

Special Meeting Notes from November 16, 2009

Meeting at St. Patrick's School @ 7:00 p.m.

Mr. David Leahy, Superintendent of Schools presented the details of the current Regional Facility Plan, the previous Facility Plan; and an explanation of the decision of the previous Board in relation to re-configuration and in particular, the movement of the grade sixes and the grades nines. An explanation of the Sectors; and utilization was explained.

The government would like 85% capacity in all schools. Included in that formula are hallways; gymnasiums etc. Our City is 81%. Our Division is 79%. We are a regional division with a school in Bow Island; therefore St. Michael's School Bow Island is factored into our equation. We think there should be city to city comparison.

Medicine Hat Catholic number 1 capital priority was a new high school, we had regional reports commissioned; we made submissions to the government and we had a very good case for the government. The reason the first plan did not result in action because it was too much money. The government said we can not commit to five or six new schools, nothing happened with that plan. The government came to us in the fall to try a new regional plan; we said we would participate in that plan. Page 3 of the plan outlines the 3 priorities for MH Public, MH Catholic, CAPE and the Francophone's.

We received additional information on these priorities today, Monday, November 02, 2009. In actuality we were informed that: there are three small lists; Modular's; Modernization and New School. We thanked the government today for the information and noted to them that going forward, that language could be better explained in the report. We are not optimistic; there is no new money for modular's or for a new school. Currently modular's are from emergent modular funds; we made this request in the spring of 2009; since that time the economic situation has worsened.

When we look at the report; and the outlook in the province; we need to prepare for the worse and hope for the best.

The government looked at the number of students that are leaving Sector 5 and in fact used that number in part of the decision making for placing a new school for our jurisdiction in a lower priority in the Report; the Board is not pleased with the government's decision and we will be responding to government accordingly.

Two months ago the Superintendent presented this grade reconfiguration plan to the Board of Trustees. In a Retreat on Oct 19 and Oct 20, the Board said to the Superintendent you need to go out and talk to the community. One of the responsibilities of the Superintendent of Schools, is strategic planning and in preparing for the future. As a result, the Superintendent presented a grade re-configuration plan to the Board; this is the plan the Superintendent has brought this evening for your feedback. The Board may take all of the recommendations into consideration, none of the considerations or parts the considerations in the proposal.

The decision has not been made.

David explained in detail the grade reconfiguration proposal. The proposed plan would go into effect in September 2010. If all of the current students in grades 5, 6, 7 and 8 move up there will be over 1100 students at McCoy; right now McCoy is full at 750; that is a major motivator for this plan. When we started this regional plan; the government said you have little or no hope for getting a new high school. We were however encouraged to go for a new elementary school in the south.

David outlined the details of the proposed grade re-configuration for 2010:

- All elementary to K – 6 with the exception of St. Patrick's
St. Patrick's; K – 5; eventually K – 6
McCoy would be 10-12
St. Mary's and Notre Dame Grade 9's; ND 6 - 9
St. Mary's K – 9 English, Dual track French Immersion 7-9; re-zone boundaries to include sector 2 (flats) and sector 3 (the hill).
LAP to St. Mary's
Mother Teresa; K – 6 and LAP
St. Louis French Immersion K – 5 with Turning Points
Notre Dame; 6 -9; Ask for a new core school of 250 in the south; with modular's
Modernize McCoy
New Modular Classrooms
Modernize St. Francis at a later date

David reviewed Page 3 – The Executive Summary and a list of priorities.

David reviewed Page 9 – The Facility Condition Index was reviewed. Our schools are in good condition; we have been good stewards of our facilities; monies have been appropriately allocated year over year that have maintained our schools to good condition. The lower the number on the facility index the better the condition of the school. Please note that there is an error in the report under St. Francis; the government used another St. Francis School somewhere else in the province; St. Francis Xavier School in Medicine Hat is in excellent condition rating a 0.6.

David reviewed Page 19 and 20 and further discussed utilization rates for the division and schools. How many students the government thinks can fit into the building; they consider the school full at 85%. Utilization works by including all of the empty space including foyers...because of high ceilings and wide hallways and wide stairwells that capacity counts towards utilization rates.

With no new money projected...and not knowing what the budget is going to bring; we need to come up with a plan; so I have put a plan together for the Board's consideration; we know we are going to face a situation fitting kids into the schools.

To sell St. Thomas Aquinas School to the Greater Southern Francophone Board; essentially taking back the school; the government has said they have never allowed a Francophone school to close in Alberta; if the government can't find another place; the government will need to build them a new school.

St. Thomas only has 120 capacity, taking it back would only be a very short term solution. The Board has considered taking St. Thomas back; but it does not give much relief.

It is important to note that a number of years ago, we needed to generate enrolment up to get more elementary kids into our schools to create the scenario to advocate government for a new school; it was done out of need; it was artificial; it was done none the less. A lot of this grade reconfiguration is reversing that.

What are the drivers behind bringing these considerations forward?

- Too many kids at McCoy High School;
- Too many kids at most schools;
- We need to create space;
- If we don't receive modulars or a new school; we are facing serious considerations of where we can house our students.

1. When are you making the decision on facilities and grade re-configuration?

- a. On December 10, 2009; the Board will hold a Special Board Meeting dedicated to the decisions on grade re-configuration. In accordance with Policy 7 – Board Operations under Article 9 – Delegations to Board Meetings; the Board will be prepared to hear presentations from delegations or individuals at that Meeting.
- b. The Board might say we like the entire Plan; we like none of the Plan or part of the Plan; or modify the Plan in any way depending on your feedback. The issues brought forward to the Board at the first parent meeting held at St. Louis School has given the Board members cause for more thought and consideration.

2. Tell me about Turning Points?

- a. A Program for students experiencing severe behavior disorders grade 1 thru to 12 about 15 students in the program at any one time. Students are transitioned out of the Program when the student is ready and in particular at the higher grade levels. The Program is fully supported with expert personnel offering special services following Treatment Plans and Individual Program Plans for students that are coordinated with parents.

3. How are students in Turning Points integrated;

- a. For the most part integration occurs in Physical Education and Religion.
- b. There are behavior management programming and academic programming in Turning Points.

- 4. I still have questions about St. Thomas School; if our chances are slim getting a new school; I would still like you to think about St. Thomas?**
 - a. I understand what you are saying; it is part of my job and the Board's job to think strategically; we are doing that
 - b. Infrastructure says that we need to ask year after year after year for infrastructure needs.
 - c. If you take a look at the province of Alberta; you will notice that South East Alberta has had very little infrastructure overall in health and education.

- 5. If you open up St. Thomas; it is not going to take much to fill the school would you consider putting specialized programming there?**
 - a. To help make your point; you might be suggesting turning ST. Thomas into a Centre for Early Learning that would include Preschool ; Kindergarten" and Special Education Programs; I don't know if the community would be interested in segregated programming at a school.
 - b. Even so; we just won't get that much relief, a year or two at best.
 - c. The government is saying to us that it is problematic for us to take this school back

- 6. Four hundred students and only two washrooms, now if we are adding more modular's there is even less washrooms; would we meet code on that?**
 - a. We are planning to create entrances to the main school for washrooms.
 - b. Washroom space is an issue in most schools.
 - c. Overall, if we don't get a new school; we are going to have to ask for modulars specifically as washrooms; these are the kinds of issues we have to deal in looking for facility relief.

- 7. If you were to take back St. Thomas; what kind of repair is that school in and what would it cost to bring it up to our condition. Where would that money come from?**
 - a. We initially forecasted about \$100,000
 - b. We would also need to add a playground
 - c. We would need more technology

- 8. What about Academy Programs in particular grade 6's?**
 - a. That is part of the review we are currently conducting to evaluate the programming overall
 - b. Other reviews under way are Turning Points Program, The Fine Arts Academy and The Sports Academy by an outside consultant Mr. Lyle Lorenz; part of that review is looking at attendance boundaries relating to Sports Academies at Notre Dame
 - c. One of the issues where by we could say that the entry to Sports Academy is open to everyone; however, it starts in grade 7; perhaps by lottery; or first come first serve; no decision has been made on that as of yet

- 9. If the utilization of the division is over 81%; is there a point based on the demographics that sectors affect this utilization?**

- a. A lot of emphasis is placed on sector utilization; as described in the Alberta Infrastructure Manual; and according to that manual 85% sector utilization requires attention and further enhances our argument for a new school
- b. You will notice in the report that a large number of public students leave this sector to attend other schools as well
- c. We don't have a lot of flexibility; this number is going to go up projections are 1 – 2% per year
- d. Utilization rates do not include Pre-Schools; and also some schools have Designated Special Education Sites and Preschool combinations; these programs may have to go to accommodate the large number of students if there is no new school.

10. If we get rid of Full Day Kindergarten and Pre-Schools would this create room?

- a. Yes, and as part of the budget discussions, these issues are considerations and are on the table for budget discussions.

11. The commitment of the School Board to education Grade 1 – 12; is a greater need than the option to offer Full-Day Kindergarten. If we are not fully funded why are we offering it?

- a. We went to Full Day Kindergarten following the public as we saw a migration of our students out of the Division.
- b. Full Day Kindergarten is a hot topic and does cost the division \$300,000 that comes from other areas.
- c. Another consideration is we are also funding transportation of 1.2km that we do not receive funding for; the government funds us for 2.4 however we bus at 1.2km for elementary
- d. Another consideration is Special Education Funding in that our profile is based on funding 69 students, however; we actually serve 85 students; those students need the help; but no money is received for them.
 - i. Funding for Special Education is under Review Province Wide with the Setting the Direction Initiative from the Government. The government said that for this year a review of all files for severe coded students just did not meet all of the criteria for a number of school divisions; therefore, caucus said they are going to review the funding model and how services are being delivered under this initiative; therefore the short answer is zero percent in special education.
- e. All of these things are going to be on the table this Spring in 2010.

12. Is it possible to lease space?

- a. Yes, Central Office being sold then move to St. Mary's was a consideration under the first plan
- b. CAPE to ST. Mary's
- c. Other half of St. Mary's could be leased to community groups etc.

13. Could we leave space?

- a. It is possible. We could take over other schools offered to us from the public; they were not in the areas where our kids were however, and we had big concerns about the conditions of the buildings.

14. St. Pat's; you need more modular's but there is not sufficient space for them on your school property.

15. There has been a lot of talk in the public system that they made a mistake with full day kindergarten, there has been talk they may go back to half time; would we go back half time. This might be a win-win; I think it is a good thing to go back.

- a. They get to do what they get to do
- b. Our Board will have a tough decision to make
- c. We would save \$300,000 if we didn't have full day kindergarten; it will be a tough decision

16. You moved St. Pat's here and built modulars around it; so why can't we take St. Thomas and build around it?

- a. This is a valid point. One of the reason's we wouldn't is because of what we said earlier
- b. Infrastructure said it was too cost prohibitive

17. We are privileged to have what we have.

- a. To be fair to the government they are seeing the possibilities of moving students around Ken Arthur...The 85% notion is a yard stick the government has created; they don't feel forced to give us a new school at that number; realistically the government is up against it; as a Division how do we possibly deal with contingencies in case we don't get a new school. The proposed reconfiguration is almost unaffected by the issue of the sale of St. Thomas; we are not planning on using it in our re-configuration; it is a separate conversation.
- b. The total re-configuration does not consider using St. Thomas

18. Are the MLA's invited to these meetings?

- a. Yes, any public member can attend; a special invitation was not sent to the MLA's.
- b. The Board and Senior Administration met with the MLA's on Friday, November 13, 2009.
- c. I can tell you that after our meeting on Friday; I am comfortable saying that there are two voices in caucus for Southern Alberta. The MLA's are interested and are aware of our issues and are advocating on our behalf.
- d. The Board is interested in engaging a Public Relations Campaign; to engage the government and public. The MLA's will be kept informed of our Campaign.
- e. The Board will consider working with a Consultant on the Campaign; if we do it we want to do it right....

19. Suggestion; if Notre Dame is a 6,7,8,9 School and the Academy was 7, 8,9 instead of four years; and the academy in grade 7 is the entrance point; and is made by lottery division wide; then you

would not have kids needing to cross attending earlier and you wouldn't have four years of academies taking up space. If the academies are not core; why not consider eliminating some of them to a degree.

- a. We are having a consultant review the academy right now for some of those very concerns.

20. Division has a tremendous amount of cross attendance at all of our schools; one of the parents who just moved here could not understand they we allow it?

- a. Yes for example; St. Francis almost half of the students come from outside of the boundaries; historically the grandfathering idea has also followed. Now they can no longer enroll unless there is a sibling at a school right now.
- b. We are studying cross attendance very carefully and have generated all of the statistics division wide and have presented that our Trustees for their consideration as well.

21. Grade 6's to elementary...what about middle school philosophy?

- a. Middle School Philosophy is not tied to a specific grade structure it is a philosophy...junior high has it's own specific needs as well...we are not going back to the traditional model.

22. How much capacity does St. Mary's have?

- a. 649
- b. Why not 7,8,9 and make Notre Dame the other elementary school in the south
- c. At 589 St. Mary's is crowded; if the Art room went; Music Room went; Drama Room went we could make St. Mary's work.
- d. We have to look at desperate measures; if we don't get modular's; it is a distinct possibility that programming from a-z will have to go. We have a small school division doing phenomenal things.
- e. At St. Mary's the computer labs may disappear; we may have to use portable laptop labs.

23. Our community needs to get political; our vote where our mouth is; The public engagement campaign is critical to this plan

- a. The MLA's said is there enough needs in this end of the province to fill the needs of P3's; maybe we could package it all together; that was there idea...this is evidence they are advocating for us.
- b. They are trying to be creative for our city.
- c. We need to help the MLA's help us.

24. Grade 9's returning to Notre Dame; they are not going to have PE; I have more concerns about Fine Arts where they are out for 15 periods of week?

- a. Timetabling will be reviewed to accommodate the need but might look different.

25. Do you think we are at a disadvantage being a Catholic System?

- a. We have a constitutional right to education in the province; it is actually the opposite we have the advantage of having our education sited as a Constitutional Right; however we do need to keep advocating for that right.

26. Why don't you just turn non-Catholics away?

- a. That came up at our Town Hall Meeting; we took the question to the Bishop; the Bishop said: I will let you know when you have too many non-Catholics in the Division; our work is to permeate the faith in our own children and those who come into the Catholic system.
- b. Some divisions are tougher on their entry than we are.
- c. The first list of students to Notre Dame were a large majority non-Catholic.

27. Peter Grad. After the Meetings with MLA's. I remember saying to David, I had admiration for the gentlemen we just met with; they are working hard for us; we have to trust them with our advocacy. A new school is still three years away. The meetings we have had and will continue to have will be voiced and re-voice; I believe each of you; can make a difference by contacting your MLA's; we need to serve these people.

28. Wish you all luck in a pursuit of a new school and your budget; it will not be an easy feat for you; wish each other luck.

29. Are you meeting with the Minister of Education?

- a. We have asked for a meeting with the Minister of Education regarding the Facility Plan
- b. To be fair to the government; they are able to look at the map and see where the stick pins are and there is very little in the South.
- c. If we are going to talk politics let's talk politics.

30. Good to get together to advocate; this is important; it is also important individual phone calls be made to the Minister as they are considered as more weight. Do it as a group is fine; the government does listen.

- a. Part of the government's job is to cut out news paper ads and be aware of what's in the news in other parts of the province; we have received calls from Government Officials saying they have read about our displeasure to the Regional Facility Plan. They are listening; we need to keep them engaged.

31. Perhaps all of us can make a call to Mr. Rob Renner; Mr. Len Mitzel and the Minister of Education; we are concerned that we need a new school in our division.

- a. If you were to email Mr. Renner and Mr. Mitzel please let them know you appreciate their efforts also...and then outline your concerns.
- b. One parent said she will create an email to send to the St. Patrick's School Community and it will be passed along from parent to parent.

- c. From a Municipality and City perspective; whenever a sub division goes in; there is existing room set aside for school division property. Currently the Leisure Centre Facility is zoned for school property; we have three or four pieces of land that are pre-designated as school sites...We have asked for the land by the leisure centre...the city explained we would share the facility..the City envisioned it as a tournament centre initially, there would negotiations on this parcel of land.

No further questions. Thank you for coming.

About 80 people in attendance.