

Andrew Schinkel

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Greetings

I am writing this letter to express my concern regarding the ongoing evaluation of CSPA (Charlton Savard Public School) with respect to its potential closure. I have been made aware through various channels that DSBONE (District School Board Ontario North East) has identified CSPA as a potential for school closure and is currently reviewing its status for the upcoming school year, and I would like to take this opportunity to express thoughts on the matter.

First of all I am quite confident that closing the school this year will negatively affect the quality of life for residents of Charlton and the surrounding townships. Speaking as a former student and resident of the area I have been very privileged to experience the many benefits which the school offers to the community. While the school is primarily a building where children receive the foundation for their future lives, the facility also serves as the gather center for a wide range of community events. I can recall many events which were possible due to the gymnasium's spacious room. Charlton is a small community where everyone is connected to everyone else by a few degrees of separation, therefore events such as anniversaries, birthdays, family reunions, are often far too large to be hosted elsewhere and therefore have been held at the school. Not only personal events, but in a given year various community events such as meals, musical recitals, etc utilize the school's size and central location to enrich the lives of all residents from the young children, to the elderly. In hindsight I feel that the feeling of community made an impact on not only life, but also the development of my peers.

While the school is very important to the community in general, clearly the most important role of the school is in preparing its pupils for their lives ahead of them. While I don't have access to data which can be used to prove statistically that the school has and continues to do an exceptional job at preparing its graduates for their studies in high school, and beyond, I am quite confident that the school provides its students with a very solid foundation based on my personal experience. I attend the University of Waterloo and over the last 4 years have been studying Electrical Engineering. The vast majority of the students in

my classes came from larger schools. While these schools were able to provide the students with special programs tailored to their interests and abilities, I feel that I received a much more rounded and solid education at CSPS. The schools small size is not a hindrance at all to a good education. The personal support and mentoring that the teachers were able to provide at CSPS was a very valuable asset which should never be underestimated. I found that many of my peers in University not only attended elementary schools, but their parents saw it necessary to enrol them in private tutoring after school to ensure that they were learning the fundamentals. Charlton's size and personal touch provided what the larger and perhaps more prestigious schools could not.

While numbers, standardized tests and metrics are powerful tools which can give an idea of a schools success or failure, I don't believe they can accurately evaluate the benefits of the teachers understanding the background of each student. At Charlton the teachers know all of the student; they know the student's strengths as well as their weaknesses, as such they can provide a personal and appropriate response to each student. In larger schools the teachers cannot deal with the students in a personal and standard protocols must be enforced to maintain order, since they may not know the students very well beyond those in their current class. I know from experience that I have benefitted from the guidance provided by teachers at the school who were not my teacher that year. However they knew who I was and what they should expect from me.

A good education is more than acquiring a strong foundation in reading, writing , math, etc. These skills have limited usefulness if you cannot interact well with others. Life skills such as handling disagreements, respecting other people, and the ability to work with others are developed while interacting with others. These skills are very critical to ones success in life as well as in business. Over the last 5 years I have worked with a number of different companies through my co-op program, and I am beginning to appreciate the importance of so called "soft skills" more and more. I believe that my time at Charlton provided me with an excellent opportunity to develop my soft skills. The size of the classes requires that everyone in the class has to participate on the team since, there wasn't enough senior boys to form a team unless everyone played. While not having enough students to require cutting some players doesn't always translate into wins it does force the students to learn to get along. Team work and co-operation are particularly critical to success when there is a wide range in ability. Those who are naturally athletic learn to support and encourage those who are not, and those who are not athletically inclined through necessity are afforded the opportunity to compete and gain confidence.

I have heard that the board has indicated their research has noted a decline in the student population, which if it continued would eventually lead to classes with 3 or 4 grades lumped together. While this situation is clearly not ideal, it

will not be required with the current predicted enrollment for several years. I do not see any benefit at all to moving ahead this year and closing the school. For the next several years there will be a large enough population to maintain the classes more or less at status quo. The region does not have a large population base which makes predictions particularly difficult to make accurately. Changes which in a larger center would make very little difference to the prediction's accuracy, such as several families moving into or out of the region can drastically affect the prediction's of enrollment made by the board. For this reason I see little to no benefit of closing the school now. The school by all accounts is doing very well with very successful students. I agree that we can't look at the past, but have to look to the future. Who is the future? It is the students in school preparing for the ever changing world around them. For the future to be bright, we must provide our students with an excellent education. Based on past as well as current indicators we can be confident that those enrolled at CSPS will receive a world class education, why risk that? While it may be that in 5 years the school aged population will have decreased sufficiently that it is necessary that the school has to be closed, but why do it now? If we keep the school open, the decision to close it can be still made when the conditions truly warrant closure, however if we close the school now it will be very difficult to bring it back. What happens if in three years the population begins to increase? Will the board reopen the school? What I am trying to express is succinctly stated in the idiom "Don't fix what isn't broken."

Until we have evidence that indicates there is or will be a problem with the school, we should focus on the success that is CSPS, and appreciate the blessing it is and has been to us.

Thank you,
Andrew Schinkel