

## Notes

### Meeting of School Council Members about High Needs Schools

Wards 1 and 2

October 5 2005

Education Centre

Present: Arlene Koomen, Diane Crawshaw, Elizabeth Carter, Lynda Byers; Jean Lewis Knight, Cathy Gazzola, Pattie Coates, Susan Wier, Lorraine Cooper, Grant Thomas, Mike Rehill, Judith Bishop.

Concerns were grouped under three headings:

#### **Equity Issues**

- Programming opportunities may not be as rich as in other schools.
  - e.g. not daily or frequent physical education classes;
  - lack of junior and primary music programs, or even intermediate programs
- Athletics program in secondary school difficult as cannot rely on parental support for transporting students, or funding programs. Consequently have to provide \$40-50,000 out of school budget, use all the Pepsi money for athletics, and buy all the uniforms. If lost funding from foundations would lose athletic program.
- French Immersion, because there is no transportation, is hardly an option for parents living in the inner city.
- Playgrounds are unattractive compared to playgrounds elsewhere, even though often they are the vital open spaces for inner city children. Often they do not have play structures, and little or no green space. Fields are in poor shape.
- Schools in the inner city are often the oldest and their maintenance has been poor.
- Resources lost across the system are especially felt in these schools. E.g. There are 42 ESL elementary teachers where there were once 90. Hess Street once had 11 or 12 ESL teachers. Although the school population has altered little, the number is now 2.
- Educational expectations of students by staff are lower.
- Being provided with, and retaining good staff and leaders (planned school closure leads staff to transfer elsewhere, rapid turn over of staff and principal undermines stability, staff get burned out).
- Equity and equality not the same: additional staff such as Educational Assistants from diverse communities, social workers and guidance counselors, are needed to provide a level playing field

#### **Heavy Reliance on Community Partners/Funds**

- Cannot rely on parental fund- raising for the extras that other schools provide, e.g. attractive play structures, so must rely on community agencies and funds.
- If Sir John A. Macdonald lost its funding from the Hamilton Community Foundation, Rotary, Breakfast for Learning and Partners in Nutrition, which pay for food programs and provide bus tickets for students to get to school from the

wide catchment area, it would have to divert money currently being spent on extra-curricula programs.

- Extra-curricula programs only possible in most elementary high needs schools with agency help and support.
- Agencies provide valued personnel including settlement workers, an aboriginal worker, mentors, and volunteers. More community support is needed for:
  - Immigrant families
  - aboriginal students
  - for bullying and conflict resolution (Halton-Catholic District School Board has hired retired police officers to work in their schools)
- Contacts with community agencies take up a great deal of administration's time (writing proposals, dealing with CAS, shelters etc), time away from instructional leadership.

### **Socio-Economic Markers result in large numbers of students at risk**

- Some parents are illiterate and so cannot help their own children with reading, placing their own children at risk of school failure.
- Aboriginal students reside in the catchments of high needs schools, and about 80% drop out of school and do not complete their education.
- Government assisted refugees and other immigrants are living in poverty.
- The cultural inclusion of some immigrant children needs high resources, and stretch the schools' capacity to provide the support needed.
- 80 students at Sir John A Macdonald live on their own, on few funds.
- Large number of single mothers who are having to rear children with little support, and are not available to provide help for community run activities after school.
- Students are hungry.
- Classes contain a high proportion of vulnerable students, which places a strain on the teacher's capacity to provide adequate instruction.

In addition it was pointed out that the City of Hamilton should rethink its position on the disadvantaged in our midst. A productive and thriving Hamilton can occur when adults have the needed skills, or, in the case of immigrants, are recognized as having these skills, to be employable. An investment in disadvantaged youth or adults is an economic investment in the community.