



**ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION**

Leading Education's Advocates

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To: Karen Pitre,
Premier's Special Advisor on Community Hubs

OPSBA Submission to the Premier's Special Advisor on Community Hubs

Thank you for attending our May 8th Education Program and Policy Development Joint Work Team meeting, as well as the recent consultation session at our Annual General Meeting. The high turnout for that voluntary session speaks to the keen interest school trustees have in the concept and future of a provincial framework supporting community hubs. Numerous positive examples exist within schools where educational leadership has been able to bring agencies together, but much more can be done if inter-Ministerial partnerships are more fully realized.

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) has been a longstanding advocate of the concept of community hubs, as we believe that through community partnerships we can work collaboratively to improve the social, emotional, mental and physical well-being of children, youth and the wider community.

As the representatives of the only publicly elected officials responsible for the education of our children and youth, we bring a wealth of expertise to this review. We are committed to supporting any plan that will provide high-quality and accessible services by adapting existing schools into community hubs, provided school boards' concerns and challenges are taken into account. We are also in support of the concept of community hubs as it applies to new school builds.

As guiding principles for a provincial vision of community hubs, that includes public schools, we recommend:

- Ensuring all partners adhere to high quality standards in the services they provide
- Having facilities and services that are accessible and equitable for all members of local and unique communities, both rural and urban
- Offering language support based on a community's unique needs
- Establishing hubs that meet an identified community need or service expectation
- Provincial direction towards a shared commitment between partners to deliver on local community hub agreements

Through consultation with our Member Board trustees and staff, we offer our comments and recommendations based on the following three major themes:

- *Student Safety, Building Security and Infrastructure Needs*
- *Education Funding and Budget Cycles*
- *Barriers to, and Opportunities for, Partnerships with Municipalities and Other Sectors that Serve Families and Communities*

Comments

Student Safety, Building Security and Infrastructure Needs

- Student and staff safety will be a major concern for school boards.
- Community hubs should be considered to be just as viable/feasible in new school builds as they would be in retrofits.
- When utilizing schools as community hubs, building management during the months of July and August must be considered, as school principals are the designated site managers. As well, there is concern that additional site management could take away from the primary responsibilities of a principal.
- School boards must receive funding for renovations and site management when a community hub is located within a school board site. Smaller boards, in particular, do not have large planning departments or the resources to coordinate the community development and ongoing maintenance of substantive hubs.
- For many of our member boards, land value is often more financially valuable than the exorbitant cost of rebuilding, so there would need to be an incentive for boards to renovate and renew buildings instead of selling properties and rebuilding in another location.

Education Funding and Budget Cycles

- It is often too late after potential partners' capital funding has begun to flow from the province to reverse the forward momentum of the drive for each party to have their own spaces. Local school boards cannot control this outcome.
- Lease of school property agreements often provide agencies with school board property at below market rate. Even then, rent costs can still be too high for community partners who want to use the space. Since school boards receive zero dollars for the upkeep of space not used for students, they have to recover the cost of facility maintenance themselves.
- Regarding Regulation 444/98: Disposition of Surplus Real Property, school boards need to receive full market value for sales, even if it comes from other levels of government and community groups.
- A number of our member boards have partnerships where space has been dedicated to community agencies, but custodial and maintenance fees continue to be an issue.
- The funding formula for the building of new schools only supports the exact number of student spaces affected by closure of old schools. It does not allow for anticipated growth in a new school, nor does it allow for any additional space beyond what is specified in the formula – classrooms, gymnasias, hallways, etc.
- One of the barriers to the creation of community hubs that meet a school board's educational needs has been that capital funding can be used for new schools and maintenance, but not to repurpose facilities; e.g. to renovate an elementary school for adult education or alternative secondary education.

Barriers to, and Opportunities for, Partnerships with Municipalities and other Sectors that Serve Families and Communities

- Partnerships are very important, as well as municipal support and cooperation. All involved organizations have to share a common vision and values and work to foster trusting

relationships between community partners and the school.

- While municipalities do have great interest in the hub model, and at times some parallel roles and concerns in the partnership process, school board staff should maintain autonomy in planning and managing school spaces that meet the varied needs of students and school staff.
- The staff of some existing community hub partner services are considered part of the school staff body - they attend staff functions and are there for the parent walk-throughs and open houses. These kinds of relationships need to be nurtured and considered to ensure hubs work well. There cannot be a 'them' and 'us' mentality. Sometimes existing policies and procedures undermine this.
- The creation of any new school board employee positions will require consideration of collective agreements with education sector unions.
- Community hub partners must complement one another, meet the immediate needs of the community and possess a natural synergy. There should also be a high degree of collaboration and support among on-site leaders, or a well-developed dispute resolution process (i.e. on-site management committees).
- Sometimes leases have worked because parties external to the school board had a need and the board, being a willing lease partner, was able to satisfy that need, leading to a win-win situation.
- Some small, remote communities could never support hubs in schools for several reasons. There is often no public transportation and schools don't have enough parking. Smaller communities may have trouble finding available partnerships and the declining population will not be able to support an increase in public services. As well, long-term viability of the agency/service needs to be considered. Services may need to change to respond to demographic shifts.
- Use of community hubs should be forward-looking and embrace the ways in which young people access services technologically and also take into account that youth do not fit into traditional categories. These issues currently present barriers. A cited example is the process of permitting school space for sports/social activities.
- Hubs will allow families to access programs and services in their own communities without the cost and inconvenience of travel. In order to do this, services will need to be expanded, made fully accessible and coordinated with current provincial initiatives, e.g. Service Collaboratives and Lead Agency Community Tables.

Recommendations

Provincial

- Create a specialized working group that focuses specifically on education-related matters including facilities, planning and funding. This group should include representatives from a cross-section of school boards that have expertise in these areas. The working group should also include Ministry of Education finance staff. Part of the mandate should be to review the current education funding formula for gaps that negatively impact the potential creation of community hubs in schools.
- Establish a permanent provincial office overseeing community hubs, which could be accessed by all stakeholders and serve as a resource for the interactions between partners and various ministries. There needs to be a centralized information source where, for instance, a school principal or school could be directed to determine answers regarding approvals, zoning issues, etc. (*Note: We understand that the Premier's Office has created a temporary Community Hubs Secretariat in the Cabinet Office for the purpose of this initiative and we recommend that this remains in place for the long term.*)
- Create a communications portal or mechanism (such as regular meetings) for sectors to share and obtain information easily.
- Continue to meet regularly with stakeholders (OPSBA, AMO, Public Health, etc.).

- Lead a concerted cross-ministerial effort to ensure potentially divergent funding timelines/paths from various Ministries are avoided at the local level. Suggest regular funding meetings to discuss and provide continuous feedback on upcoming projects.
- Determine a set of minimal common data/information to be used, aligned to the purpose of each individual community hub to determine where hubs should be located. Long-term sustainability and ability to continually adapt services to fit community needs must be taken into consideration.
- Give consideration to creating a formula for leasing space that is equitable and matches community expectations (i.e. rent/utility rates differ across the province).
- Create hub manuals, which should include guiding principles and common information for all stakeholders.
- Require that the proposed community hubs framework, and the decisions stemming from it, are mandated to ensure student and staff safety in schools.
 - Consider school safety audits as part of all partnership agreements.

Ministry of Education

- Encourage the Ministry of Education to consider the implications of ongoing funding reductions to the supports for excess system capacity, School Improvement and Safe Schools funding lines and various processes (including Capital Planning Priorities) during community hubs consultation.
- Establish a focused working group to review Regulation 444/98: Disposition of Surplus Real Property. Streamline and modify the process to address issues regarding the sale of school board properties at below market rates.
- Provide school boards with incentives to partner with other “community-oriented” services, e.g. seniors’ centres, child care, community centres and fitness and wellness facilities.

School Boards

- Review the recently revised Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline and local board policies to ensure that Community Hubs are considered and part of the discussion.
- Develop a strategic plan with a specific focus on establishing hubs in schools to support students and families (based on the agreed upon common data/information that shows where current hubs are located and gaps). The plan should be developed in conjunction with local municipalities and support agencies.
- Once a community hub is approved, the school board should develop a communication plan.
- Through their associations, establish regular communications with key stakeholders including AMO, Public Health, library boards, etc.
- Neighbourhood/community advisory committees should be established to nurture partner and stakeholder relationships.

The concept of community hubs holds great promise for Ontario, however we must stress the development of a hub concept needs to be community-based and always reflect local needs and include all relevant community partners. Determining the need for a community hub should be based on data and purpose in order to appropriately decide where a hub should be located, i.e. municipal building, school, not-for-profit third party facility, etc.

Public schools are at the centre of most communities and will be considered one of many varieties of sites to house services for residents spanning the full spectrum of life, from early years centres to senior citizens’ homes and activity centres.

We trust that these recommendations and advice will be taken into account as the Community Hubs Framework Advisory Group continues its work on this portfolio. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laurie French". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L'.

Laurie French
First Vice-President
Ontario Public School Boards' Association

Community Hubs Successes

Found throughout our member boards are many **successful examples** of community hubs in action. Here are just a few success stories:

Lambton Kent DSB

Best Start Community Hubs

Lambton Kent DSB's community hubs are located in 10 rural communities in the school board. Parents/grandparents drop in during opening hours with their children. The core functions and services of the hubs include: child care, screening and assessment, nutrition programs, Ontario Early Years Centres, Public Health – Healthy Babies Healthy Children program, parenting programs, preschool speech and language, occupational and physical therapy, recreation programs, literacy events, wrap-around child care (before-and-after-school programs as well as extended day programs), and preschool early learning programs (children ages 2.5-3.8), all at no cost to parents. *Note: The LKDSB and the St. Clair Catholic DSB communities were one of three regions in Ontario that piloted the Province's "Best Start School Community Hubs" approximately eight years ago.*

In the community of Grand Bend, the Municipality of Lambton Shores guaranteed funding to the Board for a community library that is shared by the students of the school. It includes day care space that is run by a private day care and a full size gym that is open for community use after school hours. The Municipality shares the costs of custodial services.

Simcoe County DSB

SCDSB currently hosts the Essa Library Angus Branch. The school board worked with the Essa Township library board to create the partnership and students have the opportunity to use the public library at any time during the day. The building also includes the local Ontario Provincial Police detachment, with a separate entrance.

Also in the SCDSB, Midland Secondary School has converted empty classrooms into space now used by the Midland Office of the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit.

Durham DSB

The DDSB hosts 15 full "hubs" with programming five days per week, one special needs hub (Grandview Children's Centre), eight "mini-hubs" open two days per week, and four rotating hubs, with six-week programs in schools. The board started the process by creating a strategic plan with a specific focus on establishing hubs in schools to support students and families. The board then developed partnerships with agencies that could provide services. Other important steps Durham DSB has taken include:

- Development of a communication plan and a plan to integrate services into schools.
- Using data (specifically EQAO, EDI and Social Risk Index) to determine where hubs should be located.
- Education of principals and school staff to understand the need to partner with outside agencies to establish the concept of a community school providing integrated supports for families.
- Provision of space, for which partners were not charged. The board paid for signs including board and partner logos to communicate hubs were located inside each host school. They also developed brochures and created space on the board website where the monthly calendar of hub activities was located.

- Each time the DDSB opened a hub they hosted a community forum and an official opening, as well as media releases and newspaper coverage.
- Provision of a report to DDSB trustees each year on hub stats – attendance by parents and children, the number of programs offered and referrals.

Limestone DSB

LDSB staff recently worked with City of Kingston staff to create the shared Wally Elmer Recreation Centre, situated between an older arena and the adjacent school property. Plans include a cost-shared renovation and addition with expanded facilities capitalizing on school infrastructure and public services (library) as well as a gymnasium-sized multi-purpose room, allowing for school day and evening community use. Shared maintenance of the building and grounds are part of the agreement.

Additionally, LDSB has a longstanding rural library managed through a partnership between LDSB staff and Loyalist Township. The library is attached to a small rural school that had no previous library. It is now securely accessible to students during the day, with infrastructure, land, and washroom space available to the public during evenings and weekends.

Trillium Lakelands DSB

The Bracebridge Secondary School facility includes a jointly funded (with the Town of Bracebridge) public sportsplex and a community theatre. The process began in 2002 when the Town approached the TLDSB about the possibility of a joint facility to replace its aging recreational complex. The recreational facility opened in December 2006, and the theatre and the school opened in September 2007. There were numerous challenges and barriers (*See Appendix B*) but the facility now works well as a community hub.

Toronto DSB

All TDSB sites are community hubs to some degree, with child care, before-and-after school programs, pools, City programs and ‘permit’ users. The board hosts more than 300 child care centres; 33 school locations with City of Toronto operating pools; three school locations with private-public Partnerships involving state-of-the-art sports fields, with three more locations planned; three school sites with Foodshare urban farming programs; and pediatric clinics at three school locations. All of these partners have exclusive use of space in school facilities and pay for their share of that space on a cost-recovery basis with the TDSB.

North Toronto CI is a specific example of integrated development. The land was severed for a condo development, which was built using the school as the structural podium. The developers paid for part of the new build, which replaced the old North Toronto CI a short distance away. The board also has partnerships with child care providers, the TCDSB and health care providers. (*For more information, please see Appendix C*)

Halton DSB

The Halton model (Our Kids Network) offers a one-stop shopping option for families and communities. Our Kids Network is a Halton-wide partnership of organizations and agencies serving children and youth, including the Halton DSB, Halton CDSB, Halton Children’s Aid Society and Halton Regional Police Service. To replicate this model broadly across Ontario would require additional flexibility in each sector’s funding envelope. (<http://www.ourkidsnetwork.ca/Public/Home.aspx>)

In addition, the recently built Halton DSB’s White Oaks SS was constructed to include the White Oaks Branch of the Oakville Public Library. The success of partnerships such as this is proof that services delivered in a hub need to fit well with each other. Partnerships need to be symbiotic.

Lakehead DSB

Lakehead DSB's remote Armstrong PS hosts a community library, located in the school, which is run by volunteers a few nights each week. The board also is part of a partnership with the Thunder Bay Public Library and Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board to allow shared use of three facilities located next to each other in the city.

Ottawa-Carleton DSB

Ottawa-Carleton DSB's Bayshore PS has ESL programs for adults and also hosts a daycare. It is an older rental neighbourhood with many new Canadians. The programming allows for a mixture of young students and adults. There are also multicultural offices housed in the school. The services provided have evolved to fit the need in the community. The ESL programming has been accommodated partly because the school has dropping enrolment, so there is extra space.

Indigenous Friendship Centres

The inclusion of First Nation, Métis and Inuit organizations in the community hubs initiative must be given prominence. Indigenous Friendship Centres are a great community hub model. Friendship Centres are Canada's most significant off-reserve Aboriginal service delivery infrastructure. These not-for-profit and charity corporations deliver necessary services to the needs of urban Aboriginal people in the areas of children and youth, education to employment, family, healing, health and justice. (www.ofifc.org)

TRILLIUM LAKELANDS DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Community Hub Development Process

Town of Bracebridge and TLDSB



TLDSB Community Hub Development Process



BACKGROUND

- In 2002, the Town of Bracebridge was planning for expansion into a new recreational complex to replace the existing one and approached TLDSB about the possibility of a joint facility
- TLDSB staff and Town of Bracebridge staff established a committee and began to explore options for a combined facility on the same site.
- the local gymnastic club approached the town about incorporating a gymnastic facility into the planned recreation center
- the local arts council approached the committee about funding for a new community theatre
- Two years of planning meetings, developing terms of reference, development agreements, discussions with the ministry regarding approvals and financing
- Undertook School Closure review process for 6 months
- 30 months into the process before ministry approved the concept of the joint project
- Another 6 months to get Ministry approval for funding
- Three years after the process began tenders were issued
- Recreational facility opened in December 2006, the theatre and the school opened in Sept 2007

CHALLENGES / BARRIERS

Trying to move forward with planning and agreements when having to wait to see if approval would be granted for the project and financing was very difficult.

In order to develop the agreements, we needed to engage the services of a legal firm and an educational space planner who had expertise in the development of joint projects.

Development Agreements with the town and theatre - issues on how title to land will be held; how costs will be shared (i.e. architect, engineering, etc.); sharing cost of infrastructure; who will run the project; easements and right-of-ways

Operating Agreements How ongoing costs will be shared (i.e. gas, hydro, etc.); share of capital repair costs (i.e. boiler, roof, etc.); how decisions will be arrived at (unanimous vs. majority); establish a Management Committee to deal with day-to-day decisions

Shared-Use Agreements - who issues community use permits; when facilities are available to each partner; policies of the facility (i.e. liquor use and smoking)

Agreement Key Elements - Ownership of the building, including fixtures; who will be responsible for general maintenance of the facility; aligning policies and procedures around such things as parking lot lighting, field irrigation, herbicide use and grass cutting schedules, and snow ploughing schedules; responsibility for replacement of fixtures and general up-grades; who will provide property insurance and liability insurance related to functions; ensuring exclusive use of the by the board of the Theatre during the school day; who provides custodial services and how will they be reimbursed for these costs; establishment of a Management Board to govern the Theatre needed to be created; what would be the representation on the Management Board; Redevelopment plans have to be established based on the life cycle of the facilities

Each agreement has to be managed and reviewed regularly, understandings have to be clear as individuals from all parties move on and continuity needs to be maintained. Relationships have to be maintained continuously to ensure smooth operations of the facilities

SUCSESSES

The facility works well as a community hub, combining the elements of a school, recreational complex, and theatre at one convenient location. The School staff and Recreation Centre staff have continued the spirit of joint facilities, working together to establish a beach volleyball area, playground area and an outdoor challenge course.

Community members are now accustomed to entering the secondary school to visit the theatre box office during the day and attending evening community performances.

Students are able to participate in a number of extracurricular activities that would otherwise require additional transportation to another location – i.e. Swimming, community theatre, gymnastics, dance, etc.

When additional rooms are needed for board-wide events, there are usually facilities available at the sportsplex. Consequently a large number of symposiums, conferences, and special events take place at this location.

Community Hubs at the TDSB

Community Hub is an aggregation of uses on a site with facilities and amenities that serve the needs of a community. These services are delivered in a multi-purpose campus setting where synergies exist with the potential for natural symbiotic relationships.

Workshop Questions:

1. Are there examples we should know about?

All TDSB sites are Community Hubs to some degree, with Child Care, Before and After school programs, Pools, City Programs and 'Permit' users.

In the Toronto District School Board there are: 300+ child care centres; 33 school locations with City of Toronto operating pools; three school locations with Private-Public Partnerships involving state-of-the-art sports fields, with three more locations planned; three school sites have urban farming programs with Foodshare; and Children Pediatric Clinics are at 3 school locations. All of these partners have exclusive use of space in school facilities and pay for their share of that space on a cost-recovery basis with the TDSB.

With respect to identifying 'natural synergies', the TDSB's 'Partnerships Office' identifies educational benefits offered by tenants and partners and prepares a service agreement outlining reciprocal benefits.

With respect to co-building opportunities, current agreements are underway with the City of Toronto and the Toronto Catholic District School Board to develop 'Block 31' in the Railway Lands area. This 2 acre site situated next to a public will accommodate two elementary schools, a childcare and community centre.

The following are a few identified examples of schools within the TDSB that currently act as a community hub:

- Humberwood Downs JMA (Etobicoke)- TDSB, TCDSB, Childcare, Community Centre and City Library
- Sir Adam Beck PS- Toronto Public Library, City of Toronto (Parks & Recreation), TDSB
- Marketlane PS- City of Toronto (Parks & Recreation), TDSB
- Nelson Mandela PS- City of Toronto (Parks & Recreation), TDSB
- Charles E Webster ES- Clinic, TDSB
- The Waterfront School- Child Care, City of Toronto (Parks & Recreation), TDSB
- Lakeshore CI- Mastercard Hockey Arena, Humber College, City of Toronto (Parks & Recreation), TDSB

2. What makes these work and why?

The uses in the above examples complement one another, meet the immediate needs of the community and possess a natural synergy. There is also a high degree of collaboration and support among on-site leaders, or a well-developed dispute resolution process (ie. on-site management committees)

3. What are the barriers to establishing more community hubs?

- Ensuring the security and safety of students. This may impact the ability of partners to access school facilities (fields, gymnasiums, auditoriums) during school hours;
- Zoning by-laws can be inflexible and restrictive to accommodate proposed complementary or compatible uses on the school site. The proposed Harmonized Zoning By-law seeks to establish school sites for education purposes only, which is counter to other City interests to establish community hubs and partnerships;
- Community concerns over mitigating negative impacts such as traffic and on-site parking requirements;
- Fluctuating school enrollment levels with looming changes in enrolment that could undermine long-term viability of partnerships on site/facility due to the school population expanding or contracting; and
- Partners are not able to bring capital funding to upgrade their share of space (i.e. to delineate separation of spaces, entrances and general improvements).

4. What additional advice would you offer to the Province to encourage and strengthen Community Hubs?

- Implement 'as-of-right' permissions (Zoning) on all TDSB schools to accommodate a variety of uses that support community hubs as a secondary use of the school property;
- Funding must be stable to ensure fully supported facility operations as well as capital improvements;
- Identify specific sites as core 'Hubs' with base operating funds to maintain service levels in areas of need;
- Maintain flexibility of options for service providers to re-locate if required to respond to the realities of changing school enrolment levels and emerging school needs/priorities.

5. Guiding Principles of Community Hubs

- Compatibility of uses;
- Community need and support;
- Willing partnerships; and
- Viable economic model (market driven, fully funded programs including funding for capital).