

ROUND HILL SCHOOL COMMUNITY MEETING

ROUND HILL SCHOOL GYMNASIUM

February 6th, 2020

TRUSTEES

Norm Erickson, Chair

Karen Belich, Vice Chair

Lyle Albrecht

Zsuzsanna Hemperger

Jeff Kimball

Kendall Severson

Valerie Sims

Laurie Skori

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Rita Marler, Superintendent of Schools

Shan Jorgenson-Adam, Assistant Superintendent – Learning

Imogene Walsh, Assistant Superintendent – Business

Natasha Wilm, Assistant Superintendent – System Supports

Diane Hutchinson, Director of Communications

Cheryl Kropinske, Director of Finance

Garth Rapson, Director of Transportation

Percy Roberts, Director of Facilities

Jason Urkow, Computer Technician

Shirley Fairall, Executive Assistant – Superintendent

Chair Erickson call the meeting to order at 7:05 PM

Chair Erickson welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending, then continued by introducing the Trustees and Rita Marler, Superintendent of Schools. Chair Erickson shared the following comments:

- ~ Our purpose here this evening is to present information and answer some of your questions about the consideration for closure of Round Hill School.
- ~ The Education Act gives boards the decision-making power in this process.
- ~ The Superintendent's and her teams responsibilities are to do the research, gather the numbers, and provide the information required by the Board to make an informed decision.
- ~ As a school community, it is your right to receive that information too, and that is why we are here tonight.
- ~ Under the Education Act, we have the mandate and responsibility to make our children's education our number one priority but also charged to consider the best interests for the whole of Battle River School Division.
- ~ It is our job to balance our obligations between these two equally important roles.
- ~ I can tell you the Board certainly recognizes how emotional a possible school closure can be and we know this school is dear to the heart for many of you.
- ~ Despite the level of emotion, we trust you will keep your comments and behavior respectful.
- ~ Regardless of how you feel about school closure – all of us, everyone in this room, care deeply about children and that is why we are here.
- ~ As Trustees we will be hearing the information along with you and we hope the process we have set up will facilitate answering as many of your questions as possible.

- ~ After tonight, we welcome presentations from parents and community at our Board Meeting of February 27th, 2020. The date of the vote is March 19th, 2020.

Chair Erickson explained the process:

- ~ A number of people from the School Division will share information such as educational programming, staffing, transportation, finance, facilities, and more.
- ~ They've gathered information and anticipated questions you may ask.
- ~ We are asking you to write down your questions, some will be answered as we go through the meeting.
- ~ We are aware it's a school and work night so we will wrap up this meeting by about 8:30 p.m.
- ~ Any questions we cannot answer will be posted on our website as soon as we can.

Provincial Landscape

- ~ We are all aware of the realities people of the Province of Alberta are facing. Cities continue to grow and the rural population continues to decline.
- ~ BRSD's primary issues are caused by having fewer people in rural Alberta.
- ~ Our funding is based on the number of students, less students means funding goes down.
- ~ We've been told that the overall amount of funding for education in Alberta will remain the same for the next 3 to 4 years. At the same time, there are thousands of new students in Alberta cities while we continue to experience declines not growth.
- ~ As a Board we have been holding off making tough decisions in hopes that there would be a positive change in student population. It is clear that it is time for us to make some tough decisions.
- ~ The budget is to be released in late February or early March so we expect to have clear information on our financial realities soon.

Demographics

- ~ BRSD has nearly 2000 students less than 25 years ago when our School Division was formed. Many rural communities and rural school divisions are facing the same issue.
- ~ Over the same time frame, Round Hill School has lost a significant number increasing this year partly due to kindergarten being included.

Asking For Input

- ~ BRSD's Board has been meeting with municipalities, parents, students, and inviting input into our decision-making through an online consultation process.
- ~ First round of questioning, asked in October \ November 2019, was "what do you believe are things students need most to receive a quality education."
- ~ We received more than 1100 responses.
- ~ A significant category of response was that students need access to a diverse range of opportunities and options.
- ~ In the second round of questions, we asked how we could provide diversity of programming within our financial realities to which we received 900 responses.
- ~ Nearly 150 replies specifically suggested we close or combine small schools. Other suggestions were to review attendance boundaries, reduce PD, consider a four day week, charge school fees, reduce division-level staffing, etc.

~ We are looking at all suggestions we received.

QUESTION BREAK 7:24 pm to 7:33 pm

Chair Erickson introduced Shan Jorgenson-Adam, Assistant Superintendent – Learning, to discuss educational programming.

Educational Programming

- ~ Our current educational concerns are . . .
 - Can students acquire the skills they need with current or fewer resources?
 - Can teachers provide appropriate learning experiences with current or fewer resources?
 - Can we provide the essential learning environments (classrooms) necessary for today's students with current or fewer resources?
 - When do we put sound programming at risk?
- ~ A significant amount of research has been conducted on school size and its effect on student achievement.
- ~ In the majority of studies a “small” school at elementary level consists of 200 – 400 students, a “small” school at middle school level consists of 400 – 600 students, and a “small” school at high school level consists of 600 – 1000 students.
- ~ Round Hill student population is significantly below what studies consider small. Even the largest school in our Division according to research is considered a “small” school.

Impact of School on Rural Communities

Some advantages in the area of Teaching & Learning:

- ~ Closer relationships between students, parents, and teachers
- ~ Closer connection to the community\fostering intergenerational relationships particularly if teachers live in the community

Some challenges in the area of Teaching & Learning:

- ~ Multi-grade or multi-level teaching more challenging\time consuming for teachers
- ~ Less choice in programs and options for students with varying interest\aptitudes

Some advantages in the area of Extracurricular:

- ~ Flexibility to use local resources for extracurricular activities
- ~ More opportunity for students to participate in extracurricular sports because everyone is needed to make a team

Some challenges in the area of Extracurricular:

- ~ Challenging to build a competitive team without “tryouts” and being able to select best players
- ~ Challenging to find skilled coaches for teams

Some advantages in the area of Social:

- ~ Leadership opportunities for older students by mentoring younger students
- ~ More multi-generational interaction through school\community events

Some challenges in the area of Social:

- ~ Limited pool of friends so do not necessarily choose friends based on similar interests
- ~ May not have any same aged, same gender students in your grade

Other advantages:

- ~ Feelings of safety because school is close by \ right in the community
- ~ Safe and caring atmosphere because everyone knows and “watches out” for each other

Other challenges:

- ~ Allocation of resources challenging in schools with small enrollment and spread of programming ie. K to 12
- ~ Enrollment instability from year to year makes planning more difficult

Final Thoughts on Educational Programming

- ~ Consideration will be given at the junior high level to ensure students continue to have access to Band and CTS classes
- ~ With the addition of students to other schools it may increase the number of students at each grade level to the point where there will be more than one classroom of that grade level offered
- ~ All students transitioning to new buildings will be supported and if a school closes a formal plan will be put in place for student to visit be oriented and leave about their new school prior to attending
- ~ The Board believes that all schools in Battle River, whatever their size, are focused on providing a high quality education. The board also wishes to acknowledge the current Round Hill School Staff. This discussion is in no way a reflection on their skills or efforts.
- ~ All schools in Battle River have been focusing on the Everyday 4 which has created increased consistency between schools. Students would continue to have access to high quality teachers and support staff and possibly access to greater programming opportunities.
- ~ As resources diminish, the number of people carrying the educational responsibility shrinks but the workload isn't shrinking. In many ways, it's swelling and as a result we risk compromising what we know is right for student learning.

Several questions on cards were answered and can be found in the Questions And Answers Section in the School Closure Discussions Area on the BRSD Website.

Shan Jorgenson- Adam introduced Natasha Wilm, Assistant Superintendent of System Supports.

Staffing Configurations

- ~ Should Round Hill School remain open, the projected teacher FTE would be 4.87 in the 2020 – 2021 school year based on current information on funding and enrollment projections.

~ This school year, the teacher FTE was 5.32.

Classroom Configuration

- ~ Ms Wilm provided the anticipated classroom configuration for the Round Hill School for the 2020 – 2021 school year. There would be a requirement in some grades levels to be triple-level classrooms.
- ~ Currently, every grade with the exception of kindergarten is two-grade classrooms.
- ~ Ms Wilm presented potential classroom configurations for the 2020 – 2021 school year with Round Hill students being received at Hay Lakes, Bawlf, École Sifton, and École Charlie Killam Schools. These charts can be viewed in the slide presentations posted on the BRSD website.

Final Thoughts on Staffing

- ~ Regardless of what decision is made, staffing in Battle River School Division will look different next year.
- ~ Battle River values all of our employees, and we will support all of our employees through this process.
- ~ Meetings have already occurred with staff since the motions were passed on January 23rd, 2020.
- ~ Should the school be closed, we would work closely with current staff to try to find them positions at other sites within Battle River School Division.

Several questions on cards were answered and can be found in the Questions And Answers Section in the School Closure Discussions Area on the BRSD Website.

Natasha Wilm introduced Garth Rapson, Director of Transportation.

Transportation

- ~ Route design is based on current student count
- ~ Proposed boundaries based on current boundaries for students in grades 10 to 12
- ~ This scenario uses same number of buses
- ~ First pick up time within 5-15 minutes of what it is currently
- ~ This is a proposal. The Board ultimately has the responsibility to review boundaries and make changes if they think it's appropriate, based on your feedback.

Mr Rapson invited parents to join him after the meeting at the transportation bus route display to address their specific questions.

Several questions on cards were answered and can be found in the Questions And Answers Section in the School Closure Discussions Area on the BRSD Website.

QUESTION BREAK 8:04 pm to 8:13 pm

Imogene Walsh, Assistant Superintendent - Business opened the next section of the meeting by presenting finance information.

Funding For School Divisions

- ~ Funding is provided by Alberta Education to school authorities with the expectation that the school authority will offer the necessary programs or services to meet the needs of all funded children/students.

How BRSD Allocated Funds

- ~ The funding framework is a mechanism that allocates provincial funding to support the education in the province.
- ~ The funding manual provided indicates that School Divisions have the flexibility to use these funds to best meet the needs of their jurisdiction.
- ~ BRSD uses a per student formula to allocate funds to schools for classroom and administrative operational costs.
- ~ Teacher and support staffing levels are determined by Division Administration based on the program needs of the students that are registered at the school.

Round Hill Schools Funding

- ~ Ms Walsh presented a graph of funding allocated to Round Hill School in the last five years.
- ~ The final year presented on the graph is the projected funding for Round Hill School next year – based on current enrollment projections and assuming provincial funding levels stay the same, and there is no change in the cost of staff salaries and benefits. All schools have been asked to incorporate a potential 8% reduction in staffing levels. The impact of that has been included in this projection.

BRSD's Fiscal Realities

Over the past four years, the following reserve amounts have been used to balance the budget and support the Division's operations:

- 2016-2017 - \$1,261,313
 - 2017-2018 - \$2,844,482
 - 2018-2019 - \$678,423
 - 2019-2020 - \$4,098,804 (budgeted)
- ~ BRSD's trustees believe in our rural school division and have continued to support all schools annually by using the reserves. This trend started in 2016-2017, when the board used \$1.2 million to support the Division's operations.
 - ~ The current year's use of reserves is larger than anticipated due to a larger than expected enrollment decline in the jurisdiction, as well as a significant increase in the cost of the Jurisdiction's insurance.

Several questions on cards were answered and can be found in the Questions And Answers Section in the School Closure Discussions Area on the BRSD Website.

Ms Walsh introduced Percy Roberts, Director of Facilities.

About The Round Hill School Building

- ~ The Round Hill School was originally constructed in 1956 as a two storey building with a split entry. The school was added on in 1962 with a two storey 4 classroom addition to the South and a one storey gym to the North. In 1988 a modest modification to the 1956 section with window removals and wall infills and replacement of original wood framed windows.
- ~ As a two storey split entry building without an elevator, Round Hill School does not meet current standards for barrier free accessibility.
- ~ Some of the projects completed in recent years were a new boiler and pumps in 2017, gym reroof in 2010 with the remainder of the school roof completed in the 2016-17 school year. Also we have recently installed a new security camera system.
- ~ The school has required little emergency maintenance over the years, however all components have now exceeded their life expectancy and are due for replacement. An expected increase in maintenance cost will occur over the next few years as with any aging infrastructure.
- ~ The challenge facing Facilities is that funding is heavily weighted on student enrolment. Less students means less funding.

Utilization Rates

- ~ A term that is often referred to in relation to the student population is utilization rate. It is one of a few factors used by Alberta Infrastructure and Education in determining funding request for Capital projects. It basically is a percentage of the student capacity level of our schools.
- ~ The formula is determined by Alberta Infrastructure.
- ~ The rates are calculated by dividing a school's total full time enrolment by its net capacity. As for Round Hill the net capacity is 208 students and the adjusted enrolment is factored at 66.
- ~ Therefore the utilization rate for the Round Hill school is approximately 32% and thus referred to as the school being 32% utilized.
- ~ If the Round Hill school were to close one of the receiving school would be Sifton. Which is currently 78% utilized.
- ~ Another receiving school would be Bawlf which is currently 78% utilized
- ~ Hay Lakes is 58% utilized.
- ~ And Charlie Killam, which is currently 90% utilized.

Several questions on cards were answered and can be found in the Questions And Answers Section in the School Closure Discussions Area on the BRSD Website.

MEETING WRAP UP

Chair Erickson advised the Board welcomes presentations from parents and community members at the Board meeting on February 27th, 2020 and acknowledged his belief that the Round Hill parent group is already working on this.

Chair Erickson also reiterated that anyone who wants to be on the agenda for this meeting, please contact BRSD's Executive Assistant Shirley Fairall. BRSD needs all presentation requests made by Thursday, February 13 in order to get the agenda together.

Meeting adjourned at 9:26 p.m.