

ARC Meeting April 26, 2016

Good Evening. It has been quite the wait to be given the privilege to speak on behalf of our own children's safety and wellbeing, so we feel so grateful to be given such an opportunity. Being parents, tax payers, educators and people who only want the best for their children, the Accommodation Review Committee should be able to sympathize with our frustration on how unaccommodating and self-serving this process seems to have been.

From the beginning the process has been under-publicized (I'm sure not intentional) ill-researched (we live in Wyoming, not Sarnia, and thus have access to Wyoming's amenities not Sarnia's) and poorly timed. Ranging from the walk-throughs being at the peak time of the work day for most people, the community meetings held on the exact same day and time as the Kinder-start registration afternoon -whom your decisions will affect and impact directly, and of course, conveniently delaying the presentation of information that was requested **by the community** to a later date **where the community** was not permitted to ask questions, raise concerns, or comment on any of the proposals put forth that would directly affect **their** children. A meeting that was promised earlier in this review process, delayed, but then a new promise was made by the Board and Superintendents, which was heard by all, published in the meeting minutes, and printed in the Petrolia Topic and The Independent that members of the community would be allowed to speak at the next working meeting to voice their questions and concerns. A promise that we now know was broken.

It has been mentioned several times that we as a school community have been most agreeable. We have not protested the fact that you want to close one of our schools. Yes, it hurts, but we are reasonable beings and realize that a changing society, fiscal responsibility and government assistance are all entities that require careful attention. All that we have been asking for this whole time is that, that same careful attention that has been given to the numbers, be given to our children. We are all well aware that this is not your community, and it is not affecting your children, so there is no way you can feel the way we do, think of the questions we have, and have the concerns that we raise. It has been duly noted since the first meeting January 19 , 2016, right up to the Thursday March 31, 2016 meeting that you speak of our children as a "number," "a projection," "a commodity" to be shuffled around to make your bid for government money "appear stronger" and a "recommendation." For once I would love to hear that the little people you are referring to be called "children." Not your children, but somebody's children, kids who are the centre of their parents existence, who want to protect them, not from inconvenience, but physical harm and danger.

Wyoming is a wonderful place to live, raise children, grow-up in and grow old in. We wish to plan for the future to ensure that this remains true. We want the best site to be chosen to house the minds and bodies of our future doctors, mayors, teachers, secretaries, lawyers, custodians, astronauts, engineers, artists or whatever they choose to be.

A site that has an abundance of land for new construction, while still allowing for outdoor play and exploration.

A site that is capable to handle the ebbs and flows of traffic congestion without undue risk.

A site that welcomes and accommodates school bus transportation to ensure the safety of its patrons

A site that makes sense when looking at the operating costs and addressing community concerns

A site that will be able to grow with the community not only now, but into the future as needs and populations change.

South Plympton Public school is a very special school. A school that I wish was still our best kept secret. Having a junior school was a luxury admitted, but a luxury that I wish was still afforded to my young, shy son and the other juniors who would be entering the education system on a smaller scale. South Plympton is a place where the teachers know all of the children, it has a secretary who looks out for students well-being and a custodian, who does so much more than keep the school clean. All of these little things add up and create anxiety for those following this process, as they recognize that your decision as to where the physical building will be, translates to so much more than bricks and mortar.

There are a lot of people depending on you to make the right decision regarding their children's future. You have been hired to listen to the people. We all sit curious to see if you truly have been listening or whether your preconceived agenda will go ahead as planned.

Wyoming is a small town, but with big hearts. We are highly educated and skilled working professionals who strive to change within a fluid society. Affecting change without looking out for the future generations is short-sighted and irresponsible. Manipulating numbers to fit self-serving ideas or egos is unjust. Listening to the people who reside in this town, who choose to send their children to the school in the public elementary system when there are two other viable options available, as well as a strong home-schooling community, is the only way to gain understanding and appreciation for the situation at hand.

You have an opportunity with time, to create a new school that is inclusive to all students and parents involved. A school that is safely constructed in a timeline that is responsible and

realistic. Accommodations and considerations will have to be made to ensure this transition process is not rushed, nor is there any student or teacher or parent concern overlooked. The JK and SK Kindergarten children are small, innocent, naïve, and have unique needs. They are forced to place their trust in complete strangers that their cognitive, physical and emotional needs will be met and will flourish under capable hands and minds.

The Junior teachers at South Plympton are absolutely wonderful. And I have no doubt that they will handle this process with responsibility and grace that they have shown our children on a daily basis. However, supports need to be put in place to encourage the continued growth of our students body and mind, prior to any building switches, closures or constructions. Certain questions need to be addressed. For example, are the coat hooks, cubbys and bookshelves going to be at an accessible level? Will you ensure that appropriate Kindergarten sized toilets and sinks will be in place in any environment that is chosen, in the interim or long term? What will you do once the two schools go from two computer labs, two libraries and two gymnasiums down to one? Will the new gymnasium facility be large enough to be partitioned to facilitate Quality Daily Physical Education for all students? This is just a small sampling of the questions that we have been collecting during these ARC meetings, but have been silenced by the continually changing rules.

Student safety needs to be made a priority. School bus info.com states that for JK/SK students “a parent or guardian must be at the bus stop to receive the student.” “By procedure we do not leave students in JK/SK at a bus stop without a parent or guardian to greet them.” However, there appears to be a glaring disconnect within the members of the ARC committee on the importance of student safety. You all have repeated on several occasions to parental concerns that JK/SK students will be left to walk to and from school 1.6km, guardian or not, without batting an eye.

Safe Kids Canada.ca is part of Safe Kids Worldwide, a global movement to prevent childhood injury states that “walking is usually a child’s first means of independent transportation, which makes children particularly vulnerable to pedestrian injuries. The level of danger posed by traffic exceeds children’s overall cognitive, physical, sensory and auditory development. This danger is exacerbated by their small stature, lower eye level and the need to look up and over vehicles. Obstructions also limit children’s field of vision, decreasing their perception and ability to deal with on-coming traffic. It is worth noting that child pedestrian injuries are the leading cause of injury-related death for Canadian children aged 14yrs. or younger. Pedestrian-related injuries contribute almost 15% of all injury-related deaths of children younger than 14yrs old. On average, 30 child pedestrians younger than 14yrs are killed and 2412 are injured every year in Canada, noting that when children are struck by vehicles, their injuries are often life threatening or cause permanent physical damage because of the child’s small size.

The Canadian Pediatric Society states that “the human skull can be shattered by an impact of only 7-10km/hr., thus putting children at risk while walking or biking to school. Transport Canada statistics further state that “drivers travel between 7 and 12 km/hr. **over** the already posted speed limit, and that drivers are unable to accurately assess their own speed while they are driving and, as a consequence, make few adjustments in the presence of children.”

Children are vulnerable to pedestrian injuries because they are exposed to traffic threats that exceed their cognitive, physical, sensory and auditory development. When crossing the street, children have to undertake complex behaviours that put them at risk for injury. Crossing involves planning the route, detecting traffic, making assessments about the speed and distance of traffic, and deciding when to cross. Crossing skills involve both motor skills and continuous feedback about decisions. Children in this age range have vision and hearing that is not yet fully developed and thus they are less able to detect the direction of traffic, they struggle with recognizing a safe gap in traffic in order to cross the street, and they have a difficult time judging vehicle speed or even their own walking speed. Detecting traffic requires a specialized search strategy and this is not a reliable skill until children reach approximately 11 years of age.

Young children in general also often favour the most direct route available (which in Wyoming is not the utilization of the risky ‘use at own risk’ crosswalk for a large portion of the town) --rather than seeking the safest place to cross, regardless of the practice and teaching from their parents and teachers. As a result, they will cross in the middle of the block, at right angles to the curb, or diagonally across an intersection. To compound this lack of judgement, both pre-school and school-aged children are egocentric and as a result, they find it hard to believe that a driver would **not** be aware of **them**. Therefore, any young child’s decisions are based on distorted perceptions, and incomplete cognitive tools as a result of the child’s developmental level.

I am an avid promoter of health and physical education and I endorse physical activity in its fullest capacity, but only when it is encouraged in a safe and secure environment that is developmentally appropriate for each child participant. In the overall picture the small amount of money that it would take to bus the small town of Wyoming safely to and from school is well worth the investment.

Sending children to school in a construction zone should also not be considered an option. Children have enough potential for injury while walking to school, playing on the playground equipment, receiving threats of harassment and bullying from their peers and the ever popular social media abuse, without being unnecessarily subjected to the risks of trying to learn in a construction site. With the South Plympton site being chosen as the future elementary site for the community of Wyoming, it would allow for both Wyoming Public School and South Plympton Public School to stay open status quo for September 2016. Both schools would be

able to operate as normal educational institutions while waiting for the application for funding to be completed, approved and the funds secured. The schools would be fully operational while the board waits for the ground to thaw for work to begin. Schools and children would be able to operate and function as they should without jeopardizing the learning environment or health and safety of the children. Then, once the money is in place, construction can proceed at the South Plympton site on the extra classrooms and gymnasium required to accommodate the increased population. Construction that would not interfere with the day-to-day operation of either school. The proposed location of the addition could be done throughout the remaining time of the school year and any modifications and renovations to the existing building could then be taken care of during the summer months.

There could be a well-organized plan in place prior to the merging of the two schools that would protect the integrity of the educational system, as well as its students, while furthering the goals of the ARC committee, and create a 21st Century school. There are better ways to solve this modern day predicament, ways that are not rushed through, or conclusions made without attention to every detail. This process has been flawed on many levels, but there is still an opportunity left to create a positive result. Students would still be able to learn and the school community would be afforded the respect and time to transition into the idea of uniting two schools into one. Time to prepare the South Plympton site properly for our future generations.

In closing, do I think that any of what I say is going to make a difference? Absolutely not. Do we feel that decisions have been made long before public input was welcomed? Absolutely. But we could not just sit back without at least making one last plea for consideration of those who are directly involved, and who will continue to be involved during the next 10 years that they will be going to elementary school in Wyoming, wherever that may be.

Thank-you.