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From:
Sent: Monday, 30 March 2009 9:43 PM
To: Committees
Subject: INQUIRY INTO SCHOOL CLOSURES

Ms Amanda Bresnan MLA
Chair
Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs
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INQUIRY INTO SCHOOL CLOSURES AND REFORM OF THE ACT EDUCATION SYSTEM

Dear Ms Bresnan

In 2006 I was the Board Chair and P&C Secretary for Hall Primary School.

I want you to know that to prepare our submission to the Towards 2020 proposal a large team of concerned parents, community members, Progress Association members and parents of previous students worked tirelessly for 6 months to gather facts, examine alternative proposals, report on the likely impact of closing Hall Primary and, most importantly, reporting the history of our school's founding and continuing role in our community. I understand that you have been provided with a copy of our original submission and I thank you for taking a look at it in the context of your review.

As a group and as concerned individuals we fully participated in the, so called, consultation process, attending all relevant sessions with the consultants and meeting with Government Ministers and their staff. This effort seemed to be a complete waste as it was clear very early in the process that the government had made its decision well before any member of any school community was consulted. The proposed amendments to the Education System with regards to such processes will go a long way towards avoiding that situation in the future.

In response to your listed terms of reference I submit the following.

1. The ACT Government's Towards 2020 policy:

This policy talked about offering families choice in the education of their children. However, the choice of a small rural school has now been completely removed as an alternative for any ACT family. Hall Primary was established by NSW families in 1911 to service the community surrounding Hall. When Hall became a suburb of Canberra the 'community' that was Hall did not separate on State lines. That community still exists. The descendants of those families who worked so hard to establish the school continued, until December 2006, to attend Hall Primary. The children are now scattered throughout Canberra schools, resulting in the loss of our close community supports and

networks for parents who do not live the typical suburban lifestyle of most Canberra residents.

It is my view that Hall Primary School, along with Tharwa, provided a unique learning environment for students. At Hall, the students were effectively an extended family. It wasn't so much that all children had friends it was that all the children were friends. Each child, no matter their age or inclination, was welcomed and cared for in our nurturing, supportive school. As a result of the confidence gained by such an experience our students have gone on to achieve at outstanding levels in other schools, academically, socially, artistically and in their sporting pursuits.

I would like you to be able to again provide this opportunity to our regional community and the broader community Canberra.

2. The impact of school consolidation and closures:

In 2006 my eldest son was in year 6, my next son in year 5 and my daughter in year 3. From June through to the announcement that the school was to close I was an absentee parent, concentrating my efforts on working to keep the school open, spending many evenings away from home and many hours closeted in the study. My children were distressed and were worried about what the outcome would be. Once the decision was reached to close Hall we had mere days to come to terms with our loss. Our community was devastated. The retirement village across the road lost the daily contact that they enjoyed with our kids. They would no longer be able to hear the wonderful sound of children playing at recess nor have the opportunity to share their wisdom and experiences with the kids whose lives they had previously been such an important part of.

Although my children settled well into high school and Maribyrnong Primary they continued to hope that they could return to Hall and be with their friends. Up until the Election last year the hope remained alive that Erin could return to Hall for her last year of Primary School. Of course this is now impossible and she has lost the chance to experience the same excellent leadership development that was such an important feature for year 6 students at Hall.

For myself, I miss the daily contact with the other parents. It was not uncommon for parents and children to still be chatting well beyond the end of the school day. This does not seem to happen at schools in Canberra. Many children walk home alone and parents do not get the opportunity to interact casually at school. I treasure those times I spent with other parents discussing our children, our school, our village and our lives.

3. Community responses, including interest expressed by school communities to re open schools listed for closure:

The community of Hall Village and region have consistently stated our desire to reopen Hall Primary School. At our most recent community meeting, in early March, this resolution was again confirmed unanimously by those in attendance. There is no doubt that our

Community supports the reopening of Hall and will continue to work towards that outcome while ever there is a chance of success.

I ask that your committee please give every consideration to reopening Hall so that parents truly have full choice of education opportunities for their children and so that Canberra's close rural neighbours are considered when these decisions are taken.

Please note: I fully support the submission made to your committee by the Hall Village and Region Progress Association.

Yours sincerely

Maryann Harris