

Board of School Trustees
School District No. 57 (Prince George)

PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEETING

SHADY VALLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

March 27, 2003

MINUTES

Present:

Bill Christie, Chairperson
Lyn Hall Vice-Chairperson
Carlene Keddie, Trustee
Michelle Marrelli, Trustee
Fred McLeod, Trustee
John Rustad, Trustee
Patricia Wick Thibault, Trustee

Bryan Mix, Secretary-Treasurer
Kerry Firth, Assistant Superintendent
Wendy De Marsh, Executive Assistant (Recorder)

Approximately 80 people in the audience.

1. Opening Remarks

Mr. Christie called the meeting to order at 7:08 p.m., reviewed the agenda and the rules of order for the meeting and then gave a brief overview of the district's budget and enrolment situation.

2. Board Presentation

Mr. Firth gave a presentation comprised of information about:

- the consultation process
 - the decline in the district's enrolment
 - the district's budget shortfall
 - the components of the budget solution
 - the savings to be achieved by closing Shady Valley Elementary School
 - the reasons for selecting Shady Valley Elementary School for proposed closure
 - a summary of written submissions received to date
 - when the decision about closing the school would be made
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3. Shady Valley Elementary School Parent Advisory Council Presentation

Lily Bachand expressed concerns about students' safety at Hart Highlands Elementary, the length of the bus ride that would be required and the impact that closing the school would have on the community. She noted that Shady Valley had been a receiving school when Hart Highway closed at the beginning of the school year, so the children from that school would have to move twice in two years if Shady Valley were to close. She expressed concern that it would be too hard on children to move from a small country school to a very large city school.

Marie Lorenz spoke about the importance of the school to the community and the benefits to children of attending a small rural school.

Mike Carson gave a presentation on the link between school size and student achievement and between income levels and reading difficulties; he explained that children from lower socio-economic levels achieved greater academic success in smaller schools.

Janice Elsenheimer commented on the special qualities of the school and its importance to the community.

Alicia Lock spoke about the warm and caring environment of the school

Gary Archibald expressed concern about Hart Highway students, who had just moved to the school this year when their school closed, having to move a second time. He expressed concern about the effect that closing the school would have on students and staff.

Val Taylor spoke about the importance of the school to the students and families from the Shelley reserve, and the good relationship that had been built between the band and the school.

Anita deDreu spoke about the safe, secure environment of the school and the negative impact of long bus rides on students. She raised concerns about the students' safety if they moved to Hart Highlands and spoke about the positive, personalized learning environment at Shady Valley.

4. Speakers' List

Lheidli T'enneh Elder Ron Seymour spoke about his experiences at a residential school and expressed concern about students from the reserve making the transition from a small rural school to a large city school. He asked the Board to be creative in finding a way to keep the school open.

Lheidli T'enneh Chief Barry Seymour expressed concern about children's health and safety on the long bus rides that would be required for them to attend Austin Road or Hart Highlands. He requested that if the children from the band had to attend one of those schools, that their language and culture be taught, that the quality of education

they received be as good as or better than that at Shady Valley, that they spend no extended periods outside unsupervised and that the staff of their new school(s) receive cross-cultural training.

Dawn Murphy expressed concern about how the children lower-income, rural families would fit in at schools in town and about their safety at a large school.

Vannessa West spoke about the support provided by the school to students and their families and the positive relationship between the band and the school.

Kenneth Seymour expressed concern that the children from the reserve may be subjected to harassment and bullying and spoke about the extra support that is available to children in a smaller school.

Ben Berland expressed the Aboriginal Education Board's concerns about long bus rides, separating children from their community, the potential for racism and bullying at city schools and the loss of the support that Shady Valley provided for aboriginal students.

MLA Pat Bell commented on the unique, rural environment of the school and his belief that it should qualify for the Ministry of Education's small community grant. He explained that he and MLA Shirley Bond were working with the Minister of Education to try to find a solution.

5. Other Speakers

Mr. Christie opened the floor to anyone who wished to speak. A number of people came forward and raised the following concerns and questions:

- Comments about the strong sense of family and community.
- Comment that keeping the school open pays dividends not just to the community but to the province as well.
- Comment in favour of closing school, as the Board has indicated that schools of less than 150 students are not financially viable; keeping the school open would take resources away from all the other students in the district.

6. Closing Remarks

Trustees commented on the uniqueness of Shady Valley Elementary and its community, and the difficulty of maintaining necessary service levels at the school without the small community grant.

The meeting adjourned at 10:30 p.m.