

REPORT TO BOARD OF TRUSTEES

June 10, 2008

Paul Wubben, Director of Education

SUBJECT: Accommodation Review Report – Blenheim Catholic Schools

PREPARED BY: Dr. Frank Leddy, Superintendent of Education

BACKGROUND:

On September 25, 2007 the St. Clair Catholic District School Board approved the establishment of an Accommodation Review Committee for the Catholic elementary schools in the town of Blenheim.

The members of the Accommodation Review Committee are as follows:

Dr. Frank Leddy, Chair/Superintendent of Education
Johanna Cox, Principal – St. Anne Catholic School
Kelly VanBoxtel, Principal – St. Mary Catholic School
Father Paul Duplessie, Pastor – St. Mary’s Catholic Parish
Lisa Dorssers, Parent Advisory Council Member – St. Anne Catholic School
Elinor Howell, Parent Advisory Council Member – St. Anne Catholic School
Kathy Johnson, Parent Advisory Council Chair – St. Anne Catholic School
Joann Wiltenburg, Parent Advisory Council Chair – St. Mary Catholic School
Lori Weber, Parent Advisory Council Member – St. Mary Catholic School
Cindy Valley, Parent Advisory Council Member – St. Mary Catholic School

The ARC met on four occasions with the following topics for discussion:

January 22, 2008 at St. Mary Catholic School – Understanding the Problem
February 19, 2008 at St. Anne Catholic School – Evaluating the Schools from Different Perspectives
March 18, 2008 at St. Mary Catholic School – Considering the Possibilities and a Recommendation
April 15, 2008 at St. Anne Catholic School – Confirming the Recommendation and Presenting the Recommendation to Administration.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Both Blenheim schools are under-capacity according to the Ministry of Education On the Ground Capacity rating. In 2012, both schools will be well under the 80% threshold established by the province with St. Mary at 62% and St. Anne at 53%. By 2012, combined enrolment at the two schools will decline to 322 which is a reduction of 97 students over five years and 235 students since 1997.

SUMMARY OF KEY INFORMATION:

- The On the Ground Capacity (a ministry measure of the occupancy of a school building) of the two schools in Blenheim in September 2007 is 64.8% for St. Mary and 80.4% for St. Anne. In 2012, the OTG capacity is projected to be 61.9% and 52.5% respectively.

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- The enrolment of the two schools in Blenheim in September 2007 is 160 for St. Mary and 259 for St. Anne for a combined enrolment of 419. In 2012, the projected enrolments are 153 and 169 respectively for a total enrolment of 322. Over the years from 1997 to 2012, the combined enrolment has declined by 235 students.
- St. Anne, which has 14 classrooms was built in 1992 and sits on a site of 11.88 acres.
- St. Mary was originally built in 1950 and has had additions in 1951, 1959, 1967, 1985 and 1989. St. Mary has 13 classrooms, which include 2 dedicated to Best Start. St. Mary sits on a site of 3.41 acres.
- The boundaries for St. Mary and St. Anne are identical as St. Mary serves students Junior Kindergarten to grade 3 and St. Anne serves students grades 4 to 8.

Further information can be found in the various reports and meeting notes for the four meetings.

SCHOOL VALUATION:

The Accommodation Review Committee toured both St. Mary and St. Anne on February 19, 2008. At that time, the members used the School Valuation Instrument to make an assessment of each of the schools.

At the ARC meeting of March 18, 2008, the ARC confirmed the following values for each school:

Valuation Category	Value	St. Mary	St. Anne
Value to the Student	45	35	40
Value to the School Board	25	10	22
Value to the Community	20	12	18
Value to the Local Economy	10	8	8
Totals	100	65	88

The comparison of the two schools using the instrument showed a higher value attributed to St. Anne.

CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVES:

The ARC considered how many schools were needed to serve the students in and around Blenheim. The ARC concluded that only one school was needed and that the better alternative was St. Anne.

PRIMARY RECOMMENDATION:

The Accommodation Review Committee recommends that the St. Mary and St. Anne school communities be consolidated at the St. Anne site and that the St. Mary site be closed.

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It is further recommended that the St. Clair Catholic District School Board undertake to build a small addition to St. Anne to meet the accommodation needs for consolidating the two schools and to replicate the Best Start facility at St. Anne.

SECONDARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

During the four ARC meetings, the ARC had the opportunity to hear several presentations from school board staff, to ask questions, to ask for further information and to reflect on the information they received. Based upon this discussion, the ARC makes the following recommendations with the view towards the successful implementation of its primary recommendation:

- The ARC recommends that as part of the renewal of St. Anne that the building's HVAC system be upgraded so that air conditioning can be provided throughout the building.
- The ARC recommends that the Best Start facility, currently at St. Mary, be replicated at the St. Anne site. It further recommends that the Board consult with the Best Start operator in the design of the new facility. Further that the Board undertake to move or replace the existing playground equipment.
- The ARC recommends that all other playground equipment and all other "creative playgrounds" currently at St. Mary either be moved or replicated at the St. Anne site.
- Preliminary drawings from the Board showed a four classroom addition would address Best Start and the accommodation needs of moving the St. Mary students to St. Anne. This would be adequate for accommodation needs beginning in September 2009. Thus, the ARC recommends that the consolidation occur at the start of the 2009-2010 school year.
- Concerns were expressed regarding sidewalks and the safe arrival and dismissal of students. The ARC understands that the Board will revisit parking, bus loading zones and drop off and pick up zones as part of its normal procedures. The municipality has been notified of the concern regarding sidewalks which is a municipal responsibility.
- The ARC recommends that the eastern boundary of the Blenheim Catholic schools between St. Michael Catholic School in Ridgetown be resolved such that the Mull Road boundary between Brush Line and New Scotland Line be extended into the Blenheim boundary area up to, but excluding Kent Bridge Road.