

# STRATHCLAIR COMMUNITY SCHOOL SUPPORTERS MEETING

NEWDALE COMMUNITY HALL – April 10, 2008 at 7:30 pm

Bruce Dalgarno, Chairman, opened the meeting at 7:30 pm and began by explaining the procedures of the meeting. He introduced the presenters and the R.M. of Strathclair Council. Head Table: Debby Lee, Denise Dewar-Norosky, Garry Dalgarno, Brendan Kelly and Don Cochrane.

Anthony and Wayne Kowalchuk were introduced and Anthony, Reeve of the R.M. of Harrison gave greetings and support to the audience from the municipality.

Bruce acknowledged that Brent Fortune was in attendance on behalf of the R.M. of Blanshard and also the R.M. of Saskatchewan.

Debby Lee presented the proposal of the Park West School Division as recently past trustee of our Ward. She explained that the basis of the proposal is one central high school in the south area and one in Russell. The plan is to combine Strathclair and Shoal Lake schools in 2009/2010 with Strathclair being the elementary centre and Shoal Lake being the High school centre. They have projections for 2009/2010 of 114 high school students in Birtle, 104 high school students in Hamiota, 56 high school students in Shoal Lake and 92 in Strathclair.

Right now the average is 14 students per classroom.

By 2012 they are looking at 60 in Shoal Lake and 72 in Strathclair. 250 students would make an ideal high school. This proposal is causing chaos in all of the communities.

Elementary would range from 17 – 28 students per class.

Several questions were given to Debby: What will be the projected cost to have 250 kids?

Question: Are the students from Keeseekoowenin First Nation included in the Strathclair numbers. Debby said Yes they are. Question: Do they guarantee the vocational courses if the proposal goes ahead? Debby said No. Question: What part does the Provincial Government have in this proposal? Debby explained the elementary projections and numbers for the review process. Question: Is the Government pushing this? Question: Is the review process a provincial decision or board decision? Debby said it is a School Board decision.

Question: Is the Park West School Division Board aware of what Rolling River School Division is doing with regard to restructuring? Are the divisions under one umbrella? Debby said No.

Question: Has it ever been discussed to join the two schools situated within one town (i.e. Rosburn, Hamiota and Birtle all have two schools in one town) Debby said not really.

Question: Why are the Park West School Division board minutes so vague? Why isn't there more information in the minutes? Debby said that when they are in camera the discussion is confidential. Only open meeting decisions are in the minutes.

Question: Why is the Park West School Division board not listening to the people? Not only in our area of the division but they are not listening to any of the communities in the south. Debby said that some of it is financial reasons. It was stated by someone in the audience that no one has worried about tax dollars. Another person commented that there is not enough information about the financial gain by doing this. Debby said another consideration is the age of the buildings, many are 50 – 60 years old. She said the Province has said if several schools are closed we could put more funding into maintenance of the other ones.

Bruce invited Denise Dewar-Norosky to present the views of the Parent Advisory Committee. DENISE DEWAR-NOROSKY, chairperson of Strathclair PAC, explained the committee's viewpoint in this proposal. She said that other communities are upset as well. The Park West School Division board has amended the school review policy. This change will hasten the time for schools to become under review. Strathclair and Shoal Lake would otherwise not be in review. She explained that the Strathclair school enrolment has remained constant in the last several years. The number of students in elementary school at Shoal Lake and Strathclair are very comparable. The Strathclair & Newdale families are not ready to make changes to the Strathclair Community School. She gave survey statistics, 45% returned the survey, and this shows that the people of the Newdale and Strathclair communities care a lot about what happens to the Strathclair Community School. Denise explained some of the concerns from the survey such as longer bus times, should use more technology for courses, 60 said that they would move students out of the division. If this is the case the Shoal Lake/Strathclair numbers would mean a review process would begin.

She explained that Strathclair PAC is angry that the Park West School Division Board members are not listening to their concerns, or any communities concerns.

Denise said that other smaller schools have had positive results with their children's education. Inter-campus bussing helps give more courses and at times sports, band and extracurricular activities. She was told that inter-campus bussing costs \$65,000.00 per year. Maybe the inter-campus bussing could be improved and be more efficient. The Park West School Division Board promotes more bussing for more students. They have not given any cost saving information. More likely this proposal would cost more.

This plan asks that the children in this division ride further on the bus than any other division in the Province of Manitoba. There will be no further courses in the near future with this proposal. They haven't allowed PAC to have any input. Why can't we build on our successful programs? The cost per student here is \$6,183.00, which is \$2,700.00 below the provincial average.

The Park West School Division and one other division are the only ones that use numbers of students in their criteria for review. The board needs to have a review policy that uses more than numbers. We need a long term plan in our division and School closures should be a last resort. The Deputy Minister of Education spoke on keeping our schools open at Rural Forum last year. The Minister of Education said the same thing at the Strathclair luncheon held earlier this year. Strathclair PAC will request the Park West School Division Board to slow down and rethink their proposals, and allow us to work with them.

Debby Lee said that anyone can be there for the presentations in Birtle on April 21, 2008. She encouraged anyone and everyone to listen to what other towns are saying as well.

Bruce invited Garry Dalgarno, Councillor, to speak on behalf of the R.M. of Strathclair. Garry welcomed and thanked everyone for coming. The attendance at the meeting shows that we still have a great interest in our school. The R.M. of Strathclair Council wants to hear from you, the people, on this very important issue. Garry thanked everyone who has been attending the many meetings that have been held in the last year regarding the restructuring proposals.

He thanked the people who travelled to Birtle to attend the school board meetings. These people who attended some board meetings spent a fair bit of time out in the hallway as the board spends a large amount of time “in camera”.

Garry attended the Community meeting in Birtle on April 7, 2008. They read out ten concerns that they had and passed three resolutions, all unanimously. Garry read out the concerns and resolutions believing that they are similar to this audience’s concerns.

Concerns:

1. How have the Board decided to move ahead with this proposal when so many negative concerns for each of the questions were voiced at the Focus meeting of March 18 and are available to be seen on PWSD’s own website.
2. We have not seen a cost analysis for this proposal and we do not believe it can be favourable.
3. Transportation – We have not seen a cost projection or analysis for the increased cost of transportation to bus students under the circumstances imposed by the proposal.
4. Time spent for transportation. How long can a student ride on a bus and still be alert in school and how will this affect their quality of life? Family time which is already strained will be minimized.
5. We have not seen a survey of the periphery area of the division. How many students will stay within Park West to populate a super school?
6. This proposal creates an image and a fear of a community without a school in their future which influences people’s choices to locate in those communities. Thus this proposal is not responding to rural depopulation but rather may create or expedite it.
7. Small schools are already finding ways to meet the opportunities the board thinks we may gain. A super school is not the only model.
8. Given the ramifications of students, communities and schools in our region along with the board’s inability to provide assurance that the dollars proposed to facilitate construction of two super schools; the time frames are inadequate to support a decision of this magnitude.
9. Every order of government has invested a large amount of time and money to develop and encourage rural community sustainability. This proposal is in conflict with the wishes of this community.
10. To facilitate implementing this proposal the elected school board trustees are in the process of implementing a 29% or higher increase in high school student threshold numbers which means the average number of students per grade will increase from 14 to 18 required to keep a school open.

Resolutions passed at the Birtle community meeting:

1. Whereas we believe that the revision of the Park West School Division policy for school review with regards to increasing the average threshold number for grade 9-12 from 14 to 18 would facilitate a more rapid closure of our, and other community high schools;  
Therefore Resolved that our trustees be representative of their electors and vote against the increase in average enrolment for high schools.
2. Whereas the PWSD board of education has set strict time lines for itself with regards to the bringing forth of a motion to implement their radical proposal for restructuring;  
Therefore Resolved that our trustees be representative of their electors and expand those time lines in order to allow communities to prepare thoughtful and constructive submissions to the board for consideration regarding the proposal for restructuring.
3. Whereas the PWSD board of trustees has proposed to their public a more severe move from 6 area high schools to 2, to serve our division of approximately 7200 sq km;  
Therefore Resolved that our trustees be representative of their electors and focus on the responses and outcomes of the public meetings held in various communities and further be it resolved our trustees explore all options especially including those that would look at improving the efficiency and quality of education within our existing schools.

You all have shown support for your trustee and helped put a face on our school within the division. I don't believe the board appreciated us attending some of those meetings and we are not done yet.

The Strathclair Council believes that Park West School Division board should slow down and expand the time lines for this restructuring. They have not given us any information on better education, transportation costs or length of time students will be on the buses. They don't know if they can get funding for a larger school in Shoal Lake. They have given us nothing. We are not in favour of this proposal and are willing to prove this by lobbying efforts followed with the consideration of financial help if needed.

Bruce invited Brendan Kelly, Principal of Strathclair Community School to speak next.

Brendan Kelly stated that he wanted to bring the view from the students on this issue. They are the main concern in this.

We need to use something other than numbers in this process. He said that he has talked with staff. In his opinion without inter-campus bussing the school could function alone, but it would only be core subjects.

He explained that he has seen mobile vocational courses done. He expressed his opinion that one day more schools will close. You don't do it in secrecy; you do everything you possibly can first. The government has to step up to the plate; they decide what money your school gets. 56% of funding goes to staffing.

There is a benefit of having a larger K-8 school. You can't operate a division this big with only two high schools. And kids are a larger size now, so 25 is too much for one class. The cost of education has gone up and we haven't kept pace with that. The costs in cities are different than they are in the country. A strong message needs to be sent to the School board members to sit down and listen to the people. Brendan explained some aspects of education in Newfoundland, saying that they have divisions from 90 – 20. He wants a good future for Strathclair School and thinks K-8 is good. He said there is a great staff and a great school.

He explained that if we leave it as status quo the school division will lose money. He said that Strathclair has a number of options and Shoal Lake and others do not. Only two divisions have the review process using numbers, and our division is one of them. He said he believes that double grading does not give a good education, you lose programs e.g. reading recovery. He stated that we should not give in to the numbers game. We should all lobby the provincial government to fund basic needs of education. This is now downloaded to school boards.

Bruce explained the petition on the proposal using the numbers game, and that anyone could sign it. It would be at the back of the hall after the meeting.

Debby asked everyone to please sign it and support it.

Martin asked Debby about the money that the provincial government is going to put into the new extended hydro line, and why that can't go into education.

Karen asked why PWSD is using the numbers game. Do we have an option in this? Debby said that we have to get this message to all trustees.

Don spoke about presentations, make them logical and compassionate.

Garry Thanked Debby Lee for being a Trustee on our behalf and the audience gave her a standing ovation of support. Bruce added thanks as well for the commitment she has given the communities.

Bruce explained that he had one resolution that was made by Gerald Pederson and seconded by Bob Moffatt. Gerald spoke to the resolution stating that he is one of the few people that is around that went through this in the 1960's when the Newdale School was closed. The hearing lasted for 5 days, and required a lawyer. He asked the audience to support this motion. Bob stated that he agreed with Gerald, and stated that a lot of time has already been put in, and he wants to help the committee. Gerald added that it was to be better education when Newdale School closed moved to Strathclair but he hasn't seen it yet.

Bruce asked for any other discussion on the resolution. Being none he asked the question.

The vote was in favour, carried unanimously.

Bruce asked the audience if there were any other resolutions anyone wanted to bring forward.

Debby suggested everyone to come up with ideas to make the proposal better.

Jason will look into web based delivery of courses. Neepawa and Winnipeg have this as well as one in our division.

Each school is encouraged to use video conferencing with two subjects now. Brendan said they are limited to 18 students, one course in the fall and one in the winter. Jason said this is a positive step.

Brendan said that the PWSD board has committed to train teachers for this. Independent study is good to teach at a younger age. Also Strathclair School has the highest number of students taking ISL courses now. Brendan's opinion is that they are not as successful as independent study.

Jason asked Don to take this question to the PWSD board. Where are students going to go when the numbers aren't there even after Shoal Lake & Strathclair High Schools combine?

Denise said that several people should attend the board meetings, not just the same ones all of the time as they are labelled as trouble makers and not taken seriously.

Bruce said that the next step is to set up the committee. He commented that the R.M.'s of Blanshard and Saskatchewan are here along with the R.M. of Strathclair and Harrison.

Gerald said his opinion is that the R.M.'s should strike the committee. Ken and Anthony agreed to spearhead this.

Tammy commented that she read a lot of minutes and went to meetings. Why is the board not listening? Why will they start listening now?

Bruce said that the Birtle trustee originally voted for it and now after meeting has changed his mind.

Debby said the next election is 2010. She also said that there was only one seat that had an election last time.

Kathy asked how we can tell them to slow down and have them listen. She suggested a vote of non-confidence.

Debby said to go to the meetings and give reasons. Ask them to wait until they hire a new CEO. Brent Fortune explained Russell and area are all set up now. Those trustee's are voting on what happens to our schools.

Verna commented that every year we read about enrolment drops all over the province. If this is done here will other divisions start this too? The two divisions with review process's using numbers are the one's closing schools.

Could car pooling be arranged for going to the division meetings?

Everyone encouraged to make an appointment to make presentation to the board on April 21/08.

Shonda said that her appointment time has been changed, and the location has been changed to the school and she understands it may be two nights.

Gayleen asked Debby if this statement she heard was correct. If you don't like what's happening you can resign. Debby explained that what was meant was she is one vote, and if the majority of the board made a different decision she would have to accept it and if she could not accept it she could resign. All decisions of the board are made by a majority vote.

Elaine asked what we will do if they decide to go ahead anyway.

Bruce explained that the resolution that was passed deals with this. The committee will be set up and we encourage the municipal councils to provide funding for them to work on our behalf.

Garry said that a group from the area has been formed.

Bruce ended the meeting with a quote from Martha Meade, "A Small Group CAN Conquer the World"

Martin asked Denise if our PAC could work together with Shoal Lake PAC. She said that she would be glad to spearhead this.

Bruce adjourned the meeting at 9:20 p.m.

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