



OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD



Consultation Report

September 10, 2024

2024 OCDSB ELEMENTARY PROGRAM REVIEW



Report No. 24-101

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Consultation Overview

The consultation for the elementary program review sought to be inclusive and respectful of all members of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) community, staff, and students. The purpose of the consultation was to receive input from the OCDSB community

about current elementary programming that could improve program quality and accessibility for all students. To capture fulsome and representative input on the elementary program review, multiple consultation pathways were used. In total, the review captured input from **4,294 respondents**. Groups were asked specific questions that differed based on their identified demographic group (e.g., parent/caregiver, OCDSB staff, student, community member). The consultation pathways resulted in ample input that was synthesized and themes were extrapolated from each respective pathway.

IN TOTAL, THE
REVIEW CAPTURED
INPUT FROM
4,294
RESPONDENTS

The perspectives and opinions outlined in this report reflect the input received through the consultation about elementary programming. Please be aware that these views may not accurately represent the actual operations of OCDSB programs and structures.

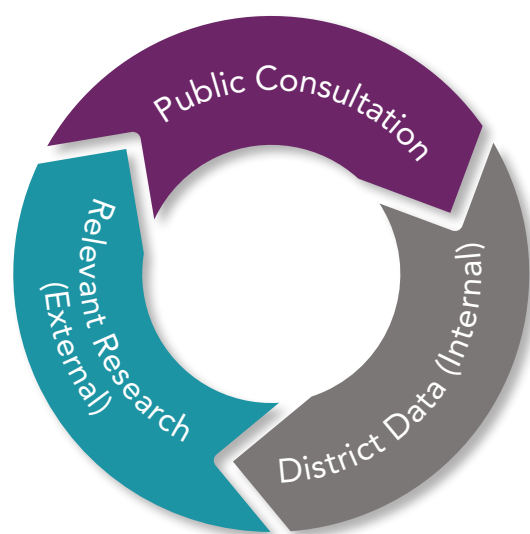
Context

As part of the renewed strategic planning process in 2023, the OCDSB invited students, parents/guardians and caregivers, and 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 programming has, over the past quarter century, served the needs of many in the community, many in the community have also been underserved.

As such, the public feedback indicated 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.


Resultantly, this consultation report serves as one of three fundamental sources that provides an in-depth, inclusive analysis of the current program offerings at the OCDSB. The three fundamental sources that inform the elementary program review, and subsequent implementation of any changes, are 1.) public consultation, 2.) district data (internal), and 3.) relevant research (external).

Each of these sources will be covered and represented in a report that informs the development of a program model(s) and the direction of the District. This report provides insights offered through the OCDSB's public consultation.



Thematic Analysis

All consultation pathways resulted in qualitative data. Relying on qualitative data allowed for a more thorough, in-depth, and complex understanding of the views, beliefs, and opinions of participants (Creswell, 2003). Given the breadth of data, a thematic analysis was undertaken to extrapolate key themes from the various consultation pathways. Thematic analysis “is a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (‘themes’) within qualitative data” (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p. 297; see also Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Thematic analysis was especially useful due to the rich



and copious data. The aim of thematic analysis is not “simply to summarize the data content, but to identify, and interpret, key, but not necessarily all, features of the data” (p. 297). There are commonly six phases in thematic analysis which are comprised of familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 87-93; see also Braun, Clark, Hayfield & Terry, 2018; Patton, 2014). Ultimately, the approach chosen for this report was a thematic identification process that relies on identifying patterns of recurring ideas that are then grouped into broader themes. As such, the themes present are among the most common that emerged in this process. It was not within the scope of this consultation period to employ interpretive frameworks or theoretical approaches to analyze and interpret the themes themselves. As such, this thematic analysis sought to generate semantic themes. With semantic themes, the data analyst “is not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said or what has been written” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.84; see also Byrne, 2022). The production of semantic themes is a descriptive analysis of the data, aimed solely at presenting the content of the data as communicated by the respondents. In addition to the themes represented in the report, select quotes are included from respondents to supplement and further ground the themes in the voices of those who participated. These quotes further exemplify the themes that emerged throughout the analysis of the data. Where applicable/available, demographic information is included alongside the quote.

Given the multiple consultation pathways, and in particular, the numerous participant groups involved (e.g., parents/caregivers, staff members, community members, students, etc.), it is common that themes from one group may conflict with those of another, and sometimes, even within the demographic group itself. This is common among semantic theming as it presents the content of the data as communicated by the respondent. It is imperative to report on and share these themes for the sake of transparency, regardless of any contradictions that may emerge between and amongst them. Sharing these thematic contradictions also minimizes the potential for any confirmation bias from the thematic analysis as it presents numerous lenses and positions that afford a fulsome view of lived experiences. As a result, what follows are the thematic categories emergent from each pathway that was used in the consultation process.



Overall Themes

There were a total of **292 themes across all consultation pathways**. Through further analysis, all of these themes can be grouped into **seven thematic categories** that encompass the input for this phase of the consultation process. Below, the seven themes are listed along with their descriptions:

Accessibility & Inclusion:

Represents sentiments around access to programming as well as considerations of who is being included and excluded, and who is being served or underserved, in programs and classrooms

Administration and Structure

Covers the sentiments around District specific considerations, such as transportation, policies and procedures, budget considerations, and questions of accountability.

Communication:

Represents public input on the need for transparency about the review, and ensuring parents/caregivers receive timely communication around program changes and decisions. This theme also speaks to building relationships of trust with parents/caregivers through regular communication.

Language Acquisition:

Encapsulates the input related to language programming. Sub-themes in this category represent both positive and negative input around language programming, as well as consideration around the capacity for language acquisition.



Program Quality:

Covers questions and sentiments from the public around perceptions on the successes or failures of current programming and suggestions for improvement of current program quality. Sub-themes within this category provide constructive feedback for all programs, as well as areas for improvement in a revised model.

Special Education:

Covers the input from the public about special education programming, concerns around this programming, and potential for improvement (e.g., resource/support allocation). Sub-themes in this category emphasized the importance of special education programming and the significance of its preservation and the impacts of any changes on students within the program and those within mainstream programs when integration is discussed.

Resources and Support:

Represents the sentiments around the need for increased, improved, and/or reinvisioned resource and support allocation across the District. Sub-themes in this category expressed where further support is needed and where support could be reallocated.

Engage OCDSB

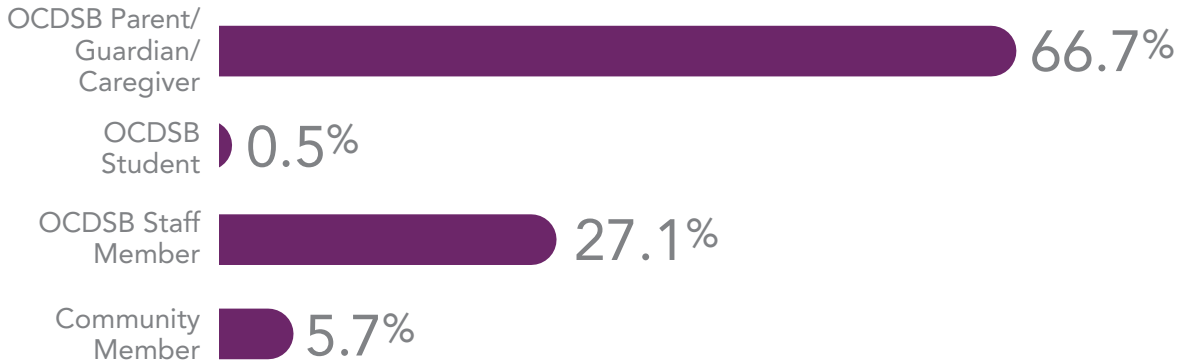
The OCDSB conducted an online survey that was open to the public from April 12, 2024 to June 28, 2024. This survey sought input from parents/caregivers, students, staff, and community members on current elementary programming. Each demographic group was prompted with different questions; if they were connected to the OCDSB in multiple ways (e.g., parent and a staff member), they were able to complete the survey more than once. To inform preliminary thinking dictated by public input, the thematic analysis was broken down into two reporting periods. Responses (n = 1,175) submitted between April 12, 2024 to May 1, 2024 were analyzed and themed during the months of May and June. Once the survey closed, responses (n = 1,206) from May 1, 2024 - June 28, 2024 were subsequently analyzed and themed over the summer. This allowed us to monitor how public discourse was shifting and changing within the OCDSB community. In total, 2,381 contributions were collected through the Engage OCDSB survey.



Note: In the thematic analysis *for the period of April 12, 2024 - May 1, 2024*, *students* are not represented as a demographic as there were *too few responses* at that time. In addition, Early French Immersion and Middle French Immersion are combined into one category due to the consistency of overlapping themes and a general lower response rate from Middle French Immersion responses. In what follows, you will find the thematic analysis represented for the two reporting periods. Themes are broken down by demographic (e.g., parents/caregiver, OCDSB staff member, etc.), and then subsequently by the question posed to the specific demographic group.

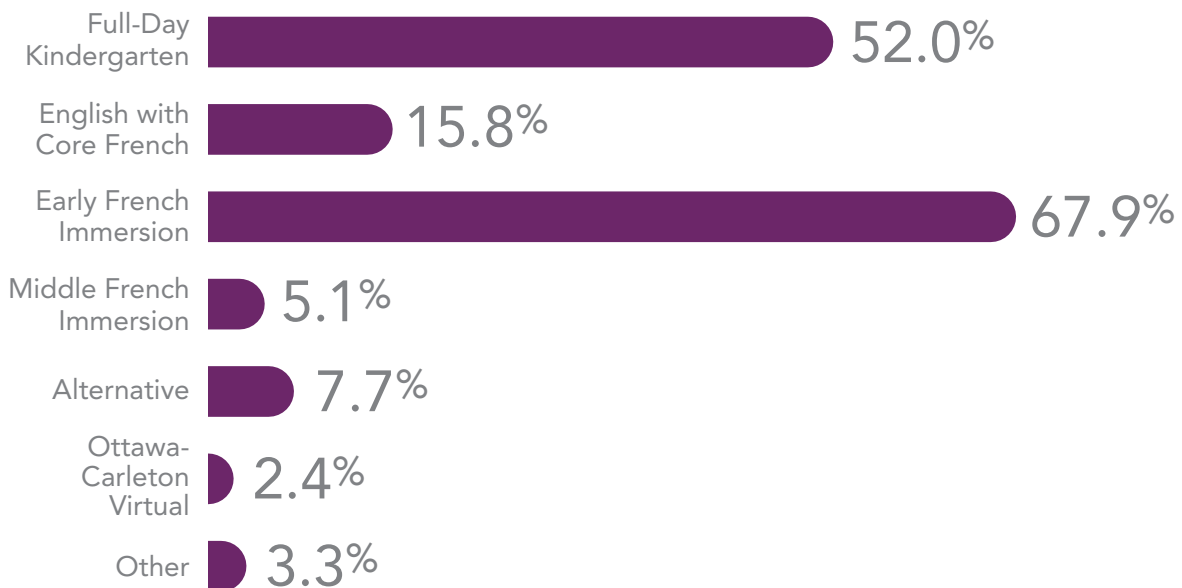
Total Respondent Demographics

3. How are you connected to the OCDSB? REQUIRED

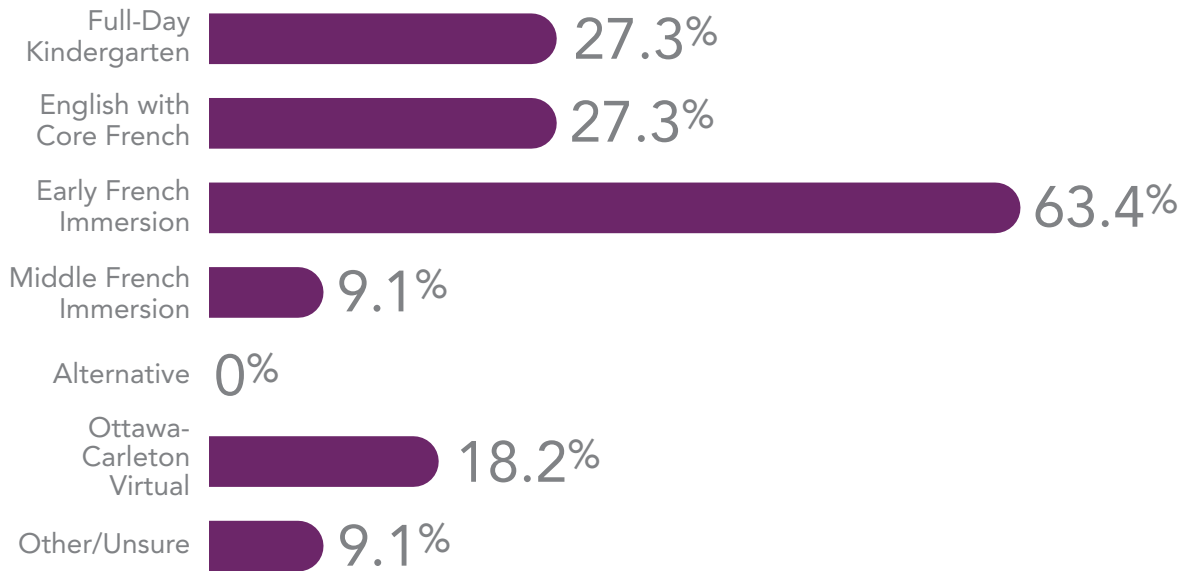


PARENTS

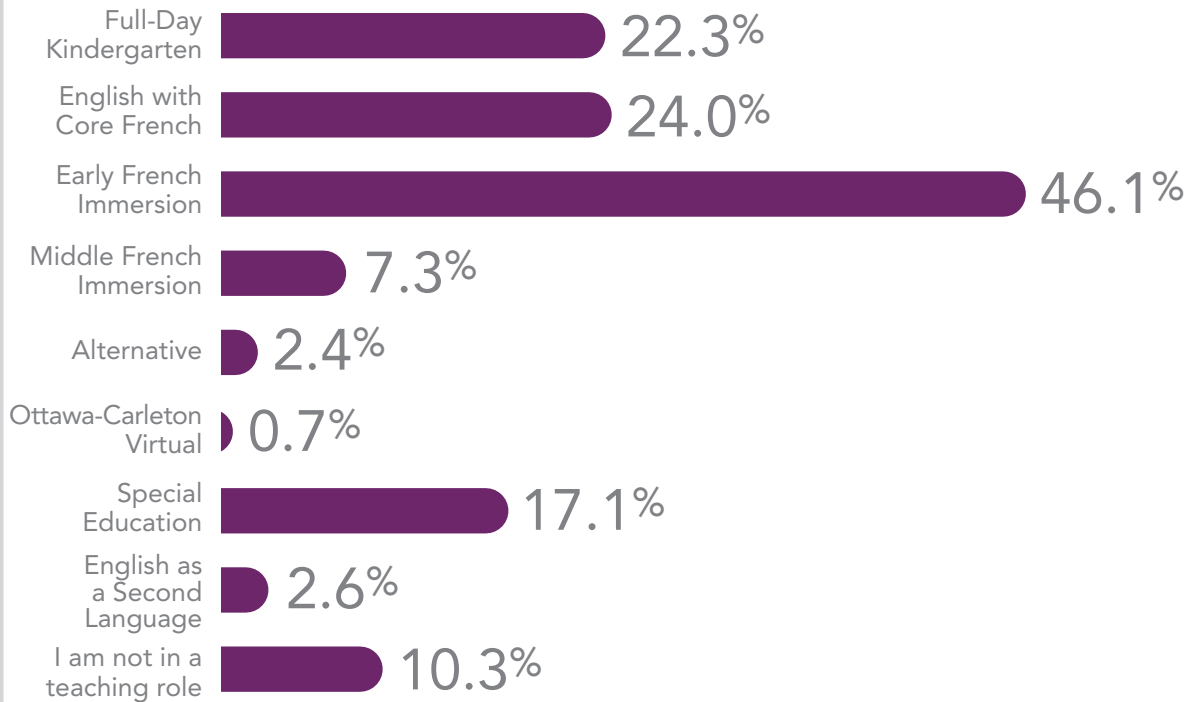
4. Which program(s) does/did your child attend in elementary school? (Check all that apply) REQUIRED



6. Which program(s) do/did you attend in elementary school? (Check all that apply) REQUIRED



10. Which program(s) do you teach?(Check all that apply) REQUIRED



11. In which language(s) do you teach? (Check all that apply) REQUIRED



Parents/Caregivers (April 12, 2024 - May 1, 2024)



What factors are or were important to you when choosing the program(s) for your child(ren)?

Parents/caregivers indicated that they chose the **Early French Immersion (EFI) and **Middle French Immersion (MFI)** programs for the following thematic reasons:**

Bilingual Advantage

The majority of parents/caregivers believed that being bilingual, especially in English and French, is a significant advantage in Ottawa and cited this as a significant reason for choosing the EFI or MFI program. They noted that bilingualism was a way to secure more opportunities for their children in the future.

Early Language Acquisition

Some parents/caregivers cited research that they indicated confirms that their children can more effectively pick up additional languages at an earlier age. They believed that starting French early would provide a strong foundation for their children's language skills.

Academic Challenge

Some parents/caregivers chose the EFI or MFI program because they wanted their children to be in an academically challenging environment. They believe that learning a second language can stimulate cognitive development and that these program options would support their children in this way.

Cultural Connection

Many parents/caregivers believe that learning French helps their children connect with the bilingual nature of Canada and appreciate the country's cultural diversity. Parents/caregivers often referenced Ottawa as a bilingual hub and the need for not only understanding both English and French, but the cultural connection to the French language in Canada's history.

School Reputation and Support

The reputation of the school, the quality of teachers, and the support available for students also influenced parents'/caregivers' decisions to select the EFI/MFI

programs. Some parents/caregivers mentioned the importance of special education support and the availability of before and after school care as motivators for selecting the EFI or MFI program as well.

Proximity to Home

Community schools were important to some parents/caregivers. They indicated that the location of the school was a factor for selecting the EFI or MFI program, as it was present in their community school.

Respondent Quotes

“It’s important for our English-speaking family to expose our children to as much French as possible, whilst still being able to properly support them in their schooling.”

“Early French Immersion was the reason we choose [sic] the OCDSB. Living in the nation’s capital, it is important to have a working knowledge and understanding of a second language in French.”

“We live in an area where our English public school and catholic school boards are extremely close together. When deciding which school to enrol in, our decision was made primarily on our school’s offering of early French immersion since research has repeatedly shown children can more effectively pick up additional languages at an earlier age.”

Parents/caregivers indicated that they chose the **English with Core French** program for the following thematic reasons:

Language Proficiency at Home

Some parents/caregivers mentioned that they or their partners did not speak French at home, making it difficult to support their children’s learning in a French Immersion program. As such, they felt the English with Core French program was the most appropriate and suitable for their family, as this proficiency was not required of them.

Special Education Needs Considerations

Some parents/caregivers chose the English with Core French program because their children have learning disabilities, language delays, or special education needs that they felt would be better supported in an English program without the added pressure of immersion. They believed that their child might struggle with French language acquisition while trying to juggle their various other challenges.

Child's Interest and Ability

Several parents/caregivers mentioned their child's lack of interest in learning French or their belief that their child would struggle with French Immersion as reasons for choosing the English with Core French program over the EFI or MFI programs offered by the District.

Concerns about Pressure and Stress

Some parents/caregivers believed that the French Immersion programs put too much pressure on children, especially those without French support at home. They believed this would adversely affect their student's mental health and also impact their success in education.

Desire for Strong English Foundation

Some parents/caregivers wanted their children to have a solid foundation in English before introducing a second language. They believed that choosing an EFI/MFI program could inhibit their English literacy skills if they had to focus on more than one language at a time.

Diversity and Inclusion

Some parents/caregivers expressed concerns about the inclusivity of French Immersion programs, particularly for children with disabilities or visible differences. They viewed these programs as being exclusionary and not conducive to learning for children with special education needs or inadequate support.

Availability of Programs

Some parents/caregivers mentioned that English with Core French was the only program available in their local community. They indicated that, were other options available to them, they might have made a different choice.

“

Respondent Quotes

"I don't know how to speak French at all. So I can't help speak the language at home. The only place my kids daily get the opportunity to learn French is at school."

"One child has an LD and is Dyslexic. English with core French was chosen to help her focus her Early reading skills in one language to maximize her success."

"The closest school to our home offers English with Core French and EFI, but we were only in the catchment zone for the English with Core French program (at Connaught). The closest EFI school (Devonshire) is twice as far from our home."

”

Parents/caregivers indicated that they chose the **Full-Day Kindergarten** program, specifically, for the following thematic reasons:

Early French Immersion (EFI) Opportunity

This is the most frequently mentioned factor mentioned by the majority of parents/caregivers for selecting the Full-Day kindergarten program. Parents/caregivers value the opportunity for their children to learn a second language at an early age. They believe that early exposure to French will lead to better fluency and confidence in the language, which is particularly important in a bilingual city like Ottawa.

Bilingualism

Many parents/caregivers indicated that they want their children to be fully bilingual and comfortable communicating in both French and English. They believe that being bilingual will provide their children with more opportunities in the future, especially in the job market.

Community and Location

Some parents/caregivers expressed that they prefer their children to attend a local, community school. They value the sense of community and the convenience of a nearby location.

Special Education Needs

Some parents/caregivers chose the Full-Day kindergarten program due to the support for children with special education needs or learning disabilities. They value individualized instruction and access to specialized resources.

Respondent Quotes

“Early French immersion is critical. The earlier that kids learn their second language, the easier it is for (most) to gain fluency.”

“Our priorities are that our children attend the closest community school (neighbours) and receive a strong education in french.”

“Good overall quality. I am not from Ottawa and am not sure anywhere else in the country (without the public service as the main employer) would have the same kinder model. I think it works here.”

Parents/caregivers indicated that they chose the **Alternative** program, specifically, for the following thematic reasons:

Smaller Class Sizes

Some parents/caregivers appreciated the smaller class sizes in the Alternative program, which they believe can provide a more personalized and focused learning environment for their children.

Specialized Education

Some parents/caregivers chose the Alternative program because it offers specialized education that caters to their children's specific needs. Some examples that they provided included different teaching methods, resources, or curriculum that are not typically found in mainstream programs that they indicated served their students better.

Community Feel

Some parents/caregivers appreciated the community feel of the Alternative program, with children being able to participate in school/community events and having access to nature. They indicated that this created a sense of belonging for their students that they did not feel or experience in the mainstream classroom.

Respondent Quotes

"Customized, specialized education with smaller classroom sizes to minimize stimuli."

"I chose based on the size of the school, size of classrooms, speaking with the principal, etc. I had to sacrifice French to meet other, more immediate needs. All the Special Ed kids piled into the Alternative programs which would have been my first choice but this wasn't an option given the makeup of the schools now."

"We chose OCDSB because we were promised speech language therapy among other supports for our non-verbal daughter with Down syndrome. We were SHOCKED when her kindergarten team told us she does not have ANY one on one support during the day."

Parents/caregivers chose the **Ottawa-Carleton Virtual School**, specifically, for the following thematic reasons:

Special Education Needs Supports

Some parents/caregivers expressed concerns about the lack of support for children with special education needs in the Virtual School program. They suggested that more resources and assistance should be provided to accommodate these students.

Quality of Virtual Learning

Parents/caregivers had mixed experiences with the quality of virtual learning. Some appreciated the option during the COVID-19 pandemic, while others found the quality of the program to be inconsistent, with the first year being beneficial during an uncertain time but the second year less conducive to student learning.

Program Availability and Accessibility

Some parents/caregivers appreciated the availability and associated busing of the Virtual School program. However, some parents/caregivers expressed concerns about the overpopulation of local schools, suggesting that the Virtual School program could be a solution to crowding in schools.

Respondent Quotes

"The severe lack of support for my special needs child."

"My second child attempted in-person learning for SK, but found the kinder space too crowded and loud. As a result, the decision was made to switch him back to virtual."

"Chose OCV during Covid and due to overpopulation of local school."



How has your child's experience been in their program(s)?

Parents/caregivers of a student(s) in the Early French Immersion (EFI) and Middle French Immersion (MFI) program spoke to the following themes with respect to their child's experience(s) in the program:

Positive Learning Experience

Many parents/caregivers appreciated the positive opportunity for their children to learn French at an early age, and felt that it provided them with valuable skills and opportunities. They felt that their experience in the EFI and MFI program provided a strong foundation for their learning and the building of skills to support their future education and careers.

Challenges with French Language Acquisition

Some parents/caregivers felt that the amount of French being taught was limited, their children were not sufficiently engaged, and that their children struggled with learning French, especially if they did not have support at home. Moreover, they indicated that teachers have been coming and going at a high rate, and that some substitute teachers only speak English and cannot teach the French part of the curriculum, which disrupts and impacts student learning.

Program Structure and Support

Some parents/caregivers felt that the EFI and MFI programs could be improved with more structure and support. They suggested that there should be more emphasis on French within the school to foster greater immersion.

Impact on English Literacy

Some parents/caregivers expressed concerns about the impact of the EFI and MFI programs on their children's English literacy. They felt that the focus on French language acquisition was affecting their children's ability to read and write in English, noting that they were lagging in these skills in comparison with their French literacy.

Individual Differences

Parents/caregivers noted that individual differences among children can impact their experience. Some of their children thrive in these programs, while others struggle and need additional support. Parents/caregivers specifically indicated that, while one of their children did well in the EFI or MFI program, their other child was struggling significantly.



Respondent Quotes

“There is not as much French as promised. And almost all substitute teachers speak English only and cannot teach the French part of the curriculum.”

“My little one started EFI and it’s fine right now, if she struggles then we can switch to English core but my oldest one started MFI and she has difficulties because French is a lot since she had little introduction to French before and now she wants to go back to English core.”

“I do wish that the French was a little more intensive I.e. that teachers spoke more French, that students spoke more to each other in French.””



Parents/caregivers of a student(s) in the **English with Core French** program spoke to the following themes with respect to their child’s experience(s) in the program:

Classroom Environment and Support

Some parents/caregivers expressed concerns about the lack of support for students with special education needs in the English with Core French program. They felt that the program is not equipped to handle students with learning disabilities or those who required additional assistance.

Quality of French Education

Some parents/caregivers were not satisfied with the quality of French education in the program. They felt that the English with Core French program was not strong enough and did not provide a solid foundation in French.

Teacher Engagement

There were positive comments by parents/caregivers about the level of teacher engagement in the English with Core French program. Parents/caregivers appreciated smaller class sizes and the adaptive, tailored learning approach, which improved teacher engagement and communication with their students.

Transition to High School

Some parents/caregivers expressed concerns about the transition from the English with Core French program to high school. However, they fear that modifying the program could set students up for failure when transitioning to high school.

Impact of Specialized Classes

A few parents/caregivers of children with learning disabilities appreciated the small class sizes and targeted lessons in Specialized Program Classes. They expressed concern about the potential elimination of these classes.

Program Suitability

Some parents/caregivers felt that the English with Core French program was not suitable for their children's needs and view it as more of a place for students who struggle or are not interested in learning French, and that the expectations for English students were much lower than for those of EFI and MFI students.



Respondent Quotes

"My daughter moved from French Immersion to English with Core French because there weren't enough supports for her French programming."

"I would say the English program is very weak and I regret putting my daughter in it and not moving her into french immersion while I still had the chance."

"The English track is a catch-all for kids from overseas, from other provinces or even other Ontario cities who do not hold French with such importance."



Parents/caregivers of a student(s) in the **Alternative** program spoke to the following themes with respect to their child's experience(s) in the program:

Positive Learning Environment

Many parents/caregivers mentioned that the Alternative program provides a supportive, inclusive, and flexible learning environment. This environment has been particularly beneficial for children with special education needs, such as those with ADHD, ASD, and neurodiverse children.

Community and Holistic Approach

The Alternative program is appreciated by parents/caregivers for its community-oriented and holistic approach to learning that has greatly impacted the experiences of their children. Some parents/caregivers mentioned the benefits of mixed-age activities, student-directed learning, and the emphasis on community engagement as positive experiences for students attending the Alternative program.

Individual Attention and Support

Numerous parents/caregivers noted that the Alternative program offers individual attention and support to students that has improved their overall experience in school. This has been particularly beneficial for children who have struggled in more traditional learning environments.

Development of Social Skills

The Alternative program is viewed by some parents/caregivers as a platform that helps children develop social skills. The kindness shown by older students to younger ones, the emphasis on cooperation, and the opportunities for engagement are all seen as positive aspects of the program and the student experience.

Language Learning

Some parents/caregivers mentioned that their children had positive experiences with language learning in the Alternative program, particularly with French. The structure of the Alternative program with French language acquisition allowed for their students to have a productive experience in language learning.

Academic and Personal Success

Several parents/caregivers mentioned that their children experienced academic success in the Alternative program. They appreciated the program's focus on individual learning and development. Parents/caregivers noted that the program also had a positive impact on their children's well-being. They mentioned that their children developed self-confidence, became active community members, and learned to interact with adults and peers in a respectful and cooperative manner.

Respondent Quotes

"Having teachers who integrate his interests, take such creative approaches, and the supportive and inclusive environment has made such a difference for his learning and confidence."

"Particularly spending the first years of his life missing playgroups and other socializing opportunities due to the pandemic, the Alternative format's emphasis on the alternative tenets, the kindness shown by older students to younger, and the bright, safe and happy building and school environment really helped accelerate some of the missed social development pieces."

"Not having enough support (EAs, ECEs) available for their peers who need them has significantly disrupted the learning experience of all three of my children."

Parents/caregivers of a student(s) in the **Ottawa-Carleton Virtual** spoke to the following themes with respect to their child's experience(s) in the program:

Quality of Teaching

Some parents/caregivers expressed concerns about the quality of teaching in the Virtual School program. They mentioned that the teaching methods were not always suitable for the grade level of the students, leading to a loss in learning.

Lack of Extracurricular and Gifted Programs

A few parents/caregivers felt that the Virtual School program lacked extracurricular activities and Gifted programs that are offered in person. This was seen as a disadvantage for the students in the Virtual School program.

Flexibility and Individual Attention

Some parents/caregivers appreciated the flexibility of the Virtual School program and the ability for more one-on-one engagement with the teacher. This was particularly beneficial during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Inclusion and Accessibility

Some parents/caregivers expressed a desire for the Virtual School program to become a permanent part of the school board, indicating that it was a good fit for their children. However, there were also concerns about the accessibility of the program, particularly for students with special education needs.

Impact on Virtual Learning

Some parents/caregivers felt that the Virtual School program was not as effective for language learning, particularly for students in the Early French Immersion (EFI) program. They felt that the lack of immersion in the French language was a disadvantage for students who are attending virtual school.

Respondent Quotes

"Experience varies significantly based on quality of teacher."

"However, we feel like the children at OCV are excluded from having extracurriculars and gifted programs that are offered in person."

"Both my children are doing well in OCV and both say they want to continue with it, so I would very much like to see OCV become a permanent part of OCDSB."



What changes to the current program model could enhance learning for students today and for future generations?

Parents/caregivers of a student(s) in the English French Immersion (EFI) and Middle French Immersion (MFI) program spoke to the following themes with respect to changes to the current program model that could enhance learning for students today and future generations:

Increase French Instruction

Many parents/caregivers expressed a desire for more French instruction in the French Immersion program. Some suggested that French Immersion should include more French subjects at least until Grade 6.

Improve Support for “Average” and Students with Special Education Needs

Some parents/caregivers highlighted the need for more support for average children to enhance their skills. They also advocated for more dedicated classes or supports for children with learning differences.

Maintain Current EFI Program

Many parents/caregivers expressed satisfaction with the current EFI program. They believe that the program should continue as it is. They maintained that there is a benefit in offering students a choice between an English Program, MFI program, and EFI program.

Provide Literacy Support in French Immersion

Many parents/caregivers suggested that there should be literacy support in French Immersion to prevent students from being discriminatorily streamed out of the immersion program. Parents/caregivers suggested providing more resources for students struggling in French, rather than encouraging them to switch to English, which would alleviate the issue of the core English program becoming a catch-all for students with behaviours and learning difficulties.

Restructure and Improve EFI and MFI Streams

Some parents/caregivers suggested redesigning and restructuring the EFI and MFI streams so that those who are motivated to learn are not distracted by those in the classes that aren't. They also suggested that EFI should be strengthened,

not weakened, and that MFI programs should be offered in more schools. Some parents/caregivers suggested restructuring French programs to strictly be 50/50 English and French in all schools.

Respondent Quotes

“French Immersion should include more French (math in French at least until Grade 6).”

“We are not in favour of changing the EFI model and adopting the model used by the Catholic board.”

“The issue would be alleviated if there were more resources for students struggling in French.”

Parents/caregivers of a student(s) in the English with Core French program spoke to the following themes with respect to changes to the current program model that could enhance learning for students today and future generations:

Improve Quality of French Instruction

Some parents/caregivers expressed a desire for better quality French teachers in the English program. They believe that students can become bilingual without needing to attend EFI or MFI if the quality of French instruction in English schools is improved.

Provide Equitable Opportunities

Some parents/caregivers want English program students to have the same opportunities, resources, and activities as French Immersion students. They believe this would enhance the quality of education for all students.

Provide Support for High Achievers

Some parents/caregivers suggested offering separate English classes for high achievers and non-high achievers, rather than lumping all students into one class. They believe this would better cater to the different learning needs of students.

Provide Support for Struggling Students

Parents/caregivers would like to see more support for students who struggle with learning two languages. They feel that currently there is not enough support from French teachers and a lack of resources to support their learning at home

or independently. They believe this would help these students to succeed in the current job market.

Create Smaller Class Sizes

Some parents/caregivers believe that smaller class sizes would enhance learning by allowing for more individualized attention and support for each student.



Respondent Quotes

“The English program should have more French with better quality French teachers. I don’t believe that kids need to go to French school or French immersion to be bilingual.”

“More supports for students who struggle learning 2 languages. Not coming out of school knowing how to function in more than one language is a huge disadvantage for students in current job market.”

“Require English program students have the same opportunities, resources, field trips and activities as French.”



Parents/caregivers of a student(s) in the **Alternative** program spoke to the following themes with respect to changes to the current program model that could enhance learning for students today and future generations:

Implement Stronger Integration of French Curriculum

Some parents/caregivers expressed the need for a stronger French curriculum within the Alternative program. They suggested more hours of French, the introduction of a French Immersion stream, or access to third language courses.

Improve Special Education Supports and Resources

Many parents/caregivers emphasized the importance of special education programs and the need for more support for students with learning disabilities or neurodivergent students. They suggested more resources, smaller class sizes, and more EAs.

Integrate Alternative Pedagogy in All Schools

Some parents/caregivers suggested that the strategies employed in the Alternative system should be implemented in all schools, as the unique approach to learning and child development in the Alternative program could benefit all students. This

would further support an integrated approach where all students would benefit from the approach and support.

Focus on Holistic Development

Some parents/caregivers highlighted the importance of activities like art and outdoor education, which contribute to the overall development of their children. They believe these activities should be given equal importance as academic subjects as they benefit the well-being of their children and are demonstrative of various avenues of skill and learning.

Address the Needs of All Students

Some parents/caregivers expressed concern that the Alternative program sometimes becomes a 'dumping ground' for students who don't do well in other programs. They suggested that more support needs to be provided to ensure that all students' needs are met.

Respondent Quotes

"The main factor for Alternative program success in the NCR [National Capital Region] is inclusion of a strong French curriculum - whether that is more hours of core French or introduction of an immersion stream or access to third language courses on site throughout the year to reflect the diversity of the school community."

"I think all students would benefit from alternative pedagogy. I think the program should be offered in more schools."

"More supports/opportunities for regular English classes. Right now they are the dumping ground for students who can't handle EFI/MFI."

Parents/caregivers of a student(s) in the Ottawa-Carleton Virtual spoke to the following themes with respect to changes to the current program model that could enhance learning for students today and future generations:

Increase Support for Special Education Needs

Many parents/caregivers expressed a need for more resources and support for students with special education needs. They suggest that teachers need more support to differentiate their teaching to meet the needs of all students particularly in the virtual classroom. They also suggest that students with special education needs should receive the support they need to be successful in an EFI class.

Ensure Teacher Quality

Some parents/caregivers indicated concerns about the quality of teaching. They suggest that teachers should be chosen to teach core classes at the grade level they are capable and in subjects they are good at. They also express concerns about the lack of support for struggling learners in OCV.

Increase Support for Virtual Learning

Some parents/caregivers expressed a need for more support for virtual learning. They suggest that virtual learning should not replace in-class learning and that more support is needed for students learning virtually.



Respondent Quotes

“Virtual learning is an exception and should not replace in class learning due to many factors related to a child learning needs both for the subject and social environment.”

“During the virtual schooling there is no communication with the board. Till [sic] this day, I am unable to retrieve my kids report card for that year.”

“More hands-on, practical application as opposed to lecturing from the front of the class.”



OCDSB Staff (April 12, 2024 - May 1, 2024)



What are the strengths and challenges of the present elementary program offerings?

OCDSB staff identified the following **strengths** with respect to elementary programming options:

French Immersion Options

Many OCDSB staff noted that a strength of current elementary programming is that it offers earlier French Immersion options and more French instructional minutes than other boards. This provides students with an excellent understanding of the French language, producing graduates who can enter the workforce at B2 or higher.

Core French

Some OCDSB staff viewed the English with Core French program as a strength. In particular, they viewed the opportunity to learn basic French without necessarily needing to invest entirely in it as a strength of the program.

Variety of Entry Points

Some OCDSB staff noted that the different levels/grades for entry into the French Immersion program are seen as a great asset, providing options for families based on strengths and needs. This fluidity is viewed as beneficial for families who require the flexibility based on their own shifting contexts.

Specialized Classes

Specialized Program Classes for autism spectrum disorder (ASD), language learning disabilities (LLD), primary special needs (PSN), and developmental disabilities (DD) provide specialized support for these students in a smaller class setting. These classes were viewed as a strength by some OCDSB staff as they provide more nuanced and tailored support that aren't available in a traditional, mainstream classroom.

English Program

A few OCDSB staff noted that the English with Core French program is straightforward with ample time to deliver the Language curriculum, and is generally well-supported by learning resource teachers (LRT) and English language learner (ELL) teachers.

“

Respondent Quotes

“EFI: Strengths-provides students with an excellent understanding of the French language, producing graduates who can enter the workforce at B2 or higher.”

“Offering specialized programming is a strength. This should be funded further as there are many students in classes of 30 children who are unable to get the support required to succeed or even move forward.”

“French is critical to becoming employed in this city, and parents want it for their children. EFI draws them to our Board.””

”

OCDSB staff identified the following challenges with respect to elementary programming options:

Lack of Support

Many OCDSB staff noted that while the desire to create inclusive classrooms is admirable, the lack of adequate support for students with exceptionalities and special education needs is a significant challenge. This lack of support also impacts the immersive environment and the ability of students to achieve a conversational level of French further impacted by lack of resources and teachers proficient in French.

Perception of English Program

Some OCDSB staff noted that there is a fear among parents/caregivers about placing their children in the English program due to rumors about behavioural issues. In some cases, educators validated these rumours by suggesting that there are significant behavioural issues in classrooms, particularly in English-stream classes, which are not adequately addressed or supported.

Increased French Instruction

Some OCDSB staff noted that math should not have been removed from being taught in French from grade 1-3 and that students need more French instruction, not less. Moreover, staff indicated that the lack of French teachers impacts the capacity for French instruction in schools and minimizes the capacity for true immersion and proficiency.

Specialized Teachers

There is a concern amongst some OCDSB staff that teachers are expected to be specialists in too many areas, which can dilute the quality of instruction in certain subjects or minimize their capacity to support all students adequately.

Language Delays

A few OCDSB staff noted that students with language delays in their first language and in English struggle in the French Immersion program and miss the structured English instruction in Grade 1. This creates significant gaps for these students where they are unable to catch up.

Respondent Quotes

“Inclusion without adequate support continues to be a form of exclusion within the classroom. Sadly, many students with exceptionalities and special needs do not receive adequate support for them to achieve a conversational level of French.”

“Parents are afraid to put their children in the English program due to the behaviours that they have heard of rumours of in the English program.”

“The lack of French teachers in the system means that EFI classes have, more often than not, English supply teachers.”



What changes to the current elementary program model could enhance learning for students today and for future generations?

Several themes emerged regarding OCDSB staff suggestions for changes to the current program model:

Implement More Balanced Bilingual Education

Many OCDSB staff suggested a more balanced approach to English and French instruction. They proposed various models, such as a 60/40 or 50/50 English/French split for grades 1-6, which would allow for strong French language development while also establishing an earlier English foundation that does not compromise English literacy.

Restructure French Immersion

Many OCDSB staff suggested restructuring the French Immersion program, with some staff suggesting the removal of Early French Immersion (EFI) and focusing on Middle French Immersion (MFI). They believe that this would allow students to develop key literacy skills in English during the critical early years.

Increase Special Education Support

Many OCDSB staff emphasized the need for more specialized support, particularly for students with special educational needs and English Language Learners (ELL). They suggested adding French Special Education Support Teachers (SSTs) and ensuring that Learning Resource Teachers (LRTs) or Learning Support Teachers (LSTs) have French qualifications in order to fully support students. OCDSB staff also suggested providing more special education support for complex learners, including Educational Assistants (EAs), smaller classes, and not closing Specialized Program Classes.

Improve Resources and Infrastructure

Some OCDSB staff suggested that Core French teachers should have their own classrooms and that resources should be made available to support French language learning. They also proposed that split grade classes should be restricted and that three-grade split classes should be banned altogether.

Improve Inclusion and Accessibility

Some OCDSB staff suggested making all schools dual track by offering both English with Core French and French Immersion. This would ensure that all students have equal access to learning opportunities, and that families with children in different streams do not have to attend different schools. It would allow for true educational accessibility and inclusion at all school sites.

Expand Community Building

A few OCDSB staff suggested that including students with special education needs within their community schools with accessible programming helps build community and opens up learning opportunities for all students. Staff suggested that this would also reduce transportation costs.

Respondent Quotes

“Make ALL SCHOOLS dual [sic] track, so that all schools offer both core French with English, and French Immersion.”

“Including students with special needs within their community schools with accessible programming helps build community and opens up learning opportunities for all students.”

“Provide more special education support for complex learners (EAs, smaller classes) and stop closing ASD, DD, LD, LLD classes in the name of “equity” as these students will get left behind when dropped into a regular classroom without proper support.”

Community Members (April 12, 2024 - May 1, 2024)



What are the strengths and challenges of the present elementary program offerings?

Community members identified the following strengths with respect to elementary programming options:

Early French Immersion

Many members of the community highlighted the EFI program as a significant strength. They emphasized the benefits of starting French language education early, which they believe and cited research that indicates doing so leads to better language proficiency and offers a competitive advantage in the job market. Some community members also noted that the EFI program is becoming more diverse and less elitist, which they view as a strength.

Bilingualism and Cultural Appreciation

Many community members appreciated the bilingual options offered in the elementary program model, which they believe helps students connect with Canada's bilingual heritage and multicultural society. They also mentioned that learning French allows students to gain a deeper appreciation of Francophone culture.

Educational Opportunities

Some community members praised the current program for providing access to unique academic pathways and enriching learning experiences. Community members mentioned that learning French can open doors to French Immersion programs, bilingual schools, and post-secondary institutions that offer programs in French.

Alternative Program

Some community members indicated that the Alternative program is a strength in the District, as it provides a different learning environment for students who may not thrive in traditional settings.

Variety of Options

Some community members indicated that the variety of program options available to families was seen as a strength for community members, as it allows parents/caregivers to choose the program that best suits their children's needs.



Respondent Quotes

“The strengths of the current program are that there are a lot of choices for parents. With the proximity to QC, the ability for children to learn French from Grade 1 provides a huge advantage to them for their social, cultural and job opportunities.”

“As a former French immersion teacher and a doctor in second language education, I believe in the benefits of early full immersion in a second language. Given their early age, children are better equipped to learn French at more ease, while having the ability to also improve their first language through plurilingual teaching activities.”

“Early and middle French immersion are strengths to the program, given that Ottawa holds many public sector jobs that require fluency in French for promotions.””



Community members identified the following challenges with respect to elementary programming options:

Large Class Sizes

Some community members expressed concerns about large class sizes, particularly in the Early French Immersion (EFI) program. They believed that this makes it difficult for teachers to manage and provide individual attention to students.

Does Not Serve All Students

Some community members felt that the current model is not suitable for students with learning disabilities or those learning to speak English. They suggested that these students may struggle in the EFI program and that the program reduces their opportunities to become bilingual. They suggested that other model options must be explored to be inclusive of these students' experiences and capacity to become bilingual.

Virtual Challenges

A few OCDSB community members raised concerns about the impact of virtual schooling on socialization and the responsibility it places on parents to ensure their child's learning. They suggested that Virtual School should only be used as a last resort.

Complexity of Current Programming

Some OCDSB community members felt that the current programming model is too complex and offers too many different grade structures. They suggested simplifying

the model and ensuring that the options that are provided are done extraordinarily well, rather than offering many options and having them watered down in quality and capacity to serve students.

Lack of Alternative Programming

Some OCDSB community members raised concerns about the lack of Alternative programming for students with special education needs, such as those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or English as a Second Language (ESL) students. They believed that these students did not have enough access or opportunities with the programs currently offered within the elementary program model.

Transportation Issues

Some OCDSB community members highlighted the issue of children being bused to schools far from their homes to access specific programs, suggesting that children should be able to attend schools as close to home as possible. They insisted that having students spend significant amounts of time on a bus was problematic and needed to be addressed in any updates to the elementary program model.

Respondent Quotes

“You have way too much complexity in your programming model, you should not have so many different grade structures. You’re also offering WAY too much French, it’s by far the least important subject you teach and you should not discriminate against students who struggle with languages. Separate classes & programming for some students helps each student receive the appropriate educational experience.”

“Challenges: Not enough alternative programming (PSN, ASD, ESL etc).”

“Teachers having too many students in their classes with not enough support.”



What changes to the current elementary program model could enhance learning for students today and for future generations?

Several themes emerged regarding **community members' suggestions for changes to the current program model:**

Preserve and Expand French Immersion Programs

Many community members emphasized the importance of maintaining and expanding Early French Immersion programs. They believe that early exposure to French is crucial for language acquisition and bilingualism, which are valuable skills in the job market and in a multicultural country like Canada.

Increase Support for Students with Learning Disabilities

Some community members highlighted the need for more resources and support for students with learning disabilities. This includes more Specialized Program Classes, additional in-class support, and better communication with parents.

Improve Teacher Support

Some community members suggested that providing more resources for teachers would enhance the quality of education. They believe that teachers are currently overwhelmed and under-supported, which impacts their ability to effectively teach and support students.

Provide Transparent Communication with Parents

A few community members emphasized the need for better communication with parents, particularly in situations involving evacuations or other emergencies. They also suggested that parents/caregivers should have the opportunity to meet teachers and visit classrooms before the school year starts.

Support High-Achieving Students

A few community members highlighted the need for more support for high-achieving students, including the continuation of 'gifted' or 'challenge' programs. They suggested that these programs could be renamed to avoid creating a sense of separation from their peers.

Ensure Equitable Access to Programs

Some community members suggested that all students should have equitable access to programs, including French Immersion. They proposed that English and

French students could be merged for English and Math classes to promote equity. Opportunities to have English and French students interact and socialize was continuously brought up by community members.

Preserve Alternative Program

Some community members expressed significant concern about the potential removal of Alternative programs and emphasized the importance of these programs in meeting diverse student needs. They indicated that the removal of these programs would adversely impact students and inhibit their progress and achievements.

Respondent Quotes

"I, myself, have been through Early French Immersion and Ottawa-Carleton Virtual over the course of my elementary years, and first year of high school. I truly appreciated the large variety in options for students, as I have friends who have been in different elementary programs and I firmly believe that this variety is incredibly useful for students as no one student is the exact same."

"I did not receive a satisfactory education in French, and I personally regret not taking immersion. In my school there was also a significant difference in terms of quality of education - EFI classes were smaller so they had more individual attention."

"Educators are overwhelmed with lack of support to be able to do their job. If you want to enhance the quality of education, you should start really listening to the problems the educators are complaining about. Invest in educators."

Parents/Caregivers (May 1, 2024 - June 28, 2024)



What factors are or were important to you when choosing the program(s) for your child(ren)?

Parents/caregivers chose the Early French Immersion (EFI) and Middle French Immersion (MFI) programs, specifically, for the following reasons:

Bilingualism

Many parents/caregivers believe that being bilingual, particularly in English and French, is crucial for their children's future, especially in a city like Ottawa where bilingualism is highly valued. They see it as a way to open up more career opportunities for their children in the future. This was instrumental in their selection of the EFI or MFI program.

Early Language Acquisition

Many parents/caregivers believe that children learn languages more easily at an earlier age. Therefore, they prefer the EFI program, which starts at an earlier grade compared with the MFI program. However, these programs are largely selected due to the opportunity to learn French earlier and more intensively than in the English with Core French program.

Academic Challenge

Some parents/caregivers chose the EFI or MFI programs because they believe these programs provide an academic challenge for their children, stimulating their cognitive development. Parents/caregivers view these programs as more academically challenging than the English with Core French program.

School Quality and Resources

The quality of the school, its resources, and the availability of enough teachers to support the program are also important factors for parents/caregivers when choosing the EFI or MFI programs. Many parents/caregivers believed that these programs offered more resources and support.

Community and Location

Some parents/caregivers prefer schools that are in their local community and offer immersion programs. They believe that attending a local school helps establish friendships and a social network for their children.

Respondent Quotes

“Ottawa is a very bilingual city, and having multiple languages opens future career options and experiences for my child.”

“Our children could read before starting school. We were looking for academic challenge, and EFI added that component.”

“We specifically chose a neighbourhood so that our local school had that option!”

Parents/caregivers chose the **English with Core French** program, specifically, for the following reasons:

Learning Disability and Special Education Needs

Some parents/caregivers indicated that their children have learning disabilities, autism, or other special education needs. They found that the English with Core French program was more suitable for their children’s needs, as it allowed them to focus on learning in their first language, reducing the additional challenge of learning in a second language.

Limited Language Proficiency at Home

Some parents/caregivers expressed that they are not proficient in French, making it difficult for them to support their children’s learning in a French Immersion program. They chose the English with Core French program to ensure they could actively participate in their children’s education.

Child’s Well-Being and Success

A few parents/caregivers emphasized the importance of their child’s well-being and academic success. They reported that their children thrived more in the English with Core French program, showing improvements in reading, writing, engagement, and overall attitude towards school.

Strong English Foundation

While parents/caregivers valued bilingualism, many also stressed the importance of a strong foundation in English. They felt that the English with Core French program provided a balanced approach to learning both languages while prioritizing English.

Location and Proximity

A few parents/caregivers also considered the location of the school and the desire for their children to have community connections. They preferred schools that were close enough for their children to walk or bike to.

Parental Involvement

A few parents/caregivers expressed the desire to be actively involved in their child's education. They felt that the English with Core French program allowed them to do so more effectively than they would be able to in the EFI or MFI program.

Respondent Quotes

"Both my children are Autistic. My son is also hard of hearing. Both also have learning disabilities. These are all major factors in determining which program we chose."

"As a parent, my primary concern is being actively involved in my child's education. With English being my first language, I seek a program that not only prioritizes proficiency in English but also provides opportunities for my child to learn French."

"We specifically moved to a neighbourhood with a school that had a large English/core French program."

Parents/caregivers chose the Full-Day Kindergarten program, specifically, for the following reasons:

Early French Immersion

Similar to the first round of survey analysis, parents/caregivers continued to cite this as the most significant motivator for choosing the Kindergarten program. Parents/caregivers believe that early exposure to French is beneficial for their children's language development, especially in a bilingual city like Ottawa. They believe that starting French early gives their children a better chance of becoming fluently bilingual.

Proximity to Home

Some parents/caregivers noted that they prefer schools that are close to their homes. They indicated that this is for convenience and to give their children some independence, such as walking to and from school. As such, they indicated that they selected the Full-Day Kindergarten program due to the proximity to their homes.

School Resources and Environment

Some parents/caregivers consider the wealth of the surrounding neighbourhood, the population of the class, and the resources available at the school. They believe that wealthier schools have better resources and fewer behavioural problems. They also considered the school's culture, teaching philosophies, and the number of staff when selecting the Full-Day Kindergarten program.

Special Education Needs Support

For some parents/caregivers with children who have special education needs, the availability of support programs and resources was a crucial factor in choosing the Full-Day Kindergarten program.

Respondent Quotes

"Early French Immersion was important to me, so that my children could begin to learn French as early as possible without having to be in the French school board."

"I look for proximity to my house (as close as possible), so my kids can have some freedom walking home and avoid the bus."

"Right now it's important that he gets the extra support that he needs. Recently being diagnosed with autism, it's been very clear the lack of support that is in place for children like him."

Parents/caregivers chose the **Alternative** program, specifically, for the following reasons:

Student-Centred Learning

Many parents/caregivers chose the Alternative program because they appreciate the focus on individualized learning, where the curriculum is tailored to meet the unique needs of each child. This includes the flexibility to adapt to different learning styles and the emphasis on intrinsic motivation.

Inclusivity and Support

The Alternative program is seen by many parents/caregivers as a haven for children who may not thrive in traditional settings. This includes children with special education needs, such as autism or ADHD, who benefit from the additional support and smaller class sizes.

Community and Family Involvement

Many parents/caregivers value the strong sense of community in the Alternative

program. They appreciate the opportunity to be involved in their child’s education and the emphasis on cooperation and teamwork.

Holistic Approach to Education

Some parents/caregivers praised the Alternative program for its focus on the whole child, not just academics. This includes an emphasis on social justice, the arts, and outdoor learning. A few parents/caregivers also appreciated the multi-age groupings in the Alternative program, which they believe fosters leadership, empathy, and problem-solving skills among students.

Tenets and Skills of Alternative Program

Some parents/caregivers appreciated the specific tenets of the Alternative program, such as no homework, collaborative learning, and parental involvement. They appreciate the focus on life skills and independence in the Alternative program, which they believe prepares their children for the future.

Safety

Parents/caregivers want to ensure their children are safe at school, and some feel that the Alternative program provides a safer environment for their children than any other program offered by the District.



Respondent Quotes

“The student centred learning model was important for my family, and the overall philosophy of the Alternative Program fits in well with the scope of how I want my children to experience their elementary years.”

“I wanted a school experience that was community-oriented where, as a parent, I could play a valued role in a rich school learning environment.”

“The most important factor for me is that my son is safe while he’s at school. My son is in a BIP class and needs close supervision. He is Autistic and struggles with emotional regulation, every day.”



Parents/caregivers chose the Ottawa-Carleton Virtual School, specifically, for the following reasons:

Health and Safety Concerns

Many parents/caregivers chose the Virtual School option due to health and safety concerns, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. They wanted to protect vulnerable family members with lowered immune systems and ensure the safety of their children.

Flexibility and Convenience

The Virtual School option provided flexibility and convenience for some parents/caregivers. It was seen as a suitable option for that particular year during the pandemic, and for some families, it continues to offer flexibility and convenience that in-person schooling does not.

Support for Unique Learning Needs

Some parents/caregivers felt that the Virtual School option was better suited to their children's unique learning needs. For instance, it was mentioned that children with severe anxiety didn't have enough support staff at their local school, and the Virtual School was the only option that also allows students to attend external appointments, such as therapy.

Response to Pandemic Uncertainties

Some parents/caregivers chose the Virtual School option due to uncertainties about how the pandemic would proceed and what classrooms might look like in terms of proper air filtering, and spacing between students.



Respondent Quotes

"We chose Ottawa Carleton Virtual School for the 2020-2021 school year in order to protect vulnerable family members with lowered immune systems."

"We choose Ottawa Carleton Virtual and early French immersion for our family as we feel French is super important for our children's future to succeed in Ottawa. Virtual has been a blessing for us."

"I was planning on removing them from the board and then virtual became an option."



How has your child's experience been in their program(s)?

Parents/caregivers of a student(s) in the Early French Immersion (EFI) and Middle French Immersion (MFI) program spoke to the following themes with respect to their child's experience(s) in the program:

Positive Learning Experience

Many parents/caregivers reported that their children had a positive experience in the EFI and MFI programs. They appreciated the opportunity for their children to learn a second language at an early age and noted significant progress in their children's French language skills.

Challenges in Learning

Some parents/caregivers mentioned that their children faced challenges in learning French, especially for those whose first language isn't French. There were also concerns about the impact of immersion programs on their children's English reading and writing skills.

Quality of Instruction

The quality of French instruction was often noted by parents/caregivers. While some parents/caregivers praised the quality of French instruction, others expressed concerns about the diminishing quality as their children moved into higher grades. There were also concerns about the lack of fluent French teachers.

Support for Special Education Needs

Parents/caregivers of children with special education needs expressed mixed experiences. Some found the immersion programs beneficial for their children, while others felt that the programs were not adequately equipped to support their children's needs.

Classroom Environment

Several parents/caregivers mentioned disruptive behaviours in the classroom, which they felt negatively impacted the learning environment. They called for more resources and support in the classroom to manage these behaviours.

Curriculum Concerns

Some parents/caregivers expressed concerns about the curriculum, particularly the balance between French and other subjects like Math and Science. They felt that more emphasis should be placed on these subjects and suggested that they be taught in English.

Parental Support at Home

Parents/caregivers of children in MFI expressed a need for more support to assist their children at home, especially for non-French speaking parents.

Respondent Quotes

“Early French immersion has been excellent. My kids have easily been able to learn French and practice it from a young age...”

“Has not thrived in French immersion and not getting enough or the right support to learn to read in English...”

“The only thing that I feel could be improved is support for non French speaking parents to help assist our child at home.”

Parents/caregivers of a student(s) in the **English with Core French** program spoke to the following themes with respect to their child’s experience(s) in the program:

Quality of French Instruction

Many parents/caregivers expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of French instruction in the English with Core French program. They felt that the French provision was not very good and that their children did not progress much in French.

Support for Learning Needs

Parents/caregivers raised concerns about the lack of support for children with learning needs. Some parents/caregivers felt that teachers were not able or willing to support their children’s learning needs in the English with Core French program.

Classroom Environment

Some parents/caregivers mentioned that the classroom environment was often disruptive due to the disruptive behaviour of a few students. This had a negative impact on the learning experience of the rest of the class.

Lack of Resources

There were concerns raised by parents/caregivers about the lack of resources in the English with Core French program. Some parents/caregivers felt that the program was under-resourced, which affected the quality of education that their students were receiving.

Program Reputation

Some parents/caregivers felt that the English with Core French program is not as valued as the French Immersion program and is thus viewed as less important. This perception was seen to directly affect the content, quality, and delivery of the Core French program.

Respondent Quotes

“The French provision does not seem to have been very good, our child has repeatedly told us they watch an English language movie in French lessons whilst colouring.”

“One of my children is in Grade 5 and has had an IEP since SK. They need additional support and, year after year, it often feels as though the teacher does not have time to provide the support.”

“Our observation was that EFI was, for the most part, the choice for stronger students and the English stream tended to attract weaker students and was in practice a more remedial program.”

Parents/caregivers of a student(s) in the **Full-Day Kindergarten** program spoke to the following themes with respect to their child’s experience(s) in the program:

French Immersion Experience

Many parents/caregivers expressed satisfaction with the Early French Immersion (EFI) program. They noted that their children have quickly developed good French language skills and enjoy learning in French. However, some parents/caregivers felt that the level of immersion was not enough and that there was too much English spoken in the program.

Support for Students with Learning Disabilities and Special Education Needs

There were concerns about the lack of support for children with learning disabilities and special education needs. Parents/caregivers of children with ADHD, dyslexia, and other learning difficulties felt that their children were not getting the necessary support and resources. They also mentioned the struggle of communicating their concerns with the school and teachers.

Integration and Inclusion

Some parents/caregivers appreciated the integration of children with different needs into regular classrooms. However, they also expressed concerns about resources being stretched too thin and the safety of students and educators when students with higher needs or behavioural challenges did not have one-to-one EA support.

Program Structure and Transitions

Some parents/caregivers felt that the transition from kindergarten to grade 1 should be more gradual. They also mentioned the overemphasis on French and the underemphasis on outdoor education.

Diversity in School Community

A few parents/caregivers appreciated the inclusive, welcoming environment of their children's schools and the dedication of the educators and staff. They also mentioned the benefits of being part of a diverse school community.

Respondent Quotes

"The EFI program is, sadly, subpar. There is so much English spoken in the program, particularly in the Kinder years."

"Poor. Zero supports available despite a documented learning disability and IEP. Our child with dyslexia is just left to figure it out on his own."

"In terms of special education and the integration of children with suffering levels of need into homogenized classrooms, we worry about the safety of her classmates and educators if students with higher needs or behavioural problems are not able to have one-to-one EA support."

Parents/caregivers of a student(s) in the **Alternative** program spoke to the following themes with respect to their child's experience(s) in the program:

Impact on Learning and Engagement

Many parents/caregivers reported that their children thrived in the Alternative program. They appreciated the program's ability to adapt to the learning needs of multiple students, the focus on student-led and community-focused programming, and the integrated way that concepts are taught. The program was also praised for its ability to challenge and support students where they needed to be, leading to increased engagement and success in learning.

Inclusive and Welcoming Environment

The Alternative program was often described by parents/caregivers as a welcoming and inclusive environment. Many parents/caregivers appreciated the sense of community throughout the school and the multi-age classrooms. The non-competitive ethos of the program was also highlighted as a positive aspect that helped children feel supported both academically and socially.

Improved Emotional Well-Being

Some parents/caregivers noted that their children's emotional well-being improved after joining the Alternative program. They reported that their children gained confidence and independence, learned to work with others to solve problems,

and felt like they belonged to a family. The program was also praised for helping children with special education needs, such as ADHD and learning disabilities, feel supported and thrive.

Challenges with Support and Structure

While many parents/caregivers had positive experiences with the Alternative program, some reported challenges. These included a lack of support for children with special education needs, a lack of structure in the classroom, and difficulties with the implementation of Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Some parents/caregivers also expressed concerns about the lack of neighbourhood friends for their children and the socio-economic disparities among the students.

Impact on Language Skills

The Alternative program was also noted for its impact on language skills. Some parents/caregivers reported that their children did not seem to be making progress with the French language in the English with Core French program. They praised the Alternative program for enhancing their children's language skills, particularly for nonverbal children.

Teacher Quality and Engagement

The quality and engagement of teachers in the Alternative program were frequently mentioned by parents/caregivers. Parents/caregivers appreciated the dedication, creativity, and care of the teachers. However, some also noted challenges with teacher training and consistency, particularly for children with special education needs.



Respondent Quotes

"The integrated way that concepts are taught, as well as the multi-age classrooms and sense of community throughout the school has completely transformed his relationship to school and learning."

"Our child went from being nonverbal to verbal. The program has enhanced her language skills tremendously."

"Although teachers work hard they do not really understand the requirements or follow through with the recommendation of specialist or the IEP on file when dealing with an "invisible" disability."



Parents/caregivers of a student(s) in **Ottawa-Carleton Virtual** spoke to the following themes with respect to their child's experience(s) in the program:

Flexibility and Comfort

Many parents/caregivers appreciated the flexibility and comfort that the Virtual School option provided. They noted that their children enjoyed being able to learn from home, which helped manage anxiety and reduce sick days.

Quality of Teaching and Support

While some parents/caregivers praised the teaching staff and the support provided within the Virtual School option, others felt that the teachers were not as engaged or interested in their students and had a difficult time providing individualized support and adjusting teaching practice to an online format.

Technological Challenges

A few parents/caregivers mentioned that if they were not able to provide support, technology often became a significant issue for their children in accessing or engaging with OCV. They also noted a lack of opportunities for discussion or one-on-one help.

Impact on Social Skills and Well-Being

Some parents/caregivers expressed concerns about the impact of the Virtual School option on their children's social skills and physical education. They felt that the virtual environment limited their children's opportunities for social interaction and physical activity. In addition, parents/caregivers felt extended screen time had a negative effect on their children's vision and overall development.

Language Learning

For those in the French Immersion program, a few parents/caregivers noted that the virtual environment limited the ability to practice oral communication in French.

Individual Learning Needs

The Virtual School option was seen as beneficial for children with unique learning needs. Some parents/caregivers mentioned that their children who struggled in traditional school settings found the virtual option to be a better fit.

“

Respondent Quotes

“So far we have had a very positive experience. They love being able to do school where they are comfortable at home. Anxiety is under control. They don't need to take many sick days so they are not missing out on learning opportunities.”

“OCV - excellent! Great principal, great teachers and excellent support!!”

“OCV- we did not have a good experience with OCV. Neither teacher seemed interested in being there or in their students.”

“He struggled from JK-grade 3 in public school but loves OCV. He switched after Christmas break mid-way through grade 4. He's not getting enough socialization with other kids but he's finally calm enough to engage in learning activities.””

”



What changes to the current program model could enhance learning for students today and for future generations?

Parents/caregivers of a student(s) in the English French Immersion (EFI) and Middle French Immersion (MFI) program recommended the following changes to the current program model that could enhance learning for students today and future generations:

Increase Support for Students with Special Education Needs

Many parents/caregivers expressed a need for more resources and support for students with special education needs in the EFI and MFI programs. This includes more Specialized Program Classes, additional support staff, and better management of students with disruptive behaviour in the classroom. Parents/caregivers also highlighted the need for better support for diagnostics and helping parents/caregivers navigate the process. They also suggested more focused education on emotional regulation.

Enhance Resources for Social Emotional Learning

Some parents/caregivers highlighted the importance of social-emotional learning and behaviour management. They suggested more resources to help students develop these skills, such as incorporating more arts and athletic outlets, and strengthening protective factors for mental health.

Improve Access to French Immersion Programs

Some parents/caregivers suggested that French Immersion programs should be more widely available across the city. They believe that learning a second language at a young age sets students up for a successful, diverse future.

Improve Support for English Language Development

While some parents/caregivers noted the value of French Immersion, they also expressed the need for a rigorous academic stream that prioritizes English language development alongside a strong French program.

Increase Resources and Supports for Teachers

Many parents/caregivers noted that teachers need more resources and support to effectively manage their classrooms and provide quality education. This includes additional staffing, better training, and more support for dealing with implicit biases.

Increase Focus on Academics

Some parents/caregivers expressed a desire for a more rigorous academic stream, with substantially more homework in elementary school. They believe this would better prepare students for future academic challenges and make their transition into secondary school more seamless.



Respondent Quotes

“Greater access to supports in the classroom, I hear from my kids that there are quite a few kids in the classroom that are challenging or need extra support that takes away from the teachers ability to help others/move forward with the rest of the class.”

“Early French immersion should be offered in all schools as that would be equitable.”

“While some parents will feel that EFI is essential for French development, I personally feel that a rigorous academic stream that prioritizes English language development with a strong French program alongside would be best.”



Parents/caregivers of a student(s) in the English with Core French program recommended the following changes to the current program model that could enhance learning for students today and future generations:

Increased Supports for Students with Learning Difficulties

Some parents/caregivers expressed concern about students with learning difficulties or neurodivergence being left behind. They suggested more support for these students, including more EAs and Specialized Program Classes.

Balanced Bilingual Education

Numerous parents/caregivers suggested a 50/50 split of English and French, especially in the early grades. They believe this would allow students to learn both languages equally and make a more informed decision about their language preference later on.

More Resources and Training for Teachers

Some parents/caregivers suggested providing more resources for teachers, including professional development and specialized materials. They also suggested hiring more teachers who are experts in English language acquisition.

Program Flexibility and Options in Single School

A few parents/caregivers expressed a desire for more options in the program, such as the ability to choose between Early French Immersion and English with Core French in the same school. They also suggested more flexibility in the curriculum to cater to varying abilities and interests of students.

Increased Focus on Special Education

A few parents/caregivers suggested improving and adding to special education options, including more Specialized Program Classes at local schools. They also suggested testing for giftedness and other neurodiversities by the board.



Respondent Quotes

“Right now my child is being under serviced. He doesn’t check all the boxes for a specialized program and there are so many needs in his classroom of 20 students.”

“Giving a 50/50 split will allow all students to learn both language equally and make a more informed decision when the time comes to choose which way to go (grade 4), as well as promotes more unity within the school.”

“More options: Our family chose a school that had both Early French Immersion and English with Core French in the same school so that each of our children could choose which program they preferred.”



Parents/Caregivers of a student(s) in the Full-Day Kindergarten program recommended the following changes to the current program model that could enhance learning for students today and future generations:

Increase Emphasis on Language Learning

Many parents/caregivers expressed a desire for more emphasis on French language learning, with some suggesting an 80% French model, or maintaining the current Early French Immersion (EFI) program. Some parents/caregivers also suggested that teachers should have strong French fluency.

Improve Specialized Support

There were numerous calls for more support for students with special education needs, including more EAs in classrooms, more special education classrooms, and more readily available itinerant support for social work, speech & language, and occupational therapy. Some parents/caregivers also suggested that teachers and support staff should have training on how to handle children with autism.

Improve Program Options and Flexibility

Parents/caregivers suggested offering more program options, such as advanced math, core Mandarin, basic computer programming, and advanced drama. Some parents/caregivers also suggested that the school board should make the Alternative program more known to parents/caregivers and that there should be more Alternative school programs available throughout Ottawa.

Increase Resources and Support

Many parents/caregivers called for more human resources in the classroom, including more teachers and support staff to work with students and provide teaching and learning support. They also suggested that there should be more French language resources for parents/caregivers to support their children's learning at home.

Improve Transition to Grade 1

Some parents/caregivers expressed concerns about the transition from kindergarten to Grade 1, suggesting that more attention could be paid to this transition. They also suggested that similar programs should be offered at more schools to ensure continuity in learning.

Improve Equity and Inclusion

Some parents/caregivers expressed concerns about equity and inclusion, suggesting that all material covered in one stream should be covered in all streams

by year end, and that all schools should adopt alternative tenants to think beyond academic success and foster thoughtful, compassionate children.

“

Respondent Quotes

“I honestly believe the best approach would be to make the entire elementary program 50/50 as it is with kindergarten.”

“Strengthen the ‘immersive’ element of early French immersion by prioritizing francophone hires and requiring strong proof and maintenance of French fluency amongst French teachers.”

“That all schools adopt the alternative tenants to think beyond academic success and rather thoughtful, compassionate children motivated to support each other’s learning and development.”

”

Parents/Caregivers of a student(s) in the **Alternative** program recommended the following changes to the current program model that could enhance learning for students today and future generations:

Consider Smaller Schools and Class Sizes

Some parents/caregivers expressed a desire for smaller schools and class sizes, which they believe would provide a more personalized and engaging learning environment. They feel that smaller settings would allow students to feel more like they belong and are known as individuals, rather than just a number.

Increase Support for Teachers

Some parents/caregivers emphasized the need for more support for teachers, particularly in managing student behaviours. This could involve additional support staff in the classroom or professional development opportunities for teachers.

Provide Equal Access to Quality French Education

Some parents/caregivers expressed concern about the division of schools into “have” and “have not” classes based on access to French Immersion programs. They believe that all students should have equal access to quality French education, regardless of the school they attend.

Improve Support for Students with Special Education Needs

Many parents/caregivers called for more support for students with special education needs, including more EAs and specialized programs. Parents/caregivers believe that these supports are essential for these students to be successful.

Preserve and Expand Alternative Program

Many parents/caregivers expressed a desire to preserve and even expand the Alternative program. They believe that this program meets the needs of its students well and should be the default education model.

Provide Diversity in Learning Modalities

Some parents/caregivers expressed a desire for more diverse learning modalities to cater to the unique strengths and challenges of each student. They believe that a one-size-fits-all approach to education is not effective.

Provide Community-Based Learning

Some parents/caregivers expressed a desire for children to learn in their community, where they can develop relationships with children and families in their neighborhood. They believe that resources dedicated to crossing boundaries should be dedicated to those requiring increased support for psychosocial or learning needs.



Respondent Quotes

“Support teachers in every class to manage behaviours so that teachers can teach.”

“More EAs are needed to help ensure that students with exceptionalities receive the individual support they need to be successful.”

“To be honest, after seeing how well the alternative school model meets the needs of its students, I am perplexed why it has not been adopted as the default education model.”



Parents/Caregivers of a student(s) in Ottawa-Carleton Virtual School recommended the following changes to the current program model that could enhance learning for students today and future generations:

Improve Use of Technology

Some parents/caregivers expressed a desire for better use of online platforms like

Google Classroom. They suggested that keeping these platforms up-to-date would help students catch up on missed lessons due to illness or other reasons.

Provide In-Person Gathering Opportunities

Some parents/caregivers suggested that virtual students should have opportunities to gather in-person in a COVID-safe manner. They believe this could help improve social interaction among students who are attending OCV.

Increase Asynchronous Work Time

A few parents/caregivers suggested that virtual students should have regular asynchronous work time built into their week. This would allow students to work at their own pace and according to their own schedules.

Implement Small Group Activities

Some parents/caregivers proposed that a portion of the virtual students' week should be centred around small group activities. This could help improve engagement and collaboration among students.

Ensure Participation in District-Wide Activities

A few parents/caregivers suggested that virtual students should have access to participate in district-wide activities such as track & field. This could help them feel more connected to the larger school community.

Improve Support for Students with Special Education Needs

A few parents/caregivers expressed concern about students with special education needs not getting the support they need in the virtual setting. They suggested that more resources and support staff should be allocated to assist these students.

Improve Quality of Instruction

Some parents/caregivers expressed concerns about the quality of instruction in the virtual setting. They suggested that the curriculum should be kept up-to-date and that teachers should be properly trained and supported to deliver high-quality instruction.

Improve Equity and Inclusion

Some parents/caregivers emphasized the importance of equity and inclusion in the virtual setting. They suggested that all students, regardless of their learning abilities or backgrounds, should have equal access to resources and opportunities.

Respondent Quotes

"OCV students would do better if a portion of their week was centred around small group activities but allowed other students to be asynchronous."

"Stories I hear about autistic children not getting the supports they need and being ignored and bullied is heartbreaking. Parents cannot leave their jobs in order to educate their children with special needs."

"OCV: I wish the bricks-and-mortar schools had kept up with putting resources, tests, and results in Google Classroom. It's used only minimally right now and the content uploaded by teachers is not reliable."

OCDSB Staff (May 1, 2024 - June 28, 2024)



What are the strengths and challenges of the present elementary program offerings?

OCDSB staff identified the following **strengths** with respect to elementary programming options:

Program Variety and Choice

Many OCDSB staff indicated that a strength of the current system is that it offers a variety of programs to cater to the diverse needs of students and their families. This includes Early French Immersion (EFI), Middle French Immersion (MFI), and specialized programs for students with specific needs. Specifically, the EFI program was praised for providing early exposure to a second language, which is seen as beneficial for students' language development.

French Immersion

Many OCDSB staff highlighted the French Immersion program as a strength. It provides an excellent opportunity for students to learn a second language. The Middle French Immersion program was particularly praised for allowing students to first establish a foundation in one language before focusing on learning another.

Special Education Programs

The existence of specialized programs for students with special education needs was also seen as a strength by many OCDSB staff. These programs provide targeted support and intervention, helping students to succeed.

Support for Diverse Learning Needs

Some OCDSB staff indicated that the current offerings are designed to support a wide range of learning needs, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with exceptionalities. This was viewed as a significant strength of the current model.

Language and Learning Disabilities Program

The LLD program was highlighted by some OCDSB staff for its direct intervention approach and its goal of helping students rejoin the regular program. This program is seen as invaluable for students with severely delayed language skills.



Respondent Quotes

“Middle French Immersion is an excellent time to expose kids to a second language. The students are grounded in one language first and are then able to focus their attention and energy on learning another.”

“For grade 1 students in French Immersion, they are just learning to read and be in a structured environment for a full day. Having the entire day (minus 60 math) is a lot when they are transitioning from play based kindergarten.”

“I love the diversity of our special education specialized program classes. These need to stay.””



OCDSB staff identified the following challenges with respect to elementary programming options:

Lack of Support

Many OCDSB staff expressed concern about the lack of support for educators, especially when dealing with students with significant needs. This includes both academic and behavioural support. Staff noted safety and well-being concerns, particularly in relation to exposure to aggression and extreme dysregulation in classrooms and hallways.

Early French Immersion Challenges

Some OCDSB staff pointed out that EFI can be challenging for students, particularly in terms of transitioning from a play-based kindergarten environment to a structured full-day program. There were also concerns about the impact of EFI on English literacy development.

Streaming Segregation

There were concerns by many OCDSB staff about the segregation of students based on their academic abilities and language proficiency, with stronger students often ending up in French Immersion and students with special education needs, ESL students, and those with behavioural challenges often ending up in the English Program.

Limited Space and Resources

Many OCDSB staff raised concerns about the limited number of spaces available for students who need congregated special education classes. Participants also mentioned the lack of resources and support for teachers, leading to feelings of being overwhelmed.

Early Identification of Learning Challenges

There were concerns raised by some OCDSB staff about the potential for early misidentification of learning challenges in the EFI program, with some students who may simply be slower to acquire a second language being mistakenly identified as having learning difficulties.

Respondent Quotes

“There is not enough support for the educators and the school teams when there are so many students with significant needs in the classroom.”

“EFI students are at a disadvantage for learning to read because they do not receive English Literacy instruction in their grade 1 year.”

“Our classes are “streamed” so that many of our stronger academic students end up French Immersion, and many of our Spec Ed., ESL, behavioural challenges students end up in the English Program.”

“Our regularly streamed classrooms are full of students who are unable to regulate themselves and in addition to the elimination of other specialized programs, we would see an influx of students who will continue to struggle.”



What changes to the current elementary program model could enhance learning for students today and for future generations?

Several themes emerged regarding OCDSB staff suggestions for changes to the current program model:

Increase Support for Special Education

Many OCDSB staff emphasized the need for more specialized classrooms and resources to support students with special education needs. They suggested hiring more EAs and providing more one-on-one support for students with behavioural, physical, and learning needs.

Revise French Language Instruction

There were mixed views on French language instruction. Some staff suggested that French Immersion should start later (Grade 3 or 4), while others advocated for more support for students in French Immersion classes, including French language

support for struggling students. There were also suggestions to improve the quality of French teaching by hiring teachers with stronger French language skills.

Reconfigure Classroom Size and Structure

Some OCDSB staff suggested maintaining caps on classroom sizes to ensure effective teaching and learning. They also proposed reconfiguring school boundaries to reduce the need for bussing and to make community schools more accessible.

Increase Resources and Supports

Many OCDSB staff called for more resources and support for both teachers and students. This includes more support staff like psychologists and social workers in schools, more resources for English Language Learners, and more consistent daily programming for students with behavioural and academic challenges. Staff also suggested mandatory and meaningful training on embedding Indigenous, Black, and person of colour resources, points of view, and histories within the curriculum.

Improve Inclusion and Equity

Some OCDSB staff highlighted the need for more inclusive classrooms and equitable distribution of resources. They suggested that all schools should have access to necessary resources, regardless of their ability to generate funds through parent councils.



Respondent Quotes

“More support for students and teachers, more EAs, more Spec Ed teachers in schools.”

“More emphasis on MFL. So many learners would do better to develop strong literacy skills in English first, then add more hours of French.”

“We need more psychologists, social workers etc. in our schools to support these students, their families and our educational teams.”



Community Members (May 1, 2024 - June 28, 2024)



What are the strengths and challenges of the present elementary program offerings?

Community members identified the following **strengths** with respect to elementary programming options:

Early French Immersion

Many OCDSB community members highlighted the EFI program as a significant strength. They appreciated the opportunity it provides for children to become fluent in French and fully bilingual, especially in non-French speaking families. The program is seen as crucial for career opportunities in Ottawa's largely bilingual environment.

Special Education Program

The tailored education provided by the Special Education program was praised by some OCDSB community members. They valued the specialized training of educators in this program and the targeted support it offers to students with special education needs.

Diversity of Options

Some OCDSB community members appreciated the variety of program options available to elementary school children. They indicated that this diversity allows parents/caregivers and children to choose the path that best suits their needs and abilities.

Middle French Immersion

Some community members specifically mentioned the Middle French Immersion Program as a strength, as it gives children a solid grounding in English language learning alongside a robust English with Core French program.

Inclusivity

The goal of offering all children equal access to education was seen as a strength by some OCDSB community members. This inclusivity extends to children with special education needs, with some participants highlighting the importance of dedicated classrooms and specialized training for these students.



Respondent Quotes

“EFI is an amazing program that has allowed me to become bilingual and work in French every day. I wouldn’t have my job/career without the OCDSB’s EFI program.”

“There are not enough classrooms and Educational Assistants specifically targeted to special needs kids. Children with behavioural issues, autism, intellectual disabilities and other special needs cannot be expected to learn and thrive in a large regular class.”

“Ensuring the optimal developmental journey and safety for children with special needs necessitates dedicated classrooms tailored to their requirements. Mainstream classrooms, even with additional support, fall short in catering to the specific needs of children with severe developmental delays and medical conditions.”



Community members identified the following challenges with respect to elementary programming options:

Support for Students with Special Education Needs

Many OCDSB community members expressed concern about the lack of resources and support for students with special education needs. They highlighted the need for more specialized classrooms, trained staff, and educational assistants to cater to these students.

Integration of Students with Special Education Needs

Some OCDSB community members expressed concern about the potential negative impact of including students with special education needs in mainstream classrooms without adequate support. They worried about the potential for disruption and the impact on the learning environment for all students.

French Immersion Program Challenges

While many OCDSB community members praised the French Immersion program, some also pointed out challenges. These included concerns about the potential for reduced hours in the program, the need for more support for students struggling with French, and the potential negative impact of removing the program.

Parental Pressure

Some OCDSB community members noted that parental pressure and unrealistic expectations can lead to students being placed in programs that may not be the best fit for their abilities and needs.

Lack of Local School Access

Some OCDSB community members mentioned the challenge of students not attending their most local school, leading to issues such as overcrowding in some schools and underutilization in others.

Budget Constraints

Some OCDSB community members mentioned budget constraints as a challenge, noting that these can impact the quality and availability of educational offerings.

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Respondent Quotes

“There needs to be more support for students with special needs. I’m friends with several parents whose kids have special needs and I have witnessed what they have gone through in recent years.”

“There are so many challenges with schools these days. Children are not provided with supports from the school. Special need children that should not be in classrooms are causing chaos in schools because there are no supports.”

“I have seen many children in French immersion that don’t speak French at all, or way too little for their grade. These students are pushed by their parents who want the best for their children, not taken into account the capabilities of their kids.””

”



What changes to the current elementary program model could enhance learning for students today and for future generations?

Several themes emerged regarding community members’ suggestions for changes to the current program model:

Improve Quality of Literacy Instruction

Some OCDSB community members emphasized the importance of high-quality literacy instruction, particularly in the early grades. They suggested that this could be achieved through professional development for teachers and the provision of adequate resources.

Increase Support for Teachers

There were suggestions from some OCDSB community members for more

support for teachers, including reducing stress leave and providing more training, particularly for teachers working with a diverse range of students.

Improve Special Education Needs Support

Many OCDSB community members highlighted the need for more resources and support for students with special education needs. This included calls for more educational assistants, specialized classrooms, and integrated therapies.

Revise French Immersion Program

There were mixed views on the French Immersion program. Some community members suggested increasing French learning time, while others proposed changes such as introducing Middle French Immersion holistically and phasing out Early French Immersion in order to prioritize English as a foundation.

Revise School Structure and Organization

Suggestions were made for changes to the structure and organization of schools, such as a community school model in which all neighbourhood students go to the same nearby school, and coordinating bussing between nearby schools.

Consider Program Changes

Some community members suggested changes to specific programs, such as getting rid of the Gifted program and Alternative programs if needed for the budget, or merging the Alternative program with the Virtual School program.

Reconfigure Resource Allocation

Some OCDSB community members suggested that more resources should be allocated to training, hiring, and retaining educational assistants, and to support student learning in schools.

Respondent Quotes

“There need to be more adults supporting student learning in schools. There are not enough EAs in classrooms to support students and allow teachers to do their jobs fully.”

“Monitor which EFI teachers are consistently getting students to switch to the Regular program due to needs. These teachers should be given PD and training on how to work with a diverse range of students.”

“I think the best change would be to offer Middle French Immersion, with the English/Core French as the backbone of the Elementary program.”

Students (April 12, 2024 - June 28, 2024)



What has your experience been in your elementary program(s)?

The following **key themes** emerged amongst students and their experiences in their elementary program(s):

Variety and Individual Needs

Some students noted their appreciation for the variety of educational programs available because every student is different. They believe the variety of programs accommodates the varying needs of students. They argue that condensing or eliminating programs could hinder learning for students, especially those with specific support needs.

Discrepancies in Education Quality

Some students noted their concern about disparities in educational quality between different schools within the same board. Students indicated that the pace and depth of learning can vary greatly between schools, which they feel has impacted their educational experience and preparedness for higher grades.

Challenges with Language Programs

Students reported mixed experiences with language programs, particularly French Immersion. Some students feel that the program was beneficial and helped them develop bilingual skills early, which they indicated are highly valued in a bilingual country like Canada. However, others feel that the quality of language education was inadequate, often due to various issues, such as teacher proficiency in French or integration challenges with ESL students.

Inclusion and Special Education Needs

Some students expressed concerns about the integration of students with special education needs. They highlighted the importance of specialized programs, such as autism classes, emphasizing that merging these students into regular classrooms could be detrimental to their educational and social development without proper supports.

Personal Impact and Preparedness

Many students reflect on how their elementary school experiences have prepared them for secondary school and beyond. They attributed their current educational success to the foundation laid during their elementary years, whether through language skills, academic preparedness, or personal growth.

Respondent Quotes

"I truly appreciated the large variety in options for students, as I have friends who have been in different elementary programs and I firmly believe that this variety is incredibly useful for students as no one student is the exact same. Students across the board have varying needs, and I appreciate how the level of variety accomodates for these differences."

"I went to two elementary schools in the board, one in the city and one in the country. There was a massive discrepancy between the level of education between the two schools."

"You need to consider the effects of disruptive students on the rest of the class, especially when there is a 1:29 ratio of disruptive to non disruptive students in a class."

"An issue I faced was a lack of support when I was ahead of the class, leading to me despising being in class because - to be honest - I was bored. This was in addition to supporting an ESL stream. Although my teachers tried to give me a more enriched version of their subjects, ultimately they had a lack of time to spend on one student."

"Early French immersion needs to include more French earlier on. This is a program for parents who believe their child is already getting enough English language immersion. They want their child to develop a solid foundation in French."

"As an OCDSB french immersion graduate the current system leads to an invaluable amount of bilingual language skill development. Twelve years of french immersion are extremely important, especially in Ottawa."

"If you are going to include students with special needs into the classes, then give them support. It's not fair to anyone if their needs are not being met."

Principal Consultation

On June 6, 2024, all principals across the District were invited to participate in discussions around the current elementary program model. In table groups, principals (**n = 138**) provided input in the form of a “*Stop-Start-Continue*” approach. They were asked to share what they’d like to see *stop* in the current elementary program model, what they’d like to see *continue* in any potential proposed model, and what the District should *start* doing in the program model. Below are the key themes identified within these three categories:

STOP

Inadequate Resources and Support

Principals indicated that there was a need to better balance student safety with proactive intervention and skill-building. They noted that there was a high ratio of students to support staff (social work, IEA, EA), leading to overflow in responsibilities on administrators. Tied to this was the impact of staffing shortages, adding to the overload on admin and LST (Learning Support Teacher) beyond regular hours. Ultimately, principals noted the need to address staff shortages and increase staffing to support academic needs, which would also help address behavioural issues.

Inequitable Programs and Streaming

Principals advised that the current two-tiered program structure creates disparities (EFI vs. MFI) and is harmful and inequitable to students. Further, they signaled concern that schools offer different program options, and that more consistency must be achieved. Principals questioned the rationale behind streaming students, particularly into Grade 1, without clear educational benefits and against education research that indicates this to be problematic. Collectively, Principals emphasized the need to stop streaming practices that perpetuate inequities and limit educational opportunities, and to stop inequities in program availability and configurations across schools.

Ineffective Special Education System

Principals indicated that the current SPC (Specialized Program Classes) names and criteria are not fully aligned with student needs in these classes. They expressed that many of the students are placed into these programs without any plan for possible re-integration. Principals also raised concerns with BIP (Behaviour Intervention Program) and the efficacy of current models like LLD (Language Learning Disabilities Program). Further, they signaled that peer support and teaming teachers for push-in support are not always effective due to lack of guidance and qualification concerns. Principals indicated an over-reliance on emergency EA

hiring rather than embedding supports that proactively support students before an emergency EA is required. Finally, principals expressed concerns over the misplacement and overrepresentation of students in the special education system (e.g., Gifted Program).

Policy and Structures

Principals noted issues with transportation time and allocation of EA (Educational Assistant) resources. They also pointed out inequities in access to programs like SPCs, impacting certain student groups disproportionately and that this model needs to be reconfigured and reassessed to improve equity of access. Principals also signaled that there was insufficient PD for educators to support complex student needs. They further suggested ceasing ineffective models, such as the Learning Disabilities Student Intervention Program (LDSIP).

START

Redefine Support Model and Staff Roles

Principals indicated a need to redefine the roles of Educational Assistants (EA), Learning Resource Teachers (LRT), and Learning Support Teachers (LST) to focus more on proactive support rather than reactive measures. Further, there was a call for increased push-in support and a move towards integrated spaces, and reducing siloed environments like Behaviour Intervention Program (BIP) rooms. Principals also suggested the implementation of a structured approach for EA coaching to enhance EA capacity and ability to manage vulnerable students effectively. They also encouraged the introduction of more inclusive practices, such as partial integration when suitable for student learning.

Redesign and Rethink Professional Development

Principals suggested offering mandatory and specific professional development (PD) for EAs, focusing on topics like ASD, behaviour management, and supporting inclusive education. They also indicated a need to revamp PD sessions to be more effective and impactful, ensuring they address the needs of educators and contribute directly to improving student outcomes. Finally, principals called for the implementation of ongoing PD for teachers and staff on differentiating instruction, literacy interventions, and classroom management tailored to diverse student needs. Principals noted for teachers in French language programs a particular need for further professional development and supports for student regulation.

Restructure Systemic Inclusive Practices and Student Support

Principals noted a need for an increase in resources for Special Education Needs (SEN), English as a Second Language (ESL), and socio-economic support to ensure equitable distribution across schools. They suggested creating more opportunities

for integration and peer support within classrooms to foster a sense of belonging for all students. In addition, principals requested the establishment of early interventions and support in Junior Kindergarten (JK) and Senior Kindergarten (SK) to address learning needs early. Finally, Principals called for the development of a systematic approach for early reading intervention and clear strategies for supporting ESL learners.

Improve Leadership and Administration Support

Principals expressed a need to rebalance Principal and Vice-Principal roles from crisis management to instructional leadership and monitoring student progress. They also requested more flexible models for LRTs and LSTs and possibly integrating an inclusion teacher role to enhance support for diverse student needs. More broadly, Principals wanted to ensure administrative roles are supported with adequate resources and time to focus on instructional leadership rather than administrative tasks.

Revise Instructional Strategies

Principals highlighted the need to refocus on evidence-based instructional strategies and the instructional core to improve learning outcomes for students. Further, principals suggested a review of the curriculum in order to include life skills, differentiated instruction, and structured literacy practices. Finally, Principals suggested the implementation of a district-wide strategy for early literacy and numeracy, driven by data and responsive to student needs.

Increase Focus on Staff Well-Being and Capacity

Principals indicated a need to address staff workload and well-being concerns by streamlining administrative processes and providing more support for classroom management. Additionally, there was a suggestion to enhance staff efficacy through mentorship programs, coaching sessions, and regular feedback mechanisms. Principals also suggested implementing incentives and supports for staff attendance at PD sessions to ensure ongoing professional development.

CONTINUE

Support and Inclusive Practices

Principals provided positive input on current ratios of students in Specialized Program Classes (SPC), suggesting they should continue even if the support model changes. Principals also indicated a recognition of inclusive practices already in place at some schools, with efforts to prevent streaming and promote inclusive environments and suggested that any proposed model should build on or continue these efforts of inclusion. The ongoing utilization of Learning Support Teams (LST) and adaptive solutions within schools to address student needs effectively

was suggested. Further, Principals indicated that regular special education team meetings should continue in order to analyze data and ensure appropriate support allocation.

Relationship Building and Trust

Principals called for a continued emphasis on building relationships with parents/caregivers to foster growing trust. Principals also indicated that there should be a continued emphasis on building positive relationships with students as a foundational pathway to effective support and learning outcomes.

Professional Development and Resources

Principals indicated the ongoing support for ongoing professional development opportunities for literacy screening and intervention support using tools such as Acadience and RITs (Reading Intervention Teachers) was important as they are valued for their impact and focus. Further, Principals encouraged the continued building and accessing of resources to support staff and enhance teaching capabilities, such as flexible PD formats and specific instructional models.

System Leaders' Thought Exchange Survey

On April 3, 2024, system leaders (e.g., elementary Principals, secondary Principals, central staff, etc.) (**n = 140**) completed a ThoughtExchange survey that prompted them to share their thoughts and/or questions about an elementary program review. Subsequently, elementary and secondary vice principals (**n = 34**) also completed the same ThoughtExchange survey about the elementary program review. Vice principals completed this survey in groups, thus minimizing the number of responses in comparison to system leaders. The themes for each group (system leaders and vice principals) are represented below:

SYSTEM LEADERS

Equity and Inclusion

System leaders expressed the need for equitable access to all programs for every student, regardless of their background or abilities. The importance of destreaming and ensuring that all students have the same opportunities was emphasized. In addition, system leaders highlighted the importance of including all students in their community schools and ensuring that their needs are met within these settings. They also stressed the need for appropriate supports for students with special education needs.

Transparency and Communication

System leaders expressed the need for clear communication and transparency in the review process. They wanted to know how decisions were being made and how they could contribute to the process. In particular, they emphasized the importance of consultation with educators, parents, and administrators. System leaders expressed the need for realistic timelines, brave decision-making, and effective change management strategies.

Quality Education

System leaders expressed concerns about the quality of certain programs, including the French programs. It was suggested that the effectiveness of these programs may need to be reviewed and changed. As such, there was a strong call for reviewing existing programs to enhance effectiveness, accessibility, and ensure appropriate and qualified staffing of these programs.

Resource Allocation

System leaders expressed concerns about the allocation of resources, particularly in relation to staffing. They suggested that more resources are needed to support student success and to prevent students from being underserved. System leaders

also expressed the need for appropriate supports and resources to meet the needs of students with special education requirements as well as those in regular classroom settings.

Community Building

System leaders expressed the importance of community building and ensuring that students feel connected to their communities. Improved connection to their communities could lead to better social skills for students.

Student Success

Above all, system leaders emphasized the importance of student success. They expressed concerns about current practices and their effectiveness in ensuring student success. Whether through program changes, resource allocation, or equity measures, participants spoke explicitly about the commitment to enhance student success.

VICE PRINCIPALS

Equity and Inclusion

Many participants expressed concerns about ensuring equal access to French Immersion programs, particularly for marginalized and low-income students. They also mentioned the need for equitable opportunities for all students, regardless of their background or abilities.

Special Education


Special Education was a recurring theme in the responses amongst vice principals, with participants questioning how students in Specialized Program Classes would be supported under any new or proposed program structure. There was a clear concern for ensuring that these students not be disadvantaged by any changes, and that appropriate supports be put in place to ensure they are supported through any potential transitions.

Transparency and Communication

Vice principals expressed a desire for transparency in the program review process. They emphasized the need to prioritize students outcomes rather than budget considerations. There was a clear call for openness and honesty in decision-making. Vice principals also indicated the importance of meaningful engagement with educators and the wider community in the program review process.

Program Flexibility

Vice principals maintained that any revised or proposed elementary program



model should be flexible and responsive to student needs. They expressed a desire for decisions to be data-driven and adjustable based on changing and dynamic circumstances.

Quality Education

Vice principals emphasized the importance of providing a high-quality education. This reinforced the importance of ensuring the availability of qualified French teachers and the potential impact on the French program offerings. There was a strong perception that any changes to the program should not compromise the quality of education provided and should improve it.

Boundary Reviews

Vice principals raised the importance of boundary reviews, recognizing that some schools are over capacity while others are under. They viewed this program review as an opportunity to investigate, assess and have these issues addressed.

Student Achievement Through Equity (SATE) Community Sessions

Students who attend the identified [SATE Inquiry schools](#) face challenges and systemic barriers associated with race, ethnicity, language and socioeconomic status. Recognizing there is a discrepancy between students' academic achievement in the English program compared with students in the French Immersion offerings in these schools, five sites were selected for consultation. Focus groups were conducted with parents/caregivers, posing the same questions that were posed to parents/caregivers in the Engage OCDSB survey and the Trustee Zone Meeting focus groups, allowing for discussion and conversation amongst parents. A total of **64 parents/caregivers participated** with **translation services provided** (e.g., Napali, Arabic, and Somali). The following schools were selected as locations for the focus groups with SATE families:

- Robert E. Wilson Public School
- York Street Public School
- Pinecrest Public School
- Charles H. Hulse Public School
- Carleton Heights Public School

Difficulties with French Instruction

Parents/caregivers expressed that there is a need for additional French tutoring support for non-French-speaking families. They indicated a need for providing options for parents/caregivers to choose between French and English programs. They also suggested that alternating French lessons in the morning and afternoon for better alertness would be a good approach to minimize difficulties.

Need for Parental Support and Involvement

Parents/caregivers expressed a desire for involving them in school activities to understand children's activities. They also indicated the need for more tools and opportunities for parents/caregivers to support their children's education at home. They mentioned issues with support for children with special education needs like ADHD, epilepsy, and autism that they very much required.

Parent/Teacher Relationships

Parents/caregivers expressed a desire for clear communication about curriculum changes and school activities, early notification of program changes, resources for supporting children's education, particularly in French language learning, and tools for better communication. They wanted continuous updates and transparency regarding any changes in programming as well as what children are learning.

Limited Awareness and Flexibility

Parents/caregivers expressed difficulties in access to different schooling options and transitions during COVID-19. They also indicated a lack of awareness about the school's English-only curriculum before registration. Parents/caregivers indicated a need for better options and opportunities for children as they grow. Some noted that they did not know that their school did not have an Early French Immersion option when they registered their child. Providing more options for language programs and clearer information about program offerings and decision-making points were highly requested.

Support for Students with Special Education Needs

Parents/caregivers indicated safety concerns and lack of suitable options in nearby schools often compelled them to seek specialized programs elsewhere. Specialized programs were viewed as highly valued for enabling children to thrive, gain independence, and develop social skills. Parents/caregivers also suggested reconsidering the current system of Educational Assistant (EA) allotment to better suit the needs of all students.

Respondent Quotes

"I have a school across the street from my house, but I have to travel to bring my child to the school because there are safety concerns with him being in the van."

"Skills are very important to me. I want my children to be able to speak at least 3 languages. Now that I realize my children will not be able to have access to both languages, French and English, I am looking to move my children to another school."

"I found out last week that this school does not offer Early French Immersion."

"Bringing the specialized classes to the community is better than bringing the students to the specialized classes."

"We need more educators to support students with needs. They have the right to get the education everyone else is getting."

"We travel for 20K to get to the school for my son to be part of the DD program. He has so many medical needs that it would be very difficult to manage."

"The school acts as a center point for all the families; it would be nice if it can be a community school and have families and kids connect with each other."

Advisory Committees

Participation was encouraged through existing structures and groups that exist within the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. The Director of Education attended a meeting by each group and provided a briefing on the elementary program review and listened to subsequent input from those in attendance. In particular, **six committees/groups** were consulted for input regarding the current elementary program model and the review of programs, including:

- Advisory Committee on Equity
- Indigenous Education Council
- Parent Involvement Committee
- Special Education Advisory Committee
- Alternative Schools Advisory Committee
- Student Senate

Inclusion and Equity

Advisory committees expressed a strong emphasis on ensuring that all students, including those with special educational needs, are included effectively in mainstream education. This includes addressing issues such as streaming into English programs and the disproportionate access to programs and pathways for certain student groups. Students noted they felt a sense of separation from their peers throughout the entirety of their elementary schooling experience due to program streaming. Further, ensuring that in the revision of the elementary program model that Indigenous sovereignty and self-identification are prioritized.

Resource Allocation and Funding

Advisory committees emphasized the financial implications of implementing an inclusive model and whether resources and funding are sufficient to support it. Concerns about transportation costs, budget constraints, and the overall affordability of the program review were prominent across all committees. Advisory groups specifically noted the need for specialized programming, early intervention, and appropriate support within inclusive models.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

The importance of engaging various stakeholders, including parents, advisory committees, and marginalized communities such as Indigenous groups, was emphasized. There was a call for meaningful consultation and ensuring that the voices of all community members are heard, particularly those historically underrepresented or disadvantaged.

Education Quality and Accessibility

Advisory committees raised questions about the quality of education and the accessibility of programs, particularly in terms of field trips, sports, and mental health resources. There was a concern across advisory groups about equity gaps and the need to address them through program revisions. Students expressed concerns around the stigma tied to students who are enrolled in specific programs within the District due to perceived reputation of the program.

Structure and Organization Challenges

Advisory committees indicated specific Issues, such as site limitations, school overpopulation, and the potential impact on Early French Immersion (EFI) programs. Advisory committees encouraged collaboration to identify and implement ways in which French language acquisition can be enhanced in an alternative and inclusive way. There was a desire to create more consistent grade structures across schools and potentially consolidate resources to create true community schools.

Implementation and Transparency

Advisory committees expressed skepticism about past program reviews leading to tangible changes. There was a desire communicated for clarity on timelines, transparency in reporting, and accountability for implementing proposed changes effectively.

“

Respondent Quotes

“Everyone should be treated equitably, but people with unique special needs need to find similar peers to grow, learn and learn about themselves collectively. They need to learn what they have in common to better understand what is unique to them.”

“Parents want to know how children can be supported in a mainstream classroom and met at their skill level. Will there be extra specialized teachers and what would the financial impact be?”

“Parents struggle with decisions regarding specialized programming or schools that would best suit children due to distance and transportation issues.”

“We need additional aid for students struggling in Early French Immersion schools as they tend to fall further and further behind until they are able to transfer out of the program.”

“There are not enough tutoring opportunities for Indigenous students.””

”

Trustee Zone Meetings

Eight trustee zone meetings (**n = 441**) were held in the communities of trustees to gather input from parents/caregivers, staff, and community members. Seven of these meetings were conducted in person (**n = 337**), while an eighth, virtual meeting (**n = 104**) was added following public input that requested this option. These sessions centered around small group discussions, each of which were facilitated by an elementary principal (and/or member of central staff during the virtual session), while trustees and superintendents circulated among the groups to gather and record diverse perspectives. The following sites were selected as locations for the discussions with the OCDSB community:

- Kanata Highlands Public School
- Ottawa Technical Secondary School
- D. Roy Kennedy Public School
- Glashan Public School
- Longfields-Davidson Heights Secondary School
- Sawmill Creek Elementary School
- Avalon Public School
- Virtual Webinar

Special Education and Support Resourcing

Participants expressed a strong commitment to protecting the needs of students with diverse learning profiles, including those requiring special education support. There was an expressed emphasis that any changes to programming should not compromise the supports currently in place for students with special education needs. Additionally, there was recognition of the challenges faced by teachers in meeting the diverse needs of students and the importance of ensuring adequate support within classrooms. In particular, parents/caregivers signaled significant safety concerns including instances of violence, dysregulation, and the need for crisis intervention. The lack of support and resources exacerbated these issues, leading to traumatic experiences for both students and Education, thus underscoring the need for programs such as Behaviour Intervention Program (BIP) to provide targeted support for children with complex needs.

Parents/caregivers were concerned about the lack of support and resources available for children with learning disabilities or exceptionalities in the current program model and advocated for more support staff, including additional EAs, therapists (such as ABA, OTs, and speech-language pathologists), and support for educators. As a result, parents/caregivers were concerned about inclusion in regular classrooms without adequate support, which they argued can lead to

negative outcomes for both the high-needs students and their neurotypical peers. Parents/caregivers stressed that any integration must be accompanied by additional support, such as that of EAs in classrooms. Parents/caregivers valued the sense of community and socialization that specialized programs provide for their children. They emphasized the importance of having a supportive environment where children can develop friendships and access resources tailored to their needs.

Advocacy for Early French Immersion

Participants acknowledged that certain programs, like French Immersion (FI), work well and are effective learning tools. However, there was discussion about maintaining the integrity of these programs and ensuring they adequately prepare students for future education and employment, particularly in Ottawa's context as a bilingual, governmental city. Parents/caregivers of children in the Early French Immersion (EFI) program expressed concerns about potential changes or elimination of the program. They strongly believe in the French program and feel their children will thrive in it. However, there were concerns about the current French Immersion program, including access to resources and support for students who may struggle with language acquisition. Participants suggested reviewing the structure and accessibility of FI programs.

Focus on Inclusive and Accessible Education

There was a shared belief amongst participants in the importance of inclusive and accessible education for all students, regardless of their learning profiles or abilities. Participants stressed the need for specialized tools and resources to support students in accessing the curriculum and developing essential skills. Concerns were raised about equity in access to educational opportunities; some participants noted that their schools did not have access to Early French Immersion programming. Suggestions included maintaining diverse program offerings, such as FI and alternative models, to cater to different learning styles and needs. There was also a focus on ensuring equitable access to resources and support services for all students. Parents/caregivers also expressed frustration over the lack of inclusivity in mainstream classrooms where children with special education needs often feel segregated, sitting at the back of the classroom with minimal interaction unless prompted by educational assistants (EAs).

Awareness and Understanding of Program Options

Participants indicated that there was a need for increased awareness and understanding of the various program options available to students and families. This includes dispelling misconceptions about the value of different programs and ensuring that parents/caregivers are well-informed about the benefits and opportunities associated with each option. This confusion was largely attributed to the expansive number of options that exist within the District. Participants

highlighted the importance of flexibility in learning models to accommodate the diverse needs of students, which included providing options for specialized programs, withdrawal support for one-on-one time with an EA, and flexibility in curriculum delivery to address specific areas of difficulty, such as math processing. Participants valued having options for their children's education, but there was a call for clarity and transparency regarding program outcomes. Additionally, there were concerns raised about equity and access to programs, especially for marginalized students.

Transparency and Communication

Participants emphasized the importance of receiving timely and transparent information about any proposed changes to programming. They expressed a desire to be informed as early as possible to allow for reflection and decision-making regarding their children's educational options. Concerns were raised about the potential impact of changes on students, particularly those who may be most affected by alterations to programs like French Immersion. There was a desire amongst some participants for a phased approach to any changes and that there be support for teachers during these phased transitions.

Quality of Education and Staffing

The quality of education and adequacy of staffing were recurring concerns amongst participants. There was a call for ensuring that all students receive high-quality education and that teachers have the necessary support and resources to meet students' needs effectively. Participants emphasized the importance of providing teachers with adequate support and training, especially regarding inclusive practices and meeting the needs of students with disabilities or special education needs. There was also an indication that there was a lack of French educators in the system and more support was required to assist French teachers.

Learning Support Services (LSS)

LSS supports the numerous Specialized Program Classes offered by the District to enhance educational success and the welfare of students with special education needs. This department works in partnership with parents/caregivers and school personnel to ensure that all the learning needs of children are met through ongoing communication, cooperation, active participation and sharing of responsibility. Educators, psychologists, social workers, speech language pathologists, etc. (n = 240) provided input to questions that were posed in the Engage OCDSB survey. Below, the themes associated to each question are indicated:



How has the current model offering shaped students' learning and well-being?

Inclusion vs. Segregation

LSS staff strongly encouraged a strong push towards inclusion of students with disabilities and exceptionalities into regular classrooms rather than segregating them into separate programs. Staff raised concerns that include the belief that segregation perpetuates the idea that these students do not belong with their peers. Further, LSS staff noted that students in Specialized Program Classes often miss out on opportunities for socialization with peers in their local communities. This isolation can impact their social development and sense of belonging.

Equity and Access

LSS staff noted that there are disparities in access to programs, such as French Immersion (EFI) and Specialized Program Classes. This disparity results in issues of equity, where some students have more opportunities based on the program they are in while others are put at a disadvantage.

Effectiveness of Specialized Programs

LSS staff noted that while Specialized Program Classes can and have benefited some students, concerns were raised about whether these programs adequately prepare students for integration back into regular classrooms or their communities. There is a belief amongst staff that once students are placed in these programs, they are often confined to them.

Educator Training and Support

LSS staff highlighted the need for better training and support for educators to effectively teach students with diverse needs in inclusive settings, such as within

“regular” classrooms. This training includes understanding Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and providing appropriate differentiation in all programs.

Program Diversity

LSS staff noted the importance of offering a variety of programs to meet students’ needs and strengths. However, there are concerns about how choices may inadvertently pigeonhole students or limit their opportunities. Staff noted that the silo-ing of programs results in a poorer sense of belonging and community amongst students.

Communication and Collaboration

LSS staff noted that issues around communication between schools, families, and central support teams highlight challenges in implementing effective educational strategies and supports.



What changes to the current program model could enhance learning for students today and for future generations?

Inclusion and Integration

There was a strong emphasis on improving inclusion by integrating students with diverse needs into regular classrooms and community schools. This includes advocating for the removal of specialized labels and barriers that segregate students. However, LSS staff noted that facilities must be updated to support increased integration of students into mainstream programming.

Support and Resources

The need for increased staffing levels in classrooms to better support the diverse needs of students was highlighted by LSS staff. This included advocating for more Educational Assistants (EAs), Communicative Disorders Assistants (CDAs), and other professionals and para-professionals who are trained to support students with specific needs. In addition, LSS staff noted that there was a need for more comprehensive training and ongoing professional development for educators and support staff, focusing on coaching and modeling rather than traditional workshops. LSS staff highlighted the importance of targeted supports for students with mental health and social-emotional challenges, including dedicated spaces and highly trained staff.

Educational Model Adjustments

LSS staff suggested a transition from Early French Immersion (EFI) to later immersion options, reducing system-wide classes to free up resources for direct

support, and favouring K-8 schools over middle schools to enhance student connections and leadership opportunities. Staff also advocated for flexible curriculum adjustments that prioritize social-emotional learning and self-regulation skills, as well as individualized program plans that are regularly reviewed and adapted based on student progress.

LSS staff highlighted the importance of targeted supports for students with mental health and social-emotional challenges, including dedicated spaces and highly trained staff.

Systemic Coordination and Accountability

LSS staff advocated for structured multi-disciplinary team meetings, clear criteria for student placements, and systematic data-driven approaches to ensure accountability and consistency across schools. The LSS staff also emphasized the need to address disparities in access to educational programs and services, including advocating for dual-track options in all schools and eliminating single-track schools.



What information, resources and supports students, families, and staff need to be successful when changes are implemented?

Transition Support

LSS staff emphasized the need for providing adequate support during transitions, both for students moving into new programs or schools and for staff adapting to new models. This includes structured multi-disciplinary team meetings and proactive interventions that can provide crucial transition support.

Staffing and Training

LSS staff advocated for increased staffing levels, particularly Educational Assistants (EAs) and Early Childhood Educators (ECEs), with a focus on specialized training and mentorship systems to support professional development. There was also a call for more in-class support and reduced administrative tasks for Learning Support Teachers (LSTs) to facilitate more direct student support.

Inclusion and Integration Strategies

LSS staff noted the need for strategies to support potential integration. Suggestions included the implementation of inclusive models such as co-teaching and “Pod” interventions within classrooms to support diverse student needs effectively. They expressed the importance of moving away from self-contained Specialized Program Classes (SPCs) towards integration into regular classroom settings.

Community Engagement and Communication

LSS staff placed great importance on clear and consistent communication with families about changes to programs, criteria for placements, and available resources. They expressed a desire for enhanced community partnerships and supports, including school-based community meetings and accessible information sessions for families. LSS staff also suggested increased efforts to educate parents/caregivers on navigating the education system, providing resources in home languages, and hosting annual meetings between parents/caregivers and external organizations to support student needs effectively would be beneficial.

Equity and Accessibility

LSS staff advocated for equitable access to resources and educational opportunities, particularly for marginalized groups such as racialized students, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and those with special education needs. This included ensuring that supports are available in multiple languages and addressing barriers to access.

Professional Development and Capacity Building

LSS staff called for a focus on ongoing professional development during school hours to build capacity among staff, including training on special education, integration strategies, and mental health supports. There was also a call amongst LSS staff for specialized training for educators working in French Immersion settings to accommodate children with exceptionalities.

Collaborative and Multi-Disciplinary Approaches

LSS staff indicated a need for collaborative practices among multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs), where these teams should be more involved in schools from the beginning of the year to support effective program implementation and student success.

Systemic Coordination and Accountability

LSS staff raised concerns about the effectiveness of current systems, advocating for structured data-driven support and accountability measures to ensure consistency and quality across schools. This included clear information dissemination and clear communication of a rationale for program changes to all stakeholders.

Supporting Diverse Learners

LSS staff sought a commitment to supporting diverse learner needs through proactive screening, targeted interventions, and flexible program adaptations that prioritize social-emotional learning and individualized support plans.

Ottawa-Carleton Elementary Teachers' Federation Town Halls

Three town hall meetings were conducted with the Ottawa-Carleton Elementary Teachers' Federation (OCETFO). These sessions included members of the federation who were able to ask questions regarding the elementary program review. Two of these meetings were conducted in-person (**n = 40**) and one virtual session (**n = 147**). While these sessions were primarily opportunities for members of the federation to ask questions about the review, thematic categories emerged through the consistency among questions. The following sites were used for the town hall sessions:

- Gloucester High School
- Confederation Education Centre
- Virtual Session

The following are the **key themes** for the questions that were asked:

Staffing Implications

Federation members sought reassurance on job security as a result of the review. Tied to this were questions about the potential for school closures and/or population changes within schools that could impact job security and retention rates. They raised questions about mitigation plans for teachers who are impacted by program changes. In addition, they inquired about how the District would fill a potential increase in French educator roles with qualified teachers.

Professional Learning and Support

Questions were raised about what professional learning and support would be provided by the District following the implementation of any proposed model. Federation members underscored the importance of providing timely professional learning to support this transition, particularly with respect to the potential integration of students with special needs across programs. Members inquired about increased funding for behavioural/academic support in French classes.

Review Process

Federation members sought clarity on the review process with respect to timelines, consultation, transportation, and boundary reviews. Further questions were raised about whether the District will be receptive to feedback on the model(s) when presented in the fall. Federation members also inquired about the motivations

behind potential program changes (e.g., cost-cutting measures). Members inquired if the 2016/2017 FSL review and its impacts were being considered in the conduct of this holistic review. Members also inquired about the outcome measures that were being used to identify ideal and successful models. Members inquired about the extent to which the Ministry was a part of this review and if had agreed to fund changes.

Education Quality

Federation members inquired about maintaining and improving educational quality, particularly in French language development and literacy. Members made suggestions for enhancing literacy support, particularly in French Immersion and early grades. Further, questions were posed around how French language acquisition in kindergarten might be improved.

Special Education

Federation members questioned the potential integration of students with special needs across programs. They inquired how the District would prepare both students and staff for this integration. Members also questioned how the OCDSB could better support students who met the criteria for placement in a Specialized Program Class but did not get in because there was no space. Relatedly, members emphasized the importance of Specialized Program Classes, having them in community schools, and the community that students find within these classes.

French Immersion

Federation members inquired about early literacy support, particularly in Grade 1 Immersion and beyond. Members noted that there is a lack of support positions (e.g., LRT/LST positions) within FSL programs for French speakers and inquired if EFI teachers would be permitted to take on support roles and why this wasn't already an option. In addition, members inquired about potential changes to Grade 1-3 French Immersion percentages.

Student Support Professionals Town Hall

In addition to the ETFO town halls, an additional virtual town hall was held with Student Support Professionals (SSP). The SSP represents both Educational Assistants and Early Childhood Educators. Like the ETFO town halls, this session included members of SSP (e.g., EAs, ECEs) who were able to ask questions regarding the elementary program review. While this session was primarily an opportunity for members of the federation to ask questions about the review, thematic categories emerged through the consistency among questions.

The following are the **key themes** for the questions that were asked during the town hall:

Special Education Support

SSP members inquired about the potential dissolution of Specialized Program Classes. They suggested that any move to make an integrated approach should be accompanied by added support, such as those of EAs. In this regard, members also inquired about reviewing EA allocation on a more regular basis than what is currently done.

French Immersion

SSP members sought clarification on whether or not the District would offer only Early French Immersion with little to no English. Similarly, members also inquired about whether the District would switch to only offering Middle French Immersion and eliminate the Early French Immersion program altogether.

Safety Implications

SSP members raised concerns and questions about whether the District had looked into the link between violence in schools and EA/ECE leave. They also inquired about reconciling the tensions between equity of access to education for all students and the threat to student safety by integrated students with special education needs into classrooms and how they two might conflict through integration.

Professional Development and Support

SSP members sought clarification and reassurance that there would be support and training provided for staff to implement any potential changes to the system. They noted that support for EAs was important to improve current retention rates. In addition, members noted the importance of providing onboarding and immediate training for EAs as well as reviewing how supports are put in place, such as SEA equipment and medical equipment.

Review Process

SSP members asked if jurisdictional scans of other school boards that have conducted program reviews would be done to inform the process. In addition, they asked about the extent of involvement of students in the review process.

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