

Joint School Advisory Council Meeting Minutes
 Bridgewater Elementary School (BES)/Bridgewater Junior High School (BJHS)
 October 17 2017

BES SAC		
Lindsay Willow, Principal	Claudia Robar, Teacher	Daphne Egilsson, Principa
Siobhan Doyle, Parent, Chair	Beth Norwood, Teacher	Kim Benjamin, Parent, Ch
Sean MacLeod, Parent, Vice-Chair	Kelly Sylvester, Teacher	David Walker, Communit
Engelina Crouse, Support Staff, Secretary	Heather Dalton, Parent	Richard MacMillan, Paren
Marg Forbes, Community Member		Patty Culbert, Parent

Others in Attendance
Scott Milner, SSRSB Superintendent
Jenna Eason, School Parent
Katie Hannah, School Parent
Alanah Wentzell, School Parent

Introduction

Kim Benjamin (BJHS SAC Chair) opened the meeting by welcoming the BES SAC and explained the motivation for having some joint meetings, which is to share some feedback and advice from the experience of a grade transition to another school and to promote more open communication between the two school communities, especially in light of the planned move of at least grade 6 students from BES to BJHS.

School Board Motions

SSRSB Superintendent Scott Milner provided some background on the two motions passed by the school board in March of this year and events that have happened since then

- The first motion was to move the Grade 6 students from BES to BJHS in Sept of 2018, to address the imbalance between the school populations created by the move of the high school students from BHS to PVEC.
- The second motion, based on the recommendations of the School Options Committee, was that further decisions on moving additional grade levels (i.e. grade 5 students) should be deferred until the catchment area review that was scheduled to start in Sept of 2017 was completed
- Since those motions were made, the Minister of Education for the province has announced they are conducting a governance and management review of the school boards in the province and that any school (closure) reviews should be suspended until that is completed (expected to be Jan 2018).
- Based on that direction, the school board decided to postpone starting the school catchment review until then. It was noted that although a school catchment review is not directly a school review activity, and is based on student travel times, the output heavily informs the school review process and the board felt it was best to postpone the review so as to follow both the

- letter and the spirit of the Minister's direction and to avoid public perception that they were moving ahead with school reviews.
- Scott further explained the elected school board and staff are aware of the impact this postponement has on decisions and planning to be done at many schools, including the effect on BES and BJHS. Both he and Director of Operations Brian Smith have visited with various SAC's to give updates and to hear concerns. The primary concern for the BES and BJHS SAC's is the impact that a delayed decision on moving the Grade 5 students to BJHS will have on the school communities. It was noted that while it may be possible to estimate the school populations based on the more probable outcomes of the catchment reviews, this would not be scientifically accurate and it would pre-judge the outcome, so is not a viable approach.

Feedback and Discussion

Lindsay Willow (BES principal) offered some feedback on one of the main reasons she thinks that moving the Grade 5 students along with the Grade 6 students is the right move, which is that BES is running out of space. Leaving aside the official utilization calculations, the building is "busting at the seams", with lack of rooms for teaching classes (one teacher is working out of the library) and for special needs teaching, including groups that have to go across to BJHS for some classes, as well as not having enough space/schedule availability to allow the required physical education time for all students. It was also noted the new provincial requirements for Pre-Primary sites to be opened would mean that if such a site was to be opened for Bridgewater in a school it would need to be in the BJHS due to capacity. BJHS Principal Daphne Egilsson added that there would be benefits to BJHS as well, which is very under-utilized and that there is a feeling that the school feels "empty" and that there has been an impact to school spirit among other things, and that adding additional grades would help address this.

It was noted that the school administrators and teachers are working on the necessary transition planning for the move of the Grade 6 students, including meetings of the principals together and with teachers. It was further noted that that there is a lot of planning to be done, more so than might seem obvious, with one example being some still unresolved bussing concerns from the bell alignment changes, where some students miss announcements and other morning routines.

Related to this, Lindsay stated another reason for her preference to move both grade 5 and 6 students at the same time, rather than move one grade now and potentially another grade later, which is the amount of planning, mental effort and related tension and stress that comes from planning and executing a grade configuration, on teachers, administrators, staff, students and parents. Additionally, people have already started thinking in terms of the future state (i.e. teacher to principal relationship), which is natural and expected, but could become a challenge if it remains unactioned for a long period of time. Along the lines of planning for the future state, a suggestion was made to consider having a Grade 6 teacher and parent from BES added to the BJHS SAC.

The group discussed the effects of the planned and potential grade changes on school culture and student life. There were different opinions expressed on the suitability of certain grades being in the same school (i.e. are Grade 5 students too young to be with Grade 9 students, would BJHS start to be run more like a middle school, would Grade 5 and 6 students be set up in their own space in the building, how would bussing be handled, etc..). There was not sufficient time to fully explore the various opinions or try to identify solutions, but it was agreed that there are valid concerns that merit a fuller discussion, and it was noted that from the public consultations held earlier this year, there is some available feedback and recommendations from participants available on the SSRSB website that could be considered as part of that discussion.

The group discussed the actual impact that any additional influx of students into either school as a result of a catchment review would have on the decision. Specifically, it was suggested that even if no additional students from outside the current catchment areas are added, there is enough benefit to be gained from shifting the number of students from grades 5 and 6 to BJHS to be the right decision on it's own merits. Given that BES is at or above practical capacity and that BJHS is well under, it was also noted that since potential additional students moved from other schools would be added to both school populations, it would not significantly affect the ratio of utilization but that it would worsen the space situation at BES.

Scott Milner noted that he feels this joint meeting between the two SAC's is a very positive step and noted a more open and collaborative atmosphere and tone than what was observed in the BHS/PVEC transfer. He also suggested that in his view, the school board would likely be receptive to feedback from the joint SAC's (representing the school communities) with respect to our suggestion to de-couple the decision to move Grade 5 students from the catchment review and assess it on it's own merits so that a decision can be finalized sooner rather than later.

Consensus

The overall consensus was that although there are concerns to be worked through, and there will be trade-offs in any decision taken, the need to relieve the space problem at BES, address the under-utilization in BJHS and the importance of allowing sufficient time to plan and implement all of this mean that both SAC's and principals plan to recommend to the school board that they reverse the motion to wait for the catchment review to be completed and plan to move the Grade 5 and 6 students to BJHS in September of 2018. To allow for parents to ask questions and provide feedback, a letter will be generated and reviewed by both SAC's, and then sent home to parents to ask them to send their questions about the planned approach so that they can then be addressed. Based on the feedback, additional mechanisms to gather feedback will be considered.

Next Steps

It was noted that given the desire to finalize a decision soon, and the timing of school board meetings where a decision can be taken, we will need to move fairly quickly, with the following plan agreed:

- Principals to draft letter to parents this week, share with both SAC's
- Send the letter home to parents next week (week starting Oct 23)
- Hold a joint SAC meeting (which is always open to the public) November 2
- Take the joint recommendation and additional feedback to the Board's Corporate Services Committee meeting November 8
 - A request to be added to the agenda (which does not spell out the content to be presented) will be sent this week in order to ensure being added.

Meeting Adjourned

Next Meeting Thursday, November. 2, 2017 6:00pm at BES