

Presentation

To: ESDNL and Trustees

From: St. Matthew's School Council

Wednesday, Jan 12th, 2011

Opening Remarks

Good evening ladies and gentlemen of the board and trustees. Thank you for your valuable time and providing the opportunity for me to speak this evening. My name is Dean Menchions and I am the chair of St. Matthew's School Council. My two children attend St. Matthew's and I have been a member of council for four years.

Process

The school councils of both St. Matthew's and Cowan Heights Elementary met jointly on Monday, Dec 6th with representatives of the School District. At this time we were informed of the proposal to close I.J. Samson in June 2011 and possibly retain our grade six classes for grade seven in the following school year.

By Wednesday, Dec 8th both councils, in a joint manner, sent home communication regarding the proposal and requested feedback from parents. The communication came in three forms; a letter sent home with each child, a posting on the school website and a voice mail communication

For several days, we did not receive any feedback. Then, one parent demanded a public meeting to discuss the "pros and cons" of the proposal. I requested a written submission from this parent to outline concerns and informed the parent that both the school council monthly meeting was open to the public and there would be public consultations in January. After three days, there was no response and so the council did not see the need for a public meeting in addition to the current forums provided.

Given a lack of feedback, I proactively asked parents for feedback as did many other school council members. The response was overwhelmingly in favor of the proposal. In fact, most of the parents of K to Grade Five students expressed disappointment that the change was merely for one year.

Before the Dec. 20 deadline, we received six emails from Grade 6 parents of one particular class. Of these, only one parent was completely opposed to the proposal. The

other parents had concerns that I will list below. However, I emphasize, that they did not say no. The concerns were:

- 1) Missed opportunity for our students to socialize and be mentored by older children
- 2) Participation in competitive junior high sports and other extra-curricular activities
- 3) Overcrowding at Beaconsfield and possible disruptions during renovations
- 4) Possibility of modular classrooms becoming permanent
- 5) Homeroom setting versus floating classrooms
- 6) Lack of qualified French instructors and subject specific teachers
- 7) Concern that programming would be identical to Beaconsfield

After these were identified, Mr. Dwyer met with all the grade six students to address these concerns as well as any other student concerns. Questions were asked and many concerns allayed.

At this point, I have to acknowledge the school's administration. Mr. Dwyer and Ms. Vivian proactively forwarded these concerns to the board and Mr. Rice was kind enough to send a memo dated Dec 21st. This memo was again sent to all parents, posted on the website and further notified through voice mail communication. The memo directly addressed these concerns.

Recommendation

St. Matthew's School Council met on Monday, Jan 10th. Our original meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, Jan 4th, but we delayed to provide interested parents the opportunity to have more time to make arrangements to attend the meeting. We had received criticism that we were not being open enough. Members of council encouraged parents to come and we were expecting those who expressed concern to attend. The only people in attendance were council members.

Other than one email from a parent restating her objection, we received no other feedback on the district's Dec 21st memo.

During our meeting, we reviewed all correspondence and went point by point through each concern raised by this small group of parents. Some were beyond the scope of the School Council (i.e. concern about disruptions during Beaconsfield renovations). The others were fully satisfied by the School Board memo or a greater understanding of board policy.

Therefore, St. Matthew's School Council, in a unanimous vote, will issue the following statement:

“St. Matthew's School Council supports the proposal to close I.J. Samson in June 2011. We are prepared to retain our Grade 6 students for Grade 7 on the condition

that qualified teachers are hired and sufficient, timely resources provided. We would like to develop a formal monitoring and evaluation process to determine the level of success and the impact of this change on our school community.

Thank you for your time and consideration.