

# What we heard from parents



## Introduction

Whether it's technology in the classroom, allowing students to learn by failing or the basics of education; parents don't have a single, unanimous vision of learning.

This was reflected in the feedback from about 100 school council representatives who attended five public meetings in February. The gatherings were hosted by the Board of Trustees. The meetings were held as part the trustees' commitment to communicate better with parents, community and business leaders.

There was no expectation to reach any sort of consensus or solve individual problems at these two-hour sessions. The objective was to ask questions and gather thoughts and opinions on how to maximize funding from the province and best contribute to learning in the classroom.

Parents shared their expectations for student learning during the meetings, which come at a time when we're facing many challenges.

Asked what's most important, answers ranged from providing safe and clean facilities to ensuring students are prepared for post-secondary education.

Feedback from a series of other questions revealed a diverse range of needs and wishes.

It seems only one thing holds true: every parent and guardian with a student in the CBE wants the best possible education for their kids. What that looks like is as varied and complex as the system itself.

The following questions were used to facilitate the discussion at each of the meetings. It should be noted, that in some cases, due to the enthusiastic discussion and limited time, not all questions were asked.

- What is most important to you when you consider your child's education?
- What is sacred?
- What is less important?
- How do we make these tough choices?
- What do we need to consider when preparing our budget?
- If you were a Trustee, what would you need to consider when approving the budget?
- Do you have any ideas about how to help us optimize our funding?
- How do we prepare your children for the future?
- What is your vision for your child's education?
- How is your child's education different from yours?
- How do your children's education needs differ from your education?
- What educational benefits and opportunities do your children have that you did not?
- What issues and challenges do your children face that you did not?



## What is most sacred?

It used to be called the three Rs: Reading, 'riting, 'rithmetic. While still important, today's expectations for learning reach beyond those core fundamentals.

For example, ethics and citizenship along with critical thinking and problem solving were mentioned more than 20 times combined during the five meetings. Individualized learning was mentioned 15 times. This tells us these qualities are top of mind and important to many parents.

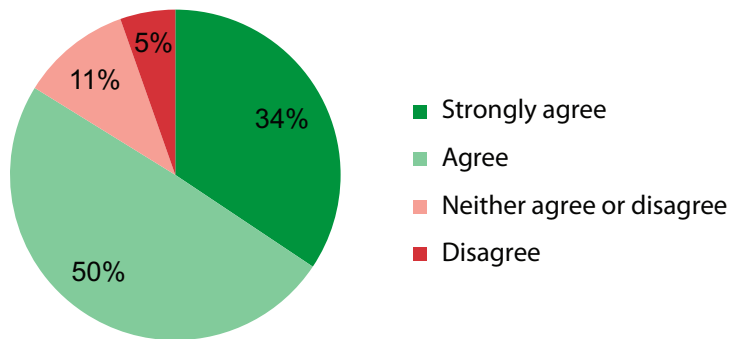
This feedback was encouraging. It confirmed we're on the right path. Beyond academic success, CBE student achievement also focuses on responsible citizenship, personal development and good character.

The CBE is dedicated to personalized learning and each one of our 107,000 students is honoured for their individual gifts. We see every student as unique and each one learns differently; our core values include diversity and choice.

Should students get information online or from books? Should they type assignments or write? Is cursive writing as important as keyboarding?

We did not ask specifically about technology in the classroom but this topic frequently came up in broader discussions. Technology—including accessibility and use—is clearly important to parents but how it ought to be used by teachers and students is another story.

The topic of this meeting was relevant to my school council's concerns.



These results were compiled from 94 respondents.

Some view technology as vital yet others see it as a distraction or complain kids are too dependent on electronic devices.

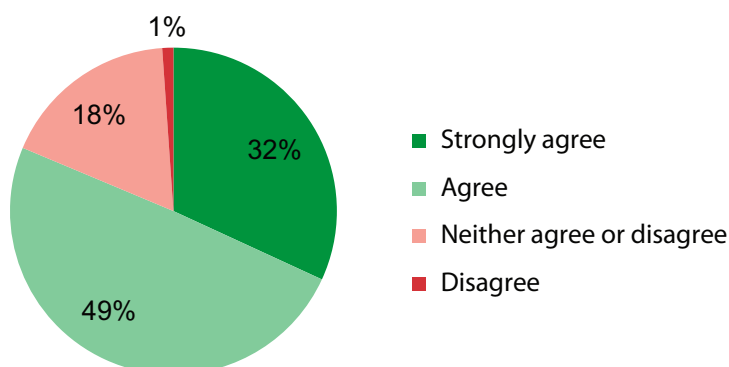
One parent said, "Teach technology as a tool, not a toy." Another noted there has to be "a balance between technology and writing."

The CBE is committed to helping students thrive in the 21st century. This requires providing them with access to current technologies.

The challenge for us as leaders within our complex system is to consider, respect and balance the many different points of view on what role technology plays in learning. What we can promise, however, is to offer a rich and diverse learning environment and to prepare students for the future.

The "Mega Result" is our vision for students. It is that each student, with individual abilities and gifts, will graduate high school with a foundation needed to thrive in life, work and continued learning. In this vision, students will succeed academically, be responsible citizens, identify and develop personal talents and demonstrate good character.

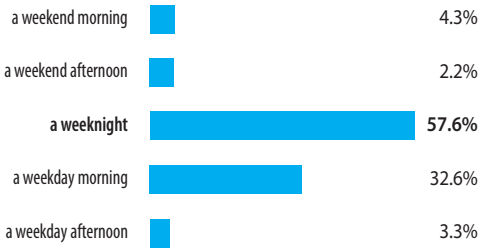
I feel the Board of Trustees is improving communication with schools.



These results were compiled from 94 respondents.

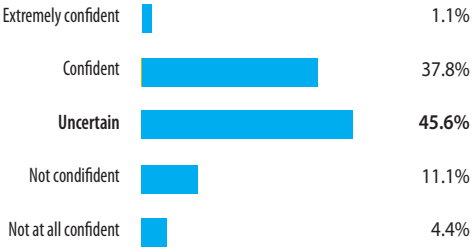
Parents participated in a post-meeting survey about the format of the meetings and whether they found them helpful. Here are some of the results.

Please indicate your preference for a future meeting time:



These results were compiled from 92 respondents.

How much confidence do you have that this discussion session will influence decision making?



These results were compiled from 90 respondents.



## Financial challenges

The provincial budget loomed over the meetings and since that time, we’ve learned our system is facing new and even bigger challenges. We need to optimize learning with essentially fewer dollars.

In anticipation of the provincial deficit, we asked parents for ideas on how to optimize the use of our funding, most of which comes from the province. The suggestions reflected how difficult it is to manage such a large system with so many priorities.

Suggestions for cost savings were far ranging and specific, from putting kids on public transportation starting in Grade 7, to cutting back on photocopying to raising new revenue by renting out surplus space. Other ideas were broader, relating to space utilization and looking for efficiencies within administration.

There was no clear direction how we should tackle our budget woes but parents agreed there needs to be minimal impact in the classroom.

We agree. Classrooms remain a top priority for us. There are some difficult choices ahead, but we are committed to the best possible learning for our students and intend to keep the CBE among the best education systems in the world.

Administration is poring over the numbers and on April 16 will come to us with recommendations on how to balance our budget while still optimizing learning outcomes.

## Top 10 topics of mention

There were 10 or more comments about these topics but they are not ranked in particular order.

- Teaching the basics (reading, writing and arithmetic)
- Excellence in teaching
- Individualized learning
- Program consistency and stability
- Class size
- Readiness for the next step, which includes post-secondary education and/or work
- Regular communication with parents and more parent involvement
- Good citizens
- Critical thinking/problem solvers
- More accountability for students



## Let's keep talking

As your elected representatives, we vowed to communicate better with you this year. Aside from these meetings, we've also had conversations with business representatives and other leaders in Calgary, including the mayor and the chief of police.

We'll take what we've learned and use it to further our discussions as a Board of Trustees as we continue to make improvements in the system and further student success.

We also want to continue the conversation. We all play a role in ensuring our youth develop into well-rounded and contributing members of our community.

We're listening. And the more we listen, the more we understand and appreciate the diversity and complexity of our students, parents and our community.

We look forward to our next meeting with the council of school councils on April 17.

### What you said...

A sample of what participants had to say after the meetings

"My first meeting and I thought it was great."

"This worked well—I appreciate the round-table format."

"I would have more enjoyed an opportunity to discuss how to make these tough choices."

"Thanks for listening and documenting."