

Board of Trustees Battle River School Division

BRSD Board votes on school closure / consolidation motions



Every Student, Every Day, A Success.

The Board of Trustees of Battle River School Division held votes on the possible closure or consolidation of several schools on Thursday, March 19.

Since notice of these motions was brought to the table on January 23, Board members have been collecting and sharing information, listening to input and feedback from communities, as well as considering a wide range of options for how the Division's projected deficit can be addressed.

In the end, the Board voted to:

- Continue to operate Round Hill School, a K to 9 facility serving 86 students;
- Reallocate the 35 high school students from Ryley School, and consolidate Holden School and Ryley School into one school site serving students in Kindergarten to Grade 9. This will be located at Ryley School and Holden School will be closed.
- Close Allan Johnstone School, a K to 9 facility in Hardisty, which serves 48 students.

Each of the Board members expressed their appreciation for the work of the school staff, and emphasized these decisions are in no way a reflection of their work. In addition, they praised the dedication and passion of parents and communities who have addressed the Board in recent weeks.

In the words of Board Chair Norm Erickson, "these are very difficult decisions and they are not made lightly. Each Board member has considered all aspects of the question and voted based on their own perspective. No one has voted without thinking long and hard about the implications. Now that the decisions are made, it's time to move forward. We will do our very best to make the transition to a new reality a smooth one for students and families, whether they are moving to a new school site, welcoming additional students to an existing school or staying in the same school, but adjusting to a new level of funding."

The Board of Trustees

Board Chair: Norm Erickson

Vice Chair: Karen Belich

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Camrose County

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West: Jeff Kimball

City of Camrose

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Val Sims

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Superintendent:

Rita Marler

Assistant Supt, Learning:

Shan Jorgenson-Adam

Assistant Supt, System Supports

Natasha Wilm

Assistant Supt, Business:

Imogene Walsh



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Board of Trustees

Battle River School Division

Given the unprecedented COVID-19 situation and the unexpected cancellation of classes in all schools just days prior to the vote, Trustees did consider postponement of the decision until a later date.

Ultimately, they chose to proceed, based on the belief that the Board must continue to look to the future. The postponement of decisions has implications on planning, staffing and budgeting processes for next year and Trustees felt those processes must continue to move forward.

Board members are aware that many more decisions will be required in order to offset the school division's projected deficit for next year.

Coping with the COVID-19 situation

Board members also heard an update from Superintendent of Schools Rita Marler, in which she outlined the steps Battle River School Division has been taking to ensure that students can continue to learn, even though classes are cancelled.

Following the cancellation notice, which was received on Sunday, March 15, division and school leaders have worked together to implement new ways of reaching out to students who are now at home.

Grade 12 learning opportunities became available electronically by mid-week and Kindergarten to Grade 11 subjects will not be far behind. Planning is nearing completion and when school staff return to their duties on March 30, following Spring Break, they will be reaching out to support all students.

School staff were also working hard this week to ensure that students' personal belongings were returned to them.

Impact of new budget

Board members heard more details of the provincial government budget that was announced on February 27, which will impact the school division's 2020-2021 school year. BRSD representatives have attended numerous budget meetings in the last few weeks. Government estimates are that BRSD's funding for next year will be similar to the current year. In addition, there will be funding reductions in each of the two following school years of approximately \$1.9 million.

According to Board Chair Norm Erickson, who was part of the budget discussions with provincial representatives, "the Board is going to have further difficult decisions in the next few years."

- information from the March 19, 2020 meeting of the BRSD Board of Trustees



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