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## TVDSB promises dialogue

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School officials and rural politicians can meet together early in the school-review process to advocate for students and their small communities, the head of the Thames Valley District School Board said Tuesday.

But the dialogue won't necessarily translate into keeping small or half-empty schools open, education director Bill Tucker said during a meeting of the County of Middlesex.

County politicians have been pushing for a process which would force boards to include them as partners in talks about rural-school closings.

Tucker offered up a compromise: "I believe there's an opportunity where we can sit down and work together toward both those goals" of program equity and fewer surplus classroom spaces.

But when asked if those partnerships might stave off school closings, he told councillors more than once he wouldn't make any promises and that ultimately the decision is an educational one.

Tucker offered that senior administrators would meet with community members and politicians before accommodation review committees convene.

"I think as a group we need to move forward. I think the days are gone when we have competing interests," Tucker said, noting they share the same taxpayer base.

Southwest Middlesex Mayor Doug Reycraft -- chairperson of the Community Schools Alliance lobbying the province to mandate municipal inclusion in school-closing deliberations -- said he hopes the board's commitment translates into action.

Tucker said the board has learned from the first round of accommodation reviews it conducted.

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