

MPP presses Education Minister on Treetops school

Plans to build a new Catholic school in the Treetops subdivision of Alliston have been underway for a few years now, but are currently awaiting final approvals from the Ministry of Education.

Simcoe Grey MPP Jim Wilson pressed Minister of Education Stephen Lecce during a question period at Queen's Park last week, regarding the timeline for the project's approval, so it can be put out for tender.

"After meeting all of the requirements, the Board is still waiting for final sign off. Parents, students, staff and trustees are beyond frustrated and COVID-19 has only heightened their exasperation," said Wilson.

"The pressure to limit overcrowding, reduce the use of portable classrooms and allow for physical distancing is greater than ever."

Lecce responded by saying the request for approval to proceed to tender for the project has been under review since it was submitted in August of this year. He added that the application is being looked at "expeditiously."

"I appreciate very much the community pressures in Alliston, a growing community in your riding, and I'll work with the Deputy Minister's office to make sure that the board gets an answer as soon as possible," Lecce noted.

The new school will accommodate 430 students, who are currently being bussed to Beeton, which is now almost at maximum capacity, with a number of portables in use.

Eight portables are presently occupied and that's expected to grow to 12, which is the municipal limit for the school, said Wilson.

He noted that "time is of the essence" and the school should have been built years ago to accommodate the population growth within the community.

"I very much agree that building schools during COVID is important, at least for the medium term, to help alleviate the accommodation pressures that are arising across communities, including in Alliston," said Lecce. He noted that the Province has announced roughly \$1 billion for capital investments for the education sector this year and that there's more work to do in repairing and replacing Ontario's schools.

By Sam Odrowski Local Journalism Initiative Reporter