

# **Submission Presented by Holy Angels Catholic School Delegation Submitted to Corporate Services, Strategic Planning and Property Committee**

Thursday, January 21, 2016, 7:00 PM

## **A. Introduction**

Holy Angels Catholic School is at the heart of the Etobicoke community. Generations of families have attended this great school. Families specifically choose Holy Angels because of its unique character and family like environment. Its appeal is in its exceptional academic reputation, its size and the very personalized touch that this offers to our children's education. The Principal knows every child by name and students have a greater opportunity to participate in teams and clubs.

It is a vibrant school community that embraces Inquiry Based Learning, Bucket Filling, Me to We and other wonderful initiatives. Teachers love working at Holy Angels, as demonstrated by the very positive staff retention rates. Our EQAO scores are in the 90s. We are very proud of our school.

In light of this exceptional learning environment, we would be happy with status quo. We would love for this close knit community to stay as is and feel that the proposed changes will change Holy Angels at its core. However, our community understands that change is inevitable and we wish to work together with the school board in order to make transition as smooth and comfortable as possible for the school community.

## **B. Current Challenges**

The current school, which was already expanded with an addition many years ago, has an on the ground capacity of 372 students. The current enrollment is at 114% capacity and without any changes is projected to grow upwards to 126% by 2017. The building is unfortunately not structurally able to support a second story.

The overcrowding has limited programming opportunities at the school. In 2014, to accommodate full day kindergarten, we lost the library to create two new classrooms and a portable was added. In order to accommodate the PLASP before and after school program, we have had to multi-purpose rooms and PLASP is required to share a classroom. Due to the limited green space and current overcrowding, use of the field and playground is managed by a weekly rotation, limiting the time each child has to play on the grass. The use of the gym is also limited and most students have minimal access to gym time. The loss of the large library and tight gym schedule makes meeting in larger groups impossible. Any guest speakers or authors have to use the gym.

The 2015 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth indicates that Canadian children are getting a D- in both physical activity and sedentary behaviour. The

proposed increase in enrollment without an appropriate facility and outdoor environment is concerning because:

- (1) **“Children and youth spend a large proportion of their waking hours in non-parental environments such as schools”.** “These environments represent multiple opportunities to promote and facilitate physical activity (e.g., PE, recess, intramural sport, varsity sport). Indeed, there is evidence that more physical activity offerings at school are associated with more active children and youth.” (ParticipACTION, 2015)
- (2) **Decreased participation in school sports has a negative effect on mental health.** A ParticipACTION study showed that “Grades 7-12 students who reported participation in school sports throughout their secondary school years were more likely to report lower levels of depression symptoms and perceived stress, and were more likely to report higher levels of self-rated mental health when followed up at approximately 20 years of age.” (ParticipACTION, 2015)
- (3) **“Ontario preschoolers spend twice as much time being active when play is outdoors (53% of time active outdoors versus 23% of time active indoors).”** “Children who engage in active outdoor play in natural environments demonstrate resilience, self-regulation and develop skills for dealing with stress later in life.” “Outdoor play that occurs in minimally structured, free and accessible environments facilitates socialization with peers, the community and the environment, reduces feelings of isolation, builds inter-personal skills and facilitates healthy development.” (ParticipACTION, 2015)

Holy Angels is surrounded by new developments. A large-scale development is under construction to the north at Norseman Street and Islington Avenue. There are several condos being built south of the school on The Queensway. Overcrowding is already a serious concern for our school community. The current facility cannot accommodate any additional students.

Holy Angels C.S. sits next to a large industrial section of the city, which not only has very limited green space but also has created a serious safety concern with regards to traffic in and around the school. In addition to bus traffic, church traffic and parents dropping off and picking up children, Jutland Road is a major thoroughway for heavy trucks. The police and city are aware of these issues. Any further increase in enrollment on the current site would add further stress to this precarious situation.

### **C. Impact of Director’s Report Recommendations**

The Director's report is recommending a boundary change resulting in a drastic increase in the enrollment at Holy Angels C.S. In three years (2019), the capacity would be at 160% and in eight years (2024), it would be at 182%.

The proposed boundary change would redirect 20 existing high-rise buildings northwest of Islington and Bloor to our school. It would also include the planned high rises on the Islington Subway station lands and the Westwood Theatre developments. This would be in addition to the development already happening in the area.

If St. Louis closes, Holy Angels would also absorb students from that school. This will likely result in the student's home being situated further from the school inhibiting the student's ability to use active modes of transportation (ie: walking, cycling) to travel to school. Active modes of transportation not only have significant benefits to physical health, but also on mental health. The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) strongly promotes the use of active transportation and "walking" school busses. The proposed boundaries should not pose an obstacle in allowing children to follow PHAC guidelines encouraging children to walk to school. Using active transportation for all distances less than 1 km are generally recommended.

The boundary changes proposed in the Director's report predicts that enrollment at Holy Angels to be 182% by 2024. This level of overcapacity would cause a crisis at our school under the current conditions. It would move the overcrowding crisis from Our Lady of Sorrows to our school. If the boundary changes, we need a new school. The TCDSB purchased the Kerr Candy Factory next to the school. If a boundary change is made, it is imperative that the overcrowding problem is not just moved from one school to another. Moving students who are currently in portables at Our Lady of Sorrows to portables at Holy Angels is not a solution.

#### **D. Moving Forward**

Our school community is not supportive of moving a crisis from one school to another. Our Lady of Sorrows has a new state of the art facility, which has been able to house its overpopulation and can continue to do so until Holy Angels can accommodate more students.

The Holy Angels community will only support your plan under the following conditions:

- The TCDSB presents a business case to the Ministry of Education which prioritizes a new school for Holy Angels.
- The proposed effective date of September 2017 for the boundary changes as indicated in Appendix D is reconsidered. The current facility at Holy Angels cannot accommodate students from St. Louis and Our Lady of Sorrows. There is inadequate space to accommodate additional portables as the limited green space has already been compromised.

- The TCDSB does not implement a boundary change until there is funding approval for a new school at Holy Angels and the Kerr Candy Factory lease has been terminated allowing for immediate construction minimizing delays and impacts on our community.
- The allowed capacity at a new Holy Angels school does not exceed 600 students.
- The TCDSB creates a transition committee that includes parent and community representation.
- Assessments are completed that deems the land on the Kerr Candy Factory to be suitable to build and play on prior to any boundary changes.

To summarize our position:

- Holy Angels is currently overcrowded.
- Traffic and limited green space are already safety issues.
- Additional students would compound the problem.
- No boundary change should be implemented until a new school is in place to house the increased number of students.

The Holy Angels community acknowledges that changes are coming and want to work together with the school board to make Holy Angels a 21st Century school and community hub. The purchase of the Kerr Candy Factory land has doubled our potential footprint. The potential for an enhanced green space that can promote both physical and mental well being to stimulate academic excellence in an industrial area is exciting. Surely the city and other community partners will be excited to partner with the TCDSB to make it a shared green space.

## **E. References**

1. ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth –

<http://www.participation.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/2015-Report-Card-Full-Report-EN-FINAL.pdf>

2. ParticipACTION Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play –

<http://www.participation.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Position-Statement-on-Active-Outdoor-Play-EN-FINAL.pdf>