

May 20, 2021

Board of Education of School District No. 73  
1383 9th Ave, Kamloops, BC V2C 3X7

**Re: Juniper Ridge/Marion Schilling Catchment Boundary Change Consultation**

To the Board of Education,

I am kindly requesting that the Board of Education consider how catchment boundary decisions affects student health and well-being. I recognize that student enrollment numbers, school capacity, and finances are necessary considerations, but these must be weighed against our children's health. The proposed catchment change for Juniper West has potential to impact our children's physical and mental health, while providing no foreseen benefit.

I appreciate that the school district has a limited budget and a responsibility to be diligent with spending public funds. However, I encourage the board to consider that when finances are prioritized over student health this is not a cost savings. This is a cost deferral. In the long run public funds in the form of healthcare dollars will be paying for current decisions that impact children's health.

In addition to being the parent of two children who attend Juniper Ridge Elementary School, I also work in Public Health. Therefore, I am well versed in the current health evidence that considers community planning to support population health. Research shows that in recent years Canadian children have become less physically active<sup>1</sup>. This is recognized as a public health concern<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, making catchment changes that result in a loss of ability to walk to school is arguably a public health issue.

Children's ability to walk to school has significant impacts on their physical and mental health. Physical activity is among the most significant modifiable behaviours that can influence a younger person's likelihood of developing chronic diseases<sup>2</sup>. Research shows that the majority of Canadian children and youth are not getting the recommended levels of daily physical activity<sup>3</sup>. A key factor for increasing children's active transportation (e.g. walking or biking) is proximity to school<sup>2</sup>. Increased physical activity improves mental health and protects against the development of chronic disease.

In addition to physical health implications, the proposed catchment change for Juniper West will inevitably have mental health impacts due to separation of peer groups and loss of community connectedness. It is tempting to reason that "kids are adaptable, they will make new friends", but this logic does not consider that children are currently grappling with the psychological toll of

the pandemic. Our children have been forced to adapt continuously over the past year and research shows it is affecting their mental health. What they need on the heels of a pandemic is continuity, a sense of security, and connectedness to their peers, school, and community. This is echoed by the Ministry of Education who recognizes that during the pandemic "we also need to attend to our social and emotional well-being. During this time especially, students need to know that they are valued and that they are still part of a school community"<sup>4</sup>.

I struggle to find any benefit for Juniper West families in the proposed catchment change. Juniper West children will be disproportionately impacted compared to families from other neighborhoods. Families from Valley View gain the benefit of becoming closer to their new school, making it easier to walk. Families from Rose Hill and Sun Rivers have to bus regardless if they attend Marion Schilling or Ralph Bell; in addition, they will move schools with their neighborhood peer group. On the other hand, Juniper West families are being removed from their neighborhood, losing the option to walk to school **AND** being separated from peers. Only to move from one over capacity school to another. To pour salt on this wound, the new housing development going in directly above us in Juniper West will land in the Juniper Ridge catchment. Our students are being removed from their school while children who don't even live in our neighborhood yet will be able to attend Juniper Ridge. All of this indicates that student well-being is not a consideration in planning.

I understand that at this point there are no 'easy' solutions, but making decisions based primarily on financial pressures and student numbers is short sighted and harmful. Recognizing the opening Ralph Bell is a temporary interim solution (as stated by the school district), I am requesting the board consider other options:

**1. Make Ralph Bell a grade 6/7 middle school**

- a. This would maintain peer relationships and keep our youngest students in our neighborhood and in walking distance to school.
- b. We are a tight knit community, keeping our children together offers many benefits including shared after school childcare and a sense of safety and connectedness

**2. Share a cost analysis of an expansion to Juniper Elementary for public consideration, and advocate to the Ministry of Education to support this option**

- a. This is the most over-capacity school and the neighborhood is still growing significantly. It seems likely that numbers may support a school expansion and a future new school in Juniper West.
- b. Opening Ralph Bell is a temporary solution; it and the other schools will quickly be over capacity.

**3. Grandfather in the students who currently attend Juniper Ridge**

- a. This would maintain established peer relationships and be more equitable than removing current students, while admitting students who are new to the neighborhood (moving into the new development above Galore Crescent).

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Simone Jennings

References:

1. Colley RC, Garriguet D, Janssen I, Craig CL, Clarke J, Tremblay MS. Physical activity of Canadian Adults: accelerometer results from 2007 to 2009 Canadian Health Measures Survey. Component of Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 82-003-X Health Reports. Ottawa: 2011 Aug.
2. Planning Communities Factsheet Series. Active Living, Children & Youth: What is the Canadian Evidence Saying? <https://cip-icu.ca/Files/Resources/FACTSHEETS-ChildrenYouth-FINALenglish.aspx>
3. Colley RC, Garriguet D, Janssen I, Craig CL, Clarke J, Tremblay MS. 2011.
4. BC Ministry of Education, Supporting the K-12 Education Response to Covid-19 in BC <https://www.csf.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/ressources/k-12-covid-19-integrated-planning-framework-march-27-2020-1.pdf>