

Final Report on the Secondary Program Review

To: Committee of the Whole

Date: 4 November 2020

Report No.: 10-20-3964

Strategic Directions

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

Recommendation

It is recommended that:

- a) The preliminary concepts identified in Appendix A of the report be developed into future studies within the 2021-30 Long-Term Program and Accommodation Strategy document, and;
- b) That small collegiates be prioritized during the first phase of reviews to align with the commitments and vision for secondary schools, as discussed with Trustees in the Secondary Program Review workshops held in the Spring of 2020, and presented in the Interim Report received by Trustees on 20 May 2020.

Context

The Toronto District School Board's vision is that all students have equitable access to stronger programs and richer opportunities – as close to home as possible. This is the driving force of the Secondary Program Review, which, for the first time ever, reviewed all TDSB secondary schools at once in a comprehensive way to develop a plan to address the inequities and imbalances throughout our current system.

In May 2020, the Board of Trustees received the interim report of the Secondary Program Review, which highlighted the issues, gaps, and needs facing our system and that are impacting our ability to support the vision. The report relied heavily on data to show a comprehensive, unbiased view of our secondary school landscape, now and in the future. The full Interim Report of the Secondary Program Review can be found [here](#).

The interim report was the result of a lengthy collaborative and consultative process that demonstrated the complexity and interconnectedness of our secondary schools. It revealed that one of the primary contributing factors to the imbalances and inequities that exist today is the prevalence of surplus capacity in our system.

The interim report identified a range of target capacity reductions based on projected population and enrolment within groups of secondary schools. To address issues, including surplus capacity, a number of preliminary concepts for discussion within each secondary school group were identified.

The final report of the Secondary Program Review is the next step forward as we re-imagine and re-draw our system in consultation and collaboration with our communities. Our shared goal is to enhance equity and support the achievement and well-being of each and every student in the TDSB. This report outlines what comes next in the process and identifies the priority issues to be addressed during the first phase of studies.

Our Commitments

The future work of the Secondary Program Review will become embedded within the annual Long-Term Program and Accommodation Strategy process. The studies that are identified and undertaken each year will be guided by the commitments and directions that have been set through the Secondary Program Review.

Future studies must recognize our commitment to create a system that:

- Has fewer but stronger schools that provide greater access, better options, and rich pathways as close to home as possible;
- Strengthens the role of the neighbourhood secondary school;
- Continues to support specialized schools and programs and increase access for all students;
- Provides schools with the flexibility to respond to student needs and interests by creating the programs they desire, supported by strong enrolment;
- Provides school choice through a revised Optional Attendance policy and procedure and a new Specialized Schools and Programs policy and procedure;
- Continues to support some small secondary schools that offer different learning environments, programs or supports; and,
- Offers the support that students want such as caring adults, flexible learning environments, and general scheduling modifications.

Summary of Feedback Received

After the Secondary Program Review Interim Report was received by the Board of Trustees, a significant online presence was established on the public website. Over a five-month period, students, parents, staff and community members were able to provide feedback and further insight through an online survey. This feedback period compliments the multiple engagement opportunities that were held with the public, students, community advisory committees, staff and Trustees over the past two years.

Social media platforms were also used to share information and to encourage members of the public to learn about the process and provide their feedback.

The level of feedback received was lower than expected due to a number of factors such as the impact of the pandemic on the lives of our stakeholders, the system shutdown that began in March 2020, the challenges with remote learning for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year, and the uncertainty associated with schools reopening for the 2020-21 school year.

A total of 259 individuals accessed the online form, but not all responses provided specific comments on the Interim Report. No respondents directly opposed the preliminary concepts that were presented in the Interim Report. Some offered suggestions for consideration such as:

- Considering the importance of choice for families;
- Establishing or relocating French programs;
- Considering densely-populated areas when planning boundaries;
- Examining program patterns and offerings across school communities, and;
- Exploring the needs of alternative schools and their students.

All of these suggestions will be considered as we move forward. Students, parents, staff and community members will continue to be engaged throughout the process.

Impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on Secondary Schools

The global coronavirus pandemic resulted in schools across the province being closed in March 2020. Since then, the evolution of the pandemic has led to substantial changes in how elementary and secondary school programming is being delivered.

Schools in the TDSB were re-opened to students in September 2020 with a virtual school option for both elementary and secondary students who did not wish to attend school in-person. The demand for virtual learning has been overwhelming; there are approximately 63,200 elementary and 17,500 secondary students enrolled in their respective virtual schools. This represents nearly 37% of elementary and 24% of secondary students enrolled in TDSB schools.

The majority of secondary students are now learning in a quadmester format. Prior to the pandemic, most secondary students were learning in a semestered or non-semestered model, depending on the school. The quadmester model allows the school year to be broken down into four blocks where students will concentrate on only two subjects at a time.

Further, secondary students attending in-person schools are learning via an adapted model where students attend school every other day, supported by live synchronous learning with their teacher each day. Secondary school students have been divided into two cohorts (A and B) to further reduce the potential contact between students and support health and safety protocols.

The impact of the virtual school on enrolment at brick-and-mortar secondary schools has been dramatic right across the system. At some secondary schools, this has

resulted in classes being combined and courses being cancelled. This is contrary to the vision of secondary schools being able to offer a range of courses and programs that meet the needs of all students.

Impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on the Secondary Program Review

The uncertainty associated with how and when we may return to a pre-pandemic learning environment must be considered as we move forward. The Virtual School has become a viable option for secondary school learners, and as such, may become a permanent offering in some capacity for students.

The introduction of the Virtual School for student learning has had an impact on the amount of space that is required for in-person learning. The current requirement for less space augments the surplus capacity issue that already exists in our system.

The complexity of the secondary school system in the TDSB will become more complex if the Virtual School is to become a permanent part of the landscape. More time is required to fully understand the long-term implications of the pandemic and the Virtual School on the system.

To this end, the annual cycle of review offered by the Long-Term Program and Accommodation Strategy process provides staff and Trustees with an opportunity to closely monitor and evaluate how changes in enrolment, program delivery and accommodation due to the pandemic and the virtual learning environment may influence our next steps.

Moving Forward

The preliminary concepts identified in the interim report, developed with the input of Trustees during the working sessions held in the spring of 2020, will form the foundation for future studies. As mentioned previously, the work of the Secondary Program Review will be embedded in the Long-Term Program and Accommodation Strategy.

Recognizing that the Secondary Program Review is an evolving process, there will be an opportunity each year to refine, to add or to remove studies. The next step in the Secondary Program Review is to identify and schedule the studies to be undertaken through the Long-Term Program and Accommodation Strategy (LTPAS) process.

Given the scope and scale of the work required to re-draw the secondary school system, it is proposed that this work takes place in a series of three, three-year phases.

Phase 1 - Fall 2021 to June 2024

Phase 2 - Fall 2024 to June 2027

Phase 3 - Fall 2027 to June 2030

Each year provides staff and Trustees an opportunity to evaluate and discuss the progress of the studies undertaken, revisit the issues, gaps, needs and opportunities within the secondary school system, and to identify the next round of priorities.

Priority projects for each phase will be determined through ongoing collaboration with Trustees during the annual Long-Term Program and Accommodation Strategy process.

Staff will work closely with Trustees in early 2021 to revisit the preliminary concepts, the population and enrolment data, along with any other other issues, gaps, needs and opportunities within each of the secondary school groups. Studies will be identified and timed in the LTPAS, beginning with Phase 1.

Pending approval of this report, Phase 1 studies will be centered around small collegiates. Contained within Appendix B is a rationale for why small collegiates have been recommended as priorities, and outlines other active projects that will be undertaken within Phase 1 such as the review of technical and commercial boundaries.

Future Phases

The Secondary Program Review process will evolve as studies are undertaken. The outcome(s) of these studies could result in wide-ranging impacts on the secondary school system. These impacts will need to be studied to inform how future phases will proceed, and what priorities should be identified.

Priority projects for phases 2 and 3 of the Secondary Program Review will be determined in consultation with Trustees through the annual Long-Term Program and Accommodation Strategy process.

Long-Term Program and Accommodation Strategy

The Long-Term Program and Accommodation Strategy document will be expanded to include a section dedicated to the Secondary Program Review. Included in this section will be summaries of the background information contained within the interim report, the secondary school groupings, and a list of studies that will be undertaken over the next ten years. This new section allows the information to be presented in a manner that is easily accessible.

The addition will emphasize the importance of the Secondary Program Review and provide the public with improved access to the information on an annual basis. The public website will be updated as the process evolves.

The LTPAS is a public document that may present new opportunities to gather feedback from the public as the Secondary Program Review evolves. Staff will explore opportunities to expand the feedback process through mechanisms such as online surveys, interactive maps and a new feedback period on the proposed studies in the LTPAS by ward direct them to actual studies or direct links to the groups and the studies within them.

Alignment with the Toronto Lands Corporation

In June 2020, the Secondary Program Review team met with the Toronto Lands Corporation Board and Senior Staff to present the interim report. As we move forward with this work, staff from the TDSB and TLC will be working collaboratively prior to and during each Pupil Accommodation Review process to ensure that we are aligned in our respective planning processes. Data and/or advice from the Toronto Lands Corporation on land-use planning and real estate matters may be sought to build upon the information shared and discussed within these processes.

Action Plan and Associated Timeline

The future work of the Secondary Program Review will be embedded in the Long-Term Program and Accommodation Strategy, which identifies studies to be undertaken over a 10-year period.

Meetings with Trustees are expected to begin in early 2021 and conclude in the late Spring of 2021. These meetings will be used as opportunities to revisit the issues, gaps and needs identified in the interim report and to determine the specific studies to be undertaken.

The 2021-22 Long-Term Program and Accommodation Strategy process will begin with individual Trustee meetings, similar to previous years. When the individual meetings have concluded, a series meetings with groups of Trustees will be arranged to focus on studies associated with the Secondary Program Review.

The Long-Term Program and Accommodation Strategy 2021-30 is expected to be presented to Trustees for approval in June 2021. Phase 1 of the Secondary Program Review process is expected to begin in the Fall of 2021 and conclude in June 2024. This will be followed by Phase 2, which could begin in the Fall of 2024 and conclude in June 2027. Phase 3 would follow in the Fall of 2028.

Due to the complexity and interconnected nature of the Secondary Program Review, staff are also considering providing ongoing update reports for information to the Committee of the Whole. These reports will be presented at 6-month intervals and will provide ongoing updates on active accommodation projects, public feedback, policy initiatives and other advancements as the process evolves.

Resource Implications

Not applicable

Communications Considerations

The Secondary Program Review is a significant and complex initiative. The Government, Public and Community Relations team will continue to be engaged to help support ongoing stakeholder communication and issues management.

The final report will be shared with the public and the TDSB community through our regular channels of communication including TDSB Connects, the Board website, social media, and school newsletters.

In addition, to address the complexity of this review for the public, ongoing efforts will be dedicated to making the information as accessible as possible. Moving forward, these materials will continue to be updated to help ensure the public is aware of ongoing timelines and opportunities for engagement.

Board Policy and Procedure Reference(s)

P013 - Optional Attendance

PR545 - Optional Attendance

PR612 - Admission to Specialized Schools and Programs

Appendices

Appendix A - Preliminary concepts identified in the Interim Report

Appendix B - Description of Phase 1 priorities

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