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Subject: Changes to Frech Immersion programs in GBW

I am writing this letter as a disappointed parent of two Grand Bay students, one at Inglewood and one at Grand Bay Primary. The unexplained decision to make the closed door changes to the current french immersion program in Grand Bay Westfield, without any community or parental involvement is entirely unacceptable. Making decisions of such magnitude without consulting parents, administration and community leaders proves that the department of education has very little respect for families and those who know what is best for their children. Limiting opportunities to students is not what an education system should pride itself on, yet here we are. As the only bilingual province in Canada, limiting access to french immersion programming makes zero sense and is a massive step backwards. In Grand Bay the numbers do not lie. There is enough enrollment to have a class at Grand Bay Primary and Westfield without impacting teaching positions. Combining the GBP students with Westfield overloads the allotment for class size and 2FTE teachers will be needed regardless. This decision will only jam students into a school already experiencing overcrowding, not conducive to a positive classroom environment.

The unnecessary impact of bussing students from their community to another school at such a vulnerable age is absurd. Taking students from their peer groups and further away from family supports, and childcare will create tremendous stress on the average family living in Grand Bay. Students thrive in positive environments with peers and teachers who know them. Taking this from them can very well have a damaging impact on their social/emotional well being and will restrict access for many to extra curricular activities due to increased travel time.

The achievement numbers for Barnhill vs Rivervalley (58.1% vs. 81.8%) provide concrete evidence that our Grand Bay students are thriving at their designated community schools in immersion programs. This is a direct correlation to being in their community schools, with incredible PSSC, administration and teachers who know the students and are able to provide the direct support necessary to meet their needs, something that will be lost to many if crammed into a middle school already experiencing low achievement levels. We fully understand that students often travel from their communities to attend school, long bus rides, and often classes in many schools are at capacity and teachers just make due with the cards they are dealt BUT the thing is, none of this is necessary for our community. The schools can handle the early immersion program and the late immersion program.

Completely misleading parents by saying enrollment levels are not high enough to offer the program when in fact they are, is so disheartening and simply creates a massive mistrust of the department of education and its leadership.

The additional transportation costs to support these changes is reckless, creating unnecessary strain on an already strained education budget!

If there was financial gain or cuts to be made these decisions might be a bit more tolerable, but from what the community can see, from looking at numbers, and GNB data, these decisions are by no means about cost saving.

Premier Higgs was very clear that the immersion programs in NB need an overhaul as we are not seeing the best achievement results- why make epic changes and limit the access for students who have clearly been thriving in the immersion programs offered in their community? Why mess up something that clearly has been successful?

I truly hope that this letter and all letters I am sure your office is receiving are not falling on deaf ears and are looked at with a critical eye. Families are not happy, and we are coming together to ensure our children have FAIR access to french immersion opportunities that will not have major effects on our families day to day lives. It just is not fair. There is nothing worse than having these notices sent out without any formal announcements, or clarification and how dare the district remove my son from his designated school and enroll him in a different school without notifying me. Our administrators and teachers work tirelessly to create positive safe schools and thrive for high achievement levels- they are the glue holding these schools together and to have them also blind sided by their employer, and have to deal with upset families and have no answers themselves is simply unacceptable. Change is never easy, we get that, but changes that are made without proper consultation and not having student best interests at heart are unacceptable and sad to see.

Yours truly,
A very concerned parent.
Adam Elder