

Shannen Koostachin and Gatestone Boundary Review Analysis of Themes – December 2023

Data Sources

- Public Meeting on Dec 5, 2023 – 22 people attended, 15 participated in small group discussions (~75% from SK, ~25% from Gatestone)
- EngageHWDSB – 4 comments, 4 submitted questions, 488 page views
- Emails to planning @hwdsb.on.ca – 2 emails
- Advisory Committee notes

Index of Themes

Below is a list of themes that emerged from the data sources that were analyzed. Conversations with Resource Staff and facilitators regarding their conversations with community members at the public meeting also informed the development of these themes. There are four categories of themes: one for each of the school areas affected (Shannen Koostachin, Binbrook, and Gatestone) and one category that captures themes across all school groups (General). Examples of the concerns/comments/quotes raised by community members under each theme are included below. Examples listed may represent a sentiment expressed by multiple community members or a singular individual (e.g., “one parent said…”).

Shannen Koostachin

- 1) Transportation
- 2) Communication gaps
- 3) Students with special education needs
- 4) Siblings of Grade 7 students
- 5) Before and after school care
- 6) Portables
- 7) School utilization
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Binbrook

- 11) Students are “doubly impacted”

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General (not specific to one school)

- 16) Timeline for new Binbrook school
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Illustration of Themes

Shannen Koostachin

1) Transportation

- There were concerns about the dangers of walking across Rymal Road from the proposed boundary change area to Gatestone.
- Parents were upset that their children would no longer have the option to walk or bike to school because crossing Rymal Road to get to Gatestone is dangerous.
- One community member expressed concern that there is no HSR route for Gatestone to the area they live (Rymal and Terryberry).
- Community members sought clarification on who would be eligible to receive transportation to Gatestone (all students in the proposed boundary change area are eligible for transportation). Parents asked if future Grade 8 students would be eligible for bus transportation.

2) Communication gaps

- Community members were surprised about the low attendance at the public meeting. They suspected it was due to gaps in communication about the boundary review process at Shannen Koostachin.
- Community members raised that many families, especially those where language is a barrier, are not aware of or lack understanding about the boundary review and how it will affect them. Some parents may not even understand what a “boundary review” is.
- Solutions proposed to reduce communication gaps: go door-to-door, reach out to families directly, send physical letters to families, translate the letter, and hold a public meeting at Shannen Koostachin.

3) Students with special education needs

- Parents of children with special education needs (e.g., Autism Spectrum Disorder) expressed concern about the impacts of changing schools. Children with special education needs are already acclimatized to Shannen Koostachin and a move to Gatestone could separate them from their supports and allies. Questions were posed about whether those supports (e.g., Education Assistants) could move with the student. One parent also expressed concern that placing their child in an unfamiliar school would pose risks such as their child leaving the property.
- Community members asked whether children with special education needs could be allowed to stay at Shannen Koostachin.

4) Siblings of Grade 7 students

- It was proposed that current Grade 7 students could stay at Shannen Koostachin for their Grade 8 year. Parents expressed concern that younger siblings of these Grade 7 students will not be allowed to stay at the school, which would create a “before and after school nightmare [when for coordinating pick up/drop offs].”

5) Before and after school care

- Community members were concerned that families with before and after school care at Shannen Koostachin would not have a childcare spot at Gatestone. It was discussed that Umbrella Family and Child Centres (the provider at both schools) have already been in touch with the 2 families who are currently affected and the 5 families who have children on the waitlist.

6) Portables

- Community members asked whether a portapak could be added to Shannen Koostachin instead of students having to move to Gatestone. In their view, if their child was going to be placed in a portable anyway (since it is proposed that 3 portables would need to be added at Gatestone if the boundary change is implemented), they would rather their child be in a portable at their current school.

7) School utilization

- Community members had doubts that this boundary change would not be a long-term solution to their school's growing population. They were concerned that their school would need to do another boundary review in the near future and the impact multiple disruptions would have on their children. One parent said, "I need to trust that my kids will have stability and will not be uprooted."
- One community member questioned whether the boundary should be further reviewed "to get the two schools closer in utilization," stating that "the targeted 2028 goal to meet utilization of 147% (Shannen Koostachin) vs. 111% (Gatestone) is not enough."
- Another community member questioned whether "the new 85 singles and 88 townhomes being built on Rockledge for 2024" were considered as part of the review. This community member was concerned that Gatestone would not have the capacity to accommodate children of families who will be moving into these homes once they are built.

8) Boundary lines

- Community members questioned why the proposed boundary change did not include the new subdivision (behind the houses on Rockledge Drive, yet to be developed). Parents expressed frustration that the families who have yet to move to the area will be allowed to enroll their children at Shannen Koostachin, yet families who are already established must move to Gatestone.

9) Voluntary enrolment

- Community members questioned whether this boundary change was a "done deal" and whether they had the option to choose whether or not to move to Gatestone.
- Suggestion to allow students already enrolled at Shannen Koostachin to stay, along with future siblings who will enroll.

10) More time to transition

- Community members requested more time before transitioning students to Gatestone. This would allow families to make alternative plans, such as moving to a different community if they wish.

- Parents also considered how much their children have endured over the last few years with COVID-19. They were worried that their children were being asked to make another adjustment when “life was just getting back to normal.” More time before transitioning students to another school would help their children to adjust and mitigate impacts on their mental health.

Binbrook

11) Students are “doubly impacted”

- One parent suggested that students from Binbrook should be the ones to move to Gatestone. From their perspective, Binbrook students are already being bussed to Shannen Koostachin; they may as well be bussed to Gatestone.
- A Binbrook parent was concerned that their children would be “doubly impacted” by this boundary change. Their children are already attending Shannen Koostachin as part of an accommodation strategy to alleviate enrolment pressure from Bellmoore while a new school in Binbrook is slated for construction. If their children were asked to move from Shannen Koostachin to Gatestone (rather than those families in the proposed boundary change area), it would be another disruption for their children. Furthermore, their children would need to move again once the new school in Binbrook is ready.

Gatestone

12) Traffic safety

- Community members were concerned that additional students would exacerbate traffic issues at drop off and pick up.
- It was raised that the city bus has a stop right in front of the school and the timing of that HSR bus coincides with drop off/pick up times at the school, causing traffic congestion. Some parents were frustrated that they have been told that staff are “looking into it” but a solution has yet to be proposed.
- Requests for additional traffic calming in front of the school (e.g., signage, crossing guards, speed signage).
- Suggestion to add a ‘Kiss and Ride’ lane to reduce traffic congestion.

13) Portables

- Community members had questions about how the influx of students from Shannen Koostachin would be accommodated at Gatestone. They asked if there was extra space in the school or whether portables would need to be added.
- If portables were added, community members had questions about where those portables would be located. They expressed concern that adding portables would result in a loss of green space.
- One parent expressed that she wasn’t concerned about Gatestone needing to add 3 additional portables. It would simply be going back to the number of portables Gatestone had when it first opened.

14) Out of catchment students

- Community members were concerned about the impact on out of catchment (OOC) students given that Gatestone will be closed to out of catchment students in September. Would current OOC students be allowed to stay? Would younger siblings of OOC students be allowed to attend Gatestone?

15) Resources to support additional students

- Community members asked whether there would be additional staff at Gatestone to support the influx of students. For example, educational assistants, a vice principal, additional educators, etc.
- Community members also asked whether Gatestone would receive additional funding with a larger student population.
- Questions about the impact on class sizes were also raised.

General (not specific to one school)

16) Timeline for new Binbrook school

- Community members inquired about the timeline for the new school in Binbrook. There were concerns that the construction of the new school would take longer than anticipated, which would prolong the disruption their children would experience.

17) Impact on high school

- Community members were concerned about the impact of a growing student population on the local high school (Saltfleet). Would Saltfleet be overcapacity? There were also questions about whether there are plans for a new high school in Binbrook.

18) Bell times

- Shannen Koostachin's bell time is at 9:30am and Gatestone's is at 9:15am. Coordination would need to happen between the two schools to ensure pick up and drop off is streamlined if parents have children at both schools. Coordination is also necessary to ensure older siblings can care for younger siblings after school.
- Coordination with the nearby Catholic school will also need to be considered.

19) Proactive versus reactive

- Community members expressed frustration that decisions about school boundaries are made reactively rather than proactively. One parent said, "Why wasn't this issue flagged years ago?"
- Community members suggested that the school board coordinate with city planning. As one parent asked, "Why is the city allowing housing expansion while the catchment school is over capacity?"

- One of the factors people consider when buying homes is the school their children will go to, and now their children won't be allowed to go to that school. One parent suggested that the school board work with real estate agents in the area to make them aware of school changes.

20) "Think outside of the box"

- Community members proposed several "outside of the box" solutions, such as:
 - To allow residents of Binbrook who attend Shannen Koostachin school to attend Bellmoore instead
 - To consider Tapleystown school as an alternative location for additional students
 - To use the former Our Lady of Assumption School (an HWCDSB site) to accommodate additional students
 - To build an extension for the Shannen Koostachin building

21) Opportunity to vote

- One community member asked if there was an option for parents to vote on this decision as stakeholders.