



# OSTA TRANSPORTATION SURVEY OVERVIEW REPORT

2020



**OSTA**  
Ottawa Student  
Transportation  
Authority



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# OSTA Transportation Survey

**Collection dates:** October 22 to November 9, 2020

**Method:** self-reported, on-line

**Distributed by:** Ottawa Student Transportation Authority (OSTA) shared survey through email and social media. Ottawa Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) and the Ottawa Catholic School Board (OCSB) shared survey with school principals who may have distributed with their school community. Community partners shared through social media.

**Number of surveys collected: 5422**

**Overall response rate of households: 7.41%**

**Confidence interval: +/- 1% with a 95% confidence level**

*Note: [Margin of error response rates calculated through Survey Monkey](#)*

Board	Number of surveys collected	Percentage of surveys	Number of households	Response rate for survey	Confidence interval
Total	5422	100%	73171	7.41%	+/- 1%

## Introduction

The OSTA Transportation Survey was shared on-line with families in the OCDSB and OCSB from October 22, 2020 to November 9, 2020.

To investigate for the effects of COVID-19 on school transportation patterns, the survey asked family members the following five questions:

1. Which school does your youngest child attend?
2. In what grade is your youngest child?
3. How did your youngest child travel to school in October?
4. Have you observed any of these behaviours in your child's school zone?
5. Do you have any other suggestions on how school zone safety could be improved?

## Response profile

In total, 5422 responses were collected, representing a response rate of 7.41% with a confidence interval of plus or minus 1%.

The 7.41% response rate was calculated using the number of registered households.

Note that many families have more than one school-aged child in OCDSB and/or OCSB therefore survey information was only collected for the youngest child, in order to represent their household.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some families are choosing to attend virtual school. It should be noted that 98% of the responses are from families with the youngest child attending school in person.

The majority (78%) of the surveys came from families in which the youngest child attends an elementary school. The following table separates by school type:

School type	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Number of surveys	4208	129	1085
Percentage of surveys	78%	2%	20%

Note that some elementary and high schools have grade 7-8 classes. In the table above, most intermediate students are included in either the high school or elementary survey count. The “Middle School” column represents the number of surveys from schools that have only grade 7-8 students.

The following table shows the portion of surveys by grade in both school boards:

Grade	JK	SK	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Percentage of surveys	12%	11%	11%	8%	8%	8%	8%	7%	7%	5%	5%	3%	4%	3%

The response rate is highest for kindergarten and grade one, and declines through the grades. It is notable that there is a significant drop in survey participation between grades 1 and 2.

EnviroCentre broke down schools by geography based on whether they are within the Greenbelt, outside the Greenbelt (including Kanata, Orleans, Barrhaven, Blackburn Hamlet and Stittsville), or Rural.

The following table shows the portion of surveys collected by designations.

Geographic Region	Within Greenbelt	Outside Greenbelt	Rural
Percentage of surveys	39%	45%	16%

Results were collected from **215 schools** in OCDSB and OCSB. No surveys were received from 13 schools, including some elementary schools and secondary schools, as well as adult high schools and special treatment centres.

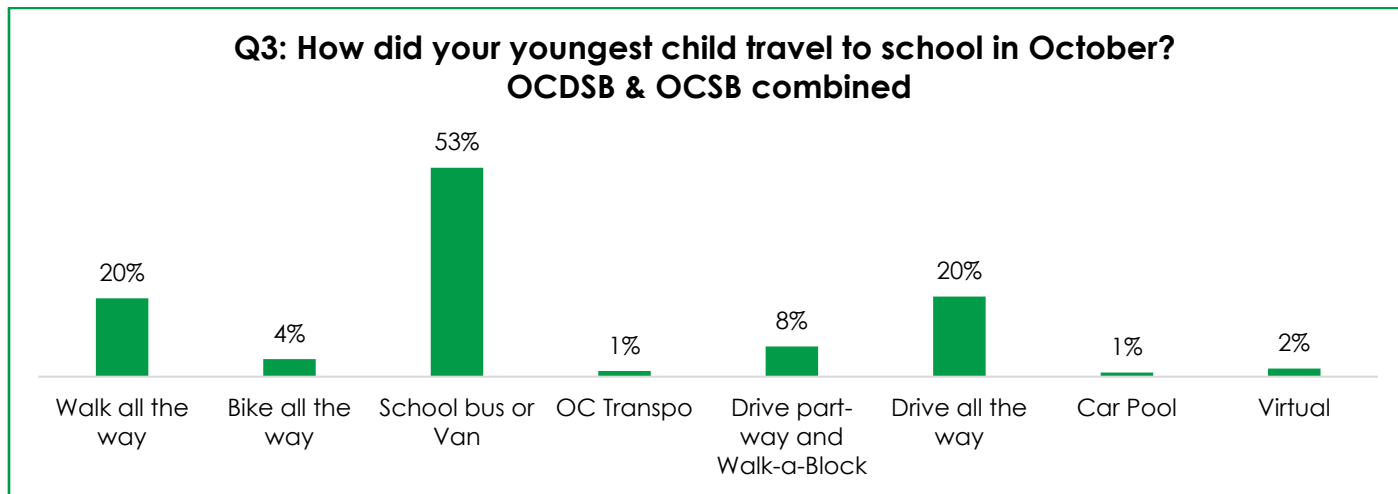
The following chart shows the number of schools and response rate ranges:

Response rate range	Number of schools in range
40 - 44%	2
35 - 39%	4
30 - 34%	7
25-29%	4
20-24%	8
15-19%	14
10-14%	33
0-9%	143

# Overview of survey results

## How did your youngest child travel to school in October?

The respondents were able to select up to two transportation modes for their youngest child. The following graph summarizes the transportation modes for students travelling to school, with both boards combined.



Walk all the way	Bike all the way	School bus or Van	OC Transpo	Drive part-way and Walk-a-Block	Drive all the way	Car Pool	Virtual
20%	4%	53%	1%	8%	20%	1%	2%

Note that most families surveyed reported using **a sustainable mode of transportation** (walking, biking, bussing, “Walk-a-Block” or car-pooling.) Only 20% of families reported “driving all the way.”

Of all the responses, 90% selected only **one** travel mode, while the remaining 10% selected **two**. Of the families that selected two travel modes:

- One fifth (or 2% of all surveys) selected “School Bus or Van” and “Drive all the way,”
- One fifth (or 2% of all surveys) selected “Walk all the way” and “Drive all the way,”
- One tenth (or 1% of all surveys) selected “School Bus or Van” and “Walk all the Way” or “Bike all the way,”
- The remaining 5% selected other combinations.

As of November 26, 2020, OSTA provides school bus services to 31% of the student population in OCDSB and OCSB. The option, “School Bus or Van,” was selected by 53% of respondents, suggesting that the survey distribution method may have favoured families with school bus riders. It should also be noted that the Empty Seat program for school busses was temporarily suspended due to COVID-19.

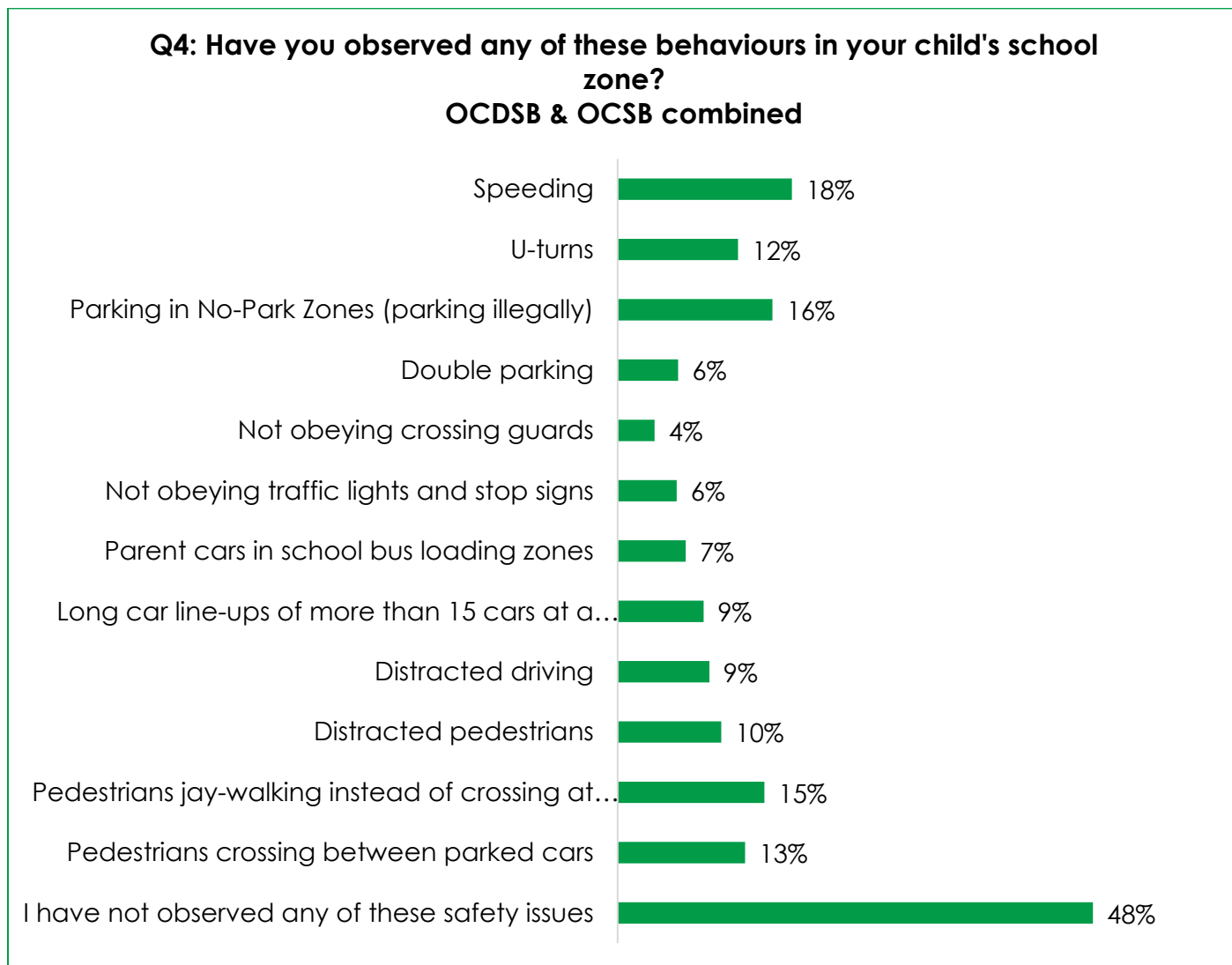
Similarly, OCTranspo Presto cards are provided to 9% of the student population, but the survey responses show 1% using OCTranspo. This is likely a result of two factors; a lower response rate from families with middle or high school students who would be eligible for this program and the known

drop in ridership for public transit in Ottawa. OC Transpo had only 30% of ridership in 2020 compared to pre-pandemic levels.

The option "Drive part-way and Walk-a-Block" was selected by 8% of respondents. In fall 2020, OSTA held a promotional campaign to encourage families to park away from the school and "Walk-a-Block." Maps with QR codes and signage to promote the campaign were generated for each school in the OCDSB and OCSB. The survey was conducted after the campaign launch.

## Have you observed any of these behaviours in your child's school zone?

Family members were asked to indicate any concerns about traffic and pedestrian safety in the School Zone. Multiple check boxes could be selected. The following table illustrates the percentages as a portion of all surveys.



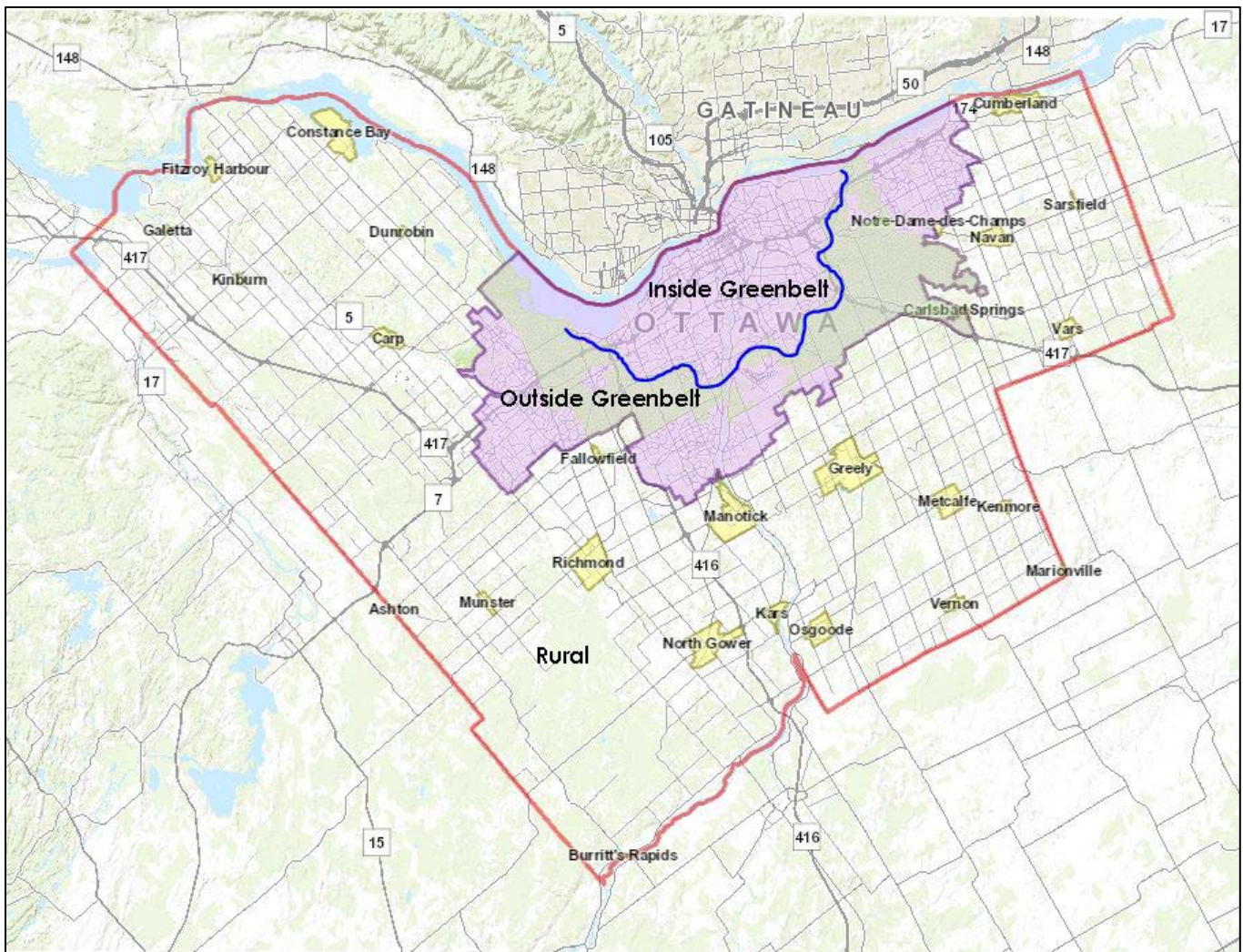
Speeding (18%) and illegal/double parking (24%) were the areas of most concern. Poor pedestrian behaviour, such as distracted pedestrians, jay-walking, and crossing between cars were also of high concern.

Note that 48% of the respondents did not identify any safety issues in the School Zone. There was a notable difference between those who ride a School Bus or Van and those who do not.

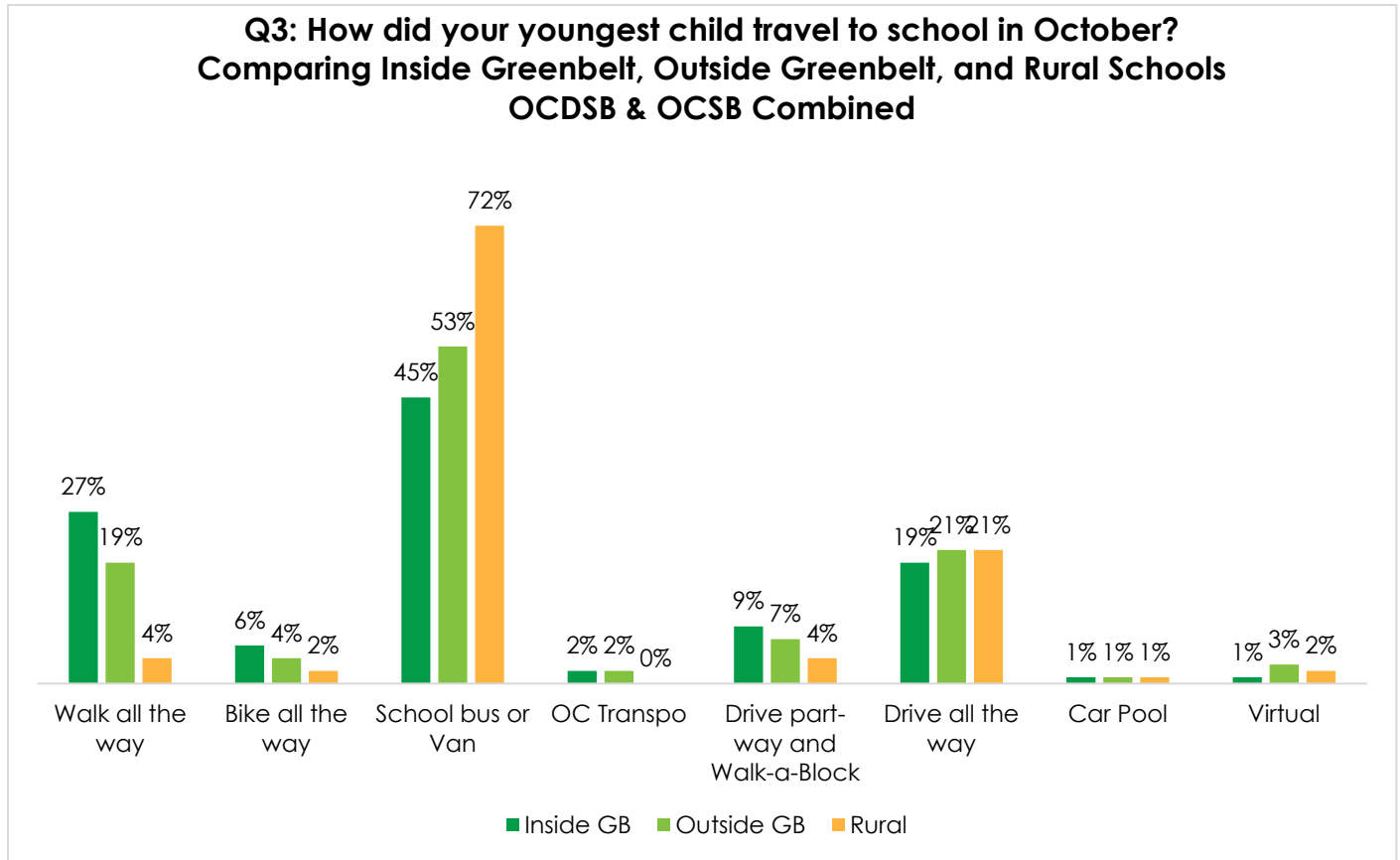
For the 53% of respondents that reported using a School Bus or Van, 32% of respondents did not observe any safety issues. 16% of those using all other modes of transportation (walk, bike, drive, OC Transpo, etc.), did not report observing any of these safety issues.

## Comparison of results by Geography

The following map shows the City of Ottawa boundaries including 'Inside the Greenbelt', 'Outside the Greenbelt' which are both within the official Urban Boundary, and 'Rural'.



The following graph shows aggregated results of travel patterns reported by schools depending on their location: inside the greenbelt, outside the greenbelt, or rural areas.



	Walk all the way	Bike all the way	School bus or Van	OC Transpo	Drive part-way and Walk-a-Block	Drive all the way	Car Pool	Virtual
Inside GB	27%	6%	45%	2%	9%	19%	1%	1%
Outside GB	19%	4%	53%	2%	7%	21%	1%	3%
Rural	4%	2%	72%	0%	4%	21%	1%	2%

Results show 33% of students living within the greenbelt were engaged in active transportation (walking and cycling) to school. It is encouraging to see that between 7-9% of students living within the City Urban boundary (inside and outside of the Greenbelt), were walking at least part of the way. Good connectivity and safe walking routes in both established and newer neighbourhoods may be contributing to these positive numbers.

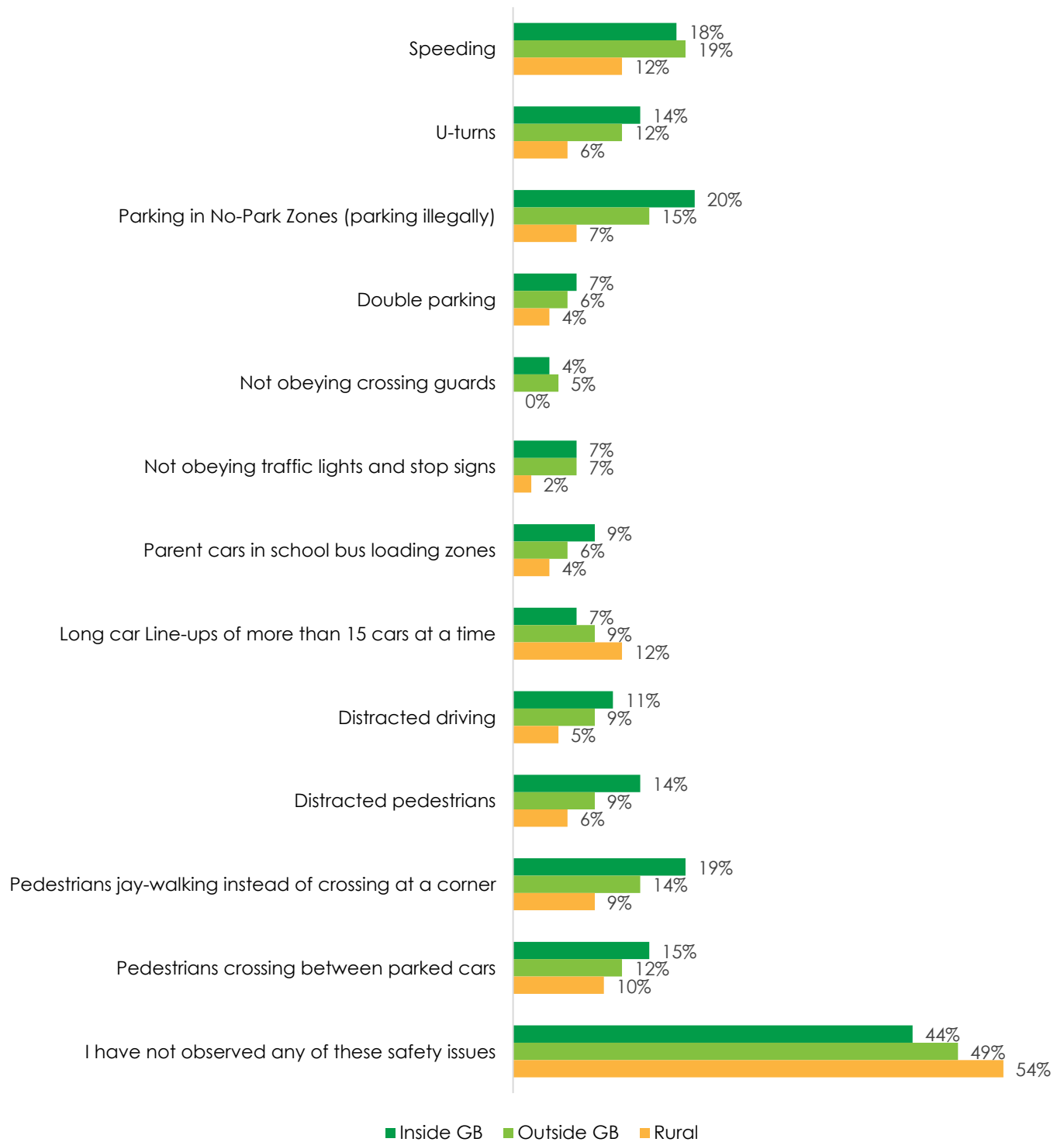
Families driving their child all the way is similar no matter where they live geographically.

All transportation habits could have been affected by the impact of COVID-19 on family dynamics and overall commuting patterns. Future surveys to measure long term modal changes are recommended, but this data helps us take a snap-shot of the current trends.



The following chart shows the safety concerns at schools inside the greenbelt, outside the greenbelt, and rural.

**Q4: Have you observed any of these behaviours in your child's school zone?**  
**Comparing Inside Greenbelt, Outside Greenbelt, and Rural Schools**  
**OCDSB & OCSB combined**

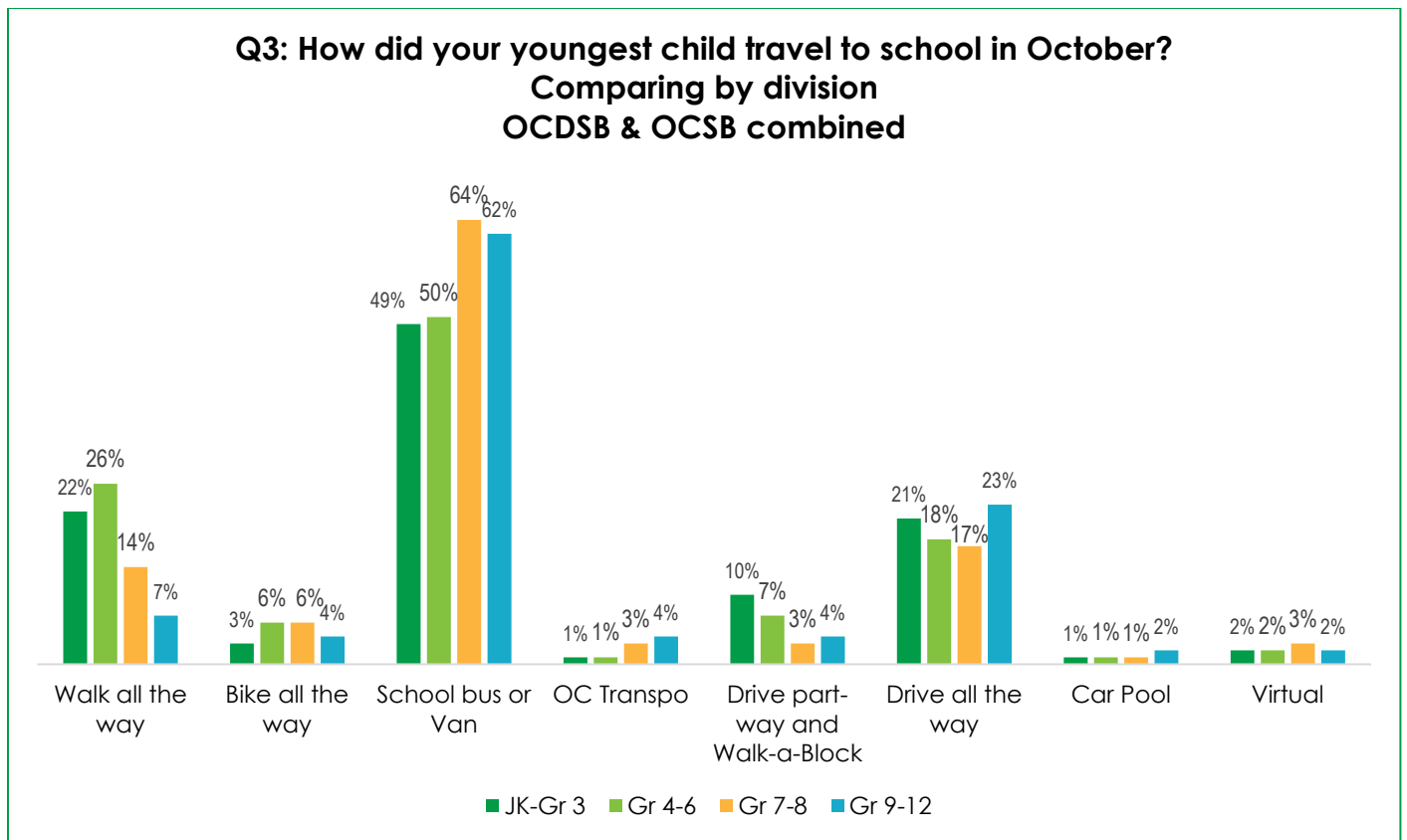


Though driving rates for all three areas are similar, the concerns about illegal parking, distracted driving and speeding are notably higher around urban schools, both inside and outside of the Greenbelt.

Pedestrian safety concerns are also significantly higher around urban schools within the Greenbelt than at rural schools, likely due to the significant difference in walking rates.

## Comparison of results by division

The following table provides modal share information for primary, junior, intermediate, and senior divisions.

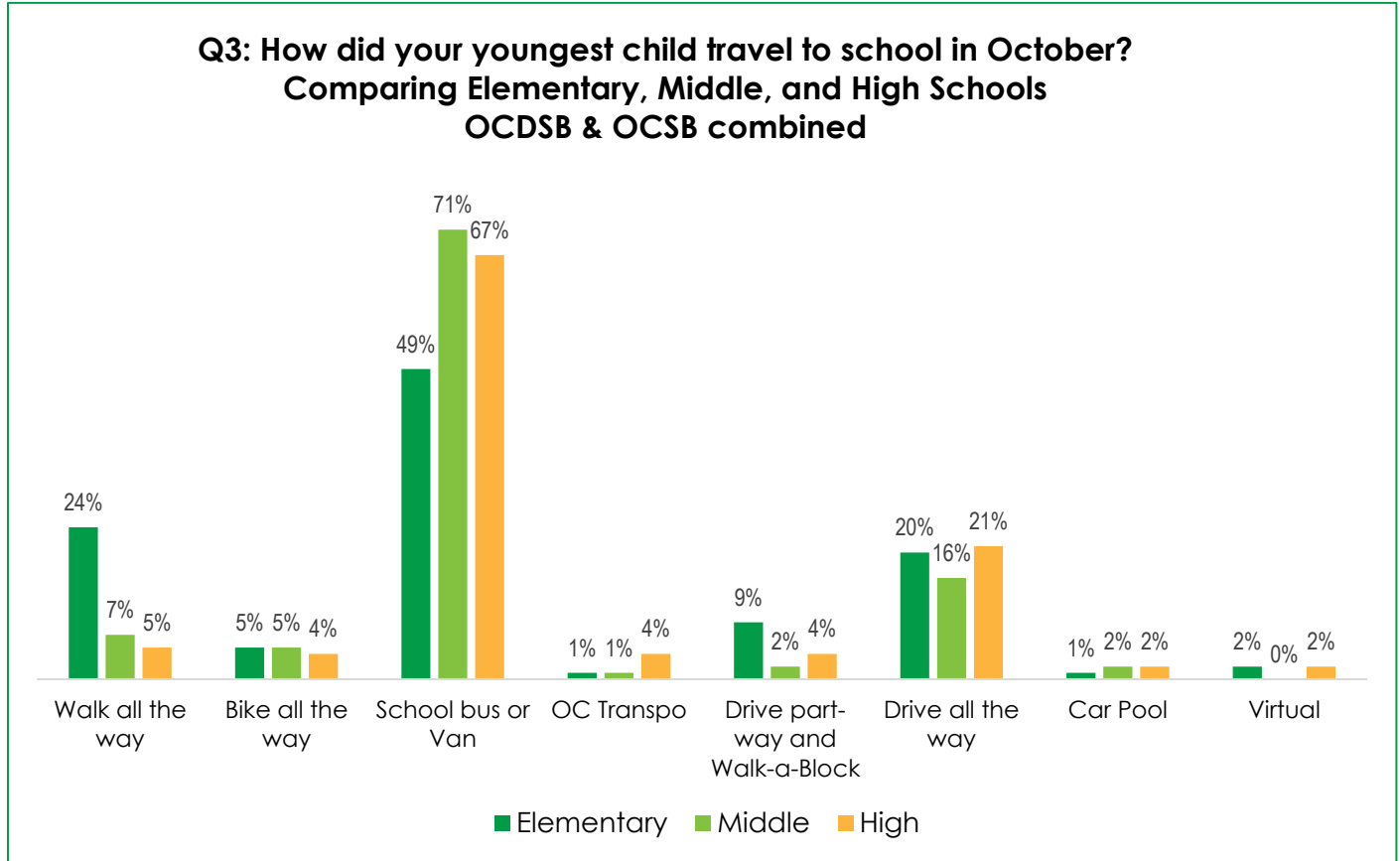


	Walk all the way	Bike all the way	School bus or Van	OC Transpo	Drive part-way and Walk-a-Block	Drive all the way	Car Pool	Virtual
<b>Primary JK – Gr 3</b>	22%	3%	49%	1%	10%	21%	1%	2%
<b>Junior Gr 4 - 6</b>	26%	6%	50%	1%	7%	18%	1%	2%
<b>Intermediate Gr 7 - 8</b>	14%	6%	64%	3%	3%	17%	1%	3%
<b>Senior Gr 9 - 12</b>	7%	4%	62%	4%	4%	23%	2%	2%

Active transportation (walking and cycling) increases by 8 percentage points from primary grades (25%) to junior grades (32%), as students are able to walk independently.

During the intermediate years (middle and high school), active transportation overall (walking or biking all the way) decreases to 21%. Cycling remains the same, but walking rates are dramatically lower. This could be a result of school catchment areas or distance from home to school as students transition to Middle Schools or combined Intermediate/High Schools.

The following table compares travel modes at elementary, middle and high schools.

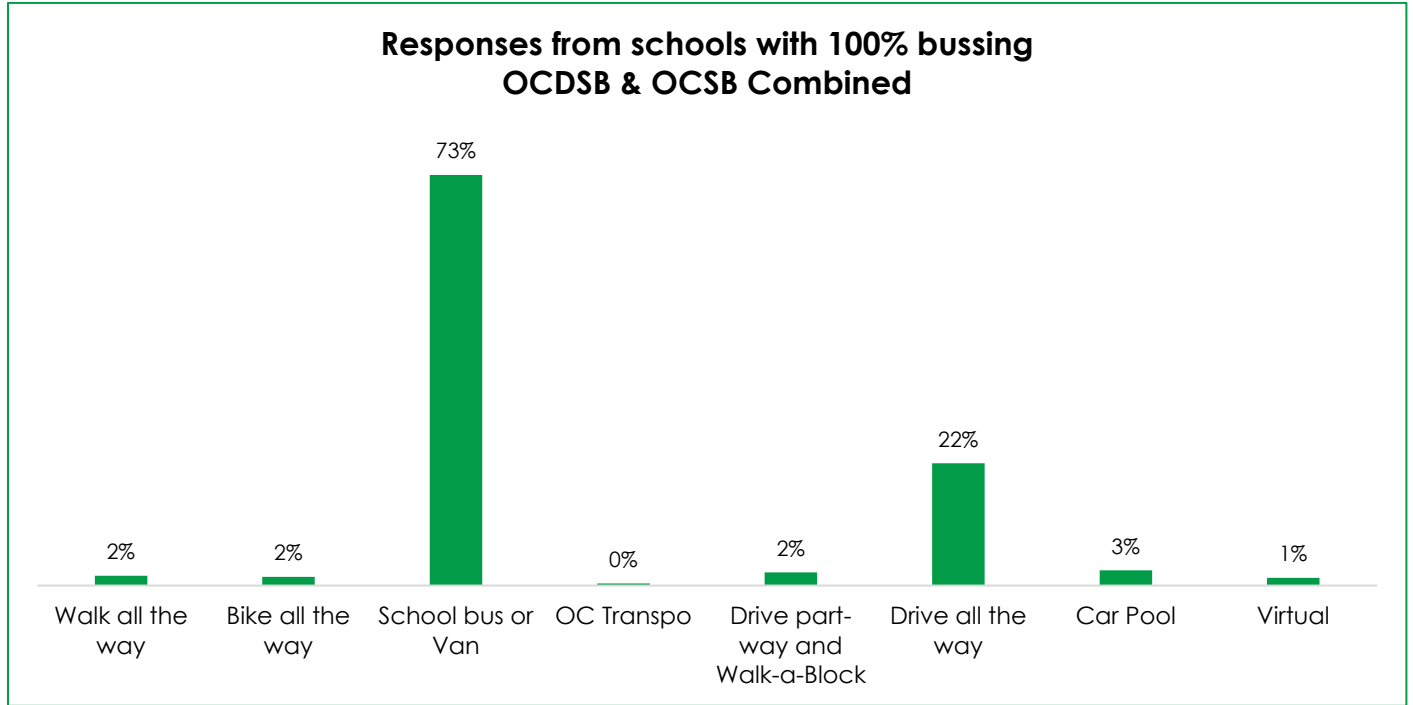


	Walk all the way	Bike all the way	School bus or Van	OC Transpo	Drive part-way and Walk-a-Block	Drive all the way	Car Pool	Virtual
<b>Elementary</b>	24%	5%	49%	1%	9%	20%	1%	2%
<b>Middle</b>	7%	5%	71%	1%	2%	16%	2%	0%
<b>High</b>	5%	4%	67%	4%	4%	21%	2%	2%

Note: Only 129 surveys were collected from families with the youngest child attending a grade 7-8 Middle School. Most surveys for grade 7 and 8 students are included in either the high or the elementary school, depending on school configuration.

## Results for schools with 100% bussing

Ten percent of the responses were from families with students in OCDSB and OCSB schools that have 100% bussing coverage. Typically, these schools are located on rural roads with no sidewalks or on busy streets with no safe crossing. The following graph shows the travel modes for students attending schools with 100% bussing.

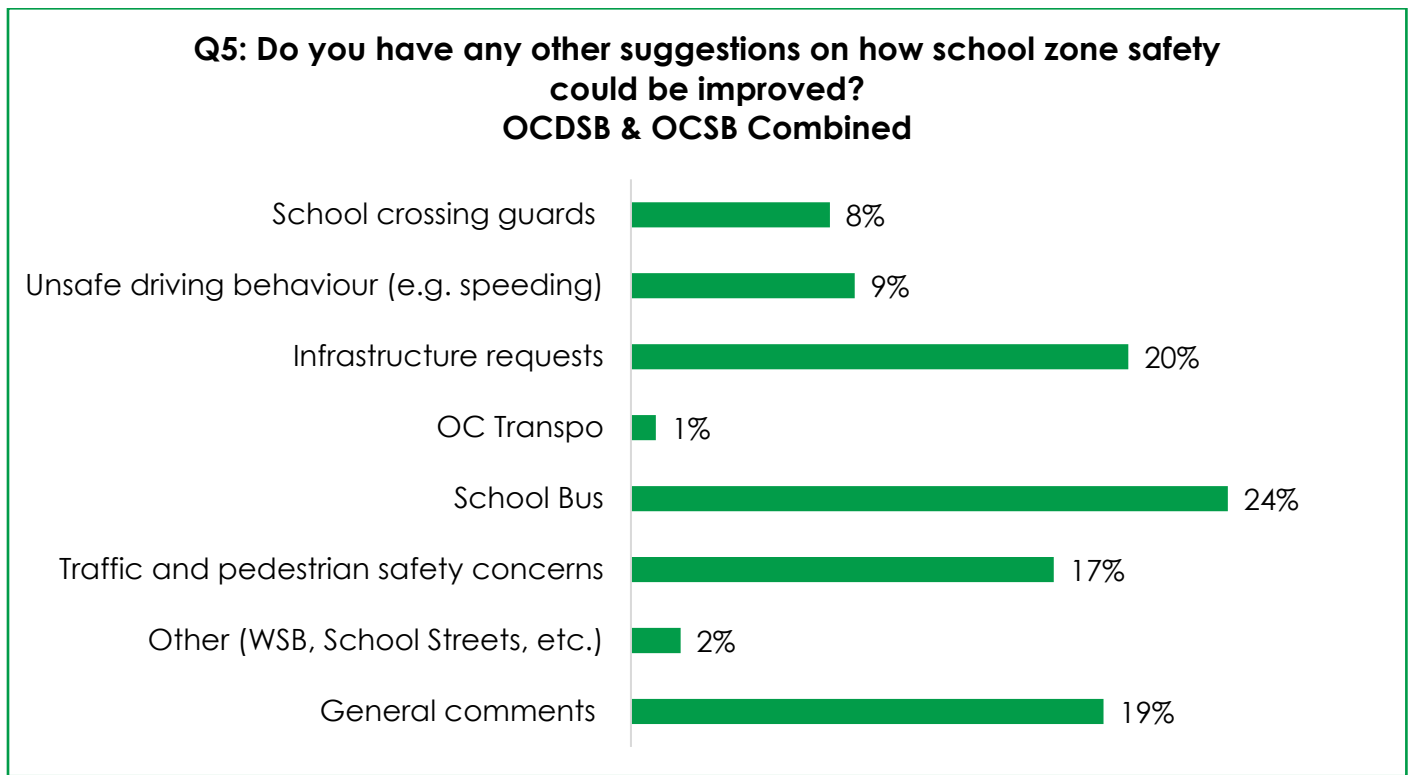


Walk all the way	Bike all the way	School bus or Van	OC Transpo	Drive part-way and Walk-a-Block	Drive all the way	Car Pool	Virtual
2%	2%	73%	0%	2%	22%	3%	1%

Despite all of the students at these schools being eligible for bussing, only 73% reported using the school bus. Although there can be a challenging environment around these schools, it is interesting to note that 6% chose to walk, bike, or Walk-a-Block. Despite being eligible for bussing, 25% of students are driven or participate in a car-pool. These numbers could be impacted by the hesitancy of some families to send their child on the bus during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Summary of open-ended comments

The final question on the survey was an open question asking for suggested improvements in School Zone safety. The following tables show the comment topics and type (positive, negative, or request).



Positive	Negative	Request	Other
15%	20%	53%	12%

Many respondents skipped question #5, the open-ended question. Only 24%, or 1313 family members provided suggestions for improvement. The majority were requests while others were positive or negative comments.

The percentages in the charts above represent the portion of responses (1313) not of all the surveys collected (5422). For example, 8% of the open-ended comments were related to school crossing guards.

# Comparison with SATP schools

## Comparing Historical Data & 2020 OSTA Transportation Survey Results: SATP Schools Only

Eleven schools in Ottawa are currently participating in the School Active Transportation Program (SATP). Each year, hands-up classroom surveys are conducted over 5 days in all SATP schools. This historical data provides some context and points of comparison for the 2020 OSTA Transportation Survey.

Seven SATP schools, both current and recently-graduated, were selected for further comparison. School specific results are not included in this report, but overall trends are highlighted below.

Only SATP schools with response rates over 10% were considered.

Points to note when comparing data between the on-line OSTA Transportation Survey and in-person SATP classroom survey.

- The OSTA Transportation Survey permitted one or two transportation mode choices, whereas in the SATP classroom survey, students were directed to raise their hands for their transportation mode each day (for 5 days).
- The transportation mode choices do not correspond directly between the two surveys. For the purposes of this comparison, two categories are combined: "Other" from the SATP classroom surveys, and "Virtual" from the OSTA Transportation Survey. Both are usually 1 or 2%.
- The SATP classroom surveys are typically conducted in the spring. The OSTA Transportation Survey was conducted in fall 2020. Time of year may influence survey results.
- The OSTA Transportation Survey is a self-reported survey asking usual mode(s) of transportation for a month, whereas the classroom survey is based on daily transportation counts over 5 days.
- Circumstances at the graduated schools may have changed over the intervening years, for example, school boundaries may have changed. This could impact the comparability of the results with the OSTA survey.

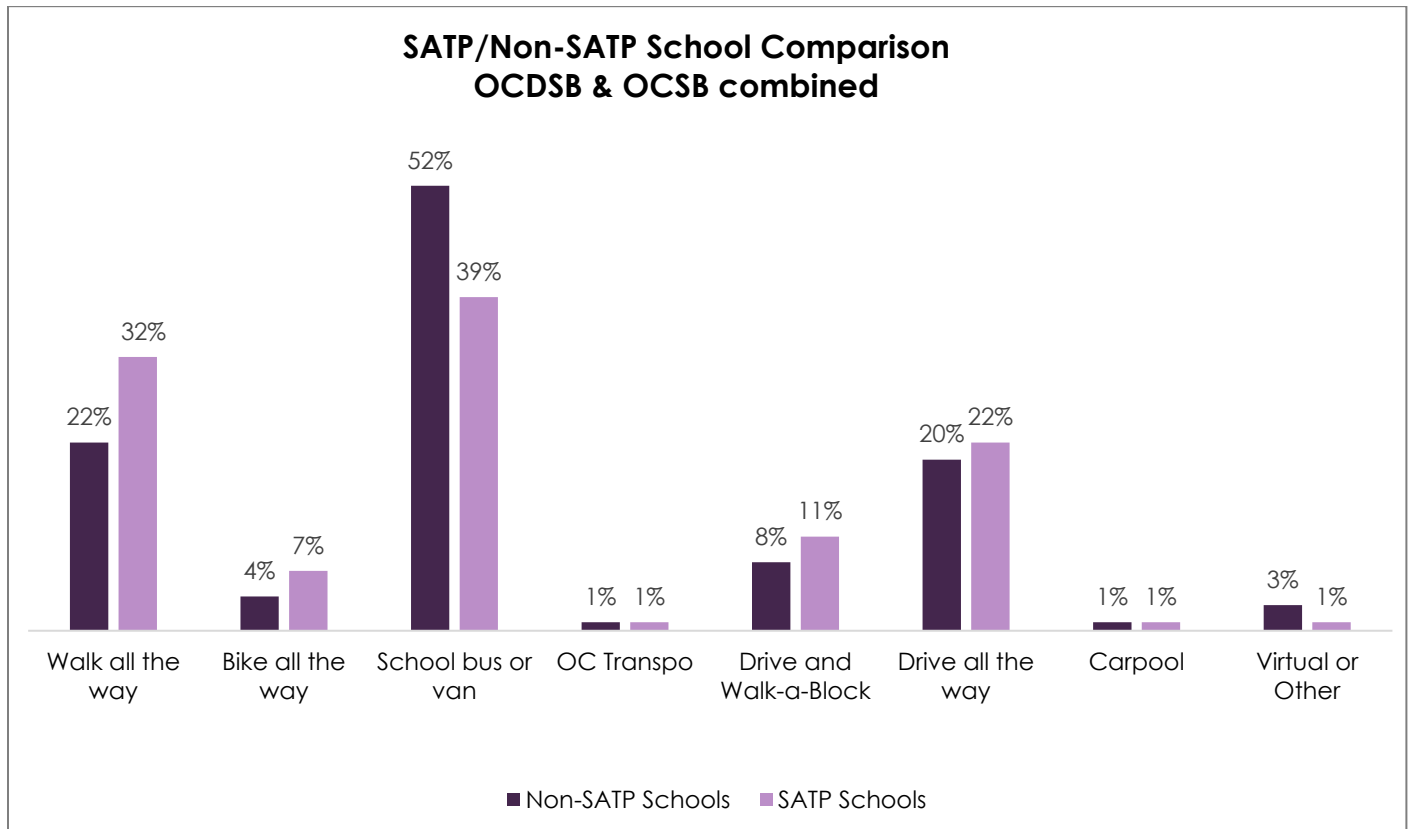
Because the data is collected in different ways, it is not possible to draw firm conclusions. However, **some trends were discovered:**

- Walking and cycling rates increased at 6 of the 7 schools in the comparison.
- Walk-a-Block increased noticeably at all but one of the schools in the comparison.
- Walk-a-Block rates from hands-up survey data between 2017 – 2019 ranged from 2% - 3% whereas average Walk-a-Block rates from the 2020 OSTA Transportation Survey were 8% for non-SATP schools and 11% for SATP schools.
- Driving all the way decreased at five of the seven schools. The largest decrease compared to the most recent classroom survey was by 16 percentage points.

## Comparing 2020 OSTA Transportation Survey Results: SATP and non-SATP Schools

For the 2020 OSTA Transportation Survey, results showed that schools that have participated in SATP had a significantly higher average response rate (11.99%) compared to schools that have not participated (7.41%).

Any school that has graduated from or is currently engaged in SATP, had a 10% or higher response rate, and is not 100% bussed is included in the SATP Schools results, compared against Non-SATP Schools, which includes any school that has never participated in SATP, had a 10% or higher response rate, and is not 100% bussed:



	Walk all the way	Bike all the way	School bus or van	OC Transpo	Drive and Walk-a-Block	Drive all the way	Carpool	Virtual or Other
Non-SATP Schools	22%	4%	52%	1%	8%	20%	1%	3%
All SATP Schools	32%	7%	39%	1%	11%	22%	1%	1%

## Key take-aways

The OSTA Transportation Survey allowed us to listen to and receive feedback from families in OCDSB and OCSB. The **survey response rate of 7.41% was excellent**. Many positive comments were directed towards OSTA, the school boards, bus drivers, crossing guards, and the schools. Some specific examples include “OSTA is doing a wonderful job!”, “our bus driver ensures that our children are as safe as possible, he's the best!”, “OSTA and the schools are doing a fantastic job with the situation they are in”, “overall well done at our school!”, and more.

The OSTA Transportation Survey illustrates that **the vast majority of families in the two English-speaking boards are choosing active and sustainable modes of transportation** for their children's daily commute to school during the COVID-19 pandemic. While perceptions remain that driving rates are high at schools, the survey shows that it is 20% of families who drive regularly. Most families in urban and suburban areas are choosing to have their children walk, bike, ride the bus, Walk-a-Block, or car-pool.

This fall, OSTA held a Walk-a-Block campaign to encourage families to park away from the school and walk five or ten minutes to school. Maps were created for all elementary and high schools that OSTA serves. The survey results show that overall, **8% of families Walk-a-Block**. This is significantly higher than the 2% - 3% Walk-a-Block rates from recent SATP hands-up survey data. The success of the Walk-a-Block campaign shows that system-wide, focused messaging can be very effective.

The survey shows that students in **grades 4-6 are the most likely to walk or cycle** and the least likely to be “driven all the way.” In higher grades, active transportation rates drop and driving rates increase correspondingly. This suggests that more promotion and education could be directed towards intermediate and high schools.

When asked to comment on safety in School Zones, **families noted unsafe pedestrian behaviour** as frequently as they noted problems with parking, traffic flow, etc. This suggests the importance and need for pedestrian education and safety campaigns for students and their families.

There is room for improvement in both driver and pedestrian behavior, and while students receive pedestrian and cycling safety education, there is an opportunity for targeted messaging to parents/guardians. Many respondents also included feedback or requests regarding infrastructure, traffic violations, and school crossing guards, suggesting that there is an opportunity to educate and empower school communities to make use of the channels and resources available to them (for example, 3-1-1).

The information collected was valuable and the results of the survey highlight some key observations and opportunities. By repeating this survey annually, such as in spring and fall, it allows us to identify transportation trends and continue to monitor both safety concerns and the impact of transportation programs.