

Board to hear from delegations here June 19

K-12 school committee splits on gym and space issues

M. McKinnon

The accommodation review committee has reached a 'consensus' on how Atikokan should proceed with a K-12 school, but only over strong objections from two of its ten members

The final recommendation of the committee, reached at its May 23 meeting, stated:

"It is recommended that the Rainy River District School Board consolidate Atikokan High School and North Star Community School into a new Kindergarten to Grade 12 school on the Atikokan High School site while maintaining Grayson Hall and the Outers Building and constructing a large, flexible space for physical education and the arts.

And, it is recommended that the Rainy River District School Board continue with the North Star Community School site consolidation option if a viable community partner is not found."

The "large, flexible space" mentioned in the first sentence is not a gym, and that has several members of the committee concerned, so concerned they would not accept the minutes containing the recommendation.

Darryl Gannon, a parent rep for AHS, said a combined school requires a second gym to accommodate the physical activity needs of all students, and a proper stage for arts and similar type programming.

He suggested that by preserving the shop classes at AHS, and dropping plans to create a full-size sports field, the school board could reduce construction costs enough to finance a second gym with a stage at the AHS site.

Karen Gannon, a teacher rep for AHS, agreed, and detailed two other concerns as well.

Space was one. "Will data management be taught in the shop, and English in the library?" she asked.

Currently, AHS has 27 classrooms (most of which are used less than half the time) and North Star has eleven. A combined K-12 school would likely have about half that number of classrooms.

Although a new school will include designated space for programs like construction technology, auto shop, and food preparation, space will be at premium. Although that can be

eased by good design, students and teachers will have to adapt to very different working conditions.

The amount of classroom space in the new school will be based on a Ministry of Education formula that considers enrolment and other factors. Gannon argued that that formula should reflect the very different needs of a K-12 school. Although it will be all one school, "the square footage should be for one elementary school and for one high school that are attached, and share a few areas.... Two hundred and thirty K-12 students need a lot more space than two hundred and thirty K-6 or two hundred and thirty 7-12 students."

Her other concern involves the lack of reliable information on the impact of creating a K-12 school, and on best practices for doing it.

"If we go ahead and build a K-12 school, we will be the research," she said. "We should be consulting with every K-12 school we can find, especially Ignace School, whose demographics quite closely match ours. We need to incorporate these schools'

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suggestions, and ensure we don't repeat their mistakes.”

Board staff issued a final report and recommendation on

Friday (after the Progress deadline; we will report on it next week). A committee-of-the-whole meeting of the board is planned for Monday, June 19 at Atikokan High School at which the board will hear from any interested delegations on the accommodation review. Presenters have until Monday, June 12 at 4 pm to register their intent to address the board. (See Atikokan Accommodation Review at www.rrdsb.com for details.) The meeting will be open to the public.

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