

# **A Public Appeal Against TDSB's Proposed Boundary Change for Whitney Jr PS**

Dear sir/madam

The Toronto District School Board ("TDSB") is proposing, inter alia, to redesignate the school boundary of Whitney Junior Public School ("Whitney Jr PS") and assign 6 addresses to Eglinton Junior Public School ("Eglinton Jr PS") and 2 addresses (together "Affected Addresses") to John Fisher Junior Public School ("John Fisher Jr PS") (the "TDSB Proposal").

We, as concerned parents, stakeholders, and members of the community, are writing to express our disapproval of the TDSB Proposal and to request the TDSB **to rescind or modify the TDSB Proposal in accordance with our suggested solution below.**

## **The TDSB Proposal was rushed and not well communicated**

Parents and prospective parents plan years ahead for their families and children. The school catchment is an important, if not the decisive, factor for parents in their choice of residence.

The TDSB Proposal has not been communicated well, if not at all, by the TDSB and the affected schools in the last few years.

No matter how many times the TDSB throws the word around, the fact remains that **the alleged "*temporary*" status of the Affected Addresses was never communicated by both the TDSB and the schools prior to 2023.**

Document records of the 2018 boundary review for Eglinton Jr PS, freely available on TDSB's website, do not mention Whitney Jr PS at all. In fact, most of the Affected Addresses were completed after 2018 and have never been included in the school boundary of Eglinton Jr PS.

No families doing their research based on the TDSB and school websites could have reasonably known about the alleged "*temporary*" status of the Affected Addresses, let alone the numerous newcomer families who have an inherent information disadvantage.

Midtown Toronto, where the Affected Addresses are located, has some of the highest rents in Toronto and Ontario. Even at this moment, purchase agreements and leases are signed at the Affected Addresses by parents and couples anticipating sending their children to Whitney Jr PS. These families would be blindsided by the TDSB Proposal.

The TDSB Proposal, if approved, would become effective in just a few months in September 2023. There would not be nearly enough time for these families to uproot their families and move to a different school catchment should they be unhappy with the TDSB Proposal, and it would put enormous financial and psychological burdens on these families and their children.

## **Eglinton Jr PS is already struggling with its existing students**

The capacity of a school goes beyond the mere number of desks available.

In both 2018-19 and 2021-22 (the last two years with EQAO Assessments), **Eglinton Jr PS has a smaller proportion of students than even the TDSB average** achieving at or above the provincial standard (Levels 3 and 4) in Education Quality and Accountability Office (“EQAO”) Assessments.

On the other hand, **Whitney Jr PS has consistently year-after-year one of the highest proportion of students in Ontario** achieving at or above the provincial standard in EQAO assessments.

Considering that Eglinton Jr PS is already struggling with bringing enough of its existing students up to the provincial standard, one can reasonably anticipate a further deterioration in education quality and academic performance upon the influx of students from the Affected Addresses should the TDSB Proposal be approved.

In addition, outdoor activity space is essential for children’s physical and mental wellbeing. Enclosed by roads, shops, and bars, Eglinton Jr PS has very limited outdoor playground and activity space, with the entire outdoor activity area measuring less than 2,500 m<sup>2</sup>.

In contrast, Whitney Jr PS has over 5,500 m<sup>2</sup> of outdoor activity space, **more than double that of Eglinton Jr PS**, which is surrounded by pleasant trees and greenery. Any child can easily tell the TDSB which schoolground they would prefer to spend their recesses on.

**The TDSB Proposal introduces a life instability for parents to be settling in the community and affects parents’ short term and long term decisions**

Modifications in TDSB policy affect children and their families. The TDSB Proposal caught many families off-guard and directly and indirectly affected their futures leading to enormous challenges.

Children, especially newcomers, who are forced to adapt to new environments, teachers, and peers, will suffer from instability in life. Moving is extremely difficult for a family. Many families have made long-term plans to live in the Affected Addresses.

These families should not be forced to sacrifice for the miscalculation and miscommunication on TDSB’s part.

**No demographic studies or thorough planning were conducted prior to the TDSB Proposal**

The sudden influx of students at Whitney Jr PS in the past year can be attributed to the recent completion and moving-in of two new condo buildings at the Affected Addresses in 2022.

As of today, all the Affected Addresses have been fully completed and occupied. Accordingly, the sudden increase in the number of students at Whitney Jr PS is unlikely to repeat in the future, and the number of students at Whitney Jr PS can be expected to stabilize barring any unforeseeable changes in school and/or TDSB policies.

## **The TDSB Proposal contradicts TDSB's commitment to Equity, Anti-Racism & Anti-Oppression**

Within the current school boundary of Whitney Jr PS, the Affected Addresses have a significantly larger proportion of people of color, new immigrants, families that do not speak English as their first (or second) language, and lower-income families.

In direct contradiction to the TDSB's stated commitment to equity, anti-racism, and anti-oppression, **the TDSB Proposal would disproportionately affect the most vulnerable and disadvantaged part of the Whitney Jr PS community**, leading to greater education and wealth disparity and racial inequality that can span multiple generations.

New immigrant families who anticipated sending their children to Whitney Jr PS would be particularly hard hit. The TDSB Proposal, especially when implemented on such a rushed timeline, could utterly destroy their newly established sense of belonging and community to Toronto and Canada. Children in these families are more likely to experience anxiety, low self-esteem, stunted academic development, and social integration.

It is unreasonable and unjust that these children and families have to pay for TDSB's miscalculation and miscommunication.

### **Solution: let parents choose what is best for their children**

We believe the most just and equitable solution would be to **allow all existing and future parents at the Affected Address to freely choose** between Whitney Jr PS and Eglinton Jr PS (or John Fisher Jr PS).

Parents care about their children's wellbeing the most. If the TDSB truly believes that families at the Affected Addresses do not have a preference for Whitney Jr PS, then they would naturally gravitate towards the local schools and organically solve the alleged capacity issue at Whitney Jr PS.

Otherwise, the TDSB should dedicate its effort and resources into improving Eglinton Jr PS to make it more attractive to the families at the Affected Addresses, instead of ham-fisting them into a school that these families did not sign up or pay for.

We urge the TDSB to listen to the community it claims to serve and to rescind or modify the TDSB Proposal in accordance with our suggested solution above.

Regards

Concerned Parents, Stakeholders, and Members of the Community

**In addition to the above, please find below a list of other issues that we would like the TDSB to provide some clarifications by end-of-day Thursday on Feb 9, 2023.**

1. Parents and prospective parents find their children's school catchment based on TDSB's website. The TDSB has never specified the "*temporarily*" status of those Affected Addresses in the past few years, in fact referring Whitney Jr PS as the "**home school**" of the Affected Addresses. A significant number of parents have already made the decision, either for short term or long term planning, based on the school catchment. How can families in the future plan their housing decision if the TDSB affects school boundary change with such short notice?
2. Has the TDSB conducted any research or impact study to evaluate how significantly the redirection will impact the psychological development, sense of belongings, mental health and wellness of affected parents and children residing at the Affected Addresses?
3. If the elder siblings will soon graduate from Whitney Jr PS or no longer study at the school, will it affect their younger siblings who have not entered into the kindergarten or elementary school at Whitney Jr PS yet?
4. Will the TDSB Proposal affect students who are currently in daycare, Junior Kindergarten or Senior Kindergarten of Whitney Jr PS? For example, if a student who is currently 2 years old and is attending the daycare at Whitney Jr PS, will they be allowed to enter into Junior Kindergarten of Whitney Jr PS after 2 years?
5. For example, if a family currently resides at 15 Roehampton Avenue and then moves to 39 Roehampton Avenue (school catchment: Rippleton Junior Public School), would existing students at Whitney Jr PS and their siblings be forced to move to the new school catchment?

Or if the family moves to 161 Roehampton Avenue? Would the children be then considered "*new residents*" of 161 Roehampton Avenue and be forced to move to Eglinton Jr PS?

Would families currently residing at the Affected Addresses be expected to move their homes within the 10 Affected Addresses in order to stay at Whitney Jr PS in future?

6. There is a newly completed condo at 39 Roehampton Avenue, the school catchment is listed Rippleton PS which is at North York. Why is the "*home school*" of 39 Roehampton Avenue Rippleton PS?
7. Will the school bus be affected? Will the current two bus stops remain no matter how many students are left for each bus stop?
8. As of today, many affected parents, stakeholders or members of the Community are not aware of the TDSB Proposal and the virtual meeting. What will the TDSB do to make sure residents at the Affected Addresses receive appropriate information and time to form an informed opinion? How will the TDSB ensure that their voices are heard and their concerns are addressed?
9. When parents have to leave Toronto or Canada with their children for several months, will they be denied a place at Whitney Jr PS when they register again after Sept 2023?

Signatures of the Concerned Parents, Stakeholders, and Members of the Community:

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