Written Brief Proposed Relocation of Phoenix Alternative School
[redacted] | Teacher, Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board[redacted]

To the Chairperson, Commissioners, and Administration of the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board,

I am writing as [redacted] of this school board to submit this brief on the proposed relocation of Phoenix Alternative School to Laval Senior Academy. I am relieved that closure is no longer being considered. But relocation is still on the table, and I believe it would put at risk the very things that make Phoenix work.

I have seen this before. When the board merged two schools in the past, I taught in both. I watched what it did to students and staff, and I can tell you honestly that it was more devastating than helpful. There was no real evidence that it served the children.

I have also taught [redacted], and I have seen how challenging a large, busy setting can be for students who are already struggling. Attendance was an ongoing challenge, and some students found it hard to feel connected to their school or to feel fully at ease there. The pace and noise of the classrooms, hallways, and cafeteria could be overwhelming, even for students without additional needs. These are not failings of the staff, who work tremendously hard every day. They are simply the realities of a large school, and they are the very conditions many Phoenix students needed relief from.

The board has said Phoenix would remain a distinct school, with its own entrance and its own schedule. I appreciate that intention, but a name, a door, and a timetable do not create an environment. Phoenix students would still share a building, its noise, its hallways, and its crowds with the very kind of school they once had to leave. Keeping the name Phoenix does not mean keeping what makes Phoenix work.

This move would not affect Phoenix alone. The students currently in LSA's D-Wing, who also rely on specialized programming and support, would be displaced to make room. Solving a building problem by unsettling two vulnerable groups of students is not a solution.

Phoenix students are not in a small school by accident. Many came there because large schools overwhelmed them. Some lived with anxiety, bullying, or learning difficulties that made walking through a school door feel impossible. At Phoenix, they finally found adults who know them, classes small enough to breathe in, and a place where they belong.

Once again, this decision is being made far from the people who live with its consequences. Those deciding are not the parents who wake their child gently on a hard morning, pack a lunch, and promise it will be a good day. They are not the ones holding their son or daughter through a moment of panic, or reaching out to Phoenix teachers and administrators in distress because they need help just to get their child to school. Together, these families and Phoenix staff have built a support system that keeps children safe, happy, and willing to go to school.

This is not only a feeling. In the most recent Quebec survey of secondary students (Institut de la statistique du Québec, EQSJS 2022-2023), only about half reported a strong sense of belonging to their school, and that proportion has been falling. Fewer than one in three said they have an adult at school who truly listens to them and believes in them. These numbers likely understate the problem for students like Phoenix's, since the survey excludes specialized schools. Quebec research has found belonging to be the very foundation of engagement and success (St-Amand et al., 2020). Phoenix has rebuilt exactly that for students who had lost it.

Before any decision is made, I urge the board to listen: to Phoenix students past and present, to their parents, and to the teachers and staff who walk alongside them every day. I have seen and heard what Phoenix has done for these young people, and their stories are the most compelling evidence the board could ask for. They also point to something larger. Many more of our students would thrive in this kind of environment. Small classes, genuine relationships, and a real sense of belonging are not a luxury reserved for a few. They are the essence of education, and all too often they are the first things set aside when budgets take precedence over people.

I ask the board to keep Phoenix in a setting of its own, and to protect the D-Wing students as well. These students worked hard to find their place. Please don't take it from them.

Sincerely,

[redacted]
[redacted] Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board[redacted]
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