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PONDERING CHRISTMAS



Heather Wright Photo

Julia Pegg, 7, of Dresden takes a few moments to ponder just what she might want for Christmas as she sits on Santa's lap during Holiday in the Hamlet at Dawn-Euphemia Public School, Saturday. Hundreds of people made their way through the school looking for Christmas bargains during the annual event.

South Plympton could be first school closure casualty

Board may merge it with Wyoming, could close Dawn-Euphemia

Heather Wright
The Independent

This could be the last year the wildcats roar at South Plympton.

Next school year, students at South Plympton Public School could be going to class at Wyoming Public School. Closing the rural school which houses Junior Kindergarten to Grade 3 students is just one of a raft of recommendations made by staff of the Lambton-Kent District School Board as it tries to grapple with the realities of shrinking provincial funding and declining enrolment.

A report, trustees were to study at Tuesday night's meeting, lays out the bare facts. The Lambton-Kent board's enrolment is declining nine times faster than the provincial average and in the next 10 years the board will have about 1,150 students.

That will only increase the amount of empty space in the region's schools. Lambton-Kent's high schools are only 62 per cent full compared to the provincial average of 79.6 per cent. Elementary schools are 75.3 per cent filled, compared to 86.4 per cent provincially.

Jim Costello, director of education, says the province is already cutting funding for empty space. In the next three years the board can expect to lose another \$4.298 million.

And then there is the money needed to update the systems and aging buildings. Lambton Kent needs \$202,906,000 to complete capital projects on its schools. The board will get \$14.48 million this year leaving \$188,423,000 to go.

The report estimates another \$189 million in upgrades and repairs will be needed over the next 10 years.

"A reduction in the number of schools is necessary in order for the LKDSB's capital dollars to be efficiently allocated to strengthen the learning environment for the maximum number of students on an equitable basis," say officials in the report to trustees.

So Costello and the superintendents have put together a comprehensive plan to reorganize schools. South Plympton would be among the first buildings to close if the recommendation is accepted.

Youth may get a say in Petrolia politics

Heather Wright
The Independent

Petrolia Councillor Grant Purdy wants to see more young people involved in local politics.

He's proposing the town set up a youth committee to get ideas from local teens. Purdy would like 10 young people from the community between the ages of 13 and 18 to "act as an advisory board to Petrolia Council... identify and bring forward issues affecting youth... and encourage members to become familiar with the workings of local government" according to the Terms of Reference he drew up.

Councillor Tim Brown – a youth pastor at New Life – supported

Purdy's idea saying he wanted to see teens with different interests involved.

"When you get a group of youth together, it is important that the youth from different areas are all represented," he says.

"I'd like to see some teens from the community centre, some from hockey, some representing the skateboard crew, and local youth groups."

Councillor Joel Field agreed but voiced concern the youth committee might duplicate opportunities already available for young people.

"We have committees representing everything about our town... and we can have youth members on these committees. I could see us making a push for that."

Then, Field says, the youth members

of town committees could get together for a "Youth Summit" once or twice a year to share ideas. He suggested connecting with organizations including service clubs who deal with youth issues to be involved.

"I don't want it to be just 10 kids who want the skateboard park who put up their hands (to serve)," says Field.

"We do need to have the voice for those kids... I would really like to tap into what's being done now."

But Councillor Ross O'Hara isn't sure adding youth to established committees would accomplish the same thing. He believes they need a voice of their own.

SEE YOUTH PG 2

SEE CLOSURE PG 2

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