

Received May 27, 2017

Dear Chair White and Members of the Board,

I write as a former member of the West Hamilton Accommodation Review Committee. It was a privilege to have been allowed to serve on this committee and be allowed access to information about the community and have the opportunity to meet a group of extremely idealistic and intelligent members of that community. So thank you for that. I do have concerns about the final recommendation to the Board because it involves school closure and disruption of existing school communities. My concerns are based on the following-

1. Uncertainty in the school enrollment projections- Given significant differences between Census, Ministry of Finance and homegrown estimates and the time scale involved, the post 2020 numbers should be checked for reliability. Add to that the uncertainty around the planned building in the Tiffany- Barton and Piers 7 and 8 areas, the moving of programmes within the ARC area and the consequent possible loss or gain of enrollment, and the possibility of large influxes of immigrant and refugee families in the near future due to war, climate change, sea level rise and you have a "better wait and see" situation. As a sanctuary city we have a moral obligation not to burn accommodation bridges.
2. Emotional needs of newcomer and other families in the area would not be well served by community disruption and it would not be offset by new school glitziness. While children are resilient and teachers kind and skillful, we have a disproportionate number of ELL, Spec Ed, poor and dysfunctional kids in the core. Wouldn't it be kinder to the families involved (whose fears are increased by parental difficulties with English, lack of a car and general knowledge of our system) to give them as much continuity as we can. Safeguarding students' sense of well being is one of the avowed objects of accommodation changes and parents frequently cited it as their primary concern. Student achievement was never even raised until the last meeting when a teacher at Hess admitted the open concept school was difficult to teach in.
3. Environmental concerns are also involved. There seems to be a hope that closure of one school will justify the awarding of money not just for a new school but for a chunk of provincial money much needed to bring existing facilities up to benchmark standards and complete accessibility renovations. The amount of money needed for this is daunting but is it really this high? Intuitively the older a school gets the less seems to be spent on it partly because of the prospect that they will go into an accommodation review and be closed in the near future- so why waste funds. The high rehab costs contribute to a feeling of urgency to close somebody so these needed repairs will be made to other schools. My point is that the profligate building of schools meant to be torn down and sold in less than 40 years cannot continue into the era of peak oil. Structures must be built to last, and be cheaply repaired. The provincial coffers will have many demands being placed on them that will be more important than "upgraded" schools when the basic provision of service is already adequate.

In summary, my feeling is that we should keep all existing schools,

Received June 1, 2017

Dear Hamilton-Wentworth School Board Trustees,

CC: Mitzie Hunter, Minister of Education

We, the undersigned, urge you to reconsider the decision to close Strathcona school. Attached to this email you will find petitions signed by 119 individuals.

Everything we have read on the subject indicates that smaller schools are better for kids, period. We do not understand why the PAR concluded the opposite, other than for financial reasons. We realize that the Ontario government will provide funding only if schools are closed. This is flawed, and the Hamilton Wentworth District School Board should not destroy our communities for the sake of money. This is a school that previous teachers, administrators, Trustees, community members, families and students have worked so hard to create. How can you take this away?

Closing Strathcona School would negatively affect the families who attend this school and the community around it.

The PAR clearly 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. 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! There doesn't seem to be any benefits to the proposal to close Strathcona other than financial.

Please DO NOT vote against community, walkability, safety, achievement and teachers just for the sake of money.

The Strathcona community looks out for each other. When a 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 a community.

We support Hess getting the new school that they need; we strongly believe that Strathcona school and the community do not need to be destroyed to achieve this goal. We ask you to work harder to develop a plan that will support both the Hess and Strathcona communities.

Again, we the undersigned urge you, please do not close Strathcona school. For the sake of Hamilton, for the sake of our community's children: Vote for smaller schools and better communities.

Thank you for your time.

(HWDSB Staff Note: The petition has been not posted on the HWDSB website due to privacy reasons.)