



Understanding Parental Attitudes Towards Health in Ontario Schools - Research Report

February 2018



ENVIRONICS
RESEARCH

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Executive Summary

Parents believe that Health and Physical Education (H&PE) is important for their children and that schools have an important role to play in this area, but have mixed views about the quality of the H&PE offered at their children's schools.

- **Parents identify obesity and mental health as the top health issues** facing Ontario children. Since the question was last asked in 2010, there is greater emphasis placed on mental health and addiction issues. **Eight in ten parents say that Health and Physical Education helps prepare children** to address these health issues - although more so around physical activity, diet and nutrition than around mental health.
- There is **broad consensus about the importance of Health and Physical Education** for their children. Most parents also **agree with the inclusion of all eight topic areas in the curriculum**, particularly healthy eating, but also mental health, substance use and sexual health education.

Executive Summary

- The degree of parent satisfaction with Health and Physical Education is linked to **variety** and perceptions of the **amount of time dedicated**: those who are not fully satisfied tend to say that longer and/or more frequent classes are needed.
- Parents are most comfortable with **health professionals and themselves as sources of health information** for their children, followed by teachers and the school curriculum.
- **Most parents agree that their child's school demonstrates the attributes of a "healthy school"**, saying that the school is accepting, cares about physical safety, encourages involvement, and is open and welcoming.

Executive Summary

- In 2014, the Ontario government committed to encouraging 60 minutes of daily physical activity for children, and there is **strong agreement from parents (99%) that this is an important goal.**
- Currently, **one quarter of parents (26%) report that their children are active to that standard every day**, while another one third (33%) say that they are this active four to five times a week. The reported level of physical activity declines with age of the child.
- **Almost all parents (89%) believe schools have a shared responsibility to ensure that children are physically active during the regular school day** (rather than a single-minded focus on academic learning). The use of safety guidelines helps parents feel comfortable with active play during the school day, although somewhat more so for indoor than outdoor active play.

Methodology

In Fall 2017, Ophea commissioned Environics Research to conduct a survey of parental attitudes towards health in Ontario schools.

An online survey was conducted October 23-31, 2017 with **651 parents** of Ontario school-aged children.

Survey respondents are members of an online research panel. Because an online survey constitutes a sample of convenience, no margin of error can be ascribed.

The 2017 results are compared (where applicable) to research previously conducted for Ophea in 2010 and 2013.

Profile of Parents

Demographic	Sample %
Number of children	
One	52
Two	39
Three or more	9
Grade attendance of children	
Junior or senior kindergarten	16
Grades 1-3	27
Grades 4-5	20
Grades 6-8	30
Grades 9-12	48
Type of school board attending	
English language public	67
English language Catholic	28
French language public	5
French language Catholic	5

Demographic	Sample %
Age	
<40	26
40-49	49
50+	25
Gender	
Male	49
Female	51
Region	
Toronto	21
GTA	24
East/Central	20
Southwest	29
North	6

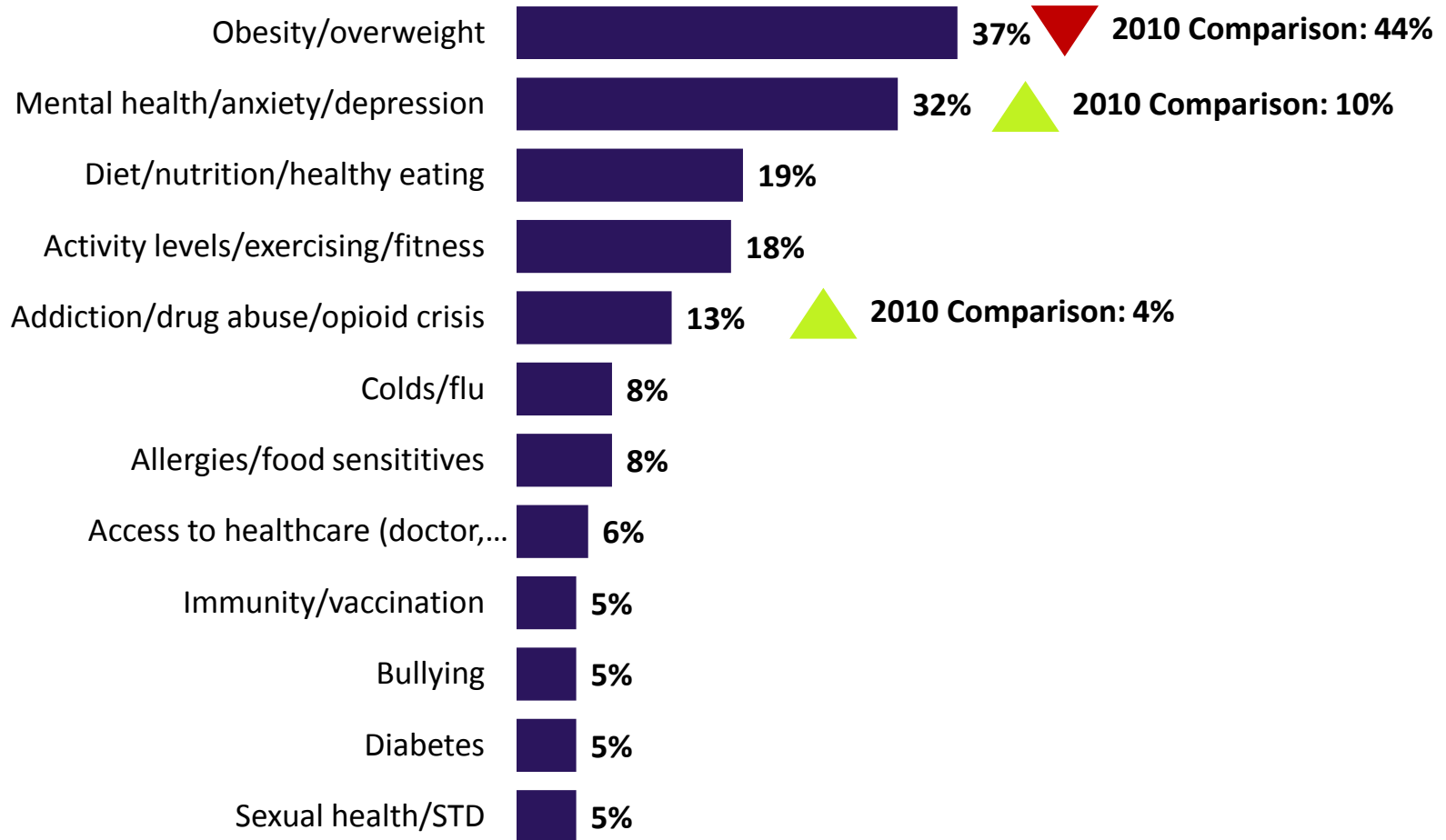
Demographic	Sample %
Education	
High school or less	23
College	24
University	53
Household income	
Less than \$60,000	16
\$60,000 to \$100,000	29
\$100,000 or more	39
Birthplace	
In Canada	74
In another country	25
Religious/faith group identity	
Yes	46
No	49



Findings

Parents identify the main health issues facing children to be obesity and mental health

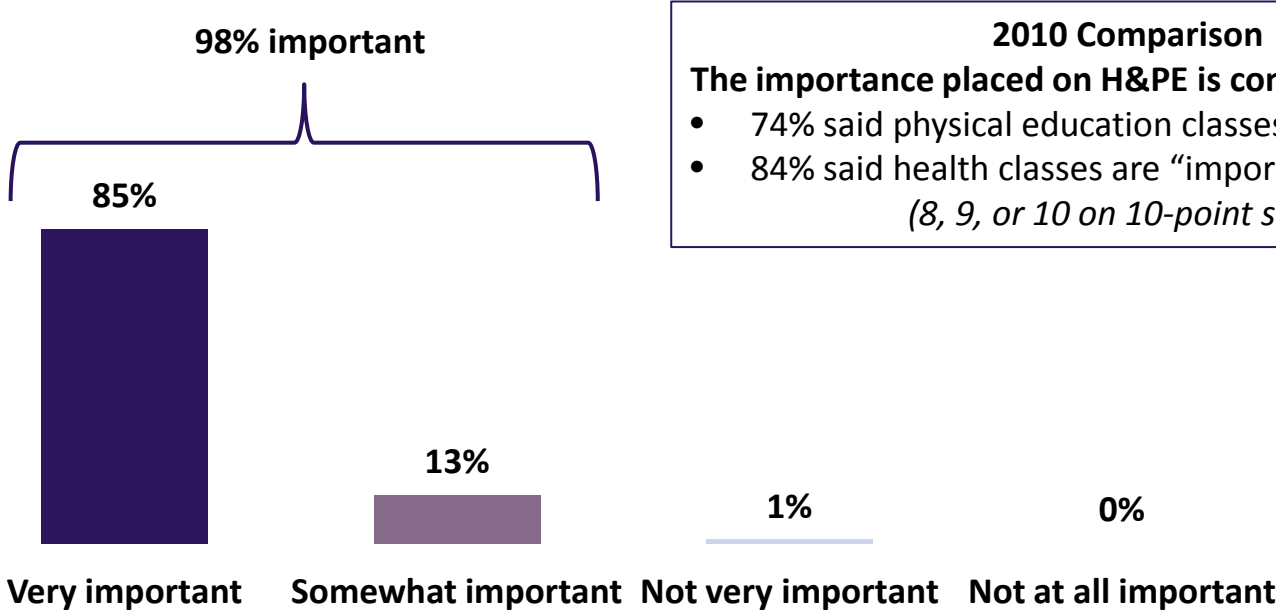
Top health issues facing children (top mentions)



Q What do you feel are the main health issues facing children in Ontario today? Please list your responses in the spaces provided below.

There is broad consensus that Health and Physical Education is important for their children

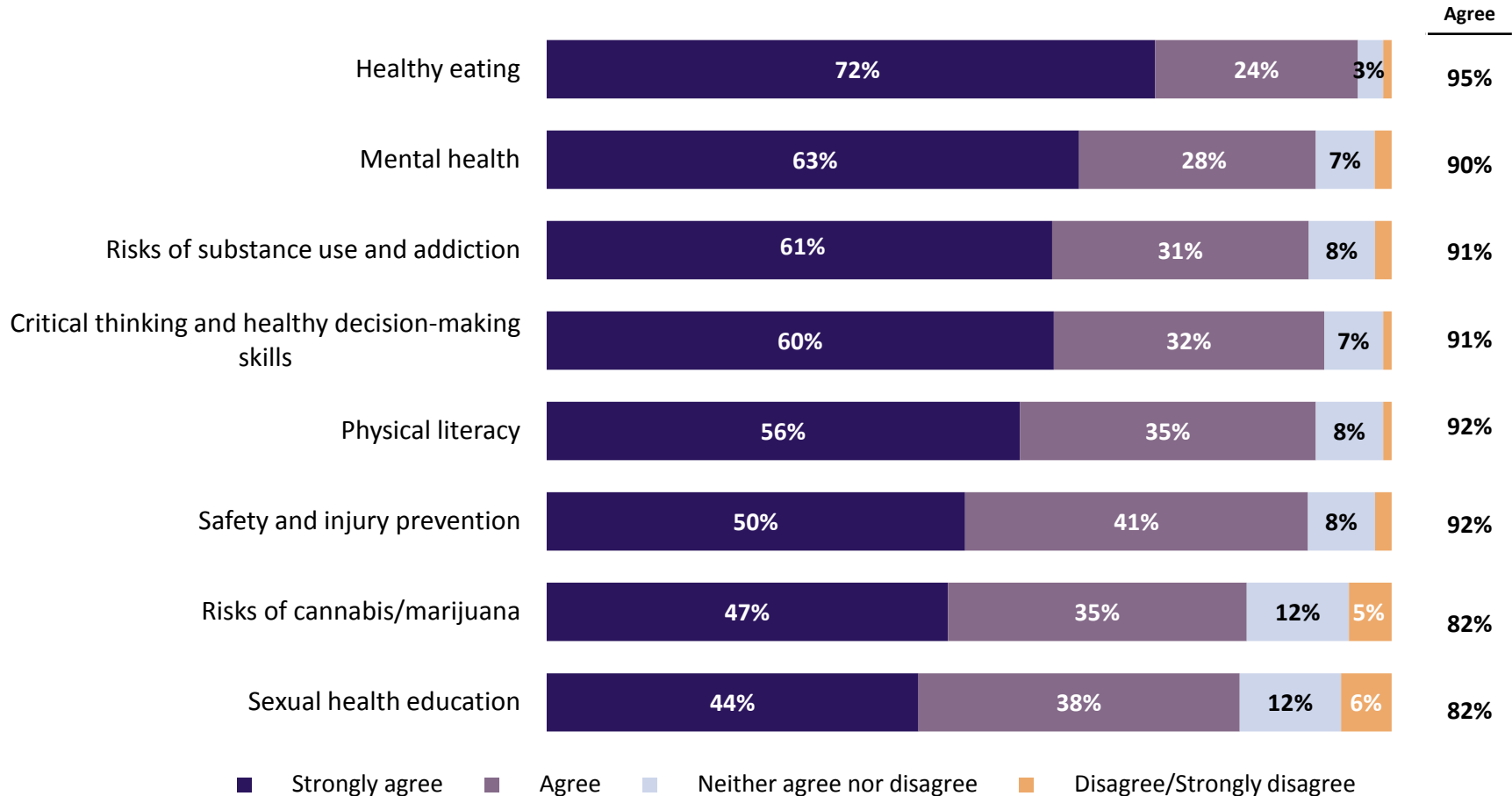
Importance of Health and Physical Education for your children



Q Overall, how important do you think Health and Physical Education is for your children?

Most parents agree that these eight topic areas should be included in the Health and Physical Education curriculum

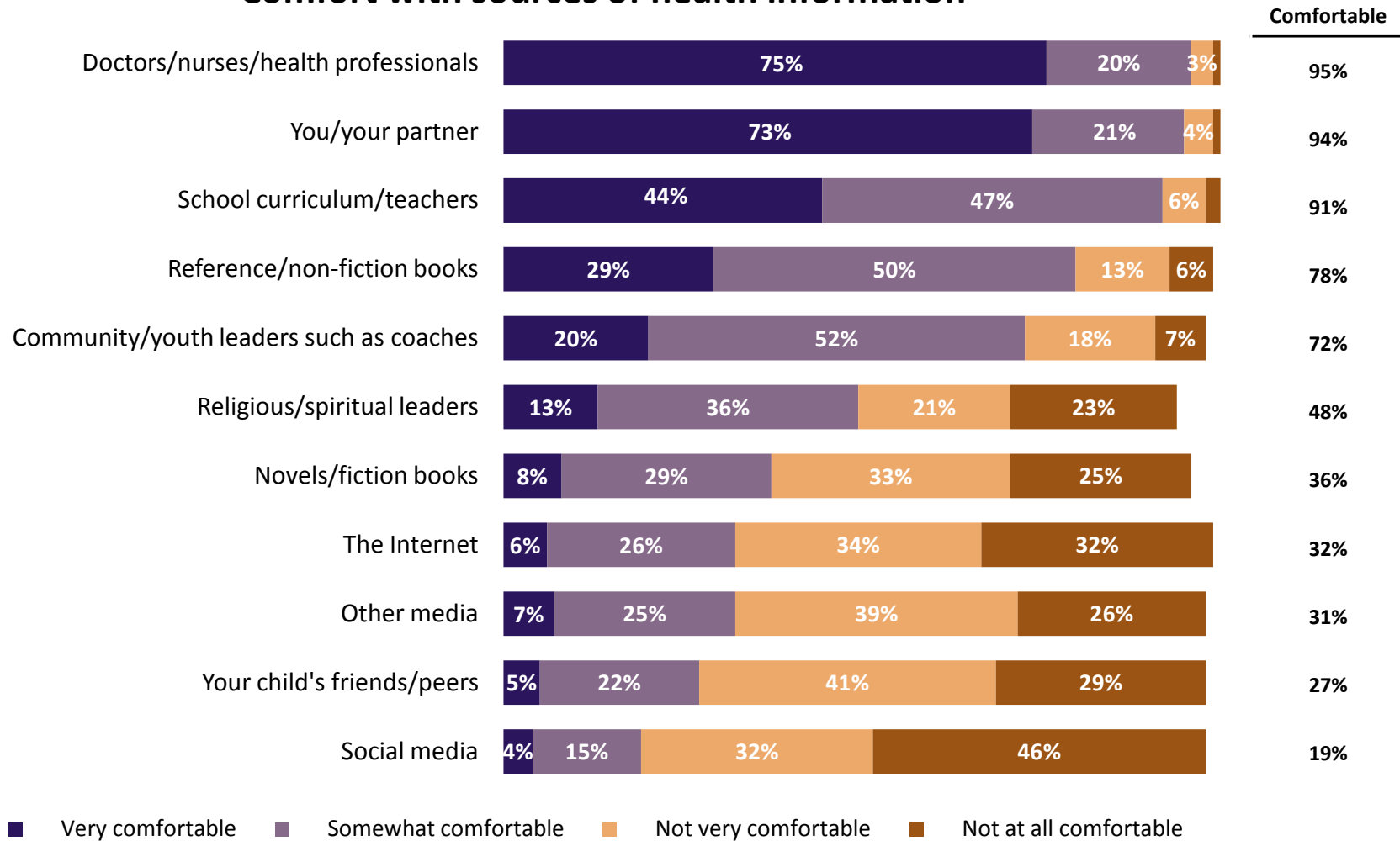
Agreement that topics should be taught as part of Health and Physical Education curriculum



Q To what extent do you agree or disagree that each of the following topics should be taught in schools as components of the Health and Physical Education curriculum?

Parents are most comfortable with health professionals and themselves as sources of health information, followed by teachers

Comfort with sources of health information*

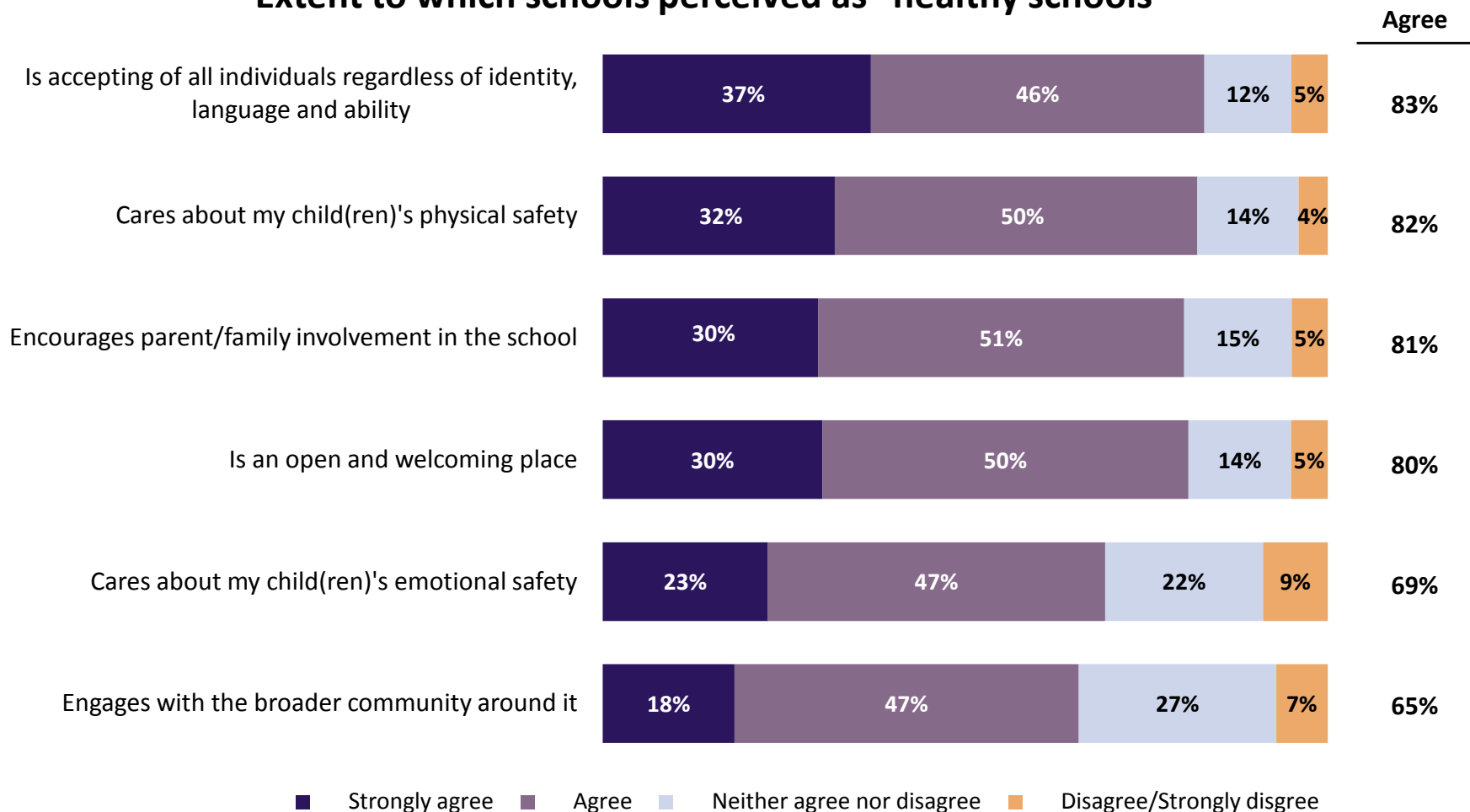


Q How comfortable are you with your child(ren) receiving health information from each of the following sources?

* DK/NA responses have been excluded from this chart (range: 1%-7%) for clarity.

Most parents agree their school is accepting, cares about physical safety, encourages involvement, and is open and welcoming

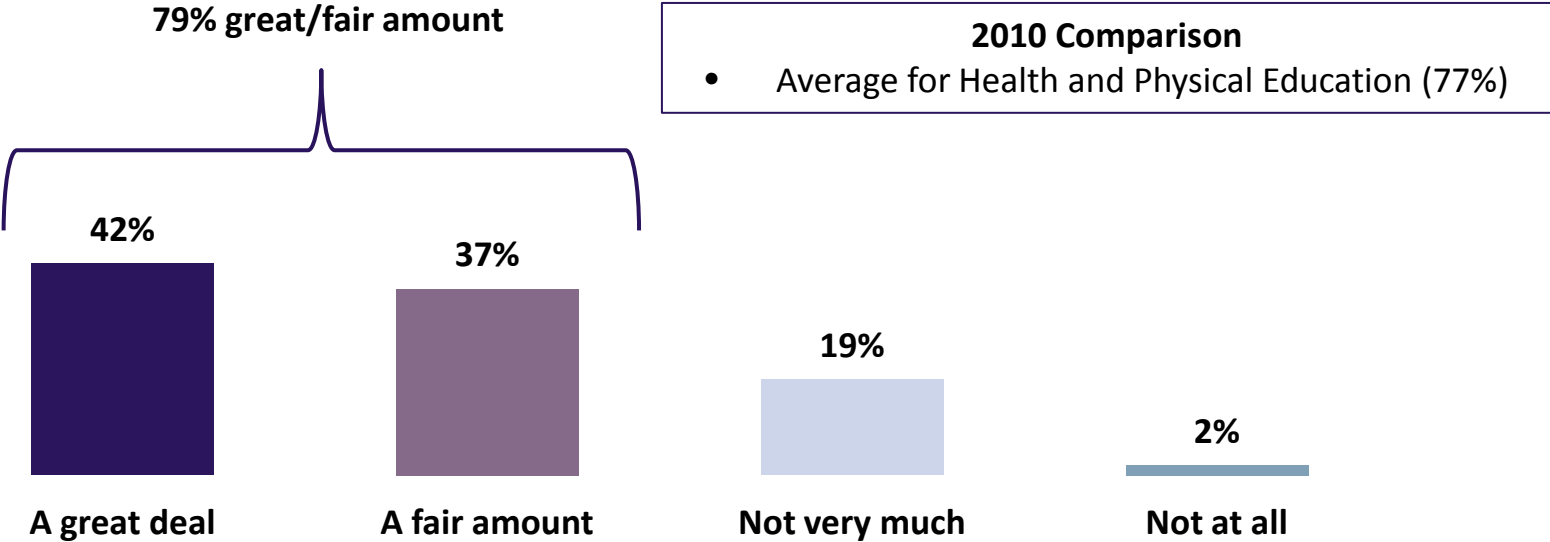
Extent to which schools perceived as “healthy schools”



Q To what extent do you agree or disagree that your child(ren)'s school:

There is general agreement that Health and Physical Education in schools helps prepare children to address health issues they face

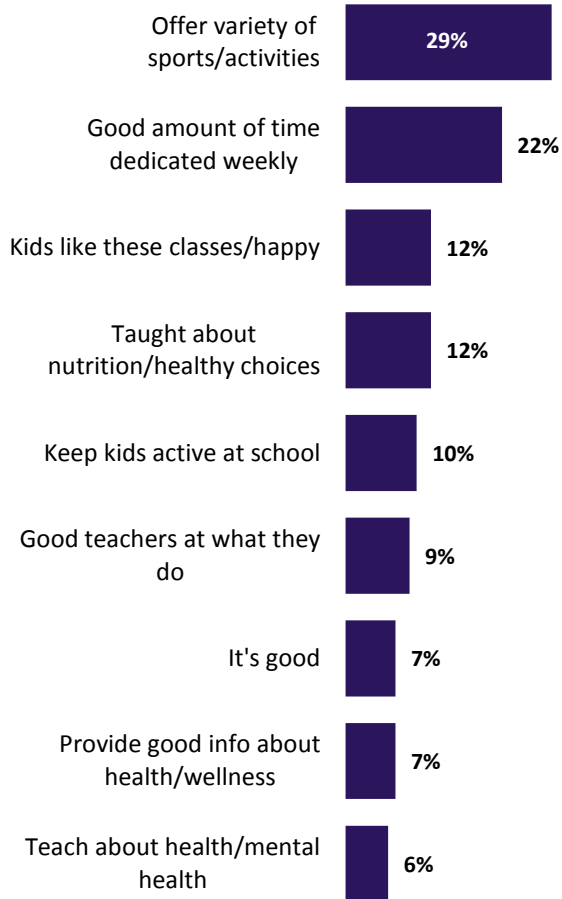
How much Health and Physical Education helps children address health issues



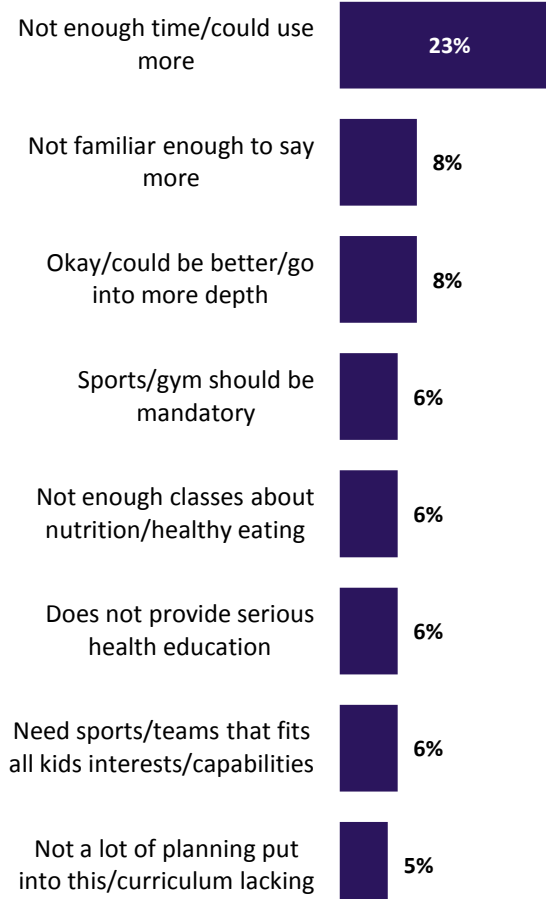
Q To what degree do you feel that teaching Health and Physical Education in schools helps to prepare your child(ren) to address these types of health issues?

Key factors in degree of satisfaction with Health and Physical Education (H&PE) include perceptions of dedicated time and a variety of activities

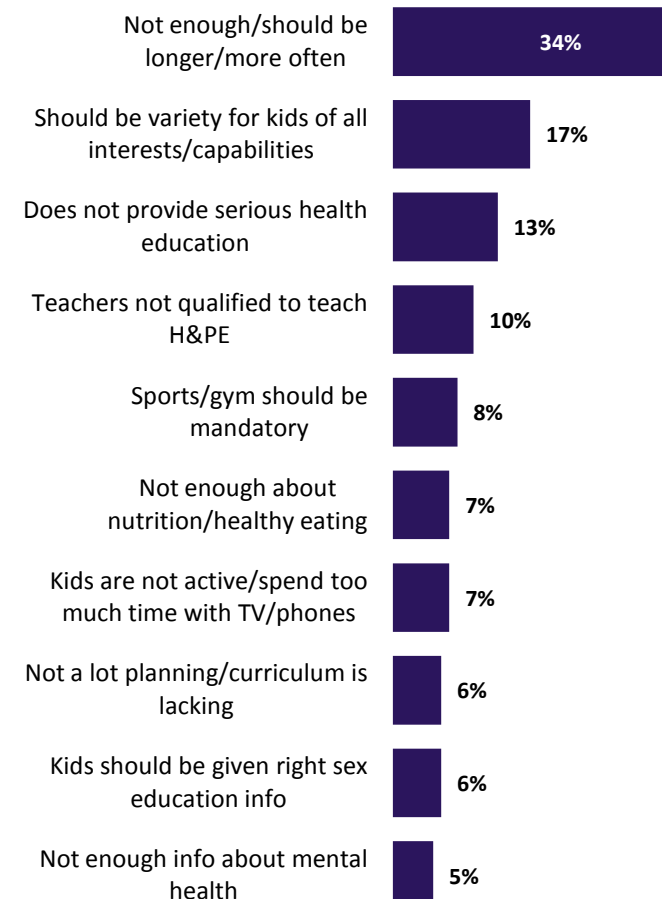
Top reasons for being *very* satisfied with quality of H&PE



Top reasons for being *somewhat* satisfied with quality of H&PE



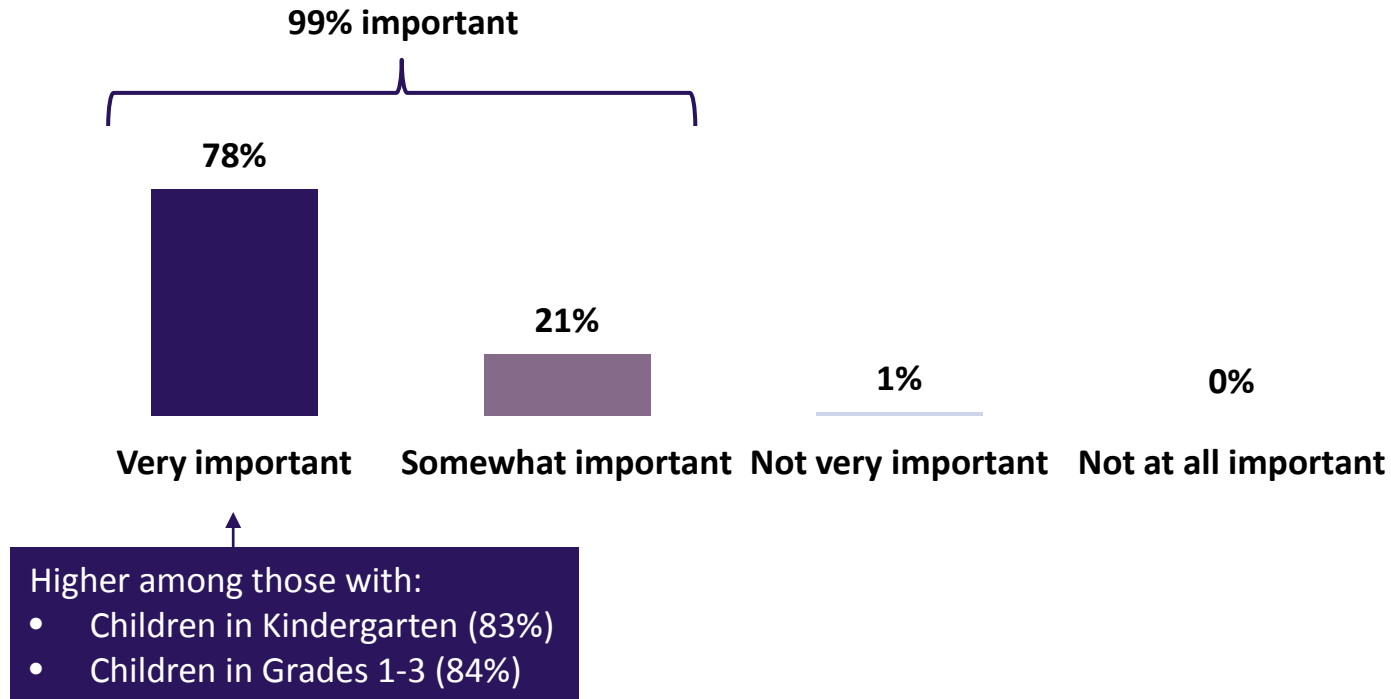
Top reasons for being *not* satisfied with quality of H&PE



Q Why do you say you are <very satisfied/somewhat satisfied/not very satisfied/not at all satisfied> with the quality of Health and Physical Education offered at your child(ren)'s school?

Virtually all parents agree on the importance of 60 minutes of daily physical activity for their children

Importance of 60-minutes daily physical activity for children

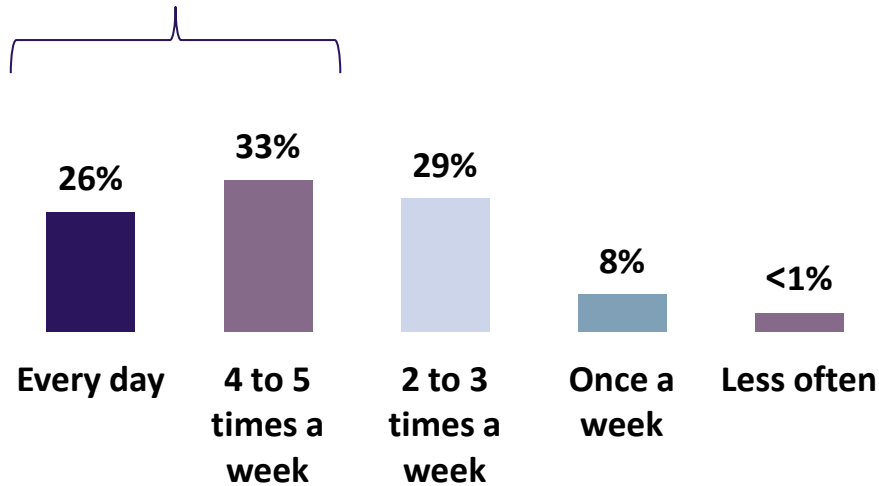


Q How important is it to you that your child(ren) is (are) physical active for at least 60 minutes each day? (Physical activity is any movement that works your muscles and requires more energy than resting/sitting, such as walking, running, dancing, climbing, or swimming).

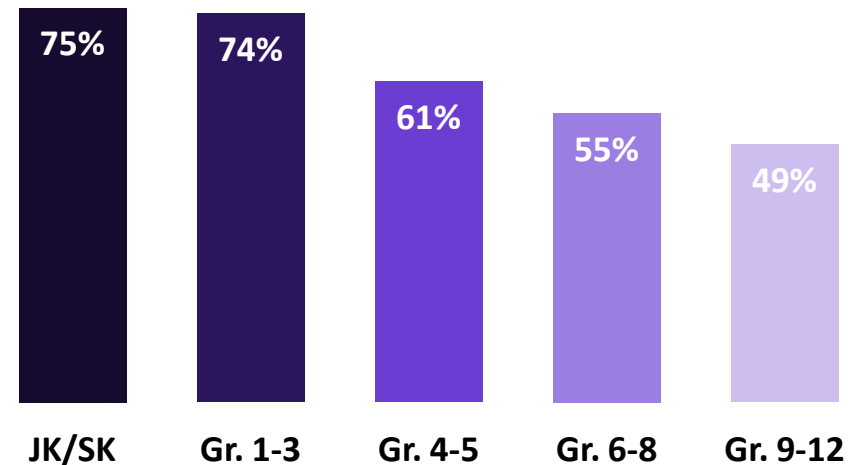
Six in ten parents say their children get at least 60 minutes of physical activity on most days, if not every day

Frequency with which children receive 60 minutes of physical activity/day

59% at least 4-5 times/week



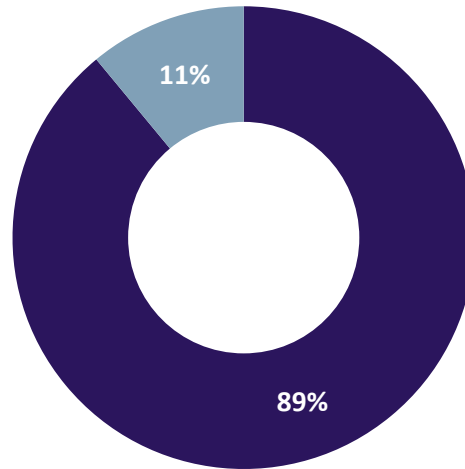
Results by child's grade level (% saying every day or 4-5 times/week)



Q How often would you say your child gets at least 60 minutes of physical activity in a day? If you have more than one child under 18, please answer thinking about your oldest child.

There is widespread consensus among parents that schools have a responsibility to ensure children are physically active

Responsibility of schools to provide physical activity



- Schools have a responsibility to ensure children are physically active during the regular school day
- Schools should focus on academic learning and children should have their physical activity needs met outside school

Q Which of the following best describes your opinion?

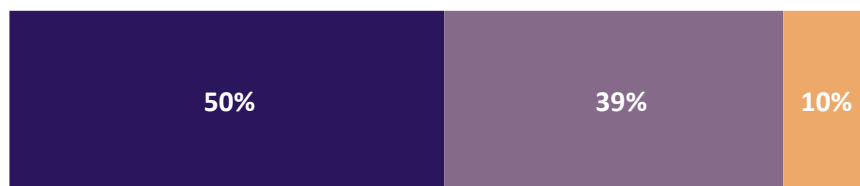
Parents are generally comfortable with active play if safety guidelines are in place, but more so for indoor than outdoor activities

Comfort with physical activity when safety guidelines are used

Indoor active play, such as high jump, indoor soccer, gymnastics, indoor rock climbing or indoor jungle gyms



Outdoor active play, such as canoeing, swimming, baseball, rock climbing, skiing, and tobogganning



■ Very comfortable

■ Somewhat comfortable

■ Not very/not at all comfortable



Strong comfort - outdoor active play

- Children in high school (48%)
- Northern Ontario (71%)
- Southwest Ontario (57%)
- Born in Canada (54%)



Strong comfort - indoor active play

- Mothers (66%)
- Those outside Toronto (66%)

Q Schools and school boards sometimes limit the types of active play that students can do because of concerns about injury. The Ontario Physical Education Safety Guidelines exist to support teachers, intramural supervisors and coaches in minimizing risk in every physical activity. If you knew that your child(ren)'s school uses these safety guidelines, how comfortable would you be having your child(ren) engage in the following types of active play at school or during school-related activities such as extra-curriculars and field trips:



Next Steps - Ophea



Ophea is a not-for-profit organization that champions healthy, active living in schools and communities through quality programs and services, partnerships and advocacy. Ophea's vision is that all children and youth will value and enjoy the lifelong benefits of healthy, active living.

Ophea believes that this information is critical in better understanding parent opinions on the ***role of schools*** as it relates to the ***health and well-being*** of their children.

In recent years, the Government of Ontario has established / updated a number of ***key policies*** (including the Health and Physical Education Curriculum) that aim to enable children and youth to build the knowledge and skills needed to lead healthy, active lives.

Ophea is supportive of these policies and feels that a focus should be placed on investing in ***deeper implementation*** of these policies to realize their full potential.

Ophea has summarized this position in a [Pre-Budget Submission](#) that includes recommendations for a ***school engagement strategy*** with a focus on deeper implementation of the Health and Physical Education (H&PE) Curriculum, reinforcing positive health behaviours through Ophea's Healthy Schools Certification, and support for daily physical activity across the school day.

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