

Draft Proposal for a System School for Students of Promise¹ for the HWDSB North Cluster ARC

Foreword

The HWDSB North Cluster ARC appreciates much in the HWDSB documents: *Our Strategic Directions 2009-2013*, *Learning for All: HWDSB Program Strategy*, *Annual Operating Plan 2010-2011*, *Schools of the Future*, *Education in HWDSB*, and *Connecting with 21st Century Fluencies - Leadership and Learning*. The committee has taken advantage of opportunities throughout the ARC process thus far to raise matters of concern and to envision a quite extraordinary role for the HWDSB in the forefront of educational innovation in North America, particularly with respect to students of promise.

“No more cookie-cutter schools” indeed!

- We affirm that rationalizing our educational institutions ought not simply to be an exercise in applying financial formulae to pupil placements.
 - We affirm that students are not uniform widgets on an assembly line.
 - We affirm that gaps between educational theory and pedagogical experience must be addressed in the interests of student achievement, engagement, and equity.
 - We also affirm that education is not primarily a matter of management.
1. Members of Senior Management at the HWDSB rightly emphasize the goal of “all students learning”² and appropriately welcome – both orally and on paper – “student voice” and “student needs” as drivers of programming.³ Through the North cluster ARC process so far, however, student (and parent/EA/teacher/administrator) voice concerning students who would rather drop out of secondary school than be consigned to large composite schools has received little response apart from platitudinous dismissal and ideologically-driven dogmatic claims about inclusive education.
 2. Given the increasing number of students of promise in our community, the diversity of factors comprising their specific circumstances and challenges, breakthrough diagnostic and remedial techniques, interested community-based organizations eager to participate in assisting the HWDSB in its mandate to serve students of promise, and the tacit

¹ “Students of promise” is an epithet referenced in *Whatever It Takes: How Twelve Communities Are Reconnecting Out-of-School Youth* from *American Youth Policy Forum*. The phrase highlights the potential of students whose success in conventional education has been compromised for any of a number of reasons. Sept.-Oct. 2011 statistics on these students will have to be updated for ARC consideration. Clear profiles will also have to be developed. Parkview staff members are working on this now.

² HWDSB Program Strategy

³ Education in HWDSB, p.8 and repeated asseverations of Superintendent Joshua at April 12 North ARC working meeting.

knowledge and first-hand insight embodied in students, their parents and guardians, and the professional staff of the HWDSB, it is integral to the vision of, and incumbent upon, the North Cluster Accommodation Review Committee to propose a System School that "...is about knowing our students [of promise], and meeting their abilities with the right level of support"⁴ outside of the cookie cutter model of large, composite schools.

Considering the fundamental alternatives:

1. According to parents, guardians, administrators, teachers, E.A.s, other support staff, and students themselves, the recommendation of HWDSB Senior Management to provide students of promise with special programming (Selected and Targeted Interventions)⁵ within composite secondary schools is sub-optimal for, among other factors, it threatens to revive the pain of marginalization and ostracism these students have experienced in their prior special assignments within elementary and middle schools. Such proximal segregation undermines for adolescents their need to belong and to be eligible to participate fully in the many activities a secondary school offers. It amounts to an illusion of inclusion. Research finds that overt and covert bullying colour such students' experiences in mainstream school, despite reputed benefits of integration.⁶ Suffering social alienation and frequent exclusion or outright failure in competitive arenas, many integrated students of promise would feel disenfranchised and precluded from taking advantage of opportunities that could otherwise constitute their best memories of high school. We know from many of these students themselves that they would rather drop out of school than suffer the ignominy of being accommodated among their institutionally and socially privileged peers⁷ or endure the daily stress of hypervigilance the threat of bullying engenders. For students of promise, a composite school is an environment often hostile to well-being and positive self-regard. As well, many students of promise suffer perceptual complications due to ASDs, FASDs, acquired brain injury, and/or mental illness. A composite school can be a cacophonous environment.⁸ An inclusive elective classroom with a large number of other students can be disconcerting in itself for students of promise.
2. It might be difficult for administrators, managers, and trustees to understand the psychological and perceptual experiences at play here, because the majority of

⁴ Education in HWDSB, p. 8

⁵ Learning for All: HWDSB Program Strategy (2011)

⁶ "[P]articipants reported being bullied at some time, with this being described as both overt and covert in nature" *Integration versus Segregation: the experiences of a group of disabled students moving from mainstream school into special needs further education* (Victoria Pitt and M. Curtin, 2004).

⁷ "Comparisons with similar ability peers are thought to be protective of self-esteem, while negative social comparisons with non-disabled peers are considered to be psychologically threatening" (G. Cooney, A. Jahoda, A. Gumley & F. Kootz, 2006).

⁸ "...the preference for routine, predictability and low sensory stimulation expressed by individuals with ASDs is at odds with the noisy, bustling and chaotic environments of secondary mainstream schools" (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Moore, 2007; Wing, 2007).

them have flourished in mainstream education. When we listen to the voices of students of promise, however, the aversion they feel at the prospect of integration within composite schools comes through indisputably, and no amount of special accommodation or adaptive programming can compensate for these educationally significant psycho-perceptual-social dynamics. Research supports student observations that whatever stigma they might suffer outside of school for their perceived differences from the social mainstream, this does not cease within integrated settings.⁹

3. By way of contrast, a secondary school designed to accommodate 300 students of promise who share distinctive profile elements, and who would rather not attend a composite school, would provide them with a safe, shared secondary school experience. Opportunities to participate in programming related to diverse arts, practical skills training, cognitive-ability-specific literacy and numeracy education, social-emotional meta-awareness and self-regulation techniques, numerous extra-curricular activities, and regular engagement with local agencies and businesses whose expertise and other resources would provide support and pathways for students throughout their secondary school careers and beyond, are the sorts of occasions and services a System School for students of promise such as we propose would provide. Centrally located in a single building, the school would serve as a convenient hub for partners from the greater community to participate in the education and specialized support of students of promise. As more students find success and genuine esteem in the new System School, word will spread and fewer young people will slip through the normative cracks in our district.
4. It is important to understand the pragmatic aspects of program planning with particular attention to sought-after curricular outcomes for students of promise. There can easily arise a gap between what managers are convinced by, *in abstracto*, on paper, and the actual exigencies of education for these students. A helpful model of learning propounded by Goldstein and Mather is the “Building Blocks Model of Learning.”¹⁰ The basic idea is that learners proceed from foundational through symbolic to conceptual understanding of given information. Foundational learning requires social-emotional self-regulation and healthy self-esteem. Proceeding with respect to literacy, for example, symbolic learning requires phonology, orthography, and fine motor skills. Finally, conceptual learning entails thinking with language, images, and strategies. Without a basis of mastery in foundational learning, consequent symbolic and conceptual learning cannot be consolidated; the progressive learning hierarchy is subverted from the outset. Many students of promise approach secondary school with low self-

⁹ “Participants from mainstream school and special school reported similar experiences of stigmatized treatment beyond school. However the mainstream participants indicated that they were also treated in a stigmatized fashion at school, primarily by their non-disabled peers” *Young people with intellectual disabilities attending mainstream and segregated schooling: perceived stigma, social comparison and future aspirations* (G. Cooney, A. Jahoda, A. Gumley & F. Kootz, 2006).

¹⁰ Reported from *Practical Strategies for Students with Learning Disabilities and ADHD* – a workshop at Trillium Demonstration School, by Dan Birkenberg 2010-2011 school year.

esteem, social-emotional deficits, heightened needs for differentiated instruction, attention challenges, and personal experiences of trauma, failure, being misunderstood, being judged, and being dismissed. To attempt to create for students of promise an inviting context for learning requires a specialized facility. This will be a symbolic and practical move by the HWDSB to express interest in and support of students of promise.

5. It would be fallacious to describe such a school of choice as ‘segregation,’ for enrolment would be a free determination of students, parents/guardians, and administrators collaboratively deciding whether placement in the System School for students of promise would be best. Voluntary participation in the programs offered will bolster students’ sense of efficacy and self-determination. Intrinsic motivation, not extrinsic coercion, is key to all optimal student engagement, particularly that of students of promise.
6. Beyond the number of students of promise currently enrolled in the HWDSB and according to the census of 2006, 17% of youth 15 to 19 years of age within the Hamilton area were not involved in formal education of any sort.¹¹ Innovative educational experiments alongside evidence-based best practices that attract and assist learners in the new System School for students of promise would be applicable to alternative settings to which educationally-disengaged youth might be drawn.
7. Fear of litigation has prompted school districts in the U.S.A. to provide accommodations for students of promise in composite schools under the auspices of inclusion. This is neither the best motive for integrating students of promise, nor has it been proven to be effective in terms of outcomes. We have been unsuccessful in our search for compelling research on the favourable side of the question of inclusion within composite schools as it pertains to the sort of students of promise who presently attend Parkview and Mountain Secondary Schools. There are no other public secondary schools in North America of which we are aware that reflect the same student profiles as Parkview or Mountain.¹² We ought

¹¹ ‘Some key features of the youth population in Hamilton are:

- 17% of young people 15 – 19 years old did not attend school in 2005.
- 45% of young people 20 – 24 years old did not attend school in 2005.
- Young men were more likely to not attend school than young women.

These measures of academic achievement are a matter of concern for educators and indicate an area for improvement for Hamilton.’ (Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton: Seeking Better Outcomes for Youth in Hamilton, January 2011, p.13).

¹² The history of Parkview Secondary School is difficult to trace along policy lines. A clear vision has not led it to its present state. Throughout the North Cluster ARC process, discussion of Parkview’s fate has varied in its nomenclature, no doubt because Parkview has served as a boys’ only school, a co-educational vocational school, a community school, a System School, and as a site for special education programming. Over the years its function has metamorphosed into the *de facto* special education school that it is. As staff have come and gone, they have adapted to the varying profiles new cohorts of students present. Over the past three years, a unifying effort to calibrate programming for the students who attend has had some success. But there is far to go, and the vision required to see the way where others have not gone before is coalescing among numerous members of the HWDSB community and Greater Hamilton.

to respect the opportunity facing us to implement an innovative System School for just these types of students rather than blithely sending them into environments unprepared to receive them in a fully inclusive way. Without a proven cultural and educational reevaluation within the HWDSB and beyond, the ideal of fully inclusive, cookie-cutter composite secondary schools remains an aspirational goal, the premature implementation of which will amount to callous disregard of student voice and the loss of a tremendous opportunity to host and support the education of students of promise by recognizing and facilitating their aspirations.

8. When one knows that an institution exists to develop one's strengths, to foster one's abilities and interests, and to provide opportunities to enter spheres not otherwise accessible, does one not feel welcome there and indeed inclined to feel good about being there? This is the sort of 'inclusion' afforded students who attend Westmount Secondary School. Why ought not the HWDSB to offer similar service and respect to our students of promise at the other end of the spectrum?

Elaboration vis-à-vis ARC Terms of Reference

Accommodation

1. The proposed facility would consolidate the student cohorts who otherwise would enrol in Mountain Secondary School and Parkview Secondary School. It will also accommodate students of promise entering the secondary level from feeder schools and from other secondary schools throughout the district. The number of eligible students will exceed capacity and thus meet the target of 100% utilization for a future ten-year period.
2. Given the identifications assigned to many students of promise and the diverse programming suggested for this school, it might be advisable for the HWDSB to request a re-evaluation of the ratio of classroom space to student numbers in planning to accommodate this innovative System School for students of promise.
3. Parents, guardians, HWDSB staff, and students themselves will together determine the appropriateness of placement at this school for specific programming. Staff will feel privileged to have the opportunity to work with students of promise in the new System School, and it is hoped that students and their parents/guardians will consider it a great opportunity for students of promise to attend. Students and parents will have the option of enrolling in a composite secondary school if they think the new System School for students of promise will not meet their needs.
4. For a number of students, the proposed System School will function as a Transition School, i.e., it will serve as an environment for students to develop their social-emotional self-awareness and self-regulation, to learn secondary school routines such as personalized time-tables and the responsibility that

- pertains to secondary school freedoms (in contrast to their erstwhile more restrictive experience in special middle school programs), to learn life skills, and to remediate social, practical, and academic learning lost to adverse circumstances. Further, the relative small size of the new school conduces to its being a safe environment for students with anxiety disorders such as social phobia.
5. Periodic review of individual student progress will occasion consideration of a move to one of the composite secondary schools. This might involve part-time placement in a composite school so that the student can take advantage of specific programming unavailable at the System School. Conversely, a student in a composite school might attend the new System School on a part-time basis to remediate one or more facets of schooling.
 6. Transitions direct from the new school to workplace, apprenticeship, and other post-secondary pathways will also be supported.
 7. As a System School, the proposed facility will serve as an experimental venue for an extended school day and an extended school year. A more flexible schedule will make possible greater remedial efforts and mitigate the hiatus of summer vacation which some students find to be an occasion more for forgetting than consolidating learning.
 8. Like Trillium, the new System School for students of promise will test various approaches to education in its many aspects and serve as a centre for research.
 9. It is further recommended that the building for this school include a community centre. The new System School will thereby invite greater community familiarity and involvement. For some families and individuals, the community centre will serve as an alternative threshold to secondary level education. In this respect, the new school's operation (and attendant costs) will benefit from the increased use of its facilities by other agencies. Some of these agencies could be program partners with the HWDSB, contributing to the multifaceted offerings at the school, e.g.: the Industry Education Council, C.O.R.E. (Community Organizations Reaching Everyone), Mohawk College: iDeaWorks and Access, McMaster University, and the John Howard Society. Alternatively, a location close to an extant community centre will serve students of promise and their families.
 10. Enrolment levels are an important consideration of the HWDSB in maintaining and enhancing public education in the district. The proposed System School for students of promise will provide parents, guardians, and students a unique opportunity to see their strengths addressed in a specialized environment that exists to serve them. Many erstwhile early leavers will find an educational home at the proposed System School.

Facility Condition

1. The proposed school will require “permanent accommodation” per the language of the ARC Terms of Reference, i.e., it will require a “bricks and mortar” structure.
2. It is suggested that the current location of Parkview Secondary School (60 Balsam Avenue North), together with the adjacent King George School building site, would be an excellent location for the new System School. Together, the buildings, if renovated, could accommodate many different programs, including a community centre. The two buildings are currently connected by a hallway.
3. Informal consultation with HWDSB personnel has indicated that the structure of Parkview Secondary School is sound. Replacement windows are the greatest obvious need for improvement of the facility. In turn, this renovation will elevate the image of the HWDSB in the inner city as an organization that respects and appreciates the important role a System School for students of promise can play.
4. The City of Hamilton’s plans for sports-related development in the Parkview neighbourhood suggest that a local school will be able to take advantage of some of these facilities and develop a mutually-advantageous relationship with the city.
5. To locate the proposed System School for innovative practice in addressing the needs of students of promise near a prominent downtown development (including the renovation of Ivor Wynne Stadium), will mean to connect the HWDSB with a centre of attraction in the Golden Horseshoe. The new System School will be on the map functionally and geographically. The symbolism and the practicality of the new school’s location are both important considerations.
6. A second possible location to renovate for the new System School for students of promise is the Delta Secondary School building. The building and its grounds could be modified to accommodate a greenhouse; parts of the building could be demolished, some of its shops could be updated, the theatre would be a great asset for the performing arts program, and the formula for space-to-students could be reassessed to reflect the identified student clientele. The building is an historic landmark with fundamental ties to education in Hamilton. Again, the symbolic value of such an investment ought to be given due consideration. As the HWDSB building at Main St. and Bay St. is surplus, some staff could be relocated to the Delta Secondary School site as well. This would serve to foster familiarity between our students of promise population and those persons responsible to support them at the system level.
7. A possible location for new construction of this System School is nearby the North Hamilton Community Health Centre. A LEED platinum standard building would be a showpiece for the HWDSB in its desire to reflect the values of the coming century (sustainability, efficiency, alternative energy, recycling, etc.) and

would pair aesthetically and ethically with the new NHCHC facility. Connections with health and social services for students and their families would be expedited by proximity to the NHCHC.

8. A second possible location for new construction of this System School for students of promise is the current site of Siemens on Myler Street. Siemens has a history of philanthropic beneficence in Hamilton. With this plant closing, the corporation might be willing to contribute significantly, as a legacy project, to clearing the land and making it available at nominal cost for construction of a new LEED platinum standard building. [For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact DL Leslie, Director, Media Relations dl.leslie@siemens.com]

Program

1. As suggested above, the proposed North Cluster System School would set a new standard in North America for assessing, addressing, and developing the many untapped strengths of students of promise. The program will entail both proven strategies and experimental approaches to life skills development, social-emotional meta-awareness and self-regulation (e.g.: mindfulness-based stress reduction, self-compassion, yoga, etc.), curriculum-related differentiated instruction (e.g.: role play, virtual environments, kinaesthetic, visual-spatial, hands-on, problem-based, and solution-focused learning), proven and new assistive technologies, and creative, responsive, and relevant assessment and evaluation. Many aspects of the program will develop along with links to community agencies (see partnerships, below) according to a flexible schedule (daily and calendrical). Evidence-based research, both quantitative and qualitative, will inform best practices as the new System School develops over the coming years.
2. Similar to the principles underlying SHSM programs, the approach to be taken in the proposed System School for students of promise will integrate academic and skilled disciplines (theory and practice) across the curriculum. Students will be encouraged to see connections between reading and calculation on the one hand, and working practically on the other. Student exit strategies into the world of meaningful work will entail a priority on skills development; academic instruction will serve the literacy and numeracy needs of the hands-on shops. Certification will be the principle means of acknowledging student progress.
3. With a focus on practical skills and student of promise exit plans, the new System School will include a strong co-op and entrepreneurship program.¹³ Numerous placements able and willing to accommodate students of promise have already

¹³ See Appendix I for figures on the economic upside to our proposed entrepreneurship partnership with McMaster University.

been established with the HWDSB.¹⁴ Spring – Summer – Autumn on-farm organic permaculture programming is another important offering to provide students. Several local farmers are willing to participate in such a venture.

4. Information gleaned from current and developing imaging technology reflected in new understandings of neuroplasticity¹⁵ and the neurobiology of genetic, environmental, and interpersonal interactions¹⁶ offers new insights into how human minds develop and how neural connections can be created, nurtured, or left to atrophy. Working together with experts in these fields, the HWDSB can pioneer collaborative studies of students of promise with a view to discovering diverse functional patterns in their minds and developing approaches to education best adapted to these varieties of mental experience. The proposed System School will be a centre for such innovative work.
5. The proposed System School for students of promise will incorporate introductory Vocational training and Student Success initiatives such as student re-engagement, improving attendance, reducing bullying, ensuring equity, providing group instruction for enhancing self-esteem, problem solving, socialization, and transitioning into the composite secondary school setting and beyond.
6. The proposed System School for students of promise will incorporate several of the HWDSB Alternative Education programs, including Supervised Alternative Learning (SAL), Crestwood/Phoenix Alternative Learning, NGage, Strengthening Hamilton Aboriginal Education (SHAE), etc. Incorporating these alternatives will allow for seamless transitioning between programs so that students of promise can meet their full potential. Students of promise will be integrated into the program that best meets their social-emotional, psychological, intellectual, individual, and cultural needs. Some of these programs (i.e.: NGage and SHAE) will continue to be satellite programs due to the resources available at their current sites that satisfy specific programming needs; however, they would fall under the umbrella of the System School for students of promise. An integral part of the ethos of the new System School will be a restorative justice program.
7. The proposed System School for students of promise will incorporate the Drive to Success initiative begun at Parkview and adopted at Mountain.
8. The proposed System School for students of promise will also incorporate the Nya:Weh program for aboriginal culture and support.¹⁷ Aboriginal youth have the highest drop-out rates of young people in Canada. At Parkview, the Nya-Weh program has enhanced many students' pride in their ancestry and contributed to

¹⁴ Students of promise generally require placements where employers understand the variables entailed. Parkview and Mountain staff have established connections with numerous such co-op placements.

¹⁵ This refers to observations that changing one's mental states changes one's brain. See, for example, Mind and Life Institute publications, such as *Healing Emotions* (Goleman, ed., 1997) and *Destructive Emotions* (Goleman, ed., 2003).

¹⁶ See, for example, Daniel Siegel, *The Mindful Brain* (2007), and *The Neurobiology of We* (2010).

¹⁷ See Appendix II for summary on the Nya:Weh program.

the inclusive community students and staff enjoy there. Support from the Métis Women's Circle will continue in the new System School.

9. Arts programming in the new System School will be as important as skills training: drama, music, dance, sculpture, and painting and drawing will be important parts of the program.
10. Skills training in the new System School will include cosmetology, budgeting and shopping, culinary arts,¹⁸ urban agriculture, home repairs, sewing, basic auto mechanics, and introductory design & manufacturing.
11. The new System School will not offer any Specialist High Skills Majors. It will, however, offer introductory level instruction in several SHSM areas. Students who meet with success in these programs can later transition into SHSMs at composite schools, or move directly from the System School into the workplace or new programs developed at Mohawk College designed specifically for students from the System School.
12. Physical activity is an integral element of wellness. The proposed System School for students of promise will offer a range of fitness and sports programs.
13. Academic programming in the new System School will focus upon literacy, numeracy, and creativity, linked across the other program curricula.
14. There is evidence that the Wilson© program for phonics-based word attack helps many students learn to pronounce text accurately. It does not work for all students who have difficulties deciphering text. As the HWDSB has implemented it so far, it does not address deficits in comprehension. These are promising areas for System School experimentation with complementary approaches to literacy.
15. The registered charitable organization JUMP Math offers many students the opportunity to understand mathematics in ways that engage their imaginations with reference to concrete situations. There are numerous other ways to connect basic mathematics with everyday life. At the proposed System School, math instruction will be coordinated fluidly with arts and skills training. As patterns of instruction prove useful, they will inform best practices.
16. Many students of promise lack experience outside their local neighbourhoods. The new System School will coordinate opportunities for trips within and without the city of Hamilton. These trips will complement programming within the school.
17. Nature Deficit Disorder will also be addressed with a focused outdoor education program.

¹⁸ See Appendix III for guidelines on Nutritional Life Education

Transportation

1. If the new System School for students of promise is located in the North Cluster, it ought to be on or close to a public transit route. It is understood that many circumstances that contribute to student of promise status are related to low Socio-Economic Status. We know from the Hamilton Spectator *Code Red* series and from the SPRC report of January 2011 that Hamilton's lowest SES neighbourhoods are located in the North Cluster.¹⁹ Many students for whom the new System School would be most appropriate would be attending their *de facto* community school. For example, more than one-half of current Parkview students walk to school. It is important to note that, although many students at Parkview have low SES, the programming appropriate for them is geared to their particular strengths and deficits, not their SES. Various social-emotional, psychological, perceptual, and intellectual challenges, including remediable gaps in learning, unite these students in their efforts to succeed at Parkview.

Funding

1. The HWDSB might seek additional provincial funding to support this proposed System School. Its experimental dimension makes it similar to a Provincial School, like Trillium. The HWDSB can allocate personnel to source and direct funding (e.g. SEA funds) to ensure that students enjoy the best assistive technology available. Another priority is funding to support teacher and E.A. training in proven approaches, new technologies, and student strengths.
2. Provided the Provincial funding formula is applied accurately to this proposed school, there ought to be sufficient funding available as it is anticipated that the need for such a school is considerable. Its size relative to the number of students of promise in the district (300 : >300) indicates likely 100% utilization.
3. In the case of Parkview Secondary School, close to 100% of the students enrolled have individual education plans (I.E.P.s); well over 90% of them have identifications.²⁰ If funding designated for identified students is directed to the proposed System School where identified students of promise will attend, there ought to be sufficient monies to support appropriate assistive technology and differentiated instruction.
4. The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, the Industry Education Council, Mohawk College, McMaster University, C.O.R.E., the North Hamilton Community Health Centre, Public Health, the Canadian Mental Health Association, the YMCA, Immigration, Aboriginal organizations, and the City of Hamilton will be interested in participating in this initiative, providing financial

¹⁹ "The marginalized youth population is heavily concentrated in the central lower city" (SPRC, p. 16).

²⁰ The remaining 10% might have been identified in another district, in which case their identification has not accompanied them to the HWDSB; others might be awaiting an I.P.R.C.

support along with other resources, such as expertise, personnel, and good will.²¹ The HWDSB will need to allocate personnel to the task of maintaining and developing working relationships with these and other community organizations.

5. It seems important to note that the recommendation of Senior Management would require that the services of the proposed System School for students of promise be replicated in every composite school. The associated costs in time, increased resources, teacher training, and associated funding required by the HWDSB itself, its staff, and its community partners would amount to far more than the costs associated with the System School.

Quality Teaching and Learning Environments

1. As a System School for students of promise, the proposed facility ought to have close ties to Senior Management at the HWDSB. In the interest of their knowing the students and removing any appearance of a disconnection between the HWDSB and the new school, it is recommended that one or two superintendents of education and system principals have offices on the premises. 21st century telecommunications remove the need for placement of management in a 'headquarters' building. On site administration and senior management will manifest respect and familiarity throughout the HWDSB hierarchy. This is a possibility to consider in relation to all schools.
2. Shops (construction, home repair, painting, drywall, kitchen, bakery, cosmetology, greenhouse, sewing, automotive, design/manufacturing, and environmental/outdoor education) ought to be state-of-the-art. The greenhouse ought to be integrated with the structure in such a way as to invite students and staff to enjoy its ambiance while also affording space to develop a horticulture and urban agriculture program.
3. There ought to be a gymnasium and outdoor space suitable for sport and other fitness activities. An integrated community centre with a pool for student use would be a great asset.
4. There ought to be a health suite, including space for visiting practitioners (public health nurses, dental hygienists, nutritionists, social workers, neurology researchers, students from Mohawk and McMaster: Social Services Workers, Child and Youth Workers, Nursing students, Social Work students, Psychology students).

²¹ The Atlantic Centre for Policy Research, University of New Brunswick, Policy Brief: "Outcome-Based Model for Evaluating Programs For Children At Risk" (J. Douglas Willms, Elizabeth A. Sloat, University of New Brunswick, 1998) outlines 17 outcome-based evaluation criteria for cost-effective assessment by community agencies supporting at-risk student remediation. Contact Sandy Harris (506) 447-3178 for information about the project described in the policy brief.

5. The arts program requires practice spaces, studio spaces, display spaces, and performance spaces.
6. Classrooms ought to have natural lighting, effective window blinds, sound-absorbent materials and design, dimmable lights (l.e.d.), comfortable seating, display areas, lockable storage space, ergonomic work spaces conducive to alternative configurations (independent and group work), and high quality computer work stations with good quality monitors and headsets with microphones. Each classroom ought to have a scanner, a printer, an L.E.D. projector, a digital camera, a good sound system, and an interactive system, such as a Mimio or Smartboard.
7. Metacognition and Self-regulation, enhanced through Yoga, Mindfulness, and Compassion affirmations, require classroom space with muffled acoustics and dimmable lighting.
8. A Co-op/Career Centre ought to accommodate multiple online users for certifications and instruction. It ought also to be suitable for presentations by community agencies and employers. Entrepreneurial initiatives, supported by McMaster business mentors, will be an enhancement to the co-op program as it presently operates at Parkview.
9. The proposed System School for students of promise ought to have a comfortable, inviting School Library Information Centre (SLIC). It ought to have variable discreet areas for group interactions as well as areas for browsing resources (online and off), dimmable lighting, natural light conducive to growing plants, plenty of display space, lockable storage, and an open circulation area.
10. The foyer ought to accommodate portable displays for meet & greet events and be a welcoming space for people entering the building. Display spaces for student and staff work will conduce to the sense of community in the new System School.
11. The cafeteria ought to be integrated with the kitchens, bake shop, and greenhouse. Free breakfasts and lunches for all students – without discrimination based on SES – will be prepared by classes with locally-sourced (where possible) nutritious ingredients.
12. The high correlation between low SES and student of promise status means that many students attending the proposed System School will benefit from supports like a ‘walk-in closet,’ laundry facilities, showers, and hygiene supplies.
13. There ought also to be a spacious, inviting nursery to accommodate infants and toddlers while their parents attend classes. Facilities for changing and feeding ought to be available as well.

Partnerships

1. The list of potential partners is extensive. Currently Parkview Secondary School enjoys numerous connections with community organizations and businesses. They provide financial, in kind, and personnel support for students of promise at Parkview. It is expected that they and others will be happy to support the proposed new System School for students of promise.

Equity

1. The basis of this proposal is the on-going quest for equity for students of promise in the HWDSB.
2. In terms of physical plant, a new building would have to comply with all regulations for accessibility.
3. If existing buildings are refurbished to accommodate this proposed System School, then they would have to be brought up to code in all respects, including accessibility, e.g., if the Delta Secondary School building were renovated, an elevator would have to be installed, perhaps in one of the existing stairwells.
4. Beyond physical access, location along a public transit route would obtain in any of the four proposed situations: Parkview-King George, Delta, adjacent to the North Hamilton Community Health Centre, and the north Hamilton Siemens site.
5. The program environment aspect of equity is the decisive factor in this proposal. The trustees need to ask themselves whether the HWDSB ought to offer the least advantaged student members of our learning communities the opportunity to find themselves in a nurturing, highly-adaptive, innovative centre for learning. These features can all the better be offered in a stand-alone facility, supported by agencies and institutions within the greater Hamilton community. Young people eligible to attend this System School for students of promise will be proud to belong to it and will reap the positive memories and tangible benefits it affords them throughout their lives. Seizing this opportunity at a time when budgets are tight and we know our current education system is failing the increasing number of students of promise among us, will elevate the HWDSB in the regard of its constituents and further afield.

Appendices

Appendix I:

Economic Stimulus Resulting from Entrepreneurial Skills Development Program through System School for Students of Promise.

(Modified from Rachel Cameron, 03, 2011)

Using the Ministry of Education Statistics on students with disabilities and the Hamilton Poverty Matrix:

- The number of children 0-14 is 93,895 of 483,150 people, and represents 19% of the Hamilton population.
- 13% (5% to 20%) have a disability = 12,206 disabilities.
- Half of all Ontario students identified as exceptional had learning disabilities; for Hamilton this = 6,103.
- Assuming equal numbers per year, $6,103 \div 14$, there are an estimated 436 children per year with learning disabilities.
- Parkview has 275 secondary school students or 69 for each of grades 9, 10, 11, and 12.
- 69 students per year are registered at Parkview on exit with ODSP for a total of 275 every 4 years and 550 every 8 years.
- $275 \times \$900$ monthly ODSP allowance = $\$247,500/\text{month} \times 12$ months = $\$2,970,000$ expenditure over 4 years.
- Setting up combinations of these 200 youth in small businesses (e.g., car wash, dishwashers, skilled service industries, kitchens) to earn minimum wage at $\$10.75/\text{hr.}$ = $\$403/\text{per person/per week}$ and = $\$20,962/\text{per person/per year} \times 200$ youth or = $\$4,192,448$.
- While these 200 youth every 4 years would be registered as independents, below the taxable income, they could contribute to Unemployment Insurance and the Canada Pension Plan and spend $\$4,192,448$ or $\$1$ million per year in the local economy.
- In combination as small businesses, they could offer much-needed services at lower than the competitions' prices.

- The difference between a cost of \$2,970,000 over 4 years to earnings of \$4,192,448 over 4 years = \$7,162,448 or \$1,790,612 per year of economic stimulus by these individuals, and even more if arranged as small businesses.

References:

Ontario Human Rights Commission. Education and Disability: Human Rights Issues in Ontario's Education System. July 2006. http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/resources/discussion_consultation/Education.

Hamilton Poverty Matrix. Developed in partnership with Social Planning & Research Council of Hamilton and City of Hamilton Public Health & Community Services Department. August 2001. <http://www.hamiltonpoverty.ca/docs/Poverty%20Matrix.pdf>.

Appendix II:



Native Youth Advancement With Education Hamilton

Parkview Secondary School
Prepared by: Jordan Carrier
Aboriginal Youth Advisor

Mission Statement: The Native Youth Advancement With Education Hamilton (NYA:WEH) primary focus provides a culturally-based support program for Aboriginal youth in Secondary Schools in the Hamilton area.

Amalgamating the two streams of education, Western and Traditional, is integral to the success of Aboriginal youth in mainstream society. Both education systems are necessary assets for the advancement of healthy individuals, communities, and nations.

Culture: Many Aboriginal youth grow up with little or no exposure to their ancestral roots. NYA:WEH guides students as they learn to incorporate traditional values and beliefs into their lives. Aboriginal youth can make their way through the mainstream education system as they “walk in two worlds,” the world of their native heritage and that of mainstream society.

Cultural support is a critical need within the school system for Aboriginal children and youth to succeed. The NYA:WEH program provides a culturally-oriented learning environment that assists Aboriginal youth in learning and continuing the ways of our ancestors.

Some believe the dearth of traditional beliefs and values in formal education contributes significantly to the increase in the unhealthy practices of Aboriginal youth (e.g.: drugs, violence, dropping out of school, etc.).

Areas of service: The NYA WEH Program is directed to assist and support status, non-status, Métis, and Inuit students in secondary education institutions in the Hamilton area.

Services available at Parkview:

- Alternative and culturally sensitive resource room
- Academic Assistance
- Access to tutors and peer support
- Social and personal consultation
- Student Advocacy
- Computer access
- After school homework program

- School supplies provided (pens, paper, pencils, and binders)
- Teachings from Elders and Traditional Teachers
- Outings to culturally specific destination
- Social
- Team Building Activities and Outings

Facts and Statistics about Aboriginal Peoples

According to the 2006 Census (Statistics Canada, 2006), Canada has more than a million people of Aboriginal ancestry, about 4% of the Canadian population profile.

This is projected to increase by 405,200 over the next 16 years to 1,471,700 by 2017. This means that the annual increase (1.8%) is more than double the rate projected for the total population of Canada. (0.7)

Ontario is seeing a marked increase in off-reserve Aboriginal peoples. According to Statistics Canada's Aboriginal Peoples Survey (2006), 242,290 Aboriginal people live in Ontario.

From 1996 to 2001, that number grew by 33%, compared to a 6% growth in the province's overall population.

The majority live (78%) off reserve in Ontario (Statistics Canada, 2006).

Multigenerational Trauma

- Although Aboriginal people account for 2.8% of the Canadian population, they represent 18% of the federally incarcerated population (Annual Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator 2005-2006).
- The overall incarceration rate for Aboriginals is 1,024 per 100,000 adults, while for non-Aboriginals it is 117 per 100,000 (roughly one-tenth the Aboriginal rate) (Annual Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator 2005-2006).
- A study of young offenders appearing in provincial court indicated that nearly 50% had prenatal exposure to alcohol (Zakreski, D. (March 10, 1998) Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Linked to Crime. Saskatoon Star Phoenix).
- Approximately one in six Aboriginals in custody were suspected or confirmed to have had Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and more than eight out of every ten Aboriginal youth in custody were suspected (24%), or confirmed (57%), to have a substance abuse problem (One Day Snapshot of Aboriginal Youth In Custody, Phase I, 2002).
- 30-40% of children "in care" are Aboriginal (Child Welfare League of Canada, Children in Care in Canada: A Summary of Current issues and trends with recommendations for Future Research, Manning-Farris, Cheryl and Zandstra, Marietta).
- There are 22,500 Aboriginal children "in care" across Canada (Child Welfare League of Canada, Children in Care in Canada: A Summary of Current issues and

rends with recommendations for Future Research, Manning-Farris, Cheryl and Zandstra, Marietta).

- As recently as February 2007, the Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations raised that number to 27,000 (National Chief responds to Minister Prentice's dismissal of the First Nations Child Welfare Crisis, February 8, 2007, <http://www.afn.ca/article.asp?id=3316>).

Child Poverty

- Since 1995, poverty rates in Ontario have increased by 6.3% while decreasing in the rest of Canada by 11.1%.
- 20% of children in the general Canadian population live in poverty. This is the second highest rate of child poverty in the developed world.
- 52.1% of Aboriginal children are poor.
- 12% of Aboriginal families are headed by single mothers.
- 40% of Aboriginal mothers earn less than \$12,000 per year.
- 47.2% of the Ontario Aboriginal population survives on less than \$10,000 per year.

From: *Urban Aboriginal Child Poverty: A Status Report on Aboriginal Children and Their Families in Ontario, OFIFC, 2000.*

- Poverty leads to poorer health status in children, particularly in the many Aboriginal communities (including urban) where health care is limited or unavailable. Health effects associated with child poverty include: Iron deficiency, anaemia, inadequate dental care, chronic ear infections, learning disabilities, poor school performance, and increased suicide rates (Urban Aboriginal Child Poverty: A Status Report on Aboriginal Children and their Families in Ontario, OFIFC, 2000).
- Over 20% of urban Aboriginal children in Ontario experience hunger (Child Hunger and Food Insecurity Among Urban Aboriginal Families, OFIFC, 2003).
- Mainstream studies suggest that families of hungry children are 13 times more likely to be on social assistance and 4 times more likely to be Aboriginal (Urban Aboriginal Child Poverty: A Status Report on Aboriginal Children and Their Families in Ontario, OFIFC, 2000).

FASD

- The world incidence rate of FASD is 1.9 per 1000; in some Aboriginal communities, there have been documented rates as high as 190 per 1000 (Paediatric Child Health, 2002).
- An estimated 68% of people affected with FASD will come into conflict with the law (Undue Trials, Justice Issues Facing Aboriginal Children and Youth, OFIFC, 2004).
- It is estimated "...roughly 50% of the youth we see in court have some form of FASD" (Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders and the Justice System, 2004).

- “A leading researcher in the field [of FASD], asserts that every native child adopted in the last two decades has suffered from alcohol damage *in utero*, and that this fact – rather than alienation from white society – is at the root of their difficulties in life.” (Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders and the Justice System, 2004).

Education

- Fewer than 50% of Aboriginal youth finish high school (Literacy as a Barrier to Employment, OFIFC, 2005; Juristat, Canadian Centre for Justice Studies, Statistics Canada, Vol. 26, no.3, 2006).
- 38% of youth in special education programmes were bullied compared to 18% for other students (Overview of OFIFC Programmes – Youth Issues and Involvement, 2005).
- Persons affected with FASD experience disrupted school experiences at a rate of 68% (FAS World, 2005).

The OFIFC’s 2005 report entitled “Literacy as a Barrier to Employment: A Literature Review and Discussion Paper Addressing the Literacy Needs of Aboriginal People in Ontario” reports:

- One study showed that children living in a high risk community who were provided with literacy skills training were significantly less likely to become involved in crime than those who had not received training;
- Self-reported levels of education for Aboriginal inmates showed that 65% had less than a grade 10 education.
- Recidivism rates were 50% lower for inmates who had received literacy interventions while incarcerated than those who had not received training.

Children’s Mental Health

In 2000, the OFIFC undertook a child poverty study in which 100% of respondents identified psychological effects of poverty:

- Low self-esteem, depression, anger, self-doubt, intimidation, frustration, feelings of being overwhelmed, shame, and hopelessness (Urban Aboriginal Child Poverty: A Status Report on Aboriginal Children and Their Families in Ontario, OFIFC, 2000).
- Evidence of a mental disorder has been found in 81% to 95% of Aboriginal suicide victims (Undue Trials, Justice Issues Facing Aboriginal Children and Youth, OFIFC, 2004).
- Aboriginal suicide rates for youth between the ages of 15 to 24 years are 5-8 times higher than the non-Aboriginal population and in some communities this rate is higher (A Statistical Profile of the Health of First Nations in Canada,

2003). In 2000, the OFIFC undertook a child poverty study in which 100% of respondents identified psychological effects of poverty. Some of these effects are: Low self-esteem, depression, anger, self-doubt, intimidation, frustration, feelings of being overwhelmed, shame, and hopelessness (Urban Aboriginal Child Poverty: A Status Report on Aboriginal Children and Their Families in Ontario, OFIFC, 2000).

- Evidence of a mental disorder has been found in 81 to 95% of Aboriginal suicide victims (Undue Trials, Justice Issues Facing Aboriginal Children and Youth, OFIFC, 2004).

Employment

Aboriginal peoples' unemployment rate is 19.1% versus 7.4% for the non-Aboriginal population (Fact Sheet on Members of Designated Groups, Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2001).

“Just under half of all Aboriginal youth did not work in the year 2000 (46%) and of those who did work, 9% were employed full time for the entire year of 2000 while 45% worked part time” (www.youth.gc.ca, Statistics Canada, 2001).

“While favourable developments have taken place in recent years in the labour market for youth, not completing high school, or not achieving a given threshold in terms of skills, places youth at a serious disadvantage in an economy that demands a more highly-skilled workforce. Aboriginal youth, who are among the fastest growing segments of the youth population in Canada, face especially serious challenges. (www.youth.gc.ca, Statistics Canada, 2001).

Appendix III:

Nutritional Life Education

Learning about food and nutrition should be as practically involving an experience as possible at all ages. Food presents people with everyday decisions to make and problems to solve. Students need to develop the knowledge, skills, and practical capability to meet their nutritional needs, and those of their families. Food is an excellent vector for applying mathematics, literacy, aesthetics, health, and life skills.

Students ought to become critical consumers, understanding food products in order to make informed decisions.

The proposed System School for students of promise will make provision for students to grow, harvest, source, preserve, prepare, and eat nutritional whole foods and to learn basic cooking skills through dedicated lessons in food preparation techniques, diet and nutrition, hygiene, safety, and prudent food shopping.

Good quality food education makes a tangible improvement to the quality of students' lives.