



ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION

Leading Education's Advocates

AMO Community Hubs Panel

August 18, 2015

OPSBA First Vice-President Laurie French Speaking Notes

- Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.
- My organization, the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, represents more than 40 public school boards and school authorities, from Upper Canada's Brockville CI to Niagara's Crossroads Public School and Rainy River's Atikokan High School.
- As the only publicly elected officials responsible for the education of our children and youth, Trustees bring a wealth of expertise to this table and important understanding of the implications for student learning. We are bound by our legal duty to be effective stewards of our board's resources and support student success.
- We've been longstanding advocates of the concept of community hubs, as we believe that through community partnerships we can work collaboratively to improve the social, emotional, mental and physical well-being of our children, youth and the wider community. We have numerous successful examples of these hub-like partnerships in action throughout Ontario as a result of successful efforts together – this renewed focus in Ontario is the difference going forward.

- School boards are committed to supporting any plan that will provide high-quality, accessible services by adapting existing schools into community hubs, provided that we can ensure viable programming for students. This can be done in many situations, although hubs are not always a solution in every existing school building, and hubs alone will not provide a solution to avoiding school closures. We must continue to manage our schools.
- We're also in support of the concept of community hubs as it applies to new school builds and have made some great progress in bringing education and community service partnerships together with more to come as capital investments are made if Boards and Municipalities can work together. Even schools already closed can provide examples 'second lives' – we have seen Senior Centres, health clinics and more in some of these buildings, remembering that market value is very different in rural areas.
- We need to remember that the people who elect municipal councillors, mayors and reeves are the same electorate as those who elect trustees. They expect us to work together in the best interests of all of our constituents and the time is right to put in place processes that support this work.
- Our Trustees were fortunate enough to meet with Karen on a couple of occasions during her consultation and our staff have been in frequent contact with her staff as well. A few of the principles that were part of our recent submission to her, we recommended that:
- All 'hub' partners will adhere to the high quality standards of the services they provide

- Facilities and services in a hub will be accessible and equitable for all members of local and unique communities, both rural and urban
- Language support will be offered based on a community's unique needs
- Establish hubs that will meet an identified community need or service requirement
- Provincial direction is necessary towards a shared commitment between partners to deliver on local community hub agreements
- We were pleased to see many of our recommendations, suggestions and comments reflected in last week's Community Hubs Framework and Action Plan, so thank you to those on this panel who had a hand in crafting that document. Many of the barriers we have all been challenged by in past efforts have been clearly identified and next steps should enable the work, but the report also notes that hubs aren't only in schools.
- In particular, I wanted to mention some elements in the plan that are directly in sync with OPSBA's priorities for this work for education:
 - The acknowledgement of the singular mandate of school boards to "look at the education requirements in a community", which often leads to taking on the burden of being responsible for assessing the full value of schools as community assets. We are pleased this will be examined through the reassessment of the concept of Sale at Fair Market Value, and the potential lengthening of the circulation process for surplus property.
 - It was good to see recognition that the current education funding formula does not properly take into account community partner use of school space and we look forward to participating in

consultation to improve on that issue for full benefit of community use of schools.

- The acknowledgement that boards and principals may need funding or staff resource to assist with property management of newly created hubs, as well as the mention of security and liability issues that will need to be examined in every future community hub.
- And very importantly, the acknowledgement that the policy solutions that will work for urban and rural settings are very different, again supporting that a community hub is not always the solution to a school closure, considering provincial declining enrolment, and particularly in rural areas. We need to seek out the most viable opportunities for all partners. Student programming inevitably suffers when school enrolment drops below a certain threshold, particularly when all students are funded equally in each community, whether it's downtown Toronto, a medium sized City, or a remote northern town. In situations like this, filling empty space in a school with integrated services from community partners may actually harm the educational opportunities available to each student in the school when low numbers of children result in triple or quadruple grades, or required secondary courses cannot be offered.
- I'd like to highlight a couple examples of which we can be proud and that demonstrate the great possibilities that exist - in addition to our Moderator Mayor Sweet's example of General Panet's K-12 school in Petawawa, I can speak of a recent example in my own Limestone DSB - Limestone staff recently worked with the City of Kingston to plan for a shared Recreation Centre at Shannon Park and the adjacent Rideau Heights school property.
- Plans include renovation and expanded recreation facilities capitalizing on school infrastructure and property with a large

new gymnasium-sized multi-purpose room, allowing for school day as well as evening community use. Opportunities also include shared maintenance of the building and grounds in partnership.

- Another example is associated with the Halton DSB - this model offers a one-stop shopping option for families and communities. Named 'Our Kids Network', it is a Halton-wide partnership of organizations and agencies serving children and youth. The network includes the Halton DSB, Halton Catholic DSB, Halton Children's Aid Society and Halton Regional Police Service. Replicating this model broadly across Ontario would require more flexibility in each sector's funding envelope.
- In conclusion, we are excited about the possibilities for all Ontarians and want to ensure school boards are part of discussions going forward. When I consider my healthcare career I can similarly see so many opportunities to integrate the public services our shared students, families and constituents' need that will improve the access and improve the outcomes that are important to us all.
- My own Board has reached out to the four Municipalities in our area (some Boards have more), and established community partner tables to meet periodically and explore opportunities together.
- We now look forward to working together with municipalities, the provincial government and our many other community partners and services to provide the very best in integrated services for each unique Ontario community. Thank you.