

**Mount Benson Parent Presentation to
Trustees of School District 68 :
Consultation General Presentation Night 2:
Safety**

April 15, 2008

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Mount Benson PAC**

Today I received a letter from Yvonne Haggard of the M'Akala Housing society which relates to the presentation I prepared tonight, so I will read it before I start my presentation.

Mount Benson school is being considered for closure. We currently have a population of 175 students K-7. The District has proposed that 65% of Mount Benson students transfer to Coal Tyee, with the remaining 35% transfer to Pleasant Valley.

Mount Benson is at the centre of its busy neighbourhood. Every housing area is within 1.6km to the school and has safe pedestrian access to the school via parks, overpasses or underpasses.

SD68's proposal would require students to walk up to 5km through commercial, industrial and highway routes.

Presentation

Mount Benson school has the highest percentage of First Nations students in North Nanaimo. The majority of the First Nations students who attend Mount Benson School live next to the school in the M'Akola housing buildings on Wellington Road. These students currently have to walk a very safe 100-200 meters to school. More First Nations students also walk over 1km from the M'Akola Non-Profit housing on Shenton Road.

If Mount Benson School is closed, SD68 has proposed to change the school catchment boundaries so that almost the entire First Nations population of the school, along with the only apartment building housing, go to Pleasant Valley 3 to over 4km away.

The walk to Pleasant Valley involves walking almost exclusively on busy roads with no sidewalks. These students would also be in the Dover Catchment for high school. This would result in both their elementary walk going from 100m to 3-4+km, and secondary being moved to over 5km away.

Truck Route

Routes to Coal Tyee and Pleasant Valley require children walking along designated truck routes, in Industrial areas, with little or no separation between children and Vehicles.

- Mostar connects two highways and is a major industrial road. Children shouldn't be on it, or crossing.
- The Mostar E&N pedestrian crossing is dangerous. Children cannot tell when it is safe, cars do not always stop for the flashing yellow lights, and you cannot tell if the lights have stopped flashing when you are crossing.
- Crosswalk gives a false sense of security.
- Mostar road speeds are often in excess of 80km/hr
- Mostar E&N Crossing has being identified by the City of Nanaimo as a dangerous location to put a crosswalk because drivers do not expect to have to stop(Engineering and Public Works Dept 2003).

Safety : Busing

- A bus is not a substitute for a walkable neighbourhood school.
- Buses are one of the places where bullying can occur as the driver cannot drive and listen to what ever student is saying.
- Busing contributes to obesity, pollution and stress.
- Lantzville students get a bus to pleasant Valley on route 1, trip 3(SD68 2008). The farthest stop is less than 4km from the school. Using crosswalks, some Mount Benson students are farther than 4km. Two permanent bus routes would be required to get Mount Benson students to Pleasant Valley, and Dover.

Safe walking routes

- Safe walking routes are short walking routes where children are separated from vehicles.
- The longer the child is exposed to traffic, the more likely he or she is going to be injured.
- Walking along truck routes with pollution. 2 hours a day.

Commuting

- The district stated that if the school were to close, they would work with parents and the city of Nanaimo to ensure the safest possible walk routes. Obviously recommending students walk along industrial roads like Shenton, Wellington or Mostar, where sidewalks are rare, requires plenty of revision. Coal Tyee's PAC chair stated at our school's public consultation meeting that traffic congestion during pickup and drop-off is already a huge problem which hasn't been addressed yet by the Safe School Program, even though it was raised over a year ago.
- If you add another 100 Mount Students, Coal Tyee's traffic problem will only get worse.
- It can take decades to get safety work completed. Mount Benson Student Overpass was not completed until April of 2008. It was started in February of 1963. 45 years to properly fix an intersection which resulted in a student death.
- Saying that municipal partners will work on making routes safer ignores the fact that safe routes are short routes with minimal traffic exposure.

Crowding

Crowding - Buildings

- The proposal to close Mount Benson will put Coal Tyee Over Capacity, even after proposed expansions have been completed.
- Fire departments place limits on room and school capacities because large crowded buildings and schools are dangerous.
- Schools which are too large make it unsafe to hold school assemblies with parents due to fire code limits.

Crowding - Playground

- “Crowded conditions, such as on school playgrounds, encourage bullying (Coy, 2001)”
- Crowded Playgrounds are a safety risk as too many children of different sizes compete for space.
- Young children do more exercise when playgrounds are less crowded
<http://www.ijbnpa.org/content/5/1/11/abstract>
- Playground crowding increases the number of injuries.
- Safe playgrounds are not crowded playgrounds
- Safe schools are not crowded schools.

Portables

- The proposal to move Mount Benson to Coal Tyee will require portables. Because Coal Tyee is projected to be operating over capacity even after the expansion of 2 rooms, SD68s plan clearly intends for portables to be a long term part of Coal Tyee's facility.
- Portables are rarely heated properly resulting in mold related health problems.
- Portables rarely have proper air circulation which can pose health problems.
- Expansion being proposed is too small, and school will be overcapacity, resulting in continued use of portables.

Portables & Earthquakes

- The following quotes are from the BC Select Standing Standing Committee on public accounts: Earthquake preparedness performance audit.
- Alarming evidence regarding the danger presented by portable classrooms in the event of an earthquake. (SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS 1999)
- "most portable structures are not secured to foundations, when earthquakes occur they tend to slide off the foundations, causing injuries and serious natural gas hazards due to the fragility of gas line connections." (SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS 1999)
- A representative of B.C. Gas said the threat of natural gas fire following an earthquake is not as great as public perception would have it, except as regards to portables. (SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS 1999)
- Why is the district proposing closing Mount Benson to immediately overcrowd Coal Tyee, resulting in the continued use of portables

To Summarize

- The Ministry of Education does not require the District to operate at any utilization level.
- Schools do not need high utilization levels to be replaced or rejuvenated.

In Conclusion

- Safety is obviously a big issue when children walk long distances along roads but there are many other issues which will have a strong impact on families and students who are forced to walk long distances to school. These issues affect all students who do not have access to a neighbourhood school, but they particularly affect families without transportation. The proposed closure of Mount Benson will have the greatest negative impact on the students who live on Wellington Road. These students would be shuffled to a remote school which will knowingly have a negative impact on their safety, learning and family.
- Mount Benson School currently provides the safest and healthiest possible commute.
- School District 68 is fortunate to have schools like Mount Benson elementary which for the most part are accessible to students without a dangerous commute.

Works Cited

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- Engineering and Public Works Dept. "Crosswalks." *City of Nanaimo*. October 2003. http://www.nanaimo.ca/uploadedfiles/Site_Structure/Community_Services/Engineering_&_Public_Works/Crosswalks.pdf (accessed April 13, 2008).
- SD68. "Route 1." *SD68*. September 1, 2008. <http://www.sd68.bc.ca/Buses/Route1.html> (accessed April 13, 2008).
- SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS. "Earthquake Preparedness; Performance Audit (continued)." *BC Government*. 1999. http://www.leg.bc.ca/cmt/36thParl/cmt12/1999/4report/pa4_06.htm (accessed April 13, 2008).