



March 10, 2011

To the Members of the KPRDSB Advisory Committee:

I am writing each of you today in my role as Board Chair of the New Canadians Centre Peterborough. I have served the Centre in a number of capacities since arriving in this community in 1995 and am currently nearing the mid-point of my two year tenure as board chair. Members of our board hail from all parts of the Peterborough region and, like me, bring a range of experiences, as parents and community members, to bear upon our mutually held belief in the unique qualities of PCVS and its contribution to the project of making Peterborough a tolerant, welcoming place to call home.

As outlined in a message to your committee from the staff of the Centre, PCVS continues to provide a range of services for newcomers and their children. Beyond the obvious contribution of the ESL teacher, her support of the students and the variety of programming offered, PCVS students I encounter, both newcomers and native residents alike, can clearly articulate their reasons for attending the school: they feel safe, they feel part of a vibrant community; they feel welcomed by the city and valued by the staff and teachers there. You often hear students say, “It’s ok to be different at PCVS,” or ‘Who I am, whatever I am, that’s ok here.’ While the school board may believe that this environment can be replicated elsewhere, as someone who spends many hours supervising student teachers in local secondary schools, I can assure you this is not the case. There are a host of reasons why PCVS has a reputation for being a safe and welcoming school but the one I wish to draw the committee’s attention to in this letter is its presence in the downtown and the very physical environment of the school itself.

The chance for students to establish a connection to the downtown of this city – its library, restaurants, community services, and cultural institutions – is a key dimension of the uniqueness of the educational experience at PCVS and, more pointedly, it is essential to the reputation and development of Peterborough as a welcoming, vibrant city which has much to offer **all** of us, whether urban, suburban or country dwellers. Students can begin to feel a part of this community as they walk past ArtSpace on their way to the library, drop into Natas Cafe or Dancing Blueberries for a snack on their way to the movies, or volunteer at the art gallery after they stop in at the New Canadians Centre. These pathways of familiarity are **fundamental** to our long term health as we live and grow together. Thus, here’s a challenge: I ask each of you to take an hour of your time to walk down George Street to PCVS at lunchtime or after school, and experience the positive interactions on the street, in the shops, in our community centres and institutions. The vibrancy you will feel exists, in part, **because** of the presence of PCVS students and

staff and, in some cases, their families, and business owners who are graduates. Then take a few minutes to spend some time in the school, wander the hallways, listen to the conversations, feel the sense of pride associated with attending school in that particular place, in those storied, architecturally beautiful, hallways, and I defy you NOT to feel something truly special and unique. This positive synergy will be lost and our reputation as a welcoming community with a bright future, which begins on the streets of our downtown, will be greatly diminished, perhaps fatally so if PCVS is closed.

As a newcomer here 15 years ago, I looked for ways to integrate myself and my young family into this community. We spent time at the public library; we joined the YMCA, and registered our children to attend publicly funded French-immersion kindergarten. We walked downtown and cheered when Galaxy Cinemas relocated on Water Street and continue to celebrate each new restaurant or small business opening. Our sense of belonging here emanates from the city's core, its heart. Now, as Board Chair of the New Canadians Centre I call upon the KPRDSB advisory committee to carefully weigh the lasting and repercussive effects of closing a downtown high school which so clearly offers so much to its staff and students and which is one of the lifelines of our community.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary S. Ladky".

Mary S. Ladky
Board Chair
New Canadians Centre Peterborough