

Balmoral School
Community Consultation Meeting
Questions and Answers from April 1, 2009

Question: have alternatives to closure like moving French Immersion from Handsworth been considered as a way to keep Balmoral open?

Answer: moving French Immersion to Balmoral has been considered and would be very difficult to support. The Board is introducing French Immersion to Windsor to support its enrolment and as a 'green initiative' to reduce driving from the east side.

Q: Is the Board proposing the closure of Balmoral to get more capital funds?

A: No, the Board is pursuing capital funding through the capital planning process. The Board has completed 100 million in projects over the last 10 years and has requested a further 200 million dollars worth of capital projects.

Q: If funding has stayed the same and enrolment has dropped, why does the school district have a shortfall in funds?

A: While funding has remained constant, costs have risen by 3.5 to 4%.

Q: With declining enrolment how can the Board continue to pursue the \$38 million dollars for the Education Services Centre on Lonsdale?

A: The Board has a conditional agreement with Polygon that will provide the funding necessary for the Education Services Centre while contributing further funds to the heritage projects at Ridgeway Elementary and Queen Mary. Building the Education Services Centre will allow for the consolidation of a number of buildings, sites and services to allow for reduced operating costs for the next fifty years.

Q: How safe is the Balmoral gym if it is going to be kept and used for revenue?

A: The Balmoral gym is a steel structure that would be lower seismic risk than the Carson Gym. However, it would still require upgrading in the future. The upgrading costs at Carson exceed the cost of a new gymnasium.

Q: Has the population risen since 2006 that would result in additional student enrolment? What if these projections are wrong?

A: Census data was last compiled in 2006. All housing developments, built and planned, have been factored into enrolment projections. The birth rate year for next year's Kindergarten students is the lowest rate in twenty years. Enrolment projections conducted by Matrix in 2004 were updated in 2007. The 2004 projections were viewed as being pessimistic, while they have proven to have been too optimistic, with enrolment declining at a greater rate than originally forecast.

- Q:** With North Vancouver becoming more affordable in the last year, won't there be more families moving in?
- A:** As home prices have dropped in North Vancouver, prices have similarly dropped in other areas, maintaining those as more 'affordable'.
- Q:** What is the School District doing to draw students here, rather than going to other School Districts? Why not offer programs that others are not doing?
- A:** The School District has increased program offerings for students across North Vancouver, investing in programs to retain students in North Vancouver. The Hockey Academy at Windsor has been very successful and unique programs are provided through the Digital Media Academy at Argyle and the Artists for Kids Academy at Carson Graham.
- Q:** What is the district doing to address the increase in student enrolment in private schools in recent years?
- A:** The increase in private school enrolment to 18% of the total student population is of concern to the Board. Labour relations disputes at the provincial level and negative media attention have contributed to this issue. In reality, we have very good relations at the local level. The BC educational system, and that provided in North Vancouver, performs at the top in all international measures. Current economic conditions may benefit public education as the costs of private school become impact families.
- Q:** Do you have statistics of the number of children that don't go to public schools by individual neighborhoods?
- A:** The enrolment information for private schools that we have is not broken down by individual neighbourhoods.
- Q:** Why is there not more discussion of making Balmoral a full high school rather than having students travel further to Carson?
- A:** Capital funds are not available to support increasing Balmoral school to add further grades. The Ministry of Education and the Board of Education have an agreement to build a new school at Carson Graham, to accommodate either 800 or 1100 students.
- Q:** With students taking a full course load, won't it be difficult to operate the school at a capacity of 110 % to 115%?
- A:** We would prefer not having to run a school at 110 to 115%, but would prefer operating at 100 to 105% capacity to maintain a degree of flexibility.
- Q:** What would be lost from Carson if it is not built to 1100 capacity?
- A:** The main ancillary spaces stay the same size (gym, multi-purpose, cafeteria, administration) as these are sized for an 1100 student school regardless of final size.

A school of 800 would not have the specialty areas to support more electives as would the school of 1100. The details related to the spaces that will be provided will be developed in consultation with the Steering Committee.

Q: Are people moving out of schools because of uncertainty for their future? Didn't Coquitlam move to junior high schools? Couldn't we get students back from Handsworth? Is this a real consolidation process? Are we looking at alternatives?

A: There are always challenges when there is uncertainty for a school's future. Coquitlam built middle schools when there was rapid growth. Now they are closing schools, with about 10 closures in the past five years. The School District has pursued various alternatives to closure as indicated through the Sustaining Schools Working Committee process. This process is a consultation process to consider the potential closure of Balmoral and there is a process in place with the response team.

Q: Will there be an opportunity to dream about what the new potential might be? If the school closes, I know what I will be losing, but I don't know what it will be like for the schools to come together. Will this community have an opportunity to participate in what the new Carson will look like?

A: The Steering Committee has been established to facilitate discussions related to the design of the new Carson and to consider various programs. There are a number of sub-committees as well looking at the issues of transition. It will be important to provide the community with a better idea of the opportunities that the future Carson will provide.

Q: A response date of April 28th will be difficult for the Response Team to respond as we won't know what we are responding to. I don't know what I am being asked to buy into as I would be giving up something really good for something I don't know.

A: The April 28th date was not intended as a decision date for the Board and is flexible. (The date for response has now been moved to May 26th). The most important thing will be to make the best decision for the future. The Steering Committee is working to provide as much information as possible over the next 4 weeks; there will be tours of other new schools in the metro area, and the design will build upon lessons learned at Sutherland. There will be an Open House at Carson (now confirmed for May 11th) to better illustrate the potential in the school of 1100 capacity.

Q: Is there another option that could be pursued with the Ministry of Education? Could we suspend this project and go back and negotiate with the Ministry? Could we wait a few years until the population has stabilized?

A: The Board of Education and the Ministry of Education have a project agreement for the construction of a new Carson Graham School at \$38 million for a capacity of 800 and \$43 million for a capacity of 1100. The Board wishes to proceed as soon as possible to provide students with a new, safe facility.

Q: Where would we be in terms of scalability if the student population goes up in the future?

A: Each of our new schools will identify areas for future expansion, if needed. The school district is also ensuring that it retains sufficient land for the construction of new schools into the distant future.

Q: Is it possible to provide a clear picture of the future Carson Graham at 800 and at 1100, from a building perspective and program opportunities for student perspective as well?

A: The Steering Committee will be working with the consultant team to prepare materials for the Open House to present a much clearer view of the future opportunities that will be possible with the new school. There is great excitement within the Steering Committee for the future building.