



October 6, 2004

Dear Parents/Guardians of St. Ignatius Catholic School,

I want to thank you for the input that you have given, to me personally, to your school principal Lynn Moir and to our Board, concerning whether St. Ignatius Catholic School and St. Paul Catholic School should be consolidated in Thamesville, for September, 2005. I believe the comments we have received, both in support of consolidation and in opposition to it, represent your honest concerns for the education and well-being of the students of St. Ignatius Catholic School.

As you know, the consolidation process was begun because of the dwindling student numbers at St. Ignatius. It has been my strong belief for some time that enrolment at our Bothwell school has reached the point where educational programs have begun to suffer. Classroom learning is about more than simply teacher instruction. Rich and meaningful learning comes from students sharing ideas and interacting with other students, who are at their same level of development. This can only happen in grades with significant numbers. Co-curricular activities, including team sports, school clubs, assemblies and participation in liturgical celebrations are also important to the wider Catholic elementary school experience. They too, are seriously impacted by low enrolment.

I know that many of you share my view in this regard, and that you are anxious for consolidation. However, I am also aware that there are some who resist this change. I believe it is important that when we move forward we do so together, as a Board and a school community united and working for positive change.

From the beginning of this process, I have said that school consolidation for Bothwell and Thamesville is **not** about saving money. Rural education funding from the ministry of education makes it possible for the St. Clair Catholic District School Board to keep St. Ignatius Catholic School open, even with such a low enrolment. In my view, for the reasons I've already outlined, even though this option is one that is affordable, it is not optimal.

However, I believe this is a decision that must be guided by you as parents. I would like to meet with you again, on Monday, November 15, 2004 at 7:00 p.m. at the school. This meeting will be open only to parents or guardians of children at the school. At that time I will answer any questions and poll each family individually. Unless there is a clear majority which favours consolidation, I will not recommend to the Board of Trustees that consolidation go forward. I will however, continue to grant out-of-boundary exemptions to any family who wishes that their child/children attend St. Paul Catholic School in Thamesville.

Let me say again very clearly, that as an educator I strongly believe consolidation is in the best interests of your children. The St. Clair Catholic District School Board is prepared to invest in Catholic education for the communities of Bothwell and Thamesville. We believe consolidation will produce a school community that is stronger and more viable for the future... one that will attract new families and new students. Whether we move forward is up to you.

Sincerely,

Margaret Nelson
Director of Education