

January 24, 2011 Chair's Report

January has begun with a bang! We have started the important secondary accommodation review process and all three ARC committees have successfully met for the first of many meetings. Two important reports that will influence our work for many years were presented and approved tonight: Program Strategy and Facilities Master Plan, and 2010 -11 Updated MOE Capital Priorities Submission. In addition we are committing ourselves to two elementary Accommodation Reviews to be completed by December 31 2011 and three to be completed by the end of December 2012

Special Education

We also learnt this month where we stand in the province with regard to our Special Education services and funding. As a board we have 18.86% of students receiving special education programs and services compared to the provincial average of 14.39%. Six boards provide 5.47% to 10.07% of their students with services, 17 boards provide 10.07% to 12.95% of their students , 20 boards provide 12.95% to 15.83%, 21 boards provide 15.83% to 18.7% and only 8 including ourselves provide services and programs to 18.17 to 24.4 percent of their students. For support given to special education students we are in the top 11% of all boards in the province.

All boards receive SEPPA grants for special education students, which are provided on a formula dependent on enrolment in any given board. The actual number of special education students or their needs does not enter into the calculation. The High Needs Allocation is meant to compensate boards for this. For the HNA we receive \$443 per student compared to the provincial average of \$525. Twenty three boards receive \$675 to \$1780, 11 boards receive \$575 to \$675, 19 school boards receive \$475 to \$575, and 19 boards, including HWDSB, receive \$351 to \$475. For funding of special education students HWDSB is in the bottom 26% in the province.

This explains why we have been having difficulties with our special education funding, and have had to augment it with funds from elsewhere. **HWDSB is in the top 11% of all boards for the numbers of students we are serving, and in the bottom quarter for the funding we receive per student.**

A new special education funding proposal is being considered by the province in March this year. We will be watching with interest.

Settlement Services

HWDSB has a large number of English Language learners (ELL) in its schools. The EQAO 2010 Board Reports indicate that in Grade 3, 4% of students in HWCDSB and 9% across the Province were ELL learners. In HWDSB the figure was 20%. In Grade 6, 4% of HWCDSB, 6% for the province as a whole, were ELL learners. In HWDSB the figure was 16%. Hamilton is the third largest destination for newcomers to Canada (after the GTA and Ottawa), and many of the those newcomers are also government assisted refugees - Somali, Iraqi and Karen, who require long-term assistance with settlement and integration. With such high numbers of newcomer students, community services to support settlement are important and necessary.

On January 7 SISO closed down its offices and services ceased. Prior to January 7, 2010, 15 Settlement Workers were working in HWDSB schools. HWDSB knows that 3,098 students received support from

settlement services at the Assessment Centre between 2007 and 2010. This does not include students who may have received support outside of the Assessment Centre.

In addition, many other newcomers received SWISH workers support directly at their schools. Other programs that have been affected are the Refugee Assistance Program, the New Dawn Reception Centre, and Cultural Interpretative Services.

So HWDSB has concerns about the following

- The integrity of the SWISH program
- Impact on current families and students receiving support
- Potential interruption of services during the school year
- Potential transitions to new service providers
- Potential negotiations of new partnership agreement
- Training of new staff (if necessary) and acculturation to our schools
- Ability of families to access affordable interpretation services
- Language assessments and classes for new immigrants
- Other settlement services currently being provided within Hamilton

In addition, HWDSB's experience in the last decade has been that there has been largely one agency to whom all concerns effecting our large population of diverse families and students could be addressed. This was particularly helpful in difficult or crisis situations, and compared favourably with Hamilton's experience prior to SISO when many agencies were involved and services were fragmented. HWDSB's concern is that future settlement services in Hamilton work within an integrated framework, that there will be community input into their development, and that the same level of provision of service is available to meet the needs of our community.

Answers to these questions and concerns at the present are not clear.