



# OSTA TRANSPORTATION SURVEY OVERVIEW REPORT

2021



**OSTA**  
Ottawa Student  
Transportation  
Authority



OTTAWA  
CATHOLIC  
SCHOOL BOARD



OTTAWA-CARLETON  
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

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# OSTA Transportation Survey

**Collection dates:** November 1 to November 14, 2021

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

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

**Number of surveys collected: 7,919**

**Overall response rate of households: 9%**

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

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

	Number of surveys collected	Percentage of surveys	Number of households	Response rate for survey	Confidence interval
<b>Total</b>	7,919	100%	89,069	9%	+/- 1%

## Introduction

The OSTA Transportation Survey was shared on-line with families in OCDSB and OCSB from November 1, 2021 to November 14, 2021. This was the second annual iteration of the OSTA Transportation Survey, which was distributed at the same time of year in 2020.

The survey asked family members the following eight questions:

1. Which school does your youngest child attend?
2. In what grade is your youngest child?
3. Was your youngest child on a bus that had a long-term cancellation (lasting longer than 4 days) in October?\*
4. How did your youngest child travel to school in October? (Top two methods)
5. Have you observed any of these behaviours in your child's school zone? (Mark all that apply)
6. What influences the way your youngest child travels to school? (Mark all that apply)\*
7. Which tools have you or your child used this fall? (Mark all that apply)\*
8. Do you have any other suggestions on how school zone safety could be improved?

\* Note: This is a new question asked in the 2021 OSTA Transportation Survey, and not asked in the 2020 OSTA Transportation Survey.

## Response profile

In total, 7,919 responses were collected, representing a response rate of 9% with a confidence interval of plus or minus 1%.

The 9% response rate was calculated using the number of households that have children attending OCDSB and OCSB schools.

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.

**Selection Bias** - This survey was promoted by OSTA and its partners/stakeholders, and the data may be skewed towards those who follow OSTA's social media and are currently enrolled in OSTA's bus service. A greater percentage of survey respondents reported taking the school bus or being affected by a long-term bus cancellation than the percentage of students that OSTA provides bus service to, as summarized below.

- OSTA provides school bus service to 41% of OCDSB and OCSB students, including those who were affected by long-term bus cancellations
- 48% of survey respondents reported taking a school bus
- 15% of survey respondents reported being affected by a long-term bus cancellation

All surveys collected were included in the survey total (7,919), including 96 surveys that were submitted with no responses, representing 1% of surveys. Duplicate data was received in 11 surveys, where respondents submitted answers for having experienced a long-term bus cancellation and for also not having experienced a long-term bus cancellation. All duplicate responses were included in the data, representing 0.1% of all surveys collected.

The majority (70%) of the surveys received were from families in which the youngest child attends an elementary school. The following table separates surveys by school type:

School type	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Number of surveys	5,525	702	1,692
Percentage of surveys	70%	9%	21%

Note that some elementary and high schools have grade 7-8 classes. In the table above, some 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 or 6-7-8 students.

The following table shows the portion of surveys collected 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%	9%	9%	7%	6%	7%	7%	6%	9%	7%	7%	5%	4%	3%

The response rate is highest for kindergarten and grade one, and generally declines through the grades. There is an increase in response rates in grade 7, correlating with when many students in Ottawa may be transitioning to a new intermediate school.

EnviroCentre broke down schools by geography based on whether they are inside 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 geographic region.

	Inside Greenbelt	Outside Greenbelt	Rural
Percentage of surveys	33%	55%	12%

Results were collected from **239 schools** in OCDSB and OCSB. No surveys were received from 7 schools, including some elementary schools and secondary schools, as well as adult high schools and special treatment centres.

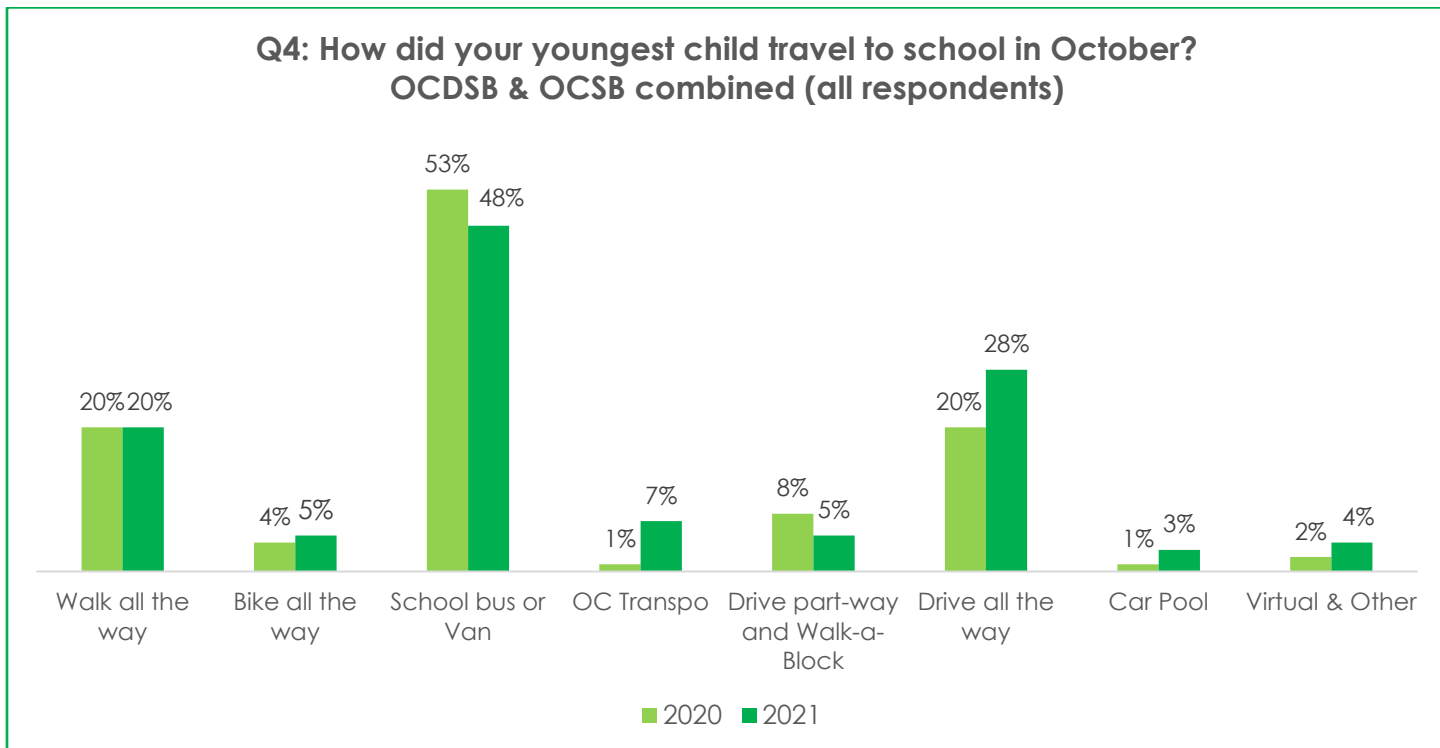
The following chart shows the number of schools and response rate ranges:

Response rate range	Number of schools in range (2020)	Number of schools in range (2021)
45 - 49%	0	1
40 - 44%	2	0
35 - 39%	4	2
30 - 34%	7	6
25 - 29%	4	3
20 - 24%	8	9
15 - 19%	14	25
10 - 14%	33	57
0 - 9%	143	136

# 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. Of all responses collected, 79% selected only one travel mode, while the remaining 21% selected two. The following graph summarizes the transportation modes for students travelling to school, with both school boards combined. Data from this year is compared to survey results from 2020.



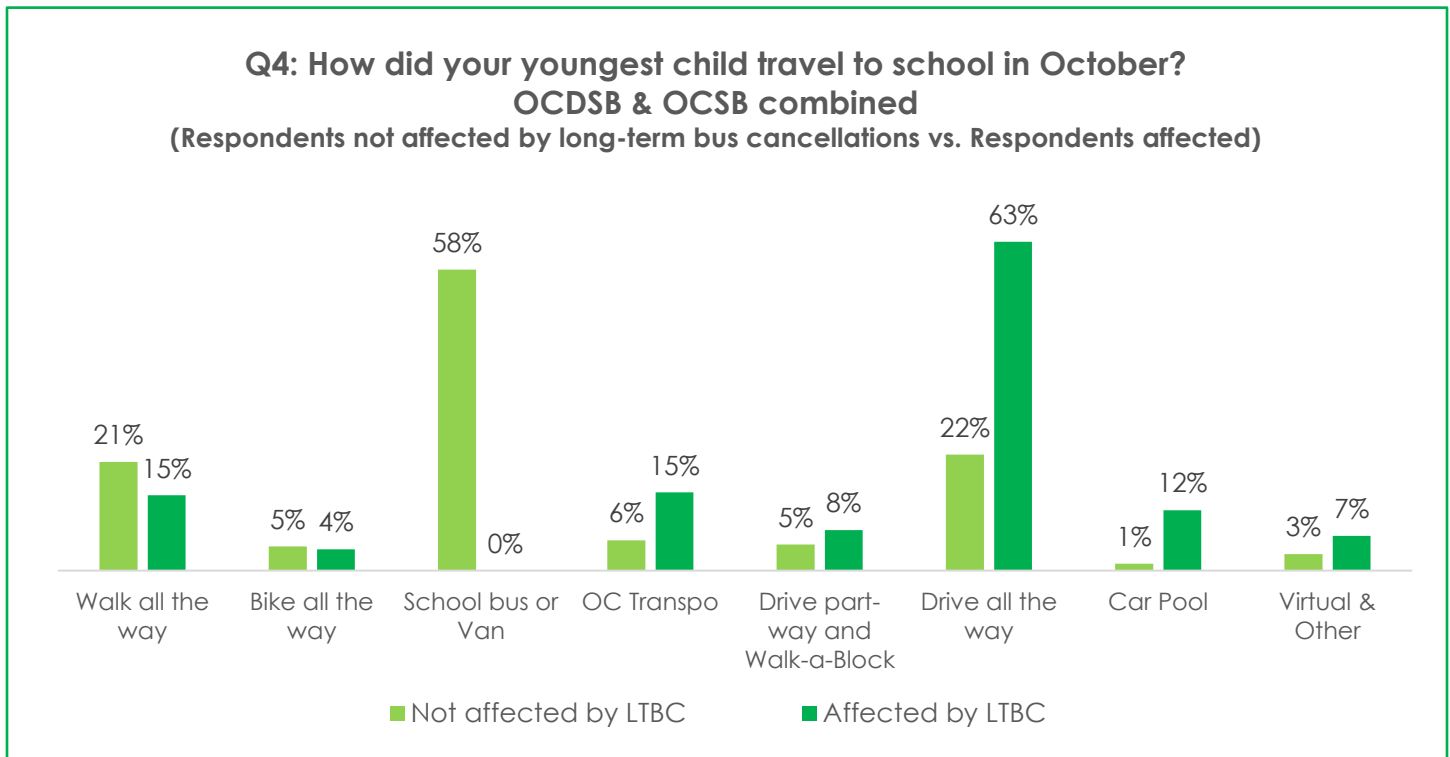
	Walk all the way	Bike all the way	School bus or Van	OC Transpo	Drive part-way and Walk-a-Block	Drive all the way	Car Pool	Virtual & Other
<b>2020</b>	20%	4%	53%	1%	8%	20%	1%	2%
<b>2021</b>	20%	5%	48%	7%	5%	28%	3%	4%

Most families surveyed reported using **a sustainable mode of transportation**, (walking, biking, bussing, “Walk-a-Block” or car-pooling). Only 28% of families reported “driving all the way.”

The option “Drive part-way and Walk-a-Block” was selected by 5% of respondents and decreased from 8% in 2020. In the fall of 2020, 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. In fall 2021, the same campaign and promotion of Walk-a-Block did not occur, correlating with a 3% decrease in Walk-a-Block rates. This suggests that repeating 2020's campaign in future years could help increase Walk-a-Block rates.

The number of families driving all the way increased by 8% this year compared to 2020, which can be attributed to the large number of families affected by long-term bus cancellations. Driver shortages and the COVID-19 pandemic led to an increased number of long-term bus cancellations in 2021 compared to 2020.

This year, 1,216 survey respondents (15%) were affected by long-term bus cancellations compared to 6,618 survey respondents (84%) who were not affected by long-term bus cancellations. The following graph shows significant differences in travel modes for families depending on whether they were affected by a long-term bus cancellation (LTBC).



Families who were affected by a long-term bus cancellation reported driving at a much higher rate (63%) than those that were unaffected (22%). Families affected by long-term bus cancellations also reported higher rates of using OC Transpo and carpooling than families unaffected by long-term bus cancellations.

Note that 77% of survey respondents who were affected by a long-term bus cancellation and walked all the way to school were in grades 1-12. Students in grades 1-12 must live more than 1.6 km from school to be eligible for bus service; therefore, the majority of students who chose to walk when they were affected by a long-term bus cancellation walked more than 1.6 km to school.

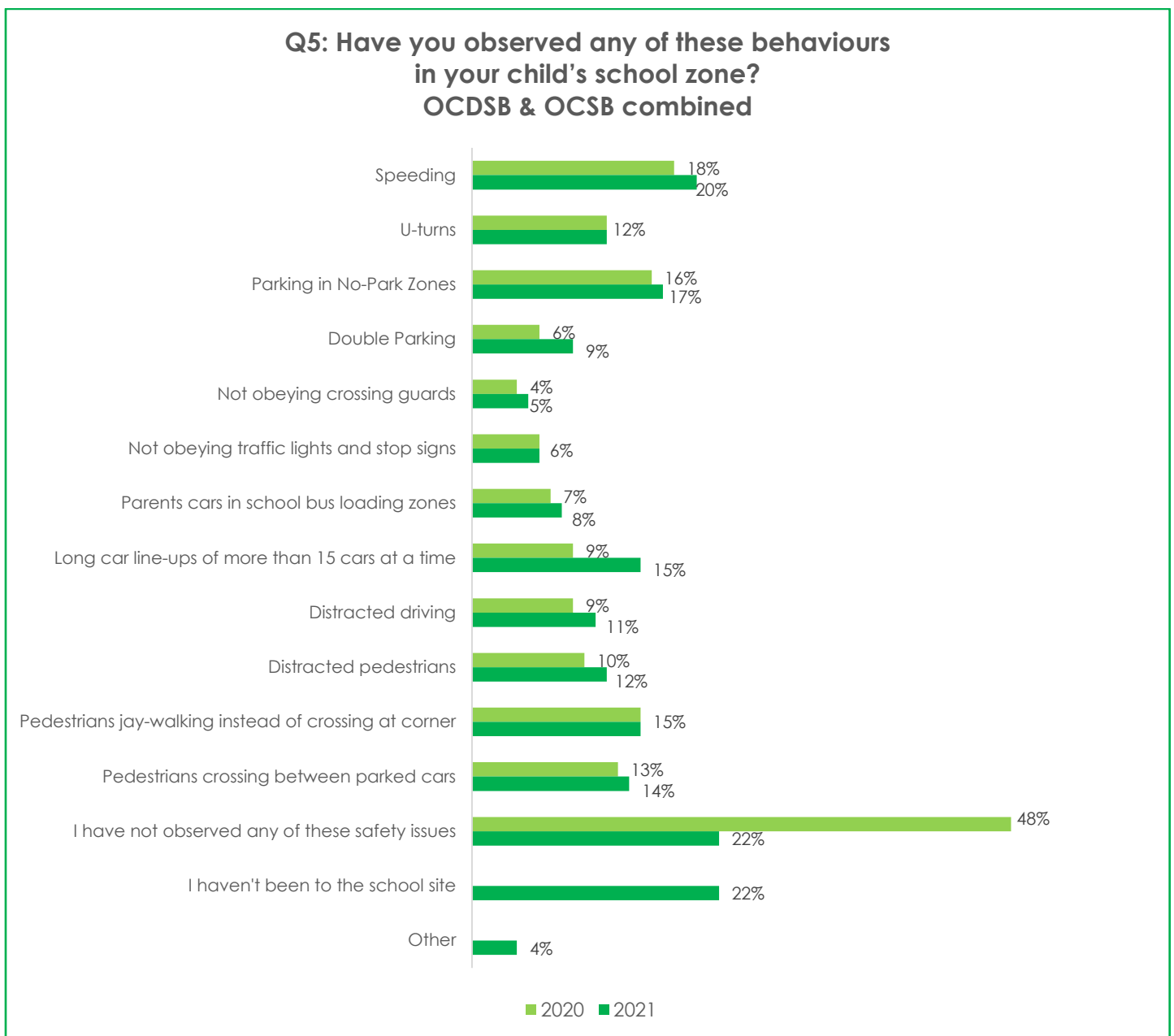
As of January 21, 2022, OSTA provides school bus services to 41% of the student population in OCDSB and OCSB. The option, "School Bus or Van," was selected by 48% of respondents, suggesting that the survey distribution method may have favoured families with school bus riders. It should also be noted that the Empty Seat program for school busses was suspended due to COVID-19. Note there was a significant increase in bus service between the 2020/2021 school year (31%) and 2021/2022 school year (41%), due to COVID-19 related enrollment in virtual school in 2020/2021.

OCTranspo Presto cards are provided to 11% of the student population, and the survey responses show 7% using OCTranspo. OCTranspo ridership rate has increased significantly from 2020, when the ridership rate was only 1%.

As demonstrated by the travel patterns of families affected by long-term bus cancellations, the availability of bus service greatly impacts how families get their children to school. Although some families are eligible for bus service, some families choose not to use it. This year, approximately 4,400 families who were eligible for transportation service opted out.

## 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 graph illustrates the percentages as a portion of all surveys.



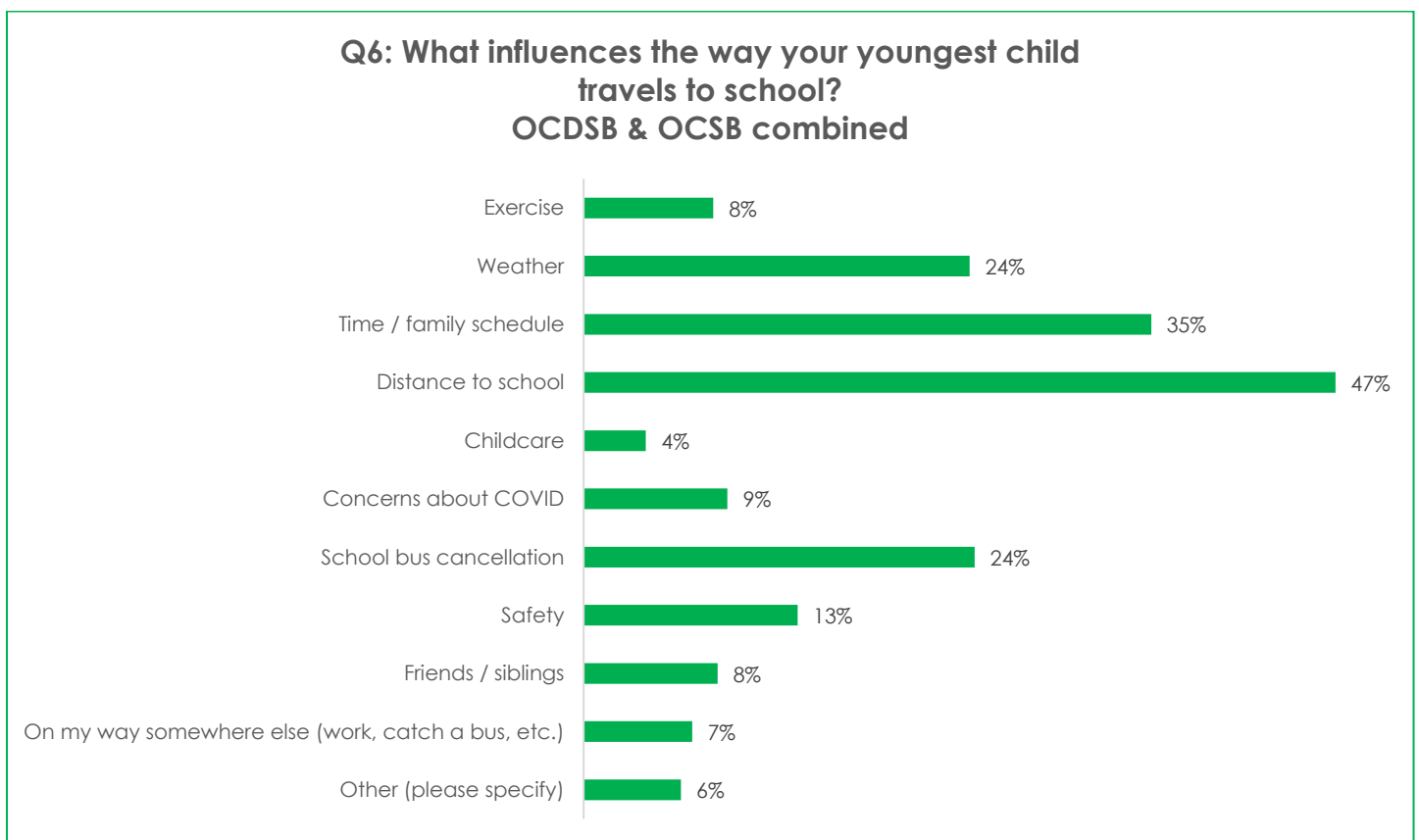


Observations of speeding, illegal/double parking, and long car line-ups were higher this year compared to 2020. The higher number of survey respondents who reported driving this year correlates with the observation of increased traffic in front of schools. Poor pedestrian behaviour, such as distracted pedestrians, jaywalking, and crossing between cars, were also of high concern.

More survey respondents observed safety issues this year. The number of people reporting that they have **not** observed any safety issues has **decreased by 26% since 2020**. In 2020, 48% of the respondents did not identify any safety issues in the School Zone, whereas in 2021 only 22% of respondents did not identify any safety issues. Of the families that reported not observing any safety issues this year, 79% of these responses came from families that reported taking the bus. It is interesting to note that 22% of respondents reported that they hadn't been to the school site. "I haven't been to the school site," was a new response option in 2021 that wasn't an option in 2020.

## What influences the way your youngest child travels to school?

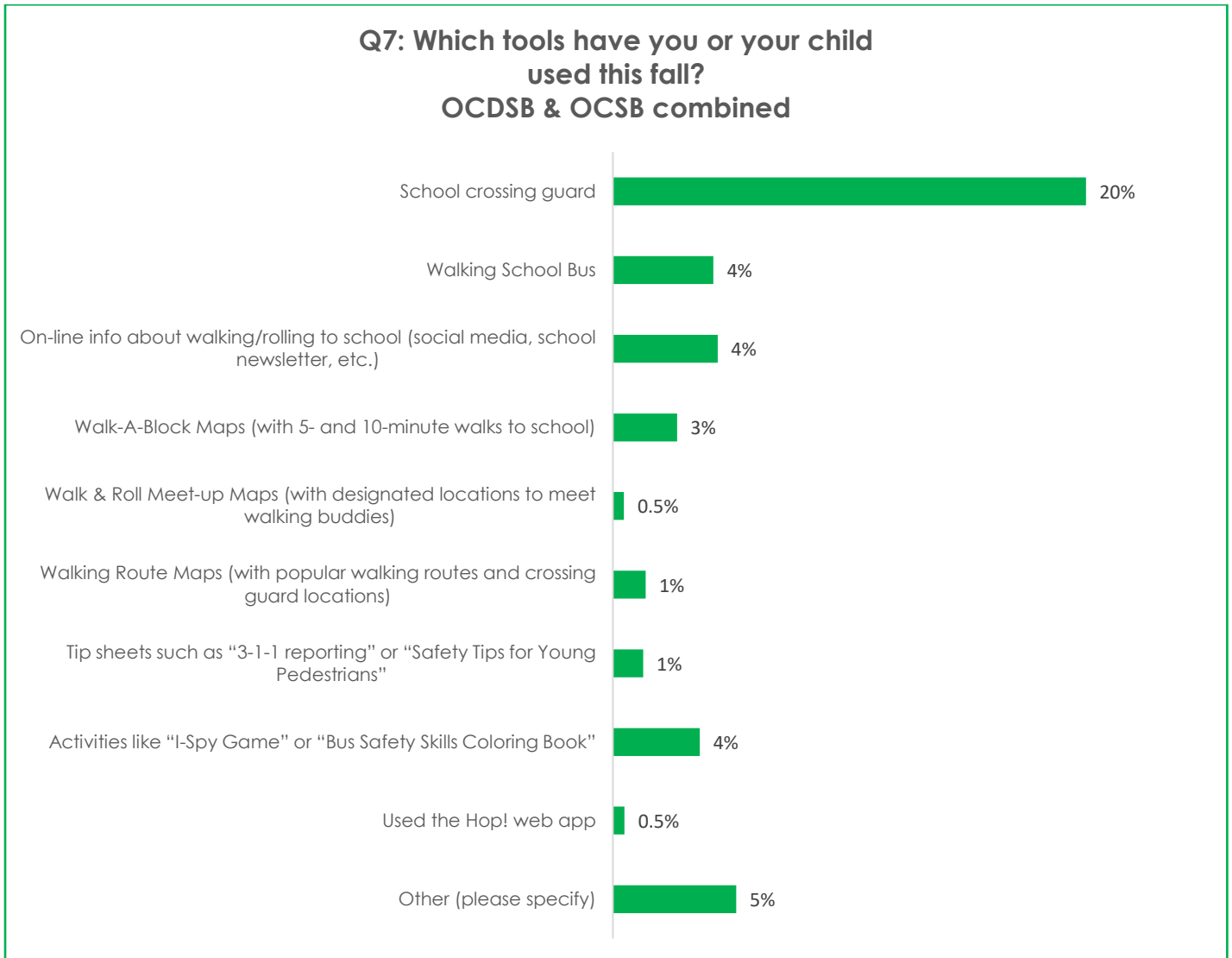
Family members were asked to indicate factors that influence how their youngest child gets to school. Multiple check boxes could be selected. The following graph illustrates the percentages as a portion of all surveys.



Question 6 was a new question in the 2021 survey, not asked in 2020. The top influences for how survey respondents travelled to school were the distance to school (47%), time/family schedule (35%), weather (24%), and school bus cancellations (24%). Concerns about COVID-19 influenced 9% of survey respondents, and safety influenced 13% of survey respondents.

## Which tools have you or your child used this fall?

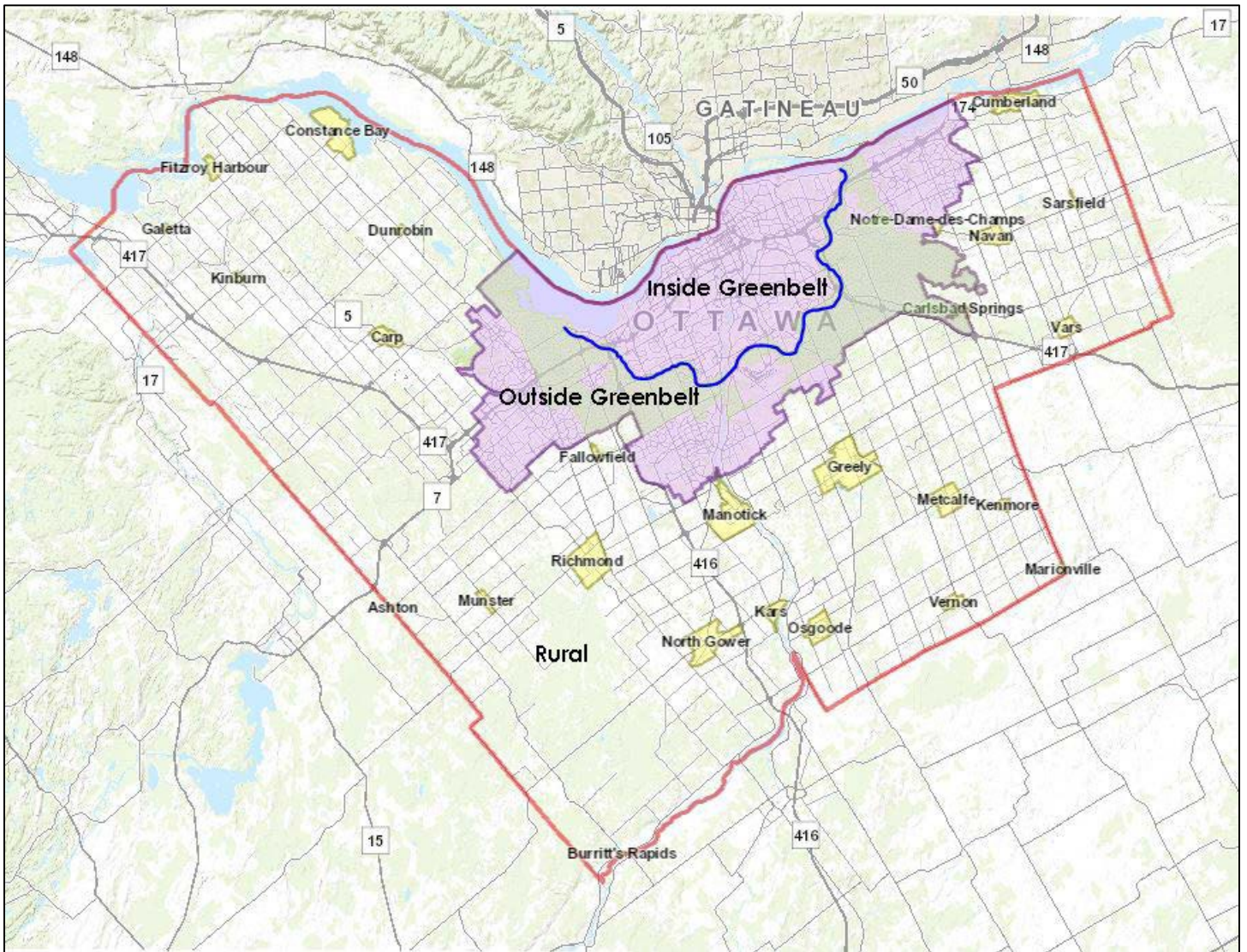
Various tools are used to promote active transportation, and this year families were asked which tools they had used. Multiple check boxes could be selected. The following graph illustrates the percentages as a portion of all surveys.



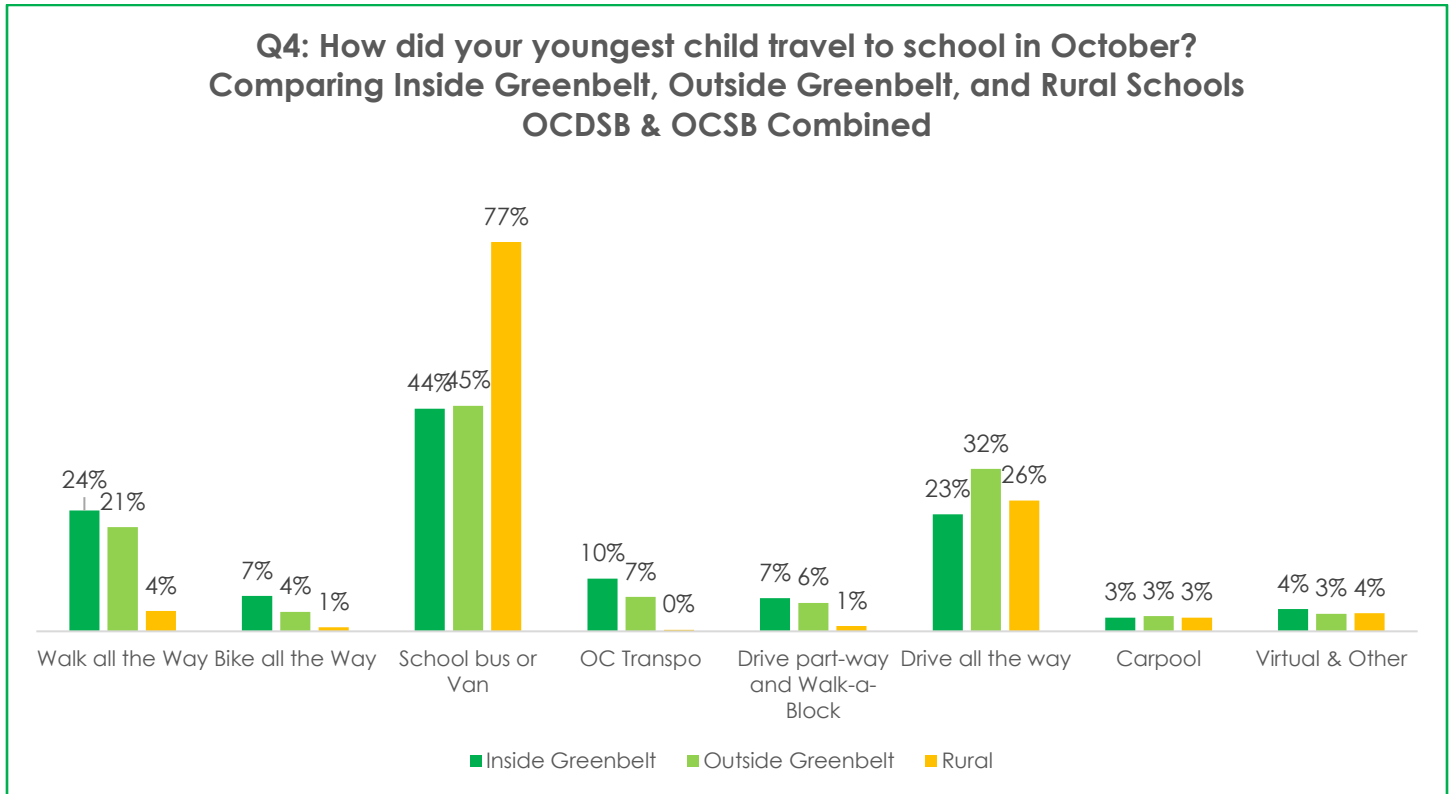
Question 7 was a new question in the 2021 survey, not asked in 2020. The main tools used by families include school crossing guards (20%), Walking School Bus (4%), on-line information about walking/rolling to school (4%), and activities like the "I-Spy Game" (4%). Walk-a-Block Maps were used by 3% of families surveyed.

# Comparison of results by geography

The following map shows the City of Ottawa boundaries of 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
<b>Inside GB</b>	24%	7%	44%	10%	7%	23%	3%	4%
<b>Outside GB</b>	21%	4%	45%	7%	6%	32%	3%	3%
<b>Rural</b>	4%	1%	77%	0%	1%	26%	3%	4%

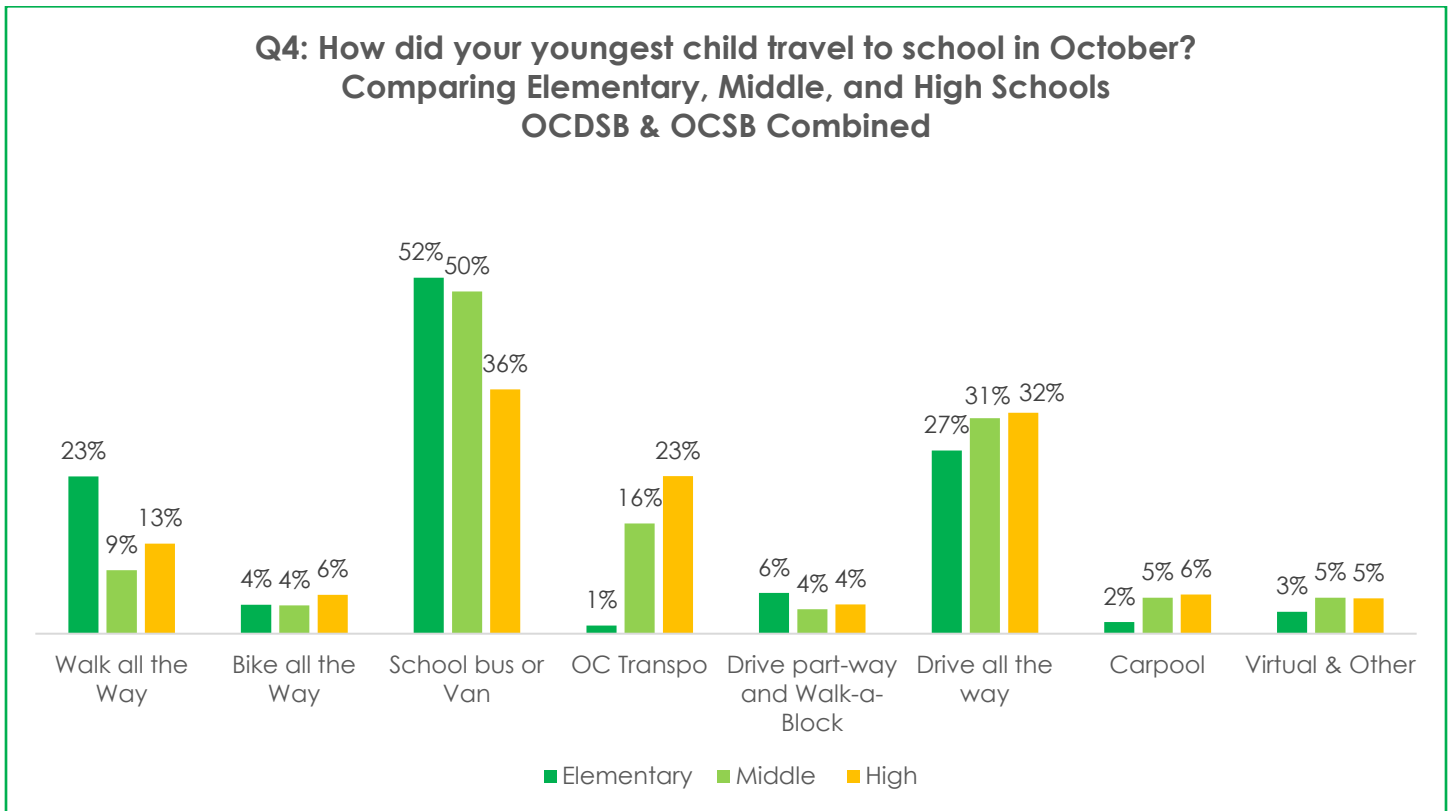
Results show that students living inside the greenbelt were the most engaged in active transportation (walking and cycling) to school. It is encouraging to see that between 6-7% of students living within the City Urban boundary (inside and outside of the greenbelt) were walking at least part of the way. 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 highest in areas outside of the greenbelt (32%).

All transportation habits could have been affected by the impact of COVID-19 on family dynamics and overall commuting patterns.

# Comparison of results by division

The following table and graph provide modal share information for elementary, middle, and high schools.

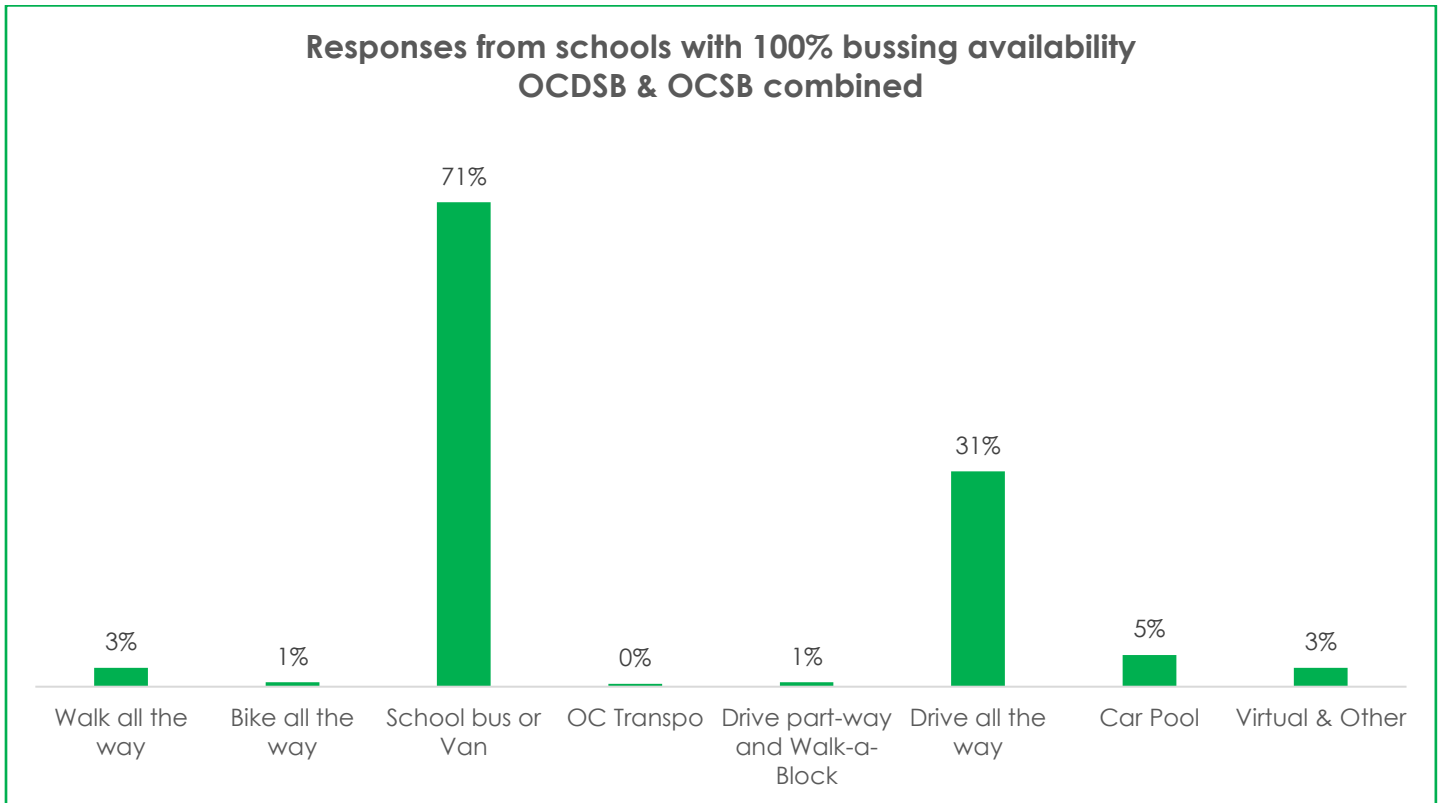


	Walk all the way	Bike all the way	School bus or Van	OC Transpo	Drive part-way and Walk-a-Block	Drive all the way	Car Pool	Virtual
<b>Elementary</b>	23%	4%	52%	1%	6%	27%	2%	3%
<b>Middle</b>	9%	4%	50%	16%	4%	31%	5%	5%
<b>High</b>	13%	6%	36%	23%	4%	32%	6%	5%

Results show that elementary students were more likely to walk all the way to school (23%) compared to middle school (9%) and high school students (13%). Active transportation decreases by approximately 10% from elementary to senior years. This could be a result of a number of factors, including school catchment areas, distance from home to school, or changes in student preferences or independence as students transition to intermediate and senior grades.

# Results for schools with school bus service available to 100% of students

Six percent of survey responses were from families with students in OCDSB and OCSB schools that have bus service available to 100% of the students. Typically, these schools are located on rural roads with no sidewalks or on busy streets with no safe crossing. At schools where bus service is available to 100% of the students, not all students take the bus. Some opt out of transportation service and parents choose alternate modes of transportation. The following graph shows the travel modes for students attending schools with 100% bussing available.

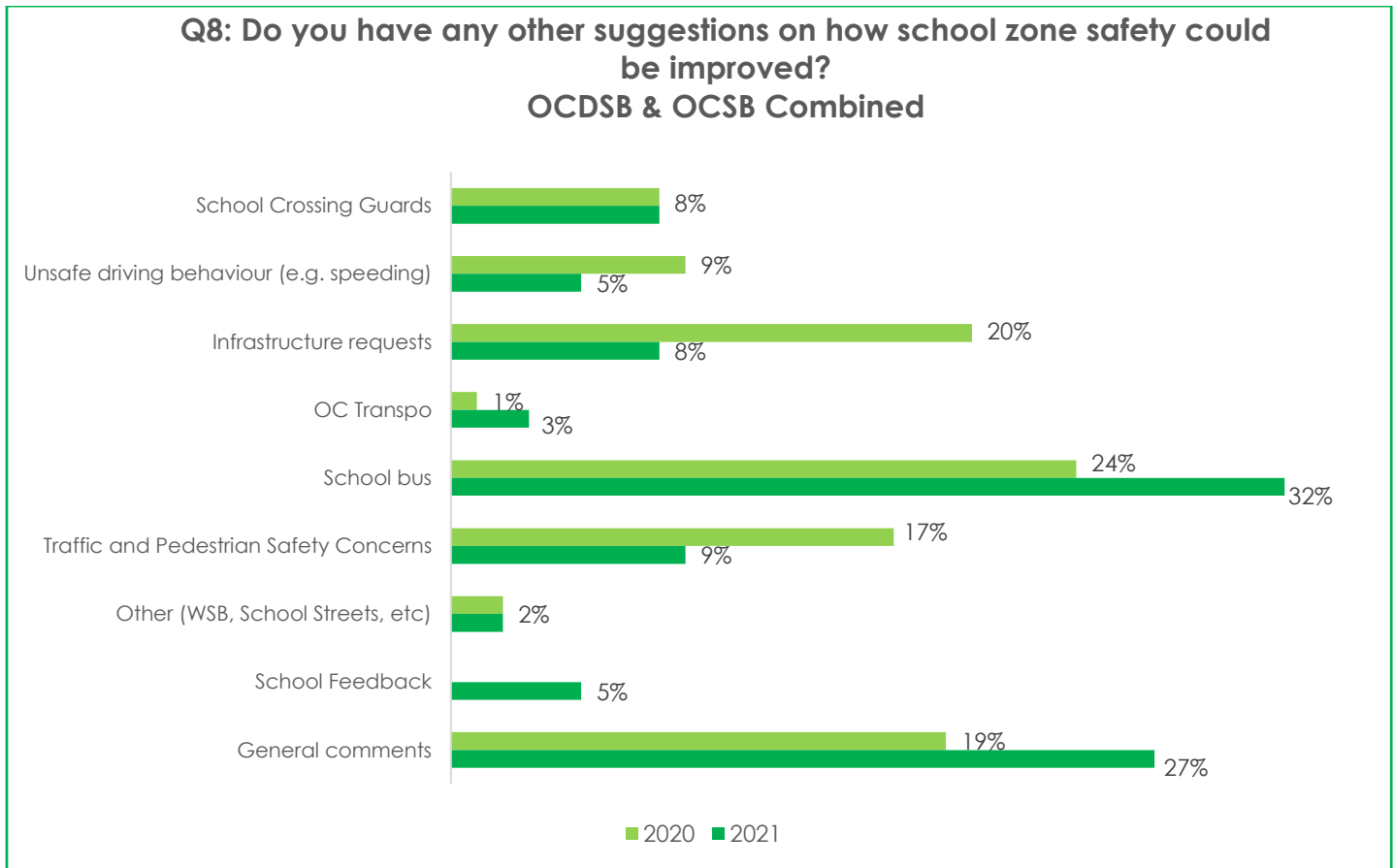


Walk all the way	Bike all the way	School bus or Van	OC Transpo	Drive part-way and Walk-a-Block	Drive all the way	Car Pool	Virtual & Other
3%	1%	71%	0%	1%	31%	5%	3%

Despite all students at these schools being eligible for bussing, only 71% reported using school busses, while 36% of students drove all the way or participated 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. Although there can be a challenging environment for pedestrians around these schools, it is interesting to note that 5% chose to walk, bike, or Walk-a-Block.

## Summary of open-ended comments

The final question on the survey was an open question, asking for suggestions on how school zone safety could be improved. The following graph summarizes different categories of topics that survey respondents commented on.



In addition to being categorized by topic, each comment was also categorized as either positive, negative, or a request. The table below shows the number of respondents within each of these categories.

Positive	Negative	Request
10%	29.5%	60.5%

Many respondents skipped question #8, the open-ended question. Only 18%, or 1,439 respondents, provided suggestions for improved school zone safety. The percentages in the charts and table above represent the portion of responses to question #8. For example, 8% of the open-ended comments were related to school crossing guards.

The majority of comments were requests (61%). In 2020, a large percentage of the requests were about infrastructure, with 20% of all comments being related to infrastructure requests. This year only 8% of comments were related to infrastructure requests, and there were many requests for other categories such as bylaw enforcement of traffic laws or requests to not cancel busses.

# Comparison with SATP schools

## Comparing Historical Data & 2020/2021 OSTA Transportation Survey Results: SATP Schools Only

Twelve schools in Ottawa are currently participating in the School Active Transportation Program (SATP). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, hands-up classroom surveys were conducted over 5 days in all SATP schools. This historical data provides some context and points of comparison for the 2020 and 2021 OSTA Transportation Surveys.

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 those SATP schools with response rates of 10% and over were considered.

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

- 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 one 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 Surveys were conducted in fall 2020 and fall 2021. 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:**

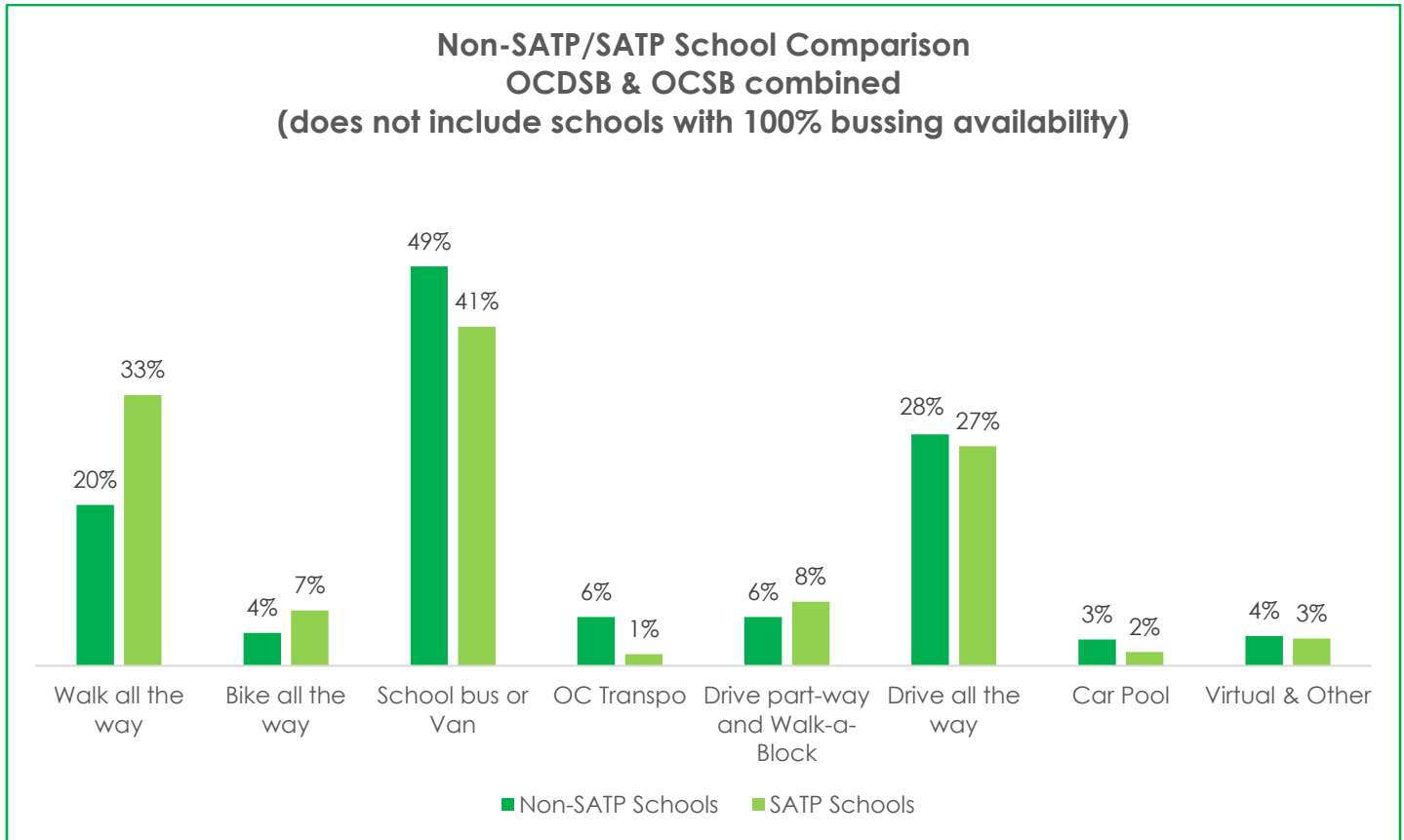
- School-bus ridership increased significantly at 6 of the 7 schools. The significant increase in bussing rates could be due to selection bias, more parents working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, new routines having been formed, and/or other reasons unexplained in data findings.
- The schools with notable increases in bus ridership also showed decreases in driving rates.
- Driving all the way decreased at five of the seven schools. The largest decrease compared to last year's survey was 25 percentage points.
- One school's walking rates increased by 10 percentage points compared to last year's survey.



## Comparing 2021 OSTA Transportation Survey Results: Non-SATP and SATP Schools

For the 2021 OSTA Transportation Survey, results showed that schools that have participated in SATP had a higher average response rate (12%) compared to schools that have not participated in the program (8%).

Any school that has graduated from or is currently engaged in SATP, had a 10% or higher response rate, and does not have 100% bussing availability is included in the SATP School results, compared against non-SATP Schools, which includes any school that has never participated in SATP, had a 10% or higher response rate, and does not have 100% bussing availability.



	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
<b>Non-SATP Schools</b>	20%	4%	49%	6%	6%	28%	3%	4%
<b>SATP Schools</b>	33%	7%	41%	1%	8%	27%	2%	3%

Results show that 13% more survey respondents walked all the way at schools that have graduated from or are currently engaged in SATP compared to schools that have never participated in SATP.

## Key take-aways

The OSTA Transportation Survey allowed us to listen to and receive feedback from families in the OCDSB and the OCSB. The **survey response rate of 9% was excellent**. Many positive comments were directed towards OSTA, the school boards, bus drivers, crossing guards, and the schools. Some specific examples include, “the Walking School Bus service has been so great to use this year. Active, low-risk, safe transportation is more important than ever. Thank you for providing this service!”, “my child’s bus driver is amazing he is always on time and very friendly and I am completely satisfied in the bus service that my three sons receive!!! Thank you for all the hard work! Keep it up as you are a vital role in my and my children’s daily lives!”, “I am very happy with quality of service”, and more.

The OSTA Transportation Survey illustrates that **the vast majority of families surveyed in the two English-speaking boards are choosing active and sustainable modes of transportation** for their children’s daily commute to school. While perceptions remain that driving rates are high at schools, survey responses indicate that 28% of all families 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.

In the fall of 2020, 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 same promotion did not occur in the fall of 2021 and Walk-a-Block rates decreased by 3%. This suggests that repeating the campaign in future years could help increase Walk-a-Block rates.

When comparing survey responses for different age groups, **elementary students 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 promotion of active transportation at the elementary level may have a positive impact and/or families of younger students are more receptive to engaging in active transportation.

The top influences for how students travelled to school were the distance to school, time/family schedule, weather, and school bus cancellations. Families who were affected by long-term bus cancellations reported driving at a much higher rate than those that were unaffected by long-term bus cancellations, showing the **important role that bus service plays in promoting sustainable modes of transportation**.

When survey respondents commented on safety in School Zones, speeding, illegal/double parking, and long car line ups were the areas of greatest concern. Poor pedestrian behaviour, such as distracted pedestrians, jaywalking, and crossing between cars, were also of high concern. 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 behaviour, 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. Repeating this survey annually allows us to identify transportation trends and continue to monitor both safety concerns and the impact of transportation programs.