



# Revisioning Multi Age Cluster Classes

Pre-engagement Report

Delivered by: Spur Communication

# Introduction

The current Multi Age Cluster Class (MACC) model was introduced in 1988 and recent peer-reviewed research suggests the current service model should be redesigned to meet today's education standards. As such, the District is revising the future of MACC through a public engagement process.

Elementary students, their families, staff, stakeholders and related associations will be invited to participate in the engagement in January and February 2022. Their feedback will be used to inform the new program design.

To ensure the engagement process is inclusive of the school community's desires and aspirations, the Vancouver School District hosted two workshops in December 2021 with stakeholders, teachers and student representatives to provide an opportunity to work together and design the upcoming engagement process. The purpose of these workshops was threefold:

1. Provide an overview of available research and information about Gifted programs
2. Outline the 2022 engagement process and the various opportunities through which the District will be inviting community to participate
3. Invite stakeholders to provide input about the engagement process, potential program name change, communication channels, values, and prevalent myths and misconceptions

The District invited all formal stakeholders (11), gifted specialist teachers( 4), gifted outreach teachers 2, and MACC students. As a result, the following stakeholders and representatives attended the pre-engagement workshops:

- 11 current MACC students
- Two current MACC teachers
- Seven representatives from formal stakeholder groups

The following outlines both information provided at these pre-engagement workshops and the input received.

## Information & Research

### Existing Program Overview

The Multi-Age Cluster Class (MACC) model was introduced in 1988 and the program has remained largely unchanged since then. The class provides academic enrichment and social-emotional support for students in grades 4 to 7 through a conceptually advanced curriculum. To attend MACC, students must be designated by the B.C. Ministry as Gifted, which is under the umbrella of Special Education.

There are three MACC classes on the west side of Vancouver and one on the east side of Vancouver.

MACC students leave their catchment school for the school year to attend classes, though many MACC students attend year-over-year from grades 4-7. There are 80 available spaces in MACC and currently 72 students are enrolled in the program.

# EXTENDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES



## Gifted Programs (Special Education)

There are currently 600 students who have gifted in their learning profile and meet the Ministry criteria for giftedness in the District. These learners can be referred to the following District programs.

- Gifted Outreach programs
- Gifted Learning Disabled (GOLD)
- Develop Executive Function (EXEC)
- UBC Transition Program
- Multi Age Cluster Class (MACC)

## Enriched Programs (Non-special Education)

The redesigned BC curriculum supports differentiated instruction and enriched learning into regular classrooms. Additionally, the District offers programs that provide enrichment opportunities for highly motivated students. These learners can apply to the following school-based programs.

- International Baccalaureate
- Mini schools
- Advanced Placement

## Rationale for Change

The current MACC model was introduced more than 30 years ago. Although it was forward-thinking at the time, recent international, peer-reviewed research shows different approaches have better outcomes for students.

The Ministry of Education redesigned the BC curriculum in 2016 to tailor learning to meet the needs of every learner. There has been a shift in today's education, from:

- Content *to* concepts
- What is learned *to* how to learn
- Academically-centred prescribed learning *to* core competencies
- Memorization *to* developing critical, social and thinking skills

As the needs of learners have evolved, the District places a strong emphasis on programs that are dynamic and responsive to student growth and development.

Recent international, [peer-reviewed research](#) shows learners with a Gifted designation thrive in a regular classroom setting where learning is tailored to meet the needs of everyone in class, rather than segregating learners with a Gifted designation amongst themselves. As such, the District is evolving its approach with learners' needs in mind.

# Revisoning MACC



## Equity of **LOCATION**

**CURRENT:** three centres located on the west side and one on the east side  
**REVISION:** four enrichment centres located in each quadrant of the District  
A centre to be within 1.4 kilometres from any given elementary school, making each centre walking distance and geographically easier to access.



## Equity of **ACCESS**

**CURRENT:** 80 students per year have access to a class  
**REVISION:** more than 700 students have access to multiple enrichment sessions  
Multi-week enrichment sessions increase student access and participation in the program.



## Equity of **DEVELOPMENT**

**CURRENT:** develops a student's academic skills while working at an accelerated pace  
**REVISION:** develops a student's problem-solving, social and inter-personal skills, while providing an enriched curriculum  
By going to their catchment school and an enrichment centre, students are exposed to different learning environments to better navigate the world outside of a classroom setting.



## Equity of **SERVICE**

**CURRENT:** students are committed for multiple years, some as long as 4 years.  
**REVISION:** students can participate in repeat visits per year so that they may engage in enrichment activities within different topics of interest.  
The revised model fosters student agency by allowing students to choose to attend once, or multiple times a year to engage in deeper learning opportunities.



## Equity of **ADMISSION**

**CURRENT:** referrals generated from teacher identification based in part on findings from a psychoeducational assessment  
**REVISION:** referrals generated from teacher identification and a student's self-referral  
A flexible referral system encourages more students to attend the enrichment centre.

## 2022 Engagement Overview

During two workshops with stakeholders and school community representatives, we outlined the proposed 2022 engagement program, including in-person events, condensed digital workshops and an online engagement. Feedback will be gathered from all of these engagements. We will analyze and summarize feedback in a What We Heard report, which will be available to all stakeholders and the public.

<b>In-person workshop</b>	The District proposed hosting one in-person event in early 2022. We will design these as drop-in events through which participants can learn more about the proposed changes and provide feedback on how to deliver the new service model. The District will host this at a VSB school.
<b>Condensed digital workshops</b>	We will host two condensed digital workshops. These will be designed to garner feedback on topics and learning activities, and ask participants to contribute to the online engagement.
<b>Online engagement</b>	Finally, the District will host a three-week online engagement that occurs concurrently with the in-person and digital workshops. The online engagement will allow the District to provide an opportunity for those who are unable to attend events to provide feedback at their convenience. This increases the equity of the process overall.

NOTE: Since these two pre-engagement workshops occurred, public health restrictions changed, limiting public events and indoor gatherings. As a result, we shifted 2022 engagement events to include four digital workshops and no in-person events.

## Discussion

### Perception of Engagement Process

After outlining the engagement process, we asked participants to provide feedback on the proposed approach. The following is what we heard.

<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants felt multiple engagement forums increase accessibility and inclusivity</li> <li>• Participants said the engagement offers multiple forums for participation</li> <li>• Participants said the online engagement might help students continue to build their technology skills</li> <li>• One participant pointed out the in-person</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One stakeholder asked for engagement to occur at the 'collaborate' level on the IAP2 spectrum of engagement</li> <li>• Participants wanted the engagement process to better address concerns about the changes from students and families</li> <li>• Some participants were unsure where teachers fit into the engagement process.</li> </ul>

engagement could generate a dynamic dialogue (prompting a discussion of how the online engagement can include compelling graphics, visuals and techniques)

## Topics & Activities

To help inform the District with the new program design, we asked participants to provide feedback on topics and learning activities.

### Enrichment Topics

We provided stakeholders with the following list of potential topics students may study.

- Architecture
- Animation
- Chess and game strategy
- Coding
- Digital music production
- Minecraft
- Poetry and rap
- STEM
- Screenplay writing
- Solving history's mysteries
- The human body
- The physics of sports
- The physics of flight
- The science and art of photography

We asked participants to provide feedback about the list outlined above and identify other potential topics. Overall, we heard requests to add the following topics for inclusion in the 2022 engagement:

- Arts & crafts
- Arts programs (STEAM over STEM)
- Debate
- Drama
- Film
- Grammar
- Indigenous programs (INSTEAM over STEM), including drumming, singing and storytelling
- Literature, reading & writing (including long-form story development)
- Music and music theory

Participants asked that we break out STEM, allowing folks to provide individual feedback on topics within it (i.e. science, technology, engineering and math). We also heard a concern about the term STEM and whether it held masculine connotations. Suggestions like STEAM and INSTEAM provide possible new directions for positioning this umbrella of topics.

### Activities

Similarly, we presented the following list of potential learning activities.

- Board game design
- Broadcasting and digital media
- Entrepreneurship
- Field studies
- In-residence programs
- Learning with your hands
- Movie making and directing
- Play design and performance
- Puzzle design
- Songwriting

We asked participants to provide feedback on the list and provide additional learning activities they would like the District to include in the engagement. Participants asked the District also to consider:

- Carving
- Debating
- Drumming
- Experiments
- Heritage fairs & special exhibitions
- Independent research
- Logic puzzles
- Math-based activities, such as Mathematica, contests, weekly problems
- Plant-based activities
- Hands-on problem solving (e.g. escape rooms and break-in boxes)
- Science fairs
- Team building
- Video games

## Fostering Strong Participation in 2022

Overall, participants had two suggestions for increasing participation at our engagement program.

1. **Communicate clearly about how engagement has created change in the past.** Overall, participants asked for clear information about how engagement feedback would inform changes to MACC. Students, in particular, were interested in understanding how engagement impacts change in the District and expressed a desire to feel that their participation and contributions were considered. Students also recommended that this approach be combined with a message of how much the District values students' voices in education planning.
2. **Ensure a broad and diverse participant invitation process.** In addition to groups and organizations outlined in the presentation, participants asked that we also invite the three host First Nations and former teachers.

## MACC Value

We asked pre-engagement participants to outline what they liked most about MACC. We asked this question to understand better what elements of the current MACC we might carry forward. Overall, we heard the following key themes:

1. **MACC students garnered practical life skills through the program.** Students spoke to the program's impact on their communication skills and confidence.
2. **MACC students appreciate the opportunity to grow and excel.** Students appreciate access to a challenging environment that can accelerate their learning through creative thinking and problem solving. That said, they want to continue doing so in a safe space.
3. **MACC allows students to explore multiple topics.** Students enjoy the capacity to learn about multiple topics throughout their time in MACC. They viewed this feature of MACC as one that facilitates student growth.
4. **Participants appreciate the long-term nature of MACC.** Many participants spoke to the strength of the long-term structure of MACC and expressed a desire to maintain this approach.
5. **Students and families value the social elements of MACC greatly.** Some MACC students develop deep relationships with their MACC cohorts. MACC brought together students with similar interests over time. They hope that a new program can do the same in bringing like-minded

students together. Maintaining programs that foster long-term relationships was a priority for some participants.

## Building Shared Understanding (Previously Myths & Misconceptions)

We asked participants whether there were common myths and misconceptions they heard about within their respective groups and communities. In response:

- We were asked to adjust the wording of this question to focus more on where there might be a lack of clarity around the proposed changes and not dispelling myths and misconceptions, hence the change in title. The way this discussion was phrased felt unwelcoming for some participants.
- Participants outlined differing understandings of equity across workshops.
- Participants expressed concern that the new program would not meet the social and emotional needs of students designated as Gifted.

## Recommendations

1. **Provide a clear overview of proposed changes to prospective MACC students and their families.** Pre-engagement participants wanted greater clarity around who could attend the new MACC, the proposed timeframes and how often students could return. In particular, the project team should be clear that students can return as often as they would like (if space allows) so that they can engage in multiple learning opportunities. Because current Gifted students said they would like the new Gifted Enrichment Centre to be equally challenging in their content and structure, we recommend addressing this in the 2022 engagement. The engagement should also clarify that Gifted students' diverse needs will continue to be met through a reimagined MACC - a right protected by the ministry and upheld by the District, no matter the structure of Gifted programs.
2. **Ease concerns for existing MACC students.** Ensure current MACC students and their families understand they can remain in the existing MACC structure until the current youngest students have finished Grade 7. Ensure the changes to MACC are communicated as a pilot program, during which both MACC and the new Gifted Enrichment Centre(s) will be open. Further, communicate that the District will evaluate the pilot and outline both successes and challenges as they arise.
3. **Report back transparently about how feedback informs process and outcomes.** We have two clear opportunities for reporting back. First, reach out to pre-engagement participants to overview what we heard and how feedback informed 2022 engagement. Create a comprehensive engagement report in February 2022 that outlines what we heard and how engagement feedback informed overall MACC design, both for the pilot and ongoing program. Both of these steps align with the [District's engagement policy](#).
4. **Create a comprehensive definition of equity.** Participants did not have a synonymous understanding of equity. We should outline the principles of equity, how it is applied in our materials, and ultimately, how it informs revisioning MACC.
5. **Create a straightforward process and mechanism through which teachers can participate.** In both pre-engagement workshops, District staff outlined how the current BC Curriculum supports all teachers to foster dynamic, challenging learning environments tailored to diverse learning needs. Teachers in catchment schools and in the current MACC program may not agree about revisioning MACC. All teachers should be encouraged to participate in the engagement in ways that speak to their unique perspective, from both inside and out of Gifted learning programs.

At least one in-person or digital workshop should be offered at a time when teachers can participate during regular work hours.

6. **Provide an overview of how the District will support students to transition in and out of MACC in its reimagined form.** Some students and stakeholder representatives felt the new model might be disruptive to students' ability to form and maintain close friendships at school. Teachers and teachers' representatives were also curious how Gifted teachers and catchment teachers would work together as students transition in and out of their respective classrooms. More information about this aspect of the change can help stakeholders understand how the pilot programs will roll out.
7. **Move values earlier on in the online engagement to allow participants to speak about this topic first.** Pre-engagement participants were keen to speak to what they most valued about MACC. We recommend adjusting the order of the questions in the broader engagement to accommodate this.