

ANDREW SCHOOL COMMUNITY MEETING: APRIL 25, 2023

SUMMARY

Overview

Elk Island Public Schools (EIPS) invited parents and community members to take part in a conversation on April 25, 2023, regarding the potential closure of Andrew School.

Division Principal Dave Antymniuk shared the agenda for the meeting and encouraged attendees to provide feedback to the Division using the QR codes posted on site or to visit www.eips.ca and follow the link to the Andrew School Community Meeting page to access the feedback form. Division Principal Antymniuk then introduced those present at the meeting from EIPS:

- EIPS Board of Trustees Chair Trina Boymook; Trustee Randy Footz; Trustee Jim Seutter; Trustee Don Irwin; Trustee Susan Miller; and Trustee Cathy Allen. Trustee Colleen Holowaychuk was absent from the meeting due to a death in the family.
- From administration, Superintendent Mark Liguori; Associate Superintendent—Human Resources, Brent Billey; Associate Superintendent—Supports for Students, Sandra Stoddard; Division Principal Dave Antymniuk; Secretary Treasurer Candace Cole; Lisa Weder, Director of Student Transportation; Calvin Wait, Director of Facility Services; Laura McNabb, Director of Communication Services; Brent Dragon, Assistant Director, Planning; Stephanie Krause, Senior Planner, Student Transportation; and Principal Kelly Sawatzky.

First, Superintendent Liguori revisited the issues previously discussed in regard to both the fire suppression system and the roof—that emerged as the result of four phases of construction undertaken between 1957 and 1991.

The fire suppression system originally installed was a dry system; that is, it wasn't designed with pipes to hold water in reserve. Unfortunately, at some point the system was charged with water and as a result, pipes have corroded, leaked and it has led to incidents of flooding. The Division has replaced portions of the system over time, but an entire replacement is required. Should the system fail, the building could no longer be occupied.

Problems with the roof have also contributed to the deterioration of the fire suppression system, and the system cannot be replaced without also addressing the condition of the building envelope. The slope of the roof, as well as a lack of insulation between old and newer portions of the structure, means ice dams will continue to form in the winter as warm air rises, snow melts, and then refreezes.

In order to get an estimate for repairs of both systems, EIPS placed a post on Alberta Purchasing Connection in order to prequalify General Contractors. Once that process was complete, there were six general contractors who met the pre-qualifications. Packages with details about the project were sent to all six general contractors. Of those that received packages, only two contractors submitted bids. The estimated cost of the repairs—not including contingency costs, asbestos abatement or GST—came in at approximately \$3.3 million.

While the fire suppression system currently remains operational, its failure is imminent, and the building cannot be occupied once the system can no longer be certified.

Second, Superintendent Liguori talked about the low enrolment at Andrew School. While the school used to receive funding based on a per-pupil allocation, the Government of Alberta moved to a Weighted Moving Average model three years ago. This means schools are funded for students who attend but not all dollars are received up front. In the first year, schools receive, 50 per cent funding; 30 per cent in the second year; and 20 per cent in the third year. There also used to be a Small School by Necessity grant that provided block funding to small schools which made it possible for them to continue operating. When that funding model changed to WMA, the government also changed how it block-funded small schools. Depending on the tier of funding, as population declined, dollars declined as well. School boards were then left with having to make some very difficult decisions about the viability of small schools. More than ever, the numbers of students became critical in keeping small schools operational.

In Andrew, there has been a consistent decline over time. As a result of the decline noted for the upcoming school year, the funding level in Andrew has dropped from \$663K to \$482K. Unfortunately, that means there are just not enough students attending Andrew School for the Division to provide high quality, equitable education for the remaining students.

The low student numbers at Andrew School equate to a small teaching and support staff, and two or three combined classes. The early years are the most important for students, and they need more time and teaching than this grade alignment could provide. Although years ago one-room schools were able to serve small communities, the Superintendent knows it is no longer possible to offer a high quality education for any of those students in those conditions.

EIPS' first obligation is to ensure equity of education for students regardless of where they live in the Division. For that reason, we are recommending students from Andrew be designated to Mundare School, which is a relatively new facility and has the capacity to accommodate them.

Because of these two reasons—facility condition and low enrolment—the superintendent will be recommending a closure and asking the Board to move students to other schools. He feels ultimately, it is in the best educational interest of students. No decision has been made, though, and the Board of Trustees will debate the recommendation vigorously.

Key themes

COMMON QUESTIONS & RESPONSES

Q: Has EIPS considered asking Alberta Education for funds to address the condition issues at Andrew School?

A: In dealing with recent infrastructure issues at other schools, the Government of Alberta has advised EIPS that school divisions are provided Infrastructure Maintenance and Renewal (IMR) and Capital Maintenance and Renewal (CMR) dollars, and must use either those or existing capital reserve funds for emergent repairs.

The superintendent and senior administrators have a fiduciary responsibility to ensure allocations to the Dollars in division be spent in the best way possible, to the maximum benefit of the greatest number of students.

Q: Could EIPS request that Alberta Education undertake a major renovation or build a new school in Andrew?

A: Due to the proximity of Mundare School, a facility that opened in 2015, and the fact that Mundare School is only at 40 per cent enrolment, Alberta Education would not consider funding a major renovation or new school for Andrew.

Q: Could EIPS just bring in some modular classrooms that are in good repair, and keep students at Andrew School?

A: Modular classrooms are prioritized for schools that have exceeded or are close to exceeding capacity.

Q: Has the Board considered the decline in student enrolment may be due to the previous closures of both the junior and senior high schools in Andrew, and the uncertainty about the future of the elementary school?

A: We can't speculate as to the reasons for a decline in enrolment but do know a declining population in the Andrew area is a contributing factor.

Q: How long do principals and teachers stay at Andrew? There has been significant turnover and it's difficult for students to forge positive relationships with educators when they only stay for a few years. Perhaps that also impacted enrolment.

A: Principals and teachers are employed by the Division and not of the school itself; often, if they are not local to the area, they seek growth opportunities at other schools. EIPS cannot indenture employees to a specific school.

Q: Quite a few high school students didn't want to move and weren't happy after the fact. For a lot of those kids, attending post-secondary was never in the cards for them.

A: Moving students wasn't about pushing them towards post-secondary, but it was about ensuring they had a chance to excel academically and to open every single door to future success that we could for them. As an educational institution, that is our job.

Q: If students are already attending a non-designated school, how will the possible designation to Mundare Elementary impact student transportation? Currently, those who send their children to a school other than Andrew have to pay the non-designated fee. If the Board decides to designate students to Mundare Elementary, parents shouldn't have to pay to continue sending their children to another school like Lamont Elementary or A.L. Horton Elementary.

A: Part of what the Board will decide, should the motion to close the school be passed, is where students will be designated and how student transportation will be configured.

Q: Ride times are already very long; the report says those could increase even further. Those times are very long for elementary students. Why doesn't the Division allocate additional buses to bring ride times down?

A: Right now, the Division supplements the two buses that are funded through Student Transportation resources with four additional buses. EIPS does everything it can to reduce ride times, but the Andrew School catchment area is very large and long rides times are sometimes inevitable. Everything in the report provided to the Board of Trustees is based on averages and estimates. Should a decision be made to close the school, Student Transportation will work on routes to keep ride times as low as is feasible.

Q: Why does EIPS allow families to send their children to schools outside of Andrew? Why are we busing students out of community when our numbers are so low here? Who approves them leaving the schools?

A: The *Education Act* states that if a family wants their child to attend another school within the Division, and there are resources and space at the school in which they want to enrol their child, then Division must accommodate that request. It's also a philosophical practice to allow "School of Choice" in our Division, except in areas with closed boundaries where schools are at capacity.

Q: There are many families within the Andrew catchment area with children who are not yet school age, but there is a lack of communication about Andrew School and kindergarten registration. What could our future enrolment numbers be if EIPS sent them letters and got in touch with them?

A: Communication Services undertakes an annual comprehensive awareness campaign about kindergarten registration in every community it serves. This includes targeted advertising in small local newspapers, on the radio, on Twitter and Facebook, and online. EIPS has no way of identifying or directly contacting families who have not already enrolled in the Division.

Q: What was enrolment at the elementary level before the junior high and senior high programs were relocated?

A: In 2018-19 when Andrew was a K-12 school, the elementary enrolment total was 67. Kindergarten to Grade 6 enrolment has remained under 100 in Andrew since 2005.

Q: We pay school taxes in our area, so why aren't our taxes used to address the problems in Andrew?

A: Taxes aren't designated by area; they are pooled by the Government of Alberta and allocated according to their own funding formulas.

Q: Will parents have the choice as to where kids go? Having my child attend school in Mundare, which starts later in the day and runs later, will cause issues for me around work and childcare.

A: The Board of Trustees will make a decision about designated and non-designated schools, should the motion to close Andrew School pass.

Q: Why doesn't the Division pull students from other schools to raise enrolment in Andrew?

A: If boundaries were changed and more students designated to Andrew rather than Mundare, then Mundare would be facing the same enrolment situation as Andrew School. Mundare Elementary, however, does not have the same infrastructure challenges as Andrew.

Q: Why doesn't the Division give families in schools that have higher enrolment the option of attending Andrew School instead, thereby evening out class sizes and enrolment in both locations?

A: It is highly unlikely parents in larger centres would want to transport students that far outside their designated boundaries. However, the Division's practice of allowing families school of choice doesn't prevent them from doing so.

Q: Would EIPS allow students to attend a school division outside of the boundary? For example, maybe Andrew Elementary students who live closer to Smoky Lake could attend an Aspen View School Division school.

A: Parents and students currently have the option of attending any school, or enrolling with any school division, provided there is space and resources at that school to accommodate students.

Q: Have the Andrew School boundaries been changed in the last twenty years for buses?

A: No.

Q: If Andrew School closed, could the facility be offered to the Village of Andrew for a nominal fee?

A: If a school closes, the Division has a process it must follow. The Minister of Education would first ask if there is another school or division that wants it. If there is interest, there is a disposition of property regulation that is followed. Typically, the asset is transferred for "fee simple." EIPS owns all the land and its portion of building, and the Village of Andrew has a 99-year lease for their portion of the building on the land. This has to do with the transfer of land done in 1994. It may be possible but it's not a simple process—all parties would have to agree to it. If the fire suppression system fails, the Village would be on the hook for \$3 million or more.

Q: Has the school division considered a specialized school or other way to change programming to attract students from further away?

A: Yes, we looked at a variety of options when the closures of the junior and senior high were being considered. At this point in time, however, the facility condition may impede those considerations.

Q: How do we, as people from Andrew, confirm that the Board of Trustees is accountable to us? That we have had people trying to make the school successful?

A: Locally elected trustee Colleen Holowaychuk is from this area, graduated from Andrew, and has spoken passionately about rural education and the value in the community. The Board represents a geographically diverse area and faces challenges in each area we serve. At the end of the day, the Board takes seriously all the decisions they make – which are made for all 17,400 students. They have a responsibility to consider the larger picture.

Q: If the school closes down, what happens to all those items for which parents raised money over the years—the library, fitness centre, Chromebooks and so on?

A: Items purchased by school council are the property of the school or the school division—not the parents or students. Having said that, the Board will wrestle with a number of decisions including transportation, fees, and the disposition of items. When the Board goes through process, it may choose to retire specific assets but would have to work with secretary treasurer to ensure regulations are followed.

Q: What about the playground? Will it be removed? .

A: The disposition of the playground and structures would be decided by the Board.

Q: Maybe the Village of Andrew could put out a tender and get a better price for the repairs that have to be made.

A: The estimates we received came from prequalified contractors; it's highly unlikely that with the increase in prices and limited capacity of contractors, prices will have dropped.

Q: Can parents undertake fundraising to help pay for repairs? Can we volunteer to work on the building and find our own contractors?

A: The Division must abide by the New West Trade Partnership Agreement, which has prohibitions against those actions. Even if parents undertook fundraising, the Division would still have to go out to tender through APC.

Q: What will happen to all the historical artifacts and items within the school? Would we be allowed to have them displayed in the Village museum? There was a school in Fort Saskatchewan where those items were thrown away.

A: Administration can't speak for decisions which remain the purview of the Board of Trustees, but for Wye School a number of artifacts were given to the local museum for retention and display.

Q: At the September meeting, the superintendent said the Division has spent \$663K to do temporary fixes since 2015. The roof has leaked long before that. Why weren't dollars allocated earlier than now?

A: There was money spent on repairs before then; that \$663K total is just within recent history. EIPS has been trying to remediate the issues beforehand. The problems stem from the actual design of the roof that was incorrect from the beginning. Since taking over the building we've undertaken ongoing fixes but it's beyond simple repairs now.

Q: Why wasn't asbestos remediation part of the bid process?

A: Until the contractors actually deconstruct the roof, they cannot provide an estimate of how much it will cost.

Q: How was the addition of the school done without proper inspection before children began attending this school? Who signed off on it? Who should be held accountable?

A: EIPS did not have possession of the school before 1995; the addition was undertaken by Lamont County, who ran their own school division.

Q: What makes a school "investment worthy?" Even if the roof and fire suppression system was fixed, how long until something else is no longer safe within the school building?

A: Inspections undertaken in Andrew School last year provided us a maintenance estimate of \$2.1 million over the next five years—outside of the cost of repairing both the roof and fire suppression systems.

Q: Could just a small portion of the building be demolished, and the rest continue to be used with no issue?

A: No, as 80 per cent of the roof currently leaks.

Q: When will you make a decision on Andrew? The village would only have 90 days to come up with a place for the library, rec centre, council chambers, archives, and so on, and figure out a plan to finance it.

A: If the Board of Trustees votes to close the school, EIPS administration would meet with the council and discuss what comes next. There would be a conversation, notwithstanding what the Minister of Education may wish to do with the school.

Q: Could current Andrew Staff all be moved to Mundare Elementary, if that is where students are redesignated, in order to provide consistency for the children?

A: Permanent staff with continuous contracts can apply on any available job within the Division; some may wish to go to Mundare and some may wish to work elsewhere. Employees under the collective agreement have the right to choose where they work.

CONCLUSION:

Superintendent Liguori indicated the Board will consider this decision next week—on May 4. Once a decision is made, information will be shared with school families, the village and the county.

If community members wish to speak to the Board at that meeting, they must contact [Candace Cole](#), Secretary Treasurer by noon the day before the meeting. Superintendent Liguori thanked attendees for being respectful, honest and willing to voice their opinions.