to 47% of students with parents from Afghanistan, 43% of students with parents from Northern Africa, and 34% of students with parents from Iran.

Compared to the overall TDSB student population:

- Middle Eastern students were as or more likely (over 80%) to live with two parents (this includes those living with step-parents or living half-time with each parent);
- parents from Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Northern Africa were more likely to have multiple children, but those from Iran were much less likely to have three or more children (12%);
- parents from Northern Africa and Iran were more likely to have university degrees, parents from Lebanon were as likely, whereas parents from Afghanistan were much less likely;
- more Middle Eastern students came from the two lowest income groups (i.e., with annual household incomes of less than \$30,000 or between \$30,000-\$49,999), particularly those with parents from Afghanistan.

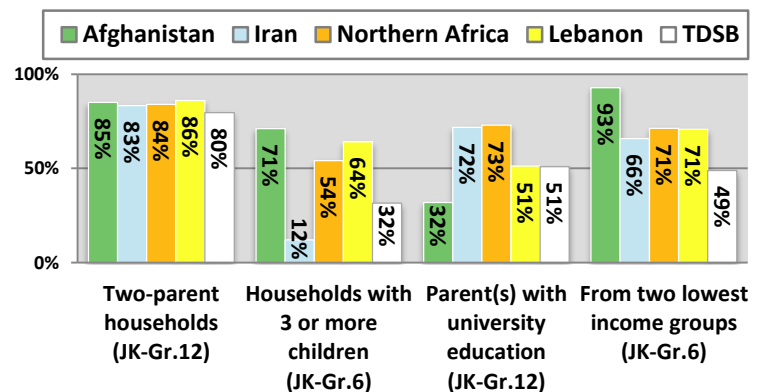
Learning about One's Culture (Gr. 7-12 Students)

Compared to the general TDSB student population, Middle Eastern students were as or more likely to agree that learning more about their own culture would make their learning more interesting (70%), help them enjoy school more (59%), and help them do better in school (50%). Students of Afghani background, in particular, were more likely to agree that it would make their learning more interesting (73%), it would help them enjoy school more (61%), and it would help them do better in school (55%).



*Canada includes one or both parents born in Canada

Family Background



Census Portraits: Middle Eastern Students

Life in School

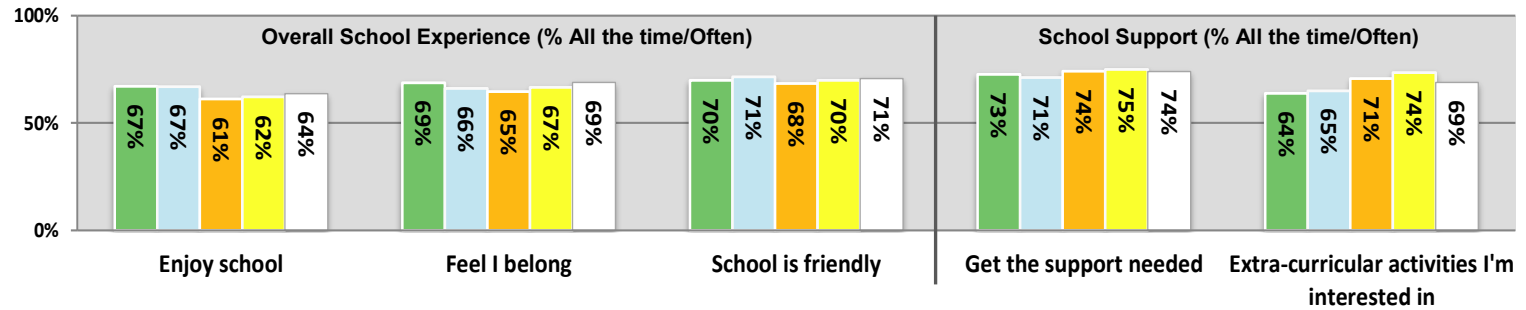


Student Perceptions of School

Middle Eastern students were as or more satisfied than others about their overall school experience and the support they received from school.

Compared to the overall TDSB student population:

- all four sub-groups of Middle Eastern students were as likely to feel that they enjoyed or belonged in school, that school was a friendly place, and that they received the support they needed from school;
- students of Lebanese and Northern African backgrounds were more likely to feel positive about the extra-curricular activities at school, whereas students of Iranian and Afghani origins were less likely.

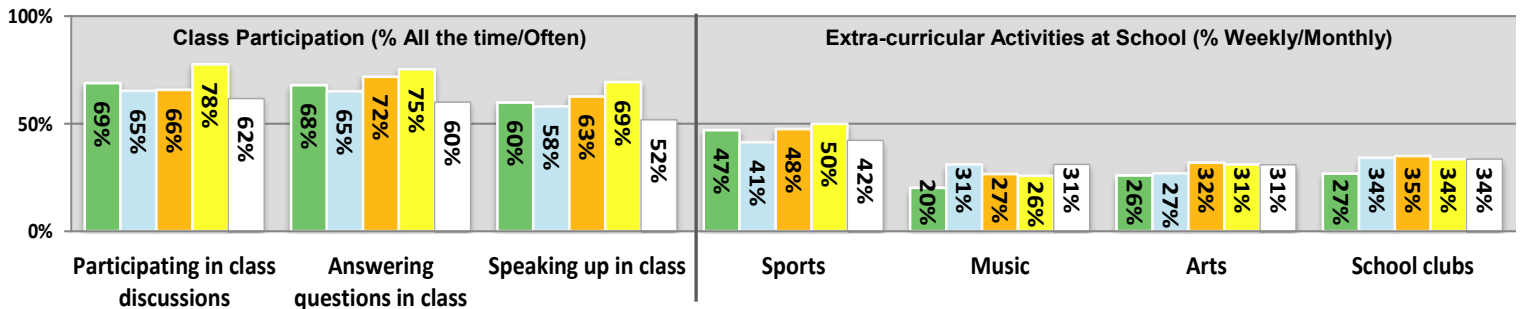


Student Participation at School

Middle Eastern students felt more comfortable participating in class compared to the general TDSB student population. Most of them were as active as others in extra-curricular activities, except for Afghani students who were less active in music, arts, or school clubs.

Compared to the overall TDSB student population:

- Middle Eastern students, particularly those of Lebanese and Northern African backgrounds, felt more comfortable participating, answering questions, and speaking up in class;
- Iranian students were generally as likely to participate in all types of extra-curricular activities;
- students of Lebanese and Northern African backgrounds were more likely to participate in sports, but less likely in music;
- Afghani students were less active in music, arts, or school clubs, but more involved in school sports.

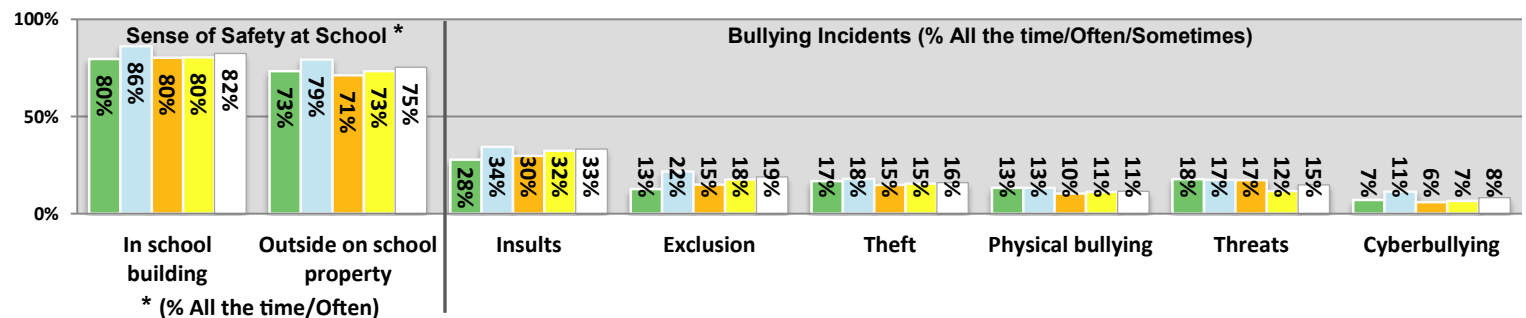


Safety at School

Middle Eastern students felt as safe as others in school.

Compared to the overall TDSB student population:

- Middle Eastern students felt as safe as others inside the school building and outside on school property;
- Middle Eastern students in general did not experience more bullying incidents than others, Afghani students particularly reported lower levels of insults and exclusion than others.



Census Portraits: Middle Eastern Students

Life in School (Cont'd)

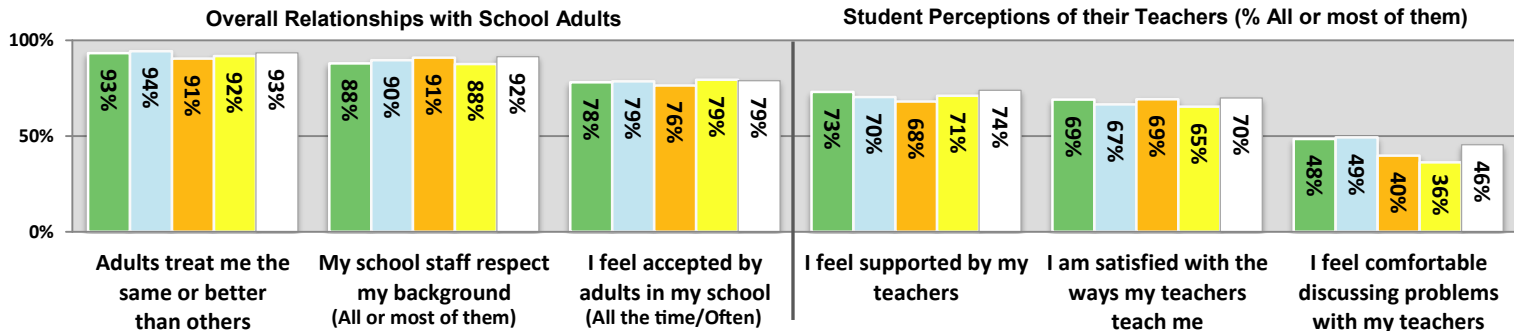
■ Afghanistan ■ Iran ■ Northern Africa ■ Lebanon ■ TDSB

Relationships with School Adults

Middle Eastern students generally felt as or more positive than others about their school adults, but those from Lebanese or Northern African backgrounds felt less comfortable discussing problems with their teachers.

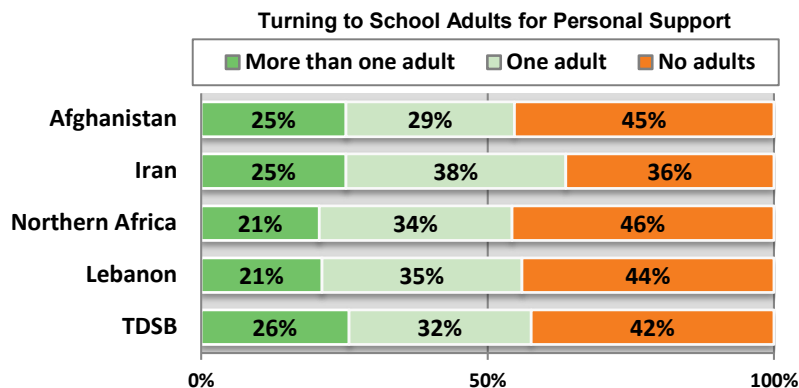
Compared to the overall TDSB student population:

- most Middle Eastern students felt as or more positive about their school adults in terms of how they were being treated, their background being respected, and feeling accepted;
- students from Northern African backgrounds felt less supported and less comfortable discussing problems with their teachers;
- students from Lebanese backgrounds were less satisfied with the ways they were being taught, and felt much less comfortable discussing problems with their teachers.



Compared to the overall TDSB student population:

- students from Northern African, Afghani, and Lebanese backgrounds were as likely to have at least one school adult who they could turn to for personal support, help, or advice;
- Iranian students were more likely to have at least one adult they felt comfortable to turn to.

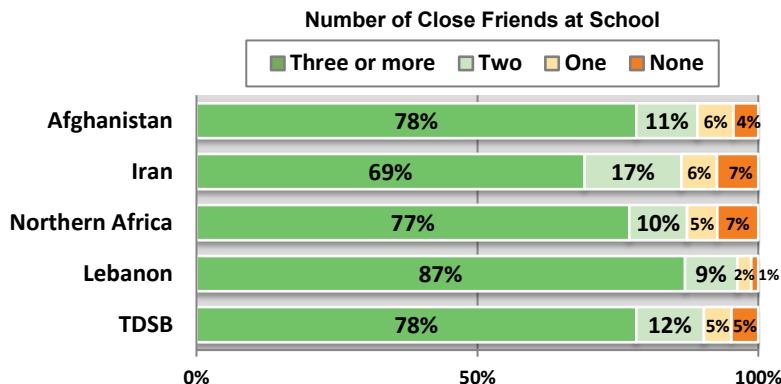
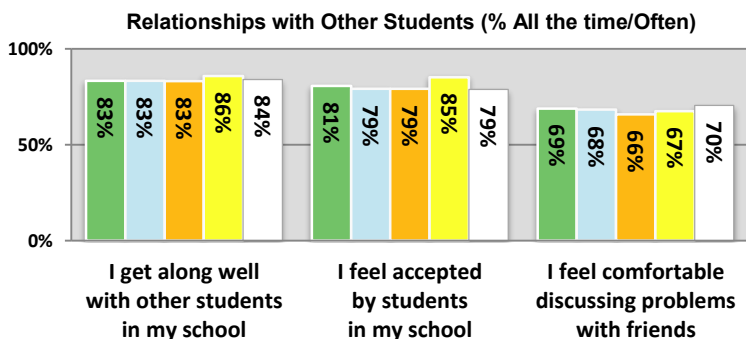


Relationships with Peers

Middle Eastern students generally felt as positive as others about their peer relationships at school. Lebanese students were more likely to feel accepted by peers and to have more close friends, while Iranian students reported having fewer close friends.

Compared to the overall TDSB student population:

- Middle Eastern students felt as positive about their relationships with other students in terms of getting along well, feeling accepted by their peers and feeling comfortable discussing problems with friends;
- Lebanese students in particular reported getting along well with and feeling accepted by their peers;
- Northern African and Afghani students were as likely to have one or more close friends at school, whereas Lebanese students were more likely to have three or more friends and Iranian students were less likely.



Census Portraits: Middle Eastern Students

Life Outside of School



Relationships with Parents

Middle Eastern students were more likely than others to report having positive relationships with their parents.

Compared to the overall TDSB student population:

- all Middle Eastern students were more likely to report that their parents often praised them when they had done well, showed interest in what they had to say, or helped them make plans or set goals;
- Afghani students were as likely to report that they talked about

school work with their parents, whereas students from all other Middle Eastern groups were more likely;

- Middle Eastern students, with the exception of Lebanese students, were more likely to report talking with their parents about relationships and problems



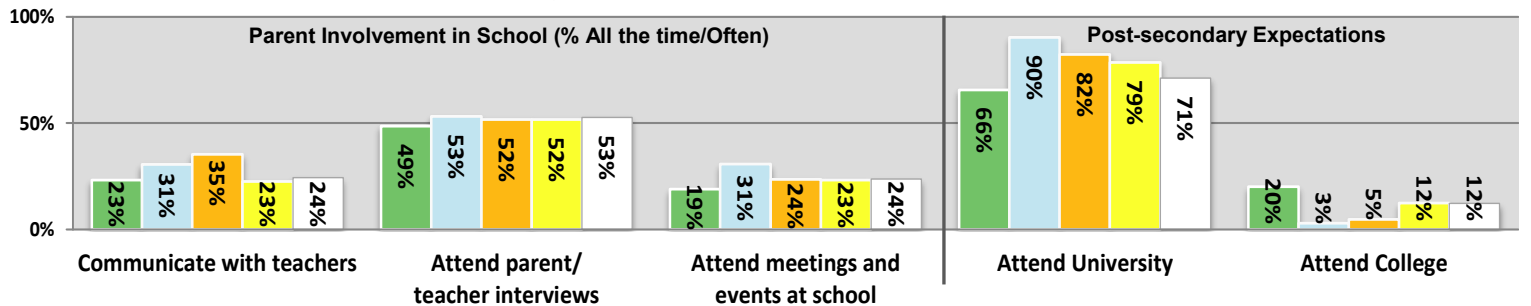
Parent Involvement and Expectations

Compared to others, Middle Eastern parents were as or more involved at their child's school. With the exception of Afghani parents, who were more likely to expect their child to attend college, Middle Eastern parents were much more likely to expect their child to attend university.

Compared to the overall TDSB student population:

- Middle Eastern parents were as or more likely to communicate with teachers and attend parent/teacher interviews;
- Iranian parents were much more likely to attend school events or meetings, whereas Afghani parents were less likely;

- Afghani parents were less likely to expect their child to attend university, while all other Middle Eastern parents were much more likely to expect their child to attend university and as or less likely to expect their child to attend college.



Activities and Opportunities Outside of School

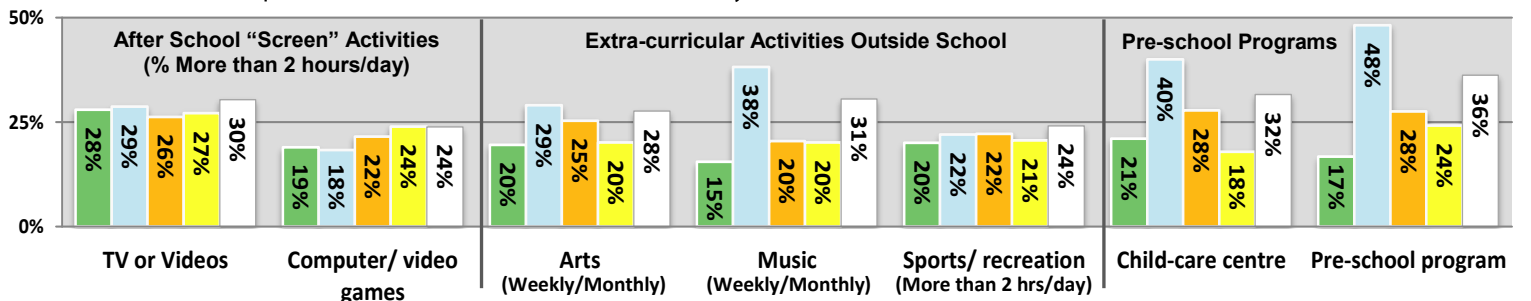
Middle Eastern students generally spent less time on screen activities than others, but were as active in sports. Except for Iranian students, fewer Middle Eastern students participated in arts or music activities, or had attended child-care or pre-school programs when they were young.

Compared to the overall TDSB student population:

- Middle Eastern students were less likely to spend over 2 hours per day watching TV or videos or playing computer or video games, but were as likely to participate in sports outside of school;
- Middle Eastern, except for Iranian, students were less actively

involved in arts or music activities outside of school;

- while Iranian students were much more likely to have attended a child-care centre or pre-school program when they were young, all other Middle Eastern groups were less likely.



Census Portraits: Middle Eastern Students

Student Health and Wellness

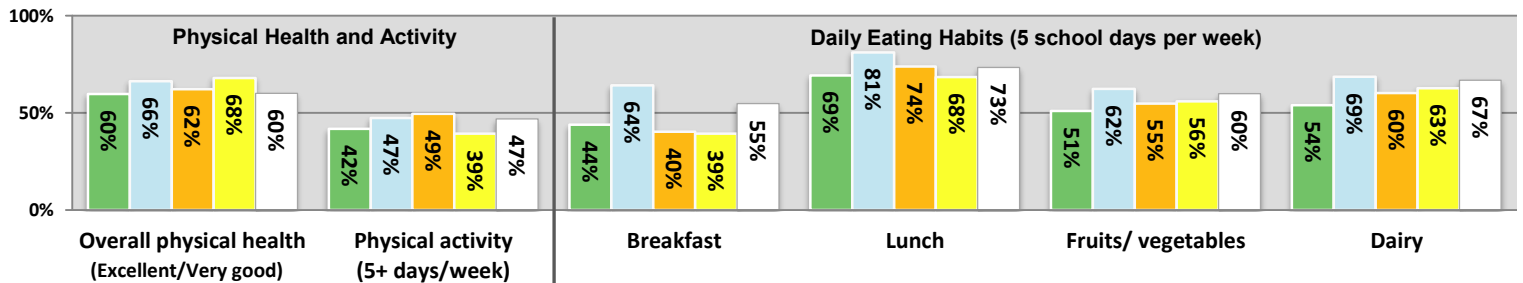
■ Afghanistan ■ Iran ■ Northern Africa ■ Lebanon ■ TDSB

Physical Health

Middle Eastern students reported being as or more physically healthy than other students, but Afghani and Lebanese students reported being less active. Iranian students were the only Middle Eastern group who were more likely than others to report having daily breakfast and lunch, and as likely to have regular intake of fruits, vegetables, and dairy products.

Compared to the overall TDSB student population:

- Middle Eastern students reported similar or better levels of physical health, but Afghani and Lebanese students reported having less weekly physical activities;
- Iranian students were more likely to eat breakfast five days a week, whereas all other groups were much less likely;
- Iranian students were also more likely to have daily lunch, while Afghani and Lebanese students were less likely;
- with the exception of Iranian students, Middle Eastern students were less likely to eat fruit, vegetables, and dairy products regularly.

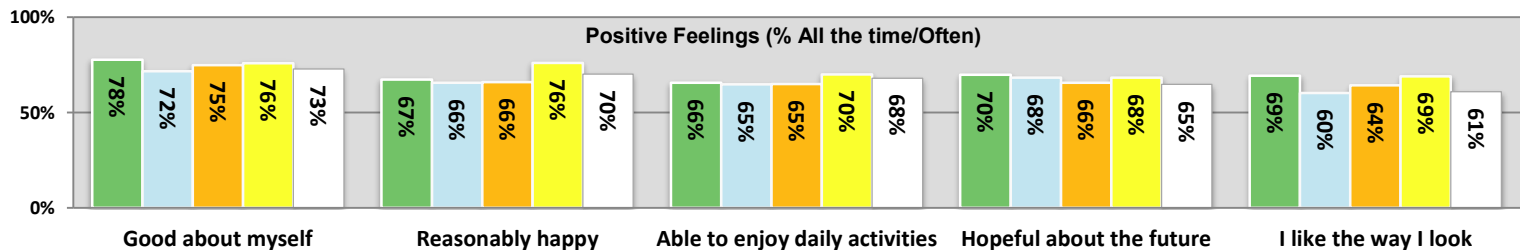


Social and Emotional Well-being

Middle Eastern students were as or more likely than others to feel positive about themselves, and were as or less likely to have experienced emotional challenges. However, they seemed more worried about their future, school work, family matters and relationship issues.

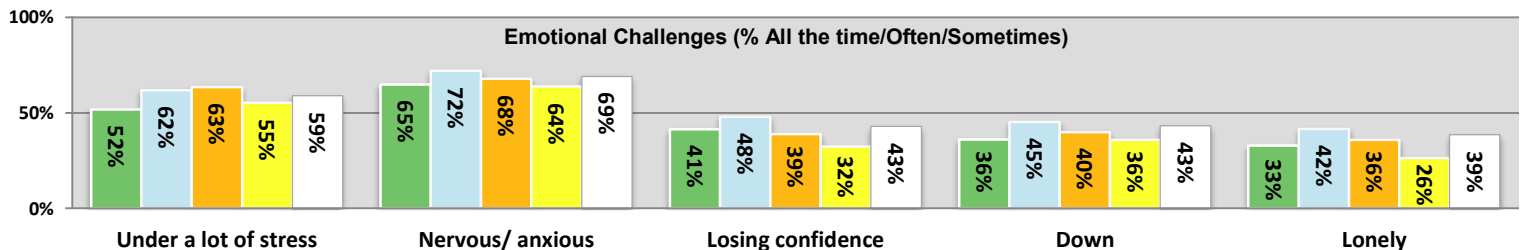
Compared to the overall TDSB student population:

- Middle Eastern students, particularly Afghani and Lebanese students, were as or more likely to feel positive about themselves, to enjoy daily activities, to be hopeful about the future, and to like the way they look.



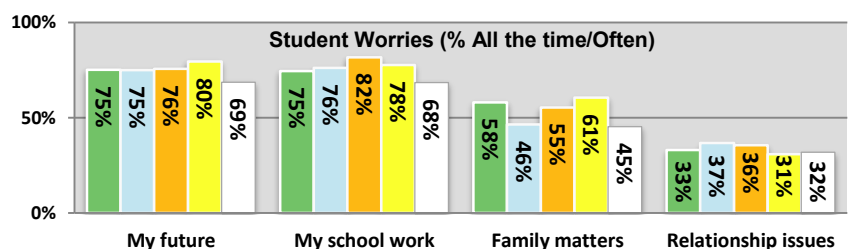
Compared to the overall TDSB student population:

- Afghani and Lebanese students were less likely to report that they were under a lot of stress, nervous and anxious, losing confidence in themselves or feeling down or lonely;
- other Middle Eastern students were as likely to report having similar emotional challenges; the only exception was Iranian students who were more likely to report losing confidence in themselves.



Compared to the overall TDSB student population:

- higher percentages of Middle Eastern students worried about their future or school work;
- with the exception of Iranian students, Middle Eastern students were more likely to worry about family matters;
- on the other hand, Iranian students were more likely to worry about relationship problems.



Census Portraits: Middle Eastern Students

Self-Perceived Abilities and Academic Achievement

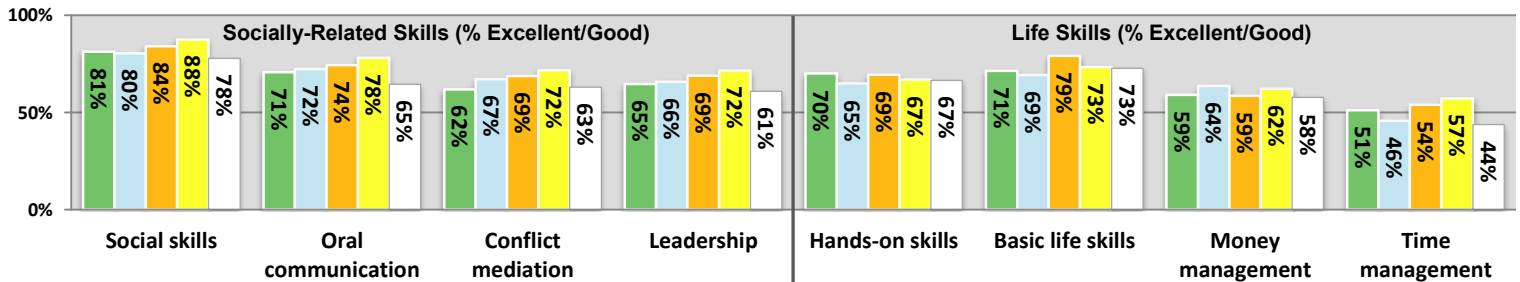
■ Afghanistan ■ Iran ■ Northern Africa ■ Lebanon ■ TDSB

Self-Perceived Abilities: Social Skills and Life Skills

In general, Middle Eastern students rated themselves more highly than others in socially-related skills and various life skills.

Compared to the overall TDSB student population:

- Middle Eastern students, particularly Lebanese students, were more likely to rate themselves excellent or good at social skills, oral communication, conflict mediation, and leadership skills;
- they rated themselves similarly in hands-on skills and basic life skills;
- Middle Eastern students were also as or more likely to rate themselves excellent or good at time- and money-management skills.

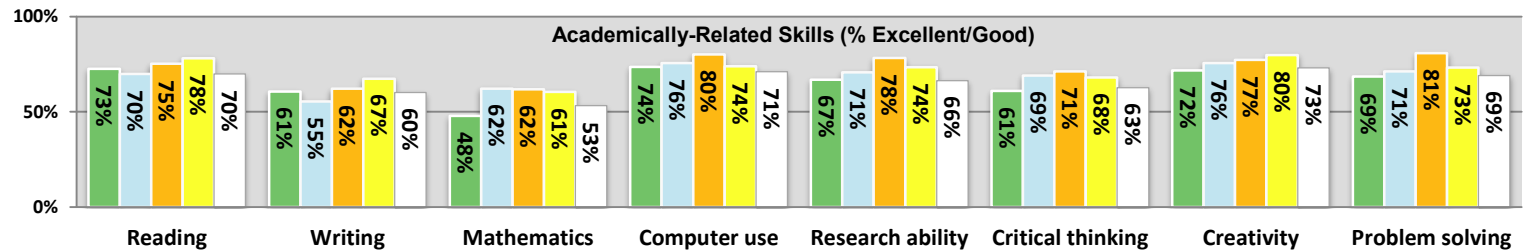


Self-Perceived Abilities: Academic Skills

Middle Eastern students rated themselves as or more confident in all academically-related skill areas, except for Iranian students who rated themselves lower in writing, and Afghani students who rated themselves lower in mathematics.

Compared to the overall TDSB student population:

- Lebanese and Northern African students were more likely to rate themselves excellent or good in all academically-related skill areas including reading, writing, mathematics, computer use, research ability, critical thinking, creativity, and problem solving skills;
- Afghani students were as likely to rate themselves highly in different academic areas, but less likely in mathematics;
- Iranian students were also as or more likely to rate themselves highly in all academic areas, except in writing.



Academic Achievement (2011-12)

Middle Eastern students, except for those of Afghani descent, performed well on Grade 6 provincial tests, particularly in Mathematics. At secondary school, the performance of different sub-groups of Middle Eastern students was less consistent.

Compared to the overall TDSB student population:

- although Afghani students underperformed in Reading and Mathematics on the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) Grade 6 tests, they did as well as others in Writing;
- other Middle Eastern students performed equally well in Reading and Writing, and higher percentages met the expected level in EQAO Grade 6 Mathematics tests;
- Afghani and Iranian students were less successful on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT);
- while more Iranian students earned 16 or more credits by the end of Grade 10, significantly fewer Lebanese or Northern African students did.

