



June 21, 2024

Honourable Becky Druhan  
Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development  
2021 Brunswick Street  
P.O. Box 578  
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 2S9

**Re: HRCE Public Engagement Session #2 Results**

Dear Minister,

On the evening of June 4, 2024, Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE) held its second public engagement session. HRCE invited all families, as partners in education, to participate in a discussion about student well-being.

To ensure the session covered topics that reflected the concerns of community, all HRCE families were asked to submit questions about student well-being using ThoughtExchange in advance. This information was collected from May 16 until June 4, 2024.

Following a high-level presentation that set HRCE's current context, highlighted data from the most recent Student Success Survey and outlined resources available to support students and their well-being, the top themes captured in [ThoughtExchange](#) were addressed. These themes included:

**Cell Phones:** Many expressed a desire for a cell phone policy to reduce distractions for students at school. Concerns were raised about the negative impact of cell phone use on student well-being, mental health, and academic achievement.

**Safety:** Participants emphasized a need for consequences for those who disrupt the learning environment or cause harm to others. Questions were raised about strategies to address school violence and to support students exhibiting unsafe behaviours.

**Growth:** Many concerns were raised about overcrowded schools, the need for more support staff, and the issues posed by students with learning and behavioural challenges.

Following the engagement session, HRCE invited all families to provide additional thoughts and ideas in a second [ThoughtExchange](#). This information was collected from June 5 until June 11, 2024. The following is an overview of the key themes that emerged:

**Safety:** Concern about violence in schools continued to be a common theme. The need for strict policies and a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and violence was highlighted. The importance of creating safe, inclusive spaces was also emphasized.

**Technology:** Concerns were raised about the impact of technology, especially smartphones and social media, on student well-being. Suggestions included banning or limiting cell phone use during

instructional times and controlling access to certain websites on school devices.

**Mental Health Supports:** The need for increased mental health support in schools was noted, with rising rates of anxiety and depression among students. Proposals included mindfulness practices, staff training in mental health, and creating safer spaces for neurodiverse students.

**Classroom Environment:** Discussions focused on the need for smaller class sizes, individualized support, and improved classroom management. Concerns about overcrowded schools and the need for more teacher training were also mentioned.

**Support for Diverse Learners:** Participants called for more resources and support for students with special needs, and newcomer students whose first language is not English.

Public engagement for this session was as follows:

- 231 people attended on June 4, 2024
- 943 participated in ThoughtExchange
- 1,087 thoughts were collected
- 23,856 thoughts were rated
- 917 views of recorded session on YouTube to date

HRCE's Senior Leadership team is reviewing the feedback provided by those who participated in this session. We are holding this valuable insight close as we prepare for the 2024-25 school year, and beyond.

Please let me know if you have any questions, or if you require additional information on any of the above-listed themes.

HRCE's next public engagement session will be in the fall. The topic will be capital planning.

Sincerely,



Steve Gallagher  
Regional Executive Director of Education  
Halifax Regional Centre for Education

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