

November 29, 2015

Dear Sharon,

I simply can not understand why, once again, the Province is pushing to close the Millville school. Clearly the impact on the entire village, not to mention on the students is not being well served. When it comes to cost cutting, the Department of Education uses a cleaver when a scalpel is sorely needed.

The Millville School is a wonder. The last time the community faced this crisis, I passed along to you the comments of my good friend David Perks, who worked there briefly as a substitute teacher. David Perks' assessment was that he was in awe at what he observed. He had substituted at Nackawic and Canterbury, but it was Millville that stood out from the crowd. He was impressed with the whole atmosphere...happy, respectful, motivated students, and teachers who were highly professional. Not to say that the other schools in the area did not come up to par, but that Millville simply demonstrated a degree of competence, organization, and professionalism that was truly outstanding to even his perspective as a casual observer.

David Perks' perspective can not be dismissed lightly. His is a storied career, first as a CGA, then as financial advisor to such renowned companies as DeBeers and Thompson Newspapers to name only two. His last position before retirement was as publisher of the Montreal Gazette. He sets a high value on education and over the years has been a keen observer of the fate of education in Canada in general.

Since that last "battle to save Millville School" I have had some first hand experience there. Upon retirement, I was asked to tutor some of the students in mathematics. I was NOT eager to take on that work. However, it soon became clear that one else was available, and the Principal persuaded me that the need of these students was the paramount issue. That level of concern for the students from both teachers and administration really struck me. It is rare, in my experience that such a real bond exists between students and faculty. Oh, certainly the professional instincts are there, but to work in a school where there is almost an organic relationship throughout all the grades is really quite amazing.

I remember that being the situation when I went to, what was then, the Millville Consolidated High School. But that was a time when most of the teachers and administration actually lived in the community and everyone knew everyone else on a personal level. So to find that atmosphere alive and flourishing at that same place in 2011 was unexpected to say the least. It reminded me of David's words in describing his experience: "It was like being in a time warp. The kids were happy and well behaved, the teachers were happy and loved their work, and the school was the cleanest place I have ever seen!" I was in China at that time, and knowing my history with Millville and that school, I knew David would give me feedback, and it was so gratifying to hear that the quality of the school had not slipped, at least in the estimation of a friend whose opinions I have come to greatly respect.

I hope that these anecdotal remarks have some value to the decision makers in this latest move to close a remarkable school. Some schools just deserve to be exceptions to the rule. Educators, more than almost any other professionals, should be able to draw those distinctions and refuse to bow to the pressures to cut costs when so much more than savings is at stake.

Please pass along these comments to anyone who might be able to help keep this little jewel of a school operating as long as possible. Thank you for allowing me to put forward my thoughts and let's hope reason prevails over money issues.

See you in a couple of weeks,

The Other Sharon