



ST. CLAIR CATHOLIC
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

REPORT

SUBJECT: ACCOMMODATION REVIEW (ST. IGNATIUS CATHOLIC SCHOOL AND ST. PAUL CATHOLIC SCHOOL) – SUMMARY REPORT

SUBMITTED TO: BOARD OF TRUSTEES

DATE OF MEETING: November 23, 2004

PREPARED BY: MARGARET NELSON, Director of Education

PRESENTED BY: MARGARET NELSON, Director of Education

SUBMITTED BY: MARGARET NELSON, Director of Education

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BACKGROUND:

At its Regular Board Meeting of April 27, 2004, the St. Clair Catholic District School Board approved the following motion:

Motion: O-063-2004 (Linda Ward and Ross Daly) That the St. Clair Catholic District School Board approve the administrative recommendation to commence a Student Accommodation Review in September 2004 of the St. Ignatius (Bothwell), St. Paul (Thamesville) and St. Michael (Turnerville) Schools. Carried.

At the Regular Board Meeting of June 22, 2004 the following motion was approved:

Motion: O-095-2004 (Linda Ward and Mike Neuts) That the St. Clair Catholic District School Board, based on community response, remove St. Michael School, Turnerville from the consolidation process that will begin September 2004. Carried.

The communities of St. Paul and St. Ignatius were notified of the Board's intention to proceed with the Consolidation Review. At the request of parents, the Facility Services staff under the leadership of Mat Roop (Manager) and Jim McKenzie (Associate Director – Corporate Services) identified that the Thamesville school site would be the preferred location for a consolidated and renovated school to serve the rural areas of Thamesville and Bothwell.

CONSOLIDATION REVIEW PROCESS:

Written communication from the Director of Education to parents, staff, and the School Council identified the Review Process, beginning formally on September 1, 2004 and concluding near the end of November 2004.

School Council members from both schools have met with the Director of Education Margaret Nelson, Todd Lozon Community Relations Officer and Principal Lynn Moir to discuss the consultation process. Regular Board and Committee of the Whole (Public) meetings between September 1 and November 23, 2004 would receive reports from staff and parents concerning the various aspects of consolidation as required by Policy 7.4.

Public meetings were held at St. Ignatius Catholic School and St. Paul Catholic School on October 6, 2004 and October 13, 2004 respectively, to receive input from the communities.

The following Reports have been received by Trustees and discussed at the following Board meetings:

Enrolment Projections.....September 28, 2004
Facilities ReportOctober 12, 2004
Alternative Use or Disposition of School Property Report ...October 12, 2004
School Boundary Report.....October 26, 2004

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Transportation Report	October 26, 2004
Programming Implications Report.....	October 26, 2004
Financial Impact Report.....	November 9, 2004
Parent Survey Results	November 9, 2004
Community Impact Report by St. Ignatius Catholic School Council	November 9, 2004
Community Impact Report by St. Paul Catholic School Council	November 9, 2004

ISSUES RAISED:

The following issues have been raised by parents either from St. Ignatius Catholic School or St. Paul Catholic School.

1. Small Schools

St. Ignatius parents referenced studies suggesting that small schools are more effective. What has been neglected in this discussion was a definition of small schools. Generally, research studies have determined that elementary schools between 200 and 400 students are considered small schools. The People for Education Report that was referenced states that the “average size of Ontario schools closed is 168 students.”

In the St. Clair Catholic District School Board our elementary schools range in size from 60 to 500 with an average size of about 250. The Board has declared that for rural schools a FTE of 110 is the lowest level of student enrolment that can be supported. The new consolidated school in Thamesville would be a small school with a population of about 160 FTE students. The St. Clair Catholic District School Board recognizes and supports the value of small schools.

One St. Ignatius presentation claimed that multi-grade groupings are a “weapon” used by Boards to threaten parents. In fact it is the experience in St. Clair, as it is across the province, that parents most often complain when their child is placed in a multi-grade classroom. In the past, educators have supported the concept of multi-age or multi-grade classes. However, current curriculum demands and parents’ expectations drive the requirement for single or at the most double grade classrooms.

2. Rural Catholic Education

The Board’s plan to invest significantly in this consolidated school is a clear and public signal that Catholic education is being supported in the rural communities. A renovated and improved school building in Thamesville is the strongest statement possible about the St. Clair Catholic District School Board’s support of rural life and rural parents’ right to access quality Catholic education.

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3. Impact on Students

Our experience with school closures and student moves has been very positive. In this small rural school, we are confident that students will be supported and made welcome and that their educational opportunities will be greatly enhanced.

4. Enrolment and Boundaries

The declining enrolment in all Ontario schools is a result of a dropping birthrate. Accordingly, the population is not continuing to grow at the rate it did 20 years ago. Our student decline is exacerbated by an overall declining population in rural communities.

The Board must respond to these population changes, in order to continue to provide excellent, competitive Catholic education.

5. Improved Educational Opportunities

Some St. Ignatius parents argue that they are satisfied with the current level of program. Other parents recognize that we can provide better opportunities within a consolidated school.

It is important to recognize that the Board cannot continue to augment the staff complement in both of these schools, while sustaining much larger classes in some of our urban schools. We are expected to provide equity and relatively similar programs to all St. Clair students. Staff are convinced that educational programs will be greatly enhanced by consolidating two very small schools.

6. Boundary Changes

The recommended boundary changes will be presented for trustee approval this evening. These changes merely formalize what has been happening. These boundary resolutions will have no impact on the enrolment at St. Ignatius Catholic School.

SUMMARY:

The recommendation of senior staff is based upon the professional educational judgement of superintendents, principals, and Director of Education. The burden of providing an excellent well-rounded and equitable program for 60 students is onerous for teaching staff. Therefore, in the best interests of students and staff, the consolidation of St. Ignatius Catholic School and St. Paul Catholic School at the school site in Thamesville is highly recommended by staff.

In addition to the meetings listed above, Director of Education, Margaret Nelson met with St. Ignatius parents on November 15, 2004. Final discussions and questions were considered before parents submitted an "Advice to the Director" form. In this additional consultation St. Ignatius parents have indicated that they prefer to have triple or even quadruple grade classrooms rather than move their children to a consolidated school in Thamesville. Accordingly, I present the following recommendations.

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the St. Clair Catholic District School Board receive the report: *Accommodation Review (St. Ignatius Catholic School and St. Paul Catholic School) – Summary Report, November 23, 2004* for information.

That at this time the St. Clair Catholic District School Board not proceed with the consolidation of St. Ignatius Catholic School and St. Paul Catholic School at the Thamesville school site.

That the St. Clair Catholic District School Board confirm the following boundary changes effective July 1, 2005:

- 1. Catholic school boundaries in the “gray area” in Dawn/Euphemia, Brooke-Alvinston and Enniskillen Townships be assigned by expanding the current boundaries along Aberfeldy Line (inclusive of the north side) for the following schools:**

Sacred Heart Catholic School, Port Lambton – East boundary will be expanded to include both sides of Mandaumin Road. North boundary will exclude Bickford Line.

St. Michael Catholic School, Turnerville – North boundary west of Hale School Road will be expanded north from Kent Line to Aberfeldy Line (exclusive).

St. Paul Catholic School, Thamesville – North boundary will be extended from Hale School Road north to Aberfeldy Line (exclusive).

St. Ignatius Catholic School, Bothwell – North boundary will be extended to Aberfeldy Line (exclusive).

St. Philip Catholic School, Petrolia – South boundary will be extended to Aberfeldy Line (inclusive).

St. Peter Canisius Catholic School, Watford – South boundary will be extended to Aberfeldy Line (inclusive).

- 2. The north boundary of St. Michael Catholic School, Ridgetown will be extended to include both sides of Selton Line from Clachan Road to Kent Bridge Road.**