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POSITION PAPER ON BEHALF OF THE TEACHERS
FROM THE LAVAL HIGH SCHOOLS
FOR THE
CONSULTATION ON THE REORGANIZATION OF
LAVAL HIGH SCHOOLS 2015-16

June 2, 2014

Preamble

We the teachers, before stating our views regarding the models proposed in the present consultation on phase 2, would like to reiterate our discontent and deep disappointment in regards to the process put into place, the lack of a true consultation and the decision finally made by Council in the context of the reorganization of the Laval High Schools. We also would like to denounce the unnecessary cost, instability and upheaval caused by the board's decision to proceed with the first phase as of 2014-2015. There was no justification whatsoever to rush such a process that requires major organization and preparation in order to limit, as much as possible, the inconvenience caused to the staffs and to the students.

All of the contemporary research on school size is leading in the opposite direction, as outlined by the teachers' position paper presented as part of the pre-consultation on September 12, 2013, but also in the brief submitted by the school board's *Educational Policies' Committee* and presented before the *Ad Hoc Committee on the Future Laval High Schools*, on June 5, 2013. What the research concludes essentially is that smaller school settings have a much more positive impact in regards to the major aspects of school life. **It is essential that we reaffirm these facts as they remain the basis of our position in regards to the proposed models and their organization.**

Meta-analysis confirms that smaller school settings thrive

- Decreased bullying
- Increased sense of belonging and student motivation
- Increased student achievement
- Increased teacher motivation and engagement
- Better and more personalized service for special needs students
- Decreased dropout rate

- ❑ Increased participation in school activities
- ❑ Decreased behavior problems
- ❑ Increased curricular advantages
- ❑ Increased sense of security

Research also states that the optimal school size for High Schools from a middle class socio-economic background (our students in Laval) would be around 1000 students. The Souvenir building will be at 1800 students as of 2014-2015, a population which will only increase in subsequent years. Also, if Model number one (1) is chosen, we would see the creation of a mega school with 2800+ students.

Comments on the Consultation Document:

In reading the document provided by the board in preparation for the consultation on phase 2, we have noticed a certain number of inaccuracies (mostly on page 12 of the document) that we would like to point out, because they are either non-factual or do not correspond to what the actual research says:

Excerpt from the consultation document, page 12

	Needs expressed	Proposed solution
1-	End imbalance requests and enrollment between the two junior schools. Enable SWLSB to keep growing by keeping its student population between gr. 6 and sec. 1.	Ensure that everyone can have their first choice.
2-	Enable SWLSB to attract new students who would like to be in a specific program. Allow SWLSB to have placement exams for specific programs at the same time as the private schools.	Create space within our current schools to enable new registrations.
3-	Align programs to give equal opportunities to all students.	Offer equivalent programs by grade level to ensure all students have the same accessibility.
4-	Facilitate transition/articulation process between Cycle 1 (sec. 2) and Cycle 2 (sec. 3). Facilitate continuity of programs between Cycle 1 (sec. 2) and Cycle 2 (sec. 3).	Keep cycles 1 and 2 as part of the same structure, vision.
5-	Keep small groups and small cohorts.	Respect class ratios by reducing the number of oversized classes.
6-	Have all necessary resources and equipment in all schools (sharing and purchasing). Maintain stability for all students. Maintain stability for students with special needs.	Equitable distribution of resources and equipment in both the Souvenir & Daniel-Johnson buildings. This also includes the organization of educational & complementary services for all students.
7-	Scheduling and programming the school for all students.	Accommodate students within the capacity of either the Souvenir or Daniel-Johnson buildings.
8-	Ensure safety and well-being of all students.	
9-	Offer a wide variety of programs with a 21st century vision.	Enable a greater choice of programs, by having a greater number of students within a specific school.
	Stability of employment.	Maintain security of employment.
10-	Summer school.	Maintain summer school at the 3200, Souvenir Blvd. building.

Comments on each “proposed solution” as outlined in the consultation document

1-The proposed solution to the problematic implies that all students will have their first choice. The reality will be that students will no longer have a choice between two high schools but rather be all registered to the same school. This certainly does not constitute an improvement.

2- Creating space for more registrations at the junior building (Daniel Johnson) may not have a negative impact in the short term, but could potentially create a problem of overcrowding at the Souvenir building when these students reach grade 9.

3- To offer equivalent programs to all students would have also been possible with two distinct 1 to 5 high schools.

4- To keep cycles 1 and 2 as part of the same structure or vision would be much easier with both cycles in the same building and in a smaller school setting as stated by the research.

5- The proposed solution will allow the school board to respect class ratios by reducing the number of oversized classes. With the number of programs and concentrations, as well as special needs groupings and lower ratios groupings, combined with more limited space in the Souvenir building, it will, to the contrary, represent a greater challenge for the school to limit the number of oversized classes. It would be much easier with two 1-5 high schools and enough space in each building.

6- There is no evidence that resources will be distributed more equitably with this type of setting. As a matter of fact, none of the junior students will have access to the state of the art sports’ facilities at the Souvenir building as well as the Atom’s Math lab, and none of the senior students will benefit from a totally revamped auditorium and its technology. Furthermore,

research shows, to the contrary, that the organization of educational and complementary services is more efficient in a smaller setting which benefits the special needs population.

7- It is expected that the Souvenir building will be over capacity within 3 to 5 years which will make it difficult to accommodate all senior students. As well, research shows that students' safety only improves in smaller schools and that, to the contrary, instances of bullying tend to increase in larger schools.

8- We recognize that a larger school setting would make it easier to maintain programs or concentrations with a greater pool of students. As a note, teachers would like the school board to define exactly what is meant by this 21st century vision.

9- School organization or size has nothing to do with security of employment. The teachers' Provincial Agreement guarantees the security of employment. Furthermore, both models might cause a number of teachers to be declared surplus to their school as a result of the consolidation of programs and the maximization of groups.

10- We are quite clueless about this statement. Isn't summer school already taking place at 3200 Souvenir with the present organization of schools in Laval? We do not understand why the school merger has any impact on the choice of holding summer school in a specific building.

Comments on Model number one (1):

- ❑ Creation of a mega school of 2800 + students with all of the pedagogical disadvantages of the Mega School as previously outlined.

- ❑ One principal for both buildings will cause a greater disconnect between administration, teachers and students as it is the case at every school in similar situations. For example, we are already faced with a situation, at a much smaller scale, where one principal has been assigned to a school with two campuses at St-Vincent elementary (not walking distance) and the situation is far from being ideal as one building suffers a lack of administrative presence. We can only expect the situation to worsen with a much larger school population.

- ❑ This model implies a greater ratio of students to administrators than in Model number two (2). There would be one administrator for 481 students. It is important to note that presently, with 8 administrators in both buildings, the ratio is of one administrator for 361 students, which would represent a great difference in terms of behavior management, safety and security of the students. Also, the school that often being used as a reference by our school board's management team, Centennial Regional High School, is staffed with one principal and three vice-principals for a school population of 1055 students, a ratio of one administrator for 264 students.

- ❑ Another impact of this model would be that teachers would not necessarily remain attached to one building and might be required to teach in both buildings. This would create a situation that would be far from ideal by causing less stability in one building, forcing teachers to go back and forth, teaching in multiple classrooms and making it way more challenging for them to access their teaching materials. In other words, it would constitute a major factor of instability for teachers concerned and their students.

- ❑ The fact that there would be one principal for close to 3000 students would make it logistically impossible to organize proper follow-up meetings for students on I.E.P.s. Furthermore, as it is already extremely complex to organize I.E.P. meetings where the majority of the high school teachers are present, it would make it almost impossible with this two campuses proposed model. As a result, the establishing of and updating/review process for I.E.P.s for the special needs population would suffer.

Comments on Model number two (2):

- ❑ Compared to Model number one (1), Model number two (2) involves the presence of one principal per building which guarantees a little more consistency in leadership and administrative presence.

- ❑ The ratio of students to administrators would be slightly lower than in Model number one (1). It would be of 1 administrator for 413 students. Please note that we are using the term “ratio of students to administrators” rather than “ratio of students to vice-principals” because in most normal sized schools (the present situation), principals are also involved in students’ behavior management and usually make a big difference in that area. If one principal is assigned for more than 2800+ students, we can expect his/her role to be essentially administrative with little to no interactions with staff or students.

Teachers’ position in regards to the models proposed:

Although, as stated previously, teachers find that both models proposed present a number of challenges, they concluded that the least damaging model to our student population would be Model number two (2). After consulting the teachers from the four (4) High Schools, and from the teachers who expressed their preference on the proposed models, the great majority leaned towards Model number two (2).

More importantly, in order to offset some of the problems caused by the creation of mega-schools, a proposed solution would be the implementation within each building of a *school-within school system* (Lee and Smith, 1997), also called the *vertical housing system*. This type of school organization can be implemented in order to recreate the feel of the smaller school in the context of a larger school. As mentioned in EPC’s position paper developed in the spring of 2013,

“...a growing body of research suggests that school-within-school plans have potential for producing results like those associated with small schools provided they are distinct administrative entities within the buildings that house them.

As a matter of fact, this aspect seems to be the most important challenge to making this model a success. According to Mary Ann Raywid, the challenge is “obtaining sufficient separateness and autonomy to permit staff members to generate a distinctive environment and to carry out their own vision of schooling” (1985, p. 455). The challenge of the “house” model will be to maintain the separateness of the model as well as is currently achieved by having two separate schools in each of the buildings.”

In other words, teachers are proposing that a *vertical house system* be implemented with a distinct separateness where a group of teachers and administrators will be assigned, at the junior and at the senior level, to a specific group of students in order to ensure that students maintain a certain sense of belonging to their teachers, to avoid a situation present in larger schools where the atmosphere becomes very impersonal. We also have concerns for our special needs population who often get forgotten in a larger school setting. This *vertical housing* organization, if implemented properly, could also allow for a better “encadrement” of the special needs students.

The middle-school model:

The teachers do not see the pertinence to include this topic as part of the consultation on phase 2. This should be a topic for a separate discussion as there are a number of issues to be discussed that relate to collective agreement, workload, etc. This conversation should take place between the teachers, educational services, complementary services, human resources and the principals concerned and, more importantly, the teachers must be at the center of the discussion on the possible implementation of such a model at any school.

Conclusion

The teachers still strongly feel that the decision to merge the schools and to create mega schools is not the better one for our students. Teachers still do not accept the fact that none of the models involving the *feeder school system* were part of the discussion in the present consultation process. Teachers still believe that the only viable long-term solution, and the least detrimental for our students, would have been a model with two secondary 1 to 5 high schools including a feeder school system as a way of assigning elementary students to a specific high school.

We the teachers of the four Laval High Schools wish that this reorganization be implemented in a manner that will least affect the student population and hope that this time, the teachers' position will be taken into account at this stage of the process.

References:

Johnson et al, 2002
Roeder, 2002
Steifel et al, 2000
Howley & Bickel, 1999
Lee & Smith 1997
Newman, 1997
Cotton, 1996
Fowler, 1995
Mercer, 1995
Howley, 1994
Walberg & Walberg, 1994
Bryk, et al, 1993
Monk, 1992
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Stekelenberg, 1991
Williams 1990
Fetler, 1989
Rutter, 1988
Thrasher, 1970
Barker & Gump, 1964

Attached, you will also find EPC's position paper on "School Compositional Effects".

Research on School Compositional Effects

Submitted to

SWLSB School organization Sub-Committee

By

Educational Policies Committee

Committee Members

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Introduction

It is not often that school boards have the opportunity to reorganize their schools and to consider how the school's organization will influence educational efficacy. In the case of Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board, we have two large buildings in close proximity to one another. We cannot change the size of the buildings; however, we can make decisions that will promote success for all students, by informing ourselves of what the research tells us about best

practices.

The objective of the Educational Policies Committee is to provide the School Organization Committee with a review of the literature on the impact of school size, and to give our recommendations based on this review.

Students' Academic Achievement

No research finds large schools superior to medium-sized schools in academic achievement. And smaller schools show positive effects on the achievement of students with low socioeconomic status.

Stekelenburg (1991) found that the curriculum advantages of larger schools start becoming less effective as they grow larger than 800. In another significant study, Lee and Smith found that students from medium-sized schools demonstrated higher achievement than from either larger or smaller schools (1997). In this longitudinal study of over 9,000 students, Lee and Smith found that students in moderate-sized schools have larger gains in both reading and mathematics. Specifically, they found that the highest gains were in high schools with enrollments between 600 and 900 students. Similarly, Ready, Lee, and Welner (2004) explored the effects of school success across more than 800 schools, and concluded that academic achievement gains in Math and reading were higher in schools that had between 600 and 900 students.

Although larger schools often have the ability to offer more elective, there is no evidence that more electives improve students' results. On the contrary Walberg and Walberg (1994) note that students do better in schools where there are fewer special programs, but a strong core curriculum is offered.

According to Howley & Bickel (1999) there is an important moderator in this conclusion about ideal school size and academic achievement, and this is that the higher the socio-economic status, the larger the school can be without negatively affecting academic achievement.

Students' Engagement and Attitudes

Attitude, behavior, and attendance play a large role in students' success and happiness at school. Taken together, the bulk of research reports that there is a greater sense of community and belonging among students in smaller schools.

Extra-curricular participation is an important factor in students' engagement in school life and sense of belonging. Halmilton (1983) reported that students in larger schools tended to polarize, with groups of students who are active participants at one end of the spectrum, and large groups of students who do not participate in any extracurricular at the other end. In smaller schools, students are more often given better opportunity to get involved in activities (ie. Bands, clubs, sports, etc), while in larger schools, although there are more opportunities, there is also more competition, and the talented students take up all the spots. This explains the phenomenon of the polarization that can occur in large high schools. Barker and Gump (1983) conclude that it is easier to prevent students from becoming marginalized in a smaller school.

According to Research Watch (Feb, 2003) studies have also found that students in smaller schools have better attendance, feel safer, and experience fewer behavior problems. Studies have also shown that smaller schools generally have a lower drop out rate (Fetler, 1989; Pittman & Haughwout, 1987; Toenjes, 1989). Rutter (1988) reports that there is a strong relationship between smaller schools, better interpersonal relationships and a stronger self-esteem.

Teachers' Work- Related Attitudes

Newman (2006) reported that teachers and students in smaller schools are more likely to have a positive perception of their school environment. Lee and Smith (1997) found that in high schools of between 600 – 900 students there was more collaboration, team teaching, and teachers had more input into decisions affecting their work. Gottfredson (1985) states 'large schools appear to promote negative teacher perceptions of school administration and low staff

morale". Other researchers have also found that smaller schools promote better social interactions between students and teachers, and a feeling that teachers are interested in them (Bryk, Easton Kerbo, et al, 1993).

Economic Aspect

Although advocates of school consolidation have argued that economic gain were to be made with the creation of larger schools, researchers' findings seem to say otherwise. Turner and Thrasher (1970) studied schools with a wide range of enrollments including schools with more than 3000. They found that decreases in cost per student were minimal once enrollments passed 1000 students. Most important, however, was Fox's (1981) finding that cost curves actually take the shape of a U, so that increasing school size beyond an optimal level increases rather than decreases per pupil cost. Thus, schools are similar to the other labor intensive organizations studied by Gooding and Wagner (1985) in that increased size can result in increases in per unit costs. Monk (1992) found that savings projected for a number of expenses simply did not occur with large school size.

When school size is considered in isolation, schools between 500 and 1,000 students are probably operating at peak economic efficiency already (Turner & Thrasher, 1970). Thus, with regard to economies of scale, current research does not support school consolidation of schools that already have 500 or more students. Also literature does not support consolidation that would result in a school of more than 1000 students.

Comments, Conclusions and Recommendations for Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board

It is clearly indicated throughout the literature that high schools of over 1000 students are not educationally advantageous. In fact, in general, it has been found in business that after a certain size, all organizations begin to fall apart, particularly organizations that depend primarily on human effort, such as schools. The research concludes that, secondary schools serving economically and socially heterogeneous, or relatively advantaged students (our schools in Laval), should be limited in size to about 1000. Our larger high school in Laval, Laurier Senior,

has already reached close to 1100 students.

We recognize that we cannot change the size and location of our buildings; however, at Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board, we have dealt with this issue by re-dividing each large building into two medium-sized schools. In our opinion, this was a good solution to the problem of the mega buildings.

There are other possible scenarios that may also lead to a well-designed school organization, including using the school within school approach (Lee & Smith, 1997). We can organize school-within-schools for specific grades, or use the vertical-house plan, which is common in Great Britain, where the school is divided in “houses” or groups of several hundred students, each overseen by an administrator, but sharing the same teaching faculty. This model is familiar to us due to Harry Potter! However, a growing body of research suggests that school-within-school plans have potential for producing results like those associated with small schools provided they are distinct administrative entities within the buildings that house them. As a matter of fact, this aspect seems to be the most important challenge to making this model a success. According to Mary Ann Raywid, the challenge is “obtaining sufficient separateness and autonomy to permit staff members to generate a distinctive environment and to carry out their own vision of schooling” (1985, p. 455). The challenge of the “house” model will be to maintain the separateness of the model as well as is currently achieved by having two separate schools in each of the buildings. In other words, maintaining the present structure may be less risky than to experiment with a model that presents no guarantees for success.

Finally, it is to be noted that the literature suggests that the most effective schools do not offer a multitude of programs and electives. Rather, they remain close to the mandated curriculum, offering a strong core curriculum, using fewer electives, because too many elective course and programs tend to stream and dilute the curriculum. Therefore, we recommend that in restructuring the schools, we also take a close look at the programs and pathways offered at these schools, in an attempt to stream-line our program offerings. It will be essential that the board consolidates, streamlines, strengthens, and supports the existing programs in each school in order to change that negative perception.

The Educational policies Committee believes that it is important to learn from our own teachers, administrators, and schools; and to base our decisions on the empirical data that is currently available, in order to ensure that we are making informed decisions that will guarantee the continued and growing success of our students.