

TO: The Operations Policy and Planning Committee

FROM: Piet Langstraat, Superintendent of Schools

RE: Home Learners' Link

DATE: May 9, 2016

HLL/The Link Update

Over the past several years we have experienced a decrease in the number of School-Aged students enrolling at HLL/The Link (see Table 1) and an increase in the number of students with mental health concerns. As a result, our ability to staff and provide appropriate support for the students has become increasingly challenging. In order to meet these challenges, supplemental staffing was provided in 2014/15 and 2015/16 (an additional 1.451 FTE and 1.659 FTE respectively).

Consultation with Staff

We recognize that this practice is not sustainable and, as a result, Associate Superintendent Deb Whitten and I met with the staff and administration at HLL to discuss options for the 2016-2017 school year and to begin an open dialogue on a vision for the future. The conversation was a valuable and insightful collaborative process. The HLL staff spoke about the different levels of support available at SJ Willis and throughout the District, their concerns regarding the potential reductions in the levels of service due to the DL funding model, and the potential programs available through HLL given the current staffing allocation. Throughout the discussion it became evident that an additional .8 FTE was needed to support students in grades 9 – 12 and create a continuity of care model for the students during the 2016-2017 school year. After meeting with the staff and administration at HLL, it was clear that the current level of service at HLL did not align with the Provincial Distributed Learning model. Staff agreed that they work very hard to support every student within a funding formula designed for Distributed Learners. As a result it was decided that a comprehensive review of our Alternative programs and services including Distributed Learning was needed.

Consultation with Parents

Once it was determined that the HLL program for K – 8 students was going to change, the Principal and Vice Principal of HLL began a consultative process with the parents. Parents were contacted and invited to meet with the administration to share their thoughts on the individual needs of their learner. Information will continue to be gathered and on-going consultation with the parents will occur in order to ensure each student receives continued support.

Developing a Vision and Plan

As a result of the discussions with staff and parents it has become evident that a broader process is necessary in order to determine a long-term vision and plan for Distributed Learning, Alternative Education and Continuing Education in the Greater Victoria School District. While it is the intent of District administration to provide for the needs of all students in the 2016 - 2017, it is my opinion that the current model is not financially sustainable nor does it necessarily provide the preferred educational options for students.

This consultative process with the staff and administration of the SJ Willis Education Centre has begun and will continue throughout the fall of 2016 in anticipation of the 2017-2018 budget preparation. Further, in addition to the feedback currently being gathered from parents of students in the HLL program, a broader consultative process will be developed and implemented in the fall of 2016.

Recommendations

The conversations with parents and staff have helped to guide our planning and we recommend that for the 2016 - 2017 school year we:

- Offer a flexible and supportive alternative learning environment for ages 6 - 11 at SPARK
- Offer a flexible and supportive alternative learning environment for ages 12 – 14 at a Middle School with equitable access to middle school learning experiences
- Conduct a comprehensive review of all of our alternative education programs

Table 1: School-Aged Student Enrolment for 2012 - 2016

SD 61					
HLL Enrolment Figures					
	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017
	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Prelim
September: School-aged	67.500	70.500	54.250	43.875	43.875
February: K-9 School-aged	10.625	18.000	13.625	9.000	13.625
February: 10-12 School-aged	47.625	41.250	29.125	36.375	29.125
				89.250	
May: K-9 School-aged	17.000	11.250	12.500	n/a	12.500
May: 10-12 School-aged	33.250	21.125	26.625	n/a	26.625
Total	176.000	162.125	136.125		

Table 2: School Aged Student Enrolment By Grade for 2015 - 2016

Grade	Number of School Aged Students
K	0
1	2
2	1
3	0
4	3
5	2
6	6 *2 cross enrolled and 1 moving
7	8 *5 cross enrolled
8	13
Total	35

Distributed Learning, Alternative Education and Continuing Education

Distributed Learning (DL): In this style of learning, students can connect with their teacher from anywhere in the world on their own schedule and their own terms. Teachers use a wide variety of electronic tools to teach their students. Students can choose to complete an entire program via DL or partner it with other learning options like in-person classes, blended classrooms or homeschooling.

Students in K – 7 must take a full course load at one school, while students in Grades 8-12 may enroll in courses from a number of different DL schools at one time.

DL means a method of instruction that relies primarily on indirect communication between students and teachers, including internet or other electronic-based delivery.

Alternative Education: Alternative education programs focus on educational, social and emotional issues for students whose needs are not being met in a traditional school program. An alternative education program provides its support through differentiated instruction, specialized program delivery and enhanced counseling services based on students' needs. Students who attend alternative education programs are often the most vulnerable population in the school system. Alternative education programs must satisfy certain requirements to be deemed a Type three facility.

The alternative education program must:

- focus on the educational, social and emotional issues for students whose needs are not being met in a traditional school program
- include an intake process
- have an annually reviewed learning plan for each student
- have an exit strategy to facilitate the student's transition back into regular school system continuing education, graduation or to work or post-secondary training and education.
- provide evidence of additional services as required by the student population (ie. youth workers, YFC, drug and alcohol counselors and/or sessions, etc....)

If the program meets alternative education program requirements and procedures, Boards receive full 1.0 FTE funding for students enrolled in those programs.

Continuing Education:

Non-graduated adult students are eligible for course funding leading to the British Columbia Certificate of Graduation (the Dogwood) or leading to the Adult Graduation Diploma (the Adult Dogwood).

Effective Dec 4, 2014, boards of education may receive funding for adult students who have graduated and who enroll in any of the literacy courses offered at continuing education centres, K-12 schools or through distributed learning.

Graduated adult students are no longer eligible to receive funding for courses other than literacy courses.