



Regional District of Central Kootenay

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School District 8
School Board Office
570 Johnstone Rd
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Dear Trustee Lang and Fellow SD8 Board Members:

RE: JEWETT

It has come to my attention, as rural Area D Director, that there is further discussion at your board to entertain the possibility of closing the remote school of Jewett Elementary. This letter is to bring to your attention the various concerns the community and I share as well to ask for a hold on the closure of Jewett. In 2016, the community and I as their Director, prepared a proposal that was sent to the SD8 board, staff and our local trustee. There was no response. We respectfully request this hold until you have engaged with the communities of Lardeau Valley on this proposal to explore options for sustainable and secure educational services in the remote region.

In the winter of 2019, SD8 staff presented a facility update to the communities Jewett serves. This meeting presented the dire situation of low enrollment and costs of operating the facility. While no one debated there is a serious utilization issue, some facts presented were inaccurate and community concerns were met with little to no options other than homeschool or put the kids on the bus (a 100km return trip for our most remote students through mountainous conditions that see annual closures due to avalanche or slides) and most concerning, no mention or even knowledge of the communities proposal from 2016 to work collaboratively on solutions. I will add here that as Director, I set aside \$50,000 in Community Works funding for the Jewett facility including guidelines on application criteria and a staff contact to assist in the public funding process we must follow. SD8 never pursued these funds.

May 2019, a resident informs me that SD8 is contemplating a resolution that will see the closure of Jewett should they not be able to secure a teacher for the 2019/2020 school year. This resolution was accompanied by an appendix that included, again, inaccurate information. Most notably that SD8 staff were retiring and not returning when in fact they had never given such notice. I will also note that in the 'cons' section of the report, there was no mention of the severe detriment to the seven community's, that Jewett serves, viability if educational services are terminated nor the safety and separation risks young children face if they are forced to bus. Further, the loss of the early years programming North Kootenay Lake Community Services provides at Jewett elementary, which requires placement in a school, is a major impact. With 25 attendees on a regular basis in 2018, this will completely erode early years learning opportunities and social opportunities for families in Lardeau Valley.

While it is not lost on anyone that keeping a school open for less than the ideal number of children is not sustainable even if grants are ensuring your costs are neutral in continuing services, it is a complete shock to the community and me as an elected official that there be no attempts to remedy this long standing issue besides merely proposing



closure and telling parents they will have to bus there very young children or homeschool. In a time of innovation and community engagement being paramount to modern day solutions, it is highly concerning that SD8 would not be taking the communities offer to work together seriously.

This letter is to respectfully request, again, that SD8 board and staff reach out to the community members who have been working hard to find alternative methods for securing educational services for their children.

As education is not a local government service, I submit this letter as advocacy on behalf of the community but do recognize the appropriate representative to work on these issues would be the SD8 trustee for North Kootenay Lake, SD8 board with staff and the community members.

At a community meeting in late May, the community initiated a committee with a research team, collaboration team and a communication team to be able to report out to the community on the progress.

The suggested course of action is:

1. SD8 places a hold for 2 years on the closure of Jewett or until such time that alternative solutions can be fully implemented
 - a. We are aware you have applicants for the position of teacher
 - b. We are also aware that those interviews keep getting cancelled?
2. SD8 trustee and staff meet with the Lardeau Valley Education Committee to;
 - a. Define roles; who is doing what?
 - b. Define timeline; what do you need to achieve and by when?
 - c. Establish a MOU to secure the educational services, at this time, with a deadline for solutions to enable SD8 to address the utilization and facility issues
3. Establish framework for improved educational services that brings in the homeschool cohort; LINKS has done ample research on how the utilization could be better achieved by attracting those who choose to homeschool to participate in the school and therefore ensure sustainability with sufficient enrollment

I will continue to support fair and equitable services for the residents of the Lardeau Valley while offering guidance and support where I can to ensure they are sustainable. As I had no uptake on the previous funds of \$50,000 offered to SD8 for the facility, these funds have been reallocated. Should this request be accepted by SD8, we can certainly explore if SD8 will want to take RDCK, Area D up on the offer for financial support.

I respectfully request this letter be place on your next board agenda and we, the community and I as their Director, be informed of when this will be, so we can attend to answer questions and hear how we will proceed to establishing this working group,

Sincerely,



Aimee Watson
Director of Electoral Area D