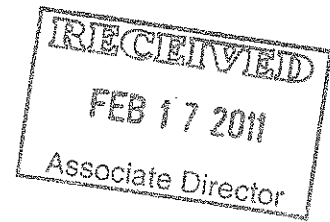


Friday February 11, 2011



Mr. Ken Bain  
Associate Director of Education  
100 Main Street West  
Hamilton ON  
L8P 1H6

Dear Mr. Bain:

RE: ARC / Parkside High School

Thank you for the letter that has been sent home with the students of Parkside High. While I appreciate what you have said in this letter, it is hard to not read between the lines and assume that this decision has already been made and this year of meetings is just to prepare students and parents for the inevitable.

As a parent, it is difficult to see the disappointment on the faces of my teenagers as they face closure of their school. For our family, the journey to Parkside was a little different, and I would like to share our Parkside experience with you.

We lived for 15 years on the centre mountain, mountain brow area of Hamilton. Our children attended Norwood School, for French immersion. When our third child entered Grade 2, it was obvious that the French immersion program was not suitable for his learning style. We decided to move him to our neighborhood school, Queensdale (at the time, Elizabeth McQueen was the Principal at Queensdale and she made this transition time so smooth that it was unnoticeable!), and our three other children chose to move schools as well at that time, to be able to stay together. All four of our children graduated from Queensdale and went on to SAGE Quest at Ryerson for middle school. Currently two remain at Ryerson, Grade 7 and 8.

When the time came to make the high school choice, our oldest was following the path of our neighborhood feeder school pattern, Westmount. Although the choices were made, subjects chosen, and it was June, neither my son, my husband and I, felt settled about this. Through a series of events that randomly came out of nowhere, we found ourselves at an information meeting for a proposed program that would continue the SAGE Quest program into High School. This meeting was at Parkside in Dundas.

I had to look up on a map to find the school. It was a June evening, warm and a beautiful breeze was blowing. I only mention that because the location of this school, no matter what time of year, is tranquil, picturesque and in the minds of many, very conducive to learning. Nestled under the escarpment, located beside the

driving park, it has a feeling of belonging and community that not many schools have. The students have access to great settings for outdoor learning under shade trees, art classes with natural vistas to sketch, running the track at the driving park, or my daughter's favourite, spending winter lunch hours skating at the ice rink located steps from the school. What other school in this Board can offer one of those choices, let alone all four? I have driven up many days and observed teachers leading classes outside with students sitting crosslegged, totally engaged in this style of learning. Or I have observed Mr. Gregoriou teaching etiquette and that art of tying a man's neck tie to his business students, on the lawn, once again, students totally engaged in this. Walking trips within minutes, lead to waterfalls and the Bruce Trail, great for gym or art classes.

Back to my original thoughts.....

We were met at the front door by student Ambassadors, a student program at Parkside that enables students to learn leadership skills, and directed to the library. We quickly realized that the school was not large, that from standing in the centre hall you could see the complete first floor level head off in three directions. As we sat through this initial meeting about QUEST, it wasn't the QUEST program so much that captured our attention, as it was the sense of community and caring, that this school, it's staff, and it's presenting students on that evening, exuded. The level of enthusiasm for learning, and acceptance of new students into the school (totally supported by the teacher/student mentorship program, PANTHER PACKS), and just getting involved, was tangible in the room that night. As we drove away from that meeting, my son said, "Mom, I want to go to that school". When I questioned him as to why, his response was that it just "felt right".

I wish I had counted how many times I have said under my breath, "I am so thankful for that night, and for the decision that we made the following day". Jonathan transferred his Grade 9 plans from Westmount to Parkside. He chose to not enroll in the QUEST program, but in mainstream. The first week of school was tough, he didn't know anyone, but with the help of the Panther Pack leaders and the great staff, he soon felt at home, and the next thing we knew, it was June! Yes, I drove back and forth from Hamilton Mountain to Dundas, twice a day, but it was worth it.

I remember a conversation with one of the math teachers, he spent every lunch hour in his room, offering help to students in math. He told me that if his students didn't do well in postsecondary math, it was his fault, for not enabling each of them to have access to understanding math concepts to the best of their ability. Jonathan had always been an average student, putting in as much or as little effort as he felt like that particular given day. ☺ However, Parkside has led him to excel academically, socially and he has stepped out to take on leadership roles. He has graduated from both Grade 9 and 10 with honours. ☺

In September 2009, our daughter followed her brother and entered Grade 9 at Parkside. She graduated Grade 9 with honours as well. SHE LOVES SCHOOL, and that is something that has been nurtured by her teachers, a love of learning.

In December 2009, we relocated our residence to Dundas, so we were closer to our high school of choice. It just made sense to have our older children closer to their peers.

My husband and I have had the privilege of being present for two Student Achievement Award Ceremonies at Parkside, held in November (2009, 2010). We were both impacted visually by the obvious fact that there were more students sitting in the awards section than the section of those not receiving awards. How many schools can speak to that?

From our perspective, one of the many things that is unique to Parkside is the sense of belonging from the Parkside school community. Being a smaller school, to us, has huge benefits. The teachers know almost all the students, at least by face, but most by name. That is huge. Students are not lost in the sea of faces. It is not just the smartest or the top athlete or the kid that is always in trouble that are most recognized. The students share a connection with almost all the teachers in some way, and also with the other students. What a support system that alone is.

When I read through the HWDSB website, what jumped out to me was the statement, "All students achieving their full potential". I truly believe that is what is happening at Parkside. Is bigger better, I don't know. I don't shop the bigger box stores, I am a traditional "support the local merchant", shopper. Comparatively speaking, is bigger best for the students, or is it the way schools are going these days, so it is just what needs to happen, regardless of the students? I think there is a case for both sides, but with the ARC, there will be no choice left for those who fit better in the smaller, community based environment of learning. How will this change impact the future students of Parkside?

I know this is a Board wide issue. I have walked the halls of many Hamilton High Schools, and yet see the character of location and community at Parkside, that isn't felt at those others.

For a Board that is on the leading edge of "Programs of Choice" for Ontario, it would be great if Parkside could be the centre of yet another choice. The mainstream programming could be partnered with for example "The Arts", supported by the huge foundation of art in the Dundas area (DVSA, potters, painters, theatre) or even the expansion of the Navy Seals or EcoChallenge courses offered at Parkside, into something bigger, supported by the great location (access to many natural environmental perks, Bruce Trail, escarpment, Dundas Valley Conservation Properties, Christie Conservation, bike trails... the list goes on).

So here we are, our next child is set to enter Grade 9 in September 2011. We are faced with a choice. Do we start him in Parkside, anticipating closure in 2013 and he would be moved, not a good choice for a 16 year old in my mind, or do enroll him in Westdale. Two choices of which neither appeal to us. The following year we will have the same choice, for our fourth child.

As the talks begin for the final outcome, I would hope that consideration is given to the impact on the students, not just the impact on the budget and the enrolment numbers. I plan to attend as many of the ARC meetings for our area as possible. However my husband and I are very involved in sustainable development projects in Haiti, and will be out of the country for these projects from time to time over the year.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Marcilyn Schultz". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Marcilyn Schultz  
7 Skyline Drive  
Dundas

cc: Paul Barwinski, Principal, Parkside High School  
Chair of the Board, Judith Bishop  
Ward 13 Trustee, Jessica Brennan  
Superintendent of Student Achievement, Krys Croxall