

## **Three Point Action Plan in Support of Rural and Northern Education**

### **Background Information**

#### **Schools Have Social and Economic Impact for Small Communities in Ontario**

The Community Schools Alliance, with the support of its many municipal members, has made changing provincial education and infrastructure policy in the delivery and maintenance of school properties a priority.

- The educational policy of past two decades in Ontario has resulted in the amalgamation of smaller local schools into larger buildings, and often the closure of schools in smaller communities. Instead of attending school within their local community, many students are forced to attend schools in communities further away from home.
- This trend towards bussing rural and smaller community students into other communities can have wide-ranging impacts on the health, wellbeing, and stability of students, parents, and affected communities. The impacts of these closures may also not be immediately apparent, with potentially longer-term impacts being experienced decades later with negative economic competitiveness and socioeconomic outcomes.
- The Community Schools Alliance retained the Human Environments Analysis Lab at Western University to undertake an objective analysis of the connections between a community's vitality and the presence of a school within the community.

This study, [Schools Have Social and Economic Impact for Small Communities in Ontario](#) was released in January of this year.

The research shows that

- small rural and northern communities with schools tend to have more private amenities and more public services than those without schools.
- closing a school in a single-school community threatens the future existence of those amenities and services and the quality of life of the families living there.
- closing a school also reduces the ability to attract new growth and economic development to the community.
- This analysis revealed that of the 733 communities in Ontario with more than 300 and less than 10,000 population that were included in the study, 303 (41%) had no schools, 232 (32%) only have one school, and 198 (27%) have two or more schools.

#### **Governance Model**

- Unfortunately, under the current education governance model, local area municipalities have little influence over school board capital infrastructure

decisions. Many smaller municipalities may even be forecasting growth that would support a school with declining enrolment.

- However municipalities have no way to prevent a school closure and disposition of the land should the school board choose to do so in the short-term to meet new growth elsewhere in the board.

## **What Can Be Done**

The Community Schools Alliance believes that a better system is needed to address the educational facility needs of Ontario's smaller communities. The Ministry, school boards, and municipalities need to work together to develop policies that address planning for declining enrolments, a predictable Accommodation Review Committee process, a review of funding to rural and small community schools, and improved transparency and accountability in capital infrastructure decision-making.

## **A Three Point Action Plan for Rural and Northern Education**

During the past few months, the Community Schools Alliance has met with the Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education and representatives of the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party to share the results of this recent research and to ask for support for the following:

- 1. The province increase the Rural and Northern Education Fund (RNEF) to \$50 million;**

The Rural and Northern Education Fund (RNEF) was introduced in 2017 as a \$20 million addition to provincial funding for school boards to address the unique needs of schools in rural and northern Ontario. It will be increased in 2022 to \$21.8 million. At \$20 million, the grant was targeted to provide an average of \$55 to the estimated 368,000 rural students who comprise close to 20% of the total student population in the province. By increasing the grant to \$50 million, it would slightly more than double the grant per student, better serve 70 of the 72 district school boards, and still be a very small percent of the 2022 projected 26 billion Grant for Student Needs

- 2. Should the current moratorium on accommodation reviews and school closures be lifted, we ask that the moratorium remain in place for [schools that qualify for the RNEF](#) until a thorough review of the education funding formula is completed**

The RNEF has been a welcome supplement to the education funding formula. However, a thorough review is required to prevent the closure of schools in rural and northern communities where limited economies of scale make small and underutilized schools tempting targets for closures and consolidations. These force many students to attend schools in communities further away from home and threaten the quality of their school experience and the quality of life in their communities.

**3. Before templates required by the 2018 Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline (PARG) are developed, there be consultation with school boards and community groups including the Community Schools Alliance.**

A new Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline was released in April, 2018. It establishes the minimum standards that school boards must follow when each board adopts its own Pupil Accommodation Review Policy. Improvements in the 2018 PARG are the requirements that a school board must consider the impact of a proposed closure on the local community and, if one of the schools in a proposed review qualifies for the Rural and Northern Education Fund, the impact on the local economy. Each of these impact studies must follow a template provided by the Ministry of Education. Those impacts have not yet been developed.

## Resolution for Niagara-on-the-Lake Municipal Council

### Resolution

Whereas all students should have the opportunity to attend elementary and secondary school in their home community

Therefore, be it resolved that:

1. The province increase the Rural and Northern Education Fund (RNEF) to \$50 million;
2. Should the current moratorium on accommodation reviews and school closures be lifted, we ask that the moratorium remain in place for [schools that qualify for the RNEF](#) until a thorough review of the education funding formula is completed;
3. Before templates required by the 2018 Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline (PARG) are developed, there be consultation with school boards and community groups including the Community Schools Alliance.



## Community Schools Alliance

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[www.communityschoolsalliance.ca](http://www.communityschoolsalliance.ca)

May 31, 2022

Memo: All members of the Community Schools Alliance

Our constitution provides for an Annual Meeting of the Alliance to be held every August in conjunction with the Annual General Meeting of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. As you will recall, the 2020 Annual Meeting was cancelled because of the pandemic and the 2021 Annual Meeting was conducted virtually on Sunday, August 15, 2021.

This year we will hold a virtual Annual Meeting prior to the AMO AGM on **Tuesday, August 9, 2022 at 7 p.m.**

Following the Annual Meeting, we will be electing members to our Executive Committee. Information about registering for the virtual Annual Meeting and the election will be sent to you in late June.

Candidates for the Executive Committee must be either an elected member of a council whose municipality has joined the Community Schools Alliance or an individual who holds a personal membership as of July 1, 2022. A list of current members is in the footer below.

The Executive Committee is currently comprised of eleven (11) members. Because the three-year terms of three (3) of the current members expire August 31, 2022, there will be an election to fill those three (3) positions if there are more than three persons nominated.

The goals of the Community Schools Alliance are listed in our constitution which you will find on our website. If you support those goals and should you wish to be a candidate for election to our Executive Committee you must submit a nomination form by Monday, July 11, 2022. A blank nomination form is attached. Completed forms must be submitted to Vice-Chair Marcus Ryan ([mryan@zorra.ca](mailto:mryan@zorra.ca)) or Secretary-Treasurer Jim Collard ([jim@collards.com](mailto:jim@collards.com))

Doug Reycraft  
Chair, Community Schools Alliance  
181 Main Street  
Glencoe ON N0L1M0

Current Executive Committee Members: Chair Doug Reycraft, Vice-Chair Marcus Ryan, Meghan Chumut, Jim Collard, Denis Doyle, Patricia Greig, Stephen Harvey, Stephanie Jaworski, Caroline Lowery, Stephen Townsend, Marigay Wilkins

## **Call for Nominations 2022**

### **Community Schools Alliance**

Memo: Members of the Community Schools Alliance

From: Marcus Ryan, Vice-Chair and Jim Collard, Secretary-Treasurer

Please be advised that in accordance with the Constitution of the Community Schools Alliance, nominations to the Executive Committee of the Alliance are invited.

The three-year (3) terms of three (3) members of the Executive Committee will end August 31 of this year. Nominations to fill those three positions are being invited. A nominee must either be an individual member of the Community Schools Alliance or an elected official of a member municipality as of July 1, 2022. Should more than three people be nominated, an election will be held to fill the three positions.

A Nomination Form is attached.

The election will be held following the virtual Annual Meeting of the Community Schools Alliance on August 9, 2022 at 7 p.m.

All individuals and members of municipal councils who are members of the Alliance and who register to attend the Annual Meeting and election will be sent a ballot following the meeting.

The names of all qualified individuals who are duly nominated will appear on the ballot for election to the Executive Committee.

Please print, complete and forward a completed Nomination Form to Vice-Chair Marcus Ryan ([mryan@zorra.ca](mailto:mryan@zorra.ca)) or Secretary-Treasurer Jim Collard ([jim@collards.com](mailto:jim@collards.com)).

A completed Nomination Form must be received by Vice-Chair Marcus Ryan or Secretary-Treasurer Jim Collard no later than Monday, July 11, 2021. Nominations will not be accepted beyond that date.

There are currently eleven (11) members of the Executive Committee.

Section 5(g) of the Constitution establishes staggered terms for members of the Executive Committee. At this year's Annual Meeting three (3) members may be elected for three (3) year terms.

Section 5(i) of Constitution states: "The Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretary-Treasurer shall be elected by the members of the Executive Committee following the Annual Meeting."

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