

The Calgary Board of Education

Minutes of the Public Input Meeting Regarding Consideration of Closure for the Purpose of Relocation of Discovering Choices Start Outreach Bowness, held virtually through Microsoft Teams, on Thursday, May 26, 2022 at 7:00 p.m.

ATTENDANCE (Virtual)

Board of Trustees:

Trustee L. Hack, Board Chair, Trustee – Wards 3 & 4
Trustee P. Bolger, Trustee – Wards 6 & 7
Trustee N. Close, Trustee – Wards 11 & 13
Trustee M. Dennis, Trustee – Wards 5 & 10
Trustee D. Downey, Trustee – Wards 1 & 2
Trustee C. May, Trustee – Wards 12 & 14
Trustee S. Vukadinovic, Trustee – Wards 8 & 9

Administration:

C. Usih, Chief Superintendent of Schools
D. Breton, Superintendent, Facilities and Environmental Services
K. Fenney, General Counsel and Procedural Advisor to the Board
A. Holowka, Superintendent, School Improvement
J. Pitman, Superintendent, School Improvement
P. Randhawa, Education Director, Area 1
D. Barbor, Principal, Discovering Choices and Alternative High School
K. Derbyshire, Principal, Robert Thirsk High School
K. Johnson, Acting Director, Planning
C. McGreish, Acting Manager, Planning
T. Scanga, Manager, Corporate Planning and Reporting
P. Minor, Corporate Secretary
J. Anderson, Communications Advisor
M. Broda, Board Administrator

WELCOME, ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND INTRODUCTIONS

Board Chair L. Hack called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and noted she would Chair the Meeting. Chair Hack acknowledged the traditional territories and oral practices of the Blackfoot Nations, which includes the Siksika, the Piikani, and the Kainai. She also acknowledged the Tsuut'ina and Stoney Nakoda First Nations, the Métis Nation (Region 3), and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta.

Introductions were made of The Calgary Board of Education (CBE) Trustees and Administration in attendance. The Chair also welcomed CBE teachers, staff and members of the public.



Chair Hack stated that the meeting was being recorded for the purpose of maintaining an accurate internal record of the proceedings, and that minutes of the meeting will be available on the CBE website at www.cbe.ab.ca prior to the Board of Trustees making a decision on this matter.

Chair Hack reviewed the agenda for the meeting, as follows:

1. Opening Remarks
2. Meeting Purpose and Outline
3. Meeting Guidelines
4. CBE Administration Presentation
5. Questions and Comments
6. Closing Remarks

OPENING REMARKS

Chair Hack spoke to the role of the Board of Trustees in the closure consideration process. She clarified that the Board of Trustees has the sole responsibility and authority to make closure decisions and that no decision on this matter has been made at this time.

In accordance with Alberta legislation and the Board's Closure of Schools Procedure, the consideration of closure process has many steps to it.

As part of the process, at the regular Board of Trustees' meeting held Tuesday, April 26, 2022, the Board passed a motion to commence the public input process to consider the closure of Start Outreach – Bowness for the purpose of relocation. This was a decision to initiate the consideration of closure process - not a decision to proceed with the closure.

The rationale, pertinent facts, and information about the proposed closure is available on CBE's public website and the Discovering Choices Start Outreach - Bowness website. This information is one part of the information that has been, and will be, reviewed and considered by Trustees. Before making any final decision on the closure of a school, the Board follows a process to secure additional input from parents and the general public, which includes:

- convening this public input meeting to provide important and relevant information; and
- providing an opportunity for the public to share their perspectives with the Board.

Additional public comments or concerns may be provided in writing by Tuesday, June 14, 2022. The details for written submissions were set out in the parent and student letter sent through School Messenger on April 27, 2022 and the details are available on the CBE public website. Trustees were present to listen to comments and questions as the public's input will inform the Board's decision-making on this matter.

All of the information collected during the consideration of closure process will be weighed very carefully by Trustees before any final decision is made.

The Board of Trustees tentatively anticipates debating the merits of this matter and making a decision regarding the proposed closure for the purpose of relocation on Tuesday, June 21, 2022 at a public meeting of the Board of Trustees.

The Board's ongoing commitment is to provide educational programs and services in suitable facilities throughout Calgary. To honour that commitment, the Board needs to take into consideration many factors including student enrolment levels, the ability to resource instructional programming, the health and safety of students, and accessibility. The Board also considers financial factors, to ensure the CBE is using resources effectively. The Board takes the information received and makes decisions, on a system-wide basis, serving the overall interests of public education within the CBE.

Consideration of closure of a school is a serious matter to the Board of Trustees. The Board also appreciates that it is very significant to the students, parents, and other members of the community.

The attendance of CBE administration was to assist the Board with the presentation, to respond to the public's questions, and to help Trustees manage the process for this meeting.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, Chair Hack thanked everybody for attending the meeting.

MEETING PURPOSE AND OUTLINE

Chair Hack noted the purpose of the meeting is two-fold. Firstly, it is for Administration to outline the rationale for the proposed closure and relocation, and to share information about the timing of the proposed closure and the accommodation plan for students affected. Secondly, it is to provide the public an opportunity to share their perspectives about the proposed closure for relocation with the Board.

The agenda was arranged to ensure that everyone had plenty of opportunity to ask questions and make any comments. The public's comments and questions form part of the formal material that the Board of Trustees will consider as they review this matter and ultimately reach a decision.

MEETING GUIDELINES

Chair Hack asked everyone to observe the meeting guidelines, which included:

- muting microphones except when called on to speak;
- comments and questions to be addressed following the presentation portion of the meeting;
- limiting questions or comments to five minutes; and
- being respectful of differing opinions and everyone's right to speak.

ADMINISTRATION PRESENTATION

Administration's presentation was provided with the aid of a PowerPoint slide show, and covered the following details:

What is Discovering Choices?

Discovering Choices is outreach programming for students who require additional supports to be successful in completing courses and making progress toward high school graduation. The program may be offered to students who may have experienced interrupted schooling, severe attendance issues or other challenges affecting their high school experiences. Discovering Choices allows for individualized and flexible programming in recognition of individual student needs.

Rationale for the Proposed Relocation

The CBE has a vision of creating a continuum of learning and support opportunities for Outreach programming. The CBE recognizes that Outreach students' needs are unique and range from needing separate facilities to requiring sheltered programming that allows for engagement in optional programs and other individualized opportunities that exist within a larger high school setting, while still maintaining the core of services and supports that are essential to all students within the Outreach program.

The CBE currently offers outreach programming, known as Discovering Choices, at four leased facilities. The leases at two of these sites, namely the Bowness and Westbrook outreach sites, will expire in 2023. This fact, combined with recent changes to government funding for outreach programs, and the elimination of the government requirement to house outreach programs outside of school buildings, means it is now possible to support outreach students in different ways.

Two alternate school locations in close proximity to the current Bowness and Westbrook locations are being proposed. These locations would allow Discovering Choices students to participate in enhanced learning opportunities while also continuing to provide the individualized programming and supports available at the current sites through a sheltered approach.

With the proposed location moves, student access is maintained at four Discovering Choices sites, one location still in each quadrant of the city. There is also the opportunity to provide flexibility and choice for students to choose the location that best meets their needs.

A consideration of the proposal for relocating these two outreach sites is that students continue to have access to good transportation to these programs. The majority of the students attending the current Bowness site are from the Bowness community and surrounding areas in the northwest. Robert Thirsk High School is located approximately 10 minutes away from the current location and is accessible via the Crowfoot LRT, bus, bikes and cars.

Proposed Student Accommodation Plan

With Start Outreach and Westbrook Outreach having less than 40 per cent of the students enrolled in the program and considerable flexibility in attendance, it is estimated that approximately 50-60 students will be at each school location (Robert Thirsk High School and Alternative High School) on any given day. As a result, the impact on students at Robert Thirsk and Alternative High schools will be minimal.

The Nexus Program that currently operates out of Bowness will relocate to the Northgate location and this process will be aligned with the specialized placement process led by the CBE's Inclusive Education team.

Students will still have the flexibility to choose the location that is right for them. Discovering Choices staff will work with students in a highly individualized way on this.

Education and Program Impacts for Discovering Choices Students

Many components of outreach supports for Discovering Choices students would remain the same and includes individual and flexible programming, and psychology and well-being supports. Discovering Choices teachers would continue to teach core subjects to Discovering Choices students only. In this way, the programming would be provided in a manner that is consistent with what is currently offered at the Bowness and Westbrook leased sites even though the program would be delivered within a high school building.

Additional opportunities would also be available for outreach students relocating to Robert Thirsk and Alternative high schools for greater learning and support beyond what they currently receive. This includes access to Career and Technology Studies (CTS) and optional courses, the opportunity to engage in extra-curricular offerings, and access to larger guidance and student services staff. Discovering Choices students would participate in the CTS/option courses and extra-curricular activities along with other students at Alternative High School and Robert Thirsk High School.

Proposed Student Transition Plan

Student transitions will be coordinated, purposeful and outcomes-oriented. Transitions will be carefully and deliberately planned as they require a holistic approach which is multi-faceted, timely, on-going and responsive. If the proposed relocation is approved, a detailed implementation plan will be created in October 2022 that will include feedback and perspectives gathered from students, parents, staff, and school administrators. It is important that transitions are student-focused and are inclusive of the social-emotional needs of each student.

The transition plan will include, but will not be limited to:

- Discovering Choices school administration team and staff working with each student in a personalized approach to support programming, flexible schedules and well-being supports. This will include determining which location would be most appropriate for them,



ranging from the discrete sites that would remain to the sheltered programs within the two high schools.

- Discovering Choices staff, students and parents being provided an opportunity to tour both Robert Thirsk High School and Alternative High School during the 2022-23 school year.
- Creating warm, welcoming and conducive learning spaces for Discovering Choices students that include separate classroom spaces, break-out spaces for quiet learning, entrances and exits that are accessible, flexible entry and exit times.
- Current and future Discovering Choices students continuing to have choice as to which outreach location they would like to attend: Robert Thirsk High School, Downtown, Northgate or Alternative High School. By offering the programming in both leased spaces and high school buildings, there is the opportunity to be more responsive to the various needs and interests of different Discovering Choices students. Students can be placed into sites based on their programming and support needs, ranging from sites that have isolated building sites to those housed in larger schools with sheltered programming with access to engage in optional courses, as per individual student need and interest.

CBE Planning Principles

The principles considered when planning for student accommodation are outlined in the CBE Administrative Regulation 1090, and include: using space and resources effectively; providing long term sustainability; providing equitable access for all students to quality learning environments and choice of programs.

These principles guide the CBE decision making when considering student accommodation changes and making recommendations such as the closure for the purpose of relocation of the Start Outreach Bowness and Westbrook Outreach.

It should be noted that all planning principles are important but they are not mutually exclusive. This means addressing one principle on the list, may affect our ability to satisfy another. For example, allowing students to attend school as close to home as possible may present challenges with keeping cohort groups of students together.

Existing Leased Sites and Capital Plan Impact

If approved, the leases at the existing leased sites will be allowed to expire. Accordingly, these sites will not be repurposed for other school jurisdiction purposes, thereby allowing the lease savings to be reinvested within the system in support of student learning.

Additionally, the proposal to relocate outreach sites into Robert Thirsk High School and Alternative High School is anticipated to favourably impact CBE long-term capital. The primary reason for this is due to how increased system utilization rates are viewed favourably by the government in deciding upon new high school construction requests from school jurisdictions.



Outreach Program Enrolment

Students enrolled in regular high school programming may transition into Discovering Choices through conversations led by the student's current high school administrative team. The staff at Discovering Choices engage in an intake process to fully understand the profile of a student and how support and services of outreach can meet their needs. Students and parents/guardians are part of this intake process and must agree to the transition to Discovering Choices. During the school year, ongoing registrations are processed with a focus on continuum of programming for high school students.

Except for the former Marlborough location, which operated at full capacity for several years before moving to the new site at Northgate in 2020, enrolment in other outreach programs has increased since 2012. However, Discovering Choices I & II have more students enrolled than Start Outreach - Bowness and Westbrook Outreach combined. In addition, enrolment at the Bowness and Westbrook locations has been declining since 2018. A graph was shown of the change in student enrolment at all four sites from 2012 to 2021.

Enrolment and Impacts

A diagram was shown of the current enrolment at all four outreach locations. It also indicates the percentage of the total enrolment that each of the four sites comprises. As of Sept. 29, 2021, 1,108 students were enrolled in outreach programs across all four sites. Over 60 percent of the students are enrolled at the downtown (41 percent) and the Northgate (25 percent) locations. The downtown location had 457 students enrolled, while Northgate had 277 students. These locations will continue to operate from the existing leased sites.

With Start Outreach and Westbrook Outreach having less than 40 percent of the students enrolled in the program and considerable flexibility in attendance, it is estimated that approximately 50-60 students will be at each school location (Robert Thirsk High School and Alternative High School) on any given day. As a result, the impact on students at Robert Thirsk and Alternative High schools will be minimal.

Student enrolment and utilization at Robert Thirsk High School is projected to increase through to 2023 with a projected utilization of 94 percent in 2023. From 2024 onward, enrolment and utilization is projected to decline to 885 utilization by 2026.

With the Start Outreach Program added, there will be a reduction in the provincial capacity from 1,543 to approximately 1,440. As a result, the school will be at capacity in 2023 with a utilization rate of 100 percent but will decline slowly after to an anticipated 94 percent.

Financial Impacts

A table in the slideshow highlighted the annual lease costs and the cost per student at each outreach location. The Bowness and Westbrook locations are the most costly to lease and have the lowest student enrolment numbers. There is an operational savings of approximately \$38,000 per year. As these sites do not qualify for Operations and Maintenance Funding there is no cost being redirected from any savings that may arise from the closure and relocation.



Proposed Timeline for Implementation

The proposed timeline for implementation, should the Board of Trustees decide to proceed with the closure and relocation of Start Outreach Bowness and Westbrook Outreach was shown. The Board of Trustees will make the decision at a public Board meeting scheduled for June 21, 2022.

Should the Board decide to proceed with the closure of the school for the purpose of relocation, there will be time for a full year of transition planning with staff, students, and families, prior to full implementation in the 2023-2024 school year. This will allow opportunities for Discovering Choices staff to explore ways to offer outreach programming in new and innovative ways with two leased sites and two school locations. These discussions will be ongoing throughout the 2022-23 school year.

There will also be opportunities for Discovering Choices staff to come together with staff at Alternative High School and Robert Thirsk High School to collaborate and share ideas on how to operate the outreach programs alongside the existing school programs in ways that best support all students.

A personal and individualized approach will be taken to transition students from the current Bowness and Westbrook locations to the location that best meets their needs. An implementation plan will be communicated by October 2022, which will provide flexibility to adapt to individual student needs.

OPEN DISCUSSION, QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS FROM PARENTS AND PUBLIC

Chair Hack reiterated the Trustees were present to hear public input and that they will ultimately be the sole decision makers regarding closure for the purpose of relocation of Discovering Choices Start Outreach – Bowness. She pointed out it would not be appropriate in the middle of the process for Trustees to respond directly to questions or to engage in debate. She asked that questions or comments be indicated in the chat box, with their first and last name for the record and as the meeting Chair she would direct the question to an appropriate CBE staff member for response.

Chair Hack opened the meeting to questions or comments from the public.

Mike McInnis, community member, asked a clarifying question regarding why students choose to be in the outreach program versus the traditional high school setting. He also asked if any other locations or smaller settings were considered as alternatives.

Superintendent Holowka spoke about ensuring the availability of a continuum of supports for students by maintaining the two other Discovering Choices discreet sites for those who would not be successful in the larger environment. She also stated that the sites being considered for the relocation of the Discovering Choices programs were selected by looking for sites with good access to transportation as well as being able to accommodate some of the additional opportunities for students.



Susan Holroyd, parent, stated that what attracted their child to Discovering Choices was the smaller site and as a place where students could relate. The support of smaller groups helped and made the experience a success for their child.

Rosamaria Lopez, parent, expressed concerns about sending students back to the large traditional high school settings that did not work for them; the negative reputation of Robert Thirsk High School; and about relocating NEXUS students to Northgate as she thinks that site is difficult to access. Rosamaria also asked if transitioning to online would be a possibility if the decision to relocate was made.

Superintendent Holowka spoke about the NEXUS program, and stated that because it is a specialized program and they move throughout the city, it is not part of this relocation process. In response to the ability to move a student online, Superintendent Holowka stated that the CBE would continue to look at the individual transition plans of students, continuing the approach which is already used for outreach students for their programming.

Lisa Waites, parent, wondered if the decision to close the program for the purpose of relocation was still undecided. Lisa stated that the existing program and location are what best suits the existing student's needs and that Career and Technology Studies courses are already accessible for students at Bowness.

Brandy Whitfield, parent, agreed that the Bowness location has been a good fit for their child. Brandy asked if the other two Discovering Choices sites could handle an increase in students if the Bowness Discovering Choices students choose not to go to Robert Thirsk High School.

Superintendent Breton shared that recently the Marlborough location was relocated across the street to Northgate mall with the purpose of expanding capacity to be able accommodate an increase in students.

Education Director Randhawa confirmed, that due to the flexible nature of the Discovering Choices program, there is space and staff in the other locations to welcome additional students and to be able to offer them the supports and services they might need.

Lindsay McKerness, community member and stakeholder; asked a question regarding how the year round intake of Discovering Choices students will continue at Robert Thirsk, and will the after-hour's and late night flexible programming continue.

Education Director Randhawa addressed the question, speaking about the continuation of offering Discovering Choices as a sheltered program – which means access to core programming on the current flexible timetables and not using the semester based system.

Susan Holroyd, parent, inquired if parents and students had been asked about the transportation options and locations presented. Susan also reiterated a previous comment about Bowness being a very special place for the students and their families. Susan expressed concern about complex needs student being unable to travel on public transportation.



Superintendent Breton acknowledged that most students who attend the Bowness location live in the community of Bowness. He stated that transportation was considered and that Robert Thirsk High School is located about 10 minutes away and is accessible by bike, bus, train, cars, and that if a student chooses to attend one of the other Outreach locations, they are also accessible by train. Of particular note, Superintendent Breton shared that the Bowness location lease owner was looking to sell the building last year and indicated that extension of the lease would not be possible, so the CBE administration were already looking at other location options.

Rosamaria Lopez, parent, asked about the transportation options in the winter stating that the public transit bus stop is not close to the school and students have to walk up a hill.

Lisa Waites, parent, provided that her family chose Bowness even though Robert Thirsk is closer, and thinks that the CBE needs to consider disabilities and special needs of students when looking at transportation options and alternative locations.

Brandy Whitfield, parent, referenced the student numbers decreasing at the Marlborough Discovering Choices location and asked why. Brandy voiced that most of the students at Bowness are driven to school and questioned if that is possible at a traditional school site.

Superintendent Breton reviewed slide 17 showing the enrolment and spoke to the declines in enrolment in 2019 at the Downtown and Marlborough locations being largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, whereas the declines at the Bowness location were not impacted. He also spoke about transportation being something that will need to be part of the transition plan to allow families to plan how to best get to the location that is the best fit for them.

Superintendent Holowka reiterated the importance of maintaining the flexibility of the outreach program at the sheltered sites.

Lindsay McKerness, community member and stakeholder, asked about how the wider age range attending Robert Thirsk High School would be handled and if different entrances and exits would be utilized for the different programs. Lindsay stated that they do not believe that the other discreet locations would be very accessible or a good fit for Bowness Outreach students. Lindsay inquired what research and best practices the CBE uses relating to Outreach programming.

Superintendent Holowka stated that high schools already have a variety of age ranges, including older students, as well as different programs within them. She also reiterated that the Discovering Choices students would have their own separate spaces where they would be doing their core programming. She stated that the core program, components, and supports already in place would not change, only the building would.

Superintendent Breton provided additional comments stating that the CBE is offering a greater spectrum of opportunities and allowing students to select the site that will meet their needs best.

CLOSING REMARKS

Chair Hack reiterated that following this public meeting the public has until Tuesday, June 14, 2022 to provide further written submissions for the Trustees regarding this closure consideration for the purpose of relocation, to the following:

Attention: Prem Randhawa
CBE
3445-37 Street SW
Calgary AB T3E 3C2
t | 403-777-8750
e | Area1@cbe.ab.ca

Email directly to BoardofTrustees@cbe.ab.ca

Chair Hack stated that should anybody need support regarding the information available to the public and posted to the CBE site, to contact Don Barbor, Principal, Discovering Choices and Alternative High School.

Chair Hack thanked everybody for attending the meeting and for providing respectful comments and input. The Board of Trustees tentatively anticipates debating the merits of this matter and making a decision regarding this school closure consideration for the purpose of relocation on or about Tuesday, June 21, 2022 at a public meeting of the Board. The observations, comments and questions by the public are valued and will form part of the material that Trustees will consider as they review the matter and ultimately reach a decision. She noted that the public's input at this meeting has been an important contribution to the Board of Trustees' decision-making process.

Chair Hack declared the meeting closed at 8:25 p.m.

Note to Reader:

The Minutes of the Public Input Meeting Regarding Consideration of Closure for the Purpose of Relocation of Discovering Choices Start Outreach – Bowness, held virtually through Microsoft Teams on Thursday, May 26, 2022 at 7:00 p.m. include the major points of discussion - they are not a verbatim transcript of the meeting.