

I live in Port Severn and my children have all attended Honey Harbour Public School. I have three boys aged 16, 13 and 7. I would like to start by saying how much we love our school. In fact my oldest was just telling me how much he misses HHPS since he found it so much more of a supportive learning environment and he has struggled in high school. Now that is not to say he struggled because he was ill prepared because of HHPS but rather that due to a very serious accident half way through his grade 8 year he missed 6 months of school. He only came back to be forced into high school where due to his very high needs and poor attendance, due to medical conditions and appointments, he has struggled greatly. All Justin's life he has been a more quiet child and would withdraw from active participation and I feel that due to his nature had he attended a larger school his learning disability and unique needs would likely have gone unnoticed. However he began school at HHPS in kindergarten in a class of six and his teacher was able to really get to know him quickly and noticed that his learning needs were different and even without formal testing and waiting for his phyco Ed she began an IEP and started working with him to help him not just learn but to come out of his shell and become a part of the school. I was very happy with his progress all the years he was there which was due to the individual attention and support he received, not just from the teachers and EA's but from the other students as well. Therefore, not only do I not feel that anything at all was lacking in the education HHPS is providing I believe they are giving a better and more rounded education, preparing them not just for the next level of education but for life in general.

Before Justin's accident he had improved to the point that he was not just participating in class discussions but was leading group activities and teaching other students in some of the different things they were working on. Because the school is so small the students become like family and they all help each other. In fact it is another thing I love about them is that because there are so many grades in a class the older kids help the younger and they learn cooperation and about helping others and also the information is reinforced as they help another student who might be struggling. Another thing Justin struggled with is team sports. Because of the type of kid he was he hated gym activities that included team sports but because HHPS does not have a gymnasium the standard basketball and other sports, while still played often, are not the focus. Rather they look at all forms of exercise and sports. Justin was exposed to so many things he might not have been at another school and developed a deep love of Golfing, skiing, tennis and bowling, All things he learned there. They also practice dance, yoga and anything they can do inside on a rainy day while making sure the kids get outside for gym class on better days, even in winter. My youngest has some anxiety and I am finding that the yoga he is learning there is helping him understand relaxation better and he thinks its fun to come home and show me cobra pose or dog pose. I believe in fresh air and sunlight and like that they are playing ball in the yard on a crisp winter day or even better going snowshoeing. I also like that they have to walk to the library getting more exercise and getting out into the community rather than just go in another room in the school.

The teachers at this school are just amazing individuals and the amount that they care for their school and the kids who attend is just unbelievable and not like anything I have seen before. Maybe because it is such a small place and its always us against the world that it bonds them even further. Maybe its because they have a student in their class for three and four years at a time before they switch to the other room right next door. Or maybe its because there are so few students it is really easy to get to know each student, and their whole family, very well. All I know is that I myself attended many schools, some larger, a couple smaller (although much bigger than HHPS) and yet this is the school I wish I could have attended. I never in all my years in school saw the kind of spirit that this school has.

Now to get down to the practical. right now my son, who is 7, is on the bus for 20 minutes and arrives home at 3:22. he has plenty of time for outside play, which my husband and I both deeply believe is important. He has time to go to horseback riding lessons, or to go for family snowmobile rides in the winter, which we do very very regularly. We also do family bike rides and many other activities in fall and spring as well, and we feel having proper play time is important for kids, especially in this day and age. Also because I have 2 special needs kids, one with the physical needs from his accident which requires many many trips to Toronto for appointments with doctors and sickkids, and another with ASD I am not always home; therefore, his daycare stop is on his way home and is already a stop so he goes there right off the bus. in fact if I am running late and wont be home for the bus I can call the school and have him dropped there so I never have to worry about him being stuck on the bus because they wont let him off if no one is home. If you close HHPS you expect me to send my child on a bus where he could very likely spend at least 3 hours a day sitting on his butt not having time for anything when he gets home not to mention the lack of sleep for how early I will have to get him up for the bus in the morning. oh and that bus will travel up the 400 highway that if it shuts down in winter, which does happen, we will have NO OTHER WAY TO EVEN PICK OUR KIDS UP especially in bad weather!! Not to mention that because it is out of our community we will not even know someone we trust to take our son in, but on top of all that I lose the option of his daycare being my backup when needed. There is NO way I am going to do that. I don't feel it is safe or appropriate and I guarantee you that if the law changed and said that all the trustees and school board members had to abide by their decisions for other peoples kids and were made to send their children the distance they expect us to and thereby force them to put their kids or grandkids on a bus for that length of time they would not do it.

The way my husband and I see it we have two options if HHPS closes. One is to move, which I am for and my husband is against so thank you for the extra marital strife. The second is to send our kids to Victoria Harbour if they have the room (they might end up full if all 40 kids get sent there which is what im hearing. I have not heard one single parent say they would ship to GO) or try Coldwater. In that case if bussing is not provided I have no clue whatsoever how I will get him there each day and pick him back up. As I mentioned earlier my schedule between my other two kids does not even allow me to work so i don't know how I will swing this. Plus hello gas money, I think if bussing

is not provided TLDSB should have to pay our gas and time since they are not providing us with reasonable access to education which I thought was a right. It is definitely something we pay for with our taxes but of course you want all our money to go over to Lindsey and don't care about us or our area. You don't live here, you are 2 hours away and its really really stupid that we are part of your board. We should be Simcoe which I can actually walk to the boarder of Simcoe Muskoka. if you do close HHPS and all the kids go to VH then all the tax money for this area, which I have heard is like 5 Mil should also go over to Simcoe. Not just a portion you deem acceptable, but all of it. if you wont service this area you should not be entitled to our money plain and simple!!!!

So I am back to my options. I have so much anxiety over all this I don't sleep whenever this comes up again. Which is a lot since we are all so desperate over it. What can I do? First I wait, and see if someone sensible puts a stop to the madness and keeps our little school open. If not I rush over to Victoria Harbour as fast as I can to register and pray we get in. Then we look at how much our house will depreciate thanks to dropping property values (I just heard of one family already who was going to buy in HH and decided not to because they were told the school is closed.) and try and figure out how to financially make it work to move. We have been here since 1997, its the only place my husband and I have lived together. We have a great piece of property and thanks to a large addition a great house. But because of a bunch of people we don't even know we could very well lose it all. so yea, thank you for that as well.

I don't know what else I can say, I don't even know if this will do anything. while we have some great crusaders that we are sa lot of people feel that its inevitable because our kids just are not important to you and we absolutely believe this is about money and nothing else. If you close us down you keep more of it to use for you and your area. Who cares about us and our community and kids. Me, I don't know and won't know until the decision is shared what kind of people these trusties are because there is nothing that will convince me this is in my childs best interests. Nothing.

Funny thing, every single person I talk to about this issue can not believe you want to put the kids on a bus for this length of time. Some of them have been advocates for larger central schools and even they are shocked about our situation.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Leslie Walker

Desperate Mother