

**From:** Anne Marie Grigaitis

**Sent:** October 31, 2016 4:31 PM

**Subject:** Reviews in process to potentially close the Honey Harbour Public and Separate Elementary Schools

Dear Mr. Miller (MPP)

Louise Clodd Public School Trustee

Carol Corriveau-Truchon Separate School Trustee

It is with great frustration that I am writing my concerns to you , today. I recently attended (Sat. Oct. 29<sup>th</sup>/16) a third meeting in our Community that was organized and held by our dedicated local Councillor , Kathy Kay and a local school advisory committee that is called SOS ( locally) "SAVE OUR SCHOOLS". The topic discussed: the Proposed Closure of the Honey Harbour Public and Separate School, currently both under review.

Our family, originally transplants from Kitchener, have resided in the Honey Harbour / Port Severn community for 33 yrs. We own two businesses in the area and employ approx.. 40 people on a fulltime basis. In our small rural community , this would qualify us as one of the larger employers locally. Many of our employee and their families reside in the Hamlet of Honey Harbour and surrounding area.

My husband Armin who at 19 started his construction business (40 yrs ago) and I, raised our 3 children in this community. They attended " Our Lady of Mercy School" in Honey Harbour, St. Theresa's High School in Midland , and all 3 of our children continued on to complete their University educations, and become viable , productive members of their chosen communities. Our eldest daughter(32) is a Paramedic downtown Toronto, our middle daughter(30) and amazing teacher in the Halton District, and our son(28) a Civil Engineer is running his own Consulting business in Toronto, with Price Waterhouse as his main contract. I would argue by these achievements alone that a small town, small elementary school environment proved to be successful in providing an excellent education to chart the course for their respective careers.

Our family is only one of many success stories of the Honey Harbour Education system in place. Clearly the local education model, in our rural community is not broken, and is working!

In the past few months, the residents of our community, have been informed that the Ministry of Education has decided to undergo reviews, of the viability of these two schools remaining OPEN in our Community. Sadly, it appears that it is a Provincial mandate that the Rural country school, becomes something only to be remembered in History books.

I have many issues with the current review process and the Board of Education policy that prevents School Board Trustee's to be accountable verbally to the parent body and students they represent. I would argue that School Board Trustee's are accountable to their voter's, and have a responsibility to show up , when such a serious matter is at hand.

There has been a lack of any correspondence or information put forth from the elected Board Trustee's for our Schools. It is my understanding that , "A school board trustee is an elected

representative of the public and is the community's advocate for public education." How can they advocate for our SOS committee, if they do not return parent phone calls or requests for information regarding what is being discussed at Board levels? We have yet to meet or hear from our Trustee's face to face- to date.

1. Has the idea of Co-locating been discussed by the Province or Board of Education, rather than closing many rural schools? Maybe we need a new model to suit the needs of our and other small communities. Put both the Public and Separate Schools under one roof –sharing the Gym, library etc. We have a perfectly underutilized Separate School building , that could easily rent out several classrooms to the Public School, to accomplish almost a capacity attendance in one building. A progressive idea, for progressive learning! Share resources, paid by the ratepayers of the Municipality. Don't throw the baby out with the bath water. Change the approach to education. Make it about the children! Not about Board Procedure, Policy and different School Boards not communicating and co-operating, or sharing their tax dollars.

2. The proposed 80 min. bus ride one way for some of our Elementary students is simply – unacceptable in my opinion. I challenge the Trustee's and School Board members voting on this issue, to first take that 80 minute ride to and from , on the Hwy 400 in a Snow storm , and test drive their decision. Public School trustees should ride from Glen Orchard in Bala, Ont. To Honey Harbour. Then imagine a 5 yr old spending that many hours a day, unsupervised by adults, possibly being subjected to bullying on a bus. I would argue again, Unthinkable!!!

3. These 3 hrs a day, will take away from living an active lifestyle, homework time with parents, and extracurricular lessons being attended. Who will drive to a music lesson , if you've had your child on a 3 hr. bus trip, or how will one make it to Hockey practice after that long a school day?

4. If it were my child on a 80 min. bus ride, I would be left no choice but to leave the Honey Harbour area and move to the new school community. Consequently how do we attract new young families to purchase local real estate if we do not offer a school, locally.

5. Which brings me to my next concern. If families are forced to leave the community , Our workforce leaves, our young vibrant families leave, and we are left with an already struggling local economy, of retired cottage population. Not a balanced community at all. This is very concerning to the health and prosperity of our businesses ,and therefore our Community.

6. It has been suggested that the Board of Education is receiving about 5.5 million dollars in tax revenue from Georgian Bay Township alone. A substantial paycheque in my estimation. I am told that the Public School costs about \$500,000. To run annually. 10% of the revenues collected, by my math. So approximately 5 million dollars is going to Trillium /Lakelands Board of Education to subsidize their Gravenhurst and Bala Schools. Not acceptable, to a Georgian Bay Township rate payer.

7. If there really isn't any other compromise or new solution to leave the Schools in Honey Harbour open, than at the very least I would argue that the children should be bused to either Coldwater or Victoria Harbour, for their Elementary education. They already bus the High

School Students to Midland, so a realignment of School Districts must be addressed and discussed. It just is not logical or acceptable to Bus our students to Bala. Realign the School District borders to accommodate the best outcome for our children.

I urge all of you to give this your serious consideration and take my message to your respective Boards that make these decisions , directly affecting our families and community. The lack of consideration and concern for Rural Ontario is appalling. These type of decisions are deep rooted, and will have adverse domino affects throughout Rural Ontario, and more immediately here at our home in Honey Harbour, Georgian Bay , Ontario.

Annemarie Grigaitis