

DATE: February 21, 2012

**SUBMISSION TO: EDUCATION COMMITTEE
FROM: OCDSB ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE ARTS**

RE: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EQUITY IN ALL FOUR ARTS AREAS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

ACA recommends that OCDSB adopt a series of policy initiatives and financial investments to ensure that there is equity of access and equity of quality of delivery in all four Arts areas at the K-8 levels. These initiatives will not only support the OCDSB strategic priorities, but will help foster parental interest in having their children attend OCDSB schools.

BACKGROUND/ STATUS

One of the goals of the 2011-2015 OCDSB Strategic Planning Map is “to provide equity of access to programs and pathways for all students”. Equity is recognized as an overarching concept within the OCDSB.

All four Arts areas (Dance, Drama, Music and Visual Arts) are a mandated part of the Ontario curriculum from grades K –8. The OCDSB requires that each classroom teacher provide 150 minutes per week in a combination of those Arts areas. Unfortunately, many teachers are not as skilled or experienced in teaching the Arts as they are in other academic areas. It is often harder for such teachers to deliver the curriculum effectively and enthusiastically.

In its 2010/11 Budget, the OCDSB allocated \$322,971 specifically to support Music. In order to accommodate the Ministry’s changes to classroom fees and fundraising, the 2011/12 Budget allocated untargeted extra monies to schools, both elementary and secondary, on a one-time basis. Included in the 2011/12 Budget was an additional on-going \$300,000 allocation to the 50 elementary schools with grades 7 and 8, specifically to ensure the continuation of Music.

ACA welcomed these first steps towards recognizing targeted funding for the Arts, but remains extremely concerned at the policy focus and implied hierarchy of concentrating on just one of the four mandated Arts areas.

In June 2011, ACA appeared before the Budget Committee and asked the following question: “Given that as part of the OCDSB’s commitment to inclusive education,what contingency plans does the Board have to ensure equity of access to all of the Arts by all students?”

On October 18 2011, and again on December 13, 2011 at Education Committee, ACA requested information on the required incremental funding that would be required to provide support for consumables, equipment, maintenance etc in the, Dance, Drama and Visual Arts Curricula at the Elementary/ Intermediate levels.

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OCDSB Advisory Committee on the Arts

Recommendations for Equity in all Four Arts Areas in the OCDSB

The committee expressed its concern that Dance, Drama and Visual Arts did not currently receive the same level of support as Music, and expressed the hope that all Arts subjects would be equally available to all students in all schools in the future. The committee also noted that it wanted the support for Music to continue.

CONSIDERATIONS

It is self-evident, that when schools showcase their special qualities, it is often the Arts that are highlighted. The Arts are seen to promote a student's well-being, both emotionally and physically, and are seen to provide the context for creative development.

ACA is fully aware that devoting new, targeted resources to the Arts is a challenge. It also recognizes that despite a mandated curriculum, not all of the Arts areas are being equitably delivered in all schools. All Arts areas do not have the same financial requirements, but those that require greater consumables and equipment repair should at least be treated equitably; none should be treated as frills or as less important.

The Instructional Coach model has been effective in helping the OCDSB reach its goals, and the ACA believes that it could be used to much greater effect in raising the quality of Arts teaching in the K-8 levels. Targeted and specific teacher training in the Arts would go a long way to redressing some of the current gaps in teaching all the Arts and help compensate for the current financial inequity. The effect of specific training is measurable, both in the teachers' abilities, and in the outcomes of their students.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To counter-balance the approved allocation for Music, and to move towards equity and quality of delivery for all Arts areas at the 7/8 levels, there should be a yearly \$300,000 supplement for consumables and repairs, specifically targeted to cover the three areas of Dance, Drama and Visual Arts.
2. The Board should adopt a series of clear guidelines concerning the deployment of the Instructional Coaches assigned to the Arts at the Elementary level. The specific goal should be to improve teacher expertise in the Arts and thus ensure more equitable access to all the Arts at all the K-8 schools. The initiative should also actively encourage every K-8 Principal to include teachers with Arts expertise on their staff.

Until such time as all K-8 schools have equally strong Arts programming in all four Arts areas, secondary schools should work within the curriculum guidelines to offer accessible Arts programs in all Arts areas.

3. If in the 2012/13 OCDSB Budget there is to be an extra allocation to Elementary schools to help compensate for the Ministry fees guidelines, the Budget should include targeted monies for the Arts.