

February 10, 2025

Dear School Board Members,

Yesterday, the Citizen newspaper published an article online announcing that my teaching position at CIDES will cease to exist at the end of June 2025. Although I was aware the school board planned to discuss the *potential* closure at tomorrow's meeting, the announcement still came as a shock. After reviewing the boards agenda for tomorrow's meeting, this statement on page 46, confirmed the Citizens' information.

*Based on this information, the district is proceeding with the closure of the Central Interior Distance Education School (CIDES) effective June 30, 2025.*

I began my career in the Prince George School District in 1995 as an in-class elementary teacher and hoped to retire at CIDES, a collaborative, enjoyable school that provides essential educational services to students from Kindergarten to Grade 12, including adult learners.

For the past five years, I have worked alongside a dedicated and talented team of professional teachers committed to offering students a unique and engaging educational experience that traditional brick-and-mortar schools cannot replicate. However, a statement in the board report downplayed the significance of our local program, suggesting that once CIDES closes, students could simply transition to a provincial online program. On paper, this might seem straightforward, but in practice, it is far more complicated. Many families have been part of CIDES for years, establishing meaningful connections with our staff through in-person visits, virtual sessions, and phone calls. Closing CIDES will eliminate the opportunity for students to engage directly with their teachers at the center, diminishing the critical connections that foster student success. CIDES is, and always has been, a school in every sense of the word—the “S” in our name stands for “school.”

Students deserve the option of a local online school within their district rather than seeking for a large provincial online learning system that cannot offer the same level of personal connection. For many students, CIDES is the only program in the district where they feel supported after exploring all other options. CIDES also serves as a bridge between brick and mortar. Many students attend our program for a year then return to in class learning. We help facilitate this process at a local level. What will happen to students in our district who choose to return to in- class learning if they lack a supportive local representative and instead assigned a provincial teacher with limited knowledge of our district?

Last year, when the board considered closing CIDES, the budget report described our program as “cost neutral,” meaning the district was not losing money by keeping it open. I understand the district's need for in-class teachers and that the redeployment of our staff members may help address this need. During the COVID pandemic, our program experienced a significant

surge in enrollment as we swiftly and professionally stepped up to support the district during an urgent and unpredictable time. While enrollment has since returned to typical levels, I believe it remains steady enough to “keep our door open” without imposing any additional financial burden on the district.

If you would like additional information about our program services, I am more than happy to discuss this further.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter of support for the Central Interior Distance Education School.

Sincerely,

Tana Gowan

CIDES Elementary Teacher