OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

MEMORANDUM

Memo No. 19-062

TO: Trustees
              Student Trustees
              Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)

FROM: Camille Williams-Taylor, Director of Education and Secretary of the Board
              Peter Symmonds, Superintendent of Learning Support Services

DATE: 10 May 2019

RE: **Empower Reading Update**

The following information is provided as an update regarding the status of the Empower Reading program in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB).

The Empower Reading program was developed by the Learning Disabilities Research Program (LDRP) at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto (SickKids). Empower is a Tier 3 intervention designed for students who have challenges with phonological awareness and fluency resulting in difficulties learning to read, spell and comprehend text.

In 2009, the OCDSB entered into an agreement with SickKids to provide Empower Reading: Decoding and Spelling Grade 2 to 5 and Empower Reading Teacher Training. Since that time, the OCDSB has expanded Empower to include Empower Reading: Comprehension and Vocabulary Grade 2 to 5 and Empower Reading: Decoding and Spelling Grade 6 to 8.

First year Empower trained teachers must participate in no fewer than three mandatory mentor visits, and Empower trained teachers who continue to use the program must complete an annual refresher training session and a minimum of one mentor visit. Training and mentoring obligations are clearly stated in the Memorandum of Agreement with SickKids and monitored jointly by SickKids and the District's Empower Reading program coordinator.

Empower teachers administer four screening tests to measure letter-sound knowledge and word reading before and after completing the Empower Reading program. These tests include a Sound Symbol Test, Sound Combinations Test, a Challenge Word Test, a Keyword Test and a Test of Transfer. Teachers also use a Phonological Awareness Checklist and administer PM Benchmark pre and post Empower training.

Teachers are asked to record pre and post Empower training data in a tracking form developed by Learning Support Services (LSS), however, gaps in data collection exist due to the voluntary nature of this request. Based on the data LSS has been able to collect over time, results consistently indicate that Empower has a positive impact on students

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and their ability to read, and anecdotal reports from parents and families provide further evidence about the positive effects of the Empower Reading program.

In terms of Empower Reading program participation, the maximum number of students per group is eight and the majority of students are participating in Empower Decoding and spelling Grade 2 to 5, or Empower Comprehension and Vocabulary Grade 2 to 5.

This year, the OCDSB is piloting the Empower Reading High School Program with Grade 9 students in two secondary schools. Each of the 70 program lessons presents decoding, spelling, vocabulary, and comprehension tasks, and the programs are completed over a school semester. Since the Empower Reading High School program integrates cross-curricular content incorporating narrative, expository, and graphical text, schools are encouraged to make it a credit bearing course (e.g., Locally Developed English or Learning Strategies).

Estimated cost for delivering Empower (includes supplies, training, release time for teachers and travel costs for SickKids trainers)	Cost
2018-2019	$148,867
2017-2018	$153,293
2016-2017	$212,304*

*costs reflect an increase in number of teachers trained and schools delivering Empower Reading program.

The following table summarizes the number of schools currently participating in Empower and the overall number of teachers trained to deliver Empower programs. Not all trained teachers are delivering Empower this school year. Please see Appendix A for a complete list of schools that offer the program.

Empower Reading Program data as of April 2019

Empower Reading Program	Number of Schools	Number of Teachers Trained
Decoding and spelling Grade 2 to 5	92	128
Comprehension and Vocabulary Grade 2 to 5	21	20
Decoding and Spelling Grade 6 to 8	13	14
High School	2	4

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Peter Symmonds at 613-596-8254 or at peter.symmonds@ocdsb.ca

cc   Senior Staff
        Manager Board Services
        Corporate Records