

**Prince Arthur Junior High
School Review Committee Response
January 2012**



BACKGROUND:

On March 30, 2011, the Halifax Regional School Board, through a motion of the elected board, placed Prince Arthur Junior High School up for review. On October 20, 2011, Judy White, the facilitator assigned by the board, held the first meeting of the Prince Arthur Junior High School Review Committee (SRC) (Appendix 1). The committee, comprised of the School Advisory Council, met weekly and examined both the *Identification Report* and the *Impact Assessment Report* supplied by the school board. On November 8, 2011, the SRC toured Bicentennial School with Wayne Clarke from Operation Services and Kim Campbell, Principal Bicentennial School and Jamie Kavanaugh, Vice-principal Bicentennial School. Following this tour, the SRC met and determined that it was time to hold the public meeting and hear from the community regarding the review of Prince Arthur Junior High School.

The public meeting was held on November 29, 2011, in the school library. Approximately 20 community members, plus the School Review Committee members and three board members attended the meeting. The *Verbatim Report* is attached as Appendix 2. Many viewpoints were expressed throughout the meeting and these opinions influenced the discussion at the next SRC meeting and the final outcome of the response to the Board.

RESPONSE:

The *Impact Assessment Report* proposed two options to be considered by the SRC:

- Prince Arthur Junior High School remains open.
- Prince Arthur Junior High School closes and students attend Bicentennial School.

The School Review Committee – Prince Arthur Junior High School cannot in all conscience suggest that Prince Arthur Junior High School remain open. The school is beyond its life expectancy. Students, staff and community agree that this school needs to be replaced. It is for that reason that the community was so pleased when a replacement school was announced in April 2009. The fact that the school would be a primary – nine was a surprise but the previous SAC felt that it was workable. Now, the SRC is being asked to review the school for permanent closure without the promise of a new school.

The SRC held a public meeting on November 29, 2011, and at this meeting it was clear that Prince Arthur Junior High School needed to be replaced. However, the SRC and the community want to be sure that the students and community of Prince Arthur Junior High School are not short changed when the decision is made. Option 2 – attending Bicentennial – may not be the best solution for the students and community of Prince Arthur Junior High School.

It appeared that both the English and French Immersion community were equally represented at the public meeting. The SRC heard clearly from the English community that having a junior high school located within their community is important. Providing a space where junior high students can experience extracurricular activities close to home

and a place that is theirs as they develop their identity is essential. However, at the same time, the French Immersion parents were more concerned with having a sound facility for students, regardless of location.

The SRC understands that it is not their decision where the students will be assigned; however, the SRC wants the elected Board to understand the intricacies of Prince Arthur Junior High School before making their decision.

As the Board knows, Prince Arthur Junior High School is centrally located in the catchment area and this was a major priority for the English community members at the public meeting.

Prince Arthur Junior High has both English and the early French Immersion programs. Community members, staff and students – all agree that the dual track has been a positive aspect of the school. However, this duality does impact any decision. The *Impact Assessment Report* states that:

The Facilities Master Plan recommends a capital upgrade and grade reconfiguration from P-6 to P-9 at Shannon Park School. (p.4)

If French Immersion students are going to be relocated, then enrolment figures will change and alternatives to Bicentennial will be available.

Another factor affecting the committee's report is the current review of South Woodside. The outcome of this review may also impact any decision regarding the placement of Prince Arthur Junior High students.

The SRC wishes to put forward three alternatives for the Board's consideration regarding the placement of PAJH students. These considerations are in order of preference.

Consideration One: Build the Proposed P-9 School

The SRC would recommend that the board not request the Department of Education to change the approved P-9 school to house students from Southdale – North Woodside and Prince Arthur, but rather build this school as first promised.

The SRC and the community agree that Prince Arthur Junior High School needs to close. Structurally, the building is sub-standard and students deserve a healthy and safe building in which to learn. The school was built in 1955 and renovated in 1967 but it has not been maintained appropriately so it has deteriorated to the point that it needs to be replaced.

A new P-9 will maintain a junior high in the middle of the catchment area.

Currently, South Woodside is also under review. If South Woodside were to remain open, the P-9 will house Southdale – North Woodside and Prince Arthur, including the French Immersion students with little or no difficulty. As the long-term suggestion is to relocate the French Immersion students, there would be space available in the future

should South Woodside need to close and attend the new P-9 school. The current population of French Immersion students is almost equal to the current population at South Woodside.

Since Prince Arthur Junior High has been placed under review, there is concern that the students' education may be compromised as staff who thought they were moving to a new school may now decide to transfer to a better facility. Recruitment, retention and morale are and will be affected if the Board does not support the original plan to build a new P-9 to replace Prince Arthur Junior High School.

Consideration Two: Build A New Dartmouth Junior High School

Although Bicentennial School may be in better structural condition than Prince Arthur Junior High School, one need only tour the building to discover that the condition is only marginally better than Prince Arthur Junior High School. Bicentennial School would require a major renovation to make it viable for a long period of time.

One needs to question why Bicentennial – a school on the perimeter of Dartmouth – was selected as the receiving school. Why not build a new school more centrally located in Dartmouth? Have Bicentennial be the temporary solution for both schools while a new junior high school is built on the Prince Arthur site. Close Bicentennial and have both Bicentennial and Prince Arthur Junior High School students attend a new school. The new school would be renamed and all students would have a new beginning without having either school lose its identity. The new school would also be more centrally located for most students as opposed to being on the periphery in the case of Bicentennial.

It may even be worthwhile for the Board to consider this solution as it could resolve two issues. If the Board were to build a new junior high to replace Bicentennial and Prince Arthur, they would be providing a first class junior high facility for Dartmouth students. Once the new junior high was open, Bicentennial could be renovated to become the French Immersion P-9 for Dartmouth. If the Board is considering having the Department of Education renovate Shannon Park as the P-9 French Immersion school, money may be better spent renovating Bicentennial as there are no labs, shops, etc. at Shannon Park but Bicentennial does have these spaces. As French Immersion students are bussed, there will be limited impact to these students. The renovation of Bicentennial for the French Immersion students would cost less than trying to renovate an elementary and have it meet the needs of a junior high population. The French Immersion students would gain a newly renovated state of the art P-9 school.

Consideration 3: Renovate Bicentennial

The SRC recognize that the elected board may decide to follow the option presented to the committee and renovate Bicentennial to receive the Prince Arthur Junior High School students. If this were to be the decision, then the following points need to be addressed.

The location of Bicentennial is on the periphery of Dartmouth; therefore, the Prince Arthur students will have a long walk to get to this site. The route is heavily trafficked and although the students are in junior high, they are still young and many will not be familiar with maneuvering traffic to get to school. The English families will mainly be affected by this change. Some families in this area may not have the resources for students to take busses. The concern then is that if students get up late or if the weather is bad, the students will choose not to attend or will be so late that their learning will be jeopardized. Is bussing, similar to French Immersion bussing, something that could occur for the students of Prince Arthur?

Students from Prince Arthur Junior High School who participate in extracurricular activities will experience additional hardship. Issues of safety and transportation due to distance will negatively impact the students.

However, more importantly to the SRC and the community is the fact that by having the junior high students attend Bicentennial School, the students have to travel outside their neighbourhood. This will be a hardship for some families. Economically, some families cannot afford additional bussing costs so if students get up late or the weather is bad, students may not attempt the longer walk. Tardiness and/or absenteeism may increase, thereby affecting the academic outcomes for these students. Some families also depend on the junior high students to be available to care for younger children after school. With these junior high students now further from the younger students, some families will be negatively impacted for after school care or monitoring younger children as they travel home.

Bicentennial School is only marginally better structurally than Prince Arthur Junior High. The school would require a major renovation. The scope would need to cover the exterior and interior structural issues as well as the aesthetic issues of the interior. The *Building Audit* report clearly outlines the interior and exterior issues that need to be addressed, but the renovation needs to go beyond this to ensure that the students have a facility that is comparable to the one they were expecting with the brand new P- 9. This renovation should be completed **prior** to moving Prince Arthur students to this site. It does not seem appropriate to uproot students and staff to move to a facility that is no better than their current one.

In addition, the elected Board needs to consider the access and parking availability at Bicentennial. The site is poorly situated to handle bussing and an increase in staff and parents who would need to park at this site. This would be an additional cost that is often not considered when renovations occur.

Summary:

The SRC has deliberated a long time regarding the review of Prince Arthur. Unlike most review committees, the SRC agrees with the closure of Prince Arthur. The school is in despicable condition and students deserve a better facility in which to learn and grow as young people. However, it is the placement of the students that is the committee's

primary concern. With this in mind, the SRC *recommends the Board accept Consideration One: The Proposed P-9*, as originally announced.

We recognize that the elected board needs to be strategic and comprehensive in making a decision regarding Prince Arthur Junior High students. The *French Immersion* report, the *Facilities Master Plan*, the outcome of *The South Woodside Review* will impact the final decision. Regardless, the SRC respectfully requests that Prince Arthur not close until there is a viable facility ready to receive the students. The community was expecting a new school and to now ask them to attend an un-renovated Bicentennial is insulting. The SRC believes that Prince Arthur students should have a sound, aesthetically pleasing facility with state of the art technology.

Whatever decision the elected Board makes regarding the placement of the Prince Arthur students, the SRC hopes that the Board understands that the education of the students at Prince Arthur has been a good one thanks to the staff and that if the facility were not in such dismal condition, the SRC would not have accepted the decision to close so readily.

School Review Committee Membership

Shari Ridgewell	SAC Parent Representative and Co- Chair of Review Committee
Karen McDonald	SAC Parent Representative and Co- Chair of Review Committee
Cheryl Osmond	SAC Parent Representative
Barb Hamilton - Hinch	SAC Parent Representative
Tara MacDonald	SAC Staff Representative
Janet Rose	SAC Staff Representative
Hailey Thomas	SAC Student Representative
Darcel Williams Hart	Principal – Prince Arthur Junior High School
Judy White	Facilitator