

Presentation to the ARC Committee February 15 ,2017

My name is Garth Goodhew. I was an employee of the Nipissing Board of Education for 28 years. In that period of time I was the first Vice-Principal at WSS. I was then Principal at Algonquin Composite School, WFSS and CSS. Also during that time I was Vice-Principal of W.J. Fricker P.S. for one year. Most of my experience was at the secondary level and my comments will reflect my background.

I realise that our Board's major problems are funding issues and declining enrolment. I applaud the efforts put forth to develop options to deal with these issues facing public education in North Bay. I believe that it is noteworthy to point out that the Board's proposed deadline suggests a determination to make all major decisions, attain provincial approvals and get shovels in the ground before the next election of trustees in 2018.

I do not agree with the preferred option recommended by our Board. This option will lead to the closing of 3 elementary schools and the 3 existing English public secondary schools in North Bay. A new K-6 school would be built on the Fricker site accommodating 400+ students and a new 7-12 school would be built on the current Chippewa site accommodating up to 2200+ students including approximately 600 grade 7 and 8 students.

My remaining comments will apply primarily to the proposed 7-12 school. If this is built it will be of a size and scale never before experienced in North Bay. The Board has stated that all existing secondary programs will be transferred from the 3 existing secondary schools to the new 7-12 school. This one building will house all of the current traditional subjects, options and programs. French Immersion, Extended French, Nipissing Arts, specialized science, mathematics, technology and technical programs and all of necessary programs and services for students with learning exceptionalities and other special needs will be centred in this building. That will be some building!

One concern is that the Board has not stated that the facilities required for some of these programs will be replicated in the new school. To take just one program --will Arts Nipissing, currently housed at WSS, have similar facilities in the new school such as a large appropriately equipped auditorium? A second problem will be traffic congestion at the new Chippewa site. Can you imagine the traffic generated by the new school along with the traffic resulting from the other schools and facilities close to our site?

When recommending this option the Board presents two major arguments--that this option is the most fiscally responsible one and the size of the 7-12 population will make more subject options available for the student. I submit that a responsible business plan could be developed requesting funding for the refurbishing of one or two schools especially since the Board has spent significant funds keeping our secondary school buildings up to date. Furthermore you do not need a school of the size proposed in the preferred option to offer a broad selection of subjects and programs. If you have a secondary school with a population between 800 and 1200 you can offer all of the required compulsory subjects plus all current programs, numerous options and still provide necessary programming and services for special needs students.

Can the proposed new 7-12 school operate in an efficient way? Absolutely! We have the skills and the technology to make it work. However a school is not an assembly line or a finely tuned industrial plant.

Keep in mind that a secondary or intermediate-secondary school is the only relevant societal institution in the life of most students. The adolescents attending these schools are going through an exciting and often difficult time of their lives. It has become the responsibility of schools not only to meet the academic and skills needs of students but also to guide and assist them with their emotional, social, psychological and moral/values development. Compulsory subjects, program choices, program requirements for post secondary education and options are of course important to them. In addition they want to feel safe, they want to feel valued and that they are part of their "great" school. They want to belong and to know that they matter. It is my strong belief that a secondary school of 800-1200 has a far better chance of meeting the needs of students than one of 2000 students. These schools can be too large and too impersonal.

To the trustees--the decision you make will impact public education and North Bay for the next 50-60 years. Take the time to consult widely and to look again at your options. In my view the current preferred option is not in the best interests of students and one overly large public intermediate-secondary school is not in the best interests of North Bay. I made reference to traffic congestion above but I also ask you to consider what impact the closing of WSS and WFSS will have on their respective communities.