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## THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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### Shrinking school-age population a worry

By KATE HAMMER  
From Thursday's Globe and Mail

Toronto's school-age population is shrinking and this spells trouble for the Toronto District School Board where enrolment is down and funding is based on head counts.

The board's new education director, Chris Spence, announced this week that he hopes to improve enrolment numbers by hiring a director of marketing to toot the board's horn locally and abroad.

Demographics are partly to blame. Families are having fewer children and enrolment has fallen steadily at the TDSB since 2003. The problem is province-wide and enrolment has decreased at all but one of Ontario's 72 school boards.

Dr. Spence hopes to combat the problem by keeping students from slipping away into the private system and by drawing international students. Both approaches have special potential for improving the TDSB's enrolment numbers because of the high concentration of private schools within Toronto and the city's international appeal.

"There's great things happening, but I don't think the average person knows about it," said Dr. Spence. "We need a dedicated person to really talk about the great things that are happening."

The details of Dr. Spence's plan remain unclear, but the idea of promoting TDSB programs and successes as a way of coping with the declining school-age population was met with cautious enthusiasm by several trustees yesterday.

Trustee Bruce Davis (Ward 3, Etobicoke-Lakeshore), chairman of the TDSB's finance committee, said he proposed a similar idea in a report released in February.

He said his fellow trustees showed interest, but raised some concerns about how the costs would compare to returns in promoting the school board and its programs.

"I'm thrilled to see that it's something the director has looked at and is willing to take on," Mr. Davis said. "It will be interesting to see how he sees it rolling out, his emphasis on international students versus local, and the whole issue of retention."

The board's more than 1,000 international students provide a financial boon to the budget: Elementary school pupils pay \$11,500 in tuition and secondary school students \$13,000.

"We have a lot of activity where we try to promote the TDSB around the world to obtain international visa students who pay a premium to be able to be educated in the TDSB," said board chairman John Campbell. "What we're looking at here is just more acutely defining what we do in terms of marketing our board because we are a body that is funded by enrolment and more enrolment means more funds."

There are slightly less than two million school-age children in Ontario, and about 6 per cent attend private schools.

Trustee Mari Rutka, (Ward 12, Willowdale), said that enrolment might be improved if parents were more aware of the programs that already exist with the school board.

"If it would help people to know about the treasures they have already got in public education, maybe we should talk about it," she said.

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