



**To:** Board of Education, Greater Victoria School District (SD #61)

**From:** École George Jay Elementary, Parent Advisory Committee

**Date:** March 7, 2018

**Re: Request to Recognize George Jay Parent Room as an Integral Space in Our School**

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### **Recommendation**

**It is requested that the Greater Victoria School District Board of Education:**

- Formally recognize the Parent Room of École George Jay Elementary as a space integral to the continued success of the school's students and their families;
- Direct staff to continue working with École George Jay Elementary administration to identify and implement classroom and professional space solutions that will preserve a Parent Room within the school as part of its three flexible space priorities (sensory "Rainbow Room," Music Room and Parent Room).

### **Background**

Over the past six years, École George Jay Elementary ("George Jay") has been experiencing a welcomed increase in enrollment, growing from 209 students at the start of the 2012/13 school year to 467 students anticipated for 2018/19. Coupled with increased need for classroom space due to the re-implementation of 2002 class size limits, it is expected that four additional classrooms will be required to meet school needs next year, with further additional spaces likely required in subsequent years.

George Jay has a unique role in the District in terms of the students and families it serves, and because of this has some unique resources not found at other schools. One of these resources is the school's Parent Room, a space established more than 22 years ago to better serve and connect the economically, socially and culturally diverse families who attend the school.

The Parent Room has become integral to the functioning of our school and a key foundation for providing the family supports, social connection and access to healthy resources that enable our students and families to thrive. There is substantial concern among school staff and families that the pressure to create further classroom space will convert George Jay's Parent Room into classroom space and take away this vital element of our school.

We are providing this package so that the School District Board and staff have a full understanding of the role the Parent Room serves in the functioning of our school and the substantial support within our school and the larger community to retain this space. We seek Board recognition of its importance and support to retain it.

### **Discussion**

The George Jay Parent Room is an extremely well-utilized space that enables a large number of formal and informal programs to serve the needs of families within our school. **Appendix A** provides the full list of initiatives currently operating out of this space.

From the Good Food Box Program and its role as a distribution location for other food, clothing and health supplies, to access to employment resources, community programs and our school's Family Liaison, the room is integral to providing the supports that enable families to thrive. It therefore plays a vital role in creating the base conditions for student success.

The Parent Room also acts as the hub for the substantial number of Parent Advisory Committee voluntary activities that contribute to the health and community well-being of the school, including lice check, school supply, Multicultural Day and Holiday Emporium initiatives, as well as school events (September Welcome Back Barbecue, Family Movie Nights, Family Games Nights) that contribute to the overall inclusiveness and social connection within the school.

However, beyond these programs and resources, the Family Room has become an integral space where families of many diverse abilities and backgrounds *connect to each other* and by doing so are able to achieve more. From providing a welcoming web of social connections for new Canadian families, to sharing parenting skills, to providing a safe space to talk about the highs and lows that come with life in any family, the Parent Room is a daily busy hub of activity and conversations that enable our families to succeed.

**Appendix B** provides letters of support from families and the community to retain this space within George Jay, while **Appendix C** provides additional comments provided by many different families on what this space means to them.

## Conclusions

It is our understanding from the School District *Long Term Facilities Plan* (pg. 6) that schools have the opportunity to prioritize the retention of three "flexible spaces" not required for classroom needs. The PAC supports the designation of our school sensory room (known as "The Rainbow Room"), Music Room and Parent Room as these three priority spaces.

It is also our understanding that our school administration has met with District Facilities staff and have identified possible classroom and professional space solutions that will meet future requirements while retaining these three priority spaces. Therefore, we request that the Board recognize the integral nature of our school's Family Room to the success of our students and families and that it direct staff to continue working with George Jay administration to implement space solutions that will retain the Family Room as part of our flexible space priorities.

Sincerely,



Gillian Gaffney, President

On behalf to the École George Jay Elementary Parent Advisory Committee

Cc: Terri Smith and Jessica McPhee, Principal and Acting Vice-Principal, École George Jay Elementary

Appendix A: École George Jay Elementary Parent Room Overview and Programs

Appendix B: Letters of Support to Retain the George Jay Parent Room

Appendix C: Parent Comments on What the Parent Room Means to Them

## APPENDIX A:

### École George Jay Elementary Parent Room Overview and Programs



#### George Jay Parent Room Fast Facts:

- **Size:** Approximately 79m<sup>2</sup> / 850 sq ft
- **Features:**
  - **Fully accessible:** located on ground floor, making it easier to access for parents with strollers or family members using mobility aids (motorized wheelchairs, walkers, etc.)
  - **Access to Family Liaison** in adjacent office creates opportunities for informal connection
  - **Small kitchen** to facilitate school and volunteer activities
  - **Children's play and reading area** which usually acts as overflow for well-attended Strong Start program on same corridor
  - **Children's clothing exchange area** accepts donations and shares items between families
  - **Three computer stations** to facilitate access to word processing and internet
  - **Bulletin boards and community program information** located at several locations in room provides easy way for families to connect to opportunities and services in school and community.
  - **Large central table, two couches and rocking chair** create friendly spaces for families to connect to each other, as well as undertake volunteer work parties (bread program distribution, food prep for large school events, etc.).



Connection to each other and to school and community services.

The École George Jay Elementary Parent Room currently provides the space and facilities for the following formal and informal programs.

### Formal Programs

- **Good Food Box** – Supports local farmers and distributes fruits and veggies to participating families. George Jay is one of the only schools in the District to be a distribution location for this program.
- **Happy Healthy Kids Program** – Distributing hygiene supplies to families who need them.
- **Bread Program** – Packaging and distributing bread to school families through partnership with COBS Bread.
- **Outreach and resources for indigenous families.**
- **Outreach and resources for new Canadian families**, including many families recently arrived from Syria.
- **Clothing Exchange** – Space for families to share and redistribute children’s clothing and shoes/boots.
- **In Class Volunteering and Lice Check** – Space to organize family volunteering within classrooms, including lice checks, as well as parent help with lunch and after school clubs and sports activities.
- **School Supply purchase program**
- **Bulletin boards and information materials** for multiple community programs.



Computer stations.



Clothing Exchange area in Parent Room.



## Informal Programs

- **Peer support and connection for families** to each other and the larger community.
- **Food prep and logistics planning** for large school events, including Welcome Back Barbecue, Halloween Dance, Family Movie Nights / Games Nights, Holiday Emporium and Multicultural Day.
- **Children's Play Area and Books / overflow area for Strong Start Program.**
- **Couches and rocking chair to support nursing mothers and their babies.**
- **Employment support and online access** through use of three computer terminals, plus informal assistance with completing online applications for services.
- **Parenting library and resources.**



Kitchen area.



EDUCATION

Times-Colonist - June 13th '96

# Program helps parents become better students

By Ian Dutton  
Times Colonist staff

There are no blackboards, and desks and chairs have been replaced with second-hand couches, but still it's back to school for a bunch of George Jay Elementary School parents.

The parents crowd into a former kindergarten classroom in the basement for weekly lessons on parenting, money-managing, dealing with the system — or just to share their cultural heritage.

The inner-city school's unique parents resource room is the creation of Tessa Lloyd, a child and family counsellor on contract to the Greater Victoria School District, who wants to make education a happy experience for the school's kids — and for their parents.

It hasn't always been comfortable for them, said Lloyd, pointing out that some bring with them bad memories of their own school days, or feel intimidated or rebuffed by the system.

Karen Wheeler, who has a son at George Jay, said her school days were no fun.

"I didn't enjoy those days very much," said Wheeler.

"Mostly it was having to deal with bullies. The school was right in our backyard and it took my brother half an hour to get home from school, because he was having to avoid kids on the way home."

Wheeler said a school program — Second Step — trains kids how to deal with bullies and how to avoid becoming a bully. It's terrific, she said.

Other parents have overcome their reluctance to make contact with the school.

"I came out from Ontario this year and there's a tremendous difference [between the school systems]," said Linda Ford. "You didn't feel welcomed at the schools there — all the doors were locked — and here you're part of all that goes on."

Ford said she felt more a participant in her children's education at George Jay, and that in turn made the kids feel better about being at school.

Teacher Bev Whimby said the resource room has provoked greater parental involvement in the classroom.

"I think it helps the children feel better when they know their parents are interested in what they're doing



I think it helps the children feel better when they know their parents are interested in what they're doing in school.

Bev Whimby,  
teacher at George Jay Elementary

in school," Whimby said. "It makes them feel more important."

Karen Hamilton, whose children now go to Sundance Elementary, still drops in for the parent sessions.

"There's great support here, a real network for parents," she said.

Lloyd said there's a daily drop-in and formal programs run once or twice a week. About 50 parents use the resource room frequently, with another 50 or so on a less-regular basis, she said.

As well, the Upper Room delivers bread once a week and there is a clothing exchange, and a library of books and videotapes offering guidance and support for parents.

Lloyd said other schools have expressed interest in the resource room concept and may copy it.

The room operates on a monthly budget of about \$20, she said.

## **APPENDIX B:**

### **Letters of Support to Retain the George Jay Parent Room**

The following individuals have provided letters of support for retaining the George Jay Parent Room, as well as perspective on what this room means to them and/or the students and families they work with.

Letters include submissions from:

- Leila Durzi, Family Liaison and First Nation Support Services
- Gillian Gaffney, current PAC President and George Jay parent
- Gita John-Iyam, Family & Youth Services Coordinator, Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria
- Mitchel du Plessis, School Counsellor
- Tania Wegwitz, current PAC Co-Vice-President and George Jay parent
- Sue MacTavish, Youth & Family Counsellor
- Eileen Coyle, current PAC Treasurer and George Jay parent
- Bhamini McDonald, Strong Start Early Childhood Educator
- Jennifer Davies, current George Jay parent
- Kimberlie Drapeau, current George Jay parent
- Lillian Bauer, current George Jay parent
- Angela Carmichael, current George Jay parent
- Valeria Cortes and Jorge Aranda, current George Jay parents
- Vanessa Hamilton-George, current George Jay parent
- Kate Wallace, former PAC President and George Jay parent
- Beth and John Threlfall, former PAC Vice-President and George Jay parents

To School District 61,

As the Family Liaison Worker at George Jay Elementary School I would like to share with you my thoughts around the Parent Resource Room and the impact it has on students, families and our school as a whole.

As you have been hearing from many parents, the Parent Room is more than just a drop-in space. It is a place where we create belonging, support for our diverse community, and facilitates access to resources. It creates engagement in our building that has become a fundamental part of our school culture. Part of my job here is to work with vulnerable families addressing many issues that impact not only the academic life of students, but also their social and emotional health and well-being. Social emotional learning which as you know has a significant impact on school performance and future success.

Family Liaison services are provided both formally and informally, and are intended to increase family and parental capacity as well as parents' connection to school. Liaison between school and families is a prevention tool. My services also provide direct support for vulnerable children. I help parents with issues such as parenting, homelessness and housing, poverty and financial issues, MCFD involvement, immigration and settlement issues, legal and custody issues. I also provide direct support for school staff and administration in regard to parental school involvement. This is done through counseling, crisis intervention, advocacy and mediation, case management, and community referrals. My office is located adjacent to the parent room and my daily work life centers around this room. My ability to do my job effectively, will be greatly impacted if this room were to no longer exist.

I understand that this room is a unique space that most schools do not have. However, I would like to emphasize that what happens in this room has a major impact on the school as a whole. It creates parent and family connection to school in a very fundamental way. This directly impacts kids through increased attendance, greater family support, and an increased sense of belonging.

Without this space, our school would be a very different place. The Parent Room plays a fundamental role in our school. Everything that we work for to make the school a unique and special place would be negatively impacted by the loss of this room.

Thank you for taking these concerns into account when making the very real and challenging decisions you have to make as a School Board.

Sincerely,

Leila Durzi, Family Liaison Worker, George Jay Elementary

To the Greater Victoria School District Board of Education,

As our school grows, I know that space is tight and the district is looking for more rooms to fill. Today I would like to speak to you about a very valuable space that our school is at risk of losing; our Parent Resource Room. As a parent and as President of the PAC I am reaching out to you for your support to save this room.

As some of you may know, our Parent Resource Room is much more than just a space for parents to drink coffee. It is a space for families, a space for community. This space allows parents somewhere to be if their children need them. It is a space that encourages family participation in their children's education. Somewhere safe to visit, for some who may not otherwise step foot in this school. Somewhere for new Canadians and vulnerable families to access resources. A place to ask for help. A friendly place for families to meet with advocates and community workers. Getting people in the door is step one. From there we see people actively participating in our school community. Volunteering, making connections. Our most vulnerable become empowered, become community leaders. This room is a catalyst for all things George Jay.

Beyond this, without this space, we would lose our clothing exchange room. Imagine all the children who come here for clean clothing in a day. Accidents, being inadequately dressed for the weather, mud, snow, rain. I cannot tell you how many pairs of dry socks and shoes I have put on wet feet in this room. How many teachers, EAs, and students know they can come here for clean, dry kids clothing. Students can get cleaned up, and continue with their school day. There is no shame here, no judgment. We are all here to care for these children together and when children enter this space, they feel that.

This is the space where I come to coordinate and meet with classroom volunteers. Where the community comes together to bag bread for families in need. Where we sort fresh fruit and veggies for classes and families. Where we coordinate lice checks. Our PAC coordinates all of our major fundraisers in this space. Without this space, our school would be a different place.

Thank you,

Gillian Gaffney  
George Jay PAC President,  
Volunteer Coordinator,  
Mom  
georgejaypac@gmail.com , 250-893-4455



8 March 2018

The Trustees

School District 61

Respected Trustees:

I am connected to George Jay Elementary in a few ways. I was a settlement worker in schools, a volunteer and now a coordinator of Youth and Family services at the Intercultural Association of Greater Victoria.

The Parent Room at George Jay Elementary has been a life line for many of the clients – parents and children I have had the privilege of serving. Sometimes a cup of tea and a warm and safe space to sit with someone who is willing to listen is all that stands between someone walking out stronger or broken. I have been in these situations and every time the Parent room has been that space.

- I have had several clients; primarily mothers who needed to have that space to sit and talk – with the kids playing in the kid zone.
- When it has been pouring rain, the parent has found a clean and dry pair of socks from the 'take what you need room'.
- The counselor who always has an open door and warm smile has offered a bus ticket to the doctor's office when the mother was unable to go without it.
- I have seen and participated in the joy of packing bread with other parents – sharing laughter and community.

I have been a witness to these and many more small miracles.

Nothing I have seen anywhere else comes close to this welcoming space that makes community happen. My hope is that every school will have something like this to support its parents. And I wish I had something like this when my children were growing up. I would not have felt so alone or as marginalized.

I think it is the right space at the right time. I know community centers and other spaces exist. But they are not where the children get dropped off at 8.30 am.

One of the things that makes George Jay such a caring school is in the form of that Parent Room. It is such a great space for such a fragile group of people.

Sincerely,

Gita

Youth & Family Services Coordinator

Copy: Ms. Terri Smith, Ms. Lella Durzi,

March 5, 2018

Dear School Board Trustees and George Jay Pac President, Gillian Gaffney,

This is a letter outlining my observations, interactions and beliefs about continuing to honour and hold the space for the Parent Resource Room at L'Ecole George Jay Elementary to continue. In my multiple roles in the school as an Aboriginal counsellor, elementary school counsellor and teacher, I have had many opportunities to see how this unique and valuable space is used.

The Ministry of Education states that "School connectedness is not a learning outcome of curricula per se. Rather, it is a condition fostered in a positive school environment, where teachers and other adults create opportunities for students to feel valued, supported, appreciated, involved, and engaged in the school setting." I believe that this is true of students' families too. Having a safer space for parents and caregivers to come and connect helps foster this sense of connectedness for adults to the school which can help the children stay attached. Attachment to school is essential for student success. In Elementary school, more than ever, this has to include parents and families. I work with several families who struggle to feel safe and are building trust with the school through the parent room. When working with parents who have struggled with their own experiences in school, sharing spaces to connect include connecting with the parents and our family Liaison, Leila Durzi in the parent room. We are able to invite and connect with more families as the parent room is a place to access resources, meet other parents, provide support for New Canadians, collaborate around school initiatives, and decompress in a safe space.

After a school assembly, I noticed an adult walking around, reading the bulletin boards. I said hello, introduced myself and asked which student they were connected with. The person broke down. I quickly took them into an office and listened to their story. This person got to see their child for the first time in 6 months. After listening to their story, I invited them to check out the parent room. There, they connected with Leila who immediately welcomed them. There were also several other parents in the room, some using the computers, one making tea, and another coming out of the clothing exchange room. We introduced the parent to the others in the room. It was so heartening to see this parent relax and engage with others. It is a safer space for people to connect while their children are at school.

I could share many more stories and examples of where parents, grandparents, and other family members come and use, connect and receive support in the Parent room... I will share that this space is an integral part of the George Jay community and that it is vital to keeping our school community strong and connected.

In solidarity,

Mitchel du Plessis

# Connecting Dots...

TRANSPORTATION | FACILITATION | COMMUNITY PLANNING & ACTION

Tania Wegwitz, MCIP, RPP | 1442 Camosun Street, Victoria, BC V8V 4L6 | [tania@connectdots.ca](mailto:tania@connectdots.ca)



March 4, 2018

Greater Victoria School District (SD# 61)  
Board of Education  
556 Boleskine Road  
Victoria, BC V8Z 1E8

Dear Board Chair, Vice-Chair and Trustees:

**Subject: George Jay Elementary Parent Room and School Communication Strategy**

I am writing to support the retention of George Jay Elementary School's Parent Room and provide perspective on how this space relates to the school's communications strategy and increasing enrollment.

As a Member of the Canadian Institute of Planners and a Registered Professional Planner, over the years I have worked with more than 80 local governments, First Nations, provincial government organizations and non-profits to develop long-range plans, strategic plans and communication strategies. I am also proud to be a George Jay parent.

In 2012 to 2013 myself and two other volunteers collaborated with George Jay students, families and staff to conduct a series of workshops and open houses to develop a new communications strategy for the school. The goal of this work was to "write a new story" for George Jay that would better describe what already made it an amazing place and improve how it was perceived by some neighbourhood families. At the time when we started this work—when my oldest son was in kindergarten—enrollment in the school was just above 200 students.

The focus of our work with the school community was to determine the top three things that made George Jay special and different from other schools that could then form the basis for new messaging. Of all the groups I have worked with, I have NEVER experienced such immediate alignment across everyone involved in terms of expressing what made the school great. By far, the top things that people wanted to celebrate about George Jay were:

**A deep sense of community and appreciation of diversity. Innovative approaches to learning that meets the needs of each child. Programs and services to support all aspects of students and their families.**

Above all, what struck me was that when we asked the question about what made the school great, "our diversity and sense of community" was almost always the first response. When asked to dive deeper, the Parent Room was almost always mentioned by parents and staff as one of the significant resources at the school that enabled this diverse community to happen.

The above three themes developed with the school were used to revamp all communications materials and outreach activities for George Jay: from its website text and printed brochure, to materials provided in the Strong Start room and as part of Kindergarten enrollment. It also formed the basis of significant outreach undertaken by the PAC at Quadra Village and Fernwood neighbourhood events and in their community papers.

Five years later, my oldest son is in Grade Five and preparing for middle school. And enrollment at the school has almost doubled to 411 students. It is forecast for 467 students next year.

While many things have contributed to this increase—and certainly the introduction of French Immersion is responsible for approximately 100 of this 258 student increase as of next year—I can't help but think that celebrating what we do well and sharing those stories with our neighbours is also a key factor in George Jay's admirable increase in enrollment.

Sharing our amazing sense of diverse community has created an even larger community of learners and their families.

In my view, not retaining the Parent Room in the face of increasing enrollment would not only be a very poor decision in terms of disrupting the daily programs and services it provides families but also an extremely unwise strategic decision. It would undermine one of the cornerstones of what makes our school great and why more and more of our neighbourhood families have been choosing to come here. Whether a School Board or a business owner, changing the conditions that have helped to create a 123% increase in seven years would not be smart.

Students, families and staff embrace the cultural, economic and social diversity that is integral to George Jay. The Parent Room is fundamental to developing the ties that make that community happen and connecting families to services and each other when they need them most.

I strongly encourage you to create the conditions for the school's continued success by prioritizing retention of the Parent Room space. George Jay is on a roll: please don't hinder it.

Sincerely,



Tania Wegwitz

[tania@connectdots.ca](mailto:tania@connectdots.ca)

250.208.3874



École George Jay Elementary  
Youth & Family Counselling Program  
1118 Princess Ave. Victoria, B.C. V8T 1L3  
(250) 385-3381



March 6, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

This is a letter of support for the George Jay Parent room. It is my understanding that there is the potential for this room to be eliminated in order to meet the needs for space for our growing school population. As the Youth and Family Counsellor at George Jay, who has worked at the school for the past 9 years, I feel an obligation to make District #61 aware of the important needs that this space meets for our students and their families.

The parent room is not just a space, its existence helps to create a sense of community in our school. At many schools parents only enter the school when they are attending events or parent teacher interviews. This is not the case at George Jay, our parents are active participants daily in our school. They are engaged their child's learning, planning events, getting support when they need it, taking responsibility and becoming empowered. As a counsellor in the school who works with the children of these parents, this participation makes a profound difference. The children know that their parents are invested and a part of our school community. It assists in helping to build trust for many families that have had negative school experiences, either with their own children or as a student themselves.

The Parent Room at George Jay is actually already a classroom in a sense. It is a place for parents to learn and grow and to feel the arms of our school wrapping around them with love and support. It is an integral part of what we do and who we are.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sue MacTavish".

Sue MacTavish

Youth & Family Counsellor  
Ecole George Jay Elementary

Friday March 2, 2018

To SD 61

Re: the parent room at Ecole george jay Elementary School

I am the parent of 2 children who are currently attending george jay. I also brought a young child in my care to george jay when he attended in 1999. I've always experienced george jay as an inclusive space for a diverse population. This isn't always an easy path to walk, and the parent room has been a space that is safe for families; where we try to learn and move forward with hope and respect for each other and ourselves. We support our children's learning from here.

I find this space valuable to our school community for the following reasons.

The parent room provides:

- A safe place for diverse families: for example, some children have exceptional needs and parents can support them from the parent room (one parent was eating lunch with her child in the parent room because the child was experiencing an eating disorder and needed the support; another parent with an autistic child may stay there in the mornings in case her son or the school staff need her support). International families also gather here. Bread days are one of the most fun events as families from all over the world bag and distribute bread together. The space encourages parents who may be unfamiliar with this culture to participate, ask for help, and/or have questions answered when needed.
- A working space for family support professionals, and a learning space for professionals entering the field of family and youth services: Leila Durzi is our family support worker and contributes invaluable time, energy, and resources to the many families in our community who need extra support. She also trains students from Camosun.
- A working space for parents who provide support for the school: our parent room is our PAC's meeting space. Leila helps us to support school programs like swim club and Emporium. Our families are a vulnerable population, and many of them work or are supporting large families. The parents would not otherwise be able to participate in the school as much as we currently can currently, with the space and with Leila's support. We promote so many programs, and our efforts encourage students and their families. Our community is strong because we are involved.

Thank you for this forum, and for this opportunity to communicate with you about the value we experience when we access the parent room at george jay.

Sincerely, and with respect.

Eileen Coyle

email: [eileenchix@gmail.com](mailto:eileenchix@gmail.com); phone: 250-382-4141

March 6, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

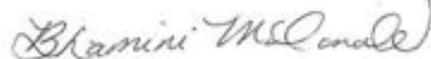
Re- Parent Resource Room

I am currently the George Jay Strong Start Educator. I would like to voice my support for the continuation of the Parent Resource Room at George Jay School. Our Parents use the room daily and rely on it for support and comfort during their busy days. We also use it for an overflow space when our room is full.

I have observed many wonderful activities that support a positive School community such as the food donations and Various Sales. The Parents work cooperatively and thrive on their joint efforts to support their children's successful experiences at School.

I hope that this Team effort will continue for the benefit of all who use and benefit from the Parent Resource room.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bhamini McDonald". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Bhamini McDonald

George Jay Strong Start

Feb 17/2018

To School District 61,

My name is Jennifer and I am a parent at George Jay School who uses the Parent Room every day. Every morning I drop my son off and come to the parent room to talk to Leila Durzi the Family Liaison, have coffee, attend the potlucks, order the Good Food Box, use the computers and connect with other parents.

My son has been attending George Jay since Kindergarten and now he is in grade 4. He went to a different school in Grade 1 and there was no parent room at that school. The lack of community at the other school was very apparent. I missed not having the support of other parents. It was definitely not easy to become friends with the other parents.

We decided to come back to George Jay for Grade 2 and I started coming to the parent room every day again. Each morning the parents welcomed me with open arms and the coffee was on, I felt instantly at home.

The little ones were playing with the toys in the toy area, moms talking and having coffee and helping support each other through the parenting challenges and successes.

George Jay has a lot of multi-cultural and diverse families attending school. What I love about George Jay is that there is the parent room and the parent room creates a happy space where everyone is welcome and we all get to know each other.

The parent room has many programs that help support families. Such as the PAC, used clothing exchange, monthly potlucks, play area, the bread program, and the Good Food Box.

My son has had many mental health challenges and other adversities and Leila Durzi has been an amazing resource. I have been able to have a safe space to debrief with Leila every morning. Leila has not only helped counsel me but she has assisted me with paperwork, find resources and encouraged me!

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Davies". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jennifer Davies

## What the parent room means to me.

My name is Kimberlie Drapeau, first off like to thank you for taking the time to read my letter. To give you a bit of my family background, I'm a 28 year old single mother, I have a 7 yr old named Olivier in grade one, who is speech delayed, has ADHD, sensory processing disorder and so far has been held back a year due to his abilities. We have gone through two schools and let me tell you how much of a godsend George jay has been not only because the amazing teachers and administration but because the parent room gives all of us parents a place also.

if it wasn't for the parent room I never would have been connected with the family liaison worker Leila Durzi. Thanks to Leila we now get fresh veggies every two weeks which is essential in keeping Olivier off of medication for his ADHD. Leila has connected me with a lot of resources to help my special needs child in any situation, including finding after school programs and funding so he can harness and understand just how awesome he truly is, because unfortunately with his special needs comes the feeling of failure and not being good enough. without the parent room I never would of met the support group I have now.

It truly takes a village to raise a child and the parent room has given me that. I can walk in there ugly crying about how horrible of a parent I feel because again we had a melt down on the way to school that I could do nothing to calm, and while I feel like a failure of a parent and I'm ugly crying I can hear that this too shall pass from parents who actually understand. I cannot tell you as a parent how important it is to talk to people that actually understand and get the struggle of a special needs child. Too be honest the parent room is my sanity.

**From:** Lilli Patey <[treelilli@hotmail.com](mailto:treelilli@hotmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 7, 2018 6:30:07 AM  
**To:** [georgejaypac@gmail.com](mailto:georgejaypac@gmail.com)  
**Subject:** parent room

To whom it may concern,

I have been a part of the George Jay School since 2011 when my oldest started kindergarten. I am a mother of 5 and my fourth child will be attending George Jay in the fall. I would like to express what an invaluable asset the parent room is to the school and the community.

The parent room is a place where we can gather as parents, grandparents and care-givers to truly be a part of George Jay. They say it takes a village to raise a child. Our parent room is a cornerstone in our village. My children and myself have made some of our best friends in this room. It also has an endless supply of resources to support us as parents and our children.

When my 4th was born 10 weeks premature and subsequently spent 7 weeks in the NICU, the parent room family came together to support my family. Childminding was arranged for my toddler and a meal train was put in place by the people in this room. With their support, I was able to spend valuable time with my tiny infant and I am forever grateful.

Now, we spend many mornings a week meeting in the parent room. I am able to volunteer time to the school and the PAC thanks to having safe place for my kids to play and parents taking turns looking after the children. Not only are we able to connect and volunteer, the parent room is a wealth of resources. It hosts a clothing exchange room so when a child has an accident or their shoe breaks, they can come find a replacement. There are computers and a printer available to access information, forms and documents online. There is even a food exchange table.

I don't know of another place with such a vast array of information available. We are blessed with our family liaison officer, Leila Durzi, here as well. I have been able to meet with her and find resources for my anxious child and discuss other family struggles. There are supports for newcomers to Canada, for those needing housing support, for those dealing with separations, for those dealing with traumas and much more. We are safe to access this information and these resources in the parent room.

George Jay is an extremely diverse community and the parent room is there to tie us all together, not just as a school but as a society. It's spaces like this that make Canada a better place and it would be devastating to lose it.

Thank you,

Lillian Bauer

From: **Angela cooper** <[angelacooper24@hotmail.com](mailto:angelacooper24@hotmail.com)>  
Date: Tue, Feb 27, 2018 at 10:14 AM  
Subject: Parent Room  
To: George Jay School PAC <[georgejaypac@gmail.com](mailto:georgejaypac@gmail.com)>

To whom it may concern:

As a parent of George Jay School, I'd like to talk about the importance of the parent room. For my family it has been an overwhelming sense of community. Coming from a private school, I was so welcomed after feeling like we didn't belong. On a day to day basis, not only do I feel supported in my parenting and the challenges that presents, but in being a woman, and not being alone in those aspects. There are also a plethora of services we all have access to, no matter our economical, religious or racial backgrounds. I also feel this room and its services are irreplaceable to our students & their families who are new to Canada or just this school. There is no language barrier in this room, services are accessible, and basic needs are met with out humiliation. With out this unique room, I truly believe, many of our most vulnerable families will be left behind, both in the school and in the community.

I hope I have made clear the needs for this space, both for myself, my family and my community.

Thank you.  
Angela Carmichael

March 6, 2018

Administrators and Educators within George Jay and School District 61,

I am writing this letter to express my concern regarding the removal of the Parent Room at George Jay School. I sincerely acknowledge the need for space within our schools and I can see how decision-makers would see an easy fix in using the Parent Room to allocate space for the upcoming school year. However, I think removing this resource would be a mistake, and I would like to join my voice to the many parents in our community who know the importance of our Parent Room.

As educators, you might know well the recent literature on community engagement\* (particularly parent involvement) as a strategy to improve schools and educational attainment. I truly believe that the parent room at George Jay School is unique and essential for our school community to continue thriving.

The Parent Room has been a safe space for my kids and me since my daughter started Kindergarten last year. Both as a new member of the school community and as a mother of a new baby, I was grateful to have a dedicated space where I was able to meet other parents and staff, nurse my baby, grab a coffee, and access resources. The Parent Room was essential to my daughter's transition into the school community, as she knew that I would be around after dropping her off and before the end of the school day.

What is more, the Parent Room is a space that promotes multicultural engagement, and, through its constant activity, it shows our kids the importance of being engaged in a community. From informal chatting over coffee, kids' birthday celebrations, arts and crafts, clothing exchanges, our fantastic bread program, to PAC meetings and activities, the Parent Room is an important space. I truly believe that losing it would have unintended negative consequences in our school community.

We trust that, moving forward, decision-makers will engage in creative problem solving, listen to the school community, and keep the Parent Room.

Sincerely,



Valeria Cortes and Jorge Aranda

\* Gardner, K. (2004). *Improving Schools through Community Engagement: A Practical Guide for Educators*

Brier, M., Kato, H. (2016). *Trust and Parents' Involvement in Schools of Choice. Educational Management Administration and Leadership*

**From:** Vanessa Hamilton-George <[VanessaHGeorge@hotmail.com](mailto:VanessaHGeorge@hotmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 6, 2018 9:28:13 AM  
**To:** [georgejaypac@gmail.com](mailto:georgejaypac@gmail.com)  
**Subject:** RE: Parent Room

To Whom it may concern (School Board),

My name is Vanessa Hamilton-George, I recently moved to Victoria in November and my son who is 5 started at George Jay Elementary, when I moved to Victoria I had no knowledge about this city or what my community has to offer.

My first week of my son attending a new school in a new city I was very anxious and timid. I entered the parent room and the parents / PAC welcomed me and I was able to connect with them about the services that are offered in this city. Without the parent room I would have no knowledge about the best dentistry, pediatrician, doctors, programs, lessons, and etc. I have grown a connection with these parents.

As a mother with awful anxiety and high stresses in my life, the parent room is a place where I can sit have a coffee with my fellow parents and talk about what is going on with ourselves, our children, our family, and our community. The parent room has given me a sense of community.

If the parent room was taken away I would have nowhere to use a computer and print off important paperwork. The parent room offers various helpful resources such as coffee, computer/printer, free bread program, clothing room, and much much more. These resources are vital to our parents, foster parents, grand parents and care givers.

I would be heart broken if we lost this, as it is extremely helpful and beneficial. Especially for us parents with multiple barriers in life. Please, let us keep the parent room and find another alternative for more classroom settings.

Sincerely, Vanessa Hamilton-George

Feb 24 2018

To Whom It May Concern,

Regarding the Parent Resource Room at George Jay Elementary

My name is Kate Wallace. I was a parent with two children at George Jay from 2011-2017.

I was also acting as PAC President for 3 and PAC Secretary for 1 of those years.

I have heard that there is conversation about closing the parent room to make way for a new classroom.

Here's why the Parent room is important:

1. In a school where the financial diversity of families is as robust as the cultural diversity, this parent room is a place where food can be shared. Food is one very important way that people can show support of others.
  - There is a bread program where a volunteer picks up hundreds of loaves from local bakery weekly, and then a dozen parents will volunteer to bag it and make it available to any parent in the school. Weekly quality bread? A savings of \$10-20 week for some families.
  - This a place where parents, volunteers and staff can drop off non-perishable items at any time which supports families in need
  - The School has a fruit and veggie program where parents volunteer to divvy up and deliver fruits and veggies to all the classrooms
  - There is PAC meetings. Many times families can't come and participate because meetings happen at night. The PAC has had different parents bring food to make or heat up so that dinner is served during meetings and families can come and eat and participate in PAC meetings where voices are heard and volunteers are made!
  - Coffee shop! We have used the parent room to host Teacher Appreciation mornings. We have a local business bring a pop-up style coffee shop, parents bring treats, and we send an invitation to teachers a few days in advance so we know they will be able to make time to come and join us. We also deliver to the teachers/staff who can't make it into the room.
  - Community Volunteers: George Jay has a very strong literacy program and there are over 40 volunteers who read with kids. The Parent room serves as place where volunteers can go for a coffee or eat their lunches at recess or lunch recess.
  - There is also a community lunch once a month where the Parent room is used for a place where families bring something from their cultural background, to share with others. Community and tolerance and open hearted-ness is at the core of these lunches and serves not only for the parents, but those experiences will be brought home and taught to their children.
  - Food prep for the Welcome to George Jay BBQ is a big deal. We have multiple volunteers who use this kitchen to prep fresh veggies and more, for the BBQ, so it's not just about hot dogs, but eating healthy at the event. Starting the year off right and

enticing other parents to participate by seeing the love created in this first event of the season.

You can see just by these examples, that the Parent Room is imperative to the culture of the school. It's working! The problem of sharing all these events in the Gym's kitchen or the Staff Room, is that parents need a place to bring their kids where they are occupied and safe. And the GJ kitchen is already busy with prepping breakfast and lunch and other programs. The Staff room: well I don't think it would go over well to take over the staff room where informal meetings are held and teachers need a get away as well!

As you can see: The Parent room is so important just for the Food but other uses are just as important:

- We have a computer section where parents can look for work, create resumes and look for resources to help them in their lives. Lots of GJ families do not have access and the PAC wants to support families as much as possible so that they can support themselves.
- The philosophy of the GJ PAC is that they don't charge for events so that all families can afford to participate. Like Dances, and Spring Fairs, etc. That means the PAC needs to be supported by having a space to create events easily. This isn't other schools. This is the culture of George Jay.
- There is a clothing exchange room in the Parent room allowing families to get free clothes as needed, but also teachers and EA's can access if a child doesn't have proper footwear for the weather for example. Imperative!
- A toy zone. Giving parents a chance to do computer work, make food for an event, sit and have coffee with our family counsellor while the kids play, or have a coffee and get support from other parents, the toy zone makes these possible.
- Resources: Not just the computers, but there is information on the walls, in pamphlets and the Youth and Family Counsellor in an attached office, to help new or struggling families to find the help they need all in one place. Less searching, means more time to get and use the help offered. Including other parents lending a hand to each other.

All in all, the Parent Room is always in use. Always. There are parent volunteers dedicated to keeping it clean, bagging bread, doing laundry for the clothing exchange, let alone PAC meetings. This gives some parents a place to volunteer when they can and feel a part of the PAC in their own way.

I hope you can find another solution to the growing nature of the School. All schools would benefit from a Parent room, George Jay is ahead of the game. I hope you can find another solution than taking this very important, well used room from the community of parents.

Thanks

Kate

**From:** John & Beth Threlfall <[t-house@shaw.ca](mailto:t-house@shaw.ca)>  
**Sent:** February 27, 2018 11:40 AM  
**Subject:** Save the Parent Room!  
**To:** George Jay School PAC <[georgejaypac@gmail.com](mailto:georgejaypac@gmail.com)>

Our family ( Threlfalls ) were a member of the George Jay Elementary School community from 2008 to 2015.

Starting school is a big transition for everyone, parent and child. We continue to be grateful for our experience in this educational journey which started at George Jay Elementary and a factor of that came from the involvement of the parent room. A space where you can go after dropping off your children for the day, to check in with other parents, to sit and have a tea, relax, share information and get to know one another is important to the mental health of any parent.

Having the opportunity to cultivate a community that is larger than the school, creating a bond which is special, a network that couldn't have happened without the use of the parent room. The parent room to me isn't just a space to get resources, it provided a place where I could get some canned goods when I was short on dinner, look for a pair of donated pants when our son had grown out of another set, bag bread with other parents to give out to families in need.

This room is a place of connection, it would be a great lost to future families not to have the same opportunity to make those important relationships of togetherness that we all need as people and parents.

Help save the parent room, thank you.

The Threlfall Family :)

## APPENDIX C:

### Parent Comments on What the Parent Room Means to Them

In addition to formal letters of support, many parents and members of our community provided comments through social media and in person on what the Parent Room means to them and their families. The following presents a sampling of these comments.



**Nidaa Al-Furaiji** (left): This is where I meet other parents and access Leila and get her assistance. For nine years I've known her and I've made lots of friends in here. And we need this room for talking with others and getting access.

**Leila Gaal** (right): I came here and met many parents and families. I have no family here and so this has been so important to have this. Some parents use this often to access clothes and other things for their children.

**Stacia Skye:** The parent room means a lot to me. It provides the most social interaction I get in a week. Without that I don't know what my mental health state would be. I wouldn't have the chance to get to know the other parents at my son's school. My daughter gets the social interaction she lacks with not being in daycare. I'm not a big fan of how the strong start program is run, at least for my daughter's age. Without the parent room she wouldn't get that.

**Tammy Page:** When you walk into a room full of peeps either it be a classroom, diner, small closet, PARENT ROOM..and you smile cuz you know your loved by them all..kinda makes your day...if you take the parent room away where do you plan for us to go a lot of us find comfort in

talking to parents with kids at our school then to some group ... we are a community that sticks together.

**Miranda Jay Blue:** This room is loved by many, including myself. Some mornings are harder than others and, after dropping my kindergartener off, having the ability to go be with other parents is just the relief I need. If this room is taken away, the community that has been developed (and used by many, including many new Canadians) will also be gone and I don't see this as a good thing.

Many moms are isolated and being able to chat with and just be around parents going through the same changes is very helpful.

This room could be considered a life saver.

**Brianna Day Atkins:** It's incredibly difficult when put on the spot to enunciate just how much the space means to us parents. I guess I can't say I speak for everyone, but I'm sure many of these sentiments are shared.

Our school isn't just a school. It's a gathering space. At the heart of this gathering space is a haven- the parent resource room. This is not just any space. This does not come down to simple square footage. This is a space we use to celebrate victories. A space we use to comfort one another when terrible things happen and we just don't understand why. A space to commiserate in, share a laugh in, be a shoulder to cry on in, drink a gallon of coffee in.

The parent resource room is also a space for all of the incredibly hard workers involved in the PAC and volunteerism around the school and community. A space that shows these very people that we value their contributions and appreciate everything they do to improve our surroundings our supports and the daily lives of the kids at the school.



When we say it takes a village, we mean it here in Fernwood. Our village gathers here. Our village laughs and cries and laughs again here. Our village belongs here and it needs to stay here.

**Christina Wilkie:** I go to the parent room to be able to talk to other parents over a cup of coffee. I can unwind before taking my little one home. I go in there to talk with Leila Durzi as well. Without that room I wouldn't have made the friends I have who's kids are in different grades than my

son. We share info about our kids developments before we have to go to work or school etc. It's a place for the volunteers (PAC) to organize things for the school. If the school district thinks it's wasted pace, then they don't understand how much use it gets and how many things have been accomplished there.

**Dawn Pearse:** I was recently informed that the Parent Room at George Jay is in jeopardy of being allocated for an alternate use. I feel a sense of dismay as the Parent Room is a hub for so much connection for parents and their children as well as a space within the learning environment to resource tools, information, food, support, and much more.

Speaking for myself, I am a single mother with a special needs child in grade 3 at George Jay Elementary. I am taking courses online to increase the betterment of myself and my family. My son has a shorter school day than the average student and the amount of hours I have within the day to study/complete assignments is minimal. I am able to access the Parent Room computer space to attend my own schooling while my child is in class. I don't know what I would do without this resource.



Also, there is the aspect of isolation that comes from single parenting especially with having a special needs child. The Parent Room is a place for parents to connect with/without their children and there aren't enough places in our society that provide a space like that and not enough in the public school system. The very fact that there is a parent room within the school is a message of support to my child. My child has said to me that he knows it's a "good school" because "there is a place for you [his mom] in it". It shows that I'm involved as a parent which speaks volumes in example to supporting my child.

There are many other reasons that I use the Parent Room, such a bread, food, scheduling special needs appointments, parent support, and so forth. Thank you.

**Geneva Johnson:** When I moved to Victoria and our child started at George Jay, I didn't know a single person in the entire school. The parent room was a beacon of community for me when I was very isolated as a parent. Because of the parent room, I was able to get support and resources, become more involved at the school, volunteer, get to know the amazing parents who were making George Jay the awesome place it is. Now, I stop by regularly, I don't say much but I always exchange a smile with someone, listen to the support fellow parents are

getting and sharing. George Jay needs this room for the parents and the community. It is a hub of all that's great about Victoria.

**Alicia Ropo:** The parent resource room is an extremely important part of our child's lives and their ability to thrive at George Jay.

We have such a diverse student group, with many languages, socio economic status, cultures that without somewhere for us parents to come together it would be very challenging for many of us to create a community and thereby set an example for our children to create a community and improve their outcomes, both at school, and in life. It allows people with challenges accessing resources for themselves or their children to have an open non-judgemental place to come and get assistance, it allows those who have resources to share (be it physical, emotional or cognitive) a place to go to help those who need help.

The resource room also allows accessibility to computer access for the many forms that we need to fill out in our lives every day, many for our families and children. It allows for networking to create new job, housing and social opportunities for our families. By removing the parent resource room the school board is undermining the entire purpose of public school - to have a safe, inclusive place for families to come together, share resources and help each other improve their standing in life, and thereby be better able to create a strong future for their children.

**Tanja Delahoz:** The parent room is] A place to make friends [and] meet other parents. A space where all cultures come together. A warm loving space where we can just be together.

**Cassie Hooker:** I love the parent room. Where else can we go? This room has been a fantastic place to get to know the other parents in the school community, pick up some much-needed clothing and food, share a cup of coffee and a chat, or even use the computers (for those who might not have one at home). Parents with small tots can let them play in a safe space. Meetings can be held there. I know it's a staging area for the school's volunteer activities. Good Food Hampers get passed out, there. If the room goes... where does all that go? The Parent Room is an important part of our school community.