

Christine Breshamer

From: Christine Breshamer
Sent: Friday, March 10, 2017 10:13 AM
To: 'Erin Visser'
Subject: RE: Staff Report and Recommendations Concerns and Questions

Please see responses below.

Christine

Christine Breshamer
Administrative Assistant to Superintendent of Education: Accommodations
Greater Essex County DSB
Tel: 519 255 3200 ext 10271
Fax: 519 255 7053
E-mail: Christine.Breshamer@publicboard.ca

From: Erin Visser [mailto:ekvisser@outlook.com]
Sent: Tuesday, February 28, 2017 1:12 PM
To: parc <parc@publicboard.ca>
Subject: Staff Report and Recommendations Concerns and Questions

I have attached a PDF file that is the same as the following letter.

Dear Trustees and PARC Committee Members,

My name is Erin Visser and my kids attend Mill Street Public School. It has taken me a couple of weeks to think about what I want to say. I understand that the decisions that you must make are ones that are in the best interest of all students in the Leamington area and that these decisions are coming with pressure from the provincial government. I have several concerns that relate to the closing of Mill Street at the end of June 2017 and a few concerns that include the other schools in the recommendations. I could write pages of why I think Mill Street needs to be left alone and how great the staff are and what a family it is, and all those things are very true. I do however understand that it is a numbers game and that sometimes facts are what lead the decision. Please bear with me and know that I believe that all the points I make are not only from my heart as a Mom, or from a parent volunteer that knows the staff and students, but also as a community member looking at the bigger picture.

- 1) **Closing of Mill Street Public School as of June 2017:** I am very concerned about the short time frame that has been put in place should this be still part of the final staff report that is voted in on June 8, 2017. Since the 9th is a P.A. day for elementary schools, most parents would not find out until the 12th, I am assuming the announcement will be sent home from the different schools. This only gives staff, students, and parents 14 school days (Monday 12-Friday 29) to say good bye and for students to transition to their new schools. The last couple of weeks are busy for any school with field trips, graduation, assemblies, and normal transitions from one grade to the next. Somehow there must be

additional transition events worked in while not letting anything else go by the wayside. The transition events would not just be for Mill students but for students within the new boundary lines.

The FCI is not just bricks and mortar. It is the infrastructure. Such equipment as boilers, electrical system, floor tiles, fire alarm, h-vac systems, etc. are all pieces that determine the FCI. There is not a person to blame. As a Board we have an aging infrastructure that is one of the oldest in the province. Over the years, the monies received by the Ministry for renewal needs was substantially less than what was actually required. Priority is best to be placed on immediate items to be repaired or replaced.

- 2) **Mill Street Building:** In the community meeting at LDSS on Feb. 9 there was a lot of information and stats shared. A few that stuck out to me: Mill street is the newest school by eight years yet has the highest FCI rating of 36%, we were told at the meeting that this does not include the portapacks. Why is this number so high for the brick and mortar building and what/who is responsible? Also, the running costs that included snow removal, grass cutting, and custodians etc. seemed extremely high compared to the other schools. Is this for the whole building including the portapack or just the brick and mortar portion?

The operational costs have the portapak included.

- 3) **Programs currently at Mill Street: GAINS** - in everything that I read or heard (Feb. 9), GAINS has not be mentioned. They are a huge part of our school community, body of students, teachers and they should not be forgotten about. If Mill were to close at the end of this school year where would that program go? These children have a very hard time with change just within their days let alone a whole move. As a community member, I feel very strongly that this very loving, caring, unique group of children will have to have all of their staff and equipment go with the program to a location that would be permanent should Mill close.

The Superintendent of Special Education has already visited all Leamington schools. She, along with her staff, will determine far ahead of time where the program would be housed if Mill Street were to close.

Breakfast Club – Mill currently has a hot breakfast available to all students every morning of the week. I am very passionate about this since I have been helping with it for five years now. Most of the children that utilize it currently and in the past at Mill Street are students that walk. This gives them enough time to come, sit and not be rushed. My fear is that a lot of these children will now be bused to a new school and not given the same opportunity to get the nutrition that they need to start their day.

If the breakfast program is necessary for the students, the school will explore the necessity and implement it according to need.

Ontario Early Years: This is a community program that is run out of Mill Street. It is not a program that is only used by Mill Street Parents with kids not yet in school but also by Leamington parents. If Mill were to close this would be a huge loss to the City of Leamington.

The Ontario Early Years is currently undergoing a review, along with the Parenting & Family Literacy Centres across the entire region. The findings will be shared with the school board in the near future.

Swiss and Talk: This is another program used by the whole community. It would be a loss to see it go. Would space be made for these programs in a new location for Sept. 2017 should Mill Street close.

Yes.

- 4) **Boundary line changes:** Some of the proposed line changes would see some kids changing schools several times in the next 2-3 years. One of the proposed changes would see some Queen Elizabeth students moved to Gore Hill only then to be moved all the way back across town to MD Bennie in 2-3 years. This is a step that is not necessary. ,

Grandfathering rule: This is part of the boundary line changes that I am also concerned about. You have no idea how many students will choose to stay at their current school and for how many years that will be, depending on their current grade. If students want to stay at their current school, then you will not have the room for students now in the new boundaries that change schools or for all the students coming from Mill Street. I believe that more consideration needs to be made into the layout of the boundary lines and when the boundaries need to be changed.

Based on the proposal, and fewer JK students registering than grade 8s graduating, the overall number with the proposed boundary adjustments comes out to 514 which is currently at Queen Elizabeth.

- 5) **Space:** Right now Queen Elizabeth has portables and yet there is room for half of Mill Street's (appx. 115) students to go there? Does this mean that more students will be put into portables?
- 6) **Heating and Cooling:** This is something that I thought about before the PARC started and is now something I feel needs to be addressed with all the changes possibly happening. In the winter time the students are not allowed outside for recess depending on how cold it is with the wind-chill, yet most of the schools do not have school wide air conditioning in the warmer months. Being in a building with high humidity that feels like 35 to 40C is just as dangerous as the cold and wind-chill. Not only is the high temperature dangerous in terms of heat related illnesses, but also no one wants to work or learn in an environment that causes them discomfort and distraction. I strongly recommend that this is something that is considered before additions or new builds are done and that old schools be retrofitted to make teaching and learning more comfortable.
- 7) **French Immersion:** Why start a program at Gore Hill if those student and staff will just have to move in a couple of years. It seems like the program would start off better and maintain growth if it was started in a building what was not going to change.

I know that change is not easy for anyone that is involved in this process but I also understand and believe that some changes can be made to the current recommendations that would be not only better for the students and staff at Mill Street but for all students and staff at the area schools. Thank you for your time and I am looking forward to hearing what you think.

Sincerely,

Erin Visser

Parent, Volunteer, and Community Member

Christine Breshamer

From: margaretklassen62 <margaretklassen62@yahoo.ca>
Sent: Tuesday, March 21, 2017 10:30 PM
To: parc
Subject: Please keep Gore Hill open

Good evening,

Tonight I come to you as a concerned parent. I know that Gore Hill is one of the schools that is up for closure and that worries me greatly because I feel that the board is not listening to the parents at all! We have a community of people in this school that are extremely involved with the school and do an amazing job with all the functions and fundraisers much like a private school.

On the topic of private schools I have a feeling that the public system will lose a lot of students if this all happens the way it is planned on paper, I know parents that have already enrolled their children in private school for next year and know that some will home school because their kids won't thrive in the atmosphere and need more one on one.

Also the public system has already lost more than a thousand students in the Essex school board and this will increase that number drastically and all these big schools that you plan to build will be empty again.

I know that you are under a lot of pressure with all of this but all we are asking is please keep the parents and students as your first priority that our community may thrive for the future of our children.

Thank you for taking the time to read my concerns

Margaret Wiebe.

 Reply all |   Delete Junk |  ...

Re: Leamington schools

P

parc

Today, 3:52 PM

Nettie Guenther <frank_nettie@hotmail.com> Reply all | 

Sent Items

As a Board, we try to align our schools under a JK to Grade 8 model. We currently have two JK-12 schools and one JK to Grade 6 school, that is soon to become JK to Grade 8. However, your suggestion is noted and may warrant discussion.

From: Nettie Guenther <frank_nettie@hotmail.com>**Sent:** Tuesday, March 7, 2017 11:56 AM**To:** parc**Subject:** Leamington schools

To whom it may concern,

Has the board considered splitting the elementary students into two different schools? Putting kindergarten to grade 4 in one school and grade 5 to grade 8 in another school. This would lower the number of kids per school and it might also lessen the need for as many additions to accommodate all the kids in leamington.

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Christine Breshamer

From: Kim McKinley
Sent: Friday, March 03, 2017 3:41 PM
To: Todd Awender
Cc: Christine Breshamer
Subject: FW: Leamington School Accommodation

Please include this letter in the PARC files for the committee's consideration.

Thanks,

Kim

From: micreid7@gmail.com [mailto:micreid7@gmail.com] **On Behalf Of** Kerri Reid

Sent: Thursday, March 02, 2017 9:04 PM

To: parc

Cc: Julia Burgess; Connie Buckler; Alan Halberstadt; Tom Kilpatrick; Ron LeClair; Cheryl Lovell; Kim McKinley; Jessica Sartori; Gale Simko-Hatfield; Dave Taves; Todd Awender; Erin Kelly; John Howitt

Subject: Leamington School Accommodation

Hello,

I am writing to you today as the parent of a Gore Hill student. A parent who loves her school. A parent with a strong emotional attachment to her school. But also a level-headed parent who understands the need for this Accommodation Study. It is not logical for Leamington to have six elementary schools when they are not full to capacity.

I appreciate the opportunity to voice my opinion and am thankful for your open minds and willingness to hear me. I would like to tell you a few of the reasons I love our school so much, and some of the reasons I feel it should remain open. Please understand that I'm not alone in my opinion of Gore Hill. The school has a wonderful reputation around the town, and there are praising testimonials everywhere you go. I've heard many stories about people purposely moving into the Gore Hill boundaries to ensure that their children can attend the school. Alumni enroll their children there. Staff come and don't want to leave.

Our staff and parent community are close-knit and hard-working. We come together as one unit to tirelessly provide the most nourishing environment for our students. We are one big family, where everyone knows everyone's name. We work together to raise funds in order to provide additional opportunities and resources to our students. Our community partnerships and connections with local businesses also contribute to this atmosphere. Field trips and in-school presentations expand learning beyond the blackboard and textbooks.

Gore Hill is making great strides in the development of the arts at our school. Our new music program is flourishing and has generated great interest from the students. And while they're not professionals yet, they sure are improving! The kids come out in droves to audition for holiday concerts, musicals and talent showcases. This builds great confidence in students and allows them many opportunities to display their individuality and talents.

The clubs within the school not only provide opportunities for the students to bond and learn new skills, but also to begin emerging as leaders. The Recycle Rangers and Greening Gang, along with Eco-Educators, allow the kids to learn and teach each other about the environment and our responsibility to make it a better place. This

is reinforced with the use and care of our outdoor spaces. Principal's Council also puts the students in a leadership role, making decisions within the school and helping to make it a fun place to grow.

I believe a lot of children thrive in a smaller school setting. There are more opportunities to shine. There is less chance of falling through the cracks, or fading into the background. There is little fear of standing out - instead, it is encouraged and embraced.

Gore Hill is the only school left with an actual baseball diamond. This diamond is rented out to community groups, therefore bringing money to the board. (MCB indicates they have two diamonds, but I know from personal experience that there is one backstop to a grass field and a large open area used as another diamond. Neither of these are actual diamonds, nor are they usable throughout most of the season, due to the swampy nature of the yard.)

I believe that rural schools offer what urban schools can't. The unique opportunities cannot be man-made. As was recently in the news, Andrea Horwath stated "how important it is to support farm communities and agricultural families, you can't do that by pulling the resources out of their towns. In order to keep rural Ontario vibrant, we have to make sure we're providing schools for the kids." I whole-heartedly agree!

While my initial reaction to the proposal was an emotional one, there are valid arguments for alternative considerations.

Gore Hill has the largest green space of the schools involved in the accommodation study. Our outdoor area is vast, more than enough to accommodate a student body larger than we currently have. It includes areas like the outdoor classroom, picnic shelter/pavilion, butterfly garden, Chamberlain trail, rock garden, basketball nets, baseball diamond, volleyball and soccer areas, primary play area and recently painted blacktop. The students have many opportunities to play and learn in the beautiful environment created by the staff and students and community partners (like ERCA). In an age where obesity and inactivity are epidemics, we have the space required to promote physical activity. We have the room for the students to play without being on top of one another.

The proposal to combine Gore Hill and MD Bennie on the MD Bennie site would increase the population to 550 students in an area approximately half the size of Gore Hill's site, even more of which would be eaten up by a larger new construction or addition. While my best possible scenario would be to leave Gore Hill alone, I understand that is very unlikely. To me, it makes more sense to adjust the boundaries and send additional students to Gore Hill to fill up our current available space without addition or construction. Alternatively, Gore Hill and MD Bennie could be amalgamated, but at the Gore Hill site. While we have been assured that "five acres is sufficient" for a 550 student school, 15 acres is better!

Gore Hill is in a desirable location in my opinion. A lot of recent development has taken place on the southern and eastern areas of the town. Businesses are moving from the downtown core to Seaclyff Drive, the Leamington Soccer Fields have a large area along the 2nd Concession and Mersea Road 12, and there are multiple subdivisions either under construction or planned for the future, along with additional farmland for sale to subdivide - all within our catchment area. The potential for additional students is great. (I'm not aware of any other school in the accommodation with planned development in their catchment area.)

While the town is spreading out our way, our rural location could easily accommodate an increase in traffic, without the congestion and potential need for stop lights, crossing guards, etc. For example, the MD Bennie site is in an already busy location near the recreation complex and two Catholic schools. Sherk Street is very busy with traffic and this would only increase with additional busses and parent vehicles coming and going.

Our very invested parent community has discussed alternative proposals such as:

- Closing Mill Street and sending the kids north of Talbot Street to Mount Carmel/Blytheswood and south of Talbot to Gore Hill, each having room for additional students in our current buildings with no immediate need for construction. Sure, some money may be needed for upgrades to the infrastructure, but certainly not the cost of a new build.
- Closing all three schools in town (Mill Street, Queen Elizabeth and MD Bennie) and combining them into one large school on a central site - perhaps the current LDSS site which will be vacant effective Sep 2017 - and this could include the dual track program. This would leave the town surrounded by three rural schools - Mount Carmel/Blytheswood on the north/west end, Gore Hill on the south end and East Mersea on the east end. Likely, those three urban sites could be sold and subdivided.

In closing, I would again like to thank you for allowing the public the opportunity to provide feedback and ideas. It's nice to know that our voices matter! I attended the public meeting at LDSS on Feb 9th (I was one of the Gore Hill parents in the front few rows, proudly wearing my Gator gear!) and was pleased to hear that everything is being considered and that all ideas/suggestions will be taken seriously. I would also like to commend Superintendent Awender on his professionalism and ability to remain composed and not get defensive when obviously emotional parents were speaking. I'm not sure that I would have been able to stand up there and not take some of the comments personally.

I beg you all to please remember that this is a difficult and emotional process for us. Thank you for your time and careful consideration.
Kerri Reid

"I can't pick just one favourite thing about my school. I love all of Gore Hill!" Travis Reid, age 9

Christine Breshamer

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Kerri Reid

"I can't pick just one favourite thing about my school. I love all of Gore Hill!" Travis Reid, age 9



P.A.R.C. Public Meeting Comments:

☐ Parent ☐ Teacher

for: Mill Street Public School.....

☒ Community Member

aunt

- my 2 nephews have attended Mill St since grade 1 & have excellent teachers who are aware of their needs & give them the special attention they need & deserve. Please re-think the closure of this school as the boys benefit so much here. Thank you for this consideration.



Name:

Kathryn Brooker

Address:

181 Robson Rd, Leamington,



P.A.R.C. Public Meeting Comments:

☒ Parent ☐ Teacher
☐ Community Member

for: MILL ST Public School

MY BOYS HAVE Bn AT MILLST SCHOOL
FOR FIVE YEARS I WOULD LIKE
THEM TO CONTINUE THERE FOR THERE
FINALL YEARS THANK YOU -
CONCERNED PARENT



Name:

NANNY MARENTETTE

Address:

613 HAZELTON ST



P.A.R.C. Public Meeting Comments:

☒ Parent ☐ Teacher
☐ Community Member

for:

To whom it may concern That I Mary Klassen, would be very sad to see Mill Street School close. I have 3 children that went to this school one of them Graduated last year and this year My daughter will Graduate from Mill Street, so I have one son left and I always wanted all of my children to Graduate there. This is the only school that they have went to, and it's a great school great teachers and great principles, I think it should stay open. Lot of parents would be sad to see it close. Thanks



Name:

Mary Klassen

Address:

28 Briarwood Ave Leamington