



# Community Evaluation of Halifax Farsi School



## Team

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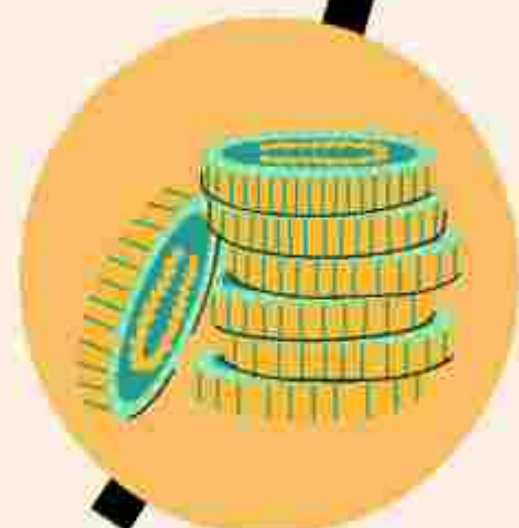
### Iranian Cultural Society of Nova Scotia:

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## Project Goal

- The aim of the proposed project was to better understand how the Halifax Farsi School could enhance the engagement of Iranian immigrant children with the Persian language and culture.



## Funding

- Funding Agency: Change Lab Action Research Initiative (CLARI)



## Ethics

- This project was a program evaluation and received an exemption from research ethics board approval at Mount Saint Vincent University. Nevertheless, all participants provided their consent to participate in this project. For children's photos and quotes included in this report, parental consent and child assent was obtained.



# Participants & Data Collection

## CHILDREN

- Nine children (five boys and four girls) between eight to ten years old participated in an art-based play session to talk about their experiences with the Halifax Farsi School.
- Four sets of tables were set up with activities (craft, play dough, story writing, & blocks).
- The play session with the researchers lasted for approximately one hour.



## PARENTS

- Seven mothers participated in a virtual interview session that lasted from 30 minutes to 45 minutes.
- The children of these mothers were:
  - Six second-generation immigrants and one first-generation immigrant;
  - Six were between the age group of seven to ten, and one child was five years old;
  - Five children have been attending school for three years and two for one year.



## TEACHERS

- Five teachers (all identified as women\*) participated in a virtual interview session.
  - Four current teachers and one past teacher.
- Most of the teachers, except one, had experience working in Canadian schools as early childhood educators, substitutes, and support teachers.
- One teacher had extended experience in teaching Farsi.
- Teachers with no Farsi teaching background received training from the school expert and/or trained themselves by participating in various workshops.



## DIRECTORS/OPERATORS

- Three principals of the school participated in the project.
  - Two past principals and one current principal.
- The experience of the individuals as the operator of the Halifax Farsi School ranged from two to four years.
- The operator role entails managing all activities related to the school (e.g., registration, scheduling, teacher hiring, etc.)



\*For the parent group, even though both mothers and fathers were invited to participate, only mothers volunteered.





## Children's Voices

Children said they like the school because they learn the Farsi language, meet their friends, and have snacks. They also enjoy the music, drama, and craft classes.

"Good. I have a good opinion. I can learn lots of things and get break time."

"[I] like drama class. I like it because we can practice. Drama and break time to play."



"Craft class is interesting for me because we make different crafts."



"This is watermelon. I like Farsi school and watermelon because they are both very good."

Some children said they believed that the Farsi school was fun and entertaining; however, for some, it was boring and sedentary.



"I like it kind of. I do not love it, kind of like it."



"[I] like to learn the Farsi language. I like doing homework, but I like to have break time too."

"The first part of the day is a little bit boring (short reading and writing). The second part is a little more fun (reading books). The third part is very fun (snack and after snack)"





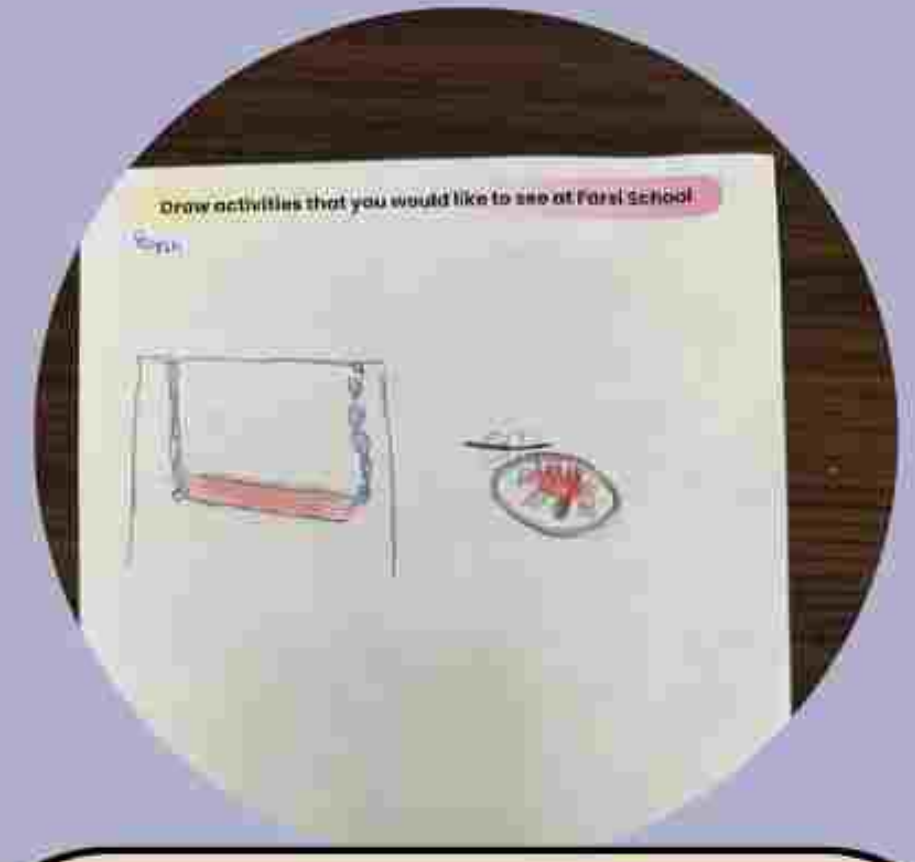
## Children's Voices

### Children said that they wanted to have:

- More fun at the school.
- Access to swings, bubbles, monkey bars, outdoor play time, field trips, longer snack break, disco time, and dance.
- Fewer hours in class for formal education, less homework, and less writing.



*"Add a monkey bar and outdoor play."*



*"I want to have a swing [at Farsi school] because when sometimes I get sleepy, I can move my legs. I want to set more energy and be movable."*



*"I am drawing two children in the field, one girl, and one boy and they play Tag. Having longer break time. Because I like Farsi school to be like a regular school so that I can go outside and play."*



*"I made a happy face. I want to add bubbles to Farsi school. I want to pop up the bubbles. If school is fun, I am happy."*





## Parents' Voices

### We Love Halifax Farsi School!



All mothers highly **valued the existence of the Farsi school**, especially in Nova Scotia, where their children have limited exposure to practicing their mother tongue, Persian culture, or meeting Iranian friends.



These mothers especially appreciated all the activities and lessons prepared for their children, knowing the **limited budget** available to the school and the **volunteer-based nature** of the teachers and principals.



Participating mothers also acknowledged and valued all the **changes and efforts** the ICSNS has made to make the school more interesting for children:

- They loved the addition of extracurricular activities, including dance, music, and craft classes.
- They agreed that the involvement of children through various performances (Dancing, singing, and playing) in the traditional events (Nowruz, Yalda's night, etc.) increased children's interest in connecting to their Persian roots and enhanced family bonds.



## Families' Reasonings and Priorities for their Child's Participation in Halifax Farsi School



### • Strengthen Family Bonds and Connections

- All participating mothers said that they want their children to especially learn to speak and understand Farsi so they could effectively communicate with them and distant relatives like grandparents who have limited English proficiency.
- These mothers also believed that the bond of their family is strengthened when their children learned about their Persian culture at school as it increases shared family interests.



### • Finding Iranian Friends

- For all the mothers, it was very important for their children to have Iranian friends to help keep connections to their cultural roots and provide an opportunity for them to practice Farsi.
  - Mothers believed that the connection of Iranian friends with similar language and cultural background would enhance their children's sense of belonging in Halifax.
- Finally, the school provided opportunities for whole family to see other families who share similar backgrounds and values related to raising children.



### • Feeling Proud of their Heritage and Culture

- All mothers believed that their children as minorities have the responsibility to preserve Persian heritage, culture and language.
- These mothers believed that learning Persian history, language, culture, poetry, idioms, and slangs were essential to preserve Persian culture.
- The participating mothers shared that learning Persian history and culture would help their children to feel proud and connected to their heritage and cultural identity.



- Families' priorities for the Halifax Farsi School is for the ICSNS to make an environment where their children become interested to learn more about their culture and language.





## Parents' Voices

### Safe and Interesting Environment for Children to Learn Farsi:



- **Confidentiality:** Two mothers believed that teachers and principals who have access to private information of families and children should be very diligent in ensuring the confidentiality of families knowing the very tight and small community of Iranian in Nova Scotia.
- **Hands-on experience:** All the participating mothers highly valued the addition of extra-curricular activities (singing, making art, participating in events, etc.) and play materials as they believed that their children learned best and understood better when they were involved in the learning process. They also believed that their children's exposure to their heritage and culture through hands-on experiences was very meaningful for families as it increased the shared interest among family members.
- **Technology:** Half of the participating mothers also felt that their children could benefit from technology such as using chrome books for homework and watching Persian cartoons/movies/sports. These mothers all commented that their children rely heavily on technology at their Canadian school, so they felt that their children's familiarity with these platforms could help their children in advancing their learning of the Farsi language and make the school interesting for them.





## Parents' Voices

### For an ideal Farsi school, parents recommended changes to:

All mothers were aware of the limited budget of the school and lack of sufficient classes due to low number of teachers; however they made some suggestions when they were asked of an ideal Farsi school for their children:

- **Different groupings of classes:** Mothers wanted their children to participate in classes that aligned with their literacy skills and also considered peer and gender balance.
- **Varied activities:** Some mothers (especially those with boys) felt that there should be additional extracurricular physical activities added after the formal school time, such as soccer, basketball, etc. Mothers also suggested that planned field trips and outdoor activities for their children would provide an opportunity for connection with their Iranian peers.
- **Expanding the subjects taught at school:** Some mothers thought that inclusion of other subjects (math and science) at school would help engage children and provide an opportunity for them to learn more vocabulary.
- **Less homework:** Finally, although families understood the importance of homework for children to practice Farsi during the week, they requested fewer and easier assignments. Mothers said that children often needed support with their homework that it sometimes led to child-parent conflict.







## Teachers' Voices

### The Halifax Farsi School Is Critical for the Connection of Immigrant Iranian Children to their Persian Roots



All teachers feel that the existence of the school is very important because Iranian children have limited exposure to Persian language and culture in Nova Scotia as they are a minority group among other immigrant populations.



All teachers expressed that connection to Persian culture and language would support Iranian children's cultural identity development and would enhance the quality of their communication with their families.



All teachers said that the Halifax Farsi School has been successful in enhancing the children's engagement in the recent years because of its new location and addition of extracurricular activities.

### Teachers' main goal is to enhance the engagement of children with the Farsi language



All teachers agreed that children learn best when the teaching style is designed based on their interests.



Four teachers suggested that teaching style should become closer to the Canadian style of teaching; more child-directed rather than teacher-directed. However, it was felt that child-directed teaching requires more time, funding, and resources.



All teachers thought that other opportunities, outside the school, would allow children to practice Farsi and connect with their Iranian peers (e.g., picnic, field trips, indoor & outdoor playground, etc.).





## Teachers' Voices

### For an ideal Farsi school, teachers recommended changes to:



**Funding:** Additional funding is needed to create a curriculum based on children's educational needs and interests (e.g., purchasing play materials, using visuals, planning outdoor activities, and accessing other indoor play spaces for younger children).



**School Curriculum:** Teachers talked about the challenges that they face when their classroom is attended by children with different Farsi literacy skills. These teachers believed that variation in children's Farsi knowledge in the same classroom made the teaching difficult because they had to work individually with children based on their level of Farsi language. As a result, teachers felt that children were bored when the teachers could not lead group learning activities.



**Staffing:** In terms of staffing, teachers believed that more staff should be hired for two specific reasons. First, more teachers meant more classes, which addressed the challenges that teachers face when the classes have children from different language backgrounds. Second, more staffing would take the pressure off of teachers and give flexibility to their schedules in terms of vacation and sick days.





## Directors/Operators' Voices

### Areas of Improvements:



The directors/operators of the school listed areas of improvement that they hope they can reach in the following years. These operators all agreed that with the **enhanced funding** they could achieve all the desired changes offered by the school knowledge users including children, families, teachers, and the ICSNS board.

**Funding:** Like other participants in the study, funding was discussed as the main issue by the school operators. The school mainly ran by limited donation money and the low-cost registration fee (provided by families); therefore to be able to afford their program, the school had to borrow money from the ICSNS board. The school requires more funding to:

- **Hire additional experienced teachers so there can be more classrooms.**
- **Offer additional training to Farsi teachers in both child and teacher-directed instruction.**
- **Involve health professionals at the school who are familiar with Iranian family culture and parenting practices to support the overall wellbeing of children.**
- **Engage musicians and artists with the school to support inclusion of Persian culture.**
- **Purpose additional developmentally appropriate materials and resources (chrome books, play materials, picture books, educational videos, etc.).**
- **Rent classrooms that are age-appropriate especially for younger children.**
- **Plan extracurricular activities (field trips).**
- **Offer classes and activities in Farsi more frequently (e.g., weekdays)**
- **Teach more subjects (Farsi literature, math, science, etc.)**
- **Register ICSNS as a charitable organization to be able to receive more funds and donations.**



# Moving Forward



This project was in direct response to the interest of our community partner, the Iranian Cultural Society of Nova Scotia. All participants in this study appreciated the existence of Halifax Farsi School as a way for Iranian children to connect to their Persian heritage and culture. The participants made their suggestions knowing that the school has very limited fund and resources.

The following recommendations are based on our overall conversations with children, families, teachers, and the school principals at the Halifax Farsi School to support engagement of Iranian children in Nova Scotia with Farsi language and their Persian heritage and culture.

1. Consider different ways of grouping children in the classrooms to reflect their understanding of Farsi as well as their age.
2. Provide training and workshops for teachers to bridge the current teacher directed instruction with play-based and child-centred learning.
3. Invest in materials that will engage children in the classroom environment while learning the Farsi language.
4. Continue to host events that celebrate Persian heritage and culture to engage children along with their families.
5. Organize a recreational club for children and youth to interact with other Iranian peers through various indoor and outdoor activities.
6. Explore the option of registering ICSNS as a charitable organization to become eligible for various funding and donations.





## Acknowledgements:

We would like to express deep gratitude to the **Iranian children, families, teachers, and principals** who participated in this study and generously shared information with us about their experience accessing the Halifax Fasi School.

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