

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

March 9, 2010

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: D. Barrett, Acting for Superintendent of Schools
B. Coggles, Acting for Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Response to Board Request for Information

ORIGINATOR: T. Parker, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE
STAFF: Lorne Parker

INFORMATION

BOARD REQUEST #273, FEBRUARY 9, 2010: PROVIDE PREVIOUSLY GATHERED INFORMATION REGARDING THE EXPERIENCES OF THOSE STUDENTS WHO TRANSITIONED FROM A CLOSED SCHOOL. Following the closure of North Edmonton School and the relocation of the K-6 students to Balwin School, no formal process was used to gauge the perceptions of students, staff or parents. The process of a formal follow up was initiated by the Planning Department following the closures of Newton and High Park schools in 2007. Response to Trustee Request #326, September 11, 2007 providing a summary of the process, as well as the *Sustainability Review Survey Results* follow up report is provided in Attachment I.

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ATTACHMENT I: Response to Trustee Request #326, September 11, 2007 and Sustainability Review Survey Results

RESPONSE TO TRUSTEE REQUEST #326 SEPTEMBER 11, 2007 (TRUSTEE KEIVER) PROVIDE INFORMATION REGARDING THE EDUCATIONAL AND OPERATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOLS MOST RECENTLY HAVING UNDERGONE CLOSURE AND THE RESULTING RE-DESIGNATION OF STUDENTS, INCLUDING WHAT PLANS ARE IN PLACE FOR DEBRIEFING STAFF, PARENTS AND POSSIBLY STUDENTS TO LEARN WHAT PROCESSES MAY NEED IMPROVEMENT AND HOW WE PLAN TO USE THAT INFORMATION? As a result of the closure of High Park School, students in the former High Park School attendance area were designated to Mayfield School. A total of 38 of the 71 students registered at Mayfield School. Twenty-eight other students registered at a total of thirteen other district schools, five former students are not registered at any district school.

Montrose School received 42 of the 91 students from Newton School, with seven students moving to the newly created Opportunity District Centre program at Overlanders School. An additional twenty-six students registered at seventeen district schools and fifteen former students are not registered at any district school.

Planning is preparing a survey for distribution to parents and staff at the schools that underwent closure. This survey will be used to identify successes and challenges resulting from the process followed to close Newton and High Park schools. In addition, principals of both the closed and receiving schools will be interviewed. The information gathered through these surveys and interviews will be used to guide and refine the sustainability review and school closure procedures in the future.

SUSTAINABILITY REVIEW SURVEY RESULTS: Attached are copies of the January 2008 survey results from parents, staff and principals of schools that underwent sustainability reviews in the 2006-2007 school year. Survey results include the emerging themes from the written responses and personal interviews conducted as part of the survey. Community members are involved in the study and their data will be reported as soon as it becomes available.

Sustainability Review and School Closure Process Survey

Process

In January of 2008, parents, staff, and principals of the schools involved in Sustainability Reviews during the 2006-2007 school year were surveyed to obtain feedback on the Sustainability Review, School Closure, and post closure processes and the effects of each on the students, staff and principals of those schools.

In 2006-2007, there were nine schools in the district selected for sustainability review: Coronation, Grovenor, High Park, Lendrum, Mill Creek/Ritchie, Montrose, Mount Pleasant, Mount Royal, and Newton. There were four general outcomes from the sustainability reviews:

- two school closures
- two regular programs closures
- three new program focuses
- two schools remained status quo with designation as receiving schools.

The wording in the surveys reflected the outcome of the Sustainability Reviews at each school.

Parents of students who are currently registered in the district were sent letters to their home via Canada Post. They were asked to complete a hand written survey and return it via a pre-paid envelope. Staff who are currently on contract with Edmonton Public Schools were surveyed based on the school they were assigned to in the previous year. Staff members from custodial and support groups were included in the survey.

Nine principals who were assigned to the schools that underwent sustainability reviews were surveyed, as well as personally interviewed. Three other principals who were at receiving schools, or were assigned in the current year as principal to a school that was under review the previous year were also interviewed.

	Parents	Staff	Principals
Sent	619	134	9
Received	74	54	9
Percent response	12%	40%	100%

The complete results of the survey questions can be viewed in Appendix 1.

Analysis of Survey Results

The following are highlights of the survey questions:

- Parents, Staff and Principals had a good understanding of the processes used for School Sustainability Reviews and School Closure.
- The student enrolment history and school program information provided for sustainability reviews was beneficial to their understanding of the need for the school reviews.
- School newsletters, district information sheets, and public information meetings were considered the most effective means of communicating to parents about the school sustainability reviews.
- Parents did not feel they received adequate notice about being under review, while staff and principals stated they did receive adequate notice.
- Parents, staff and principals believed that the outcomes of the sustainability reviews benefitted the learning experience of their students.
- The majority of parents, staff, and principals felt they were provided the opportunity to express their opinion during the review process, but that their participation was not meaningful.
- The majority of parents believed that the end result of the physical transition from their closed school to their current school was not positive.

Emerging Themes

The following themes were summarized from the survey comments and interviews of parents, staff and principals.

Sustainability and School Closure Processes:

- The district support for administration and staff was consistent throughout the sustainability reviews and school closure process. Communication between central administration and Principals was timely and helpful.
- Parents, community and staff require greater access to a wider range of data used for the sustainability review process.
- Students are benefiting from changes due to sustainability review outcomes:
 - Single grade class grouping
 - Increased adult supervision
 - Increased access to teacher aides
 - Increased support for special needs students
 - Increased opportunities for extra curricular activities
 - Increased opportunities for curricular enrichment activities (i.e. field trips and learning technology)
- The school review process should have a clearly defined rationale and purpose with outlined goals, timelines, and potential outcomes.
- The role of each group of participants should be clarified and their degree of influence should be stated from the onset.
- Participation of staff and parents in the sustainability review process was perceived as unable to affect the outcome of the process. The scenario development step in the process was frustrating for staff and parents.

Post Closure Decision:

- The district support for administration and staff broke down when the supports were spread among the various departments facilitating the school transitions. Cross departmental communication made it difficult to get messages and tasks organized efficiently.
- Costs associated with the closure of schools are an additional burden on the closing schools and receiving schools (i.e.: packing boxes, moving expenses, clean up, supply staff time).
- Communication between parents, staff and administration of the closing school and the administration of the receiving school varied in its effectiveness. If the communication was deemed to be positive, it corresponded to a positive transition between schools.
- Some parents of students who were transferred from closed schools/programs expressed negative consequences relating to re-socialization at the new school and a drop in achievement levels.
- The decision to make changes to the school is taken out of the hands of the staff. This appears to be a source of high stress and anxiety. The sustainability review affected staff in different ways:
 - additional stress in their roles with parents and some students,
 - helped staff to develop a team focus on their educational work in the reviewed schools,
 - helped staff to refocus their teaching in new assignments, and,
 - staff gave personal time to pack and unpack.

Recommendations

School Sustainability Review & School Closure Process Recommendations:

- All data collected or referenced in the Sustainability Review Process should be easily available to all parents, community, and staff. This may include informational newsletters sent home to parents or postings on the district website.
- Data presented should include the costs associated with educating one regular program student (staff, school maintenance, material costs, etc.)
- District administration should clearly define the level of involvement that parents and community are to have in the determination of the outcome.
- Coordinators of parent and community involvement should be from a department other than the EPSB Planning Department staff.
- Positive anecdotal accounts of students and staff involved in school closure should be collected and shared with parents of students involved in future school closures.
- Planning staff should create the school scenarios and present them to the Parents, Staff, and Community for their review and discussion.
- Costs associated with running smaller schools should be shown on the profile for each benchmark. (i.e.: Extra grants or allocations awarded to the school as well as PO&M costs versus revenue.)

Post School Closure Decision Recommendations:

- One district staff should be designated as the key contact for support of staff and administration through all phases of the school sustainability and school closure processes, up to the time the students, staff, materials, and equipment are transferred to their next school.
- A procedure manual should be developed which includes checklists of closure tasks, complete with who is responsible for the task, the timeline, and assignment of any associated costs.
- A one time allocation, based on the size of the closing school, should be provided to each closing school to cover the costs of additional teacher supply time and labour involved in closing the school under the current timelines.
- Meetings between the staff and administration of both the closing school/program and the receiving school should be scheduled for May and June to assist in the planning for student transitions.
- Staff should be kept informed throughout the process, and following any decision to close requires a range of supports including emotional, as well as time and resources to allow for the packing of staff classroom materials and belongings.
- Grieving is part of the school closure process. Following a decision to close, students, staff and parents should be provided district support for one year.

The information gathered through these surveys and interviews will be used to guide and refine the Sustainability Review and post - school closure procedures in the future. This information will also be shared with other district departments involved in the school Sustainability and post school closure processes.

In closing, it is to be noted that the communities of the two schools involved in school closures have also been identified for involvement in the survey process. Their results have not been included at this time, but will be forwarded when that process is complete.

Survey Questions:

1. Rate your overall knowledge and understanding of the Sustainability Review Process:

Responses:	excellent	good	fair	poor
Principals	6	5		
Staff	7	30	14	2
Parents	19	32	14	10

2. If your school was involved in a School Closure Process, please rate your overall knowledge and understanding of the School Closure Process:

Responses:	excellent	good	fair	poor
Principals	3	2		
Staff	2	7	3	
Parents	3	5	1	5

3. Would you agree that the district information on student enrolment history and programming was beneficial in helping you understand the necessity for a Sustainability Review Process at your school?

Responses:	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
Principals	7	1	1	
Staff	5	36	6	4
Parents	6	34	17	14

4. What would you consider the most effective means to provide parents with information about the School Sustainability Review Process? Please rank from 1 (most effective) to 8 (least effective).

Responses:	Principals	Staff	Parents	
	1	1	2	Public meetings
	2	2	1	School newsletter/district communications
	8	8	8	EPSB Planning Department website
	4	4	4	Direct contact with Trustees and/or Principals
	5	6	3	E-mail letters to parents
	6	7	6	TV media /newspaper
	3	3	5	Community letters/flyers
	7	5	7	Posters in schools
				Other

6. Do you feel you were given adequate notice about the Sustainability Review Process in the previous school year (2006-07)?

Responses:	Enough	Not enough
Principals	6	3
Staff	36	16
Parents	25	42

7. Do you agree that the Sustainability Review Process and its outcome has benefited the learning experience of your child/students?

Responses:	strong agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
Principals	5	1	1	
Staff	8	19	7	8
Parents	8	27	11	16

8. Do you feel you were given an opportunity to express your opinion during the Sustainability Review Process?

Responses:	Yes	No
Principals	7	2
Staff	32	20
Parents	48	15

9. STAFF & PARENTS ONLY - How meaningful do you believe your participation was in the Sustainability Review Process?

Responses:	excellent	good	fair	poor
Staff	2	10	20	21
Parents	8	11	25	24

10. STAFF ONLY - If you were reassigned as a result of the Regular Program/School Closure, how would you rate your transition from _____ School to your current school?

Responses:	excellent	good	fair	poor
Staff	1	6	3	5

11. PARENTS OF CLOSED SCHOOLS/PROGRAMS ONLY - Do you agree that the end result of the transition from _____ School to your child's current school has been positive?

Responses:	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
Parents	2	2	7	6

The following questions required written responses and were included in the thematic summaries provided previously.

Q: What further information would have been useful to better understand why a school or program was being considered for closure related to the Sustainability Review Process?

Q: Are there any additional actions or considerations that you feel could have been taken by EPSB to provide additional opportunities for participation in the Sustainability Review Process and/or School Closure Process?