

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

April 26, 2005

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Pre-Advanced Placement Alternative Program

ORIGINATOR: B. Holt, Executive Director, Instructional and Curricular Support Services

RESOURCE
STAFF: Karen Bardy, Jenise Bidulock, Randy Billey, Gloria Chalmers, Douglas Davis, Sandy Forster, Stuart Wachowicz, Stephen Wright

RECOMMENDATION

That Pre-Advanced Placement be approved as an alternative program for grades 7 to 9 beginning in the 2005-06 school year or when numbers warrant.

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Background and Rationale for the Recommendation

Edmonton Public Schools supports providing a range of alternative programs for students wanting a more academically rigorous and challenging program. Currently, the range of academic alternatives at the junior high level includes Academic Alternative, Middle Years International Baccalaureate and Cogito. At this time, not all sectors of the district offer ready access to one of these programs. Additionally, the district offers a junior high academic challenge program, under the special needs category.

Based on a desire to ensure that students in all sectors of the city have the option of selecting an academic-type alternative program, our current offerings were reviewed. It was determined that our current Academic Alternative would be difficult to duplicate as it is rooted in 30 years of history that has developed into a particular culture. The Middle Years International Baccalaureate involves costs for certification and teacher professional development. Thus, while the district will consider the need for additional sites to meet demand and remain competitive, it is fiscally prudent for the district to explore other options. With Cogito, we are investigating the demand for additional elementary sites that would, in the longer run, provide sufficient numbers of students to expand the junior high offerings.

Because requests were received from several junior high schools to offer pre-advanced placement and because the board approved advanced placement as an alternative program for grades 10 to 12 in the 2002-2003 school year, pre-advanced placement was investigated. It was determined that it would be possible to describe an alternative within the conceptual framework of Advanced Placement that instructs the provincial curriculum but also provides

enrichment in the core areas. An outline of the proposed alternative was forwarded to the western Canadian Advanced Placement representative who advised that such a program could be called pre-advance placement. To address the enrichment aspect and ensure consistency, Curriculum has completed a first draft of a prototype enriched curriculum for each of the core subject (Mathematics, Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, Health and Physical Education). A copy of the draft curriculum is available in the Trustee's Reading Room. If the recommendation is approved, the curriculum work would be completed by July 2005. The proposed option provides the district with an academic alternative that can be accessed beginning in grade 7, that can be duplicated as demand requires and one that, not unlike the International Middle Years Program, has international recognition.

Proposed Alternative Program

Name: Pre-Advanced Placement Alternative Program (grades 7 to 9)

Curriculum and Program Focus: This program is described within the Advanced Placement conceptual framework and meets or exceeds the Provincial Program of Studies. It will provide a coordinated, rich and rigorous curriculum and develop analytical thinking and writing skills. It is grounded in the belief that preparation for high intellectual engagement begins by developing skills and acquiring knowledge as early as possible and that this enables more students to perform at high levels. It will involve strategies that engage students in active, high-level learning and foster appreciation of quality work and diligent effort. The intent is to develop students who have a strong work ethic, welcome problematic situations, tolerate ambiguity, seek alternative possibilities and consider evidence on both sides, are reflective and deliberate, make connections among hitherto unrelated events or ideas and revise goals when necessary.

The key program elements include:

- Extensive use of subject-based vertical teams to ensure continuity from grade to grade
- Close links with senior high schools offering advanced placement or international baccalaureate programs to ensure smooth transition
- Use of vertical teams to increase standards, foster greater inclusion, encourage innovation, and bring about coordination with the goal of stimulating enthusiasm and empowering students
- Creation of challenging learning environments through the development of tasks that require active student engagement and encourage students to take intellectual risks and experiment with ideas (i.e., problem-based learning, inquiry-based learning and community service)
- Use of rubrics to assess (e.g., writing as exemplary, commendable, effective or approaches effective) and to enable student self-evaluation
- Use of primary sources and effective questioning
- Requires that students formulate questions and draw inferences from a variety of sources and construct solid verbal and written arguments
- Requires fine arts and second language options
- Incorporates a global perspective, fosters a culture of character and underscores the responsibilities of citizenship through the use of a broad range of resources, some additional curriculum outcomes and the strategies previously identified

Curricular Support: The district has developed a first draft of a prototype enriched Alberta Education curriculum for the core subjects (English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Health and Physical Education). Should the alternative program be approved by trustees, this work would be finalized. By developing this curriculum, the district can better ensure that there is in fact rigor, that there is consistency across district sites and that transition to high school options is smooth. In addition, in view of the content and expectations of the prototype draft, the district would support teacher professional development relative to this curriculum.

Target Students: This program is intended for all junior high students who want a more academically rigorous and challenging program, who are interested in broadening their intercultural and international perspectives and who wish to develop skills that enable them to become socially responsible life-long learners. These are motivation and performance-based criteria (e.g. honours or near honours marks, standard of excellence on the Provincial Achievement Examinations and above grade on the HLATs). It will assist students to be successful in any high school program, post-secondary or the world of work.

Staffing: The program requires staff who are supportive of the program as described and experienced content area specialists. In addition to implementing the key elements, such staff will be expected to participate in vertical teams and to participate in an Advanced Placement professional development offering on a yearly basis and a Summer Institute once every 5 years.

Costs: Advanced Placement is an affordable program. At the junior high level, the costs are similar to those of any program, that is, teacher professional development and resource acquisition costs. With respect to professional development, the Advanced Placement organization will ensure that there are yearly Pre-Advanced Placement and Advanced Placement sessions in Edmonton. The cost per teacher for participation in Pre-Advanced Placement professional development is about \$200.00 or \$375.00 for combined Pre-Advanced Placement and Advanced Placement.

District Support: It is recommended that a start up grant of \$319 be provided for each student in the first year of implementation and for growth in year two. This recommendation is consistent with district practice over the past ten years. This enables the school location to acquire the resources and to ensure staff has the initial professional training required. There would then be an expectation that the alternative would be sustainable without additional funding.

Location: If the program is approved, planning will identify a site or sites based on a number of criteria such as current availability of academic alternatives in the sector, interest and support from the school community, and demand in the sector.

Program Monitoring and Review: As with all alternative programs, achievement and staff, student and parent satisfaction will be monitored on an annual basis. During the implementation phase, assistance will be provided to ensure the program is offered as described. Again, as with other alternatives, the program will be reviewed periodically to determine whether modifications are required to keep the program current and viable.

GC:ee