

## **Budget Consultation Report**

**Date:** April 13, 2022  
**Topic:** Surrey Schools Budget Consultation

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From February 16<sup>th</sup> to March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Surrey Schools conducted its annual budget consultations by inviting staff, students, parents and members of the Surrey, White Rock and Barnston Island communities to provide input on the 2022-23 district budget.

The community was asked to share feedback through an online survey, email, traditional mail or their local Parent Advisory Council representative. The online survey was available in English, Punjabi, Mandarin and Arabic.

Consultations were promoted through social media, PACs and the district website. A total of 2,310 online survey responses were received, and 67 of those responses (3%) were via translated surveys (12 in Arabic and 55 in Mandarin). The vast majority respondents were parents (81%) that have students currently enrolled in the district.

Class size/composition was the top concern with 20% (1,381) of respondents listing this as their key priority. Rounding out the remaining top five priorities were support for students with special needs with 16% (1,113), mental health services at 15% (1,059), investments in technology with 12% (843), career education at 10% (675) and assistance for gifted learners at 9% (569).

### **Methodology**

From February 16<sup>th</sup> to March 4<sup>th</sup>, staff, students, parents and community members were able to provide feedback in three ways: online survey, email and traditional mail. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the district once again opted against hosting an in-person community consultation forum and instead shared presentations via video. The online survey utilized Microsoft Forms.

To promote the consultations, online advertising was employed via Facebook, which was geo-targeted to users in Surrey and White Rock and was purchased for a total spend of \$2,400. The district also sent the survey to 78,39 subscribed parent email addresses and principals were asked to share the survey with their parent communities.

### **Engagement**

As a result of the combined channels of communication, we received 2,310 survey responses, which is an 18% drop in responses compare to last year's 2,793 respondents.

One explanation for this drop could be that last year's survey included a question on continuing blended learning, which was a very important issue for parents in 2021 as they were navigating their child's education during the pandemic, with Surrey Schools garnering consistent media coverage for school-based exposures. The vast majority of parent comments in last year's survey referenced Blended Learning and encouraged the district to continue this program for the duration of the pandemic.

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We also received three feedback emails, all from staff members seeking support and resources in their respective departments. As in previous years, we received no responses by traditional mail, but that option was made available.

**Table 1: Method of Engagement**

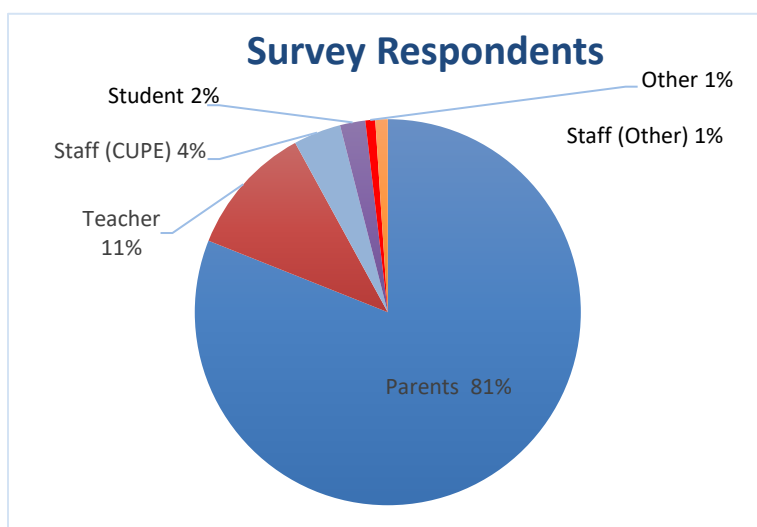
	2022	2021
<b>Survey Responses</b>	2,310	2,793
<b>Email Responses</b>	3	10
<b>Traditional Mail</b>	0	0
<b>Total Responses</b>	2,310	2,803

**Respondents**

Survey respondents were asked to identify which stakeholder group they identified with.

The largest group of respondents was parents/guardians at 81% (1,872), followed by teachers at 11% (254). CUPE staff made up the third largest group of respondents at 4% (92), followed by students at 2% (49). All other respondent groups were under 2%.

Survey respondents were also asked if their budget priorities had changed from last year's survey. Of the 2,803 respondents, 42% (985) said their priorities had not changed from 2021, while 4% (87) said their priorities had changed. The remaining respondents either did not respond to that question or said it was not applicable to them.


**Language**

This year we saw a notable increase in non-English responses as well. As in previous years, we offered the survey in Punjabi and Mandarin and added Arabic as a new option for this year. As a result, we received 12 responses in Arabic and 55 in Chinese. We saw no responses in Punjabi this year.

This year's uptake in translated surveys was a significant increase over our previous non-English response count of 15 (14 in Mandarin, 1 in Punjabi).

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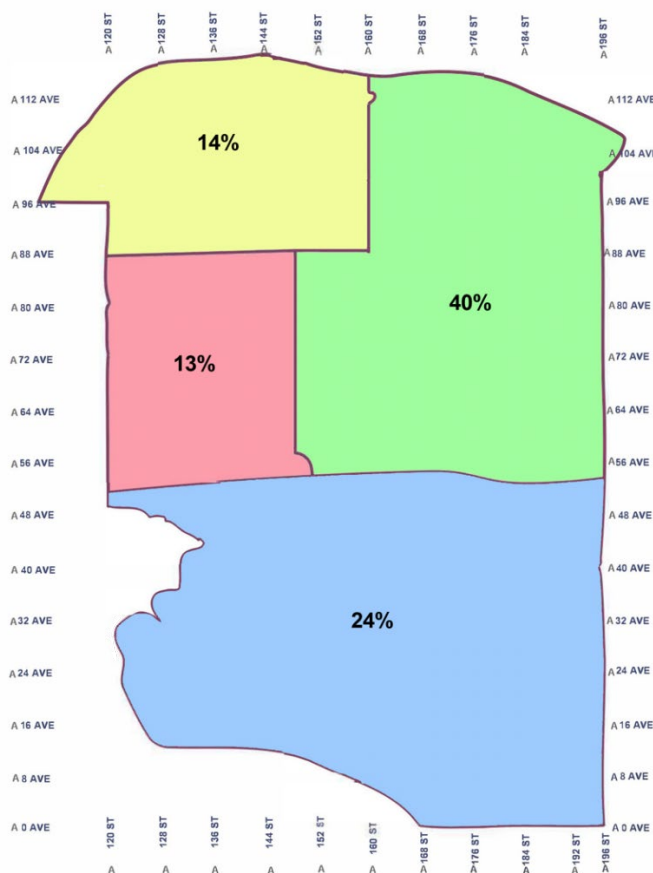
One recommendation for next year would be to do greater engagement with the South Asian community, including South Asian media.

**Regions**

For the 2022-23 budget survey, we asked respondents to share their postal code. This question was not asked in previous surveys. The remaining top-five engaged regions are as follows:

- **East Surrey 40%** of survey respondents.
- **South Surrey/White Rock 24%** of respondents.
- **North Surrey 14%** of respondents.
- **West Surrey 13%** of respondents.

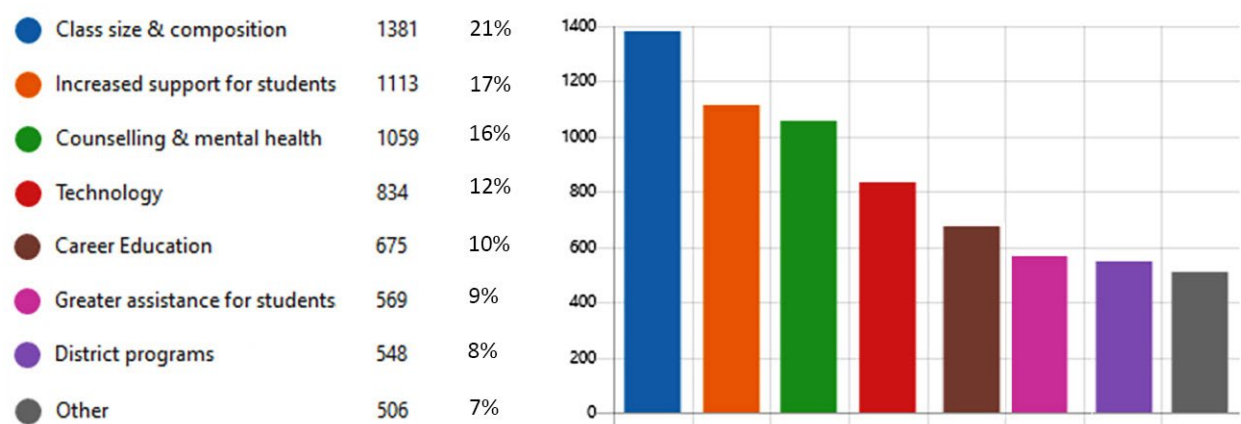
Based on the responses, we can see that East Surrey was the most-engaged region, with 40% of all survey responses coming from residents in that area. South Surrey/White Rock had the second most responses with 24% of all responses.



- North (Yellow): V3V, V3T, V3R
  - West (Red): V3W, V3X
  - East (Green): V3S, V4N
  - South (Blue): V4A, V4P, V4B, V3Z
- 9% chose not to share postal code or selected 'other'.*

**Survey Responses**

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Themes in priorities remained similar to past years, with class size and composition coming in as the top concern at 1,381. As in past years, a smaller, more intimate classroom setting continues to be the number one desire for respondents. The reasons expressed for this primarily touch upon teachers needing to spend less time and resources on maintaining a large class and having more time to spend with each student in order to meet their unique learning needs, leading to a richer classroom experience for all.

While last year saw mental health services come in as the second most-prioritized concern due to the pandemic, 2022 saw the return of support for students with special learning needs (1,113) as the second most-requested priority, with mental health services (1,059) being the third highest priority area. While last year's increased focus on counselling and mental health services can be attributed to the pandemic, this year's shift marks a return to what is seen to be more of the 'traditional' priorities and concerns.

Technology (834) was the fourth-most selected priority, a spot it has held in previous years. Users who prioritized technology noted the pandemic has highlighted how important these tools are in providing students with equal access to learning, regardless of their situation or location.

Career education (675), assistance for gifted students (569) and district programs (548) continue to round out the final three selections. Written-in comments included a request for increased support for students who are not only designated, but for those in class who may not have a designation but struggle with having enough support time from teachers due to class overcrowding or other factors.

Respondents that selected 'other' (506) wrote in covering a variety of concerns not addressed in the above topics, such as an increase in ventilation safety, increase pay and support for staff to foster healthy work environments, tighten up job qualifications to have 'higher-quality' staff and more language support for non-English speaking families.

Some examples of these responses include:

*“The class size and technology are important, if we have a big classroom, the kids will not be able to learn, and the teacher will not be able to devote time all the students. Technology is needed to prepare kids for the future.”*

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*“Keep up with a changing future. Archaic education is getting them nowhere in this day and age. Kids need to be taught and how the teachers able to dedicate their time with assisting students rather than being overwhelmed with student numbers. Career planning will be helpful for kids trying to understand what their interests are so when they graduate, they know what direction to go. Financial planning and life skills are not taught in school and that's where we are failing with preparing our kids after graduation.”*

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*“I see behind the scenes struggles in the classroom. Class composition is strained with limited resources to even reach students who are not designated ..the challenge to teach the class as a whole is consumed with so many high needs in the classroom especially with students struggling in Social Emotional learning ,dysregulation, then literacy and numerous becomes secondary.”*

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*“Going through 2 years of COVID stress has made class sizes and cleanliness much more important to our family. The school shouldn't be a health hazard all day until nighttime staff comes in.*

*Also, my daughter has been diagnosed with ADHD and anxiety, but is also a gifted learner, and there aren't many supports available.”*

## **Non-English Responses**

This year also saw a notable increase in non-English responses. For 2022 we also offered the survey in Arabic, Mandarin, and Punjabi. While past efforts to offer in other languages have only netted a handful of responses (14 in Mandarin, 1 in Punjabi), this year we saw 11 Arabic and 55 Mandarin submissions.

The sentiment of these submissions is in line with the English responses, with a focus on quality of education, classroom experience for their child and adequately preparing them for life beyond secondary school.

## **Emails**

As for email responses this year, we received only three, all of which were from staff members. Two of the email submissions were from employees at DEC who expressed a desire to see more personnel/departmental support from the budget, noting that as the district expands with more schools year after year, the number of employees in DEC departments largely remains the same, increasing the workload for departmental workers annually.

The third email was from a teacher-librarian requesting more support for classroom support, citing staff burnout and a lack of EAs to help facilitate students with designations and behavioural issues.

## **The Why**

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After selecting/writing in their priorities for the current year, users were asked to expand on why they made the selection they did. Out of 2,310 survey respondents, only 5 opted to skip this question.

While last year saw a marked change in users expressing concerns and priorities for the larger populations of staff and students due to the pandemic, this year saw a partial return of users citing their own child or employee experience as their motivating factor.

Health and safety were no longer a top concern for many respondents, likely due to the decrease in hospitalizations, high vaccination rates and adoption and maintenance of many health and safety protocols since last year's budget. Instead, this year saw a return to more traditional responses, such as students needing higher-quality learning environments, more staff to help address student needs and to lessen staff burnout.

While the sentiments of respondents seem to mark a slight shift from focusing on the general populace to their own specific case, the vast majority claimed that their priorities from the previous years had not changed, somewhat contradicting their responses. However, this can likely be attributed to many perhaps not being able to remember how they answered the previous year.

Taking the responses and analyzing them against the reasonings provided, it appears as if the easing of COVID-19 restrictions and dropping of case numbers around British Columbia (as of the time of this survey, between February 16<sup>th</sup> and March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022) have many settling back into the concerns and priorities that have traditionally been at the forefront for stakeholders.

### **Next Steps**

This Report is presented to the Surrey Board of Education for their information and consideration prior to setting the 2022-23 Annual Budget.

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