
Parents call for action on Burke middle school

Coquitlam parents collect signatures on petition for fast-tracking

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Some Burke Mountain parents are hoping to convince School District 43 to fast-track a middle school in their neighbourhood after recent census figures showed a large jump in pre-middle school aged children.

Hundreds of signatures are being collected on a petition calling for planning to begin now on the middle school so that it's ready for 2020, when parents say Burke will have more than 500 Grade 6 to 8 students.

"Schools decide budgets at the end of December. We want to make sure we're on the priority list," said Alon Weinberger, who has children aged three and five.

The latest timeline from School District 43 shows a middle school won't open on Burke until 2025. The district has also promised a public meeting this fall on school planning for the area. But the parents say 2025 is too late for a middle school to open in their area and they are concerned that with current schedules, a child who is eight years or older will never go to a school in the community.

Weinberger, who crunched the 2016 census numbers to predict that there will be 550 11- to 13-year-olds by 2020, said the timeline needs to be moved ahead.

According to his figures, the area's population of kids birth to age 14 has grown 140% between 2011 to 2016 — 2,765 children last year compared to 1,155 in '11. And those numbers don't account for new families that have moved into the neighbourhood since the census was taken.

"SD43's priorities do not reflect these figures, and that's why we are asking them to push our middle school up the priority list," he told *The Tri-City News*.

Parent Mery Naveh worries that Burke families with young children have no certainty about where their children will go to middle school if SD43 sticks to its 2025 opening date.

The plan has been for Burke Mountain students to attend a rebuilt Minnehada middle but Naveh says that school, located across from Hyde Creek rec centre, will be over capacity the minute it opens.

"You're going to put 700 to 800 kids on top. Where are you going to send them?" she asked.

Many other Burke residents have similar concerns, with Naveh saying she collected more than 100 signatures in one night of canvassing.

Meanwhile, at least one Coquitlam councillor seems to be on side with the parents' demands. Craig Hodge, a longtime Burke Mountain resident, said he supports the parents in their efforts to get the school built by 2020 instead of 2025.

"There no sense in delaying eight years," Hodge said. "Our ask is to make this a district-wide priority after Sheffield," which is a new elementary school for the area and the district's top priority.

"The city is trying to build a complete community and that includes schools." Hodge said. "We're prepared to work in any capacity to bring it along."

Another idea Hodge is advancing is to build the larger secondary school first to accommodate both middle and secondary students so all ages have schools in their neighbourhood. Once enrolment justifies further construction, a new middle school would be built next to the secondary on the David Avenue property. Hodge said the "blended school," while unconventional, could address parents'

concerns.

The parents' petition also supports a blended middle/secondary school as one option to get a school built on time.

Tri-City News reached out to School District 43 to confirm the school's priority and need but has yet to hear back on this issue.

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