

EIPS Frequently Asked Questions

JAMES MOWAT ELEMENTARY | ENROLMENT PRESSURES

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FAQS: JAMES MOWAT ELEMENTARY ENROLMENT PRESSURES

INTRODUCTION

Elk Island Public Schools (EIPS) is exploring how best to manage the student growth and enrolment pressures at James Mowat Elementary.

In June 2022, EIPS contracted Y Station Communications and Research to conduct public consultations with the James Mowat school community. Two in-person public consultation sessions were held. Attendees learned details about the enrolment issues, discussed possible solutions, asked questions and provided feedback. Y Station also conducted an online survey to collect additional input, which it used to produce a [What We Heard Report \(bit.ly/3NEBRvD\)](https://bit.ly/3NEBRvD).

The following are the frequently asked questions (FAQ) from the June engagement efforts.

General

Q: Why is EIPS consulting James Mowat Elementary's school community?

A: As part of the Division's annual reporting requirements to Alberta Education, the Division reviews programs, enrolment transitions and boundaries every year. When areas of concern are identified, the Division works to determine how best to resolve the issue. In the case of James Mowat Elementary, the school is operating at full capacity, despite adding another modular classroom this year. Currently, there's no more room on the school site for additional modular classrooms—the city owns the surrounding land.

As new families move into the Westpark area, EIPS anticipates enrolment pressures to continue at James Mowat. As such, the Division must address the issue to prevent programming challenges related to program delivery, classroom use and accommodating students with special needs. To determine the best solution, EIPS is seeking feedback from the school community.

Q: What's the school's occupancy limit?

A: School divisions don't use fire occupancy limits to determine how many students a school can accommodate. That's because the limit only applies to a school gymnasium. Instead, divisions use school capacity, set by the province. Annually, Alberta Education reviews each school's capacity number using a formula that considers the building's available instructional space, area per student and grade configurations. At James Mowat Elementary, the school capacity is 406 students, which includes the building and modular classroom.

Q: How many spaces does James Mowat Elementary need to find to accommodate students next year?

A: It's difficult to provide an exact number until after the returning student registration process in February. That said, James Mowat Elementary's current utilization rate is at 103 per cent. So, that means the school is completely full. Looking ahead, for the next three years, enrolment projections predict the school needs to create 15 more student spaces, per year, to accommodate all those living in James Mowat's attendance area.

Q: [How can we get the City of Fort Saskatchewan involved?](#)

A: The City of Fort Saskatchewan continues to work with EIPS on an ongoing basis. The two meet regularly to discuss mutual matters. In terms of the enrolment pressures at James Mowat Elementary, the city is limited in how they can help as funding comes from the provincial level. A replacement school is listed as Priority 3 on the EIPS' [Three-Year Capital Plan 2023-26](#). However, the province needs to approve funding for a replacement school, which will likely take years.

Q: [Can the school community fundraise the cost to address the enrolment-pressure issue at James Mowat Elementary?](#)

A: No. Fundraising can't address the enrolment pressures at James Mowat Elementary. A replacement school is listed as Priority 3 on the EIPS' [Three-Year Capital Plan 2023-26](#). A new school, with a larger capacity, will help address the growing population in Fort Saskatchewan. However, the province needs to approve funding for a replacement school, which will likely take years. Once a replacement school is approved, there are fundraising opportunities for the community, for example, for a new school playground.

Attendance Areas

Q: [Does EIPS use census data to establish school attendance areas?](#)

A: EIPS does review federal or municipal census data. But, it doesn't rely on it to determine attendance areas or develop enrolment projections. Instead, EIPS uses Barargar Systems, a planning software used by school divisions nationwide. Using Baragar software, EIPS can accurately develop enrolment projections and comprehensively analyze all demographic data within a school boundary—such as Provincial Birth Registry, Canada Child Benefit database, EIPS' student information system. Annually, EIPS reviews each school's enrolment projections for long-term planning.

Q: [How are the current school boundaries enforced?](#)

A: EIPS uses boundaries strategically to ensure high-quality learning environments in all its schools. The Division has established attendance areas and [boundary maps](#) for each of its schools. These determine a child's designated school. Each school also has a set optimal enrolment limit, which is a pre-determined maximum number of students a school can register.

Every year, the Division reviews its enrolment projections and uses the projections to determine a school's optimal enrolment limit. Schools with enrolment projections that fall under the optimal enrolment limit have open boundaries—meaning students who live [outside the designated attendance area](#) can register there. Schools with enrolment projections that fall above the optimal enrolment limit have closed boundaries—meaning only students designated to the school can attend. A school's optimal enrolment limit often fluctuates from year to year, as does its open and closed boundary status.

For the 2023-24 school year, James Mowat's OEL is 374 students. The school has had closed boundaries since 2021-22.

Student Capacity

Q: Are any other EIPS schools within Fort Saskatchewan facing similar enrolment pressures as James Mowat Elementary?

A: EIPS operates eight schools in Fort Saskatchewan. To determine if the school is at capacity, the Division looks to the school's utilization rate, which Alberta Education updates annually. As of the 2021-22 school year, James Mowat is the only EIPS school in Fort Saskatchewan at full capacity.

Fort Saskatchewan student utilization, in percentages:

James Mowat Elementary – 103%

Fort Saskatchewan Christian – 90%

SouthPointe School – 87%

Win Ferguson Elementary – 84%

École Parc Élémentaire – 78%

Rudolph Hennig Junior High – 72%

Fort Saskatchewan Elementary – 66%

Fort Saskatchewan High – 65%

Q: What elementary schools in Fort Saskatchewan have more available student space than James Mowat Elementary?

A: All EIPS elementary schools have more student capacity than James Mowat Elementary. Fort Saskatchewan Elementary has the most space available, with roughly 140 surplus student spaces. Next is Win Ferguson Elementary, it has 75 surplus student spaces.

SouthPointe School has closed boundaries because of anticipated enrolment pressures from the Southfort neighbourhood. Meanwhile, École Parc Élémentaire and Fort Saskatchewan Christian have 86 and 41 surplus student spaces, respectively. However, both offer Alternative Programming and can't take regular program students.

Q: When current James Mowat Elementary students enter senior high, will the enrolment pressures also follow them there?

A: EIPS anticipates enrolment pressure issues across Fort Saskatchewan for the foreseeable future. In fact, if no additional capacity is added, the Division projects fewer than 600 student spaces available by 2028—that's for every grade level, kindergarten to Grade 12. As the senior high level, EIPS anticipates fewer than 150 student spaces available at Fort Saskatchewan High by 2028.

Q: How many extra spaces does the school need to find to accommodate all students living in the James Mowat Elementary attendance area?

A: Providing an exact number is challenging. That said, James Mowat Elementary's utilization rate is at 103 per cent. That means the school is completely full. EIPS believes the school needs approximate 15 additional student spaces, annually, to accommodate children living within the James Mowat's attendance boundaries.

Random Selection Process

Q: [How will it work if EIPS decides to pilot a random selection process at James Mowat Elementary?](#)

A: If the Board pilots the proposed random selection process at James Mowat Elementary, it will start in the 2023-24 school year. The process remains in place as long as the school has closed boundaries. However, it only affects new students wanting to attend the school—not current students, they can stay at the school. Essentially, each grade would have a limit for the number of classes and registrable students. If the number of new students exceeds the available space for a specific grade, the school accepts all new children registering using the random selection process and a closed boundary priority scale. Those selected through the random selection process attend James Mowat Elementary. Those not selected attend their alternate designated school and are automatically placed on a callback list, by grade—used if space becomes available before the September 29 cutoff.

Q: [How will the closed-boundary priority scale work?](#)

A: The proposed process includes a closed-boundary priority scale made up of three categories. Using this process, school administration would select students to attend the school using a random selection process by grouping registrants into one of three priority categories.

Priority 1: Children living within the attendance area with a sibling attending the school and returning the following year.

Priority 2: Children living in the James Mowat Elementary attendance area. *AND*, children living outside the attendance area with a sibling currently attending the school and returning the following year.

Priority 3: All kindergarten children living outside the James Mowat Elementary attendance area, when required.

Q: [How do students register for James Mowat Elementary using the random selection process?](#)

A: The process to register at James Mowat Elementary would be the same as in previous years. All students wanting to attend the school register during the returning student registration process in February. Families indicate they want their child to attend James Mowat. Students currently attending the school are automatically accepted for the following school year. Meanwhile, new students are grouped into one of the three closed boundary priority categories. School administration randomly select new students, starting with those in Priority 1 and moving down to each category until all available spots, by grade, are full. Children not selected, attend their alternate designated school and are automatically added to the school's callback list—used if space opens in a class before the September 29 cutoff.

Q: [My older child currently attends James Mowat Elementary. If EIPS introduces a random selection process, can my younger child also go to James Mowat when they reach school age?](#)

A: When the younger child turns kindergarten age, they can register to attend the school. The child will be grouped in the Priority 1 category for the random selection process. The younger child can attend the school, as long as space is available.

Other Solutions Raised at Previous Engagements

Q: Why did EIPS decide against changing the James Mowat Elementary attendance area?

A: An attendance-area adjustment would impact the entire James Mowat Elementary school community—new and existing students. Whenever there's a change to a school's attendance area, current students are redirected to another school. A random selection process only impacts new students to James Mowat.

Q: Why did EIPS decide against a grade reconfiguration at the school?

A: It's imperative the enrolment-pressure solution is in the best educational interests of all students living within Fort Saskatchewan. Part of that means ensuring the solution disrupts the least number of students and families possible. Introducing a grade reconfiguration at James Mowat Elementary would impact far more families than a random selection process for new students.

Q: Instead of the random selection process, can EIPS create more alternative classroom spaces—for example, rental spaces owned privately or by the city?

A: No, alternative classroom spaces are not feasible. These spaces present their own challenges and often come with additional costs, including added rental cost and student transportation fees that cost that also take away from student instructional time.

Q: Instead of the random selection process can EIPS add more modular classrooms to the school site?

A: No. EIPS added a modular classroom to the James Mowat Elementary this school year. There is no more room on the school site for additional modular classrooms. The land surrounding the building belongs to the city.

Busing

Q: How will busing work for students requiring transportation services?

A: EIPS provides an enhanced transportation service for both eligible and ineligible riders. So, anyone who wants to access Student Transportation can do so by requesting busing services during the returning student registration process in February. Families simply indicate on the online form busing is required for their child. Before the end of the school year, the family will receive their child's busing information, including any associated fees.

Q: How are families charged for busing?

A: EIPS offers enhanced transportation services for students, using the below fee structure.

Eligible Fee: Riders who attend their designated school and live more than 2.39 kilometres from that school. For 2022-23, the eligible fee is \$121 per year.

Ineligible Fee: Students who attend a non-designated school or live less than 2.4 kilometres from their designated school. For 2022-23, the ineligible fee is \$346 per year.

Next Steps

Q: When will EIPS make a final decision about the how it will address James Mowat Elementary’s enrolment pressures?

A: A final decision is expected before the end of November. Before making a decision, the Board will review all the information and feedback gathered throughout the public consultations. EIPS is committed to keeping the community informed about the process and will provide information as it becomes available.

Q: What is the registration process for affected families? Can families apply to other schools?

A: Families can apply to have their child attend another EIPS school during the returning student registration process in February 2023. Families can request registration at a different school—subject to available space. If Student Transportation services are required, fees apply.