



Accommodation Review – Final Report

Facility: Blind River Public School

ARC Committee Members:

- Chair / School Council Representative – Tanya Mitchell
- Community Member – Melanie Lees
- Municipal Member – Mayor Sue Jensen
- Principal – Ellis Nyman
- Staff member – Adrienne Edwards
- First Nations – Ryne Boyer-Denis
- Superintendent of Education – Brent Vallee

Date: May 18, 2017

Introduction:

On June 14, 2016, the Algoma District School Board placed Blind River Public School on “Under Review Status”. The review would focus on the possibility of school closure, accommodating the JK to 8 program and students currently housed at Blind River Public School as a JK-12 facility on the W.C. Eaket site.

The Accommodation Review Committee (ARC) was approved by the Board on January 17, 2017, and a written invitation was sent to the Town of Blind River to meet and discuss the option presented by the Board. No response was received in regard to this invitation; nor has any written correspondence taken place to date. However, Mayor Sue Jensen participated as part of the ARC committee.

The Blind River Public School ARC held Public Meetings on March 6, 2017 and May 4, 2017. The first Public Meeting was originally scheduled to take place on March 1st, 2017 but was re-scheduled due to inclement weather. Minutes were taken at each meeting and are available on the ADSB website at www.adsb.on.ca. ARC timelines were shared at both meetings. The community was notified of public meetings in advance and reminders were sent out to school community members through advertising and flyers. In addition to school-based communication, meetings were advertised in local media, through radio advertisements, and the first meeting was advertised on the school board website. Attendees at each public meeting were asked to “sign in” to document their attendance. Prior to the first public meeting, an orientation meeting was held with members of the ARC (Feb 23, 2017), and additional ARC meetings took place before, between, and after the public meetings (April 26, May 8, and May 16th, 2017). A consultation meeting was also conducted with staff members at Blind River Public School to identify any concerns/issues that could be addressed (April 26, 2017).

Throughout the public meetings information was shared with regards to the Accommodation Review policy and process. At the first meeting, the Blind River Public School Initial Staff Report and School Information Profile were shared. These documents contained both a facility and instructional profile. Enrolment trends and projections were shared and facility discussion was supported at the First Public Meeting by Superintendent of Business, Joe Santa Maria. The ARC sought public input regarding

recommendations that could be included in the final staff report. At the final public meeting on May 4, 2017 the Accommodation Review Committee discussed its possible recommendations for Blind River Public School.

Reflections on the Accommodation Review Process:

1. In addition to members of the ARC and representatives from the Algoma District School Board, members of the public were in attendance at the first public meeting and members of the public were in attendance at the second public meeting.
2. The Principal utilized a variety of approaches to advertise the public meetings within the school and promote parent attendance, including the scheduling of the “School Showcase” immediately prior to the second Public Meeting to encourage increased attendance.
3. The process allowed the opportunity for input from the community, municipality, staff and parents.
4. The accommodation review process states that a minimum of two public meetings must be facilitated. Two public meetings took place on March 6, 2017 and May 4, 2017.

Community Consultation:

Outlined below are the main points of feedback brought forward through the community consultation process:

- **JK-12 Model:** While many attendees seemed comfortable with the programming opportunities and operational structures used in a JK-12 model, some community members maintained reservations about the model. Potential benefits of a JK-12 model that were presented included increased leadership opportunities for secondary students, reach ahead opportunities for elementary students, or opportunities for elementary students and staff to work with secondary facilities and staff in areas such as the tech shops.
- **Shared Facilities** – If there is a move to a JK-12 facility, concerns were expressed as to whether there would be adequate gym time for both the elementary and secondary programs – both in terms of curriculum use during instructional hours, and extracurricular use after hours and during student breaks (e.g. nutrition breaks and lunch). In addition, feedback included the need to ensure adequate elementary access to library resources and computer labs.
- **W.C. Eaket Building:** Some community members expressed concerns that the WC Eaket facility is an older building. Some questioned whether it would make sense to invest funding towards retrofitting an older building that currently has an FCI of 50%. Conversely, other community members expressed that the foundation/original design for the WCE building was developed to allow for further expansion of the facility.
- **Outdoor Space:** The primary area of concern expressed in the public meetings was the lack of available outdoor space on the W.C. Eaket site. While there is some limited outdoor space available in the courtyard, concerns were expressed in regard to the current lack of a playing field or playground space on-site (field beside the school is owned by the town), that there is a roadway that separates the field and the school, that this roadway encircles the W.C. Eaket property, and that the water is in proximity to the rear of the school. The community expressed a belief that for the site to be viable as a JK-12 facility, outdoor space issues must be resolved. This would require discussions with the town to see if a mutually beneficial partnership for access to outdoor space could be negotiated.
- **New Build vs. Retro-fitting:** Feedback expressed at both public meetings was that while JK-12 seemed to be a realistic model in light of the demographics in Blind River, making a recommendation for the board to request funding to construct a new building on a site with more available outdoor

space would present a unique opportunity for the future of education in Blind River. Community feedback considers this to be a preferred option to retro-fitting the W.C. Eaket facility and seeking to address the outdoor space concerns outlined above. It was also discussed that this request to the Ministry of Education could delay funding for a JK-12 facility in Blind River if the Ministry did not feel it was a viable option.

- Administration: The community raised several questions as to what the administrative structure of a JK-12 school would be in a K-12 school in Blind River. The community would like to ensure that this is determined and communicated early in the process.
- Partnership with First Nations: It was expressed during the consultation process that partnerships with the First Nation communities must be a priority. The community expressed an interest in reaching out to First Nations in future consultations regarding potential building, renovations and/or potential program options.
- FSL Programming: With the number of school options available in the community, the community expressed an interest in pursuing program options that would make ADSB schools the first choice for education in Blind River. Feedback was provided at both meetings that having a French Immersion or other French language learning opportunities would help to increase enrollment.
- Day Care: The community expressed an interest in exploring the potential for a day care at the JK-12 site. It was noted that schools of the other boards currently offer daycare within their sites and this creates a disadvantage for Blind River Public School in attracting enrollment.
- Car Traffic/Crossing Guard: Concern was expressed that if the move is made to the W.C. Eaket site, an additional crossing guard would likely be required to help ensure safety of students walking to school.
- Transition: If there is a move to a JK-12 facility, there was an interest in ensuring that the transition process is comprehensive and that any issues/concerns are addressed prior to the transition taking place. Planning should involve the staff at both sites, parents, and students. In addition, the community wanted to ensure that students would not move until work was completed and the building was prepared for their arrival.
- Further Consultation: If the decision is made to relocate students to a JK-12 facility, the community has expressed an interest in continued consultation throughout the process. This would include input from both the elementary and secondary school communities into either construction or renovation design as well as further discussion about program options within the JK-12 facility.

Based on the feedback from the community, the Blind River Public School Accommodation Review Committee recommends that the first option for consideration would be that the board submit a request for the construction of a new JK-12 facility on a site to be determined through the Capital Priority process. The ARC recognizes that this recommendation would be dependent on Ministry funding to meet the request. It also recognizes that there are funding parameters that need to be addressed within the application process, and that one such parameter is the recognition for existing school assets to be utilized and renovated as a viable option to ensure that Public Assets are not wasted throughout the Province.

In the event that the Ministry did not approve new construction, the Blind River Public School Accommodation Review Committee believes that the issues in regard to outdoor space would need to be resolved prior to supporting a recommendation to close Blind River Public School and relocate the students into a K-12 facility on the site of WC Eaket. Discussions with the municipality would need to

take place in the interest of establishing a mutually beneficial partnership and capital funding would still be required to retro-fit the facility as a K-12 site.

In the event that relocation to a JK-12 facility on the site of W.C. Eaket was to move forward in the future, the Accommodation Review Committee would further recommend the following:

- Discussions with the Town of Blind River to address the concerns outlined above in regard to outdoor space. This would be considered essential prior to moving forward with relocating students into a JK-12 facility on the W.C. Eaket site;
- Ensure ongoing consultation with both the elementary and secondary school communities on an ongoing basis throughout the construction/renovation design process, including discussions about program opportunities and potential community partnerships;
- Ensure safety concerns brought forward in the consultation process are addressed;
- Ensure shared facility upgrade concerns brought forward in the consultation process are addressed; and
- Ensure completion of any renovations before relocating the JK-8 students.

Summary Statement:

The Accommodation Review Committee appreciates the feedback provided by parents, staff and community members throughout this process. The community also acknowledges the work of the current staff at Blind River Public School and W.C. Eaket. The ARC believes that this is an opportunity to create a JK-12 community hub with enhanced program opportunities and partnerships to serve the future needs of students within our community. The ARC acknowledges that construction of a new JK-12 facility is the preferred option to meet this goal and recognizes that this would be dependent on Ministry approval.

In the event that such funding is not granted by the Ministry, the ARC believes that the outdoor space issues outlined above would need to be addressed prior to supporting a recommendation to relocate students from Blind River Public School into a JK-12 facility on the W.C. Eaket site, also pending capital funding to make necessary upgrades to the facility. This would require discussions among the Board and Town in the interest of developing a mutually beneficial partnership that will provide our students with the best possible educational opportunities.

Staff Recommendation:

Consistent with the Initial Staff Report and based on the School Information Profile feedback, it is the Senior Administration recommendation that the JK-8 school population, staff and program currently housed at Blind River Public school be relocated to a JK-12 facility:

- Option One: In recognition of the community's preference, Senior Administration supports making a request through the Capital Priority process for funding to construct a new JK-12 facility, with the understanding that the process recognizes there are funding parameters that need to be met and one such parameter is the recognition for existing school assets to be utilized and renovated as a viable option to ensure that Public Assets are not wasted throughout the Province.
- Option Two: Recognizing that the Option One request will open the door for discussions with the Ministry of Education Capital Branch to determine what could be funded, in the event that the Ministry did not approve new construction, Senior Administration recommends the closing of Blind

River Public School and relocation of students into a JK-12 facility on the site of W.C. Eaket. Capital funding would still be required to retro-fit the facility as a JK-12 site. Discussions with the municipality would need to take place in the interest of establishing a mutually beneficial partnership for further use of outdoor space. In the event that sufficient funding was not approved, students would remain at their current sites pending further consultation in regard to future options at some time in the future.