



ST. CLAIR CATHOLIC  
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD  
*Lighting the Way – Rejoicing in Our Journey*

October 13, 2004

Dear Parents/Guardians of St. Paul 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 represent your honest concerns for the education and well-being of the students of St. Paul Catholic School.

As you know, the consolidation process was begun because of the dwindling student numbers at both schools, but most seriously in Bothwell. It has been my strong belief for some time that as student numbers continue to decline, educational programs will 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 school communities 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 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 that as this is a decision that most seriously impacts the parents of our St. Ignatius students, it must be made with their guidance. I have arranged a meeting with them for mid-November, at which 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.

What all of this will mean to investment at the Thamesville school is, at this point, unclear. These are decisions that must wait until I have met again with our Bothwell parents, or until we have a clearer picture of what our September 2005 enrolment will be in Thamesville. However, let me say again very clearly, that as an educator I strongly believe consolidation is in the best interests of the children from both school communities. I believe it will produce a stronger, more vibrant school... one that will attract new families, and ensure Catholic education for future students in these rural communities.

Sincerely,

Margaret Nelson  
Director of Education