

## Holden and Ryley Schools Questions and Answers

The questions in this document are specific to Holden and Ryley Schools. Some of these questions were asked and answered at the public meeting on February 10. Others were asked that evening and are being answered in this document. Still others have been received by email or letter.

Questions that are related to school closure but not specific to Holden and Ryley Schools are included in a larger question and answer document.

**Question:** *Have the Trustees considered that part of the reason Holden and Ryley have a four day week is to utilize the kids on the farm? The four-day week means less absenteeism. Who is going to watch the younger kids on Fridays if the older kids are in a five-day a week school? Are you changing our school to a five day week? Why don't you move all schools to a four-day week?*

**Answer:** Holden and Ryley schools have been using a 4-day week system for several years. In the early years, it's true that absenteeism was a bit lower but that trend has not been sustained. When the four-day week system was put in place at Holden and Ryley, it was in recognition of the time some students were spending waiting at school due to the bus transfer system. The decision was to move to longer school days and have classes one less day per week. No decision has been made about whether or not to continue with a four-day week system for Holden / Ryley. In many ways, it makes good sense to have all schools in the division on the same calendar. The Board is also looking into all of the pros and cons of having all schools on a four-day a week system. It does not save money on instructional costs, because school staff work the same number of hours, in less days, but it could potentially save in other areas, such as transportation and custodial costs. These are all factors that need to be taken into consideration when making a decision.

**Question:** *Has the school division given any consideration to the impact of school closure on businesses in our community? Holden does not have many options and closing the school will affect the businesses there are. Without a school families won't move in.*

**Answer:** Since 1995, the population of Holden School has declined by about 40%. We recognize that the closure of a school creates additional challenges in communities. We encourage people to work with both their municipal and County Councillors to develop strategies for community development.

**Question:** *Have you given consideration to the toxic air possibilities from Clean Harbors in Ryley? Why put students under that?*

**Answer:** There has been a school in Ryley for many years. We have not been made aware of any significant air quality issues affecting students or staff.

**Question:** *We understand that there is a big drug use problem in Tofield School. I do not want to send my child to that school, as I do not feel it is being addressed. What are your recommendations for dealing with this concern?*

**Answer:** Tofield School does not have a widespread drug use problem. There has only been one suspension at the school related to drug use. The school works hard to support students' educational and mental health needs, as well as provide them opportunities to be active participants in the community. School Administrators, parents and members of the community all work together to support students and address any issues that arise. They provide education about drugs, alcohol, smoking and vaping, and help students to make healthy lifestyle choices.

**Question:** *I went to Ryley. I am 60. We had K to 12, full classes and a good education.*

**Answer:** You have likely witnessed many changes to the realities of rural Alberta since the time you graduated from high school. The student population at Ryley has gone down by more than 50% in the last 25 years and the population of many rural communities has changed as well.

**Question:** *Have you looked into sending Round Hill kids to Ryley School?*

**Answer:** This is an option the Board and Round Hill School families could consider if their school were to be closed.

**Question:** *What are the factors that will be taken into account when selecting which of the two schools to keep open, if Holden and Ryley schools are consolidated?*

**Answer:** There are facility factors, such as condition of the buildings, amenities and resources in the buildings, upcoming maintenance work that might be required, etc. plus the quality of gymnasium and school grounds / equipment. There are also factors such as overall capacity of the buildings, how many families live in closer proximity to each school and potential transportation issues that are taken into consideration.

**Question:** *Having the school in Ryley makes it a longer transport time for kids that want to go to Viking, whereas Holden is central.*

**Answer:** Transportation routes and ride times are among the factors that will be taken into consideration when making a decision about how to proceed.

**Question:** *What if you have one high school in Holden, with Tofield, Ryley and Viking high school students attending. That way more courses could be offered for the high school students.*

**Answer:** Thanks for the suggestion. That would create a high school of about 120 students in Grades 10 to 12 (with the current year's enrollment). Something for the Board to think about! One challenge would be the lack of facilities to offer courses such as Foods, Building Construction, etc.

**Question:** *Why are we shipping the high schoolers out? Wouldn't it make more sense to keep them here and utilize portables?*

**Answer:** The high school numbers in Ryley are quite small and BRSD is concerned that students are not able to access the choices and opportunities they need. Lower numbers can result in practices such as cycling curriculum and offering -1 and -2 courses together, as well as fewer options for students.

**Question:** *Is there a possibility of combining Tofield and Ryley high schools, by*  
*a) Transporting kids based on their programming to appropriate schools (eg Ryley for -1 programs and Tofield for -2 programs; or*  
*b) Offering programming via web-based means and keep students in their designated schools, except for possibility options*

**Answer:** In the future, the Board could consider streaming of high school programs at different sites. The school division does currently make use of virtual learning, distance learning and online learning programs for students.

**Question:** *BRSD did not build the schools, why would they demolish something that Beaver County residents built? Also, the playground was fundraised by the Friends of Holden School and the Holden School Council. They don't belong to BRSD.*

**Answer:** If a school is closed, the school division's first step is to approach the local community and ask what they'd like done with the building. If the Holden School were to close, the Village of Holden could choose to take on the building for community use. When a group makes a donation of funds or goods such as playground equipment, those funds or that equipment become the property of the recipient. If Holden School were to close, BRSD would continue to maintain the current playground until the equipment has reached its lifespan, or until the school site was sold.

**Question:** *Why does BRSD not bring elementary students from Tofield to Ryley to reduce the pressure on Tofield School?*

**Answer:** Tofield School serves students in Grades 5 to 12 and is currently 67% utilized. CW Sears School in Tofield, which serves Kindergarten to Grade 4 students, is 83% utilized.

**Question:** *What will happen to the junior high sports program if Ryley and Holden consolidate?*

**Answer:** The junior high sports program should not change if Ryley and Holden schools consolidate.

**Question:** *Will we be Huskies or Rebels?*

**Answer:** Good question! If the two schools are consolidated, you may want to consider using one of the two existing names, or you may want to consider a completely new name for both the school and the sports teams, to reflect a new era for your school community.

**Question:** *Why can't we have K to 12 in one school?*

**Answer:** This is an option the Board could consider. However, the concern is that the small high school enrollment makes it challenging to provide the educational programming choices and opportunities that high school students need.

**Question:** *What will have to be done to make either Holden or Ryley schools ready to have more students and students of different ages?*

**Answer:** If the decision were to keep Holden School open, consideration would have to be given to creating CTS labs at the school. If Ryley School were to be the choice, one set of washrooms would need to be fitted with smaller toilets and sinks, suitable for younger children.