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Brief summary of issue or topic of discussion:

Concerns about the EPR's changes on Pleasant Park Public School.

**Written submission regarding the EPR
Families at Pleasant Park Public School**

Executive Summary

This submission outlines the concerns of dozens of parents whose children currently attend Pleasant Park Public School (PPPS), located in Alta Vista. We are deeply alarmed by the proposed changes to the school, which we believe will result in significant disruptions to the community. These changes have been proposed without initiating a Pupil Accommodation Review (PAR), which we believe should have been required given the scale of the transformation and the fact that over 50% of the current students would have been reassigned without the mandatory "grandparenting" rule. This rule is seen as an attempt by the school board to bypass the PAR process and a thorough community consultation, to the detriment of many families whose children will have to remain at PPPS, even if they wish to attend another school.

The proposed changes are concerning for several reasons, including the negative impact on families, particularly vulnerable groups such as low-income families, single parents, and those with atypical schedules. The division of grade levels into a K-3 and 4-8 structure, for example, would split siblings, create logistical challenges for working parents, and add unnecessary transitions for young children. The proposed changes also threaten to disrupt childcare arrangements, particularly as the school would lose its licensed childcare spaces for younger children, creating further strain for families.

Furthermore, the planned pairing of PPPS with Riverview, which is located a significant distance away, contradicts the school board's goal of creating accessible community schools. This would force children to travel further, undermining the "community school" philosophy and presenting safety risks. The changes also disproportionately affect families already facing economic and logistical challenges, further exacerbating inequalities in education access.

The reform also proposes to turn PPPS into a school for Grades 4-8, despite the fact that the school's facilities were not designed for older children. This shift would require costly and unnecessary investments, which could further strain an already underfunded system. Additionally,



the closure of alternative schools such as Riverview, without adequate plans to reintegrate students into the mainstream system, raises serious concerns about equity and the well-being of vulnerable students.

In light of these concerns, we request a delay in the vote on the proposed changes, along with indepth consultations with the PPPS community to explore alternative solutions that ensure both equitable access to programs and education and the preservation of the existing community. We also call for consultations with families from alternative schools and specialized programs to find alternatives to their closure, ensuring that all students have access to the support and education they need.

Detailed Submission

This analysis reflects the concerns of dozens of parents whose children currently attend Pleasant Park Public School (PPPS), a dynamic and diverse school for kindergarten to grade 6, located in Alta Vista. We are shocked by the proposed changes to our school and the way the school board is attempting to implement these changes. We firmly believe that, given their scope, a Pupil Accommodation Review (PAR) should have been initiated because the school will undergo significant transformation, it will no longer serve the community in the same way, and the changes will result in the reassignment of more than 50% of the currently enrolled students. It is shocking that the school board deliberately chose to circumvent the PAR by imposing a mandatory 'grandparenting' rule for all students already enrolled, to the detriment of many affected families.

If a PAR had been possible, consultations with the community would undoubtedly have led to the expression of serious concerns. It is easy to understand why: the negative impacts of these changes on families are too great, making this reform unacceptable in its current form.

We want to be very clear: the negative effects of this reform will not only affect the families during the transition. They will also affect all new families in the area, to the point that families living near the school will choose to enroll their children in other school boards, as enrollment at Pleasant Park will only bring disadvantages.

This situation deeply saddens us, as we are attached to our school and community, and we do not want to see PPPS deteriorate. We understand that changes are necessary in the Alta Vista neighborhood. Several schools in the area are under capacity and lack resources. We also know that some families must take the bus to access the French immersion program. We share the



desire to have community schools where every child could walk to school and follow their program of choice. However, this plan does not result in the creation of a true community school at PPPS, contrary to what you claim, and it cannot be supported.

We regret that OCDSB has not allowed for true consultations within the different communities. We are particularly concerned to see that the most vulnerable families will be poorly heard due to OCDSB's lack of genuine willingness to consider their perspectives and needs. Despite this, we submit this written submission hoping that it will be taken into consideration by the trustees before the vote. In it, we describe in detail the various negative impacts we see in the plan for our school.

The proposed structure of K-3 and 4-8 splits up siblings and causes logistical problems for parents.

The plan calls for 17 schools in the city to adopt the KG-3 and 4-8 structure, which currently exists only marginally. Of these 17 schools, 7 of the 8 schools in Alta Vista are affected by this change in configuration, abandoning the traditional KG-6 and KG-8 setups. All families will be affected, whether they follow the Enhanced English or French Immersion program. OCDSB has not explained the rationale behind this change, nor demonstrated any benefit for the children and their education. On the contrary, this division contradicts a 2017 decision by OCDSB that the preferred model is KG-8, which led to the elimination of middle schools in certain parts of the city. We find it hard to understand why, less than 10 years later, the board is proposing such a configuration, thereby recreating middle schools, especially since it presents numerous drawbacks:

- During the transition, SKG and Grade 1 children will face an additional, unnecessary transition. They will begin their schooling at PPPS, move to another school until grade 3, then either return to PPPS or go to another neighborhood school. These changes, especially for such young children, are highly disruptive.
- Changing schools in grade 3 involves an earlier transition: an age at which children are not fully independent, cannot walk to and from school alone, and still require supervision before and after school. This means many will still need daycare before or after school. The plan to turn Pleasant Park into a 4-8 school will jeopardize childcare for hundreds of families. Our school currently has 198 licensed childcare spaces for JK to Grade 5 students, which will be lost when younger children leave the building. Families will lose their before-and-after-school care spaces amid a childcare crisis, with no guarantee they'll be able to find suitable alternatives.



Delegation 6.17.f

- The transition at such a young age is also more difficult for children, who need security and stability. A change of environment and teaching team can be very disruptive.
- The fact that older students will be separated from younger students removes the opportunity for mentorship and solidarity with the younger children. Generally, children from Grade 4 onward are expected to be reading buddies or lunch monitors, or to organize activities for younger students. Being separated from the younger students takes away an important leadership and role model experience.
- For families with multiple children, this separation also means that younger children will be separated from their older siblings, removing an important role for older children to take care of the younger ones and cutting an important inter-sibling bond.
- The division will place an enormous burden on working parents. Parents will have longer commutes and more complicated family schedules, with different schedules and pick-ups and drop-offs. There is already a problem with tardiness and absenteeism. This phenomenon is likely to worsen with such a division. The risk is that families will choose a different school board so that their younger children can all be in the same school.
- This division will prevent parents from being involved in their children's school, as they won't be able to do so in both schools. There will be less of a sense of belonging and community.
- Finally, this configuration will also seriously affect children with Individual Education Plans. Just as the plan is put in place, and the trust and security between the child and the teaching team are established, the child will have to change schools, and the whole process will have to start over. During the transition, the challenge will be even greater for these children and their families, some of whom will have to change schools three times between kindergarten and grade 4.

This situation will be difficult for everyone, but what will be the impacts on the most vulnerable parents, such as single parents, those with low income, those with multiple jobs, those with atypical schedules, those with disabilities, or those who don't speak English or French? The Alta Vista neighborhood is home to many diverse communities, some of which are vulnerable. 29% of children at Pleasant Park live in low-income families, and 29% also do not have English as their first language.

One of OCDSB's goals is to make access to school programs more equitable. But is it truly equitable to force families to separate their children and manage complicated logistics? Some of these families might end up with access to the French Immersion program at a school closer to



them, but at what cost? It is unrealistic to think that offering the French Immersion program in more schools will solve the inequity problem. More than just a French Immersion program, vulnerable families need a strong teaching team, books and supplies, academic support, access to food, daycare spaces, help navigating the system, social support, psychological support, etc. Offering greater accessibility to the French immersion program must not come at the expense of vulnerable families' fundamental needs. For education access to be truly equitable, it must first address their basic needs: proximity, simplicity, and comprehensive support that goes beyond just access to a particular program. Only by strengthening social and academic support for vulnerable families can we truly ensure an equitable and supportive educational environment for all children.

Furthermore, we must highlight the disproportionate impact this will have on women, particularly single mothers. Many women already face significant challenges in balancing work, childcare, and household responsibilities. The proposed changes, which would require them to manage multiple school schedules and childcare arrangements, will place even greater strain on them. This situation exacerbates existing gender inequalities and further marginalizes women who are already facing financial or caregiving burdens.

Impact on PPS families

In a survey conducted by the School Council after the plan was published, in which 93 people responded, 66% of the respondents said that their children would attend different schools. 73% of respondents said their before-and-after-school care would be affected, and 43% said they would need before-and-after-school care at two locations.

The boundary redesign results in many families traveling a further distance, outside of the community, which contradicts the "community schools" philosophy and creates safety hazards.

The reform proposes pairing Pleasant Park with Riverview. Riverview will accommodate children from kindergarten to Grade 3, while Pleasant Park will serve children from Grade 4 to Grade 8. This pairing between the two schools makes no sense. They are separated by 3 kilometers (at least a 30-minute walk), do not belong to the same community, and are currently not connected. All other schools in the neighborhood (Alta Vista, Featherston, Vincent Massey, Arch, Hawthorne), except for Charles H. Hulse, are closer to Pleasant Park and share the same community.



This choice radically alters the situation for children living near the school and staying within its boundaries. Currently, these children can walk to school up until Grade 6 and continue their education at another nearby school. With the proposed changes, these children will now have to take the school bus to Riverview from kindergarten to Grade 3 and will have to wait until Grade 4 to attend Pleasant Park, their neighborhood school.

The situation becomes even more complex for children in the Pleasant Park neighborhood who are currently in the Enhanced English program. Depending on where they live, these children have access to a neighborhood school that offers programs from kindergarten to Grade 8. For them, this means moving from a school easily accessible throughout their elementary schooling to a school that will only be accessible for four years.

It should also be noted that the new boundaries are divided by Smyth Road, the General Hospital and CHEO campus, a shopping district, and the railway line. These major obstacles limit the ability to create a true community and represent significant safety risks for children. No child will be able to cross these obstacles safely.

Finally, the new boundaries do not align with the City of Ottawa's objective, which, to reduce car dependency, has developed a plan based on 15-minute neighborhoods. This principle assumes that all daily or weekly services, including school, should be within a 15-minute walk. It is regrettable that with the pairing of Pleasant Park and Riverview, the school board does not respect this principle.

The geographic distance between the two schools and the significant barriers separating them mean that children who were once able to walk to school throughout their schooling will now have to take the bus. This adds unnecessary pressure to an already dysfunctional and unreliable system, creates additional challenges for parents, and harms children's education.

Just like the K-3 and 4-8 configuration issue, the fact that PPS is paired with a distant school primarily harms vulnerable families, single-parent families, and women, undermining the equity principle advocated by OCDSB.

Impact on PPS Families



In the survey (N: 93), 43% of respondents said they would attend a school farther away than they do now, while only 24% said they would attend a school closer to their current one, contradicting the idea of community-based education.

Additionally, 34% of respondents stated they would transition from walking to bussing, while only 15% said they would switch from bussing to walking.

Unnecessary transformation of an elementary school into a middle school with insufficient budget

The plan proposes turning Pleasant Park into a school for Grades 4 to 8. However, the school was designed to meet the needs of younger children, from kindergarten to Grade 6. Beyond the inadequate toilets, which may seem trivial, several essential facilities and staff needed for education of Grades 4 to 8 students are missing: science labs, a music room, a large gymnasium, a well stocked library, lockers, and staff to prepare students for the transition to high school. On the other hand, all the facilities and investments made for kindergarten classes and the playground will be lost. Given that many of the kindergarten facilities at PPS were funded through community contributions, it is difficult to accept such waste.

PPPS's situation is not unique in the Alta Vista neighborhood or other parts of the city. With the reconfigurations of grade levels in almost all the schools in the neighborhood and several parts of the city, many schools will need to be refitted. Some, like Pleasant Park, will need to accommodate new grade levels, while others will likely have to increase their number of classrooms and facilities to accommodate more students at the same grade level. It seems that the school board has not considered the magnitude of the necessary investments, or the huge waste represented by eliminating some of the equipment that will become useless. Given that 30% of OCDSB schools are in a need of repair, these investments seem unnecessary and counterproductive, especially since this grade-level configuration presents significant drawbacks for parents.

Even if these investments were possible, we doubt that the work will be completed by September 2026, or even in the near future. For several years, children in Grades 7 and 8 will not receive the same quality education as those in schools equipped to meet their needs. This is far from the equitable plan OCDSB desires.



An unwanted closure of an alternative school

It is planned that PPPS will be paired with Riverview, which is currently an alternative school that would be transformed into a regular school under the new plan. Just as we cannot accept that PPPS becomes a school for Grades 4 to 8, we cannot accept the closure of alternative schools like Riverview. These schools were created to meet the specific needs of children with particular needs and for those for whom the traditional school system does not work. Hundreds of families, adults who attended these schools, and children currently served testify to the benefits of these schools. For them, these schools have been a real refuge where they were able to thrive.

How does OCDSB plan to reintegrate these children into a system that did not meet their needs and, let's face it, probably still won't? The fact that the board wants to close alternative schools and 39 special programs without a credible plan to ensure these children's integration into the regular system is utterly irresponsible. It is unrealistic to believe that, by September 2026, all schools will be ready to meet the needs of all these children. Given the budgetary constraints, it seems unlikely that all schools will ever be equipped to provide the support and education these children are entitled to. It is unacceptable that children could be abandoned by the public education system.

In this situation, it is also difficult for us to speak of equity. The school board claims to want to improve equity in access to programs while eliminating programs that are important and necessary. How is it equitable to force the integration of children with special needs into the traditional school system, which is not suited to their needs?

Conclusion and Request for Plan Revision

Given all the negative impacts on the community, it is clear that if a Pupil Accommodation Review (PAR) had been allowed and initiated, and if consultations had taken place, the plan for PPPS should have been revised, as it presents too many drawbacks. Therefore, it is unacceptable to us that the school board did not take the time to consult the community, and even worse, that it is attempting to circumvent the PAR by imposing a mandatory grandparenting rule for all students enrolled in Grade 2 and above as of September 2026. This rule was not put in place to ensure the well-being of the students, but rather to avoid having the proposed changes for PPPS fall under a PAR. For some families, grandparenting is seen positively as it allows their children to stay in a familiar environment until Grade 8. However, for others, it represents a constraint, as they would have preferred their children to attend their new neighborhood school. This is the case for families with younger children, who will attend their new neighborhood school, while the older children will



be required to stay at PPPS. It is also the case for families who would have liked their children to attend a school suitable for their grade level and not overcrowded, as PPPS will remain. For several affected families, the issue of accessibility will also arise because it is uncertain whether they will still have access to school buses.

Our Requests

Given all the negative impacts of the plan, we request:

- A delay in the vote on the EPR
- An in-depth consultation with the PPPS community to find an acceptable alternative to the proposed plan that allows for both better equity in access to French Immersion, but most importantly, equity in access to education
- A consultation with the families of alternative schools and specialized programs to find alternatives to their closure.