

# **Special Meeting Notes from October 29, 2009**

## **Meeting with St. Louis Parents @ 7:00 pm @ St. Louis School**

Mr. David Leahy presented the details of the current Regional Facility Plan and 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 looked at the number of students that are leaving Sector 5 in making the decision in 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 will be responding to government accordingly.

One of the responsibilities of the Superintendent of Schools is strategic planning and we have to prepare 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 it; none of it; parts of it or another 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.

**1. Sectors. Why would you move sector 3 students to sector 2 and deny the children to access Catholic Education in a neighborhood; how can we justify the cost of transportation if the budget is so tight?**

- a. It has to do with utilization. St. Mary's is running out of space; St. Louis has space. Without a new school we have to better utilize the space we have;
- b. 144 coming to a space of 255. LAP would go to MT; Turning Points would stay here;
- c. Economics is true; the cost of busing is going up;
- d. Next year we will have to find the money to bus the ST. Mary's students here and bus the students of St. Louis to St. Mary's;
- e. Programming will have to go at St. Mary's if we don't move the students;
- f. The main reason is utilization;

**2. Other communities don't allow cross attending for specialized programming and people would have to pay for bussing; why is the division paying for bussing for students that don't live in the neighborhood schools. Why don't you consider putting an end to that? Don't give free bussing.**

- a. Our division has a history of allowing cross attendance;
- b. Medicine Hat Catholic is the fourth smallest division in the province of Alberta; we have a lot of specialized programming; our parents have always expected we have always had a lot of choice;

- c. Grandfathering has always been a practice;
3. **Why not put the French Immersion Program on a hold; it is a small portion of your entire student population? The bus services that are given right now are awful; there is 4 students per seat; at times there are students sitting on the floor (David asked the parent to contact the Board Office) with this concern. Children should not be on the bus for an hour.**
    - a. We will be needing to add more buses next year;
    - b. The province gives us funds for 1.2 km; we bus kids 2.4 kms; we are paying for difference; that is not funded;
  4. **Does the Board get money for French Immersion? I would like to see it penciled on paper.**
    - a. The French Immersion Program is partially funded with federal funds; we have to apply for a grant; average about \$20,000 per year; it is not subsidized
  5. **It is a shame we attracted other students and now we can not offer the programming.**
  6. **Issue in putting our younger children with grade nines?**
    - a. This issue first came up at St. Mary's when the FI began there; as the school was a middle school; if you were to ask the large majority now there has not been a problem.
  7. **There is a lot of community support here; with special programs at this school and I don't want you take that away from them?**
    - a. We will do our best to provide the services you are used to.
  8. **You said you are proud of Special Education; I believe your Special Education program will be compromised? St. Louis is a very successful place. There would be hardship. What Zone is Redcliff considered? They are now bused to ST. Michael's MH; what if you took St. M LAP and transferred to MT; and what if you rezone Redcliff to St. Louis; Would the Board then have fine arts location and a French immersion location. My children with Special Needs have had a good experience here.**
    - a. Now. Redcliff is zoned to St. Michael's;
    - b. Trend at St. Michaels is growing; that community of NW is getting younger with families;
    - c. The school is getting stronger; the enrolment is tracking up.
  9. **Moving LAP to Mother Teresa and then to St. Mary's; that is too much for a special needs child. Three schools in three years is not good for a child. We are moving towards a concept of inclusion; St. Louis is a school of inclusion; there is not a child in this school that does not feel like they do not belong; we are losing something as a division and what they do with students if we move this school. There are so many resources; all of the teachers; children know the rules; I worry about moving them to a big school.**
    - a. We hear your concerns we empathize with you and reassure you we would work for a good transition.

**10. Would the majority of the staff move?**

- a. Yes

**11. When I looked at this proposal, I would rather have a K – 9 than 9 – 12. I had a coded child from the public system; my son is now on the honour role and is doing so well here.**

**12. Our children here are very accepting.**

**13. David explained he has experienced the scenario in a school where the transition for the students has been difficult.**

**14. Culture of the school for K – 9. Concern about my young daughter being around children of an older grade.**

- a. Generally the parents at St. Mary's have not had a problem and actually enjoy the interaction.

**15. The parents of French Immersion have chosen FI. That being said I think it is naive to go in without a plan; if we are going to make that step we should have a better plan for transitioning elementary children into a big school.**

**16. There are so many strengths at St. Louis; I believe the Board needs to make St. Louis known for its qualities not just promoting academies.**

- a. I do believe we promote all of our schools equally, but I hear what you are saying.

**17. My son now is at grade 12 at McCoy; and because of St. Louis School, and thru supports he received through St. Louis is doing very well; why don't you make it more of a Special Needs School. There is a caring awareness here that is not anywhere else. The entire program here works well. There is something magical. There is something great. This school has a bond. Our children are the ones that are losing; look at the Dream Centre Program; where are these programs going. My children know every teacher at the school. I never have to worry. I appreciate the diversity at the school.**

- a. We have talked about a special education centre in the Division;
- b. I would be disappointed if a service would stop just because the students moved; if there is a need to feed students; social groups could continue to offer those services to students;
- c. We can let it go or do something about it; we will do our best to keep the programs in place that support your children.

**18. I am not happy about K – 9.**

**19. The North Flats Neighborhood Association; are my children going to be bussed to Elm Street School to access the after school care; because we live in the flats we have accessed that free program.**

- a. David has been involved with North Flats Program and has spoken with them; David noted that the bus will drop them off and we are committed to assisting those programs to continue. We will advocate having them continue.

**20. Let's be reminded that we have a larger problem; are the changes we are proposing are looking at the Division as a whole.**

**21. Do we not have enough children in our school; if you are looking for our support you are probably not going to get our support?**

- a. Because of the space crunch, we have to better utilize the space we have; currently this school is under utilized;
- b. The Board might say we don't do anything with St. Louis;
- c. If we don't get any new space; some children are going to have to move
- d. I am here tonight you have an opportunity to influence the decision; it may get passed; the Board might say no to all of the report; it will be the Board's job to look at the space problem.

**22. When are we going to find out when the decision are made?**

- a. It will be made in December 2009 at a Special Board Meeting on December 10, 2009.

**23. There should be options presented; it is our children you are pushing around?**

- a. The Board is looking for options;
- b. Make your points to the Board; we want to hear your voice and your opinions; that is what this process is all about; there is more collective wisdom in this room than what is sitting up here; we are not married to the report; we are not out to get St. Louis; I would be disappointed if you are unhappy entirely, we are trying to solve a division wide problem

**24. My son attends St. Louis; if Mrs. Martin leaves my son, I will need to quit my job; moving special education around is not what you should be doing; it is harder to move special needs kids around; why not move the other kids around.**

**25. This is my first year with students in the school; you explained there are 141 students in FI according to this report there is 136 students at St. Louis; so why are we moving the students what difference does it make?**

- a. If you look at the table for St. Louis and look at the top of the column; it references adjusted enrolment; there are actually 100 now in St. Louis students; however Alberta Education counts students with disabilities at 3 students rather than 1;
- b. 85% if considered full;

- c. One of things that hurts St. Louis School is wide hall ways and staircases; as it is considered as part of the utilization rate
- d. Bottom line is if FI comes here utilization for this school would go up;
- e. Capacity is the number of students that can fill in the school

**26. Coded kids bring a lot of money in the Division; are you using that money elsewhere in the division?**

- a. No.
- b. Our profile is 69; we get enough money for 69 we are currently serving 84; we are taking money from elsewhere to offer more special education

**27. We get what you are saying Mr. Schlosser in absolving the pressure for the division. Monica's idea regarding the student body could stay in tact; you are willing to fragment FI anyway; so why can we not utilize the space here for K – 3 St. Louis FI; leave the rest as is; and continue on with FI at St. Mary's; then you are not disrupting. It is going to take more transitioning. A dual track at St. Louis and Grade 4 – 9 French Immersion at St. Mary's.**

- a. We will present this idea to French Immersion next week;
- b. We did consider St. Louis K -9, however, there are options that need to be considered.

**28. I am driving my children here at my cost because of the benefit and the value of the programs here.**

**29. If we are bursting at the seams; why not put the brakes on? I don't mean Catholics...I mean enrolment overall?**

- a. This issue came up in our town halls; the issue of Non-Catholics in our system; we took that issue to the Bishop; the Bishop said I will let you know when there are too many Non-Catholics in the division;
- b. You need to understand; we can't turn away anyone who is Catholic;
- c. Our mission is to share our gospel with all

**30. If a Non-Catholics comes to enroll in the school and if it is full you can turn them down?**

- a. Yes

**31. This community is an extension of the church; we love this community here...What is going to happen to our milk and food fridge for students; this is really important that needs to be considered. What about gym time... I love this school; there is nothing in this school but heart and soul.**

**32. What happened to the pre-school program here?**

- a. It was moved to Mother Teresa because the other preschool was at St. Francis. We had a large number of children at each end of the city so the Mother Teresa location then served the families in the south. We had only a small number of families that were

prepared to go to St. Louis because they all lived on the south end of town so continuing the St. Louis preschool was not a viable option.

**33. If this does happen, are we just moving the problem around? Other schools would be full right away as well.**

- a. Yes a number of parents would go to other schools or the public school
- b. We did have a scenario where various grades would move to MT; St. Francis and St. Michael's... but decided against it.
- c. Anytime you move children, a certain percentage would move

**34. Could we have a pre-school here; to increase utilization**

- a. Yes; we can consider that;
- b. But you also need to know division-wide we might also need to use the pre-schools we have now if we run out of space.

**35. My son gets picked up at CH at 7:30; two days before school started we had no school bus. What is going to happen next year if he goes to Mother Teresa?**

- a. We did put ads in the paper; I am sorry your son got missed;
- b. There were a number of bussing issues this year; we get funded for 1.2 we bus to 2.4; we acknowledge people were upset and we are sorry you had that experience

**36. Is this a long term solution or a short term solution? Explain St. Thomas and CAPE. Does the sale of St. Thomas Aquinas School impact on funding dollars to a new school?**

- a. It does talk about the sale; but it is less likely; we have been given the indication from the government that if we take back St. Thomas; the Francophone's then go to the government that they need a new school; the government will not allow the Francophone's to not have a school; if they don't have a school we will have to build them a school and our priority would go down the list

**37. What about the Francophone Program at St. Thomas. There are 83 adjusted enrolments at that school.**

- a. A francophone is different than French Immersion; they have a constitutional right to have education in their mother tongue as outlined in the Constitution
- b. If there is space in the community; we need to share

**38. With overcrowding, we need to remember putting the proper grades together. I attended the Catholic school system here; my son is here and I am happy with it. Too young with the high school students is not a good idea. K – 9 is not a good idea. Consider the kids first.**

- a. We think about the kids, you can be assured. In the Board Retreat we hear "what is best for kids", it is a criteria

**39. We have proven success here.**

- a. If we don't get more space in this division; we are going to have to move students
- b. The Board may say...David your plan is not our plan and we are considering other options
- c. The modular's could carry us for a while
- d. It may be there is no more drama room; no more choral room at St. Mary's; that is possible

**40. I had a wonderful experience in this division; there are benefits of older kids and younger kids; students can be stronger with older and younger kids together. Going to a K – 12 school has been my best experience.**

**41. David. .It is not so much the grade structure in the school; it is the people in the school. I think one of our friendliest schools in the division is St. Michael's School in Bow Island and that is a K – 12 School. I am saying to you; no matter what the grade structure it is the people in the school; the staff; school and parents.**

**42. What about taking St. Michael's and combines it with ST. Mary's.**

- a. We did consider that; we don't know how many students are actually there because of the fine arts; we don't know how many would come over;
- b. One of things I am worried about in moving St. Louis to the hill, we are going to have too many students coming to St. Mary's; since we haven't had a Catholic School in the SE for some time; and the attraction of K – 9 at one school and then 10 – 12 at another school could be very desirable .

**43. It would not be fair to move the St. Michael's School LAP program; the same way it would be not be fair to move Special Needs students from St. Louis.**

**44. David....Depending what space Turning Points needs; we would need more room at St. Mary's this would depend on how many students would come over from St. Louis. One of our priorities is modular's at St. Mary's.**

**45. In making the proposed switch are you looking at our school coming over with straight grades?**

- a. Yes
- b. St. Mary's does have procedures in place for mixing of students; there are specialized areas and designated areas to run the flow of student traffic.

**46. Was there this kind of anxiety; when the old St. Louis School closed?**

- a. It is possible there was not this kind of anxiety as we were going from an old building to a new building and we got to stay in the neighborhood and the programs stayed the

same

**47. Peter Grad. This crunch is coming; even though we have the best case for a new school in SE Alberta; I love your passion here at St. Louis; it shows your strength; if you were this emotional to the government that may help us as well. Thank you for your spirit.**

**48. Wayne. We commend you for fighting for the school. It is never easy when there is changed involved. I personally commend you all for sticking up for your school.**

**49. Question to Hugh. How is this going to impact the special education department? What kind of pressure will be put on the Special Education Department; numbers have proven small class sizes are successful...You can not guarantee this same success...it is the building it is not just the people..it is the entire programming that factors in the success.**

- a. Hugh. We can say; we trust it will move over with the same culture and the same passion for the students; we know it will be successful;
- b. David. I think schools this size are jeopardized. We are not optimistic we are not going to have small neighborhood schools in the future; the government is looking for consolidation.

**50. What about more growth at Mother Teresa instead of St. Mary's. MT has a lot of area and land to utilize? This reconfiguration does not seem fair and it is not good for kids.**

- a. As Southlands get populated Mother Teresa will grow; if we don't get a new school in the south there will be more pressure at Mother Teresa
- b. One of the places students may get rezoned to; we might zone St. Patrick's area to St. Mary's; there might be room there;
- c. Worse case scenario; we might be re-configuring every year. It is not a good situation.

**51. Move children that are not as compromised.**

**We are at 9:00. Please come to more meetings. Thank you for coming.**

**Approximately 50 in attendance**