



February 27, 2008

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 7:30PM
FEBRUARY 27, 2008**

School Board Receives Report on School Utilization

Bridgewater, NS: The South Shore Regional School Board received the report of consultant, Dr. Jim Gunn, on school utilization in the region at its regular meeting tonight in Bridgewater. The Board will consider the report over the next month. Decisions about the adoption of the report and its nine (9) recommendations will be taken by the Board at its March 26th meeting.

In 2005, the Board undertook a review of its educational programming. Phase I of the program review defined the basic educational program the Board can sustain, in a time of declining enrolment, at the elementary, middle and senior levels. Phase II began in 2007, when the Board contracted consultant, Dr. Jim Gunn, to author a discussion paper on school utilization. The discussion paper was received by the Board on November 27, 2007.

The School Utilization Study Report follows public meetings held at each of the region's seven high schools in January and early February, 2008. The South Shore Regional School Board currently operates 31 public schools in an area of 5250 square kilometers in Lunenburg and Queens Counties. The South Shore currently has an enrolment of 7882 students. The region has lost 18% of its enrolment in the past decade. The current enrolment is projected to decline by 25% over the next ten years.

The consultant was contracted by the Board to study the utilization of its public school buildings. Questions considered by the study are:

1. What changes in school grade configurations and school boundaries would contribute positively to a more effective delivery of basic educational programs?
2. What schools should be considered formally for possible closure under the new, provincial "School Review" process?
3. How can student access to the Board's special or alternate programs be made more equitable? (To be provided in a supplementary report.)
4. What are the financial implications of the recommendations to deliver programs more effectively and equitably?
5. What is a reasonable timeline for the implementation of the recommendations?

The report's nine (9) recommendations address school grade reconfigurations, limited boundary changes, and identification of some schools for consideration under the province's new, year-long school review process. Schools to be reviewed over the next year must be identified by the school board by April 1st of this year.

Key recommendations the Board will consider over the next month include:

- An engineering study of three elementary schools – Hebbville, Pentz and Petite Rivière – whose students all attend Hebbville Academy for the middle school years. The study would compare the viability of school renovation or new construction to house the three school populations at a single or separate locations. (If a new school were constructed, this would mean that Pentz, Petite Rivière, and Hebbville Elementary Schools would close.) There is no recommendation to submit these schools for review at the present time;
- Re-configure Lunenburg Junior-Senior High School as a Grade 6-9 school, and send senior high school students from Lunenburg to Park View Education Centre, of which the school boundary area currently surrounds the Town of Lunenburg;
- Weigh the advantages and disadvantages of constructing a new Grade P-9 school to replace Centre Consolidated School, Lunenburg Academy and Lunenburg Junior High School (If a new school were constructed, Centre Consolidated, Lunenburg Junior-Senior, and Lunenburg Academy would close);
- That the current Grade 4 students remain at Newcombville Elementary School year to attend Grade 5 and then transfer to Hebbville Academy for Grade 6;

- That Big Tancook Elementary School be considered for review under the new provincial School Review Process. (This recommendation is put forward with the expressed opinion of the consultant that the children in early elementary school should not have to travel off Big Tancook Island by ferry to attend school.);
- That Greenfield Elementary School be considered for review under the new provincial School Review Process. (The report acknowledges the unique educational experiment underway between the Department of Education and a community-based organization that is constructing a building suitable for use as a public school in the Greenfield community);
- That Mill Village Consolidated Elementary School be considered for review under the new provincial School Review Process, and further, that the school be closed when all its students can be transferred to Dr. John C. Wickwire Academy;
- That Milton Centennial School be considered for review under the new provincial School Review Process, and further, that the school be closed when all its students can be transferred to Dr. John C. Wickwire Academy; and
- That Riverport & District Elementary School be considered for review under the new provincial School Review Process. (If the school were closed, students could attend Centre Consolidates School or Lunenburg Academy. If a new school for Centre and Lunenburg were constructed, Riverport & District communities would be included in that school boundary).

In 2007, the Province of Nova Scotia introduced a new, year-long School Review Process to replace an older, shorter School Closure Process. Legislation and Regulation to govern that new process are still in development.

“The Board has taken a very important step in contracting this study and asking the questions it has,” Superintendent of Schools, Nancy Pynch-Worthylake, says. “We are experiencing a dramatic enrolment decline, and one which will have an impact on our ability to sustain quality, equitable educational programming across our region. The questions raised are provocative, but necessary and responsible.” Pynch-Worthylake adds.

“This study has brought to light facts we all need to know,” Consultant Jim Gunn says. “Foremost among them is the ability of teachers and administrators to creatively and effectively deal with the programming challenges posed by declining enrolment. This region has some very small schools that are still able to deliver a quality program. That is testament to the dedication and competence of teaching staff and educational leaders.”

“Another fact which clearly emerges is that south shore schools benefit from enormous support and loyalty from students, families and others in the community. In many cases, that support makes a critical difference in the ability of students to achieve and teachers to deliver quality programming in some very small schools,” Gunn says.

Pynch-Worthylake adds, “It is essential to point out that, even if the Board accepts a recommendation and names a school for review, this does not necessarily mean it will close, or even that it should. It simply means that the responsible course of action to take is to ask the question and conduct the review.”

“Our goal is to sustain the delivery of a high quality public education program, with equity across the region, into the future,” Board Chair Wanda J. Broome says. “To do that, we have to ask how we can make the best use of the resources we have. We also have to consider grade and school boundary reconfigurations, and their impact on the communities that support our public schools. The Board will now consider this study in depth before rendering any decisions.”

The full report of the consultant, along with background documents, is available on the school board’s website, at www.srsb.ca.

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For more information, contact:

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CONSULTANT’S REPORT ATTACHED