

Oak Park and River Forest High School

Results of Thoughtexchange Survey

July 14, 2020

INTRODUCTION

As the United States continues to deal with the Covid-19 global pandemic, schools are working feverishly to figure out what teaching and learning will look like for the coming school year. On June 23, the Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Department of Public Health released their joint guidance for resuming learning this fall in our state. School districts were given the latitude to develop plans for in-person, blended/remote, and remote instruction.

Approximately 85 Oak Park and River Forest High School teachers, administrators, and staff members have been working since May to determine whether we can feasibly provide any level of in-person instruction this fall. As our assessment and planning continued into June, it was becoming apparent that if we are truly to prioritize the health and safety of our students and staff, and by extension the entire community, that remote learning is the only safe option.

To determine whether this priority was in sync with the views of the broader school community, we invited the entire school community to participate in a [Thoughtexchange](#) survey. Thoughtexchange is a unique software tool that allowed us to gather input with greater breadth and depth than a typical survey.

Our Thoughtexchange, which was open from June 29 through July 6, 2020, posed a single open-ended question: *“What are some of the most important things we need to consider as we work toward a plan for starting school in the fall?”* Participants were asked to anonymously share their responses of up to 300 words, as well as review and rank at least 30 responses from the other participants on a five-star scale.

Until the survey closed, participants could revisit the survey as many times as they wanted to review and rank thoughts. It’s important to note that the Thoughtexchange algorithm shuffles the thoughts that each participant is given to rank, so that later thoughts have as much chance of being seen and ranked as earlier thoughts.

RESULTS

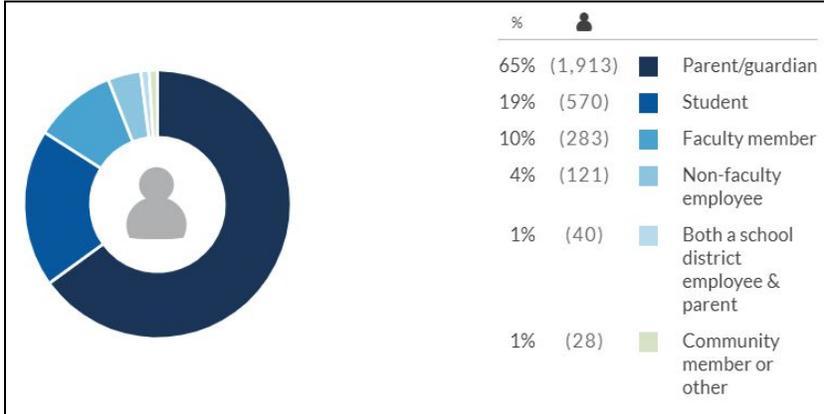
Demographics

Participation in the Thoughtexchange was robust, as evidenced by the following:

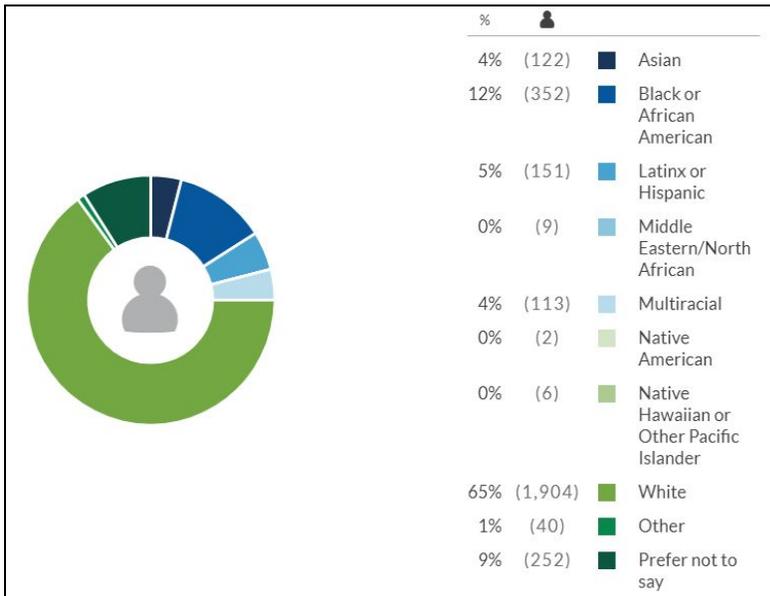
- Total number of participants: 3,194
- Participants who shared thoughts: 1,953
- Number of thoughts shared: 4,913
- Number of ratings given to thoughts: 155,211

We requested that participants answer five demographic questions, with the results as follows.

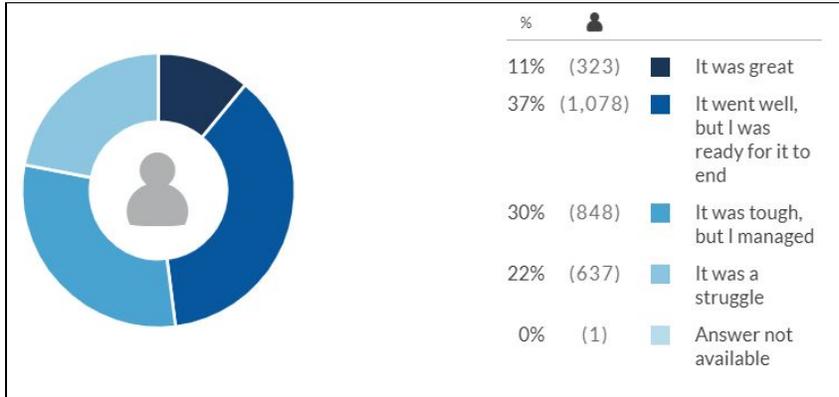
1. What best describes your role?



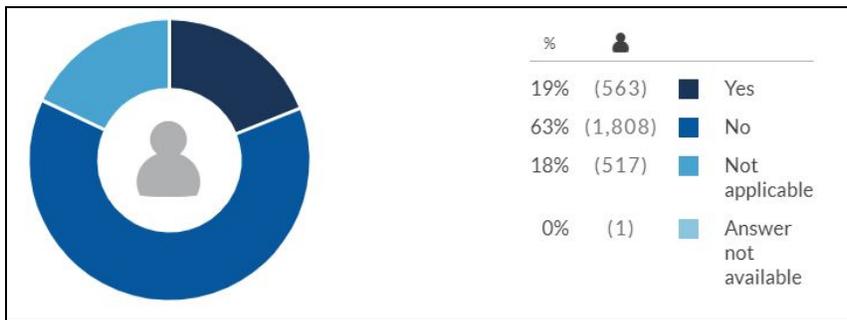
2. How do you self-identify?



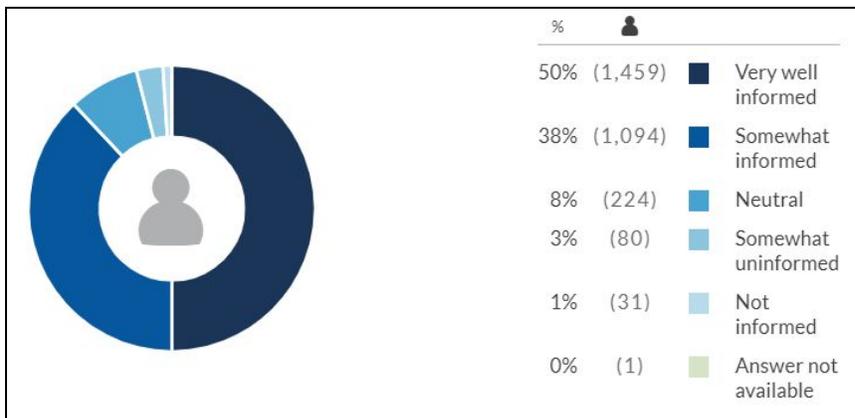
3. How well did things go with remote learning?



4. For students/parents, do you/does your child receive special education or 504 accommodation services?



5. How informed are you about our response to Covid-19?



Themes that emerged

One of the ways the Thoughtexchange sorts the data is by themes, based on the 155,211 ratings given to the total of 4,913 thoughts that were shared. The top themes that emerged were:

1. Prioritizing student engagement.
2. Ensuring the health and safety of students/staff/families.
3. Having more structured, personal interaction.
4. Providing more/better direct instruction (instead of simply posting assignments).

Top-ranked thoughts

Of the 4,913 total thoughts that were shared, you can see the top 50 by [clicking here](#). As noted previously, the Thoughtexchange algorithm shuffles the thoughts that each participant sees, so that later thoughts have as much chance of being ranked as earlier thoughts.

Critical difference

One of the Thoughtexchange features is that it assesses whether there are any significant areas of disagreement among respondents. The most substantial difference in opinion was on the subject of safety/remote instruction vs. low risk/as much in-person instruction as possible. Here's a look at the top-ranked responses for these two groups.

Side A - Focus on safety/remote instruction. 892 responses fell into this camp.

Top-ranked responses, in order:

1. **Safety of our students, families, and staff.** People's lives are at stake.
2. **We should stay home and do e-learning.** The safety of students and staff should come first.
3. **How is the school going to keep the children safe from the COVID 19?**
4. **The health and safety of our entire community: students, faculty, and families.** On NPR yesterday, a nurse said she wished she could show everyone the 26-year old with no comorbidities being intubated in the ICU. Covid is dangerous.
5. **How are you going to keep kids and staff safe.** Health is number one.
6. **Safety.** It is not worth getting back in the classroom if it is too much a health risk for students and faculty.
7. **I think maybe don't physically open up again until it's blown over and/or they have a vaccine, regardless of how difficult online learning can be.** Literally anyone can be carrying it and even if some students aren't as affected it can spread to those who are more at risk and cause serious harm.
8. **Continue online learning.** Safety.
9. **Safety of family members, teachers, and staff.** COVID 19 is highly communicable.
10. **Keeping kids and families safe.**

Side B - Covid-19 not a risk/implement as much in-person instruction as possible. 360 responses fell into this camp.

Top-ranked responses, in order:

- 1. OPRF must be open for in class instruction.** I am concerned that this disruption will have a negative affect on my child's education.
- 2. Open school in the fall as normal.** For the emotional and economic well being of our children and to stop destroying our economy.
- 3. Please return students to in-classroom learning!!!!** Lethality to people under 19 years is the same as the regular flu.
- 4. Although Covid-19 is a serious concern, the academic and social/emotional needs of our students can most effectively be addressed in school.** In person education far outweighs remote learning.
- 5. Students NEED to have the option to be in school FULL TIME.**
- 6. The elearning was horrendous and we pay so much in tax dollars to our schools. Other communities with less mo why did a much better job.** The state has given the okay for in person learning, and this is what should be done.
- 7. We NEED to have school in the fall. It's not like we will get corona. Everyone from op hung out everyday over quarantine and none of us have it.** It's my senior year and I need a football season or else I will be very sad.
- 8. Any parents/students worried about their kids getting the virus aren't thinking about the big picture.** We need to go to school, in person, as normal as possible. For mental health. And to actually LEARN something. People at risk should have accommodation.
- 9. Get the kids back in school.** The numbers don't lie. While "cases" are going up, deaths are not. Do the math. No reason to shut down the world.
- 10. That it is critical that children interface in person. The virus is of little risk to children.**

Based on these results, the support for safety/remote instruction outweighed support for low risk/as much in-person instruction as possible by about 2.5 to 1.

Thoughtexchange also assessed whether there were any strongly held thoughts in common between Group A and Group B and found that they **did** agree on the following: promoting student accountability, engaging students via synchronous learning, building connections between teachers and students, improving the rigor of any remote instruction, and properly training and supporting teachers.

IN CONCLUSION

Thank you to all who took so much time to participate in this Thoughtexchange. We find it to be a valuable tool for understanding the perspectives from a broad swath of our school community, including those who may not be comfortable sharing their thoughts via email or social media comments.

Regardless of the variations in opinion on how to resume classes, we are confident that we all share a common goal: to safely deliver the best education possible to our students during the global Covid-19 pandemic. This is one of the greatest challenges our school has ever faced, and we appreciate your input as we work to solve it together.