Independent Facilitator Report

Review of the Ottawa-Carleton DSB school closure decisions

June 2005

Joan Green
June 15, 2005

Dear Mr. Minister:

Please find enclosed my report of the review of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board’s (OCDSB) school closure decisions, together with recommendations.

Over the last two weeks, I have spent four days with students, parents, community members, board officials, trustees, teachers and principals hearing their views on the process used and the decision made by the OCDSB to close two secondary schools, Laurentian High School and J. S. Woodsworth Secondary School, effective the end of this month — June 2005. I have received and reviewed a great deal of documentation which was supplied by the OCDSB, the Ministry of Education and student parent and community groups.

In light of the “Good Places To Learn” document released in February 2005, the process the board employed to close these schools has serious shortcomings. The board, however, felt their conclusions stemmed from a commitment to using resources wisely in order to provide a viable and engaging program for the students of these two high schools and, indeed, all students in the jurisdiction.

I appreciated the opportunity to conduct this review and offer my advice. I was struck by the common concern voiced by all parties with whom I discussed these school closures. Everyone had the same goal although many had conflicting opinions about how it could be realized. That goal was, of course, to provide the best educational experience possible for the students in these two schools. Because public education is the key to a civil society, I believe, as I am sure you do, that having open and transparent processes around important educational decisions is essential. The finalized version of the new guidelines in “Good Places To Learn” should help avoid the distress that was clearly felt by some parents, students and staff in the process that I have just reviewed.

In summary, the process the board undertook to come to the conclusion to close these two schools was far from perfectly aligned to Good Places To Learn, but, I believe the outcome, the closure of these two schools, was the right one for the most important people involved: the students.

I want to extend my thanks to the staff of the Ottawa Regional Office of the Ministry of Education, Ms. Monique Chateauvert and Mr. Allan Kathnelson for their professional support, advice and facilitation of my meetings with so many interested stakeholders in such a short time.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan Green, Independent Facilitator
INTRODUCTION

On May 9, 2005, you asked me to act as the Independent Facilitator to review the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board’s (OCDSB) decision, taken on December 16, 2004 to close Laurentian High School and J.S. Woodsworth Secondary School.

The government of Ontario and you, as Minister of Education, have initiated steps to ensure that the obligations that school boards and the Province have to schools and their communities when school closures are being considered are fully addressed.

If school boards made closure decisions after the December 2003 request for a school closure moratorium, and the schools in question had not closed, the Ontario government committed to providing an independent facilitator to determine if the spirit of the new closure guidelines and capital planning process had been met. In my capacity as the independent facilitator of the process in OCDSB, you asked me to consider two questions in my review:

1. Did the OCDSB adhere to the spirit of the New School Closure Guidelines outlined in the document, released by the government February 17, 2005?

AND

2. Would the students and the school communities of Laurentian High School (LHS) and J. S. Woodsworth Secondary School (JSW) have benefited substantially if the new guidelines had been used to conduct the school closure process?

With the logistical and recording assistance of the able staff of the Ministry of Education Regional Office in Ottawa, I conducted a thorough review of the chronology of events, processes and public consultations which preceded the board’s December 16 school closure decisions. For both schools (see Appendix for schedule and numbers), I meet with:

- Senior board officials and trustees on three separate occasions
- School councils of both schools
- Parent and community groups twice
- Students’ council along with other interested students
- Principals of the closing and the receiving schools where the students are being redirected
- Minister Jim Watson, MPP for the riding in which both schools slated for closure are located (by phone)
- Three interviews with media, (two print and one television)
- Ottawa-Carleton OSSTF president (other labour leaders were interested in meeting but were unable to do so due to pending labour disruptions).
I also visited the schools scheduled to be closed and three of the five receiving schools. The three which I visited are scheduled to receive over 90 per cent of the students who would be redirected. In addition to the school visits, I met with the principals of all the receiving schools in a collective meeting.

Of course, I have received and reviewed a great deal of documentation which was supplied by the OCDSB, the ministry, student, parent and community groups, as well as extensive media coverage on the proposed closings.

**REVIEW OF THE CLOSURES AND CAPITAL PLANNING PROCESSES**

The following outlines the OCDSB’s process and steps leading to December 16, 2004 school closure decisions:

- The OCDSB had conducted studies which identified the need to consolidate secondary school programs, particularly in the Ottawa West area of the city. Declining overall enrolment as well as a more flexible student transfer policy resulted in several schools with low enrolment. The problem had been identified during the “Student Accommodation 2004 and Beyond” study, but the board did not approve the closure of any secondary schools as a result of that study. It was speculated by senior staff of the school board that, because most of the process at that time was conducted under the supervisor during the time when the powers of the trustees were suspended, the recommendation to close LHS were seen as associated with the supervisor rather than the board’s oversight and was thus rejected. In addition to the need to improve students’ access to viable schools, closure of both schools would allow the board to reduce its annual expenditures by about $1.5 million. Of course, in the short term, the board will have to expend money to ensure the smooth transition of students to their new schools.

- At the June 14, 2004 meeting of the OCDSB, trustees requested staff to present proposals to appropriate committees of the Board re plans for “meaningful consultation with stakeholders…to address the issues associated with program and school viability (i.e., critical mass/minimum enrolment thresholds) at the secondary level” with a view to making decisions with regard to school consolidation and the challenges facing small and rural schools. There was a particular focus at the time on secondary schools with very low enrolments. LHS and JSW, identified as the schools with the lowest enrolments, were located close to each other and to schools with surplus capacity. The trustees directed staff to consider the Ottawa West and Merivale sub-area.

- On September 13, 2004, the board approved the process and timelines for a secondary school consolidation study for this area of the city to address issues of program and school viability. The staff was asked to provide the consultation plan for the board’s consideration and the date for final school consolidation decisions was set for December 8, 2004.
• On September 30, 2004, the board wrote to you, Minister, to advise that the consolidation study was underway because low enrolments were having a negative impact on students. This letter provided the timeline and the process the board planned to use and asked if there were any concerns that should be considered as the school closure process was being initiated.

• On October 19, 2004, staff identified both LHS and JSW as “candidates for closure” making three outcomes possible: closure of either school, both schools, or neither school.

• On October 26, 2004, an open house was held to meet with staff and community of the two schools.

• On November 15, 2004, board staff met with representatives of the Ottawa-Carleton Association of Secondary Schools’ Working Group.

• On November 16, 2004, the board sat as Committee of the Whole and received 33 delegations from school councils, students and parents of JSW and LHS.

• On Nov 29, 2004, the staff report recommended LHS for closure at the Committee of the Whole meeting of the board.

• On December 2, 2004, a motion to close LHS was defeated and another motion to close JSW was introduced, but deferred until December 8, 2004.

• On December 8, 2004, the motion to close both LHS and JSW was debated in Committee of the Whole. The committee heard delegations and the decision was deferred to the Board meeting of December 16, 2004.

• On December 16, 2004, the board voted to approve the motion to close both schools.

In addition to the opportunities for public input outlined above, staff provided eight separate information packages which included responses to inquiries and correspondence from the public. These were circulated at Board meetings to trustees and members of the public in attendance.

At my final meeting with the trustees, the vice-chair of the OCDSB, David Moen, who chaired the board’s School Closure Committee, described the OCDSB’s approach for these school closures as deploying the board’s resources in the most effective way to maximize educational opportunity for all students.
QUESTION #1

Alignment of the Board’s Process to the Spirit of “Good Places To Learn”

The first question you asked me to consider was whether or not the OCDSB’s school closure processes conformed to the spirit of the New Closure Guidelines outlined in “Good Places To Learn”.

At the outset, it is important to note that, as we are all aware, the OCDSB completed their closure processes two months before the Good Places To Learn document was released. The board argued that the timeline and process adhered to school closure process in effect at the time and took account of previous discussions. The trustees claimed the review of these schools’ viability was not a surprise and that timelines were provided in advance and published at the beginning of the study.

Although this is the board’s position, there is no doubt in my mind that the communities affected by this school closure would have had a much better opportunity to participate in discussion and contribute to the deliberations if the school closure guidelines had been available and had been used by the OCDSB as they considered the closing of LHS and JSW.

That said, I will now provide a brief analysis of the alignment, or lack thereof, for each of the components in the ten-point New School Closure Guideline.

1. A school valuation process determined with the help of a public committee and approved by the ministry

It is apparent that this school valuation process did not occur as envisioned by these guidelines.

No doubt, in the course of discussions regarding the closure, there was consideration of the value of the school to the student and the system, but there was no formal process to engage community members with representatives of the board in a discussion which would consider value to the community and value to the local economy in an open and transparent way.

The driving force behind the decisions seemed to be the low enrolments in each school compared to their capacity and the consequential negative impact on the provision of a full range of programs. It could be argued that because the educational experience of the students in these schools was considered, the value to the student was assessed by the board but not through discussion with the students, parents and the community. When challenged on this point, the board’s response was “we are awaiting ministry clarification on ‘valuation processes’.” According to senior officials of the board, the OCDSB report did identify potential impacts on students, programs, and the community.
Economic Impact: The board asserted that its analysis of the impact of its consolidation plans considered the potential economic impact of the decision to close LHS and JSW, and concluded that there was no specific economic impact of the closure of these two schools. While it is true that most schools have wide-ranging value to their communities no matter what the school’s liabilities might be, given the proximity of the receiving high schools in this urban setting, it can’t be reasonably argued that the closure of this school would have a negative impact on the local economy or influence real estate values in the community.

The parent groups with which I met did not focus their objections on a negative economic impact of these closures on the community. Rather, they centered their objections on the loss of the sense of community and tradition which had been established in each school over many years and the particular aspects of the academic and extra-curricular program which they valued, as well as the contributions made by staff to the satisfaction parents and students had about their schools.

JSW is situated in a residential area where there are other high schools. Merivale High School, which will receive most of the JSW students, is quite close to JSW. The impact of the closing of JSW on local businesses will be minimal as the commercial areas on Merivale Road will continue to be the local destination for students from the area. As it is very likely that the JSW building will continue to be used as a publicly funded high school, there should be no impact on neighboring property values.

LHS is located in a multi use neighborhood and is bounded by two high volume arterial roads as well as a significant office complex. While local businesses have benefited from the presence of LHS staff and students, they form only a very small portion of the retailers overall customer base.

While the board has not yet made a decision on future uses for the LHS site, it is unlikely that there will be any negative impact on local property values. Local residents have always had a choice of a number of secondary schools to attend, and in fact, the current student population of LHS was drawn from a very wide area.

There is every reason to believe that students and families from these two schools will continue to contribute to the local economy in their new schools which are in relatively close proximity to the closing schools.

Community Use of Schools: There was an analysis done of the two schools’ use by the communities and it was determined that much of the use of the schools outside of school hours was by the board’s Continuing Education Department, and that accommodations have been made for most of the other users at alternate Board locations. Depending on the final determination of the use of the two facilities to be closed by the OCDSB, the schools may be available in the future for use by the community.
The decision for the use of LHS will be made in the context of the board’s five-year capital plan and, depending on the disposition of JSW, the facility may be available through another school board for use by the public.

2. **Five-year capital plans that name the potential surplus schools and indicate overall system requirements to meet program needs**

There was no five-year capital plan. However, there was a year-long, system-wide accommodation study (Student Accommodation: 2004 and Beyond) which considered the system’s facilities needs and identified areas of concern and underutilization in both elementary and secondary schools.

When questioned on this point, senior officials of the board stated that, although some of the recommendations presented to the board at the completion of this study were not approved at the time, the study did provide trustees and the public with a framework for the key issues involved in the subsequent three month closure process, i.e. low enrolment and program viability and the possibility of consolidation in the Ottawa West and Merivale sub–area. The decision to close these two schools was rooted in the identification of this part of the jurisdiction as having a large number of high schools and significant unused capacity.

3. **One year’s notice to school communities of consideration for closure**

The formal notice to the communities involved was about 90 days. Both schools were identified as “candidates for closure” at the October 19, 2004, meeting of the board. The public process, which resulted in the school closures, lasted three months from the beginning to the December 16 motion to close the two schools.

4. **Schools may only be processed for closure once in a five-year period, pending legislative approval**

Both schools had been considered for closure several times in the last few years, and from the viewpoint of the communities, “were saved” several times by the board defeating motions for closure. It is the viewpoint of members of the two school councils that their schools were targeted repeatedly for closure, thus exacerbating declining enrolment.

5. **A draft of the school valuation plan in plain language must be made available to the public within two months of providing notice**

No such draft was either written or made available, since it was not part of the existing OCDSB process. As one of the trustees put it in a written communication to me, “If one stretches the definition of valuation to the accommodation review report generated by staff, then the public had approximately four weeks to consider the valuation of its schools and two weeks, or so, to comment on them.”
6. **Several opportunities for public input must be held with wide notice given**

   1. On October 26, 2004, an open house was held to meet with staff and community of the two schools.


   3. On November 16, 2004, the board sat as Committee of the Whole and received 33 delegations from school councils, students and parents of JSW and LHS.

7. **A task force is to be appointed. The task force, headed by a trustee, will have broad membership and hold public hearings, soliciting feedback and gaining community consensus**

   While no task force was appointed, the local trustees appeared to be extensively involved in the process and in dialogue with the communities of the two schools both in formal meetings and informally. The vice-chair of the board chaired the deliberations when the board convened in Committee of the Whole to hear delegations and consider staff closure recommendations.

8. **The final school valuation with the committee recommendation must be made available 60 days before the board meeting where the decision will be made and a public meeting must be held to explain the ratings provided**

   This component of the guidelines was not implemented. The entire process took ninety days and the only “reports” back to the public were in the form of question and answer packages (eight in total), which were distributed to members of the public who made inquiries or who attended the public board meetings where the proposed closures were being considered.

9. **Boards’ decisions can be appealed on the grounds of process. Upon receipt of a petition with 50 signatures or 50 per cent of the affected parents, whichever is smaller, the ministry will cause an independent facilitator to conduct a review of the process to determine whether it matches the provincial guidelines**

   I don’t believe the board had any process in place for appeal other than the understanding that the minister would appoint an independent facilitator to review their process because the closures occurred after the December 2003 request for a moratorium.

10. **Boards will be responsible for tracking student retention and performance from the closed schools.**

    This board has gone to great lengths to redirect students to appropriate and supportive programs in their new schools and has committed to tracking the academic progress of affected students. There is ongoing discussion about this intention.
PARENT AND COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE

Overview of both schools

There was considerable community dissatisfaction with the process which parents found to be “very abbreviated, even by the board’s admission.” In the view of the JSW parents who met with me, “a decision had already been made at the outset and there were hidden agendas from the beginning.” This view about “a hidden agenda” was fuelled by the public discussion in the media and in the community about the possible sale of JSW to the French Public Board. It is important to note that the OCDSB vigorously asserts that the sale of the school to the French Public Board was never part of their consideration to close the school and was discussed and considered only after closing decisions had been made.

Many of the LHS and JSW parents made the argument that small schools are better and seemed prepared to live with limited program choices for their students with the small school atmosphere as a trade-off. As the board would argue, this view is often short-lived when real and pervasive program cuts become a reality due to low enrolment.

Parents who spoke to me believed that their school’s program was viable or could be made so if the board had considered other strategies to enhance enrolment at their school or had designated other schools as closure candidates. One LHS parent said that “because the school had been identified for closure twice in eight months — parents and staff had to use energy to work to save the school rather than improving it.”

Some believe that the fact that JSW and LHS have been discussed as possible closure schools several times in the last few years has contributed very substantially to the current low enrolments in the schools.

Overall, the representatives of the two communities of some parents, students and interested non-parent community members who met with me complained that the process was not as they believe it should be to serve their interests. It should be pointed out that there were not large numbers of participants in attendance at the public meetings (about 30 for LHS meeting and about 45 for the JSW meeting), so it is reasonable to conclude that many other community members have moved on and have accepted the closure decision. There was not a lot of time for advance notice of these public meetings with me as the Independent Facilitator, but parent groups were given a second evening opportunity to meet with me if they were unable to attend the first evening.

LHS Parents’ Concerns

- LHS parents told me that from their perspective, “the two schools were set up in competition with each other and that the criteria for the decisions weren’t clear and, because the board couldn’t make a decision to choose between the two schools and the process was incomplete, they decided to close them both.”
• LHS parents were very concerned about potential lack of support for students with special needs in their new schools. They felt that students have to choose between support for their challenges and adequate program.

• Some LHS parents wanted to use the schools’ facilities to create a Centre of Excellence for Special Education. They felt very strongly that the students in special education programs at LHS benefited from the interaction among the special education programs in the school and that students with challenges had many adults to whom they could turn for help with so many special programs in the school.

• One parent captured a general appreciation for the building’s facilities in this way: “The board is looking at what it would cost to run the school: they should look at what it would cost to replace it…No one would fund this kind of building today. This closure is a permanent loss for all students in Ottawa.”

• LHS parents also expressed concern regarding transportation for their students to get to the schools to which they have been redirected as many students currently walk to school.

**JSW Parents’ Concerns**

• Parents who attended the meetings with me stated that they felt the process was a sham as there was a predetermined decision because of possibility of selling JSW to the French Public Board (CEPEO).

• Some parents and community members felt that no proper valuation of the school was made or taken into account and the materials that they submitted were ignored.

• They objected to this process as it was the third closure process in three years.

• JSW parents felt the process was abbreviated.

• JSW said terms of reference were not used in making the decision.

• Although the Board’s motions raised four possible outcomes along the way, the JSW parents felt the 2-school closure option was only given one week for consideration and that the Trustees rejected the staff recommendation to close Laurentian alone. (Looked like it was either one or the other and then suddenly it was both.)

• Despite the Board’s 2004 accommodation study, JSW parents felt that there was no plan accompanying the decisions.

• JSW parents expressed the view that the OCDSB “had it in for our school for a long time but were in love with Laurentian” and that board staff “brought good data to support closing just Laurentian” but the Board rejected their “expert” advice.

• There was suspicion among JSW community members that the Board was closing in order to build a new school in Nepean South.

In summary, many JSW parents believe that the schools were pitted against each other. Ironically, given that perception, parents from JSW continued to argue that closing Laurentian could fill their school and that LHS was more expensive to maintain over ten years because of shops and number of facilities. Overall, JSW parents thought the process
was not transparent and believed that “JSW is a school that works” and contended that the closure of JSW was a business choice rather than program choice.

**Student Perspectives**

I met with the student councils and a few other students from each school. At LHS, the students were concerned about the loss of what they called “a family feeling” at their school. They felt the process had been too short and they felt the decision was already made before the process began. They argued to keep their school open but call it something else to rekindle interest in the school because, from their perspective, declining enrolment was a good thing as it made some of their classes smaller. Like their parents, they were worried about transportation issues.

Students from JSW felt they were targeted unfairly by trustees during the presentations to the Board because they were questioned directly about their rationale for their conclusions whereas there were few pressing questions asked of the LHS student presenters. The board response to this was that, while the LHS students made heartfelt statements about the value of their school, they didn’t present the kind of analytical information that the JSW students offered and thus, did not invite the same kind of questioning from the trustees.

Overall, the students didn’t believe their presentations had much impact or that they had ample time to have their views considered. One group of students said, “A public meeting to describe what the valuation meant would have been helpful.”

After outlining the new school closure guidelines in “Good Places To Learn”, I asked both groups of students, “Would you have felt better about the closing of the school if these guidelines had been implemented even if the board’s decision remained the same?” One group of JSW students answered, “Yes, we would have felt better about the decision.”

There is no doubt in my mind that the new guidelines would have offered a superior process which would have resulted in greater community participation and thus satisfaction. That being said, I want to turn now to the second question, which you asked me to consider.

**QUESTION #2**

*“Would the students have been substantially better served if the new guidelines had been used in this school closure process?”*

Notwithstanding the apparent weaknesses of the consultation process employed in this situation by the OCDSB when compared to the spirit of the new school closure guidelines in the government’s “Good Places To Learn” document, I believe that the interests of the students would not have been substantially better served if the new guidelines had been used.
I believe this to be the case for the following reasons:

1. While it is fair to say that the board’s consultation with the community fell very short of what was envisioned in the “Good Places To Learn” document, the same cannot be said regarding the board’s attention to the transition process which addressed placement and program for redirected students.

I visited three of the receiving schools, the combination of which will provide schooling for over 90 per cent of the students affected by this closure. I also met at separate meeting with all the principals of the receiving schools and was very impressed with the quality of the planning that had been done to ensure all incoming students from the closed schools would have a very good experience and excellent educational programs in their new schools should the closures proceed.

Principals, vice-principals and guidance counsellors from the closing schools worked with their counterparts in the receiving schools on a student-by-student basis. They consulted with parents and students to explore every avenue available in order to create suitable programs of study for all affected students. Issues were identified that needed to be resolved and staff worked together to minimize disruption to students. Work was done with unions and federations to assist in staff transitions. When I met with OSSTF, no significant outstanding issues were raised as problematic in terms of staff being prepared to work in the best interests of students when the closures were completed.

2. Secondary schools with relatively small student populations, particularly those in isolated rural areas where there are no other high schools within a reasonable distance, often strategize to provide excellent programs and meet the needs of their students. However, in the case of these two OCDSB schools where program has been seriously curtailed due to declining enrolment, there are other options because this is an area with several high schools.

It is apparent that extensive adjustments have been required to maintain level of service to students in both schools. As the student population declines further, those program opportunities have become more and more difficult to provide. Both schools have had to cut courses and reduce extracurricular activities. Most of the courses in these low enrolment schools are in single sections making timetable conflicts the order of the day. Students find themselves settling for second, and often third, choices for a substantial part of their program. In this academic year, 50% of JSW students had timetable conflicts and 59 per cent of LHS students had to make these hard and often unsatisfying choices.

At LHS, with an enrolment of 300 in the regular program, this has meant:

- Offering courses every other year
- Reducing the number of courses offered
- Holding split and multilevel classes with more than one grade and having students studying at the applied and academic level in the same class
• Encouraging students to take any of the available courses to fill their timetables and earn credits instead of taking spares
• Encouraging students to take night school, summer school and on-line and correspondence courses.

The current regular program enrolment at LHS of 300 this academic year and the projection of only 180 in the regular program by 2009-10 is partially the result of the number of students who have chosen to transfer to other secondary schools, rather than attend LHS. There is not much reason to believe that students would have chosen to attend LHS if it remained open and students from other schools were redirected there.

The 2004-05 course calendar that LHS published had many course offered. The reality was that with the low enrolment, the school was unable to offer many of the courses advertised.

In preparation for the move to Brookfield, Merivale or Woodroffe (the receiving secondary schools for LHS students), every student at LHS has had the opportunity to consult with guidance staff in the receiving schools to go over option sheets. Guidance staff and the staff who participated in IPRCs reported that students and parents reviewed the students’ course selections for appropriateness and prerequisites, and that all concerned were satisfied with course selections for next year.

The concern of one parent regarding the lack of availability of a particular technology course at Brookfield has been addressed by the creation of a special position: a full-time co-op teacher at Brookfield who will provide students with opportunities to access learning situations and credits in technology areas.

It is also noteworthy that after the Adaptive Program at LHS is phased out in a year’s time, many other courses at LHS would have had to be cancelled due to insufficient enrolment.

At JSW, with a declining enrolment in the last two years from 682 in 2002-03 to around 500 in 2004-05, the following actions were taken:

• Cancelling some courses
• Combining applied and sheltered ESL classes
• Multi-grade courses
• Scheduling courses outside of the regular timetable schedule
• Increasing class size in some classes due to low enrolments in others.

I am persuaded by the board’s data and information that there is little doubt that the loss of Grade 13/OAC combined with a slight decline in Grade 9 enrolments for two years has presented JSW with real challenges in providing a comprehensive set of educational opportunities for its students.
Merivale High School, which will receive most of the JSW students in the regular program, will offer widely enhanced program choices for students redirected from JSW. The students will have approximately 26 new course offerings from which to choose that were not offered at JSW in 2004-2005. This comparison is predicated only on a comparison to what was not offered this year at JSW. Given the anticipated lower projection for enrolment next year at JSW if it had not been closed, there would have been even less course availability for students.

The issue of program pathways is also a critical factor to consider in terms of Merivale’s enhanced educational opportunities for students. Merivale has traditionally been able to offer full high school program pathways for students in Applied, Academic and gifted programs. Next year, there will also be a selection of workplace destination courses to provide realistic pathways for student going directly into the world of work. Large arts and technology programs also allow the school to meet the needs and interests of a wide variety of students.

A listing of additional courses available at Merivale follows:

- Arts: 9 additional courses
- Business Studies: 2 additional courses
- Canadian & World Studies: 1 additional course
- English: 1 additional course
- Health & Physical Education: 3 additional courses
- Math: 1 additional course
- Technological Studies: 9 additional courses

3. LHS was built in 1958, and according to the board’s estimates, its capital renewal needs would be one of the most costly secondary facilities in the system. This expenditure would result in a significant drain on the board’s resources in light of the need to provide appropriate facilities for all its students.

From a facility perspective, JSW is a small secondary school. Using the ministry-rated capacity as a measure, it is the smallest urban secondary school in the OCDSB. To quote from the staff report to the board, “Without significant physical change, J.S. Woodworth Secondary School will continue to face challenges with respect to providing choice and opportunity for students under the new secondary program. In order to accommodate 1,000 students or more, JSW would require the siting of a number of portables.”

4. Additional resources both in terms of staff and program resources have been allocated to the receiving schools to ensure a smooth transition for the redirected students. Additional vice-principal time has been allocated to the receiving schools. The current vice-principal at JSW is transferring to Merivale which will receive over 90 per cent of JSW students, thus ensuring some continuity for students.

The vice-president at LHS is transferring to Woodroffe Secondary School which will receive a large number of the LHS students. Many teachers from both schools are
transferring to the schools where the JSW and LHS students will be reassigned so the students will be working with teachers who are familiar to them.

5. Transportation issues were a concern, particularly at LHS. To address these concerns, the board has waived its regular income criteria for providing bus passes in order to accommodate the redirected students from these two schools.

The distance in kilometres between schools (which is not excessive) is outlined below:

- JSW to Merivale 1.2 km
- JSW to Laurentian 2.9 km
- JSW to Brookfield 4.4 km
- LHS to Merivale 2.4 km
- LHS to Brookfield 4.9 km
- LHS to Nepean 3.5 km

6. The board has given priority to LHS and JSW students for transfers to the school of their choice where space is available. Thus far, all student transfer requests have been accommodated with the exception of four special education placements where the required program was not available at the student’s school of first choice.

7. The board has commenced the required renovations to accommodate the redirected students in the receiving schools and there has been extensive consultation with principals of the closing and receiving schools by senior officials of the board to ensure that the incoming students in the receiving schools will be taught in facilities appropriate to their needs.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, Minister, I believe the answer to your first question is that the OCDSB school closure procedures do not honour the full spirit of the new guidelines which the government has proposed in “Good Places To Learn.”

I think the new school closure policy will require an enhanced consultation effort with authentic opportunities for school communities to help shape decisions re school closures which are painful at the best of times, even with very good processes in place.

Should the OCDSB embark on future school consolidation studies, and this is likely, they will benefit from working with the government to develop a model school closing process for urban settings. The new guidelines outlined in Good Places To Learn, and the policy that will evolve from them, will equip school boards to genuinely engage their school and broader communities in these decisions.

That said, as I have indicated already, I believe the answer to your vitally important second question about whether the students would have been better served if the new guidelines had been used, is also clear.
I am convinced that, even if the new guidelines had been the framework in which these decisions were made, the closing of the schools would have been the likely outcome as it seems to be the best solution in the circumstances to allow the system to deliver a diversified and balanced curriculum which meets the needs of all students, and to provide a multi-streamed and multi-optional learning experience for the affected students.

I think there is evidence that the students who will leave J.S. Woodsworth Secondary School and Laurentian High School will experience at least an equal (in the case of students in special education) and more often than not (in the case of students in the regular program), a better program than they are currently experiencing.

I recommend that you accept the closing of Laurentian High School and J.S. Woodsworth Secondary School as proposed by the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board.
APPENDIX: SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS HELD BY THE INDEPENDENT FACILITATOR & SCHOOL BOARD PROFILES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>STAKEHOLDER GROUP</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MAY 12, 2005</td>
<td>OTTAWA-CARLETON DSB</td>
<td>Evening meeting with trustees and senior staff</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 13, 2005</td>
<td>MINISTRY REGIONAL OFFICE</td>
<td>Background consultations with ministry staff and minister’s office staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY 13, 2005</td>
<td>LAURENTIAN HIGH SCHOOL</td>
<td>Meeting with principal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY 13, 2005</td>
<td>LAURENTIAN HIGH SCHOOL</td>
<td>Meeting with school council</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY 13, 2005</td>
<td>J.S. WOODSWORTH HIGH SCHOOL</td>
<td>Meeting with principal, staff and trustee</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY 13, 2005</td>
<td>J.S. WOODSWORTH HIGH SCHOOL</td>
<td>Meeting with school council</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY 13, 2005</td>
<td>J.S. WOODSWORTH HIGH SCHOOL</td>
<td>Meeting with students’ council</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY 13, 2005</td>
<td>J.S. WOODSWORTH HIGH SCHOOL</td>
<td>Evening meeting with parents and students</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY 13, 2005</td>
<td>LAURENTIAN HIGH SCHOOL</td>
<td>Evening meeting with parents and students</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY 24, 2005</td>
<td>OTTAWA-CARLETON DSB</td>
<td>Meeting with senior staff</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY 24, 2005</td>
<td>MERIVALE HS</td>
<td>Meeting with the principal and staff</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY 24, 2005</td>
<td>BROOKFIELD HS</td>
<td>Meeting with the principal and staff</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY 24, 2005</td>
<td>WOODROOFE HS</td>
<td>Meeting with the principal and staff</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY 24, 2005</td>
<td>OSSTF</td>
<td>Meeting with the Ottawa president</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY 24, 2005</td>
<td>OTTAWA-CARLETON DSB</td>
<td>Second evening meeting with trustees</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY 24, 2005</td>
<td>J.S. WOODSWORTH HIGH SCHOOL</td>
<td>Second evening meeting with parents and students</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY 24, 2005</td>
<td>LAURENTIAN HIGH SCHOOL</td>
<td>Second evening meeting with parents and students</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY 25, 2005</td>
<td>OTTAWA-CARLETON DSB</td>
<td>Third meeting with trustees</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY 25, 2005</td>
<td>MEDIA</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
School Profiles

Laurentian High School

- Enrolment: 473 ADE (average daily enrolment), approximately 300 in the regular program and 200 in ESL and special education classes
- Capacity: 1,143
- Utilization rate: 41.4 per cent
- Built in 1958
- Projected total enrolment in 2005-06 is 404 and 307 by 2009-10
- There were 43 new grade 9 students in Sept 2004.
- Four special education system programs:
  - Learning Disabilities Program (LD)
  - Special Support Unit (SSU)
  - Deaf/Hard of Hearing (D/HH)
  - Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- 8-12 students from the regular program in each shop course plus 1-3 students from “system classes”
- Adaptive program entering its final year of phase out
- Houses the McHugh (Section 20 program) run by OCCSB
- EQAO results for 2003-2004 academic year:
  - Grade 9 Academic Math: results 12 per cent below board average
  - Grade 9 Applied Math: results 5 per cent below board average
  - Grade 10 Literacy Test: results (Method 1) 32 per cent below board average.

J.S. Woodsworth Secondary School

- Enrolment: 450 students in the regular program, approximately 50 in ESL, half of whom will graduate into regular program next year (the number remaining in ESL is too small for a stand-alone program)
- Capacity: 747
- Utilization rate: 66.7 per cent
- Built in 1973
- Projected total enrolment in 2005-06 is 454 and 423 in 2009-10
- EQAO results for 2003-2004 academic year:
  - Grade 9 Academic Math: results are about the same for the school and the board
  - Grade 9 Applied Math: school is about 12% below board average
  - Grade 10 Literacy Test: taking into account both method one and two, results are about the same for the school and the board.