

Peter Coleman

# The Closing of Howden School

## Decision-making under conditions of stress

The following personal report from the (former) superintendent of a Manitoba school district takes us step by step through the stages of what might have been a much more prolonged and harrowing crisis than it turned out - although, as it was, it had all the familiar, upsetting, and noisy characteristics of many a decision to close a school. For this was a district that was administering French-language schools for the first time as well as English-language ones, and into that politically tense picture, already beginning to be complicated by declining enrolments, had swum great numbers of English-speaking parents eager to have their children learn French by "immersion". The fascination of this article lies in following the board's officials as they navigate with care among the shoals and reefs of public legislation, public opinion, and legal judgment. We may peruse the chart that guided them, in the shape of the superintendent's analysis of the board's many options (of which a part appears in Appendix A). Coleman concludes with comments on the light thrown by his experience on certain propositions currently held by writers on educational administration.

This case-study is a participant observer account of a lengthy, intense, complex, and potentially destructive episode in the life of a school district. Since I was one of the major participants, as Superintendent, it is unavoidably subjective. However, written at some distance in time and space, the account is, it is hoped, objective enough to be useful and instructive to school districts, and particularly to senior administrators facing similarly loaded issues. I have made some attempt to generalize from the experience.

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Since the entire episode was conducted in public meetings, and subsequently extensively reviewed in court, virtually all the data is real-life. However, I have rarely used the names of individuals; rather I give offices, titles, or position descriptions. All other information of every kind is real.

Some insights can be gained into at least the following matters: the representative role of trustees; the political role of senior administrators; policy decision-making under conditions of conflict; public involvement in decision-making; the impact of declining enrolments; and the working relationship between trustees and administrators under conditions of stress.

### **St. Boniface, on the Red River**

St. Boniface is a medium to small suburban district of 8,000 students, on the east bank of the Red River immediately adjacent to the original city of Winnipeg. The district divides by natural boundaries into three regions, North (or old) St. Boniface, a mid-age subdivision, Windsor Park, and a new subdivision, Southdale.

The most significant recent event in the history of St. Boniface School Division was the creation in 1971 of a sub-system in which French was the language of instruction. This divided the pupil population of the district, at a time when enrolments had peaked but decline was not anticipated. This initiative was the first district-level response in the province to legislation permitting French to be used as a language of instruction. The French schools were immediately and spectacularly successful. They were, for the most part, completely French and intended for children from French homes, with instruction in English only for the English language and commencing in Grade 2.

However, the national concern with bilingualism and biculturalism, and the mobility of some middle-class residents who were aware of the beginnings of immersion programs in French for English-speaking children in Eastern Canada, made these schools attractive to some English-speaking parents. One parent expressed interest thus: "It is the perfect immersion program - my child in a class of 20 Francophones." It was also to be unique and short-lived.

Concurrently with the development of the French sub-system, the population centre of the district was moving south - away from "Vieille St. Boniface" - as a large, new subdivision (Southdale) opened up and three new elementary schools and a major addition to the southernmost high school were built. These construction projects coincided with the end of the school building

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boom in Winnipeg, and probably across the West.

The seeds of the 1979 crisis were already in place by about 1974. Declining populations in schools in North St. Boniface and Windsor Park were being partially offset by growing enrolments in Southdale's new schools, but the trend was down.

### **Phase 1: The impact of declining enrolments**

In 1974 what was to be Phase 1 of a continuing crisis occurred. Two schools, one French (Taché) and one English (William Russell) were facing enrolment declines to below 200. Since Taché was a kindergarten to grade 8 school (K-8), this was particularly serious. The wide range of support services typically available could not be economically provided to such small schools. On such grounds the Board decided to close both schools.

These were the first urban closures of small schools in Manitoba, and there was tremendous community reaction, including a one-day boycott of classes at William Russell (about 90% effective) and Federal intervention by the Secretary of State on behalf of Ecole Taché, because of its symbolic significance as the first purpose-built French Language school since the Manitoba Schools Question of 1876.

However the Board held firm, and both schools were closed. William Russell students were absorbed into two neighbouring schools, each about six blocks away, and William Russell was converted into a combined Board office and Teacher Centre. The principal and staff moved to a newly opened school about ten blocks south in the new subdivision. Taché students and staff were integrated into another French school about six blocks away.

Phase 1 established several things: the major arguments for and against school closures were rehearsed; the senior administrators became familiar with the resistance to be expected from a school community, including the possible political consequences in composition of the School Board; and the damaging potential of declining enrolments became very apparent, together with the need for careful planning of such major decisions for the future. Most important, the significance of sociopolitical factors in school district decision-making as against cost-benefit analyses became obvious.

### **Foreshadowing Phase 2**

Two developments in programming preceded and effectively initiated Phase 2. First, the district had initiated immersion

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French classes at the kindergarten level in three English language elementary schools. A substantial minority of children had been enrolled in these classes, commencing in 1972. Second, population pressures on the southernmost French school, Lacerte, had led to the construction and opening of a new French school in the new subdivision, Southdale. This new school, Guyot, opening in September 1975, offered precisely the same programs for Francophones as Ecole Lacerte, and received the older students from that school, thus alleviating population pressures.

During the 1977-1978 school year, the Parents Committee at Ecole Lacerte (which still included Guyot parents, since the two schools were seen as serving a single population) addressed themselves to a serious problem, the presence in a school intended for Francophones of a substantial minority of children whose native language was English and for whom the supposedly French school was serving as an immersion experience. In many classrooms 25% of the students were effectively English-speaking. The solution proposed by the parents was to regroup students into French and French Immersion streams, to use Lacerte for Francophones, and to use the new school, Guyot, for a French Immersion program, incorporating English-speaking students from Lacerte and from the immersion classes at other elementary schools.

Despite some objections, in particular from the parents of immersion students currently accommodated in local schools, the Lacerte parents' proposal was accepted by the Board. In September 1977 Guyot became exclusively a French Immersion centre and Lacerte exclusively Francophone. At that time, Guyot had a K-5 population of 358, and a designed capacity by district standards of 326. Other schools in the district were operating at capacity or, in many cases, well below capacity.

By September 1978, Guyot had 438 students. The unanticipated popularity of the immersion program was causing two related difficulties. First, Guyot was overcrowded; second, English elementary schools were losing badly-needed students, thus accentuating the consequences of declining enrolments. Because the school-based management system allocated resources to schools on the basis of enrolments, the success of the immersion program was seen by the principals of English elementary schools as threatening. This feeling certainly contributed to the subsequent problems.

## **Phase 2: Immersion and overflow**

Phase 2 of the crisis effectively commenced with a letter (November 20, 1977) from the Chairman of the Guyot Parents'

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Council to the Secretary-Treasurer of the School Division, suggesting that "the total enrolment for 1978-1979 could be 452 students, well over the 'working capacity' for the school. We feel construction plans must be commenced immediately to keep pace with anticipated enrolment. We would ask that you bring our request to the attention of the school board." The School Division's projections of enrolments confirmed the expectations of the parent group.

On May 4, 1978, the Assistant Superintendent (who was responsible for French and Immersion programs) reported on additional facilities for Guyot School, recommending the use of a portable classroom for September 1978, and suggesting three alternatives for September 1979:

Alternative I. That the Board request an additional ten classrooms at Guyot for September 1979.

Alternative II. That the Board establish Howden School as an immersion school. This would necessitate the displacement of 320 (K-6) and 30 (Sp.Ed.) students from Howden to General Vanier, Prendergast, and Frontenac schools. The capacity of Howden is 500.

Alternative III. That the Board establish Prendergast School as an immersion school. This would require the displacement of their 354 (K-6) students to General Vanier, Howden, and Frontenac schools. The School capacity of Prendergast is 500.

On May 16, 1978, the Board approved a "letter of intent" to the Capital Facilities Council of the provincial Department of Education, proposing the addition of ten classrooms, another gymnasium, and a multipurpose room, to accommodate an anticipated 639 students by the 1981-1982 school years. This letter included a statement on immersion programs written by the Assistant Superintendent, asserting a very important principle which became critical in the debate which followed:

The St. Boniface School Board has considered the utilization of classrooms in other schools of the division to accommodate the rapid growth of the (French) Immersion program. Inasmuch as the levels of expectation in immersion vary substantially from that in the core French program, the provision of an effective immersion program presumes the centralizing of the youngsters and the related services. It is therefore the antithesis of the community school concept. This is supported by a statement made by the Department of Education through its Minister in

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April 1977 declaring that "if enrollment in a program is sufficient for the grouping of enough classes to justify the creation of a French school, the Department of Education would expect the school division to attempt to establish such a school." We must assume that this statement holds true in the context of an immersion school.

The St. Boniface School Board is convinced that the Immersion program must remain in a regional school setting if it is to have a chance of success. The main criterion of success rests on the premise that the entire school be staffed by native-like French-speaking teachers. Accordingly, through its classroom, music library, physical education and cultural programs the school is able to provide the necessary ambiance for its pupils. We have come to realize that the immersion school is more than the sum of its classrooms. The language of the halls, playground, school clubs and related activities plays a vital role in achieving the objectives of the immersion program.

In the context of the current linguistic problems facing the country and in light of the current policies of the Department of Education, it is a matter of natural justice that English-speaking children wishing to become fully bilingual have full access to Immersion programs. The addition to Guyot School assures us that the rights of the majority are respected through granting an equal opportunity of receiving instruction in the minority language.

This letter to the Department was supported by a letter from the Guyot Parents' Council (June 12, 1978):

Because of the success of French immersion in our area, many parents are taking advantage of the opportunity for their children to learn and use a second language. We believe the most successful approach is an immersion school such as Guyot, planned and staffed specifically for the teaching of the second language.

#### **No new space - displace**

On July 6, the Board received a letter from the Public School's Finance Board refusing the request for additional space, because "there is vacant space available in other schools in the

division that could be utilized through rearrangement of enrolments and grade levels ..." At this point it became obvious that the Board faced a serious political problem involving the relocation of substantial numbers of its students.

A position paper from myself as Superintendent suggested that three assumptions needed to be examined before alternatives were generated: "(1) that program growth was inevitable; (2) that additional facilities were indeed not available; and (3) that a single immersion centre was, in fact, necessary." This report also proposed some criteria for judgment -

In determining the advantages and disadvantages of various alternatives, one needs bases for judgement. The following are given as possibilities, in order of importance:

- A. Provides a location and setting favorable to the success of the program.
- B. Makes good use of space available in the division.
- C. Minimizes disruptions for parents and students.
- D. Minimizes additional costs, including transportation costs.
- E. Is viable over both short and long term.

**(Note.** These bases for judgment became the Criteria A, B, etc. which were applied in the later report (see Appendix A) on which the Board's decisions were finally based.)

Ten different alternatives were rated against these criteria; only four were considered particularly promising. These were new construction at Guyot School (that is, an appeal against the Finance Board decision); leasing a school in an adjacent division; using all or part of an existing English elementary school; and using part of a French school.

At the parents' request, a meeting was held with the Guyot School Parents' Council, in which the parents pressed strongly for program growth and immersion centres, as opposed to shared facilities with other programs. The Superintendent's report listing a number of alternatives was given to the Parents' Council.

After this meeting, it became clear that, for several of the trustees, shared facilities were unacceptable; they had been convinced by the Guyot parents, and by the views of the Assistant Superintendent, that separate immersion centres were the best

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way to offer an immersion program. At about the same time, it became obvious that the first two alternatives analyzed were not available. The possibilities were narrowing down to alternatives which involved the relocation of students in English programs.

### **Phase 3: Parents seize the initiative**

At the end of November the Guyot Parents' Council proposed the use of Beliveau, a large junior high school, located centrally in Windsor Park, as the single immersion centre. Guyot School would be closed. This alternative entailed a shift from an elementary/junior high/senior high pattern to a K-9, 9-12 pattern in Windsor Park. It had been dismissed in the Superintendent's report because a great many students would be displaced, and because facilities for special programs (band, science, art, and industrial arts) at Beliveau School could not be duplicated at neighbourhood elementary schools, thus requiring the discontinuance of these programs.

The most important consequences of this proposal by the Guyot Parents' Council, made in a public Board meeting, were to make it clear that the Board, by its delays in addressing the problem, had lost the initiative. Other parent groups, particularly at the junior high school in question, were quick to respond to this proposal, and the trustees were deluged with telephone calls and letters. Various parent groups were invited to respond to the Superintendent's report, and to the proposal from the Guyot Parents' Council.

Parent groups at various schools, working with the school principals, put together briefs each arguing that the status quo should be maintained at their school. Many suggested that the empty classrooms at various schools be utilized. But this approach, although economically very sensible, was absolutely unacceptable to the Guyot Parent's Council. At its regular meeting in March, held in the gymnasium of the school board office to accommodate the large number of parents in attendance, the Board received six briefs from school parent groups, including a slightly amended one from the Guyot group. Briefs were also received from the Manitoba chapter of Canadian Parents for France, and the staff of Guyot School, both reasserting the importance of the immersion centre concept.

At the April 3, 1979 Board meeting, trustees used the information and opinion from the briefs to list seven alternatives, and asked the administration to report on these. As a consequence of the public discussion of alternatives by trustees at this well-attended meeting, the Board received a flood of letters from parents, including a petition letter signed by 306 parents of



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Guyot School. This letter resulted from a meeting at the school to which police had to be called to prevent its disruption by parents from other schools. Essentially, the Guyot letters urged the Board to make a rapid decision. The other letters urged the Board to preserve the status quo at the schools listed as alternative sites.

At the next meeting, held on April 17 in a large secondary school gymnasium to accommodate the several hundred parents in attendance, the Board addressed the report on seven alternatives requested at the April 3 meeting. The report is given, in part, as Appendix A. It recommended the adoption in principle of the use of a Windsor Park elementary school, with the identification of a specific school to follow, depending on the method of implementation. This came down to a choice between sharing facilities, phasing in immersion students, and moving out the entire present population of the school selected.

The minutes reveal what then occurred:

### EXPANSION OF IMMERSION PROGRAM

MOVED Trustee Barker (S) Trustee Patterson that (1) Provencher in North St. Boniface, (2) original building at Shamrock School in Southdale, and (3) Howden Elementary school in Windsor Park, be established as the three alternatives best suited for the expanding Immersion Program.

#### First Amendment

MOVED Trustees Garwood (S) Trustee Patterson that Provencher and Shamrock be eliminated as possible alternatives.

**Carried**

#### Second Amendment

MOVED Trustees Patterson (S) Trustee Barker that Howden School alternative be accepted, in principle, by the Board, contingent on further consultation with the Howden and Guyot parents; and

That the administration be asked to advise the Principal and staff, immediately assuring the Principal of an administrative position within the Division and placement of staff members who would have been retained at Howden next year.

**Carried**

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Against:

Trustee Garwood

The procedure here, in which the amendments seem contrary to the intent of the main motion, was certainly inappropriate. The Chairman was advised by the Secretary-Treasurer in his capacity as Parliamentarian not to accept the amendments, but the trustees were adamant in wishing to proceed. Thus the decision arrived at was controversial both in substance and in form.

#### **Phase 4: Implementing the decision**

As a result of the alternative chosen at the meeting of April 17, the Board received a number of letters from Howden parents. One is provided as an illustration (Appendix B). The administration was instructed to prepare a report on how the "Howden alternative" might best be implemented.

The next meeting of the Board on May 1, 1979, was held at the Board offices, again with a large attendance. Howden parents organized a march of students and parents from the school to the Board offices, and a noisy demonstration at the Board offices in advance of the meeting. Many students carried picket signs, including some threatening violence. (For example, one carried a picture of a baseball bat, and a legend "THIS IS NEXT.") A delegation of Howden parents presented a lengthy brief, a petition, and a number of supporting letters. The brief made three main points: that the Special Education children would be disturbed by a move, that Howden School was the best school in the division, and that the Immersion Program should not be expanded because it was 'experimental' and not demonstrably successful.

In addition, the Board received a report from the administration, dated April 24, which provided detailed plans for redistributing the students and staff of Howden School. Special Education classes would move to a school approximately 1-1/4 miles away, with bus transportation continuing to be provided. Other students would move to Frontenac School, about six blocks away, with Howden teachers, Principal, and support staff. The move of the Principal was made possible by two other moves of elementary school principals, made necessary by the termination of an administrative appointment.

A meeting was planned with the Howden Parents' Committee to discuss their brief, and held on May 8. An administration response to the brief made the following points.

1. Special Education placements are normally short term

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placements being adjusted to meet the changing needs of the individual students; half the Special Education children at Howden School had only been there one year, and several of these would normally be moved the next year anyway.

2. Howden School was quite successful, but not outstandingly so. As part of the routine assessment program in the district, a parent opinion survey of schools provided to trustees earlier showed that Howden was perceived positively, but only at the Division average for elementary schools. Similarly in test scores: Howden students were four months ahead of national norms; the Division average for elementary schools was +3 months.
3. The immersion program at Guyot, by any measure available, was outstandingly successful. It was attracting more than one in four of all new Kindergarten registrations in the Windsor Park and Southdale areas, despite the fact that virtually all these students had to be bussed. Test scores showed that in tests conducted in English, Guyot students scored well ahead of Divisional and national norms; in tests conducted in French they approached the competence of Francophone students in French schools. In terms of parental opinion of the schools, Guyot was clearly the **best** elementary school in the school district.

However, this meeting was not productive. The Howden parents were unimpressed with this response to their brief, and informed the Board that they planned to ask the Minister to use his special powers to hold an enquiry, and also, or alternatively, that they planned court action, including an injunction to prevent the Board from taking any action until after a court hearing. Because of this course of action, communication other than through lawyers terminated with this meeting.

At its next meeting, on May 15, the Board confirmed its decision of April 17, to use Howden School for the expansion of the immersion program, and accepted the implementation process outlined in the administration's report of April 24. This effectively closed the decision-making stage.

### The aftermath

The subsequent events were less dramatic. Howden School opened in September, 1979, as an immersion school, and an extension of Guyot. Despite the threats which had been made, by telephone and in person, in the spring, no attempts to block access to the school by the immersion children were made. The immersion program continued its rapid growth. The ex-Howden

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students and staff were integrated into Frontenac School without difficulty.

In December, the Howden parents had their day in court. They alleged that "the decision of the School Board was in excess of its jurisdiction and in breach of its duty to act fairly towards the plaintiffs." They sought a court order to the Minister, under his powers in the Public Schools Act, to restrain the Board.

However, Mr. Justice Morse, reviewing the Act and legal precedents, found that "the authorities support the right of school trustees to determine what use is to be made of schools in their school division or district and what school a pupil must attend."(p.14) Further, examining the allegation that the Board had acted unfairly, he found that the Howden parents "had ample opportunity to be heard."(p.22) Again, he found that the procedure followed in the meeting of April 17, in which an improper amendment was accepted, was a procedural error, but not significant because "the motion of April 17 to choose Howden School was a motion in principle only, and the final decision was not taken until May 15."(p.22)

On the complaint that the Howden parents' views were heard but not listened to, the judge made the following interesting comments, speaking to the whole issue of decision-making:

It is clear that the trustees had a very difficult decision to make, one where they were certain to be damned if they did and damned if they did not. They did the best they could after hearing representations from all sides and after considering all of the various alternatives which were open to them. I cannot find that they proceeded with closed minds. I think they acted in good faith.(p.23)

Further, on the issue of whether the Board's decision was reasonable, he maintained:

It is not for the Court to decide whether the school trustees reached the right decision. If they acted fairly, in good faith, and within their jurisdiction, the Court cannot intervene...Merely because the plaintiffs would have liked the school trustees to give an equal or higher priority to one criterion as opposed to another, this does not render their decision subject to judicial review.(p.26)

To the allegation that the Board acted hastily, under pressure from the Guyot parents, he responded:

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...it is a normal part of the democratic process to bring pressure to bear on elected representatives to persuade them to adopt a particular policy or point of view. There is nothing sinister or wrong about this, provided no illegal or improper means are used. Certainly the Howden parents themselves attempted, at the school board meeting of May 1, to bring pressure to bear on the school trustees to change their decision in principle which had been taken on April 17. It seems to me to lie ill in the plaintiffs' mouths to criticize the Guyot parents for doing what the plaintiffs themselves did.(p.27)

Thus the judgment asserted the right of parents to attempt to influence Boards, the Board's right to accept or reject such arguments, the need for alternatives and the use of explicit criteria for judgment, and finally the authority of the Board to make such decisions. His final comment on the Howden parents case was "their remedy, if they have one, lies not in the legal process but in the democratic political arena and through the ballot box."(p.29)

### **Significance of the case**

The case illustrates, at least in part, some propositions concerning school board decision-making and the relationship between trustees and administrators. Conversely, certain propositions from the literature may help to reveal the significance of the events described.

#### **Proposition 1: Administrative dominance in school board decision-making.**

"In school district decisions, the superintendent is clearly the dominant actor."(Zeigler, Tucker, and Wilson, 1977, p.254)

Although the parents frequently made reference to this, and there were attempts by various parent groups to ascertain the sympathies of senior administrators, in essence they largely provided information. The trustees clearly made the final decision. However, it is also true that the Board and senior administrators **together** formed the decision-making unit. Under the pressure of the parent groups, the tendency was for the administrators and the trustees to act in mutually supportive ways.

#### **Proposition 2: School district decision-makers and community preferences.**

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Such studies as that of Zeigler and Jennings (1974) "exaggerate the power and dominance of the administrative staff... School administrators - and their school boards as well - are inclined to anticipate community desires as they formulate educational policy." (Boyd, 1975. See also, Lyke, 1970; Greenhill, 1977, p.92)

The decision-makers had clearly anticipated community preferences in establishing the first immersion centre, Guyot School, but had not anticipated its popularity and rapid growth. The strength of the preferences was not assessed prior to the events recorded here.

**Proposition 3: Strategic decisions and community power.**

"When strategic decisions in the life of a school district are faced, not only school board but also community power is likely to be mobilized... On the other hand, in more routine decisions...school boards, and communities, are much more likely to defer to the expertise of their administrative staff."(Boyd, 1975, p.121)

The Boyd critique (p.121) of Zeigler and Jennings' overemphasis on administrator control, based on a review of decisions of which most were routine, is thoroughly substantiated. In major decisions with community impact, administrative participation is very likely to be restricted to the informing and implementing elements in the classic policy-making model.

**Proposition 4: Administrator as (informational) gatekeeper.**

Senior administrators functioned as "gatekeepers", limiting and hence biasing the information available to trustees and thus controlling decision-making.(Boyd, 1975, p.117; Greenhill, 1977, p.94)

In the case of strategic decisions, this is an unlikely role. Many people seek to influence, and there are many sources of information. Further, the information given by the administrators is likely to be very carefully scrutinized for evidence of error, inconsistency, or partiality. In such circumstances any attempts at "gatekeeping" would be publicly and severely criticized.

**Proposition 5: School board responsiveness to community preferences.**

Studies of the interest group model of school board responsiveness to their community frequently conclude that boards are not responsive. However, "it is in the nature of interest group behavior and school system politics that when one group

becomes exercised enough to speak out, the issue is probably one which will evoke other positions by other groups. So in that sense a board can virtually never be responsive; if there are conflicting preferences, no policy will satisfy all."(Jennings, 1975, p.245)

The Board here was in fact responsive to the community's preferences, although in the process it alienated one sub-group. Given the limitations in buildings available, established early on, and the model of immersion centre preferred by parents, staff and administrators, it could not please all groups. (That is, as Jennings argues, implicit in the interest group model.)

**Proposition 6: Informing policy-makers and policy influencers.**

Political and rational models of policy-making can be combined into a model which considers rational assessments and social values, and in which alternatives are generated by insiders and outsiders. In such a model, "administrators would have to ensure, not only that all value and belief systems find access to the policy process, but also that appropriate information finds its way to those who choose and those who influence."(Downey, 1977, pp.141, 142)

The administrators here, and more particularly the Board, did attempt to provide information on values, as well as technical considerations such as enrolments and space, to all the parties concerned; in large measure the delay in arriving at a decision was intended to provide an opportunity for parent groups to share information and formulate positions. Virtually all the information available, including all administrative reports, was widely circulated.

**Proposition 7: School board as meta-mediator.**

"A meta-mediator is a decision-making system that processes all competing demands, organizes, reorganizes, modifies, generalizes, illuminates and emphasizes and in general reshapes these demands into an operational decision involving, usually, the distribution of limited resources."(Lutz, 1975, p.1; see also Coleman, 1977)

The incident illustrates the Lutz meta-mediator model rather precisely. Obviously the participants were not self-consciously enacting the roles described by Lutz, but the formulation of alternatives using community preferences as expressed in briefs, and the explicit weighing of the cases and the political resources of competing groups are the essential activities of the model. The "limited resource" in this case was, of course, the number of

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schools available.

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In addition to serving as an illustration of the seven propositions cited above, the case also illustrates the impact of social change on the educational system of a community (see Boyd, 1978). Local changes - declining school enrolments in an aging suburb - and national changes - the impact of Federal bilingualism policies in creating an interest in immersion programs - clearly generated the issue faced by the school board here.

Perhaps the clearest significance of this case study for future research on school board decision-making, and particularly on the interactions of politicians with administrators, is to make it clear that routine decision-making and decision-making under conditions of conflict are quite different processes. Given the current level of interest in policy analysis, this is important.

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### APPENDIX A

#### THE EXPANSION OF IMMERSION FACILITIES IN ST. BONIFACE SCHOOL DIVISION

Supplementary to Position Paper of November 24, 1978  
Peter Coleman, Superintendent

##### ...ALTERNATIVE 3:

USE A WINDSOR PARK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TO ACCOMMODATE GRADES K-4 IMMERSION STUDENTS WHO ARE WINDSOR PARK RESIDENTS (i.e. 23 KINDERGARTEN REGISTRANTS, 32 GRADE 1, 41 GRADE 2, 35 GRADE 3, 22 GRADE 4, TOTAL 153, REQUIRING 7 CLASSROOMS). THE PROGRAM COULD GROW TO A K-6 PROGRAM, WITH CONTINUATION AT GUYOT. (See notes which follow for more details.)

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(Note: These criteria are set out under Phase 2, in the text - Ed.)

##### Criterion A

The provision of a location and setting favourable to the program is questionable in this alternative, since the Immersion program might share the school. Some provision could be made to separate areas of the school, but clearly the French ambience would suffer, to some extent.

##### Criterion B

This alternative makes excellent use of space available,

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since there are many empty classrooms in Windsor Park.

**Criterion C**

This alternative minimizes disruption, since only the 153 Guyot students would be affected, and their travelling time would be reduced.

**Criterion D**

This alternative limits additional costs, since reduced transportation costs would offset minor building changes. There would be costs for materials, especially library materials (see Notes).

**Criterion E**

This alternative might be viable over the long term, depending on which school was used, and whether or not the existing program was phased out (see Notes).

**NOTES**

There are two major issues to be resolved, within this alternative: which school will be used, and will the present population be moved immediately, phased out, or remain?

If the school is to be shared, then the largest school should be used, to provide maximum space for sharing. If the present population is to be moved immediately, then the smallest school should be used, to minimize disruption.

The present school populations, with capacities and rates of decline, are as follows:

|                      | <b>Class<br/>rooms</b> | <b>Capa-<br/>city</b> | <b>March<br/>31/75<br/>A</b> | <b>March<br/>31/79<br/>B</b> | <b>Percent<br/>Decline<br/>B + A</b> | <b>Percent<br/>Space<br/>Used</b> |
|----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Prendergast          | 18                     | 475                   | 505                          | 355                          | 70.3%                                | 74.7%                             |
| Howden               | 19                     | 500                   | 444*                         | 310*                         | 69.8%                                | 62.0%                             |
| Frontenac<br>General | 25                     | 675                   | 666                          | 405                          | 60.8%                                | 60.0%                             |
| Vanier               | 23                     | 625                   | 610                          | 436*                         | 71.5%                                | 69.8%                             |
| <hr/>                |                        |                       |                              |                              |                                      |                                   |
| Total<br>W.P. Elem.  | 85                     | 2275                  | 2225                         | 1506                         | 67.7%                                | 66.2%                             |

(\* excludes Special Education Students, who can readily be accommodated in any school.)

## The Closing of Howden School

At present, we need 66% of 85 rooms available, or 56 rooms. Thus there are about 29 spare classrooms at present in the four Windsor Park elementary schools.

### ALTERNATIVE 3:

The three versions of this alternative are these:

#### I MOVE IN IMMERSION; MOVE OUT PRESENT PROGRAM

Logically, it would be preferable to use Howden School to minimize disruption. Howden students could attend Frontenac or General Vanier, and Special Education students could attend Prendergast. The benefits, with reference to the criteria, are as follows:

- A. This provides a good setting for the program, which would fill the school in a few years, drawing on the Windsor Park population.
- B. This makes excellent use of space available, because it helps to fill declining schools, and the many empty classrooms.
- C. This localizes disruptions to one school population of 310 (and the immersion students affected). Staff allocation is simple, because teachers would follow students.
- D. Additional costs are minimal.
- E. The Immersion program (K-8 or 9) would be well accommodated for the foreseeable future. School capacities of Guyot and Howden are 400 and 500 = 900. With enrolments of 80 - 90 per grade, the maximum space needed will be 9 grades x 90, or 810.

#### II MOVE IN IMMERSION, PHASE OUT PRESENT PROGRAM

It would be preferable to use the school with the most surplus space at present, i.e. Frontenac with 10 rooms spare, to minimize crowding. The kindergarten registrants at Frontenac could be accommodated at Howden and Prendergast.

- A. This would provide a good setting for the program, in the long run, with ample room for growth. In the short run, the ambiance would suffer from sharing the school.
- B. This makes excellent use of space available, because it helps to fill declining Windsor Park schools.
- C. This alternative minimizes disruptions, since only the 153

Peter Coleman

immersion students and the 35 Frontenac kindergarten registrants would be affected.

- D. This alternative limits additional costs, particularly if for the first year or two the students at Frontenac are treated as Guyot students, with administrative support and specialist services, and library materials being provided from Guyot. Eventually, the group would become independent. The major additional cost would be the salary of a full or part-time vice-principal.
- E. This alternative would be viable for the foreseeable future, since eventually the capacities of Guyot and Frontenac would be available for Immersion programs ( $400 + 675 = 1075$ ).

### III MOVE IN IMMERSION; RETAIN PRESENT PROGRAM

This would certainly require the use of the largest Windsor Park elementary school, Frontenac. It could easily accommodate its present enrolment of 405 and the 153 immersion students, since it has a capacity of 675. The rate of decline of Frontenac also suggests that it could accommodate a K-6 Immersion School (at 30% per grade = 210) and its future enrolment of about 300 K-6 English program students.

- A. This would provide an adequate but not good setting for the program, because of the difficulty of maintaining a good linguistic ambience.
- B-E. In other respects, the advantages are the same as the previous versions of this alternative.

**CONCLUSION:** Alternative 3, in any one of the three versions, seems the best available. Probably version II, in which a phasing in of immersion and phasing out of the existing program occurs, is the best option open to the Board at this time. (See p.6 of the November 24 report)...

**(Other Alternatives are treated similarly in the original report - Ed.)**

### RECOMMENDATION

Based on the considerations detailed above, I recommend that the Board adopt, in principle, ALTERNATIVE 3, the use of a Windsor Park elementary school, with further consideration to be given to identifying which immersion students are moved, and how they are to be accommodated.

## The Closing of Howden School

### APPENDIX B

23 Ormiston Road  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R2J 2Z1

April 27, 1979

Dear Mrs. Huot (Chairman of Board of Trustees - Ed.):

We are sure you feel you have heard it all before, but as concerned Howden School parents, we feel it is imperative that we express our very great concerns over the decision that has been made to take our school away from our children.

We cannot understand how this can happen in a democratic society. We have four children, all have been and three still are Howden students. We purchased our home in this neighbourhood so that our children would not have to cross busy intersections or have that far to walk to school. Now it seems we are to send our three children, one of whom is only six years old to school where they do have to cross busy intersections and have a long distance to walk. WHY when we have a school almost in our back yard.

It doesn't seem to make any sense that our children have to come home crying because they are losing their school and their teachers, yes they do consider it their school and their teachers. We have lived in different cities and provinces, and have never seen such closeness between students and teachers. They have worked hard as a team at Howden School and made it a school everyone is proud to be part of. Now some unfeeling adults who do not understand are trying to take this away from them. They just do not understand, but then we are adults and we cannot understand it either.

It breaks our hearts to say to them that we do not know how to save their school for them. Yet mom and dad are here to protect them and their property - they have to do something.

So we are writing this letter on behalf of our three children and all of their fellow classmates who beg YOU to save their school for them.

There has to be an alternative other than making so many children, parents and interested people so unhappy. There has never been so much alienation between friends and neighbours as there is now, this CANNOT be the way to solve a problem.

Peter Coleman

We understand that not all of you are taking a stand against Howden School, if you are one of these please accept our thank you for seeing our concerns. If you have taken a stand against our children, we ask you to take a second look.

Is this the only way? Is it worth the price it is costing our children and our community? IS IT?

Sincerely,

Bruce and Marlene  
Amell.

c.c. Abe Kovnats MLA  
Howden School Committee

