

**Presentation to the Regina Public School Board  
By Peter Joyce (Connaught School Parent)  
Tuesday, March 25, 2014  
RE PROPOSED CLOSURE OF CONNAUGHT SCHOOL**

MY TWO CHILDREN ETHAN AND ADAM JOYCE ATTEND CONNAUGHT SCHOOL. MY FAMILY MADE A DELIBERATE CHOICE AND MANY COMPROMISES TO LIVE CLOSE BY SO OUR KIDS HAVE WALKING ACCESS TO A DUAL TRACK SCHOOL IN CENTRAL REGINA, AND CAN SPEND THEIR PRIMARY YEARS AT CONNAUGHT. ALL TOGETHER MY WIFE AND I VOLUNTEER ON THE SCC, SCHOOL PLAYGROUND COMMITTEE, FOR THE NUTRITION AND READING PROGRAM AND THE BOOKS AT BREAKFAST PROGRAM. WE ARE HEAVILY INVESTED IN THIS SCHOOL AND THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE OF OUR CHILDREN. WHAT THE PROPOSED CLOSURE MEANS FOR OUR FAMILY IS THAT OUR KIDS WILL SPEND THE REST OF THEIR PRIMARY SCHOOL CAREERS BEING BUSSED TO TEMPORARY FACILITIES OUTSIDE OUR NEIGHBORHOOD. WE FEEL LIKE WE ARE BEING ROBBED OF THE AMENITIES WE HAVE PAID AND WORKED HARD FOR.

BUT I AM ALSO HERE TODAY ON BEHALF OF A DELEGATION OF PARENTS WHO ARE AS CONCERNED AS WE ARE ABOUT THE PROPOSED CLOSURE OF CONNAUGHT SCHOOL IN JUNE 2014. I AM HERE ON BEHALF OF PARENTS WHO MOVED TO THE AREA SO THEIR KIDS CAN ENTER PRE-K AT CONNAUGHT NEXT YEAR; I AM HERE ON BEHALF OF FIRST NATIONS AND METIS FAMILIES WHO MOVED TO THE AREA TO AVOID BUSSING AND SO THEIR KIDS CAN BE PART OF OUR DIVERSE AND ACCEPTING CONNAUGHT COMMUNITY; I AM HERE ON BEHALF OF PARENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS KIDS WHO ATTEND BECAUSE OUR HISTORY AS A COMMUNITY SCHOOL MEANS THEIR KIDS GET THEIR NEEDS MET RIGHT IN THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD; I AM HERE FOR FAMILIES WHO DEPEND ON THE CONNECTION BETWEEN WISE OWL AND OUR FRENCH PROGRAM EVERY DAY ; I AM HERE FOR THE CONNAUGHT KIDS I'VE MET AS AN OUTDOOR HOCKEY LEAGUE COACH, KIDS WHO BARELY MAKE IT TO SCHOOL NOW, AND ARE EVEN LESS LIKELY TO MAKE IT IF THEY HAVE TO CATCH A BUS THERE; AND I AM HERE ON BEHALF OF GRANDMOTHERS WHOSE GROWN CHILDREN HAVE RETURNED TO OUR NEIGHBORHOOD SO THEIR GRANDKIDS CAN ATTEND CONNAUGHT. I DO NOT SPEAK FOR ALL, BUT I SPEAK FOR MANY.

WE FEEL LIKE WE ARE BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE. THE RELOCATION OPTIONS PUT FORWARD BY THE BOARD WILL PUT OUR KIDS - MY KIDS - IN MARGINAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AND INTO TRANSPORTATION ARRANGEMENTS WE DON'T WANT. *FOR YEARS*. WE NEED TO WORK TOGETHER AND FIND A BETTER WAY FORWARD. WE NEED TO KEEP THE SCHOOL OPEN UNTIL AT LEAST JUNE 2015 AND BUILD A RENEWAL PLAN WE CAN ALL LIVE WITH.

THE BOARD'S OWN ENGINEER SAYS THE SCHOOL CAN BE MADE SAFE FOR ANOTHER YEAR. NOW ITS INSURER SAYS THEY WON'T PROVIDE COVERAGE EVEN IF REMEDIAL MEASURES ARE TAKEN. IT'S NOT CLEAR WHY. BUT WHAT IS CLEAR IS THAT WE HAVE TO FIND A SOLUTION, BECAUSE THE ALTERNATIVES AREN'T ACCEPTABLE. WE NEED TO WORK THIS OUT TOGETHER, AND FAST.

WE RECOGNIZE THE MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES THAT YOU AS A BOARD ARE FACING. WE ARE IN A TOUGH SPOT. BUT CLOSING THE DOORS ON OUR SCHOOL THIS JUNE CLOSSES THE DOOR ON OPTIONS THAT MIGHT WELL BE IN THE BEST INTEREST OF OUR KIDS. CONNAUGHT IS ARGUABLY THE BEST "BRIDGING ACCOMMODATION" WE HAVE. CLOSING IT TAKES IT OUT OF THE EQUATION AS A PLACE FOR OUR KIDS TO ATTEND SCHOOL, UNINTERRUPTED, WHILE WE GET OUR ACT TOGETHER. AND IF WE'RE SMART, MAYBE WE CAN TRANSITION SMOOTHLY AND DIRECTLY INTO NEW ARRANGEMENTS. LET'S LEAVE THOSE OPTIONS OPEN. OUR BUILDING IS AN ASSET, LET'S USE IT.

WE THINK CLOSING CONNAUGHT THIS JUNE WILL PUT OUR KID'S HEALTH AND LEARNING EXPERIENCE AT RISK AND WE ARE AFRAID IT WILL JEOPARDIZE THE FUTURE OF OUR COMMUNITY SCHOOL . FAMILIES WILL NOT KEEP THEIR KIDS IN LEARNING ARRANGEMENTS THAT DON'T WORK.

WE'RE PLEASED THERE IS MONEY IN THE PROVINCIAL BUDGET FOR PLANNING BUT RECOGNIZE THAT FUNDING FOR RENEWAL WON'T COME UNTIL NEXT YEAR. WE ALSO RECOGNIZE THAT SUBSTANTIAL TIME WILL BE NEEDED FOR CONSULTATION AND TO COMPLETE PLANNING AND DESIGN BEFORE RENEWAL OPERATIONS CAN BEGIN. IT JUST DOES NOT MAKE SENSE TO RELOCATE CONNAUGHT STUDENTS UNTIL THERE IS A CLEAR PLAN AND COMMITMENT IN NEXT YEAR'S BUDGET TO BEGIN CONSTRUCTION. LET'S FIND A WAY TO USE THE SCHOOL WE HAVE.

WE URGE YOU TO KEEP THE EXISTING BUILDING OPEN UNTIL JUNE 2015 AT MINIMUM. YOUR ENGINEER SAYS THAT CONNAUGHT SCHOOL CAN BE MADE SAFE FOR AT LEAST ANOTHER YEAR - WE AGREE. OUR KID'S SAFETY IS PARAMOUNT TO US AS PARENTS. AND WE TRUST YOUR ENGINEER'S ADVICE THAT CONNAUGHT SCHOOL CAN BE MADE SAFE FOR AT LEAST ANOTHER YEAR.

OUR SCHOOL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IS INEXTRICABLY LINKED TO OUR COMMUNITY. RELOCATION WILL HURT US AND OUR KIDS IN MANY WAYS. IT WILL:

- DISRUPT CONNECTIONS TO THE PARENT COMMUNITY THAT PRESENTLY SUPPORT AND ENHANCE THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AT CONNAUGHT;

- SEVER LINKS TO VALUED STUDENT AMENITIES LIKE OUR PUBLIC LIBRARY, COMMUNITY CENTRE AND DAY CARE FACILITIES;
- IMPOSE GREATER FINANCIAL AND HUMAN COSTS THAN STAYING PUT

RBE HAS UPPED ITS ESTIMATE OF REPAIR COSTS TO KEEP CONNAUGHT OPEN FROM \$25,000 IN FEBRUARY TO \$67,000 TODAY. BUT THAT'S STILL A FRACTION OF WHAT RELOCATION WILL COST.

USING RBE'S FIGURES IT COSTS \$1,400 A YEAR TO BUS ONE CHILD. THE COST OF BUSING 320 STUDENTS FOR A YEAR IS \$438,000. THAT'S NEARLY HALF A MILLION AND TWENTY-TWO TIMES MORE THAN IT WOULD COST TO REPAIR THE SCHOOL FOR ONE YEAR. AND THAT'S BEFORE THE COSTS OF MOVING SCHOOL MATERIALS AND REFITTING ALTERNATIVE FACILITIES.

ALL BUT ONE OF THE RELOCATION OPTIONS INVOLVES SENDING THE STUDENTS TO SEVERAL DIFFERENT SCHOOLS, THUS BREAKING UP THE CONNAUGHT SCHOOL COMMUNITY. AND BY INCREASING THE PHYSICAL DISTANCE BETWEEN OUR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNITY AMENITIES AND OUR HOMES, WE DISTANCE AND SEPARATE OUR KIDS FROM THE SUPPORT SYSTEM THAT IS SPATIALLY CONNECTED TO THE OUR SCHOOL.

ON BEHALF OF THE CONCERNED PARENTS I REPRESENT, I URGE YOU TO FIND A WAY TO KEEP CONNAUGHT SCHOOL OPEN UNTIL AT LEAST JUNE 2015.

THIS LEADS ME TO ANOTHER MESSAGE I HAVE BEEN ASKED TO BRING FORWARD. AS PARENTS, WE DO NOT FEEL WE HAVE BEEN MEANINGFULLY ENGAGED BY THE RBE ON THIS DECISION, OR ON A RENEWAL PLAN FOR OUR SCHOOL. KEEPING OUR SCHOOL OPEN PAST JUNE 2014 HAS BEEN TAKEN OFF THE TABLE WITHOUT ANY REAL DISCUSSION. AND DECISIONS ARE ALREADY BEING MADE ABOUT RENEWAL ALTERNATIVES WITHOUT ANY MEANINGFUL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

ON MARCH 12<sup>TH</sup> I WAS PART OF A DELEGATION THAT MET WITH EDUCATION MINISTER MORGAN AND WE ASKED FOR HIS SUPPORT FOR A JOINT RBE/MINISTRY/COMMUNITY TASK TEAM TO DEVELOP A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE RENEWAL PLAN FOR CONNAUGHT SCHOOL. WE TOOK THE SAME PROPOSAL TO KATHERINE GAGNE AND JULIE MCRAE LAST WEEK. WE WANT TO CHANGE THE CONVERSATION AROUND THE CONNAUGHT CRISIS AND WORK TOGETHER TO FIND THE BEST SOLUTION FOR OUR KIDS AND OUR COMMUNITY. IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER THAT WE JOIN FORCES AND FIND

SOLUTIONS TOGETHER. I HAVE NOT SPOKEN TO A SINGLE PARENT THAT DIDN'T SUPPORT KEEPING THE SCHOOL OPEN FOR ANOTHER YEAR, AND THE RECENT COMMUNITY SURVEY CORROBORATES THIS: 90% WANT THE SCHOOL TO STAY OPEN. AS YOU KNOW, THAT OPTION WASN'T ON YOUR SURVEY. WE NEED TO REASSESS FOR OUR KIDS SAKE.

WE ASK YOU TO FIND A WAY TO KEEP THE SCHOOL OPEN FOR ANOTHER YEAR AND USE THE TIME IT BUYS TO ENGAGE WITH US AND THE MINISTRY ABOUT A RENEWAL SOLUTION THAT MAINTAINS A QUALITY LEARNING EXPERIENCE NOW, MAKES PROVISION FOR AS SMOOTH A TRANSITION AS POSSIBLE, AND PROVIDES A SOLID, LONG TERM SOLUTION FOR THE FUTURE. WE ASK FOR ENGAGEMENT THAT LETS PARENT-FAMILIES, TEACHERS AND COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS SHAPE OUR FUTURE AND THE PUBLIC FACILITIES WE HELP PAY FOR. AS THE CLICHÉ GOES, WE NEED EVERYONE'S WISDOM FOR THE WISEST RESULTS. WE THINK WE CAN BRING VALUE AND INSIGHT TO HELP MANAGE THIS CRISIS, AND DO WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT – FIND A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE SOLUTION THAT IS GOOD FOR OUR KIDS.

**ON BEHALF OF THE CONCERNED PARENTS WHO HAVE ASKED ME TO SPEAK ON THEIR BEHALF, PLEASE KEEP OUR SCHOOL OPEN FOR AT LEAST ANOTHER YEAR.**

**WE LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH YOU.**