

Lambton Kent District School Board

Request to Delegate with regard to FOREST ARC at the February 28, 2017 meeting

Name: Rev. Dr. Christine O'Reilly

Background: Community Resident; former parent of a Bosanquet School student; School Involvement for 25 years; have served on School Council since its inception; involved in the community as pastor and community advocate since 1988

Good evening, Board Members, Trustees, Director Costello, Superintendants, Staff, and others.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this evening regarding the proposed closure of Bosanquet Central School, and other area schools, and the formation of a JK-Grade 12 school in Lambton Shores/north Lambton County.

I have been around long enough to remember when the motto of the Lambton Public School Board was "Touching Tomorrow Today". The slogan and geography may have changed, but the truth of those words has not. The decisions you make regarding a school in the north part of Lambton County, the small town, rural areas will indeed 'touch tomorrow'. I am speaking to you this evening, and have written to you, and have served as the Bosanquet Central School community representative on the Accommodation Review Committee. I have lived in and served the Thedford-Bosanquet community for 29 years; it has been my choice to live and serve here, and I am both thankful and proud to do so. I care deeply about the people in the community; and the future of the community and those who live there. Volunteering and serving the school has been a privilege – and one I take seriously – for 25 years.

I am very cognizant of funding formulas and declining population issues. I am also very aware of the way rural communities and small towns face an uphill battle in

being taken seriously by our provincial government. I am aware of the financial challenges you face as a Board. You, and we in our community, are currently facing issues today that were decided yesterday – in the 1990's when Bill 160 brought massive changes to education in this province, and to our own communities and our local schools. "Touching Tomorrow Today" in fact has happened, and brought us to this decision...a decision you will vote on in a few weeks. You will "touch tomorrow" when you take that vote.

I am here to ask you to take very seriously the letters and comments of the community you have received; close to forty letters have been submitted just to Ms. Andrea Walden and myself, advocating for a new school to meet the needs of our students and our community. This community cares deeply about our children and young people. This community wants to be heard, to be respected, and to have decisions made that will benefit us today and tomorrow, not simply be a patch job that ticks off the boxes imposed by the Ministry of Education.

Yes, we are "asking for a lot" as one Board member has stated. We are asking for a quality education for our children and youth, so that as your current motto "Student Achievement = Community Success" is more than a slogan. We are asking you, who represent Lambton Kent District School Board, not simply your own community, to advocate for, vote for, work for, provide for this community a school that offers students the chance to experience and excel in areas of education so that they can excel in building a life and a community. There are jobs in our community; agriculture and agriculture related employment in this province is, I believe, the third largest sector in the ecology. Offering a STEM school simply makes sense if you as a Board are to fulfill your mandate. Working with institutions such as Ridgetown and the University of Guelph to anticipate and provide an education suited for the further education needed to fill these jobs makes sense. According to the University of Guelph there are three jobs waiting for every agriculture degree graduate and two jobs waiting for every diploma graduate. This is neither a dying economy nor a low skilled one; in our rural communities we need skilled mechanics, robot technicians, computer programmers, veterinarians, soil specialists, crop specialists, animal science specialists, and more. We need people with skills to serve our community in areas

of health care and wellness, business, accounting, construction, design, architecture, engineering, manufacturing, law, education, child care, youth support, senior support, law enforcement, social work, personal support workers, tourism, food services and much more. A quality school that offers the foundations of learning, experiences that affirm the interests and experiences of our students, and encourages the desire for life-long learning is what is needed here.

Make no mistake: Bosanquet Central parents and students do not want to lose our local school. But we want even more the best for our children. We have worked respectfully and cooperatively throughout his process. We know our community, far better than many of you who do not live there. Building a new school in the north end of the Forest community is the best decision you can make to fulfill “Student Achievement and Community Success”; you will indeed be “Touching Tomorrow Today” in a positive way if you will vote for, advocate for and get behind the reasonable, well-thought out desire of this community.

Building a new school in the vicinity of The Shores will offer

- shared use of community resources in collaboration with the municipality of Lambton Shores (e.g. ice surface, wellness centre) and potential community hub
- reasonable traffic flow accommodation
- proximity of EMS and police services
- proximity to a ‘post-disaster safe’ building (The Shores)
- not have vulnerable residents (from infant care to frail senior citizens) in one block of the town
- a design that will be environmentally and educationally sound
- fiscally responsible both now and in the future (shared facilities, modern building techniques that offer cost savings in electricity, heat, water)
- an opportunity to truly welcome all students to form a new school community
- a positive response to the expressed needs and desires of our First Nations partners, as expressed in the ARC process.

The quality and opportunity for excellence in education must not be compromised in any way due to the geographical location in the province, or the economy of any given community. The quality of the education given is, I recognize not just about a building – it is about the curriculum and experiences offered. I would be happy to share my thoughts on that – perhaps another time.

Tonight, this is about the decision you will make about education for students in rural north Lambton County. I urge you to listen carefully and read thoughtfully to the submission from our community. I urge you to ask questions, to come visit, to meet and listen to the people who will be most affected by the choice you make.

You will indeed be “Touching Tomorrow Today” when you vote on the Forest area school; I hope – and yes, I pray – that tomorrow will be touched for good, for the well-being and success of our most precious resource: our people, those who are students now, who will be students, and who will impact our community and beyond. You are indeed “Touching Tomorrow Today.”

Thank you.