

February 4, 2020

Dear Esteemed Decision Makers for SD 73 (Kamloops-Thompson),

I am writing this letter in support of the parents whose children attend school at Sun Peaks. I taught Grades 2 and 3 at Sun Peaks in 2017/2018. I have been an educator for 35 years, and have never had a teaching experience equal to that year. The reason it was so unique and amazing was not because of the children. They were lovely and typical. It was the parents who made the difference.

I know that a decision has to be made regarding whether or not to continue with the current 4 day per week schedule. Unease regarding the length of day for secondary students appears to be the primary concern that has resulted in the suggested change to a 5 day per week schedule. This concern is not one shared by the parents of the community. They voted 94% in favour of maintaining the 4 day schedule.

As a long time educator, there are some truths that have stayed constant throughout my career. One of the most critical for ensuring optimal outcomes for children and youth is an effective partnership between school and parents. The image of a three-legged stool comes to mind, the child-parent-teacher triad. When all three are committed to learning, when the adults work together to support the child, great results occur.

The arguments for maintaining the **4 day schedule are in-line with all 6 School District priorities** as outlined in the Five Year Plan:

**Priority One: Ensure every student acquires strong foundational skills and core competencies.**

Information shared at the recent consultation meeting held at Sun Peaks, January 21<sup>st</sup>, indicated that the most recent results available for the Foundational Skills Assessment (FSA) scores showed Sun Peaks Elementary students in top place in the district. It is worth noting that during that school year, students were in school an additional 15 or so minutes longer than the current schedule. **The length of day the children of Sun Peaks historically spent in school is comparable to the anticipated increase in time secondary students would need to be at school on a 4 day schedule.** Academically, students are excelling on an extended day, 4 day schedule. I encourage you to check attendance records for Sun Peaks students and compare to attendance with other schools in the district. Sun Peaks parents make school a priority because they can schedule appointments outside of school time and can travel to ski events without missing school. The research is clear; **there is a high correlation between school attendance and achievement.**

**Priority Two: Connect students to their passions and interests.**

As you heard at the consultation meeting, parents use the current Friday to provide their children with access to passions and interests not accessible in Sun Peaks, and not available through a school classroom. Having a day to travel into Kamloops for lessons ranging from dance, to music, to swimming, and much more, fills the gap that exists in a school that does not

have a gymnasium, library, music room, etc... As for skiing, many students are involved in ski lessons, racing and competitions. Lessons run Friday – Sunday, and weekend competitions require travelling on Friday. The current school schedule allows students to make school a priority (maintain excellent attendance) and participate in their passions.

**Priority Three: Honour the First Peoples’ principles of learning and Aboriginal worldview and perspectives.**

The first two principles are particularly relevant to this situation.

- **Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.**

The First Nations Principles of Learning rightly places the child within community. A child’s first community is family. The parents of Sun Peaks are asking you to support their need to be a vibrant part of their children’s education. As was said by parents at the consultation meeting, many of the parents either work for Sun Peaks Corporation or in the tourism industry that supports Sun Peaks. They do not get weekends off. The current schedule allows them a day with their children. ***Going to a five day schedule will rob most Sun Peaks families of something many of us take for granted.***

- **Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).**

Learning is holistic and relational, and the children of Sun Peaks demonstrate the power of experiential learning. Parents of Sun Peaks value the outdoors, good health and exercise, and they model it for their children. Spending time outdoors, exploring the natural world, and building strong, healthy bodies is as important as book-learning. I question a decision that negatively impacts parents’ abilities to provide these for their children.

**Priority Four: Foster an inclusive, adaptable and accountable district culture.**

While I believe the intent of this priority may pertain specifically to students with identified special needs, I argue that it should also apply to unique schools and communities. The recently redesigned curriculum published by the Ministry of Education is based on a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework. This includes providing flexible learning environments and spaces that accommodate individual learning differences. **The current 4 day schedule, and more importantly, the pre-2018/2019 even longer 4 day schedule, have worked and do work for students.** Their academic achievement is high, they have the opportunity to participate in extra-curricular activities in Kamloops that are not available at Sun Peaks, and they get to spend time with their parents that will be lost if their school goes to a 5 day schedule.

**Priority Five: Strengthen partnerships to enrich the way we lead, learn and work.**

Parents are a school’s most valued partners. Happy and supportive parents equal happy and industrious children and youth.

**Priority Six: Ensure the sustainable use of our resources.**

A school open four days per week costs less to operate than a school open five days per week and likely has a smaller carbon footprint.

In closing, you may wonder why I feel so passionate about this issue. I have asked myself the same question. I have no vested interest in the outcome, but I am passionate about education. In my current role as Home Hospital teacher and Mental Health Clinician I am working with some of our most vulnerable families; families who are finding it really challenging to engage with their schools. That is not the situation at Sun Peaks. The parents truly are engaged and partnering in their children's education. The school is a gem, and it is due to a large degree because the current 4 day schedule works to support both family and school based education. It honours parents and their role in their children's education, and the impact is enormous. When something is obviously working so well, please carefully consider what the parents are requesting. Theirs is not a request for convenience, it is a request based on what is best for their children and their children's education.

Sincerely,

Jody Oetter  
Mental Health Clinician & Home Hospital Teacher  
School District No. 73 (Kamloops-Thompson)