

Tuesday April, 26, 2016

To the LKDSB Trustees;

My name is Chris Burley, I currently have three children in LKDSB schools. I'd like to start with a famous quote from Upton Sinclair. "It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends on him not understanding it". Wise words from the past that are equally applicable today. I believe this quote sums up public sentiment towards our LKDSB administrators who refuse to acknowledge they are mistaken in spite of the sea of information that has inundated them throughout this accommodation review.

If there is one thing that drives me crazy as a SCITS supporter, it's how often we are patronized by the board as being "very emotional" and "full of passion". As if, those are the defining characteristics of our movement to save Sarnia Collegiate from closure. I have watched two of my childhood schools being torn down. I have not shed a tear for either of these buildings being razed despite my wonderful memories at both schools; which will forever remain in my heart and mind. For many of us, saving SCITS is not about sentimentality and nostalgia, it's about what is best for our students and community, both now and into the future. The Sarnia Collegiate building offers a unique learning experience for our kids in the arts and technical fields that will not be easily replicated anywhere at any cost.

Most SCITS proponents have been very rational throughout this accommodation review process; despite being stonewalled by administration almost every step of the way. We have even agreed with the board on several major points which we saw as being reasonable and serving the greater good. We agree it is likely, that South Sarnia can only support one public high school. We agree that students will be better served in a larger school population with more options for curriculum and other opportunities. We agree that there will be considerable cost savings available to the board by closing either one of our South Sarnia public high schools.

The point on which we will not waiver or compromise; is that we believe SCITS offers the better building to house those South Sarnia high school students. Sarnia Collegiate is approximately 25,000 square feet larger than St. Clair, provides an 850 seat auditorium, an indoor swimming pool and better overall amenities. SCITS is deeply rooted in Sarnia's core economically, historically and socially. As a recognized arts, music and theater school, Sarnia Collegiate is nurtured by our city's arts community which also resides in the downtown area. SCITS was built in an era when graceful design was a requisite for school buildings. Its build quality is unrivaled at any school in the Lambton Kent district. Upon it's opening in 1922, Sarnia Collegiate was hailed as the great pride of our city, a title many Sarnians still feel suits our most architecturally significant school. Many of SCITS students served our country in times of war, some of whom never returned. In this respect, SCITS may be considered a war memorial.

Many of us have never campaigned for anything like this in our lives. We have always trusted in our public school board and believed it was doing a fine job of educating our children and managing our schools. That all changed last fall when the LKDSB publicly announced that they wanted to tear the heart out of our community by closing SCITS. We were optimistic that the overwhelming city-wide support for this beloved institution would sway administration. We felt validated by the multitude of letters of support coming from the people of Sarnia, Point Edward, Corunna and beyond. Our support stemming from students, teachers, business interests, community groups and even our own representatives at city hall. How could all of these people believing Sarnia Collegiate to be the better accommodation, be so wrong?

The plan to close SCITS was authored by a few board administrators. Furthermore, they have been able to pick and choose which information is relevant and should be included in the final staff report. It should come as no surprise that these same administrators still believe that their original plan is best, despite the deluge of contrary input from the public. We were told that the community impact of closing SCITS wasn't a concern of the board. We have been told that the historical role of Sarnia Collegiate doesn't factor into the board's equation. From what I've seen and heard over the last several months, I'm not really sure the students factor in either. How can this board justify closing the larger, more amenity rich, community-rooted and historically important school? How is this best serving our students?

Many of us were convinced that the LKDSB was determined to close SCITS from the beginning. Every step of the way, the board has disrespected the community by minimizing our concerns. Administration's plans have been proven to be weak, full of holes and contingent upon winning provincial grant money, still they are

determined to stay the course. We are frustrated as a community that our public school board is refusing to hear our collective voice. Closing St. Clair will bring comparable annual savings and yield the LKDSB considerably more capital at the time of sale. Keeping Sarnia Collegiate open will guarantee that our kids continue to have amongst the best arts and technical educations available across two counties.

Why were our city council recommendations so quickly dismissed? Why have the board administrators closed their eyes and ears to the pleas of this community? How can they ignore the thousands of people across this city and county who are outraged at the prospect of losing all of the unique and wonderful opportunities that we have at SCITS? Many of us have lost our confidence in our public school board. We don't trust this administration, their plans or their figures. Time and again, they have been presented with working solutions to address the board's financial woes. Administration continually, reminds us that they are not interested in anything other than their own myopic plan. It seems obvious to most, that this administration is the uncompromising party at the table.

If the LKDSB had its finger on the pulse of this community, they would realize that most of us are furious with them and their bullish plans. We are being forced to accept our public school board's verdict, that Sarnia Collegiate is not the best present and future option for the students of South Sarnia, when it so obviously is. We don't want a second best option for our children and community. We already have the better building, with more valued amenities. We're not buying the board's message that we will be better off with the inferior accommodations at the St. Clair site.

We don't believe the board's manufactured figures for SCITS repairs. Many petty building condition issues that have sat on the back burner for years and decades are now being considered "necessary to address". No small defect at SCITS can be missed by those overzealous to see her permanently closed. Conversely, St. Clair building defects, deficiencies and lack of amenities can all be easily dismissed with high hopes of free provincial grant money. We don't believe that SCITS is dangerously exposing our children to lead and asbestos. How could our school board have justified this exposure over the last thirty six years since the banning of these materials in Canada? We don't believe that spending millions of dollars in provincial debt will give us a better high school than we already have at SCITS. We don't believe that St. Clair will ever have an 850 seat auditorium, an indoor swimming pool or any of the priceless features that make Sarnia Collegiate the darling of our community. We're not convinced that the board will definitely be approved for their much hyped provincial grant.

If the board administrators were being honest with the public, they would admit that the real purpose of applying for the provincial funding grant is to address their \$200 million board wide maintenance deficit. By insisting on closing SCITS, essentially, the board is saying Lambton Kent's largest city, Sarnia, is undeserving of its fair share of board resources. They want us to give up our inheritance, enabling them to apply for the larger government grant so they can spread it around the entire two county district. They have blamed everyone and everything but themselves for this mismanagement and now Sarnia is expected to take a raw deal. After all, if there's something that nobody else wants in their back yard, they can always dump it in Sarnia's South end.

The bottom line is; we don't trust the Lambton Kent District School Board anymore. We cannot sit silent as we are being deceived by administration. In no way will our children and community be better served by closing the greater facility. As trustees, do you really want to hitch your wagons to this train wreck and be held responsible for this kind of mess? I can't recall a local issue that has stirred so many good quiet citizens to rage in anger like this. Voting to close SCITS will not be the end of this issue. Our city will remember the day the LKDSB turned their back on our community for a short-sighted "best for the board solution". I humbly urge you to make the responsible choice, vote to close St. Clair Secondary and make Sarnia Collegiate, South Sarnia's public high school. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely, Chris Burley