

Good Evening. It is my pleasure to speak to you tonight not only as a parent of two former MacLeod Graduates but also as an EA at MacLeod for the past 22 years. You might think it is a long time to stay in one school. To be honest, I have had many opportunities to change positions, offers from other Principals, but MacLeod is my home and it is my wish and my hope to retire from there, but not for awhile yet. I feel that my children were incredibly lucky to attend MacLeod, received great elementary education, forged life long friendships and had the opportunity to participate in a wide variety of extra curricular activities, just like the students of today. With a staff of 45, talents and interests are diverse so we have and have had chess and skateboarding clubs, curling and baseball teams, drama and sewing clubs, choirs, bands, soccer teams, drumming and guitar groups, basketball and volleyball teams, public speaking, spelling bee and rhythmic gymnastics to name a few. For some students, this is an opportunity that might not otherwise be available to them. Yes, we have a big staff. But we are a team; our connection is strong and goes far beyond good working relationships. There are many benefits to having a large staff. Having two and sometimes more teachers at each grade level provides us with some flexibility to match students with teacher personalities when making class lists for the next year. Having a grade partner to teach with is most helpful to teachers when doing their planning so that ideas and units can be shared and is cost effective when going on field trips when we can fill the bus. I have always felt that MacLeod is like a family and I mean that in two ways. First is the big picture. The MacLeod family as a community has a strong parent commitment. I am talking about the folks who find time to volunteer for field trips, helping out in the classroom, providing the breakfast program and doing an

incredible job of raising funds for and with our kids. These parents are not just friends with the staff, but are well known to the kids and many kids know them by their first name. Parents that are new come through our doors and are quick to sense the atmosphere as one of caring and incredible support. They feel and see an environment of acceptance, inclusion and friendship that is shared among classes and with our special needs students. I know too, first hand, because that has been much of my job while at MacLeod, to ensure the smooth integration of special children into regular classrooms. I have seen superb peer tutoring, great sportsmanship, heart-warming inclusion and special bonds formed... making impacts that I believe will be life long and in many cases life altering. I have seen incredible nurturing and support when an autistic child joins a class or perhaps a student struggles with tourettes, down syndrome, cerebral palsy, a learning disability, diabetes, muscular dystrophy, spina bifida, anaphylaxis allergies or cancer. Or when a classmate is hit by a transport while riding his bike early in the summer and becomes an amputee at the tender age of 8. When he is finally able to come to school his classmates take turns pushing him in the wheelchair until he gets his prosthetic leg and then on their own they modify their games so that not only can he play, but he doesn't lose or feel left out because he kind of hops now and can't really run very well. I know, not just because he is my neighbour but because he is a MacLeod Mustang. Many times I have been brought to tears when I am witness to a heartfelt hug between a student who is hurting and one that is ready to help make it better. I remember well when my son was in grade two and I would pass him in the hall and notice the wet marks on his shirt sleeve. I knew then that his classmate had had another of many seizures and he got down on the floor with him and held his head until his mom arrived. And you know what else, it didn't matter that the little fellow

would likely wet his pants during the seizure. Nobody in that class ever cared about that, that's just the way it was. This is what our kids do when a classmate needs some help. MacLeod is known for having great kids and they learn compassion and empathy at a young age and it just grows. I have seen it all. These are some of the great kids that pass through our doors. These are some of the special kids whose parents put them nervously on the bus and pray that when they get off the bus at MacLeod, they will be well and lovingly looked after and successful. And they are. We make sure of that and our kids make sure of it. Our kids have heart. Secondly is the MacLeod Family as a family, which I am incredibly proud to be a part of. This is the group that rallies when a co-worker needs a boost because of a family hardship or when a loved one passes away and the show of support is touching and overwhelming. I know, because when I lost my dad a few years ago, not only did the staff rally to be there for me, but many parents of the kids I worked with and even parents of kids I didn't work with were there to hold me up even though it was mid July and everyone was on holidays. I was very grateful for that support and to be a part of that team. A short time later I was again in a position to feel the love of the MacLeod family this time when my husband had a Heart attack and required bi pass surgery. Again visits, phone calls, flowers, cards, meals...from staff and parents alike. The same group of staff and parents that purchased return tickets for my son to fly home from Calgary to see his dad after the surgery. The nicest thing anyone has ever done for me and something I will never forget. This kind of support isn't just between staff. MacLeod is home to the Pay if Forward initiative and monthly character building and through the program we model paying it forward to people we don't know, but people who need it. We have fund raised for

numerous charities and needy families, fire victims, wounded war heroes, Elgin Street Mission clients, food bank recipients, Alzheimer's Society, Heart and Stroke Foundation, Easter Seals and Pet Save are but a few that MacLeod students, families and staff have reached out and helped. Our students have been made aware of the circumstances that children around the world face. For many years we participated in Operation Christmas child where students brought in small gifts that were packed in shoes boxes for needy children in Africa. Another time we had a reading afternoon to raise money to help outfit a school in the Congo that badly needed books. We were there to raise funds when disaster struck Haiti as well.

..... And closer to home, I remember last year when one of our kids had his bike stolen during the last week of school. Some of the staff got together and bought him a new bike and a swanky new helmet so he would have a happy summer. This staff doing nice things for people is not something new. Many of the staff brings food, clothes and sports equipment from home for kids that need it. Parents doing nice things for kids isn't new either. Graduation dresses, dress pants, shirts, ties, shoes, hair does, snowsuits and winter boots have been anonymously purchased for students who are in need year after year. On grilled cheese and hot dog days less fortunate kids end up with a treat on their desk because our parents know everyone can't afford a special lunch and they don't like to see anyone feel left out. Yes we have a lot of kids. But guess what. We know them by name and we know our kids and we know their stories. We know the ones who need some extra TLC and the ones who might need to have an hours sleep because of a difficult night at home. The gals in the annex know the little ones and the staff in the main knows the bigger ones. It is such a benefit to have a big staff, that means many eyes on the students and I believe we are more likely to catch those

that are struggling. It gives kids that are having troubles the opportunity to share with a staff they feel comfortable with because there are lots of us to pick from. Having a big staff has given us the opportunity to provide small group instruction especially for those primary students that are struggling in reading. Is it worth it? You bet it is... The result is EQAO scores above the provincial average. As we all know technology today is ever changing and is where it's at!! We have a staff with technology wizards on board who are willing to partner and provide leadership and sharing with those that aren't so technologically able. Our kids can only benefit and are able to then enhance their learning through technology. MacLeod deals with many Community agencies all of who want their kids placed at MacLeod. We are a magnet for kids, especially those that might need a little extra. Agencies know the staff at MacLeod work hard to do their best to provide for our kids. It is no wonder that we were ranked in the top ten best elementary schools in Canada by Parent magazine. We rock at MacLeod. Ask any of the students participating in the talent show or the grade 8s who work hard to provide a song and dance routine for the annual MacLeod Idol. By far my favourite day of the year. Ask Emily, a former graduate with Downs Syndrome and Tourettes who in her grade 8 integration class joined the most popular group of girls to bravely get up on stage perform an ABBA routine. Having little rhythm and difficulty remembering the sequence of moves, her group totally modified what easily could have been difficult and the most talked about routine into one that Emily could master. Did any of those girls mind? Absolutely not. And, they won the respect of all the grade 8's and their teachers for putting the needs of Emily before theirs. This is the same Emily whose parents were amazed and most pleased when out shopping and teachers would stop and talk to Emily,

teachers they didn't know, but who knew their daughter. You see, we know our kids. The MacLeod Family is an inclusive one, we have a nice blend of variety of cultures amongst the children and I believe we do a great job of meeting the needs of the entire community. It works at MacLeod and it works well. How do I know? Supply teachers want to come back. They always tell Sandra in the office how nice our kids are. When teachers go on maternity leave there are always dozens of applicants for the positions because MacLeod is the place to be. I know because the kids keep coming back. They come back in high school and some even when in college and university, sometimes when things aren't so well and they are looking for a little guidance and maybe a hug from a trusted and familiar face but more often when things are going well and they want to celebrate with those teachers who saw the best in them and never gave up. They come back hoping to do a co-op placement with us. And, they come back with memories. They come back and talk about how in the winter of grade 6 they spent a week outside during polar bear week building quinzhees, making fires to cook over and carving snow snakes out of wood to play games with!

Warmer days spent outside with the robins and chickadees singing in the bush, learning in the peaceful atmosphere of the outdoor classroom is a common place to find classes these days. If they are lucky, one of our rabbits might hop along while a class is going on. What can get any better than that.

I guess my time is near up....I could go on. I have stories that would give you goose bumps and bring you to tears, but I am not that brave and besides I am an ugly crier. Still, I hope you got my message. Yes, I am passionate about MacLeod. It is a great school and I am very proud to be a part of the MacLeod Family. Thank you for this opportunity.