



Program Committee
Thursday, December 11, 2025
6:00 pm

BE YOU. BE EXCELLENT.



The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board acknowledges our presence on ancestral Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Confederacy land as determined by the Dish with One Spoon treaty.

The intent of this agreement is for all nations sharing this territory to do so responsibly, respectfully and sustainably in perpetuity.

We respect the longstanding relationships with the local Indigenous communities, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the Six Nations of the Grand River.

Program Committee Workplan

Program Committee Meeting Date	Program Committee Reports
December 11, 2026	Elementary Program Strategy, Secondary Program Strategy & Elementary French Immersion Location Strategy and Application Process
February 19, 2026	Information Session (50 minutes): Learning for Life: A look at Continuing Education, Suspension & Expulsion 2024-2025, Caring & Safe Schools Action Plan 2024-2027 Update Program Review Guiding Principles
March 26, 2026	Student Achievement Action Plan (Ministry Requirement) MYSP - Progress Rpts Goals (1-3): Literacy, Numeracy, Future Preparedness Human Rights & Equity Action Plan 2023-2027 (including Hate-Based Incident Tracking Tool data)



**2025
PROGRAM
STRATEGY
REVIEW**



HWDSB

**Elementary Program Strategy,
Secondary Program Strategy
& Elementary French
Immersion Location Strategy
and Application Process**



HWDSB
BE YOU. BE EXCELLENT.

Scope of the Program Review

Three-parts with Malatest Consulting:

1. Secondary Program Strategy
2. Elementary Program Strategy
3. French Immersion Location Strategy and Application Procedure

Program Review Timelines

Phase	Focus	Timeline	Status
Phase 1	Project Planning and Scoping	November 2024– January 2025	Complete
Phase 2	Primary Data Collection	February – May 2025	Complete
Phase 3	Analysis	September – October 2025	Complete
Phase 4	Report of Findings and Recommendations	December 11, 2025	Complete

“It creates a tiered education system. Most parents want to put their kids in [French Immersion] because it ‘weeds out’ challenging kids who can’t ‘handle’ the [...] setting. They believe it’s a superior education.”

–HWDSB Parent

“I believe that the Focus Programs are the single biggest source of inequity at HWDSB.”

–HWDSB Staff Member

“I am not sure our French Immersion Program is sustainable. We have some FI schools growing very quickly in terms of enrolment, while other schools have classes going empty... We can’t continue to just add to the French Immersion Program if we are draining students from other schools.”

–HWDSB School Administrator

“I knew that to get into the school, I needed to have good marks and attendance.”

–HWDSB Student

HWDSB
BE YOU. BE EXCELLENT.

Review of the Elementary Program Strategy, Secondary Program Strategy & French Immersion Location Strategy & Application Process

HAMILTON-WENTWORTH DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Final Presentation
December 11, 2025



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Background and objectives
- Methodology
- HWDSB overview
- Elementary Program Strategy: Key Findings & Recommendations
- Secondary Program Strategy: Key Findings & Recommendations
- French Immersion Location Strategy and Application Process: Key Findings & Recommendations



BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The Hamilton Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB)'s Secondary Program Strategy was approved on June 10, 2013. HWDSB's Elementary Program Strategy and the French Immersion Location Strategy and Application Process were approved on November 10, 2016.

In 2024, the HWDSB contracted Malatest to review all three Program Strategies.

The objectives of this review were to:

Assess the **accessibility** of the program offerings

Assess whether program delivery was fair and equitable, and **aligned with HWDSB's Multi-Year Strategic Plan** and values

Evaluate the **fiscal sustainability** of the programs



METHODOLOGY

Scoping interview with **Executive Council** members to determine **key research priorities**

Secondary data review

Reviewed **administrative data files** provided by HWDSB

Jurisdictional scan of 4 other Ontario boards to examine their French Immersion program:

Halton DSB (interviewed)

Niagara DSB

Peel DSB (interviewed)

Waterloo Region DSB (interviewed)

A total of 6,879 survey responses were received. Specifically, we received responses from:

Parents/Caregivers (n= 4357) (9.2% response rate)

Staff (n= 2090) (38% response rate)

Students (n= 432) (0.8% response rate)

4 school visits:

Prince of Wales Elementary

Bellmoore Elementary

Bernie Custis Secondary

Westmount Secondary

Conducted 21 **key informant interviews** with interested parties.

Conducted **18 focus groups** with:

Education centre staff

Union presidents

Parent Involvement Committee

Indigenous Education Council

System principals, School principals & Vice-principals

Parents/caregivers

Students

Community organizations

Validation of key findings

Engage platform receiving close to **50 individual feedback submissions**



OVERVIEW OF HWDSB

Elementary:

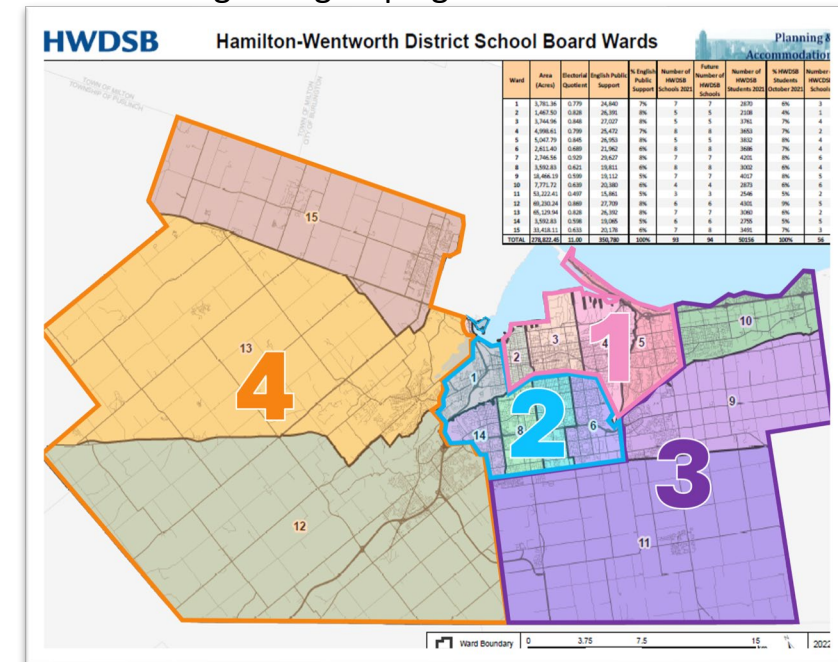
- 81 schools
- 37,859 students (72% of board students)
- 2.6% enrolment growth between 2019-20 to 2023-24
- Programs include French Immersion and **6 Focus Programs**

Secondary:

- 13 schools
- 14,882 students (28% of board students)
- 6.9% enrolment growth between 2019-20 to 2023-24
- Programs include French Immersion and **12 other Specialized Programs (e.g. Tier 3 and Specialist High Skills Major Programs)**

Region	Elementary Special Programs	Secondary Specialized Programs
Region 1	Dual-track FI	Audition-Based Performing Arts* Strings* SHSM ELD, ESL ILS Dual Credit
Region 2	Basketball, High Performance* Mandarin Language Transition Program* SAGE* SAGE Quest* Single-track FI Dual-track FI	Art Smart* Cosmetology International Baccalaureate (IB) OYAP* Self Paced Self-Directed* SHSM ELD, ESL ILS Dual-track FI Dual Credit
Region 3	Hockey Academy* Single-track FI Dual-track FI	Cosmetology Dual Credit ILS SHSM
Region 4	Dual-track FI	Cosmetology International Baccalaureate (IB) SHSM Dual Credit

Regional groupings of wards used:



*Exclusively offered in one school



ELEMENTARY PROGRAM STRATEGY REVIEW



ELEMENTARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: KEY FINDINGS

Perceptions of Focus Programs were mixed

- Parents with children in Focus Programs were generally satisfied, however support for these programs was considerably lower if the parent did not have a child in the program.
- Staff believed that Focus Programs contribute to a student's educational experience by increasing engagement and enrichment.
- However, staff questioned the equity of Focus Programs and whether they were meeting all students needs. Concerns voiced by staff centred on the types and locations of such programs.

"I believe that the Focus Programs are the single biggest source of inequity at HWDSB."

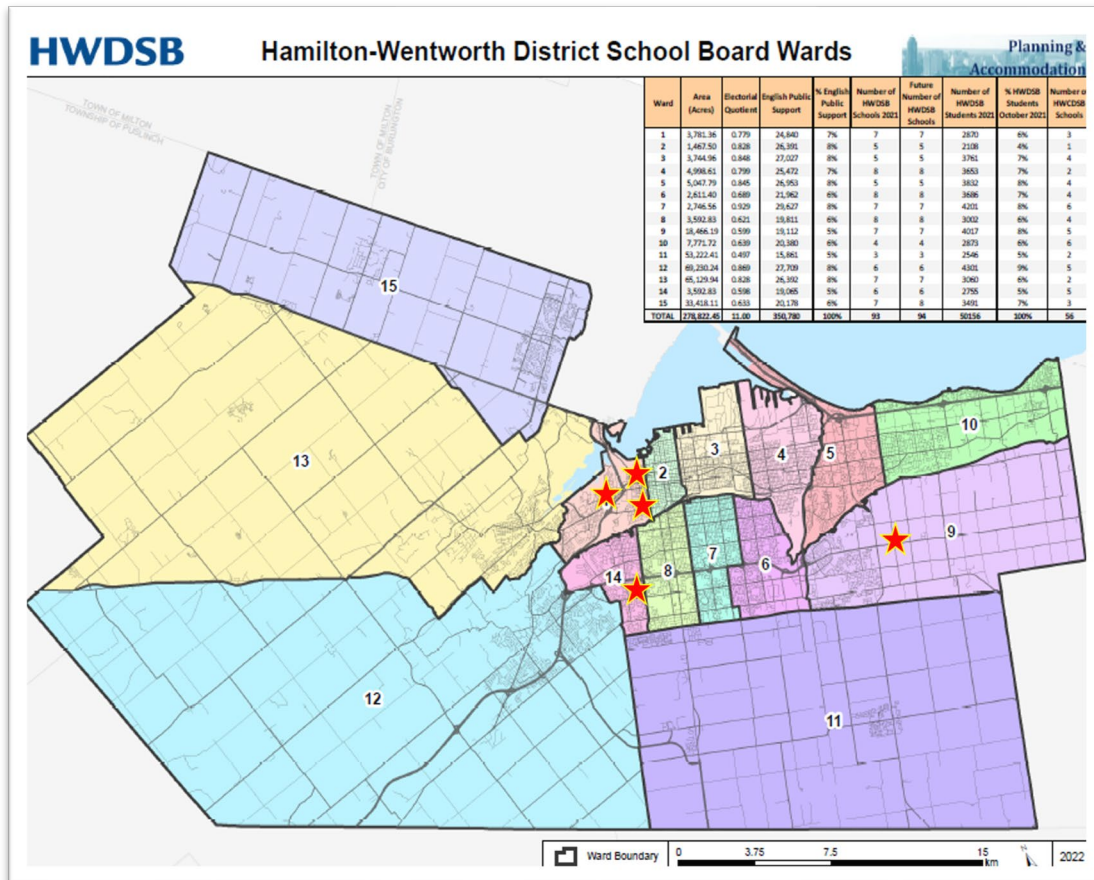
–HWDSB Staff Member

- Parents of children who were not enrolled in a Focus Program also highlighted various barriers that prevent their child from participating, including transportation barriers, commute times and lack of information.



ELEMENTARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: KEY FINDINGS

Focus Programs are not accessible for the majority of students.



- The majority of students enrolled in Focus Programs come from out of catchment (72% of all focus program students in 2024-25).
- With the exception of Hockey Academy (Ward 9), all Focus Programs are located in the western region of urban Hamilton (Wards 1 and 14).
- According to staff, the locations of the Focus Programs were not developed strategically, being founded by local champions and many questioned why they are located where they are.

★ Approximate location of Focus Program school



ELEMENTARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: KEY FINDINGS

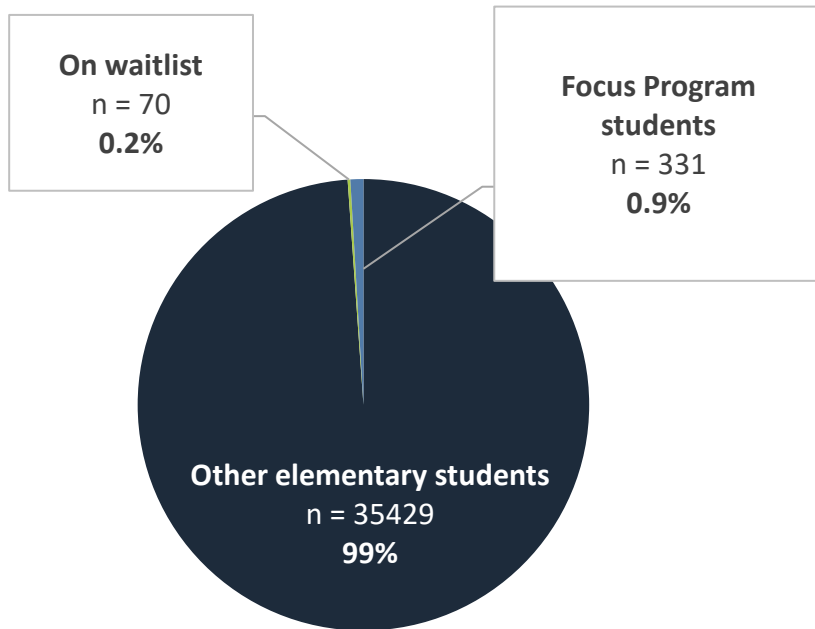
Awareness around Focus Programs was low.

- Just under one third (30%) of surveyed parents who did not have a child enrolled in Focus Program expressed that the lack of information was a barrier to enrolment.
- Many parents expressed they were unfamiliar with the Focus Programs, some believed them to be weekend or after-school programs.
- Although schools release information over SchoolMessenger, post information on websites, and hold information nights, some staff expressed that communications about Focus Programs could be improved.
- Staff also suggested that the communications about Focus Programs may not be reaching all families equally, as the way the information is presented and delivered might be less accessible for certain historically underserved groups.



ELEMENTARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: KEY FINDINGS

A small proportion of HWDSB families access Focus Programs, but enrollment and interest have grown.



- A total of 331 students (<1% of total elementary population) were enrolled in a Focus Program in the 2024-2025 school year.
- According to the 2024-25 waitlists, there were 70 students on the waitlist, which represents 0.2% of the total elementary student population.
- Enrolment in Focus Programs has grown by 6% since 2019, which is almost three times the enrolment growth for Kindergarten to Grade 8 (which saw 2.6% growth in enrolment from 2019 to 2025).
- The waitlist has increased by 90% for the 2025-26 school year.



ELEMENTARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: KEY FINDINGS

Some Focus Programs are not representative of HWDSB's population.

- Administrative data suggests that some Focus Programs are not representative of HWDSB's population.
- In the 2024-2025 school year, administrative data demonstrates that relative to HWDSB elementary students who are not in Focus Programs, racialized students are under-represented in most Focus Programs.
- Focus Program students are also more likely to be from neighbourhoods with higher median household income when compared to the median household income of the neighbourhood where the Focus Program is located.
- Moreover, students in the sports-related Focus Programs come from neighbourhoods with some of the highest household incomes relative to the median and average household income of the Hamilton Census Metropolitan Area



ELEMENTARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: KEY FINDINGS

The types of Focus Programs were questioned.

- As Focus Programs were often developed by a local champion, the types and locations of Focus Programs were not developed strategically and lack a blueprint for development. There was also no formal approach to capturing parent/student demand for desired programming. There is also no process or policy to identify when such programs should be discontinued.
- Some staff perceived the sports programs as offering enhanced opportunities to a small proportion of student and perpetuating inequity since these opportunities are not equally available to students in other schools.
- For other programs such as SAGE and SAGE Quest, some staff questioned why the learning approach and global education lens were limited to these programs. Although it was innovative years ago, they believed it should be integrated more broadly and made accessible to all students across all classrooms.
- The Mandarin program was also questioned, as staff explained that there are many other language groups at Cootes Paradise that receive support through the English as a Second Language (ESL) coordinator at the school and do not have a Focus Program dedicated to supporting their transition to the English language.

“Why do we have an ESL program for Mandarin speakers, and not other language groups, like Arabic?”

–HWDSB Staff Member



ELEMENTARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: KEY FINDINGS

The “concept” of additional experiential learning opportunities is not unique to HWDSB.

- In general, we found that most boards had very similar programming, including specialized programs associated with athletic, arts and vocational programs.
- Similar to HWDSB, these boards provide such programming to enhance learning, attract students who would go elsewhere if such programs were not available, and engage or retain students at risk of not completing their programs.
- HWDSB has grown at a higher rate than its neighbouring coterminous board, the Hamilton Catholic District School Board (HWDSB: 2.6% vs. HWCDSB: 2.0%, from 2019-2020 to 2024-2025), suggesting that it is attracting more students than HWCDSB.
- However, some Focus Programs (particularly the sports programs) have a lower-than-average retention rate compared to the Board average (56% vs 81% of all Grade 8 students).



ELEMENTARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: KEY FINDINGS

Focus Programs have a small incremental cost to the Board.

- Focus Program schools are provided with a Board budget to run the program. Certain programs also collect fees to help cover costs.
- The incremental costs of these programs (i.e., the amount coming from the core education funding that is not provided by the Ministry) for each Focus Program was calculated based on the number of students enrolled in a Focus Program.

Program	Program funding support	# of students	Incremental cost per student
Hockey Program	\$5,000	38	\$131.58
Mandarin (Language Transition Program)	\$5,000	45	\$111.11
SAGE	\$5,000	65	\$76.92
SAGE Quest	\$5,000	19	\$263.16
Sports Academy: Basketball	\$5,000	77	\$64.94
Sports Academy: High Potential	\$5,000	50	\$100.00

Incremental cost per student calculation was provided by HWDSB. It does not take into account the difference in class sizes.



ELEMENTARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: KEY FINDINGS

Some Focus Programs run at lower-than-average class sizes.

Focus Program	Grade	Focus Program class size	Average class size by grade of Focus Program school	% Difference
Hockey	Gr. 7	20	25.9	-23%
	Gr. 8	19	25.9	-27%
Mandarin Language Transition Program	JK & SK	16	28.8	-44%
	Gr. 1, 2, 3	23	19.8	+16%
	Gr. 3, 4, 5	23	25.0	-8%
SAGE	JK & SK	22	20.0	+10%
	Gr. 1 + 2	18	20.5	-12%
	Gr. 2, 3	17	20.5	-17%
	Gr. 4, 5	27	30.0	-10%
SAGE Quest	Gr. 6, 7, 8	21	24.5	-14%
	Gr. 6, 7, 8	21	24.5	-14%
Sports Academy: Basketball	Gr. 6	28	24.5	+14%
	Gr. 7	25	24.5	+2%
	Gr. 8	24	24.5	-2%
Sports Academy: High Performance	Gr. 7	25	24.5	+2%
	Gr. 8	24	24.5	-2%

- A separate examination of class sizes suggests that some Focus Programs (particularly Hockey Program, Mandarin Program, SAGE, SAGE Quest) are running some or all classes at a lower class size than the average class size for that school and grade.
- The Board should review the incremental costs in consideration of programs with small class sizes that cannot be stacked or combined with other classrooms, such as the Mandarin Language Transition Program, to examine whether the Board is subsidizing programs with small class sizes.



ELEMENTARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 1:** The Board should establish a formal process through which new Focus Programs can be introduced. Such a process should include a mechanism to canvas parent (and student) interest, as well as ensuring that programs are equitably distributed across all regions of HWDSB. Contingent on demand, any new Focus Programs should be established in Wards with little access to existing Focus programs, including Wards 11, 12, 13 and 15.
- **Recommendation 2:** The Board should establish a criteria (for example, a criteria based on enrolment, class sizes, staffing and other incremental costs) that would initiate the closure of a Focus Program. The programs that should be examined for closure include SAGE, SAGE Quest and the Mandarin Language Transition program. However, there may be a need to increase opportunities for students in Arts (e.g., music, drama, and dance) and STEM programs. HWDSB should explore community feedback about desired Focus Programs before establishing any new program offerings.
- **Recommendation 3:** The Board should consider the relocation of the Hockey program to a location that has better access to an arena.



ELEMENTARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 4:** Given the limited transition of elementary Focus Program students into secondary programs, the Board should establish what elements of the elementary Focus Programs should continue at the secondary level to help ensure students can remain in HWDSB.
- **Recommendation 5:** The Board should determine a per program budget that can support a marketing strategy for the Focus Programs to increase general awareness of such programs as well as to broaden equity group participation.
- **Recommendation 6:** Given that the elements of the Elementary Program Strategy were reviewed holistically with a broad focus on all program offerings, the Board should consider conducting a distinct in-depth review of certain areas, such as the Special Education Program. Moreover, as elements of the Program Strategy have evolved over time to meet the needs of the students (e.g., some of the Special Education Program supports are different than what was originally stated in the 2016 Elementary Program Strategy), it is recommended that HWDSB review elements of their Strategies periodically in between the global Program Strategy reviews.



ELEMENTARY PROGRAM STRATEGY

Questions?
(15 Minutes)



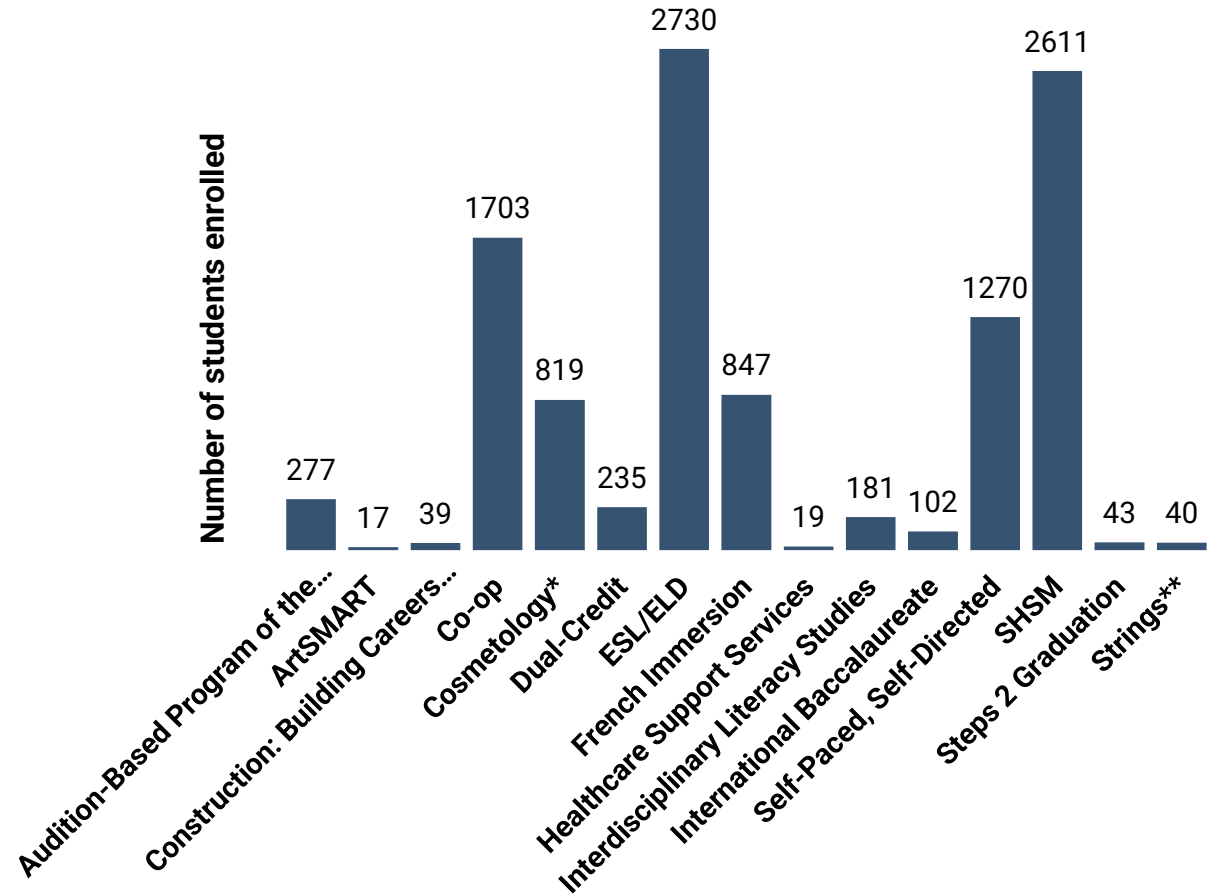
SECONDARY PROGRAM STRATEGY REVIEW



SECONDARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: KEY FINDINGS

Enrolment across secondary Specialized Programs is generally high.

- Overall, across all programs (excluding ESL/ELD and the Self-Paced, Self-Directed program at Westmount), there were over 11,000 secondary student registrations in a Specialized Program during the 2024-2025 school year.
- This suggests a high level of interest in secondary Specialized Programs, with such registrations representing more than 60% the total secondary student population.



Based on data provided by HWDSB. Note that students can be enrolled in more than one secondary program.

*Represents the number of students who enrolled in at least one cosmetology-related course.

**Enrolment in Strings is based on anecdotal information.



SECONDARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: KEY FINDINGS

Overall, many were satisfied with the secondary program offerings.

- Most parents (69%) were satisfied with their child's secondary programming.
- Many parents (69%) and staff (77%) believe the program offerings enhance students' educational experiences.
- Staff also expressed that Specialized Programs can help boost student engagement, confidence, leadership, and preparation for future career pathways.



SECONDARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: KEY FINDINGS

Being in a Specialized Program was often associated with better outcomes.

- Often, students in Specialized Programs:

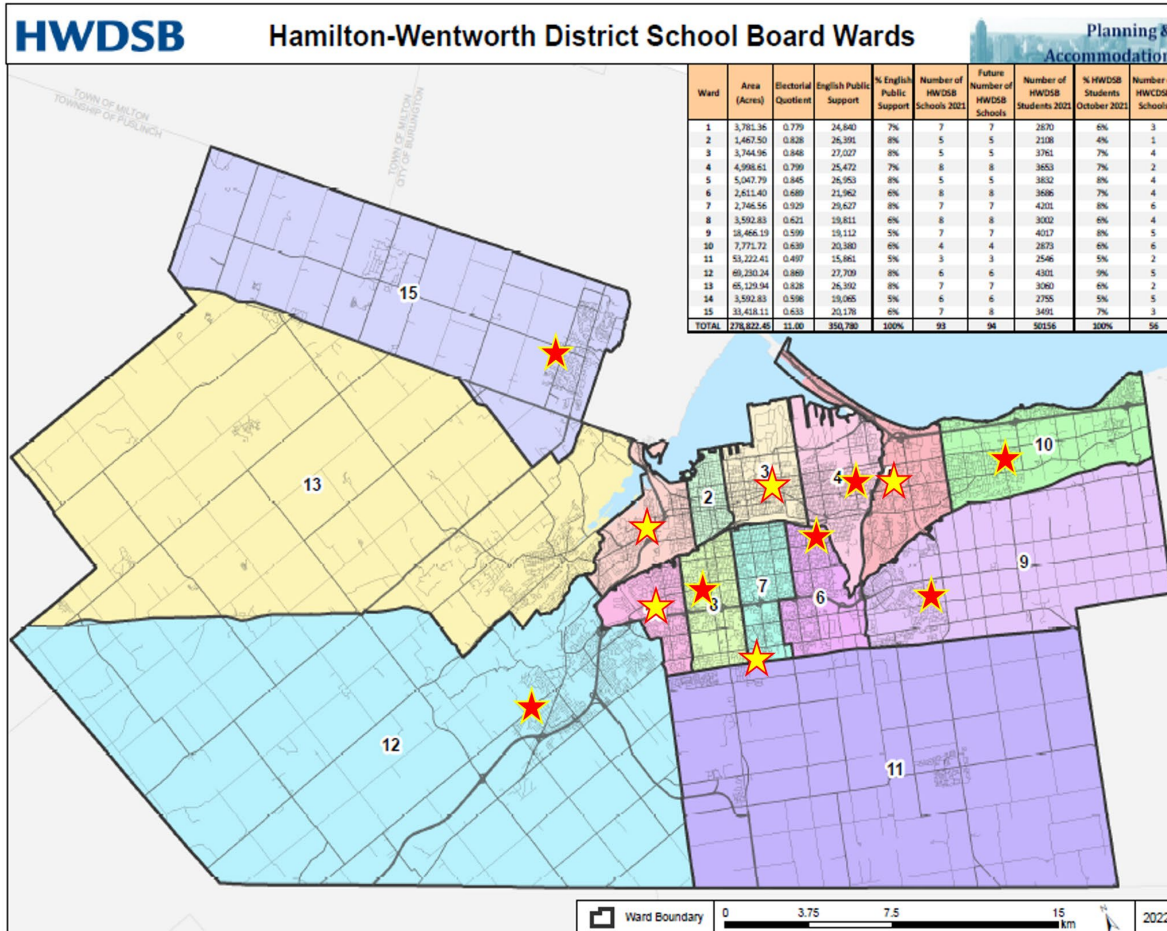


- Students in some Specialized Programs **missed more classes and days of school** on average (Audition-Based Program of the Arts, ArtSMART, Dual Credit, G11/12 students, SHSM, Westmount G11/12 students).



SECONDARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: KEY FINDINGS

Specialized Programs could be more accessible to all students.



- With the exception of IB at Ancaster (Ward 12), nearly all secondary Specialized Programs are located in Wards 1-8, and 14.*
- A few Specialized Programs provide transportation, however many parents cited lack of transportation and commute times as a primary barrier to enrolling their child in a Specialized Program.

- ★ Schools with 3 or more Specialized Programs*
- ★ Schools with at least 1 Specialized Program*

* Note that some schools run multiple SHSM programs. For the purposes of comparisons across regions, SHSMs were counted as representing one Specialized Program within a school.



SECONDARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: KEY FINDINGS

Parents lacked awareness about Specialized Programs.

- There was a lack of awareness of programs among families – among secondary parents whose children were not enrolled in a Specialized Program, 31% were not aware the programs were offered. Some staff also considered lack of awareness of programs as an issue (34%).
- In the absence of a comprehensive communication plan, families often only hear about programs with respect to their child’s school, and are often unaware of other program offerings in the board.
- According to a community advisory committee, parents in rural areas are often unaware of the Specialized Programs.
- Staff believed that enhancements could be made to communications by increasing the accessibility of the communications by improving the website navigation experience and developing a comprehensive marketing strategy for all programs that helps to attract students from across and external to the board.



SECONDARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: KEY FINDINGS

The creation of Specialized Programs over time do not reflect a system lens.

- Some staff questioned whether the Specialized Program offerings aligned with the demands of modern workplaces, and whether students were being adequately prepared.
- Although SHSM-Specialized Programs were believed to be beneficial to engaging students in practical learning, there was concern that new programs are reactionary to trends (e.g., barbering).
- Many Specialized Programs were founded by local champions, however the Board does not have a framework for the development of Specialized Programs and the current program offerings lack an equitable distribution.
- Some parents and students felt positively about their ability to have a voice around program offerings at the school level, but there was no formal process to collect this voice at the Board level.
- Staff reported that the process to develop a speciality program lacked coordination with the Board, with schools often developing Specialized Programs independently and informing the Board during the final stages.
- This creates pressures for financial and capital planning, with a lack of consideration towards the lifecycle of the program and other key components such as health and safety.



SECONDARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: KEY FINDINGS

Specialized Programs thrive in certain regions, whereas other regions are challenged due to a variety of contributing factors.

- The Board has experienced challenges with being able to support all Specialized Programs equally.
- Some staff highlighted the Board's previous attempts to locate programs in certain regions in efforts to balance the program offerings by region.
- Programs that have been placed to parallel other offerings have not always been reflective of local need (*do families in this area actually desire such a program?*) or supported through local capacity (*is there appropriate staff to champion this program, and is this staffing purposeful?*).
- Some programs struggle with low enrolment, with some eventually leading to closure (e.g., the International Baccalaureate program at Glendale, Aviation program at Sir Winston Churchill).
- Staff expressed that certain programs struggle due to a lack of management buy-in, perceived competition between similar programming, and biases around the type of student the program serves.



SECONDARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: KEY FINDINGS

Westmount's Self-Paced, Self-Directed model offers unique learning opportunities.

- Two other regional Boards offer a model similar to Westmount.
- Westmount's self-paced, self-directed learning model allows students to learn as fast or as slow as they would like, and allows students to dig deeper into subject areas of particular interest.
- Westmount offers various unique opportunities and supports to all their students, such as:

Self-Directed Learning days:

- During these days (2 days/month), students can catch up on subjects/curriculum.

Teachers as Advisors:

- Teachers are assigned a student in grade 9 and they serve as an advisor to that student until the time that they graduate.

Innovative Learning Commons:

- Staffed by 6 educators which means students can drop in at any time to seek assistance and access learning resources without stigma.



SECONDARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: KEY FINDINGS

Westmount receives more applications than places available and uses an application-based entry process.

- According to Westmount staff, the review of over 500 applications is a demanding process.
- Application-based entry is less equitable than a lottery-based application process.
- While the application-based entry is not based on marks, students held the perception that only high achievers would be enrolled in the school.

“I knew that to get into the school, I needed to have good marks and attendance.”

–HWDSB Student

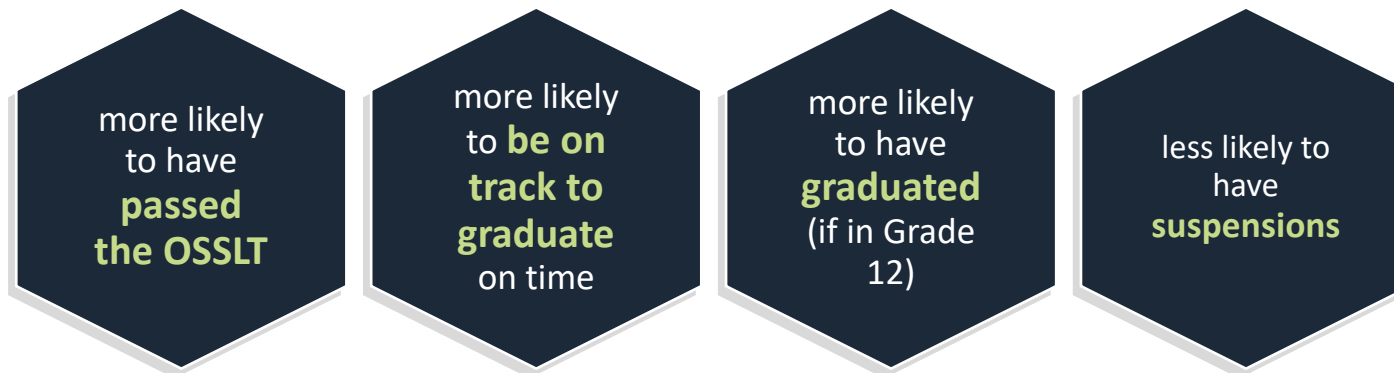
- Parents and students were not very familiar with the Self-Paced, Self-Directed program.
- Only entry point is Grade 9, creating barriers to entry for learners in higher grades, or transferring from outside the Board that would benefit from this model.
- The other school in the area (i.e. Sir Allan MacNab secondary school) sees challenges with enrolment and experiences difficulty offering well-supported programming.



SECONDARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: KEY FINDINGS

Westmount has better student outcomes than other HWDSB schools.

- Like other secondary Specialized Programs, the Self-Paced, Self-Directed students also showed better outcomes when compared to the rest of HWDSB's secondary student population.
- Westmount students were:



SECONDARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: KEY FINDINGS

Westmount's student population is different from the greater HWDSB student population.

- There is a higher representation of students from racialized groups at Westmount compared to other HWDSB schools.
- There is also a higher proportion of students from neighbourhoods with above-average income (>\$100,000).
- The Self-Paced, Self-Directed program is attended by:
 - 3% of students with non-gifted exceptionalities (versus the Board secondary average of 7%)
 - 6% of students with gifted exceptionalities (versus the Board secondary average of 2%).
- Westmount is the only HWDSB school that does not have special education classes.
- Transportation is not provided to Westmount students, certain families may not be able to access Westmount due to this barrier.



SECONDARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: KEY FINDINGS

Certain Specialized Programs have higher incremental costs than others.

Incremental cost per student for certain Specialized Programs

Program	Total incremental program costs	# of students	Incremental cost per student
ArtSMART	\$175,246.70	17	\$10,308.63
Audition-Based Program of the Arts	\$20,000.00	277	\$72.20
International Baccalaureate Program	\$417,238.42	74	\$5,647.90

Incremental cost per student calculation was provided by HWDSB and takes into account the staffing costs, incidentals cost and enrolment numbers.

Transportation costs for select Specialized Programs

Program	% of students in program receiving HWDSB transport	# of students transported	% of students transported by taxi	Total transport costs	Cost per student transported
ArtSMART	4%	11	0%	\$8,246.70	\$749.70
Audition-Based Program of the Arts	31%	223	34%	\$539,978.80	\$2,421.43
International Baccalaureate	12%	12	25%	\$31,720.90	\$2,643.41

- The incremental costs represent the amount coming from core education funding that is not provided by the Ministry.
- The programs with the highest incremental cost per student were ArtSMART (\$10,308.63) and IB (\$5,647.90). The program with the lowest incremental cost per student was Audition-Based Program of the Arts (\$72.70).
- Transportation costs were also highest for IB and Audition-Based Program of the Arts.
- Variations in costs being largely associated with the percentage of students who are transported by taxi (versus bus or public transit).



SECONDARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 7:** To ensure better geographic distribution, HWDSB should consider equitably rebalancing programming into strategically located hubs, or add to current programming in Wards with fewer Specialized Programs, such as Wards 15, 13, 12, 10, and 9, contingent on demand
- **Recommendation 8:** Given the additional resources that are required to run certain Specialized Programs, HWDSB should consider the relocation or closure of Specialized Programs with consistently low enrolment and small class sizes. These include:
 - Firstly, as enrolment in ArtSMART is low, HWDSB should consider closure of the program. However, there may be a need to increase opportunities for students in Performing Arts programs at MacNab or other schools given the high level of demand in the Audition-Based Program of the Arts which is currently at capacity. HWDSB should also explore community feedback about other desired Arts programs before establishing any new program offerings.
 - Secondly, although the IB program has just over 100 students, the viability of continuing the program at Ancaster is low due to limited enrolment. HWDSB should consider the closure of the IB program at Ancaster and determine whether there is sufficient interest to maintain the IB program at Westdale or consider moving the IB Program to a location where interest would be higher and lead to greater enrolment



SECONDARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 9:** The Board should establish a framework with guiding principles as to how new Specialized Programs are developed and launched, including how they formally capture student/parent voice, and align with local labour market and/or postsecondary education requirements.
- **Recommendation 10:** The Board should establish a criteria (for example, a criteria based on enrolment, class sizes, staffing and other incremental costs) that would initiate the closure of a Specialized Program.
- **Recommendation 11:** The Board should provide equitable support, resourcing, and buy-in for Specialized Programs, and provide information and education to staff to help challenge belief systems.
- **Recommendation 12:** The Board should determine a per program budget that can support a marketing strategy for all Specialized Programs to help increase awareness among students and parents.
- **Recommendation 13:** HWDSB should endeavor to review elements of the Strategy periodically between comprehensive global reviews.



SECONDARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 14:** A lottery system for the Self-Directed, Self-Paced Program at Westmount should be established for all qualifying students.
- **Recommendation 15:** HWDSB should examine the feasibility of opening a Special Education Program at Westmount by conducting a needs assessment to evaluate student needs, available capacity, and resources.
- **Recommendation 16:** Elements of the Self-Paced, Self-Directed Program at Westmount should be better promoted across the Board.
- **Recommendation 17:** Although Westmount is a system school, it is not available to students beyond Grade 9. Westmount can better function as a “system school” by developing processes that enable at-risk students to transfer in, with additional support staff assigned to the school.
- **Recommendation 18:** Enrolment at Westmount should be centrally managed by the Board, necessitating additional Board resources to be assigned to this centrally managed process.
- **Recommendation 19:** Although some schools already implement Self-Directed Learning Days and teachers as advisors, HWDSB should consider how these promising or best practices from Westmount can be more formally established and supported throughout HWDSB schools.



SECONDARY PROGRAM STRATEGY: RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 20:** HWDSB should consider transportation subsidies to support students in the Self-Paced, Self-Directed Program with exceptional need, and work with school administrators to define these criteria for exceptional need.
- **Recommendation 21:** The Board should consider conducting a separate review of the System Alt Ed program to explore whether the supports for students are sufficient and responsive to their needs.



SECONDARY PROGRAM STRATEGY

Questions?
(15 Minutes)

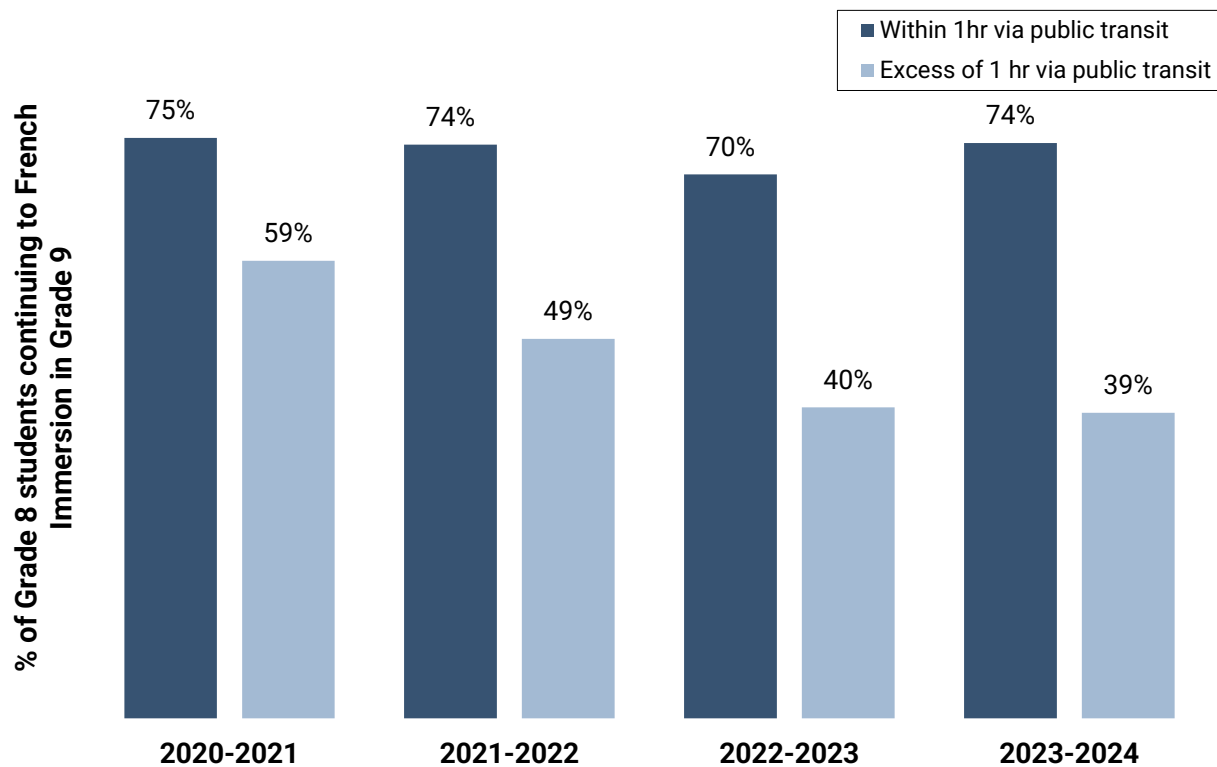


FRENCH IMMERSION LOCATION STRATEGY & APPLICATION PROCESS REVIEW



FRENCH IMMERSION LOCATION STRATEGY & APPLICATION PROCESS: KEY FINDINGS

Trends in French Immersion enrolment and waitlists have remained steady over the years, but transition rates are low.



- Since 2019, French Immersion enrolment has remained relatively consistent (9-10% elementary population; 6-7% secondary population).
- Waitlists have also remained consistent and relatively small for the size of HWDSB.
- Transition to secondary French Immersion is low, as just under one third (32%) of elementary students in the 2024-25 school year continued to pursue this program in secondary.
- Students in elementary schools located within 1 hour of public transit to/from the nearest secondary school that offered French Immersion experienced transition rates that were markedly higher than for those students whose elementary school was more than 1 hour away using public transit.
- Transition rates for students located further away from their nearest French Immersion secondary schools have been declining continuously in between 2020-2021 and 2023-2024.



FRENCH IMMERSION LOCATION STRATEGY & APPLICATION PROCESS: KEY FINDINGS

Students in the French Immersion program represent a fairly homogeneous group.

- Students in French Immersion were more likely to be from neighbourhoods with higher socio-economic status
- Diversity in the French Immersion program was low. There was an underrepresentation of:
 - Male students
 - Non-binary students
 - Racialized Students
 - Students with non-gifted exceptionalities
- Most staff (74%) believed all students should have the opportunity to access French Immersion, but less than half (40%) believed the French Immersion Program is readily available to all students interested in taking it.
- Some open-ended comments from surveyed parents raised the opinion that the program is exclusionary or creates inequities.

“It creates a tiered education system. Most parents want to put their kids in [French Immersion] because it ‘weeds out’ challenging kids who can’t ‘handle’ the [...] setting. They believe it’s a superior education.”

–HWDSB Parent



FRENCH IMMERSION LOCATION STRATEGY & APPLICATION PROCESS: KEY FINDINGS

Parents of French Immersion students see it as a valuable program, however there were differing perceptions on quality of instruction.

- Survey results from elementary parents illustrated that they perceive FI as a valued program (72%), and they were generally satisfied with the program (80%) and the amount of French instruction provided (74%).
- However, parents of students in single-track schools were ten times more likely to indicate in the survey that their child receives high quality French instruction compared to parents of students in dual-track schools.
- Slightly fewer staff (66%) believed it was a valuable program, and only 48% believed the instruction was of high quality.



FRENCH IMMERSION LOCATION STRATEGY & APPLICATION PROCESS: KEY FINDINGS

HWDSB runs an abundance of French Immersion programs, however there are significant challenges with findings French-certified teachers to meet the demand.

- Only a small minority (17%) of surveyed staff believed there were sufficient resources to meet the demands of the French Immersion program.
- Staff and parents expressed great concern over the lack of French-certified teachers in the French Immersion program, explaining that some classrooms are staffed by educators that cannot speak French.
- Staffing of French-certified teachers is a significant issue for many other Ontario school boards.
- A 2021 study funded by the Ministry of Education suggested that the availability of French-certified teachers outpaced the demand by a 2:1 ratio. Recent reviews of Ministry and other educational materials suggest that French language staffing challenges remain and are projected to worsen as the pace of retirements quicken in the coming years.
- A further issue compounding HWDSB's ability to recruit sufficient numbers of French-certified teachers could be related to current hiring practices, as it was explained by HWDSB staff that employment offers to new teachers are made later than is the case in other boards.



FRENCH IMMERSION LOCATION STRATEGY & APPLICATION PROCESS: KEY FINDINGS

There is variability in the percentage of instruction in French.

Grade	Target % of instruction in French
1	68%-85%
2-3	68%-80%
4-6	68%-80%
7-8	50%-60%

- HWDSB strives to exceed Ministry mandated requirements for French Immersion Programming. Mandated levels dictate that 50% of the total instructional time must be in French and that students receive a minimum of 3,800 hours of French instruction by the end of Grade 8.
- Although the French Immersion program promises a percentage of instruction in French by grade, staff and parents report that the percentage varies by classroom depending on the educator and their French language abilities.
- Variance in the proportion of French language instruction creates inequitable delivery of the French Immersion Program.



FRENCH IMMERSION LOCATION STRATEGY & APPLICATION PROCESS: KEY FINDINGS

Absences of French-certified teachers creates additional staffing challenges.

- Absenteeism data demonstrates that staff in dual-track schools had a higher number of absences than those at a single-track school.
- According to discussions with student and parents, replacement teachers were not always French-certified. Students and parents reported that some French Immersion classrooms went months without a French teacher, expressing that it left them feeling behind in their level of French acquisition.
- Some school administrators noted that that absences of French-certified teachers severely affected their ability to meet established instruction targets as it was often difficult to find a French-certified teacher from the Occasional and Long-Term Occasional lists.
- High absences among French-certified teachers potentially due to the requirement to remain in a French assignment for 5 years.



FRENCH IMMERSION LOCATION STRATEGY & APPLICATION PROCESS: KEY FINDINGS

Costs of running the French Immersion program mainly constitute the transportation costs

- Assuming no differences in class sizes between French Immersion and non-French Immersion Programs, the only cost associated with French Immersion is transportation for students attending their French Immersion catchment school.
- In 2024-25, HWDSB spent a total of \$2,974,169.00 on transportation in French Immersion, or \$1,195.00 per student transported.
- These costs represent the cost of transportation and are not incremental in all cases, as students may otherwise be eligible for transportation regardless of participation in the French Immersion program.
- Concerns around the fiscal responsibility of the program mainly focused on the sustainability of the current French Immersion model.

“I am not sure our French Immersion Program is sustainable. We have some FI schools growing very quickly in terms of enrolment, while other schools have classes going empty... We can't continue to just add to the French Immersion Program if we are draining students from other schools.”

–HWDSB School Administrator



FRENCH IMMERSION LOCATION STRATEGY & APPLICATION PROCESS: KEY FINDINGS

HWDSB's French Immersion program varies from other regional Boards.

- When comparing HWDSB's French Immersion model to other regional Boards (PDSB, DSNB, WRDSB, HDSB), it was observed that:

Entry point

- Some boards have a later entry point (e.g., grade 2)

% of French instruction

- Many boards have lower % of French instruction by grade

Application & placement

- Some boards have board-wide (e.g., limit total Grade 1 French Immersion enrolment to about 25% of all Grade 1 students)

Alternative FSL programming

- Early Core French
- Extended French

- Transportation is provided to students attending their French Immersion home school by all regional comparators, however the distance guidelines for eligibility varied by Board.
- In discussion with other boards, moving the entry point to Grade 2, offering the Ministry mandated percentage of instruction in French, and adding caps to enrolment were means of mitigating the impact of staffing challenges to improve quality of instruction.
- Adding other French programming (Early Core French and Extended French) also helped the regional comparator Boards provide other French language options.
- Some Boards do not offer certain subjects in French (i.e. Math and Science).



FRENCH IMMERSION LOCATION STRATEGY & APPLICATION PROCESS: RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 22:** Given the challenges in terms of providing a uniform quality French Immersion Program, the Board should implement policies that will better align French Immersion Programming with available capacity. This could include a board-wide cap on elementary enrolments, establishing the French Immersion entry point to be at Grade 2, standardizing the proportion of instruction in French Immersion in line with the Ministry mandate, and/or considering which subjects should be taught in French (i.e., excluding math and sciences from being taught in French).
- **Recommendation 23:** In cases where demand for the French immersion Program exceeds the capacity to offer the program, retain the lottery system to determine acceptance into the program.
- **Recommendation 24:** The Board should establish processes to be able to monitor and report on the proportion of French language instruction provided to French Immersion by school to ensure that all students are receiving equivalent amounts of instruction in French.
- **Recommendation 25:** The Board should consider enhanced Core French Programs in elementary grades to provide some additional French language instruction to students who may not be able to access the French Immersion stream due to enrolment limitations. This could include, for example, having Core French language instruction starting prior to Grade 4. Providing earlier Core French would help to offset a Grade 2 entry point to French Immersion, should the Board consider this change.



FRENCH IMMERSION LOCATION STRATEGY & APPLICATION PROCESS: RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 26:** The Board should examine current hiring practices and timelines that may affect the Board's ability to recruit certified French language instructors.
- **Recommendation 27:** The Board should undertake additional research to establish whether the proportion of elementary students who would continue to secondary French Immersion would improve if secondary French Immersion was offered in at least one other location. This could include exit surveys with non-transitioning students as well as more consultations with families who currently have one or more children in elementary French Immersion.



FRENCH IMMERSION LOCATION STRATEGY & APPLICATION PROCESS

Questions?
(15 Minutes)



Recommended Action

That the Review of Elementary Program Strategy, Secondary Programs Strategy and the French Immersion Location Strategy and Application Process report prepared by R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. be received, and that staff be directed to develop Guiding Principles to support consideration of the recommendations. These Guiding Principles will be presented to the Committee in February 2026 for review, discussion, input, and a recommendation for approval.

Strategic Reflection and Action

Timeline	Structure	Action
December 11, 2025	Program Committee	Receive report and develop Guiding Principles
February 17, 2026	Program Committee	Draft Guiding Principles
May 21, 2026	Program Committee	Draft Implementation Plan Various Recommendations
Fall 2026	Fall Engagement Sessions	Initiate Implementation Plan for 2027-2028



THANK YOU
team

- **Michelle Lemaire**
- Meshel Baines
- Matthew Gerard
- Brian Goodram
- Jagoda Kirilo
- Sally Landon
- Allison Reynolds
- Beth Woof