

December 7, 2015

Good evening,

My apologies that I am unable to speak to you in person, but as a member of the Canadian Armed Forces, I am not always in command of my own schedule. My name is Megan Kilbride and I am a former high school teacher. I hold a teaching license in NS, ON and QC. I hold a B.Sc. (honours), B.Ed., and an M.Ed. I do not have a child attending Burton Elementary School; however, I was equally as concerned when a co-worker informed me that the future of Burton Elementary was unsure.

One concern that should be the concern of everyone involved is the amount of sleep debt we would be allowing the children of Burton to accumulate. For what I understand, currently many students at Burton Elementary arrive at school at 8:20am, and begin classes at 8:30am. If the school were to close, students would need to be bussed over 10km to attend another school. This would necessitate an approximate pick up time of 7:00-0720 am. This would result in a loss of 1 hour and 20 minutes of time in the morning. In my experience, this time will be made up by an equivalent loss of sleep, resulting in what is called a chronic sleep debt.

Too-early start times have been identified as a causational factor for impaired academic performance across all of levels of schooling in numerous peer-reviewed articles. I have taken the liberty of including their reference at the end of this letter. Children who incur a sleep debt by sequential nights of lost sleep not only demonstrate cognitive deficits during the day, but are also at risk for developing behaviour problems. If parents were to choose an early bedtime in an attempt to counteract the drastically early start time, this would inevitably have a detrimental impact on quality family time, as many families in the area are in the CAF and typically work until 4:30pm. This would leave the average family 2.5 hours in which to interact; which I am sure everyone can agree is not acceptable.

Another aspect which I find cause for concern is the increased amount of time young students will spend on the bus travelling too and from school during their daily commutes. Travel time alone would amount to 1.5 hours per day, which does not include the time students will be held on the bus on school ground waiting for supervision to become available. This amount of time (approximately 10% of the average elementary

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student's waking time) is simply preposterous when we consider that the youngest students are but four years old. This time could be much better spent engaging in play with friends or siblings.

One final concern I feel the need to touch on is the broader impact the closure of the school will have on the community. I have been witness to the consequences of closing a small community school, and the heartache that ensues. An elementary school perpetuates the sense of community and closeness within that community, and is often the first place where students develop a cultural identity. I have witnessed first hand the loss of the sense of belonging that a young child experiences when they are re-routed to a larger urban school, while still trying to maintain attachments within their local rural community. I cannot emphasize the importance of having an elementary school within the community, and that the social cost of this closure is not one which can be calculated on any feasibility study.

As an educator, I am well aware of the delicate balancing act of a budget. After speaking with parents, and reading recent studies I truly feel that the long term social cost to the students, families and communities far outweighs the investment in infrastructure that is being currently sought.

Thank you for your consideration,

Megan Kilbride, B.Sc., B.Ed., M.Ed.

Teacher

References

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