

Good Evening, my name is Rachel Smith. I am the PSSC chair here at Bath Middle School. I grew up in the Bath area on a small farm in Piercemont. I work fulltime as a restaurant manager in Florenceville – Bristol. Over the past four years I have had the privilege to work with many of the students here at Bath Middle School through the volleyball program and various community basketball programs. Most importantly I am the parent of three incredibly awesome children.

Tonight I was asked to speak about the quality of education offered at the Bath Middle School. To truly understand quality of education here we must look past the ABC's and the 123's of the education system. In comparison to the other parts of the province our children are no better and no worse but when we look past this at what our children take with them from Bath Middle School into high school and life beyond we are miles ahead of the pack. To understand this statement you must first understand what a Monquarter truly is.

The Monquarter is actually a small river that feeds into the Saint John River. People from Bath have been called Monquarters for generations. However the connotations of being a Monquarter have not always been positive. In fact of the three communities that feed Carleton North High School, Bath, Florenceville – Bristol and Centreville, Bath could be compared to the crazy cousin that no one truly wants to claim. The demographics within the village are best described as low income with a large percentage of seniors. That is no to say we have ever seen ourselves that way.

The majority of us who have chosen to stay or have returned to the village of Bath and surrounding areas have done so not because of the booming economy or the lack of opportunity in other parts of the country but because we want to instill in our children a sense of home and pride that cannot be found beyond the borders of our tiny community.

Being a Monquarter means overcoming the stigma attached to it. Rising above, working hard and persevering are all extremely important aspects of our community and identity.

It brings to mind an old African proverb that states, "It takes a village to raise a child", nowhere in this province will you find this proverb more apparent than in the village of Bath.

Within our two schools we have dedicated teacher and staff who know all of our children by name. They not only know them within the education system but within the community as a whole. They know all of the parents and create a welcoming and nurturing environment for our children to succeed often going above and beyond their duties.

I am reminded of the six weeks my son spent in a wheelchair after breaking his femur. Upon returning to school he and I discussed how he was going to get up and down the stairs. Not wanting my child to be a burden, we had decided that once he got to school he would slide up and down the stairs on his bottom and make the best of it. Well Mrs. Angel Crain, the custodian was having none of that. Angel carried my son up the stairs to his classes, down the stairs to recess and Physical Education and back up again. She then carried him back down when it was time to go home. She did this for six weeks. She did this even though it was well beyond the scope of her duties with the school. She did this because she cares. She did this because that is what Monquarters do!

Outside of the staff of the two schools we have a large group of volunteers at our disposal. Monquarters who give their time frequently to help provide our children with new skills and experiences to become well rounded, productive members of society.

It has been said that smaller schools cannot possibly offer children the opportunities in extra curricular activities that the larger community schools can. Here in Bath we scoff at that small minded thinking. Our philosophy is that if there is a will, there is a way. When my oldest daughter approached us four years ago and asked if they could have a volleyball team at school, she was told if she could find enough girls we most definitely could. At the time there were only 14 girls in the entire school from grade 6 to 8. After the first practice we had 12 of them on the team. Now I am not going to lie and say that our first year wasn't rough, the girls only won one game the entire season but they all learned and grew and participated. The following year we had a team of 10. When my husband discovered that VNB was hosting provincials in Moncton he was so excited. His thought was that many of these girls would never see a provincial competition of this size. Many of them would not go on to play sports at the high school level and that the experience alone was worth the trip. So we took them. Not only did they have a blast but they came together and placed 8th in the tier 2 division. Not to be outdone they returned last year and placed 4th. Now you can't imagine the pride both of us as parents and volunteers had to see this band of misfit girls pour their hearts into a game they loved and succeed. As coaches in a small school we can't always have a bench full of athletic grade 8 girls to put on the floor, in fact being the fourth year with the girls volleyball team we have never had to cut a girl from the team. The same can not be said for larger schools. Many of these children would not be playing if they went to a larger school like Florenceville. We work hard with our kids to make them competitive but when you see the kids that are not so athletically inclined learn to serve a volleyball over the net for the first time, that accomplishment is worth more than any trophy or banner could ever be. To watch a child realize that they can do anything is inspiring.

Now above all these kids have learned to lose which may be one of the most important lessons to teach them. Losing is a hard lesson to learn but it is such a part of life. As parents and educators we try hard to shelter our kids from loss but learning to work harder and persevere build character within these kids that shines through in all they do.

The same can be said about the recreational programs offered in our community. I have heard comments from other communities and coaches saying how incredible it is that such a small school and community can field such great teams and athletes. My favorite though was a comment I overheard with my son's basketball team. The parents comment was that they always knew when they had been playing against a Monquarter team because win or lose they never gave up.

Another aspect of our community that contributes to our children's education is the tremendous support we receive from community organizations and businesses. When the middle school first applied and were accepted to go to WE Day last year the Lions Club heard what they wanted to do and supported them whole heartedly. Without their financial support it would have been difficult for them to go and let me tell you once all of the ducks were in a row Gerald was as giddy as a school girl. Now if you have ever met Gerald giddy would never cross your mind when describing him, but there it was. The opportunity to take the majority of his students to a life changing event such as this was monumental. When they returned the kids did not disappoint.

Finally we have Step Ahead program and it's partners. While the early education centers purpose is to prepare our youngest children for entrance into the education system, it has also had the beneficial affect of allowing the older children to interact with the youngest of the Monquarters. Now let me tell you there is no better way to learn patience, versatility and compromise than by working with a three year old. None the less during breakfast and after school you can always find a student or two hanging out with Rebecca willing to help do whatever needs to be done.

Now what do we stand to loose with the decision you will make in two weeks time? Let's look at the options:

1. You can choose to maintain the status quo. This may be the most painless secision for all parties. Everything remains the same and life carries on as usual in the Monquart, however this will not protect us from further speculation and another 409 study down the road.
2. Close Bath Middle School and send the children to Florenceville. This option is actually the worst option for the community and the children involved. The students and their parents lose the connection to the community that gives them their identity and sense of belonging. The community loses a recreational facility that is in use on a constant basis. From November to now over 260 hours of gym time has been used by the community. This does not include school related events and teams. Losing this facility would result in the loss of 2 mini basketball teams, 2 middle school basketball teams and 2 adult recreational programs. The other huge loss would come from the closure or relocation of the Step Ahead program. This program is vital to many of the residents of the area. Providing quality affordable childcare and early education to so many.
3. Close the Bath Elementary school and consolidate the two into one Newborn to Grade 8 facility. This option is more difficult to weigh out. On one hand we keep all of our children in our community which to me is the most important thing. All these children deserve a school that is safe and nurtures their development. Do we need 1.6 million dollars in renovations to accomplish that? Well it would be nice and even the easiest route to our vision however if you allow us to work with you to change this school to accommodate the Newborn to Grade 8 concept I believe that we can have an incredible school that works for everyone. Mr. McTimoney recently referred to the Step Ahead program as the Cadillac of early childhood development centers. Let us take this school and make it into the Cadillac of rural community Newborn to Grade 8 schools.

In conclusion the quality of education here in Bath is second to none, Our children are learning the curriculum set out by the province but beyond that they are learning strengths and characteristics that they will carry with them the rest of their lives. They will help shape the future and make this province a better place to be. Help us keep our children in our community. Let us show you what education in rural New Brunswick can be while preserving our culture. Give us a little and I guarantee you will get a lot.

Sincerely,
Rachel Smith