



School Review Impact Assessment Report Greenfield Elementary School

May 1, 2009

On March 26, 2008, the South Shore Regional School Board decided that Greenfield Elementary School should be taken through the formal School Review Process, as set out in Sections 14-23 of the Ministerial Education Act Regulations. One requirement of the regulations and the board motion is that an Impact Assessment Report be submitted to the Board by May 31, 2009. The following information has been prepared to meet this requirement.

The option being assessed is to close Greenfield Elementary School and transfer all students in Grades P-6 to North Queens Elementary School in Caledonia.

Part 1: School Information

School: Greenfield Elementary School (GES)

School Configuration: Grade P-6

Address: PO Box 184, Caledonia, N.S., B0T 1B0

Principal: Mr. David O'Quinn

Vice-Principal: Mrs. Marsha Freeman

Enrolment History and Projection:

The enrolment of GES decreased from 40 in 2000/01 to 33 for the present school year. The projection for the next 5 years indicates that the enrolment will remain stable with an increase to 38 in 2013/14.

History

2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9
40	44	37	37	35	40	35	25	33

Projection

2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
36	33	34	33	38

In preparing the initial report that led to this school being identified for the School Review process, one of the main concerns was the enrolment decline from 35 to 25 for the last school year. Now it seems significant to note that the enrolment increased to 33 for this year; in other words, it appears now that the enrolment of 25 for 2007/8 may be an anomaly in a relatively stable enrolment since 2000/1.

Further evidence the enrolment stability lies in the fact that the enrolment of GES in 1995/6 was 33. The enrolment of the whole SSRSB system declined by 25% since 1995 and, yet, the enrolment of GES remained the same. In fact if the 5-year projection proves to be accurate, the enrolment in 20013/14 will be greater than that of 1995/96. Over the same period, other schools in the system have declined by 30, 40 or even over 50% and are projected to continue declining.

Population patterns

According to the Planning Department for the Region of Queens Municipality, although no recent data specifically related to the population trends for the Greenfield area are available, there is no reason to expect a measureable increase or decrease in the population of the GES catchment area in the foreseeable future. This general observation is confirmed through discussions with the Principal and Vice-Principal of GES.

Capital Construction Planning

Under a lease agreement between the Department of Education and the community of Greenfield, the construction of a new community facility was completed in 2008. This new facility now houses Greenfield Elementary School.

In September, 2008, North Queens Elementary and North Queens High School began operating as one facility or under the same roof. North Queens Elementary School was destroyed by fire in the fall of 2006, so a completely new facility was constructed and connected to North Queens High School, which received major renovations or upgrades at the same time.

The SSRSB capital request is to construct a new middle school (grade 6 to 8) to replace the present facility of South Queens Junior High School (SQJHS) in Liverpool. This request includes the reconfiguration of Liverpool Regional High School to transfer the Grade 9 students from SQJHS and a reconfiguration of Dr. John C. Wickwire Academy to transfer its Grade 6 students to SQJHS. Also related to this reconfiguration, Milton Centennial School will close when the construction is completed at South Queens Junior High School; its students (Grade P-1) will attend Dr. John C. Wickwire Academy.

Physical condition of building

Given that the facility for GES is brand new—with new furnishings and equipment, there is no issue regarding its physical condition.

Building Use

Within the new community facility, the GES has all the required school facility requirements (except for a gymnasium), including 2 classrooms, meeting room, resource room, library, office, staff room and washrooms. As with any new school construction, the building has new furniture and equipment. Although the facility does not have a gymnasium, the students have full access to the recreation centre which sits on the same property.

Part 2: Impact Analysis

Capability to Deliver the Public School Program (PSP)

From a Facility Perspective: There is no problem or difficulty, related to the facility, in delivering the Public School Program.

From an Educational Perspective: Given the challenges of program delivery when the enrolment is extremely low, it is to the credit of the Vice-Principal and staff that the Public School Program is being delivered with no evidence of problems or negative effects for the students. This is evident in the fact that the students of GES do very well when they go on to North Queens High School in Grade 7.

Presently and for at least the next 5 years, things are going well because the enrolment is projected to be stable, no turnover in staff is expected, and the school is housed in new facility. When the recommendation to identify GES for the School Review process was made, the main concern was that the enrolment had taken a serious percentage drop, with no evidence that it might level off. Now that the enrolment is projected to be stable, the level of concern has diminished.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the enrolment of GES will continue to be under 40. The capability of the school to deliver the PSP effectively is very dependent upon the enrolment not taking a sudden drop over a year or two and upon there being highly qualified, committed teachers who are able to meet the challenges of teaching in a very small school---of "being all things" to all students and all families. In the worst case scenario, a significant drop in enrolment and a turnover of staff could create a situation that would be unacceptable to the SSRSB and the families of the students of GES.

The main concern about the problems created by a turnover of staff in the future is related to being able to find teachers who can effectively deliver the specialist programs, French, Music, Art, Physical Education and who are qualified to cover the responsibilities of a program support teacher. When the number of teachers is limited to 2 or 3, the risk of being unable to attract and hold suitably qualified, experienced teachers is a concern. At the very least, the families need to be aware of this risk because the circumstances can change quickly.

Educational Benefits of the Transfer to North Queens Elementary School

The potential for educational benefits is related to the enrolment of NQES being greater than that of GES by more than 100. The significantly larger enrolment requires a greater number of teachers and support staff which increases the chances of being able to successfully meet the needs of each and every student in the long term. The challenges and risks related to an enrolment of less than 40 are reduced.

Transportation

All students of GES attend North Queens High School from Grade 7 to Grade 12, so there would be very little change in the transportation system. In fact, some improvements could be made in terms of operational efficiency, financial cost, and length of bus runs because the existing buses would have to serve only one school.

From the perspective of the GES students, some would spend more time on the bus because of the greater distance to Caledonia. On the other hand, some students who live near the boundary for the North Queens School elementary students would have about the same distance to travel.

The longest bus run to North Queens School from the GES area now begins at 7:04 a.m. and reaches NQES at 8:20 a.m., a run of 1 hour and 16 minutes. This run would be reduced in length because the transfer at GES of students from other buses would be eliminated.

Extra-curricular Activities

The students of GES have enjoyed the advantages of a strong extra-curricular activity program with a high level of commitment and support from the school community. There is no reason to be concerned that they would not have similar opportunities at North Queens Elementary. And again because of the larger enrolment, the potential for a greater variety of extra-curricular activities and the social interaction with a larger number of students offers benefits as well.

To participate in after-school extra-curricular activities, some students and their families would have greater distances to travel while others would have less. Also, some students might have difficulty adjusting to the larger numbers of students while others would be excited by the new type of environment and the social interaction with more students.

Perhaps the most obvious advantage for families and students in the area of extra-curricular activities would result from the fact that all students in each family would be attending the same school. Young brothers and sisters in elementary school would be attending the same school as their older siblings in junior and senior high.

Property Service Efficiencies

No obvious property services efficiencies would result from the closure of GES because of the unique circumstance regarding the lease of the new community facility. The lease is between the community and the Department of Education and there is no cost to the SSRSB.

Staff Allocation Efficiencies

Staff allocation efficiencies would result because GES has to be staffed above the general formula allocation in order to offer the full program. For this school year, 3.10 Full-Time-Equivalent (FTE) teaching positions are assigned to 33 students at GES—including the teaching Vice-Principal position. 10.47 FTE's are assigned to the 131 students at NQES. If the students were transferred, it may be possible to place the students in the existing classes without having to add another class, depending on the split class arrangements. If another class was required, 1.26 FTE's would have to be added to NQES, including 0.10 FTE's for Reading Recovery. The net saving could be as much as 3.0 FTE teaching positions, or 1.84 FTE's if a class had to be added. The net saving could be assigned elsewhere in the school system.

Also, the elimination of a full-time administrative assistant position and the responsibility allowance for the Vice-Principal would result in cost savings.

It is fair to note at this point that any financial savings from these greater efficiencies would be wiped out by a loss of revenue from the closure of GES. In other words, the revenue received to operate Greenfield School covers the extra cost of going beyond the general staffing formula.

Operational and Capital Requirements

As noted or implied above in several sections, no operational and capital requirements would result from the closure of GES. The students would attend NQES at no additional, operational or capital cost.

Impact on the Community

The loss of a school from its community is always perceived as negative and no doubt it would be by the Greenfield Community. The level of concern and negative reaction might be lessened

by the fact that the students would be attending the same school as their older siblings and the one they would eventually attend in Grade 7. NQES and NQHS have served the GES families for many years.

Also, the negative impact should be lessened by the fact that the community would still have full access to its new community facility in which GES is housed.

Part 3: Proposed Receiving School Information

School: North Queens Elementary School (NQES)

Address: PO Box 184, Caledonia, N.S., B0T 1B0

Principal: Mr. David O'Quinn

Vice-Principal: Mr. Jeff Sylvester

Enrolment History and Projection

Although the enrolment of NQES decreased to 115 in 2006/7, the present enrolment of 131 and the 5-year projections suggest that the enrolment may be stabilizing.

History

2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9
130	125	115	125	131

Projection

2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
127	138	128	126	125

School Configuration

As noted in an earlier section, North Queens Elementary and North Queens High School began operating as one facility, Grade P-12, last fall.

Physical Condition of Building

The new elementary section or wing has new furnishings and equipment.

Building Use

The addition of 30 to 40 students in Grades P-6 from GES should have no negative impact on the use of the new elementary facility or the whole P-12 facility. As noted above, it may be possible accommodate all the GES students in the existing P-6 classes without adding another class.

Transportation

As indicated earlier in this paper, all students of the GES catchment area eventually attend North Queens High School, beginning in Grade 7, so the closure of GES would have no negative effect on the transportation of the students of NQES and NQHS.

The longest bus run to North Queens School from the GES area now begins at 7:04 a.m. and reaches NQES at 8:20 a.m., a run of 1 hour and 16 minutes. This run would be reduced in length because the daily transfer of students from other buses at GES would be eliminated.

Part 4. Conclusion

In the School Utilization Part 2 Report, February 27, 2008, the following notes explained the concern regarding the future of Greenfield Elementary School:

In terms of the small school issues raised in this study, the enrolment of Greenfield Elementary School is definitely below what it should be. The greater concern is that the recent decline is extreme. Hopefully it is only temporary.

The table in Appendix A shows that the enrolment of Greenfield Elementary dropped by 38% since 2000. Looking more closely, this drop has really occurred over the past 2 years. To go from 40 students to 25 students in 2 years is extreme---and alarming if the trend continues. What if it drops by another 15 students in the next 2 years? Hopefully this will not be the case, but one can not say "surely" without a thorough study of the demographics for the Greenfield community. It is prudent to anticipate and prepare for the potential challenges ahead, rather than wait.

Since the writing of that report, the level of concern expressed a year ago has diminished for at least 2 reasons. The main reason is that the enrolment appears to be more stable. The decline from 40 to 25, over 2 years, may prove to be an anomaly in what has been an otherwise stable enrolment since 1995. The second reason is that the terms of the lease agreement for the new community facility have been formalized and the students are in their new school.

The discussions with school administrators and regional office staff in preparing this Impact Assessment Report focused on the "what ifs". What if the enrolment drops significantly and quickly? What if an unexpected staff turnover occurs and teachers suitably qualified to cover all the specialized program areas cannot be hired for the long term? What if some new families would prefer that their children attend Grade P-6 at NQES instead of GES? These discussions confirmed that only way to deal with these potential problems is to respond with appropriate actions if and when they occur. The discussions also confirmed the seriousness of the question, "Should the school continue to operate under the shadow of the risks to the program delivery or should action be taken now?".

The conclusions from the preparation of this report are not specific or definitive primarily because the concerns are about what might happen in the future. A general conclusion is that there should be more discussion with direct input from those most closely affected by the decisions in the future. As indicated in the initial report a year ago, the Greenfield school and its community should have an opportunity to be involved in this assessment and to have their say before the final decisions are made. The next stages of the School Review process will give them this opportunity.

In conclusion, although the educational program is being delivered as it should be under the present circumstances, difficulties could arise rather quickly in the future. At this stage in the review process, whether or not Greenfield Elementary School should be closed remains as a question for further discussion and direct input from the South Shore Regional School Board and the school community.

The following options are put forward for discussion and input:

- 1. Greenfield Elementary School should not be closed, and will not be reviewed for at least 4 years.*
- 2. Greenfield Elementary School should be reconfigured so that some or all of the upper elementary Grades (P-6) are transferred to North Queens Elementary School.*
- 3. Greenfield Elementary School should be closed and the students transferred to North Queens Elementary School.*
- 4. The School Review Process for Greenfield Elementary School should be put "on hold" and assessed annually to see if it should proceed to the school community consultation or "Study Committee" stage.*