



**COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE**

**08 December 2020**

**REPORT NO. 20-103**

**HIGH PERFORMANCE ATHLETIC PROGRAM**

**Key Contact:** Shawn Lehman, Superintendent of Instruction Ext. 8391

**PURPOSE:**

1. To present findings on the OCDSB High Performance Athletic Program consultation.
2. To seek approval of recommendations concerning the future of the High Performance Athletic Program.

**SUPPORTING OUR STRATEGIC PLAN:**

3. Examining programs within the OCDSB is work that supports the goal of creating a culture of responsibility that leads to the desired outcomes of improved student achievement, increased graduation success in all pathways and an increased sense of relevance and motivation for students.

**CONTEXT:**

4. The High Performance Athletics Program (HPA) was established at Confederation High School three decades ago and was moved to John McCrae Secondary School (JMSS) when the school was closed. It was originally started at Confederation High School due to its proximity to the Nepean Sportsplex, where many students trained with swim, skating and hockey clubs. The move to JMSS was predicated on its connection to the Walter Baker Sportsplex. In the 2020-2021 school year there are 110 grades 9 - 12 students in the program at JMSS representing a wide range of competitive sports.
5. The HPA Program is classified as a District Program as per the "Secondary School Program Framework" as found in *Policy P.105.CUR, Changes to*

*Programs and Program Delivery Structures at Secondary Schools.* As such, it is within the Board's purview to make any changes to, and/or eliminate the program. This could include a significant change to the delivery model or the relocation of the program. This framework also defines what constitutes a District Program and names the High Performance Athletic Program as one of these programs at the secondary level.

6. John McCrae Secondary School is currently experiencing facility enrolment pressures. The school has a capacity for 996 students (based on an addition done a number of years ago) and has seen its enrolment grow to 1391 in the 2019-20 school year. While the school does have some ability to function over capacity, the current enrolment presents a challenge.
7. At the 1 October 2019 Committee of the Whole meeting, trustees passed a motion directing staff to commence the activities outlined in *Policy P.105.CUR and Procedure PR.629.CUR, Changes to Programs and Program Delivery Structures at Secondary Schools*, with a view to phasing out the High Performance Athlete Program (HPA) at John McCrae Secondary School, effective September 2021. It should be noted that the activities in this procedure provide a process for the addition of a District program to a school but do not provide a process for closing or moving one.

## **KEY CONSIDERATIONS:**

8. The two most important aspects to contemplate the potential phasing out of the District High Performance Athletic program at JMSS are (1) the program delivery model and (2) the location of the program. Both aspects should be measured by how well they support the success of elite athletes from across the system.

### The HPA Program at John McCrae Secondary School

#### Program Delivery Model

9. As a District program, students may apply from across the jurisdiction and from out of board jurisdictions. The criteria for entrance into HPA is as follows:
  - Applicants must be competing at the provincial level (or higher) in their respective sport.
  - They must train/compete in their respective sport a minimum of 14 hours per week.
  - Admission criteria include an entrance portfolio accompanied by a letter of recommendation from a coach and in some cases their previous school.

Admission requirements have been 'tightened up' over the past few years in regard to monitoring that students continue to meet admission criteria during their enrolment in HPA. This has resulted in fewer students being enrolled in the HPA Program over the last three years.

10. Working with the dedicated HPA coordinator (guidance counsellor) in the school, students build a long range timetable that looks at their whole academic career

while attending JMSS, with a focus on their desired post-secondary placements, athletic goals, and career aspirations. Flexibility in attendance and modification in course work assignments is provided where needed based on training and competition schedules. Web-based resources are used to support classroom learning (such as staff webpages/blogs/video streaming/Google Classroom, VLE).

11. Students in the HPA Program may have the option to take some of their credits in dedicated HPA classes. In this environment students can work more independently with the support of a mentoring teacher and it allows HPA students to spend a large portion of their day together when attending school. Currently the program offers these classes for grade 10-12 students in English, Math, Science and Social Science.

#### Location

12. As stated previously, 110 students are enrolled for the 2020-2021 school year and come from across the District. A small percentage of the enrolment comes from out of the jurisdiction. The program's enrolment has seen ebb and flow over the years, climbing as high as 240 students in past years. Traditionally, twenty-five percent (30%) of the grade nine intake for the program lives in the John McCrae/South Carleton/Longfields Davidson catchment area. The total population from the catchment area from grades 10-12 is in the thirty percent (35%) range (Appendices 'A' and 'B').

#### Consultation: What We Heard

13. A broad consultation process was undertaken in June and October, 2020. In June two focus groups were held; one with OCDSB administrators and one with a mixture of present and past parents of students enrolled in the HPA program at JMSS. A Thoughtexchange™ was also conducted with staff and HPA students at John McCrae Secondary School. We heard from 72 participants: 31 students and 41 staff. This feedback highlighted:

#### Things that are working well:

- Flexible schedules, deadlines, and exam dates; the ability to continue with academics while away;
- Well-organized, supportive and understanding teachers in HPA;
- Being together with other athletes, who understand each other – this also helps teachers understand them as a group;
- Students can study and train simultaneously; maintain balance;
- Location at JMSS;
- Teachers and guidance counselors who are familiar with student athletes;
- Helps students earn competitive grades/the grades they deserve; and
- The program should continue as there are Arts and IB Programs.

#### Things that could work better:

- Desire for non-HPA teachers to understand the program better;
- More HPA classes offered; and

- Stricter requirements to enter/remain in the program.

Full results from the June Thoughtexchange can be found in Appendix “C”.

14. In October a website survey was launched that resulted in 1,310 participants: 950 parents, 161 students, 140 educators, 23 coaches and 36 community members.
  - a. The breakdown in the parental group had 144 JMSS parents (115 with students enrolled in the HPA program, 29 not) and 474 parents with children enrolled at other schools. Most parents (n = 370) indicated that their child would apply for HPA if it was offered at their school.
  - b. The breakdown in the student group had 44 JMSS students (30 enrolled in HPA, 14 not) and 81 students from other schools (40 who self-identified as elite athletes).
  - c. The breakdown of staff had 33 JMSS staff (9 who teach at least one class of HPA students) and 96 educators from other schools.

#### Program Delivery Model Feedback

##### Admission Criteria

15. On the whole, HPA students and their parents indicated over 70% satisfaction that the admission criteria met the needs of the elite athletes. The staff at JMSS felt quite differently; those 9 educators who teach at least one class of HPA students were only 38% convinced of that statement and non HPA staff only 13%. Parents and students at other community schools said overwhelmingly that they could not comment on the criteria as they did not know enough about it. This trend was apparent in the community and coaches’ responses as well.

Eighty-four percent (84) of parents from community schools said that they would apply for a program offered in their school if they knew more about the admissions criteria. Feedback from the focus groups and TE held in June identified a need for stricter admission criteria in order that students in the program were ‘true’ elite athletes. While this was not a general trend with all survey groups, 60% of students not enrolled in the program but enrolled at JMSS did state that stricter criteria would ensure integrity of the program, as did 32% of parents of JMSS students, not enrolled in HPA.

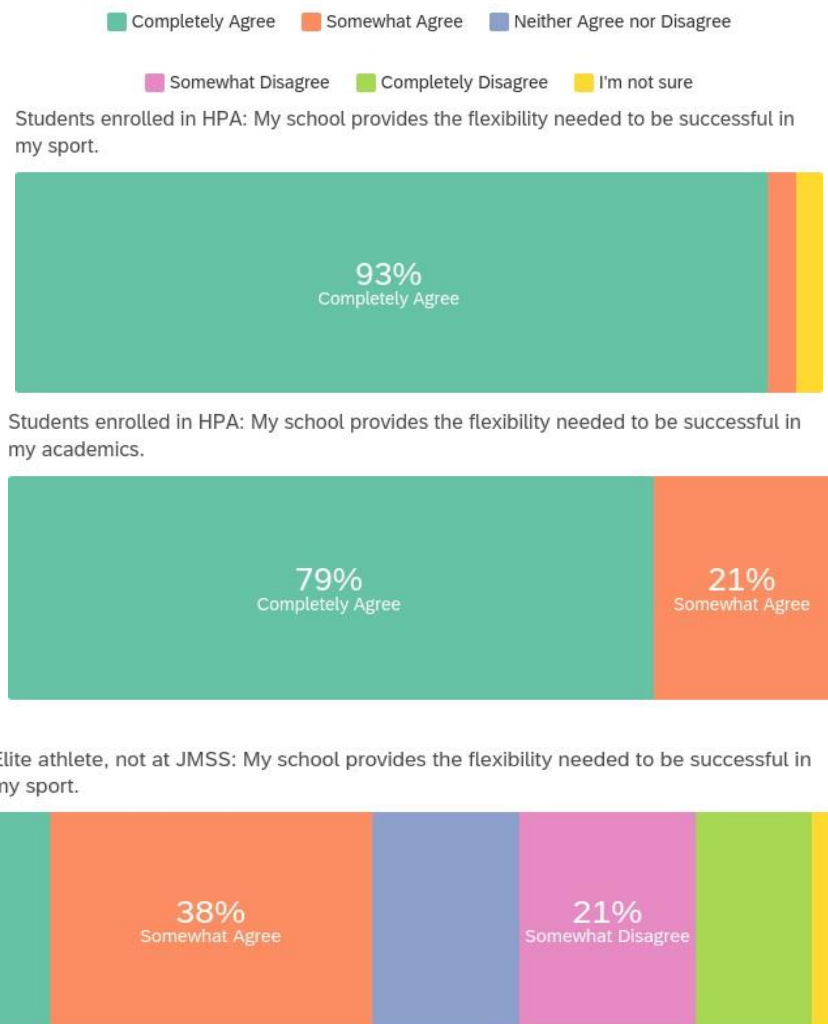
16. Of all of the groups surveyed, only the parents and students involved with the current HPA program indicated a deep knowledge of the admissions criteria. All other groups of respondents (including staff at the school) indicated that they were ‘somewhat’ to ‘not at all’ informed about the program criteria.

##### Flexibility for Students

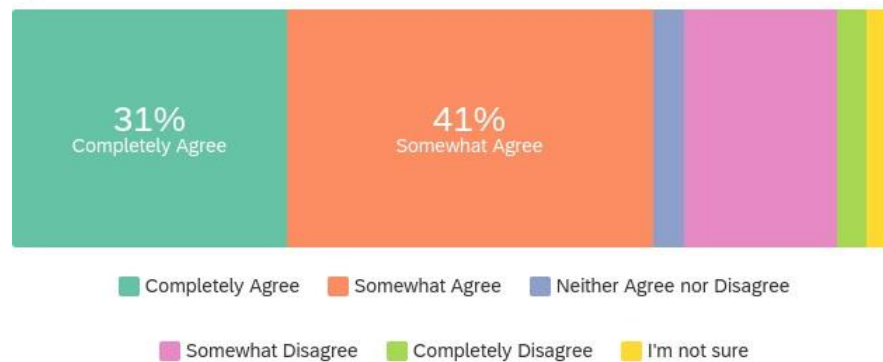
17. There was overwhelming concurrence from all groups that flexibility was the critical component for success for elite athlete students. Flexibility was needed in:

- a. timetabling creatively to facilitate the four year course plan for the student to achieve post secondary goals;
- b. adapting assignment and assessment schedules. Many students in some sports can miss up to 90 days of school time for training and competition schedules. They need to be able to work with the teacher in arranging how to achieve the appropriate demands and evaluations of course material;
- c. granting credits in relationship to co-op placement and PLAR's; and
- d. assigning HPA students to staff who were willing and accustomed to working with their erratic schedules.

The following data represents the responses from elite athletes at JMSS and other schools.



Elite athlete, not at JMSS: My school provides the flexibility needed to be successful in my academics.



Responses from parents and coaches also strongly reflected the connection between flexibility and student success. The staff responses were less definitive. 34% completely agreed that HPA students were able to keep up to the academic expectations and 31% somewhat agreed.

90% of HPA students stated that the HPA program at John McCrae SS contributed to their success as a competitive athlete.

A number of parents said that they had enrolled their child in the local community school but found it unable to provide suitable accommodation and moved to the HPA program.

## School Environment Feedback

### *Dedicated team*

18. There was general agreement by students and parents that having staff dedicated to elite athletes in a school led to their success. In the case at JMSS, a dedicated guidance counsellor (HPA coordinator) and supportive staff were cited as the next two important keys to success after flexibility. Given the enrolment at JMSS, the ability to offer 'HPA' courses in certain subjects was mentioned as a definite plus. A cadre of teachers who understand the demands of elite athletic training/competition, know the students well and have experience in adapting classroom expectations.

In a congregated setting, students and parents felt that the care, understanding and encouragement coming from another adult provides another outlet other than parent or coach and helps minimize stress. Students responded that they loved being in classes with others "who understood their world".

Many parents and students anecdotally stated that having elite athletes congregated for a program was an important support; they stated that being surrounded by like-minded peers - team mates- gave social and emotional support for athletes. However, in terms of responses, being together as HPA students was rated fourth out of five in terms of importance by parents and

students. Some educators at JMSS stated that they felt that some HPA students could be isolationist and projected entitlement.

#### Location of HPA Program Feedback

19. 77% of parents who live outside the catchment area of JMSS and have a child in the HPA program responded that the current location met their child's needs. Most students enrolled in the program are also satisfied with the location: 76% of students from outside the catchment area; 91% of students from within.

Parents and students (elite athletes) not attending John McCrae had a high rate of agreement (77% and 68% respectively) with the statement that there should be several HPA programs located across the District. Some staff (29-54%) and coaches (47%) also supported this stance.

20. Very few responses (0-14%) identified a need to relocate the program to a central location. Administrators and some parents did cite that the location in Barrhaven may not provide geographic flexibility for students but administrators at many other central District sites also made the point that they would be unable to take additional students in a program due to their lack of space.
21. Out of all of the factors of a successful elite athletic program, proximity to the training facility was rated as least important by all groups.

#### Models from Other Districts

22. Programming for elite athletes in other schools in the region and other districts varies greatly. Memo No. 19-146 (Appendix 'D') was provided for trustees late in November 2019 outlining program models from other districts.

#### The Research

23. Limited research has been done on how best to support elite athletes during their high school careers. One notable work was done by J. Diakun in 2015 at Queen's University entitled "Supporting High Performance Athletic Students Balance Sport and Education: An Examination of the Teacher's Role". Three core themes emerged from this research related to teachers' support for high performance athletes: (a) flexibility, (b) relationship, and (c) support. With the application of these three themes, it is believed that teachers can better assist student athletes in balancing their athletics and education, resulting in a positive outcome in both areas.

#### Conclusions

##### Program Model

24. The HPA program is providing a structure that supports academic and competitive success for the students enrolled in the program at JMSS. However, based on the feedback through TE, surveys and focus groups, a greater

percentage of students and parents reported that it was more challenging to meet the athletic and academic needs of elite athletes not enrolled in the HPA Program at JMSS. There is a need to apply the skills and characteristics that contribute to the success of elite athletes to all schools as identified by staff, students and parents. This includes flexibility in student learning opportunities, an educator dedicated to support the academic and athletic goals of the student and learning models that support and enhance the student athlete experience.

25. A number of issues arise around the admission criteria. Many of the respondents felt that there is a need to continue to review, monitor and adapt the criteria for the program to retain program rigor. The staff at JMSS have been refining the criteria during the last few years and that approach should continue in the future.
26. Overwhelmingly all respondents (with the exception of students/parents enrolled in the JMSS program) felt that they knew little, if anything, about the program and its admission process. There is a compelling need for better information to be shared with students and their parents who are going into the high school setting.

#### Program Location

27. The discontinuation of the HPA Program at JMSS at this time would have minimal impact on the accommodation pressures at the school, due to the percentage of students in the program who live in the JMSS or Longfield Davidson Secondary School Boundaries. As a result, we are not recommending the HPA Program at JMSS be phased out until we are able to diversity our approach in supporting the needs of elite student athletes in all schools across the District. This may include students being able to remain at their home school, engaging in digital learning, being in a congregated setting, or a combination. The goal is to create a framework to support all elite athletes across the District in meeting their athletic and academic needs, regardless of where or how they are learning.
28. There was little interest expressed to relocate the program to a more central area. Most respondents instead expressed the wish to expand the program by adding more programs in geographically appropriate sites across the District. However, a more robust, district wide framework in all community schools to support competitive, elite athletes would not require the addition of sites but rather result in all schools offering the opportunity for students to remain attached to their home school and meet their academic and athletic needs in this setting.

#### **NEXT STEPS**

29. From the time of the original motion to the writing of this report, much has changed. Based on these changes, it is prudent to look at long term and short term planning regarding the HPA program at John McCrae.

#### Long Term



30. The Ministry of Education has announced funding for the construction of two new high schools (Stittsville and Riverside South) which will ultimately have impact on the enrolment patterns of John McCrae Secondary School. The construction of these new schools will result in changes to school boundaries in the area which in turn will alleviate accommodation pressures at both JMSS and Longfields Davidson Heights Secondary School (LDHSS). As noted on Appendix B, close to 50% of the total population of the HPA program have either JMSS or LDHSS (or the optional attendance areas) as their home school. Any phasing out plan would result in 20-25 students leaving on an annual basis.
31. There was overwhelming support from survey respondents to improve communication regarding the availability and admission criteria of the HPA program in the OCDSB. Developing a more comprehensive internal communication plan regarding all District programs is a need that staff has considered as a goal for the future and HPA would be part of that work.

#### Short Term

32. More specific information concerning elite athletes attending their community schools and how they are being supported will be gathered.
33. Identify and communicate program delivery options that support the academic and athletic needs of students who meet the criteria of the HPA Program.
34. Program delivery for secondary students has changed drastically this year. Innovation in the delivery of programs through technology is rapidly expanding. Frameworks to support the needs of elite athletes in all schools will be developed. These models will include the characteristics that have been identified as successful at JMSS; namely, flexibility in student learning, a staff member dedicated to supporting students in navigating the secondary school experience while engaging in a rigorous training schedule, exploring post-secondary opportunities combining academics and athletics will be developed with local priorities in mind.
35. There are a number of short term actions tied to admission standards that will need to be addressed. It should be noted that the work on admission criteria and monitoring students' eligibility will need to be done for any type of diversified program delivery model.
36. A review of entrance criteria will be undertaken to ensure that the requirements for students to gain acceptance to the program is rigorous while aligning with the needs of students who require significant program adaptations to be successful in both their academic and sport performance goals.
37. Entrance criteria also needs to be reevaluated through an equity lens in order to remove barriers to equity of access, opportunity and outcomes for all students who wish to apply for the program. Equity of access work also will encompass a review of the eligibility for HPA students to participate on JMSS school athletic

teams. Some concern has been expressed that the participation of elite athletes in some school team sports limits access for others.

38. An annual process will be established to monitor students in the program to assure that they continue to meet the criteria in the program.
39. Where students in the HPA Program are congregated for dedicated program delivery, every attempt will be made to tailor the learning experiences to meet the unique needs/goals of competitive, teen athletes. This applies not only to how the program is offered but also to course content.
40. A review of the job description of the HPA coordinator's role will take place to ensure that the outlined roles and responsibilities continue to be in alignment with the needs of students in the program.

## **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

41. The current cost for running the HPA program at John McCrae Secondary School is approximately \$200,000. Transportation costs are in the realm of \$135,000 and the .50 FTE position for the coordinator is approximately \$65,000.

## **COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:**

42. The consultation plan has been described previously in this report.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

43. It is recommended that:
  - a. Staff develop a plan to diversify our approach in how we support students in the OCDSB with an elite athlete profile in all schools; and
  - b. That staff be directed to undertake the short term work as outlined in the report; and
  - c. That staff provide the Board with an update on the work done to develop a community school approach to support high performance athletes across the District in the Spring of the 2021-2022 school year.

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Shawn Lehman  
Superintendent of Instruction

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Camille Williams-Taylor  
Director of Education  
Secretary to the Board

Appendix A Student Counts by Grade-Students Attending John McCrae SS  
Appendix B Counts by Grade of Where Students Attending John McCrae SS  
Appendix C Thought Exchange Results  
Appendix D Memo Number 19-146, School Boards with High Performance Athlete  
HPA Programs