

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS ALLIANCE

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHAIR

August 14, 2016

It is a pleasure to present the Annual Report of the Chair at the first Annual Meeting of the Community Schools Alliance following the adoption of a formal constitution in February, 2015.

The evolution of the Alliance can be traced back to 2008 when the county council of Middlesex decided that a provincial organization would be the most effective means of lobbying for changes to the process being followed by school boards across the province to make decisions about student accommodation. In its first years the Alliance was an informal organization with an executive that met periodically using conference and video conference calls. That executive developed a platform that attracted resolutions of support from a large number of municipal councils and municipal organizations. It also attracted support resolutions from non-municipal bodies including the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. The platform was also used to develop several presentations made to successive Ministers of Education and put forward on panels at conferences of municipal organizations.

For various reasons the activity level of the Alliance declined during the 2010-2014 council term until the Town of Penetanguishene and Mayor Gerry Marshall circulated a resolution calling a moratorium on school closures, a review of the student accommodation review process and the formation of an alliance to represent small town and rural municipalities in lobbying the provincial government. The Penetanguishene resolution attracted the endorsement of many municipal councils and subsequently stimulated discussions with members of the executive of the existing Alliance.

Those discussions led to a decision to convert the Community Schools Alliance into a more formal organization. As a result, a draft constitution was presented to a meeting of representatives of municipal councils that had endorsed the Penetanguishene resolution during the OGRA ROMA conference in February, 2015. The constitution was adopted and an Executive Committee of "Initial Members" representing all geographic regions of the province was appointed.

Since February, 2015, that Executive Committee has held 17 formal meetings by conference call and has met informally in August, 2015 at the AMO conference in Niagara Falls and in February of this year at the OGRA ROMA conference. Actions of the Executive Committee and the Alliance during that period include the following:

- Adopted a schedule of membership fees based on population
- Sent emails to all municipalities and all elected officials inviting them to join the Alliance
- Updated the Alliance's website (www.communityschoolsalliance.ca)
- Created a CSA presence on Twitter (@csaont) and Facebook
- Welcomed the appointment of the CSA chair to the Premier's Advisory Group on Community Hubs
- Reviewed various reports on the impact of school closures
- Monitored accommodation reviews around the province and provided advice when requested
- Delivered a presentation as part of a panel on Community Hubs at the August, 2015 AMO conference

- Presented at the November, 2015 Ontario West municipal conference
- Monitored the activity of the province's Community Hubs initiative
- Commissioned a research project on the impact of school closures by Professor William Irwin
- Reached agreement with AMO to have the CSA's finances hosted by AMO and to have AMO issue invoices for 2016-17 membership fees
- Delivered a presentation to a People for Education media event releasing their 2016 annual report
- Agreed to participate in a Big Data for Small Places project in partnership with Frontenac County

This Annual Meeting will conclude the term of office of the "Initial Members" of the Alliance's Executive Committee. Some of them have chosen not to seek election to the committee this year and I want to thank Mayor Lucy Kloosterhuis of Oliver Paipooonge, Mayor (and Warden) Gerry Marshall of Penetanguishene, Councillor Don Murray of Huron-Kinloss, and Mayor Brian Smith of Wasaga Beach for their support and contribution to this organization. The other seven members have been elected by acclamation as a result of a Call for Nominations that was sent to the Head of Council and CAO of each member municipality in July as required by our constitution. I anticipate that the Executive Committee will fill the vacant positions this fall.

I also want to express our appreciation to Middlesex County Council who have allowed their Information Technology staff to continue to host and maintain our website and to the Town of Penetanguishene which has hosted our conference calls. Special thanks and best wishes go to Penetanguishene's Executive Assistant Kelly Cole who has provided administrative support to the Executive Committee and will soon begin a maternity leave.

The mission statement in our constitution calls for "a collaborative process that results in democratically determined decisions regarding education infrastructure". We have seen some progress in advancing with that mission, primarily as a result of recommendations of the Community Hubs Advisory Group that issued a progress report this week. However there remains much more work to be done. We hope that the results of our research will allow us to make a stronger case for the changes that are critical to the future of students and communities in rural and northern Ontario.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Doug Reycraft". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Doug Reycraft
Chair
Community Schools Alliance