



**SOUTH NATION
CONSERVATION
DE LA NATION SUD**



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Closed Schools Will Need Second Life

Last Friday afternoon, South Nation Conservation (SNC) celebrated its official opening ceremonies at the former St. Bernard Catholic School. Having outgrown its former headquarters in Berwick, SNC relocated to Finch and turned the closed elementary school into its new home.

It's great to see SNC truly live up to the "conservation" by practicing the three "Rs" - reduce, reuse, and recycle – in a significant way. Rather than construct a new building, SNC administrators chose to retrofit the school and tailor it to the needs of the conservation authority. The old St. Bernard gym – which, for a while, was only used as a storage space – has become a state-of-the-art conference centre, with facilities that the public can use.

Sadly, SNC's opening ceremonies took place about a week and a half before three more schools were to close. Students at Inkerman, Elma, and Morewood public schools will walk out the buildings' front doors for the last time on Wed., June 24. According to the Upper Canada District School Board (UCDSB), these schools have been suffering from declining enrolment for many years, and as a result, they must be shut down.

This controversial decision has many consequences. For one, it means the UCDSB has three more buildings on its hands. According to UCDSB trustee Greg Pietersma, it's not that easy to sell a school. These buildings have purposefully been tailored to teach children. While it might cost \$5 million to construct a 10-classroom school, said Pietersma, that same building can sell for as little as \$100, 000.

"At this point, we don't have any specific plans for any of those buildings," said Pietersma in an interview with the *Winchester Press*.

However, Pietersma said the board intends to sell all the schools.

In the past, he explained, old schools have been converted into apartments, car-sale lots, and storage facilities. The one-floor school in Inkerman, suggested Pietersma, could even be turned into a retirement residence.

It remains to be seen if the community can, like the SNC, figure out creative ways to give these buildings a second life.

For more on the ramifications of the changing school system, check out next week's special commemorative educational issue of the *Press*.

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