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There is a solution

In September CBC Toronto published an online article entitled '*TDSB repair backlog piling up with no solution in sight*'. The article drew attention to the fact many school buildings across the TDSB are in need of substantial repair and that for some 'it would be more costly to repair the school than to tear it down and build a new one.' Sadly, the article is correct in that fact. The wear & tear of welcoming hundreds of thousands of elementary and secondary school students for sixty to ninety years will do that. The current pandemic has accelerated our need to ensure that our school buildings are designed for a modern education system and that we maximize the value of these public assets to support all students in safe and healthy learning environments, remove accessibility barriers, bring opportunities closer to home and promote greater student success. However, to state that the TDSB has no solution to address its backlog of repairs is simply not true. There is a solution, it lies in the modernization strategy developed by our subsidiary the Toronto Lands Corporation (TLC). In their Annual Plan presented to and approved by Trustees in June 2021, TLC laid out a plan to position the TDSB to be a leader in the strategic use of its property portfolio to positively impact student learning and successful outcomes.

The benefits to students and families derived from renewing the TDSB school properties as proposed by TLC would be transformative. Research from across North America has shown that new and better schools have not only a positive impact on students sense of pride in their schools, but more noticeably on their academic diligence. One study tracked the relationship between school-building conditions and student performance for 25 years and concluded that students who attend schools in disrepair score 3 to 10 percentage points lower on standardized tests than students in satisfactory buildings, and the effects are compounded over the years a student spends in the building. Another study tracked the test scores, classroom grades, and attendance rates of more than 5 million students in the Los Angeles public school system between 2002 and 2012, before and after those same students moved from overcrowded, repair laden schools to new facilities. The study found that school building renewal led to:

- large immediate improvements in student attendance
- significant improvements in student effort
- modest to gradual improvements in student test scores

In our own jurisdiction we have evidence of this. In the northeast corner of Toronto, there are three elementary schools built in the past 16 years; Thomas L Wells (2005), Brookside (2007) and Alvin Curling (2013). Each of these new schools attracts the highest proportion of children from all the schools in the area. Additionally, the participation rate (the percentage of school-aged children within a school's boundary who attend any TDSB school) for the new schools increased almost every year. This is particularly evident for Alvin Curling PS, the newest of the schools, which increased its participation rate over 20% since it opened. The community support for, and the increased access to these new facilities has been well received.

The benefits to the community of redeveloping school properties can be equally impressive and again have precedence right here in TDSB. School properties have value far beyond the value of the land. They can and should be community destinations. The new Davisville public school proves to be an excellent example of what can be accomplished through active collaboration with the City. On a parcel of school property leased at a nominal rate for 49 years, the city will build a much needed community recreation center and swimming pool. When complete the students of Davisville school will have access to the community center facilities as part of their school program, including daily use of the pool for the duration of the lease agreement. As well, the community will have much greater access to fabulous new facilities for recreation and enjoyment all on one site. Much was learned from this project and TLC and the City/CreateTO are confident that they can demonstrate many opportunities similar to and even better than this one.

No facet of local public infrastructure holds more potential to impact public education than the land asset base of the TDSB. The total value of the Board's property portfolio is an estimated \$15B-\$20B. The potential to capitalize on and leverage the land value to repair, replace and modernize schools across the Board, while retaining to the maximum extent possible public ownership of the land is a direction that the Board asked TLC to explore and demonstrate to us.

TDSB's has two sources of funding to repair and replace school buildings. 1) annual funding from the province and 2) the proceeds from the sale or lease of owned property. With an ever increasing \$4B backlog of repairs, the current annual provincial funding will never keep pace with the volume of the needed repairs. TLC's modernization strategy this year alone shows how leveraging the Boards non instructional holdings can generate \$250M dollars for investment into TDSB's capital priorities. The broader plan will see opportunities for TDSB to generate a billion dollars over the next 10 years. This type of

revenue generation combined with stable long term provincial funding and a commitment to allow the TDSB to use our own proceeds will support schools being rebuilt and modernized across every ward in Toronto.

It is time for a generational rethinking of what a school can be and for the TDSB to advocate for enhanced collaboration with municipal and provincial governments. There is precedence for this as well. Governments have begun to direct investment and change legislation to address transit-oriented projects, housing shortages, childcare and long-term care needs. Local school boards and the students and families they serve require the same attention. TLC is involved in helping to bring about these conversations and the solutions that would result from them.

There is a lot of work to be done, and it will take years, but to believe that the TDSB has no solution to our schools' repair and replacement problem is not true. We have the opportunity to initiate the modernization one of the largest school districts in North America. Now is the time for bold thinking and creative solutions. Toronto's public school buildings hold a wealth of opportunities that can build on their great past and create exceptional learning spaces where students thrive in schools that are integrated into the communities as the foundation of their success.



Alexander Brown
Chair, Toronto District School Board