

Councillor Bill Armstrong
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To: Community and Protective Services Committee

25 May 2016

Councillor V. Ridley (Chair)
Councillor B. Armstrong
Councillor M. Salih
Councillor H.L. Usher
Councillor J. Zaifman

Dear Committee Members,

The Province of Ontario recently launched a consultation process to determine the best course of action with regard to the **Robarts Provincial School for the Deaf** and the **Amethyst Provincial Demonstration School (for severe learning disabilities)**. Both schools are located in London, Ontario, at 1515 Cheapside Street, near Huron & Highbury.

Recently, the **City of Belleville unanimously approved a motion** during Council on March 29, 2016 **requesting that the Sagonaska Provincial Demonstration School in Belleville continue operation.** My hope is to pass a similar Motion, firmly planting the City of London's support for the continued operation of Robarts and Amethyst.

I am aware that this is a provincial jurisdiction matter, however I can also see that the **closure of these schools** would have **social and economic impacts at the local level.**

Demonstration Schools

The Demonstration Schools are a **last resort option for parents**, whose children still lag behind **at least three grades** after all support options have been exhausted in the mainstream school system. The Provincial Demonstration Schools have an excellent track record of catching up students, and providing them with the supports and knowledge they need to succeed in the mainstream system and in life.

Programming at Amethyst is around the clock, with all students required to live in residence during their stay. This is a unique and crucial component which ensures that students leave Amethyst with the necessary life and social skills to succeed and thrive in their local board schools.

Children are given individualized learning programs and children excel at demonstration schools. What home school boards could not do over many years- these demonstration school have been able to do in just a few short months- teach our children to read, develop their self-confidence, teach them to advocate for

themselves and supply them with technology that truly assists them with their learning (Lesley Lehman, Chair of the Sagonaska Demonstration School Parent Council).

When I was at school before coming to Amethyst, I could not read, I was not able to comprehend what was all being read to me and had a lot of difficulty in writing tests and doing assignments. Now I write tests and complete my assignments with confidence and no longer second guess what I am doing (Becca Haggitt, current Amethyst student - Amethyst Information Package).

Robarts School for the Deaf

In mainstream local public schools, there is no curriculum in place for teaching ASL (American Sign Language) as a critical language. Rather, the teaching of ASL is as a mode of communication and is often taught by people without expertise in the language. These students are often isolated, with no real language models. By contrast, the curriculum in Robarts is highly specialized and proven to be highly effective. This specialized curriculum is not available in the mainstream schools. Deaf children in deaf schools learn ASL and English, and come out bilingual.

Through the ASL Glossing system that was developed here as part of the ASL curriculum, children are learning to read in English very effectively and it is enhancing their overall education and success. In addition, Deaf schools provide the social setting that is required for children. They are being educated in their natural language, ASL, with their Deaf peers and strong ASL and Deaf role models (Lalita Tamburri, Parent Chair at Robarts).

I hope you will **join myself and the City of Belleville** in taking a firm stand in **support** of the **continued operation** of the Robarts School for the Deaf and the Amethyst Provincial Demonstration School in our city.

Sincerely,

Councillor Bill Armstrong

WHEREAS the Mission statement from the Ministry of Education reads that, "Ontario is committed to the success and well-being of every student and child. Learners in the province's education system will develop the knowledge, skills and characteristics that will lead them to become personally successful, economically productive and actively engaged citizens" (Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario); and

WHEREAS the **Amethyst** Demonstration School has been operating within the City of London since 1982; and

WHEREAS the **Robarts** Provincial School for the Deaf has been operating within the City of London since 1973; and

WHEREAS the **Amethyst** Demonstration School provides valuable educational programs and supports for students with severe learning disabilities who have exhausted all other options in the mainstream system from the City of London as well as students from surrounding regions; and

WHEREAS the **Robarts** Provincial School for the Deaf provides valuable educational programs and supports for students who are deaf or hard of hearing from the City of London as well as students from surrounding regions; and

WHEREAS the **Amethyst** Demonstration School contributes positively to the local economy by employing residents of the City of London and ;

WHEREAS the **Robarts** Provincial School for the Deaf contributes positively to the local economy by employing residents of the City of London and;

WHEREAS the **Amethyst Demonstration School** contributes to the local economy by increasing the chances of children with severe learning disabilities to go on to postsecondary education, and be economically productive adults;

WHEREAS the **Robarts** Provincial School for the Deaf contributes to the local economy by increasing the chances of children who are deaf or hard of hearing to go on to postsecondary education, and be economically productive adults;

NOW THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT the Corporation of the City of London supports the continued operation of the **Amethyst** Demonstration School and the **Robarts** Provincial School for the Deaf;

THAT the Ministry of Education be requested to **keep open the enrolment** at the Amethyst Demonstration School and the Robarts Provincial School for the Deaf, **for the next several years;**

THAT the **Amethyst** Demonstration School and **Robarts** Provincial School for the Deaf not close as a result of the current consultations initiated by the provincial Ministry of Education; and,

THAT a copy of this motion be sent to The Honourable Kathleen Wynne, Premier of Ontario, The Honourable Liz Sandals, Minister of Education, Mr. Patrick Brown, Leader of the Official Opposition, Ms. Andrea Horwath, Leader of the New Democratic Party, and London-Fanshawe MPP Teresa Armstrong.

Appendix 1:

Item A: Why Should We Keep Demonstration Schools Open?

Item B: Letter of Caleb Stanley (current student)

Item C: Letter of Chad Downes (current Amethyst teacher)

Item D: Letter of Kristi VanDongen and Derek Miles (parent applicants to Amethyst)

Item E: Letter of Wendy McLeod-Haggitt (Parent Chair, Amethyst)

Item F: Letter of Amethyst alumni

Source: "Amethyst Information Package" prepared for Councillor Armstrong by Wendy McLeod-Haggitt, Parent Chair at Amethyst Provincial Demonstration School.