

Compass Education Support Program

2 November 2018 Update

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Background

Alternate education programs are supported for Grades 9-12 by EECD Policy 322.

An alternate education program is defined in EECD Policy 322 as: *a program for high school students (Grades 9 to 12) who require a learning opportunity in an environment that is separate from the educational program provided in the neighbourhood high school. These programs are typically compensatory or supplementary, and operationally are in distinct physical locations. Alternative education programs may be the means for a student to complete public education or it may be transitory, with the student returning to the neighbourhood high school.*

ASD-S has a number of alternate education programs, the largest being the Compass Education Support Program.¹ The Compass Education Support Program, or “Compass” for short, started in September 2018 and replaced the Woodlawn Learning Centre which had operated from 1999-2018 and is operating out of the same building (the former Woodlawn Elementary School).

The focus of Compass is not only on academics: the program is designed to develop strong relationships and foster Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) through direct and intentional instruction.

Operations at Compass to Date (August to November 2018)

Compass is operating under the leadership of Pam Miller, Alternate Education Coordinator for ASD-S. Her team at Compass consists of seven classroom teachers, one resource teacher, one certified guidance counsellor, one School Intervention Worker, an administrative assistant, and a custodian. The teaching staff and SIW meet on a daily basis after the students have been dismissed to review the day and plan for the needs of students.

Renovations took place in the building over the summer months to prepare for the new program. A small lounge for students and a conference room for teachers were built. The entire inside of the building was painted in light colours to improve lighting and reduce the “industrial” feeling of some parts of the building. Extra internal windows were added to improve natural lighting and facilitate supervision of students. Soundproofing was added to the ceiling in one classroom

¹ The others are PALS Sussex, PALS Hampton, First Steps, and Portage Atlantic.

that is being converted into a small carpentry shop. In addition, picnic tables were added to the outside of the building for the students and Ms Miller and staff planted a new flower garden.

Relationships with Schools

Harbour View, Kennebecasis Valley, Rothesay, Saint John, St Malachy's Memorial, and Simonds High Schools have students that are attending Compass. These student remain enrolled at their high schools (i.e., Compass is not a separate high school; it is an alternate education program). The principals of these six schools meet at Compass on a monthly basis with Ms Miller to discuss new referrals to the program, review the progress of their students, and to engage in ongoing discussions about the structure of the program.

As of mid-October, there were 89 students at Compass (HVHS= 19, KVHS = 9, RHS = 2, SJHS = 23, STM = 13, SHS = 23).

Students

The students attending Compass remain as students of their high schools. The goal of Compass is to develop skills with the students to support their return to the regular high school setting while at the same time ensuring their academic needs are being met. Prior to joining the program at Compass, students need to be referred by their school and their educational options and needs reviewed by Ms Miller and the principals. If the program appears to be the right fit for the student, Ms Miller will have a meeting with the student and parents and the student will complete an interest and strengths profile. It is essential that the student wants to participate in the program.

All students in the program have had difficulty finding success in the regular high school setting. A significant number of the students have lagging skills in in the area of SEL. This is seen in lagging coping skills, high vulnerability to stress and anxiety, difficulties in emotional regulation including lagging anger management skills, and lagging peer relationship skills. Many come from homes with significant challenges, both social-emotional and socio-economic. A smaller but significant number of students are also struggling with clinically diagnosed mental disorders, including borderline personality disorder, attachment disorder, bipolar disorder, and early psychosis.

In October, the staff at Compass held fifty meeting with parents and their students to discuss the progress of the students and adjust their individual plans.

Programming

Flexible academic programming allows students to complete work in nine-week blocks instead of the usual eighteen-week high school semester. For example, a student who needs English Language Arts 123 could work on that course two hours a day for nine weeks rather than one hour a day for eighteen. Students may be given more time to complete outcomes if necessary.

Students have the opportunity for credit recovery. For example, a student who took Workplace & Financial Math 110 but failed it with a mark of 50% is already half-way to completing the outcomes. Rather than have the student re-take the entire course, as would be common at the high schools, the student will often have the opportunity to complete the missed outcomes in order to gain credit for the course.

Academic rigour (i.e., meeting the prescribed curriculum outcomes and recommended hours of instruction) is a priority for the program. The students must meet the same curriculum outcomes and standards for each course that they would meet in their home schools.

Classes are run by workstations with multiple teachers and combined courses rather than traditional classrooms with one teacher and one course. For example, the English Language Arts (ELA) room has three teachers who work during the day with different groups of students (e.g., an ELA 9-10 group, an ELA 112/113/122/123 group).

All students participate in SEL. Currently, all students start their day with a period of Growth, Goals, and Grit: Skills for Success 120 (for Grades 11 and 12) or Personal Development and Career Planning (for Grades 9 and 10). Teachers actively work to include SEL programming into their lesson plans in the other subjects; for example, in October, the SEL theme was gratitude and the English Language Arts classes did gratitude journals to meet their writing outcomes.

In addition, the program uses the principles of the Positive Behaviour Intervention and Supports program (PBIS) and Restorative Practices program.

Community Relationships

Compass is benefiting from significant support from two local churches that are preparing brown bag lunches for the students. These churches are Silver Falls United Church and Harmony United Church.

Compass has developed a relationship with the Work Room at Agar Place and a Work Room coordinator has been to Compass to prepare students for Post-Secondary Days and discuss options for students after high school.

Compass has developed a relationship with the Saint John Police Force and Cst Cory Jamieson is the Community Police Officer associated with Compass.

Compass is connected to five Integrated Service Delivery Child & Youth teams and these teams have a shared counselling space inside the building.

A nurse practitioner specializing in sexual health has weekly appointment at Compass.

Several students at Compass are supported by Social Development through the YES program (Youth Employment Service), which supports students who are living independently.

Compass has an Artist in Residence program. Local musician Brent Mason is the artist in residence at Compass until January, 2019. He is working with the students on songwriting.

Compass has received a President's Choice grant to support their breakfast program.

Next Steps and Upcoming Events

Guest Speaker John Westhaver will be speaking to the students about safe driving on Nov 6.

The students at Compass will be hosting forty seniors from the nearby Loch Lomond Villa for tea on November 7th.

The students will have a tour of NBCC to learn about the post-secondary options available to them.

Elective courses are chosen based on the strengths profile of the students in the program. This year, students have demonstrated an interest in carpentry and visual arts, so planning is taking place for courses in these subject areas.

The carpentry shop is not yet set up. Surplus equipment from HVHS and KVHS will be moved to the school, but additional equipment will need to be purchased. The goal is to have this shop functional by mid-November, in order for the students to begin working on hands-on courses for the second nine-week block.

The staff is continuing to explore ways to develop Project-Based Learning (PBL) for the students and enhance the SEL components of their classes. The teaching staff is working towards incorporating cross-curricular, project-based learning through the workstations. The teaching staff recently toured ASD-E's alternate education program, TESS (Therapeutic Education Support Site), to learn from the experience of their staff with PBL and SEL strategies.

Compass has received a mental health grant and will be investing this in resources to teach mindfulness and skills for dealing with stress. In addition, Compass is planning to run the Yoga 110 Locally Developed Course as a way to teach both physical education and stress management to the students.