

Central Erin Mills Report to the Director of Education

Date: June 23, 2008

Re: Central Erin Mills Accommodation Review Committee

Purpose:

To report to the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board (the "Board") the recommendations of the Central Erin Mills Accommodation Review Committee (the "ARC") on school consolidation in the Central Erin Mills review area.

Background:

ARC members:

M. Prospero, Chairperson, Superintendent of Schools.
T. Munn, Senior Planner, Planning Department.
J. Rogers, Planner, Planning Department.
K. DiPasquale, Principal, Blessed Trinity.
J. Flynn, Teacher Representative, Blessed Trinity.
H. Coito, School Council Chair, Blessed Trinity.
J. Crane-Rodrigues, School Council Representative, Blessed Trinity.
N. Levey, Principal, Divine Mercy.
A. Fera, Teacher Representative, Divine Mercy.
R. Kowal, School Council Chair, Divine Mercy.
R. Zizek, School Council Vice-Chair, Divine Mercy.
T. Cruz, Principal, Our Lady of Mercy.
M. MacDonald, Vice Principal, Our Lady of Mercy.
D. Jessome, Teacher Representative, Our Lady of Mercy.
G. Bellissimo, School Council Chair, Our Lady of Mercy.
M. Scott, School Council Co-Chair, Our Lady of Mercy.
M. Buczek, Principal, St Joseph, Streetsville.
L. DaSilva, Teacher Representative, St. Joseph, Streetsville.
L. Condon, School Council Chair, St. Joseph, Streetsville.
L. Boychuk, School Council Vice-Chair, St. Joseph, Streetsville.
T. Pimentel, Parish Representative, St. Joseph, Streetsville.
F. Anderson, Principal, St Rose of Lima.
A. Daly, Teacher Representative, St. Rose of Lima.
C. Marchetti, School Council Co-Chair, St. Rose of Lima.
C. Weber, School Council Co-Chair, St. Rose of Lima.

ARC members were provided with ARC binders which included materials related to the Public Accommodation Review, such as guidelines and policies, School valuation frameworks and accommodation options.

Comments:

ARC meeting dates:

- 1) October 9, 2007.
- 2) October 30, 2007.
- 3) November 20, 2007.
- 4) January 22, 2008.
- 5) February 21, 2008.
- 6) March 31, 2008.

Public Meeting dates:

- 1) February 7, 2008.
- 2) February 19, 2008.
- 3) March 4, 2008.
- 4) May 20, 2008

Discussion:

Prior to the first public meeting, the ARC undertook a process to review the full list of 18 options provided in the ARC Binder and remove those options which were deemed to be not feasible. This was completed through extensive discussion and review of the materials provided in the ARC Binder, using guidelines and policies put in place by the Government of Ontario and DPCDSB, and using information asked for and provided by staff members (Superintendent of Schools, Planning & Transportation staff). The criteria for exclusion included the elimination of those options which did not address the capacity issue at Blessed Trinity and St. Rose of Lima (home school), and elimination of those options which resulted in an over-capacity concern at the intake school (ie. high number of portables). The ARC was advised that its mandate was to look at alternatives within the Central Erin Mills review area only and not within any broader Catholic school catchment area (for example, boundaries outside Central Erin Mills were not in scope).

This discussion resulted in 9 options (not including 'status quo') being presented at the first and second public meetings. At the subsequent ARC meeting held on February 21st 2008, the ARC reviewed the discussions and commentary from the first 2 public meetings (refer to Attachments #1 and #2), along with further information provided by staff as requested. Among others, the public raised concerns regarding the presence of a Catholic school south of Eglinton, transportation issues, the impact on intake schools (higher number of portables), and the quality of education at the schools slated for potential closure.

After extensive discussion by the ARC, the options were further reduced to 5 (not including 'status quo'). The factors for the elimination of options included the potential impact on the intake school (number of

portables), and minimization of 'boundary hopping' (ie. transporting/walking through the boundary of one school to reach another). These 5 remaining options were presented at Public Meeting #3 for discussion.

Community input from the third public meeting (refer to Attachment #3) was reviewed at the next ARC meeting held March 31, 2008 and a thorough discussion was held on the merits of the 5 remaining options. The following factors were considered by the ARC members in its final recommendation:

- 1) A majority of participants at the public meetings made it abundantly clear that they were not in favour of closing both schools south of Eglinton. There was very strong concern expressed over the possibility of eliminating visible Catholic presence south of Eglinton and north of the 403 highway given that there is public school presence in this area. It was felt that this could further accelerate declining enrolment at Catholic schools. The quality of Catholic education offered in the area south of Eglinton is high and with the Catholic Church, Merciful Redeemer, there is a strong bond with the home, school and parish community south of Eglinton.
- 2) Parents at Blessed Trinity expressed very strong concern over safety issues with the requirement for their junior/intermediate students to walk to schools further north of Eglinton. This area of Eglinton is a very busy, 7-lane roadway along which cars often travel well in excess of the posted 60km. Further, the route to the alternative schools crosses several commercial areas, two high schools, a community center, and other open areas, which raises additional safety concerns. The Blessed Trinity community also felt that the route was excessive in both actual distance and in the time it would take for the children to walk to Divine Mercy (30-45min in good weather) or Our Lady of Mercy (just under an hour) which is even further north.
- 3) Additional buses to St. Joseph school from the Extended French and Gifted programs would result in a total of 16 buses, which the ARC Committee deemed to be excessive. Concerns were also raised by some about expanding the already elongated large geographic boundary for St. Joseph.
- 4) Parents at St. Rose of Lima expressed strong views on the continued high quality of education offered by the school, of which the Extended French and Gifted programs form an integral part, and have been integrated within the school to form a cohesive school community. With this, the parents strongly advocated in favour of keeping the Extended French and Gifted programs with the core community in the option of consolidating Blessed Trinity and St. Rose of Lima to form one community.

- 5) One of the Board objectives was a reduction of 576.5 pupil places. However, this is only one objective aimed at efficiency and must be balanced with public concerns over taking the drastic steps of CLOSING TWO SCHOOLS which would be required to reach such a short-term goal. The Catholic Board is undertaking a number of programs (including full day kindergarten and French immersion) aimed at addressing the overall declining enrolment in Catholic schools. It is hoped that as these and other programs are implemented, the Catholic system will be strengthened.

After careful consideration of these and other factors, ARC members determined that the only consensus it could reach was to recommend that either Option #4 (Close St. Rose of Lima and move All to Blessed Trinity) or Option #5 (Close Blessed Trinity and move All to St. Rose of Lima) be selected. The resultant combined

school addresses the key concerns identified above. The decision on which school to close should be made by the Trustees.

This recommendation was presented at the fourth and final public meeting (refer Attachment #4). While both communities stated a preference to keep their own school open, as a collective, they endorsed the recommendation with continued strong negative views on any alternative which would close both schools. Further, given the amount of anxiety that the review process generated, the Central Erin Mills community asked the ARC committee to recommend that a consolidation review process for this area not be undertaken for another 5 years. Refer to Attachment #5 for minutes of the fourth public meeting.

Both schools, Blessed Trinity and St. Rose of Lima, have significant value to their affected families and broader community, and selection of the final option should be determined by the Trustees based on the School Valuation Frameworks (refer to Attachments #6 and #7), public input received to date and any further input received by the public prior to the time the final decision is made. It is also suggested that the Trustees visit both schools personally, to aid in the decision-making.

Copies of the presentations made at the four public meetings, as well minutes of all ARC meetings and the ARC Binder are available on the Board website.

Conclusion:

Balancing the objectives of the Board while addressing the concerns of the community were key drivers in the final recommendations of the ARC.

Recommendations:

Attachment 2	Minutes of Public Meeting #2 – February 19, 2008
Attachment 3	Minutes of Public Meeting #3 – March 4, 2008
Attachment 4	Presentation at Public Meeting #4 – May 20, 2008
Attachment 5	Minutes of Public Meeting #4 – May 20, 2008
Attachment 6	School Valuation Framework – Blessed Trinity
Attachment 7	School Valuation Framework – St. Rose of Lima