



# School Facility Requirements of the Greater St. John's Area

## Summary and Recommendations

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## *Executive Summary*

The St. John's - Mount Pearl – Paradise - Torbay area faces many of the same demographic challenges as other areas of the province, indeed much of the rest of Canada. The area has an aging population caused by, among other things, declining fertility and changing migration. While there are pockets of growth, for the most part the school population has been dropping. For example, enrolment in the study area dropped from 21,637 in 2004/05 to 20,330 students in 2009/2010; a drop of 1,307 students (-6.0%) in five years. Further, this decline took place in an area of the province which has benefited from in-migration, commercial development, housing starts, and infrastructure improvements.

Because of higher levels of in-migration to some suburban neighbourhoods and communities, enrolment in some schools has increased. Increases in these schools are due largely from students drawn from other schools rather than higher than average birth rates. Typically, students are drawn from older urban neighbourhoods, rural communities and other provinces.

This review drew together information from existing sources and site visits. The focus of the review was to gain an understanding of the issues and challenges surrounding current facilities and the effects of enrolment change. The task was to ensure that the school board's Long Term Plan strategically addresses the infrastructure needs of the metropolitan area.

Enrolment projections completed as part of this study suggest that, over the next six years, enrolment in the region is projected to drop a further 3.2 percent, translating into a net loss of about 1,000 students. While enrolments in some schools will increase, enrolments in secondary schools are projected to decline 9.6 percent, intermediate schools 7.9 percent, and elementary schools 2.1 percent. By 2015/16, enrolment in the area is projected to drop to about 19,300 students.

Although many schools are older and have maintenance requirements, the schools in the study area are in reasonably good condition and, with proper maintenance,

can continue as viable, suitable, safe, educational facilities for many years to come. Individual school assessments are included in the Appendices.

The consultants were asked to carry out two things: 1) respond to the recommendations emanating from the School Board's Multi-year Facility Plan, and 2) identify any other areas where change is possible, practicable and prudent. The discussion around these two areas is presented in Sections 4 and 5 of this report. A summary of the recommendations is presented in Section 6.

For the most part, the consultants agreed with the decisions of the School Board. For example, they concurred with the decisions to close Holy Heart of Mary High School, Booth Memorial High School, Bishops College, and I.J. Samson Junior High, and to renovate Beaconsfield Junior High School and Roncalli Elementary. On the other hand, they did not uncover information to substantiate the construction of a new elementary school in the St. Philip's/Portugal Cove/Torbay area (at least at this time).

There were several other areas where the consultants felt the School Board will need to address school organization; some should be addressed immediately and others in subsequent years. The major areas requiring response are, for the most, regions where some consolidation is in order. These are regions where already there is significant over capacity, where enrolments have been declining and are projected to decline further, and where there is sufficient space in neighbouring schools.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

Changing demographic conditions, migration patterns, declining and shifting enrolments, deteriorating infrastructure, increased costs, and rapidly advancing technologies are challenges not unique to the Eastern School District or to the study area. The need for school capital planning is being discussed in most jurisdictions throughout North America and around the world.

The study area is small geographically but contains over 55 percent of the provincial population.<sup>1</sup> Yet in a global labour market, graduates from all schools must compete with graduates from all over the world on an equal basis. Traditional occupations like fishing and farming have become increasingly more complex and require elaborate and sophisticated training. The global economy has made many of our citizens—particularly those under the age of 35 and well educated—more mobile than ever before. Improved transportation systems, emerging technologies, and increased opportunities lure young people away from their home communities and into the cities. Within this environment, participation in a global economy is not a matter of choice, but of survival.

Population phenomena and demographic events are central to many of the issues and challenges that educators face today and will face in the future. The structural, organizational and educational challenges from enrolment pressures in schools located in growth areas such as Paradise and Torbay, and the programming needs of small, neighbourhood schools such as Macpherson Elementary and St. Mary's Elementary, are two examples.

With the primary resources available to districts being provided by government—based primarily on student enrolment—a key challenge for school districts has been to provide high quality programs and services to children and youth in an era of demographic change. This review is in response to the need for comprehensive, wide-ranging school capital planning for the St. John's-Mount Pearl-Paradise-Torbay area.

## 1.2 CHANGING DEMOGRAPHIC CONDITIONS

Declining fertility is a world-wide phenomena and Newfoundland and Labrador is no exception. We have a rapidly aging population caused by, among other things, declining fertility and out-migration. The combination of low birth rates, lack of significant immigration, high levels of out-migration among young people in the most fertile child-bearing age range, the tendency to postpone marriage, large numbers of baby boomers (currently between 46 and 64 years of age) quickly moving past their prime childbearing years, the growing incidence of family break-up, and increased life expectancy, has meant that the province has experienced a rapidly aging society; and one that is likely to continue to age for some decades to come.

Birth rates in the province—once quite high among Canadian provinces—are now among some of the lowest in the world<sup>2</sup>. For a variety of reasons, birth rates have declined at unprecedented levels. For example, in 1950 the birth rate in the province was 30.1 (births per thousand), compared to 27.0 for all of Canada. By 2009, the birth rate in the province had declined to 8.9 (-70.0%), while the birth rate for Canada declined to 11.3 (-58.1%)<sup>3</sup>. This is important to understand because fertility has the single greatest impact on enrolment.

One of the factors that can offset declining fertility, at least to some degree, is migration. Migration refers to the movement of a person or people from one place of residence to another. It happens when people move to, or away from, the province, or move from one region of the province to another (e.g., from a rural community to an urban centre). After fertility, migration is the most significant demographic factor affecting schools.

Interprovincial migration, or the movement of people to and from other provinces, shows a much different picture. In the five years between 2003/04 and 2007/08, our province experienced a net loss of 14,674 people, or about 3,000 per year. However, in 2008/09 that trend reversed with the province experiencing a net gain of 2,332<sup>4</sup> people.

### 1.3 THE CHALLENGE OF LARGE-SCALE ENROLMENT CHANGE

When school enrolments are fairly constant, planning is less challenging. That is not to say that administrators still do not have to deal with issues such as overcrowding or split classes. However, large-scale enrolment change over a short period is more difficult to manage and presents more challenges. Many schools are facing significant enrolment change; both in terms of growth and decline (see Figure 1 for a list of all schools in the study area showing the percentage change in enrolment between 2004/05 and 2009/10).

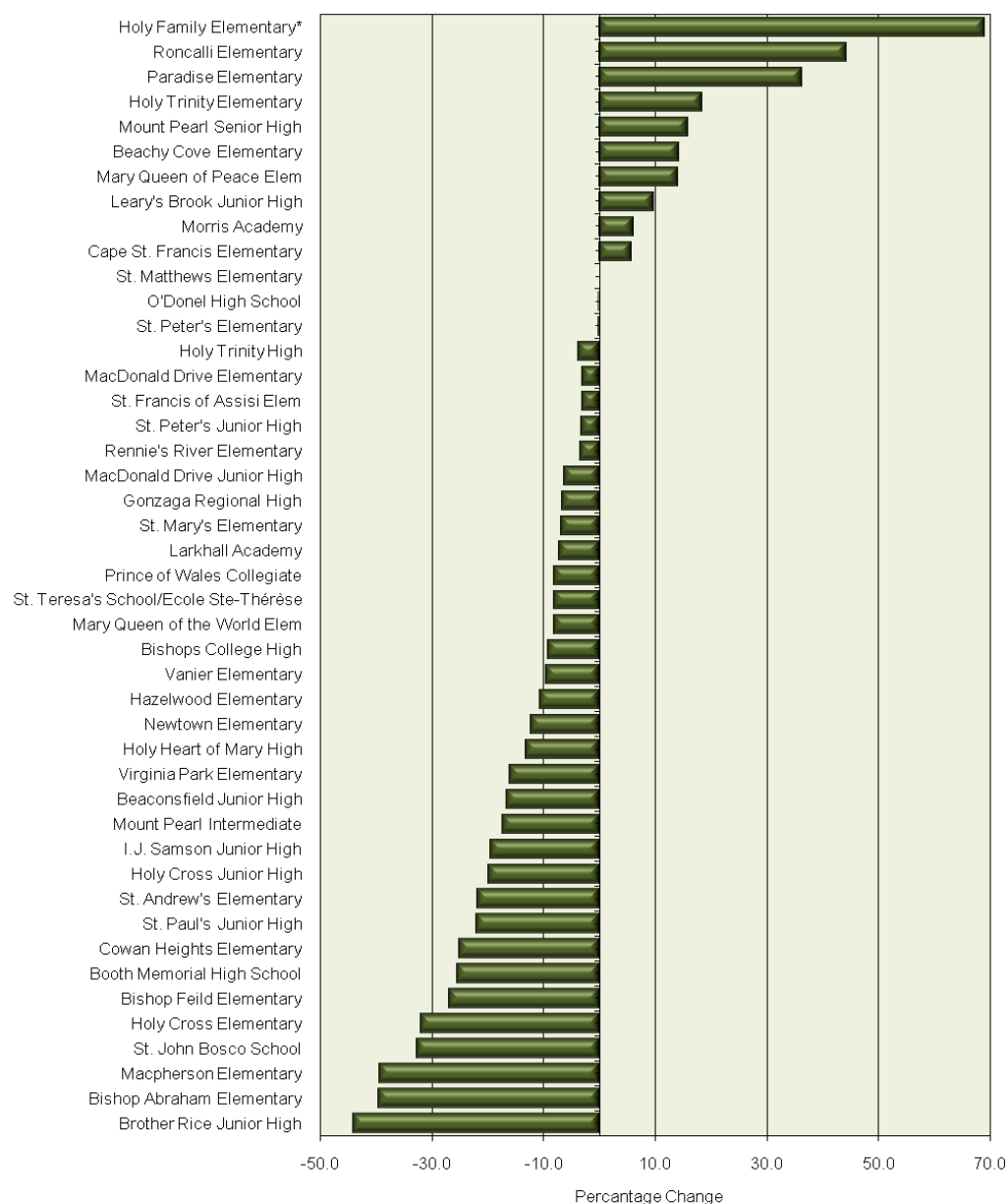
A number of schools have experienced significant growth; for example, Holy Family Elementary, grew almost 70 percent in the last five years. The two high schools in Mount Pearl—Mount Pearl Senior High and O'Donel High—have benefitted from population increases in surrounding areas.

On the other hand, over three-quarters of the schools in the area (76.1 percent) lost students in the last five years. Some schools declined only marginally, but most had declines in the range of 10 – 40 percent. Schools like Brother Rice Junior High, Macpherson Elementary and Bishop Abraham Elementary had enrolment declines in the range of 40 percent in the last five years; or about eight percent per year.

For the most part, fertility patterns are similar throughout the province and have a similar effect on all schools. Why the number of students in some schools declined more rapidly than in others has more to do with the effects of migration; people moving out of or into communities. For some schools, the effects of declining births have been offset, to some degree, by the in-migration of families with children from other areas. It is not uncommon, however, to notice increased housing starts in a particular area with little impact on school enrolments. The reasons for this are many. New condominiums, for example, can be very attractive to older citizens and families without children, new sub-divisions, such as Clovelly Trails, can have areas set aside for adults only, families who already live in the area and are upgrading to a new house already have their children enrolled in schools, and the average number of children at home per family has declined dramatically in the last 40 years<sup>5</sup>.

Another challenge of large-scale enrolment change has to do with economies of scale. It has been shown, for example, that the cost of running a school with fewer than 100 students is 29 percent higher on a per student basis than the cost of running a school with 300 or more students<sup>6</sup>. This occurs because certain fixed costs exist regardless of school size and thus some efficiencies and program advantages cannot be achieved in smaller schools.

**Figure 1: Percent Enrollment Change by School  
2004/05 to 2009/10**



\* 200 students from Holy Family Elementary will be rezoned to attend the new Paradise Elementary I when it opens.

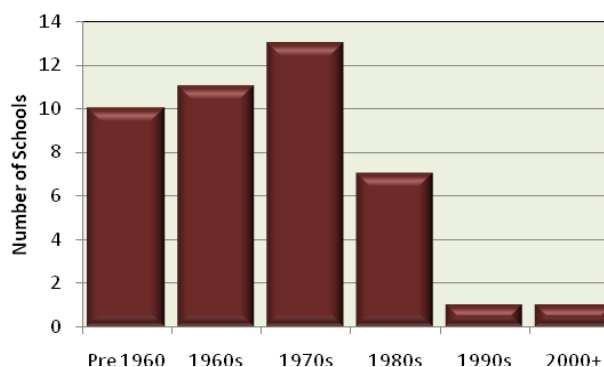


## 1.4 DIFFERENCES AMONG SCHOOLS

Aging school infrastructure is a challenge. Figure 2 shows the overall age of facilities in the study area. While over half have been built since 1970, about one-quarter were built prior to 1960.

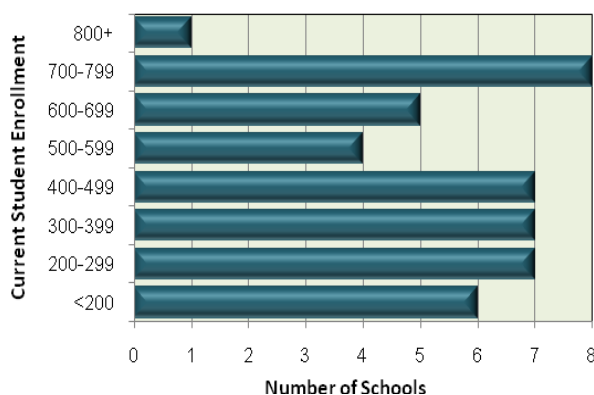
The condition of school facilities in the study area is, for the most part, quite good. While there are issues of ventilation, acoustic and noise control, storage, accessibility, technology integration, and physical security, they are not widespread. In some schools, roofs, windows and siding need attention. This is not unusual as all facilities, whether public or private, need regular preventative maintenance. In all cases, capital needs worsen if unattended. A roof repair one year could potentially prevent a multi-million dollar retrofit in subsequent years.

Figure 2: Schools by Year of Initial Construction



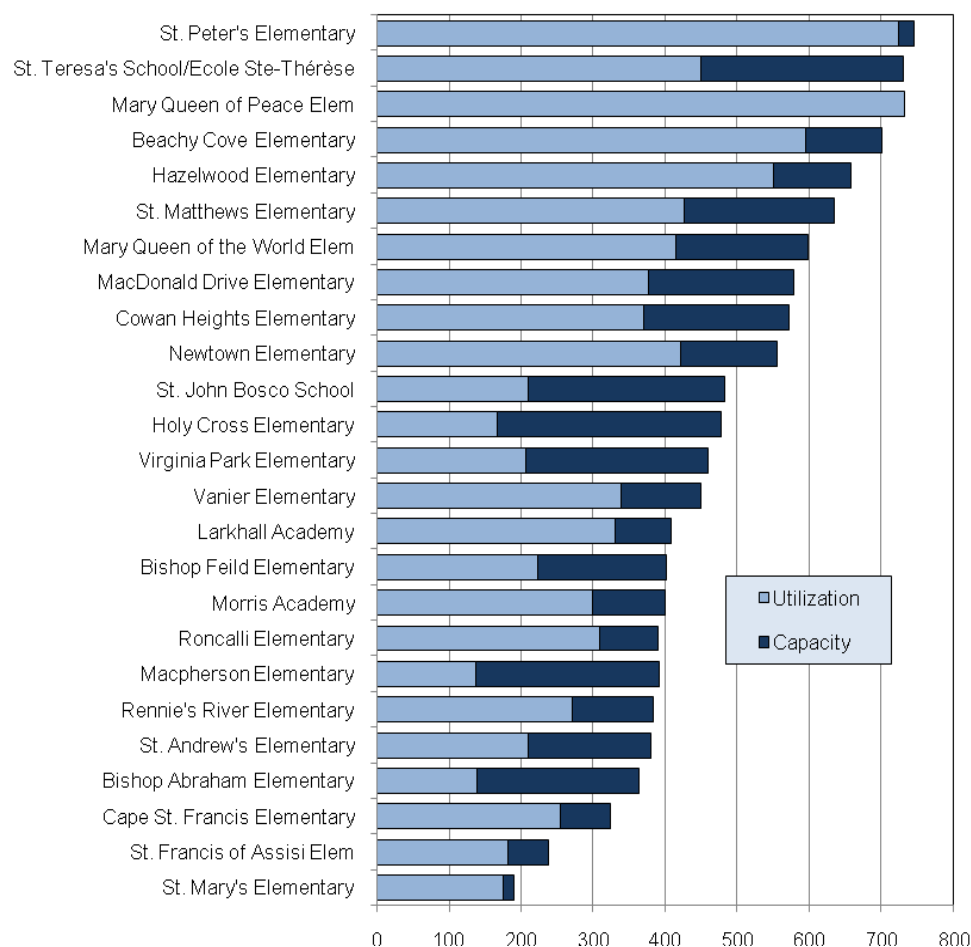
The study area has a variety of schools. It has large urban high schools such as Holy Heart of Mary High School with 910 students in levels 1-4 and small schools such as Macpherson Elementary with fewer than 150 students in grades k-6. Figure 3 shows the variance in the size of schools. The chart indicates school size based on current enrolment rather than the school's capacity. Most schools have the capacity to enroll more students.

Figure 3: Schools by Size (current enrollment), 2009/10 (n=45)



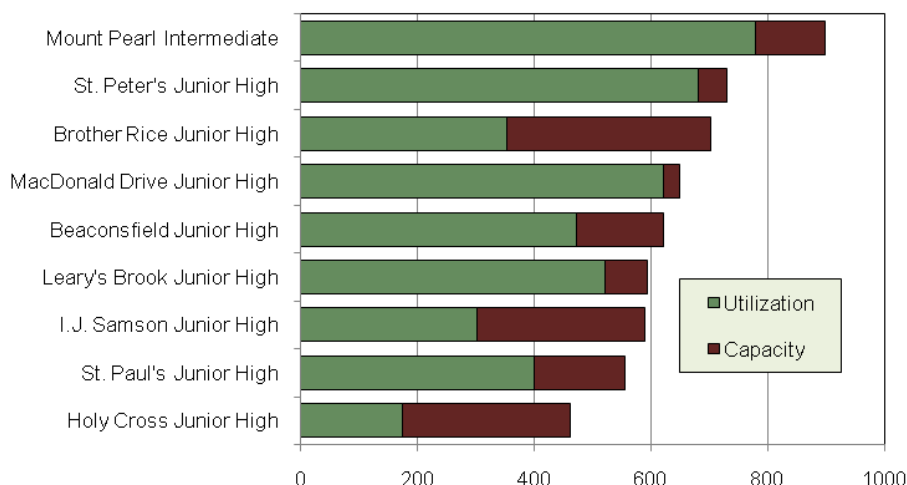
An examination of the capacity of individual schools and how they are utilized shows the degree of variation between schools in the study area. Figures 4-6 shows the variation among elementary schools, intermediate schools and high schools. In Figure 4, for example, a number of elementary schools are either at capacity or very close. However, a significant number of elementary schools are significantly underutilized, with current enrolment less than half the capacity of the school. Currently, among the 26 elementary schools in the study area, there is space to accommodate an additional 3,500 students. This is of particular concern in schools where enrolments are declining and the available space for additional students is increasing.

**Figure 4: Elementary Schools by Capacity and Utilization, 2009/10**



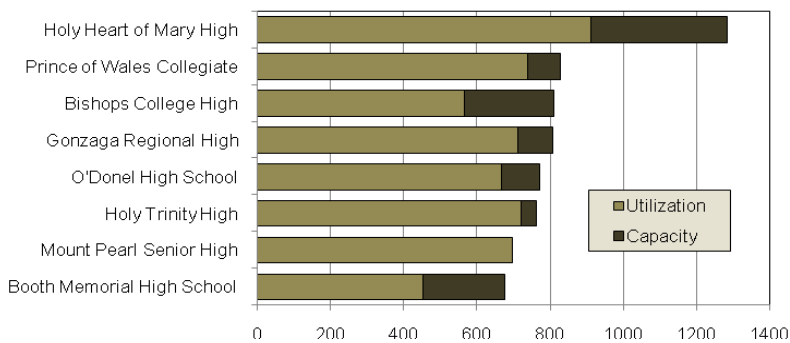
There are similar patterns for junior high and senior high schools. While a number of junior high schools are at capacity, several are significantly underutilized. Currently, there is sufficient space to accommodate an additional 1,400 students among the nine junior high schools in the study area.

**Figure 5: Junior High Schools by Capacity and Utilization, 2009/10**



High schools serving students in the Mount Pearl, Paradise, Torbay areas are, for the most part, well utilized. Inner-city high schools have considerable capacity for additional students. In total, the high schools in the study area can accommodate and additional 1,100 students. In the future, that number is likely to grow.

**Figure 6: High Schools by Capacity and Utilization, 2009/10**



## 1.5 PROGRAM DELIVERY

A challenge for schools is their ability to offer appropriate programs to children of different levels, abilities and interests and in a wide variety of school settings. Indeed, the goal of education is to provide for educational programs and school facilities where all students receive the highest quality educational experiences possible. A symbiotic relationship exists between the ability of schools to offer broad-based programming and a needs-based model for assigning teachers based on a population that is, with few exceptions, declining. Larger schools benefit from a broader-based curriculum because of the efficiencies and economies of scale that can be attained; however, there are trade-offs, such as higher class sizes and longer travel times to and from school. Smaller schools do not have the student numbers to justify employing the range of specialist teachers that are typically available in larger schools.

Among the schools in this review, 28 (62.2%) offer French immersion programming. It says a great deal about access to French language programming in the area. Enrolment in early and late French immersion programs now accounts for 21.5 percent of the total enrolment (20,330). Although there is no available comparative data, it is likely one of the highest French immersion participation rates for a similar area in Canada.

In addition, some schools pursue other French language options. These include core French, expanded core French, and intensive core French. Intensive core French is an enrichment of the core French program by the creation of a period of intensive exposure to French which enables students to receive close to five times the number of hours of instruction devoted to French they would ordinarily get in one semester. Interest in the program is growing rapidly with 16 of 26 elementary schools (61.5%) and one intermediate school now offering intensive core French.

## **2 METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES**

Currently, the Eastern School District has requests to the Department of Education for school capital works in the order of \$100 million for the greater St. John's area. Its multi-year school capital plan includes the construction of new school buildings, the closure of existing facilities, and renovations to others. It proposes to add capacity in areas of projected enrolment growth, undertake strategies to align existing facilities with instructional and enrolment needs, and continue to effect improvements to its aging infrastructure.

The focus of this review is to gain an understanding of the issues and challenges that large-scale enrolment change and aging infrastructure are having on schools in the study area. Site visits, consultations with key informants and data analysis, were used to gain a more complete picture of the infrastructure needs of the area. A comprehensive review of the current literature and related research in the field was also used to help understand how other jurisdictions recognized and dealt with similar change.<sup>7</sup>

A detailed visual inspection of each school facility was conducted by the consultants. The consultants rated each building's main systems and underlying components, identifying and quantifying any deficiencies. The condition of each building system is assessed in various ways beginning with a site analysis, examining the existing deficiencies through a visual inspection, and assessing the remaining useful life. Typically, the factors that are seen to be important to educators include, size, space utilization, thermal conditions, acoustics and storage<sup>8</sup>. Research shows that the design, condition and utilization of school facilities can have a positive impact on the quality of education of students<sup>9</sup>.

Student enrolments, enrolment projections, facility capacities, facility utilization, and classroom requirements were analyzed for each school. Enrolment projections are particularly helpful in that they open a window into the future by identifying the direction and magnitude of student population change.

When examining the organization of schools, it is recognized and understood that more than one opportunity for change is frequently available. In some cases, the only realistic and appropriate option may be the rezoning of students to other schools or even the closure of the school. In other cases, current conditions will have to be examined in relation to future consequences. For example, immediate changes in a particular school may not be necessary or possible but, because of continuing enrolment decline or growth in the school, changes will have to be considered for the future. A set of guiding principles can help ensure that different circumstances are treated equally across the district and that a focus on students is maintained.

## **2.2 RESEARCH OUTCOMES**

Specific activities included the following:

- a review of the current condition and suitability of existing school facilities in the study area, more specifically which buildings could be upgraded, closed, replaced, extended or redeveloped;
- identification of any gaps related to population change in the Eastern School District multi-year school capital plan;
- an analysis of current and projected enrolments (six years) of schools in the study area and the capacity of these schools;
- an analysis of the capacity of individual schools to determine which ones can accommodate additional students and which ones are significantly underutilized;
- a review of the suitability of each facility to provide appropriate educational programming; and
- an assessment of the catchment areas of each school in the study area.

## **2.3 ENROLMENT PROJECTION METHODOLOGY**

To gain a more complete understanding of how enrolments may change in the future, a critical step in the review was to examine current school enrolment projections. To achieve this, an alternative projection methodology was used for a sample of schools to see if there was significant variation with the Eastern School

District's own enrolment projections. This is a form of triangulation which uses mixed-methods to help understand if alternative methods can result in similar outcomes<sup>10</sup>. Research findings from different methods are a way of validating the knowledge generated in a study<sup>11</sup>.

The enrolment projection methods, assumptions and practices used by the Eastern School District are first class. They are as rigorous and as thorough as those used by any school board in Canada. The consultants found little variance between the results from their methods and the results from the methods used by the school district. The consultants then reran the school district's projections for the next six years using the most current 2009/10 data and several alternative assumptions. Individual school enrolment projections are presented in the Appendices of this report.

It is important to note that enrolment projections are simply best estimates of future enrolments based on past trends and current conditions. Unforeseen events can quickly change future enrolments (e.g., new housing developments, new business development, migration patterns, policy changes, etc.). The further into the future the projection period extends, the less reliable the enrolment projection will be.

### 3 FOCUS OF THE REVIEW

All provinces in Canada have experienced declining enrolments. This province has experienced sharper decreases in enrolment than any other province. Enrolment has declined over 20,000 students (23 percent) since September, 2000. Since that time, over 55 schools have been closed in the province. Enrolment in British Columbia has declined by about 50,000 students (8 percent) since September, 2000. Since that time, 139 schools have been closed<sup>12</sup>. The steepest declines tend to occur in small, rural and remote school districts. Declining enrolments present many challenges, not the least of which is the decreasing ability to offer the breadth and depth of programming.

One of the objectives of this review was to develop a framework for discussion to assist in the development of school organization plans. For the purposes of this report, a Multi-year Plan should be based upon: 1) the assignment of students to particular schools in such a way as to allow for the broadest and most substantive educational programs possible for the most optimal number of students, taking into account present and future enrolments, the capacity and utilization of the facility, the age and condition of the facility, the transportation impacts on children, etc.; and 2) the most cost efficient allocation of school district resources for its facilities to permit the greatest possible expenditure of board financial resources to be applied to the program needs of students.

This review assessed and developed options and recommendations similar to the following:

- construction of a new facility to replace one or more schools;
- construction of an extension to a school to accommodate additional classrooms, other instructional areas, or non-instructional components;
- upgrades and/or renovations to an existing facility to accommodate additional students or programming;
- consolidation of two or more schools resulting in the closure of one or more schools;



- change to the existing school zones to reassign some students to one or more schools; or
- no change.

### **3.1 FACTORS THAT IMPACT SCHOOL CAPITAL PLANNING**

There are many factors which come into play when developing multi-year school capital plans. Factors that help establish a link between the information collected and analyzed and the type of school organizational changes that would be most appropriate for the future. The following factors were used by the consultants to help establish options and recommendations that are reasonable, achievable, and consistently applied across the study area.

#### **3.1.1 Program**

For the most part, school consolidation is a mechanism for maintaining or building on existing programs, recognizing that the status quo will lead eventually to a reduction in programs or services. Despite efforts to adjust to demographic change through restructuring, there remain significant challenges associated with delivering a responsive education program to a population dispersed in a large number of small communities and a small number of larger metropolitan areas. As is the case in other jurisdictions, the need to operate within a context of finite financial resources is a reality. In short, such declines create challenges for accessibility, quality and affordability, particularly in rural settings and for particular program areas<sup>13</sup>.

Over the years, the education system has undergone numerous positive transformations. As a result, significantly more students now remain in school through to graduation and, in turn, go on to college and university. This is a direct result not only of broader and more diverse curriculum options for students, but also of enhanced social and cultural experiences for students, a better understanding of the importance of education and the link between education and employment, better qualified teachers, outstanding leadership, and more involved parents and support givers.

### **3.1.2 Enrolment Trends**

Fertility and migration have contributed to a 15 percent drop in enrolment in the province in the last 10 years. While some of the most significant declines have occurred in small rural schools, inner-city schools have seen dramatic declines as well. At the same time, new housing developments and movement between neighbourhoods and towns have resulted in increases in a number of schools; most notably in suburban towns such as Paradise and Torbay.

Enrolment projections are an essential ingredient in school capital planning. Projected enrolment is one of the most important factors in planning for the future. One-year projections are important because they provide a guide for budget planning, hiring of new teachers and allocating classes. Longer-term projections are used to help understand the changes that are likely to take place in the future, to plan for the best possible responses to them, and to make informed decisions when the time is right. Without enrolment projections, educators and policy makers have no way of knowing, understanding and maximizing teaching and learning opportunities.

### **3.1.3 School Size**

One area where much research exists has to do with school size. A number of studies on school size have arrived at similar conclusions, that is, schools in the range of 400-600 students for elementary schools (K-8) and 600-900 students for high schools (9-12) are most effective<sup>14</sup>. In this province elementary is defined as including grades K-6. In Canada, several jurisdictions have parameters defining small and optimal schools. For example, some define small schools as having fewer than 100 students and define optimal schools as having between 250-400 students<sup>15</sup>.

### **3.1.4 School Capacity and Utilization**

The extent to which school buildings support education is a challenge for educational administrators. For example, schools where enrolments are increasing and are at or near capacity can experience less program and organizational flexibility. This is more typically seen in suburban neighbourhoods and communities where in-migration has

led to enrolment growth. Similarly, schools where enrolments are declining will also experience less program and organizational flexibility particularly in cases where student populations decline to the point where it becomes financially unfeasible to offer specialized programs when the student base cannot support these programs. Declining enrolments are occurring in a number of smaller communities where out-migration and declining populations are becoming increasingly common. It is important to note that capacity is not a *de facto* measure of the maximum population that can be accommodated in a school. It is simply *an estimate* of the cumulative capacity of the instructional rooms in the school in order to discover if reorganizational opportunities exist. Measuring capacity in elementary schools is limited to classrooms, while gymnasias, libraries, and special education/challenging needs rooms are not included in the overall capacity. In secondary schools, on the other hand, science laboratories and other specialty areas are viewed as instructional areas and included as part of the overall capacity. Without knowing what goes on in individual rooms it is difficult to assess individual classroom capacity. The total instructional capacity of a school can vary by how it is used. That said, capacity is a useful indicator in helping to understand the current and potential usage of a school.

Measuring the number of students in the school against the capacity of the school is an indicator of how much the school is being utilized. On the one hand, if a school is 90 percent utilized, one could conclude it is at the high end of the capacity limit. On the other hand, if a school is 50 percent utilized, one could conclude there is potential for alternative uses of space within the school. As schools are used in different ways at different times, it is understood that utilization provides only a broad measure of the extent to which a school is used.

Capacity and utilization are not intended as measures for comparative purposes. For example, comparing a school with 95 percent utilization against a school with 85 percent utilization serves little useful purpose without knowing the broader context of both schools. School capacity and utilization are intended to be used along with other indicators in helping to build and understand school potential.

### **3.1.5 Quality of Buildings**

The study area has a patchwork of new and old buildings. Some school buildings are new and others are approaching (or past) the end of their useful life. A number of characteristics about school facilities are indicators of their ability to fully achieve their intended use. Suffice to say, overcrowded, underutilized, outdated and poorly laid out classrooms can create significant challenges for teachers and present barriers to learning for students.

Whatever the condition of the building, it is important that regular maintenance be done. Physical deterioration, whether small or large, is a measure of the health, safety and structural condition of a school and may include structural problems, deteriorating surfaces, failing services or safety deficiencies. Functional deterioration is a measure of the school's adaptability, efficiency of space and utilities usage, and the cost of refurbishing the building for its intended use.

In the end, regardless of condition, schools need to be efficient, welcoming, safe, flexible and responsive learning institutions, they need to promote personalization of learning, they need to provide opportunities for community engagement, and they need to be adaptable to shifts in population.

### **3.1.6 Location and Access**

A key consideration in any school capital plan has to do with location. The location of a school is important in relation to where its students and their families reside, where other schools are located, and its proximity to other facilities such as arenas, sports fields, parks, community centres, etc. Collaborating and sharing with other schools and access to other facilities creates options which can lead to increased efficiencies, more equitable distribution of available resources, and broader program opportunities for students.

Most schools began as the centre of a neighbourhood or community. As enrolments go down, opportunities to consolidate neighbourhood and community schools increase. Schools not only serve neighbourhoods and communities, they connect them. Having students from different areas converge to a single school helps build

character, collaboration, teamwork and fellowship. Schools are social institutions that bring together boys and girls from different backgrounds, religions, cultures, neighbourhoods, and communities.

## 4 RESPONSE TO SCHOOL BOARD MULTI-YEAR PLAN

School multiyear planning involves the analysis of many issues and challenges facing the organization and management of schools. For example, it would be overly simplistic to conclude that “enrolment in a particular school has declined sufficiently to warrant that it be closed,” or that “a school is overcrowded and needs to be expanded.” Each may be true. However, education is a complex enterprise that is not done justice by focusing only on one or two symptoms.

Each of the main components of the existing School District Multi-year Plan is discussed below within the context of the findings of this review, current research in the area, multiple indicators, and the guiding principles presented earlier. The components of the current Multi-year Plan were approved during a School Board meeting dated May 06, 2008 . A discussion of the main components of the plan follows.

As part of the discussion and where feasible and appropriate, alternative options are presented. The plan and alternative options were assessed based on the factors or guiding principles outlined in the previous section. In the end, they were given a litmus test: Are they reasonable and achievable? Have they been consistently applied? and, Are they in the best interests of students?

### ***Option 1: Replace Holy Heart of Mary High School***

The current plan by the school district is to close Holy Heart of Mary High School and replace it with a new high school. In the plan, students from Holy Cross Elementary and Bishop Abraham Elementary will continue to feed to Holy Cross Junior High which will be rezoned for students to attend the new high school which will replace Holy Heart of Mary. In addition, students from St. John Bosco will be rezoned to attend elsewhere.

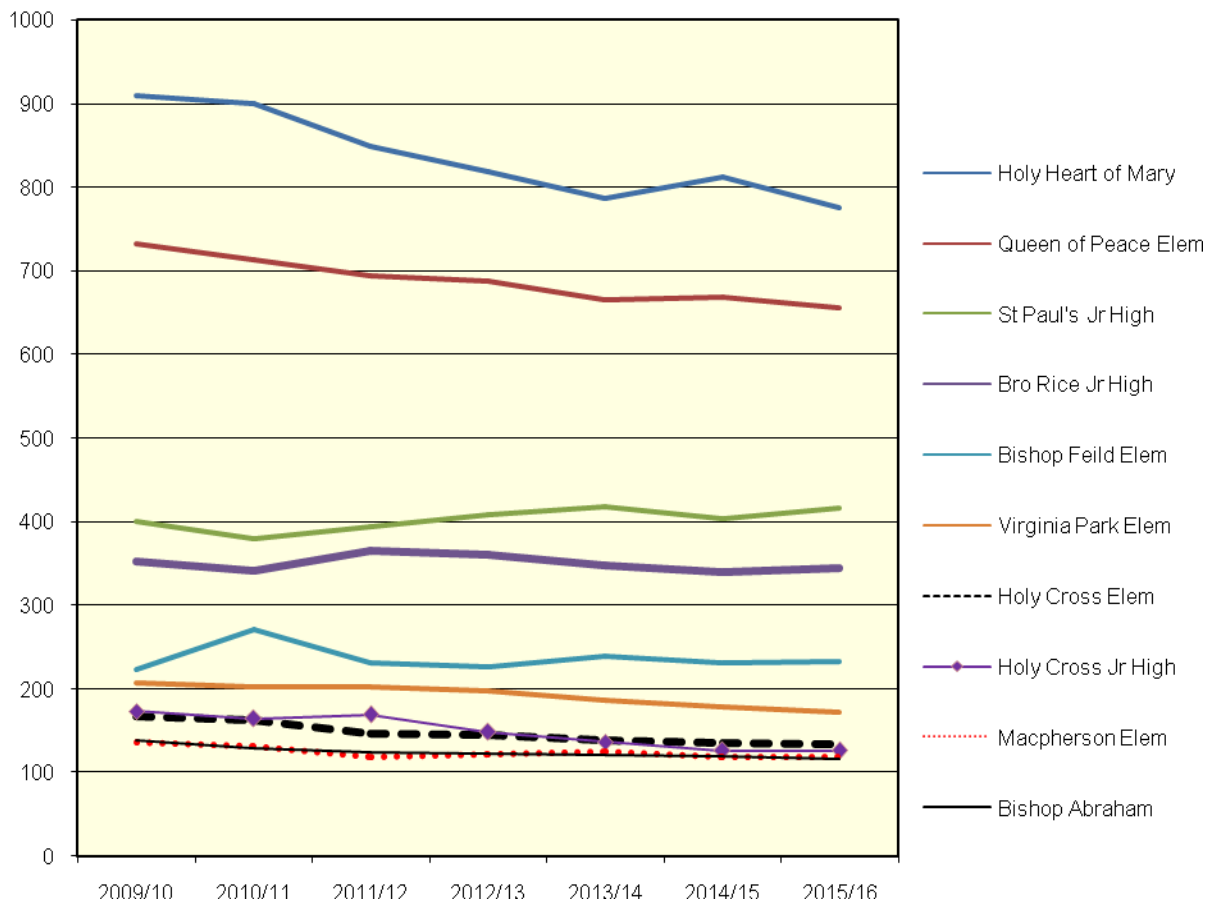
In the five years between 2004/05 and 2009/10, enrolment in the Holy Heart of Mary feeder system declined by 864 students (-20.1%). Elementary feeder schools declined 15.4 percent, junior high schools declined 31.9 percent, and Holy Heart of

Mary itself declined 13.2 percent. Much of this decline was due to a moderate but steady decline in births in the inner-city region coupled with a lack of significant in-migration.

PROPOSED NEW HOLY HEART OF MARY FEEDER SYSTEM		
Elementary K-6	Junior High 7-9	Senior High L1-L4
Bishop Field Elementary	Brother Rice Junior High School	Holy Heart of Mary High School (new school)
Macpherson Elementary		
Mary Queen of Peace Elementary	St. Paul’s Junior High School	
Virginia Park Elementary		
Holy Cross Elementary	Holy Cross Junior High School	
Bishop Abraham Elementary		

Over the next six years, schools in this region will continue to feel the effects of fertility and migration declining 13.0 percent; a loss of about 450 students. Enrolment in the six elementary schools that will feed through to the proposed new Holy Heart of Mary High will decline by about 180 students or -11.0 percent. The three junior high schools will see more modest declines (-4.2%). With the school configured as it is now, Holy Heart itself will see a drop of about 230 students, or -25.4 percent in the next six years. However, under the proposed configuration—Holy Cross Junior High moving in and St. John Bosco moving out—Holy Heart of Mary High will decline more modestly; down from 910 students to 776 (-14.7%).

### Enrolment Forecast: Proposed Holy Heart of Mary High Feeder System



Schools in the proposed new feeder system are already significantly underutilized with only 59 percent of the available space being used. With a total capacity for 5,798 students and only 3,442 students enrolled, space is available for an additional 2,356 students.

Projections indicate that excess capacity will further increase. By 2015/16, enrolment in the area will have dropped to under 3,100 students, increasing excess capacity to over 2,700 seats. With only a couple of exceptions—St. Paul's Junior High (77%) and Mary Queen of Peace Elementary (91%)—all other schools will be utilized between 27 and 60 percent. Without some consolidation, there will continue to be significant overcapacity in the proposed new Holy Heart feeder system.



Holy Heart of Mary Regional High School was built by the Presentation Sisters and opened November, 1958. With over 140,000 square feet of gross area, it is by far the largest school in the province. The facility itself is structurally sound, constructed using reinforced concrete. It is located in the centre of the old city core, over 40 percent of the students getting to school on their own.



**Credit: Holy Heart Archives. Courtesy of Learning Resources.**

The school offers Advanced Placement courses and is the only school in the province that currently offers the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme. It has students from English and French Immersion (Early and Late) tracks. Its music program is internationally renowned. A large theatre is attached to the school which is used by the school and plays host to concerts from outside the school community.

On the other hand, there are compelling reasons to close Holy Heart of Mary. While the school presently has over 900 students enrolled, it is far from being fully utilized. Over the next six years, enrolments are projected to decline a further 25.4 percent, reducing the school to fewer than 800 students leaving it significantly underutilized.

There are a number of building limitations emanating from its structural design, its entrance, its many levels, corners and turns, its wall construction, and its lack of full accessibility. The heating plant is not the most efficient or effective means for this type of facility. It is expensive to maintain and system upgrading or replacement is costly. There are site limitations as well. The school has limited available green space. The parking lot is small and poorly designed to allow for safe and efficient access for busses, drop-offs and parking. Many parents pick up and drop off their children directly on the main street. The Province does have some potential sites

available, such as the former site of the old Janeway Hospital which may be suitable for this purpose.

The decision-making, planning, design and construction of a new facility to replace Holy Heart would take several years. By that time, enrolment is projected to drop to about 800 students and to remain at that level for several years.

**Alternative Option:** *Keep Holy Heart of Mary High School open for the foreseeable future and renovate the school to meet current modern standards.*

Upgrading and replacing outdated systems would include: health and safety upgrades, mechanical and ventilation systems, electrical systems, site upgrades, program upgrades and technology upgrades. Aesthetic improvements and contingencies would have to be factored in as well.

Because of the age and construction of the building, there are some relevant issues such as limitations in the structural design, multi-level construction, extensive corners and turns, and limitations for handicapped accessibility.

Closing the school and rezoning Holy Heart students to attend other high schools in the city is not a feasible option for the short term. High school students have unique and distinct program needs and it would be impossible to find sufficient appropriate space in the area to accommodate over 800 high school students; particularly without major redevelopment to some buildings. Furthermore, because of the size, age, structure and complexity of the school, a redevelopment of this nature is costly. A full retrofit and redevelopment of Holy Heart High School including a minor upgrading of the Auditorium is estimated to cost in excess of \$40M in \$2012 (assumed mid-point of construction). Thus, this option was not seen by the consultants as the most cost-effective, feasible, or prudent solution for the long term.

The cost of closing Holy Heart of Mary High School and replacing it with a new high school, as the School Board has requested, will depend on the size of the school, land acquisition costs, labour costs, materials costs and inflation. As it will be several years before such a school could open, enrolment at that time likely would be in the order of 800 students. The site for the new school will have to be determined based

on availability, size, accessibility, cost, and school population. That said, it is estimated the cost of constructing a new high school to replace Holy Heart of Mary High School will be in the order of \$30M to \$34M in \$2012 (assumed mid-point of construction).

**Recommendation 1:** *When funds become available, close Holy Heart of Mary High School and replace it with a new high school to accommodate approximately 800 students. The former Janeway Hospital site may be a potential location for the new school.*

**Option 2: Build Extension and Carry Out Renovations to Beaconsfield Junior High School**

The School Board also plans to build an extension and complete extensive renovations to Beaconsfield Junior High School. The purpose of these changes is to:

- facilitate the closure of I.J. Samson Junior High School and rezone the students to attend Beaconsfield Junior High School;
- enable students from Cowan Heights Elementary to be rezoned to attend Beaconsfield Junior High School;
- enable students from St. Mary's Elementary to be rezoned to attend Beaconsfield Junior High School; and
- enable students from Hazelwood Elementary and St. Matthew's Elementary to continue to attend Beaconsfield Junior High School.

Between 2004/05 and 2009/10, enrolment in Beaconsfield Junior High School, declined by almost 100 students (-16.8%). The four elementary schools which are proposed to feed to Beaconsfield Junior High declined 11.8 percent over the same period; the largest decline in Cowan Heights Elementary (25.1%) and stable enrolment in St. Matthew's Elementary.

Currently, Beaconsfield Junior High is utilized about 75 percent with space for an additional 155 students. Over the next six years, enrolment in Beaconsfield Junior High is projected to decline a further 62 students (-13.1%) creating space for over 200 students.

The decision by the School Board to close I.J. Samson Junior High School is a prudent one. The school is 66 years old and has envelope issues (roof repairs and window replacement), no air handling, and is not fully accessible. Some renovations to Beaconsfield Junior High to accommodate the additional program requirements and students from both Cowan Heights Elementary and St. Mary's Elementary will be required.



Further, the consultants are recommending students from St. John Bosco (see Recommendation 11) feed to Beaconsfield Junior High as well. As a result, if all three schools feed into the facility, Beaconsfield Junior High would need an additional five classrooms for a total of 28 classrooms (currently it has 23). The decision to close I.J. Samson should proceed as soon as possible.

**Recommendation 2:** *When funds become available, build an extension and complete necessary renovations to Beaconsfield Junior High School to accommodate students zoned from other schools.*

**Option 3: Close Bishops College and Booth Memorial High Schools and Replace them with a New High School in the West End of St. John's**

The current plan by the school district is to close both Bishops College and Booth Memorial High School and replace them with a new high school specifically located in the west end of the city. Students attending the new high school would feed from two schools:

- Beaconsfield Junior High School (see #2 above) which would be reconfigured to draw students from four elementary schools (Hazelwood, St. Matthew's, Cowan Heights, and St. Mary's); and
- St. John Bosco which will be rezoned from Holy Heart of Mary High School.

<b>PROPOSED NEW HIGH SCHOOL (WEST END) FEEDER SYSTEM</b>		
Elementary k-6	Junior High 7-9	Senior High L1-L4
Hazelwood Elementary	Beaconsfield Junior High School	New High School
St. Matthew's Elementary		
Cowan Heights Elementary		
St. Mary's Elementary		
St. John Bosco		

In the five years between 2004/05 and 2009/10, enrolment in Bishops College and Booth Memorial High dropped 17.3 percent (213 students). Together, the schools have a capacity for 1,485 students, thus leaving them at about 68 percent capacity. Over the next six years, enrolment is projected to decline a further 12.6 percent, leaving the high schools at about 60 percent capacity.

Both facilities are over 50 years old. Booth Memorial High, the smaller of the two, is overall in poorer condition. Originally, Dawson Elementary was linked to Booth Memorial to form one school. The result is a facility with many sections and levels making accessibility challenging, if not impossible. While both schools are structurally sound, there are numerous deficiencies, including function and design, instructional spaces, general facility condition, maintenance costs and the magnitude of interior and exterior retrofits.

Booth Memorial has additional issues around accessibility, the limitations of the site, and a lack of available green space.

The benefits of making the required renovations together with the costs of modernizing the schools to bring them in line with current high performance educational facilities does not present a sound education or business case.

Because of the site, space, age, structure, layout, cost, and condition of the facility, redeveloping or replacing Booth Memorial was not considered a viable option. On the other hand, Bishops College has a large site (approximately five acres) and can accommodate an extension to the facility. However, because of the age, structure,

complexity and condition of the facility, a full retrofit and addition to Bishops College is estimated to cost in excess of \$30M. Thus, the option to extend and redevelop Bishops College was not seen by the consultants as a cost-effective, feasible, or prudent solution for the long term.

The cost of closing both Booth Memorial High and Bishops College and replacing them with a new high school in the West End, as the School Board has requested, will depend on the size of the school, land acquisition costs, labour costs, materials costs and inflation. The projected enrolment in three years—the time it will likely take for design, tendering and construction of a new high school—would be approximately 800-850 students. By that time, the total cost of constructing a modern new high school facility is estimated to be in the order of \$34 million.

**Recommendation 3:** *When funds become available, close both Booth Memorial High School and Bishops College and build a new high school to accommodate approximately 850 students.*

#### ***Option 4: Build Extension to Roncalli Elementary***

Roncalli Elementary is a unique neighbourhood school. The region is bounded by the Trans Canada Highway to the south, Pippy Park to the east, and St. John's Airport to the west. However, there are a number of housing developments in progress and as a result the school population has grown rapidly in recent years. Between 2004/05 and 2009/10, enrolment increased 44.2 percent. The school is a brick, steel and concrete building ventilated by windows. An extension to the building is under construction and is substantially complete. The extension, designed to address the growth in the school region over the last five years, will provide three additional classrooms.

In the meantime, enrolment is projected to increase a further 17.4 percent the next six years. With that in mind, the School Board is seeking funds to demolish the older section of the school (including the vacated church) and build extra classrooms to accommodate the expanding population in the area. Because of the projected growth in the region, the school does need a long term plan for redevelopment.

**Recommendation 4:**     *Complete necessary extension/renovations to Roncalli Elementary to accommodate projected future needs.*

**Option 5: Build a New Elementary School in the Portugal Cove / St. Philips / Torbay Area**

The School Board has requested a new school be built for the area between Holy Trinity Elementary and Beachy Cove Elementary. Holy Trinity Elementary is a new school that opened in September 2010. Beachy Cove Elementary has had two extensions added to the building in recent years. The last extension has left the school site with little space for expansion.

The area served by these two schools is growing. Between 2004/05 and 2009/10 the enrolment in both schools combined increased by 169 students (16.3%); Torbay Elementary increased 14.2 percent and Beachy Cove Elementary increased 18.4 percent. Enrolment in both schools likely will continue to increase over the next six years: Beachy Cove Elementary is projected to increase modestly (2.7%) to 610 students; and Holy Trinity Elementary is projected to increase approximately three percent per year (22%) to 746 students.

With the most recent extension, Beachy Cove Elementary has the capacity to accommodate about 700 students. This means it is being utilized about 85 percent of its capacity. With enrolment projected to increase, by six years the school will be utilized approximately 87 percent of its capacity.

On the surface, it does not look like a new school is prudent in the short term. However, enrolments need to be monitored and if enrolments increase significantly beyond the projected numbers, the decision to build a new elementary school in the region will have to be revisited.

**Recommendation 5:**     *Defer decision to construct a new school in the Portugal Cove/St. Philips/Torbay area until enrolments increase to a point where a new school is viable and sustainable.*

## 5 OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The consultants were asked to identify other areas for consideration exclusive of the School District Multi-year School Capital Plan.

### *St. Andrew's Elementary*

The assessment of St. Andrews Elementary uncovered some conditions that could eventually lead to problems. Minor renovations to the school are required to address these conditions and the School Board is taking steps to address these conditions.

**Recommendation 6:** *Complete necessary renovations to St. Andrew's Elementary.*

### *Holy Trinity Elementary*

Holy Trinity Elementary, which opened in September 2010, has 27 classrooms for grades K-6. It was built for a population of 700 students. However, with the new Torbay By-pass Road scheduled to open within a year and with a number of new housing developments planned for the surrounding area, the assumptions underpinning the enrolment projections had to be modified. The end result is that enrolment in the new school is now projected to reach about 722 students by 2015/16. While not an immediate concern, enrolments should be monitored to see if they increase beyond the capacity of the school. If they increase beyond the capacity of the school, the catchment area can be changed to rezone some students to other schools in the immediate area. There are a number of other schools with space available for this to happen, including: Cape St. Francis Elementary, Beachy Cove Elementary, Roncalli Elementary, and St. Francis of Assisi Elementary.

**Recommendation 7:** *Monitor enrolment in Holy Trinity Elementary School and, if enrolment increases beyond the capacity of the school, change the catchment area to rezone some students to attend other schools in the immediate area.*



### Inner-City Elementary Schools

There are four schools in an area loosely described as the inner-city of St. John's. Because the city is expanding, so does our definition of what constitutes "inner-city" or even "west end". In the end, however, where they lie has no bearing on the conclusions reached. The following discussions are about the physical condition of school facilities, the impact of demography, and the need for change.

Summary of Building Condition, Enrolment, Capacity and Use: Inner-city Elementary Schools								
School	Building Condition			Capacity	Utilization <sup>1</sup>		Excess Capacity <sup>2</sup>	
		2009/10	2015/16		2009/10	2015/16	2009/10	2015/16
Bishop Abraham Elem	fair/good	139	117	363	38%	32%	224	246
Bishop Field Elem	poor/fair	224	233	402	56%	58%	178	169
Holy Cross Elem	fair	167	134	477	35%	28%	310	343
Macpherson Elem	poor	137	119	392	35%	30%	255	273
<b>Total</b>		<b>667</b>	<b>603</b>	<b>1,634</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>967</b>	<b>1,031</b>

<sup>1</sup> (enrolment/capacity)\*100. <sup>2</sup> (capacity-enrolment)

Each school in the inner-city area has a wonderful history and, for the most part, serves its own unique neighbourhood. Two schools, Bishop Abraham Elementary and Macpherson Elementary have no school bussing and about 75 percent of students in the other two schools travel to school on their own.

All of the schools are structurally sound. Bishop Field Elementary and Macpherson Elementary, however, are in poorer physical condition, require more maintenance, have site issues, and are more costly to maintain. The oldest, Bishop Field Elementary, was constructed in 1928 and is an example of collegiate gothic architecture with high ceilings, marble floors, oak mantles, and fireplaces. The building has provincial heritage status.

A major dilemma for educators challenged with organizing the broadest and most substantive educational programs possible for students has to do with declining enrolments. Between 2004/05 and 2009/10, enrolment in the four schools dropped 33.9 percent, and within six years is projected to drop a further 9.6 percent. The result is that all of these schools, which are already significantly underutilized, will

become even more so in the future. While some excess space is not only reasonable and practical, by 2015/16 only one-third of the available seats in the schools will be filled. In other words, with a collective capacity of 1,600 students, in six years only about 600 students will be enrolled, leaving space for over 1,000 additional students.

**Recommendation 8:**     *The School Board should take steps to immediately close MacPherson Elementary and to close Holy Cross Elementary once the new St. Teresa's School is completed*

#### ***West End Elementary Schools***

There are four schools in what could be loosely described as the west end of the city. While enrolments in this region are not declining at the same levels as the inner-city schools, nonetheless; there is considerable excess capacity. These schools, for the most part, serve their own unique neighbourhoods. With the exception of Hazelwood Elementary, the schools have little or no bussing.

St. Matthew's Elementary is projected to increase over 11 percent in the next six years while the other schools will continue to see declines. St. Mary's Elementary will see a drop of about 12 percent in enrolment by 2015/16. In the same period, Cowan Heights Elementary and Hazelwood Elementary are projected to decline modestly (4%). With the collective capacity for over 2,000 students in the four schools, by 2015/16 about three-quarters (1,513) of the available seats will be filled. The result will be excess capacity for over 500 students.

Summary of Building Condition, Enrolment, Capacity and Use: West End Elementary Schools								
School	Building Condition	Enrolment		Capacity <sup>3</sup>	Utilization <sup>1</sup>		Excess Capacity <sup>2</sup>	
		2009/10	2015/16		2009/10	2015/16	2009/10	2015/16
Cowan Heights Elem	good	370	356	571	65%	62%	201	215
Hazelwood Elem	very good	550	529	658	84%	80%	108	129
St. Mary's Elem	poor	176	154	190	93%	81%	14	36
St. Matthew's Elem	fair/good	426	474	635	67%	75%	209	161
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,522</b>	<b>1,513</b>	<b>2,054</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>523</b>	<b>541</b>

<sup>1</sup> (enrolment/capacity)\*100. <sup>2</sup> (capacity–enrolment)

<sup>3</sup> In addition, the School for the Deaf is currently being used to house 700 students from Paradise Elementary.

**Recommendation 9:** *The School Board review west end enrolments over the next 2-3 years and consider if the closure of an elementary school is necessary.*

#### Inner-City Junior High Schools

There are three junior high schools in the inner-city area. Between 2004/05 and 2009/20, enrolment in the three schools dropped 32.3 percent, and in the next six years is projected to drop a further 15.4 percent. The result is that all of these schools, which are already significantly underutilized, will become even more so in the future. Again, some excess space is reasonable, practical, and desirable. However, by 2015/16 the collective capacity in the three schools will be over 1,700 students and the enrolment will likely be down to about 700 students, leaving over 1,000 empty seats.

As noted earlier, the School Board has already made the decision to close I.J. Samson Junior High and rezone students to attend Beaconsfield Junior High. With this decision, significant capacity has been reduced in the area. However, the other two junior high schools are significantly underutilized and enrolments are projected to decline further; particularly Holy Cross Junior High which is projected to decline 27 percent in six years. The two junior high schools are just two kilometres from each other.

Summary of Building Condition, Enrolment, Capacity and Use: Inner-city Junior High Schools								
School	Building Condition	Enrolment		Capacity	Utilization <sup>1</sup>		Excess Capacity <sup>2</sup>	
		2009/10	2015/16		2009/10	2015/16	2009/10	2015/16
I.J. Samson Junior High	poor	301	230	590	51%	39%	289	360
Holy Cross Junior High	fair	173	126	459	38%	27%	286	333
Brother Rice Junior High	fair/good	353	344	700	50%	49%	347	356
<b>Total</b>		<b>827</b>	<b>700</b>	<b>1,749</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>922</b>	<b>1,049</b>

<sup>1</sup> (enrolment/capacity)\*100. <sup>2</sup> (capacity–enrolment)

**Recommendation 10:** *The School Board take steps to close I.J. Samson Junior High School and Holy Cross Junior High as soon as possible.*

### **St. John Bosco**

Enrolment in St. John Bosco has been declining rapidly. In 1999/00, the school had 532 students enrolled in grades k to L4. In 2009/10, enrolment had dropped to 211 students in grades k-9, of whom 138 were in k-6. Projections indicate that by 2015/16 enrolment will be down to 108 students in k-6 and only about 60 in junior high grades. At that time, the school will be filled to only 35 percent of its capacity. Because of its size, Beaconsfield Junior High is in a stronger position to deliver a broader and more diversified range of opportunities for students

**Recommendation 11:** *When funds become available, close the older section of St. John Bosco, redevelop the remaining section into a modern, state-of-the-art k-6 elementary school, and rezone junior high students to Beaconsfield Junior High.*

Implementation of this recommendation would facilitate locating grades k-6 in its entirety in one section of the building and closing unused areas. Closing part of the school will allow it to be rented, reused or sold. Some changes and modifications to the existing school would be required to facilitate this change.

Beaconsfield Junior High is within four kilometres of St. John Bosco. With the proposed reconfiguration of Beaconsfield Junior High School, additional classrooms will be required to accommodate the St. John Bosco students.

## 6 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendation 1: When funds become available, close Holy Heart of Mary High School and replace it with a new high school to accommodate approximately 800 students. The former Janeway Hospital site may be a potential location for the new school.
- Recommendation 2: When funds become available, build an extension and complete necessary renovations to Beaconsfield Junior High School to accommodate students zoned from other schools.
- Recommendation 3: When funds become available, close both Booth Memorial High School and Bishops College and build a new high school to accommodate approximately 850 students.
- Recommendation 4: Complete necessary extension/renovations to Roncalli Elementary to accommodate projected future needs.
- Recommendation 5: Defer decision to construct a new school in the Portugal Cove/St. Philips/Torbay area until enrolments increase to a point where a new school is viable and sustainable.
- Recommendation 6: Complete necessary renovations to St. Andrew's Elementary.
- Recommendation 7: Monitor enrolment in Holy Trinity Elementary School and, if enrolment increases beyond the capacity of the school, change the catchment area to rezone some students to attend other schools in the immediate area.
- Recommendation 8: The School Board take steps to immediately close MacPherson Elementary and to close Holy Cross

Elementary once the new St. Teresa's School is completed.

Recommendation 9: The School Board review west end enrolments over the next 2 to 3 years and consider if the closure of an elementary school is necessary.

Recommendation 10: The School Board take steps to close I.J. Samson Junior High School and Holy Cross Jr. High as soon as possible.

Recommendation 11: When funds become available, close the older section of St. John Bosco, redevelop the remaining section into a modern, state-of-the-art k-6 elementary school, and rezone junior high students to Beaconsfield Junior High.

## 7 CONCLUDING COMMENT

Important demographic trends are shaping the size, nature and composition of the education system on the Island. One of the most significant of these trends is the decline in fertility and the subsequent impact that has on the province's school population. This has resulted in enrolments in our province declining at rates never seen before in our history.

Over the next six years, enrolment in the study area is projected to drop a further 3.2 percent, translating into a net loss of about 1,000 students. While enrolments in about a dozen schools will increase, enrolments in the majority of schools will continue to decline (see Figure 8 on the following page). Secondary schools will decline 9.6 percent, intermediate schools 7.9 percent, and elementary schools 2.1 percent.

It is hard to predict how long and to what extent this development and growth will continue in the Northeast Avalon region. It is unlikely that fertility will increase significantly in the future<sup>16</sup>. Thus, any positive impact on enrolment in one school—in the form of enrolment growth or even slower than average decline—can result in a negative impact on enrolment in another school.

School facilities provide positive learning environments for children and adults and serve as a source of deep pride for everyone. The challenge is to provide high quality instruction and diverse program opportunities in clean, safe, positive learning environments enabling every student to acquire the tools and confidence to meet his or her goals and aspirations.

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