

May 3, 2007

Honourable Kathleen Wynne
Minister of Education
900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario

Re: Facilitator's Report for Bayview Public School

Dear Minister

On March 29, 2007, your Ministry appointed me as the Facilitator to review the process undertaken by the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board as it undertook a pupil accommodation review in the Hunt Club/Riverside Park area. The review resulted in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board deciding to close the current Bayview Public School and move the entire French immersion program to the R. Byrns Curry Public School and the students currently attending this school being distributed to General Vanier Public School (J-K to grade 3) and Fielding Drive Public School (grades 4 to 8).

My appointment was the result of a petition, received in February 2007, from parents of students attending R. Byrns Curry Public School, asking for the review, which is provided for in the Ministry of Education's *Good Places to Learn* document released on February 17, 2005. The Ottawa Carleton District School Board's pupil accommodation review in the Hunt Club/Riverside Park area began prior to the Ministry of Education's *Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines*, released October 31, 2006 and therefore my review was guided by the Ministry's policy of February 2005.

In carrying out my responsibilities, I was supported by Philip O'Brien from the Ottawa Regional Office of the Ministry of Education. This support was essential to proceed with this review in a timely way and I appreciate the very professional, timely assistance.

I would also like to express my thanks to the trustees, board officials, parents, and members of the community who provided me with their time, views and advice.

Terms of Reference

School boards have the legal right to close schools after following a board-approved school closure process and the Ministry Memorandum B12 states that where a school board has initiated a consultation process prior to October 31 2006, it would be expected to respect the spirit of school valuation outlined in the February 17, 2005 *Good Places to Learn* announcement.

Given this legal framework for this review, I was asked to:

1. Determine whether the school board followed its board-approved school closure policy.
2. Determine whether the school closure process followed by the board met the spirit of *Good Places to Learn*, by focusing on the following matters:
 - appropriate advance notice to the community re proposed school closure;
 - number and advance notice for public meetings;
 - quality and timeliness of information to the public;
 - measures taken to encourage public input;
 - process used to report back to the board and community after meetings;
 - extent to which non-financial criteria such as value to student, the community, the school system, the local economy were used to arrive at a closure decision;
 - role of the board's long-term capital plan in the decision;
 - degree of trustee involvement in the school closure process; and
 - advance notice and opportunities for the community to respond to recommendation for closure prior to the board making a final decision
3. Consider whether the process that reflected *Good Places to Learn* resulted in fair community consultation, community understanding of the decision-making process and a focus on the school's educational and community value.

I have carried out consultations in Ottawa, meetings with board officials, trustees, parents and union leadership and reviewed all the written material provided which I believe has given me the information I require to carry out my task.

Description of Schools

There were four schools involved in the Hunt Club-Riverside Park school closure review. Bayview Public School is 3.38 km. from R. Byrns Curry Public School which is 2.21 km. from General Vanier Public School. Fielding Public School is midway between all the schools.

Bayview Public School was built in 1951 and currently has one portable classroom. There is a childcare centre in the school.

The school is a French immersion, JK to grade 4. Most of the students, 91% are bussed and the enrollment projections are stable.

I toured the school and it is in a good state of repair; however, the Board projects, based on the age of the school, a 50% or \$2.2 million of renewal needs over the next several years.

EQAO test results for grade 3 students are significantly above both Provincial and Board results.

The Board's plan would have this school close and the entire school, including all staff, move to its new location which is currently R. Byrns Curry Public School.

R. Byrns Curry Public School was built in 1976. There are childcare facilities at this school. The enrollment in the fall of 2006 was 214.5 but according to the Principal there has been several new students come to the school during the school year. Because the Board used enrollment data from the fall of 2006 and calculates it on the basis of full-time equivalents (this means kindergarten students count at ½ student) there has been some confusion between the Principal's and the Board's numbers. The bottom line is enrollment trends are clear and show a decline.

I toured this school and it is a great facility with a capacity of over 300 students. The program offered is a JK to grade 6 and the student body reflects the make-up of the Ottawa community. It is very multi-cultural and the first language of many of the student's families is not English. 28% of the student body is currently bussed.

At the grade 3 level, EQAO test results are a bit above the Board average but at the grade 6 level, the results are well below both Board and Provincial results.

Fielding Public School was built in 1968 and it has an enrollment of approximately 440 students. Since this school is the middle and senior elementary receiving school for the other schools in this review, it offers grades 4 to 8 English and grades 5 to 8 French immersion. There are also childcare facilities at this school. The capacity of the school

is over 600 and if no consolidation took place, the future for this school would be significant enrollment decline.

I toured the school and it is also in a good state of repair. This school was originally built as an “open concept” school. These schools enjoyed a short period of popularity in the late 60’s and early 70’s. Like many of these schools across Ontario, renovations have occurred to provide for the more traditional classrooms. The classrooms do not have windows, which concerns some parents but didn’t seem to bother the students when I observed them.

The student body is very much like R. Byrns Curry and General Vanier. The EQAO test results for grade 6 are well above both Provincial and Board results.

General Vanier was built in 1963. With enrollment of 89 students and a capacity of over 200, this school has the most significant problem of under-enrollment. There are childcare facilities and services and the student body is similar to Fielding and R. Byrnes Curry Public Schools. 89% of the students are bussed to school.

I toured this school and found it in a good state of repair. This school along with the others has great playground areas and some have city parks adjoining them.

The program offered is JK to grade 3, English and the EQAO test results are significantly above the Board and Provincial results.

Process Leading to School Closure

On September 21, 2006, the Ottawa-Carleton DSB’s Business Services Committee approved a motion, on the recommendation of its administration, to conduct a school closure study of the schools in the Hunt Club-Riverside Park area. The full Board approved the motion and the timelines for the study on September 26, 2006. The timelines approved were said to be four months but when Christmas holidays are factored in, the time was reduced considerably.

On September 29, 2006, a letter was sent home to parents at the four schools, informing them of the Board approved motion and the staff report. The letter also informed parents that a Community Working Group would be formed to study the issue. Even though these schools have many parents whose first language is not English, the Board letter was in English only.

A Community Working Group (CWG) was set-up comprised of parent representatives from each of the four elementary schools chosen by the School Councils, principals and Board staff. The CWG was chaired by Ian Baxter, a facilities planner with the Board. Parents have expressed concern that the review process was lead and driven by facilities

staff as opposed to education staff. The perception is that program took a back seat in assessing the needs of students.

The first meeting of the Community Working Group was held on October 17, 2006. A package was given to all members of the CWG that had huge amounts of information. According to parents, the package was not in plain language and had much information that was not central to the issue before the CWG.

Options were presented, and additional options discussed. No time was provided for members of the CWG to get to know one another, feel comfortable with the process and digest the data and information presented. On October 24, 2006, another meeting of the CWG was held and the options were reduced to four.

On November 1, 2006, an Open House/Public Meeting was held at Brookfield High School from 6 to 9pm. Notice for the Open House was posted on the Board's website and advertised in the Ottawa Citizen and community newspapers. Information regarding the process and options were available on the Board's website and hard copy was available at the Open House in English only.

By all accounts, this Open House was a bit chaotic so a second Public Meeting was held on November 30, 2006. Again it was held at Brookfield High School at 7pm. This time, the meeting was more formal with Board presentations and a question and answer period.

On December 21, 2006, the staff recommendation was presented to the Board. On January 29, 2007, the Board met in "Committee of the Whole" to receive delegations from the community. Twenty-six delegations made presentations. On February 8, 2007, the Board again met in "Committee of the Whole" to listen to seven additional delegations and review additional material from administration. The "Committee of the Whole" meeting rises and members go into a Board meeting where the final decision was made:

THAT Bayview Public School be closed, effective at the end of the 2006-2007 School year, with the following redirections:

- A. i) Redirect the Bayview Public School, JK to 4 Early Immersion Program attendance area to R. Byrns Curry Public School
- ii) Redirect the R. Byrns Curry Public School, JK to 3 English Program attendance area to General Vanier Public School.
- iii) Redirect the R. Byrns Curry Public School, grade 4 to 6 English Program attendance area to Fielding Drive Public School
- iv) Relocate the R. Byrns Curry Public School Special Education General Learning Program to a new school pending the results of the "Specialized Classes/Programs for 2007-2008 review and consultation process".

- v) Provide out of boundary students attending schools or programs (via a student transfer) which are to be redirected as a result of the closure of Bayview Public School with a one-time option to move to the newly designated schools.

- B. That up to \$30,000 be allocated to General Vanier Public School to be used for the construction of a new play structure.

- C. That the redistribution of educational resources currently in use at Bayview Public School and R. Byrns Curry School be carried out in a manner that would most appropriately serve the needs of all students in the study area.

- D. That staff immediately begin discussions with the Ottawa Day School Nursery Inc. in order to retain school day care services and placements within the Hunt Club-Riverside Park Community, with ODSN being given first priority for space over any other community use.

What I Heard

I met with the Director of Education and senior staff at the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board and they told me that there is a need to deal with declining enrollments in their Board. I was told that no changes to the school accommodation review policy have been adopted by the Board as a result of the Joan Green Report of 2005. Ms. Green's Report was very critical of the Board's policy and its lack of meaningful consultation. The Board instead chose to wait for final Ministry policy which was released in the fall of 2006. In fact this school accommodation review was even shorter than the one reviewed by Ms. Green.

Administration feel there are several advantages to the school consolidation in the Hunt Club/Riverside Park area such as, stronger enrollment in the JK-3 English program, fewer split grades, less crowding in the new Bayview, fewer portables, and no need for further school reviews for many years in this area.

Administration believes that people wanted decisions to be made and the Board needed to get on with it. It was clear that administration felt the process was inclusive, fair and while the timelines were short, they were adequate.

The trustees told me that the community was exhausted as consolidation of schools in the Hunt Club/Riverside Park area was an ongoing issue that needed to be decided. A significant decline in enrollment is a fact that needed attention. Program viability and structure and better use of space were priorities. The trustees recognized the tight timelines but felt they were adequate and allowed for input.

The trustees who opposed the closure told me that the process did not provide enough time for the community to understand all of the data and develop options. There were no school valuations done and the process was very weak when compared to the expectations in *Good Places to Learn*.

Representatives from all unions were invited to meet with me. Only OSSTF, representing the school secretaries and other education support staff, attended. The representative expressed concern about the timelines in the review and said that office staff was asked many questions as the notices for meetings went home in English only.

She could not tell me what the final impact of this school consolidation will be on staff as this had not all been worked out.

I met with parents from school councils, and the Community Working Group. In addition, we had a meeting in the evening with over 70 petitioners.

The comments were virtually the same from everyone. The process was far too short, the data and other information was unclear and not user friendly. There is a strong feeling that the Board knew what it wanted to do before the process even began. There was no opportunity to develop trust because the process was so rushed.

Many parents said they understood that a school needed to close but the process did not allow for meaningful input by the community.

Parents pointed out that these schools are very diverse but the notices for meetings and all the Board material were in English only.

The lead for the Board was the facility staff as opposed to education or program staff and this was a negative for parents who wanted to have discussions around what was best educationally for their children.

Many said that they could live with the decision but the process had to change. Parents at R. Byrns Curry Public School were most upset by the process and the decision, since it is their school that closes and then re-opens as the new Bayview Public School. Parents at the meeting of petitioners expressed anger at the process, lack of meaningful opportunities for input, and their belief that students' needs at R. Byrns Curry were not front and centre.

The two parents from the School Council at General Vanier did express their satisfaction with the decision to keep their school open and support for the review process.

Observations and Suggestions

In June of 2005, Joan Green was appointed as a facilitator to review the closure of two secondary schools by the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. In her Report to

Minister Kennedy, Ms. Green concluded that the process followed by the Board did not honour the full spirit of *Good Places to Learn*. She noted that the new school closure policy, aligned with *Good Places to Learn* “will require an enhanced consultation effort with authentic opportunities for school communities to help shape decisions regarding school closures.”

Two years have passed and after my consultations, I must conclude that nothing has changed. The timelines for community consultation were too short, and the design did not provide for meaningful, two way dialogue.

School closing reviews are always difficult. Parents and communities are very attached to their schools, and the staff in them. This bond reflects the overall success and support our public education system enjoys in Ontario. I agree with those who told me that no matter how the review process is designed, if a school is to close, not everyone will believe the process was fair. However, successful public education is a partnership between the Ministry of Education, the school board, the school, parents, and the community. Decisions about the future of a school must respect and promote this partnership.

In the case I have reviewed, there is no evidence the Board did not follow its own policy but there is clear evidence the Board did not follow the spirit of *Good Places to Learn*. In fact, the Board officials said that they did not revise their policy after receiving Joan Green’s Report in 2005. They stated they chose instead to wait for the Ministry of Education to release the final version of the new School Accommodation Guidelines. While I understand the Board needed Ministry direction for a complete revision of its school closure policy, I strongly believe the Board should have adjusted its policy to reflect *Good Places to Learn* which was released early in 2005.

The Board approved a motion on September 26, 2006 to carry out a “School Closure Study/Hunt Club-Riverside Park” and on February 8, 2007, the final decision was made by the Board. The consultation process and timelines were inadequate because it did not allow for two-way discussion and examination. The information provided was not user friendly and it was often written in unclear language.

I want to be clear however that I do not believe that Board officials had any hidden agenda or that they acted in bad faith. I think this Board needs outside help to develop the capacity to carry out thorough and meaningful consultations.

The bottom line is that the advice given by Joan Green in 2005 still applies.

“Should the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board embark on future school consolidation studies, and this is likely, they will benefit from working with the government to develop a model school closing process for urban settings.”

Obviously, the Board decided to ignore this advice. Now the Board is required to develop new school accommodation policy in line with the Ministry of Education policy

guidelines released in October 2006. They informed me they have developed interim policy without any public consultation. I strongly advise that the Board seek assistance to design a public process that involves parents, teachers, support staff, students, and the community that results in a new accommodation review policy for the Board. The Board should not proceed with any further accommodation reviews until the permanent policy has been developed in partnership with the community.

This Board needs to take some immediate steps when communicating with the community. First, they must communicate in more than just English. During my review, I was told that materials and meeting notices were produced in English only. This meant that many families could not participate in the consultation at all. The only exception was at General Vanier School where the Principal made sure that notices for meetings were in several languages for her school community.

In light of the inadequate process, consideration was given to the possible benefits of the board redoing the accommodation review. I do not believe that performing another review would benefit the community.

It seems everyone agrees one of the four schools had to close because of the decline in enrollment. The make-up of the student populations at R. Byrns Curry, General Vanier and Fielding Public Schools English programs are very similar. General Vanier can accommodate the primary students from R. Byrns Curry and Fielding can accommodate the students in grades 4 to 6. These students already would be attending Fielding for grades 7 and 8.

The current Bayview Public School is the oldest building and while it is in reasonable condition, it is clear that it is beginning to show its age. Closing this building makes sense and the move to what is now R. Byrns Curry is reasonable.

Overall there will be fewer split grades, fewer portables, childcare programs protected, and there will not be a need to look at school accommodation in this area again for many years.

The Board has good transition plans in place and I believe this will make the move for the students smooth, so that everyone can focus on learning this fall in the new facilities.

Minister, I do want to congratulate the communities for their involvement and commitment to public education. While this has not been a pleasant experience for many parents, I believe if they remain involved, their children and public education will be the winners.

Dave Cooke, Facilitator

Facilitator's Review

Hunt Club / Riverside Park
School Accommodation Review
Ottawa-Carleton District School Board

ITINERARY

Monday, April 16, 2007

TIME	GROUP
10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Meeting with Ministry of Education - Ottawa Regional Office Representatives: <u>Attendees:</u> Monique Châteauvert, Regional Manager Philip O'Brien, Education Officer <u>Location:</u> Ottawa Regional Office Ministry of Education 1580 Merivale Road, Suite 504 Nepean ON
11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.	Luncheon meeting with Director and Superintendents of Ottawa-Carleton District School Board Room B-400 <u>Attendees:</u> Lorne Rachlis, Director of Education Diane Jeudy-Hugo, Executive Superintendent Michael Clarke, Chief Financial Officer Michael Carson, Superintendent of Facilities Janice McCoy, Superintendent of Human Resources Michele Giroux, Executive Officer Larry Archibald, Superintendent of Instruction Laura McAlister, Superintendent of Instruction Cathy Nevins, Superintendent of Instruction Walter Piovesan, Superintendent of Instruction Neil Yorke-Slader, Superintendent of Instruction Peter Gamwell, Superintendent of Instruction
1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.	Meeting with Union Representatives (Room B223) <u>Attendees:</u> Sheila Lanthier, OSSTF, Educational Support/Professional

TIME	GROUP
3:20 p.m. - 3:45 p.m.	<p>Meeting with Bayview Public School Principal and Tour of School</p> <p><u>Attendees:</u> Anne Laperrière, School Principal Mike Carson, Superintendent of Facilities Ian Baxter, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board</p> <p>Ministry Representative: Philip O'Brien, Education Officer, Ottawa Regional Office</p>
3:45 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.	<p>Meeting at Bayview Public School with Representatives of the School Council and the Community Working Group (CWG)</p> <p><u>Attendees:</u> Anne Laperriere, Principal Lisa Czajkowski, CWG Lynda Collie, Parent Brenda Wilson, Parent Georginna Drew, School Council Representative Wendy McPharlane, School Council Representative</p> <p>Ministry Representative: Philip O'Brien, Education Officer, Ottawa Regional Office</p>
6:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.	<p>Dinner meeting with Trustees</p> <p><u>Attendees:</u> Rob Campbell, Chair of the Board Lynn Scott, Vice-Chair of the Board Cathy Curry, Trustee John Shea, Trustee Pam FitzGerald, Trustee Riley Brockington, Trustee Alex Getty, Trustee Jennifer McKenzie, Trustee David Moen, Trustee Bronwyn Funicello, Trustee Lorne Rachlis, Director of the Board</p> <p>Ministry Representative: Philip O'Brien, Education Officer, Ottawa Regional Office</p> <p><u>Location:</u> Trustee Committee Room/Trustee Lounge Ottawa-Carleton District School Board Office 133 Greenbank Road</p>

TIME	GROUP
	Nepean ON
7:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.	<p>Meeting with Petitioners</p> <p><u>Location:</u> Gymnasium R. Byrns Curry Public School 185 Owl Drive Ottawa ON</p> <p>Ministry Representatives: Philip O'Brien, Education Officer, Ottawa Regional Office Monique Châteauvert, Regional Manager, Ottawa Regional Office</p>

Tuesday, April 17, 2007

TIME	GROUP
09:00 a.m. - 09:15 a.m.	<p>Meeting with Fielding Drive Public School Principal and Tour of School</p> <p><u>Attendees:</u> Barbara Lloyd, School Principal Mike Carson, Superintendent of Facilities Neil York-Slader, Superintendent of Instruction Ian Baxter, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board</p> <p>Ministry Representative: Philip O'Brien, Education Officer, Ottawa Regional Office</p>
09:15 a.m. - 9:35 a.m.	<p>** Although this time was allocated for Fielding Public School Rep, time was used to meet with Jim Elves, Chair of Bayview School Council and Community Working Group (CWG)</p> <p>Ministry Representative: Philip O'Brien, Education Officer, Ottawa Regional Office</p> <p>A teleconference for Fielding Public School Rep was scheduled for Friday, April 27, 2007 (as noted below)</p>
10:15 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.	<p>Meeting with R. Byrns Curry Public School Principal and School Tour</p> <p>Gayle Singer, School Principal</p>

TIME	GROUP
	Ministry Representative: Phillip O'Brien, Education Officer, Ottawa Regional Office
10:30 a.m. - 11:15 a.m.	Meeting at R. Byrns Public School with representatives of the School Council and the Community Working Group (CWG) <u>Attendees:</u> Gayle Singer, Principal John Nihmey, School Council Co-Chair Sara Burke, CWG Al Lucier, CWG Jan Downing, School Council Dorothy Overton, CWG Ministry Representative: Phillip O'Brien, Education Officer, Ottawa Regional Office
11:30 a.m. - 11:45 a.m.	Meeting with General Vanier Public School Principal and Tour of School <u>Attendees:</u> Deborah Kuffner, Acting, School Principal Ministry Representative: Phillip O'Brien, Education Officer, Ottawa Regional Office
11:45 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.	Meeting at General Vanier School with representatives of the School Council and the Community Working Group (CWG) <u>Attendees:</u> Deborah Kuffner, Principal/CWG Shawn Menard, School Council Co-Chair/CWG Sylvia Wood, School Council Co-Chair/CWG Ministry Representative: Phillip O'Brien, Education Officer, Ottawa Regional Office
12:45 p.m. - 1:45 p.m.	Luncheon meeting with Joan Green, former Ottawa-Carleton District School Board School Closure Facilitator <u>Location:</u> Le Bifthèque Ministry Representative: Phillip O'Brien, Education Officer, Ottawa Regional Office
3:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.	Wrap-Up Meeting with Trustees:

TIME	GROUP
	<p><u>Attendees:</u> Lynn Scott, Vice-Chair Pam FitzGerald David Moen John Shea Riley Brockington (by phone)</p> <p>Lorne Rachlis, Director of Education Neil York-Slader, Superintendent of Instruction Michelle Giroux, Executive Officer Cathy Nevins, Superintendent of Instruction Michael Carson, Superintendent of Facilities</p> <p>Ministry Representative: Philip O'Brien, Education Officer, Ottawa Regional Office</p> <p><u>Location:</u> Trustees' Committee Room</p>

Friday, April 27, 2007

TIME	GROUP
12:00 noon - 12:30 p.m.	Teleconference with representatives unable to participate in meetings scheduled on April 16 and 17, 2007: <u>Attendees:</u> Sarah Godwin, Parent Catherine Drew, School Council Co-Chair, Fielding Martha Heyerdhal, School Council Co-Chair, Fielding Annie Schwarz, Community Working Group, Fielding Ministry Representative: Philip O'Brien, Education Officer, Ottawa Regional Office