

February 7th, 2017

Near North District School Board
Capital Planning

Re: ARC process regarding North Bay Secondary Schools

I write this letter as a concerned parent of current elementary school students who will be impacted by your proposed plan to close three public secondary schools in North Bay and open one new large secondary school. This proposal is so preposterous that you may actually achieve some of your predicted declines in enrollment by virtue of students switching to schools covered by other school boards. I would point the board to the appeals and investigations in other cities over the ARC processes have been conducted since, it is my understanding through colleagues that the decision has already been rendered and that this current "consultation" is just for show. My concerns follow.

1) Violence

Recent reporting in the Nugget has presented an alarming trend of violence in our area elementary schools. When violent incidents occur there are few supports for the teachers and the most common action taken is to remove all of the other children from the room so in effect no one is learning. In reviewing statistics of larger secondary schools one of the consistent observations is an increase in in-school violence. By one large high school, the board would be sacrificing the safety and learning opportunity of our children.

2) Access to varsity athletics and other space-limited school activities

Students would lose 2/3 of their present day access to varsity athletics and other school related activities, possibly altering the course of their entire academic future. In this model only youth whose parents have financial access to sport or art programming outside of school would be of sufficient caliber to make a school team or activity therefore further marginalizing youth from less privileged families. In support of smaller schools, education policy makers have indicated that smaller schools are better able to mitigate the impact of poverty on learning.

3) Student travel time and traffic congestion

With only one school location most students would need to be bussed or driven to school. This reduces the number of students walking and participating in active transportation and also reduces the ability of some students to participate in extracurricular activities. In addition this will create an even greater traffic congestion challenge at the location selected (present Chippewa site).

4) Quality of Education - Fraser Institute Academic Ratings

Compared to schools in the southern parts of the province, North Bay Secondary Schools already rate poorly in the Fraser Institute's evaluation. Indications on the creation of larger secondary schools are that the savings achieved by cramming more students under one roof

directly affect academic quality. The only acceptable solution for our students is one that focuses on increasing academics in the North, not the opposite.

5) Numbers

While the idea of reducing the future of our youth to dollars and cents is completely objectionable, this seems to be the very crux of the issue for the board. The board should present their enrollment projections versus actual final enrollment for past years and calculate a margin of error on their enrolment projections. This margin of error needs to be applied to this current process if numbers are what it comes down to. I questioned the validity of some of the numbers being relied on in a past ARC process and was simply told that whenever the board is incorrect in their numbers it is a "statistical outlier". Anyone taking the time to participate in this process should be able to do so based on sound and transparent evaluation and analysis.

Students have been shown to perform the best in schools with 600-900 students. This number should be a key consideration of the board in their contemplation of a school with 2000+ students.

6) Community declines

The loss of schools has been documented to be the death knell for neighbourhoods resulting in eventual loss of businesses and declining property values. The loss of these schools, in particular West Ferris Secondary, would be detrimental to our these neighbourhoods and our community as a whole.

7) Analysis of other options

The board has glossed over other opportunities that might exist to rectify their lack of capital planning and the subsequent urgency of this current decision. The construction of 2 new schools is noted but is discounted with little evaluation or analysis. With a growing French Immersion student population the board should have more fulsomely evaluated the option of a French Immersion high school or other 2 school models.

For the reasons above and others that I cannot fit in to the allotted 2 pages, I compel the Board of Education to re-examine more student and community centered solutions such as the two-school option. Options should be analysed in light of their benefit for our students and not strictly on how much money the board can save. The board owes this to our youth.

Sincerely,

Heather Garbutt