

Received May 8, 2017

Dear Christine Bingham and Larry Pattison,

I am writing to you as a Strathcona community member and a parent of a child at Strathcona School. I have been reading everything I could find about the PAR, and attended one of the meetings late last year. I was extremely saddened and upset when I read the recent report. **I urge you to reconsider the decision to close Strathcona school.** Everything I have read on the subject indicates that smaller schools are better for kids, period. I cannot possibly understand why the PAR concluded the opposite, other than financial. I realize that the Ontario government will provide funding only if schools are closed. This is flawed, and we should not destroy our communities for the sake of money.

Of course, I am not without bias. My family moved to the strathcona neighbourhood in 2015 because we saw how strong the community is, and how having a community school knits together a neighbourhood. We moved just before my daughter began junior kindergarten because it was important to us – as parents – that we live in a community that supports families and children. So yes, I am biased. Closing Strathcona would directly affect me and my family in a very negative way. However, my concerns go far beyond my own family.

When reading the report, I was struck by how it actually lays out all of the reasons for keeping small schools: community, traffic and student safety, walkability. These are not trivial concerns. Smaller schools are more community-focused, encourage walking, and having children attend schools that are close to their home is beneficial for health and the environment.

Aside from that, **smaller schools have demonstrated benefits in terms of student achievement, student behavior and safety, parental involvement and teacher satisfaction.** The research backing this up is overwhelming. I could include here the dozens of studies and anecdotal evidence backing this claim up, but quite frankly I don't think I need to. I think you all realize that smaller schools are better. There is information backing this up within the report itself! There doesn't seem to be any benefits to the proposal to close Strathcona other than financial. Are you really going to vote against community, walkability, safety, achievement and teachers just for the sake of money?

I cannot begin to explain to you how vital this community has been to my family. As a two-mom family, we feared our child starting school and facing bullying. Instead, we were welcomed into the strathcona community with open arms. We found the "village" it takes to raise a child that I never thought existed. The strathcona community looks out for each other. I have seen firsthand the benefits of this. When your child is part of a community – not just attending a school, but truly part of a community – they are supported by everyone and will achieve success because of that support.

If Hamilton is meant to truly be the best place to raise a child, what message are we sending if we cast those children out for the sake of extra provincial money? How can it be the best place to raise a child if schools close and communities are torn apart? How can we say we encourage walkability and value the safety of our children if we are closing schools and sending children further away from their homes? If the safety of our neighbourhoods is important, then we need to keep our neighbourhoods together. **We are safer when we feel like we are a part of something.**

Again, I urge you, please do not close Strathcona school. For the sake of Hamilton, for the sake of our children: **Vote for smaller schools and better communities.**

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely, Ward 1 resident, Parent of SK student at Strathcona

Received May 10, 2017

Dear Trustees,

I would like to add some additional comments to this process, as a parent, having discussed the Final Report with other parents, and not strictly as a member of the Accommodation Review Committee.

It would be detrimental to the Hess and Dr. Davey school communities to simply close Hess and move the majority of those students to Dr. Davey, and it wouldn't provide benefits to any of the other schools either. It would be best for the communities involved to keep all the schools open.

The problem of too many empty spaces in the grouping of nine schools stems primarily from the overbuilding of Cathy Weaver, Queen Victoria, and Dr. Davey; which I have been led to understand was the result of Provincial supervision and intervention by the Ministry of Education.

It is interesting to note also that Adelaide Hoodless School was not included in our Accommodation Review, nor has it been already reviewed with the other schools in the Central City, nor is it scheduled for a review on the Board website. Inclusion of this school in our family of schools would likely have changed our overall usage percentages as I understand it is quite full.

Causing further damage to our inner city communities is not going to help.

If keeping all nine schools open is not fiscally possible, please consider the following option instead of closing Hess and sending most of the students to Dr. Davey with a small proportion of them going to Strathcona.

My proposal is that a larger number of students be transferred to Strathcona and that a smaller number go to Dr. Davey (east of Bay St.) That Strathcona be built up to accommodate all the Strathcona kids in a k-8 school and that the SAGE and 2nd French Immersion program be housed at Bennetto. I also propose that some boundaries change to reduce population pressure at Central and Ryerson and that walkability be improved for students in the Keith neighbourhood by allowing them to attend Cathy Wever by redrawing boundaries for Bennetto, Dr. Davey, Queen Victoria and Cathy Wever.

This option will provide better walk-ability for pupils in our area of schools and offer a more socially equitable option for the structural problems at Hess School, while also addressing other concerns for our group of schools.

Program movement

Second French Immersion: A second French Immersion Program initiated at Bennetto will reduce enrollment pressure at Earl Kitchener and Ryerson and help fill unused pupil places at Bennetto.

SAGE and SAGE Quest: Move the SAGE and SAGE Quest programs to the same k-8 school. Keeping these programs together in one location will reduce the need for split classes which contain more than two grade levels. If there is enough room to have it at Strathcona, that would be great; otherwise it could be moved to another school which has adequate unused pupil places. (probably Bennetto)

Boundary movement

Expand the Strathcona catchment to include the west side of Bay Street North on the east side of the catchment and north side of Main Street on the South side of the catchment, thereby reducing over-enrollment at Central and Ryerson schools. This is still very walk-able for students and parents for many of the Hess School families.

Expand the Dr. Davey catchment to include the east side of Bay Street North and the north side of Main Street, which is still very walkable for those residents. This will reduce the number of unused pupil places at Dr. Davey. This will also reduce the population at Queen Victoria, however; increasing the size of the Queen Victoria catchment on the west side from John Street to James Street will help mitigate and further reduce population pressure at Central and Ryerson. All of the new Queen Victoria students will still be within the walk-able distance to school.

Reduced population pressure at Central and Ryerson will remove the need for an addition at Central (approx \$1.2 million) and will allow the portable usage at Ryerson to be discontinued, reducing operating costs and improving student safety at that school.

School Consolidation and Renovations

Closure of Hess Street School with students redistributed to their newly defined catchments. All of the students and parents should still be within walk-able distance of their schools. There may need to be some tweaking of boundaries at the corners to accommodate walk-ability and eliminate the need for bus transportation.

Renovate Strathcona School to accommodate all of the pupils (k-8) within the newly defined Strathcona school catchment. This will further reduce the population pressure from Ryerson School as the Gr. 6-8 students from Strathcona would no longer be going there.

Other comments

The new supervision policy at the Board level has created a situation where children who could formerly be taken to adjacent parks by their teachers can no longer be taken there without written permission from guardians, and volunteer supervision. This is an issue which needs to be further addressed, either by changing the policy, and/or by having a volunteer coordinator at each school, and/or having parents agree to lower supervision ratios for the nutrition breaks (as we do for nutrition break eating times during school hours).

Purchasing additional land for the Strathcona school site by acquiring the adjacent back alley from the City, and/or one or more adjacent residential properties, and/or redesigning the site to move the parking closer to the front to allow larger play space out back would help enlarge the available outdoor play space and possible area for expansion of the school. A larger parent/volunteer base to supervise students may also allow more usage of the park as a recreation space for students during school time. Having the school closer to the park will also encourage children and parents to use it for active play and social time after school hours.

From a 'business case' perspective, renovating Strathcona also makes more sense because we wouldn't have to build a whole new school and deal with the asbestos clean-up at SJAM before building; and we would still qualify for the additional funding from the province for School Consolidation. If the Sir John A MacDonald site and the Hess school sites can be sold, it would mean more money going back to the board to fix the other schools in the future.

(Alternately, it is possible that Hess Street School could be re-purposed as a City of Hamilton Recreation Centre with a gym and a pool and a hot pool and a community kitchen, which would improve access to facilities for all the members of this community. I believe funding is available from the provincial government to help create this.)

Strathcona is more central to the Strathcona community and has Victoria Park, a lovely large park with multiple uses right next door to it that is used for student and community events. We can make better use of the available school land by moving the parking around (site redesign). The Sir John A MacDonald site is one that was fine for high school kids but many elementary parents are very uncomfortable and concerned about it's location being used for an elementary school. It is very close to Jackson Square and the Salvation Army and there are concerns about mentally unwell and/or individuals who are using illegal substances presenting a threat to the well-being of the students. The location is also an island surrounded on all sides by many lanes of traffic which creates safety issues as well as noise and air pollution. The impact would be detrimental for both the Hess and Strathcona communities if the SJAM site were used for the purpose of a new elementary school.

In light of the information provided by the LRT spokesperson who came to the working group meeting at Ryerson School, the boundary movements from King Street to Main Street will also make sense in terms of feeling safe to cross in the future. King Street is going to feel more like a local street and less like a major thorough-fare for cars in the city. Most of that type of traffic will end up using other routes (like Main Street).

This proposal is a more socially equitable way to deal with the budgetary constraints as well as the structural and learning environment problems of the building at Hess. It would also make the communities more walk-able for all of the children and their parents.

Thank you for your time and consideration for my proposal. If you have any questions or are in need of assistance I am happy to help. Please don't hesitate to ask me.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Nadine Bernack, B.A., RMT

Parent of child Grade 3 at Strathcona Elementary,

Parent of child in Grade 1 in SAGE,

Executive Member of the Strathcona Home and School Associations,

Parent Volunteer at Strathcona Elementary, and

Accommodation Review Committee representative for Strathcona Elementary School