

Dr. Mary Jackson School Viability Community Meeting Minutes

Keg River, Alberta

6:00 pm – 8:00 pm

March 15th, 2018

NSD: Maddy Daniels (Ward 1 Trustee), Randy Anderson (Ward 3 Trustee), Louis Cardinal (Ward 5 Trustee), Shelley Willier (Associate Superintendent, Area 1), Crystal Colville (Pedagogical Supervisor), Curtis Walty (Communications Coordinator), Krystal Potts (Executive Assistant)

Community: 39 community members, 1 journalist, and 5 school staff

Cultural Reflection: Mrs. Louise Loyier gave the opening cultural reflection.

Supper

Opening Remarks – Randy Anderson

- Trustee Randy Anderson introduced himself as the Chair of the meeting.
- NSD Administration and Board members introduced themselves.
- It was asked that community members introduce themselves as they come up to speak.

Policy 15 – Randy Anderson

- Trustee Anderson: this is a difficult time for your families and children, we don't take school closures lightly as Trustees of Northland School Division. One of our responsibilities as Board members is to review Policy 15, the school closure policy.
- Policy 15 was handed out to community members.
- Trustee Anderson explained the Policy 15 process:
 - Prior to December the Superintendent conducts a viability study on the school.
 - The Superintendent then approaches the Board with a school closure proposal and the Board debates this.
 - If the Board decides to proceed, a Notice of Motion is made at a regular board meeting and this was done on January 26, 2018.
 - There is a notification of proposed school closure sent to the parents of students enrolled.
 - There is a public meeting to discuss the information and receive feedback from the community.
 - The Board will not make a decision until the May 24th 2018 Corporate Board Meeting in Wabasca.
- Trustee Anderson explained the school closure considerations:
 - The cost incurred by the Board in maintaining the school and education program are high and it is viable to transport students to another school.
 - The ability to provide an adequate educational program to the students in attendance.

Dr. Mary Jackson Viability Study – Shelley Willier

- If you would like to provide additional feedback, there is a survey available to fill out through a link on school website or you can turn the paper copy in to the school.
- Associate Superintendent Willier explained the purpose of the report: to collect information regarding the viability of Dr. Mary Jackson School.
- Background Information:
 - Dr. Mary Jackson is located in Keg River, Alberta and situated by Paddle Prairie and Carcajou.

- Historical Context:
 - Keg River is the original site of the Slavey and Cree Natives summer village.
 - The Hudson Bay Company set up fur trading in 1896.
 - In 1908 a trading post was established and a store opened in Keg River. Carcajou served as an uploading point.
- Name of the School:
 - In 1931 Dr. Mary Jackson arrived in Keg River and she practiced medicine until 1975.
 - Dr. Jackson received many national awards, including the Order of Canada.
- The capacity of Dr. Mary Jackson School is 113 students.
- The Viability Report looks at 2 issues: the financial cost of running the school and information on programming.
- Attendance areas were discussed. The re-alignment of the attendance area would be that Dr. Mary Jackson would be absorbed by the Paddle Prairie School attendance area.
- If there is a decision to close the school, NSD will provide busing to Paddle Prairie from Keg River.
- When NSD is making decisions to close the school, we look at the impact of what the school closure would be. There is not a significant impact as the number of students (17) would transfer to Paddle Prairie School and would be able to absorb into the school population.
 - Parent Comment: it would 15 kids going to Paddle Prairie, my kids will be going elsewhere.
- Busing:
 - It would be an 80 minute round trip for students to ride the bus and this could have a negative impact on younger students.
- Education program:
 - Dr. Mary Jackson has 2 certified staff and one is a principal. So you have one person taking on 2 roles and both roles are important to the school but difficult when time is dedicated in the classroom and the office.
- Education in the school:
 - At the end of the viability report there is Accountability Pillar Results and data.
 - Every year we have students that take Provincial Achievement Tests (PAT's), Diplomas and surveys.
 - This data is collected and we use that data to make decisions in the school.
 - As there are less than 6 students that wrote the PAT's, the data is suppressed.
 - Safe & Caring was given a low reading, PAT's very low, citizenship is high, education quality is low, school improvement very high.
- Financial Information:
 - In 2016/17 NSD ran a deficit at Dr. Mary Jackson School of \$267,000 which has grown to \$300,000 due to the loss of students.
 - It costs \$45,000 to educate the students at Dr. Mary Jackson and we receive \$21,000 for each student.
 - 40 students is the breakeven point – we need 40 students to make the school viable.
- Possible uses of the school building:
 - There is no decision that has been made for the school closure – there is no anticipated use for the school right now.
 - The school would be turned over to the community – outdoor education campus or there would be process we would introduce to see what the options could be.
- Shelley went over the school closure timeline.

- NSD received a letter from the County of Northern Lights and they are in support of the school staying open.
- We are gathering all this information for the Trustees to make their decision on May 24th, 2018.
- Written submissions should be sent to Gord Atkinson, write your letters and address them to him.

Questions and Comments from Community Members

- Has NSD ever looked at dividing the schools grade 1-6 in Keg River and grades 7-12 in Paddle?
 - One of the options NSD had in 2011 was for Dr. Mary Jackson to be an elementary based program. Students from Paddle Prairie and Dr. Mary Jackson would be together for elementary and junior high would be in Paddle Prairie.
 - If there is a decision like that to make, we would have to have a formal engagement with Paddle Prairie Métis Settlement and those parents would weigh into the decision.
- Keg River and Paddle Prairie are part of the same district, I don't see why we wouldn't be able to work that out, plus there are already students that go to Paddle Prairie and are from Keg River.
- My daughter went to Paddle Prairie School in kindergarten when we lived in Keg River and she had to ride the bus and she had no problem.
- In my young days, I went to school in Keg River and we were bused from Paddle Prairie. The bus brought us part way then the Keg River bus picked us up there and we enjoyed going to school here. It worked well for us when I went to High School here and it as very very good – meeting the people, our neighbours, worked well.
- I thoroughly enjoy this school, it has a good family environment. The staff and students come together. There is zero tolerance and that's what I really love about the school. The only hiccup is courses in High School, they are not offering all the courses my child requires and my child has to go to the Learning Store in High Level to complete these courses. I am hoping that NSD makes offers more programming. I found my child was behind and I've been looking into it for a year and been getting zero answers so I had to go somewhere else to get courses. The survey should have why we don't want to attend Paddle, it just asks why Paddle Prairie School wants to attend Dr. Mary Jackson. Why should we be uprooted, my kids have been here for 3 years. My kids will be omitted if there is a school closure, I will drive the distance to take my kids somewhere else. I say we look at Fort Vermilion School Division, why can't we go through them? They like our school.

Shelley provided the following information:

- Although Dr. Mary Jackson is designated as K-12 we don't teach high school here. It is offered through Career Pathways School in Wabasca and they have our courses online – there is not face to face programming here, but there is K-12 face to face.
- I have a foster home and have children with learning disabilities. My grandson will be in kindergarten next fall, he has learning disabilities – he needs special one on one attention. I drive 120 km (30 km 4 times a day) to bring my little girl to this school because she gets the one on one she needs. She couldn't say her alphabet or anything before she got here and now she is

excelling. I have children in and out all the time, they are number one in this school and that's what matters the most to me.

- As far as the bus times, my neighbour's boy is picked up at 6:55 am – my kids would be getting on the bus at 6:45 am which is an hour and $\frac{3}{4}$ one way, that is way too far for little ones to be on the bus.
- Question was raised: where did you get the 40 minute bus ride from in your report? 40 minutes is not right.
 - Shelley explained the 40 minutes was the commute to the highway and on the highway, the bus stops were not included. We did not do a mock run.
- Will the mock run be done before you make your decision? We need real numbers.
 - That is information we can work on to inform the Board, yes.
 - The mock up run would have to start in Carcajou and include the stop times.

- My kids have learning disabilities and they are getting one on one help here because there are lower numbers and our staff have gone above and beyond. The principal's schedule is full and they go above and beyond for our kids. They provide a loving and caring environment and don't think they can get this anywhere else and it is priceless.

- I have a child in Dr. Mary Jackson who has full time one on one aide. Should the school close, will that one on one aide continue? Will my child still have that?
 - For any extra support that is needed the student is coded so we can match up staff. Money for that staff comes from different envelopes, if your son needs that aide time it will follow him. It's the student generating that money.
- 90% of his learning is due to his aide. Once you put the notice of motion out then I got worried – how is he going to transition without a full time aide? How is NSD going to support that transition?
 - Schools do transition plans all the time, from grade to grade, and school to school. The principal and teachers have meetings, and cumulative files also house a lot of data on the student which transfers with the students.
- I went and visited Paddle Prairie School. He is in a classroom of 6 right now. In Paddle he'll be in a class of 20 and the noise level goes up. He's used to it around here, he's not familiar with that school - that's the kind of transition I'm talking about. He needs time for it to sink in. It will be benefit for all the kids, not just mine.
 - There will be opportunity for them to go to the school before the school year ends. For a child to go to Paddle Prairie School after school so he can do the walk when no kids are there would be beneficial. We work as a team of educators and talk to parents.
 - We want to reassure you that if the school were to close, we want the kids to succeed. I hear special needs identified, and as a Board we want to support you, we don't want to lose your success.
- The aide that is with my son has a great relationship with him. Is it even viable from the aide to go with him? If it isn't viable for the aide to get to Paddle then why would they go?
 - We can work together to work those issues out.

Trustee Anderson asked: how can we increase the number of students?

- Combine with Paddle Prairie School was suggested.
 - If you have an idea please share them.

- I agree with comments to combine the schools and have more room to get them the one on one time. I think this will strengthen both communities.

- I want my grandchildren to go to this school when they start school. Of all the schools I've worked in, this school provides a warm and welcoming feeling. It's really crucial that children have the feeling that they are welcome and this school gives that feeling. 1981 was the first time that I came here and I was welcomed and want my kids to have that feeling as well. I want to bring my other kids here next year. I like it in Keg River, it is the only place we get a true cultural education rather than the academic, we need to get back to where our roots are from. I speak to my kids in Cree – do they have Cree in Paddle? (Yes.) I volunteer my life here and am in my 80's and will volunteer in this school. The bullying – somehow we can't stop it and I have a method of stopping bullying – nobody even knows it happens. I will be real sad if they can't go to school here next year.

- It is stated that NSD students are strong in identity, healthy, and successful. It is also stated the attitude that is needed to be self-reliant and contributing members of their communities. If there is a possibility of school closure, then they will miss out on their individualities. Our values differ from other communities. The majority of students in Keg River attend here and their identity and values are different. We need to remain strong in identity and values within our own community

- When my kids came here they got picked up at 7:30 am and the school didn't start until 9:00 am, it was a very long ride for little ones and it was hard on them. I have 6 kids and they all came to this school.

- I have 2 children, both went to Paddle and oldest one came back. My youngest still goes there and I drive him back and forth there – 35 km there and back twice a day so 140 km a day.

- I drive 140 km to bring my children to this school and I'm a single mother.

- Is it feasible to have either elementary at Dr. Mary Jackson and junior high/high school at Paddle Prairie School or vice versa or doing more stuff at Dr. Mary Jackson?
 - We would have to enter into engagement for both communities.

- School of choice was discussed.
- If we're all in agreement to it then it won't be a school of choice – it shouldn't matter because it would be the only K-6 in the area.
 - We staff schools based on registration – we look at kids registering here then dollars flow though and we are able to make decisions based on enrolment.

- I dropped out of school in grade 10 and later on when I got tested I was at a grade 12 level. I think it is because Dr. Mary Jackson is a smaller school and can offer more one on one help.
- Does NSD have any alternative programming?
 - We wanted community to weigh in and let us know if there is any alternative programming you would like to see.
- If you guys make the notice of motion it forces me to look at other programs inside and outside of NSD. If it does not meet the needs to my child and I have to go outside of the division, how would NSD support me?
 - At this time we can only mention it is a school of choice, there may or may not be supports.

Closing Comments

- We hear you and we will be making our decision May 24th. We appreciate all your comments, you're passionate and care about your community.
- When I first came to this community before I was married, I worked in Keg River as a sub and I will never forget how the school welcomed me and was it was wonderful experience. I saw a lot of the values and it still exists today. You have a lot of strengths as community and parents and you are there to support your kids.
- Please send your written submissions to Gord Atkinson, the deadline is April 16th, 2018.

Closing Reflection: Mrs. Louise Loyier gave the closing reflection.

Meeting Adjourned: 8:10 pm