

27 May 2016

Student Learning and Accommodation Planning in the OCDSB

Over the next five years, the OCDSB will conduct a process to transform the schools across our school district. It's an exciting time, full of opportunities for students. It's also tough work. Our commitment is to have an open, transparent process so that parents and communities feel informed through each step along the way.

Why are we doing this?

Because our students deserve to be in schools that maximize learning. Our Chair Shirley Seward said it best "We are leading with learning". One key strategy will be to minimize transitions for our students. Over time, we will move towards school configurations of K-6, K-8, 7-12, and 9-12.

We know that secondary schools with student populations of over 800 can provide more choices for students. Particularly in urban and suburban areas where there are a number of secondary schools in each area of the city, we will look to consolidating groups of secondary students to ensure a great selection of course offerings, comprehensive supports and services, as well as a full range of extra-curricular activities.

In our elementary schools, the OCDSB offers one of the broadest ranges of program choices in the province (e.g., English, Early French Immersion, Middle French Immersion, and Alternative). All programs are excellent. But with trends in parental choice having changed over the past decade, we need to structure our elementary schools in a way that ensures equity for students in each program. Our goal is to work towards having a class and a half per grade level in all programs in every school. For example, this would mean one class of grade one, one combined class of grades one and two, and one class of grade two. This approach allows for flexibility of student placement, ensuring we have options for students based on their learning and social needs. It also provides opportunities for teacher collaboration.

The good news is that while improving learning for students, we'll be using our resources wisely. The Ministry no longer provides funding to maintain empty pupil places in schools. Understandably, they are directing tax dollars towards students rather than buildings. At the District level, we'll be doing the same. We currently have 5,500 empty secondary pupil places and 6,000 empty elementary pupil places. The right-sizing of our schools means that we can continue to have appropriate numbers of staff to meet the varied needs of our learners. Our talented and committed staff is our most precious resource for students.

Are we ready?

You bet we are. We know this is massive work that over the next five years will impact every school and every community.

For the past five years, the District has been involved with a secondary school review. This process has allowed us to create a renewed vision for our secondary schools. The new provincial guidelines for accommodation reviews require staff to develop a recommended plan at the beginning of the area review. Thanks to the detailed work of teachers, principals, students, post-secondary partners and business/community members on seven secondary school review working groups, staff will be able to incorporate their ideas into these plans. Staff-recommended plans at the beginning of an area review will not only provide details on where students will attend school, but also details on program enhancements (e.g., three program pathways in community secondary schools; Core French, Extended French and French Immersion in secondary schools; additional course offerings; new Specialist High Skills Major programs; and facility upgrades).

At the elementary level, significant program reviews and studies have been conducted over the past ten years which will inform the development of staff-recommended plans for elementary schools in a geographic area. Some examples include the French as a Second Language (FSL) Review (2007), the Alternative Schools Review (2010), Supports for English Programs (2015), the Learning Disabilities

Review (2016), the introduction of the 50/50 kindergarten program (2016). Policy decisions from these reviews, as well as the direction on school configurations from the secondary school review will help us redesign elementary schools in any given geographic area.

How will this be done?

On 17 May 2016, Committee of the Whole was presented with a multi-year plan for Student Learning and [Accommodation Planning](#). Staff has recommended beginning with two area reviews in September 2016, with final recommendations coming forward in March 2017. The Western Area Review includes 4 secondary schools (Merivale, Sir Robert Borden, Bell, and Woodroffe) and 22 elementary schools. The Eastern Secondary Review includes three secondary schools (Rideau, Gloucester, and Colonel By). The elementary schools in this area will be studied in a second phase at a later date. A third review will begin next year in the Alta Vista/Hunt Club area. This review will begin in April 2017 with final recommendations by December 2017.

Who will Benefit from Student Learning and Accommodation Planning?

Students. They will attend schools that maximize our resources for student learning and student well-being. Careful transition planning will support students as they move to a new location so they feel welcome in their new learning environment.

Staff. Our staff takes great pride in giving their best to students. The consolidation of schools will maximize the allocation of resources so that staff is able to focus on student learning and well-being.

Parents. Three years ago, we developed our Exit Outcomes – every student will leave the OCDSB with 5 characteristics (resilient, globally aware, collaborative, innovative/creative, goal-oriented) and 5 skills (critical thinkers, effective communicators, academically diverse, digitally fluent, ethical decision-makers). The re-visioning of our schools will help us fulfill this promise to parents.

I look forward to hearing from you as we begin this important work.

Sincerely,

Jennifer