



# *Medicine Hat Catholic Board of Education*

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## MEDIA RELEASE

In an effort to clear up some misconceptions in the community over the recent decision of the Board of Trustees of Medicine Hat Catholic to return St. Thomas Aquinas to its inventory the following Frequently Asked Questions are presented as information:

- 1. Did Medicine Hat Catholic give advance notice to the Conseil scolaire du Sud de l'Alberta that it might be taking St. Thomas Aquinas back?**

*Yes. On June 24, 2009, Medicine Hat Catholic Superintendent of Schools, David Leahy, phoned the Mr. Gerald Auger, the Superintendent of Schools for Conseil scolaire du Sud de l'Alberta, to inform him that the MHCBE budget had been approved the previous night. Mr. Leahy informed Mr. Auger that the budget contained money set aside to refurbish St. Thomas in case we decided during the 2009-2010 school year to take the school back at the end of its current lease. Mr. Auger was informed that a decision had not been made to take St. Thomas back but that it was a possibility that the lease would not be renewed when it expired at the end of July 2010. In fact, the Conseil scolaire du Sud de l'Alberta wrote Alberta Education this fall asking for a new school based on the conversation Mr. Leahy had with Superintendent Auger.*
- 2. Is the Medicine Hat Catholic Board of Education breaking its lease with Conseil scolaire du Sud de l'Alberta?**

*No. The lease is set to expire on July 31, 2010. There is a clause in the lease that MHCBE needs to notify Conseil scolaire du Sud de l'Alberta six months prior to the end of the lease if the lease will not be renewed.*
- 3. How long is the current lease?**

*The current lease is for two years. MHCBE has been unwilling to sign longer leases with the Conseil scolaire du Sud de l'Alberta for the St. Thomas property for some time now. MHCBE has done this because we are facing a space crunch at a number of schools and had to keep our options open in terms of gaining some facility relief by re-opening St. Thomas.*
- 4. Taking back St. Thomas was not part of Superintendent Leahy's proposed Facility/Grade Reconfiguration Plan. Why did the Board of Trustees alter the plan to bring back St. Thomas?**

*This was a very difficult decision. MHCBE has a serious overcrowding problem in a number of our schools. There is no guarantee that we will be getting a much needed school let alone modular classrooms. During the public consultations on Mr. Leahy's plan, the Board of Trustees heard many stakeholders put forward the position that we would gain additional space by bringing back St. Thomas into our inventory. When St. Thomas Aquinas was closed our Division had enough surplus space to accommodate all our students in our nine remaining schools. However, over time, our student population has increased steadily and we are facing a problem with over utilization. As a result St. Thomas is no longer considered surplus. In addition, looking after our own students has to be our number one priority. We feel that bringing back St. Thomas School into our Division will be in the best interests of the Division because it will alleviate overcrowding at St. Mary's.*
- 5. Is Medicine Hat Catholic willing to meet with the Conseil scolaire du Sud de l'Alberta to discuss this issue?**

*Yes. The Conseil scolaire du Sud de l'Alberta sent us a letter last week requesting a meeting. We replied that we were willing to meet this week. We contacted the Chairperson of the Conseil scolaire du Sud de l'Alberta in order to set up a meeting; however, some of the officials with Conseil scolaire du Sud de l'Alberta were unavailable for a meeting this week.*
- 6. Is the decision to take back St. Thomas a political ploy by MHCBE to put pressure on the government to allocate a school?**

*No! During the recent regional planning process our board decided that we were not going to play politics when it comes to facilities in Medicine Hat. Our Division was not happy with the regional planning process or the final report. Our dissatisfaction was communicated to the Minister of Education and our local MLA's. We have been very public in supporting the needs of other jurisdictions for schools. We respect the constitutional right Francophones enjoy for education. We need space. We need it next year and the community told us to take St. Thomas back.*

7. **Some Francophone parents are upset that they heard about this decision through the media. Why was this decision not shared with the Francophone school before it was announced?**

*The MHCBE made the decision on the facility plan at a public board meeting on Thursday, December 10. We held five public consultation meetings prior to the board meeting. We promised our community that we would make the decision in public. What the public saw on December 10 was vigorous debate amongst the trustees.*

*By 9:00 a.m. on December 11, 2009, we had informed Superintendent Auger of the decision.*

For more information please contact:

**Mr. Stan Aberle, Chair, MHCBE  
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