

Issues in K-12 proposals raised, explored

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The accommodation review committee identified a number of issues last week that will have to be sorted through, as Atikokan moves to one combined K-12 public school.

Among these are:

- Will one gym (Grayson Hall) be enough for a K-12 school?

Can the gym time needs of NorWOSSA sports, lunch time intramurals, AHS team practices, the after-school program, and regular classes be balanced?

"We don't want to see elementary students taking a back seat to high school sports," said Jody Labossiere.

A committee member noted that K-12 public school students now have three gyms (two at AHS, one at North Star); going to just one will be a challenge. Another suggested this was a plus for the expanded North Star option - there, the existing gym would remain (presumably mostly for elementary use), and a new full-sized gym built.

School board staff suggested getting funding to include a second, smaller gym at a new K-12 facility at AHS would be difficult.

- What can the board do to allay parent concerns about the safety of putting primary and secondary students together in one school?

- What specific evidence is there that fewer transitions (i.e., staying in the same school facility) produces better results for students?

- What impact will the change have on St. Pat's School?

The board invited St. Pat's to the community partner meeting in April; no one attended.

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K-12 school issues raised, explored

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- Can a community partner be found to take over North Star School, and turn it into a senior-oriented facility?

The structure at North Star is far better suited to being re-designed as a multi-unit seniors' facility. In fact, that is one of the chief reasons the board currently favours building a new school at AHS - North Star as it stands would have real value to Atikokan. A closed AHS would likely have to be demolished.

- The change will mean some loss of jobs (likely through attrition). It shouldn't mean any loss of programming, though; in fact, there will be opportunities for improvements to French and

special education programs, and possibly others. How can these benefits be maximized, and publicized?

A related issue here is that the change will be a loss for the community, which has just suffered the loss of two banks.

Will there be enough space to offer all the programs available now at the high school?

Space will be tighter, but there are options in design that will allow for less than full-size classrooms.

What will happen with the high quality playground equipment at North Star?

The accommodation review committee includes three School

Council members (Mellisa Gallagher, Darryl Gannon, Jeff Lehman), a student rep (Chloe Machura), a community rep (Sylvia Parker), staff reps Martha Duquette and Karen Gannon, principals Jody Labossiere and Beth Fairfield, and director of education Heather Campbell. Senior board staff were on hand as resource people for the meeting, including financial officer Laura Mills and operations manager Travis Enge.

Their meeting was recorded, and can be watched on-line. The committee will meet again next week to follow up on the issues it raised last week, and any raised at Thursday's public meeting.

Have your say

The school board will hold a public meeting this Thursday (May 18) from 5 to 7 pm at Grayson Hall.

There will be presentations from the public. Announced presenters have until the end of the day tomorrow to book a spot; that can be done at the school board website (www.rrdsb.com), at the 'Atikokan Student Accommodation Review' page.

There will also be the opportunity for open mic style presentations during the meeting.

There is a great deal of information, from architect studies to meeting minutes, related to the work going into this accommodation review at the web page cited above. It will also accept questions about the review process and its findings.

The final staff report to the school board will be made public on June 2. The school board is also open to hearing from delegations at its June 19 committee-of-the-whole meeting. A final board decision is expected in mid- to late September. Whatever the board decides will have to be approved, and funded, by the province. How long that will take is unknown.