



**West Galt Elementary Schools Pupil Accommodation Review
(School Closure Review)
Community Information Session Minutes
October 25, 2012
Highland Public School from 7:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.**

The Community Information Session to share the [Administrative Analysis Report](#) and provide an update on the West Galt Elementary Schools Pupil Accommodation Review was held at Highland Public School on Thursday, October 25, 2012.

Attended by:

Dennis Cuomo, Manager of Planning, Waterloo Region District School Board
Lauren Manske, Senior Planner, Waterloo Region District School Board
Lila Read, Superintendent of Education, Waterloo Region District School Board
Wendy Bowker, Principal, Highland Public School
Marcia Lubert, Principal, Tait Street Public School
Andrea Kean, Recording Secretary
Pamela Wolf, Cambridge City Councillor
Approximately 50 members of the public were also in attendance.

1. Welcome/Introductions:

Dennis Cuomo, Manager of Planning for the Waterloo Region District School Board welcomed members of the public and introduced Lauren Manske, Senior Planner for the Board.

Ms. Manske noted that the purpose of this evening's meeting is to advise the West Galt community about the options that Board administration have been considering regarding the West Galt Accommodation/School Closure Review.

2. Presentation: tonight's presentation is available online [here](#)

Review Area

The West Galt Review involves Blair Road, Dickson, Highland, St. Andrew's and Tait Street Public Schools. An accommodation review can result in school closures, boundary changes, program or grade changes and/or school construction.

The Accommodation Review Committee (or ARC) worked very hard throughout the last school year to develop accommodation solutions and recommendations for the West Galt community. The ARC's report and recommendations were presented to the Board of Trustees on June 18, 2012.

West Galt ARC Recommendations

The ARC made 6 recommendations regarding the accommodation of students in the West Galt area of Cambridge:

1. To close Dickson Public School
2. To construct a new JK-6 facility
3. To modify the boundary for Blair Road Public School
4. To modify the boundary and add Gr. 6 to Highland Public School
5. To modify the boundary for Tait Street Public School
6. To offer only Gr. 7-8 at St Andrew's Public School

The work of the ARC concluded when its [report and recommendations](#) were presented on June 18, 2012. This submission also triggered the commencement of a 60-day waiting period before Trustees can decide on the outcome of this review.

During this 60-day period, which does not include the summer holidays, it is the role of Board Administration to review the ARC's recommendations and provide and [administrative analysis](#) and recommendations to the Board of Trustees.

This administrative analysis was presented to the Board of Trustees on October 15, 2012 for information only. This means that there were no recommendations associated with this report; those will come at a later date. The intention this evening is to share the content of the administrative analysis presented to Trustees, as well as, a few alternative options that Board administration have developed that attempt to address the concerns staff have with the ARC's recommendations.

Analysis

In general, Board Administration believes that the ARC developed a set of recommendations that are based on an ideal long-term solution for the West Galt area. It is ideal because it redistributes facilities or accommodation within the review area. As a result of a new facility (in a strategic location) there would be more students able to attend a school within walking distance of their homes.

Ms. Manske provided a more detailed analysis related to each recommendation of the ARC noting the importance that this analysis in no way is intended to undermine the work of the ARC. There is strong administrative support for the intent of the ARC's recommendations; but there is considerable concern regarding its dependence on funding from the Province for a new elementary school.

ARC Recommendation #1: Close Dickson P.S.

The ARC's recommendation to close Dickson PS is consistent with the rationale for the Board initiating this review. Further, staff are cautious of the implications of the 2012 Ontario Budget that highlights the need for school boards to consolidate small and underused urban schools to deliver services more effectively. Since the Board is currently operating this school in an urban area where there are at least 4 nearby alternative schools, there is concern that in the future the Board's likelihood of receiving provincial funding for the administration and/or operation of the school is reduced.

The ARC's recommendations could also not present a firm timeframe for when Dickson PS would close. [Board Policy 4000](#) – *Pupil Accommodation Review* states that "If the

Board of Trustees votes to close a school or schools, it must outline clear timelines around when the school(s) will close. The Board's resolution will also outline specific timelines for approved actions." As a result, the Board will have to set a timeframe that is achievable. Since the closure of Dickson PS in the ARC's scenario is reliant on funding from the Province to build a new school, staff are cautious of outlining timelines that are beyond the Board's control.

ARC Recommendation #2: Construct a new JK-6 facility

The addition of a new JK-6 school in this community is an ideal solution; however, construction costs for this facility are estimated at \$6.5M and are subject to Ministry of Education (provincial) approval and funding. The Ministry is currently using a business case model for capital funding and it is unknown whether the Board could make a compelling argument to receive the capital funding necessary given the number of competing projects ahead of this one within the Board and across the province. Therefore, the construction of a new facility may not be achievable within a reasonable timeframe. As a result, all other ARC recommendations would be held up and also not achievable within a reasonable timeframe.

ARC Recommendation #3: Modify Blair Road P.S. boundary

The realignment of attendance areas between Blair Road PS and Tait Street PS puts Township students closer to their assigned school. However, the size of Blair Road PS remains at approximately 80 percent utilization. There are two implications to this: 1) it weakens the case for proposed new school; but 2) may jeopardize case for a future school in the Cambridge West Master Environmental Servicing Plan Area just west of Blair Road PS.

ARC Recommendation #4: Grade 6 and modify boundary for Highland P.S.

The ARC's proposed boundary change reduces the enrolment at Highland PS, makes room to consolidate Dickson PS, and, in the future, room for Grade 6; but not until the new elementary school is funded and built.

There also continues to be pressure at Highland PS until another location for Partial FI can be established.

ARC Recommendation #5: Modify Tait Street P.S. boundary

Realignment of catchment areas for Tait Street PS and Blair Road PS puts more Township students closer to their assigned school and provides accommodation for some Dickson PS students.

The ARC highlighted in its report that transportation is an issue at Tait Street PS. This is a long-standing issue at the school since the site does not have any street frontage; therefore, there it has no designated loading zone for buses. Students require adult supervision to walk to/from Grand Ridge Drive and West River Road where the bus loads/unloads.

Over the summer, an opportunity arose to put in an offer on a property that would allow the Board to construct a driveway access connecting the site to West River Road. The Board has approved the purchase of this land; however, has not closed on the deal and is not currently in possession of the land. There are several options being explored as to how to make this work, and any plans will be subject to approvals from the City of

Cambridge. This is a solution that would have been required regardless of the outcome of this review.

When developing solutions, the ARC was very limited by the boundaries it could set for Tait Street PS. because it was not achievable to add more students who would require busing to the school. As a result of this opportunity to solve the transportation issues, we can now consider alternative solutions that include the use of Tait Street PS to accommodate a larger boundary, as well as the potential to offer French Immersion at that site.

ARC Recommendation #6: Gr. 7-8 only at St. Andrew's PS.

The ARC's recommendation to provide a consistent entry point (Grade 7) to St. Andrew's PS. creates greater equity for all students. The concern is that by eliminating the Grade 6 students, the facility's utilization is under 80 percent; therefore it is uncertain if the Board can make a convincing argument to receive the capital funding necessary for a new JK-6 facility when there is available capacity in the area.

Discussion

Given the discussions Board staff have had with Ministry staff regarding our recent capital priorities submission, there is definitely some cause for caution that under the ARC's Scenario 23, 2 Schools would be at 80 percent capacity. This utilization rate may make it difficult to meet the province's criteria for Capital funding. The Board would have stronger business cases for other higher priority projects that may continue to be funded ahead of a new JK-6 school in West Galt.

Also, there is an urgent need to address the overcrowding issues at Highland PS which cannot wait for new school funding to address these issues.

Board staff believes that the intent and spirit of the ARC scenario can be implemented WITHOUT construction of a new school.

It is very important to note that the following scenarios are all suggestions of what could take place. No final recommendations have been brought forward yet, and everything suggested here tonight is subject to change – either by staff based on the comments we receive tonight, or by trustees when they make the final decision. Please [let us know](#) if you like or dislike what we are presenting here tonight.

Administration [Scenario A](#)

In Scenario A, all but one of the ARC's recommendations would be implemented. Instead of constructing a new JK-6 facility for \$6.5M, the recommendation under Scenario A is to construct an 8 classroom addition to Blair Road PS for approximately \$3.5M and start a Partial French Immersion program at Blair Road PS, in addition to the one at Highland PS currently.

The boundaries do vary slightly from the ARC's Scenario 23, mostly because now there is no new school to direct students to.

There are several implementation pieces that go with this Scenario. One of these pieces is the year of implementation. We have shown either a September 2013 or September 2014 date on our display boards. We are also considering several grandfathering options that in order to explain span several pages.

Please open the links below to view the possible implications for the affected areas in Scenarios A and B (**Please note that all listed possible implications, including transportation provisions, are subject to change**):

- [Blair Road P.S. to Tait Street P.S.](#)
- [Dickson P.S. to Highland P.S.](#)
- [Dickson P.S. to Tait Street P.S.](#)
- [Highland P.S. to Blair Road P.S.](#)
- [Highland P.S. to Tait Street P.S.](#)
- [Highland P.S. Out of Boundary/Out of Review Area French Immersion](#), North of Cedar Creek Rd/Cedar St/Concession St/Main St
- [Highland P.S. Out of Boundary/Out of Review Area French Immersion](#), South of Cedar Creek Rd/Cedar St/Concession St/Main St

With Dickson PS students in mind the recommendation is to allow all existing Dickson PS students to stay together and attend Highland PS. We also have some grandfathering options for French Immersion students. All the options indicate if transportation may be provided.

The implementation of French Immersion would not happen all at once. This means that we would not be able to offer Grade 1- 6 right away. We can however, because the numbers break out ok, offer up to Grade 3 and then add a new grade each year after that.

Administration Scenario B

As with Scenario A, all but one of the ARC's recommendations could be implemented in Scenario B. Instead of constructing a new JK-6 facility for \$6.5M, the recommendation under Scenario B is to construct an additional 3-4 classrooms to Tait Street PS for approximately \$1.3M (and may likely cost less if combined with the upcoming construction of the Full-day Kindergarten addition) and start a Partial French Immersion program at Tait Street PS, in addition to the current partial French Immersion Program at Highland PS.

Again, the boundaries do vary slightly from the ARC's Scenario 23, mostly because now there is no new school to direct students to.

There are two different boundary options we have chosen to display for you tonight. The first option ([Scenario B – Boundary Option 1](#)) sends a greater portion of the Dickson PS boundary to Highland PS and the second ([Scenario B- Boundary Option 2](#)) directs more of the boundary to Tait Street PS.

Again, there are several implementation pieces associated with either of these options, which include grandfathering. Since they are lengthy, Ms. Manske did not go through all the details; however, provided handouts outlining how this may impact students below:

Please open the links below to view the possible implications for the affected areas in Scenarios A and B (**Please note that all listed possible implications, including transportation provisions, are subject to change**):

- [Blair Road P.S. to Tait Street P.S.](#)
- [Dickson P.S. to Highland P.S.](#)
- [Dickson P.S. to Tait Street P.S.](#)
- [Highland P.S. to Blair Road P.S.](#)
- [Highland P.S. to Tait Street P.S.](#)
- [Highland P.S. Out of Boundary/Out of Review Area French Immersion](#), North of Cedar Creek Rd/Cedar St/Concession St/Main St
- [Highland P.S. Out of Boundary/Out of Review Area French Immersion](#), South of Cedar Creek Rd/Cedar St/Concession St/Main St

Summary

Ms. Manske reiterated that these new scenarios are variations on the ARC's recommendations.

They remove the uncertainty associated with provincial funding allocations.

By implementing one of these alternative solutions, the Board can be in full control of a planned timeline for implementation of the accommodation changes in the West Galt area.

It is the opinion of staff that the Board could fund the proposed additions from a reserve fund; therefore would not rely on provincial funding.

Next Steps

Our next scheduled meeting where staff will present their recommended solutions is on Monday November 12, 2012. This is a [Board Committee of the Whole meeting](#) that will be held at the Education Centre.

The report will be posted on the Board's website on Friday November 9.

This is the date where trustees may vote on the recommendations. Trustees have a few options on that day:

- Consider and approve the recommendations of the ARC
- Consider and approve the recommendations of Board administration
- Consider and approve any alternative solution proposed by a trustee or member of the public (this would be an option we would strongly discourage making a decision on the same day as the proposal is presented)
- Opt to make no decision

3. Questions

Ms. Manske opened the floor up for any questions/comments:

Q: What parts of tonight's information will be posted online?

R: The presentation, display boards and handouts explaining how changes will affect the students in the affected areas will be posted on the Board's website at: <http://www.wrdsb.ca/planning/accommodation-review/west-galt-elementary-schools-accommodation-review/>

Q: Can you explain why the large difference in size and cost between the proposed addition at Blair Road PS and Tait Street PS?

R: Blair Road PS will require an addition of 8 classrooms because it currently has fewer classrooms than Tait Street PS. Tait Street PS will require a total of 6 additional classrooms but due to Tait Street PS being approved for 2 classrooms for its Full-day Kindergarten (FDK) program addition (which is outside the scope of this review) with funding being provided by the Province, the additional 3-4 rooms required could be combined with the FDK construction so the Board can achieve better pricing for design and construction.

Q: What do you mean when you say that the new scenarios keep the spirit of the ARC recommendations?

R: The 'spirit of the ARC recommendations' refers to the issues the ARC was addressing with their scenarios. The staff analysis targets these same issues in our scenarios; and shares 5 out of the 6 recommended actions (but based on differing funding assumptions) with that of the ARC recommendations.

Q: The earliest possible date of implementation for changes would be September 2013 – is that the best case scenario with everything falling into place?

R: Yes; that is based on Trustees making their decision before February 2013; The Board determines staffing for the 2013-14 school year in March 2013. This would also require that the Full-day Kindergarten program be implemented at Tait Street PS in September 2013, one year earlier than originally planned.

Q: What are the reserve funds mentioned for the funding of the additions at Blair Road and Tait Street Public Schools?

R: The Board has some reserve funds which it can use for these additions; the scope would still need to be approved by the Board, and the Ministry of Education would provide approval to spend our money.

Q: Is Scenario B dependent on the Board approving the purchase of property to address bussing concerns at Tait Street PS?

R: The Board has already approved the purchase of the property for Tait Street PS; this is site work that will be done regardless of the outcome of this Review. The purchase will be closing in mid-November and the Board is in the process of preparing a site plan.

Q: How did the Board find this property and how much are you paying for it?

R: Over the summer staff found the property which was listed through a real-estate agency and the Board put in an offer (which we cannot disclose until the deal is finalized) and prepared a report to the Board of Trustees which they approved in September. The purchase price will be part of public record through the Property Registry once the deal closes.

Q: Is the outcome of this review a foregone conclusion now that Tait Street PS will have this additional property to allow for bussing access to the school and allows for the school to be expanded?

R: The purchase of this property does not mean that the outcome for the review will be a foregone conclusion but it does allow for Tait Street PS to be able to accommodate transported students which the ARC was unable to recommend in its report due to the bussing concerns which the property purchase will alleviate. It will also allow for new solutions for issues in this review which staff presented here this evening. The purchase of this property was initiated outside the Review to address the ongoing bussing concerns at Tait Street PS. This property on West River Road connects to the Tait Street PS site and will be used to create a driveway to allow students to be dropped off and picked up on site; students currently require adult supervision to walk to/from Grand Ridge Drive and West River Road where the bus loads. Regardless of the outcome of this review, the Board will be going ahead with the purchase of the property and driveway construction to address Tait Street PS's bussing issues.

Q: Does that mean the Tait Street Public School's bussed students will no longer be dropped off on Grand Ridge Drive?

R: Yes. Once the purchase of the property closes and the Board completes the plans for the site the bus will pick up and drop off on school property.

Q: Does the Board already have an offer for purchase on Dickson Public School?

R: No. The Board of Trustees has not voted on the recommendations of the West Galt Review. Should the Trustees decide to close Dickson PS; the Board would then have to decide if it still requires the site for another purpose. If the Board decides that the site will no longer be needed we have to follow a [process](#) under the Education Act which involves circulating the site at fair market value to a list of approved public bodies before it can be considered to be sold on the open market.

Q: Does the dollar amount for the new scenarios include the money spent to purchase the new property for Tait Street PS's site.

R: No.

Q: Was there any consideration given to buying more land to be able to do renovations at Dickson PS to accommodate more students instead of building a new school?

R: No. This is cost-prohibitive. As far as we are aware, there are no properties for sale around Dickson PS and this may not address the many issues with the school including the very small site, limited parking, and no room for portables.

Q: By what date does the Board need a decision to be able to implement changes for September 2013?

R: We would need a decision no later than February 1, 2012 for staffing purposes to be able to implement for September 2013.

Q: If Highland PS is already over capacity; how will it be able to accommodate all the Dickson Public School's students, should they all decide to attend there?

R: There are boundary changes for Highland PS students as well. Some will be directed to Blair Road PS or Tait Street PS.

Q: If all the Dickson PS students chose to attend Highland PS what affect will that have on the enrolment numbers for Tait Street PS?

R: Not a significant effect would amount to 20-30 students. The enrolment projections assume that students will take the Highland PS option, not Tait Street PS.

Q: The implementation of the partial French Immersion (FI) program at Tait Street and Blair Road Public Schools is a good idea; would there be enough FI students to be able to offer the program from grade 1-3 at Blair Road PS right away?

R: Yes. Blair Road PS could also accommodate students who currently attend Highland PS from outside the boundary who are presently enrolled in the FI program there.

Q: Is the ARC's recommendations for this review still on the table?

R: Yes.

Q: If the Trustees decide to go with one of the new scenarios will the new school on Beechwood Road still be on the table?

R: No.

Q: Why haven't you suggested starting a French Immersion program at Dickson PS?

R: There is no space to send more students or offer this program at Dickson PS and it would negatively impact the regular program there (the numbers are not great enough to support the program).

Q: What are the approximate class sizes for the Board's schools?

R: The primary class sizes are mandated by the Province as follows:

- Grades 1-3, average 20 students
- Grades 3-6, average 23 students

Q: These numbers are the Board average; can classrooms have higher numbers than those listed?

R: Yes. Sometimes there could be more.

Q: Will students who currently have special education supports at their current school be eligible for those supports at another school?

R: Lila Read, Superintendent of Education, for the South Area Family of Schools, responded that special education supports (including resource teachers, child and youth workers and educational assistants) are determined by the overall needs of a school's student population. A student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) identifies what modifications and/or accommodations are needed to support that student. If a student moves to another school anywhere in the Province, their Ontario Student Record (OSR) which includes their IEP, moves with them. It is the IEP that assists schools in determining how best to support that child.

Q: Will the boundaries be adjusted to move students out of Highland PS?

R: Yes. Those adjustments are incorporated into the scenarios.

Q: What formula does the Board use for developing attendance projections?

R: Projections are developed based on several different assumptions. We consider various criteria depending on the area; and use Statistics Canada Census data as well as historical data. Every community is different and we like to consider the special conditions when studying each school community.

Q: Why are the enrolment projection numbers so low for Dickson in 2013?

R: The number assumes that any new JK students would chose to attend the school where they would be directed to under the boundary change one year early to avoid having to change schools in the following year when Dickson PS would close.

Q: Will bussing be required for the Dickson PS students being directed to Tait Street or Highland PS?

R: That would be dependent on distance to school. The Board's policy provides bussing for the following:

- JK-SK over 0.8 km (.5 mile)
- Grades 1-8 over 1.6 km (1 mile)

There is also special hazard bussing to address safety concerns and there are some students attending Tait Street PS who are bused based on those concerns. A transportation consortium exists to look at safety issues and make the determination on behalf of the Board.

Q: What are my options to be able to move my children to another small school?

R: Our boundaries are set and any requests to attend another school would have to go through an application process.

Q: If the Trustees don't vote on a recommendation at the November 12th meeting, how will that affect the timeline?

R: The Trustees are not guaranteed to vote on November 12th and are not bound to any timeline for making a decision – they can take as long as they like.

Q: If the Trustees don't vote – what can be done to help alleviate the problem at Highland PS?

R: The Board could still implement another French Immersion Program elsewhere without needing Board approval but would not be able to change boundaries.

Q: Does Dickson Public School have “a snowball's chance in hell”?

R: Staff will be recommending that Dickson PS be closed: It is up to the Trustees to decide (by majority vote) if it will remain open.

C: Tonight I've heard you talk about numbers and boundaries but I have not heard you talk about the children; the children need to be considered.

R: The members of the ARC represent the school communities and have been representing the children all through this process. Whenever changes are proposed, there are always some that are affected. We have been considering the Dickson PS students and that is why we have offered them all the option to go together to Highland PS. As Board staff, it is our job to balance the needs of all the students within our Board and we recognize that a school is not just a building and is made up of all the people that go there, but that does not mean that tough decisions should not be made.

C: A Dickson PS parent commented that Dickson PS students have an ideal situation where they are in classrooms that have sizes well below the provincial average; “we don't want that to change, it is an ideal situation”.

R: A Highland PS parent responded that Highland PS does not have that situation and is overcrowded – the Highland PS students deserve better.

Mr. Cuomo thanked everyone for attending, and gave the contact numbers and Board website information for the public to access with any questions or comments. He reminded those in attendance to please fill-out the comment sheets and send them in either via fax at (519)570-2172, by email at boundaryfeedback@wrdsb.on.ca. Board staff will be taking the comments provided into consideration and please send your comments in before staff makes its recommendation to the Board of Trustees at the [Committee of the Whole](#) meeting scheduled for November 12, 2012.

The formal presentation ended at 8:30 p.m. and Mr. Cuomo, Ms. Manske and Superintendent of Education Lila Read made themselves available to answer questions one-on-one until 9:15 p.m.

Website:

[West Galt Elementary Schools Accommodation Review | Waterloo Region District School Board](#)

Email:
boundaryfeedback@wrdsb.ca

Phone:
519-570-0003 ext. 4419

Fax:
519-570-2172

[How to be a Delegation](#)

Individuals, organizations and groups are welcome to speak to the Board as a [delegation](#). In accordance with Board Bylaws, at regular Board meetings, delegations speak only to matters relevant to items listed on the agenda. All other presentations will be scheduled at Committee of the Whole Meetings.

You may register as a delegation by calling Jayne Herring, Manager of Corporate Services, at 519 570-0003, ext. 4336, during business hours. You should register by noon on the Thursday prior to the meeting.