

## Declining enrolment and school closings From the 2009 Annual Report on Ontario's Schools

# OVER 150,000 STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS UNDER REVIEW FOR POSSIBLE CLOSING

A new report from People for Education shows that 146 schools are closing or recommended to close in Ontario. A further 16 schools closed in 2008. Over 100 more are undergoing accommodation reviews.

People for Education conducts research on the effects of policy and funding changes on schools. As part of an overall review of Ontario's schools, the group examined Accommodation Reviews in each of the province's 72 school boards. They found that declining enrolment is having a significant impact on boards' ability to provide adequate programs in all schools, leading to the closure of many smaller schools.

### Enrolment decline

The report found that since 1997/98, there has been a 15% decline in average enrolment in Ontario elementary schools. Since 2002, average enrolment in secondary schools has seen a 14% decline.

Because boards and schools receive much of their funding based on numbers of student, declining enrolment can mean reductions in the number and variety of programs schools can offer, an increase in the number of multi-grade classes, and a reduction in specialized teaching staff. The per pupil amounts in the provincial funding formula were developed in 1997 and have changed little since, despite dramatic decreases in average school enrolments.

Enrolment decline is a phenomenon across the country, the result of a decline in the birth rate.

Even Ontario's substantial immigration rate does not offset the general aging of the population; proportionally, there are more seniors and fewer young people.

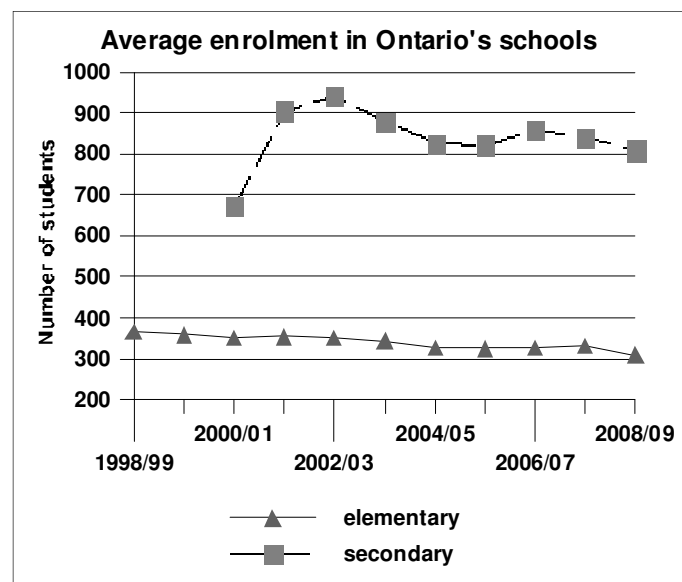
### School principals raise concerns

The report quotes a number of school principals:

As a small school with declining enrolment, it is difficult to maintain staffing to offer the course selection students need. [there should be] extra staffing in small secondary schools particularly in rural areas like ours."  
*Rural Ontario secondary school*

It is extremely difficult to be a school with declining enrolment in the North. The Ministry provides less funding as enrolment declines but we have to teach complete curriculums. We can't teach half a science lab because our budget has been reduced or rent half a bus at a cheaper rate to save money. Being in the biggest geographical board we still have the greatest distances to travel with less money. The unique challenges of the North are forgotten.  
*High school in Northern Ontario*

School closure is a topic that upsets parents and community members. Every so often the school's name is put forth regarding closure. Our enrolment is down this year which makes everyone nervous. Our parent group is fundraising to build a reading garden at the front of the school. They hope that the school will be here for a long time to come. Being on the school closure horizon creates its own problems. Moving ahead is hindered by 'what if'. Smaller rural schools need stability to improve. Provincial funding needs to address the stability issue so that there is security and trust.  
*Rural Ontario elementary school*



## **Declining enrolment and school closings**

### **From the 2009 Annual Report on Ontario's Schools**

#### **School closings**

Closing schools is often the only solution open to boards faced with declining enrolment. Currently there are a total of 146 schools either closing or recommended to close across the province. A total of 40 new schools will be built to replace them. A further 145 are under review. Last year, 16 schools closed. Over 150,000 Ontario students attend schools that are either closing or under review.

In a summary of the school closings People for Education found:

- 16 schools closed in 2008
- 34 schools will close in 2009
- 29 schools will close in 2010
- 8 schools will close in 2011
- 7 schools will close in 2012
- 68 schools are recommended to close over the same time period
- 145 schools are undergoing Accommodation Reviews

#### **School size**

Average school sizes vary across the province, with Northern schools being among the smallest.

The researchers also examined optimal school size and found that despite a popular assumption that fewer, larger schools are more economical and are able to provide a better education, students seem to be more successful in smaller high schools. Graduation rates are higher, and students are more engaged and more likely to participate in activities, even though smaller high schools have fewer activities. The higher graduation rates, in many cases, offset the higher cost of providing a range of programs to smaller classes.

Research also shows that students in disadvantaged communities are significantly more successful in both smaller elementary and secondary schools. The optimal size appears to be under 400 students in elementary schools and between 600 and 900 in secondary.

#### **New vision required**

People for Education noted that recommendations from the Ministry of Education's Declining Enrolment Working Group would benefit Ontario students, schools and communities.

The organization also says that declining enrolment provides an opportunity to "re-think" of the use of school buildings in Ontario. The authors recommend that before the review of funding, the Ministry of Education, in cooperation Ministries such as Children and Youth Services, Health, Health Promotion and Municipal Affairs, should:

- examine research on optimal school size;
- investigate the impact of a community hub model on things like overall health promotion, neighbourhood viability, youth violence and poverty reduction; and
- develop policy and funding to support and promote schools as community hubs.

#### **Annual report coming**

On June 8<sup>th</sup>, People for Education will release its Annual Report on Ontario's Public Schools, with findings from over 1,000 school surveys covering everything from split classes, to music teachers, to parent fundraising.

Complete numbers are available on People for Education's website at: [www.peopleforeducation.com](http://www.peopleforeducation.com)

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### Board by board breakdown:

#### - enrolment decline or increase

#### - total number of schools recommended (by board or by ARC) or slated to close

	2002/3	Projected 2009/10	Percent Increase or Decrease	Total # of schools recommended or slated to close	Total Openings
Algoma	12,624	9,901	-21.57%	4	2
Algonquin & Lakeshore CDSB	12,556	11,089	-11.68%		2
Avon Maitland	18,839	16,452	-12.67%	10	1
Bluewater DSB	21,573	17,391	-19.39%	3	
Brant Halidmand Norfolk CDSB	10,544	10,361	-1.74%		
Bruce-Grey CDSB	3,701	3,498	-5.49%		
Catholic DSB of Eastern ON	13,942	13,466	-3.41%		
CSD catholique Centre-Sud	10,780	12,006	+11.37%		
CSD catholique del'Est ontarien	12,601	10,358	-17.8%		
CSD catholique des Aurores boreales	566	648	+14.49%		
CSD catholique des Grandes Rivieres	8,457	6,597	-21.99%		
CSD catholique du Centre-Est del'ON	15,288	16,956	+10.91%		
CSD catholique du Nouvel-ON	7,673	6,856	-10.65%		
CSD catholique Franco-Nord	3,435	2,822	-17.85%		
CSD des ecoles catholiques du Sud-Ouest	6,379	7,014	+9.95%		
CSD des ecoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario	9,207	9,962	+8.2%		
CSD du Centre Sud-Ouest	5,761	7,029	+22.01%		
CSD du Grand Nord de l'Ontario	2,301	2,056	-10.65%		
CSD du Nord-Est de l'Ontario	1,078	1,533	+42.21%		
DSB of Niagara	43,198	36,723	-14.99%	3	
DSB Ontario North East	9,293	7,264	-21.83%	3	1
Dufferin-Peel CDSB	81,232	82,079	+1.04%	3	1
Durham Catholic DSB	24,962	21,997	-11.88%	5	
Durham DSB	65,068	66,173	+1.7%	3	1
Grand Erie	29,313	25,638	-12.54%	4	
Greater Essex County DSB	37,327	34,234	-8.29%	2	5
Halton Catholic DSB	24,369	27,290	+11.99%		
Halton DSB	43,662	50,348	+15.31%	5	2
Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic DSB	28,449	27,458	-3.48%	8	2
Hamilton- Wentworth DSB	55,076	48,654	-11.66%		
Hastings and Prince Edward DSB	19,106	15,953	-16.5%		
Huron-Perth Catholic DSB	4,994	4,375	-12.39%		
Huron-Superior Catholic DSB	6,319	4,913	-22.25%	8	1
Kawartha Pine Ridge DSB	39,218	33,233	-15.26%	1	1

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Keewatin-Patricia DSB	6,380	4,879	-23.53%		
Kenora Catholic DSB	1,103	1,154	+4.62%		
Lakehead DSB	13,241	9,693	-26.8%		
Lambton Kent DSB	27,206	22,692	-16.59%	1	
Limestone DSB	22,647	19,873	-12.25%	5	2
London District Catholic School Board	21,279	20,871	-1.92%		
Near North DSB	13,010	10,239	-21.3%		
Niagara Catholic DSB	23,474	22,533	-4.01%	3	1
Nipissing-Parry Sound Catholic DSB	3,554	2,840	-20.09%		
Northeastern Catholic DSB	2,763	2,277	-17.59%		
Northwest Catholic DSB	1,301	1,148	-11.76%		
Ottawa Catholic DSB	39,120	36,602	-6.44%	3	
Ottawa-Carleton DSB	72,335	66,183	-8.5%	2	
Peel DSB	122,716	139,560	+13.73%	8	2
Peterborough V N C Catholic DSB	14,103	13,725	-2.68%		
Rainbow DSB	15,529	13,666	-12%	3	
Rainy River DSB	2,874	2,400	-16.49%	2	1
Renfrew County Catholic DSB	5,013	4,235	-15.52%		
Renfrew County DSB	11,358	9,548	-15.94%	3	1
Simcoe County DSB	52,553	50,341	-4.21%	2	
Simcoe Muskoka Catholic DSB	20,945	19,964	-4.68%	3	1
St. Clair Catholic DSB	11,875	9,310	-21.6%	4	2
Sudbury Catholic DSB	7,142	6,220	-12.91%	7	1
Superior North Catholic DSB	839	663	-20.98%		
Superior-Greenstone DSB	2,681	1,643	-38.72%		
Thames Valley DSB	79,529	70,625	-11.2%	26	7
Thunder Bay Catholic DSB	7,828	7,659	+2.16%		
Toronto Catholic DSB	91,947	85,673	-6.82%	4	1
Toronto DSB	270,602	237,102	-12.38%		
Trillium Lakelands DSB	20,163	17,248	-14.46%		
Upper Canada DSB	34,724	28,107	-19.06%	13	1
Upper Grand DSB	32,750	32,222	-1.61%	5	1
Waterloo Catholic DSB	22,549	21,562	-4.38%	6	2
Waterloo Region DSB	56,992	56,648	-0.6%		
Wellington Catholic DSB	7,788	8,035	+3.17%		1
Windsor Essex Catholic DSB	26,361	23,120	-12.29%		
York Catholic DSB	47,683	52,178	+9.43%		
York Region DSB	94,634	106,812	+12.87%		10
<b>Totals</b>				<b>162</b>	<b>53</b>