PLANNING AND POSSIBILITIES:

THE REPORT OF THE DECLINING ENROLMENT WORKING GROUP

March 2009

Declining Enrolment Working Group
77 Wellesley Street W., Box 238
Toronto ON M7A 1N3

February 2009
The Honourable Kathleen Wynne
Minister of Education

Dear Minister,

We are pleased to present the report of the Declining Enrolment Working Group, *Planning and Possibilities.*

This report recommends ways in which Ontario's elementary and secondary education community can continue to improve student achievement while addressing the impact of declining enrolment. As we heard throughout our consultations, Ontario's partners in education recognize the importance of student success. They understand the need for our education system to adjust to enrolment trends, and they want to ensure that resources are focused on programs and services that enhance student learning.

We hope that our report will contribute to and strengthen the capacity for positive change at all levels of the education system.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to serve the people of Ontario, especially the students in our publicly funded schools.

Sincerely,

Dave Levac
MPP, Brant
Co-chair

Eleanor Newman
Director of Education
Renfrew County District School Board
Co-chair

DECLINING ENROLMENT WORKING GROUP

Dave Levac, Co-Chair
MPP, Brant; Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services

Eleanor Newman, Co-Chair
Director of Education, Renfrew County District School Board

Gerri Gershon
Trustee, Toronto District School Board; former President, Ontario Public School Boards' Association; former President, Canadian School Boards Association

Brian Greene
Senior Business Official, Thames Valley District School Board

Kathy O'Brien
Trustee, Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board

Michel Paulin
Senior Business Official, Conseil scolaire de district catholique Franco-Nord

Barry Peterson
Senior Business Official, District School Board Ontario North East

Doug Reycraft
Past President, Association of Municipalities of Ontario; Councillor, County of Middlesex; Mayor, Southwest Middlesex

Michael Schmitt
Director of Education, Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board

TABLE OF CONTENTS

This publication is available on the Ministry of Education's website at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca>.

PREFACE

Enrolment in Ontario's publicly funded schools reached a high point in the 2002–03 school year. In some areas, enrolment was already declining, but since 2002–03 the issue has received increasing attention as one of province-wide concern.

For the past six months we have had the opportunity to study this issue. We have engaged in productive dialogues with education stakeholders. Our work has also included reviews of the research literature and the experiences of other jurisdictions. Although each of us started with individual perspectives based on our own roles and experience, we learned much as a group. This report reflects our common learning and consensus.

One of the most important points that emerged from our work was our definition of the issue. The rate and effects of enrolment change vary widely across the province. But whatever the local circumstances, the fundamental challenge of declining enrolment – and it is a challenge to all education partners – is the need to realign and reallocate resources today to ensure that the best possible education is available to students tomorrow. Even with the decline in enrolment, in 2012–13 Ontario will still be providing elementary and secondary education to about 1.85 million students. By effectively addressing declining enrolment today, we are investing in the education of those students – an investment that will enhance their opportunities and help them contribute to the social health and economic development of the province.

We call this need to realign and reallocate resources the challenge of "resizing" the education system. Our recommendations are focused on providing the education system with the direction, flexibility, and support it needs to meet that challenge.

An important factor that changed as we were carrying out our mandate was the province's economic outlook. Faced with global economic uncertainty, the Ontario government stated its intention to bring greater focus to the management of its expenses and to delay or slow down some new spending.

Our recommendations recognize the new economic realities. The education funding formula already includes direct and indirect supports for school boards and schools that face declining enrolment. We believe steps can be taken to improve the way these resources are allocated and the way they are used to support student achievement. At the same time, we have not hesitated to recommend investments that can help school boards and schools operate more effectively and direct more resources to supporting students.

In fulfilling our mandate, we were supported by staff of the Ministry of Education. We thank them for their dedication and assistance.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report recommends ways in which Ontario's elementary and secondary education community can continue to improve student achievement while addressing the impacts of declining enrolment.

Since reaching a peak in the school year 2002–03, enrolment in Ontario's publicly funded schools has declined, largely as a result of the decline in the number of school-aged children in the province. Between 2002–03 and 2007–08, the decline was 68,000, or 3.4 per cent. The Ministry of Education expects a similar trend over the next five years, projecting that the number of students will decrease by a further 72,000, or 3.8 per cent.

Declining enrolment is an issue because a substantial portion of each school board's revenue – which is largely determined by the provincial funding formula – is based on enrolment. To some degree, this is appropriate, because with fewer students boards have to hire fewer teachers and purchase fewer resources. However, not all costs can be adjusted in a way that is strictly proportional to declines in enrolment. Some costs can be adjusted with relative ease from one school year to the next, while others may take more time to adjust.

Declining enrolment can therefore generate financial and operational pressures for school boards. These pressures can lead to reductions in education programming, staffing, and other supports for students. As schools become smaller, the number and variety of programs offered may be reduced, especially at the secondary level. In some cases, a school's enrolment may decline to the point where the educational viability of the school is in question. The costs of maintaining excess and underutilized school space can divert significant resources from programs and services for students. Many communities facing declining enrolment fear that these pressures will lead to school closures.

Strategies to address these and other impacts of declining enrolment need to be applicable to a wide range of circumstances. The rate of enrolment change varies widely across the province. In the last five years, enrolment has been declining overall at the elementary level; over the next five years, it is projected to decline at the secondary level as well. At the same time, the distribution of the student population is changing. While most school boards are seeing enrolment declines, some boards, notably in the Greater Toronto Area, are seeing enrolment increases. Enrolment is declining in both English- and French-language boards, but a lower net decline is projected for French-language boards.

Enrolment change also varies by school board size – that is, by the number of students enrolled in the board. The most significant change has been an increase in the number of small boards – those with fewer than 12,000 students. Although most schools are experiencing declines in enrolment, the change in any particular school may not reflect the board-wide rate of decline. The effect of such a decline depends in part on the size of the school – a decline of 20 students is more significant in a small school than in a larger one.

Even with this overall decline in enrolment, in 2012–13 Ontario will still be providing elementary and secondary education to about 1.85 million students. The education system's most important task will continue to be ensuring that all students receive a high-quality education. The challenge of declining enrolment is one of realigning and reallocating resources today – what we call "resizing" the education system – to ensure that the best possible education is available to all students tomorrow.

To fully understand the issues and to develop informed, practical recommendations, we consulted with key partners in the province's education community, including a Trustee Advisory Group made up of representatives of the four Ontario school board associations. We reviewed the literature on declining enrolment and looked at the experience of other jurisdictions. We also kept in mind the province's changed economic outlook in the face of the new global economic uncertainty.

As noted above, in our consultations we heard concerns about the financial pressures that declining enrolment can place on boards, often leading to program and staffing reductions. We also heard about the difficulty of engaging parents and the wider public in a dialogue about declining enrolment, not least because many members of the public believe that it leads directly to school closures. In addition to the concerns school closures cause parents, they can have an economic impact on the community.

We also heard that partnerships between boards and schools, and between boards or schools and community organizations, while not a panacea, have the potential to help boards cope with declining enrolment. Municipalities are important potential partners, and it became clear to us that both school board and municipal planning would benefit from mutual consultation.

We reviewed how the present funding formula addresses declining enrolment. In recent years, changes to the funding formula have resulted in less emphasis on enrolment as a cost driver, although a large portion of the formula is still linked to enrolment. We concluded that the present formula provides both direct and indirect supports for boards and schools that face declining enrolment, but that steps can be taken to improve the way these resources are allocated and the ways they are used to support student achievement.

As our work progressed, we identified principles that would guide our recommendations. The first of these recognizes that improving student achievement is the top priority and the fundamental goal of education. We agreed that, faced with declining enrolment, maintaining the status quo is not an option. Another important principle, therefore, is that schools, boards, and communities must be prepared to adapt and to realign resources to benefit students. At the same time, the funding formula must provide effective transitional support for boards – support that is flexible enough to allow boards to address local circumstances and needs.

Actions taken to address declining enrolment should ensure that students have fair access to education programs and services based on their need and circumstances. All measures must also respect the constitutional and statutory framework for education in Ontario, which includes English-language public, English-language Catholic, French-language public, and French-language Catholic school boards.

Our recommendations focus on four key strategic activities:

1. We recommend a comprehensive multi-year, enrolment-based planning process, based on a common, province-wide template and supported by business intelligence tools that would enable boards to take a proactive approach to planning for enrolment change. This process would help boards adjust costs and operations now, so that they will be able to direct the maximum possible resources to supporting student achievement in the future. This planning process is the foundation for our other recommendations. Province-wide, multi-year plans will enable boards to move forward in the areas of partnership, e-learning and alternative program delivery, and will better inform the Ministry of Education's refinements to the education funding formula.

2. We recommend measures to build community dialogue and to encourage the wider use of effective partnerships both between boards and schools and between boards or schools and community organizations. For example, we recommend that the Ministry of Education provide the public with comprehensive information about declining enrolment and review the Accommodation Review Committee process for determining the future of low-enrolment schools. We recommend that boards that have unutilized school space or that are building new school facilities be required to seek opportunities for partnerships. We also recommend that the government require services and agencies that it funds to consider the use of available school space in local communities before building, purchasing, or leasing other space.

3. We recommend ways to promote e-learning and alternative program delivery as part of the solution to the effects of declining enrolment, while urging the government to ensure that all students have equitable access to broadband connectivity.

4. Finally, we recommend changes to the education funding formula that would provide more effective supports for boards facing declining enrolment and incentives for boards to find a better balance between resources and expenditures. These changes include consolidating funding for classroom and administrative information technology into a single grant; simplifying the Declining Enrolment Adjustment grant and providing most of the support offered by that grant over a shorter period; limiting "top-up" support for schools in some cases; and making some savings from school consolidations available to boards for capital improvements that would support education programs for the students affected by the consolidations.

1. MANDATE AND PROCESS

Mandate

The Minister of Education announced the establishment of the Declining Enrolment Working Group on May 30, 2008, with a mandate to provide advice and recommendations on strategies to advance the province's priority goals for student achievement while addressing the impact of declining enrolment.

Declining enrolment is an issue because a substantial portion of each school board's revenue from the province is based on enrolment. As enrolment declines, boards lose revenue. To some degree this is appropriate, because with fewer students boards have to hire fewer teachers and purchase fewer resources. However, as the Ministry of Education points out in its Technical Paper, which describes the provincial funding formula and funding criteria:

> Boards' costs … do not decline in a way that is strictly proportional to declining enrolment.
> Some costs can be adjusted easily. For example, the cost of classroom teachers can be reduced
> by changing the arrangement of classes to adjust to reduced enrolment. Other costs cannot be
> adjusted as easily…. It takes time for boards to adjust their cost structures to declines in enrolment
> (Ontario Ministry of Education, October 2008, p. 75).

At the school level, declining enrolment may create pressure on a school's ability to offer a suitable range of education programs, and lead to reductions in specialized programming, extracurricular activities, or the number of specialist teachers.

The Ontario government has stated that it is committed to the renewal of Ontario's publicly funded education system with the goal of improving educational outcomes for all students. With more school boards and schools experiencing lower enrolments – and growing awareness that this trend is long-term – Ontario's education system must adjust so that progress towards this goal continues.

To support its goal, the province has identified three core priorities, which our working group supports:

- high levels of student achievement
- reduced gaps in student achievement
- increased public confidence in publicly funded education (Ontario Ministry of Education, Winter 2008, p. 4)

Declining enrolment does not change these priorities, but it does require all education partners to look carefully at how to maintain and improve the education programs, services, and supports that are key to achieving them. It requires both school boards and individual schools to face important questions, such as how to make the most effective use of available education resources and how to ensure that all students have fair access to the programs and services they need to be successful.

Our specific mandate, reproduced in full in Appendix B, was to:

- examine the impacts of declining enrolment on school boards and schools;
- review how school boards have responded to declining enrolment;
- evaluate the effectiveness of current grants and allocations in the Grants for Student Needs funding formula;
- consider partnerships between and among boards and with municipal governments, other provincial government services and volunteer organizations at a local and regional level;
- recommend changes to support school boards in improving student achievement while making the transition to lower enrolment; and
- recommend strategies and best practices for school boards and schools.

The mandate also asked us to ensure that our recommendations:

- respect the constitutional and statutory framework for education in Ontario, which includes English-language public, English-language Catholic, French-language public, and French-language Catholic school boards; and
- promote the effective use of available education resources to support student achievement throughout the province, while recognizing the benefits of strong ties between schools and local communities.

Consultation process

The working group's consultation process focused on obtaining the views of stakeholders in the education community, while also providing opportunities for input from other organizations and the public. We carefully considered all submissions, and thank all the individuals and organizations who participated.

Trustee Advisory Group

Our mandate included a direction to consult with and seek feedback from a Trustee Advisory Group made up of representatives of the four Ontario school board associations:

- the Ontario Public School Boards' Association
- the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association
- l'Association des conseillères et des conseillers des écoles publiques de l'Ontario
- l'Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques

Each of these associations submitted its own brief to the working group in addition to the joint perspective offered by their representatives in the Trustee Advisory Group.

Other Education Stakeholders

In June 2008, we requested written submissions from 34 key education organizations that participate in the Education Partnership Table, a forum that provides advice to the Minister of Education.[1] To focus their input, we asked them to respond to specific discussion questions about the impacts of and issues related to declining enrolment. Our request encouraged respondents to offer a full range of perspectives, concerns, and solutions. The discussion questions are reproduced in full in Appendix C. Organizations that made submissions are listed in Appendix D.

To follow up the written submissions, we held eight roundtable discussions with stakeholders over two days in October 2008. These sessions allowed us to gain a fuller understanding of the submissions. Groups that participated in the roundtable discussions are also listed in Appendix D.

General Consultation

In August 2008, we set up our own web page on the Ministry of Education's website (http://www.edu.gov.on.ca) to give members of the public and interested organizations an opportunity to respond to the discussion questions and make submissions. In response, we received a small number of additional submissions.

Research process

To round out our understanding of the issue, we also reviewed the literature on declining enrolment and looked at the experiences of other jurisdictions facing this challenge.

---

[1] More information about the Education Partnership Table is available on the Ministry of Education's website,
  at http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/partnership/index.html.

2. ENROLMENT TRENDS IN ONTARIO

Enrolment[2] in Ontario's publicly funded elementary and secondary schools peaked in the school year 2002–03. Between 2002–03 and 2007–08, enrolment in Ontario's schools declined by 68,000, or 3.4 per cent. The Ministry of Education expects a similar trend over the next five years, anticipating that the number of students in the public education system will further decrease by a projected 72,000, or 3.8 per cent.

Chart 1: Total enrolment in Ontario's publicly funded schools
History and projections, 1998–99 to 2012–13
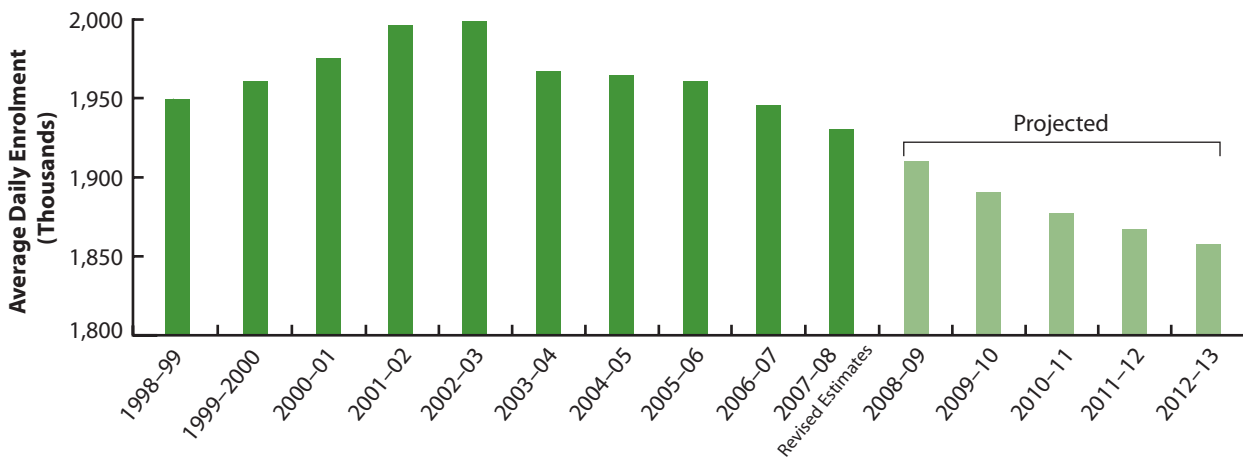
The decline in enrolment has largely been driven by a decline in the number of school-aged children in Ontario. Long-term demographic projections indicate that this trend is likely to continue well into the next decade. The distribution of students across the province will also change.

> Despite the expected decline in student population in Ontario schools, by 2012–13 the province will still be providing elementary and secondary education to about 1.85 million students. Its most important task will continue to be ensuring that all students receive high-quality education.

---

[2] "Enrolment" in this report means Average Daily Enrolment (ADE), which provides a full-time-equivalent count of students. For example, a student in a half-day Kindergarten program is counted as 0.5 of a full-time student; two Kindergarten students in half-day programs equal 1.0 full-time student. The Ministry of Education's Grants for Student Needs funding formula uses ADE to calculate much of the funding provided to school boards.

A Note on Enrolment Projections

The Ministry of Education provided the enrolment statistics and developed the enrolment projections for 2008 – 09 to 2012–13 that are used in this report. The ministry completed the projections in March 2008, using enrolment projections submitted by school boards and the most recent demographic data available. Data and projections from the Ministry of Finance were key inputs.

We emphasize that these are projections, based on assumptions about future demographic trends. Other assumptions could be made, leading to different projections. The scenario presented here is a "middle" one. "Low" and "high" scenarios would lead, respectively, to more conservative or more aggressive assumptions.

In particular, the projections make assumptions about two factors that will have major influences on enrolment trends over the long term:

- Number of births: The projections assume an increase in the number of births – a combination of growth in the cohorts of women of childbearing age and a slight increase in birth/fertility rates. Children start entering the education system four years after birth and generally remain enrolled for up to 14 years.

- Patterns of immigration/migration: The projections assume an immigration/migration trend that is similar to the province's recent experience, in terms of the number of immigrants and migrants and the age distribution (composition) of these groups.

In addition, the projections do not take into account provincial education initiatives that may affect enrolment in the future. For example, the Learning to 18 initiative could increase student retention and, therefore, enrolment at the secondary level. The government's commitment to provide full-day learning for all four- and five-year-olds could affect elementary enrolment. The projections also do not take into account any future recruitment of students from other countries.

Trends in elementary and secondary enrolment

Since 2002 – 03, the basic pattern of declining enrolment has been that declines at the elementary level (Junior Kindergarten to Grade 8) have exceeded modest growth at the secondary level (Grade 9 to Grade 12). At the elementary level, enrolment peaked in 2002–03, and it has declined over the last five years. This trend is projected to continue over the next five years. Projections also suggest that, as these smaller elementary cohorts progress to the secondary level over the next few years, a decline in secondary school enrolment will follow.

Table 1 provides further detail on these trends.

Table 1: Percentage changes in elementary and secondary enrolment
History and projections, 2002–03 to 2012–13[3]

	2002–03 Actual (000s)	2007–08 Revised Estimates (000s)	2012–13 Projected (000s)	Change (%)		
				Last 5 years (2002–07)	Next 5 years (2007–12)	10-year period (2002–12)
Elementary (JK–8)	1,324	1,248	1,192	(6%)	(5%)	(10%)
Secondary (9–12)	674	681	665	1%	(2%)	(1%)
Total (JK–12)	**1,998**	**1,930**	**1,857**	**(3%)**	**(4%)**	**(7%)**

In the last five years, the decline has been at the elementary level; over the next five years, enrolment at the secondary level is projected to decline as well.

Trends across the province

As expected in a province as large and diverse as Ontario, the pattern of enrolment change is not the same everywhere. Although an increasing number of school boards have seen and will continue to see a decline in enrolment, some boards will be dealing with significant growth.

There are 72 district school boards in Ontario. The projected decline of 72,000 is a net result of a projected decline of 97,000 students in 60 boards and projected growth of 25,000 students in 12 boards between 2007–08 and 2012–13.

---

[3] In Tables 1, 2, and 4, numbers in parentheses are negative, indicating a decline.

Table 2: Growth boards and declining boards
         History and projections, 2002–03 to 2012–13

	Actual 2002–03 to 2007–08	Projected 2007–08 to 2012–13	Cumulative 2002–03 to 2012–13
Total number of district school boards		72	
Number of growth boards	20	12	14
Enrolment growth (000s)	44	25	65
Number of declining boards	52	60	58
Enrolment decline (000s)	(112)	(97)	(206)
Net change in enrolment (000s)	**(68)**	**(72)**	**(140)**

The rate of enrolment decline also varies dramatically, as illustrated in Table 3 below. For example, over the 10-year period from 2002–03 to 2012–13, total enrolment in 32 boards is projected to decline by 15 per cent or more (8 of these boards have already seen a decline on this scale). By comparison, 6 boards are projected to decline by up to 5 per cent.

Table 3: Rate of change in total enrolment, by number of school boards
         History and projections, 2002–03 to 2012–13

|	TOTAL (Elementary and Secondary)		
Growth versus decline	Actual 2002–03 to 2007–08	Projected 2007–08 to 2012–13	Cumulative 2002–03 to 2012–13
Growth of 5% or more	13	5	11
0% to 5% growth	7	7	3
Number of growth boards	**20**	**12**	**14**
0% to 5% decline	12	14	6
5% to 15% decline	32	37	20
Decline of 15% or more	8	9	32
Number of declining boards	**52**	**60**	**58**

> The rate and effects of declining enrolment vary significantly across the province, and some school boards are experiencing growth.

Trends by region

Declining enrolment varies significantly from one region of the province to another. Between 2002–03 and 2007–08:

- Toronto declined by 9 per cent, but other parts of the Greater Toronto Area (referred to in this document as "Other GTA"[4]) experienced growth.

- Northern Ontario experienced the largest rate of decline – over 12 per cent since 2002–03. Declining enrolment was a reality for many school boards in northern Ontario for several years before it emerged as a province-wide trend.

- Eastern and southwestern Ontario each experienced declines of over 7 per cent.

Chart 2: Change in total enrolment, by region
History, 2002–03 to 2007–08
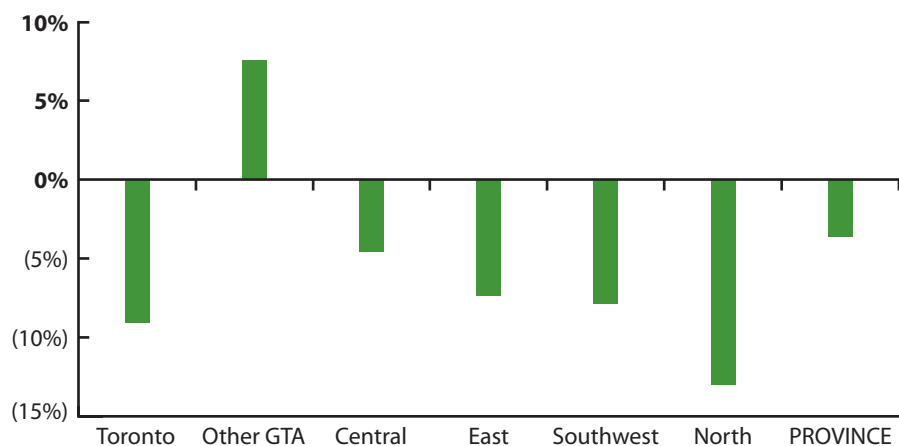
In the next five years, the only region of the province that is expected to see enrolment growth is the Other GTA. Declining enrolment will be the norm in all other regions, with the largest expected rate of decline in northern Ontario. Between 2007–08 and 2012–13:

- Toronto is projected to decline by over 4 per cent, while the Other GTA is projected to grow – the only region where growth is projected.

---

[4] For the purposes of this report, Other GTA comprises the regions of Durham, Halton, Peel, and York.

- Northern Ontario is projected to have the largest rate of decline – over 13 per cent.

- Eastern and southwestern Ontario will each continue to experience rates of decline of about 6 per cent to 7 per cent.

Chart 3:   Change in total enrolment, by region
Projections, 2007 – 08 to 2012 – 13
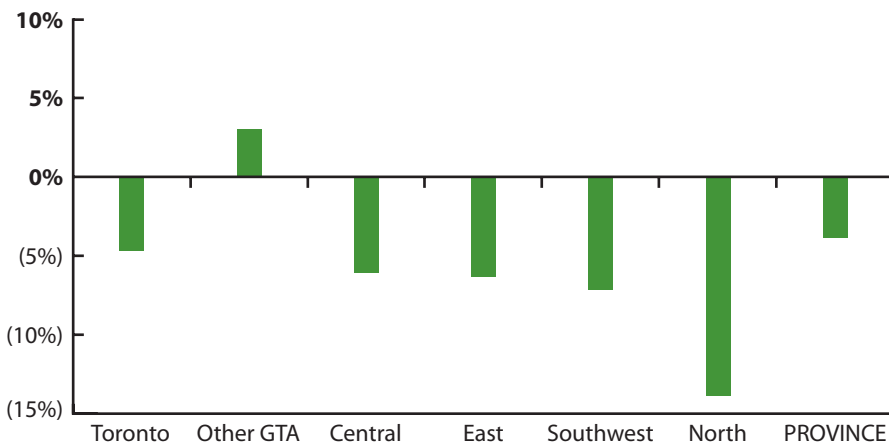
Some time after 2012 and before 2020, Ontario's school-aged population is expected to begin growing again. At a regional level, however, this growth will likely be confined to the Other GTA, while other regions will see enrolment stabilize or continue to decline. Over all, at the provincial level, only slight growth above the 2012–13 enrolment level is projected. During the period from 2012 to 2020:

- Toronto's school-aged population is projected to decline only minimally, while the Other GTA's is projected to continue growing at a higher rate than previously – about 8 per cent.

- Northern Ontario is projected to have the largest rate of decline – over 12 per cent.

- Central, eastern, and southwestern Ontario will decline at more modest rates of about 2 per cent to 3 per cent for the former and about 5 per cent for southwestern Ontario.

Chart 4: Projected percentage change in the 5- to 18-year-old population, 2012–20

Legend: Toronto, Other GTA, Central, East, Southwest, North, PROVINCE
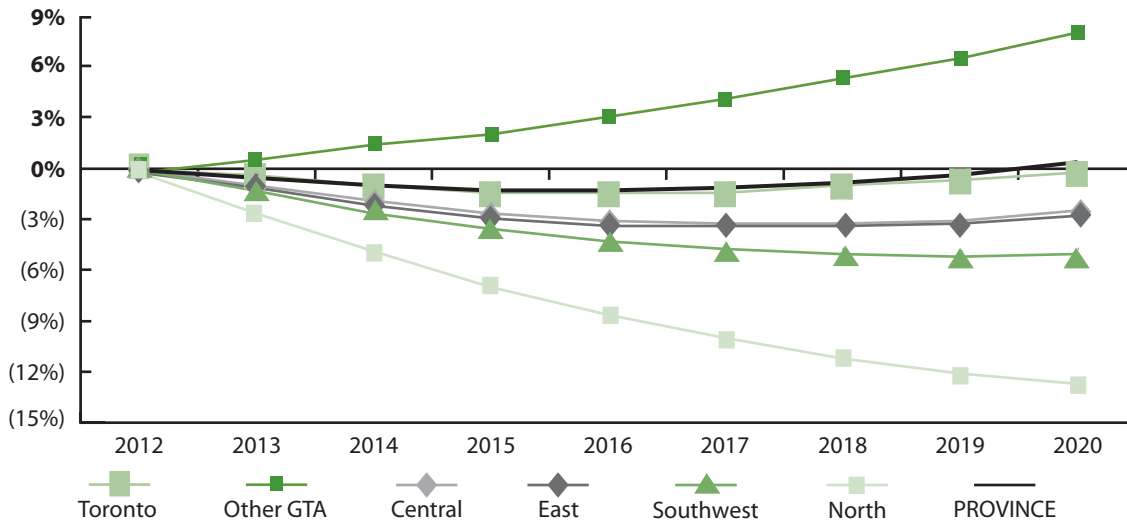
> Enrolment is decreasing at different rates in different regions of the province. Demographic and enrolment trends indicate that the student population is not only decreasing, it is being redistributed across the province.

Trends by language

French-language education in Ontario operates in a different context than its English-language counterpart. Covering the same geographic area as 60 English-language school boards, Ontario's 12 French-language boards serve a linguistic minority that is, in general, a more dispersed population than that served by the English-language boards. For the francophone community, French-language boards and schools are of linguistic and cultural importance, helping to nourish a sense of identity and pride.

Both English- and French-language boards have experienced a decline in enrolment since 2002–03. The overall rate of decline in French-language boards, however, has been lower than in English-language boards – 1 per cent and 4 per cent respectively.

Projections indicate that most of the 60 English-language boards will experience enrolment decline by 2012–13; only a few will experience growth. In contrast, about half the 12 French-language boards are expected to grow.

French-language boards operate many small schools. These schools are often located a considerable distance from one another and the only schools operated by their board in the community. These circumstances make it difficult to achieve economies of scale. Even without declining enrolment, French-language boards are challenged to balance the need to provide education services with the need to be economically viable. The Ministry of Education's funding formula recognizes this challenge by providing resources targeted specifically at French-language boards and schools.

Table 4: Comparison of enrolment trends in English- and French-language school boards

	Actual 2002–03 (000s)	Actual 2007–08 (000s)	Projected 2012–13 (000s)	Change 2002–03 to 2007–08		Change 2007–08 to 2012–13	
English	1,914	1,847	1,776	(67)	(4%)	(71)	(4%)
French	84	83	81	(1)	(1%)	(2)	(2%)

> While there have been declines in both English- and French-language boards, a lower net decline is projected for French-language boards.

Trends by board size

The effects of declining enrolment also vary by school board size – that is, by the number of students enrolled in the board.[5]

The most significant change has been an increase in the number of small boards – those with enrolments of fewer than 12,000 students. In 2002–03, 29 school boards had fewer than 12,000 students. By 2007–08, that number had grown to 34 boards. Not only had the number of small boards increased, but these boards have tended to become even smaller as enrolment declines.

The largest boards – those with more than 60,000 students – remain large. In 2002–03, eight school boards had more than 60,000 students. In 2007–08, this number had not changed. Some of these boards have seen their enrolment levels fall, but the large boards in the Other GTA are experiencing enrolment growth.

---

[5] Many school boards that are small in terms of number of students enrolled cover large geographic areas. In this report, the term *small board* refers to a board's size in terms of its enrolment.

Most of the changes in the relative size of school boards as a result of declining enrolment already appear to have taken place (see Chart 5). Few, if any, further shifts are expected between now and 2012–13.

Chart 5: School board size (by enrolment)
History and projections, 2002–03, 2007–08, and 2012–13
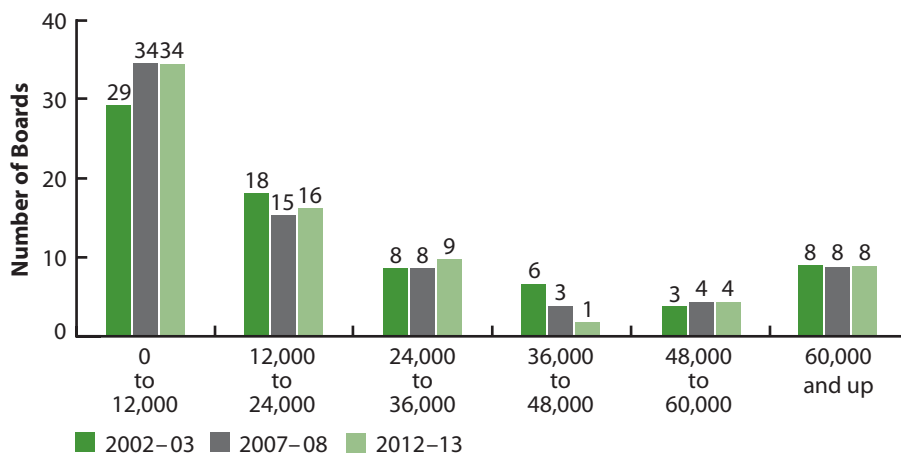
Boards are becoming smaller, as measured by enrolment, across the province. The increase in the number of small boards is complemented by a decrease in the number of mid-sized boards.

Trends in schools

Across the province, there are approximately 3,800 elementary schools and approximately 870 secondary schools, of varying sizes and with varying rates of enrolment change.

As Table 5 shows, in 2007–08, elementary schools had an average of 318 students. That average varied considerably by region, with the lowest average school size in the north and the highest in the Other GTA. In that year, 5 per cent of the province's elementary schools had fewer than 100 students.

In 2007–08, the average enrolment in secondary schools was 819 students. In that year, 7 per cent of all secondary schools had an enrolment of fewer than 100 students (calculated using average daily enrolment or ADE; see footnote 2 on page 4).

Although most boards are experiencing a decline in enrolment, the decline in individual schools is not always reflective of the board-wide rate. For example, some boards with relatively stable enrolment have experienced a decline in individual schools, but growth in other schools. On average, however, enrolment per school is decreasing.

Table 5: Average school size, elementary and secondary, 2007–08

	ELEMENTARY		SECONDARY	
	Average school size	% of schools with less than 100 ADE	Average school size	% of schools with less than 100 ADE
PROVINCE	318	5%	819	7%
Toronto	347	1%	767	8%
Other GTA	415	2%	1,140	2%
Central	311	2%	918	5%
East	264	10%	706	6%
Southwest	292	3%	803	3%
North	178	25%	406	25%

Chart 6 compares year-over-year enrolments from 2004–05 to 2007–08. In that period, an average of more than 1,000 schools saw enrolment decline by at least 20 students from one year to the next. The effect of such a decline depends in part on the size of the school. A decline of 20 students in a small school is more significant than the same decrease in a larger school. Since elementary schools tend to be smaller than secondary schools, the impact has been greater at the elementary level.

Chart 6: Schools experiencing annual growth or decline, 2004–05 to 2007–08
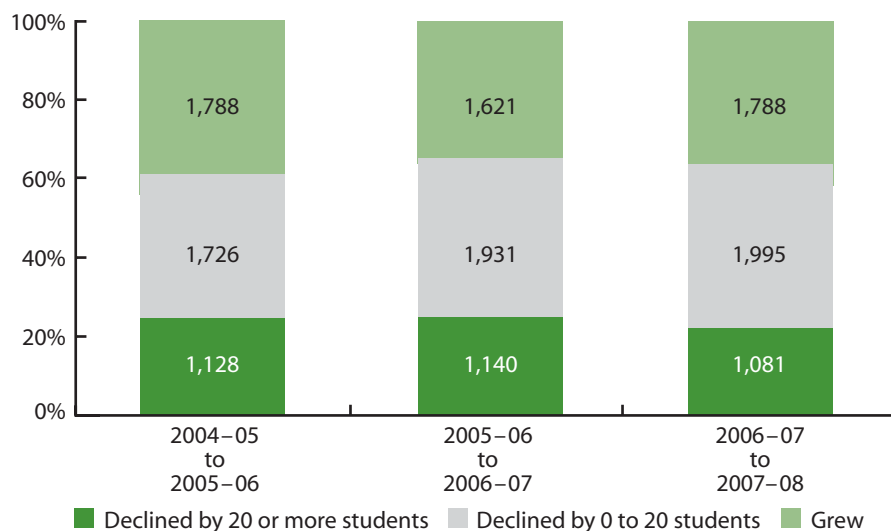
Average school size varies considerably from region to region. The rate of enrolment decline also varies (with one region experiencing growth), but the majority of the province's schools are experiencing a decline.

Are Private Schools a Factor?

Some participants in our consultations raised the question of whether enrolment in private schools is a cause of declining enrolment in the publicly funded system.

According to information provided by the Ministry of Education, there is no link. Over the past few years, the proportion of students enrolled in private schools – 5.7 per cent of all students – has not changed. This information supports the view that declining enrolment is primarily a demographic trend: fewer students are enrolled in publicly funded schools because there are fewer school-aged children.

3. THE EDUCATION FUNDING FORMULA AND DECLINING ENROLMENT

The main source of funding for Ontario's district school boards is the provincial Grants for Student Needs (GSN). The funds boards receive through the GSN are determined by enrolment, the number and size of schools in the board, and the programs offered, as well as by geographic, socio-economic, demographic and certain other factors.

Our mandate with respect to the funding formula was to "evaluate the effectiveness of current grants and allocations in the Grants for Student Needs in mitigating the impact of declining enrolment on school board finances and in helping boards and schools to continue providing quality programs and services while aligning costs with revenues."

To fulfil this mandate, we looked at all grants in the formula; however, some are not affected by enrolment. We therefore focused on grants that are clearly enrolment-driven or that provide important support to ensure that, in a declining enrolment environment, students have fair access to education programs and services no matter where they live in Ontario.

This section of the report describes how the funding formula addresses declining enrolment *at present*.

The formula's sensitivity to enrolment

A large portion of the GSN funding formula is linked *directly to enrolment*. Funding through some grants varies with changes in enrolment. An example is the Pupil Foundation Grant, which provides a per-pupil amount to cover the costs of a classroom education that are common to all students.

Some grants are based on *a combination of enrolment and other factors*. As these grants are somewhat sensitive to enrolment, they can mitigate the impact of enrolment changes on funding. An example is the School Foundation Grant, which provides a guaranteed minimum amount per school to support at least one principal ("half" a principal when enrolment is below 50), one secretary, and the purchase of school office supplies. Additional funding for vice-principals, secretaries, and supplies is based on enrolment.

Other grants are *not based on enrolment at all*. An example is the Program Enhancement Grant, which provides a per-school amount for programs, such as arts, music, physical education, and outdoor education, that contribute to a well-rounded education.

In recent years, changes to the funding formula have resulted in less emphasis on enrolment as a cost driver, although it continues to be the major factor in determining each school board's allocation.

As Chart 7 indicates, in 2002–03, $10.8 billion, or three quarters of GSN funding, was tied to enrolment. By 2007–08, this portion had risen to $12 billion, but accounted for only two thirds of the total GSN.

Chart 7: Bases for funding in the GSN, 2002–03 and 2007–08

Capital, $0.8B, 5%
Other operating, $2.9B, 19%
School-based, $0.2B, 1%
Enrolment-based, $10.8B, 75%

2002 – 03

Capital, $1.1B, 6%
Other operating, $3.7B, 20%
School-based, $1.5B, 8%
Enrolment-based, $12.0B, 66%
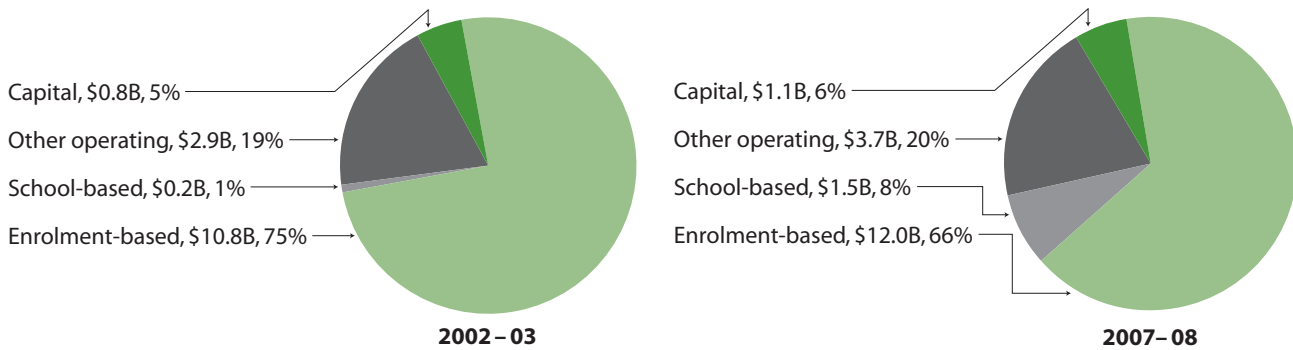
2007– 08

During this period, the amount and percentage of school-based funding increased significantly – from $0.2 billion, or 1 per cent, in 2002–03 to $1.5 billion, or 8 per cent, in 2007–08 – in part because of the introduction of new school-based grants. These grants include the following:

- Program Enhancement Grant: Funding is based on the number of schools for each board.

- Supported Schools Allocation: Funding is provided for a core level of teaching staff for schools deemed to be "supported,"[6] and is calculated for each eligible school using a formula that takes enrolment into account.

- School Foundation Grant: Funding is largely based on the number of schools in each board, with enhancements based on each school's enrolment.

Funding is also generated by other drivers besides enrolment and schools. Examples of other operating (as opposed to capital) grants include the following:

- English-as-a-Second-Language component of the Language Grant: Funding is largely based on the number of recent immigrant students in the board, although other factors are involved.

- First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education Supplement: Funding is based on the estimated number (calculated using census data) of Aboriginal students enrolled in the board and the actual number of students enrolled in Native Studies and Native Language courses.

- Student Transportation Grant: Funding factors include enrolment, fuel costs, and the costs of maintaining standards for safe vehicles and trained drivers.

---

[6] An elementary school is deemed to be "supported" if the next closest elementary school of the board is at least 20 kilometres away. A secondary school is deemed to be "supported" if the next closest secondary school of the board is at least 45 kilometres away.

- Demographic component of the Learning Opportunities Grant: Funding is based on factors such as the estimated percentage (calculated using census data) of people in a board's jurisdiction who have low incomes (using Statistic Canada's low-income cut-off point) or Aboriginal status, or who constitute lone-parent families.

Additional support in the formula for boards facing declining enrolment

In addition to the grants and allocations described above, the GSN includes other adjustments and allocations specifically designed to further mitigate the impact of declining enrolment on school boards' revenues.

Declining Enrolment Adjustment

The Declining Enrolment Adjustment (DEA) provides boards with transitional support to adjust to changes in revenue related to enrolment declines. As noted earlier, some board costs decline relatively quickly in proportion to declines in enrolment, while others decline more slowly. The DEA recognizes this distinction between "variable" costs, which can be adjusted with relative ease from one school year to the next, and "sticky" costs, which require more time to adjust. It is intended to support boards while they deal with their sticky costs.

The DEA anticipates that boards will eventually adjust their sticky costs. It therefore represents *transitional* funding; it is not intended to permanently replace the decrease in revenue that results from a decline in enrolment.

The DEA's design was based on the recommendations of an expert working group, made in 2002, which estimated that boards could manage a year-over-year rate of decline in operating revenues equal to 58 per cent of the rate of decline in enrolment. The remaining decline was considered to be more difficult to adjust to. The group recommended transitional funding for a two-year period (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 49); the province later extended it to three years (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 55).

School-Based Support

The School Foundation Grant, described on page 15, ensures funding for a minimum level of in-school leadership and administration, regardless of enrolment levels, and then provides additional enrolment-based funding to support these two areas.

The Supported Schools Allocation provides eligible supported schools (defined in footnote 6 on page 16), which are located far from other schools in the same board, with funding to support at least a minimum level of teaching staff so that they can maintain a viable program despite enrolment decreases.

In 2007–08, 198 elementary schools were deemed to be supported because they were located at least 20 kilometres from their board's next elementary school.

Table 6: Distances between elementary schools, 2007 – 08

	0 – 2 km	2 – 20 km	More than 20 km	Total
Number of schools	2,231	1,409	198	3,838

In the same year, there were 89 supported secondary schools, which were at least 45 kilometres from their board's next secondary school.

Table 7: Distances between secondary schools, 2007 – 08

	0 – 2 km	2 – 45 km	More than 45 km	Total
Number of schools	222	556	89	867

The School Operations and School Renewal Allocations cover the costs of heating, cleaning, renovating, and repairing schools. When enrolment declines, a school may be underutilized, but the costs of maintaining the school do not decline correspondingly. These two allocations are based in part on enrolment, but include "top-up" funding for schools operating at less than full capacity.

The top-up increases a board's total revenue for the operating and renewal costs of its rural[7] and supported schools up to the amount that would be generated if the schools were operating at 100 per cent capacity. Schools that are not designated as rural or supported generate top-up funding of up to 20 per cent higher than the actual utilization rate. For example, a school with a utilization rate of 60 per cent would be treated as if it were operating at 80 per cent.

---

[7] The funding formula identifies a "rural" school in one of two ways: (1) the second character of the school's postal code is zero (0), which indicates that the school's address is defined as rural by Canada Post; or (2) the school is listed as a rural school in the GSN regulation (Ontario Ministry of Education, October 2008, p. 88).

Temporary Stabilizers

For other types of grants, including the Student Transportation Grant and the High Needs Amount of the Special Education Grant, where enrolment is a factor but not the only one, funding has been temporarily stabilized, which eliminates the financial impact of declining enrolment. This means that boards do not experience year-over-year decreases in these grants as a result of declining enrolment. (Boards where enrolment is increasing do receive the increases they are eligible for through these grants.)

Support for Small, Remote, Rural, and Northern Boards

The GSN provides additional funding to small, remote, rural, and northern boards in recognition of the special challenges these boards face. The Geographic Circumstances Grant provides funds to support the higher costs of purchasing goods and services in rural and remote boards with low enrolments. In addition, the Board Enrolment Component of the Remote and Rural Allocation (Geographic Circumstances Grant) provides boards with low enrolments with some support to deal with the sticky costs associated with the decline.

4. OUR CONSULTATIONS

Part of our mandate was to review how school boards have responded to declining enrolment. In the discussion questions we sent to stakeholders, we asked them to identify the impacts of declining enrolment and the strategies that schools and school boards have been using to address the issue.

Most submissions stated that maintaining student achievement was the top concern. In this context, respondents identified several possible effects of declining enrolment related to programming and other supports for students at both the elementary and secondary levels, including the following:

• As schools become smaller, the number and variety of programs offered may be reduced, especially at the secondary level. In some cases, a school's enrolment may decline to the point where the educational viability of the school is in question. In others, the range of extracurricular activities available to students may be diminished.

• The number of multi-grade and multi-level classes may increase.

• Schools may face reductions in the following areas:
    – teaching staff who deliver support and programs in areas such as literacy and numeracy
    – library and guidance staff, supervisory staff, vice–principals, and secretarial staff
    – the availability of services provided by professional/paraprofessional staff, such as social workers and speech-language pathologists

    Aside from the obvious impacts of losing staff in these areas, staff reductions also may affect the ability of remaining staff to adequately supervise students.

As might be expected, respondents also focused on the stress declining enrolment can place on school board finances. Specific financial and operational pressures school boards face that were described by respondents include the following:

• The costs of maintaining excess and underutilized school space can divert significant resources from programs and services for students. There is a point at which boards must consider school closures or consolidations, to free up these resources.

• When school consolidations occur as a result of declining enrolment, student transportation costs can increase, as more busing is needed.

• Information technology is an important tool for both education program delivery and efficient administration, two areas where declining enrolment can put pressure on schools and boards. Indeed, its value increases when enrolment declines. The costs associated with information technology – for example, the initial expenditure to establish a network and the overhead for network maintenance – are often sticky rather than variable.

- Other board administration services also involve sticky costs that are not easily adjusted when enrolment declines.

We heard other concerns and suggestions as well:

- Many members of the public are unaware of the problems associated with declining enrolment until it affects their community. Nor do they understand that declining enrolment has different effects in different communities.

- It is difficult to discuss declining enrolment with the public, because many of them believe that it leads directly to school closures.

- In addition to the concerns school closures cause parents, these closures can have an economic impact on the community.

- Where a school closure or consolidation is a possibility, it's better to make parents and the public aware of the problem and engage them in the issue before closure or consolidation is on the table.

- Partnerships between boards and with community organizations can help boards cope with declining enrolment, but they are not a panacea and require work and specialized knowledge. As well, where partnerships involve increased access to school facilities by people who are not part of the school community, safety concerns may need to be addressed.

- Municipalities are important potential partners. Both school board and municipal planning would benefit from mutual consultation and input.

- The funding formula as a whole needs more flexibility to address local needs and circumstances related to declines in enrolment.

As the first point listed above notes, the effects of declining enrolment are not the same, nor are they felt to the same degree, in every community. Just as enrolment trends vary across the province, so schools and school boards that experience and must respond to the challenges of declining enrolment face varying circumstances.

In rural, remote and northern areas of the province, part of the challenge of declining enrolment is that, in some circumstances, the alternative to keeping a school open is to require students to travel for a long time or over great distances. An increase in travel time or distance may make it impossible for students to participate in extracurricular activities or to hold a part-time job. One of the reasons the Ministry of Education introduced the Supported Schools Allocation (described on page 16) in 2007–08 was to provide more effective support to many of these schools. Respondents from these areas of the province noted that, in many instances, the school is the last public institution still located in a community.

In contrast, respondents from urban centres said that the challenges of declining enrolment in their areas often include the presence of several schools in close proximity to one another, but operating well below capacity. They reported that the cost of maintaining this excess space consumes resources that would otherwise be applied to programs and services for students. However, they also said that they face challenges in attempting to reconfigure or consolidate programs or schools. Issues include community use of school playgrounds – often a scarce "green space" for the neighbourhood – as well as potential safety concerns – for example, if sending children to a different school means that they will have to use or cross major traffic arteries.

We discuss more of the feedback we received during our consultations in section 7, "Recommendations."

As we stated earlier, we were most appreciative of the level and quality of the responses to our questions, and carefully considered every submission.

Declining Enrolment and Aboriginal Students

Aboriginal students are an important exception to the pattern of declining enrolment – their population has been growing while most other student populations are declining. The problem of students whose local school has closed having to go outside their community for education is one shared by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. However, it can have particular significance for Aboriginal students, who, if they have to attend a school outside their community, may find themselves removed as well from their culture.

The term *Aboriginal* includes First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples. Not all Aboriginal students attend provincially funded schools. The elementary and secondary education of First Nation students who live and attend school in First Nation communities is the responsibility of the federal government. The education of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students who live in the jurisdiction of school boards and attend Ontario's publicly funded schools is a provincial responsibility. Funding for these students' education is provided through the GSN, and for the purposes of funding they are treated like other students of the board.

5. OUR RESEARCH

Our review of the literature on declining enrolment and the experiences of other jurisdictions reinforced two of the key messages we received during our consultation with the education community: the impacts of declining enrolment are different in different situations, and there is no "one size fits all" solution.

The literature

The research literature on declining enrolment that we reviewed came from a variety of sources – Canadian and foreign jurisdictions – and reflected both a current and a historical perspective. We list this material in our Select Bibliography (see Appendix F).

However, the existing literature on strategies to address declining enrolment has only limited application in Ontario's present context:

- First, much of it focuses on remote and rural areas. Historically, the problem of declining enrolment has been most "visible" in these locations. Many urban areas in Ontario are now experiencing enrolment decline as well, and the literature does not adequately reflect the complex dynamics that exist in these areas, and that can complicate the challenge of addressing the issue.

- Second, some of the literature dates from the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the last of the baby-boom generation began to graduate from high school. Ontario itself produced one of the major pieces, the 1978 report of the Commission on Declining School Enrolments, which included numerous background papers and studies. While this report and other research from 30 years ago are relevant, the intervening years have brought major changes in education governance and funding, and in technology. For example, the 1978 report contained a major focus on issues related to education property taxes that is no longer relevant.

Much of what the research says about the impacts of declining enrolment, as we noted above, reinforces the common themes heard in our consultation:

- Declining enrolment reduces the flexibility schools have in allocating their resources. It may result in a reduction in course and program options, a loss of teachers, accommodation reviews, and changes to the organizational structure.

- One common reaction to enrolment decline is an increase in multi-grade or multi-level classes.

- Consolidation of schools is often necessary in jurisdictions suffering from declining enrolment. Arguments for consolidation are typically based on efficiency and equity, as schools with small student populations cost more to operate per student than those with a larger number of students.

- Consolidation can be contentious, and often involves a great deal of community resistance.

- Some Canadian jurisdictions are looking abroad for potential students to fill their classrooms. International students pay tuition and fill some of the spaces left by declining enrolment. International student recruitment is increasing and can play an important role in enabling Canadian schools to continue to be well equipped and remain open.

- Many school board responses to declining enrolment are short-term and reactive, yet the research suggests that focused, long-term planning to address the reduction in revenue caused by declining enrolment can help boards avoid or mitigate negative effects such as reductions in classroom resources.

- School boards can potentially achieve efficiencies through co-operative approaches to providing administrative services.

- School boards can explore opportunities to utilize their excess school space as a way to maintain school viability and maximize efficiency.

- Information technology can play an important role in expanding curriculum and program options for students in communities with declining enrolment.

- Improved partnerships, efficiencies, and relationships with community organizations are important ways to address the effects of declining student populations. Partnerships between boards or schools and between boards or schools and community organizations can greatly improve efficiency and help to reduce costs during a period of declining enrolment.

- There is a wide range of partnerships and cost-sharing agreements that boards can explore in areas such as programs, services or staff.

- Many school boards have attempted to enhance the viability of their low-enrolment schools by bringing in community organizations. By bringing other resources and partners into the schools, the use of space can be maximized and efficiency can increase. Research has also identified some challenges and limitations to this approach. Tensions related to the sharing of resources can arise between school administrators and community program coordinators. Such tensions must be carefully managed to ensure the integrity of the school as a learning environment.

Other jurisdictions

Declining enrolment is a reality in many Canadian and international jurisdictions, as well as in Ontario.

Different jurisdictions have pursued various different options to address the effects of enrolment decline, but few have developed comprehensive strategies. Policies and programs to promote community-school partnerships are common, – although declining enrolment is not necessarily the main reason for such initiatives. Other initiatives, such as e-learning and recruitment of students from other countries, are also in evidence.

Further information on enrolment decline elsewhere in Canada and in selected international jurisdictions is included in Appendix E, with some examples of the kinds of policies and programs that have emerged to address the challenge.

6. THE PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDED OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

As our work on declining enrolment progressed, we began to identify principles that would guide our recommendations. These principles acted as filters through which we assessed the issues and evaluated options for addressing them. Input from our consultations and the submissions we received was an important and helpful contribution to this process.

The principles set out below reflect values that are common to all partners in Ontario's publicly funded schools. They are also rooted in our mandate, which states, "A primary goal of Ontario's education system is to ensure that all students have fair access to the programs and services they need to be successful as students and as members of the community."

Student achievement

1. The fundamental goal of education in Ontario is the continuous improvement of student achievement.

Improving student achievement is the top priority for all partners in Ontario's publicly funded education system. A holistic goal, it encompasses both measurable academic achievement in areas such as literacy and numeracy and graduation rates *and* the development of character, a sense of community, and citizenship skills.

To attain this goal, schools must be able to provide students with a wide range of programs and services. For example, in addition to academic and extracurricular programs, they must provide English-as-a-second-language programs, programs for students with special needs, and psychology and social work services.

Fair access to education programs and services

2. Students have fair access to education programs and services – that is, access based on their needs and circumstances.

The concept of fair access encompasses the following:

- Elementary students have access to the full Ontario curriculum.

- Secondary students have access to a full range of pathways that allow them to fulfil the requirements for an Ontario Secondary School Diploma.

- Differentiated instruction[8] and programming are available for students based on their needs.

---

[8] "Differentiated instruction" is the selection and use of a variety of teaching strategies that meet students' different needs. It recognizes that students should be challenged at an appropriate level, in terms of their readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Differentiated instruction can include the use of alternative instruction and assessment activities, and a variety of groupings.

- Students can expect their schools and school boards to meet obligations with respect to providing special education programs and services.

- Students are placed in appropriate, workable classes, including combined-grade and combined-level classes where such classes offer students academic benefits.

- Students have equitable access to alternative forms of program delivery, such as e-learning.

- Students have access to extracurricular activities.

- Students' right to experience the core values of the school system they attend – English-language public, English-language Catholic, French-language public, French-language Catholic – is respected.

Students' safety

3. Students' safety is of paramount importance, and cannot be compromised.

Students' travel time

4. The distance between schools and the amount of time students spend travelling to and from school does not compromise student instruction, learning, and achievement.

School boards need to consider these two important factors in making many of their decisions about programming, facilities and partnerships.

School facilities

5. Decisions to retain, close, consolidate, or share schools are guided by the goal of establishing the best possible learning environment for students.

All students are entitled to safe, clean schools that are appropriate to their age and offer reasonable accommodation for the school's programming. Good school facilities are also an essential support for teachers, school leaders and administrators.

The sharing of schools, like other partnerships, should involve a fair sharing of the costs and services involved in the partnership.

When consolidation occurs, the condition of the schools involved should be reviewed and every effort made to choose the best facility and/or to improve the facility chosen to provide the best possible learning environment.

Decisions should also include consideration of future needs – for example, whether the facility can be easily modified or adapted for alternative uses.

Partnerships

6. Successful partnerships are based on mutual benefit and the fair sharing of costs; they do not compromise, and where possible they enhance, the provision of education programs and services; and, especially where coterminous boards are involved, they respect the integrity and core values of each partner.

For a partnership to be viable and sustainable, all partners should benefit while fairly sharing the costs and services – including capital and maintenance costs, where appropriate.

Partnerships must recognize and respect the school system's first responsibility – to provide education programs and services to students. However, the school system can play an important role in the community and should consider how it can contribute to the public good and encourage a sense of community.

In evaluating the potential of partnerships, school boards and schools can consider a range of partners, including other boards and schools, provincial government ministries and agencies, federal government departments and agencies, municipalities, volunteer groups, community groups, non-governmental organizations, parents and families, businesses, and unions. The scope of the partnership could range from a simple rental agreement for use of space to an arrangement that provides students with learning opportunities. The clients served by partnerships can include students, families, community groups, or the community as a whole.

"Resizing" the education system

7. Schools, school boards, and communities that are prepared to adapt to declining enrolment by realigning resources to benefit students need sufficient transitional funding to accomplish the resizing without compromising student learning and achievement.

When faced with declining enrolment, maintaining the status quo is not an option. All partners in education must acknowledge the situation, initiate dialogues and build trust with communities and with each other, and work together to arrive at the best possible solution for students.

At the same time, the province's education funding system must provide effective transitional support for boards experiencing declining enrolment, support that is flexible enough to allow boards to address their specific local circumstances and needs.

Constitutional and statutory framework for education

8. All actions taken to address declining enrolment respect the constitutional and statutory framework for education in Ontario, which includes English-language public, English-language Catholic, French-language public and French-language Catholic school boards.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

In this report, we have described the challenges declining enrolment poses to school boards – primarily reduced funding, which often leads to reductions in education programming, staffing, and other supports for students. Many communities facing declining enrolment fear that school closures will result.

Closing or consolidating schools is one response to declining enrolment – in some circumstances, the appropriate response. None of the stakeholders we consulted argued that all schools must be kept open. Indeed, all acknowledged that there are situations when closing a school is the best course of action.

However, many circumstances exist in which school closures are undesirable or even unworkable. The clearest case is when a school is the only one operated by a board in a community, with no nearby school that could accommodate the students. Closing such a school would mean excessive travel times for students, or even requiring students to live away from home while attending their new school. The province's education funding formula, as we have noted, already addresses such situations by funding supported schools (see page 17).

If closure or consolidation is the only solution considered, we risk losing sight of our primary goal – the continuous improvement of student achievement. Our consultation and research have shown us that other options exist. They have also shown us that declining enrolment is an issue that must be faced, not just by school boards now affected by it, but by all partners in education, to ensure that Ontario's schools continue to be viable, vibrant places of learning.

Our recommendations focus on four strategic activities that we see as critical to improving the education system's response to declining enrolment:

1. *Enrolment-based planning*

We recommend a comprehensive planning process that encourages sharing information and opening dialogues before the discussion turns to choices about the future of individual schools.

2. *Dialogue and partnerships*

We recommend measures to build community dialogue and to encourage wider use of effective partnerships with both education and community partners.

3. *E-learning and alternative program delivery*

We recommend ways to promote e-learning and other alternative means of delivering programs through the use of information technology. These approaches can form an important part of program delivery for all boards, but particularly those experiencing declining enrolment.

4. *A more effective funding formula*

We recommend changes to make the funding formula more effective in allocating support for boards experiencing declining enrolment and in providing incentives for boards to find a better balance between resources and expenditures.

Enrolment-based planning

We recommend that:

1. the Ministry of Education require school boards to manage declining enrolment through a multi-year, enrolment-based planning approach, based on a common template

2. the Ministry of Education provide school boards with the business intelligence tools they need to develop and implement their multi-year plans. The purpose of these tools, which should be developed in consultation with school boards, is to help boards use data to develop benchmarks and employ strategic elements in staff and resource planning

It is essential that the publicly funded education system move toward a strategic approach to planning based on enrolment trends. To be sure, all levels of the education system – the province, school boards, and individual schools – now pay attention to enrolment in their planning. But that planning often appears to focus on reviewing and reacting to enrolment data, rather than on analysing the impact of the picture revealed by the data. It seems geared to fixing immediate problems rather than devising long-term solutions. When dealing with enrolment change, many boards appear to be in reactive mode, relying on stopgap, rather than sustainable, measures.

Strategic planning is focused on future goals and on what needs to be done today to achieve those goals. Strategic planning that addresses declining enrolment would connect the enrolment picture to other important areas – for example, the projected impact on board revenue. Strategic planning would enable school boards and schools to start adjusting costs and operations now so that they will be able to direct the maximum possible resources to supporting student achievement in the future.

Strategic enrolment-based planning should be based on a common, standard framework and a common, province-wide approach. A common approach would encourage good planning practices, such as benchmarking – comparing what one's own board is doing about enrolment change with what other boards are doing.

We envision that, within this planning framework, school boards would proactively identify issues they will need to address in the next three to five years. Each board should engage in an ongoing, comprehensive review of its enrolment picture and the effect that picture will have on revenue, staffing, facility use and other operational issues.

We suggest that enrolment-based planning include the following key features:

- School boards develop multi-year (three- to five-year) plans using a common template.

- The plans build on planning activity already under way in areas such as capital, primary class sizes, and estimates/budgets.

- The plans include strategic and operational planning components and performance measures.

- The plans include program planning components that address the need for services arising from any changes to education programs.

- The plans identify projected enrolment, the financial pressures that may result from declines in enrolment, and any funds that may become available for reinvestment as a result of adjustments boards make to their costs.

- The plans consider the effect of existing and anticipated provincial or local initiatives (for example, the province's plans for full-day learning for four- and five year-olds) on enrolment and on the use of school facilities.

- The plans be informed by consultation and dialogue with the local community, and information about the plans be shared with potential partners, especially local municipalities.

- Progress towards meeting the goals set out in the plans be monitored on an ongoing basis and the plans updated annually to reflect progress, changes to enrolment and other relevant circumstances.

In making these first two recommendations, our focus is on school boards and schools facing declining enrolment. However, we believe that all boards should engage in enrolment-based planning, including those that expect to see overall enrolment growth. We believe that it will help all boards address the impacts of both their overall enrolment trends and varying enrolment trends within their jurisdiction.

Our intent is not to increase the already extensive planning and reporting requirements faced by school board and school administrators. Our intention, in recommendation 2, is that the Ministry of Education continue to work with school boards to streamline these requirements, paying special attention to (1) eliminating multiple requirements for the same information, and (2) integrating the multi-year plan with other planning and reporting requirements as much as possible.

Multi-year plans will provide other benefits in addition to better management of declining enrolment. Three of these benefits are:

1. Greater transparency and accountability: Enhanced accountability is important as a condition for our other recommendations. If a school board needs additional resources to address declining enrolment, it is reasonable to ask it to demonstrate that it has a long-term strategic plan for using those resources. This plan should indicate how the board intends to continue providing high-quality programs and services, while making the transition to lower enrolment and aligning its costs with its revenues.

2. Opportunities to share information and raise awareness: Although the enrolment planning process need not involve formal consultations, it offers school boards opportunities to share information about their plans with the public and potential partners, especially other school boards and municipal governments. Aside from raising awareness of the issue and the board's plans to deal with it, and opening the door to potential partnerships, information sharing also offers boards and schools opportunities to learn about what other boards and schools are doing and any best practices they may have discovered.

3. Greater capacity for partnerships: Some of our recommendations (especially recommendations 5 to 9) focus on the importance of partnerships, both between boards and between boards and other government and community agencies. As a first step in identifying and leveraging such partnerships, boards need to anticipate and plan how they will manage the impacts of changing enrolment.

Ensuring that all boards have access to a common business intelligence tool will result in greater consistency in board planning across the province and facilitate the sharing of information between boards and the Ministry of Education. It will also make it easier for boards to work together to develop collaborative and cooperative solutions to common issues. This is especially important because, to develop the wider partnerships that we envision, school boards must first demonstrate the willingness and capacity to work with each other.

These two planning recommendations are the foundation for all the recommendations that follow. We see the development of province-wide, multi-year plans as a preliminary step that will enable boards to move forward in the areas of partnership, e-learning and alternative program delivery, and that will better inform the Ministry of Education's refinements to the education funding formula.

Dialogue and partnerships

Whenever a community faces declining enrolment, there needs to be informed dialogue between the school board and the community about what is best for students. One of the themes we heard repeatedly in our consultations was how difficult it is to have these conversations. Too often the focus becomes "saving or closing" a single school, and alternatives are not given adequate consideration. The debate can become divisive and distrustful, and even degenerate into a winners-versus-losers confrontation rather than a search for a win-win solution.

It is essential that the province, local communities and school boards have a supportive framework that would make it easier to engage in productive discussions about the future of schools. In our opinion, three steps that would achieve these results are (1) greater public awareness about the issue of declining enrolment, (2) improvements to the Accommodation Review Committee process for determining the future of low-enrolment schools, and (3) greater opportunities for partnerships between schools and between school boards, and also between schools or boards and other community partners.

Greater Public Awareness

We recommend that:

3. the Ministry of Education provide the public with comprehensive information about declining enrolment and its impacts

The first step in establishing a better framework for dialogue is greater public awareness. In our consultations, we consistently heard concerns that neither the reality nor the implications of declining enrolment are well understood. This lack of knowledge is a barrier to boards' abilities to involve communities in discussions and decisions about schools and to find and build partnerships. Dialogue and consultation about declining enrolment is not likely to succeed if the facts are in dispute. We need to build a stronger consensus about the facts.

For example, it is often asserted that declining enrolment is only temporary and that, in a few years, the size of the education system will be back to where it was 10 years ago. Demographic projections do not support this view. Many people see declining enrolment as a local, rather than a board- or province-wide issue; and some become concerned only when a local school is at risk of closing.

We hope that this report will contribute to a greater public understanding and awareness of the importance of declining enrolment. Such an understanding would facilitate both the broad, ongoing dialogue about the education of Ontario's children within the context of declining enrolment that we want to see and the more specific consultations about the future of schools that occur through the Accommodation Review Committee process that we address below.

We therefore suggest, through recommendation 3, that the Ministry of Education undertake to provide the public with more information about declining enrolment through its website and by other means. The ministry's class-size tracker,[9] which provides information about class sizes in the primary years (Junior Kindergarten to Grade 3), is an example of the kind of information-sharing initiative we encourage with respect to declining enrolment.

---

[9] The class-size tracker can viewed on the Ministry of Education's website, at http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/cst.

Recommendation 3 reflects what we heard more than once during our consultations – that declining enrolment is "the elephant in the room," a difficult subject that no one wants to discuss. This situation especially prevails when a school closure or consolidation is under consideration. These situations will never be easy to resolve, but communities need to be aware of all aspects of the issue in order to contribute to and respect a soundly based decision. They must understand the significant costs as well as the benefits involved. For example, the costs of keeping an underutilized school open could divert resources from programs and services that promote student achievement. Whether a school closure is at issue or not, better information will help to build understanding. Usually the status quo is not an option.

An Improved Accommodation Review Committee Process

We recommend that:

4. the Ministry of Education review the purpose, composition, and role of Accommodation Review Committees within the context of the multi-year enrolment-based planning approach recommended in recommendation 1. The outcome of this review should maintain the present standard of public involvement and discussion, while considering the following:

- **the current School Valuation Framework guideline, and in particular whether it gives enough weight to the school system's first responsibility, which is to provide educational services and programs to students**

- **the purpose and scope of the work of Accommodation Review Committees, including the purpose of their reports and the nature of the advice they can offer**

- **the framework for the Accommodation Review Committee consultation process, and in particular how that process would relate to a wider, ongoing planning process focused on schools, enrolment, and pupil accommodation**

- **the role and engagement of school boards in the Pupil Accommodation Review process and the Accommodation Review Committee process**

- **special circumstances in which a streamlined alternative to or exemption from the Pupil Accommodation Review process may be warranted**

The second step in building a better framework for dialogue is to look at the current process for making decisions about school closures and consolidations. The essentials of this process are set out in the *Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines*, which the Ministry of Education released in October 2006. In our consultations, we heard several concerns about the guidelines, particularly with regard to the school valuation process and the role of Accommodation Review Committees.

The purpose of the guidelines is to ensure that school board decisions about school closures and consolidations are informed by community consultation and take into account each school's value to its community – within the overall context of the school board's responsibility for managing its schools to meet its students' needs. The guidelines set requirements for public disclosure of information, consistent and structured consultations with clear timelines, and the use of a formal School Valuation Framework. This framework is used to assess each school's value to the student, the community, the school board, and the local economy.

The public review is to be led by a local Accommodation Review Committee, appointed by the school board, with members drawn from both the school community and the broader community. The Accommodation Review Committee's role includes providing information to the public, holding public consultations, customizing the School Valuation Framework to the task at hand, and completing a school valuation report for each school involved in the review.

We heard little satisfaction with the present guidelines. Many consultation participants said that the process was too lengthy and complex, with no offsetting benefit in terms of increased public understanding or engagement. Public disclosure of information, it was claimed, led to disputes about the information's accuracy and assessments of different schools' "value to the community"; it pitted one school against another; and the outcome was often seen as predetermined.

The school valuation process was seen as too narrow, focusing on a specific school or schools with no opportunity to consider alternatives or to address issues outside the context of those schools – "forcing communities to look at their micro level, so they can't see the bigger picture," as one person stated. Underutilized or surplus school space – and its implications for resource allocation and, ultimately, student achievement – is the responsibility of the board, but the school valuation process, in many participants' view, seems to imply that the responsibility lies at the level of the local school. It evaluates the schools involved in the process, but does not require evaluation of all the options under consideration. We also heard that the process often seems to be applied mechanically, as an accounting exercise rather than a community consultation.

With respect to the Accommodation Review Committee's responsibility for the school valuation process, specific concerns we heard were as follows:

- There is a lack of clarity about the purpose of these committees. Many people incorrectly assume that a committee can give direction to the school board, and are surprised if the board does not follow the committee's recommendations.

- Following from the point above, although the decision to close or consolidate schools remains the decision of the school board, the committee process seems, in effect, to disengage the board – that is, the trustees who are elected to represent the community – from the school valuation process.

- While the committee has a clear consultative role, it is often seen less as engaging the public than as a "technical" group focused on completing the school valuation report.

- Serving on the committees was described as intense and time consuming, with potential for individuals to feel that their role on the committee conflicts with other roles they play in the education community. For example, while school council members would naturally be seen as good representatives of a school's community, in some cases it would be unrealistic and unfair to expect them to make recommendations about the closure of their own child's school.

In looking at these issues, we balanced the criticisms we heard against the consideration that the Accommodation Review Committee and school valuation processes are relatively new. Some of the problems may represent growing pains rather than policy deficiencies. As school boards gain more experience with these processes, many will develop successful practices that could help other boards.

We also considered that a formal procedure for public review and input, such as that set out in the Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines, is necessary as part of the decision-making process for school closings and consolidations.

In our view, the essential problem is that the process seems to create expectations about community involvement and consultation that it may not fulfil.

- The emphasis on providing information to the public is valuable, but if the information is not analysed and interpreted for the public, meaningful dialogue will be limited. It would be especially useful if the dialogue were based on an agreed-upon set of facts.

- Although pupil accommodation reviews are about specific schools or sets of schools, the issues they address may be board-wide in nature. The present process seems to lack the flexibility to address board-wide issues.

- While the process is well-intentioned, the launching of a pupil accommodation review is often interpreted as a "crisis."

This last point reflects the fact that no requirement exists for school boards to engage the public about accommodation and capacity problems before an Accommodation Review Committee is appointed.

From our perspective, then, the priority is to build a wider dialogue. Given that the pupil accommodation review process is necessary, boards are still adjusting to it, and best practices are emerging, we are not prepared to recommend specific changes to it at this time. However, we do think that a review of the process is in order as part of a larger project of building public dialogue about and engagement in the issue of declining enrolment.

Greater Opportunities for Partnerships

The third step in building a better framework for dialogue is to expand the opportunities for partnerships both within and beyond the education community.

In one way, partnerships seem a natural part of our education system. Throughout the province, schools are used for community and recreational activities. School gymnasiums, auditoriums, and playgrounds can be used outside of school hours. In some instances, municipalities or communities have funded these facilities. Schools often share space with child care and early years centres, parenting programs, nutrition programs, and public health organizations.

As part of our mandate, we examined issues related to partnerships (1) between and among schools and school boards and (2) between schools or boards and other municipal and provincial services at both the local and regional levels, including volunteer agencies.

An urban school that offered English-as-a-second-language courses to both its students and students' parents saw an opportunity to offer related services to its community's growing immigrant population. The school became a welcoming centre for new immigrants, offering them a central location from which to access settlement and support services that they would otherwise have had to travel to, in different government offices and agencies scattered around the city.

Recommendations 5 to 9 deal with the use of school facilities that have available space – both new constructions and existing facilities – but they are fundamentally about partnerships and collaboration. They grow from our conviction that the response to declining enrolment must include a more extensive and inclusive dialogue with potential partners. Our recommendation for multi-year enrolment-based planning, if implemented, would provide the foundation for that dialogue. Better planning would help school boards monitor the ways in which enrolment changes are affecting their schools, in terms of usage, operational and staff planning, and programming for students. Better monitoring would help boards identify partnerships that could be effective and sustainable solutions to their specific circumstances.

In making these recommendations, we want to emphasize three important points:

1. Our recommendations are aimed at encouraging wider cooperation among Ontario's four publicly funded school systems: English public, English Catholic, French public, and French Catholic. Collaboration among boards from different systems is not new; many examples exist of different boards and their schools working together to benefit students. To develop the wider partnerships we envision, these boards must continue to demonstrate their willingness and capacity to work with each other.

2. Effective partnerships must respect the core values of each partner and ensure the safety of students. This applies to partnerships between school boards from the different systems and to those between boards or schools and organizations outside the education community.

3. While the province can – and should – require school boards and schools to consider and pursue partnerships, it cannot mandate a specific partnership in a specific community. Effective partnerships depend on effective relationships, which need to be developed over time through such practices as reciprocal sharing of information.

We recommend that:

5. in their multi-year planning processes, coterminous school boards be required to consider opportunities for shared use of school facilities and other resources

6. in their multi-year planning processes, school boards that have excess space in their schools be required to solicit expressions of interest from other community partners to engage in facility-based and other partnerships that could help boards adjust to declining enrolment

There is a broad range of potential partnerships between schools, between boards, and between schools or boards and other community agencies, and the possibilities in that range vary in scope and complexity. Two key challenges for schools and boards are to determine which specific partnerships can assist them in addressing the impacts of enrolment decline and how to structure flexible partnership agreements that can adapt to changing circumstances.

> A school's green spaces and playground equipment are often viewed as community resources by those who live in the school's neighbourhood. Recognizing this, many school boards have signed joint-use agreements with municipalities that include arrangements to share the costs of maintaining these spaces.

Partnerships between schools or school boards and other community partners should:

• be mutually beneficial for the school/board and the other partners;

• be sustainable (that is, the school/board should recover costs);

• ensure the safety of students; and

• respect the primacy of the school's major purpose, to provide students with instruction and education.

Potential partners include private sector partners. Local businesses can give students access to broader learning opportunities, demonstrate the links between education and work, and help students better prepare for the workforce.

In our consultations, adult education and skills training were identified as areas where there is great potential for partnerships. Boards are already involved in these areas as both partners and providers, and they will continue to have opportunities to work with universities, colleges, community agencies, libraries, social planning councils, and various levels of government to meet the needs of adult learners.

We recommend that:

7. in their multi-year planning processes, school boards that are planning new school facilities be required to solicit expressions of interest from prospective community partners to engage in the co-planning, co-financing, and co-construction of new schools

When boards are considering the development of new school facilities, it makes sense that they take into account the needs of their local communities. Indeed, Ontario's present approach to planning encourages multi-sectoral efforts to develop multi-purpose, sustainable buildings. Requiring boards to reach out to their communities at the planning and design stage could offer a range of benefits, including improved board access to specific expertise (for example, in the areas of energy efficiency and accessibility) and to financial (operational or capital) contributions or investments.

We recommend that:

8. the government require services and agencies it funds to consider the use of available school space in local communities before they build, purchase, or lease other space

In our consultations, we heard a concern from education stakeholders that the responsibility for building partnerships should not be laid only at the doorstep of school boards. Access to the widest and best range of opportunities will occur only if potential partners make similar efforts. The province needs to establish similar expectations for other publicly funded institutions and agencies. The requirements set out in recommendation 8 would recognize the complex interrelationships among social, health, education, economic, and environmental sectors, and lead to the best use of existing public facilities before new capital projects are undertaken.

Service providers that would be covered by such a requirement include but are not limited to coterminous school boards, social service agencies, and children's, seniors', health, recreation, housing, and other such services. Municipalities are very important potential partners. We recognize that consultation between the province and municipalities would be the first step in achieving the goals of this recommendation.

To support the direction envisioned by recommendation 8, the Ministry of Education should also ensure that school boards requesting capital funding for new projects have carried out appropriate consultations before the ministry approves those projects.

We recommend that:

9. the Ministry of Education provide templates and funding to develop and accommodate school- or board-community partnerships

One of the barriers to sharing facilities is the lack of a template for partnership agreements. The Ministry of Education, in consultation with school boards, should develop a standard lease and a standard facilities management agreement for use by schools or boards and their partners.

Providing such a template and building on the support now available through the funding formula would encourage school boards to intensify efforts to seek partnerships with the broader community. The outreach and organizational work involved in soliciting and managing new partnerships will require additional operating support, and we believe that school boards should have the flexibility to decide how to use those additional operating funds.

Agreements to share school space may also require capital funding for modifications to buildings – for example, to make sure that the schools remain safe for students. (Sharing a school with a community service agency might require the installation of additional doorways to control access to the school.) To facilitate new partnerships, the ministry should make capital funding to support these modifications a priority.

We recommend that:

10. school boards seek to provide a range of both program and administration/business services through cooperative approaches with other school boards and other entities, rather than each board providing these services on its own

Cooperatives and business consortia in program, administrative, and operational areas provide boards with opportunities for service improvements, efficiencies, and potential cost savings related to economies of scale. Program services that would benefit from such consortia include curriculum development services and e-learning; administration/business services that would benefit include information technology, student management systems, videoconferencing, accounts payable, purchasing, and payroll services.

Throughout our consultations, we heard many examples of the cooperative activities in which boards and schools are now involved. The following selection of examples illustrates the wide range of these partnerships and shows that the publicly funded education system has a good foundation on which to build additional collaborations.

- Many boards share schools. Public and Catholic boards of the same "language" share buildings with one another as well as with boards of the other language. Sometimes sharing is initiated when a school closes and its students move into unused space in another board's building. Sometimes, through joint planning, schools are constructed specifically to house students from two boards. In this case, students from each board are taught separately, but share common areas such as gymnasiums or libraries.

- One new school that includes a community centre within its space was developed through a four-way partnership. The municipality and the board share the recreational facilities, including soccer and other sports fields. The partnership includes agreements to share maintenance and custodial costs and to purchase goods and services through a consortium.

- The Ontario Education Services Corporation is a not-for-profit agency established by Ontario school boards in 2002 to provide police record checks for staff and other service providers who are in contact with students. However, it not only saves boards money in this important capacity. It also acts as the boards' official intervener at the Ontario Energy Board. And this year, it launched a secure Internet portal to provide accurate, timely, interactive information to board officials on a wide variety of administrative matters, including labour relations, employee benefits, and school board finances.

- The Northern School Resource Alliance helps school boards, Native education authorities, and private schools in northern Ontario access services and resources.

- The Eastern Ontario Staff Development Network, a consortium of eastern Ontario district school boards and the faculty of education at Queen's University, provides supervisory officer's qualification program certification to Ontario educators and offers administrators and teachers in its member boards professional development and opportunities for collegial sharing.

- Many examples exist of school boards sharing professional services related to special education, such as speech therapists. Sharing also extends to programs. For example, two French-language boards jointly host a summer program for children with autism spectrum disorders, allowing the boards to avoid duplication of services and serve a greater number of children.

E-learning and alternative program delivery

We recommend that:

11. the Ministry of Education and school boards continue to expand and promote e-learning and other technology-based alternative means of program delivery, such as videoconferencing and webcasting

12. school boards work cooperatively to develop and improve technology-based alternative means of program delivery, especially e-learning, but also videoconferencing and webcasting

When schools cannot be closed because they are located in remote areas or for other reasons, maintaining them can threaten the board's ability to deliver a full range of educational programs. This is especially a problem at the secondary level, where a full range of courses is needed to provide students with equitable learning opportunities. E-learning allows boards to deliver courses over large geographical areas, to rationalize class sizes, and to avoid duplication of effort. Through e-learning, it is now possible to have students from different regions and school boards enrolled in one "electronic" class, rather than having each of several schools offer the course to one or two students.

Meeting the needs of students in small, rural, and isolated schools is an obvious use of e-learning and other alternative means of program delivery, but the technology can benefit students in all areas of the province. For example, e-learning provides secondary school students – especially older ones seeking to complete their studies – with greater program choice and greater flexibility in how they learn; it offers an effective tool for credit recovery programs;[10] it enriches teaching and learning in elementary and secondary classrooms; and it provides support for building literacy and numeracy skills.

The same technology also provides alternative ways to deliver professional development for teachers and other staff. Using the technology for meetings, workshops, and other interactions significantly reduces travel time and costs.

We were impressed by the range and quality of the e-learning courses that are available. We encourage the province, school boards, and educators to continue the excellent work that is being done to develop and promote this kind of alternative program delivery, including for teachers' professional development.

We recommend that:

13. the government ensure that all students have equitable access to broadband connectivity to support e-learning and other alternative means of program delivery

---

[10] Credit recovery programs enable students to earn credits in subjects they previously failed.

In some areas of the province, access to broadband connectivity remains a barrier to maximizing the use of educational technology. Where school boards cannot get access to high-speed Internet service, their students do not have fair access to e-learning and other alternative means of program delivery.

The responsibility for addressing access to information technology in rural and remote communities is shared by several ministries. We were pleased to note that, in March 2008, the province announced a four-year initiative to reduce broadband infrastructure gaps in underserved rural regions of southern Ontario.[11] The first allocations under this initiative were announced at the end of November 2008. We encourage the government to continue this initiative as a priority.

The ability to learn online is becoming increasingly important. E-learning offers this inherent benefit, as well as providing a way to cover what might otherwise be programming shortfalls. Recognizing this benefit, the state of Michigan introduced legislation making it mandatory for all high school students to complete at least one of their courses online.

A more effective funding formula

The following recommendations are a result of our review of the GSN funding formula. Our mandate with respect to the funding formula was to "evaluate the effectiveness of current grants and allocations in the Grants for Student Needs in mitigating the impact of declining enrolment on school board finances and in helping boards and schools to continue providing quality programs and services while aligning costs with revenues." As noted earlier, we focused on grants that are clearly enrolment-driven or that provide important support to ensure that, in a declining enrolment environment, students have fair access to education programs and services no matter where they live in Ontario.

Funding for Information Technology

We recommend that:

14. **funding for both classroom and administrative information technology be consolidated into a single special purpose grant. This grant should recognize the fixed nature of many information technology costs, including start-up and ongoing costs related to network infrastructure, as well as maintenance costs and costs related to computer and technical support staff**

---

[11] More information about the Rural Connections Broadband Program is available on the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs website, at http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/rural/ruralconnections/broadband.htm.

Recommendations 11 to 14 reflect our view that information technology is an increasingly important tool for learning and instruction. We also believe that it is key to effective administration at both the school and board levels.

Two main components of information technology funding in the GSN are the Pupil Foundation Grant and the School Board Administration and Governance Grant. Funding for classroom and instructional information technology is provided through the Pupil Foundation Grant. The Classroom Computers part of this grant provides a per-pupil amount for "classroom computers," a term that includes computer hardware, peripherals, upgrades, networks, and software. The Textbooks and Learning Materials part, also a per-pupil amount, covers funding for instructional software, CD-ROMs, DVDs, Internet expenses, and technology to support distance education. Funding for technicians to support school-based information technology is included in the Professional and Para-professional Services part of this grant. Enrolment therefore drives the amount of funding a school board receives from all these parts of the grant.

The funding formula supports school boards' administrative information technology needs through the Board Administration Component of the School Board Administration and Governance Grant. This component does not identify a specific amount for boards' administrative information technology needs. Funding includes a base amount that all boards receive,[12] but is also partly based on enrolment.

Information technology funding is also provided through a number of special purpose[13] grants.

Because of the growing importance of information technology for education – in the classroom, for e-learning, and as a necessary tool for the sound administration of schools and boards – the funding formula needs to show greater transparency in terms of the resources it provides for information technology and the allocation of these resources. Bringing all information technology grants together in one place in the formula and ensuring that the funding is adequate would address this need.

In designing an information technology grant, the ministry should conduct a review to ensure that information technology funding is based on the real costs school boards face. In our consultations, many stakeholders expressed the view that some costs related to classroom computers – for example, network start-up, infrastructure, and maintenance costs – are sticky rather than variable and not easily reduced when enrolment declines.

---

[12] In 2008–09, there was a $10-million increase to the base funding provided under this component. The additional funding is intended to ensure that the administrative resources and capacity of low-enrolment boards (that is, boards with fewer than 26,000 pupils ADE) are not compromised as a result of declining enrolment.

[13] Special purpose grants recognize the special needs of individual students, schools, and school boards. Examples include the Language Grant, the Learning Opportunities Grant, and the Student Transportation Grant. At present, the funding model has 14 special purpose grants. Some information technology for students with special needs is funded through the Special Equipment Amount, a component of the Special Education Grant. As most of this funding is allocated on the basis of individual students' needs, and therefore is not sensitive to enrolment, we have excluded it from this recommendation.

Declining Enrolment Adjustment

We recommend that:

15. the Declining Enrolment Adjustment be adjusted to reinforce its purpose as short-term transitional funding by (1) simplifying the calculation and recognizing that some types of costs are more difficult to reduce than others, and (2) providing most of the support over a shorter period so that school boards have a stronger incentive to make adjustments, while continuing to provide some assistance in the third year. On a province-wide basis, school boards should receive at least the same amount of funding after these changes as they would receive under the current calculation

Our consultations revealed a wide consensus in support of the basic concept of the Declining Enrolment Adjustment (DEA) as transitional funding. It is important that school boards use funding from the DEA as intended – as a bridge to lower-enrolment cost structures – not as a prop to maintain the status quo. Each board's plan for using this funding should be a key part of its multi-year enrolment-based plan; and a board's ability to use this funding strategically will likely be a good predictor of the success of its multi-year plan.

Recommendation 15 is intended to make the DEA a more effective transitional tool. At present, the adjustment is seen as too complicated and lacking transparency. Participants also observed that the present formula makes the grant too unpredictable, leaving boards uncertain about the level of transitional funding they will receive under it.

To address these concerns, the scaling factor, which adjusts each board's entitlement on the basis of the percentage of its enrolment decline, should be discontinued.

The DEA should also continue to recognize the same grants in the funding formula that it now recognizes. These grants, which are based on enrolment, are as follows:

- Pupil Foundation Grant
- Special Education Per Pupil Amount of the Special Education Grant
- French as a First Language component of the Language Grant
- Remote and Rural Allocation of the Geographic Circumstances Grant
- all components, except the Trustees and Reporting Entity Project components, of the School Board Administration and Governance Grant
- School Operations Allocation of the Pupil Accommodation Grant

The calculation of the year-over-year revenue decline in these grants should be simplified as follows:

- Pupil Foundation Grant – Many of the costs covered by this grant are relatively easy for boards to adjust in the short term. The DEA should therefore recognize only a portion of the decrease in revenue from this grant.

- All the other grants provide funding for costs that are harder for boards to adjust in the short term. The DEA should therefore recognize the total decrease in revenue from these grants.

- As happens under the present formula, the total decrease in operating revenue should exclude the impact of new investments added to education funding.

To provide a stronger incentive to school boards to make adjustments quickly, most DEA funding should be provided over a two-year period rather than the present three-year period. Advice from our consultations was that some costs, especially in the area of school operations, may be more difficult to adjust within two years. Therefore, we suggest that the ministry provide declining enrolment assistance for the school operations component of the DEA over a three-year period and for the remaining components over a two-year period.

On a province-wide basis, this change should be implemented so that boards as a whole receive at least the same total amount of funding as they would receive under the present formula. We recognize that, given boards' different circumstances, some boards may see a difference between the amount they receive after this change is made and the amount they would have received if there had been no change. The impact of the change on any individual school board should be minimized to the greatest extent possible.

Remote and Rural Allocation

We recommend that:

16. **all grants in the funding formula that are targeted to support small, rural, remote, and northern school boards be reviewed as part of the ministry's 2010 funding review. The review should include a review of the factors and formulas used to calculate the Remote and Rural Allocation of the Geographic Circumstances Grant, which should be revised to allocate existing funding for goods and services more equitably**

In making our recommendations, we are aware that the government has made a commitment to review the education funding formula by 2010 and that our report will be one contribution to that review.

Our review made it clear that declining enrolment poses different challenges for small, rural, remote, and northern school boards than for larger urban boards. This is not surprising, and it was amply confirmed by both our research and our consultations. Small, rural, remote, and northern boards and their schools face issues of distance, dispersed populations, and additional operational, staff, and fixed costs that reflect the difficulty they have in achieving economies of scale.

While declining enrolment highlights these issues – and makes their solution more difficult – it is not their cause. Changes to the funding formula since 2002–03 (see section 3 of this report) have recognized these issues and have had, among other purposes, the goal of providing more effective support to these boards. Nonetheless, we believe that a thorough review of all these supports is appropriate and that it should be a priority for the 2010 funding review.

One example is the Remote and Rural Allocation of the Geographic Circumstances Grant. We observed that components of this allocation have, over time, become less responsive to the costs school boards face in providing goods and services to widely dispersed schools. In particular, the Distance/Urban Factor, which is based on distance from the nearest major urban centre (Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton, London, or Windsor), excludes some boards that feel they share the same "remote" or "rural" characteristics as other boards that receive funding through this allocation.

Supported Schools Allocation and Top-up Funding

We recommend that:

17. **the Supported Schools Allocation be maintained, but with greater accountability for how school boards use these resources, and that the Ministry of Education consider identifying more schools as eligible "supported" schools through expanded criteria, such as the size of school catchment areas**

18. **while ensuring that schools that need to stay open continue to be supported, eligibility for top-up funding for school operations and school renewals be redefined to provide a stronger incentive for consolidation where appropriate**

Our recommendations include these directions:

- Full top-up support continue to be provided to schools that are eligible for the Supported Schools Allocation, including those identified under expanded criteria. Our recommendation for expanded criteria reflects a concern that the use of distance as the only criterion for identifying a supported school may be too limiting. Other criteria, such as the school's catchment area should also be taken into account.

- For other schools where the utilization rate is below 50 per cent of capacity, with a significant amount of underutilized space:
    - Top-up funding not be provided if nearby schools of the board have sufficient capacity to absorb current and projected enrolment, unless the board has made a business case, as part of its multi-year plan, for continuing to operate the school.
    - Where a board plans to consolidate a school with another one as part of its multi-year plan, top-up funding be provided for the full multi-year planning cycle, and the board be allowed to retain the top-up funds that it does not need for the school for other uses (see recommendation 19 below).

- Top-up funding continue to be provided for all other eligible schools.

In making recommendations 17 and 18, we are distinguishing supported schools from low-enrolment schools that a board should be looking for ways to keep viable over the long term (through partnerships, for example) or should consider closing or consolidating with other schools.

The alternatives to keeping a supported school open would be to require students to make lengthy trips each day or to move out of the community to attend school. In our consultations, we heard unanimous support for the Supported Schools Allocation, although, as noted above, concern was expressed about using distance as the only criterion for eligibility for this allocation. We agree, and therefore have recommended that other criteria be considered.

For other low-enrolment schools, school boards have a wider range of choices. When top-up funding was introduced in 1998, its stated purpose was to make additional funding "available to boards which decide, in consultation with their communities, that they wish to continue to operate schools which are not completely full" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1998, para. 6). While the purpose of this policy was to provide boards with greater flexibility in making decisions about schools, we heard that top-up funding may be a disincentive in situations where consolidation may be the best course.

We have acknowledged that decisions about closing schools are not easy. School boards, however, are not accountable only for individual schools; they must make the best use of their resources across their jurisdictions. Keeping an underutilized school open may mean that other student needs are being underfunded. On the other hand, a board may have good reasons for keeping a low-enrolment school open.

It is, and should remain, the responsibility of school boards to make the ultimate determination of the viability of a school or group of schools. Boards are in the best position to make informed decisions that take into account local and individual circumstances and to balance these circumstances against the needs of their students and schools as a whole. Our recommendations therefore include provisions for boards to make a case for continuing to receive top-up funding, even though a school's enrolment is low and its students could be accommodated in other schools of the board.

Of course, partnerships also offer a possible solution to the problem of underutilized space, and appropriate partnership agreements that include cost recovery for use of the space should be considered by boards facing this problem.

Transition Adjustment Funding

We recommend that:

19. **a Transition Adjustment Fund be established to make savings from school consolidation available for school facility improvements that would support education programs for the students affected by the consolidation. School boards would be able to access transition adjustment funding to support the cost of renovations or upgrades that are not supported by other capital funding programs**

A consistent theme in our consultations was the need, in light of declining enrolment, to ensure that school consolidation would preserve and enhance program opportunities for students. There was consensus that school communities would be better able to adjust to school closures if a portion of the expenditure reductions from a consolidation could remain in the community and be available to boards to use for the benefit of the students.

The Transition Adjustment Fund would include the revenue the board would have received from the School Foundation Grant and any top-up funding that it would have received over a three- to five-year period if the schools had not been consolidated.

We envision this fund being used to help boards respond to the needs of students affected by the consolidation. It would be available only for one-time program-related capital expenditures arising from school consolidation. Boards would not be able to access it to fund permanent, ongoing costs, and it would be restricted to projects that are not covered by any other capital funding program. Projects would be funded on a basis that recognizes regional variations in construction costs for the projects being undertaken.

A board would be able to access these funds for improvements to the consolidated school that would enhance education programming for the students attending the school – for example, retrofits and upgrades for science labs or gymnasiums or to address accessibility issues. To access the fund, a board would have to demonstrate, as part of its multi-year plan, both the need for the funding and its planned use for the funding.

Capital Needs

We recommend that:

20. the Ministry of Education, when making allocations for capital programs, give priority to projects that would support school consolidations under a board's multi-year plan

Recommendation 20 reflects our view that, in addition to transition adjustment funding, the allocation of provincial funding for school capital should, in general, recognize capital needs arising from school consolidations as a priority.

Special Education Grant

We recommend that:

21. the Ministry of Education and the Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education continue to review the Special Education Grant with the goal of basing both the Special Education Per-Pupil Amount and the High Needs Amount components of that grant on the educational needs of students rather than on enrolment

We heard from many stakeholders that, although, overall, enrolment is declining, the number of students with special needs is increasing. Support for special education programs and services is a key to closing the learning gaps for these students. It also reflects the province's priority goal of reducing gaps in student achievement.

Marketing Ontario's Education System

Declines in enrolment levels are driven primarily by declines in the number of school-aged children in the province. We did hear and consider ideas about attracting more school-aged children to Ontario's publicly funded education system. Ontario offers a high quality of public education. More intensive marketing of our schools as a valuable resource could help attract and retain students, including foreign students. Some participants in our consultations suggested that Ontario should be more proactive in recruiting foreign ("visa") students – a step already taken by a number of boards and provinces.

Such suggestions do not solve the issue of declining enrolment – it would take tens of thousands of students to reverse the trend – but they may have potential as part of a local solution, as a measure that would enhance the overall provision of educational programs and services in a board by increasing enrolment numbers and hence the flow of funds based on enrolment.

APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that:

1. the Ministry of Education require school boards to manage declining enrolment through a multi-year, enrolment-based planning approach, based on a common template

2. the Ministry of Education provide school boards with the business intelligence tools they need to develop and implement their multi-year plans. The purpose of these tools, which should be developed in consultation with school boards, is to help boards use data to develop benchmarks and employ strategic elements in staff and resource planning

3. the Ministry of Education provide the public with comprehensive information about declining enrolment and its impacts

4. the Ministry of Education review the purpose, composition, and role of Accommodation Review Committees within the context of the multi-year enrolment-based planning approach recommended in recommendation 1. The outcome of this review should maintain the present standard of public involvement and discussion, while considering the following:

   • the current School Valuation Framework guideline, and in particular whether it gives enough weight to the school system's first responsibility, which is to provide educational services and programs to students

   • the purpose and scope of the work of Accommodation Review Committees, including the purpose of their reports and the nature of the advice they can offer

   • the framework for the Accommodation Review Committee consultation process, and in particular how that process would relate to a wider, ongoing planning process focused on schools, enrolment, and pupil accommodation

   • the role and engagement of school boards in the Pupil Accommodation Review process and the Accommodation Review Committee process

   • special circumstances in which a streamlined alternative to or exemption from the Pupil Accommodation Review process may be warranted

5. in their multi-year planning processes, coterminous school boards be required to consider opportunities for shared use of school facilities and other resources

6. in their multi-year planning processes, school boards that have excess space in their schools be required to solicit expressions of interest from other community partners to engage in facility-based and other partnerships that could help boards adjust to declining enrolment

7. in their multi-year planning processes, school boards that are planning new school facilities be required to solicit expressions of interest from prospective community partners to engage in the co-planning, co-financing, and co-construction of new schools

8. the government require services and agencies it funds to consider the use of available school space in local communities before they build, purchase, or lease other space

9. the Ministry of Education provide templates and funding to develop and accommodate school- or board-community partnerships

10. school boards seek to provide a range of both program and administration/business services through cooperative approaches with other school boards and other entities, rather than each board providing these services on its own

11. the Ministry of Education and school boards continue to expand and promote e-learning and other technology-based alternative means of program delivery, such as videoconferencing and webcasting

12. school boards work cooperatively to develop and improve technology-based alternative means of program delivery, especially e-learning, but also videoconferencing and webcasting

13. the government ensure that all students have equitable access to broadband connectivity to support e-learning and other alternative means of program delivery

14. funding for both classroom and administrative information technology be consolidated into a single special purpose grant. This grant should recognize the fixed nature of many information technology costs, including start-up and ongoing costs related to network infrastructure, as well as maintenance costs and costs related to computer and technical support staff

15. the Declining Enrolment Adjustment be adjusted to reinforce its purpose as short-term transitional funding by (1) simplifying the calculation and recognizing that some types of costs are more difficult to reduce than others, and (2) providing most of the support over a shorter period so that school boards have a stronger incentive to make adjustments, while continuing to provide some assistance in the third year. On a province-wide basis, school boards should receive at least the same amount of funding after these changes as they would receive under the current calculation

16. all grants in the funding formula that are targeted to support small, rural, remote, and northern school boards be reviewed as part of the ministry's 2010 funding review. The review should include a review of the factors and formulas used to calculate the Remote and Rural Allocation of the Geographic Circumstances Grant, which should be revised to allocate existing funding for goods and services more equitably

17. the Supported Schools Allocation be maintained, but with greater accountability for how school boards use these resources, and that the Ministry of Education consider identifying more schools as eligible "supported" schools through expanded criteria, such as the size of school catchment areas

18. while ensuring that schools that need to stay open continue to be supported, eligibility for top-up funding for school operations and school renewals be redefined to provide a stronger incentive for consolidation where appropriate

19. a Transition Adjustment Fund be established to make savings from school consolidation available for school facility improvements that would support education programs for the students affected by the consolidation. School boards would be able to access transition adjustment funding to support the cost of renovations or upgrades that are not supported by other capital funding programs

20. the Ministry of Education, when making allocations for capital programs, give priority to projects that would support school consolidations under a board's multi-year plan

21. the Ministry of Education and the Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education continue to review the Special Education Grant with the goal of basing both the Special Education Per-Pupil Amount and the High Needs Amount components of that grant on the educational needs of students rather than on enrolment

APPENDIX B: OUR TERMS OF REFERENCE

Background

A primary goal of Ontario's education system is to ensure that all students have fair access to the programs and services they need to be successful as students and as members of the community. With more school boards and schools seeing lower enrolment, Ontario's education system must adapt and evolve, so that the objective of improving educational outcomes for all students continues to be met.

Between 2002–03 and 2007–08, total average daily enrolment in Ontario's elementary and secondary schools has declined by 68,000, or 3.4 per cent. In that time, a majority of the province's school boards has experienced a year-over-year decline in total enrolment. A similar trend is expected over the next five years and is projected to continue as long as current birth rate and migration patterns persist.

To ensure that education funding continues to support student achievement, the funding formula must respond effectively to the range of local circumstances and needs resulting from declining enrolment.

The funding formula includes a variety of measures to help school boards and schools that face declining enrolment. These measures include funding stabilizers that provide transitional support, giving schools boards time and resources to adjust their costs to their reduced enrolment while providing education programs and services for their students.

Other measures support schools with declining enrolment and recognize the costs of operating small and remote schools. These measures are particularly important for Northern and rural boards, where the alternative to operating a small and remote school would be to have students travel over long times and distances each day.

Mandate

The Declining Enrolment Working Group is established to provide advice and recommendations to the Minister of Education on strategies to advance the province's priority goals for student achievement while addressing the impact of declining enrolment.

The advice and recommendations of the Working Group must respect the constitutional and statutory framework for education in Ontario, which includes public, Catholic and English- and French-language school boards.

As the most important reason for change in education is to improve outcomes for all students, the advice and recommendations of the Working Group should promote the effective use of available education resources to support student achievement throughout the province, while recognizing the benefits of strong ties between schools and local communities.

The Working Group will:

- Examine the impacts of declining enrolment on school boards and schools and assess how these impacts vary based on different characteristics, such as board size; urban, rural or Northern context; and language of instruction.

- Review how school boards and schools have responded to declining enrolment, including how they have managed, changed and adapted their delivery of education programs and services to support student achievement and their planning and business practices to support program change and address smaller student populations.

- Evaluate the effectiveness of current grants and allocations in the Grants for Student Needs in mitigating the impact of declining enrolment on school board finances and in helping boards and schools to continue providing quality programs and services while aligning costs with revenues. Grants and allocations to be examined will include, but are not limited to:
  - Declining Enrolment Adjustment
  - School Foundation Grant
  - Operations and Renewal top-up funding

- Recommend strategies to improve the alignment of school board cost structures with reduced enrolment, recognizing that local circumstances and needs may make different strategies appropriate for different boards and schools. In developing these recommendations, the Working Group will consider the possibilities of co-operation between and among boards and schools on a local or regional basis, and the sharing of school facilities with other public sector or community entities in order to increase program opportunities or reduce operating costs. These entities include, but are not limited to, municipal government, provincial government services, and volunteer organizations.

- Recommend strategies and best practices that will help boards and schools deliver effective education programs to support student achievement while adjusting to lower enrolment, including ways to engage local communities in decisions about allocating education resources.

- Recommend changes to the education funding formula that will support boards and schools in improving student achievement while making the transition to lower enrolment.

The Working Group will consult with and seek regular feedback from school board associations as an advisory group. These associations include l'Association des conseillères et des conseillers des écoles publiques de l'Ontario (ACÉPO); l'Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques (AFOCSC); the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association (OCSTA); and the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA). The Working Group will also consult senior school board officials and other education stakeholders, and will seek expert advice as it deems appropriate.

Timeline and reporting

The Working Group will begin work in June 2008 and provide its advice and recommendations in a written report to the Minister of Education by the end of 2008.

Staff support

Administrative and policy support will be provided by staff of Education Finance Branch and other Ministry staff as appropriate.

APPENDIX C: OUR CONSULTATION DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Enrolment projections suggest that the trend of declining enrolment in Ontario schools will continue. More importantly, projections show that declining enrolment will be a reality for most boards and many schools and that in many cases enrolment will not return to current or past levels.

(A) Impacts of Declining Enrolment and Response Strategies

- What are some of the principles that need to be considered when a board or school adjusts operations to reflect lower enrolment?

- What are some of the adjustments that boards and schools need to make to adapt to declining enrolment and to provide a strong foundation for learning for the smaller number of students who remain now and in the years ahead?
    - Would some of these strategies vary across boards with differing characteristics such as geography? board size? school size? setting (urban/rural)?
    - In cases where enrolment projections may be uncertain beyond the next 10 years, what are some strategies that boards and schools can make to manage lower enrolment in the short to medium term?

- What are some successful examples of a school or school board that has continued to support student achievement while adjusting to declining enrolment?
    - How can these examples be promoted across boards and schools that are expected to decline in enrolment?

(B) Funding Formula Supports/Effectiveness

- For school boards/board associations: What would you include in a list of the basic costs of operating a school?
    - Which costs can be adjusted quickly, and which costs are more difficult to adjust?

- For school boards/board associations: In terms of providing transition time and support for schools and school boards that are facing declining enrolment, what works in the current funding formula?
    - What could be improved and how?

- Often school boards have to weigh the educational value of a small school against the educational value of a larger consolidated school that would be located within a reasonable travel time for students. However, when the smaller school is the only school in a community, this may impact the community. How could school boards and their communities determine the balance between education for students and contribution to the community?

- Does that balance differ at the elementary versus secondary level?
- Besides distance and enrolment, are there other measurable factors that could be considered that affect the cost of operating small schools in urban, remote, rural, or Northern settings?

- For school boards/board associations: What effects does declining enrolment have on school board administration, especially on a board's capacity to deliver the many support services schools and students need?
  - What would you include in a list of the basic costs of operating a school board?
  - Is increased collaboration and cooperation between boards a possible solution (i.e., shared payroll systems, information technology)?
  - What else could be done?

(C) Partnerships

- What are the possibilities of partnerships between and among boards and schools on a local or regional basis?
  - What principles could form the basis of sharing of facilities or co-operation in service delivery between schools and boards and other public sector partners?
  - What are some of the obstacles and how could those be addressed?
  - What are some successful examples and how can they be shared?

- Partnerships between schools and school boards and other public sector partners, including municipalities, can help make better use of surplus space in a school or help create a more vibrant educational environment in a school or community.
  - What principles could form the basis for the pursuit of these partnerships, in terms of the balancing the responsibilities of schools, the needs of students and the needs of communities?
  - What are some of the obstacles and how could those be addressed?
  - What are some examples of successful practices and how can they be shared?

(D) General

- Are there other costs that, in light of declining enrolment, need to be recognized or funded in a different way?

- Are there other relevant areas that have not been addressed in this exercise for which you would like to share a creative solution?

APPENDIX D: ORGANIZATIONS THAT PARTICIPATED IN OUR CONSULTATIONS

Respondents to requests for written submissions

Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariens

Association des gestionnaires en éducation franco-ontarienne

Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario

Canadian Union of Public Employees

Conseil ontarien des directrices et des directeurs de l'éducation de langue française

Council of Ontario Directors of Education

Council of Senior Business Officials

Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario

Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education

Métis Nation of Ontario

Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education

Ontario Association of School Business Officials

Ontario College of Teachers

Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association

Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations

Ontario Principals' Council

Ontario Public Supervisory Officials' Association

Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation

People for Education

Provincial Parent Board

Individual District School Boards

Participants in roundtables

Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariens

Association des gestionnaires en éducation franco-ontarienne

Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario

Canadian Union of Public Employees

Conseil ontarien des directrices et des directeurs de l'éducation de langue française

Council of Ontario Directors of Education

Council of Senior Business Officials

Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario

Fédération de la jeunesse franco-ontarienne

Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education

Métis Nation of Ontario

Ontario Association of School Business Officials

Ontario Catholic Supervisory Officers' Association

Ontario College of Teachers

Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association

Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations

Ontario Principals' Council

Ontario Public Supervisory Officials' Association

Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation

Ontario Student Trustees' Association/ Association des élèves conseillers et conseillères de l'Ontario

People for Education

Regroupement des élèves conseiller(ère)s francophones de l'Ontario

APPENDIX E: DECLINING ENROLMENT IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

The following provides an overview of declining enrolment in a selection of Canadian and international jurisdictions.

Canadian jurisdictions

Most provinces are affected by the decline in the number of school-aged children. The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada/Statistics Canada publication, *Education Indicators in Canada: Report of the Pan-Canadian Education Indicators Program 2007*, stated that:

> Given current demographic assumptions, the population aged 5 to 14 years peaked at 4.1 million in 2001. That population is projected to decrease by less than half a million between 2001 and 2011 to about 3.7 million, as the smaller cohorts born in the late 1990s and early 2000s enter elementary schools. After 2016, it may start to slowly increase again if fertility rates remain constant from 2006 on, as assumed in the medium-growth scenario of Statistics Canada's official population projections (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada and Statistics Canada, p. 5).

British Columbia

Since its peak in 1997–98, enrolment in BC has been on the decline, a trend that is expected to continue (M. Lee, 2004, p. 2). In the 2008–09 school year, BC has an estimated 542,509 full-time public school students – 8,073 fewer than in 2007–08 and about 50,000 fewer than in 2000–01 (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008). Enrolment is expected to continue to decline in BC until 2014.

BC's Neighbourhoods of Learning program was announced in September 2008 as a means to formalize community-school partnerships that are already in place in some areas of the province (British Columbia Office of the Premier & Ministry of Education, 2008) The program, now being developed, will involve five pilot schools. To determine the best mix of services, the five schools will consult with municipalities, governments, and parents. The program is modeled after successes such as a school in Pouce Coupe, BC, that was built as a collaborative effort between the school board and the municipality, and that includes a community hall and a public library.

Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan, a province with an already small population of school-aged pupils, expects to see an 11 per cent decline in enrolment from 2004 to 2009. The province has implemented a community-school partnerships model, establishing the School[PLUS] program, which enables community groups to make use of additional school space caused by enrolment decline (Saskatchewan Learning, 2001).

Manitoba

Manitoba has seen enrolment fall over the last 30 years, with approximately 60,000 fewer students today than in the 1970s (D. Owens, 2004, p. 1). Since 2003, enrolment has decreased on an average of 1 per cent per year, and it is expected to fall at a rate of 1.3 per cent annually until 2011.

In April 2008, in response to concerns presented by parents, the Manitoba government tabled a bill to put a moratorium on school closures (Manitoba, 2008). The proposed legislation would mean that any school now up for review would no longer be eligible for closure except under extreme circumstances. Many schools with declining enrolment would not be eligible for closure or consolidation. In Manitoba, school districts are funded by the province as well as through local taxes. Some charge that the moratorium undermines the democratic process that allows trustees to engage in discussions with communities to reach decisions that are in the best interests of all parties. The government maintains that it is attempting to meet the needs of Manitoban students.

Quebec

According to the Minister of Education in Quebec, between 2000 and 2016, 6 of 17 regions in Quebec will see their populations decline (Chartrand, 2006, p. 4). This demographic shift is more exaggerated among the school-aged population. Between 2000 and 2016, the number of children aged 0 to 14 is expected to decline by 15.2 per cent in Quebec as a whole.[14] As in Ontario, the rate of decline is not uniform across the province. Rural to urban migration means that some regions have seen their enrolment fall by as much as 39.7 per cent, while Montreal is expected to see an enrolment increase of 7.3 per cent.

Newfoundland and Labrador

Newfoundland and Labrador has faced the largest percentage decline in enrolment in Canada, due to a combination of demographic changes and continuing emigration from the province. Between 1990 and 2004, enrolment decline was a significant force behind provincial education reform. Extensive school board consolidation between 2004 and 2005 reduced the number of boards from 11 to 5 (Wright, Brunet, & Monette, 2007).

---

[14] In the same period, Quebec's preschool-aged population is expected to fall by 16.5 per cent, its elementary-aged population is expected to fall by 20.4 per cent, and its high-school-aged population is expected to fall by 13.6 per cent.

International jurisdictions

Australia

Australia has experienced declining enrolment, particularly in its rural jurisdictions. A recent study showed that 121 government schools in remote areas had fewer than 20 students (Welch, Helme, & Lamb, 2007).

Some parts of Australia, particularly the State of Victoria, have initiated the creation of partnerships for the purpose of sharing school facilities (Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2007). Many Victoria schools and communities enjoy the benefits of these partnerships, which include new or improved facilities created through the pooling of resources and expertise, more efficient use of government investment, increased access to high-quality facilities for community members, stronger social networks, and a greater sense of community. Victoria has developed a policy to facilitate the establishment of these partnership programs and successfully integrate stakeholders.

Scotland

Between 2004 and 2013, enrolment in Scotland is projected to fall by about 15 per cent, leading both to a decrease in the number of teachers and an increase in school consolidations (British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC], November 9, 2004). In the Western Isles, three quarters of the schools have an occupancy rate of 60 per cent or less. In 2004, the City of Glasgow announced that 25 schools would close, to be replaced by 10 new schools; the city council attributed this decision to the decline in pupil numbers and to the poor quality of the school buildings. The Scottish Executive (the Scottish government, established in 1999) has said that declining enrolment in Scotland presented an opportunity for school rejuvenation and renewal that was long overdue (BBC).

England

The rate of declining enrolment in England varies across the country. Where enrolment has fallen, the decrease is due primarily to rural to urban migration, but also, to some extent, to a falling birthrate. In Liverpool, a 23 per cent decline in the population of primary-school-aged children occurred between 1993 and 2002. However, in many towns and cities in England, student populations are growing as a result of increased urbanization (United Kingdom Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007). This trend adversely affects the enrolment levels in rural areas, where the falling birthrate is exacerbated by a decline in local industries such as farming, fishing, and mining, as well as by a lack of affordable homes for parents with young families.

APPENDIX F: SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Uniform Resource Locators, or URLs, shown below were accurate at the time the material was accessed, between August and December 2008.

Abrams, L.S., & Gibbs, J.T. (2000). Planning for school change: School-community collaboration in a full-service elementary school. *Urban Education*, 35, 79–103. Available from Sage Journals Online, at http://uex.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/35/1/79

Ardon, K. (2008, September). *Enrollment trends in Massachusetts* [Policy brief]. Retrieved from http://www.pioneerinstitute.org/pdf/080924_ardon_enrollment_trends.pdf

Bard, J., Gardener, C., & Weiland, R. (2005, April 1–2). *Rural School Consolidation Report: History, Research Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations.* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED497049)

Beeson, E., & Strange, M. (2003, Spring). Why rural matters 2003: The continuing need for every state to take action on rural education. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 18(1), 3–16. Retrieved from http://www.jrre.psu.edu/articles/v18,n1,p3-16,Beeson,Strange.pdf

Berry, C.R. (2006–07). School consolidation and inequality. *Brookings Papers on Education Policy*, *2006/2007*, 49–75. Available from http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/ brookings_papers_on_education_policy/v2006/2006.1berry.html

Blank, M.J., Melaville, A., & Shah, B.P. *Making the difference: Research and practice in community schools.* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED499103)

British Broadcasting Corporation (2004, November 9). School rolls facing 14% slump. Retrieved from http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/3996059.stm

British Columbia Office of the Premier & Ministry of Education. (2008, September 3). *Neighbourhoods of learning map new future for schools* [News release]. Retrieved from http://www2.news.gov.bc.ca/news_releases_2005-2009/2008OTP0216-001326.htm

British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2008, August 21). *The facts on declining enrolment in B.C. schools*. Retrieved from http://www.gov.bc.ca/fortherecord/enrolment/en_education.html?src=/education/en_education.html

California County Superintendents Educational Services Association, Declining Enrollment Work Group. (2003). *Declining enrollment in California*. Retrieved from http://wwwstatic.kern.org/gems/ccsesaAtWork/DecliningEnrollmentpaper3.pdf

Canadian Council on Learning. (2006, September 26). School enrolment trends in Canada. *Lessons in Learning*. Retrieved from http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/LessonsInLearning/20060921LinL_DecliningEnrolment.htm

Center for Rural Pennsylvania, A Legislative Agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly. (2005, July). *Trends in school enrollment: A 20-year perspective* [Fact sheet]. Retrieved from http://www.ruralpa.org/school_enrollment_projections.pdf

Chartrand, A. (2006, August 5). École privée et école publique : le mythe de l'exode. *École et Société* (145). http://recit.cadre.qc.ca/%7Echartrand/index.php?2006/08/05/145-ecole-privee-et-ecole-publique-le-mythe-de-lexode

Chernos, S. (2007, Summer). The case of the missing students. *Education Today*, 19(2), 10–14.

Commission on Declining School Enrolments in Ontario. (1978). *Implications of declining enrolment for the schools of Ontario, a statement of effects and solutions: Final report*. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

Corbett, M., & Mulcahy, D. (2006). *Education on a human scale: Small rural schools in a modern context – A report prepared for the Municipality of Cumberland County*. Retrieved from http://www.cumberlandcounty.ns.ca/Education%20on%20a%20human%20scale_5%20April.pdf

Council for American Private Education. (2008, April). U.S. high schools face enrollment decline. *Cape Outlook* (334). Retrieved from http://www.capenet.org/Outlook/Out4-08.html

Council of Ministers of Education, Canada & Statistics Canada (2007, December), *Education Indicators in Canada: Report of the Pan-Canadian Education Indicators Program 2007*. Retrieved from http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/81-582-XIE/81-582-XIE2007001.htm

Crowe, G. (2006, February). Minnesota school district enrollment trends. *Money Matters*, 6(2).

Davis, R.G., & Lewis, G.M. (1977). Coping with declining enrollments. *NASSP Bulletin*, 61(407), 1–7. Available from Sage Journals Online, at http://bul.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/61/407/1

Dillon, N. (2008, May). Hard times, hard cuts: As the nation's economy slides, what can your district do to manage uncertain financial times? *American School Board Journal*, 195(5), 28–29. Available at http://direct.bl.uk/bld/PlaceOrder.do?UIN=227880960&ETOC=RN&from=searchengine

Dryfoos, J.G. (1992, Fall). The role of the school in children's out-of-school time. *The Future of Children: When School is Out*, 9(2), 117–134. Retrieved from http://www.futureofchildren.org/usr_doc/vol9no2Art10.pdf

Eggers, W.D., Snell, L., Wavra, R., & Moore, A.T. (2005, November). *Driving more money into the classroom: The promise of shared services*. Retrieved from http://www.deloitte.com/dtt/cda/doc/content/DTT_DR_SS_Education_Nov05.pdf

Eisenberger, K.E. (1977). Declining enrollments: Implications for the school curriculum. *NASSP Bulletin*, 61(407), 47–53. Available from Sage Journals Online, at http://bul.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/61/407/47

Fink, D. (2003, June). The law of unintended consequences: The "real" cost of top-down reform. *Journal of Educational Change*, 4(2), 105–128. Available from http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/klu/jedu/2003/00000004/00000002/05124788

Grossman, J.B., Walker, K., & Raley, R. (2001, April). *Challenges and opportunities in after-school programs: Lessons for policymakers and funders*. Retrieved from http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/120_publication.pdf

Howley, C.B., & Howley, A.A. (2004). School size and the influence of socioeconomic status on student achievement: Confronting the threat of size bias in national data sets. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 12(52). Retrieved from http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v12n52/v12n52.pdf

Jacques, C., Brorsen, B.W., & Richter, F.G.C. (2000). Consolidating rural school districts: Potential savings and effects on student achievement. *Journal of Agricultural and Applied Economics*, 32, 573–583. Available from http://www.saea.org

Jimerson, L. (2006). *Breaking the fall: Cushioning the impact of rural declining enrollment.* (Rural Trust Policy Brief Series on Rural Education). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED497979)

Kinley, K. (2007, February 1). Declining enrollment imposes tough choices. *California School News.* Retrieved from http://www.csba.org/NewsAndMedia/Publications/CASchoolNews/2007/Feb/InPrint/Declining_enrollment_imposes_tough_choices.aspx

Lee, M. (2004, January). *Who's cutting classes? Untangling the spin about K-12 education in BC.* Retrieved from https://www.policyalternatives.ca/documents/BC_Office_Pubs/cutting_classes.pdf

Lee, M. (2005, March 17). *The $150 million question: What does new K–12 funding mean for BC's schools*? Retrieved from http://www.policyalternatives.ca/documents/BC_Office_Pubs/bc_2005/ cutting_classes_update.pdf

Lee, V.E. (2004). Effects of high school size on student outcomes: Response to Howley and Howley. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 12(53). Retrieved from http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v12n53/v12n53.pdf

Lee, V.E., & Smith, J.B. (1997). High school size: Which works best and for whom? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 19(3), 205–207. Available from Sage Journals Online, at http://epa.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/19/3/205

MacLean, D. (2006, March 21). *Renewing Regina public schools: Submission to the Regina Public School Board.* Retrieved from http://www.taxpayer.com/bank/report/130.pdf

McMillen, B.J. (2004). School size, achievement, and achievement gaps. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 12(58). Retrieved from http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v12n58/v12n58.pdf

Manitoba (2008, April 28). *Bjornson introduces legislation that would place moratorium on school closures* [News release]. Retrieved from http://news.gov.mb.ca/news/index.html?archive=&item=3588

Mason, D.W.A., & Burns, R.B. (1996). "Simply no worse and simply no better" may simply be wrong: A critique of Veenman's conclusion about multigrade classes. *Review of Educational Research*, 66(3), 307–392. Available from Sage Journals Online, at http://rer.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/66/3/307

Michigan Association of School Boards. (2003). *Shared services work for two Michigan districts: Glen Lake and Suttons Bay share superintendent and enjoy student success.* Retrieved from http://www.michiganedusource.org/DistrictOrg/dualsupt.doc

Ontario Ministry of Education. (1998, November 13). *Johnson announces permanent adjustments to December 31 accommodation deadline* [News release]. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/nr/98.11/deadline.html

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2002, Spring). *Technical Paper 2002–03.* Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/funding/e0203tech.pdf

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2004, Spring). *Technical Paper 2004–05.* Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/funding/0405/technical.pdf

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2006, October). *Pupil accommodation review guidelines.* Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/reviewGuide.pdf

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2008, Winter). *Reach every student: Energizing Ontario Education*. Retrieved from
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/energize/energize.pdf

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2008, October). *Technical paper 2008–09*. Retrieved from
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/funding/0809/TechnicalFall2008.pdf

Owens, D. (2004, September 22). Manitoba's public school system – Economic powerhouse? *Background Brief Analysis*. Retrieved from
http://www.fcpp.org/pdf/FB28MbEducationasEconomicPowerhouseSeptember2004.pdf

People for Education. (2008) Declining enrolment. In People for Education, *The Annual Report on Ontario's Public Schools 2008*, 6–7.
Retrieved from http://www.peopleforeducation.com/reportonschools08

Reimer, D. (2007, April 17). *Investing in community schools – An economic perspective*. Retrieved from
http://www.acebc.org/pdf/InvestingInCommunitySchools_EconomicPerspective.pdf

Saskatchewan Learning. (2001). *SchoolPLUS at a glance* [Brochure]. Retrieved from
http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/adx/aspx/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=283,589,144,107,81,1,Documents&MediaID=2073&Filename=ataglance.pdf

Schwartzbeck, T.D. (2003). *Declining counties, declining school enrollments*. Arlington, VA: American Association of School
Administrators. Retrieved from
http://www.aasa.org/files/images/PolicyLeg/EdIssues/Declining%20Counties%20R.pdf

Slate, J.R., & Jones, C.H. (2005, Spring). Effects of school size: A review of the literature with recommendations. *Essays in Education*, 13.
Retrieved from www.usca.edu/essays/vol132005/slate.pdf

Stevens, K. (2006, November 26). Rural schools as regional centres of e-learning and the management of digital knowledge: The case of
Newfoundland and Labrador. *International Journal of Education and Development Using ICT*, 2(4), 119–127. Available from
http://ijedict.dec.uwi.edu/viewarticle.php?id=229

21st Century School Fund and the Brookings Greater Washington Research Program. (2004, August 26). *Program coordination and
master facilities planning best practices project: Task 1 report for the office of the mayor and city administrator*. Retrieved from
http://www.brookings.edu/metro/gwrp/20040826_task1.pdf

United Kingdom Department for Children, Schools and Families. (2007, December 17). *Factors behind falling rolls*. Retrieved from
http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/fallingschoolrolls/context/factors

Veenman, S. (1995, Winter). Cognitive and noncognitive effects of multigrade and multi-age classes: A best-evidence synthesis. *Review of
Educational Research*, 65(4), 307–322. Available from Sage Journals Online, at http://rer.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/66/3/307

Veenman, S. (1996). Effects of multigrade and multi-age classes reconsidered. *Review of Educational Research*, 66(3), 323–340. Available
from Sage Journals Online, at http://rer.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/66/3/323

Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. (2007). *Shared facility partnerships: A guide to good governance
for schools and the community*. Retrieved from http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/propman/facility/sharedfacilities.pdf

Victoria Department of Education and Training, School Resources Division and Strategic Policy and Planning Division. (2005, November). *Schools as community facilities: Policy framework and guidelines*. Retrieved from http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/propman/facility/SACF-PolicyFramework-Guidelines.pdf

Welch, A., Helme, S., & Lamb, S. (2007). Rurality and inequality in education: The Australian experience. In R. Teese, S. Lamb, & M. Duru-Bellat (Eds.), *International Studies in Educational Inequality, Theory and Policy: Volume 2 – Inequality in Education Systems*. (Vol. 2, pp. 271–295). Available from http://www.springerlink.com/content/mk804n54m75p66n0/

Wright, A., Brunet, V., & Monette, J.M. (2007). Policy narrative for Newfoundland and Labrador. In A.S. Chan, D. Fisher, & K. Rubenson (Eds.), *The evolution of professionalism: Educational policy in the provinces and territories of Canada* (pp. 169–185). Retrieved from http://www.chet.educ.ubc.ca/pdf_files/Evolution-Book-CHET.pdf