

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 27, 2003

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Bellevue School Closure

ORIGINATOR: A. Habinski, Executive Director School and District Services

RESOURCE

STAFF: Jenise Bidulock, Michael Ediger, Pat Fizell, Andrea Furness, Pat Niven, Don Pomfrey, Gerri Porter, Pat Semeniuk, Amy-Irene Seward, Morrie Smith

RECOMMENDATION

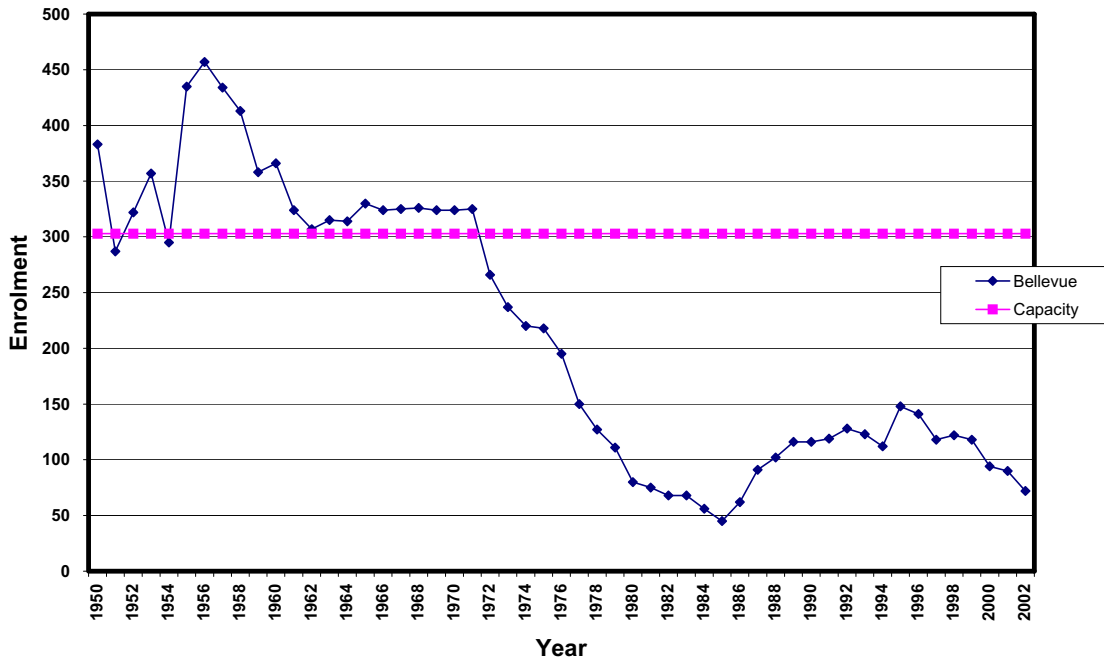
That the closure of Bellevue School at the end of the 2002-2003 school year be approved.

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Rationale for Recommending Closure

Bellevue School has a capacity for 303 students and according to the September 30, 2002 enrolment count there were 72 students attending Bellevue. This represents a provincial utilization rate of 24%. Enrolment at Bellevue has been declining steadily since 1995. In September, Kindergarten students were relocated to Mount Royal for the current school year. These students would probably remain at Mount Royal for grade one, resulting in Bellevue accommodating only grades two to six for the 2003 – 2004 school years. The enrolment projection for Bellevue for September 2003 is 55 students which represents a space utilization of 18%.

Bellevue - Capacity and Enrolment Trend



The chart below, indicates that the combined enrolment at Bellevue, Montrose and Mount Royal Schools is far less than the available capacity. The total capacity for the three schools is 996 student spaces and the enrolment is 326 students. Although it is difficult to determine the census data for this area because the city neighbourhood boundaries are different than the district’s attendance boundaries, we do know that the number of pre-school age children living in this area of Edmonton has declined slightly while the number of elementary age children has remained stable. Although, Edmonton Public Schools has attracted many of the students living in this area, there is far more space available in the schools than children to fill the space.

Capacity, Provincial Utilization and Historical Enrolment of Schools in the Bellevue Area

School	Capacity	Utilization	2002 Enrolment	2001	2000	1999	1998
Bellevue	303	24%	72	90	94	118	122
Mount Royal	310	55%	122	114	137	125	139
Montrose	383	45%	132	177	161	160	168
Total Elementary	996		326	381	392	403	429

This pattern is not unique to the Bellevue neighbourhood or this area of Edmonton. Many of the older neighbourhoods in Edmonton were developed in the 1950’s, at a time when the birth rate was relatively high and the population could support a school in each neighbourhood. Furthermore, the Bellevue attendance area encompasses Wayne Gretzky

Drive and Northlands Park, which were constructed after Bellevue School was built and as a result the number of residential units in the Bellevue attendance area has decreased slightly.

Bellevue School is eligible for closure according to board policy FL.BP (Appendix IV), which allows the board of trustees the authority to close an entire school when the provincial utilization rate as of September 30, in the current school year is less than 40 per cent or when the September 30, enrolment is below an average of 15 students per grade. Even if all the students who live in the Bellevue neighbourhood and attend public schools were to enrol in the school, the utilization rate would be 33 per cent. The district will realize the following annual savings by closing the school; \$101,393 for the multiple program allocation, \$19,553 for maintenance and \$47,395 for utilities. The Plant Operation and Maintenance Grant funding would be increased by approximately \$2000 if the school were closed.

Accommodation of Bellevue Students

There are currently 101 public elementary students living within the Bellevue attendance area. Only 44 of these students attend Bellevue School. Of the remaining 57 students, seven attend Montrose School, six attend Mount Royal School 10 attend Virginia Park school and the remaining 34 are spread among 21 other district schools.

The attendance areas for Montrose, Mount Royal and Virginia Park are adjacent to the Bellevue attendance area. Of these three schools Montrose has a provincial utilization rate of 45% and Mount Royal has a provincial utilization rate of 55%, indicating that both have space to accommodate all the public elementary students living in the Bellevue attendance area. Virginia Park has a provincial utilization rate of 97%, therefore, could not accommodate all the students living in the Bellevue attendance area.

To best serve students living in the Bellevue attendance area it has been determined that a dual designation to Montrose or Mount Royal would be appropriate as the receiving schools. Both schools are in close proximity to the Bellevue attendance area and both have space to accommodate all the students if required. Yellow bus transportation would be provided to both schools from the Bellevue attendance area for students attending Bellevue School at no cost to the parents.

Consultation

Two public meetings were held to receive input from parents and residents. The first meeting was held on March 20, to receive input from the Bellevue community about concerns regarding Bellevue School and options for the future of the school. Twenty-three parents and residents from Bellevue attended the meeting in which district staff provided information about Bellevue School. Opportunity was given to ask questions and raise issues and concerns. Questions were answered by the administration and provided to those interested.

The second meeting was held in accordance with the School Act (Appendix III), on April 10, to provide information and receive input regarding the closure of Bellevue School. Thirty-six community members and parents were present, as well as five trustees and district staff. Attendees were provided with information about the implications of the closure for the students, the community, and the district, the implications of keeping the school open, and

information about the implementation of closure (Appendix I). Opportunity was given to ask questions and raise issues and concerns. Questions were answered by the administration at the meeting, and follow-up summary of questions and answers from the meeting was subsequently mailed to those in attendance (Appendix II). This letter also informed parents of the May 27, 2003 Public Board meeting.

The following is a summary of other concerns and perceptions that were expressed after the public meeting through emails, letters, delegation to the Board of Trustees at the May 13, 2003 Board meeting and telephone conversations with parents and community members:

- Edmonton Public Schools has not done an adequate job ensuring the viability of the school and should implement a special needs program or an alternative program to boost enrolment.
- There are many houses for sale in the Bellevue neighbourhood and young families with children are moving in, which will result in increased enrolment.
- Without a neighbourhood school, property values will fall because it will be seen as a less desirable place to live.
- What would be done with the Parent Council money if the school were to close?

The following information is provided in response to these concerns.

The declining enrolment at Bellevue School is due to a shift in population demographics. The population in Edmonton is growing, however the average age is increasing, and the number of children is decreasing. The enrolment at Edmonton Public Schools has increased slightly, and is projected to remain stable. Consequently, adding a special needs program or an alternative program to a school with low enrolment does not attract new students to the district, rather it simply relocates students from one school to another school without changing the overall space utilization in the district where we have 112,000 student spaces to accommodate 79,000 FTE students.

Edmonton Public Schools determines the need for new locations for alternative programs and special needs programs based on student demand. The district prefers to accommodate the demand for special needs programs within existing district sites in order to maximize existing resources such as facilities, staff and transportation. Alternative programs are located in a school that is geographically central to the students who want to access the program. The school must also be large enough to accommodate all the students in the regular program and in the alternative program. In the past five years there has not been a demand for additional locations for special needs or alternative programs in the Bellevue area. It is neither practical nor acceptable to parents to have their children bussed long distances when schools in closer proximity are available.

Some community members and parents recommended that Bellevue become a district site for speech and languages, an International Baccalaureate program for primary education, or a music and an academic program. Currently, the district does not offer a speech and language program, rather it depends on Capital Health to provide this service to students as required. Alternative programs, including music, academic and the International Baccalaureate program are guided by students need.

The administration does not believe that a significant number of additional students would be attracted to the local neighbourhood school to make it viable whether the program was a regular program or an alternative program. Compared to newer neighbourhoods in Edmonton, Bellevue neighbourhood is in close proximity to a number of schools, and travel times would be relatively short to other designated schools.

Any money that has been raised by the parent council and is not spent by the end of the school year will be distributed among the schools the students choose to attend. This money must be used for its mutually intended purpose, regardless of how it is distributed.

Input from the City of Edmonton

The City of Edmonton was invited to comment on potential community impacts of the proposed closure of Bellevue School. The following is a summary of their impact statement: “Bellevue School closure would have no impact on community programs held in the school since one program will end and the other can be moved to another location at the end of this year. Eastglen cheerleading squad would need to find another practice location. There would be reduced use of sportsfields during the day if Bellevue closed. Parkland size would not be affected unless the school was declared surplus and the land purchased for parkland. In that case, the neighbourhood’s deficiency in parkland could be reduced.”

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APPENDIX I – Notice of Meeting

APPENDIX II – Questions and Answers from the April 10, Public Meeting

APPENDIX III – School Act Requirements for school Closure

APPENDIX IV – Board Policy FL.BP School Closure