



COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (PUBLIC)

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Report No. 24-052

Program Review Process at the Elementary Level

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PURPOSE:

1. The following report seeks the approval of the Board of Trustees for the initiation of an elementary program review to commence in the spring of 2024. The program review process at the elementary level (grades 1-8 inclusive) is the first of four stages of a 'vision exercise' for the District. The other stages of the vision to be addressed in subsequent school years, from start to success, include: early years and childcare; secondary (grades 9-12 inclusive); and, adult and continuing education.

In response to the expressed desire to review programs and/or services offered at the elementary level as a priority, system-wide, by members of the Board of Trustees and Senior Staff, the report provides:

- an overview of current programs offered at the elementary level;
- guiding principles for consideration in the elementary program review; and,
- a detailed 'critical path' for the operationalization of the elementary program review.

STRATEGIC LINKS:

2. The OCDSB's Strategic Plan for 2023-2027 makes a strong commitment to improving program quality and accessibility. The need to review current programming options was a recurring theme during the strategic plan consultation in the winter and spring of 2023, as outlined in the [Report#23-029: 2023-2027 Strategic Plan Consultation Report](#). A comprehensive review of elementary program offerings, enrolment patterns, and achievement data, with a view to improving program quality and accessibility, is a fundamental step in achieving this strategic priority.

CONTEXT:

3. The OCDSB offers a variety of programs at the elementary level. Over the past quarter century, the number and placement of programs has grown considerably, resulting in a patchwork of school configurations and grade structures, as well as program offerings. In that same period, the City has experienced large population growth outside of the Greenbelt, and some redistribution of population within the Greenbelt. The demographics of the community have also changed and the City of Ottawa now benefits from a much more diverse population. Over that same period, the District's understanding of pedagogy has become richer, more inclusive, and more aware of the socio-emotional importance of education, along with systemic and structural barriers which adversely impact achievement and well-being for some groups of students.

As part of the strategic plan consultation in 2023, the OCDSB invited students, parents/guardians and caregivers, as well as staff, to share their thoughts about public education in Ottawa. Their feedback highlighted the value the community places on program quality and accessibility. In many respects, this input was a call to action for the District. While the current program model has, over the past quarter century, served the needs of many in the community, we know that many others have been underserved. There is an immediate need to rethink what programming the District offers, how and where it is offered, whose needs are served, and how schools may be redesigned to better meet the needs of current and future generations.

On Saturday 24 February 2024, the Board of Trustees and Senior Staff held a day-long retreat at Gloucester High School to engage in professional learning about elementary programming with a view to undertaking a comprehensive program review. Attached as Appendix A is the background document which formed the basis for that day. Over the course of the morning, trustees and staff reviewed program offerings and explored data on school configurations, enrolment patterns and trends, retention rates, and special education. In the afternoon, working in small groups, there was time to discuss the opportunities and challenges that could come with a program review, ways to undertake effective community engagement, and the values which could inform the development of guiding principles. A few key observations from these discussions include:

- the District's huge geographic area, which includes rural, suburban, and urban communities, is a factor for consideration in terms of program accessibility;
- the wide variation in the size, age, layout and functionality of school buildings impacts boundaries and program offerings;
- the current number of grade configurations and the combination of program offerings creates both a challenge and an opportunity for any program review;
- the current program model is no longer serving the needs of all members of the community;
- the sustainability of the current program model and the responsible use of the District's resources will need to be considered in the program review process; and,
- strong communication plan will be needed to support meaningful community engagement in a program review at the elementary level.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

4. The elementary program review must focus on improved program quality and accessibility for all students, including marginalized and/or underserved groups, which is an integral part of 'learning' and a key area of focus. The 'core values' of inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility, as well as community building and the responsible utilization of resources (human/material/fiscal) throughout the organization are key drivers for the review process.

5. Current Program Offerings

The District's elementary program framework is established in policy, as outlined in [P.139.CUR](#). At the elementary level, the District currently offers six programs, along with a continuum of special education supports, classes and/or programming. A summary of the programs offered is noted below:

<p>Full Day Kindergarten</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 50% English & 50% French 	<p>English with Core French</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Starts in Gr 1 ● 40 min Core French per day 	<p>Early French Immersion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Starts in Gr 1 (entry point) with 80% French/20% English ● Grades 2-6 - 60% French/40% English ● Grades 7/8 - 50% French/50% English
<p>Middle French Immersion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Starts in Gr 4 (entry point) with 66% French & 34% English ● Grades 7/8 - 50% French & 50% English 	<p>Alternative Program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● K-6 in 4 schools ● 7/8 in 1 school ● Tenets shape the program ● 40 min Core French per day 	<p>Ottawa-Carleton Virtual School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● K-8 ● 50% English & 50% French

The nature of these offerings, along with enrolment data, school configuration data, along with achievement data and more are described in detail in Appendix A.

6. Community School Model

The District's policy for elementary programming champions a "designated community school model" providing programming options for students as close as possible to their home. Every elementary school has a defined geographic attendance boundary for each program that it offers. However, the geographic boundaries may differ by program. This is where the community school model becomes more complex, and has some students travelling long distances to access programs and other students having a fulsome range of program choices within walking distance. For students in the Alternative Program, in classes for English as a Second Language (ESL) and/or English Literacy Development (ELD) Programs, or in Specialized Program Classes (SPCs), the requirement to travel long distances is more likely to be the norm. A program review offers an opportunity to reassess the conception and definition of community schools, as well as the extent of students' travel distances to/from school. It is a forward-thinking approach to boundaries and programming that sets direction for the future.

7. Special Education

The majority of the District's students with special education needs are served through programming at their community school in the regular classroom. The District also runs 143 elementary Specialized Program Classes (SPCs) which accommodate approximately 2000 students, system-wide. There are 11 types of elementary SPCs that support students with specific exceptionalities and/or learning profiles. While SPCs can be partially integrated, the majority are fully self-contained with limited opportunity for the integration of students.

Growing bodies of research - and trends provincially, nationally and globally - challenge the notion that specialized program classes have the impact for which they are intended (i.e., ability grouping to meet learning needs, efficient allocation of resources). Increasingly, school districts are understanding that specialized classes can also segregate students from their peers, limit student access to curriculum or growth opportunities, force students to be transported out of their communities, and reinforce stereotypes and stigma. While program classes that are specialized may serve specific needs in some cases, they often require a greater number of transitions for students and do not foster inclusive learning environments. The above issues are to be explored in the program review.

8. English as a Second Language/English Literacy Development

English as a Second Language (ESL) and/or English Literacy Development (ELD) services and supports are provided to students identified as multilingual learners using the Ontario Ministry of Education's Steps to Language Proficiency (STEP) framework as a guideline.

Students identified as multilingual learners and as having limited prior schooling (for ELD) may receive supports and interventions in a regular classroom (for ESL and ELD) or in a semi-congregated class (for ELD in some instances). The location of the class is dependent on the needs of the learner and the program availability, system-wide.

9. Review of Program Offerings

A review of elementary programming is overdue for the District. The current program model was established over two decades ago and has undergone numerous structured and ad hoc revisions, sometimes with a system focus and sometimes with a school focus. The result is a complex model which does not fully align with the Board's commitment to community-based schools, program quality, as well as equity of access and opportunity. A program review is an opportunity for the District to consider the following questions to determine whether the current program model serves the needs of the community:

- Are the academic needs of students being met effectively by the current program model?
- Does the current program model provide equitable access to educational opportunities for all students, regardless of background or ability?
- How does the current program model address the diverse learning styles and needs of students within the community?
- Are there any gaps or areas for improvement in the current program model, as identified by student performance data, parent feedback, or other indicators?
- To what extent does the current program model promote social-emotional learning and well-being among students?
- Are there any specific needs or priorities within the community that are not adequately addressed by the current program model?
- How does the current program model support the inclusion of students with disabilities or special needs?
- Are there opportunities to enhance family and community engagement within the current program model?
- How does the current program model align with best practices in elementary education and educational research?
- Is the current program model sustainable from a resourcing perspective?

10. Possible Outcomes

While it is premature to determine possible outcomes, it is reasonable to expect that a program review could lead to any of the following:

- **Maintain the status quo:** The review may affirm the effectiveness of certain aspects of the current program model, leading to minimal or no changes.
- **Adjustments, enhancements and/or restructuring:** The review may identify opportunities to make adjustments or enhancements to the current program model based on feedback and/or input from stakeholders and analysis of data and best practices. This could range from minor adjustments to the status quo or a major restructuring of elementary program offerings.
- **Exploration of other models:** The review may prompt exploration of other program models or approaches that better align with the needs and priorities of the community.

The nature of the recommendations will impact how any potential changes would be implemented.

11. Pupil Accommodation Guidelines

The Ministry of Education’s Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline (PARG) (2018) will influence how this work might be approached and decisions that may be implemented. The guideline was introduced to provide a structured framework for district school boards to follow when considering changes to school facilities, such as program changes, closures, consolidations and/or boundary adjustments. Deliberations with Ministry representatives will be required throughout the process, including the potential for a phased-in approach to any recommendations that may take place through the program review process. It will also be important to benefit from the experiences and lessons of previous reviews as context for the move forward.

12. Developing a Critical Path for Elementary Program Review

Recognizing the keen interest in this worthy endeavour and the amount of work involved in making recommendation(s), as well as the implementation of decision(s) made, a critical path has been developed for the program review process at the elementary level with a view to implementation beginning in the fall of 2025 if/as required.

April 2024: Decision to Conduct the Elementary Program Review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● formal decision made by the District to initiate the review process ● announcement sent out to stakeholders, including parents, staff, and community members, informing them of the decision to conduct the review ● reach out to existing advisory committees of the District regarding the program review
April-June 2024: Active Community Engagement Campaign
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● community engagement strategy developed and implemented, including town hall meetings, surveys, focus groups, and online discussions (April) ● trustees host zone meetings in their communities to gather input and feedback from constituents (May) ● a day for school engagement held across all schools in the District to involve students and families in the review process (June)
Summer 2024: Analysis and Synthesis of Feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● review and synthesize feedback collected during the active community engagement campaign (July & August)
September - November 2024: Decision on Program Delivery Model
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● presentation of preliminary report to trustees for discussion and feedback (September) ● preparation of additional reports if/as required (October) ● trustees presented with recommendation(s) for consideration by staff and a decision(s) made by Board on the new program delivery model (November)

Winter 2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implementation planning for operationalization of decision(s) begins, including development of implementation timelines, resource allocation plans, and communication strategies. • coordination of academic staffing; provision of information to the Ottawa Student Transportation Authority (OSTA); other operational details
Spring - Summer 2025: Implementation Preparation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • oversight of transition preparations, including logistics planning, staff training, curriculum modifications, facility upgrades, and communication with stakeholders about changes
Fall 2025: Implementation Begins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implementation of new program delivery model at the elementary level, may be phased • ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the implementation process, with adjustments made as needed to address challenges and optimize outcomes

13. Guiding Principles for Consideration

Based on the extensive community feedback received during the strategic planning consultations, and the ideas raised in the retreat discussions, the following draft guiding principles have been developed based upon the key focus areas - learning, social responsibility and well-being - of the current strategic plan:

- **Learning**
 - o Strive to continuously improve the quality and accessibility of programs and/or services to meet the diverse needs of students and promote equitable educational opportunities, monitoring progress and adjusting strategies to improve learning outcomes and promote student success.
 - o Address systemic barriers by identifying and dismantling structures that hinder equity of access and opportunity to a quality education for all students.
 - o Promote universal design for learning and differentiated instruction, along with culturally-relevant and responsive pedagogy, in the design/redesign of programs, facilities and services that ensure accessibility for students of all backgrounds, abilities, readiness levels and learning styles.
- **Social Responsibility**
 - o Embrace a community-based school philosophy, fostering authentic, strong connections with the local community to create inclusive and supportive teaching and learning environments that reflect the values and needs of the community.
 - o Recognize, respect and integrate Indigenous perspectives and knowledge, skills and teachings throughout the curriculum and school practices to honor cultural diversity and promote cultural competency.

- o Allocate resources strategically to support student learning and well-being, ensuring equitable distribution and maximizing the impact of available resources (human/material/fiscal).
- **Well-Being**
 - o Prioritize the genuine interests and lived experiences of students at the forefront of all decision-making processes, as a student-driven approach, ensuring their voices are heard and respected.
 - o Endeavour to minimize and/or reduce unnecessary transitions and disruptions in students' educational experiences in order to ensure continuity, stability, and a sense of belonging.
 - o Ensure schools are easily accessible for students, minimizing transportation barriers and promoting walkability, physical activity and community engagement.

These guiding principles overlap by key area of focus, to a great extent, and ensure that the elementary program review process is student-centred, inclusive, and focused on creating equitable and enriching educational experiences for all students, system-wide.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

14. Conducting a comprehensive program review will require a significant investment of staff time from many departments and/or portfolios. A project implementation team including educators, administrators, planners, and communications staff will be established. In order to effectively manage the review, and keep the project on track, it is anticipated that some staff members may need to be reallocated to serve on a full-time basis for the duration of the process. This reallocation will necessitate backfilling their regular positions. Additional costs will be associated with the community engagement campaign. For the current school year, it is anticipated that these costs can be managed within existing budgets, but additional funds will need to be allocated in the 2024-2025 budget. Looking forward, changes to the elementary program model are likely to require significant investments to implement it - overlay staff, new learning resources, capital improvements, etcetera. The nature and extent of these will be considered through the program review period.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

15. A comprehensive program review is enhanced by a community engagement strategy, which ensures diverse perspectives, ideas, and input from stakeholders is in place to inform decision-making aspects. This will require multiple communication channels to reach and engage with stakeholders effectively, such as emails, newsletters, social media platforms, school websites, and community forums. Feedback mechanisms will be accessible and inclusive, accommodating diverse perspectives and preferences.

Active Community Engagement Campaign (April-June 2024)

i. Build Awareness: (April 2024)

With the release of the report, there will be information shared about the program review as an agenda item. With the decision to proceed, information will be shared District-wide via email, newsletters, and social media platforms to inform students, parents, and staff about the upcoming elementary program review. The engage.ocdsb platform will be updated to include an overview of the review process, objectives and timelines. It will also provide information and resource materials including reports, resource guide, FAQ, how to ask questions, etc.

ii. Presentations to Advisory Committees: (April - June 2024)

Staff will be reaching out to the District advisory committees, including the Parent Involvement Committee (PIC), Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), Alternative Schools Advisory Committee (ASAC), Indigenous Education Council (IEC), the Advisory Committee on Equity (ACE), Arts Advisory Committee, and the Student Senate. These presentations will provide committee members with an overview of the program review process and an opportunity for discussion related to feedback and/or input provided.

iii. School Engagement Time/Day: (May - June 2024)

Designate a specific time/day for schools within the District to focus on the program review. This time/day will provide students and families with the opportunity to learn more about the review process and share their thoughts and ideas.

iv. School Board Trustee Zone Meetings: (May - June 2024)

Coordinate with school board trustees to host zone meetings in their respective communities. These meetings will serve as opportunities for trustees to engage directly with constituents, gather feedback, and answer questions about the program review process. Staff will be working with trustees to make these arrangements.

v. Online Engagement: (May - June 2024)

Establish opportunities for online participation to share and prioritize thoughts and ideas. This virtual engagement opportunity supports participation of students, parents/guardians/caregivers, staff, and community members who may not want to attend a meeting, but want to voice their opinions, ask questions, and engage in meaningful dialogue about the elementary program review.

vi. Ongoing Communication and Updates: (April 2024 - November 2025)

Maintain regular communication and updates throughout the program review process via email, newsletters, social media, and the District website. Provide information about upcoming events, progress reports, and opportunities for engagement and participation.

More specific dates, locations, and other related information will become available in the days and weeks following the deliberation on this item.

The feedback collected from stakeholders over the next three months will be consolidated in a report which synthesizes key themes, insights, and ideas. The findings of the engagement campaign will be shared with trustees and senior staff, as well as the broader community. Feedback and/or input will be sought on the proposed recommendations in the fall of 2024 before finalizing and implementing any potential changes to programs at the elementary level.

RECOMMENDATION:

- A. THAT an Elementary Program Review be undertaken, as outlined in Report 24-052, beginning in April 2024 with the intent of implementation beginning in September 2025.

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the Board

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Elementary Program Review Booklet