

## EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

April 24, 2001

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Dosdall, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: City Centre Education Project – Closure of Schools

ORIGINATOR: Gary Reynolds, Department Head

### RESOURCE

STAFF: Karen Bardy, Donna Barrett, Rick Bell, Ed Butler, Rick Craig, Betty Dean, Mary-Ellen Deising, Ken Dropko, Michael Ediger, Brian Fedor, Paul Gish, Sherry Holmes, Colin Inglis, June Klassen, Manfred Malzahn, Angus McBeath, Faye Parker, Deanne Patsula, Nancy Peterson, Pat Semeniuk, Sandra Woitas

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) That the board supports enhanced programming for the schools of the City Centre Education Project.
- 2) That the closure of Eastwood School junior high program at the end of the 2000-2001 school year be approved.
- 3) That the closure of John A. McDougall School junior high program at the end of the 2000-2001 school year be approved.
- 4) That the closure of Alex Taylor School at the end of the 2000-2001 school year be approved.
- 5) That the closure of Queen Mary Park School at the end of the 2000-2001 school year be approved.
- 6) That schools in the City Centre Education Project be exempt from the board-approved schedule of transportation fees, and that:
  - a) Elementary and junior high students residing in attendance areas where a school or program is closed will be eligible for transportation at no cost to parents.
  - b) Attendance area families registered in a school or program that is to be closed will have the option of being transported to one of two schools designated by the district.

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### Overview

The recommendations flow from the City Centre Education Project (CCEP), a comprehensive effort to strengthen the delivery of educational programming for all city centre students. The

CCEP involves eight schools: Alex Taylor, Eastwood, John A. McDougall, McCauley, Norwood, Parkdale, Queen Mary Park and Spruce Avenue (map in Appendix I).

Principals of the city centre schools are recommending dramatic changes in the way programming is delivered to students. They have created a new vision of education in the city centre, and formulated a plan to implement it. The plan is supportive of the district priorities “to improve student achievement in the core subjects with an emphasis on language arts and mathematics” and “to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged students at risk of not completing their schooling.” The plan is needed because schools in Edmonton’s city centre face difficulties that are chronic and getting worse: declining enrolments, limited programming opportunities, deteriorating buildings, and the challenge of serving a population that has a high percentage of disadvantaged students and families. Limited budgets and small staffs result in an inability to provide students with all the high-quality programming and enrichment that they need to succeed in school and life. If no action is taken, the situation will continue to deteriorate.

### **New Programs and Services**

The purpose of the City Centre Education Project is to ensure equitable access for all district centre city students to an enriched program of instruction. There will be a focus on reading comprehension, writing for a variety of audiences and purposes, oral language development in all courses, and the development of numeracy skills. The curriculum and instruction will be organized in order that students can make meaningful connections between school and the world outside of school; in particular, they will be more effectively prepared for post-secondary education and the world of work. All students will have the opportunity to receive instruction in international languages, and there will be new learning opportunities in the fine arts.

Although the development of this enriched program will occur over the next three years, the elements listed below will be in place for 2001-2002. Details are found in Appendix II.

- Full day kindergarten, Reading Recovery, and Balanced Literacy programming will be available to students who currently do not have them
- Focus on literacy and numeracy development
- Small class sizes at the grade one level
- Extra professional development in literacy
- Additional print and technology resources to support literacy and numeracy instruction
- Teacher-librarians to support instruction of the curriculum
- Teacher-technology support to coordinate the integration of technology with instruction
- Targeted programming for the highest achieving students -- top 3% to 5%
- Specialist teachers for core and enrichment courses
- Teacher advisor/success coach at the junior high level: each student will have a teacher advisor/success coach who, within the instructional focus for the project, will work closely with the student and parent to help the student achieve success in school
- Fully equipped labs for mathematics and science

- Mentors from post-secondary education and the business community
- Increased counseling support to give all students and parents access to required services
- Expanded field trips: more learning experiences in the community will be provided to enhance the curriculum
- Expanded extra-curricular opportunities for students: the number and kind of extra-curricular activities will be expanded; for example, debate groups, publishing clubs
- No-cost school supplies for elementary students
- Access to scholarships: a scholarship foundation will be established to provide students with opportunities to develop their skills; for example, scholarships will be available for students to participate in experiences such as summer science camps, music lessons, or drama programs
- International language instruction: instruction in one or more international languages will be provided at the elementary and junior high level
- French instruction
- Enrichment in fine arts: increased opportunities for enrichment will be provided; for example, city centre choir and band, strings program
- Parent information sessions on strategies to promote success for children
- School-sponsored family events: through the use of a shuttle bus service, there will be increased opportunities for families to attend special events at school, such as parent-teacher conferences, concerts and sports events
- Transportation shuttle: to enable students to have access to specialized programming, teacher expertise and facilities such as career and technology studies, labs, studios
- Project Coordinator: facilitate the coordination of services for CCEP and develop partnerships and alternative funding sources to further enhance project initiatives

Other plans are in the developmental stage, and implementation will take place in stages over the next two to three years. Examples are:

- Collaborative planning among teachers from all city centre schools
- Collaborative planning among subject and grade level specialists
- One instructional focus for the city centre schools
- Teachers remaining with groups of students for at least two years
- Continued funding for the Norwood Pre-school Demonstration Site will be sought; research from the program's success will be used to interest potential partners/funders to expand this type of programming to other city centre sites
- Modified school hours and instructional strategies for at-risk students

Some new programs and services are dependent on the participation of public agencies and not-for-profit organizations. Discussions with potential partners are ongoing. For example:

- Edmonton School Lunch Program
- Head start programs
- Pre-school programs
- Edmonton Police Service
- Family Centre

- University of Alberta
- Success by Six
- United Way
- Victoria School – access to staff expertise and specialized facilities
- Capital Health – medical services, a model similar to AIM High
- YMCA – after-school activities
- The Centre for Family Literacy – expansion of the services to all city centre schools
- Big Sisters and Big Brothers – in-school literacy mentoring will be broadened
- Cool School
- In-school Scouting
- Norwood Child and Family Services – after-school programming
- City of Edmonton Community Services
- Alberta Children’s Services

### **Funding the City Centre Education Project**

The financial impact of the recommended closures is significant and would underwrite enhanced programming:

1. \$600,000 available for new initiatives, due to a reduced number of schools and programs.
2. \$1.2 million in allocations re-deployed in the city centre due to the recombination of students; this will result in increased efficiencies.
3. \$175,000 available to pay for basic transportation due to an increase in the provincial transportation grant; the grant increases when the district has fewer schools.

The funds freed up by reducing the number of schools and programs, together with increased efficiencies, will pay for all project costs and program enhancements.

### **Rationale for the Recommended Closures**

One of the changes being recommended is to group students in larger numbers so that financial and human resources can be used more efficiently and effectively. To achieve this, some schools and programs are recommended for closure. The need for school closures becomes evident when the consequences of not closing schools are considered. Enrolments would continue to decline, ever more students would attend schools elsewhere to get the programming they want, middle-income mobile families would continue to move to the suburbs, and school buildings would continue to deteriorate.

Systematic consultation with parents and the community started at the end of January. The administration’s initial responses to concerns raised during that time are summarized in Appendix III. A theme that emerged repeatedly was a strong desire to keep all city centre schools open. It is acknowledged that the prospect of school closure is difficult to accept. However, the principals believe that the benefits students and parents will experience as a result of programming changes will offset the initial impact of school closures. Principals and school staffs will work hard to give students and parents the same level of comfort and

confidence in their new school setting that they have in their current one. In addition to satisfaction of parents who currently have children in city centre schools, another measure of the CCEP's success over the next several years will be the extent to which city centre students choose to attend local schools rather than schools elsewhere.

Multiple factors were considered when developing the recommendations, and no single factor was predominant: number of students in each school and program, enrolment trends in each school and attendance area, potential benefits to students, location, size and condition of the buildings, parent preferences, and community impacts.

Closure of the junior high programs at Eastwood and John A. McDougall, and all of Alex Taylor School, is recommended because of low enrolment. In addition, the Alex Taylor building is in poor condition and would be costly to upgrade.

Elementary populations at Queen Mary Park and John A. McDougall are small, and should be combined. If no action is taken, enrolments would continue to decline and programming would be further eroded. It is recommended that Queen Mary Park be closed because:

- John A. McDougall School building is larger and therefore has more potential for introduction of new programs and accommodation of ancillary services and partnerships.
- John A. McDougall has heritage and architectural significance; once upgraded, it would be a first-class learning environment with historical character and aesthetic appeal.
- Proposed new housing in Central McDougall will generate new students; once upgraded, the school would be well positioned to attract them.
- The probability of securing provincial funding to upgrade John A. McDougall is good because it is high on the provincial priority list according to Alberta Infrastructure's condition ratings, while Queen Mary Park is low on the list.

### **Where Students Would Go**

For each attendance area where a school or program is closed, a "receiving school" will be responsible for accommodating the students, as follows:

- Eastwood junior high would go to Parkdale; enrolment would grow by about 60
- John A. McDougall junior high would go to Spruce Avenue; enrolment would grow by about 65
- Alex Taylor would go to McCauley; enrolment would grow by about 80
- Queen Mary Park would go to John A. McDougall; enrolment would grow by about 75

In addition, an "alternate school" in the city centre for each of the above will be identified in consultation with parents. Free transportation will be available to the receiving school and the alternate school. Having more than one alternate was considered, but is not recommended because it would defeat the intent of the busing, which is to have fast, safe, convenient service that satisfies as many parents and students as possible.

## **Student Transportation**

Yellow bus service will be provided to support initiatives arising from the CCEP, to minimize impacts on students affected by school and program closures and to create access to innovative programming opportunities that would otherwise not be available to students. Recognizing that the CCEP is a unique undertaking, the approach to provision of transportation will be unique as well. A package of services will be developed to meet the transportation needs of city centre students. It is intended that transportation services be a permanent part of the CCEP; they would include the following:

- Students who live in attendance areas where a school or program has been closed will be eligible for free transportation to and from their designated receiving school (the usual fee is \$5 per month).
- Attendance area families registered in a school or program that will be closed will have the option of being transported to one other school designated by the district in consultation with parents.
- School hours and the design of bus routes will be coordinated so that ride times are short, there are frequent stops, and minimal distance between stops. Service of this kind will offer more safety and security for students than if they walk to school.
- Shuttle service will be provided among city centre schools during the school day to enable students to have access to specialized programming, teacher expertise and facilities. For junior high students this will involve travel to take complementary courses such as band, art and French. Elementary students will be transported to participate in field trips and enrichment opportunities offered at schools other than their own.
- To enable students to participate in extra-curricular activities after school, transportation will be provided to bring students home later than usual. Schools will coordinate their activities and buses will be scheduled to make this possible.

## **Input from the City of Edmonton**

The City of Edmonton was invited to comment on potential community impacts of the proposed closures, and did so. Concerns were expressed about financial impact on the City if it purchases closed schools, potential loss of open space if it does not purchase, and potential loss of recreational opportunities. The district administration, in collaboration with the City, is addressing these concerns to the extent possible.

## **Other Information**

Delton School will be incorporated into the CCEP beginning in September 2001.

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APPENDIX I – Map - City Centre Education Project

APPENDIX II – Programming Initiatives of the City Centre Project

APPENDIX III -- Initial Responses to Parent and Community Concerns

## Map – City Centre Education Project

**Programming Initiatives of the City Centre Education Project**

Feature	Funding Source	
	School Budgets <sup>1</sup> (incl. \$1.2m redeployment)	Project Budget <sup>2</sup> \$600,000
Full day kindergarten, Reading Recovery, and Balanced Literacy: additive for students not currently receiving these programs	✓	\$110,000
Focus on literacy and numeracy development	✓	
Small class sizes at the grade one level	✓	
Extra professional development in literacy	✓	
Additional print and technology resources to support literacy and numeracy instruction		\$10,000
Teacher-librarians to support instruction of the curriculum	✓	\$60,000
Teacher-technology support to coordinate the integration of technology with instruction	✓	\$60,000
Targeted programming for the highest achieving students -- top 3% to 5%	✓	
Specialist teachers for core and enrichment courses	✓	
Teacher advisor/success coach at the junior high level: each student will have a teacher advisor/success coach who, within the instructional focus for the project, will work closely with the student and parent to help the student achieve success in school	✓	
Fully equipped labs for mathematics and science		\$50,000
Mentors from post-secondary education and the business community	✓	
Increased counseling support to give all students and parents access to required services	✓	\$60,000
Expanded field trips: more learning experiences in the community will be provided to enhance the curriculum	✓	\$30,000
Expanded extra-curricular opportunities for students: the number and kind of extra-curricular activities will be expanded; for example, debate groups, publishing clubs	✓	



Feature	Funding Source	
	School Budgets <sup>1</sup> (incl. \$1.2m redeployment)	Project Budget <sup>2</sup> \$600,000
No cost school supplies for elementary students	✓	\$10,000
Access to scholarships: a scholarship foundation will be established to provide students with opportunities to develop their skills; for example, scholarships will be available for students to participate in experiences such as summer science camps, music lessons, or drama programs	✓	Project Coordinator (see below)
International language instruction: instruction in one or more international languages will be provided at the elementary and junior high level	✓	\$10,000
French instruction	✓	\$10,000
Enrichment in fine arts: increased opportunities for enrichment will be provided; for example, City Centre choir and band, strings program	✓	\$50,000
Parent information sessions on strategies to promote success for children	✓	\$8,000
School-sponsored family events: through the use of a shuttle bus service, there will be increased opportunities for families to attend special events at school, such as parent-teacher conferences, concerts and sports events	✓	Transportation Shuttle (see below)
Transportation shuttle: to enable students to have access to specialized programming, teacher expertise and facilities such as career and technology studies, labs, studios		\$57,000
Project Coordinator: facilitate the coordination of services for CCEP and develop partnerships and alternative funding sources to further enhance project initiatives		\$75,000
TOTAL:		\$600,000

<sup>1</sup> \$1.2 million in allocations re-deployed in the city centre due to the recombination of students; this will result in increased efficiencies.

<sup>2</sup> \$600,000 will be available for new initiatives, due to a reduced number of schools and programs. This amount will be available in each subsequent year.

## **Initial Responses to Parent and Community Concerns**

### Student safety

Provision of busing close to students' homes will address most of the concerns expressed by parents about student safety. Students will not be travelling alone, and will not have to cross busy streets or walk in areas that parents believe are unsafe. Additional service will be provided for those who stay after school for extra-curricular activities. Safety issues will be addressed by the schools on an ongoing basis.

### Helping parents and students make transitions

In order to facilitate a positive transition of students and families to their designated receiving schools, a number of strategies will be used. Some examples are open houses and school visits, student activities involving students from more than one school, familiarization with busing, and collaboration between staffs and parents to make transition plans for individual students. These kinds of activities will begin to establish a level of trust and confidence for families toward their new schools.

### Students with special needs

The proposed closures will require that other accommodation be provided for students in the John A. McDougall and Eastwood junior high Opportunity programs. The following approach will be used:

- Principals of the students' current schools will be responsible for finding placements appropriate for individual students' needs.
- Parents will be involved in placement decisions.
- Placement options include the existing district site at McCauley, a new Opportunity site to be established at Parkdale (operating on a modified school calendar), and district sites outside the city centre.
- A new site may be established if the number of students requiring placement exceeds the space available at Parkdale and McCauley Schools.

### Eastwood junior high outreach program

The junior high outreach program operated by Eastwood School will continue to operate in its present location. A decision will be made shortly about which school will administer the program.

### Modified school calendar at Eastwood

Loss of the modified school calendar for junior high students is a source of concern for Eastwood parents. Introduction of a modified school calendar at Parkdale will address this issue. Also, it is intended that Eastwood School and Parkdale School, with support from the district, publicize the benefits of the modified school calendar in order to make this alternative available to more elementary students. It is anticipated that enrolment in the elementary grades at Eastwood will increase as a result.

### Effectiveness of small schools

During the consultation process, the view was expressed that large schools are not necessarily more effective. However, “small” is a relative concept in this context. If the board approves the recommended closures, the remaining six schools will still be relatively small and will have many of the advantages of small schools, including the familiarity and trust that parents value. At the same time, programming in the schools will be strengthened.

### Capital plans

The district will request capital funding for upgrading and modernizing schools in the city centre. An architectural consultant is in the process of determining upgrading needs in greater detail than what is found in Alberta Infrastructure building condition reports. Once the board has made its decision about closure, the consultant will prepare concept plans for the schools that are to remain open and prepare cost estimates for modernization. In some schools, there may also be a need for minor modifications to support program delivery. Provincial capital funding or district BQRP funding may be needed to complete them. The cost of these new projects would be offset by the major maintenance costs avoided as a result of school closures; therefore, there would be little or no impact on other schools in the district.

### Use of closed school buildings

Edmonton Public Schools has an interest in facilitating the re-use of closed schools in a manner that benefits the community. To this end, the administration will explore all possible alternate uses and ownership arrangements including district use, partnerships, leasing, and sale of buildings.

Under the Joint Use Agreement, if the board decides that a school building is to be sold, the City has the first right to purchase the land and building. If the City chooses not to purchase, the administration proposes to hold broad-based discussions among community service providers, government departments and community members to explore new ownership arrangements that would allow closed buildings to keep operating in the community. Participants could include:

- Capital Health Authority
- Ma'Mowe Capital Region Child and Family Services Authority
- Community foundations and granting agencies

- Specific service providers such as Head Start and YMCA
- Continuing care providers such as Good Samaritan Society and Caritas
- Alberta Infrastructure
- Alberta Learning
- City of Edmonton Community Services
- City of Edmonton Planning and Development Department

It is hoped that the discussions will point to other possible combinations of owners and funding agencies who emerge to assume the responsibility for operating the buildings to support ongoing community service needs.

#### Schools as heritage resources

With the exception of Queen Mary Park, each of the City Centre Schools is on the *Register of Historic Resources in Edmonton*. Alex Taylor, John A. McDougall and Norwood are on an "A" list of higher importance structures, and Eastwood, McCauley, Parkdale and Spruce Avenue are on a "B" list of lesser importance resources.

Owners of registry buildings may apply to have them designated as historic buildings in order to be eligible for program resources. Designated "A" list buildings require council approval of partial or full demolition, or significant alteration. Designated "B" list buildings have less stringent requirements for upgrading, and permits can be approved through consultation and negotiation with the Planning and Development Department, which then reports the results to City Council.

The City of Edmonton Planning and Development Department has indicated that the district is not eligible for funding support by virtue of being a government agency, even if a school is designated as a historic building. However, the district could initiate the process of designating buildings on behalf of future owners, who would then receive program benefits.

#### Duck Inn day care and out-of-school care

The administration will offer to work with the Duck Inn day care and out-of-school care to facilitate its relocation to John A. McDougall School.