

Mr. Carson,

First of all, thank you again for taking the time to come to speak with us. Your presentation was very clear and set out many of the complexities that exist in our area and it is comforting to see that the Board is well aware of many of the important considerations. Your job is not an easy one, but please know that we are willing to work with the Board to find solutions for our area - there are always solutions.

One of the points that is not reflected in Rob's notes from the meeting, but which we noted, was your reference to the fact that the Board does not want to dismantle things that are working well. We were pleased to hear this and would encourage the Board to find the success stories in the zone and to build on these wherever possible. In fact, the principle of respecting programs that are working well should be one of the guiding principles in a framework for the ARC.

I have attached here a link to the Parent Survey that I mentioned at the meeting. The survey was conducted by the Mutchmor School Council and sent to all parents through our electronic email directory. It was designed to start parents thinking about issues related to an accommodation review and gather their initial thoughts on the future of the school. You'll see that there is strong support for Mutchmor as both an English centre and as a Congregated Gifted centre, with many parents including those items alongside academic excellence as their reasons for choosing to send their children to Mutchmor. With respect to program offerings at the school, parents supported the continuation of English and Congregated Gifted programs but also strongly supported the addition of MFI. Many also support the addition of grades 7 and 8 although it would be a challenge in our small space. In summary, while parents feel strongly that Mutchmor as it exists now is a success, there is an openness to change.

Appendix A of the Survey contains the full list of comments that were received from parents in response to one of the open ended questions in the survey asking parents to identify the positive aspects of the school as well as suggestions for improvements. I hope you also take the time to review these. As you know, parental consultations are an important part of any ARC process and we are happy to help with that process in whatever way we can. The Board and ARCs need to look beyond numbers and boundaries but also to what is really happening on the ground.

[http://www.mutchmorsc.ca/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=18:survey&catid=31:survey](http://www.mutchmorsc.ca/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=18:survey&catid=31:survey)

Many at Mutchmor are not eager for an ARC but would like to see MFI added for Sept 2011 in order to determine whether having that program available in the catchment of First Avenue and Mutchmor schools makes a difference in the program choice and could rebalance of number of students at those schools. We would also consider relocation of the MFI program from Hopewell to Mutchmor if that was felt to be a way to assist Hopewell's overcrowding issues. From our survey results we know many parents would like the MFI option, but choose not to send their child to it because it is at another school.

We have responded to the specific questions that Rob has circulated and these are set out below.

**1. Are communities willing to support solutions where, given tight space and limited facility options, 70-80% of the students move somehow in order to get it right?**

To clarify - the "community" in this response is the Mutchmor parent and student community. We can't speak for the broader community.

Mutchmor cannot support the movement of 70-80% of its students to a different location. It is a challenge to maintain a strong English program in the Board in the current reality in which the majority of parents are choosing an immersion option. Moving this many students from Mutchmor would break up the existing successful English programs, weakening them and placing the long term sustainability of a previously strong program in question. While we understand that you are advising us of the challenges facing this zone and that permanent solutions will be difficult and some people will be unhappy, we encourage the Board to strive for the least disruptive options wherever possible. We agree with the goal of finding creative solutions and exploring all options before floating real options to parents. For example, the only "real" option that has been mentioned so far is making both First Avenue and Mutchmor dual track schools. This is, without a doubt, a very disruptive option and needs to be closely examined. (please see response to your question 4). We would suggest that the objective of seeking out the least disruptive options be included in any framework for an ARC.

A Board report to the Business Services Committee at this link

[http://www.ocdsb.edu.on.ca/Documents/Board\\_Meetings/Meetings/2009/April\\_2009/BSC\\_Apr15\\_2009/7\\_09\\_079\\_Accomm\\_Initiatives%203.pdf](http://www.ocdsb.edu.on.ca/Documents/Board_Meetings/Meetings/2009/April_2009/BSC_Apr15_2009/7_09_079_Accomm_Initiatives%203.pdf), outlines the challenges for accommodation across the city and also discusses the need for policy direction on programming, including the fragile English programming preferably before, further accommodation reviews in order to provide much needed direction. A review within our zone will focus attention on the future of English programming at the Board and will force an ARC to determine how to ensure that this zone has sustainable English programs. At paragraph 34 of this report, there is a suggestion that the Board examine the option of congregating English programming as a means of supporting this program and ensuring its viability. Mutchmor is currently an English centre that supports this model. We would encourage the Board and any ARC to consider this as a viable option for continued delivery of English programming.

Mutchmor is willing to accept students to its school who may be redirected from other schools to attend the programs that currently exist at Mutchmor. For example, redirecting English program

students to Mutchmor would allow the school to build on the success that it has established in the area of English programming with core French education. In addition, Mutchmor is willing to accept the redirection of any students from the Hopewell MFI program. The addition of this program would fit within the current offerings at Mutchmor, fill a gap that currently exists in the community and build upon, rather than disrupt, the existing English offerings.

## **2. How would you feel in general terms about various grade configuration options in concept?**

Many Mutchmor parents have already indicated support for having grades 7 and 8 (for ECG and English stream) at Mutchmor. This is an option that could be explored and may take some pressure off Hopewell, but the impact upon Glashan would have to be explored. Another option would be to expand Glashan's middle school model to include grade 6s from the EFI program at First Avenue freeing up space at that school. Or perhaps, Glashan's catchment area could be expanded so fewer students attend Hopewell in order to ease the overcrowding there.

Including grades 7s and 8s at high schools would require input from parents, however, given that both Glebe High School and Lisgar are already over or at capacity, this may not be a realistic option for this area.

## **3. How would you feel in general terms if programs had to shift?**

There is no support for moving programs away from Mutchmor, but there is support for bringing certain new programs to Mutchmor.

The Mutchmor school community does not support a relocation of the ECG program. This program was put in place at Mutchmor several years ago because the school had space available and the program fit within the school's offerings. The ECG program at Mutchmor has been a success. It has thrived and the regular English stream has benefited from the presence of the gifted program resulting in the creation of a strong English centre. At this time, enrollment in Mutchmor's English program remains low and the relocation of ECG from Mutchmor would be very damaging to the long term viability of English programming in the neighbourhood.

We recognize the strong demand for EFI within Ottawa, however that option does not work for all children. In addition, when families move to the area from another city if the children do not have the requisite French background, they are not eligible for EFI. It is essential to maintain English programming in schools. In addition, where strong, successful programs exist, it makes no sense to dismantle them, to move programs that ensure their continuity, or to split the programs between schools, further risking the viability of the program. Of the four School Boards in Ottawa, all four offer French programming but only two offer English. There is a duty

upon the Board to ensure the long term viability, quality and strength of english programming in a primarily english speaking community.

We recommend that the ARC be asked to examine the impact of the ECG program on the school and the entire effect it has upon the English program and how strong English programming can be maintained. We encourage this to be examined within the context of the suggested principles of seeking out the least disruptive option and maintaining successful programs and schools.

Mutchmor does support adding new programs that fit well with the existing programs at Mutchmor. In particular, Mutchmor supports the addition of MFI at its school and suggests that this would be a good fit for the school, would benefit the community and alleviate some pressure from neighbouring schools. MFI is currently not offered in the Glebe. Students who start at Mutchmor and then wish to move to an MFI program are required to leave their immediate community and attend Hopewell. Depending on where the students live in the Glebe, this could be quite far for the student and is often not within walking distance. The inclusion of MFI at Mutchmor would fit well with the existing english program, allowing students to build a strong base in english before tackling french as a second language. Last year, 13 students left the school to attend MFI at Hopewell. This is half a class. The survey results show that almost 75% of parents with children at Mutchmor in grades JK to 3 would consider enrolling their child in MFI if it were offered at the school. The addition of MFI would mean fewer transitions for those students who choose this program and would offer an alternative to EFI in the community.

#### **4. Do you have a preference for, or what is your opinion on, dual track, split grades, etc? (ie. various mix options)**

Parents at Mutchmor do not support the inclusion of dual track (EFI/English) programs at Mutchmor. Making Mutchmor and First Avenue both dual track (EFI and English) would result in each having English programs with low enrolment making split classes for every English grade unavoidable. The quality of the English programming would suffer in that environment as would the student experience. Split grades are beneficial to some but not all students, so it is best that any program (English, EFI, etc) have enough students to provide at least 1 full grade class without splits.

We encourage the Board to look very closely at the numbers enrolled in English programs in the Glebe and recommend that an ARC be asked to examine these numbers as well.

Some parents chose Mutchmor over neighbouring dual track schools because their local school's English program has been "ghettoized" by overwhelming numbers in immersion programs leaving small numbers in the English stream.

Mutchmor School Council has examined the numbers of students who come from Mutchmor's catchment area to attend the regular English program and our conclusion is there would be insufficient numbers to sustain dual track schools at First Avenue and Mutchmor. The Board has advised that the presence of 250-300 students over 8 grades is generally required for a healthy program. Our preliminary analysis of the numbers suggests that dual tracking the schools would result in approximately a third of what is necessary to sustain a healthy program. Even if only one of the schools were dual tracked, the numbers in the English program would be very thin and split classes would be necessary for every grade and triple grades would be a real possibility.

We could expect that enrollment levels in the core English program would decline in years to come as the perception of the program declined. Meanwhile First Avenue's numbers, currently at 500, when divided would result in 250 EFI students at each school, easily overwhelming the english numbers.

Teachers, as with any profession, benefit from the presence of colleagues. Currently at Mutchmor, english language teachers and ECG english language teachers are able to work together, share experiences and best practices creating a strong community of teachers which contributes to the overall success of the english program at the school.

Dual tracking these schools would severely damage the core english program, ghettoize the program, the students and teachers.

We encourage you to look very closely at the numbers before proposing dual track system for these schools. We recommend that any ARC be advised of the priority of ensuring sustainable english program in any reconfiguration of schools.

## **5. What would you advise with respect to specific to street boundary changes, program changes, grade configuration changes?**

We would propose the following:

- Mutchmor continue offering English with core French and be identified as an excellent English Centre;
- First Avenue remain a French centre for EFI;
- the ECG program remain at Mutchmor; and
- Add an MFI program to Mutchmor to give more options to the community and meet an existing need.

Consider the following options:

- Add MFI to Mutchmor. MFI is not currently offered in the community and this would ensure a full offering of programs to local families. If Mutchmor and First Avenue were both

dual tracked, MFI would never be an option in the neighbourhood forcing parents to bus their children to a different school for this option. MFI at Mutchmor would relieve some pressure from Hopewell and might in relieve some from First Avenue. The Mutchmor Parent Survey shows strong support for this program.

- Expand Mutchmor's English boundary to the South to capture some of, or all, of the English program children currently directed to Hopewell and relieve some pressure from that school (this could be done with parents being free to choose between the two schools as is currently done with other downtown neighbourhoods).
- Once the English boundaries overlap and MFI is available at Mutchmor, examine the boundaries at the South end of First Avenue's catchment and consider redirecting part of the area to Hopewell for EFI. If this is done in combination with the suggestions listed above, some pressure will have been relieved from Hopewell allowing them to accept more EFI students. For some parts of the Southern section of First Avenue's school catchment, Hopewell is within closer walking distance than First Avenue.
- Examine the boundaries for English grades 7 & 8 and redirect all students within Mutchmor's catchment to Glashan (instead of Hopewell) for grades 7 & 8.
- Examine the boundaries for EFI grades 7 & 8 and redirect some or all students graduating from First Avenue to Glashan (instead of Hopewell) for grades 7 & 8. Glashan is currently under enrolled and there are low MFI numbers coming from Centretown, so adding 7 & 8 EFI would ensure a good mix of students and relieve pressure from Hopewell. In addition, for many children attending First Avenue, Glashan would be closer walking distance than Hopewell.
- Students from Mutchmor who graduate from the MFI program be directed to Glashan for grades 7 & 8. These students can be merged with the MFI students from Centennial and possibly even mixed with EFI students.
- Have JK children sent to their closest school for their JK year. If by SK, they wish to start a program, such as EFI, which is not offered at their local school, they would then switch. This

option would decrease pressure on schools like First Avenue and reduce bussing costs. This option could split the JK numbers between First Avenue and Mutchmor.

- Students graduating from English programming and ECG at Mutchmor could either continue to Glashan as is currently the case, or consideration could be given to adding grades 7 & 8 to Mutchmor (renovations to the school would be necessary for this option).
- Seek out additional space to accommodate full day kindergarten within the Glebe area, for example, with Corpus Christi School (OCCSB), Glebe Parents Daycare, Glebe Montessori School, and the Glebe Community Centre.

We hope that you will consider these comments and continue to seek out parents' views on these difficult issues. Remember, even a rubik's cube has a solution!