

Hello, and thank you to the Chair John Campbell, and to the Planning and Priorities Committee, for listening to us this evening.

My name is Heidi Wilson and this is Nancy Abbey. We are parents of children attending Allenby Public School, which has a pool slated for closure in June 2009.

We are here tonight to ask you, the TDSB, to **overturn** your decision to close 39 school pools. We are here tonight to ask you **to not terminate swim staff**. We are here to tonight to insist that the TDSB **work with** the City of Toronto and the Provincial Government to find a long-term sustainable solution to fund all school pools. We are here tonight to **lend our support** to help achieve that solution.

We recognize that the current provincial funding formula does not provide the TDSB with funds to support the cost of operating school pools. We gratefully acknowledge that the TDSB has been trying for years to find a funding solution within a budget that diminishes each year as families move outside of the city...

So why is it important that we find this funding? Many of the deputations you hear tonight will speak to the merits of swimming that play on Health, Safety, and overall Wellness. These are all important points, however I want to spend my time talking about **community**.

Why were TDSB pools built in the first place? From what I gather, it served three functions:

1. School buildings existed so it was cheaper than building new community centers to house pools;
2. Kids could learn to swim as part of their educational curriculum. They were dubbed to be a "floating classroom";
3. The school would become a community resource and *part of the community* rather than a separate entity. *Imagine: A community would be joined by its resources.*

In 40 years, these rationales have not changed:

- 1- It is cheaper to keep existing school pools open than to build new community centres that would need to accommodate all of the various lost programs that will result by closures.
- 2- Our children continue to learn to swim during their school day because pools are accessible. Across the city, over 70,000 students have access to these pools. Moreover, these school pools serve a function for our multicultural groups, many of whom would not think about swimming if not for instructional swim;
- 3- TDSB pools serve an equally rewarding function as part of the larger community.
 - Children and adults tend to stay in their community to use nearby resources, which results in dynamic and community-based developments.
 - Families meet other families in their neighborhood. It introduces new parents to each other.
 - After school swim programs take some of the strain away from the already overburdened City Parks and Rec pools,
 - And what is most important, they help keep our children active, healthy, focused and away from TV.

School pools offer children and young adults the opportunity to set goals and excel. Research clearly shows a positive relationship between involvement in sports and academic achievement. These are our adults of the future. Providing them various opportunities to excel increases the likelihood that they will serve our community in a positive way. If we take the pools away from them, there is more to lose than just the aquatic program.

I want to step back for a moment and provide context. In the 1990s, while finishing my Ph.D. in Education, I worked for 5 years in an American inner city school. My day to day goal was to promote literacy, but the real successes happened when a student overcame a personal challenge, or enhanced a life-long skill, or demonstrated personal growth. I won't go into detail about the dysfunctional funding system the US has in place for its public schools except to say the impact of that system has a long-term and devastating effect on those students.

My 5th grade students lived that system. They knew they had restricted access to resources, and I experienced, first-hand, what this lack of resources can do to a child's esteem and self-perception. The underlying and consistent message sent to those 10-year old children each day they walked through the door of their school was that *they are not worth it*.

We don't want to operate like that in Toronto.

We want to send a positive message to our youth that we support each other, and we support community. We shouldn't be closing the pools. We should be **investing** in them to maximize their use. Let us treat our floating classroom like our traditional classroom, and determine a funding model for pools and aquatic programming.

As a Trustee, determining how to spend your limited and diminishing budget is not an easy or enviable job. For 10 years the TDSB has been put in this recurring position. In organizations, structure drives behavior. So I ask you:

- Is it time for the TDSB to consider re-defining its funding structure, so it can modify its recurring behavior?
- In the immediate term, is it reasonable to ask that the TDSB meet with the City and the Province, and even the private sector, to explore other solutions, before draining our pools?

This is about all of us working together to find a solution.

These are critical community resources. I implore you: Please. PLEASE.

- Don't do anything that is irreversible to the operation of these 39 pools.
- Tonight, do not agree to provide notice of termination for swim staff.
- Overturn your decision to close these community resources, and
- Work with the City and the Provincial Government to find a long-term, sustainable funding solution.