To: The Chairperson, Commissioners, Director General, and Administration
Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board

Re: The Future of Phoenix Alternative High School

Dear Mr. Chairperson, Director General, Commissioners, and Members of the Administration,

I am writing regarding the possible relocation of Phoenix Alternative High School into a separate wing of a mainstream senior high school, or alternatively, its closure and the return of its students to their respective schools with additional resources.

I understand the realities the School Board must consider—enrolment, facilities, staffing and financial responsibility. However, before making a decision that could fundamentally change Phoenix, I respectfully ask that one question remain at the centre of the discussion:

Why was Phoenix created in the first place?

Phoenix exists because the traditional high school environment does not work for every student.

Many students arrive at Phoenix after struggling, becoming disengaged or failing within the conventional school structure. These are not necessarily students who lack ability or the potential to graduate. In many cases, the environment itself simply did not work for them.

For many, Phoenix is not just another school choice.

It is their last chance—and often their last hope—of completing high school.

By the time some students reach Phoenix, other approaches have already been tried. Confidence may be gone, academic difficulties may have accumulated, and some may be close to giving up on school altogether.

Phoenix gives them somewhere different to begin again.

Its small environment allows students to be known as individuals. Teachers notice when someone is struggling. Absences are noticed. Relationships develop. Students remain accountable, but they are given an opportunity to move beyond previous difficulties rather than continually being defined by them.

Returning Students to Mainstream Schools

I understand the reasoning behind possibly returning Phoenix students to their respective schools with additional resources and support.

But this raises an important historical question.

Wasn't the need for something different precisely why Phoenix was created in 1981?

The educators and commissioners who established Phoenix recognized that providing assistance within the traditional system did not meet the needs of every student. Some students required not simply additional resources, but a different environment in which those resources could work.

Education and student services have certainly evolved since 1981, and today's schools have supports that did not exist then. But resources alone cannot solve every problem.

A student can have access to counsellors, academic assistance and specialized services and still feel lost or unsuccessful within a large school.

Sometimes the environment itself is the resource.

If returning students to mainstream schools with additional support were always sufficient, the need for Phoenix would never have existed.

A Separate Wing Is Still Within the Same School

I also understand that the proposed relocation would provide Phoenix with a **separate wing** within a senior high school. I recognize the effort to preserve some independence under that model.

But a separate wing is not necessarily a separate environment.

Some Phoenix students may be returning to the same school—or certainly the same type of school—in which they previously struggled.

Consider that from their perspective.

A student struggles or fails in a mainstream high school, comes to Phoenix and finally begins to succeed. Phoenix becomes that student's fresh start and perhaps their last opportunity to graduate.

We then tell that student that Phoenix still exists, but it is now located inside the very type of environment they needed to leave.

A separate wing changes where the classroom is located. It does not necessarily change where the student feels they are going to school.

That distinction matters.

Phoenix's independence is part of what allows a student to walk through its doors and feel that yesterday does not have to determine tomorrow.

[redacted]

[redacted]

Phoenix was established in 1981 through cooperation between educators and the (then, Laurenvale School Board) Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board. [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Two of my own children attended Phoenix. Both graduated successfully, and one graduated as valedictorian.

I have therefore seen firsthand what Phoenix can accomplish.

A student who needs an alternative environment should never be mistaken for a student who lacks potential.

Before We Change Phoenix

Before making an irreversible decision, I respectfully ask the Board and Administration to speak with the people who know Phoenix best—its students, graduates, parents, teachers and staff.

Ask students who struggled elsewhere what changed when they came to Phoenix.

Ask graduates whether they believe they would have completed high school without it.

And ask one particularly important question:

Would Phoenix have represented the same opportunity for a new beginning if it had been located inside the school environment in which they had already struggled?

Phoenix should certainly evolve where necessary. It can be strengthened, improved and adapted to today's realities.

But in doing so, we should not eliminate the very characteristic that has made it successful: **being genuinely different from the environment that did not work for these students.**

For more than four decades, Phoenix has provided another path for students who needed one.

For many, it was not their first choice.

It was their last chance.

And when it felt like their last chance, Phoenix gave them something just as important:

hope.

[redacted]

My own children benefited from it.

Future students deserve to have it available to them as well.

I respectfully ask the Chairperson, Commissioners, Director General and Administration to preserve Phoenix as a distinct and independent alternative educational environment.

Do not take away the difference that gives these students another chance to succeed.

Respectfully,

[redacted]
Parent of two Phoenix graduates
[redacted]
Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board