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The Chair and Trustees of the Board of Education
School District No. 73 (Kamloops-Thompson)
1383 9th Ave, Kamloops, BC V2C 3X7

June 3, 2021

RE: 2021 Catchment Boundary Change Public Consultations for Aberdeen Elementary / Pacific Way Elementary and Sa-Hali Secondary / South Kamloops Secondary (SKSS) Schools

Dear Chair and Trustees of the Board of Education,

Thank you for the opportunity to engage in the matter of the proposed school catchment boundary changes for Aberdeen Elementary / Pacific Way Elementary and Sa-Hali Secondary / South Kamloops Secondary Schools.

Although my comments are directed towards the Aberdeen / Pacific Way and Sa-Hali Secondary / SKSS consultations, founded in my circumstances as a parent of two daughters presently attending Pacific Way Elementary in grades 3 and 6, I believe they are applicable to the other catchment consultations presently in progress within the school district and I implore you to consider their much broader application.

I wish to recognize the effort and thought that goes in to planning such proposed changes. I do not believe they are being proposed lightly. By engaging in this consultation process, I wish to focus on presenting an alternative approach by which to manage school catchment boundaries, which I will outline below.

I heard many valid concerns raised by anxious parents during the online Aberdeen / Pacific Way engagement session held on April 27th, 2021. I share many of their worries presented regarding safety of access routes, traffic concerns, and challenges with daycare, even if some, like the latter, are less applicable to my family's particular situation. Because they are important to my school community, they are important to me. While I may not be addressing these issues below, I voice my solidarity to the concerns of my school community.

The proposed changes to school catchments are very distressing. Although we did not initially discuss them with our children, they quickly learned about them from their peers at school. This has caused them further anxiety, over and above that caused by the present challenges of COVID-19. When we initially enrolled my older daughter at Pacific Way, I was very torn between sending her to South Sa-Hali (to French Immersion) or to our local community school. When I completed immersion at South Sa-Hali it was also my local school. As a parent I tried to tease out what was most important to my own education – learning fluent French or attending our local school. I decided that attending the local school was the more important factor and would likewise be best for my daughter. Additionally, part of this consideration was the ease with which my children would be able to walk directly across the street

to their grandparents' house for afterschool care. Now, needed family support is at risk of being taken away from us through catchment area changes when there is another approach available to the school district.

I understand and respect the need to rebalance enrollment across schools and limit the use of portables. However, contrary to your proposed approach, I believe this can be done in a manner much less disruptive for families and that would be easier for the district to administer. As an alternative approach to managing school catchment boundaries, **I propose that school catchments be locked-in when students first enroll with the school district.** All students presently enrolled in the school district should have their present catchments grandfathered and locked-in according to the present catchments of the 2020-2021 school year. I wish to present just a few key points below explaining why I believe this alternative approach is worthy of your serious consideration.

[Locked-in catchments are predictable for both parents and the school district.](#)

With locked-in catchments, families who move within the district they can do so mindfully. Parents could apply to forfeit their locked-in catchment for that of their new residence when moving across catchment boundaries through a variance application. If parents wish for their children to remain in same school regardless of the move, the family will have that right; if parents wish to move their children to a new school, they can apply to do so. Parents of other students at a school will have certainty that their children will not get bumped from their school by catchment areas changes and new student enrollment. The district will have certainty in school enrollments because schools will not be pushed over capacity, without the district choosing to do so by granting new catchment rights through variances, or the district having to force student out of their previous schools to compensate.

[Locked-in catchments must apply to both elementary and secondary school catchments to keep families and student cohorts together.](#)

To be most effective, catchments for both elementary and secondary schools should be locked-in during the first student enrollment in the district. The elementary to secondary school transition is a challenging and critical period in the lives of young students. To ensure continuity and student success, rights to secondary school catchments must be secured during elementary school enrollment. This will allow for continuity of student siblings (and cohorts) during this transition year.

My older daughter is presently in grade 6 at Pacific Way. Because of the timing of the Pacific Way / Aberdeen catchment area change she would (thankfully) be able to complete her grade 7 year at Pacific Way. However, the Sa-Hali/SKSS catchment area change would come into effect for the school year beginning September 2022 and would result in her attending high school at SKSS rather than Sa- Hali. This will result in a significant breakup to her elementary school cohort. This is an unnecessary disruption to all students. Both elementary and secondary catchments should be decided at elementary enrollment and locked-in collectively to ensure continuity of student cohorts.

In theory, if I had a preference to my daughter attending Sa-Hali instead to remain with her cohort, I could apply for a variance. However, this would begin to cause other issues for my family as I have a younger daughter presently in grade 3 at Pacific Way. Come September 2022, when the Pacific Way / Aberdeen catchment area change takes place, she will need to move to Aberdeen elementary for grades 5 through 7. If I were able to get my older daughter a spot at Sa-Hali, when my younger daughter enters grade 8, she would by the catchment change, attend SKSS. To keep my daughters in the same school, I

would then need to apply for a second variance for my younger daughter to attend Sa-Hali with her older sister. This might be more practical for my family, however doing so would mean ripping my daughter from the newly established cohort she had to join at Aberdeen elementary. What if I cannot get the variances that we need as a family due to capacity constraint? I hope I have demonstrated how the approach of systematically implementing changes and requiring families to apply for variances create undue stress, challenge, and uncertainty. Lock-in catchments would solve this issue. The status quo would keep my daughters with their friends and my daughters together, no issue.

[Locked-in catchments prioritize the continuity of school communities.](#)

Through locked-in catchments, student already attending a school would be exempt from catchment changes. This is a significant improvement over the proposed system where catchment changes can be imposed on families by the school district. The present system forces families to apply for variances to keep their children at their current schools.

This system prioritized the rights of students who newly move into a school catchment over the rights of students presently attending that school; a student who moves into the catchment can bump an existing student from the school if there is not sufficient school capacity to grant the existing student a variance. This can unnecessarily result in two students attending new schools. With locked-in catchments the school district would have the power to decide if the new student should be granted new catchment rights. Existing students do not become innocent victims of new students moving into the catchment area. Student and their families are invested members of their school communities and should be allowed to remain as such unless they choose to leave.

With the proposed catchment change to Aberdeen / Pacific Way, if ten new students move into the Pacific Way catchment (in an area that is unaffected by the proposed catchment change) this may have to result in ten existing students of Pacific Way (residing like mine in the former catchment area) having to attend Aberdeen elementary (assuming there is capacity) because with the new enrollment at Pacific Way there was no longer space for the granting of variances. The present system would result in 10 new students at Pacific Way and 10 new students at Aberdeen. Under a locked-in catchment scenario, the 10 new students applying for catchment rights to Pacific Way could have their applications denied due to a lack of capacity and instead be provided with an opportunity for catchment rights at Aberdeen (assuming capacity), or else stay at their present schools (if families are moving from within the district). Locked-in catchments would result in a maximum of 10 new students at Aberdeen Elementary. The enrollment at both Pacific Way and Aberdeen Elementary would remain the same under both systems, however the locked-in catchment system would yield a 50% reduction in disruption to student cohorts.

[Locked-in catchments keep siblings together.](#)

Beyond the point made above about how locked-in catchments for both elementary and secondary are necessary to keep siblings at the same schools, locked-in catchments generally keep siblings together by default in any school, not through the use of variances. The present system again prioritizes student who newly move into a school catchment over existing students; families are forced to apply for variance to keep siblings together. This is a backwards approach to respecting families' rights. Under a locked-in catchment system siblings would be guaranteed to stay together.

[Locked-in catchments can be managed using student Personal Education Numbers.](#)

Naturally, administering a complex system of locked-in catchment area privileges can be challenging. However, I believe the existing Personal Education Number (PEN) profile tied to each student may hold the key to implementing a fair and manageable system. When a student moves into a catchment area within a school district for the first time, their PEN profile should be updated to include the catchment area that will apply to that student. All that is required is that the date of enrollment is recorded and the elementary and secondary schools applicable named. This catchment can remain with the student unless the family applies for and is granted a variance to change a catchment during a move within the school district.

With such a system, an existing student at a school would not ever get bumped from their school because of catchment area changes and/or by new students moving into the catchment area. Parents can make mindful decisions about how a move might affect the school their child may attend. The student may be able to remain at their present school without repercussion for the parents needing/choosing to move, or the student may move to the school of the new catchment, provided the new school can handle another student. The system as proposed takes choice away from parents. Parents and students can be forced to follow catchment area changes which, as we heard from parents, can have devastating repercussions on parents' ability to find suitable childcare, work and afford their homes. The system as proposed presents undue hardship on families through no fault of their own.

[Locked-in catchments would allow for more frequent tailoring of catchment boundaries to projected change, streamlined consultation processes, and reduced parental concerns.](#)

Most parents are reasonable and appreciate the challenges associated with managing school enrollment levels across the district. Most will understand the need for the district to alter catchment boundaries periodically to do so. However, most also do not understand why someone new to a catchment should be put before their child(ren). I believe nearly all the concerns raised by parents during the above and other ongoing catchment boundary consultation processes could be sufficiently addressed by adopting a policy of locked-in catchments. Upon implementation of such a policy the district would be free to alter catchment boundaries more frequently, without the need to engage in such deep consultation with parents, because the status quo would remain intact for these families. Naturally, it is wise to engage with the public when making these decisions, but this would no longer be such a high stakes game for affected families.

[However, if the status quo approach must remain, proof of residency within school catchments is essential.](#)

While I am advocating strongly for a locked-in catchment system, and I remain hopeful that you will be willing adopt this fundamental shift in catchment management, in the event this will not be adopted I offer this one piece of advice relative to the status quo approach. I am aware of numerous students attending Pacific Way who no longer live within the catchment boundary as present. While I have no proof and expect many of these students have been granted legitimate variances to attend the school, it is common knowledge among Pacific Way parents that there are some students attending Pacific Way whose parents have purposefully deceived the school district as to their residential address; parents have moved out of the catchment and not updated their address with the school to purposefully ensure their student will not risk having to attend another school as a result of having a variance to attend Pacific Way denied.

If the proposed catchment area changes are implemented, it is vital that the school district insist on an annual proof of residency. Without insisting on proof of residency the hierarchy of variances cannot be properly implemented and those seeking variances according to the rules will be subject to unfair determinations due to the willful deception of the school district by others. If you prescribe one set of rules for all, I insist you apply the necessary diligence to apply them accurately and fairly.

[Locked-in catchments are the solution we all need.](#)

In closing, I hope that my comments have provided you with some substantial reasons why you should consider a locked-in catchment system. I appeal to you to truly consider this option, as I believe it will make the management of catchment boundaries much easier, both immediately and in the long term, for the school district to administer, and will allay the fears parents and students who will be subject to the very real repercussions of the proposed changes.

Should I be able to offer any other assistance with this matter I would be very pleased to help.

Sincerely,

Richard Cane