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Media Advisory

Cowichan School Closures Would Negatively Impact Regional Child Care

Social Planning Cowichan Board of Directors

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A lack of licensed child care in the Cowichan Region could become more serious with closures of Koksilah, Tansor, Mill Bay and Somenos elementary schools, notes the Board of Social Planning Cowichan.

Closures will mean that children attending child care programs in these schools will have to move elsewhere. It is unclear, however, where they will go as the District has advised that there will no longer be space for child care in its other schools in order to accommodate the new students. Here are the numbers of care spaces in the three affected schools:

Mill Bay: 'Among Friends' – 24 licensed spaces.

Koksilah: 'Strong Start' – 38 families currently registered (there is, however, no ceiling on the number of families that can take part in Strong Start Programs). Daily average attendance 5.

Tansor: 'Parkside Academy' – 66 licensed spaces (recently applied for another 16 spaces to open in April, 2008).

In addition, the receiving elementary schools – Cobble Hill, Alexander, Drinkwater and Maple Bay Elementary – will be forced to close their child care services to make room for elementary students absorbed from the four closed schools.

Cobble Hill: 'Montessori' – 16 licensed spaces.



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Maple Bay: 'Boys and Girls Club' - 40 licensed spaces; Kelly Scott Pre-school - 20 licensed spaces.

Drinkwater: 'We're All Sharing Together' – 40 before and after school spaces; 16 licensed preschool spaces.

Alexander: 'Strong Start' – 150 families registered. Daily average attendance 10.

At least 237 children attending early child hood learning programs and before and after school programs will be directly impacted by the school closures. If the number of family members is taken into account, particularly those involved in the Strong Start family oriented programs, the number is actually much higher.

The number of children who will be displaced is concerning because the Cowichan Region is unable to meet the current need for child care. In fact, as a Social Planning Child Care Report released last fall shows, this region is currently only meeting 48% of child care needs. By closing four schools, this number will be reduced even further.

School District 79 has a strong mandate toward the provision of early learning. The evidence that a strong foundation in the early years leads to a successful school experience later on is undisputed. We know that early child care programs are the corner stones of learning. We are pleased that a motion was recently passed by the Board requesting that the child care numbers be included in the Ministry of Education's school counts.

Social Planning Cowichan advises School District 79 to consider both the short and long term impact of the school closures on licensed child care and early learning.

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