



Community Schools Alliance

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ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHAIR August 9, 2022

I am pleased to again present a summary of the activity of the Executive Committee of the Community Schools Alliance during the past year 2021-2022. The Committee decided to again hold the annual meeting virtually to make it possible for all members to join from the comfort of their own homes. And to avoid any conflict with AMO events, the meeting is being held prior to the AMO annual conference instead of during it.

Following the 2021 annual meeting and election of committee members, we welcomed three new members to the committee (Meghan Chomut from Shuniah, Stephen Townsend from West Grey and Marigay Wilkins from Southwest Middlesex) and two re-elected members (Jim Collard from Niagara on the Lake and Denis Doyle from Frontenac Islands). The committee met virtually 12 times meetings using the Zoom platform between September, 2021 and July, 2022.

Last fall, the CSA entered into a secondment agreement with Southwest Middlesex to allow Melissa Tighe, the municipality's Building, By-Law & Facilities Coordinator, to become the part-time administrator of the Alliance. The cooperation and support of Southwest Middlesex and Melissa's work are much appreciated by the executive committee.

Last August we reported that the CSA had entered into a contract with the Human Environments Analysis Laboratory (HEAL) and Spatialists Consulting Ltd associated with Western University to collect data to draw comparisons between small rural and northern communities with similar population sizes. The objective was to assess sociodemographic and socioeconomic differences due to the presence or absence of a school. Basically, the plan was to compare communities that have schools to those of a similar size that don't.

The research project was completed and presented to the executive committee in late fall and released to the public in January. The research study identified 733 communities in rural and northern Ontario with more that 300 but less than 10,000 people. The 733 communities were divided into two groups: those with more than 300 but less than 1500 people and those with more than 1500 but less than 10,000. Each group was analyzed separately.

The research shows conclusively that small rural and northern communities with schools tend to have more private amenities and public services than those without schools. Communities with schools are more likely to have a bank, grocery stores,

variety stores, pharmacies, doctors, emergency services, libraries, public parks and community centres. The research proves that schools definitely do have a social and economic impact on small communities in Ontario. It seems logical to conclude from the research results that closing a school in a small community threatens the future existence of some of the private amenities and public services. Their loss will diminish the quality of life for families and children. The ability of the community to attract new growth and economic development will be reduced.

In February, the CSA was invited to participate in a virtual Rural Education Symposium organized by the United Counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry. The symposium was livestreamed by SDG Counties via Zoom on its YouTube channel. Presentations were made by SDG Deputy Mayor and CSA committee member Stephanie Jaworski, Zorra Mayor and CSA vice-chair Marcus Ryan and CSA chair Doug Reycraft. The keynote speaker was noted author and speaker Paul Bennett, Director of the Schoolhouse Institute and Adjunct Professor of Education at Saint Mary's University in Halifax. More than 200 people attended the virtual symposium which is still available for viewing on the SDG Counties website.

In January, several executive committee members met virtually with MPP Sam Oosterhoff, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education, during the ROMA conference. In the months preceding the June provincial election, committee members met with MPP Marit Stiles, Official Opposition critic for education and with Liberal candidates on their party's education policy team.

In April, the committee developed a Three Point Action Plan designed to improve and protect access to public education in rural and northern communities. It calls on the provincial government to (1) increase the Rural and Northern Education Fund (RNEF) from the current \$21.8 million to \$50 million, (2) to keep the current moratorium on accommodation reviews and school closures in place for schools that qualify for the RNEF if and when the province proceeds to lift the moratorium on other schools, and (3) to consult with school boards and community groups including the Community Schools Alliance before finalizing the templates required by the 2018 Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline.

The Three Point Action Plan was circulated to all CSA members and provincial municipal organizations in May with a request that it be supported with a council resolution and forwarded the municipality's MPP and to the CSA. Many responses to the request have been received and they continue to be reported.

Once again, I extend our thanks to the Middlesex County IT Department that maintains our website and to AMO for continuing to serve as our banker, sending out invoices for membership fees and preparing financial reports for the committee.

I especially thank our municipal and individual members who support us with their membership fees. Those fees are our only revenue stream and they allow us to fund research and to employ a part-time administrator to keep us organized.

Finally, I thank the other 10 members of our Executive Committee for their ongoing

generosity with time and advice as we work to protect our schools in rural and northern Ontario and give as many students as possible the opportunity to attend elementary and secondary school in their home community. In addition to the five members elected last August, the others are Patricia Greig from Northern Bruce Peninsula, Stephen Harvey from Middlesex Centre, Stephanie Jaworski from South Glengarry, Carol Lowery from Temagami and Marcus Ryan from Zorra Township

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Doug Reycraft". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping tail on the "t".

Doug Reycraft
Chair, Community Schools Alliance