



**Name: Jean Acharya**

**Brief summary of issue or topic of discussion:**

Opposition to the Elementary Program Review proposal, with a focus on safety, social well-being, and equity, highlighting specific concerns shared by parents of children at Severn Avenue Public School.

Dear OCDSB Trustees,

While the proposed changes to school boundaries and programming aim to improve equity and create community schools, they instead introduce **new barriers—including safety risks and transportation challenges, increasing transitions, and disrupting vital support systems that public education depends on**. The plan emphasizes community-based education, yet for our community—naturally defined by the Queensway and the Ottawa River—these boundary changes do the opposite. **Research** underscores the benefits of active school travel, yet under the new boundaries, students from Severn Avenue Public School will leave our community for grades 4-8, to attend Pinecrest Public School across the 417 highway.

**Safety & Social Connection Concerns**

The plan claims to strengthen community ties, yet it **severs a child's ability to safely connect with their peers** outside of school hours. From the time they can walk, we teach our children to 'look both ways' before crossing the street—to wait, to be cautious, to make eye contact with drivers. We do this because even at 40 km/h in our residential neighbourhoods, we know that a moment of inattention can have devastating consequences. Now picture a child—just 10 years old—standing at the edge of an on-ramp, nervously gripping their backpack, watching as cars accelerate from 60 km/h to 100+ km/h. There is no protected crossing—just the roar of traffic and a sign that reads "wait for gap". The instincts we've worked so hard to instill in them—'look both ways, wait for a break'—are no match for the reality of crossing a high-speed highway.

This is not a hypothetical—it is the **terrifying reality this plan creates for families** of children at Severn Avenue Public School and Pinecrest Public School. These children, who can currently walk and bike safely to school and friends' homes, would instead face unsafe crossings and be further isolated by transportation barriers. Families without vehicles or financial resources for alternative transportation (taxis, rideshares) **will have increased barriers to maintain peer relationships**, contradicting the plan's own stated goal of strengthening community connections. This is not just



an inconvenience—it is a structural barrier that fractures communities. [Research](#) has shown that highways significantly **reduce social connectivity** in urban areas, limiting interactions between neighborhoods and reinforcing social isolation.

### **Impacts of Grade 4 Transitions on School and Social Dynamics**

Forcing students to transition to a new school in Grade 4 disrupts not only the individual child but the entire school community. Students and schools thrive on continuity and peer supports, yet relocating students at this stage eliminates critical support systems such as:

- Older siblings walking younger siblings home from school, providing safety, reassurance, and role modeling—a simple but powerful form of peer support.
- Reading buddy programs and clubs, where older elementary students mentor and guide younger ones, fostering academic confidence and social development.
- Parental involvement, which increases as children age, plays a critical role in enhancing school resources and strengthens school culture.

These are not just conveniences; they are **foundational pillars of a strong public education system** that nurtures lifelong learning, social-emotional growth, and community ties. Instead of fostering a sense of belonging, this plan fragments school relationships, disrupts mentorship structures, and weakens the natural peer support networks that help children transition through key developmental stages.

### **Equity Concerns**

The plan seeks to “provide more equitable access (to French immersion), particularly for families new to the city or those facing other barriers.” However, **true equity does not mean making every school identical—it means ensuring all students can fully participate without unnecessary obstacles**. By increasing travel distances and reliance on transportation, the plan creates significant attendance challenges—including bus driver shortages, missed buses, and difficulties with mid-day pickups for appointments or illness. Families without vehicles or financial resources for alternative transportation (taxis, rideshares) will struggle to maintain peer relationships, contradicting the plan’s stated goal of strengthening communities. Children in many Zone 4 and other urban and rural neighbourhoods will be bussed out of their communities for much of their elementary education to make the “dual-stream in every school” plan viable. Rather than eliminating inequity, this plan shifts it elsewhere, potentially increasing the challenges for the same



## Delegation 6.17.d

---

vulnerable communities it intends to support. While increased language program access is important, it should not come at the cost of community-based education and school accessibility.

I encourage you to reflect on how personal experiences and privileges—such as access to a vehicle, flexible work hours, or the ability to choose schools without financial constraints—might shape perceptions of this plan’s impact. Many families in our community do not have these same advantages. For them, increased reliance on transportation is not just an inconvenience but a **significant barrier** to school participation, social connections, and academic success.

Based on the EPR capacity projections, we are deeply concerned that REKSAP—a not-for-profit, Ministry of Education-licensed childcare provider renting space in Severn and Regina schools—could be displaced under this plan. REKSAP has operated in our communities for over 40 years. REKSAP provides vital childcare for over 170 children across Severn and Regina Street Alternative Schools, offering affordable early learning and extended-day care for working families attending these schools. **Access to affordable and local childcare is a major equity issue, and eliminating REKSAP would disproportionately impact low-income families and single parents, further deepening barriers to workforce participation and economic stability.**

**I urge the Board to re-evaluate the proposed program, grade distribution, and boundaries through a lens of safety, social well-being, and equity—one that eliminates barriers rather than simply shifting them elsewhere.** If the plan moves forward with amendments, I urge the Board to consider alternative solutions for our community—naturally defined by the Queensway and the Ottawa River. Our neighborhoods, including Queensway Terrace North, Lincoln Heights, Britannia Bay, Britannia Heights, Woodpark, and Whitehaven, already offer **safe, active routes to school**, with sidewalks and bike paths. Alternative pairings should be explored that do not require children from Severn Avenue Public School to cross the 417 highway to attend school.