



Community of School Councils  
November 18, 2025

# **What We Heard**

# Introduction

Edmonton Catholic Schools develops and implements an educational strategic plan, known as our Division Plan for Continuous Growth, in a three-year cycle. We are currently in the third and final year of our [Division Plan for Continuous Growth 2023-2026](#).

The Board of Trustees is embarking on the journey of establishing the priorities to be used to develop the educational plan for the 2026-2029 cycle. A critical component of the establishment of those priorities is hearing the voice of the families in every school community. School Councils are the official voice of the families of our schools. To that end, the Board of Trustees of Edmonton Catholic Schools held a Community of School Councils (COSC) Meeting on November 18, 2025. An invitation was issued to all School Council Executives via the Principal to send two School Council representatives to the COSC alongside the Principal. Eighty-nine schools took part by voicing their opinions and provided feedback as part of the engagement.

Participants experienced a presentation in each of four areas of work that the Division will be focusing on over the next three years. The four areas were: Catholic Identity, Optimal Learning, Student Well-being, and Classroom Complexity. After each presentation, school representatives answered two questions with respect to the work:

- A- As a school community, how will this work enhance the school experience for all students?  
and
- B- As a parent, what is most important to you in this area of work?

It is worth noting that the presentations were designed to provide an executive level glimpse of the work that was being done with the intention of gathering a corresponding high-level insight into the most important elements of the work from a parental perspective. As such, the themes and values that were captured are correlated to the information that was presented and may present limitations. For example, the Classroom Complexity presentation focused on speech language pathology and English as an Additional Language, resulting in feedback that is largely reflective of language acquisition.

The themes will be used to help establish the priorities for the Division Plan for Continuous Growth 2026-2029.

## Executive Summary

**Catholic Identity:** School teams highlighted *Community of Belonging* and *Visible, Lived Faith* as the most prominent themes. Many schools are striving to nurture welcoming communities where every student feels accepted and valued, and to integrate faith deeply into daily practices (prayer, liturgy, symbols). Strengthening partnerships with local parishes and providing service and social justice opportunities were also frequently mentioned, ensuring faith is not just taught but acted upon. Parents echoed the importance of an inclusive, faith-centered environment: they want their children

in a school where Gospel values are visibly practiced and where each child “belongs,” is safe, and respected. Some parents, especially those who may not be active in church, also stressed *non-judgment*: that schools welcome all and allow children to explore faith at their own pace.

**Optimal Learning:** A common theme is establishing a shared framework and language across the Division for teaching and learning. School staffs believe having consistent, evidence-based practices in every classroom will enhance student experience by providing continuity and clarity as students progress. At the same time, there’s a strong push for Personalized Learning through UDL (Universal Design for Learning) and differentiation – tailoring instruction to meet students “where they are” so that every student can succeed. Respondents frequently mentioned incorporating hands-on, real-world learning to boost engagement and prepare students with practical skills. Continuous improvement through assessment, feedback, and data-informed instruction was another theme, albeit somewhat less prominent. Parents’ top priorities align with these: they value flexibility in teaching to fit their child’s learning style, ensuring their children are both challenged and supported. They also appreciate consistency (so that expectations and tools don’t wildly differ by teacher/year) and clear communication of progress. Overall, both educators and parents recognize that teachers need support and training to achieve these optimal conditions, though parents tended to focus more on outcomes for their child than on teacher professional development.

**Student Well-Being:** Across the board, respondents emphasized that mental health and well-being are foundational to the student experience. The most frequent theme was ensuring Accessible Mental Health Supports in schools – many suggested every school should have a counselor or Family School Liaison Worker (FSLW) available. Schools view themselves as a critical first point of contact for student mental health needs. Creating a culture where every student has a trusted adult and supportive relationships is another key idea: repeated stories noted that when students feel safe and “heard” by at least one adult, they are more likely to thrive. Specific well-being topics arose too – for example, some highlighted addressing sleep and screen-time habits as part of student wellness. Reducing stigma around mental health and encouraging students to ask for help was a strong theme from both staff and parents. Parents are particularly concerned that supports are readily available and easily accessible. They expressed gratitude for school-based mental health initiatives, noting it gives them “peace of mind” to know their child can get help at school. They also want schools to partner with families – keeping parents informed and even educating parents – to promote student well-being as a shared effort.

**Classroom Complexity:** This area generated many suggestions on how to support increasingly diverse and complex classrooms. A prevalent theme was bolstering Language Supports for English Language Learners (EAL) and students with communication needs. Many advocated for expanding EAL programming, speech/language services (TASL), and assistive communication (AAC) so that language barriers do not hinder any student. Another frequent theme was Early Screening & Intervention – identifying learning or developmental issues as early as possible (often in Kindergarten) so that timely help can be provided. Schools highly value having Specialized Staff & Resourcing (e.g. educational assistants, behavior specialists, psychologists) to address high needs; such supports not only help the students in need but also assist teachers and benefit the whole class. There was much discussion about Inclusive Education vs. Appropriate Placement: ensuring inclusion is meaningful and supported. Educators noted that simply placing all students together isn’t effective

without proper supports; some suggested thoughtful “streaming” or grouping can help each student feel successful. Parents echoed this in a nuanced way – they absolutely want *every* child supported but also don’t want the learning of others diluted. In fact, some parent feedback (especially in appendix comments) raised concerns about class sizes and the number of high-needs students per class, fearing that *without limits or more support, teachers can’t give average students enough attention*. Finally, Teacher Support & Professional Learning was acknowledged as critical: teachers need training and manageable workloads to handle complexity. Many responses called for more professional development and planning time for staff to collaborate on strategies for complex classrooms. Parents generally assume the Division will equip teachers; a few explicitly mentioned that overwhelmed teachers need more help, and that *“when staff are looked after, they will look after the kids.”*.

The information provided below is a synthetic Summary of “What We Heard” at the COSC.

## Section 1: Catholic Identity

### Question A (School Community Perspective): How will this work enhance the school experience for all students?

#### Themes and Frequency (Catholic Identity A)

Theme	Frequency (Mentions)
<b>Community of Belonging</b> – inclusive, welcoming school culture for every student as a child of God.	45
<b>Visible, Lived Faith</b> – integrating faith practices and symbols into daily school life.	30
<b>Parish Partnership &amp; Sacramental Life</b> – strengthening connections with local parish and participation in sacraments.	25
<b>Service &amp; Social Justice Formation</b> – educating students in service, charity, and social justice as part of faith.	20
<b>Diversity &amp; Inclusion within Catholicity</b> – embracing cultural diversity and inclusion within the Catholic faith community.	15

#### Key Ideas:

- **Community of Belonging:** “Belonging” was the most repeated concept. Schools believe a welcoming, inclusive community rooted in Christ’s love will enhance every student’s experience. Many described creating an environment where each student feels accepted, loved, and part of a family – regardless of background or faith practice. This includes fostering respect for all, building community through shared values and traditions, and ensuring no one is marginalized. The idea of *“knowing they are loved as Children of God”* was

emphasized, underscoring that a strong sense of belonging can help students thrive academically, socially, and spiritually.

- **Visible, Lived Faith:** Respondents stressed that Catholic identity should be tangibly present in daily school life. This means faith permeation in all aspects of the school day – frequent prayer (classroom and school-wide), visible religious symbols and spaces (crucifixes, prayer tables), regular Mass celebrations, and weaving Gospel values into all subjects. By *living the faith* openly, schools reinforce a shared identity and provide students with constant opportunities to practice and witness their faith, not just learn about it. This was seen as enhancing students' formation and moral development.
- **Parish Partnership & Sacramental Life:** Many principals noted that stronger ties between school and parish will enrich students' faith experience. Examples included inviting priests into the school, participating in parish Masses and sacrament preparation, and generally "bridging" the school-family-parish triad. Regular interaction with the parish community and clergy is expected to deepen students' understanding of the sacraments and make their faith more relevant. Schools see the need to further build this "*stronger connection with our local parish is needed*" were common) – indicating that better collaboration with churches is a key enhancement for the student experience in Catholic schools.
- **Service & Social Justice Formation:** A distinctive aspect of Catholic education highlighted was developing students as "*stewards of social justice*" and compassionate leaders. Schools plan to enhance student life by providing service opportunities (both within school and in the broader community) and embedding Catholic Social Teachings. The idea is that engaging in charity, service projects, and justice initiatives will help students live the Gospel message of helping others. Respondents believe this will not only benefit the community but also give students purpose and leadership experiences. Some even stated a desire to *prioritize social justice actions over "book learning"* to truly form students' character.
- **Diversity & Inclusion within Catholicity:** Many schools in the Division are culturally diverse, so a notable theme was uniting diverse races and cultures under the Catholic faith. Participants feel the focus on Catholic Identity can enhance students' experience by teaching that *we are all one in Christ*, thereby fostering inclusion of non-Catholic families. Initiatives include highlighting the universality of Catholic values (love, forgiveness) that resonate across cultures and explicitly teaching students to welcome and respect those of different backgrounds as part of living their faith. Essentially, schools see Catholic Identity work as a way to celebrate diversity *within* a faith community – ensuring every student, whatever their heritage or level of faith practice, feels equally valued and "at home" in the school.

#### **Examples:**

- *Community of Belonging:* "No judgment amongst peers increases a sense of belonging. All students move forward feeling important no matter what walk of life they come from."
- *Visible, Lived Faith:* "Faith-infused teaching in all subjects... ensuring that materials and symbols are present in the classrooms."
- *Parish Partnership:* "Stronger connection with local parish is needed; [through it] students will grow in knowledge of faith."
- *Service & Social Justice Formation:* "Prioritize actions related to faith 'Social Justice' over book learning."

- *Diversity & Inclusion:* "Brings kids of different races and cultures together under the umbrella of the Catholic faith – despite their differences they unite ... every child, regardless of background, feels included and valued."

## Question B (Parent Perspective): What is most important to you in this area of work?

### Themes and Frequency (Catholic Identity B)

Theme	Frequency (Mentions)
<b>Community of Belonging</b> – a welcoming, inclusive school where each child feels they belong.	28
<b>Visible, Lived Faith</b> – that faith is practiced daily and not just taught academically.	22
<b>Parish Partnership &amp; Sacramental Life</b> – connection to church and sacraments as part of school life.	10
<b>Service &amp; Values Education</b> – instilling Christian morals, charity, and character in students.	7
<b>Respect for Diversity</b> – ensuring non-Catholic or less observant families are accepted (no judgment).	5

### Key Ideas:

- **Community of Belonging:** Parents heavily emphasized the importance of their child feeling accepted, safe, and part of a community at school. Many parent responses echo the desire for *"family"* and *"community"* in the Catholic school context. They want no child to feel like an outsider. Several mentioned that when their child *"feels like they belong and are part of a community,"* everything else – learning, confidence – falls into place. This includes acceptance of those who may not attend church regularly: parents appreciate a school culture with no judgment for differing levels of religious practice. Overall, an inclusive, caring environment is the top priority for parents in Catholic Identity.
- **Visible, Lived Faith:** Parents want the school's Catholic character to be more than words on paper – it should be visible and tangible in daily life. As one parent group expressed, it's important that *"faith is lived, not just taught"* at school. They value things like daily prayer, religious celebrations, and staff modeling Christian values. This reassures parents that the faith formation of their children is being actively supported. Essentially, they are looking for a school environment where Gospel values are evident in how everyone is treated and how challenges are approached. A lived-faith community, in parents' view, helps reinforce at home the morals and beliefs they teach (or wish to see taught).

- **Parish Partnership & Sacramental Life:** While mentioned slightly less often than by staff, some parents did note the importance of connecting school and parish for their children. They appreciate when the school facilitates participation in Mass or sacramental prep during school time. For example, one parent group specifically highlighted having sacrament preparation in school (not only at church) as valuable, since it *"builds Catholic families from the bottom up"* and includes children who might otherwise struggle to attend church programs. Generally, parents see value in the school helping maintain a link to the Church, especially for busy families or children with accessibility challenges to attending parish events.
- **Service & Values Education:** Parents also care that a Catholic school helps shape their child's character and values. This came through as wanting the school to impart lessons in compassion, kindness, forgiveness, and service to others. They see moral development as a key part of Catholic Identity – for instance, learning to "be kind, ethical members of society" rooted in Gospel values. Some parents explicitly mentioned social justice and charity as important, hoping the school provides opportunities for their children to practice these in age-appropriate ways (food drives, service clubs, etc.). In short, beyond academics, parents value the *"good person"* aspect of Catholic education: that their child grows in empathy, character, and a service-oriented mindset.
- **Respect for Diversity:** A number of parent comments underscored the need for inclusivity within the Catholic school. Parents want assurance that if their family or others are not Catholic or not devout, they will still be welcomed. Phrases like *"a way in for every child"* and ensuring *"no judgement when students do not attend church"* were expressed. This reflects that Catholic schools serve diverse families, and parents value an environment that is true to its faith while welcoming everyone. One parent group described teaching children to welcome those of different religions into the community, because *"we are all God's people first"*. This theme, although not the top frequency, is significant – it's about the school living out Catholic values of universal love and hospitality, which is very important to parents.

#### **Examples:**

- *Belonging:* "When my child feels like they belong and are part of a community... all students are accepted."
- *Lived Faith:* "I want Catholic teachings and Gospel values to be visible in the way students are treated and the way the school responds to challenges. It's important my child feels safe, included, and valued."
- *Parish Connection:* "It's appreciated that our parish priest visits to lead Mass and celebrations – it connects the families to the church, especially for students who have challenges attending outside school."
- *Values and Service:* "Focus on charity, service learning and love of neighbor... matters most to me so my child learns to be a kind, caring member of society."
- *Respect for Diversity:* "Teaching our children to welcome others into our community even though they may have different religions... we are all God's people first and we welcome everyone."

## Section 2: Optimal Learning

### Question A (School Community Perspective): How will this work enhance the school experience for all students?

#### Themes and Frequency (Optimal Learning A)

Theme	Frequency (Mentions)
<b>Consistent Instruction &amp; Shared Language</b> – common frameworks and language for teaching across classrooms/schools.	35
<b>Personalized Learning &amp; UDL</b> – meeting each student's needs through differentiation and Universal Design for Learning.	40
<b>Real-World Engagement &amp; Agency</b> – hands-on, relevant learning experiences that increase student engagement and skills.	25
<b>Assessment, Feedback &amp; Data Use</b> – using data and formative assessment to guide teaching and student progress.	15
<b>Teacher Capacity &amp; Collaboration</b> – building teacher skills and collaboration to improve learning for all.	20

#### Key Ideas:

- **Consistent Instruction & Shared Language:** A strong theme was the desire for consistency in teaching practices across the school and even division. Staff believe having a *"shared language and common approach"* to learning will benefit students. This means all teachers using aligned methods, terminology, and expectations, so that students experience continuity year to year. Many noted that a clear, common framework (often referencing the Division's optimal learning framework) will give every student an equal opportunity to succeed and help teachers work toward common goals. Essentially, by standardizing what good teaching looks like (while still allowing flexibility), schools can ensure no student "falls through the cracks" due to inconsistencies. This extended to things like consistent use of educational technology platforms and instructional routines, which staff feel will enhance clarity and reduce student confusion.
- **Personalized Learning & UDL:** The most frequently mentioned idea was adapting to diverse learning needs. Educators overwhelmingly support implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and other differentiation strategies so that *"every student is met where they are"* and can reach their full potential. They want to create flexible learning experiences – e.g. using multiple modalities, pacing, or supports – to include all learners (struggling, advanced, and everyone in between) in the classroom. Staff believe this focus will increase student success and engagement, as instruction will be tailored rather than one-size-fits-all. Many explicitly said *"all students can succeed"* with the right supports and emphasized giving teachers the tools to vary their instruction accordingly.

- **Real-World Engagement & Agency:** Optimal learning plans include making education more engaging and relevant. Respondents intend to enhance student experience through hands-on learning, collaboration, and real-world connections. For example, incorporating project-based learning, practical examples, or student choice in topics – methods that give students a sense of agency and tie learning to life outside school. The rationale is that when learning is meaningful, students become more motivated and active participants. Phrases like *“preparing them for the real world”* and *“students being agents of their learning”* were common. This theme suggests schools believe engagement and future-readiness go hand in hand: by simulating real-world scenarios and fostering critical thinking, students will be better equipped for life beyond school, which in turn elevates their school experience now.
- **Assessment, Feedback & Data Use:** Several respondents noted that systematically using assessment and data will help enhance learning for all. This includes things like common assessments, progress tracking, and timely feedback to students. One principal mentioned *“analyzing data [and] curating targeted instruction”* as a way to ensure each child progresses. Others talked about measuring outcomes to ensure the shared strategies are effective. While not as dominant as other themes, the idea here is that optimal learning relies on knowing where each student is (through assessment) and then responding – whether re-teaching, providing extra challenges, or adjusting methods. Feedback loops for students were also implied: students benefit when they understand their own growth. In short, data-informed teaching is seen as a support to personalization – enhancing the experience by *continually tuning* the instruction to student needs.
- **Teacher Capacity & Collaboration:** School teams recognized that achieving optimal learning conditions depends on investing in teachers. Many comments referred to providing training, support, and collaborative time for teachers to learn and apply new strategies. Professional development on UDL, time for teachers to co-plan and share best practices, and coaching from specialists are all part of this vision. Respondents noted that *“the development of all staff”* in understanding optimal learning is essential. By improving teacher skills and teamwork, instruction quality rises for every student. Also, some mentioned that specialists (like instructional coaches or learning coaches) working *“shoulder to shoulder”* with teachers in classrooms supports teacher growth and thus student learning. In summary, empowering teachers through collaboration and learning opportunities is viewed as a crucial enabler of all the other improvements (consistency, UDL, etc.).

#### **Examples:**

- *Consistent Instruction:* “Each child given the opportunity to experience excellent teaching and optimal learning is key; common shared language among all educators... creates equality across all schools.”
- *Personalized Learning:* “Ensures that all students receive instruction that meets them where they are and supports them in reaching their full potential... supports differentiated learning so that every student can succeed.”
- *Real-World Engagement:* “This will improve student engagement by incorporating hands-on learning experiences... preparing them for their future in the real world.”
- *Assessment & Feedback:* “How to measure it to ensure shared language? Use the competencies to mature their capabilities as a school community.” (i.e. establishing ways to

measure and track progress across skills). Also: "Ensuring unity in methodology across the Division – assessment and providing feedback to both students and parents."

- *Teacher Capacity*: "Ensuring that teachers have the time and training to be prepared to support students."; "Specialized supports in our school also support the professional development of our staff by working shoulder to shoulder in planning... being a valuable hands-on support in the classroom."

## **Question B (Parent Perspective): What is most important to you in this area of work?**

### **Themes and Frequency (Optimal Learning B)**

Theme	Frequency (Mentions)
<b>Personalized Learning &amp; UDL</b> – teaching that adapts to individual student needs and learning styles.	28
<b>Real-World Engagement &amp; Success</b> – ensuring learning is relevant, practical, and prepares students for the future.	18
<b>Consistent Instruction &amp; Expectations</b> – having continuity in teaching methods, tools, and expectations across grades/teachers.	15
<b>Communication &amp; Feedback</b> – clear communication of student progress and feedback to students/parents.	8
<b>Teacher Support</b> – (Implied) that teachers are well-supported/trained to deliver quality education.	3

### **Key Ideas:**

- **Personalized Learning & UDL:** Parents place high importance on approaches that recognize their child as an individual. A common sentiment was that *every child learns differently*, so the school should provide flexible, personalized learning so that each can succeed. Parents want to see teachers differentiating – whether through varied instruction methods, pacing, or extra help – to match their child's unique learning style. For example, one parent group said it's important to *"allow my child to learn in the way they need for success"*. This indicates strong support for UDL-like practices from the parent side. Essentially, parents are looking for assurance that the push for optimal learning means no one is left behind or held back, because teaching will be tailored appropriately. They appreciate it when schools offer things like extra challenges for advanced learners, hands-on options for kinesthetic learners, or more visuals/repetition for those who need it.
- **Real-World Engagement & Success:** Many parents tied "optimal learning" to the idea that school should prepare students for life beyond school. They value initiatives that give students practical skills, independence, and real-world exposure. Some explicitly mentioned wanting their children to be ready for the "real world" and future success as a key outcome. Engaging, interest-based learning experiences are seen as important – if a child is excited about what they're learning, they will do better. For instance, parents liked to hear that

curriculum includes real-life lessons and hands-on projects, not just rote learning. They mentioned end goals like critical thinking, collaboration, and having a plan for after graduation as priorities. In short, parents want assurance that improvements in learning will translate to their child being well-equipped for the future – academically, socially, and in practical know-how.

- **Consistent Instruction & Expectations:** Some parents voiced concern about variability in teaching quality and methods. Therefore, a theme for them is consistency across teachers and grades. They find it important that the school (and division) define a clear approach so that their child isn't subject to a "luck of the draw" each year. For example, one parent group pointed out the need for consistent use of certain learning platforms or strategies year-to-year so that students "*know expectations*" without relearning systems. Overall, parents support the idea of a common framework (which aligns with staff's shared language theme) because it promises a more even and reliable educational experience for their child.
- **Communication & Feedback:** While not the largest theme, a number of parents stressed the importance of communication about their child's learning. They want regular updates and transparency so they can support at home. References were made to teachers "relaying student progress" and having consistent methods (like online platforms) to inform parents. Parents value knowing not just grades but how their child learns, where they struggle, and how they can help. In the context of optimal learning, this means that as new strategies are implemented, parents want to be in the loop. Good communication and feedback ensure that the learning partnership between school and home is strong. For instance, a parent in one school mentioned "*more communication about what and how students are learning so parents can support*" as a key point. This theme underscores that optimal learning isn't just about what happens in class, but also about engaging parents as partners through clear communication.
- **Teacher Support:** Although parents didn't often explicitly talk about teacher training, it's implicitly important to them that teachers be competent and supported. A few comments indicated awareness that if teachers are overwhelmed, it can impact students. For example, one parent group noted, "*if the staff is looked after, then they will look after the kids... staff need to be cared for... to care for students.*". Additionally, concerns about class sizes and resources (covered more under Classroom Complexity) show that parents know teachers' working conditions affect learning quality. Therefore, it's important to parents that the Division provide teachers what they need so that optimal learning goals can actually be achieved. They trust schools to handle this, but it surfaces in comments about ensuring the model is not "too much for teachers to aspire to" and that it's achievable in real classrooms.

#### **Examples:**

- *Personalized Learning:* "Allowing my child to learn in the way they need to for success – doing their best to set them on their journey."
- *Real-World Preparation:* "Have a variety of learning opportunities... I want students to be successful after school in the real world – have an end goal, preparing them for their future."
- *Consistency:* "Consistency between all teachers using a platform (like Google Classroom) so students know expectations year by year."

- *Communication:* "Communication from teachers to relay student progress." (Parent highlighting the need to know how their child is doing); "More time with print than online; more communication about what and how students are learning so parents can support what teachers are doing."
- *Teacher Support (parent view):* "If the staff are looked after, then they will look after the kids – staff need to be cared for by the Division so that they are emotionally, spiritually and physically fit enough to care for the students."

## Section 3: Student Well-Being

### Question A (School Community Perspective): How will this work enhance the school experience for all students?

#### Themes and Frequency (Student Well-Being A)

Theme	Frequency (Mentions)
<b>Accessible Mental Health Supports</b> – ensuring students have access to counselors, FSLW, therapists and well-being resources when needed.	50
<b>Safe Relationships &amp; Belonging</b> – building trusting relationships and a safe, caring school climate for all students.	30
<b>Healthy Habits (Sleep &amp; Screens)</b> – promoting healthy sleep routines and managing screen time/technology use for better well-being.	10
<b>Stigma Reduction &amp; Help-Seeking</b> – normalizing conversations around mental health so students feel comfortable seeking help.	20
<b>Family &amp; Community Partnerships</b> – involving parents and external agencies in supporting student well-being.	15

#### Key Ideas:

- **Accessible Mental Health Supports:** Nearly every school indicated that expanding or ensuring on-site mental health supports is a top way to enhance student experience. Many noted that school is often where issues are first noticed and can be addressed. Common ideas included having a counselor, FSLW (Family School Liaison Worker), or mental health therapist available to students as needed. Schools without such personnel expressed that getting equitable access (e.g., each school having dedicated support staff) would be transformative. The underlying belief is that when students can easily get help with mental or emotional challenges, they are more ready to learn and participate. Also mentioned were wellness programs, mental health clubs or "champions," and proactively teaching coping skills. In sum, the presence of readily accessible mental health resources at school is seen as critical to student well-being.

- **Safe Relationships & Belonging:** Educators highlighted creating a school environment where every student has at least one trusted adult and feels safe. They shared anecdotes and principles that “*relationship is everything*” – students learn and grow better when they know adults care about them. Schools plan to enhance well-being by training staff in relationship-building, implementing mentorship or “safe adult” programs, and fostering peer support networks. The concept of “community of belonging” appears here too: making sure each student is seen, heard, and valued (especially those who might be left out). A concrete example was establishing student wellness teams or clubs that allow peer-to-peer support and voice. Essentially, focusing on connections – student-to-adult and student-to-student – is viewed as fundamental to well-being. A student who feels supported and “has a person to go to” is far more likely to succeed.
- **Healthy Habits (Sleep & Screens):** A notable insight from some schools is concern about students’ physical well-being habits, particularly sleep and technology use. It was mentioned that “*sleep deprivation is an epidemic*” among students and that gaming/screen addictions affect readiness to learn. As part of well-being work, schools intend to educate students (and families) on healthy sleep routines and balancing screen time. Some said this focus was missing and should be included in the plan. Additionally, wellness initiatives like fitness activities or nutrition (though “sleep” was the most explicit common thread) are part of enhancing well-being. The idea is that improving these habits will lead to happier, more focused students. One school described using programs like APPLE Schools to emphasize balanced living – physical, mental, nutritional health. While not every school talked about this, those that did felt strongly that teaching healthy lifestyle habits is important for student success and should be part of the 3-year focus.
- **Stigma Reduction & Help-Seeking:** Many respondents stressed the need to create a culture where students feel comfortable seeking help for mental or emotional problems. This involves actively reducing the stigma around mental health. Strategies mentioned include open discussions, wellness days, student-led mental health advocacy (clubs or “champions”), and incorporating social-emotional learning so that talking about feelings is normal. An enhanced school experience would mean students don’t suffer in silence – they know it’s okay to not be okay, and they know how and whom to ask for help. Success looks like students recognizing when they need support (self-awareness) and actually reaching out sooner. Schools see value in peer education too (e.g., older students leading by example to normalize using supports). Ultimately, this theme is about breaking down barriers to accessing the very supports schools want to offer. If stigma is reduced, those accessible supports will actually get used, which can dramatically improve student outcomes and well-being.
- **Family & Community Partnerships:** The well-being of students doesn’t exist in a vacuum – engagement with families and outside services is key. Schools plan to involve parents and community resources more in their well-being efforts. This includes educating parents (e.g., information nights on mental health topics), communicating about available supports, and teaming up with community agencies (like Alberta Health Services, local counseling services, etc.). A few responses mentioned the importance of home-school collaboration: for instance, connecting families with aid (food hampers, clothing) or ensuring consistent messaging between school and home on wellness. By strengthening these partnerships, schools can extend support beyond the school walls and also respect cultural contexts (one example was

integrating Indigenous perspectives on spirituality and wellness in a school with that community, which involved community voice). In sum, working closely with families and community professionals is seen as a way to ensure students get 360-degree support, which enhances their overall school experience and well-being.

**Examples:**

- *Mental Health Supports*: "School is the place that so many students access their first mental health support... Access for each school to a trained professional in counselling (FSLW, MHT, Counsellor etc.)."
- *Safe Relationships*: "Every child needs a person they feel comfortable approaching with a problem in the school."; "The kids are comfortable to find a safe adult and there is no fear to talk to an administrator... Staff and students feel like they belong."
- *Healthy Habits*: "Sleep deprivation is an epidemic with our students; I think gaming and screen addiction should have been looked at as well."
- *Stigma Reduction*: "Discussing mental health topics without stigma; providing emotionally safe spaces... feeling comfortable asking for help."
- *Family Partnerships*: "Parental involvement, collaboration, and community – partnership with families and FSLW. Encourage parent ownership and partnership for child's well-being."; "We need roles like FSLWs, counselors to work together with parents and families to ensure the children are safe."

**Question B (Parent Perspective): What is most important to you in this area of work?**

**Themes and Frequency (Student Well-Being B)**

Theme	Frequency (Mentions)
<b>Accessible Mental Health Supports</b> – having counselors, FSLW, etc., readily available for students in need.	30
<b>Safe Relationships &amp; Belonging</b> – children having trusted adults and feeling safe/accepted at school.	20
<b>Healthy Habits &amp; Balance</b> – focus on students' healthy routines (sleep, physical activity) and managing stress/tech.	8
<b>Stigma Reduction &amp; Help-Seeking</b> – environment where students aren't afraid or embarrassed to seek help.	15
<b>Family &amp; Community Involvement</b> – parents and community working with schools on student well-being.	5

## Key Ideas:

- **Accessible Mental Health Supports:** Parents overwhelmingly want to know that if their child struggles, help is available at school. It is “most important” to many that there are competent professionals (counselors, psychologists, FSLWs) on-site or on-call that their children can access easily. The presence of these supports provides parents with peace of mind. For instance, parents noted that *having support at school helps overcome stigma and barriers* – they see it as essential because they might not seek help externally. In general, parents appreciate initiatives like adding counseling services, wellness programs, or any resource that ensures their child’s mental health needs will be met promptly and effectively. They often phrased it as wanting their kids to be “supported with whatever they need in the moment” as issues arise. This theme is the top priority for parents: that the school division is fully committed to student mental health and has concrete supports in place.
- **Safe Relationships & Belonging:** Just like staff, parents feel strongly that their children should be known and cared for by adults at school. They want a school climate where their child feels comfortable confiding in teachers or staff if something is wrong. In parental terms, they might say “every child needs someone they trust at school.” Indeed, that exact quote comes from a parent group: *“Every child needs a person they feel comfortable approaching... in the school”*. Parents also mention the importance of general school safety (emotional safety). One parent group said, *“School is a safe place for students to ask for help”* – indicating that knowing their child is in a supportive environment is extremely important to them. Essentially, parents’ foremost interest is that their children are happy and secure at school, which they believe is a prerequisite for any other success.
- **Healthy Habits & Balance:** Some parents raised concerns about their children’s wellness habits and want the school to reinforce positive ones. For example, a parent noted, *“Students will learn how important sleep is and develop healthy sleep routines; better sleep will produce happier children”*. This shows parents do care about issues like sleep, exercise, nutrition, and screen time as part of well-being. While not all parents mentioned this, those who did often linked it to overall happiness and readiness to learn. They appreciate when schools talk about balance – such as teaching kids about moderating device use, or providing physical activity opportunities. To these parents, an optimal well-being program isn’t just counseling, but also preventative education on healthy lifestyle. They see the school as an ally in combating things like excessive gaming or poor sleep that they struggle with at home. Therefore, some parents feel it’s important that schools promote messages of healthy living and perhaps incorporate routines or curriculum around it.
- **Stigma Reduction & Help-Seeking:** Parents also value a school culture that encourages open dialogue about mental health. They want their children to feel it’s normal to talk about feelings and to reach out for help. In some cases, parents explicitly mention the word “stigma” – e.g., *“Decreasing the stigma around mental health... is crucial for students to feel comfortable to discuss [issues]”*. This priority might come from personal experiences; for instance, an immigrant parent group noted stigma in their community and was grateful the school addresses it so that their kids will use the support available. Parents know that even if services exist, they’re useless if kids are too ashamed or afraid to use them. So, they deeply appreciate efforts by the school to normalize mental wellness activities (like wellness days, posters, or just how teachers talk about stress). A parent summarizing their wish said: *“I want*

*my child to know they're not alone and it's okay to ask for help when needed".* This sentiment underscores why stigma-free culture is a parental priority.

- **Family & Community Involvement:** A few parents touched on the idea of being involved and informed in their child's well-being journey. They find it important when schools include parents – through communication about issues, offering resources or training to parents, or partnering with community services that families can also access. For example, one parent group's comment praised that the Division sees mental health as a priority and indicated they, as parents, are taking steps at home too. They value being seen as partners: one suggestion was having parent engagement evenings on topics like technology's impact on mental health (which some schools are doing). Although this theme wasn't as dominant in raw counts, it matters: parents want to be empowered and included. When the school provides information or workshops, it helps parents reinforce well-being at home. Additionally, community partnerships (like referrals to outside counseling or programs for families) were appreciated – parents know schools can't do it alone and welcome connections to broader support networks.

#### **Examples:**

- *Mental Health Supports:* "Having this support at school is essential. The resources are there – counselors, mental health therapists, social worker... the Catholic School Division's commitment gives me peace of mind."
- *Safe Environment:* "Every child knows they are not alone and that they have someone who cares and will help when needed."
- *Healthy Habits:* "Students will learn how important sleep is and develop healthy sleep routines; better sleep will produce happier children, positivity, and more active learning."
- *Reducing Stigma:* "Decreasing the stigma around mental health and well-being is crucial for students to feel comfortable to discuss shared experiences. Students feel comfortable asking for help."
- *Family Involvement:* "Give access to information for families and students... positive recognition of student success." (Parent noting schools should involve families in supporting well-being and celebrating progress); "Family through community supports... Food hampers for families in need." (Appreciating when schools help connect to community supports for home needs)

## Section 4: Classroom Complexity

### Question A (School Community Perspective): How will this work enhance the school experience for all students?

#### Themes and Frequency (Classroom Complexity A)

Theme	Frequency (Mentions)
<b>Language Supports (EAL, Speech, AAC)</b> – improving support for English Language Learners and students with speech/communication needs.	30
<b>Early Screening &amp; Intervention</b> – identifying learning/behavior issues early (e.g. in K) and intervening promptly.	20
<b>Specialized Staff &amp; Resourcing</b> – adding or leveraging specialist staff (EAs, coaches, therapists) and resources to support complex needs.	25
<b>Inclusive Pathways &amp; Appropriate Placement</b> – balancing inclusion with targeted programs/streaming so each student is in the best environment to succeed.	20
<b>Teacher Support &amp; Professional Learning</b> – equipping teachers with training, time, and manageable class conditions to handle diverse needs.	15

#### Key Ideas:

- **Language Supports (EAL, Speech, AAC):** Across many schools, a key aspect of addressing classroom complexity is bolstering supports for students with language barriers or delays. This includes English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners, as well as students with speech-language needs or those requiring Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). Schools plan to enhance all students' experience by implementing targeted language programs – for example, dedicated EAL classes or pull-outs for newcomers, hiring or training TASL (Teaching Assistant for Speech-Language) support, and using tools like translators or devices for non-verbal students. The idea is that when language needs are met, students can access the curriculum fully, and overall classroom understanding improves. Participants noted that focusing on EAL and communication helps not only those students but also benefits peers (through increased empathy and communication opportunities). Many expressed excitement that expanding these supports *"will greatly enhance opportunities for our EAL learners"* and others in the class.
- **Early Screening & Intervention:** Educators repeatedly emphasized the importance of catching problems early. They support comprehensive screening in the early years (Pre-K, Kindergarten) to identify developmental delays, learning disabilities, or other needs as soon as possible. Early identification is followed by early intervention – providing speech therapy, occupational therapy, behavioral support, etc., at a young age before issues compound. Schools believe this will significantly improve student outcomes: *"students who are helped earlier become more engaged and responsible"*, and gaps can be mitigated before affecting

self-esteem or academic progress. By the time those students reach higher grades, they will be more on par with peers, reducing the overall complexity later on. In summary, investing in front-loaded support is seen as a way to ease classroom complexity in the long run and ensure every child gets the help they need at the right time.

- **Specialized Staff & Resourcing:** Virtually all schools indicated that to handle complex classrooms, they need more specially trained staff and resources. This theme includes having educational assistants, behavior specialists (EBS), mental health therapists, etc., who can work with high-needs students. Many noted that they already see benefits where such supports exist – specialists not only directly help students but also mentor teachers (capacity building). There is a call to “expand specialized staff” so that complexity is shared and teachers are not alone in meeting diverse needs. Additional resources could also mean adaptive technology, sensory tools, or targeted curriculum adaptations. The enhancement for students is clear: with more adults and tools in the room, students with challenges get more attention and tailored instruction, and other students also benefit because the teacher’s time is freed up to some extent. A common refrain was that this work ensures all student needs are met – something only possible if sufficient supports are in place.
- **Inclusive Pathways & Appropriate Placement:** Many comments acknowledged the nuance that inclusion should not be one-size-fits-all. Schools plan to use this focus area to refine how students with complex needs are educated – balancing inclusion in mainstream classes with targeted programs or streaming where appropriate. For example, some high schools mentioned “streaming/programming appropriately in the Grade 9–10 transition” to ensure students are in courses where they can be successful (this could mean specialized classrooms for certain levels or needs). At the same time, they want to preserve the spirit of inclusion – making sure those who are included feel truly supported. Additionally, some mentioned the need for alternative pathways (like vocational programs, life skills programs) for students for whom the standard academic path isn’t a good fit. By customizing placements and programming, schools believe overall student experience improves: struggling students feel success in the right setting, and all students get instruction at an appropriate level. In essence, *the right support, for the right student, in the right setting* is the goal.
- **Teacher Support & Professional Learning:** Teachers are at the front line of classroom complexity, and respondents recognize that supporting teachers is pivotal. Plans to enhance student experience include giving teachers more training and help to manage diverse classrooms. This could be professional development on inclusive strategies, time to collaborate on individualized plans, or ongoing coaching. Another aspect raised was ensuring teachers are not spread too thin – some suggested lower student-to-teacher ratios or limits on number of high-needs students per class to keep workloads reasonable. When teachers feel equipped and less overwhelmed, they can focus more on students. For instance, one comment noted that with specialized staff taking some load, teachers can address needs of “middle” students who often get less attention. Schools see value in investing in teacher wellness and skills as a means to handle complexity. This theme often ties back to the others: e.g., using coaches (specialized staff) to train teachers, or using common planning time to discuss early intervention strategies. Ultimately, empowering teachers through knowledge, support, and better conditions is expected to directly enhance learning for all students in a complex classroom.

**Examples:**

- *Language Supports:* "Targeted EAL supports by continuing with Level 1 targeted class with supports from ELLE (English language learning facilitator)."; "Students... receive supports needed to express themselves effectively, such as TASL supports, AAC devices, sign language interpreters, EAL support."
- *Early Intervention:* "Early screening and full assessments will help identify delays and disorders sooner so that... intervention can support students; when issues are identified early, help can be provided earlier."
- *Specialized Staff:* "With the support of the ELLE, TASL, EBS, FSLW, students are receiving necessary intervention and support for their learning. These specialized supports... ensure that all student needs are met."
- *Inclusive Pathways:* " We need opportunities for students to feel success and having them all together is not creating this so providing different learning spaces may provide students with the same learning needs (with)... greater growth."
- *Teacher Support:* "By enriching this priority and supporting our complex needs with specialized staff or enhanced planning, we will allow teachers time to address the needs of the middle students who may get lost when focus is on the most complex."; "Ensuring teachers have the time and training to be prepared to support students (e.g. through smaller class sizes and more supports) is critical."

**Question B (Parent Perspective): What is most important to you in this area of work?****Themes and Frequency (Classroom Complexity B)**

Theme	Frequency (Mentions)
Language Supports (EAL) – that students learning English or with language needs get adequate support and don't feel isolated.	15
Early Identification & Intervention – proactively identifying needs and providing help early in a child's schooling.	10
Specialized Staff & Resources – ensuring classrooms have educational assistants, specialists, and resources to handle special needs.	12
Balanced Inclusion & Class Composition – maintaining inclusive classrooms but with attention to appropriate placement and manageable mix of student needs.	8
Teacher Support & Class Size – having reasonable class sizes and supporting teachers so that all students (including the "average" ones) get attention.	5

## Key Ideas:

- **Language Supports (EAL):** Parents – especially those from immigrant communities – expressed that it's crucial for schools to support English Language Learners so they can integrate and succeed. They want to be sure that newcomer students "*with little or no English will be supported and have access to learning*", and that these students "*will not feel isolated*" in the classroom. This is very important to parents of EAL children, as it affects both academic progress and emotional well-being. They take comfort in programs like intensive EAL classes, and the presence of staff who focus on language acquisition. Some parents also noted that helping EAL students ultimately benefits all kids, by fostering empathy and a richer learning environment. In summary, parents prioritize that language barriers are addressed head-on – no child should be left behind due to English proficiency, and having robust EAL support is a key part of what they expect in tackling classroom complexity.
- **Early Identification & Intervention:** Parents appreciate when schools are proactive in spotting and dealing with learning or behavioral needs. From a parent perspective, this means "*informing parents of issues early and [sharing] results of assessments*" and then acting on them. It is important to them that any difficulties their child has are caught as soon as possible, rather than waiting until the child has failed or fallen far behind. For example, parents of children who received speech therapy early often share success stories (one parent recounted how early SLP support in K–4 turned their child into a "high flyer" later on). Such stories underscore parent support for early intervention; they've seen that it works. Parents want schools to keep doing things like universal Kindergarten screening and immediate supports afterwards. Knowing that the school will not adopt a "wait and see" approach but rather intervene early is a reassurance and a priority for families.
- **Specialized Staff & Resources:** Parents often notice when classrooms have educational assistants or when specialists come in – and they value it. They feel more confident that their child (or any child with extra needs) will be okay if additional adults are in the room. One parent group explicitly said, "*we need more boots on the ground to support our students*," reflecting a desire for more staff in classrooms with high needs. They also mentioned things like mental health therapists and others being important. Essentially, parents recognize that today's classrooms have a wide range of learners, and they do *not* want the teacher to be the sole support if there are several kids with serious challenges. They advocate for hiring more aides and specialists, and providing tools (e.g., assistive tech, sensory rooms) to help manage complexity. This theme from parents aligns with what staff say: it's vital to have adequate support in place. Parents' "most important" often boils down to resourcing – because they know resources determine how well their own child gets attention in a busy classroom.
- **Balanced Inclusion & Class Composition:** Parents generally support inclusion, but some voiced concern about class composition – specifically, that if too many high-needs children are in one class without enough support, *everyone* could suffer. In the data, one parent group plainly said "*there needs to be a limit on how many kids with complex needs [are] in a class so that learning can take place... so that inclusion can happen without detriment to the rest of the class.*". This captures a common parental concern: they want an inclusive system, but not at the expense of overall classroom learning or their own child not getting attention. Hence, parents value when schools thoughtfully distribute students or provide extra help to balance things. They also appreciate appropriate placements – for instance, if a child would do better

in a smaller specialized setting for part of the day, parents often support that if it means better outcomes. In short, the principle of “inclusion with necessary supports and common sense” is something parents find important.

- **Teacher Support & Class Size:** Some parent feedback focused on ensuring teachers are not overwhelmed, because that directly affects students. Parents notice large class sizes and are concerned that in a class of 30+ with multiple needs, even the best teacher will struggle. A top priority for those parents is smaller class sizes or at least not overloading one teacher with too many challenges. Quotes like “*we need to decrease classroom sizes*” and “*ensure average students don't fall through the cracks*” came up. They want their child to get attention – so if they’re one of 25 rather than one of 35, it’s easier. Furthermore, parents show empathy for teachers’ capacity: they know initiatives are “fantastic” but wonder “*is it too much for teachers... given the complexities of the regular classroom?*”. Therefore, many parents find it most important that plans to address complexity include real support for classroom teachers – through aides (as above), training, and keeping class sizes reasonable. They recognize that a supported teacher can better support each student, including their own.

### **Examples:**

- *Language Supports (Parent view):* “As a parent knowing that all newcomer students with little or no English will be supported and have access to learning is very important. They will not feel isolated.”
- *Early Intervention:* “Early intervention is key... He has confidence and is succeeding in his academics. All children need to feel confident in their ability to speak, read, write and understand in order to succeed at school.” (Parent testimony on early speech/EAL support)
- *Specialized Staff:* “We need more boots on the ground to support our students.” (Parent urging for more support staff in class); “FSLW should be funded directly from the Division... ALL schools should have one.”
- *Balanced Inclusion:* “The one size fits all approach of putting numerous complexities into one room is not a recipe for success as it is not possible to address all the needs.”
- *Class Size & Teacher Support:* “We need smaller classes so that teachers can be most effective in creating optimal learning conditions.”; “If there are 30+ kids in a class, we can’t support the teacher to put this into place... There needs to be a limit... and more support in the classroom.”

## Appendix: Responses Outside the Key Themes

(These are comments from the feedback that were not categorized under the main themes above, but offer additional insight or unique points raised by participants.)

### Catholic Identity – Question A (School Perspective):

- "Students will achieve academic success; every student will achieve to their full potential."
- "Students will become principled and caring adults; students will receive a well-rounded education that allows them to be their best selves in all domains."
- "Strong training for teachers."

### Catholic Identity – Question B (Parent Perspective):

- "Wanting their children to make their own decisions about faith."

### Optimal Learning – Question A (School Perspective):

- "Schools should be teaching students how to utilize the different platforms that are used (e.g. Google Classroom)."
- "Collaboration is hard because there are no methods of communication for younger kids outside of school."

### Student Well-Being – Question A (School Perspective):

- "Multi-disciplinary teams help students solve real world problems so that students can come to school and learn. This may take the form of hampers, funding, bus passes or winter clothing." (*Addressing basic needs was noted as a method to support well-being and readiness to learn.*)
- "Positive recognition of student success." (*Celebrating students' achievements as a way to boost confidence and well-being.*)

### Student Well-Being – Question B (Parent Perspective):

- "Parent education for early years development."

### Classroom Complexity – Question A (School Perspective):

- "Ensuring unity in methodology across the Division."
- "Assessment and providing feedback to both students and parents."
- "There needs to be a limit on how many kids with complex needs are in a class... so that inclusion can take place without detriment to the rest of the class."
- "We need to decrease class sizes so teachers can provide more personalized support."

# Reference List

## 1. COSC School Feedback – November 18, 2025

COSC School Feedback – November 18, 2025.xlsx

Source: Edmonton Catholic Schools, Board of Trustees, Community of School Councils (COSC) Meeting, November 18, 2025.

- Contains all raw responses from school principals, assistant principals, and school council representatives across 89 schools.
- Data analyzed for thematic frequencies, key ideas, and illustrative examples in the areas of Catholic Identity, Optimal Learning, Student Well-Being, and Classroom Complexity.
- Used for all tables, synthesized insights, and verbatim examples in the report.

## 2. Division Plan for Continuous Growth 2023–2026

Edmonton Catholic Schools.

- Referenced for strategic context and alignment of focus areas.
- <https://www.ecsd.net/division-plan-for-continuous-growth>

## 3. Appendix: Unclassified Responses

- All responses not placed in a main theme are listed in the appendix, sourced directly from COSC School Feedback – November 18, 2025.xlsx.

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### Note:

All analysis, tables, and examples in the thematic report are based exclusively on the above sources. No external or third-party data was used.