

Speaking Notes; Dec. 7, 2010
Kirsten Miller Lo

After reviewing the proposed amendments to SD57 Policy 5119 I wish to express some major concerns. Children and families should be treated equally, whether they attend a Choice program or school (Aboriginal, Montessori, Traditional or French Immersion) or not. I am concerned that the proposed changes to the policy do not reflect the School District's demonstrated commitment to ensuring siblings from one family will attend the same school.

It is clear from the policy draft (item 6.4) that the District feels that keeping siblings and families together is important, as it reads: "if the Board determines that space is available in a school or program, a student whose transfer application was received by the Board by the date established is entitled to enrol in that school in the following descending order of priority: 6.4.1 The siblings of a student who, in the previous school year, attended the school in question and who will be attending the school in the following year". So siblings DO have priority in your policy.

It is discriminatory to not offer the same priority to siblings of Choice program or school students. I am gravely concerned that without sibling priority included in Policy 5119, siblings in Choice programs or schools are more likely to be separated than siblings in other programs. In addition, the policy draft as it stands now clearly unfairly discriminates against multiple siblings (twins and triplets) applying to Choice programs.

I am highly disturbed that the School District erroneously followed an out-dated, and thereby **defunct**, policy when making enrolment decisions in recent years (according to the SD57 website this was due to a "technical error or oversight"). The appropriate and most current version of SD57 Policy 5119 (dated April 29, 2008) stated in item 5.6 "Kindergarten students seeking to enrol in a school outside their normal catchment area who have a sibling already enrolled in that school shall be given priority over other non-catchment area students who do not have a sibling in the school". This is the policy that should have been used to make enrolment decisions.

This policy (dated April 29, 2008) did not define "Choice programs", "Choice school" or "Choice child", implying that children in Choice programs fell into one of the other defined categories (they were either a "Catchment area child" or "Non-catchment area child"). Thus, children across all programs should have been entitled to sibling priority. I see from the website link to "Frequently Asked Questions" that "the way that administration has interpreted "catchment" since the French Immersion program came to Prince George in the 1980s" is that "The catchment area for French Immersion is the

whole district. There is no "outside their normal catchment"", which of course implies that the definition employed by the School District was that the French Immersion children (or children wishing to attend a choice program/choice school) would have been considered "Catchment area children", as their catchment area was the whole district.

It seems that the inappropriate use of a defunct policy (which did not include the statement quoted above, item 5.6 from the April 29, 2008 Policy 5119) led to inappropriate decision making regarding applications for enrolment by children applying to kindergarten Choice programs or schools (Aboriginal, Montessori, Traditional, French Immersion) in which their older sibling(s) was/were enroled. I trust the School District Board will rectify this by addressing the injustice done towards these families.

I see from the website link to "Frequently Asked Questions" that this question has been posed to the Board already, but the reply in the FAQs states that "Registration for French Immersion has always been administered on a "first-come, first-served" basis". This is false information. Many parents will tell you that they were told by the school staff that their enroled child's sibling would receive priority for enrolment, and until the 2010 application year this has always been what happened; this was de facto policy.

In the FAQs on the School District website there are several references to the French Immersion program and students. Remember that these issues pertain to ALL Choice students and their families (Aboriginal Choice families, Traditional choice families, Montessori choice families and French Immersion Choice families).

I expect to see amendments to the proposed changes to SD57 Policy 5119 that reflect the School District's commitment to keeping families together, regardless of whether their children attend a Choice program or school or not. Families need to be kept together and, therefore, prioritizing siblings in school enrolment is clearly important for everyone. I trust the approved policy will reflect that need without any discrimination towards students in Choice programs or schools.