

Richmond Schools Stand United – Brief

School Board meeting of September 19, 2016

Thank you for taking the time to hear the concerns of many families and communities in Richmond. My name is Kelly Greene, and I am a founder of Richmond Schools Stand United, a non-partisan advocacy group for education.

We are disappointed to hear that Richmond's School Board has decided to close multiple elementary schools, and that the Board feels that children and their families are best served by school closures. Despite asking both the Ministry and the Board on multiple occasions, no one has been able to specifically answer the question "How are elementary aged children benefitting from school closures?" Nor has anyone been able to provide an answer as to what are ideal enrollment levels for a child's learning environment.

And yet, the School Board, supported by the Ministry of Education, is proceeding to permanently close multiple schools in Richmond. And when those schools are closed, they will not be reopened if funding becomes available in the future. They will see their end soon with a wrecking ball. Those communities will forever be lacking the basic resources that children need, that are fundamental to developmental best practices. Local schools provide a sense of community and belonging, and the social networks that support families in a community.

Further, the schools that are not closed this year will see a dramatic increase in the number of students they are expected to receive. Receiving schools will see their resource rooms filled with desks and they will lose the ability to deliver the curriculum as prescribed, and they will lose the flexibility to manage bumps in enrollment or changes in the number of children who have special needs. Children in these combined schools will have a smaller share of fixed resources, like the gym and library, as they are divided by a greatly increased student population.

Richmond's families and their supporters do not believe they are best served by school closures. Closing schools does not provide equitable access to education – far from it. Children travelling to a distant school, having school resources divided among more students, and no flexibility in the school to adapt to change, does not provide equitable access to education. Closing schools steals from tomorrow, to pay the policy demands of today. Richmond's children deserve better.