

Reconfiguration of Secondary Schools in the Quesnel School District

Report to the Board of Education October 1, 2008

In the spring of 2004, a Superintendent's Advisory Committee on Secondary Restructuring was struck to proactively review secondary facility needs in the district. Approximately 35 stakeholders met routinely until June 2005 and provided comprehensive advice to the Superintendent of Schools with the assistance of Cornerstone Consulting.

During this process the committee's mandate was expanded to include a review of overall district restructuring issues to accommodate student needs related to middle schools as an option which in turn impacted on the elementary school capacities and programs.

The report, Schools Development Strategy was accepted by the Board of School Trustees on July 4, 2005.

The recommendations in the report were:

1. one secondary school encompassing grades 9 through 12;
2. two middle schools for grades 6 through 8 embracing the middle school philosophy;
3. the closure of up to 4 elementary schools to efficiently accommodate grades K through 5; and
4. adopting non-conventional approaches to accommodate the educational needs of students in 3 outlying schools which are located more than 40 km from the nearest school.

This report was reviewed with staff from the Ministry of Education and accepted as part of the District's capital submission for the replacement of Quesnel Secondary School. The projected date for implementation of the plan was September 2008.

Since July 2005, the Quesnel School District has not received a capital funding announcement from the Ministry of Education. The District has experienced a continuous decline in student enrolment at a greater rate than originally projected.

This decline can be attributed to a number of factors: a greater understanding of the devastation caused by the pine beetle epidemic and the effect it has had on the local forestry industry, the impact of the strong Canadian dollar on manufacturing and lumber sales and reduction of the number of jobs in local mills due to improvements in technology.

Recent government initiatives and announcements have called in to question our ability to implement our 2005 district wide restructuring plan. Shortly after the original report was submitted to the Ministry of Education, it was announced that Vancouver would host the 2010 Winter Olympics. Following this announcement it appears that very few school replacement projects have been awarded and the majority of capital projects have been seismic upgrades in the lower mainland.

The Ministry of Education and the Boards of Education have an expanded mandate for early learning. Government made a 2008 Throne Speech commitment to study the possible implementation of all-day Kindergarten for five year old children and optional all-day programs for three and four year old children. Future space requirements related to these new initiatives must be considered prior to disposing of current underutilized or surplus property.

The District remains committed to the *Guiding Principles* of the July 2005 report. These guiding principles were developed at the beginning of the school restructuring process to ensure that discussions and resulting options remain true to the values of the stakeholder group.

The following are the guiding principles:

- The well-being and success of students remain central to the restructuring process.
- Parents and staff are supported throughout the restructuring process.
- Positive effects on students are maximized and negative effects are minimized.
- Available funds are used to enhance programs and services to students.
- The use of resources is focused on student achievement, success and opportunities.
- The process is collaborative, constructive and transparent.
- A healthy, safe learning environment is optimized.
- Respect for multicultural and social diversity in schools is promoted.

Reconfigured Secondary Grades

Early in the 2007-08 school year, the senior administration and the secondary principals began discussing the need to reconfigure the grades in our secondary schools. It was becoming clearer that the declining enrolment was having an effect on our student programs. We are not able to offer a full range of core and elective courses for students in two high schools. We have found it difficult to provide additional supports to our grade 8 and 9 students, some of whom have struggled with the transition to high school. The present secondary structures limit our ability to provide an optimal learning environment for young adolescents.

District enrolment will continue to decline for at least the next decade.

Enrolment Projection Based on 2008 Numbers

Year	Grades									
	8 to 12	8	9	School Enrolment 8 & 9	10	11	12	10 to 12	Alternate Programs	School Enrolment 10 to 12
2009-10	1733	324	331	655	337	376	365	1078	-50	1028
2010-11	1647	279	324	603	331	337	376	1044	-50	994
2011-12	1552	281	279	560	324	331	337	992	-50	942
2012-13	1506	291	281	572	279	324	331	934	-50	884
2013-14	1373	198	291	489	281	279	324	884	-50	834
2014-15	1287	238	198	436	291	281	279	851	-50	801

Projected declines in the student population are not factored into this table. Student numbers will likely be lower at all grade levels from 2009-2015.

In 2007-08 our financial constraints were further exacerbated by the change in funding structure for secondary students (per course funding).

Over the past year the administration team has spent a great deal of time considering how we can best serve our grade 8 to 12 students. We have been involved in literature reviews, conversations with secondary teachers and have attended professional conferences focused on improving student achievement. Representatives from the 2004 Superintendents Advisory Committee on Secondary Restructuring were invited to participate in the secondary reconfiguration discussions.

From this stakeholder group four sub-committees were struck to investigate the possibility and implications of reconfiguring grades 8 -12. Parent and community representatives participated in three of the four sub-committees. The four sub-committees reported to the Stakeholder committee in June 2008 that reconfiguration would be educationally and financially beneficial to the Quesnel School District.

Senior administration worked with secondary principals to review options and put forward a recommendation.

One option considered would have postponed the need for portables for one year by splitting the grade 10 students between the two facilities. It would have provided a transition year, with QSS enrolling grades 8, 9 and 10 and Correlieu enrolling grades 10, 11, and 12. This option was discounted for the following reasons. First, the projected student enrolment at the grade 10 -12 level will make it necessary for portables to be used for at least the next three years (until the 2011/2012 school year).

Secondly, the inclusion of the grade 10's in the grade 8 -9 school would impact on all student programming in the building. We would not be able to fully develop the grade 8 – 9 middle years structure. The grade 10 students beginning their graduation program would be better supported in the senior school. The academic benefits outweigh the one year delay in purchasing portables for the Correlieu site.

We believe the configuration put forward in this report will best meet the needs of secondary students in the Quesnel School District.

Proposed Secondary Structure for 2009-2010

“No particular sequence of grade spans is perfect or in itself guarantees student achievement and social adjustment. With thought and effort effective practices can be implemented in a variety of grade configurations. What is important is to be aware of the potential benefits and difficulties of different configurations and to make each configuration, whether it comes about from choice or necessity, work as well as possible for all students.”

Paglin and Fager, 1997 Grade Configuration: Who goes where?

Quesnel Secondary School

– grades 8 and 9 with a middle years structure

Correlieu Secondary School

– grades 10, 11, and 12 with enhanced programs

McNaughton Centre Alternate Program

– no change

Grade 8 and 9

- This school will enroll approximately 655 students based on September 25, 2008 numbers (324 grade 8's and 331 grade 9's). This number is expected to decline slightly based on Ministry of Education projections.

Grades 10, 11 and 12

- This school will enroll approximately 1028 based on September 25, 2008 numbers (337 grade 10's, 376 grade 11's and 365 grade 12's). From this total we remove the Alternate Education enrolment of 50 – 60 students. This number may decline slightly based on Ministry of Education projections.

Benefits for students in grades 8 and 9

- Our grade 8 and 9 students would be best supported in an environment where the staff is able to focus on; student engagement and learning through interdisciplinary teams, on social development and parent engagement, and teaching students critical skills and strategies before there is significant need to focus on specific content and provincial exams.
- We have found it challenging to provide additional supports for our grade 8 and 9 students, some of whom have struggled with the transition to high school.
- Grade 8 and 9 students are failing or are at risk of failing more courses than other grade groups.
- Greater opportunities for extended extra curricular activities.
- Lower enrolment would provide opportunities for team building (house structures) contribute to a positive school climate and an enhanced sense of belonging.
- Larger numbers at each grade level would strengthen electives such as band, drama, and choir.
- Specialist teachers would be provided for electives.
- Structures would be in place to provide support for students through interdisciplinary teams which would include LA, counselling, behavior support, classroom teachers etc.
- Students would have fewer teacher contacts which would strengthen relationships with their classroom teacher.
- Teams will focus on ensuring student success and early intervention when students begin to struggle.
- A possible closed campus during the lunch time – opportunity for positive activities.
- Reduced negative influence from older students.
- School structures and programs would be designed to meet the needs of young adolescents.
- Closer ties with families and guardians.
- Enhanced leadership opportunities.
- Opportunity to improve the transition to high school for grade 7 students.
- The school structures and supports should enable more students entering grade 10 to feel confident and academically prepared (reduced failures).
- The exam schedule and graduation program will no longer impact instructional time.

Concerns

- No older peer tutors.
- Current Correlieu grade 8's would be in their new school one year.
- All current grade 8's would have to adjust to a new structure, some students might find this limiting.

- Concerns about proximity to McNaughton Centre Alternate Program were raised in two meetings. QSS Principals report limited interaction with McNaughton students and very few problems related to the shared campus.

Benefits for students in grades 10-12

- more sections of core subjects offered in each semester
- a wider range of electives could be offered without compromising the core subjects
- opportunity for new courses or courses to be revived
- opportunity to take a variety of courses in a specific discipline or area of strength will be motivating for students –i.e.: English, English Literature, Writing 12, Film Studies for a student who loves to write
- a greater variety of electives may appeal to our at risk students; success in these courses will have them making progress toward their graduation program
- students could develop focus on career strands in the elective areas
- student-to-student issues will need to be resolved as there will only be one high school
- courses will be provided by subject area specialists
- a more diverse and multi-cultural student body will provide opportunities for students to develop understanding and tolerance

Concerns

- only one choice for high school
- current QSS grade 11's will move to a new school for their graduating year
- students will not be able to remain in one school for grades 8 to 12
- students will not have the opportunity to act as older peer tutors to junior students, however peer- to- peer tutoring programs could be developed

Specialty Programs

French Immersion would be offered to students in both schools. Following consultation with Secondary French Immersion teachers a tentative plan was developed.

Hockey Academy would be offered to students in both schools. Bussing would be required for students from the secondary school. With bussing in place there is potential for this program to grow.

See Appendix A – Bibliography

Facilities

Quesnel Secondary School

No changes to the facility will be required. It is possible with a smaller enrolment that some portions of the school may not be required.

Correliou Secondary School

Several portables will be required to provide adequate classroom space for the next three years (based on present enrolment projections). The number of portables required may be reduced by timetable adjustments, resource room requirements and further declines in enrolment.

The projected timetable and class assignments support that Correliou Secondary School has adequate space for the labs, shops and specialty classrooms required.

Financial Analysis

Grade 8 - 9 at Quesnel Secondary and Grade 10 – 12 at Correliou Secondary

Purchase 2 portables	\$ 80,000
Move 2 portables from QSS and set up 4 portables	\$ 25,000
Move equipment, supplies and learning resources	\$ 50,000
Shop equipment	\$ 25,000
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Total: one-time costs	\$180,000

With internet and other technology the CSS library has become somewhat under-utilized. A portion of the library could be converted to classroom space thus saving the cost of one portable. This option will be explored in more detail.

The bottom line is that the savings with economies of scale are greater than the additional costs of operating the portables therefore annual operational costs will be reduced.

The cost of heat and light for the two additional portables would be \$2,400. There would be increased custodial costs for the two additional portables amounting to approximately \$12,000 annually. There will be opportunities to reduce custodial at QSS if classrooms can be closed.

General Renovations

Defer requests for classroom renovations, equipment and supply moves that are not essential to the consolidation.

Transportation

We do not anticipate any overall effect on transportation costs. The impact on hockey academy has been mentioned.

Instructional Program Costs

Hockey Academy

This program enrolls approximately 60 grade 8-9 students and approximately 40 grade 10-12 students. The senior grades would be most affected by a move to CSS. The move to CSS may create more opportunities for participation of those students. The cost of transportation has been estimated at approx \$130 per student per year. This cost must be factored into the reconfiguration plan.

Learning Resources

We expect to utilize to the greatest extent possible, existing learning resources for courses. There maybe some need to purchase additional resources for linear courses at the grade 8 and 9 school. A process will be developed to address the movement of specialized equipment.

We anticipate minimal movement of shop equipment between the schools. The transfer of the milling machine at QSS will cost approximately \$25,000.

Staffing

We do not anticipate any overall change to administrative costs.

Economies of scale and scheduling efficiencies should allow for the savings and reinvestment of 3.5 FTE teaching staff amounting to \$260,000 annually.

We anticipate some move of clerical time from Quesnel Secondary to Correlieu Secondary. This should not increase overall costs.

Human Resources Considerations

A key component of any secondary school restructuring plan will be a smooth transition of district staff in a manner that best meets student needs while respecting the District's obligation to provide staff with appropriate assignments. Some aspects of the plan that follows will be dependent upon agreement of either CMAW or the QDTA and may need to be revised.

School Administration

Should the secondary school restructuring plan be approved, the administration of both schools should be named within two weeks of the decision being made.

Identifying the administrators of each school early in the process will ensure that there are individuals who will oversee the new configuration from the beginning.

Student Timetables

School administration will need to develop a draft student timetable for each school by the end of January 2009. The timetable will be used to determine the staffing requirements for each school. In addition, the development of a timetable early in the process will assist in determining which resources should be provided to each school.

Teacher staffing

Teacher staffing should be in place before the end of February. There will be one round of postings with all positions being posted. Teachers will bid on the positions that are of interest to them and the positions will be filled based on qualifications as defined in the June/August posting process, current continuing assignments and seniority. Only the teachers in continuing positions at either QSS or CSS may bid. Teachers may not increase their FTE during this round of postings.

Any positions not filled during the February posting process as well as any new vacancies created by leaves, resignations, or student needs, will be posted during the normal June/August posting process and all teachers will be eligible to bid. Teachers who were placed in positions in February will have opportunities to amend their assignments at their new school, as is current practice, before postings are created in June and August.

Support Staff staffing

Support staff positions at the two schools will be filled by staff who hold permanent positions in the current schools. Staff who work with students, such as Student Support Workers, Youth Care Workers, and First Nations Support Workers will be assigned to a school based on student location and needs.

Staff who work with specific students will follow those students while the remainder of the staff will be assigned to one of the schools based on student need.

Secretarial staff will remain in their current school unless some adjustment is required due to student enrolment and the different needs of grades 8-9 and grades 10-12 schools.

Custodial staff will remain in their current schools assuming the square footage to be cleaned remains approximately the same.

Should a staff reduction be necessary, the contractual bumping process will apply. Any vacant support staff positions that are created by either an employee vacating

a position or a newly created position, will be filled through the normal posting and filling process that occurs every May and June.

Other considerations

Teachers who do not transfer schools will remain in their current room assignments unless it is determined that all teachers in a certain department will be grouped in the same area of a school. School administration will assign rooms to staff that change schools.

The district will provide some moving assistance to teachers and support workers who are changing schools.

School timetables should be developed in such a manner that there is a greater opportunity to provide common prep periods which should permit more staff consultation opportunities.

School resources will stay in the school that purchased them unless they are items that are specific to a certain grade such as textbooks.

Some of the small classes with 12-20 students will be larger as the students from the two schools in a grade will be combined. This should mean that the staffing may be more efficiently utilized so that the number of larger classes in the 28-30 student range can be reduced to the 24-27 student range.

Teachers at the grade 8 and 9 school will have an opportunity to work in interdisciplinary teams. Research informs that interdisciplinary teams increase collegiality and improve teachers' abilities to plan for curriculum, discipline methods and problems that occur.

Teachers, especially at the junior school, should have contact with fewer individual students over the course of a school year as the students would be assigned to pods.

Teachers at the grade 10, 11 and 12 school will have an opportunity to teach in their subject specialty and reduce the number of grade level courses they teach. Larger enrolment at the secondary level would provide the opportunity to revive courses that have been discontinued due to low enrolment and create new electives based on student interest,

Conclusion

The proposed secondary reconfiguration plan will support secondary students indefinitely. A Ministry of Education capital funding announcement is possible around 2010. Following the announcement the Board of Education will have 3 years to consider district-wide needs before the project is undertaken.

Appendix A
Bibliography

Appendix A

Review of the Literature

There are many ways a community may configure a school. There is a growing body of research examining the effectiveness of these grade configurations, and the grade span within a school that will have the greatest positive effect on young adolescent learning. Research informs that there are positives and negatives for every grade configuration possible.

There is however, a connecting thread through the research. It is that young adolescents, no matter how they are housed will be more successful in a program that implements the essential and effective strategies that best meet the unique needs of this rapidly developing age group. Middle level schools or programming does work, in any configuration when systematically and fully implemented.

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The following is a listing of the books and articles referenced throughout this process.

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