

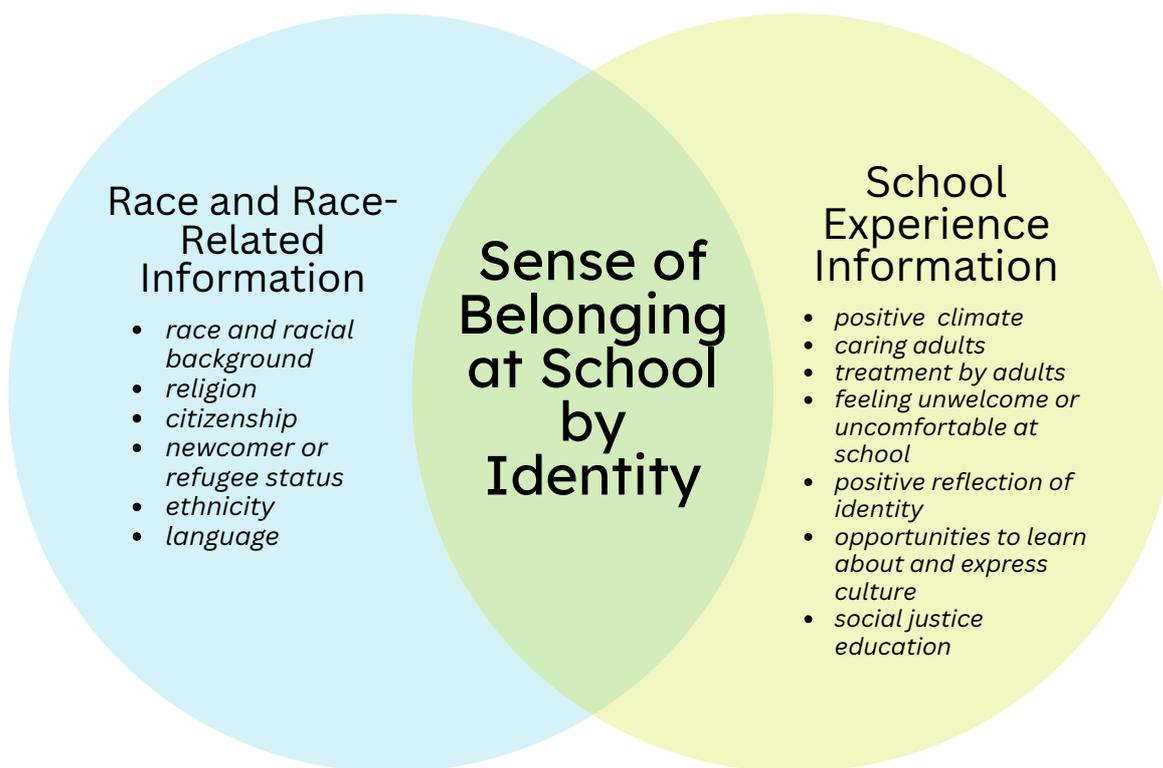
# See Yourself in Limestone: Student Sense of Belonging

Student Census Report One: Race and Racial Background, Religion or Spiritual Affiliation, First Language, Country of Birth, and Newcomer and Refugee Status

## Report Summary

***Building local knowledge about who Limestone District School Board students are and how they are experiencing school is a crucial step towards actively creating meaningful positive change for all individuals within the school community.***

Student sense of belonging is inseparable from personal identity, lived experience, and educational outcomes.[1] Data from the **See Yourself in Limestone Student Census** - along with contextual feedback from Limestone students - are key sources of information that will help the board and community understand where focused action should occur to ensure all students see themselves in Limestone.



[1] Safir, Shane, and Jamila Dugan. *Street Data: A Next-Generation Model for Equity, Pedagogy, and School Transformation*. Sage Publishing, 2021.

Historically, students have provided formal and informal feedback to staff in the system regarding lived experiences that suggested some students had a different sense of belonging or experienced a negative school climate based on their race, religion, ethnicity, newcomer status, and/or their language. This Student Sense of Belonging Report affirms that reports from students over many years that had been treated as isolated experiences are indeed systemic issues. The report is also consistent with evidence from a wide range of academics and community-based groups indicating that all education systems, like all public services across sectors, have systemic barriers and practices that disproportionately and negatively impact some individuals and groups of people. This Student Sense of Belonging Report shares data that provides guidance for Limestone moving into the future.

Student experiences and perceptions are affected by multiple intersecting factors. This report focuses on how race, religion, country of origin, newcomer status, and language relate to student experience. Using single factors like these in isolation is not holistic, nor does it address intersectional identities: the data you see here is not the whole story. However, there are very clear disparities among the identity categories examined in this report that demand action. By focusing on disparities, the joy, successes, collaborative efforts, and positive experiences that are happening for students across Limestone are missing from this report. There are many examples of classrooms, schools, programs, staff, and communities doing excellent, affirming equity work. As plans to respond to the data you see here are developed, Limestone staff will learn from what is already working and expand on those strengths to continue to build bias-free classrooms, equitable outcomes for student achievement, and a culture of well-being.

## Purpose

The intention of this report is to create local knowledge about systemic barriers to equitable student experience based on race, religion, country of birth, newcomer status, and language. The goal is to use this knowledge to create a plan for action and reduce the disparities you see below. This report is the first in a series that will identify systemic barriers facing students in Limestone, and is not intended to place blame, nor to fuel shame and guilt. Rather, this information is shared so that everyone throughout Limestone can work together to build equity of hope for every student. As previously stated, this survey was the first student census for LDSB, and it will be repeated as part of a process to maintain updated data and monitor change. This report also begins to meet the board's obligations to report racial disparity data publicly, as per the Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism, or the Anti-Racism Data Standards (ARDS).[2]

[2] ARDS, Standard 36: Public Reporting of Results.

This work directly ties to the system-wide, multi-year inquiry launched in Limestone at the start of the 2022-2023 school year that focuses on three questions:

For whom is the current education system not working and why?

How do we know?

What are we going to do differently?

The Student Sense of Belonging Report makes it clear that further work needs to be done focused on reducing and eliminating disparities tied to race, religion, country of origin, newcomer status, and/or language.

## What is this report about?

The Technical Advisory Group (TAG) - an internal and external committee whose purpose is to give advice, opinions and make recommendations in the design of methods for secondary data analysis and representation of results - identified student sense of belonging as a priority for analysis, as belonging is a fundamental element of student engagement, agency, and self-determination.[3] This report offers information on seven belonging indicators:

- positive school climate
- caring adults at school
- treatment by adults at school
- being made to feel unwelcome or uncomfortable at school
- social justice education
- positive representation and reflection of identity
- and opportunities to express and learn about cultural background

Future reports will cover student achievement (report card data, credit accumulation, graduation outcomes, streaming), discipline (suspension and expulsion), and well-being (mental health and factors affecting well-being, including social determinants of health). These future reports will also include additional demographic groups, which are described on page 12.

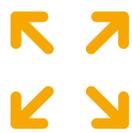
[3] Safir, Shane, and Jamila Dugan. *Street Data: A Next-Generation Model for Equity, Pedagogy, and School Transformation*. Sage Publishing, 2021.

The full report includes disparity index calculations. A disparity index describes a difference in experience and the likelihood that the experience will occur relative to a comparison group (e.g., If the disparity index is 2, Group A is twice as likely to disagree with a statement as Group B). Disparity is preventable and reparable. To close this distance and create parity is a main driver of equity work. As a reminder, it is important to understand that any differences in group experiences do not reflect anything about that group's characteristics. Instead, differentiated group data show that there is something about the education system that does not offer equitable experiences to certain groups of students. Limestone will use disparity indices moving forward to measure change from baseline and determine the extent to which we have reduced disparities among groups. Disparity is used to focus the findings on action and repair.

As stated in our preliminary report, over time, and through careful analysis in collaboration with students, families, staff and community partners, the information gathered through the Student Census will help the board:



Identify and address systemic barriers



Expand on existing strengths



Cultivate classrooms and schools that eliminate discriminatory biases



Create more equitable outcomes and inclusive learning environments



Support student achievement and well-being

This report focuses on identifying systemic barriers, identifies some strengths, and notes actions already being taken to reduce bias in schools. The remaining goals will be addressed collectively by Limestone staff using this data in collaboration with students, families, and community partners to provide feedback to the school system and help it become more responsive to students who are not being effectively served, or who are under-served. The Student Feedback section of the full report includes some early suggestions from students as to how Limestone can create more inclusive learning environments.

# Background

Overall, the 2020 Student Census collected data on 10,906 students: from students themselves in Grades 4 to 12, and from families on behalf of students in Kindergarten to Grade 3. The survey was voluntary, and families had the opportunity to opt out entirely. Consultation for the content and administration of the survey began in 2019, and data was collected from November 2020 to January 2021.

All versions of the survey were available in the 10 most common languages used in Limestone as identified by school board enrolment data and in consultation with stakeholder groups: Arabic, Cantonese, English, Farsi, French, Korean, Mandarin, Somali, Spanish, and Urdu. Students could complete the survey on mobile and desktop devices, and surveys were compatible with assistive technology, such as Google Read and Write. Staff assisted students with special education needs to complete the survey. The Research Team began preliminary analysis in early 2021, which led to the release of a Preliminary Report in September 2021. Since then, the Research Team and the TAG have been establishing priorities for analysis, identifying key variables, and working to build meaningful, empowering representation of the students and communities whose data is included here.

## Who is involved in this project?

The TAG, the Limestone Indigenous Education Team, the Limestone Research Team, the Limestone Equity Team, the Senior Staff, student groups, and many other community stakeholders have supported the creation of this report.

The TAG has been active in the creation and editing of this report since secondary data analysis first began. The data below is the result of a shared vision and intention to bring local knowledge about student experience to the Limestone community. Our discussions at TAG led to the creation of a closed group: a sub-committee of TAG comprised only of racialized members. This committee is responsible for the treatment and representation of race-based data specifically.

The Equity Team has been closely tied to this work throughout and has acted as a conduit of information and as project ambassadors to various internal and external stakeholders. The Senior Staff (Superintendents and the Director) have reviewed this report, which includes their suggested edits, observations, and recommendations.



## Preliminary Student Consultations

The Equity Team and the Research Team approached four existing student equity groups and their staff advisors at two secondary schools and two intermediate-secondary schools for preliminary student feedback sessions on the census findings. Students were invited to review the contents of this report in the context of their lived experience. Altogether, 50 students in Grades 7 to 12 from four schools attended these sessions and offered their input in December 2022 and January 2023. The board is immeasurably grateful for their time and expertise in reviewing this work.

The purpose of speaking with students was not to see if the Census results were “still true.” Rather, these consultations were done in recognition that as the board releases information to the public about the school experiences of racialized students and students who belong to religious and linguistic minorities, students and families need to see these findings as consistent with their experience or that of their peers. Equity work carries with it the responsibility to minimize harm, and our hope in speaking with students was to verify this report contained information that was a fair representation of student experience from which to begin our action planning. Presenting student voice in addition to quantitative data offers some control over the messaging about data that pertains to them, and guards against the risk of a group being further stigmatized. This choice also actively prioritizes the need to work in respectful relationship with students to address systemic racism and reduce the risk of further harm.[4]

Being the first attempt at engaging students in data review at the board level, the Research Team agreed (with the support of TAG and the Closed Group) that starting with a smaller group for this report would build a good foundation for all future review sessions. There is a continued need to engage with specific groups of students beyond those who provided their input here and prioritize their feedback and experience in board decision-making. This Executive Summary includes summarized initial findings from student feedback sessions; the full report contains a more fulsome description of their observations. Continued engagement with students, families, and communities through a variety of means is critical on the path forward in providing further feedback and continuous monitoring.

[4] *Disaggregated demographic data collection in British Columbia: The grandmother perspective*. British Columbia's Office of the Commissioner of Human Rights. September 2020. P. 8-9. See also the remainder of the report.

This report is the first in a series that identifies systemic barriers facing students in LDSB. Students who participated in the engagement sessions offered some suggestions as to why some of these barriers exist. Throughout Limestone, the goal is to build a broader circle of students, families and community members willing to work with the school board to understand systemic issues and design strategies to eliminate them. Those strategies will be embedded in the board's various planning and strategy documents, largely within the Equity Action Plan and the Strategic Plan, where they are subject to annual monitoring and public reporting for additional accountability.

## Findings from the Student Census

**There is a connection between belonging to certain racialized and religious groups and experiencing a less positive school climate.**

**School experience can vary among racialized students based on whether they hold a single racialized identity, or a mixed racialized identity.**

Students who identify as Black and students who identify as Latine have consistently negative findings on every indicator included in this report. Students who selected Indigenous as their race report higher rates of negative school climate and report that their identity is not positively reflected at school. Students who identify as Jewish also have comparably negative findings on all indicators.

Students who identify as having mixed or multiple racialized identities are more likely to report negative school climate and to disagree that they receive a comprehensive social justice education. Students who identify with a single racialized identity are more likely to say they do not have a caring adult at school; that they do not have opportunities to learn and express their culture in school; and that they have been made to feel unwelcome or uncomfortable because of their race, culture, or skin colour. More work is needed to understand why these differences exist.

**Racialized students are far more likely to report that they do not see their identities reflected positively at school; that they do not have opportunities to learn about and express their cultures at school; and that they do not receive comprehensive social justice education.**

**To varying degrees, all racialized groups of students, and students who belong to most religious minorities, are more likely to disagree that there is an adult in their school that cares about them. This is also true for students born outside of Canada, students who are newcomers or refugees [5], and students whose first language is not English.**

Students who identify as both Latine and White are almost three times as likely to disagree that their identity is positively reflected at school compared to students who identify as White. Students who identify as Black are nearly three times as likely to disagree that they receive comprehensive social justice education than students who identify as White. Students who identify as Southeast Asian, students who identify as South Asian, students who identify as Black, students who identify as Latine, and students who identify as Middle Eastern are all about twice as likely to state that they do not have opportunities to learn about and express their cultural identities at school compared to students who identify as White.

Students who identify as Black, Indigenous, or Latine are about twice as likely to disagree that they have at least one caring adult at school. For linguistic groups, students whose first language is only French and students whose first language is not English are almost twice as likely to disagree with this same statement as their peers who speak only English. Students who identified themselves as newcomers or refugees have the highest disparity index of all groups and were much more likely to disagree that they have a caring adult at school. Among faith groups, students who identify as Hindu, Jewish, or who practice Indigenous Spirituality are one and a half times to twice as likely to report that they do not have a caring adult at school compared to students with no religious or spiritual affiliation.

[5] This group is underrepresented in the data. More details can be found in the full report.

**Students who were born outside of Canada, and students who are newcomers or refugees have similar experiences to students born in Canada, with some exceptions.**

**Students whose first language is not English may experience positive school climate but have more negative experiences in all other areas.**

In most cases in this report, survey data suggests that students who were born outside of Canada, and students who are newcomers or refugees have school experiences like their Canadian-born peers. However, students born outside of Canada are more likely to disagree that they have opportunities to learn about and express their cultures at school. Students who are newcomers or refugees are more likely to disagree that they experience positive school climate, and that they receive a comprehensive social justice education.

Students whose first language is not English are as likely as their English-speaking peers to experience positive school climate, but are more likely to disagree that they have a caring adult at school; that adults treat them the same or better than their peers; that their identity is positively reflected at school; that they receive a comprehensive social justice education; and that they have opportunities to learn about and express their culture. This trend also exists for students whose first language is only French, but with more variability.



# Findings from Preliminary Student Engagement Sessions

The statements below are findings from the student engagement sessions outlined on page 6 and are representative of a small proportion of the student population. Further student engagement needs to happen at the school level to better understand these findings.

**Racialized students who experience racism at school are feeling unsupported.**

A strong theme that came from student feedback sessions in response to census data is that racialized students who experience racism at school are feeling unsupported. Students offered possible reasons for this perceived lack of support, such as racist comments that are “not handled properly,” or that “nothing happens” when they are reported.

**Some students shared that the Student Census data as it is currently presented does not match their full experience.**

Based on some of the choices made in how to present the data in this report, not all groups appear on all graphs. Other times, groups appear on the graphs but with a low rate of disagreement. In both cases, some students shared that the survey data presented here does not fully match their experiences. Specifically, students who identify as Hindu, Middle Eastern, Muslim, Sikh, and/or South Asian shared this feedback: most consistently from students who identify as Muslim. Because these consultations were preliminary and therefore not comprehensive, this experience may exist for students belonging to other groups who are not mentioned here. This apparent disconnect between quantitative and qualitative findings is a reminder that large-scale surveys like the Student Census are best for understanding broad patterns rather than details and illustrates the importance of including students in the interpretation of data that pertains to them.

**Students who identify as Jewish say they are not represented at school.**

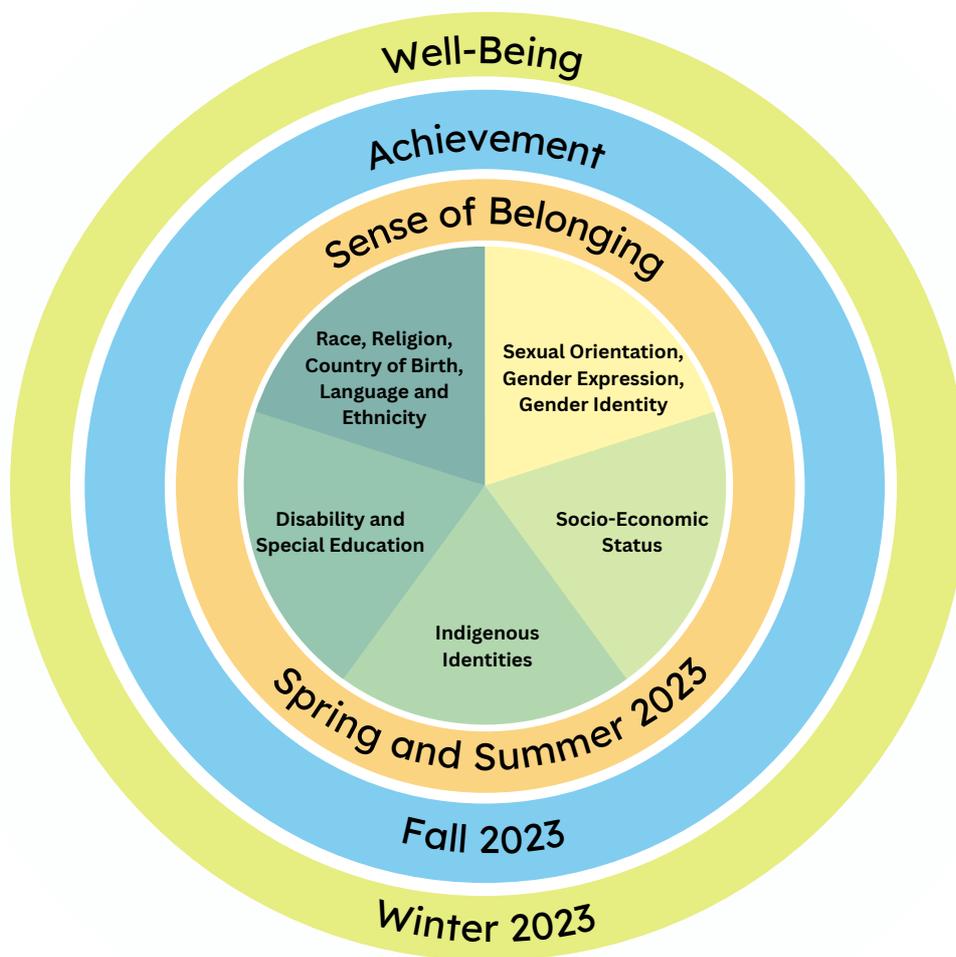
Students who identify as Jewish shared a sense of not being represented or considered in their school celebrations. When students who identify as Jewish reviewed this census finding, they highlighted that Jewish history and Holocaust education are not offered early enough or with enough depth to help build understanding of Jewish identities.

**Students shared that the perception of whether adults are “caring” can be influenced by their responses to racist incidents.**

How an adult responds to student reports of racism and discrimination can affect students’ perception of that person as caring. While caring adults’ identities do not have to “match” students to build empathy and authentic connections, students identified that it helps.

# What is happening next?

The board plans to build reports on sense of belonging for four additional demographic categories: sexual orientation and gender, including gender identity and expression; disability and special education; socio-economic status; and Indigenous identities. These will be released periodically over the next year, based on the availability of stakeholder groups for consultation. These future reports may also take a different form than the current report, based on stakeholder feedback [6].



[6] Only reports pertaining to race and racial background, religion, Indigenous identity and ethnicity are subject to the ARDS, which means certain metrics must be reported in certain ways.

## Between now and the next Student Census, the Limestone District School Board will:

- Familiarize itself with and understand systemic barriers facing students discussed in this report.
- Work to reduce these disparities as a collective, demonstrating that equity work is everyone's work.
- Expand on identified strengths and continue to build supportive programs and services for students.
- Prioritize the voice and experience of historically marginalized students in system-wide decision-making, including (but not limited to) the Equity Action Plan, the Strategic Plan, the Mental Health and Substance Use Strategy, the Special Education Plan, the Board Improvement and Equity Plan, School Improvement Plans for Student Achievement, and Human Resources policies and planning.