

CAPITAL COST OF CLOSING SCHOOLS OUT-STRIPPING SAVINGS

Through the work we are doing in reviewing and evaluating school closure decisions, the Ontario Alliance Against School Closures (OAASC) has information suggesting the Ministry of Education is spending more on school consolidations than it is saving, and that an in-depth review of education infrastructure spending generated by these decisions is imperative.

To date, the ministry of education states there is approximately \$1 billion in allocations to support about 150 consolidation projects that reduce excess space.

Based on available public information, the following report identifies that since 2014, almost \$1.73 billion in capital spending directly related to school consolidations has been spent through 301 school closures. The rationale for this expenditure was that potentially \$1 billion in the renewal needs of schools that are closed and scheduled to close could be saved.

Our concern is that Ontarians are not receiving value for their money. That is why we are calling for an immediate value-for-money audit of the public education system. Closing and consolidating schools is proving to be a costly undertaking with capital spending out-stripping the renewal needs of existing schools. We have also identified \$18.8 million that has recently been approved to spend on schools that have since closed or are slated for imminent closure. It is critical that an assessment be done on how school boards are able to obtain this funding to determine if this is an efficient use of capital.

The advancement of a policy of capital spending for school additions, renovations, retrofits and new builds has led to innovative school board capital applications whereby;

- enrollment pressures are being created at consolidated schools to bolster cases for new school builds – deliberately putting students in less-favourable learning environments in order to trigger the release of capital funding from the province,
- schools in a good state of repair are being shuttered in favour of those in worse condition to prop up capital funding applications and,
- growth in a board's urban centers is resulting in the closure of its rural schools.

Unrelated to capital, consolidations have also led to the ballooning cost of student transportation. Since the introduction of the 2015 Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline, these costs have risen 14% to a projected \$919.6 million for 2018. We can easily predict this will increase to \$1 billion in the near future if school closures continue to rapidly proceed.

We are asking for a shift from an infrastructure priority to an education priority. Ensuring our existing schools are in a good state of repair and that communities not lose their only school is paramount.

Therefore, the OAASC is requesting that the provincial leaders of the New Democratic, Progressive Conservative and Liberal parties include in their education platforms, a commitment to extend the current moratorium to include schools slated for closure June 2018 and beyond, and that party leaders commit to an in-depth "value-for-money" audit whereby school board capital application submissions can be reassessed and prioritized before any additional schools close.

THE CAPITAL AND SOCIAL COSTS ARE ADDING UP