



Prince Edward Island Home and School Federation Inc.

PO Box 1012, Charlottetown, PEI C1A 7M4
(P) 902-620-3186 1-800-916-0664 (F) 902-620-3187
peihsf@edu.pe.ca • www.edu.pe.ca/peihsf

April 21, 2009

Robert Clow
Chair, Board of Trustees
Eastern School District

Re: Consultation Presentation by the PEI Home and School Federation, April 21, 2009

Dear Mr. Clow:

I would first like to thank the Eastern School District for the opportunity to speak at this public consultation meeting. The PEI Home and School Federation is a network of local associations at 52 schools in the Eastern School District and Western School Board. Nine of the 11 schools considered for closure are members of the Home and School Federation:

Parkdale Elementary
Georgetown Elementary
Tracadie Cross Consolidated
St. Jean's Elementary
St. Peter's Consolidated
Grand Tracadie Elementary
St. Teresa's Consolidated
Rollo Bay Consolidated
Dundas Consolidated

It is important for parents, trustees and our elected officials to know that the Federation is neither for nor against school closures. Our mission is to ensure that every child in the province receives the same, high quality education. We place great emphasis on a goal of equality, that "every child" has equal access to the best education programming and services available. The Federation realizes that such a goal is difficult to achieve in an education system affected by so many internal and external pressures, such as declining enrolments.

The Eastern School Districts Organizational Plan clearly shows that some schools have too many students while others have too few. Neither situation is conducive to effective learning and student success. So what is the solution? How should the school board deal with the issue of declining enrolments? Rezone first.....consider school closures first. It is not clear to me which is the best approach. Both have merits and both have risks. What I can say for sure is that there is no unique solution. The challenge you face as our trustees is to come to an acceptable solution that will result in an improved

education system.

The federation has heard from parents who support the school organization plan, as related to their school or community, and from those who oppose the plan.

After listening to presentations at the consultation meetings, it is clear to the Federation that system-wide changes in education are necessary. One observation is that the public consultation model, used in the Eastern School District, is deficit in its approach. Parents have played no part in framing the key questions around school closures.

Parents should have confidence that their ideas and values will have an impact on the decision making process.

The federation would prefer a public engagement model, which gives parents a more active, participatory role in the conversation around school closures. I talked publicly a few months ago about the process in Ontario whereby, if a school is considered for closure, parents are invited to sit on a community based committee that reviews the value of that school. I only learned last week that such a public engagement model exists closer to home here in PEI in the Western School Board (WSB).

Section 18.3 of the WSB Policy on Facility Planning and Development states that “No later than October 30, the Board shall, by resolution, establish study committees for those schools under study by the Board possible for closure for the next school year.”

Section 7.4 of the policy lists the possible membership of the study committee.

- three parents for each school in the study, one of whom should be the President of the Home and School/School Council;
- the Chairperson and trustee(s) who represent the community in which the schools under study are located
- up to three staff representatives from the school(s) involved
- the Director of Schools for the area(s) involved
- the Superintendent of Education
- other support personnel or community representatives
- the school Principal(s) involved
- a student representative from any Senior High School affected

Section 18.4 states that “In the case where a School Board has taken a final decision to recommend permanent closure of a school and Government approves closure of a school, the Board shall establish a transition committee to plan for the orderly relocation of affected students.”

I encourage you, our trustees, to look closely at the policy in the Western School Board and consider this when reviewing the policy in the Eastern School District around permanent school closures.

Last Saturday at the Federation’s Annual General Meeting we discussed a resolution submitted by the Parkdale Elementary Home and School association.

“THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Federation urge the Department of Education and the Prince Edward Island School Boards to delay the proposed school

closures until the full impact of re-zoning and the introduction of kindergartens into the school system can be carefully and critically analysed, keeping the best interests of the students as the primary consideration.”

This resolution passed and will be forwarded to the Minister of Education and to the School Boards. I want to be clear that with this resolution the Federation is not asking for the decision making process to be delayed. This resolution is urging the trustees to recommend that school closures be delayed, if in fact there is a recommendation to close schools. Delay so that you can continue to consider internal influences such as re-zoning and the introduction of kindergarten as you work to improve the education system. The Federation believes this to be a reasonable request, one that is in the best interest of the students.

I want to end by saying that the Federation understands and supports the role of our superintendents, school board trustees and Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, which is to act in the best interests of our children, and the decisions they make, within their respective mandates, are to be directed at improving the education system for all children.

We wish you the best in your deliberations.

Sincerely,

Bill Whelan, President
PEI Home and School Federation