SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, October 6, 2021, 7:00 pm
Zoom Meeting

9.2. Committee of the Whole

9.3. Committee of the Whole, Budget

9.4. Advisory Committee on Equity

9.5. Indigenous Education Advisory Council

9.6. Parent Involvement Committee

9.7. Advisory Committee on Extended Day and Child Care Programs

10. New Business

11. Adjournment

Building Brighter Futures Together at the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board

OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

Thursday, September 9, 2021, 7:00 pm
Zoom Meeting

Members:	Christine Boothby (Trustee), Rob Campbell (Trustee), Chris Ellis (Trustee), Sonia Nadon-Campbell (Community Representative), Susan Cowin (Community Representative), Jim Harris (VOICE for deaf and hard of hearing children), Terry Warner (VOICE for deaf and hard of hearing children, Alternate), Lisa Paterick (VIEWS for the Visually Impaired), Dr. Maggie Mamen (Learning Disabilities Association of Ottawa-Carleton), Safina Dewshi (Ottawa-Carleton Assembly of School Councils)
Association Representatives (Non Voting):	Jennifer Titley (Ottawa-Carleton Elementary Teachers' Federation), Connie Allen (Professional Student Services Personnel, Alternate), Jean Trant (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, School Support Personnel), Catherine Houlden (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Teachers), Andrew Winchester (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Alternate), Kimberly Elmer (Ottawa-Carleton Secondary School Administrators' Network)
Staff and Guests:	Lynn Scott (Trustee), Peter Symmonds (Superintendent of Learning Support Services), Amy Hannah (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Kate Stoudt (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Emily Balla (Mental Health Lead, Learning Support Services), Stacey Kay (Manager, Learning Support Services), Joan Oracheski (Manager, Research and Analytics Division), Kathryn Langevin (Supervisor Social Work Services, Learning Support Services), Sue Baker (Acting Board/Committee Coordinator)

1. Call to Order

   Chair Nadon-Campbell called the meeting to order at 7:15 p.m. She acknowledged that the meeting is taking place on unceded Algonquin Territory and thanked the Algonquin people for hosting the meeting on their land.

2. Approval of the Agenda

   Moved by Trustee Boothby,

   THAT the agenda be approved.

Carried

3. Information

    3.1 Policy P.019.GOV Special Education Advisory Committee

    Policy P.019.GOV Special Education Advisory Committee was provided for information.

4. Delegations

    There were no delegations.

5. Review of Special Education Advisory Committee Report

    5.1 2 June 2021 SEAC Report

    Moved by Trustee Campbell,

    THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee Report dated 2 June 2021 report be received.

    Carried

    5.2 Forward Agenda 2021-2022

    The Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) forward agenda was provided for information.

    Superintendent Symmonds requested that members of SEAC review the forward agenda and advise staff if there are any additions and/or updates.

6. Presentations

    6.1 Report 21-046, Examination of Elementary and Secondary Program Pathways and Achievement Outcomes (M. Giroux)

    Manager Joan Oracheski and Superintendent Symmonds presented Report 21-046, Examination of Elementary and Secondary Program Pathways and Achievement Outcomes.

    The report examines enrolment distribution in elementary and secondary programs and student achievement outcomes in relation to demographic data collected through the Valuing Voices – Identity Matters! Student Survey conducted in 2019-2020. The information presented seeks to address the following questions:

    - What is the representation of students across elementary programs (English with core French, early French immersion, middle French immersion) and secondary pathways (academic, applied, locally developed)?

- How well is the system doing to support students in meeting high expectations in French, language, and mathematics (elementary panel) and English, math, and science (secondary panel).

The report aligns with the OCDSB 2019-2023 Strategic Plan; Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights Roadmap (2020); Grade 9 de-streaming of mathematics; the Annual Student Achievement Report (ASAR); the Anti-Racism Act (2017) and accompanying Data Standards (2018), and the QuantCrit Framework (Gilbert et al., 2018).

The report shows the program enrolment distribution for elementary students in grade 1 to 8, and mathematics for grades 9-10. For each group, enrolment patterns were similar over the past three years.

Disproportionality measures a group's over-representation or under-representation in a program, service or function. relative to their representation in the reference population. A value of 1 means equal representation relative to their representation in population.

In the Early French Immersion (EFI) program, representation was lower amongst the English Language Learners (ELLs), identifying as Indigenous, students with special education needs, students identified as Middle Eastern, students who identified as trans boy/man or two spirit, students with disabilities including addiction, autism, blind/low vision, developmental, learning, mobility, and speech impairment.

In the secondary applied mathematics group, representation was disproportionate for low-socio-economic status (SES) students, students identifying as Indigenous, Black, students who identified as gender fluid, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and two spirit, and all disabilities with the exception of developmental and mobility.

Conversely, when looking at the elementary and secondary in the English and core French programs, the representation was higher for the same groups over the past three years. Both groups met the provincial standards.

Disparity measures group differences in outcome. Disparities in achievement outcomes were most pronounced for students with special education needs (excluding gifted). French (writing) showed the greatest variation and mathematics showed the least variation in outcomes across groups. Outcomes were generally higher for South Asian and White (race), and generally lower for Indigenous, Black, Latino, Middle Eastern, and disability groups. In the secondary panel, there was great variation in English, mathematics and science with locally developed courses having the lowest outcomes.

Central departments, including Learning Support Services (LSS), Program and Learning, and Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights, are using an equity lens and sharing responsibility for the work.

Learning and Support Services is taking the lead to reinforce conditions for learning to create positive relationships with a focus on mental health, and ensuring a safe, warm and welcoming environment.

Key strategies and next steps to support students in their learning includes the following:

Program and Learning Department:

- grade 9 de-streaming of mathematics and other compulsory subjects;

- detailed scope and sequence in all curricular areas in grades 1-8;

- literacy assessment field tests for grades 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, and 9;

- introduction of the intensive reading intervention program (kindergarten to grade 9) as part of the Summer Learning Program; and

- Student Achievement Through Equity (SATE) inquiry to look at factors contributing to student success and creating situations to overcome barriers;

Learning and Support Services Department:

- implementation of the Third Path - A Relationship-based Approach to Student Well-Being and Achievement;

- online resource to support the development of quality IEPs; and

- mental health promotion and prevention (including Culturally Response Social-Emotional Learning Resource);

Indigenous, Equity & Human Rights Division:

- expanded partnership with Inuuqattigiit education hubs for Inuit students;

- expansion of Indigenous Speakers Series and credit-bearing courses for Rainbow Youth Forum and Black Student Forum;

- hiring of a Gender Diverse and Trans Student Support Coordinator;

- expansion of reach ahead and summer courses to support Indigenous students, Black students, and English Language Learners (ELLs); and

- introduction of Indigenous Languages (elementary and secondary).

Innovation & Adolescent Learning Department:

- creation of multi-credit packages for English as a Second Language/English Language Development (ESL)/ELD students (grade 8 secondary schools);

- experiential learning to promote student engagement and create school-community partnerships;

- collaboration with the Indigenous Education team to create a multi-credit package to include land-based and language learning; and

- support new Canadians for granting credits for educational experiences that have occurred outside of Canada.

Identity-based data will be used to identify patterns and trends. A system-wide capacity to understand disproportionality and disparity and how to address these issues will be developed. Developing strategies which recognize the unique learning needs of students and shifting conditions to support the learning needs of all students is critical.

In response to queries from SEAC members, the following points were noted:

- staff has prioritized the work on intersectionality for this year along with the establishment of thresholds and identifying systemic barriers to success and unintended outcomes of placement in specialized program classes to help with program planning for students with special needs;

- with respect to the lower outcomes for students with special needs, LSS will work with staff to identify specific strategies to support learning such as ensuring teachers in specialized program classes have current information to improve practices in schools;

- some instructional coaches, multi-disciplinary team members, psychologists, speech language pathologists, a community engagement worker and the Research and Analytics Division will support the work of the Student Achievement Through Equity (SATE) initiative;

- the Right to Read inquiry will help educators look at evidence-based reading instruction;

- the District has received funding for a math project in grades 4, 5 and 6 to support students in achieving provincial standards for math. The project will focus on lagging skills and early intervention;

- the grade 9 math de-streaming documentation has explicit expectations about monitoring student achievement; and

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- students with lagging speech skills can be successful in EFI with support. The school multi-disciplinary team may identify an appropriate intervention.

Chair Nadon-Campbell thanked Manager Oracheski and Superintendent Symmonds for their presentation.

7. Matters for Action

7.1 Election of a SEAC Representative for the Advisory Committee on Equity (ACE)

Chair Nadon-Campbell called for a volunteer to represent the Special Education Advisory Committee at meetings of the Advisory Committee for Equity.

As there were no volunteers, Chair Nadon-Campbell advised that this item will be brought back to the next meeting.

8. Discussion

8.1 Memo 21-093, Students Requesting Remote Learning from Specialized Program Classes (P. Symmonds)

Superintendent Symmonds provided an overview of Memo 21-093 with respect to students requesting remote learning from specialized program classes.

During the 2020-2021 school year, students in specialized program classes were supported through a blended model of remote and in-person learning. Many strategies used to support students in specialized classes did not work well in a virtual environment without additional funding. For the current 2021-2022 school year, specialized program classes will be only offered in-person; however, 24 students who would have normally been placed in specialized program classes have requested virtual learning. These students will be supported by learning support teachers, educational assistants, and LSS central supports in regular classes in the Ottawa-Carleton Virtual (OCV) school. They will not lose their spot in a specialized program class; however, they may not be able to return this year if there are no existing vacancies.

9. Department Update

9.1 Superintendent's Report

a. Launch of School Year 2021-2022

Superintendent Symmonds welcomed everyone back to SEAC and expressed the hope that everyone had a good summer break. He introduced System Principal Kate Stoudt who is replacing Christine

Kessler, and Mental Health Lead Emily Balla who is replacing Petra Duschner to lead the mental health support division.

Superintendent Symmonds advised that staff had three professional development (PD) days prior to the start of school on 9 September 2021. PD focussed on establishing connections and creating conditions for learning in a safe, warm and welcoming environment, normalizing the return to school, health and safety requirements to keep children in school for as much as possible, and literacy and numeracy instruction. Staff is aware that students have had varying experiences over the pandemic and are taking an asset-based approach on what students are now bringing to the table. LSS is working on ensuring Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports are in place for consultation, direct support and referral.

Superintendent Symmonds noted that the Board has mandated that staff, volunteers and coaches must provide proof of vaccination against COVID-19 by the end of September unless an exemption for medical or religious/creed human rights reasons has been granted. All staff and students in kindergarten to grade 12 must wear a mask and the District is required to report on the requirement for vaccination status.

The Ministry of Education's Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) 81 sets out responsibilities for school staff and nurses for the provision of school health support services. There is currently a nursing shortage across the province and some students who require nursing procedures such as tube feeding may not be able to attend school if there is no nurse available. Nursing services in schools are the responsibility of Home and Community Care Support Services (HCCSS) which is currently being transferred from the Local Integration Health Network (LIHN) to CHEO. Staff are aware of fewer than 5 students who are unable to attend due to the nursing shortage. Staff continue to collaborate with CHEO for the provision of nursing services and with schools to maintain connection and support programming while students remain home.

There is currently a shortage of yellow school bus and small vehicle drivers necessitating the cancellation of some transportation runs. This situation is similar in all school districts and the District is assessing whether students who currently receive individual transportation in a small vehicle are still in need of it or if they can be transported with other students on a yellow school bus. If transportation is not available, the student may be marked as absent with the same code used for missing school due to the cancellation of busses in inclement weather.

b.   Summer Transition Programs

System Principal Amy Hannah advised that the District received funding from the Ministry of Education for a summer transition program for students with high special education needs. Approximately 100 elementary and 22 secondary students participated virtually in the program. Learning was individualized for each student depending on their requirements and early reports indicate that the program was successful. The program ended on 2 September 2021 and further information about the program will be provided in a memo in late September.

Manager Stacey Kay advised that 50 speech and language assessments and 50 psychoeducational assessments were conducted over the summer. Staff did not have the same opportunity to complete assessments over the past school year because of the pandemic, and they will continue to monitor the impact of last year as LSS utilizes support staff this year.

System Principal Kate Stoudt reported that one elementary and one secondary evidence-based social skills program was provided virtually for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The students were recommended by the central ASD team and the program has received positive feedback.

c.   Continuity of Mental Health Supports

Mental Health Lead, Emily Balla, advised that mental health support was provided by psychologists and social workers. The support consisted of wellness checks, weekly meetings with students, groups for stress management for students in grades 7-11, and support for summer transition programs. Three drop-in sessions were held for parents wishing to speak with mental health professionals on supporting their children when returning to school. Students were identified by psychologists and social workers and parents of identified groups including Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour (BIPOC) students were invited by email to register for support groups.

Chair Nadon-Campbell advised that the Wabano and Odawa centres also provided summer programs for families and camps for students over the summer.

Trustee Ellis suggested that SEAC discuss mental health oversight at a future meeting and that this topic be added to the Forward Agenda for SEAC.

9.2   Schedule for the Review of the Special Education Plan (Standards)

System Principal Hannah advised that the schedule for the review of the Special Education Plan (Standards) was provided for information. The process that was used last year will continue for 2021-2022. Some standards will remain unchanged and some are out of the District's purview, for example, health supports. Staff will be looking for feedback from SEAC members via independent review or discussion at upcoming SEAC meetings.

Superintendent Symmonds noted that some of the content is provided to the District and cannot be changed, but having SEAC review the standards and providing feedback to staff on the readability and accessibility of the information to the community is very much appreciated. He encouraged the members to read the standards and provide feedback as they come forward to SEAC.

10.   New Business

Chair Nadon-Campbell advised that the Indigenous Education Advisory Council (IEAC) did not meet in June 2021. She noted that the Advisory Committee on Equity (ACE) needs a representative from SEAC. Terry Warner and Trustee Ellis represent SEAC on the Advisory Committee for Extended Day and Child Care Programs.

Mr. Warner advised that Chief Financial Officer Carson will replace Superintendent Duah as the Director's designate on the Advisory Committee for Extended Day and Child Care Programs.

11.   Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Sonia Nadon-Campbell, Chair,
Special Education Advisory
Committee

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Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Forward Agenda 2021-2022					
SEAC Forward Agenda 2021/22	**Champion high learning expectations for all students in all programs**	**Prioritize the dignity and well-being of students in inclusive and caring classrooms**	**Remove barriers to equity of access, opportunity, and outcomes**	**Advising the community on key initiatives**	**Special Education Plan Standards**
9 Sept	Summer Transition Programs	Continuity of Mental Health Supports	Examination of Elementary and Secondary Program Pathways and Achievement Outcomes Memo 21-093, Students Requesting Remote Learning from Specialized Program Classes	Update on the re-opening of schools	Schedule for Reviewing the Standards
6 Oct	Update on the OCDSB Interest Academy Pilot			Individual Education Plan On-Line (IOL) Parent Portal	Transportation
3 Nov	TBD - Right to Read Inquiry Results		Learning Support for Students with Special Needs Online Tool Update		• Special Education Staff • Equipment

SEAC Forward Agenda 2021/22	Champion high learning expectations for all students in all programs	Prioritize the dignity and well-being of students in inclusive and caring classrooms	Remove barriers to equity of access, opportunity, and outcomes	Advising the community on key initiatives	Special Education Plan Standards
8 Dec				• Elections	• The Board's Special Education Advisory Committee
5 Jan				• 2022-2023 Budget Update	• The OCDSB General Model for Special Education • Individual Education Plans (IEPs)
2 Feb					• Early Identification Procedures / Intervention Strategies • Educational and Other Assessments

SEAC Forward Agenda 2021/22	Champion high learning expectations for all students in all programs	Prioritize the dignity and well-being of students in inclusive and caring classrooms	Remove barriers to equity of access, opportunity, and outcomes	Advising the community on key initiatives	Special Education Plan Standards
2 Mar				• 2022-2023 Budget- SEAC's Priority Considerations	All Standards for 'Independent Review' due back by 28 February 2022. (Attached)
6 Apr				• Academic Staffing Plan 2022-2023	
4 May	Special Education Plan 2021-2022				
1 June		Summer Learning Programs			

OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

POLICY P.008.GOV

TITLE: **ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EQUITY**

Date issued: **30 January 1998**
Revised: **24 April 2018**
Authorization: **Board 19 January 1998**

1.0   OBJECTIVE

1.1   To establish an Advisory Committee on Equity (ACE) to advise the Board of Trustees in fulfilling its commitment to provide an equitable and inclusive educational and work environment which supports student achievement and well-being.

2.0   DEFINITIONS

2.1   **Board** means Board of Trustees.

2.2   **Community Agencies or organizations** mean entities focused on serving youth and families with a diversity, equity, low income or inclusion lens.

2.3   **Community groups or associations** mean groups representative of communities that experience systemic barriers and marginalization.

2.4   **Creed** means a religious or non-religious belief system that influences a person's identity, worldview and way of life. A creed:
(a)   is sincerely, freely and deeply held;

(b)   integrally linked to a person's identity, self-definition and fulfillment;

(c)   is a particular and comprehensive, overarching system of belief that governs one's conduct and practices;

(d)   addresses ultimate questions of human existence, including ideas about life, purpose, death, and the existence or non-existence of a Creator and/or a higher or different order of existence; and

(e)   has some "nexus" or connection to an organization that professes a shared system of belief.

According to the Human Rights Code, creed includes the spiritual beliefs and practices of indigenous cultures.

2.5 **Diversity** refers to the presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization or society. The dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, creed, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

2.6 **District** means the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB).

2.7 **Equity** goes beyond treating people the same and takes into account their individual needs and differences.

2.8 **Inclusive Education** refers to education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected.

2.9 **LGBTQ2S+** means Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning, Two-Spirit, and additional sexual and gender identities.

2.10 **School Community** refers to students, parents/guardians, trustees, staff, contractors and service providers, volunteers and community members.

2.11 **Systemic barriers** are policies, practices or procedures that result in some people or groups of people receiving unequal access and/or outcomes or being excluded.

3.0 POLICY

Terms of Reference

3.1 The Advisory Committee on Equity shall:
(a) provide strategic policy and program advice and/or recommendations on matters of diversity which support equitable education access and outcomes, student learning and well-being, and the development of citizenship;

(b) advise the Board of Trustees on the review, development, implementation, and monitoring of all policies and its equity strategy and programs;

(c) advise the Board of Trustees on the identification and elimination of systemic barriers to providing bias-aware education, including power dynamics, discrimination and marginalization that may impact the lived experience of members of the school community;

(d) liaise with community stakeholders by actively engaging parents and community partners to help create and sustain a safe and inclusive learning environment; and

(e) advise the Board on potential budget implications that may help or hinder its commitment to foster equitable and inclusive education.

4.0　SPECIFIC DIRECTIVES

Composition

4.1　The Committee shall be comprised of up to 19 members, including eleven (11) voting members and up to eight (8) non-voting members.

4.2　The eleven (11) voting members shall include:

(a)　four (4) individual members; and

(b)　seven (7) community members representative of community organizations, agencies, groups and/or associations.

4.3　The non-voting members shall include:

(a)　up to two (2) Trustees as appointed by the Board of Trustees;

(b)　one (1) Superintendent of Instruction or designate;

(c)　one (1) Diversity & Equity Coordinator;

and may include:

(d)　one (1) representative appointed by the Student Senate;

(e)　one (1) representative appointed by Ottawa-Carleton Elementary Teachers' Federation;

(f)　one (1) representative appointed by Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation; and

(g)　one (1) representative of a local post-secondary institution.

4.4　Additional employees of the District may be invited to attend, participate, and act as a resource to the Committee in a non-voting and non-membership capacity, as determined on an as needed basis.

Membership Criteria

4.5　All applicants to the Committee shall have a strong interest in and commitment to student achievement and well-being and have:

(a)　knowledge and understanding of the link between equity and inclusive education;

(b)　the ability to work effectively and collaboratively with representatives from various communities who may have diverse opinions and perspectives;

(c)　tact, diplomacy and a respect for others;

(d)　an enthusiastic approach and ability to motivate and support others; and

(e)   the ability and willingness to attend meetings during the school year.

4.6   Every effort shall be made to ensure that the four (4) individual members are:
(a)   parents/guardians with children enrolled in the OCDSB who represent the diverse demographic composition of the District; and/or

(b)   members of the following identities:
(i)   Creed-based;
(ii)   Disability (e.g., physical, mental, and learning disabilities);
(iii)   First Nations, Métis or Inuit;
(iv)   Immigrants and newcomers to Canada;
(v)   LGBTQ2S+ ; and/or
(vi)   Racialized Groups.

4.7   Community organizations, agencies, groups and/or associations seeking membership on ACE shall be representative of communities experiencing systemic barriers and marginalization, and have diversity, equity and inclusion-centered mandate. These may include, but are not limited to the following:
(a)   Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN);

(b)   Children's Aid Society;

(c)   Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centers of Ottawa;

(d)   Family Services Ottawa;

(e)   Lebanese and Arab Social Services Agency;

(f)   Ottawa Chinese Community Service Center;

(g)   Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO);

(h)   Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership (OLIP);

(i)   Ottawa Police Service;

(j)   Pathways to Education;

(k)   Rainbow Alliance arc-en-ciel;

(l)   Somali Center For Family Services;

(m)   Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health ; and/or

(n)   Youth Services Bureau.

This list may be changed or expanded to reflect the District's demographic composition and its equity and inclusive education priorities.

Term of Office

4.8   The term of office for a voting member of the Committee shall be two (2) years beginning December 1.

4.9   Individual members may serve for no more than two (2) consecutive terms of office.

4.10   Community organizations or agencies may serve multiple consecutive terms but an individual representative of the organization or agency may serve for no more than two (2) consecutive terms of office.

4.11   Non-voting members are determined annually.

Appointment of Members

4.12   The Committee shall elect a Chair and a Vice Chair from amongst its eleven (11) voting members.

4.13   ACE shall review its membership needs and as required create a Membership Sub-Committee that includes the Chair and Vice-Chair, plus up to three (3) members, as nominated by the Committee.

4.14   The Membership Sub-Committee shall ensure that the voting members are selected using a fair and equitable process.

4.15   The Membership Sub-Committee shall,
(a)   post a notice inviting applications for appointment of individual members;

(b)   identify community agencies, organizations, groups or associations that meet the criteria stipulated in section 4.7 of this policy and best meet the needs of the Committee;

(c)   invite identified community agencies, organizations, groups or associations to put forward the names of a representative and an alternate; and

(d)   submit a recommendation to the Committee for the appointment of new members.

Vacancies

4.16   A vacancy in the membership of the Committee does not prevent the Committee from delivering on its mandate.

4.17   A member shall lose their seat if absent from three consecutive regular meetings of the Committee without notice.

4.18   In the event that a voting-member vacates their position during the appointed term, the Committee may fill the position for the remainder of the term.

4.19   To replace a non-voting member, the Board, Student Senate or the District shall appoint another individual to the position. Where the non-voting member is a Trustee, the Board of Trustees shall make the appointment.

Roles and Responsibilities of Members

4.20   All members of the Committee shall:

(a)   demonstrate a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusive education in the work of the Committee and the District;

(b)   attend and productively participate in Committee meetings;

(c)   review all relevant material prior to the Committee meetings;

(d)   participate in Committee and sub-committees work (as required);

(e)   provide equity-focused input/feedback when they represent ACE at special meetings of the Board, Ad-Hoc or Advisory Committees; and

(f)   bring to the attention of the Committee any issues related to its mission as stipulated in provision 3.1 of this policy.

4.21   In addition to the above, community agencies, organizations, groups and/or associations, and the student senator shall act as a liaison between ACE and their respective community groups or organizations.

4.22   Community agencies, organizations, groups and/or associations with membership on the Committee shall appoint a representative and an alternate to replace the named representative if the representative is unable to attend a meeting. Temporary substitution of a representative by a duly authorized alternate during the course of a meeting shall be allowed.

4.23   The Chair shall:

(a)   plan the agenda in consultation with the Superintendent;

(b)   preside over the Committee meetings;

(c) act as a spokesperson and representative for the Committee in communicating with the Director of Education, Board of Trustees and the public;

(d) review the minutes before they are circulated to members; and

(e) share information and reports received from various stakeholders with the District, e.g., community organizations, individuals representing affected groups, etc.

4.24 The Vice Chair shall assume the roles and responsibilities of the Chair in the event of their absence.

4.25 The Secretary shall:
(a) keep and maintain all records and property of the Committee including but not limited to records of minutes and reports of the Committee;

(b) distribute Agendas and Minutes of all meetings to Board Services and committee members at least five (5) business days prior to the next meeting; and

(c) ensure the minutes are provided to Board Services for distribution to the Board of Trustees and for posting on the District website.

Meetings
4.26 The Committee shall meet at least six (6) times in each school year.

4.27 All meetings of the Committee will be open to the public and be held at a location that is accessible to the public.

4.28 The Committee shall welcome and encourage the participation of the public at the discretion of the Chair.

4.29 The rules of order for the conduct of meetings shall be consistent with the OCDSB By-Laws and Standing Rules.

4.30 A notice of each regular meeting shall be provided to all members of the Committee at least five (5) days before the meeting.

4.31 A member who participates in a meeting by electronic means is considered to be present at the meeting and will be recorded in the attendance for the meeting.

Quorum
4.32 A meeting of the Committee achieves quorum when a majority of voting members are present. Majority is defined as fifty (50) percent plus one (1).

Voting

4.33   Each voting member is entitled to one (1) vote.

4.34   Non-voting members of the Committee shall have all the rights and obligations of voting members except for moving, seconding and voting on a motion, and counting for quorum.

Sub-committees
4.35   The Committee may establish sub-committees as it deems appropriate to the achievement of its mandate. Sub-committees may include voting and non-voting members and non-members.

Reporting
4.36   The Committee shall provide an annual report to the Board of Trustees which summarizes its activities and achievements during the past year and its plans for the upcoming year.

4.37   The Director of Education shall have the authority to establish procedures that are consistent with this policy.

5.0   REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

The Education Act, 1998, section 8.1 (29.1)
Ontario Human Rights Commission Policy on Preventing Discrimination Based on Creed, 2015
Ontario's Equity Action Plan , 2017
Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119, "Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools", June 24, 2009
Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, 2009
OCDSB By-Laws and Standing Rules
Board Policy: P.001.GOV: Policy Development and Management
Board Policy P.010.GOV: Community Involvement on Board Standing Committees
Board Policy P.018.GOV: Electronic Meetings of the Board and Committees
Board Policy P.048.GOV: Board Guiding Principles
Board Policy P.065: Advisory Committees to the Board
Board Policy P.086.CUR Religious Accommodation
Board Policy P.098.CUR: Equity and Inclusive Education

By-Laws and Standing Rules
Parent Involvement Committee

BEING the rules governing the establishment and composition of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) Parent Involvement Committee under *Ontario Regulation 612/00 School Councils and Parent Involvement Committees* of the *Education Act* of Ontario, which rules shall apply to the structure and proceedings of the Parent Involvement Committee (PIC), henceforth known as the Committee, from 1 October 2011, unless or until amended by resolution of the Committee.

Interpretation

In these By-Laws and standing rules:

Board means the Board of Trustees.

Community Member means an individual or a local association with an interest in supporting public education, and who has been appointed to the Committee;

Director means the Director of Education/Secretary of the Board;

District means the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board;

Parent means a parent/guardian of a pupil who is enrolled in a school of the OCDSB; and

Parent Member means a parent who is appointed to serve on the Committee for a specified term*.*

Mandate

1.0   The mandate of the Committee is to support, encourage and enhance parent engagement at the District level in order to improve student achievement and well-being.

Purpose

2.0   The Committee will achieve its purpose by:
a)   providing information, advice and recommendations on parent engagement to the Board of Trustees;

b)   communicating with and supporting school councils; and

c) undertaking activities and working with partners and agencies to help parents of pupils of the OCDSB to support their children's learning at home and at school.

2.1 The Committee shall:
a) develop strategies and initiatives that the Board of Trustees and the Director of Education could use to effectively communicate with parents and to effectively engage parents in improving student achievement and well-being;

b) advise the Board of Trustees and the Director of Education on the use of strategies and initiatives, as referred to above, that could support engaging parents and improve student achievement and well-being;

c) communicate information from the Ontario Ministry of Education to school councils and parents of pupils of the District;

d) work with school councils and parents of students of the OCDSB and may work with partner agencies and, through the Director of Education, with employees of the District to:
   (i) share effective practices to help engage parents, especially parents who may find engagement challenging, in their children's learning;
   (ii) identify and reduce barriers to parent engagement;
   (iii) help ensure that OCDSB schools create a welcoming environment for parents of its pupils; and
   (iv) develop skills and acquire knowledge that will assist the Committee and school councils of the District with their work.

e) determine, in consultation with the Director of Education and in keeping with the OCDSB's policies, how funding, if any, provided under the *Education Act* for parent involvement, is to be used.

2.2 The Committee may solicit and take into consideration the advice of parents of pupils enrolled in schools of the District with regard to matters under consideration by the Committee.

Membership

3.0 The Committee shall be comprised of up to 18 members, a majority of whom shall be Parent Members, including:
a) thirteen (13) voting members appointed by the Committee; and

b) up to five (5) non-voting members appointed by the District.

3.1 Voting members shall include:
   a) ten (10) Parent Members; and

   b) three (3) Community Members.

3.2 Non-voting members shall include:
   a) the Director of Education or designate; and

   b) One (1) trustee appointed by the Board of Trustees.

3.3 Non-voting members may include:
   a) One (1) elementary or secondary principal or vice-principal;

   b) One (1) elementary or secondary teacher; and

   c) One (1) employee of the District, other than a principal, vice principal or teacher.

3.4 The Director of Education of the OCDSB may:
   a) delegate any of their powers or duties as a member of the Committee to a supervisory officer employed by the District, and

   b) designate a supervisory officer of the board to attend a meeting of the Committee in their place.

3.5 The Trustee member may:
   a) delegate any of their powers or duties as a member of the Committee to the alternate trustee member appointed by the Board of Trustees; and

   b) if unable to attend a meeting, have the alternate trustee attend that meeting of the Committee in their place; and

   c) delegate their powers or duties to another member of the Board of Trustees where the alternate trustee member is not able to attend.

3.6 Employees of the OCDSB are eligible for appointment to the position of Parent Member but not to the position of Community Member. Where an employee is appointed as a Parent Member they shall, at their first Committee meeting, inform the Committee of their employment with the OCDSB.

3.7 Members of the Board of Trustees are not eligible to be a Community Member or a Parent Member of the Committee.

Membership Criteria

4.0 All members are expected to have a strong interest in and commitment to public education, student achievement and well-being and be able to represent the views of a wide variety of parents.

    a) Eight (8) Parent Members shall be selected based on their knowledge, skills, and experiences in one or more of the following areas:
        (i) public education;
        (ii) community engagement;
        (iii) equity and inclusion strategies; and
        (iv) public policy and/or communications.

    b) Two (2) Parent Members shall be appointed as representatives from the following groups/organizations:
        (i) two (2) Parent Members named by the Ottawa-Carleton Assembly of School Council (OCASC); one (1) of who may be the Chair or Vice-Chair of the OCASC.

    c) Three (3) Community Members shall be selected based on their ability to provide a broad community based perspective and should meet one or more of-the following criteria:
        (i) demonstrated connection to and/or knowledge of the OCDSB;
        (ii) active participation in a community group, organization or business that has as part of its mandate an interest in education, community development or social service;
        (iii) interest in and/or ability to link the OCDSB school community with external community groups or organizations;
        (iv) ability to represent broad societal or community perspectives; and
        (v) experience or demonstrated interest in educational issues.

4.1 The Committee may invite representatives of District committees, including but not limited to: Standing Committees (i.e., COW and COW Budget), Statutory Committees (e.g., SEAC, Audit and SALEP) or Advisory Committees (e.g., Arts Advisory) to attend meetings (as necessary) to provide expertise on those particular topics or issues related to the work of the Statutory, Standing or Advisory Committee.

Term of Office

5.0 The members of the Committee shall be appointed before November 15 of each school year for a term of office beginning December 01 and ending November 30.

5.1   The eight (8) Parent Members of the Committee plus the two (2) Parent Members appointed by the OCASC shall be appointed to serve a term of office of either one (1) or two (2) years and, wherever possible, members shall be appointed for a two-year term.

5.2   The term of office for Community Members shall be two (2) years.

5.3   The term of office for the Board member and alternate Board member shall be one (1) year unless otherwise determined by the Board.

5.4   A member of the Committee may be re-appointed to the Committee for more than one term subject to the Committee's appointment process.

Appointments of Members

6.0   Annually the Committee shall review its membership needs and, when required, create a Membership Sub-Committee.

6.1   The Membership Sub-Committee shall include the Chair, Vice Chair, the Director of Education or designate, a Parent Member, and may include a Community Member.

Appointment of Parent Members
6.2   The Membership Sub-Committee shall post a notice inviting applications for appointment to the position of Parent Member, as required.

6.3   The posting of notice shall be done through a variety of methods to ensure awareness of the application process by the entire jurisdiction of the District. The notice shall include:
a)   a summary of the position, including the term of office of the appointment;

b)   the process for making an application;

c)   the deadline for the application; and

d)   the name and contact information of the person(s) responsible for managing the process.

6.4   All applicants will be required to provide:
a)   a written expression of interest outlining their interest in public education as well as their knowledge and skills in one or more of the areas noted in s. 4.0 (a) of these by-laws;

b)   a written confirmation that they are a parent of a pupil enrolled in an OCDSB school; and

     c)   an indication of his or her interest is serving a one (1) or two (2) year term.

6.5   The Membership Sub-Committee may choose to interview prospective candidates and/or request and check references.

6.6   Upon the close of the application period, the Membership Sub-Committee shall review the applications and provide the names of the recommended candidate(s) to the Committee for ratification.

6.7   In making the recommendation(s) the Membership Sub-Committee shall take into consideration:

     a)   the knowledge, skills and experience of the current Committee membership;

     b)   the knowledge, skills and experience of the applicants;

     c)   the balance of elementary and secondary perspectives on the Committee;

     d)   the geographic representation of urban, suburban and rural perspectives from across the District;

     e)   the unique needs to parents of special education students; and

     f)   the knowledge and ability to add the perspective of diverse communities as referenced in Policy P.098.CUR Equity and Inclusive Education.

6.8   Where practicable, the Membership Sub-Committee may create a waiting list of recommended candidates for the Committee to use when vacancies arise during the year.

Appointment of OCASC Representatives

6.9   For the two (2) Parent Members who are representatives of OCASC, the Committee shall seek the names of appointees from the Chair of OCASC.

6.10   The names of the Parent Member representatives of OCASC shall be provided to the Committee for ratification.

Appointment of Community Members

6.11   As required, the Committee shall discuss possible candidates/candidate associations who could serve as Community Members in accordance with section 4.0 (c).

6.12   Staff shall send letters to those candidates exploring their interest to sit on PIC and appoint a representative to the Committee.

6.13 Where the number of the interested candidates/candidate associations exceeds the number of vacancies in the Community Member position; the Membership Sub-Committee shall make a recommendation to the Committee to select Community Members who best meet its needs.

6.14 Wherever possible, individual Community Members should also be parents of a pupil enrolled in a school of the OCDSB.

6.15 Where a Community Member is an association, the Member may appoint an alternate to replace the named representative if the representative is unable to attend a meeting. Temporary substitution of a representative by a duly authorized alternate during the course of a meeting shall be allowed.

6.16 The names of the Community Members, and the alternates if applicable, shall be provided to the Committee for ratification.

6.17 An appointment to the Committee is of no effect unless the person agrees to the appointment.

Election of Chairs and Vice Chairs

6.18 The Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee must be parent members and shall be elected for a two-year term by the Parent Members of the Committee.

6.19 Where a nominee to the office of Chair or Vice Chair is a Parent Member with a one-year term of office, their term may be extended for a second year.

6.20 A member may not serve more than two (2) consecutive terms as Chair.

6.21 An individual who has served two (2) consecutive terms as Chair of the Committee may be re-elected as Chair provided at least one two-year term has elapsed since their last term as Chair.

Vacancies

7.0 A vacancy in the membership of the Committee does not prevent the Committee from exercising its authority.

7.1 A member shall lose their seat if absent from three consecutive regular meetings of the Committee without notice.

7.2 In the event that a Parent Member or an individual Community Representative appointed to the Committee vacates their position during the appointed term, the Committee may appoint another individual to the position for the remainder of the term.

7.3   In the event that a representative of a local association that was appointed to the Committee is no longer able to attend PIC meetings, the association may appoint another representative to fill their seat for the remainder of the term.

7.4   Vacancies in positions may be filled from the waiting list, if applicable, or be advertised. Methods of advertising may include, but are not limited to:
   a)   advertisements in newsletters of District schools or school councils;

   b)   advertisements in newspapers with general circulation in the geographic jurisdiction of the District;

   c)   advertisements on radio or television stations that broadcast in the geographic jurisdiction of the District;

   d)   notices in schools of the District; and

   e)   notices on the OCDSB's website and where possible on District schools websites.

7.5   Individuals appointed as a result of a vacancy shall hold the position until the original term for that position expires.

Roles and Responsibilities of Members

8.0   All members of the Committee shall:
   a)   promote and encourage parent engagement and the work of the Committee in the OCDSB;

   b)   review all relevant material prior to the Committee meetings;

   c)   attend and participate in the Committee meetings;

   d)   participate in Committee and Sub-Committee initiatives as required; and

   e)   act as a liaison between the Committee and their community .

8.1   The Chair shall:
   a)   plan the agenda in collaboration with the Director or designate;

   b)   chair the Committee meetings;

   c)   act as a spokesperson for the Committee in communicating with the Director of Education, the Board and the public; and

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    d)   ensure that notice of each meeting is provided to all members of the Committee.

8.2   The Vice-Chair shall assume the duties of the Chair in the event the Chair is unavailable.

Meetings

9.0   The Committee shall meet at least six (6) times in each school year.

9.1   All meetings of the Committee will be open to the public, except in accordance with s. 207 of the *Education Act*, and be held at a location that is accessible to the public.

9.2   The first Committee meeting of the term shall not be held until after the appointments for the term have been made.

9.3   Notice of each meeting shall be provided to all members of the Committee at least five (5) days before the meeting. Notice may be provided to each member by e-mail or regular mail; by telephone call; and by posting to the District website. Notice by regular mail is deemed to be provided five (5) days before the meeting if it is mailed five (5) days before the meeting.

9.4   A meeting of the Committee cannot be held unless:
    a)   a majority of voting members present at the meeting are Parent Members; and

    b)   the Director of Education, or designate, is present; and

    c)   the Trustee, or designate, is present.

9.5   Committee members are expected to attend all Committee meetings. A member who participates in the meeting through electronic means shall be deemed to be present.

9.6   Additional employees of the District, as determined on an as needed basis, may be invited to attend, participate, and act as a resource to the Committee in a non-voting capacity.

9.7   The rules of order for the conduct of meetings of the Committee shall follow these by-laws. In any situation for which there is no specific provision in these by-laws, the OCDSB By-Laws and Standing Rules shall apply for matters of interpretation, the Committee shall adopt as its parliamentary authority the latest edition of Procedures for Meetings and Organizations by M. K. Kerr and H. W. King, Carswell Legal Publications, Toronto.

9.8   Wherever possible, the Committee shall conduct its business through a collaborative decision making process.

9.9   When the Committee votes on a matter, only Parent Members and Community Members are entitled to vote.

9.10   In the event of a tie, the motion is defeated.

Sub-Committees

10.0   The Committee may, as it deems necessary, create sub-committees to make recommendations to the Committee. The sub-committees must include at least one (1) Parent Member of the Committee, and may include non-members.

Professional Conduct

11.0   Members of the Committee have a duty to make decisions consistent with Ministry and District policies and procedures in the best interests of students in compliance with the requirements of relevant legislation and regulations.

11.1   Members will not act in order to gain financial or other material benefit personally.

11.2   Where a PIC member, has any direct, indirect or a deemed pecuniary interest in any matter that is subject to consideration by the Committee, they shall disclose such interest and exclude themselves from the respective item on the agenda.

11.3   Members will respect the privacy of individuals in accordance with the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA).* When meeting, members shall not discuss personal information relating to parents, students, school boards/trustees, or other personnel or council members.

11.4   In the event of a conflict between members, the Chair or designate will make every effort to resolve the dispute by mediation.

Minutes and Financial Records

12.0   The Committee will keep minutes of all of its meetings and records of all of its financial transactions, if any, in accordance with the policies and procedures of the District.

12.1   The minutes of the Committee's meetings and the records of its financial transactions will be available for examination at the Administration Building by any person in accordance with the records retention schedule.

12.2 The minutes of the Committee will be posted on the OCDSB website and will be sent electronically to the chair of each school council. The minutes posted on the website will remain on the website for four years.

12.3 A person shall not receive any remuneration for serving as a member of the Committee with the exception of an honorarium for a member of the Board of Trustees as stipulated in section 191 of the *Education Act*.

12.4 Committee members may be reimbursed for incidental expenses incurred as a result of their work on the Committee. Invoices for expenses related to their role shall be submitted and reimbursed in accordance with the financial policies of the OCDSB.

Summary of Activities

13.0 The Committee will annually submit a written summary of the Committee's activities to the Board of Trustees and to the Director of Education.

13.1 The summary of activities shall include a report on how funding, if any, provided under the *Education Act* for parent involvement was spent.

13.2 The Director of Education will provide the summary of activities to the school councils and post the summary of activities on the District website.

Amendments to By-Laws and Standing Rules

14.0 These By-Laws and Standing Rules may be amended only by approval of two-thirds (2/3) of all voting members present, at a regular or special meeting of the Committee, provided that advance notice in writing has been given to all Committee members.

Approved by the Parent Involvement Committee: 13 January 2021.

Building Brighter Futures Together at the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board

OTTAWA-CARLETON DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE   **6 October 2021**

Report No. 21-072

Update on the OCDSB Interest Academy Pilot

Key Contact: Peter Symmonds, Superintendent, Learning Support Services, 613-596-8254
Nadia Towaij, Superintendent, Program and Learning, 613-596-8211 ext. 8573
Amy Hannah, System Principal, Learning Support Services, 613-596-8211 ext. 8111
Laurie Kavanagh, System Principal, Program and Learning, 613-596-8211 ext. 8515

PURPOSE:

1.   To provide an update to the Board on the OCDSB Interest Academy pilot and to provide an overview of the evaluation analysis of the pilot and the next steps for further implementation in the District.

STRATEGIC LINKS:

2.   The Interest Academy (IA) pilot has several links to the District's Strategic Plan. The specific links to the objectives are as follows:

Culture of Innovation - Promote collaborative environments which foster innovation and creativity; increased sense of relevance and motivation for students; increased capacity to support personalization of learning; provide professional learning and tools to support quality instruction and collaboration; modernize learning and enhance student experience.

Culture of Caring - Prioritize the dignity and well-being of students in inclusive and caring classrooms.

Culture of Social Responsibility - Improved social and emotional skills for students; opportunities for increased student voice for students.

This initiative at its core has capacity building for OCDSB staff in the areas of equity, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, instruction, assessment, and innovative practices, as well as fostering student engagement and voice in their learning.

CONTEXT:

3.   At the Board meeting on 30 October 2018, Trustees passed a motion that
        included the following element:

> **THAT** staff be directed to implement a pilot program which utilizes both the
> OCDSB Guide for Supporting Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom and
> the OCDSB Interest Academy: A Vehicle for Accessing the Curriculum
> Through Inquiry-based Learning - A Guide for Educator Teams, as soon as
> may be practical.

In January 2021, report *20-110 Update on Supports for Students with Giftedness
(Elementary) in the OCDSB* was brought to the Board to provide an update on
the progress of the two pilots, some challenges impacting their execution, and an
update on the next steps to be undertaken. This report outlined some key
changes to how the OCDSB IA pilot would be offered. The OCDSB IA pilot
began in spring of 2021 and concluded in June 2021.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

4.   **OCDSB Interest Academy Pilot Implementation Overview**
        The OCDSB IA is an inquiry-based learning experience in which students are
        given class time to explore a student-selected topic of interest. Students and
        educators co-create project learning goals and success criteria and contribute to
        a learning portfolio that will serve to document and reflect on their learning. At
        completion of the project, students share their learning in a creative manner.

        In the 2020-2021 school year, the creation of the Ottawa-Carleton Virtual (OCV)
        campuses presented a unique opportunity to reimagine how this inquiry-based
        learning project could be piloted. An exciting aspect of the OCV campuses is
        that their school communities were made up of a variety of students brought
        together from a variety of school communities across the District. In addition, the
        virtual mode of learning in the OCVs had the potential to be conducive to
        student-led inquiry projects in the areas of student interest and/or passion.

        It was determined in collaboration with the Program and Learning (PAL)
        department, that the pilot plan be reviewed and adjusted to offer the pilot only in
        OCV campuses and to expand possible participating grades of students from
        grade 4 to 6 to grade 4 to 8. The cross-departmental collaborative team worked
        with the administrative teams in three OCV campuses to identify appropriate
        staff, classes, and/or students to participate in the pilot.

        OCDSB Interest Academy Pilot Evaluation Overview
        In spring 2021, the OCDSB IA pilot was implemented in seven different OCV
        classrooms. The pilot was formally evaluated using a participatory approach with
        the main purpose of exploring the experience of stakeholders involved in the pilot
        (i.e., students, parents/caregivers and teachers). A complete detail about the
        evaluation of the pilot is contained in Appendix A.

In line with the participatory evaluation approach (Patton, 2012)[1], key program stakeholders were involved at every stage of the pilot evaluation. An evaluation project team was struck composed of evaluation staff, program staff and administrators from the Learning Support Services (LSS) and PAL departments (i.e., program evaluator; psychologist; learning support consultant; instructional coach and system principals) who met weekly to inform the evaluation at each stage, and to ensure the pilot was being implemented and supported appropriately.

This team developed the IA evaluation purpose and the following two main evaluation questions:
1. How does the Interest Academy meet the needs of all learners in a virtual environment, including learners with giftedness?
2. What organizational conditions impacted the implementation of the Interest Academy pilot at the OCV sites?

Methodological Considerations
Notably, sensitivity to the stress and pressures which the COVID-19 pandemic had on families as well as staff in schools was required in carrying out the IA pilot evaluation plan (e.g., teachers delivering the IA project online for the first time; release time for teachers unavailable; scheduling for parent/caregiver focus groups unfeasible, etc.). Therefore, a survey vs. focus group method was selected for data collection - despite the limitations of this procedure to achieve the evaluation's purpose. For example, exploring participant perceptions and digging deeper into respondents' experience with the IA pilot was not ideal via an online survey. Important demographic characteristics about the pilot stakeholders' personal background, which may have emerged during focus group discussions, were not explored (i.e., income or identity information). In short, very little identity information about the survey respondents (parents/caregivers or students) was known.

Evaluation Participants
Information/consent letters containing an online survey link were distributed to all parents/caregivers of students involved in the pilot, and the resulting sample was based on parent/caregiver responses to the survey N = 60. All students involved in the pilot (N = 145) also completed a self-reflective assessment at the completion of the project. The sample represented both students with giftedness and non-gifted learners from Grades 4 to 8 located in Regular or French Immersion OCV classrooms. Six of the seven teachers involved in the pilot responded to the educator survey.

Evaluation Findings
Results from the stakeholder surveys provided strong evidence for the inquiry-based learning approach represented by the pilot. Notably, the majority of students, parents/caregivers and teachers involved with the initiative were in agreement that they would participate in the IA again or recommend it to others. Three main themes also emerged from the analysis of stakeholder experience.

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[1] Patton, M. Q. (2012). Essentials of utilization-focused evaluation. Los Angeles, Calif: SAGE

The most salient theme centered on the utility of the inquiry-based learning approach to motivate and engage students in their self-directed learning, and ultimately to improve their connection to school. A second major theme pertained to how inquiry-based learning addressed the specific learning needs of all students, including learners with giftedness, particularly the impact on the learning skills and work habits contained in the Elementary Provincial Report Card. The third major theme which emerged surrounded the organizational conditions either supporting or impeding the implementation of the inquiry-based approach delivered via a virtual platform.

Highlights from the evaluation show that:
- Parents/caregivers provided rich insight into the ways that the pilot met their child's specific learning needs, including parents/caregivers of students who were identified with the gifted exceptionality;
- Parents/caregivers also reported observing several benefits of the pilot in terms of impacting their child's learning skills and/or work habits specified in the Elementary Provincial Report Card;
- Students also observed many benefits of the pilot in terms of impacting their learning skills and/or work habits;
- Teachers reinforced that, through the pilot, they were able to address several areas of the Ontario Curriculum, in addition to the learning skills and work habits contained on the Elementary Provincial Report Card;
- Teachers indicated that several aspects of their instructional practices changed resulting from their experience with the pilot, in line with the inquiry-based learning approach;
- Teachers were in general agreement that the pilot had a positive impact on their student's critical thinking, creativity, communication and metacognitive skills; and
- Stakeholders also put forward several organizational conditions which affected the implementation of the pilot. These centered mainly on the delivery of inquiry-based learning in a virtual environment, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. A full exposition of the findings as well as the implications for the District moving forward is discussed in Appendix A.

Recommendations / Next Steps
Interest Academy and/or Inquiry-based learning Field Testing
The findings from the pilot evaluation point to several implications for both the LSS and PAL departments. Possible next steps for PAL and LSS staff include expanding the implementation of this inquiry-based strategy to all interested educators. The results of this exploratory evaluation indicate that inquiry-based learning is an ideal differentiated instruction strategy suitable for all students regardless of whether or not they have been formally identified with giftedness.

Universal Screener Pilot
The results of this pilot further affirm and align with the work undertaken by LSS to gather and review information related to the possible implementation of a universal screening tool. It is recommended that a universal screener pilot proceed to further explore how its use may reduce barriers of access for all students and support underrepresented populations District-wide. Furthermore, a pilot may further provide staff with an opportunity to identify student strengths,

needs, talent, and interests to support the personalization of learning for each student based on their unique profiles.

Talent Development Exploration
The inquiry-based approach to learning in the pilot revealed a variety of student interests, passions, and talents. LSS and PAL would like to further explore the concept of talent development and possible approaches to fostering it. According to Renzulli (2005)[2], the focus in a talent development approach is to provide every student with opportunities, resources, and encouragement in order to help all students reach their full potential. Renzulli also described how a talent development approach allows for enriched programming models that develop talents of students who traditionally tend to be excluded from gifted programming. To further explore a talent development framework, additional information and consultation will be required to better understand the implementation considerations of such an approach for the OCDSB.

Learning Support for Students with Special Education Needs
The results of this pilot suggest that an inquiry-based learning approach is an impactful and ideal differentiated instruction strategy to include in the Learning Support for Students with Special Education Needs (formerly Quality Program Indicators) online resource. LSS will incorporate inquiry-based learning into the resource. Specifically, it will be incorporated into the section for students with giftedness both in the specialized program classes and in the regular program and other exceptionality areas as appropriate. The work on the resource is ongoing and further information will be shared in the coming months.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

5. The work undertaken on these recommended next steps and different initiatives will be substantive over the course of the 2021-2022 school year.

Interest Academy/Inquiry-based learning Field Testing
Release time for participating teachers will be provided to implement further field testing of this approach to learning in both specialized program classes and in the regular program. Sessions will focus on pedagogical strategies, assessment and evaluation practices and instructional strategies through the lens of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), differentiation, and culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. To further support this learning, collaborative capacity building sessions will be provided by PAL and LSS coaches for participating teachers. Ongoing focused support will be provided by PAL and LSS coaches through weekly virtual sessions.

Talent Development Exploration
LSS estimates that approximately 15 days of work will be invested by a cross-departmental team in LSS and PAL to complete exploratory review activities and to develop possible plans for the next phase of this work.

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[2] Renzulli, J. (2005). Applying gifted education pedagogy to total talent development for all students. Theory Into Practice. 44. 80-89. doi:10.1207/s15430421tip4402_2.

The other two recommended initiatives will be discussed in future reports and their resource implications will be outlined at that time.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

6. In an effort to effectively communicate with a variety of stakeholders, the cross-departmental pilot project team was struck. Regular weekly meetings helped to set the course for communication with participants, other departments and stakeholders, and report regularly to the senior team members in both LSS and PAL. Regular office hours and information sessions were provided by staff from both departments to support the teachers with the implementation of the pilot.

    Regular updates related to this pilot project were shared with the Association for Bright Children (ABC) representative. This ongoing communication with the ABC representative helped to inform the pilot evaluation plan.

    Appendix A is the OCDSB IA Evaluation Report, which is another communication tool that may be shared with other educators and school staff as a part of the field testing. This report will help future participating teachers, parents/caregivers, administrators and where appropriate students to learn about this innovative learning opportunity and provide some details and context to support its implementation.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- How might field testing of the IA support all learners in a variety of specialized program class settings and in virtual and/or in person regular program settings?

- What factors should be considered in the exploration of talent development for students in the OCDSB?

Peter Symmonds, Superintendent of
Learning Support Services

Camille-Williams Taylor
Director of Education and
Secretary of the Board

APPENDIX
Appendix A   OCDSB Interest Academy Pilot - Evaluation Report

OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

**OCDSB Interest Academy Pilot:
Final Program Evaluation Report**

IA Pilot Evaluation Report

Executive Summary

In Spring 2021, the OCDSB Interest Academy (IA) pilot was implemented in seven different Ottawa-Carleton Virtual (OCV) classrooms. The IA pilot was formally evaluated using a participatory approach with the main purpose of exploring the experience of stakeholders involved in the pilot (i.e., students, parents/caregivers and teachers). Informed consent letters containing an online survey link were distributed to all parents/guardians of students involved in the pilot (see Annex I). A total of sixty parents/caregivers responded to the online survey. All students involved in the IA pilot also completed a self-reflective assessment at the completion of the project resulting in nearly one hundred and fifty student respondents. The resulting sample represented gifted and non-gifted learners from Grades 4 to 8 located in Regular or French Immersion OCV classrooms. Six of the seven teachers involved in the IA pilot responded to the educator survey.

Results from the stakeholder surveys demonstrated a vast diversity in research topics explored by students. The majority of students, parents/caregivers and teachers involved with the IA pilot were in agreement that they would participate in the Interest Academy again or recommend it to others. Stakeholders also generally agreed that participation in the IA pilot had a significant impact on students' desire to learn (motivation); commitment to learning, belonging and participation (engagement); and on connectivity with school. These findings provide strong evidence for the inquiry-based learning approach as represented by the OCDSB Interest Academy.

Parents/caregivers also provided rich insight into the ways that the IA pilot met their child's specific learning needs, including those of students who were identified with the gifted exceptionality. Students, parents/caregivers and teachers alike reported several benefits of the IA pilot in terms of impacting the learning skills and/or work habits specified in the Ontario Elementary Report Card. In fact, teachers identified several changes to their instructional practice resulting from their experience with the IA pilot, and were in general agreement that it had a significant impact on their student's critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration and metacognitive skills. Teachers also reinforced that, through the IA pilot, they were able to address several areas of the Ontario Curriculum.

Finally, stakeholders put forward several organizational conditions which affected the implementation of the IA pilot. These centered on the delivery of the IA in a virtual environment, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Full expositions of the findings as well as the implications for the District are discussed below.

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IA Pilot Evaluation Report

Table of Contents

IA Pilot Evaluation Report

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

Inquiry-Based Teaching and Learning
Inquiry-based teaching and learning involves investigation through dialog, asking questions, and proposing explanations based on evidence (Shore, et al., 2009; National Research Council, 1996). Inquiry involves developing a plan based on student interest, collecting data, examining evidence, drawing conclusions, reflecting, and engaging in next steps (Aulls & Shore, 2008). Aulls and Shore (2008) identified two main characteristics of inquiry including how the interest of learners guide curricular decision making and that there are exchanges in roles between teachers and students (e.g., responsibility for decisions around curricular choices, evaluation, and communication in the classroom). Inquiry-based tasks are meaningful and relevant to the learner and students engage in authentic collaboration (Walker, Shore, & Tabatabai, 2021).

OCDSB Interest Academy Program Description
The OCDSB Interest Academy (IA) was developed as an inquiry-based learning experience in which students are given class time to explore a student-selected topic of interest. Students and educators co-create project learning goals and success criteria and contribute to a learning portfolio that will serve to document and reflect on their learning. Upon completion of the IA project, students share their learning in a creative manner. Inquiry-based learning is widely accepted as an effective approach to teaching which research has empirically supported in facilitating curiosity, motivation and engagement in students.

The OCDSB Interest Academy is an authentic learning experience that provides students with the opportunity to complete a self-determinant research, experimental, or experiential task that focuses on the development of the students' critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration and metacognitive habits of mind. The learning is centered on an inquiry question related to a student interest or passion and findings are creatively shared using a medium of the students choice. Regular class time is allocated for students to research, experiment, or experience and connect with their peers and teacher for mentoring and collaboration.

Purpose of the IA Pilot Evaluation
As demonstrated above, inquiry-based teaching and learning is based on a rich cadre of academic research and grounded in sound instructional practice. One of the goals of the IA pilot evaluation was to explore the efficacy of this particular strategy in the context of the unique organizational conditions of our District. For example, the pedagogical nature of the recently established Ottawa-Carleton Virtual School (OCV) presented a unique set of circumstances considered ideal for creating new relationships and connections for all students, including those with giftedness, within a larger online

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school community. It was hypothesized that this new virtual learning space, where students, parents, school staff and local community members could connect with each other in novel ways, could help support students in developing and sharing the knowledge gained from an inquiry-based learning project. Thus, the purpose of the OCDSB Interest Academy pilot evaluation was to explore the impact of this initiative in supporting all students, including learners with giftedness, engaged in an online inquiry-based learning project.

PART 2: METHODOLOGY

Formative Evaluation Approach

In line with the participatory evaluation approach (Patton, 2012) key stakeholders were involved at every stage of the IA pilot evaluation. To that end, an evaluation project team was struck composed of evaluation staff, program staff and administrators from both the Learning Support Services and the Program and Learning departments (i.e., program evaluator; psychologist; learning support consultant; instructional coach and system principals). This evaluation project team developed the IA program logic model which served as a framework to guide the evaluation (see Annex 1). The program logic model describes the key stakeholders involved with the IA pilot (i.e., students, parents, teachers), and features the program activity architecture and outcome indicators, as well as the main and secondary evaluation questions outlined below.

Interest Academy Pilot Evaluation Questions:

1) How does Interest Academy meet the needs of all learners, including students identified with giftedness, in a virtual environment?

   i. Did the Interest Academy pilot promote motivation, curiosity, or engagement with online learning for all students?;
   ii. Did the Interest Academy pilot promote motivation, curiosity, or engagement with online learning specifically for students identified with giftedness?; and
   iii. Did involvement in the Interest Academy pilot promote connectedness with like-minded peers in all students, including learners with giftedness?

2) What organizational conditions impacted the implementation of the Interest Academy pilot at the OCV sites?

   i. What benefits and/or challenges did teachers experience with the implementation of Interest Academy?
   ii. What benefits and/or challenges did students experience through participation in the inquiry-based learning project?

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iii.   What benefits and/or challenges did parents/guardians observe through their child's participation in the Interest Academy pilot?

Given the early stages of program implementation of the Interest Academy pilot, the program evaluation approach was exploratory in nature and included mainly formative evaluation activities (Patton, 2012; Creswell, 2009). Formative evaluation approaches seek to explore key dimensions of interest by engaging with stakeholders and diving deeply into their perspectives and experiences with the program (see Figure 1)[1]. The data obtained from the IA pilot stakeholders served to address the overarching evaluation questions specifically related to the key dimensions of interest identified by the evaluation project team.

Figure 1: Interest Academy Formative Evaluation Model
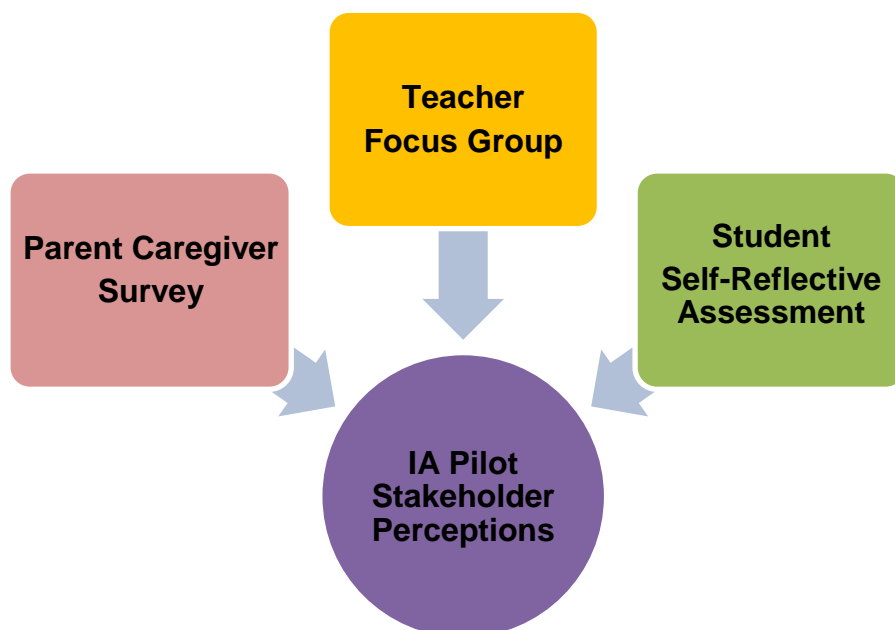
IA Pilot Key Dimensions of Interest
Program stakeholders identified several key dimensions of interest considered important for exploring the impact of the Interest Academy pilot on all students, including learners with giftedness. Foremost among these key dimensions of interest, the evaluation included several perceptual measures of student connectedness, engagement and motivation which have been identified in the research literature as critical indicators of learning for all students, including learners with giftedness (Martin & Bolliger, 2018). Operational definitions for the constructs of engagement, motivation and

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[1] Due primarily to methodological constraints posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the final IA pilot evaluation sought stakeholder feedback through quantitative, rather than qualitative, data gathering procedures (see methodological note p. 7).

connection were reviewed from the academic literature, and in each case, the original definitions were modified by the evaluation project team in order to better suit the context of the OCDSB IA pilot.

Specifically, the theoretical construct of 'Academic Engagement' espoused by Christenson et al., (2008) was modified on the parent survey to: *"My child's investment in, and commitment to, learning, belonging and participation in Interest Academy activities"*. The construct of 'Motivation' has itself been operationally defined in numerous research studies (Mallick et al., 2017). However, the evaluation team deemed a modified definition by Mutweleli (2014) as most suitable for the purposes of the evaluation: "*My child's desire to learn activities related to the Interest Academy*". With respect to the operational definition for 'Connection to School', the evaluation team considered a modification of the term by the CDC (2021) most satisfactory: *"My child believes that their teacher and peers in the class care about their learning"*. Slight modifications to each of these operational definitions were made to reflect the responding stakeholder group in the OCDSB context (students, parents and teachers). Finally, the IA pilot evaluation sought to explore what organizational conditions impacted the implementation of the Interest Academy pilot at the OCV sites (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Interest Academy Pilot Evaluation Key Dimensions of Interest
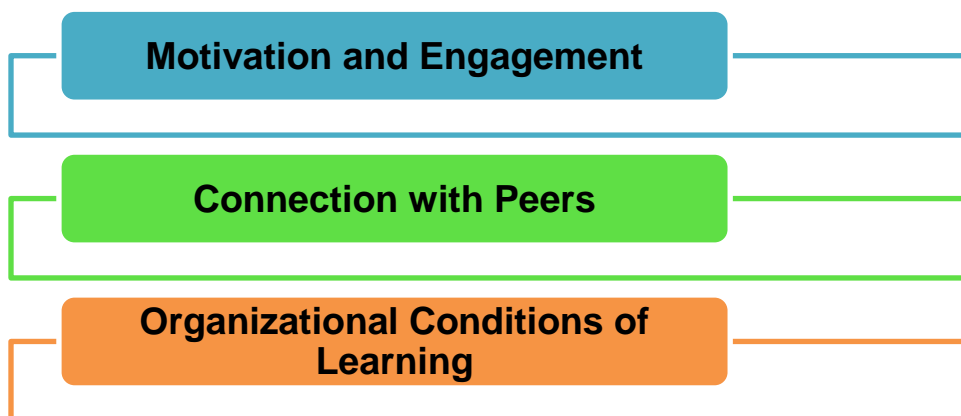
Methodological Note
The planned exploratory methodology of the IA pilot evaluation was constrained by important logistical considerations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, sensitivity to the stress and pressures which the health crisis presented for families as well as staff in schools was required in carrying out the evaluation plan (e.g., teachers delivering the IA strategy online for the first time; release time for teachers unavailable; scheduling for parent focus groups unfeasible). Therefore, a survey vs. focus group method was selected for data collection, despite the limitations of this procedure to achieve the evaluation purpose. Exploring participant perceptions and digging deeper

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into respondents' experience was very challenging via survey methodology. Indeed, important demographic characteristics about the pilot stakeholders personal background were unknown. For instance, income or identity factors about the parents/caregivers, which may have emerged during focus group discussions, were not explored. Similarly, the number of English Language learners in the pilot classrooms, and how this information affected their experience with the IA pilot, was not known. In short, there were limits to using empiricist data collection methods for an exploratory purpose. To mitigate this methodological constraint, the surveys were constructed using a mixed-methods approach (i.e., qualitative and quantitative survey items) with both open-ended and closed-ended response questions for each stakeholder group were used in the question items (e.g., please explain vs. please rate).

Data Collection Procedures
As noted above, the final IA pilot evaluation sought stakeholder feedback through quantitative, rather than qualitative, data gathering procedures. As such, a parent/caregiver online survey was developed in order to explore participants' observations related to their child's experience at school specifically concerning the IA pilot. A online survey was also developed for students to reflect on their experience with the Interest Academy, focusing on such factors as engagement, motivation and connection with peers in an online learning environment. Finally, feedback was sought from OCDSB educators involved with the IA pilot via a google form which examined the organizational conditions of the pilot and/or other key dimensions of interest for implementation (e.g., barriers/facilitators). All three data collection instruments were administered in the Spring of 2021.

Summary
Evaluation of the IA pilot took a participatory approach with key stakeholders collaborating on different aspects of the evaluation process wherever possible/feasible (i.e., developing evaluation purpose, program logic model, methodological approach, data collection tools, data analysis and report-writing). The evaluation design was exploratory, not confirmatory; therefore, no claims can be made about the representativeness of the sample to the general OCDSB population. The purpose of the evaluation was to explore participant experience with the IA pilot. A program logic model was developed collaboratively by program stakeholders which specified key evaluation questions, as well as data collection methods and major program components (i.e., program activity architecture; outcomes and outcome indicators). Alignment was intentionally constructed between outcome indicators specified in the logic model (e.g., engagement; motivation; connection); thus, the key dimensions of interest have common parallel structure across data collection tools (parent, teacher, student surveys). The data collection procedure was constrained due to the COVID 19

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pandemic. Nevertheless, findings of the integrated qualitative and quantitative data analysis (mixed methods) below discuss the links between stakeholder groups on key dimensions of interest and address the two main evaluation questions.

PART 3: FINDINGS

The findings from the IA pilot evaluation are structured into five main sections below, where each section represents a major theme from the findings. Each section in turn features either quantitative data from the online surveys, or supporting quotes drawn directly from the data (but without individual identifiers to protect anonymity). These supporting quotes provide rich context around the themes emerging from the data. The first section describes the demographic characteristics of the sample, providing detailed information about the student and parent survey respondents, including grade, program and exceptionality background information (i.e., gifted). The second section highlights participants' general experience with the Interest Academy pilot, including a brief discussion of the topics which students explored and stakeholder perceptions about participating in the IA pilot. The third section dives more deeply into the key dimensions of interest identified in the program logic model (i.e., engagement, motivation and connectivity), and the role these three important constructs played in the IA pilot.

The fourth section addresses two key questions identified in the program logic model. Specifically: i) how the IA pilot met the learning needs of all learners, including learners with giftedness, particularly in terms of its impact on critical thinking, creativity, communication collaboration and metacognitive skills; ii) any changes in teacher instruction/assessment practices, as well as the overall curriculum expectations that were addressed by teachers through the IA pilot; and iii) the impact of the IA pilot on participants' learning skills and work habits, as outlined in the Provincial Elementary Report Card. The final section reports the organizational conditions either supporting or impeding the IA pilot including several challenges put forward by stakeholders.

I. Sample Demographics

The following section provides demographic details concerning the Interest Academy pilot parent/caregiver survey (herein referred to as 'parent survey'), and the student self-reflective assessment. Via these surveys, information on the following three main demographic variables respecting the students was collected: i) Grade; ii) Program; and iii) Gifted Exceptionality. Notably, there was not a 1:1 relationship between the respondent groups on the stakeholder surveys. For example, a parent may not necessarily not have reported on their child who did submit a response to the student reflective assessment (or vice versa).

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Table 1: Demographic Descriptors Interest Academy Pilot

Respondents	Grade		Program		Gifted	
	Junior (G4-6)	Intermediate (G7-8)	French Immersion	Regular English	Yes	No
Parents/Guardians (N = 60)	41	8	42	5	4	37
Students (N= 145)	73	54	85	44	7	75

*Note: Totals do not necessarily tally for each demographic factor due to non-response in that category.

Demographic results showed that there was accordance across both respondent groups on the three main descriptors (see Table 1). In general, there were more respondents in the non-gifted, Junior and French Immersion categories. However, the differences within each demographic factor across both respondent groups must be considered when reviewing the results in the next section. For example there were: i) more student respondents than parents; ii) student respondents were more balanced respecting program registration than parents (i.e., French Immersion vs. English); and iii) according to both respondent groups most students were not formally identified as gifted.

Grade - The majority of parent respondents reported that their children were registered in the Junior panel vs. the Intermediate panel. In fact, two thirds of parents stated that their child was in Grade 4 (61%), and another 16% reported that their child was in Grade 8. No parents indicated that their child was in either Grade 5 or Grade 7. Student respondents were also more balanced between the Junior and Intermediate panels (i.e., 58% vs. 42%, respectively). Similar to parents, the majority of student respondents were in Grade 4 (39%), Grade 6 (19%) or Grade 8 (42%). There were no students reporting that they were registered in Grade 5, and only one student in Grade 7.

Program - The majority of parents (i.e., 84%) reported that their child was registered in the French Immersion program. By contrast, two-thirds of students (n = 85) reported being registered in the French Immersion program while 35% (n = 44) said they were registered in the Regular program.

Gifted Exceptionality - A total of n = 4 parents reported that their child was formally identified as gifted through the IPRC process, while n = 7 students reported that they had been identified with the gifted exceptionally. Interestingly, 37% of student respondents (i.e., n = 47) said they did not know if they were formally identified with giftedness. Thus, the majority of student respondents were not formally identified (i.e., 58%). This figure was similar for parent respondents (i.e., 77%).

Teachers - The IA pilot initially began with N = 19 OCV teachers expressing interest in having their class participate in the initiative. Of the teachers who attended the

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introductory session to learn about the objectives and structure of the IA pilot, N = 7 teachers completed the IA pilot itself. Several teachers who had initially expressed interest declined participation before the introductory session because they did not: i) have any students identified with a gifted exceptionality in their class; or, ii) feel that they had the capacity to take on something new. Teachers who attended the introductory session but later declined participation indicated that mitigating factors had made it difficult for them to complete the task such as the volume of curriculum required to 'get through', which precluded their participation.

II. General Experience with the Interest Academy Pilot

Results from all three stakeholder groups exploring their general experience with the Interest Academy pilot can be characterized as generally positive. For instance, qualitative data from the student self-reflective assessment highlights the sheer range in diversity of research topics explored by students who participated in the IA pilot, including those with the gifted exceptionality. Testimony from parents/caregivers of both gifted and non-gifted learners regarding their child's experience with the pilot also brings to fore the main rationale for implementing inquiry-based learning. These elements are explored more deeply later in this report.

Parents/Caregivers

- ***This project was amazing, because for once, he was intrinsically motivated to do the work. It wasn't just a "make work" project.***
- ***My daughter explored story writing. She likes to write stories herself and her notebooks and she thought it was a good opportunity to look at and share the process of story writing with her classmates. It was also nice for her to be able to learn something about a topic she's interested in and how people "in real life" go about the process of writing a story or a book.***
- ***Given the scope of the project there were many ways for her to express herself creatively, learn new skills, and challenge herself mentally. Each part of this project provided her with an opportunity to experience success and a sense of personal accomplishment. The beautiful feedback she received from her classmates for her presentation will encourage her to explore other areas of personal interest and to build the self confidence needed to share this with others. Thank you.***

Students

- ***I chose four common health issues in dogs. I chose it because a lot of people get dogs without being aware of these things and I feel it is***
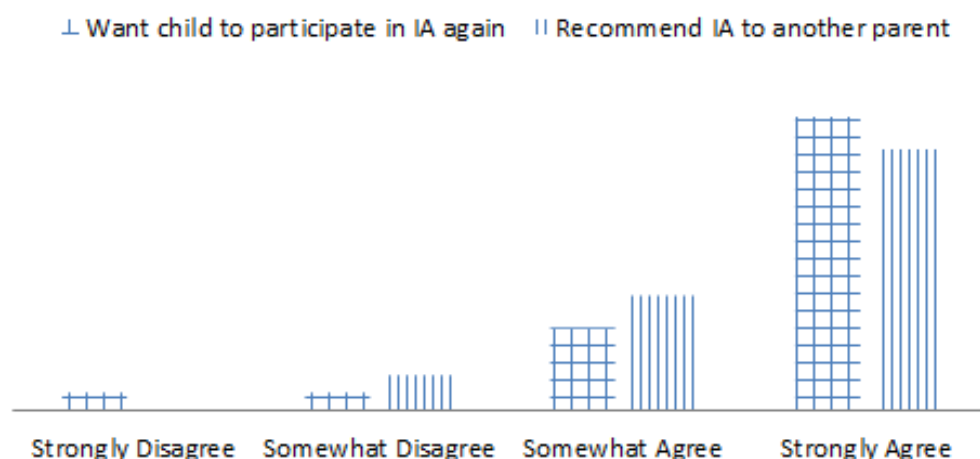
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important to know the signs of having them, what is the issue, and how you can treat it.

- *I picked chocolate history because I love to eat chocolates. I wanted to explore chocolates and learn where it was made, how it was made and who invented them.*
- *I explored the wonders of piano. I chose piano because it helps me be calm,I like music, and I don't know...it is sweet!*
- *A time lapse video of me drawing a realistic rabbit, I chose it because I love drawing and I love animals, so I combined them together, and I never drew a rabbit so it was a great experience to learn how.*
- *My topic was about improving sleep quality by creating a bed. I chose this because I thought it would be an interesting topic and I love sleeping. Sleeping is my passion.*
- *I chose to try a new thing each day for 30 days. I chose it to push myself out of my comfort zone.*
- *What causes us to forget? I chose it because I forget a lot and I've wondered how and why that happens.*

Figure 3 below shows that the vast majority of parent/caregiver respondents strongly agreed that they would: i) want their child to participate in the Interest Academy again; and/or; ii) recommend the Interest Academy to another parent/caregiver. Students also expressed extremely positive feedback respecting their experience with the IA pilot. In fact, nearly 91% of all student respondents reported they at least might want to participate in another Interest Academy next year.

Figure 3. Parent Perceptions of IA Pilot

⊥ Want child to participate in IA again   ‖ Recommend IA to another parent

Strongly Disagree   Somewhat Disagree   Somewhat Agree   Strongly Agree

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Finally, based on their experience with the pilot, all teachers involved with the pilot indicated that they would either participate in the Interest Academy again, or recommend it to another teacher. Although some teachers had previous experience with an inquiry-based learning approach, none of the IA pilot participants had previously implemented this particular inquiry-based strategy in their classrooms.

III. Engagement, Motivation & Connectivity

Parents/Caregivers

Figure 4 shows that, according to parents/caregivers, participation in the pilot had the strongest impact on their child's desire to learn (motivation). In fact, several parents/caregivers commented that because the IA projects were chosen by the students themselves, and from their own personal interest, their children were more self-motivated to work hard, practice for results and/or complete the project. Other parents/caregivers observed increases in their child's overall enthusiasm with the learning process, and noted how the pilot motivated their child to complete the project's sub-tasks (i.e., research; preparing; and presenting).

Figure 4. IA Pilot Impact: Parents
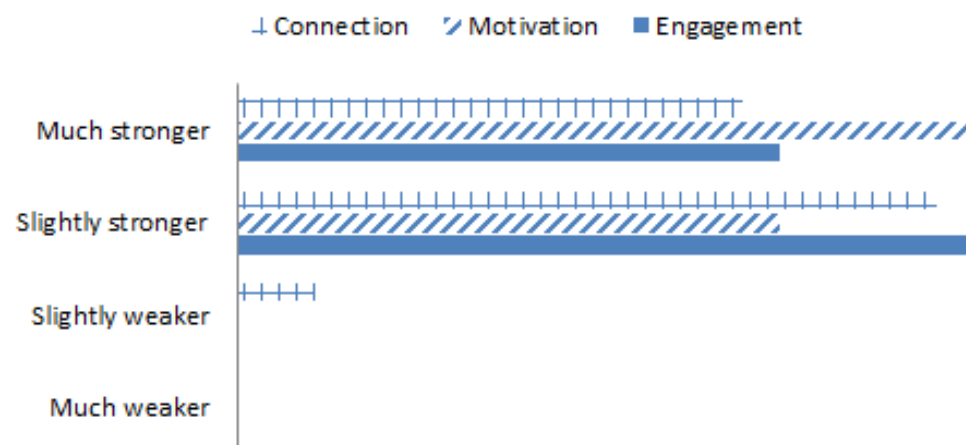
Results from Figure 4 also demonstrate that parents/caregivers rated favorably the extent to which participation in the Interest Academy impacted their child's commitment to learning, belonging and participation (engagement). In expanding on their child's experience in terms of engagement, several parents/caregivers noted improved interest, enjoyment and excitement in their child's learning. As a consequence, parents/caregivers perceived that their children were more confident and spent more time on school work.

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- ***The passion project infused life and enthusiasm into the learning process, encouraged motivation for greater detail of learning, and resulted in more connectedness with the classroom peers during the presentation phase because the student was excited and engaged to present the material.***
- ***It was by far the work they have been the most excited about and self-motivated to do all year***

In addition, parents/caregivers of both gifted and non-gifted learners emphasized that the pilot had a significant impact on their child's connectivity with school. These parents noted that participating in the pilot was an excellent opportunity for their child to share work with their classmates and receive enjoyment in presenting their passion projects. Some parents/caregivers observed that their child had opportunities to lead the class, taking turns with other students to teach and learn about their projects. Other parents/guardians noted that the IA pilot presented opportunities for 'a lot of fun', particularly in learning about other students' projects and interests. Finally, parents/caregivers observed a sense of connectivity with the class in their child's feelings of accomplishment and pride in their achievement, particularly sharing their passion projects with their classmates and/or family.

- ***She had the opportunity to collaborate with peers she would not have otherwise been able to outside of class.***
- ***The final output made him really proud to showcase it to friends and teachers and family.***
- ***He was eager to teach and learn about the topic since it was one of his interests. His teacher has also gone above and beyond to encourage him to lead the class through coding groups.***

Teachers

Teachers reported reasonably favorable ratings on these three key dimensions of interest, with generally higher ratings on engagement compared with connectivity and motivation. However, given the small sample size (n = 6), caution should be exercised in interpreting these ratings. Nevertheless, teacher qualitative feedback regarding the favorable impact of the IA pilot on their students' motivation, engagement and connectivity to school echoed those of parent/guardian perspectives.

- ***Students were excited to be given so much time to explore their topic of choice. They were even more excited to share it with their classmates.***
- ***Most of the class was excited to be learning about a passion.***
- ***Students were completely engaged in their learning journey. They self-selected their topics. So, it was something of deep interest to them. That is always a motivating factor.***

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Students

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of the impact from participating in the IA pilot on engagement, motivation and connectivity came from the students themselves. Figure 5 shows that most students rated their desire to learn and willingness to complete the project as stronger as a result of their experience with the IA pilot. Many students also indicated positive changes in their beliefs that their teachers or classmates care about their learning, or connectivity to school.

Figure 5. IA Pilot Impact: Students
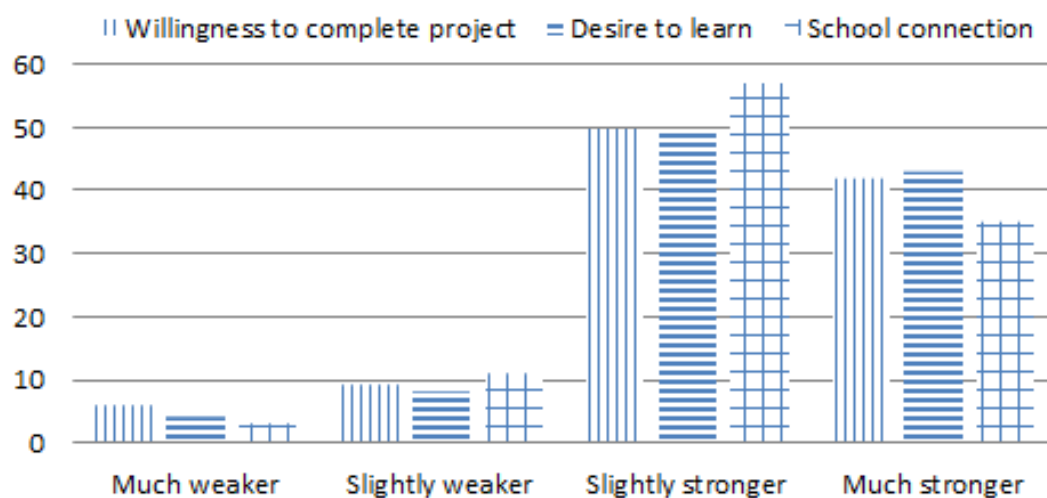
In fact, students expressed strong connections to school resulting from their experience with the pilot in that most students indicated that they shared and received feedback at least a few times from their peers when completing their project. Finally, perceptual data from both gifted and non-gifted learners bears-out the positive overall experience and impact of the IA pilot on these three key dimensions of interest.

● *I chose the topic I chose with a desire to learn more. As well once I started my project I wanted to see the finished project and that strengthened my willingness to complete the project. As well, my classmates and teacher were there at all times if I had any questions for them.*
● *Interest Academy changed my willingness and desire to learn because it was the biggest project I ever did and I completed it. So, that told me "Wow. That means you can do anything in between that and the smallest thing I did!"*
● *Before I had started my Interest Academy project my main problem was procrastination and lack of motivation, but once I started the project all I wanted to do was work on the different skills and techniques I could learn.*
● *I think it changed my belief in my teacher and classmates' perspective on learning it because instead of everyone listening to a similar presentation*

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> *about something the whole class was assigned, they got to listen to something people were interested in and cared about.*
> - *Well a lot of classmates gave me help by doing this project. It also helped me be more motivated to do my other school work.*

IV. Learning Needs and Pedagogy

i) Understanding the Learning Needs of All Students

Parents/Caregivers

Parents/caregivers identified several ways in which participating in the IA met the specific learning needs of their children, including children identified with giftedness. For example, they noted enhanced learning skills in a particular area of interest, as well as increased opportunities for hands-on practice and application of acquired skills. Many parents, including those whose children have special education needs other than the gifted exceptionality, also noted improved presentation skills in their children as a result of participation in the pilot. According to parents/caregivers of both gifted and non-gifted learners, other specific learning needs were addressed by the pilot such as the ability to navigate a new topic as well as critical and creative thinking skills, like finding appropriate resources and organizing thoughts and information. Several parents/caregivers also noted improved capacity in their child to take-on challenges, where participation in the pilot helped to build confidence in their learning. Finally, parents/guardians noticed improvement in their children's cooperation and collaboration skills, particularly in the sharing with classmates during the presenting aspect of the project.

> - *[The IA Pilot] helped him in enhancing the skills in his area of interest, improve presentation skills, and improvement of application of skill acquired.*
> - *These kinds of presentations are good for my daughter as she finds it challenging communicating in large groups. She has language delays. She has difficulty participating in class discussions as a result. These kinds of projects give her plenty of practice with this and boost her self confidence in this area.*
> - *More cooperation or collaboration with classmates or teachers for the research project, like sharing what the student found and what they thought, or ideas they have. How to present their works to people who know nothing about projects.*

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Teachers

Teacher perceptions were mixed with respect to the impact of the IA pilot on their instructional practices. Figure 6 shows that finding new ways of understanding the learner was the least likely instructional practice to remain changed after participating in the pilot. Nevertheless, teachers also indicated positive changes to their assessment practices as a result of participating in the IA pilot. For example, teachers reported that leveraging student strengths in expressing their learning was most likely to remain changed, followed by facilitating student determinant learning and assessing the process of learning not the product. However, the small number of overall teacher respondents requires consideration in interpreting the results.

Figure 6. IA Impact on Teacher Instructional Practices
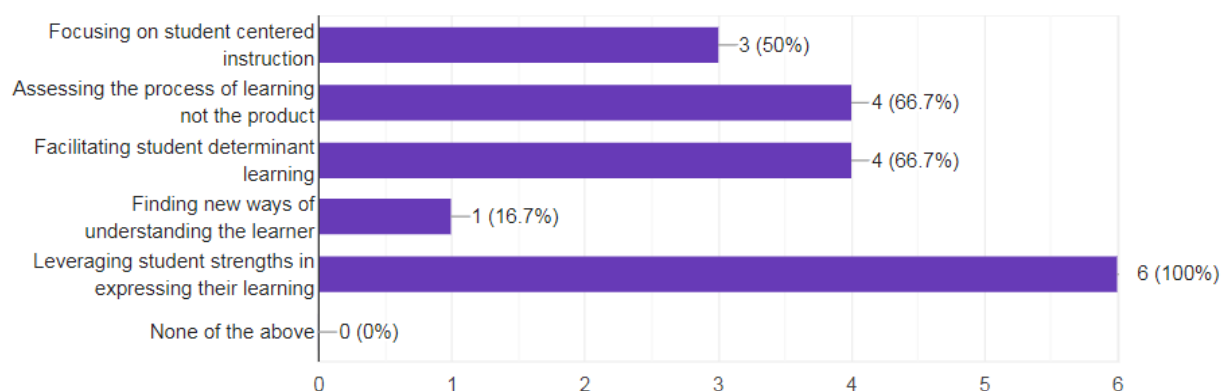
Teachers were also in general agreement that the pilot had a positive impact on their student's critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication and metacognitive skills (4 C's and M skills). In fact, Figure 7 (next page) shows that student creativity was rated as significantly impacted, whereas critical thinking, metacognition and communication skills were also favorably impacted. Teachers perceived the least impact in their student's collaboration skills; however, collaboration may have simply occurred more often outside of the virtual classroom. Again, the small number of teacher participants requires caution in the interpretation of the quantitative data from the teacher survey.

When asked to describe the specific changes in instructional or assessment practices attributed to their participation in the pilot, teachers noted how allowing students to choose their topic and style of presentation served as a natural motivator for engagement. As a result of their participation in the pilot, teachers also better understood how to properly assess project-based learning through open-ended products or assess the progression of learning. Nevertheless, the challenge of

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implementing the pilot in the virtual environment was also noted as a constraint by some teachers.

Figure 7. IA Impact on Students' Skills: Teachers
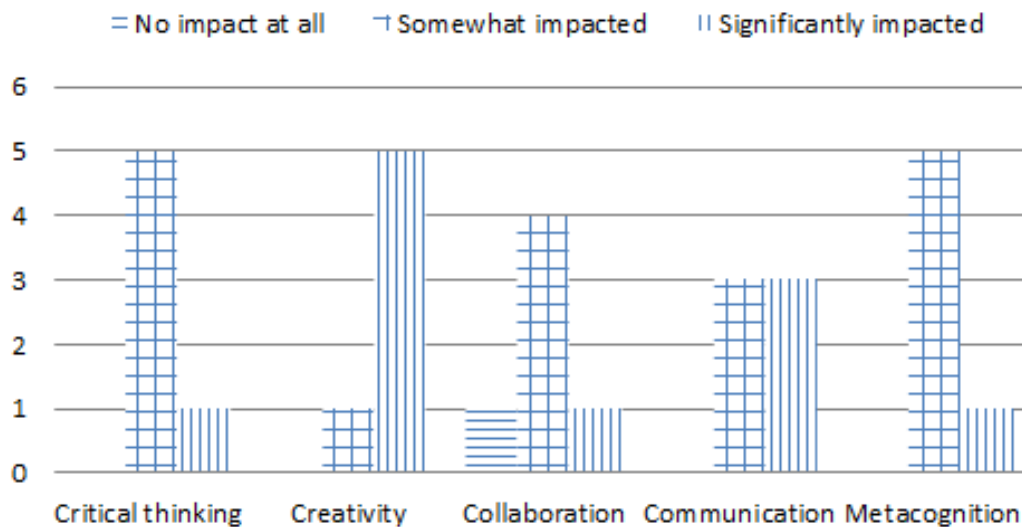
- *[The IA pilot] made it clear that not all students learn with the same model. That, as educators, we need to provide some flexibility and opportunities for individual students to excel in their own driven way.*
- *It's way more of an investment to assess work this way, but when a project has a long timeline, it gives you the necessary time to do it, and I think it can be worth it when done correctly.*
- *Would need to do this project again under less stressful circumstances to determine this [understanding of the learning needs of all students, including learners with giftedness].*

ii) Learning Skills, Work Habits & Curriculum

Parents/Caregivers

Parents/caregivers were in general agreement regarding the benefits of the IA pilot in terms of impacting their child's learning skills and/or work habits. In fact, many parents/caregivers observed significant improvement in their child's independent work abilities showing, for example, initiative in order to define the project and decide on its elements independently. Parents/caregivers also noted increases in their children's organization and self-regulation skills, as evidenced by working outside of school hours, or self-directed discipline and perseverance to work on their IA projects. Finally, parents/caregivers of both gifted and non-gifted learners highlighted the flexibility in curriculum and learning skills opportunities which participation in the IA pilot provided to their child.

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- *… there were many ways for her to express herself creatively, learn new skills, and challenge herself mentally.. The beautiful feedback she received from her classmates for her presentation will encourage her to explore other areas of personal interest and to build the self-confidence needed to share this with others. Thank you.*
- *My daughter is very independent learner and is largely self-directed. With a multi-phase project, she showed her creativity and more initiative to define the project and decide on its elements by herself.*
- *Increase in independent work, responsibility and self-regulation - she worked outside of school hours on her project for interest academy.*

Teachers

Notably, teachers reinforced the curricular flexibility of the IA pilot, stating that they were able to address several areas of the Ontario Curriculum, in addition to the Learning Skills and Work Habits contained on the Elementary Provincial Report Card. Figure 8 shows that teachers were most able to assess independent work through delivering the IA pilot, followed by: i) responsibility and organization; ii) self-regulation; and ii) initiative. Collaboration was the lowest rated learning skill/work-habit assessed by teachers; however, this was likely due to the online nature of the delivery platform which makes assessing collaboration less straight-forward. These particular findings should aso be interpreted with caution due to the small teacher sample size.

Figure 8. Teacher Ratings on Learning Skills/Work Habits.
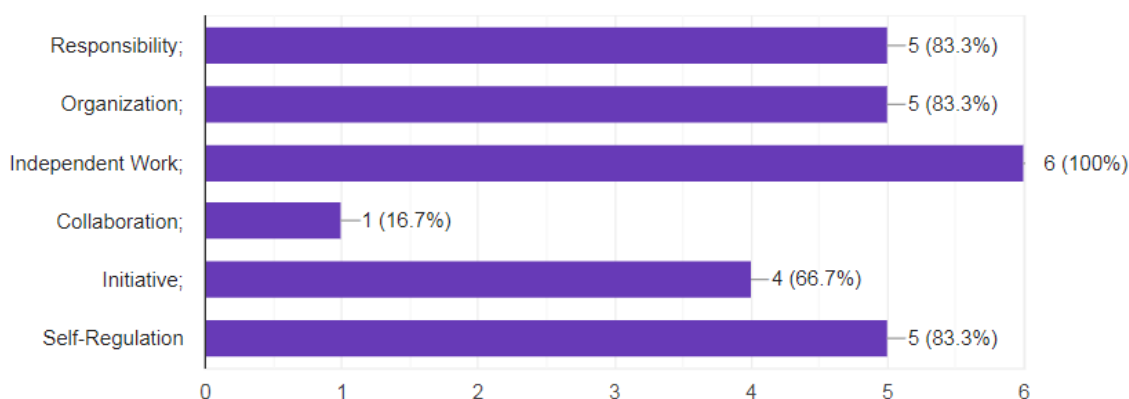
- *I addressed learning skills more than any other curriculum expectation. Since I am a French Immersion teacher, I also assessed their reading, writing, and oral communication.*
- *Many of the subject areas were reached depending on the topic of choice. We had science, math, coding, visual arts to name a few that were represented.*

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Students

A tremendous variety of curriculum areas was evident in the student responses from both gifted and non-gifted learners when asked about which topics they explored during the IA pilot. For example, students explored many topics directly specified in the Ontario Curriculum areas such as Science & Technology; The Arts; and/or Physical and Health Education.

- *I picked the topic bears because bears are really interesting and I thought it would be fun and it was!*
- *I explored the history of basketball for the Interest Academy. I chose it because I really enjoy playing basketball, but because of the virus I cannot play it anymore and I wanted to find out about the history.*
- *I decided to explore the history and cultural impact of rap music, I also created my own rap song and music video.*
- *I thought it would be cool to make a bass attractant and learn more about them since I love fishing so much. It would also give me like a special weapon for when I'm fishing that no one else has.*

Students also observed several benefits of the pilot in terms of impacting their learning skills and/or work habits directly related to the Elementary Provincial Report Card. According to Figure 9, most students indicated that the IA pilot was not only well-suited to their learning style, but also changed the way they learned in terms of better understanding how they learn; planning and organizing their work; and even reflecting on their thoughts.

Figure 9. IA Impact Student Learning Skills/Work Habits

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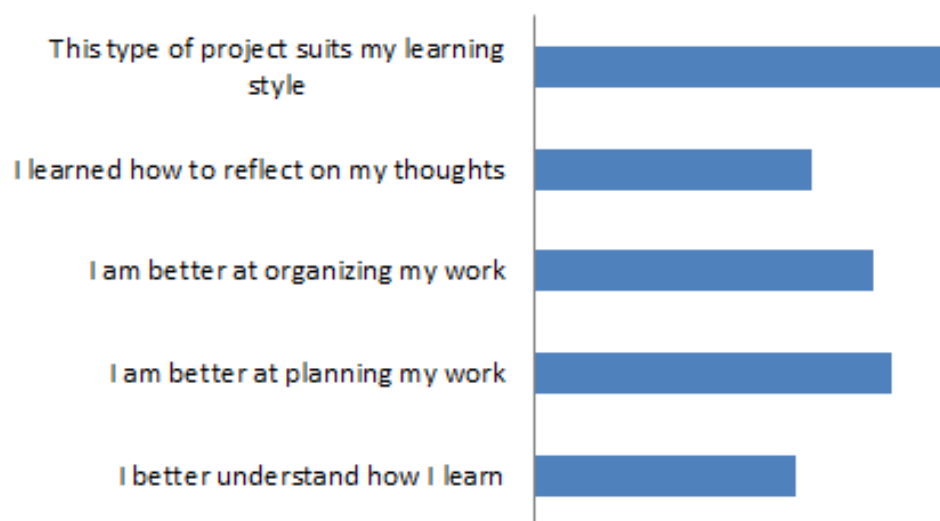
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Perhaps more importantly, students reported acquiring several other learning skills or even 'life lessons' from their participation in the IA pilot -- beyond those specified in the Elementary Provincial Report Card. In fact, many essential learning lessons were highlighted by students such as how to research efficiently or to manage time effectively, staying focused and not doing their work last-minute. Important lessons in being attentive to others' interests were also learned, such as the value of listening to their classmates or relying on other students for support. Notably, many students reported learning lessons in perseverance, patience and project planning, particularly dealing with disappointment when things do not work out the first time. Finally, students reported learning valuable metacognitive strategies to cope with presentation fears or recognizing the value of trying new things.

- ***I learned that things won't always work out the first time, and that doesn't mean that it won't work at all, it just means that you have to try again.***
- ***I learnt a lot about how to research efficiently. Because of all the problems I faced during my project I was forced to research and learn how to research in the best way possible.***
- ***that you can't do it alone without my class it would have been bad but my class told me things that I could never think of but they helped so much***
- ***I learnt a lot about my classmates' interests besides my own. I was happy to show the class what kind of crafts I enjoy doing, and I was happy to see that everyone liked my art.***
- ***I learned not to do things last minute. I like art so I didn't do this project last minute and it turned out much better than how some of my other projects turned out.***
- ***To try exploring new things sometimes, doing past things isn't always the best way.***
- ***I learned that planning and patience both play key roles in big projects such as this one based on my personal experience.***
- ***I learned how to manage my time and that lots of ambition is great for this sort of project when you're passionate about the topic.***
- ***I learned that listening to other people's advice is helpful and making your project creative is also very fun.***
- ***I learned to stay focused and persevere while making the project because there were a few times that I had made a mistake…But, I stayed focused and I persevered through the process and my video ended up being something I'm really proud of.***

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V. Organizational Conditions

i) IA Pilot Challenges

Parents/Caregivers

Parents/caregivers identified several challenges which their children experienced with the IA pilot. Some challenges were associated with the virtual delivery platform, such as access to technology where students were using older laptops, or slow internet connections, or finding creative ways to present their topics in a virtual environment. Other challenges were characteristic of an inquiry-based learning task, irrespective of the virtual delivery mode, such as: i) researching materials and screening information relevant for their topic; ii) organizing thoughts and completing tasks without supervision; and iii) synthesizing information and preparing written composition for presentation. Notably, parents/caregivers saw these particular challenges as important learning experiences for their children.

- ***Excessive online exploring is not good for eyes or thumbs for kids. Especially when technology and resources exist where they can research from books and write their funding and later scan /upload it online review by teachers and peers.***
- ***Due to the virtual learning fact, my kid found it is hard to find a creative way to present the work.***
- ***In the zeal to achieve the target, there was interest in skipping some steps. Still a great experience for a kid his age to experience the whole build process and to understand it takes time to finish a project successfully.***
- ***My daughter had some difficulty organizing what information she would need to begin with on her topic of choice but this practice provided a necessary road map that she can use in the future with other topics of interest.***

Students

Student ratings on the challenges associated with the pilot are very interesting juxtaposed against their parents' feedback. For example, when asked to rank the parts of the IA project they liked from most to least, the majority of students indicated that they liked working with others most (i.e., collaboration). Notably, this was followed by creating the final product. Students reported liking least researching, experimenting, or experiencing their topic, and/or finding their passion/interest (see Figure 10 next page).

Student qualitative feedback on the challenges they faced during the pilot echoed that of their parents/caregivers where creativity in presenting their projects may have been

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impeded by the virtual delivery platform for some students. Other students experienced the usual challenges associated with an inquiry-based learning task such as choosing and researching their topic, or organizational challenges in synthesizing and presenting information. These challenges were not necessarily related to the virtual classroom environment but might just as well be expected to emerge in a regular classroom context.

Figure 10. IA Pilot What Students Liked Most
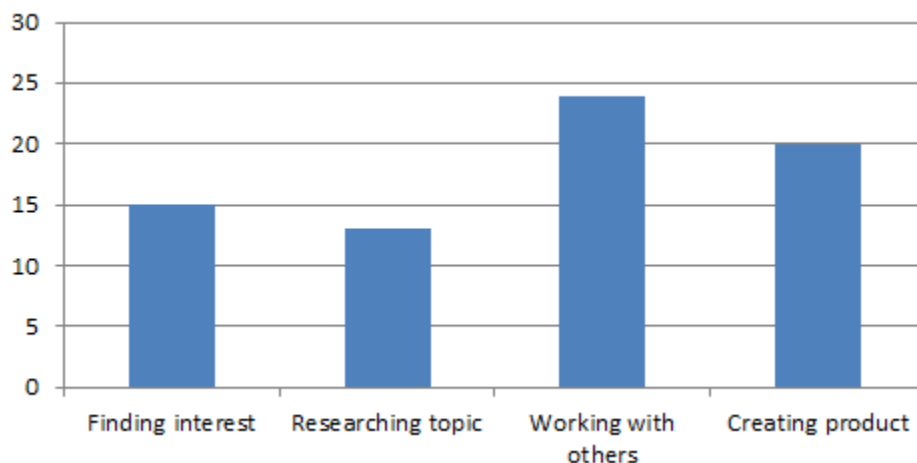
- ***The hardest part of the Interest Academy for me was finding what I was interested in. I really had to reflect on what I liked to do and what interested me. But once I found what I wanted to do, it was really fun and I really enjoyed doing it.***
- ***Because of virtual school, I couldn't present my project in an interesting, exciting, new way so I had to try to find a way to present it in an interesting way on google slides.***
- ***The hardest what I would say is researching since I would need to find reliable sources and need to dig deep into learning key things. Like a challenge would include learning new words so that I don't get confused later on the research.***
- ***The hardest part of the IA for me was remembering to document my day's work. Sometimes I would forget to write what I did that day on the Google Slide because I was having too much fun coding my project.***
- ***The hardest part of the Interest Academy project was to find a way to express creativity inside it. I wanted to give an idea and a base of what I feel when I'm doing my passion, it took me some time to get ideas but it ended up great!***

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Teachers

Teacher experience with the challenges of implementing the pilot were similar to those of parents and students, but with important nuances specific to their instructional perspective. These challenges can be summarized into: i) timing and scheduling of the IA within the school year; ii) impact of the online mode of delivery on student motivation, engagement and collaboration; and iii) organizational challenges associated with managing the IA strategy in a virtual environment.

- ***Teaching virtually the biggest challenge was trying to fit everything in our schedule. Also not having all of the necessary means of presenting student projects was tricky as well. They were left to slides, websites, etc over a live in person poster board style presentation.***
- ***I implemented it during a very stressful time of the semester. This meant most students were checked out and didn't get as excited as I would have hoped. Also, I probably came short in making sure the research part was done properly first. Students rushed through research and went straight to the creation part.***
- ***Difficult to engage students who are non-responsive over the virtual environment.***
- ***Some students focused on research instead of some of the higher order critical thinking skills.***

ii) Aspects of the IA to Change

Feedback from parents and students regarding aspects of the pilot that should be changed centered on: i) better timing of the IA within the context of the school year, but also in terms of amount of time spent on specific tasks (i.e., research vs. production of product); increased teacher guidance in terms of helping their children focus and set clear goals for different project stages; and iii) better presentation options specifically in the context of a virtual delivery environment.

Parents/Caregivers

- ***maybe more resources for the research topic, or patterns for the research work presentation, like videos or poems or songs.***
- ***Slightly more focus for the students. The selection of broad topics can lead to frustration trying to come to a conclusion.***
- ***It was nice to allow him to choose his own topic but I think further guidance on what should be accomplished is needed.***
- ***Announce it much earlier so students (and parents) have plenty of time to gather materials and prepare. For example all library books needed to be***

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ordered and delivered during the lockdown which took longer…Perhaps even announcing it at the beginning of the year, or at least the term to allow ideas to brew.

Students

- *One aspect of the Interest Academy that I would change would probably be, giving students more check-ins with teachers. Just to make sure they are on the right track. And making sure that they are on the track to finish the project in time. Other than that, I thought it was a great project!*
- *That there was some sort of guide line or an expectation I could follow.*
- *I would change the amount of collaboration that we are expected to have. Especially because it was an online school it could be very difficult to collaborate with my classmates...*
- *The thing that I would change is the researching part. There should not be too much research or too little research.*
- *More class time and more time to work with other students. Also a longer due date as well as a better time frame provided.*

Teachers

Teacher feedback on which aspect of the IA they would change reflected similar themes to those of parents and students, but again with an instructional nuance. Some teachers reported that the length of the time allocated for the IA pilot (i.e., 6 weeks) exceeded what was necessary to complete the project. Other teachers would change the amount of time spent on different aspects of the project. Teachers with less experience implementing this particular inquiry-based strategy indicated that they would have benefited from examples to show their students what was expected of them at each stage of the project.

Finally, teachers were also asked which organizational conditions positively impacted the implementation of the pilot in their classroom (see Figure 11 next page). Most teachers indicated that support from the central instructional coach and sharing online resources were the most important organizational conditions impacting the implementation of the IA pilot. Teachers rated administrative involvement as the least important organizational condition. Again, the small sample size needs to be considered when interpreting the teacher survey results.

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Figure 11. Organizational Conditions Supporting IA Pilot: Teachers
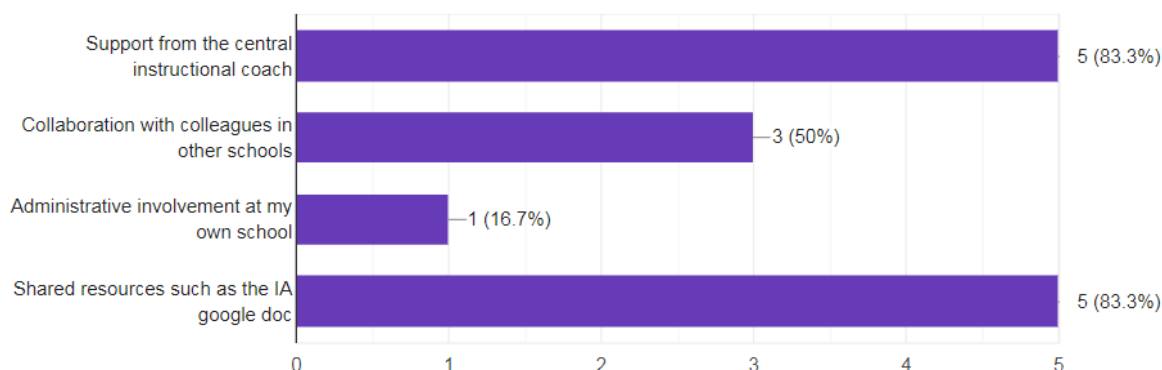
Summary of Findings

Results from the stakeholder surveys provided strong evidence for the inquiry-based learning approach as represented by the IA pilot. Notably, the majority of students, parents/caregivers and teachers involved with the initiative were in agreement that they would participate in the Interest Academy again or recommend it to others. Three main themes emerged from the analysis of stakeholder experience. The most salient theme centered on the utility of the IA strategy to motivate and engage students in their learning, and ultimately to improve their connection to school. A second major theme was concerned with how the pilot addressed the specific learning needs of all students, including learners with giftedness, particularly the impact on learning skills and work habits contained in the Provincial Elementary Report Card. The third major theme which emerged surrounded the organizational conditions either supporting or impeding the implementation of the IA pilot delivered via a virtual platform.

Parents/caregivers provided rich insight into the ways that the pilot met their child's specific learning needs, including parents of students who were identified with the gifted exceptionality. In fact, parents/caregivers and students observed many benefits of the pilot in terms of impacting their learning skills beyond the Ontario Elementary Report Card. Teachers reinforced that, through the pilot, they were able to address several areas of the Ontario Curriculum and noted several aspects of their instructional practices which changed resulting from their experience with the pilot. Teachers were in general agreement that the IA pilot had a significant impact on their student's critical thinking, creativity, communication and metacognitive skills. Finally, stakeholders put forward several organizational conditions which affected the implementation of the IA pilot. These centered mainly on the delivery of the IA in a virtual environment, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. A full discussion of these findings are presented in the concluding section below.

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Part 4: Discussion & Conclusion

Timing Emphasis

Findings from the evaluation with respect to challenges of the pilot suggest that too much or too little time spent on any one aspect of the IA strategy (by either a teacher or student) may have been detrimental to the overall success of the project. For example, stakeholders reported that over-emphasis on the research component or the final product presented difficulties for some students. Other students lacked the necessary time to develop good research questions, or meaningful inquiry topics. Add to this the virtual delivery platform, which limited interactions with teachers, insufficient time was spent by some students on that key area.

Indeed, the entire 1st week of instructional time for the IA strategy was meant to demonstrate to students how to ask meaningful inquiry questions, and to conduct research properly. During this time, teachers should have outlined the steps which need to be explored more deeply and ensure that every student relates to the research and focuses on their topic of choice. However, teachers noted that not being physically present (i.e., virtual environment) also played a role in that aspect of the project because it was difficult to engage and mentor students online for the questioning process. In this sense, the online platform and the focus of IA time were interrelated challenges due to the interdependence of these two factors.

Virtual Delivery Platform

The ability of teachers to support skills such as critical thinking may also have been impeded by the virtual delivery environment. Teachers noted that it was difficult to identify students who were struggling with an idea and/or other cognitive processes during an online session. By contrast, learning in a physical classroom is visible and audible, where teachers can practice 'listening at a distance'-- in effect hearing how their students are thinking. This type of observation is difficult to carry-out in a virtual classroom, particularly assessing meta-cognitive processes such as selecting a research topic. Further, upon entering the virtual classroom, a teacher's presence often changes the behaviour of students. When the teacher arrives in an online environment, they become almost 'too visible' causing the student to worry about being judged or assessed. Whereas in a physical classroom, students can lose track of the teacher's presence and so become unworried about judgement or assessment. Essentially, students need to be challenged sufficiently to create a need, and teachers must be present to address that need when it comes. In a virtual classroom this need is created; however, the teacher cannot be there physically to support metacognitive processing in the same way. This creates frustration in the student, and this frustration was evident in some stakeholder feedback.

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Teacher Online Presence

Although it was very challenging for stakeholders to leverage technology for this aspect of the IA pilot, there are potential options for solutions, such as creating google classrooms which make the online learning platform more dynamic. For example, break out rooms could be created where students are working collaboratively, and the teacher can 'wander over' unnoticed. Still, a virtual environment may not be ideal for capturing some of the IA metacognitive processes. Many teachers suggested that it was difficult to make observations and have conversations with students as their learning journey was happening. Parents also reinforced this challenge in their expectations of the teachers' role, noting that there was no teacher there to guide their children during the process of learning. The problem here is really one of connectivity between teacher and the individual student, and the challenge of relationship building in a virtual environment. In short, online learning may not be as conducive for the IA when compared to a physical classroom space. Nevertheless, it should be recalled that there was overall satisfaction with the IA pilot in the evaluation findings, particularly respecting the motivation, engagement and connectivity key dimensions of interest.

Motivation, Engagement & Connectivity

Results from the IA pilot evaluation clearly reinforce the concept that motivation, engagement and connectivity are linear. Testimony from stakeholders shows that an increase in a student's motivation will entice them into deeper participation in their learning, which itself leads to greater engagement in the learning process. In turn, this engagement in the learning process leads to greater collaboration with teachers and peers which results in greater connectivity to school. These three interrelated processes all support self-determinant learning (a philosophical pillar of inquiry-based learning), by giving students the opportunity to follow their own learning path. In contrast to teacher-determined learning, knowledge is in the hands of the student. In other words, rather than determining learning for the student in some prescribed or pre-determined fashion, the teacher supports student engagement and ownership of knowledge. Moreover, teachers facilitate the thinking journey of the student by conferencing with and coaching the students, rather than guiding students down a predetermined path. In this way, teachers provide students with the tools to overcome challenges in their individual learning journey. Feedback from all three stakeholder groups strongly reinforced this notion in their experience with the IA pilot.

Learning Outside the Curriculum

The evidence from the IA pilot also speaks to learning that is done outside of the formal curriculum, where opportunities for authentic learning are created for students to experience. For example, one of the topics chosen by a student participating in the pilot was different breads of the world. Indeed, this philosophy of education is the

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cornerstone of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy. The positive findings concerning this philosophy of learning also reinforces why it is currently being used in the OCDSB's Indiginenous Education program, as well as our Alternate secondary sites across the system.

Flow States

From a psychological perspective, the IA pilot evaluation findings concerning motivation, engagement and connectivity also bear discussion. For example, it is generally understood by school psychologists that student-driven learning is a catalyst for engagement and connectivity at school. Csikszentmihalyi first identified the concept of "Flow" in 1975 whereby a student experiences an energized focus and enjoyment and becomes so completely engrossed in an activity that his or her concept of time can shift. This is a sign of full engagement, where the student is tapping into key learning processes automatically and becomes more confident in their learning.

The inquiry-based approach also facilitates a growth mindset (Dweck, 2009), where the student believes their abilities can be developed through effort. In this sense, collaboration emerges in a different way with the IA strategy than one might expect in a traditional teacher-determined learning approach. For example, school connectivity in the IA context speaks to the networking that students can do with other students when the teacher may not necessarily possess knowledge of their research topic. Consequently, the student must engage in collaborative activities beyond the teacher-student relationship, asking questions from experts in the field, parents, or even outside community members. Moreover, self-determined inquiry in a virtual environment allows students to connect to the school in innovative ways, providing them with more opportunities to connect and share about themselves and their interests with their classmates. In this way, the online platform helps to define and build relationships with their peers in school, and to 'put yourself out there'. Student testimony clearly shows a strong positive impact from the IA pilot in terms of connection to school for both gifted and non-gifted learners.

Self-Determined Learning

The findings from the evaluation surrounding confidence, or even empowerment, speak to the self determination that students experienced in participating in the IA pilot. In this sense, student empowerment/confidence increases when students are provided with opportunities to control their learning, and when they're not being judged on the rightness or wrongness of their knowledge. The inquiry-based approach removes the fear of being wrong for the student in their learning journey. Consequently, the student feels confident sharing what they have learned. This is why coaching, facilitation of learning, mentoring and peer-support to students is a central pillar of the IA strategy. By contrast, when there is a determined learning destination, students get focused on that

destination. The inquiry-based learning philosophy represented by the IA clearly allowed students to focus on their own learning journey, and acquire key learning skills such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration and metacognition.

Learning Journeys Vs Curriculum Outcomes

Many educators still espouse a philosophy of teaching based on outcomes and/or learning curriculum expectations (Hattie, 2012). Indeed, teachers are trained to focus on outcomes such as specific curriculum expectations in specific subject areas. To a certain degree, the emphasis of learning in traditional pedagogical approaches is preparing for a test, or a product at the end of a lesson rather than following the students' own learning journey and supporting their skill development. With the inquiry based approach, learning skills in areas like student conferencing or peer-peer interactions may be well developed but still difficult to assess with an outcomes-based assessment approach. In the IA type of approach, the teacher is always observing, in a constant assessment mode, looking for the strengths and needs of their students and what they can or cannot do.

This type of learning approach is underused at every level of education. Indeed, very little information from the type of experience where the teacher controls the path can be considered high-yield. This is why instructional strategies like the IA are excellent examples of 'visible learning', or high-yield instructional strategies (Hattie, 2011). Student self-efficacy, the facilitation of learning over direct instruction, and other meta-cognitive strategies such as feedback that students receive are all hallmarks of inquiry-based learning and so represent high-yield instructional strategies. In other words, through improvement of these high-yield instructional strategies, students who participated in the IA pilot learned more effectively overall.

Learning Paths

Results from the IA pilot evaluation demonstrated mixed results about whether or not teachers found new ways of understanding the learners, including students with giftedness, in their classroom. Indeed, several teachers acknowledged merit in the idea of allowing their students to explore their own learning path. There is a parallel here between the Elementary Report Card learning skills/work habits and effective pedagogy, where both constructs become an intertwined, complex mixture of good pedagogy and instruction. The main reason teachers found the IA valuable was that it provided an opportunity for their students to process learning skills more deeply than teacher-directed learning pathways. In short, it was messy.

The reason for these mixed results is likely that, with the IA, teachers do not have complete control of the learning path. Although teachers are still there to guide the learners and have a sense of the learning path or the assessment required, they cannot

determine entirely what these assessment items will be. This can create an uncomfortable situation for some teachers who may be more comfortable having students explore knowledge that they are familiar with. Particularly inexperienced teachers who may be overly concerned with addressing curriculum content and/or developing experiences which directly assess specific or overall curriculum expectations. On the other hand, when teachers enter into an inquiry based learning strategy, they can see how it connects to important learning competencies and work habits beyond the curriculum. When teachers engaged with this type of instruction, and recognized these important connections, they realized that students were learning skills through the IA that they might not otherwise have acquired as effectively.

Dimensions of Interest Connection

Evaluation findings also showed a link between the key dimensions of interest, such as learning skills and work habits for students participating in the IA pilot, and their relationship with motivation, engagement and connectivity. In terms of initiative, for example, students were more likely to get started on work that they were passionate about (motivation link). This reinforced the student's confidence, and therefore, the task became easier for them to complete (engagement link). Likewise, the freedom to explore topics of their own interest was related to independent work insofar as students were 'coming out of their shells' to complete the IA project (connectivity link). In this way, motivation, engagement and connectivity were linked with important learning skills and work habits identified in the Ontario Elementary Report Card.

Summary

Findings from the IA pilot evaluation indicate that there was a strong relationship between motivation, engagement, and connectivity. An increase in motivation often led to increased engagement which supported connectivity between students, their peers, and their teachers through mentoring and collaboration. The pilot supported a self-determinant learning path where students were given opportunities to explore a personal interest while applying and developing skills related to the 4C's and M (critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration and metacognition). Through these types of experiences students were permitted to take ownership of the knowledge as their teacher and peers facilitated and supported their learning journey. This type of task allowed students to engage in authentic learning experiences that connected them with concepts and content not found in the formal curriculum. It also allowed students the opportunity to engage in learning through their personal culturally relevant lens. The IA pilot evaluation results also provided strong evidence that an inquiry-based learning approach reinforces important learning skills and work habits. Through a self-determined learning path, students take initiative and gain confidence in their learning, and as a result, become more independent learners. Good pedagogical practice

includes creating these types of learning opportunities for students. This knowledge is important for teachers across the District who may be reluctant to engage in an inquiry-based learning approach, particularly teachers with less experience or those who may be more focused on assessing specific curriculum expectations.

Concluding Remarks

In Spring 2021, the OCDSB Interest Academy (IA) pilot was implemented in seven different OCV classrooms. The IA pilot was formally evaluated using a participatory approach with the main purpose of exploring the experience of stakeholders (i.e., students, parents/caregivers and teachers). In line with the participatory evaluation approach (Patton, 2012), key program stakeholders were involved at every stage of the IA pilot evaluation. An evaluation project team was struck composed of evaluation staff, program staff and administrators to inform the evaluation process. Two main evaluation questions were explored. The first question sought stakeholder feedback on their experience respecting the efficacy of the Interest Academy to meet the needs of all learners in a virtual environment, including learners with giftedness. The second question gathered feedback on the organizational conditions impacting the implementation of the IA pilot at the OCV sites. Notably, the planned exploratory methodology of the evaluation was constrained by logistical considerations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, the survey method was selected despite the philosophical limits to using empiricist data collection methods for an exploratory purpose. Nevertheless, the sample represented both students with giftedness and non-gifted learners from Grades 4 to 8 located in Regular or French Immersion OCV classrooms as well as their parents. Six of the seven teachers involved in the pilot responded to the educator survey.

Results from the stakeholder surveys provide strong evidence for the inquiry-based learning approach represented by the OCDSB Interest Academy pilot. Notably, the majority of students, parents and teachers involved with the initiative were in agreement that they would participate in the Interest Academy again, or recommend it to others. Three main themes also emerged from the analysis of stakeholder experience. The most salient theme centered on the utility of the IA strategy to motivate and engage students in their learning, and ultimately to improve their connection to school. A second major theme was concerned with how the IA pilot addressed the specific learning needs of all students (including learners with giftedness), particularly the impact on learning skills and work habits contained in the Ontario Elementary Report Card. The third major theme which emerged surrounded the organizational conditions either supporting or impeding the implementation of the IA pilot delivered via a virtual platform. These

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findings provide clear evidence that address the evaluation's two main questions, and lay the groundwork for actionable recommendations for the District's next steps.

Next Steps

The information gained from the OCDSB IA pilot evaluation will be useful for informing the ongoing work of both the Learning Support Services (LSS) and Program and Learning (PAL) departments. This work falls under four main areas. First, the results of this exploratory evaluation indicate that the OCDSB Interest Academy model is an ideal differentiated instruction strategy suitable for all students, regardless of whether or not they have been formally identified with giftedness. Thus, the District might consider an expanded field testing model of the IA strategy for all interested educators. Second, the results of the pilot evaluation align with the work undertaken by LSS to gather information related to the possible implementation of a universal screening tool. A third related area is an exploration of talent development framework for the District.

According to Renzulli (2005), the focus in a talent development approach is to provide every student with opportunities, resources, and encouragement in order to help all students reach their full potential. Renzulli also described how a talent development approach allows for enriched programming models that develop talents of students who traditionally tend to be excluded from gifted programming. To further explore a talent development framework, additional information and consultation will be required to better understand the implementation considerations of such an approach for the OCDSB. Finally, results of the IA pilot evaluation suggest that an inquiry-based learning approach is an impactful strategy to include in the Learning Support for Students with Special Education Needs (formerly Quality Program Indicators) online resource specifically for students with giftedness both in the specialized program classes or in the regular program.

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Annex I: IA Parent Information Letter/Consent Form

OCDSB Interest Academy Pilot
Parent/Guardian Information Letter

19 March 2021

Dear Parent/Guardian:

We are pleased to announce that your child's class will be participating in an exciting pilot project this spring called the OCDSB Interest Academy. This inquiry-based learning project is designed to support all learners, including students identified with giftedness and/or talented students receiving instruction in a regular or specialized classroom setting. Your child's classroom is one of several classrooms chosen from three Ottawa-Carleton Virtual (OCV) campuses to take part in this important initiative. The goal of the OCDSB Interest Academy pilot is to implement this innovative, inquiry-based strategy in selected OCV classrooms and to explore/evaluate its impact on students.

An important component of the evaluation is to seek parent/guardian feedback on their child's experience with the Interest Academy through an online survey. Your participation in the survey is completely voluntary; however, your response is highly valued and encouraged so that results from the evaluation are representative of all students involved in this initiative. A link to the online survey will be forwarded to all parents/guardians later this spring. We are also seeking your approval to use the data collected from your child in the evaluation of the pilot, consisting of a self-reflective assessment measuring peer connection, engagement and motivation in the Interest Academy.

Information gathered from the evaluation of the OCDSB Interest Academy pilot will assist the District in our efforts to better understand the impact of an inquiry-based learning project on all students, including gifted and/or talented learners, placed in different classroom settings. Results from all evaluation components of the pilot (i.e., parent/guardian survey or student self-reflection) will be aggregated so that no individual names, or any other personal identifying information for you or your child will be included in public reports. Please note that

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the OCDSB Interest Academy forms part of your child's regular classroom instruction. Thus, you are receiving this letter for information purposes only; no further action on your part is required. **However, should you wish to exclude your child's information for the purposes of the evaluation of the pilot please send an email directly to: steven.mckibbin@ocdsb.ca with the text, *"exclude my child's results"* in the subject line of your email.**

Finally, this project has been approved by both the Learning Support Services and Program and Learning Departments of the OCDSB, as well as your child's OCV school principal. Please feel free to contact your OCV school principal with any questions, concerns or comments related to the OCDSB Interest Academy pilot, or either of us directly using the contact information below.

Sincerely,

Amy Hannah
System Principal, Learning Support Services
amy.hannah@ocdsb.ca

Jennifer Offord
System Principal, Program and Learning
jennifer.offord@ocdsb.ca

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Annex II: OCDSB IA Program Logic Model

OTTAWA-CARLETON DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

OCDSB Interest Academy Pilot

PROGRAM LOGIC MODEL

Stakeholders	Inputs	Activities	Outcomes	Outcome Indicators	Evaluation Questions
The Interest Academy (IA) Initiative involves n = 2 OCDSB OCV School Communities with the following stakeholders: • School Staff • Students • Parents/Guardians • Program staff • OCDSB Senior Staff • SEAC Reps, including ABC	• N=x school principals • N=x regular classroom/FI teachers (G 4-8) • x classes of (G 4-8) students, including those identified with giftedness • Central program staff including 1 LSS Instructional coach and 2 PAL coaches • Senior Staff including 1 LSS Principal and 1 PAL Principal • Parents/Gu ardians of students in pilot classrooms	**Training/PD** • Introductory session with Interest Academy pilot schools (Feb 2021) • PD for teachers on inquiry-based learning intervention (Interest Academy) • Teachers decide on inquiry-based learning project at OCV sites **Continual support** • Intensive remote support for Interest Academy pilot (i.e. PAL/LSS) • Email support, as necessary i.e. PAL coach and LSC • Weekly prompts on Google classroom by central program staff (PAL and LSS) **Program activities** • IA teacher implements pilot over an approximate 6 week period • Central program staff coordinates remote visits with teachers as necessary • Online teacher community and collaboration on Google classroom (S&LT) • Students complete IA self-assessment and highlight student voice through showcase/Learning Fair.	• Teachers in IA classrooms feel more informed regarding students' needs, in particular identified gifted learner needs • Students with giftedness in IA classrooms have better understanding of themselves as learners • All students in IA classrooms, including gifted learners, are more connected, engaged and motivated in their learning	**Staff focus group** • N=x teachers (@ end of intervention) factors: challenges and barriers in implementation of pilot at OCV sites • question route exploring their students' experiences in inquiry based learning project **Parent/Guardian** Survey (of both identified gifted and not identified students) • factors measuring their child's connectedness, engagement, motivation in IA classroom **Student assessment** • self-reflective assessment (factors measuring connection, self-engagement, motivation, awareness of personal learning style) **student voice** • Sharing fair/showcase	Overarching... • Did the inquiry-based learning intervention support the needs of all learners in participating IA classrooms, including gifted learners? • What organizational conditions positively impacted the implementation of the IA pilot at the OCV sites? Specific... • What benefits/challenges did teachers experience with the implementation of Interest Academy? ◦ Would a teacher participate again? Recommend to others? ◦ Were teachers more engaged? ◦ Did teachers have a better understanding of gifted and nongifted learner needs in IA Classrooms? • What benefits/challenges did teachers observe through their students' participation in the IA pilot? • What benefits/challenges did students experience through participation in the inquiry-based learning intervention? ◦ Were students engaged with the intervention? ◦ What did students learn about themselves throughout the pilot? • What benefits/challenges did parents/guardians observe through their child's participation in the IA pilot? • Were there any changes in student learning observed at home, since participation in the pilot? • How well did the IA pilot fit with the curriculum? • Is this pilot format useful to teachers?

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Transportation

Purpose of the Standard
To provide details of the Board's transportation policies to the Ministry and to the public.

Transportation providers must, in all respects, meet the requirements of federal and provincial legislation, regulations and standards governing student transportation using vans, school buses and public transit. They must also comply with relevant Ministry of Education requirements and Board policies and procedures governing student safety and transportation.

The Ottawa Student Transportation Authority (OSTA) is responsible for the provision and administration of all Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) transportation services.

The OCDSB Policy P.127.TRA, Ottawa Student Transportation Authority, establishes the authority of the OSTA to act as the Board's agent with respect to the provision of transportation services to students of the OCDSB. Outlined in this policy the OCDSB recognizes the Ministry of Education requirement for the provision of safe, effective and efficient student transportation services through a consortia delivery model. Delivery of transportation services is detailed in a Service Level Agreement (SLA). The OCDSB has responsibility for service standards to be included in the SLA including but not limited to: eligibility standards based on distance address and program; bell time changes of more than 10 minutes; and accessible transportation for students with special needs. Through this policy the OCDSB delegates authority to its representatives on the OSTA Board of Directors to create policies and procedures as required to fulfill the service requirements, as well as other elements required to maintain the OSTA organization.

Information about OSTA may be found on their website at Ottawa Student Transportation Authority. More specifically, the following OSTA policies relate to the provision of accessible transportation:

- T10 Stakeholder Responsibility
- T14 Transportation Services
- T15 Transportation of Service Animals
- T18 Transportation Eligibility
- T21 Accessible Transportation

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- [T22 Transportation for Students in a Joint Custody Arrangement and Living in Two Homes](#)

The Board encourages the integration of students with special education needs with other students in regular programs as much as possible. This is also true in transportation, where students with special education needs may be assigned to yellow bus or public transit, with accommodations. In the event integration is not possible, the Board agrees to provide specialized/accessible transportation for students with special education needs for whom the Board has received an acceptable medical certificate and/or the Learning Support Services Department has determined that regular transportation is not the best option for a student given the nature of the student's disability or safety concerns.

Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), individual school transportation plans are required for students with disabilities to ensure that accessible and appropriate transportation services are provided to them. To request specialized transportation, a Student Request for Accessible Transportation and Personalized Accessibility Plan form must be completed in consultation with the parent(s)/guardian(s) of students with disabilities. Requests for students with disabilities must be approved by the Board's Learning Support Services Department. Medical requests should be directed to the school principal for approval by the school's Superintendent of Instruction. In addition, transportation operators must comply with all AODA requirements.

The OCDSB [Procedure PR.686.SCO, Use of Service Animals for Students](#) outlines the process for developing a transportation plan that includes the transportation of service animals.

To ensure the safety of special needs students, drivers shall deliver each student into the care of a responsible adult. Should any student require assistance getting on, or off the bus, such assistance must be provided by the parent(s)/guardian(s) or school personnel. In the event that a responsible adult is not available, the driver shall report this to OSTA.

Older students in grades 9-12 are exempted from this requirement providing the parent/guardian has given written permission to OSTA, and the school concurs the student does not require supervision when on their own.

For some students with special education needs it may be most appropriate for transportation to be provided separately from other students. School teams carefully consider these circumstances and document a request for solo transportation on the

Student Request for Accessible Transportation and Personalized Accessibility Plan form. These requests require approval from the Superintendent of Instructions or the Manager of Learning Support Services.

A Transition Plan ensures steps are being taken to help the student develop the necessary skills to return to group transportation, whether riding with other students in a van, or taking mass transportation on yellow bus or public transit. Each student's ability to access transportation is reviewed annually.

Any special equipment used to ensure the safety of the student while being transported must be properly fitted for the size, weight and/or age of the student. Parents / guardians and school staff are responsible for ensuring the equipment is securely fastened. Parents / guardians must approve the use of any such equipment such as a buckle guard, a harness, car seat, booster seat, etc.

Students in specialized program classes in schools outside their home communities, as supported by Board policy, may be provided transportation without reference to distance units. Students residing within 800m from their designated school may be assessed for their ability to walk to school, with support, on an annual basis. The Board provides transportation for special needs students enrolled in the Summer Learning Program and Education and Community Partnership Program (ECPP). Students attending Provincial or Demonstration schools are transported by the Board. Provincial and Demonstration schools are operated for students who are deaf, blind, or deaf-blind, or who have severe learning disabilities, which may include attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Drivers must complete a Vulnerable Sector Check and participate in sensitivity training and other specialized training when dealing with students with special needs. The OCDSB actively supports and participates in any region-wide school vehicle safety committee or initiatives with a view to improving the uniformity of school bus safety procedures and to assisting school bus drivers to improve their management of students.