

Burnaby Schools

Programs of Choice Review

Report

Prepared for The Board of Education
and the Superintendent of Schools

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Executive Summary

The Purpose

The Programs of Choice Review was initiated in 2020 as part of the Burnaby School District's Strategic Plan (2019-2024). The impetus for this review stems from the Plan's strategic priority 1, "Thriving Students":

- Engage students in individualized, relevant and innovative learning opportunities
 - Expand program options that meet the needs and interests of our student population
- Implement a strength-based approach to inclusion that meets the diverse needs of all students
 - Review, identify and implement adjustments within program and service options to meet the needs and interests of our diverse student population.

The Process

The Burnaby School District offers a wide variety of Programs of Choice throughout the district. The following programs were selected for the purposes of the review:

At the elementary level:

- French Immersion (Early and Late)
- Mandarin Language Arts
- Multi-Age Cluster Class (MACC)
- The Challenge Program

At the secondary level:

- Advanced Placement (AP) Capstone
- BETA Mini-School
- French Immersion
- DigiPen Game Development Academy
- Microsoft Office Specialist
- Volleyball Academy
- Lacrosse Academy

The key areas of focus of the review were:

- Examination of the alignment of the Burnaby School District's Programs of Choice to the BC curriculum's emphasis on personalized learning, differentiated instruction and inclusion
- Geographical access to Programs of Choice across the school district
- Diverse interests of the student population
- Special range of abilities or talents within the student population

The process involved interviews with individual staff at the district and school levels, stakeholder focus groups, an extensive survey process and some in-person visits to schools and programs. Also, Programs of Choice availability and offerings in other neighbouring school districts were examined.

In each interview and focus group, the participants were asked to comment on the following three questions:

- What is working well and supporting students as they strive to achieve success?
- What are the obstacles/challenges to the program or to student success?
- What suggestions are there for improvement?

Focus groups took place with the following stakeholder and representative groups:

- District Student Advisory Council
- BETA Mini-School Students
- Elementary Mandarin Language Arts Program Parents
- Secondary Mandarin Language Parents
- MACC Parents
- BETA Mini-School Parents
- District Parent Advisory Council Executive

- French Immersion Parent Representatives (Elementary and Secondary)
- Burnaby Teacher's Association Executive
- Burnaby Principals and Vice-Principals' Association

Electronic surveys were also made available over a two-week period to:

- All Parents
- All Teachers

Additionally, electronic surveys containing questions specific to programs as well as general questions, were sent to the following groups:

- Secondary Students Enrolled in Programs of Choice
- Grade 6/7 MACC Students
- Grade 6/7 Mandarin Language Arts Students
- Grade 6/7 French Immersion Students
- AP Capstone Parents
- BETA Mini-School Parents
- Challenge Program Parents
- Lacrosse Academy Parents
- Microsoft Office Parents
- DigiPen Development Academy Parents
- Volleyball Academy Parents
- Elementary and Secondary French Immersion Parents
- Elementary Mandarin Language Arts Program Parents
- Secondary Mandarin Language Parents
- MACC Program Parents
- Teachers in Programs of Choice
- Principals and Vice-Principals

As well, in-person visits were made to MACC classes, BETA Mini-School, the Digi-Pen Academy, the Microsoft Office Specialist Program, and the Mandarin Language Arts Program.

What Was Learned

What is Working Well?

- Overall, respondents to the surveys as well as participants in the various focus groups and individual interviews expressed a high level of satisfaction with both the number and the variety of Programs of Choice that are offered in the Burnaby School District. As noted in the "Programs of Choice in Burnaby and Neighbouring Districts" Chart (page 19-20), although Burnaby is the 4th largest school district after Surrey, Vancouver and Coquitlam, in some cases it offers an equal or even larger number of program sites as districts with two or three times the student enrolment. As well, there are programs offered in Burnaby that are not found in any of the other districts.

Secondary Programs (Digi-Pen Game Development Academy, Microsoft Office Specialist, Lacrosse Academy, Volleyball Academy)

- Many of the secondary programs offered are evidence of very successful partnerships with local and international companies and educational organizations. Many programs are unique to Burnaby and are not available in other school districts.
- In addition to quality of program offerings, the passion and dedication of the teachers leading these various programs is what has inspired the students to learn.

French Immersion

- Burnaby's Early French Immersion Program is a long-running, well-established and much sought-after program.

- There has been consistent demand for the EFI Program over the years, with application numbers remaining relatively constant.
- The district has a strong and dedicated cadre of French Immersion teachers to support the program.

Mandarin Language Arts

- There is strong support across the district for a Mandarin Language Program.
- While language learning is woven throughout the day in all grades, parents of primary children particularly like this structure and that language is taught through stories, songs and poetry.
- The teachers work together to support the program and there is a better understanding of language learning expectations from one grade to the next at the elementary level.

Advanced Learning Programs (AP Capstone, BETA, Challenge, and MACC)

- All Advanced Learning programs received the highest of praise from parents and students alike. They are believed to be a wonderful opportunity for highly able learners to participate in a more challenging educational setting.
- The special training, experience and passion of the teachers involved is integral to the success of these programs.
- The teachers' ability to address and support some of the social-emotional challenges that some students display is important.

What are Some of the Challenges and Obstacles?

Secondary Programs (Digi-Pen Game Development Academy, Microsoft Office Specialist, Lacrosse Academy, Volleyball Academy)

- There is a definite lack of knowledge and familiarity on the part of students and parents as to which Programs of Choice exist, what they entail and where they are located.
- There is a desire on the part of students to provide feedback into possible Programs of Choice being offered or being considered for future options.
- The locations of some of the programs was often seen by parents as prohibitive to their child being able to participate. Programs that were a significant distance from their home as well as a lack of adequate public transportation were factors that impacted their decisions and their ability to enroll their child(ren) in a Program of Choice.
- Parents' perception regarding secondary schools in the district could be a factor in their decision-making process.
- There is a fear that a reliance on one or two teachers to run programs will result in a lack of succession planning and staff burnout.

Early French Immersion Program

- Parental demand for the Early French Immersion Program is much greater than the availability of spaces.
- There is a need for better understanding on the part of parents as to what the French Immersion Program entails and expectations for each grade or stage of language development.

- There is a lower enrolment rate and interest in the Late French Immersion Program than for the Early French Immersion Program.
- There are a significant number of students leaving the French Immersion Program at the end of Grade 7.
- French Immersion teachers feel that they are working in isolation and would like the opportunity to meet and connect with other FI teachers at the same grade level or subject area.
- There is a shortage of trained French-speaking Learning Support teachers, resulting in some support for French Immersion students being provided in English.

Mandarin Language Arts

- Parents expressed disappointment with the amount of Mandarin taught during the course of the day and would prefer a more immersive setting.
- Many children are not able to carry on conversations in Mandarin, other than those which are highly scripted.
- Most teachers in the program are Mandarin-speaking but may not have experience in second language teaching.
- There is a lack of coherence between the elementary Mandarin Language Arts Program and the Mandarin classes offered to these students when they arrive at secondary school.

Advanced Learning Programs (AP Capstone, BETA, Challenge, and MACC)

- There is a lack of understanding of the various programs' intentions and goals, and pressure from some parents to focus on the acceleration of their students rather than providing opportunities to "go deeper" into the grade-level curriculum.
- There is a perceived increase in pressures, stress, anxiety, and other social-emotional challenges that staff are seeing in some students
- There are transportation issues involved with the Challenge Program that impacts certain families and denies opportunities to some students.
- There is a belief that a greater number of students' needs could be met if a Challenge Program was based in each school rather than having students pulled out to attend at another location.
- The AP Capstone Seminar and Research classes are not recognized by universities as credits assigned to a particular subject area.
- Many parents and some students expressed dismay that the BETA Program was no longer an option for Grades 10-12, but recent changes to the Graduation Program led to a high number of students dropping out of the program in Grade 10 because of their desire to pursue other interests and scheduling conflicts that arose from being in BETA.
- Within the BETA cohort, there was sometimes difficulty establishing strong and supportive relationships between those students who had been in the MACC program and those who had joined the class from elsewhere.

Considerations for the Board and Senior Staff

Secondary Programs (Digi-Pen Game Development Academy, Microsoft Office Specialist, Lacrosse Academy, Volleyball Academy)

- Look for new and different ways to build staff and school awareness of the various secondary Programs of Choice.
- Implement a more structured, regularly scheduled review process for each of the secondary Programs of Choice.
- Consider surveying secondary students regarding programs that would interest them.
- A focus on support for Programs of Choice staff, including targeted professional development opportunities and opportunities to collaborate and learn with others in their field.

French Immersion

- Promotion of the Late French Immersion program to students and parents in Grade 5.
- Professional development funding or release time for collaborative planning for French Immersion teachers.
- Additional sources of information (other than existing parent information evening) for parents regarding French Immersion Programs and what they entail.
- Continued work with the Burnaby Chapter of Canadian Parents for French to provide information and support to parents.

Mandarin Language Arts

- More clarity as to the intended outcomes of the program.
- In Grades 5-7, the Mandarin portion of the program could be taught by an itinerant teacher.
- Additional professional development support and training in second language teaching for those teachers in the program.
- Examine the feasibility and appropriateness of offering a Mandarin 9/10 combined class at the secondary level.

Advanced Learning Programs (AP Capstone, BETA, Challenge, and MACC)

- Clearer communication and information for parents as to the role of acceleration versus the intent of the MACC, Challenge and BETA programs.
- Change the name of the department from “Advanced Learning”.
- Examine the perceived increase in social emotional challenges and if appropriate, consider additional counselling support to those schools that host Advanced Learning Programs.
- Review how the Challenge Program was most recently delivered and look at other ways to use the staffing, budget and resources to provide direct support at the school level.
- Continue with the current model of BETA (Grades 8 and 9), but look to group the BETA students together in 1-2 classes in Grade 10, where scheduling permits.
- Professional development support and training for all elementary classroom teachers regarding the identification of high ability learners.

- Change the admissions process for MACC students entering BETA and require them to follow the same application process as all other applicants.

Additional Items to Consider

- According to survey responses, the other most frequently noted Programs of Choice that the district may want to explore include:
 - Outdoor education at both the elementary and secondary levels
 - Programs with an Indigenous focus at both the elementary and secondary levels
 - International Baccalaureate at the secondary level
 - Montessori at the elementary level
 - STEM programs at the elementary level
 - Other sports academies (tennis, basketball, baseball)
 - More Fine Arts options
- Also, according to the surveys, many respondents feel that the placement and locations of programs was heavily weighted towards schools in the North end of Burnaby.

Acknowledgements

The Burnaby School District would like to acknowledge and thank the Coast Salish Nations of xʷməθkʷəy̍əm (Musqueam), səliłwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh) and Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), on whose traditional territory we teach, learn and live.

Introduction and Context

The City of Burnaby is located at the geographical centre of Metro Vancouver and has a population of more than 249,197 (2017). With 50% of the city's population born outside of Canada and more than 100 languages spoken by its students, the Burnaby School District is culturally diverse. It is the fourth largest school district in BC with an enrolment of over 25,000 K-12 students in 41 elementary and eight secondary schools.

The Burnaby School District work is governed by the Burnaby Board of Education who, as outlined in their 2019-2024 Strategic Plan, believe that “through strength-based approaches and innovation we challenge and support our learners. We celebrate diversity, embrace inclusion and offer multiple learning and career pathways to ensure all students thrive.”

Amongst its many accolades, the Burnaby School District has a long and successful history of offering a variety of Programs of Choice for students at both the elementary and secondary levels. As part of the District's Strategic Plan, a review of several district programs of choice was initiated in order to build upon the key strengths of current programs, as well as identify and address possible gaps or overlaps in existing programs and services.

The Burnaby School District Strategic Plan 2019-2024

https://burnabyschools.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/StrategicPlan2019-24_Detailed_Web.pdf



The Burnaby School District's 2019-2024 Strategic Plan was developed over a series of sessions conducted between January and June 2019. The Plan represents the cumulative input, experience and vision of the Board, the Senior Management and its 130+ member Burnaby Leadership Team, as well as recognizing the voice and vision of its constituents and community. As a result of this consultative process and the extensive contributions and guidance brought forward, the Board and Senior Management are confident in the vision and well-founded direction it sets out for the duration of the plan.

The Burnaby School District Vision, Mission and Values

Our Vision: A premier learning community where we engage and innovate to inspire global citizenship.

Our Mission: To engage and empower a caring, inclusive community of learners for the opportunities of today and tomorrow.

Our Values:

- **Students Come First:** Learners are at the centre of what we do. We focus on their lives within our schools, support them in their lives away from our schools, and keep in mind the lives they will lead in the future, recognizing that their time with us will be key in shaping their futures.
- **The Power of Diversity:** Burnaby is one of the most diverse cities in the world, and we recognize this as a privilege and a strength. We meaningfully involve all learners and respect and value the infinitely variable characteristics that make them unique human beings.
- **Equity, Access, Inclusion:** Our schools are for everyone. We recognize that barriers exist and seek to identify and remove them. We encourage our learners to speak honestly, and we uphold the rights of individuals, families and organizations within our schools and our community. We value and respect everyone's contributions.
- **Collaboration and Partnership:** We strive for trusting, respectful, collaborative relationships, and we work together to ensure we make the best decisions. The learning environment includes our learners, teachers, all staff, families and the community. We work with and encourage the participation of all.
- **Curiosity, Innovation, Discovery:** The world we live in is complex and rapidly changing. We, our students, and the world itself are beneficiaries when questions are asked, experiments undertaken, ventures launched, and challenges embraced. Our classrooms and school communities foster curiosity, innovation, and discovery.
- **Excellence, Success, Improvement:** We challenge ourselves and our learners to make their highest contributions, and we foster opportunities to make this possible. We celebrate success and recognize that there are many ways to define and achieve it. Working collaboratively, we challenge ourselves and our

learners to improve, as individuals and as a group. Along with these ideals, we place an equal emphasis on health and well-being, as it is required to support all of our contributions and achievements.

Strategic Plan

The Burnaby School District's Strategic Plan for 2019-2024, adopted by the Board of Education in June of 2019, identifies 5 Strategic Priorities:

1. Thriving Students

- Engage students in individualized, relevant and innovative learning opportunities
- Embed Indigenous perspectives and knowledge across the District
- Implement a strength-based approach to inclusion that meets the diverse needs of all students
- Create opportunities for student success through multiple career development pathways
- Community and Continuing Education engages and meets the needs of the broader community

2. An Inclusive and Caring Community

- Create supportive, inclusive and caring learning communities
- Increase understanding and support of mental health and well-being

3. An Inspired Workplace

- Enhance supports to empower employees in their roles
- Increase the District's leadership capacity
- Implement a staff recruitment / retention strategy that ensures qualified and capable staff in all positions
- Develop and implement a mental health and wellness strategy to ensure the well being of all staff

4. Strengthened by Partnerships

- Deepen engagement and collaboration and information sharing with educational and community partners, and families
- Increase opportunities for student voice and engagement

5. A Modern, Safe and Sustainable Learning Environment

- Develop and implement a sustainable Education Technology Plan
- Develop a Long-Range Facility Plan consistent with Ministry Guidelines
- Increase District awareness of climate change and decrease the District's environmental impact

Most relevant to the review is the Priority "Thriving Students" along with the following goals and objectives:

- Engage students in individualized, relevant and innovative learning opportunities
 - Expand program options that meet the needs and interests of our student population
- Implement a strength-based approach to inclusion that meets the diverse needs of all students
 - Review, identify and implement adjustments within program and service options to meet the needs and interests of our diverse student population.

Relevant Policies

Provincial

Programming of any kind in school districts across the province of British Columbia is guided by a variety of provincial laws and regulations, including the BC School Act and its accompanying Regulations, as well as several Governmental and Ministerial Orders.

The Statement of Education Policy Order: Mandate for the School System Province of British Columbia (OIC 1280/89, effective September 1, 1989) (<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/legislation-policy/manual-of-school-law/school-act-related-regulations-and-orders-in-council>) states the following:

Diversity and Choice

Government is committed to ensuring that parents in every region of the province have access to quality public schooling for their children.....

In an effort to accommodate varying parental and student expectations of school services, public schools, within available resources, will provide parents and students with choice of programs.

Attributes of the Public School System

- *Accessibility – a variety of programs is available in the province to meet the full range of student needs.*
- *Relevance – programs are current, and relevant to the needs of the learner.*
- *Equity – resources are allocated fairly.*
- *Quality – professional teaching and administration are of high quality.*
- *Accountability – resources are allocated in a cost-effective manner; parents and the community are informed of the progress of schools and are involved as partners in planning.*

While the School Act (<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/legislation-policy/legislation/schoollaw/revisedstatutescontents.pdf>) does not make specific reference to “Programs of Choice”, the Act does make reference to specialty academies:

82.1 In this section, "specialty academy" means an educational program that emphasizes a particular sport, activity or subject area and meets the prescribed criteria set out in the regulations. A board may offer a specialty academy if the board has consulted with the parents' advisory council for the school where the board proposes to offer the specialty academy, and the board is of the opinion that there is sufficient demand for the specialty academy. A board that offers a specialty academy must make available sufficient instruction for students enrolled in the specialty academy to meet the general requirements for graduation and continue to offer a standard educational program in the school district.

In addition, B.C. Regulation Number 219/08 (Specialty Academy Criteria Regulation) (<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/legislation-policy/manual-of-school-law/school-act-related-regulations-and-orders-in-council>) outlines the following:

The specialty academy must meet learning outcomes that

- (a) are in addition to the learning outcomes that a standard educational program must meet, and
- (b) reflect an emphasis on a particular sport, activity or subject area.

If the specialty academy emphasizes a particular subject area, the subject area must be

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| (1) Applied Skills, | (4) Mathematics, |
| (2) Fine Arts, | (5) Physical Education |
| (3) Language Arts, | (6) Science, or |

(7) Social Studies.

District

In addition to the goals and objectives outlined in the District's Strategic Plan, SD 41's Policy No. 6.35.00 "Program and School Consolidation" (<https://burnabyschools.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/63500.pdf>) and accompanying Administrative Procedure outline the district's beliefs and expectations regarding the maintenance, growth and resource allocation for all instructional programs, including Programs of Choice:

"The planning and organization of instructional programs involves the ongoing process of allocating and re-allocating resources. Changes in the size, nature, and location of student populations require adjustments in programs and, sometimes, in their relocation.

In allocating and re-allocating resources for programs or for the relocation of programs, the board shall base its decision on the most cost effective utilization of resources for the maintenance of viable education programs in schools.

Objectives

1. To ensure that all existing programs in the District maintain their viability
2. To ensure that the relocation of programs is done on a fair and rational basis taking into account costs, the interests of all parties affected, and the educational viability and value of programs.
3. To ensure that funds are allocated or re-allocated on a fair and rational basis for all parties affected, taking into account the educational value of all programs offered in the District."

The accompanying administrative regulations and procedures include the following information:

1. The Superintendent, or designate, shall maintain a data base from which cost-effectiveness studies on educational programs shall be conducted.
2. In determining the viability of programs in effect in the District, the Superintendent, or designate, shall supervise and evaluate them in terms of the following factors:
 1. Instructional Program: Is it broad enough to meet the provisions of the core curriculum, the curriculum, the extracurriculum, and enrichment options?
 2. Staff Utilization: Are there enough staff to provide a sound program? To ensure professional development of other staff?
 3. School Organization: Are grades, classes, and instructional groups organized in a manner appropriate to student needs? Does the organization minimize inappropriate or awkward multi-grade groupings?
 4. Student Support Services: Is there adequate support for students with special needs? Is there adequate support for students who encounter difficulty?
 5. School Support Services: Are there appropriate time allotments for secretarial, custodial, and instructional support staff?

Burnaby School District Programs of Choice (District and School-Based)

Secondary & Elementary

PROGRAMS OF CHOICE

Elementary:

- Burnaby Online
- Challenge Program (currently on hiatus)
- Education Through the Arts
- Early French Immersion
- Late French Immersion
- Mandarin Language Arts Program
- Multi-Age Cluster Class – MACC

Secondary:

- AP Capstone™
- Athletics and Visual & Performing Arts (AVPA)
- BETA Mini School
- Burnaby Online
- Business Summit
- Cisco Networking Academy
- DigiPen Game Development Academy
- Engineering Summit
- Film & Broadcast
- Fitness Instructor
- French Immersion
- Graphics & Media Arts
- Health Sciences
- Hockey Academy at Burnaby North
- Hockey Academy in partnership with Burnaby Winter Club
- Independent Directed Studies
- Microsoft Office Specialist
- Music Production & Technology
- Palo Alto Cyber Security Academy
- Rethink
- Robotics - Mechatronics
- SFU Lacrosse Academy (currently on hiatus)
- Soccer Academy in partnership with Simon Fraser University
- Soccer Academy in partnership with the Vancouver Whitecaps
- STEAM
- Tourism & Event Management
- Volleyball Academy

Trades:

- Automotive Collision and Refinishing Technician
- Auto Service Technician
- Baker - Pastry Arts
- CNC Machinist Technician
- Cabinetmaker/Joiner
- Carpenter
- Construction Electrician
- Hairstylist
- Heavy Duty Equipment Technician
- Horticulturist, Landscape
- Metal Fabricator
- Millwright
- Motorcycle Mechanic
- Painter & Decorator
- Plumber
- Professional Cook
- Welder

- Trades & Technologies Exploration Program
- Youth Work in Trades Apprenticeship Program

Given the large number of program offerings in the district, the following programs of choice were selected as those which would be the focus of this review.

At the elementary level:

- French Immersion (Early and Late)
- Mandarin Language Arts
- MACC
- The Challenge Program

At the secondary level:

- AP Capstone
- BETA Mini-School
- French Immersion
- DigiPen Game Development Academy
- Microsoft Office Specialist
- Volleyball Academy
- Lacrosse Academy

Terms of Reference and Review Process



As outlined in the review proposal presented to Senior Staff in early March of 2020, the key areas of focus for this review were:

- Examination of the alignment of the Burnaby School District's Programs of Choice to the BC curriculum's emphasis on personalized learning, differentiated instruction and inclusion
- Geographical access to Programs of Choice across the school district
- Diverse interests of the student population
- Special range of abilities or talents within the student population

The review followed an appreciative inquiry model, and in all conversations, interviews and focus groups, the following three questions were posed:

- What is working well and supporting students as they strive to achieve success?
- What are the obstacles/challenges to the program or to student success?
- What suggestions are there for improvement?

When the initial proposal was presented in March of 2020, it was anticipated that the review would include visits to schools and programs, in person individual and small group meetings with school staff, teachers, administrators, parents and students, large stakeholder focus groups, and surveys. It was also assumed that the report would be completed and presented to the Board of Education in June 2021.

Schools and staff had a myriad of issues to deal with regarding Covid safety concerns and therefore, the entire process was put on hold from March until October 2020. At that point, Senior Staff felt that the review could move forward, but in a much more targeted and safety-conscious manner. Given that Covid restrictions meant that schools were asked to limit the number of visitors to their sites, all school visits related to the review were canceled at that time. Conversations with staff at all levels happened primarily through individual phone conversations and electronic (Zoom) focus groups. In addition, parents and students were also asked to participate in small (6-8 people) Zoom focus groups. Because of these limited "in person" interactions, it was decided that the number and variety of surveys created would be increased in order to provide anyone who was interested, with the opportunity to participate.

In total, there were 23 individual phone interviews with various personnel (district and school-based staff, administrators, and teaching staff), as well as 15 Zoom focus groups. Individuals were made aware of the opportunity to share their opinions and ideas and were asked to register to participate in each group. These meetings took place with the following groups:

- District Student Advisory Council (8 of 8 of the individuals registered for the focus group participated)
- District Student Advisory Executive (6 of 6 of the individuals registered for the focus group participated)
- District Parent Advisory Council Executive (5 of 6 of the individuals registered for the focus group participated)

- Burnaby Teacher's Association Executive (3 of 7 of the individuals registered for the focus group participated)
- Burnaby Principals and Vice-Principals' Association (10 of 12 of the individuals registered for the focus group participated)
- Capitol Hill MACC Parents (1 of 3 of the individuals registered for the focus group participated)
- Suncrest MACC Parents (4 of 6 of the individuals registered for the focus group participated)
- Forest Grove Mandarin Language Arts Program Parents (3 of 5 of the individuals registered for the focus group participated)
- Burnaby Mountain Mandarin Parents (3 of 4 of the individuals registered for the focus group participated)
- BETA Mini-School Parents (5 of 8 of the individuals registered for the focus group participated)
- BETA Mini-School Students (5 of 5 of the individuals registered for the focus group participated)
- French Immersion Parent Representatives
 - Early French Immersion North (4 of 8 of the individuals registered for the focus group participated)
 - Early French Immersion South (5 of 6 of the individuals registered for the focus group participated)
 - Late French Immersion (4 of 5 of the individuals registered for the focus group participated)
 - Secondary French Immersion (1 of 2 of the individuals registered for the focus group participated)

As noted above, participation in the focus groups varied greatly. While there were typically 6 to 8 people registered to attend, not all would log in for the meetings. Nevertheless, the conversations generated during these meetings were fulsome and were very helpful to the review.

In addition, 20 different online surveys <https://burnabyschools.ca/your-feedback-improving-student-opportunities/> were created and made available over a two-week period to the following groups:

- Secondary Students Enrolled in Programs of Choice (196 survey responses received)
- Grade 6/7 MACC Students (9 survey responses received)
- Grade 6/7 Mandarin Language Arts Students (4 survey responses received)
- Grade 6/7 French Immersion Students (19 survey responses received)
- All Parents (3028 survey responses received)
- AP Capstone Parents (11 survey responses received)
- Beta Mini-School Parents (19 survey responses received)
- Challenge Program Parents (50 survey responses received)
- Lacrosse Academy Parents (0 survey responses received)
- Microsoft Office Parents (3 survey responses received)
- DigiPen Development Academy Parents (16 survey responses received)
- Volleyball Academy Parents (16 survey responses received)
- Elementary French Immersion Parents (185 survey responses received)

- Secondary French Immersion Parents (117 survey responses received)
 - Elementary Mandarin Language Arts Program Parents (41 survey responses received)
 - Secondary Mandarin Language Parents (4 survey responses received)
 - MACC Program Parents (49 survey responses received)
-
- All Teachers (222 survey responses received)
 - Teachers in Programs of Choice (38 survey responses received)
-
- Principals and Vice-Principals (28 survey responses received)

In total, 4055 survey responses were received over a two-week period.

And finally, as Covid restrictions eased, in-person visits were made to MACC classes, the Humanities class at The BETA Mini-School, the Digi-Pen Academy, Microsoft Office Specialist Program, and the Mandarin Language Arts Program.

Throughout the report, comments from the surveys have been included and these comments represent themes identified in the surveys. All key findings and considerations in this report are based on feedback from all data sources included in the review process.

Programs of Choice in Burnaby and Neighbouring School Districts

District	Burnaby (SD 41)	Surrey (SD 36)	Delta (SD 37)	Richmond (SD 38)	Vancouver (SD 39)	Coquitlam (SD 42)	North Vancouver (SD 44)
K-12 Students (Sept 30, 2020)	25,107	75, 696	16, 255	20,676	51, 105	32,759	15,817
Elementary Programs of Choice							
Elementary Schools	41	104	24	38	89 (incl. 12 annexes)	46 (gr. K-5)	25
Early French Immersion	8 sites	6 sites	6 sites	7 sites	14 sites (incl. 2 annexes for K-3)	11 sites	6 sites
Late French Immersion	3 sites	5 sites	2 sites	2 sites	3 sites	3 sites (middle schools)	2 sites
Mandarin	1 site (Mandarin Language Arts)				2 programs, 2 sites (Early Mandarin Bilingual K-7, Mandarin Bilingual gr. 4- 7)	1 site (Mandarin Bilingual)	
MACC (Multi Age Cluster Class)	2 sites, 2 classes each site	4 sites, 2 classes each site (gr. 5-7)			4 programs, 3 sites (1 FI)	3 sites, 3 classes each site (middle schools)	
Challenge Program	6 groups of Gr.2-3, Gr. 4-5 4 groups of Gr. 6-7 10 students per group Each group meets ½ day per week, 12 weeks per year (Currently on hiatus)	5 sites (gr. 3 - 7) Each Centre operates four sessions. Each session organized by grade level with 4 half-day modules that last 8-9 weeks.			Challenge (gr. 1-7): 2-4 days Seminar (gr.4- 7): 6-10 days	Gifted staffing assigned to each school and 5 half days per year for Challenge programming	Family of Schools Zone Explorations ½ day per week (Oct.- May)
IB Primary Years Program (PYP)			1 site		1 site		3 sites
Montessori		3 sites	1 site (K-3)	3 sites	3 sites	7 sites	
Traditional Schools		3 sites	3 sites				
Other		Intensive French (5) Punjabi Language (6) Intensive Fine Arts (2) EKOLogy (1)			Intensive French (2) Indigenous Focus (1) Fine Arts (1)	Reggio- influenced Program (1)	

Secondary Programs of Choice							
District	Burnaby (SD 41)	Surrey (SD 36)	Delta (SD 37)	Richmond (SD 38)	Vancouver (SD 39)	Coquitlam (SD 42)	North Vancouver (SD 44)
Secondary Schools	8	21	9	10	18	8 (gr. 9-12) 14 middle schools (gr. 6-8)	6
French Immersion	3 sites	4 sites	2 sites	2 sites	3 sites	2 sites	3 sites
Advanced Placement (AP)*	8 sites	9 sites	3 sites	9 sites	18 sites	7 sites	2 sites
Sports Academies	6 (2 hockey, lacrosse, volleyball, 2 soccer)	1 (hockey)	7 (lacrosse, golf, 2 soccer, baseball, softball, basketball - 4 on hiatus due to Covid)		1 (hockey)	1 (hockey) at 3 sites	6 (basketball, field hockey, lacrosse, hockey, soccer, volleyball)
Mini Schools **	1			1	17	1	
International Baccalaureate (IB)		2 sites (1 MYP/DP, 1 DP)	1 site	2 sites (1 MYP, 1DP)	3 sites	1 site	1 site
AP Capstone	2 sites						
Other		Math & Science Academy Inter-A Focus Program	5 Fine Arts Academies Farm Roots		2 Mandarin Bilingual sites	Mandarin Bilingual	4 Fine Arts Academies, 1 Robotics
* The number of AP classes offered at any one school site may vary from a single class (often AP Calculus) to a large variety of offerings.							
** The term "Mini-School" has different meanings in each school district and in some cases is interchangeable with the term "Academies".							

When looking at the program offerings in Burnaby as well as those in neighbouring school districts, one should take into consideration important factors such as size of district (i.e. total student enrolment, number of elementary and secondary school sites, etc.). With each of the districts noted in the chart above, there are programs that are specific to the needs or the interests of the families in that district. For example, the Delta and North Vancouver School Districts have Fine Arts Academies at the secondary level, which are not offered in Burnaby. The Vancouver School District has a large number (17) of mini-schools, each with a different focus, while most other districts have one or none. Burnaby has AP Capstone at two secondary sites, which none of the other districts host. Surrey has an elementary Punjabi language program; Vancouver has an Indigenous Focus School at the elementary level.

Burnaby is the fourth largest school district in this group, behind Surrey, Vancouver and Coquitlam. Interestingly, while the Surrey School District is three times the size of Burnaby, both in student enrolment and number of schools, Burnaby offers more Early French Immersion elementary sites than Surrey, and the same number of Late French Immersion sites as Vancouver, which has twice the student enrolment. Also, Burnaby and Vancouver are the only two districts to offer AP classes in each of their secondary schools. Finally, Burnaby is one of only three neighbouring districts that offer a Mandarin Language Program, and one of only four which offer MACC classes.

Emerging Themes, Key Findings and Resulting Considerations

SECONDARY PROGRAMS OF CHOICE

(Digi-Pen Game Development Academy, Microsoft Office Specialist, Lacrosse Academy, Volleyball Academy)

Survey Results:

Secondary Students Enrolled in a Program of Choice (35 total survey responses received):

- ❖ 86% of secondary students enrolled in a Program of Choice agree or strongly agree that “This Program of Choice challenges me and improves my skills.”
- ❖ 83% of secondary students enrolled in a Program of Choice agree or strongly agree that “I am engaged in my learning in this program.”
- ❖ 77% of secondary students enrolled in a Program of Choice agree or strongly agree that “This program meets my academic needs.”
- ❖ 89% of secondary students enrolled in a Program of Choice would recommend their program to others.
- ❖ 50% of secondary students enrolled in a Program of Choice say they chose to enroll because of their interest in the subject, 24% said they thought it would be helpful to their post-secondary plans.

Parents of Secondary Students Enrolled in a Program of Choice:

Digi-Pen Game Development Academy (16 responses received):

- ❖ 100% of parents agree or strongly agree with the statement “This program challenges my child and allows them to further improve their skills and knowledge.”
- ❖ 94% of parents agree or strongly agree with the statement “This program meets my child’s academic needs.”
- ❖ 100% of parents agree or strongly agree with the statement “My child is engaged in their learning in this program.”
- ❖ 100% of parents agree or strongly agree with the statement “My child’s participation in this program will be helpful to their future school or career plans.”
- ❖ 94% of parents would recommend this program to other families.

Volleyball Academy (16 responses received):

- ❖ 100% of parents agree or strongly agree with the statement “This program challenges my child and allows them to further improve their skills and knowledge.”
- ❖ 94% of parents agree or strongly agree with the statement “This program meets my child’s athletic needs.”
- ❖ 81% of parents agree or strongly agree with the statement “My child’s participation in this program will be helpful to their future school or career plans.”
- ❖ 94% of parents would recommend this program to other families.

Microsoft Office Specialist Academy (3 responses received)

- ❖ 2 of 3 parents agree or strongly agree with the statement “My child is engaged in their learning in this program.”
- ❖ 2 of 3 parents agree or strongly agree with the statement “This program challenges my child and allows them to further improve their skills and knowledge.”
- ❖ 100% of parents agree or strongly agree with the statement “My child’s participation in this program will be helpful to their future school or career plans.”
- ❖ 100% of parents would recommend this program to other families.

Lacrosse Academy (0 responses received)

What is working well?

- Programs of Choice such as the DigiPen Game Development Academy, and the various Sports Academies offered with Simon Fraser University, Volleyball Canada, etc. are evidence of very successful partnerships with local and international companies and educational organizations, and as such, may not necessarily be available in other school districts.
- District and school staff have both commented that the BC curriculum, particularly in the area of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) as well as the numerous Applied Design Skills and Technology (ADST) courses offered at the secondary level, has had a positive impact on interest in the district Programs of Choice that are offered, particularly in terms of the number of female students who are now applying.
- A comment heard throughout this review, and one that came from district staff, school administration, parents and students alike was about the passion and dedication of the teachers leading these various programs. Many times, students said that they enrolled because of an interest in or curiosity about the subject, but stayed because of the teacher, their subject knowledge, and their ability to instill excitement in their students. This lack of succession planning was a concern to all of them.

Parent Survey Comments:

- *“She is willing to commute over an hour each way daily from North Burnaby to Cariboo Hill JUST to continue in Digi Pen and seeks a career in the same thing.”*
- *“Child’s interest is higher than with any schooling done before.”*
- *“My child has learned more than I ever thought he would. The teacher is awesome, intuitive, thorough, helpful and an excellent communicator, with both student and parent. I could not be more satisfied with my child’s experience of the program.”*

What are some of the challenges and obstacles?

- Some parents and school staff also indicated a lack of familiarity with the programs that are offered. While programs are being promoted by the district, it would seem that it is not entirely successful in reaching all of the target audience.

Staff Survey Comments:

- *“Too many students (and teachers) are unaware of the options available.”*
- *“At the start of each school year - as a Grade 7 teacher - I would like to talk up the variety of high school programs available and need more information.”*
- *“I wasn't aware of all programs offered (particularly secondary)”*

Student Survey Comment:

- *“More advertising needed to ensure the success and sustainability of certain programs in future years “*

Parent Survey Comments:

- *“Besides French Immersion, I never heard of "Programs of Choice"”*
- *“I am definitely not aware of the full programs offered by bby school districts and don't even know how to go about enrolling in one.”*
- Throughout the review, parents often commented that the fact that a program was in a school that was a significant distance from their home was the primary factor in deciding whether their child would continue in high school (i.e. continuing with French Immersion at the secondary level). Another factor was the availability of transportation options. For example, Cariboo Hill, which offers several district Programs of Choice is not on a Skytrain line and that may impact a student's ability to get there. A few parents commented that their child had expressed an interest in the DigiPen Academy, for example, but that it was “too hard to get them there”.

Parent Survey Comments:

- *“My 14 year old is a trooper and has not complained about her 2 busses and one skytrain commute for over an hour each way daily BUT ideally I wish the program had been offered closer to home.”*
- *“I liked the idea of picking the smallest secondary school but it really is so far for her to commute- and I work full time and am a single parent so it's been a big sacrifice for her to take what interests her.”*
- *“There are programs that my daughter is interested in but are not available in the school she can get to.”*
- *“I transferred my kids to Cariboo Hill Secondary because of programs of choice last year, but had to transfer them back to Byrne Creek, because of inconvenient commute on public transport there. Programs of choice should be more evenly distributed among public Burnaby schools”*

Staff Survey Comment:

- *“Location of sites limits access and creates barriers for many families.”*
- As mentioned earlier, the passion and dedication of a program teacher is key to a program's success. If there is not enough support for staff through succession planning, professional development, and opportunities to collaborate with others in the same field, there can be staff burnout and staffing vacancies that may be difficult to fill.

Staff Survey Comment:

- *“More staffing is needed to support capacity in each area”.*

Considerations:

- New and different ways to build awareness of Programs of Choice with school-based staff.

Social media, in person and virtual presentations, video clips of various program activities, as well as a variety of other promotional tactics should continue. It might be worthwhile for district staff to ask the District Student Advisory Council for their suggestions of how best to promote and advertise these programs to their peers.

Parent Survey Comments:

- *“For Elementary school, I find that the parents are informed too late. I did not even hear about the MACC program until Sept, and applications were due in Nov. Parents should be informed about the Programs of Choice the year PRIOR so that they have time to prepare potential transportation, housing locations closer to the school (for those who are renting), extra tutoring, etc. Immigrant families barely know the Canadian education system, so a lot of them miss out on these fantastic programs for their kids.”*
- *“The types and availability of the programs of choice are not communicated in an obvious way. They aren’t communicated in the kindergarten enrollment packages and only in English on the school district webpage that I could see.”*
- Ensure there are targeted professional development opportunities as well as scheduled opportunities for teachers in Programs of Choice to collaborate and learn with others in their field. This can help alleviate isolation and “burnout” as well as support succession planning.

FRENCH IMMERSION (Elementary and Secondary, Early and Late French Immersion)

Survey Results:

Parents of Elementary French Immersion Students (185 total survey responses received):

- ❖ 78% of parents of elementary French Immersion students agree or strongly agree that “The application process is clear, fair and consistent” and 93% agree or strongly agree that “my child was placed in one of the three schools I requested.”
- ❖ 78% of parents of elementary French Immersion students agree or strongly agree that “This program meets my child’s academic needs” and 80% feel that their social and emotional needs are also being met.
- ❖ 86% of parents of elementary French Immersion students agree or strongly agree that “My child is engaged in their learning in this program.”
- ❖ 97% of parents of elementary French Immersion students said that they would recommend the program to other families.

Parents of Secondary French Immersion Students (117 responses received):

- ❖ 90% of parents of secondary-aged French Immersion students agree or strongly agree that “My child is engaged in their learning.”
- ❖ 89% of parents of secondary French Immersion students agree or strongly agree that “This program will be helpful to my child’s future school or career plans.”
- ❖ 92% of parents of secondary French Immersion students agree or strongly agree that “This program challenges my child and improves their skills and knowledge.”
- ❖ More than 96% of parents of secondary French Immersion students would recommend this program to other families.

Grade 6/7 French Immersion Students*: (19 responses were received from 3 of the 10 elementary schools which offer a Late or Early French Immersion Program)

- ❖ 85% agree or strongly agree that “This program challenges me and improves my skills and knowledge” and 84% agreed or strongly agree that “I am engaged in my learning in this program.”
- ❖ 89% agree or strongly agree that “I have met friends as a result of being in this program” and 100% would recommend this program to other students.

What is working well?

- The Early French Immersion Program in Burnaby is a long-running, well-established and much sought-after program. Enrolment numbers have grown from 678 students registered in Early French Immersion twenty-five years ago during the 1995-96 school year, to 1486 registered in 2020-21. Total Immersion numbers (Early, Late and Secondary) have grown from 1047 to 2196 during that same period. Each year, the district offers 10 Kindergarten French Immersion classes at 7 elementary schools, which with current class size limits, means spaces for 200 students.

K Intake		
School	Classes	Students
Aubrey	1	20
Brantford	1	20
Inman	2	40
Marlborough	2	40
Seaforth	1	20
Sperling	2	40
Westridge	1	20
Total Intake	10	200

- In addition, it is evident that there is consistent demand across the years for the EFI program. Application numbers have remained relatively constant:

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Applications *	513	565	541	505	518
Actual Students	351	416	375	394	357
<i>*Some students apply for more than one location</i>					

- District staff also report that the Burnaby School District is fortunate to have a strong and dedicated cadre of French Immersion teachers to support the program. Staffing in French Immersion is always a concern for all school districts, but the Burnaby Human Resources Department states that while there are always unanticipated challenges, typically, the district is able to fill all French Immersion postings, with some (ex. Secondary Math/Science, Learning Support) being more difficult than others. This success is in part due to a strong relationship with local universities (UBC and SFU) and the fact that the school district often hosts cohorts of teacher-candidates who then are hired directly to the district.

In addition, there does not seem to be a problem with the retention of these teachers, as is often the case in other districts. While French Immersion teachers do sometimes “come and go”, the numbers are the same as those of English teachers, and many French Immersion teachers in Burnaby have taught in the program for 10 years or more.

Parent Survey Comments:

- *“Amazing program and great number of these schools in Burnaby! Thank you very much!”*
- *“The French Immersion program has been an amazing experience for my children to experience and develop a new language. Even though we don’t speak French at home, the teachers and school community has been a great asset to my children’s learning.”*

What are some of the challenges and obstacles?

- As is the case in virtually every school district in the Lower Mainland (and indeed in BC and the rest of Canada), parental demand for the French Immersion Program is much greater than the availability of spaces. Many parents commented that they would like to see the French Immersion Program available in every elementary school in Burnaby. As noted in the table above, there are often twice as many students applying to the program as those who are able to secure a placement. While ideally, it would be wonderful if

all school districts could offer more Early French Immersion classes, it is not currently possible in Burnaby, or most other school districts for that matter. This is due primarily to a shortage of French Immersion teachers in BC as well as a lack of the required additional physical space (classrooms) in most schools.

Canadian Parents for French (CPF), which has an active chapter in Burnaby, continues to advocate for more classes. Both the Federal and Provincial governments have initiated studies and projects which are intended to suggest current and possible measures that the Government of Canada, along with different ministries of education, faculties of education and school boards could consider to address the French teacher supply and demand gap. As stated earlier, this is a national issue and not specific to the Burnaby School District.

- A topic that was brought up by both French Immersion staff (teachers and administrators) as well as parents themselves, was the need for a better understanding on the part of parents as to what the French Immersion program entails and expectations for each grade or stage of French language development. The school district does hold orientation and information meetings for parents. In previous years, these sessions were in person, but are currently happening as virtual presentations due to Covid restrictions. Unfortunately, many parents are not taking advantage of these information sessions before making a decision to enroll their child. Staff has made suggestions such as mandatory participation in an information meeting, or that the parent must “check a box” on the application, stating that they know about and understand the program. While the first suggestion is not enforceable, and the second suggestion would not guarantee that the parent had actually done the required research, it is evident that this lack of understanding is a source of frustration to both staff and families.

Staff Survey Comments:

- *“I don't think that the French Immersion program is promoted in such a way that parents truly understand what the program needs from their child, and from them. I have been teaching for 10 years and I have never seen as many parents as now not truly understand what their child being in the French program means.”*
- *“I would really like to see Burnaby take a different approach in how they promote the French Immersion program. Too often it does not feel like parents are aware of how challenging the program is and what may be expected from their child/them. I don't feel like we are honestly presenting the program and its entities to parents. Pitfalls of joining the French program should be presented so that parents can weigh the pros and cons of enrolling in French. Some parents view the French program as simply “winning the lottery” but don't realize anything beyond this.”*

Parent Survey Comments:

- *“It's not very clear where to get detailed information about the program. For example, how much of the schooling is in French vs English at each level.”*
- *“Would like more information about the late immersion vs early immersion, and how effective are the program results.”*
- *“Sometimes I wonder if because they in the immersion, they have reduced learning in the other subjects, especially English?”*
- While Early French Immersion is a popular program, there appears to be a much lower enrolment rate and interest in the Late French Immersion Program which is offered in 3 elementary schools (Armstrong, Capitol Hill and Marlborough).

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Students who applied to LFI	63	60	66	60	71

Class size limits at the Grade 6 and 7 levels are 30 students per class, meaning that there is space for a total of 90 Grade 6 Late French Immersion students across the district, yet there are not enough applicants to fill all three classes.

The numbers are even lower in the Grade 7 classes. Where there is space for 180 students (6 classes total, one grade 6 and one Grade 7 per school), the total number over the last 5 years has been between 110 and 120 Grade 6/7 Late French Immersion students. School-based administrators say that this may be because the program is not promoted across the district to all students in Grade 5. Indeed, when speaking with the Late French Immersion Parent Focus group, every parent there was aware of the program and decided to enroll their child in LFI because they were already attending that school in the English program. Also, some parents commented on the survey that they were not aware of Late French Immersion and would request some additional information.

Staff Survey Comments:

- *“I wish Late French Immersion was better promoted. Having taught it and early immersion I have noticed that there is absolutely no push for it at other schools where there are lots of potential candidates.”*
- *“Very few parents and students from other schools are aware of the Late French Immersion program, which makes it difficult to promote if teachers are unable to go to other schools to spread the word to other students from other neighbouring schools”.*
- Although almost 80% of parents of elementary-aged French Immersion (Early and Late) students surveyed say that it is their intention for their child to continue with French Immersion in high school, the number of students leaving the French Immersion Program at the end of Grade 7 is significant. The attrition between Grade 7 and Grade 8 is shown below:

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Grade 7 Total Number of FI Students	211	212	212	239	229
Grade 8 Total Number of FI Students	146	115	125	115	151
Gr. 7- Gr. 8 Attrition	36%	45%	41%	46%	37%

While it is worth noting that attrition between elementary and secondary French Immersion Programs is a common issue for all school districts, the data varies when it is broken down by school:

Grade 7 Program	Grade 7 2020/21	Grade 7	Grade 8 Burnaby FI Program	Burnaby French Transition
Late	Armstrong Elementary	21	12	57%
Late	Capitol Hill Elementary	11	5	45%
Late	Ecole Marlborough Elementary	21	10	48%
Early	Aubrey Elementary	21	14	67%
Early	Brantford Elementary	25	21	84%
Early	Cascade Heights Elementary	24	20	83%
Early	Ecole Marlborough Elementary	47	42	89%
Early	Ecole Seaforth Elementary	20	3	15%
Early	Sperling Elementary	27	16	59%
Early	Westridge Elementary	12	6	50%

Grade 7 Program	Grade 7 2019/20	Grade 7	Grade 8 Burnaby FI Program	Burnaby French Transition
Late	Armstrong Elementary	21	11	52%
Late	Capitol Hill Elementary	21	6	29%
Late	Ecole Marlborough Elementary	25	15	60%
Early	Aubrey Elementary	30	18	60%
Early	Brantford Elementary	24	15	63%
Early	Cascade Heights Elementary	22	21	95%
Early	Ecole Marlborough Elementary	39	34	87%
Early	Ecole Seaforth Elementary	18	6	33%
Early	Sperling Elementary	25	10	40%
Early	Westridge Elementary	14	12	86%

Grade 7 Program	Grade 7 2018/19	Grade 7	Grade 8 Burnaby FI Program	Burnaby French Transition
Late	Armstrong Elementary	17	10	59%
Late	Capitol Hill Elementary	18	3	17%
Late	Ecole Marlborough Elementary	20	11	55%
Early	Aubrey Elementary	20	3	15%
Early	Brantford Elementary	19	11	58%
Early	Cascade Heights Elementary	15	11	73%
Early	Ecole Marlborough Elementary	34	29	85%
Early	Ecole Seaforth Elementary	25	9	36%
Early	Sperling Elementary	30	12	40%
Early	Westridge Elementary	15	11	73%

The reasons given by parents and students for this high rate of attrition are varied and include:

- The secondary French Immersion site that the student was expected to attend was too far away and transportation was an issue
- Students in French Immersion at the secondary level did not have access to some of the same courses that English students did
- The courses offered at another secondary school were more appealing to the student
- A concern that to continue in French at Secondary would have a negative impact on the student's academic success in areas such as Math and Science
- It was the student's decision as to whether they wanted to continue in French, and many wanted to "stay with their friends" at the neighbourhood high school.

Parent Survey Comments:

- *"It would take 2 buses and close to an hour to get to the school by transit".*
- *"Location of FI high schools is inconvenient and difficult for kids to get there on multiple transfers on transit."*
- Comments were made by both district and school-based staff regarding the wonderful collaboration of teachers on the various French Immersion school staffs (often with their English colleagues) and the innovation that is being seen in many French Immersion classrooms across the district, but there were also frequent references to the lack of "coherence" across the district. Many French Immersion teachers who were surveyed disagreed with the statement "I am satisfied with the professional development offered to teachers in this program."

While there are opportunities for professional development for French immersion teachers throughout the school year, many teachers spoke of the need for FI teachers across the district to be able to meet, share and plan together. Teachers spoke of feeling that they were working in isolation and often "re-inventing the wheel", of wanting the opportunity to meet and connect with other FI teachers at the same grade level or subject area. It is evident that there are topics and issues that are specific to teaching in French Immersion that would merit discussion and planning district wide. Opportunities to plan and learn together in French would create a greater sense of collaboration, collegiality, and satisfaction.

Staff Survey Comments:

- *"There are relatively little opportunities for French Immersion teachers to attend program-specific professional development. At this time, it is largely up to individual schools to ensure that their teachers are supported. There are sometimes conferences offered in other provinces, but these can be difficult to attend financially."*
- *"Every year, Fr. Imm. teachers are offered different occasions to sign up for workshops or programs specific to our program. We need occasion to gather together more often."*
- Both school-based staff and parents commented on the lack of Learning Support Services (LSS) for students in French Immersion. Staffing allocations for Learning Support at each elementary school are based on total student FTE (French and English) and total number of designated students (French and English) in the school. Therefore, the support allocated should be enough to support students in French Immersion. The difficulty arises in finding qualified French-speaking LSS teachers to fill these positions. Many times, schools do not have the appropriately qualified staff and are obliged to provide the LSS support to some of the French Immersion students in English. In addition, there are few if any Education Assistants who speak French and can assist designated students with special needs in the French Immersion Program.

Also, parents of students who would benefit from an additional challenge to their learning, such as MACC or Challenge at the elementary level or Honours courses at the secondary level are sometimes frustrated that these options are not available to them in French. There were frequent survey comments from both students and

parents about how they would have liked to be able to participate in an Honours Math class in French, or how if they had wanted to be part of the MACC or BETA programs, they would have to leave the French Immersion Program entirely to do so. This need to “give up one to get the other” could also explain at least some of the students who choose to leave the French Immersion Program upon entering high school.

Parent Survey Comments:

- *“Learning support teachers that speak fluent French to help the students in French immersion is needed versus just for English”*
- *“Challenge programs or any other academic programs are only available to English students, not ok not to offer the same programs to FI students.”*
- *“Missing French Honours Math”*
- *“I would like to have more academic support for the French Immersion program. like literacy support.”*

Considerations:

- In order to support the growth and stability of the Late French Immersion Program, the district may want to reinstate the promotion of LFI through annual visits to grade 5 classes in each elementary school prior to the application deadline. This has been done in the past in Burnaby.
- When looking to lower the attrition rate of that occurs between Grade 7 and Grade 8, many have commented that better promotion and understanding of the secondary French Immersion Program may help to retain students. This could be easily handled through more targeted promotion of the program with secondary students visiting the French Immersion-Grade 7 classes to speak about the benefits of continuing in French Immersion. Parents in the focus group as well as those who responded to the survey commented on the power of a video and a presentation that a secondary school’s French Immersion Department made and shared with the Grade 7 classes and how it convinced many of the students and their parents to continue with the program.
- Another factor to consider regarding attrition in certain schools may be the school’s location. Capitol Hill, which hosts one of the three Late French Immersion programs has very low rates of students who continue in secondary French Immersion. The school’s belief is that this is because the students would prefer to go to their catchment area school, Burnaby North as opposed to their French Immersion school which is Alpha Secondary. It may very well be impossible to change the program’s location due to space limitations in other schools in the area, but if the district wants to continue to maintain the Late French Immersion program in 3 separate elementary school sites, perhaps the Late French Immersion program in the Northwest area of Burnaby could be moved from Capitol Hill to one of the five elementary schools already within Alpha’s catchment area. This may help to alleviate some of the attrition issues, as Alpha Secondary would be the students’ catchment school regardless of program.
- To help alleviate that sense of isolation that FI teachers say they feel and to promote coherence across the district, it may be worthwhile for the district to consider devoting some of the professional development funding or release time to collaboration time where teachers can meet to focus on areas of interest to them and their colleagues at a particular grade level, or subject area. While the provincial curriculum is the same for both the French and English programs, it is still important, both from a language as well as program perspective that French Immersion teachers have the opportunity to meet and work in their language of instruction. Additionally, many districts are finding that creating opportunities for French Immersion teachers to meet, both informally and socially in a “Café Français” type of environment, as well as in French professional development situations helps all FI teachers, but particularly those new to the profession to feel supported and valued by their district. This in turn supports the retention of these teachers in the district. As well, it may be worthwhile to survey FI teachers prior to the start of each school year to see where their priorities lay regarding professional development.

- While the district has always offered parent information nights prior to French Immersion Program application deadlines, there continues to be a lack of understanding of what the program entails and what the expectations should be. The district may want to consider alternative accessible sources of information for parents. In addition to reviewing and adding to the FAQs already on the district website, other sources of information such as video clips of FI classroom activities, of FI teachers talking about the program, of students at various grade levels speaking about their experiences, and of parents talking about their experience would all provide an additional dimension of information for the public.

It may also be worthwhile for the district to consider to continuing working with the Burnaby Chapter of Canadian Parents for French to help educate parents about French Immersion. The CPF website has a section designed specifically for parents (<https://bc-yk.cpf.ca/en/category/for-parents/>) that provides a wealth of resources and information, including online French courses that parents can access, information and research about second language learning and what can be expected from a French Immersion program.

Parent Survey Comments:

- *“For my daughter, I didn’t see a real grasp of French until midway through Grade 1. I would like to see more support and resources provided to parents who don’t speak French at home.”*
- *“For parents who are not familiar with French, I think we need more guidance in how to support better our children at home.”*
- *“Need more resources/help for parents who don’t speak French.”*
- Given that the lack of French speaking learning support teachers in schools is a concern to many staff and parents, the district could consider finding ways of “growing” the number of French-speaking qualified Learning Support teachers in the district. This could be done by providing added support to French Immersion teachers who are interested in pursuing the additional training required. Suggestions could include bursaries, release time, or even the establishment of a partnership with a local university where a “Learning Support Teacher” certification program cohort could be based in Burnaby, thereby making it easier for Burnaby teachers to attend.

MANDARIN LANGUAGE ARTS

Survey Results

Parents of Elementary Mandarin Language Arts Students (41 survey responses received):

- ❖ 62.5 % of parents of students in the elementary Mandarin Language Arts Program agree or strongly agree that “The program’s expectations for oral and written language learning at each grade level are appropriate and attainable.”
- ❖ 75% of parents of students in the elementary Mandarin Language Arts Program agree or strongly agree that “My child’s academic needs are being met in this program.”
- ❖ 80% of parents of students in the elementary Mandarin Language Arts Program agree or strongly agree that “My child enjoys learning and speaking Mandarin and is proud of their learning.”
- ❖ 97% of parents of students in the elementary Mandarin Language Arts Program agree or strongly agree that “It is my intention that my child will continue to take Mandarin language at the secondary level.”
- ❖ 95% of parents of students in the elementary Mandarin Language Arts Program say that they would recommend this program to other families.

Parents of Secondary Mandarin Language Students*: (4 survey responses received)

- ❖ 2 of the 4 secondary parents who responded to the survey agree or strongly agree that “The expectation for oral and written language learning at the secondary level is appropriate and attainable.”
- ❖ 1 of the 4 secondary parents who responded to the survey agree that “I am satisfied with the cultural component of the curriculum that is taught in the Mandarin language class.”
- ❖ 1 of the 4 secondary parents who responded to the survey agree that “This program meets my child’s academic needs.”
- ❖ 3 of the 4 secondary parents who responded to the survey agree or strongly agree that “My child is engaged in their learning in this program.”
- ❖ 2 of the 4 secondary parents who responded to the survey would recommend this program to other families.

Grade 6/7 Mandarin Language Students*: (4 survey responses received)

- ❖ 3 of the 4 Gr. 6/7 Mandarin students who responded to the survey agree that “This program challenges me and improves my skills and knowledge.”
- ❖ 1 of the 4 Gr. 6/7 Mandarin students who responded to the survey agree that “I am engaged in my learning in this program.”
- ❖ 2 of the 4 Gr. 6/7 Mandarin students who responded to the survey agree that “This program meets my academic needs.”
- ❖ All 4 of the Gr. 6/7 Mandarin students who responded to the survey said that they would recommend this program to other students.

What is working well?

- Overall, there appears to be strong community support for the idea of a Mandarin Language Program offered in the Burnaby School District. With the exception of the 2018-19 school year, the number of applications for placement in the Mandarin Kindergarten class usually exceeds the number of available spaces (20).

Mandarin Language Arts	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Kindergarten Applications	39	40	16	38	26

As well, the percentage of students coming from out of catchment and out of district is higher (58%) than the number of students who already reside in the Forest Grove catchment, indicating that there is interest across the district and beyond for the program.

Mandarin Language Arts K-7	Total
Forest Grove Catchment	42%
Other Burnaby Residents	49%
Out-of-District	9%

From its beginning in September 2010 with one Kindergarten class and adding a grade each year, the program has grown, and enrollment numbers for the past four years appear to remain relatively constant at around 140-150 students from Kindergarten to Grade 7.

Year	K	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	Total
2020/21	20	21	22	20	16	20	13	19	151
2019/20	20	18	22	18	20	15	19	10	142
2018/19	18	24	19	21	18	20	13	14	147
2017/18	20	20	23	19	21	13	14	11	141
2016/17	22	21	21	24	16	15	12		131
2015/16	20	20	24	16	17	13			110
2014/15	21	24	18	18	13				94
2013/14	22	17	19	17					75
2012/13	18	21	20						59
2011/12	20	19							39
2010/11	22								22

- Parents who shared their thoughts during the Zoom focus group had several positive things to say about the elementary program; they very much liked that in the primary grades, much of the language that the children learn is taught through stories, songs, poetry, etc. They appreciated the cultural component and the fact that it is “woven throughout the day”. In this way, they felt that it was much broader than just a language program.
- Parents also made note that as the program has grown and the staffing has stabilized, there has been more evidence of collaboration, of teachers working together to support the program. They feel that there is a better understanding of the expectations for students from one grade to the next.

Parent Survey Comments:

- “We wish that there were more spots available and more schools offering the program.”

- *“The Mandarin Language Arts program is an excellent program and I wish other schools in Burnaby would offer it. I also wish the program could be expanded into Mandarin Immersion if not at Forest Grove, then at another school in Burnaby.”*
- *“Overall we have been quite happy with the program and the teachers involved!”*

What are some of the challenges and obstacles?

- Although 83% of the elementary parents who responded to the survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I understand the intent of the Mandarin Language Arts Program and the expected learning outcomes for students”, some of those same parents express disappointment that there is not more Mandarin taught in the classroom and comment that they would prefer a more immersive setting such as is found in a French Immersion classroom.

The parents who participated in both of the Zoom focus groups (elementary and secondary) stated that they did not feel that there is enough clarity around the intent of the program; that although they were aware that there would only be the equivalent of 150 - 180 minutes per week of Mandarin Language Instruction, they were under the impression that their child’s language acquisition would be more than they have seen or heard and that the Mandarin language would be more pervasive through the classroom and the school than it is.

The information regarding the program that is available on the district website is as follows:

Developed in Burnaby, the Mandarin Language Arts Program offers an enriching and rewarding opportunity for students to celebrate and appreciate an additional language and culture.

- *..... Students study the regular core curriculum in English as prescribed by the Ministry of Education*
- *A component of the Language Arts curriculum will be delivered in Mandarin.....*

The program will develop

- *Mandarin oral communication skills*
- *Reading and writing skills (Chinese simplified language)*
- *An understanding of and appreciation for Mandarin Chinese culture*

While the district has been clear that Mandarin is only a component of the Language Arts Program and occurs only about 30-40 minutes per day, many parents are still disappointed in the lower-than-expected language abilities of their children.

- Some parents felt that their children were not able to carry on conversations other than those that are highly scripted. Many commented that their hope from this program was that their children would be able to converse with family members or other Mandarin-speaking people, and yet this was not the case. They also noted that their children appeared to be uncomfortable trying to use the language outside of the classroom.

Again, it appears that the district was quite clear in outlining what would be realistic expectations for the program. The following is from a presentation made to interested parents before the application process each year:

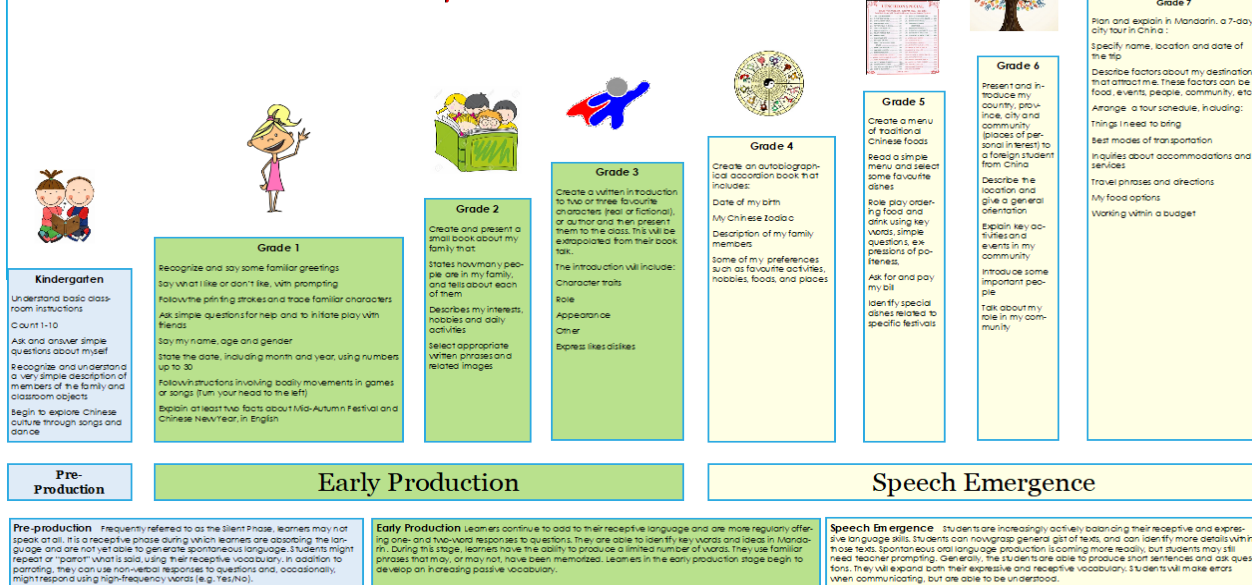
Learning Outcomes (examples)

Language

- *Respond to offers, invitations, instructions*
- *Exchange greetings and farewells*
- *Express simple preferences*
- *Produce simple words and phrases in guided situations*

As well, they are provided with the following visual, “In Mandarin, I can....”

In Mandarin, I can...



Parent Survey Comments:

- *"I feel that there could be more of an immersion vs a set time for Mandarin instruction."*
- *"Thankful this program is available. Just hoping that there could be more Mandarin incorporated as most parents at the school supplement with additional Mandarin lessons/tutors/schools, etc. because there isn't enough within the Mandarin program."*
- *"Because I want to encourage my child to use his Dad's first language I would love to see it used more in an immersive setting at some points of the year and perhaps have additional schools offer it."*
- *"Please consider making this Mandarin Arts into a Mandarin immersion program, much like the ones offered in Vancouver and Coquitlam."*
- Recruiting and retaining qualified teachers to the program has been challenging over the years. Staff remarked that in the first years of the program, there were staff changes and of course, as the program grew, new teachers arriving each year. Except for last year's Grade 6/7 class which did not have a Mandarin-speaking teacher, all of the teachers in the program are fluent in Mandarin but may not necessarily have experience in second language teaching.

As noted earlier, there does appear to be more staff stability now in the Mandarin Language Arts Program. In order to support these teachers in their work in the classroom, the district's French Immersion Liaison Teacher (prior to Covid) did work with the Mandarin staff at Forest Grove to develop a continuum of expected learning outcomes for K- 7 and also began providing some professional development support regarding second language teaching methodologies. However, some of the teachers at both the elementary and secondary levels of Mandarin commented on the need for continued collaboration opportunities, conferences and workshops on teaching Mandarin and that an increase in these opportunities will help with curriculum design and lesson planning.

Staff Survey Comments:

- *“1. Regular collab time covered by TOC, 2. Funds for resources, 3. Cross-district collaborations”*
- Many of the parents of those students who went on to study Mandarin at the secondary level were extremely dissatisfied with both the transition from elementary to secondary school as well as the experience that their students had in the secondary program. While it was assumed by most parents that students who had completed the K-7 program should be able to enter an accelerated class upon their arrival at high school, that was not always the case. Staff shared their beliefs that at the end of Grade 7, students should function at a Grade 10 Mandarin level and therefore be able to complete Mandarin 12 by the end of their Grade 10 year. This transition to a secondary Mandarin language class has not been consistent resulting in uncertainty for students and parents.

Parent Survey Comments:

- *“The elementary and secondary portions are too disjointed at the moment.”*
- *“The Mandarin program at the secondary level still needs to be differentiated from solely a language class. The cultural emphasis in elementary is what makes the program unique and should be followed up in secondary.”*
- *“After 6 years of my daughter being in the Mandarin program at Forest Grove, I do not believe the program was strong enough to benefit my daughter. She is attending the Gr. 9 program but has not connected to it in a way that has been beneficial to her. Conversational Mandarin, a chance to connect to other Mandarin students perhaps in China, and a lack of good Mandarin teachers were some of the reasons this program did not benefit her.”*

Considerations:

- Perhaps most important, the district may want to consider providing more clarity as to the intended outcomes of the program. As one parent said during a focus group meeting “My expectation was never that they would be fluent, but I hoped that they would get the exposure and have “steppingstones” for an easier transition into the language if they choose to take it further in the future. I don’t feel that even that is the case.”

If it was never intended that the students be as fluent as they would be in an immersion program, then this needs to be stated even more clearly at the outset. Being able to explain to parents what secondary level course the student will be eligible to take (discussed in greater detail below) will help greatly with parents’ understanding and will provide a sense of stability. More clarity in the information provided to parents on the website would also be helpful.

- Some of the parents and staff suggested that if the program was not intended to be a truly immersive experience, then perhaps the students would be better served if the Mandarin portion of the program were taught by an itinerant teacher in the later grades (Grade 5 and up). This would mean that the grade 5-7 students would be taught by a second language specialist and the classroom teacher would be able to focus on the rest of the curriculum. While there would be a cost associated with this change as there would need to be an overall increase in teacher FTE, it would reduce the number of Mandarin-speaking teachers required for the program, something that in the past has at times been difficult to staff.
- If the district were to decide to continue with the current model of the Mandarin-speaking classroom teacher providing the language instruction as well as all of the other subject areas, the district should consider providing additional professional development training and support for those teachers, so that they can continue to develop a portfolio of effective teaching strategies that will help build students’ language skills and learning.

- As part of the clarity of intended outcomes mentioned earlier, a crucial piece to the puzzle is a clear path for students from the Mandarin Language Arts program once they enter secondary school. Parents say that they want to know the expected outcomes for Mandarin, and that those outcomes must be achievable and consistent.

A positive step was work that was done this year by the Mandarin staff at Forest Grove (with support from a secondary Mandarin teacher) to augment the year-end assessment with a more fulsome three-part test (reading, writing and oral) that was administered to the Grade 7 students in May. This in-depth assessment provides a clearer picture of the students' abilities at the end of their elementary experience.

Examine the feasibility and appropriateness of offering a Mandarin 9/10 combined class at the secondary level. This would require additional staffing FTE at the secondary school. While it is understood that each year there typically is not a sufficient cohort of Mandarin Language Arts students entering Burnaby Mountain to fill the class entirely, perhaps the class could be offered to other students who may not have taken the elementary program, but who have already had some exposure to the language and could handle the slightly accelerated pace.

ADVANCED LEARNING (AP Capstone, BETA Mini School, MACC and Challenge)

Survey Results:

Parents of MACC Students: (49 surveys received)

- ❖ 98% of parents agree or strongly agree that “This program challenges my child and allows them to further improve their skills and knowledge.”
- ❖ 94% of parents agree or strongly agree that “This program meets my child’s academic needs.”
- ❖ 100% of parents agree or strongly agree that “My child is engaged in their learning in this program.”
- ❖ 98% of parents agree or strongly agree that “It is my hope that my child would continue in an Advanced Learning Program (BETA Mini-School, AP Capstone Program) or enroll in Advance Placement Courses at the secondary level.”
- ❖ 100% of parents would recommend this program to other families.

Gr.6/7 MACC Students: (9 surveys received)

- ❖ 100% of students agree or strongly agree that “This program challenges me and improves my skills and knowledge.”
- ❖ 100% of students agree or strongly agree that “I am engaged in my learning in this program.”
- ❖ 100% of students agree or strongly agree that “This program meets my academic needs.”
- ❖ 100% of students would recommend this program to other students.

Parents of Challenge Students: (50 surveys received from parents whose students had participated in the Challenge program prior to 2020)

- ❖ 86% of parents agree or strongly agree that “This program meets my child’s academic needs.”
- ❖ 96% of parents agree or strongly agree that “My child is engaged in their learning in this program.”
- ❖ 80% of parents agree or strongly agree that “My child is engaged in their learning in their home school.”
- ❖ 98% of parents would recommend this program to other families.

Parents of AP Capstone Students: (11 surveys received)

- ❖ 100% of parents agree or strongly agree that “This program challenges my child and allows them to further improve their skills and knowledge.”
- ❖ 100% of parents agree or strongly agree that “This program meets my child’s academic needs.”
- ❖ 100% of parents agree or strongly agree that “My child is engaged in their learning in this program.”
- ❖ 100% of parents agree or strongly agree that “My child’s participation in this program will be helpful to their future school or career plans.”

- ❖ 90% of parents would recommend this program to other families.

AP Capstone Students: (24 surveys received)

- ❖ 58% of students chose to enroll in the program because they felt it would be helpful to their post-secondary plans
- ❖ 92% of students agree or strongly agree that “This program challenges me and improves my skills and knowledge.”
- ❖ 88% of students agree or strongly agree that “I am engaged in my learning in this program.”
- ❖ 79% of students agree or strongly agree that “This program meets my academic needs.”
- ❖ 88% of students would recommend this program to other students.

Parents of BETA Students: (19 surveys received)

- ❖ 89% of parents agree or strongly agree that “This program challenges my child and allows them to further improve their skills and knowledge.”
- ❖ 84% of parents agree or strongly agree that “This program meets my child’s academic needs.”
- ❖ 94% of parents agree or strongly agree that “My child is engaged in their learning in this program.”
- ❖ 83% of parents agree or strongly agree that “My child’s participation in this program will be helpful to their future school or career plans.”
- ❖ 88% of parents would recommend this program to other families.

BETA Students: (35 surveys received)

- ❖ 89% of students agree or strongly agree that “This program challenges me and improves my skills and knowledge.”
- ❖ 94% of students agree or strongly agree that “I am engaged in my learning in this program.”
- ❖ 94% of students agree or strongly agree that “This program meets my academic needs.”
- ❖ 94% of students would recommend this program to other students.

What is working well?

MACC

- Students, parents, and staff all applaud the benefits of the MACC Program. They describe it as the opportunity for highly able learners to participate in a “more challenging education”, one that is interdisciplinary and inquiry-based and that focusses on and promotes critical thinking, independent study, and project work.

Parent Survey Comments:

- *“MACC is an excellent, well run, and much needed program!”*

- *“It definitely helps my child develop his social and academic skills, so I hope Burnaby school district continues to keep and support this program.”*
- *“It is a great program that goes into depth and width of learning to challenge gifted students.”*
- *“Nothing but good things to say about the program. It is quite intensive but is exactly what our son needs.”*
- District and school-based staff commented frequently on the positive impact the teacher has on the program, and how it is crucial that they understand the different characteristics, abilities, and needs of the highly able student. Parents speak highly of the teachers involved in the program and believe that their training and experience are a large part of what make the MACC classes so successful.

Parent Survey Comment:

- *“The flexibility of the program and the teachers had a great impact on my son’s view of school. He was finally engaged and happy at school.”*
- Another positive aspect of the MACC Program which is recognized by staff and parents, and in some cases the students themselves, is the program’s ability to support the students’ mental health issues when they arise, such as anxiety, which may inhibit a student’s ability to grow, learn and thrive in a classroom. With the inclusion of social and emotional learning (SEL) strategies and a focus on mindfulness, students learn the necessary skills to better deal with these emotions.

Staff Survey Comments:

- *“Parents need to understand when they come into MACC that this isn’t just an academic program choice, it is to address SEL and gifted excitabilities, perfectionism, gifted student well-being, as well.”*
- *“Being with like-minded peers, and with a teacher who understands their SEL needs, are game changers for many of these students. Just because they are advanced learners doesn’t mean they don’t need supports, and this program recognizes this. “*

Challenge

- The Challenge Program has been on hiatus for the last two school years due to Covid restrictions. Nevertheless, Challenge was a very popular program for those families who were able to access it. Open to students in Grade 2 through 7, each elementary school was allocated a specific number of seats available to them (anywhere from 2-10 students per year, depending on school size). Students were nominated by their school to attend but parental input and permission was also obtained. Both staff and parents commented that there were always more students interested in attending than there were spaces available, which is a testament to the program’s popularity. There were frequent comments in all of the surveys as to how much the program is missed and how hopeful people are that it will be able to return in the future.

AP Capstone

- The Burnaby School District offers a large number of Advanced Placement (AP) courses in each of its’ 8 secondary schools. Burnaby North Secondary School and Burnaby South Secondary School also host the AP Capstone Diploma Program. They are two of less than 1000 schools worldwide to offer such a program, and Burnaby is the only school district in British Columbia to offer AP Capstone in two of its schools. As outlined on the district website,

*“AP Capstone includes a two-course sequence: AP® Seminar and AP Research.....The **AP Seminar course**, typically taken in grade 11, equips students with the power to explore academic and real-world issues through an interdisciplinary lens and consider multiple points of view.....The subsequent **AP Research course**, allows students to design, plan, and conduct a year long mentored investigation on a*

topic of their choosing. Students who earn scores of 3 or higher on the AP Seminar and AP Research exams and scores of 3 or higher on four AP exams of their choosing will receive the AP Capstone Diploma™”

- The program is skills, rather than content-based and is structured to enable inquiry-based learning where students pursue research that is specific to their passions and interests across the curriculum. The students who enroll in AP Capstone are highly motivated students, many looking to develop their research skills in preparation for university. AP Capstone encourages a focus on the learning, not on the letter grade.

Student Survey Comments:

- *“AP Capstone is an amazing program but should be offered in more schools.”*
- *“I have an excellent teacher who is able to keep me engaged even in the early mornings.”*

Staff Survey Comments:

- *“The Capstone program has been an excellent addition to the “inventory” of programs in Burnaby and I hope it continues to receive the full support of the District in the years ahead. Students who have taken the program over the past 7 years frequently email from their post-secondary institutions to tell us how significantly prepared they were for university, and how the skills they learned and developed have helped them transition successfully into their higher-level education.”*
- *“The cornerstone of this program is differentiated instruction and personalized learning. Students Capstone projects are varied both in topic and methods. It’s amazing to see the work each student produces and the journeys they go on. “*

BETA

- At every opportunity provided (surveys, focus group meetings and letters of support), the parents of students enrolled in the BETA (“Bringing Exceptional Thoughts Alive”) Mini-School provided very strong and positive feedback regarding the benefits they believe that their children have received from the program. These include:
 - ❖ Learning in a cohort with their intellectual peers
 - ❖ The inquiry-based approach of the program
 - ❖ The training the teachers have that help them address the needs of gifted learners
 - ❖ The activities and issues studied which help the students develop advanced critical thinking and research skills
 - ❖ The independent study projects which allow the students to develop metacognitive skills, set goals, reflect on the steps required to achieve them and organize and structure their own approach to learning.
 - ❖ The social and emotional benefits of learning in a cohort have created a supportive, accepting learning environment.

Many of the students are equally pleased and happy to be in the program. In a focus group with former BETA students, the following comments were heard:

- BETA provided a solid and stable friend group with a bond that exceeded expectations because they were able to share in struggles and common goals
- Students appreciated the in-depth projects, presentations, as well as the independence and accountability. They felt comfortable saying, “I need help” or “Can I get an extension?”, things that are often not easy for high achievers

- One student said that her Mini-School experience helped her to “come out of shell”, as she was previously very quiet and shy. She learned to ask for help and get support, both academic and emotional.
- There were many comments about how the program nurtured creativity and allowed room for self-expression.
- Some students commented that it was nice to be surrounded by a group looking to achieve higher success.

Student Survey Comments:

- *“The environment of teachers and classmates is very healthy and something that I am thankful for, they definitely exceed my social/emotional needs.”*
- *“It offered what regular enrolment could not have, and I strongly believe that it has improved my skills and aided me to be a better learner.”*
- *“This program is necessary for my motivation, mental well-being, I couldn’t learn without it.”*
- *“Mini school was the best thing that happened to me.”*

Parent Survey Comments:

- *“Learning with like-minded students has been positive for our child. In contrast, during the non- Beta elective classes he finds the repetition and lack of focus amongst the students stops him from progressing at an advanced pace.”*
- *“It is a great program. My child feels highly of the teachers. Keep it up!”*
- *“We are very much appreciated the existence of BETA mini school as there are very limited programs for gifted learners. They are a group of extremely nice children but don’t always survive in the regular classes. It’s great that they are learning with similar minded peers and develop their social/emotional skills. They are generally happier when they have enough challenges academically.”*

What are some of the challenges and obstacles?

MACC

- For many staff involved with the MACC program, their biggest concern is what they perceive to be a lack of understanding on the part of parents as to the MACC program’s intentions and goals. As noted on the district website:

What is MACC?

- *MACC is an interdisciplinary, inquiry-based program for highly able learners seeking heightened cognitive and creative challenge in an inclusive and supportive community of intellectual peers. MACC is responsive to the needs of high-ability learners whose cognitive, personal, and social skills may be developing at varying rates.*

MACC Offers Highly Able Learners the Opportunity to:

- *develop a depth and breadth of understanding of **grade level curriculum** in a rigorous, creative and intellectually stimulating environment*

Staff report that MACC teachers as well as the district’s Advanced Learning Team spend a disproportionate amount of their time dealing with parent requests for acceleration and explaining that this is not the intent of the

program. District staff report that they frequently respond to requests for “mass acceleration” (moving a student up an entire grade level or more) and have to explain that the purpose of the MACC program is to “branch out or go deeper” rather than “move up”.

Staff survey comments:

- *“A point of confusion is acceleration, which we don't do, versus depth and complexity. Parents are also seeing MACC as a jumping off point for (other programs). Parents are putting pressure on MACC teachers to organize and pace their curriculum to help support applications to these (other programs). It is mentioned as something incoming parents are pursuing even in gr 4 and 5.”*
- *“Class composition has changed over time; the advertising for the program has not. Mainstream classroom teachers are unclear about the nature of the program and are therefore unclear about whom to recommend. Parents have come to see the program as a status symbol rather than a program designed to meet the needs of a specific type of learner.”*

Parent Survey Comments:

- *“Learning progress could be speed up a bit, example at grade 6, teacher can finish teaching grade 6 course material and bring in grade7 to speed up the learning. For most of the kids in MACC program, they already take different kinds of the course including Math, English, Science after school. Since MACC program try to bring in advance learning concept than normal school leaning, why not bring in grade level up feature.”*
- The table below outlines the number of applications received each year at each grade level (grades 3-6 because the MACC classes are for Grades 4/5 and Grades 6/7), the number of applicants who met the criteria necessary to be considered for the program, (<http://blogs.sd41.bc.ca/advancedlearning/macc-application/>) and the number of students actually accepted (always 24). From the information shown, it is evident that if the student is not accepted (or was not able to apply) to the program in Grade 3, there is little to no chance that they will be able to enter at a later date as the students selected to enter the Grade 4/5 MACC will undoubtedly continue with the program in successive years.

Year	Grade	Number of Students Who Applied	Number of Students Who Met Criteria	Number of Students Accepted	Number of Students Accepted During the School Year
2015	3	41	31	24	
	4	17	15	0	
	5	8	4	0	
	6	10	4	0	
Total: 76					
2016	3	64	31	24	
	4	11	6	0	
	5	9	9	0	
	6	3	3	0	
Total: 87					
2017	3	83	39	24	2
	4	6	4	0	1
	5	23	13	0	
	6	8	6	0	1
Total: 120					

Year	Grade	Number of Students Who Applied	Number of Students Who Met Criteria	Number of Students Accepted	Number of Students Accepted During the School Year
2018	3	81	30	24	
	4	12	12	0	
	5	36	13	0	
	6	8	4	0	2
Total: 137					
2019	3	61	32	24	
	4	8	7	0	
	5	6	6	0	
	6	7	7	0	
Total: 82					
2020	3	47	32	24	
	4	6	6	0	
	5	5	5	0	
	6	5	5	0	
Total: 63					

Staff also commented on the need to perhaps re-examine the current screening and selection process for students entering the program. Although the application form asks parents to describe their children's learning styles and asks for information about their social emotional strengths and issues, some feel that there should be more information collected from the student's current teacher, rather than relying heavily on the parent's information. They also comment that a written cognitive screening test may not provide sufficient information as to learning styles, etc. and may privilege students who are good test takers or who have had the opportunity to practice the test ahead of time.

Staff Survey Comments:

- *"While the cognitive screening identifies high cognitive ability, it doesn't give a full picture of overall knowledge coming into the program. ... The candidates have been generally gifted in many ways, however, there have been some who are high achievers, who do not like the open-ended approach of MACC or things like project-based learning and discussions leading to depth and complexity."*
- *"Originally, selection for the program was based on a combination of teacher recommendation, cognitive screening test, interview, and in-person observation of engagement in tasks. Now, selection is based on parent recommendation and the cognitive screener. The cognitive screener is a type of test that most of our families have their children practicing for at a very young age. Performance on the cognitive screener is not an accurate reflection of cognitive ability, engagement, and curiosity, traits which the program was originally designed to cater to (while providing support for the asynchronous socio-emotional growth inherent in many advanced learners). With selection based almost solely on the results of the cognitive screener, MACC is by default also selecting for over-programmed students who suffer from high levels of performance anxiety. These are mostly high achievers rather than cognitively advanced students and streaming these students into the MACC program deprives mainstream classrooms of academic diversity."*
- *"A key question needs to be asked....is the child thriving and okay already at their home school? If so, what is the motivation for moving them? Is the child unhappy at their home school because they would benefit from having like-minded peers, need a greater complexity to discussions? Then, the move may be the best thing for them!"*

- *“The makeup of students enrolled has changed over past years from divergent thinkers who would struggle to connect in a mainstream class to high achieving students with intense parental pressure to succeed. While I feel the academic needs can still be met, there is a lack of emotional support in terms of counselling for the students struggling with regulation and anxiety.”*
- *“Becoming harder to engage in open ended divergent tasks because of high levels of fear and anxiety that students are coming in with.”*
- Another frequent comment among staff and some parents was the notion of an “artificial barrier” between programs in the schools that hosted MACC classes along with the regular program. While school administrators did not feel that there was a separation between the staff members involved in both programs, they could all provide examples of separation witnessed both on the playground between students and at school functions involving parents. Several school staff made the comment that the parents seemed to believe that the MACC program had more of an “elite” status than the regular program. Admittedly, this separation between programs can often be found in any school that houses a regular neighbourhood program along with a Program of Choice such as French Immersion, Mandarin, or MACC.

Parent Survey Comments:

- *“Would love for there to be more integration into the larger school community somehow. I understand this is challenging during the pandemic however allowing the MACC kids to socialize with others outside their program would be beneficial to their overall school experience we hear about how the “MACC kids” are different, etc. It’s been like that since the program joined the school and I understand how and why it has a reputation but making all kids integrated into the school community would be great. The MACC program itself is good and my child learns so much and is engaged in learning in the MACC class.”*
- *“There is very little integration with the MACC kids and the other kids at school.”*
- *“My child goes to a school where the MACC program is offered. I see they are still trying to figure out how to integrate the kids into the school but for the most part they do things separately from what I can see.”*

Challenge

- While the Challenge Program was very popular with those students able to participate, the total number of spaces available was quite small in comparison to the number of students in grades 2-7 who would likely benefit from this additional support.

In the years prior to the program being put on hiatus, there was 2.5 teaching FTE assigned directly to the Challenge Program: 1 teacher for the Grade 2/3 group, 1 for the Grade 4/5 group and a 0.50 teacher for Grade 6/7 group. There were 60 spaces districtwide available for students in Grades 2 and 3 and the same for Grades 4 and 5. This means a total of 120 spaces available for the over 7200 students enrolled in Grade 2 through 5. The students attended one 2-hour session each week for 6 weeks per term (3 terms) throughout the year. This means that the selected Grade 2-5 students participated in Challenge once a week for a total of 18 of the approximately 38 weeks in a regular school year, or 36 of the 873 hours in a school year.

At the Grades 6 and 7 level, there were 144 students selected per year. These students did not attend for the entire year, but rather came once a week (2 hours) for 6 weeks of a term, starting in either late September, January, or April. In this case, an individual Grade 6 or 7 student would have received 12 hours of Challenge support during the entire school year.

Grades 2-5 (60 spaces for Gr 2/3, 60 spaces Gr 4/5)			
Grade	Year	Applicants	Accepted
Grades 2-5	2015	238	120
	2016	181	120
	2017	192	120
	2018	196	120
	2019	201	n/a
Grades 6-7 (144 spaces)			
Grades 6-7	2015	160	139
	2016	166	135
	2017	160	130
	2018	190	145
	2019	195	n/a

Both staff and many parents remarked that while this program was an excellent opportunity for their students, they do not believe that there are enough spaces for the number of students who would benefit from such a program. Even for those students selected, there was not enough time spent in the program during the course of the school year.

Staff Survey Comments:

- *"We have many students who exhibit an interest in Challenge programs but are never selected due to limited spaces."*
- *"From an elementary standpoint, one 1/2 day of "challenge" for a couple of months does not really differentiate learning."*

Parent Survey Comments:

- *"Feel like it should be an entire day."*
- *"More frequent/longer term for the program"*
- Many parents state that they are unclear as to how and why certain students were selected for the Challenge Program. Each school had a limited number of spaces allotted to them. For small schools it would be one Gr.2/3 and one Gr. 4/5 student each year, and one Gr.6/7 for each of the three terms. Medium sized schools would be able to select four to six students and larger schools may get as many as ten. Knowing those numbers, school staffs would nominate specific students to the program after first advising parents of their child's possible nomination, providing them with a criteria outline and seeking their permission to move forward. If the parents agreed, then the child's name was put forward for consideration. Those students who met the criteria were put into a lottery and from that group the final students were drawn.

The confusion and frustration appeared to come from how the students were initially selected at the school. In some cases, where there were perhaps a smaller number of students who met the program's criteria, schools allowed the same student names to be put forward every year, so that one or two students might be able to participate in Challenge every year from Grade 2 to Grade 7. In other schools where there were many students who would have met the criteria, schools had to sometimes make the difficult decision to allow each child to participate only once during their elementary school years.

Parent Survey Comments:

- *"Do not fully understand the selection process and how children are being selected."*
- *I had to bring up my son's interest in the program with his teacher, and the selection process was very unclear to me as a parent."*
- *"Seemed based on favoritism."*
- *"Not clear if it's always by teacher referral or child's designation."*
- *"Should be open to any interested child rather than hand-picked based on non-transparent criteria."*
- The location of the Challenge Program and the fact that parents were responsible for getting their child to the program and then back to their home school once a week in the middle of the day was an issue for many. Some believe that this was a factor that deprived many students of the opportunity to participate.

Parent Survey Comments:

- *"The program felt too short. It was easy for us to make it, but it excluded anyone with less resources/privilege."*
- *"Yes, but transportation is a big issue, and a reason some may not go. In Burnaby many families have two working parents and minimal extra help."*
- *"If transportation wasn't a problem, I would recommend it."*
- *"It was difficult to transport kids, wish there was an easier way."*
- *"The program was great, and my son really appreciated it. I'd really like all children to have this kind of engaging opportunity though. Relying on parents to provide transportation also necessarily discriminates against parents with less flexible employment and those who do not have a car, privileging more affluent families."*
- *"A wonderful program. Both my children participated and the teachers were wonderful. Transportation was the only issue. As two working parents we had a hard time."*

Staff Survey Comment:

- *"Students must be able to be driven to the site and often that is not an option for the families at the school I work at, as a result there is inequity in the ability to access these programs."*
- Finally, many school and district staff and some parents also asked the question "Why aren't we "pushing in" with support instead of "pulling out?" In other words, can the program be re-imagined, and funding and FTE be reallocated so that the needs of students are being met in their home school? This could happen either within their regular classroom or in a smaller, but equally effective Challenge-type program led by someone already on staff at the school who brings all of the school's highly able learners together for a certain amount of time each week.

Staff Survey Comments:

- *"It doesn't even need to be a "program of choice" at a local school. It can be a support teacher offering challenge times 1 period per week for selected grades (ex: 2/3, 4/5, 6/7) and selected students. In school, not off-site."*
- *"Offering challenge programs within a school is very beneficial. I taught this at our elementary school as part of LSS in the past."*

- *"We need more programs of choice like challenge in south side schools so students here have the chance to get to them. We often have to refrain from nominating students we know that would thrive in the program, but they cannot participate because it is held at a school site they cannot get to. Choice programs need to be more socio-economic and geographically fair for all students that could participate."*

Parent Survey Comments:

- *"It would be great to have more children served by these programs. From what I was told, only two students per grade can be nominated per school. Unfortunately, this can leave out deserving students the opportunity to participate in such a unique program that stretches and compliments the learning occurring in their home school."*
- *"I am really grateful for the public school system and the attempts made to improve, but it still panders to mediocrity. Maybe one child will attend Challenge every other year; there are many SMART children who would benefit from such programs."*
- *"It would be nice if kids could be in the Challenge Program more than once. My oldest took part in it and absolutely loved it and would love to do it again but he is not able to due to giving other kids a chance to apply and be accepted which I completely understand and support. However, since he enjoyed it so much, it would be nice for him to do it again or have other options."*
- *"Some of the programs could be replicated in the schools, increasing the opportunities for more students to participate."*
- *"Make it in house, in the individual schools, so transportation isn't an issue."*
- *"Challenge program for gifted students is difficult to access due to student parents having to drive kids. In school programs would be easier for parents, and provide the service to more kids in every school."*

AP Capstone

- Many students take Advanced Placement classes to strengthen their applications for university admission. Staff has commented that because the AP Seminar and Research courses themselves are not tied to a particular subject area, they aren't eligible for UBC transfer credit, although they are valuable learning experiences for the students.

The University of British Columbia's admissions page says the following about AP classes in general and AP Capstone in particular:

"All AP courses are eligible for admission consideration and can be combined with an approved Canadian high school or international high school curriculum to meet the University's admission requirements."

Generally, we use school percentage grades in AP courses to calculate admission averages. Your AP exam results may be included in the calculation if they are available at the time of admission."

AP Capstone complements the subject-specific knowledge gained through AP courses and exams, and allows students to develop skills in research, analysis, writing, and presentation."

The AP Capstone Diploma Program, AP Seminar and Research Certificate, and AP Seminar and AP Research courses aren't eligible for UBC transfer credit, but we will look at them positively when you apply."

While this may be disappointing and may be a detractor for some students considering taking these courses, it also means is that the students who are choosing to take these rigorous courses are doing so because of their own interests and desires to learn and improve. School staff say that students who take AP Seminar and Research are those who have a genuine interest in preparing themselves for the level of work required at a post-secondary institution.

- As was mentioned earlier in this report, like many Programs of Choice at the secondary level, the success of AP Capstone is largely tied to the small group of teachers who are trained to lead it. Their passion and dedication are wonderful, but the reliance on a few individuals to lead this program is concerning. As one staff commented: *“I would love to see more teachers train in this program but it has been hard encouraging teachers to take on the task of AP Capstone training.”*

BETA

- Again, as is the case with the MACC Program, district and school staff often commented on the fact that while the intent of the Mini-School Program is “expansion rather than acceleration”, they say that they still field many requests each year for individual students to be allowed to enroll in a course at a higher grade level, particularly in Math and Science. While the district works hard to promote the philosophies and beliefs of the program (a focus on critical thinking and inquiry-based learning), there are parents who continue to advocate for the ability to accelerate.

Parent Survey Comment:

- *“Our child supplements the Beta program with advanced online courses in order to fully meet his needs. Unfortunately, accelerated learning is not supported within Beta mini school.”*
- When the BETA Program began, the program ran from Grade 8 through Grade 12. However, with the recent implementation of the redesigned provincial curriculum, staff at Alpha Secondary were finding that students were dropping out of the Mini-School Program in Grades 10, 11 or 12 in order to be able to choose some of the new courses being offered. Students were finding that being enrolled in the BETA Program was creating scheduling issues that were not allowing them to access other courses of interest. The numbers of students wanting to remain in the Grade 10 portion of the program eventually became prohibitive and the BETA Program was shortened to include only Grades 8 and 9.

The former BETA students who made up the focus group had mixed reactions to this decision. Less than half of them (2 out of 5) would have wanted to stay in the program if it had continued through Grade 10. While they said that it was a fantastic experience at grades 8 and 9, they did not feel that “it was necessary” past that point and that they preferred to look at other options. And even the two who would have liked the program to continue felt that it would only be successful if there was a full class, which was no longer the case due to students opting out for other courses. When specifically asked, four out of five of the students stated that their academic needs were still being met outside of the BETA Mini-School Program.

Conversely, several of the current BETA students expressed their dismay that the program was not to continue after Grade 9, and in response to the survey questions about additional thoughts or suggestions for other types of programs, asked that the program be continued at least until Grade 10.

Student Survey Comments:

- *Great program only wish that it lasted until Grade 12.”*
- *“Keep Mini School and extend it to Grade 10 please!”*
- *“Mini-School was cancelled for grades 10-12 due to lack of interest, but for those who wanted to continue to be in the program, it was frustrating to have to do “normal” school.”*
- Former BETA students and staff commented that at times it was difficult to establish strong and supportive relationships amongst the various students arriving to the program. MACC students are automatically invited to transition to the BETA Program, and there are also additional spaces available for students coming from the regular English program, French Immersion, etc. There were times when these combinations were not successful and created significant stress and tension in the class. The former BETA students suggested that the automatic acceptance of MACC students into BETA can negatively affect the rest of the cohort once they are all together in BETA. They also reported feeling “segregated” in certain years.

Below is a table that outlines the number of applications to BETA received over the past few years. The class size limit is 28 and those students applying who are not already in the MACC program must meet the following criteria:
<http://blogs.sd41.bc.ca/advancedlearning/beta-mini-school-application/>

Year	Grade	Number of Students Who Applied (not MACC)	Number of Students Who Met Criteria	Number of Students Accepted (not MACC)	Number of Gr. 7 MACC Students Who Continued to BETA
Dec-16	7	60	24	18	10
	8	1	1	1	
	9				
Dec-17	7	39	18	12	16
	8	2	2	2	
	9	2	1	1	
	10	1	1	1	
Dec-18	7	59	37	14	14
	8	4	1	1	
	9	0		0	
	10	0		0	
	11	0		0	
Dec-19	7	42	31	7	21
	8	0			
	9	2		2	
	10	0			
	11	0			
Dec-20	7	33	26	19	9
	8	1	1	0	
	9	0		0	
	10	0		0	
	11	0		0	

Parent Survey Comment:

- “Granting elementary students automatic entry from the MACC programs is detrimental as stated criteria are different for the two programs.”

Staff Survey Comments:

- “Concerned that programs of choice undermine regular programming for kids because of their added costs, separation of kids, etc. I think this is more true of mini-school type programs that separate by perceived ability than more inclusive, true choice based programs (like Transition to Trades, Sports Academies, etc.). The cost of any such program for students in low SEC families could be an unjust barrier.”

Considerations:

- The district could consider clearer communication and information for parents as to the role of acceleration versus the intent of the MACC, Challenge and BETA programs, most specifically that they are programs which are designed to “enrich, challenge and support students who have demonstrated high potential, talent and ability.” In other words, these programs are intended to focus on expansion, not acceleration.

While the district website and the Advanced Learning Department’s Blog (<http://blogs.sd41.bc.ca/advancedlearning/>) do a great job of explaining what the programs involve, perhaps there needs to be clearer wording around the fact that mass acceleration is not usually part of the MACC or BETA Programs. It is understood that subject-specific acceleration can at times be considered for highly able learners, but this is a separate issue or process, not something that is automatically part of these programs.

Another small thing that may help with the assumption that gifted learning should mean the automatic ability to accelerate students is to perhaps change the name of the department from “Advanced Learning”. Some parents did comment that the term “advanced” led them to believe that their child would be able to “advance past their actual grade”.

- The district may want to consider allocating additional counseling FTE, particularly at the elementary level, to those schools which host Advanced Learning Programs. This support could be targeted specifically to deal with the growing concern mentioned frequently by staff around the perceived level of anxiety and social emotional learning challenges. Professional development support in this area would also be helpful.
- Should the district be able to find the financial means to reinstate the Challenge Program, it may want to consider reviewing the format, and looking at other ways to use the significant staffing, budget and resources previously assigned to Challenge to provide direct support at the school level. With the issues of transportation, the small number of spaces available to students, the limited number of weeks or hours that students are able to participate, it would seem that there are more effective and equitable ways to ensure that the greatest number of students’ needs are being met. Three possible options to consider are:
 - A small portion of additional staffing could be allocated to each school, allowing schools to provide Challenge programming to their own students in their own space.
 - The district could also consider developing a hybrid model, where some of the program would take place in the school and some through an online program. This would allow highly able students to work with like-minded peers, both in their school and across the district.
 - Another option would be to use district-based staff and resources to provide in-class support and professional development to those teachers who have highly able learners in their classes, thereby better enabling them to differentiate their programs and meet the needs of these students (and others) in the classroom.
- In terms of the BETA Program, it is difficult to reach consensus from parents and students as to whether the program should run only for Grades 8 and 9, or whether it should continue for Grade 10. Everyone closely involved in the program seems to recognize (albeit perhaps somewhat reluctantly) that it is not desirable to have it continue through Grades 11 and 12, as there are too many other options for students at that level and being in BETA was becoming somewhat prohibitive in terms of being able to access other courses. Parents of students currently in the program would like to see it continue for Grade 10, while previous students said that it was not worthwhile, stating that after Grade 9, Mini-School “wasn’t as important because there are more challenges and options for enrichment that became available”.

A compromise suggested by this year’s BETA parents in a letter to the district was to “encourage the school to continue the cohort-based approach in grade 10 or find a way to maintain the sense of community for these groups by placing them in at least 1-2 common classes as they transition out of the cohort model for upper years.” While this may seem like a relatively easy request to accommodate, it may in fact be very difficult. The

Grade 10 portion of the Graduation Program (Grades 10-12) has the largest number of courses required for graduation. They are:

- Physical and Health Education 10
- Science 10
- Social Studies 10
- Math 10
- Language Arts 10

While it may be possible to schedule all former BETA students into the same Math, Social Studies or Science class, it is probably not possible for the English 10 class, because there are 5 different options offered at Alpha at the Grade 10 level:

- Eng. 10: Composition
- Eng. 10: Creative Writing
- Eng. 10: Film Studies
- Eng. 10: New Media – Lab
- Eng. 10: Mystery

And even though all Grade 10 students must take the same Science, Social Studies or Math class, it cannot be guaranteed that they could be grouped together, as the electives that they choose will have an impact on their scheduling. Nevertheless, school staff could be asked to make every effort to keep the BETA students, (or at least smaller groups of them) together in one or two classes, where scheduling permits.

Therefore, it is suggested that the district continue with the current model of a BETA Mini-School comprised of Grades 8 and 9 only, as well as continuing to support the former Mini-School students after Grade 9 through the IDS (Independent Directed Studies) options, and where possible, through scheduling them in the same classes.

- Although it appears that a significant amount of time and effort has been spent over the years by Advanced Learning staff in deciding on the criteria used for admission to the BETA, MACC and Challenge Programs, it seems that work has not necessarily translated to a thorough understanding on the part of teachers or parents of what the characteristics of a highly able learner actually are, and what the district is looking for before placing the students in an Advanced Learning Program. Therefore, it is suggested that professional development opportunities for elementary classroom teachers regarding the criteria and the identification of gifted students be presented on a regular basis. This would enable teachers to better identify those students who would benefit from this type of programming and would also help them to explain to parents the necessary requirements, hopefully eliminating many ineligible applicants and disappointed students and helping to target those students who may not automatically appear to be the right type of candidate.
- Finally, the district may want to consider a change in process related to admission to the BETA program. Currently, all MACC students are automatically able to move from a MACC Program to the BETA Mini-School. The MACC students are expected to complete an application form, but this is merely to confirm their interest in continuing in an Advanced Learning Program. They are not required to submit any additional documentation.

District and school staff often find that MACC students will use this automatic placement in BETA as a “placeholder” for them while they look to pursue other options, both in the district and elsewhere. Staff has reported that often MACC students or their families consider the Mini-School Program to be their “back up plan”. They can list numerous times that MACC students have been accepted elsewhere or change their minds late in the game, sometimes even in the first week of school, thereby denying other interested students the chance to attend BETA Mini-School.

At the same time, staff also believe that there are many students not already in an Advanced Learning Program who would benefit from the BETA experience and should be given more consideration or opportunity than is currently offered to them. It was the BETA students themselves who suggested this change; that “the playing field be leveled” and that MACC students be required to demonstrate the same level of commitment and go through the same application process as all other students who are interested in attending BETA. They felt that the composition of cohort of learners was an important consideration in the selection of suitable candidates.

ADDITIONAL ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

- When asked about other Programs of Choice that parents, staff, and students would like to see the Burnaby School District consider for the future, the most frequent suggestions included:
 - Outdoor education at both the elementary and secondary levels
 - Programs with an Indigenous focus at both the elementary and secondary levels
 - International Baccalaureate at the secondary level
 - Montessori at the elementary level
 - STEM programs at the elementary level
 - Other sports academies (tennis, basketball, baseball)
 - More Fine Arts options

Parent Survey Comments:

- *“Programs are language focused and do not provide many alternatives if language is not of interest. Would love to see outdoor school or Montessori programs offered.”*
- *“Where are the arts? Where are transdisciplinary studies? Computer Science and art are an easy fit, but it could go so much deeper. How can art impact sustainability? Why is storytelling an important skill in business? These options are very bland. If we want our students to be community leaders, we need to broaden their thinking.”*

Student Survey Comments:

- *“I really love coding and would love to see you expand into areas other than game development. For example designing android apps for uses like tracking the air quality of the city you are in and more practical uses of programming.”*
- There were also frequent comments about the placement of Programs of Choice throughout the Burnaby School District, with the general feeling being that the placement of programs was heavily weighted towards schools in the North with not as many in the South. As well, there was a feeling that many programs of choice were placed in what were perceived to be neighbourhoods with a higher socio-economic standing.

Parent Survey Comments:

- *“There are no programs of choice offered at Byrne Creek Secondary - why not? AP Capstone would be great! Could this be offered online so that my kids could attend? They are both academic achievers but can't participate by going to a different school. I feel we are discriminated against because of the school they attend.”*
- *“Yes, but all the programs are too far from where I live.”*
- *“Would like Mandarin and French taught at elementary schools west of Holdom Ave. All programs are in schools to the east. Why is that? Commute is far for kids to walk to and from school.”*
- *“Some schools, e.g. Cariboo Hill Secondary offer many programs of choice, while others, e.g. Byrne Creek Community School, only one and others do not offer any.”*
- *“There is a lot of privilege to be able to drive your kid out of catchment for school. More regional programs would make them more accessible.”*
- *“Any programs of choice need to be on a good transit route as most parents work during the day and can't drive.”*

- *“Consider offering programs of choice in south Burnaby.”*
- *“Programs are offered disproportionately; certain areas having the bulk of the programs while others having none.”*
- *“I highly appreciate programs of choice offered at Burnaby School District, but it would be great if they were more evenly distributed among schools and schools with easy access to public transport should have more programs of choice.”*
- *“The programs should be expanded so that families all across Burnaby will have access in their neighborhoods.”*
- *“Please have programs of choice available in different areas of Burnaby! I.e. Mandarin available only in North Burnaby.”*
- *“Nothing is offered in my community near Edmonds.”*

Staff Survey Comments:

- *“Programs of choice help bring variety to schools. However- not all schools get choice programs and many are in North side schools, so South side school students do not have access or have limited access as they can't be taken to different programs due to transportation and before/after school care needs.”*
- *“We need more programs of choice like Challenge in south side schools so students here have the chance to get to them. Choice programs need to be more socio-economic and geographically fair for all students that could participate.”*

With Gratitude

The information provided in this report is intended to support the Burnaby Board of Education and Senior Staff when making decisions regarding both existing Programs of Choice and any new program offerings that may be contemplated in the future.

The reviewer would like to acknowledge and thank the many staff, students and parents who took part in the Burnaby School District's Programs of Choice Review. The participants were open, honest, and welcoming. Despite the many pressures of a regular busy day in schools, to say nothing of the additional stress and restrictions imposed by the Covid 19 pandemic, each participant gave willingly of their time to ensure that a complete picture of their schools, their programs, their beliefs, and their thoughts were shared.

I would also like to commend the school and district staff who work in all Burnaby schools for their obvious dedication to student success and wellness. This dedication was evident in my observations during the review and in their thoughtful responses and suggestions during our conversations and meetings.