



REPORT TO BOARD OF TRUSTEES June 16, 2009

Paul Wubben, Director of Education

SUBJECT: Staff Report – Accommodation Review of the Sarnia-Lambton Catholic Secondary Schools

PREPARED BY: Paul Wubben, Director of Education

BACKGROUND:

On June 10, 2008 the St. Clair Catholic District School Board approved the establishment of an Accommodation Review Committee for St. Patrick’s Catholic High School and St. Christopher Catholic Secondary School, which triggered a review of all data relative to the two schools. The same information used by the Accommodation Review Committee was used for the staff review of our two Sarnia-Lambton Catholic secondary schools.

On The Ground (OTG) capacity is the number the ministry uses to measure the occupancy of a school building. For the 2008-09 school year, the OTG for St. Patrick’s and St. Christopher were at 82.7% and 89.5% capacity respectively. The long term OTG number for St. Patrick’s is projected to fall to 60.4% by 2013. St. Christopher is projected to see its enrollment decline to 75.1% of capacity by 2013. Both are below the 85% funding threshold (amended to 85% from 80% in May 2009) set by the Ministry of Education. The significance of 85% is that from that number, the Ministry will “top up” funding to 100% for the maintenance and repair of the facility. Anything below the 85% value results in increased cost to the Board, as it is required to fund the difference. The 2013 date is an important reference point, as according to Board policy and provincial guidelines, the accommodation review process cannot be repeated in a school community for five years – 2013.

The staff considered how many Catholic secondary schools were needed to serve the students of Sarnia-Lambton. A review of the long term demographic trends indicated that just one high school would be required for the future. As programming issues are examined, it becomes apparent that course offerings and extra curricular programs would become more limited if both schools remain open. The spectrum of programs and activities is in large part a function of the population of the school. Ursuline College in Chatham is an example of a school that would approximate the population of one secondary school in Sarnia-Lambton. The experience at UCC supports the notion that programs and activities increase as the student population grows.

In determining the site at which the consolidated school would be located, the following factors were considered:

1. the cost of accommodating the increase in student population at either site
2. the age of the two buildings
3. the ReCAPP data related to each of the sites
4. issues related to accessibility

REPORT:
Staff Report – Accommodation Review of the Sarnia-Lambton Catholic Secondary Schools

While programming needs could conceivably be met at either site, the costs of achieving that goal are significantly higher at the St. Patrick's site.

In summary, the staff concluded that the Sarnia-Lambton community could be served by one Catholic secondary school and that the location of that school be at the St. Christopher site. Consolidation will require expansion of the St. Christopher site, which would necessitate an investment of \$11 to \$13 million. It is expected the work could be completed in time for full occupancy of the building by September 2013. This part of the staff report is in support of the Accommodation Review Committee's report, which is included in this agenda package.

Boundaries will remain in place as they currently exist, as will transportation. At the time of consolidation, Lambton County will constitute the catchment area for St. Patrick's Catholic High School.

It is recommended that, following full occupancy of the newly consolidated school at the St. Christopher site, the current St. Patrick's site at 281 East Street N. be closed and the property disposed of as per Board policy and ministry guidelines.

It is further recommended that administration explore options with respect to the future of the track and field facility located at the East Street site, in consultation with the Board's current partners in the operation of that facility.

The staff has determined via the ARC process, the focus groups, informal feedback, etc., that it is in the interests of secondary Catholic education in Lambton County and the St. Clair Catholic District School Board that the issue of naming the school be resolved at this juncture.

A range of options is available for the Board to consider. The option offered by the ARC defines one end of the decision making spectrum; that is, that the name of the consolidated school be left to a committee to decide. The Director of Education has defined the other end of the spectrum, which is that both secondary schools share the name of St. Patrick's, effective September 2010, with each site becoming a campus of one large school. Another possible option is to have St. Christopher remain the name of the newly consolidated school at The Rapids Parkway site. A final option is that St. Patrick's Catholic High School be the name of the new school at the time of full consolidation, and that there be no change in names in the meantime.

Thirteen years ago, because of increasing enrolment, the St. Patrick's community split into two schools – St. Patrick's and St. Christopher. Now, as enrolment returns to levels of the past, the school communities are coming back together as one. It is well-known that St. Patrick's has moved sites in the past and the name has travelled with each move. Given its venerable, seventy-five year history, it is recommended by senior staff that, when the schools are consolidated, the new school be named St. Patrick's Catholic High School, ensuring the rightful place of this important institution within the Sarnia-Lambton community.

REPORT:
Staff Report – Accommodation Review of the Sarnia-Lambton Catholic Secondary Schools

Should the Board approve the staff recommendations with respect to consolidation, closure and naming, a Consolidation Implementation Committee will be established. This committee, headed by the principals of the two high schools and with representation from students, staff, parents and alumni from both schools, will begin work to identify and address the issues surrounding consolidation, closure, and legacy. The history and legacy of St. Christopher, while short in length, warrants significant consideration and respect. It would be the responsibility of the committee to make recommendations to the Director of Education as to how the history and traditions of St. Christopher Catholic Secondary School can be venerated.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the St. Clair Catholic District School Board consolidate the two secondary school communities of St. Christopher and St. Patrick's at the St. Christopher site; that construction be undertaken at the St. Christopher site to accommodate the consolidated school population; that upon completion of construction at the St. Christopher site, the current St. Patrick's site at 281 East Street N., shall be closed and the building and land disposed of as per Board policy and Ministry of Education guidelines. This recommendation is contingent on funding.

Boundaries will remain in place as they currently exist as will transportation. At the time of consolidation, Lambton County will constitute the catchment area for the new consolidated school at The Rapids Parkway site.

That the St. Clair Catholic District School Board rename St. Christopher Secondary School, St. Patrick's Catholic High School at the time of full consolidation, which is expected to be by September of 2013.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the St. Clair Catholic District School Board receive the report: *Staff Report – Accommodation Review of the Sarnia-Lambton Catholic Secondary Schools* for information.