

PRESENTATION TO THE REGINA PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD TRUSTEES

Our school community is facing a serious issue and we all need to work together as a whole to come up with the best solutions for the students at École Connaught Community School. The School Community Council feels that proper planning to relocate our school family, while respecting the needs of the children, parents, caregivers and neighbourhood, will require longer than the next few months left in this school year. Therefore, we strongly urge that the Trustees request emergent capital projects funding up to \$30,000 to respond to our emergency school facility issue. We request that the necessary repairs be made to Connaught during the Easter and this summer breaks to allow our students to safely remain in the school for one more year.

Our school serves a very diverse cultural and socio-economic student population which houses English and French programming, a fantastic pre-K class and the all important Wise Owl Daycare program. All of these children need to be included in the re-location within our community. All of these students need to feel a sense of belonging. As one of only 13 community schools, our school has a significant Aboriginal student population. Will our First Nations and Métis students, along with the rest of the student body, feel that sense of belonging if they are split up and removed from the neighbourhood?

Dual-track programming is an important feature to many of our students' parents as many of our families have children who each attend different programs. My friend Theresa has two children who attend Connaught. While her son Ed does well in the English program, her daughter Katie has been able to participate in the French program. Our unique school keeps families together under one roof while providing the option for our students to learn Canada's second official language which will provide students with additional work opportunities in the future. Our strong French immersion program is the only one located in the inner-city.

A few years ago my daughter Aja, couldn't wait to start pre-K and join her big sister Bella at school. She packed her little Dora lunch kit and was ready to go for the first day of school; never mind that she was not quite three yet and had to wait a few more weeks, never mind that pre-K does not stay for lunch; because she was ready to go, right now. Aja enjoyed pre-K so much that she attended the class for two years until she was old enough to graduate to the French Kindergarten class.

My neighbour Sarah, who lives one street behind me, has a son named Otis who has been patiently waiting for the day that he too can join his older sister Ella at Connaught. Sarah has been talking to Otis about his future at Connaught so he's ready once the day comes that he is old enough to start Kindergarten. Parents need time to prepare their children for the changes that are going to take place. Sarah needs time to prepare Ella, Otis and baby Grace for the changes ahead.

The Wise Owl Daycare plays an important part of weekdays for many parents and children. It allows parents to drop their children off in a safe and welcoming location that not only looks after their children before and after school allowing parents to get to work on time, but also makes for an easy commute for children to get to their classrooms once school begins since all they have to do is walk down the hall or up the stairs. The School Community Council would like to remind you that daycares in Regina are scarce and waiting lists of one or more years are not uncommon. A few months does not give Wise Owl enough time to find an alternate space and certainly does not provide parents with adequate time to be able to find alternate care. Please do the right thing by keeping the school open for one more year to give us all the proper amount of time that we are going to need to prepare for such a huge upheaval.

The Cathedral area is proud of its walk-able community. This adds to the charm for the residents who live there and is the reason that many of us choose to raise our children in the neighbourhood. My daughter Aja currently takes the bus to school with the plan for her to walk when she is one year older and my oldest, Bella, now walks to school. A good number of our kids are able to walk themselves to school each day and this is an important fact for many of our parents. One thing to consider is that many parents would rather move their children to another neighbourhood school than see them hop on a bus and be carried out of the neighbourhood each day. This will lead to overcrowding at Davin, Holy Rosary and St.Pius schools and will possibly rob some students of the chance to continue in their French Immersion studies, as some parents will make the tough choice to put their children into English programs rather than ship them out of the community or transfer them to the nearest French Immersion school which is Catholic. The best possible solution for our students is to find a way to keep our entire population together, both programs, and within our community.

The School Community Council understands that we have many young children who travel to school by bus each day until they are old enough to walk, or are bussed into our neighbourhood from nearby communities to attend our very successful French Immersion program. Bussing some children to school is not quite the same as having to bus an entire school population. We have concerns that the next few months do not provide enough time, nor are there enough resources to be able to figure out how to safely transport our children out of our neighbourhood or to another location within our community. Bus Driver want ads can be seen across the city on the sides of trucks and heard on local radio; clearly there are not enough to go around as it is. Where are these additional drivers going to be found and how can they be trained in such a short amount of time? Won't it cost substantially more to bus an entire school population than it would to repair what we already have? If the entire school is forced to hop on a bus at the cost of \$1400 per student per year and we average that 350 students will need to be bussed out – that equals the cost of \$420,000 per year.

It seems that a better use of tax payer's money would be to do the repairs and save a substantial amount of money. Is bussing the children, especially those in Pre-k to grade three, out of the neighbourhood in their best interests? We don't think so. How long would they be on the bus each day? What about those children who do not make it to school on time each day but do eventually make it there with siblings in tow? It may not be ideal to be late for school most days but at least they are able to walk there eventually and receive an education. We need an additional year to sort out questions such as these.

In summary the School Community Council recommends the following:

- Keep our entire dual-track school family together to ease the transition for students;
- Find a temporary location for the school within our neighbourhood, community is everything to us;
- Really hear what students, parents, caregivers and the School Community Council are saying: do not gather opinions and then do the exact opposite of what the neighbourhood says it needs;
- Keep students, parents, caregivers and the School Community Council in the loop: send us regular updates every step of the way;
- Work to break down barriers, mend fences and make the school community happy: life is much better when we respect each other, as reflected in the Public School Board motto: "I Respect";
- Keep École Connaught Community School in our neighbourhood where it is needed, now and in the future;
- Take a serious look at the possibility of using Victoria School as a temporary location: it may not be perfect but it's in our neighbourhood and we know how to be creative;
- Find the funding for Connaught no matter what happens with the up-coming Provincial budget; don't continue to sell our community short by applying band-aide solutions;
- Proper maintenance of schools should always be a top priority, not an after thought: make sure this does not happen to anyone else by funding your maintenance budget appropriately.
- Have remedial repairs done to the school over the Easter and summer breaks to make Connaught safe for at least one more year which will give everyone involved enough time to make some important decisions;
- Do what is best for the children of École Connaught Community School, not what is the easiest for the School Board.

Thank you.