

Dear TCDSB Leadership,

Introduction

We have two children at OLP in grade 1 and SK and two younger children ages 4 and 2 that we hope to send to OLP in September 2015 and September 2017. Our two children currently at the school have had an amazing experience largely due to the terrific staff and the sense of community and family that the school has. Given their closeness in age our children share many of the same friends and experiences together. We have witnessed firsthand how the older sibling eased the transition to school for his sister. We also see clear benefits from the two visiting each other during the school day and helping each other if there are issues during the day. The sibling relationship has strengthened as has their sense of family. Our younger daughter has been along for drop off and pickups at the school over the past three years (my wife walks with all four children to the school each day) and our 4 year old has been talking about her chance to attend school with her older siblings next year. I think the emotional cost will be devastating and unsettling for her if she were to be sent to another school next year. Not only would she not get the positive benefits of having her siblings around but she would also have to try to make sense of why she has been separated from her brother and sister. Difficult for me to fully comprehend at 36 years of age let alone for a 4 year old. We would definitely need to weigh the emotional cost of sending her to public school on her own versus the disruption caused to our older two by moving them to public school as well to keep the family together in the neighbourhood.

Family Values

It is important to my wife and I to raise our children in the Catholic faith. A key factor this decision is the importance the church places on family in a day and age where the notion of family is being attacked from all angles. Pope Francis recently said "Not only would I say that the family is important for the evangelization of the new world. **The family is important, and it is necessary for the survival of humanity.** Without the family, the cultural survival of the human race would be at risk. **The family, whether we like it or not, is the foundation.**" (emphasis added) I feel the decision to not place in-catchment siblings in a priority category above other in-catchment students is a decision against stronger communities and against families.

Sibling Preference in Other Large Urban Centers

The reasons noted are personal reasons. I wanted to see how this was handled in other school boards, so I have looked into best practices across North America in terms of the priority given to siblings in applying for schools. I looked into 5 large urban centers where I felt that there would be similar supply and demand issues for education. I note that all of these centers, Boston, New York, Chicago, Vancouver and San Francisco, all provide sibling preference for school opportunity (especially for in-catchment students). Given time, I only looked at 5 centers and the results were consistent. In reviewing the various reports and decision by these school boards around sibling preference the following factors were key in the decisions:

- Importance of family
- Building a strong community
- Logistics for parents of having children at different schools

The following three examples are informative precedents in considering sibling preference. In two of these examples the trustees overturned their original decision to remove sibling preference after feedback from parents. None of these school boards attempted to touch sibling preference for in-catchment siblings as school boards and articles on the matter refer to that as an “untouchable policy” given feedback from parents.

Key Examples of Sibling Preference in Other Centers

- **2012 New York the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) decision on sibling preference for the Gifted and Talented Programs (GT)**
 - In 2012 the NYC DOE originally decided to remove sibling preference for admittance to GT programs
 - The GT program requires incoming kindergarten students to write a test for admittance and there is significantly more demand than there is space for this program
 - The admission policy prior to 2012 had the highest scoring students admitted with the exception of those students who had siblings in the program – as long as they reached a minimum preset standard the sibling would be admitted even if they did not meet the non-sibling cutoff
 - In 2012 the DOE removed the sibling priority but then quickly reversed its decision based on feedback from schools and families and reinstate the sibling priority
 - Please see the following news story on the matter: [DOE Reverses Itself on Sibling GT Policy](#)
 - You will note the following quote in the article from Joyce Szuflita an educational consultant with NYC School Help
 - **"The city gives sibling preference everywhere else. I feel for the families whose kids are scoring high but I don't know how a family can get two different kids to schools in two different boroughs at the same time."** (emphasis added)
 - The decision to continue the sibling preference was upheld in 2013 by the Manhattan Supreme Court: <http://nypost.com/2013/08/07/ok-for-siblings-of-gifted-and-talented-students-to-get-doe-boost-judge/>
 - You will note the article quotes Manhattan Supreme Court Justice Alice Schlesinger saying the following: “there’s a “rational basis” for the policy because it’s intended **to make it easier on families by not forcing their kids to attend different schools.**” (emphasis added)
- **2004 Boston Public Schools (BPS) Review of Assignment Process**
 - Please see the 2004 Boston Public School Task Force Report - [BPS Task Force Report](#)
 - In the report they conclude on sibling preference - **Sibling preference: A student assignment plan should include preference for assignment to the same school for siblings.** (page 8 of Report)
 - Further on Page 14: Sibling preference is important to all families in Boston and must be maintained. **Once the siblings are assigned,** we recommend the following procedure for assigning students from the walk-zone. (emphasis added)
 - The full Algorithm of priorities is listed on page 15 and is as follows:
 - 1) Sibling walkers
 - 2) Siblings
 - 3) Children who live within the walk-zone set at 50%

- 4) Children who live within the buffer zone
 - 5) The rest of the children who live within the primary zone
 - 6) Children from the secondary zone
- **2012 BPS Revisiting of Sibling Preference**
 - In September 2012 the BPS tried to tighten sibling preference for out of catchment siblings – see attached article from Boston Magazine [Boston Public Schools Changed Rules](#)
 - This change was eventually over turned in December 2012 after review by the Mayor's External Advisory Committee on School Choice (EAC) – please see the following press release from Boston Mayor Menino's office [Mayor Menino's Press Release on Sibling Preference](#)
 - Commenting on the EAC's decision Mayor Menino said "The intention with a new student assignment plan is to offer families quality schools, closer to home, building stronger communities. **Thursday's EAC recommendation will allow families to keep their children at schools where they have connected and invested as we transition towards a new school choice model.**"
 - It is important to note here that the BPS never attempted to lower the priority for in-catchment siblings who remain the highest priority above that of other in-catchment students

Human Rights Arguments

It is important to note that the Supreme Court of Manhattan Decision touched on the human rights argument for not having sibling preferences and found that sibling preferences in no way encroached on the human rights of the individuals. While the NYC DOE case was clearly in a different jurisdiction, I have had a preliminary consultation with [The Human Rights Legal Support Centre](#) in Ontario (click link for further details on HRLSC) and they have indicated providing preference to siblings is not against any of the grounds protected by the Code ([for information on the grounds click here](#)). They stated they did not believe there was any human rights violation in providing preference to siblings.

Summary

I unfortunately need to travel for business this week and will not be able to attend the meeting in person. I request that you reconsider your decision and place siblings in-catchment in the highest priority ahead of other in-catchment students. This type of preference is supported by other large school boards in urban areas across North America. In-catchment sibling priority is fundamental guiding principal for assignment one that BPS indicated "must be maintained". It is important, especially in the Catholic School system, given the importance members of the community place on family when the family unit is being attacked from every angle. The logistics of dropping siblings at different schools creates unnecessary complications and this practical logistics argument has been a key factor in many school board decisions on sibling preferences and was cited by Justice Alice Schlesinger in the NYC DOE decision.

Thank you for taking the time to reconsider this matter. Please vote to keep families together.

Regards,

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