

Exploring the Demographic Factors That Are Related to Belonging



Context

In May 2023, EQAO presented a study on perceptions of belonging among students in French-language Ontario secondary schools to Acfas, a Canadian society of francophone scholars. Research shows that a strong sense of belonging and inclusion at school increases school attendance, motivation to do well in school and overall mental health/wellness,¹ and decreases unhealthy behaviours.²

Young people feel a strong sense of belonging at school when they have good relationships with teaching staff and peers, and good experiences

at school. Gender identity, special education needs, language learner needs, time in Canada and other student characteristics can be related to students' sense of belonging and inclusion.

This is why, using data gathered from the voluntary 2021–2022 *Test provincial de compétences linguistiques (TPCL)*³ student questionnaire, EQAO examined perceptions of belonging and inclusion among various groups of students in French-language secondary schools in Ontario.

This EQAO study suggests that newcomers experienced a higher sense of belonging and inclusion than those who have been in Canada five years or more.

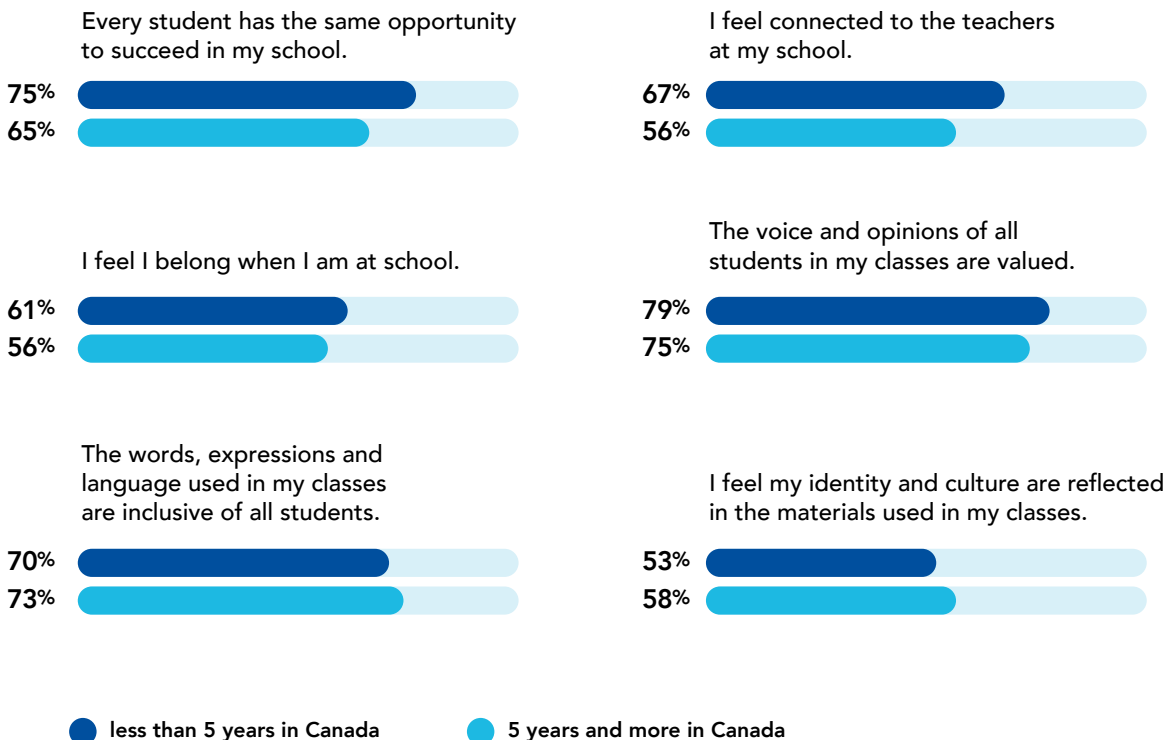
How Was the Study Conducted?

- In 2021–2022, 8 702 Ontario high school students in French-language school boards participated in the TPCL and completed the student questionnaire.
- The student questionnaire included questions about students' sense of belonging and inclusion at school.
- Regression analyses⁴ were conducted to find out which groups of students felt a stronger or weaker sense of belonging and inclusion. This report focuses on results related to time in Canada.

Newcomers' Perceptions

- A majority of newcomers held positive attitudes toward factors related to school connectedness.
- Feelings of inclusion and belonging were weaker among students with lower literacy scores, older students, female students and students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

Percentage of students* who agree, by time in Canada



* Students who had successfully completed the TPCL and did not have an Individual Education Plan (IEP)

Conclusion

These findings underscore the necessity of nurturing a sense of inclusivity and community, particularly among newcomers to Ontario. A positive sense of student connectedness can be fostered through education policies such as the *Programme d'appui aux nouveaux arrivants (PANA)* and *Actualisation linguistique en français (ALF)*, which offer adapted assistance for students and prioritizes groups requiring additional support to achieve equal outcomes (e.g., newcomers). The impact of these targeted interventions extends beyond individual demographics and contributes to the overall sense of community within the entire educational landscape.

1 Arslan, G., Allen, K.-A., & Ryan, T. (2020). Exploring the impacts of school belonging on youth wellbeing and mental health among Turkish adolescents. *Child Indicators Research*, 13(5), 1619–1635. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-020-09721-z>

2 Kim, J., Walsh, E., Pike, K., & Thompson, E. A. (2020). Cyberbullying and victimization and youth suicide risk: The buffering effects of school connectedness. *The Journal of School Nursing*, 36(4), 251–257. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059840518824395>

3 The name of the test remains in French, since the French and English tests are distinct in their content and the curricula they cover. Students in English-language schools write the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT).

4 A regression analysis is a way to figure out how a dependent variable (e.g., feelings of belonging) is connected to specific independent variables (such as gender, immigrant status, grade and academic success).