



MEMORANDUM

Memo No. 20-169

TO: Trustees
Student Trustees

FROM: Camille Williams-Taylor, Director of Education and Secretary of the Board
Shawn Lehman, Superintendent of Instruction

DATE: 11 December 2020

RE: **High Performance Athlete October 2020 Survey Summary**

At Committee of the Whole on 8 December 2020, the summary comments from the High Performance Athlete survey conducted in October 2020 were requested. Attached, please find the summary that outlines the themes generated from parents, students, staff, coaches and community members. This information is part of Report 20-103.

Please do not hesitate to contact Superintendent of Instruction Shawn Lehman at shawn.lehman@ocdsb.ca if you have any questions.

Cc: Senior Staff
Manager, Board Services
Corporate Records

Attached: Appendix A - HPA Qualitative Feedback Survey Oct 2020

HPA Consultation – Survey Feedback – October 2020

Parent feedback was generally very positive, with a strong desire for more information on the program and greater access to it.

Praise for the program:

- Very grateful for the program; it's wonderful; essential; a gem; amazing; well-run; etc.
- The flexibility of the program is very important;
- HPA encourages students to effectively manage time between sports and studies;
- Dedicated guidance counsellors have been and are superb; extremely helpful;
- Nice for students to have classmates who can relate because they have no free time;
- Utility in grouping the athlete in a single school,

Requests for more info:

- Didn't know it existed;
- Why wasn't info on the program shared with child, an elite athlete;
- Many requests for more information.

Strong desire to expand the program:

- There should be more HPA programs in more schools;
- Minimum 4 district areas (central, east, west, south);
- Make a HPA guidance counselor available for students across the city so that they all have some supports.

Expand online:

- Many of the learning needs of elite athletes can be met in their home communities through the expansion of online learning;
- Remote learning would provide flexibility with the home school curriculum and access to teachers and staff; no need for specialized locations.

Want at all schools/local school:

- This option should be available at all schools;
- All schools should be able to provide the flexibility to foster high academic success for athletes.

Local schools don't meet needs of elite athletes:

- Local school guidance counsellors don't have the knowledge/perspective required
- No specific accommodation or facility to help students balance both studies and sports;
- The culture and understanding of an athlete's needs simply isn't there with teaching staff and administration;
- Local schools did not accommodate travel schedule.

Local school is meeting needs:

- Student better served by the supportive and flexible team at our local school.

Location:

- John McCrae is the ideal location given its adjacency to the Walter Baker Centre and proximity to the Transit Way; proximity to training facilities;
- JMSS has the right experience; it should remain at JMSS and possibly be expanded within John McCrae.
- HPA program at John McCrae school only benefits competitive swimmers and hockey players;
- The current location creates systemic barriers to access; move to central location
- JMSS it is already beyond capacity with the students who live in the catchment area.
- Increased student population at the school should not be a reason to move or eliminate the program, boundaries can be changed and the Board needs to recognize the need for schools in certain locations and request and allocate funding.
- Interest for locations in Kanata and Westboro.

Disappointed a review is happening/timing of review:

- Disappointed this is being considered;
- Review was initiated by a trustee; concern own personal bias will negatively influence the HPA review;
- Don't believe OCDSB is being upfront; the number of students trying to attend the school is growing and OCDSB is looking to remove the program in order to free up space for Barrhaven students;
- Disappointed that this review is going ahead in the middle of a public health emergency;
- The people pushing changes through are those that do not understand or care or have a vested interest in the athletes and the educational supports they need.

Offerings:

- A French immersion option would be good with HPA;
- Want more offerings in terms of course selections for academics;
- HPA should be offered to elementary students too; not just high school students.

Special education:

- Combine with gifted program to satisfy my child's learning and training needs.
- Benefits of the HPA would be appreciated by students with IEPs as well.
- Funds should be spent on special education instead of HPA.
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Admissions criteria:

- Should be more flexibility to accommodate more kids with potential;
- Should be open to athletes in all sports;
- Athletes should be screened every year to make sure they are still competing and practicing.

Equity:

- Invest in creating more opportunities for all students to play sports;
- Majority of HPA students would be higher income families and not those who are most at risk.

Criticisms:

- Poorly run.
- Not all teachers support the program; inconsistency;
- Long wait times to see guidance; lack of knowledge of the staff on what is required for post-secondary;
- Takes focus away from other programs;

- Needs to accommodate elite athletes across all/more sports.

Other comments:

- Critical importance to female athletes (already under-represented in sports);
- Athletes can be successful in the Alt program;
- Shortening the track to accommodate portables seems detrimental to some sports;
- Concern about HPA athletes were taking up spots on school teams can be easily controlled by the teachers/coaches; school should be encouraging involvement by the HPA students.

Student feedback was very positive of the program, with those in the program not wanting it to change and those not in the program wanting more information.

Praise for the program:

- Highly beneficial to both athletic and academic success; great program;
- Ability to work with fellow athletes;
- Opportunity to take HPA classes offers flexibility as well as companionship with peers who understand situation;
- HPA teachers are highly dedicated towards ensuring success in all aspects of life;
- Teachers understand the need to balance school with practice/competitions;
- Reduces stress;
- Guidance is extremely beneficial.
- Praise for specific teachers/guidance

Benefit of being with other athletes:

- At old school, there were almost no elite athletes and the athletes that were there were all guys; it's really important to have other HPA girls to share things with;
- Important to have other students around who understand the pressure of high level competition.

Location:

- A place to train in the east would be beneficial;
- Appreciate location; close to training facility.

Want in more schools:

- It should be in multiple schools, to go to a school just for this program offered in a specific location is inconvenient;
- Want the program, but not the commute;

Want more information:

- Elite athletes at other schools want to know more.

Local school don't meet athletes' needs:

- Previous school was often unwillingly to compromise towards hectic schedule; no flexibility for even though schedule was supplied;

- A program like this would be super helpful because some teachers don't understand how to adapt to sport commitments;
- Regular schools don't support athletes' mental health;
- Can tell the difference between HPA students and other teammates whose schools don't offer flexibility;
- Not in program, not maximizing potential.

Students don't want to lose the program:

- Many request to please not take away or change the program; no more change right now;

Co-op/ want credit for training:

- Elite athletes should have the option to train and get credits for their training.

Admissions:

- 2021 admissions should reflect the impact of covid-19 on training.

Staff feedback was very mixed.

Praise for the program:

- Student athletes' needs cannot be met in regular classes; the program supports the unique needs of the genuinely elite level high school athlete;
- HPA program is excellent; must be maintained; allows students to thrive in all areas of development.

Issues with the program:

- The HPA students have a sense of entitlement; attitude; exclusivity;
- Students take advantage of the program;
- Local students have a different set of rules/opportunities;
- Negative tone to the school and a divided school community;
- Negative effect on school culture; creates us vs. them mentality similar to IB, local kids suffer;
- Children need to have a back-up plan, HPA sets students up for 1 route; could have severe mental repercussions.

Desire to discontinue HPA:

- Needs can be met at local school;
- No need for special classes just for the HPA students;
- Schools should be diverse;
- HPA creates a two-tiered education system;
- With online learning there is no need for athletes who miss a lot of school due to their sport to leave their home school. (since HPA students can access course material online, when needed).

Areas for improvement:

- How it is promoted: Should not be promoted as "elite", but as a learning accommodation for students who are also high performance athletes, who may need flexibility and alternative methods of delivering instruction - like an IEP.
- Staff need to be even more flexible and supportive;
- Admissions criteria need to be stricter;
- It should include all sports (be inclusive);
- We should look at successful models being used at other boards;
- The program lacks tracking and accountability;

- Expectations of the students in the program should be clearer.

Unfair stereotypes/perceptions of the program:

- HPA is an excellent program which suffers from a number of unfair negative stereotypes;
- Judgements made about the integrity of the program are no longer valid; program reputation is tarnished by previous staff.

Co-op:

- Students in the HPA program get coop credits solely for participating in their sport – why isn't this opportunity provided to all students?
- Students exceed expectations of the co-op component of the program; considerable reflection of their goals as a student athlete; allows students to capture how their time and efforts translate to life skills.

School sports teams:

- Overabundance of strong athletes participating in sports other than their own; leaving few opportunities for local kids to make sports team;
- Concern that HPA students aren't allowed to play on the school teams; playing sports with your friends in high school is a powerful experience;

Location:

- The program is well-established at its current location;
- Keep the program at JMSS and add second location (central/more east);
- Move the program to inside a training facility;
- Create an entire school dedicated to HPA to provide an immersive experience;
- Most athletes wish to stay connected to their home school and at a central location; they are reluctant to travel to John McCrae;
- Move it from John McCrae so that our local students can have a break.

Coach feedback was positive of the program, with interest in an east-end location, mention of stricter admission criteria and offer from coach to help support students:

- HPA students really enjoy the flexibility and support within the program.
- HPA program is an integral part of allowing athletes to both fulfill a commitment to elite sports and achieving their academic goals.
- program needs to stay in place and continue
- Would have more HPA athletes if there was another program closer to the east end;
- Current location of HPA too far for athletes to travel to;
- Stricter criteria for admissions should be considered.
- Gymnasts need more help and support from school boards; offer to help from coach.

Community feedback was very polarized.

- Excellent program; hope it will continue; sports offer so much to our youth; program allows students to balance academics and sports; desire for more locations throughout the city.
- Expense is unnecessary; home schools can support these students; academic integrity is questionable; waste of time and money; HPA athletes need to make their own arrangements.

Other feedback reflected many of the comments heard in other groups.

- Program is critical to student success; value in expanding it (west, central/south, and east options);

- Flexibility is key;
- Proximity to training facility is important; program helps with carpooling;
- In theory, students could be supported at local school but teachers are often inflexible.