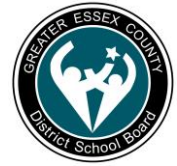


**Greater Essex County District School Board
2016-2017 PROGRAM AND ACCOMMODATION REVIEW
Report of the First Community Meeting
Thursday, February 9, 2017 at 6 p.m.
Leamington District Secondary School**



At the December 13, 2016 regular meeting of the Board, Trustees approved the following recommendation regarding Gore Hill PS, Margaret D. Bennie PS, Mill Street PS, Mount Carmel-Blytheswood PS, and Queen Elizabeth PS:

THAT THE BOARD APPROVE THE IMMEDIATE COMMENCEMENT OF A STANDARD PROGRAM ACCOMMODATION REVIEW THAT INCLUDES GORE HILL PS, MARGARET D. BENNIE PS, MILL STREET PS, MT. CARMEL-BLYTHESWOOD PS, AND QUEEN ELIZABETH PS, AS SET OUT IN THE PROGRAM ACCOMMODATION REVIEW - INITIAL STAFF REPORT, DATED DECEMBER 13, 2016.

Present: There were approximately 110 persons in the audience including committee members
Regrets: Scott Scantlebury, Public Relations Officer.
Chair: Superintendent Todd Awender
Recorder: Christine Breshamer

1. Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m. by Superintendent Awender welcoming everyone to the meeting. Superintendent Awender introduced Trustees, the Director, the Area Superintendent and Committee members then introduced himself. He explained that notes were being taken and that the proceedings were being audio and video recorded.

2. Orientation (describes mandate, roles and responsibilities, procedures of the PARC)

Superintendent Awender welcomed everyone to Leamington District Secondary School. He explained this is an information session but there would be an opportunity to share ideas, ask questions and be involved in the process. The Superintendent pointed out the location of the washrooms and the exits.

Superintendent Awender stated that this is a public forum and minutes will be kept and then posted on the board website. He explained how to access this icon on our website. Be mindful that anything posted to the PARC mailbox will end up published on the internet. He stated that cards were available to be completed for anyone uncomfortable asking questions in public. Answers will be included in the notes of the meeting on the Board website.

Superintendent Awender gave history of how the Program and Accommodation Review process works and background as to what information was used to prepare the Long Term Accommodation Plan. He then described how the Initial Staff Report and School Information Profiles were prepared and presented to the Trustees and at the December 13, 2016, regular meeting of the Board, Trustees approved the following recommendation:

THAT THE BOARD APPROVE THE IMMEDIATE COMMENCEMENT OF A STANDARD PROGRAM ACCOMMODATION REVIEW THAT INCLUDES GORE HILL PS, MARGARET D. BENNIE PS, MILL STREET PS, MT. CARMEL-BLYTHESWOOD PS, AND QUEEN ELIZABETH PS, AS SET OUT IN THE

PROGRAM ACCOMMODATION REVIEW - INITIAL STAFF REPORT, DATED DECEMBER 13, 2016.

The committee composition was reviewed. Superintendent Awender explained that the Committee will act as the conduit with respect to the sharing of information between the Board, the community, the school, staff, parents, and students. Superintendent Awender emphasized that this is a collaborative process and the committee is not a decision making body, they will give their recommendations to the Director who then will meet with Senior Administration before submitting to the Trustees of the Board. Trustees make any final decisions.

Superintendent Awender stated that this is a public forum and notes will be kept and then posted on the board website. He explained how to access this icon on our website. Be mindful that anything sent to the PARC email box will be posted as public information.

Superintendent Awender asked that the community be respectful of others during public meetings and refrain from making derogatory remarks about other schools. All our schools have exceptional students, families, staff, and administration. It is anticipated that the public meetings should be approximately two hours in length.

Superintendent Awender explained the Committee had an Orientation meeting and reviewed the Initial Staff Report, the process of an Accommodation Review, and the School Information Profiles. They will be looking at enrolment trends and other relevant data and hear community input before writing a Final Staff Report which will be presented to the Trustees in late May. The Committee will be exploring potential options all the while ensuring the public is well informed. He went on to explain that working groups of the Committee will take place over the next few months.

Superintendent Awender reviewed the Accommodation Review process being the presentation of the Initial Staff Report to the Trustees, formation and approval of the Committee, Committee meetings, Community meetings, presentation of the Final Staff Report to Trustees and ultimately the decision of the Board of Trustees in June.

3. Presentation

A PowerPoint presentation used to share information with the community has been posted on the website.

4. Future Meeting Dates

Any information related to the Program and Accommodation Review process is available on the Board website at publicboard.ca. The Student Accommodations icon is a red schoolhouse located at the bottom of the main page of the website. All information from this presentation will be available on our website.

Future meeting dates were discussed as follows:

Committee meetings at 4:00 p.m.:

1. Thursday January 26 at Mill Street PS
2. Thursday March 2 at Gore Hill PS
3. Wednesday March 29 at Mount Carmel-Blytheswood

Community meetings at 6:00 p.m.:

1. Thursday February 9 at Leamington DSS
2. Thursday April 20 at Leamington DSS

Board meetings at 7:00 p.m.:

1. Wednesday May 24 - Board meeting where public delegations will be heard
2. Thursday June 8 - Board meeting where Trustees make final decision

The Superintendent re-emphasized that this is a collaborative endeavor. We take note of all community input. He reminded that the committee is an advisory body, not a decision-making body and that sometimes during a PAR process the ideas which evolve have not even been considered at the onset of the process, while other times the ideas are very similar. The committee hopes to arrive at some creative solutions at the end of the process. Input is collected through the PARC email at parc@publicboard.ca which is then posted publicly. Questions will be responded to and posted for all to see as well as all notes from both Committee and Community meetings.

Superintendent Awender reiterated that everyone in the room is aware their school is excellent. He stated he will not tolerate derogatory comments toward another school and asked everyone to be respectful of each school and other's opinions. We understand it is difficult to please everyone but we have to continue to have the interests of the 35,000 plus students of the Greater Essex County District School Board at heart.

5. Questions and Input

Erin Vister, Mill Street parent

Q: From graphs shown, Mill Street seems to be the newest school out of the 5 by 8 years but it seems to have the highest FCI. With it being a newer building, why is that?

Sometimes as parts of buildings are renovated due to the concerns, renewal needs on those particular items are no longer necessary; thus, causing the FCI to decrease. At other schools, additions built at a later date, such as the 1990s or 2000s, are a newer part of the building which leaves the other part of the building in not as good condition so an average is taken for the building as a whole.

Q: If Gore Hill and MD Bennie combine in a new build they will have a known transition date. How is that fair if Mill Street will not find out until June 8 which leaves only 2 ½ weeks to deal with the news and transition? There are kids who will struggle. How is that dealt with?

For every consolidation we have a transition committee. Everything is still proposed. We are unaware of the final outcome at this time. Barbecues can happen and visit dates for students at their new schools as well as information nights. The Superintendent of Staffing has already had conversations with the staff with respect to what could potentially happen, what the process looks like and language in the collective agreements surrounding consolidations. Parents may have ideas as to what could make transitioning as seamless as possible. That has typically worked with closures or consolidations that have happened in the past. I know it's a short time frame but whatever we can do to make it as seamless as possible we're willing to consider.

Jamie, Gore Hill parent

Q: If kids go to Gore Hill now and there's an amalgamation with MD Bennie, you said something about they're able to continue to go to Gore Hill until they graduate from grade 8? What happens if new school is built in meantime so obviously they're not able to go to that school? Please clarify.

Students currently in whatever the building at present they are attending, are able to stay until graduation, unless their address changes. In the situation you're talking about where Gore Hill goes into MD Bennie, those students are considered Gore Hill students so they would move with Gore Hill into the new building on the MD Bennie site.

Andy Younger, Queen Elizabeth parent

Q: If recommendations go through, is there a time frame as to how long until a new build needs to be completed? Is there a set protocol that you follow for that? What I see happening is the school gets crowded when others are brought over.

There is no set time frame. If what has been recommended is approved, the Board submits a business case to receive funding from the Ministry under School Consolidation Capital funding. The Ministry has to determine if the business case we present is warranted. That would be submitted in late fall/early winter. If approved by the Ministry, the Board would find out in approximately March/April. Once that happens we then have to acquire land. In this particular case we'd consider the existing land that Queen Elizabeth is on but we always explore all options. We then bring architects in for site plan, put RFPs out for construction companies, and following that, construction commences. Once they start a build for a school of 500-600 students, it takes approximately 12 months. Architect plans take approximately 4-6 months. On another note, if an addition is approved, it would take approximately 2-4 months.

Karen, Gore Hill parent

Q: I'm concerned about larger schools (super schools). Has there been any thought put into the fact that students don't adapt well in larger schools? I feel a smaller school is necessary for different types of children. I feel students get lost in larger schools as there is not as much opportunity for leadership roles as in a small school. There is more competition in large schools for parts in plays and involvement in extra-curricular activities. Gore Hill students welcome all new students, even ones with learning disabilities as it is a small school environment. Gore Hill has one of largest acreages in the Leamington family of schools. It would be a shame to have that go to waste with the Chamberlain Trail in our backyard and the outdoor classroom which students utilize when the weather allows. No school in the Town core can provide the same type of experience where students are exposed to wildlife, animals and species where kids can experience outdoor eco learning. I'm concerned about the proposal to consolidate Gore Hill and MD Bennie putting 550 kids on the MD Bennie site when it's one of the smallest properties. How would students be affected by a new build happening on property while they are in the existing building?

Currently the proposed site put forward is the MD Bennie site. Options that are put forward can change. When West Gate was built on the Taylor property while students were still there, the buildings were in very close proximity; however, their school day was not interrupted.

Anything which could interrupt learning throughout the day was done during the summer. Just recently this past year at Herman, all secondary students were in school while the elementary portion was under construction. Construction companies are very capable and can move forward with construction in close proximity all the while proceeding safely.

Q: Is the Board open to recommendations such as what Mrs. Stickles put forth to have a super school built on the current Leamington District Secondary School site when current students are moved on to the new Leamington District Secondary School being built? You could build one public elementary super school centrally. That would mean you'd have a school on the north end of town, Gore Hill on the southeast end of town, East Mersea on the east end of town and then also a centrally located school. This would save the school board a lot of money in transportation costs as there would be a large number of students who could walk to school because the school would be in central Leamington. I feel

this proposal makes more sense than building a school for 550 students in one building on the existing MD Bennie site. Speaking of the MD Bennie site, transportation costs would increase as students would require bussing from Pelee and surrounding area into MD Bennie site.

We are open to all options.

Mario Spagnuolo, ETFO

I specifically want to talk to you about Mill Street and I've expressed these concerns with the Director and the Superintendent of Staffing. You are correct that we are trying to make staffing timelines work; however, our concern is with Mill Street. We don't support the closure of any school. However, closing Mill Street in June is problematic as it basically gives two weeks notice for a whole school community to close a school. Not only is that difficult from an administrative point of view but emotionally, it is irresponsible of the Board to do that. The school community deserves time to close their school. I can't ever remember a school being closed in that short of a time line. Quite problematic. If any decision is made, we would like one school year for staff to implement it. Around boundary changes, I realize boundaries can be changed but boundaries being discussed can have a huge impact on staffing and once again, giving time for school, including teachers, to implement it would be wise. Lastly, the recommendation itself – February is the timeline for kindergarten and parents want to know where their children will be attending. What we're asking staff to do presently is problematic. We're marketing our school board to the best of our abilities because we want to get every student we can but when a parent asks teacher where will my child go there really is not an answer as the decision will not be made until June. It's difficult for parents to make a decision as to where they will register their child because everything is in limbo and potentially find out in June that alternate child care arrangements have to be made as parents may find out in June that the school they thought their child would be going to is now going to be closed and now parents will have to make changes under very strict timelines. That can be very difficult. I think it would be wise, whatever the decision is, to implement it in September 2018. These are our preliminary concerns. We'll be at the next community meeting to address other issues.

Pete Epp, Gore Hill parent

Q: I was happy to read in the Minutes from the Orientation meeting of the Committee that no final decisions have been made, there are no preconceived notions of the outcome, all options will be explored and that at this time anything is possible. I feel the initial draft is a starting point and the report will evolve until 2 weeks after the final invitation when the Final Staff Report posted. My understanding is this is supposed to be a very open and transparent process. In the previous process, the report was written and more or less controlled by the Committee. In the new process the Initial Staff Report is written by yourself and the Final Staff Report is written by yourself and the group. How will the Committee be kept up to date and aware of the changes to the Initial Staff Report as everything is being explored and evaluated by you and your staff?

In the previous Accommodation Review process the Committee formulated their recommendations. There was nothing put out on the table at the start. The Committee worked over a period of time and formulated recommendations based on the majority. The recommendations were presented to the Board of Trustees merely as the Committee's recommendations. Then the Board put together their recommendations. Sometimes the Board recommendations mirror the Committee's, sometimes they are similar with minor differences, and sometimes there are vast differences. These are then presented to the Board of Trustees and that is what the Board of Trustees approves or not.

Q: When you said the Board put together their own recommendations, you're talking about the staff?

Yes. That is the previous process. The Trustees saw what the Committee put together over that time frame before they looked at Senior Administration's recommendations. In the current process, there is something that is put out by Senior Administration right at the beginning as you had mentioned. This is the starting point. It could be the ending point or it could be totally different. It could be some of the initial recommendations with some other ideas. The working groups will have this as a starting point. The Committee has already received input and with respect specifically to Leamington District Secondary School, we will be looking into whether it is a viable option with appropriate rationale. The committee will brainstorm and have discussions as a whole group. The notes, input and all brainstorming coming from the meetings are posted for the public on the Board's website. As the process evolves, things may change. If someone has only one recommendation it's still posted for the public to observe. A number of committee members may not agree with the recommendation; however, no input or idea is discounted. If a recommendation is put forth that the majority of Committee agree with, or even a minority, it will be made available to the community.

Q: All those things will be put into the Final Staff Report to the Trustees?

Yes.

So there's a set of 5 recommendations in the Initial Staff Report. What will be in the Final Staff Report will be everyone's input along with a set of new recommendations, or the original recommendations?

I can't answer that. The recommendations may or may not evolve.

The initial 5 recommendations could change?

Possibly.

Q: Will the Committee know through the process as those recommendations change?

Yes, when I present the Final Staff Report to the Board of Trustees at that second last meeting, that will have the most recent recommendations, whether they are the same or different. The Committee will know ahead of time. When the Final Staff Report is presented, delegations are able to speak at that meeting. The recommendations could still change. There's the final Final Staff Report presented at that last meeting and there are still delegations that can be heard and Trustees vote. Even though recommendations are presented, Trustees still have the option to approve, change, or not approve.

Q: My question is basically with the report and how it changes and who knows what's going into it.

The entire way through process, everyone is involved.

Quinten Unger, Gore Hill parent

Q: Gore Hill has a lot to offer. It has a large green space helpful in education purposes. Gore Hill is the only one in the Leamington area with an outdoor classroom meaning students are able to learn in an outdoor setting in sunshine as well as enjoying nature. Speaking of Transportation safety – if kids are bussed outside the congested Leamington area, I feel a case can be made for less children on the roads and sidewalks during morning rush hour. If we look at where expansion is happening in the Leamington area, houses are popping up toward the south east part of Leamington, and with the new soccer fields I feel it would be a great idea to keep our school open in that area to keep up with future growth. I feel limiting boundary adjustments would be beneficial. If you're closing Mill Street, rather than adjusting all the boundaries, think about distributing those children between Mt Carmel-Blytheswood and Gore Hill and leave the other boundaries as is in order to limit the amount of readjustment the children go through so they deal with as little change as possible. Are the boundaries as proposed something being considered or is this a formal recommendation?

Initial recommendations and all community input and information will be discussed at Committee meetings.

Tracy Buel, Gore Hill parent

Q: With Gore Hill and MD Bennie merging on the MD Bennie site, why have another 230 students on such a small property? Has it been thought to bus the MD Bennie kids to Gore Hill where they have 15 acres which allows the school board to expand?

All things are considered. The Board considers 5 acres an appropriate size for an elementary school.

Q: But we have 15 acres.

15 is a tremendous amount of space. The Board barely receives that for a secondary school. 5 acres is considered a fairly substantial size for an elementary school.

Q: Would consideration be given to bringing MD Bennie students and consolidating on the Gore Hill site?

All suggestions are considered.

Q: When schools are amalgamated and when classrooms hit capacity, which is the point, there is no wiggle room. What happens to students? Instead of teachers looking after 23 students, they are looking after 33 children? Their eyes can't be everywhere. What is maximum capacity for teacher to teach?

As far as class sizes are concerned, Kindergarten has a 26:1 ratio with an E.C.E., grades 1-3 is 20:1 maximum, grades 4-8: 24.6 is board average for those classes. Often when people think of more students going into a building, they think it means their classes are getting huge. That is not the case.

Q: Then there would be more classes of certain grades?

Yes, typically that's what happens.

Denise, Queen Elizabeth parent

Q: My daughter started in class of 30 kids, now in class of 35. You are quoting ratios of 24.6. How do class sizes keep increasing? I feel children are struggling due to larger class sizes.

When kids move into a community throughout the year it increases class sizes. Sometimes at the beginning of the year class sizes are lower. Also sometimes students move out of the community. When this happens class sizes get smaller. As individuals move into the community class sizes get larger. When schools are amalgamated the student numbers are already in place and staffed as such; however, as people move in the students need to be placed into classrooms accordingly.

Q: When class sizes continue to increase do students not have support for them?

Supports for students at Queen Elizabeth have been put into place in addition to extra staff being placed in the school.

Mt Carmel-Blytheswood parent

Q: We're going to save money with this amalgamation. What additional supports can we take from savings and apply to students who deal with larger class sizes, to our teachers who now have to deal with more, to our support staff, LSTs, and everybody else who is now supporting a greater student body population? Daughter came from another school where she was completely lost, to MCB where she's thriving, due in part to small class size and because school has fair number of students on IEPs which take a lot of teacher's time both teachers and resource time. As student numbers increase so do number of IEPs and time requirements from teachers and resources. Is there a plan to increase supports to teachers and support staff so they can continue to provide a high level of support to students so they don't get lost in larger schools? Where are program changes that will help combat some of the issues?

The Superintendent of Special Education looks at needs across the system. Based on numbers in those schools that's how support is divided up. If a school receives more students with exceptionalities, there is the possibility more supports will be put in place. By the same token, if a school loses students with exceptionalities, then supports may be taken away and placed in another building.

Q: Will there be time to do that between June and September?

With respect to supports for special education, a lot of that is done after the school year starts as students move over the summer and are now in a different building and sometimes programs are changed and put into different buildings.

Q: With an amalgamation of a whole bunch of changes, that's going to be pushed off even more so you're going to have students going one to two months without adequate supports?

No. That wouldn't have any impact. Special Education would know where all students would be and would put individuals where support is needed.

Ryan Houston, Gore Hill parent

Q: I feel 5 acres is not a lot of property for elementary school. Kids need room to run and play. Where will kids play if a new build is put on 5 acres? Who makes the decision on size of property?

Typically the Ministry feels 5 acres is appropriate. With 5 acres we can put a kiss n ride, an adequate bus bay, parking, and a fair size school. Often a site of 5 acres can house a building of approximately 650 students or more. There is also room for a soccer field and blacktop area for kids to play. We have a number of schools that have far less than 5 acres of land. The Board prefers 5 acres but there are many that have less than 5.

Q: I grew up in Toronto at schools that had 1000 plus enrolment. Elementary and middle school had almost 20 acres of field, not just the school space. Why is the Board looking at 5 acres when you have 15 where the children could run and play and burn off energy?

We consider everything. A large piece of property is a nice option and the GECD SB believes a 5 acre property is an acceptable site. Obviously you feel bigger property is something that's important and that has been noted.

Jody Foster, Gore Hill parent

Q: I'd like to clarify with FI starting in JK at Gore Hill, will you close the option for Leamington students starting out to go to Kingsville so all those students would go to Gore Hill?

Yes.

Q: Then kids who want to register in FI in the Leamington area will have to go to Gore Hill and not be allowed to go to Kingsville?

Yes.

Q: When closing schools, we leave a large void within a community. A lot of times what we're seeing is when a school is taken over by a private school, we lose students. Have we considered we may lose students to another school or another board?

Yes, that is considered.

Ruth Beem, MD Bennie parent

Q: One of the things I value about Leamington and MD Bennie is it is multi-cultural and multi-lingual. What process is in place at our local schools that could include other languages or parents who are not as familiar with the formal process or who are very intimidated by that. I don't hear that built into this process at all. I'm wondering what options there may be for that. At MD Bennie many parents speak low german. We also have parents who have emigrated from another country who are not familiar

with this kind of formal process and would never come and stand up and talk but might have strong views or concerns. Is there a way that parents in a less formal setting could be helped to be informed and could be included and have their voices heard even if translators are needed?

We do have SWIS workers in all our schools. We have two people in attendance at this meeting for anyone who needed translators.

Q: The process is intimidating for someone who struggles with language and even for those who don't. Is there another way in individual schools of ensuring between now and the next public meeting there could be something more accessible for a conversation to take place?

There certainly can be. Please see me after the meeting to discuss a proper forum and to elaborate. Then that information could be shared throughout all of the schools. As far as translating is concerned, when you access the Board's website, at the top you can pick your language and information is then displayed in that particular language, including all Minutes from PARC meetings. On PAR notices sent home to families it is mentioned that if translation of the document is required, to see school office for assistance.

6. Focus Groups

There being no further questions, Superintendent Awender thanked everyone for coming and invited the community to join the focus groups.

7. Closing Comments and Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.