

Chapter 8: School Development

School development is an ongoing process in our schools designed to guide and focus a school towards the achievement of its ultimate goal - to enhance student learning. To do this, schools not only develop a series of goals and objectives but also an evaluation framework. This framework enables schools to show the degree of progress they have made in reaching their goals. For example, one of the broad goals listed by a school could be to improve student achievement levels across the curriculum. A specific objective designed to meet this goal could be to begin the process of implementing annual, long range plans that outline the academic strategies for curriculum delivery for each grade level. The next step is to measure the degree to which teachers working with similar curriculum outcomes have been provided with networking opportunities to share information.

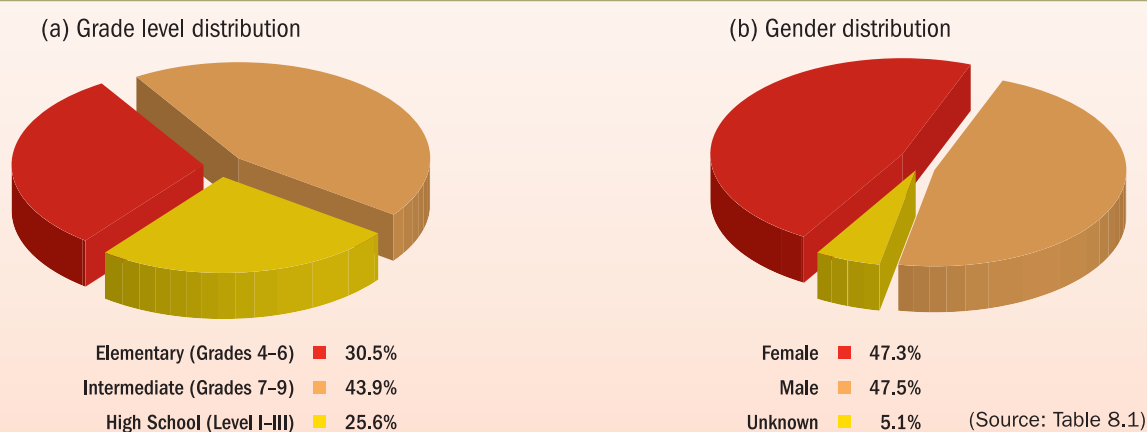
An important component of this process is to hear from parents, teachers and students. Each group completes a short survey designed to get feedback on a wide variety of topics including school safety, physical activity and dietary habits, and participation in school activities. Participants are provided with a list of statements and asked whether or not they agree or disagree with each one.

This chapter will focus on the 2009/10 school development survey results. It will explore the responses of elementary, intermediate and high school students, on selected questions from the school development surveys.

Sample size (2009/10)

During the 2009/10 school year, 16,582 students in 82 schools across the province completed the school development survey. Figure 8.1 provides a breakdown of the student sample. The overall sample was composed of a higher percentage of intermediate level students as compared to high school and elementary students. Along gender lines, a similar percentage of boys and girls completed the survey. This was also the case within each grade level.

Figure 8.1: Sample characteristics (n=16,582)



The school environment

This first theme explores student perceptions on how they feel in the school environment. For example, do they feel safe, are they listened to, do they believe people in school care about them?

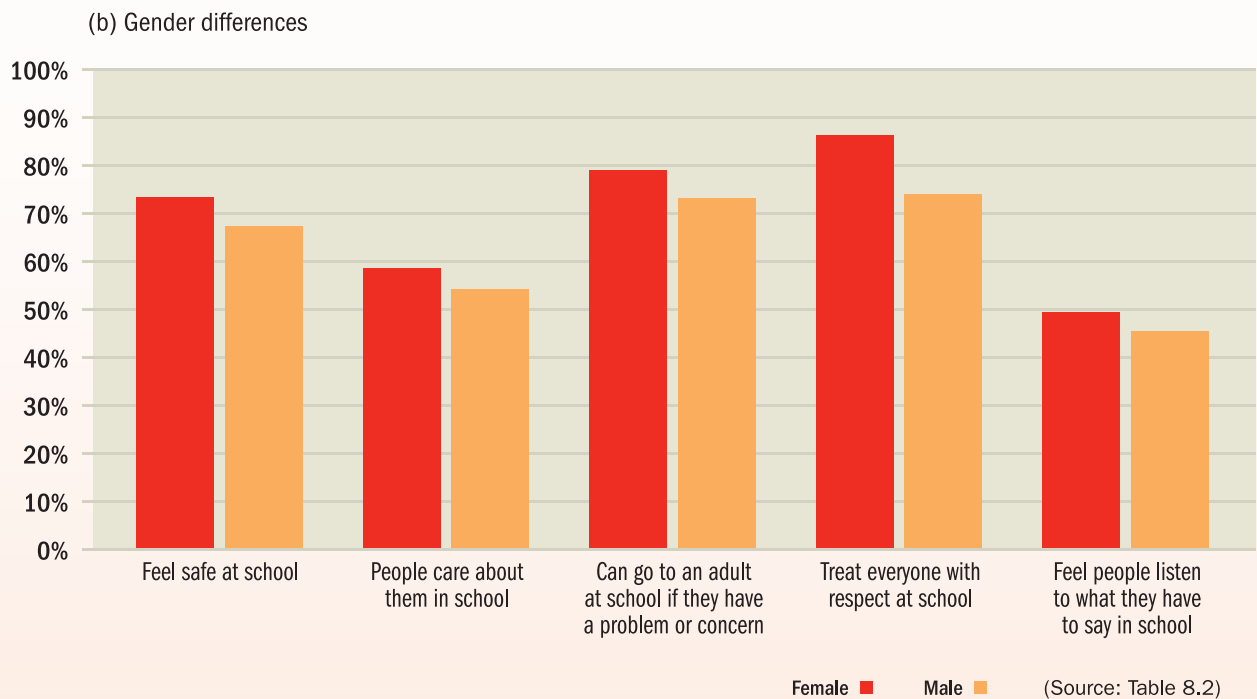
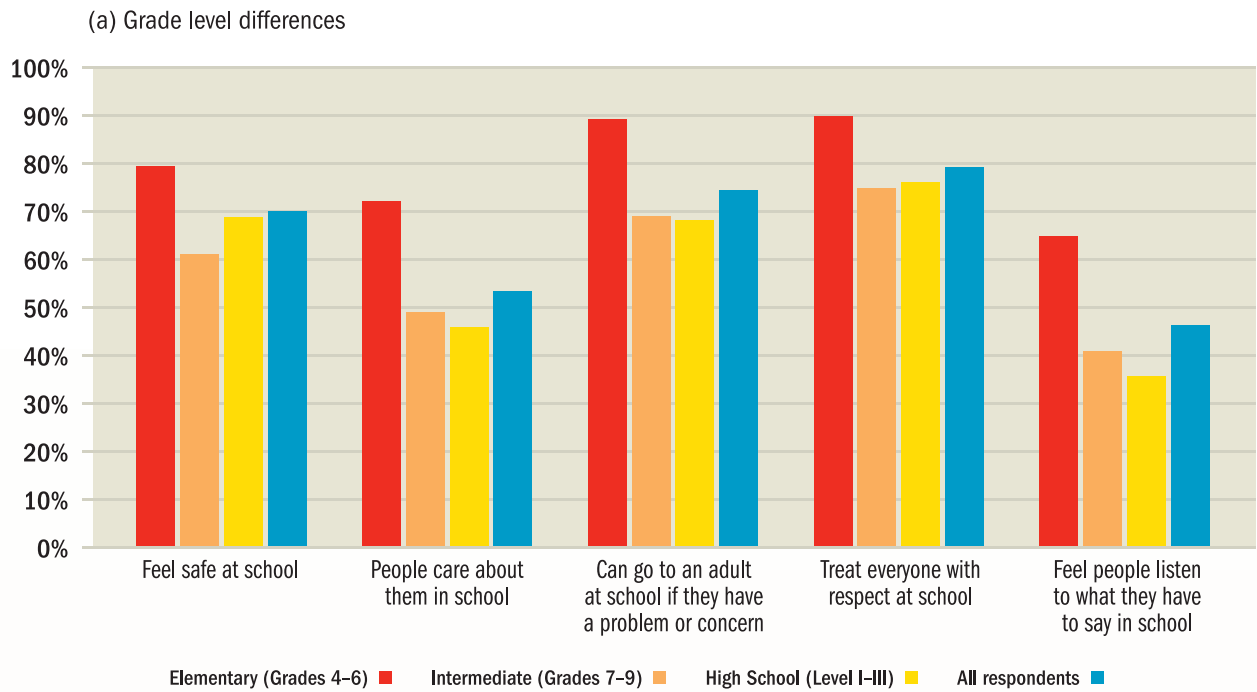
Close to two thirds of students reported that they felt there was someone at school they could talk to if they had a problem or concern, 78.7% treated everyone at their school with respect, and approximately one-half the students felt that people cared about them or listened to what they had to say in school. In terms of safety, 68.8% stated they felt safe in school.



A higher percentage of elementary students perceive their school environment as a safe and supportive setting as compared to the other grade levels (see Figure 8.2a). A higher percentage of elementary students agreed or strongly agreed with each of the statements in this section. For example, a higher percentage of elementary students reported they felt safe at school and people cared about them in school. There was very little difference between the perceptions of intermediate and high school students. The only exception was seen in the statement dealing with feelings of safety in the school environment. In this case, a higher percentage of high school students reported feeling safe at school compared to intermediate students (68.2% and 61.8% respectively).

Along gender lines, a higher percentage of girls than boys felt their school had a safe and supporting environment. Also, a higher percentage of girls agreed with each of the statements in this section (see Figure 8.2b). The largest difference was found in the percentage of girls who agreed with the following statement - "I treat everyone with respect at my school". In this case, 84.9% of girls agreed with this compared to 73.4% of boys. In the other statements, the percentage of girls agreeing was between 4.8% and 6.3% higher than the boys.

Figure 8.2: Safe and caring environment



Healthy and active living

The statements in this section focused on factors promoting a healthy and active lifestyle. For example, students responded to statements about their diet and their participation in physical activities.

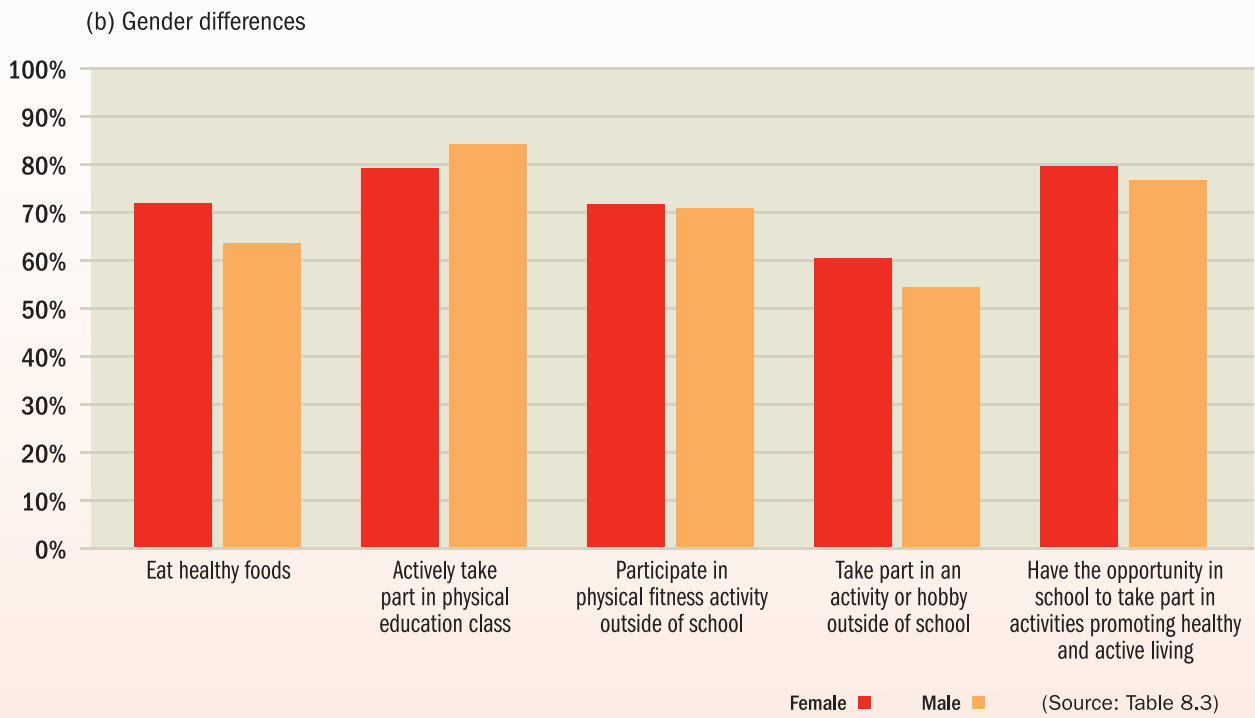
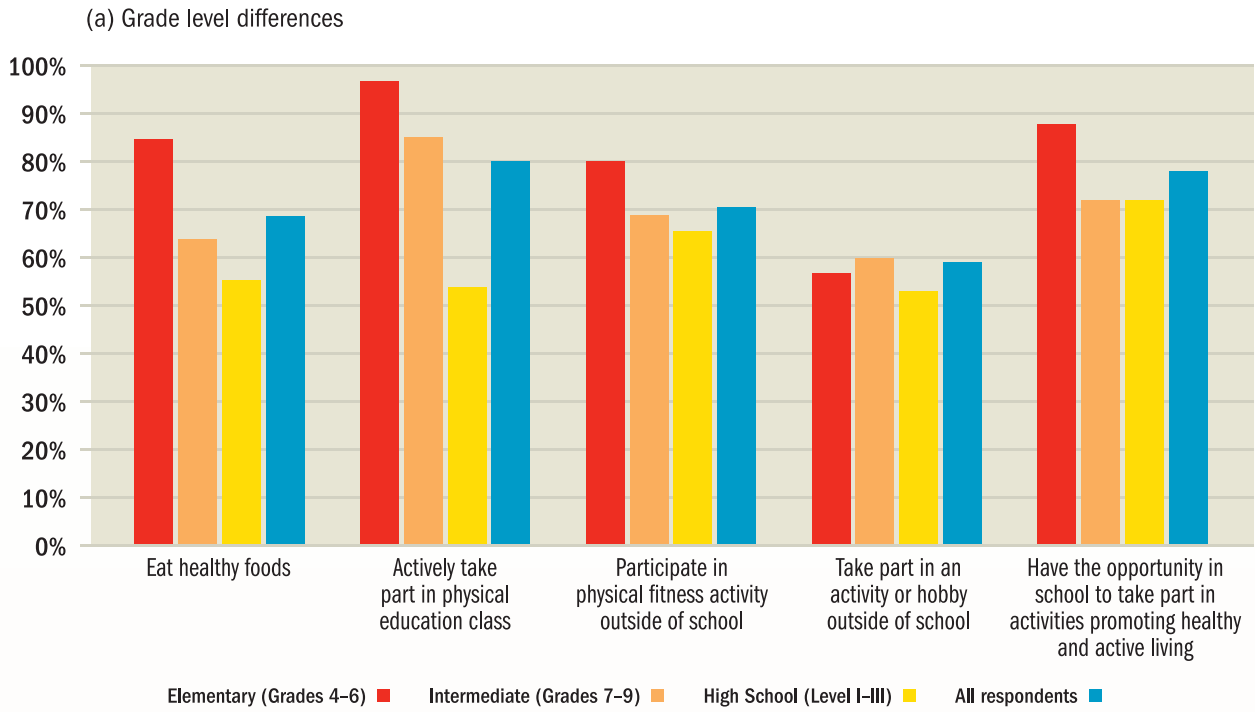
While a little more than two thirds of students stated they make healthy food choices, 79.5% actively take part in gym classes and 70.5% participate in some form of physical fitness activity outside of regular school hours. A little more than three quarters of the students stated they have the opportunity at school to take part in activities promoting healthy and active living. However, only 57.2% regularly take part in a hobby or club.

Elementary students appear to engage in a healthier and active lifestyle compared to the higher grades. For example, 83.7% of elementary students eat healthy foods compared to 55.2% and 53.6% of intermediate and high school students respectively. The only area where the three grade levels were similar was in the percentage of students who take part in hobbies or activities outside of school. This percentage was approximately 55.0% for each of the grade levels (see Figure 8.3a).

Overall, there was little variation in the responses of boys and girls in this section. The only difference was a slightly higher percentage of girls stated they eat healthy foods and take part in activities and hobbies outside of school as compared to boys (see Figure 8.3b).



Figure 8.3: Healthy and active living



Attitudes about school

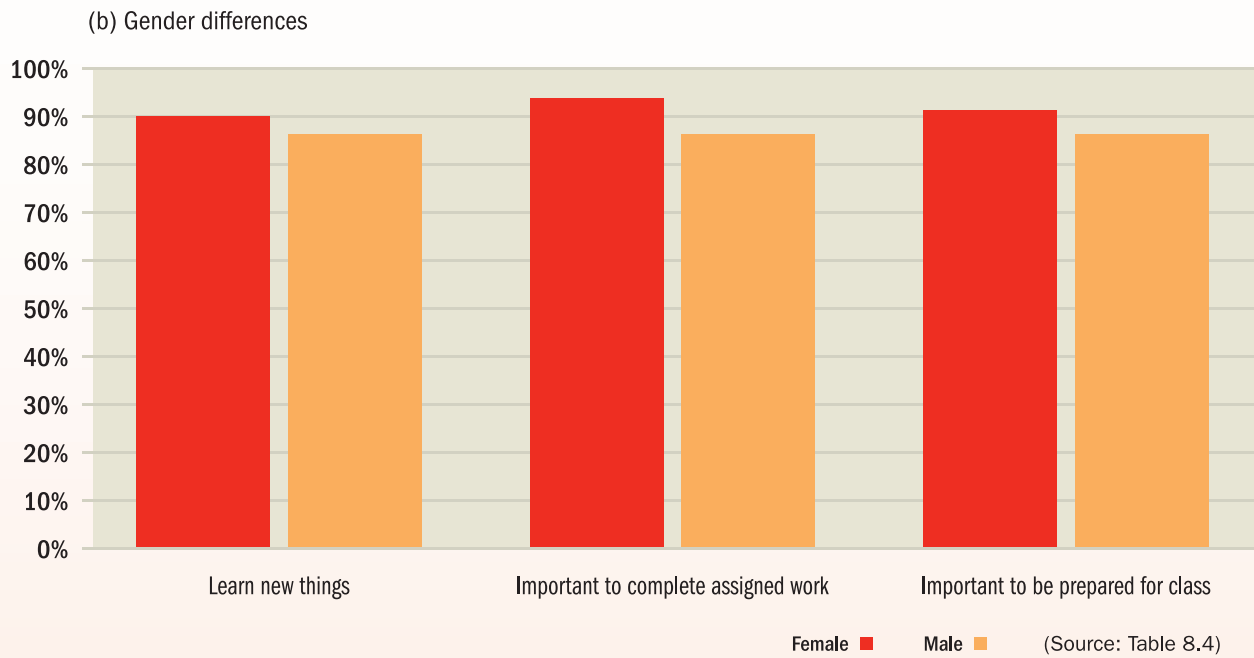
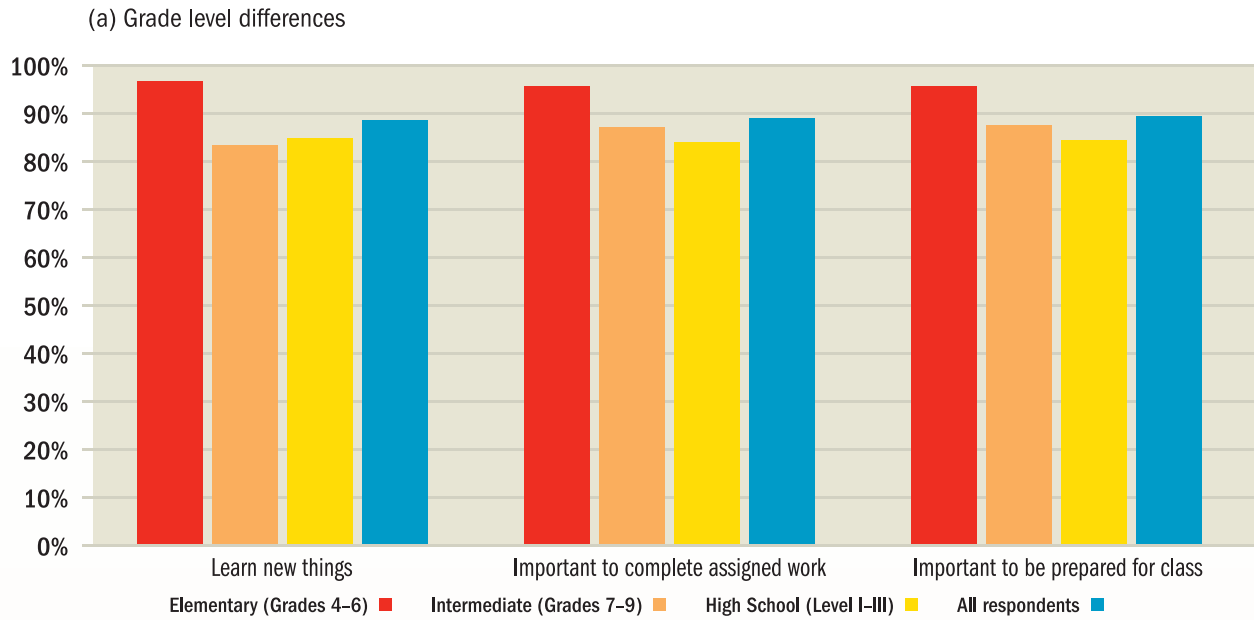
Overall, students had a positive attitude about school. For example, approximately 90.0% reported they were able to learn new things in school, believed it was important to complete any assigned work and be prepared for class.

A higher percentage of elementary students agreed with the statements in this section and there was little variation in the percentages seen in the other two grade levels (see Figure 8.4a). For example, 89.4% of elementary students stated they were able to learn new things, compared to 84.1% and 84.5% of intermediate and high school students.

Along gender lines, girls appear to have a more positive attitude towards school than boys based on the statements in this section. For example, a slightly higher percentage of girls than boys reported they were able to learn in class and believed it was important to complete their assigned work and come prepared to class (see Figure 8.4b).



Figure 8.4: Attitudes about school



Learning activities

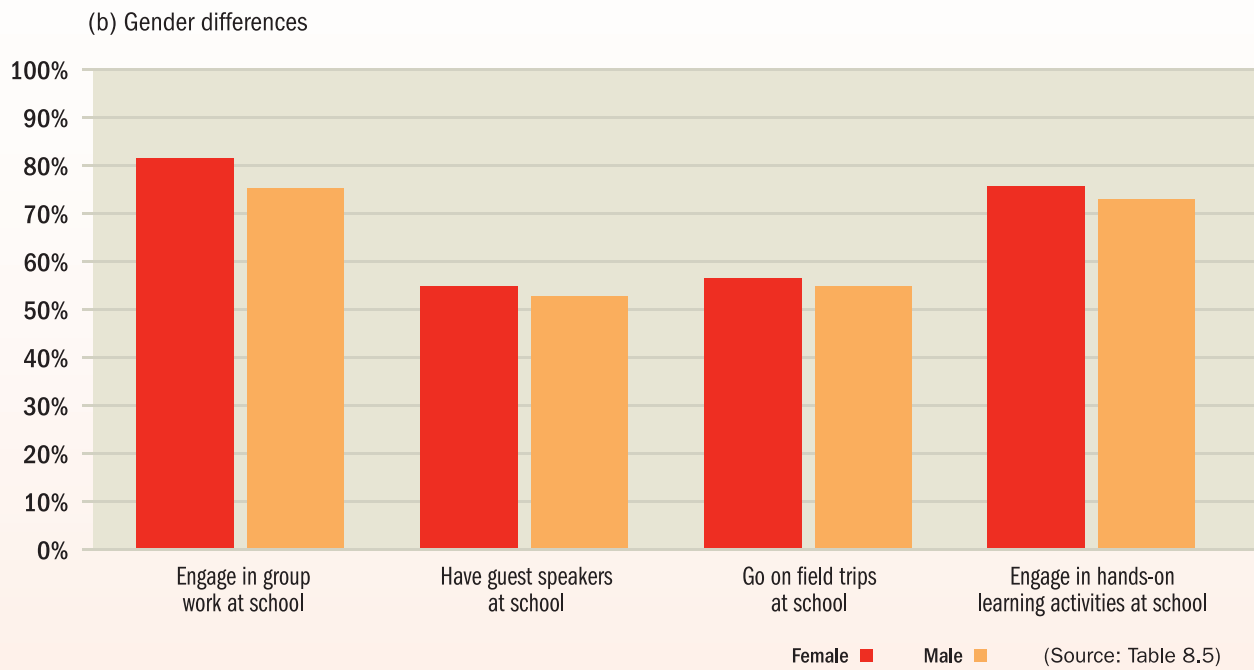
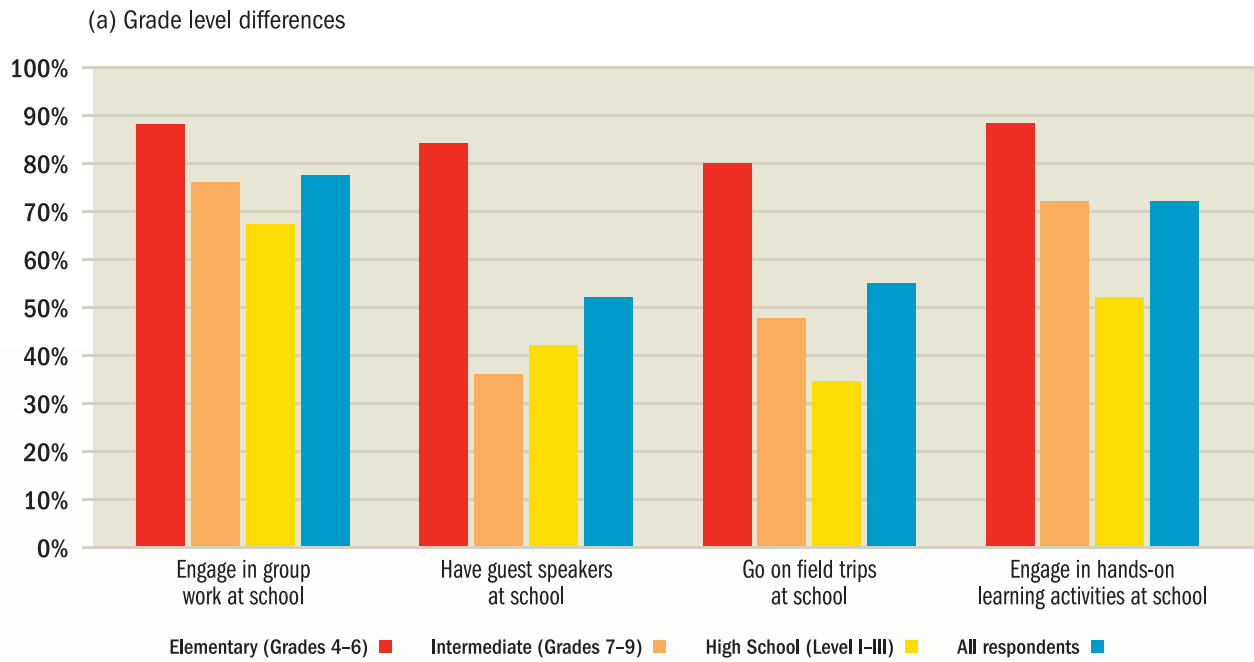
This section deals with the methods used in the classroom to encourage learning. For example, students were asked if they worked in groups, had guest speakers or went on field trips. The most popular learning activities included working in groups and taking part in hands on learning opportunities, such as art projects, science experiments or algebra tiles. This was the case for approximately three quarters of students. A little more than half the students had guest speakers visit their class or went on field trips.

Elementary students appeared to be exposed to the most variety of learning opportunities listed in this survey. They had the highest percentage of students agreeing with each of the statements in this section (see Figure 8.5a). For example, 87.6% of elementary students engaged in group work compared to 75.6% and 66.9% of intermediate and high school students, respectively. The largest difference was found in the statements dealing with guest speakers and field trips. In these cases, the percentage of elementary students agreeing with these statements was 48.0% and 32.6% respectively higher than the intermediate students.

There was little difference between the percentage of boys and girls who agreed with the statements in this section. However, for each, there was a slightly higher percentage of girls compared to boys (see Figure 8.5b)



Figure 8.5: Learning Activities in the Classroom



Opportunities for learning

This section focused on the opportunities available for students to reinforce learning. For example, students were asked if they could take part in math or science fairs, English Language Arts and French related activities, as well as fine arts activities.

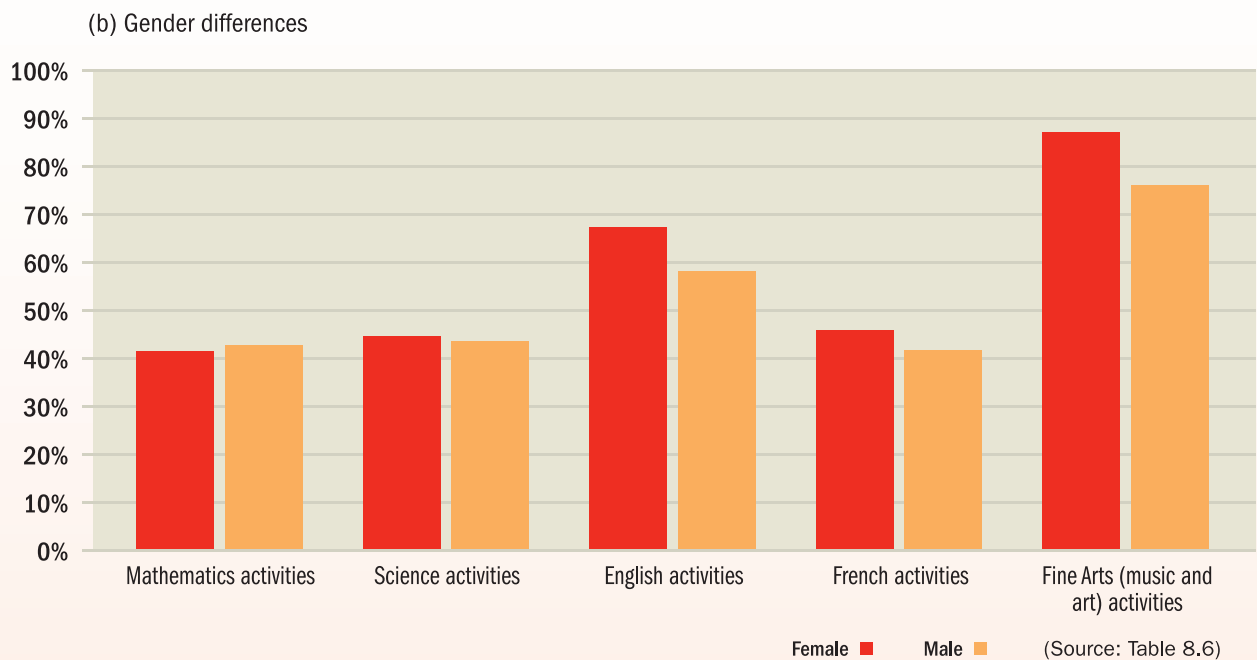
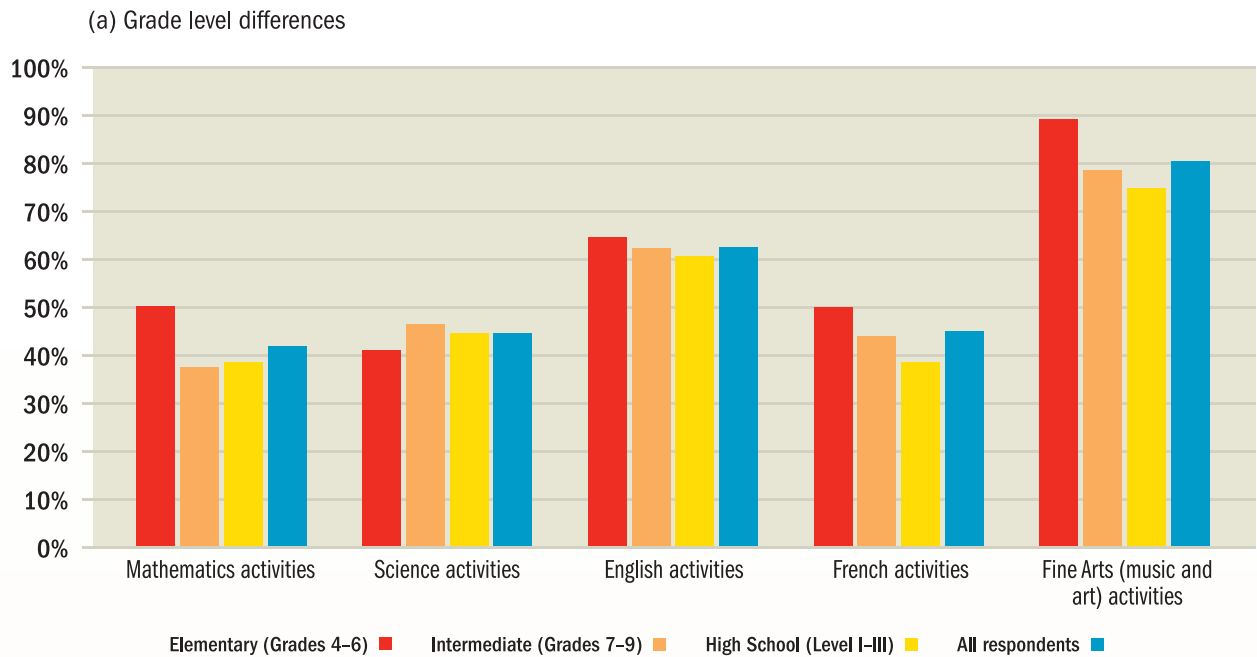
A high percentage of students (80.4%) stated there were fine arts activities available at their school. The second most frequently cited activity was related to English language arts. These would include activities such as drama clubs and public speaking. For the other activities (math, science and French related), less than half the students stated they could take part in those.

There were some distinct differences present among the three grade levels (see Figure 8.6a). For example, a higher percentage of elementary students stated there were mathematics and fine arts activities available for them to participate in compared to students in the other grades. The elementary grades also had a higher percentage of students with English and French related activities available.

There was a gender difference present in this section. A higher percentage of girls than boys felt there were English, French and fine arts activities available for them to take part in. This gender difference ranged between 4.1% and 10.6%. There was little variation in the availability of the other activities (see Figure 8.6b).



Figure 8.6: Opportunities for learning



Teacher support

The majority of students reported that teachers provided support in the classroom and helped them to learn. For example, 81.0% of students stated teachers provided them with course outlines and 80.6% said their teachers showed or told them how to improve their work.

Elementary students reported the highest feelings of teacher support. As the grade level increased, student perception of teacher support tended to decrease (see Figure 8.7a). For example, 85.9% of elementary students stated their teacher uses a variety of technologies to help them learn. This was the case for 72.4% of high school students.

There was little difference present between the responses of boys and girls in this section with only a slightly higher percentage of girls agreeing with these statements (see Figure 8.7b).



Figure 8.7: Teacher support (2009/10)

