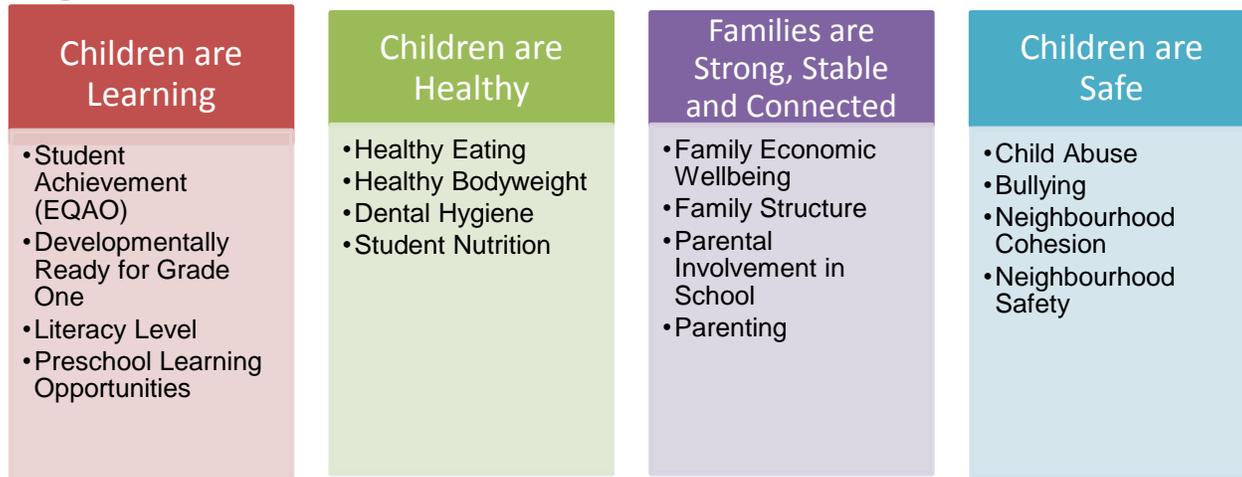


Parent online survey version II

In April 2011, Early Years Niagara asked parents and community agencies what they felt were the biggest concerns about children's health, learning, safety and family. Parent and community agency feedback on the most pressing issues led to the selection of the priority indicators under each of the Niagara 4, result statements.

Niagara 4



Further input by parents/guardians was sought through a brief online survey. The survey provided the opportunity to share and validate the selected priority issues, and also give parents a chance to “lend their voice” and share their thoughts, and further inform strategic planning by answering three questions:

1. Of the four indicators under each result statement, parents/guardians were asked to select what they felt were the two most important.
2. Parents/guardians were then asked to explain why they felt these indicators were the most important.
3. Lastly, parents/guardians were given the opportunity to share whether they felt the right indicators had been selected, by listing any other indicators they felt were pressing issues that were not included in the list provided.

While drafting the questions, there was some discussion about asking demographic information from parents other than where they lived. In the end it was decided that because these findings were intended to inform the future direction of Early Years Niagara Planning Council and the work of the sub-committees, that level of information was not required.

The online parent survey was completed in two phases:

1. English version of the parent survey

Links to the English survey were placed on Niagara Region's website and Facebook ads were used to promote the survey to parents in the Niagara area. The English survey was available online from November 12th to December 14th, 2011. Packages containing a promotional poster, bookmarks and information letter were prepared and sent: to all 171 licensed child care centres, and Ontario Early Years Centre main and satellite locations in Niagara region. An electronic copy of the poster was sent to the Parent & Family Literacy Centres and YMCA.

The poster and bookmark listed the website where parents could go to complete the online parent/guardian survey. Parents/guardians with a Blackberry or iPhone could scan the barcode on the poster or bookmark for immediate access to the survey. The back of the bookmark invited families to celebrate National Child Day on Sunday, November 20th by taking part in free swimming and skating at locations across Niagara.

Because not all households have access to a computer/internet, an electronic copy of the survey was made available to the aforementioned locations. Parents/guardians or licensed child care centre staff with questions were referred to Sandra Noël, Data Analysis Coordinator.

As an incentive parents could enter a draw for a chance to win a \$100 gift card to the Pen Centre. Please note, survey responses were not linked to the ballot, all responses were anonymous. In total there were 276 completed English surveys (250 completed online and 26 completed hardcopies).

2. French language version of the parent survey

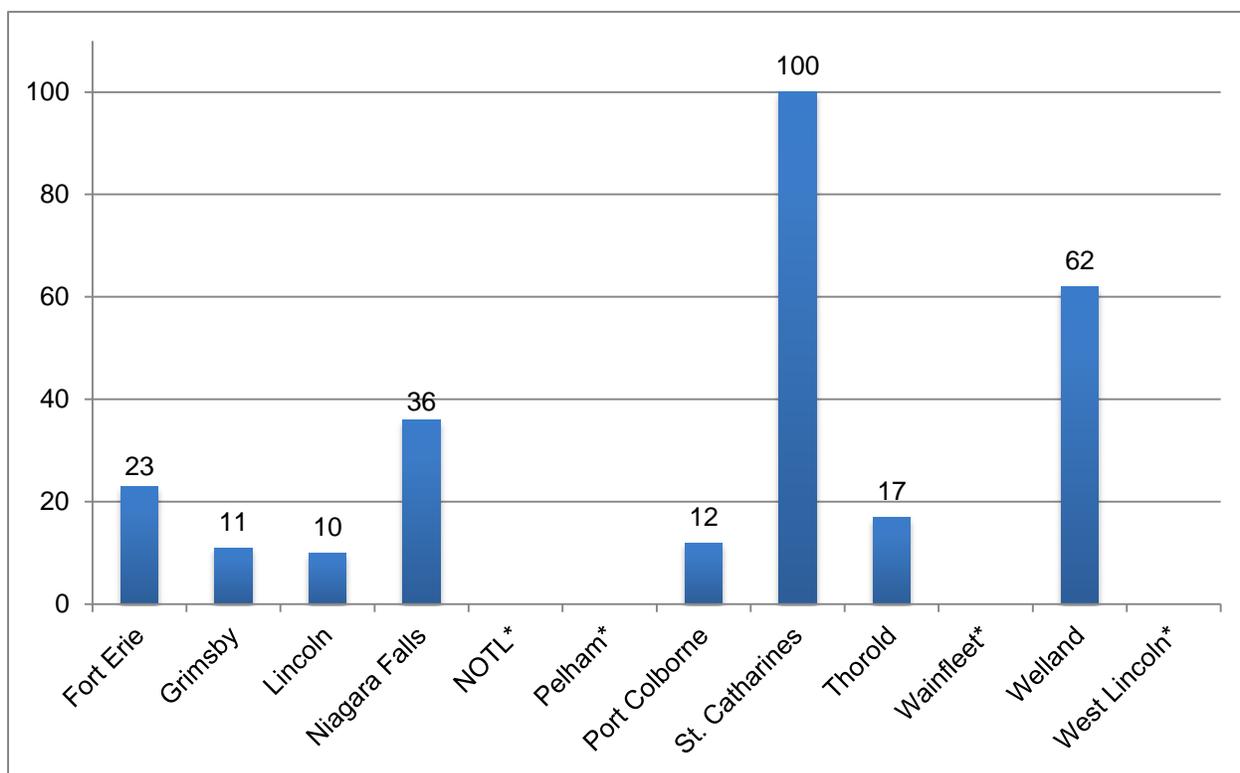
Links to the French language parent survey were placed on Niagara Region’s website. Working with the local contact from the French language network, PDF documents of the French language poster, survey, ballot and instruction letter was fanned out to the French language community. As was the case with the English poster, parents were given the URL address to go to complete the online parent/guardian survey. Parents/guardians with a Blackberry or iPhone could scan the barcode on the poster for immediate access to the French language parent survey.

The same incentive was available for parents to enter a draw for a chance to win a \$100 gift card to the Pen Centre. Survey responses were not linked to the ballot, all responses were anonymous.

The survey was available online from January 9th to January 30th, 2011. In total there were 28 completed French language surveys (23 completed online and 5 completed hardcopies).

In total there were 304 completed parent surveys. The following provides a brief overview of the results.

When asked to identify where they lived, parents/guardians responded:



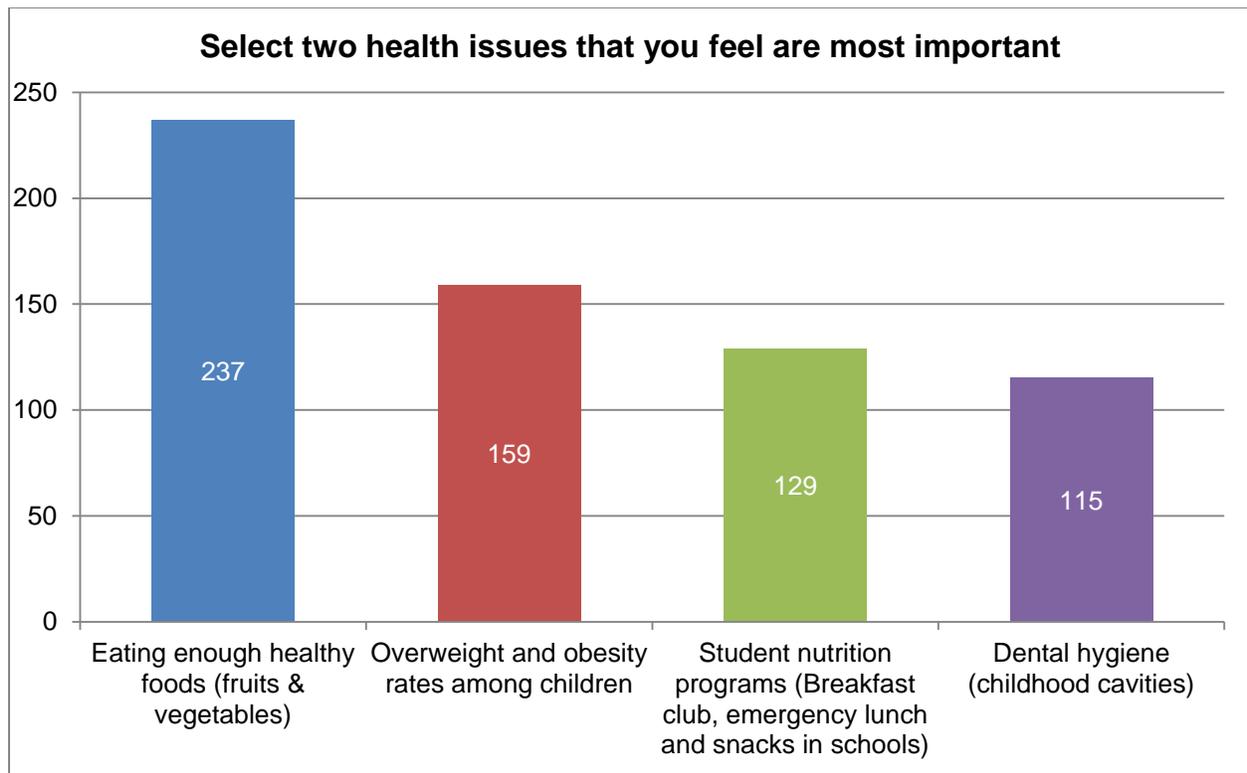
*Numbers too low to report

Of the 304 completed parent surveys, there were 6 cases where the municipality was not identified by the respondent.

There were parents/guardians from all 12 municipalities who participated in the survey, however to ensure anonymity the number of respondents was not reported for municipalities when there were fewer than 10 respondents.

Children are Healthy

When asked to select two child health issues that they felt were most important, parents/guardians responded the following:



Regardless of whether parents/guardians noted it was their first or second choice, each selection was counted once.

In total there were 304 completed surveys, however for the questions asking to select the first and second choice a small number of parents/guardians selected more than two choices. Rather than assume which two issues were most important to the parents/guardians, none of the selections were discounted and each selection was counted once.

When asked why they felt the child health issues they identified were the most important, parents/guardians responded:

(Only responses from the two selected child health issues identified by parents have been included)

Eating enough healthy foods (fruits and vegetables)

Just over 75% of parents/guardians who provided an explanation felt it was a very important component for a healthy lifestyle and ensuring long-term good health.

“Eating healthy foods is important for our children because it gives them a good start in life for a healthy future.”

Other common themes:

- Parents/guardians felt it was imperative to establish good eating habits in their children now, for them to continue throughout their lifetime.
“Learning healthy eating habits at a young age will prepare them to be healthy adults”
- Parents/guardians were worried about the lack of healthy eating and the increasing rise in overweight and obesity rates in young children.
“I am seeing more and more children in my son's class (grade 2) that are dangerously overweight for their age/height group. A 7 year old should not be out of breath for walking (not running) up a set of stairs.”
- Parents/guardians felt it was very challenging to offer healthy foods when living on a limited budget.
“We are low income and it's difficult to afford to buy healthy foods for our children to eat and I know eating healthy affects their performance at school.”
- Parents/guardians worried about the health effects of eating processed/fast foods and the kind of eating habits this would help to establish.
“I feel that many children these days are eating many processed foods or even fast foods that are easy to get and prepare for the busy working families!”

- Parents/guardians felt there should be more parent education.
"I need help on my children eating Healthier."

"As a parent to two small children, I know the importance of eating healthy and staying active but this can be a struggle when your child is picky and does not want to eat certain things. Strategies to help accomplish this would be appreciated and helpful."

Overweight and obesity

While parents/guardians overwhelmingly identified eating enough healthy foods (fruits and vegetables) as a priority issue, many parents who provided an explanation felt that eating enough healthy foods and overweight and obesity went hand in hand.

"I feel like Obesity and healthy foods are equal in importance but go hand in hand"

Other common themes:

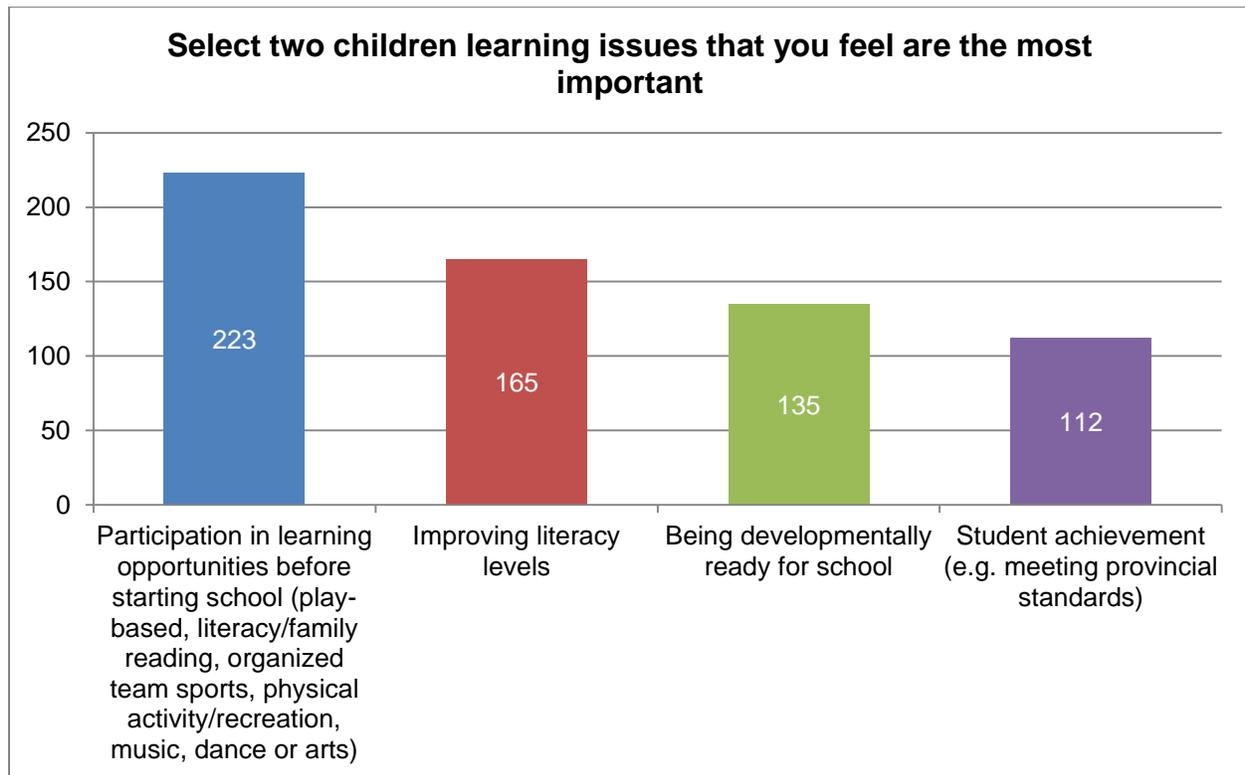
- Parents/guardians were concerned with the lack of physical activity with young children
"There needs to be programs both at school and available through the city to encourage physical activity at a reasonable rate and reasonable time of day. It's important because being overweight at a young age will create self esteem issues that carry on in adolescence and create negative attitudes"
- Parents/guardians were concerned with the long-term health effects of overweight and obesity
"both affect long term health - if better addressed as kids, we will have a community of healthier adults"
- Parents/guardians expressed the lack of time and money to provide adequate meals, leading to unhealthy food choices like fast food and processed foods.
"I find that people now a days lead a busier life with both parents working not enough time to provide an adequate meal as well as the healthier we eat the more expensive it is.."
- Parents/guardians felt there should be more parent education.
"I find it hard to really tell if my son is getting enough nutrition and physical activity. We have a history of obesity, diabetes and heart problems in our family and I want to do my very best to help prevent these problems in my son. I also do not want him to have to experience any bullying due to his weight (under or over)."

When asked if there were other issues related to child health that they would add, other than what was listed, parents/guardians responded:

Physical Activity	50
Mental Health	35
Health/Health Care	13
Immunization	8
Parents/Parenting	7
Allergies	6
Bullying	5
Special Needs	5
Dental Health	3
Exposure to ETS	3
Child Development	3
Abuse	3
Breastfeeding	2
Poverty	2
Nutrition	2
Other	14

Children are Learning

When asked to select two children learning issues that they felt were most important, parents/guardians responded the following:



Regardless of whether parents/guardians noted it was their first or second choice, each selection was counted once.

In total there were 304 completed surveys, however for the questions asking to select the first and second choice a small number of parents/guardians selected more than two choices. Rather than assume which two issues were most important to the parents/guardians, none of the selections were discounted and each selection was counted once.

When asked why they felt the children learning issues they identified were the most important, parents/guardians responded:

(Only responses from the two selected children learning issues identified by parents have been included)

Participating in learning opportunities before starting school (play-based, literacy/family reading, organized team sports, physical activity/recreation, music, dance or arts)

Overwhelmingly parents/guardians believed learning opportunities provided the opportunity to interact with other children and develop healthy behaviours.

"Participation in learning activities is important to me because it helps children to develop healthy behaviour, skills, and opportunities to socialize."

Other common themes:

- Parents/guardians felt it was important to have extra-curricular activities
"I also feel that having the child/children in family readings and g activities such as sports or art or clubs are great to help build the childs character but also helps them learn to communicate and work as a team."
- Parents/guardians believed it was a key part of getting children developmentally ready for school

"i feel that by introducing your children to other kids and social activities outside of the home, that it aids in the child's development mentally and emotionally and teaches the child that it is alright to be away from the parents...and also prepares them intellectually for school"

Improving literacy levels

Most parents/guardians believed that strong literacy skills were the key to lifelong success, both academic and in their chosen career, but also for life in general.

"Good literacy skills are key to future success as a student, further education and placement in the workforce. Simple daily tasks can be difficult without good literacy skills."

Other common themes:

- Parents/guardians were very concerned with what they perceived as the increasing number of children who could not read and spell.

"My son is 2 grades behind in reading and 2 grades behind in Math. Without the core subjects being taught properly he is not able to excel in much."

- Parents/guardians were concerned that technology was impairing their child's ability to spell (spell check option on computer, texting, etc.)
 - *"I am frustrated by the schools telling me that its not important that my child cannot spell, that computers have spell check. I feel children need to know how to spell and read like we did."*

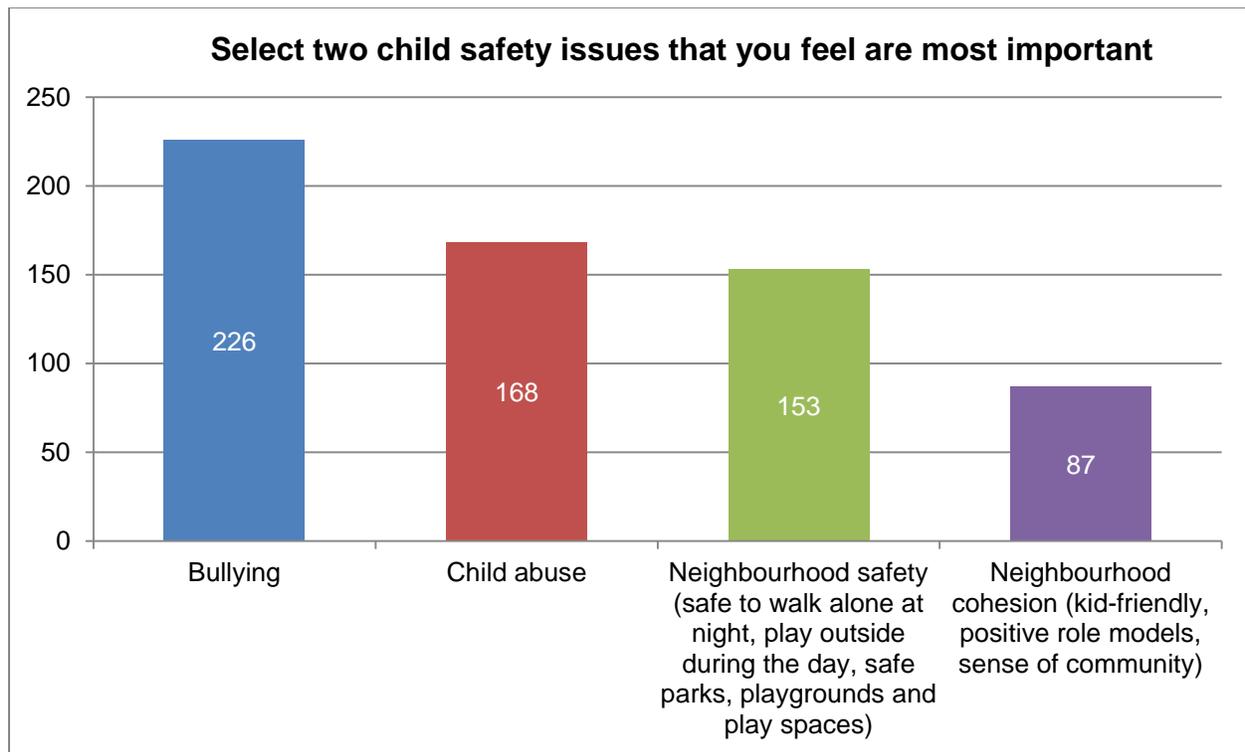
"With all the instant messaging and and lack of proper grammar being used in communication, especially with the youth of today, I fear they will never learn how to write properly."

When asked if there were other issues related to children learning that they would add, other than what was listed, parents/guardians responded:

School/Education	42
Parents/Parenting/Parental Engagement	15
Special Needs	10
Bullying	5
Child Development	4
Child Care	2
Numeracy	2
Other	13

Children are Safe

When asked to select two child safety issues that they felt were most important, parents/guardians responded the following:



Regardless of whether parents/guardians noted it was their first or second choice, each selection was counted once.

In total there were 304 completed surveys, however for the questions asking to select the first and second choice a small number of parents/guardians selected more than two choices. Rather than assume which two issues were most important to the parents/guardians, none of the selections were discounted and each selection was counted once.

When asked why they felt the child safety issues they identified were the most important, parents/guardians responded:

(Only responses from the two selected child safety issues identified by parents have been included. Parents/guardians felt these two issues were so closely intertwined, as noted by their explanations which addressed both issues together rather than separately.)

Bullying/Child abuse

Overwhelmingly parents/guardians were concerned about the lifelong negative effects that bullying and child abuse have on children.

“As an abuse survivor and a person who was also bullied as a child...I have to live with the impact these things have had on my life. No child should have to live through those things....make no mistake, it affects them for their whole lives and shapes the adults they will become.”

Other common themes:

- Parents/guardians also recognized that bullying/child abuse affects all aspects of a child’s development.
“Because the trauma of both of these issues (bullying and child abuse) has a detrimental impact on the child as a whole this effect the child physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Creating low self esteem and left with feeling worth less”
- Some parents/guardians felt the link between bullying and child abuse was very strong, that the abused child becomes the abuser at school, as a coping mechanism.

“I believe that children subject to abuse at home express their anger, frustrations, and oppression in the school yard in the form of bullying. Perhaps if victims felt like their communities supported them and they had someone (a neighbor) to turn to, they would be better equipped to deal with their anger and the abuse might be addressed all the sooner.”

Bullying

- With regard to bullying, parents/guardians were very concerned that bullying no longer just happened in school or on the playground, but that in their own homes through cyber-bullying.
"Bullying exists at so many levels these days for children. Not only the bully in the playground but the cyber bully as well now. I have 3 children and so far have been lucky not to have to have dealt with bullying issues, but as a teacher, I know it is a huge concern for schools and parents and children."
- A large number of parents/guardians felt bullying "has been around for a very long time" but that the issue of bullying was getting worse, regardless of all the policies that have been put in place, and the heightened awareness. Where parents/guardians tended to disagree was who should do more about addressing the issue. Some parents/guardians felt it was an issue that parents, teachers, caregivers and the community as a whole should be involved to affect change.
"Bullying has been around forever. We just looked at it differently when we were kids. It's like we adapted to it, and got use to being called names, and picked on. I just keep hearing in my head, kids will be kids! Yes, they will be but we as parents, teachers, caregivers, instructors need to teach children, about setting safe boundaries to work and play in. That way if a child is feeling threatened, or harmed physically, mentally or emotionally, we will be able to help them a) make good and safe choices for themselves, even when we (the parents) are not there. b) teach our kids to talk about things that are bothering them in a safe environment c) be able to communicate their feelings with the bully. I think schools should continue on helping address bullying, on a monthly basis, and parents/caregivers get in on it. Continue to address the issue at home with family and friends. It should be a never ending thing that we the community needs to continue on validating, and stressing the importance!"
- While other parents/guardians felt that school staff should do more to deal with the issue.
"Anti-bullying taken seriously.....not just slogans and t-shirts but action followed through in the schools when it happens(from our childs personal bullies ,it is not being taken serious enough by teachers)"
"bullying is so common, and the schools really don't do anything about it, and don't protect the kids when they get bullied. The bullies seem to be shielded by the system."
- Parents/guardians were very concerned that even at a very young age, children were subjected to bullying.
"My daughter's JK class had an issue with bullying. There is clearly a problem when this issue is affecting children as young as 4 years old."

Child abuse

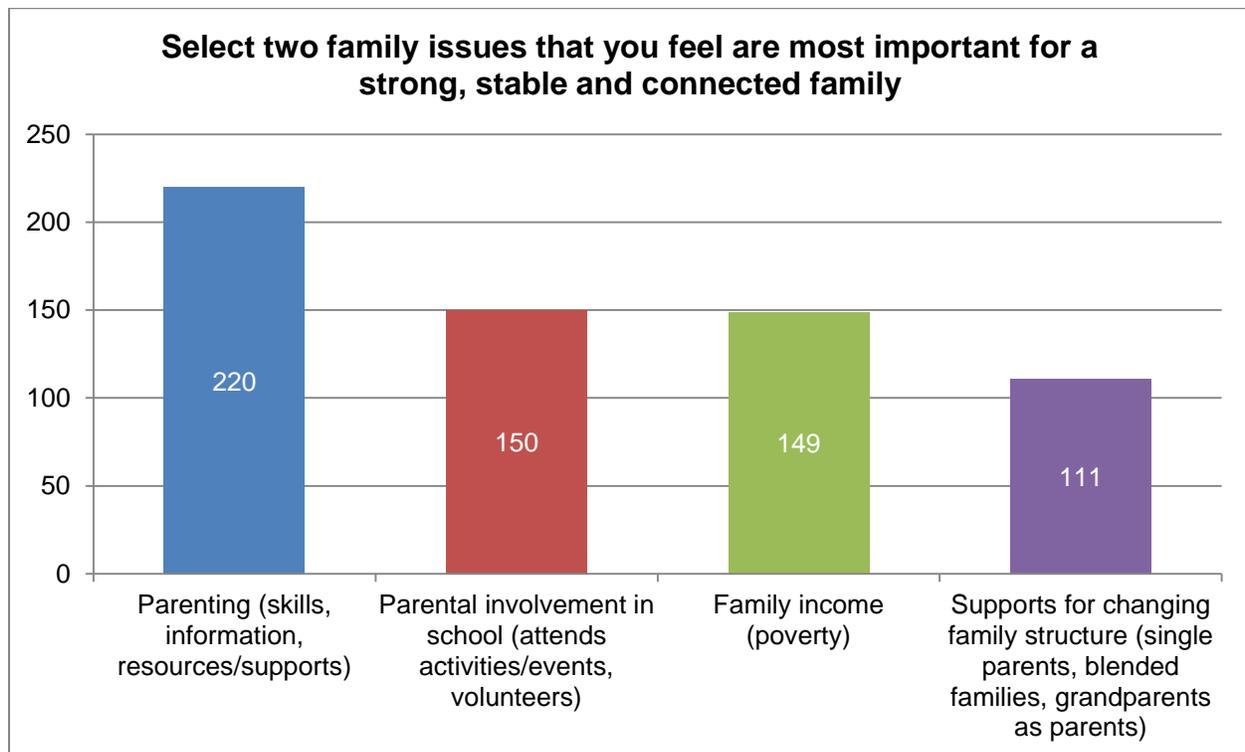
- With regard to child abuse, some parents/guardians believe that child abuse has negative effects beyond the victim.
"Child abuse affects not only the abused but a school,home,neighbourhood/community on a whole. People should be aware of the 'signs'of someone being abused in any shape or form. We all have a responsibility to speak out on such a matter. The children of today are the future. We are the 'voice'for those who cannot speak for themselves!"
- According to parents/guardians school staff play a key role in recognizing the signs of abuse.
"Child abuse is also a very serious issue. Schools are sometimes the only hope for these children by having educated staff to be able to recognize the signs. Whether it's physical or mental our educators need to be on alert."
- With the downturn in the economy, parents/guardians felt that more Niagara families are struggling financially and this added stress is affected their parenting skills. Additional supports are needed to support families.
"Child abuse - as parents struggle to maintain economic and emotional stability, particularly in a depressed economy like Niagara, it can create additional pressures on families, especially those with limited support systems. Child abuse needs to be discussed, in tandem with identification and prevention for professionals and effective parenting strategies in a safe environment for parents who may be struggling."

Families are Strong, Stable and Connected

When asked if there were other issues related to child safety that they would add, other than what was listed, parents/guardians responded:

Prevention/Education	14
Neighbourhood/Community	11
School	5
Internet	5
Car Seat/Vehicle Safety	4
Drug & Alcohol Misuse	3
Suicide	2
Other	10

When asked to select two family issues that they felt were most important for a strong, stable and connected family, parents/guardians responded the following:



Regardless of whether parents/guardians noted it was their first or second choice, each selection was counted once.

In total there were 304 completed surveys, however for the questions asking to select the first and second choice a small number of parents/guardians selected more than two choices. Rather than assume which two issues were most important to the parents/guardians, none of the selections were discounted and each selection was counted once.

When asked why they felt the family issues they identified as the most important for a strong, stable and connected family, parents/guardians responded the following:

(Only responses from the two selected family issues identified by parents have been included.)

Parenting (skills, information, resources, supports)

The majority of parents/guardians responded that good parenting skills were key to the healthy growth and development of their children.

“good parenting is the key part in a child's growth if they are raised in an atmosphere that is positive, supporting, loving they will know they will always have someone to turn to when they need it whatever the reason maybe.”

Other common themes:

- Many parents/guardians felt that all parents, regardless of socio-economic status, could benefit from learning parenting skills.

“Basic parenting skills are needed in houses of every income, social status, whatever. This is a key cornerstone to being a parent.”

“All parents should be taught basic parenting skills and know that there are resources they can access to get information.”

“Income has nothing to do with being a good parent. Supporting parents with information and skills to raise children is required.”

- Some parents/guardians felt that good parenting benefitted not only the child and created a positive family dynamic, but that the community at large also benefitted.

“If skills, info, support are actively/openly put in place and known to parents it is beneficial to not only that family but society on a whole. Having supports in place as we do nowadays is greatly beneficial as well for even families that have growing/older children as parenting never ends. Having the skills etc makes for happier/healthier child, parent, home, community etc and is a win-win in the end!”

- Many parents/guardians expressed that more resources for parents were needed to help parents develop good parenting skills.

“They are most important, because there is no such thing as a perfect parent....but with some information, or guides to help parents deal with issues they may be having with their children, perhaps we could feel confident about our parenting skills, and be able to guide our children through these issues as well!”

*“...Children do not come with manuals. Even though we all hoped they do, they don't.....I did not know much about babies, other than holding and playing with a few before that. Didn't know the stress, time, and lack of sleep would do to me. Not having family to help assist me when I felt overwhelmed, etc. I am glad the public health nurse helped me get my daughter into programs that aided in her development. Sometimes I wish I still had one! Just making all resources available to all parents.....”**

*Some sentences from response removed as it contained identifying information.

Parental involvement in schools (attends activities/events, volunteers)

Overwhelmingly parents/guardians felt that being involved in their child's school was essential, not only to support their child's academic success, but more importantly to keep the family connected.

“My belief is that if a parent is involved in their child's life, both academically and socially, this will help garnish a stable, connected family life which also builds trust and caring.”

“School is our child's work and they spend more time there than they do at home, if parents aren't involved in the school how can you connect with your childred.”

Other common themes:

- Parents/guardians spoke of the importance of being connected to the school, to support their child's learning.

“parental involvement will always be the best part of the home to school team”

“YOu can tell which parents are not involved with their children at school. A teacher can only do so much I think parent involmnet contibutes 100% to their child's school success.”

- Many parents/guardians understood that work made it difficult for parents to be involved in school.

“Unfortunately if you have to work FT to make ends meet it is difficult to be as involved in the school as you would like.”

“Many parents can't be involved, as they're working two or three part-time jobs and barely scraping by. “

When asked if there were other family issues related to a strong, stable and connected family that they would add, other than what was listed, parents/guardians responded:

Family time/unity/resources	29
Parenting	12
Income/Poverty	4
Mental Health	3
Use/Substance Abuse	3
Child Care	3
Faith	3
Other	12