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Brief summary of issue or topic of discussion:

The submission from the Rockcliffe Park Public School (RPPS) School Council to the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) provides a detailed perspective on the proposed Elementary Program Review. The Council commends the Board for its community-focused approach and highlights RPPS as a model of community-based education. They emphasize that RPPS's K-6 structure has fostered a strong sense of belonging among a diverse student body that includes families from various socioeconomic backgrounds, international communities, and both French Immersion and English programs.

A major recommendation is to expand RPPS to include Grades 7 and 8. Currently, RPPS experiences one of the lowest retention rates post-Grade 6, with many parents expressing concerns over the inadequate options at designated intermediate schools. Survey data reveal that while only a small percentage of parents plan to send their children to existing OCDSB intermediate schools, nearly all would prefer to remain at RPPS if the school were extended to K-8. The Council argues that such an expansion would not only maintain continuity by keeping siblings together and reducing travel burdens but also strengthen community ties and support systems.

Another critical concern is the absence of a grandfathering provision in the current proposal for redrawing school boundaries, which is particularly worrisome for families with children who have complex learning needs. The Council stresses that forced mid-program transitions can disrupt established support networks and have adverse effects on student well-being, especially in the context of ongoing challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic and staffing shortages.



In summary, the RPPS School Council urges a phased, community-sensitive implementation that expands RPPS to intermediate grades and includes grandfathering provisions to protect current students' continuity and well-being.

Submission on Elementary Program Review

From: School Council - Rockcliffe Park Public School

To: Ottawa-Carleton District School Board

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rockcliffe Park Public School (RPPS) currently exemplifies the community-based model that the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) champions in its Elementary Program Review (EPR). RPPS fosters a strong sense of belonging among students, parents, and staff, seamlessly uniting families from a diverse array of socioeconomic backgrounds and international communities.

Opportunity for Retention: Expanding RPPS to a K-8 Model

Current data from the RPPS community reveals an abysmal retention rate following Grade 6, with an average of only 5 EFI and 2 English students continuing within the OCDSB system. A survey of RPPS parents indicates that if the school were to expand to include Grades 7 and 8, a compelling 94% would opt to keep their children at RPPS. This change falls squarely within the EPR's goals of community-based schools and keeping cohorts together.

Elementary Program Review: Critical Need for Grandfathering Provisions

The EPR's proposed boundary changes – absent a grandfathering clause – have raised serious concerns among the RPPS community. A significant majority (76%) of all RPPS parents fear that redrawing boundaries without allowing current students to complete their education at RPPS will disrupt students' and families' well-established



support networks, academic achievements and mental health well-being. The breakdown in community will be felt by all RPPS children.

While breaking up RPPS's existing community would be bad for the whole school, the changes would directly disrupt about 30% of RPPS students, specifically those living in Lowertown and the Byward Market. The impacts are especially acute for children with complex learning needs who depend on consistent, individualized support in a stable setting. Beyond these groups, all current RPPS Grade 6 EFI students continuing with OCDSB will go through four schools in four years if the EPR is adopted (RPPS for Gr. 6 to Queen Elizabeth for Gr. 7 to York St. for Gr. 8 to Lisgar for Gr. 9), an outcome no educator or parent would advocate. The toll borne by each of these children is unacceptable — regardless whether it's a few or many.

OCDSB needs to take more time and more care in designing its implementation plan, including grandfathering to avoid the serious and unnecessary disruptions its plan will impose on these children.

SUBMISSION

On behalf of the RPPS School Council, we thank the OCDSB for the opportunity to share our perspective on the Elementary Program Review. Our Council has been closely following this process and has engaged the broader RPPS community to understand the implications of the proposed changes for our school, staff, and children.

We begin by commending the OCDSB for striving to place community at the centre of its proposed approach. RPPS exemplifies the community-based model that the Board seeks to strengthen. As parents, we have witnessed firsthand how our school's K-6 structure has fostered a strong sense of belonging and connection.

The RPPS community is remarkably diverse, bringing together students from the city's lowest and highest socioeconomic neighborhoods, international families, and

learners from both French and English programs. In alignment with OCDSB's vision, RPPS serves as a hub for community activities; its proximity to surrounding neighborhoods has cultivated an engaged parent and caregiver community, and has enabled children to build meaningful friendships with nearby peers.

As Ontario's Ministry of Education has emphasized across its various policy documents related to equity, inclusive education, and student well-being: public education extends beyond academic achievement. RPPS already serves as a model for how schools can create inclusive environments where children from all backgrounds come together with mutual respect and a shared commitment to community building.

Opportunity for Expansion of RPPS to K-8

Given the Review's objectives, we see an ideal opportunity to explore expanding RPPS to include Grades 7 and 8. This addition would align with several key goals outlined in the Elementary School Review while addressing a significant challenge: RPPS currently has one of the lowest retention rates in the OCDSB after Grade 6, with an average of only seven of 50 students a year progressing to their designated OCDSB school for intermediate grades.

Currently RPPS EFI feeds into Queen Elizabeth for the Early French Immersion program. However, most RPPS EFI families seek alternatives outside the OCDSB. Over the past five years, the average retention rate for EFI families moving to Grade 7 at Queen Elizabeth is just five out of 35 students. Similarly, very few families (two out of 15 on average) choose to attend York Street, the designated intermediate school for the English program. Data from a survey of RPPS parents (see Attachment 1) indicates that only 10% of parents plan to send their children to an OCDSB school for intermediate grades. While 32% are uncertain, 58% plan to switch school boards or move to private schools. Notably, among parents of Grade 6 students, 32% remain unsure about their child's school for Fall 2025, highlighting the perceived lack of

suitable local options. If RPPS offered Grades 7 and 8, 94% of parents would keep their children at RPPS.

The community-based education model prioritizes equity of access and streamlined grade configurations. By introducing an intermediate program at RPPS, we would achieve many of the OCDSB's own objectives:

- More children are able to walk to school or have a shorter commute by bus: none of the students in RPPS's catchment area can walk to Queen Elizabeth
- More opportunities for children to interact with peers and form friendships - before, during, and after school - by remaining in local neighbourhood close to local library, community centres and parks
- Increased parental involvement and engagement in student life and the single school community
- Keeping siblings together in the same school enhances shared school experiences and facilitates commuting to school and after-school care needs
- Fostering community development and partnership opportunities for sports and other recreation and learning activities supported by an active School Council
- Eliminating a disruptive transition for our students and ensuring that cohorts move together in more cases

Importantly, RPPS already has many of the basic facilities needed for an intermediate program, though some modernization may be required. We have initiated discussions with our Trustee and Superintendent to assess the feasibility of such an expansion.

Concerns About Program Review Implementation: The Critical Need for Grandfathering

While we support the move toward community-based education in all OCDSB schools, our community engagement has revealed one major overarching concern: the lack of a grandfathering provision for existing students. The proposal to redraw boundaries without allowing children to complete their education at RPPS has

created significant anxiety in our community. A survey of RPPS parents indicates that 76% of respondents are concerned about boundary changes, rising to 95% among Lowertown and Byward Market families.

This issue is particularly acute for families of children with complex learning needs. Establishing effective support systems requires significant effort—securing diagnoses, developing Individual Education Plans (IEPs), and building relationships with staff who understand their child's unique requirements. The consistency of care that RPPS provides is not easily replicated and forced mid-program transitions threaten to undermine years of progress. Like children in existing SPCs, IEP students should be allowed to complete their education within their existing support networks.

Grandfathering is not merely about convenience; it is about preserving educational continuity and emotional wellbeing. When children form bonds with teachers, support staff, and peers, these relationships become central to their sense of security and belonging. Disrupting these connections outside of natural transition points can have far-reaching consequences for social development and academic progress. This is well substantiated in academic literature.

As noted by multiple Trustees at the January 21, 2025, Committee of the Whole meeting, a comprehensive risk assessment is lacking. Any meaningful risk analysis, including the social-emotional and mental health impact, must centre on the implications of failing to grandfather existing students.

Our concerns are magnified by persistent staffing shortages. In 2022, the Ontario Teachers' Federation reported that nearly 50% of school boards are struggling to fill positions, with vacancy rates reaching up to 30% in specialized areas such as special education, French immersion, and STEM subjects. Despite these challenges, no plan currently exists to address these vacancies —particularly for French teachers— that would enable OCDSB to have sufficient staff for French

Immersion in every school by September 2026. Without provisions such as grandfathering, the simultaneous transition of students and staff is likely to place even greater pressure on an already strained system.

Any significant change will inevitably face challenges. We urge the OCDSB to develop a more comprehensive change management plan that avoids a one-size-fits-all approach for Ottawa's diverse communities. Given the geographic differences, unique community circumstances, and individual school environments across the city, implementation plans should be customized for each school or, at minimum, for each OCDSB zone.

Furthermore, many of these children were already impacted by COVID-19 pandemic-related disruptions, including school closures, lack of contact with teachers and peers (in and outside of school), mask mandates, canceled extracurriculars, and dealing with many uncertainties over extended periods. Since the start of the pandemic, the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario has seen a significant increase in the demand for mental health services, including a 126% increase in the number of children presenting in the emergency room in a mental health crisis.

Our community strongly believes it is unreasonable to subject these children to yet another major transition as they are still adjusting to life after the pandemic. It is too soon. This is consistent with the messaging that was delivered in consultations last year where stakeholders emphasized the need to address the pandemic's negative social impacts.

A phased implementation approach — one that allows current students to remain at RPPS if their families so choose or introducing the new program streams gradually for incoming students — would mitigate these risks while still advancing OCDSB's long-term goals. New students could be directed according to the revised boundaries, creating a gradual transition that respects existing families' needs while embracing the community-based model for future cohorts. It would also move these students to

schools with established programs rather than abruptly moving them into schools new to the French Immersion curriculum.

Recommendations: A Two-Pronged Approach for Success

We respectfully submit two key recommendations that we believe will strengthen the Elementary Program Review's implementation while best serving our students:

1. Expand RPPS to Include Grades 7-8

We urge the OCDSB to consider adding an intermediate program at RPPS as part of this review. This expansion would:

- Address the significant retention challenges RPPS faces after Grade 6
- Provide a walkable, community-based option for intermediate education
- Eliminate a disruptive transition point for our students and families
- Keep siblings together longer
- Leverage our existing facilities and strong community support
- Create a continuous K-8 experience that promotes educational stability

2. Implement Grandfathering Provisions

We strongly advocate for incorporating grandfathering provisions as a foundational element of the implementation strategy. This approach would:

- Honour the trust that families have placed in OCDSB
- Protect vulnerable learners from unnecessary disruption
- Allow schools to adjust gradually and staff appropriately for changing enrollment patterns
- Demonstrate OCDSB's commitment to putting student wellbeing first
- Prevent additional disruption for students still recovering from COVID-19's impact

- Ensure current students benefit from community stability while new cohorts adjust to the revised boundaries

Conclusion

The OCDSB is at a pivotal moment, and we applaud its goal of creating more equitable schools. RPPS is committed to supporting this vision, as demonstrated by our engagement efforts and the role we play in our community. While we feel that this proposal will make the RPPS community less diverse if the proposed new boundaries are adopted, we recognize that it is the OCDSB's role to make decisions for all schools. At the same time, the impact on OCDSB's current student population needs to be prioritized.

As advocates for our children and community, we encourage the OCDSB to balance its vision for systemic improvement with practical solutions that minimize disruption. By expanding RPPS to K-8, incorporating grandfathering provisions, conducting thorough risk assessments, and developing tailored implementation plans, the Board can achieve its objectives while maintaining educational stability.

This review attempts to design a community without fully incorporating the voices of those it seeks to define. Zone-level engagement would allow Trustees to understand the unique needs of each school. For example, current Grade 6 French Immersion students moving to Queen Elizabeth for Grade 7 will then be required to transfer to York Street for Grade 8 before transitioning to Lisgar Collegiate for Grade 9—four schools in four years. Proper consultation could have identified and addressed such disruptions.

We urge the OCDSB to consider these recommendations to ensure this well-intentioned initiative strengthens our educational community rather than creating unnecessary challenges. RPPS School Council remains committed to collaborating with the OCDSB to put student well-being at the forefront while keeping more students within the Board for their elementary and intermediate years.

Thank you for your consideration of our submission.

ANNEX: RPPS Survey - What We Heard Report

In February 2025, RPPS School Council conducted a survey of parents and guardians on two topics:

1. How the Elementary Program Review may affect your family, including possible implications of new school boundaries.
2. Views on extending RPPS to include grades 7 and 8.

The survey was run from February 13 to 23, before the upcoming boundary changes were announced. We received responses from 157 families, representing 228 children at RPPS, which is 57% of the total student population of 403. A further 37 younger siblings of current RPPS students, who will begin school in Fall 2025 or later, are also represented by this survey.

Of the families who responded, 81% have their children in Early French Immersion, and 17% in English with Core French. 2% have multiple children in a combination of the two programs.

The data represents a fairly even distribution across grade levels and matches school enrollment, as shown in the table below.



Delegation 6.4.c

Grade	Percentage of children (responses)	Percentage of children (school enrollment)
JK	11%	11%
SK	10%	11%
Grade 1	11%	12%
Grade 2	16%	15%
Grade 3	13%	14%
Grade 4	16%	14%
Grade 5	13%	11%
Grade 6	10%	13%

The data also represents families from across the current RPPS catchment area, as shown in the table below.

Neighbourhood	Percentage of families
Byward Market	8%

Lindenlea	17%
Lowertown	20%
New Edinburgh	30%
Rockcliffe Park	21%
Outside RPPS' catchment area	4%

Boundary Changes

We asked families questions about the boundary changes that might impact their families. The responses represent the high level of concern of current RPPS families that they may be excluded from the school following boundary changes, particularly for those living in the Lowertown and Byward Market areas. Note that the survey was conducted before the new school boundaries were released.

Of all responses, 76% of families indicated that they chose their current place of residence based on RPPS's catchment area. For those who live in the Lowertown/Market area, this rose to 84%.

We observed a varying level of concern with how families may be impacted by boundary changes, depending on the neighbourhood. Those who live in the Lowertown/Market are more concerned about the impact of potential boundary changes than those who live in Lindenlea/New Edinburgh/Rockcliffe Park.



Delegation 6.4.c

	All responses	Lowertown/Market	Lindenlea/New Edinburgh/Rockcliffe Pa
Concerned	44%	95%	22%
Not concerned	32%	0%	44%
I'm not sure	24%	5%	33%

We asked families where they would send their children should their current home fall outside of the new catchment area. It was not a provided option, but many families wrote-in that they would move in order to be able to continue to send their children to RPPS. Nearly half of all respondents were unsure, indicating the general concern about the impact of the boundary changes. Those who wrote in another response were mainly those who would pursue a grandfathering option for their children to remain at RPPS.

	All responses	Lowertown/Market	Lindenlea/New Edinburgh/Rockcliffe Pa
OCDSB	8%	5%	10%
Other board/private school	36%	52%	31%
Move to stay at RPPS	3%	9%	1%
I'm not sure	46%	34%	51%
Other	6%	0%	7%

Families are overwhelmingly willing (91%) to drive their children to RPPS to keep them in the school. This percentage increases to 95% if only those who live in Lowertown or the Market are considered.

Extension to grades 7/8

We asked families their views about extending RPPS to have grades 7 and 8. Families with children in all grade levels were almost unanimously (97%) in favour of this. Those families that were not were concerned that their children would be excluded from attending because they think they will fall outside of the school's new catchment area.

We asked families where they were considering sending their children for grades 7 and 8 under the current program model and school catchment areas. The responses show a high level of uncertainty. Even for those whose eldest child is in the junior grades, close to one third of families are uncertain about where they will send their children for the intermediate grades. For those families with older children who have already graduated from RPPS, only 4% of those children attended their designated OCDSB school.

	All responses	Eldest child in grades 4-6
OCDSB	10%	14%
Other board/private school	58%	55%
I'm not sure	32%	30%

We asked families where they would consider sending their children if RPPS were to offer grades 7 and 8. In this scenario families are much more certain that they would send their children to RPPS.



Delegation 6.4.c

	All responses	Eldest child in grades 4-6
OCDSB	94%	91%
Other board/private school	3%	4%
I'm not sure	3%	5%

We asked families what factors would influence their choice of school for grades 7 and 8. Academics, including program availability, was the most important factor, with 88% of families identifying this factor.

Factor	Percentage indicating this factor is important to them
Academics	88%
Friend group	80%
Close to home/walkable	68%
Familiarity with the teachers	53%
Ease of transportation	50%
Extracurricular clubs	45%
Familiarity with the school board	34%
Sports teams	34%
Siblings in other grades	33%

Families were very supportive of the proposal to add grades 7 and 8 to RPPS. Many raised that doing so aligns with the objectives of the Elementary Program Review in



creating community-based schools and would remove one transition for most students at a vulnerable age.

Elementary Program Review

We asked families if they had any other concerns about the Elementary Program Review aside from the boundary changes. We received comments on the following topics:

1. Families are concerned about the elimination of some Specialized Program Classes, not only for the children who would have attended these classes, but for the implications to educator workload in regular classes and the impact this may have on other children. The loss of the alternative program is also a concern.
2. Many families question if there is already a shortage of teachers who are qualified to teach French - many have noted that supply teachers are rarely able to speak French.
3. There is concern about the loss of French education in Grade 1 French Immersion, and questions about how children who join French Immersion in Grades 2 and 3 will be able to catch up with those who began in Grade 1 without significant additional support.
4. Families worry about the impact of changing schools on their children at an unanticipated point. The loss of friend groups, unfamiliar teachers, loss of support systems in place at RPPS, and stress of moving to a new school were all raised. This is particularly a concern for children who have IEPs in place.
5. The speed at which the changes are being implemented was also highlighted, as well as the perceived lack of consultation of parents on the new program model.
6. Families are also worried that if the new catchment area follows the current English boundary for the school, there will be less diversity at the school, which is a loss for all students.



7. Concern that RPPS may lose up to 30% of its students, which could result in more multiple split grade classes, such as the Grade 1-2-3 split in the English program we had in 2023-24.
8. Safety concerns about the area surrounding York St PS, as well as safety concerns for children in intermediate grades traveling long distances by public transit.
8. Families who are concerned about falling outside the new catchment area for RPPS hope that there will be grandfathering options for their children and their children's younger siblings who have yet to start school.
9. Specific concern for children who are currently in Grade 6, who will be changing schools in Grade 7, may have to again in Grade 8, and will then transition to High School, leading to them attending four schools in four years. These kids were in Grade 1 when the Covid-19 pandemic began, which led to a disruption in their education that lasted years.
10. There is strong support for the overall goals of the Program Review to increase equity and create community schools. However schools today are not equal, and there is hesitancy from parents/guardians in having their children be the guinea pigs in creating more equitable schools.