

■ **EDUCATION:** Some are frustrated the Thames Valley District school board decided to close Metcalfe Central

Parents pull pupils in protest

BY JOE MATYAS

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Teachers at Metcalfe Central public school southwest of Strathroy may be in almost empty classrooms today if a one-day parents' protest succeeds.

Parents plan to keep their children out of school today to protest a decision last week by the Thames Valley District school board to close the school by September 2010, said Rob Langford, father of three kids who attend the school.

"We don't know how many parents will support the protest, but we think a strong majority will," said Langford, who sat on the board's accommodation review committee that reviewed the fate of five local schools.

"There's been a lot of phone calls in the school community

about this and we think most parents will want to send a message to the board."

Langford expressed frustration with the outcome of the review, which involved two representatives of each school, municipal representatives and local trustee Sarah Doub, who served as chairperson.

The board looked at closing Metcalfe and Caradoc South school in Melbourne when the review committee was struck in 2007. It voted 9-4 last week to close them.

"All of our recommendations were glazed over," said Langford. "We met about 10 times over the course of the past year and the outcome was what the board wanted from the beginning. It's very frustrating to be disregarded."

Also part of the review were Caradoc North school on Scotchmere Drive south of

Strathroy, Caradoc Central in Mt. Brydges and Echo Central in Glencoe.

With 112 pupils, Metcalfe was the smallest school under review, said Langford, and other schools need costly upgrading.

"We feel that our children receive more individual attention from their teachers and learn well because of it. Metcalfe's most recent scores on provincewide tests for Grades 3 and 6 were among the highest in the board."

The school is the hub of the Cairngorm area, said Langford.

"It's a community resource as well as a school, the only one we have in the area."

Angela Brodie, the mother of two children who attend the school and co-chairperson of its home and school association, echoed the view that the

school is the community's "most important" resource.

There's an exceptional level of co-operation between parents, principal and teachers at the school and "all the kids know each other," she said.

If the school closes as scheduled, some local children will be bused for as long as 90 minutes, twice a day, she said.

Plans call for Metcalfe's students to be dispersed to the schools that remain open. That means some will be schooled in portables, Langford said.

The closing of Metcalfe and Caradoc South will result in an increase in the cost of busing, the building of portables and expansion of Caradoc Central, said Langford.

Joe Matyas is a Free Press reporter.