



16 June 2009

Report No. 09 - 143 to the Education Committee

**Re: Framework for a Review of the Alternative Elementary Program in the
Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB)**

ORIGINATORS: Jennifer Adams, Superintendent of Curriculum, ext. 8573
Pino Buffone, System Principal, Elementary Curriculum
Joan Oracheski, Manager, Quality Assurance

PURPOSE:

1. To present, and seek approval on, the framework for a review of the alternative elementary program in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, including: scope of the study, timelines, and consultation.

BACKGROUND:

2. The alternative elementary program was first established in 1982 in the former Ottawa Board of Education. Lady Evelyn, the first Alternative School, was founded as a pilot project in response to a group of parents committed to a philosophy of education which espoused child-centred, individualized, self-directed programming which recognized the importance of individual learning styles.
3. Between 1982 and 1997, five additional schools introduced the alternative program, including one at the intermediate level. The guiding principles of the alternative program, as described in *Report No. 98-105: Alternative Elementary Schools*, include the following:
 - a) *Active Parental Involvement*

Parents make personal choices to take an active role in the education of children in the school community. Active parental involvement can take many forms depending on the circumstances of the individual parent, the needs of the classroom and the activities in school-related projects. This involves supporting teachers in the implementation of programs.

- b) *Family and Community-Centred Environment*

Each school is a community of parents, educators and students working and learning together. All members of the school are partners in sharing a commitment to the guiding principles of alternative schools.
 - c) *Multi-Age Groupings*

Students are grouped according to mixed age levels for classroom placement and other activities throughout the school. Multi-age groups provide the opportunity for interaction between children of different ages and stages of development.
 - d) *Staff Dedicated to the Implementation of the Alternative Approach*

Staff have an understanding of and are committed to the implementation of the guiding principles of Alternative schools.
 - e) *Integrated Curriculum*

Alternative schools follow the Ministry of Education and Training Curriculum using an integrated approach which stresses the inter-relatedness of all learning.
 - f) *Flexible Curriculum Delivery*

The use of innovative approaches to teaching provides teachers with the opportunity to respond to the individual child's needs and to address various learning styles.
 - g) *Self-Directed Learning*

This is an educational approach which respects the child's interests, learning agenda, learning style, and the rate and progress of development. The teacher assists, guides and directs the child in the quest for knowledge by providing a solid structure for learning.
 - h) *Student Self-Evaluation*

Children are actively involved in the evaluation of their learning. The child's assessment of progress is based on the achievement of objectives mutually agreed upon by the child, parent, and teacher.
4. In September 1998, trustees of the newly amalgamated Ottawa-Carleton District School Board approved the continuation of alternative elementary programs. At that time it was agreed that the location of these programs, and appropriate boundaries for each, be determined through the area review process and that the Alternative Schools Advisory Committee (ASAC) be consulted regarding any future review of elementary Alternative programs. At present, there are six alternative elementary programs in the OCDSB – Churchill, Grant, Lady Evelyn, Manor Park, Riverview, and Summit.
5. Since amalgamation, the following key staff reports regarding the alternative elementary program have been presented to Education Committee:
- *Report No. 98-368: Work Plans for MFI and Alternative Elementary Programs* that outlines a workplan for the purpose of confirming the placement of alternative programs for the 1999-2000 school year and developed a process for the possible expansion of the program across the system.

- *Report No. 99-014: Progress Report on the Alternative Program Working Group in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board* that described communication strategies to support the continuation and further establishment of these programs (e.g., development of a pamphlet to inform parents about the program, holding a public meeting/open house in one of the alternative schools that includes classroom visits, informing principals and the Ottawa-Carleton Association of School Councils about the approach and application process).

6. The aforementioned pamphlet developed in 1999 and revised in September in 2006 describes the alternative philosophy:

a) *Cooperation and Teamwork*

Cooperation and teamwork are emphasized instead of competition in all aspects of the school. The core belief is that children who are motivated from within, instead of by rewards, will become lifelong learners, eager to take on challenges.

b) *Commitment to Innovative Approaches*

There is a commitment to innovative approaches to teaching and learning through a shared responsibility among staff, students, and parents.

c) *Student-directed and Teacher-directed Learning*

A balance between student-directed and teacher-directed learning: the teacher acts as a facilitator/mentor/guide of the child's learning; enhances self-concept, enthusiasm for learning, and personal responsibility.

d) *Multi-aged Groupings*

Interaction among children of different ages and at different stages of development provides an environment wherein students learn from each other, as well as from the teacher.

e) *Integrated Curriculum*

This provides a natural progression from whole to parts and stresses the interrelation of all learning and subjects.

f) *Family-centred School Environment*

There is a family-centred school environment wherein parental involvement is a partnership between the home and school fostering self-respect, respect for the ideas and opinions of others, and an appreciation for people's differences.

g) *Assessment and Evaluation*

Assessment and evaluation is ongoing using multiple strategies which include student self-evaluations. The primary focus of this process is personal growth as well as being used as a tool for program planning and assessment.

7. Additionally, the Alternative Schools Advisory Committee has made delegations to Education Committee on a variety of occasions, including:
 - On 17 May 2004, ASAC presented a Letter of Understanding for the purpose of better communicating with parents who have chosen that program for their child the philosophy and practices of the alternative program.
 - On 16 April 2008, ASAC provided an overview of the findings from the revitalization project undertaken by the Committee which included stakeholder consultation and the establishment of a number of proposed recommendations to the Board. Superintendent Hammond was identified as the staff liaison who would work with ASAC to review their recommendations.
8. On 18 June 2008, *Report No. 08-106: Multi-year Plan for Program Reviews* was submitted to Education Committee for information. The report highlighted the various levels of program reviews (i.e., formal program review, program monitoring and Ministry curriculum reviews) and presented a tentative plan for the next three years. At that time, the alternative elementary program was identified for a formal review during the 2010-2011 school year.

STATUS:

9. As a result of strategic planning discussions throughout the 2008-2009 school year, the review of the alternative elementary program has been advanced by one year. This change in timeline has been noted in *Report No. 09-102: Cyclical Review of Programs* presented to Education Committee in May 2009.
10. Over the past two years, the district has been involved in a number of formal program reviews that have helped define useful structures and processes. For example, in the review of FSL programs, K-8 and 9-12, structures (e.g., Ad Hoc Committee/staff committees) and processes (e.g., literature review, central review of data, stakeholder surveys) led to a comprehensive report that assisted in decision-making.
11. The purpose of this review is threefold. That is: (i) to determine the extent to which the mandate and expectations regarding program delivery for the alternative elementary program in the OCDSB differs from that of the non-alternative programs (e.g., regular English and French immersion); (ii) to determine whether or not the OCDSB will continue to offer the alternative program in grades JK-8 – it should be noted that a decision to discontinue the alternative elementary program may require other processes (i.e., an Accommodation Review Committee – ARC); and, (iii) in the event of a decision to continue with alternative programming in elementary schools, that a process to focus on program quality be developed.
12. The structure for overseeing this review will be a steering committee comprised of: a Superintendent of Instruction; two trustees; a representative from each of ASAC and OCASC; two elementary principals/vice-principals and two elementary teachers (one of each from an alternative and regular program school); and central staff from Curriculum Services, Quality Assurance, Human Resources and Planning.

13. This committee will receive and discuss information from the review of: central data, programs in other school districts, and Ministry documents and related literature. It will provide input into the design of the stakeholder survey. The steering committee will not be a decision-making authority; rather, recommendations will be submitted to the Board from staff.
14. The process for this review will include:
 - information contained in the ASAC report presented to Education Committee in April 2008;
 - an environmental scan of alternative elementary programs in other Ontario school boards;
 - a synthesis of enrolment trends and staffing requirements in alternative programs;
 - a review of Ministry documents and research literature pertaining to the core guiding principles of alternative program delivery models (e.g., parent involvement, self-directed learning, etc.); and,
 - stakeholder consultation through surveys and public submissions through the district web site.

A detailed plan of action is attached as Appendix A, including the anticipated timelines for the various components of the review. A final report to Education Committee is expected for February 2010.

CONSULTATION:

15. Staff has contacted the two co-chairs of ASAC for input on the review process.
16. *Report No. 09-102: Cyclical Review of Programs* was presented to Education Committee in May 2009, informing trustees and the public of the upcoming review. Elementary principals of alternative programs have been made aware of the program review for the 2009-2010 school year.
17. Pending Board approval, consultation with stakeholders will take place according to the plan attached in Appendix B.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

18. It is anticipated that the review of the research literature will need to be carried out under contract given the scope and timing of the review. It is estimated that a maximum of \$8,000 will be allocated from the district's 2009-2010 MISA budget to cover the costs associated with review and synthesis of the literature and preparations for the program review.
19. Release time for teachers and principals/vice-principals to attend stakeholder meetings will be allocated from the Quality Assurance budget. These costs will be dependent upon the number of times the committee is expected to meet, but are anticipated to be minimal.

20. Stakeholder surveys will be developed using SurveyMonkey for teachers and school administrators. A paper-and-pencil survey will be mailed to randomly selected parents of students in both the alternative and non-alternative programs (i.e., regular English, French immersion). Based on 31 October 2008 enrolment figures for the alternative elementary program, and anticipating a 50% return rate with follow-up, it is anticipated that 600 surveys would need to be distributed to parents of students enrolled in an alternative elementary program and 760 surveys would need to be distributed to parents of students enrolled in a non-alternative program (e.g., regular English and French immersion). As a result, approximately \$3,000 from the Quality Assurance operating budget will be used to cover the cost of postage to and from the recipient.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended THAT:

- A) the scope of the review of alternative elementary programs in the OCDSB and associated timelines, as set out in Appendix A of Report No. 09-143, be approved; and,
- B) the consultation plan, attached as Appendix B of Report No. 09-143, be approved.

Lyll M. Thomson
Director of Education/
Secretary to the Board

Jennifer Adams
Superintendent of Curriculum



Plan for a Review of the Alternative Elementary Program

Outcome: By January 2010, a review of Alternative Elementary Programs in the OCDSB will have been conducted for the purpose of: (i) determining the extent to which the mandate and expectations regarding program delivery for the alternative elementary program in the OCDSB differs from that of the non-alternative program (e.g., regular English and French immersion); (ii) determining whether or not the OCDSB will continue to offer the alternative program in grades JK-8; and, (iii) in the event of a decision to continue with alternative programming in elementary schools, that a process to focus on program quality be developed.

	Activity / Strategies Used	Deadline/Target Date
1.	Approval of the framework for the review of alternative elementary programming in the OCDSB.	June 26, 2009
2.	Conduct an environmental scan of alternative elementary programs in other Ontario School Boards.	August 31, 2009
3.	Identify enrolment trends, including retention rates, within the OCDSB for the alternative elementary program.	August 31, 2009
4.	Gather information regarding staffing (e.g., teacher qualifications).	August 31, 2009
5.	Conduct a review of the literature regarding the core guiding principles of the alternative program and their impact on student achievement (e.g., parental involvement, family and community-centred environment, multi-age groupings, self-directed learning, student self-evaluation, flexible curriculum delivery).	August 31, 2009
6.	Review and summarize information from a variety of Ministry documents (e.g., curriculum documents, reports from the expert panels on reading and mathematics, Education for All) that relate to core guiding principles of the alternative program (e.g., integrated curriculum, flexible curriculum delivery, self-directed learning, student self-evaluation).	August 31, 2009
7.	Establish and convene a Steering Committee comprised of: Superintendent of Instruction; two trustees; one representative from each of ASAC and OCASC; two elementary principals/vice-principals (one from an alternative school, one from a regular program school); two elementary teachers (one from an alternative school, one from a regular program school); staff from Curriculum Services, Quality Assurance, Human Resources and Planning.	September 15, 2009
8.	Consult with stakeholders through: a) Stakeholder Surveys (random representative samples of parents and teachers from elementary programs e.g., alternative, regular English, French immersion) in order to: (i) measure the importance of each of the guiding principles associated with the alternative program; and, (ii) identify some of the practices/activities currently being employed that are associated with each of the guiding principles. d) Public submissions (e.g., make parent survey available on Board web site to allow any parent to provide input – note results will need to be analyzed separately from the random sample).	October 31, 2009 November 15, 2009

9.	Produce interim report that contains information gathered in #3-8 (above) and present to Steering Committee, Director's Executive Council, and Education Committee.	December 15, 2009
10.	Develop recommendations regarding alternative elementary programs, based on the report produced in #9 above.	December 31, 2009
11.	Submit final report, including recommendations, to Director's Executive Council, Education Committee and Board for approval.	January 26, 2010



CONSULTATION PLAN

(REFERENCES: POLICY P.110.GOV AND PROCEDURE PR.644.GOV)

DATE:	June 16, 2009
PROJECT: (Project name, Letter of Transmittal, etc.)	Report No. 09-143: Framework for a Review of the Alternative Elementary Program in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB)
CONTACT / PROJECT LEAD (Name, telephone, email):	Joan Oracheski, Manager, Quality Assurance; 613-596-8211 ext. 8426; Joan.Oracheski@ocdsb.ca
WHAT?	
1. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE CONSULTATION? (Describe project scope, nature of consultation, decision to be made, and any relevant information)	
<p>To determine: (i) the extent to which the mandate and expectations regarding program delivery for the alternative elementary program in the OCDSB differs from that of the non-alternative program (e.g., regular English and French immersion); (ii) whether or not the OCDSB will continue to offer the alternative program in grades JK-8; and, (iii) in the event of a decision to continue with alternative programming in elementary schools, that a process to focus on program quality be developed.</p>	
WHY?	
2. WHY ARE YOU CONSULTING? (Check all that apply)	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> To seek advice, informed opinion or input for consideration prior to decision-making? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> To share information and/or create awareness about a subject/potential recommendations/decision yet to be made? <input type="checkbox"/> To share information and awareness about a subject/recommendation/decision that has been made? <input type="checkbox"/> Other? (Please explain)	
3. HOW DOES THIS CONSULTATION LINK TO THE OCDSB STRATEGIC PLAN, DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT PLAN, BUDGET, ANNUAL DISTRICT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES AND/OR RELEVANT MINISTRY / OCDSB POLICIES OR PROCEDURES (if applicable)?	
<p>This consultation is linked to the OCDSB strategic plan and district improvement plan as one means of ensuring our programs are meeting the needs of students to support improved student learning and achievement.</p>	



CONSULTATION PLAN

(REFERENCES: POLICY P.110.GOV AND PROCEDURE PR.644.GOV)

WHO?		
4. WHO WILL BE CONSULTED? (Key stakeholders) (Check all that apply)		
<p><u>OCDSB Community</u></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Students</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Parents/guardians</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> School council(s)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Ottawa Carleton Assembly of School Councils</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Advisory committees (Specify below)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Special Education Advisory Committee, etc</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other _____</p>	<p><u>Internal to OCDSB</u></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Trustees</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Superintendents</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Principals and/or Vice-principals</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Managers</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> District staff</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Federations</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other _____</p>	<p><u>External / Other (please identify)</u></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Agencies/associations _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Community groups _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> General Public _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other governments _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other _____</p>
<p>Please describe or expand on who will be consulted and any partners in the consultation:</p> <p>Formal consultation with a random representative sample of parents, teachers, and elementary school administrators will take place through mail-out/on-line surveys. An opportunity will also be available for individuals who are not part of this random selection process to provide input through an e-mail link on the Board web site.</p>		
<p>5. HAVE ANY OF THESE STAKEHOLDERS BEEN INVOLVED IN INFORMAL CONSULTATION AS PART OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS PLAN? In accordance with section 4.3 of Policy P.110.GOV, it is expected that informal consultation has taken place with representative stakeholders to obtain their suggestions <u>prior</u> to finalizing this plan. Please describe below. (If this informal consultation did not take place, explain why it was not feasible.)</p>		
<p>Informal consultations regarding alternative elementary programming in the OCDSB have taken place at strategic planning sessions held throughout the 2008-2009 school year as well as through communications with the Chair of the Alternative Education Advisory Committee.</p>		
HOW?		
6. HOW WILL STAKEHOLDERS BE MADE AWARE OF THIS CONSULTATION PROCESS? (Check all that apply)		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Media advertisement (print and/or radio)</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Letter distribution</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> School council(s)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Ottawa Carleton Assembly of School Councils</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> School newsletter</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Website (schools and/or OCDSB sites)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other</p>	
<p>Please describe how stakeholders will be made aware of the consultation process and any special requirements for consultation (translation, alternate formats, etc)?</p> <p>Individuals who have been randomly selected to participate in the formal consultation component will be informed of the consultation via Canada Post (parents) or e-mail (principals, vice-principals, teachers). Parents will receive an information letter along with the survey, whereas staff will receive an electronic version of the information letter that will contain the SurveyMonkey link to complete an on-line version of the survey.</p>		



CONSULTATION PLAN

(REFERENCES: POLICY P.110.GOV AND PROCEDURE PR.644.GOV)

7. HOW WILL THE CONSULTATION BE CARRIED OUT? (Check all that apply)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Focus groups <input type="checkbox"/> Interviews <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mail-out or email circulation <input type="checkbox"/> Open houses / workshops / cafes <input type="checkbox"/> School council(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Ottawa Carleton Assembly of School Councils <input type="checkbox"/> Public meetings <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Survey / questionnaire <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Web-based notice / Web-based comments <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
Please describe: As indicated above, randomly selected parents, teachers and school administrators will be invited to complete a survey either in paper-and-pencil Canada Post mail out (parents) or by electronic means. Anyone who is interested in providing input to this process may also submit feedback through the board web site.		
WHEN?		
8. PROJECT PLAN FOR CONSULTATION (KEY ACTIVITIES AND COMMUNICATIONS)¹: i.e. Identify plan approval dates; Timelines for awareness of consultation; Specific consultation initiatives; Timelines for analysis; Date for Committee/Board deliberation; Evaluation of consultation		
TARGETTED DATE FOR FINAL DECISION:	January 2010	
<u>PROJECTED DATE(S)</u>	<u>ACTIVITY/MILESTONE</u>	<u>NOTES**</u>
June 2009	Approval of Education Committee for initiation of the alternative elementary program review as outlined in Report No. 09-143.	
September 2009	Distribution of surveys to randomly selected parents, teachers, and principals.	
October to November 2009	Quality Assurance analyzes results from surveys for inclusion in final report.	
December 2009	Interim Report presented to Steering Committee, Director's Executive Council, and Education Committee.	
December 2009	Recommendations are developed by staff.	
January 2010	Final report, including recommendations, presented to Steering Committee, Director's Executive Council, and Education Committee.	
**In filling out this chart, please note: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the materials, reports or resources that will be distributed to stakeholders, either in advance or at the session; ▪ any constraints such as necessary deadlines, availability of stakeholders; and ▪ the timelines for communicating the outcome/related decisions reached to those consulted. 		

¹ Outline provides information on the minimal number of activities proposed, which may be amended to intensify the process if required. Further information on the overall project/initiative and the specific consultation plan and process can be provided in the Letter of Transmittal to Board.

