

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

December 14, 2004

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Addressing Student Programming Needs in Clusters of Schools with Low Enrolment

ORIGINATOR: C. McCabe, Assistant to the Superintendent

RESOURCE STAFF: Jenise Bidulock, Randy Billey, Michael Ediger, Andrea Furness, Roland Labbe, Randy Leal, Karen Linden, Deanne Patsula, Cindy Skolski

RECOMMENDATION

That the examination of the following groups of schools for the purpose of addressing improved educational opportunities, for students in low enrolment schools be approved:

1. Balwin, North Edmonton and Princeton Schools
2. Athlone, McArthur and Wellington Schools
3. Forest Heights, Fulton Place, Hardisty, Strathearn and Terrace Heights Schools

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Background

On November 9, 2004, the board received an information report entitled “District Space Utilization and Accommodation Strategy”. That report outlined a number of approaches that the administration will use to address issues related to improved educational opportunities for students in low enrolment schools in both the short and long term. As a means of improving programming opportunities for students, one of the strategies identified in the report was the consolidation of schools and/or programs with low enrolment.

Goal of the Cluster Studies

The goal of the cluster studies will be to realize a variety of outcomes through input from staff and communities. These outcomes are:

1. Enhanced programming for students;
2. Improved educational and co-curricular opportunities for students;
3. Improved facilities and learning environments for students; and
4. Improved use of school space.

The last two outcomes are discussed in the rationale for the selection of cluster schools and the next steps later in this report.

Educational Benefits for Students

By working together with school communities, increased educational opportunities for all students is an expected outcome of the studies. The following are educational benefits for students that have been realized in areas of the city where schools or programs have been redefined or relocated:

- In larger schools with more than one class per grade, students can be placed with the most appropriate teacher to match each student's learning needs. There is typically no choice of teachers in small schools. Very small schools, or programs with low enrolment, provide little flexibility for grade groupings, often necessitating double or triple combined grades.
- The possibilities for integration and inclusive classes for students with special needs are far greater in a larger school than they are in very small schools. As well, specialized teaching for students with special needs may be more difficult to provide.
- Students attending schools with increased enrolment and more resources are able to experience diverse programming options that very small schools are unable to offer. As enrolment declines, staff expertise in very small schools is limited. The availability of specialist teachers, for example, for fine and performing arts, physical education, second languages and special education is less likely in a very small school. School librarians and computer specialists, as well as the available resources for libraries and computer rooms are far greater in a larger school.
- At the junior high level, teacher specialization is compromised in a very small school, for example, teachers teaching beyond their specialty areas of expertise. The range of junior high option courses is limited as are opportunities for the organization of junior high clubs, teams and activities.
- Very small schools have limited resources to purchase resources for new curriculum, library book upgrades, physical education equipment, mathematics and science manipulative materials and technology upgrades.
- Studies have shown that student learning is enhanced in school facilities that are up to date and provide optimal classroom environments for student learning. In larger schools, students have better access to specialized equipment, materials, and facilities for option courses, such as: Music, Instrumental Band, Food and Fashion Studies, Design and Technology and Computer Studies.

Rationale for the Selection of Schools

The rationale for identifying groups of schools to be examined rather than individual schools is that schools in close proximity impact on one another as they often serve the same community and it is, therefore, difficult to consider individual schools in isolation. The examination of a group of schools can result in a wider range of creative strategies and a more positive community consultation process than simply identifying a single school for study.

Three specific groups of schools have been identified based on the following:

Cluster A (Balwin, North Edmonton, Princeton)

The Balwin, North Edmonton, Princeton cluster was previously part of the district's concept development studies initiative (2001-2002). Extensive community consultation occurred at that time, and a number of options for improving programming, space utilization and facilities were developed through community involvement. The circumstances which prompted the original concept development studies have not changed substantially (limited program opportunities, under-utilized schools, deteriorating physical plants, and the inability to obtain funding to modernize buildings in areas where there is excess capacity). The administration is hoping to build on the original work and arrive at recommendations within a reasonable time frame. Balwin, North Edmonton, Princeton schools are located within the district's Central planning sector.

Cluster B (Athlone, McArthur and Wellington)

The Athlone, McArthur and Wellington cluster of schools are also located within the district's Central sector and, as well, were schools which were previously part of the district's concept development studies initiative. Athlone and Wellington schools are identified together in the district's current three-year capital plan as a Year 1 priority for preservation (i.e. General Upgrade with an estimated project cost of \$5.35M). More specifically, it was proposed that consideration be given to the consolidation of area K-9 students at Athlone School, accompanied by the possible refit and completion of preservation work at the school.

This would enable the district to improve opportunities for success in student achievement, improve student accommodation and program opportunities and provide appropriate upgrades to the learning environment at Athlone. The inclusion of McArthur School in this cluster would provide for the further consideration of preserving both K-6 and K-9 options for students within the community.

Cluster C (Forest Heights, Fulton Place, Hardisty, Strathearn, Terrace Heights)

The Forest Heights, Fulton Place, Hardisty, Strathearn, Terrace Heights school cluster is located within the district's South Central sector. These schools were not previously part of the district's concept development studies initiative. The examination of kindergarten to grade 9 capacity within the South Central sector is critical if the district is to appropriately address key issues around student accommodation, program distribution and student transportation in this part of the city.

Forest Heights, Terrace Heights, Strathearn and Hardisty have elementary and junior high programs with low enrolment and have limited or no flexibility in organizing classes. As enrolment in these schools continues to decline, fewer educational opportunities will be available in these schools. For example, Terrace Heights and Strathearn schools may, out of necessity, have to be organized in triple grade classrooms.

Many students attending schools in the South Central sector reside outside of the sector. The district has recognized, as a principle in its planning for the accommodation of students, the need to ensure that students have access to programs and learning environments close to where it is that they reside without having to travel great distances. As students from outside of this sector are able to be accommodated closer to home and enrolment in the South Central sector declines

further as a result, educational opportunities for the few students remaining in the sector will be eroded further.

Appendix I provides the rated capacity, enrolment and utilization rates for schools within the three proposed clusters. Appendix II provides more specific information regarding student enrolment at schools within each cluster. In Appendix III, a single map illustrates the boundaries that define the district's planning sectors and in Appendix IV, three maps identify and locate the three clusters as they have been proposed.

Study Results and Next Steps

With the goal of improving programming opportunities and learning environments for students, it is anticipated that each of the three studies will result in recommendations to the board for the consideration of one or more of the following:

- the relocation or consolidation of programs;
- the upgrading and preservation of existing space;
- the closure of schools;
- the demolition or decommissioning of space; and
- an alternative arising from the community consultation process.

Appendix V describes the proposed consultation process and timeline for the studies. Any recommendations which would require a school closure process for implementation will need to be presented to Board by mid-March in order to allow the process to be completed within the current school year.

Consultation Process

The administration has held preliminary discussions with the principals of all the schools in each of the three clusters. These discussions have focused on identifying optimal learning environments for students. It is intended that the results of these discussions will form the basis for further consultation with parents and community members.

Early in the New Year, staff from the Planning Department will coordinate studies in each of the three cluster groups. Planning staff will continue to consult with principals and will consult, as well, with school staff, school councils and the broader community within each cluster. The objective of the consultation process will be to provide participants with the opportunity to work effectively and meaningfully with the district in the further clarification of options and, finally, in the identification of preferred alternatives.

The City of Edmonton will be provided with information and given opportunities for involvement as required by board policy and provincial regulations should any school closure process be undertaken. This will ensure that the municipal impacts of any potential school closure can be determined and communicated to the board as information.

The Board will receive regular updates regarding parent and community meetings, the outcomes of those meetings and the general progress of the studies.

Long-term Plan

The proposed cluster studies involve strategies to enhance programming for students, improve educational opportunities for students and improve facilities and learning environments for

students. In addition to these studies, the administration will continue to identify other initiatives, considering a full range of possible strategies, many of which were described in the November 9 report to the Board. The Board will be provided with an update on this work early in 2005.

Work will also continue on the annual review of the district's Ten-Year Facilities Plan for submission to Alberta Infrastructure early in 2005. This work will include school and community consultation and will help to further define a long-term plan and the district's response to a variety of challenges related to opportunities for students, student accommodation, transportation, program distribution and capital development. Additional clusters of schools to be considered for study during the next two years will also be identified.

RL:FP:pn

APPENDIX I:	Capacity, Enrolment and Utilization Rate of Schools in Proposed Clusters
APPENDIX II:	School Enrolment
APPENDIX III:	Map of the District's Planning Sectors
APPENDIX IV:	Cluster Maps
APPENDIX V:	Proposed Consultation Process and Timeline

CAPACITY, ENROLMENT AND UTILIZATION RATE OF SCHOOLS IN PROPOSED SCHOOL GROUPS

(Based on September 30, 2004 enrolment.)

Cluster Schools	Total Capacity (Actual)	Total Enrolment (Actual)	School Utilization (%) (PUR *)	Sector Utilization (%) (PUR *)	Planning Sector
<u>Cluster A</u>					
Balwin (Gr. 7-9)	758	279	40	51	Central
Princeton (K-6)	449	249	64	51	Central
North Edmonton (K-6)	448	193	42	51	Central
<u>Cluster B</u>					
Wellington (Gr. 7-9)	676	182	36	51	Central
Athlone (K-6)	340	229	84	51	Central
McArthur (K-6)	329	173	56	51	Central
<u>Cluster C</u>					
Hardisty (Gr. 5-9)	1159	331	33	57	South Central
Fulton Place (K-6)	471	267	65	57	South Central
Terrace Heights (K-6)	321	99	31	57	South Central
Forest Heights (K-6)	496	246	51	57	South Central
Strathearn (K-9)	670	182	31	57	South Central

* **PUR (Provincial Utilization Rate)** is the calculation of school space utilization based on “weighted” enrolments and capacities. The PUR is not calculated on the basis of “actual” enrolments and capacities.

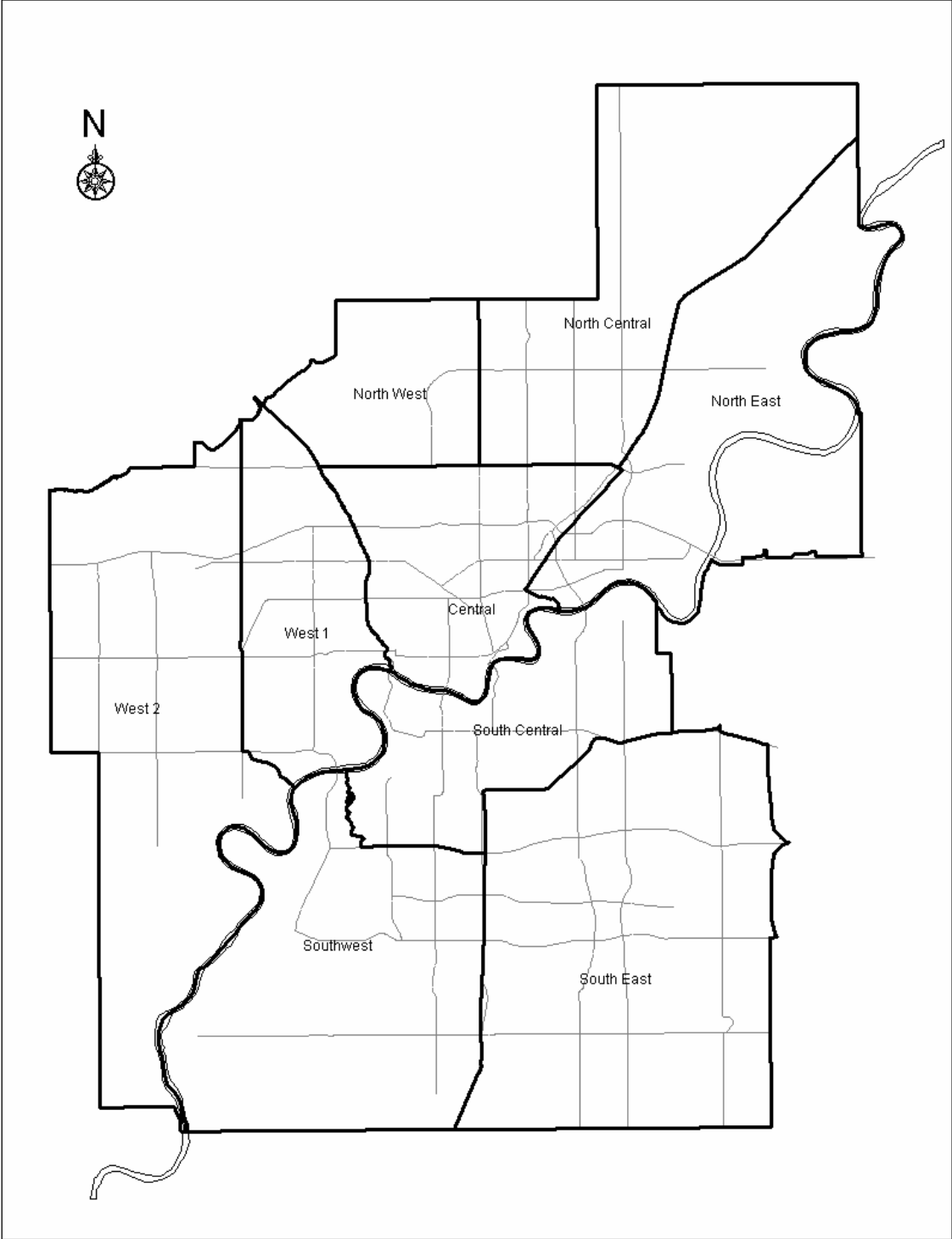
- **Weighted enrolment:** The total enrolment at schools is weighted by Alberta Learning with consideration being given to the accommodation of students enrolled in special education programs.
- **Weighted capacity:** The total capacity at schools is weighted (or adjusted) by Alberta Infrastructure as well, with consideration being given to the total area of leased space and CTS (Career Technology Studies) space that exists within schools.

SCHOOL ENROLMENT

Cluster	School	Programs	Enrolment ¹
A	Balwin (Gr. 7-9)	Regular	185
		Literacy	32
		Opportunity	30
		International Ukrainian Bilingual	22
		Interactions	10
		<i>Total</i>	279
	Princeton (K-6)	Regular	203
		Opportunity	46
		<i>Total</i>	249
	North Edmonton (K-6)	Regular	139
Opportunity		54	
<i>Total</i>		193	
B	Wellington (Gr. 7-9)	Regular	150
		Individual Support	18
		Behaviour & Learning Assistance	14
		<i>Total</i>	182
	Athlone (K-6)	Regular	210
		Behaviour & Learning Assistance	19
		<i>Total</i>	229
	McArthur (K-6)	Regular	144
		Strategies	29
		<i>Total</i>	173
C	Hardisty(Gr. 5-9)	Regular (7-9)	120
		Logos Christian (5-6)	62
		Logos Christian (7-9)	97
		Strategies	20
		Community Learning & Behaviour Skills	16
		Community Learning Skills	16
		<i>Total</i>	331
	Fulton Place (K-6)	Logos Christian (K-4)	131
		Regular	113
		Behaviour & Learning Assistance	23
	<i>Total</i>	267	
Terrace Heights(K-6)	Regular	83	
	Strategies	16	
	<i>Total</i>	99	
C	Forest Heights (K-6)	German Bilingual	165
		Regular	81
		<i>Total</i>	246
	Strathearn (K-9)	Regular (K-6)	94
		Regular (7-9)	68
Opportunity		12	
Behaviour & Learning Assistance		8	
	<i>Total</i>	182	

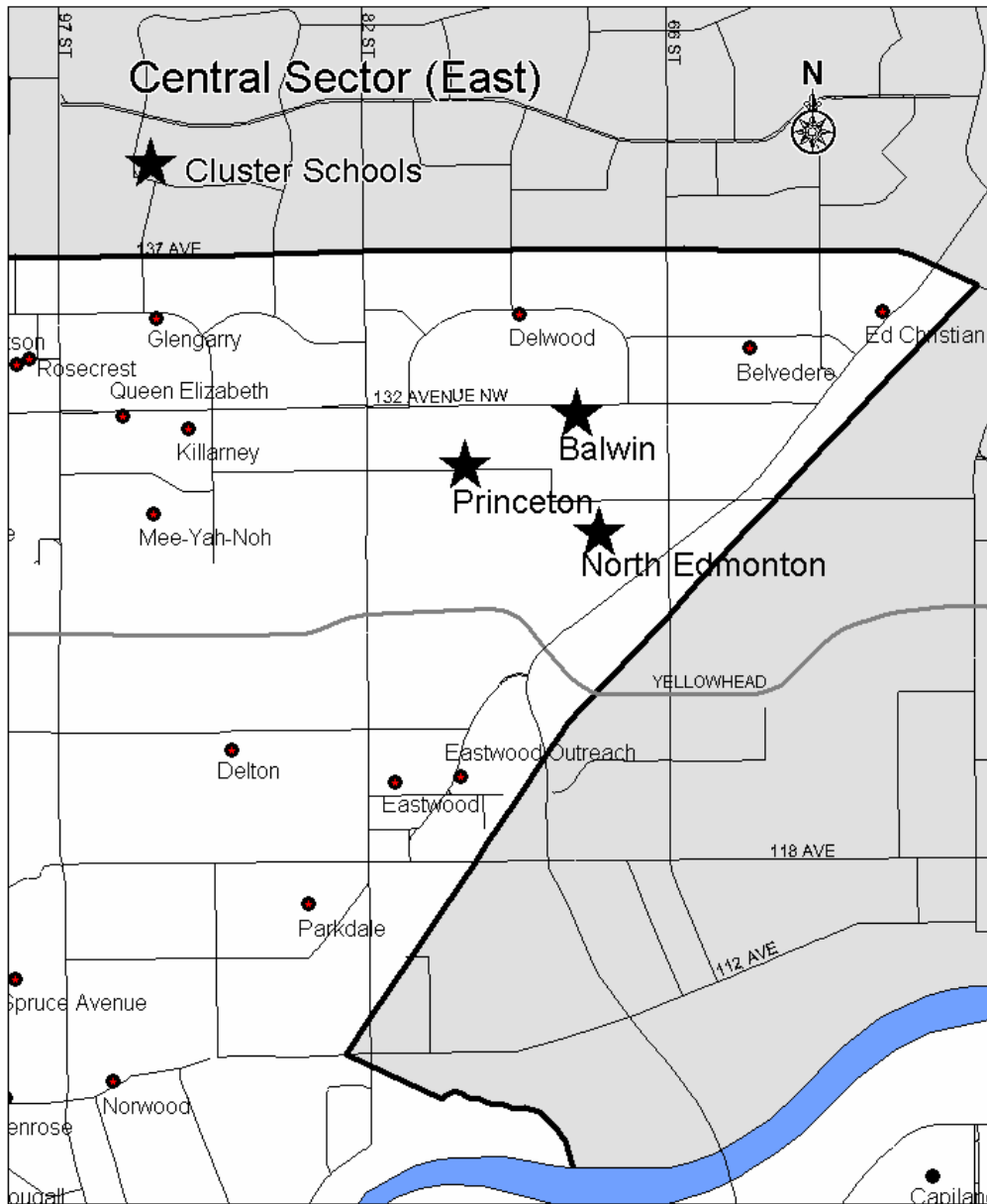
¹ September 30, 2004 enrolment

MAP OF THE DISTRICT'S PLANNING SECTORS

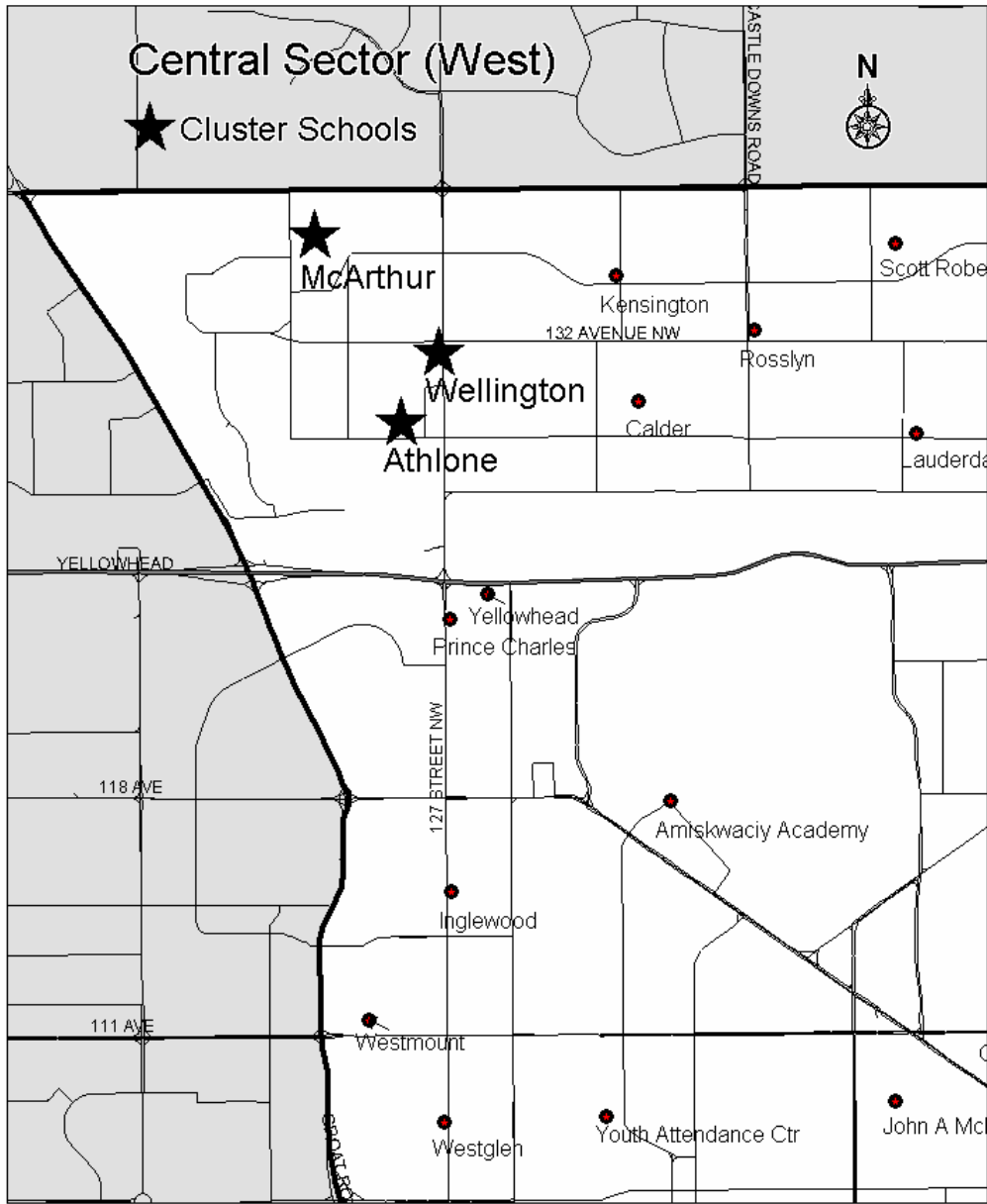


CLUSTER MAPS

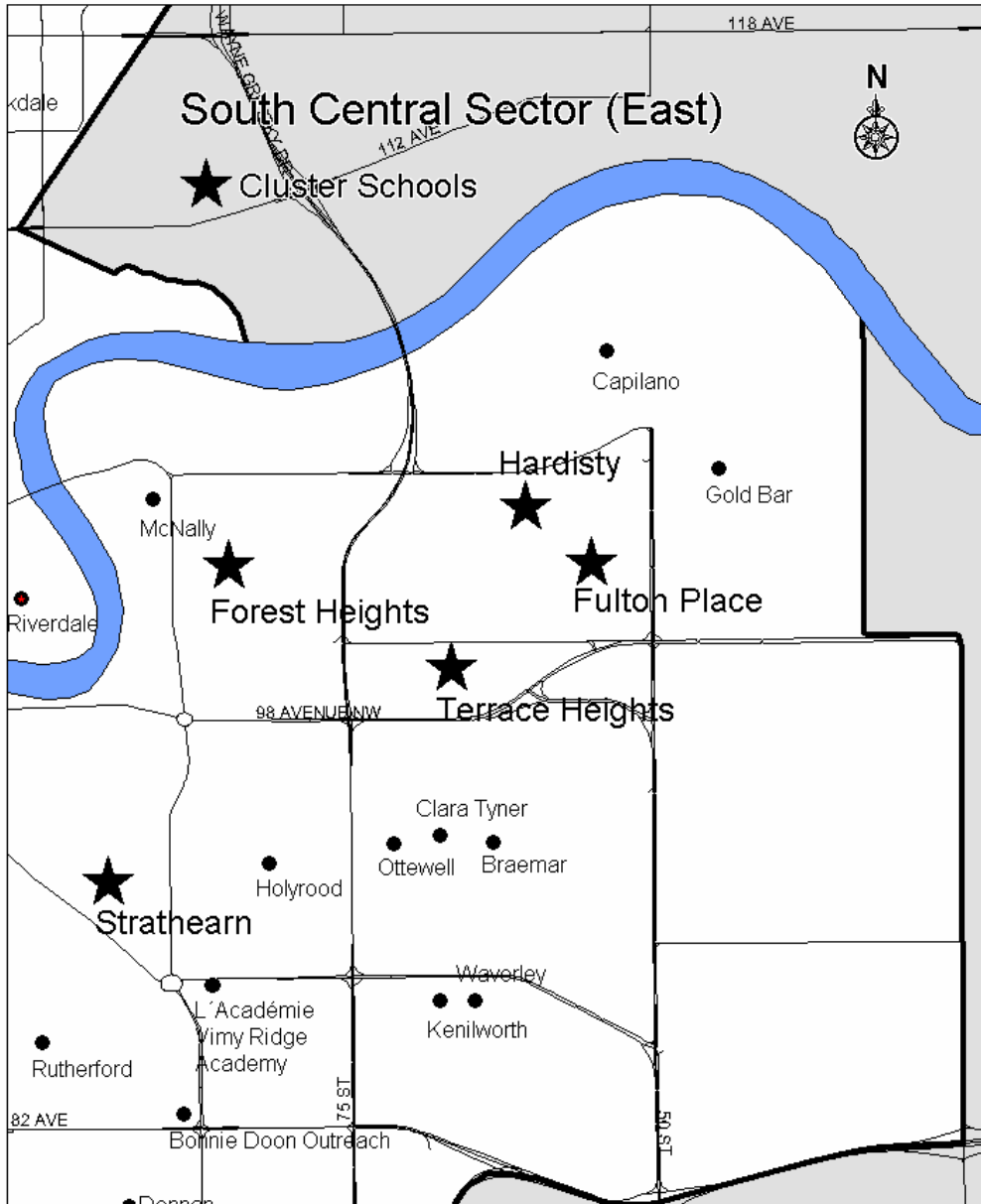
CLUSTER A
(Balwin, North Edmonton, Princeton)



CLUSTER B
(Athlone, McArthur, Wellington)



CLUSTER C
(Forest Heights, Fulton Place, Hardisty, Strathearn, Terrace Heights)



PROPOSED CONSULTATION PROCESS AND TIMELINE

Consultation Goals:

- To reinforce Edmonton Public Schools' commitment to involve parents and the community in public education; and
- To engage participants in a meaningful and effective process that will inform recommendations to the Board regarding future student accommodation, programming and space utilization at schools within identified school clusters.

Consultation Objectives:

- Provide and exchange information with respect to the needs and interests of students, parents and the community within each identified school cluster.
- Work directly and collaboratively with participants in the consideration of options and preferred alternatives.
- Complete the process in a timely manner that will facilitate decision-making by the Board within the current school year (i.e. 2004 – 2005).
- Provide participants with follow-up information regarding how their input influenced the decision.

Consultation Timeline:

- November 2004
 - Initial discussions with principals of schools within proposed clusters to identify cluster schools and possible options.
- December 2004
 - Continuing discussions with principals to review possible options.
 - Conference Committee report: Addressing Space Utilization and Accommodation in Selected School Clusters (December 7, 2004)
 - Public board report: Addressing Space Utilization and Accommodation in Selected School Clusters (December 14, 2004).
 - No meetings with schools or school communities to be scheduled during the month of December beyond December 17th.
- January/February 2005
 - Initial meetings with school communities to exchange information and begin discussions involving them in the development and refinement of options.
 - Further meetings with school communities and community groups to examine and evaluate options and identify preferred alternatives.
 - Consolidation of input and formulation of preliminary recommendations to the Board.
- March 2005
 - Recommendations to Board for consideration of school closure process if required (regular public board meeting - March 8th, 2005).