

## PRESENTATION TO RPS BOARD MEETING – DEC. 14, 2010

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I want to thank the Board for the opportunity to present to this meeting. I rise to speak emphatically against the closure of Athabasca School ! I believe that this school's continuation makes sense in every way that this issue can be viewed from.

I am sure that most people, who hear of stories about the threat of school closures, believe that it is about economics. In fact, I've heard it said, callously, by people who support such closures, that "we need to get rid of the schools we don't need." I ask, "Who is we?" However, I am told that this threat to our school is not about economics, but rather about fitting a "program model". Although I'm sure that the Board administration has a lot of personal investment in this "model" of their making, I look to a Board, and administration with the ability to be flexible and open to new ideas and changing conditions.

So let's examine the economics of closing Athabasca school and building a shared facility with Argyle School. Board documents show that the estimate to build this new facility has ballooned from the 2007 estimate of \$8.05 to a 2010 estimate of \$18,681,581.00. According to the 10 Year Plan, the Board anticipated administration savings related to the closure at \$113,000.00 per year. Now, I was never a math whiz, but by my calculations, I believe that it would take 160 years to make up for that wasteful and needless expenditure.

Let's compare that now, to the two very sound Athabasca and Argyle School buildings, requiring \$1.8 and \$1.4 million respectively, for repairs. I imagine that the Board may save some money if they had the surrounding receiving schools bear the augmented burden without increased financial support. My wife Margaret has mentioned, and I agree, that she is very concerned for the teachers and the stressful conditions that they would encounter with an increasingly difficult work load. But, as I said earlier, we have been told that the proposed school closure isn't about cost saving and I can now see why that is so.

We've been told that it's about fitting the "program model". And what about that "model"? I have been researching information about school size and I have found that in almost every way, "smaller is better."

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Many who favour creating larger “super-sized” schools often speak of the “increased opportunities and activities for children. The studies that I have read, and my own experience, reveal the opposite. I have observed that our children have had more opportunities and greater engagement at Athabasca because of its smaller size. In fact, our granddaughter graduated from Grade 8 at Athabasca last year. She was able to improve her academic achievement immensely in just one year because of the small school atmosphere and the excellent teaching staff. She is now doing very well at Sheldon Williams Collegiate with the continued psychological support of her teachers at Athabasca. We have another granddaughter in Grade 1 who is also benefiting a lot from the small school atmosphere and supportive learning environment. Our three year old has been on a waiting list for months to get into the preschool at Athabasca. That is a positive sign for the future of Athabasca. In fact, what is even more positive for the future, is that there are more children in the kindergarten class than in grades one and two.

Some have argued that, in order to create small groups for literacy and numeracy instruction, you have to first move the students into larger schools. What I have read about such small-group learning and “schools within schools” in the US, is that this is recommended only as a last resort to duplicate the small school environment, and not as a replacement for small schools. If you already have a small school, you are ahead of the game, not only in achievement data, but also across a wide range of positive social factors that are greatly diminished in a larger school environment. I have observed for myself what students, who are often lost in a larger student body, can accomplish in a smaller school. Studies show that smaller schools are more cost efficient when graduation rates are included in the criterion. When it comes to academic achievement, as expressed in standardized test scores, students fare better in small schools, period.

I want to, again state that in our area, as with many areas of Regina, there is a major population change-over that is no doubt increasing the numbers of potential school-aged children. The board’s own numbers point to a significant increase in the number of school-aged children in the school area by 2014.

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In the meantime, we are at a natural point at which we can pause, take our time, and ensure that we don't rush into closing a school in the middle of a growing neighborhood. Give the neighborhood a signal that Athabasca is not about to close, and watch as other children flow back in. Also, I suggest, that we welcome the children from Harbour Landing to our school until their new neighborhood school is built. Let's get creative as well as being fiscally prudent. I strongly urge you to vote to keep Athabasca as a strong vibrant and necessary part of our community.

Before I close, I want to, again raise a concern that I, and others, brought up at the meeting at Athabasca. We strongly disagreed with the children in the FIAP program not being included in the core enrolment. Mr. Hoium stated in the meeting that that was the way it was. Mr. Hoium also stated to the concerned parents at that meeting that the children in the FIAP program would be kept together if Athabasca School closed. The next morning I read in the Leader Post that these students would likely be disbursed across the system. I need to ask.....and these parents and students have a right to know, "Which is it?" From what I have read, children who are vulnerable, for whatever reason, do best in a school with less than 300 students. It is a blessing for all of our students to have the FIAP program students in our school.

Thank you for listening.

Bob Hughes