

Mary Hopkins and Flamborough Centre Accommodation Strategy Analysis of Themes – December 2023

Data Sources

- Public Meeting on November 30, 2023 – 59 people attended, 42 participated in small group discussion (~70% from Mary Hopkins, ~30% from Flamborough Centre)
- EngageHWDSB – 8 comments, 13 submitted questions, 586 page views
- Emails to planning@hwdsb.on.ca – 5 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 (Mary Hopkins and Flamborough Centre) and one category that captures themes across both school groups (General). Examples of the concerns/comments/quotes raised by community members under each theme are included below. A limitation of this analysis is that it cannot be determined whether an example listed below is a sentiment expressed by multiple community members or a singular individual during the consultation process.

Mary Hopkins

- 1) School is at a “breaking point”
- 2) Inadequate facilities
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- 7) Siblings Exemption
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Mary Hopkins

1) School is at a “breaking point”

- This proposed strategy does little to solve the overcrowding problem at Mary Hopkins. Community members feel this is a “crisis” and diverting 19-30 students isn’t enough to solve the problem.
- HWCDSB is not accepting non-Catholic students next year which will further increase enrolment pressure at Mary Hopkins.
- School is at a “breaking point” and waiting for a new school in 5 years doesn’t help. School needs help now.

2) Inadequate facilities

- Space is scarce. No cool down rooms, quiet rooms, special education rooms. There is nowhere to go when students have escalating behaviours leading to incidents and lockdowns. Overcapacity also contributes to perceived increase in behavioural challenges.
- Overcapacity has impacts on school programming:
 - Children do not get adequate gym time. For example, classes get 20 minutes of gym time and then need to finish their physical education requirement by doing music or other activities. In the winter, classes are further challenged to meet gym requirements because there isn’t enough outdoor space either (due to snow piles). Community members are concerned about how gym time will be further impacted with the construction scheduled at the school.
 - Children do not get adequate library time.
- Regarding 2 proposed additional portables: Community members question where these portables will go and are concerned that there will be 12 portables to accommodate almost 700 students. Community members feel that the large volume of portables is unreasonable for any school.
- Too many full-day kindergarten (FDK) classes (4 classes) and bathrooms aren’t in sight line.
- Not enough parking
- Concerns about HVAC system and ability to cool school in summer months. Consider HVAC replacement.
- Review fire plan for the school – Egress, marshalling areas, and fire truck access.
- Capital investments needed to support school in current state of overcapacity due to impact of housing developments. Community members asked whether housing developers had financial responsibilities to offset these costs.

3) Inadequate facilities: Washrooms

- Challenges for children in portables to use washrooms:
 - Need to put on all their winter gear
 - Wait outside in the cold for someone to open the door [to the main building]
 - In the winter, snow piles block the way to the bathroom and the icy blacktop is dangerous to cross.
 - Limited supervision sightlines

- Parents claim that inadequate washroom facilities have caused anxiety/health conditions for their children. Examples: children holding their urine/bowels all day; children having accidents; children developing multiple urinary tract infections.
- Related to inadequate facilities, washroom capacity is a significant concern for Mary Hopkins community members. There isn't enough capacity to accommodate existing students, and school population will continue to grow.
- Community members questioned what calculations were done to determine that their washroom facilities meet the requirements because, in their view, the facilities are insufficient. For example, are fixtures that are not working, and are staff washrooms included in these assessments? Parents also stated that urinals were included to meet the minimum requirement for girls, even though it's unlikely that girls will use urinals.
- Parents claim upstairs washrooms flood all the time.
- Long lines to use the washroom results in children losing instructional time.
- Community members acknowledged the plans for washroom renovations in the new year. However, they were concerned about what facilities children would use while renovations are underway.
- Community members asked if porta potties could be an option.

4) Traffic safety

- Dismissal area is chaotic with buses loading and parents doing pick up. Concerned that additional students (due to increased enrolment) will mean the dismissal area cannot accommodate an additional bus/additional cars.
- The kindergarten area is also close by, which makes the area more dangerous.
- To illustrate the danger/chaos of the dismissal area, community members gave the example that a collision between a bus and a parked car occurred the day of the public meeting.
- Community members acknowledged that a crossing guard was stationed in this area, but questioned whether this was enough.
- Community members request to conduct another safety walkabout.
- Hamilton Wentworth Student Transportation Services (HWSTS) representative suggested that busses use a wave system for pick-ups.

5) Inadequate staffing

- The school needs additional administrative staff. Currently, there no coordination in management because of overcapacity.
- Mary Hopkins cannot retain staff because of the state of overcapacity at their school.
- Staff have difficulty supervising the large volume of students.
- Additional students would mean hiring more teachers, EAs, ECEs, caretaking staff, yet the facility cannot accommodate additional staff (e.g., no public transportation to commute to school, not enough parking, limited resources).

6) Education not equitable

- One parent felt that the HWDSB "preaches equity, but these kids are suffering."

- Parents feel their children aren't having the school experience they want them to have. Children will have a bad experience in K-5 and then will have a bad experience in 6-8 when they move to Flamborough Centre because of overcrowding.
- Parents feel that the overcrowding at MH has impacted their children's academic success (e.g., referenced low school EQAO scores).
- Parents feel that this accommodation strategy will negatively impact the mental health of small children.

7) Siblings Exemption

- What does the exemption process look like? Decisions about which families are exempt from the accommodation strategy should be made using a set of criteria rather than a lottery system.
- Parents request exemptions for new Junior Kindergarten (JK) registrations living south of Highway 5 who have a sibling attending Mary Hopkins.
- All families who have kids at Mary Hopkins in French or English should have younger siblings "grandfathered in" (i.e., previous rules apply to these cases even though a new policy is in place)
- Splitting up siblings will mean that parents/guardians need to coordinate two different bell times, two different bus schedules, two different school calendars, two different before/after school care plans.
- Community members concerned that splitting up siblings will be unsettling for children who are used to having their sibling to rely on. The impact on younger children is especially of concern.

8) Out of catchment process

- Can parents/guardians move their children to other schools in the area (e.g., Guy B. Brown) instead of Flamborough Centre?
- Out of catchment process is not streamlined. Parents/guardians often face delays and barriers (e.g., "getting bumped from principal to principal").
- What does the out of catchment process look like?

9) French Immersion program

- Questions about why Mary Hopkins was selected to be a French Immersion school when it is already overcrowded.
- Suggestion to move French Immersion program completely out of Mary Hopkins and move it permanently to Flamborough Centre.

10) Bell times

- Bell times between Mary Hopkins and Flamborough Centre do not align which will make it difficult for parents/guardians who have children at both schools.
- Suggestion to do a "bell time study."

Flamborough Centre

11) Septic system

- The school currently has an aging 55-year-old septic system.
- Community members state that influx of students would put current system under extreme strain. Daily sewage flows are calculated using 30L/day/student. Once a property has a sewage flow of over 10,000 L/day, an Environmental Compliance Assessment (ECA) should be required from the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. With the projected 442 students (332 current students + 100 additional students), the flow would be 13,260 L/day, warranting an ECA.
- Community members expressed frustration that HWDSB was not able to produce maintenance records for the septic system.

12) Well water

- Well water and water flow must be assessed and improved upon ahead of taking on more students.
- Well water at Flamborough Centre is often undrinkable for the current student population. “All three of my children have reported a foul taste and feeling sick after using the water stations on various occasions.” Though water is tested daily, how can the public know if water is actually safe to drink?
- Sinks have low flow rates for hand washing and sanitation.
- Request flow rate analysis and water safety upgrades.

13) Bus and traffic safety

- Centre Road is a rural road with minimal shoulder and no sidewalk. Further, the shoulder is used for snow piles in the winter months. It is often a re-route from Highway 6 when there is high traffic (transport trucks, large vehicles) and in the winter.
- Students at Flamborough Centre are required to take a bus to school to ensure safe arrival and departure. Bus lane is full at Flamborough Centre with no room for additional buses. Adding another bus will create a dangerous backlog on Centre Road.
- Expansion of the bus lane would need to be addressed by city planning as there are large rural ditches/swales at the property entrance/exit.
- Parents/guardians attempt to drop off/pick up their children on this already dangerous road environment (students running between cars, no school zone, no sidewalks, drivers U-turning to get back to Centre Road, drivers pulling out blindly into traffic).
- Parking lot is very small (staff are already parking on the grass). There is a need to expand the parking lot.
- Conduct a traffic assessment to ensure safety of students.
- When facilitator asked if having an adult direct traffic and/or supervise drop off/pick up would allay concerns about road safety, this was met with mixed feelings.
- Several potholes on road where parents/guardians are parking.

14) Tension in neighbourhood

- Neighbours are upset because drivers are doing 3-point turns during pick up/drop off and are using private driveways to do so.
- Neighbours also upset because some students are trespassing onto the property of surrounding homes. Community members believe that the lack of enriched, green spaces leaves students little choice but to end up on private property.

15) Limited green space

- Concerns that additional students will result in loss of limited greenspace if portables are added and the parking lot is expanded.

16) Gym time and space

- Inadequate gym time because there is only one gym to serve numerous classes.

17) Hallway safety

- 6.5-foot-wide hallways are congested, posing safety risks, and limiting efficient movement between classes. Community members question whether their school can accommodate an increased student population.

18) Siblings

- Can families with an older child enrolled at Flamborough Centre and a younger child enrolled at Mary Hopkins elect to send their younger child to Flamborough Centre? Will bussing be available to Flamborough Centre for these children?

19) Supports for students

- What supports exist for students with individual education plans (IEP) or special needs at Flamborough Centre?

General (not specific to one school)

20) Alternate solutions

- Community members hold the view that not enough time or resources allocated to exploring alternative solutions in this process.
- Community members suggest that Allan A. Greenleaf be considered as an option for the following reasons:
 - Greenleaf is situated in a location with better road safety areas equipped with traffic lights to enter property, multiple well marked crosswalks, sidewalks, and adequate space for busses and families to drive and park on site.
 - Greenleaf is equipped with city sewers and city water.
 - Greenleaf has a larger gym facility. Potential opportunities to partner with Waterdown High and YMCA for additional gym space.

- Greenleaf has space for portables (e.g., fence off part of spacious parking lot)
- Greenleaf has 10-foot-wide hallways to accommodate extra students.
- Suggestion to move the Hamilton St. border east so more students can attend Greenleaf.
- Community members suggest that Guy B. Brown be considered as an option:
 - More capacity at school to accommodate additional students.
- Community members suggest that Balaclava be considered as an option.
 - If North Concession students attended Balaclava, it could make room for students at Flamborough Centre
 - East Waterdown students can be bussed to Balaclava.
- Suggestion to add a permanent expansion of Flamborough Centre to accommodate more students (not portables)

21) Feedback on the consultation process

- Community members feel more transparency is needed. For example, they questioned why the enrolment projections presented at the end of last year did not match the projections presented at the public meeting. Community members also requested to see a breakdown of the school capacity assessment.

Timing

- The revised timeline to consider other schools makes it seem that Flamborough Centre is the only option to alleviate enrolment pressure at Mary Hopkins. Community members feel the revised timeline is an “excuse and a threat.” They also feel the ultimatum of ‘add more portables at Mary Hopkins’ or ‘move to Flamborough Centre’ is an “empty threat” because they know the electrical grid at Mary Hopkins cannot accommodate 13 portables.
- Community members questioned why the school board needs to follow such stringent timelines if this is an *accommodation strategy*, not a formal boundary review. They questioned why there can’t be more flexibility.

Perceptions of Community Involvement

- Process has lacked community involvement which may leave items off the agenda. For example, would the well water/septic system issue have been considered if community members hadn’t been consulted?
- Community was informed it was “too late” into the planning process to consider other schools as options.
- Community members feel “tokenized” and that this is just a “check box exercise.” In other words, community members worry that decisions will be made regardless of their input.
- Community members spoke about a lack of trust in the process and with the school board.
- Community members feel the process has been unevenly focused on Flamborough Centre.
- Community members feel the two schools have been “pitted against” each other.

22) New school

- Community members would like more details on timelines for the new school's construction. Community members were skeptical that the new school would be built according to the projected timeline. Community members would like to know what the contingency plan is if the new school is not built by 2027? Community members also wish to see what enrolment projections look like through to 2030.

23) Proactive v. reactive

- Community members posed the following questions: Why wasn't funding for a new school pushed for before this year? How are we so behind to build schools when [Waterdown] should have a new school by now?
- The Mountainview Heights development has been known about for years. Why weren't there more active steps taken to prevent the problems we're facing today?
- Many housing developments in Waterdown (e.g., north side developments) to come. Has the school board considered how these future developments will further impact school capacity in the area?

24) High school plans

- Community members concerned about how full Waterdown High School will be. Community members asked whether staff are examining the enrolment projections for the secondary school.
- Community members at Mary Hopkins are concerned their children will have a bad school experience in the primary years (at Mary Hopkins), in their junior years (at Flamborough Centre), and then in high school (at Waterdown High).

25) "Our kids don't matter"

- Community members expressed frustration that they pay high taxes, yet school conditions are poor
- From Flamborough Centre: "Our kids haven't mattered for a long time, and now [that there's an influx of students from new developments] they do?" (Re: upgrading water and septic system)
- From Mary Hopkins: Our kids are being fed from a "dirty spoon, a mud pie"
- From Mary Hopkins: "It feels like the board has given up on us, that we're too far gone"