



Draft 4: Response to Impact Assessment Report

Hebville Academy  
School Advisory Council  
SAC Study Committee  
January 18th, 2013



Our Mission Statement

*Hebville Academy is a school that cares about students, both academically and personally. It encourages students to achieve academically and promotes personal growth as individuals and members of the community.*

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## **Introduction**

This document is the formal, written response to the Impact Assessment Report: Hebbville Academy, prepared for the South Shore Regional School Board by Deloitte, September 2012.

It has been prepared by the volunteer members of the Hebbville Academy School Advisory Committee (SAC) through the process laid out for the School Advisory Council by the Education Act of the Government of Nova Scotia, as well as the Ministerial Education Act's Regulations.

Our goal is to address the three Options outlined in the Impact Assessment Report through the guidance of our volunteers as well as feedback from the parents, staff and the school community.

Those options include:

1. Status Quo
2. Send grade P-5 students to a new elementary school
3. Move grade P-5 students to HA middle school building

We have prepared our response based on four criteria:

- I Financial Impact
- II Program Delivery
- III Extra Curricular and Community Use
- IV Transportation

## Executive Summary

School boards across Nova Scotia have been challenged by significant cuts to provincial funding over the last few years. We hope this response will offer the members of the South Shore Regional School Board an opportunity to show leadership and vision by choosing the best option for the students in the Hebbville Academy feeder system.

Although this report addresses the options specific to HA, there are three other school communities that feed into the HA middle school campus. What happens to one affects all.

As a feeder system, the board should consider Hebbville Academy, Newcombville, Pentz and Petite Riviere under the same funding platform when applying for financial resources from the Nova Scotia Department of Education. This could give the SSRSB money for capital upgrades for small, rural schools without reaching into the budget for Operational funding provided annually by the DOE.

As previously recommended by Jim Gunn<sup>1</sup>; "Pentz Elementary School and Petite Riviere Elementary School: These two schools are discussed together because they have so much in common and their futures should not be considered independently." Those two schools make up half of the Hebbville Academy feeder system, and assessing all four independently does not recognize the reality of the trickle down effect and how it will impact all of the schools if changes are made in isolation.

A theme that was consistent throughout our consultation process was that small schools are vitally important to small communities. As quoted in the 2006 CBC article [NDP Calls for Moratorium on School Closures](#)<sup>2</sup> the opposition leader of the day said:

"Often times the closure of schools involves marginal savings to the school boards themselves and they represent a huge loss to the community," Darrell Dexter.

Are we looking at change for the sake of change or will we decide on what's best for the students, teachers, staff and taxpayers within our feeder system?

**The Education Act** spells out the process for school review saying it needs to take place on each campus being considered, but there is no formal assessment of the impact on feeder systems. Instead, it seems to be an adversarial, confrontational process for individual SAC's and their volunteers trying to wrestle the limited funding away from each other.

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<sup>1</sup> [School Utilization Study Part 2. Page 6](#) - Gunn's Leadership Consulting Services February 27, 2008

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/story/2006/03/22/ns-schoolclosures20060322.html>

Our Study Committee and our school community is recommending our facility remain as is with the necessary upgrades and capital investment to have a functioning, successful facility for the next 25 years. The overwhelming choice by our school community is to support the dedicated staff and volunteer base within the current layout of the school campus and the two buildings within that footprint.

The board received estimates suggesting a \$1,010,000 investment would keep Hebbville Academy open for another 20 years. Instead of the estimated 12.9 million dollars needed for new school construction, status quo with upgrades would realize a saving for the taxpayers of Nova Scotia of \$11,890,000.

In the IAR's for Pentz and Petite Riviere, the board estimates long-term capital costs to maintain the two schools at \$790,000 and \$785,000 respectively. All three estimates show a combined capital investment of \$2,585,000. The board could apply to the Department of Education to help provide that funding. As we are a feeder system, we suggest that this application for capital improvements be combined into one document – not three separate requests which may not meet the minimum request requirements for renovations. The total investment is significantly lower than the estimated cost of constructing a new school (12.9m) suggesting the board can save the Government of Nova Scotia and its taxpayers more than 10-million dollars by supporting status quo with required capital upgrades.

The financial impact of moving all of the students into the one campus would need more detailed analysis. As noted, operating costs of the P-5 building are based on a formula using a ratio of square footage to expenses for the two buildings. We don't feel this gives the board members enough data to make a recommendation based on those estimates alone.

And the social impact on the students is also in question. We know there would be an immediate impact on physical education and extra curricular activities if all of the students were required to use one gymnasium. Current scheduling would require an additional 27 periods of gym for the P-5 students if they were moved into the middle school building. Even by cancelling intra-mural sports for all students, that would be an impossible number of classes to re-schedule. This option would require the construction of a new gymnasium to the current structure of the 6-9 building.

Students who graduate from Hebbville Academy, whether they've arrived through the feeder system or through the P-5 building on campus go on to great success as they move on to Park View Education Centre. They arrive with a sense of independence and community as they move into the "big school" and they carry that with them as they collect their awards and diplomas upon graduating from High School. Throughout the process, there has been no one calling for the assimilation of the students in the feeder system into one, large shiny new school.

If the board chooses to look at new school construction within the Hebbville Academy feeder system in the future, there needs to be a mechanism outside of the school review process to identify the need and financial validity of such a plan. Volunteer SAC members have neither the expertise nor the mandate to make a recommendation for new construction. The current process asks us to respond to a document prepared by a Consultant and the paid staff of the SSRSB and engage in a debate over the viability of status quo. That may not have been the intention of the process, but that feeling persists.

## **Background/ Methodology**

It is important to note that our response to the IAR is based on input and data collected over a 6 month period from the greater Hebbville community including staff, parents, students and community using the following approach:

### **Step 1 - Brainstorming**

We first started with a Community brainstorming session, over 100 people attended. The session was designed to inform the greater Hebbville Community on the School review process, the options proposed in the IAR and to solicit input and feedback on:

- Data- statistics, demographics
- Political - short and long term impact on the community if options identified in IAR are implemented
- Options - community use of school facilities
- Other suggestions

### **Step 2 - Survey**

The following survey was sent home with the students and posted on a community facebook page to solicit opinions.

#### **Survey**

As many of you know, Hebbville Academy (P – 5) building is currently under school review. As a member of the Hebbville school community, you have a say in what option you feel would best serve our children. The top two options chosen will help guide the direction which Hebbville's Study Committee will take in the coming months.

**Please rank the following five (5) choices in your order of preference, 1 being your most favored and 5 your least favored. The options are as follows:**

1. Status quo - Keep all students in Hebbville Academy elementary building.
2. Send grade P-5 students to a new elementary school – new elementary school for P-5 students of HA, PES and PRES on an alternate site.
3. Send P-5 students to new elementary school for students of HA, PES and PRES located at current Hebbville Elementary campus site.
4. Move grade P-5 students to HA middle school building - transfer grade P-5 students to newer Hebbville Academy building thus making it a P-9 facility.
5. Any other option: Please define your option below.

We received a total of 117 responses. The top selection was status quo. The second most popular choice was for the elementary students to be sent to a new elementary school built on the current campus.

### **Step 3 - Data Review**

Our study committee then conducted a comprehensive review of the data from Deloitte and the staff of the South Shore Regional School Board. In addition we accessed community data and expertise to draft our response to the options outlined in the IAR.

It is important to note that our response is based on the wishes of our school community. After carefully considering the financial, the academic and extracurricular success of our students, we have the following recommendation:

**The Hebbville Academy Study Committee is asking the Board to keep Hebbville Academy in its current configuration with the necessary capital investments to allow our school to continue bringing an exceptional educational experience to our students for the next 25 years. Doing so will save the taxpayers of Nova Scotia \$10,300,500 (the cost of a new school vs. 25 year capital investment at Hebbville Academy.)**

## Hebbsville Academy SAC Study Group Response:

For purposes of clarity we have highlighted the IAR recommendations in “grey” (IAR States) and our response in “yellow” (SAC Response).

### I Financial Impact:

#### Option 1 - Status Quo

Although there needs to be money spent for the long-term viability of the building, the cost is significantly lower than the cost of building a new school. We believe there is a case to be made that board members could ask the province to fund the capital expenditures required to upgrade and maintain the Hebbsville Academy feeder system, instead of the buildings on a stand-alone basis with separate requests for each campus.

#### IAR States:

A substantial increase in long-term capital costs would have to be incurred to keep HA Elementary School open indefinitely. Estimates were obtained for major structures or systems likely to reach end of their life, or need upgrade (electrical system), in the longer term (A list of possible requirements appears in Appendix G). Not all these repairs will be needed, but a significant cost is likely. The SSRSB’s preliminary estimate of long-term costs at HA is approximately \$1.15M.

#### SAC Response:

Long-term costs would still need to be incurred if the building were to be used for another purpose. Upgrades and improvements will still be less expensive than building a new school.

#### IAR States:

It was determined that in the last 10 years, an estimated \$400,000 in capital expenditures have been made at HA. (See appendix G for details.) Recent improvements were considered in determining what future building improvements need to be funded through capital expenditures. Capital expenditures are made from an allotment of the Department of Education's centralized capital budget, as well as from SSRSB's own budget which has a designated amount for capital purposes



**SAC Response:**

**It is not clear if these expenditures are related specifically to the P-5 Building or if they are inclusive of both buildings on the campus.**

**Recommendation:** The Hebbville Academy Study Committee is asking the Board to keep Hebbville Academy in its current configuration with the necessary capital investments to allow our school to continue bringing an exceptional educational experience to our students for the next 25 years. Doing so will save the taxpayers of Nova Scotia \$10,300,500 over the cost of building a new school.

**Option 2 - Send grade P-5 students to a new elementary school**

There is no data from the consultant, the board or from parents to show the school communities within the Hebbville Academy feeder system want a new school. If that is to be an option, it should be studied by a group outside of the school review process. The site for a new school will require the most study and compromise to meet the current needs and the transportation challenges for the geographic areas within the feeder system. There is no logical, centralized location.

**IAR States:**

**The capital construction costs for building a new school, which would include students from PES, HA and PRES, would be approximately \$12.9M if built today and that cost would likely increase over time given inflation.**

**SAC Response:**

**Status quo makes much more financial sense than building a new school at a cost of 12.9 million dollars. The board can make modest capital investments in the current elementary school, keeping the younger students separated from the older students while taking advantage of the proximity of both buildings for teacher and support resources.**

**Recommendation:** By considering all of the campuses within the current Hebbville feeder system, we feel the board could make a case to the Department of Education that all of the money required for technology and code upgrades would come in at \$2,585,000. That is more than 10-million dollars lower than the 12.9 million dollars it would cost to build a new school. The construction estimate also does not include the land acquisition and site preparation for a new school suitable for all of the current campuses in the Hebbville Academy feeder system. Given the challenge of geography,

site selection (finding a suitable and acceptable location) would be the most difficult aspect for the SSRSB Board Members/Staff and Site Selection Committee.

**Option 2.1 - Send grade P-5 students to a new elementary school built on the current Hebbville Academy campus**

**IAR States:**

Costs for a new school, which are difficult to accurately estimate, are land acquisition costs, assuming the school would be built on a greenfield site, and cost per square foot estimate for construction. DOE cost estimates included \$500,000 for land acquisition of an area large enough to accommodate the building and \$200/per sq. ft. based on current average construction costs in the South Shore Region.

**SAC Response:**

If a new school were built on the existing Hebbville Academy site the cost of land acquisition could be saved. Other cost savings could be applicable also, such as but not limited to the possibility of shared library and cafeteria, use of existing playground equipment and existing green space, utility and communication connections, septic and water infrastructure, etc.

This response is made without prejudice knowing there is a site selection process spelled out under the Nova Scotia Department of Education Act, but we also bring to the board's attention the location of the new Lunenburg P-9 school on the grounds and playing fields of the former Lunenburg Junior-Senior High and in Liverpool for the new South Queens Middle School.

**Recommendation:** From the data included in the IAR, there does not appear to be anyone asking the province to build a new school within the Hebbville Academy feeder system. Therefore we recommend the Board approach the Nova Scotia government for financial support through capital funding improvements for the upgrades as contained in the IAR for our school and the others within our feeder system. Keeping the schools open in their own communities makes the most fiscal and compassionate sense.

**Option 3 - Move grade P-5 students to HA middle school building**

Our report already addresses our concern over some of the assumptions that have been made about potential savings. There is a lack of concrete data within the Impact Assessment Report for the board to make an informed decision based solely on the numbers provided by staff.

**IAR States:**

**“...the HA middle school building will require approximately \$150,000 in upgrades to accommodate the younger students if it were to become a P-9 school. To determine the right solution, an engineering firm would be required to do a preliminary assessment.**

**SAC Response:**

**It is believed that additional gymnasium space would be required, which is not included in this figure. There may also be a need to add/adapt space for other specialty areas such as an elementary music room, learning centers, sensory room, staff room, teacher workspace etc.**

**IAR States:**

**The impact of Option 3 is given some attention in only a few sections of this report because, in some areas of operation, it would have no impact. The only change contemplated in Option 3 is that the P-5 students who already attend HA would attend classes in the newer building that presently houses grades 6-9. This transfer would have no impact on how the staffing formula is applied, on student transportation and on what programs and student services are delivered.**

**SAC Response:**

**Even if it were determined that there is sufficient classroom space, it is believed that additional costs would need to be incurred to provide the additional students with a gymnasium as scheduling is difficult in the present situation.**

We will address that in more detail in our response to program delivery but school staff losing the gymnasium in the P-5 building would mean an end to intramurals from Primary to 9 in addition to scheduling limitations. There are currently 27 periods of Physical Education for the P-5 students per six day cycle that would need to be relocated into the middle school gym. This would be logistically impossible. Given the long history of success by Hebbville Academy athletics, this would drastically affect the school culture and spirit.

**IAR States:**

**In Option 2 and Option 3, the elementary building of HA would no longer be used by students. It would be closed or used for other purposes. One possibility is that it could be converted to office space for the SSRSB regional staff. An assessment of converting the building for regional offices requires a detailed engineer’s report and has not yet**

been commissioned by the SSRSB. High level estimates are discussed in Section 4 of this report.

**SAC Response:**

Our SAC Study Committee does not feel it is fair to base a decision on that consideration. None of the other schools under review were required to make a recommendation for future uses of their buildings if they were faced with closure. It's our opinion there is insufficient data for the board to come to that decision.

**The cost of keeping the building operating as a school with required upgrades should be no greater, in fact, less than converting the building for another purpose by and for the SSRSB.**

Based on that conclusion, there are no “hard numbers” to suggest any significant savings by the board to put towards students services in the district if that decision was taken.

**The savings of rent paid for the current SSRSB regional office cannot be determined exactly until it is decided what would be required to convert the building to be used for this purpose. Long-term costs as outlined in Appendix G: Capital Expenditure Data would still be required.**

Any savings realized by moving the students to allow for the board to occupy the P-5 building are also based on “guesstimates” of operating expenses. There would have to be a full and complete accounting of actual costs instead of a percentage based on the square footage of both buildings.

**In Appendix F: Operational Expenditure Data, it is clear the annual expenditures are derived from combining all expenditures for Hebbville Academy P-5 and 6-9 buildings and then calculating a percentage based on the square footage of each building. This does not reflect a true and fair representation of actual expenditures for HA Elementary School as some expenditures calculated in the overall totals are specific to each building.**

There is no hard data to back a decision to move the students from their current facility to make room for school board staff based solely on the financial estimates provided in the IAR.

**Recommendation:** There is not enough data provided in this review for the board to know if it can save money by moving the students into one building on the Hebbville Campus. Maintaining Status Quo with the needed capital investment will best serve the

students and the school community for the foreseeable future. IF the board wants to pursue the option of building a new school, another committee should be struck with that purpose in mind. The current review process is about the current school(s) and our volunteers involved with the SAC do not have the experience, expertise or mandate to recommend a new school construction. It needs to happen through negotiation, not confrontation.

## **II Program Delivery**

### **IAR States:**

**French immersion is the only “alternate” program that is offered in the elementary schools of Nova Scotia. Early French Immersion is not offered at HA and there is no indication that it would be offered in a potential newly constructed school.**

### **SAC Response:**

**This is in fact NOT TRUE as HA currently offers Grade Six Intensive French and the additional optional program of PATHS to the minimum PSP.**

Hebbsville Elementary currently provides all elements of the PSP as well as the PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) program. Early French Immersion could be offered in the future in our existing P-5 facility. The school received full accreditation last year as a P-9 facility.

It is clear that HA P-5 students are currently receiving the PSP, however a move to the newer HA middle school building would result in compromised physical education programming. In order to deliver the same program as is currently the case in the Hebbsville Elementary building, intramurals from Primary to 9 would be cancelled. Additionally, this would create scheduling challenges for all grade levels, as there are currently 27 periods of Physical Education for the P-5 students that would need to be relocated into the middle school gym. This would be logistically impossible.

The current gym usages often see doubled and even tripled classes to accommodate the necessary PSP time for Grades 6-9 students. The current government and DOE also support programming to help young people become more active – to reduce intramural and extra curricular time is counter productive to these initiatives.

Because HA’s enrolment is over 500, most of the specialist allocations are full-time positions. Our full time specialists are fully committed to the Hebbsville school community, and staff at the P-5 building have immediate access to specialist services like guidance staff who are literally a few feet away.

**Recommendation:** Status quo with the necessary capital investments will help maintain the current level of PSP while meeting extra curricular and PE requirements. Having all students in one building could severely limit the access to gymnasium time and would drastically affect the high athletic standard achieved by the students, coaches and parent volunteers.

### **III - Extra Curricular and Community use**

Hebbville Academy is already a destination school for the elementary students within the feeder system. The SAC Study Groups of Hebbville, Petite and Pentz held a joint meeting to discuss possible outcomes and collaboration. There is a wide variety of interests in the satellite schools and a strong sense of community for each.

There is little consensus for construction of a new school that would be in a location that wouldn't disadvantage the youngest of our student population by extending the amount of travel time.

Pentz and Petite have more in common with each other geographically than with Hebbville and there appears to be little support to the option of sending the P-5 students from Hebbville farther away to a new school in either of their catchment areas.

The logical choice of a central location would suggest construction in an area with limited access and few support services (e.g. Crousetown/Mount Pleasant).

The Study Committees reached just one point of agreement; we would try and avoid making recommendations that would harm either of the other school communities.

There's concern that the larger Hebbville Academy campus and school population would place more weight on our recommendations than with the others.

Therefore we would like to offer the following without prejudice.

Our subcommittee chose to respond to the most popular two options as identified in our parent/community survey.

1. Status Quo.
2. A new P-5 building on the Hebbville campus.

### **Supporting Status Quo and/or a new P-5 Elementary School on the Current Site of Hebbville Academy:**

With Elementary students already onsite there is an easier transition between Elementary and Middle Level. They are already here and familiar with the environment, personnel and schoolmates.

There are biking, walking/running trails in place behind Hebbville Academy

Real Estate – people move to buy or build in the Hebbville Catchment area so their children can attend this school.

Highway 103 provides direct and easy access to the school, and there have been major upgrades to Highway 3 which makes it much safer for the large volumes of traffic and pedestrians (especially during special events).

The current site facilitates summer programs, especially soccer, which again makes it a familiar destination point for parents and students.

New gym and locker rooms could be added to the existing gym area to facilitate larger tournaments and sporting events not only for the students, but other athletic clubs as well.

Ecology education – the outdoor classroom at Hebbville can be revitalized. There are natural woodlands and waterways readily accessible for student educational/curriculum purposes on the school property and in the community.

Hebbville Academy's newer building was constructed onsite while students were present with modifications to the old building and the use of portable classrooms. Building a new Elementary school onsite could follow a similar protocol with limited disruption to the school community.

Cost savings will be realized as new land will not have to be purchased and there is already some infrastructure in place such as septic and roads.

Bus routes are already established; some minor alterations should accommodate routes to a P-9 site for all Petite, Pentz and Hebbville students.

**Recommendation:** To maintain the high academic and extracurricular standards, Status Quo with the necessary capital investment would be the best option for the Hebbville Academy school community. It's easy for our SAC and school community to rationalize why our location makes logistical and financial sense for the board to locate a new school on our campus. But we also refer back to our previous stand that IF the board wants to pursue the option of building a new school, another committee should be struck with that purpose in mind. The current review process is about the current school(s) and our group of volunteers does not have the experience, expertise or mandate to recommend a new school construction. If it is to happen, it needs to happen through negotiation and consultation. There also has to be an "ask" or a desire for a new school. At this point we see no data suggesting there is a desire to close schools in favour of replacing them with a new one.

## **IV – Transportation**

The option of Status Quo with the necessary capital investments would have no direct impact on the movement of Hebbville Academy students or the costs associated with that. Our option of a new school constructed on the HA campus could have an impact but as previously stated by the Superintendent, actual transportation costs would have to be worked out for all possible locations identified through site selection. IF the board chooses to recommend construction of a new school, those numbers would have to be worked out by Board Staff.

### **Conclusion:**

Status Quo with the necessary capital investments is both the most popular and the most cost efficient option for the future of Hebbville Academy.

By asking the Department of Education for a strategic investment in the Hebbville Academy school **feeder** system, the school board can ensure the long-term viability of the communities in rural Nova Scotia, which can be realized through provincial capital funds instead of the board's operating budget.

The cost of all renovations and upgrades to Hebbville Academy are a fraction of the cost associated with selecting a suitable and logical location for construction of a new school. The cost of supporting each of the small school communities within the Hebbville Academy feeder system by applying for provincial funding would be a sound investment, saving taxpayers \$10,300,500 over the option of building a new school.

While there may be some benefits to having a new school constructed within the catchment areas of the Hebbville feeder system, it is not a position our members are willing to commit to based solely on the information that has been supplied. Further study would be required by an appropriate body with a mandate to examine that option and specifically tasked with finding the most appropriate location and establishing a construction timeline.

Moving the entire population of Hebbville Academy into the middle school building may appear to offer cost savings on the surface, but the need for a second gymnasium would require significant capital investment by the board or the loss of extracurricular and PE activities for the students in all grades. The current arrangement offers an age-appropriate mix of students in one building with specialist support in the building next door and cost-effective shared services for the entire school population.

We make these recommendations to the members of the South Shore Regional School Board and thank you for the opportunity to be a part of the process.