

Report to Committee of the Whole November 23, 2009



Waterloo Region
District School Board

_____ Director of Education

SUBJECT: SECONDARY SCHOOL BOUNDARY REVIEW

ORIGINATOR: This report was prepared by Marilyn Marklevitz, Executive Superintendent of Business and Financial Services and Treasurer, Marion Jarrell, Controller of Financial Services, and Chris Smith, Manager of Planning.

PURPOSE:

To seek approval for the retention of a professional consulting firm to undertake a review of the Board's secondary school boundaries; and to utilize working fund reserves to undertake this study.

BACKGROUND:

The Board's sixteen secondary schools all have established home school boundaries and all deliver a core program that enables students to achieve their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD).

Grade 8 students are first directed to the secondary school which boundary includes each student's residence address (their "home" school).

However, there are also district boundaries for the six schools offering the Fast Forward option and the four schools offering the English as a Second Language program. Extended boundaries exist for both these programs based on residence; but the students "home" school might not be one of those sites.

Transportation is provided to the students "home" school based on the Board's transportation policy. Transportation is provided to the Fast Forward and English as a Second Language based on program specific criteria.

There are also a number of choice or magnet programs such as the International Baccalaureate, Integrated Arts, Extended French and French Immersion, which are site specific. Attendance at these programs is outside of the home school boundary (OOB). Transportation is not provided to program sites based on student choice.

STATUS:

Many of the current boundaries have remained largely intact for some time, while others have been adjusted to greater or lesser degrees to accommodate enrolment growth and decline, and for the opening of the two newest schools: Sir John A. Macdonald and Huron Heights Secondary Schools.

The Board has not looked at any secondary school boundaries since Huron Heights' catchment was designed. That resulted in a review and changes to the Cambridge secondary school boundaries in 2005.

From time to time, there have been requests about possible adjustments to individual school's boundaries because of high enrolments, pressure on the facilities or community proximity.

Secondary catchments are large in size and include a number of elementary school communities. Generally this size allows a secondary school to stabilize enrolment declines and increases across the catchment with greater pressure on a school with a higher proportion of newer residential development. Changes such as the new boundaries for Sir John A. Macdonald SS have significant impacts on the existing schools. Traditional school catchments provide identity for the school communities, and opportunities for student-to-work placement and community support.

Earlier this year there was discussion about the possibility of a secondary boundary review but nothing was included in budget because the scope was not yet determined and therefore no estimate of the cost was available.

Given the number of requests and ongoing concerns with school size and community balance, a comprehensive review of the current secondary school boundary situation could be undertaken by an independent consultant during the 2009-2010 school year.

Current staff workload was a factor in the decision to retain an independent consultant for this review, but it is also important that such a comprehensive task have the opportunity of an “outside” perspective. In this regard, the Board recently issued an RFP for consultants qualified in this area of practice.

The consultant would be retained to look at the current situation, existing and projected development and enrolment, program distribution, transportation, school size and range of size, facilities and capacity, etc. The review will complement other secondary work underway, such as the Secondary Staffing Utilization Review. The study would be conducted in two phases:

Phase 1:

Data collection, revising existing situation and relate to ongoing studies or processes.
Arrive at preliminary observations and recommendations.
May result in recommendations regarding boundary reviews.

Phase 2:

Develop preliminary recommendations and undertake community consultation process.
Develop final boundary recommendations.
Present recommendations to communities and Board.

The Request for Proposals to the consultant required separate pricing for each phase; depending on the outcome(s) of Phase 1, the Board may choose not to proceed with a Phase 2.

COMMUNICATIONS:

If approved, the Secondary School Boundary Review would be communicated to the secondary schools’ administration and school communities. Phase 1 will be largely an investigative process and the consultant will report to a Project Steering Committee, with representation from Learning Services, SSPA, Planning, Human Resources, Facilities and Finance.

Should the review proceed to Phase 2, the usual public and school community communications could be undertaken, following the Board’s boundary change procedures and practices if warranted.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The proposal for a consultant-led boundary review of the Board’s secondary schools was discussed during the development of the 2009-2010 operating budget but no allocation was assigned until a project scope and RFP was developed and released.

The recommended amount for the study has now been determined to be up to a limit of \$100,000.

This cost cannot be funded from the regular 2009-2010 Budget.

SYSTEM SUCCESS PLAN:

The implementation of this boundary change relates to the Caring and Connecting areas of focus by addressing the following priorities:

- safe and secure learning environments
- caring and supportive school cultures and communities
- communication with students and parents and consultation with community members and staff
- operational effectiveness and efficiency
- quality information for planning, decision-making and accountability

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended:

That the Waterloo Region District School Board retain a professional consulting firm to undertake a comprehensive boundary review of the Board's secondary schools during the 2009-2010 school year; and

That the Waterloo Region District School Board approve the transfer of up to \$100,000 from working fund reserves to cover the cost of the Secondary School Boundary Review.