

The following are school closure updates from the superintendent and board of School District 6 Rocky Mountain. The BCSSA wishes to thank the district for sharing this information with BCSSA members.

Volume 1, March 2002

SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 6 (ROCKY MOUNTAIN)
Office of the Superintendent

SUPERINTENDENT and BOARD UPDATE TO PARENTS, STAFF and COMMUNITY

As we prepare for Spring Break, the Board and Administration of Rocky Mountain School District would like to take this opportunity to wish you an enjoyable and relaxing break and to provide a District update.

Communication

The Board of Trustees and Management of Rocky Mountain School District have a clear commitment to open communication. Communication, to be effective, must be two-way and it must be timely and accurate. We look forward to communicating with you on a regular basis as new information becomes available on the numerous topics of shared interest. In addition, we look forward to your input as the Board and Management move forward in making the challenging decisions which are ahead of us.

Budget

We know that the recent news regarding school district budgets will be causing you concern about the potential outcomes. We have just received the preliminary budget information and are currently analyzing the impact for Rocky Mountain School District. At the same time, we have just received preliminary enrollment projections from all of our schools. Unfortunately, we have declining enrollment throughout the District. At any time, fewer students means reduced staffing and other costs in the District. At the same time as we are experiencing a continued decline in our enrollment, we have also been given the challenge of working with a new funding formula from the Ministry of Education. It would appear that we will have a shortfall of just under \$1,400,000 for the 2002-2003 school year and the shortfall could be as much as \$1,800,000 in the 2003-2004 school year. The Management and Board will be meeting in April regarding this challenge and will be developing a process of consultation and input once we have a complete picture of the financial implications and potential areas of reduction. At this point, we can confirm that we will likely need to look at all possible spending reductions throughout the District, but no decisions have been made.

Calendar

You will be aware that the government passed new legislation regarding the school calendar. This legislation states that Boards must set the school calendar in consultation with parents and representatives of staff. We have just begun discussion about the placement of the 6 non-instructional days for the 2002-2003 school year. The Trustees and District Management will be arranging meetings, over the next couple of months, with all Zone Parent Advisory Councils to consult with parents regarding your wishes for the distribution of the non-instructional days. We urge all parents to attend those meetings in order to have an opportunity to let us know what works best for your children and family when the Board is setting the

schedule for the non-instructional days. Consultation with staff will be facilitated through the schools and we look forward to receiving this input by the middle of April.

Surveys

The Ministry of Education has just sent surveys for parents, school staffs and students in grades 4, 7, 10 and 12. These surveys will be conducted annually and the results will be very useful to our schools and to the District as we continue our planning to best meet the needs of children. We appreciate the support of teachers and administration in administering the surveys to students. We thank parents for completing the survey and returning it to the school. It is only through feedback from parents, students and staff that we can, as a district, truly address our commitment to a continued focus on educational excellence.

We applaud the success of our students which is a result of the dedication and strong working relationship of parents, teachers, support staff, administrators and the community. The District and each of our schools strive for continued outstanding achievement for all of our students and we thank you for the support you provide as we reach that goal together.

Sincerely

Bendina Miller
Superintendent of Schools

and
The Board of Trustees

Volume 2, April 2002

SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 6 (ROCKY MOUNTAIN)
Office of the Superintendent

SUPERINTENDENT and BOARD UPDATE TO PARENTS, STAFF and COMMUNITY

During this time of enrolment and budget discussions, we know that parents, staff, students and community members may be worried about the future. Please be assured that we are committed to working with you to ensure the best educational decisions possible and will continue to share information with you as it becomes available.

School District No. 6 is facing the most challenging budget decisions we have ever faced. To support the board in making the best decisions possible, the Board developed Guiding Principles of Budget Adjustment:

Within the funding available, establish a long-term plan which:

- Focuses on providing quality education and support in an equitable manner for all students;
- Provides effective and efficient services to the entire District; and
- Maintains a respectful relationship with staff and all partner groups.

The Board is committed to open communication and a 'transparent' process of budget adjustment. As such, the Board and Senior Staff have just completed public meetings in Kimberley, Golden and Invermere with the following purposes in mind:

- Inform the public of the projected 2002/03 student enrolment and funding facts;
- Provide an opportunity for the community to clarify their understanding of the facts; and
- Elicit suggestions from staff, students, parents and community members for ways the District may achieve a balanced budget through either reducing spending or increasing revenue.

The District is facing a two-pronged challenge in balancing the budget for 2002/03. These challenges include a projected enrolment decline of 221 students from 2001/02 to 2002/03, as well as the funding changes which include a reduction in Ministry funding of about \$56,000 for next year and a downloading to the District of over \$1,000,000 in costs for increased salaries and increased costs of benefits. This picture would result in a shortfall of \$2.1 M if we were to continue operating the District in the same manner next year as we do this year.

In addition to the challenge of addressing the expenditures for the 2002/03 school year, the Board must make decisions which will have long-term impacts since we project that our enrolment may be down by another 160 students in 2003/04 and an additional 170 students in the 2004/05 school year. This would mean a decline of more than 1,000 students over a seven-year time frame.

As a follow-up to the community meetings which were attended by about 445 people, the Board has

received over 100 submissions which outline suggestions for both reducing spending and for increasing revenue. The theme of the suggestions for reducing spending includes the suggestion that the Board should reduce spending on Senior Administration and school-based administration, should hire fewer teachers and support staff, must look at practices to create greater efficiency in the way we do our work, should consider closure of Zone Offices and Zone District Resource Centre collections, and must consider closing schools. The input also stressed the need for continued leadership in Special Education and suggested revenue generating ideas such as increasing the enrolment in the International Program and in the Sports School. Input also suggested that the Board should look at revenue generated through renting or leasing space that is not needed for instructional purposes.

The Board conducted a working session to consider input and determine a course of action. The Board clearly supported the Senior Staff direction of making reductions in all aspects of the District operations. As such, reductions must be considered in areas such as District staffing, purchase of equipment, and we must look for ways to create efficiencies in areas such as transportation, maintenance and the operation of schools and zone offices. The Board Agenda at the April 18 Special Board Meeting held at Laird Elementary School, included:

Board support for District staffing adjustments:

- Eliminating the Director of Instruction, Windermere Zone, and reassigning the Director of Instruction, Kimberley Zone, to cover responsibilities in both Zones.
- Eliminating 2 of the 3 District Support Teacher positions.
- Cutting the psychological consulting budget.
- Reducing the East Kootenay Consortium budget by 50% to \$7,500.
- Adding a Special Education Administrator position to administer Special Education services in the District and conduct the psychological testing required.
- Reassigning the remaining Support Teacher from a Zone position to a District position and, therefore, changing the title to Special Education Coordinator.

Since that time, the decision has also been confirmed to reduce Speech and Language Pathology positions from 3 full time equivalent positions to 2.5 positions. The actual allocation of the service throughout the District will be determined based on the best strategy to meet the needs of students. In addition, the Board passed a Notice of Motion to consider closure of the following schools: Chapman Camp Elementary School; Meadowbrook Elementary School; Wasa Elementary School; Canal Flats Junior Secondary School; Radium Elementary School; Columbia Valley Elementary School; Edelweiss Elementary School Field Elementary School.

As you may imagine, this Notice of Motion is the most serious decision this Board has ever made. It was made after very careful consideration of the fact that there is space for students in these schools to attend neighboring schools, and the closure of the schools would save money which could then be redistributed to increase funding for students in all schools in the District.

This Notice of Motion begins a process of consultation with the school communities which will last for a period of not less than 60 days. During this period, the Trustees, Directors of Instruction, and the Assistant Superintendent, supported by the Superintendent, Secretary Treasurer, and Director of Operations, will set up school specific Consultation Working Groups composed of the principal, a teacher representative, a CUPE staff representative, and 2-3 parent representatives. Students will be involved in discussions at a

level which is appropriate considering their age. In addition, the staff, students and parents of the school which would potentially be welcoming these students as part of their school will be involved in transition discussions and orientation opportunities as developed by the schools and the Consultation Working Group. This Consultation Working Group will facilitate a series of opportunities and public meetings to receive input from the school communities, provide responses to questions and ensure that there is a common understanding of the funding and enrolment facts and, most importantly, ensure that all implications are carefully considered in preparation for the Board to consider whether or not the motion to close the school will be taken to the June 18 Special Board Meeting to be held in Invermere (location to be announced).

As we focus on ways that the District can make changes in the way we operate so as much funding as possible can go directly to support programs and educational opportunities for all students, we encourage you, as parents, staff, students and community members, to become involved in these critical discussions and provide the best input possible to support the Board in making decisions which will have the greatest advantage for all students in School District No. 6. Please do not hesitate to call for further information or clarification, to provide input, or simply to talk. Together, we can make the best decisions for all students.

Sincerely

Bendina Miller
Superintendent of Schools

and
The Board of Trustees

Volume 3, June 2002

SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 6 (ROCKY MOUNTAIN)
Office of the Superintendent

SUPERINTENDENT and BOARD UPDATE TO PARENTS, STAFF and COMMUNITY

RE: SCHOOL CLOSURES, GOLDEN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL RECONFIGURATION AND BUDGET ANNOUNCEMENTS

With enrolment declining by over 230 students from the 2001 to the 2002 school year and resulting budget shortfall in excess of \$2.1 M, the Board of Trustees, School District No. 6 (Rocky Mountain), has just made the most difficult decision it will possibly ever have to make. All decisions have been based on a clear commitment to provide the best educational opportunities for all students in School District No. 6.

At a Special Board Meeting held in Invermere on June 18, the Board voted that effective July 1, 2002 the following schools will be closed: Canal Flats Junior Secondary School and Radium Elementary School in the Windermere Zone; Chapman Camp Elementary School, Meadowbrook Elementary School and Wasa Elementary Schools in the Kimberley Zone; and Columbia Valley Elementary School and Edelweiss Elementary School in the Golden Zone. The motion to close Field Elementary School was defeated as an outcome of the Burgess Shale Foundation providing \$40,000 in recognition of the utilities, custodial and maintenance costs of keeping Field Elementary School open.

The closure of 7 of 23 kindergarten to grade 12 schools in School District No. 6 results in 297 or approximately 8% of our 3768 students being welcomed to new schools. These decisions followed three public budget meetings, one held in each of Golden, Kimberley, and Invermere, as well as at least three Working Group and public meetings held to seek specific input on each of the 8 schools under consideration for closure.

The Board received input from the parents, students, staff and community members, and carefully considered the implications of all suggestions received. As such, the community partnership of \$40,000 from the Burgess Shale Foundation has enabled the Board to keep Field Elementary School open at this time.

The school closures result in a savings of approximately \$1.5 million as well as \$390,000, or \$103 per student, being redistributed to the schools remaining open. The redistribution of this funding will enable schools to provide greater educational service for all students.

It is recognized that change as significant as school closures must be addressed through sensitive transition planning. Some schools have already begun the transition activities with students and parents visiting their new school while other schools will provide the best transition opportunities possible given the limited time available between now and the end of June. Staff and parents are commended for the outstanding leadership which has been focussed clearly on ensuring that the educational and emotional needs of students are at the forefront of all plans and activities. Through such strong partnerships involving students, parents, staff and the community, we will ultimately be best able to meet the educational needs of every student.

Golden Elementary Schools Reconfiguration

On June 18 the Board also passed a motion to reconfigure Alexander Park and Lady Grey Elementary Schools to an English/French Immersion dual track primary school at Alexander Park and an English/French Immersion dual track intermediate school at Lady Grey. This reconfiguration enables both schools to provide the best educational opportunities for all students, with the flexibility for growth in both schools.

Other Budget Announcements

At previous Board meetings this Spring, the Board announced net reductions of over \$300,000 in District program budgets, including the elimination of one Director of Instruction position, effective June 30, 2002. In addition, on May 14 at a Board Meeting held in Golden, the Board approved the closure of the Kimberley and Golden Zone District Resource Centers, resulting in a saving of \$25,000. Further reductions of \$318,000 have been made in the District's transportation and operations budgets. In addition, there will be a reduction of principal and vice-principal positions arising from the school closures.

Summary

Over the past six years, since the amalgamation of the Golden, Kimberley and Windermere School Districts, we have experienced a decline of 750 students, resulting in a 20% vacancy in utilization of classroom space and no previous school closures. Clearly, the decision to close schools has been the most challenging decision the Board has ever made, however, it was made with a strong commitment to enhance educational opportunities for all students.

Sincere appreciation is expressed to community members, parents, staff and students who have been actively involved in the Working Groups and in providing input through the community consultation process over the past three months. Your dedication to public education is applauded and we invite and welcome your continued input as we, together, facilitate the successful transition of our students to their new schools.

Sincerely

Bendina Miller
Superintendent of Schools

and
The Board of Trustees