

From: Nicole Jessome  
Subject: Dalewood/GR Allan/Prince Philip

Message Body:  
Dear Committee Members;

As I write this, I have just finished watching my youngest of 3 graduate from Dalewood Middle School. All of my children attended GR Allan as well. Although I know that now I have come to end of my use with the elementary schools in the neighbourhood, I feel compelled to write you regarding the possible closure of Prince Philip or Dalewood.

The area of Westdale/Ainslie Woods is the one of the last like it in Hamilton. We enjoy our community and many different facets about it. Most of us live here precisely because we wanted our children to be able to walk to school. The daily trek to GR Allan and also to Prince Philip, for those in that area, is part of their daily routine that enriches their quality of life. When children are younger, parents can bond and you get to know the friends of your children as you chat on the playground. As the children get older and perhaps are able to walk with friends to school, the independence of an adolescent blossoms. Prince Philip and GR Allan both stand for much more than the buildings they are. They represent the safe, loving, thriving environment we want for all of our children. The pride the children develop for their school, the independence as they grow through the grades, and the looking ahead to their years at Dalewood will not be replaced by containing them in a school that they are bussed to and not part of their own surroundings. By taking Prince Philip or GR Allan children out of their neighbourhood, we negate one of the main reasons why we are all here living in this neighbourhood, therefore putting the community as a whole at risk.

Dalewood School is also, not just another building to this community. As parents, we quickly find out that once our child is at Dalewood, the critical part it plays in their development. This middle school stepping stone is vital in their independence, learning, and social development. Dalewood is the quintessential 'mini' high school. It gives the students there a true to life taste of what life will be like when they attend high school. Most students are able to get to school on their own, giving them the independence and space their age group hopes for. The clubs and sports teams available allow them to try new things, be recognized for their achievements and know what it is like to be part of a bigger picture. The teachers, and staff are stellar and the quality of learning is second to none. In fact, as I had mentioned, I just attended this year's graduation ceremony, where the vast majority of its graduating class have finished with honours.

As I have watched my children as well as their friends progress through their school years, I am always thankful for the place we live and what was available for them. Each step, from K-5 in GR Allan or Prince Philip, and from grade 6-8 at Dalewood, has been crucial in their success at Westdale High School. The thought that one of the pieces of this puzzle may be lost, is not just sad, it is devastating to not only their development, but the future of our neighbour as a whole.

I truly hope you re-consider closing any of these schools as once they are gone, they are gone for good. Once you take away the reason for a neighbourhood to exist, it is also gone for good.

Sincerely,  
Nicole Jessome

An article in the June 29 Dundas Star news state that "Written and on-line petitions in support of keeping both Prince Philip and George R. Allan open, and selling the Dalewood property to get funds for improvements to the two elementary schools, have been signed by more than 850 people, according to Prince Philip parent Aimee Reid." While I signed a petition in early June in favour of maintaining Prince Philip as a community school in West Hamilton, acknowledging the value of walkability and the corresponding positive effect on the environment and children's health, the petition did not address whether we would support closure of Dalewood to achieve this aim. The petition did not ask whether Dalewood should be closed instead of Prince Philip, and it should not be inferred that those who supported one particular school are by default supporting closure of a different one. There is value to the students and community of having small local schools in the early years. Equally important, as shared at the public meeting in June by current students at Dalewood and their parents, is maintaining the richness of programs, specialized classrooms, extracurricular activities, social and developmental experiences at Dalewood. These would disappear if the Grades 6-8 students were to be divided among two schools. In the upcoming deliberations, closing a school should be only one of the options explored, together with enhanced revenue and maximized use of the current buildings for other uses including community groups, social services, early childhood education, businesses. Partnerships between the school board and the city as currently exist at Dalewood with the school and recreation centre should continue and be encouraged.

There appears to be strong support for maintaining all the schools, and should not be interpreted (as was done in the newspaper article) as indicating support for one school compared to another. I am concerned that the board proposal will create a school at GR Allan that is too large (approaching 600 students) and crowded, both inside and on the playground. The additions proposed minus the rooms removed from use in the basement do not appear sufficient.

Glenn Fletcher

From: Mary Anne Duncan  
Subject: Dalewood Arc

Message Body:

A comment for the committee. I live in Westdale proper, sent kids to Prince Philip and currently have children in Dalewood but really won't be affected that much by this process. Having said this, I am amazed that the Board would recommend busing almost an entire neighbourhood. Can this really be the best solution? Is it really the best solution to leave one neighbourhood entirely without a school/rec centre while allowing another to keep theirs, but at a substandard level as both schools require a tremendous amount of upgrades. What about "walkability" for those in Ainslie Wood? There is absolutely no benefit to the Ainslie Wood neighbourhood in this scenerio that I can see.