

November 24, 2008

Honourable Kathleen Wynne
Minister of Education
900 Bay Street
Toronto
M7A 1L2

Re: Facilitator's Report for Southeast Oakville (PARC 14 – Ward 3) region which includes schools: Brantwood, Chisholm, E.J. James, Linbrook, Maple Grove and New Central Public Schools.

Dear Minister,

On August 27th, 2008, your Ministry appointed me as the facilitator to conduct an Administrative Review of the accommodation review processes undertaken regarding Brantwood, Chisholm, E.J. James, Linbrook, Maple Grove and New Central Public Schools.

My appointment was the result of a petition received by the Ministry in July, 2008 asking for an administrative review of the Halton District School Board decision to close Brantwood, Linbrook, Chisholm, and New Central Public Schools. The petition for each of the schools met the requirements under the Ministry of Education's *Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline*, October 31, 2006.

My responsibilities were supported by Marg Curto of the Toronto Regional Office of the Ministry of Education. Her professional assistance and advice was much appreciated. I would also like to express my appreciation to the trustees, board officials, parents and members of the community who provided me with their time, views and opinions.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The following terms of reference were established by your Ministry for my work as the Facilitator conducting this administrative review.

PRINCIPLES

- School boards, parents, communities and the government recognize that school boards have the legal right to close schools after following a board-approved pupil accommodation review process.

- The Ministry of Education released the new *Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline* on October 31, 2006. The guideline provides direction to school boards regarding pupil accommodation reviews undertaken to determine the future of a school or a group of schools.
- School boards are responsible for establishing and following their own accommodation review policies. School boards' accommodation review policies are to reflect the requirements of the Ministry's *Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline*.
- Under the *Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline*, schools are required to make school valuation the centre of board and community decision-making. School valuation requires school boards to consider the value of a school or schools, based on community consultation.

SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

- The independent facilitator shall be responsible for:
 - Determining whether the Halton District School Board followed its board-approved pupil accommodation review process in conducting the accommodation review;
 - Reviewing formal documentation, interviewing relevant participants including PARC members, petitioners and board staff;
 - Submitting a written report to the Minister of Education upon completion of the review.

REPORTING TO MINISTER

- The report should be in the form of a letter to the Minister, indicating whether the accommodation review process followed the board's pupil accommodation review policy.
- The Minister is responsible and will make the facilitator's findings available to the board and the public in a timely fashion.

PROFILE OF HALTON DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

The Halton District School Board serves approximately 52,300 students in the municipalities of Burlington, Halton Hills, Milton, and Oakville. The four municipalities

together form the Regional Municipality of Halton which has the same boundaries as the Halton DSB encompassing 232,000 acres of land, running 25 kilometres along Lake Ontario.

The Board has 78 elementary schools with a total student enrolment of 35,622. In Oakville, 27 schools accommodate 12,698 students. The Board has 17 secondary schools with an enrolment of 16,679. Oakville has 6 of the Board's secondary schools with 6,727 students.

Some regions of the Board are experiencing declining enrolment and other areas like Milton are growing rapidly. Overall the Board is growing.

PROFILE OF SOUTHEAST OAKVILLE

Southeast Oakville is a section of the town of Oakville, located at the south end of the Halton District School Board. All of the schools which are the subject of this review are in the Southeast. The area is bounded by the Queen Elizabeth Way on the north, the shoreline of Lake Ontario to the south, the Sixteen Mile Creek to the west and Winston Churchill Boulevard to the east. The historic downtown core of Oakville and a large part of the mid-town core are located here. There is some commercial/industrial and retail development but most of the area is residential. The area developed outwards from the downtown core, which was first settled over 180 years ago, with the final development occurring in a north eastern section, known as Clearview, in the 1980's.

Southeast Oakville is covered by three school board planning areas: PE14, PE17 (elementary school areas) and part of PS03 (secondary). This Administrative Review will examine the Halton Board's review of pupil accommodation in PE 14. The schools involved are: Brantwood, Maple Grove and Chisholm (JK-5 regular track), Linbrook (JK-5 French Immersion), New Central (6-8 regular track) and E.J. James (6-8 dual track). The Board owns property in PE 17 (Clearview) which has not been developed. The secondary school which serves Southeast Oakville is Oakville Trafalgar High School.

In addition to the seven public schools in Southeast Oakville there are two JK-8 Catholic schools, at least 7 private schools, 6 of which serve elementary age pupils, and 3 other private schools, with elementary programs, just outside the boundaries.

Southeast Oakville is defined, in planning terms, as a mature neighbourhood. Student enrolment is projected to decline until approximately 2011, at which point it should stabilize. Enrolment in elementary schools in 2005-06 was 1672 pupils. In 2008-09 enrolment is expected to have dropped to approximately 1230. Declining enrolment has led to some schools operating below capacity.

PROFILE OF SCHOOLS

I visited each of the schools which were subject to review and to ensure that I understood the issues, I also visited the Clearview site and Oakville Trafalgar High School. In general I was impressed with the atmosphere in all of the schools. The children were happy and engaged, each school's staff was enthusiastic and positive, and in several cases, because of time of day, we could see that the children loved their playgrounds.

The school enrolment numbers are from the Report of the ARC for PE14 and represent head count as of September 2007.

BRANTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL

- Brantwood Public School was built in 1921 to serve the downtown core of Oakville. It is in the Heritage district. A gymnasium was added in the 1970's. Brantwood is a JK-5 school with an enrolment of 122. The capacity of the school is 227. The first floor and the gymnasium are accessible, but the school does not meet the requirements of the Ontario Disability Act because the basement and the second floor are not accessible. There is no bus drop off as it was conceived as a "walk to" school. There is a small but attractive playground.
- The school is clearly showing its age and would require major capital investment not just to maintain the fabric but to deal with accessibility issues.

MAPLEGROVE PUBLIC SCHOOL

- Maple Grove Public School is roughly in the centre of Southeast Oakville, adjacent to the High School. Part of the building, the 1872 one room schoolhouse, has a Heritage designation. The schoolhouse was added to four times between 1935 and 1986 with a library and gymnasium being significant additions. Maple Grove is a JK-5 school with an enrolment of 329. The capacity of the school is 302. The Clearview neighbourhood currently sends 91 children to Maple Grove by bus. The school is on one floor and is accessible with the exception of one kindergarten classroom which is in the Heritage section and accessed by stairs. There is one portable on site. The school site is 5.89 acres with extensive play areas in both grass and hardtop. There is a bus drop off point.
- The school is looking tired and the many hands involved in multiple additions show. The heritage section would need accessibility renovations. Nevertheless, the site and location are excellent.

CHISHOLM PUBLIC SCHOOL

- Chisholm Public School is slightly south and east of Maple Grove, close to Lakeshore Road. The school was built in 1974 and has had several upgrades since then. Chisholm is a JK-5 school with an enrolment of 285. The capacity of the school is 230. This would indicate that it is “over-utilized”. The Clearview neighbourhood currently sends 145 children to Chisholm by bus. Chisholm is fully accessible and is the designated special needs school for Southeast Oakville, JK-5. The facility and program requirements which come with this designation may explain why it is well over-capacity. The school sits on 3.8 acres and has a very attractive playground. There is a bus drop off point at the front entrance to the school property.
- Chisholm Public School was built as a small, “walk-to” school. While it is in better physical condition than some of the other schools, it is also looking tired.

LINBROOK PUBLIC SCHOOL

- Linbrook Public School is roughly halfway between Maple Grove and Brantwood. It was originally built as a one room schoolhouse in 1932. It was added to three times between 1949 and 1955. The school became the grade 1-5 French Immersion centre for Southeast Oakville in 1982. The enrolment is 365. The capacity is 236. There are 6 portables. French Immersion is a significant growth program in this community. The school sits on 5.3 acres and has an exceptional playground with mature trees on the edge, huge log “benches”, and spacious grassed areas. With the exception of the original schoolhouse, which houses the office, library and music/staff room, all accessed by stairs, the school is fully accessible. There is a designated bus lane at the front of the school, separate from the parking lot.
- As with all of the other schools in PE14, Linbrook needs maintenance of the basic fabric. It is also not fully accessible. The capacity numbers tell us that this was also built as a “walk to” school.

NEW CENTRAL PUBLIC SCHOOL

- New Central Public School is just north of Lakeshore Road in the west end of Southeast Oakville. It was built in 1958 and has had neither additions nor upgrades since then. It is a grade 6-8 school with an enrolment of 96 and a capacity of 161. The school site is 4.6 acres, with large trees, an attractive playground with grassy areas and hardtop. Again, it was built as a “walk to” school. As the numbers indicate, the school is substantially underutilized. The building is showing its age to a greater degree than several of the older buildings.

E.J. JAMES PUBLIC SCHOOL

- E.J. James Public School is on a central site between Linbrook and Maple Grove. It was built in 1857 and added to three times between 1961 and 1982. The school provides a grade 6-8 regular track program and a grade 6-8 French Immersion program. The enrolment is 501 and the rated capacity is 377. There are two portables. Clearview sends 140 students to the English language program. The school has 6 subject specialty classrooms (2 science, 1 music, 1 art, 1 design and tech, 1 computer lab). The school is the designated special needs school for Southeast Oakville, (grades 6-8). It is fully accessible. The school site is 5 acres with ample play areas. A bus drop off circle is at the rear of the property. The school is in reasonable condition, but does need updating and maintenance.

SUMMARY OF EVENTS LEADING TO THE BOARD'S DECISION

On March 21, 2007, the Halton District School Board approved its *Program and Accommodation Review Policy*. This policy implements the *Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline* released by the Ministry of Education October 31, 2006.

Also on March 21, 2007, the Halton DSB approved a motion to establish a Program and Accommodation Review Committee (PARC) for Ward 3 in the Town of Oakville.

Board policy establishes the membership of the PARC as follows:

- two trustees (at least one from the area being studied)
- the appropriate school superintendent
- from each of the affected schools, the principal, one teacher, one non-teaching staff, three parents (one of the parent representatives from the schools with Clearview students attending would be a Clearview parent)
- one local municipal councillor
- representation from the business community

On May 22, 2007, the PARC held its first meeting and three representatives from the Clearview community were added by the Board as members of the PARC. Since six schools were part of this review, the PARC was very large.

Board officials distributed binders to PARC members with background information. The information did not include a preferred direction or any accommodation alternatives to guide the committee. Instead the committee was told to prepare the alternatives.

Between May, 2007 and March 4, 2008, the PARC held 18 meetings plus 4 public meetings. The public meetings were held October 29, November 20, January 15 and 29, 2008 and were well attended.

PARC meetings in the fall of 2007 focussed on developing accommodation alternatives. There were brainstorming sessions and at one point the PARC developed 72 scenarios. Schools in other parts of Halton were visited to get a feel for different options. Eventually the PARC began to focus on fewer school configurations. Board officials told committee members that different school configurations exist across the Halton DSB and there was no Board policy or preference on this matter. They were told that effective schools were a result of good teachers and principals.

The PARC continued to meet and in January they began to focus on the grades JK-6 schools and one single track French immersion grades 1-6 and a grade 7-8 school. They settled on scenarios that would have 2 or 3 grades JK-6 English schools, a single track grade 1-6 French immersion school and a dual track grade 7-8 school. Board officials then developed 4 scenarios and presented them to the PARC just before the fourth public meeting which was held on January 29, 2008. Three of the options had provision for 2 grades JK-6 English schools and one had three grades JK-6 English schools. All options included a grade 1-6 French Immersion school and one dual track grades 7-8 school at E.J. James Public School. Two of the options included provision for a Clearview site.

The public meeting was held and significant input was received from the community and further feedback was received through the Board's web-site.

On February 19, 2008, the PARC voted by secret ballot to support three grades JK-6 schools, one grade 1-6 French Immersion school and a grade 7-8 school.

The recommendations called for New Central, Brantwood and Maple Grove or Chisholm Public Schools to remain open. A second option added Linbrook Public School as one of the possible JK-6 schools to remain open. Depending on the option chosen, either Linbrook or Maple Grove would be the grades 1-6 French immersion school and E.J. James Public School would be the dual track grades 7-8 school. On March 4, 2008, the PARC gave the report its final examination and submitted it to the Board to be published on the Board's website.

Up until this point the Board had told the PARC that the Ministry of Education policy would allow only 50% of the proceeds from the sale of any school site in Southeast Oakville to be used for accommodation solutions. In fact this was not the case. The Halton DSB, because of its overall enrolment growth and new pupil place funding, had adequate revenue to cover outstanding debt and therefore 100% of the proceeds, from the sale of any redundant site could be used by the Board for capital related purposes. This information came to light after the PARC had submitted its report.

On April 15, 2008, the Director of Education's report on the accommodation issues was published and it argued that a 3 school English JK-6 option would result in an imbalance of enrolment since, at the request of Clearview residents, all Clearview students would attend one school. This resulted in two large schools and one very small school which

would be a likely closure candidate within five years. As a result the preferred direction was;

- two JK-6 English-stream schools
- one 1-6 French-stream school
- one 7-8 dual-stream school

The Board meeting on April 16, 2008, deferred the matter to June 18, 2008, and decided that a public meeting be held on May 20, 2008, to hear delegations on this matter.

The public meeting was held on May 20, 2008. There were over 30 delegations and the Board was receiving many e-mails expressing a variety of points of view. According to the petitioners some delegations referred to the changed financial circumstances that the Board now found itself in and stated that the option of building a new school in Clearview was now viable. At this point the PARC had still not been told that the Board now understood that it could keep 100% of the proceeds from the disposal of redundant school property.

On June 13, 2008, the Director released his revised report. This report recognized the new financial assumptions and put forward the JK-8 option with a new Clearview School which would result in 4 schools closing. The Board received this report at its June 18th meeting and deferred consideration until the July 2, 2008 Board meeting. This meant that the public had just 2 weeks to consider and respond to a direction for accommodation that was completely different than anything seriously under consideration up to this point.

On July 2, 2008, the Board approved E.J James Public School as a JK-8 English school, Maple Grove Public School as a grade 1-8, French Immersion school and building a new JK-8 English school in Clearview. The debate was minimal and the vote was unanimous.

FEEDBACK FROM THE PARC

I spent over 2 hours with approximately 45 members of the PARC from the Clearview community, the petitioners and school board staff who served on the committee.

There seemed to be agreement that the Board did not present accommodation alternatives and instead expected the PARC to develop these. They had been told that all grade configurations exist within the Halton DSB and that there was no preference.

Many members expressed concern that the Board knew, as of the later part of March, that it would be able to use 100% of the revenue generated by the sale of redundant properties, to fund accommodation solutions in Ward 3. This information came to light after the PARC submitted its report.

The members of the PARC from the Clearview area felt that the JK-8 model was discussed, but the petitioners said that it was raised during the brainstorming session when dozens of options were put on the table. Some members said they had been told that JK-8 was not an option because it would require a new school and there was no financing available for a new school in Clearview.

Overall, the session with the PARC was not particularly helpful. Very few Halton DSB staff who served on the PARC felt comfortable enough to contribute given the fact that they are employees of the Board. As a result we heard from parents who were opposed to the Board's decision and therefore had signed the petitions that resulted in this administrative review and from Clearview parents who supported the construction of a school in their community.

THE PETITION

On July 28, 2008, your Ministry received a petition for an administrative review of the process used by the Halton DSB that led to the decision to close Brantwood, Linbrook, Chisholm and New Central Public schools.

The petition alleges that the Halton DSB did not follow its Board approved Program and Accommodation Review policy.

I have reviewed the petition, supporting material, and met with the organizers and leadership of the petition. The petition claims that the Board provided no alternative accommodation plans to the PARC. The Board policy is absolutely clear. Section 2.7 of the policy states that "an information package necessary to permit the PARC to carry out its mandate will be provided no later than at the commencement of the PARC's first public meeting." It goes on to say the package will include:

"Alternative accommodation plans for students in the schools located in the area of the accommodation review including suggestions as to where the students could be accommodated, what changes to existing facilities might be required, what programs could be available to the students, and associated transportation requirements."

The petitioners explained to me that questions were asked of Board staff regarding Halton DSB's preferred grade configurations and the consistent answer was that there was no preferred option.

As the PARC had no focus, nearly 50 members, no alternative accommodation option from the Board, meeting after meeting was held and frustration began to build.

Petitioners expressed concern that the PARC had proceeded with inaccurate financial assumptions. The Board had indicated that only 50% of revenues from the sale of any properties as a result of a school closure could be applied to the accommodation

solutions. This assumption was incorrect; 100% of the revenue was available. The petitioners feel this was so significant that the entire PARC process was faulty.

The petitioners felt that inadequate notice was given to the community to consider the revised Administration report, released June 18, 2008, which outlined the JK-8 model, with a new school in Clearview and 4 existing schools to close. The Board meeting to decide the issue was scheduled for July 2, 2008. The view of the petitioners is that the Board policy calls for 60 day notice.

Concerns were raised about the process used by the PARC and the petitioners argue that it did not “exemplify open decision making”. For example, representatives from the Clearview community were added at the first meeting of the PARC, without discussion or consultation.

The size of the PARC, the lack of a work plan, the role of Trustees and accuracy of data on enrolment and finances were all issues that the petitioners raised when we met.

The bottom line was that in addition to the specifics in the petition, the petitioners felt confused because the June 18, 2008, revised administration report was a complete change from the administration preferred option of April 15, 2008. How did this happen? Why such a radical change? It made no sense to the petitioners, many of whom had been members of the PARC and attended meeting after meeting throughout the fall of 2007, winter and spring of 2008.

THE BOARD’S RESPONSE

I reviewed the Board’s response to the petition, as well as meeting with the Director, his senior management team and I had a separate meeting with the Board of Trustees. While the written and oral responses to the petition covered a lot of territory, I will focus on the issues where there are allegations of the Board contravening its policy.

The Board’s policy seems to be very clear. Section 2.7 of the Board policy states that “An information package necessary to permit the PARC to carry out its mandate will be provided no later than at the commencement of the PARC’s first public meeting”. This information package was to include “alternative accommodation plans”.

The Board’s written response to the petition states: “Alternative accommodation options were not provided at the outset because the intent and spirit of the policy was to allow an approach that had the community generate/develop models as part of the PARC process.”

The Director and the Trustees argued that the reason for this decision was “strategic” because they did not want there to be a perception or an allegation of bias, so the PARC was charged with developing its own scenarios

While the PARC made repeated requests for the Board to state its views concerning a variety of options, the Board rejected these requests. Again, the Board's position was that the community should develop the options.

With respect to the three representatives from the Clearview community presented at the first meeting of the PARC, the Board argues that this representation was a carry-over from a "Program Viability Study Committee" already underway. While no motion was sought at the PARC for approval of this new membership, there was little opposition.

The Board argues that it did not know until after the PARC submitted its report that the financial assumptions it had been operating under were incorrect. According to the Director, it was after his first report had been published that the Ministry confirmed that the Board had access to 100% of the proceeds from the sale of any properties.

When I met for a second time with the Director he stated that the PARC was not informed about the significant change in financial assumptions because the message given to the PARC had been "don't talk about funding, talk about program".

Board policy calls for the Board to make its final decision regarding accommodation recommendations from a PARC Report, Administration Report, and Administration Follow-up Report at a regular Board meeting. The Board meeting will not occur sooner than 60 days after the Administration Report, 30 days after the Board meeting held for public input and 15 days after the Administration Follow-up report.

The petitioners claim that the 60 day notice for the closure of schools was not achieved.

The Board argues that adequate and extensive notice was given by issuing a press release, posting on its web-site, the use of local media, and communicating with school council representatives, the PARC, etc.

The Administration and the Board argue that the opportunities for public input exceeded the requirements of the Board policy.

When I met with the Trustees they expressed confidence that the correct decisions had been made and that students would be well served by the changes to a JK-8 system in Ward 3. They told me the lack of debate at the July 2, 2008, Board meeting and the unanimous vote on the final decision was a result of the extensive homework done by all the Trustees. The Trustees pointed out that all 16 new elementary schools built over the past few years by the Board were JK-8 schools, so the decision for Ward 3 continued this direction. This would seem to indicate the Board had a preference for grade configuration that favoured JK-8 but this was never communicated to the PARC.

OBSERVATIONS

The purpose of a comprehensive school accommodation review policy is to guarantee significant opportunities for parent and community input when difficult choices need to be made by a school board concerning the future of community schools.

The Halton DSB Accommodation Review Policy reflects the Ministry of Education's *Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline*, October 31, 2006, which sets out the make-up of the PARC, timelines to follow, information the Board must provide, etc. The policy is a framework for a partnership between the District School Board and the community. While the power clearly resides with the Board to make these decisions, it cannot do so before this partnership examines the community issues and provides its opinions.

The process used for this accommodation review had major flaws from the very beginning. The size of the PARC was unmanageable and the significant membership of school board staff was of concern to some of the parents. While I do not believe the addition of 3 members from the Clearview community was a violation of Board policy, I do believe the way it happened was unclear, and it lacked transparency. Clearview parents were already represented on the PARC from each of the schools their children attended under review.

Without a direction or vision from the Board the PARC had difficulty developing a plan that could unite the community and allow it to move forward. The lack of an "alternative accommodation plan" from the Board was a significant mistake and a violation of Board policy.

The role of the trustees on the PARC was confusing. On one hand there was an expectation that trustees should remain neutral, yet on the other hand their involvement was extensive. I will not detail this issue but I think it is clear the local trustee's interventions resulted in some members of the community feeling concerned.

The change in the financial assumptions that came to light, after the PARC submitted its report, was significant. It would be difficult to believe that this new financial information did not have a very significant, if not decisive, influence on the final decision of the Board. It seemed to change everything. In addition a mistake was made in the *Revised Administration Report* to the Board regarding the number of students to be bussed for E.J. James Public School. The report originally stated 30 students but was corrected on July 22, 2008, to 300.

The decision making process followed by the Board from April to July 2, 2008, was not transparent and it confused the community. I think everyone involved, the Board, Administration, and the communities would have to agree that the change from the first preferred option to the final decision was a complete surprise.

The PARC put in hours and hours at meeting after meeting and in the end their work did not seem to be valued. The Director told me that the PARC process was just one of the

avenues for consultation by the Board but given the policy framework for accommodation review, it has to be seen as much more than that.

The final Board meeting on July 2, 2008, did little to convince the public that the decision making process was transparent. There was little debate, and a unanimous vote, for an accommodation plan that a few weeks ago was not even on the table.

The Petition argues that the timelines provided for in the Board policy were violated because 60 days notice was not given after the Director released his preferred option that called for the closure of more schools. While the option released June 13, 2008 was significantly different than the earlier one and it resulted in more schools closing, I do not believe that would require the 60 day notice. The timelines set out in the Board policy are pretty clear and set out requirements for each stage of the review process.

The community understood that schools needed to be closed. They knew the status quo would not work. If the Board had followed its own policy and presented an alternative accommodation plan, perhaps the PARC would have been able to provide the Board with the advice required to find a more acceptable solution.

SUGGESTIONS

The accommodation review in Southeast Oakville was a significant undertaking by the Halton DSB. For many years the Board had attempted to deal with accommodation issues in this part of Oakville.

Everyone seems to understand that schools need to close and others need to be updated and renovated. The Clearview community has a school site but no school and I believe there is general agreement that this should be corrected. All parents involved would like to see as few students being bussed as possible.

It is reasonable to agree that these issues need to be resolved by the Halton DSB.

How these matters are addressed can either bring communities together or divide them. The PARC process followed by the Board decision making process has resulted in division because it lacked transparency and from the outset it did not clearly state what the Board wanted to achieve.

An alternative to continued division and conflict would be in the best interest of the students.

I encourage the Board, the Petitioners and the Clearview community to step back and consider what could be done to lead to a consensus for both Clearview and Southeast Oakville. This consensus must put the interest of students first.

The accommodation plan needs to reduce the excess pupil places in Southeast Oakville. This means some schools need to be closed and the remaining schools renovated and modernized. Clearview students need accommodation in their own community. The plan should result in as few students being bussed as possible.

Perhaps a two month process could be set-up to explore solutions and work from the Board's goal of meeting the accommodation needs of students in both Southeast Oakville and Clearview. Another possible process would be a revised PARC, with shorter timelines and a focussed mandate.

Whatever steps are taken to find common ground, everyone involved must be open-minded about possible solutions. The Board would have to understand that its existing Board approved position would likely change but the objectives would remain the same.

Continued conflict means important staff and financial resources are diverted from students. It is in the interest of the Board, the communities and most of all the students to find a solution.

In the longer term I would also suggest that the Board review its accommodation review policy. The size of the PARC needs to be examined and the role of Trustees on the PARC should be clarified.

CONCLUSIONS

I want to thank the Trustees, Board officials, members of the PARC, and the Petitioners for their time and advice. Much work went into preparing material for my review of the process and this was very much appreciated.

Quality public education and up to date schools are important to our communities and essential if our Province is to prosper. They offer an opportunity for students to grow and develop the necessary skills to lead a successful life. It's not surprising that when a Board examines schools for possible closure that parents and communities have very strong, emotional reactions. Because communities care about their schools, school boards need to have clear policy that sets out the process for community input leading to a decision by the elected trustees. These decisions are best made by the locally elected trustees who have the local community knowledge, understand the needs of their students and are accountable to their constituents. However, the Board needs to understand that Public Education is a partnership with parents and the community and this partnership needs to be nurtured and respected.

The process followed by the Halton DSB fell short. As I have already stated, the PARC process lacked direction, because the Board decided, not to provide "alternative accommodation plans" even though their Board approved policy requires this.

I can't help but believe that the PARC process would have been better served if the Board policy had been followed. A Board cannot decide to violate its own policy for "strategic" reasons.

Based on my review and consultations I have concluded that the Halton District School Board failed to adhere to its Board-approved policy. I suggest that the board and the community review my suggestions and work together to find solutions for this matter.

Dave Cooke
Facilitator