

East Hamilton and Lower Stoney Creek Boundary Review Analysis of Public Feedback

Background

To address the pressures of currently high enrolment at Eastdale and continued growth in English and French programs, HWDSB staff recommended a boundary review to better balance the enrolments between East Hamilton and Lower Stoney Creek area schools and to reduce the reliance on portables. Trustees received the Accommodation Strategy Schedule at the June 10, 2024, Board Meeting, and approved the boundary review.

Data Collection

At the November 19, 2024, public meeting, participants were invited to contribute to discussion groups where their comments were recorded by HWDSB facilitators, and to provide written feedback at stations set up around the meeting space detailing each proposed accommodation scenario. Further community input was also received through the EngageHWDSB platform and email.

The public consultation was not intended to serve as a plebiscite, with participants voting to approve a particular scenario. Rather, we have used the feedback collected from the consultation to compile priorities and concerns that should inform the Board's decision-making process.

Public Meeting

The facilitated conversations at the public meeting produced rich feedback. Participants were asked what they thought of the evaluation of each proposed option conducted by the Advisory Panel, and to identify advantages and disadvantages to the possible solutions. Participants were also invited to provide suggestions for ways to ease the future transition. Some participants provided specific comments related to the four proposed scenarios. Others offered more generalized comments about their priorities and concerns about a potential accommodation strategy. This feedback is summarized below.

Concerns and Priorities

Switching Schools

- Minimize the number of times students will need to switch schools.
- Students have already been moved:
 - Due to past boundary reviews and closures.
 - In grade 1 due to enrolment in French Immersion.

- Boundary moves will split siblings between schools causing disruption:
 - Due to different busses.
 - Due to different bell times.
 - Due to childcare (older siblings will not be able to care for younger siblings).
- Boundary moves will split up friendship groups and divide neighbourhoods.

Bussing

- Students will be on new or longer bus routes.
- Students who previously did not need to bus will now need to.
- Siblings will be on different busses.

Childcare

- Concerns regarding the availability of Before and After Care and transferring between providers.

French Immersion (FI)

- FI resources are already low – including staffing. This will worsen if FI is split up.
- Splitting up FI will isolate classes and leave them unsupported and lacking resources in a new school.
- FI families feel targeted – that a solution will be at their expense.
- Concerns whether younger students will be admitted into FI to join older siblings.
- Concerns that families will pull their students from FI to avoid being involved in a move.

Safety

- Concerns that boundary adjustments will require busy traffic crossings (e.g. Hwy. 8, Queenston Rd., Lake Ave.)
- Will need more crossing guards and reduced speed zones.
- Concerns that additional portables will obstruct sightlines when monitoring outdoor spaces.

Concerns regarding proposed scenarios

- **Options 1 & 2**
 - Involve multiple transitions for the same students.
 - Will leave siblings at different schools.
 - Will split friendship groups.
 - Will reduce FI resources.
 - FI program will shrink through attrition or lowered enrolment.
 - Option 2 is not viable – why present it?
- **Option 3**
 - Will divide siblings.
 - Will divide friends.

- Allows increased walkability (potential advantage).
 - Boundary had been in Collegiate's catchment – could ease transition or impact the same students again.
 - Avoids moving grades (potential advantage).
 - Has the least number of moves, but does it have impact?
 - Involves busy crossings.
 - May have the least impact on families because impact is on whole families (potential advantage).
- **Option 4**
 - Students in boundary already take the bus (potential advantage).
 - Concerns regarding bussing (that students will be on new and/or longer routes) and increasing bussing pressure.
 - 'Walkability' is part of the criteria, but this adds busses.
 - Before and After Care concerns – whether spaces will be available for new students or when switching between providers.
 - Students will be sectioned away from other students in their community.

Other comments

- There are no good options.
- Families are stressed about future moves.
- There is a parking shortage already at Collegiate.
- Staffing isn't included in the criteria – will we lose EAs and/or LRTs?

Suggestions

- Coordinate bell times between schools.
- Organize orientation visits to new schools.
- Coordinate bussing routes.
- Provide timely information.

Single Stream French Immersion School

Of note, 8 of the 12 facilitated table groups discussed the possibility of a single-stream French Immersion school. Three of the 12 groups specifically mentioned Michaëlle Jean and Norwood Park as single stream precedents within HWDSB, and 4 of the 12 groups referred to using Sir Isaac Brock or reopening another former HWDSB school as a French Immersion school.

Online Feedback

Community input received (as of November 27, 2024) through the EngageHWDSB platform and email is summarized below.

Concerns and Priorities

- Keep FI together in one school / start a single stream FI school.
- Concern that siblings will be separated between schools.
- Portables are not a solution. A new build is needed – or renovations/additions.
- Concern that the same students will be moved multiple times during their time in Elementary school.
- Concerns that students will be on new or longer bus routes; that siblings will be on different busses.
- Concerns that friendship groups or communities will be separated.
- Concerns or confusion about the logic behind how zones in Options 3 and 4 were chosen.
- Use Sir Isaac Brock or reopen another HWDSB facility.
- Concerns regarding new housing development/condos and added enrolment pressures.
- Concerns regarding traffic safety.
- Desire that a solution redirect new enrolment rather than relocate current students.
- Concerns regarding impact on school staffing.
- “Eastdale families don’t want their students moved and Collegiate doesn’t want portables”.