

KAHNAWÀ:KE EDUCATION SYSTEM PARENT & STUDENT CONSULTATION

Community Report on
Study Findings & Recommendations



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The Kahnawà:ke Education System Parent & Student Consultation Study was designed collaboratively by the Kahnawà:ke Combined Schools Committee (KCSC) and the Kahnawà:ke Education Center (KEC) to provide these organizations with an understanding of the educational needs of the entire Kahnawà:ke community. The purpose was to ensure that the education system heard the voices of families, whether they choose public or private schools on- or off-reserve, so that they are all represented in KCSC & KEC strategic planning processes.

This **Community Report** includes four sections that describe the process and outcomes of the work completed by Christie Huff’s Consulting Team (see team description below):

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THE CONSULTATION AIMED TO INCLUDE THE VOICES OF	
PARENTS (OR PRIMARY CAREGIVERS)	& STUDENTS
<p>With children who are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preschool (age 0-5) • In elementary & high school (age 6-17) • Recently graduated (age 18-25), with diverse experience since leaving school <p>Who will choose or have chosen to send their child(ren) to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-reserve (KEC & Non-KEC) • Off-reserve (public & private) <p><i>Ensuring that parents of special needs and gifted students are represented</i></p>	<p>In Grade 10 & 11 with high school experience at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KSS • Off-reserve (public & private) <p>Students who have left school since 2012, with post-secondary experiences including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult education • Adult Kanien’kéha immersion • Vocational • CEGEP • University • No post-secondary

Christie Huff works collaboratively with other professional consultants based on the knowledge and skills needed to complete projects. She has spent the past ten years working with community schools in development and consulting roles. For this project, each team member provided highly valued expertise. Julie Hobbs contributed from her extensive experience in education consulting; Paula Knowles, in facilitation and experiential education, and Morgan Phillips, in research and community engagement.

CONSULTATION APPROACH

In the process of clarifying the consultation purpose and scope, the consulting team recognized that the issues the consultation aimed to understand were complex and that the community's views were diverse and potentially polarized. To determine what truly affects education choices, we needed to explore deeply personal reflections with people, so offering parents and students a respectful, private opportunity to share their views was very important. We chose to begin the data gathering with interviews; in the communications, participants were invited to contact us to set up individual or group interviews at a time and place that was convenient for them, by phone or in person.

The simplest explanation of the Consultation is that it was designed to explore what affects families' CHOICE of schools and their CONFIDENCE in schools, based on their EXPECTATIONS, and their EXPERIENCES of education.

Our main source of quantitative data during the interview phase came from the School Program Choice Charts. Parents and students were asked to think about fourteen areas that could be included in a school's program and to rate from 1 (low) to 5 (high) the importance of each area in an ideal school program and how they would rate the schools their children/students have attended. The areas included: art, athletics, English language, extra-curricular activities, French language, gifted learning support, health promotion, Kanien'kehá:ka culture and language, outdoor education, parent engagement support/services, safe school environment, STEM (science, technology, engineering, math), and special needs support.

Overall, we took what is called a "grounded theory" approach (Grounded Theory Ltd., 2016) in the interview phase of the consultation. Based on participants' responses to qualitative and quantitative questions, we identified important themes as we went along and adapted or added questions to explore topics and issues that we needed to learn more about as needed.

When we had done enough interviews that we had heard from multiple parents representing each of the groups whose voices the KCSC/KEC wanted to ensure were heard, we introduced an **online survey** to enable parents who preferred to participate in a brief, anonymous survey to share their views. The online survey also gave us an opportunity to estimate the percentage of parents who share the education goals identified during the interviews (see page 7).

The Study was conducted in the following phases:

- Consultation purpose and scope clarification (March – April 2017)
- Implementation – recruitment and data gathering (May-September 2017)
- Sharing findings for sense-making and integration (May-November 2017)

COMMUNICATIONS & RECRUITMENT

To recruit parents and students' the consultation was promoted through:

- Distribution of a Press Release to media and community organizations. Media coverage included radio & TV interviews, and newspaper articles and publicity ads.
- Flyers/letters were distributed to parents through KEC schools and by mail for non-KEC parents *and* grade 10, 11 & post-secondary students
- Posts on KEC and schools' Facebook pages and in the post-secondary students' group
- Meeting with the KCSC to encourage members to promote the consultation through the schools they represent and their community connections.
- Direct contact at school/community events (i.e. Step By Step Family Breakfast, KSS Sing).
- KSS students were recruited through class visits when they were offered choices in how to voluntarily: in a group over lunch (pizza provided), in an individual interview, or by answering a survey in writing (paper or email).

PARTICIPATION

Overall, **parents and/or students from 175 families, representing 294 students**, were consulted to produce the findings and recommendations in this report.

Parent Participation

During the interview phase of the consultation, parents from 57 families had at least one parent participate (62 parents total). 41 Parents participated in individual interviews – the average interview took an hour to complete by phone or in person. Four parents submitted individual responses in writing. Parents from 16 Families participated in group interviews¹.

83 parents participated by completing the online Parent Survey.

NUMBER OF CHILDREN REPRESENTED FROM PARENTS CONSULTED			
<i>How many children do you have who are:</i>	INTERVIEW	SURVEY	COMBINED
Pre-school age (0-5), not yet in school	18	33	51
In elementary school (Nursery to Grade 6)	37	64	101
In high school (Grade 7 to 11)	33	52	85
Have left school since 2012	24	33	57
Totals	112	182	294

¹ Seven participants in the group interviews were not parents themselves – they participated with their families and/or colleagues as active members of their communities and extended families.

Student Participation

26 KSS Students in Grades 10 & 11 participated in the consultation:

- 11 Female, 15 Male; 11 Grade 10's, 15 Grade 11's
- 10 in group, 6 individual interviews, 10 written (with some additions in interaction)
- Several students had also attended off-reserve public and private schools

10 Students with recent post-secondary experience participated, **all female**, all of whom are experiencing success in their chosen post-secondary pathways.

Recruiting students from off-reserve high schools and students not participating in post-secondary education was even more challenging than we anticipated. While we hoped to hear directly from more of these students, their experiences were shared through their parents' participation. During the interview phase, the stories that we heard from parents about students who were not succeeding in post-secondary education from both on- and off-reserve schools led us to conduct further research and analysis and to include specific questions for parents of students who left school since 2012 in the parent survey.

From the overall parent and student participation, we were able to hear about how students have experienced elementary and secondary schools both on- and off-reserve.

SCHOOLS ATTENDED BY CHILDREN OF PARENTS CONSULTED			
<i>What schools do your children currently attend or have they attended in the past?</i>	PARTICIPANTS		
	INTERVIEW	SURVEY	COMBINED
No child in school yet	5	9	14
Kateri	19	37	56
Karonhianonhnha	24	30	54
Kahnawà:ke Survival School	17	24	41
New Frontiers Elementary School	9	7	16
French Public Elementary School	4	2	6
Private Elementary School	11	1	12
H.S. Billings High School	5	7	12
Lakeside Academy	1	5	6
Private High School	16	21	37
On-reserve Non-KEC	4	7	11
Another Reserve's High School	1	1	2
Other	2	1	3
Totals	118	152	270

Findings Part I: Parent Expectations & School Choice

This section explores the main themes related to school CHOICE and parent EXPECTATIONS of schools in the consultation's findings, addressing these questions:

- What do parents think is needed for education to be successful? In what areas do parents think students need to develop to achieve their potential in life?
- What most affects parents' choices of elementary and high school?

Overall, what we learned is that parents' choices of schools for their children are affected by their family history, their own education experiences, and by each of their children's unique needs.

Parents choose schools based on what makes them feel most confident that their child(ren)'s education experiences will prepare them to achieve their individual potential in life.

Parents described their hopes for their children's lives by saying that **they want them to be able to open any door that they want to open** – to be able to choose their future direction and to have the tools to access their dreams. They want to have healthy, happy children who become healthy, happy adults, able to develop fully as unique, confident individuals who know who they are as Onkwehón:we.

How does that happen? **In what areas do parents think that their children need to learn and develop to achieve their potential?**

On page 6 the areas that parents talked about needing to see developed in their children are described under the heading **Parents' Education Goals**.

On page 7, the table titled **Parent Education Goals: Survey Results** shows the percentage and number of parents who selected each goal in response to the question: "When you think about the hopes you have for your children's lives, please check all the education goals that apply to you".

Parents' positive and negative education and life experiences have a big impact on their choices.

*How was school for them?
Where did they go to school?*

Did they have an opportunity to learn in their language and culture or did they feel they missed out on that growing up?

Was post-secondary education easy or difficult? Have they found it easy to find work to support their families while living in the community or did they have to leave Quebec to find work because their French wasn't strong enough?

PARENTS' EDUCATION GOALS

Parents talked about the need for education to develop students in five different areas. Within each area, the major goals that parents think need to be achieved for students to be successful in life are described. In Findings Part II: Parent & Student Confidence in KEC Schools, findings, analysis and recommendations are provided for each area (A-E).

A. STUDENT LEARNING

1. All students are learning to the maximum of their potential, including students with behavioral, developmental or other learning challenges/special needs and students identified as gifted learners.
2. Students are prepared to succeed academically in post-secondary education of their choice, so that they can later work in the field of their choice.
3. Student's literacy and math skills are well developed early in their education.

B. LANGUAGE LEARNING

4. Students are tri-lingual. They have the English and French skills to be able to get any job they want in Quebec and they are proficient speakers of Kanien'kéha.
5. Students are proficient Kanien'kéha speakers.
6. Students have strong enough English and French to succeed in their post-secondary studies and are able to work in their chosen field with the level of French required.

C. DEVELOPING CONNECTION TO IDENTITY, COMMUNITY & CULTURE

7. Students have a strong sense of identity as Kanien'kehá:ka – they have a healthy attachment to their community and culture.

D. RECOGNIZING AND DEVELOPING THE UNIQUENESS OF EACH STUDENT

8. Students' personal interests are recognized and used as a motivating factor to encourage learning. Education is able to leverage the diverse talents and the learning preferences of individual students.
9. Students develop both work-related and personal and professional interests that help them to lead meaningful lives.

E. EXPOSURE TO DIVERSITY AND RESPECT FOR OTHER CULTURES

10. Students develop a global understanding and appreciation of the diversity of people and cultures. The knowledge and experiences they develop from exposure to the outside world are used to strengthen their capacity to contribute to their community.

In the online parent survey we asked parents to select all of the education goals that apply to them to get a sense of the percentage of community members who share the views expressed during the interview phase of what is needed from education for their children to develop to their potential.

PARENTS' EDUCATION GOALS: SURVEY RESULTS		
<i>When you think about the hopes you have for your children's lives, please check all the education goals that apply to you:</i>	RESPONSE %	RESPONSE COUNT
A strong academic foundation that prepares them well for post-secondary education	83.1	69
Development of their individual strengths and interests to help them develop both work-related and personal interests	77.1	64
Support for each student's learning needs to reach their individual potential, including gifted learners and students with special needs	72.3	60
Education that is grounded in learning the Kanien'kéha language and culture to attach them to their identity as members of our community and nation	67.5	56
Tri-lingualism – strong language skills in English, French, and Kanien'kéha	67.5	56
French language skills required for post-secondary education and/or work in Quebec	66.3	55
Exposure to diversity – opportunities to interact with other cultures so that our children are open and comfortable with educating others about our people and learning from other cultures	63.9	53
For them to become Kanien'kéha speakers	49.4	41
² Other (please specify)	9.64	8
Answered Question - 83		

² 7/8 of the participants who chose 'Other' explained the goals they had already selected in their own words. The only addition was from one person who identified sports opportunities as a goal.

SCHOOL CHOICE

The factors parents described as most affecting overall school choice apply to both elementary and high school. Overall, parents asked themselves: Where do I think he/she will be most likely to succeed? To receive support needed to achieve his/her potential and for my education goals to be met?

For every parent, one or more of these four factors was important in determining their choice of schools for their child(ren):

1. Perception of the school's ability to deliver a strong **academic** program that prepares students for post-secondary education
2. Support **in evidence/practice** for **special needs** students including **gifted learners**
3. **Culture**, identity and community connection
4. **Language, language, language**

For high school, the school's fit with the needs and interests of the student is also taken into consideration by both parents and students (arts, athletics, special needs support, etc.). In most cases, the student's preference for high school is chosen; when students are not allowed to go to their choice of school, many will transfer schools eventually. The majority of KSS students told us that they were involved in choosing their high school and are satisfied with the choice they made – the reasons they gave for their choice included learning in their language and culture, finding it easier to be educated in their community, feeling safe and supported, fear of going outside and being overwhelmed, family pride in the school, smaller class sizes and having a positive experience visiting the school.

PARENT PERCEPTION OF WHAT MAKES SCHOOLS SAFE AFFECTS THEIR CHOICES

In the parent survey, **94% of parents rated the ideal importance of having a Safe School Environment³ as 4 or 5/5, giving it the highest overall rating of any area of a school program.** The feeling that they get when they visit, stories they hear from other parents or from employees of schools, and their own past experiences all contribute to their perceptions. Parents' perception of what makes schools safe varies. For some it comes from having their child(ren) in the community, close to home. Others prefer the structure of outside schools and their approaches to creating safe school climates.

³ The definition given for "**Safe school environment**" was "the school ensures that students are able to feel safe at school, that they respond well to any problems that do occur".

The Choice Trade-off that Off-reserve Parents Make

The majority of parents who have chosen to send their children off-reserve for school feel that they made sacrifices in developing their child(ren)'s connection to their identity, community, culture, and language. In exchange, they perceive that their children have higher quality academics, in STEM subjects and French particularly, which better prepares them for post-secondary. They also perceive them to benefit in their social development from experiencing more diversity of people and experiences and having more pro-social interactions – there is less stigma for those who excel in French in particular. They perceive that their children with special needs and gifted learners are better accommodated in schools that have been specifically chosen for their capability in those areas.

What Would Be Needed for More Parents to Choose KSS with their Children for High School?

When asked about the current or future choice of high school for their children, we heard hesitation from some parents who have sent their children to KEC elementary schools:

I'd consider KSS but...

Maybe KSS if...

Parents expressed concern about the academic preparation of students for post-secondary – they need to be confident that students are as well prepared as they would be at other schools to succeed in CEGEP particularly. Some parents also have a perception that KSS continues to lack discipline and rigour in how the school is administered – that “students run the school”, they get away with too much, and that there is a lot of bullying and unhealthy interpersonal interaction. These parents tended to express that they want their children to be learning pro-social behaviors – they need reassurance that this is the case at KSS They would also like to see that the school is supporting students' development in their identity *and* cultivating openness to diverse cultures and worldviews.

EXPECTATIONS & CHOICE CONCLUSION: THE 'IDEAL' EDUCATION BALANCE

One of the questions that the consultation aimed to address was to determine how polarized the community views are on education priorities do people feel that the system has to prioritize either language and culture or academics? With only a few exceptions, parents and students expressed that an ideal education in the community would **balance** language and culture with strong academics. The community's education system should be able to provide a strong foundation overall, not sacrificing one for the other. These quotes express views that were frequently shared:

“There has to be a balance – no one subject should trump the others. Kids need everything for their future.” – Parent

“Why can't we have it all here?” – Multiple Parents

“You could come out of here with everything...but the students need to try harder and some teachers need to teach better.” - KSS Student

Recommendations for Parent Expectation & School Choice Findings:

- Overall, the school system leaders need to decide how to integrate the goals that parents have for students' education into the KEC strategic plan and in the school programs that you offer to students.
- Recommendations to address parent concerns expressed in the Expectations & Choice section in ways that would improve confidence in KEC schools are included in the next Findings section by education goal area and in the Overall Recommendations.

Findings Part II: Parent & Student Confidence in KEC Schools

This Findings section summarizes parents' and students' feedback on how the KEC schools are doing, based on their experiences, in the five goals areas described in Part I *and* in the fourteen areas that schools could ideally include in their programs and services. (The complete list of school program areas with parent and student ratings is included in the Appendix).

Recommendations are offered to support the schools in responding to parent and student feedback in each area.

A. Student Learning

This section describes the expectations parents have for student learning that affect their confidence in schools – overall parents would have confidence in a school that:

- ✓ provides a safe environment for learning
- ✓ ensures all students are learning to their individual potential, including students with special needs and gifted learners
- ✓ provides students with preparation required in all subjects to succeed in post-secondary education
- ✓ develops literacy and math skills early in their children's education

Is my child learning what they should be learning at school?

While some parents from the community are more focused on learning in academic subjects and others are more concerned about learning that develops identity and culture, everyone wants to see that children are learning. For that learning to happen, parents and students overall feedback indicated that **being at school needs to be a safe and positive experience.**

SAFETY AT SCHOOL: THE ROLE OF SCHOOL CLIMATE IN CREATING CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING

As described in the Parent Expectations & School Choice findings, for nearly all parents confidence in the school's ability to provide a safe school environment is highly important.

A negative perception of a school's ability to maintain a climate that is safe and structured enough for their child to learn may affect parents' choice of schools, causing them to rule out a school that would otherwise meet their expectations.

The Ontario Ministry of Education (2012) defines school climate as "the learning environment and relationships found within a school and school community" and explains that:

A positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, included, and accepted, and actively promote positive behaviours and interactions. Principles of equity and inclusive education are embedded in the learning environment to support a positive school climate and a culture of mutual respect. A positive school climate is a crucial component of the prevention of inappropriate behaviour.

In stories we were told of students who were moved from one school to another, the school's perceived ineffectiveness in responding to bullying or a generally negative perception of the school's ability to provide a safe environment for the student to learn in was one of two overall contributing factors. When parents do not perceive their children to be achieving their learning potential, they also lose confidence in schools. The education consultant on our team has extensive experience working with schools to address both of these areas and explains that they are intertwined and that ultimately when student learning needs are addressed respectfully by all staff, improved school climate follows.

Based on parent and student ratings for safety at school and their explanations in interviews, all three KEC schools need to focus on improving school climate to progress toward parents' and students' expectations for safety and learning at school.

	PARENTS' AVERAGE RATINGS				KSS Student Ratings	
	Ideal Importance	Karonhianonhnha	Kateri	KSS	Ideal Importance	KSS
Safe school environment*	4.76	3.51	2.98	3.62	4.44	3.36

Parents' average ideal importance rating for safe school environment was 4.86 in the interviews and 4.70 in the survey. The average parent ratings shown include 24 responses for Karonhianonhnha, 21 for Kateri and 14 for KSS. Perceptions and experiences shared by parents and students in the response to interview and survey questions are provided for each school.

KATERI

Several parents with students who do not attend Kateri stated that they had heard that Kateri has no anti-bullying policy or programs in place. In this case, the perception is not a reflection of what is currently happening in the school - a quick tour of the school makes it visibly clear from the messages and student posters throughout that they are making significant efforts to raise awareness, to prevent bullying, and to help students who experience bullying. The attention and responsiveness that the school has worked to develop recently need to be continued so that the kinds of stories we heard from years past stay in the past, when either a lack of response or ineffective responses from administration and teachers caused students to experience a lack of safety at school for an unacceptable length of time.

Teasing of students in the French immersion program was noted as an ongoing source of stress for some students and should particularly be focused on next year in encouraging more pro-social, respectful behavior.

KARONHIANONHNHA

While parents talked about students experiencing some lateral violence and bullying at Karonhianonhnha, there were fewer stories where dissatisfaction with the school's response led a parent to withdraw a child from the school. Many parents talked about behavior issues related to boredom or disengagement in the classroom, pointing to a need to focus on teaching approaches (addressed in the Student Learning section). This parent's observations reflect frustrations that were shared by many parents in interviews:

"In Kahnawake, bullying seems to be socially acceptable (nicknaming, teasing is the norm) – there's a certain amount of verbal, emotional abuse, subtle violence, that seems to be acceptable even in families. Teacher said, "kids need to know how to take a joke" - they don't understand what bullying is. The teasing shouldn't be acceptable."

KSS

As explained in the School Choice Findings, a negative perception of the school climate at KSS is a significant factor in many parents' explanations of why they have not sent or will not send their children to KSS. When we asked students about their experience of the school, the majority of students shared a very positive overall perception of their experience at KSS.

17 out of 25 students described the school as having a fairly positive climate, using words like: 'good', 'comfortable', 'normal'.

Students, all female, who expressed dissatisfaction with their experience overall attributed their low ratings to issues with:

- bullying and intimidation (especially if they seem 'different'), teasing and 'harsh' sense of humour, homophobia
- lack of or ineffective support when experiencing challenges, particularly in mental health
- lack of confidentiality

When asked about their school bullying policy, all of the students who participated individually said that they had seen the policy, understood it and had seen improvements since entering KSS.

Students' suggestions for improving safety at school/school climate included:

- For staff and students to acknowledge and act regarding bullying and intimidation. Send message that it's ok to be 'different'.
- Provide training, support and resources (tools) for staff, teachers and students on mental health and respect for diversity, specifically considering the needs of First Nations youth.
- Awareness and sensitivity of the need for trust/confidentiality
- Address teasing and 'harsh' sense of humour – how do you keep a sense of humour without hurting individuals

Recommendations for developing school climate for safety & learning in KEC Schools

- Reach out to community partners, particularly Kahnawake Shakotii'a'takehnhas Community Services (KSCS) to develop training sessions for teachers and staff to understand more about intergenerational trauma and lateral violence. Develop sustained partnerships to work with schools to implement strategies that encourage student well-being through pro-social behaviours and support for mental health when needed and appropriate. At KSS, ensure that this specifically includes sensitivity training on respect for diversity of gender and sexuality.
- Given that many of the unhealthy relationships between children started early in their school experience, the schools should develop specific prevention and pro-social development strategies for nursery and kindergarten, and again at grade 7. The elementary schools should work more closely with daycares and families to understand existing dynamics amongst children and the strategies that daycares have been using, expanding the focus of transition meetings to include all students and not just students with special needs.
- Communicate the anti-bullying policies and strategies in place so that parents and community members are aware of the prevention work that KEC schools are doing.
- Be rigorous in assessing the effectiveness of the approaches taken and consider introducing additional measures as needed to prevent bullying, particularly during unstructured time (recess and lunch hour).

ENSURING STUDENTS ARE LEARNING TO THEIR POTENTIAL

The consultation made it very clear that in developing schools, ensuring that all students are learning to their potential, including students with special needs and gifted learners is highly important to meeting parent expectations and to providing students with the foundation they need for their futures. Parents are naturally very concerned about their children's learning experiences.

The Canadian Language & Literacy Research Network (2017) states that:

Communication and literacy skills provide the foundation for effective social functioning and for academic, occupational/economic and life success. When children fail to develop good language, and reading skills there are a range of profound and enduring consequences, including academic failure and dropping out of school, poor psycho-social development, and reduced self-esteem and sense of well-being. All of these reduce the opportunities for lifelong success. <http://www.cllrnet.ca/research/>

	PARENTS' AVERAGE RATINGS				KSS Student Ratings	
	Ideal Importance	Karonhianonhnha	Kateri	KSS	Ideal Importance	KSS
Academic focus	4.65	3.46	3.54	3.52	4.11	3.28
Outdoor education	4.21	3.21	2.71	3.32	4.33	3.11
STEM	4.53	2.87	2.75	3.41	4.17	3.78

Many parents of students currently attending KEC schools expressed concerns about whether the schools are providing students with curriculum and teaching approaches needed for them to reach their potential – from developing literacy and math skills in the early elementary years to post-secondary preparation. When that learning is not evident, the parent may lose confidence in the teacher and in the school.

Parents expressed the most concern about literacy and math skills development in nursery to grade 2 at Karonhianonhnha:

“Felt like Karonhianonhnha didn’t prepare them for science/math at high school either. Was it the language? Parents didn’t realize that by choosing the language they would sacrifice other subjects. I think math and science should be (taught) in English.”

“I like the atmosphere at Karonhianonhnha. I find it very mellow and most students are respectful. It always feels nice driving up to the school, it has nice curb appeal and reception is always friendly. This is aside from my children learning their language. But my older children both had problems with math. They learned it in Mohawk and had trouble with the formulas in English. Eventually they got it but maybe some math could be taught in English also.” - Parent

While some parents stated that learning ‘who they are’ would provide an adequate foundation for them to be able to fill in any gaps in their education later in life, others found it unacceptable that the education level cannot at least meet the standards of outside schools while also providing this foundation. Some Kateri parents also expressed concern that the school is not providing a challenging enough learning environment early in elementary – those who have moved their children because of this observed that their children made rapid progress in their new schools.

KSS STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE

Feedback from parents and current and former KSS students quickly pointed out appreciation for any and all opportunities for engaging and, in particular, experiential learning opportunities that help students practice and realize value. They also clearly identified a need to improve the current processes and content of teaching and learning to achieve the post-secondary preparation needed in core subjects and languages and in the development of required competencies (writing and study skills, project management, communication, teamwork, etc.).

Students indicated that there are some great teachers who “*really teach*” with hands-on techniques and “*really try to help them learn*”. They perceive that the STEM subjects are better taught than some of the languages and other core subjects. Students also stated in numerous ways that they feel they should be evaluated on what they are actually learning, versus how many assignments they complete or exams they write.

Many mentioned that when teaching is not engaging students, they become disruptive, making it difficult for those who want to learn. Students specifically asked for help on this – that they want to learn, but the distractions caused by other students make it difficult.

KSS Students #1 Priority for Change:

- ✓ **Engaging teaching: providing them with learning that is an effective blend of experiential, contextual, and theoretical (when applicable) in every subject and consistent across subjects**
- ✓ **Assessment based on learning, not on output (with diverse assessment methods)**

Students said they want to be asked about school program choices that affect the nature and quality of education they receive. If asked, they want to be shown that you heard and they are willing to play an active role in improving the learning potential of all KSS students.

Several parents of KSS graduates expressed frustration with the lack of preparation for CEGEP, telling a story similar to this experience of a student who graduated since 2012:

“(Child) went to CEGEP and failed... did well at KSS but didn't know how to study. Graduated 201x into sciences - failed French and core subjects, not just science. ...didn't do the work.”

Some parents feel confident that current students are being prepared well enough for post-secondary, while others expressed concerns, particularly with the French level (see Language Learning). Several parents and students complained that the school assigns students to course levels with no transparency or consultation and that these decisions affect the students' post-secondary options.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS & GIFTED LEARNERS TO REACH THEIR POTENTIAL

During the interview phase, we spoke with parents of children with a wide variety of diagnosed developmental, learning and behavior challenges, including parents of children identified as gifted learners.

	PARENTS' AVERAGE RATINGS				KSS Student Ratings	
	Ideal Importance	Karonhianonhnha	Kateri	KSS	Ideal Importance	KSS
Gifted learning support	4.29	2.09	2.93	2.43	3.73	3.55
Special needs support	4.52	2.41	3.72	3.17	3.94	3.67

For gifted learners, feedback indicates support would need to improve significantly at all three schools for parents to have confidence in sending their children. Parents interviewed who had transferred their students to private schools would have preferred to keep them in community schools, particularly to develop their Kanien'kéha language skills. Several parents shared stories of their children misbehaving because they were bored. They see a strong need for schools to be able to provide the enrichment that their children need to learn.

Parent feedback regarding current performance of KEC Schools included:

A current parent of a Kateri student said that when (child) was in Kindergarten, the parent would have rated Kateri a negative (-1)/5 for "Special Needs Support" but for the family's current experience, several years later, she rated them a 4/5.

When asked what advice they would give to other parents considering schools for their children now, a parent who chose not to send their child to KEC elementary schools because of a negative perception of their capability in adapting to the needs of students with learning disabilities said:

"Try Kateri school – it's a rich curriculum...the special needs support is there now. Really consider Kateri."

Overall, parents from Kateri with children with special needs were very positive in their feedback on the current level of support and services provided. Karonhianonhnha on the other hand is perceived to be very lacking in the resources and training for staff/teachers to accommodate students with special needs.

Students at KSS only gave feedback on the support they have seen for students with visible needs – they perceived the school to be doing a good job overall of including and accommodating those students. They suggested intentionally sensitizing students on how to respond when students experience challenges and to promote inclusive behaviors overall.

Parents from KSS perceive that there is room for improvement in services for students, particularly those with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Generally, parents of children with special needs want to see that the school and teachers have a strong understanding of the particular needs of their children, and that the teachers are able to support them with approaches to learning that are effective. For example, parents of students diagnosed with ADHD talked about how strong communication with teachers enables them to share with each other strategies that work well for the student. When behaviors that are indicative of ADHD (like making impulsive decisions) are treated as misbehavior, for which students are punished in some way, this shows parents that the school does not have staff trained to recognize and work with the students developmentally and that the student will ultimately be unlikely to reach their learning potential.

Analysis & Recommendations for Planning and Programming for Students with Special Needs, including Students who are identified as Gifted Learners

Overall the consultation made it clear that the system needs to continue to build on the progress made over the past few years at Kateri, ensuring that students are able to access the support they need to achieve their learning potential at all three schools. The disruptive behaviors described by some KSS students may indicate that there are students whose learning and behavior needs were not assessed when they were younger.

- In the inclusive settings of the elementary and secondary schools, it is vital to ensure that the needs of all students are being met, so that students with special needs may attain their full learning potential. The following should be included in the planning and implementation:
 - As needed, provide assessments, in a timely fashion, with appropriate, concrete recommendations, so that the needs of the students are met.
 - Ensure that clearly articulated, practical IEPs and work plans are in place for students identified with special needs, including students requiring gifted learning support.
 - Train staff, both teachers and teaching assistants, “on-the-job” in approaches which recognize and respond to the emotional, psycho-social and academic needs of the students so that they can grow developmentally.

Parent suggestions for improving education and schools

Parents made many suggestions for how to improve education and schools in the areas discussed based on observations, experiences and/or reading they have done. The specific suggestions parents made often contradict each other. Three areas where we received feedback from parents that exemplify this include:

Homework: many parents think that homework should be minimal, particularly in early elementary school – that evenings should be time for family, social and extra-curricular activity without the stress that homework puts on parents and children. Other parents think that homework is important for students to achieve their learning potential. They feel more confident when their children are doing work at home because they think it helps them to advance and it enables parents to see what is being taught and to connect with their child’s learning during the day.

Inclusion of students with special needs: some parents are in favour of inclusion, others think that for the sake of the students with needs and the other students, streaming or some other means of separating children who need more support services to learn is preferable.

Promoting students in elementary school: some parents and community members expressed concern with the promotion of students who are not learning at grade level.

Analysis and overall strategies suggested to improve student learning in KEC schools:

In all of the areas where parents have made suggestions and in general for student learning goals, we recommend that the school system continuously examines the evidence-base for the approaches it chooses. Research on Indigenous and non-Indigenous education, learning theories and brain development are expanding and evolving every year. Educators need time to research and to consult with experts as needed and to communicate effectively the reasons for the approaches they collaboratively choose to implement to parents and the community.

In order to improve student learning in KEC schools, it is important to address the gaps in curriculum development in both the elementary and secondary programs. While there are measures presently underway to address the curriculum, e.g., the English Language Arts and Mathematics competencies and progressions of learning through the Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum (GVC) committees, etc., **there is an urgency to ensure that students currently in the system are being taught a solid core curriculum that is vertically planned from nursery (pre-kindergarten) through Secondary 5.**

Teacher knowledge of the subject areas being taught and classroom practices that focus on the learner are essential to student success. Approaches to teaching that ensure students are learning what is being taught should be the focus of classroom practice. Implementing evidence-based highly successful approaches is critical to ensuring that this happens (Hattie, 2009, 2012, 2016).

Building the capacity of the teaching staff to teach in a way that connects with the students and to create in students the capacity to learn how to learn will prepare them well for their post-secondary experiences. This includes **helping teachers to develop their skills in teaching in a more engaging, experiential, hands-on way** that takes into account how all students learn, e.g., project-based learning, outdoor learning, and learning ‘in the field’ linked to grade-level and curriculum goals.

Recommendations to achieve Student Learning goals:

- Follow the evidence-based strategies recommended in John Hattie’s work on Visible Learning, prioritizing those that ensure schools, teachers and staff are adapting to learners’ needs, including:
 - Professional Learning Communities to improve Collective Teacher Efficacy
 - Response to Intervention (RTI)
 - Formative teacher evaluation

- Implement specific approaches to meet the needs of learners with learning disabilities such as and Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), collaborating with community partners (KSCS, Family Wellness Center) to align approaches for children with FASD, ADHD, etc. Explore highly successful approaches such as Acceleration (Pepper Rollins 2014), that prevent delays in student learning.
- Ensure that support is in place to identify teachers' developmental needs and to provide 'job-embedded' coaching, training, mentoring and other support required.
- Select/develop curriculum resources & assessment tools as needed in core subjects and languages, aligning with post-secondary competencies needed for student success.
- Experiential/hands-on learning & Project-based learning (including outdoor learning and learning 'in the field' linked to curriculum)
- Ensure that parents and community members have accurate information on the approach to inclusion of students with special needs and gifted learners, the support/services provided and the professional development offered.
- Create a plan to provide enrichment in the program of students identified as gifted learners. As project-based learning and inquiry learning are explored in the system, this will give guidance in how to provide enrichment programming for students. Models of enrichment that can be explored include [ArtsSmarts](#), [the Maker movement](#), [Imagination Foundation](#) etc.
- Develop a parent and student consent process for KSS students' course selection.
- Follow-up on 2017 KSS graduates' confidence after they begin post-secondary: As students expressed appreciation for the opportunity to be heard in a meaningful manner, we recommend bringing the grade 11 group back after their first semester of post-secondary to see what their experience has been since leaving school. How do they now feel KSS prepared them? Has their opinion remained the same or changed?

B. Language learning

Parents prioritized learning second language(s) as one of the most important areas in an ideal educational program in nearly all interviews – the exceptions were a few cases where special needs were perceived to make second language learning too difficult. Given the importance of language learning in parents' goals for their children's education (see pages 6 & 7) and in student's own perception of what is important in an ideal education, the KEC schools' perceived and actual performance in delivering language learning that achieves the proficiency desired is an important area of system accountability.

“You can learn three languages – may not be proficient, but strong enough”.

“I want them to be Mohawk speakers...and to have French if needed to realize their dreams”.

Many parents expressed that their ideal school would be a “super school” in the community that provides a strong tri-lingual education. The importance of developing future Kanien’kéha speakers so that the language is not lost was emphasized by many parents.

“(I)Want kids to be tri-lingual... quality French – one philosophy that isn’t about having to compromise one language for another, one thing for another.” – Parent

What does tri-lingualism mean to parents and students? What levels of proficiency would be required to meet their expectations?

We were asked after our initial presentations of findings to provide some clarification on these questions. The response we offer is that the expectation varies greatly and even changes during the life of the child because the answer depends on what each child’s life goals become. If the child needs strong French for professional success in a field that requires certification of French proficiency in Quebec, that bar is high – while no parent said that they had any particular aspiration that their child be a doctor or an engineer, if that is the child’s choice, they want it to be possible. If the child wants to become a community leader, they want them to develop the highest Kanien’kéha proficiency possible while in school.

The description of tri-lingualism that best fits what we heard is:

- **Strong English reading and writing skills**
- **French proficiency to be able to study, work and/or function in French as needed**
- **The ability to speak Kanien’kéha comfortably with correct pronunciation**

*“Wanted (child) to learn French – because of options. If you are in the community and Mohawk speaker, still limited in opportunities. With higher education, French, will have more opportunities. Decided if (child) wants to learn Mohawk in future, as a parent (I) will fully support it. Feel French gives most access.” – **Off-reserve parent who chose a NFSB public elementary school before Kateri offered French Immersion***

“My son has just finished kindergarten at Kateri School and we love it for how welcoming and inclusive they are with parents and the family, the French immersion program and the quality staff. We are very happy there and feel lucky to have a school like this so close to home. I would only say maybe a bit more emphasis on Mohawk language. I would be interested in a French and Mohawk immersion program with much less emphasis on English as it will be spoken and taught at home (we read English books with him daily)”. – Parent

Parents generally expressed appreciation for the language learning program choices that the KEC elementary schools currently offer because they are able to choose a program based on their first and second language learning priorities.

Each of the KEC schools has different strengths and challenges based on parent and student ratings. Our reflection on the ideal importance ratings for English in the parent interview average and the student ratings average is that it is almost taken for granted that students will develop strong skills in their first language.

	PARENTS' AVERAGE RATINGS				KSS Student Ratings	
	Ideal Importance	Karonhianonhnha	Kateri	KSS	Ideal Importance	KSS
English language	4.52	2.81	3.85	3.60	4.17	3.78
French language	4.26	2.18	3.47	2.84	3.42	2.26
Kanien'kéha language	4.37	4.62	2.73	3.45		
Kanien'kehá:ka language and culture	4.46	4.26	3.00	3.86	4.59	4.06

In the interview phase parents and students rated language and culture together. We separated the ratings for the survey to get a better sense of the importance of the expectations for Kanien'kéha language proficiency.

Examples of parent responses regarding the need to improve language learning:

"(I) want strong core programs, but also stronger core Mohawk language (perceives that program has not improved since early 90s) ...you can learn three languages – may not be proficient, but strong enough. (I) think it's feasible – how to look at needs to be done."

– Kateri Parent

"The ideal is full proficiency in all three. (I) feel they are getting towards that – oldest is retaining Kanien'keha...would like more pressure to converse in Kanien'keha in the advanced class. They could be speaking more – not just learning from lists of words – too basic. They need to look at how they are learning and to reach the goal of being speakers of language." – Parent of students at Karonhianonhnha and KSS

In the parent interviews, some parents had questions about what it means to be in a language immersion program – about what is realistic to expect, how language acquisition happens, how literacy in a first language develops when learning a second, whether math should be taught in the first or second language, etc. Many parents talked about having to “teach” English at home or that they need to hire additional teaching support for children to become literate in their first language or to develop their English or French language skills adequately for high school. *Parents talked about how difficult it is for them to do this - even for parents who have the knowledge, skills and/or financial resources to support learning outside school, finding the time and energy is difficult.*

A significant number of parents told stories or expressed opinions that reflect a lack of consistency around understanding of the capacity needed for a student to participate in

immersion programs – particularly regarding the inclusion or exclusion of students based on learning or behavioral challenges

KSS STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

All but one of the students consulted at KSS said that learning the three languages is important. The students' ratings make their priorities clear, with Kanien'kéha ranking first.

Just as students were very clear in their feedback on their perception of the importance of learning languages - they were similarly clear on what needs improvement, specifying that more attention needs to be paid to Kanien'kéha and French, especially in terms of how the languages are being taught.

While twenty-four (out of 25) students spoke clearly of the importance of retaining the Kanien'kéha language and understood the role of the "younger generation" to do so, there were varying ideas of how much **time** should be spent learning - from mandatory, enriched classes to one student suggesting the language should be optional after Grade 9. **In each case, students asked for more effective and engaging ways of learning the language. Pronunciation is a struggle for many students and these students asked that more time be spent on this.**

When we inquired on their proficiency, even students who had attended Karonhianonhnha did not describe themselves as proficient Kanien'kéha speakers. Several students who had attended Karonhianonhnha responded that they think they actually began to lose proficiency when still in elementary school because of the way that the program is designed – they are not able to build on the language they have acquired effectively after grade 4.

"The (Kanien'kéha) language could be built upon more. I think it should be mandatory and more time. We have to get our sciences and math done, but I think that this school, as a survival school, we need more." – Student in focus group (8 students expressed agreement.)

"(Kanien'kéha) language is important to me but if it's to the point where it keeps you from getting a job or getting past college then it is a problem for those who can't learn other languages too well." - Student

With regards to **French** language learning, only two students stated that they felt confident in their French language skills and in both cases they attributed this to experience at outside schools or having lived elsewhere temporarily. Parents of post-secondary students and post-secondary students themselves strongly emphasized the importance of French in enabling students to succeed and strongly encourage KSS to improve their student results.

Suggestions for moving towards tri-lingualism from parents, students, and graduates with experience of schools:

For Kateri: increase the time spent learning Kanien'kéha (most perceived it needed double the amount of time); for French, regrouping learners for a subject that they may have a negative attitude toward amplifies behavior challenges – make it easier on the teachers and keep the students with their usual class.

For Karonhianonhnha: looking at the design of the language immersion program is the priority for achieving better outcomes in Kanien'kéha proficiency, English reading and writing, and math. If possible, they would also like to see French introduced earlier. Kanien'kéha should be used in physical education and involve outdoor learning as much as possible.

For KSS: Strengthen both Kanien'kéha and French programs – the levels of proficiency required to achieve post-secondary and vocational goals in French need to be examined and a plan put in place for students to have the French proficiency needed to achieve their goals after high school. For those who will not continue on an academic pathway, focusing on conversational French should be a priority. Try to encourage students by partnering with French-speaking Indigenous communities, doing activities in Montreal, and exposing them to community members who can tell their stories about why learning French has been helpful to them.

Analysis & Recommendations Regarding Language Learning:

Both the quality of language instruction and the quantity required to achieve proficiency goals need to be reflected on by the system to achieve students' and parent's language learning goals in Kanien'kéha and French. How much time, for how long? When is best?

- To align with the language proficiency goals expressed by parents and students, the consultation clearly indicates a need to review the approach to language immersion and core language learning at all schools. **We recommend meeting with experts in the field of immersion language learning to examine when to start (nursery/kindergarten) and when/how to introduce other languages so that literacy and numeracy goals are also achieved.** (Reference: Drs. Fred Genesee and Caroline Erdos). *We recommend that this meeting include education leaders involved in making program and implementation decisions – administrators, teachers and consultants who are decision makers and learning leaders from all three schools and the KEC and those educators already involved in the second language learning committee.*

Along with the review of the overall program structure for elementary and secondary:

- Plan for a continuation of intensive language learning into KSS of both Kanien'kéha and French.
- Determine the curriculum development needs and put a plan in place to accomplish that development as soon as possible.
- Look at the need to support teachers in developing proficiency as second language learners and in developing second language teaching practices that produce the best outcomes for students' development of proficiency including incorporating experiential ways of learning and practicing language at both elementary and secondary.
- Communicate with parents about expectations of language learning to improve confidence in the approach to language learning, addressing their questions and concerns.

C. Development of Identity, Community Connection & Culture

The majority of parents want to see their children’s connection to their identity, community and culture developed through their education experience, particularly during elementary school. Parents talked about how developing pride in who they are fosters resilience and gives them a foundation that will serve them well in life – reflecting this parent’s description:

“If we’re strong there (in identity and culture), we can take on everything”.

As with languages, the enrolment of students from the community in KEC elementary school is a strong indicator of the value that parents place on the development of students’ identity, community connections and culture as Kanien’kéha:ka. In the parent interviews, the majority of parents expressed that they want to see cultural teaching in schools. Some explained their feel that families could take more responsibility and schools could focus more on academics, a rationale that probably explains the percentage of parents who selected “Students have a strong sense of identity as Kanien’kehá:ka – they have a healthy attachment to their community and culture” in the parent survey (67.5%, see table on page 7).

	PARENTS' AVERAGE RATINGS				KSS Student Ratings	
	Ideal Importance	Karonhianonhnha	Kateri	KSS	Ideal Importance	KSS
Kanien’kehá:ka culture	4.49	4.46	3.49	4.19		
Kanien’kehá:ka language and culture	4.46	4.26	3.00	3.86	4.59	4.06

Kateri parents expressed the most need for improvement in both the Kanien’kéha language and culture education. The system’s performance overall on this outcome is best measured by the KSS students’ feedback on their experience.

KSS STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCE

Students often referred to KSS as being a place where they felt they belonged, with the majority expressing appreciation for being able to go to school in their community and being able to connect with their culture and language at school:

“Outside schools can be so stressful.”

“I fit in at KSS.”

“It has a family-like feel. KSS is like being in your community.”

“If you invest your time wisely in the school while you’re here, you won’t leave fluent in the language but you’ll leave with self-identity.”

All but one of the students consulted named the language and culture aspect of KSS as relating to the development of sense of identity and asked that the school pay more attention to this connection. Three students stated that they felt excluded often because they didn’t identify as ‘Kanien’kéha:ka enough’.

Recommendation for Development of Identity, Community Connection & Culture:

- **Continue the development underway of the Tsi Niionkwaroho:ten program** embedded in the curriculum including professional development and pilot projects on project-based learning (which partly answers the need for more hands-on, experiential, project-based learning in student learning as well).

D. Recognizing and Developing the Uniqueness of Each Student

What does it mean to parents to leverage their children’s individual strengths and interests to enable their learning and development?

When we designed this study, the importance of making connections with student’s personal interests was not a focus that we anticipated would come out as an important theme and in terms of performance, we do not have a quantitative rating how KEC schools are doing in this area. During the parent interviews, there were many examples of the positive effects of having students connect with interests through school and having their strengths, talents, and interests recognized at school.

“Some are going to excel in academics – not everyone does well with words/paper/books, some excel in the arts, in athletics...others...they can feel like failures in school. But a lot of children can shine...”

“Learning should be individualized...based on strengths, for example math – how does this child learn best – if interested in computer programming, use Lego Robotics, find ways to leverage their interest”

“Kids need stimulation...diversity to become passionate, inspired lifelong learners”.

“(We need to offer students) options...a wide range of visions...to know careers that exist”

These are just some of the ways that parents talked about needing to ensure that every child find ways to become engaged in learning, for teachers and students themselves to see what helps them to learn and develop. By nurturing student interests in school and in the community, students develop in ways that help them to connect with others and to develop meaningful lives in both work and recreation. This was particularly evident in the feedback from post-secondary students, whose strong interests in their chosen areas of study helped them to persist academically.

In terms of how this fits in education – connecting with students’ personal interests taps into the factor of intrinsic motivation. Once the basic needs of survival, connection and power are taken into account, students are motivated by freedom of choice and fun (Hume, 2011).

Motivation is often enhanced when instructors connect course material to students' personal interests. For example, a chemistry professor might link a lesson on chemical transformations of carbohydrates to students' interest in cooking. A history instructor might motivate interest in colonial history by showing how it helps to explain contemporary geopolitical conflicts or environmental problems. Carnegie Mellon University, Eberly Center

When students and parents told stories about the efforts individual teachers had made to recognize and connect with what makes individual students unique, they talked about the pride students felt when their characteristics (leadership qualities for example) and interests (from sports to arts and more) were recognized and how their self-esteem was positively impacted in lasting ways.

The development of opportunities to explore career pathways through newer options classes at KSS was specifically mentioned by parents as having enabled students to discover passions that they are continuing to study at CEGEP. The guidance counsellor at KSS' efforts to help students find post-secondary pathways that fit with their personal interests was also strongly affirmed.

Parents of off-reserve students spoke highly of the quantity and diversity of extra-curricular opportunities that their students have and the positive effects on their development. Many expressed a desire for more opportunities in the community:

“Off-reserve they have extra-curricular activities after school – sports clubs, activities. (Here) they leave and go home. Survival has the wrestling program, but that’s all. Now developing a music program but it wasn’t there until recently.” – Parent

	PARENTS' AVERAGE RATINGS				KSS Student Ratings	
	Ideal Importance	Karonhianonhnha	Kateri	KSS	Ideal Importance	KSS
Art	3.96	3.50	3.43	3.47	3.11	2.94
Athletics	3.81	3.73	3.34	4.00	4.39	4.22
Extra-curricular activities	3.73	3.19	2.86	3.30	4.06	3.41

Students requested that KSS/the KEC continue and expand **out of school** learning opportunities: McGill tutoring, summer school, Kanien'kéha learning, after school programs (more than sports-based include more arts, outdoor and other types of activities).

Parent recommendation: “Do a resource inventory, invite university students/successful community members to speak/mentor our kids from a young age”.

Analysis & Recommendations for recognizing and developing students' uniqueness:

Intentionally creating more extra-curricular opportunities for learning outside school time, improving the variety of programs and activities that students can easily and equitably access locally and at a distance with field trips, and developing other travel opportunities would help

to address this area as well.

The development of the Tsi Niionkwaroho:ten program should also help to ensure that students are getting more variety in the school program to connect with potential interests related to culture, outdoor learning, work being done by community organizations, etc.

- **Increase community and parental involvement in schools to develop students' awareness/understanding of what their opportunities are and how to achieve their goals in life.** Develop a process for inviting community organizations/members, parents and caregivers (volunteer, selected depending on need) to provide meaningful, connected learning experiences for students – ensure that participants are well prepared to lead an activity, share a skill, make job-related presentations and/or answer questions, woven into curriculum whenever possible.

E. Exposure to Diversity and Respect for Other Cultures

The importance of developing an appreciation for diverse cultures was expressed by parents who have chosen both on-reserve and off-reserve schools. Many of the parents whose children have attended off-reserve schools talked about how their children have benefitted from the exposure. For example:

My (child) is learning about other cultures, nationalities, and they take an interest in (child). They use (child's) Mohawk name. (Child is) accepted...(child's) identity is being supported.

Parents with children in on-reserve schools talked about wanting students to have more exposure to other Indigenous cultures particularly, as well as non-Indigenous cultures.

Unfortunately, when we recognized that this was a theme in the parent data, we had already completed the student consultation so we did not specifically ask them for their views in this area. In general though, their feedback clearly indicates that more tolerance for diversity within the community is needed.

Our perception is that efforts to expose students to other Indigenous People and non-Indigenous people will help them to recognize and strengthen their own identities, based on the experiences of the post-secondary students we interviewed. Those students found that interacting with students in other cultures caused them to want to be able to explain more about their nation, history, and culture, and to improve their Kanien'kéha language skills.

Recommendations for Exposure to Diversity and Respect for Other Cultures

Our recommendation in this area is that as educators you begin a dialogue on the need to expose students to other cultures. We recommend looking at a book like **Cultural Proficiency: A Manual for School (Lindsey, Robins & Terrell, 2009)** and looking for opportunities to integrate learning about diversity in the curriculum.

PARENTS' CONFIDENCE IN SCHOOLS OVERALL: WHAT MATTERS MOST

Parents need to trust the school and teachers to look after their child's learning and development needs. Relationships established with the school overall and with teachers each year takes work, but for parents it is critical.

This list captures what parents told us in response to questions about the things they like most or least that schools do and how they would like these areas responded to:

- **Communication, communication, communication** – proactive, clear, direct, positive feedback, listening non-judgmentally, openness to parent feedback - not dismissing, following up, and using multiple channels to communicate – finding ways to connect with parents. Direct communication about their child is highly valued – demonstrates that their child is understood as an individual and that educators are paying attention – hearing as much about when things go well as when there are problems.

"You can't help if you don't know what's going on" -- Parent

- **IEPs** are in place for special needs students and gifted learners and there is **evidence of them being followed** by teachers and staff.
- **Organization!** Especially around report cards and school calendars – events/activities that affect parents' lives and students' safety (ped/early dismissals days, bussing, etc.)
- **Rapid, effective responses to bullying** and other inter-personal conflicts between students ensuring parents perceive that their **child is safe and feels happy while at school to learn and play.**
- Show that school leaders, teachers and staff are learning and innovating – that **professional development is being applied.**

PARENT ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS

A very common refrain education consultants hear from schools is that parents aren't engaged. In the consultation we did hear from some parents who think that other parents need to be more engaged. More commonly though, we heard about what makes engaging in a relationship with the school difficult. The parents who participated want to support their children, but often don't know how.

	PARENTS' AVERAGE RATINGS				KSS Student Ratings	
	Ideal Importance	Karonhianonhnha	Kateri	KSS	Ideal Importance	KSS
Parent engagement support/services	4.28	2.90	3.09	3.16	3.94	3.18

Approaches like The Learning Partnership’s Welcome to Kindergarten™ program, which recently recognized Karonhianonhnha with an Award for Partnership Excellence provides a concrete, hands-on experience for parents to learn how to support their children.

KSS Students Feedback on Parent Engagement:

These quotes from students reflect ideas they shared on parent engagement in their school:

“The school makes the effort (to communicate with parents). Students don’t always do their part.”

“Here at KSS, I think that with inclusion from real support from the parents, students can get both academics and language – but they need to be inspired, to be helped. We need more parental engagement in education”

Students expressed that they themselves should take more responsibility to connect their parents with the school and their education. The school also needs to do its part in informing and involving parents and the community.

PARENT & STUDENT CONFIDENCE IN KEC SCHOOLS: CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The findings described in this section provide insight into how parents and students perceive KEC schools to be performing vis-à-vis parents’ education goals in five areas. We recommended strategies to help schools move toward alignment, particularly in the highest priority areas with the largest gaps – student learning and language learning. Improving outcomes in these areas requires team effort and time to plan and implement in way that ensure teachers and staff are engaged and feel supported. Many of the approaches we recommended are already being implemented – progress is being made and in time we have confidence that parents and students will see a measurable improvement. And as the KSS students said, students and parents have a role in seeing that their expectations are met too.

Overall Recommendations: Communicating & Collaborating

A significant amount of the feedback offered by parents, particularly those who do not send their children to KEC schools, reflected inaccurate information and misperceptions about what is offered by schools and how they are managed.

In general, our recommendation is to communicate the difference that your schools and teachers are already making in students' lives.

- **Continue to develop** your Public Relations & Communications function to improve public/parent perception of schools, changing the narrative re KSS in particular, although there is promotional work to do for all of the schools to improve perception aligned with reality. Develop a plan to promote the schools together and individually, including information about their collective and unique approaches, particularly their language learning program approaches and goals. Communicate about the school program expectations and services, particularly regarding special needs to address inconsistent impressions of the enrolment requirements at the elementary schools. Promote the guidance and other support offered to high school students in their transition to post-secondary, including KSS and KEC services.
- **Consider incorporating the use of Appreciative Inquiry and Storytelling**, as activities for KEC and School leaders to be able to tell share more success stories about schools, teachers/staff and students.
- Many KSS students expressed **pride in their school** and frustration that old reputations and stories are still stuck in the minds of many. **KSS Students would welcome more opportunities to help change the stigmas that linger.** Asking for their input on how to do this, working with the school staff, would be energizing and help build the desired momentum to lift the community's confidence in KSS education. They suggested that a clear message be sent to the community - "don't take the opinion of others, visit the schools directly".
- **Encourage direct communication from teachers/staff and administrators of schools** - the teachers and staff who reach out increase parent confidence in schools. Determine what the expectations are and how support can be provided to teachers so that they have the time and resources to make these direct contacts. Use technology to communicate directly and frequently with parents and with students to maximize their learning potential.
- Promote all support available to families who need childcare on ped days, early dismissal days and during the summer.

Cultivating Community Collaborations to Meet Student & Family Needs

To develop schools that meet the expectations and needs of parents and students, developing collaborative relationships is essential. An excellent example of the system's work in this area is the collaborative work done in the past on diabetes prevention which was mentioned by parents and students. They encourage ongoing with cafeteria service providers to align food services with health promoting lifestyles particularly and ongoing collaboration in general to support the health and wellbeing of students overall.

	PARENTS' AVERAGE RATINGS				KSS Student Ratings	
	Ideal Importance	Karonhianonhnha	Kateri	KSS	Ideal Importance	KSS
Health promotion	4.27	3.61	3.26	3.49	4.37	3.21

We encourage the education system to continue to align with the community's Collective impact planning as well as approaching your partners who share common goals to engage in dialogue and cooperative planning.

- Consider finding funding to support the addition of human resources needed to organize the collaborative planning and implementation efforts needed. Creating a community collaboration role will help in developing the specific collaborations already mentioned. Parents also expressed needs for more diverse extra-curricular activities, summer learning opportunities (particularly for families with 5 year olds), and learning opportunities for off-reserve students in their culture and language that you could explore solutions to with community partners.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION: THE NEED FOR COLLABORATION TO ADDRESS AN OVERALL COMMUNITY CONCERN

As explained in the Participation section, during the interview phase of the consultation, many parents told stories of students who were either not pursuing post-secondary education or not completing the programs they had chosen after high school, including students who graduated from KSS and off-reserve public and private schools. Through the interviews that we completed with students who were successfully pursuing their post-secondary pathways, those students' stories indicated that their development in all of the parent education goal areas had supported their success to date in pursuing their education and career development goals.

Ultimately 'the Study' found questions: Why are students not completing post-secondary education and what is needed to get more students and community members qualified?

To answer some of the questions the study raised, we reviewed some of the literature on post-secondary outcomes of Indigenous students in Quebec and worked with the KEC to develop a comparative analysis of the outcomes of the students from KSS and provincial (public and private) schools.

The challenges in post-secondary completion are not unique to Kahnawà:ke – in an analysis of intergenerational trends in Quebec’s post-secondary education Richards (2011) found that the most recent generation studied had lower graduation rates from CEGEP and University than the previous generation. In 2015 the Truth & Reconciliation Commission specifically called for action to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. According to Briscoe (2015), partnership approaches between communities, colleges, and universities could lead to finding better ways to support Indigenous students at the postsecondary level.

Overall our study findings aligned with Rodon, Lévesque and Kennedy Dalseg’s (2015) research that indicates both strong support by families and strong high school background are important for students pursuing post-secondary education.

Contributing factors to post-secondary success based on interview and survey responses from parents of post-secondary students and students themselves included:

- Academic preparation that prepares them well enough for their chosen course of study. In recent years, female students who attended private high schools are experiencing higher success rates in CEGEP and University, particularly in science programs.
- The program’s fit with students’ interests is important – students are more motivated to persist in difficult circumstances when they know the program is preparing them for work that they have a meaningful connection with.
- The type of program chosen seems to affect student outcomes, with students who select smaller, cohort-based programs experiencing more success.
- The post-secondary institution’s effectiveness in creating a climate that is welcoming and supportive for Indigenous students. CEGEPs and Universities are making more efforts in this area, with the Dawson Journeys program receiving favourable comments and Concordia and Carleton Universities being described generally as more supportive than other universities.
- Supportive relationships – students having people they trust and depend on in their day to day life. Those relationships may include parents, extended family, friends, peers and/or partners. Maintaining contact with former teachers and staff (guidance councillor specifically) was mentioned as helpful by former KSS students.
- A strong sense of identity and connection to their culture helped students to define themselves and to be able to respond to questions from other students.
- Living away from home requires maturity and autonomy and the ability to establish supportive relationships in the community they are living in.

In the parent survey, when asked what they would like to see the KEC develop overall for students and families, supporting the development of post-secondary education in the community was the most popular response. Many parents interviewed also talked about the

need for more community members to get the qualifications for professions in the community, particularly in the education and health & social services sectors. Some parents and students suggested that an optional grade 12 year at KSS could help to give students time needed to

<i>Other than things that are taught during class time (academics, languages), what would you like to see KEC schools improve on or develop more of:</i>	RESPONSE PERCENT	RESPONSE COUNT
Support the development of post-secondary education in the community	59.5%	44

explore post-secondary interests.

Analysis & Recommendation for Improving Post-Secondary Outcomes

The questions and issues that surfaced in the consultation need to be further explored in collaboration with the community organizations who also serve students in developing their post-secondary qualifications. Significant effort is already being put into improving outcomes by all of the organizations – we recommend the organizations reflect together on what developments are needed to provide students and community members with more post-secondary alternatives.

Concluding Reflections

We conducted this consultation for the KEC and KCSC to help the organizations integrate the voices of families in aligning school programs and services with the expectations that students and parents' have of education. It seems timely when "School systems across Canada are waking up to the profound need for Canadians to learn and integrate the wisdom and world views of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples" (Kaser & Halbert, 2017).

When community members took on the impressive task of developing an independent school system, they made it possible for future generations to have the choice to send their children to schools that develop their identity in their community, culture and language. This generation of parents has clearly voiced that they want schools to deliver both development of students through connection with their cultural identity and through providing strong knowledge and competency development in languages and core subjects, so that students can succeed in their chosen post-secondary academic and vocational pathways.

They want to see their children's unique strengths, talents and interests recognized to encourage them as learners and to lead them toward the lifelong learning and career options that will enable them to lead happy, healthy lives. By offering exposure to diverse people, cultures, and experiences, they want to see future generations develop respect for themselves and others, confidence that serves them well when they are within and outside the community.

There are areas where improvement is needed in the KEC schools – gaps that are understandable given decades of underfunding and the enormity of the task undertaken to develop an entire approach and curriculum for teaching and to train community members to teach and lead.

For the goals parents have for their children's education experience, there is significant work to be done to improve student learning. To ensure that all students are learning to their potential every year, making progress every day, in every subject, the system needs to continue its efforts in selecting and adapting curriculum and to supporting teacher and staff professional development with training that is applied with support from principals, consultants, and other professionals.

We conclude this report by humbly thanking every student and parent who spoke with us and the educators and leaders who worked with us. We are grateful for this opportunity and hope that this consultation is helpful as you continue developing education that will serve the lifelong learning needs of your community well.

"Hoping that with constant evaluation/education of people and our system that we end up with an education system that people from outside want to apply to and get into. I think this vision is achievable, and that they are going to be well towards it within five years with leadership and direction they have now." - Parent

APPENDIX: AREAS OF SCHOOL PROGRAM RATINGS CHART

Parents and students were asked to rate from 1 (low) to 5 (high):

Ideal importance: What is ideal for you? How important is it that a school address this area?

School Performance: How have schools that students have attended from nursery to high school performed?⁴

	PARENTS' AVERAGE RATINGS				KSS Student Ratings	
	Ideal Importance	Karonhianonhnha	Kateri	KSS	Ideal Importance	KSS
Academic focus	4.65	3.46	3.54	3.52	4.11	3.28
Art	3.96	3.50	3.43	3.47	3.11	2.94
Athletics	3.81	3.73	3.34	4.00	4.39	4.22
English language	4.52	2.81	3.85	3.60	4.17	3.78
Extra-curricular activities	3.73	3.19	2.86	3.30	4.06	3.41
French language	4.26	2.18	3.47	2.84	3.42	2.26
Gifted learning support	4.29	2.09	2.93	2.43	3.73	3.55
Health promotion	4.27	3.61	3.26	3.49	4.37	3.21
Kanien'kehá:ka culture	4.49	4.46	3.49	4.19		
Kanien'kéha language	4.37	4.62	2.73	3.45		
Kanien'kehá:ka language and culture	4.46	4.26	3.00	3.86	4.59	4.06
Outdoor education	4.21	3.21	2.71	3.32	4.33	3.11
Parent engagement support/services	4.28	2.90	3.09	3.16	3.94	3.18
Safe school environment*	4.76	3.51	2.98	3.62	4.44	3.36
STEM	4.53	2.87	2.75	3.41	4.17	3.78
Special needs support	4.52	2.41	3.72	3.17	3.94	3.67

The parents' average rating for 'Ideal Importance' includes 52 interviews responses and 83 survey responses, a total of 135 responses. For schools that students have actually attended, in the parent survey, the number of responses varied by area. The averages were calculated with the exact number of responses for each area. Responses by school:

Karonhianonhnha: 17 interview and 29 survey responses

Kateri: 9 interview and 40 interview responses

KSS: 11 interview and 22 survey responses

*Due to an error in the online survey, Safe school environment was missing from the list of areas to be rated for schools actually experienced during the first three weeks the survey was open in June. For safe school environment Karonhianonhnha's average includes 24 responses, Kateri 21 and KSS 14.

⁴ If a parent answering the survey rated a school that their survey responses clearly indicated their child(ren) had not attended, their responses for that school were not included in the ratings.

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