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## Four school pools spared the axe

**Nine others, many in poorer areas, need rescue, as trustees offered unique solar-energy proposal**

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Toronto trustees voted last night to save four school pools – two more than expected – leaving nine pools on a list to close at the end of the year unless new funds are found.



TONY BOCK/TORONTO STAR

Students demonstrate outside city hall April 16, 2009, before a committee met to discuss the future of swimming pools in city schools.

Three of the saved pools, at Jarvis Collegiate, Queen Alexandra and Downsview Secondary, are in needy neighbourhoods.

The pool at Fern Avenue public school will also reopen.

Some critics of pool closings had complained that low-income areas were being disproportionately hit.

The remaining nine pools are: Carleton Village, Central Technical School, Earl Grey, George Harvey Collegiate, Kensington Community School, Monarch Park, SATEC @ W.A. Porter, Western Technical-Commercial School and Winona/McMurrich public school.

The board's aquatic working group has been trying to drum up donations and find community groups willing to pay for pool time for the pools that will be closed and drained if nothing is secured in just over three months' time.

"While the (board) has been successful now, due to the advocacy of parents, students, residents, ...we still have nine more to save," said Trustee Josh Matlow after last night's vote.

"We are seeking the continued support of community and corporate partners to keep the remaining pools open for every one of our communities."

The board receives no money under the province's education funding formula to run the pools. However, Premier Dalton McGuinty announced \$12 million to \$15 million in the spring to fix and maintain them.

The City of Toronto pays \$6 million for 33 school pools.

Meanwhile, one local business owner says he has a solution for the pool at Monarch Park Collegiate, but the board seems uninterested.

Monarch Park's pool operating costs are higher than most because it serves special needs students and must be kept at warmer temperatures for therapeutic reasons. The school would have to secure at least \$71,726 per year to keep its pool afloat.

Bill Shinas is the owner of a company which installs and manufactures solar panels.

He has proposed paying the school \$60,000 a year over the next two decades in exchange for leasing the school's rooftop space.

He would then sell the energy generated to the Ontario Power Authority to be fed back into the local energy grid.

Local Trustee Cathy Dandy says the proposal is under review.

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