Community Schools Alliance

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May 6, 2014

Mayor Bob Bratina

Chair

Joint City of Hamilton and HWDSB Liaison Committee

Dear Mayor Bratina:

I regret that I am unable to personally attend your May 8, 2014 meeting but want to advise you of the call by the Community Schools Alliance for a ‘smart moratorium’ on disputed school closures.

The Community Schools Alliance was formed in 2009 by Ontario municipalities to address the challenges associated with the process school boards use to determine which schools in a municipality stay open, which ones get closed and where new schools will be located. As municipal leaders, we believe our community schools are vital pieces of our public infrastructure; our schools are as important to our communities as the municipal infrastructure for transportation, water and recreation that we build and maintain. Clearly we would not close any part of our municipal infrastructure without ample public input into the decision making process. Likewise, we believe communities, parents and students should have a strong voice at the table where student accommodation decisions are being made – and that their voice should be heard and considered.

The members of the Community Schools Alliance know that the current system for determining which schools stay open and which schools are closed is a flawed process and that school boards are closing schools, amalgamating schools and transporting students out of their neighbourhoods without fully weighing the impact of these decisions on our communities.

The goal of the ‘smart moratorium’ is to provide time for the Ministry of Education, school boards and municipalities to work together to develop policies addressing such issues as planning for declining enrolments, a mutually agreed upon Accommodation Review Committee (ARC) process, a review of funding to rural and small community schools and establishing a working relationship between municipalities and school boards that provides transparency and accountability. The Community Schools Alliance believes a better system is needed to ensure that school boards and municipal councils work together on decisions regarding the use of schools so that the public’s investment yields the best return possible for our communities.

While this challenge may sound complex, through the hard work of both the Community Schools Alliance and the Thames Valley District School Board, we have developed a unique solution that is already producing dividends. In the fall of 2010, the County of Middlesex and the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) signed a historic Letter of Agreement that allows municipal input into the accommodation decision-making process prior to the Board`s administrative staff developing a recommendation and putting it before the Board. Similar agreements are now in place between the TVDSB and Oxford County, Elgin County and the City of London. We believe the protocol established in these agreements will lead to more informed decision making by the Board and increased acceptance of the decision by the community.

However the Letter of Agreement described above is only a small step forward. A much more comprehensive review is needed to put in place a process that supports municipalities instead of weakening them. A ‘smart moratorium’ will give us time to build that process.

Yours truly,



Doug Reycraft

Chair

Community Schools Alliance