

EMB Parent Response to Recommended EMB Secondary Placement

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- The Early Mandarin Bilingual (EMB) program is highly supported by Parents.
- Parents were pleased to have been given a place on the EMB Transition Committee and we were able to provide to committee members a Parent survey with over 70% response rate by Grade 5 & 6 EMB parents, now in Grade 6 & 7.
- Parents appreciate the time and effort of the VSB staff to produce the Early Mandarin Secondary Placement Report being presented here today.

However, there are some serious concerns regarding the methodology and criteria used in this report to arrive at Windermere as the recommended secondary school site for the EMB program.

Quick review of 4 of the 5 criteria used in the Report:

1. "# of students attending the EMB at Norquay and who live in this school catchment."
 - The numbers presented in the matrix are misleading. There are 195 students in the EMB program, so 46/195 students are in the Windermere catchment, is only 27% of all the EMB student population, which means 63% EMB students live out of catchment and are already commuting.
 - Students come from all over the city for Choice programs and parents and students have been willing to cross boundaries to attend this program for the last 7 years. This willingness to attend outside catchment increases in high school rather than decreases. So it makes little sense to use this as one of the main criteria for site selection.

2. "Space challenges" -

- "Limited Space" is listed for Hamber, Churchill and Thompson, the top 3 school choices of EMB parents. Each year the EMB students enrolling into the Secondary program with the exception of the current Gr. 6 class, there will only be 20 - 24 students. This does not seem to pose much of a challenge for any secondary school to accommodate each year. In fact, given Hamber's high number of cross boundary students, Norquay EMB students could easily be given priority for cross-boundary acceptance.

3. "Other District/Choice Programs" -

- One of the main reasons Hamber is the top parent choice for the secondary site is because it currently already has an advance Mandarin Choice program that is closely aligned to the Norquay EMB students acquisition levels. Therefore, EMB students could easily merge into the existing Mandarin Choice program with only minor modifications, if any at all. Intensive French students merge with French Immersion classes at Gr. 8, so this would be a similar process.
- **Program strength and track record** is the overriding concern and main factor for parents' choice when choosing a secondary school site. They are tired of their children being "guinea pigs" especially when there is a long established program already in existence.
- Parents are not confident that there is enough time to properly develop and implement a brand new Choice program and given this perception, they will be less likely to choose this program for their children.
- If not enough parents have confidence to choose this new program, this could jeopardize all the hard work that has been put into this program.

4. "What are the future Facilities plans around this site?"

- Hamber and Thompson are next in line for Facilities upgrade/rebuild. Parents would prefer any disruptions to happen early in their child's high school years rather than later.
- Given Hamber and Thompson's facility schedule, most of the facility work will be completed by the time our children reach Gr. 11 and 12, but this will be exactly when Windermere is slated for upgrades.

EMB was started by a Parent Advocacy Group and the VSB made it into a reality.

- Parents have played a large part in the program's success and if it is to succeed into high school, it will require continued parent support.
- Disregarding Parent Feedback could be highly detrimental to the sustainability of the program.
- Grade 7 students will be choosing a high school this Fall, therefore, VSB has just over a month to provide a program overview for students to consider and compare to other well established programs.
- To date, the EMB program has lacked Key Performance Indicators or Mandarin acquisition milestones and this makes it difficult for parents to have confidence that they will know where their children's Mandarin level will be by the time they reach Gr. 12 and they may not be willing to forego other Choice programs for something that is not clearly defined for them.

The Ask:

A modified recommendation:

- Windermere to be the high school for Norquay EMB students within the next 3 years, but for the current intermediate students, they will be allowed to merge with Hamber Mandarin students.
- This will allow VSB time to see how EMB students do in high school and then they can use these findings to build a strong program with a well defined implementation plan, which will boost parent confidence in a brand new high school program.
- Space constraints would not be as important as there would only be 3 classes of about 65 students potentially going to Hamber.
- It will also allow initiatives such as late intakes at Gr. 4 time to maximize enrollment numbers.
- We think this is the best win/win situation for everyone and will guarantee the highest number of EMB students continuing onto high school in this program. Thus, guaranteeing its sustainability into the future.

Thank you and we look forward to seeing the first graduating Grade 12 class of EMB students!!!