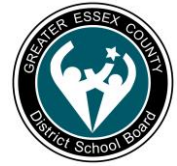


**Greater Essex County District School Board**  
**2015 PROGRAM AND ACCOMMODATION REVIEW**  
**Report of the First Community Meeting**  
**Thursday, January 29, 2015 at 6:30 p.m.**  
**General Amherst High School**

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At the December 9, 2014, regular meeting of the Board, Trustees approved the following recommendation regarding General Amherst HS, Harrow DHS, Harrow PS, Kingsville DHS and Western SS

**THAT THE SUPERINTENDENT RESPONSIBLE FOR ACCOMMODATIONS FACILITATES AN ACCOMMODATION REVIEW OF GENERAL AMHERST HIGH SCHOOL, KINGSVILLE DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL, WESTERN SECONDARY SCHOOL, HARROW DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL AND HARROW PUBLIC SCHOOL, TO ADDRESS CAPACITY ISSUES.**

**Present:** There were approximately 147 persons in the audience including committee members

**Regrets:** Bill Orawski, Committee Chairperson; Connie Buckler, Trustee, Erin Kelly, Director of Education and Scott Scantlebury, Public Relations Officer.

**Facilitator:** Todd Awender, Superintendent of Education

**Recorder:** Lynne Hornby, Administrative Assistant.

**1. Call to Order and Welcome**

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 p.m. by Superintendent Awender welcoming everyone to the meeting. This is the first of four meetings that will take place over the next few months. He explained that notes were being taken and that the proceedings were being audio and video recorded.

**2. Introductions**

Principal Keefner pointed out the location of the washrooms and the exits. Superintendent Awender introduced Trustee Leclair and Committee members then introduced themselves.

**3. Background**

Every year the Director presents an annual accommodation report to our Trustees.

At the December 9, 2014, regular meeting of the Board, Trustees approved the following recommendation regarding General Amherst HS, Harrow DHS, Harrow PS, Kingsville DHS and Western SS:

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

The committee composition was reviewed and Mr. Awender explained why we are examining this group of schools. This PARC is somewhat different, we are not just examining a family of schools but are taking a much broader approach. Between them, these four schools have close to 25% of the total empty student spaces in the whole of our board. Many school boards across the province are experiencing enrolment declines and large amounts of empty student spaces. Today, the Ministry of Education noted that they cannot continue to fund empty student spaces. Superintendent Awender noted that the Board needs to be proactive and not reactive; our focus is to be more efficient in our buildings and use our funds for student programming. Operating costs and utilization rates were reviewed.

The Committee has many tasks before them. They will look at the enrolment trends, other relevant data, student programming in each school and hear community input before writing final recommendations to the Director which will be presented to trustees in a report probably in late May. This report will be posted on the website for a period of 60 days (excluding summer break). During that time, the Director studies the report and makes recommendations to trustees. Ultimately, the trustees will make the final decision, probably in the Fall, but not before the 60 day period is complete.

Mr. Awender reviewed the four sections of the School Information Profile:

- Value to the Student
- Value to the School Board
- Value to the Community
- Value to the Local Economy

Tonight is the first of 4 meetings. This meeting is an information meeting to explain the process and to provide the opportunity to collect input and provide feedback.

The Superintendent again once again reminded the community of the process that the committee will follow.

He 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 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 email box will end up published on the internet.

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.

Mr. Awender asked that the community to be respectful of others during public meetings and refrain from making derogatory remarks about other schools and students. It is anticipated that the

public meetings should be about two hours in length, with no more than a 90 minute question period, as outlined in the Regulation.

#### **5. Future meeting dates**

Any information related to the PARC process is available on the Board website at [publicboard.ca](http://publicboard.ca). The PARC ICON is a red schoolhouse located in the bottom left of the front page of the webpage. All information from this presentation will be available on our website.

There are three more public meetings. All will be at 6:30 p.m.:

1. Monday March 2 at Harrow DHS
2. Monday April 13 at Western SS
3. Tuesday May 12 at Kingsville DHS – Migration Hall

At the next meeting, School Information Profiles will be presented for each one of our schools. At the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting the committee will bring forward possible recommendations and ask for feedback. They will take that input and come back to the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting with a draft and seek final recommendations.

The Superintendent re-emphasized this is a collaborative endeavor. We take note of community input. Remember the committee is an advisory body, not a decision-making body. Often during a PARC process the ideas which evolve have not even been considered at the beginning of the process. There is no predetermined notion of the outcome. We hope to arrive at some creative solutions at the end of the process. Superintendent Awender has already received some creative ideas that actually might be feasible but we know it is impossible to please everyone. Input is collected through the PARC mailbox. The address was shared.

Everyone in this room knows their school is excellent. The Superintendent stated that he will not tolerate derogatory comments toward another school or community and asked that the audience not be offensive in comments. We know it is impossible to please everyone but we try to do what's best for all.

#### **6. Questions relating to the process**

As the floor was opened up for questions, Mr. Awender stated he wouldn't be answering hypothetical questions, but those relating to the process only.

Ron McDermott, Mayor of town of Essex

There is a public meeting on March 2 in Harrow. That is one of our council meetings. Can you change the date?

Meeting dates have been determined and advertised according to the Regulation's timelines.

They work for our committee and the Board.

They might work for your committee. Who did you consult with? We'd like it changed. We could possibly change our meeting but our schedule has been arranged for the whole year. You people are just starting.

Gord Freeman, former trustee, former Essex Board of Education

We have to know how you determined your figures. You say renewal costs are over \$5million for General Amherst HS and that the Ministry determined the figures. Who are they? There is a conflict there. The Ministry of Education is trying to eliminate empty spaces so the easiest way to do that would be for them to inflate costs. A better way would be to have a neutral person go with them and come up with a consensus. How did you determine how many spaces are in a school?

There is a Ministry of Education space template and rooms are graded accordingly.

I was a trustee in 1991 when we lost a school and those figures that the Board at that time was using were skewed right from the start. They included shops as classrooms and included storage rooms. Can you tell us how that was done on your website? Can you put the template on your website so we can look into it? If the figures aren't correct at the start, what is the use of the process?

This Ministry of Education document will be posted on the Board website.

Pria, Western Secondary School parent

Western is a special ed. school so when you look at the learning outcomes and student success for Western are you comparing it to the spec ed. students in other schools so it's fair?

The Student Information Profiles are not provided to compare schools, they contain information that is used during the process.

Will a note be made that these are special education students?

Yes, absolutely.

Western has a bigger catchment area than the other schools being studied. Can we have community reps from some of the areas that Western is not in. Is input being sought from a wider area? I'm from LaSalle but I want my voice to be heard. Can we write into the PARC? Even if their children aren't in Western can they participate?

Yes, and they can come to all the meetings. It is for the greater community.

When you looked at the cost per student, since Western is a special ed. school do they get extra funding in terms of the unique programming they provide?

The costs we shared tonight are actually operational costs for the building so the extra funding doesn't help that. Student funding does not contribute to these particular costs.

These are the operational costs for the building only.

Jason Levine, town of Amherstburg

One of these meetings falls on one of our council meeting dates, for future reference, you need to include municipalities a lot more in this process as it affects us greatly. Your accommodations are projected to remain low for several years. Where do you get this data? Our planning department has contacted you several times. Our housing data is much different from yours. Our housing starts are some of the largest in the county. Your housing start figures are wrong.

We factor in the students coming from elementary into secondary. We also use the services of an outside consultant and we use census Canada data.

Our figures don't match up with yours, our housing starts are great. We are bringing a lot more people into our community at a lot faster rate. Housing starts don't match up and for future reference you really need to include councils in this process. We have experts who want to help you. We need to be a part of this process.

Peggy Thompson, children will be entering General Amherst in the near future

Community meeting dates were posted, what about the PARC meetings? Are they open to public?

Yes you may attend in an observation capacity only. Minutes will be posted to the site. The agendas are for the committee, they aren't posted prior to the meeting.

Can we have access to the agenda prior to the meeting?

Past practice hasn't been to do that, the agendas are for the committee.

Our biggest fear is transparency. We need to know what is going on minute by minute. The more you keep us engaged that's going to be huge and will solve a lot of secrecy. You said that the PARC report handed in in May won't be voted on? So the work this committee does won't be voted on?

I'm confused. What happens?

The process was clarified again. The committee will formulate a report with recommendations that will be presented to trustees in a report probably in late May. This report will be posted on the website for a period of 60 days (excluding summer break).

During that time, the Director studies the report and makes recommendations to trustees.

Ultimately, the trustees will make the final decision, probably in the Fall, but not before the 60 day period is complete.

Bottom line is the Director will make a recommendation and trustees vote on that. Will the recommendations be the same as the PARC committee's?

They may, but they could also be different.

Are we able to see the template to see how you judged the square footage so we know you are comparing apples to apples? We've already heard tonight that you consider storage rooms.

We can get that information and post it on the PARC website.

If the numbers are declining steadily, what is the public board doing to increase enrolment and compete against the other boards?

Remember, we are talking about the process this evening.

It is part of the process. We see in the paper that other board's numbers are up, we need to know the board's plan so we aren't doing this again in 5 years. What is the Board's plan?

Jenna Boshin, works for Boblo Island Developments

Would you work with developers to bring people to the town of Amherstburg. In the next 6-10 years we will have enrolments. We are adding 200 homes to the south end of the island and there will be a large increase in enrolments. We are attracting hundreds of families to Boblo Island from as far away as Toronto. Our timelines are much shorter to get people to the town of Amherstburg. We are attracting younger families. Island sales are way up. Families need to know the longevity of their families. Having a high school in your community is a good selling feature.

I have already spoken to Amherstburg's town planner. As requested by the towns of Kingsville and Essex, staff from the Board will be meeting with those councils in the near future.

Leo Meloche, Amherstburg town council

General Amherst accommodated the board by sharing space with the separate board over the years and now we are getting kicked to the curb. I live in an area where a school was slated for closure. Demographics changed in that it was an aging school but then new families moved in and an

addition ended up being put on the school. What is the funding per student from the government? We need to know what is being funded from the government. You need to publish it.

For a full-time secondary student in school for the whole year, the funding is approximately \$10,500.

John Corbett, resident of Amherstburg

Will the PARC consider when closing a school to replace it with a new school? Will it be part of the process?

I can't tell you what might happen but do we want new schools built? Of course.

Jamie Monger, Harrow parent

We have been going through this for years. I have a business in Harrow and no one wants to see their schools close. We need to come up as a group together with one solution that is viable. We have to look at what's best for the students. A new super school. When you close a school I know it affects taxes, new homes, housing. We are busing kids to Western. Villanova killed three schools when it opened. We all know about that. We need to look at distances. Harrow is a small community but it is very central. They play travel hockey with Kingsville. We hear build a new school on the Arner town line, why? Build a new school in Harrow, 15k from each of the other schools and close all the other schools. We have to look at what's best for South Western Ontario. Build one school in Harrow. It's a solution for everybody. A new super school.

Susan Cote – WSS parent

How will you compare Western student outcomes?

We aren't really comparing schools. The Ministry provides a template for your School Information Profiles and it will be made very clear that Western SS is different. The School Information Profile is not to compare schools to schools.

Students at Western SS aren't going to have comparable scores. They all have an IEP or a diagnosed intellectual or developmental disability. They have to take the same OSSLT test as academic students in the province and obviously their scores aren't comparable. I'd like to know the committee is not saying that their poor scores will be used against them.

That wouldn't happen. It would be noted that it is a vocational school.

You are calling it a vocational school. Is there a difference between vocational and special education?

Different terminology is used across the province. We refer to it as a vocational school in our annual report to point out that it is a special education school. The Superintendent of Special Education is at meetings with her counterparts around the province over the next couple of days and will be speaking with them about vocational and special education schools in their respective Boards in order to bring back a provincial overview.

I hope this Board is following suit of the province and isn't doing something different that is to the detriment of the special education students. Is the committee taking into account exceptionalities and these students don't function as well in integrated schools? Another factor on one of your slides was accessibility of students with disabilities. Again, every single student at Western has a

disability. I'd like to know if the committee is taking into account their mental health and psychological well-being and their accessibility for having a school which takes into account the fact that they don't function as well in integrated schools, which many parents can attest to. They came from elementary schools where they were not served as well as they are at Western, where they are getting the programming and supports they need as the staff understand special education students. If you put those students in a school like General Amherst HS, which are wonderful schools, but these students need different programming and different accommodations. I'd like to know if the committee is considering that when it considers accessibility rather than the traditional accessibility such as ramps etc.

It certainly will.

Jolene Parent, resident of Amherstburg

Are you taking into consideration just public students or looking at separate board students who might attend GAHS? 50% of my graduating class (separate board) went to Amherst rather than Villanova so it might skew your numbers.

That is taken into account.

Are you taking into consideration the psychological affects on all these kids? Going to a high school in proximity of where you live. These kids are going through a lot of change. High school is scary. Having a high school close to home really helps. Are you really thinking about the psychological effects changing schools or boundaries is going to have on them?

All those things are taken into account.

Tara Moore, Harrow DHS and PS parent

Is the template for Western different from the other three schools? Is Western in the same category as the other three high schools or does Western require more square footage per student because of their special needs?

The committee asked that question so we are in the process of collecting that data. There is a space template for all schools. Elementary and secondary space is rated differently. Some rooms are rated differently from others. Special education classrooms have a lower cap size. All this data will be provided to the committee in the future.

Neil Boudreau, Harrow parent

Why is Harrow Public included?

They are included in the study because currently the grade 7 and 8s are located in the high school, it is the only 7-12 school. They are filling spaces in the high school but the programming is different. They were placed there to fill space because at the time, the elementary school was quite full.

Do we have a cost per student for Harrow public grade k-6. Do we have that data?

We do. I don't have it here but it will be posted with the School Information Profiles.

Ross Scott, member of Amherstburg community

We have been through these many times and from what I understand, we are going to make a submission to you and you are going to give a report to the Director who in turn will send on a recommendation to the School Board to make the final decision?

The process was clarified again. The committee will formulate a report with recommendations that will be presented to trustees in a report probably in late May. This report will be posted on the website for a period of 60 days (excluding summer break).

During that time, the Director studies the report and makes recommendations to trustees.

Ultimately, the trustees will make the final decision, probably in the Fall, but not before the 60 day period is complete.

So the Director may consider the committee's report meaningless and make her own report. Is that correct? I'd like to make an immediate recommendation for future meetings that the Director sits up there along with the entire school board so they are getting everything first hand. The Board's Mission statement says, "The Greater Essex County District School Board, in partnership with the community, provides learning opportunities which support, challenge and inspire all students to achieve their full potential and enable them to participate meaningfully in their communities."

Rick Fryer, Amherstburg town council

The meeting at Western is on the same night as the council meeting. I hope the message gets to the Board loud and clear that we need to be there. You either change your meeting night or send correspondence back to us. Our council has stated we will fight like hell to keep General Amherst in our community. As far as your committee, you added a P to the ARC. I sat on the ARC committee for the separate board. I'll tell the committee now if I can, do your due diligence as the board will feed you skewed information. We went through this with the catholic school board. They put it through before the end of the school year so they could implement it. The Trustees and every trustee and the Director should be here. When is the board implementing this review?

The final vote won't be until the following school, year, probably in September or October. So you are looking at a 2016 change? When is the implementation date? We are hanging in the air. It isn't going to be a year, it's going to be a year after June. Municipalities need that information to market ourselves. People moving to Amherstburg need to know that the school will be there. What is the date of this implementation?

The Trustee vote will be in September or October of this year.

So when is the implementation going to happen? 2016, 2017, 2018? When?

We don't know at this time. It is for the committee to recommend and the trustees to determine. I can't say.

So why are you going through this exercise? It's because the province is pushing you to save money. The province is going to allow this process to go on and continue to lose money like you are stating. We weren't allowed to do that as a municipality. Why can you just continue to lose money? You need to set the implementation date so we know. We need as a council to see all your numbers, not just what you want to present to us. We want to know what you are doing to cut your costs. If you are losing enrolment you need to remove layers up top. What is going to happen with the Board itself? Are you laying people off? Are you cutting people at the top?



Former WSS student

You just recently closed Century. Why don't you just wait 5 years for the Century students to fill the seats up at Western? Those kids are going to need that extra help.

That's not related to the process.

Well, it is, because you have all these empty seats. Why can't the Century students just go to Western and fill the school up? What if Western closes, they can't go to other schools. They don't offer the same programs. They can't go to Sandwich. We should just wait and see instead of scattering all those kids around the county. They could fill up those seats and solve your problems. I hope that's part of your consideration.

Patricia Scazma, Western SS parent

The kids at Western don't fit into regular high school, they have a special way of learning. They don't fit into the regular high school as there aren't accommodations for them. If you put these kids in regular high school they won't survive, they will be ostracized and they won't fit in. They have more one-on-one at Western than they will have anywhere else.

My other concern is that when we have a shortage of nurses we advertise for people to come here. When we need doctors we do the same. We are losing our kids to the separate board, what is more attractive there? Why are we losing these students? You need to be looking at how we can get them back. These schools should be filled. You should be selling yourselves. There's something more attractive at the other boards. You as a board should be advertising why it's so good in these schools. It is your job to attract students so that our schools will fill up again. We have enough people in the community here.

James Long, Harrow

How can we calculate the loss in revenue to the community when the kids transfer to the other board? My child will switch over to the catholic board. He's not leaving town. As far as funding, how do you calculate that because you are going to make people have hard choices - Stay with the public board or move. How can you justify a kid on a bus for 40 minutes or go to the catholic school in town? How can you calculate the loss in revenue that will occur when they switch boards. How can you know though. You are going to bust the community up.

We don't know that's going to happen.

You are pushing that way though are you not? Does the committee get a rebuttal after the Director makes her decision. Do they get that back to rebuttal it if they don't like the choice or maybe compromise here or there?

The process was explained again. The committee will formulate a report with recommendations that will be presented to trustees in a report probably in late May. This report will be posted on the website for a period of 60 days (excluding summer break).

During that time, the Director studies the report and makes recommendations to trustees.

Ultimately, the trustees will make the final decision, probably in the Fall, but not before the 60 day period is complete. Trustees can amend the recommendations if they wish.

That's a little unfair, no?

Those are the guidelines.

Leo Meloche again, Amherstburg town council

You may not be able to answer this but for some time it has been a concern to me. Why do we still have all these school boards? Municipalities have been forced to amalgamate as have police services. Isn't it time that the boards get together as a group? The Catholic and Public boards could operate in the same buildings, they could share gyms, English or Catholic doesn't make a difference. This committee needs to look at this issue and costs and boards sharing facilities. Why did we build Villanova in the middle of no-man's land? My children went there. Keep it in the community. It's better economically. Every student is bussed to Villanova.

Ian Matheson from General Amherst

Are any of these schools that are being closed fed by a French Immersion school?

Closure has not been determined. Kingsville Public has a FI program.

Are we losing more students to the French program in Amherstburg than in Kingsville? Maybe we should be providing French in all our feeder schools to reduce the loss to the French board.

At this point in time the numbers don't warrant us putting a FI program in Amherstburg but we don't know how many FI students are in the separate board.

One of the main factors we have lost so many students in Amherstburg is because we don't have FI. They went to the separate board. They might not be catholic but they go there for the opportunities they have by learning French and then they go to Villanova. We should have FI in every community. There is no option in Amherstburg, they have to go to Sandwich West.

Doug Ballsillie, Harrow resident and former trustee Essex County Board

Your presentation was illegible. I couldn't see it at the back of the room. You need to change it up for the future. I encourage the committee to be creative. There are many school boards across the province that are being very creative to keep small schools open. There are many creative solutions to look at. It is concerning to me that our board does not embrace creativity that would allow small community schools to stay open. We have been fighting since 1987 to keep Harrow open.

Leslie Ballsillie, Harrow resident

My question is about the timing of this process starting. So this is the time when families are choosing their high school. Recently in the media there have been lots of positive stories about exciting things going on in the other board. All we have heard from our board is we have four schools that need to close because we have no money. It's discouraging. People say it's because they can't get the programming they want in Harrow but they can. I've had four children go through the high school and in four years they can take 32 courses and they need 30 of those credits. They don't have a lot of time for a lot of electives because they have a lot of required courses but they can plan and they can get some electives in. In small communities there are other opportunities for activities and when you go to away you don't get that type of thing. Our community has been supportive of these schools. I hope a solution is found in a creative way to keep these schools open. I hope the board takes a more positive view and let's get the kids signed up for the Fall.

Carey Lauzon – Harrow resident

My kids go to the French Catholic board by choice. I'm here for the communities. You are failing to realize that by closing the schools you are taking away property values. You need to get creative. I don't know whether that is building 3 new K-12 schools in the three communities. Close the small public schools. You've done it off Banwell Road. It's easy to sit in Windsor and decide to close schools in the county. The community of Harrow revolves around the high school. I don't want to see the school close, my kids don't attend there. We need schools like Western, not everyone is cut out to be a doctor or a lawyer. Programs aren't there in a regular high school to handle these kids who need extra help. I'm appalled at the decision making. I'd hate to see you close a school in any of these communities. My kids are on a bus for 45 minutes to French elementary school in McGregor and 50 minutes to get to high school at L'Essor. I'd rather they went to school in Harrow, but there is no French. We are trying to keep our communities. Closing high schools is a death blow. Pretty soon you'll be closing elementary schools. This problem has been going on for years. You should have seen a long time ago that you were losing enrolments.

#### **7. Closing Comments and Adjournment**

There being no further questions, Superintendent Awender thanked everyone for coming. The meeting adjourned at 8:14 p.m.