

ARC head hopes both schools stay open

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By Denis Langlois

A co-chair of a joint student accommodation review for Amabel-Sauble and Hepworth Central says she hopes the committee can convince the Bluewater District School Board to keep both schools open.

"One can always hope," Katherine Arnold said Monday afternoon. "Certainly, we don't want to see either school close."

She said she is hopeful sufficient information has been gathered to make a strong enough case to save both schools, even though she believes the board wants to see at least one close.

A working meeting of the Sauble Hepworth Accommodation Review Committee (ARC) was cancelled Monday night due to a winter storm.

A notice from the Bluewater board says the meeting will be rescheduled "shortly and advertised accordingly."

Both Amabel-Sauble Community School and Hepworth Central Public School are under review, with board staff recommending closing the Sauble facility and the status quo for Hepworth.

Amabel-Sauble, built in 1994, operates at the highest loss among all Bluewater schools, at about \$100,000 a year.

Two other Bruce Peninsula schools - Hepworth and Peninsula Shores in Wiarton - could accommodate Amabel-Sauble's 143 students with no capital upgrades. That would have the least impact on the fewest students, according to a board staff report.

Alternatively, half of Hepworth's 316 students could go to either Amabel-Sauble or Peninsula Shores and the other half could go to schools in Tara and Southampton. But that would not eliminate the Sauble school's annual deficit, the report says.

There have been three public ARC meetings so far. The next step is to hold a working meeting at which the committee will discuss information gathered and try to make a recommendations to the school board. The meeting will be open to the public, but there will be no opportunity for public input.

The recommendations will be presented at another public meeting in February. The committee will then take questions from the floor.

Final recommendations will go to the school board for a decision.

Efforts are being made to keep the Amabel-Sauble school open.

South Bruce Peninsula council has given pre- budget approval to contribute an additional \$51,000 toward the operating costs of the school to better reflect the amount of space the municipality uses. The daycare that uses the school has also agreed to pay more.

The community is also searching for ways to generate more money to pay to operate the school.

The Bluewater board has said that along with the operating deficit, the school also needs more than \$1.3 million in capital renewal work over the next five years.

A student accommodation review is also under way for Derby Public School near Kilsyth