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# Mutchmor Save Our Schools Committee

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COMMUNITY UPDATE #3: Summer 2000

## Why School Closures Won't Work

On May 24, Mutchmor Public School was targeted for possible closure in a planning report released by the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB). In all, the report called for the Board to close 13 or 14 schools B about one out of every five elementary schools inside the Greenbelt B in September, 2001. In late June, Mutchmor issued a detailed impact statement that made the case against closing one of the most exciting, effective schools in the city. OCDSB staff will release their final closure recommendations August 28, and school trustees expect to make final decisions in mid-October.

If you live in the Glebe or Old Ottawa South, we need your help to keep Mutchmor open. If you're from another core-area neighbourhood, chances are that a school near you is facing the same threat. If you live in the suburbs, you should still be worried that school closures will make it nearly impossible for families to move downtown...so that all the population pressures of a high-tech boom will fall on *your* neighbourhood. READ ON to learn more about the impact of school closures, and to find out WHAT YOU CAN DO to help slow down or stop the closure process. FOR A COPY of the complete Mutchmor impact statement, call 594-8281 or send an e-mail to <mlb@infolink.ca>.

### *The Case for Mutchmor*

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\$ It makes no sense to close a viable, vibrant school that has been at the **heart of the community** for 105 years. There would be absolutely no reason for closure if not for an **arbitrary, unworkable space allocation formula imposed by the province**, combined with the mistaken belief that the Board can save a large amount of money by closing schools.

\$ Rather than targeting Mutchmor and other schools, trustees should work with the community to oppose and change provincial education policy.

\$ If Mutchmor closed, almost all the students who now attend the school would be **forced into overcrowded classrooms or portables**.

\$ The space shortage caused by closing Mutchmor would get worse over time. **Ottawa's population may double in the next 10-12 years**, according to the May, 2000 report of the Economic Generators Initiative. **A share of that population is headed downtown**. Parents in our community know about the long waiting lists in local child care centres, the streets with six or more preschoolers per block, and the dozens of

families moving into the area in which the *oldest* of three children has only just started school. With realtors predicting greater interest in downtown living, trustees can't close Mutchmor until they know where schools will be needed.

### *What it Means for Students*

\$ The OCDSB is proposing to send 198 of Mutchmor's 339 students to First Avenue Public School. With one of the smallest school yards in the city, **First Avenue could not safely hold the number of portables** that a combined population would need. A recent fire marshal inspection at First Avenue raised serious concerns about how well portables would fit on the site.

\$ Even if there were space for portables at First Avenue, families at the two schools are concerned about the **health aspects of learning in portables**, where moulds causing childhood allergies and asthma are among several serious and recurring problems.

\$ Combining the two populations would **damage the excellent school programs** that have been established at

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both Mutchmor and First Avenue. First Avenue parents are against closing Mutchmor because they value the all-French - environment that has made their early French immersion program a success. Mutchmor parents feel the same about the atmosphere we have created in our school.

\$ Limited space would make it far more difficult for teachers to deliver the supports that would **help students with special needs** to learn and succeed at school.

\$ The 122 students in Mutchmor's gifted program would be sent to Hopewell Public School. For most of these children, this would be the **second school closure and the second move in three years**. This would be hugely unfair for any group of students, but could be particularly damaging for a vulnerable group of special education students.

\$ Hopewell is located at the very busy intersection of Bank St. and Sunnyside Ave., and already has serious traffic safety problems that would be worse with a larger student population. *The number of buses at Hopewell each day will increase from 3 to 15 if the Board's current plans for downtown schools become a reality.*

\$ If Mutchmor closed, there would be **no guarantee that the gifted program could keep the specialized teachers** who've made it a success. It would also be much more difficult to hold the gifted program together in a very large elementary school with more than 900 students.

### ***What to tell your trustee***

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Some trustees hope they can cut costs *and* open the door for new schools in high-growth suburbs by closing classrooms inside the Greenbelt. But the reality is more complicated: most core-area schools are full, or close to it, and there are very few schools with enough open space to hold the students who would be displaced by school closures. Research by the Glebe Community Association suggests that OCDSB staff have underestimated the number of new students entering core-area schools...and with high tech employment in Ottawa growing at a rate of 6.5% per year, no one can predict which schools will become overcrowded first.

Wherever you live in the Region, we urge you to call or e-mail your trustee to make some or all of the following points:

\$ There are very few empty classrooms inside the Greenbelt B certainly not enough to hold thousands of students whose schools have been targeted for closure. It makes no sense and it isn't fair to close schools when it means putting even more children in portables. The Board should be looking for

\$ A combined school would face **serious traffic safety problems**. A large proportion of Mutchmor students live west of Bank Street. At First Avenue, they wouldn't qualify for busing, but it would be unsafe for many of them to walk to school. The extra cars would increase a traffic problem that has already raised safety concerns at First Avenue, and would contribute to downtown pollution and congestion.

### ***Community Impacts***

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\$ The **day care centre in the basement at Mutchmor would be lost**. And if Hopewell becomes overcrowded, the day care at that school might also be forced to leave.

\$ **After-hours sports and recreation programs** located at Mutchmor would have to move or die.

\$ In the past year, Mutchmor and nearby Corpus Christi Catholic School raised \$60,000 for a new, **wheelchair-accessible play structure on the Mutchmor field**, across Fourth Ave. from the school. There's no guarantee that the community could keep the play structure B or the field B if Mutchmor closed.

solutions to its space crisis that will take suburban students *out* of portables, rather than spreading the pain more widely.

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\$ Ottawa's population is expected to double in the next 10 to 12 years. Even if it only increases by 50%, core-area schools can expect a large influx of new students. The OCDSB shouldn't close schools until it knows where those students will go. It's usually more expensive to build new schools than to maintain existing ones.

\$ Suburban neighbourhoods have already grown faster than schools and other community services can keep up. Closing downtown schools will only add to the city-wide pressure. The OCDSB must build schools where they're needed, but

not at the expense of children in other parts of the city who are just as entitled to quality education.

\$ The Board doesn't know how much money it will save by closing schools B if any. Trustees have asked OCDSB staff to report on the full cost of Amothballing@ a school until it can be sold; so far, they haven't done so. Any savings may well be wiped out if the Board eventually has to buy land at market rates to rebuild and reopen schools in high-growth neighbourhoods.

### ***OCDSB Trustees***

*(Trustees' e-mail addresses all follow the same format: <firstname\_lastname@ocdsb.edu.on.ca>.)*

Zone 1 (Rural West-West Carleton, Goulbourn/Rideau): Lynn Scott 832-3813 *(voted to support the closure process)*

Zone 2 (Kanata): Jim Libbey (Chair) 599-7984 *(voted to support the closure process)*

Zone 3 (Nepean South): Norm MacDonald 823-7599 *(voted to support the closure process)*

Zone 4 (Nepean North/Central): Alex Getty 829-3114 *(voted against the process, but generally supports school closures)*

Zone 5 (Ottawa West): Patty Anne Hill 798-7940 *(absent for the vote, but generally supports this round of closures)*

Zone 6 (Ottawa South East): Russ Jackson 733-5842 *(moved the motion that created the closure process)*

Zone 7 (Blackburn/South Gloucester/Osgoode/Rideau): Pam Morse 739-0788 *(voted to support the closure process)*

Zone 8 (Orleans/Cumberland): Sheryl MacDonald 834-8466 *(voted to support the closure process)*

Zone 9 (Ottawa Central/East): Lynn Graham (Vice-Chair) 730-3366 *(voted against the closure process)*

Zone 10 (Near West): Albert Chambers 233-7175 *(voted against the closure process)*

Zone 11 (Ottawa South/Nepean East): Andrew Lam 225-3066 *(absent for the vote)*

Zone 12 (Ottawa East/Gloucester/Rockcliffe Park): Cynthia Bled 749-9140 *(voted to support the closure process)*