

Trustee Chris Bolton,  
Chair,  
Planning and Priorities Committee,  
Toronto District School Board.

February 7, 2011

Dear Trustee Bolton,

We regret that it was not possible for us to address the Planning and Priorities Committee at its last meeting to discuss the structure of the upcoming PARC in the Rexdale area. We fully understand that the details of our PARC could not be on the agenda, but we had hoped to be part of a larger discussion on the structure of PARCs for all areas of the city, which would, of course, apply to our situation.

We have been lead to believe – rightly, we think – that the trustees are serious about making the Pupil Accomodation Review Committee process more democratic and transparent than it has been in the past. With this new emphasis at the Board, we think the city-wide PARC process, including our own in Rexdale, has the potential to draw our school communities closer together and allow us to help each other more in sharing resources and best practices.

We have received, as you know, a letter from superintendent Annie Appleby outlining, among other things, the personnel who are to be on the PARC. We understand Ms. Appleby was simply carrying out what she believed was the proper process at this time – and we mean no criticism here – but we believe, given the new emphasis on transparency and democracy in developing the PARC process, that her letter forecloses the work the Planning and Priorities Committee has begun in this area. She has told us that the PARC will be composed of 5 principals. 2 parents from each school, 1 principal from a non-PARC school, one community representative, two secondary school students, city councilors for Wards 1 and 2, trustee Hastings and the superintendent from N.W.1.

We have no objections to any of the people she has selected, but we want to add to this group in a democratic fashion. We want a much broader representation of parents, concerned community members, teachers and school board workers. This will allow us to use the PARC process to strengthen communication between all of those involved in the 5 schools within the PARC. It would especially allow us to discuss best practices of parent involvement in our schools and ways in which our schools can become more dynamic "full-service schools" or community hubs, which would include (given the limited resources available) various initiatives in sharing community facilities between the different schools. A large committee would facilitate this discussion and bring a broad representation of school and community views on the issues raised.

We understand the Education Ministry guidelines allow the Board the freedom to strengthen the democracy of the PARC as we suggest. We also believe that many other communities facing PARCs across the city would welcome this increased level of democracy.

Attached you will find a fuller explanation of our proposal to increase the democracy and transparency for the community residents, parents, workers, and teachers. We have also tried to give you a summary of the concerns of the parents and students at Queen's Plate Drive who have been dealing with the problem of pupil accommodation for 10 years now. Finally, we bring forward five key issues our communities want to raise during this upcoming PARC process.

Let us say again, that we are very much looking forward to participating in this PARC and we hope you find a way to make it more representative of our broader school community. We especially hope that this discussion can return to the Planning and Priorities Committee and a new democratic framework for our PARCs can be worked out there. We hope, too, that we can be part of that discussion.

Sincerely

*Gautham Dey and Hawa Kusow (Co-Chairs Greenholme JMA)*

*Hersi Ali and Iman Omar (Co-chairs, Elmbank JMA)*

*Abdullah Wardhare (Chair, Queen's Plate Parents and Community)*

## Recommendations on the PARC Process

Here is how we imagine our PARC should be constituted:

- 3 parents from each of the 5 schools elected by their school councils – 15
- 2 community members from each of the 5 schools elected by the school council in their community – 10
- 1 teacher from each school elected by the teachers of that school – 5
- 1 school board worker from each school elected by the school board workers of that school – 5
- 2 secondary school students elected by the student council of West Humber Collegiate – 2

When others from Superintendent Appleby's selection are added to this group (6 principals, 2 councilors, 1 trustee, 1 superintendent) that makes a total of 47. This group would elect the chair of the PARC.

This does not seem to us too unwieldy a group. It's large, but we can make it work. What is crucial for us is that the PARC process reach out to a large number of those who will be affected by it and bring forward a wide range of views that must be taken into account. We will get to know each other in this process and get to trust each other. For us, this is a key factor in the future betterment of our schools.

This level of democracy seems especially important now that we have learned in the press that it appears that a great many in-private discussions have already moved forward to deal with decisions (or structure decision-making choices) that should be dealt with publicly in the PARC, with as much democratic representation as possible (see Tim Foran "Board examines Rexdale school changes, " InsideToronto.com, Dec. 16, 2010). The article raises the issue of the approximately 2,500 residential units from the 555 Rexdale Boulevard (Woodbine Live – Phase 2), which, while its timelines put it outside our present PARC, it still has to be taken into account, particularly given the continuing community concerns over the development of Woodbine Live and the extent of affordable housing that will be provided. It also appears the PARC will "examine what to do with an existing elementary school-sized property the board already owns on the south side of Finch Avenue West at Humberline Drive," which might be used to build a new school to handle Humberwood Down's overcrowding, and which might result in the closing of Elmbank – a possible closing which disturbs us greatly. Our problem here is not with outlining various possibilities – that's a reasonable role for administration – but of the shaping of possibilities without full and broadly representative discussion and thus, potentially, narrowing our choices. We are very pleased to see Trustee Hastings quoted as saying "I'm insisting that a name like 'growth area strategy' will be the name, because ARC has certain connotations to the public. ARC means closing schools and that's not our issue. We're not closing schools. We've got to figure out where we're putting kids that are (in overcrowded schools)." That's exactly the spirit we hope for in the upcoming Rexdale PARC.

## **The Queen's Plate Issue**

As some of the trustees will know, one of our communities centred on Queen's Plate Drive (and represented in this letter) has been before this Board since November 2009 trying to resolve an issue that will be part of the upcoming PARC in Rexdale. This is the injustice they experienced over 10 years ago – in which their children were forced out of their neighbourhood school – and which continues to hurt them badly. We are attaching two of their documents to the Board to give you some sense of what their children have suffered – losing most of their after-school activities, forced to go much further to school across very dangerous roads, unable to come home at lunch, their parents unable to connect to their teachers regularly. The Queen's Plate community strongly believes the original decision was racist – forcing a poor, black community to make way for a development composed of wealthier families – and is a serious human rights issue. They have, however, always hoped that they don't have to go that legal route. Which is why they are especially pleased that this PARC has been set up. They believe – as we all do – that it gives them the opportunity to right the injustice their children have continued to face every day for 10 years.

The Queen's Plate Parents and Community organization was especially anxious to stress (as they have in the past) that their desire to go back to Humberwood Downs is, in no way, a criticism of the staff and administration of Elmbank, the school their children presently attend. In fact, they have found both the administration and the staff at Elmbank to be very sympathetic to the situation in which their children have found themselves and have tried their best to help. But there was only so much staff and administration could do given the distance and obstacles between the school and the community.

Throughout their struggle to get back their neighbourhood school, the Queen's Plate parents and community have never forgotten how important it is that all the schools in our area be strengthened. In this work they have spoken out – with all our support – for good tutoring programs for all, a stronger framework for parent-teacher communication, a more flexible and reliable bus service for all who are using buses, better means of engaging our parents on school activities, and the need to open up a deeper discussion with our teachers to find ways to build a curriculum that will truly engage our students and turn back the high dropout rate. We all continue to care about these issues, and we think that this PARC will at least begin a discussion of some of these issues and allow us to meet with others who share our concerns or have issues of their own, which we should know about. The new broad representation of parents, students, teachers, community members, administration and politicians should make this discussion really valuable.

## **Schools As Community Hubs**

Over the last couple of years, there are at least five major issues in which all our communities have been concerned to deal with. We hope that the PARC in its new form will allow substantial consideration of these issues. They are as follows:

(1) There is a great need for many more tutoring programs in the area dealt with in this PARC. We hope that some central office in this area might be set up to let everyone know the tutoring

programs that are available, help strengthen those that are available, and create new ones for those currently not within a tutoring program and who need it.

(2) As recent reports from the Inner City Advisory Committee make clear, neighbourhoods like ours have some very major health problems among their students. ICAC has flagged many eye and hearing problems, but we know there are many other health issues in front of us. We would like these five schools to find a way to share a health service, and especially one that would examine all our children for a wide range of health problems.

(3) A recent report from Graham Hollings of CUPE 4400 has indicated that our neighbourhood is badly lacking in needed adult education programs. We hope that if extra space or time is found in our five schools, then we might apply for more adult programs to fill this space and time.

(4) We are very impressed by the recent initiatives to build green schools at the TDSB. We hope that, through the PARC, more of these initiatives can come to our part of the world.

(5) Finally, we would very much like a presentation from the Board on all the programs in these five schools – to see how those that are there might be strengthened through more resources and to see if there are programs missing that would be valuable to our communities.