

## CATHOLIC EDUCATION

# Deadline for school closures extended one year

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A decision to delay a review of 15 schools that could be closed has created more questions than answers for concerned Catholic parents in York Region.

The separate board is pulling back plans to create a list of schools pegged for closure after the Ministry of Education's pledge of an additional \$204 million to its capital funding formula last Friday.

The announcement erased a Dec. 31 deadline for Ontario boards to identify schools for closure, allowing boards an additional year to create their hit lists.

The region's separate board, meanwhile, subsequently cancelled a report set for release today that detailed enrollment, transportation, boundaries and long-range development for 15 schools located in Thornhill, Woodbridge and Newmarket.

Public input sessions arranged for later this month will likely be placed on hold as well.

And while officials at the separate board work overtime this week crunching a new set of financial figures from the ministry, parents remain confused over the future of their neighbourhood schools.

"Everyone agrees there has to be improvements in efficiencies, but this seems like a good excuse to do nothing."

"The issue shouldn't be about school closures, it should be about keeping the Catholic community viable," stressed Carmine Marcello, a member of a task force at Bishop Scalabrini, a Thornhill school currently 176 students below its 433 capacity.

"We should be working and pushing ahead. It's good for the board to come out and say there isn't a big problem right now, but we will be looking at this next year and the year after."

"Everyone agrees there has to be improvements in efficiencies, but this seems like a good excuse to do nothing," he added.

Catholic district union president Ihor Baczynsky said just the mention of closing schools sends shivers down the backs of parents — a normal scare tactic, he maintains, since the election of the Tory government.

"It's certainly not as big a deal in York Region as it is in Toronto and other parts of the province, but what the government wants to see is bigger and better," Baczynsky said.

"They are trying to do the same thing as with the hospitals by wanting to close the small community schools. Unfortunately, it just doesn't look very good when a school closes. It has an impact on the community and is frustrating for both parents and students."



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