



For Immediate Release

Toronto Aquatics Plan must be completed before any school pools are drained

June 24, 2008 – Toronto, Ontario – **Let's Make Waves** is calling on mediator **David Crombie** to recommend a Special Adviser be appointed by the Provincial Government to work with the **Toronto District School Board** and the **City of Toronto** on a **Toronto Aquatics Plan**, which would include both City and TDSB school pools.

The grassroots community coalition also calls on Mr. Crombie to recommend school pools not be drained until the Special Adviser has completed this Plan, and that it include a thorough financial analysis of each of the TDSB school pools.

Currently, 23 school pools in Toronto are slated for closure in mid-August, with another 16 as of June 2009. Over 4,500 elementary school children are learning how to swim during their school day and thousands of school swim team students use their school pool to train and compete.

The closure also affects thousands more Toronto residents who use the pools, located in TDSB schools, for aquatic programming.

"It is not acceptable that the TDSB Board decision to close the pools be allowed to stand, as it was based on information that misrepresented the facts and does not effectively consider the health, safety and educational risks," states Peter LaMantia, a Let's Make Waves member. "The TDSB lacks the motivation and expertise required to manage this valued school and community pool portfolio. Now is the time for a Special Adviser to step in to develop a city-wide Aquatics Plan, which is funded and managed for the benefit of all Torontonians."

"Toronto has a higher proportion of its public pools in schools than any other urban centre in the country", says Nancy Abbey, member of Let's Make Waves. "If over 50% of the TDSB school pools are closed, the remaining pools owned by the City and the TDSB will not be able to meet the demand for swimming lessons and school swim team practices. A Toronto Aquatics Plan needs to be completed, including both City and TDSB school pools, before any school pool is drained."

Closure of the 23 school pools slated for June 2008 has been postponed until mid-August in order for David Crombie to have more time to find a long-term funding solution. Mr. Crombie will have been on the job for only 4 months before the first round of school pools are slated for closure. Not one school pool should be closed until a Special Advisor has completed their mandate.

ABOUT LET'S MAKE WAVES

Lets Make Waves is a non-partisan coalition of parents, students, concerned citizens, and members of not-for-profit sports organizations from across the city of Toronto united by a common interest to save the TDSB pools from closing.

More information at www.letsmakewaves.ca A complete media kit is available upon request.

MEDIA CONTACT:

Heidi Wilson Tel. 416-526-7080 info@letsmakewaves.ca

BACKGROUNDER

The TDSB Board has made their decision to close school pools based on inaccurate and incomplete information. Examples of this include:

1) Criterion used to select pools for decommissioning in 2008.

The main criteria used to determine a school pool closure was whether the school could timetable the physical education program without a pool. At 23 schools, the TDSB says physical education timetabling will not be affected, and those pools will close in 2008. In the first two schools chosen for independent assessment, the TDSB is wrong. In how many other cases are they also wrong?

Case #1: Riverdale Collegiate is over capacity – average class size is 34 students. The TDSB solution to providing physical education without the pool is to divide the large gym into two spaces. Independent evaluations have calculated that 60% of Riverdale's students would be required to watch and not actively participate during physical education classes due to space limitations and safety concerns.

Case #2: North Toronto Collegiate is currently waiting for a new school to be built on land adjacent to the existing facility. Their sports field is a construction zone. Next year, 650 students, roughly 70% of the students, are expected to sign up for physical education classes. The TDSB has been unable to explain how North Toronto Collegiate could timetable physical education, as they have stated, without a pool and without a sports field.

2) Ability of schools to deliver physical education curriculum without pools

The TDSB Evaluation of Pools for Possible Closure document specifically states that the *16 schools with pools slated for closure in 2009 can't timetable physical education without the use of their pool.*

No plan or financial analysis is available to explain how these schools will timetable physical education without pools, or what it will cost to modify a school for them to be able to do so.

3) Missing pool financial data

The TDSB cannot provide actual pool-by-pool operating costs. Operating costs are based on a series of assumptions and allocations according to the square footage of the pool area. Yet, the TDSB is claiming that they will be able to save \$4 million by closing 23 school pools in 2008.

The capital repair costs associated with school pools are from 2002 documents. Furthermore, there is no record of what repairs have been made to each pool between 2002 and 2008. Yet, the TDSB is claiming that the estimated capital cost to renew all school pools is \$56 million over the next 6 years.

4) Downplaying risks associated with decommissioning pools to the public

Many Trustees have made assurances to concerned parents that closed pools can be returned to full operation easily in the future. The TDSB's Engineering Department has maintained "pool systems left unused for a couple of months become increasingly more difficult and costly to return to full operation."

In fact, the Engineering Department has still not completed its Plan to decommission the first 23 school pools, which are slated to close in August, lending more urgency to the situation.

Need for a Toronto Aquatics Plan

- 1) Toronto has a higher proportion of its public pools in schools than any other urban centre in the country.
- 2) There are only 30 City owned and operated indoor pool facilities. North York District (6), Toronto & East York (11), Etobicoke (10), and Scarborough (3).
- 3) Toronto with a swim rate of 1.1 swims per capita in publicly accessible pools is less than half the lowest swim rate ever measured in a Canadian urban centre, large or small.
- 4) The City of Toronto currently pays the TDSB \$5.3 million to deliver Parks & Recreation programming in 35 school pools – approximately 45% of Parks & Recreation swim programs is provided in TDSB school pools.
- 5) The TDSB and the City need to work together to develop a Toronto Aquatics Plan that includes both City and TDSB school pools.

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