

Parent starts petition to allow Madawaska students to attend Whitney Public School



by MICHAEL RILEY Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

A petition was started on Jan. 8 on change.org by Madawaska resident Lynsey Aleck to allow school aged children in her town to attend Whitney Public School, which they are currently not allowed to do under Renfrew County District School Board regulations. As of Jan. 17, her petition had garnered 182 signatures. RCDSB communications manager Jonathan Laderoute responds to the petition's complaint. Aleck started the petition titled "Allow the children in Madawaska the option to attend Whitney Public School?" on change.org on Jan. 8. The petition explains why Aleck started it up; the fact that children in Madawaska are not allowed to attend Whitney Public School, even though they can attend St. Martin of Tours Catholic School, which shares the same building. Their only

option for attending public school is to go to Sherwood Public School in Barry's Bay. Due to the fact that the two schools are in the same building and Whitney is closer than Barry's Bay for these kids to attend public school, Aleck contends that many parents are outraged. She says that parents who have raised these concerns with the RCDSB have been told there is no transportation available to get these kids to and from Whitney Public School, which the parents believe isn't true and could easily be rectified. They say that the children from Madawaska who attend St. Martin of Tours Catholic School share the same bus as children from Whitney Public School. While the cut off line between Madawaska and Whitney is along Hwy 60 at Paplinskie Road, which is roughly five minutes outside of town, they contend that the school bus that ferries the kids attending St. Martin of Tours goes right by Paplinskie Road. A petition was started on Jan. 8 on change.org by Madawaska resident Lynsey Aleck to allow school aged children in her town to attend Whitney Public School, which they are currently not allowed to do under Renfrew County District School Board regulations. As of Jan. 17, her petition had garnered 182 signatures. RCDSB communications manager Jonathan Laderoute responds to the petition's complaint. Aleck started the petition titled "Allow the children in Madawaska the option to attend Whitney Public School" on change.org on Jan. 8. The petition explains why Aleck started it up; the fact that children in Madawaska are not allowed to attend Whitney Public School, even though they can attend St. Martin of Tours Catholic School, which shares the same building. Their only option for attending public school is to go to Sherwood Public School in Barry's Bay. Due to the fact that the two schools are in the same building and Whitney is closer than Barry's Bay for these kids to attend public school, Aleck contends that many parents are outraged. She says that parents who have raised these concerns with the RCDSB have been told there is no transportation available to get these kids to and from Whitney Public School, which the parents believe isn't true and could easily be rectified. They say that the children from Madawaska who attend St. Martin of Tours Catholic School share the same bus as children from Whitney Public School. While the cut off line between Madawaska and Whitney is along Hwy 60 at Paplinskie Road, which is roughly five minutes outside of town, they contend that the school bus that ferries the kids attending St. Martin of Tours goes right by Paplinskie Road to get to Madawaska, and so the no bussing claim by the board is without merit in their minds. The petition ends with the following two questions; should the people of South Algonquin not have a choice as to where they send their children to school? Why should only a part of the community be allowed to use the public school but yet the whole community is welcome at the catholic school, which shares the same building and bussing? It also urges the school board to change the regulation and allow these students to attend Whitney Public School. Aleck told Bancroft This Week on Jan. 15 that she first became aware of this situation a few months ago when she and some other parents from Whitney and Madawaska got talking about where their kids go to school and their options. "I was not aware that children from Madawaska couldn't attend Whitney Public School as we send our son Ryder to the Catholic school [St. Martin of Tours]. Our cousin said she inquired about enrolling her children at Whitney Public School but was told she was past the cut off point since she lives in Madawaska," she says. Aleck is not directly affected by this regulation, as her son Ryder attends St. Martin of Tours, but she is concerned that it does affect other parents and children who may want to send their kids to the public school. While Aleck has not personally spoken to anyone at the RCDSB about it, she says she hopes that they hear her and the other parents as a community and give them the option to send their children to Whitney Public School, not only for current children but for future students and residents of Madawaska. "Once our petition reaches 200 signatures, I intend to reach out to the RCDSB and show them the amount of support we have in changing this matter. I would like to talk to them about their views and reasoning for this seemingly ridiculous regulation and hopefully we can come to either an understanding or a change," she says. As of Jan. 18, Aleck's petition had garnered 182 signatures of the 200 that it had been seeking. The petition can be found at

www.change.org/p/renfrew-county-district-school-board-allow-the-children-in-madawaska-the-option-to-attend-whitney-public-school. Laderoute explains that there are a couple of issues at play here with this situation of Madawaska students not being able to attend Whitney Public School. "Whitney Public School is located within St. Martin of Tours Catholic School, which is the Algonquin Lakeshore Catholic District School Board. Their school boundaries are different from ours. Generally speaking, each school board's boundaries differ from one another, regardless of neighbouring proximity," he says. Laderoute says that additionally transportation is provided by Tri-Board [Student Transportation Services] and they may have criteria that influence the ability of a student to qualify for transportation, either regardless of their address or because of their address. Laderoute also reveals that the attendance boundary for students who had previously attended Madawaska Public School, which closed down in 2015, was designated to Sherwood Public School in Barry's Bay. He says that a cross boundary process is available for families who wish to have their children attend outside their boundary school. "Overall, school boards may move attendance boundaries and programs to balance enrolment between over and underutilized schools as part of an Accommodation Review Process, which is currently paused by the Ministry [of Education]."