

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

February 27, 2001

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Dosdall, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Response to Trustee Request for Information

ORIGINATOR: G. Reynolds, Department Head

RESOURCE
STAFF: Rick Craig, Andrea Furness, June Klassen

INFORMATION

TRUSTEE REQUEST #168, JANUARY 18, 2000 (TRUSTEES) PROVIDE FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE COST OF BUSING VERSUS CONSTRUCTION FOR ALL OF THE AFFECTED AREAS IN THE CITY. The district provides transportation service to receiving schools from 54 neighbourhoods without a local elementary school and from nine neighbourhoods where an elementary school has been closed. To better understand the relationship between the cost of busing versus construction, the average student growth patterns for the communities of Jackson Heights, Twin Brooks, Belle Rive and Ozerna have been combined and are used as an example for what may be anticipated in other new areas (Appendix I).

As shown in Appendix I, there is a slow increase in student numbers in these communities during the first several years. This slow build out pattern can affect the cost of busing in two ways:

- 1) It takes longer to reach the 300 student enrolment figure in a neighbourhood which would trigger a request for a school, which means that students must be bused for more years.
- 2) It means that the cost of busing remains at a low level for a long time, which delays, when the costs of busing become equal to the costs of building a school.

Using average enrolment the cost of busing was determined based on the following assumptions:

- that one bus could serve 44 students.
- a bus costs \$27,000 in year one with a 3.0 per cent cost increase per year.
- the costs to construct a stand-alone K-6 school with a capacity of 500 students are estimated to be \$6.9 million. (Alberta Infrastructure January 2001)

Appendix II shows the cumulative busing costs to serve this typical neighbourhood and indicates that at 17 years the cost of busing will equal only one-third the cost to build an elementary school. It is important to emphasize that the cost of busing will increase significantly as the rate of the neighbourhood build out pattern increases along with the length of time it takes to build a school in a particular neighbourhood.

While it appears that the current development pattern results in busing being less costly than constructing an elementary school, it should be noted that the true costs of busing versus building a school are not limited to financial considerations. There are other significant impacts associated with continued busing:

- The district and our parent community support the concept of the local neighbourhood school. A local elementary school acts as a focal point in a neighbourhood. Children and parents meet and have common experiences and goals. Children play with their neighbourhood friends. A local school helps to build a sense of community to a neighbourhood. While we try to bus neighbourhood children to the same receiving school these are usually well away from the local community. The children may not feel attached to the receiving school community or their own neighbourhoods.
- It is common for parents to be concerned about the bus travel times and these will continue to increase as new suburbs expand further away from the locations of potential receiving schools located in older neighbourhoods. Long travel times may also have an affect on student behaviour and on achievement. Parents see this as unproductive time for the child and often feel that their children are not getting the same quality of learning experience as those students living in communities with a local school.
- At the end of 17 years of busing the district will have no physical asset or legacy in the neighbourhood. The community will not have a facility to provide community services and recreational and educational opportunities. (R. Craig, 429-8434)

GR:mjl

APPENDIX I – Average Number of Elementary Students in New Neighbourhoods

APPENDIX II – Cumulative Bus Costs for New Neighbourhoods