

Good Evening, Mr. Chairman, Members of the District Education Council, Ladies and Gentlemen:

This small school has come under review for closure several times in the past, and I would just like to remind us of some of the reasons the decisions have been made to keep it open.

1. The school is the heart of the any community and our rural communities need to be nurtured and maintained. Although rural communities, when located more than a few miles from a city centre, are often seen as “remote locations” by many in government and in other city-centric activities, the rural community is the sustainer of the urban centres. The rural community is where our food is produced, where our wood products are harvested, where people settle to raise their families and pursue pastoral lifestyles, and where many urban employed workers are housed, freeing up urban dwellings for people who need to live in the cities: students at the universities, people with low incomes who need to be near their work or their doctors or other service industries. Also, there is a growing demographic of people who want a few acres to grow their own vegetables or keep a few horses. This may not be apparent to the casual observer, but it is a trend that is happening subtly and with ongoing progression, and the rural areas are where many prefer to live. It is where folks like to live who desire a quiet and slower paced life. We need to work to preserve the rural areas of the province, and removing the school is a tremendous blow to a village or other small community.
2. Children have a better sense of stability when schooled closer to their own homes. There is more of a sense of being still under the

parents' observance and it does have an effect on behaviour for older children and on a sense of security for the younger ones.

3. Children who attend school out of their own area don't have as much opportunity for after school activities because of needed transportation to get home after their activity and too often they just end up missing out on those opportunities.
4. Children traveling from the farthest corners of the Millville catchment area all the way to and from Nackawic or Keswick schools would have long bus rides that would be detrimental to their daily lives. Small children who travel long distances on a school bus arrive home at night tired and drained and in no condition to do their homework or enjoy needed interaction with their families.
5. Children are the heart of a community. The presence of children out playing in the playground gives life to the community. Any move to close this school would be a blow to the quality of life in Millville and its satellite communities.
6. Another vacant building in Millville would not be beneficial to the community, nor can it be beneficial to the province as a whole. That is a whole other topic that I won't go into just now.

Although money should not be the motivator for what is preserved and what is given up, it is usually financial considerations that bring pressure on the survival of any organization or program. That being the case it is important to identify clearly what those financial constraints are.

Some of the factors that have been mentioned to indicate that it is too costly to keep this school open are:

1. The need for a paved driveway and parking lot: I submit that the present graveled surface has served us well for the last 66 years and is adequate for our needs going forward. Any maintenance occasionally needed is certainly far less costly than unnecessarily paving such an area. And if we were to pave the parking lot we would need to put in speed bumps, and we have those already!

2. The need for a gym: There is more opportunity for fun and interesting outdoor activities here than in the other schools in the area – a sliding hill, a softball/soccer field, and an outdoor gym – a paved basketball court that can also be a play area for various activities all at once – provided, may I say, by local funding, not from government funds.

3. The need for a cafeteria: Breakfast and lunch programs have been carried on very successfully in Millville for many years and parent volunteers are closer to the school to take part in these activities than to travel to other school locations farther from home.

Let's not think only with our public purse in this matter. Let's consider what is worth preserving. Millville Elementary School was declared a Protected Rural School by then Education Minister Kelly Lamrock less than ten years ago. It must have been deemed to be worth preserving at that time, and a close look at what goes on in this school would underscore that idea. Please take time to look at the list of all the many activities that happen here to enrich the lives of the students and give them a full and rounded education in more than the three Rs, while still excelling in that area too.

May I just read you a few excerpts from a letter written to me by Sharon Hawkins, who is a teacher and was a graduate here when this was Millville Consolidated High School. She is presently in China so was not able to be here this evening, but she wrote me a letter upon hearing of the Sustainability Study of Millville Elementary School.

(The letter is included in its entirety at the end of this presentation. Only excerpts were read in the meeting for brevity sake.)

Next, I would like to address some recent developments that could impact this school with higher enrollments. These need to be considered carefully before taking any irreversible action impacting Millville Elementary School.

The Sisson mine that is in the development stages has the potential to bring families back from western provinces where they have gone for jobs, and to bring new families into the area, both for the construction phase and for the ongoing operating phase. Then there are the service industries which will naturally spring up to service these extra workers and the mine itself. Many of the people who run these businesses will have school-age children. The Mine has a plan to hire locally as much as possible, but the numbers of workers needed will have to be drawn from a wide enough area that people will be moving closer to the mine site, even from other places in this province. It only stands to reason that some of these families will want to settle in the Millville area, and that there will be young children in those families.

The development of the Sisson mine could well be just the first of more industry to be attracted to the province and to this area.

Another major employer in the area, the nearby AV Nackawic mill, is staffed by many workers who are nearing their time of retirement. These will most likely be replaced by younger workers of child-rearing age, and this could bring more young families to this area also.

And then there is an expected influx of refugees. Since the conflict in the Middle East does not show signs of being over any time soon this could be an ongoing situation, certainly bringing many more than the stated 25,000 in the next few years, and it is likely many of those families will be settled in rural areas. Many of these are large families with a number of small children. This could have an as yet unforeseen impact on enrollments in all schools, rural as well as urban. Millville has a number of vacant houses and it is not unreasonable to think that several families may find their new homes in this village.

Does it not seem wise to at least keep Millville Elementary School open for the next few years until we can see what effect these factors - the mine, the mill and the refugees - will have on enrollment here?

Once the school is closed it would be far more costly to reopen it if needed, than to keep it open now and let the changing demographics show us what is the wisest course of action. I am requesting that any decision to close Millville Elementary School be deferred to give these demographic changes time to play out.

Let any decisions taken fall on the side of caution.

Thank you.