

Thames Valley trustees close three rural schools

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Three London-area rural public schools will be closed, trustees decided late last night.

Thames Valley District school board trustees debated over an hour before voting 9-4 to shut Caradoc South school in Melbourne, Metcalfe Central in Strathroy and M.B. McEachren in Lambeth.

The schools were chosen for closing because of falling enrolment.

Caradoc and Metcalfe will shut down in September 2010, and McEachren will close in June 2010.

"There's no question it was a difficult decision," said board spokesperson Kate Young.

Pupils will transfer to Caradoc Central school in

Mt. Brydges, Caradoc North in Strathroy, Ekcoe Central in Glencoe and A.E. Duffield in Lambeth, respectively.

The administration's recommendation to close London's Brick Street and Manor and Highland Park schools dominated earlier discussions.

Concerned parents and London city councillor David Wainwright spoke in favour of keeping the schools open.

Wainwright said closing them would be like "tearing the heart out of this community."

About 30 people attended the meeting. One critic called it "bad judgment" for the board to keep its scheduled meeting when people would be distracted by the federal election.

"It guarantees that the board's decision won't be the front-page headline Wednesday morning," Doug Reycraft,

a defender of rural schools and a former MPP, had said.

The board had intended to make a final decision on the small Middlesex schools two weeks ago. But trustees wanted more information and rescheduled that meeting.

Parents should have had enough time to vote and attend the meeting, said trustee Joyce Bennett. "If they're that passionate about being there,

they'd find the time."

Melissa Somerton, a local parents' association representative, said she had time to vote and attend the meeting.

"That wasn't an issue," she said. "(The board) didn't have much choice."

School closings are a "hot potato," said Sally Baughman, representing A.E. Duffield.

Jenni Dunning is a Free Press reporter.