

News Release



September 25, 2009

York Region District School Board to close Aurora school

Aurora, ON - Trustees of the York Region District School Board have voted by a wide margin to close Wells Street Public School permanently, after 117 years of service as an educational institution in downtown Aurora. The school, which was vacated in June 2007 following independent engineering reports that warned of serious structural deficiencies, has operated out of a nearby school with available classroom space, for the past two years.

Board Chair Diane Giangrande said the decision was difficult because of widespread neighbourhood sentiment favouring repair or reconstruction, but that trustees could not ignore the obvious case supporting closure. "The Board was not able to justify spending \$5 million to \$10 million on an aging school building with a clear pattern of declining enrolment, in a community with an abundance of empty classroom space in nearby schools," she said.

Wells Street Public School has been the subject of a year-long review process, which is prescribed by the Ontario Government for any public school district considering a school closure. The review required the formation of a student accommodation review committee, including both Board staff and community members, tasked with completing a detailed evaluation of the school, compiling a report and making recommendations to the trustees.

Throughout the past year, the committee conducted a series of five public meetings to receive public input on the school's future. Another two regularly scheduled trustee meetings were adapted as forums for receiving public delegations on the fate of the school. In April 2009, the student accommodation review committee recommended that the Board renew or replace the school.

Director of Education Bill Hogarth acknowledged the proposal to close Wells Street Public School has been stressful for both community members and many staff of the Board, whose headquarters are also located within the Town of Aurora. "It is regrettable that the process has pitted Board staff against many members of the community who oppose the closure of the school. It is my sincere hope that tonight's decision will be the beginning of a process to restore trust and confidence and return the community to a focus on student achievement," Mr. Hogarth said.

The fate of the school building, which was declared an historic site by the Town of Aurora last year, is yet to be determined.

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