

## Diversity and Education: Half of Canadian kids witness ethnic, racial bullying at their school

*However, majority ambivalent towards classmates wearing different clothes, eating different foods*

**October 19, 2021** – As Canada grows and changes, becoming more diverse every year, new generations of children are immersed in a reality that can look far different than that of their parents or grandparents.

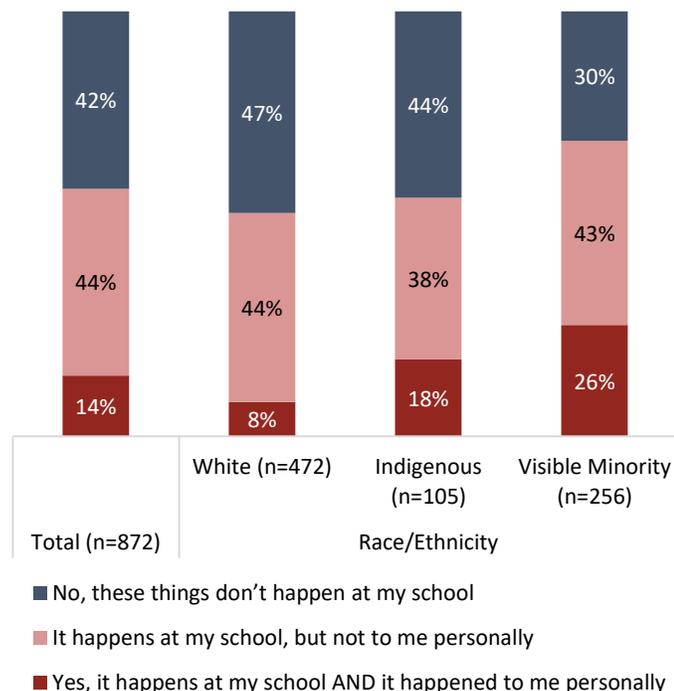
And while diversity in schools is largely an accepted and comfortable fact of life for Canadian children, a new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute in partnership with the University of British Columbia finds some – in particular those who identify as a visible minority – struggling to fit in more than children who do not identify this way.

Indeed, this conversation with 12- to 17-year-olds in Canadian schools finds that racially motivated bullying and insults are a reality in more ethnically diverse areas of the country.

While half of kids who describe their school as made up of mostly students from similar backgrounds say that these racial issues are something they have seen, this rises to two-thirds among those who say their school is more diverse. Further, visible minority students are three times as likely as white children to say that they have faced personal abuse. Indigenous children are twice as likely to say this.

That said, most Canadian children say that they have an outlet to talk about these issues. Indeed, nine-in-ten say that they talk to their parents or other family members about it. There may, however, be more for teachers and school staff to do. Three-in-ten victims of bullying or abuse say that staff in their school were either unaware of it or just ignored it.

### Does this (name calling, exclusion OR bullying) happen to kids at your school or to you based on racial or ethnic background?



#### **METHODOLOGY:**

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from Aug. 24-27, 2021 among a representative randomized sample of 872 Canadians aged 12 to 17, whose parents are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 3 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was conducted in partnership with the University of British Columbia (UBC) and paid for jointly by UBC and ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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## More Key Findings:

- Children in more diverse schools are significantly more likely to say that they have learned about racism in Canada's history, Indigenous treaties, residential schools, and multiculturalism, than those who say their student body is made up of kids from mostly the same background.
- Most Canadian kids are comfortable with their peers wearing different clothes, celebrating different holidays and speaking different languages than they do. Approximately two-thirds say it's not a big deal, while one-in-ten say they enjoy it.
- Among those who say that they have been the target of ill treatment, 43 per cent say it is something that they carry with them after it happens. More than half (57%) say it doesn't bother them, or that they're able to move past it.
- Older kids, between the ages of 15 and 17, are more likely than 12- to 14-year-olds to say they talk about racism with their friends – 73 per cent to 56 per cent respectively

## About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

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## Introduction: Who was surveyed?

The volume of the discussion around racism in Canada has increased in recent years. The conversation took on new importance as anti-Asian discrimination [intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) and [hate-based attacks](#) grabbed headlines across the country.

This study is the third in a series conducted through a partnership between ARI and UBC. The first report issued in May detailed [the impact on Asian Canadians](#) of prejudice during the first year of the pandemic and helped inform a [two-day national forum](#) UBC held in June on the impact and causes of anti-Asian racism.

The [second study](#) in the series looked at diversity and racism in Canada more broadly, including how Canadians feel about the country's diversity and whether or not they perceive Canada as a racist country.

This follows on a study from 2020 in which ARI partnered with the University of Alberta for a study that found many Chinese Canadians had been the [victims of racism](#) during the pandemic.

### **Related studies:**

[\*\*Blame, bullying and disrespect: Chinese Canadians reveal their experiences with racism during COVID-19\*\*](#)

[\*\*Anti-Asian Discrimination: Younger Canadians most likely to be hardest hit by experiences with racism, hate\*\*](#)

[\*\*Diversity and Racism in Canada: Competing views deeply divide country along gender, generational lines\*\*](#)

As those earlier studies showed, racism touches many Canadians, and follows them throughout their life. This survey looked to explore Canadian middle- and high-school students' experiences with racism, and the extent to which they notice or experience racism at their schools. Youth aged 12- to 17-years-old from across Canada were asked a series of questions about their experiences with diversity and racism at their school.

Canada may be a diverse country overall, but diversity varies significantly by province. Atlantic Canada has a much lower visible minority population. Ontario and B.C. are the most racially diverse provinces, while Quebec is the least racially diverse of the most populous provinces in the country:

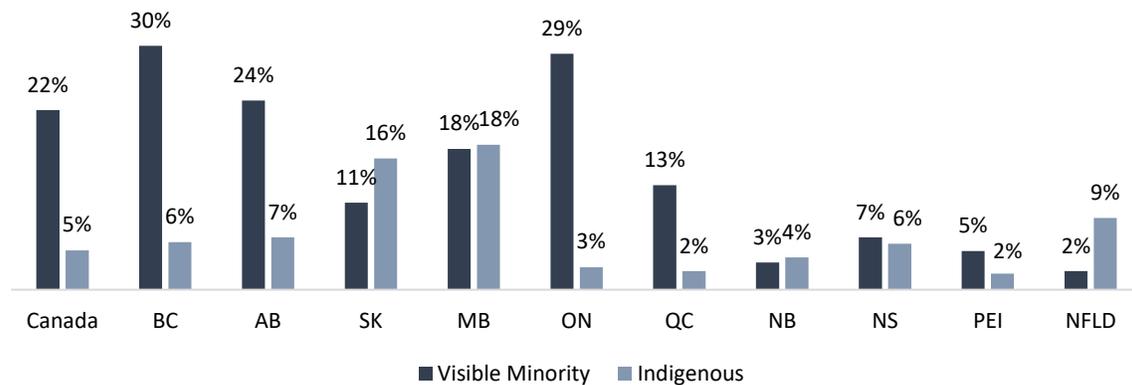
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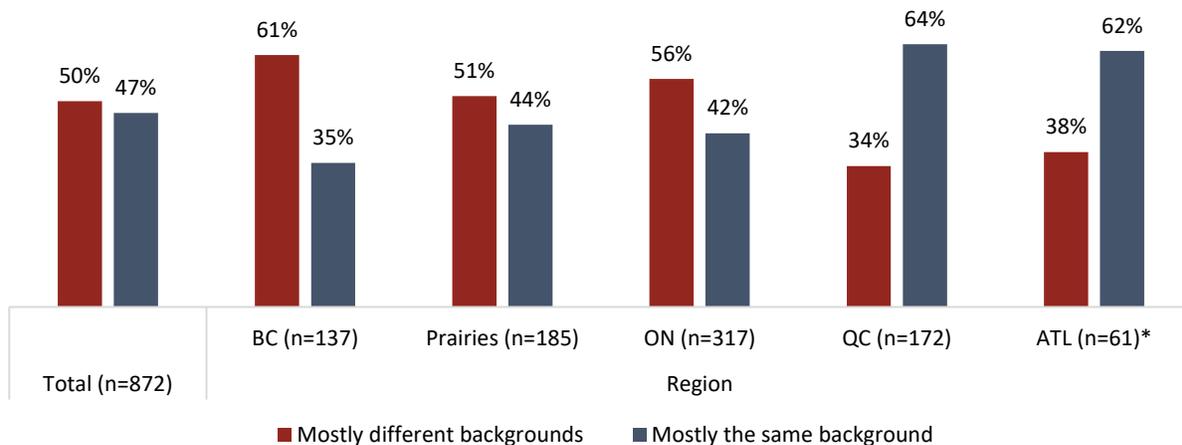
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**Visible minority and Indigenous percentage of population  
(StatsCan Census 2016)**



That reality is reflected in ARI's school-aged sample:

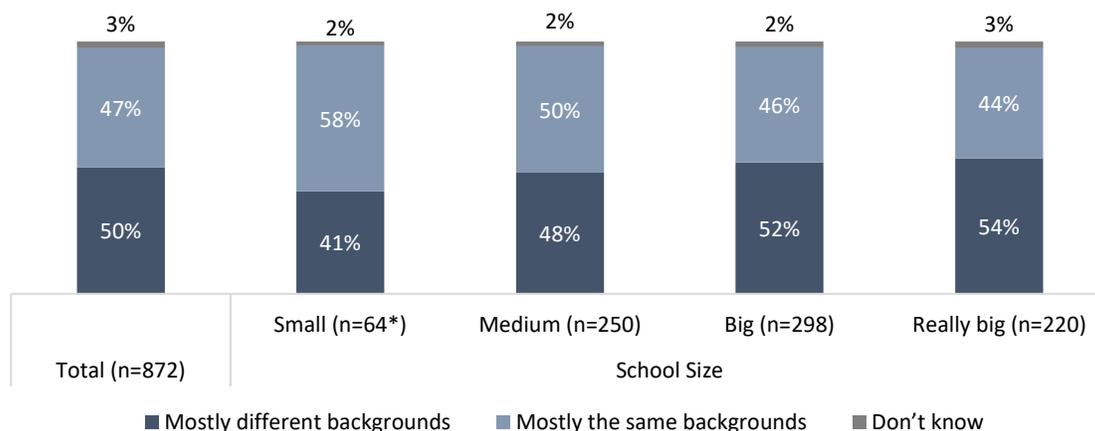
**How about the kids who go to your school? Are they mostly from the same or a different racial or ethnic background as you?**



*\*Small sample size, interpret with caution*

Importantly, the larger the school, the more likely children are to report the student body is diverse. Half of children that go to “big” schools (501 to 1,000 kids) or “really big” schools (more than 1,000 kids) say kids at their schools are from different backgrounds:

**How about the kids who go to your school? Are they mostly from the same or a different racial or ethnic background as you?**

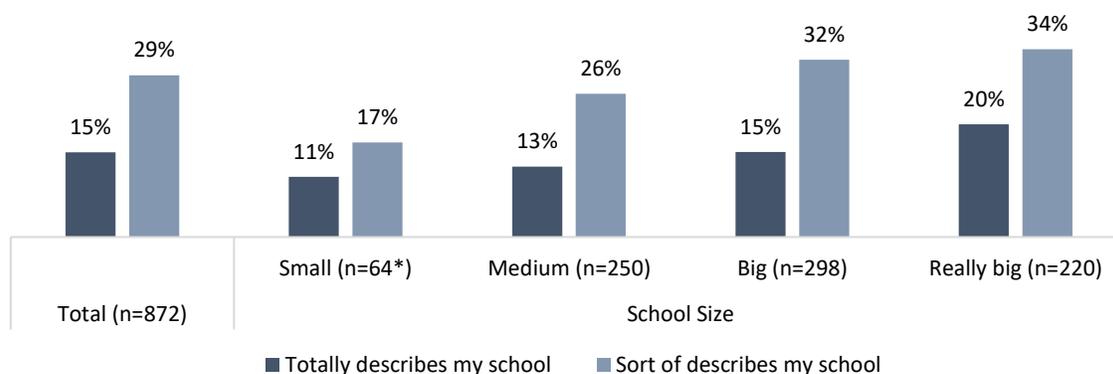


*\*Small sample size, interpret with caution*

This distinction is important. Children at larger schools are much more likely to encounter other students who speak different languages. For example, half of kids at big schools (47%) and “really big” schools (54%) say that “many kids speak languages that I don’t” describes their school, compared to 28 per cent of kids at small schools:

**Tell us whether each of the following describes the situation at your school, or not:**

**"Many kids speak languages that I don't"**



*\*Small sample size, interpret with caution*

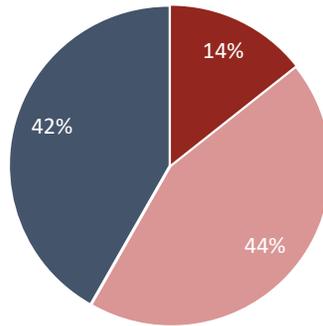
**Part One: Youth experiences with racism**

A majority of children report witnessing or experiencing racism at their schools. Three-in-five (58%) say they’ve seen kids insulted, bullied, or excluded based on their race or ethnicity, and another 14 per cent say they’ve experienced it themselves:

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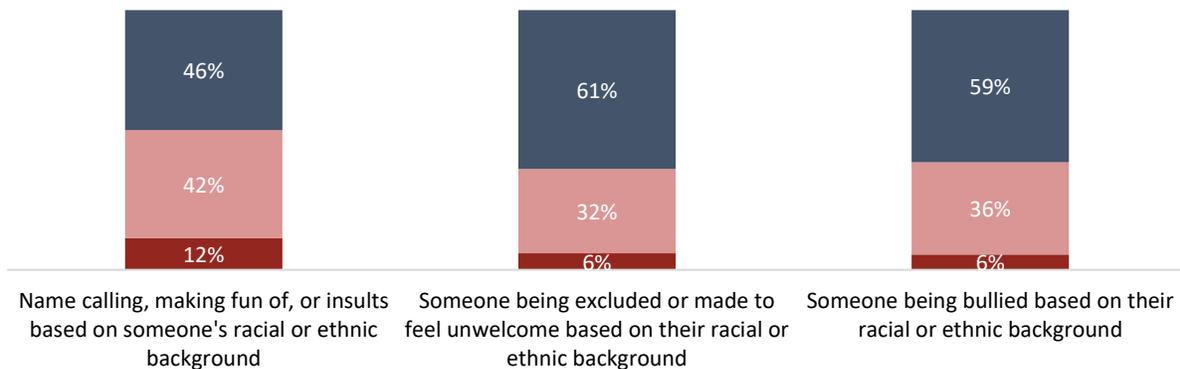
**Does this (name calling, exclusion OR bullying) happen to kids at your school or to you based on racial or ethnic background?  
(All children, n=872)**



- Yes, it happens at my school AND it happened to me personally
- It happens at my school, but not to me personally
- No, these things don't happen at my school

Breaking this down further, half (54%) say kids name call or use insults based on racial or ethnic background at their school, while smaller proportions say kids are made to feel unwelcome (38%) or are bullied (42%) based on their racial or ethnic background:

**Does this happen to kids at your school or to you based on racial or ethnic background?  
(All children, n=872)**

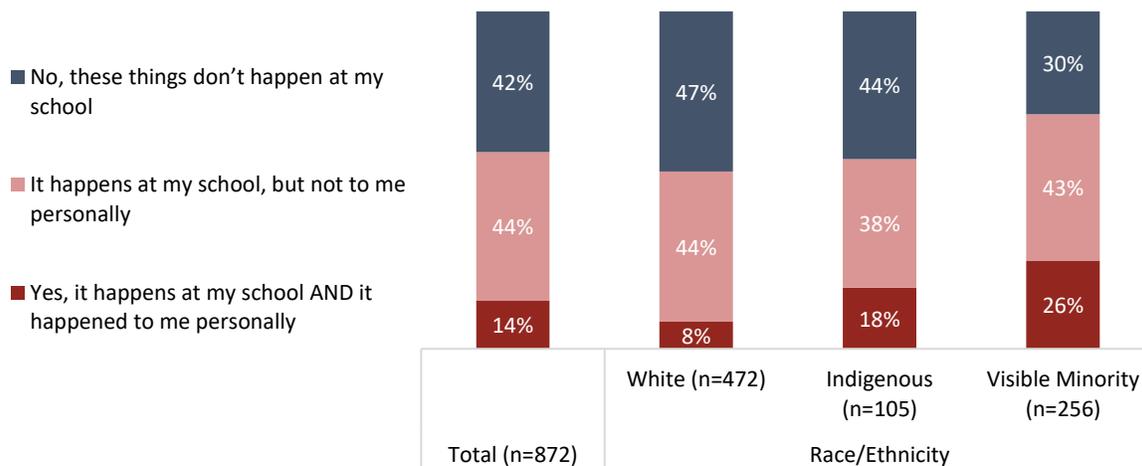


- No, these things don't happen at my school
- It happens at my school, but not to me personally
- Yes, it happens at my school AND it happened to me personally

**Children who identify as visible minorities more likely to experience racism at school**

White (47%) and Indigenous students (44%) are more likely to say none of those behaviours happen at their schools than those who identify as a visible minority (30%). That said, Indigenous (18%) and visible minority (26%) kids are, respectively, twice and three times as likely to say they have experienced either race-based bullying, exclusion, or insults than those who do not identify this way (8%):

**Does this (name calling, exclusion OR bullying) happen to kids at your school or to you based on racial or ethnic background?**

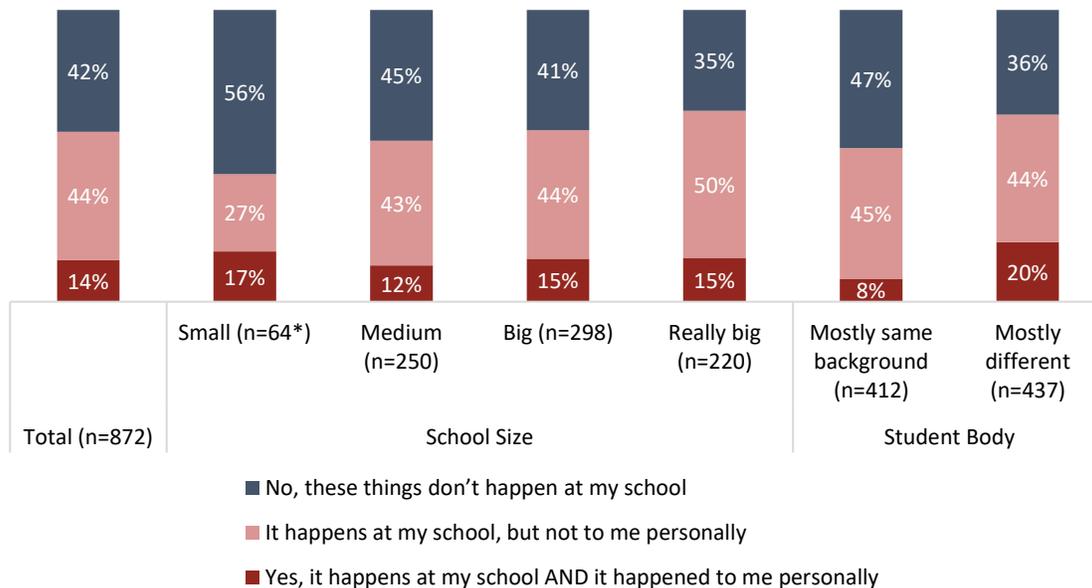


School size seems to be less of a factor than diversity when it comes to whether or not students personally experience racism. Kids at schools with a diverse population (20%) are twice as likely to say they've experienced race-based insults, bullying or exclusion as kids at more homogenous schools:

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**Does this (name calling, exclusion OR bullying) happen to kids at your school or to you based on racial or ethnic background?**



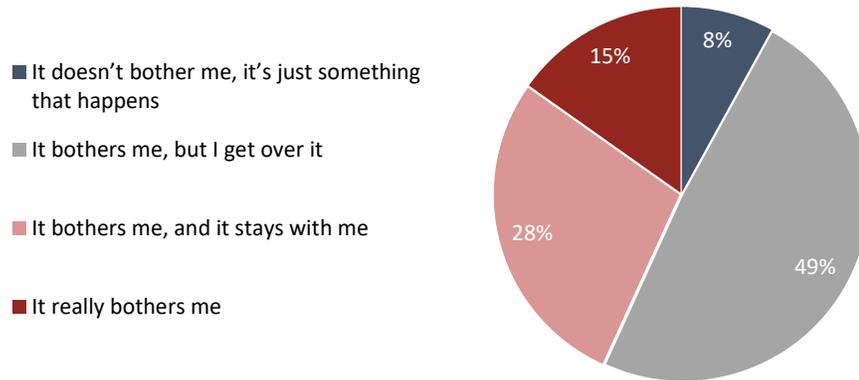
*\*Small sample size, interpret with caution*

**Two-in-five who face racism say they carry the feeling with them**

One of the ugliest effects of the COVID-19 pandemic has been [intensified anti-Asian discrimination](#). The impact of such race-based prejudice is long-lasting, according to those who experience it. Half of those surveyed by ARI and UBC [earlier this year](#) say the discrimination is upsetting and stays with them.

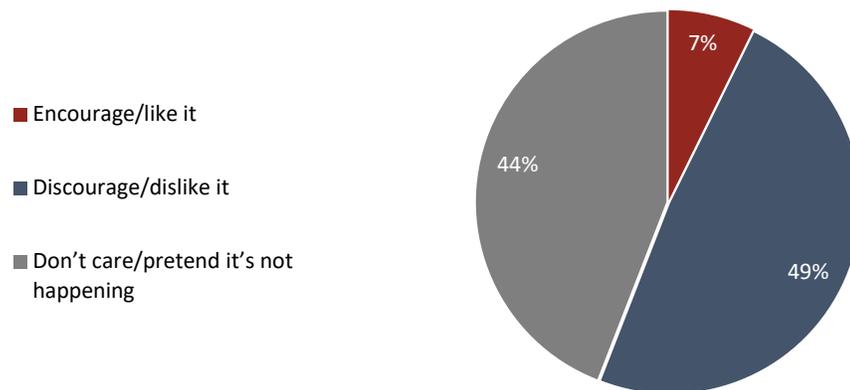
Nearly all of the children surveyed in this study who personally experienced racism at school say the behaviour bothers them (92%), including three-in-ten who say the experience stays with them (28%):

**And when this kind of thing happens to you, how does that make you feel? (Personally experienced racism, n=125)**



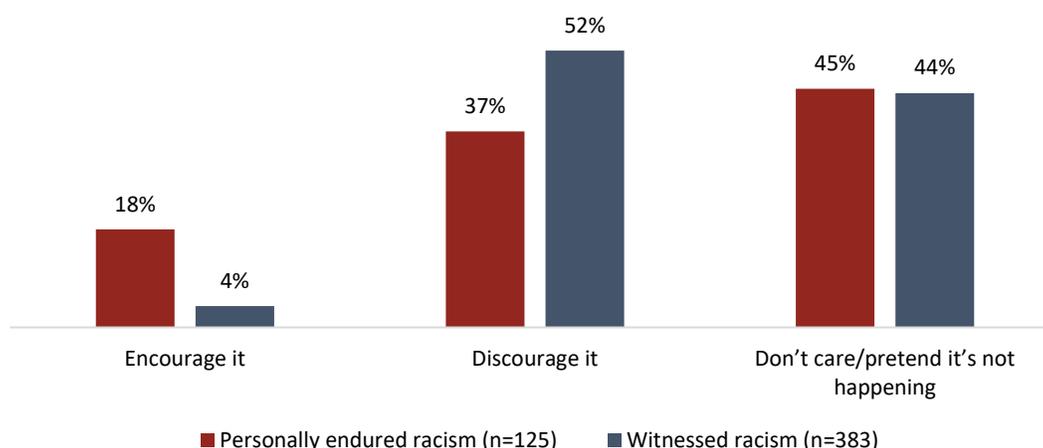
While half of kids who experienced or witnessed racism at their schools say kids try to discourage the behaviour, 44 per cent say other kids don't care or pretend it's not happening, and a small number say other kids actively encourage these behaviours:

**How do the other kids around usually respond when other kids say or do these kinds of things? (Experienced/witnessed racism, n=508)**



The impression of their peer group's reactions is much different for kids who actually experienced the racist behaviour themselves. Students who personally endured racism are four times as likely to say the other kids encouraged the behaviour (18%) as those who just witnessed it (4%):

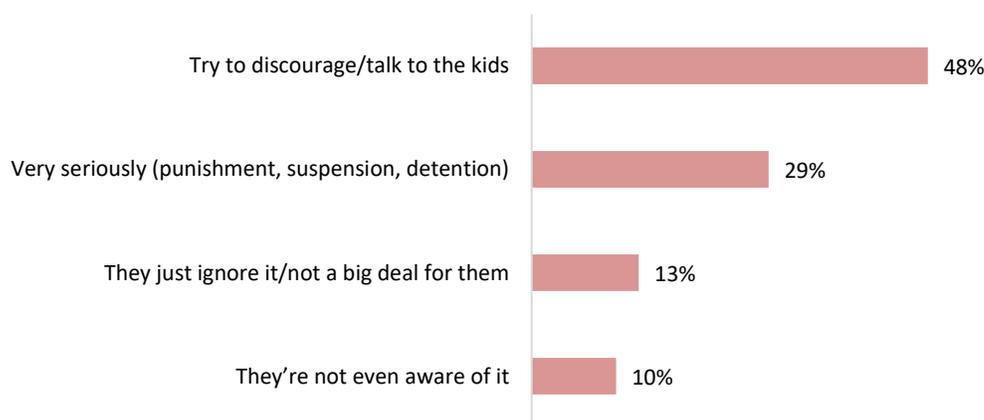
**How do the other kids around usually respond when other kids say or do these kinds of things?**



**One-quarter of kids say teachers ignore racist behaviour or are not aware of it**

Children who have experienced or witnessed racism at their school say, most often, teachers try to discourage the behaviour and talk to the bullies about it. Three-in-ten say racist behaviour usually results in punishment, suspension or detention for the kids who did it. But one-quarter (23%) of kids say teachers ignore racist behaviour, or are unaware of it:

**How do teachers and principals at your school usually react when things like this happen?  
(Experienced/witnessed racism, n=508)**

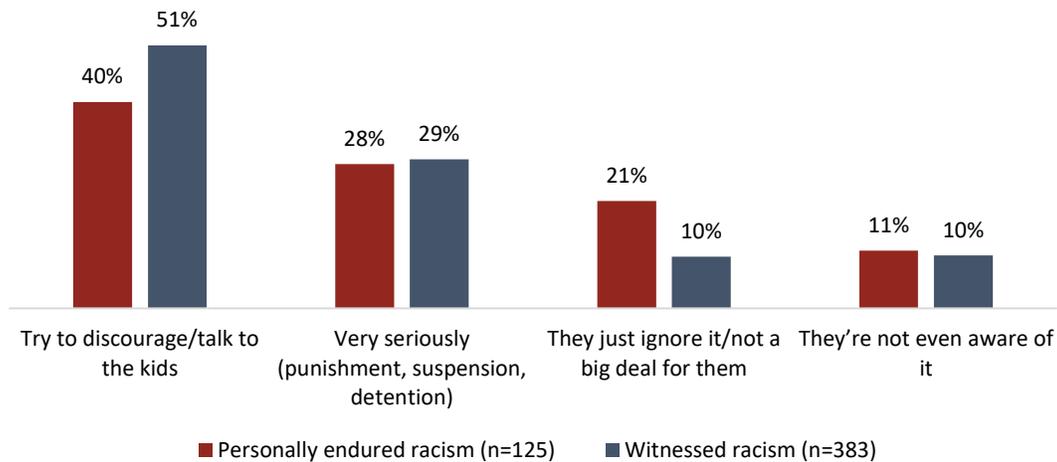


Those who have personally experienced racism have a different perception of teachers' behaviour than those that only witnessed it, and are more likely to say teachers ignore or are not aware of the behaviour:

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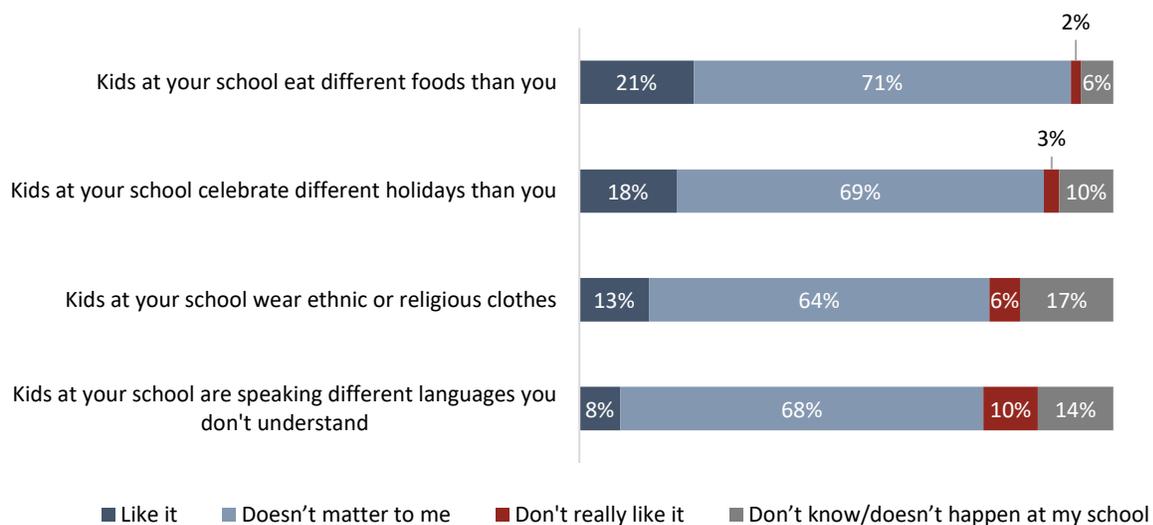
**How do teachers and principals at your school usually react when things like this happen?**



**Part Two: Differences a part of life, don't bother most**

While the existence of racism at schools is a reality, kids are overwhelmingly more ambivalent than approving or disapproving about ethnic diversity in the classroom. At least two-thirds of 12- to 17-year-olds say that it “doesn’t matter” to them when it comes to kids eating different foods, celebrating different holidays, wearing ethnic or religious clothes, or speaking languages they don’t understand at their school. Kids disapprove of language barriers the most, with one-in-ten saying they don’t really like it when they can’t understand their peers:

**Do you like it or not like it when:  
(All children, n=872)**

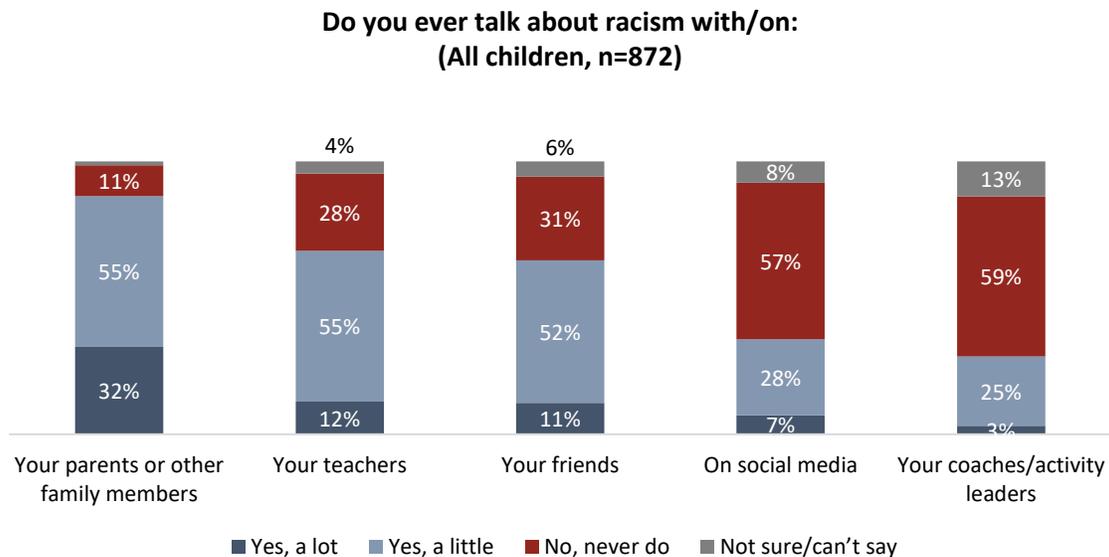


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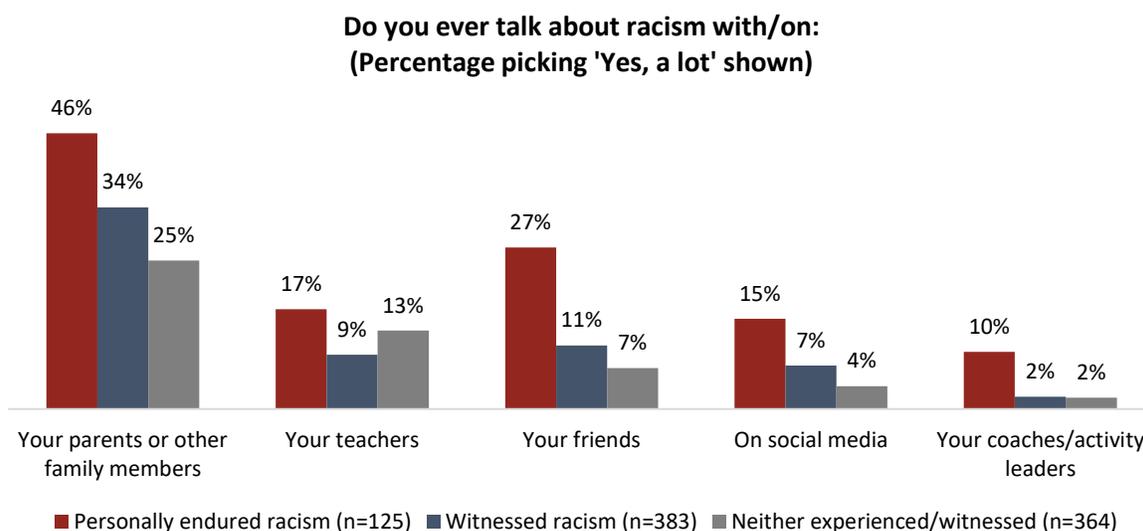
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**Nine-in-ten say they talk to parents and family about racism**

The children surveyed do report having outlets to talk about their experiences. Nine-in-ten middle and high schoolers (87%) say they talk about racism with their parents, including one-in-three where it's a regular family topic of conversation. Kids are much less likely to talk about it with teachers, friends, coaches, or on social media however:



Those who personally experienced racism are much more likely to have talked about it with the people in their lives. They are four times as likely to have talked about it with their friends 'a lot' (27%) when compared to kids who have neither experienced nor witnessed it themselves:

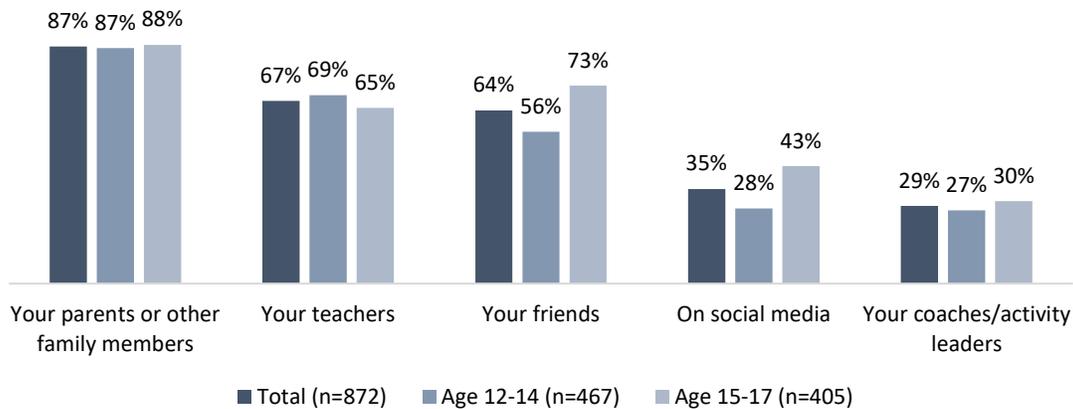


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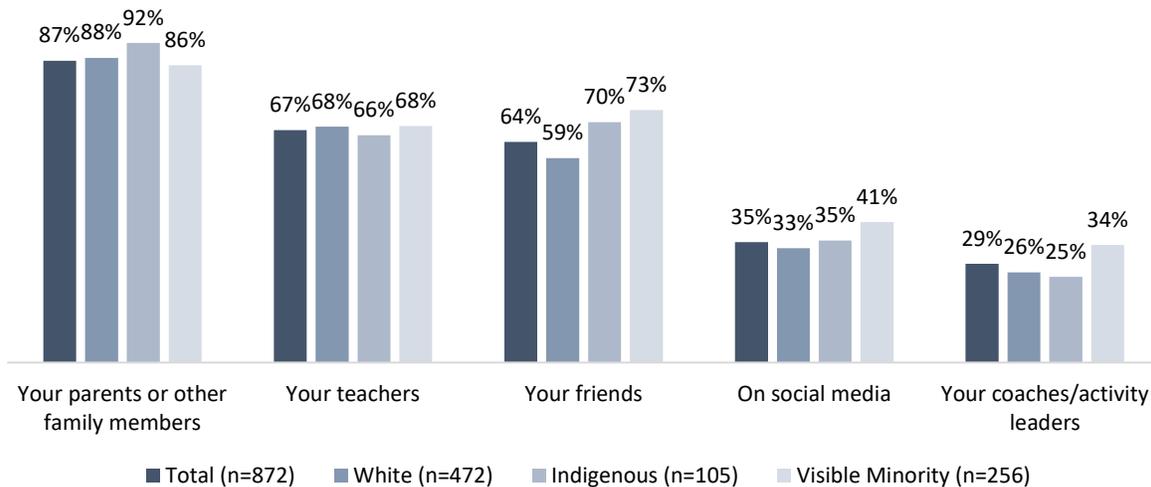
While older and younger high schoolers say they talk about racism with their family, teachers, and coaches at about the same rate, older kids are also more likely to talk about it with their friends (73% for kids aged 15 to 17 vs. 64% for those aged 12 to 14) and on social media (43% vs. 35%):

**Do you ever talk about racism with/on:  
(Percentage picking 'Yes' shown)**



Those who are much more likely to experience racism – children who identify as Indigenous or as a visible minority – are also more likely to talk about it among their friends:

**Do you ever talk about racism with/on:  
(Percentage picking 'Yes' shown)**



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### Part Three: What kids learn at school about racism in Canada

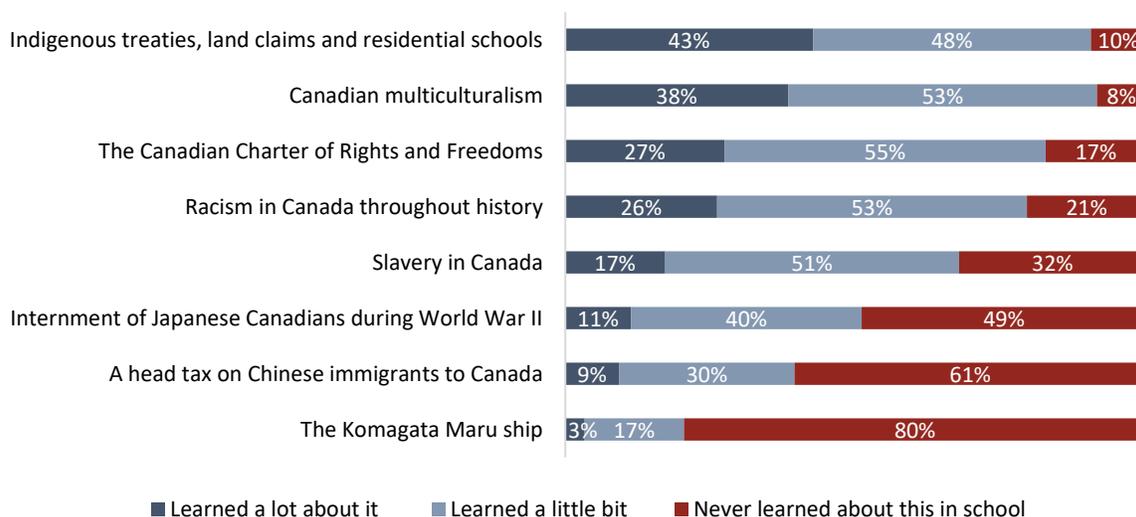
The school-aged survey respondents were asked about a number of issues and events related to racial discrimination throughout Canada’s history to gauge their self-reported level of awareness of these issues and events. ([See the questionnaire for the full list.](#))

School curriculums have been put [under the microscope](#) as conversations around [racism](#) in [Canada](#) have [grown](#) in recent years. Last fall, Black parents across the country found lesson plans that were [wanting](#).

Indeed, in ARI’s survey, kids in the final half of their compulsory education are reluctant to say they are well versed in key topics and events. One-quarter (26%) of kids aged 12 to 17 say they learned a lot about racism in Canada throughout history at school, but nearly as many (21%) say they haven’t learned anything at all about it.

Further, one-third say they never learned anything about slavery in Canada, half say they didn’t learn of the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War, three-in-five say schools didn’t teach them about the head tax on Chinese immigrants and four-in-five say the Komagata Maru ship never came up in their classrooms:

**Here’s a list of topics. We want to know which ones you might have learned about at school  
(All children, n=872)**



### **Regional differences**

As education is a provincial mandate, curriculums vary across the country. While Indigenous treaties, land claims, and residential schools appear to be – at least comparatively – well-learned in Canadian schools, in Quebec one-quarter of kids say they learned a lot about those topics, half the rate of kids in B.C. and the Prairies. Students in Canada’s second largest province are also the least likely to say they’ve learned a lot about racism in Canada throughout history (15%), the internment of Japanese Canadians (6%), the Chinese head tax (4%) and the Komagata Maru ship (1%):

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Percentage of Canadian children saying they 'learned a lot' about each topic in school:						
(Unweighted numbers)	Total (n=872)	Region				
		BC (n=137)	Prairies (n=185)	ON (n=317)	QC (n=172)	ATL (n=61*)
Indigenous treaties, residential schools	43%	52%	59%	42%	24%	28%
Canadian multiculturalism	38%	36%	55%	38%	28%	23%
The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms	27%	22%	42%	26%	23%	18%
Racism in Canada throughout history	26%	26%	31%	29%	15%	26%
Slavery in Canada	17%	18%	17%	21%	9%	20%
Internment of Japanese Canadians during WW2	11%	22%	14%	9%	6%	7%
A head tax on Chinese immigrants to Canada	9%	19%	10%	9%	4%	2%
The Komagata Maru ship	3%	10%	2%	3%	1%	-

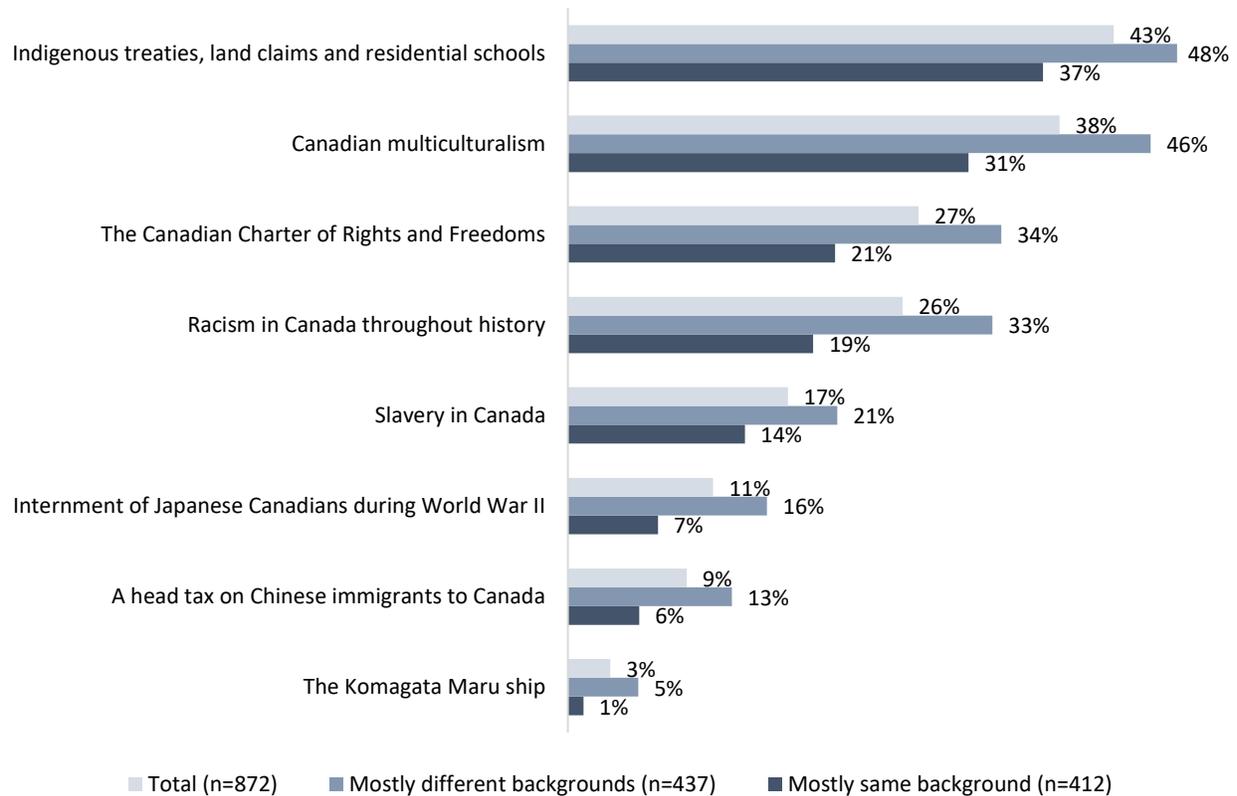
### **Students from diverse schools report better knowledge of Canada's history with racism**

There appears to be a strong correlation between the diversity of the student body and increased awareness of topics related to racism in Canada throughout history. Half (48%) of kids who say their peers come more from different backgrounds than similar ones say they've learned a lot about Indigenous treaties, land claims, and residential schools, for example. Two-in-five (37%) high schoolers from more homogenous schools say the same:

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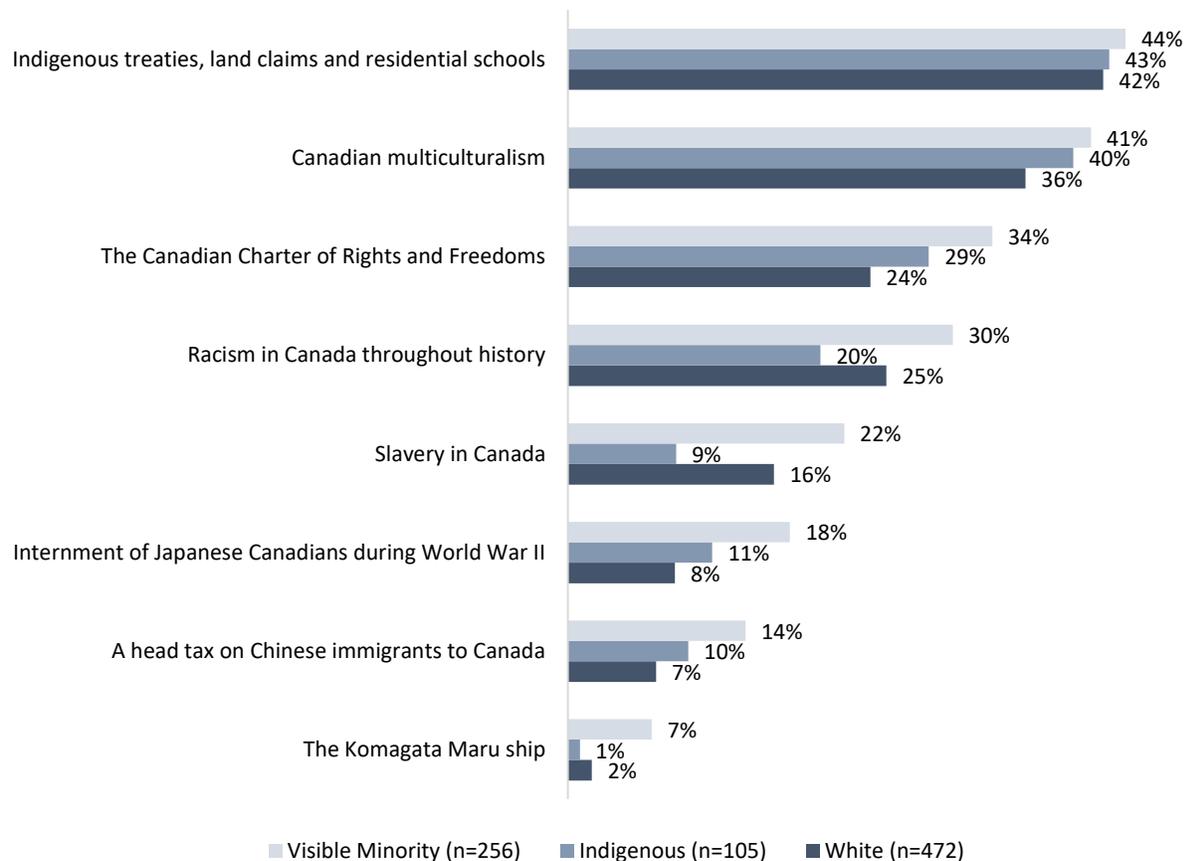
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**Percentage of Canadian children saying they 'learned a lot' about each topic in school by school diversity:**



While what is taught is under the control of education departments across the country, what is retained is up to students. High-schoolers who identify as visible minorities are more likely to report they've learned "a lot" about the range of topics related to diversity and racism in Canada presented to them than those who do not identify as such.

**Percentage of Canadian children saying they 'learned a lot' about each topic in school (All children, n=872)**



*For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).*

*For detailed results by school size, school diversity and the respondent's proximity to racism, [click here](#).*

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