

November 17, 2016

Re: Our Lady of Mercy School and Honey Harbour Public School

Dear: Mr. Ab Falconi
Mrs. Carol Corriveau-Truchon
Mr. Larry Hope
Ms. Louise Clodd
Mr. Norm Miller

It is with great upset and frustration that I find myself writing to you regarding the possible closure of both Honey Harbour Schools.

I was born and raised in Honey Harbour. When I attended Our Lady of Mercy School, we were taught by the Nuns and had an attendance of 177 pupils. After elementary school, we attended MSS in Midland for high school. It was a LONG bus ride as a teenager! I am 46 years old now. I am a Registered Early Childhood Educator who works for two school boards; Muskoka Family Focus; as well as, our 3rd generation Family business, White Contracting & Barging, here in Honey Harbour. As you can appreciate from the many titles I hold, I have many points of view from each professional position; as a business owner, registered ECE and as a resident of the hamlet.

With Kindergarten students enrolled at the tender age of 3 ½ years of age, I feel you are not taking consideration of the needs of our children and ages of the children in question here, for a bus ride of approximately 1 hour each way and up to 1hr 20 minutes each way. We all know children need sleep and nutrition to be successful in school. How is a 3 ½ year old going to function when they finally reach the school after spending an hour bus ride thus getting out of bed this much earlier? Where will they go to the bathroom on this long bus ride? Children's bladders are very small. How BIG of a lunch bag and backpack are they going to have to carry with them to accommodate all this food for snacks, lunches and drinks when they are now enduring an additional 2 hours +, just riding on a bus each day?

For once, let's look at the "needs" of our students and NOT the numbers! Do you really think they are not going to be falling asleep during class because most of the kindergarten students I work with presently, without this drawn out bus ride, are ready for a nap by the time 1pm – 2pm rolls around each day. How productive are they really going to be? How much are they going to retain? How will they possibly learn? I feel you are setting them up for failure. I urge each of you to put yourself into the mind and body of these small children we call.....our future! Are we being fair to them?

As a member and employee of our 3rd generation Family business, we employee and rely on the local people who reside in our hamlet. If we have no schools to attract new families to our area, you are setting our business that was established in 1946 up for closure. It is already difficult to

find local trades people in the construction industry and if we have nothing to offer people for education, they will not relocate to this area. Please be aware, my Father has MANY employees who have worked all their lives for him! Their employment started at the age of 15-16 when they finished high school and a majority are still employed by him now!

I've just recently attended our local Ontario Early Years Program here in Port Severn, provided by Muskoka Family Focus for children in Honey Harbour, Port Severn and surrounding areas and with an attendance of 15 children, 10 of those are babies under the age of 1 ½ years old. The next time I was in attendance this Fall, of 14 children, 8 of those were babies. As this is a "drop-in" program, our numbers are higher than stated above as not all Family's attend each week and new Family's are always starting. These are all children who will be occupying either Honey Harbour Public School or Our Lady of Mercy School. I urge you all to take a hard look and consider co-locating these two schools. We have approximately 58 students enrolled between the two schools presently and our numbers will only grow as these babies and toddlers grow up.

From another angle, as a resident, I have a rental house in the hamlet of Honey Harbour and just the other day, saw a post on our local Facebook page stating a new Family is hoping to move into the area and their children will be attending school once they find a place to rent. We are still a growing community! If you choose to not work together and form one school for our local children, we will be a dying hamlet very soon.

I also work with a couple of local children after school through the week as their tutor. If they now have to endure an hour or hour and a half bus ride in the evenings, when are they going to have time to be tutored? When are they going to have time to do their homework when they are in older grades? Are we expecting our children to leave at 6:30 am and return home around 5:30 pm and be productive or have a life after school? Family's are not spending enough time together as it is doing Family things together and spending quality time together learning and having fun. What are we doing to our future generation!?! How will these closures really impact them?

It is in my opinion, there is no reason why the two school boards shouldn't and couldn't work together. If we asked the children, who this is for and all about, whether they had any objections if the two schools were put together, do you really think they would care? Let's remember who and what we are striving for in the big picture.....an education for our children and their future, not ours.

Let's work together and have our children occupy one school, keeping them in our hamlet!

Kindest regards,
Janine White