

## **Details of Delegation re Loretto Abbey Project**

I am a parent of a grade 11 student at Loretto Abbey and a representative of the School Parent Council.

I appreciate the opportunity to make representations to the Board this evening to express the significant concerns of the school community, both parents and students, regarding the proposed plan for school relocation in September 2020 due to renewal/upgrade of the school's HVAC, boiler and electrical systems.

The concerns relate primarily to the lack of notice and the inadequacy of information provided to the school community in regard to this project and the need for the proposed relocation. Given the profound impact of a relocation on many Loretto Abbey families, the lack of procedural fairness in this process goes to the heart of the reasonableness and legitimacy of any decision the Board may make in favour of the proposal at this time.

### **Lack of Notice**

The school community only became aware of the proposed renewal project and school relocation on the evening of Sunday, January 13, 2020 – i.e. four days ago. This notification did not come from the superintendent, Board or Loretto Abbey school officials but from students. A student stumbled across the school relocation plan and circulated it to fellow students via social media on Sunday night. Students in turn, told their parents. As you can imagine, the reaction was one of shock and distress.

It appears that school staff also had no advance notice of this proposal and the issue was hastily added to the agenda of the school parent council meeting on Monday, January 16<sup>th</sup>. Many parents attended this meeting and all expressed concerns about the relocation and the impact of such a relocation on the school community.

Unfortunately, few details were forthcoming about the proposed project and relocation. This issue will be discussed further in the next section on the lack of information / consultation.

The lack of notice has several negative impacts. There has been insufficient time to obtain additional information about the project and consider and provide input on possible alternatives to relocation, or if relocation is ultimately deemed necessary, on how to mitigate the negative impacts of such relocation – i.e. through

the possibility of finding an alternate temporary location closer to Loretto Abbey or the provision of busing.

It has also left minimal time for parents and students to consider other viable alternatives. It is clear that a number of families are considering transferring their children to other schools. The commuting time, which for some students will be close to 1.5 hours each way (3 buses and an over 20 min walk from Keele Street or Jane Street to the school) and the resulting impact on students' time with their families, for themselves, for homework, for part-time jobs and/or for extra-curricular activities both within and outside the school, may make it unfeasible to attend Nelson A. Boylen.

This means that parents/students have been left to scramble, in mid-January, to find other schools. There are no other Catholic high schools in the area so the ability to continue receiving religious instruction may be lost and students will be forced to attend their local district public high school. The course selection process for the 2020-2021 school year is happening imminently at most schools which means students looking to transfer to another school may be at a disadvantage in obtaining information about course options in time and in registering for those courses relative to incumbent students. For families who are considering and have the means to send their children to private schools, they have already missed the registration deadline, which was December 3, 2019 for most schools in the area (e.g. Havergal and St. Clement's).

The lack of notice and potential transfer of students to other schools has also had a significant emotional impact on the students who are understandably distressed about losing their friends or having to involuntarily consider relocation/transfer. This is particularly impactful for the current grade 11 students, many of whom have been together since grade 9. As we know, friendships that we make in high school can be some of the most enduring relationships of our lives. The transfer of students due to the proposed relocation means that next year's graduating class will lose some of its members, necessarily impacting on these close relationships and the entire school community.

### **Lack of Information / Consultation**

As has been mentioned, the lack of information and meaningful consultation with the school community is also a significant concern. Apart from the one-page outline about Loretto Abbey contained in the Executive Summary of the 2020-

2021 School Relocations Plan as part of the materials for the January 16, 2020 Board meeting and the extremely limited information provided by school staff at the School Parent Council meeting four days ago, parents/students have been provided with none of the underlying evidence, research and analysis for the proposed upgrade and relocation. As a result, there has been no opportunity for meaningful consultation **before** a decision is made by the Board to determine if viable alternatives short of relocation, or at a minimum, mitigating some of the most harmful effects of relocation, can be mitigated. Such alternatives, may include, but are not limited to:

- conducting critical repairs to the boiler system now and/or over summer of 2020 to the keep the system operational for the remainder of this school year and the 2020-2021 school year
- phasing the remainder of the work such that students can remain at the present location during upgrades – e.g. closing off parts of the school while work is being done in those areas and moving student to other parts of the school; making basic upgrades to the Convent over the summer of 2020 to allow it to be used as instruction space while work is being done in the school building proper; the use of portables on the current site
- if relocation is ultimately deemed necessary, consideration of other locations closer to the current school
- if relocation to Nelson A. Boylen is ultimately deemed necessary, putting in place more viable transportation options for affected students (i.e. bussing)

Also, from the Executive Summary, it appears that further assessments are necessary before renewal can occur. The results of these assessments may require further consultation.

There is also a concern about the lack of information about the safety of Nelson A. Boylen as the proposed temporary school. What is its current state as a building which has not housed students for four years? What renewal work is required there and will it be sufficient to address current concerns and completed in time for September occupancy?

All of these concerns underscore the fact that this proposal is premature. The lack of notice, information and meaningful consultation with the school community point to the inescapable conclusion that this decision should be deferred. A failure to do so amounts to an unfair process which may be reviewable.

### **Action Requested**

Based on the above-noted concerns and the significant impacts on the school community, I respectfully ask that you vote NO to the proposed plan.

Thank you.

Cathy Tempesta (Loretto Abbey parent)