

for immediate release

School closings to increase

People for Education releases new data on school closings for the coming year

Toronto (August 25, 2008) – More school boards across the province are exploring the option of closing schools in the face of enrolment declines and budget pressures, according to a new report released today by People for Education. Updated information from People for Education shows that there are 77 schools slated or recommended to close in Ontario, and a further 129 reviews in progress.

Declining enrolment puts pressure on boards

Ontario's schools have lost nearly 90,000 students over the last six years, and, according to Statistics Canada, that trend is going to continue into the foreseeable future. And because much of school boards' funding is based on numbers of students, fewer students means fewer programs, less funding, and, in many cases, closing schools.

According to a People for Education:

- ❑ Enrolment has declined in 63 of Ontario's 72 school boards.
- ❑ In four of Ontario's northern boards, enrolment has declined more than 20% since 2002.
- ❑ Across the province, there are 77 schools slated to close or recommended for closing over the next 3 years.
- ❑ A further 129 schools are currently undergoing Accommodation Reviews for possible closing.

Changes in funding formula do not offset enrolment decline

The province has made some adjustments to the funding formula to offset some of the difficulty caused by declining enrolment, and boards with declining enrolment do receive some temporary extra funding from the province to help them adjust to the loss of funding. Grants have been added to support very small and remote schools, and school boards now receive funding for principals, vice-principals and secretaries on a per-school as well as a per-pupil basis.

But most funding is still granted based on numbers of students. And despite a steep drop in the average school enrolment, the number of students required to generate most staff has not changed since 1997, when the formula was first developed.

People for Education recommends new policy

While the parent's group acknowledges that some schools will have to close, it has recommended that the province speed up the review of the funding formula, and adjust education policy to support expanded uses for school buildings. The group is also concerned that boards are making decisions that will affect hundreds of communities and tens of thousands of students, before new provincial policy for declining enrolment has been developed. The group recommends the province provide interim funding to boards while their Declining Enrolment Task Force prepares its report.

The full report is available on the People for Education website at www.peopleforeducation.com

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