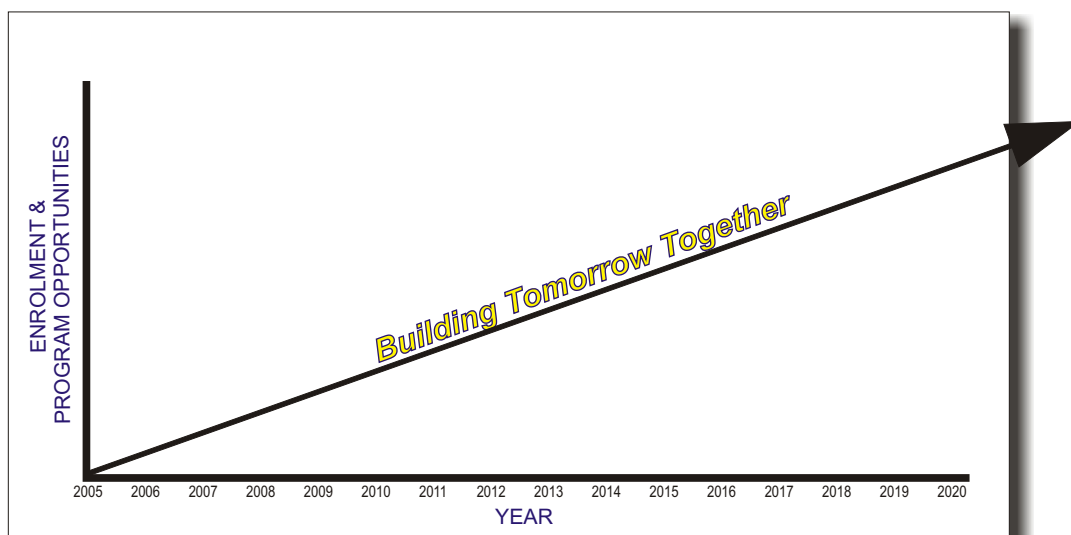


BLUEPRINT FOR DEVELOPMENT

An Alternative
To The Secondary School Task Force White Paper

Presented By
The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation
District 9

Representing over 1500 Teachers and Education Workers in Greater Essex



OSSTF District 9

Preamble

The Federation has taken considerable time reviewing and discussing the Secondary School Task Force's White Paper. In addition to discussions within the Federation, we have had a series of meetings with members of senior administration in order to seek clarification on some issues while stating our concerns with others. These frank discussions were very helpful and we are glad they took place.

It is best to respond point-by-point to the issues raised and proposals made in the White Paper. However, before responding to individual issues, it is important to note that while we support improvements which can be made, OSSTF does not accept the premise that our education system is in peril and is in need of a complete overhaul. In short, while we are not opposed to change for appropriate reasons, we are opposed to change for the sake of change. If massive change is to be successful, all participants must understand clearly why it is being undertaken.

While this document serves to respond to the White Paper, more importantly, it provides a positive alternative to the White Paper.

The GECDSB's Annual Accommodation Planning Report dated June, 2005 shows that our Board is expecting increased enrolment at the secondary level each and every year for the next fifteen years. In fact, the projection for 2020 stands at 15,393. This number represents a 21.5% increase in secondary enrolment over the 2005-2006 figures and a 29% increase when compared with the 2003 enrolment. Given the fact that additional students generate additional staff, course offerings will be on the rise for the foreseeable future. These increases in course offerings will provide more opportunities for all students in their neighbourhood and community schools.

Severe funding shortages, declining enrolment and declining numbers of staff and programs appear to be concerns of the past. The assertion of why it is necessary to make radical change to an education system which has served Windsor and Essex County extremely well over many years needs to be accepted before it can be successfully undertaken. That acceptance does not currently exist.

Part of the original motion passed by Trustees reads as follows:

"That this task force undertake its work with the goal of ensuring that our secondary schools are vibrant, stimulating learning communities, designed to meet the wide range of needs and choice of our secondary school students for the next decade."

We respectfully submit that many of the proposals in the White Paper cannot even be implemented within the next decade, let alone meet the needs of students for the next decade. We also do not accept the premise that our secondary schools are not vibrant, stimulating learning communities in their present form. In fact, some of our greatest concerns about the White Paper are its recommendations for dismantling the unique and effective "learning community" concept which our current system offers.

Specific Responses to Various Sections of the White Paper

Establishment of the Task Force

As pointed out in the White Paper, “It was important that the Task Force include a broad range of voices and perspectives.” Unfortunately, while various stakeholder groups were invited to participate during the deliberations, many significant groups had no input. For example, Educational Support Staff workers and Professional Student Services Personnel who deal with our at-risk and special education students on a daily basis had absolutely no voice throughout the process. These groups would have brought perspectives to the discussions which are lacking, particularly regarding the proposal’s potential impact on special needs students.

Special Education

It is worth noting that the White Paper discusses the importance of offering a full range of programs within the home school environment. This point of view would seem to conflict with the rationale for magnet programs later in the proposal.

While we understand the fact that there will be Locally Developed Compulsory Credit Courses offered in all schools, we would urge the Board to keep those courses to a minimum. Creating the illusion that home schools are able to provide an educational opportunity similar to the Western or Century experience for special education students would be unfair.

Students attending Western and Century are not only exposed to a more appropriate curriculum throughout their schools, they are also engaged in an environment which allows them to become successful in non-academic, social and extra-curricular activities such as athletics, student parliament, yearbook and prom committee, just to name a few. Simply offering a variety of locally developed courses in home schools would certainly not provide the many opportunities to our students which are provided by Western and Century. However, unsuspecting parents and students would be tempted to enroll students in the home schools, which would ultimately lead to declining enrolment, reduced program offering and ultimately, the demise of Western and Century.

Respectfully, we suggest that the Utopia for Special Education Students attending their home school outlined in the White Paper is a wonderful platitude. However, it is not based on reality nor does it recognize past successes at Western and Century.

The GECSB must continue to provide a safe environment for identified students to take risks in an atmosphere where these students feel comfortable and are supported by specialty teachers and support staff. Identified students presently have a full range of opportunities at Western and Century including involvement in student council, working on year book, playing on sports teams and a number of other opportunities. These same students would lose many of these opportunities if they were to attend a composite high school.

Therefore, we recommend keeping the number of locally developed courses offered in home schools to a minimum while continuing to support Western and Century as the preferred secondary school placement for special education students.

Secondary Schools Today

The White Paper begins this section with the following statement:

Feedback from Administrators

The Task Force was initiated in response to a very direct plea from school administrators to change the existing structure of the secondary school system. They expressed the following concerns:

- The resources are inadequate to meet the needs of the schools in delivering programs.*
- The number of students in each individual school requiring specialized programs is so small that staffing becomes very difficult. Many classes are smaller resulting in other classes being too large.*
- An increasing difficulty in providing good programming within the present structure.*

While these issues make it more challenging for administrators to staff and schedule schools, it is certainly attainable. It is interesting to note that two of our smallest schools, Forster and Harrow, were two schools which had no oversized classes this year. This would seem to be counterintuitive to the argument that specialized programs in smaller schools create small classes in the specialty areas and large classes elsewhere within the school.

Ultimately, decisions must be made based on what is best for students in a particular community or neighbourhood school, not what is most convenient to administer.

As mentioned earlier, our secondary enrolment, staffing and funding have all risen significantly and are scheduled to climb steadily for at least the next 15 years. Increased enrolment ultimately leads to increased program availability. In fact, the number of secondary teachers in the system is up approximately 10% when compared with two years ago. We already know that the GECD SB will be getting more teachers in each of the next two years. This increase is in addition to the extra staff which will be generated as a result of the projected increase in enrolment.

Because the original concerns were brought forward in an era when the number of staff and students continued to plunge, the issue of that time does not reconcile with the reality of enrolment and staffing levels today.

Within this same section of the White Paper, reference is made to ESL not being reasonably accessible to all students due to the distance to existing centres. We support and embrace the concept of creating more ESL centres within neighbourhood and community schools in order to serve the needs of ESL students.

Ironically, in the section entitled “Our System - What needs to be developed”, the first point made is that the system needs to “ensure that decisions are based on available data, research, best practice and student needs.” We support this statement entirely. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the White Paper is anecdotal. It seems that many of the observations, perceived problems and proposed solutions are based on feelings, hunches and beliefs. When proposals are being made which affect an entire education system, all decisions should be made based on facts and figures, not on speculation.

Goals For Schools of the Future

From the White Paper:

Our schools are not large enough to provide a full range of programs for all students. The Task Force feels that while we cannot have full-service schools, we can have a full-service system.

This is where we have a significant difference of opinion from the Task Force. The very foundation of our public education system is providing a full service school within each neighbourhood or community. To suggest that we abandon that philosophy based on anecdotal reporting and speculation would be a huge mistake.

What sets us apart from the competing systems is our excellent programming, tradition and full service schools within each neighbourhood and community. Moving toward a system and/or regional model would be to abandon what we have done well for many, many years. The full service school is an essential component for the continued success of our schools in the future.

We must point out that the “goals” listed in this section of the White Paper are as follows:

- *Schools smaller than 1600 students should be our focus.*
- *We need to provide a system with reasonable access to pathways for all students.*
- *We need to provide enhanced student support in every school.*

These are fluffy statements, not tangible goals.

Ironically, the proposals in the White Paper are not consistent with the Provincial Government’s initiatives. Government proposals speak to the emphasis of schools as the “hub of the community”. Regional based schools would move this Board in the opposite direction.

Three Tier Model

This section of the White Paper is by far the most problematic for the Federation. Our members are absolutely opposed to moving to a magnet school model. As mentioned earlier, we are firmly committed to full service schools, not a full service system.

Under the White Paper’s proposals, students would be faced with a choice of either leaving their home school to get access to a particular program, or being denied access to the program. This is a significant problem.

To provide an example, if we consider Technological Studies for students at School A, it is clear that the “core” program offerings at this school would not include senior level Technical courses. Therefore, students would have to make a decision to leave School A and take a rather lengthy bus ride to School B in order to have access to a senior level program. Our experience with student dynamics would indicate that the majority of students feel a significant draw to attend school with their friends and within their community. While we accept that students who are very motivated may, in fact, make the trek to another school to take the program, these students would be the minority - not the majority.

The net result of this example is the majority of students at School A not being exposed to senior level Technical courses while students at School B would have extraordinary access to a superior program. This scenario creates a “have and have-not” scenario for students who should have equal opportunity within their respective community schools. The GECDSB should not be steering in that direction.

Although the above example deals with a particular course at a particular school, the example can be transferred to many courses at many schools. Simply stated, magnet programs cater to the minority while taking away opportunities from the majority.

The White Paper does not deal with the issue of increased and/or declining enrolment at schools which could come as a direct result of magnet programs. How would the number of students migrating from one school to another be controlled?

We have another significant concern with busing students out of their neighbourhoods and communities: once students have made the decision to leave their home school and their friends, they may very well choose to attend a school from another system. As mentioned earlier, in addition to excellent programming and supports for students in our schools, a big draw to our schools is the community link as well as the great traditions developed because of this community link.

Everyone would agree that extra-curricular activities are a large part of the secondary experience for our students. The White Paper does not address the obvious concerns with extra-curriculars in a magnet school model. If a student attends two different schools, which school would he/she be involved with for extra-curriculars? With time being lost because of students travelling between schools, would students have time to participate in after-school activities? Would students belonging to two different schools have the strong feeling of belonging and school spirit? These questions and many others must be addressed before magnet schools could ever be given serious consideration.

At present, parents and students in the Walkerville community are rightly feeling angry and alienated over the prospect of turning their neighbourhood school into an exclusive school for Visual and Performing Arts. If the White Paper is accepted, parents and students from communities and neighbourhoods all across Windsor and Essex County will have similar feelings of anger and betrayal when students are forced to leave their local schools.

Again, if students now have to leave their neighbourhood to attend a school, are we convinced

that they would all choose another of our schools? The Federation is not at all confident in that assumption.

Such a move would be a radical and fundamental departure from what public education has stood for in this District. It is clear that under the magnet concept in the White Paper, the minority would benefit while the majority would lose.

Some other concerns with the magnet school proposal are as follows:

- **Transportation Costs:** Where would this money come from? How will future increased transportation costs be met? What will be the impact on the now efficient transportation consortium shared with the Catholic Board? Would this money not be better spent on education resources and staff to assist students?
- **Instructional Time:** How will time lost transporting students from one school to another be reclaimed? Does additional busing have the potential to lead to even more instructional time lost to snow and fog days?
- **Staffing Issues:** Current staffing provisions would not work with this model and the Federation would not be interested in looking at system staffing models to facilitate magnet schools as proposed in the White Paper.
- **Environmental:** At a time when citizens in Windsor and Essex County are very concerned about air quality, additional and unnecessary busing would be viewed as irresponsible.
- **Facility Limitations:** If a school were deemed to be a magnet for a particular subject area, it would not have the required physical capabilities for students from three or more schools (ie: the number of shops at Herman could not support the students from Herman, Kennedy, Riverside and Tecumseh, assuming that a significant number of students subscribed).
- **Students' Choices** Students are often undecided as to their future plans. They may not be able to make a decision as to whether they wish to be bused to another school to be exposed to particular courses. They may also have time commitments such as part time jobs which prevent them from committing the extra time to accommodate additional transportation to and from other schools. Asking a student as young as 15 years old to decide whether or not to attend a specialty program at a particular school is unrealistic. Most students have interests in a variety of areas and should have the opportunity to experience all of these interests.

- Community Support: Weakening school ties with communities and neighbourhoods by shipping students out of traditional jurisdictions would ultimately weaken support of our schools.
- Funding Issues: Resources would have to be put in magnet programs at host schools creating the natural consequence of the basic programs in the same subject areas at the home schools being starved for money.
- Timetabling Issues: The timetabling necessary to leave students available to travel for blocks of time to another school for programs would be difficult at best and likely restrictive for students wishing to take the courses they want and/or need at their home schools.
- Student Support: Many students require support from LSTs, CYWs, PSSPs and other educational support staff. Would the staff travel with the students or would the students be expected to work with different staff at each location? Either scenario creates a unique set of problems.
- Tracking: Large numbers of students attending two different schools would be difficult to track. Student behaviour may be well known in one school but not in the other. Would students be suspended from one school but not the other? If a student received lunchtime or after school detentions at the home school, how could they serve them if they are attending another school in the afternoon? Other tracking considerations include students' medications, communication to and from parents, permission forms, access orders, individual education plans and Ontario Student Records. The list could go on and on.
- Loss of Students: If we don't have full service schools while the other system does, the chance of losing students from our system is significant. Loss of students means loss of funding, staff and programs and we could begin a downward spiral.
- Instability: After many years of massive change and upheaval created by the Provincial Government, it is not at all healthy to suggest more massive change and upheaval. After losing students to other systems because of the uncertainty facing Harrow High School, it is not prudent to now have other schools go through similar periods while they face an uncertain future.
- Pathways to Success: Programs being removed from certain schools would hinder the principles for program pathways. Our schools should provide pathways for success for all students at risk. It is not realistic to expect that at-risk students would travel to other schools to take alternative programs. Therefore, removing optional programs from

home schools would create a very real impediment for these at-risk students. The goal of the system must be to make these students successful, not to put roadblocks in front of them.

Small niche programs, designed with a community flavour and appropriate partnership in mind, which complement existing senior curriculum running in each of the schools is an excellent idea and worth pursuing. Any idea which broadens the strength of our community based system must be explored.

Summary

While we appreciate the work that was done by the Secondary School Task Force and while we support the notion of reviewing on an ongoing basis the needs of our students, we have significant concerns with major aspects of the White Paper. Everyone would agree that the confidence of staff is essential to successfully implement any significant plans within the system. Based on extensive discussions with our members, we can say that the major components of the White Paper are not supported by our members for reasons outlined in this document. Any major shift from the present successful system should only be made based on hard data. It appears to us that the White Paper offers very little in the way of facts, figures and data. The stakes are much too high to make decisions based on anecdotal reporting and speculation.

If treated as a “take it or leave it” package, attempts to implement the White Paper will be met with tremendous resistance from staff and, we believe, from the community. If dealt with in a more pragmatic way, specific initiatives and ideas can be pulled from the White Paper and implemented through a collaborative relationship amongst all stakeholders.

It is important to understand that many of the ideas contained within the White Paper are completely independent from one another. For example, the creation of small market niche programs is not at all dependant upon magnet schools being created. Again, since the White Paper has been presented as a discussion paper, we hope that the Board will not respond defensively to criticism of flawed proposals and will objectively consider suggestions to embrace or even improve other proposals.

We urge the Board to reject the White Paper in its present form. Instead, we would ask the Board to consider the recommendations that we have made. Rather than focussing on what is perceived as “wrong” with the system and making fundamental changes, we strongly suggest taking a positive approach by looking at what is right with the system and building upon our strengths. We do an excellent job of educating students in this community and should not abandon our foundation of providing a full range of opportunities within each of our neighbourhood and community schools.

Rather than making a radical shift from what has been successful for many years, we should build upon our successes. The Federation is interested in working with the Board to enhance our system through increased enrolment which ultimately leads to increased funding, staffing, program offerings and support for our students. To overcome the concerns which initiated the creation of the Secondary School Task Force, there is no need to make sweeping structural changes to a proven successful system.

OSSTF, District 9 urges the Board to consider our concerns as well as the following 14 recommendations so that we can work together toward what is best for our schools and our students.

Recommendations

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

- ESL:** OSSTF supports the concept of additional ESL programs in order to attract students who do not attend our current programs because of geography. More ESL opportunities will help to increase student performance. One such example is Literacy Testing. Of course, the number of ESL programs would have to be limited in order to ensure that the critical mass of students necessary for adequate program offerings at each location remains.
- Special Education:** OSSTF recommends keeping the number of locally developed courses offered in home schools to a minimum while continuing to support Western and Century as the preferred secondary school placement for special education students.
- Professional Development:** Opportunities for relevant professional development for all administrators and staff are critical to implementing successful 21st century change. We need a return to Professional Development Days and Department Heads who can model and support what we know from current research. An ongoing focus on cross-curricular teaching and learning strategies such as those at the root of the Literacy, Numeracy and Pathways pillars of the Student Success Initiative is critical for staff and students alike.
- Niche Programs:** OSSTF fully supports the concept of creating small market niche programs to enhance traditional programs available to students. This is a positive idea to provide additional opportunities for a select group of students while not reducing exposure to a variety of programs for the majority. An example of this type of niche program is a group of Construction Technology students from a school, or from across the system working with industry to build a house. This type of opportunity provides experience for students who excel in Construction Technology, but is not in place of Construction Technology programs at home schools. These types of programs could be created within communities through partnerships within the community. The students and programs would obviously need to be monitored by a teacher.
- Full Service Schools:** OSSTF supports the full service school model. Providing a full range of programs within each of our neighbourhood and community schools has been and continues to be critical to our success. Moving to a regional or system-wide model would be disastrous for our schools. Such a move would undermine our schools' historic roles within their neighbourhoods and communities.

COLLABORATION/TEAMWORK

- Stability:** Education has been extremely turbulent for the past 10 years. There have been many changes and conflicts during that time. Now that we have an opportunity to provide stability, we should do so. We should always be moving toward improvement, but significant and unnecessary change would be extremely detrimental to the system at this time. If our system is viewed as unstable and does not have consensus regarding any changes, we will lose students not only from our secondary schools, but also from our elementary schools. There is no public appetite for radical change in education at this time. “Peace and Stability” is the mantra of the current government. The White Paper proposals would clearly put the GECDSB out of step with that sentiment.
- Consultation:** Only through consultation with all stakeholder groups will we gain a perspective from all vantage points. All future consultations should be more inclusive as the support of all staff of the Board is imperative for major policy implementation.
- Improved Relations:** As mentioned above, staff support is essential. A stable and positive working relationship must be fostered in order for changes to be viewed as positive. There is still work to be done in this area.
- Data, Data, Data:** We must compile data through surveys, roundtable discussions, input from all stakeholders and results from here and other jurisdictions. Before any formal position goes out for debate, it must be substantiated through factual analysis.

MOVING FORWARD

- JK Enrolment:** Given the fact that our retention rate from our own feeder schools is extremely high (believed to be over 90%), our focus should be on attracting students into our elementary schools rather than wholesale changes in our secondary schools. It is a fact that increased secondary enrolment leads to more diverse program offerings, which ultimately provides an advantage to all students.
- Increase Enrolment:** Understanding that increased enrolment ultimately provides the best opportunities for students, the Federation would be interested in working with the Board to explore options to attract students to our schools who typically attend private and religious schools. Perhaps we could look at

school-within-a-school models. The Federation would work with the Board to look for staffing solutions to accommodate these types of situations should that be an impediment. Rather than working from the basis that we must protect our current enrolment, we should use our current enrolment as a base and work toward increasing it. In other words, we should not ask how can we change so that we don't lose students, we should ask how we can build on our strengths to attract new students who would not have traditionally been in our buildings.

Improved Image: Money spent on improving the curb appeal of our secondary schools would be helpful. This could include landscaping, curtains, effective school signs, painting, facility repairs and updated equipment. First impressions are lasting impressions.

Promotion: Our system has some very admirable attributes including superior support for special education students, exceptional program offerings for students and partnerships through schools associated with particular neighbourhoods and communities. We should heavily promote these strengths of our system rather than abandon them. Positive word-of-mouth promotion from staff, students and parents is the cornerstone to building our profile within the community. In addition, formal advertising through a professional advertising or public relations firm would be money well spent.

Cost Issues: We believe that part of the motivation for creating magnet programs, particularly in Technological Studies, the Arts and other optional areas, is the issue of costs. Rather than removing program opportunities from home schools, a committee should be struck to examine costs and how to most effectively manage them. Through consultation with teachers and education workers, we are confident that efficiencies can be found while still working toward better meeting the needs of students. Further, increased enrolment, as identified in the previous recommendation, leads to increased funding. This increased funding could be used to refurbish or rebuild schools as necessary.

Conclusion

The task force was organized to address 3 specific concerns brought forth by in-school administration. From the White Paper, they are:

- Inadequate resources
- Staffing issues
- Inability to meet Program needs

As indicated earlier, OSSTF supports some initiatives contained in the White Paper. Further, we have made suggestions on important topics not covered in the White Paper. However, the Federation rejects the cornerstone initiative of the White Paper. OSSTF does not support a restructured system to incorporate the Magnet School philosophy.

OSSTF supports:

- √ A Full Service School model, not a Full Service System model
- √ Change that is supported by hard data
- √ A collaborative, all inclusive approach to discussing change
- √ Maximizing success through change, while minimizing risk

The White Paper recommendation is based on the assumption that system enrolment can, at best, remain status quo. The Magnet School approach is born of a “make do with what we have” philosophy. Magnet Schools disrupt and displace students to accommodate this “make do” philosophy. OSSTF rejects this last hope approach.

In contrast, OSSTF believes the system can grow. Hard data supports that the system will indeed grow. As the system grows, school populations develop as does the funding to support programs. This type of action plan, which is focussed on growth, will successfully nullify any resource, staffing and/or program concerns.

And just because the system is destined to grow (due to natural migration and demographic patterns) does not mean the growth has to stop. Greater Essex is an excellent system, a community based system, with an abundance of untapped energy waiting to be embraced, to further develop and celebrate our system of delivering education to the communities of Windsor and Essex County.

Finally, the risk of failure (from the Magnet School approach) is serious and must not be taken lightly.

OSSTF enthusiastically suggests to Trustees and the community that this Alternative to the White Paper be accepted so that we may begin *Building Tomorrow Together*.

Resolution from Membership Meeting November 28, 2005

BIRT the Membership of OSSTF, District 9 endorse the Blueprint for Development, an Alternative to the Secondary School Task Force White Paper.

Carried Unanimously

