

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

November 28, 2000

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Dosedall, Superintendent of Schools

ORIGINATOR: S. Stiles, Assistant to the Superintendent

SUBJECT: Career and Technology Studies - Investigation

RESOURCE

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INFORMATION

In September of this year, media reports focussed on CTS credits and modules in schools across Alberta and in Edmonton Public Schools. The media reports concentrated on two specific types of CTS modules: those combined with core courses, e.g. a communication CTS one credit module attached to an English 20 course; and, a CTS module of one, two or three credits that operates as a freestanding module, e.g. a leadership module for work done by students for a specified period of time or a career preparation initiative.

The media reports explored on the practices for structuring, communicating and staffing of CTS modules in our schools. As a result of this, the Superintendent requested that the administration initiate an investigation to gather information about the implementation of the CTS modules in Edmonton Public high schools.

Underlying the media reports were allegations on four major themes:

- A. Implementation of CTS Modules
- B. Use of CTS Modules for Credit Dollars
- C. CTS Modules and the Quality of Education
- D. Optional Nature of CTS Modules

Summary of Findings

Upholding the integrity of CTS modules is widely encouraged, supported and requested from staff, students, parents and central services alike.

- Staff agree that the integrity of quality education must be the foundation of our CTS practice. Staff identified a need for more consistency of practice and commonality of communication among schools. Staff have indicated a willingness to develop consistency in appropriate module combinations and standards of content and assessment through collaboration among schools on the identifying of best practices.

- Students indicated wide variations from school to school in modules available, the prior communication of modules integrated with core courses, and the rigor of the assessment processes.
- Parents believe that practices in our schools with regards to CTS integration are reasonable and ethical.
- Central staff believe that more consistency in the interpretation of Alberta Learning guidelines would support CTS as a valuable component of curriculum.

The results of this investigation revealed a wide variety of interpretations of the Alberta Education guidelines for these CTS modules, the need for more consistent practices, and for more consistent communication by schools regarding the implementation of CTS modules.

Approved Recommendations

The Superintendent has approved the following actions to be taken by the administration as a result of these findings.

1. All high schools will ensure that all free standing and combined CTS modules are planned prior to the printing of course material, and that CTS course information will be clearly communicated to students and parents prior to students being enrolled in the course.
2. A committee of consultants and high school staff will be assembled to:
 - a) Develop an inventory of best instructional practices, resources, and most used CTS combined and free standing modules
 - b) Make recommendations to high schools regarding CTS organizational practices, particularly related to
 - Combined CTS modules with core courses
 - Free standing CTS modules
3. A committee of junior high and high school principals will be assembled to address the following issues:
 - a) Alignment of CTS course offerings to ensure a smooth transition from junior to senior high school
 - b) Credit recommendations based on CTS module completion at junior high.
 - c) Consistency of requirements for CTS module completion at the junior high level.

APPENDIX I	Investigative Findings
APPENDIX II	Investigative Procedure
APPENDIX III	Focus Groups Questions

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Investigative Findings

This investigation did not focus on the delivery of all CTS courses, but rather, those CTS modules that specifically are combined with a core course or are assigned as freestanding modules and are not taught during regularly scheduled CTS course time.

The investigative findings will be addressed by theme.

A. Implementation of CTS Modules

There are a variety of practices regarding communication and planning timelines for CTS modules. Exemplary practice include:

- schools planning the combination of core courses and CTS modules well in advance.
- CTS modules well referenced in written materials such as course booklets, registration materials, course outlines and newsletters.
- the number of modules attached to core courses is limited, predictable, and well articulated.

Stakeholders believe that some ad hoc practices may lead to potential miscommunication gaps with staff, students and parents.

Schools provide for instruction time over and above the regular 125 hours in combined courses in a variety of ways. Examples of this practice:

- staff is available on a scheduled basis in a teaching area, such as a library, a computer lab or a designated tutorial location.
- in some schools, staff believe that the time in the regular core class is sufficient to meet the needed instruction of CTS modules, and so no additional instruction is needed.
- teachers and department heads are available for students requiring instruction prior to the beginning of the day's classes, during lunch and after school.

There is no consistent provision among schools for access to 25 hours of instruction beyond the 125 hours of core course instruction.

Staff believe that CTS modules combined with core courses have clearly defined instruction and learning benefits for students. Staff believe this is the result of these courses being in place for a longer period of time, the establishment of clear learner expectations and standards, and a broad base of teacher collaboration.

There is a desire among staff to have consistency in the kinds of CTS modules attached to core courses, standards, and course content. Staff believe the decision to attach CTS modules to core courses should be and generally is, based on benefit to student learning.

Most freestanding CTS modules are related to activities such as special events, field trips, extra curricular activities, student conferences, homeroom and career planning. Freestanding CTS modules are implemented in a variety of ways, both within and among schools.

Teachers, department heads, and principals believe that there are many best practices in CTS modules. There is a desire to share exemplary modules and strategies associated with these offerings among high schools.

Principals expressed an interest in collaborating with their junior high colleagues to discuss the aligning of CTS module standards and pre-high school practice.

B. Use of CTS Modules for Credit Dollars

All school principals believe that they are operating in accordance with the Alberta Learning guidelines. The major practice is combining one single credit CTS module with a core course. Some schools have multi-layering and more schools are considering increasing the number of modules.

The number of credits assigned for combined and freestanding modules has increased over the years. Parents view the increase of CTS modules as a indication of government under-funding of high schools. Students and staff indicated discomfort with the perception that some courses are offered for financial gain rather than enhancing learning.

All focus groups stressed the positive educational opportunity that CTS modules provide for students and expressed a desire for these to be more widely communicated.

C. CTS Modules and the Quality of Education

The variation in the number and kind of CTS modules offered in schools is perceived as an unequal access to educational opportunities being offered to students among high schools.

The choice to combine a CTS module with a core course of study is made in a variety of ways, for example:

- by departments working collaboratively
- by individual teachers
- by the administration with or without consultation with teachers

In most schools, teachers have a choice of combining a CTS module with a core course. CTS combined and freestanding modules are chosen based on a variety of reasons. The most common CTS modules that are combined with core courses are those that have the most potential for significant enrichment and extension of the core course content. Where departments have worked collaboratively to make decisions regarding CTS modules, teachers believe courses have greater benefit to students.

D. Optional Nature of CTS Modules

The “optional” nature of CTS modules for students is interpreted by schools in a variety of ways, including these examples:

- students have the option to enroll in the CTS modules prior to the course beginning.
- students enroll in the module with a “signature” of their acceptance of registration.

- students are initially enrolled in the CTS module along with the core course, however, choose not to complete the course work, and so do not receive credit for the course.

The wide variety of practices may be responsible for the resulting confusion among some students as to whether or not they are enrolled in these CTS courses.

Investigative Procedure

A. Focus Groups

The most valuable information gathered for this report came from the input received from focus groups. All of the focus groups responded positively to the invitations to join a group and were most forthcoming in providing feedback. The principals, teachers, department heads, and parents were asked similar questions. The students' questions were reformatted, as were those for Central Services. In total, ten focus groups provided input. These involved 33 staff, 5 parents, and 16 students.

B. Other Data Reviewed

1. Review of the procedures for implementing CTS single credit modules attached to core courses and free standing single credit modules, in EPS high schools.
2. Review of Alberta Learning CTS audit of Edmonton Public Schools in 1997.
3. Review the summary data on the number of combined CTS courses in place for 2000-01.
4. Review of printed information provided by schools to staff, students, and parents regarding CTS modules.
5. Review of CTS guidelines with Alberta Learning staff.

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Principals provided names of staff and parents.

Questions for Principal, Department Head, and Teacher Focus Groups

1. What is the process of communication and consulting with staff in your school in setting up CTS modules combined with core courses and free standing CTS modules?
2. What is the process of communicating with students regarding freestanding and combined CTS/core courses?
3. What communications are provided to students and parents to inform them about the accessibility to teachers for these courses?
4. How is the optional nature of these courses communicated to students and parents and what is that process?
5. What critical issues around free standing and combined CTS/core courses do you believe we need to address together?

Questions for Parent Focus Groups

1. What information has been given to your child about academic courses that have a CTS module attached to it? e.g. a communication module in English. What about the information provided with a freestanding CTS module?
2. Does your child know if taking CTS modules combined or freestanding is optional in his/her school? Does your child know the process for opting in or out?
3. Does your child know when/where/how you can access teachers for completion of one of the CTS combined or freestanding modules?

Students were chosen from the Superintendent's Student Advisory Team.

Questions for Student Focus Groups

1. What information is given to students in your school about academic courses that have a CTS module attached to it? e.g. a communication module in English. What about the information provided with a freestanding CTS module?
2. Is taking CTS modules combined or freestanding optional in your school? What is the process for opting in or out?
3. How do you know when/where/how you can access teachers for completion of one of the CTS combined or freestanding modules?
4. What other comments might you want to make about combined and freestanding CTS modules as they are handled in your school?

Questions for Central Services Focus Groups

1. What do you perceive the guidelines are that schools should be operating under for combined and freestanding CTS modules?
2. What exemplars do you know in the district that provide information and CTS programming the way it is intended?
3. What do you believe the gaps are in the communication?
4. What do you see as the one most critical issue we need to address as a district?
5. What next steps do you think we need to take to resolve that issue?