

Boundary Review Committee Minutes
May 10, 2011
Palermo Public School

Co-Chairs: Trustee Kelly Amos and Superintendent Stuart Miller

Superintendent Miller called the meeting to order at 7 pm – thanking all the committee members for their dedication and hard work. The chair reminded members that it was important to provide recommendations tonight as this was the final meeting.

1. Process

The meeting began with a brief review of the process. Members have participated in eight committee meetings plus one public meeting. It has taken a lot of hard work to reduce the number of scenarios from 15 to the final three. This committee has had to tackle an emotional issue within respective school communities. All members came on this committee in the spirit of recommending a scenario that supports all students in West Oakville and not individual communities. Superintendent Miller highlighted specialties at all three existing high schools currently in West Oakville - WOSS, TAB, Abbey Park – all superb schools in their own right. The new high school may have a “newer” building but staff and program will be on the same excellent path.

2. Role of BRC

Chair reminded committee that the role of the BRC is not to pick sides but to make a recommendation to the Steering Committee. The role of the BRC is really two part. Firstly, the BRC agrees on recommendation(s) to forward to the Boundary Review Steering Committee. The Steering Committee makes recommendation(s) to the Director, who then makes the final recommendation(s) to Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees are the only people who vote on the recommendation. The BRC is not making the decision – lobbying for information and providing recommendations are the role of this group. Last week there was a tendency to lobby for the best fit for particular communities and that is not the role of this committee. Secondly, the role of this committee is to bring a community together. This community will have a new high school – the program and staff will not be any better than other schools – just a newer building. The BRC is focusing on all West Oakville students and communities – bringing communities together is all important.

One member noted that consensus was required to get to three preferred scenarios and consensus means majority of opinion – not unanimous. It was noted that the four feedback forms that was missing were received but not brought to this meeting as staff advised no new information.

3. Questions

Cost of French Immersion

The Superintendent of Business Services provided additional background information on the funding for French Immersion. It was noted that the funding per pupil foundation grant covers class size of 22. Because the average FI high school class is in excess of 22, the foundation grant covers the cost of French teachers – no additional dollars required – has no impact on English subject teachers. For each new section (a section is a class) additional funding (texts, supplies) is provided for the first two years (\$1350 – 1st year and \$950 – 2nd year) Transportation costs approximately \$15,000 per run. Currently three runs to TAB - \$45,000. Scenario 5 would have more students walking to school so only two runs – savings of \$15,000 in transportation costs.

Superintendent gave a brief overview of the timetabling process in high school. FI students take 10 courses in French (4 in Gr. 9, 4 in Gr. 10, 1 in Gr. 11 and 1 in Gr. 12) In Grades 9 and 10 a student usually takes 8 credits while in Grades 11 and 12 a student may choose only 6 credits. For example, 400 sections; teachers are based on a formula; more students – more teachers; not part of programming. i.e. 90 students – 3 sections of 30 Try to keep class size lower for Grade 9 – applied then academic; therefore, other classes – senior level higher numbers. FI just another section – look at total numbers. Decision-making process the same for FI and English programming. They are all lumped in as classroom sections. Sp. Ed and OYAP are specific sections. It is a reality that most of the school budget is spent on staffing.

4. Discussion of Scenarios

Chair steered Committee towards discussing what information would help the Steering Committee about a particular scenario.

- Good quality programming
- Limit student movement
- Limit overcrowding – class sizes do not increase – space becomes an issue not class size – i.e. use seminar room, back of library for classroom, teachers don't always have access to classroom during prep time.

An open dialogue followed with questions raised by BRC members.

- One BRC member asked if there was a scenario that trustees were considering that is not one of the three preferred scenarios? Historically, this has happened in the past – if so, would like to discuss openly. Chair of Board – Do you expect one of these three scenarios to be approved exactly as it is today? BRC said yes. The Board Chair said it was unrealistic not to expect any change and that the Trustees would honour all three recommendations and said that there was absolutely no other scenario being contemplated. One Trustee noted that French Immersion with a September 2016 start was a concern. This Trustee believed that an earlier start should be considered. It was noted that when boundaries are changed, it is important to include grandfathering as much as possible.

- One member asked if there was a tipping point regarding numbers for each high school? A point where Board is uncomfortable... This is a grey area as different schools have a different ability to absorb more students. New school can accommodate more students – i.e. easier for portables. Because students don't take 8 out of 8 credits, there is flexibility – 15% more usually okay – problems arise when specialty classes are large (science lab, computer room) – quick fix is lunch hour classes - three lunches when student population is 20 – 25% overcapacity. For example overcrowding at WOSS which has two lunch periods has resulted with students in hallways, excessive garbage, extracurricular activities more difficult, classroom shortage – stage used for music class, teachers work/eating area a classroom. Staff can make it work, but it is not ideal. A third lunch period is always an option. At Abbey Park, with its current population of 1250 students, is almost out of science room space with 57 of the available 60 science class sections filled.
- One BRC member reminded the committee that 13 of the scenarios were generated by the Planning Department – only two were generated by members. BRC member concerned that trustees present have boundary concerns and numbers concerns that are being mentioned now at this late date. Member noted that the committee never brainstormed as a group how to make scenarios better, but always were debating merits of scenarios put forth by staff. Reflection if committee should be focusing on making these three scenarios better. Chair of Board would be happy to hear how these scenarios might be improved. Need to give Director best information possible. BRC would like to know how trustees would improve scenarios. Generating new ideas and feedback was purpose of this committee.
- One BRC member noted that up to and including the public meeting there was a good feeling – members had bonded. After April 28 meeting – group divided. Concentration tonight has to be about making scenarios work. Original survey sent to homes in Ward 4 resulted in a strong sentiment that community wanted a community school. What does that mean? Better neighbours – your children generate relationships for your whole family. We have great programming in Halton. Numbers are the best forecast that can be done. Ten year plans still need to be reviewed annually – commitment to regular review. Create flexibility in all of the schools – different ways to enhance each school. With numbers starting in 2012, it was suggested that flexibility was needed until FI programming starts in 2015 or 2016. Plan needs to be reviewed on a regular basis. It was suggested that optional attendance be promoted, let people have more choice, tweak boundaries for specific neighbourhoods, grandfathering for all students.
- BRC member expressed concern that NW Oakville has largest population in Oakville and that the Town was considering dividing NW Oakville into two wards.

- Stability of student is key. Constant moving of children in school atmosphere can be detrimental – forming relationships, building trust. Over the past several years, students have been moved by the Board causing parents to cope with school-to-school moves. A big variable is high-growth area. Number of transitions is definitely a negative in student achievement; however, it is less negative when whole cohort moves than small groups.
- One BRC member noted that it was critically important to hear from trustees as to preferences. The more information the trustees have the better. Trustees encouraged “tweaking” at the BRC level.
- Concern by one member that numbers for new school will be over-populated very quickly – private school students, Catholic students, new homes if FI started early.
- It was noted that optional attendance is the responsibility of principal and superintendent. Also that Third Line is a “wiggly line” – follows the Forest Trail boundary – need to clarify.

The Committee was asked to review scenarios with input that would be helpful to Director. What can make this scenario better? It was decided to review the three preferred scenarios with two views: Points to Consider and Possible Improvements*

Scenario One

Points to Consider

- FI boundary remains the same (all students to TAB)
- Abbey Park population stabilized, (numbers are down but reality is that optional attendance does have impact) leaves room for flexibility, meets LTAP goal to reduce overcrowding at Abbey Park. New school has low school population
- Pressure on school population at TAB
- Possible impact on long-term stability for FI students at TAB, stability for the present
- No FI program offered north of QEW
- Public preference from feedback received
- English boundaries are logical
- FI – keeps cohorts together
- Keeps TAB viable
- Low numbers in new high school – so more flexibility
- Possible students leaving FI program at high school level
- Most balanced for all schools

Possible Improvements

- Need to review TAB school population in two years
- Co-build a French Immersion Program with the new French Catholic High School on Bronte Road.
- Has the most students in oldest high school – possible building improvements
- Status quo for FI students for two years, review, 2014 flexibility to convert to Scenario 5 if room at new high school. Helps long-term viability at TAB
- Innovative Programming – new French Catholic school in North, consider offering Grade 11, Grade 12 FI credit at Abbey Park and new H.S. as well as TAB

Scenario Five

Points to Consider

- FI introduced in 2016 might coincide with first portable, perception for community negative
- Expectation that French will end up at new high school. Students need to know what high school they will be attending. FI moved from QEP to TAB. It takes time for program (2 -3 years) to be integrated into school and for new FI students to feel “at home.”
- Need FI high school in NW Oakville – sooner start would be better
- Reality is that the new high school is overcrowded by 2020
- Need flexibility in the new high school
- This will give FI students in this part of Oakville opportunity to walk to high school.
- Keeps maximum number of students in community.

Possible Improvements

- Review process to ensure long-term stability
- Open Abbey Park for optional attendance and grandfathering
- Introduce FI Grade 8 to new high school in 2015 so FI Grade 8 and FI Grade 9
- Offer Grade 11, Grade 12 FI French courses as soon as school opens
- Move English boundary north of Upper Middle to better balance English program between Abbey Park and new high school.
- Start Forest Trail Grade 9 students in new high school for Sept. 2012. Flexible boundary – difficult to manage flexible boundaries for administration.
- A BRC member noted that people spend \$800,000 on a home, or rent a home, in a particular boundary to go to a particular school and they would not be happy with “flexible boundaries.” On BRC member supported the comment and noted that they had purchased a home based on location of a “future” walk-to school and then had to relocate family from this area as the children were not able to attend as the walk-to community school was opened as a single track FI school.
- Implement caps for FI (trustee noted that this would involve a policy change).

Scenario Ten

Points to Consider

- Students will walk or be bussed by neighbourhood high school.
- Splits Palermo English cohort.
- Bussing costs for some Palermo students to Abbey Park.
- Pressure on Abbey Park enrolment – at or near capacity till 2015.
- Abbey Park is a holding school for Palermo and was never intended to be its long-term school.
- Does not alleviate overcrowding at Abbey Park.
- New school underutilized.

Possible Improvements

- Students at Palermo have ability to have optional attendance at new high school.
- Start FI program earlier at new high school. Optional attendance for FI students at new high school. (Forest Trail students could walk to new HS not be bussed to TAB) Program is the number one criteria for Optional Attendance at high school.

** The BRC does not endorse these possible improvements from members and trustees. There was no time to discuss whether they were good ideas or not and no time for data analysis.*

5. Other Recommendations outside Scenarios

- Look at new high school starting with Grade 9 and 10.
- Possible extension of grandfathering to lower grades – this could impact class sizes and program especially in grade 11. Currently the new High School is scheduled to open as Grades 9-11. Effective 2012 – four-year program.
- Better transparency has been a good process. Public meetings regarding LTAP (Long-term Accommodation Plan) The annual Open House needs to be better communicated to public at large what an LTAP Open House is about.
- Schools are closed to optional attendance when overcrowded. All Oakville High Schools have accepted optional attendance students; elementary schools are more likely to be closed schools.
- BRC member suggested that data analysis (population projections) be done, and shared, for any possible improvements including trustees' improvements. Information put on the website. (Information would be in Board report.) Steering Committee could consider sending report to BRC members after trustees have received their package.
- There is a two-week process for Board Meetings. Report would be available a few nights before Board meeting. Delegations would be two weeks later. Decision-making process would take place at the next Board meeting. The Board can defer decision if new information is tabled or recommended. If amendment to recommendation were significant, the decision would likely be deferred to give public a chance to respond.

6. Wrap-up

11 trustees (4 Oakville, 4 Burlington, 2 Milton, 1 Halton Hills) Majority vote.

Director will make a recommendation to the Board based on input from BRC Steering Committee. Principals of involved high schools have had an opportunity to provide input. The chair asked for one overall comment from each BRC member to provide final closure. The BRC will be forwarding all three preferred scenarios with additional comments to the Steering Committee for further review.

- Allow the most students to stay in their community
- All neighbourhood students should be attending new high school.
- Need to meet LTAP goal of alleviating Abbey Park overcrowding.
- Ensure that all high schools in West Oakville remain vibrant.
- Strive for balanced school enrolment and program viability.
- French Immersion program deserves same commitment and importance as other programs.
- Trust staff to develop creative solution from the referred scenarios.
- Chosen scenario needs to have flexibility.
- Recommendation should maintain integrity of preferred scenarios.
- Students' security and stability are key.
- Good core values of community – flexibility is important.
- Don't lose key impact of preferred scenarios while "tweaking."
- FI offers a good learning opportunity to speak both official languages in Canada, Canada is a dual-language country. Benefit to have FI in a community high school.
- Balanced numbers in all high schools.
- Balance in schools with room to grow; hope committee input is heard and taken into consideration.
- School community should be heard. English is mandated program and deserves priority.
- Ensure a balanced enrolment in all high schools. Flexibility is important. Key to make sure BRC is heard.
- Public Meeting provided input – even though limited – it should be considered.
- Good dialogue, respect for fellow members

Thanks extended to the BRC for their recommendations. June 1 is the tentative Board meeting scheduled to preview final recommendation. Information regarding upcoming meeting will be on Board website.

Meeting adjourned at 10:50 p.m.