

Name: Anne Ritzema

Regarding Alta Vista Cluster

I am urging you to please vote NO to the proposed OCDSB Elementary Program Review Proposal.

Key points:

1. Proposed boundary changes will negatively impact children who will be in JK through grade 2 in September 2025 due to ruptures in relationships with peers, teachers, and the school community.
 - o Case example: For Alta Vista P.S. the primary grade population will be relocated to Charles H. Hulse, Featherston, and Riverview. This will unnecessarily separate students from their friends.
 - o Families will have to adjust before and after school care arrangements, parent work hours/schedules, etc. Under the proposed model, many families will have to juggle sending their children to different schools. This means two sets of childcare arrangements and it removes the option of older siblings walking with younger siblings.
 - o The proposed model goes directly against the two-year kindergarten program model that aims to keep students with their peer group and teaching team for JK and SK.
2. Separating JK-grade 3 and grades 4-6 is pedagogically unfounded.
 - o Students lose the continuity and sense of community that is built when older and younger children attend the same school.
 - o Younger students lose the opportunity to learn from older students.
3. In many cases the proposed boundary changes are blatantly in opposition to the aims of the proposal, namely “More children are able to walk to school or have a shorter commute by bus.”
4. Ending the Primary Special Needs, Primary Language Learning Disability, Primary Learning Disabilities Specialized Intervention, and General Learning Programs without a detailed plan and funding model is irresponsible.

Proposed boundary changes will negatively impact children who will be in JK through grade 2 in September 2025 due to ruptures in relationships with peers, teachers, and the school community.



Delegation

My daughter is currently in grade 1 EFI at Alta Vista P. S. We live approximately 800m from the school. Once she started JK, we made conscious decisions to remain within the boundary for Alta Vista, knowing how important it is for children to develop consistent strong relationships with friends, teachers, and the school community. In fact, my daughter met her core group of friends in JK and strengthened those relationships because we met the other families outside the kindergarten yard, where they all played together after school. In the proposed model, the neighbourhood around Alta Vista will lose this central feature that the proposal claims to achieve. The proposed new boundaries and school changes will be disruptive for an entire school population. In my daughter's case, she will remain with her cohort for grade 2 but will then need to move schools for grade 3, being separated from half of her cohort when they are divided across schools. Most of her close friends will be in the other group, based solely on which side of Heron Rd we live on. Countless students will be uprooted from their friends, with whom they formed connections starting in JK. This group of current grade 1 students will then have to move again in grade 4, going back to Alta Vista. My daughter will miss an entire year with her core social support group, while they have an entire year to strengthen their bonds. When she returns to Alta Vista for grade 4, it is likely that she will struggle to rejoin the group, at least in the way that she left it one year prior. The impact of such a social rupture on a child's academic performance, due to the emotional fallout, is without justification.

Our family, and many others, will need to temporarily adjust our patterns to accommodate a different school for only one year. This impacts before and after school care arrangements, parent work hours/schedules, etc. Placing stress on the family system increases stress for children.

The proposed model goes directly against the two-year kindergarten program model that aims to keep students with their peer group and teaching team for JK and SK. My son will be starting JK this September. Under the proposed changes, he would complete one year at Alta Vista, then move to Charles H. Hulse for SK. Given that there are no proposed changes to the kindergarten program, kindergarten remains a two-year program. Children enter in JK, and are expected to stay with their consistent classmates and teaching team through SK. According to the proposed boundary changes the entire JK cohort at Alta Vista (and other schools facing the same sort of change) will be torn apart, with no regard for the connections children have made with other students or with their educators.



Delegation

If the boundary changes go ahead, they should at a minimum be phased in starting only for students entering JK in September 2026. A transition plan needs to be established for all older grades, allowing them to remain with their cohorts.

Separating JK-grade 3 and grades 4-6 is pedagogically unfounded.

Students lose the continuity and sense of community that is built when older and younger children attend the same school.

Younger students lose the opportunity to learn from older students. A current feature of early literacy programs is pairing younger students with older, more experienced readers, through reading buddies. Reading buddy programs will be impossible if schools only go up to grade 3. Children will also lose enriching opportunities to learn from older students, for instance in plays or concerts.

In families with more than one child, two different schools for JK-3 and 4-8 will often mean children from the same household will need to go to different schools. This again places unnecessary strain on family units that have to arrange different before and after school care for their children. In families with only one parent, this strain seems almost impossible to navigate. The option of having an older sibling walk to school/home with a younger sibling is removed, as is the option of having both children at the same before/after school program.

The proposal does not appear to have been fully costed. There are renovation costs that it seems have not been accounted for (e.g., turning Alta Vista's 5 kindergarten classes into classrooms for grade 4-8 students, and making enough kindergarten-sized toilets and play structures at the other schools), transportation costs (many kids who currently do not need busing will need to be bussed).

In many cases the proposed boundary changes are blatantly in opposition to the aims of the proposal, namely "More children are able to walk to school or have a shorter commute by bus."

According to the proposal, "When all neighbourhood children attend the same school, there are more opportunities to interact with peers and form friendships- before, during and after school."



Delegation

And "More children are able to walk to school or have a shorter commute by bus." This is blatantly untrue for many schools under the proposed boundary changes. For example, in the case of Alta Vista P.S., by removing JK-3 the immediate surrounding neighbourhood will be forced to send their children by bus to Featherston. Take for example a hypothetical address on Niagara at Begonia Ave: current distance to Alta Vista: 450 m versus distance to Featherston: 2.4 km. Another example: Clover at Richard Ave: Current distance to Alta Vista: 1.3 km versus distance to Featherston: 2.9 km.

As noted above, my daughter did meet her friends at school and in the school yard. Yet, she and her friends will be separated, and going forward, the community will be fractured.

Ending the Primary Special Needs, Primary Language Learning Disability, Primary Learning Disabilities Specialized Intervention, and General Learning Programs without a detailed plan and funding model is irresponsible.

The brief summary available to the public about special needs program changes is insufficient for reasonable debate. These are students who are or would be struggling within the regular program because they are unable to follow along with grade-level curriculum expectations in the way that their neurotypical peers can. In the existing model, not only are class sizes smaller, but teachers have specialized training and access to additional support professionals. Curriculum expectations are modified to meet the needs of students and can be tailored to each student's needs. Ending these programs, with no clear plan for how the needs of these students will be met, is short-sighted and is setting a group of already vulnerable students up for failure in later grades.

The plan is being rushed through without adequate consultation and assessment of impacts. I urge you to consider the profound ramifications of the proposed model. Please commit to undergoing true consultation and analysis, where the lived experiences of stakeholders are taken into account and solutions to these issues are found.

I thank you for carefully considering these issues.

Sincerely,

Anne