



# OSTA TRANSPORTATION SURVEY OVERVIEW REPORT

2022



**OSTA**  
Ottawa Student  
Transportation  
Authority



OTTAWA  
CATHOLIC  
SCHOOL BOARD



OTTAWA-CARLETON  
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

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# OSTA Transportation Survey

**Collection dates:** November 9 to November 28, 2022

**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: 6,257**

**Overall response rate of households: 7%**

**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>	6,257	100%	95,489	7%	+/- 1%

## Introduction

The OSTA Transportation Survey was shared on-line with families in OCDSB and OCSB from November 9, 2022 to November 28, 2022. This was the third annual iteration of the OSTA Transportation Survey, which was distributed at the same time of year in 2020 and 2021.

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. Is your youngest child eligible for bussing?\*
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. Is there anything that would encourage your family to walk, roll, scoot, or bike all the way or part of the way to school more often? (Mark all that apply)\*
9. Do you have any other suggestions on how school zone safety could be improved?

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

## Response profile

In total, 6,257 complete responses were collected, representing a response rate of 7% with a confidence interval of plus or minus 1%.

The 7% 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. If a family has children attending schools at both school boards, their household would be noted in the totals at each board, but the survey responses refer to the family's youngest child.

**Incomplete Responses** – A significant number of partially completed surveys were received this year. A total of 7,630 surveys were received, but 1,373 (18%) of those responses only included answers to the first three questions. These partially completed surveys were excluded from the data analysis and the 6,257 complete responses were analyzed. The reason that so many surveys were submitted partially completed remains unknown, although is likely due to a technical error with SurveyMonkey.

**Selection Bias** - This survey was promoted by OSTA and its partners/stakeholders, and therefore the respondent population is likely skewed towards those who follow OSTA's social media and are currently enrolled in OSTA's bus service. When survey respondents were asked if their youngest child was eligible for bussing, 71% of respondents reported using bus service compared with 22% of respondents who were not eligible for bus service, 5% who opted out, and 3% who were affected by a long-term bus cancellation. In 2022, OSTA provided bus service (including school bus, van, or Presto) to 56% of the student population at both school boards.

The majority (67%) 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	4,173	664	1,420
Percentage of surveys	67%	11%	23%

Note that some elementary and high schools have grade 7-8 classes, so in the table above, some intermediate level 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 across both school boards:

Grade	JK	SK	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Percentage of surveys	11%	10%	9%	7%	6%	7%	7%	6%	10%	8%	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	30%	58%	12%

Results were collected from **244 schools** in OCDSB and OCSB. No surveys were received from 10 schools, including some elementary schools and secondary schools, as well as adult high schools and special treatment centres.

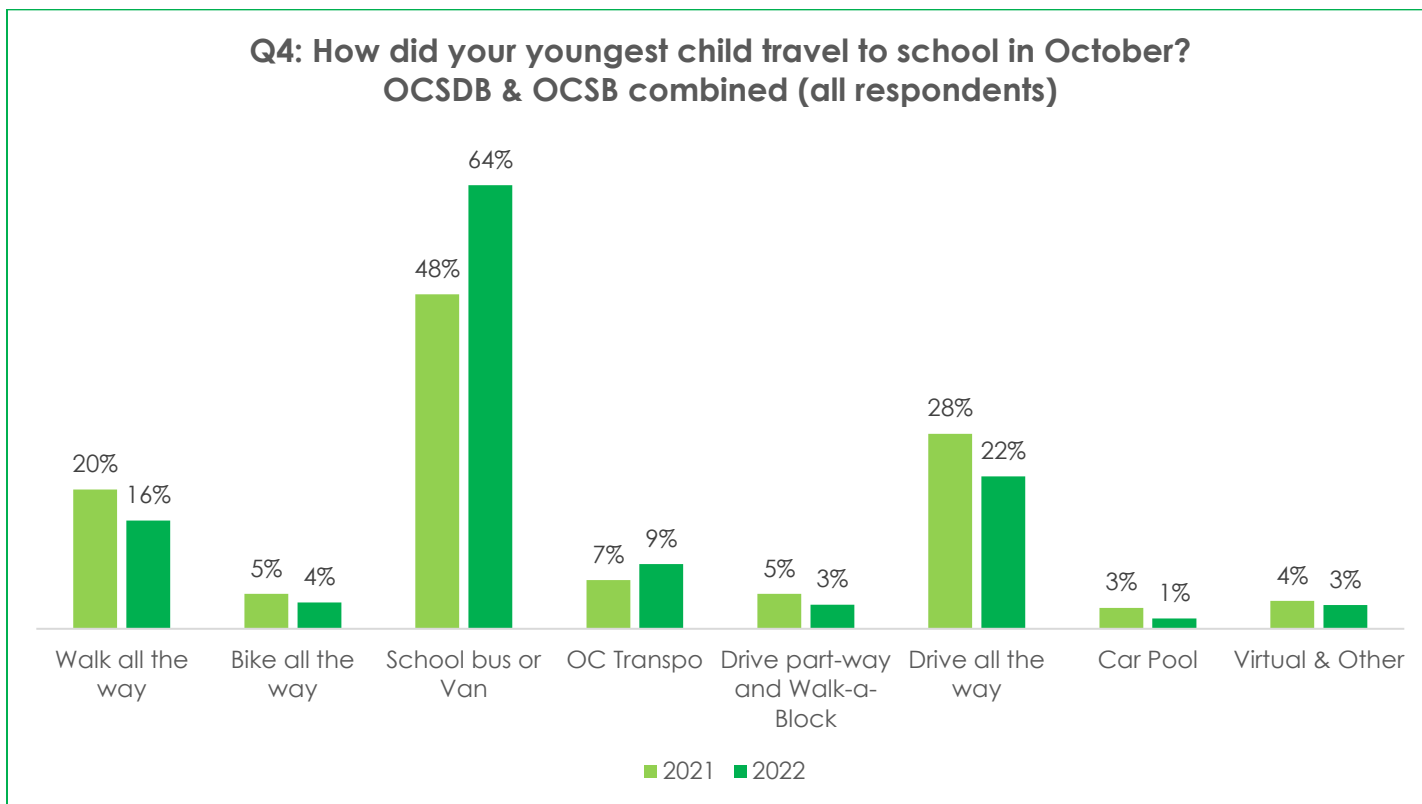
The following chart shows the number of schools and response rate ranges:

Response rate range	Number of schools in range (2020)	Number of schools in range (2021)	Number of schools in range (2022)
45 - 49%	0	1	0
40 - 44%	2	0	0
35 - 39%	4	2	0
30 - 34%	7	6	0
25 - 29%	4	3	2
20 - 24%	8	9	8
15 - 19%	14	25	9
10 - 14%	33	57	46
0 - 9%	143	136	180

# 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. In 2022, 77% selected only one travel mode, while 23% selected two travel modes. The following graph summarizes the transportation modes for students travelling to school, with both school boards combined. Data from 2022 is shown compared to survey results from 2021.



	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	Carpool	Virtual & Other
<b>2021</b>	20%	5%	48%	7%	5%	28%	3%	4%
<b>2022</b>	16%	4%	64%	9%	3%	22%	1%	3%

Most families surveyed reported using **a sustainable mode of transportation** (walking, biking, bussing, “Walk-a-Block” or carpooling), while 22% of families reported “driving all the way.” The number of families who reported walking all the way and driving decreased compared to 2021, which could be attributed to the greater number of families that reported taking the bus. The reported 16% increase in bus ridership in 2022 compared to 2021 could be due to the reduced impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and families may be less hesitant to send their children on the bus.

The option “Drive part-way and Walk-a-Block” was selected by 3% of respondents and decreased from 5% in 2021 and 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. The campaign did not run in the fall of 2021 or 2022, correlating with a decrease in Walk-a-Block rates. This suggests that repeating 2020's campaign could help increase Walk-a-Block rates.

As of January 1, 2023, OSTA transports 42% of the student population in OCDSB and OCSB by school bus or van. However, the option "School Bus or Van," was selected by 64% 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 buses remained suspended due to COVID-19.

OC Transpo Presto cards are provided to 13% of the student population (primarily in grades 7-12), and survey responses show 9% of the student population using OC Transpo for school transportation. Survey response rates are highest in the elementary grades where Presto cards aren't generally provided, which could account for the 4% difference. OC Transpo ridership rate has increased significantly from 2020, when the ridership rate was only 1%.

**How eligibility for bus service affects travel modes:** This year, in order to compare how families travel to school based on busing eligibility, survey respondents were asked if their youngest child was eligible for bus service. Survey respondents were able to select from the following options:

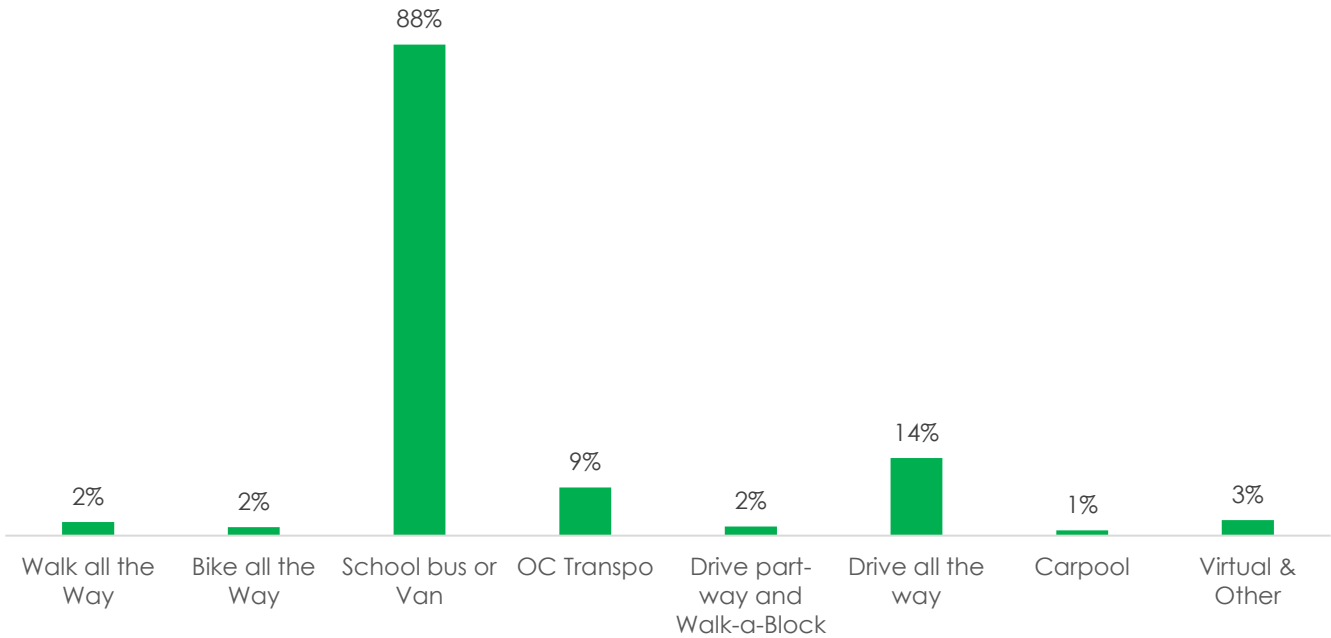
- a. Yes – we are using bus service
- b. Yes – but we opted out
- c. Yes – but we are affected by a long-term bus cancellation (lasting longer than 4 days)
- d. No

Of the surveys received, 71% of respondents reported using bus service, 22% were not eligible for bus service, 5% opted out of bus service, and 3% were affected by a long-term bus cancellation.

Travel modes varied significantly based on bus service eligibility, as summarized in the table below.

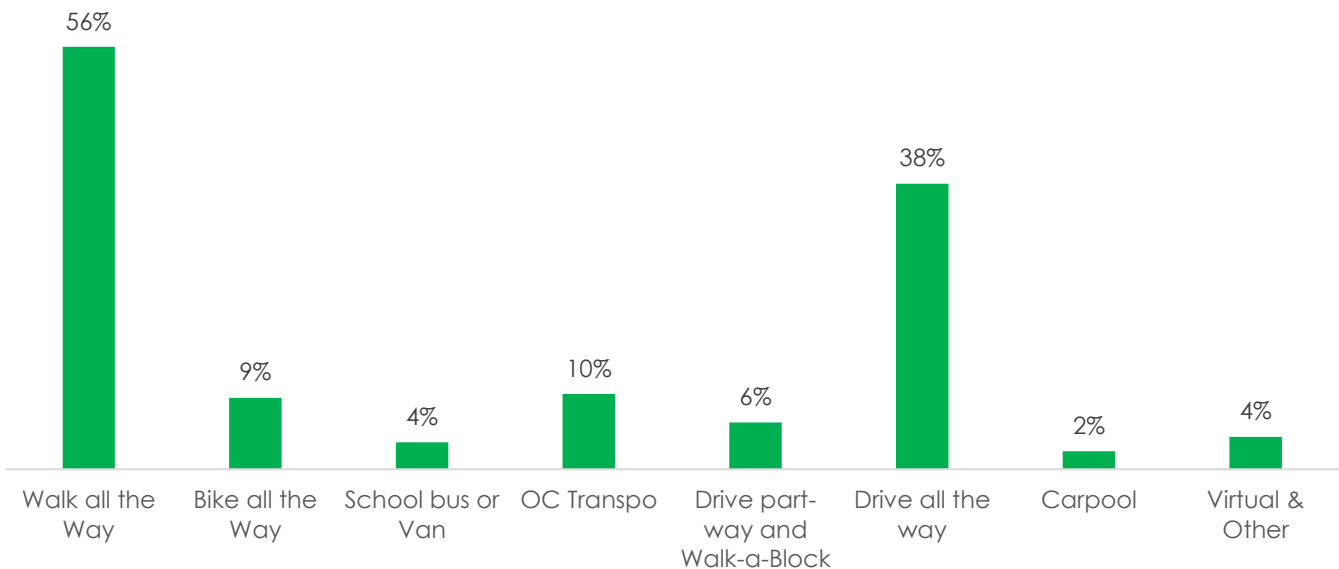
	Walk all the way	Bike all the way	School bus or Van	OC Transpo	Drive part-way and Walk-a-Block	Drive all the way	Carpool	Virtual & Other
<b>Using bus service</b>	2%	2%	88%	9%	2%	14%	1%	3%
<b>Opted out of bus service</b>	31%	11%	2%	2%	17%	59%	1%	5%
<b>Affected by long-term bus cancellation</b>	9%	4%	27%	31%	6%	38%	8%	10%
<b>Not eligible for bus service</b>	56%	9%	4%	10%	6%	38%	2%	4%

### How children using bus service travelled to school in October



Survey respondents using bus service primarily used the school bus or van to get to school in October (88%), but some families also reported driving all the way to school (14%) or using OC Transpo (9%).

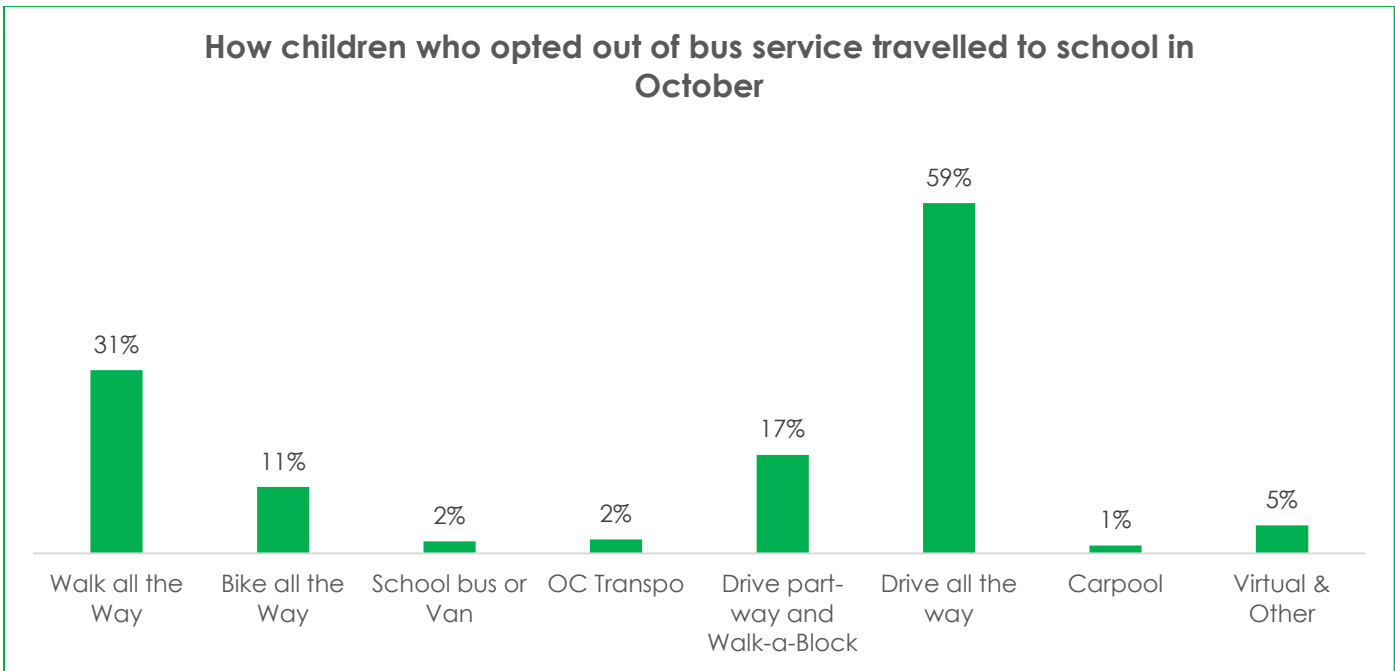
### How children not eligible for bus service travelled to school in October



To be eligible for bus service, students in grades 1-12 must live more than 1.6 km from school and students in kindergarten must live more than 800 m away. Families who were not eligible for bus service reported the highest rates of walking and biking all the way to school (65%). As these families live closest to school, it is likely more convenient for them to use active transportation, explaining why their walking and biking rates are higher compared to other survey respondents.



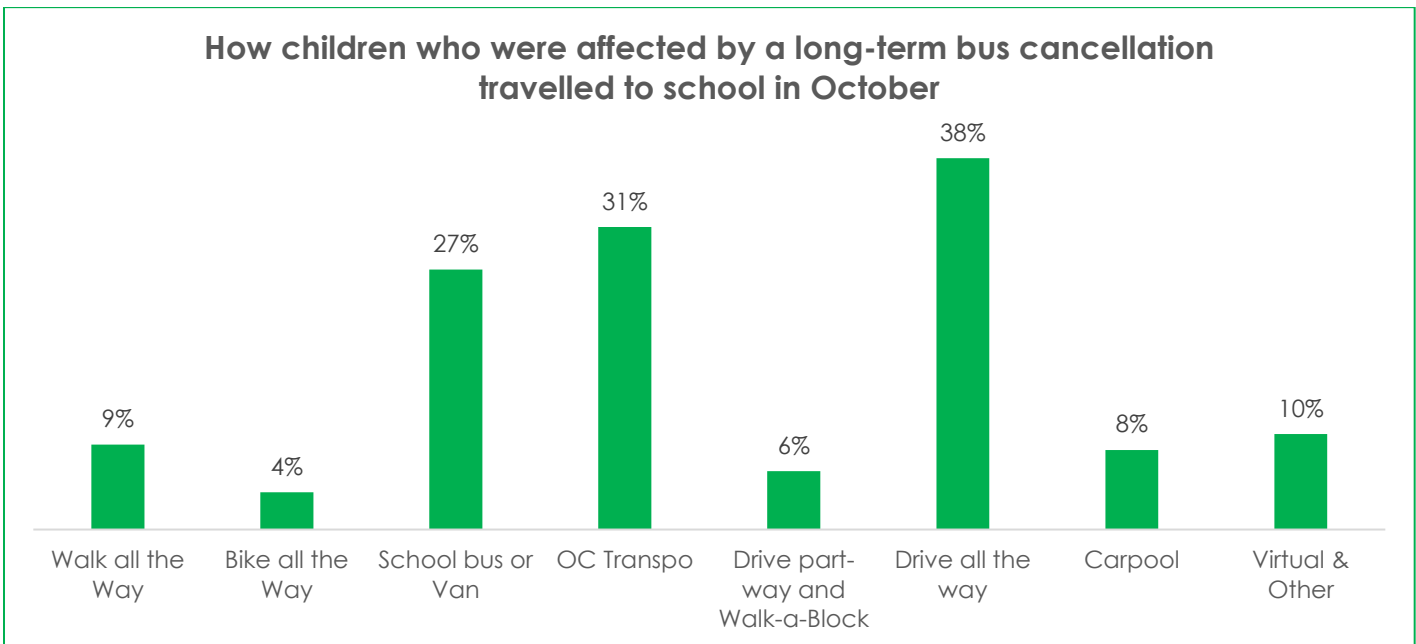
### How children who opted out of bus service travelled to school in October



There was a large percentage of families eligible for bussing who opted out that reported walking or biking all the way (42%). These students would have to walk or bike more than 1.6 km to school if they are in grades 1-12 and more than 800 m if they are in kindergarten.

The survey respondents with the highest rates of driving all the way were those who were eligible for bus service but opted out, with 59% of these respondents reporting driving all the way. There is an opportunity to focus on encouraging these families to walk-a-block as a means for reducing congestion in the school zone. Further research could be done to investigate why these families opted out of bus service to try and increase the number of students using bus service instead of driving all the way.

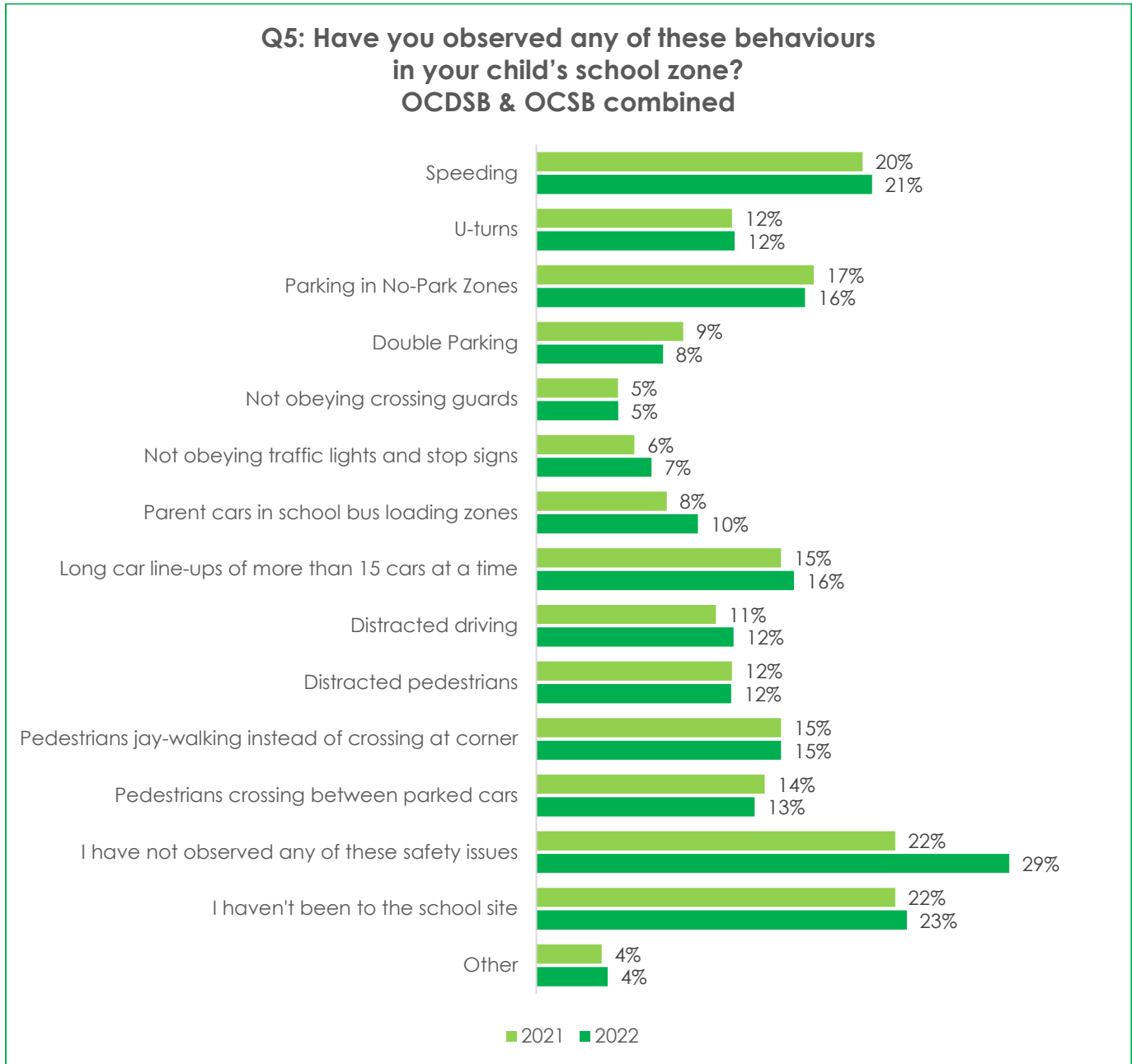
### How children who were affected by a long-term bus cancellation travelled to school in October



Students who were affected by a long-term bus cancellation reported driving and using OC Transpo as their most common travel modes, with 38% of respondents driving all the way and 31% of respondents using OC Transpo.

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

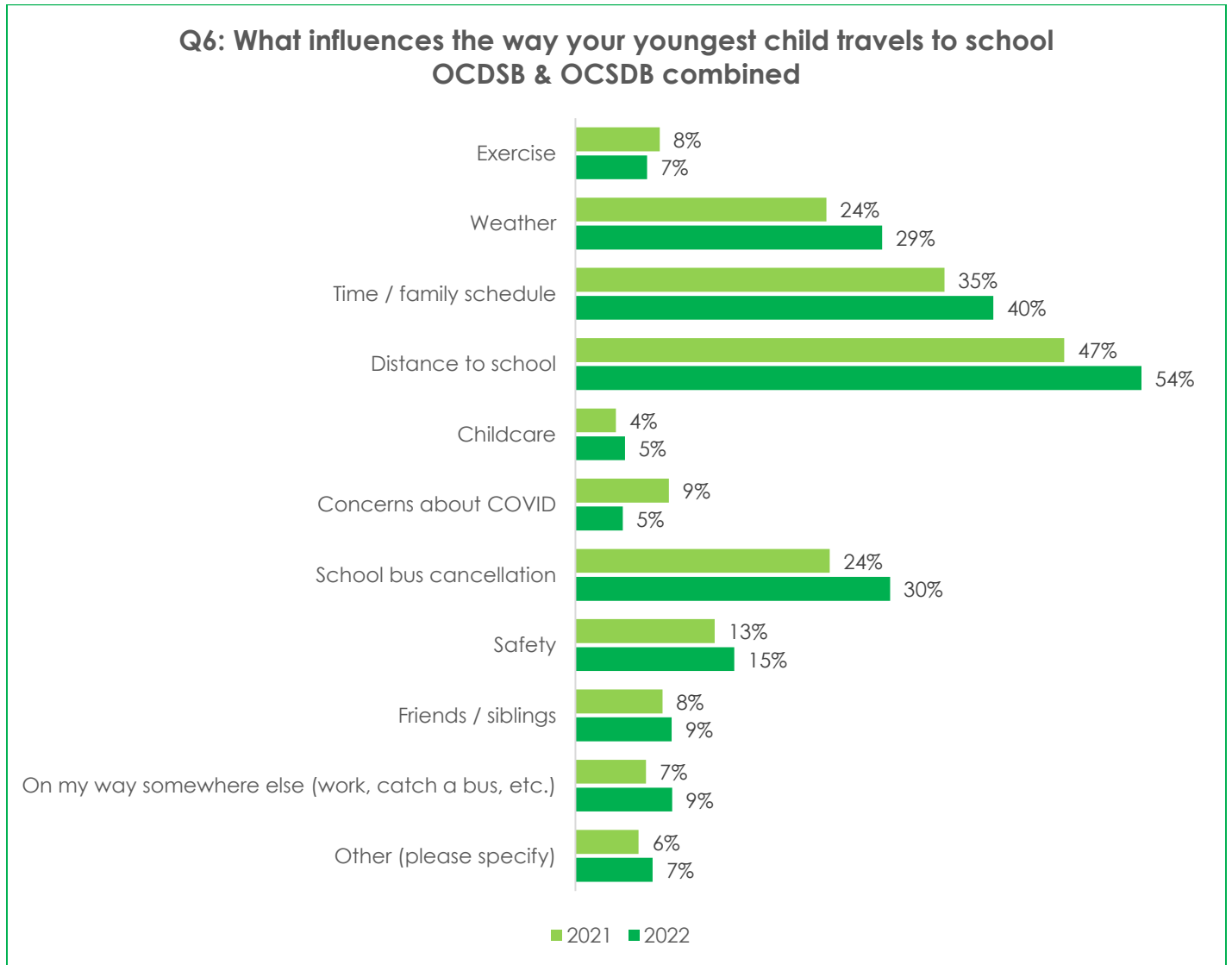
Family members were asked to indicate any concerns about traffic and pedestrian safety in the School Zone. Multiple check boxes could be selected. The following graph illustrates the percentages as a portion of all surveys.



There was an increased number of survey respondents who reported that they did NOT observe any safety issues in the school zone this year compared to 2021. The higher number of survey respondents who reported taking the bus this year correlates with the increased number of people who did not observe of safety issues in front of schools. Similar to 2021, there were over 10% of respondents that reported observing distracted pedestrians, jaywalking, pedestrians crossing between cars, speeding, U-turns, long car line ups, and parking in no-park zones.

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

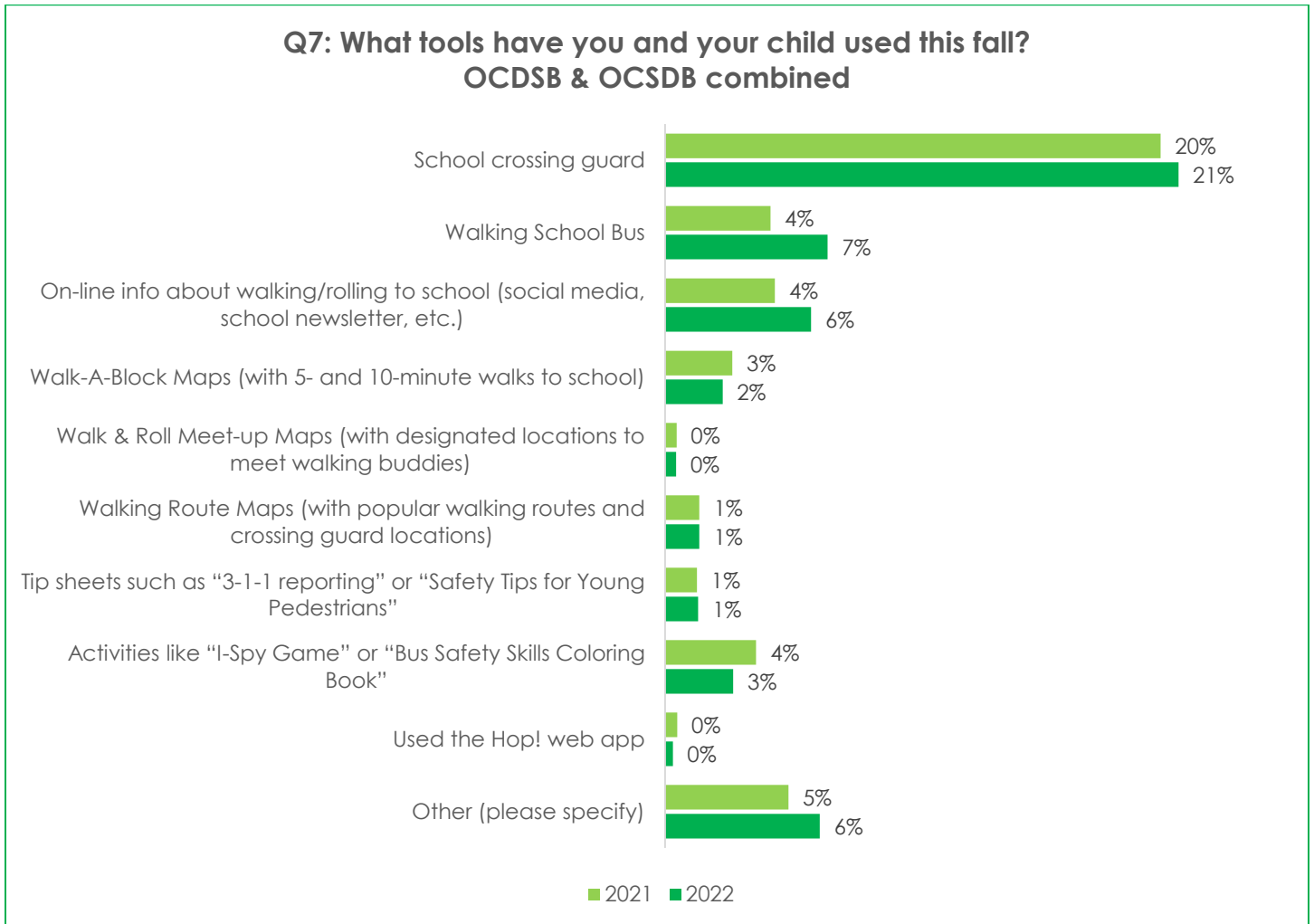
Family members were asked to indicate factors that influence how their youngest child gets to school. Multiple check boxes could be selected. The following graph illustrates the percentages as a portion of all surveys.



The top influences for how survey respondents travelled to school were similar to 2021: distance to school (54%), time/family schedule (40%), school bus cancellations (30%), and weather (29%). Concerns about COVID-19 have decreased by 4% since 2021.

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

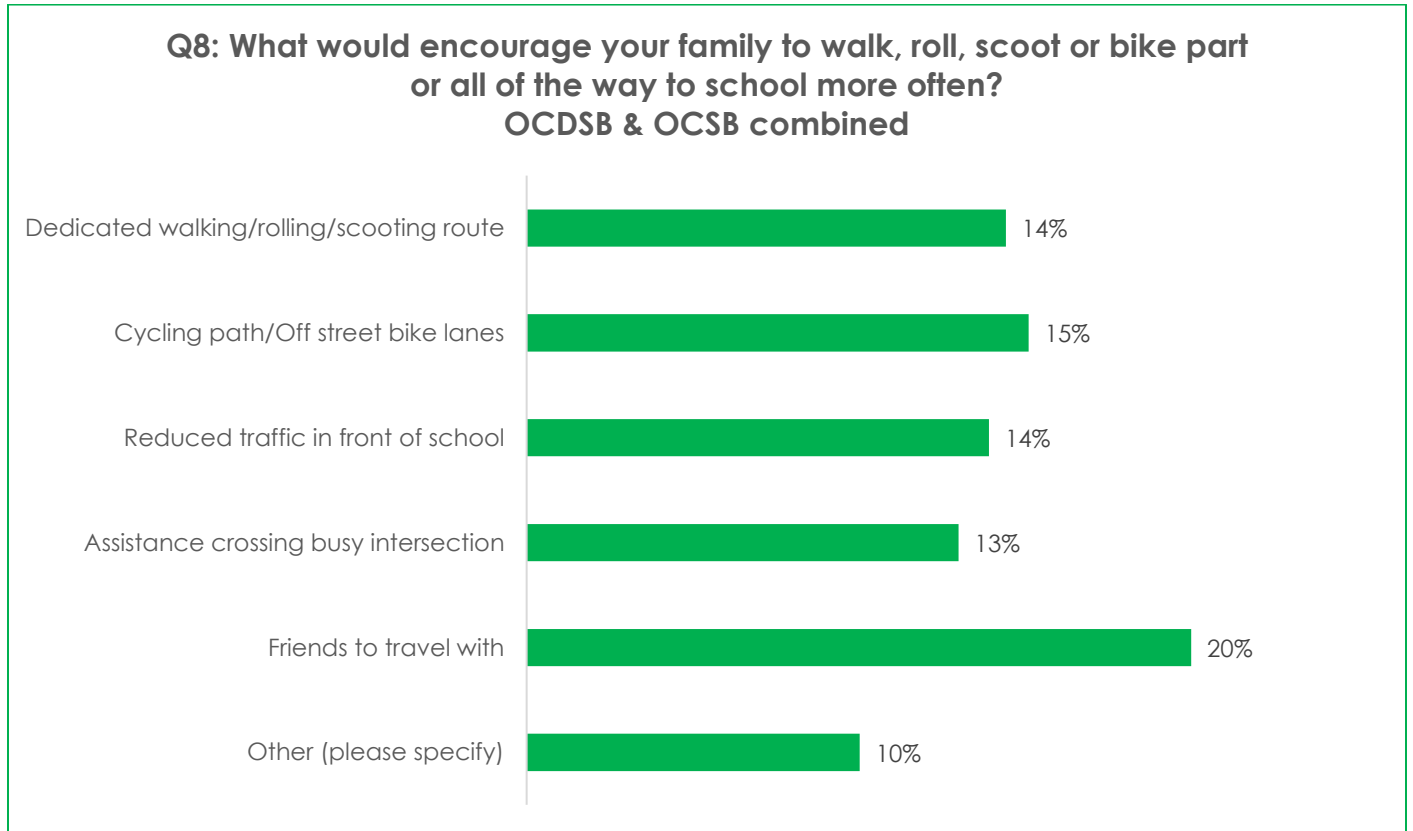
Various tools are used to promote active transportation, and families were asked which tools they had used. Multiple check boxes could be selected. The following graph illustrates the percentages as a portion of all surveys.



The main tools used by families surveyed include school crossing guards (21%), Walking School Bus (7%), on-line information about walking/rolling to school (6%). There was a 3% increase in survey respondents who reported using the walking school bus this year compared to 2021. The respondents who reported "other" primarily commented that they had not used any of the tools.

## What would encourage your family to walk, roll, scoot, or bike part or all of the way to school more often?

Question 8 was a new question in 2022, and it was not asked in previous versions of the survey. Families were asked what would encourage them to use active transportation, including walking part of the way to school, more often. Multiple check boxes could be selected.

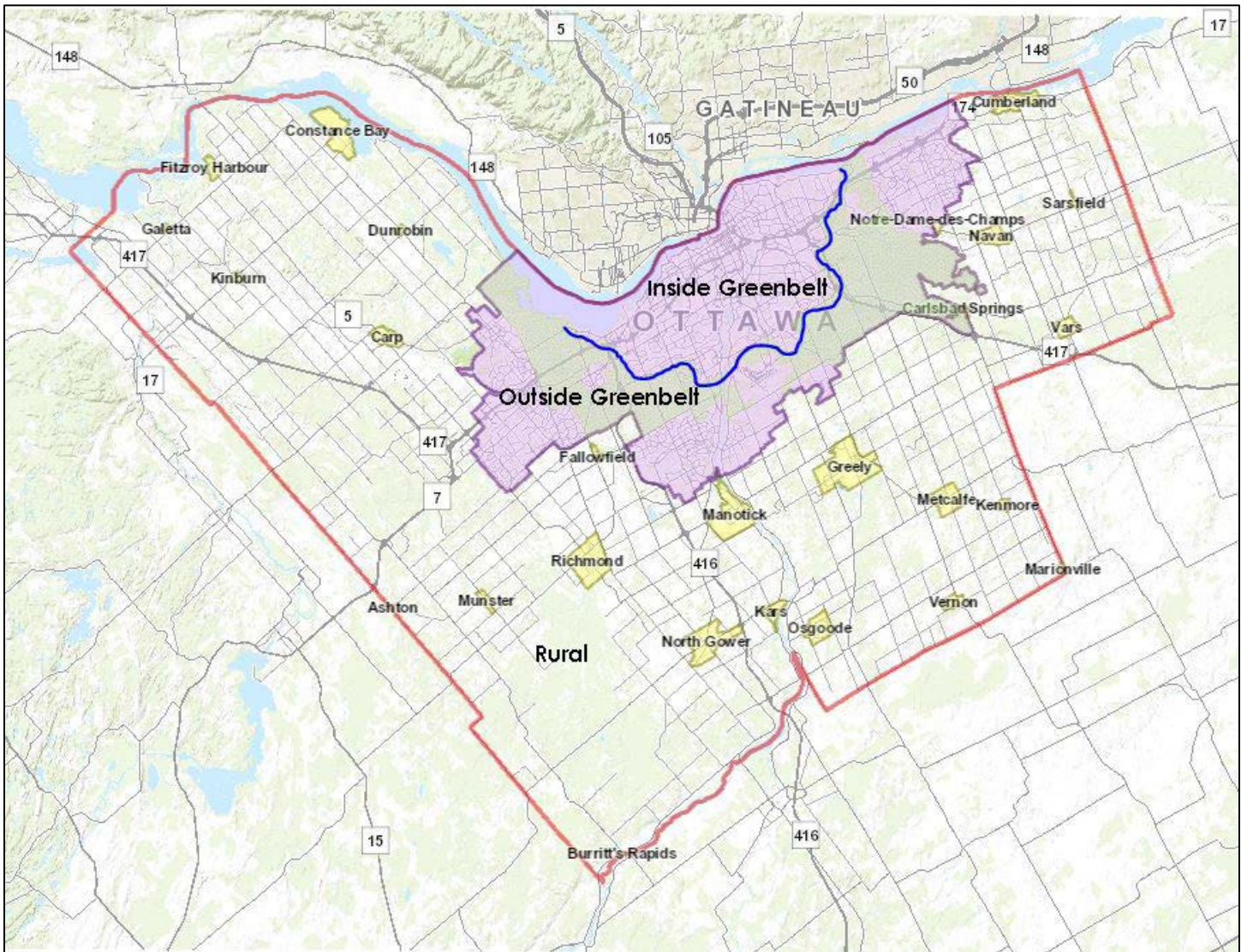


The greatest number of survey respondents (20%) indicated that having friends to travel with would encourage their family to walk, roll, scoot, or bike to school more often. Promotion of OSTA's Walk and Roll meetup maps could help families arrange meeting times and places to walk together to school.

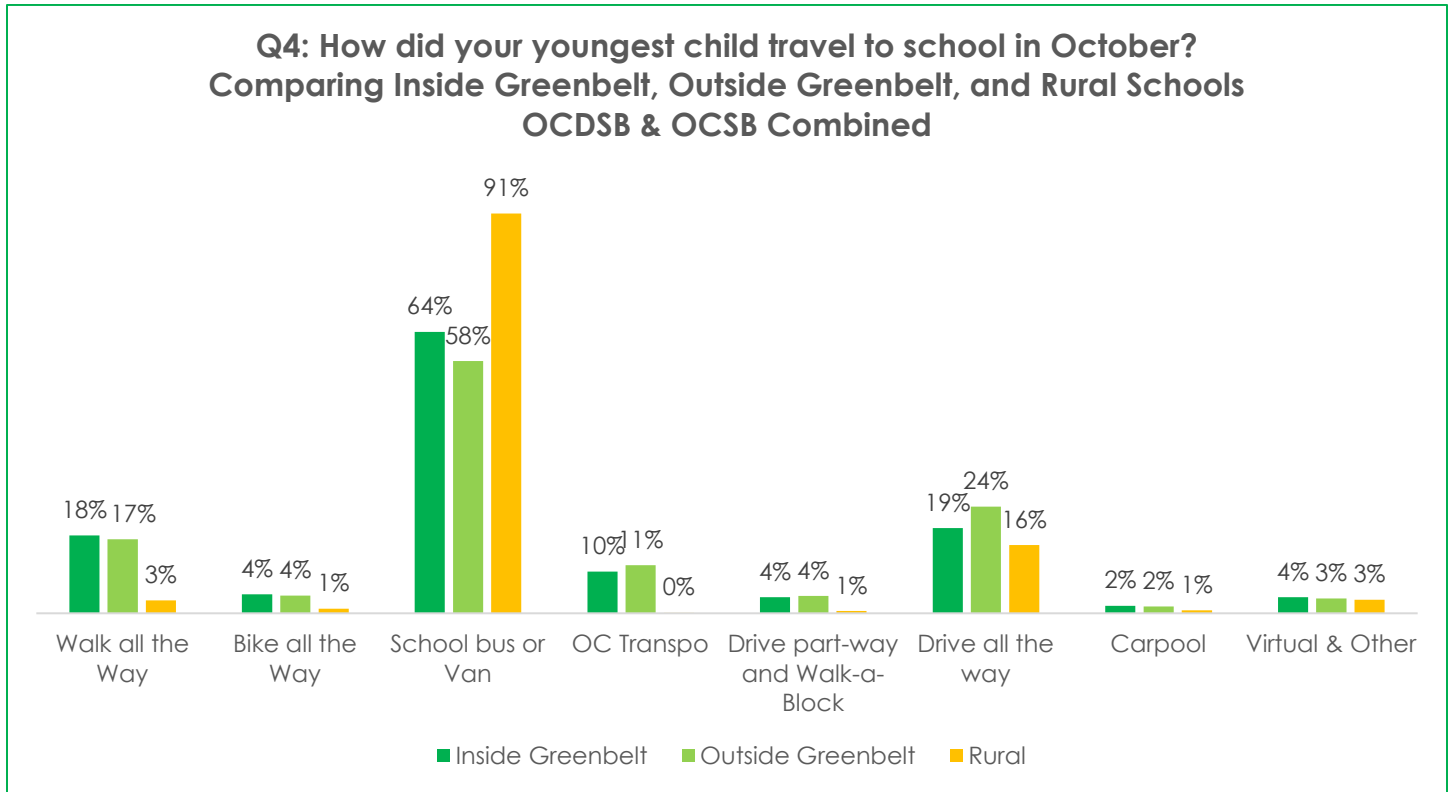
There was an error with the "other" option in the survey, and respondents who answered "other" were not able to specify their answer. Many comments entered in Question 9 referenced question 8, with respondents stating that they live too far away to walk to school. Others commented that they must use bus service and can't use active transportation. For those families who live far away and drive, promotion of Walk-a-Block could be an effective tool for encouraging them to walk part-way.

# 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.



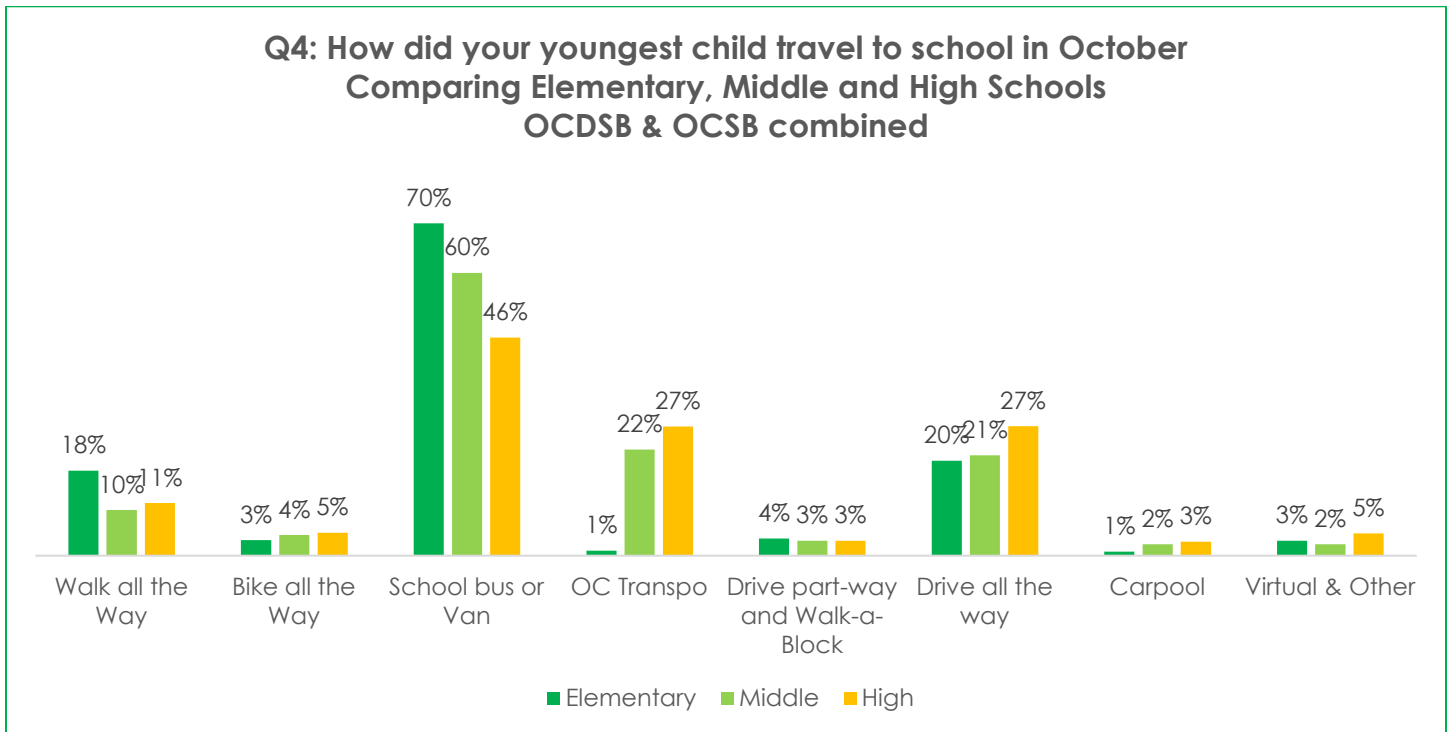
	Walk all the way	Bike all the way	School bus or Van	OC Transpo	Drive part-way and Walk-a-Block	Drive all the way	Carpool	Virtual & Other
<b>Inside GB</b>	18%	4%	64%	10%	4%	19%	2%	4%
<b>Outside GB</b>	17%	4%	58%	11%	4%	24%	2%	3%
<b>Rural</b>	3%	1%	91%	0%	1%	16%	1%	3%

Results show that students within the city's urban boundary (inside and outside of the greenbelt) were the most engaged in active transportation (walking and cycling) to school. Good connectivity and safe walking routes in both established and newer neighbourhoods may contribute to these positive numbers. Rural families reported the highest rates of school bus ridership (91%) and the lowest rates of active transportation.

Families driving their child all the way is highest in areas outside of the greenbelt (24%).

# Comparison of results by division

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



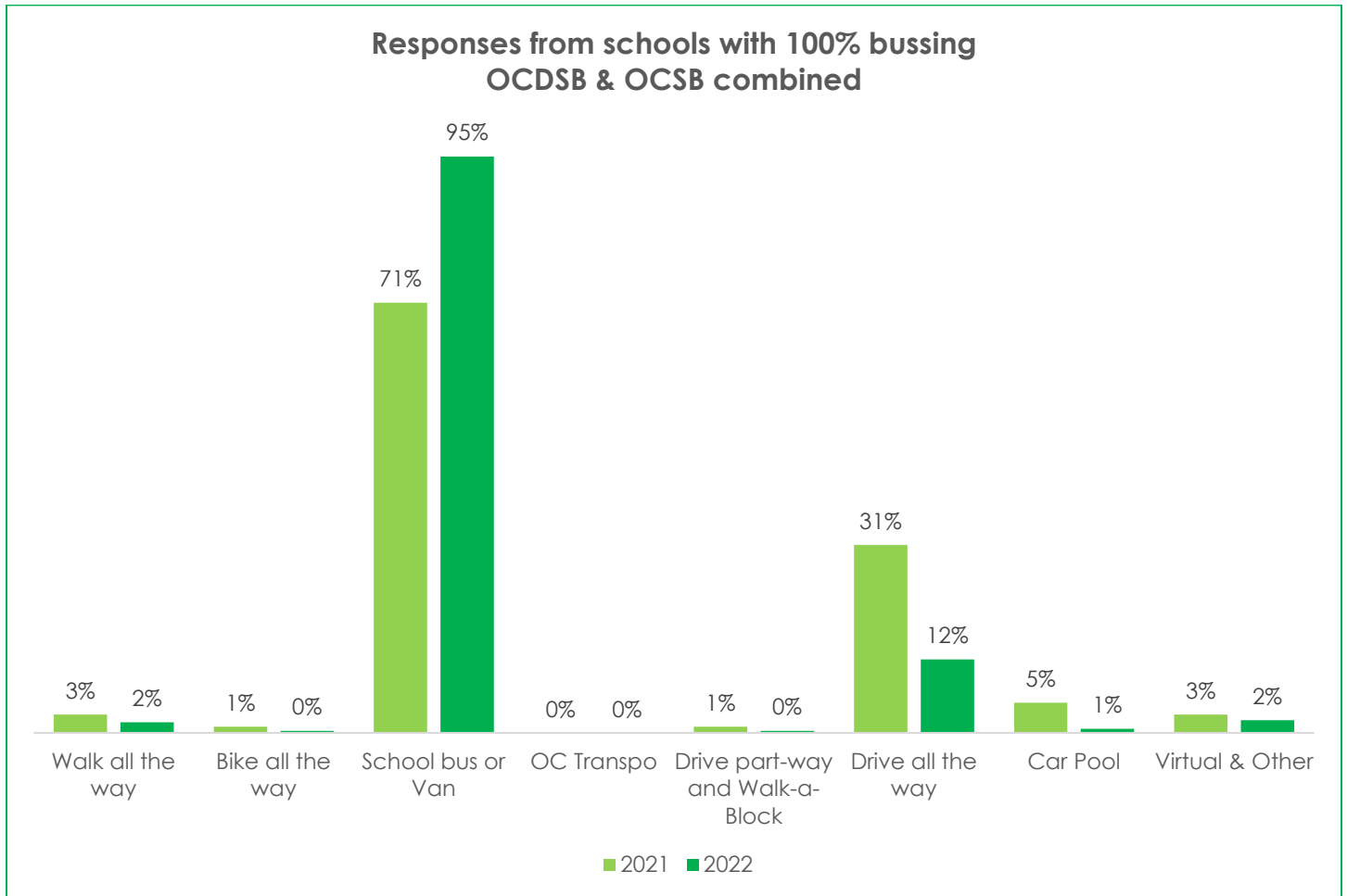
	Walk all the way	Bike all the way	School bus or Van	OC Transpo	Drive part-way and Walk-a-Block	Drive all the way	Carpool	Virtual & Other
<b>Elementary</b>	18%	3%	70%	1%	4%	20%	1%	3%
<b>Middle</b>	10%	4%	60%	22%	3%	21%	2%	2%
<b>High</b>	11%	5%	46%	27%	3%	27%	3%	5%

Results show that elementary students were more likely to walk all the way to school (18%) compared to middle school (10%) and high school students (11%). Active transportation decreases by approximately 8% 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. This shows an opportunity to promote active transportation at middle schools where active transportation rates are the lowest.



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

Five 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. Even though 100% of students at these schools are eligible for busing, 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.

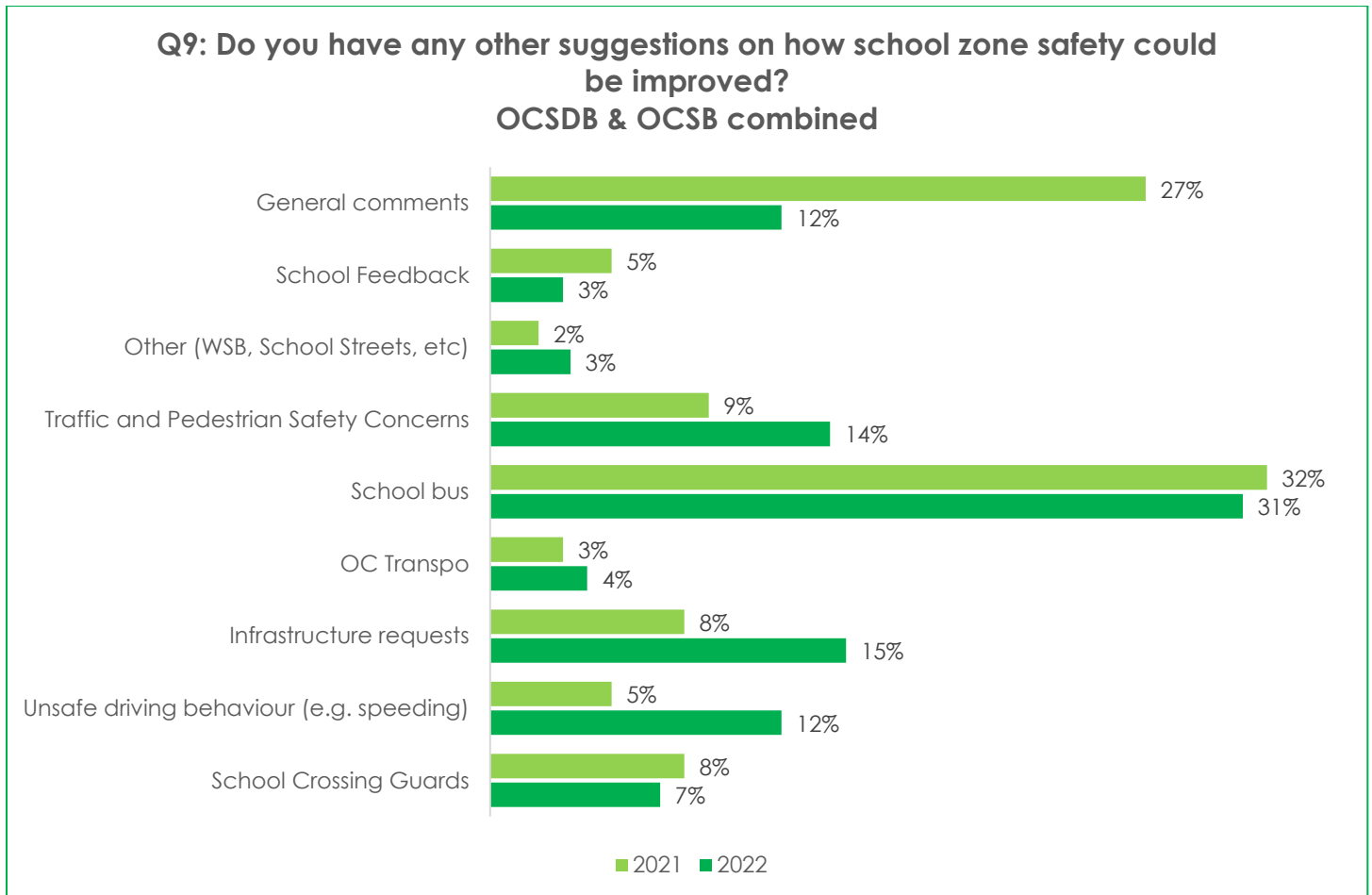


	Walk all the way	Bike all the way	School bus or Van	OC Transpo	Drive part-way and Walk-a-Block	Drive all the way	Carpool	Virtual & Other
2021	3%	1%	71%	0%	1%	31%	5%	3%
2022	2%	0%	95%	0%	0%	12%	1%	2%

There was a significant increase in students taking the bus at schools with 100% bussing in 2022 compared to 2021. In 2021, only 71% reported using school busses compared to 95% of respondents taking the bus in 2022. This increase could be due to the reduced impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic this year, and families may be less hesitant to send their children on the bus.

## 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
10.1%	21.0%	68.9%

Many respondents skipped question #9, the open-ended question. Only 20%, or 1,269 respondents, provided suggestions for improved school zone safety. The percentages in the charts and table above represent the portion of responses to question #9. For example, 7% of the open-ended comments were related to school crossing guards.

The majority of comments (69%) were requests. There were 9% fewer negative comments this year than there were in 2021. In 2022, most comments were related to school buses (31%), followed by infrastructure requests (15%), pedestrian and traffic safety concerns (14%), and unsafe driving behaviour (12%). Due to the nature of open-ended questions, it is difficult to quantify and summarize the results. A secondary report has been created to categorize and show comments.

# Comparison with SATP schools

## Comparing Historical Data & 2021/2022 OSTA Transportation Survey Results: SATP Schools Only

At the time when the survey was completed in November 2022, thirteen schools in Ottawa were 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 2020-2022 OSTA Transportation Surveys.

Four SATP schools, both current and recently graduated, have been selected for this comparison. 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 the fall. 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.

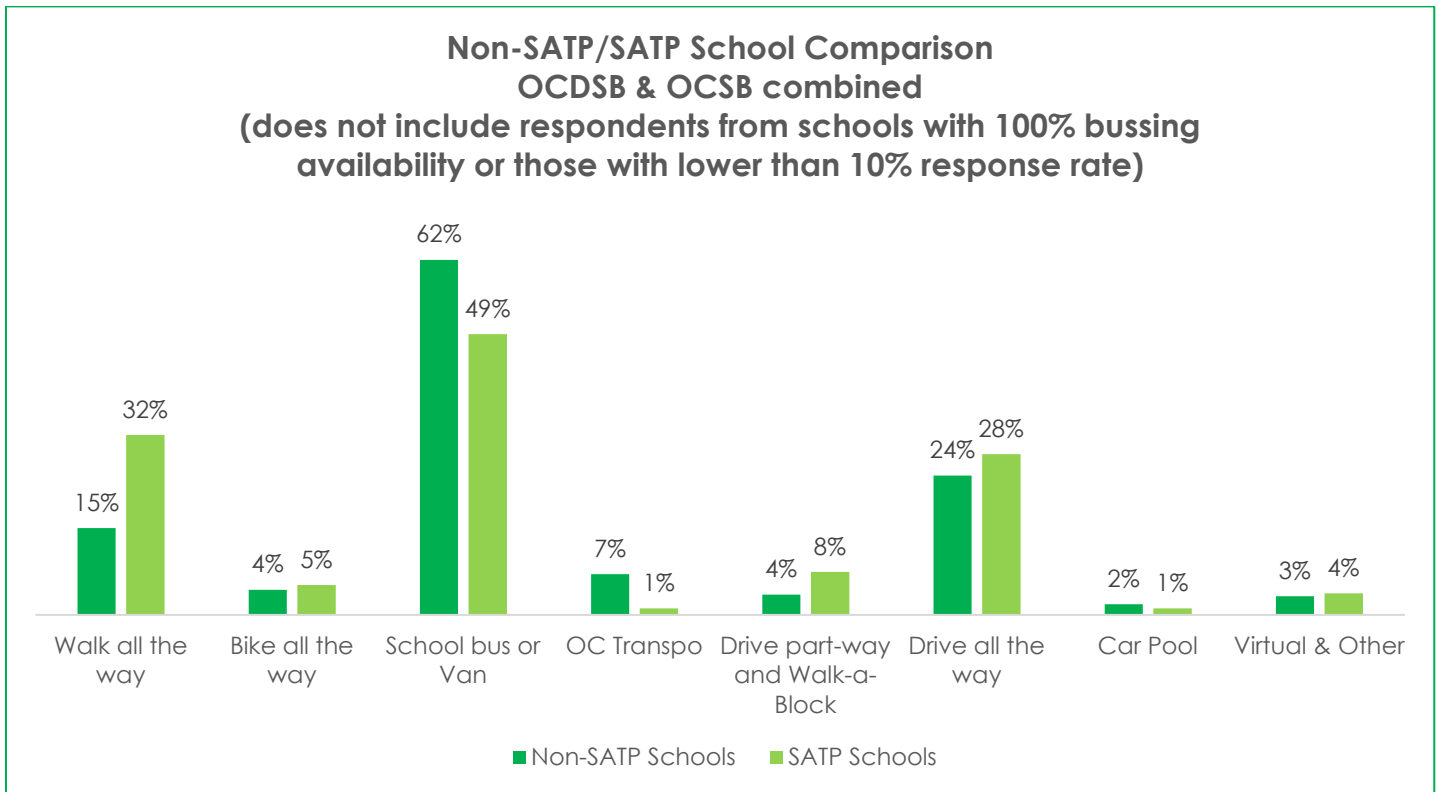
Because the data is collected in different ways, it is not possible to draw firm conclusions. However, **some trends were discovered:**

- School-bus ridership increased significantly at three of the four schools: This increase in bus ridership could be due to reduced impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, with more families feeling comfortable sending their children on the bus instead of driving them to school.
- One school's walking rates increased by 11% compared to 2021.

## Comparing 2022 OSTA Transportation Survey Results: Non-SATP and SATP Schools

SATP schools had a higher average response rate (8%) compared to schools that have not participated in the program (6%).

The following graph compares schools which received 10% response rate or higher, split between schools who are current or former members of SATP, and those who have never been members. For this analysis, schools with 100% bussing have been excluded.



	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>	15%	4%	62%	7%	4%	24%	2%	3%
<b>SATP Schools</b>	32%	5%	49%	1%	8%	28%	1%	4%

Results show that 17% 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. Survey respondents from SATP schools are also 4% more likely to use Walk-a-Block than non-SATP schools.

## 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 7%** was lower than last year due to a significant number (18%) of surveys that were partially completed. The source of the technical error causing these partially completed surveys should be investigated to prevent recurrence in future years.

Many positive comments towards OSTA, the school boards, bus drivers, crossing guards, and the schools were received. Some specific examples include: "I feel our zone is pretty safe - we started the year off biking to school, but my kids decided they wanted to be on the bus. I'd love to walk/bike them in while the weather is still nice, but also love that they love the bus!", "OSTA is doing great job. We have only few cancellations during last year. This year only one or two cancellation, that is ok. We have no car yet, so bus cancellation affects us. Thank you OSTA.", "Thank you crossing guards they do a great job !!"

The OSTA Transportation Survey illustrates that **the vast majority of families surveyed in the two English-speaking boards are choosing sustainable and active modes of transportation** for their children's daily commute to school. Most families in urban and suburban areas are choosing to have their children walk, bike, ride the bus, Walk-a-Block, or carpool. While perceptions remain that driving rates are high at schools, survey responses indicate that 22% of all families drove to school at least once in October, down 6% from the 2021 survey results. The number of families who reported walking all the way also decreased this year, which could be attributed to the **16% increase in families that reported taking a school bus or van**. Increased bus ridership rates in 2022 could be due to reduced effects of the COVID-19 pandemic compared to the previous two years.

**Walk-a-Block rates have continuously decreased since 2020** when 8% of survey respondents reported walking a block, to 5% in 2021, and further to 3% in 2022. 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 subsequent years and repeating the campaign 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. This suggests that promotion of active transportation at the elementary level may be having 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, school bus cancellations, and weather. Since distance to school heavily influences travel modes, this year's survey responses were compared based on how far away from the school respondents live (whether they were eligible for bussing or not). Not surprisingly, respondents who live close to school and are ineligible for bus service had the highest rates of walking and biking all the way (65%). **Survey respondents who opted out of bus service had the highest rates of driving all the way**, with 59% of these respondents reporting driving all the way. There is an opportunity to focus on encouraging these families to either take the bus or walk-a-block as a means for reducing congestion in the school zone. Families who were affected by long-term bus cancellations also reported driving at much higher rates than average survey respondents, showing the **important role that bus service plays in providing access to sustainable modes of transportation**.

When survey respondents commented on safety in school zones, the greatest areas of concern were speeding, illegal/double parking, and long car line ups. 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 towards 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, when to call 3-1-1).

The information collected via this survey provides valuable data which helps identify transportation trends and opportunities for promoting sustainable and active transportation. Repeating this survey annually allows us to continue to monitor both safety concerns and the impact of transportation programs.