



Hillview School Viability Community Meeting Minutes

March 15, 2017

Hillview School

East Prairie, Alberta

In Attendance:

Lois Byers, Official Trustee, Northland School Division
Gord Atkinson, Superintendent of Schools, Northland School Division
Krystal Potts, Executive Assistant, Northland School Division
Patrick Lambton, Principal, Hillview School
24 Community Members

Opening Prayer

Dinner

Opening Remarks – Northland

- Lois Byers delivered opening comments.

Viability Study/ School of Choice Discussion/ Possible Alternative Programs – Gord Atkinson

- When a school falls below a certain enrolment, a viability of the school is considered.
- The enrolment currently is 20 students at Hillview.
- We have to look at: are there unnecessary costs to NSD for operating a school with low enrolment? And also, is there enough funding to provide adequate programming?
- One of the considerations is the impact of other schools (this is not impacted to other NSD schools).
- Our students transfer to High Prairie from grade 6 to 7.
- We have to look at long range capital plan implications, if the school were aging it would be a factor to consider, but this does not impact Hillview.
- We need to find the determination of busing – if Hillview students were to go to High Prairie – the choice would be Holy Family School Division or High Prairie School Division (we received grant money from the province so this busing would be paid for).
- Comment: Older kids in grade 7/8 were picking on the little guys - that was a lot of the reason why they moved the students from junior high to High Prairie.
- We have to look at the analysis of finances and the educational impact – how do we put on the program that is effective and efficient?
- The financial analysis of having the school open was discussed.
- What can we do with the building? What would we do to create more opportunity in this building to offset costs?
- NSD is in conversations with East Prairie Métis Settlement about a Pre-Kindergarten program starting at Hillview, we can partner with the community and can be committed to this through the LTA agreement.
- Comment: first meeting I have been to about this school closure - we are trying to solve problems and this doesn't give enough time to sort out issues – we should re-open in September to try to solve the issues, we need more time to look at this – I have one child

attend here and would like him to finish grade 6 (he's in grade 3) – if we close it down we will not solve the problem, we shouldn't close it down, we need to solve the problems.

- We offer a service in the community but parents make the final choice of where their kids go to school.
- Comment: I've been on the board since 2001, my children went to school in Kinuso, we are a sports family. For them to be on the bus each day, it affected their academics, their ability to do sports – I wish this school was here when I had them in school.
- Comment: I sat on the board before this school was open, the issue was that students didn't like the long bus ride.
- Comment: I worked in High Prairie and regarding confidentiality there, there isn't any. There is a lot of prejudice, Native kids put in special ed class immediately, there were kids with head lice sent home and embarrassed, or put in the corner in front to everybody.
- The educational results for the school are not where we want them to be, the province tests 10,000's of students and we have a handful of children who have individual needs, it is hard to compete against those big numbers.
- Comment: Keep in mind that the ones that are older, they might run into issues down the road, might change their mind about going to High Prairie – give them time to see if they run into any issues.
- We are going to try to improve the quality of education at the school.
- Comment: parental involvement is a give in. If you want your child to be success you have to take time with them and work with the school and principal and teacher. Unfortunately there are a lot of social problems – addiction, poverty –and there is not enough emphasis on student achievement.
- Comment: There are times I am at home with my little guy and I'm tired and don't want to read to him or help with his homework– I'm not going to turn around and blame the school for everything.
- Attendance was discussed: if you have 80% attendance every year by the time you reach grade 10 you will have missed a full 2 years of school.
- Hillview School has an average of 80-81% attendance.
- Comment: one of the children that left the school he was bullied, over time people that worked here had kids in the school and they acted like they owned the school. There is gossip and things said at home. Kids hear things at home and they carry that with them. There are people in the community trying to get rid of staff here.
- Comment: my little guy came home and told me that his teacher told him he should go to school in High Prairie –like, if you're going to have an attitude like that....
- Comment: I think having combined classrooms plays a huge role in our kids' education – by the time they get to grade 7 they are so far behind.
- Combined classrooms can be successful if they are implemented correctly.
- Comment: But they haven't been here. It is attractive to parents to take their kids to High Prairie because they have single teacher per grade and every classroom has a TA.
- Comment: If you are coded and have special needs they have a worker for them, not a TA or SA. There is too much for too little here at Hillview.
- Comment: there is a student that moved here in grade 4, they were teaching what he learned in grade 2 in Edmonton.
- Question: if we solve the issues in the community and bring their children back here, what would the classroom sizes look like that?

- If we had 40 students, there would be some combined classes such as 1-2, 2-3, etc.
- The ratio should be 1 teacher to 17 students – we would need 100 students in here to have single classes.
- Question: what kind of training do teachers have in other communities?
- The Teaching Quality Standard (TQS) and Principal Quality Standard (PQS) is all changing to address the teaching quality standards across Alberta.
- We have a First Nation, Métis, and Inuit department that focuses on language and culture training for the Cree language instructors.
- We need to look at what is culturally relevant for each community, what is specific for East Prairie Métis Settlement?
- Question: How many Métis teachers do we have?
- Not sure of the number.
- Question: how about if we tried all Métis teachers here at East Prairie?
- We will always try to put the best teacher into the school – how they fit into the community is also a piece to consider but the best teacher for the job is picked.
- Comment: what happened to me in Kikino was that I was not comfortable there because the teacher was white.
- Comment: I drive my grandchildren to school every day to High Prairie. I take them there because of the quality of education they don't receive at this school, I can see the difference. I have 3 grandkids that need one on one special services (speech, ADHD). When he was here they knew he needed help but I was told Northland does not give enough money here because we didn't have enough kids. Northland is taking money away – why is it we are always in the red? Why are our marks so low? I was given the excuse that there are only 5 kids here so that is why. No, that's not right.
- Question: why is the teacher turnover so high? It affects the students when there is turnover, we get good quality teachers then they move on.
- Comment: I'm not saying that all kids are doing bad, but specialized care is not provided – by the time they get to grade 7 they are illiterate, and their social interactions are not there.
- When you were told that special services don't come here who told you? That was when Sally was the principal. (Explained that the model does not work that way).
- Go to your student's schools website and look for their achievement results report on their FNMI results – you will find the vast majority are the same across the province.
- Comment: a focus of the local school board was combined classrooms. We were told they didn't focus on grade 5 and 6. We hashed it out over and over again. Student success has always been the focus, we always had an open door policy. We always asked people to come meet with the board and they didn't come to the board.
- Question: what about funding for students who want to attend catholic school? You are outright refused if you want to go to Catholic school and it is not offered here – isn't it cited somewhere about the religion of students?
- We are a public school in a public school division, we follow the School Act. It is not in the School Act to offer religion, some schools have chosen (in other jurisdiction) and it can be in the school via locally developed courses, but not necessary to the curriculum.
- Question: why doesn't NSD pay to send the kids K-6 Catholic school?
- That is the parents' choice. The Alberta government gives you the choice to attend any school you want, but the government neglected to say transportation and cost is included. They do not provide funding to any school district for students to attend school of choice –

no school offers school of choice. We send students to High Prairie in grade 7 because it is a designated school, the system works that way.

- Comment: I don't understand this meeting. We're supposed to be solving these problems where nothing was solved before and now we're trying to close down the school. These should have been dealt with already. It doesn't make any sense, this meeting.
- This is part of a process to know what the problems are to make a decision – we need to hear those stories in order to make a decision.
- Comment: just fix the problems and open the doors in September. If the community thinks the problems can be fixed and we fix the problems then I'm hearing we can keep it open.
- Comment: can't we test run for a year or two?
- The trigger is the enrolment – we are here due to low enrolment numbers.
- Comment: we didn't solve anything yet, why are we closing the doors?
- Are there any new students starting next year? As far as we know, all anecdotal, there are 3 starting next year but will not start here, just 1 or 2 might start here.
- Question: you can see in the history of enrolment it was going down years before, why didn't NSD come here and say why aren't you bringing your kids here? You can see the steady decline, why didn't you come earlier to find out and meet with the community?
- As we learn we are modifying and changing things. We put into the Corporate Board motion stipulations that are not in usual school closure motions. We are asking why are people choosing to go elsewhere? What are the problems? We put more in the motion so we can have discussions.
- Comment: since 2001 we've had community engagement sessions in this community. We never had buy into the LTA. There were times we had meetings at the community hall and no one would show up, we would turn around and have to go home. We have transient families because there are not enough jobs or housing. It is hard to keep people here.
- Comment: I have 3 boys, I pulled them out of Hillview at the end of September. One son is still struggling, he hated school because he didn't know anything. Now since he's been in High Prairie he wants to get up and go to school.
- We have started transitioning for students with Holy Family and High Prairie to help grade 6 into grade 7. There are 4 school transitioning times for students where academics drop off (grade 6 into 7, grade 9 into 10 etc). But if they transition 4 times to other schools they will not achieve the same level of success as a student transitioning grades within the same school.
- Comment: Community members transition in and out all the time here for work. Stability is so important, it does have an impact on students.
- Question: How come we can't keep teachers? Why do they leave? Do they tell you why?
- We want stability, we want to have teachers and students stay here. Currently we are engaged in a study at the U of S on exactly this – when a person exits they can tell us their reasons.
- Question: if moms want to help out is there an option to provide training?
- We need that kind of programming – assistants can take schooling to become more and more qualified and help in the classroom.
- If someone wants to be an EA then become a teacher, we are designing a way to do that, we are promoting a bachelor of Education at U of C right now – community based education, where you do not have to leave your home to go to school.
- What are those things to suggest to us to make it better? What are some of the solutions?

- Comment: I don't think it's fair to have one meeting then close the school.
- Comment: There's another way to look at our school – it creates jobs for bus drivers, etc – there's a lot of advantages to that.
- Comment: when we had our rounds and consultations with the LTA, there were a lot of areas identified in K-6 about how the funding can help. There are already ideas out there, money and partnerships, and I think it's pre-mature to bounce us on this on the 11th hour.
- Comment: what can we do to make the school successful? If it can't be done then we would not be able to keep the school open.
- This isn't just a possible closure of the school, it is a viability study on the school.
- Comment: there's a lot of dysfunction. Lots of families don't get along or communicate or support their children, it's never ending nightmare about all types of issues.
- Comment: the push would be more fierce if you support the paving of the road, more people would come here if that road was paved.
- Comment: you're putting out here to us we need attendance. Bring your children back, talk to the principal and Lois and say hey we want our school this way. Why aren't you coming into the school and fixing your problems?
- Comment: I've seen kids put in a room that they were screaming when they are here. There should be some kind of accountability. My grandson went to school here for 3 or 4 years and he was put in that room. He has a problem with authority and because of his experiences here he has to go to a behavioural school. Nothing was ever done in any way possible instead social services was brought in and they tried to make it look like my daughter was the bad person. That is why some parents don't bring their kids here, they don't want their kids to get lost in the system.
- Comment: I think there should be a principal that is just the principal and educated in Native culture.
- Comment: We moved to East Prairie in the middle of school, in December. We were in Edmonton and I do not see my son being challenged or bringing home homework. There is a lack of education here.
- We need to have that kind of communication between the parent and principal. You need to tell them what you see and continue to work that way. Spend time to look at the education program for your child with their teacher/principal.
- Comment: seems like we are at the beginning of hearing the issues: are you willing to fix these problems? Yes.
- Are you willing to help us? Yes.
- Comment: maybe consider to house the teachers that work here – teachers are low paid and go through a lot of issues when they are first beginning.
- Our housing is a huge issue and we will look at it in our housing plan. We have a 6 million liability to fix the housing in our division.
- 5 years ago across Canada this school had a top 5 in across Canada – it can be done.
- Comment: we have regular school board meetings each month – they are open and we invite members. Is it in the newsletter? Suggested to put it on Facebook.
- Never heard of a board meeting –
- Comment: in regards to the culture component, we've had huge fights about culture – lots of backlash. We need diversity to be open to things.

Meeting Adjourned: 8:19 pm