

3. What questions do you need answered for the Fall Community Meetings?

- Do schools fit in with municipality plans?

Working with the municipal planners and consultants, the SD developed a long range facilities plan. The Matrix report is on the SD website. Municipal planners and SD staff informally review these long term plans annually.

- Has the District and Board expressed displeasure with government legislation?

Many times in many venues. Our District has been very vocal as has the Secretary-Treasurers' Association and BC School Trustees' Association. The last time the School District met with senior government officials on funding was this past April.

- Are we putting needs of kids first over the all mighty dollar?

The Board of Education and staff always consider the needs of students having paramount importance.

- Is there going to be a closure?

The Board does not yet know whether there will be a closure in the Milne's Landing Zone. The findings of this Public process will inform the direction for the next Board.

- Concentrate on building first; then move into new school.

The ideal scenario would always see a new school being built prior to closing an existing school.

- Will/have you considered reviewing the catchment areas and reconfiguring?

The district regularly reviews catchment areas as the population shifts to various parts of the community. In looking at the issues in the Milnes landing zone, catchment areas and potential reconfigurations will be considered during the process.

- Can we canvass new developments to determine real needs (accurate demographics)?

This was done and is indicated in the Matrix Report 2007 update. The SD has retained the same consultant to work with Sooke planners and developers to update the new development data which will be available in late August or early Sept. As well, in October we will have the updated Baragar Demographics analysis of our enrollment for the current school year.

- Will after school care be considered?

After school care space is provided in many of our elementary schools to independent child care providers who pay for classroom use.

- What are the chances of the legislation changing?

Only the Provincial government has the ability to change legislation. It is impossible for us to determine whether the funding formula will change in the future.

- What is the cost of a new school vs. upgrading existing buildings?

Costs are specific to each building condition and site. The consultants business case presented last year indicated that the cost to complete minimum seismic, roof, mechanical upgrades to extend the building life 15 years for Saseenos and Sooke schools was in the order of \$2.85M each while the cost of a new school would be in the order of \$6.3M excluding fees. These costs will have to increase significantly to allow for inflation.

- Is new construction a financially viable option?

Similar to major home renovations new construction is the most cost effective to attain major savings in utilities and reduced maintenance. New construction ensures that all building systems, (mechanical, ventilation, electrical, emergency, disabled access) and structure (windows, walls, roof, etc.) is constructed to the current building code and not a percentage of current code. This is the most relevant factor if a new school building is going to be used as a community emergency shelter during a seismic event.

- Where do students go during transition?

If a school were to close prior to opening another facility, students would be housed in existing spaces within the remaining schools. Depending on which school closed, there is capacity in the other schools to accommodate all students.

- Can you provide accurate demographics for now and the future?

Currently in process by demographic consultant. See previous question answer.

- Why no new high school in the zone?

The future population projection supports and addition to EMCS, but not a new school.

- Could French Immersion return to Saseenos?

Yes.

- Is there truly a need for a new school driven by Sun River development?

The updated demographic analysis now in progress will determine this.

- Why are meetings same night as Journey PAC meeting?

The Public Forum meeting was scheduled on the same night as Journey by accident. As one might appreciate, it is near impossible to prevent all meeting night conflicts; however, in the fall, all efforts will be made to ensure there is no PAC meeting conflicts.

- Why did Ministry of Education deem playgrounds unsafe and then not have money to replace them?

The Ministry of Education did not deem the playgrounds unsafe, the insurers did. Our staff is trained to review and remove unsafe equipment.

- Why is our Board not putting more pressure on Ministry of Ed. for more funding (schools, playgrounds, etc.)?

The Board constantly lobbies the Ministry for more funding and shows the inadequacy of funding. Playground equipment has always been the responsibility of PACs. The School District assists in selection and cost of installation.

- Why does it appear that there is pressure to close small rural schools and consolidate into larger urban schools?

It could be seen this way because of the government funding formula and how the school population affects the amount of operating funds available to keep the school open. If the school is too small and it does not receive funding targeted for remote areas, then schools whose enrolment drops below 180-200 have operating costs significantly greater than the funding received.

- Is there going to be a school at Sun River?

Currently, the Board has a school site in the Sun River development, but no planning or building funds from the Provincial Government.

- What kind of notice process will be given if a school is closed?

If the Board of Education is going to consider a school closure it must pass a motion (in public) giving notice and the timeline for the process cannot be any less than 60 days.

- What can we explore to keep schools open and vibrant?

The Board has looked at outside partners renting spaces within buildings; however, at the moment, these rental agreements do not cover the additional expenses of operating very small schools.

- Is it the District's intention that, in order to accomplish Q1 and Q2, we need a 350-student school? Or can Q1 and Q2 be accomplished in existing schools?

The greatest potential for the educational outcomes to be accomplished can generally be found in schools that have 250-350 students enrolled. This is not a hard and fast rule, because there are so many other factors that affect the best environment for student learning. The Board is seeking public input on what the community believes it desires for our students and to what extent that will affect decisions about school size.

- Real information regarding small school, very small school and large?

There is a wealth of articles addressing this question. We will provide access to representative articles on the website for you to review.

- Would like to see an even-handed presentation on different options.

We trust that will be the result of this consultation process.

- What do we give up to have a small school?

While there are many positive attributes of small schools, and most of our schools are considered small schools, there are some challenges with "very small" (less than 180) schools. These challenges generally refer to flexibility in student placement (i.e. the number of combined classes and no choice for a certain grade other than one class); the number of staff available to offer extracurricular and athletics opportunities; and smaller amounts of support time available to students outside of the classroom teacher.

- What, if any, building sites are being looked at?

We have to work with the sites we have. At this time we do not anticipate receiving funding from the Provincial Government for construction or land purchase.

- Are there interested users for existing sites? What are possible uses?

As the result of this process, there may be sites available. We know of one potential interest in one site. We are not advising until the community forum draws to a close. Possible uses for any site could be virtually anything, providing the local town supports that.

- We can recycle/reuse existing sites.

Yes, at this time we can reuse/or reinvent any site.

- What does "belonging" look like in schools?

Student's sense of belonging is a subjective quality which is self-reported by the student. We know that we cannot directly impact this value, but hope to achieve student belonging through the creation of a welcoming school, that engages and interests students and has the programs that invites participation.

- When are we looking at building a new school?

As soon as we can attain funding approval from the Provincial Government. That would be determined by the Province after the consultation process.

- What is appropriate size?

Research generally supports the "ideal school size" for elementary schools to be in the range of 250-350 students.

- Do we need another school?

The updating demographic analysis currently in process will determine this.

- What is the saw-off safety (earthquake) with respect to windows?

The building walls and structure support the windows. The seismic upgrading of buildings typically is not done to the code of the day but typically attains a large percentage of current code requirements.

- Do we want buildings and grounds for community or only school use?

The Board is always interested in expanding the use of school facilities with the community. The primary responsibility for maintaining school properties remains with the Board.

- Is it possible to have French Immersion only school? (staff, etc.)

Yes, it is possible to have a French Immersion school. The Board would have to determine (with community input) that this option would be to the greatest benefit to all students.

- What about K-3 school?

The school district did have a K-3 school some years ago; however, with decreasing student enrollment it was consolidated with a 4-7 school. This configuration is possible provided that the overall size of the school enrollment supports the school operational costs.

- Impact of MOE policy re full day K/4s/3s?

The MOE is studying the practice of full day kindergarten and other preschool options with recommendations coming forth in January 2009 regarding costs and space. Those recommendations will be known in late spring, based on funding options and Ministry policy direction. Already, StrongStarts are funded separately from the regular operating budget, and space is usually provided in vacant school space.

- Should schools which are presently under-utilized be "moth-balled" or saved for later use?

Alternatives should be reviewed and evaluated with the value being utilized to proceed with the best option for the students and the facilities.

- Are schools up to the fire code?

All buildings, including schools conforming to the code of the day when the building permit was issued. All school fire detection, emergency lighting systems, are well maintained and tested regularly. All schools are reviewed annually by an outside agency to ensure risks to students and staff are well managed. Not all schools have fire sprinkler systems or fire walls and framing stops to prevent the spread of fire. This is not a code requirement.

- \$450 million was the Provincial budget - it was cut \$250 million? Where did that money go?

The Provincial Education budget is \$4.5 billion. There have been pressures for adult education and summer school, and some money was removed from school district discretionary spending, causing local cutbacks.

- Has the District hired a demographer?

Yes, see more detailed answer in a previous question.

- How much money is the District willing to throw out regarding the gathering of school information?

The gathering of information is critical to judicious decision-making. Without good data, we cannot develop good solutions. Money is customarily spent on appraisals, engineering reports on existing buildings and gathering student demographics, present and future.

- Does the District look at individual school numbers before making the decision of school closures?

The district looks carefully at individual school numbers and takes great pains to engage consultants to look at projections of up to 10 years before considering any school closure or consolidation. We also look at proximity to other schools, such as Port Renfrew, Willway and Hans Helgesen, where there are no other schools within a reasonable traveling distance.

- Does the School District have to have enough room in another school before closing a school? Is the goal without using portables?

Staff always recommends moving students into permanent structures rather than portables. The current cost of new portables and the prohibitive cost of moving and hooking up portables often come close to building permanent structures.

- Permanent space.
- Where will there be a large enough green space to house another school if a school closes in the town core? Without having to bus students?

SD will review options.

- Is it possible to build a new school on the Sooke Elementary property while keeping the old school open?

Yes, it will be considered as part of the process.

- When will the Sun River school be open?

Currently the Board owns the land, but does not have planning or building money for a new school at Sun River. The Ministry funds schools and currently there is excess capacity in the zone, and therefore no need to build a new school.

- What is the deciding factor for closing a school?

There is not one deciding factor. Many factors have to be considered when reviewing alternative options. Some of the more important facility factors are: student enrolment present and future, number of vacant classrooms, condition of the school site and building, will required upgrades cost large percentage of a new building. utility and maintenance costs, etc.

There are many educational factors that must be considered as well. An example of this would be a consolidation of schools providing different opportunities at each grade level for student placement that optimizes their learning. Another example is the greater flexibility that may be obtained by having a larger student support services staff in a consolidated school, therefore being better able to tailor programs for student needs.

- Is this true? - The government has a certain number of dollars to put towards a school - Does the School District have to match this amount?

No. However sometimes school districts need to fund or co-fund from capital funds construction projects if they want them to go ahead.

- Why was this process not done in October?

The Board decided to focus on the Glen Lake Elementary school closure process in the Fall, Winter and Spring of this year. It delayed implementation of the process to consider issues in the Milnes Landing Zone.

- Is there a decision already made for school closures?

No. The Board made no decisions regarding school closures in the Milnes Landing Zone.

- The history behind Sooke Elementary is very important. Does the historical background hold any weight when decisions are made?

Many factors are considered in the decision to close any school. Community significance is one element that the Board may consider.

- Is the Board's goal to merge two schools into one? OR how many? Which ones?

The Board has yet to make a decision. It is looking for a solution that involves maintaining programs for students as well as ensuring choice for parents and students.

- Why can you not build new schools on existing school sites?

We can and have done. Colwood Elementary is just that. Sooke Elementary could be rebuilt on the back of the property. EMCS was rebuilt on its site.