Name: Nicole Whitten

Brief summary of issue or topic of discussion:

I would like to voice parent concerns related to proposed changes to Sawmill Creek Elementary School with the proposed OCDSB ERP changes.

I would like to request that the school remain a K-8 school since this was acknowledged by the Director that this was the ideal model configuration when planning for new schools and to allow for the least amount of transitions possible for students for their well-being and mental health.

I would also like to request that the board re-examine the boundary changes, specifically for Sawmill Creek Elementary school as unfortunately, the new proposed boundaries actually do the reverse effect on community building and more kids are moving further away from their homes to different schools.

Dear OCDSB Board Members and Attendees,

I am a member of the parent council and mother of two children who attend Sawmill Creek Elementary Public School in Zone 11. While I appreciate some of the changes made under the revised Elementary Program Review (EPR) proposal, the overall goals of the plan are still unclear, and I am not certain that the plan will achieve the goals that were stated by the Board.

Ultimately, I hope the trustees will vote against the EPR or I respectfully request that the board re-examine the proposed boundary changes, specifically for Sawmill Creek and Blossom Park. Unfortunately, the new boundaries do not support the goal of community building and appear to have the opposite effect, with students being moved farther away from their homes and families being split up without any clear rationale.

Currently, both of my children attend the closest school to our home—Sawmill Creek. It is where my children have grown up, and I have invested time and effort in building relationships with the school, teachers, other parents, and the broader community. This is

our network, our safety zone. However, both the original EPR and the revised plan separate my family. Under the new plan, my youngest son will be transferred from Sawmill Creek to Blossom Park for three years, then return back to Sawmill Creek for two years. This is the case for many families in our zone, and no one I've spoken to wants to undergo this unnecessary transition.

Furthermore, the proposed changes for these two schools, just move some students from Sawmill Creek to Blossom Park and visa versa for the same program, all while splitting up siblings. If families are aware and take the time to request grandfather exemptions, then possibly these children will end up staying at their current school, so again I ask, what is the purpose of the EPR? Why should we shuffle students between schools, creating unnecessary upheaval, separating families, and increasing the number of transitions for no clear reason?

The OCDSB seems overly focused on implementing the EE and FI streams in almost every school, even when it doesn't make sense. Under the EPR both Sawmill Creek and Blossom Park would offer similar programs and serve the same general areas due to their proximity to one another, however this makes the programs at each school become less viable, making it highly likely that many classes will need to be split classes. How does this benefit our children's education or improve program quality as the EPR was stated to do? This only makes things harder for both students and teachers and decreases the quality of the program.

Given the revised plan, I question why the boundaries for Sawmill Creek and Blossom Park are still being altered. The board recently reversed boundary changes and grade configurations for other schools in Zone 11, such as Roberta Bondar, Dunlop, Bayview, and Feilding. Why not reconsider the changes for Sawmill Creek and Blossom Park as well? Why not scrap the entire plan? Doing so would reduce transitions and minimize disruption for students. Who is the EPR truly benefiting in Zone 11?

Furthermore, these changes undermine parents' ability to help guide their children's education.Many families chose to live in specific neighborhoods or have chosen not to move to ensure their children could attend particular schools or stay at their current schools in their communities. These changes disregard that choice.

Ultimately, I hope the trustees will vote against the EPR, as the OCDSB has failed to meaningfully engage with teachers, students, and parents in developing the plan. There has been no cost-benefit analysis, and the board has shown a severe lack of transparency and communication, especially with families not on their email distribution list. Additionally, there has been insufficient consideration of the impact these changes will have on families, students, and school communities.

I understand that change is sometimes necessary, but there must be more consultation with affected families and a longer transition period. The reasoning behind separating my children, moving one farther from home and forcing him to now cross a very busy road (Bank Street), and increasing transitions needs to be clearly explained and justified. Change is possible, but it needs to be done thoughtfully and with care. I believe the OCDSB has tried to implement too much, too quickly.

I am deeply concerned about the potential negative impact these changes will have on my children's well-being, mental health and education as well as others in this zone. The stress, anxiety, and tension these changes are creating among students, teachers, and parents are already evident. We are still recovering from the disruptions caused by the pandemic—a time marked by uncertainty, isolation, and mask-wearing—and students are only just beginning to regain a sense of normalcy. Our children are uncertain about which school they will attend, who their teachers and principal will be, and who they will be surrounded by. Some children will even be separated from their siblings—imagine how overwhelming and frightening that must be for them. These changes are unsettling and overwhelming, but what are we truly achieving by implementing them?

Sincerely,
Nicole Whitten
Concerned Parent