

Castle Downs High School Feasibility Study

Prepared by Planning Department, June 2003



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Purpose and Background

In response to Edmonton Public Schools' 2000-2003 Capital Submission, Alberta Infrastructure provided funding to undertake a feasibility study that would examine north side public high school populations and the potential need for a new public senior high school. This report presents the results of that study.

The request for funding was initiated as a result of interest expressed, primarily by Castle Downs residents, in having a new public senior high school constructed within the Castle Downs area. At a meeting in 2001 attended by district planning staff, area residents provided the following as their rationale in support of a local senior high school:

- The community believes there is sufficient enrolment in the area to support the school.
- The Castle Downs area is growing and the re-development of land around Major General Griesbach School will generate additional students within the area.
- A school would enable students to attend senior high within their community.
- A school would address the issue of lengthy bus ride to and from the area's currently designated school.
- A new public high school would contribute to a sense of community for the area.

Study Area and School Site

The study area and the proposed school site are illustrated in Appendix III. The study area defines, conceptually, the attendance area of a new high school within the Castle Downs area and includes communities within Castle Downs, Castle Downs Extension, the Palisades and Griesbach.

The school site is located at the corner of 153 Avenue and Castle Downs Road. Designated as a school site in a plan of subdivision registered in 1975, the plan's original conceptual drawings provide building envelopes for stand-alone public and Catholic senior high schools on either side of a recreation centre. The recreation centre and a YMCA now occupy the site. The site plan is illustrated in Appendix IV.

Public Consultation - Process and Summary of Results

Key stakeholder groups, identified early in the process, included area residents involved in the community either as members of community leagues or school councils. Beginning in February, 2003 and extending through April, planning staff met with community league representatives and with members of school councils to review the study's Terms of Reference, discuss issues and receive feedback.

A questionnaire was also prepared and distributed to members of the community leagues and school councils in Castle Downs. Of the 139 questionnaires distributed, 54 were completed and returned reflecting a response rate of 38.8 per cent. Tabulated results of the questionnaire are presented in Appendix II.

In summary, the results indicated that the overriding concern among respondents was the issue of programming for students. Ninety-four per cent indicated a high level of satisfaction with educational programming offered by public elementary and junior high schools attended by their children and sixty per cent cited it as the issue that would be the most important consideration in their choice of a senior high school. Concern over the issue of educational programming was also a predominant theme that consistently arose in virtually all of the discussions that took place during the study's consultative meetings with community league representatives and members of school councils. In these meetings, area residents were forthright in stating that if programming changes were to occur at Queen Elizabeth High School, the high school to which the greatest proportion of area students are designated, attendance at that school from within Castle Downs would very likely increase.

Feasibility - Summary of Findings

While a more detailed analysis of feasibility is included as Appendix I in this report, the key elements determining the current feasibility of such a facility in this area are:

1. There is sufficient public high school space within close proximity (i.e. Queen Elizabeth High School) to accommodate the number of students residing within the Castle Downs study area;
2. The expense of constructing a new public senior high school within the study area should not negatively affect the capital priorities previously identified by the district; and
3. The conditions and requirements of Alberta Infrastructure that precede their approval of funding to support new construction (i.e. the availability of alternative space and a senior high utilization rate of 85 per cent) have yet to be fully addressed by the district. (The district's senior high utilization rate is currently 81 per cent.)

Current and Future Planning Initiatives

While projected enrolments within the study area indicate that a stand-alone public high school may not be the most cost efficient alternative, the demographics of the area warrant consideration, by the district, of other strategic alternatives. The district fully recognizes merit in the model of partnership arrangements in capital projects. As a means of addressing the extent to which the need for additional high school space within Castle Downs does exist, it would appear to be more cost effective for the district to consider the option of a multi-campus facility involving other educational service providers and having a smaller capacity for public students.

A proposal for a multi-campus facility in partnership with Edmonton Catholic Schools on the Castle Downs site has therefore been identified and proposed within the district's current 2003-2005 Capital Submission. While all means of creating efficiencies in terms of costs will be considered (i.e. shared gym, labs, physical plant, etc.) consideration will also be given, by the district, to Edmonton Catholic Schools' requirements for a successful partnership, including the option of involving a third party within a multi-campus facility. These considerations would be essential in order to ultimately ensure project feasibility and acceptability.

A number of other initiatives which could impact the need for a new public senior high school in the Castle Downs area are either currently being considered or pursued by the district. These initiatives focus primarily on the obvious need to positively affect facility utilization within district high schools so that Alberta Infrastructure's conditions for the approval of funding for new space can be met as soon as possible.

Disposition of Space Through Lease or Conversion: The district is currently considering the lease of surplus high school space within a district high school to another educational service provider in support of a partnership arrangement that would present two distinct public education options to Edmonton students within one facility. A second initiative is also being considered that would convert surplus space within another district high school for the purpose of accommodating decentralized district administration (i.e. Edmonton Regional Educational Consulting Services). Combining these measures with the closure of the high school program at Stratford School would have the effect of removing a total of 1,585 student spaces and increasing the district's high school utilization rate to 84 per cent.

Alternate Grade Configuration: As either an alternative to or as a complementary component of a partnership, a new facility could include additional junior high grade levels. It is expected that in the near future there will be a need for additional junior high space in the area. As well, because of the relatively low numbers of public senior high students in the study area, a junior-senior high may be more feasible than a senior high only facility.

Special Program Placement and Program Improvement: Options to implement special programs in senior high schools will be explored to provide opportunities for success similar to that which has been achieved at L'Academie Vimy Ridge Academy with the placement of a Sports Alternative program. Work has also been undertaken to improve program delivery in north side high schools with discussions anticipating program improvements that would lead to increased enrolments and improved utilization in north side high schools. Examples include establishing formal "consortia" between groupings of senior high schools to more clearly determine specific programming needs and improved program delivery as well as the development of pre-tech/career programming partnerships between schools and/or other public institutions.

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Appendices

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Appendix I

Analysis of Feasibility

1 Capital Planning and Fiscal Considerations

Priorities for capital expenditures within the district are thoroughly examined, carefully considered and fully justified each year through the district's capital planning process. A formal request for the funding of these priorities is then presented to Alberta Infrastructure through the district's yearly Capital Submission. The timeframe considered within each of these capital planning cycles extends over a three-year period. The need for a new senior high school in north Edmonton was not identified in the 2002 - 2004 capital plan, nor was it in any previous plan.

2 Capacity of a New Senior High School in Castle Downs and Estimated Costs

Currently, there are 1184 public high school students residing within the study area. This area includes Castle Downs, Castle Downs Extension, the Palisades and Griesbach. Based on attendance patterns at the high school level district-wide, it has been found that high school students tend to be highly mobile and that only 40 per cent of high school students district-wide choose to attend their designated school. Depending on a variety of factors, however (e.g. programming and facility options, staffing and administration), a new public high school in Castle Downs could well attract a greater number of students both from within its attendance area and perhaps beyond. The estimated costs, supported by Alberta Infrastructure, for senior high schools of various capacities are included in Appendix V.

3 Existing Facilities

Both Queen Elizabeth and Ross Sheppard High Schools are currently the designated high schools for students residing within the Castle Downs study area. Appendix III is a map illustrating the locations of these schools and their attendance area boundaries as well as those of M.E. LaZerte High School.

Queen Elizabeth High School is presently underutilized. Alberta Infrastructure's audit of the condition of the school in 2000 concluded that "With the exception of the few architectural, mechanical and electrical concerns (detailed in the audit report), the facility appears to be well maintained and cared for". It estimated the cost of repairs for the facility at approximately \$2.5 million and added that the facility "is in a good location within the surrounding community and should meet the needs of the community now and into the future".

4 Area Attendance, Residency and Enrolment Patterns

Information outlining study area attendance patterns, student residency and enrolment is included in Appendix VI. The enrolment history of students residing within the Castle Downs study area is illustrated by grade in Appendix VII.

5 District Funding Priorities

The district is continuing to implement measures aimed at improving the utilization rate to increase plant operation and maintenance funding and improve its position with respect to capital funding approvals within the capital submission process. The administration is presently reviewing the district's 2002-2004 capital priorities to ensure that schools that are proposed to be modernized are, or will be, well utilized in the long-term.

6 Provincial Criteria for Approval of Capital Funding/Spending

Edmonton Public Schools has a current enrolment of 82,000 students with a provincially rated total student capacity of approximately 112,000 students. This results in a utilization rate of 69 per cent. At the high school level, the district's utilization rate is 81 per cent. Prior to the approval of new high school construction, Alberta Infrastructure requires that school districts have a senior high space utilization rate above 85 per cent. Alberta Infrastructure's capital manual also states that approval of projects designed to provide space to meet increases in enrolment require that there be no other space available in another school in the jurisdiction to which transportation may be feasible.

7 District Priorities for Student Accommodation

Over the past ten years, the district's capital plans have reflected an emphasis on providing local accommodation at the elementary level. This emphasis recognizes the concerns of parents regarding the transportation of younger students over long distances and the notion that elementary schools provide a nucleus within neighbourhoods thereby enhancing a sense of community. In the past ten years, the district has built only two new elementary schools, while, currently, there are over 40 new and developing neighbourhoods in the city without a local elementary school.

8 Enrolment Trends, Population Projections and Demographics

Planning for the original Castle Downs senior high campus site was undertaken in the early 1970's at a time when household sizes were larger and households generated more students than is the case today. These lower student generation factors have resulted in the Castle Downs area yielding a lower peak senior high total enrolment today than was anticipated when planning for the site was completed and the site reserved almost 30 years ago.

Appendix VIII illustrates graphically the history and five year projected senior high enrolment within the Castle Downs study area. Demographics and development trends in the area indicate a trend that is expected to be "flat" in the near term with the total public senior high population in the area remaining at under 1200 students. This trend is a function of the declining number of students per grade within the established neighbourhoods of Castle Downs even with the expected growth in population in Castle Downs Extension, the Palisades and Griesbach. In other words, while the study area does include new and growing neighbourhoods, student populations are continuing to decline in the established areas of Castle Downs. As a result, senior high enrolment within the study area is not expected to increase for at least the next five years.

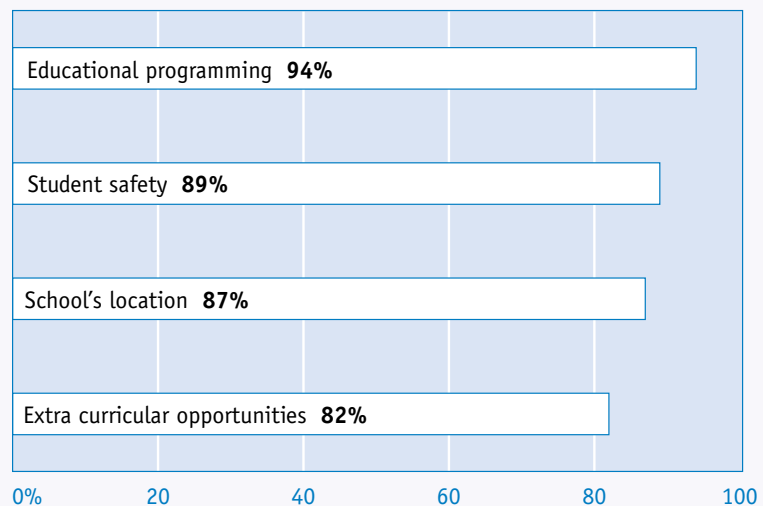
Appendix II

Castle Downs Senior High School Feasibility Study Questionnaire

1 Respondents were asked whether or not they were satisfied with the school(s) attended by their child (or children).

Responses received indicated a high level of satisfaction.

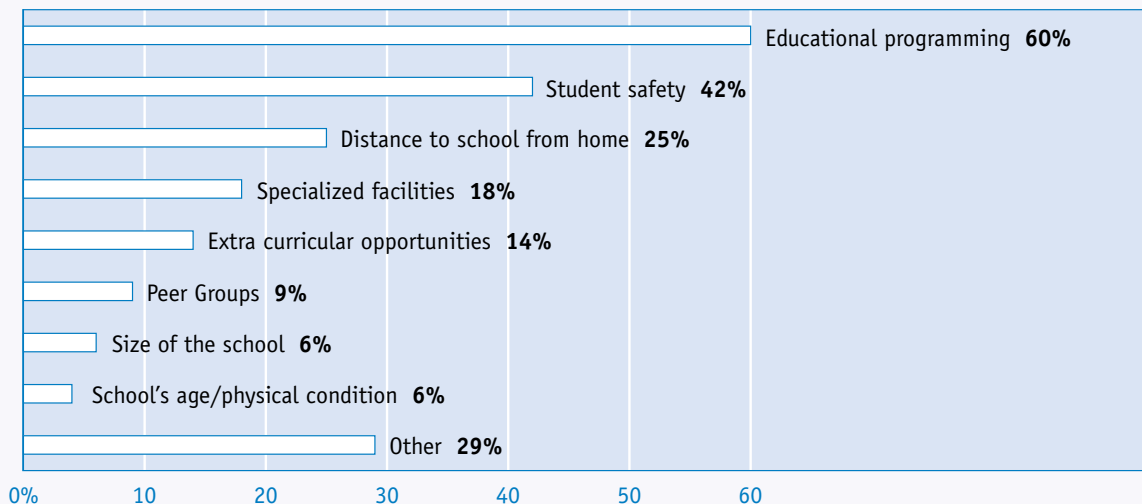
Current Satisfaction with School(s) Attended (N=54)



2 Respondents were asked what their most important considerations would be when choosing a senior high school for their child (or children).

Responses indicated that the most important consideration for parents choosing a high school is educational programming.

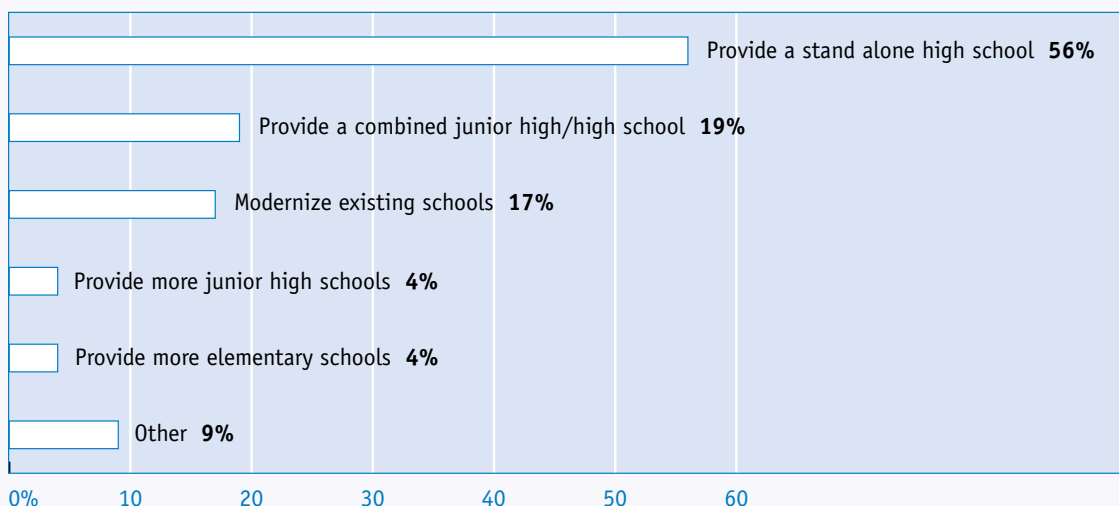
Most Important Considerations for Choosing a High School (N=54)



3 Respondents were asked what they thought should be Edmonton Public School's highest priority in providing schools for students within the Castle Downs area.

Responses received indicated a preference for a stand alone public senior high school.

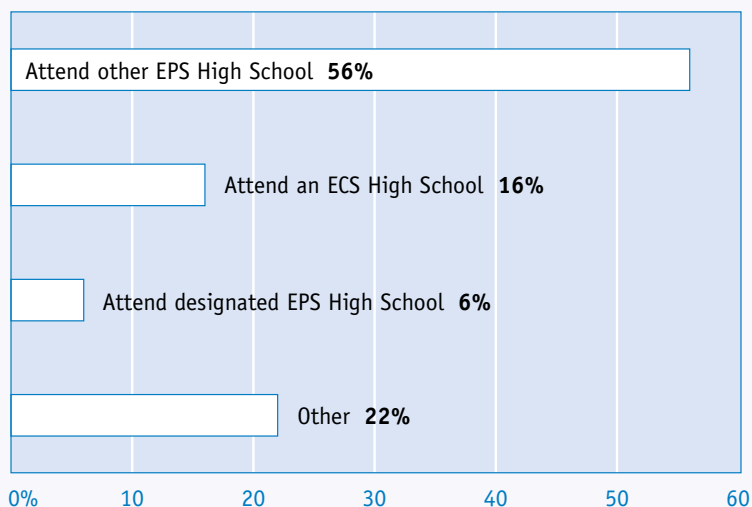
Priorities for Providing Schools in Castle Downs (N=54)



4 Respondents were asked what they would choose to have their child (or children) do if there were no public senior high school within the Castle Downs community when he/she/they reach grade 10.

Responses received indicated that most (56 per cent or respondents) would have their child (or children) attend another EPS high school.

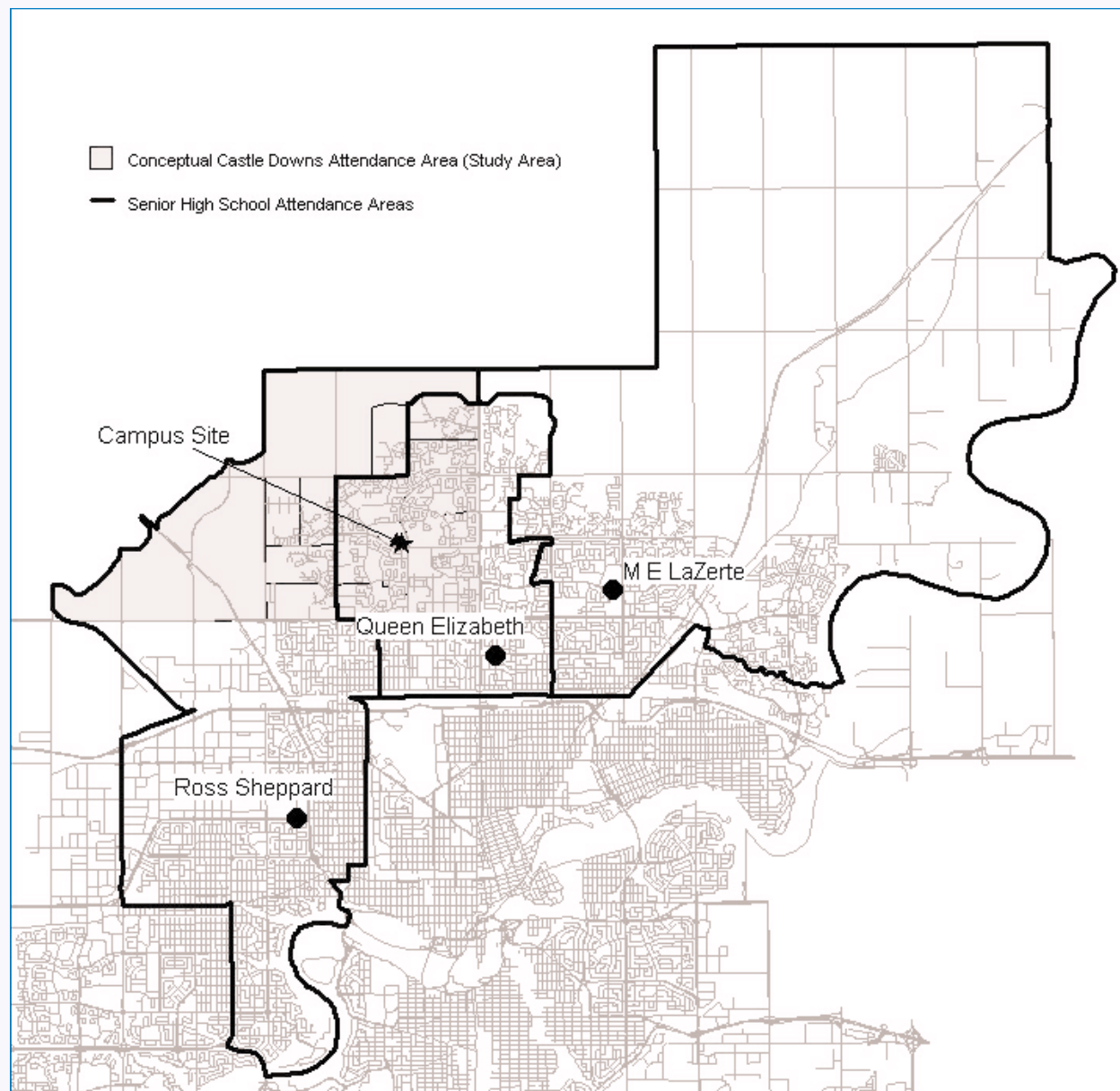
Choices if there were no EPS High School in Castle Downs (N=54)



Note: In comments provided by respondents, the choice "Other" most often indicated simply a preference for a school which would best serve the needs of the child.

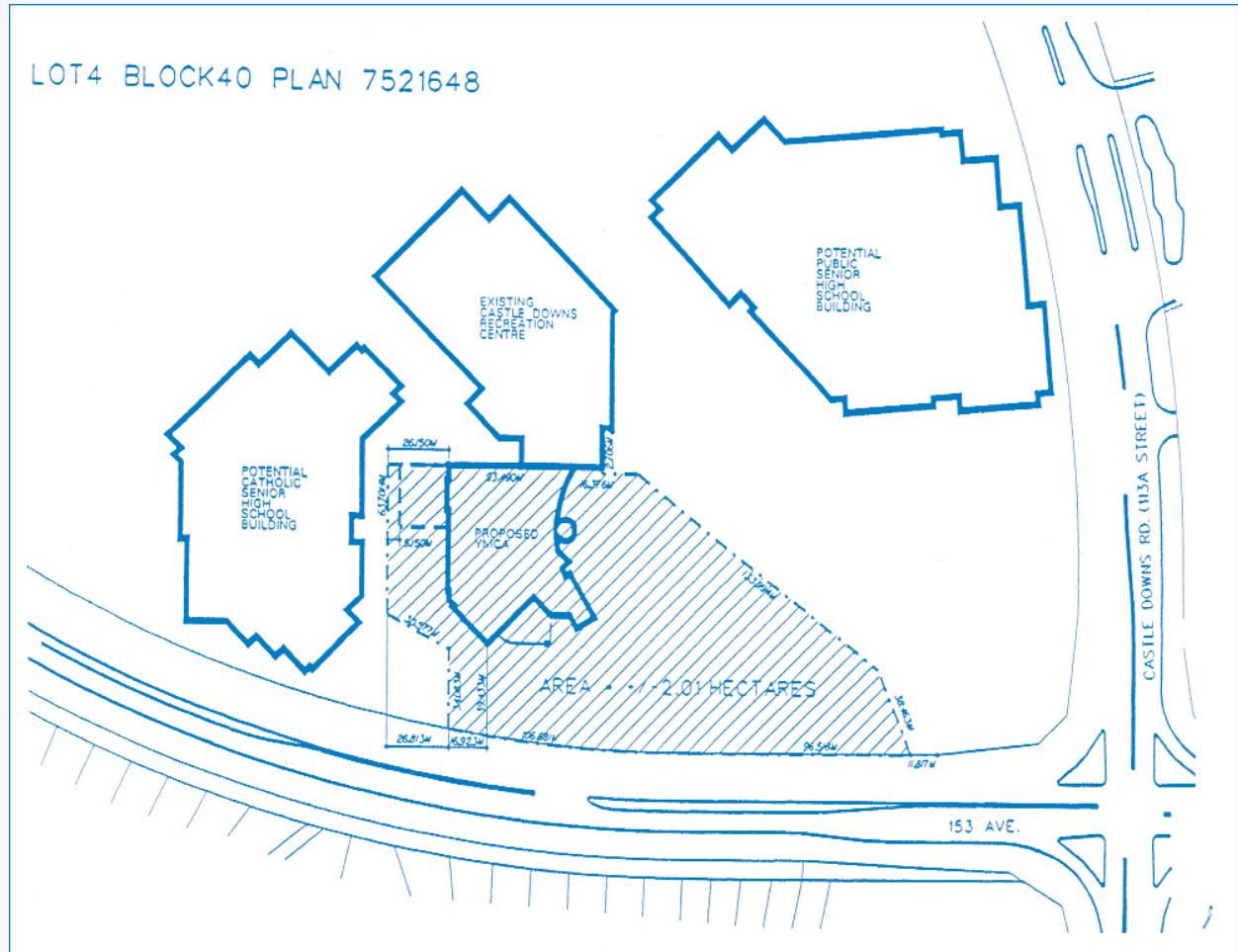
Appendix III

Study Area and North Side Senior High Attendance Areas



Appendix IV

Site Plan



Appendix V

Construction Cost Estimates: Senior High Schools

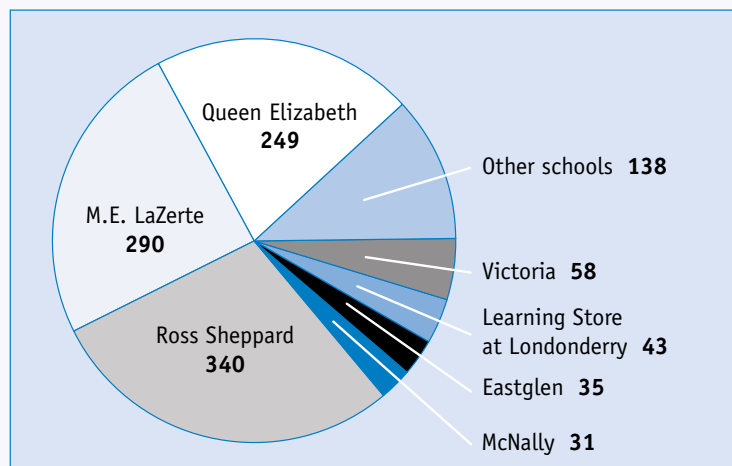
	\$/Metre	Gross Area	Construction Cost	Consultant's Fees	Consultants Expenses (2%)	Furniture & Equipment (9%)	Total Cost
600 Capacity	1380	5356	\$ 7,391,280.00	\$ 646,737.0000	\$ 147,825.60	\$ 665,215.20	\$ 8,851,058
1400 Capacity	1380	11770	\$ 16,242,600.00	\$ 1,312,402.08	\$ 324,852.00	\$ 1,461,834.00	\$ 19,341,688
1500 Capacity	1380	12424	\$ 17,145,120.00	\$ 1,385,325.70	\$ 342,902.40	\$ 1,543,060.80	\$ 20,416,409
2000 Capacity	1380	16827	\$ 23,221,260.00	\$ 1,876,277.81	\$ 464,425.20	\$ 2,089,913.40	\$ 27,651,876

Source: Alberta Infrastructure: School Capital Manual, April, 2002

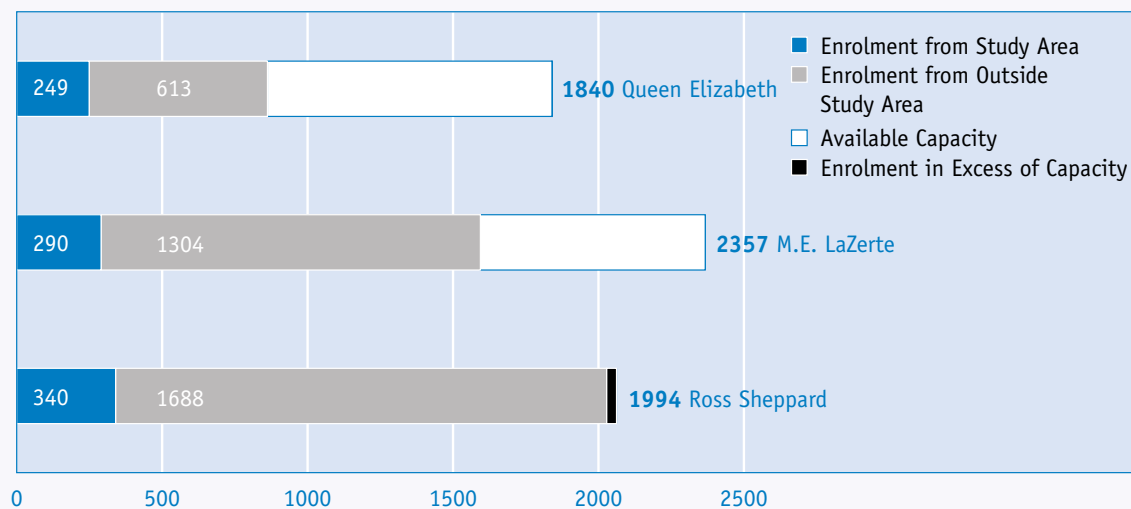
Appendix VI

Attendance, Residency and Enrolment Patterns

High Schools Attended by Public Students Residing in the Study Area (1184 Students)

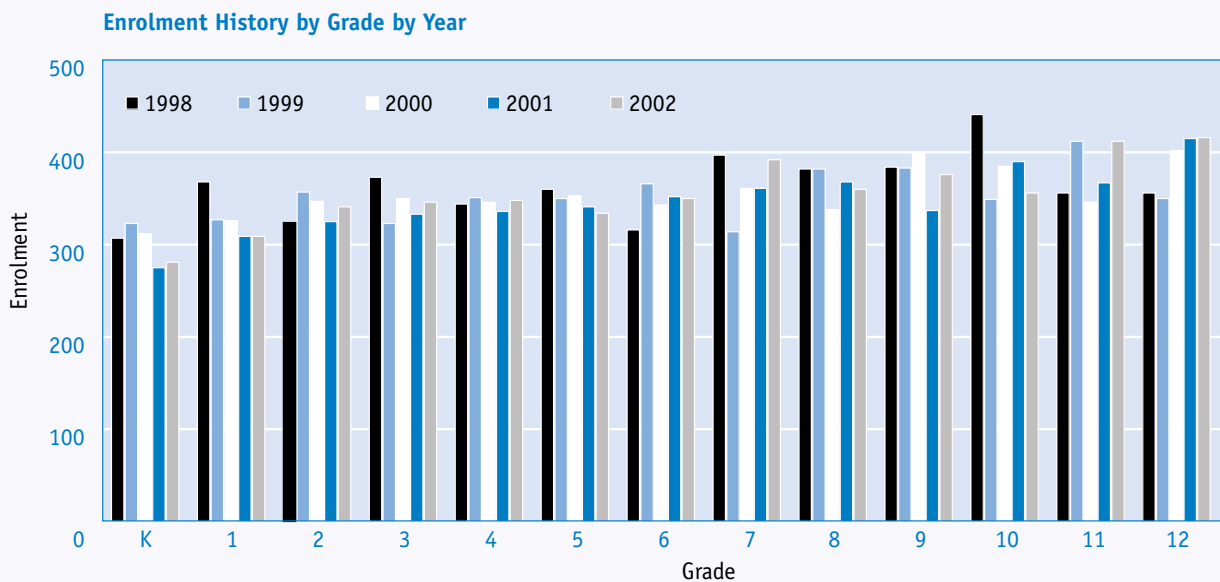


Capacities and Enrolments of the Main Senior High Schools Serving the Study Area



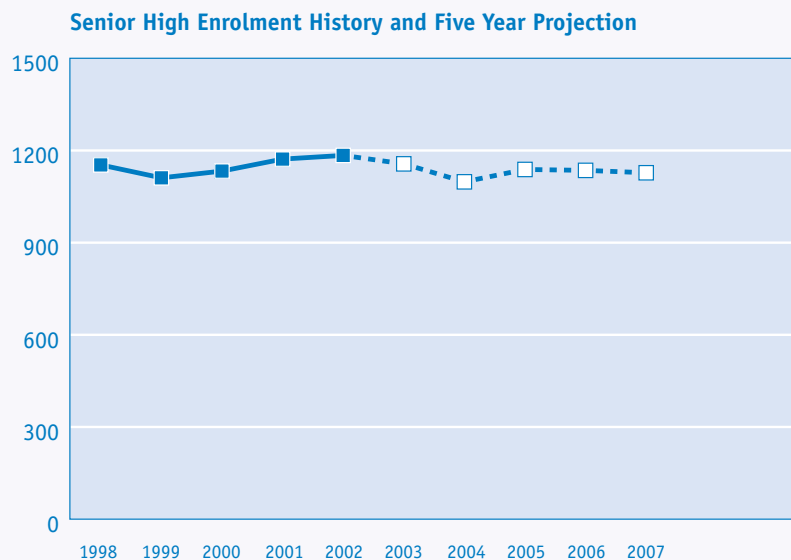
Appendix VII

Enrolment History of Students by Grade and Year



Appendix VIII

Senior High Enrolment History and Five Year Projection





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