

HOLDEN \ RYLEY SCHOOLS COMMUNITY MEETING

HOLDEN SCHOOL GYMNASIUM

February 10th, 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
Ken Robitaille, Director of Technology
Shirley Fairall, Executive Assistant – Superintendent

Chair Erickson call the meeting to order at 7:09 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 the reallocation of high school students from Ryley School and possible consolidation of Holden School and Ryley School students into one school site, serving students in kindergarten to grade nine.
- ~ We need to figure out why our students are choosing to go somewhere else for their education. We need to figure out what they are looking for and how to help them get what they need and want.
- ~ We are considering having those students attend high school in either Tofield or Viking where they can access more programming; we need to provide a diverse range of choices and opportunities.
- ~ And we need to ensure that there is a viable school available to meet the needs of younger students which is why we are considering consolidating two schools into one.
- ~ The Education Act gives boards the decision-making power in this process.
- ~ The Superintendent's and her team's 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 are mandated the responsibility to make children's education our number one priority but also charged to consider the best interests for the whole of Battle River School Division.

- ~ I can tell you the Board certainly recognizes how emotional a possible school closure can be and we know these schools are 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.
- ~ We are all rural people with rural roots and I can guarantee you everyone in this room wishes we did not have to have this conversation.
- ~ 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.
- ~ We've 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 Minister of Education share with us that the way education funding is allocated is under review and that the budget is to be release in late February or early March so we expect to have clear information on our financial realities soon.
- ~ We already know that we will not be receiving any additional funds.

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, Holden School had 193 students and is now down to 118. That's a 39% decline in enrollment.
- ~ At Ryley School there were 192 students in 1995 and their official enrollment for this year is 92. That's over a 50% decline in enrollment.
- ~ Combined, over that same time frame, the population changed from 403 students to 210. Also a decline of just over 50%. All of these students could be accommodated in one building.

Fiscal Realities

- ~ For the past four years, our school Division has been trying to shelter schools from drastic change by making cuts and reductions outside of the classroom. 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)
- ~ We've reduced Division-wide staffing by 14 positions; made changes to Administrator time in schools and positions such as Learning Coaches; and we've been using reserves to offset the shortfalls in funding caused by declines in student enrollment.
- ~ This year, due to a bigger decrease in students than expected, a 274% increase in building insurance, and the Board's decision to not make big staffing changes or implement fees part-way through the school year means we're expecting to spend just over \$4 million from our reserves to cover costs. That cleans out our savings.

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 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 7:28 pm to 7:36 pm

Chair Erickson introduced Imogene Walsh, Assistant Superintendent - Business and welcomed her presentation on funding and budgets.

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.

Holden School's Funding

- ~ Ms. Walsh presented a graph of funding allocated to Holden School in the last five years.
- ~ The final year presented on the graph is the projected funding for Holden 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. This also includes an 8% reduction in staffing levels.

Ryley School's Funding

- ~ Ms. Walsh presented a graph of funding allocated to Ryley School in the last five years.
- ~ The final year presented on the graph is the projected funding for Ryley 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. This also includes an 8% reduction in staffing levels.

Instruction Budget Spending Per School

- ~ On average, BRSD allocates \$7,968 per student to each school in the Division based on the current Year's expenses.
- ~ That cost covers teachers, principals, administrative assistants, librarians, and substitute staff salaries along with classroom supplies, library books, paper, and office supplies.
- ~ Holden's cost per student is \$8,413 and Ryley's are \$9,635.

School Maintenance Costs

- ~ Facility costs to maintain the Holden School that could be eliminated if the school were closed, based on an average of the past three years for caretaking and maintenance would be \$74,900.
- ~ Based on the same average, we estimate ongoing costs of \$61,000 for expenses such as power, heat, insurance, and grass cutting until the building was disposed.
- ~ Facility costs to maintain the Ryley School that could be eliminated if the school were closed, based on an average of the past three years for caretaking and maintenance would be \$93,500.
- ~ Based on the same average, we estimate ongoing costs of \$61,000 for expenses such as power, heat, insurance, and grass cutting until the building was disposed.

Changes in Grant Funding

- ~ Small School By Necessity Grant funding includes a closed school allocation that is reduced over a five year period, which would result in an annual loss of \$122,000 in funding at the end of five years.

What We Expect To Save

- ~ If the decision is made to move the senior high students to Tofield School and Viking School, combined with the consolidation of Holden and Ryley Schools, the result would be a net savings of \$317,000.

Ms. Walsh introduced Percy Roberts, Director of Facilities.

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 and it is one of a few factors used in determining funding request for capital projects.
- ~ The rates are calculated by dividing a school's total full time enrollment by its net capacity. As for Holden the net capacity is 324 students and the adjusted enrollment is factored at 155. Therefore the utilization rate for Holden School is approximately 48%.
- ~ As for Ryley School, the net capacity is 313 students and the adjusted enrollment is factored at 108. Therefore the utilization rate for Ryley School is 35%.
- ~ At Tofield School, the net capacity is 643 students and the adjusted enrollment is factored at 432. Therefore the utilization rate for Tofield School is 67%.
- ~ At Viking School, the net capacity is 585 students and the adjusted enrollment is factored at 265. Therefore the utilization rate for Viking School is 45%.

About The Holden School Building

- ~ Holden School was originally constructed in 1956 as a single storey building with additions in 1964, 1978 and 1986 which included the addition of six portables as well as modernizations to the 1964 part and some of the 1978 addition.
- ~ Some of the projects completed in recent years were an exterior upgrade in 2011, gym furnace replaced in 2011, security camera system installed in 2013, new boilers and pumps in 2014, mechanical control system upgrade in 2016, new intercom system in 2018, roofing replacement and repairs and painting and flooring in various locations.
- ~ If the Holden School remains open, it will require roofing, gym flooring replacement, change room upgrade, and new flooring in the music room.

About The Ryley School Building

- ~ Ryley School was originally constructed in 1954 with additions in 1956, 1961, 1971 and 1972 which included the addition of four portables as well as a major modernization to the 1954, 1956, 1962, and 1971 sections.

- ~ Some of the projects completed in recent years were an exterior upgrade, roofing section replacement and repairs, new CTS room and cosmetology, fire alarm upgrade, replaced sewer line, new intercom system, new mechanical roof top units, mechanical control upgrade, conversion to rooms for inclusive education, and painting and flooring in various locations.
- ~ If the Ryley School remains open, it will require an upgrade to the 1961 CTS building, mechanical room upgrade, roofing, flooring and painting.

Recommendation

- ~ Based on the building condition, facility reports and resources available along with the programming needs of students, it is our recommendation that, if Holden and Ryley Schools are consolidated into one kindergarten to nine school site, we would recommend Ryley School.

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 RECESS 7:50 p.m. to 8:01 p.m.

Chair Erickson introduced Garth Rapson, Director of Transportation to discuss transportation.

Transportation

- ~ Route design is based on current student count
- ~ Proposed boundaries based on current boundaries for a combined kindergarten to nine school
- ~ Grade 10 to 12 students would be shuttled to their new designated school.
- ~ This scenario uses same number of buses
- ~ First pick up time within 20 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.
- ~ Current enrollment Kindergarten to 6:
 - Holden area – 47 students
 - Ryley area – 82 students
 - Other – 3 students
- ~ Current enrollment 7 to 9:
 - Holden area – 26 students
 - Ryley area – 30 students
 - Other – 5 students
- ~ Current enrollment 10 to 12:
 - Holden area – 9 students
 - Ryley area – 23 students
 - Other – 3 students

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.

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

Educational Programming

- ~ 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

- ~ Battle River believes that all schools in this Division, whatever their size, are focused on providing a high quality education.
- ~ 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.
- ~ 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.

It is important to note that 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 Holden School remain open, the projected teacher FTE would be 7.314, a decrease of .706 FTE, in the 2020 – 2021 school year based on current information on funding and enrollment projections.
- ~ This school year, the teacher FTE was 8.02.
- ~ Should Ryley School remain open, the projected teacher FTE would be 6.44, a decrease of 1.17 FTE, in the 2020 – 2021 school year based on current information on funding and enrollment projections.
- ~ This school year, the teacher FTE was 7.61.

Classroom Configuration

- ~ Ms. Wilm provided the anticipated classroom configuration for the Holden and Ryley School for the 2020 – 2021 school year. There would be a requirement in some grades levels to be double grade level classrooms.
- ~ Currently, only option classes are multi-grade classrooms.
- ~ Ms. Wilm presented potential classroom configurations for the 2020 – 2021 school year with Holden and Ryley combined as well as the potential configurations if Ryley high school students were redirected to Tofield and Viking 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 schools be reconfigured, 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.

MEETING WRAP UP

Chair Erickson advised everyone that the Board welcomes presentations from parents and community members at the Board meeting on February 27th, 2020 and I believe your parent group is already working on this.

If you want to be on the agenda for this meeting, please contact BRSD's Executive Assistant Shirley Fairall. We need all presentation requests made by Thursday, February 13 in order to get the agenda together.

Meeting adjourned at 9:08 p.m.