

February 23, 2010

School Board meeting speech

Faellen Brandner for Giscome Elementary School

I appreciate the Board's consideration for our children's quality of education. I have read through many of the reports and can see the thought process in addressing the deficit and improving access to educational services. We have worked hard to create a good relationship with our school and school board so we can work together to find a healthy solution for our children in these trying times. Please hear everyone's suggestions so we may find the best solutions.

In my findings, research has proven that rural schools do provide an 'equally good' education. From the Report of the Task Force on Rural Education I quote, 'Can the rural-urban achievement gap be reduced or eliminated, and can a small rural school offer the quality of educational experience that would be required to achieve this? The answers seem to be yes....Based on extensive testing programs as well as school inspections, the study concluded that, "Overall, the quality of learning tends to be slightly better in the small rather than the large schools." Other studies show similar results.

Each student has talents and contributions which are recognized in the school community. Family atmosphere makes rural schools a safe and nurturing environment. There is a strong bond between the community and the school. Small classes and low teacher-pupil ratios creates a positive learning environment. From my perspective our teachers deal effectively with multi grade classes creating a strong sense of leadership and no age boundaries. Our teachers strive to overcome the challenges of training and support for special needs. It is not sufficient to impose urban solutions on rural schools.

I agree with the already mentioned option for rural schools to participate in the technology assisted video-teleconferencing and internet based teaching technologies. It has also been mentioned that Northern Development Initiative Trust has suggested support toward this innovative development.

Rural schools are partially funded with the 100,000 rural school grant as well as the small community supplement. From the School Closures report by Dick Chambers I quote, 'A board concerned about a school with dwindling enrollment...could find they might just break even or perhaps

lose money if they were to close the school as they would lose the recognition for that school within the fiscal framework.'

I appreciate the other suggestions made in the Sustainability report and wish to see what savings could be made there. I believe there is enough to be saved through tightening the ropes rather than requiring mass school closures. **Not underfunded just misdirected.** So rather than simply pointing out the problems, I am well aware that answers are needed. Please listen to our additional recommendations.

-I ask that the school boundaries be redrawn for Giscome to the original catchment area thus adding to our student population.

-How much could be saved by keeping inventory of school property, assets, etc so as not to overspend and purchase multiples of items when there may be extra in the next school?

-How about an incentive program to cut down on paper usage? For each school this may seem small but on a District level there could be substantial savings. How much would this save?

-What about reducing the frequency that curriculum is changed? Our storage room is full of books that are no longer used, as well as extra training hours and travel costs. How much would this save?

-And last but definitely not least, District Infrastructure.

From the Sustainability Report for 2010 I quote, 'District Infrastructure has not been reduced at the same rate as enrolment decline. In fact, during the last decade district infrastructure expanded as district enrolment declined. In order to sustain school district operations going forward, it will be necessary to right-size district infrastructure'

-Is the central admin /School Board office necessary considering it's market value of approx 3 million? Is there not another building already owned by the District that could facilitate this?

In the Report of the task Force on Rural Education it is mentioned that as much as 25% of some school districts time is spent in transit. My suggestion to this is to allocate those district employees who live closest to a school to handle that area specifically. What savings could be reaped here? As well as the already suggested teleconferencing.

I request that more District Infrastructure recommendations be made immediately to offset the consideration of school closures.

Giscome has completed a proposal for a Neighborhood of Learning Centre which was submitted to Honorable MacDiarmid in November. This model

would share the costs which are currently the sole responsibility of the School District. Support has only grown. Please refer to handout # 1 for a list of our research which includes prospective partnerships and aid. We too are committed to finding the best possible solution for our children. Though, this cannot be done in 60 days. I ask that you, the Board and Superintendants extend this minimum consultation period to allow time to process the Ministry's new budget which is not due until one day after the end of the 60 days. Until we get our Neighborhood of Learning Centre we are willing to operate in the portables.

It's been several years since the last mill closed on the Eastline, no more large economic challenges such as this are foreseen. Our population sustains itself based on families who want to live out there. Our population has increased along with enrollment for the past three years due to affordable living and healthy lifestyle. This is expected to continue (please see diagram below). The Families in our community want to live rurally and thus have their children schooled within the area. Our children (ages 4-12) cannot be expected to be removed from their community, traveling 3-4 hours per day, five days a week

Giscome Elementary School Projections -by Faellen Brandner Jan 24, 2010

Grade	2009 2010	2010 2011	2011 2012	2012 2013	2013 2014	
Preschool	16	13	5	4	4	not inc in totals
K	5	3	7	1	0	
1	6	5	4	7	1	
2	2	6	5	4	7	
3	7	2	6	5	4	
4	6	7	2	6	5	
5	0	6	7	2	6	
6	2	0	6	7	2	
7	3	2	0	6	7	
	31	31	37	38	32	

The recommendation made by the Sustainability Committee is for Giscome to be amalgamated to Blackburn Elementary. This school is out of our geographical everything! You are already aware of long bus travel not taking into consideration unique road hazards including but not limited to crossing a bridge, a ravine and a highway . There should be no question of the effect

on student learning in this consideration. Elementary students should be schooled as close to home as possible.

Early learning would be virtually lost given the travel time that would be required to participate. Right now we facilitate the Ready Set Learn program which is volunteer driven. Our attendance averages 9 children. There are many challenges such as operating out of our local church basement and moving necessary items from one building to another. We do this because we feel this is important for our children and makes a difference in preparing them for Kindergarten.

(Speak against full day Kindergarten. Early learning programs are sufficient for my child. The costs are unnecessary at a time of financial challenges (1.2 million for 2010/2011))

There have been a lot of assumptions made concerning regular funding, given that the Ministry has not announced their budget. What will happen if the funding is provided from the Ministry? Is there a plan B?

I hope that the feedback from the schools and communities will help you to make clear, concise, healthy decisions for the children. Please extend the consultation period. We have gone through mass school closures which provided a fix for some years, though here we are again. Let's be creative, innovative, research and explore partnerships which will provide long term benefits. School District 57 has been known to pioneer new methods and show a prime example to the province. 60 days is not enough.

The children are our future. I ask you to best serve the educational interests of our students.