

School board expected to decide Wednesday on K-12 plan for Atikokan

M. McKinnon

The Rainy River District School Board is expected to choose its preferred option for the future of Atikokan's public schools at a meeting here Wednesday (7 pm, AHS).

School board managers have recommended the board amalgamate the elementary and high

schools in Atikokan into one (mostly new) school at the current high school site. Some of the existing high school would be maintained as is (Grayson Hall, the Outers building), some would be upgraded (the labs and tech rooms), but most of the current building would be razed and rebuilt. A second gym would be

included in the revamped facility.

That recommendation came about after a series of public meetings last winter and spring, including several sessions of a special accommodation advisory committee.

The board wants to amalgamate to reduce operating costs. The province is also cutting funding for maintaining underused schools, an additional incentive.

North Star School, built for 331 students, is expected to enrol 138 students this year - a usage rate of about 42 percent. That is not expected to change much over the next decade.

The situation is even more dramatic at AHS, which has a rated capacity of 627 students. Enrolment is expected to be about 178 this year (136 in grades nine to twelve, plus 42 in grades seven-eight), which produces a usage rate of about 31 percent.

By combining the schools, the board hopes to push the usage rate over seventy percent, and to reduce operating costs in Atikokan by about \$720,000 a year, from \$4.5 million to \$3.88 million. There would also be significant long-term savings in building maintenance costs by disposing of the North Star building, and upgrading the sixty year old high school building. Renewal needs for the two facilities over the next five years are projected to be over \$25 million.

An architect hired by the board estimated the new amalgamated K-12 school could be built at the high school site for \$17.8 million.

If the school board accepts this recommendation Wednesday, the proposal would then go to the Ministry of Education, which would have to agree to fund the project.

Noted Wednesday's special board meeting will also cover the director's annual operational plan.

Supervised Alternative Learning

Superintendent of Education Allan McManaman offered the board an overview of the Supervised Alternative Learning (SAL) program at its September 6 meeting in Fort Frances.

SAL provides continued educational opportunities for students who have difficulties attending school on a regular basis. The program meets legal attendance at school requirements; students are provided with individualized programming. Students, primarily between the ages of 14 to 18, may participate on a full or part time basis, and the length of programs may vary from one semester to a full academic year.

Last school year, 85 students

See 'School board', page 6

School board notes

From page 1

earned 49 credits through the program, with four graduating.

"SAL students are able to experience success because they become engaged or are re-engaged through a combination of innovative timetables, alternative programming and flexible schedules," said the superintendent.

Summer maintenance

In terms of maintenance work, it was a fairly ordinary summer at North Star and AHS, plant manager Travis Enge indicated in his report to the board.

The wireless access points were upgraded at North Star and five other schools. "Now all schools have the most up-to-date, stable, wireless technology," he said.

The gym floors at both schools were refreshed, and the fire alarm panel at North Star was replaced.

Also conducted were regular

and preventative maintenance projects, including inspection of building safety systems, boiler cleaning, playground maintenance, painting, and technology infrastructure upgrades.

The latter will continue into the school year, as the board (at a July 13 special meeting) awarded multi-million dollar contracts for IT backbone upgrades. (Bell Canada \$2.2 million, Integra Data Systems \$1.2 million) All schools will get new servers and network switches that will increase infrastructure between schools and core services to ten gigabytes per second. A new network firewall is part of the upgrade.

Staffing

Personnel reports at the June and September meetings showed a number of staffing changes involving Atikokan schools.

Teacher Eric Arner was hired full-time at AHS, an increase

from 0.33 full-time equivalent (FTE) last year.

Teacher Tyson Grinsell was hired full-time at AHS, an increase from 0.5 FTE last year.

Teacher Sherri Dragan was hired for AHS (0.83 FTE basis).

Teacher Heather Algje moved from AHS to Rainy River HS; she will remain on parental leave through semester one.

Teacher Marlys Morden will go on parental leave from North Star for a year starting in mid-October.

Teacher Anna Demchuk, moved from North Star to Robert Moore School. The move included an increase to full-time status, from 0.9 FTE.

AHS educational assistant Marion Dyck retired, effective August 27.

Maxine Bailey moved from casual to full-time caretaker at AHS.