

Accommodation Review- Sudbury South

Concerning Future Plans for Monetville Public School

Presentation to Rainbow District School Board, October 18th, 2010

My name is Susan Crane. My husband and I own and operate Crane's Wilderness Lodge on the French River. Our daughter, Gracie, is in Grade 2 at Monetville P.S. My co-presenter is Chantel Wors. Mrs. Wors and her husband have two children at Monetville P.S.- Hunter is in Grade 1, and Hailey is in Grade 3.

It is my intention here tonight to suggest that the Rainbow District School Board suspend plans to renovate or "right-size" Monetville P.S. in its present location.

Instead, the Board should continue to maintain Monetville P.S. until funds are available to build a new "right-sized" school, French River Public School, in Noelville, the geographic and administrative center of the Municipality of French River. Below are outlined the political, economic, and environmental considerations which support this recommendation.

Monetville P.S. no longer serves only the immediate community of Monetville, the community it was originally built to serve. It now services a much larger geographical area- the Municipality of French River. Its present location in the hamlet of North Monetville no longer makes sense, and is, in fact, a major obstacle to establishing a greater presence for Rainbow District School Board in the French River area.

History

T.S.A. Martland #1 was originally built in 1949 to serve the English-speaking families of the Monetville community. At that time, the English-speaking "enclave" of Monetville was surrounded by the much larger Francophone communities of Alban and Noelville to the south-west, and Lavigne and Verner to the north. (There was also a largely English-speaking community in the French River Station area, on Hwy. 64, south of the Hwy. 64 and 69 intersection, but those students had a local school- the Allen-Bigwood School.)

French or English, most families were employed in agriculture or forestry.

In the 1960s and 1970s, many people, both French and English, left the area for education and because employment opportunities were better and more remunerative in the larger centers.

The Sudbury Board of Education took over the school in 1972, and it was re-named Monetville P.S.

Present Situation

The demographic of what is now the Municipality of French River has changed dramatically in the last 60 years.

English-speaking families are now spread throughout the Municipality of French River, and the number of families who report English as a first language in the home is slowly increasing in our area, especially in the Noelville area. Almost half of our students are now coming from Noelville, with the rest divided between Alban, Monetville, and Dokis. **(See Appendix 4 attached, or as part of powerpoint presentation).**

While many people from French River have always commuted to Sudbury, the imminent completion of the 4-laning of Hwy. 69/400 from Sudbury to Hwy. 64 will/is making our area even more attractive to people willing to commute to Sudbury, and that trend is likely to continue into the future.

Those of us who teach at Monetville P.S. have noticed that the occupations of the parents who send their children to us are becoming more diverse. Some have home-based businesses. Some are professional and semi-professional people who have Northern Ontario as their service or sales area, and they find French River to be a good base of operations. We have noticed an increase in families from Southern Ontario, who are moving to the area because they can buy affordable rural and/or waterfront properties here.

Instead of being at the hub of the community, where it was originally situated, the school is now on the extreme eastern periphery of its catchment area. The school is now isolated (15 kms.) from the center of the municipality which it serves. (See Appendix #1 attached, or as part of slide show)

Challenges Posed By the Present Location of Monetville P.S.

1. Bus Commute:

The majority of our students at Monetville P.S. now come from either the Hwy. 69/Alban area (a distance of 45 kms.) or Noelville (15 kms.). Students are also coming from Dokis Reserve (31 kms.). The average length of bus commute for students is 80 mins./day. Many students coming from Hwy. 69 and the Alban area are on the bus for 2 hours/day or more. At the present time, 96% of students are bused to the school, with only one family of walkers. The long bus commute, especially from the Alban area, is a challenge for behavioral students, and for our younger students.

2. Volunteers, Lunch Supervisors, Parents:

The school has difficulty attracting and keeping both parent volunteers and part-time paid help for our various programs because of our isolated location. Volunteers must consider the cost and the time spent to get here. Parents must have reliable transportation to get to parent interviews, special nights such as movie night or literacy nights, or to pick up their child if he/she gets sick in the middle of the day. We have had limited success in attracting prospective parents to programs such as Early Years, which ran for several years at the school, only to be cancelled because of low attendance. Again, families with one car, or with no car, are unable to get to our school because of its location.

3. Cost of Travelling for Local Field Trips:

In order to go anywhere from the present location, school administration must pay for the cost of bussing, whether it is to go skating at the arena in the winter time, visit the fire station or police station, or go to the cenotaph for Remembrance Day activities.

Advantages of Relocating our school to Noelville

1. Greater Presence in French River

The school would have a much higher profile in the area by relocating to Noelville, and we would be much more attractive to prospective parents seeking a school for their entry-level child.

Our only competitor for students, Ecole St. Antoine (Conseil scolaire catholique du Nouvel-Ontario), is now the only French-language school in French River, having absorbed students from its sister school in Alban in 1998, when that school was closed. In recent years, St. Antoine has relaxed its French-language requirement, and is now accepting students from English-language homes, even if neither parent is French-speaking.

The number of elementary French students in French River is declining, while the number of elementary English students in French River is stable or slowly, but steadily, increasing. (See Appendices #2 and #3, attached, or as part of slide show)

St. Antoine has its equivalent of the Early Years program, and last year experimented with a before and after-school program, another draw for prospective parents.

If Monetville P.S. were to relocate to Noelville, we could possibly re-institute an Early Years program, and offer an after-school program.

2. Opportunities for Student Involvement/Activities

- a) If the school were located in Noelville, the following sites would be within walking distance: the public library, the arena, businesses for a Grade 7/8 co-op program, seniors' building for student volunteer work, the cenotaph, police station, fire station
- b) If the school were located in Noelville, many students would be able to stay after school for extra-curricular activities such as sports or music

Economic Advantages to R.D.S.B

1. Cost of Bussing

The cost of bussing would most certainly be reduced. Many students in Noelville would become walkers. The cost of bussing students from the

West Arm and Alban areas would be reduced. We now have two busses picking up students in the Noelville and Alban areas and each bus is driving them 30 kms. per day *just from Noelville to the school*.

Students from Dokis Reserve would have a slightly longer commute, about 20 mins./day longer. If a relocation of the school were to become reality, the Dokis community should be fully informed and consulted from the outset.

2. Structural Costs

Noelville does have a sewage system; therefore there would be no need for installation of, and maintenance of, a septic system. Noelville does not have municipal water, so a new school would be on a well system.

However, Noelville does not have problems with well water, such as we are currently experiencing at Monetville P.S.

3. Overall Future Costs

While the cost of building a new, energy-efficient, “right-sized” school would certainly be expensive, so will the cost of retrofitting an aging, energy-guzzling building which is not fully handicapped accessible. At the present time, the Board has estimated current renewal costs for Monetville P.S. at over \$ 2.2 million dollars. We must ask ourselves if the current location warrants such an expense.

4. Environmental Considerations

A new energy-efficient school would reduce the carbon footprint of the school itself. Furthermore, the reduction in bus distances would reduce carbon emissions in the atmosphere, and many students would walk to school rather than riding a bus.

5. Health and Safety Concerns

We are currently experiencing problems with well water at the school, in spite of the installation of an expensive water treatment system. Until very recently, we were drinking bottled water. The maintenance and monitoring of this system is costing the Board a great deal of money, whether done by a private agency or by Board employees.

There are other health and safety concerns with an aging building such as Monetville, such as asbestos in ceiling tiles, and a leaky roof which has contributed to mould contamination next to a basement classroom.

6. Accessibility Issues

Monetville P.S. is not fully accessible for persons with disabilities. Even if the oldest part of the building is torn down in the “right-sizing” process, there will still be no access to the gym from the main floor of the building for wheelchairs, except by going outside the school, which would be a safety concern, especially in the winter. This issue will have to be addressed in any renovation of the school, and it would no doubt be costly.

I urge the R.D.S.B. to take the above-mentioned points into consideration before spending a great deal of taxpayers’ money on “right-sizing” Monetville P.S.

Money would be better spent on relocating the school to the center of French River.

There is a future for English-language education in French River, but our school needs to be visible in the center of the community, not out on the periphery.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to express my views here tonight.