



Secondary Program Review: Update #4

To: Committee of the Whole

Date: 7 April, 2020

Report No.: 04-20-3851

Strategic Directions

- Transform Student Learning
- Provide Equity of Access to Learning Opportunities for All Students

Recommendation

It is recommended that the fourth update on the Secondary Program Review be received for information.

Context

This fourth update of the Secondary Program Review highlights ongoing activities and those that have taken place following the 29 January, 2020 Committee of the Whole meeting.

1. Access

Ongoing Consultation Sessions

a) Virtual Public Consultation Sessions

On 30 January, 2020, two virtual public consultation sessions were held, one at 1 p.m. and the other at 7 p.m. The format of each session was the same. In the first fifteen minutes, the most commonly asked questions and answers about the Secondary Program Review were shared. The second part of the meeting provided an opportunity for viewers to post questions, which were then answered in real time. Questions that included specific school names or individual cases were not posted. The transcripts from both meetings have been posted to the Secondary Program Review webpage. Approximately 50 viewers participated in the 1 p.m. session and 28 viewers participated in the 7 p.m. session.

b) Toronto School Administrators' Association (TSAA)

On 30 January, 2020, a consultation session on the draft revised Optional Attendance policy and the Secondary Program Review was held with members of the TSAA Rep Assembly.

c) Urban Indigenous Education Centre and Kapapamahchakwew - Wandering Spirit School

On 31 January, 2020, two consultation sessions on the Secondary Program Review were held at the Urban Indigenous Education Centre and Kapapamahchakwew - Wandering Spirit School. The first was with students from Grades 7 to 11. The second was with staff including teachers, student success transitions counsellors, and a vice-principal.

d) Black Student Achievement Community Advisory Committee (BSACAC)

On 3 February, 2020, a consultation session on the draft revised Optional Attendance policy and the Secondary Program Review was held with members of the BSACAC to provide input on the potential impact on Black students.

e) Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)

On 3 February, 2020, a consultation session on the Secondary Program Review was held at the SEAC meeting.

f) Secondary Alternative School Staff (West)

On 4 February, 2020, a consultation session on the Secondary Program Review was held with approximately 75 teachers and staff from Secondary Alternative Schools (West): City School, Contact Alternative School, East York Alternative School, Inglenook Community School, Oasis Alternative School (including Oasis Skateboard Factory and the Triangle Program), School of Experiential Education (SEE), Shared Experience Exploration and Discovery (SEED), Subway Academy II and West End Alternative School.

g) Strategy and Planning Division

On 12 February, 2020, a consultation and working session on the Secondary Program Review was held with staff from the Strategy and Planning division. In addition to providing input into the Secondary Program Review, staff participated in a working session to identify additional issues to explore through the Review.

h) Student Surveys

An online survey about the Secondary Program Review was sent by e-mail to a representative sample of students in Grades 6 to 10 (approximately 4300 students). The survey link was available online from 18 February to 13 March, 2020. The link was also shared by members of the Student Senate on various Facebook and Instagram accounts. In total, 729 students completed the survey:

- 255 from Grades 6 to 8
- 460 from Grades 9 to 12
- 14 other (Adult learners)

i) Staff Consultation

On 20 February, 2020, an after-school consultation session on the draft revised Optional Attendance policy and the Secondary Program Review was held for staff from CUPE, Schedule 2, and TSAA. There were 30 staff in attendance.

j) Student Senate

On 27 February, 2020, a consultation session on the draft revised Optional Attendance policy and the Secondary Program Review was held with the Student Senate.

k) Adult Day Schools and EdVance

On 27 February, 2020, a consultation session on the Secondary Program Review was held with principals and vice-principals from the five Adult Day Schools and EdVance programs.

l) Elementary Itinerant Counsellors (EICs)

On 13 March, 2020, a consultation session on the draft revised Optional Attendance policy and the Secondary Program Review was held with the Elementary Itinerant Counsellors from each Learning Centre.

m) Secondary Alternative School Staff (East)

On 23 March, 2020, a consultation session on the Secondary Program Review was held with Curriculum Leaders and administration from Secondary Alternative Schools (East): A.S.E. 1, Avondale Secondary Alternative School, Delphi Secondary Alternative School, Parkview Alternative School, Subway Academy 1, and the four year-round alternative schools (EYRAC, NEYRAC, NWYRAC, SEYRAC).

A summary of the consultation efforts from the Secondary Program Review is included as Appendix A.

Steering Committee Meeting #2: Specialized Schools and Programs and Optional Attendance

The second meeting of the Specialized Schools and Programs and Optional Attendance steering committee took place on 30 January, 2020. Participants shared feedback about this year's Optional Attendance process as the deadline for parents/students to submit their forms to secondary schools was the following day. Specifically, input was provided on two requests made of schools for this year's process:

1. No offers of admission would be made until the week of February 10, 2020, so that students from across the system would receive notifications within the same week. In the past, some schools would make offers very early, putting undue pressure on some students/families to respond ahead of the posted deadline. It also created anxiety for students/families who had heard from one school but had to then wait until the second school sent out offers. Alignment of offers was intended to support student well-being during the Optional Attendance period which, for many, can be a very stressful time.
2. All secondary schools will submit by 6 March, 2020 to our Research department a spreadsheet that includes data from this year's Optional Attendance process. Analysis of this data will provide further clarity about the impact and use of the Optional Attendance policy across the district. By identifying which students apply to schools and programs and from where, this will help staff determine parts of the city that would benefit from the replication or creation of similar programs. We will also be able to determine general patterns within the Optional Attendance data itself, such as schools with the highest number of applications, number of applications system-wide, etc.

Highlights from Optional Attendance Process February 2020 and Next Steps

The ninety day consultation period for the revised draft Optional Attendance policy concluded on 3 February, 2020, including the online survey. Some focused conversations occurred outside of the 90-day window due to scheduling constraints. A summary of the key findings from the consultation process is included as Appendix B.

As described above, work is currently underway to analyze the data provided by schools on this year's Optional Attendance process. This information will be included in the next report to the Committee of the Whole.

Agenda Page 5

A meeting with the 2018-2019 Optional Attendance Working Group was convened on 23 March, 2020 to review feedback from the public consultations and survey. This group had a pivotal role in developing the work plan for the policy review. Staff is currently revising the draft policy based on feedback from the survey, the consultations, and the suggestions from the Working Group.

A revised draft policy will be brought to the Governance and Policy Committee on 29 April, 2020.

Specialized Schools and Programs Policy Development and Public Consultations

On 5 February, 2020, the Board of Trustees approved the work plan for the development of a new policy for Specialized Schools and Programs. This work plan had been presented to the Governance and Policy Committee (GPC) on 8 January, 2020.

On 21 January, 2020, a meeting was held with the Consultation Working Group, a sub-committee of the Parent Involvement Advisory Committee (PIAC), to further explore the draft provisions that were shared at GPC. Suggestions were incorporated into the draft policy. The Working Group also recommended developing a Questions and Answers section for this policy.

As well, staff consulted with Sue Winton, an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at York University, in the creation of this policy. As an educational policy researcher, she has extensive knowledge about research related to school choice and specialized programs.

Public consultations on a draft policy document began on 4 March, 2020, and will continue to 20 April, 2020 (45 days).

In an effort to reach a wider audience, staff in School Operations created a video to accompany the draft policy document. The video begins with a brief introduction to the Secondary Program Review by the Director of Education. The video then provides an overview of the policy, including a Question and Answers section, as recommended by the PIAC Working Group. Finally, the video invites viewers to complete an online survey on the Policy Consultation page of the TDSB website.

The Secondary Program Review webpage has been updated to include a section on the draft Specialized Schools and Programs policy, including Questions and Answers. The draft policy, video, and survey can also be found on the Policy Consultation page of the public TDSB site.

As of 2 April, the following consultations on this draft policy have taken place:

a) Student Senate

On 23 March, 2020, an online consultation session (Google Meet) on the draft Specialized Schools and Programs policy was held with the Student Senate.

b) Community Advisory Committees (CACs)

On 25 March, 2020, an online consultation session (Google Meet) on the draft Specialized Schools and Programs policy was held with the Student Senate.

c) Virtual Consultation Meeting/Web Chat

On 2 April, 2020, the TDSB community was invited to participate in an online web chat on the draft Specialized Schools and Programs policy.

For each consultation session, participants were invited to complete the survey which can be found on the Policy Consultation page of the TDSB website.

Update on Technical and Commercial Boundaries

On 11 March, 2020, a Local Feasibility Team (LFT) meeting was held with Principals, Superintendents and Trustees of schools that currently have legacy technical and/or commercial boundaries.

The meeting provided an opportunity to provide background information, additional context and information to the membership. The role of the Board-approved Guiding Principles for the Long-Term Program and Accommodation Strategy (LTPAS) were highlighted in the conversation.

Exploring opportunities to dissolve these legacy boundaries has been a study outlined in the LTPAS document since 2015-16, but has been deferred as other priorities have emerged. Given the scope and timing of the Secondary Program Review, this study is now underway. The following schools are included in this LFT:

1. Central Technical School (technical boundaries)
2. Central Toronto Academy (commercial boundaries)
3. Danforth Collegiate and Technical Institute (technical boundaries)
4. George Harvey Collegiate Institute (technical and commercial boundaries)
5. Northern Secondary School (technical and commercial boundaries)
6. Victoria Park Collegiate Institute (technical boundaries)
7. Western Technical-Commercial School (technical and commercial boundaries)

The LFT is focusing the discussion on how the TDSB public website could be reworked to provide an enhanced presence for these schools if the boundaries were to be dissolved. Staff have engaged the web team and have met on a number of occasions to review options for the website, including the existing Street Guide, a tool used by prospective students and their parents/guardians to determine which TDSB school is the designated school by street address.

The technical and commercial boundaries established by legacy school boards still exist in certain areas, particularly in the former City of Toronto. These boundaries have outlived their intended purpose which was to 'stream' students into a particular type of program. Each of the schools has reinvented itself over time and now offers programs in all pathways (university, college, workplace and apprenticeship), similar to other secondary schools across the district.

It is important to note that some legacy technical and commercial boundaries have been eliminated over time as other accommodation reviews were undertaken. For example, commercial boundaries were eliminated from Monarch Park CI and Eastern Commerce CI in June 2016. Technical boundaries in the former Scarborough Board of Education have all been eliminated.

This review proposes to dissolve the remaining legacy technical and commercial boundaries, and to move to a single set of boundaries for secondary schools. This would result in improved equity of access to programs for all areas of the city and create consistent attendance boundaries throughout the district.

An online public consultation meeting is being planned for late April 2020, followed by a report to the Committee of the Whole on 20 May, 2020.

Meeting with College Board re: Advanced Placement

The College Board is a not-for-profit organization whose mandate is to expand access to higher education. From its website, "...the College Board helps students prepare for a successful transition to college through programs and services in college readiness and college success — including the SAT and the Advanced Placement Program."

The Advanced Placement Program (AP) "enables willing and academically prepared students to pursue college-level studies while still in high school. The program consists of college-level courses developed by the AP Program that high schools can choose to offer, and corresponding exams that are administered once a year."

Over twenty-five different AP courses are currently offered in TDSB. In total, there are over 100 AP classes offered in sixteen secondary schools, six of which are identified on the TDSB site as "Specialized Programs".

On 29 January, 2020, a meeting was held with representatives from the College Board, including the Executive Director (International) and the College Board Representative (Canada). The purpose of the meeting was to explore opportunities to expand AP in the TDSB, but also to clarify the College Board's position on equity and access.

The representatives were surprised to learn that some TDSB schools administer an entrance exam for students interested in attending a specialized program for AP. This does not align with the College Board's philosophy that "All students who are willing and academically prepared to accept the challenge of a rigorous academic curriculum should be considered for admission to AP courses. The College Board encourages the elimination of barriers that restrict access to AP courses for students from ethnic, racial and socioeconomic groups that have been traditionally underrepresented in the AP Program. Schools should make every effort to ensure that their AP classes reflect the diversity of their student population."

In some TDSB schools, students can choose an AP course as part of the regular course selection process, provided there is a sufficient number of students to run a section. In other schools, however, admission to AP classes is made available only to those who have successfully passed an entrance exam/test.

Once schools have resumed 'regular' operations, a meeting will be convened with the six schools offering a specialized program in AP to discuss next steps. Although these schools will be able to continue offering AP courses to their students, an entrance test can no longer be required, and therefore the schools can no longer operate specialized programs in AP. Not only will this allow for alignment of practice within TDSB schools with the College Board's philosophy, this will support alignment with the TDSB Multi-Year Strategic Plan and our commitment to increasing equity of access for all students.

2. Program

Long-Term Program and Accommodation Strategy Meetings

The annual Long-Term Program and Accommodation Strategy (LTPAS) meetings commenced on 21 February, 2020. These meetings provide an opportunity for Trustees to meet with staff from School Operations, Strategy and Planning, and local Superintendents to discuss projected enrolment, residential intensification and demographic trends within their respective wards.

The LTPAS meetings also provide a mechanism to confirm planned studies and to discuss new or emerging issues. A major focus at the LTPAS meetings this year was the Secondary Program Review and the implementation of the recommendations from the French Review that was approved in June 2019.

Similar to last year's cycle, Trustees were placed into nine different groups to engage in a team approach, and to share issues and ideas that crossed over the existing ward boundaries.

At each of the LTPAS meetings to date, Trustees, Superintendents and staff were invited to participate in a workshop to review and discuss their ideas for the Secondary Program Review. For each of the groups, issues related to enrolment (over and underutilization), demographic trends, optional attendance, program availability and access were discussed.

Due to the current situation regarding COVID-19, the cycle of LTPAS meetings was not able to be completed. Staff are working to arrange an online opportunity to ensure that all Trustees have been consulted and engaged in this process.

At the conclusion of this process an interim report will be presented to Trustees. The report will include a series of maps that identify the primary issues and challenges within each grouping to be addressed through the Secondary Program Review. A final report will be presented to Trustees after this report and corresponding maps have been shared with the public.

Identification of Program Type in Trillium

As reported in previous reports to the Committee of the Whole, efforts are currently underway to identify students who are in a specialized program in Trillium. On 3 March, 2020, instructions were shared by IT Services with all schools on how to change a student's program from 'Regular Secondary' to the appropriate specialized program. Staff in School Information Systems (SIS) have been supporting schools as they transition to this new way of identifying students, in advance of the timetabling process.

3. Location

To be provided in the upcoming summary report developed through the LTPAS cycle this year.

4. Facilities

To be provided in the upcoming summary report developed through the LTPAS cycle this year.

Action Plan and Associated Timeline

Additional focused consultations on the newly drafted Specialized Schools and Programs Policy will be scheduled for early April.

Both the Optional Attendance Policy (P013) and the new Specialized Schools and Programs Policy will be presented to the Governance and Policy Committee on 29 April, 2020.

The interim report, including maps of preliminary concepts, will be shared at the next Committee of the Whole in May.

Resource Implications

Not applicable.

Communications Considerations

The webpage for the Secondary Program Review continues to be updated as reports are approved at Board Meetings. As well, the Question and Answer page is updated on a regular basis as new questions are received to the Secondary Program Review e-mail address (secondaryreview@tdsb.on.ca).

Board Policy and Procedure Reference(s)

P013 - Optional Attendance

PR545 - Optional Attendance

PR612 - Admission to Specialized Schools and Programs

Appendices

Appendix A: Consultation Overview - Secondary Program Review

Appendix B: Research Summary - P013 Optional Attendance Public Feedback

From

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CONSULTATION OVERVIEW: SECONDARY PROGRAM REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

A review of secondary schools, programs, policies and procedures began in 2019.

The goal of this review - which is informed by the Multi-Year Strategic Plan, the Guiding Principles of the Long-Term Program and Accommodation Strategy, and the Board's commitment to equity - aims to ensure that all students have equitable access to programs and opportunities, as close to home as possible.

An important piece of the Secondary Program Review is hearing from members of the TDSB community. The objective of the 2019-2020 Secondary Program Review engagement component is to understand the experiences, challenges, logistical concerns, ideas, and general process considerations of various community and staff groups in relation to Secondary Programming at the TDSB. This document summarizes the consultation efforts of the Secondary Program Review. A larger document that summarizes the themes of the conversations will follow in the coming months.

ENGAGEMENT POPULATION

The engagement components of this review are based on the TDSB's policy on community engagement (Policy P078), which was informed by best practices within the area of community engagement as well as recommendations outlined in the Director's Response to the TDSB's Enhancing Equity Task Force (TDSB, 2018).

Over **4,000** stakeholders were heard from, in some capacity, during this 2019-2020 consultation period.

Tables 1, 2, and 3 outline who and how groups were engaged during this year's consultation efforts.

Table 1: The Public - Engagement Details

Engagement Methods	Population Details
<p>Four Public Consultation Sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Western Technical-Commercial School East Education Office C W Jefferys Collegiate Institute John Polanyi Collegiate Institute 	<p>Approximately 200 attendees made up mostly of parents and a small number of students and staff.</p> <p><i>*in conjunction with the Optional Attendance (P013) review</i></p>
<p>Online Survey:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Available from November 1, 2019 to February 28, 2020. <p><i>*Families, students, staff, and community members were all invited to complete this survey.</i></p>	<p>2,484 respondents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents: 2019 respondents (current and future) [1216 elementary; 527 middle; 1050 secondary] Students: 241 respondents [19 Gr 6/7/8; 222 Gr 9-12] Staff: 134 respondents [1 superintendent, 9 central admin, 14 principals/VPs, 13 school support staff, 96 teachers, 1 trustee] Other: 90 respondents [former students, former parents/grandparents; community members/tax payers, etc.]
<p>Two Online Question and Answer Sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thursday January 30, 1:00 pm Thursday January 30, 7:00 pm <p><i>*Q and A sessions were posted online for viewing.</i></p>	<p>A variety of questions were asked by the public. It is unknown the actual number of individuals who accessed the session or viewed it afterwards.</p>
<p>Open feedback collected</p>	<p>Total number: Approximately 220 emails.</p> <p><i>*in conjunction with the optional Attendance Policy (P013) Review.</i></p>
<p>Focused Conversations</p>	<p>Joint meeting with representation from: Alternative Schools (ASCAC), Black Student Achievement (BSACAC), Community Use of Schools (CUSCAC), Early Years (EYCAC), Equity Policy (EPCAC), French as a Second Language (FSLAC), Parent Involvement (PIAC), Urban Indigenous (UICAC), Parent Involvement Advisory Committee (PIAC), and Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC).</p> <p>Additional email feedback and meetings with PIAC and SEAC.</p>

Table 2: Students - Engagement Details

Who we talked to?	Engagement Methods	Population Details
Students (Grades 6 to 12) and Adult Learners	Online Survey: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email distributed to a representative sample of students in grades 6 to 10 Survey link available online from February 20, 2020 to March 13, 2020 	729 respondents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 255 Gr 6/7/8 460 Gr 9-12 14 other- adult learners/co-op students
Students enrolled at Urban Indigenous Education Centre/ Wandering Spirit School	Focused conversation with students on January 31, 2020	15 Students
Student Senate	Focused conversation with students on February, 27 2020	20 students

Table 3: Staff - Engagement Details

Who we talked to?	Engagement Methods	Population Details
Staff Forum	Multiple small table discussions with staff groups on February 20, 2020	Approximately 24 (school-based and non-school based staff)
Principals and Vice Principals	Focused conversation with TSAA representatives on January 30, 2020	Approximately 22 principals and vice-principals
Staff teaching at Urban Indigenous Education Centre / Wandering Spirit School	Focused conversation with staff January 31, 2020	6 Staff
Principals and Vice Principals from Adult Day Schools/ EdVance Programs	Focused conversation with principals and vice principals from Adult Day Schools/ EdVance programs on February 27, 2020	Approximately 10 principals and vice-principals
Staff at Alternative Secondary Schools	Focused conversation with staff at Alternative Secondary Schools on February 4, 2020 (west) and March 23, 2020 (east)	Approximately 85 staff
Elementary Itinerant Counsellors (EICs)	Focused conversation with EICs on March 13, 2020	Approximately 25 staff

Further Engagement Details

Public Consultation Sessions

The four public consultation sessions noted above included a presentation about Optional Attendance and the larger Secondary Program Review followed by a two-part table discussion on (1) the suggested changes to the new draft Optional Attendance Policy and (2) the Secondary Program Review¹.

Participants sat grouped at small tables while a facilitator and note-taker at each table asked discussion questions and recorded comments. Note, all table facilitators and note-takers had the same discussion guide with questions and templates for recording notes.

Please see Appendix A for the list of consultation questions.

Online Survey

An online survey was developed which asked stakeholder groups to comment on current secondary programming. The survey was voluntary and responses were anonymous. The survey was posted on the Secondary Program Review website. Information inviting participation was distributed via Trustees Weekly, Direct Line, System Leaders Weekly, TDSB Connects (Parents and Staff), and social media avenues.

A second online survey was developed for TDSB students. A random representative sample was created using student enrollment and demographic information from the TDSB's School Information System and TDSB's Student Census data. A survey consent letter was emailed first to TDSB parents followed by an email invitation to the student sample (Grades 6 to 10). The survey link was also posted online for any other students who wished to participate. Administrators at Adult Learning Centres were asked to encourage their students to complete the student survey as well.

Please see Appendix B for the list of survey questions.

Staff Forum and Focused Conversations

A staff forum was held for all TDSB staff. Due to the timing and related job action campaigns, attendance was limited and teaching staff were unable to attend. Focused conversations were held with multiple stakeholder groups throughout this review. In addition to the groups noted in tables 1 through 3, key

¹ For information and presentations on the Secondary Program Review, please visit <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/High-School/Secondary-Program-Review>.

conversations were held over the course of this review that informed stages along the way (e.g., Secondary Review Steering Committee, Trustees, Senior Team, Planning Department).

Email Feedback

Stakeholders were encouraged to contact secondaryreview@tdsb.on.ca if they had comments, concerns, feedback, etc. All emails were read. In certain communities, stakeholders submitted letters documenting their concerns and recommendations.

Consultation Questions

Public Session and Community Advisory Groups

1. *Ice breaker*: In your opinion, what is the goal of secondary schooling?
2. What is the most important part of your child's (or your, or your students') secondary school experience?
3. What are the positive aspects of the secondary school your child (or you) currently attends (staff - or work at)?
4. What are the challenges your child (or you) have experienced at your current secondary school?
5. If applicable, why did your family (or you) choose to attend a school outside of your neighbourhood secondary school? How did your family (or you) choose this secondary school?
6. If not attending your neighbourhood secondary school, what would be the furthest distance your family (or you) are willing to travel to attend another regular school or specialized/ alternative program/school? (in time)
7. Any additional comments?

Staff Forum

1. What do you think are the important aspects of a student's secondary school experience?
2. Related to secondary programming:
 - a. What are the current challenges in your secondary school – for you and your staff?
 - b. What are the current successes in your secondary school – for you and your staff?
3. How can the TDSB work to address both under and over-utilized schools – while moving towards fewer secondary schools with strong programming and access to courses that support all pathways?
4. Do you think your school would benefit from a change in program offerings? Yes / NO Why?
5. Are there specialised programs or courses that you think would be beneficial to the students at your school?
6. Do you experience competition for students from other secondary schools? How do you deal with this?
7. Additional Comments:

TSAA

1. What do you think are the important aspects of a student's secondary school experience?
2. Related to secondary programming:
 - a. What are the current challenges in your secondary school – for you and your staff?
 - b. What are the current successes in your secondary school – for you and your staff?
3. Do you think your school would benefit from a change in program offerings? Yes / NO Why?

4. Are there specialised programs or courses that you think would be beneficial to the students at your school?
5. Do you experience competition for students from other secondary schools? How do you deal with this?
6. Additional Comments:

**Please note other focussed conversations had similar questions, but were not as structured as the sessions noted above and may have asked additional questions specific to the group.*

Online Consultation Questions: Public Survey

1. I will be completing this survey as: Current Parent/Guardian/Caregiver, Future Parent/Guardian/Caregiver, Student, Trustee, Superintendent, Central Administration, Professional Support Services, Support Staff (e.g., CAP, Manager, Coordinator, Program Lead, etc.), Principal/Vice Principal, Teacher, School Support Staff (e.g., Office Admin, Caretaker, etc.), Other
2. What grade do you currently attend? OR What grade does your child(ren) currently attend?
3. What ward do you live in?
4. What are the reasons why you (or your child) do not attend your neighbourhood secondary school?
 - a. How did you choose this secondary school?
5. Why did you (or your child) choose to attend your neighbourhood secondary school?
6. What is the most important part of a secondary school experience? In terms of:
 - A. School learning environment and culture (e.g., academic program or course availability, extracurricular activities, opportunities for students' social, emotional, ethical, intellectual and civic learning, technology and e-learning, experiential learning, etc.).
 - B. Organizational structures (e.g., school location, staffing, general rules and norms, infrastructure, resources, supplies, scheduling/calendar, school organization model, etc.).
7. If considering attending a secondary school outside of your neighbourhood, what would be the furthest distance your family/you is/are willing to travel to attend another regular school or specialized/alternative program/school? (in time)
8. Would you consider attending a secondary school that had a modified calendar/timetable? (e.g. non-semester, full year, late start, etc.).
9. What are the positive aspects of the secondary school your child (or you) currently attend?
10. What are the challenges you/or your child have experienced at your current secondary school?
11. How well does the current secondary school experience prepare students for their future?
12. Any additional comments?

**Please note different stakeholder groups were directed to different questions based on survey skip logic.*

Online Consultation Questions: Student Survey

1. What grade are you in?
2. Are you currently enrolled in any of the following programs? French Immersion/Extended French, Arts Focused Schools (Elementary), Arts Focused Schools (Secondary), Cyber Arts/Studies, High Performance Athletes /Elite/Exceptional Athletes, Integrated Technology, International Baccalaureate, Leadership Pathway, Math, Science & Technology Advanced Placement (AP), Elementary Academies (e.g., Boys Leadership Academy, Girls' Leadership Academy, Vocal Music Academy, Sports & Wellness Academy, Health & Wellness Academy), Other
3. Are you currently attending a school on optional attendance?
4. What is needed in elementary school to help you prepare for high school?
5. What do you think is the most important part of high school?
6. What structures of support would help you better succeed in high school? Caring Adult or Mentor Mental Health Supports, Post-secondary Pathways / Skilled Trades / or Career Counselling, Nutritional Resources, Increased Access to Social Workers or Child and Youth Workers, Increased Access to Special Education Support, School Time Table Coordination of Tests and Exams, Public Speaking Support, Focused Academic Support, Stronger School Community/Connectedness
 - a. Are there other things the school board should consider that would help you better succeed in high school?
7. If applicable, what are the challenges you have experienced at your current school?
8. In the future, what courses or programs would you like to see at your high school? French Immersion / Extended French, Arts Focused Schools, Cyber Arts/Studies, Elite/Exceptional Athletes / High Performance Athletes, Integrated Technology, International Baccalaureate (IB), Leadership Math, Science & Technology, Advanced Placement (AP), Skilled Trades, Co-op, Other
9. Would any of the following timetable adjustments positively support your learning? Late start, Year round school calendar, Modifications to class time (e.g., increased homework time during the day, better spacing of difficult academic subject,) Increased breaks / holiday time, Changes to length of class time, Increased transition time in between classes, Campus model (e.g., multiple buildings, cluster of schools), Other
10. Do you know where you want to go to high school?

- a. Are you planning to go somewhere outside of your neighbourhood?
 - b. Why are you planning on attending your neighbourhood high school? OR
 - c. Why are you planning on attending a high school outside of your neighbourhood?
 - d. If considering attending a secondary school outside of your neighbourhood, what would be the furthest distance you are willing to travel to attend another regular school or specialized/alternative program/school? (in time)
11. Do you attend your neighbour secondary school?
 12. If considering attending a secondary school outside of your neighbourhood, what would be the furthest distance you would be willing to travel to attend another regular school or specialized/alternative program/school? (in time)
 13. Please provide any additional comments you feel is relevant to this review.

**Please note students in different grade levels were directed to different questions based on survey skip logic.*



RESEARCH SUMMARY: P013 Optional Attendance Public Feedback

INTRODUCTION

The Optional Attendance (OA) Policy (P013) allows students to apply to schools (where there is excess capacity) other than their designated school by home address. The OA Policy (P013) was reviewed during the 2019-2020 school year (as per the Toronto District School Board’s (TDSB) Policy Review Schedule). Following the TDSB’s Policy Framework (P001) and the Policy Development and Management Procedure (PR501), policy reviews carry specific expectations for internal and external consultation. The following report summarizes the feedback from the external consultation for the OA Policy (P013) review.

EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT METHODS

The following table outlines the consultation methods and respondent details for the draft OA Policy (P013) review.

Table 1: Engagement Details

Methods	Population Details	
Four Public Consultation Sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Western Technical-Commercial School East Education Office C W Jefferys CI John Polanyi CI 	Approximately 200 attendees made up mostly of parents and a small number of students and staff. <i>*in conjunction with the Secondary Program Review</i>
Online Survey	Survey accompanying the posting of the OA draft policy	623 respondents provided feedback to the draft OA Policy <i>*Although the survey did not ask individuals to identify themselves, it was clear that the majority of respondents were TDSB parents (including both secondary and elementary panels).</i>
Focused Conversations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Advisory Committees TSAA Representatives Student Senate 	Multiple meetings with Community Advisory Committee Representatives (PIAC, SEAC, joint meeting with all committees); TSAA (principals and vice principals) representatives; and Student Senate.

Email feedback	Open feedback collected	Total number: Approximately 220 emails. <i>*in conjunction with the Secondary Program Review.</i>
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Public Consultation Sessions

The four public consultation sessions noted above included a presentation about Optional Attendance and the larger Secondary Program Review followed by a two-part table discussion on (1) the suggested changes to the new draft OA Policy and (2) the Secondary Program Review¹. Participants sat grouped at small tables while the presenter walked participants through the proposed changes for the draft OA Policy². A facilitator and note-taker at each table asked discussion questions and recorded comments. Note, all table facilitators and note-takers had the same discussion guide with questions and templates for recording notes.

Online Survey

A short online survey was developed which asked respondents whether they agreed, disagreed, or were unsure of the proposed changes to the draft OA Policy. These questions, for the most part, mirrored the questions being asked at the public consultation sessions. The survey was voluntary and responses were anonymous. The draft policy and accompanying survey was available for 90 days (November 1, 2019 to February 3, 2020).

Focused Conversations

Focused conversations were held with key stakeholder groups as per Governance Procedure PR501.

Email Feedback

Stakeholders were encouraged to contact secondaryreview@tdsb.on.ca if they had comments, concerns, feedback, etc. All emails were read. In certain cases, stakeholders submitted letters documenting their concerns and recommendations. For the purpose of this summary, stakeholders’ key recommendations have been included; however, letters have also been reviewed in their entirety outside of this summary.

¹ Please note this summary is only presenting results related to P013.

² The presentation, along with discussion questions, can be viewed at: <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/High-School/Secondary-Program-Review>

FEEDBACK SUMMARY

Part A: Online Survey Results

There are seven suggested revisions to the draft OA Policy (P013) outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Online Survey Responses

Policy Suggested Changes	Agree	Disagree	Not sure
Suggested name change <i>*Attendance at Schools Outside of Designated Attendance Area</i>	391 (63%)	169 (27%)	60 (10%)
The revised Optional Attendance Policy would only apply to: (1) Regular schools and (2) Schools with French programs. Specialized schools will no longer be included in this policy.	289 (51%)	148 (26%)	129 (23%)
One application for a regular school only. There will be a new Policy/Procedure to specify the application process to specialized programs.	132 (24%)	356 (64%)	64 (12%)
There will be an additional priority grouping for TDSB students vs non-TDSB students.	367 (67%)	126 (23%)	51 (9%)
There will be no distinction for feeder school students who apply via Optional Attendance.	234 (44%)	156 (29%)	139 (26%)
Students in school-based child care who register after January 1 must apply as out-of-area students.	227 (43%)	188 (36%)	112 (21%)
Students who change residence or who withdraw from child care must change schools, unless the following year is a graduating year.	321 (61%)	155 (30%)	48 (9%)

A greater percentage of respondents agreed with the suggested name change, scope of the revised policy (only for regular schools and French programs), a new priority grouping for TDSB students versus non-TSDB students, and students who change residence should change schools (if not a graduating year).

The other suggested changes (no distinction for feeder school students and a child care deadline) showed a split between respondents with no clear agreement.

Lastly, the majority of respondents did not agree with decreasing the number of school choices from 2 to 1.

Part B: Summary of Themes from all Engagement Methods

Suggested Change: Policy Name

The majority of respondents agreed with changing the policy name to “Attendance at Schools Outside of Designated Attendance Area.” The common theme amongst stakeholders who agreed with the name change was the need for “clarity.” According to the respondents, the new name is more straightforward and relates more specifically to the goal of the policy. Furthermore, the suggested name does not evoke the perception that attending school is “optional” and the suggested name places emphasis on attending your neighbourhood school.

Those that disagreed with the suggested name change were concerned with the length of the name. Many agreed that it was too long, not clear and could be confusing, especially for those who are non-native English speakers. Others stated that the suggested name had a negative connotation for students that did not attend their designated school due to emphasis on “outside of designated attendance area.” It implied that students are doing something wrong by not attending their local school; the term “optional” suggests choice while the term “designated” sounds like students are being controlled. Another reason cited for the disagreement was familiarity with the current term.

Those that were unsure agreed that the term “Optional Attendance” should change, but did not agree with the suggested name. See Appendix A for a list of suggested names. Others felt that this change was unnecessary and insignificant.

Suggested Change: Scope of Policy (Regular and French Programs)

Approximately half of respondents agreed with the approach of having two different policies (one for regular and French programs and one for specialized schools and programs). The main theme that emerged was the ability to have a singular focus on the distinct policies. Respondents believed that the distinct policies would better address student need and allow for more specificity in relation to specialized schools and programs. Some respondents commented that this change would create less confusion in terms of applying to the different programs with just one form. Principals were especially supportive of separating specialized programs and alternative schools from the current OA policy.

Although many supported this change, many others did not. Key reasons for the lack of support included: absence of the specialized programs and school policy, lack of transparency from the TDSB, confusion, and further complication to the application process. Many believed that the current policy

was meeting the needs of students and there was no reason to separate the policies. Some were also worried about the amount of paperwork that would be involved with separate application processes and potentially navigating both processes at the same time.

Overall, most respondents wanted to see the content for the new specialized schools and programs policy before commenting on the suggested changes to the OA policy.

The placement of the OA Policy review paired with the Secondary Program Review exasperated concerns that specialized schools and programs may be closing or relocating. For this reason, there was a lot of concern about how the suggested policy revisions would impact specialized schools. Many questioned the Board's intentions and continued to ask whether specialized schools will be closing and/or moving to new neighbourhoods.

Suggested Change: Number of School Choices

The majority of respondents did not agree with reducing the number of applications from two to one. The most common theme amongst those that were against this change was that it would be too limiting and restrictive for students to have only one chance of getting into their choice school. Respondents feared that by reducing application numbers, students would be "forced" to attend their home school – a school that may not be the best fit for their educational and social-emotional needs. Many respondents suggested that instead of reducing the number of school choices, they should be increased beyond the two choices in the current policy. This would provide students with a wider variety of options and a greater chance of getting into a school through Optional Attendance.

There were a smaller yet sizable proportion of stakeholders that agreed with this change. Responses from the public suggested that this change would reduce overcapacity in schools; schools would also be better able to predict the number of students to expect at each school. Additionally, it would decrease the "shopping around" by families and the competition between schools. Less choice might encourage students to attend their home school and potentially strengthen neighbourhood schools. Some school staff and principals also noted that this change would reduce the amount of paperwork involved in the process.

Priority Groupings: TDSB Students vs non-TDSB Students

A majority of the respondents agreed that TDSB students should be prioritized over non-TDSB students (e.g., Toronto Catholic District School Board, Private Schools, and French Language Schools). Common

reasons provided were: it may reduce the chances of TDSB students moving to a different school board, tax-base contribution to public school boards, and following in the footsteps of other school boards who prioritize their students' first. On the other hand, there were some stakeholders who were not supportive of this change. A majority of those that disagreed believed that all residents of Toronto should have equal access to school opportunities and the suggested change could negatively impact potential student enrolment opportunities.

Priority Groupings: No distinction for feeder school students

A large number of participants were in favour of this change³. Many believed this change would benefit 'in-district' feeder school students and was more equitable compared to current practices. Another common theme from those in agreement was the importance of keeping students with their peers and cohort. It was felt that this particular change would ease the transition when moving from elementary to secondary school.

Those that opposed the change feared it could separate students who had applied as 'out of area' students from their peers as they transitioned into secondary school. They expressed that adjusting this priority was unfair and they preferred the current policy over this suggested new priority grouping. Feedback and questions demonstrates confusion with the existing policy's distinction between students who attend the feeder school as in-district students versus those who attend as Optional Attendance students.

Priority Groupings: General Feedback

While commenting on the suggested changes to the priority groupings, participants also provided general comments on the priorities.

- Participants questioned Priority 1 [Students who are attending another school as an Out-of-Area student and who wish to return to their designated school by address]. Why do students have to re-apply to their home school? Families felt students should be able to attend their original home school if they would like to return after being at a different school via Optional Attendance.

³ Current Policy notes a distinction between students who attend the feeder school as in-district students vs. those who attend as Optional Attendance students.

- Priority 2 [Secondary students whose child/children is/are enrolled in a child care centre in the designated attendance area of the secondary school] should become Priority 1 to prevent students from dropping out.
- Priority 4 [Students currently attending a feeder school of the requested school] should move up to Priority 3.
- Participants all agreed with Priority 9 [Students residing outside the City of Toronto] being the last priority.
- A sizable portion of the public was not sure of the change to priority groupings as it related to feeder schools. Quite a number of stakeholders had been led to believe that in-district students always received first priority. Participants expressed further clarification of this section of the policy.
- Lottery process should be revisited as it is not a transparent process.

Child Care (January 1 deadline)

Approximately half of respondents were highly supportive of this change. Stakeholders spoke of parents using child care as a way to reserve space in a school they would like their child to attend. Many felt this was wrong and created problems of inequity from an early age. Those in support of the January 1st date were hopeful that this change would reduce such instances. Others agreed with the suggested change as it accommodates students living in the catchment area over out of area students attending child care in the same catchment area. In some cases, respondents felt there should be a discontinuation of automatic enrolments for out of area children. Some stakeholders suggested that all out of area children should apply to attend the school the child care was based in through Optional Attendance. Respondents felt that the priority should be to support the needs of local child care centres, including before and after school programs (BASP), before admitting those from out of area into the school and the local BASP.

On the other hand, a sizable proportion of respondents opposed this change in the policy. The most common reasons cited were limited access to child care and long waiting lists. Parents lamented on the hardships of finding quality child care in the city and subsequently being placed on long wait lists to access spots. With the cut-off date of January 1st, parents were worried that by the time they were accepted to the child care, they would be forced to apply to the school through optional attendance with a reduced chance of getting accepted.

Some felt the change had the potential to be disruptive for children who were already immersed in the school community through child care. Parents were concerned with the transition for children if they had to attend a different school other than what was attached to the child's care centre. A number of stakeholders commented on the benefits of children attending school-based child care and the ease of transitioning to kindergarten. They cited the relationships children built with the staff and other children and the attachment to the school and the environment. To have the children stay with their cohort is beneficial for both children and families. TDSB's Early Years Community Advisory Committee specifically believes the system should continue to prioritize minimal transitions for young children. Similarly, Toronto's Children Services notes children attending a child care program in a school should be able to access that school as if it were their home school and would like TDSB to consider removal of the enrolment criteria (i.e. before or after January 1st).

A number of stakeholders expressed concern for those who were new to the area and the impact this suggested change could have for them. A few mentioned that life was unpredictable and circumstances could change suddenly forcing families to move in the middle of the year with no knowledge of how this change could impact their access to schools for their children.

Suggested Change: Change Residence or Withdraw from Child Care Must Change Schools (unless the following year is a graduating year)

Many respondents agreed with the suggested change. However, many respondents also emphasized that students should be allowed to finish their current school year. To limit the stress and disruption for students, others felt that students should have the option to stay at their current school no matter what year graduation might be. Some individuals commented that perhaps differentiate between elementary and secondary students for this policy provision – some felt it was more disruptive for secondary students to have to change schools.

Those that disagreed with the suggested change felt that students' decision to remain or move schools should be their own. Some questioned whether this scenario could be looked at on a case by case basis instead of an entire policy provision. Others wondered why the TDSB would force students to leave a school if there is capacity within.

GENERAL THOUGHTS ON OPTIONAL ATTENDANCE

Participants at the public consultation sessions were asked about their experiences with Optional Attendance: how has it impacted their child's school experience; and, how has it impacted their community? Throughout the sessions, there were varied experiences and sentiments about Optional Attendance. The overarching notion - balancing accessible choice, student learning needs and school 'fit', and strong neighbourhood schools - is a complex issue at the TDSB.

Many families like the notion of choice and feel their children benefit from the choices that Optional Attendance provides. Students are able to access a specialized program or attend a school that is a good fit for them and their interests. In some instances, students have been able to access safer neighbourhoods and schools through Optional Attendance.

There were comments questioning the value of Optional Attendance if TDSB is moving to strengthen neighbourhood schools. Some participants noted their neighbourhood school is underutilized because of optional attendance. Others questioned why some schools are allowed to function above 100% utilization and others are so underutilized. Questions were raised as to the accountability of principals in situations where schools are over capacity.

Many families asked *Why aren't students going to their local school? What are students accessing that is not available to them closer to home? How will changing priorities make neighbourhood schools more viable?* A few parents noted that the current system disrupts neighborhoods and students should stay local except for special circumstances (e.g., student is gifted in the arts or athletics, Special Education Needs) and all others students should have a well-rounded education with their local peers.

It was suggested that having less choice may strengthen the neighbourhood school, but the Board should ensure that the same great programming is accessible across neighbourhoods. Efforts should be made to have access to high quality schools across all neighbourhoods. A small number of respondents suggested moving specialized programs from over capacity schools to balance out other schools as opposed to limit Optional Attendance universally.

Some felt that the Board's vision of equity will not be addressed with the current OA policy and there should be distinct policy provisions to promote diversity and inclusion – especially for specialized programs. Acknowledging that Toronto is made up of neighbourhoods with differing socioeconomic

status, a small number of respondents noted that by limiting Optional Attendance choices, the TDSB is limiting access to families that may not live close to their preferred school.

Some conversations focused on school boundaries. In some instances families noted that their neighbourhood school is farther away than their Optional Attendance school. Concerns moved to discussions around how to change school boundaries and asked if boundary re-working is a component of the larger Secondary Program Review? Some respondents felt that fixing school boundaries (especially secondary) would increase school utilization rates.

The public had questions about the Optional Attendance process, the new policy, and the end goal of these policy changes. Many questioned whether the TDSB would be transparent with the findings from the review as well as any larger visions related to the Secondary Program Review that may impact families. Parents questioned the relevance of their feedback as they felt they are not being provided with all the information. Families wanted more information on the larger vision for schools and neighbourhoods under this new policy.

Moving Optional Attendance to a Centralized Web-Process

Participants at the public consultation sessions were asked to comment on the Optional Attendance process moving from a paper-based to web-based centralized process. Most were in agreement as it would add less paperwork to the process, become more efficient, less burdensome on school staff, and have the potential to be more impartial.

Some felt that by removing the school and the principal from the application process, the process itself would become more transparent; however, others disagreed, noting that the principal adds a human layer to the process and can help pick the best candidates – when applying to specialized schools.

There were many logistical concerns about how a new online process would unfold (e.g., timing of acceptance offers, support for families without internet access, multi-lingual platform, cost etc.). Many participants felt that there should be both paper and online application options offered to families – at least during a transitional period.

Appendix A

SUGGESTED NAMES FOR THE NEW POLICY

Respondents had suggestions for a new name that would either be shorter or clearer than the suggested policy name. The suggested names are listed below:

- Out of designated school area attendance
- Admission to Out-of-Area Schools
- Out-of-Area Admission
- Optional Admission
- Elective Admission
- Attendance beyond Neighborhood Schools
- Going to a school that is not your local school
- Attendance at schools outside of Home School Area
- "Outside of Residential Area (ORA) Attendance Policy"
- Alternative attendance for other programmes
- Attendance at a school other than your home school (then only need to define home school in policy)
- Attendance at non-designated school
- Attend Another School Policy
- Attendance Outside of Designated Area
- Application to School Outside Designated Area
- Application for Attendance to Schools Outside of Designated Attendance Area
- Applying to a School Outside of Designated Attendance Area
- Attendance Outside Designated Area Schools
- Optional Attendance at Schools Outside of Designated Attendance Area
- You should include in brackets (formerly called Optional Attendance), with a plan to remove the brackets from the name in 5 years to reduce confusion for people who are already familiar with what "Optional Attendance" currently refers to.
- "Designated attendance area" definition is also up for change, so using changing definition in title is confusing.
- Attendance outside of home area
- School enrolment out of designated area
- Cross boundary transfer or (application through) open enrolment
- School of Choice
- Optional School Choice
- Option to attend school outside your area
- Non-Designated School Attendance Option
- Out of area enrolment
- Out of Catchment Attendance

- Non Catchment Attendance Policy – (NCAP)
- Out of Area Attendance (OAA)
- Cross-boundary transfers
- Out of Residential Area (ORA)
- Attendance at non-addressed school
- Non-designated school application
- Attendance Outside of Designated Area
- Cross Boundary School Transfer
- Out of Area policy
- Non-designated school enrolment, out of catchment enrolment
- Cross-boundary admissions
- Outside of Designated Attendance Area