



MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Final C.N. Watson report tabled at special Board meeting

At a special Board meeting on Tuesday night, Cynthia Clarke of the consulting firm C.N. Watson presented the final Focus On Excellence Long-Term Accommodation Study to Thames Valley Trustees. The report is the first jurisdiction-wide independent review of the Board's facilities, programs, and future capital funding needs since Thames Valley was created in 1998 as an amalgamation of the Middlesex, Oxford, Elgin, and City of London school boards.

C.N. Watson, a leading land economics consulting firm based in Mississauga, was hired in November of 2004 with a specific mandate to:

- Assess the impact that demographic trends will have on future accommodation needs of our school system;
- Recommend program and facility structures that would enhance the educational and economic strengths of local communities;
- Demonstrate, under the Ministry's Accountability Framework, "efficient and effective" use of the Board's capital resources;
- Include in any cost analysis the impact on total board costs/savings of all factors such as, but not limited to, transportation, facility maintenance, facility operations (heat and utilities), and staffing.

The final report identifies several important issues that Thames Valley faces as a result of the amalgamation process and the reality of declining enrolment across the system. Key findings include:

- According to Ministry records, in 2003-2004, Thames Valley had more than 15,500 surplus classroom spaces within its schools – more surplus space than any school board in Ontario except the Toronto District School Board
- Since 2001, Thames Valley has experienced a decrease of more than 4,000 pupils; between 2000 and 2015, it is expected that the Board will lose a total of approximately 8,500 students
- More than 27% of the Board's space was constructed specifically to accommodate a much greater "baby boom" population

- Continued enrolment decline without rationalization of classroom space will likely mean an increase in split grades at the elementary level, difficulty in delivering breadth of programs at the secondary level, increased operating costs and constraints to staffing levels at all schools

The complete document outlines comprehensive recommendations to consolidate empty space where appropriate, and build new schools in growth areas over the next 15 years. Among many highlights, the report recommends:

- Construction of 19 new elementary schools (a total of 8,642 additional spaces) and one secondary school (1,200 additional spaces)
- Additions to 30 elementary schools (4,133 additional spaces) and four secondary schools (1,443 additional spaces)
- Consolidation of 52 elementary schools (13,213.5 fewer spaces) and 9 secondary schools (6,426 fewer spaces)

The report also notes the potential of school consolidations as outlined to save approximately \$400-million in capital renewal savings to Ontario taxpayers over the next 25 years.

Like all school boards in the province, Thames Valley is required to submit a long-term capital plan to the Ministry of Education for review and approval by the current deadline of December 16. The Board must consider a number of implications related to class size regulations, programming for students who are now required to stay in school until age 18, and the priorities of the Ontario Government's Good Places to Learn and Best Start initiatives.

Upon Ministry approval, the Board will invite public input into its long-term capital plan.

"The findings and recommendations of the C.N. Watson report will provide us with an extensive database as we move forward with our long-term planning," said Director of Education Bill Bryce. "As always, our first priority is to meet student needs in the best and most practical way. With this information and our own data in hand, we can set to work on a plan that will accommodate change in the system while enhancing programs and learning opportunities for students."

The complete C.N. Watson report can be read on the Thames Valley website at:

<http://www.tvdsb.on.ca/areastudy/cnwatsonreport.shtml>

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