

Hello,

I wish to express my opposition to the staff recommendation to temporarily redirect students from John Young to Westwind out of concerns about the transparency of the process that led to it and the social impacts on the youngest students who are being forced to move twice. I believe the process was fundamentally flawed in that it was a clear example of confirmation bias, designed in such a way as to confirm a pre-existing conclusion.

The essence of confirmation bias is the tendency to interpret new evidence as confirmation of existing beliefs or theories and I believe that's what happened here. Specifically, my concern is that the board considered "the temporary redirection of year 1 kindergarten, year 2 kindergarten and grade 1 Fernbank-area students from John Young ES to Westwind PS, effective September 2020." The very wording of this makes it a binary problem, where redirection or the status quo are the only two possible outcomes. Would it not have been more appropriate to ask "what should we do about overcrowding at John Young?"

Here are some examples of how this affected the process in my view:

- The advisory committee involved participation from John Young and Westwind parent councils as well as the principals from those schools. Why not involve representation from other schools in the area, unless those options were never going to be given serious consideration? Would it not behoove the process to hear from an objective advisory council?
- How many of the members of this advisory council were parents of affected students? It seemed at the public consultation that those members who were most vocal were those who lived in John Young's "traditional" boundary and whose children were not being moved. This gave them a disproportionate amount of influence into this decision over the families who are actually affected by this. It's easy enough to support a recommendation when it involves someone else's children. It also seemed like parents in the Blackstone/Fernbank areas are being perceived as outsiders "infringing" on their neighbourhood school. It's every bit our school as it is theirs.
- The parent consultation on the matter occurred at Westwind School, not John Young. If the issue is crowding at John Young, and we were looking at options objectively, we shouldn't have had the meeting at the fancy new school where parents could fall in love with all the new facilities it offered.
- The parent consultation occurred in January when a recommendation was already on the table. Why was this meeting not held at the outset so we could suggest a range of options for staff to go and consider? It seems like the many other options were not given any serious consideration as the current consultation process was already too far along. It would not have been possible to go back to the drawing board on January 20<sup>th</sup>, so pushing this proposal through with mitigating measures was essentially the only option at that point.

The other key concern of mine is that staff failed to give meaningful consideration for the social impacts on the children, except when it aligned with the staff recommendation. The report, and indeed the process itself, treats students like numbers to be shuffled around, not vulnerable children.

At the parent consultation, I specifically asked for additional information on how school transitions affect children. At first, staff downplayed this concern outright – kids are resilient, they said – before

later conceding that changes of this magnitude are indeed difficult on children and not to be taken lightly. So which is it? When I asked them to elaborate on what information they had on social and emotional impacts of school changes on young children, they were unable to tell us about any academic research in this area. Is there information they are holding back? How is it possible that nobody could answer this question, and why was it not reflected in the report?

In fact, the only mention of social considerations relates to the importance of keeping grade 4-5-6 sports teams at John Young intact. The report failed to comment on what it will mean to make the most vulnerable young students move schools TWICE, but we gave undue weight to what it would mean if we asked senior students to break up their sports teams by starting at Glen Cairn a year or two earlier than they would otherwise have to. The fact that my concern was downplayed and is barely reflected in the report supports my concern about confirmation bias: there was a preconceived agenda to get this recommendation pushed through, because it was already too late to look at other options.

I implore the board, once again, to consider moving grade 5-6 students to Glen Cairn for the next two years or until such time as the new school is built in the Fernbank lands, by putting the necessary portables in place at Glen Cairn to alleviate the added pressure this would cause there. When the new school is ready (theoretically in two years), students from the Fernbank lands could then be redirected to the Fernbank school; grade 5-6 students at Glen Cairn would remain at Glen Cairn and students in grade 4 and younger at John Young could then stay at John Young through grade 6. This would mean the older students change schools a bit earlier than they otherwise might, but it's a change they have to make at some point anyway. And it would allow the youngest students at John Young to remain together and change schools just once when the new school is ready. In terms of the geographical impact on families and the social impact on students' development, this would be the most reasonable, most practical, least intrusive and least disruptive option.

I also feel it's an option that would have merited closer consideration had the process not been predesigned, intentionally or unintentionally, as to deliver the outcome it did.

Thank you to the board for your consideration.