

**Written Submissions of The Glen Park Community Association
Regarding the Attendance Boundary Review - St. Gregory, Nativity of Our Lord,
Mother Cabrini, St. Marcellus, Our Lady of Sorrows - Interim Report
(Trustee Wards 1 and 2)
“Recommendation Report”**

**Submitted by President and Spokesperson, Jenny P. Mboutsiadis
March 9, 2017**

The Glen Park Community Association (the “**Association**”) represents over 200 residents who reside within the area bordered by Highway 427, Burnhamthorpe Road, Mimico Creek, and Eglinton Avenue (the “**Glen Park Community**”).

The Association agrees with and strongly supports the recommendations of the staff of the Toronto Catholic District School Board (“**TCDSB**”) as stated on page 73 of the Recommendation Report. In particular, the Association agrees that the attendance boundaries for St. Gregory, Nativity of Our Lord, Mother Cabrini, St. Marcellus and Our Lady of Sorrows remain status quo (unchanged) and that the TCDSB investigate and assess possible locations in the South/Central Etobicoke area for a new elementary school to alleviate enrolment pressures.

We applaud Director Gauthier’s judgment and reasonableness. The TCDSB’s recommendations are the most appropriate, logical, and safe options for the community and, in particular, the community’s children.

The Association devoted a significant amount of time and resources to reviewing and considering the scenarios originally proposed by the staff of the TCDSB and found that all of them would have provided only short term relief to the attendance issues affecting the subject schools while, at the same time, jeopardizing our children’s physical safety and emotional health. The Association expressed its concerns and disagreement with the previously proposed scenarios at the two public meetings held in the fall of 2016.

We take this opportunity to remind the Trustees why altering the boundaries as originally proposed is unacceptable. We submit as follows:

1. CROSSING THE BRIDGE OVER HIGHWAY 427 IS DANGEROUS

Forcing children residing east of Highway 427 to attend a school on the west side of Highway 427 is **dangerous**. The on and off ramps to Highway 427 at both Burnhamthorpe Road and Rathburn Road are very busy, uncontrolled, and create danger zones for all children and for parents with young children and/or strollers. There are no traffic lights, stop signs, yield signs, crosswalks, or crossing guards. There is nothing to slow down or stop the cars travelling at high speeds as they enter or exit Highway 427. The curb height is only 3 inches, whereas curbs are generally at least 6 inches high, and a car crossing the icy bridge in the winter could very easily

skid onto the sidewalk and injure a child as evidenced by skid marks already on the bridge. There are also no permanent barriers installed between the sidewalks and the live traffic lanes on the Rathburn and Highway 427 bridge to protect children from falling into traffic, from cars skidding onto the sidewalks from icy roads, and from wind created by buses and trucks travelling in the curb lanes.

Consequently, it is unsafe for an elementary school aged child to even attempt to cross the highway on and off ramps to get to school. It will also be difficult and dangerous for a parent with young children and/or a stroller to traverse the area.

The peril of these areas are substantiated by the "Traffic Report" produced at page 70 of the Recommendation Report, which states that between 2012 and 2016 there were 6 pedestrian collisions and 2 cyclist collisions. It is further stated that most collisions occurred between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. as well as 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m., which are the prime travel times for elementary school children. It must be kept in mind that those collisions occurred during the current scenario in which children are not required to cross over Highway 427 to get to school. It is to be reasonably expected that those numbers would increase if children on the east side of Highway 427 were forced to attend a school on the west side.

An analysis of the elementary school fixed boundary map located on the TCDSB's website evidences that it is uncommon for TCDSB schools to have a boundary that straddles a series 400 highway (being Highways 401, 427, 400 and 404). Of the 43 elementary schools that are in the vicinity of a 400 series highway, only 5 of them have a fixed boundary that straddles a 400 series highway. The remaining 38 elementary schools' fixed boundaries are drawn at the 400 series highway so that children do not have to cross over a highway to get to and from school. Without going into detail as to why 5 catchment areas are permitted to straddle the 400 series highway, the fact that 9 times out of 10 the Board has decreed that the fixed boundary be drawn at the 400 series highway indicates that there is overwhelming support to draw the boundary at the 400 series highway to ensure the safety of our children. The St Gregory/Nativity boundary is presently drawn at Highway 427, which reflects the TCDSB's recognition that the highway presents an extreme hazard for children.

2. BUSSING IS NOT A SOLUTION

Bussing children across Highway 427 for the duration of their elementary school life is not a solution. On the contrary - it creates problems.

First and foremost, in light of the serious bussing issues that have plagued the TCDSB during the last year (including threatened cutbacks and bus driver shortages),¹ students cannot rely on buses to get them to school on time, if at all. On Monday September 19, 2016, CTV news

¹ See Toronto Star article about the TCDSB cutting bussing services:

<https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2016/06/24/catholic-school-boards-bus-cuts-leave-families-scrambling.html>

See also Global News piece about bus driver shortage causing children to be late or not picked up at all:

<http://globalnews.ca/news/2927053/toronto-public-and-catholic-school-bus-delays-on-sept-8/>

reported that with two weeks of the school year completed, about 1300 students in the TCDSB were still without school buses because of a shortage of school bus drivers and that fixing the problem would take several weeks. Making bussing the only safe option for elementary school aged children to get to and from school will have dangerous repercussions. If children miss their bus, they either have to stay home (possibly unattended) or risk their lives by walking past Highway 427's uncontrolled on and off ramps to get to school. Neither is a favourable scenario.

Making bussing the only safe way to get to school will prohibit children from walking or riding bikes back and forth from school on their own. Children should not be locked into a lifestyle of being bussed to school if they want to walk or ride their bikes. Forced bussing is contrary to the current goal of government and the TCDSB to increase children's physical activity and promote a healthy lifestyle. In fact, in March 2014 Trustee Ann Andrachuk promoted the "Walking School Bus Program" to expand safe walking routes for students. This fact is advertised on Trustee Andrachuk's website at www.annandrachuk.com. Information on the Walking School Bus initiative can be found at www.walkingschoolbus.org. See also "Active & Safe Routes to School" at <http://www.saferoutestoschool.ca/>, which identifies itself as a "community-based initiative that promotes the use of active transportation for the daily trip to school, addressing health, physical activity, and traffic safety issues while taking action on air pollution and climate change." The consensus is that school boards and the community should be promoting opportunities for children to be physically active, not restricting them.

Parents with young children and/or strollers will be prevented from walking their children to and from school. Not everyone wants their child to be bused to school. Many of us want to walk our children.

Forced bussing will prevent older children from participating in after school activities because they will not be able to return home safely after their regular bus has departed.

3. MOVING SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN IS UNACCEPTABLE

It is unethical, contrary to current social values, and obscene to relocate children with special education needs to another school, disrupt their lives, and inconvenience them and their families to make space for children without similar needs.

Nativity of Our Lord has three classrooms in the school with children who receive special education. These classes are: the "Multiple Exceptionality" class; the Behaviour Class; and the "Special Education Class". Two of the classrooms have eight special education students in each and the previously proposed scenarios moved these students to another school in order to free up 40 spots for students from the Glen Park Community. See the meeting notes from the May 16, 2016 'closed' Boundary Review Committee Meeting.² It is inconceivable that anyone would

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<https://www.tcdsb.org/Board/PlanningandFacilities/PlanningServices/BoundaryReview/Documents/Boundary%20Review%20Meeting%20-%20May%202016.pdf>

think that moving these special needs children to accommodate children from the other side of the highway is ethically justified.

4. IT REDUCES ECONOMIC DIVERSITY WITHIN THE AFFECTED SCHOOLS

The previously proposed boundary changes would have resulted in St. Gregory's being a school of rich kids and Nativity being a school of poor kids. This is unacceptable and conflicts with current thinking that schools should be made up of mixed income families. Further, it would have been predominantly the poor kids that would have been forced to risk their safety traversing the bridge over Highway 427

Catholic Equity and Inclusive Education Policy H.M. 24 embraces diversity, including the dimension of socio-economic status. The previously proposed boundary scenarios directly conflict with Policy H.M. 24. Based on Statistics Canada data, currently both St Gregory's and Nativity's catchments have at least 22.5% of students from Low Income Measurement households. The previously proposed scenarios would have resulted in Nativity having at least 29% (or 3 in 10) students from Low Income Measurement households, whereas St Gregory would have less than 10% (or only 1 in 10) such students. Consequently, the St Gregory enrolment derived from "poor kids" would have been halved, while Nativity's enrolment derived from "poor kids" would have increased by a third.

5. COMMUNITY HEALTH AND UNITY

Families moved into the area east of Highway 427 expecting that their children would attend St. Gregory. Many people invested their life savings to be in a community where their children can attend a nearby school and play with neighbourhood friends. Forcing children to be bussed to and from school will drastically limit their children's abilities to form friendships with children at their school as well as with children in their neighbourhood. They would not be able to stay and play with their school friends because they would have to go home right after school on the bus. No more going to a friend's house after school to play. Then, when they are in their own neighbourhood, they would not know the neighbourhood kids because they do not go to school with them. Any scenario that relies on bussing over the Highway 427 bridge would have a detrimental social effect on our children.

6. MIMICO CREEK AS A BOUNDARY LINE IS INAPPROPRIATE

The TCDSB identified Mimico Creek as one side of the previously proposed boundary based on its perception that it is "natural barrier between communities". However, it is just the opposite. It is a harmonizing influence that pulls the community together through parkland, trails, and outdoor activities. Using it as a school boundary sends a disturbing message to the community and is a disruptive influence on how our community is bound together. In contrast, Highway 427 is a very real physical and psychological barrier and the logical school boundary dividing line.

7. NATIVITY ALREADY HAS FOUR PORTABLES

The stated purpose of the previously proposed scenarios was to decrease St Gregory's enrolment and increase Nativity's enrolment. Nativity currently has four portables. St Gregory has no portables. It is highly questionable that Nativity is not at capacity if it already has four portables and draws into question whether Nativity could physically accommodate the projected 203 students³ that would eventually be redirected from St Gregory.

8. IT IS UNDESIRABLE TO FORCE FAMILIES TO SWITCH PARISHES

The integration of family, school, and church is an important facet of instilling a sense of community in a child. Most students at St. Gregory attend St. Gregory parish, regardless of parish boundaries. Many students in St. Gregory have grandparents, other family members, and neighbours in the parish. They see their fellow classmates with their families in Church, which greatly adds to their sense of belonging in the community. For students residing on the east side of Highway 427, but attending Nativity of our Lord school on the west side of Highway 427, the previously proposed boundary scenarios would result in parents having to choose church membership between St. Gregory and Nativity parishes. The effect of this would be to have to choose between classmates at Nativity, or family and neighbours at St Gregory. This is divisive instead of unifying.

9. A SCHOOL AUDIT IS AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO REDUCE ENROLLMENT PRESSURES

According to page 53 of the Boundary Review Binder, St. Gregory had 51 out of area students knowingly enrolled in it during the 2015-2016 school year. Many of these are students enrolled in the Extended French program. The Association has received information that there are many out of area students enrolled at St. Gregory of which the school is completely unaware. Some of these students live in Bolton, Milton, Vaughan, Mississauga, and parts of Toronto far away from St. Gregory. As a first step, out of area enrollment should be discontinued altogether. Current out of area students who are known to the school should be allowed to complete their education at St. Gregory as long as they are in the Extended French program. Any out of area student not in the Extended French program who is not otherwise validly attending the school for a reason permitted under the TCDSB's attendance policy should be removed from the school so that they can return to their own local school. The school should conduct a thorough audit of all the students to identify out of area students who are improperly attending the school and have them redirected to their neighbourhood school. This will alleviate some of the enrolment pressures at the school.

Conclusion

We reiterate that we support the staff of the TCDSB's recommendation that the attendance boundaries for St. Gregory, Nativity of Our Lord, Mother Cabrini, St. Marcellus and Our Lady of

³ Boundary Review Binder, p. 82.

Sorrows remain status quo (unchanged) and that the TCDSB investigate and assess possible locations in the South/Central Etobicoke area for a new elementary school to alleviate enrolment pressures.

We thank you for considering our submissions.

Jenny P. Mboutsiadis
President and Spokesperson
Glen Park Community Associations