

April 26th FSR Delegation

Hi, my name is Kara Woolridge. I am a proud SCITS alumni and it's no secret that I would like to see SCITS remain open. I've bled BLUE since the early 1980's. I am far from a political person and except for issues regarding my children, there is not really much that would get me up in front of this many people to talk. However, SCITS IS a family and I am thoroughly invested in the movement to Save SCITS from closure.

It can't be denied that the populations of SCITS and SCSS would benefit from the amalgamation of their student populations. Combining them into one school will significantly increase the number and variety of courses that can be offered and it would bolster all of the extra-curricular programs.

However, this amalgamation could occur at EITHER school, and unfortunately for SCITS, this was never a consideration for the LKDSB administration. The Initial Staff Report proposed ONLY the SCSS site and declared the definite closure of the first high school in the history of Sarnia.

As a member of the Accommodation Review Committee, I have been extremely committed to the examination of the process, documents and discussions. I am also extremely disappointed in the outcome. After many hours of research and meetings, the LKDSB is still proposing only one option to the trustees for the final vote on May the 10th.

SCITS students, teachers, parents, alumni, home and business owners, as well as many past teachers flocked to both Public ARC Meetings to show their allegiance, express their concerns and convey the importance of keeping the SCITS legacy alive. SCITS serves as an extraordinary learning environment. It offers larger rooms and hallways than most schools, a heated pool, a concert style music room, an expansive double gym with more than enough bleachers for any crowd, wrestling facilities that were recently updated with a \$40,000 Trillium grant and, of course, the magnificent auditorium.

These facilities are also enjoyed by the surrounding neighbourhood, as proven by the 1788 community use hours that have been logged in the past year. SCITS was designated a Priority School Initiative site to address the needs of the community/neighbourhood where socioeconomic or other barriers would otherwise hinder access and programming, as determined by the Canadian Census Data. SCITS is where the surrounding community seeks social interaction. People of all ages can be found competing in sports and academic events, performing in plays and musicals, attending charity drives and student achievement ceremonies. It is close by and easily accessible to the immediate neighbourhood of south-west Sarnia and it contributes to the vitality of Mitton Village and the presently revitalizing "downtown" Sarnia. They cannot afford to lose this institution!

The Final Staff Report proposes that it will APPLY for a grant and POSSIBLY enhance the other location and reproduce some of these amenities BUT, they are applying for money with all boards across Ontario and therefore, they MAY NOT be successful. IF that is the case, it is the administration's intention to make due at SCSS when SCITS already offers these luxuries NOW. Chair trustee Bryce even publicly "questioned the administration's decision to state provincial funding will be sought for new amenities at St Clair to replace those lost WHEN SCITS closes."

During the ARC process, several alternative options were tabled, briefly discussed and eliminated by the board.

On page 13 of the Final Staff Report, it states that there was

"little support from the ARC members" for options described in bullet marks #1-5

This information is called into question when, on page 40, OF THE SAME REPORT, those same votes are documented to show each school's ARC members (totalling 5 from each school) voting for their school to stay open.

In addition, 5 of the votes were recorded supporting the option 6.1 which is:

Consolidation @ SCITS of Secondary School with the creation of the dual track City of Sarnia F.I. K-8 school, along with a portion of an English Language school at SCSS.

The rationale for this decision is that “this option would leave many elementary schools in the City of Sarnia under capacity with the potential for closure to create needed efficiencies for the board.’

In addition, to this, “the majority of French Immersion student in the City of Sarnia live in the present area for NCIVS.”

NOTE: 3 different options received 5 votes BUT only one has been carried forward and presented in the Final Staff Report AND both additional options involved using SCITS as the final site for the amalgamation.

It is my feeling that these options require revisiting.

IF SCITS were to stay open, SCSS could be reused through 1. Redeveloping or 2. Repurposing

Firstly; It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see that SCSS has much more land and per square metre, and that the land is worth a great deal more in the real estate market, due to its location.

There is detailed data to support the suggested redevelopment potential for both schools in the City Of Sarnia's Community Impact Study. Pages 22-23. The estimated dollar value per square metre is used to calculate the monies predicted for resale and to determine that SCITS would lose money in an attempt to redevelop and sell, while SCSS land could potentially make the school board between \$400,000 and \$1M in profit. This money could be recirculated to address the back log of expenditures.

NOW, the money is an enticing idea, however, saving money is too! Bear with me!

The LKDSB has also addressed the Sarnia Elementary Schools Phase in the Pupil Accommodation Report.

On page 15, the proposed phase of the Initial Staff Report suggests closing Confed Central, Queen Elizabeth II, London Road and Lakeroad Public Schools and relocating the students to various schools to boost their % capacity numbers but they also suggest constructing a NEW elementary in Sherwood Village.

There is a need for an elementary school in the Sherwood area, as currently some 316 students are from the subdivision and bused to 4 different schools all across Sarnia. SCSS is right next to the Sherwood subdivision and could accommodate these students and possibly some of the students being displaced from the proposed closure of Queen E.

The phase further suggests relocating Errol Road students so they can use that school as a single track F.I. site

Based on data received from the LKDSB, it is obvious that there isn't enough room for all 606 F.I. students at Errol because its' OTG capacity is 435. It was suggested that 6 classrooms be added to Errol, but, I did the math and the numbers don't work out.

WHY use a school that isn't big enough and spend money on additions when:

SCSS would provide an exciting alternative for the 606 F.I. students. The building can be further utilized in combination with an English Language School to house the 316 Sherwood and maybe 100 or so Queen Elizabeth II students. That would result in over 1000 students and bring the numbers up to 85-90% capacity in the building.

There also is grant money available for the decommissioning of extra building space if necessary.

Many creative answers have been proposed during this process and it seems that the rush to ATTEMPT to attain this GRANT, has moved the focus AWAY from the possibilities that would properly address the needs of OUR community.

I ask that we slow down, and look carefully at how this decision will ultimately cripple the west of the South Sarnia School areas that are being considered. Recently, there was praise for the trustees of the Halton Catholic School Board just voted against proposals to close schools to do what was in the best interest of the community. They admitted that “the process was flawed”, that they weren't giving proper time to address “the serious concerns raised by the parents

over the past few months, about the rushed nature of the process in an effort to take advantage of Ministry of Education school capital consolidation funding”

Finally:

I wrote to the trustees today, to supply them with the link to the recent petition that has been organized, in response to the board’s Final Staff Report on the South Sarnia Secondary Schools.

The ARC process generated several options for the trustees to consider, however, the administration has still chosen to ignore everything SCITS has to offer, prior to the grant application which is not a sure thing. The students, parents, alumni, business owners, and even the City of Sarnia have spoken up to ask for equal consideration, but our voices have not been heard.

The petition has been organized to generate an idea of the vast number of people concerned about the possible closure of Sarnia’s first high school and the negative ramifications it WILL have on the students, the home owners, Mitton Village and the recently regenerating downtown of the City of Sarnia.

We have attained over 1000 signatures in the first week and the number continues to grow. There are many insightful comments that I am presently compiling in a file to forward to you closer to the date of the vote.

I have the first 16 pages of comments in hard copy for you today but will continue to organize further comments as they arrive.

I encourage you to consider the beliefs of your constituents when make your decision and I thank you, on behalf of the community for the time and efforts you have invested in this process.