

Cowichan Valley School District #79 - Small Secondary Schools Task Force Report (March 2012)



Lake Cowichan Secondary School



Chemainus Secondary School

In the District Strategic Plan for Student Success under the goal “Equitable Access”, one of the actions under the objective of “Enhancing Program Opportunities for Small Secondary Schools” was to form a Small Secondary Schools Task Force that reported back to the School Board during the 2011-2012 school year.

At the first meeting held at Chemainus Secondary School in November 2011, School Administration and School Planning Council members from both schools (CHSS and LCSS) along with the Acting Director of Middle/Secondary Education discussed what should be the objectives of the committee. We decided that concerns expressed by parents and administration related to senior elective courses, alternative course delivery options, a change in the format of the teacher staffing model, and a commitment to the schools from the School Board to support the Grad Program, would all be items for consideration and discussion.

We looked at the current demographics of the schools including grade configurations and at the enrollment data for the past 3 years and the upcoming 4 years. The data shows many challenges ahead as enrollment decline is forecast. We also asked our school administrators to survey students at the school, asking them what they valued in their school and what would entice students to maintain their commitment to the school and to complete their graduation requirements while remaining attached to their home school.

The overall intent of the committee was to be proactive, search for creative solutions and to make recommendations. One of the key questions discussed was, “Is it possible to develop educational programs that supplement what is currently offered in order to provide an adequate education for students, thereby encouraging them to choose LCSS and CHSS as suitable educational options?” The overall consensus of the committee was to support the current grade configurations at the schools and recommend that the Grad Program (Grades 10-12) be continued at both sites.

Important Items of Discussion – Two items that continually came up in our meetings centred on the funding formula for teacher staffing at the schools, which does not provide an adequate level of service, and a discussion about aligning school timetables between secondary schools in order to enable joint delivery of courses via video conferencing. This would enable our secondary schools to share teachers in specialty subject areas enabling schools to provide course offerings that they otherwise would not be able to offer.

Participation - Over the last four months, a total of 4 meetings have been held, including meetings at Chemainus Secondary School, Lake Cowichan Secondary School and the School Board Office.

The following participants have taken a regular and active role in committee discussions and recommendations.

Lake Cowichan Secondary - Peter Jory (Principal), Dani Garner (VP), Brenda Morrison (parent) Chemainus Secondary – Sian Peterson (Principal), Mike Martin (VP), Gail Calderwood (parent), Marlene Hayes (parent), Kate Marsh (parent)

School Board Office – Ron Nunweiler (Acting Director of Middle/Secondary)

Other individuals who participated on several occasions were – Erika Blume (Lake Cowichan Teachers' Assoc. President), and Trustees Haythornthwaite, Brown, and Oxman.

Questions that the Task Force Discussed

- Do both schools require a unique funding/staffing formula?
- Are students in Grades 10-12 limited in educational opportunities at either CHSS or LCSS?
- Is there equitable access for student program options in our secondary schools?
- Should the current grade configurations be maintained at both schools?
- What opportunities currently exist in each school for our students in Grades 10-12? What are some of the limitations?
- What are the valuable assets that each school provides that we want to maintain?
- Should Distance Learning Programs (with support) remain an option for course selection?
- Would the alignment of school timetables create opportunities for program development between schools?
- Could bus transportation be used to enable students to attend different sites on a part-time basis?
- Are Dual Credit Post Secondary academic/career courses a viable option for developing some student timetables?

Statements and Recommendations

The following is a summary of proposals and recommendations from the Task Force.

1. The current funding model that bases staffing primarily on FTE (students) has not provided an adequate level of service to the small secondary schools. Baseline Funding needs to be guaranteed for staffing purposes – both schools must be provided with a base line staffing model to provide a basic level of educational support to meet the needs of all students in the graduation program.
2. Engage other District Secondary Schools in developing a common timetable to accommodate joint course delivery opportunities via “Video Conference”, Distance Learning, or other curriculum delivery methods.
3. Grad Programs to continue at LCSS and CHSS (Grades 10-12). Equitable access for student program choices is supported.
4. Schools to be proactive advocates of their programs and services. Develop District and school based initiatives that detail and promote the opportunities that are available for students in attending our two “Small Secondary Schools”.
5. Establish and support “Centres of Learning” in each school dedicated to supporting students utilizing interactive and course delivery through computer and video technology, for DL support, completing courses, independent directed studies, and for students working on their 1 day in-school course work (for students who are enrolled in apprenticeship, career and trades programs).
6. Distance Learning continues to be staffed and supported (by the District) to accommodate student learning and graduation requirements.
7. The District maintains their level of commitment to supporting the ongoing maintenance and upgrading of school facilities, including buildings, playing fields, science labs, etc.
8. The District commits to the local communities in offering a viable education to students and an adequate level of care in supporting their learning needs.
9. Dual Credit opportunities continue to be made available for students to attend both trades/careers and academic programs at the post secondary level.
10. Allocation of resources (budget provided by the District) to be flexible to accommodate costs associated with introducing new curriculum and new programs.

The one over-riding comment that was heard from students, parents and staff is the “ sense of community” that both schools offer. Students do not want to go elsewhere to get a quality education. It has been shown that students have been, and can be successful, at both CHSS and LCSS. The local communities feel a strong attachment to both of these schools and want them to remain and be supported so that quality education can be offered at a local level.

“Parents in the communities of Lake Cowichan and Chemainus need to be reassured that their Small Secondary Schools will be a viable option for students in the future.”

**Presentation to the School Board
Wednesday, March 7th, 2012 @ 6:30pm**