



Ontario Federation of Agriculture

Ontario AgriCentre

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Ms. Gayle Stucke,
Director of Education
Lambton Kent District School Board
stuckega@lkdsb.net

Ms. Suzanne Jean
Accommodation Review Committee
Lambton Kent District School Board
jeansu@lkdsb.net

February 11, 2010

Dear Ms. Stucke and Ms. Jean,

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) is the voice of Ontario farmers. Supported by over 38,000 individual members and 30 affiliated organizations, the OFA represents farm family concerns to government and the general public. The OFA is committed to addressing issues regarding the economic and service infrastructure required for agricultural prosperity. Schools are critical infrastructure for farm families.

It has come to our attention that the Lambton Kent District School Board (LKDSB) is considering closing low enrolment schools in the area. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) is opposed to such decisions being made prior to consideration of a number of critical factors impacting the well-being and success of the students and the potential impact of school closures on the local community.

In our opinion, there are several questions which must be answered before the decision to close a school is made. These questions include the following:

- How will students get to school? What is the impact on students if they are required to spend hours each day on the bus just getting to and from school? Will they be too tired to learn to their full potential as a result of how early they must rise just to catch the bus? Will they be able to participate in extracurricular activities, which are so important to children's development?
- How will parents' involvement in their children's education change? Will the school be too far away for parents to be able to volunteer / participate at the school? What is the potential impact to the school from this loss of volunteer basis? How does this impact the children?



- How will students employment opportunities change? If they are spending a long time commuting, they will not be available for part-time jobs, impacting their ability to save for continuing education after high school and potentially impacting rural businesses that no longer have these students available to hire.
- What is the impact of larger schools on the students learning environment and opportunities? It has been demonstrated empirically that in general, learning outcomes are better for smaller schools than they are for larger schools and that smaller schools do not have as many of the social problems that larger schools have¹. Has this fact been considered in the decision making process to date?

The welfare and best interests of our future generation cannot be ignored, and must be considered even in budgetary decisions. The OFA is committed to lobbying for education and childcare funding that is appropriate for rural Ontario. School boards must also send the message that rural Ontario values its children by making decisions that support their development and growth.

We encourage the LKDSB to reassess the issue of school closures with consideration to the impact on the students and the local community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Bette Jean Crews'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bette Jean Crews,
President

cc: Honourable Leona Dombrowsky, Minister of Education

¹ Dr. Al Lauzon and Ms. Maureen McCallum. Negotiating Rural Futures: A Study of Relationships Between Boards of Education and Rural Communities During a Period of School Consolidation.