



Mark Fisher, Director of Education and Secretary

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February 17, 2023

Hon. Stephen Lecce  
Minister of Education  
5th Flr, 438 University Ave.  
Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

Via email: [minister.edu@ontario.ca](mailto:minister.edu@ontario.ca)

Dear Minister Lecce,

The Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) is currently conducting community consultations for the City of St. Thomas Elementary Panel Attendance Area Review (STAAR). If approved by Trustees, attendance area changes would take effect September of 2024.

In 2020, TVDSB submitted a funding request for a new school in St. Thomas. This project was not approved for Capital Priorities Grant funding and the Ministry recommended that the Board employ alternate strategies to address the accommodation pressure.

The Board believes that a grade reconfiguration option should be available for St. Thomas families to consider and provide feedback on as part of STAAR.

For example, we have two underutilized Kindergarten to Grade 8 schools in St. Thomas (Elgin Court P.S. at 69% capacity with 144 empty pupil places (EPP), and Forest Park P.S. at 74% capacity with 138 EPP, for a total of 282 EPP). One option may be to amalgamate all the Kindergarten to Grade 6 students at one school. The other school could then be a Grade 7/8 school, accepting Grade 7 and 8 students from several surrounding over-capacity schools, leaving those schools at 100% capacity. In addition, a grade reconfiguration option would allow St. Thomas students, currently in a holding zone and being bused to Kettle Creek P.S. in Port Stanley, the potential to return to their home school, which is within walking distance of their residences. If this option were considered, it could reduce Kettle Creek P.S.'s capacity, currently at 136%, to 106%.

At the January 31, 2023, regular Board Meeting, TVDSB Administration advised Trustees that a grade reconfiguration option could not be part of STAAR because the current moratorium prevents moving more than fifty percent of a school's population. Based on this information, the Board passed the following motion to have the Chair write a letter to the Ministry requesting an allowance, so that consideration of a grade reconfiguration could be part of STAAR:

“THAT the Chair write a letter in consultation and collaboration with the Trustees of Elgin to the Ministry of Education for clarification on the previous direction given when the funding for a new Southeast St. Thomas School was denied, as well as a request for an exemption or allowance to the current moratorium in an attempt to mitigate displacement and disruption of families and cohorts possibly impacting student well-being and success.”

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**Thames Valley District School Board - Office of the Chairperson**

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*We build each student's tomorrow, every day.*

To assist us in balancing enrollment at St. Thomas elementary schools, we ask that the Ministry of Education advise TVDSB's Board of Trustees on how we might be able to propose a grade reconfiguration option for implementation during the 2024 school year, as part of the City of St. Thomas Elementary Panel Attendance Area Review.

We look forward to your response as final recommendations from STAAR will come before the Trustees in June 2023.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "L. Pizzolato".

Lori-Ann Pizzolato  
Chair of the Board  
Thames Valley District School Board

cc: Trustees