

My family and I moved to Coles Island at the end of last summer. We came from a rural community in Northern Ontario where I was born, and where our kids grew up to ages 9 and 11. It is a beautiful area with wonderful people, but after one too many winters spent freezing our faces off at -30 for 6 months, we decided to look for greener grass, or really just grass, anything that wasn't white. Last fall we came on a driving trip out East and fell in love with this part of New Brunswick and a property in particular here in Coles Island. Of course, with young kids, before making a commitment to move, we looked into the schooling situation in the area. I'm sure you know what we found. A small local school for our grade 4 daughter, and a 50 km bus ride for our grade 7 son. The distance bothered us right from the beginning, and as outsiders, our first thoughts were, why couldn't our son go to Cambridge-Narrows or Sussex, which are so much closer? But of course, the district lines are what they are, so unless we were able to commit to driving to and from another school every day for 6 years, it's a long bus ride or bust. We were also surprised to find that French Immersion is in all practical terms, not available to the children of Coles Island...again, if we want to drive them daily to a school in another district, or if we want to drive to meet a bus that goes to Oromocto, which isn't exactly down the road, then it could be an option. This was especially disheartening to me, since I am French, and I would like to see my kids maintain that part of their heritage. They were both in French Immersion since pre-K, and in our small community, funding for schools was split up even further between Public and Catholic, in addition to English and French. To find that a bilingual education was not available to ALL families who want it, in the only province that is officially bilingual, was quite a shock.

My wife made phone call after phone call, and we spent several months trying to decide if this was really the right move for us. It was a tough decision, and hard to get all the information we needed from so far away. What we did hear time and time again from everyone we spoke with was how wonderful Coles Island School is, and what a special treat it would be for our daughter to go there, even if only for two years. So we made the leap, and decided to see what the other schools were like for our son in person after we got here. To be honest, if there wasn't this school here in Coles Island, I don't know if we would have made the same decision. I know if our kids were younger that we would not have moved here if there was no school. It's bad enough to put older kids on the bus for so many hours, but to start them in elementary school? No way. We would have just kept looking for another area and another community, one that wouldn't require such a sacrifice of our children.

This is what I want to tell you, from the perspective of someone who came to this community from somewhere else. When we decided to move, we could have gone just about anywhere in Canada and had better weather than what we were used to. People move all the time for all kinds of reasons, but that was ours. Since the move wasn't based on family or jobs, we pretty much had our choice of where to go. So what brought us here? The natural beauty of the area, water everywhere, the rich history that goes much further back than my hometown in the northern bush, the proximity to all three major cities in the province, and yes, the low housing prices. It is well known that if you don't want to spend a lot of money on a home, you don't head to BC. I think there are going to be more and more people moving to this area because it's still possible to live well on little here. But any family with children is going to be looking for a school in the community, and if there isn't one, well, they're just going to keep looking.

I grew up in a small village where everyone knew each other, and if you get right down to it, most of us were related. I went to a small school that was a lot like Coles Island School. It was a great place to grow up and I wouldn't trade it for anything. I hope the kids here get to keep the same privilege, to stay and learn close to their homes and families, and within their community. The kids deserve it and so does the community as a whole.