
Alliance calls for halt to school closings

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Havelock-Belmont-Methuen - Council is supporting a proposal by the Community Schools Alliance to impose “a smart moratorium” on disputed school closings across the province.

The alliance has drafted a resolution petitioning the province impose the moratorium to create time and opportunity for the Ministry of Education, school boards and municipalities to work together to review funding for rural and small community schools and develop policies for such issues as declining enrolments. The alliance would also like to see a “a mutually agreed upon accommodation review process” and “transparency and accountability between municipalities and school boards.”

Reeve Ron Gerow said he has held discussions with Community Schools Alliance Chair Doug Reycraft, who is also a past president of AMO, about the concerns expressed by many Ontario municipalities regarding the review process, which was developed by the province to determine which schools stay open and which school are to be closed.

“I think we should get behind this and support the principal behind this,” Gerow said during a recent meeting of council. “I know there is no immediate threat at this time to Havelock-Belmont Public School. But I don't get the same feeling about our secondary school in Norwood.”

In Ontario 100 schools are are now undergoing accommodation reviews. And the accommodation review committee has closed, or is recommending the closure of 146 schools.

In a letter to Ontario municipalities, Reycraft stressed that community schools are “vital pieces of our public infrastructure.” Municipalities, parents and students “should have a strong voice at the table where school accommodation choices are made,” he said.

In August the Community Schools Alliance met with Minister of Education Kathleen Wynne to discuss the need for a smart moratorium for disputed school closures. During the meeting the alliance representatives “highlighted the flawed process used to determine which schools will be closed,” said a Community Schools Alliance media release.

Wynn discussed the ministry's recently drafted “Encouraging Facility Partnerships” policy,” which has been designed to encourage school boards to work with their community partners “in order to maximize opportunities to share facilities.”

Reycraft said the ministry's draft policy “is an important step forward.” However, “it falls short of recognizing the urgency of finding a solution to the current school crisis,” he said.

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