

Hello, my name is Trish Mahmoud, I am a mother of three girls, ages 7,5 and 4. I would like to share my story and my experience thus far with the school district.

In 2008, my husband and I decided that the French immersion Program was what we would like have our children enrolled in and we looked into College heights elementary as it was the French Immersion school located in our community. I spoke with the principal and wanted to ensure that if I enrolled my eldest in the program, the enrollment of my two other children would be secured, this would be the deciding factor for us. Without hesitation I was assured that IF I got in there was indeed the policy of sibling priority in practice, but I was told to be quick on line as the siblings of children already attending the school would get in first. As a new parent wanting to invest long term into this school, I completely understood the policy as this is what I, myself wanted for my family once I got in. That year I was successful, my daughter, Sophia was in.

Last March came the time to register my second child. Imagine my anger and frustration when I received a letter 2 business days before kindergarten registration informing me that although the policy at the the school thus far had given priority to siblings, this would no longer be the case. I acted quick: I with other parents sent emails, made phone calls to you the trustees and immediately set up a meeting at the board office for some sort of explanation as to why? I was told there was no policy regarding sibling priority when registering for Kindergarten.

So then came the day for registration, I did the best I could, I got # 36. Only 8 of the 12 siblings gained entry to join their brothers and sisters into the FI program this year at CHE.

Being #36, my 2nd daughter Farah did not get a spot. I was devastated. I felt as though I had failed my daughter, my family and most of all myself. Now was the dilemma to decide whether to leave Sophia, my eldest, at CHE where she had established herself and take Farah to Lac De Bois OR pull Sophia and take them both to Lac De Bois. In the end seeing how Sophia was thriving in French at CHE and wanting to invest in this school and the community we had become apart of, we chose to stay and was luckily able to take a spot in the English Kindergarten class with hopes of enrolling Farah into French come grade 1.

Now again I will be faced with Kindergarten registration for my third child in Feb 2011. I lack confidence as Farah's future in French Immersion is still up in the air and the not knowing if my youngest will be joining her sisters at the same school.

It is not so simple to say just go to Lac de Bois. Yes there may be spots available NOW, but this will not always be the case and without sibling priority policy in effect, my third daughter and any other families with more than one sibling CANNOT be guaranteed a spot in this school or any other in Prince George, French OR English . So as it stands with it being first come first serve, there still lies the uncertainty of keeping families together.

This is not strictly a French choice program issue, because if I were to now tell you I lived across the street from Southridge Elementary my daughters and I would still be faced with the same frustrating situation. A situation familiar not only to myself but many other families: full schools, no sibling priority, no catchment and families seperated. My question to you, the board now, is what are you going to do to ensure families stay together?????

This is my presentation for the Dec 7th Board Meeting:

My name is Trish Mahmoud, you know my story as i spoke on Nov. 23, regarding the sibling priority issue. I am here before you again to insure that I was heard and that we can move forward with a policy that protects our children and our families, regardless of choice or regular programs offered in Prince George. Regarding the FAQ recently presented online- I would like to adress the ' first come first serve' statement. My interpretation was that we were viewed as a family not individuals. I was told this specifically by Mme. Crandall, the principal at the time, siblings had PRIORITY. Myself and all other parents were aware that If we did not get our first child in, our family did not get in. I accepted this before even registering as this makes sense.

I need you to re write this policy 5119 so that it protects my family, all families, French or English, choice or regular, capped or non capped programs in this district for now and for the future as more schools are filled to capacity. This policy needs to be clear and needs to take in all feedback presented in this consultation. There needs to be no room for interpretation. It needs to be in place well in advance to address these changes before they happen.