

Letter from Ancaster High School Staff to the West ARC Committee

It is with disappointment and dismay that we, the staff of Ancaster High School, respond to the latest proposals being considered by the ARC committee for recommendation to the Board of Trustees.

The two proposals focus almost entirely on the educational future of Dundas students and would leave the students of Ancaster in a building that cannot compete with either a new building in Dundas or the beautiful building in the town of Ancaster in the Catholic Board (Bishop Tonnos). Given the choice of which school to attend under these plans, it seems an obvious one for students and perhaps their families, and would relegate Ancaster High School to a future of severe enrolment decline. This further impacts the program we can offer and would further hurt our ability to prepare students for their post-secondary futures.

The West ARC committee has focused on the Dundas situation almost to the exclusion of Ancaster. To demonstrate the lack of attention, I would like to address the proposals that include a new school for only Dundas by turning the plan around to illustrate the inequity. What is the difference between the new plan proposed (new school in Dundas) compared to closing Parkside, loading up the existing Highland and rebuilding a new Ancaster High? The West ARC would end up with one new school, and a school over 50 years old and in need of repair, and each of Ancaster and Dundas would still have a school. I would argue that if examined strictly on viability and logistics, that Ancaster's building limits the offering of 21st century learning more than does Highland's, due to the fractured nature of the building. The proposal to "lop off a wing" only worsens this situation, by limiting the numbers and types of classrooms available. Courses will be taught in available classroom spaces and not organized by the setting or needs of the program. Staff would have fewer work spaces. Even if some features are "revitalized" or added, the fundamental nature of the building's structure, (having been built in pieces over time) would significantly limit our ability to teach program that meets the requirements for education in the 21st-Century.

To address the concerns raised above; the staff of Ancaster HS would like to put forward two other options for the West ARC to consider. They are outlined below.

Proposal 1: In order to provide equal educational opportunities for students in both Dundas and Ancaster:

Close Parkside and rebuild a new school on the Highland site with capacity of 1000 to be opened in 2015. Rebuild a new school on the Ancaster site (capacity of 1000) on Meadowbrook and eventually close the existing Ancaster High. This would alleviate the on-going maintenance costs of all three schools. Additionally savings should be realized because there will be two new buildings as opposed three old buildings requiring a significant amount of upgrade and repair work.

At the approximate time both new schools would open, combined enrolment, using the projections provided to the ARC committee, would be 2081 students. Two schools of 1000 would accommodate these students easily. I would argue that based on our current enrolment (1020) at Ancaster, the projections are on the low side. This also does not include any new students the West schools would attract because of the new facilities. We watched as the Catholic board's new building wowed our students and lured them away 5 years ago. We know that new buildings attract new students and help to retain others. An old building and limited programming will likely cause a deep cut to the enrollment of Ancaster HS.

Proposal 2: Build a large (enrollment greater than 1500) school in an area as close to the Ancaster-Dundas border as site availability allows.

There has been a long held belief that the communities of Ancaster and Dundas are two solitudes neither wishing to intermingle with the other. A combined high school may help alleviate this stereotype. A modern high school, will be an attraction to the families of Ancaster-Dundas. At 1500-1700 students the school will be at capacity at opening and should remain so based on the Board enrollment projections. A realignment of the current catchments may be required to bring the other West schools up to capacity.

Please examine these proposals and have both costed to determine the true cost and ultimate savings that each proposal would offer. I believe both could allow better delivery of education to all West ARC students and treats the communities of Dundas and Ancaster and their students fairly.

Sincerely,

Reg Varghese
Staff Member
Ancaster HS
Dundas Resident