

ALLAN JOHNSTONE SCHOOL COMMUNITY MEETING

ALLAN JOHNSTONE SCHOOL GYMNASIUM

February 12th, 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
Garth Rapson, Director of Transportation
Percy Roberts, Director of Facilities
Ken Robitaille, Director of Technology
Shirley Fairall, Executive Assistant – Superintendent

Chair Erickson called the meeting to order at 7:01 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 possible closure of Allan Johnstone School.
- ~ Our School Division is facing big challenges with populations down and some of that is due to students leaving our Division.
- ~ We need to find solutions and ensure we can provide the most opportunities for our students.
- ~ 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 this school is dear to 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 routes 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 have 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, Allan Johnstone School had nearly 180 students and is now down to 44. That's about a 75% decline in enrollment.

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.
- ~ 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.

- ~ 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)
- ~ 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 means we're expecting to spend just over \$4 million from our reserves to cover costs. There is no magic solution. 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 7:13 pm to 7:22 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.

Allan Johnstone School's Funding

- ~ Ms. Walsh presented a graph of funding allocated to Allan Johnstone School in the last six years along with the projected funding for next school year.
- ~ The projected funding for Allan Johnstone 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.
- ~ Allan Johnstone's cost per student is \$13,194.51.

School Maintenance Costs

- ~ Facility costs to maintain the Allan Johnstone 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 \$58,000.
- ~ Based on the same average, we estimate ongoing costs of \$33,100 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 \$133,500 in funding at the end of five years.

What We Expect To Save

- ~ If the decision is made to close Allan Johnstone School, the result would be a savings of \$390,700 and result in a net savings of \$313,900.

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 Allan Johnstone the net capacity is 194 students and the adjusted enrollment is factored at 47. Therefore the utilization rate for Allan Johnstone School is approximately 24%.

- ~ If Allan Johnstone School is closed, the receiving school would be Central High Sedgewick Public School. At CHSPS, the net capacity is 625 students and the adjusted enrollment is factored at 457. Therefore the utilization rate for CHSPS School is 73%.
- ~ CHSPS is capable of receiving 168 students before it would be considered to be 100% utilized.

About The Allan Johnstone School Building

- ~ The Allan Johnstone School was originally constructed in 1955 as a two storey wood frame building with single storey additions in 1975 and 1986 which included the addition of two portables.
- ~ The two storey 1955 section is without an elevator or stair lifts, consequently, Allan Johnstone School does not meet current standards for barrier free accessibility.
- ~ Some of the projects completed in recent years were replacing four sets of doors and hardware in the gymnasium, emergency lighting upgrades in washrooms \ change rooms, VOIP phone system, security camera system, upgrade to the mechanical control system, and magnetic locks on five sets of doors.
- ~ If the Allan Johnstone School remains open, it will require roofing, barrier free accessibility, a window upgrade to the 1955 section, new flooring in the Library, and boilers and pump replacement.

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

QUESTION BREAK 7:13 p.m. to 7:22 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 students in grades 10 to 12
- ~ Grade 10 to 12 students would be shuttled to their new designated school.
- ~ This scenario uses one less bus route
- ~ First pick up time within 5 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.

Ms. Shan Jorgenson-Adam, Assistant Superintendent – Learning, addressed 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

Ms. Jorgenson-Adam’s presentation was abruptly halted and she went on to address several questions on cards which can be found in the Questions and Answers Section in the School Closure Discussions Area on the BRSD Website.

Ms. Jorgenson-Adam also listed a number of programs which the school, community and school division have worked together to initiative in recent years, in an attempt to bolster student numbers. These include everything from equestrian and hockey academies to a community garden and more.

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

Staffing Configurations

- ~ Should Allan Johnstone School remain open, the projected teacher FTE would be 2.968, a decrease of 1.082 FTE, in the 2020 – 2021 school year based on current information on funding and enrollment projections. This allocation does not include support staff or a learning commons facilitator.
- ~ This school year, the teacher FTE was 4.05.

Classroom Configuration

- ~ Ms. Wilm provided the anticipated classroom configuration for the Allan Johnstone School for the 2020 – 2021 school year. There would be a requirement in all grade levels to be triple grade level classrooms.
- ~ Option classes would also be multi-grade classrooms such as Grades 4 to 9 would be combined.
- ~ Ms. Wilm presented potential classroom configurations for the 2020 – 2021 school year if Allan Johnstone students were to attend school in Central High Sedgewick Public School.

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.

Chair Erickson, Vice Chair Belich, Assistant Superintendent – Business Walsh, and Director of Facilities Roberts, returned to the front to answer questions on cards. These questions and answers 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.

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 8:41 p.m.