

From: Rev. Allison Barrett George.

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I want to begin by quoting the well known writer and activist Jane Jacobs, whose advocacy for vibrant cities and distinct neighbourhoods made her one of the most respected voices in urban planning:

“Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.”

- Jane Jacobs

In that spirit, I am grateful for the opportunity to address the trustees and the community as a parent and to add my voice to those who have already spoken, in hopes that together we may create something that will indeed, provide something for everyone.

I would like to speak to the potential closing of Prince Philip School – one of the options I believe is still on the table. I would like to say why I think closing Prince Philip would be a great loss to the neighbourhood, to the community, to Hamilton and most especially to the families whose children attend there.

We all understand that there are financial considerations that are a part of this decision. And yet, I want to say that I hope that considerations other than financial play a larger role in these deliberations. I doubt that any of you are raising your children to believe that the only important consideration to take into account when trying to arrive at a decision is money. Indeed, I am trying to teach my child that things like respect for others, honoring diversity, openness to other cultures, caring for the environment, quality of life, closeness of family, the importance of friendships, honesty and integrity in how you speak and how you listen to each other are the highest values – and are the touchstones we should use when we try to decide what is most important in life.

How ironic it would be if the decisions about the very places where we try to inculcate and encourage the growth of these human qualities were made without considering them!

I want the trustees to take into account more than money. I want you to consider that Prince Philip serves a neighbourhood that is diverse socio-economically, ethnically, culturally and religiously where many children walk to school and are picked up by parents or grandparents, or ride their bikes safely through the side streets surrounding it. Within this diversity are many immigrant families from all over the world who bring a richness to Prince Philip's community that is unique to this area.

I want my children to grow up in a community that is a real representation of the world as it is in all its diversity, and of Hamilton as it really is. I want them to see that hard work and a commitment to education cuts across all lines and connects them and their classmates and their parents. This school has a shared purpose and a community spirit that is really unique. I believe this spirit exists because of its small size, its situation in the neighbourhood, its physical location nestled up under the mountain in an area that draws many people on foot to its doors, its socio economic mix and the rich wealth of backgrounds represented by its students and their families.

If it is combined or absorbed into another school in Westdale and on the other side of Main Street, its unique character will be lost. I also fear for children as young as 4 years old crossing such a major artery into Hamilton during rush hour, even when they are accompanied. It will change the nature of the way that children get to the school as well.

My children are in a program unique in the province, a jewel in Hamilton's crown, the Mandarin English bilingual program, which provides a vital link of language and culture to Chinese born Canadian children, something they cannot receive anywhere else in the province. Prince Philip's small size and "neighbourhood" nature provide the perfect cradle within which this very unique and special baby can rock. Transferred to another school, the program would be dwarfed and overwhelmed as would the children on the playground. Many of them now speak Mandarin to each other at play, but this uniqueness is very hard to maintain against a larger dominant culture. I have spent 4 years and countless hours learning Chinese myself and tutoring and coaching my own children (along with a village of help) to get my girls to JK still speaking and understanding Mandarin – and along comes Prince Philip with this AMAZING program. I know you say it would be "transferred" but an awful lot of learning and esteeming of a native language takes place in the in between times. I want my girls to have the unique environment of Prince Philip in which to love and learn about the language and culture of their birth.

My husband, Dr. Peter George was for 15 years the President of McMaster University; it's safe to say that he is passionate about education. In my capacity as a Parish Minister, I made developing the wholeness of the children under my care my biggest priority. I wanted to develop their conscience, their minds, their hearts, their social awareness and their conscience and their openness of spirit. We are both HUGE proponents of excellence in public education and so are the teachers at Prince Philip. This school has a spirit unlike any other. You can feel it the moment you walk through the door.

We could have chosen any school for our children. We didn't choose our excellent local school, Rousseau School; we didn't choose Lee Academy or Colin MacDonald. We didn't choose Hillfield. We chose Prince Philip.

I don't believe that closing one of the schools is the only option before us; it certainly is not the most creative, life-giving one. There are many ways of raising funds and thinking outside the box for solutions. Certainly it is possible to delay this decision for several years to give us all time to come up with more inspiring alternatives. I would certainly be willing to work on that. I believe we will all be enriched if all three schools stay open while we put our best minds to the opportunity at hand. I hope the trustees have the vision to see possibilities that have not yet been realized.

I'll close with the words of my 6 year old daughter Lily Rose George who just started in September and yet greets me with "Mama, I love my school!" when I pick her up every day after school. Before I left, she said "Mama, why can't I go and tell them not to close my school?" So I am telling you: Lily Rose says - 'Don't close my school!!!'

Thank you.