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School closure a bad idea

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I am a Grade 10 student at Richmond School in southwest Saskatchewan and I am concerned about the new Chinook School Division's plans and ideas.

It has recently been brought to my attention that my school and five others are under review to see if they should be closed. I don't see why this is happening. The reason we have been given is that it costs a lot of money to run a school and we don't have enough students to make it worthwhile. I don't think this is right; a school is not a business. It is not created to make money or sell a product. A school is built to educate young children's minds. It should not matter how much it costs, but how well the children are being educated. What good is a school if it does not educate the students properly and provide them with a good quality of life?

In my opinion, Richmond School does a very good job of educating its students. We have a very qualified staff here, including a science teacher, math teacher, French teacher/art teacher, shop teacher, and lots of teacher aides to help students who have special needs.

We also have recently renovated home economics and science labs, a computer room that is up to speed with technology and can hold a large number of students, large classrooms, a new shop, and quite a large library. Also, we are continually renovating and upgrading our school; the newest improvements include computers in every classroom and the sidewalk in front of the school was replaced.

Thanks to smaller grades, all children can join sports teams and other after-school activities. All students are encouraged to join volleyball teams, yearbook committee, student representative council and other activities. You are guaranteed a chance to play and have fun. This does not happen in bigger schools because there are so many kids. This leaves many children feeling left out and sometimes useless because they aren't the sports hero or lead in all the plays.

Smaller grades also give children a better education because they allow more one-on-one time with teachers. If a student is having a hard time learning something, the teachers are more than willing to help the student out. Classes also tend to be more enjoyable because there is time for class discussions that help students understand what they are learning and voice their own opinions. This gives students the best education possible.

Our school also is a great place for kids with special needs to grow up. As well as lots of teacher aides to help them out, the small classes allow these kids to get extra attention from the teachers, giving them the best education possible. Also,

they get to live their lives as normally as possible because everybody knows everybody in our school and we are willing to help the kids who need it. Plus, they get to be on sports teams and councils that they normally would not get to be on.

Having special-needs children also helps all of the children within the school. Kids learn how to respect other people's needs and to treat everyone with respect. All of this does not happen in bigger schools. The special-needs children do not get the attention and quality of life in bigger classrooms as they do in smaller ones. Why would the school division want to take that away from a kid?

Bullying is also not as much of a problem in smaller schools. I am not saying that it does not happen, but it is easier for the staff to find out about it and deal with it. Plus, when you know everybody in your school, you tend to become friends with all, or most of them, so you do not want to see anyone get hurt. Students stick up for each other, allowing all children to feel safe within the school.

As a student who rides the bus, I am worried that the closure of our school would lead to a longer bus ride. Lots of kids already ride the bus for a long period. Closing a school could mean, for some students, an hour to an hour and a half ride to and from the nearest school. Not only would this be tiring for students, it could lead to the decrease of student participation in after-school activities. This would in turn lead to fewer active students and kids would not make as many friends as they can now. All of this would lower the quality of the students' lives.

The school is also the heart of many small communities. If the division were to close it, that would mean the end of the community. Many people will move away to big cities, and in our case, to Alberta. The provincial government is continually trying to bring people back to the province, so why is the division considering closing schools? If the division really wants to bring people back to Saskatchewan shouldn't it be putting more money into the schools instead of closing them?

One final thought: if people hate the idea of closing a school so much, maybe it's not such a good idea.

- Hellman contributed this article to Minus 20, a page featuring the views of a group of Saskatchewan young people that appears regularly.

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