

Not much talk among trustees

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is still expected, that's less rapid growth than the board has been experiencing over the last decade.

Still, the plan calls for the board to spend almost \$273 million to construct new schools and renovate or enlarge existing facilities across Halton over the next two decades.

School board trustees voted to accept the report with little discussion. Public consultation will begin immediately, with the report being distributed to school councils.

In her presentation to trustees, Ms Clarke noted that the report adopts the position that the school board should move toward building larger elementary schools.

While there are currently a number of Catholic elementary schools with 300 to 350 students, Ms Clarke suggested that schools of at least 400 students are needed to offer students "the full breadth of programs."

Ms Clarke also outlined one of the biggest challenges the board may face in implementing the proposed plan — finding the money.

Following significant investment in new schools and renovations in recent years, the Catholic board currently owes \$149 million. It costs about \$14 million a year simply to service that debt.

Provincial regulations cap the board's debt load at 10 per cent of its operating budget, but Ms Clarke noted that the proposed C.N. Watson plan, when combined with the board's current debt, will see that cap exceeded within the next decade.

Ms Clarke also noted that the plan, if adopted as proposed, would ensure the board would eliminate enough surplus school capacity to remain eligible for provincial capital grants through until 2023.

Under current funding rules, school boards only get money to build new schools if they can demonstrate that all of their buildings are operating at capacity.

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