



## Accommodation Review Committee Meeting

A meeting of the Accommodation Review Committee was held on March 28, 2007 at 6:30 p.m. at the Waterloo Region Catholic Education Centre.

**Committee  
Members  
Present:**

Rick Boisvert (Principal – St. Nicholas CES), Mark Whaley (Councillor – City of Waterloo), Roger Farwell (The Walter Fedy Partnership), Louise Ervin (Trustee – WCDSB), Roger Lawler (Director of Education), Dave Bennett (Senior Manager of Facilities – WCDSB / Committee Chair), John Shewchuk (Senior Manager, Public Affairs – WCDSB), Bill Strauss (Mayor – Woolwich Township)

**Recording secretary:**

Lindsay Reinhardt (Planner – WCDSB)

**Regrets:**

Chuck Williams (Principal – St. Luke CES), Maureen Sutherland (Parent – St. Paul's), Fr. Charles Fedy (Pastor – St. Agatha Parish), Heather Cullen (Superintendent – WCDSB), Joseph Gowing (Trustee – WCDSB), Brian Page (City of Kitchener), Judy Nairn (Trustee – WCDSB)

NOTE: Representatives from Cambridge City Council and the Cambridge Chamber of Commerce have been invited to participate in both the February 28, 2007 and March 28, 2007 ARC meetings and have not responded.

**Next Meetings:**

Wednesday, April 25, 2007; Wednesday May 30, 2007 (6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.);

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**1. Welcome and Opening Prayer:**

The meeting opened at 6:35 p.m.

**2. Approval of Minutes**

There were no corrections to the minutes from the February 28<sup>th</sup> meeting. The minutes will be posted on the Board's website.

**3. Overview of Accommodation Review Process**

Dave Bennett outlined the general process that a local accommodation review committee (ARC) will go through in a review. The first step, once the local ARC is established, is to modify the generic framework by adding other issues that they feel should be examined and establishing a weighting for each subsection. The second step is to use the framework to evaluate each school in the review area. The framework will then be used to develop a report for each school. It will identify issues and problems for each individual school. The valuation scores will be included in this report. A summary report will then be written to compare the schools in the review area. Using this information, solutions in the form of alternative scenarios will be generated. A preferred alternative will then be decided upon and be taken to the board of trustees for approval and then implantation.

The framework is intended to be used to collect background information, flesh out the text of the report and provide context. This accommodation review process is very similar to what has been done by WCDSB in past reviews. The general framework must protect the Board's interests and be flexible enough to fit all scenarios and allow for local ARC modifications.

#### **4. Review and Discussion of Criteria in the Valuation Framework**

Dave Bennett introduced the generic valuation framework as a tool that can be added to by local ARCs. However, everything in the generic framework must be examined by the local ARC. Feedback is needed as to whether the draft is too specific and does it cover everything it should? He reminded the committee that it has to be broad enough to be used to evaluate every school in the WCDSB system.

After having confirmed with the Ministry of Education, WCDSB has decided to generate an elementary-specific framework because secondary closures are not foreseeable in the next couple of decades. It will be written in the policy that at such a time when a secondary review is being considered, a committee will be established to create a valuation framework for the secondary panel prior to the onset of an accommodation review.

##### **Discussion – Quality of the learning environment**

Roger Lawler indicated that there is no provincial standard for the ratio of students to computers but the board standard is 5:1 at the elementary level. However, more computers are put in schools where the students do not have computer access at home. This ratio will be highly variable from school to school and is not necessarily an indication of the quality of the learning environment. Maybe the availability of technology should be the question and whether the school is easily retrofitted for technology upgrades.

Dave Bennett indicated that the school building is different than the school community. Past reviews have generally focused on the physical school building and the location. Now things like programs and extracurricular activities need to be examined even though they are resource and staff driven and can be transferred to another school in the event of student relocation. Roger Lawler stated that it should be the value of the school to the student.

Louise Ervin questioned why we would ask whether there have been triple grades in the past. Dave Bennett stated that it gives an indication of small class sizes. Maybe the focus should be more on the probability of them occurring in the future.

Mark Whaley brought up the point of old schools and cold/hot schools affecting the learning environment. Temperature control should be an issue. Dave Bennett indicated that this is covered under the value to the board section. He cautioned that air quality does not necessarily coincide with air conditioning. Air conditioning is not necessarily better. Rick Boisvert agreed that air quality affects the learning environment but it has more to do with the layout of the school and the ventilation. Louise Ervin questioned whether air quality should be considered under this category or under value to the board. Roger Lawler suggested that this can be left up to Dave Bennett once he has received comments from everyone.

Dave Bennett suggested that the physical space section should be further broken down and compared to the standards that are used when building a new school. Roger Farwell stated if the physical space is being examined as to whether it is too small then the other side of the argument should be examined as well. Is the space dedicated to the library or gym too large for the student population? Dave Bennett said that On-the-Ground capacity plus non-permanent space should be used to evaluate the size of things like libraries and gymnasiums. Roger Lawler indicated that older schools were built with no libraries and they created them later usually by modifying classrooms. He's not sure that if there would be a situation where something would be too big for the size of the school. Dave Bennett indicated that sometimes extra space is incorporated into libraries, for example. These then become an integrated learning space with a library, computer lab and possibly a science area. The board should define what should be included in a library and assign a square footage. The framework should be used to compare a standard to what is currently at each school.

##### **Discussion – Student outcomes at the school**

Roger Lawler questioned why we would want this section based solely on EQAO scores. Rick Boisvert indicated that student outcomes are more a function of programs and staffing and not the physical building. Roger Lawler wants to avoid the potential argument made by parents to not close their schools because the students are successful on standardized testing. The Board adds resources to school in order to improve the quality of the learning environment but these resources can be moved to a different school if necessary. Some schools ask for additional resources. Rick Boisvert thought that small schools may do better because the classes are smaller and there direct interaction with teachers.

Roger Lawler had an issue with the success of graduating grade 8 students in grades 9 and 10. This is not a fair question because it could be based more the secondary school and not the elementary school. Also, grades cannot be released without parental permission. Rick Boisvert suggested that retention rates from the elementary school to the secondary school be considered instead. Roger Lawler suggested that we examine historical retention rates from the elementary school to the secondary school. Dave Bennett stated that a trend analysis can be done of these retention rates. John Shewchuk indicated that EQAO scores don't factor in to whether they stay in the Catholic school system at the secondary level. It has more to do with location.

Roger Farwell thought that cultural issues and diversity affect student outcomes. Mark Whaley questioned how diversity could be measured on a positive/negative scale. John Shewchuk indicated that having a designated bused area on the outside of town being bused to a downtown school largely affects the cultural diversity of the school. Roger Lawler pointed out that the EQAO survey that was conducted by the board had questions regarding diversity. These surveys were completed by parents and may be used as a source relating to cultural diversity. Maybe the question should read "What is the school profile (EQAO)?"

Dave Bennett asked if participation in math and science contests should be included. Rick Boisvert indicated that not all schools participate in this and it is staff driven.

**ACTION:**

1. Ask superintendents for input on the student outcomes section.
2. Change success rate of grade 8 graduates to retention rate of grade 8 graduates to grade 9.

**Range of course or program offerings**

Dave Bennett indicated that the questions listed in this section came from discussions with other boards. Input is needed as to whether these questions should be considered and what types of other items should be considered.

Roger Lawler indicated that WCDSB does have volunteer dependent programs. Strong Start is in a few elementary schools. It is fair to ask what volunteer-dependent programs are available at each school.

Rick Boisvert thought linkages to community programs should also be considered. For example, some neighbourhood associations run after school programs. Roger Lawler thought the range of partnerships with the community should be the overall question. This could be considered under either this section or the value to the community section.

**Range of extracurricular activities and extent of student participation**

Rick Boisvert pointed out that the rate of participation at smaller schools would be higher because it is more likely that everyone is able to participate. Extracurricular activities are often staff driven. Roger Lawler also indicated that the availability and viability of them often depend on fundraising and parent involvement. Louise Ervin questioned whether the proportion of student participation should be important and why it should strengthen the argument to close a school. Dave Bennett argued that the logic is that more staff means more extracurricular activities offered. Perhaps the proportion of participation should not be a factor. Rick Boisvert indicated that this section is more a measurement of staff than of the school facility. Roger Lawler recalled that half of the staff was moved to the receiving school in past closures. The issue of staff quality will have to be dealt with in a review regardless of this framework. Bill Strauss pointed out that the correct staff at the right school will be the attraction. Perhaps the quality of participation should be examined rather than the number of participants.

Louise Ervin asked how many schools would be examined in a review. She wanted the surrounding schools' extracurricular activities examined and compared in order to neutralize the argument. Dave Bennett responded that we always examine all schools within the planning review area and that a summary report will be compiled at the end of the valuation process to compare the schools.

**ACTION:**

3. Look at the number of student participants rather than the proportion.

**Adequacy of the school's physical space to support student learning**

John Shewchuk asked what "good condition" means; it is ambiguous. Dave Bennett said that there are pre-specified standards in the ReCapp system that generates items that need to be changed out of the school. ReCapp can

produce a report; the committee would receive this information from the Board. "Good condition" will be changed to "compared to WCDSB standard". The standard itself won't be included in the framework in case they change over time. That way the framework will not have to be amended.

Mark Whaley thought that consideration for the outdoor environment should be included in this section. This would address such things as treed areas, heat islands, etc. Dave Bennett suggested that this fall under the adequacy of school grounds for physical activity section but Roger Lawler felt it could be included in this section. Roger Lawler thought there should be communication with the library resource department regarding their vision for libraries in schools. Dave Bennett said that he has square footage standards for libraries.

Roger Lawler thought that the availability of technology might be included in this section rather than under "quality of the learning environment".

### **Proximity to external teaching resources**

Dave Bennett posed the question as to what should be considered "close proximity". Should it be within walking distance or a short bus ride? The resources listed, if close to the school, should be considered a positive attribute.

Roger Lawler suggested removing proximity to parish altogether since it has its own section. Schools will take field trips to the churches when necessary, regardless of proximity.

Roger Lawler thought that areas for natural education should also be mentioned.

### **Adequacy of the school's grounds for healthy physical activity and extracurricular activities**

John Shewchuk asked for a definition of play equipment. Dave Bennett said that this is a bit ambiguous. It could be anything from a full play structure to something as simple as logs and stumps on the ground that children can climb on. There is a benefit of play equipment to children at the primary level for motor skill development. Roger Lawler indicated that our board policy discourages play equipment because it is a liability. There are also cases where the equipment may be on adjacent parkland and maintained by the city. Dave Bennett suggested that the condition of the play equipment be examined if applicable as opposed to the availability of the equipment.

Roger Lawler thinks that having park land adjacent is a positive, especially if it includes sports fields that the school may use.

Dave Bennett would like to incorporate the ability to create an outdoor classroom into this section.

Roger Lawler thinks that there should be a ratio of hard surface to turf.

### **Accessibility of the school for students with disabilities**

Roger Lawler questioned where the standards came from. Dave Bennett responded that Facility Services has recently conducted accessibility surveys at all elementary schools and that an inventory at each school is available. This section would only touch on the high level issues such as getting into the school, accessible washroom, etc. There are so many different things that could be incorporated in accessibility issues but that would be too tedious for an accommodation.

### **Safety of the school**

Mark Whaley thought drop off areas should be included in this section because traffic is often dangerous to walking students. Dave Bennett pointed out that this is included in the "adequacy of the site" section but realizes it is also a safety issue and could also be examined here.

Louise Ervin thought that the question related to criminal activity implies that those acts are occurring during school hours. This needs to be reworded to refer to after hours activities. Roger Lawler questioned whether criminal activity is a function of the facility or of the social composition of the neighbourhood. Dave Bennett said that criminal activity affects mood of the school. Roger Lawler suggested changing this to examine the frequency of after hour incidents.

Rick Boisvert indicated that the location of the main entrance and the visibility of it from the main office is a concern. John Shewchuk expanded on this to question whether the interior of the school can be easily monitored. Dave

Bennett pointed out that windows area a safety feature in classrooms and on classroom doors. Site lines inside the school are important. Site lines for the school yard are important for the ability to supervise children and visitors.

#### **Proximity of the school to students/length of bus ride to school**

Louise Ervin thought that special education transportation should be included in this section. Roger Lawler pointed out that no matter where people with a physical disability live, they will be bused. Dave Bennett indicated that there are sometimes separate special education buses from regular buses. Regional transit and taxis might also be involved in transporting these students to school.

Rick Boisvert said there are sometimes opportunities to do split bus runs. Dave Bennett thought that this could be added under value to board for potential cost savings.

#### **Adjacency/proximity of the school to the local Parish**

Roger Lawler would like to pose a question related to the programming the parish provides to the school. The level of involvement of the parish in the school should be examined because this is not necessarily tied to the location. Dave Bennett thought the number of times the children go to the parish would address this line of thinking.

#### **School as a partner in other government initiatives in the community**

Roger Lawler thought that the number of child care spaces should be included in this section. If there is no facility at the school then the availability of child care in the area should be assessed. The need for child care should also be examined under this category.

### **4. Other Comments**

Mark Whaley asked if it is the responsibility of the board or the community for closures. Should there be a role of elected officials and municipalities in the process? Bill Strauss has been involved in accommodation reviews in the past and indicated that it is often beneficial for the municipality involved to work with the school board at developing a solution. Roger Lawler indicated that accommodation reviews are a legal process. Dave Bennett said that in past the first presentation in a review overviews the "state of the world"; what the situation is like in its present state. This presentation is given to the public and the municipality. Another briefing is done at a later date with the municipality regarding the progress of the review. As part of the briefing, the potential use of the school facility after it closes is discussed. Roger Lawler brought up the notion of having voting members and non-voting members on the local ARC. Decisions are usually made by consensus. There is a good opportunity for partnerships between politicians, staff, and business leaders in this process. Universities are offered to purchase a closed school property first, followed by colleges and the municipalities.

Louise Ervin questioned what the scoring would look like. Dave Bennett noted that the scoring and weighting used in previous reviews are distributed to committee members. A new scoring system will be developed and distributed at a later date.

Rick Boisvert suggested having a trial of the framework before it is approved. This will ensure that the verbiage is clear and it produces the intended outcome.

Dave Bennett briefly expressed a desire to add a fourth committee meeting and asked if the middle or end of May would work. The committee responded that it would depend on the date.

### **5. Next Steps**

Committee members should provide comments for the other sections to Dave Bennett as soon as possible.

Dave Bennett and Lindsay Reinhardt will revise the framework after receiving everyone's comments.

Dave Bennett will schedule a fourth meeting in mid to late May.

Dave Bennett will distribute scoring information and a memo or letter of explanation for the committee to respond to with their input.

## **6. Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

## **7. Written comments submitted**

Several committee members were unable to attend this meeting but did provide written comments. Committee members were also asked to provide feedback on sections that were not covered at the meeting due to lack of time.

### **Chuck Williams**

It is dangerous to base the student outcomes section solely on EQAO scores. It implies that bad test scores may lead to a closure.

Under the school's physical space, a section for "sacred space" should be added. This section would identify spaces within the school where small groups can congregate to reflect, pray and share.

### **Maureen Sutherland**

If the board is examining triple grading under quality of the learning environment, should split grading in general be examined also?

She questioned whether the number of computers in a school was related to fundraising. If so, then is it right to penalize a school for lack of fundraising?

There is a danger in examining EQAO scores. Has there been any proof that EQAO scores will improve in a new school or better school facility?

Will special programs that are offered outside of the core curriculum at the closing school be offered at the receiving school?

In the framework there is a question asking if the school currently has day care. Would all new schools offer day care? If so, would the day care be large enough to accommodate all of the students in its boundary?

The possibility of the site being converted to an adult education facility should be considered under value to the community during the valuation process of the facility.

She questioned why the number of staff living within the school catchment area is being considered.

### **Father Charlie Fedy**

The question "is the school adjacent to the church" should be replaced with "is the church accessible to the school for the celebration of liturgies".

He also suggested adding the following to the proximity to parish section:

- Is there regular interaction between the parish and school? Would this be jeopardized if the school closed?
- What is the value of the school to the parish? He thought that it is important to consider how the potential loss of students to the public board would increase the work of the parish in the catechetical formation of young parishioners.

The question "what is the level of morale in the school" should be considered under the student outcomes section under value to the board. There are students who would be happier in a small school compared to a large school.