

REPORT OF THE OXFORD STUDY 1: *East Oxford and Sweaburg Public Schools*
SCHOOL ACCOMMODATION REVIEW COMMITTEE
2008 June 04
CHAIRPERSON: Graham Hart

Recommendations

In support of the Committee's mandate to respond to the Senior Administration's recommendation, the Oxford Study 1: East Oxford and Sweaburg Public Schools Accommodation Study Committee approved the following recommendations on 2008 June 04.

The Committee recommends:

THAT Sweaburg Public School remain open as a viable school in Sweaburg (see Appendix 1)

THAT the Board provide to the Sweaburg community an opportunity to present results of The Township of South West Oxford and Sweaburg Public School Partnership Study prepared by the Township of South-West Oxford. (see Appendix 2)

THAT the Board receive the Township of South-West Oxford's Approved Motion and consider future partnerships across the district. (see Appendix 3)

THAT should Thames Valley District School Board vote against the Accommodation Study Committee's recommendations and consolidate East Oxford and Sweaburg Public Schools, the Board's administration will discuss with the community issues pertaining to program enhancements, transportation, facility upgrades and, student programming and supports, including additional washrooms, emergency exits in the gymnasium, and reconfiguration of the main office to allow for enhanced security.

Background

The Thames Valley District School Board approved the following motion on 2007 April 10.

1. THAT TRUSTEES APPROVE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FOLLOWING ACCOMMODATION REVIEW COMMITTEE:

Oxford Study Area 1: East Oxford Central and Sweaburg Public Schools

OXFORD:

Postponed because of weather from its scheduled date of 2007 March 05, this regional meeting was held on 2007 March 19. It recommended that the Board consider establishing three ARCs for the area listed below. Administration recommends the following:

Oxford Study Area 1:

That an ARC be established to review accommodation issues affecting East Oxford Central and Sweaburg Public Schools.

The closure of Sweaburg Public School with its very small enrolment of JK-3 students was formally proposed through the draft Capital Plan. Given the current and anticipated enrolment of that school and given that its pupils could be accommodated at East Oxford Central Public School without an addition, *it is recommended that this ARC proceed this year.*

The six (6) committee members, representing two school communities, met on the following dates:

Wednesday, 2007 November 07

Wednesday, 2007 November 28

Thursday, 2008 January 17
 Wednesday, 2008 February 13
 Wednesday, 2008 March 05
 Wednesday, 2008 May 07
 Wednesday, 2008 June 04

Representatives of the Thames Valley District School Board included Trustee, Graham Hart, who presided over the meetings. Administrative support was provided by Susan Livesey, Secretarial Assistant to the Superintendent of Education; Gil Owens, Planning Officer; Bill Tucker, Director of Education (former Superintendent of Education), and Principal Linda Baker. In addition, Vice-Chairperson/Trustee James Stewart and Superintendent Lynne Griffith-Jones attended meetings.

During the course of its meetings, the Committee considered, discussed and investigated the benefits, issues, concerns and considerations for the Administrative recommendation. The committee heard eleven (11) presentations from individuals and two (2) group presentations. The committee received four (4) correspondence letters.

The Committee members informed and consulted their respective communities. Monthly school newsletters and school signage included reminders about upcoming meetings.

Post-Analysis Senior Administration’s Recommendation

The draft capital plan criteria included reviewing unique situations and programs as well as identifying opportunities for consolidating future students into fewer schools.

Senior Administration recommends that students currently at Sweaburg be consolidated at East Oxford. Minor renovations at East Oxford would provide space for an instrumental program. Sweaburg Public School would close.

Estimated Costing Breakdown for Senior Administration’s Recommendation:

Oxford Study 1	Estimated Total Cost
East Oxford Central Public School - Renovations	\$50,000

The Committee received and examined:

1. Pre Valuation templates for each school involved.
2. Post Valuation templates for the resulting schools in the Senior Administrative recommendation
3. Boundary maps for each of the schools involved in the ARC
4. Independent Procedure - Pupil Accommodation and Facility Organization
5. Accommodation Review Committee (ARC) Template Definitions / Parameters / Component Value Factor Guidelines
6. Resource Binder Contents Summary
7. Post-Analysis Senior Administration’s Recommendation
8. Enrolment and OTG for East Oxford and Sweaburg Public Schools
9. Presentation by Gil Owens on East Oxford and Sweaburg boundaries
10. Thames Valley District School Board Enrolment - Actual Enrolment 1998-1999 to 2007-2008 (FTE) and Projected Enrolment 2008-2009 to 2012-2013 (FTE)

Committee Membership

<u>School</u>	<u>Representative</u>
East Oxford Central	Ronnie Zivcic
Sweaburg Central	Randy Silverthorne
<u>Citizen</u>	<u>Representative</u>
East Oxford Central	Rob Harris
Sweaburg Central	Rob Dempsey

Business

Jakeman's Maple Products

Representative

Bob Jakeman

Municipal Leaders

Township of South-West Oxford

Representative

Jay Heaman

Trustee

Graham Hart

LG-J/sl

2008 June 04

Appendix 1 - Proposal for East Oxford / Sweaburg Public Schools

Appendix 2 - The Township of South West Oxford and Sweaburg Public School Partnership Study

Appendix 3 - The Township of South-West Oxford Approved Motion

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Proposal for East Oxford/Sweaburg Public Schools

This committee recommends:

That Sweaburg Public School, remain open, viable, and integral part of the social hub of this community and further that Sweaburg and East Oxford continue as a twinned elementary schools.

During the course of ARC meetings, it has become apparent to this committee, that the process of accommodation review is creating a paradox of sorts. The ongoing viability of a school is directly proportional to the number of students who enrol at that school, yet the very threat of school closure deters these same parents from choosing an otherwise local and superior facility for fear of disrupting the education of their child. For parents, a major decision making factor is the longevity and enduring qualities of a school.

It is the opinion of this committee that Sweaburg Public School would in fact, attract many more students, were it viewed by the population as a long-term asset, with appropriate allocation of funding and resources. Yet, in reality Sweaburg Public School continues to be victimized by these cancerous reviews, which propagate further decline, leading to yet another Board ARC review.

We believe that with creative thinking, community spirit and positive re-enforcement from Thames Valley School Board, Sweaburg will once again become a thriving and growing school – a school that both the community and the Board can continue to be proud of.

Rationale – Value to the Community

Sweaburg School – a Social Facility

Sweaburg Public School is a vital part of this community. The school continues to serve as a social center for the entire village of Sweaburg and it's surrounding area. The facility provides the area with a health clinic, voting station, bike rodeos, practice fields, playground, and Easter egg hunts and of course the annual Sweaburg Lions sponsored skating rink. Most importantly, it provides the

Proposal for East Oxford/Sweaburg Public Schools

parents and children with a warm and inviting place to meet and socialize outside school hours. This ability to socialize is what separates Sweaburg Public School from any other school in the district. We as parents know whom our kids are playing with and we know their parents as we see them almost everyday. This social aspect is evident in the number of parent volunteers it has and fosters a sense of ownership and pride.

Ontario Early Years Centre

This committee also recommends that the Board enter into and thoroughly investigate the possibility of using additional space for a proposed Early Years Centre. This would create a further sense of ownership and provide a valuable service for the community while providing the Board with an additional form of revenue. The Early Years Centre suggested this potential partnership.

Joint or Shared Partnership Arrangement

This committee also recommends that the Board continue to promote changes with the ministry regarding joint or shared accommodation arrangements. Our committee in cooperation with the Township South West Oxford unanimously agreed to initiate a survey of area residents to gauge participation in a shared partnership arrangement with the Board. (See Appendix A) It is this committee's expectation that with the approval of the community the Board will partner with the Township in good faith in preparing, and administering the results of this survey. We ask that the Board refrain from any decision regarding this school until either the Province changes its rules regarding shared or joint arrangements and South West Oxford Township has had a sufficient amount of time to analyze the results of the survey, so that the Township will be able to make an informed decision. It is the belief of this committee and Township that the results of this survey will show that the residents of Sweaburg and its surrounding area desire an innovative approach to reducing the Boards operating cost while maintaining such a vital component of this community. It is also believed that by implementing this proposal that we as a school community and School Board can become a model for other boards throughout the Province.

Proposal for East Oxford/Sweaburg Public Schools

Rationale – Value to the Student

Templates

It is this committee's view that the templates used in weighting a school are discriminatory and misleading and should be viewed as such when reviewing the findings of this ARC. Note that the lack of a school gymnasium has never been at issue with the parents of Sweaburg and see no reason to include it into the template or in the Capital Draft Plan prepared by the Board. The school also received a low rating for extra-curricular activities and because we are talking about primary grade children who have no access to any such events question the relevancy of this material. The school also received a low rating for an adequate size play yard and we would like to remind the Board that these children probably have more square footage of play fields per student than any other school within the entire School Board including East Oxford due to segregation of its' student population.

Loss of Quality Physical Education

It is the opinion of this committee that the overall physical education requirement would also be compromised. At a time when the provincial government has mandated certain requirements regarding this issue, a move of the students to East Oxford would not only reduce the quality but also the quantity of its PDQA requirement. The students of Sweaburg Public School have access to their own personal skating rink every winter. With actual gym time being at a premium an increase in students would only lead to a further decline in the amount of quality PDQA time.

Loss of Library Time

This committee also believes that the students will also lose an abundance of quality library time. The students have access to an almost daily allotment of library time through a combined effort of the Board appointed librarian and the dedicated efforts of the volunteers. This would be an unfortunate loss to our children who are encouraged to become avid readers and this can only be accomplished with access to a library daily not once a week.

Proposal for East Oxford/Sweaburg Public Schools

Bussing

This committee and the parents and community it represents are extremely concerned with the length of bus ride that these young children will be exposed too. The research of this committee with assistance the Board and bussing companies have determined that some of these children will be exposed to 50 plus minute bus rides both ways. It is this committee's view that exposure to such a lengthy bus ride is unwarranted and because this time is estimated the actual time on the bus would probably be longer. These children do not have to be exposed to the safety concerns of riding the bus for such a long time if we do not have too.

This committee also has safety concerns of the proposed pick up and drop off locations proposed by the Board and its transportation companies. The community of Sweaburg currently has no sidewalks and therefore during the winter months when the snow is piled high the children will be forced to stand on the road waiting for the bus. This committee and the community have a major concern of this needless dangerous and lethal scenario and we believe needs to be addressed prior to any decision-making made by the senior management.

The majority of the students attending Sweaburg are not bussed and because of this they receive the most education for our educational dollars. The students at most schools throughout the district for this 2007-2008 school year have missed to date a total of 9 plus days due to bus cancellations. The students of Sweaburg have not been exposed to such delays because the majority walk and therefore receive a better education, which is not being influenced by time constraints and the need to rush through the set curriculum.

A Safe and Caring Environment

Sweaburg School continues to provide its students a very safe and controlled schoolyard through the continued efforts of its volunteers. A schoolyard run by parent volunteers provides all the students a sense of comfort and this can only be achieved through familiarity. This proximity provides the parents an additional form of comfort, which is also the reason why Sweaburg School has the number of volunteers that it does. A move of the students to East Oxford will not translate into more volunteers as the time and cost constraints required to perform this simple thing has increased substantially.

The students are provided a warm and caring environment that can only be achieved in a small school. The teachers are seen as being part of the

Proposal for East Oxford/Sweaburg Public Schools

community and are treated as such. The almost unlimited supply of volunteers is only achieved because of the proximity and knowing that this building is more than a school it is part of the community. The children are encouraged to act as role models for the younger children and are not exposed to large schoolyard problems such as bullying rarely if ever occur. The older children not only function as reading buddies to the JK/SK classes but are also used as lunchroom assistants to the teachers. The students of Sweaburg School acquire a sense of self-worth through responsibility and this can only be achieved at a small school. This continuous interaction between the JK/SK classes and the higher grades is one of the reasons why Sweaburg has such a negligible rate of improper behaviour from its students. The students of Sweaburg are encouraged to include all the grades at recess and this is clearly evident as one visits the school during recess time.

Rationale: Value to the Board

The Use of Biased Templates

When the committee started to research this topic several glaring factors arose concerning the valuation template. The template gave Sweaburg a low rating for the fact that it currently does not have a designated instrumental room and it must be pointed out that since we are discussing the primary grades only that this factor is not applicable and should be disregarded. The template also showed a large amount of money labelled for upgrades so that administration could compare school to school. It needs to be pointed out that these upgrades were not requested nor required if Sweaburg School were to remain open. This, to the committee is irrelevant material and only served to exaggerate the final price tag for keeping Sweaburg School open and should be disregarded. The parents of Sweaburg School are extremely happy with the facilities, as they exist today.

Proposed Teacher Savings

There has been an issue concerning the imputed teacher savings if Sweaburg School were to close? From the templates and figures provided from the Board, the committee has determined that in fact there will be no teacher savings if Sweaburg were to close and that for some unknown reason East Oxford School was provided two additional teachers over the required amount for this past year.

Proposal for East Oxford/Sweaburg Public Schools

The reasoning for this surplus was never supplied to this committee. The loss of a vice-principal if Sweaburg were to close can only be summarized as a complete loss to entire education community. The vice-principal serves in many capacities and a loss of this position will only hurt the education of its students.

Physical Condition of the School

If the condition of the school was a concern to the senior management, we would like to remind administration that this would be a non-issue if it were not for the fact of neglect. The outstanding RECAPP projects currently listed for Sweaburg are still the same items previously mentioned in the last Accommodation Review for Sweaburg back in 2003. At that time, the committee was assured by Kevin Bushell that these items would be addressed and that the school was in no better or worse shape than most schools in the district, yet 5 years later not one of those items has been corrected. The condition of the school and the cost of the RECAPP projects should not be considered when evaluating this schools worth.

Student Achievements

This committee would also like to emphasize that the students expectations realized through the use of EQAO tests were in fact higher at Sweaburg than at East Oxford. The students of Sweaburg have continually outperformed East Oxford in this series of educational testing. These differences may be attributed to the fact that the Sweaburg students because their class sizes are usually smaller receive greater attention and can receive extra support from the teachers and parent volunteers should they require it. Other possible reasons for this difference may be attributed to the role the community plays in the educational process as well as the students receive a greater amount of in class time as they are not influenced by the weather and bus cancellations.

A study conducted in 1995, by Cotton emphasized the advantages of a small school being and not limited to:

- (1) enhancement of personal and academic self concepts of students;
- (2) greater sense of belonging and less feelings of alienation;
- (3) more positive attitudes of teachers and administrators;
- (4) higher attendance rates
- (5) and less behavioural problems.

Proposal for East Oxford/Sweaburg Public Schools

Raywid (1996) reports that teachers have a growth in commitment to the school and students, engage in reflective practice, and expand extra efforts in ensuring that students are active and succeed. In addition, she states the result is improved school organization, effective and appropriate governance, stronger student supports, improved staff effectiveness and satisfaction, better advisement, and enhanced curricula. Raywid (1996) also argues that in times of change small schools are easier to restructure and reform strategies easier to implement. Clearly these benefits of small schools are indisputable.

Bussing and its Potential Hazards

The committee also has several concerns relating to the issue of bussing. The committee was provided no clear evidence that an additional bus route would not be required if Sweaburg were to close. The committee also has concerns over the designated pick up and drop off points within Sweaburg, as the community currently does not have sidewalks. The children's health and safety may be in jeopardy during the winter months. These 3,4,and 5 year old children are being asked to stand on the road to wait for the bus and according to the documentation we received a number of the pickup and drop off points are on corners. This item needs to be addressed! This committee has determined that some of the children will be riding on a bus for 50 plus minutes each way and it is the opinion of this committee that that amount of time is unacceptable.

The committee has not been shown any reasonable evidence that the Board will save any additional monies if Sweaburg School were to close. This committee has questions regarding the assumption that no additional run would be required.

Sweaburg and East Oxford as a Holding Zone

The committee would also suggest that administration look into using additional space in Sweaburg and East Oxford as a Holding-Zone for the continuing expansion of the south end of Woodstock similar to what the Board has done with Algonquin School. These students can easily be accommodated in Sweaburg and East Oxford with little or no additional cost to the Board. The bussing companies currently have routes that approach this end of the city and with little effort can be redirected to this area for pickup. The use of Sweaburg and East Oxford in this capacity serves two purposes, one it alleviates any overcrowding at both Oliver Stephens and Southside and it puts more bodies into the seats at Sweaburg and East Oxford. Gil Owens has projected that the student population of Sweaburg and East Oxford will remain reasonably stable

Proposal for East Oxford/Sweaburg Public Schools

over the next several years so planning for this possibility should be relatively uncomplicated.

Proposed Changes from the Provincial Ministry of Education

The committee would also like to remind administration of the potential changes currently being proposed by the Ministry of Education. A commitment to full day, fulltime junior and senior kindergarten will necessitate the need for additional space throughout the province not less. The provincial government is also considering placing a hard cap on the junior division grades similar to that already in place for the primary grades and this cumulative effect will result in the need for additional space and any such change will require the use of portables as there are currently no additional rooms available at East Oxford School. As administration knows the provincial government does not recognize the use of portables as classrooms and therefore would be an incurred but avoidable cost to the Board.

Boundary Adjustments

The committee would also ask that the boundaries of East Oxford and North Norwich be reviewed to increase the number of OTG capacity of students at East Oxford. The result of this adjustment would be to eliminate the overcrowding and need for portables at North Norwich while increasing the OTG capacity of East Oxford. The bus routes were examined for these two schools and with little modification those students currently attending North Norwich can be transferred to East Oxford. The result of this change would benefit all, increased OTG for East Oxford, eliminate the need for portables and cost associated with them, reduce overcrowding, and reduce the amount of time on the bus for those children affected.

Rationale: Value to the Economy

It is the opinion of this committee that if Sweaburg School were to close that there would be several effects on this community and the Board. If Sweaburg School were to close the community would become a commuter community and as a result the real estate values would be reduced. The result of this is a loss of tax dollars to the Township of South West Oxford and to the Board. The continued threat of closure for Sweaburg has already shown that people are

Proposal for East Oxford/Sweaburg Public Schools

reluctant to send their children here and by removing this threat this committee believes that enrolment at this school will increase not decline.

Conclusion:

In today's society when personal and quality family time is at a premium, the parents and grandparents of Sweaburg School students continue to devote their time in helping run this school. Whether it is for a field trip, classroom helpers, schoolyard monitors, book exchanges in the library or tying skates in the winter, these individuals do this because they love the kids and the school. Sweaburg School is not just a school to these people it is a home, where everyone knows each other and more importantly they look out for each other and this can only be found in this small rural school.

In a school where all the staff knows all the students and most of the families are addressed on a first name, it is easy to see why this school is so deeply cherished. A smaller school tends to run more efficiently, communication is easier, implementation of programs and enhancements less complicated, information is transferred more quickly, improvements and deficiencies are tracked and analyzed more efficiently and any changes to programs and or routines can be administered with relative ease. This can only be done in a small school with smaller class sizes and its dedicated family of teachers, secretaries, students and their families.

A school's inherent value can only be determined by what it means to the community it serves. In spite of the constant threat of closure, Sweaburg School students continue to excel academically and physically and this is because a dedicated and caring community drives the school. The children and parents of Sweaburg School have not asked for a new gymnasium or a new library. What they are asking for is the opportunity to have an education in a loving community school, free from all threats including closure. The face of Sweaburg will ultimately change forever if this school were to close.

This committee is convinced that the fundamental problem with public education is that our schools are becoming divorced from their communities; education is becoming divorced from everyday life. ...The price of this separation is too high. It has cost educators a wealth of resources and potential support. It has alienated adults, diminishing their understanding of education, their interest in lifelong learning and their ability to help their children learn. But most detrimental to society

Proposal for East Oxford/Sweaburg Public Schools

as a whole, has been the weakening of children's ties to their parents, to their communities, and to the idea of learning as part of life.

Education is about more than simply classroom learning, but much of the education of students occurs as a result of being an active and participating member of a community. It is here, where students learn their first lessons in civic and social responsibility. It is here where students learn lessons in compassion, empathy, and leadership. Not through textbooks and classrooms but through their active participation and involvement in their school community. Closing Sweaburg School will negate this opportunity for many students to participate in these activities as a result of long rides to and from school.

The added value of a potential partnership between Thames Valley District School Board and South West Oxford Township will only strengthen our community and provide a conduit to future relationships in small town Ontario.

Proposal for East Oxford/Sweaburg Public Schools

References

Cotton, K. (1996). Affective and Social Benefits of Small-Scale Schooling.
<http://www.ael.org/eric/digests/edorc965.htm>.

Raywid, M.A. (1996). Downsizing Schools in Big Cities.
<http://www.ael.org/eric/digests/edoud961.htm>.

Raywid, M.A. (1999). Current Literature on Small Schools.
<http://www.ael.org/eric/digests/edorc988.htm>.

The Township of South West Oxford & Sweaburg Public School Partnership Study

The future of Sweaburg Public School, the last remaining school in South West Oxford Township is once again up for review for closure by the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB). The school has continued in spite of the threat of closure as early as 1978. The school provides a social network for not only the students but also the entire SWOX community.

Your Accommodation Review Committee (ARC) of East Oxford & Sweaburg Public Schools, along with the support of the SW Oxford Township sees an opportunity to partner with the TVDSB to create a sustainable presence in your community. We are asking you if you support this approach, and if so, to what degree.

This building is so much more than just a school. The grounds continue to provide the community with an ice rink in the winter, practice fields, playground, and a meeting place for young and old. This facility is a place to learn, care, socialize, be active, vote, promote health, and with your help can be so much more. But this is up to you, the residents of South West Oxford Township.

To find out more about the Sweaburg and East Oxford School study, please visit <http://www.tvdsb.on.ca/areastudy/arc/oxford1.shtml>

Your answers to the following questions are pivotal to the future of Sweaburg Public School

1. How long have you been a resident of South West Oxford Township (SWOX)?
(Please circle one)

0-5 yrs 6-10 yrs 11-15 yrs 15yrs and more

2. How important do you believe it is to have a school in our Township?
(please rate from 0 to 5, zero being not important and 5 being very important)

0 1 2 3 4 5

3. How significant was the presence of a community school in your decision to locate in SWOX?
(please rate from 0 to 5, zero being not significant and 5 being very significant)

0 1 2 3 4 5

4. Have you or any of your family attended Sweaburg Public School?

Yes No

5. In the past, have you been frustrated by the possible closing of Sweaburg Public School?

Yes No

Has this threat impacted your decision to send your child to Sweaburg Public School?

Yes No

6. Are you in favour of sharing the school facilities with the community for local services and/or events?

Yes No

7. Are you willing to support a shared arrangement between the Municipality and the School Board through the use of existing tax dollars?

Yes No

Comments:

Name (optional):

Address (optional):

Please mail completed survey by June 1 2008 to:
Township of South West Oxford Attn: ARC SURVEY
312915 Dereham Line
R. R. # 1
Mt. Elgin, On N0J 1N0

Alternatively, you can drop survey off at Sweaburg Daisy Mart.

Township of South-West Oxford

Date: May 6, 2008

Moved by: Jay Keenan Seconded by: George Hender

WHEREAS there are schools in the Township of South-West Oxford that are part of the public school system and that are currently or may in the future be under review for possible closure;

AND WHEREAS the Council of the Corporation of the Township of South-West Oxford is concerned about the impact that the closure of these schools as centres of social, cultural and recreational activity would have on the communities in which they are situated;

AND WHEREAS the Council of the Corporation of the Township of South-West Oxford supports the concept that the municipal and educational sectors should work together to maintain and develop the role of schools as community hubs for social, cultural and recreational activity in addition to their traditional educational functions;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that

- 1) The Minister of Education be requested to investigate ways to promote community partnerships in the use of school facilities.
- 2) The Minister of Education be requested to review its funding policies for school facilities so that surplus school space may be used by community partners (with funding from the community partner) and the space so used not included as surplus/vacant space in the determination of occupancy rates in a way that negatively affects funding for school facilities and thereby promotes school closures.
- 3) That the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) be requested to study the development of community partnerships in the use of school facilities from the municipal perspective and look for ways to maintain and enhance the role of schools as centres for community social, cultural, recreational and other activities.

That the Council of the Township of South-West Oxford support the concept that community partnerships for the use of school facilities be developed that are:

- a) Sustainable,
- b) Beneficial to local communities,
- c) And will achieve efficiencies and cost savings when considered from the perspective of the community as a whole.

"CARRIED"

James Hays
Mayor