

EDUCATION

JK could help York to build three new schools

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Metroland Staff

It was hard to say no. By squeezing 4,000 junior kindergarten students into public elementary schools across York Region, the board hopes to get provincial funding to build three new schools.

Board chairperson Bill Crothers said that's not the main reason trustees agreed to bring back JK, but it was a pretty good one.

"By introducing kids in existing schools around the region, it gives us the numbers to qualify for schools in three growing subdivisions," Crothers said. "Why would we say no?"

Under the province's new education funding formulas, new schools can only be built once all existing classroom space is used up, regardless of where that space is located.

So even though JK will cause serious overcrowding at some schools, it will help fill empty spaces at other schools.

Once a board has more students than places across the entire region, the government has said it will give a certain amount of money per student, per year, towards construction of new schools.

Because JK is a half-time program, 4,000 students will equal 2,000 full-time places.

Teachers also welcome the return of JK - it will mean hiring about 80 teachers to fill the equivalent of 40 full-time positions - but they worry about the speed at which it is being resurrected.

"It seems to be a bit of a rush," said Pam Gillan, president of the York Region Federation of Women Teachers Association. "I'm thrilled it's coming back, but we have to have faith it will be done right."

"I understand we need to have it in place all over so it is equitable, but I hope they've looked at it thoroughly and carefully," she said. "I do have concerns about dedicated computer labs. When I read the report, I was thinking, I hope nothing will be jeopardized because of this."

Gillan is also worried about adding more portables to handle the increase in student population.

"It's not going to be JK kids who will be going out to the portables. It will be another class."

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