

SPACE Survey

1. Barriers to School Accessibility. What, specifically would you do to maintain and enhance affordability, equity and accessibility?

Ontario's NDP knows that there are numerous benefits to reducing barriers of public access to schools. Families are more likely to use programs in schools, and using existing school facilities for community programs and services is cost-effective.

According to People for Education, Ontario lags behind in the encouragement of public use of schools. While the Community Use of Schools program has reduced rental fees at a small number of priority schools (about one in every thirty schools), Ontario lacks an integrated community-school policy.

Further to that, schools lack the human resources to liaise effectively with community members and groups – and it is getting worse as the staff compliment of principals, vice-principals and administrative staff declines.

New Democrats support the continued expansion of the Community Use of Schools programs so that more schools can qualify. We will develop a strategy to remove barriers to public community use of schools, including processes to reduce the red-tape and form-filling that community members have to go through to access space. We will increase the say that parents and community members have over how school space is accessed and used.

2. How would you improve community consultations process regarding closing schools and how would you retain the benefits of community use of schools space?

Before any schools are closed in a community, the NDP believes local community members must be engaged in exploring the ways in which surplus space can be used to create “community hubs.” Available space can be used for community centres, parenting programs, child care, seniors' services, ESL courses, public libraries and community health centres.

Rural areas are most affected by school closures, even though schools are an integral part of both the social and economic fabric of rural communities. To protect against school closures and to maximize community use of schools in rural areas, Ontario's NDP will bring about more long-term planning for schools by establishing a Rural School Stabilization Strategy.

3. What would you do to support youth access to community space?

New Democrats are committed to making the best use of school space in communities. Instead of closing schools due to declining enrolment, there is an opportunity to strengthen connections between schools and community through the creation of community hubs. These hubs make

efficient use of school space and provide a range of services and programming. Youth face many barriers to accessing appropriate space and should be a priority group. Involving more youth in advisory and decision-making roles on government and community agencies is an important first step. We will also explore ways to create more opportunities for youth by expanding programs like Focus on Youth and ensuring the promised Community Hub program is implemented.