



RENFREW COUNTY DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

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February 24, 2010

Children First
Box 1171
DEEP RIVER, ON
K0J 1P0

Dear Madam/Sir:

Attention: Hilary Angell & John Hillborn

This letter is in response to Ms. Angell's letter of January 20, 2010 and to Mr. Hillborn's letter of February 22, 2010. At the outset I want to state that I do not respond to letters from special interest groups especially when the tactic is to have the letters published in the media to generate a controversy. Secondly, the decision to proceed to accommodate Morison students in the Mackenzie building was passed by the Renfrew County District School Board on October 26, 2009. Since that date the Board has proceeded to implement the decision. The appropriate time to make comments was prior to October 26, 2009.

I did however receive a telephone call from Mayor Aikens last week and she thought it would be helpful to your group and the community to clarify the Board's approach to this issue. As a result I am writing you this letter.

The school board has responsibilities for its students not only in Deep River and area but for the whole County. Decisions are only made after a careful review of the situation and in the best interests of the students. This does not mean that consensus must be reached in the community affected by a decision. The responsibility for making decisions rests with the Trustees and each area of the County has a local Trustee who represents the residents in that area.

In your letter of January 20th, 2010 you begin by quoting our Director of Education, Roger Clarke, as follows: "*The Board has listened carefully to the concerns expressed by the community and is looking forward to working as a partner in developing a vision for public education in the community of North Renfrew*".

Mr. Clarke accurately summarized the process of the Board in that statement.

The steps in the process were as follows:

1. On June 17, 2009, the Board received a letter from the Ministry of Education allocating \$4,876,588 to address the accommodation needs of the students at Morison P.S. This information was immediately conveyed to school councils in the North Renfrew community;

2. The Ministry indicates that its approval recognizes that the Board intends to consult further with the community about addressing these needs;
3. Board's Consultation Process:
 - September 10, 2009 – School Council/Community Partners Session
 - September 24, 2009 – Mackenzie H.S./Keys P.S./Morison P.S. Staff and Students Session
 - October 8, 2009 – Public Session;
4. October 26, 2009 - Board makes final decision to renovate the Mackenzie/Keys complex to accommodate Morison students and develop a K-12 program at that facility.

The consultation period ended on October 26, 2009 and the duty of the Board was then to implement the decision.

Our current Board of Trustees has completed two consolidation processes, the 2004/05 process that resulted in the closure of five schools and the 2008/09 consolidation that resulted in the closure of three Petawawa schools. All of our Trustees realize the value of each of our schools to our Renfrew County communities. The loss of any school is a loss to that community. No Board member wants to see any school closed.

You have asked for the rationale for this decision. No record is kept of the reasons that individual Trustees vote in favour or against any decision. For myself, I based my decision to vote in favour of the decision on all of the factors, including the financial assistance available from the Ministry, the educational needs of Deep River and area students, projected enrolments, the public consultations and the desire of some of the community to reduce the possibility of having no secondary school in Deep River. However, I can state that the Board carefully considered this issue both at Committees and at the Board meeting.

In my view the public consultation process is only one component of the decision-making process. There is no need to have a consensus before an elected official makes a decision. If that process were followed it would be a recipe for inaction.

As you are aware the Board has tight timelines for the allocated funding. The timelines chosen have virtually no flexibility because of the Ministry's directive.

I am not in a position to provide any further rationale nor am I inclined to elaborate any further. The decision rests with the elected representatives who are accountable to the electorate.

I recognize that some people believe that educating students outside the current Morison building will be inferior. I strongly disagree with that proposition. Although the Morison building and playground are excellent, the strength in delivery of the curriculum rests on the staff who have continually delivered a rich and vibrant program at Morison. I have no doubt that the staff will continue to deliver the program in the same manner.

Our Board is committed to delivering the same or improved level of programming to Morison students at the Mackenzie complex and as well, to the Grade 7 to 12 students. The work to be commissioned will result in a facility that meets the needs of all Deep River students. We will continue to work with the community to achieve that goal and as well work with community groups to continue the tradition of a high level of community use in the school.

It was within the context set out above that the Board made the decision to accommodate the Morison students at Mackenzie. Since October 26, 2009, the Board has taken a number of steps to move forward. I can tell you that an architect has been retained and there has been consultation with focus groups relating to the plans for the upgraded facility. A Project Manager will be retained in March and there has been an "Expression of Interest" for a Construction Manager issued. It is expected that construction will commence on July 1st, 2010. The bulk of the construction will take place in the summer of 2010 and the summer of 2011. The summer months are critical to ensure that the project is completed so that students can utilize the upgraded facility commencing September 2011.

I have sent a copy of this letter to Mayor Aikens as she initiated my communication with you. As a matter of courtesy I have also sent a copy of this letter to Mayor Vance Gutzman of the Town of Laurentian Hills. I hope the foregoing provides some clarification to you and your group as to the process that was followed.

Yours truly,



Roy C. Reiche
Chairperson
Renfrew County District School Board

c.c. Mayor Ann Aikens, Town of Deep River
Mayor Vance Gutzman, Town of Laurentian Hills
Trustee B. Basso, Area Trustee
All Trustees