

BOARD LOOKS AT WAYS TO BALANCE SCHOOL ENROLMENTS

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program from McKenzie-Smith Bennett to Acton District High School - a concept that was the subject of a boundary review public information meeting at ADHS Jan. 14.

The plan would see MSB and the board's other elementary school in Acton, Robert Little, become kindergarten to Grade 6 facilities. If ultimately approved, the changes would take effect at ADHS and MSB in September 2021, and at Robert Little this coming September.

Board officials say the review process was kick-started by the fact ADHS has been underutilized for the past decade. The school is currently sitting at 71 per cent capacity with 445 students - a number that's projected to rise to 658 students by 2021 with the proposed change.

Director of Education Stuart Miller told the dozens of parents in attendance that two Burlington schools have converted to Grade 7 to 12 facilities with positive results.

He noted those schools experienced a far greater retention rate of Grade 8 students who may have previously left for Catholic or private school in Grade 9.

"Let's put it on the table - Acton High School is losing kids to Christ the King. We want to look at how we can retain Grade 8 students in Acton at this school," he said. "There is an issue, and it has to be addressed. How it's addressed is what you (parents) are going to help us do."

According to Superintendent of Education John Pennyfather, increasing the student population would give ADHS the ability to offer more courses.

He noted the proposed

change would balance enrolments at the two elementary schools and also mean fewer transitions for Robert Little students, who currently move to MSB for Grades 6 to 8 before attending ADHS.

"This is about creating a better learning environment for the students of Acton," he said.

Parents in attendance had the chance to share their thoughts with board staff and provided mixed reviews. Some expressed concern about their 12- and 13-year-old children joining a school with older teens and asked if they would be kept separate during lunch breaks, etc. Board staff indicated the day-to-day logistics will be hammered out by an integration committee that will be formed if the proposal is given the go-ahead.

While the lack of an implementation plan initially



Melanie Hennessey/Torstar

Acton parents listen to details of the local school boundary review at a public meeting at ADHS on Jan. 14.

concerned Krista Kerr, the local mother of two told the Independent she was reassured to find out at the meeting that the board will take its time to create an Acton-specific plan.

"I'm generally for the change because I think it will offer the Grade 7 and 8 students an opportunity to access resources they may not otherwise have access to at MSB," she said, pointing to technology facilities, guidance counsellors and student success teachers. "As a high school teacher, I

also know the stress of the transition between Grade 8 and 9, and I think this will alleviate some of those stressors for kids."

A Boundary Review Committee has been established that consists of parents from all three schools, trustees Jeanne Gray and Leah Reynolds, HDSB Planning Department staff and superintendents.

The committee will meet again at ADHS on Jan. 28 at 7 p.m. to review the commentary submitted by parents. The group's findings

will be presented to Miller, who will make a final recommendation for the board of trustees to vote on during their March 4 meeting.

Local parents can submit their thoughts on the issue until Jan. 24 via a feedback form on hdsb.ca (search 'Acton Schools Boundary Review').

The board is also reviewing school boundaries in Burlington, Oakville and Milton. The process stems from the 2018-19 long-term accommodation plan that provided enrolment projections for the next decade across Halton.

For more information visit the aforementioned site or email actonboundaryreview@hdsb.ca.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY

We've been following this important issue that will impact many families in Acton since the boundary review launched late last year and will continue to keep our readers apprised as the process continues.



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