



A Review of School District No. 40 (New Westminster)

**Prepared for the Superintendent of Schools
and The Board of Trustees**

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Executive Summary

The Purpose

The Programs of Choice Review was initiated in January of 2023 as part of work outlined in the New Westminster School District's Strategic Plan (2019-2024). There are several components of this Plan that relate to the Review.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY A : *Transform the student experience*

District Goal: "Students Will Thrive Emotionally, Socially and Academically", specifically "*Provide robust, engaging, viable and sustainable Programs of Choice*"

STRATEGIC PRIORITY C: *Lead into our future*

District Goal: "Develop innovative and sustainable programs", specifically "*Increase access to existing and future specialty programs.*"

The Process

The Review took place over the first 6 months of 2023. Three Programs of Choice were reviewed during this process; Early and Late French Immersion at the elementary, middle and secondary school levels, Montessori at the elementary level and the Home Learners Program, which is available to students in Kindergarten through Grade 8.

The key areas of focus were:

- The alignment of the New Westminster School District's Programs of Choice to the BC curriculum's emphasis on personalized learning, differentiated instruction and inclusion
- The alignment of the three Programs of Choice with district values and the Board of Education's Strategic Plan
- The extent to which each Program of Choice meets student interests and needs
- An assessment of program viability regarding current and future needs related to facilities utilization, geographic equity, staffing, resources, training, etc.
- An analysis of the district's ability to support the diverse students' needs and interests through existing and possible new programs
- An overview of the various Programs of Choice offered in neighbouring school districts.

The process involved interviews with individual staff at the district and school levels, focus groups with students, parents and staff, an extensive survey process and on-site visits to all schools hosting a Program of Choice. Also, Choice Programs availability and offerings in neighbouring school districts were examined.

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

1. What is working well in the program (EFI, LFI, Montessori, Home Learners)?
2. What challenges and obstacles are being faced by the program?
3. What are opportunities are there for improvement to the program?

What Was Learned

What is Working Well?

French Immersion

- French Immersion in New Westminster is a sought-after Program of Choice that is well-regarded by the community.
- A higher percentage of students in New Westminster are enrolled in French immersion than the provincial average, and the program has remained stable in terms of size over the years.
- The smaller size of district allows for more collaboration and regular and consistent support of French Immersion teachers.
- The district has used the annual federal funding to ensure that FI classrooms are well-supported. As well, over the last two years SD40 has been able to access an additional \$375,000 in “French Immersion Growth Initiatives funding.”
- French Immersion teachers in New Westminster come to the program with diverse backgrounds and experiences which enhance the learning experience for FI students. The district has a strong relationship with local universities and often hosts cohorts of teacher-candidates.

Home Learners Program

- The Home Learners Program (HLP) has a small but long-serving staff who work very well together and are passionate about the program.
- HLP provides an alternative to families who are not interested in the traditional model of schooling. Parents like the flexibility of the program and the blend of in-person and at home learning.
- Parents and staff value the dedicated school site that is located adjacent to Hume Park.
- The model of one teacher supporting a family and all teachers working with all students works well for families.
- There is a large library of teaching and learning resources for families to access.

Montessori

- Parents say their children are engaged in their learning and believe that the Montessori program offers freedom and flexibility.
- The Montessori Program aligns closely with BC's revised curriculum.
- The Montessori Program is well-supported by an involved parent community and the New Westminster Montessori Society.
- There is currently a dedicated teaching staff with strong Montessori pedagogy and training.
- There is a strong sense of collaboration and professional support between the staffs at both schools.

What are Some of the Challenges and Obstacles?

French Immersion

- Parental demand for Early French Immersion exceeds available spaces in New Westminster's program.
- For a variety of reasons, it is sometimes a struggle to keep the FI program properly staffed.
- There is a need for better understanding on the part of parents as to what the French Immersion program entails.
- With only one Kindergarten EFI class in each school each year, attrition is a significant issue at the Intermediate grades and beyond.
- There is a lack of a French "presence" in any of the French immersion schools.
- There is a shortage of French Resource teaching support or French-speaking EA support for designated students.
- French Immersion staff would like to see more professional development and collaboration support.

Home Learners Program

- The excessive amount of staff time and energy that it takes to move through the yearly allotment process is a problem.
- There are space challenges within the school building itself.

- There is a need for additional inclusive supports for students, particularly in the area of counselling.
- Parents and staff do not feel that the Home Learners Program is recognized by the district or included in district events.
- The yearly activation activities are perceived by parents to be onerous and not relevant to their curriculum.
- There are frequent complaints of inconsistent, confusing or late communication from the school to parents.
- Parents feel that too much time is taken for individual student conferencing and assessment which leads to a loss of in-person instruction.

Montessori

- Parental demand for Montessori exceeds available spaces in New Westminster's program.
- There is a need for better understanding on the part of parents as to what the Montessori program entails.
- It is becoming more and more difficult to find teachers who are fully trained in the Montessori Method.
- There is a perception on the part of some parents and staff that the program is not a "pure" Montessori program.
- There are class size inequities in the Intermediate grades due to attrition.
- Montessori classroom resources are expensive to purchase and therefore difficult to replace.
- There is a perception of little or no district support for the Montessori program.

Considerations for the Board and Senior Staff

French Immersion

- The development of more program information sources for parents, including video clips, interviews, newsletters, etc.
- The provision of more opportunities for teacher collaboration across the district and between the elementary, middle and secondary FI programs.
- Reinstate school visits to all Grade 5 classrooms to promote the Late French immersion Program.

- An increased effort to provide bilingual signage in all common areas of the school site, as well as daily announcements in both languages, O Canada in French and English, etc.
- The amalgamation of the three elementary EFI programs into one or two sites.

Home Learners Program

- The inclusion of the Home Learners Program in all district notices and events.
- A change in the allotment process to provide more structure and support.
- A plan to promote stable, consistent and regular communication with families.
- A review of the funding currently allocated to professional services.
- An increase the amount of face-to-face instruction time during the school year.

Montessori

- The development of more program information sources for parents, including video clips, interviews, newsletters, etc.
- The creation of a District Montessori Advisory Committee.
- Continuing to advocate for the implementation of Montessori training programs at BC universities. Consider providing some financial support to teachers interested in pursuing Montessori training.
- A small annual budget allocation for schools to be used for items unique to the Montessori program.
- Amalgamation of the two existing Montessori programs into one school.

Additional Items to consider

- Revise AP 220 so that the waitlist dissolution date for Early French Immersion and Montessori be changed to the last school day in December of that same year. Keep the LFI date as is.
- Support additional training for Educational Assistants working in Programs of Choice.
- Do not add other new program options until such time as current capacity issues are resolved.
- Consider future placement of Programs of Choice in the Queensborough area.
- Hire a District Administrator responsible for Programs of Choice.

Acknowledgements

New Westminister Schools recognizes and acknowledges the Qayqayt First Nation, as well as all Coast Salish peoples, on whose traditional and unceded territories we live, we learn, we play and we do our work.

Introduction and Context

The City of New Westminister sits in the centre of the Metro Vancouver region between the larger communities of Burnaby, Coquitlam, Surrey and Richmond. According to the 2021 Canada Census data the city has a population of 78,916. This is an 11.2% increase from the 70,966 residents reported in 2016.

The 2021 census also notes that 3 % of the residents of the City of New Westminister self-identify as Indigenous. 44% of the city’s population was born outside of Canada and 47% of the population is considered to be part of a racialized group. As well, 26% of New Westminister residents identify a language other than English or French as the language spoken most often at home. All of this makes the New Westminister School District is one of the most culturally diverse school districts in British Columbia. It is also the second smallest school district in the Metro Vancouver region, with an enrolment total of just under 7500 students in eight elementary schools, three middle schools and one secondary school.

SD40’s work is governed by the New Westminister Board of Education who, as outlined in their 2019-2024 Strategic Plan believe that:

“Our priority is to promote student success. We know it takes focused effort and investment to provide the best possible learning experience for our students. We are dedicated to creating exciting teaching and learning environments. We will maximize the expertise of our teachers, staff, and education partners. We will leverage the human and material resources of our schools and community to promote teaching and learning of highest quality. We will nurture educational environments that are healthy and supportive. Our aim is to pursue the best possible student experience through bold, creative, attentive, evidence-informed, consistent, supportive, and effective teaching and learning.”

As part of the District’s Strategic Plan, a review of three district Programs of Choice (French Immersion, Home Learners Program and Montessori) was initiated in order to build upon the strengths of current programs, as well as identify and address possible gaps or overlaps in existing programs and services. While the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program at New Westminister Secondary School is also a district Program of Choice, it was not included in the review as it had recently undergone the IBO (International Baccalaureate Organization) audit and review which is required every 5 years.



Strategic Plan

The New Westminster School District's Strategic Plan (2019-2024) was developed through extensive consultations with students, staff, parents and the community. Opportunities for engagement included an interactive online forum, community dialogue sessions, and over 100 individual interviews. As outlined in the Plan, the District's Vision, Mission and Values are:

Vision : *A place where students love to learn*

Mission : *To enable each student to learn in a safe, engaging, and inclusive environment*

Values:

- **Collaboration** - Purposeful, cooperative relationships to achieve shared goals and consider each other in our decisions and actions
- **Inclusion** - Learning where all people are welcomed, respected, and supported
- **Engagement** - Meaningful, purposeful, and relevant learning
- **Innovation** - Curiosity, inquiry, and creativity
- **Equity** - Fair treatment and the removal of barriers to learning, achievement, and the pursuit of excellence for all
- **Integrity** - Ethical, principled, and honest in our words and actions

The New Westminster School District's Strategic Plan for 2019-2024, adopted by the Board of Education in December of 2019, identifies 4 Strategic Priorities:

STRATEGIC PRIORITY A : *Transform the student experience*

District Goals:

1. Be unwavering in our commitment to improve student success
2. Students are thriving emotionally, socially, and academically, and are whole and healthy learners
3. Students are meaningfully engaged and have an active voice
4. Staff are supported and encouraged to find purpose and meaning in their work and reach their full potential

STRATEGIC PRIORITY B : *Build meaningful relationships*

District Goals:

1. Families have opportunities to engage with the educational system to develop trusting relationships
2. Students are connected in a welcoming and inclusive learning community
3. Staff are valued and appreciated
4. Meaningful relationships with community partners to support our students and families

STRATEGIC PRIORITY C: *Lead into our future*

District goals:

1. A commitment to truth and reconciliation guides and informs our work in the district
2. Maintain financial accountability, transparency, and stability
3. Develop an environmental strategy and climate action plan, and provide leadership in environmental education

4. Develop innovative and sustainable programs
5. Implement the District's long-range facilities plan
6. Attract, recruit, and retain staff

STRATEGIC PRIORITY D : *Ensure full participation in learning*

District Goals

1. Sustain our ongoing commitment to address food security and healthy eating to ensure high quality food programs are available in our schools
2. Increased childcare opportunities for our families
3. Act as an advocate for public education in New Westminster and the province

Most relevant to this Review are Priorities A, "Transform the student experience" and C, "Lead into our future" along with the following goals:

1. Students Will Thrive Emotionally, Socially and Academically, specifically "*Provide robust, engaging, viable and sustainable Programs of Choice.*"
2. Develop innovative and sustainable programs, specifically "*Increase access to existing and future specialty programs.*"

Relevant Policies

PROVINCIAL

Educational 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/assets/gov/education/administration/legislation-policy/legislation/schoollaw/d/oic_128089.pdf states the following:

.....“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.....*

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”, there are references within the Act to language programs:

.....5. Language of Instruction.....

(3) Subject to the approval of the minister, a board may permit an educational program to be provided in a language other than as provided under subsections (1) and (2).” (Section 5)

Other relevant legislation includes:

The Required Areas of Study in an Educational Program Order

(https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/legislation-policy/legislation/schoollaw/e/m295_95.pdf) outlines the educational program that must be offered to all students in Kindergarten through Grade 9 and states:

..... Despite section 4 (c), a board is not obligated to offer English Language Arts to late French immersion students in grade 6.”

The Graduation Program Order

(https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/legislation-policy/legislation/schoollaw/e/m302_04.pdf) outlines the courses and credits required for a student to graduate in French Immersion:

- (i) Français langue seconde – immersion 10,
- (ii) a Français langue seconde – immersion 11 course,
- (iii) Français langue seconde – immersion 12,
- (iv) the Évaluation de littératie de la 12^e année – Français langue seconde- immersion, and earn at least 12 credits in Grade 10, 11, or 12 courses that are in French with at least 4 of those credits earned in courses at the Grade 11 or 12 level.”

The **Ministry Policy on French Immersion** (<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/legislation-policy/public-schools/french-immersion-program?keyword=French&keyword=Immersion>) outlines the following criteria in order for a program to qualify for French Immersion funding:

French Immersion programs must parallel the regular English program in structure and content. The content of French Immersion programs must parallel that of the regular curriculum as set out in the “Required Areas of Study in an Educational Program Order”

Early French Immersion		
Grade	% of French Instruction	% of English Instruction
K-(2 or 3)	100	0
(3 or) 4-7	80	20
8-10	50 - 75	25 - 50
11-12	no less than 25	no more than 75

Late French Immersion: *The Ministry recommends that the first year of Late French Immersion programs be taught totally in French. In the second year, English Language Arts and other courses taught in English should not exceed 20 per cent of instructional time.*

And finally, the **Provincial Online Learning Schools (POLS) Policy** (<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/legislation-policy/public-schools/online-learning-policy-general>) which will now guide the functioning of the Home Learners Program, states the following:

“Provincial Online Learning Schools deliver Online Learning programs and/or courses to enrolled students across the province. A Provincial Online Learning School may also offer in-person instruction and support services.”

DISTRICT

There are several Administrative Procedures (APs) which direct how Programs of Choice are to be implemented in the New Westminster School District. They are:

AP 213 French Programs (<https://newwestschools.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/French-Programs.pdf>)

- *French Immersion*

2.1 Opportunities to study the French language through immersion are available through Early French Immersion beginning in Kindergarten and Late French Immersion program beginning in Grade 6.

2.1.1 Limitations may be put on enrolment when there are insufficient numbers to create an economically viable class size.

AP 220 Programs of Choice. (<https://newwestschools.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/AP-220-Programs-of-Choice-220621.pdf>)

Entire policy

AP 280 Program Evaluations. (<https://newwestschools.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Program-Evaluations.pdf>)

Programs may be reviewed and evaluated for the purpose of ensuring that program goals and objectives are being pursued and achieved in an effective and efficient manner....

- *Evaluations will be used to make decisions in regard to:*

3.1 The maintenance, modification or discontinuation of existing programs.

3.2 The need for the development and implementation of other programs.

3.3 The ways in which existing or proposed objectives can be achieved in a more efficient manner.

AP 300 Student Admissions, Catchment Areas & Placements. (<https://newwestschools.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/AP-300-June-2022.pdf>)

3.4 Waitlists will be established for those not accepted and will be maintained until the last day of instruction in September.

1. Applications from new students for available spaces in Programs of Choice will follow the guidelines as per Administrative Procedure 220.

6.2 Students must be registered for their catchment school before completing a Programs of Choice Application.

6.3 Specific timelines for applications for the following school year will be published in June of each school year.

7.1 If a student, who is enrolled in a Program of Choice or district program (e.g. French Immersion, Montessori, or Home Learners), withdraws during the school year, they are expected to return to their catchment school.

Terms of Reference and Review Process

As outlined in the report presented at the Operations Policy and Planning Committee in November of 2022, the key areas of focus for this Programs of Choice Review were:

- The alignment of the New Westminster School District's Programs of Choice to the BC curriculum's emphasis on personalized learning, differentiated instruction and inclusion
 - The alignment of the three Programs of Choice with district values and the Board of Education's Strategic Plan
 - The extent to which each Program of Choice meets student interests and needs
 - An assessment of program viability regarding current and future needs related to facilities utilization, geographic equity, staffing, resources, training, etc.
 - An analysis of the district's ability to support the diverse students' needs and interests through existing and possible new programs
 - An overview of the various Programs of Choice offered in neighbouring school districts.

Three programs were reviewed during this process. Early and Late French Immersion at the elementary, middle and secondary school levels, Montessori at the elementary level and the Home Learners Program, which is available to students in Kindergarten through Grade 8.

The review took place between January and September of 2023 and followed an appreciative inquiry model. In all conversations, interviews and focus groups, the following three questions were posed:

- What is working well in the program (EFI, LFI, Montessori, Home Learners)?
- What challenges and obstacles are being faced by the program?
- What opportunities are there for improvement to the program?

The process involved interviews with individual staff at the district and school levels, focus groups with students, parents and staff, an extensive survey process and on-site visits to all schools hosting a Program of Choice. Also, Choice Programs availability and offerings in other neighbouring school districts were examined.

On-site visits were made to the following 8 schools. Each visit was approximately 60 to 90 minutes in duration and included an in-depth interview with the school administrator(s):

- Connaught Heights Elementary School
- Skwo:wech Elementary School
- École Qayqayt Elementary School
- École Herbert Spencer Elementary School
- École Lord Tweedsmuir Elementary School
- The Home Learners Program at Hume Park
- École Glenbrook Middle School
- New Westminster Secondary School

In addition to the school visits, 12 meetings (virtually and in person) were also held with the following staff and community representatives:

- CUPE 409 President
- New Westminister Teachers' Union President
- New Westminister DPAC President
- New Westminister District Parents' Advisory Council (DPAC)
- New Westminister Montessori Parents' Association President and Vice-President
- New Westminister Canadian Parents for French Executive
- District French Immersion Advisory Committee
- French Programs Facilitator
- French Programs Coordinator
- Communications Manager
- Human Resources Manager for Teaching and Administration
- Clerical and Registration Manager

12 program-specific electronic surveys were also made available to the following groups:

- All parents and interested community members
- All staff (teaching and support)
- All school-based administrators
- Programs of Choice staff (teaching and support)
- Parents of K-8 French Immersion students
- Parents of Secondary French Immersion students
- Parents of Montessori students
- Parents of Home Learners
- Grade 5 Montessori students
- Grade 5-8 Home Learner students
- Grade 5-8 French immersion students
- Secondary French immersion students

In total, 1323 survey responses were received and analyzed. The breakdown was as follows:

Partner Group	Population/Cohort Size	Number of Responses	Response Rate
Staff (Teaching, Support and Administrative)	793	154	19%
French Immersion parents	990 students	317	32% ***
Montessori parents	209 students	80	38% ***
Home Learners Program parents	116 students	48	41% ***

General parent/community	7478 students (K-12)	364	5% ***
Grade 5-8 French Immersion students	366 students	259	71%
Secondary French Immersion students	319 students	58	18%
Grade 5-8 Home Learners students	53 students	21	40%
Grade 5 Montessori students	25 students	22	88%

*** The response rate for parents is likely higher than represented here as many families would have more than one child within the program but would have only completed one survey on behalf of the family.

Copies of the 12 electronic surveys can be found in the appendix of this report.

In addition, 14 focus groups took place with the following partner and representative groups:

Partner Group	Meeting Type	Participants Registered to Attend	Number in Attendance
New Westminster Teachers' Union Executive	Virtual	n/a	16
Support Staff (CUPE 409)	In-person	n/a	2
New Westminster Principals and Vice-Principals' Association	Virtual	n/a	7
French Immersion teachers	Virtual	5	5
Montessori teachers	In-person	3	8
Home Learners Program teachers	In-person	4	4
Montessori parents	Virtual	4	4
	In-person	3	2
French Immersion parents	Virtual	15	9
	In-person	5	3
Home Learners Program parents	Virtual	4	0
	In-person	2	2

New Westminster Secondary School Student Voice Representatives	Virtual	13	6
Ecole Glenbrook Middle School EFI and LFI students	In-person	22	22
TOTAL			90

Finally, people who expressed an interest in participating in a focus group but were unable to attend due to a scheduling conflict were invited to respond to the three guiding questions by email. 8 people contributed their thoughts and opinions in this format.

“In a small school district, we do an exceptional job of offering choices for learners.” (staff)

“Knowing that the district is growing, being proactive with setting up programs of choice will help support future students.”(staff)

“The programs at my school location are, in my strong opinion, successful at meeting the needs of each student because of the care and dedication of staff. I am very proud to be part of SD40 and my school location, and feel very much supported in my role to support students.” (staff)

“I think these programs are super beneficial to kids and should continue to be offered.” (parent)

“I am a strong believer in the diverse and inclusive nature and fantastic programming and teaching in our “neighbourhood” program. I don’t feel like my child needs to attend a “program of choice” to have a quality public education. Our teachers do an amazing job.” (parent)

“The demand is much higher than the availability, so we need to understand why, we need to ensure that staffing is available and that we have access to high quality teachers for the specialized programs (such as French) and then ensure that the school community as a whole is lifted up by the program rather than becoming an exclusive group within a school.” (parent)

“Continue these surveys and have community meetings with school district parents to discuss further options. Sharing ideas, suggestions in person” (parent)

“I’m happy to be given options for my children’s education.” (parent)

Programs of Choice in New Westminster and Neighbouring School Districts

District	New West (SD 40)	Surrey (SD 36)	Delta (SD 37)	Richmond (SD 38)	Vancouver (SD 39)	Burnaby (SD 41)	Coquitlam (SD 43)	North Van (SD 44)	West Van (SD45)
K-12 Students (Sept 30, 2022)	7,478	78,421	16,710	21,999	51,180	26,535	33,092	16,555	7,230
Elementary Schools	7 (K-5) 1 (K-4)	104	24	37	89 (incl. 12 annexes)	41	47 (gr. K-5)	25	2 K-3 12 K-7
Middle Schools	2 (gr.6-8) 1 (gr.5-8)						14 (gr. 6-8)		
Early French Immersion	3 sites	7 sites	5 sites	7 sites	12 sites (incl. 1 annex for K-3)	8 sites	15 sites (10 K-5, 5 gr. 6-8)	6 sites	2 sites
Late French Immersion	1 site (middle school)	5 sites	2 sites	2 sites	3 sites	2 sites	3 sites (middle schools)	2 sites	1 site
Mandarin					2 sites (K-7 and 4-7)	1 site	2 sites (1 K-5, 1 gr. 6-8)		
IB Primary Years Program (PYP)			1 site		1 site			4 sites	3 sites
Montessori	2 sites (K-5)	3 sites (K-7)	1 site (K-3)	3 sites (K-7)	3 sites (K-7)		9 sites (7 K-5, 2 gr. 6-8)		1 site (K-5)
Traditional Schools		3 sites	2 sites						
Other	Home Learners	Intensive French Punjabi Language Intensive Fine Arts EKOLogy	Home Quest		Intensive French Indigenous Focus Fine Arts		Reggio-influenced Program		IDEC

District	New Westminster (SD40)	Surrey (SD 36)	Delta (SD 37)	Richmond (SD 38)	Vancouver (SD 39)	Burnaby (SD 41)	Coquitlam (SD 43)	North Vancouver (SD 44)	West Vancouver (SD45)
Secondary Schools	1	21	7	10	18	8	8 (gr. 9-12)	6	3
French Immersion	1 site	5 sites	2 sites	2 sites	3 sites	3 sites	2 sites	3 sites	1 site
International Baccalaureate (IB)	1 site	2 sites (1 MYP/IB, 1 IB only)	1 site	2 sites (1 MYP, 1IB)	3 sites (2 IB, 1 IB/MYP)		1 site	1 site (MYP and IB)	2 (1 MYP, 1 IB)
Advanced Placement (AP)*		9 sites	3 sites	9 sites	18 sites	8 sites	7 sites	2 sites	2 sites
Sports Academies		1 (hockey)			1 (hockey)	6 (2 hockey, basketball, volleyball, 2 soccer)	1 (hockey) at 3 sites	6 (basketball, field hockey, hockey, rowing, soccer, volleyball)	9 (soccer, rugby, field hockey, tennis, volleyball, badminton, baseball, basketball, fencing)
Mini Schools **				1	17	1	1		
Other		Math & Science Academy Inter-A Focus Program	3 Film Academies (acting, production and Visual effects)		2 Mandarin Bilingual sites	2 AP Capstone sites	1 Mandarin Bilingual Inquiry Hub	Fine Arts, Dance, Robotics, Gaming, Digital Media Academies	Mechatronics and Robotics Academy

**EMERGING THEMES,
KEY FINDINGS
AND
RESULTING CONSIDERATIONS**

French Immersion

The New Westminister School District offers both Early and Late French Immersion Programs. Late French Immersion was first introduced at Glenbrook Middle School in the year 2000, and in 2003 the Early French Immersion Program was started with Grade One classes at both Herbert Spencer Elementary and Lord Tweedsmuir Elementary.

Currently, Early French Immersion begins in Kindergarten (with some additional opportunity for entry at Grade One as space permits) and continues through Grade 5 at 3 schools; École Herbert Spencer, École Lord Tweedsmuir, and École Qayqayt. École Glenbrook Middle School is where EFI students continue their French program in Grades 6 and 7. It is also where Late French Immersion students begin their French studies in Grade 6. Both groups come together in Grade 8 to form one French Immersion cohort, which then continues for Grades 9 through 12 at New Westminister Secondary School. Attrition is an issue in FI at the secondary level (as it is in other districts as well) but the majority of French Immersion students who enter NWSS in Grade 9 will graduate with a Bilingual Dogwood Certificate at the end of Grade 12.

Year	Number of students registered in FI in Grade 12 (based on September 1701 data)	Number of FI Students Receiving their Bilingual Dogwood Certificate after Grade 12
2021/2022	59	62
2020/2021	73	66
2019/2020	72	68
2018/2019	73	63
2017/2018	63	46

During the 2022-2023 school year, there were almost 1000 K-12 students registered in French Immersion in New Westminister, representing more than 13% of the total student population. This is above the provincial average of 10%. The district has 40 FTE of teaching staff assigned to the French Immersion Program.

Grade	French Immersion Enrolment
Kindergarten	60
Grade 1	62
Grade 2	61
Grade 3	65
Grade 4	57
Grade 5	52
Grade 6 EFI	62

Grade 6 LFI	50
Grade 7 EFI	49
Grade 7 LFI	44
Grade 8	109
Grade 9	88
Grade 10	74
Grade 11	86
Grade 12	71
TOTAL	990

Canadian Parents for French (CPF) data shows the total enrolment, FI enrolment and percentage breakdown for neighbouring districts:

District	Total District Enrolment (2021-22)	Number of students in French Immersion (2021-22)	Percentage of students in French Immersion (2021-22)
Surrey (SD36)	75,696	3052	4.18%
Delta(SD37)	16,255	1895	11.85%
Richmond (SD38)	20,676	2371	11.57 %
Vancouver (SD39)	51,105	4860	10.08 %
New Westminster (SD40)	7778	966	14.70%
Burnaby (SD41)	25,107	2203	9.07 %
Coquitlam (SD43)	32,759	3827	12.42 %
North Vancouver (SD44)	15,817	2865	16.98 %
West Vancouver (SD45)	7133	1022	14.26 %

SD40's French Immersion enrolment has remained fairly consistent for the past several years. Small fluctuations in the numbers can be attributed to changes in provincial class size limits as well as the number of students with diverse needs which changes each year and would lower class size maximums.

School year	Early French Immersion Students	Late French Immersion Students	Total French Immersion Students
2022/23	896	94	990
2021/22	868	98	966
2020/21	914	111	1025
2019/20	900	110	1010
2018/19	900	111	1011
2017/18	885	113	998
2016/17	874	119	993

2015/16	857	115	972
2014/15	867	117	984
2013/14	845	132	977

Each year, SD40 offers 1 Early French Immersion Kindergarten class (20 spaces) in each of the three EFI elementary schools. This means that there is a total of 60 available spots district wide every year for those parents interested in applying to the Early French Immersion Program. The number of applications each year is often more than double the number of available spaces as outlined in the table below. As well, as per AP 220: Programs of Choice, the district guarantees sibling priority to those families with students already registered in the program, provided that they are attending the same school at the same time. This is common practice in most BC school districts, but can lessen the number of available spaces open to those families who are attempting to find a space for their oldest or only child.

Early French Immersion	
Year	Number of Applicants
2023	132
2022	159
2021	150
2020	119
2019	108
2018	111

In regard to the Late French Immersion Program, there are again a total of 60 spaces (2 classes) offered each year at the Grade 6 level. The number of applicants each year for this program is more closely aligned to the number of available spaces. This can perhaps be explained in part by the fact that students at this age are often involved in the family decision around their participation in a French Immersion Program. There is often consideration of the fact that such a move may mean attending a middle school other than the one in their neighbourhood, where all of their friends will be going. This “self-selection” tends to lead to lower numbers of students who choose to apply for LFI, but at the same time, those students who do decide to apply are truly motivated to be a part of the program.

Late French Immersion	
Year	Number of Applicants
2023	63
2022	65
2021	62
2020	75

As mentioned earlier, attrition can be an issue in the French Immersion Program, particularly between middle and secondary school. In some cases, it is because of the student's perception that it is more difficult to complete the upper-level courses (particularly Math and Science) in French than it would be in English. Also, there is a decrease in numbers between Grades 9 and 12 as students decide to leave the FI program because of scheduling conflicts. For example, a student wanting to take Physics 11 might find that it is only offered at the same time as the Français Langue 11 class. Below is the number of students at each grade for the last 10 years (based on September 1701 data)

Grade	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
8	102	93	94	98	96	105	109	97	104	109
9	60	72	78	85	79	74	89	101	81	88
10	88	52	64	72	80	76	73	89	96	74
11	76	85	51	67	72	74	73	70	60	86
12	43	74	82	48	63	73	72	73	59	71

Canada Parents for French (CPF) data shows us the following attrition levels for neighbouring school districts:

District	Average Grade 1-5 attrition for 5 most recent cohorts (2021-22)	Average Grade 7-12 attrition for 5 most recent cohorts (2021-22)
Surrey (SD36)	22.51 %	33.59 %
Delta (SD37)	17.13 %	39.87 %
Richmond (SD38)	14.54 %	32.52 %
Vancouver (SD39)	16.55 %	47.60 %
New Westminster (SD40)	16.75 %	37.66 %
Burnaby (SD41)	24.40 %	44.99 %
Coquitlam (SD43)	23.40 %	28.47 %
North Vancouver (SD44)	15.90 %	37.68 %
West Vancouver (SD45)	4.95 %	32.64 %

It is clear that SD40's French immersion attrition rate is within the range of surrounding school districts and not unusually high or low.

Survey Results

Grade 5-8 French Immersion students: 259 respondents

Secondary French Immersion students: 58 respondents

Parents of K-8 French Immersion students: 252 respondents

Parents of secondary French Immersion students: 65 respondents

74% of Grade 5-8 French Immersion students surveyed agree or strongly agree that they are happy to be in French Immersion.

90% of Grade 5-8 French Immersion students surveyed agree or strongly agree that they are proud to be able to speak and understand French.

69% of Grade 5-8 French Immersion students surveyed agree or strongly agree that they would like to continue in French Immersion at the secondary level.

81% of secondary French Immersion students surveyed agree or strongly agree that they are glad that they continued in French Immersion at the secondary level.

88% of secondary French Immersion students surveyed agree or strongly agree that French Immersion challenges them to grow and improve on their abilities and knowledge.

85% of secondary French Immersion students surveyed agree or strongly agree that their participation in French Immersion will be helpful to their post-secondary plans.

88% of parents of French Immersion students in Kindergarten – Grade 8 surveyed agree or strongly agree that their child is engaged in their learning in the French Immersion Program.

84% of parents of French Immersion students in Kindergarten – Grade 8 surveyed would recommend the French Immersion Program to other families.

89% of parents of French Immersion secondary students surveyed agree or strongly agree that their child's participation in French Immersion will be helpful to their future school or career plans

84% of parents of French Immersion secondary students surveyed agree or strongly agree that French Immersion offers a sufficient challenge to their child and allows them to improve on their abilities and knowledge.

What is Working?

4. French Immersion in New Westminister is a sought-after Program of Choice which meets the requirements of the Ministry of Education’s French Immersion Policy outlined earlier in this report, as well as the Graduation Order Requirements. In fact, at the secondary level, there are more course options available than are required. For example, in order to earn both a British Columbia Certificate of Graduation (Dogwood Diploma) and a Diplôme de fin d’études secondaires en Colombie-Britannique (what is referred to as a “Dual Dogwood”), French Immersion students must meet the graduation requirements for the Dogwood Diploma and, of these 80 credits, they must earn:
 1. At least 16 credits at the Grade 12 level (including a Français langue seconde- immersion course at the Grade 12 level).
 2. Français langue seconde-immersion 10 (4 credits).
 3. A Français langue seconde-immersion course at the Grade 11 level (4 credits) or IB French A2 (SL) 11.
 4. Français langue seconde-immersion 12 (4 credits).
 5. At least 12 credits in Grade 10, 11, or 12 courses that are in French with at least 4 of these credits at the Grade 11 or 12 level.

At NWSS, students can choose from the following Language Arts and Social Studies courses:

Language Arts – French Immersion

5. Communication orale 11
6. Études du cinéma et de la littérature francophone 11
7. Médias et communication numérique 11

Social Studies – French Immersion

8. Explorations en Sciences Humaines 11
9. Justice Sociale 12
10. Peuples autochtones de la Colombie – Britannique 12

As well, students may be able to complete their Dual Dogwood and an IB Diploma, provided that they take the appropriate IB courses.

11. As stated earlier, a higher percentage of students in New Westminister are enrolled in French immersion (currently 13%) than the provincial average of other school districts (10%) . As well, the program has remained relatively stable in terms of size over the years. This could be due to the fact that there is only one secondary school for the entire district, thereby meaning that students do not necessarily need to make the difficult decision to move from their catchment area school to continue in FI, as all New Westminister students attend NWSS regardless of programming.
12. There were frequent comments made by staff regarding the fact that the small size of district allows for all French Immersion teachers to know each other, thereby making collaboration and support easier to achieve. Again, the fact that there are only 3 EFI, 1 LFI

and 1 secondary school allows for more hands-on and in-person support from the District's French Facilitator who last year was able to spend a full day each week in each of the three elementary schools. As well, the French Coordinator was able to survey each school, grade and teacher as to which French resources they required for their classrooms.

13. Each year, with support from the Government of Canada, the British Columbia Ministry of Education and Child Care provides OLEP (Official Languages in Education Protocol) funding to school districts offering French education programs. Recognizing that resources for French Immersion programs are often difficult to find and expensive to purchase, these funds are intended to aid in the purchase of learning resources, including E-learning, and the provision of professional development for teachers and cultural activities for students. Examples of how the funding was used last year in SD40 include:

- 13.4** additional French professional development opportunities
- 13.5** technology such as iPads and document cameras for each FI classroom
- 13.6** a laptop cart for the FI secondary program,
- 13.7** literacy kits for each EFI grade
- 13.8** new French-language secondary Science textbooks,
- 13.9** cultural events such as a French talent show and Mardi Gras Week

Thanks to the District's ability to access a separate Ministry of Education "French Immersion Growth Initiatives" fund in the amount of \$175,000 for both the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years, the District has been able to focus on FI teacher retention and mentorship. With these additional funds, increases in FTE were made for both the French Facilitator and the French Coordinator. SD40 also received an additional \$15,000 grant from Make A Future and will be using that money to attend career fairs and offer incentives to those FI teachers who may be interested in signing a contract with SD40.

14. The French Immersion teachers in New Westminister come to the program with diverse backgrounds and experiences, all of which enhances the learning experience for all FI students. Adequate staffing in French Immersion is always a concern for all school districts, but the district's Human Resources Department states that while there are often unanticipated difficulties (i.e. several French Immersion staff requiring medical or maternity leaves during the course of the same school year), in general they are able to fill all French Immersion postings, with some being more difficult to fill than others (i.e. Resource, Teacher-Librarian, etc.). This success is in part due to a strong relationship with local universities and the fact that the school district often hosts cohorts of teacher-candidates who if successful, are then guaranteed interviews for future employment with the district.

"The French Immersion program has been a massive benefit to the well being of my child already. He is extremely excited to share the new language he is learning, and having the extra challenge suits him very well as he struggles with attention and boredom. He comes home singing songs in French, asking to check out French books from the library, and is generally very proud of what he has accomplished in the program so far". (parent)

“Kudos to the EFI staff and teachers in New Westminster!” (parent)

“Very pleased with the program and feel grateful our child received a spot.” (parent)

“I've been really happy with the program, having had 2 kids in EFI. It was good having the same group of kids on the way up and really appreciate that they will have a smaller "cohort" within High School at NWSS. Most of the teachers have been excellent. Many thanks to all who make this possible for our kids.” (parent)

“French Immersion is an extremely important and valuable program.” (parent)

“We have had great experiences in the French Immersion program in New West. The district as a whole needs more space, resources etc. and the FI program shouldn't bear the brunt of the issue.” (parent)

What are the Challenges and Obstacles?

- As is the case in every school district in the Lower Mainland (and indeed in BC and the rest of Canada), parental demand for the Early French Immersion Program is much greater than the availability of spaces in New Westminster's program. Some parents commented that they would like to see the French Immersion Program available in every elementary school in the district. As noted earlier in this report, there are usually twice as many students applying to the program as there are spaces. While ideally, it would be wonderful if all school districts could offer more Early French Immersion classes, it is not currently possible in New Westminster, or most other school districts for that matter. This is due primarily to a significant shortage of qualified French Immersion teachers in BC, as well as a lack of the necessary additional physical space (classrooms) in most schools.

Canadian Parents for French, which has an active chapter in New Westminster, continues to advocate for more French Immersion classes across the country. Both the Federal and Provincial governments have initiated projects such as the Growth Initiatives Fund outlined earlier which are intended to support current and possible future measures that the Government of Canada, Provincial Ministries of Education, faculties of education and school boards could consider to address the French Teacher supply and demand gap. To be clear, this is a national issue that needs to be examined at all levels of government and is not specific to the New Westminster School District.

- All school districts struggle to properly staff their French Immersion classrooms. The most common issues are teachers not wanting to work full time, an insufficient number of French-speaking Teachers Teaching on Call (TTOCs), difficulty finding long term replacements for maternity leaves, etc. However, an issue that is somewhat unique to New Westminster is French Immersion teachers who, due to the small size of the district and the low number of French Immersion classes, are unable to get a teaching assignment in the particular grade or subject area that they want. This forces some to make the difficult decision to either leave the program and start teaching in English, or leave the district entirely because they can get the position that they want in a neighbouring district.

"Better recruitment of new teachers and retention of new teachers. Being conscious that timing of application matters (we lose teachers because they can apply and accept positions in other districts before New West is accepting applications). Better incentives to come and stay within the district." (staff)

- A topic that was brought up by all partner groups was the need for a better understanding on the part of parents as to what the French Immersion program entails. The school district does hold online information meetings for parents, but unfortunately, many parents are not taking advantage of these information sessions before making a decision to enroll their child.

During the focus group meetings, frequent mention was made of the perception on the part of some parents that French Immersion is a sort of “enrichment program” that offers something “extra”, and that there are fewer discipline and learning issues in a French Immersion class, none of which is actually the case. Other than the language of instruction being French rather than English, all public school classrooms in BC follow the same curriculum, welcome the same students (there is no “selection process” for French Immersion), and provide the same educational opportunities. At these focus group meetings, suggestions were made such as mandatory participation in a parent 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 many families.

- Attrition is an issue for the Early French Immersion program in New Westminister. With only one Kindergarten class in each school each year, along with the fact that students do not usually join the program after Grade One, this means that there is a maximum of 22 students possible at any given grade in Grades One through Five. One can assume that each year in each class, there will be a certain number of students who will not continue in EFI for a variety of reasons. Unless a student arrives from out of district and has previously been in French Immersion elsewhere, there is no opportunity for students to be added to the cohort. In addition, some staff noted that some parents choose to remove their student from the program in Grade Three due to the perception that with the Introduction of English Language Arts in Grade Four, it becomes much more difficult.

All of this means that by the time a cohort arrives at the Grade 4/5 level, there are often much smaller numbers of students than started off, leading to combined classes that are usually smaller than their English counterparts. In some cases in some schools, there were English classes of 29 and FI classes of 18 or 19. This creates obvious inequities and sometimes resentment between the two programs. The smaller number of students can also cause social issues, as there is no opportunity to move students around and provide them with new opportunities to meet and interact with a new group of students.

“One of the issues with the EFI program is class composition. Because there is only one division of kids in each grade is it hard to mix up classes and kids who don't fit in can struggle to find friends.” (parent)

- Both teachers and administrators and even some parents commented on the lack of a French “presence” in any of the French immersion schools. With the exception of the 3 elementary and 1 middle school bearing the name “Ecole” on their outside signage (and it should be noted that this is not the case for NWSS), this reviewer was hard-pressed to find any indication inside the schools that there was indeed a French program there. There was little to no bilingual signage on spaces that are shared by both programs (i.e. washrooms, library, office, gym) and when asked, it was reported that school-wide announcements,

assemblies or even the singing of the national anthem rarely happen in both languages. Part of this may be attributed to the fact that there is only one French-speaking administrator in the entire district, as well as virtually no bilingual counsellors, resource teachers, teacher-librarians or educational assistants. One staff member referred to it being “a constant uphill battle” to ensure that there was some French seen and spoken in the school.

- Further to the point of a shortage of bilingual staff in the district, both parents and teachers spoke of their concerns regarding a lack of French resource support or French-speaking EA support for students with diverse needs. While designated students and those requiring resource support are provided with the necessary time and trained personnel, it can sometimes be provided in English as there is no one qualified to do so in French.

“I think that it is applicable to all levels and programs of learning but we need way more support staff - I understand it’s a province wide issue.” (parent)

“I was always told that French has the same support as English, which in reality they don’t. Instead of being so quick to have those children switch into English without allowing these children to be challenged.” (parent)

“The issue of resources has always been a problem. Especially in the K-5 schools. At times my child could only access supports from an English-speaking EA because our school did not have a French speaking resource teacher.” (parent)

“The lack of educational support for French students is incredibly disappointing. The solution of moving a child to English as there are not supports in place in French is an unacceptable answer. If you are a French Immersion school you need to support your French students.” (parent)

- While teachers were appreciative of the support provided by the French Facilitator and French Coordinator, and believe that the model of having someone in the school every week is a good plan, they don’t feel that one day a week is enough, and would like to see it increased particularly to support the many new teachers who join the program each year. Secondary FI staff would like to see more professional development opportunities and curriculum support, particularly as it relates to finding resources in difficult subject areas, such as Indigenous Education, Social and Emotional Learning and climate change, to name a few. Several spoke of a lack of feeling supported at the district level, given that there is currently no French Coordinator assigned specifically to Grades 9-12, as there had been in the past.

Considerations

1. While the district does offer online parent information sessions 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 developing further sources of information which are easily accessible by parents. In addition to reviewing and adding to the FAQs and parent resources 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. Other options could include monthly newsletters, parent workshops, etc.

“RE: EFI entry into kindergarten -- We’d like to see more informed parents before their children enter kindergarten. Many parents do not seem truly aware of the expectations Many parents do not seem to understand that they might need to facilitate some work at home..... Furthermore, many parents are unaware that their child will not receive formal English Language Arts instruction until grade 4 and express surprise at this when students are in grade 1 and 2.” (staff)

“I know very little about these programs despite having worked in a school offering French immersion. Spreading information more widely to different communities could be helpful”(staff)

“Ensure parents understand the communication component of learning in another language. Perhaps a basic screener should be presented when applying to EFI so that parents of children with communication difficulties might be encouraged to consider late immersion later on - EFI is only going to impede the learning of those of significant need and there is not enough supplementary support to assist these young learners.” (staff)

“I think there should be parent mentors who have kids in the program to guide people coming into the program and let them know about various French resources available.” (parent)

“I would like to see more transparency from the District about what additional supports will and will not be offered in French, and some honest information about what French Immersion really is and what kinds of learners would work best in the program and what kinds of learners are likely to struggle more in the program.” (parent)

Parents also spoke wanting to see more opportunities for their children to speak French, so perhaps the district could look at supporting more cultural, cross-district activities that happen in French outside of the classroom. They also expressed an interest in having a place where they could be made aware of any possible French activities happening in the broader community.

“Events for French speakers in New Westminster because the French community is located in Vancouver and it's far from here to go there every time.” (parent)

“I would like to see some clubs/groups outside of class to encourage more speaking French outside of school.” (parent)

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2. In addition to the professional development activities that are already available to French Immersion teachers in New Westminster, the district could consider providing more opportunities for collaboration between elementary, middle and secondary FI teachers in order to promote a greater understanding of the program at all levels. Release time for teachers to work in grade groups, etc. would also be beneficial and would help to alleviate the sense of isolation of which some teachers spoke.

“This year’s collaboration afternoons were useful, positive, allowed for full SD40 collaboration, promoted consistency across sites, allowed for full team (and grade group) building. Since EFI classroom teachers are often the only ones offering their grades in French at a particular site, it can be professionally isolating. Full EFI SD40 collaboration significantly reduces this feeling of isolation. More collaboration for all SD40 EFI staff, please! More opportunities allowed for collaboration as an EFI team during pro D days.” (staff)

“When I started working for the school district in French immersion, the program was very close knit (with many opportunities to work, learn and socialize) as a French immersion staff together. Our standards and objectives for the program were clear, consistent, and more universal across the district. We saw the coordinator of the program often in our classrooms and at training sessions... And I felt very connected to what was happening at the district level, and at other schools. I find now that our program is fragmented, I have never met our program of choice coordinator (at least I think not), I do not know other teachers in French immersion at other schools, and I feel disconnected. I do not feel that our programs are being advocated for, well-advertised, and well understood by the district.”(staff)

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3. In the past, annual school visits were arranged for all Grade 5 classes in the district. These visits took place just before the application period for Programs of Choice and were intended to provide students with information about the Late French Immersion Program. In recent years, these visits have not happened and it is highly likely that this is what has caused a decrease in the number of applicants to the program. Currently, the only opportunity for anyone to learn about LFI is if they choose to participate in the general French Immersion parent information meeting which happens virtually. As the students themselves play a large part in deciding whether or not they want to attend Late French Immersion, it would seem only sensible that they should be provided with an opportunity, either in-person or virtually, to learn about the program and ask their own questions.

“We should bring back visits to the elementary schools to promote/explain the late French Immersion program.”(staff)

4. If the district continues to run “dual track” schools (housing both neighbourhood English and French Immersion programs), there needs to be an increased effort to provide bilingual signage in all common areas of the school site, as well as and other details that indicate that it is a bilingual school, such as daily announcements in both languages, O Canada in French and English, etc.

Wherever possible, the district should place French-speaking administrators in schools that house French Immersion programs. Principals spoke honestly about feeling limited in the type and amount of support that they are able to provide to new or struggling French Immersion staff when they are not able to understand the language of instruction in the classroom or the content or quality of the resources being used. As well, bilingual administrators can greatly support the creation of a bilingual ambiance in the school.

“The principals of French immersion schools should be functionally bilingual. This should be a consideration when school districts are seeking new principals. At a minimum, they should be knowledgeable about, and supportive of, the immersion program.”

Ministry of Education French Immersion Policy

5. The largest and most important change that the district should consider in order to truly support and strengthen the Early French Immersion program in New Westminster is the amalgamation of the three elementary EFI programs into at most two, if not one school site. Given the challenges of attrition, class size inequities, difficulty finding qualified French staff in Resource, Library and other positions, amalgamation would go a long way to alleviating most if not all of these problems. It is this reviewer’s opinion that the current situation of having an EFI program at three different sites is not sustainable.

Ideally, one single track (French only) site with the same number of Kindergarten classes (3) offered each year would ensure that although attrition would inevitably continue, there would be at least two full classes at each grade after Kindergarten, allowing for more ability to move students around, etc. It would also allow for the development of a true “French milieu” with bilingual administrators and support staff all concentrated in one site. Professional development and mentoring support would also be enhanced and focussed on one location.

Unfortunately, this is not something that could happen immediately, as it would mean catchment boundary changes and moving the existing neighbourhood program to another site . This is a process that would take several years and would involve significant community consultation. It should perhaps be considered as a long-term goal and could be factored into the District’s Long-Range Facilities Plan.

A more immediate consideration would be the consolidation of the three current sites into two schools, both of which would remain as dual track schools. Again, in order to strengthen the program, it is essential that there be more than one EFI Kindergarten class at each site. With two K classes offered at each site each year (4 in total), the numbers of students in each consecutive grade will be healthier than what is currently occurring. Again, this amalgamation would also help with staffing shortages and professional development support as there is one less site to maintain.

“EFI should be located in 1 site or 2 with a principal that has a great knowledge and passion for French Education.”(staff)

“EFI elementary should be housed in either one school or two. 3 schools is stretching the resources too much.” (staff)

“I do not believe that we have staff consistently available to support the current level of programming for POC. .”(staff)

“I feel that we could offer programs of choice at few sites (1 school for EFI rather than 3) and Montessori at 1. New Westminster is a small city.” (staff)

“Having 2 classes at each school would allow for a.) collaboration with a colleague at your school site b.) would allow for advantageous mixing of students to minimize the reality of challenging dynamics with class composition at each site. This would reduce numbers on the EFI wait list and respond to parents’ demand for more EFI elementary classes in SD40 .” (staff)

“The POC should be consolidated into 1-2 schools for EFI and 1 school for MT. The current model does not allow for the ability to provide diverse classrooms each year (same students each class each year), does not account for attrition which creates small classes in the higher grades, stretches qualified French speaking teaching and educational assistants (there are not enough qualified French speaking teachers EAs for 3 EFI schools), does not allow for co-teaching when there is no other class of the same grade level, nor does it allow teachers to plan and support one another when the EFI program, in particular, is spread over 3 schools. “ (staff)

“Given that NW isn't that big, look at bringing together some of the program such as EFI into fewer schools so as to build a stronger community of French speakers within a school.” (parent)

“Knowing that the district is growing, being proactive with setting up programs of choice will help support future students.” (parent)

“For something like EFI, if there were fewer locations but offering more spaces within the fewer schools, there would be more of an opportunity for the students to practice speaking French. There would also be more resources in fewer locations.” (parent)

“Elementary schools are not pure immersion into French and the language is suffering. A magnet school with admin staff and non-enrolling teachers (art/music etc) who spoke French would improve the quality of the spoken language.” (parent)

Home Learners Program

The Home Learners Program (HLP) began in New Westminister in 2002 with one teacher and a group of 15 students in Kindergarten through Grade 8. Since that time, the program has grown to enrol between 100 and 180 students each year as outlined in the graph below. Currently, there is 3.8 FTE in teaching staff assigned to the program.

Year	Enrolment
2013/14	110
2014/15	105
2015/16	122
2016/17	176
2017/18	182
2018/19	123
2019/20	116
2020/21	140
2021/22	121
2022/23	116

A breakdown of the 2022-23 enrolment for HLP is as follows:

Grade	Enrolment
Kindergarten	6
Grade 1	11
Grade 2	18
Grade 3	19
Grade 4	9
Grade 5	16
Grade 6	14
Grade 7	14
Grade 8	9
TOTAL	116

Until this year, the Home Learners Program has been categorized as a Distributed Learning Program, but beginning in the 2023-24 school year, HLP will be a Provincial Online Learning School (POLS). A total of 18 school districts and 16 independent school authorities have signed Agreements with the Ministry of Education to become Provincial Online Learning Schools. As a POLS, the Home Learners Program has the ability to continue to enrol students who live in cities other than New Westminister. Out of district students make up a large portion of the student population in the SD40 Home Learners Program.

Unlike the French Immersion Program, there is not a single entry point at Kindergarten that students apply to each year. Rather, students often come to the program as a family unit and therefore, the number of students and which grade levels they are applying to will vary from year to year.

Grade	2022 Applicants	2023 Applicants (as of 08/08/23)
Kindergarten	10	13
Grade 1	9	1
Grade 2	11	12
Grade 3	10	2
Grade 4	5	5
Grade 5	2	1
Grade 6	3	5
Grade 7	4	0
Grade 8	2	0
Total	56	39

Grade	Sept. 2022 New Students	Sept. 2023 New Students
Kindergarten	4	13
Grade 1	5	0
Grade 2	4	6
Grade 3	3	0
Grade 4	4	2
Grade 5	2	1
Grade 6	9	4
Grade 7	5	0
Grade 8	1	0
Total	37	26

Families choose the Home Learners Program for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to, some who are looking for an alternative to a traditional “bricks and mortar” school, those who are dedicated to the concept of home-schooling, and those who have had a negative experience with a regular school setting. The Covid-19 pandemic also brought an increase in applications to the program.

In September, the teachers, also known as “Learning Consultants”, work with the families to create a learning plan for each child. Each teacher has a caseload of approximately 35 students throughout the year, and works with all of the children in a particular family rather than all

students at a particular grade level. Generally, teachers will stay with the same families through their entire time at HLP, unless a change is requested by the family or the teacher.

Also in September, students are expected to complete “activation activities” as per Ministry of Education requirements. These activation activities are cross-curricular projects that are assigned by the teachers. In person learning begins in October and students attend school on Tuesdays and Thursdays each week from 10 am to 2 pm. During the reporting periods of December, March and June, the Tuesday and Thursday in person classes stop, while the teacher, student and parent assess the child’s learning together, and then the teachers write the formal report cards for the students.

When enrolled in the Home Learners Program, families are provided with a \$600 per child per year allotment from the Ministry of Education. This allotment can be used for a variety of educational supports such as learning resources (i.e. online math program or art supplies), memberships (Science World), private lessons (piano or gymnastics), or camps. Families must provide the school with a list of how they wish to spend the allotment, teachers review the request, and all ordering of materials, etc. goes through the school office.

In addition to the allotment, the program also has a large lending library that parents may use to borrow books, resources, manipulatives, games, etc. to supplement their own teaching materials. There is also a substantial budget assigned to the program to support “professional services”. Currently, this funding is being used to pay for a teacher to provide online French language instruction for those students at the Grade 5-8 level. In the past it has also been used for music and visual arts education.

Survey Results

Grade 5-8 students in the Home Learners Program: 21 respondents

Parents of students in the Home Learners Program: 48 respondents (42% of whom identified as “being a resident of another city”)

71% of Grade 5-8 Home Learners students surveyed agree or strongly agree that they are happy to be enrolled in the Home Learners Program.

71% of Grade 5-8 Home Learners students surveyed agree or strongly agree that they would recommend the Home Learners Program to other students.

93% of HLP parents surveyed agree or strongly agree that they understand the intent of the Home Learners Program and support the structure of the program.

92% of HLP parents surveyed agree or strongly agree that their child’s academic needs are being met in the Home Learners Program.

92% of HLP parents surveyed agree or strongly agree that their child is happy to be a part of the Home Learners Program and is proud of their learning.

97% of HLP parents surveyed agree or strongly agree that they feel informed and included in their child’s learning.

What is Working?

15. Although it is a small staff, teachers in this program have worked together for a long time, in some cases 18-20 years. The teachers, parents and administrators all comment on the fact that the teaching staff work very well together and are passionate about the program and the students they support.
16. Parents are thankful that HLP provides an alternative to families who are not interested in the traditional model of schooling. They like the flexibility of the program as well as the blend of in-person and at home learning. They commented that they feel well-supported and respected by the teachers.
17. Parents and staff also very much value the school site itself, located adjacent to Hume Park, and the fact that they have a dedicated building that they are not obligated to share with another program. Prior to their arrival at Hume Park, the program had been housed in four other buildings, which was said to have created some difficult situations.

“The location of HLP, next to Hume Park is vitally important to the program as the kids are out there learning about nature daily. This location should not be changed.” (parent)

18. Parents appreciate that one teacher will work with the whole family and will continue to support them for as long as requested. Teachers comment that this allows them to get a “long term view of the child – not just for one or two years.” At the same time, all of the teachers work with all of the students (with the exception of the K/1 level), allowing for exposure to a diversity of teaching styles and overall familiarity of all staff with all students.
19. There is a very strong library of teaching and learning resources for families to access, allowing parents to make use of many materials that may not have been available to them otherwise.
20. Parents state that they have seen an overall improvement in acceptance, support and recognition of the program on the part of the school district, but feel that there is still more work to be done in this area.

“Our year with the Home Learners Program was amazing and although it wasn’t a good long-term fit for our family, it is a really valuable program for the district to have.” (parent)

“This program is invaluable to so many families in New Westminister and the surrounding areas. This program is a unicorn in the province as it allows for amazing and beautiful learning to happen for so many unique kids. I've been a part of this program for 8 years. I have seen so many families join this community whose kids end up thriving there who were struggling in the traditional school system. This program is so wonderful for its physical location and for its learning philosophies that it practices without fail. My family and I are very happy and proud to be Hume Parkers.” (parent)

“Don't remake the wheel. New Westminster's Hume Park is a gem in the community. It allows people here and in remote areas to school their children well. We love that New West is forward thinking and prizes alternative programs like this. Without them, we'd personally be homeschooling on our own with no guidance. Hume allows us to NOT have my child be stuck to a computer all day as well. This is vital to their health and wellbeing. Some online learning is great, but too much is damaging. We appreciate our flexibility in the ways we learn every day. I'd love to see Hume expanded to allow homeschooling through to grade 12 with the ability to graduate with a dogwood. These kids are doing amazing things! Writing books, starting businesses, doing math competitions... Hume should be supported as much as possible to continue their great work, stop fearing their future, and expand.” (parent)

What are the Challenges and Obstacles?

1. A repeated concern from the teachers as well as the principal is the amount of staff time that it takes to move through the yearly allotment process. With an average of approximately 120 students accessing the fund every year, this means at least 120 lists of requests from parents that need to be reviewed and approved by staff and then given to the school clerical staff for ordering. Realistically, this is not in fact a one-time list of items that is provided at the beginning of the school year, but rather an on-going process that takes place almost all year long as requested items are added or changed before the spending deadline of March 31st.

“Please change your allotment process. For example, pls consider relaxing your restrictions on the vendors. The whole process is time consuming and involves several rounds of back and forth with the teacher, and between the teacher and the admin. Sometimes, we purchase resources that are outdated/useless because what are useful to us are not sold by your vendors. Sometimes, by the time of the actual ordering, the products are sold out, and we need to start the discussion process again with the teacher. Even worst, if it is close to the deadline, then there will not be enough time to re-order, and we lose our allotment. It is a waste of school staff time and resources and waste of our tax dollars.” (parent)

2. Although staff and parents appreciate the program’s current location at Hume Park, they do express concern about space challenges in the building itself. Every available space is in full use when the students are there for in person learning, and there are no “extra” small spaces available for one-on-one meetings, etc., during those times.
3. While in recent years the program has seen the addition of some inclusive supports for students, such as 2 Educational Assistants when previously there were none, staff comment that there continues to be a lack of adequate supports in place. Currently there is access to a Childcare Worker once a week, a Speech and Language Pathologist once a month, as well as a District Counselor and an Indigenous Support Worker. While this is an improvement over past experience, staff express concerns that all of these support services, and in particular counselling support, should be more frequent and accessible.
4. Parents and staff were quite frank about the fact that they do not feel that they are truly recognized as a part of the New Westminister School District or as a school in itself. They cite numerous examples of being forgotten or excluded from district-wide events, everything from not being invited to a middle school symposium for students, to not being provided access to passes for recreational events that are offered and available to students at other schools in the district.
5. While understanding that the activation activities are projects required by Ministry of Education, parents often felt these activities to be “an onerous extra”, in other words not really part of the curriculum. They said that they were often informed by teachers about the requirements for the project at the last minute, sometimes even too late. They also felt that it was a much larger task than necessary and often didn’t relate to what the family had planned in terms of their ongoing home-based curriculum. Parents felt that it could be

“reined in”, made smaller and more manageable, and that it needed to be provided to them much earlier in the process than is currently the case.

6. In addition to the poor communication around the activation activities noted above, parents spoke often of their concerns with the methods of communication in general. They complained of a lack of continuity as to who was sending out emails and when. They felt that there was an almost constant change of plans and last minute messages about these changes that were not received by all families in a timely manner, leading to confusion, errors, and missed opportunities.
7. Many parents referred back to the previous pre-Covid model where there was an optional third in person day available to interested families. The focus of this 3rd day was often outdoor activities, and many families feel that this is now something that is missing from the program.
8. And finally, parents believe that there is currently too much time taken for the individual student conferencing and assessment which leads up to the reporting periods. They say that taking all of September to conference to create the learning plans, and then conferencing again for 3 weeks prior to each of the reporting periods of December, March and June means that it is difficult for students to get into a routine. Just when they become used to going to school twice weekly, the in-person learning stops for conferencing.

Considerations

1. More of a concerted effort should be made to include the Home Learners Program in all district notices and events. If there is an opportunity for HLP students to participate in events or activities appropriate to their grade level, every attempt should be made to ensure that they are invited or considered. Given that these students will move into the mainstream system at NWSS after Grade 8 (if not earlier) any opportunity to familiarize them with the rest of the SD40 school community early on can only help with that transition.
2. In regard to the huge amount of time and energy that is involved in the allotment process, there are two options that the district can consider to reduce the stress and provide more structure and support to the process. The first would be to increase the clerical allocation to the school to 1.00 FTE. Staff and the school principal report that the current 0.60 FTE (3 days per week) does not allow enough time for the clerical person at the school to do all of the necessary ordering of resources and still have time for the myriad of other duties that are a part of a normal school clerical role.

The second option would be to place requirements or restrictions on how at least a portion of the allotment can be spent. For example, if 1/3 or 1/2 of the \$600 amount must be spent on “required materials”, then the number of individualized resources needing to be ordered would be greatly reduced, and would be more manageable within the current clerical FTE. Examples of required materials could include pre-determined lists of recommended resources appropriate to each grade level or kits in areas such as literacy, Math or Science created by the teachers to support the program.

3. Many of the concerns voiced by parents centered around the lack of stable, consistent and regular communication. The teaching staff and administrator need to work to create a communication plan that is shared with all HLP families and provides regular, scheduled and consistent communication from a single source. This will ensure that everyone hears the same information at the same time and that no one is left out or informed too late. It is suggested that all teachers would share their communication messages first with the principal who, working with the clerical staff, would be the primary contact for all outgoing communication with families.

*“Inefficient communication emails: the emails sometimes get sent out from “Hume Park Homelearners”, some from the learning consultant or another teacher, and it is very confusing when we are searching for past emails because we don’t remember who sent it.”
(parent)*

“Usually the showcase projects are not emailed with adequate time to complete them. The instructions are often very confusing. And often only a few days before the showcase presentation week is when the requirements for the actual presentation are emailed. It is

also very confusing to read and understand. I know other families have expressed their frustration about this as well.” (parent)

In an added effort to improve communication with families, staff should consider reviewing the activation activities that are provided in September with an eye to providing the directions and topics earlier than is currently the case, as well as possibly streamlining or reducing the actual amount of work required.

“The activation activities are too intense at the very beginning of the year. They are very challenging and have such a tight deadline.” (parent)

4. The district should consider reviewing how the funding allocated to professional services is being used. Currently an external consultant is hired with these funds to teach FSL online to students in Grades 5-8. Also, other subject matter experts in other areas are brought in to support the program in areas such as visual arts, etc. Perhaps these subjects should become part of the in person or home learning and then some or all of this funding could instead be allocated to increase clerical support or to provide additional inclusive supports such as counseling.
5. The final and most impactful change suggested for the Home Learners Program is increasing the amount of face-to-face instruction time during the school year. Typically, there are 36 weeks (72 days for HLP) of learning in a school year. In addition to the scheduled winter and spring breaks, the Home Learners Program misses approximately 4 weeks of in-person learning in September and 9 weeks during the course of the school year for conferencing and reporting. This means that their school year is now down to approximately 23 weeks, or 46 days.

In order to provide as robust and complete a program as possible, the district should consider increasing the amount of in person time that students currently spend in the program. There are a variety of options that could be considered. The first would be to add a third day of in-person instruction to the current two days a week schedule, meaning an additional 23 days of instruction. But this option could infringe on a family’s already scheduled home-based learning activities. Also, for those families who come from out of district, this could be an added burden to now have to make the trip three times a week.

A second option would be to continue with the two days per week but increase the amount of time that the students spend in school on each of those days. Instead of being there from 10 am to 2 pm, the schedule could be changed to have classes begin at 9:30 am and end at 2:30 pm. Even adding only one hour to each day could make a significant difference. An additional 2 hours per week over 23 weeks means 46 additional hours or more than 9 additional days (4 and a half weeks) of in-person instruction.

The third possibility would be to shorten the conferencing breaks . Currently, all in-person learning stops for 3 weeks 3 times a year, or 9 weeks in total, and this is in addition to no

in-person sessions for the month of September. If the district were to decrease the amount of conferencing time from 4 weeks to 3 in September, and 3 weeks to 2 in December, March and June, this would add 4 more weeks (8 more days) of actual in-person instruction to the school year.

Montessori

The Montessori Program in New Westminster began at Richard McBride Elementary in 1997 with a single K/1 class. At the time, there was no actual physical space for the program at the school so it was located at a local community centre, and students in the class would walk over to the school to participate in various activities. The following year the District added the next grade and found space for both classes at the school itself. Montessori also started at Lord Tweedsmuir Elementary in 2002. Because Lord Tweedsmuir was also an elementary site for the Early French Immersion Program, capacity eventually became an issue and the Montessori Program was moved to Connaught Heights in 2015.

Currently, two schools in the New Westminster School District that offer the Montessori Program; Connaught Heights Community School and Skwo;wech Elementary (formerly McBride). The program spans Kindergarten to Grade 5 and does not continue at the middle school level. During the 2022-23 school year, there were 5 divisions of Montessori in each of the two schools and just over 200 students registered in the Montessori Program, making up 3% of the total student enrolment in New Westminster. There is currently 10 FTE of teaching staff assigned to the Montessori Program.

Grade	Montessori Enrolment
Kindergarten	39
Grade 1	40
Grade 2	42
Grade 3	27
Grade 4	36
Grade 5	25
TOTAL	209

These enrolment numbers have remained relatively consistent over the years as well.

Year	Total District Montessori Enrolment
2019/20	231
2020/21	223
2021/22	210
2022/23	209

As is the case in Early French Immersion, each year the District offers 1 Montessori Kindergarten class (20 spaces) at each of the two schools. And again, like French Immersion,

there are always more applicants to the Montessori program than there are Kindergarten spaces available. Siblings have priority for this program as well.

Year	Number of Kindergarten Applicants
2023	88
2022	122
2021	93
2020	70
2019	47
2018	66

It should also be noted that although it is not possible to provide exact data because there are two separate application processes, it is well-known anecdotally that many families will apply for both the Montessori Program and Early French Immersion when registering their child for Kindergarten. Given this fact, it is unclear how many of the applicants listed in the graph above are actually double-counted (one child who applied for both programs) in the Early French Immersion applications as well.

Unlike Early French Immersion, where the entry points are only Kindergarten and sometimes Grade One, students can in fact join the Montessori program at any grade level. Regardless, the vast majority of students will enter at Kindergarten.

Grade	Sept. 2020	Sept. 2021	Sept. 2022	Sept. 2023
Kindergarten	38	38	39	38
Grade 1	2	8	9	0
Grade 2	0	1	1	1
Grade 3	0	1	1	0
Grade 4	0	0	0	0
Grade 5	0	0	1	0

There is no specific Ministry of Education policy related to Montessori. The program was created in the early 20th century by Maria Montessori, the first female doctor in Italy. It is an educational approach that emphasizes individualised instruction and self-paced learning and is based on the belief that children are naturally curious and capable of learning independently.

The American Montessori Society (AMS) cites five core components of a Montessori Education:

1. Multi-age classrooms with a 3 year age span
2. Student choice of activity from within a prescribed range of options
3. Uninterrupted blocks of work time, ideally 3 hours per day
4. Specialized educational materials made out of natural materials such as wood
5. A trained teacher experienced in observing a child's characteristics, tendencies, innate talents, and abilities

Survey Results

Grade 5 students in the Montessori Program: 22 respondents

Parents of students in the Montessori Program: 80 respondents

100% of Grade 5 Montessori students surveyed agree or strongly agree that they are happy to be enrolled in the program.

86% of Grade 5 Montessori students surveyed agree or strongly agree that they like the things that they learn in the program.

89% of Montessori parents surveyed agree or strongly agree that their child's academic needs are being met in the program.

83% of Montessori parents surveyed agree or strongly agree that their child is engaged in their learning in the program.

94% of Montessori parents surveyed agree or strongly agree that their child is happy to be a part of the program and is proud of their learning.

84% of Montessori parents surveyed agree or strongly agree that they would recommend the program to other families.

What is Working?

1. Parents interviewed say that they are thrilled with how engaged their children are in their learning. Many believe that the Montessori program offers freedom and flexibility for the students to choose where they would like to focus their attention on any given day. Some talked of the program being able to “harness a student’s individuality” and support their personal areas of interest. They appreciated the students being able to learn at their own pace, and commented that they saw no anxiety or nervousness from their children when it came to school.
2. The Montessori Program aligns closely with BC’s revised curriculum, in that it offers differentiated instruction, hands-on learning, and allows learners to work at their own pace.

“What and how we teach our students has been redesigned to provide greater flexibility for teachers, while allowing space and time for students to develop their skills and explore their passions and interests. The deep understanding and application of knowledge is at the centre of the new model, as opposed to the memory and recall of facts that previously shaped education around the globe for many decades.”

BC Ministry of Education (<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/changing-curriculum>)

3. Both of the New Westminster schools which host the Montessori Program are well-supported by an involved parent community. The New Westminster Montessori Society is an active group of parent volunteers who in the past have focused primarily on fundraising in order to provide financial support for activities such as resources and experiences that relate directly to the Montessori program. In terms of district finances, Montessori classrooms receive the same support as regular classrooms. There is no additional funding provided to Montessori classrooms, as there is for French Immersion classes who receive additional federal funding through OLEP .
4. The school district is fortunate to have a dedicated teaching staff with strong Montessori pedagogy and training. Again, as noted with the French Immersion teachers, the small size of the school district allows the 10 FTE of Montessori teachers to know each other and to work together across the two school sites. There is definitely a sense of collaboration between the staffs at both schools, and professional development meetings are organized between the two sites whenever possible.

“Being part of the Montessori program has definitely made a difference for my daughter in her education in a short amount of time.” (parent)

“Very happy with our program and our child's experience in the program.” (parent)

“We love the program because we love the school, the staff and the community.” (parent)

“Wonderful experience in the Montessori program. We were looking to move away from NewWest but have had such a positive school experience we have decided to stay in the community.” (parent)

“We really love the Montessori program and sincerely hope it continues.”

What are the Challenges and Obstacles?

1. The biggest concern voiced by both Montessori parents and staff is the lack of understanding on the part of some parents as to what Montessori program is about. One parent interviewed said that in their experience, parents apply for the program because they are looking for something extra, something that they would see as enrichment over the regular neighbourhood classroom, but not because they know about or agree with the fundamental principles of the Montessori method. Several examples were cited of parents not truly understanding the focus on student-led activities, the importance of the type of materials used, why there are multi-age classrooms, all of which are core components of the program. As one staff member said, “Some parents enroll their children thinking it is highly structured and rigid, others enroll because they think it is a free for all and students can do whatever they want, whenever they want. In truth it is neither of these things.”

“I feel that the programs of choice do not support diversity and inclusion, but rather the opposite. They promote exclusivity and most parents that I know who are enrolling their children in the programs of choice, are doing so because they think it will give their children an advantage or they want their children to be above average.” (parent)

“Too often parents enrol their children into programs of choice without knowing what they are about.” (parent)

“Sometimes it feels like the public perceives that the programs of choice are better than the regular program and I feel like it has created a two-tier elitist system when looking at the classes at some locations.” (parent)

2. A significant problem for all BC school districts that offer Montessori as a Program of Choice is the difficulty in finding teachers who are actually trained in the Montessori Method. The reason for this shortage of qualified teachers can be attributed to several factors:
 1. Montessori training is not offered as part of any BC Teacher Education Program. Until a few years ago, UBC and SFU teacher candidates were able to request to be placed in a Montessori classroom for their practica, thereby giving them some experience in the program, but this is no longer the case. Also, even if the students were placed in a Montessori classroom, there was never any university coursework offered in Montessori pedagogy to accompany the experience.
 2. Montessori training is considered additional training to be completed after the initial teacher certification process, as would be the case for those teachers who wish to get more training to become a Teacher-Librarian or a Learning Support Teacher for example. This Montessori training is only offered in very limited places, none of which are recognized post-secondary institutions in BC and none of which can be found in the Lower Mainland area. There are some offerings which have very recently become available online.

3. Not only is the training difficult to find, the cost is higher than the cost of most graduate level education courses at local post secondary institutions.
 4. Many teachers will pursue further education, such as a Diploma Program or Masters' Degree not only because it opens up other teaching opportunities, but also because it benefits them financially. Teacher pay scales are based on the number of years of post-secondary education as well as their years of teaching experience. Unfortunately, the Teacher Qualification Services (TQS) does not accept the Montessori training as equivalent to a Diploma Program, because it is not *"from an accredited degree granting institute acceptable to the TQS"*. This means that there is no financial incentive for teachers to pursue the appropriate training and no way for them to recoup the significant costs that they have paid to be trained in Montessori pedagogy. Until this changes through the TQS, motivating teachers to complete the full Montessori training will continue to be a problem in all school districts in BC.
3. As was the case with French Immersion, staff commented on the lack of Educational Assistants trained in Montessori. Support staff interviewed commented on the desire to receive some sort of training or introduction to the Montessori philosophy before beginning an assignment in the program.
 4. Some parents and staff voiced concerns that the program in New Westminister was not a "pure" Montessori program. While again, these are issues that can be seen in virtually all public schools, they referred to it as "Montessori Lite" and believed that some of the Montessori concepts were followed but not all. This included:
 1. Concerns about a perceived lack of natural materials (ie. wooden blocks vs. Leggo)
 2. The physical set up of classrooms and equipment being virtually identical to a regular classroom and not specific to the Montessori requirements
 3. That there are no "uninterrupted blocks of time" as recommended by Maria Montessori. Since recess and lunch happen at prescribed times for the whole school, and having teacher prep times taught by other teachers and therefore scheduled into the week, the schedule in the Montessori classroom is much the same as in regular classrooms.
 4. Staff noted that it is sometimes hard to maintain the identity of the Montessori program when it is only a small program in a larger school.

"While I'm supportive of the Montessori program, I think that more resources are required to enhance the quality of the overall program. I question how well the program models and integrates Maria Montessori's beliefs and approaches, particularly when most teachers don't have formal training in the Montessori approach." (parent)

"I believe the difference between Montessori and the current curriculum is very minimal. I likely would have been just as happy in the regular stream." (parent)

“It seems not a lot of differences with the regular classroom, the activities and learning etc. are similar as the other regular class in the same grade, so I don’t feel special about this program, but my kid is happy in the school.” (parent)

5. While not necessarily an issue for the Montessori classrooms themselves, both school and district staff have commented on the class size inequities between Montessori and regular program classes. Because there is only one Montessori Kindergarten intake class each year, and it is not very common for students to enter the program in later years, there can be some attrition and a decrease in enrolment as students move into the Intermediate grades. Similarly, students moving into the neighbourhood at the Grade 3-5 level are most often requesting placement in a regular classroom. This can lead to Grade 4/5 Montessori classes that are significantly smaller than their Grade 4/5 counterparts in the regular program.
6. Replacement of learning resources in a Montessori classroom can be even more expensive than those in a regular classroom, and while they can sometimes be supported by the Montessori Society’s fundraising, there is no dedicated Montessori funding in the district’s budget.
7. And finally, both staff and parents spoke of a perception of little to no district support for the program, in terms of resourcing, professional development or communication.

Considerations

1. While the district does offer online parent information sessions prior to Montessori 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 further 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 Montessori classroom activities, of Montessori 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. Other options could include monthly newsletters, parent workshops, etc.

“I don't think that the program has done a very good job at educating parents about the Montessori program and its philosophy, beyond the information that is available on the District website and on the Montessori Society website.”(parent)

“We would like additional parent-oriented workshops or opportunities.” (staff)

2. The creation of a District Montessori Advisory Committee would help to improve communication with staff and parents and raise the profile of the program in the district. Representatives to this committee should come from district staff, Montessori teachers, and the Montessori Society. The mandate of the committee could include event planning, resource allocation, parameters for fundraising, out of school activities for families, etc. A similar district advisory committee already exists for French Immersion.

“I would like to see a welcome event where students, parents, and teachers can connect as they will be closely learning together for 5 years.”(parent)

3. All BC school districts should continue to advocate for the implementation of authentic Montessori training programs at BC universities. In addition, the Teacher's Qualification Service should be encouraged to reexamine the possibility of officially recognizing the genuine Montessori training provided by other institutions. Recognizing the additional years of training through a category upgrade and therefore financially compensating teachers for their studies would encourage more of them to enter the program.

On another note, this spring SFU advertised a 2 year Graduate Program called “Exploring Montessori- Inspired Educational Environments”, which is “designed for educators interested in inquiring into Montessori-inspired early learning educational environments, which support and nurture the unfolding of learner's gifts and potentials.” While once again, this is not a true Montessori training program, it is an option that would provide more than is currently available in the way of Montessori training at BC universities. The district may want to consider providing some financial support to teachers who are interested in pursuing this or other recognized Montessori training programs.

4. In order to support the principles of the Montessori program and provide the specific types of materials required in a Montessori classroom, the district should consider a small annual budget allocation for schools with Montessori classrooms. As is the case with the French funding provided to FI schools, this budget would only be used for items unique to the Montessori program. For example, the funds could be used to replace the math manipulatives and puzzles specific to the program, but would not be used for materials such as technology or books that would be seen to be useful in any classroom. These types of purchases would continue to be taken out of general school and district budgets.
5. Finally, the district may wish to consider amalgamating the two existing Montessori programs into one school. As noted for Early French Immersion, given the challenges of attrition, class size inequities, difficulty finding qualified Montessori-trained staff, the cost of resources, etc. amalgamation would significantly improve these issues. Again, it would involve some upheaval and displacement for current families, but in the long run would create a much stronger and more viable program.

“It is important for the Montessori program to have the correct grade groupings and to allow more options for combining grades. 5 Montessori teachers instead of 6 simply does not have the room for the combinations the program calls for. As well, the amount of IEPs in the intermediate grades is often more than the primary grades as students are identified through their school journey, but there is no other option for students to be put in another class because we don't have another class of the same grade combination. Therefore, the teacher is left in remedy.” (parent)

**Additional Items for Consideration
Which Impact All Programs of Choice**

The following considerations, if implemented, would support and enhance each of the Programs of Choice reviewed.

1. Currently, Administrative Policy 220 (Programs of Choice) states the following:

“Waitlists for Early French Immersion, Late French Immersion and Montessori will be dissolved on the last Friday of September at 4:00pm. “

It is recommended that this waitlist dissolution date for the Early French Immersion and Montessori Programs be changed to the last school day in December of that same year. It is not uncommon that after a month or two of school, families may decide that a program is not a good fit for their child, that transportation to the school is too difficult, or even that they will be moving out of district. Parents spoke of spaces becoming available in a Program of Choice after the September waitlist deadline had passed and that placement being given to someone newly arrived to the school rather than those who had previously been on the waitlist. Given that EFI has always accepted new students in Grade One and Montessori accepts students at any grade, there should not be any concerns about students being significantly behind in their learning if they enter the program 2 or 3 months after the school year has begun. The same however, can not be said for Late French Immersion. Given the more difficult curriculum at the Grade 6 level and the faster pace at which French vocabulary is acquired at this age, it would be a challenge for a student to begin the program a few months into the school year. This waitlist dissolution date should remain as it currently stands (at the end of September), but late admissions could be considered on a case-by-case basis.

1. The district may wish to look to work with its CUPE 409 Executive to find ways to support additional training for Educational Assistants who wish to work in Programs of Choice. This could include offering French language courses at the district level after school or online, or a series of workshops related to FI or Montessori pedagogy during district pro-d days. This should be helpful in attracting larger numbers of EAs interested in working in these programs.

Currently, CUPE does offer funds for training relevant to a member’s current position, and one CUPE member has used the funding to take French language courses.

2. One question was common to every survey distributed; “If New Westminister Schools were to consider offering additional Programs of Choice, I believe that students and their families would be interested in”. Additional program suggestions that were most frequently mentioned included:
 1. Outdoor/Environmental Education
 2. Mandarin Immersion

3. Fine Arts
4. Gifted or Challenge Programs
5. STEM focused programs

“Not all learners are identical and having a variety of programs with enough space for demand is key to students finding the right educational fit. New West has too few program supports for gifted/advanced learners.” (parent)

“I think we are lacking Programs of Choice that challenge those who are both strong academically and motivated to learn.” (parent)

“We have no middle school program of choice except LFI and HLP. There are many students leaving grade 5 who are not going to thrive in either of those programs, and who therefore have NO choice for grades 6, 7 and 8. I am an SD40 elementary school teacher (as well as a parent of students who did Montessori Elementary and LFI in SD40). As a teacher, I am worried about the lack of options for some of my students as they leave elementary and head to middle school.” (staff)

At the same time, many respondents believe that Programs of Choice should not take precedence over all students being able to attend their neighbourhood school. This is currently a problem in most of the New Westminster elementary schools housing the Early French Immersion and Montessori programs. Because of these programs, there is not currently a sufficient physical space for classrooms to meet the needs of the regular neighbourhood catchment program.

“Programs of Choice should not be located at over capacity schools.” (parent)

“Programs of choice are nice, but you are running out of places for kids to go to school near where they live - which is a much bigger problem.” (parent)

It is recommended that at this time, the district focus on supporting and improving existing Programs of Choice through the considerations already provided in this report and not look to add other program options until such time as current capacity issues are resolved.

3. A comment which appeared multiple times on virtually every type of survey was the lack of Programs of Choice in the Queensborough neighbourhood. This was a significant issue for many parents and staff. The district may wish to consider the future placement of one or more Programs of Choice in the Queensborough area in order to provide equity to all neighbourhoods.

“Queensborough is isolated from all Programs of Choice options.” (parent)

“Something (ANYTHING) in Queensborough. There are zero options for kids in Queensborough.” (parent)

“Queensborough has such a booming population, yet there are zero programs here for our children. Finally getting an expansion to our heavily over populated elementary, but still zero options to the kids in Queensborough. The community feels very left out and forgotten compared to the rest of the city..... I see the lack of thought for this community. Transiting over the bridge four times/day (to a school with a Program of Choice) during rush hour is a nightmare. If you had to take a bus, forget it. Lots of families are opting out of applying for Program of Choice options, just based on the transportation aspect.... We are part of this City too. Not just a group to collect tax money from, to fund programs on the 'main land.’” (parent)

“We live in Queensborough and I have a French background. I would have loved my kids to learn French but it was not accessible to us because it was not offered in Queensborough. Kids were also in Montessori preschool and I also believe strongly in the program but it was not accessible because it was not offered in our community.” (parent)

“Queensborough needs to have programs of choice so the parents who live down here don't have to trek across the bridge to take the kids to school. At a minimum it should be offered at the elementary school’ (parent)

“ I don't know of any programs available in Queensborough which seems like a shortcoming. It seems like these programs are more readily available in areas more likely to house higher SES or more highly educated families.” (staff)

4. Finally, it is highly recommended that the New Westminister School District consider hiring a District Administrator of Programs of Choice. Ideally, this individual would be fluently bilingual and experienced in French Immersion, but would also have knowledge of or experience with Montessori and/or hybrid programs such as HLP and would therefore be able to provide support to them as well. This Principal or Vice-Principal would provide that “district connection” that French Immersion teachers feel is lacking, improve relationships with the Home Learners’ Program community by being the visible district representative to the program, create a stronger relationship with the Montessori staff and parents, as well as lead the two District Advisory Committees previously mentioned in this report.

This District Administrator would be able to oversee the information provided to parents regarding Programs of Choice, support and work closely with the district’s HR department in their hiring of teachers and other staff for these programs, work with teacher consultants to plan for and provide relevant professional development, and support collaboration opportunities for each of the program groups. Additionally, this person could be the sole administrator responsible for the Home Learners Program, thereby eliminating the need for the existing 0.2 Principal FTE which is currently assigned to the program.

With Gratitude

The information provided in this report is intended to support the New Westminster 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 review. The participants were open, honest, and welcoming, and each gave willingly of their time to ensure that a complete picture of their school, their program, their beliefs, and their thoughts were shared.

I would also like to commend the school and district staff who work in all New Westminster schools for their obvious dedication to student success and their pride in their schools and their programs.