



Northern Gateway Public Schools

Box 840 • 4816 – 49th Avenue • Whitecourt, Alberta • T7S 1N8
780-778-2800 • 1-800-262-8674 • Fax: 780-778-6719
e-mail: learn@ngrd.ab.ca
website: www.ngrd.ab.ca

January 25, 2012

Dear Parents:

At the December regular meeting of the Northern Gateway Regional Division #10 Board of Trustees, two notices of motion were passed to facilitate the reconfiguration of Pat Hardy and Whitecourt Central elementary schools in Whitecourt. The proposal recommended to the Board is to reconfigure Whitecourt elementary schools with Pat Hardy Elementary School housing all Kindergarten to Grade 2 students and Whitecourt Central Elementary to house grades 3, 4 and 5 students.

The notices of motion by the Board **initiate a consultation process** wherein the School Board will both present and receive information related to the proposed grade reconfiguration as well as examine the implications for and the impact on the educational programs for students in the two schools involved. This letter provides information to stakeholders who will be significantly impacted by the proposed reconfigurations.

It is important for all stakeholders to understand that the intention of this grade reconfiguration is not merely to redistribute numbers and learning spaces, rather it is to increase program offerings to early learners within the community. This will become clear through the answers to the basic questions below. Opportunity for more detailed information to be received and discussed will follow at a public meeting to be held in mid-February.

The following Questions & Answers are grouped together in themes that deal with Education, Finance and Logistics.

Educational Considerations:

Why is the grade reconfiguration of Pat Hardy and Whitecourt Central elementary schools being considered at this time?

After the completion of the annual Division review of all school sites which examines enrolments, school utilization, per pupil spending and student programming, it was clear that Pat Hardy Elementary School was operating beyond its space capacity as defined by Alberta Infrastructure. This triggered an examination of solutions to the

immediate space issue, while at the same time initiating discussions about the possibilities of providing increased programming at the early learner levels. The public musings by both the Premier of Alberta and the Minister of Education about the possibility of full day, every day Kindergarten programming served as a further catalyst for rethinking program delivery within Northern Gateway Public Schools in general and the community of Whitecourt in particular.

What are the program implications for schools and students?

There will be no impact on programming at Percy Baxter Middle and Hilltop High schools. There will be a positive impact on program offerings at Pat Hardy Elementary as a Pre-Kindergarten to grade 2 school with a strong Early Childhood Education focus. Pat Hardy will potentially offer six sections of Kindergarten, with two classes being full day programs. Further, Pat Hardy will begin to offer as many as six sections of Pre-Kindergarten, all within a consistent educational approach geared to meet the needs of the early learner. This represents an increase in programming specifically aimed at supporting the early learner offered within Whitecourt elementary schools.

Whitecourt Central Elementary School will offer grades 3, 4 and 5 programming. This will provide the school with the opportunity to sharpen the focus on a student learning environment and school activities that support learning for children 7 to 10 years of age. Teachers will have greater opportunity to collaborate with other teachers at the same grade levels and to create a common school learning environment.

Why not maintain the current grade configurations at both schools and impose attendance boundaries for the Whitecourt elementary schools?

The main considerations behind the grade reconfiguration is to take advantage of an opportunity to establish a strong program for early learners, to provide the opportunity to expand Kindergarten offerings and to grow into Pre-Kindergarten programming in Whitecourt within a school that will have a strong Early Childhood Education philosophy permeating the school and supporting the early learner. Housing these programs at one site makes very good sense for program stability, synergy and growth. At the same time, the reconfiguration will allow for a more balanced use of facilities and provide both schools with the opportunity to accommodate population growth. Imposing attendance boundaries would serve to balance out student numbers by compelling some students currently attending Pat Hardy to attend Whitecourt Central and vice versa. It would not provide for the opportunity to develop two schools with a sharper focus on a particular clientele as is proposed in the reconfiguration.

Why was Pat Hardy selected for the pre-K - 2 program and Central for the 3 - 5 program?

While both buildings are able to accommodate either scenario, the building and external grounds at Whitecourt Central School were determined to be a better fit for the older students.

How will the grade reconfiguration affect the attendance at other schools?

There will be no impact on student programming paths through Percy Baxter School and Hilltop High School. Students will continue to attend Percy Baxter Middle School for grades 6, 7 and 8 then proceed to Hilltop High School for grades 9, 10, 11 and 12. It has been suggested that an added benefit to the proposed reconfiguration would be found in the transitioning of students into grade 6 from one school as opposed to two.

Logistical Considerations:

How will the reconfiguration affect the attendance areas defined for the schools?

Currently there are no defined attendance boundaries attached to Whitecourt elementary schools. Both schools offer Kindergarten to grade 5 programs, with Whitecourt Central School offering a Pre-Kindergarten program in conjunction with the *Team for SUCCESS* project. The relocation of grades would see Pre-K to grade 2 offered at Pat Hardy Elementary and grades 3-5 offered at Whitecourt Central Elementary.

What is the number of students being relocated as a result of the grade reconfiguration?

Under the proposed K-2 and 3-5 grade configuration 183 grade 3-5 students will be relocated from Pat Hardy School to Whitecourt Central School and 123 Kindergarten to Grade 2 students will be relocated from Whitecourt Central School to Pat Hardy School. This will allow additional space at Pat Hardy School for the expansion of Kindergarten and Pre-Kindergarten program offerings.

What will be the need for and extent of busing?

A grade reconfiguration as proposed will result in changes to student transportation patterns as the assigned schools for some students will change. Current transportation regulations specify that K-12 students living 2.4 kilometers or greater

from their assigned school qualify for transportation services at no cost. Students living closer than the 2.4 kilometer distance have the option of receiving transportation services on the regular “in town” busing fee schedule.

Pat Hardy and Whitecourt Central elementary schools are 3.1 kilometers apart so the reconfiguration will not result in significant increases to bus ride times for students. Pick up/drop off time changes will be determined after bus routes are adapted to accommodate the reconfiguration. Additional bus routes will be added to address the increase in the number of students accessing transportation services. Specific information related to bus routes and schedules will be determined and communicated after a final decision is made by the Board. Should you have general questions related to the potential impact of a change in assigned schools on transportation services for your child you may call the Director of Transportation at 1-888-785-3396.

Financial Considerations:

Why not simply add portables to Pat Hardy to address the space concern?

Space is not the only consideration driving the recommendation for grade reconfiguration, though the School Operational Viability Report showed that it is a concern at Pat Hardy. Alberta Infrastructure guidelines indicate a school is considered “full” when it reaches 85% of its capacity. Pat Hardy is currently at 90% capacity. Capital approval for additional spaces (i.e. portable classrooms) requires a review of all space available in Division schools located within a community. Currently, Whitecourt schools have an overall utilization rate of 73%, well below the 85% factor used to trigger a new capital request. The expectation is for the School Division to address any overcrowding needs within the current space available to the School Division with the community before additional spaces would be approved. This stated, the reconfiguration proposal goes beyond simply space reallocation. It seeks to improve student program offerings for the community through the grade redesign.

What are the financial impacts of the school reconfiguration, including the effect on operational costs and capital implications?

Further to the educational impacts outlined earlier, the operational costs will not change significantly. School based operational revenues will be adjusted to address the shift in student population. Using current populations to project future student enrolments, Whitecourt Central School would have 324 students as opposed to the current 296. Pat Hardy School would serve 343 students as opposed to the current 399. Further, the additional offering of some sections of full day, every day Kindergarten and Pre-Kindergarten programming in two dedicated classrooms

further increases the practical utilization of the school and the total number of students served.

Necessary adjustments to the physical spaces in the schools will be addressed through the Division's Maintenance and Renewal Program. This will include the adjustments to washroom facilities, drinking fountains and classroom instructional equipment to age appropriate standards.

What will be the impact on the Division's Long Range Capital Plan?

The Board's Long Range Capital Plan would not be impacted by the proposed grade reconfiguration. The Division's top capital priority remains the major modernization of Onoway High School . For more information on the Division's Capital Plan you can visit the Division's website at:

[http://www.ngrd.ab.ca/Downloads/JurisdictionReports/2010 2013 Capital plan.pdf](http://www.ngrd.ab.ca/Downloads/JurisdictionReports/2010%202013%20Capital%20plan.pdf)

What is the age and condition of the Schools involved?

Neither school presents a concern in the areas of age or condition. Both schools are in very good condition. Pat Hardy was originally constructed in 1979 and had modular additions in 1988 and 2007. Whitecourt Central School has a more storied construction history with the original school built in 1921. A patchwork of additions between 1945 and 1960 were replaced during a major modernization in 1986. This was further improved in 2010 with the addition of new modular classrooms affixed to the building.

General Information:

What is the time and location of the public meeting?

For more information and discussion about the proposed grade reconfiguration the Board of Trustees will be hosting a public meeting on **Thursday, February 16** beginning at **7:00 p.m.** in the **Percy Baxter School Gymnasium.**

What is the process after the public meeting is completed?

After the public meeting is completed, individuals or groups of stakeholders wishing to make their views known to the Board can do so through a presentation to the Board of Trustees. A face to face meeting or video conference with the Board can be scheduled by contacting Gloria Kirsch by phone at 780-778-2800 or via e-mail at gloria.kirsch@ngrd.ab.ca.

Written submissions from any affected stakeholders on the subject of the proposed grade reconfiguration will be accepted at any time on or before March 31, 2012. The Board will make a final decision related to the reconfiguration at the Regular Board meeting of April 3, 2012. Submissions can be sent via e-mail to learn@ngrd.ab.ca or mailed to the following address:

Board Chair
Northern Gateway Regional Division #10
Box 840,
Whitecourt, AB
T7S 1M8

The public meeting on February 16th will outline further information and provide the opportunity for stakeholder feedback related to grade reconfiguration of Pat Hardy and Whitecourt Central elementary schools. The Board of Trustees is committed to reviewing and weighing all perspectives and submissions prior to making any decisions. I encourage you to join us on February 16th.

Sincerely,



Kevin Andrea
Superintendent of Schools