

June 2, 2021

Dear School District 73 Board of Trustees and District Leadership,

Thank you for giving families the opportunity to comment on the proposed catchment changes. Our family, with two kids currently attending Pacific Way, would immediately be affected by the Pacific Way/Aberdeen catchment change, and, in future, by the Sahali/SKSS change, and would like to voice our concerns.

Background

We moved to Kamloops last summer. A significant factor in our house buying decision was the school catchment (based on Fraser Institute test scores, word-of-mouth, reasonable walkability, neighborhood, etc.). Had we known this was coming we may have made a different house buying decision or chosen to enroll our children at Aberdeen Elementary right away. We were surprised and frustrated to hear the catchments might be changing six months after we enrolled our children at Pacific Way. The proposed catchment changes have added a significant amount of stress and anxiety to our family.

Comments on Proposed Catchment Boundaries

We do not support the proposed changes to the Pacific Way/Aberdeen catchment for the following reasons:

- 1) **Student Mental Health:** Children have spent the last year unable to socialize with friends and often extended family, and extracurricular activities have been limited. For most kids, including ours, their “cohorts” at school have made up their entire social network. For our children, who moved to Kamloops prior to the start of the 2020/21 school year, this has meant that the only kids they really know are their classmates.

Although we are hopefully nearing the end of the pandemic, the impact that it has had on mental health (of both kids and adults) can't be underestimated, and I think we'll see the outcomes of this for years to come. A recent Vancouver Sun article¹ reports that two-thirds of youth are suffering from mental health issues, up from one-third before the pandemic. Adding the stress of an upcoming school change hanging over their heads for the next year seems cruel. The catchment change is already a discussion point between the kids at school and waiting until the 2022/23 year to complete the change isn't going to make this easier on kids. **We feel strongly that there must be a better way to address overcrowding in Pacific Way while supporting children's mental health!**

- 2) **Dividing up our Neighbourhood:**

- a. In separating just a few streets from the Pacific Way catchment, you are dividing up kids who can walk to each other's houses to play. The way the revised boundaries have been

¹ <https://vancouversun.com/health/covid-19-two-thirds-of-b-c-youth-struggling-with-mental-health-during-the-pandemic-new-research-shows>

drawn, immediate neighbours would now attend separate schools. The proposed area to change catchments is so small (as it takes in a large area of “future development”) it means that the change is singling out a small group of families. For us, our elder child would have no close friends switching schools with him.

- b. Ironically, many of our immediate neighbours send their kids to schools other than Pacific Way or Aberdeen already.
- c. Finally, all these kids who live five minutes apart are not only being split up between the two elementary schools; they won't even go to the same high school together unless the high school in Aberdeen gets built! We are really struggling to understand the School District's logic with all of this.

3) Walkability/Transportation: When we moved into our house, part of what we really liked was that the kids could walk or bike to school on the roads or trails with relative ease as they get older. This walk is relatively flat (by Kamloops standards!) as we walk across the hill, not straight up or down. Switching to Aberdeen Elementary is problematic because:

- a. The kids would need to cross Aberdeen Way, which is a busy road with poor sight lines; **speeding is also a major problem. The crosswalk below Dunrobin is poorly positioned (located near a curve & treed median) and is not properly equipped with flashing lights, etc. for pedestrian safety, let alone our children's safety!**
- b. There is a ~ 250 ft. elevation difference between our house and Aberdeen Elementary according to the Digital Elevation Data provided on the City of Kamloops Open Data Catalog². **It is unreasonable to expect elementary-aged kids to ascend/descend such an incline on foot in the summer heat or to have to use the icy 55-step stairway connecting Aberdeen Way and Dunrobin in the winter months.**
- c. Based on the above concerns, we would likely choose to drive our kids to and from Aberdeen Elementary for most, if not all, of the school year (much of it by driving through the catchment for Pacific Way!), which is not our best interests, or those of the kids, or the environment, or of the Aberdeen neighborhood. Anecdotally, it is also our understanding that vehicle parking near Aberdeen Elementary is already limited and this would only compound those issues.
- d. **Confusingly, areas of Aberdeen on the downhill side of Aberdeen Way, or that are much closer to Aberdeen Elementary with much shorter walks and across the hill as opposed to straight up/down are unaffected by the proposed catchment change** (for example, the area west of Garymede Drive). Again, we are struggling to understand the logic in how the proposed catchment boundaries have been drawn from a walkability/transportation perspective.

4) Childcare Arrangements: Although this doesn't affect us personally (at least not at this time), we have personally experienced how before- and after-school care can be critical to parent's abilities to work and children's overall happiness. Childcare is something that parents plan for years in advance so that they have a situation that work, and this cannot quickly be changed.

² <https://mydata-kamloops.opendata.arcgis.com>

Suggestions and Solutions

We recognize that the future enrollment situation at Pacific Way is untenable, and that the School District needs to take steps to address the situation so that it benefits all students. Ideally, the School District would look at adding on to Pacific Way. Adding extra portables for a few years while an addition is complete is something that we think most parents (and our kids) could live with.

However, if catchment changes must be made, please consider the following:

1) Allow the kids currently attending Pacific Way to stay (top priority):** With whatever catchment changes are made, the **School District should guarantee all the kids currently attending Pacific Way can stay**, even if their neighbourhood catchment changes. This could mean that new kids and any Kindergarten kids without siblings at Pacific Way in the revised catchment could start at Aberdeen ideally this coming fall, but all kids in the revised catchment already attending Pacific Way could stay there until the end of Grade 7. This would address the biggest point around children's mental health and changing friend groups, and yet slow down growth at Pacific Way. Perhaps this means increasing the size of the catchment change, which is fine **as long as the kids currently attending Pacific Way in K-6 can remain**. Based on the School District numbers provided in the catchment change report, Pacific Way would be dropping by 75 students, while Aberdeen would grow by 90 (likely assuming more kids coming from the "future development" area). If the "future development" area and Kindergarten kids would automatically go to Aberdeen, it would not be many kids that would need to be grandfathered in, and it would get smaller each year.

2) Spend more time considering which neighbourhoods "move":

a. We strongly encourage the School District to reconsider the proposed catchment changes and which neighbourhoods are being asked to change! Bentall, Telford, Willowbrae, Talbot etc. all only connect by road/trail to Abbeyglen/Dunrobin. To get to Aberdeen, we would always be driving/walking through the Pacific Way catchment to get to school.

Other areas, such as west of Garymede Drive and the multifamily units lower down Pacific Way would have a shorter, flatter walk to Aberdeen Elementary than the streets that are currently proposed to change! The neighbourhood up Howe Rd (Westerdale/Glenmohr) is also not being considered, and yet is physically removed from the rest of the Pacific catchment and could be entirely switched over without having neighbours going to separate schools.

b. If the future development in Aberdeen is the biggest issue, first start by moving the houses/future development to the east of the large 'Edinburgh' sign (i.e., on Bentall east of the intersection with Willowbrae, and on Edinburgh Ct and Edinburgh Blvd, thereby keeping Willowbrae, Telford, Galbraith etc. in the Pacific Catchment). Many of these properties are just in development now, and so wouldn't result in many kids changing catchments (if they do currently attend Pacific Way, these very few kids should be given the option of staying). Although this would not address some of the issues raised in this letter, families purchasing in the area would at least know from the start which school they would go to and could plan accordingly.

- c. It also seems reasonable to assume that some of these neighbourhoods on the west side of Pacific Way could be reassigned to the Pineview Elementary in the future (last year the Mayor was strongly pushing for roads to be built connecting Aberdeen and Pineview), so I think there is a strong argument to be made for reassigning other neighbourhoods currently in the Pacific Way catchment in a way that makes sense so that families aren't all going through this again in a few years' time.

We realize that this is a complicated issue facing the School District, and that it is impossible to make everyone happy; however, we kindly ask that you please try to address these issues in a way that minimizes the impact on the current students who have already been through so much over the last year.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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