



Calgary Board of Education

Traditional Learning Centre

Parent Feedback

April 11, 2011

Introduction

The Traditional Learning Centre (TLC) Alternative Program is currently housed in 7 elementary, 4 middle and 2 high schools across the City of Calgary. There are 4241 students enrolled; 4% of the student population. This program continues to be the fastest growing alternative program in the Calgary Board of Education.

The Traditional Learning Centre Alternative Program became involved in the Calgary Board of Education Program Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) process in 2009, when Balmoral was the pilot site for this research process. A year later three more sites participated through the management of a specialist from Learning Innovation. Early evidence from the PME process indicated the need for a review of the Quality Control for Program Integrity, which was revised and accepted by Superintendents' Team on December 2009 (Appendix I). To inform Area Directors and TLC principals, parents from all sites were provided with a feedback opportunity facilitated by Community Engagement and Operational Planning on November 19th, 2009. Twenty five parents participated in this event¹. Parents were again invited to an information event on May 12, 2010 to discuss changes to the growth of the TLC program into the high schools (Crescent Height and Henry Wise Wood). Since March 2010 seven other TLC sites have participated in the PME process, with five remaining sites scheduled for involvement in the spring of 2012.

In response to the CBE value to listen and respond to parents and the community, and to inform the PME process, TLC parents from all 13 sites were invited to attend a parent feedback evening that was structured in the same way as the 2009 meeting, but facilitated by the Learning Innovation specialist. On April 11, 2011, sixteen parents attended, and one parent responded through email. In this document the themes surfaced from the data gathering are presented, with comparison to the information gathered in 2009.

Seven elementary and one middle school were represented by the attendees. Seven of the sixteen parents represented one site (K-5), a factor that must be considered when interpreting the data. There were no representatives from high school.

The sixteen parents were randomly divided into four tables. The questions provide to the groups were:

1. What do you value in the program that your child attends?
2. What are the opportunities that you see in the program?
3. What are the challenges that you see in the program?

¹ Data available: http://www.cbe.ab.ca/programs/Choices/TLC_pdfs/TLC_ParentForum.pdf

4. What do we need to pay attention to in the future?

Each group brainstormed ideas and a recorder wrote on sticky notes that were collected for analysis. Sharing of ideas and discussion followed each question.

The themes from the respondents are provided in this memo. The information in this memo has been sent to Area Directors, Director of Community Engagement and Operations, and Superintendent of Learning innovation. This data source will help to inform a report to the Superintendents’ Team on the compliance of the Traditional Learning Centre alternative program to the intent of the program as defined through the Quality Control and Program Integrity.

Themes

Question 1: What do you value in the program that your child attends?

The values that parents have in the Traditional Learning Centre alternative program were aligned with the CBE values (Table 1). The predominant values are for academic enrichment, uniforms, character education, a structured learning environment and homework.

Predominant values from the 2009 feedback were: character education (9), academic rigor (6), structured instruction (5), multiculturalism (3) and education of whole child (3).

Table 1: Values

CBE Values	TLC values
Students Come First	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uniforms (5 responses) • consistency • structured learning environment (2) • no blended classes • grouping • character education • focus on virtues
Learning is our central purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging work (3) • emphasis on basics of phonics and math • regular and reasonable homework (some teachers give too much) • homework (2) • rigorous academics • direct learning • intention to have teachers teach at the highest level • literacy/phonics/graphemes • academic enrichment • early options – band, French, art (2)
Public education serves the common good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • parent involvement, core value system amongst parents (2) • strong behavioural expectations – respect • cultural celebrations of diversity.

Question 2: What are the opportunities for student learning that you see in the program?

The sticky notes collected from the four tables contained the following five themes (in order of number of responses):

- **Academic rigor:** parents see opportunities for an enriched academic experience through early exposure to French, band, arts and music along with accelerated learning and preparation for Advanced Placement. Opportunities for academic enrichment are also found through field trips, in house artists, and student projects.
- **Preparation for lifelong learning:** parents believe that the program provides opportunities for students to develop strong study skills and habits which, along with time management, are a good preparation for high school and university.
- **Teaching practice:** two tables indicated that homework was an important learning tool. The focus on the foundational skills of literacy through graphemes was also indicated as opportunities for students to have a strong grounding in learning.
- **Multiculturalism:** three tables indicated that exposure to global communities and multiculturalism were important opportunities for students in the TLC program.
- **Character Education:** three tables indicated the importance of character education in the program.

Similar themes were expressed in 2009, with the same focus on the opportunities for academic rigor (7), a well-rounded education (5), multiculturalism (3) and character education (2).

Question 3: What are the challenges that you see in the program?

Three themes surfaced from this question. In order of number of responses, these themes are:

- **Accommodation:** there were 10 responses that spoke to the challenges around the planning and growth of the program:
 - the program is growing too quickly (3)
 - there is a lack of stability in the planning of growth and management
 - planned growth seems to be a challenge for the CBE, particularly into the high schools
 - junior and senior high schools need to be a “*full program TLC*”
 - the challenge for families when two siblings are split between sites
- **Program:** there were seven responses that incorporated specific challenges to the program:
 - too much homework and a “*blanket*” approach to homework (2)
 - a lack of trained and established TLC teachers, where some teachers are adopted and not selected (3)
 - consistency between sites
 - there is no senior representation who is “*cheerleading for our program*”
 - parents are given homework to mark without an answer key
- **High School:** five responses indicated that there is little value in having a school uniform at high school unless there is a dedicated TLC school. There is a challenge in defining the value of TLC past grade 9. One response states “*our kids are dropping out – maybe we should graduate them instead.*”

The challenges defined in 2009 were more varied. The same accommodation, program and high school concerns were raised with more focus on the bussing - *“don’t punish us for making the TLC choice.”* In 2009 there was a requirement for mandatory AP courses for high school, which was a challenge for students and parents alike. This challenge was addressed through the revision of the Quality Control for Program Integrity. Communication and consistency were considered challenges, as was *“too much focus on academics at the expense of creating a well rounded student.”* Transitioning into high school was also a predominant theme at that time.

Question 4: What do we need to pay attention to in the future?

Accommodations, transitions, communication, program and resources were themes that parents highlighted as areas that needed the CBE to pay attention to in the future.

- **Accommodation:**
 - parents would like the CBE to be *“more considerate to parent by not splitting siblings into different schools”* and ensure that siblings gain access to the program
 - the CBE needs to pay attention to better planning for growth, particularly in new communities and to maximizing facilities for TLC use, such as adopting closed schools (2)
 - the CBE needs to continue to pay attention to growth and bussing
- **Transitions:**
 - in alignment with the three-year education plan, the CBE needs to pay attention to transitions between K-1, gr.4 – 5 and gr. 8-9 (2)
 - transitioning into high school requires attention
 - better engagement of parents would assist in transitioning students
- **Communication:**
 - ensure that administrators at all sites *“are welcoming of the TLC program and are supporters of its success - not encouraging students to drop out after grade 9.”*
 - *“Keep talking to parents please at meetings like this.”*
 - Pay attention to continuing to share information between senior administration and parents
- **Program:**
 - parents would like school administrations to pay attention to the choice of students entering the program (4)
 - attention needs to be paid to the preservation of integrity of the program (2)

The themes expressed by parent in 2009 were the same as above with the inclusion of a focus on high school – academic choices, uniforms in high school and to pay attention to the current students, not those on wait lists. These parents also requested better communication between sites and a review of the Quality Control for Program Integrity.

Conclusion

The attending parents appreciated the opportunity to have a voice and would like to see a process such as the feedback event continue. Parents were informed that this report will go to Area Directors, CEOP and Superintendent of Learning Innovation to inform their understanding of the perceptions of some parents within the Traditional Learning Centre Alternative Program. The parents were also apprised of the final reporting for alternative programs to the Superintendents’ Team that includes multiple data sources to inform the adjustment cycle planning for accommodations, resourcing, and staffing of all alternative programs including the Traditional Learning Centre.



Quality Control for Integrity Program Integrity The Traditional Learning Centre Alternative Program



	Elementary (K-4)	Middle/Junior High (5-8)	High School (9)	High School (10-12)
Program Vision	✓Uniformity in mission, vision, beliefs and values.	✓Uniformity in mission, vision, beliefs and values.	✓Uniformity in mission, vision, beliefs and values.	✓Uniformity in mission, vision, beliefs and values.
Uniforms - students	✓Uniforms are worn daily at all sites, except on days specified by the school.	✓Uniforms are worn daily at all sites, except on days specified by the school.	✓Students wear uniforms on occasions as identified by the school.	✓Students wear uniforms on occasions as identified by the school.
Uniforms - teachers	✓Administrators and teachers who work exclusively in the TLC wear the TLC uniform on formal and assembly days.	✓Administrators and teachers who work exclusively in the TLC wear the TLC uniform on formal and assembly days.	✓Administrators and teachers wear the TLC uniform on occasions as identified by the school.	✓Administrators and teachers wear the TLC uniform on occasions as identified by the school.
Academic Rigor	✓TLC students are a cohort in straight grades. Horizontal enrichment opportunities are available to challenge students based on their achievement.	✓TLC students are a cohort in straight grade core courses and as much as possible, in elective courses. Opportunities are provided for horizontal and vertical enrichment.	✓TLC students are a cohort in their core courses in Grade 9. Opportunities are provided for program acceleration and choices of enrichment in preparation for high school programming.	✓The school will encourage student placement in highest level academic courses and will provide access to academically enriched programming such as Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate. The school will provide credits for accelerated course work completed in middle/junior high.
Instruction	✓Teacher –directed instruction to whole groups is the primary instructional strategy. Students are grouped by skill ability for language arts and mathematics.	✓Teacher –directed instruction to whole groups is the primary instructional strategy. Students are grouped by skill ability for core. Cohorts are made up of TLC students only.	✓Teacher –directed instruction to whole groups is the primary instructional strategy in core subjects. Students are grouped and supported in a congregated Teacher Advisor setting.	

	Elementary (K-4)	Middle/Junior High (5-8)	High School (9)	High School (10-12)
Character Education	<p>✓Character education is intentionally taught and reinforced daily. Character is embedded in every subject, as appropriate. Announcements, assemblies, daily character circle supports character education and may be integrated with Health. Respect for self, others and the environment are cornerstones of the program philosophy.</p>	<p>✓Character education is intentionally taught and reinforced daily. Character is embedded in every subject, as appropriate. Announcements, assemblies, behavior plans and character circle support character education and may be integrated with Health. Service to the school/community is part of character education. Respect for self, others and the environment are cornerstones of the program philosophy.</p>	<p>✓Character education is intentionally incorporated into core subjects. Service to the school and greater community is part of character education. Respect for self, others and the environment are cornerstones to the program philosophy. Community and global service is included in character education.</p>	<p>✓Character Education is intentionally taught at all three grade levels through a locally developed course. School, community and global service are part of character education. Respect for self, others and the environment are cornerstones to the program philosophy. Students continuing in the TLC program are grouped and supported in a congregated Teacher Advisor setting.</p>
Assessment	<p>✓Students are assessed based on the Alberta Program of Studies outcomes and expectations for their grade level.</p>	<p>✓Students are assessed based on the Alberta Program of Studies outcomes and expectations for their grade level.</p>	<p>✓Students are assessed based on the Alberta Program of Studies outcomes and expectations for their grade level.</p>	<p>✓Students are assessed based on the Alberta Program of Studies outcomes and expectations for their grade level.</p>
Entrance Requirements	<p>✓All students are accepted into the program provided they can function in a whole group setting. The Student Profile is used in conjunction with the report card and teacher referral form to ensure that a student can be successful. Parents are consulted as to the suitability of the program for their student.</p> <p><u>K-4 Student Profile</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least average abilities and grade level achievement. • Age appropriate self-management 	<p>✓All students are accepted into the program provided they can function in a whole group setting. The Student Profile is used in conjunction with the report card and teacher referral form to ensure that a student can be successful. Parents are consulted as to the suitability of the program for their student.</p> <p><u>Grades 5-8 Student Profile</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least average abilities 	<p>✓All students are accepted into the program provided they can function in a whole group setting. The Student Profile is used in conjunction with the report card and teacher referral form. Parents are consulted as to the suitability of the program for their student.</p> <p><u>Grade 9 Student Profile</u></p>	<p>✓ Students continuing in the TLC program are supported through their Teacher Advisory Cohort and in their work within the Locally Developed Course, “Character Education”.</p>

	Elementary (K-4)	Middle/Junior High (5-8)	High School (9)	High School (10-12)
	<p>and organizational skills.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to focus on tasks for an extended period of time. • The ability to listen to and follow oral directions without delay. • Self-motivation and a willingness to be challenged academically. • A willingness to do nightly homework. • Ability and willingness to respect self, others and the learning environment. • A desire to work and play with others and display good character. • An ability and willingness to take ever-increasing responsibility and ownership for their own learning (independent work within a structured setting). • A willingness to wear a school uniform. 	<p>and grade level achievement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age appropriate organizational skills. • The ability to focus on tasks for an extended period of time. • The ability to listen to and follow oral directions without delay. • Self-motivation and a willingness to be challenged academically. • A willingness to do nightly homework. • An ability and willingness to participate in positive social interactions, engage in problem solving and model good character. • A willingness to undertake a leadership role in the school, including citizenship and service. • An ability and willingness to take ever-increasing responsibility and ownership for their own learning (independent work within a structured setting). • A willingness to wear a school uniform. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least average abilities and grade level achievement. • An ability and willingness to take ever-increasing responsibility and ownership for their own learning (independent work within a structured setting). • Self-motivation and a willingness to be challenged academically. • A willingness to do regularly assigned homework and review. • An ability and willingness to participate in positive social interactions, engage in problem solving and model good character. • A willingness to undertake a leadership role in the school, including school, community, and global service. • A willingness to adhere to school 	

	Elementary (K-4)	Middle/Junior High (5-8)	High School (9)	High School (10-12)
			uniform expectations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A willingness to accept the challenge of a rigorous academic curriculum and an eagerness for knowledge and service. 	
Resources	✓Common resources are used at each grade level in the core subject areas.	✓Common scope and sequence is used at each grade level in the core subject areas including horizontal and vertical enrichment opportunities.		
Second Language	✓Students begin French in Grade 1.	✓Students continue in French.	✓Students continue in French 9.	✓Second language courses are optional.
Music/Band	✓All TLC students are provided with General Music from K to 6 in an elementary setting, with an emphasis on musical theory and instrumental skills in Grades 5 and 6.	✓Band begins in Grade 5 in a Middle School setting. All students are required to continue Band or take another music option in Grades 7 and 8.	✓Students who have participated in Band in middle or junior high school are accommodated in the Band program in high school.	✓Students who have participated in Band in middle or junior high school are accommodated in the Band program in high school.
Homework	✓Daily homework, daily agenda (signed by parents), open communication between home and school.	✓Daily homework, daily agenda, open communication between home and school.	✓ A willingness to do regularly assigned homework and review.	
Routines	✓Common routines are expected for behaviour in classroom and school.	✓Common routines are expected for behaviour in classroom and school.	✓Common routines are expected for each core class.	
Assemblies	✓Regular assemblies to celebrate Virtue of the Month.	✓Regular assemblies to celebrate students, based on Character, and other achievements.	✓Award system in place to recognize student achievement	✓Award system in place to recognize student achievement
Multiculturalism	✓Intentional recognition and	✓Intentional recognition and	✓Intentional recognition	

	Elementary (K-4)	Middle/Junior High (5-8)	High School (9)	High School (10-12)
	understanding of the diversity of our communities through announcements, assemblies etc.	understanding of the diversity of our communities through announcements, assemblies etc.	and understanding of the diversity of our communities through announcements, assemblies etc.	
Parent Commitment	✓Parents sign commitment to K-12 program expectations, including wearing of uniforms by students. Parents are willing to monitor homework and mark assignments, when appropriate.	✓Parents sign commitment to K-12 program expectations, including wearing of uniforms by students. Parents are willing to monitor homework and mark assignments, when appropriate.	✓Parents demonstrate commitment to program guidelines and expectations. Parents are informed of the opportunities for academic enrichment.	✓ Parents demonstrate commitment to program guidelines and expectations. Parents are informed of the opportunities for academic enrichment.
Anthem	✓Daily singing of <i>O Canada</i> to start the day in French and/or English.	✓Daily singing of <i>O Canada</i> to start the day in French and/or English.	✓Singing of <i>O Canada</i> in French and/or English during occasions as identified by the school.	✓ Singing of <i>O Canada</i> in French and/or English during occasions as identified by the school.
Classroom Structure	✓Kindergarten students begin with a structured focus on learning graphemes and phonemes: reading, writing, and mathematics are intentionally taught. Students are provided with a structured, orderly setting appropriate to the activity. This includes desks in rows.	✓Students are provided with a structured, orderly setting appropriate to the activity. This includes desks in rows.	✓Students are provided with structured learning environments appropriate to the activity.	
<p>All TLC teachers and administrators complete the on-line TLC course before teaching in the program or as soon as practicable in the first year.</p> <p>The integrity of the program from site to site is the accountability of the school's principal and Area Director.</p> <p>Recommendation:</p> <p>THAT TLC staff on site and from site to site work together as much as possible to implement and develop the TLC program; this includes common professional development days, job shadowing opportunities and event sharing occurs between sites.</p>				