

November 1, 2011

Dear West ARC members,

At the Secondary ARC West, May 31<sup>st</sup> Public Meeting we presented the Social Communication Classroom for Middle and High School Asperger, NVLD or similar youth. We are hoping that both a high school and a middle school continuous pair pilot for this classroom will be housed in the West Cluster. We are writing to inquire as to the determination as to inclusion of this classroom within one of the three West Cluster High Schools that will emerge from the West ARC process.

This is a program that our children desperately need in order to protect and foster their self-esteem and to help prevent many co-morbidities; a program that will likely help usher them to adulthood and, hopefully, employment and independence, as well as an academic education. The cohort that we are advocating for are very high functioning, with high IQs, but often with social deficits. This is why they have such a difficult time with self-esteem, anxiety and depression – they are painfully aware of their differences, shortcomings, exclusion, and truly know that they do not fit in. In terms of serious mental health issues (e.g., anxiety, depression, etc.), this may be one of your most challenging group of kids.

We believe that our proposed Social Communication Classroom dovetails nicely with the boards' drive for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fluencies (Strategic Directions, Education in HWDSB and Learning for All: HWDSB Program Strategy, specifically Tier 3), as well as, both the HWDSB's Core Commitments and the Special Education Commitments.

It is crucial that the Social Communication Classroom program, if implemented, be well conceived. One of the many issues to consider is certainly location. While we would be very happy if this pilot program were adopted at any of the West Cluster high schools that are discussed at the Secondary ARC West and most of their feeder middle schools, we think that it would be best that the middle and high school program-pair for each cluster be in natural-neighbourhood continuous pairs (e.g., Dalewood/Westdale, Spencer Valley/Parkside, Ancaster Senior/Ancaster High School). We feel that it is not in the best interest of our children to move them more than once, as this is a very emotionally fragile population.

Please consider that if the placement of the cluster pairs is not in natural-continuous neighbourhoods, you may have a very difficult time recruiting individuals for your program. Many families will feel that this is too much change and would, in itself, cause too much anxiety. We cannot emphasize enough how strongly we feel that splitting the program between two neighbourhoods would limit the program's success.

We realize that the West ARC is only for Secondary Schools. However, we request that not only you recommend the inclusion of the Social Communication Classroom in one of the West Cluster High Schools within the ARC, but that you take in to consideration what middle school will be its potential continuous pair.

Thank you for your consideration and look very much forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

The Social Communication Classroom Delegation