

To:
School District 73 Board of Trustees
1383 9th Ave, Kamloops, BC V2C 3X7

June 18, 2021

RE: Proposed catchment change for Juniper Ridge / Marion Schilling Elementary

Thank you for sharing the alternate 6/7 split enrolment projections. With RB as a 6/7, enrolment numbers would be relatively the same as a K-7 until 2027. After that, capacity would increase over 3 years to reach a projected 162% at RB, while JR would see approximately the same operating capacity, and MS would actually benefit from lower operating capacity than the proposed geographic catchment option. The numbers provided indicate that this option would alleviate the enrollment pressures with practically equivalent results.

One statistic I've noted in comparing similar over-capacity schools in the district is that Westmount Elementary is currently operating at 164% capacity with projections in 2030 at 172%. If a new school in Batchelor is realistically 6-8 years away with no catchment changes planned, and a new Juniper Elementary 8-10 years away, the school board needs to recognize that it should be just as acceptable for RB to operate as a 6-7 at a much lower projected capacity than Westmount, for a much shorter period of time. The property that RB is on also has more room for the ability to accommodate additional portables (enrollment numbers indicate the portables would likely be displaced from Marion Schilling) to handle the projected increases for only a few years until a new Juniper West Elementary is complete.

The inequity in the district-proposed change is that it will be highly unfair to a targeted, significant population of this neighborhood for reasons that have already been stated by myself and others throughout this consultation process - most notably the physical health of students that will be denied the opportunity to walk or ride to a school that exists within their neighborhood. Alternative proposals have been brought forward with the intention to make changes that are as fair as possible, and equitable across the geographic extents of Juniper Ridge, the community most affected by this proposal. What is the data that supports the board's statement that "families tend to prefer a K-7 school"? Has a study been conducted? Has a formal survey been completed? Or is this based on hearsay from select individuals that favour this proposal? For the board to dismiss this option with such a blanket statement without relevant data is reprehensible.

It is also incredibly important for the school board to acknowledge that enrollment numbers should NOT be the primary and absolute determining factor in a final decision. The physical and mental wellbeing of students should be the most primary factor. The option of a 6/7 split will allow ALL kids of Juniper the opportunity to start a healthy lifestyle by allowing the ability to walk or ride to school for up to 5 of the most crucial years of social and physical development, as well as the ability to establish and grow local, neighbourhood friendships - a geographic catchment split will not allow any of this opportunity for those in the proposed western catchment area. The proposed geographic split will also strain and inevitably break many of the cherished bonds that our children have created on their own within their current school cohorts. We should be setting an example for our children that not always the first idea put forward is the only choice, and that fairer solutions can be explored through co-operative discussion.

As it has been mentioned by many of the respondents, the majority of Juniper residents have always considered this neighbourhood a tight-knit, family-oriented community. For years, one of the key marketing points on the Juniper West development website has been walking distance to one of the city's finest elementary schools - this is a primary factor that many people who moved to this area in recent years weighed heavily in their research prior to purchasing property here.

While this proposal has been described by the district as "temporary", the realistic timeline for a new school that is needed to address enrollment issues in this community and the southwest sector of Kamloops is 10 years away as mentioned in the public meeting, during which time all available schools will be operating over capacity standards. The children in Juniper Ridge affected by this catchment change as proposed will not "temporarily" be bussed to a school that they cannot walk or bike to, nor will they "temporarily" be separated from peers that they have grown through primary grades with - this change will last the entirety of their years in elementary school. The proposed change will deprive kids from ever having the opportunity to walk or bike to a neighborhood school that exists within their neighborhood. To label this as a "temporary" solution feels downright insulting to those affected, and emphasizes that this change (as proposed) benefits the school board's need to manage numbers more than it benefits the children it serves.

It has been stated that the district's mandate is a K-7 system, but the public feedback in this forum should be indicative that this model is unacceptable to those affected, and that other feasible, TEMPORARY, alternatives that achieve similar outcomes to relieve enrollment issues would be a better option to the whole of this community. The district has proven that non K-7 schools (Heffley Creek, Logan Lake, Vavenby, Westwold, Brocklehurst, Kamloops School of the Arts) can operate successfully and sustainably when enrollment is adapted to meet unique circumstances. The circumstances regarding the re-opening of Ralph Bell and related catchment changes warrant that the district re-evaluate this proposal.

It has become apparent in comparing the engagement on this proposal with the other recent catchment changes that there is **much** stronger opposition to the proposed changes in this neighbourhood, and that the majority of feedback posted does **not** support this change. Trustees should not approve this catchment change as proposed due to the negative effects it will have on the children, parents, and the community as a whole. Despite the opportunity for public feedback, for the district appearing to be proceeding with only a single option where several other viable and equitable options have been proposed by the public is frankly irresponsible and risks eroding confidence the public has in the school district's own foundational statement of practicing effective collaboration at all levels (Sec 1.10). I encourage all trustees to approve the re-opening of Ralph Bell, but reject the proposed catchment changes and work diligently to put forward a better option that addresses the concerns raised through this consultation process.

Thank you again for your time and thoughtful consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Graham Knights