

Pros and Cons of keeping the Tancook elementary school open

If the school remains open:

- New families will be more likely to move to the island if there's a school for their children here.
- Existing families and couples planning to start families will be more likely to remain on the island if their children can go to school here (and not have to consider relocating and finding new jobs).
- The education the children receive in this type of small-school environment has proven to be amazing; lots of one-on-one with the teacher, multi-grade lesson learning, older kids help younger kids, worry-free and stress-free school days, inclusive playtime and lesson time – no child is ever left out or left behind.
- Island children can *safely* travel to and from school.
- Island parents can reach their children easily in an emergency situation.
- In the event of our current teacher retiring, teaching at the island's school might be considered a dream job by many other teachers.
- Our island community will not become a retirement/seasonal community only.
- A small piece of history will be preserved, as we have one of Canada's last operating one-room schools.

If the school closes:

- Sending young children to school in Chester exposes them to the hazards of heavy freight being hoisted on and off the ferry as well as vehicular traffic on both wharves where it is often quite busy and visibility might not be the best.
- There is the possibility of seasickness on the way to and from school.
- The children would need an adult chaperone for both ferry crossings – it isn't fair to expect the island's middle and high school students to be responsible for them. Plus, the TA who will be traveling with our island's special needs student will already have her hands full with him alone.
- The elementary school in Chester commences at 8:00 AM and finishes at 1:40 PM. Our children would not get to school in Chester until 9:00 AM (if they took the 8:00 AM ferry) and would have to wait for 2 hours after school to catch the ferry home at 3:40 PM. In order for our elementary-aged kids to get to school in Chester on time they would have to catch the 6:00 AM ferry and then wait for an hour for school to begin.
*Our island school goes from 8:30 AM until 3:00 PM Monday to Thursday with Fridays being a half-day (9:00 AM – 12:00 PM).
- Families who cannot afford to move will likely be forced to homeschool.
- If families do move off the island so their children can safely and conveniently attend school, we will lose part of our ferry crew and part of our lobster fleet.

Other considerations

- Ours is a unique situation and conventional/existing solutions to closing a community school simply do not work here. We can't put our kids on a bus and safely transport them the extra kilometers to the next school.
- Is it healthy mentally/socially for the school to remain open for only one student & teacher? Could we implement a program where islanders with preschool aged toddlers spend some time at the school, accompanied by a parent, to interact with the student(s)? This would allow the teacher a break and it would socialize the students and toddlers. Could this program include the island's senior citizens as well?
- If the school closes is there a possibility of it re-opening when the island's existing toddlers are ready to start grade primary or if new families come to the island with elementary-aged children? Can community members keep and maintain the building so it would not be an expense to the school board until it re-opens?
- If the school closes would the school board send a teacher out to the island 2 or 3 times a week to help any parents who may have been forced to homeschool?
- The Chester District School cannot easily adjust its hours to accommodate a few island children and the Department of Transportation is not likely going to alter the existing ferry schedule, so what solution could we come up with to ensure our island children have a proper school day if they are forced to commute? An 8:00 AM to 4:15 PM school day is a very long one for young children, and how will they make up the 5+ school hours per week they will miss by taking the 8 AM ferry across and being late for school each day?
- What happens if a chaperone is hired to travel on the ferry with our children and the chaperone calls in sick? Would there be a substitute? Would the school board hire a chaperone from the island or the mainland? If it's someone from the mainland they would have to make 4 ferry crossings daily to accompany our children to and from school.
- Why not keep the island school open and hire a chaperone from the mainland and offer any interested Chester families the option of sending their elementary-aged children to school on the island?
*I mentioned this during our last review (2008-2010) and the reply I got was, "Nobody in Chester would want to send their young children to school on the ferry"
- If our school closes what would our elementary-aged children do in the event of the ferry service being cancelled during their school day in Chester? What if it's over night? Where would our children go? It's not as traumatic or as much of an imposition for a 12-year-old to spend the night with a friend as it would be for a 5-year-old who wants to be home with their parents.
- As discussed during our last school review (2008-2010) the cost of operating the Tancook Elementary School was a non-issue. In our SOC binder in the BTES

Information Profile section, page 11, it states the operating costs as \$14,699. Our school building is in good repair and any maintenance is cosmetic.

- Island parents do not feel that their elementary-aged children are lacking in any programming being schooled here. We have community volunteers who do many things with the island's school children, including music and recorder lessons, on-island geocaching and birding field trips, snowshoeing, regular guest-speakers (RCMP, lobster fishers, medical and fire first responders, Buster the Bus, etc.) and lunch hour sports. In grade 6 the children can participate in more involved music, art and sports programs. And often the children who have been educated on Big Tancook go through middle school and high school on the honour roll.
- Another thing island parents would have to think about if their elementary-aged children were going to school in Chester are evening events like Christmas concerts which would require a family to spend the night on the mainland to attend.

Potential New Students:

- There are two more families relocating to Little Tancook this spring (March) who plan to put their children in school here. One child, Liam, is currently 6-years-old and will start grade 2 in 2016 and the other, Ianna who is currently 3-years-old, will be ready to start school in 2017. Ianna's mother questioned me about early enrollment, as she believes her daughter (currently in a Montessori school) will be ready to start primary in 2016 at the age of 4.
- I am waiting to hear back from the Zwicker family who own a home on Big Tancook but currently live in the Bridgewater area. They have two elementary-aged daughters and in October 2015 they spoke with me and mentioned that they would like to move permanently to the island (in April 2016) and if so would put their daughters in school here.

*As far as I know, the school/school board has not yet been contacted by any of these families.

Here is what we know:

- There are two children (Carson and Samuel) enrolled for the 2016/17 school year here, with two resident up-and-comers currently 3- (Joshua) and 2- (Connor) years-of-age.
- This is a safe, close-knit community for children; a true example of a village raising a child. We have never had any issues with drugs or alcohol at our school and we have never had issues with "stranger danger", security or the safety of our children.
- ***Our young children can travel safely to school here*** and parents can get to them quickly if necessary.