



# Gathering Under One Tree

*Increasing Parent  
Engagement*

# School Context

- elementary school in South Markham
- diverse student population (ethnically & linguistically)
- 750 students
- community-based school
- designated a Performance Plus school
- full time day care centre & Parent & Family Literacy Centre
- High ELL population

# History of the Gathering

- started in 2005/2006
- an urban parent & community engagement project
- a partnership between York University's Faculty of Education and the YRDSB's research department
- 4 sessions per year
- gather data from the community (research team consisting of parents/ York U.)
- gather data from teachers in the school
- gather data from students on school life
- a variety of social services were invited to attend



Gathering Under  
One Tree

# Vision of the Gathering Under One Tree

- to increase parent voice, community presence and engagement in the school
  - advocacy
  - supporting student achievement
  - communication between home and school
- to provide a forum for parents and families to share their thinking/ feelings about school
- to strengthen SIP through parent/community voice
- to create a multi-faceted network

# Format of Gathering Under One Tree

- 5:30 pm - Dinner with family and community (provided by the school)
- 5:50 pm - Student Performances
- 6:00 pm -Breakout Sessions
  - students go to various locations
    - K-6 - Organized activities/ babysitting
    - 7 & 8 - Informed discussions
  - family discussion forum
    - school updates/ celebrations & student voice
    - discussion informed topics for future sessions
    - report back on survey data collected/ action taken in previous session

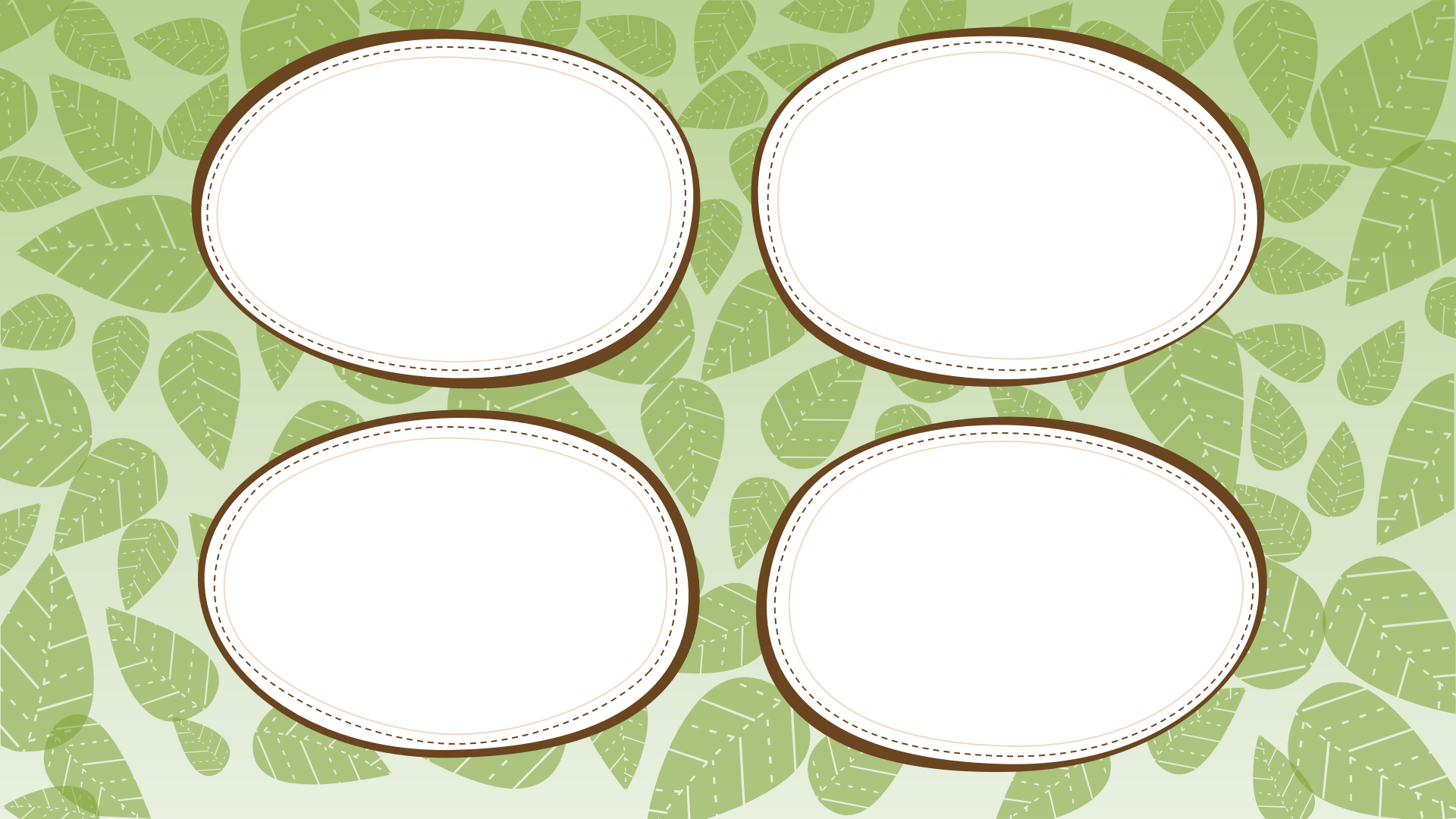


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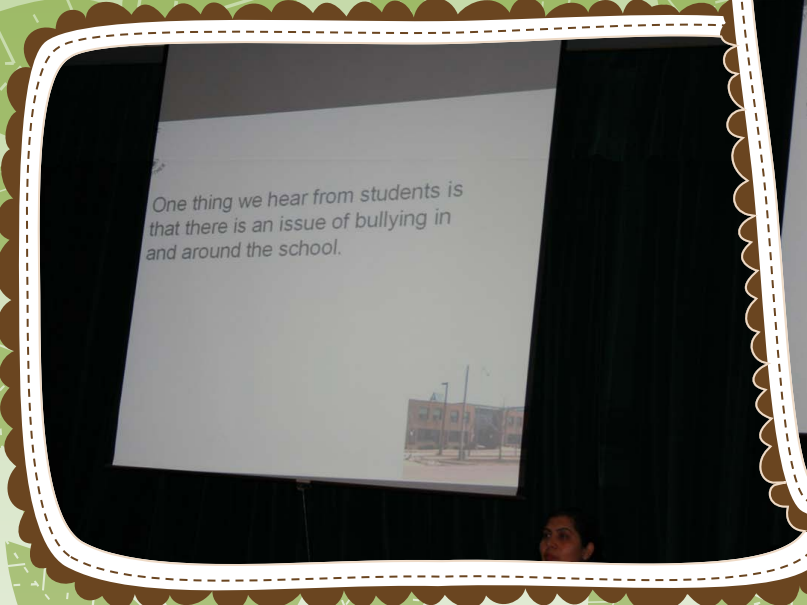
Time	Action	Notes
4:00 – 5:00	Set-up gymnasium	Caretakers to set up 15 tables and 100 chairs in the gym Steel Band on stage or music on sound system Post translated charts on walls Microphone set up TV in music room with movie LCD Projector in gym Markers and chart paper in staffroom  <b>Meal Needs:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tablecloths on tables</li> <li>• Plates, cutlery, cups, serviettes</li> <li>• Drinks (water, coffee, tea)</li> <li>• food delivery</li> </ul>
5:30 – 5:55	Family Dinner	<i>Meet and greet, sit and eat, enjoy the music and conversations.</i>
5:55 – 6:05	Introductions and Welcome	<i>Student Performances</i> <i>Welcome to families (Principal)</i> <i>Introductions of team</i>
6:05 – 6:10	Children are invited to the breakout rooms. Parents/Guardians are invited to the staffroom.	<i>Lunch Assistants to supervise with a movie in the breakout rooms.</i> <i>Intermediate students to meet in the staffroom.</i> <i>Parents to stay in gym - Given a paper template of the guiding questions</i>
6:10	planning team shares itinerary	
6:10 – 6:45	participants reflect on and respond (in writing if they wish) to 'suggestive questions' they find pressing or interesting	
6:45 – 7:00	planning team facilitates discussion in response to 'suggestive questions' and compiles a list of topics/themes/issues parents want to address in future sessions	<i>Chart Paper/Markers</i>



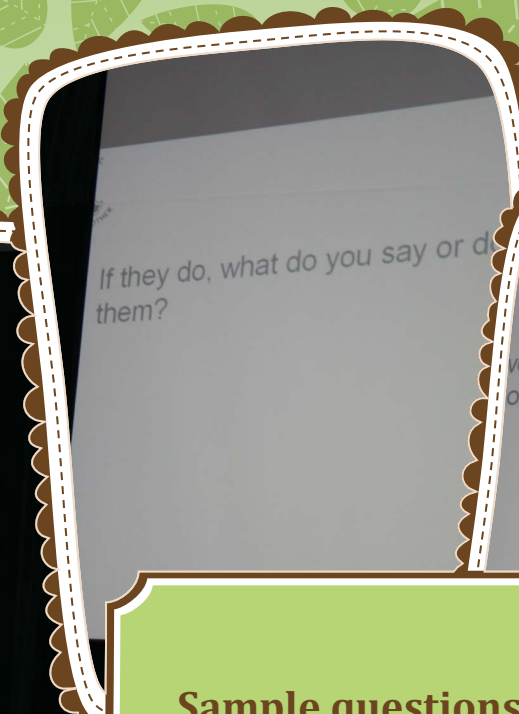


The background of the entire image is a repeating pattern of green leaves. Overlaid on this background are four decorative rectangular frames with rounded corners and a double-line border (one solid brown line and one dashed white line). The top-right frame is filled with a solid light green color and contains the text 'Student Performances'. The other three frames (top-left, bottom-left, and bottom-right) are empty and have a white fill.

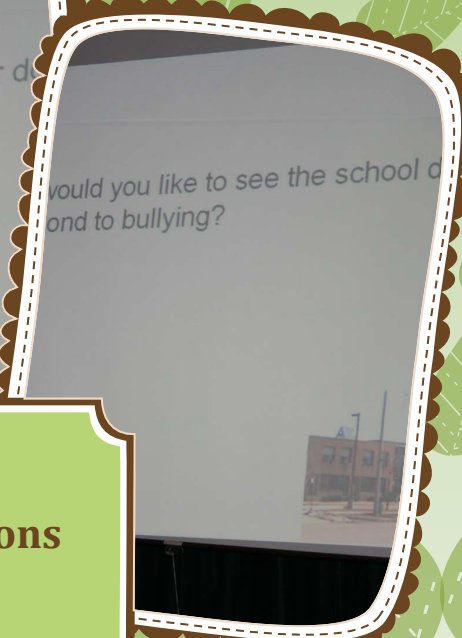
# Student Performances




One thing we hear from students is that there is an issue of bullying in and around the school.



If they do, what do you say or do to them?



What would you like to see the school do to reduce bullying?



**Sample questions  
for family  
discussion**



## Family Discussion



# Discussion Topics Through the Years

- *home and school supports*
  - using home languages as resources in children's learning
  - school-home partnership
- *formal aspects of schooling*
  - reading and understanding report cards
  - preparing for parent-teacher interviews
- *well-being*
  - managing student stress
  - cyber-bullying
  - healthy schools
  - safety in the community
- *equity policies and practices*
  - what equity means/ looks like in a school

# Planning for the Gathering

- data collection from families and staff to inform future sessions
- opportunity for families to build relationships with one another
- opportunity for student groups to share information with community (*ex: Me to We, Student Council, Healthy Schools*)
- opportunity for school to share information with community (*EQAO, Report Cards, Events - athletic achievements, academic achievements, Outdoor Classroom, Summer Institute*)
- partnerships with social service agencies
- connection with Middlefield CI

# Data into Action

- Much time and effort - especially from York U - has been invested in building the data collection 'infrastructure'
- Community members have been trained (and paid) to conduct interviews
- To maximize impact, data must be used in an intentional, impactful way
- Data is used to inform both the Gathering Project and the SIP
- Armadale staff are beginning to play a more formal role in adding their perspectives, experiences, and skills to those of the community

# Positive Outcomes

- Increased parent presence in the school.
- Increased levels and quality of school-parent and school-community communications.
- Increased number of school-based activities for parents & community members (before, during and after school).
- A shift from 'parent involvement' to 'parent engagement.'
- Stronger parent and community engagement strand in School Improvement Plan.



# Positive Outcomes

- Increased opportunities for direct interface between staff and parents/community in social environment
- Increased opportunities for students to have a voice
- Increased opportunities for students to socialize, play/exercise, and participate in organized, free activities
- Staff now working with parents to conduct qualitative research inside the school and in the community (including an on-line network)

# Project Challenges

- Planning Team turnover
- Growing the project (adding schools and community partners) in a sustainable way
- Integrating translation services
- Extending data collection to the community through parent researchers
- Engaging Intermediate students in non-social activities
- Fostering parent leadership in a community with relatively high mobility (i.e. people coming into and leaving the community)
- Sustained and strategic participation of community partners
- Funding model

# Next Steps

- partnership with Middlefield CI
  - assist with transitions, pathways, comfort with local high school, reducing stigma associated with high school
  - documentary
  - continue to build reciprocal relationships with parents and community based organizations

# School-based Outcomes from GUOT

Increase Family Voice

Extended Library Hours

Saturday Morning Classes

YMCA after school programs

Homework Club

Breakfast Club

Snack Program

Partnership with Social Services Network (yoga, parenting information sessions, resume writing)

Translating (newsletters, workshops)

Increase of Parent Volunteers

Research Group

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# Q & A