

# Minutes

**St. Mark  
Accommodation Review Advisory Committee (ARAC)  
Public Meeting  
Wednesday, March 11, 2009  
John Paul II Secondary School Cafetorium  
1300 Oxford Street East, London  
7:00 p.m.**

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**In Attendance:** Paul Whitehead (Trustee – ARAC Chair), Bill Hall (Trustee), Anne Kavelaars (Trustee), Cathy Sexton (Superintendent), Shaun Joy (St. Mark School Council representative), Peter Malcolmson (St. Anne School Council representative), Richard Renneboog (London District School Council representative), Carol Rockx (London District School Council representative), Mark Weaver (Administration), Rebecca McLean (Administration), Beth Williams (Administrative Support).  
**Regrets:** Christian Turre (Blessed Sacrament School Council representative), Lisa Torok (St. Pius X School Council representative)

## **1. Opening Prayer (led by Catherine Sexton)**

## **2. Introduction of Committee Members**

Paul Whitehead introduced committee members and who they are representing.

## **3. Committee Mandate and Boundary Review Process**

Paul Whitehead provided a brief summary of the committee mandate. He outlined the purpose of the Public Meeting, and reminded presenters about their presentation limits.

## **4. Overview of Preliminary Report**

Rebecca McLean offered a summary of the Preliminary Administrative Report and reviewed the options presented by Administration.

## **5. Presentations**

Presentations began at 7:30 pm.

**Richard Pudelek**, a parent from St. Mark residing in the Killaly North area, made a presentation. He indicated that when they decided to build a house, they checked with the Board and were told St. Mark was the school. Their family and the neighbourhood where their home is, is a part of the Northridge community; not

Central East or Central London. Those neighbourhoods are not within walking distance of their house. There has been a lot in the news lately about declining enrolment. Has this been factored into these options? Will the natural decrease in enrolment take care of the over-crowding problem? He wants no immediate changes but to revisit the issue when the numbers are higher and there needs to be something done.

**Jennifer Speziale**, a parent from St. Mark residing in the Stoney Creek East area, made a presentation. She has concerns with the 3 proposals and the timeline for discussions. The current number of kids will not have a significant impact on the school. All previous boundary changes were from established communities; the areas proposed for change with this boundary review are not. Children in previous boundary changes had classmates they moved with; with only 3 children moving, there won't be any classmates. It is now public knowledge that a new public school will be built in their neighbourhood. What impact will this have on the enrolment at St. Mark's? Has the impact been included in this review? How many Catholic families would place their children in this school? She made a recommendation to consider another option to include Blessed Kateri or St. Catherine of Siena and exclude Blessed Sacrament. She also asked the committee to consider exemptions for students who moved to new development areas from pre-existing St. Mark boundaries. A request was made to improve the communication process related to school boundary designation and the potential for a boundary review; particularly with builders, the public and registered pupils at the school.

## 6. Questions and Answers

Questions and comments from the audience were received (responses given in brackets):

- Was declining enrolment taken into effect? (R. McLean – We did take it into account. Elementary panel is in decline and will continue in the future. But we do also recognize that some schools are not declining but increasing, like St. Mark, due to building in the area. The other schools in this review are declining due to older, established neighbourhoods and families moving into newer areas of the city.)
- Did any of these projections take into account that parents might choose to send their children to a public school? (R. McLean – No. We can only use the information available and cannot make theoretical decisions. In past reviews, 95% of children remained within the Catholic system.)
- Why was St. Catherine of Siena or Blessed Kateri not included in this review? (R. McLean – Blessed Kateri's boundary was just changed. There are new building areas in their boundary as well. St.

Catherine of Siena's boundary accommodates new growth areas in West London. We are looking at doing a review of North West London and St. Paul school will have to be included in that as well.)

- Elizabeth Dotzer has 2 kids at St. Mark. The family was in St. Mark school area prior to building new home. She called Board and was told that this area was not being changed. I do not want to be moving my kids. Why can't we make a decision and go with it? Why are we putting our kids through this? (It was clarified with the parent after the meeting and made aware to the committee that this parent called the Board Office during the previous ARAC that affected St. Mark and was informed that the area where her house is located was not being changed under the boundary review which took place in 2007.)
- Ryan Trevor, a parent at St. Mark, posed a question about whether or not new options might come up in discussions. Is there still a possibility of other options? He is not affected by current options proposed by Administration. (P. Whitehead – options brought forward are those from Administration that they thought had merit at the time. Committee might choose to make recommendation that is not included in the report.)
- Julie Kovacs, a parent at St. Mark, stood up and supported the decision that this boundary be looked at right now. She said it is important to set boundaries to prevent other families from experiencing the same grief and anguish as the families who are affected with this change are feeling right now. Portables are not an option for schooling children, according to her, as it is not an ideal setting. St. Mark has been overrun with portables and these children need to be put into a school building where they belong. (P. Whitehead – Delaying this boundary change would only create more hurt feelings and affect more children. The Board has been trying for quite a while to get these students into “bricks and mortar” and not be educated in portables. Some of our students have been in portables for longer than they've been in the school building. It is difficult to come up with a solution that would eliminate these portables but that is the main objective of the Board of Trustees.)
- Julie Kovacs asked about the Board's position on boundary exemptions and if a grandfathering clause could be included in the recommendations from the committee. (P. Whitehead – Grandfathering has been done in the past boundary review for St. Mark but only for those students entering grade 8 and without transportation. M. Weaver – The Board's policy is that a boundary exemption could be provided if there are special circumstances.)
- Julie Kovacs asked if taking a child out of their environment could be considered a special circumstance. She proposed that a boundary

exemption be provided to all children currently at St. Mark so these children are taken care of. Once that is in effect, the Board can then proceed with the boundary review and set the boundaries in stone. (M. Weaver – Staff at affected schools are involved very early in the process to develop entry plans. These children adapt very quickly. P. Whitehead – if we implemented a grandfathering clause for these affected students or families, it would be a logistical nightmare for Administration to administer. A line needs to be drawn somewhere.)

- Mention was made of “neighbourhood schools” and the fact that Blessed Sacrament was not their neighbourhood school. (M. Weaver – The Public Board has 3 to 4 times the number of schools that we have in our Board. We don’t have neighbourhood schools; they are more regional. This is most evident when looking at schools in the county areas; their boundaries encompass vast areas. P. Whitehead – Only 1 school out of 47 does not have bussing. This reiterates the point of regional schools, not neighbourhood ones. The number of children who change schools due to boundary changes is very small. The largest number comes from decision made by the parents. Those children make out okay; they adapt.)
- Mike Houston, a parent at St. Mark, recently moved into the London area. As a family, they chose the St. Mark area based upon the EQAO scoring levels and if the boundaries are changed, they will be moved to a lower scoring school. (P. Whitehead – EQAO scores are not a measure of the quality of education at each school. To choose schools based solely on this is a very limited view.)

M. Weaver explained the background of boundary reviews and re-iterated the fact that as a Board, there has been an average of 2 boundary reviews undertaken each year. This is likely to be an ongoing feature of the Board’s Accommodation Plans. We have declining enrollment across the Board but there are pockets of growth. Grants provided by the Ministry are based upon the best use of facilities we currently have. One objective of the Board is to eliminate the use of portables. There will be more reviews coming. We all recognize the difficulties it creates. As a Board, we are lucky we haven’t had to deal with school closures; we do boundary reviews instead.

## **7. Adjournment**

Meeting was adjourned at 8:18 pm.