



Rural Education Task Force

THAMES VALLEY DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Table of Contents

Introduction	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Rural Education Task Force Members	3
Mandate	4
Executive Summary	1
Task Force Overview	3
Background and Context	3
Thames Valley District School Board	3
Timeline and Processes	4
Presentations and Research	6
Rural and Northern Education Fund (RNEF)	7
TVDSB RNEF Schools	8
Definitions	9
Key Findings and Actions	10
Task Force Vision	18
Thought Exchange Survey and Community Consultations	22

DRAFT

Rural Education Task Force Members

TVDSB Trustees

Arlene Morell, Middlesex County

Bruce Smith, Elgin County

Sean Hunt, Middlesex County

Meagan Ruddock, Elgin County

Municipal Leaders

Adrian Cornelissen, Middlesex County Councillor
Deputy Mayor, North Middlesex

Sally Martyn, Elgin County Councillor
Mayor, Central Elgin

Marcus Ryan, Oxford County Councillor
Mayor, Zorra Township

Education Partners

Suzanne McCullough, OSSTF

Larisa Grant, OPC

Jennifer Nuyens, TVCHSA

TVDSB

Paul Sydor, Superintendent of Student Achievement

Geoff Vogt, Superintendent of Facilities Services and
Capital Planning

Philippe Venesoën, Research And Assessment Associate

Richard Hoffman, Public Affairs Coordinator and
Communications Manager



Mandate

Recognizing that schools in rural areas face a variety of challenges including student enrolment, school population growth and decline, and other factors.

- Listen to the ideas and concerns of rural communities
- Generate fresh perspectives related to rural schools and communities
- Develop innovative solutions for consideration for a TVDSB Rural Education Strategy
- Report findings and make recommendations to the Board regarding rural schools

The task force would consult with students, parents, community, municipal leaders in TVDSB rural communities (as identified through RNEF), to identify the unique challenges and opportunities experienced by students, parents and municipalities; develop recommendations for consideration related to a TVDSB Rural Education

Task Force members to include but not limited to:

- Trustees
- Superintendents, learning coordinator (other)
- Principals and school staff
- Students (attending small rural high schools)
- Parents
- Community partners (childcare, public health)
- Municipal Leaders
- Others as identified

Scope (not limited to):

- ✓ Review the challenges and opportunities for rural schools, including funding
- ✓ Review current practices and evidence related to rural schools and communities (Re-Think Secondary)
- ✓ Examine the role e-learning plays in rural education, and other additional learning opportunities that enhance student learning
- ✓ Visit rural schools (elementary and secondary) to learn more about innovative practices as solutions
- ✓ Explore school configurations for example: Jk-12 or 7-12 models
- ✓ Develop recommendations to inform effectiveness and efficiencies within a rural education strategy
- ✓ Develop a final report of the Task Force to be presented to Trustees on or before November 2020 (extended to March 2022)

The following items were added to the scope of work at the 2020 January 13 meeting:

- ✓ Review the data used when making decisions impacting school closures/capital projects.
- ✓ Review the school level data shared at the Community Collaboration meetings.
- ✓ Review the effects of school closures on rural communities.
- ✓ Review funding mechanisms, such as the Rural Education Fund. There was a request to provide information on the criteria for funding.
- ✓ Review the provincial draft school closure guideline requirements related to an economic impact study for schools receiving RNEF funding

Executive Summary

The Rural Educations Task Force is a partnership comprised of TVDSB Trustees, Councillors from the rural municipalities of Elgin, Oxford and Middlesex County, TVDSB educators and staff, and community members. The Task Force was created in January 2020 to develop recommendations for a Thames Valley Rural Education Strategy.

The report of the Task Force reflects the voice of the rural constituency in parallel with Task Force members' expertise in their review of the challenges and opportunities of rural schools. The Task Force held in-person and virtual meetings and conducted an e-survey through the Thought Exchange platform realizing over 1,200 responses. Additionally, with the support of municipal partners, the Task Force hosted 7 in-person consultations, as community engagement, acquiring over 400 written responses. This report builds on the strengths and success of rural schools, with a focus on student success and well-being.

What We Learned

- the importance of considering rural needs in decision making
- the need for differentiated approaches
- there is disconnect between the importance of schools in rural communities and how they are funded
- the need to delivery of programming that attracts students from both rural and urban centres, and transportation to serve equitable access
- the importance of equitable access to student programming,
- the value of leveraging industry to support programming (i.e., co-ops),

The Task Force methodology identifies and concludes that differentiated approaches benefit urban, suburban and rural communities.

Summary of the Key Findings for Rural Schools

To foster student success, equity and the value of rural schools through establishing and implementing differentiated approaches. To integrate a rural policy lens ensuring decisions recognize and value rural Ontario as a strength and asset.

Thames Valley District School Board

- establish a Rural Equity Advisory Committee to implement RETF recommendations as the rural strategy
- advocate for a provincial policy requirement that school districts use the same planning data that Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Ministry of Finance require municipalities to use
- establish bi-annual planning and collaboration meetings with municipal partners, and report the outcomes of the meetings to the public
- establish joint-use agreements with municipal partners

Counties, Regions and Area Municipalities

- Develop and maintain regional(county) and local(municipal) school advisory committee, with a focus on economic development and community building
- Explore and establish joint-use agreements with the school district for example; sharing of resources, internet broadband, childcare and, student learning/career opportunities

Provincial Government

- Establish provincial policies for education funding, capital planning and pupil accommodation to formally recognize the value of rural and single school community schools to the community
- Maintain and enhance the Rural and Northern Education Fund (RNEF) model for rural and northern schools as a policy and funding framework
- Implement a policy requirement that school Districts use the same planning data that Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Ministry of Finance require municipalities to use
- Establish an education funding formula review through an equity lens to identify redundancies, efficiencies, rural inequities in the current structure of grants for student needs, relative to current expectations, expenditures, and impacts

Conclusion

Rural schools are integral to the local community, where traditions, activities and events are introduced, maintained, and evolve. They create a sense pride, loyalty and belonging with students as the beneficiaries.

The Rural and Northern Education Funding framework serves as the foundation to reduce barriers to emerging opportunities that will benefit rural schools and student outcomes. Furthermore, this funding is invaluable in severing students in rural schools and further investments will promote increased vitality of rural schools.

Above all, we are in this together, the province, the municipalities and the schools boards must be full partners. This will require provincial and local policy direction and a commitment to differentiated approaches in order to ensure this vision.

Ultimately, it will take continued engagement and resolute commitment to a Rural Education Strategy.

Task Force Overview

Background and Context

Thames Valley District School Board

With a rural, urban and suburban population, Thames Valley District School Board is a unique district shared across Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford Counties and the City of London. Our region is bordered by beautiful Lake Erie and Lake Huron, with some of the best greenspace and landscape that Ontario has to offer.



We are a District in motion toward progressive growth and student achievement. As the fourth largest public school board in Ontario, our 7,000km² district includes families who have been here for generations, and many who have recently arrived.

Thames Valley came into being on January 1, 1998, with the amalgamation of the Elgin County Board of Education, the Board of Education for the City of London, Middlesex County Board of Education and Oxford County Board of Education.

Schools

Elementary: 132
Secondary: 29

Enrolment

Elementary: 55,134
Secondary: 23,105

Transportation

Elementary Students: 23,822
Special Needs: 848
Secondary Students: 9,408
Special Needs: 637

Employees

Principals and Vice-Principals: 253
Elementary Teachers: 3,632
Secondary Teachers: 1,762
Educational Assistants: 836
Early Childhood Educators: 416

Continuing Education Instructors: 61
Professional and Support: 174
Custodial and Maintenance: 728
Office and Clerical: 418
Senior Administrative: 35
Other: 196

Total TVDSB Employees: 8,511

(Source TVDSB Web-Site)

Task Force Overview: Timeline and Processes



The Task Force was formed through a Board of Trustee resolution, as directed through the TVDSB Bylaws all Trustees were invited to indicate their interest in membership to the Task Force. Upon the appointment of the members to the Task Force, the first meeting was held in January 2020. As a group the Task Force members reviewed the scope, members identified gaps in the scope and expanded the mandate. The Task Force established a strategy to fulfill the mandate and to develop informed recommendations through three parallel pathways:

- reports and research;
- community consultation; and
- Task Force members' expertise.

As a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, in late March 2020, the Task Force paused its work until the late fall of 2020, thus a request to extend the timeline was granted.

In a manner to build a knowledge foundation, Task Force members shared, reviewed, and received presentations. The Task Force members began their work by reviewing similar projects undertaken in British Columbia and Ontario, their methods and findings served as a guide to the Task Force approaches in fulfilling the mandate.

Engagement and Consultation

The Task Force mandate to consult was supported by TVDSB Research and Assessment Department, the consultation (per the mandate) was developed and directed by the members of the Task Force. As such, it was important to Task Force members to learn directly from the rural constituency, therefore a three-phased approach was intentionally designed. Careful consideration was given to each phase, beginning with a Thought Exchange e-survey, with the results of the e-survey informing the in-person consultations. ~~and ending with utilizing expertise through a Focus Group.~~

Phase One: Thought Exchange Survey

An online survey was conducted, survey respondents asked to think about what is important to them regarding rural schools and share their thoughts, views and opinions regarding "What are the unique challenges and opportunities of our rural TVDSB schools and, how do you think we can enhance the rural experience?" The on-line survey was conducted in the late fall of 2020 with results of the e-survey presented by TVDSB Research and Assessment in January 2021. Over 1,200 responses were collected, members of the Task Force analysed the results, and emerging themes were identified as the basis of further consultation in phase two.

See Appendix XX, TVDSB Research and Assessment Report of the Thought Exchange Results

Engagement and Consultation

Phase Two: A Conversation about Rural Schools and Education in Thames Valley

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, it remained critical to the members of the Task Force to host in-person consultations, as such, the timeline was delayed. In-person consultations were held in November 2021, when it was safe to do so. As identified by the Task Force, the community consultations focused on four key themes: education funding; decision-making; school programming and the internet; and, the importance of rural community schools.

Through the generous support of the host Municipalities, a total of 7 in-person engagements were held garnering over 400 responses.

Middlesex County

Monday, November 15, Thames Centre,
Dorchester Arena

Monday, November 22, Southwest Middlesex,
Glencoe Library Community Room

Thursday, November 25, North Middlesex,
Parkhill Community Centre



Elgin County

Wednesday, November 17, West Elgin,
Rodney Recreation Centre

Wednesday, November 24, Malahide,
Springfield Community Centre

Thursday, December 2, Central Elgin,
Masonic Centre

Oxford County

Monday, November 29, Zorra Township,
Thamesford Recreation Centre



Presentations and Research

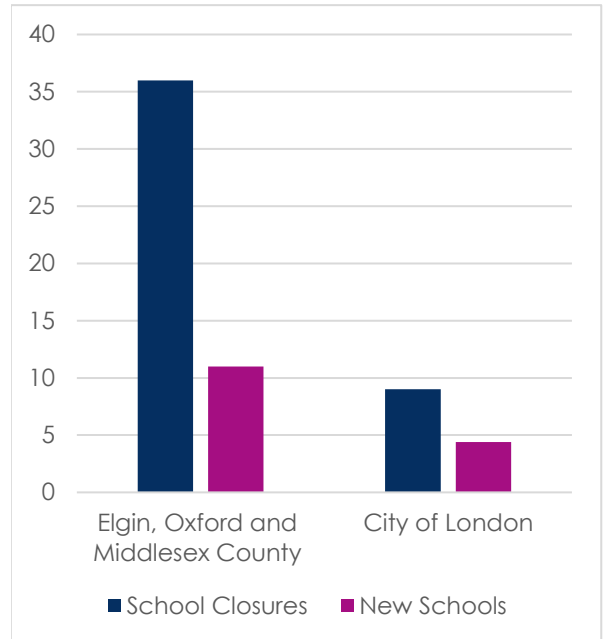
Over the course of the mandate, the Task Force received and reviewed relevant information from;

- the Ontario Ministry of Education;
- Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines;
- Plan to Strengthen Rural and Northern Education;
- Ministry Memorandums and B Memos;
- The Rural and Northern Education Funding (RENF).

Also reviewed were excerpts from;

- Grant for Student Needs Technical Paper;
- a list of TVDSB identified RNEF schools, and the parameters for qualifying for this funding;
- student enrollment data;
- the summary of the Annual Community Collaboration Meetings;
 - the facility information (FCI);
 - the system utilization of the elementary and secondary panel by region (County).
- TVDSB Annual Facility Report,
 - schools less than 100% capacity,
 - school closures, consolidations and opening since 2006,
 - holding zones and schools.
- report from Wales – Rural Education Action Plan,
- report from the Province of Alberta regarding the impact of schools on rural communities, and
- rural school and education research authored by local experts, research regarding community schools and local economic impacts.

School Consolidations and Closures 2006-2021
(School Closure Moratorium 2017)



Source: TVDSB Annual Capital Planning Report, 2018

In addition, presentations to the committee focused on school models, and grade configurations, the capital planning process, data and evidence, and grant submissions. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic limitations, the strain on board resources, the imposed timeline restrictions, the rural school visits and e-learning were not explored by the Task Force.

Advocacy

At the October 2020 TVDSB Board meeting the following motion was presented by the Trustee members of the Task Force and adopted by the Board of Trustees:

- That the Board of Trustees advocate for the following and invite the Rural Education Task Force municipal members to advocate similarly:
 - Maintaining and enhancing the Rural and Northern Education Fund (RNEF) funding model for rural and northern schools.
 - Maintaining the moratorium on school consolidations and closures for the schools that qualify/identified for the Rural and Northern Education Fund, in accordance with the Ministry of Education Draft Public Accommodation Guidelines.

- o Strengthening of integrated local planning at the community level and to promote local planning conversations among school boards, municipalities and other relevant local partners to ensure ongoing communication and notification regarding possible school consolidations, closures, additions or new builds.
- Provincial policies for capital planning and pupil accommodation reviews that formally recognize the importance and value to the community of rural and single school community schools.

Rural and Northern Education Fund (RNEF)

Background

In September 2017, in response to the provincial consultations regarding rural and northern schools, the Ontario government announced new funding and policy direction for rural and northern schools.

RNEF TVDSB

For the 2019-20 school year, the Ministry of Education invested an additional \$21.1 million through the Rural and Northern Education Fund (RNEF) as an enhancement to the Grants for Student Needs (GSN). The funding will be dedicated to further improve education for students from rural communities. The Thames Valley District School Board Received \$700,827 to improve education in our rural schools. The funds were allocated to provide support in the following areas:

Improving Programming - \$700,827 Glencoe District High School, North Middlesex District High School, West Elgin Secondary School and East Elgin Secondary School were staffed accordingly to support improved programming. (Source: TVDSB Website)

Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines – RNEF

In February 2018, the Ontario government, in response to consultations regarding provincial guidelines related to the process for school consolidations and closures provided specific direction for school identified for the RNEF allocation.

2018 B Memo: If at least one school that is eligible to receive support from the Rural and Northern Education Fund (RNEF) is included in a pupil accommodation review at any time then economic impacts must also be given consideration for each accommodation option. School boards will have discretion to undertake economic impact assessments in other communities, if needed.

The ministry will:

- Develop guidance that will define key parameters it expects the economic impact assessment to address (such as, impact on local businesses, impact on family commutes / schedules and housing starts). We will consult with school boards and municipalities on how these key parameters are shaped;
- Develop an approved list of vendors from which boards may select a third party to undertake this work.
- Seek approval for additional funding for boards that will be required to undertake economic impact assessments.

The 2018 B Memo provided further policy direction,

Impact on the local community must include consideration of the local economy if at least one school that is eligible to receive support from the Rural and Northern Education Fund (RNEF) is included in a pupil accommodation review at any time.

TVDSB RNEF Schools

Elementary Schools

A.J. Baker PS	Oxbow PS
Adelaide-W.G. MacDonald PS	Parkhill-West Williams PS
Aldborough PS	Parkview PS
Blenheim District PS	Plattsville & District PS
Caradoc North PS	Port Burwell PS
Caradoc PS	South Dorchester PS
Centennial Central PS	Southwold PS
Davenport PS	Springfield PS
Delaware Central PS	Straffordville PS
Dunwich-Dutton PS	Summers' Corners PS
East Williams Memorial PS	Tavistock PS
Ekcoe Central PS	Thamesford PS
Emily Stowe PS	Valleyview Central PS
Hickson Central PS	West Nissouri PS
Innerkip Central PS	Westminster Central PS
Kettle Creek PS	Wilberforce PS
McGillivray Central PS	Zorra Highland Park PS
McGregor PS	
Mosa Central PS	
New Sarum PS	

Secondary Schools

East Elgin SS
Glencoe District SS
Lord Dorchester SS
Medway SS
North Middlesex District SS
West Elgin SS

Definitions (others to be added?)

RETF – Rural Education Task Force

RNEF – Rural and Northern Education Funding

Single School Community: a rural community where one school is located

TVDSB- Thames Valley District School Board

SEAC – Special Education Advisory Committee

PAAR – Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines: the framework established by the Ontario Ministry of Education as guidelines for school board when embarking on school consolidations and closures, with a moratorium(June 2017) in place, the 2018 guidelines remain as a draft document(2022)

AAR Attendance Area Review: an accommodation tool(processes defined in policy and procedure) used to review and establish a school attendance area

South Western Ontario Student Transportation Services(STS)- serves as the transportation consortium for TVDSB and the coterminous school board

On Demand/Flex Transportation; community-based transportation, generally offered in low-density (rural) communities where public transportation does not exist

Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy an instructional approach that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning.

Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM 161) Students with Prevalent Medical Conditions: Ontario Ministry of Education memorandum providing school board with direction related to supporting children and students with prevalent medical conditions (anaphylaxis, asthma, diabetes, and/or epilepsy) in schools

FCI – Facility Conditions Index: data measurement regarding a school's current condition and state of repair, a school with a low FCI rating needs less repair and renewal work than a school with a higher FCI rating.
(Source: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/fci.html>)

OTG- On the Ground Capacity: a Ministry of Education formula assigned to the school instructional space based on the number of students to be accommodated in a school such as; classrooms, gym, learning commons, art and music room ect. The total of the capacity for instructional spaces within the school is the On-The-Ground capacity for the school as a facility.

Key Findings and Actions

The RETF designed the findings of our work, with students' success and well-being as our first priority, all through a lens that honours the diverse assets and inherent strengths within Thames Valley.

Key Actions serve as the foundation/framework of the Rural Education Strategy

Key Finding: Value of School to the Community

- Rural schools contribute as a strength of the District and Ontario, where local approaches are valued, honoured and nurtured.
- Community hub, place where community traditions, activities and events are introduced, maintained and evolve,
 - a sense of community pride, loyalty and belonging.
- Many rural communities have one school (single-school community) having a school contributes to the vibrancy of the community well-being, local economy, and the rural lifestyle.

Key Actions

- Explore and initiate differentiated approaches in rural schools (RNEF).
- Explore the value of a school to a community through funding and policy
- Explore and establish joint-use agreements
- Support an increased role for TVDSB expertise related to diversity, equity and inclusion in response to the growing diverse populations in rural communities.
- Develop and implement policies for capital planning, pupil accommodation reviews and other student accommodation planning tools that formally recognize the importance and value to the community of rural and single school community schools
- Explore supports for Community Use of Schools, to identify and reduce existing barriers, (red tape) that regarding the use of the facility outside the school day, specifically for single-school communities

Key Finding: Rural and Northern Education Funding (RNEF)

- Specialized rural funding and provincial policy criteria as a foundation recognizing the uniqueness of the rural geography and single-school communities.

Key Actions

- Advocate for expanding RNEF funding allocation to emulate the Urban and Priority High Schools funding allocation.
- Strengthen District direction through modeling RNEF policy differentiation through strategic and operational plans, student accommodation and capital planning, budget, policy and procedures.
- Explore differentiations required to support RNEF schools.

Key Finding: Collaboration and Partnerships

- Existing service gaps and limitations for rural community-based childcare and before/after school programming
- Municipal (local and regional) communications (exchanging information), consultations, meaningful two-way interactions and integrated planning

Key Actions

- Actively explore funding and establish partnerships for Family Centres and before/after school programming in rural communities
- Explore and establish joint Regional, and Municipal rural advisory committee with respect to fostering communication and relationships
- Foster two-way sharing (conversations) relevant to planning information with municipal governments (local and regional), for example: land use plans and official plans (to be included in student accommodation plans presented to public)
- Consider the same planning data that Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Ministry of Finance require municipalities to use



Key Finding: Capital Funding and Student Accommodations

- Opportunities for integrated approaches to balance competing priorities of school size, reduce empty pupil places, growth and capacity
- RNEF policy establishes a foundation for differentiation
- Disproportionate rural school closures
- Competing for capital and renewal funding
- Opportunities for innovative approaches through further collaborations with neighbouring school districts and coterminous school Boards
- Provincial Policy Statement contributes as a framework directing land use (urban and rural) development as this relates to capital funding, existing and new schools

Key Actions

- Explore student accommodation measures through the utilization of grade configurations models, for example grade 7-12, and other planning tools to balance school size
- Anticipating the end of the school closure moratorium, develop and establish policy guidelines and key parameters responsive to the provincial pupil accommodation review guidelines (PAAR 2018) with respect to RNEF schools
- Develop an economic impact framework and template (PARG) through collaboration and consultation with parents, community and municipal partners
- Explore and develop parallel urban and rural capital planning
- Policies for pupil accommodation reviews formally recognize the value of the school to the community for RNEF schools
- Explore collaborations with neighbouring school districts
- Explore coordination with the coterminous district school board(s), the goal of mutually beneficial dialogue minimizing duplication and for the sharing of services and resources

Key Finding: Staffing

- Generally small schools have limited staffing capacity and teacher specialists to support programming
- Staff dedication, close connections, community engagement (activities and events) of school teacher/staff with parents and community often beyond the school day
- Supporting quality education; culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy supports strength-based student learning approaches
- Staff, teacher and principal placement and length of tenure, connecting to neighbouring elementary and secondary schools
- Minimal support staff(school and community) to support students with medical needs (i.e juvenile diabetes)as defined in PPM 161, Prevalent Medical Conditions
- School leadership(principal and vice-principal) fostering connections through on-boarding with the community

Key Actions

- Explore differentiated approaches supporting/benefiting all staff
- Facilitate opportunities for teachers/staff to share ideas, innovate co-located approaches
- Support facilitating school staff to explore curriculum delivery and connections to best respond to localized place-based learning opportunities
- Support knowledge mobilization related to culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (differentiation in student instruction)
- Honour/recognize distance and length of travel associated with centralized meetings and professional development
- Explore and report the impacts of longer term stability of maintain consistent staff placements in RNEF schools, keeping same principal for longer periods of time, harnessing and valuing the knowledge of staff who have established long term understanding of the community
- Increase supports and school-based training for staff in schools with students with medical needs (PPM 161) for example: explore community-based partnerships
- As a system direction, support the role of the principal in the community

Key Finding: Provincial Education Funding

- Nature of centralized funding de-incentivizes unique and localized approaches
- Current funding formula does not recognise the unique challenges associated with the delivery of education in rural settings. For example, distance in transportation, lack of funding for specialist teachers/staff, base funding for small secondary schools
- Funding parameters support average school size that negatively impacts rural and small schools where land use policy limits population density

Key Actions

- Explore mechanisms for long-range and multi-year forecasting, multi-year budgeting, operations and capital funding
- Actively advocate for a comprehensive review of the provincial funding formula, the review would support an equity lens to identify redundancies, efficiencies and rural inequities in the structure of grants for student needs, relative to current expectations, expenditures and impact
- Explore a cost/ benefit (economic value) analysis regarding core funding for small schools in single school communities
- Advocate for maintaining and enhancing the Rural and Northern Education Fund (RNEF) funding model for rural and northern schools.

Key Finding: Policy and Decision Making

- Out-of-area exemptions negatively impact small rural secondary schools
- Equitable access to programming supports increased opportunities and success
- Internet inequity, technology and connectivity
- School size reflects the needs/population of the community
- Board geography and configuration disadvantages rural autonomy

Key Actions

- Policy accountability through school boundaries, annually report out-of-area student populations including French Immersion
- Local school councils are consulted and notified with respect to Board discussions/considerations
- Foster awareness regarding the lack of access in rural communities to technology and connectivity in assumptions and expectations
- Evaluate funding/budget assumptions as this relates to optional school size and student success research
- At minimum hold one Board meeting per Trustee term in the respective County

Key Finding: Special Education

- Equitable opportunities and learning environments for all students to meet their needs and outcomes

Key Actions

- Conduct a program review with the goal to enhance local access to programming for students with special education needs at the local school
- Ensure one Trustee of those elected in the Counties of Elgin, Oxford and Middlesex, is a member of SEAC

Key Finding: Transportation

- Out-of-area student transportation negatively impacts small rural secondary schools
- Lack of public transportation in rural communities limits co-op placements, school to work programmes and extracurricular activities and programs

Key Actions

- Review STS service agreements, funding arrangements and governance model, identify and reduce barriers to introduce differentiated approaches for rural school transportation delivery
- Explore and engage in municipal collaboration and potential joint transportation systems ie. On-Demand/Flex Transportation
- Increase equity in access to transportation, initiate a pilot with late-bussing options at a RNEF school



Key Finding: Focused Programming/ Schools

- Responsive to student-centred differentiated learning promoting global competencies
- Opportunities for rural-centric agriculture and related industry specialized programming offered reflecting the local economy and place-based learning
- Re-discover the purpose of local schools through progressive education approaches that benefit teacher expertise and personalized learning directed to increase student outcomes (Bruce)

Key Actions

- Explore and establish an innovative agriculture-tech focused learning centre (collaboration with local and industry expertise, with post-secondary programs) at a small rural high school and provide transportation from urban to rural school
 - a localized place-based approach, for example: green industry, specialized in livestock, trade related, heavy equipment, etc..
- Facilitate co-located (technology-based teacher focused) opportunities to share(coordinate) with other rural schools with online streaming content components
- Expand Field to Fork through an agriculture centre for innovation like opportunities, with transportation provided to from urban to rural school
- Farm Safety training is provided annually

Key Finding: Technology, Internet and E- learning

- Chromebook Pilot (grade 9) detrimental impacts to the termination of pilot
- Teacher/staff collaborations and promotion of creative and innovate use of technology in the delivery of classroom learning and delivery of curriculum

Key Actions

- Address and reduce barriers to innovate using technology in the classroom
- Explore minimum service level expectations for technology/devises
- Explore and implement asset management principles in relation to all board owned technology/devises

Key Finding: Land Use and Population Density

- Correlation of agriculture and related industry to the population density within the rural geography of TVDSB
- Provincial and municipal land use policy parameters limit dense population growth in rural/agriculture land areas
- Disconnect in policy (land use, agriculture and education) related to average school size as defined in funding formulas (GSN and Capital Grants)
- agriculture land is protected by policy design, regarding growth limits, further limiting the growth of communities, ability to offer services/infrastructure

Key Actions

- Foster increased awareness with the Ministry of Education, Finance, Agriculture, Infrastructure and Municipalities, regarding competing policy direction
- Foster awareness and acknowledge the protection of agriculture and related land use impacts as a guiding principle in policy
- Explore integrated local planning at the community level and to promote local planning conversations among school boards, municipalities and other relevant local partners to ensure ongoing communication and notification regarding student accommodations (school consolidations, closures, additions, holding zones or new builds)



Task Force Recommendations

TVDSB

Board Meeting

March 22, 2022

The TVDSB Task Force recommends:

THAT, the TVDSB establish a rural education strategy to implement RETF Key Actions aligned with the RNEF framework, with measurable outcomes, objectives and timelines as described in the RETF Report (March 2022).

THAT, The TVDSB establish a Rural Equity/Education Advisory Committee(REAC) .

That, the committee is representative of trustees, students (attending small rural high schools), principals and school staff, community partners(childcare, public health), municipal leaders, and others as identified.

That, the committee be engaged in a meaningful way on the implementation of a rural education strategy.

THAT, the Chair of the RETF, in collaboration with RETF members, the mover and seconder of this motion, share the RETF report findings and key actions with the Ministry of Education; Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs; Ministry of Infrastructure; Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing; Ministry of Colleges and Universities; Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, the local Municipalities; all local MPP's, ROMA, Ontario Farmers Association and its local affiliates, and, OPSBA.

THAT, the Chair of the RETF, in collaboration with the REFT members, the mover and seconder of the motion and staff, send correspondence to the Minister of Education and education partners; to expand differentiated approaches for RENF identified schools that recognizes the value of the school to its community.

AND, to enhance the REFT funding allocation.

TVDSB Rural Education Strategy

RETF Vision for Rural Schools

1. Establish the value, equity and strengths of rural schools through adopting differentiated approaches

- Conduct a program review of specialized secondary programming, Special Education, and French Immersion in the RNEF school communities to create differentiated direction and framework for delivery of these programs in a rural context (for example; dual track FI).
- Review relevant policies and procedures (for example, student accommodation) to create differentiations required to effectively support RNEF schools. In the review, attention is given to differentiated timelines, additional consultation/engagement criteria, identification of rural-based stakeholders, differentiated procedures, expectations and frameworks for RNEF schools considered for; PARs, AARs and the application for holding zones/schools.
- Review all out of area exemptions in grade nine where electives are the same at the local school, acknowledging that students who begin their career at their local community school become attached and invested in that school.

2. Foster collaboration; promote, develop, facilitate and co-operate

Schools and Student Achievement and Well-Being

- Systematically support principals, teachers and staff to promote knowledge sharing, innovations, and collaboration amongst staff at rural schools in a manner that promotes leading practices and approaches
- Research, measure and report on the impacts of longer term stability to maintain consistent placements in schools, principal tenure for longer periods of time, and harnessing and valuing the knowledge of staff who have established long term understanding of each community

Counties and Municipalities

- Host County and/or Tri-County bi-annual meetings;
 - To establish working groups where a municipality's planning staff and local superintendents, staff and community meet and establish opportunities for collaboration
 - To identify and action initiatives, monitor progress and success - a permanent working group for each county – commitment to exceed minimum requirement in the Community Collaboration and Partnerships Guidelines
 - To establish county and municipal local school advisory committees formally and permanently established to implement and review opportunities for collaboration, monitor progress and respond to arising issues and opportunities and provide advice (respective county trustees would be appointed to county level local school advisory committees)

- To initiate immediately a proactive collaboration to develop a joint framework for the development of the economic impact study template (PARG), driven by municipal and regional economic development experts, to prepare in advance for the lifting and the moratorium and to guide and enhance our programming innovation at our schools
- To identify and implement a community collaboration (use of schools excess space) project to be piloted, actualized and implemented in one year or less.

Community

- Coordinate support for the small rural secondary schools communities to fully re-implement the one to one chrome book / device model, working (seek partnerships with local businesses community
- Establish minimum service level expectations in term of devices available in these schools

Staffing

- Develop and facilitate subcommittee with our labour partners to identify specific local changes, opportunities or differentiations that could improve the benefits for teachers and school staff

Community Use of Schools

- Identify and reduce the barriers to community use of schools (for example: explore the possibility/opportunity to planned assignment of custodial staff responsible for opening and closing schools in a region after hours) to reduce the minimum costs and increase the community use of a school after school hours

Internet and Connectivity

- Actively participate in collaborative (municipal) RFP opportunities to increase broadband access in RNEF school communities
 - mandate all parties, sites, and infrastructure available for co-location of fixed wireless, switch, fibre termination and other network infrastructure - lower barriers and create clear path and framework to site antennas, etc. Refrain from purchasing, seek out or procure bandwidth without transparency to such opportunities for collaboration by all parties and stakeholders (board, coterminous board, municipality(regional and/or local) explore collaborative procurement preference with local co-op and locally owned communications and municipal utilities.
 - Emulate and implement swift REP framework with multiple bottom lines and measures (local broadband ubiquity improvement overall, not just lowest price for bid across the entire board)
- Develop and establish an ag-tech specialized program at a small rural high school (not just agriculture), inclusive of a tech-agriculture focus in collaboration with local industry expertise, and in collaboration post secondary opportunities. Provide transportation from

urban and suburban students to the rural school, offer co-located opportunities to share with other rural schools, where appropriate, with online streaming content components.

- Establish multi-subject cross-curriculum with local practical opportunities and real experiences in the host community school and surrounding area, place-based learning.

3. Capital and Student Accommodations

- Establish a framework for parallel capital planning(AAR, school consolidations, closures, additions, holding zones or new builds) for RENF Schools, implement at minimum a 5 year school closure moratorium for RENF schools, resource RENF schools to innovate approaches adapting to local place and land-based learning opportunities.
- Report annually on the FCI conditions of all RNEF schools and report to communities and municipalities from an asset management perspective, the progress each year of the specific investments and renewals made in each RNEF school
- Set service delivery targets annually and communicate service level changes and impacts that result from maintenance of the capital assets
- Measure student enrolment projection(s) accuracy and performance of projections in the Annual Student Accommodation Plan and in Capital Funding business case submissions.
- Explore opportunities to collaborate and service adjacent boards students particularly at edge of board boundaries (for example: West Elgin, Glencoe and North Middlesex) see **Appendix XX**

4. Transportation

STS Differentiated Service Agreement

- Do NOT permit transportation to out of area schools though existing buses where Catholic board spaces on school transportation is available
- Explore discounted extracurricular bussing services for late(after regular school day) transportation
- Utilize and fund On Demand/flex transportation services to increase access to co-op and other specialized opportunities

Measure and quantify savings of eligible students in rural schools who do not use busses and reallocate that transportation funding to reduce ride times, and provide net saving amount for extracurricular and co-op transportation in rural schools

Review STS governance model with the goal of increasing public accountability, ensuring Trustee(one from the counties and one urban) and parent representation.

Thought Exchange Survey and Community Consultations

In response to the mandate to consult, the Task Force began this work with a Thought Exchange e-survey. Members of the Task Force analysed the e-survey results, emerging themes were identified as the basis of further consultation focused on four key themes: education funding; decision-making; school programming and the internet; and, the importance of rural community schools.

Summary of Responses What we learned from the TVDSB rural constituency, comprised of parents and students, teachers and school staff, community leaders and members, and municipal partners.

Funding

This theme centers on the funding model noting it does not support rural schools; there needs to be a different funding model for rural schools.

There is a disconnect between the importance of schools in rural communities and how they are funded.

Provincial Funding

- The provincial funding model, as understood by respondents in the survey and the in-person consultations was a persistent subject of discussion in each of the consultation themes and throughout the survey. Many respondents quoted the adage "one size does not fit all" recognizing the formula also is similarly "not working" for urban settings. Furthermore, it was noted that the addition of the Rural and Northern Education Funding (RNEF, 2017) contained within the funding model recognizes the diverse rural needs and does help to address gaps in funding for rural school.
- At the in-person consultations, the need to determine the value of a school to a community was mentioned, this should be accounted for in the funding formula as a policy direction
 - Participants suggested consultation with municipal leaders and the community (parents) would assist in defining the value of a rural school to its community.
- Many expressed a call-to-action for a review of the provincial funding formula, noting that education funding is collected through municipal taxes as a flow-through to the province, while the formula has been enhanced since inception in 1998, many questioned if the intent of centralized provincial funding as initiated in 1998, remained relative to current assumptions, expenditures and impact.

Note: in response to questions asked during the in-person consultations, RETF members present shared information about RNEF including the definition of a rural school as described (half of the students enrolled are from rural communities) in the RNEF and the annual funding allocation received by TVDSB.

Expand Rural and Northern Education Funding (RNEF)

Participants at in-person consultations widely supported the RNEF funding allocation and policy direction. In response, the RNEF was viewed as a "game changer" honouring the rural voice in recognition of the rural geography and complexities of rural life. Additionally, many agreed the RNEF offered a model for increased and robust differentiated approaches.

Child Care, Before and After School Programming

- Survey respondents and participants at in-person consultations noted the lack of licenced child-care and before and after school program availability. Many attending in-person consultations recognized the challenges of attracting and retaining child-care staff to rural communities. Some felt factors of school – home transportation and those who work out-side of the school community further complicated the need for licenced child-care and before and after school programs. Alternatively, discussions noted that funding for rural Family Centres and child care spaces could positively impact the gaps in services for rural families, in addition it was felt these resources would play a significant role in retaining and attracting families to rural communities, thus impacting rural school enrollment.
 - Explore funding and collaborative approaches to increase licenced child care and before/after school care

Staffing

- There was widespread recognition that staffing allocations in small schools impacts teachers course load, capacity of teacher specialists and teacher/school staff burnout. It was noted innovative approaches and the commitment of teachers/staff overcomes the shortfalls of the staffing limitations. Additionally, there was evident appreciation for the dedication of school staff and teachers in rural schools, commitment and loyalty to the community and the dedication to the student experience in the classroom and through extra-curricular activities.
- A common theme among participants at the in-person consultations noted how increasing funding, and flexibility of staffing allocation could improve what schools(principals, teachers and staff) are already doing – rather than what school (staffing) can't do. Additionally, it was noted the role of funding in reducing the reliance on e-learning as a gap-measure to course offerings (secondary).
- Further discussions focused on how differentiated approaches in collective agreements could be a benefit for staff (teachers, school staff and custodians) in small and rural schools enhancing the student experience.

Transportation

- Throughout the survey and in-person consultations, the theme of transportation (school–home bussing) was expressed.

Length of Bus Ride; many expressed concerns related to the length of bus ride, while recognizing the necessity of transportation to school as this relates to the rural geography, however; many expressed the necessity of home to school transportation limited after-school extra-curricular opportunities. Additionally for most students attending rural schools, there is a reliance on parent transportation for those participating in after-school extra-curricular opportunities. Alternatively, it was noted that a benefit of rural communities is the resiliency and neighbourly supportive approaches that ensures those who wish can participate.

Transportation funding and policy lacks flexibility to differentiate rural factors, one example provided;

- distance and subsequent cost of bussing for students field trips and other education related opportunities

School Boundaries and Out-of-Area Transportation

- Survey respondents and participants at in-person consultations supported the enforcement of school boundaries, suggesting increased populations per-student funding to local schools would be the result. Furthermore, discussion related to de-incentivising out-of-area student admissions was overwhelmingly supported. Additionally, there was widespread support for the per-student funding to remain at the home school where in the circumstance, a student was granted out-of-area exemption, and the per-student funding would remain at the home school.
- Additionally, many supported the ending the practice of providing transportation to out-of -area schools, except in exceptional circumstances, considered on a case-by-case bases. As an example, a parent passionately pleaded for her child to attend the local school, supports to be provided at the home school where the community supports and life-long success could be realized.

Other Funding and Related – TBA

Land Use - TBA

Decision Making

The theme centers on the importance of considering rural needs in decision making. The need for differentiated approaches to board policy is identified as part of this theme.

Rural Considerations: Policy and Practice

- Respondents in the survey and the in-person consultations overwhelmingly noted comparisons of urban and rural, despite this discourse participants passionately encouraged recognition, celebration and acknowledgment of the urban and rural differences as strength and asset to TVDSB, the value of all geographies and communities within the boundaries of the District. Many noted this reality should be expressed (realized) through a rural equity lens in policy and practice.
- Responses clearly identified that differentiated approaches furthered rural equity, several key areas were identified:
 - Facility renewal and capital, portables
 - Transportation
 - Student accommodations: Holding schools and zones, school attendance area and enforcement of boundaries
 - school size and staffing, grade configurations (jk-12, 7-12, based on community), dual track FI, approaches to the delivery of High Skills Majors and e-learning
- Another area of discussion focused on public perceptions and uncertainty about decision making processes. It was noted in discussion the lack of local representation respective of the configuration (make-up, distribution) of the Board of Trustees, wherein decision makers are elected outside the community where impacts of decisions are localized. Additional discussion proposed the school board become community based such as a tri-county Board, further support to breakdown silos and perceptions of city-centric approaches.

“there are many options... this can be discussed forever, what is needed in a plan and direction – action and implementation”

Collaboration and Municipal Partnerships

With respect to policy (directed/defined in policy) many participants expressed increased alignment and coordination with municipal leaders as potential ways to improve rural equity. Stronger partnerships with municipal planning and economic growth would better serve policy development and implementation. Participants suggested this would alternatively serve as a way to build and enhance board-municipal relationships.

“rural decisions take rural decision makers”

School Closures (Consolidations)

- Respondents in the survey and the in-person consultations voiced a significant concern regarding school closures, many expressed opposition to school closures and attendees expressed support of an expectation for an explicit role of municipalities in school closure decision making.
- While it was noted the current moratorium remains in place, uncertainty of rural school closures remains paramount to the rural narrative. Respondents in the survey and the in-person consultations shared how the community dialogue of potential school closures negatively impacts the community and parent narrative. Alternatively, it was noted the moratorium creates a false sense of complacency, many expressed a concern that once the moratorium is lifted, rural school closures will be "a target" of student accommodation review and potential subsequent school closure(s).
- There was acknowledgement that student accommodation is a complex and multifactor issue perhaps a school can be too small, and thus should close; by contrast many participants noted the school in a community should reflect the community, optional school size (as defined in policy and funding) should be based on the community the school serves.
- Participants at the in-person consultations shared with passion and tears the trauma of the closing of the local school. It was noted this trauma is generational with devastating impacts to families and to the community. Additionally, aspects of lingering bitterness and a sense of distrust was expressed.
- Furthermore, questions were raised as to the necessity of school closures, the accountability of the process and the rationale. In particular where a rural school was closed, a new facility built the use of portables to accommodate students at the new school. Accountability regarding the rationale of declining enrolment, facility condition and if increased student programming, increased extracurricular activities and student achievement along with other factors regarding school consolidation was manufactured.
- Alternatively, the population and housing growth experienced in many rural communities was expressed, thus the importance of board-municipal collaborations, that meaningful communications, sharing of information and on-going consultations is essential.

Transportation

School Boundaries, Out-of-Area Schools; many participants who attended the consultations held in locations where the student population was served by small rural secondary schools, noted a common theme of bussing community students out of the community, this practice was strongly opposed. Many questioned the validity of this practice attributing the decline in student population at the local school, many commented on the negative impacts to programming and as a result reduced staffing, thus impacting the overall viability of the local school. While it was noted the RNEF supports additional staffing lines at small rural secondary schools, it was felt through the enforcement of boundaries and, to cease the practice of providing transportation to out-of-area schools, would increase per-student funding to the local school.

Programming

This theme centers on the importance of equitable access to a wide variety of programs, the value of leveraging industry to support programming (i.e., co-ops), and the delivery of programming that attracts students from both rural and urban centres.

The importance of technology (internet) and transportation to serve equitable access to programs is part of this theme.

Programming – Local School

- The most prevalent comments concerning programming was in regard to local school programming reflecting the community itself, leveraging local resources with a focus on supporting local. The importance for students to see themselves and their community reflected in their learning, many examples were cited
 - Local conservation area
 - Local farming/agriculture and related industry
 - Local historians
- A consistent narrative regarding promoting the positives of the local school, to rethink how small schools are marketed by highlighting the benefits of localized learning
- Additionally, the challenges of delivery programming in small schools was also included in the discussions
 - Asset management regarding the technology for grade 9 students chrome book pilot project, participants' shared the termination of this program was detrimental to students, exasperated by the lack of access and affordability of internet. (families who didn't have technology as there was no internet available)
- The limitations created through ministry policies (red tape) create barriers for innovation and creative methods for programming
 - Create/customize programs to rural communities and student populations (small rural schools) and to better leverage local resources and opportunities

School Boundaries and Transportation

Many participants in the survey and in-person consultations expressed dissatisfaction with the practice of bussing students (secondary) out of the community, many expressed that school boundaries should be observed, enforced and that policies are up-held. This subject emerged in discussions associated with decision making (Consultation Theme 3) and funding (Consultation Theme 4).

Participants also noted that outside of large urban centres, no public transportations exists. Furthermore without public transportation opportunities are limited and by contrast providing transportation is necessary and funding is required, this should be considered as an aspect in the delivery of programming in rural schools. It was suggested that models of On-Demand transportation should be explore as a viable solution.

Internet and E-learning

Context: The survey was conducted (May 2020) during the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were closed and students were engaged in remote/distance learning.

The most frequent comments gathered through the survey were related to the internet, specifically the lack of availability and affordability to small community and rural families, and

broadband connectivity. However since the survey was conducted there have been provincial investments made as a result increasing the availability of internet to some rural communities. Regardless, at the in-person consultations many expressed that availability and affordability was still a present challenge for many living in a rural setting (farm) and similarly for many living in small rural communities. One participant noted, that while she can see the tower, she lacks home accessibility.

Music and Arts

Many acknowledged the limited number of staff at a school with small student populations and, it was expressed to be accepted as factor of rural living. However some participants noted the lack of teachers qualified in music and arts, this was attributed to impacts (unintended) of policies (board and provincial) that reduce music and arts opportunities in small (often rural) schools.

Special Education

As noted in the discussions comments related to special education emerged in each of the themes during the in –person consultations, by contrast this theme did not emerge through the survey. In response to the consultations question “what is most important in programming for rural schools?” participants shared consistently throughout the in-person consultations the critical importance of providing special education programming, and their displeasure of the practice of bussing students with special education needs (school to work) outside of their community. Concerns were raised to the degree of which secondary students with special education needs are bussed out of their community, the degree and impact of the loss of local connections and friendships, and the degree of which diminished after school opportunities, work placements, connection to community ect.

Furthermore participants noted the importance for students with special education needs to have local access to;

- Transportation to co-op placements and after-school work and community activities
- supports and services (speech, language, IEP, learning exceptionalities)

Rural Focused Schools

Respondents in the survey and the in-person consultations consistently expressed how rural schools offer the unique opportunity to provide alternative learning opportunities. There was recognition the flexibility was necessary and the challenges and barriers associated with a place-based learning approach;

- reducing red-tape and Ministry requirements through education policy.
- teacher generalists and specialist and class size requirements (funding and collective agreements)
- Emphasis on skilled trades and career pathways that support the agriculture industry
 - flexible learning opportunities for students with home-farm responsibilities
 - Animal husbandry (Note: Animal husbandry is the branch of agriculture concerned with animals that are raised for meat, fibre, milk, or other products. It includes day-to-day care, selective breeding and the raising of livestock)
 - Land-based learning

- Market skilled trades – securing apprenticeships to journeyperson - careers in trades and related skills
 - Develop partnerships/mentorships with local colleges, trade schools and local skilled tradespersons
 - Market skilled trades as a viable and necessary post-secondary pathway

It was noted that while focused secondary schools would be favourable, that rural schools serve a diverse student population, therefore a balance that ensures all student pathways inclusive of work, apprenticeship, and post-secondary (college, university).

Even though discussion centred on the challenges faced at rural schools and where respondents felt improvements could be made, the pride in the accomplishments of the local school was apparent, the eagerness and commitment of a community vision for localized approaches.

“A local rural school enables students to have a wide variety of education experiences, this allow them to discover their own unique strengths and talents and where they many contribute”

Specialized Rural Considerations

Respondents in the survey and the in-person consultations consistently expressed the importance of the rural voice “ **we need the Board(b) to be present in rural schools, not just visit every 2 years or, do 20 minute drop ins, WE need to SEE you and we need to know you”**

- Additional supports and resources for staff (principals, staff, supply staff) to rural schools to assist with preparing for a small school experience
 - Purposefully hiring supply and LTO staff that commit to rural schools
 - Create opportunities that attract and retain staff to small rural schools

E-learning

- Internet affordability, accessibility and availability remained a constant theme through the survey and the in-person consultations, while it was recognized improvements are currently underway, not in every rural community and for those residing outside of a community they still experience lack of access and broadband. Some reported to overcome these barriers they “went into town” to the Tim Hortons or the library, this was viewed as un-sustainable and, awareness of internet challenges in rural communities is pivotal. Further to this, in-person participants noted that while it is assumed that cellular data would address the lack of internet access, this too is not always accessible(available) in lieu of internet .
- Respondents in the survey and the in-person consultations recognized E-learning approaches to learning at rural secondary schools as a delivery of education prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was suggested that students at rural secondary schools are leaders in e-learning

Community/Sense of Relationship

This theme centers on the value of community/rural schools noting the importance they serve in a small community. Schools are part of creating a greater sense of community/belonging.

Community Hub; school is central to the community relationships, in particular in single school communities

- Respondents in the survey and in-person consultations spoke of the critical nature of the local school as the cornerstone of the surrounding community, providing further details regarding the role of a community school, the sense of pride, connections, and relationships outside the school day. Many shared stories regarding the schools' involvement in activities that support the community and showcased the local schools
 - Food drives
 - Seasonal parades
 - Community Fairs
- Many parents, students, community members, municipal leaders and school staff shared they grew- up in a rural setting, and have made the choice to remain or return to a rural setting. Likewise, respondents who have settled into a rural setting from an urban centre noted they felt more connected, and share how the local schools facilities connections to the community. Furthermore, it was noted by newcomers to rural communities the school was the place where they connected with the community, events, traditions, service clubs and that the schools builds the community for the next generation.
- It was noted the local school contributes to a sense of safety and community well-being.

Rural Way of Life, Adopting and Adapting

- Overwhelmingly the narrative regarding the rural way of life was central in the survey responses and at every in-person consultations, sharing the advantages of the rural experiences, where the school staff know the student "story" and provide a personal approach, where families and extended families supported each other
 - Agriculture and related industry defines the way of life, the activities during the seasons of agriculture and related industry often dictates the rural lifestyle and impacts to students for example: working during harvest or daily commitments to livestock
- There was recognition that many rural communities are evolving and become more diverse, it was noted that schools and the school board have expertise that could lend assistance and support to communities in managing biases.

Proximity to School, Home and Community

- Participants spoke about the importance of students educated in the community in which they live, how the local school supports the rural way of live, many articulated living in a rural community is a choice recognising the lifestyle challenges in relation to urban centres, however the choice is the lifestyle. The importance of the school is central to this choice and lifestyle, some noted that while agriculture and related industry is primary to the community, that many also work out-side the community

where they live. Three identifiers related to the local school were noted at every in-person consultations;

- Supporting the school fundraising and volunteering
- School as the local setting to access resources and services i.e. mental health
- Length of bus ride to local school

Family and Belonging

- A consistent narrative regarding the role of the school and social interactions, in particular the advantage of small school populations were all those wishing to belong to a sports team or club generally had the opportunity to belong and be involved.
- Many agreed that neighbours knew neighbours, one quote resonated “**Knowing everyone in the area and being related to half of the them**” participants noted, in their opinion, this creates a rural experience very different to urban experiences.
- It was noted the important role of family and extended family (neighbours) in supporting after school activities and socialization, in terms of transportation and child- minding.

Small School, Relationships (students, staff, families, community members)

- Respondents in the survey and in-person consultations stated how the local school understood and embraced the rural lifestyle, in particular understood the impacts of the proximity to urban supports and resources
- Many expressed how the connections made at and in the school related back to the community and how the local school engaged students in the community through volunteer hours and co-op placements
- However as this relates to students with special education needs, all agreed the critical importance the community holds, often a school to work placement in the community is life-long
 - It was noted the gaps in resources and supports for students with special education needs in rural communities, students are bussed out-side of the community they live
 - A consistent concern was expressed, related to this practice, as local opportunities for students with special education needs, is felt necessary for life-long success along with the significance of local social interactions

Appendixes – To be Added to the Final Report

1. Thought Exchange Report
2. RETF Community Consultations – Discussion Paper
3. RETF Presentation; Superintendent Sydor and Vogt
4. B Memos
 - a. 2017: B09 Plan to Strengthen Rural and Northern Education
https://efis.fma.csc.gov.on.ca/faab/Memos/B2017/B09_EN.pdf
 - b. 2018 B:10 Final Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines and Updates on Integrated Planning and Supports for Urban Education
https://efis.fma.csc.gov.on.ca/faab/Memos/B2018/B10_EN.PDF
5. Final Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines
https://efis.fma.csc.gov.on.ca/faab/Memos/B2018/B10_attach_EN.pdf
6. TVDSB Chair of the Board Letter to Minister of Education – RETF Motions, Board approved November 2020.