



# **South Shore Regional School Board**

## **Recommendations from the School Options Committee for Bridgewater and Park View Families of Schools**

May 12, 2016

## **Opening Comments**

In a climate of declining enrolment of students in rural Nova Scotia, the School Options Committee (SOC) was presented with a challenge and an opportunity to make recommendations with the mandate to review the Bridgewater and Park View Families of Schools. The provincially mandated policy and process for school review was followed.

The review allowed the Committee Members to discuss, debate, learn, develop scenarios, and hear from the public. The Board staff provided necessary information to all of our questions, including class sizes, courses offered and enrolments over several years, specialized programs, staffing, bussing times, and other issues. This process is time consuming and can be emotionally draining and we would like to thank the volunteers who served on the SOC, the Board staff, Cheryl Veinotte – Recording Secretary, and our Facilitator, Gary Walker, who guided us through the Provincial Department of Education and Early Childhood Development process. While recognizing that the possibility of change is difficult, we would like to thank all those members of the public who gave their considered opinions. As always, more time allows more in-depth review, but we feel confident in our review and recommendations and that we met the objectives outlined in the mandate.

## **Introduction**

The *2015 SSRSB Long Range Outlook* recommended a school review for Bridgewater Family of Schools, within one year, to examine “catchment area, cross boundary registrations, facility utilization, operational costs, grade configurations, and program options,” (p. 106). It also recommended a school review for the Park View Family of Schools, within one year, to examine “catchment area, cross boundary registrations, facility utilization, operational costs, grade configurations, program options, and P3 renewal (Bayview School),” (p. 110).

The rationale for doing the school reviews for these two families together, as one review, is based on their geographic closeness. The Bridgewater Family of Schools is almost completely surrounded by the Park View Family of Schools. Students in and just outside the Town of Bridgewater attend schools in both families. It is logical to explore various solutions to identified issues (catchment area, cross boundary registrations, etc.) for both families at the same time.

## **Schools Involved**

Bayview Community School (BCS), Bluenose Academy (BA), Bridgewater Elementary School (BES), Bridgewater Jr./Sr. High School (BJSHS), Hebbville Academy (HA), Newcombville Elementary School (NES), Park View Education Centre (PVEC), Pentz Elementary School (PES), and Petite Rivière Elementary School (PRES).

## **School Options Committee Membership**

The SOC is comprised of two School Advisory Council (SAC) members from each school and a community/business representative from each family of schools. The community/business representatives are not to be elected officials, parents of impacted students, or employees of the School Board. The SOC Members are:

- Stephanie Martin – Parent Rep, BES
- Siobhan Doyle – SAC Chair, BES

- Heather Mackenzie-Carey – Community Rep, PVEC Family of Schools
- Tina Grace – Parent Rep, PVEC
- Shelley Mann – SAC Co-Chair, PVEC
- Leif Helmer – SAC Chair, PRES
- Sarah Tingley – Parent Rep, PRES
- Hope Demone – Parent Rep, BA
- Melissa Risser – SAC Chair, BA
- Mitch Foley – SAC Chair, HA
- Iris Charlton – Parent Rep, HA- resigned during April 21 public meeting
- Maja Kelley – Parent Rep, PES (effective February 25; replaced Suzanne Mosher, whose last meeting attended was on February 18)
- Allen Sullivan – SAC Chair, PES
- Andrea McGinnis – SAC Chair, BHS
- Kim Benjamin – Parent Rep, BHS
- Palma Champoux – Community Rep, Bridgewater Family of Schools (effective February 5; replaced Kathryn Dumke, whose last meeting attended was on December 16 and resignation was received February 3)
- Anne Burgess – SAC Chair, NES
- Pam Hebb – Parent Rep, NES
- John Biebesheimer – SAC Chair, BCS
- Erica Moore – Parent Rep, BCS

Gary Walker is the Facilitator and Cheryl Veinotte is the Recording Secretary.

### **Summary of Rationale to Review**

In the SSRSB's Long Range Outlook, which was approved in October 2015, Board staff recommended that the governing Board initiate a school review for Bridgewater and Park View Families of Schools.

This school review included a review of school catchment areas for Bridgewater and Park View Families of Schools. The present catchment areas for the Bridgewater and Park View Families of Schools were defined by municipalities prior to 1982. Demographics have changed over thirty-three years. The catchment areas no longer serve the students residing around the town of Bridgewater. Changes in school catchment areas may necessitate a review of grade configurations for the schools involved. This was also explored.

A school review could propose solutions for these two senior high schools that would optimize the programming options available for students residing in the areas.

Student access to courses was another focus of this review. Due to declining enrolments, course selections will continue to be limited.

The lease for Bayview Community School, a P3 (Public-Private Partnership) school, expires October 31, 2020. A notice of intent for future use is required to be communicated to the owner by October 31, 2017. A school review process of Park View Family of Schools will explore solutions for this issue.

Presently, both families have a combined excess capacity for over 1000 additional students. This is space the South Shore Regional School Board must maintain, heat, and clean. Ten years from now, the excess capacity is projected to be even greater. This excess capacity, together with the geographic closeness of the two families, the outdated catchment area boundaries, the possible limited course selection for senior high school students, and the Provincial Government requirement to provide a notice of intent for the P3 School by October 31, 2017, all necessitate that a school review be completed for these two families.

### **Mandate**

The SOC's mandate consisted of two purposes:

1. Conduct a review, with public consultation, of Bridgewater and Park View Families of Schools. The review will include catchment area, cross boundary registrations, facility utilization, operational costs, grade configuration, program options and P3 renewal recommendation.
2. Submit a Report and Recommendations to the School Board that will inform the Board's final decision.

### **Meetings**

The objective of the Committee's attendance at the public meetings is to listen to the community speak and determine what information needs to be included in the scenarios.

Notification of public meetings was communicated to families and the community in numerous ways – email to all schools, ALERT (PowerSchool) to every student's home, school newsletters, school websites, Board website, Board Facebook page, Board Twitter account, etc. Public meetings were also announced on local radio stations and there were advertisements in the local newspaper about a week before the meeting.

The following meetings took place:

- Meeting #1 – SOC Meeting on Thursday, November 26, 2015, 6:30 p.m., at the Board Office.
- Meeting #2 – SOC Meeting on Wednesday, December 16, 2015, 6:30 p.m., at the Board Office.
- Meeting #3 – SOC Meeting on Thursday, January 21, 2016, 6:30 p.m., at the Board Office.
- Meeting #4 – SOC Public Meeting on Tuesday, February 2, 2016, 6:30 p.m., at Bridgewater Jr./Sr. High School.
- Meeting #5 – SOC Meeting on Tuesday, February 11, 2016, 6:30 p.m., at the Board Office.
- Meeting #6 – SOC Meeting on Thursday, February 18, 2016, 6:30 p.m., at the Board Office.
- Meeting #7 – SOC Public Meeting on Tuesday, February 25, 2016, 6:30 p.m., at Park View Education Centre.
- Meeting #8 – SOC Meeting on Wednesday, March 2, 2016, 6:30 p.m., at the Board Office.
- Meeting #9 – SOC Meeting on Wednesday, March 30, 2016, 6:00 p.m., at the Board Office.

- Meeting #10 – SOC Meeting on Tuesday, April 5, 2016, 6:00 p.m., at the Board Office.
- Meeting #11 – SOC Meeting on Monday, April 18, 2016, 6:30 p.m., at the Board Office.
- Meeting #12 – SOC Public Meeting on Thursday, April 21, 2016, 6:30 p.m., at Hebbville Academy.
- Meeting #13 – SOC Meeting on Tuesday, May 3, 2016, 6:30 p.m. at the Board Office.

### **Variations from Provincial Policy**

There were no variations from the Provincial Policy.

### **Address Each Review Objective**

There are five review objectives for the SOC's deliberation:

1. Make recommendation to the Board that optimizes High School programming options and choices for all students.
2. Review school catchment areas as defined in the Catchment Area Policy.
3. Consider facility utilization and operational costs when making recommendations.
4. Make recommendation to the Board regarding school grade configuration at all schools.
5. Determine whether Bayview School will be needed beyond 2020.

The following scenarios were considered:

#### **1. Scenario #1 – Status Quo**

Nothing changes – programming options and choices for all students remain the same; no changes to school catchment areas; facility utilization and operational costs remain unchanged; no changes to grade configurations; and Bayview Community School stays open beyond 2020.

#### Pros:

- Both high schools still have the programs required to graduate
- No changes to catchment areas, cost to operate, and grade configurations
- No transition of students would be needed
- Scholarship opportunities remain the same in each high school
- Would have minimal effect on the International Student Program
- Bayview would remain open

#### Cons:

- Future senior high school program choices will be limited and will continue to become more limited as enrolment declines
- Possible loss of programs, including specialized programs, at both senior high schools if not a requirement for graduation
- No immediate program changes but expect loss of programs in near future at all grade levels
- Possible loss of AP at BJSHS in future years
- Will continue to reduce options

- Bridgewater will end up with core programming only
- Possible loss of teachers due to loss of programming and declining enrolments
- Funds received from province would be decreased, due to declining enrolments
- Still have long bus runs for some students; no ability to change
- Lower utilization at PVEC due to declining enrolments
- Jeopardizes French Immersion
- With fewer program offerings, students outside the area might not be attracted to the area
- Wasted funding
- Grade splits for elementary and junior high grades will increase with declining enrolments
- Schools could end up with core programming only and this may not be maintainable

The rationale for rejection of this scenario was due to declining program options for students.

## 2. Scenario #2 – Move Grades 10-12 from BJSHS to PVEC

Based on current enrolments, there would be 854 students at PVEC in September 2017.

### Pros:

- Programming options would be optimized for all senior high students with a wider selection of courses to choose from
- May add or re-introduce other options
- No permanent teachers displaced in BES, BJSHS, and PVEC (not including retirements or educational leaves)
- No change in catchment areas would be necessary for senior high
- More efficient class sizes; therefore budget savings to Board
- No increase in busing expenses
  - An average, only 42% of eligible students take buses at PVEC, which would leave space for BJSHS students
- IB will continue
- Core French could be offered
  - Currently not offered at either high school
- Excess space at BES and/or BJSHS could be a cost savings, as it could be used for Board Office, complementary services and special needs (such as space for specialists to provide children's special programming when required (i.e., speech, OT, etc.)), early learning (Early Years Centre, like the pilot project in New Germany), etc.
- Two buildings in Bridgewater be reconfigured to best optimization (ex. P-4 and 5-9)
- Bayview would still be needed

### Cons:

- Eventual loss of AP
- BJSHS could lose teachers in French Immersion
- BJSHS utilization would go down to 35%

- Possible move of BES grades 5 and 6 to BJSHS
  - Playground supervision would be required
- Possible change in catchment areas to improve elementary and middle school configurations

The rationale for acceptance of this scenario was to increase programming options for students.

### **3. Scenario #3 – Move Grade 9s from PVEC feeder schools (BCS, HA, BA) to PVEC**

Based on current enrolments, there would be 852 students at PVEC in September 2017.

#### Pros:

- Catchment area would not change
- Bayview would still be needed

#### Cons:

- Does not improve senior high programming, and could actually deprive grades 10-12 of existing programs
- Grade 9s are required to take Phys Ed and would require priority on times in the gymnasium, limiting use for extra-curricular athletics
- Grade 9s require a different set-up than senior high (i.e., locked in grid of seats (specific seat numbers)), and the building would need to be reconfigured
- Concerns around social development for the younger students in a senior high setting
- Grade 9s would be one group, and grades 10-12 would be another group
- Staff utilization at PVEC would be less efficient due to programming for grade 9s
- Jeopardizes feeder schools because of lower utilization

The rationale for rejection of this scenario was due to negative impacts on programming for students.

### **4. Scenario #4 – Move Grades 9-12 from BJSHS and grade 9s from PVEC feeder schools into PVEC**

Based on current enrolments, the student population would be 1151 students at PVEC in September 2017 and this would exceed PVEC's capacity, which, at 100% utilization, is 900 students.

#### Pros:

- Could benefit 10-12 programming options, but grade 9s pull resources, space, and time away from grades 10-12

#### Cons:

- PVEC would be over capacity
- Catchment area would change to include the town of Bridgewater
- Does not improve senior high programming, and could actually deprive grades 10-12 of existing programs

- Grade 9s are required to take Phys Ed and would require priority on times in the gymnasium, limiting use for extra-curricular athletics
- Grade 9s require a different set-up than senior high (i.e., locked in grid of seats (specific seat numbers)), and the building would need to be reconfigured
- Concerns around social development for the younger students in a senior high setting
- Grade 9s would be one group, and grades 10-12 would be another group
- Staff utilization at PVEC would be less efficient due to programming for grade 9s
- Jeopardizes feeder schools because of lower utilization
- Increased costs for busing
- Increased time on buses
- Utilization at the feeder schools would decrease
- Parking issues
- Bayview may not be needed due to loss of grade 9s (44 students)

The rationale for rejection of this scenario was due to over-capacity utilization and negative effect on programming for Grades 10-12.

**5. Scenario #5 – Move BJSHS Grades 10-12 to PVEC; move all of BCS to BES and BJSHS**

Based on current enrolments, the student population in September 2017 would be 860 at PVEC, 675 at BES, and 348 at BJHS.

Pros:

- More students at all levels means additional opportunities for expanded and additional programs, such as French Immersion
- Programming options would be optimized for all senior high students with a wider selection of courses to choose from
- May add or re-introduce other options
- More efficient class sizes; therefore budget savings to Board
- IB will continue
- Core French could be offered
  - Currently not offered at either high school
- Two buildings in Bridgewater be reconfigured to best optimization (ex. P-4 and 5-9)
- More efficient utilization of BES and BJSHS

Cons:

- Eventual loss of AP
- Reconfiguration of BES and BJSHS might require an additional playground
  - Playground supervision would be required
- Change in catchment areas to improve elementary and middle school configurations
- Based on current catchment areas, some students would be on the bus for more than an hour
- There would be bulging classrooms in schools where the BCS students would be placed
- Cost of \$500,000 due to the addition of six buses



- Bayview students would go to WNES, BA, Bridgewater, NGES, and NGRHS; would be putting students who currently walk to school on a bus for up to one hour
- Increased busing expenses
- Closure of Bayview Community School

The rationale for rejection of this scenario was due to cost escalation and bussing travel times negatively affecting students.

### **Recommendation(s)**

The SOC held ten meetings, as well as three public meetings, to gather information and gain feedback to take into consideration when reviewing the options for Bridgewater and Park View Families of Schools.

1. It is the recommendation of the School Options Committee of the Bridgewater and Park View Families of Schools to move the grades 10-12 students from Bridgewater Jr./Sr. High School to Park View Education Centre.

This recommendation speaks to the Review Objective of optimizing high school programming options and choices for all students. While this recommendation was not met with a unanimous vote and some committee members believe this decision has already been made at the Board level prior to this report, the following conditions were arrived at by unanimous decision of the committee in the hopes of positively impacting a decision to change existing school structure.

Should the Board accept this recommendation, the SOC would ask that the following conditions be considered:

- No students move until the interior renovation at PVEC is 100% complete
  - Students move at the beginning of the school year, not midway through the year
  - Clear communication from Board to public regarding transition plans and changes
  - Immediately address specialized programs, such as, but not limited to French Immersion, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate
  - Immediately appoint a Transition Team consisting of representation from SACs, staff and administration from both schools, guidance, students, and Regional staff to ensure:
    - a focus on students with learning, social, and emotional supports, with their needs being supported
    - no learning opportunities lost in transition
    - that students may finish grade 12 in the programs in which they are currently enrolled
    - additional topics (e.g., scholarships) are addressed as required
2. It is the recommendation of the School Options Committee of the Bridgewater and Park View Families of Schools that the Board review catchment areas with consideration to improvement of bussing times for all students.

This recommendation speaks to the Review Objective of reviewing school catchment areas as defined in the Catchment Area Policy.

The SOC believes that Regional staff have the expertise necessary to review school catchment areas and that it requires a more in-depth review than SOC parameters allowed.

Should the Board accept this recommendation, the SOC would ask for substantial parent engagement on this topic.

3. It is the recommendation of the School Options Committee of the Bridgewater and Park View Families of Schools that the Board direct the Superintendent to evaluate facility utilization and operational costs throughout the entire infrastructure of the South Shore Regional School Board. It is further recommended that the Superintendent request to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development an Addition and Alteration for Bridgewater Elementary School and Bridgewater Jr./Sr. High School to improve their current facilities.

This recommendation speaks to the Review Objective of considering facility utilization and operational costs when making recommendations. Although some SOC members discussed costs on their own time, it was not discussed in detail by the Committee as a whole.

4. It is the recommendation of the School Options Committee of the Bridgewater and Park View Families of Schools that the Superintendent direct Regional staff to review grade configurations for Bridgewater Elementary School and Bridgewater Jr./Sr. High School to optimize programming and facility use and space. It is further recommended that grade configurations at all other Park View feeder schools remain unchanged, until such time as the Petite Rivière and Pentz issue is resolved and the New Germany Family of Schools review is complete.

The SOC believes that grade configurations need to be examined due to moving the grades 10-12 students from BJSHS to PVEC and that Board staff have the expertise to implement changes, if needed

This recommendation speaks to the Review Objective of making a recommendation to the Board regarding school grade configuration at all schools.

5. It is the recommendation of the School Options Committee of the Bridgewater and Park View Families of Schools that Bayview Community School will continue to provide P-9 education as part of the Park View family of schools beyond the year 2020, and that the SSRSB convey its intention to do so by requesting the province of Nova Scotia to exercise Article 21 – Option to purchase or renew or surrender by selecting option (a), (b) or (c) in the service agreement between the Province and Nova Learning Inc.

This recommendation speaks to the Review Objective of determining whether Bayview Community School will be needed beyond 2020.

The SOC believes there is no benefit to closing Bayview Community School.

**Closing Statement**

These recommendations represent the best efforts of the SOC given the parameters of the Provincial Department of Education and Early Childhood Development School Review Policy. It is clear in our recommendations, particularly in the areas of catchment areas, bussing, and grade configurations, that more work needs to be done beyond the scope and timing of this Committee. It is the belief of the Committee that staff has the expertise to accurately determine what is best for students in these areas.

Throughout this process, as evidenced during the public meetings, there is public and political motivation to examine solutions that go beyond the restrictions of the Provincial Department of Education and Early Childhood Development policy mandates. Declining enrolment and financial resources are indicative of a larger problem of population decline and limited resources. We would encourage the Board to be part of a larger planning process that engages community partners and stakeholders, to find long-term solutions to these problems. We remain confident in our recommendations, given the Provincial policy mandates, as a first step towards solving a regional problem that goes beyond educational parameters.

Thank you for your time and careful consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

On behalf of the School Options Committee for the Bridgewater and Park View Families Schools,

*Heather Mackenzie-Carey and Shelley Mann*