



COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (PUBLIC)

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Report No. 24-110

Contextual Report for the Elementary Program Review: District Data and Relevant Research

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PURPOSE:

1. The following report provides the analyses and syntheses of District-level data and contextually-relevant external research related to the program review at the elementary level. The contextual report, together with the consultation report, [Report 24-101: Consultation Report on the Elementary Program Review](#), provide foundational information sources to support the elementary program review process. The report also provides an update on the status of the review, a revised timeline for sharing proposed model(s) and subsequent implementation of any approved changes to elementary programming and delivery in the District.

STRATEGIC LINKS:

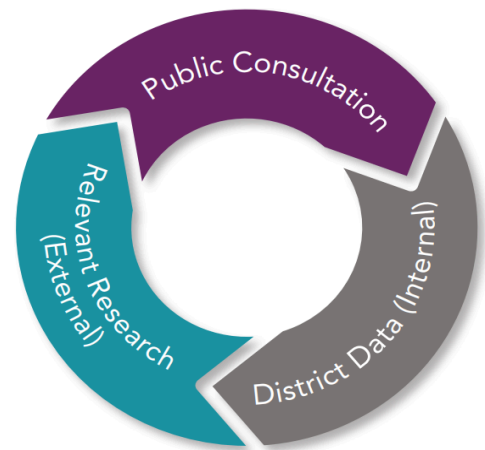
2. The need to review elementary programming was a recurring theme throughout the strategic planning process in the winter and spring of 2023, as shared in [Report 23-029: 2023-2027 Strategic Plan Consultation Report](#). The elementary program review is fundamental to achieving the objectives outlined in the multi-year strategic plan's pillars of learning, well-being and social responsibility, most specifically, improved program quality and accessibility for all students.

The student-centred focus on the strategic priorities related to achievement and well-being, informed through a lens of equity and human rights, inclusivity and social justice, also supports the optimal allocation of the District's finite resources (fiscal/human/material) in order to improve organizational effectiveness and efficiency, as well as outcomes for students.

CONTEXT:

- Members of the organization and the broader community have come to realize that the current elementary program and delivery models have served the needs of some students in some schools but clearly not all students in all schools. A number of students have been and continue to be marginalized and/or underserved as a result of the systemic barriers in place through existing programs and services. As noted in the preliminary report that launched the elementary program review in the spring of 2024, there is an immediate 'call to action' that requires the organization to rethink what programming it offers, how and where it is accessed, whose needs are being served, and how schools may be redesigned to better meet the needs of current and future generations.

The three key information sources - public consultation, District-level data, and relevant research - provide insightful perspectives related to the program review at the elementary level, as well as the development and implementation of potential proposed model(s).



The following three overarching principles are guiding the work of the elementary program review and build upon the broader guiding principles developed in [Report 24-052: Program Review Process at the Elementary Level](#) related to learning, well-being, and social responsibility:

- **community-based education** - the recognition of each school site as core to the community allows for the localization of coordinated supports related to learning, well-being, and social responsibility, as well as the effective and efficient operationalization of the organization;
- **dynamic, bilingual teaching and learning environments** - the ability to offer programming in English and French for all students at each school site, along a continuum of bilingualism organized by subject area/discipline, allows for confidence, proficiency and achievement in both official languages; and,
- **continuum of inclusion** - the provision of support at each school site allows for an array of assistance for all learners, including multilingual learners and students with special needs, with the potential for full inclusion, withdrawal assistance, and/or specialized classes.

As a result of the breadth and depth of perspectives that have emerged from the initial consultation, as well as the analyses and syntheses of the contextual information provided (internal data and external research), it has become clear that an opportunity for additional consultation, such as with advisory committees, as well as Ministry representatives, during the fall of 2024, will further inform thinking regarding the program review process. Numerous aspects are being carefully considered, including: regulatory requirements and guidelines such as the Planning and Accommodation Review Guideline (PARG), program-based school attendance boundaries, scheduling and staffing implications, childcare services, resource allocation, transportation, as well as capacity building and professional development for educators. As a result, the timeline for presenting specific recommendations has been adjusted, as outlined in detail below.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

4. Sources of Information For Elementary Program Review

In addition to the appendix related to the public consultation ([Appendix A](#)), the following key sources of information are provided:

- [Appendix B](#) - Literature review related to bilingual programming compiled by external researcher Dr. Stephanie Arnott, Associate Professor and Samantha Van Geel, PhD Candidate (University of Ottawa);
- [Appendix C](#) - Literature review related to inclusive education compiled by external researcher Dr. Gillian Parekh, Associate Professor (York University); and,
- [Appendix D](#) - District data focused on the demographics, achievement, engagement, and well-being of students at the elementary level.

Each of these information sources informs the work of the elementary program review, building on the three overarching principles.

5. Summary of Relevant Research on Bi/Multilingual Programming

It is well-established in the field of education that learning an additional language has many benefits to all learners, including students identified as having exceptional learning needs and multilingual learners. Areas of benefit include cognition, creativity, communication, interpersonal skills, empathy, intercultural awareness and overall literacy and content achievement. Studies have also identified social and economic advantages to learning French, specifically in Canada, as well as the global context.

All students deserve the opportunity to access these benefits. Yet, a common barrier to accessing them is the perceived risk(s) associated with learning an additional language. In the case of French as a Second Language (FSL) in Canada, researchers have consistently reported that there is no evidence to

support the belief that students who are at risk for poor academic performance are at greater risk in FSL than in English-only programs. And yet, exclusionary streaming in FSL programs, French Immersion (FI) in particular, continues to occur, despite such exemptions not existing in other subject areas, giving FSL the unique status in Canada as the only school subject from which students with disabilities have been excluded.

Research investigating the achievement and experiences of students with disabilities as well as multilingual and racialized learners shows that these students can indeed succeed in bi/multilingual English-French programming. The evidence from research demonstrates that students with disabilities progress at a similar rate in FI compared to their peers in the mainstream English program and that multilingual learners can excel in FSL programs like FI and Core French. In fact, multilingual learners have been shown to outperform their Canadian-born peers in English-French acquisition within these programs and attain age-appropriate proficiency in both languages.

With the knowledge that equitable access for all students in bi/multilingual programming is appropriate and important, it becomes essential to advocate that learners, educators, school administrators, and parents/guardians/caregivers be provided with equitable support in order to fully benefit from equitable access. The key aspects of evidence-based support for key stakeholder groups - learners, educators, school administrators and parents/guardians/caregivers - that should be kept in mind when assessing how to optimize the success of quality bi/multilingual programming, include:

- inclusive education by way of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction (DI) provided for all learners, including early screening and tracking of language development and early intervention (e.g., through bi-multiliteracy learning experiences);
- professional development for educators that challenges misinformed beliefs regarding which students belong in bi-multilingual programs, and encourages teaching strategies such as cross-linguistic pedagogy, a linguistically expansive practice, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP), and meaningful collaboration between FSL and non-FSL colleagues;
- site-based support for school administrators with oversight of English-French programs, including collaboration, modeling the use and promotion of French, providing access to resources and professional learning for staff, as well as relationship building, amongst others; and,
- additional supports for parents/guardians/caregivers of students in bi/multilingual English-French programs who often feel incapable of supporting their child in FI, and consequently feel isolated from the school community

notably due to perceived language barriers, by engaging all parents as ‘multilingual experts’ in culturally-sensitive ways in their school communities.

Both equity of access and equity of support cannot exist independently of one another in an orientation of bi/multilingual English-French programming for all learners and educators. Ultimately, the research report on bilingualism aims to inspire transformative conversations and actions toward more equitable, bi-multilingual English-French programming in any/all Ontario contexts.

Note: Citations and references for this content can be found in the full report (see Appendix B).

6. Summary of Relevant Research on Inclusive Education

For decades, how to best reach and teach disabled students has been a core concern across education systems, world-wide. Despite the prevalent notion that congregating students with disabilities into small, resource and intervention-rich environments is effective, there is a dearth of empirical research to support that students’ fare better academically within a special education model of education. The identified concerns related to ability-grouping, in general, have been established in several international studies and systematic reviews. International research studies have also revealed that, in both identification and placement practices, there are significant issues with students who are racialized, economically marginalized, and/or male being overidentified through and placed in special education programming.

Ableism is described as the privileging of ability whereby someone is advantaged based on perceived or demonstrated capacity. As such, ableism inherently leads to the marginalization and discrimination of people with disabilities (sometimes referred to as disablism). Ableism is closely connected to and interrelated with other forms of discrimination (such as racism, classism, and sexism) and can compound students’ experiences of exclusion in school.

Researching outcomes associated with ability-grouping and inclusive education can be challenging. For both models, there is often a lack of clarity and cohesion related to practices and measures. It is, therefore, important that when measuring outcomes related to special or inclusive models of education, that studies are not just accounting for students’ placement.

Access to post-secondary education is increasingly important in securing students’ health and financial futures. There is significant research showing how elementary experiences and program participation shape student pathways towards post-secondary education. As such, it’s an important measure for program outcome. The key findings of equity-related research as it pertains to inclusive education, include:

- equity of outcomes insights suggest that aspects of the elementary school experience such as low achievement, involvement in special education (particularly placement in self-contained classrooms), suspension and absenteeism impact access to secondary and postsecondary academic opportunities;
- equity of support analyses demonstrate that students placed on a modified curriculum are at an increased disadvantage for accessing the academic program of study in secondary school when compared to students supported with accommodations only, who appear to have similar access on par with the system overall;
- equity of experiences shared by students, educators, and families, reveals observations and experiences of disability discrimination in school such as bullying, name-calling, and exclusion, and that while self-contained special education classes intend to provide a safe space for students, this was not always the experience of students and families; and,
- equity of access evidence indicates that ability grouping, whether through intervention strategies and/or identification and placement through special education (including gifted), has had a notable relationship to students' identity characteristics (gender, race, income, etc.), and that findings encourage consideration for how bias (such as racism and classism) can shape understanding of ability and disability as well as influence decisions around students' placements and programs.

System change requires time and investment. Strategies supporting inclusion and system change include: investment in community buy-in and intentional timetabling for co-teaching, co-planning and investment in effective professional development activities; commitment to anti-ableism strategies; and, establishment of a culture of high expectations for all students. Of note, it is important that systems structure accessible opportunities for students in special education to transition into pathways that enable access to postsecondary education.

Note: Citations and references for this content can be found in the full report (see Appendix C).

7. Summary of District Data on Language Programs

The appendix regarding District-level data includes a summary of the enrolments and characteristics, achievement and engagement of students enrolled in Regular English Program with Core French (REG); Alternative English with Core French (ALT), Early French Immersion (EFI) and Middle French Immersion (MFI), as outlined in Appendix D. Note that the data summaries by language program are

inclusive of students in Ottawa-Carleton Virtual School (OCV) and exclusive of students in specialized program classes.

Summary of Enrolment Numbers by Program

As seen in Figure 1 below, EFI consistently accounts for more than half of grade 1-8 enrolment, followed by the Regular English with Core French program accounting for just over one-third of students. At a divisional level, the higher proportion of students enrolling in EFI was found in the primary grades (1-3).

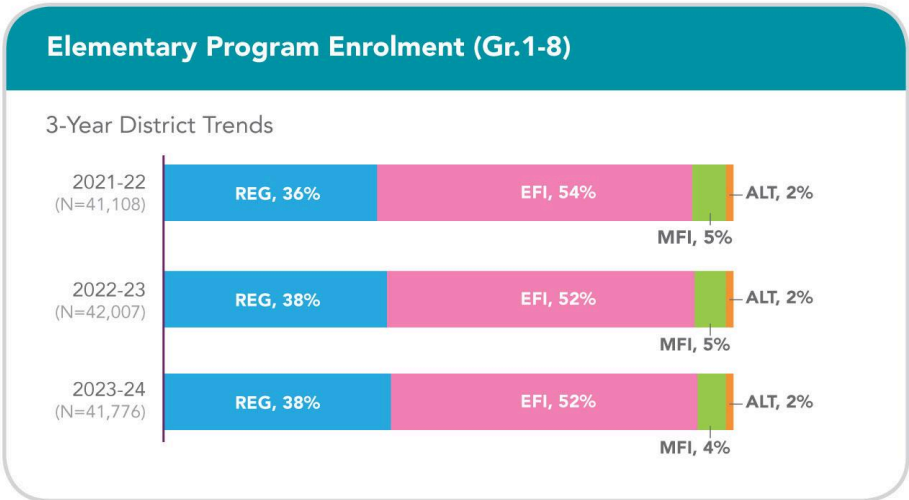


Figure 1

Summary of Program-level Representation by Student Characteristic

Overall, disproportionate representation of specific groups of students across elementary programs continues to exist, and is fairly consistent with previous District-level reporting. The following summarizes the program enrolment over a three-year period (2021-2022 to 2023-2024), including:

- Gender - Females are more likely to be enrolled in EFI and MFI programs, and less likely to be in ALT and REG programs, relative to their representation in the overall student population. Males are more likely to be enrolled in ALT and REG programs, and less likely to be in MFI and EFI programs.
- Background and Language - Students from English-language households, students who are not identified as multilingual learners (MLLs), and students who are born in Canada, are all more likely to be enrolled in ALT and EFI programs, and less likely to be enrolled in REG and MFI, relative to their representation in the overall student population.
- Students who identify as Indigenous - Indigenous (INDG) students are more likely to be enrolled in ALT and REG programs, with underrepresentation in French Immersion programs. In 2023-2024, INDG students were three times

more likely to be enrolled in ALT (6% vs. 2% District-wide) and 1.5 times more likely to be enrolled in REG (3% vs. 2%).

- Students with Special Education Needs (Excluding Gifted) - Students with special education needs (excluding gifted) are overrepresented in ALT and REG programs, and underrepresented in EFI and MFI programs, compared to their overall share in the student population. In 2023-2024, there were almost three times the proportion of students with special education needs enrolled in the ALT program compared to the District. There was also a higher representation of students with special education needs in the REG program.
- Students residing in lower-income neighbourhoods (Low-SES) - The majority of students living in Low-SES are enrolled in the REG program (42%), followed by EFI (31%), MFI (3%), and ALT (2%). At a program-level, in 2023-2024 there were proportionately more students living in Low-SES in ALT and REG, and proportionately fewer in EFI, relative to the overall prevalence in the student population.

Summary of Achievement by Program

Overall, provincial assessment and report card data tends to show higher academic achievement for students enrolled in EFI or MFI.

- Provincial Assessment Data at the Primary and Junior Levels - Both EFI and MFI programs have had consistently higher proportions of students achieving a Level 3 or Level 4 across assessments, while REG and ALT consistently fell below the District in their rate of achieving the provincial standard. In all but Jr-Math, ALT students met the provincial standard at a higher rate than those in REG (differences of 2-8%).
- Elementary Report Card - Program-level patterns in report card achievement have remained fairly consistent over the last three years, and are aligned with those reported previously in District-level reports. Notably, larger proportions of students in EFI and MFI programs are meeting the provincial standard in Math, Language-Reading, and Language-Writing compared to the District. The inverse was true for REG and ALT, who had lower percentages of students meeting the provincial standard compared to District.
- Secondary Look-Ahead - Provincial assessment results at the secondary level reinforce the pattern in elementary achievement outcomes, wherein rates of achievement are higher for students who were enrolled in EFI or MFI in grade 8. Likewise, when examined by their grade 8 program, students in both French Immersion programs were more likely to be on-track to graduate based on credit accumulation data in grades 9 and 10.

Summary of Engagement and Well-Being by Program

Analysis of perceptual data at a program level was limited to responses collected by EQAO's Student Questionnaires for Primary (Grade 3) and Junior (Grade 6). Available data tends to show higher levels of engagement and well-being for students enrolled in the French Immersion programs.

- Absenteeism - Overall, rates of absenteeism (as measured by the percentage of students who missed 10% or more instructional days) were higher in ALT and REG programs, and lower in French Immersion programs (EFI and MFI, respectively).
- Sense of Belonging and Social Connectedness - Small but stable differences were observed across programs, with slightly higher rates of agreement with positive statements on sense of belonging and social connectedness reported by students in MFI and EFI programs compared to the District, and slightly lower rates of agreement from those in the REG program. Responses from students in ALT varied across division and time, therefore a pattern for this program remains unclear.

Figure 2 provides a snapshot of each program across the above identified areas as compared to the District as a whole for the 2023-2024 school year.

Representation of Students by Demographic Characteristics Within an Elementary Program vs. District Population: 2023-2024 Academic Year

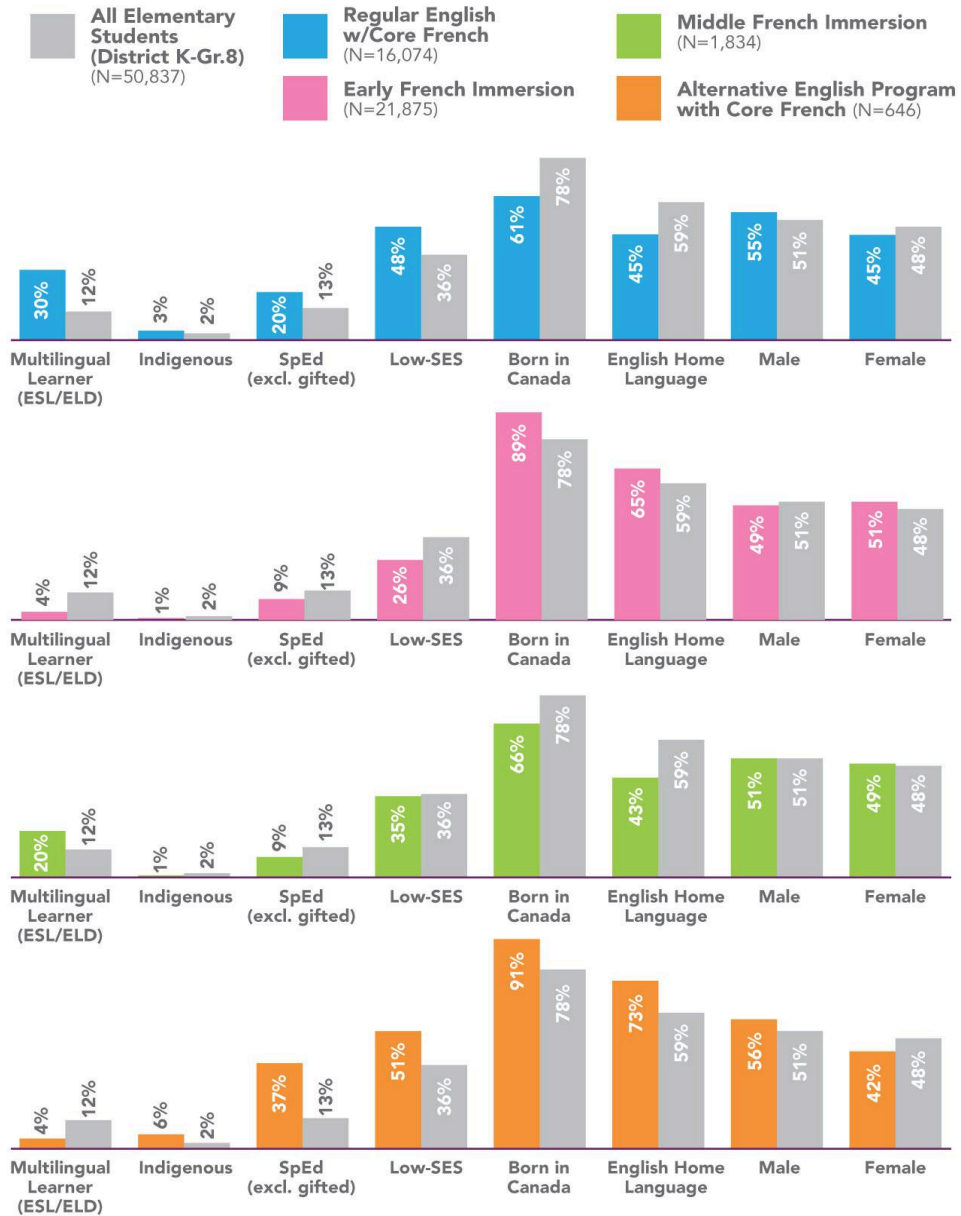


Figure 2

8. Summary of District Data for Ottawa-Carleton Virtual School (OCV)

A summary of internal data related to students enrolled in OCV has been provided in Appendix D. This includes enrolment data, demographic characteristics, achievement data and engagement data. Enrolment in OCV-Elementary has been declining in the post-pandemic period, accounting for less than 1% of the District's K-8 enrolment in the 2023-2024 school year.

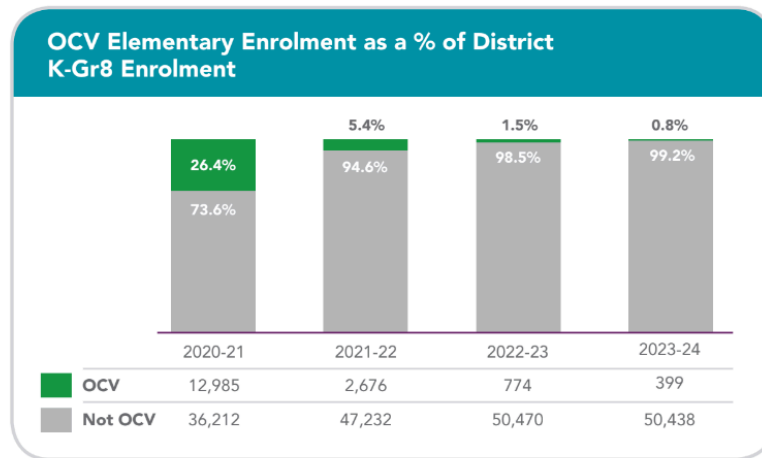


Figure 3

With respect to demographic characteristics, certain groups of students have a disproportionate representation within the OCV program as seen in Figure 4, with the most notable differences being the overrepresentation of Indigenous students and students residing in low-income neighborhoods (both of which have increased over time). Multilingual learners and females are also overrepresented in OCV.

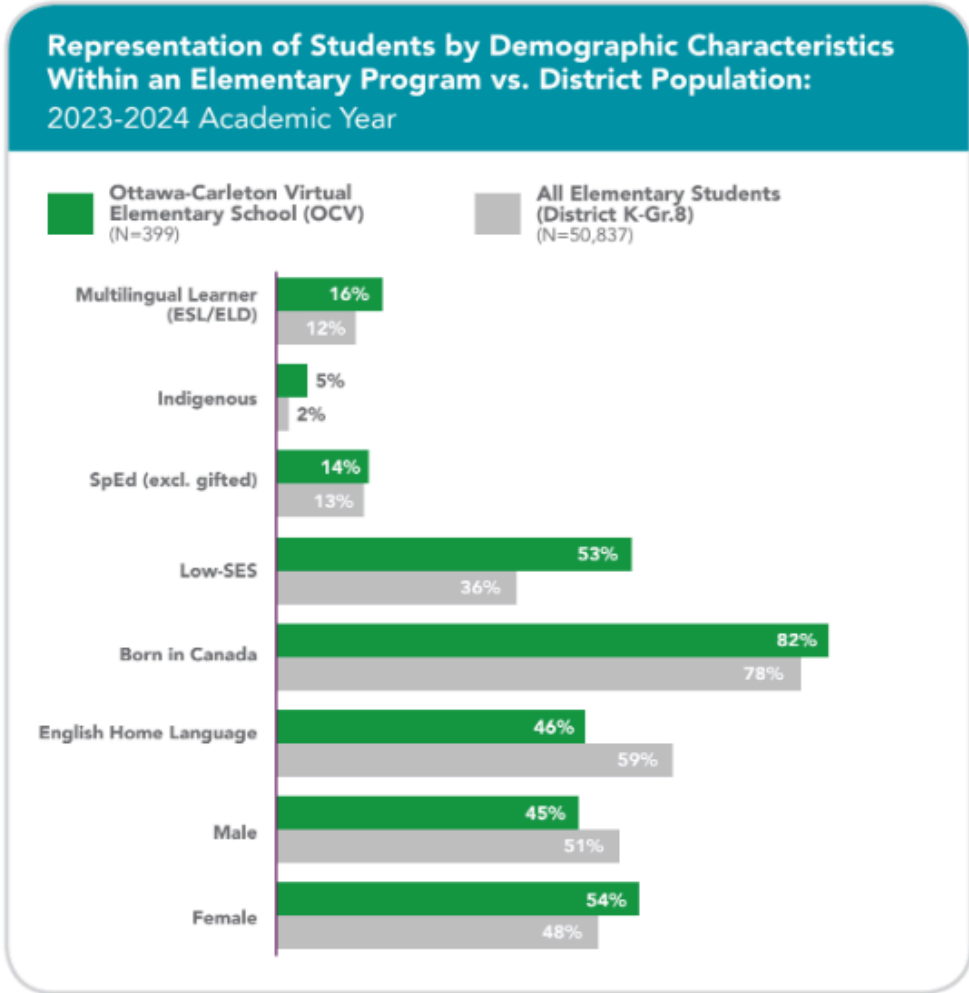


Figure 4

Additional data related to achievement, engagement and well-being for OCV are detailed in Appendix D.

9. Summary of District Data for Specialized Program Classes (SPCs)

A summary of internal data related to students in SPCs can be found in Appendix D. The SPCs include 12 different types of classes, serving the needs of students with diverse exceptionalities. Given the range of student profiles and class size within this category, overall data across SPCs may not reflect the particular experiences of students within a given class type.

Enrolment in SPCs (fully self-contained and partially integrated) accounts for less than 2.5% of the elementary enrolment. Number and type of SPCs are reviewed annually and adjusted based on a number of factors, including the type and distribution of student needs across the District; therefore changes in enrolment need to be considered in this context.

Historic differences in disproportionate representation of demographic characteristics in SPCs persist. While some progress has been made in reducing overrepresentation, in 2023-2024 there were greater proportions of male students, self-identified Indigenous students, and students residing in lower-income neighbourhoods compared to the overall District elementary student population.

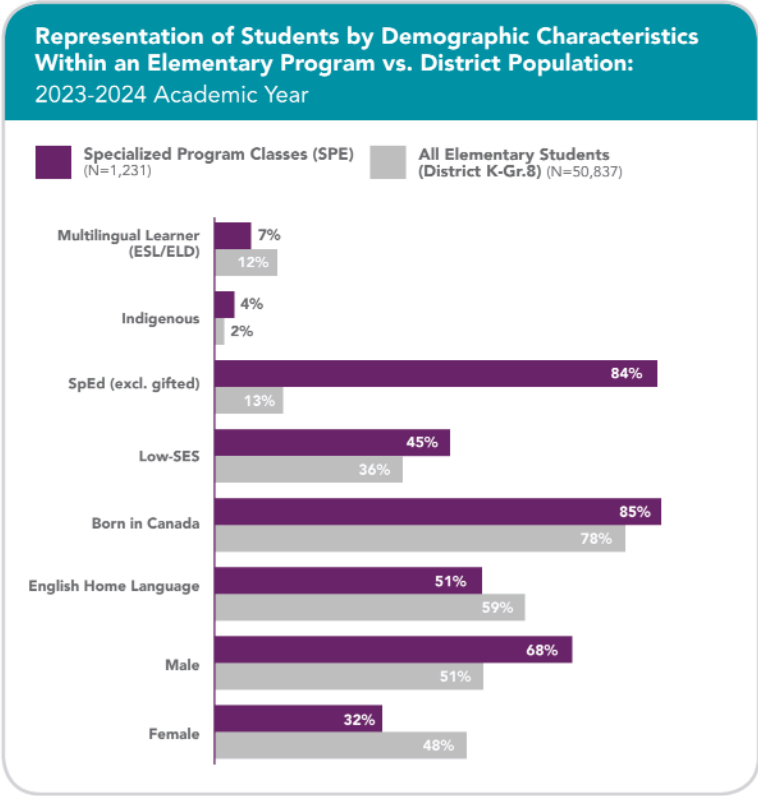


Figure 5

Standard achievement metrics, in isolation, are not suitable for monitoring the achievement of students in some types of SPCs. Many students in SPCs follow student-specific modified and/or alternative curriculum expectations (reflected in their Individual Education Plans (IEPs), which must be included for context at the student-level when interpreting achievement data. Consequently, report card outcomes for students in specialized program classes are not necessarily comparable to report card outcomes of other students. Similarly, EQAO achievement data does not provide a meaningful alternative, given the low EQAO participation of students in SPCs. Rates of absenteeism for students in SPCs were 10% higher than the overall elementary student population. Additional data related to enrolment, student demographics, and absenteeism for SPCs are detailed in Appendix D.

10. Timelines for Decision Making and Implementation

The revised timelines proposed for the program review process are identified below.

Fall 2024: Consultation & Contextual Reports
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• presentation of consultation report to trustees for discussion (September)• presentation of follow-up contextual report to trustees for discussion (October)• continued consultation through advisory committees (October)
Winter & Spring 2025: Decision related to Program Model(s) & Transition Plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• presentation of proposed elementary program model(s) for discussion (Winter)• active community engagement campaign continued (Winter/Spring)• decision(s) made by trustees on the recommended model(s) and implementation (Spring)• formation of implementation planning team and initial decisions for operationalization of model (if approved), as well as identification of budget needs for 2025-2026 school year (Spring)
2025-2026 School Year: Implementation Preparation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• implementation planning for operationalization of decision(s) continues, including:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ resource allocation and logistics planning for budget 2026-2027;○ coordination of staffing needs;○ professional development/capacity building;○ provision of information to the Ottawa Student Transportation Authority (OSTA),○ childcare services planning and coordination;• oversight of transition preparations and facility upgrades• communication strategies including updates if/as required
Fall 2026: Implementation of Program Delivery Model
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• implementation of new educational model(s) at the elementary level• ongoing monitoring of implementation and program delivery

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

11. The costs associated with the review to date have largely been related to staff time, particularly the project team, all of which have been covered within the approved project budget for the current school year.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

12. The consultation and feedback initially planned for the fall of 2024 will be deferred to the winter/spring of 2025, and will include opportunities for feedback similar to what occurred in the spring of 2024 (continuation of an 'active community

engagement campaign'), including reaching out to advisory committees, in-person and on-line feedback sessions for community and staff, as well as an on-line survey. Opportunities for student voice, and sessions with Indigenous students and families, as well as schools supported through the Student Achievement Through Equity (SATE) inquiry will be built into the winter/spring of 2025 consultation plan.

The consultation taking place in the fall of 2024 will provide opportunities for advisory committees to discuss the contextual report and provide feedback for consideration.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

13. The following guiding questions are provided for the purposes of discussion:

- How does the external research serve to inform thinking related to elementary programming and school support?
- How does the internal data serve to inform thinking on the elementary program review?

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APPENDICES

Appendix A - Consultation Report

Appendix B - Relevant Research (External) - bi/multilingual programming

Appendix C - Relevant Research (External) - inclusive education

Appendix D - District Data (Internal)