

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

March 13, 2007

TO: Board of Trustees
FROM: B. Holt, Acting Superintendent
SUBJECT: Delegation - "Mill Creek is Growing"
ORIGINATOR: A. Sherwood, Board Secretary

INFORMATION

Mr. Nick Morra, on behalf of the "Mill Creek is Growing" delegation which represents parents and community members concerned with the possible closure of the school, has requested an opportunity to make a presentation to the board (APPENDIX II). Arrangements have been made for the delegation to make its presentation to the board on **Tuesday, March 13, 2007 at 7:30 p.m.** (APPENDIX I)

Ms Karen Weis Bridges and Mr. Nick Morra will speak on behalf of the delegation. The group has provided information (APPENDIX III) with respect to the presentation.

AS:mmf

- APPENDIX I – Correspondence from Anne Sherwood, Corporate Board Secretary
- APPENDIX II – Correspondence from Mr. Nick Morra
- APPENDIX III – Information provided by the "Mill Creek is Growing" delegation

From: Anne Sherwood
Sent: Wednesday, February 28, 2007 10:41 AM
To: Nick Morra
Subject: Confirmation of Mill Creek Parent and Community Delegation – March 13, 2007 Board Meeting

Dear Mr. Morra:

Thank you for your e-mail requesting an opportunity to make a presentation to the board regarding classroom space issues arising from the recommendations to move the Mill Creek regular and Spanish programs to Ritchie. I have scheduled your presentation for the **Tuesday, March 13, 2007** board meeting at **7:30 p.m.**

Attached for your information is the link to the board's procedures with respect to formal delegations and presentations to board <http://www.epsb.ca/policy/jab.bp.shtml>. You will note that you may have two spokespersons. We ask that your presentation not exceed 10 minutes in length and that the spokesperson(s) be prepared to clarify issues and answer trustee questions. **Would you please confirm who will be speaking for your group and in what capacity.**

You indicated below that you would be providing a digest of your presentation to me by March 6th and I would ask that you submit one reproducible copy of it so that it can be photocopied and included with agenda material being sent to trustees on Friday, March 9, 2007. Please note that the agenda and related reports for the March 13, 2007 board meeting will be posted by 5:00 p.m. on Friday, March 9, 2007 at <http://www.epsb.ca/board/agenda.shtml>.

The board meeting commences at 6:00 p.m. and is held in McCauley Chambers on the second floor of the Centre for Education at 102 Street and Kingsway. Underground parking is available. The spokesperson(s) may take a seat in the audience until called by the board chair. Please note that the spokesperson(s) may make the presentation from the centre microphone or from the administration table which faces the board members.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 429-8020.

Sincerely,



Anne Sherwood
Corporate Board Secretary

cc: Bob Holt, Acting Superintendent
Corinne McCabe, Executive Director

From: Nick Morra
Sent: Tuesday, February 27, 2007 3:04 PM
To: Anne Sherwood
Subject: Mill Creek Parent and Community Delegation

Anne,

Our delegation met with several members of the Planning department last Friday. Although we were able to frankly discuss several topics related to the recommendation to close Mill Creek School, we do not feel we have yet arrived at a satisfactory arrangement. We would like to request the opportunity to present our views directly to the board at the upcoming meeting scheduled for Tuesday, March 13th.

We will prepare a digest of our presentation for the board's advance consideration, which I will send to you no later than March 6th.

Please let me know if there is anything else you require from us before then.

Thanks,

Nick Morra

From: Nick Morra
Sent: Tuesday, March 06, 2007 4:04 PM
To: Anne Sherwood
Subject: Board Presentation from "Mill Creek is Growing"

Hi Anne,

Here is a copy of our brief to the board. I have also attached a spreadsheet with two tabs of enrolment and classroom usage projections.

Ms. Karen Weis Bridges and I will speak on behalf of our delegation and answer any questions. Our delegation is called "Mill Creek is Growing" and represents parents and community members concerned with the possible closure of the school.

Our brief mentions a survey that we are currently conducting. We have partial results, and have included some of this information in our brief where appropriate, while recognizing it is very preliminary. We had set the deadline for this Friday, March 9th, and the plan is to compile the data and produce a report by Monday March 12th. We would like to provide the completed survey report to the board as supplemental information at that time, as some of the responses are very relevant to our presentation. I will email the survey results document to you as soon as it is available.

We would like to show a PowerPoint presentation while we speak.

Thanks,

Mill Creek is Growing
Presentation to the Board of Trustees
March 13, 2007

Mill Creek is Growing

Mill Creek is Growing is a group of parents and community members who are concerned about the impact of the closure of Mill Creek School. The name of our group was chosen to emphasize the very important fact that the International Spanish Academy program at Mill Creek is thriving and successful. We organized shortly after the January 16th vote to consider Mill Creek for closure.

In the few weeks since this time, we have attempted to learn as much about the process as we could, and have tried to work co-operatively with the Edmonton Public School Board and its administrative staff to come up with some realistic scenarios that will:

- (a) Work within the Sustainability Review process,
- (b) Incorporate a vision for Mill Creek and Ritchie schools,
- (c) Ensure the long term viability of the International Spanish Academy, and
- (d) Be in the best interests of the students

Recommendation to Close Mill Creek

For the reasons explained and supported below, we do not believe that the recommendation to close Mill Creek next year will accomplish any of our common goals. In fact, a vote in favour of closure directly introduces several negative issues that do not exist today.

If the recommendation to close Mill Creek is approved, the board of trustees will have:

1. Put young children into a less hospitable learning environment
2. Put young children into a potentially unsafe environment should major renovations be undertaken in the 1913 portion of Ritchie
3. Put the International Spanish Academy program at risk
4. Put the Ritchie regular junior high program at risk
5. Spent a great deal of money for very little return
6. Reinforced a perception that EPSB is not a transparent organization willing to listen and work with the public it serves
7. Not lived up to its mandate of ensuring all students can achieve success in their chosen programs of study

We feel that any single one of these negatives should be enough reason to vote against the recommendation to close Mill Creek, given the financial and administrative cost to keep the school open is virtually nil.

Survey

The Mill Creek is Growing organization has undertaken a survey of community members, parents and prospective parents, to collect opinions on the proposed closure of Mill Creek School and its implications. We will have the final results compiled and available March 12th, at which time we will immediately forward a copy to the board as additional information.

However, as of this writing we have collected a sufficient number of surveys to see that some clear trends are already emerging. We have used some of this preliminary information below.

Classroom Space

Simply put, there is less classroom space at Ritchie as compared to Mill Creek. While the Planning department has quoted provincially-rated capacity numbers as evidence that there is plenty of space at the Ritchie location, this is plainly not true. The official provincial calculation is that Ritchie can accommodate 887 students. In meeting with several members of the Planning department, we agreed that Ritchie in fact has thirteen usable classrooms, and has the potential to convert existing library loft space into an additional classroom. Assuming that the recommended class size guidelines are not going to be grossly exceeded, then the actual capacity for Ritchie is approximately 325 students.

The proposed plan includes phasing out the Literacy and Opportunities program at Ritchie. This will free up some space in the short term, although one of the rooms used by these programs is about 40% smaller than a standard classroom, and would not be used to hold a regular-sized class.

Based on EPS enrolment projections, we anticipate the following need for classrooms over the next five years. This assumes a quick phase-out of the special junior high programs, and includes the implementation of a Spanish junior high program with a 50% retention rate from the grade six ISA student cohort.

Year	Program	Projected Enrolment	Classrooms Needed
2007-2008	Spanish Elementary	166	8
	Regular Junior High	92	4
	LIT/OPP Junior High	20	2
	Total	278	14
2008-2009	Spanish Elementary	180	9
	Regular Junior High	92	4
	Spanish Junior High	6	1
	Total	278	14

Year	Program	Projected Enrolment	Classrooms Needed
2009-2010	Spanish Elementary	188	10
	Regular Junior High	96	4
	Spanish Junior High	14	1
	Total	298	15
2010-2011	Spanish Elementary	202	10
	Regular Junior High	95	4
	Spanish Junior High	21	1
	Total	318	15
2011-2012	Spanish Elementary	208	11
	Regular Junior High	96	4
	Spanish Junior High	25	1
	Total	329	16

Assuming the library loft room is renovated into a classroom, the fourteen classroom spaces at Ritchie will be filled to capacity immediately, and a lack of space becomes a very real issue within three years. Some possible solutions to this proposed by various EPS employees include the limiting of regular junior high enrolment, and the creative juggling of option space at the junior high level. It is also possible that some existing non-classroom space currently set up for options such as science, art, drama or music be converted into a more multifunctional room.

School Building Quality

The quality and condition of the Ritchie building is an important consideration. Parents who have toured the facility, and the vast majority of survey respondents to date (94%), consider Mill Creek to be a much better environment for learning based on physical condition alone. In particular, the issue of windowless classrooms is seen as important or very important by fully 100% of respondents.

We expect to see visible improvements to lighting and the overall atmosphere of Ritchie as a result of the proposed fit-ups, but only so much can be done. The long range plan has students from grade two through nine in classrooms without any windows or natural light. The loss of the new playground, recently funded and built by the parents and community, is also a major factor for Mill Creek families.

Renovations to the 1913 Building

We are excited about the ultimate vision to renovate the unused 1913 building and incorporate it with the existing space at Ritchie to create a first-class facility for the International Spanish Academy, plus all its related groups such as Caminitos preschool, daycare, and the Edmonton Hispanic Bilingual Association. This will create not just more classroom space, but a potentially beautiful and inspired architectural exemplar which is all too rare in our city.

Our group feels that while this project will be a considerable challenge, we have the energy, organization, experience and enthusiasm to work with EPS and the province to make it happen. We are realistic about what can be accomplished, and how soon, but we are optimistic that anything is possible.

What is not possible is to do all this work within the current school year. We feel that to create a viable plan to renovate the 1913 building, and to secure commitments to make it a reality, requires more time. 100% of our preliminary survey respondents agree that the Mill Creek closure should be deferred for at least a year so this scenario can be properly developed.

However, should this ambitious project become reality, we are then faced with the perceived and real risks to our children's safety once construction begins. We have altogether too many instances where despite best intentions, construction on a school facility that is currently in use causes hardship for the students, and is highly disruptive to the educational environment.

Despite the fact that the 1913 building is somewhat separate from the newer buildings at Ritchie, they are still connected and could pose a potential problem for things such as airborne dust and asbestos. The close proximity means that noise and construction debris will impact students. And if a renovation scenario includes improvements to the newer buildings at Ritchie (and we surely hope it would) then where would these children go to seek refuge from construction work if every available classroom is already in use?

Impact to Enrolment

Early survey results show that should the board vote to close Mill Creek, parents of **three out of four** Mill Creek students will consider enrolling their children at other schools, or even other school districts such as the Catholic School Board. While the Spanish program is important, other factors such as access to daycare, the condition of the facility, and the stability of a school, are more important for many families should they be forced to choose. It is not expected that next year's enrolment in the International Spanish Academy would decrease by such a drastic percentage, but it is reasonable to anticipate some decline.

Because of its unique status and central location, the Mill Creek Spanish program draws children from a wider area than a regular neighbourhood school. Since more families are already transporting their children some distance from their home, they are more mobile than local community residents and do not have to choose the next closest school.

The loss of a student in the ISA program is particularly hard to replace since there is no late entry curriculum. Unless a child already has exposure to the language at home or from another bilingual Spanish program, they do not stand a reasonable chance of success after grade two.

A dropoff in enrolment will likely occur over two years. Those parents who have already researched alternatives (many of whom already have their children on waiting lists as a contingency) could move to another school, or school district, beginning next fall. However, some families may wish to enroll their children elsewhere instead of at a combined Ritchie, but may be too late for September 2007. Families that require on-site daycare and/or after-school child care (as do about 40% of preliminary survey respondents) in particular will have a difficult time finding an immediate alternative due to the shortage of these facilities in Edmonton.

Financial Costs

The current best estimate we have of the cost of immediate fit-ups required to allow Ritchie School to accommodate elementary students is between \$300,000 and \$400,000. We use an average figure of \$350,000 in our calculations, although having seen the facility we would not be surprised if the higher amount is more accurate. In addition, out of a total of \$778,080 we calculate approximately \$350,000 in "unacceptable" repairs – the lowest, most critical rating only – based on the 2006 Capital Inspection Report. (An additional \$428,080 in maintenance and repairs was identified in this report as being rated "poor" or "marginal".) The total cost to fit-up Ritchie for fall of 2007 and make repairs to unacceptably rated elements is \$700,000. The cost of fit-ups plus full recommended upgrades would be \$1,128,080.

Based on enrolment projects it appears that the library loft space would need to be renovated within a year or two in order to create a fourteenth classroom at Ritchie. We do not have an estimate for the cost of this construction, as it is not part of the fit-up plan.

In the Notice of Meeting to Consider the Closure of Mill Creek School, produced by the EPS Planning department, it is stated that an annual cost savings of \$176,714 could be achieved. The reasoning is the staff reduction of a vice-principal, head custodian and administrative assistant. We question this rationale since additional custodial and administrative duties will be required at a consolidated school with double the previous enrolment. Most likely some proportion of a full-time equivalent position in each of these areas would be required in a consolidated school body. This would of course reduce the annual cost savings.

Finally, should Mill Creek experience a drop in enrolment as a result of the closure, the revenue from the Base Instruction funding per enrolled student would also go down. Students who choose to relocate to another EPS school other than Ritchie would take their funding with them and could not be counted in the Ritchie budget. Students who choose the Spanish program in the Edmonton Catholic system would represent money permanently lost to EPS.

Looking at the best case scenario, total costs for fit-ups and repairs to unacceptable facility elements are \$700,000, while the claimed cost savings are \$176,714. This means the costs would offset after about four years.

For a middle scenario we will include all facility costs identified on the Capital Inspection Report, not just the unacceptable ones, and we will add a conservative estimate of \$50,000 for the library loft conversion which appears likely to be needed within two years. The total expense is \$1,178,080 which would take 6.5 years to pay back.

However, if we assume a lower cost savings (due to more realistic demands on administrative and custodial duties) and also assume a loss of funding for only ten students (the actual loss rate may end up being much higher), we now have a modest annual saving of \$50,000. At this rate, the capital costs would not be recouped until the 2030-2031 school year.

Finally, should a plan to renovate the 1913 building at Ritchie go ahead, much of the fit-up and classroom conversion dollars would end up having been spent needlessly.

Summary and Alternatives

At the outset we stated that if the recommendation to close Mill Creek is approved, the board of trustees will by their collective vote have caused seven detrimental impacts or risks.

1. Putting young children into a less hospitable learning environment

The loss of their playground, and most significantly having no classroom windows, is a serious step backwards in terms of providing an environment conducive to learning.

The Mill Creek building poses no immediate safety concerns, and less than \$5,000 of repairs for unacceptable items has been identified on its 2006 Capital Inspection Report. Mill Creek has sixteen classrooms with large windows, a brand new playground, and is generally in better condition.

2. Putting young children into a potentially unsafe environment should major renovations be undertaken in the 1913 portion of Ritchie

Despite a strong desire to be sensitive to children during a construction project, experience shows that accidents and unsafe actions occur all too frequently.

It is only common sense to allow the Mill Creek students to remain in place and away from a construction zone, instead of intentionally moving them into one.

3. Putting the International Spanish Academy program at risk

Families appear ready to choose alternate schools rather than face the uncertain future at Ritchie, and its lack of facilities and supports. Once these students are lost they are difficult to replace at higher grade levels due to the nature of the Spanish language program.

The ISA program can continue at Mill Creek for another year or two without reclaiming any leased space. The program can grow indefinitely into the future (more than ten years) by reclaiming three of the six classrooms currently leased to the preschool and daycare. The long term viability of the ISA program is much more certain and sustainable at Mill Creek.

4. Putting the Ritchie regular junior high program at risk

Within three to five years, Ritchie will run out of classroom space. The unappealing alternatives at this point are the use of portables, the removal of special-purpose option rooms, or limiting and/or reducing enrolment in the junior high regular program. This will of course have an impact on the viability of a Spanish junior high program.

We feel the board should acknowledge the impact that its actions now may have in the future. The decline or demise of the regular junior high program will adversely affect the Spanish junior high's chances for success. The Ritchie junior high program is also the only one in its 1.6 km radius. We do not see this program as expendable.

5. Spending a great deal of money for very little return

Simplistic cost-benefit analyses show that upfront costs will take between 4 and 23 years to be paid back through annual savings. A sharper drop in enrolment could actually end up losing EPS money.

The status quo at Mill Creek is not a costly option, and may even be more profitable in the short and long term. Let's save this money now and put it to a better use when a proper renovation of the 1913 building is approved.

6. Reinforcing a perception that EPSB is not a transparent organization willing to listen and work with the public it serves

The closing of a school is inherently an emotional issue for most involved. Whether justified or not, Edmonton Public Schools is not perceived as being open about this process nor willing to listen to the public. More than 80% of our early survey respondents feel that the outcome of this process has been predetermined.

Our group has spent a great deal of time looking at the facts and alternatives, and how we can achieve what is best for our children by working together. We feel we are not there yet, and so an amalgamation of the two schools at this point would be premature and not beneficial. On March 22nd the board of trustees has the opportunity to consider and critically review information from various sources, and also to show that it can and does listen to its public.

7. Not living up to its mandate of ensuring all students can achieve success in their chosen programs of study

The Planning department has stated the long-range capital plan: "A strategy to decrease the amount of excess space in this sector will be undertaken, that may necessitate program relocations, program closures and school closures, in order to maximize learning opportunities for students."

While this may meet a facilities-oriented goal, we fail to see how closing a growing school will in any way maximize learning opportunities, or fulfill the board's broader mandate. We have entrusted you to put the interests of the children first.

Conclusion

We ask the board to receive this information for its consideration to close Mill Creek School.

We ask that the board vote against the recommendation to close Mill Creek School on March 22nd for the reasons cited above.

We ask that we be given the time and opportunity to continue collaborating to find the very best solution for both Mill Creek and Ritchie schools, and that in the mean time, the children are respected and left in the learning environment that clearly best meets their needs.

Current (Proposed) Use	Area	Windows	Fall 2007	Fall 2008	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011	Total
Classroom	74.00	Yes	K	K	K	K	K	36
Classroom	74.00	Yes	Gr 1	Gr 1	Gr 1	Gr 1	Gr 1	17
Classroom	74.90	Yes	Gr 1	Gr 1	Gr 1	Gr 1	Gr 1	17
Classroom	74.90	No	Gr 2	Gr 2	Gr 2	Gr 2	Gr 2	16
Classroom	74.00	No	Gr 2/3	Gr 2	Gr 2	Gr 2	Gr 2	16
Classroom	74.00	No	Gr 3	Gr 3	Gr 3	Gr 3	Gr 3	16
Classroom	70.30	No	Gr 4/5	Gr 4	Gr 4	Gr 4	Gr 4	17
Classroom	70.80	No	Gr 5/6	Gr 5	Gr 5	Gr 5	Gr 5	16
Classroom	70.80	No	JH Math	Gr 6	Gr 6	Gr 6	Gr 6	23
Classroom	70.30	No	JH Social	n/a	Gr 6	Gr 6	Gr 6	23
Library Loft (Classroom)	253.80	Possible	n/a	n/a	JH Social	JH Social	JH Social	28
School Store - small	53.90	Yes	LIT	JH Spanish	JH Spanish	JH Spanish	JH Spanish	25
Science	85.90	No	JH Sci/LA	JH Sci/LA	JH Sci/LA	JH Sci/LA	JH Sci/LA	25
Science	86.90	No	JH Science	JH Science	JH Science	JH Science	JH Science	25
Science (Classroom)	86.40	No	LIT	JH Math	JH Math	JH Math	JH Math	25
Total			Classrooms	Classrooms	Classrooms	Classrooms	Classrooms	Students
			8	9	10	10	10	208
			4	4	4	4	4	96
			2	0	0	0	0	0
			14	14	15	15	15	318
								278
								298
								329

Ritchie Classroom Usage by Year