



VICTORIA
CONFEDERATION
OF
PARENT ADVISORY COUNCILS
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Board of Education
Greater Victoria School District
556 Boleskine Rd.
Victoria, BC V8Z 1E8

Attention: Chair Loring-Kuhanga

Re: Student Enrollment Priorities

Dear Trustees:

We are writing to express our opinion and concerns related to enrollment priorities.

Over the past 18 months VCPAC has been meeting with parents to discuss the values that guide their decisions on choosing schools for their children. As you can imagine, the list is quite long and diverse. It would be fair to say that each parent places different weights on concerns and issues to address their family needs and values, and this results in a large variety of reasons for attending any particular school. Until recently, it was not too difficult to accommodate the variety of family circumstances as there was space in nearly every school and every program.

As you have noted these conditions are changing. Like the Trustees, parents believe it is important to be responsive to changing circumstances. We understand that going forward the opportunity for choice will likely be reduced. We are prepared to accept a reduction in choice through a procedure that is both transparent and consistent. We believe that the procedure should be applicable to all schools of the same level (i.e. Elementary, Middle and Senior Secondary), applicable to all students, and that it should be easily understood regardless of background, culture, or language. We recognize that there will always be exceptions to enrollment rules, however we expect that these exceptions will not severely compromise the equitable application of an established procedure or policy.

There are a few key priorities that have become clear in our process and we feel they should all be considered. We recognize they may preclude one another, never the less, we believe they should all be considered during this process to make the best decision. A list of those that were recurring in our discussions and feedback we received is noted below, along with a rationale:

- Location / Safe routes** – Parents want their children to be safe, and to develop independence by walking or biking to school. The closest school may have a hazardous route.
- Neighbourhood/Catchment** – Neighbourhood students attending neighbourhood schools

contribute to the healthy “village” that builds a sense of community for families. This is most important in elementary school years.

Returning student security – This is particularly important in senior grades at a time when children are becoming their own person, and when a sense of belonging is crucial for mental and emotional health. Students should be able to make a multi-year course selection plan, and be sure of continued eligibility for competitive sports.

Social connections and difficulties recognized – For many students their social network is intricately tied to any academic success they may experience, and so is their freedom from repeated negative social experiences. Students perform better, are physically and mentally healthier, and stay better engaged when they feel a connection to their school community.

Programs of choice are an individually qualified opportunity - District programs need to be open equally to all eligible students at each priority level. Who you are related to should not be a factor in programs of choice. There should be no practice that encourages a sense of entitlement to a seat in a district program.

Families together – Accommodations for siblings in the school should be made as often as possible, especially in elementary schools. However, this is not a priority for District programs (see “Programs of choice” above).

Re-applying to a school out-of-catchment – This should occur if necessary due to high demand for limited space when changing school levels (i.e. Elementary to Middle and Middle to Senior Secondary) and when changing programs (i.e. leaving the program of choice for mainstream track). These are natural transition points when students and parents often re-evaluate circumstances and opportunities, and choose alternate pathways or programs.

As we strive to find a path to inclusiveness and equitable access across the district, VCPAC and the parents we represent are encouraged by, and advocate for, a policy that reflects the priorities of the majority of parents, and addresses the needs of students as they work to achieve success. There is one opinion currently being expressed at board meetings it is from a minority of parents, who have benefited from current practice, which vigorously defends their “rights” to access. We are concerned their perspective will out weigh that of the majority of parents who have voiced their opinion through the consultative processes including, but not limited to, the district survey. When will their voice be recognized?

The responses from parents and students around the district, and concrete school enrollment and capacity data provide the district committee with clear guidance for its proposal. First, returning students to a previously enrolled program will have priority to continue in that school because they should decide if they have made the connections necessary for success, second, catchment students including siblings in-catchment competing equally for seats, third, out-of-catchment siblings, and fourth, out-of-district students.** Without such guidelines, the neighbourhood school will continue to be a misnomer, and we will continue to have inequitable access to our programs.

Settling enrollment priorities will inevitably inform a discovery process for re-opening schools and, in turn, the process by which students can expect to enroll in them.

Sincerely,
Victoria Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils

****This letter was written before the latest revision of the proposal, VCPAC will be writing a follow-up letter that indicates the new version is also a reflection of parent opinions we have gathered through our process.**