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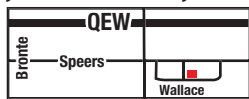


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# Compromise reached on Ward 4 elementary school accommodation plan

■ By Kim Arnott  
SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

A last-minute compromise on the contentious issue of public school accommodation in Ward 4 received unanimous support from Halton District School Board trustees on Wednesday night.

For months, the board has been grappling with how to address overcrowding at some schools in the area, while managing declining enrolment at others.

The compromise plan will minimize disruption for the area's English students, and will see a new elementary school in Palermo built as a dual-track English and French Immersion school.

However, it will also mean moving away from the single-track French

Immersion model that has been touted by many parents and trustees as academically superior to the dual-track model.

Oakville trustee Kathryn Bateman-Olmstead, who has been strongly supportive of the single-track model, moved the dual-track motion following narrow defeat of an earlier motion that would have seen the Palermo school built as a single-track French Immersion facility.

Trustees voted down that plan by a six to five vote, with many of the dissenters expressing concern that a single-track school would shut English and special needs Palermo students out of their new neighbourhood school.

"I don't personally believe in splitting up a neighbourhood when we

don't have to," said Oakville trustee Phillippa Ellis.

Milton trustee Donna Danielli said community schools express the board's values of inclusion, collaboration and respect.

"I believe dual-track to be more inclusive," she said.

Trustees in favour of the single-track option argued that the board should ensure it does everything to provide students with the most successful program possible.

"Is it where they go to school, or what they learn when they get there?" asked Halton Hills trustee Gillian Tuck Kutarna. "I don't ultimately believe that student success is correlated to proximity to a school."

Added Burlington trustee Jennifer Hlusko, "I believe in program first. I want to go home and say we met the academic needs of the children to the best of our ability."

The dual-track motion eventually approved will see a new 440-student elementary school open in Palermo in September 2010 for both English and French immersion students.

To alleviate over-crowding at Ecole Forest Trail Public School, and avoid the need for the board to make costly relocations of portables, French immersion students in Grades 1 to 3 who will eventually move to the Palermo school will be temporarily housed at Lorne Skuce School for the 2009/2010 academic year.

That school, located on Ridge

Drive, is currently acting as a holding school for students awaiting renovation of Montclair, but will be vacant next September.

To help maintain adequate populations at schools south of Upper Middle Road and minimize over-crowding in schools north of Upper Middle Road, future English students from yet-to-be developed Ward 4 subdivisions will be directed to Heritage Glen and Pilgrim Wood schools.

The plan also establishes a pilot program at the new Palermo school to offer French programming for English students beginning in Grade 1, rather than in Grade 4 as is done throughout the rest of the board.

Final boundaries for the Palermo school have not yet been established.

The compromise plan won the support of Ward 4 English parent Lesley Dalgarno, who had spearheaded opposition to the single-track plan through a group known as Oakville Parents Encouraging Neighbourhood Schools (OPEN).

"I'm very pleased with the outcome because I was so worried that Palermo was going to lose its community school to a single-track school," she said, following the meeting. "Optional schools are great, but they are just that - optional. They should not drive the bus."

Dalgarno said the compromise plan created a "palatable" solution for the whole ward and would allow schools to move forward knowing their futures.

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