



# Guiding Our Future: What We Heard Report

Peace Wapiti Public School Division

April 2023

# PROJECT AT A GLANCE

Peace Wapiti Public School Division (PWPSD) invited community members located throughout the communities of Beaverlodge, Hythe, and Horse Lake First Nation to provide input into what the Board should consider as they make decisions about how to configure school programs that support junior high students in these communities.

Throughout January and February 2023, community members shared their perspectives and ideas with us about how we can support students now and into the future in a variety of ways. We heard a wide range of ideas, suggestions, and concerns about some of the tough choices and trade-offs the Board will face as they make decisions about how best to configure junior high programming.

This What We Heard Report summarizes our approach to engagement, including how we listened, who we heard from and what we learned. What we heard from community members and what we learned is important to parents, students, staff and community members will be shared with the Board as they work to determine a path forward for junior high programming.

We engaged with the public to understand needs, values and perspectives related to school configuration. This involved hearing from students, parents, staff, and other community members about a series of three possible configuration scenarios and summarizing that feedback for use by the Board for consideration in decision making.

To host conversations that represent voices from all three communities, the engagement approach allowed for a wide variety of conversations in many locations, some a light touch and others a deep dive into content, while all covering many topics and important issues that influence school programming decisions. A variety of engagement tactics were used to ensure as many voices as possible were heard.

<b>PROJECT NAME</b>	Guiding Our Future
<b>SCHOOLS</b>	<p>In 2020, the PWPSD Board of Trustees received a request from the Beaverlodge Elementary School Council to create a junior high program (Grades 7-9) in the community of Beaverlodge. The addition of a junior high program in the community requires the Division to assess current programming in the following schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Beaverlodge Elementary School (BES)</li><li>• Beaverlodge Regional High School (BRHS)</li><li>• Hythe Regional School (HRS)</li></ul>

<p><b>ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES &amp; INFORMATION SHARED</b></p>	<p>The project webpage went live on the PWPSD website on January 24, 2023, and included the following project information and input opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project overview and key documents</li> <li>• Project team contact information</li> <li>• Registration information for community conversations</li> <li>• Online survey</li> <li>• All Our Ideas tool</li> </ul> <p>In-person community conversations were held on the following dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• February 14, 2023 at Beaverlodge Elementary School (School staff session from 3:45-5:15 pm, Public session from 6:30-8:00 pm)</li> <li>• February 15, 2023 at Hythe Regional School (School staff session from 3:45-5:15 pm, Public session from 6:30-8:00 pm)</li> <li>• February 16, 2023 at Horse Lake First Nation Arena (Public session from 1:00-3:00 pm)</li> </ul> <p>The online survey was available from January 24 to February 24, 2023 for the community to provide its input on junior high programming. An online idea generation tool called “All Our Ideas” was available from January 24 to February 3, 2023 to brainstorm ideas for junior high programming with the community.</p>
<p><b>WEBPAGE</b></p>	<p><a href="http://www.pwpsd.ca">www.pwpsd.ca</a></p>

## Acknowledgements

We respectfully acknowledge that we are on Treaty 8 territory, traditional lands of the Cree, Beaver, Dene and Métis people and their ancestors. As Treaty People, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, we share the responsibility of honouring what is agreed in the Treaty, of caring for and building equitable friendships with each other, and of our responsibilities in relationship to each other.

We are committed to ensuring Indigenous connections to this land are honoured and that the rights of those who have stewarded these lands for millennia are respected in all aspects of our work – as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the river flows.

We would like to thank everyone who participated in the engagement activities. Your contributions are greatly appreciated, and we hope you see your ideas, comments and input reflected in these pages.

*Abiding by the Code of Ethics of the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2), the Dialogue Partners team has aimed to reflect themes and summarize participant input from the community engagement activities in a manner that captures the essence of what was shared. Any errors or omissions made in this summary report are based solely on our interpretation and analysis of that input.*

***Dialogue Partners Team***

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## What's Inside

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## Why this, why now

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### Project context

In 2020, the PWPSD Board of Trustees received a request from the Beaverlodge Elementary School Council to create a junior high program (Grades 7-9) in the community of Beaverlodge, which would require a new and different configuration of schools. As a result, PWPSD asked Administration to gather information from community members to help them make an informed decision on this matter.

In order to fully understand the impact of adding a junior high program in Beaverlodge, the Division contracted a public engagement consulting firm (Dialogue Partners) to engage with community members of Beaverlodge, Hythe, and Horse Lake First Nation about programming in three schools:

- Beaverlodge Elementary School
- Beaverlodge Regional High School
- Hythe Regional School

The purpose of this engagement process was to understand what is important to a variety of community members so that the Board can make an informed decision about school programming. As part of the engagement process, we hosted a series of conversations and activities with staff, students, parents and interested community members to understand and identify:

- What's working well in the current school configuration?
- What are the challenges and opportunities for change?
- As we move forward to determining how best to design junior high programming in the area, what would you like us to consider?

In order to support community conversation about junior high programming, PWPSD identified three possible approaches for community members to review. The first two scenarios looked at possible realignment of Beaverlodge students, while the third scenario involved leaving school configurations as they currently are.

We heard that each approach to school programming has a variety of implications, opportunities and challenges and appreciate the volume of feedback that we received about the trade-offs for each possible path forward.

*Guiding Our Future is a project and conversation about working together to map out a sustainable path forward for junior high programming in the communities of Beaverlodge and Hythe. The intention is that this collectively identified path reflects the needs, values and perspectives of all community members in these communities.*

## Your voice & this decision

This was a complex discussion concerning important issues such as school programming, the needs of students, change, community history, relationships, and how to maintain vibrant schools and a positive learning experience.

PWPSD needs to serve many different students, families and community members and are continually looking to improve and provide the best possible education experience. A student's school experience is impacted by many things including how school grades are arranged, how many students are within each school, what programs are available and how long they travel to and from school each day.

We heard from many diverse perspectives; including students, teachers, parents, school staff, community members, business owners, municipal staff and officials among many others. Within these groups were non-Indigenous people as well as Indigenous people and members of Indigenous communities.

We heard that this conversation is larger than just how students get to school, but is also about what they experience within school and outside school within the larger community.

All of the input shared during this engagement will be used by PWPSD in combination with logistical, financial and planning considerations to make decisions about junior high school programming in these communities.

Your voice and participation will help the Board ensure sustainable results.

*Thank you! We wish to thank everyone who participated for sharing your ideas, insight and experiences regarding junior high programming. Your input and feedback is a very important part of this process*

## Our commitment to you

This public engagement process was done to the consult level on the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2)'s public engagement spectrum which means that we will listen, acknowledge and report concerns and aspirations about junior high programming, and provide feedback on how community input influenced the Board's final decision.

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## What we did

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The following section provides an overview of the community engagement process, how it was supported with communications and who choose to participate.

### Engagement overview

Community engagement is a critical part of the PWPSD process when making decisions about school configuration. Reconfiguring schools in the area will affect students, parents and staff connected to BES, BRHS, and HRS. To better understand community needs, values, and perspectives about the possible reconfiguration, PWPSD created three possible scenarios for community feedback:

- Realigning students so that Grades K-7 attend BES and Grades 8-12 attend BRHS
- Realigning students so that Grades K-8 attend BES and Grades 9-12 attend BRHS
- Leaving school configuration as it is currently

Information about the potential enrollment and utilization for each of these scenarios was estimated and shared with the public through the project webpage and during the community conversations (see Appendix B).

As each approach to school programming has a variety of implications, opportunities and challenges, participants were invited to consider each approach and share with us their understanding of the benefits, drawbacks and considerations for each possible path forward.

The engagement included a series of opportunities for community members to provide their feedback on junior high programming. We also connected with students and school staff directly through facilitated conversations. These conversations provided participants with opportunities to learn about the options for school programming under consideration by PWPSD and provide feedback about their school experiences and how changes to school programming would impact them.

### How we communicated

We employed several tactics to communicate information about the project to community members and other parties interested in junior high programming. The following communication tactics were used to advertise engagement opportunities:



## Project Webpage

- The “Guiding Our Future” project webpage went live on the PWPSD website on January 24, 2023.
- The project webpage included the following information and input opportunities: project overview and key documents (including a project backgrounder, FAQs and potential enrollment and utilization for each of the possible school programming scenarios); project team contact information; registration information for community conversations; link to the online survey; and a link to the All Our Ideas brainstorming tool.

## Invitations to Participate

- 11 social media posts advertising engagement opportunities and inviting community members to share their perspectives about junior high programming were posted on each of PWPSD’s social media channels.
- Posters advertising engagement activities were posted at key community locations and school sites, and also shared digitally with school staff and community members.

The communication materials used to share information about this project and support community participation in engagement opportunities is included in Appendix B.

## How we engaged

To engage as many participants as possible in this important conversation, we hosted multiple opportunities for input and involvement. These included:

### Online Survey

- An online survey was available from January 24-February 24. We shared three potential scenarios for junior high programming and asked community members to share the benefits, drawbacks and potential impacts of each scenario.
- Community members were also asked to share their ideas for other ways to configure junior high programming in these communities.
- We received 683 responses to this survey.

### Brainstorming Ideas with the Community

- Using a crowd-sourcing survey tool called All Our Ideas, together with the community, we brainstormed ideas for junior high programming and asked participants to share which ideas aligned most with them.

- 15,178 votes were received on a wide range of submissions between January 24 and February 3, 2023.
- We received over 450 idea submissions through this tool.

### **Staff Deliberative Forums**

- In-person, facilitated conversations with school teachers and staff were held at Beaverlodge Elementary School and Hythe Regional School on February 14 and 15, 2023. At each event, attendees discussed the benefits, drawbacks and considerations for each of the three scenarios under consideration for junior high programming.
- Over 58 school staff participated in these discussions.

### **Student Conversations**

- PWPSD staff spoke to elementary, junior high and high school students at Beaverlodge Elementary School, Beaverlodge Regional High School, and Hythe Regional School between February 7 and 13, 2023, asking them to share their perspectives on junior high programming.
- Over 265 students participated in these discussions.

### **Community Conversations**

- In-person community conversations took place on February 14, 15 and 16 in Beaverlodge, Hythe and Horse Lake First Nation. At each event, project team members shared the three scenarios for junior high programming under consideration and asked attendees to share the benefits, drawbacks and considerations for each scenario.
- Participants were encouraged to share their ideas for other ways to maximize benefits and address drawbacks, ask questions for compilation and response, and also to complete the online survey following each event.
- Additional emails, letters and phone calls from community members received by PWPSD were also analyzed and included along with the overall feedback.
- Over 185 community members participated in these events and/or by communicating directly with PWPSD.

The detailed feedback shared by participants, including verbatim responses received in response to key discussion questions, at each of these engagement opportunities is included in Appendix A.

## Who we heard from

From January through February 2023, we heard from a variety of community members about their experiences with schools in the area and what PWPSD should consider as they decide whether to change or maintain junior high programming. We heard from:

- Members of the public
- Parents, grandparents and relatives
- Past, present and prospective students
- Teachers and school employees
- Municipal staff
- Indigenous people and members of Indigenous communities
- Elected officials
- Other interested parties

When we asked people how they were connected to this conversation, we heard that while some participants were directly connected to schools through their children or jobs, others were connected to the conversation through the pivotal role these schools play in the community fabric.

We heard from people who are currently attending one of the three schools under discussion, as well as those who attended these schools in the past and those who are not yet within the school system. We also heard from people who shared affiliation with more than one of the three schools, some of whom worked in one location with children attending another.

While many of those who participated in our online survey shared that they were connected to Beaverlodge Elementary School, Beaverlodge Regional High School, and/or Hythe Regional School, we also heard from community members associated with St. Mary's Catholic School, Valhalla Community School, and the communities of Wembley, Elmworth and Goodfare.

Verbatim answers received in response to questions about how participants were connected to this conversation, which schools they were affiliated with and which community they most associate with are included in Appendix A.

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## What we heard

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We have compiled and assessed all the information we received from community members related to junior high programming in Beaverlodge and Hythe schools throughout the engagement activities detailed above. A summary of what we heard from community members and other interested parties in response to each of the key questions that we asked during this engagement process is included below.

### *A note from the project team*

This is an important, complex conversation that touches on student needs, family values and diverse visions for the future of these communities. During this engagement process, we heard about experiences of racism against Indigenous peoples. We are aware that racism against Indigenous peoples exists, has been an often-unconscious part of the social and institutional fabric of Canadian society for centuries and, while it can be about individual and personal behaviour, it is more significantly about broad social attitudes that have real personal impacts.

While it can be difficult for some to acknowledge and hear these experiences, we see the raising of these concerns as hopeful – showing that there is some trust and good faith in this process that all experiences and concerns will be heard, and presenting a real opportunity for the school division to become aware of these experiences and develop responses as part of their commitment to Truth and Reconciliation.

Our role in this conversation is to honour all the voices who participated in this engagement, even when what we hear can be painful. We would not be doing our job if we didn't.

**This What We Heard report includes comments about racism against Indigenous people across the communities connected to schools in Beaverlodge and Hythe.**

This section of the report captures the high-level themes expressed regarding experiences of racism against Indigenous people. Verbatim responses are provided in Appendix A.

We appreciate that hearing experiences of racism raises a range of emotions for everyone, and that our society often does not provide us with enough opportunities and skills to understand and process what we are hearing. We can imagine some people may read this content and feel relief and gratitude that they were heard in this process, whereas others may feel angry and defensive to hear it. We also know that this is a necessary conversation to hear and respond to in order to create a school community that supports the needs of all students. We very much appreciate the courage of those community members who shared their experiences with us.

Our job is to accurately record what we heard during our conversations about junior high programming, and ensure that all voices are reflected in this document and shared with the Board for consideration as they make the tough choices ahead. We invite you to read this summary of our conversations with open minds, kindness, empathy and care; appreciating that everyone in the community is valued, deserves respect and may come from very different perspectives and experiences.

We also recognize that it can be complicated and difficult to read about racism in any form, and encourage you to consider your own needs:

- Are you in a place where you have the emotional capacity to read about racism against Indigenous people in the communities connected to schools in Beaverlodge and Hythe?
- What do you need to do to prepare before reading the remainder of this report?

## All Our Ideas – Understanding the Big Picture

Using an online tool called All Our Ideas, we brainstormed ideas for junior high programming. Using this platform, participants shared a wide range of ideas for school programming as well as how the ideas submitted by others aligned with their personal value, experiences and priorities.

A wide range of ideas were submitted through All Our Ideas in response to the question: *Thinking about junior high programming, which statement best aligns with you? Add your own idea here.*

While we had a limited number of responses that specifically answered this question, respondents did share lots of comments about junior high programming, that give insight into what's on the hearts and minds of community members related to this conversation.

Key themes that emerged from this online discussion are included below. Verbatim responses shared by respondents are included in Appendix A.

### **Declining enrollment at Beaverlodge Elementary School**

Reasons shared by participants to address declining enrollment in Beaverlodge schools include the potential loss of funding and teachers, losing students to other schools, a need for a junior high school to attract and retain students, and the possibility of closing current schools if enrollment continues to decline.

We heard that the population decline in Beaverlodge is contributing to an overall decline in school enrollment, as well as the potential for a charter school to be built if public education is not provided in the community. We also heard concerns about the existing elementary programming, with issues relating to accessing the school during after school hours.

### **Programming, extracurricular activities, diversity and relational considerations**

We heard that diversity is important and some community members shared that they believe keeping Beaverlodge students at Hythe Regional School supports community diversity and the formation of relationships between students in different communities.

We also heard from those who believe that Beaverlodge has the potential to offer better electives, enrichment, and access to extra-curricular activities for local students than Hythe. Others shared that Hythe has specialized teachers, programming and extracurricular activities that would be negatively impacted by moving Beaverlodge students away from Hythe Regional School.

Participants also shared concerns about transportation, access to Career and Technology Studies (CTS) courses, funding, Compressed School Week (CSW) programming, and impacts of losing Beaverlodge students.

## **Decision-making considerations and supporting the needs of all communities involved**

A range of perspectives about making decisions that encompass the needs of all three communities (Beaverlodge, Hythe and Horse Lake First Nation) were shared by participants. We heard from those who shared that there is a need for more options for students and that the focus should be on providing the best education possible.

Some shared their belief that the decision should not be about one community versus the other and that decisions about education should not be dictated by student friendships. We also heard that there is a need to support all public schools, with suggestions to partner with St. Mary's Catholic School, and that the Board must avoid bias and make decisions that benefit all students. We also heard from those who shared that current school programming and transportation are fairly distributed, with the regional high school located in Beaverlodge and the regional junior high school located in Hythe.

Some people shared that they did not have sufficient school enrollment data to make an informed decision about how best to configure junior high programming, and some shared their perspective that now is not the right time to engage in this conversation.

## **Opportunities and challenges of delivering K-12 education in Beaverlodge**

We heard a number of opportunities and challenges related to delivering K-12 education in Beaverlodge, including the need for a public junior high in Beaverlodge, keeping children in Beaverlodge close to emergency services, and the potential disadvantages of leaving the community for junior high. People shared that continuous K-12 education is correlated to academic success, better mental health and community connections, with some sharing that the Beaverlodge population would support K-12 education and create room for growth.

People also shared concerns about the impact of moving Beaverlodge students out of Hythe on community relationships, and the potential for community segregation to result. We also heard concerns about the social aspects of adding junior high students to high school, splitting of school resources between Hythe and Beaverlodge, and potential impacts on school programming.

Other suggestions include partnering with St. Mary's for building another junior high, offering junior high at BES, adding grade 9 to BRHS, making Elmworth the regional school, building a public 7-12 school in Beaverlodge, and building a new 7-9 school in Albright.

## **Transportation, busing and commuting considerations**

We heard mixed opinions about busing as a solution for students' education. Some shared that they consider it to be expensive, potentially dangerous, and a waste of time, while others believe it is not a problem and that everyone is already commuting with Hythe and Beaverlodge schools utilizing busing for different grades. Some suggested putting the busing money towards local education instead.

## **Creating community for our children**

Participants shared a number of considerations about creating community for our children, sharing that keeping children in their own communities improves student access and contribution to local activities, families, and communities, while also offering mentorship opportunities for junior high students. People shared that Beaverlodge students should be educated in Beaverlodge and Hythe students should be educated in Hythe. Additionally, we heard concerns about students leaving their community too young and the desire to keep all students together.

## **Considerations regarding regional schools**

We heard from those community members who feel that regional schools are important and should be kept as they are currently configured. They believe that students benefit from the social connections and experiences they gain in regional schools, and that children with special needs can thrive in them. People shared that families are choosing HRS, with some sharing their opinion that BES students are not at a disadvantage when they enter HRS.

We also heard suggestions to rename Hythe Regional School to reflect all of the communities it serves.

## **What we heard from students**

PWPSD staff spoke to elementary, junior high and high school students at Beaverlodge Elementary School, Beaverlodge Regional High School, and Hythe Regional School, asking them to share their perspectives on junior high programming.

Included below are the high-level themes that emerged from these conversations in response to key discussion questions. Verbatim responses shared by students are included in Appendix A.



### *What do you enjoy about attending Beaverlodge Elementary School (BES)?*

When asked what they enjoy about BES, BES students in grades 5 and 6 shared several reasons. We heard that students enjoy being with their friends, with some noting their appreciation for the friendly atmosphere of the school. Some students enjoy the learning environment, citing classes such as math, French, fine arts, science, gym, and recess. We heard that students appreciate the school's activities and opportunities and find it a fun place to be. We also heard that some appreciate the school's proximity to their homes, family, and siblings.

### *Do you have any concerns or worries about attending Hythe Regional School (HRS) for junior high?*

During conversations with BES students in grades 5 and 6, we heard that many do not have worries or concerns about attending Hythe Regional School for junior high. Those who were worried shared a variety of concerns, including that the schoolwork will become more challenging in junior high, potential bullying and harassment, and concerns about taking the bus, as they may be late for school. We heard from students who are worried about adapting to a new school environment with unfamiliar people and teachers. We also heard concerns about being exposed to drugs at the new school.

### *What do you enjoy about attending Hythe Regional School (HRS)?*

When asked what they enjoy about HRS, HRS elementary (grade 5) and junior high (grades 7-9) students shared several reasons. We heard that students appreciate the social aspect of school, being able to see their friends, meet new people, and make new friends from other communities. They also enjoy the learning environment, with good teachers, class structures, and a variety of class options, including special supports and programs to achieve success. Specific classes cited include shop class, art class, science class, and Cree language classes as well as programs like the Knowledge & Employability group and compressed school week.

Students shared that they enjoy the extra-curricular activities, after-school programs, and ancillary services, such as sports teams, dances, lunch programs, and good playground/sports amenities. We also heard from those who simply enjoy the overall experience, feeling a sense of excitement and enthusiasm when coming to school. Students enjoy the bus ride and appreciate the pre-high school environment, providing a fresh start after elementary school and the freedom to try new things. We also heard that some students do not find anything enjoyable about HRS or are indifferent about their experience.

### *What are you most excited about in attending junior high at Hythe Regional School?*

Elementary students from HRS and BES who will be attending HRS for junior high shared that they are excited about several aspects of the new school. We heard that students are excited about the social aspect of junior high, such as meeting new people, making new friends, and seeing old friends from other communities. Some view HRS as a fresh start and are excited about the prospect of going to a new place.

We also heard that students are excited about the extra-curricular activities, particularly sports and school dances. Students shared that they are excited about the learning experience, including meeting new teachers, having more class options, and being able to learn new things. Some shared that they are looking forward to having a bit more freedom, such as bringing/having a phone throughout the day or being able to wear a hat. We also heard from those who are excited about taking the bus to school.

We also heard that some students are indifferent or unsure what they are excited about in attending junior high at HRS.

### *What are your feelings about attending Hythe Regional School for junior high?*

During conversations with current HRS elementary students, we heard a range of feelings about attending HRS for junior high. We heard from students who feel positive towards going to junior high and shared feelings like being excited, happy, and good. We also heard from those who feel negatively towards going to junior high, sharing feelings like being nervous or scared. Some students shared that they feel neutral or indifferent towards going to junior high.

### *If a change was made to junior high programming what would that mean to you as a student?*

When we spoke to HRS junior high students (grades 7-9), we heard that the possible changes in programming will have various impacts on students. We heard that students are concerned that a change in programming would affect their social life, as they may see their friends less or have fewer opportunities to make new friends. Where some students shared that they would not like the change and may feel sad about it, others shared that they do not believe that the change will affect them or they don't care, as they may be leaving junior high age before the change is implemented.

We also heard that students are worried that a change will impact their ability to participate in extra-curricular activities, particularly sports teams. Students acknowledged that a change in programming could mean that Grade 9 students would be in high school, which some shared that

they view positively while others view it negatively. Some students expressed concern about having to deal with change and starting over again in a new environment.

We heard that changes in the bus system due to program changes will have an impact on students, with some seeing it as a positive change that will make their schedule easier or help them get more sleep, while others are concerned about longer bus times. Students also shared that the change will impact their educational experience, potentially reducing option classes they like, such as art and Cree classes, or cancelling the compressed school week program.

We also heard from students who believe that the change will lead to less funding for schools.

*If things stayed the same at Hythe Regional School, what would that mean to you as a student?*

When we spoke to HRS junior high students (grades 7-9), students shared that they would be happy if the programming stayed the same, as they believe it provides the best student experience and allows them to be with their friends. Others highlighted the importance of good extra-curricular activities, primarily sports teams, and positive educational experiences with lots of class options and special needs supports.

From students who ride the bus, we heard that keeping programming the same will mean they will continue to ride the bus. Some students identified this as a downside, where other shared that they enjoy the bus ride.

We also heard from students who expressed an indifference or an "I don't care" mindset, as well as those who shared negative impacts of things staying the same such as bullying, getting bored and lack of sleep.

## Scenario 1: **Realignment BES K-7 and BRHS 8-12, HRS remains K-9**

As mentioned earlier in this report, to better understand community needs, values, and perspectives about the possible reconfiguration, PWPSD created three possible school configuration scenarios for community feedback. Scenario 1 involved realigning students so that Grades K-7 attend BES and Grades 8-12 attend BRHS.

If approved, this approach would involve:

- Adding Beaverlodge Grade 7 students to BES (BES becomes K-7)
- Adding Beaverlodge Grade 8 and 9 students to BRHS (BRHS becomes 8-12, with Beaverlodge Grades 8 and 9 zoned to attend BRHS instead of HRS)
- HRS would remain K-9

Information about the potential enrollment and utilization for this scenario was estimated and shared with the public through the project webpage and at engagement activities (see Appendix B). Through the online survey, community conversations, staff deliberative forums and student conversations, participants shared their level of comfort with this scenario along with their understanding of the benefits, drawbacks and considerations for this possible path forward.

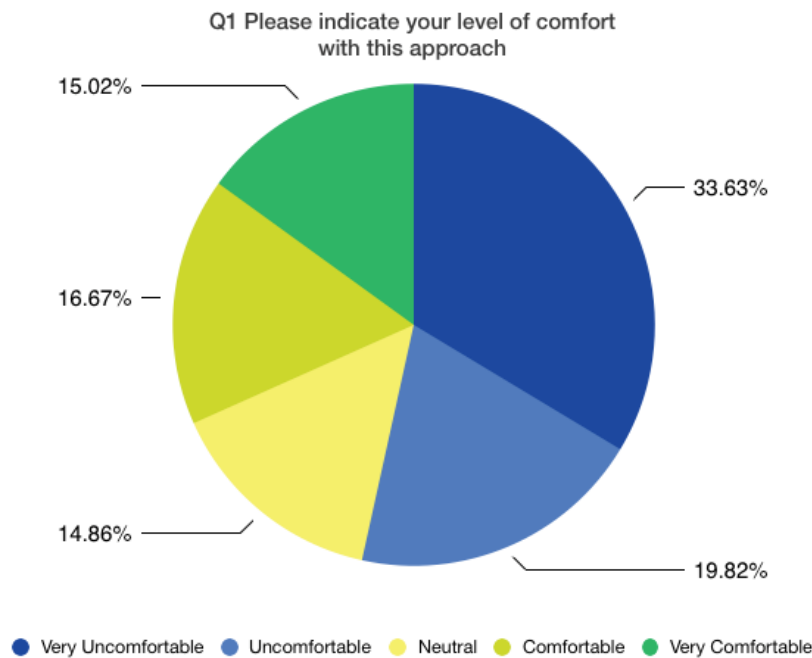
Through the online survey, in-person community, staff and student conversations, we heard that there are mixed opinions on the benefits of realigning grades in this way. Where some participants shared their perspective that this approach will reduce transportation time and costs, increase educational opportunities, and improve safety, others see it as favoring one community over another and potentially leading to disinvestment in certain areas.

Included below are the high-level themes that emerged from conversations about Scenario 1 (Realignment: BES K-7 and BRHS 8-12) in response to key discussion questions. Verbatim responses shared by participants during each engagement activity are included in Appendix A.

### *What is your level of comfort with this approach?*

In the online survey, respondents shared their overall comfort level with this scenario for junior high programming.

What we heard through this online engagement tool is shown below:



*It is important to note that the majority of survey respondents shared that they associate most with Beaverlodge, and also that voices in any engagement process expressing inequity will always be less than a majority. As such, it is important to understand that this quantitative data provides an incomplete story without the added context of participant stories, perspectives and experiences.*

### *What are the benefits of this scenario?*

Key themes emerging from what was shared during community engagement in response to this question follow. Participants shared that the potential benefits of Scenario 1 (Realignment: BES K-7 and BRHS 8-12, HRS remains K-9) include:

- Reducing transportation time and costs for Beaverlodge students, as well as students who live more remotely.
- Beaverlodge students will be able to stay within Beaverlodge, which will improve local relationships and community connections.

- Potential opportunity for increased educational opportunities, public school investment, and after school activities.
- Increased sense of safety for those who voiced concerns with the safety of HRS and/or bus transit time on the highway.
- Increased enrollment numbers within Beaverlodge public schools.
- Improving children's social well-being, including making friends and smoothing the transition between elementary and high school

Some participants shared that they do not see any drawbacks for Scenario 1. We heard that an intentional approach will mitigate any potential drawbacks and for some, the benefits outweigh the drawbacks. We also heard from some participants that they view this to be the second-best scenario and would not be upset if this change was implemented.

When we spoke to high school students at BRHS, we heard that the potential benefits of this scenario from their perspective include:

- Beaverlodge kids will be able to stay in their community
- Grade 8 students will have more role models
- CTF (Career and Technology Foundations) would be easier
- Students will have the opportunity to play sports
- It will be easier on families with siblings
- Grade 8 students will have to mature faster
- There will be larger high school teams
- Grade 8 students will have more options and programs
- It will be more convenient for parents
- Students will have more interactions with older kids
- Hythe students will get more play time
- Fundraisers would increase
- Students will spend less time on the bus

### *What are the drawbacks of this scenario?*

Participants shared that the potential drawbacks of Scenario 1 (Realignment: BES K-7 and BRHS 8-12) include:

- Benefiting Beaverlodge students while disproportionately impacting HRS and the Hythe community. People shared concerns that lower enrollment levels at HRS will lead to lack of funding and potential impacts on the current programming and specialized teaching at the school (e.g. language classes, teaching support, etc.). We also heard concerns about

potential impacts to the bus transportation grant that Hythe and Horse Lake First Nation students rely on once they start going to high school at BRHS.

- Removing a specialized environment catered to this particular age group and maturity level. We heard from those who believe that the age grouping of students in this scenario is unsuitable and may impact their ability to mature appropriately. We heard that Grade 7 is too old/mature for elementary school, Grade 9 is too young/immature for high school, and Grade 8 is both too old for elementary school and too young for high school.
- Redistribution of students may lead to an overall decrease in funding, which could negatively impact the quality of education for junior high students. People shared concerns about a potential decrease in funding for all communities leading to less specialized programs or class options, the reduction of teachers / loss of jobs for teachers, loss of the compressed school week program, and increased frequency of split classes.
- Potential impact to student extra-curricular activities, mainly school sports programs, and lead to less competitive teams or potential loss of opportunities.
- The lack of sufficient infrastructure at BES (including inadequate kitchen, sports / gym facilities, flex rooms, and washrooms) for junior high programming. Some people noted that HRS is a purpose-built regional high school to accommodate a specialized junior high program.
- Does not address the root problems within the community and could lead to segregation and division between Horse Lake First Nation, Hythe, and Beaverlodge communities.
- May lead to less socialization for the students, including socialization between communities and the general ability to have a specialized environment with people of the same age.
- May lead to reduced enrollment numbers at Hythe Regional School.

We also heard from some participants that they prefer either Scenario 2 or 3 over this scenario. We heard that busing is not viewed as an issue and therefore should not be a key aspect of this decision. People shared that they do not see any value or benefit in this scenario, and worry that it could lead to disinvestment in HRS and possibly all schools in PWPSD.

When we spoke to high school students at BRHS, we heard that the potential drawbacks of this scenario from their perspective include:

- The change will cause anxiety and be a big change for Grade 8 and 9 students.
- Hythe will lose dances, sports teams, and extra-curricular activities.
- There will be fewer option classes.
- Bus drivers may lose jobs.
- Grade 7 students may not mature appropriately.
- High school will be more crowded.
- More teachers will need to be hired.

- All communities will lose sports teams.
- Kids may abuse their new freedom and privileges.
- Earlier exposure to unhealthy habits may occur.
- There is a maturity difference between grade levels.
- There may be a lack of diversity.
- Rules and schedules may be more constricting.
- Some responses are general or irrelevant.
- Extra-curricular activities may be minimized.
- The BES gym is too small for grade 7 students.
- Teams may be unfair in experience.

*If the school division were to move forward with this scenario, what would you like them to consider?*

When we asked high school students at BRHS what they would like PWPSD to consider if they decide to move forward with this scenario, students shared the following considerations:

- Need for additional space and funding to accommodate more teachers and classes
- Impact on mental health
- Risk of entrenching existing cliques and changing social dynamics
- Concerns about bullying and lack of maturity in younger kids
- Impact on high school students and potential resistance to having junior high age kids at school
- Consideration for low-income households and lack of diversity
- Possibility of enforcing new, stricter rules



## Scenario 2: Realignment BES K-8 and BRHS 9-12, HRS remains K-9

The second scenario created for community input involved realigning students so that Grades K-8 attend BES and Grades 9-12 attend BRHS.

If approved, this approach would involve:

- Adding Beaverlodge Grade 7 and 8 students to BES (BES becomes K-8)
- Adding Beaverlodge Grade 9 students to BRHS (BRHS becomes 9-12, with Beaverlodge Grade 9 students zoned to attend BRHS instead of HRS)
- HRS would remain K-9

Information about the potential enrollment and utilization for this scenario was estimated and shared with the public through the project webpage and at engagement activities (see Appendix B). Through the online survey, community conversations, staff deliberative forums and student conversations, participants shared their level of comfort with this scenario along with their understanding of the benefits, drawbacks and considerations for this possible path forward.

Through the online survey, in-person community, staff and student conversations, we heard that there are mixed opinions on the benefits of realigning grades in this way. We heard from participants who shared their perspective that this approach will allow students to stay in their community, leading to increased use of community amenities, less bus travel, and better age grouping. Participants also shared that implementation of this scenario would create a lot of change, which will lead to the need for PWPSD to consider change management.

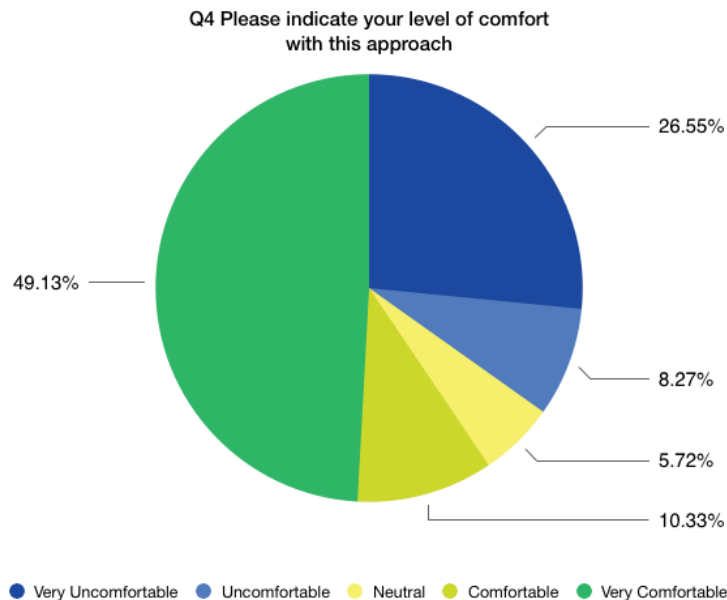
We also heard from those who see this scenario as favouring one community over others. We heard that the real problems in the community are not being addressed by this scenario, sharing that this conversation is more about racism and could lead to segregation and division between the communities at a regional level.

Included below are the high-level themes that emerged from conversations about Scenario 2 (BES K-8 and BRHS 9-12, HRS remains K-9) in response to key discussion questions. Verbatim responses shared by participants during each engagement activity are included in Appendix A.

### *What is your level of comfort with this approach?*

In the online survey, respondents shared their overall comfort level with this scenario for junior high programming.

What we heard through this online engagement tool is shown below:



*It is important to note that the majority of survey respondents shared that they associate most with Beaverlodge, and also that voices in any engagement process expressing inequity will always be less than a majority. As such, it is important to understand that this quantitative data provides an incomplete story without the added context of participant stories, perspectives and experiences.*

### *What are the benefits of this scenario?*

Key themes emerging from what was shared during community engagement in response to this question follow. Participants shared that the potential benefits of Scenario 2 (BES K-8 and BRHS 9-12, HRS remains K-9) include:

- Children can stay in their own community, closer to family, and are able contribute to their local community. For Beaverlodge, we heard that this may mean community amenities like the pool will be better utilized.
- Students will bus less, which will result in increased safety, less time wasted, and more money to fund other things.

- More appropriate age grouping than Scenario 1.
- Improving the quality of education for students by potentially increasing overall funding leading to better programs, transitions for students, and more community involvement.
- More extra-curricular opportunities for students, including more sports teams and the ability for Grade 9 students to play high-school level sports.
- Improved convenience for parents.
- Increased sense of safety for those who voiced concerns with bullying at HRS and/or student bus transit on the highway.
- Helping students build better relationships with other students and teachers.

When we spoke to high school students at BRHS, we heard that the potential benefits of this scenario from their perspective include:

- Better age distribution between elementary and high school
- Students stay in their own community of Beaverlodge
- Grade 9 students may mature faster in a high school environment
- More funding may be available
- Parents may benefit from the change
- Less time spent on the bus
- Improved sports team situation

### *What are the drawbacks of this scenario?*

Participants shared that the potential drawbacks of Scenario 2 (BES K-8 and BRHS 9-12, HRS remains K-9) include:

- Disproportionately negative impact on HRS and potential programming cuts / staff downsizing. We heard concerns that this scenario will result in a disinvestment in the Hythe community as well as Hythe / Horse Lake kids, creating a socio-economic division in the regional community.
- Lowering of the quality of education due to reduced funding, loss of specialized teachers, special needs infrastructure and the compressed school week program.
- Lessening of community interaction, creating division and segregation in the larger regional community. We heard that this approach will impact efforts related to Truth and Reconciliation and this scenario is rooted in racism.
- Not adequately capturing the age / maturity grouping, removing the junior high experience and potentially stunting social and cultural growth for this age group.
- Difficulties in school sports programming, dividing kids and resources with a lack of infrastructure at BES to accommodate junior high sports.

- Hindering students' opportunity to develop social skills and make new friends.
- Not addressing the overall regional downward trend of enrollment rates, nor the loss of students to private education systems.
- Inadequate facilities at BES to accommodate increased student population and programming for junior high students, leading to a significant need for capital investment for items like portables. Specific examples include inadequate gym facilities, washroom facilities, library facilities, and kitchen facilities.
- Not addressing bus issues for rural, Hythe, and Horse Lake students who will still need to take the bus and who may face reduced or cut funding for the bus.
- Leading to a lot of change, which will need to consider change management.

Some participants shared that they do not see any drawbacks for Scenario 2. We also heard from some participants that they prefer Scenarios 1 or 3.

When we spoke to high school students at BRHS, we heard that the potential drawbacks of this scenario from their perspective include:

- There may not be enough space or resources for students at BES
- Classes that focus on art or music may no longer be available
- Students may find it difficult to adjust when transitioning from BES to BRHS
- There may be no sports teams for students at BES or HRS
- The community may become divided as a result of this change
- Students in grades 7 and 8 are too old to attend elementary school
- The quality of education for students in K-8 may be affected
- Some people feel that this change is not important or doesn't address the real issues
- Funding for schools may decrease as a result of this change
- Younger students may be exposed to negative behaviors like smoking, vaping, and drinking

*If the school division were to move forward with this scenario, what would you like them to consider?*

When we asked high school students at BRHS what they would like PWPSD to consider if they decide to move forward with this scenario, students shared the following considerations:

- Students at BES will have a big age difference
- More money will be needed
- BES may become too crowded
- A new park space will need to be found
- Activities for students outside of school will need to be planned
- Hythe may lose funding

- Student mental health may be impacted
- Student social groups may be affected
- Transportation impacts
- There may be more accidents with increased foot traffic
- Teacher experience and consequences need to be considered
- Children from different communities may not be able to meet
- High school students' opinions need to be considered

### Scenario 3: Leave school configuration as is

The third scenario shared for community feedback involved no changes to school configuration. If approved, this approach would involve:

- Leaving school configuration as it is currently (BES K-6, HRS remains K-9 with BES Grades 7-9 zoned to attend HRS, BRHS Grades 10-12)
- No changes to school configurations or possible teaching assignments

Information about the potential enrollment and utilization for this scenario was estimated and shared with the public through the project webpage and at engagement activities (see Appendix B). Through the online survey, community conversations, staff deliberative forums and student conversations, participants shared their level of comfort with this scenario along with their understanding of the benefits, drawbacks and considerations for this possible path forward.

Through the online survey, in-person community, staff and student conversations, we heard that there are mixed opinions on the benefits of leaving the school configuration as is. We heard from participants who shared their perspective that this approach maintains the status quo, which means continuing to offer good quality education, specialized classes/teaching, and a strong sports program. It also allows for continued socialization between communities, bringing people together, and saving the school division from short-term investment costs.

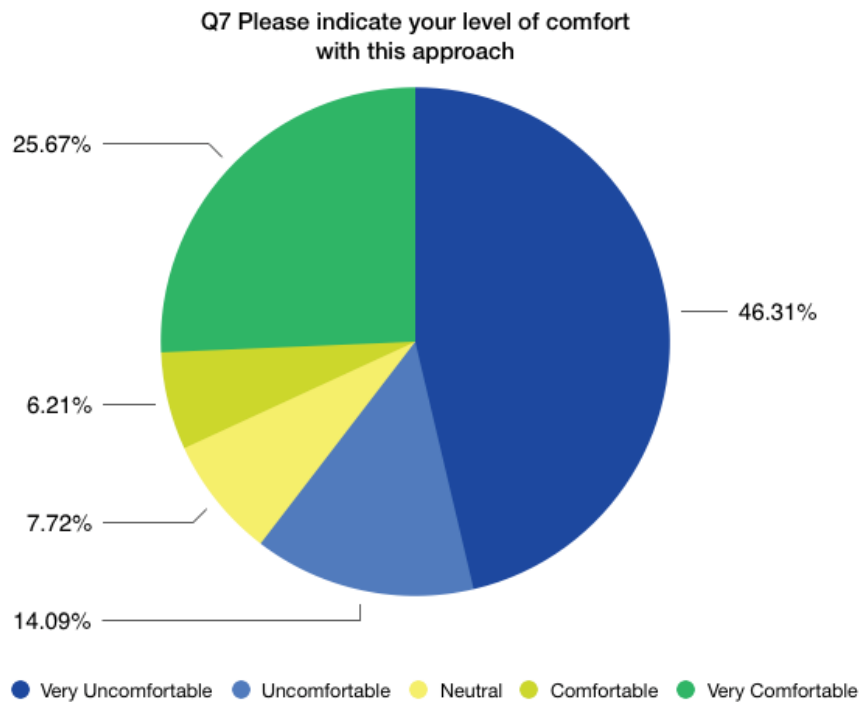
We also heard from participants who see no benefits in this scenario and expressed concerns that Beaverlodge families and students will be most impacted, which may lead to continued decreased enrollment rates in the public school system. Some also mentioned tensions due to racism underlying the decision-making process.

Included below are the high-level themes that emerged from conversations about Scenario 3 (Leave school configuration as is) in response to key discussion questions. Verbatim responses shared by participants during each engagement activity are included in Appendix A.

*What is your level of comfort with this approach?*

In the online survey, respondents shared their overall comfort level with this scenario for junior high programming.

What we heard through this online engagement tool is shown below:



*It is important to note that the majority of survey respondents shared that they associate most with Beaverlodge, and also that voices in any engagement process expressing inequity will always be less than a majority. As such, it is important to understand that this quantitative data provides an incomplete story without the added context of participant stories, perspectives and experiences.*

*What are the benefits of this scenario?*

Key themes emerging from what was shared during community engagement in response to this question follow. Participants shared that the potential benefits of Scenario 3 (Leave school configuration as is) include:

- Benefiting Hythe and Horse Lake students, potentially over Beaverlodge students.
- Continued socialization between communities and bringing people together; students and parents alike.

- Everything can remain the same. This includes maintaining existing funding, high-quality education, specialized classes / teaching, and a strong sports program.
- Students continue to create new friendships, meet new people, and start fresh while receiving a specialized junior high program that suits their age group and maturity level.
- Leveraging available infrastructure and accommodating long-term growth potential.
- Saving the school division from short-term investment costs to accommodate a new program configuration across the schools. We also heard that the bus grant can be kept under this scenario.

Some participants shared that keeping things the same will benefit all the communities. We heard from those who saw no benefits in this scenario, sharing that Beaverlodge families and students will suffer and maintaining the status quo will contribute to continued decreased enrollment rates in the public school system. Some shared that they believe the decision makers are being unfair to Hythe, while others believe that keeping things the way they are would benefit Hythe the most.

We also heard from those who shared their perspective that there are no drawbacks in this scenario. They say that this format is proven to work and that this conversation is actually about something broader than the school system or students: racism.

We also heard from those who took this opportunity to express preference for other scenarios or present a new idea.

When we spoke to high school students at BRHS, we heard that the potential benefits of this scenario from their perspective include:

- Less stress on teachers
- Beaverlodge and Hythe students can meet and form bonds before high school
- More option classes
- Better sports programming
- Minimal impact on teachers (e.g. hiring, firing)
- Students will be in classes with others at their maturity level
- More community involvement in schools
- Things will stay the same
- Schools will be used well
- The school board won't have to find extra money or resources
- Less stress on school board - No need to find funding for transition/resources
- Hythe will still get funding
- This works and is easy
- Small changes will happen more often and be consistent.



### *What are the drawbacks of this scenario?*

Participants shared that the potential drawbacks of Scenario 3 (Leave school configuration as is) include:

- Things will stay the same. We heard that some students may lose time, have to take the bus on a highway, and experience inconvenience or difficulty getting involved in school activities or extra-curriculars.
- Decreased funding and enrollment for Beaverlodge schools.
- Negatively impacting Beaverlodge schools (BES and BRHS) and disappointing Beaverlodge parents.
- Not using BES to its full potential.
- Result in lost public trust in PWPSD due to inaction on this decision.
- Continuing to divide the communities as inaction will foster continued rivalry and resentment.

We also heard from those who expressed a preference for other scenarios or presented new ideas.

When we spoke to high school students at BRHS, we heard that the potential drawbacks of this scenario from their perspective include:

- Parents in Beaverlodge parents will still be upset
- Students will still need to take the bus, but it will be manageable
- HRS will be crowded
- BES may have less funding due to lack of enrollment
- It will be more challenging for Beaverlodge parents
- Students from other areas may feel excluded
- Fewer options for schooling
- The school may need to spend more on equipment
- Siblings may have to go to different schools

### *If the school division were to move forward with this scenario, what would you like them to consider?*

When we asked high school students at BRHS what they would like PWPSD to consider if they decide to move forward with this scenario, students shared the following considerations:

- Funding
- Parents' opinions
- Students' opinions
- The potential problems that may arise from changes

- The possibility of creating a third regional elementary / junior high
- Reducing stress on the School Board

## Scenario 4: Other ideas

In addition to asking community members to share their feedback about the three possible scenarios for junior high programming outlined above, we also asked community members to share their ideas with us for consideration.

We asked people if there is another way to think about the future or other ideas that could help PWPSD maximize benefits and minimize drawbacks to support all students into the future. During our community conversations with the public, school staff and students, the following themes emerged:

- Participants support the scenarios provided.
- Transportation is a factor that needs to be adjusted.
- Community schools are preferred to allow for growth.
- Community collaboration is needed for equitable growth and best educational opportunities.
- Acknowledging underlying racism and ensuring equity amongst all students is important.
- Participants want a well-thought-out decision that puts students first and allows for choice.
- A change to age grouping at schools is desired.
- Funding should be reallocated and provided as needed for increased programming and staffing.

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## What's next

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### Summary & Next Steps

This community engagement process has provided valuable insights into the various perspectives and concerns around school programming in our division. While there is no one-size-fits-all solution, we have identified several key themes that will help inform PWPSD decision-making going forward.

While we received diverse input, suggestions and ideas from community members there were a few themes that stood out as shared and consistent – regardless of perspective or preference. Summarized below are some of the key learnings and conclusions made by the Dialogue Partners team in response to this engagement:

- **"Kids first"** - We heard that what matters most to community members is supporting the children who will participate in junior high programming.
- **The region is one connected area** - the connection between communities and the friendships created in junior high matter.
- **Convenience matters** - We also heard that convenience is important and that families want to have options for schooling that is close to home and other programs or amenities.
- **Current programming is valued** - There was a tension between convenience and a recognition that the existing junior high programming at Hythe Regional School is great. Participants noted that, while convenience matters, they also do not want to lose the benefits of the great programming currently in place.
- **Bridging cross cultural connections is key to our future** - We heard a variety of perspectives and experiences relating to cultural connections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous families and racism against Indigenous people. As noted earlier, the raising of these concerns is hopeful – showing that there is some trust and good faith in this process that all experiences and concerns will be heard. This presents an opportunity for the school

division to become aware of these experiences and develop responses as part of its commitment to Truth and Reconciliation.

- **Let this be a decision** - We heard that people want to hear and understand the results of this conversation, asking that a decision be made.

## To conclude

We hope that this conversation will provide the input the PWPSD Board of Trustees needs to make strong and sustainable decisions about school configuration that supports the needs and values of students, parents, staff, and the wider community.

We understand the input shared during engagement will be used by the PWPSD Board in combination with logistical, financial and planning considerations to make decisions about junior high school programming in these communities. Any corresponding change in school configuration requires review and approval by the Board of Trustees and subsequent implementation. Depending on the magnitude or scale of change this process may take significant time to complete.

**Thank you to everyone who shared their input about this important topic.**

**Your voice and participation will help the Board provide the best possible educational experience for all students in the region.**

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## Appendices

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Attached to this What We Heard report are a number of documents that provide additional insight into what was said during engagement and how we communicated with participants. These include:

### Appendix A: What Was Said

This section contains all of the verbatim responses submitted through the following engagement tactics, along with event photos (as applicable):

- Community Conversations
- Student Conversations
- School Staff Deliberative Forums
- Online Survey
- All Our Ideas

### Appendix B: Engagement Materials & Handouts

This section includes copies of the materials shared during engagement, including:

- Event Posters
- PWPSD Website
- FAQs (engagement version & updated version answering questions received during engagement)
- Slide deck (staff sessions)
- Interview questions (student conversations)
- Scenario Worksheets
- Backgrounder

### Appendix C: Direct Communications

This section includes copies of the emails and letters received by Peace Wapiti Public School Division.