



Board: Chair Guild, Trustee Rude

Administration: Acting Superintendent Johnson, Deputy Associate Superintendent Meunier, Acting Associate Superintendent Owens, Media Relations Manager Walty, Director of FNMI Mineault and Executive Assistant Osmond

**Call To Order:**

Chair Guild called the meeting to order at 5:45 p.m.

**Background:**

Chair Guild stated that at the January 27, 2024, board meeting, the Board of Trustees approved a notice of motion regarding the possible closing of Pelican Mountain School. The motion was made after reviewing the information from the school's viability study, which was presented to the community.

The school viability study was conducted due to the low student enrollment. As per the Education Act, before December 1st of each year, the Superintendent will inform the Board of Trustees if a viability study will be conducted at a specific school.

Chair Guild also explained that:

- Pelican Mountain School has been under review every year since the 2015-2016 school year.
- The purpose of the March 11, 2024, meeting is part of the process outlined in the Northland School Division's Policy 15 - School Closure, which follows section 62 of the Education Act.

Acting Superintendent Johnson explained that the process included hosting a public meeting to discuss alternative programs and a preferred future for the Pelican Mountain School. He described the key findings from the viability study to include the following:

- Declining enrollment: a significant decrease from 28 students in 2020 to 4 students in 2024
- Financial Viability: the operational costs significantly exceed the revenue with a continuing trend of net operating deficits.
- Facility and Repairs: The school requires extensive repairs estimated at approximately \$495,000 to meet the current standards.
- Community and Educational Impact: The school's current capacity affects its ability to offer a broad and effective educational program.

**Proposed Recommendation:**

Acting Superintendent Johnson discussed the following recommendations that the Board of Trustees are proposing:

- Closure and Repurposing: It is recommended that the ECS to Grade 3 program at Pelican Mountain School be closed due to financial and enrollment challenges while proposing



repurposing the facility as a Centre of Excellence for Indigenous Learning for division-wide opportunities.

- Transportation for ECS to Grade 3 Students: students would be bussed to St. Theresa School in Wabasca-Desmarais for the 2024-2025 school year.

The next steps were also discussed.

#### **A Centre of Excellence for Indigenous Learning:**

Debbie Mineault, Director of FNMI, presented the next steps for the Centre of Excellence for Indigenous Learning.

A Centre of Excellence for Indigenous Learning will further support the Inquiry Team Report of 2010, Recommendation #36, in principle by taking a leadership role in establishing a NSD consortium for First Nation and Metis education. She also explained using the “Kids First” Guiding principle of a vision for First Nations and Metis excellence in relationships that promote self-determination, family support, community empowerment and collaboration.

Director Mineault explained how students would be engaged in learning the First Nations and Métis Resources. The Learning Centre would bring all of the NSD communities together for a land-based learning site, providing learning opportunities for students from the local community and Elders/Knowledge Keepers.

In addition, the Learning Centre would be a place where Northland would host Career and Technology Studies Days, where students could earn high school credits, and where students and staff could work to support Truth and Reconciliation.

#### **Questions, Answers and Comments from the Community:**

Community members noted that the lack of housing in the community is a reason why families cannot remain living in Sandy Lake.

1. **Q:** If the school was to close and the Learning Centre open, what would happen to the current staff members? Would they lose their jobs? Would this facility be used to educate the staff, such as new teachers?

**A:** The school would be closed effective September 1, 2024; the facility would be used to train our educators and possibly other school jurisdictions. The Division will ensure that the Learning Centre will positively impact the students and staff.

2. **Q:** Will staff be here at all times or only when it is in use? Would we utilize local people?



**A:** The division will examine the model, including various opportunities, experiences, etc. This will consist of using historical people and cultural land-based learning. More conversations will need to be had.

3. **Q:** For the staff at Pelican Mountain School, will NSD be utilizing the current staff, laying them off, or rehiring someone else? Will it be open Monday - Friday?

**A:** The Division intends to keep all staff; it is still six months away, and community members have until April 12, 2024, to voice their concerns.

4. As a community member, it seems the decision has been made, but staff need to know, not at the last minute. We need to have job security.
5. The students in the community do very well in a small school setting, even in a multi-grade classroom; parents worry about the students locally and what will happen to them.
6. Acting Superintendent Johnson stated that the Division is aware that this is a stressful time for staff and students; the Board of Trustees will decide at their May meeting, and once the decision has been made, NSD will work on putting everything in place immediately.
7. **Q:** We have three classrooms in the school; how many do you need for land-based learning? Why not keep a classroom for the students? Can utilize the classrooms for land-based learning.

**A:** The administration will share this suggestion with the Board of Trustees.

8. **Q:** There was a previous issue about a staff member; why did the Board not do anything about it?

**A:** Acting Superintendent Johnson noted that he could not comment as this was before he stepped into this role and that due to FOIP, personnel issues cannot be discussed with the general public.

9. The school is the community's main hub, and some community members would like to see the ECS students still attend.
10. Another community member spoke up about not liking the idea of the school shutting down for the little students and stated that it took many years of fighting with the government to get a school; parents do not want to see the little kids being transported as the highways are busy with logging trucks and oil tankers. Spend money on Pelican Mountain School since the division built a new school in Wabasca.



Acting Superintendent Johnson explained that the government assigns capital funding for new schools, the division must be fiscally responsible, and the children should have the best education possible. The Board of Trustees is looking at options for keeping the school open; however, it may look different. NSD wants to partner with the community; enrollment has steadily declined, and the division is doing what it can.

11. Another community member asked if we received a commitment from the parents about enrolling their children in the school. What about partnering with the government and the possibility of a corrections centre? Employ the locals instead of having to travel to Wabasca. There is a lot of fighting within the community; it hasn't seen any land-based learning.

Director Mineault stated that part of FNMI is reclaiming the languages and what is in our culture and described the land-based model. Oral, written (syllabic), listening, and pronunciation skills.

We need to set goals/objectives in planning and how to bring Cree back, and the plan needs to be solid. Director Mineault also noted that there is a wealth of knowledge in Sandy Lake; culture, land, and language cannot be separated, and that is who we are. Making this change takes a lot of planning; money is a factor. One community member suggested offering evening classes.

12. In 2021, 20 students were enrolled in the school; did the Division ever ask why the parents enrolled in St. Theresa School? There was a lot of bullying.
13. Another suggestion is to make Pelican Mountain School a K-6 and land-based learning centre or move the Central Office to Sandy Lake.
14. One community member stated that the Cree language is dying and that it's up to the parents to bring it back; it would also be good to have people come into the community to teach syllabics.
15. Another community member mentioned that Northland is top-heavy, pushing the community to find ways to save money, and does not come to the community to show how we are fiscally responsible. The proposal is vague; how will the division come up with the curriculum? The community members like the idea of having part of the school for land-based learning and the other half for students; what about piloting that idea? Some of the maintenance and repairs are just cosmetic; the division needs to invest in the school.
16. Director Mineault spoke about the incentive for students to earn credits, Aboriginal Studies 10 can be offered, Foods - how to preserve, and lots of thought about what the 19 schools would want in land-based learning and immersion. Examples of various activities were given, such as survival skills and building a lantoon.



17. There was support for the half-and-half proposal; having the school a K-3 school limits the parents by having their children in multiple schools.
18. A parent commented that students have anxiety going to different schools; OPK and NSD do not have the same calendar, and it is a parents' nightmare; the bus ride is too long and does not support bringing in hundreds of people who are strangers into the community.
19. Another parent commented that it sounds like the decision has been made, regardless of what the community wants and says; he has five children and noted that the education at Pelican Mountain School is not the same as at St. Theresa or Mistassiniy; he encourages the Division to take every opinion seriously, hear their voices of the parents and community members.
20. **Q:** How many students are required to attend to keep the school open?  
  
**A:** We don't have the exact number of students, speculating at least 30 students; the Division would need a commitment from the community to keep the elementary curriculum.
21. A community member commented: Why not move Career Pathways and the office we rent from Northern Lakes to Sandy Lake? Also, there is the possibility of parents from Wabasca bringing their children to Sandy Lake.

Chair Guild and Acting Superintendent Johnson thanked the parents and community members for attending the meeting, providing feedback and reminding them of the following deadlines: April 5, 2024, written submissions to the Superintendent and April 12, 2024, for the surveys.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 7:50 p.m.