

## DECLINING ENROLMENT WORKING GROUP

### ***QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION***

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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.

The following set of questions has been developed by the Declining Enrolment Working Group to obtain your input. Please address these questions in your response, and feel free to add further information that will be relevant to declining enrolment in Ontario schools.

#### **(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?

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- 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**

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- 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?