

***Traditional Schools in Surrey:
Current Context and
Recommendations for
Future Directions***

Preamble

It is an exciting and dynamic time in education in the Province of British Columbia. Education stakeholders are currently involved in one of the most comprehensive curriculum transformations in years, with the BC Education Plan serving as a roadmap for the future. With the new curriculum framework (K-9) now available to explore by educators and parents, the process of transforming our education system is well underway. In the midst of such a substantive, system-wide change, the current context of 'Traditional Schools in Surrey' is being explored and the process of establishing a shared vision of 21st Century traditional schools has recently commenced.

In the Spring of 2013, with the support of the Traditional School Advisory Committee, the principals of the three traditional schools in Surrey began focused discussions with school staff members and parents about the need to look at the principles of 21st Century Learning and the use of technology finding expression in a traditional school environment. A series of discussions at various tables led to the recommendation from the Traditional School Advisory Committee to host a Parent Forum with representation from all three schools. The purpose of the forum was to engage parents around specific questions that served to start the process of providing input. The forum was described to parents and staff members as a "first step" in a more comprehensive process to explore and affirm our shared vision for a "modern traditional school" in Surrey.

Parallel to the parent forum, teachers from all three schools planned the first-ever joint professional development day. Energy was high and the session focused on using technology to enhance learning, the session was very well received by teachers. Following this session, plans were made to run a joint session for teachers again in August. It has been reported that the August session was well attended and seen as very practical. Key conversations about teaching and learning with technology are happening at all three schools and more opportunities for joint professional learning are being planned for 2014.

In the early days of September 2013, enrollment at Surrey Traditional School turned out to be lower than anticipated. Attempts to register new students from the already exhausted waitlist were unsuccessful and the result was a school-wide reorganization of classes with two fewer divisions. The re-organization of the divisions created the need for two multi-age classes. The unanticipated timing of these changes created significant levels of expressed concern and protest from the parent community. What emerged from the various discussions that took place in the aftermath of the reorganization at Surrey Traditional School, was a clear need for the district to commit to supporting a process to develop a truly shared vision for the future of traditional schools in Surrey; a visioning process that honours the past, but looks clearly to the future to ensure all students receive the best possible learning experiences that will prepare them to graduate with options in the 21st century workplace.

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the current status of the traditional school model in Surrey and to make recommendations regarding future directions. Following the submission of this report, an action plan to implement the recommendations will be developed with representatives from all stakeholder groups.

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SECTION 1: STUDENT ENROLMENT IN TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS

Surrey Traditional School opened its doors in September of 1997, with a total population of 317 students. Since this time, two other traditional school sites have opened and the total population of students in traditional schools in Surrey has almost tripled in 16 years. During this time, the location for Surrey Traditional School changed in 2003 from its Newton location to its current location in the North area of Surrey. As well, Anniedale Traditional School was relocated to a new site and renamed McLeod Road Traditional in 2010. Cloverdale Traditional has been a stable location since 2003.

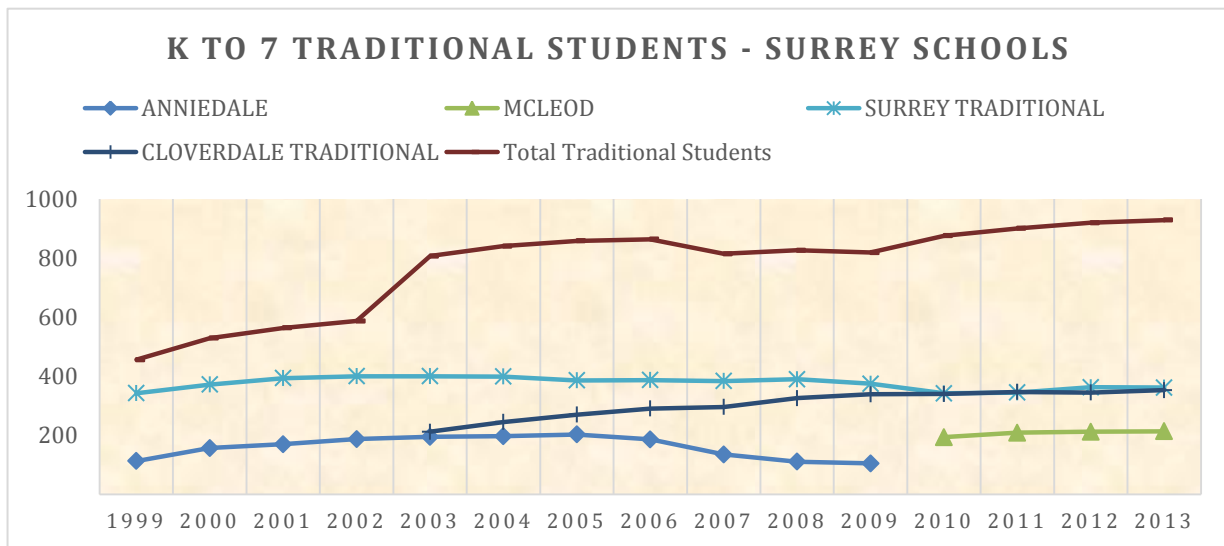
Fig. 1: Student enrolment at all of Surrey's traditional school sites 1999 - Present



1999-Present
Based on K-7 Enrolment as of September

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
ANNIE DALE	113	157	170	187	195	197	203	186	135	111	105				
MCLEOD												194	209	212	214
SURREY TRADITIONAL	343	372	394	400	400	399	386	387	384	390	375	342	345	363	362
CLOVERDALE TRADITIONAL					212	245	270	291	296	326	339	340	347	345	353
Total Traditional Students	456	529	564	587	807	841	859	864	815	827	819	876	901	920	929

Fig. 2: Traditional school enrolment trends 1999 - Present



Some shifts in student populations at Surrey Traditional School have been directly impacted by internal decisions. One example of this would be the School District's decision to transition-out the secondary program (phased out completely in 2009). It has been speculated by some stakeholders that the possible external influences that have impacted populations at particular sites could be linked to the expansion of Khalsa School in the North area of Surrey, this having an impact on the enrolment at Surrey Traditional School. Also, some speculation points to students on the wait-lists being drawn toward independent school options during the time of teacher job-action in 2011/12.

Moving forward, it will be important to establish a sustainable population at each site based on common registration, program promotion and waitlist management. Currently, both Cloverdale Traditional and McLeod Road Traditional appear sustainable. Further attention will be needed to establish a sustainable enrolment at Surrey Traditional School to minimize dramatic changes to the organization and resourcing of the school.

SECTION 2: ESTABLISHING A VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS IN SURREY

The Traditional School Model – 10 Tenets of Traditional Schools

Although there are several school districts across Canada that offer traditional school as a program of choice, there is variation as to the tenets that shape the model of traditional education and how the model finds expression in the local school context. In Surrey, all three of our traditional school sites essentially adhere to the following tenets:

1. Consistent structured approach that maximizes class time.
2. A strong focus on academic achievement.
3. Teacher directed instruction.
4. Regular skills assessment.
5. An emphasis on solid literacy skills.
6. A regular homework policy.
7. A clearly defined Code of Conduct.
8. A dress code.
9. A safe environment.
10. Parents as partners.

In the 16 years that traditional schools have existed in Surrey, there has been no comprehensive process to date to construct a shared vision of traditional school. Furthermore, there has been no extensive collaboration amongst the three sites with respect to teacher professional development or areas of shared focus (e.g., technology). There have been occasions where working groups that have involved staff members and parents from all three sites have examined details such as uniform policies and codes of student conduct; however, this type of collaboration has been infrequent and limited in scope.

In the early months of 2013, representatives from the Traditional Schools Advisory Committee, along with representatives from each school, began exploring questions related to how the elements of the BC Education Plan could be realized in the context of a “modern traditional school”. This led to discussions around the need for greater collaboration among the staff and parents from the three schools. With the endorsement of the Traditional Schools Advisory Committee, the Director of Instruction for Education Services and the principals from each traditional school planned two significant events, a parent forum and a common teacher professional development day focused on using technology to enhance learning.

Traditional Schools Parent Forum – April 30th 2013

A group of 36 parents, 3 principals, one School Trustee from the Board of Education and one Director of Instruction participated in the first ever Traditional Schools Parent Forum on April 30th, 2013. The purpose of the Parent Forum was to engage in a dialogue responding to 4 key questions intended to gather input and impressions regarding the current successes, needs and future directions for the Traditional schools in Surrey. Parent representatives from Cloverdale Traditional, McLeod Road Traditional and Surrey Traditional were all in attendance and the meeting took place over a period of approximately two hours.

The evidence was collected using an activity called an Interview Matrix, designed to hear from participants about strengths, needs and future directions of the current Traditional Schools Program. The process involved a series of rotating conversations culminating in a summary of specific areas. This analysis sets the collected evidence in a framework for constructive future directions.

Synthesis of Parent Feedback

Overall, participants indicated their passion and commitment to a well-rounded educational experience for their children. Many of the comments focused on what could be described as the “foundational” aspects of traditional schools (the importance and value of uniforms, a strict code of student conduct, high standards, and a focus on core academics... just to highlight a few). However, there was a disconnect observed between some responses regarding what it means to embrace technology and other aspects of 21st Century Learning. Some parents were very open and enthusiastic about enhancing student learning through technology and more current instructional design. In contrast, some parents were much more cautious in this regard and wanted to tread carefully moving forward. The notion of the traditional schools embracing 21st Century Learning ideals was appealing to many participants, but would require further input and discussion moving forward. A desire to develop a shared vision for all three traditional schools was evidenced.

Summary of Responses to Questions

1. In your experience, what do you see as the strengths of our traditional schools?

Primary Themes:

- The importance of uniforms and a strong commitment to reinforcing appropriate student conduct.
- Explicit teaching of manners and instilling strong ‘traditional values’.
- Teacher directed learning/strong focus on core academics (multiple references to the “3Rs”).
- High expectations/focus on standards/instill student discipline (study skills).
- Structured environment (classroom and school).
- Parent participation seen as a positive.

Secondary Themes:

- Emphasis on sequential learning of basic skills.
- Smaller class size and fewer split classes seen as a positive.
- Awards and recognition are valued

2. From your experience, what are the specific ways we could work to improve our traditional schools?

Primary Themes:

- High expectations need to be implemented for uniforms care and attention (parents need to commit to this and it must be enforced).
- Students having more access to current technology in classrooms/technology enhancing learning.
- Greater consistency of expectations from class to class/grade-to-grade. Expectations for student conduct should be enforced school-wide (other examples: homework expectations should be consistent).
- Greater opportunities for students to experience extra-curricular activities.
- Greater focus on improving consistency in home-school communication.
- More opportunities for student leadership.
- Greater emphasis on social responsibility.
- Enhance opportunities for parent participation.

Secondary Themes:

- Teachers supported in “buying in” to a traditional philosophy of education.
- Manners and traditional values need to be taught consistently.
- Need for better planning in the transition from Grade 7 to 8.

3. In the process of examining what it means to be a “Modern” traditional school:

- a. What beliefs, values and traditions do you feel are important to be preserved?**
- b. What foundational beliefs do we need to highlight (e.g. importance of manners)?**
- c. What educational experiences do you feel need to be emphasized?**

Primary Themes:

Part A

- Code of conduct, uniforms, focus on student discipline and manners, social responsibility.
- High standards.
- Teacher directed instruction.
- Structure and order.

Part B

- Focus on core academics.
- High expectations for academics, student conduct, structure and order.
- Parent involvement.
- Teacher directed instruction.
- Sense of community.

Part C

- Further emphasis on the role of technology in supporting learning.
- Greater opportunity for learning experiences outside the classroom: field trips, events (science fair), community involvement, student leadership.
- Greater emphasis on physical fitness and healthy living – “healthy body, healthy mind”.

4. In light of the BC Ed Plan, and a provincial conversation about 21st Century Learning, what is your vision of a “modern” traditional school?

Primary Themes:

- Widespread support for a focus on the integration of technology (some cautions: many still want teacher focused instruction and a focus on core academics, but see the need to use technology as a tool to support learning).
- Support for teachers to learn new technologies and how they can be used in the classroom.
- Some support for “Bring Your Own Device” (BYOD) environments.
- Kids need to learn to interact appropriately and use technology appropriately – this requires careful monitoring and supervision.
- Keep a focus on traditional values and structures, but incorporate modern teaching practices.
- Support for teachers using technology to communicate and have students interact and share their learning (websites, blogs, etc.).

Following the parent forum, the principals and the director of instruction established the following questions to guide our next steps:

- Moving forward, what key activities will help to reaffirm, establish and define a new, shared vision for the three traditional schools?
- What further input and communication with students, staff and parents would be helpful moving forward?
- How do we respect the historical foundation of the traditional schools while embracing 21st Century skills as necessary for our students?
- What next steps will be necessary in this journey?

Recommendations:

1. It is recommended that a comprehensive visioning process for traditional schools be established and carried out over the next 8-12 months. The process will involve all stakeholders and seek to create a vision of a modern traditional school.
2. It is recommended that the Board of Education consider hiring an external facilitator to host parent and staff forums to ensure neutrality and continuity in the process.

SECTION 3: STUDENT REGISTRATION PROCESS AND WAITLIST MANAGEMENT

All choice programs in Surrey follow a similar process to register new students and manage waitlists for students requesting placement in a specific program of choice.

Kindergarten

All programs of choice in Surrey follow the same “phone-in” registration process for students entering in Kindergarten. The phone-in registration for new Kindergarten students takes place annually in January and is a well-established process.

Sibling Registration

Prior to the phone-in registration process in January, siblings of students already in a program of choice will have the opportunity to register. For most of the programs, this will happen in December of each year and placement in the program is dependent on space availability in the specific grade level being requested.

Registration for Grades 1-7

During the phone-in registration process, parents can also put their child’s name on a waitlist for placement in other grades in the program. Students in grades other than Kindergarten will be offered placements as space permits. If parents are registering after the phone-in registration date, parents must contact each site directly to register their child or place their name on the waitlist.

Waitlist Management

In reviewing the waitlist management practices at each of the three traditional school sites it was made clear to the author of this report that the process for managing waitlists varies slightly depending on the site. Although all three schools create new, updated waitlists at the time of the phone-in registration in January, procedures from this point forward are not consistent. To some degree this variation exists because the size of the waitlists is not the same from site to site (e.g., Cloverdale waitlist = 38 students, McLeod Road waitlist = 174 students). It is a significant challenge for the schools to keep in regular contact with families on waitlists to ensure that they want to continue as “active”. Over the course of a school year, many families who have children on waitlists migrate toward other available schooling options for their child and may no longer wish to have a spot at the school when it materializes. Also, many families will place their child’s name on more than one program’s waitlist. This further complicates matters and requires significant cross-referencing by school clerical staff to keep waitlists current. Although the process of cross-referencing waitlists is unclear and inconsistent among the three sites, the principals are all collaborating on how to improve current procedures.

Recommendations:

1. It is recommended that a thorough review of the phone-in registration process be completed and all options be explored.
2. It is recommended that waitlist management practices with all programs of choice be reviewed and that a working group be created to establish consistent waitlist management guidelines for programs of choice.

SECTION 4: STUDENT DIVERSITY

Principals and teachers at all three traditional schools indicate that student diversity has increased significantly over the past 10 years. Traditional school student enrollment data shows an increasing number of students with identified special needs and a large increase in students who are English language learners. School-Based Team data also indicates a broad range of unidentified or undiagnosed behavioural, cognitive and mental health needs being brought forward for support planning and referral for further involvement from the medical community or school psychologist. Across all three sites, equitable support services have been apportioned to support the broad spectrum of student needs.

Despite having access to support services, school staff at all three sites have expressed significant concerns regarding the predominantly “undifferentiated” approach to instruction and assessment, and the limitations this approach has in meeting the needs of all learners. In this model, support services tend to be “pull out” by nature and given that teacher directed instruction remains one of the ten tenets of traditional schools, the principals have highlighted that mindsets of some parents and teachers will be difficult to shift toward more differentiated instructional practices and an emphasis on formative assessment. Despite this challenge, opportunities for teachers and parents to explore how evidenced-based, differentiated instruction and quality assessment practices fit into a traditional school context must be provided.

Recommendations:

1. It is recommended that as part of the visioning process, parents and staff be adequately informed on evidence-based instructional practices, including differentiated instruction and AFL (Assessment for Learning). Information can be provided through parent information workshops, staff in-service sessions and through other modes of communication as deemed appropriate. The involvement of Education Services Helping Teachers in planning the activities will be an important consideration.
2. It is recommended that an inventory of evidenced-based interventions be implemented at all three sites. Learner Support Helping Teachers and Special Education Helping Teachers will provide guidance and support to both classroom teachers and LST teachers.

SECTION 5: EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS

Student expectations for behaviour and manners remain a high priority at all three traditional schools. Students sign a “student letter of understanding” that affirms their commitment to the Student Code of Conduct. Parents also sign the letter as an endorsement in supporting their child to understand and adhere to the Code of Conduct. Principals report that there have been greater challenges with respect to managing and supporting student behaviour or the past several years. As the range of student needs has broadened and increased in complexity at each of the schools, the traditional approach to addressing student behavioural issues through progressive discipline has become very challenging. As evidenced by the increasing number of students with identified mental health issues, such as anxiety, a more differentiated approach is required to support students exhibiting social and emotional challenges. Principals also report a greater degree of resistance from parents when consequences for inappropriate behavior are enforced. Recent conversations among teachers at all three sites have involved the exploration of social and emotional learning strategies to support struggling students. However, these discussions are just starting and have not developed into school-wide goals or focused staff development.

Recommendations:

1. It is recommended that teachers and parents be provided opportunities to be informed on the principles and research-base supporting Social and Emotional Learning.
2. It is recommended that more information be provided to teachers and parents regarding strategies that support self-regulation in students. Involvement at the school level from the District Self-Regulation Team would be helpful in this process.

SECTION 6: PREPARATION FOR CURRICULUM TRANSFORMATION

Amongst the teaching staff at all three traditional schools, the range of teaching experience and years teaching in a traditional school varies significantly. All three sites have a core group of teachers who have been teaching in a traditional school context for 5+ years. However, despite this, there is also anticipated movement of teaching staff, year over year, during the transfer process. Teachers who are new to the traditional school context do not undergo any formal orientation or have any prerequisite or preferred training / qualifications. This can create tension for teachers who bring with them a range of teaching practices that may not observably align with the parent expectations of “teacher directed instruction” and the traditional construct of a “structured learning environment” (e.g., students sitting in rows). Given the system wide change process that is already underway with the curriculum transformation, this dynamic could be amplified and will need to be managed transparently and strategically. Parents will require ongoing information about the new curriculum developed by the Ministry of Education and be provided opportunities to discuss and develop a deeper understanding of the foundations of the new curriculum (e.g., understand the rationale for the shift away from an outcomes-driven curriculum, to a competency-based curriculum). Teachers in the traditional schools will require significant, ongoing support and guidance from their principals and appropriate district staff, to feel they can try new things and fully embrace the changes while possibly feeling pressured by some parents to resist change.

Principals report that they are wanting to find ways to talk about the curriculum transformation with parent groups and teachers knowing it will require a substantive shift in pedagogical understanding amongst stakeholders to find expression in the current traditional school model. Recent discussions with teachers and parents about the use of instructional technology appear to have had some traction. All three schools historically have not placed a high priority on technology and, as such, have limited access at this time. Cloverdale Traditional received an Innovative Learning Designs (ILD) grant last year and a small, but growing group of teachers are influencing change through this work. The recent joint professional development day for teachers focused on instructional technology and created a great deal of interest. However, teachers expressed frustration that they did not readily have access to working computers or iPads in order to integrate technology tools into their classrooms. All three schools are working on plans to acquire hardware.

Recommendations:

1. It is recommended that as part of the School District’s overall strategy to support the implementation of the new curriculum, that coordinated attention and support be provided to the three traditional schools given their unique circumstances.
2. It is recommended that all three sites develop a plan and apply to for an Innovative Learning Designs grant to further explore the use of instructional technology.

SECTION 7: UNIFORMS

Student uniforms (dress code) remains one of the tenets of traditional schools that is a very high priority with parents. Since the early years of having traditional schools in Surrey, managing a uniform policy and the ongoing issues that arise, has been identified as a significant, time consuming challenge for principals and teaching staff. In all three locations, P.A.C. representatives coordinate the purchasing and ordering of the uniforms. Individual parents commit to expectations for the dress code and students are also made aware of the expectations. The degree to which the P.A.C. representatives help support and monitor issues with uniform infractions varies between sites. There is no consistent approach among the three schools to manage the dress code. Principals report that there are ongoing issues with uniform infractions and it is frustrating to manage these issues when parents frequently do not follow through with the expectations. In some cases, parents are choosing other clothing items that are not part of the approved uniform and having the approved, copyrighted logo stitched onto personal clothing without consent. The details related to issues with governing the uniform policy are reported to be extensive enough to warrant further review and a coordinated approach among representatives from the three sites appears to be required.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that a working group with representatives from all three traditional schools be established to examine current issues with respect to student dress code and establish a consistent set of guidelines for the dress code that is inclusive of pre-determined consequences for infractions.

SECTION 8: PARENT INVOLVEMENT

The expectation of parent involvement remains an important tenet at all three traditional schools sites. However, the manner in which parent involvement finds expression at each of the schools varies.

Principals report that parent participation has increasingly shifted away from supporting school goals and initiatives and moved more toward parent driven initiatives that, on occasion, go beyond the mandate of the P.A.C. and may not necessarily be aligned with school priorities. Turnover in P.A.C. executive membership and smaller numbers of regular parent volunteers have created conditions where a majority of parent voices may not be heard. The ways in which the P.A.C.s at each school function appear to be quite varied. While there are some positives reported by the principals, evidence suggests the need for greater role clarity and a coordinated approach among the P.A.C.s at all three Traditional schools.

As part of the significant work to establish a shared vision for the future of traditional schools, it will be important to find ways for all parent voices to be captured. Recognizing that all parents want the best experiences and outcomes for their children, efforts toward re-establishing a true partnership between parents and the school will be essential to bringing the new vision to life.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that as part of the process to develop a shared vision for the future of traditional schools, D.P.A.C. and key parent representatives from each school must be invited to help to create opportunities for all parent voices to be heard.

SECTION 9: HOME & SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

All three traditional schools use multiple means of communication with parents. This includes regular newsletters, email updates and information posted on school websites. Over the years, each school has developed school specific communications independently and, as a result, the style, frequency, content, and breadth of information shared varies between sites. This variance came to light following the concerns raised by parents at Surrey Traditional School with respect to information on “the school website” stating that classes were organized by single grade levels. Following the September 2013 class re-organization at Surrey Traditional School, the resulting two multi-age classes became a flashpoint for parent protest. Information contained on the independently developed “school website” was incongruent with district policy and arguably, misleading.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that as part of the work ahead to create a shared vision for traditional schools in Surrey, a centralized, one-stop-shop website outlining all of the key information related to traditional schools will be developed. Each school will have their own culture and identity, but through the visioning process, common elements and shared, foundational beliefs, expectations and guidelines will be captured.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Since Surrey Traditional School opened its doors almost 17 years ago, the growth and evolution of Traditional Schools in Surrey has been made possible by a steadfast commitment from the Board of Education to support “parent choice” and to offer a range of quality educational programs that serve Surrey’s diverse student population. With the transformation of the education system in British Columbia already in progress, it is a crucial time to be actively building a shared vision of a “modern traditional school” in Surrey. Some of the recommendations contained in this report address procedural issues that can be resolved on relatively short timelines. Conversely, other recommendations made will require fulsome collaboration and input with all stakeholders and take more time to realize in a meaningful way. The intention of this report is to serve as a catalyst to develop plans for the inevitable changes ahead. Knowing that all parents fundamentally want the best education possible for their children, it is our responsibility to ensure that the traditional schools in Surrey provide a quality education that both serves children well in the future and emphasizes “traditional” beliefs and values in our modern context.

Summary of Recommendations

1. It is recommended that a comprehensive visioning process for traditional schools be established and carried out over the next 8-12 months. The process will involve all stakeholders and seek to create a vision of a modern traditional school.
2. It is recommended that the Board of Education consider hiring an external facilitator to host parent and staff forums to ensure neutrality and continuity in the process.
3. It is recommended that a thorough review of the phone-in registration process be completed and all options be explored.
4. It is recommended that waitlist management practices with all programs of choice be reviewed and that a working group be created to establish consistent waitlist management guidelines for programs of choice.
5. It is recommended that as part of the visioning process, parents and staff be adequately informed on evidence-based instructional practices, including differentiated instruction and AFL (Assessment for Learning). Information can be provided through parent information workshops, staff in-service sessions and through other modes of communication as deemed appropriate. The involvement of Education Services Helping Teachers in planning the activities will be an important consideration.
6. It is recommended that an inventory of evidenced-based interventions be implemented at all three sites. Learner Support Helping Teachers and Special Education Helping Teachers will provide guidance and support to both classroom teachers and LST teachers.
7. It is recommended that teachers and parents be provided opportunities to be informed on the principles and research-base supporting Social and Emotional Learning.
8. It is recommended that more information be provided to teachers and parents regarding strategies that support self-regulation in students. Involvement at the school level from the District Self-Regulation Team would be helpful in this process.

9. It is recommended that as part of the School District's overall strategy to support the implementation of the new curriculum, that coordinated attention and support be provided to the three traditional schools given their unique circumstances.
10. It is recommended that all three sites develop a plan and apply to for an Innovative Learning Designs grant to further explore the use of instructional technology.
11. It is recommended that a working group with representatives from all three traditional schools be established to examine current issues with respect to student dress code and establish a consistent set of guidelines for the dress code that is inclusive of pre-determined consequences for infractions.
12. It is recommended that as part of the process to develop a shared vision for the future of traditional schools, D.P.A.C. and key parent representatives from each school must be invited to help to create opportunities for all parent voices to be heard.
13. It is recommended that as part of the work ahead to create a shared vision for traditional schools in Surrey, a centralized, one-stop-shop website outlining all of the key information related to traditional schools will be developed. Each school will have their own culture and identity, but through the visioning process, common elements and shared, foundational beliefs, expectations and guidelines will be captured.