

## MPP starts school closure petition

**By Sarah Sobanski**

Prince Edward-Hastings MPP Todd Smith has started a petition to draw attention to rural school closures.

Last year's accommodation review process by the Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board suggested that five elementary schools in North Hastings could be amalgamated into two.

"The Maynooth and the northern ones are kind of on hold right now," said Smith. "I think it's something that will be discussed again in the future but so far those ones are off the table for this spring."

Smith announced via press release that he launched the petition in light of the process threatening a number of schools in small, rural communities. Parents and community members contacted him with their concerns of losing their local schools. The process is studying closing schools in Sophiasburgh and Madoc Township in June.

"I think the government doesn't want to have long discussions about this. They know that they're in a pinch and they want to close these schools. They've really limited the involvement of the communities," said Smith.

While the petition doesn't focus on any one area, Smith encouraged North Hastings residents to show their support for rural schools.

"The petition is pretty generic. It doesn't mention any part of Prince Edward-Hastings riding. I think if people in North Hastings want to sign the petition it would be good to have a bunch of people from North Hastings because at least it will show the school board and the province that people in North Hastings care about having a school in their community as well," said Smith. "I think it's a strong message to send. If they don't send the message then they'll be more likely to move on to the residual recommendations that remain and acting on them."

He added, "They've put the North Hastings ones on hold but they haven't yanked them off the table."

Prince Edward-Hastings constituents can sign the petition at [www.toddsmithmpp.ca/oppose\\_rural\\_school\\_closures\\_petition](http://www.toddsmithmpp.ca/oppose_rural_school_closures_petition).

"If you don't have a school or a hospital nearby, good luck keeping families in your community. Good luck keeping anybody really."