



Ontario Federation of Agriculture

Ontario AgriCentre

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November 11, 2016

Mr. Stephen Sliwa
Director of Education,
Upper Canada District School Board
stephen.sliwa@ucdsb.on.ca

Dear Mr. Sliwa,

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) is Canada's largest voluntary general farm organization, representing more than 36,000 farm family businesses across Ontario. These farm businesses form the backbone of a robust food system and rural communities with the potential to drive the Ontario economy forward. The OFA is committed to addressing issues regarding the economic and service infrastructure required for agricultural prosperity. Schools are critical infrastructure for farm families.

It has come to our attention that the Upper Canada District School Board is considering closing low enrolment schools in the area. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) is opposed to such decisions being made prior to consideration of a number of critical factors impacting the well-being and success of the students and the potential impact on the local community of school closures.

In our opinion, there are several questions which must be answered before the decision to close a school is made. These questions include the following:

- How will students get to school? What is the impact on students if they are required to spend hours each day on the bus just getting to and from school? Will they be too tired to learn to their full potential as a result of how early they must rise just to catch the bus? Will they be able to participate in extracurricular activities, which are so important to children's development?
- How will parents' involvement in their children's education change? Will the school be too far away for parents to be able to volunteer / participate at the school? What is the potential impact to the school from this loss of volunteer basis? How does this impact the children?

- What is the impact of larger schools on the students learning environment and opportunities? It has been demonstrated empirically that in general, learning outcomes are better for smaller schools than they are for larger schools and that smaller schools do not have as many of the social problems that larger schools have¹. Has this fact been considered in the decision making process to date?

The welfare and best interests of our future generation cannot be ignored, and must be considered even in budgetary decisions. The OFA is committed to lobbying for education and childcare funding that is appropriate for rural Ontario. School boards must also send the message that rural Ontario values its children by making decisions that support their development and growth.

We encourage the Upper Canada District School Board to reassess the issue of school closures with consideration to the impact on the students and the local community.

Sincerely,



Don McCabe
President

cc: Steve Clark, MPP – Leeds-Grenville
Adrian Wynands, President Grenville Federation of Agriculture
Heather Gowling Stewart, Oxford on Rideau SOS

¹ Dr. Al Lauzon and Ms. Maureen McCallum. Negotiating Rural Futures: A Study of Relationships Between Boards of Education and Rural Communities During a Period of School Consolidation.