

East Hamilton and Lower Stoney Creek Boundary Review Analysis of Public Feedback

Background

To address the pressures of currently high enrolment at Eastdale Elementary School and continued growth in English and French Immersion (FI) programs, HWDSB staff recommended a boundary review to better balance the enrolments between East Hamilton and Lower Stoney Creek area schools (Winona Elementary, South Meadow Elementary, Lake Avenue Elementary, Collegiate Elementary, and Eastdale Elementary) and to reduce the reliance on portables. Trustees received the Accommodation Strategy Schedule at the June 10, 2024, Board Meeting, and approved the boundary review.

Data Collection

At the November 19, 2024, public meeting, participants were invited to contribute to discussion groups where their comments were recorded by HWDSB facilitators, and to provide written feedback at stations set up around the meeting space detailing each proposed accommodation scenario. Four scenarios were provided. Further community input was also received through the EngageHWDSB platform, and email.

The public consultation was not intended to serve as a plebiscite, with participants voting to approve a particular scenario. Rather, we have used the feedback collected from the consultation to compile priorities and concerns that should inform the Board's decision-making process.

Public Meeting

The facilitated conversations at the public meeting produced rich feedback. Participants were asked what they thought of the evaluation of each proposed option conducted by the Advisory Panel, and to identify advantages and disadvantages to the possible solutions. Participants were also invited to provide suggestions for ways to ease the inevitable future transition. Some participants provided specific comments related to the four proposed scenarios. Others offered more generalized comments about their priorities and concerns about a potential accommodation strategy. This feedback is summarized below.

A. Concerns and Priorities

Switching Schools

- Families expressed the desire to minimize the number of times their children will need to switch schools and noted that students have already been moved:
 - Due to past boundary reviews and closures;
 - In grade 1 due to enrolment in French Immersion.

- Families voiced concern that boundary moves will split their children between schools causing disruption:
 - Due to siblings with different buses and schedules;
 - Due to siblings with different bell times;
 - Due to lost childcare options as older siblings will not be able to care for younger siblings.
- Participants expressed concerns that boundary moves will split up friendship groups and divide neighbourhoods.

Busing

- Families commented that they are concerned about the changes to busing required by the proposals, highlighting that:
 - Their children will be on new buses or have longer bus routes.
 - Their children who previously did not need to bus will now need to.
 - Siblings will be on different buses.

Childcare

- Families raised concerns regarding the availability of Before and After Care and whether it will be possible to transfer care since schools use different providers.

French Immersion (FI)

- Participants commented that FI resources are already low – including staffing – and suggested that this will worsen if FI is divided between two schools.
- Participants commented that splitting up FI will isolate classes and leave them unsupported and lacking resources in a new school.
- Families with students in FI expressed that they feel targeted – that a solution will be at their expense.
- Families expressed that they want to keep siblings together and questioned whether their younger children will be admitted into FI to join older siblings.
- Participants warned that families will pull their students from FI to avoid being involved in a move.

Safety

- Participants highlighted safety concerns related to the proposals including:
 - Concerns that boundary adjustments will require busy traffic crossings (e.g. Hwy. 8, Queenston Rd., Lake Ave.);
 - The need for more crossing guards and reduced speed zones;
 - Concerns that additional portables will obstruct sightlines when monitoring outdoor spaces.

Concerns regarding proposed scenarios

- Participants commented that **Options 1 & 2** will:
 - Involve multiple transitions for the same students;
 - Divide siblings between different schools;
 - Divide friendship groups;
 - Reduce FI resources;
 - Cause the FI program to shrink through attrition or lowered enrolment.
- Participants suggested that Option 2 is not viable and questioned why it was presented.
- Participants commenting on **Option 3** noted that:
 - It will divide siblings between schools.
 - It will separate friendship groups.
 - It will allow increased walkability (a potential advantage).
 - The boundary had been in Collegiate's catchment – which could ease transition or impact the same students again.
 - It avoids moving grades (a potential advantage).
 - It has the least number of moves, but questioned whether it will have an impact.
 - It involves busy crossings.
 - May have the least impact on families because the impact would be on whole families (a potential advantage).
- Participants commenting on **Option 4** highlighted that:
 - Students within the proposed boundary already take the bus (a potential advantage).
 - Families have concerns regarding busing, namely that students will be on new and/or longer routes, that siblings will be divided, and that there will be increased busing pressures.
 - 'Walkability' is part of the criteria, but Option 4 adds buses.
 - Families are concerned about Before and After Care – whether spaces will be available for their children about to start school or for children switching between providers.
 - Students will be sectioned away from other students in their community.

Other comments heard from participants:

- There are no good options.
- Families are stressed about future moves.
- There is a parking shortage already at Collegiate.
- Staffing isn't included in the criteria – will we lose EAs and/or LRTs?

B. Suggestions from the Public Meeting

Easing the transition

- Coordinate bell times between schools.
- Organize orientation visits to new schools.
- Coordinate busing routes.
- Provide timely information.

Single Stream French Immersion School

Of note, 8 of the 12 facilitated table groups discussed the possibility of a single-stream French Immersion school. Three of the 12 groups specifically mentioned Michaëlle Jean and Norwood Park as single stream precedents within HWDSB, and 4 of the 12 groups referred to using Sir Isaac Brock or reopening another former HWDSB school as a French Immersion school.

Online Feedback

In addition to the public meeting, community feedback was gathered through email and the EngageHWDSB platform. The Engage site was open from June 2024 until November 28, 2024, and again from January 8 – January 20, 2025, to receive feedback about the proposed recommendation. The Engage site was visited approximately 1600 times during the course of the consultation, with 133 visits occurring in January 2025.

A. Community input received up to November 27, 2024, is summarized below.

Concerns and Priorities

- Families expressed a desire for FI to be kept together in one school or for HWDSB to start a single stream FI school.
- Families voiced concern that siblings will be separated between schools.
- Participants remarked that portables are not a solution. A new build is needed – or renovations/additions.
- Families expressed concern that the same students will be moved multiple times during their time in Elementary school.
- Families expressed concerns that students will be on new or longer bus routes, and that siblings will be on different buses.
- Families commented that they do not want to see their children's friendship groups or communities separated.
- Participants expressed concerns and confusion about the logic behind how the zones in Options 3 and 4 were chosen.
- Participants expressed the desire to see Sir Isaac Brock or another HWDSB facility used or reopened to accommodate students and reduce the use of portables.

- Participants voiced concerns regarding new housing development/condos and subsequent added enrolment pressures causing more boundary changes.
- Participants highlighted traffic safety issues if children are required to cross Hwy 8, Lake Avenue and/or Queenston Road.
- Families expressed a desire that a proposed solution redirect new enrolment rather than relocate their children who are current students.
- Participants voiced concerns regarding potential impacts on school staffing.
- One participant summed up the situation as “Eastdale families don’t want their students moved and Collegiate doesn’t want portables.”

B. Community input received in January 2025 – after families received a letter informing them of the imminent recommendation of Option 4 by staff to the Finance and Facilities Committee of Trustees – is summarized below.

Concerns and Priorities

- Families voiced concerns about the negative educational and emotional impacts that may be caused if students are required to change schools.
- Families commented that they do not want to see their children’s friendship groups or their communities separated.
- Participants noted that Option 4 does not have a continuous geographical boundary with Collegiate Public School.
- Participants highlighted that Option 4 requires longer bus rides and is not walkable, whereas Option 3 is.
- Families voiced concern that they will lose before and after care spots if their children are required to move schools.
- Families indicated that they would like to see current students remain at Eastdale and transition ‘naturally,’ (i.e., current students age out of Eastdale and only new students to the area start at Collegiate).

Summary

Like previous boundary reviews, parents, guardians, and caregivers are concerned about the impact the proposed boundary adjustments will have on their children, their families, and their community. The main concerns include childcare, long bus rides, traffic dangers when walking, splitting siblings and friend groups, and isolating a community. Families are also concerned over the impact of multiple moves for their children since some have already experienced a move because of a previous boundary change, and some have switched schools for French Immersion. From a logistical standpoint, participants are concerned about the lack of parking at Collegiate if enrolment is increased there, and the strain on French Immersion staffing and resources should the program be divided between schools. Overall, feedback provided online and at the public meeting provides a comprehensive understanding of family and community thinking and concerns on issues related to moving a school boundary.