

Name: Selena Evans

Brief summary of issue or topic of discussion:

Hello, Would love the opportunity to speak about the importance of the alternative program schools and why it should stay and not be eliminated as the current Elementary Program Review proposes. I am a parent of a child who attends one of these schools.

OCDSB Delegation

Good evening, Trustees and members of the OCDSB. I was hoping to speak to you in person, unfortunately like many others, I was accepted for a written delegation only. I aim to make my words as impactful on a page as they are in person.

In engaging trustees throughout this process I understand that you are responsible for your own zones and care deeply about your respective communities. I thank you for your devoted time and efforts. I feel I must point out that all trustees vote for or against the continuation of the alternative program. And so maybe without realizing it, your community reach has expanded. Let me begin by saying we are happy to have you. All we ask is for your open ears, your open hearts and your open minds.

Fifteen years ago, on May 1st, 2010, there was an article published in Ottawa Life Magazine. It is titled, "Rushing to Remove Ottawa's Alternative School Option? What's the Rush?". Interesting how this article is applicable today. What is the rush? Why such a push to remove the Alternative program without proper consultation, proper analysis and amidst an onslaught of misinformation. It seems what happened then is happening now. This article goes on to say that "in 1982, the former Ottawa School Board created its first alternative elementary school, Lady Evelyn, in response to parental pressures to create an environment where education would be more child-centred, self-directed and where a parent/child/ teacher partnership would ensure relevant programming within Ontario Ministry of Education Guidelines." In fifteen years, this has not changed. The pressure for an environment such as this is stronger than ever.

ASAC states in their response to Memo 25-013 that "equity is about ensuring every student

can access the learning model that best supports their engagement and success and cannot be achieved through a singular program design with two-linguistic tracks.” That “to achieve equity, education programs need to be designed and delivered for a diversity of learners with distinctive pedagogical approaches.” The alternative programs achieve this access through its seven tenets. The program stands by these tenets not because it is incapable of change. In fact, ASAC has put forth recent documents to help you visualize how the program could effectively evolve. It’s been said by senior staff of the board that many of the tenets are already seen in other schools. Which ones? How have they been implemented and what drove the implementation process? For families that chose the alternative program, we chose this deliberately, for its unique approach to learning. Why? I’ll give you a very specific answer. Because the alternative program represents progressive education.

Our understanding of child development has drastically changed and evolved over the last 50-75 years. From Developmental Psychiatrist Mary Ainsworth’s discoveries in attachment theory to Dr. Daniel Siegel’s work in the developing mind as a professor of psychiatry. Their work helps us understand how our brains develop, how they learn, what they need to grow, to rest and to feel safe. But more importantly they help us understand we all learn and process differently. The alternative program can and continues to meet these needs. Without rewards-based teaching we see the immature brain that is just trying. The brain that needs an easier math problem one day instead of a harder one, even though we know they can do it. The brain that is spoken to with compassion when they tried and have to try again. The brain that gets to be creative in a pedagogy that has less rigidity and conformity to one singular view of education. The brain that needs co-regulation to understand self-regulation. The brain that needs dependence to then take a step into independence.

This is what these tenets support. And they do this despite not having additional resources, funding or smaller class sizes. They create a safe and beautiful learning environment for all kinds of students. Eliminating it will not cause a newfound resilience in these children. It will cause a dysregulation and feeling of insecurity that the OCDSB has already admitted is not prepared to handle. Not with the financial deficit, not with the cutting of staff, and definitely not with the reallocation of resources that were scarce to begin with. Furthermore it was admitted at the last board meeting that there will be no tools put in place to measure the success of this review. There will be no feedback for communities to access. This seems irresponsible.

No words or stories of what the alternative program is and what it truly represents will do it the justice it deserves. I implore you to not just take my word for it, but go and see for yourself. All trustees are required to vote. All trustees should be doing their absolute best in utilizing the available resources needed to make an informed decision. This requires proper exposure and evidence based information. After all, how could you vote on anything with less? Isn't that what this whole engagement and consultation process was all about? Make the values of the Elementary Program Review count. The ones that speak of inclusion and equitable education for all and embrace the community that is before you.

Thank you for your time in reading my written delegation. Please reach out to me with any clarifying questions or concerns.

Selena Evans

[Redacted signature block]