

To Whom It May Concern;

I am writing with respect to the proposed school catchment area change for the students of Juniper Ridge Elementary and Marion Schilling Elementary, and the reopening of Ralph Bell Elementary.

When my family and I moved to Kamloops, from Terrace, almost 2 years ago, we specifically picked Juniper Ridge for the school that we wanted our girls to attend. It was hard enough having to start over at a new school for my oldest daughter (who was entering Grade 1 at the time), then throw in a pandemic and the isolation that came along with that, needless to say it has not been the easiest transition. I can't imagine having to start over again at a new school after finally starting to settle in at Juniper Ridge Elementary.

I am not naive in the fact that something needs to be done, however, I don't believe splitting up a community and friendships that have been made (and maintained during a pandemic) is the right answer. In the short time that we have been in Juniper Ridge, it has become quite clear that this is a neighbourhood that prides itself on community. The proposed catchment area change would be essentially segregating a small portion of the community.

I have read over the projected enrollment numbers published by SD73 for the three schools involved in this catchment change, and should this change proceed as proposed, Ralph Bell would be the school most over capacity after this change. This would mean the children involved have to leave their schools and neighbourhoods and relocate to a school that would be the most over capacity of the three schools involved. This does not seem like a fair solution. Additionally, the area where Ralph Bell is located is frequently in the news for crime, drug use, and issues with homelessness, a less than ideal location that I for one am not comfortable sending my young children to. To put it bluntly, if I wanted my children to attend school in Valleyview, I would have bought a home in Valleyview.

A member of the school board has been quoted as saying "If we do open it, all we're doing is sharing the pain." I'm having trouble understanding why a decision that will most certainly cause pain and disruption to children's lives is being used as a band aid solution. Perhaps we should be giving kids as much stability and community as possible until a proper solution can be implemented, especially on the heels of a pandemic.

Is it possible to consider expanding or upgrading Juniper Ridge Elementary with the budget allocated to the reopening of Ralph Bell? Could priority be placed on building a school in Juniper West? Another solution would be to reopen Ralph Bell as a middle school and avoid splitting up existing friendships.

I think we can all agree that while something needs to be done with respect to the over capacity of Juniper Ridge, however, changing the catchment area of Juniper Ridge and sending a small portion of the community down the hill to a reopened Ralph Bell is not in our children's best interest.

Thank you for your time and consideration with respect to the above.

Sincerely,  
Heather Smiley

