

Name: Carrie Komesch

Brief summary of issue or topic of discussion:

The elementary program review and alternative schools. I'm a parent and a teacher.

To the Board, Trustees, and my fellow community members:

My name is Carrie Komesch. I'm a forest school teacher in Ottawa, and for ten years I have been teaching young people aged 4-14 how to use flint and steel; whittling knives; and their own grit and ingenuity.

We follow an emergent curriculum that nurtures critical thinking; creativity; and relationship-building with one another and with the land. Our students are supported in taking risks and in self-regulating, and the result is children who are kind and curious and intrinsically motivated to learn. My school is a private school, but my ultimate goal is to make this type of learning experience accessible to all children because of the benefits it provides in and out of the classroom.

Currently, Ottawa's alternative elementary schools provide the closest thing to a forest school education that is possible in the public board. Parents (like myself, who has a neurotypical third grader) are choosing the alternative program even though it doesn't offer French Immersion because of the other benefits it provides. There have been decades-long investments in professional development and institutional knowledge at these sites, and as a result educators are supported in offering learning that meets the Ontario curriculum in a way that is uniquely child-centred.

There are only five alternative elementary schools across the city. These are not special education schools. They receive the same funding as mainstream schools, and have the same class size caps as the rest of the province.

The other three school boards in Ottawa are continuing to invest in their options for alternative programming. If nothing else, it seems like a poor business decision for the OCDSB to homogenize its offerings when we could instead lean into making our alternative programs even more radical/forward-thinking/relevant.

It's not costing the OCDSB anything extra, and it's helping to build a society that is better prepared to meet whatever our collective future holds.

Thank you for your time in reading my submission. I appreciate it!