

Name: Tara Doherty

Brief summary of issue or topic of discussion:

The potential boundary changes and how they will impact the Lowertown community's families. The letter attached is written and signed on behalf of 37 parents from the Lowertown community. Attached you will find my letter with regard to my daughter [REDACTED] and the impact that the potential boundary changes will have on not only her but our family as well. I've also attached a letter from [REDACTED] psychologist expressing her concerns regarding the impact of the potential boundary change on [REDACTED]

Thank you, Tara Doherty

To whom it may concern,

I am writing on behalf of 37 parents in the Lowertown community. At Rockcliffe Park Public School (RPPS), our children's school, approximately 30% of the students are from Lowertown. We are deeply concerned about the potential boundary changes to RPPS, which will significantly impact our children and families. After reviewing the current proposal, our community identified several critical issues that require your immediate consideration.

Alignment with OCDSB's Guiding Principles

Our concerns directly align with the Guiding Principles for Consideration outlined in the April 2024 report to the Committee of the Whole, particularly regarding student Well-Being:

1. The prioritization of "genuine interests and lived experiences of students" in decision making processes
2. The need to "minimize and/or reduce unnecessary transitions and disruptions" to ensure continuity and stability
3. The importance of ensuring "schools are easily accessible for students" while promoting community engagement

Throughout this letter, we demonstrate how the potential changes conflict with these stated principles and suggest alternatives that would better uphold them.

Community impact and equity

The proposed boundary changes directly conflict with the Board's commitment to providing equal educational opportunities for all students. Our analysis reveals two critical areas of impact: socioeconomic segregation and community cohesion.

The socioeconomic disparity between the affected communities is substantial and well documented. According to recent data (2021), Lowertown West and East rank in the highest disadvantaged quintiles (4 and 5, respectively) on the socioeconomic scale, while New Edinburgh and Rockcliffe are both in quintile 1, representing the least disadvantaged areas¹. Many of us specifically chose to live in Lowertown to access RPPS's educational excellence while remaining in affordable housing areas. The proposed changes would unfairly terminate this access, making RPPS attendance contingent on a family's ability to afford housing in more expensive neighbourhoods.

Safety data further amplifies our concerns about the proposed changes. Crime statistics show dramatic differences across the affected areas, with reported incidents numbering 2,091 in Lowertown West and 1,340 in Lowertown East, compared to just 22 in New Edinburgh and 39 in Rockcliffe Park². The proposed community school, York Street Public School, is situated in an area where city councillors have documented concerns about drug-related activities near school grounds³. These statistics highlight the need for comprehensive community support and resources rather than concentrating students in areas that currently face greater systemic challenges.

¹ The socioeconomic index is the result of a principal component analysis of six variables: unemployment rate, lone-parent families, residents aged 25-64 with no high school diploma, median market income, residents living in low-income, and households in core housing need. Source: <https://www.neighbourhoodstudy.ca/>

² <https://www.neighbourhoodstudy.ca/>

³ <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/overwhelmed-by-opioid-and-homelessness-crises-council-to-ask-for-helo>

The current proposal would create three adverse outcomes that contradict the Board's equity objectives:

- First, it would concentrate socioeconomically disadvantaged students in one area rather than maintaining the current model of economic integration that benefits all students.
- Second, it would subject students to significantly different educational environments based solely on their home address.
- Third, it would diminish the valuable diversity at RPPS that currently enriches the educational experience for all students.

RPPS has evolved into more than an educational institution; it serves as a vital bridge between communities, fostering connections across socioeconomic boundaries. While the Board's principles emphasize promoting community engagement, the proposed changes would fragment existing community connections that have developed over years. The current model demonstrates how public education can provide equal opportunities for all students.

Educational disruption and special needs

The proposed boundary changes would significantly disrupt established educational support systems, particularly affecting our most vulnerable students. This disruption extends beyond simple administrative transitions and threatens to undermine years of careful educational planning and relationship building.

At RPPS, the Consistency of Care model has proven instrumental in supporting students with learning disabilities, mental health challenges, and other exceptionalities. This model ensures that students receive support from a stable team of educators and specialists who deeply understand their individual needs, learning styles, and triggers. The success of this approach relies heavily on long-term

relationships and institutional knowledge that cannot be readily transferred to a new educational environment.

The complexity of supporting students with exceptionalities extends far beyond the transfer of Individual Education Plans (IEPs). While these documents provide important guidelines, their effectiveness depends entirely on the implementation by a cohesive team of educators and support staff who have developed nuanced understanding of each student's needs. The Proposed transition to a community school would require students to establish new relationships with unfamiliar support staff, adapt to different implementation strategies for their IEPs, navigate new physical spaces and routines, and rebuild trust in an entirely new educational environment. Such transitions can lead to academic regression, increased anxiety, and behavioural challenges that may take months or years to resolve.

The personalized support systems at RPPS have been carefully cultivated through continuous collaboration between educators, specialists, families, and students. These systems represent years of accumulated knowledge and refined strategies directly contributing to student success. The proposed boundary changes would effectively dismantle these support networks, potentially erasing years of progress for our most vulnerable students.

Multiple transitions and mental health

The timing and nature of these proposed boundary changes pose significant concerns for student wellbeing, particularly given the recent disruptions our children have already experienced. This forced transition differs fundamentally from the natural progression points in our students' educational journeys.

Our students continue to process the educational and emotional effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, working through academic gaps and social adjustment challenges stemming from extended periods of remote learning and disrupted routines. Now, we are faced with the possibility of uprooting them from the school, friends, and support system they've come to depend on. For many families, this feels like an additional blow at a time when stability and consistency are more important than ever.

A critical distinction must be made between anticipated, developmentally appropriate transitions and abrupt, forced changes. At RPPS, students and families currently benefit from a predictable educational pathway. From their earliest days at the school, children understand that RPPS continues through Grade 6, allowing them to form long-term peer relationships and engage in discussions about their future school choices. This Predictability enables students and parents to prepare mentally and emotionally for natural transition points, fostering a sense of agency and readiness for change.

The current proposal would disrupt this carefully planned progression. Instead of following established pathways, students would face an unexpected upheaval, creating considerable anxiety for both children and parents. The uncertainty surrounding these changes—their timing, implementation, and implications—has already begun to affect our community's well-being. Many parents have begun to consider the options at other boards.

Many children in Lowertown will be facing multiple transitions. Some will be moved to new schools under the proposed boundary changes, and others will face further transitions as they move from elementary school to high school. Each transition requires students to navigate new social dynamics, adapt to different teaching styles,

learn new routines, and rebuild their sense of belonging and security. Kindergarteners and Grade 6 students will be forced to endure multiple transitions in just a few short years. This upheaval will create a cycle of instability that could profoundly affect their academic and emotional well-being. For Grade 6 students, this means they will not have the opportunity to graduate alongside their peers—the very classmates with whom they've built relationships over the years. This disruption will take away the sense of continuity and closure that is so important for students at this critical stage in their educational journey.

This acceleration of transitions directly contradicts the Board's stated principle of minimizing unnecessary disruptions in students' educational experiences. The current proposal would create exactly the kind of discontinuity that the board's own guidelines seek to prevent.

Implementation Concerns and capacity analysis

The potential boundary changes raise questions about implementation feasibility and capacity management. Our analysis of available data suggests that this initiative, while well-intentioned, may create more challenges for RPPS than it resolves.

Enrolment data reveals concerning capacity implications. RPPS, with a previously rated capacity of 356 students, underwent renovations to add three additional classrooms, yet maintains a stable enrollment of 403 students without utilizing the five available portables in 2025. Meanwhile, York Street currently operates under capacity with approximately 130 available spaces⁴. The potential redistribution of approximately 121 Lowertown students would create a significant imbalance: reducing RPPS to 70% capacity while pushing York Street to full capacity. This situation becomes untenable when considering the potential addition of grades 7 and

⁴ <https://www.ocdsb.ca/about-us/facts-figures/enrolment-data>

8 EFI programs at York Street, particularly if the catchment area for 7 and 8 are larger.

The expansion of French Immersion programming presents additional implementation challenges. The OCDSB has not adequately addressed several critical questions:

- First, how will the Board source and retain qualified French teachers in sufficient numbers to support this expansion? The current shortage of qualified French language educators across Ontario makes this a pressing concern. Without a clear staffing strategy, we risk compromising program quality and educational outcomes.
- Second, what measures will ensure equitable distribution of experienced French language teachers across schools? New programs often struggle to attract and retain experienced educators, potentially creating two-tier system of French language instruction within our Board.

The proposed implementation timeline demonstrates an outdated approach to change management. Best practices advocate for an agile, iterative approach rather than employing a waterfall methodology-preparing for massive change before full implementation. Complex changes affecting students, families, and communities require careful testing and refinement before full-scale implementation. We propose that the Board consider a design-thinking approach that would begin with small-scale pilot programs to test assumptions, gather real-world data on implementation challenges, and minimize disruption to student learning and community cohesion.

The Board's commitment to prioritizing students' lived experiences calls for a more careful, student-centered approach to these changes. The current proposal appears to prioritize administrative efficiency over the student-driven approach outlined in the Board's guiding principles and the ambitious scope and accelerated timeline create unnecessary risks.

Implementation failures could have long-lasting effects on student achievement, community trust, and program sustainability. A more measured, evidence-based approach would better serve all stakeholders while maintaining educational quality and community support.

Community position and path forward

The relationships our children have built at RPPS are key to their success. Whether it's with teachers, peers, or support staff, these relationships provide the foundation for their learning and emotional growth. Disrupting these connections could set our children back. We ask the Board to honour its own guiding principles by ensuring that any changes prioritize student well-being, minimize disruptions, and maintain the community connections that support our children's education.

Our concerns are not merely theoretical. Of those signing this letter, 36 parents representing over 30 children currently enrolled in RPPS's EFI program, have indicated they will pursue alternatives outside the OCDSB if these changes proceed. This potential exodus would reduce overall OCDSB enrollment, diminish program diversity, and fragment established community relationships. The decision you are asking us to make disrupts our children's education and compromises the very school community that we have all worked to build and have grown to love.

Our community remains committed to working constructively with the OCDSB to address legitimate capacity and programming challenges. However, we cannot support changes compromising our children's educational opportunities and well-being. We suggest that the OCDSB take an incremental approach to implementation, testing assumptions in areas of the city where there is greater receptivity to the proposal in order to identify unforeseen challenges in subsequent phases of rollout. Should the OCDSB proceed with a plan to displace Lowertown



OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Delegation 6.4.b

children from RPPS, we insist that all children and families be grandfathered at the school.

Sincerely,

Lowertown community parents

Andrea Proano, Andrew Elliott, Ben Sussman, Brett Thompson, Deepti Mathur, Dejan Krupljanin, Diana Inkpen, Emma Dunkley Elliott, Eric Passmore, Eugenie Defayette, Federico Boccheciampe, Frank Gagnon, Geraldine Esparza, Inderbir Riar, Inga Cordts, Jennifer Allanson, Jessica Gagnon, Jordan Worek, Jorge Delgado, Josiah Frith, Krista Eisner, Kristian Lariviere, Lotto Hocini, Louis-Marc Girard, Nadia Ahmad, Rachel Seeney, Radia Saibi, Rajneesh Mathur, Rosalie Lamarre, Rosinie Bisson, Samira Amid, Serguei Guevorkian, Shannon Worek, Sonya Lee, Tara Doherty, Viktoriya Guevorkian, Vir Advani

Subject: Concerns Regarding Proposed Boundary Changes to RPPS

Good morning,

My family has lived in Lowertown for the past 10 years. One of the key reasons we chose this area was so that our daughter could attend Rockcliffe Park Public School (RPPS), a place she now loves, where all of her friends are, and where she feels safe and supported.

In 2023, my daughter was diagnosed with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), A Learning disability in reading, as well as a tic disorder. She went through the IPRC process at RPPS and has been identified as twice exceptional. Currently, in Grade 4, she is thriving at Rockcliffe Park PS, and the school has become a cornerstone of her educational experience. With the recent discussions about changing school boundaries, I am deeply concerned that for her final year of elementary school, she may be forced to move to York Street Public School for Grade 6, which would be detrimental.

Moving my daughter's IEP to another school simply isn't enough. An IEP is just a piece of paper. The real value lies in the team we've spent years developing at RPPS. You can't just "transfer" that team, the support staff, or the relationships my daughter has built over the last five years. This change threatens everything that has supported her progress and well-being.

There are several other concerns I'd like to share:

1. Impact of COVID-19 and Uprooting My Daughter:

My daughter, who is currently in Grade 4, has already been deeply affected by the disruptions of COVID-19. Now, the OCDSB wants to uproot her from her

friends, her community, and the support system that has helped her thrive. This feels like an additional blow.

2. Community Division and the Lowertown Area:

I'm also concerned that families like ours, from the Lowertown area-which includes many middle- and lower-income households-are being separated from those who can afford to live within the RPPS boundary. We bought our home here specifically to give our daughter the opportunity to attend RPPS. Now, we're left wondering what happens next.

3. RPPS as Our Family's Community:

RPPS isn't just my daughter's school-it's our family's community. We've built meaningful relationships with the other families at the school, and the thought of losing that support network is devastating. Forcing us to move to another school **will** affect not only our daughter but our entire family's sense of belonging.

4. Uncertain Transition for My Daughter with Exceptionalities:

With her exceptionalities, my daughter will essentially be a "guinea pig" for this change, moving to a school that has never had French Immersion and is already experiencing a significant increase in student population.

5. The Emotional Toll of Multiple Transitions:

Looking ahead, my daughter will be in Grade 6 in September 2026, and the plan is for her to transition to a new school for just one year before transitioning again. She will not have the opportunity to graduate with her best friends, who

are in the RPPS catchment. This will have a lasting emotional impact on her and many other students in the same position. This acceleration of transitions directly contradicts the Board's stated principle of minimizing unnecessary disruptions in students' educational experiences. The current proposal would create exactly the kind of discontinuity that the board's own guidelines seek to prevent.

Why the Consistency of Care Model Matters for My Daughter:

A critical distinction must be made between anticipated, developmentally appropriate transitions and abrupt, forced changes. For █████ RPPS has provided a clear and predictable educational pathway. Since her earliest days at the school, she has understood that RPPS continues through Grade 6, allowing her to build long-term friendships and have meaningful discussions about her future school options. This predictability has helped █████ and our family prepare mentally and emotionally for the natural transitions ahead, fostering a sense of agency and readiness for change.

The current proposal, however, would disrupt this carefully planned progression. Instead of █████ continuing along her established path, she would face an unexpected upheaval, creating significant anxiety for her and for us as parents. The uncertainty about when and how these changes would be implemented, along with their broader implications, has already begun to affect Alice's well-being. As a result, we are now considering alternative options for her education.

The **Consistency of Care** model is something I strongly believe in, particularly for children like my daughter who have exceptionalities. In my experience, children with learning disabilities, mental health challenges, or complex emotional needs rely on

stable, consistent care in order to thrive. For children like mine, consistency in their environment, support systems, and relationships is not just helpful-it's critical.

1. **Stable Support Team:**

The **Consistency of Care** model is built on having a stable team of educators and support staff who understand the child's unique needs. Over the years, my daughter has built trust with the team at RPPS, and they've developed strategies that work for her.

Moving her to a new school would disrupt that continuity. It's not just about transferring an IEP; it's about transferring the entire support system that we've worked so hard to build.

2. **Personalized, Long-Term Support:**

The support she receives is personalized, and over time, it has been carefully crafted to meet her needs. A change like this would uproot that system of support and could set her back emotionally and academically. The **Consistency of Care** model ensures that the support evolves with the child, providing a long-term foundation for success.

3. **Emotional Security and Trust:**

For children with anxiety and OCD, like my daughter, emotional security and trust are essential for learning and development. She feels safe and supported at RPPS. Disrupting this stability would cause her significant emotional distress, making it harder for her to focus on learning and further developing the skills she needs.

4. **Avoiding the Negative Effects of Frequent Transitions:**

Frequent transitions create instability for children, especially those with special needs. My daughter has already dealt with the disruptions caused by COVID-19, and now she faces the potential upheaval of moving to a new school, followed by another transition to high school in just a year. The **Consistency of Care** model stresses the importance of minimizing transitions, as they can cause stress, anxiety, and a sense of loss. For children like my daughter, who have learned to rely on the predictability and consistency of their current environment, such changes are incredibly challenging. This acceleration of transitions directly contradicts the Board's stated principle of minimizing unnecessary disruptions in students' educational experiences. The current proposal would create exactly the kind of discontinuity that the board's own guidelines seek to prevent.

5. Building on Existing Relationships and Progress:

The **Consistency of Care** model allows a child's progress to build over time. Moving her away from RPPS would disrupt the relationships she's formed with her peers, teachers, and support staff. This continuity of care has helped her make significant strides, particularly with her learning disability and mental health challenges. The relationships she's built at RPPS are integral to her academic and emotional growth, and it's difficult to imagine how she could make similar progress in a new school.

As a parent, I've put in a great deal of effort to ensure that [REDACTED] has the best possible environment for success—one where she feels supported, understood, and safe. This proposed change feels like it is taking that sense of stability away from

her. I'm genuinely concerned about the negative impact this could have on her mental health, her social connections, and her academic progress. Because of this, I cannot support any changes that would compromise Alice's educational opportunities and well-being.

I urge the OCDSB to take a more gradual approach to implementation, testing the proposal in areas of the city where there may be greater receptivity. This would help identify any potential challenges before expanding the plan further. Should the OCDSB move forward with displacing [REDACTED] and other children from RPPS, I firmly believe that all children enrolled prior to 2026, including [REDACTED] should be grandfathered in and allowed to remain at the school.

Thank you for your time

Sincerely Tara

Doherty