

This committee recommends

THAT the five schools forming this ARC, namely Caradoc Central school, Caradoc North school, Caradoc South school, Ekcoe Central school and Metcalfe Central school, remain open, viable, and the hubs of each of their respective communities.

Rationale

The senior administration's recommendation to close Caradoc South school in Melbourne and Metcalfe Central school in Adelaide-Metcalfe, transfer students to the other three schools, and build a large addition to Caradoc Central school is premature, ill-conceived and lacking vision for the future. It is discouraging and disappointing to learn from Executive Superintendent Karen Dalton that this recommendation was made by administrators at the TVDSB headquarters, strictly on a square footage basis, and that the schools and communities in question were never toured.

The recommendation to close elementary schools strikes this committee as premature in light of several proposals put forth by the provincial Ministry of Education. One is the ministry's commitment to full day, full time senior and junior kindergarten. This commitment alone will necessitate the doubling of kindergarten space across the province. Another is the implementation of French immersion at the junior kindergarten age. Still another is the execution of a hard cap on class sizes in the junior division of grades four, five and six, similar to what is now in effect for primary classes. The cumulative impact of these proposals will be a need for more elementary school space, not less, and consequently, the board is moving in the wrong direction with their recommendation to close two elementary schools in southwest Middlesex.

The board proposal is ill-conceived. Moving students from five schools to three, will result in the students having less access to library facilities, gymnasium/general purpose rooms and outside greenspace as the board's proposal will close two of the five libraries, two of the five gymnasiums/general purpose rooms, and two of the five greenspaces. The board administration had touted closures and bussing students to the three remaining schools as giving them increased librarian time with a larger student body; however, access to the remaining three libraries by the same number of students now housed in five schools would mean an individual student would have less library time. Likewise, the provincial government has initiated quality daily physical education to improve the health and fitness of elementary school pupils. With the five current gymnasiums/general purpose rooms in the five schools, students are more likely to be able to use these gyms/general purpose rooms for QDPA, rather than struggling with exercises in their classrooms among their desks.

Students at Ekcoe Central school and Caradoc North Central school would be disadvantaged by the board administration's proposal, as more students (from the current Metcalfe and Caradoc South schools) would be added to their student populations, with no additional facilities. The only school to benefit from the board's proposal is Caradoc Central school, which would receive a large addition to its building.

The board's proposal lacks vision for the future. Two of the schools in our ARC, Metcalfe Central school and Caradoc North school, are in close proximity to the town of Strathroy, in Strathroy-Caradoc. The public elementary schools of Strathroy are all over 100% accommodation capacity, according to the TVDSB "Enrolment versus Capacity Summary" prepared by Superintendent Dalton at the request of Middlesex trustee Sharon Peters. Southdale PS is at 102.48% capacity; North Meadows PS is at 103.8% capacity; Colborne Street PS is at 134.94% capacity. A more visionary approach would be to change boundaries to redistribute student populations more evenly. (See recommendation to follow.)

Also lacking vision is the board's idea for secondary school students. The board's proposal is for the majority of Caradoc South students to be bussed to Caradoc Central school. Caradoc South is currently a feeder school for Glencoe District High School. Transferring these students to Caradoc Central would encourage these pupils to feed to Strathroy District Collegiate Institute at the secondary school level, weakening the student population of Glencoe DHS. Reducing the number of feeder schools for GDHS to two, would almost certainly destroy the viability of this rural high school.

The board administration gave figures for a capital plan for each of the five elementary schools in our ARC. Included was a building program cost projection for each school which estimated the cost of new gymnasium/general purpose rooms at Caradoc North, Caradoc Central, Caradoc South and Metcalfe Central schools, though no community member or ARC representative, excepting those from Caradoc Central in Mt Brydges, ever expressed any desire to change, modify or increase in size the gymnasium/general purpose rooms of their respective schools. Likewise, estimated costs were given for renovated library resource centres at Caradoc North, Caradoc Central, Caradoc South and Metcalfe Central schools, and a brand new one at Ekcoe Central school though no member of the public or ARC representatives expressed dissatisfaction with the current libraries in their schools. The resulting estimated costs for renovations not asked for or needed artificially raised the cost of maintaining the five schools studied. Similarly, an analysis of the ReCAPP Backlog and Future costs provided by senior administration showed that the total cost of events (repairs and renovations) deemed high priority to ensure the functioning and maintenance of the five schools was significantly lower than the millions of dollars estimated. Executive Superintendent Dalton acknowledged the ReCAPP figures were high for the London-Middlesex area as they were set by a provincial committee using Toronto construction figures. The asset replacement value of the schools in question were made by TVDSB. Comparing the artificially high ReCAPP figures of events (repairs) that might never take place, or might well into the future, against the replacement value of the school buildings costed a different way, to obtain a Facilities Condition Index (FCI) is inaccurate and outside of generally accepted accounting practices. Members of the public were unanimous in their desire to keep their community schools open with the facilities they had.

Two of the schools in our study, Metcalfe Central and Caradoc South, have student populations of less than 200. The final argument to keeping them, and the other three community schools open are the program benefits for students in elementary schools under 200 students provided at the February meeting, after being requested by ARC members. These include: the staff know all the students and their families well; its easy for the principal to be in the classroom and spend

time as a curriculum leader; staff tend to work as one team; communication is easy among a small staff; implementation of new initiatives and /or information is facilitated more quickly; improvements are tracked and analysed easily; routines and expectations are implemented easily; large percentage of children involved in extracurricular activities. Parents have a strong sense of community and ownership, and a high percentage are involved in the life of the school.

In conclusion, there are many advantages to the students, their families and their communities in keeping open and viable the five schools we have analysed in this accommodation review committee.