

# Status Quo, the Creative Option for West Oakville French Immersion Interim Accommodation

---

Pine Grove School Council Delegation to the HDSB, Wednesday 30 November 2005  
Revised: Tuesday 29 November 2005

**Chair Tate, Trustees of the Halton District School Board, Director Joudrie and Staff**, thank you for this opportunity to speak tonight on behalf of the parents, staff, students, and extended community of École Pine Grove School. My Name is Sandy McDonald.

Over the past few weeks, since board planners recommended moving grade 6 French Immersion from Pine Grove to Eastview for the 2006-07 school year, the Pine Grove school council accommodation team has worked furiously to understand this option and to search for others. After hundreds of hours of investigating, analyzing, educating and consulting, we feel there is a consensus within the community for maintaining a real status quo, and continuing to deliver grades 1 to 6 French Immersion in West Oakville at Pine Grove, without caps, without enrolment restrictions, and without redirecting any students to another school.

We hope you will find our arguments herein convincing, and that you will become part of this growing consensus!

## ***Affect Only One Community***

An additional 80 to 100 students at Pine Grove next year will exacerbate some of our existing challenges. The campus will be more crowded, there will be an increase in vehicle traffic, and buses from the community north of Upper Middle will be fuller. There will be greater demands on our library, computer lab, gym, music room and playground. There will be more portables. But, sending 105 grade 6s to Eastview will only shift these problems there.

By accommodating the growth in elementary French Immersion at Pine Grove, the Pine Grove school community is disrupted. By shifting students to Eastview, you will disrupt both.

For Pine Grove, the growth in enrolment will be a challenge. For another community, it will be a problem.

## ***Fewer Transitions, Positive Transitions***

Any option you choose to accommodate Pine Grove's students next year is an interim measure, until a school can be built in West Oak Trails in 2007. The disruption to the community in 2007 will be significant, but positive and exciting. That's not the case with this interim plan.

Should the Pine Grove grade 6s move to Eastview next year, those living north of Upper Middle would remain there for grades 7 and 8. The new school would open with French Immersion grades 1 to 6 instead of grades 1 to 7. Including these grade 7s, it would be argued, would put them through a second transition in two years. Administratively, it would also complicate the new school transition and integration process (the division of staff and resources) by adding Eastview to the mix.

Status quo ensures that West Oak Trails students endure fewer transitions, and that the 2007 transition process is positive for the West Oakville French Immersion community.

## ***Do It Once, Do It Right***

At Pine Grove, our growth in enrolment is almost entirely from north of Upper Middle Road. Because French Immersion has a single entry point, most of this growth is in the primary grades. Of the approximately 781 students at Pine Grove this year, the West Oak Trails community contributes about 275. Next year this contribution will grow to nearly 375. The

following year there will be nearly 500 grades 1 to 6 French Immersion kids living in that community.

Please, let's plan a positive transition to a new school in 2007, rather than pushing through an ill thought out change that does not best serve our children.

### ***Balanced School Configurations***

This year, Pine Grove has 480 students in its primary division and 300 students in its junior division. With status quo next year, Pine Grove will have 555 students in primary and about 325 in junior.

On the flip side, if grade 6 moves to Eastview, we will still have 555 students in the primary grades, but just over 200 in junior. Eastview, which is now split 175 (FTE) primary and 450 junior/intermediate, will still have about 175 primary students, but closer to 550 juniors and intermediates.

Status quo provides far a more balanced organization for both schools.

### ***Division of Resources***

How would the Grade 6 French and English resources be excised from Pine Grove so that they might follow the students to Eastview? How many of our junior French language reference books will migrate to Eastview? What will return to Pine Grove the following year?

### ***Staffing***

It is pretty clear that, should Grade 6 move to Eastview, the Grade 6 teaching team (4 staff) might not. Rules of seniority preclude their moving automatically with the students. This is one more disruption for the community.

### ***We Can Be Creative***

Pine Grove has a track record of dealing with challenges creatively.

We have a huge, active volunteer population, with a willingness and proven ability to rise to the occasion when required. Our staff are innovative and are already dealing with many aspects of overcrowding in ways that increase access to resources (our split lunches/recesses, for example).

We have support from the system, the school and the parents, Pine Grove kids will have opportunities they might not otherwise have. In the winter, we can make better use of our playground by including snowshoeing and cross-country skiing in the phys ed curriculum. Team teaching in grade one may reduce the number of classrooms needed while dramatically improving student: teacher ratios; leveraging the use of technology by putting a computer lab on the cart and using wireless access would relieve the strain on our current computer resources. These things are all possible and many of them are exciting opportunities for both students and staff, that wouldn't otherwise be considered.

### ***Problems and Solutions***

#### **Loss of Student Leaders**

The loss of our grade six students constitutes the loss of our student leaders. Many of these children volunteer in the office, in the primary classrooms, and on the buses. They are positive role models for the younger kids.

## **Resources**

Access to resources is a primary concern for staff and parents. As the number of classes in a school increases so does the demand on resources. At Pine Grove, the addition of three or four classes in 2006 would increase general demand by about 9%. Because the school day is divided into periods, this increased demand is already handled in creative yet practical ways.

## **Class Sizes**

Increasing class sizes is one way to reduce resource problems. By making class sizes moderately larger and reducing the number of classes, the demands on resources are reduced.

Class sizes are an important concern for parents and for staff. Parents struggling to help active children to succeed really don't want to see class size increase. Larger class sizes can be offset by team teaching, or by having additional staff available for classroom withdrawal of at-risk students to provide additional support.

Class sizes vary significantly from year to year and cohort to cohort. And almost every year in every school, principals make choices between split classes or large classes. Between adding a portable or reducing the number of classes by one. We have looked at a number of scenarios for organizing our school next year (see Appendices). In our estimates, class sizes fall well within divisional averages and do not exceed 28 or 29 students. We also use the same assumptions, and data provided by the principals to estimate the impact of increased enrolment on the organizations of Eastview and Sunningdale.

Included in the appendices is a historic review of class sizes at Pine Grove over the past five years.

## **Safety**

Increasing the number of students, the number of portables and automobile traffic at the school are all concerns that are ongoing.

**Playground supervision** is a challenge at any school with more than 500 students. Pine Grove currently has nearly 800 and next year will have nearly 900 under status quo. By splitting the recesses between our 480 primary and 300 junior students, the playground is less crowded than it has ever been, there are far fewer incidents or conflicts, and there is an improvement in the supervisor to student ratio without increasing the number of staff on duty. There is more space and increased access to resources such as the climber, basketball courts, pavement games and sports fields for all the kids.

**Lunchtime supervision** at Pine Grove is done by teaching staff, parent volunteers, and in the early primary grades by pairs of grade 6 lunchtime helpers. Losing Pine Grove's most responsible students will cause a problem in this area.

**Portable health and safety** is an ongoing concern for parents and staff. Portables, because they are outside the main building, present additional safety exposures. As portables are required at any school proposed to accommodate the growth in French immersion students, this exposure becomes a function of each school's topology, staff experience, fencing and any extraordinary measures.

**Traffic and parking** are safety issues at every school. At Pine Grove and Eastview, bus traffic would not increase, as buses would just be more heavily loaded. Pine Grove uses grade 6 and grade 5 students as bus monitors. Losing our grade 6s actually causes problems for us. Parking and traffic safety issues will increase at all three school with the addition of 100 kids. Eastview is in perhaps the worst position to handle growth in its population, being on a smaller street with far less parking available. (See attached comments from local Town Councilors concerning traffic.)

## ***Consultation***

It is our feeling that community consultation is a very important part of finding a best solution, and developing a broad consensus to accept that solution. Such a consultation needn't be protracted or never ending. However, the time given the West Oakville and the French Immersion community was certainly too short.

This may be an interim solution, and viewed, therefore, as requiring less time or consideration. Our community would suggest that this is not the case, as every short-term option suggested has a different impact or implication for the long-term decisions the board will have to make when Pine Glen (West Oak Trails #3) opens in 2007.

The Pine Grove community will be uncomfortable with any outcome of this consultation, because there has not been time for it to be thorough, nor has there been time for it to be considerate.

We hope the planning process for West Oakville French Immersion long-term accommodation will begin shortly, and that it will be more inclusive.

## ***Single-Track or Dual-Track?***

Oakville has had the proven benefit of single track French Immersion where French is natural, totally integrated and everywhere. It literally becomes a comfortable part of the children's culture.

## ***Conclusions***

The Pine Grove School Council recommends:

- That Grades 1-6 French Immersion in West Oakville continue to be delivered without capping admission, restricting enrolment, or redirecting students, at École Pine Grove School for the 2006-07 school year.
- And that long-term planning for West Oakville French Immersion accommodation begin in earnest as soon as possible, and that this process include the West Oakville French Immersion community from the outset.

We hope you agree.

Thank you.