

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

January 31, 2006

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Acting Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Alternative Programs: Overview

ORIGINATOR: D. Barrett, Executive Director

RESOURCE
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INFORMATION

This report is in response to a commitment to provide information on current alternative programs, including enrolment, process for evaluating and developing, and to provide a comparison with the Calgary area and experience.

Context:

Edmonton Public Schools introduced open boundaries and alternative programs over 30 years ago. The decision to provide choice among programs was based “on the belief that the needs of a pluralistic society can best be met by an educational system that reflects that plurality and by providing parent and student choice in determining learning experiences.....[and the belief that] basic to our democratic beliefs is the right for individuals to live according to their own values and to determine their own courses of development.” This move was intended to increase public awareness of and participation in education, to enable the personalization of instruction and to provide for continual growth and renewal (Appendix 1). These foundational beliefs are consistent with our current knowledge about how students learn. We know they learn in different ways, are motivated by different things, progress at various rates and thus, by offering choice, the district is able to more effectively match learning needs to programs.

Thirty years ago Edmonton Public was unique. Now choice is available through charter schools, private schools and within many districts throughout the province and the country. Both Edmonton Catholic Schools and Calgary Public have introduced a range of alternative programs and continue to expand their offerings, as do a number of other boards surrounding the city of Edmonton.

However, the educational landscape still varies considerably between Edmonton and Calgary. According to 2005 civic census data, Calgary (pop. 956,078) has a somewhat larger population than Edmonton (pop. 712,391) but Alberta Education statistics indicate Calgary has a substantially larger number of charter and private schools. For instance, Calgary has 6 charters located in 11 school sites with a total enrolment of approximately 5,000 students while Edmonton has 3 charters with an enrolment of just over 700. With regard to private schools, Calgary has 68, with a total enrolment of 10,769, and Edmonton has 35, with an

enrolment of 2,380. The table below identifies the major types of private schools and the enrolment by type.

TYPE OF SCHOOL	CALGARY		EDMONTON	
	Schools	Enrolment	Schools	Enrolment
Christian	17	3,723	8	659
Pedagogy	21	4,384	2	415
Language	12	602	12	14
Special Needs	7	490	2	152
Behaviour	2	295	5	154
Religion/Culture	3	863	4	864
International Students	3	188	2	122
Miscellaneous	3	224	0	0
TOTAL	68	10,769	35	2,380

Edmonton Public this year (2005-06) has 18,611 students or 23 per cent of its population in alternative programs. The numbers have been fairly consistent over the last three years with 18,621 or 23 per cent in alternatives in 2004-05 and 17,672 or 22 per cent in 2003-04 (Appendix II).

Developing, Monitoring and Evaluating Alternative Programs:

While the work of developing and maintaining the alternative programs in the district has evolved over the 30 years, the work on these programs has always been, and continues to be, cyclical. As described in Appendix II, the work involves multiple phases and the various programs are at different stages at any one time. While the monitoring of achievement and satisfaction in all alternative programs occurs yearly, in any one specific year, different programs may be in development, under review, being revitalized, under consideration for expansion or simply in need of some additional assistance (Appendix IV). This work involves ongoing consultation with all stakeholders – parents, school and central services staff (Appendix V).

Developing and Receiving Approval:

Typically, alternative programs are developed in response to parent or community requests. Some programs, however, have been developed at the request of district staff or in response to district needs. Regardless of impetus, the requirements and the process remain constant. Programs’ staff consults with the interested parties, undertakes background research and reviews the request against the criteria outlined in Board Policy HA.BP Student Programs (Appendix VI) and the foundational purpose and belief statements (Appendix I). If all criteria are met, a rationale and program description is developed and confirmed with the group requesting the new alternative. Finally, as all alternative programs require board approval (Appendix VII), an alternative program recommendation report is taken to board for approval. On average, the process takes 10 months. As part of the recommendation or once the alternative is approved, Programs staff collaborates with Program Distribution to locate a site that is as central to the area of demand as possible and, in some cases, that meets unique needs of the program.

Implementing and Fostering:

Principals of alternative programs receive a copy of the board report approving the program. This document describes the program requirements, the commitments made by the district and approved by the board of trustees, for which the principal is held accountable. Each year Programs updates the *Alternative Programs Administrator's Handbook* and provides it to all schools hosting alternative programs. All alternative program sites receive enrolment, achievement and satisfaction data specific to their alternative program on a yearly basis. The achievement data indicates that students in alternative programs tend to perform at or above the district average in both the Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs) and on the Highest Level of Achievement Tests (HLATs). Satisfaction tends to be at or above the district average. This data provides one source of information for schools to modify programming, for the district to identify trends and for the Programs unit to assist or respond as needed.

Additionally, because alternative programs generally are developed in response to community requests or to a perceived gap in service, it is critical that the Programs staff more deeply understand the perspectives of the community. Hence, relationships with a variety of groups are developed and fostered as well. These groups include staff, parents, other community members or outside organizations that contribute to local education. This process involves school visits, one-on-one conversations with staff and parents, and participating on various committees, both internal and external. For instance, Programs staff attends a bi-monthly meeting of all district principals of Christian programs. Staff meets regularly with the external societies who support the various Christian programs in the district. Meeting frequency varies, reflecting changes in the activity level of the groups. Currently, Programs staff attend the Cogito Advisory Board, the German Bilingual Parents Association and the Chinese Bilingual Education Association as needed. Programs is also represented on ad hoc joint central office and school committees. These committees are convened to handle specific issues such as the expansion of alternative programs to other sites, a program review or revitalization. As well, Programs fosters the partnerships affiliated with our Child Study Centre and dance alternative programs and is currently solidifying a number of formal partnerships in support of our reframed Science elementary alternative.

To further extend our understanding, Programs has developed an exit survey that will be made available to students leaving a particular alternative this year. From this, we hope to garner information about how students select programs, what information is most helpful in making such a decision and, of course, why they are leaving.

Monitoring and Responding:

Through the yearly monitoring, the implementation and fostering processes, it is sometimes determined that an additional site or more may be required or that the program needs to be reviewed. The review, which involves extensive consultation, provides additional information from which a plan to revitalize, reframe or reconsider is developed. If this process results in changes to the currently approved alternative, a new alternative program recommendation is taken to board for approval, as is a decision to terminate.

In the fall of 2005, priority was given to such things as the expansion of the Cogito and Logos alternatives, and on implementing the new Pre-Advanced Placement alternative at three pilot sites. The expansion work is conducted in collaboration with Program Distribution and the support to Pre-Advanced Placement with Curriculum and the schools themselves. As well, as

a follow-up to the review conducted last year of the Arabic bilingual program, support is being provided in collaboration with Curriculum to implement the recommendations from the review. Additional work is being undertaken on the review of the Awasis junior high alternative that is not offered this year.

The revitalizing and reframing work usually involves substantial consultation and subsequently advertising of the programs in question. This past spring, focused advertising was provided for the Caraway alternative resulting in sufficient numbers to once again offer the program. With the inclusion of many new families, the program description was reviewed and described in greater detail but within the parameters of the board approved program.

With regard to reframing, the Science Alberta alternative was reviewed and brought to board for reapproval as an elementary science alternative. This fall, Programs confirmed partnerships for the science alternative, worked with Planning to identify the site and with Personnel regarding staffing. Now, Programs is working on advertising the site and holding information sessions for prospective parents, students and teachers.

Other:

Programs, in common with schools and other decision units, reflects on current practices and continues to modify how the work is done. For example, based on feedback from principals and personnel, Programs, in February 2006, will hold an information session for teachers about alternative programs. The intent is to provide a context for teachers, by providing them some background on a number of the programs, and potentially to identify a pool of teachers interested in a variety of programs. A follow up is planned for the fall of 2006 to determine how effective this strategy was and how it could be improved.

The Programs unit continues to get occasional calls from the public and private schools regarding opportunities within Edmonton Public Schools. Staff responds to all these requests through one-on-one conversations, written information and negotiation meetings.

Conclusion:

In the present context, the challenge is to ensure that district programs remain relevant and rigorous, that alternatives are grown in a responsible manner to maintain program quality and integrity, to continue to respond to community and district needs/interests and, where ever possible to anticipate required changes. It is important that the work of the Programs unit remain a work in progress.

GC:ee

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- APPENDIX II - Alternative Program Enrolment Information
- APPENDIX III - Alternative Program Phases Diagram
- APPENDIX IV - Yearly Priorities: Leadership and Support from Programs
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Summary of Foundational Purpose/Belief Statements for Alternative Programs (1974)

(Source: Edmonton Public Schools, Alternatives in Education Board Report, March 1974)

The following underlying purpose/beliefs regarding alternatives in education were outlined in a February 19, 1974 Memorandum from the Superintendent to the Board of Trustees.

- To provide choice among programs
 - “Alternative education is based on the belief that the needs of a pluralistic society can best be met by an educational system that reflects that plurality and by providing parent and student choice in determining learning experiences. While it is accepted that the government must assume some responsibility in determining the course of education to preserve public interests, basic to our democratic beliefs is the right for individuals to live according to their own values and to determine their own courses of development.”
- To broaden the range of program offerings
 - “Another major purpose of alternative education is to broaden the range of program offerings in order to enhance the capacity of the school system to meet the educational needs of individual students.”
 - “It must also be recognized that there is a variety of means (processes) for achieving the goals of public education. Opinion is divided among the general public and even among educators as to what is to be studied, how it is to be studied, and where learning should take place. No one approach can provide the means of achieving the diversity which is expected.”
- To increase public awareness of and participation in education
 - “The provision of alternatives in education requires that formal lines of communication between the school system and the public be developed. Parents and students need complete and timely information about the available alternatives. The school system, in turn, needs information from the public regarding their expectations for program offerings, and must consider making provision for parent and student participation in program development.”
- To personalize instruction
 - “Alternative education encourages a more humanistic process of education to evolve.....Student, parent, and teacher are provided new opportunity for identity in programs designed to be responsive to expressed needs.”
- To provide continual growth and renewal
 - “Alternative Education provides an operational framework within which a system can plan and operate a dynamic service, accountable to those for whom it was designed. Since an element of consumer choice is provided, the number of those alternatives that are in greater demand should increase, whereas the number of those least in demand will diminish. Expanding the framework of public education to include a wide range of legitimate alternatives together with the right choice constitutes a defensive basis for educational reform.”

ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS: ENROLMENT DATA

(Source: Edmonton Public Schools, January 2006)

As we examine trends, a three-year summary of the enrolment data for each alternative program in the district is provided in this appendix.

Alternative Program	Sept 30/2003	Sept 30/2004	Sept 30/2005	
Academic Alternative	742	738	712	
Advanced Placement	323	336	357	
Amiskwaciy Academy	416	315	293	
Arabic Bilingual	555	555	523	
Arts Core	476	478	469	
Awasis	275	269	261	
Caraway	0	Suspended	50	
Child Study Centre	122	131	127	
Chinese Bilingual	1,490	1,476	1,565	
Cogito	641	820	878	
Edmonton Christian	1,073	1,019	1,128	
French Immersion	2,055	2,246	2,406	
Bilingual German	546	553	547	
Bilingual Hebrew	152	134	123	
Bilingual Ukrainian	178	188	186	
I.B. Diploma	1,112	1,156	1,165	
I.B. Certificate	1,312	1,532	1,827	
I.B. Primary Years Program	272	289	288	
I.B. Middle Years Program	890	899	926	
International Spanish Academy	91	103	117	
L'Académie Vimy Ridge Academy Dance	59	62	65	
L'Académie Vimy Ridge	635	634	591	
LearnNet	1,095	1,220	503	*04-05 change in coding
Logos	1,244	1,205	1,222	
Meadowlark Christian		255	266	
Mill Woods Christian	898	1,037	1,017	
Nellie McClung	492	486	471	
Pre-Advanced Placement			116	
Sports Alternative	426	393	292	
Traditional Program	102	92	120	
Total Enrolment per program	17,672	18,621	18,611	
Total EPS Enrolment	81,378	80,020	79,127	
Percentage in Alternative programs	21.7%	23.2%	23.5%	

The Science Alberta Alternative is not included on the list as this program will be discontinued and the new elementary Science Alternative program offered in September, 2006. Enrolment numbers for the Victoria School of Performing Arts are also not listed as these numbers are included primarily in the I.B. Primary Years Program, the I.B. Middle Years Program, and the I.B. Diploma and Certificate Programs.

Phases of Alternative Programs

(Source: Edmonton Public Schools, January 2006)

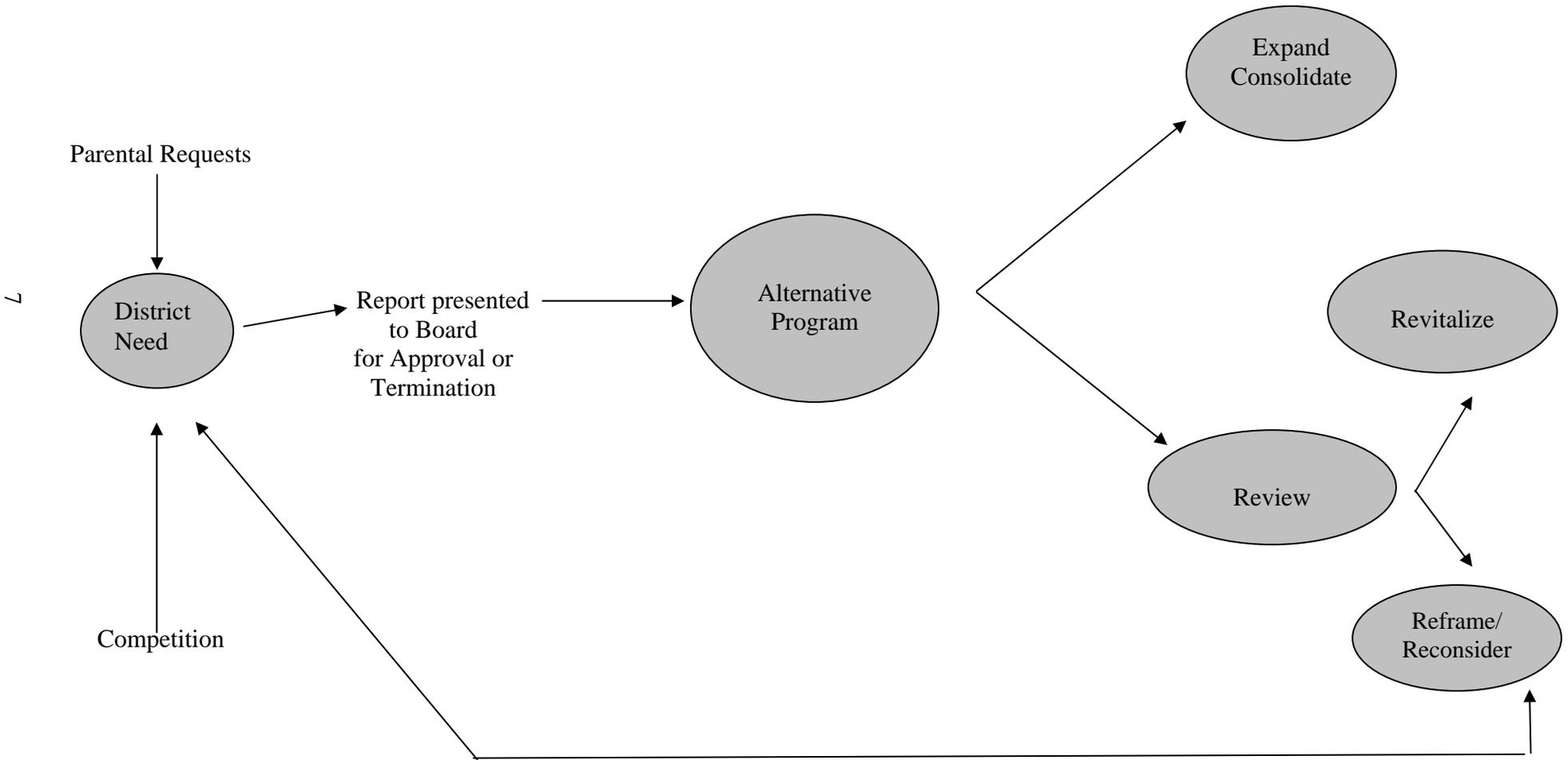
Phase 1:
Develop

Phase 2:
Board Approval

Phase 3:
Implement

Phase 4: Foster
Relationships

Phase 5:
Respond to Needs



LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT FROM PROGRAMS UNIT IN 2005-06

(Source: Edmonton Public Schools, January 2006)

ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM	DIRECTIONS AND SUPPORT FROM PROGRAMS STAFF
Academic Alternative	Provide support for implementation of 3 Pre-AP pilots.
Advanced Placement	Plan articulation between the junior high Pre-AP and AP at the high school level.
Amiskwaciy Academy	Include the needs of the students served by the Academy in work focused on promoting achievement of Aboriginal students throughout the district. Develop report for province.
Arabic Bilingual	Provide support in implementing the recommendations of the Arabic Bilingual review.
Arts Core	Update description of program.
Awasis	Continue the work to determine what programming support is needed for Aboriginal students at the junior high level.
Caraway	Provide support in increasing specificity of the program description based on the Board approved description for the program. Host information session for teachers regarding alternative program options.
Child Study Centre	Provide support for the partnership with the University of Alberta. Host information session for teachers regarding alternative program options.
Chinese (Mandarin) Bilingual	Collaborate with Curriculum regarding proficiency exams and curriculum.
Cogito	Meet as needed with Cogito Advisory Board. Work with Planning and Curriculum on identifying future accommodation for program. Host information session for teachers regarding alternative program options.
Edmonton Christian Program	Meet regularly with the society. Coordinate advertising across Christian programs.
French Immersion	Meet regularly with French Immersion Parents Association.
German Bilingual	Meet regularly with German Bilingual Parents Association.

ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM	DIRECTIONS AND SUPPORT FROM PROGRAMS STAFF
Hebrew Bilingual	Assist when requested.
International Baccalaureate Diploma	Continue discussion with the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) regarding program requirements and district rates and services.
International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program	Resolve grade configuration issues.
International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program	Provide support to schools identified as potential sites for PYP, particularly with regard to applying for accreditation.
International Spanish Academy	Promote program; explore feasibility of another site.
L'Académie Vimy Ridge Academy	Conduct program description review.
L'Académie Vimy Ridge Dance Program	Provide support to the partnership with the Edmonton School of Ballet.
LearnNet	Participate on provincial committee considering development of e-learning policy.
Logos	Promote program; consider both program consolidation at the junior high level and expansion at the elementary level. Coordinate advertising across Christian programs. Host information session for teachers regarding alternative program options.
Meadowlark Christian	Meet regularly with corporation. Coordinate advertising across Christian programs.
Mill Woods Christian	Meet regularly with society. Coordinate advertising across Christian programs.
Nellie McClung	Explore feasibility of offering an all girls high school course. Discuss strategies related to mathematics and science.
Science Alternative	Work on site identification and develop plans for opening in September, 2006. Confirm partnerships in support of the alternative. Host information session for parents regarding the program and information session for teachers regarding this option.
Sports Alternative	Conduct program description review.
Traditional	Assist upon request.
Ukrainian Bilingual	Assist upon request. Reframed the program in 2003 – renamed to Ukrainian International Bilingual
Victoria School of Visual and Performing Arts	Provide support in determining programming implications of renovations.

Consultation: Sample Involving Nellie McClung Alternative

(Source: Edmonton Public Schools, January 2006)

Context: The Nellie McClung alternative program, a grades 7 to 9 program, was introduced a decade ago and has expanded from one to three sites: Oliver, Avonmore and Bannerman.

Recent Consultation: In the spring of 2005, a parent representative from the Nellie McClung Society met with Programs staff to discuss the possibility of introducing one or more all girls classes at the high school level. Based on a preliminary discussion, the parent undertook to get broader feedback from the parent group and district staff undertook to advise and consult with district high school principals. Based on this early feedback which indicated an interest to consider further, a survey aimed at seeking input directly from the students was developed in the fall of 2005. The development and administration of the survey involved consultation with the principals in the schools where the program is offered, going to the schools to administer the survey and discussions with the girls about various options. Analysis of the results will be completed in February and then shared with principals, the Nellie McClung Society/parents and students. Subsequent to this feedback loop, a decision will be made and communicated.

Excerpt from Board Policy HA.BP - Student Programs

(Source: Edmonton Public Schools, Board Policy - Effective Date: 30-01-2001)

A. PROGRAMS AND COURSES

1. The board reserves to itself the authority to approve the establishment of new programs, locally developed courses, the optional implementation of provincial courses, and the deletion of programs and courses. The board shall be informed of all new mandatory course offerings.

2. When considering the addition or expansion of programs and locally developed courses, the administration shall address factors such as:

- rationale for program or course, including a description of unique features
- degree of demand
- availability of staff and instructional resources
- impact on financial and human resources, and facilities
- impact on current course and program offerings
- consistency with sound educational theory and practice
- consistency with board policies and administrative regulations
- consistency with the *School Act*, Alberta Learning's policies and its Mission and Mandate for Education.

3. When considering the deletion or consolidation of programs and locally developed courses, the administration shall address factors such as:

- degree of demand
- student achievement
- impact on financial and human resources, and facilities
- availability of staff and resources.

Section 21, *School Act*

(Source: Province of Alberta *School Act*, October 1, 2005)

21(1) In this section, “alternative program” means an education program that

- (a) emphasizes a particular language, culture, religion or subject-matter, or
- (b) uses a particular teaching philosophy,

but that is not

- (c) a special education program,
- (d) a program referred to in section 5, or
- (e) a program of religious education offered by a separate school board.

(2) If a board determines that there is sufficient demand for a particular alternative program, the board may offer that program to those students whose parents enroll them in the program.

(3) A board that offers an alternative program shall continue to offer the regular education program to those students whose parents do not enroll them in the alternative program.

(4) If a parent enrolls a student in an alternative program, the board may charge that parent fees for the purpose of defraying all or a portion of any non-instructional costs that

- (a) may be incurred by the board in offering the alternative program, and
- (b) are in addition to the costs incurred by the board in providing its regular education program.