

September 4, 2008

Joyce Anderson, Trustee, Brampton Wards 7 - 10
Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board
40 Matheson Boulevard West
Mississauga, ON L5R 1C5

Re: Pupil Accommodation Review – Bramalea North

I write to you as a parent of two current students of Mother Mary Ward Catholic School. I also write as a concerned Ward 7 ratepayer.

While it can be recognized that if the DPCDSB planning department's forecasted enrollment numbers for the Bramalea North review area prove accurate, conditions are likely to exist in the future to justify some sort of closure or consolidation actions in order to better utilize board resources, these conditions don't yet exist. It is premature to close a school.

The current pupil accommodation (school closure) review as prescribed by the province examines a finite, five-year window. That is to say that beyond 2012, if the conditions exist to justify closure or consolidation actions, the tools to carry out such action will once again be accessible.

Assuming DPCDSB figures; at the conclusion of the current review period two of the reviewed schools will be operating above the 80% capacity required to maintain full provincial funding, a third school nearing 90% capacity and a fourth operating at over 107% of the school's designed capacity.¹

According to these planning department figures any closures or consolidations during the current pupil accommodation review period would necessitate the installation, maintenance and prolonged use of portable classrooms at the remaining schools. Retaining the status quo during the current review period would enable the board to remove all but one portable classroom from the review area, while increasing available capacity in existing school buildings to accommodate future displaced students temporarily during what appears to be an inevitable rebuilding or construction of new permanent buildings to eliminate repair bills at our two largest schools.²

While board and provincial officials don't outwardly acknowledge suspected health/safety issues related to student environments beyond the extent that any specific complaint has not been proven, most on record would indicate that portable classrooms are not a preferred alternative to a traditional school building if either were available. It makes sense to have traditional school building capacity available if at all possible to bridge any planned capacity interruptions produced by construction or renovation projects.

It should also be noted that in the face of much research on the subject of larger schools vs. smaller schools and the near universal anecdotal support for smaller school environments this pupil accommodation (school closure) review process is inherently biased against smaller schools in favour of larger ones. This process includes criteria to identify under-capacity schools but not over-capacity schools. It includes a criterion that flags any school with fewer than 250 students without regard for the school building's designed capacity. Planning department head Beth Bjarnason agreed that this bias is present in this provincially mandated process when Supt. Alex

Tucciarone deferred an opinion on the question of bias to Bjarnason at Public Meeting #3 regarding the current review.³

Other factors that seem largely unaccounted for in terms of valuation of the collective schools in the review area include:

1. The value in maintaining schools through the ups and downs of longer-term enrollment trends for the sake of the continuity of community in the neighbourhoods where students and their families live by creatively looking at methods to voluntarily redistribute existing students amongst area schools while shifting boundaries between schools for new students in order to further shape enrollment.
2. The value in seizing on any opportunity to reduce the use and reliance on portable classrooms in advance of any contemplation of the closing of any existing permanent school capacity.
3. Total transportation costs including economic costs (volatile fuel costs), environmental costs (emissions), and health costs (fewer schools within walking distance = fatter kids).

I take this opportunity to implore you to focus on the students and families in the respective review areas by choosing to retain the four schools in the Bramalea North review area during this review period. I also implore the Trustees to actively anticipate and prepare for 2012 so they might hit the ground running in the decisions that will truly put the students first.

Yours sincerely,



Adam Smith

¹ <http://www.dpcdsb.org/NR/rdonlyres/BFFEC733-CDD6-4479-A124-7923F19C4D44/30176/BramNorthPublicMtg4ARC.pdf>

² <http://www.dpcdsb.org/NR/rdonlyres/BFFEC733-CDD6-4479-A124-7923F19C4D44/29125/BramNorthPublicMtg3ARC2008April29.pdf>

³ <http://www.dpcdsb.org/CEC/About+Us/Departments/PLN/Bramalea+North+Review+Area.htm>