

It is sad to close any school. But, one has to ask why do we have these annexes in the first place. Was it an educational decision? Not really, it was a rush to meet the needs of a growing baby boom population about 40 years ago. Things have changed today and it is time that we started to think clearly about why we have these and other schools.

January 30, 2008 7:04 PM

Tony J said:

Charles,

I have been fortunate enough to attend the meetings with the VSB, read the many responses from QEA PAC, and even many individual responses by parents. In all this material, it was absolutely never stated that UBC children should be put on a lower priority to those in Dunbar.

What is being stated, is a request for more than the 3 weeks notice, to come up with alternate solutions rather than selling QEA.

While the initial demand for the Annex stemmed from 40 years ago, the fact that QEA is at capacity and waitlisted is a testament to the need and quality of the school today.

January 31, 2008 11:21 AM

Parent in Langley said:

One of the reasons that BoE's get their way is they divide the community and pit one school against another. Do not let them tear you apart. They have already made their decision. "Public Consultation" is a sham. If you want to save QEA (my husband's childhood school) then you need to fight fast and hard. You need to stick together as you are all Vancouver School District.....

January 31, 2008 4:25 PM

Patti Bacchus said:

Hi Charles - I've also attended many of the consultation meetings and I agree with Tony J — no one is arguing that UBC's students are not in desperate, long-overdue need of a school. I see several young UBC students being bussed to my children's school each day, and I can tell you I would be outraged if my children did not have the option of attending a neighbourhood school and were forced to travel to the next neighbourhood as so many UBC children are.

Many parents at the consultation meetings have prefaced their comments by acknowledging the needs at UBC, and I've inferred from the rest that it is not even in question and thus not the focus of their submissions.

I have heard parents voice the concern that the proposals unfortunately appear to be formed in a way that pits one community against the other, and many regret this linkage of the QE Annex to the UBC school and wish they could see the issue district wide, instead of limited to this small "study area."

This is a complex and challenging situation and I do agree that it's important to allow the public a reasonable amount of time to fully consider what is being proposed and provide meaningful, informed suggestions and feedback. I did publicly request this (a 30-day extension for public feedback) at the public meeting earlier this week at QE, and followed it up with an email request to all trustees.

I think this proposal, with public input, could provide some positive opportunities for students in the area and parents really need time to consider what those might be and how they might look.

It is my hope we can work together for the best possible outcomes.

January 31, 2008 4:38 PM

Charles Menzies said:

Dear Patti,

You are right about the public face of the statements made in school meetings. But let's consider the implications of keeping the annex open under the conditions that the school board is operating -that is, there will be no capital funds to renovate the NRC Building; only inadequate funds to add a poorly designed extension to U Hill Secondary School. To keep the annex open under the current conditions IS to privilege those students over the several hundred students currently squeezed into U Hill and the additional hundreds that have to leave their neighbourhoods to go to school. The families at the Annex and those at U Hill didn't ask for this; but it is the actual implications unless some sort of fiscal miracle arrives.

So far most U Hill parents and community members have sat silently by watching. Many of us empathize with the parents of young children who are only just entering the school system. It is wrenching for many parents to let their young children go off into the strange and at times unsettling institutional environment that is a school. Though it has been 12 years since I have myself sent my boys to kindergarten, I remember the ambivalence and anxiety, the worry about whether or not they would be okay. So, we can understand how a group of parents of predominantly 5 to 7 years olds would feel worried and anxious, would want to keep their children in a very small school -even if they have to drive them to the school and out of their own neighbourhoods. These are parents who care a lot for their children and have the time and resources to ensure that they have everything that they need. And, one of the things that they feel their children need is a small protect school. Ideally all of our children in Vancouver should have that experience.

So, here is the problem. As the school board set it out -acting under the constraints imposed by the provincial government- the choice has been turned into saving a small school for small children or sacrificing a small school to build a school for big kids. But that's not really the story. We have a large number of elementary school children who are being displaced into places that they are not really wanted. Do people really appreciate that close to 300 children do not have access to a neighbourhood school.

Let's be blunt -the school that is being proposed for closure has only 24 children who live in the normal catchment area and are thus in walking distance to a 'neighbourhood' school. The other 100 or so come from outside that catchment area -they are there by choice. Should we privilege choice selections over neighbourhood displacement? It's a tough question and to be fair the school board trustees should have been talking about this publicly since last summer. But they took a less courageous path have kept everything under wraps. Perhaps they hoped no one would notice.

It is a sad thing to do to close a school but it will not be the end of the world if it has to be done. I know that I am not alone in hoping that a miracle arises and saves QEA. Our PAC at U Hill will be discussing a motion that would ask the school board to defer a decision on QEA, but that at the same time make the commitment to start building a new school this summer. If the school has to close the school board should at least allow those children now in kindergarten the chance to finish to grade three in the annex without moving.

January 31, 2008 10:56 PM

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Charles Menzies

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