

ACTION REQUEST – CAO	
To:	Warden and Members of Council
Date of Meeting:	November 15, 2021
Subject:	Improving Rural Education Report

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the Council of the United Counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry endorse the attached report and executive summary document “Improving Rural Education in Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry” prepared by Horizon Educational Consultants.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Horizon Educational Consultants were engaged earlier in 2021 to develop a report outlining recommendations for the province and/or local school boards to improve the availability and quality of educational opportunities for students across SDG. The work of the consultant was guided by a working group of elected officials and lay appointees representing all areas of the County. The working group endorses the report and executive summary document.

BACKGROUND:

In late 2019, County Council adopted a new strategic planning document. One of the pillars of the strategic plan is to advocate for conditions that allow children throughout SDG to be educated as close to their home communities as possible. As a first step, as noted earlier, a consultant was engaged after an RFP process to develop an advocacy document to highlight the challenges facing students in SDG and throughout rural Ontario, as well as be a catalyst for change through the development of recommendations to improve rural education.

Guiding the process has been a working group of elected officials and lay people, who have worked closely with the consultant and CAO throughout the entire process. Among the members of this working group are County Councillors Gardner (chair), Fraser, MacDonald, and Jaworski. There was representation from each of the 6 local SDG municipalities.

Moving forward, once the documents are endorsed, it is important that every opportunity to be taken to advocate for the recommendations to improve rural education. The working group has discussed ways to do this, including seeking a dedicated meeting with Ministry of Education officials (Minister, Deputy Minister, senior bureaucrats), developing alliances with other like-minded groups such as the Rural Schools Alliance, working with local school boards, and holding a rural schools symposium in 2022. The usual channels (delegations at major

conferences such as ROMA and AMO) will also be pursued. Plans will be developed and vetted through the working group.

OPTIONS AND DISCUSSION:

1. Do not endorse the documents (**Not Recommended**). A great deal of work has gone into the development of the attached documents. The recommendations in the executive summary document will form the basis of the County's advocacy efforts for the foreseeable future.
2. Endorse the reports produced by Horizon Educational Consultants (**Recommended**).

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS:

The cost of the report (approximately \$60K) was budgeted for in 2021. Going forward, there may be some small costs associated with implementing and related advocacy efforts, such as travelling to attend meetings, hosting a symposium, etc. These costs can be easily absorbed by existing departmental budgets.

LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT:

It is hoped that that the recommendations within the document will be acted on in the future by the relevant decision makers. These changes should have positive impacts for children throughout SDG and rural Ontario.

RELEVANCE TO STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

This initiative aligns perfectly with *Strategic Priority No. 1 – "Rural Schools – Educating Children in Their Communities"*.


OTHERS CONSULTED:

Horizon Educational Consultants
Education Working Group members
School Boards (requests for information)
Public (surveys)

ATTACHMENTS:

Final report and executive summary document

APPROVED BY:



T.J. Simpson, CAO