

Maynooth parents launch campaign to save their school

By Tony Pearson

The parent council at Maynooth Public School isn't in favour of closing their local school. They've raised new points against a school consolidation in North Hastings.

About a quarter of their students self-identify as First Nations or Metis peoples. To support such students, the Maynooth Public School has incorporated elements of Indigenous culture into their curriculum.

A Metis elder visits the school regularly to tell the stories of her people. Indigenous issues are also used in exercises to strengthen life skills, such as problem-solving.

The school reflects its community. The council can be seen through many community partnerships the school has forged.

It noted its close relationship with Hastings Highlands Township, whose new municipal building houses both a well-stocked library and a state of the art gymnasium. Both are used regularly by school students.

The gym, enabling quality hours of physical activity as pushed by the Ministry of Education, underlines another of the themes stressed in a letter written by the council to the Hastings-Prince Edward District School Board (HPEDSB). It suggests a rural school like Maynooth allows for opportunities for healthy lifestyles by its students.

The council just completed a fundraiser for an outdoor classroom, complete with art and music. It is scheduled to be built later this year. A lot of the money came from a jam-packed community concert at the Hastings Highlands Centre.

In addition, family representatives work with the Bancroft Area Forest Industry Association (BAFIA) to make sure school students learn about the environment and sustainable forest use. The school is now pursuing a grant to develop education in resource stewardship.

The school council notes other community relationships with community organizations such as the North Hastings Early Years Centre. It will provide access to a licensed daycare program this fall. This partnership is bringing family support programs, such as family literacy and violence prevention, to the school in turn. The parent council suggested the percentage of the school space that is used, compared to its full capacity is underestimated. It noted that enrollment figures have held steady for years, and are projected to remain so, or even increase, over the next 20 years. It asked for further detail on how the HPEDSB calculated the school's utilization rate. It maintained that the school is effectively using its space.

It suggests a school shutdown isn't justified.

Along with parents in Coe Hill and Hermon, Maynooth parents are concerned about transportation. They asked how much additional time students will have to spend travelling to and from their new school in Bird's Creek or Bancroft. They estimate children as young as three may have to spend an extra hour on a school bus.

Hastings Highlands council is getting involved in the struggle to keep Maynooth Public School open. It will hold a public brainstorming meeting later this month to discuss how the community can secure the future of the school.