

**Community
Alliance for
Public
Education**



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**Principiis obsta...Finem respice / Resist the beginning... Consider the end
Diary of a Mad Trustee
Open Board Meeting on January 9th, 2008**

Well most of you already know that this meeting unfurled yet another round of school closure undertakings (pun intended). The very first time that our community met the new superintendent he was hellbent for leather telling us that our schools were surplus to requirements and about to be mothballed like ancient, out of date battle cruisers.

Lying in bed that night – not sleeping -gee I wonder why – I crafted the alternate speech he might have delivered in another time. As follows:

"I have been set the task of scanning the schools in this district with the aim of designing a list of those we can do without. It seems to me unduly severe and hurried to seek any decisions this night on a matter of such significance – but as I have been thinking long and loud about the current siege on public education and since my life has been given over to protecting its marvellous potential I have made several observations which will serve as my own distinctive set of recommendations around this issue.

I have presided in my career over many closures; I have seen the trajectory of public education travel downwards. I know that for all the sacrifice that closing schools and rubbishing neighbourhoods and communities has offered, we have had nothing to show but more of the same.

I have never witnessed any credible evidence that suggests that closing schools permits a substantial redirection of funds to other facilities in the districts. In fact – as we close school after school our financial woes multiply and our alarm grows.

It has never transpired that closing schools has enhanced the working and learning conditions in our schools.

I have come to believe that damning our small neighbourhood schools is irresponsible environmentally and socially – requiring as it does the transport of our kids farther and longer by bus and car. Our small schools provide a shelter for our children when they are away from their families and in our care.

Despite all claims to the contrary – virtually none of the panic that is being sewn in our district has anything to do with an authentic fiscal crisis. We are being made fools of by a calculated program designed to eliminate the public character of our education system – in order to permit the proliferation of private options. There are always those among us who view the free distribution of crucial services as a crime against the right to profit from human need.

If closing our schools is -as I have been assured- remedial, medicinal then it should be possible to declare the final tally – the full course of treatment – how many more closures before we can say we have reached a state of grace, before we are indeed cured – if what we have been told is true then there should be an answer to that question. But there is not. And that is because there is no end – the only goal is the shrinking of the public education system until it serves only those who cannot afford another option.

My purpose tonight is to regain my own belief in the system that has provided me and many like me with well remunerated and meaningful work. I have been fooled by the baseless claims that support the premise that all our wealth does not offer enough to nurture fine schools for all and that every community and neighbourhood has a right to quality, accessible free education. But not anymore. For me to announce a list of schools for shutdown would not advance our system one iota. The only conclusion I can draw is that participating in this approach is to participate in the end of days for public education. I am first and foremost a lifelong educator.

Therefore I recommend the following:

That this board joins with the community it serves and tell the government it will not make one more cut or one more closure.

That we immediately consult our school community partners to develop a new policy that recognises the need to confirm the viability of our schools rather than one that only seeks to close them

That this board leads from the front and submit a budget that reflects the real needs of all our schools, our services and our programs.

You as trustees risk being dismissed but truly – if you do not do the right thing by our families and employees it is as if you are already gone.

Thank you for welcoming me to your community this evening. I look forward to caring for the students and the staff of this district. I hope this comes as a pleasant surprise. I will need your support. Somehow I already feel that I have it and even more important that I deserve it.”

So there you are – the speech that never was. Instead we are now scrutinising four schools in our district – Koksilah (again, sigh...) Ecole Mill Bay, Tansor and Somenos with a mind to close and sell.

The next two months will be dominated by the view that if school communities can conjure up the right combination of facts and figures they can ward off this assault – but logically anything that they can provide, the district already knows – they are just interpreting the info in a way that feeds the frenzy to cut and close. You can try to confuse them with fact but it will be a hard row to hoe. This is about imposing our will over a governing authority. It is that simple – and that brutally harsh.

Do we want our schools to evaporate? Do we want our children warehoused in larger schools that exist far from their neighbourhoods? Do we know how to fight for our communities? Can we learn? The hard fought battle for universal schooling for everyone is about to be lost during a period of fabulous wealth if we don't. What would our parents and grandparents say? It does not bear thinking about.

What must we do now?

Your Trustee pal,
Eden

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