

September 20, 2011

## PRESENTATION TO REGINA PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD

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I want to thank the Board for the opportunity to, again, present to your meeting on behalf of the Save Athabasca School Committee.

By now I believe that you will have had an opportunity to review the report titled “Exploring schools as community hubs” that researcher Dianna Graves has produced for us through the Community Research Unit of the University of Regina. We are grateful for Dianna’s excellent work and for the funding assistance that the University of Regina Community Research Unit provided to us for this project. We believe that this report will be a useful tool, not only for our school, but for all schools that may be facing the inevitable lower loop of the enrolment cycle.

I wish to quote from Dianna’s work regarding the purpose of this research: “the two-fold purpose of this report is to research the concept and review models of community hubs, and specifically schools that have become community hubs in their neighbourhoods and service regions; as well, to investigate the hub model as an alternative to closure of Athabasca School.

As Dianna has outlined, we have three goals of this report: First to present the community hub concept to this Board during your biennial review as an option for Athabasca School. The second goal is to share information learned with other schools and communities in Regina and throughout Saskatchewan. The third goal is to provide a solid research foundation for action.

As you can read in the report, Dianna used a variety of methods in producing this report including an extensive review of literature on the subject as well as through interviews of Athabasca area community members, RPS Board members and the Director of Education of the Regina Public School Board.

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This report has provided us with lots of “food for thought”. We have been encouraged by interested parties contacting us doing some initial exploration of our community’s intentions with the hub idea. We badly need a window of opportunity to be able to invite more interest and to have some initial meetings with these parties to explore this exciting possibility further.

For this reason, we ask that you vote in favour of the motion that we presented to you in June: “That the Regina Public School Board delay the disposition of Athabasca School and surrounding property for a period of at least one year.” We believe that this is critical to allow for a thorough examination of the community hub school possibilities at Athabasca.

We are cognizant of the concerns that have been raised by Board members regarding such a delay. One concern is the projected cost of maintaining a school for such a period of time. Through our own research, we have found the costs of maintaining a closed school such as Athabasca for one year to be substantially less than numbers that the Regina Public School Board has listed.

Our community would be willing to assist in several ways with the maintenance of the grounds. We are also willing to maintain the skating rink as usual for the community and we would like to know if there has been any communication between the Regina Public School Board and the City of Regina with regard to how the rink will be flooded now that Athabasca has been closed.

There also was another concern raised by the Board about what effect that our call for a grace period on the disposal of all school properties affected by closures would have. We want to make it clear that we are not referring to situations where school replacements are being contemplated. It is not our intention to delay such “true” renewals but rather to allow for community contemplation and organizing in school closure situations such as we find at Athabasca.

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As we had stated when we made our presentation to you in June, we are also presenting our petition today concerning school closures. Although we took a break for most of the summer with our petition drive, we have been able to collect a substantial number of names from an equally substantial number of households in our neighbourhood. More importantly, our petition drive afforded us the chance to meet families, new and old and to hear of their overwhelming desire for Athabasca to remain viable in our area.

Although we have noticed that there has been little attempt to truly hear and record our community concerns thus far, we are hopeful that the large number of community names on the petition will at least be cause for reflection at Board election time.

In closing, we want to make it clear that, although we have been focused on our efforts to keep Athabasca School viable in our community, we have a much wider concern for the students and families in all areas in Regina and throughout our province. We again ask the Regina Public School to follow the lead of other jurisdictions in Canada and put a moratorium on school closures until we can obtain more evidence about the effects that such closures have on students, communities, and the environment.

Thank you for listening to our presentation.

Sincerely,

Bob Hughes, on Behalf of the

Save Athabasca School Committee