

Report To Board

FROM: Gayle Stucke, Director of Education

DATE: October 14, 2008

SUBJECT: Devine Street Public School Pupil Accommodation Report

The October, 2007 Pupil Accommodation Report recommended "That the Board approve the intention to commence an Accommodation Review of Devine Street Public School". Trustees unanimously supported the Recommendation. There was immediate community interest in the much discussed possibility of consolidating two of the Board's oldest public schools, Johnston Memorial and Devine Street, into one modern building to serve the children and families of Sarnia's core area.

In December, 2007 the Ministry of Education announced an allocation of \$7.2 million in funding for a new school providing the Board followed through with the Accommodation Review process for the closure of Devine Street Public School. In October 2008 the Ministry announced an increase of 7% in capital funding benchmark which includes 4% to reflect higher construction costs and 3% to recognize the costs of providing energy efficiency or other green school features in new schools and additions.

That process began with the establishment of an Accommodation Review Committee consisting of parents, Trustees, the Principal, a student, a community representative and the Director of Education. The School Council Chair of Devine Street Public School was selected to act as Chair of this committee. Five public meetings were held in the library of the school between November 26, 2007 and May 6, 2008. Attendance from the public ranged from 9 to 16 participants with the majority being interested members of the Johnston Memorial School Community.

The Accommodation Review Committee worked through a School Valuation Template that encouraged discussion on the positive and negative aspects of the school. The deficiencies of the school building were identified by parents and the capital maintenance needs were outlined by Board staff. Devine Street Public School is a two-story building with a small gym and washrooms located in the basement. It is not accessible by government standards and the multiple entry points cause concern for the safety of staff and students. The building's infrastructure, mechanical and electrical systems are in need of replacement.

There have been too few students registered at Devine Street Public School since 2006 to offer a full program with Junior Kindergarten eliminated that year and Senior Kindergarten and grade one cancelled in subsequent years. In September 2008 the program began in grade two. With a current enrolment of 75 and a continued decline projected students would be much better served in a consolidated school with transportation provided where distance regulations applied. Enrollment at Johnston Memorial Public School has also declined with current student population being 343.

A factor that has impacted the enrolment of city schools for some time is the increasing number of students attending schools outside of designated boundaries. For example, in the school year 2007-08 there were 123 students living within the boundaries of Devine Street and Johnston Memorial Public Schools enrolled in other schools. Many attend programs, such as Special

Education or French Immersion offered in specific schools. Others may wish to and would be eligible to return to the new consolidated school.

At the same time there were 35 students attending Johnston and Devine from out of boundary which is allowed by Board policy on the "providing space is available" condition. Out of boundary students are not eligible for transportation.

The current class organizations for Devine Street Public School and Johnston Memorial Public School are included in appendices. A third chart shows a potential organization of a consolidated school with the current 418 students. In preparation for the planning of the design of the new school and the implementation of the consolidation, families of students living within the Devine and Johnston catchment areas but attending out of boundary schools would be contacted to determine if they intend to register at the new school. That would impact the number of classrooms required.

The Committee reported to the Board at a public meeting on May 27, 2007 with three Recommendations supporting the closure of Devine Street Public School and the consolidation of its students with the students of Johnston Memorial Public School into a new school on the current Johnston Memorial site. The Pupil Accommodation/School Closure Regulations of the Lambton Kent District School Board outline timelines in the process that provide for 60 days between the Report from the Accommodation Review Committee and a decision being made by the Board. During this time the Director and other Board Administration will consider the Recommendations and give consideration of any new information that may be received. It is an opportunity for parents or any member of the public to write to Trustees or come to Board Meetings to support or challenge the Recommendations of the Committee.

The Director provided a Response to the Report September 23 which allowed time for public response prior to this final Recommendation being presented to the Board in October. There were no requests for Delegations to Board during this time period nor at any time throughout the year long process. No correspondence, phone calls or messages have been received by the Director. Informal feedback from parents and school staff has been positive with many advantages to the closure and consolidation being cited.

The Accommodation Review process that began October 23, 2007 to study the possible closure of Devine Street Public School has been thorough and open with opportunities for public input during every step. All information collected and reviewed supports the Recommendations of the Accommodation Review Committee and the Administration of the Lambton Kent District School Board.

Recommendation #1

“That the Board approve the closure of Devine Street Public School.”

Recommendation #2

“That the Board approve the consolidation of Devine Street School and Johnston Memorial School into a new school on the current Johnston Memorial site.”

Recommendation #3

“That the Board approve that the dates of closure and consolidation be dependent on the final recommendations of the Planning Committee for Johnston/Devine School Consolidation.”

Recommendation #4

“The process of disposing of the Devine Street School property commence immediately following the closure of the school.”