

To Lyn Hall, Lois Boone and School Board Trustees,

I attended the last School Board Meeting (Nov 23/2010) in support of the concern over changes to policy 5119. Unfortunately, due to some miscommunication, I was not added to the list of speakers. I would, however, like to read my statement tonight for consideration by the board. I would like to add to my notes below that when I arrived home two weeks ago, my six year old, in grade one French immersion at ECHE, had waited up for me so that he could ask me "Is my brother going to be allowed to go to school with me?" Of course I did not have an answer for him, but I certainly hope that in January, I will be able to report back to him "Yes, the school board has decided it is important to keep families together, and you and your brother will be able to attend the same school".

Thank you for taking the time to listen to our concerns:

Like many of the parents here tonight, we have chosen to place our child in a french immersion school that is outside our catchment area. However, even if we were not in French immersion, our catchment school is Southridge Elementary, where many of the same issues would be encountered.

At the time of registering our first child in kindergarten at ECHE, we were 43 out of 44 accepted students at two minutes after registration opened. We made the decision to place our first child in this program with the understanding that 3 years down the road, when his brother entered the education system, that he would be given preference in the school, so that our children could a) both be in the french immersion track and b) be in the same school.

Although our second child is still 2 years away (he will begin kindergarten in September 2012) we have been worried since the restructuring this last year as to what will happen when he starts school. Will he get in to french immersion – now that intake has been cut to one french immersion class, the chances are small that we will get a spot. So what then? Our first child will have been in school for 4 years, already he has strong ties to friends, teachers and the school. Do we leave him in one school, and register our second child in a different school – then we need to decide do we have him in french or english. Or do we move them both to Lac le Bois – moving our older child away from the connections he has been building for years?

There are no good answers to those questions. We would hope that we will be one of the lucky 22 who get those prized spots at ECHE. If we don't, we don't know what we will do. No matter what decision is made it will not be an easy one for our family.

When I grew up, it was a given that children from the same family attended the same school. What does it say about our values as a community if we do not prioritize the relationships of our children with each other?

This afternoon {two weeks ago, before the last meeting}, I asked my older son (now in Grade one) how he would feel if his little brother could not go to the same school. His response was "He has to go to my school. How else will we play together at recess?" In his own way, in his six year old value system, he has indicated how important it is for his brother to be in the same school. Using the bonds between siblings, and parents needs to keep their children together, is not the appropriate tactic to be used by a school board to attempt to eliminate a choice program, and force families to a central school. If that is the plan of the board, then be honest about your plans for ECHE. If it is not the intention of the board, then formulate a policy for ALL schools in the district that emphasizes the importance of families growing and learning together.

It is interesting that since the meeting two weeks ago, we have discovered that in 2008, it was indeed a priority of this board to ensure that siblings were kept in the same schools. We are all wondering what has happened in the last two years to change that view point. I asked a few families that already have both of their children in French at ECHE, and they both said they could not imagine having their children in separate schools. One Mom said "part of the making the school a good place for children to attend is the school staff getting to know the parents and the family dynamic of the students. Requiring siblings to attend separate schools makes that impossible."

Thank you for listening, and for your consideration of this issue.

Brenda Herbert

250-612-7789

brenda.herbert@gmail.com