
Administrative Memorandum

Regular Board Meeting

Date: March 11, 2020
Topic: District Capacity and Programs of Choice
Submitted by: Dr. Jordan Tinney, Superintendent of Schools/CEO

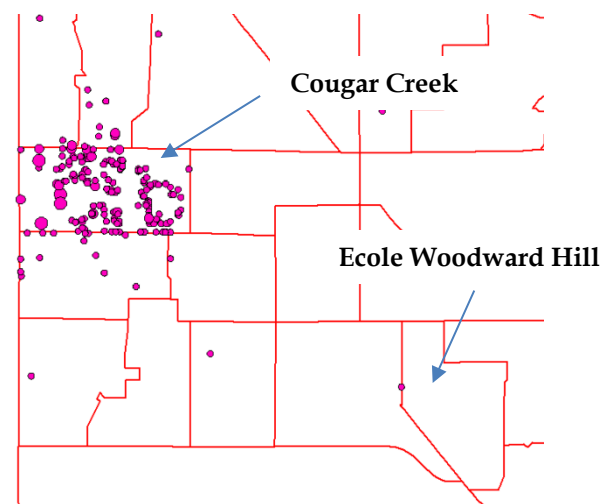
Background:

Over the past several years, there has been continued pressure to expand our programs of choice and, in particular, French Immersion. Our exploration of this topic has been extensive, and this memo is intended to highlight some of that work and our pressures not only on Immersion, but on other programs of choice.

In May of 2014, we asked our planning department for an analysis of how to expand French Immersion. We explored both intensive French and Immersion. Options that were explored were targeted to all areas of the district and had a focus on the areas of Clayton and South Surrey. There were no clear paths to expansion separate from looking far down the road at potential new schools on the horizon such as Site 206 in Grandview.

In June of 2015 our Board of Education approved a Long Range Education Plan that again asked for staff to explore French Immersion and the overcrowded École Woodward Hill Elementary. After careful examination of where we could locate a program, a decision was made to offer a program at Cougar Creek Elementary. Cougar Creek Elementary had distinct advantages, first, it was in a region of the district where Immersion is not currently offered and, it had the ability to represent a fairly stable enrolment prospect with the potential for eight free classrooms which is what it takes to expand Immersion. Finally, the school is relatively close to École Woodward Hill Elementary and is actually closer for some families already enrolled in French Immersion at École Woodward Hill Elementary.

That June, a decision was made to begin a French Immersion program at Cougar Creek Elementary. We staffed the school and opened the door for registration for September, the notice was indeed short over the summer but given the waitlists we didn't want to lose an opportunity.



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Come September, enrolment in the program was extremely light with fewer than 10 students. We recognized that we could have done a better job advertising and we also were not in the window of time for the program of choice lottery, so we cancelled the September 2015 attempt and reinvigorated the program for the Kindergarten Program of Choice Lottery in the spring of 2016.

The district began advertising and communication about the program expansion. To the district's surprise, and despite widespread advertising, promotion and directly phoning parents on the waitlist, enrolment was once again extremely low. A decision was made to give the community more time and we decided to run the program for the 2016/2017 year to see if we could attract more students. Despite another year of efforts, once again including broad advertising, the district could not secure enough enrolment to sustain the program. Overstaffed and under enrolled despite having hundreds of students on waitlists, after over a year of attempting to build support, the program was cancelled due to lack of enrolment. This was a significant setback for the Board which had made a strong effort over time to build a new regional French Immersion program.

In March of 2016, in addition to trying to secure and support other sites, we continued to have the discussion of French Immersion expansion and our very difficult decisions ahead on how to mitigate the exploding population at École Woodward Hill Elementary.

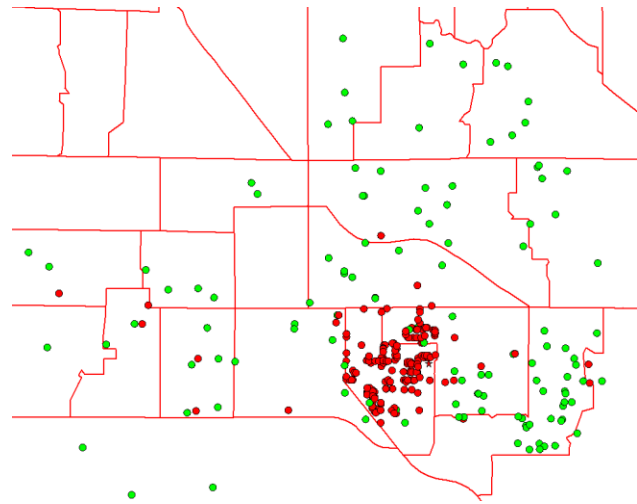
In a report to the Board, we highlighted that, since 2010, École Woodward Hill Elementary's boundaries changed in the following ways:



The narrative we see portrayed above is, unfortunately, our continuing story with programs of choice and having to find extraordinary ways to manage enrolment. In the above example, access for neighbourhood students was restricted twice to maintain our population of French Immersion students at École Woodward Hill Elementary. What do these boundary moves mean? The dot map below indicates the reality which is that we have twice had to limit the access to the school for neighbouring students so that we can sustain our French Immersion population.

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On the right, the red dots show the concentration of students surrounding École Woodward Hill Elementary's current catchment boundaries as identified above in 2016. The red dots indicate one or more students who reside at that location and attend "regular" programs. The green dots represent one or more students at that location and attend French Immersion. In essence the numerous students who come into École Woodward Hill Elementary for French Immersion displace the students who could attend from nearby. This is the reality of our continued pressures on space and our ability to make available programs of choice.



This spread of access and distances driven also continues to show that parents are indeed willing to drive to locations with programs of choice as, in many cases above, you see parents driving across 4 or 5 catchment areas to access French Immersion.

In the fall of 2017, the Board asked staff to once again report on the feasibility of expansion of programs of choice. In a November report to the Board, which was an exploration of all programs of choice and the impact of the implementation of the Memorandum of Agreement which had the district add hundreds of enrolling classrooms to our already substantially overcrowded district, the recommendation was made not to expand any programs of choice for the 2018/19 school year. It was also recommended that the district strongly explore late French Immersion as an option specifically for French Immersion. At a public meeting on September 9, 2018 the following motion was passed:

THAT staff explore the possibilities of the expansion of French Immersion in the context of our new capital announcements and to report back to the Board of Education by March 31, 2019.

A research report was written to support further expansion and was presented in May of 2019. The report highlighted many options and pressures including:

- Research on early and late immersion;
- Areas with greatest demand;
- Popularity of late vs early immersion;
- An analysis of waitlists;
- Challenges with staffing; and
- Projections and analysis of growth and the potential for expansion sites in context of current capital approvals.

The report summarized the findings and identified possible expansion at site 207 (Sunnyside Heights) or site 180 (Douglas area). Staff began again, in earnest to look at possibilities in the context of our rapid growth.

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When the report was presented publicly in May of 2019, a further motion was passed:

THAT staff bring back recommendations regarding location options for possible expansion of the French Immersion program to a future meeting of the Board of Education for consideration.

In December 2019, staff completed their work on the above motion for specific locations and the Board was given an in-service in the expansion of Early French Immersion. This latest report highlighted the Board's extreme pressure due to portables and capacity. As staff presented on areas of the district, it was highlighted that we have over 50 portables just between five schools in Clayton. In South Surrey/White Rock, we are expanding by adding three schools. In this area of the City, we are already served by one French Immersion dual track school and our only single-track French Immersion school so that region of the district has more Immersion than any other.

The population of South Surrey is exploding particularly in the Grandview region. Our recent information from the City of Surrey highlights the area is anticipated to grow by over 80,000 people. We are feeling this intense pressure in schools such as Sunnyside Elementary which hosts another program of choice, our Montessori program.

We have just completed our boundary consultation to accommodate the new schools coming and, very similar to École Woodward Hill Elementary, Montessori at Sunnyside Elementary is adding to the enrolment pressure. We have 135 students at Sunnyside Elementary who are enrolled in Montessori, and 53 of them live in-catchment for Sunnyside Elementary. Once again, we had to reduce the catchment area for the school, displacing neighbourhood students and also, we have moved the Montessori program for next year to a site on the border, 8 km away. This move was definitely not what the parents of the Montessori program desired and the substantial growth is not only due to Montessori, it is about our story of continued rapid growth in our City.

Surrey will move from a district of 74,000 students to 85,000 students in just the next eight years. As we craft this memo for the upcoming Board meeting, we have recently met about the enormous pressures on the Sullivan Heights community. Sullivan Heights Secondary is an already overcrowded school, with a schedule for extending the hours of the day to accommodate students. They are using not only their own parking lot, but the parking lot of Goldstone Park Elementary, just behind them, as a location for multiple portables. We are very thankful for the addition that is under construction to expand the school by 700 more seats but the school will not be able to use that addition likely until the late fall of 2021.

In preparation for this September's enrolment, we cannot place more portables on site without extreme compromises. We have long ago closed the school to any "out of catchment" enrolment, we have over 70 students currently on an "in-catchment waitlist" and we have growth of 58 additional students just from the natural feeder school numbers coming from elementary. The school cannot sustain its enrolment. Last year, in one other area of the district, we began bussing students the 8 km from Pacific Heights Elementary in Grandview to Elgin Park Secondary in Ocean Park. This is across two other secondary school catchments, Earl Marriott Secondary and Semiahmoo Secondary, as these schools also cannot accommodate any more students or any more portables.

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The story is the same across our fastest growing areas. Enrolment pressures are substantial, we are approaching 400 portables which would house close to 10,000 students if fully used. In our budgets, on an annual basis, we have to pay millions of dollars to sustain our portable inventory. The pressures on our schools and on our budgets are extreme. We are having to move programs and children from the schools they love, we cannot easily expand programs with extensive waitlists, and we are reducing the catchment areas so neighbourhood children cannot attend their local schools.

As a result of these pressures, the Board of Education has asked staff to prepare this report and subsequent motion. The decision to consider is to place a hold on the expansion of any programs of choice across the district until our issues related to capacity and portables are resolved. We are pleased to have schools coming, but our issues that are before us are substantial and are directly impacting our educational programs and community.

It is recommended:

THAT the Board of Education place a moratorium on the expansion of programs of choice until there are fewer than 200 portables being used as classrooms in the Surrey School District.
