

RESPONSE TO NCS COMMUNITY CONVERSATION PARTICIPANTS' QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

Question/Comment	Response
<i>Is there consideration of the changing of "School of Choice" boundaries due to the impact shown to small schools?</i>	<p>Yes.</p> <p>The Board of Trustees is reviewing the impact of a 2017 change to Policy 17 regarding the School of Choice (SoC) option which allowed the out-of-area/boundary service that impacts Niton Central School (NCS)</p>
<i>If the Grade 9s leave in September, is there a discussion about the viability of the remaining junior high, when does that happen?</i>	<p>There is no intention of removing the Grade 9 program from NCS.</p> <p>The Board and Administration are reviewing the SoC option and beginning the process of updating the Attendance Areas and Designated School Locations within the Lobstick Ward.</p> <p>A boundary update overdue from 2002 is required to address the designated school site for students in Grades 10-12; additionally, changes are required in anticipation of the new K-12 school in Evansburg (anticipated for January 2026).</p>
<i>Are our Division and Trustees advocating to our Provincial Government to change funding formulas?</i>	<p>Always. The Board and Administration value strong, rural education and actively raise awareness of the unique challenges facing small, rural schools at the provincial level.</p> <p>Central Office directs funds to the smaller schools' budget as part of its equity actions to support the smaller schools.</p>
<i>The message from this crowd is overwhelmingly in favour of keeping Grade 9. Will this meeting have any impact on the decision, or did we waste our time tonight?</i>	<p>There is no intention of removing the Grade 9 program from NCS and the support from the community for NCS was appreciated.</p> <p>The Board and Administration are reviewing the SoC option and beginning the process of updating the Attendance Areas and Designated School Locations within the Lobstick Ward.</p>
<p><i>Are Edson's numbers going up or down in the High School?</i></p> <p><i>If numbers are too high, will they continue to keep Grade 9 in the High School or move them?</i></p>	<p>Overall, Edson's enrolment numbers are strong.</p> <p>Depending on their residence within the Lobstick ward, Grade 10-12 students are designated to either Parkland Composite High School in Edson or Grand Trunk High School in Evansburg.</p> <p>As in all high school courses, class sizes in core subject areas reflect student interest.</p> <p>Class size in Kindergarten – Grade 9 is determined by the size of the student population in the school.</p>
<i>What are the chances of going back to delegated schools: if Niton is where you live, that's where you go to school?</i>	<p>Good chance. Better if the overall community supports the rationale for the decision.</p>

	<p>The Board sees the unintended consequences of busing students out of the Lobstick ward and school attendance area.</p> <p>Additionally, attendance area boundaries must be updated to align with legislation and previous changes to grade reconfigurations at NCS and WW, as well as upcoming changes once Grand Truck K-12 is open.</p>
<p><i>What are the actual zones for bussing – Lobstick vs. Edson?</i></p>	<p>The Transportation Service Area for the Lobstick Zone must align with the designated attendance area. NCS is the designated school for K-9 students residing in the NCS attendance area.</p> <p>Students in Grades 10-12 are designated to a high school either in Edson or in Evansburg.</p>
<p><i>Has the stability of staffing been looked at?</i></p> <p><i>We have heard a lot about how the community is not keeping kids.</i></p> <p><i>What is the Division doing to help? 13 teachers have left and 5 principals.</i></p>	<p>Yes.</p> <p>Teachers hold contracts with school divisions, and they have employment rights. They can apply for open positions at other schools.</p> <p>Decisions for leaving a position to pursue another position range widely and are managed through Human Resource processes.</p>
<p><i>How do we retain the staff?</i></p> <p><i>What is the community going to do?</i></p> <p><i>What is the Division going to do?</i></p>	<p>The community's support for the staff's commitment to student learning is an important factor; however, as in all employment considerations, people move to pursue new opportunities and challenges as is their right.</p> <p>The community's biggest contribution to NCS thriving is to actively support NCS through K-9 student enrolment.</p> <p>The Board is already reviewing the attendance areas and will be moving forward to address the SoC option.</p>
<p><i>How do we get an answer about removing "School of Choice"?</i></p>	<p>The Board is already reviewing the bus policy and will be moving forward to address the SoC option once the attendance area boundaries for Lobstick have been updated.</p>
<p><i>Board Policy 15 – the critical number in the policy in regards to possible school/program closure. Why did you not address this in 2022?</i></p>	<p>There was a plan during the 2022/2023 school year to engage the community around decreasing student enrolment numbers. The wildfire situation caused the May meeting to be cancelled. In the May 2023 Education Plan, updating the Attendance Area Boundaries in the Lobstick was a primary engagement goal.</p> <p>The Board is currently reviewing Policy 15 as it does not align with the <i>Education Act</i> – which supersedes policy.</p>
<p><i>35 students in [the NCS] designated area that are not here.</i></p> <p><i>Are they home schooled, at HRH, or PCHS?</i></p>	<p>Based on the information GYPSD <i>can</i> access, the K-9 students who have left:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 11 students are attending another school division (Catholic, private) ● 23 students are attending a SoC in the Edson ward.

<p><i>Is that where you expect them to go?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 student is attending a SoC in the Lobstick ward. <p>Grade 10-12 students are delegated to either PCHS in the Edson Ward or GTHS in the Lobstick Ward – depending on where they reside.</p>
<p><i>What is the viability? What can we do to bring others back?</i></p>	<p>There is no intention of removing the Grade 9 program from NCS. The Board and central team are reviewing the Lobstick attendance areas and Policy 17 to re-establish processes and update designations that will confirm the Board’s commitment to protecting its small rural schools.</p> <p>The community can support the school by encouraging their neighbours and friends to enrol their children at NCS.</p> <p>Interested community members could consider operating a before/after school program at NCS to address childcare needs for working parents.</p>
<p><i>Most people don’t want to move the Grade 9s. What do people who want it to move see as the benefits?</i></p>	<p>Responses from individuals indicate a benefit to moving to a larger school ahead of schedule is their children will have access to more opportunities: educational, social, extracurricular.</p>
<p><i>What needs to be done to keep the program viable?</i></p>	<p>The community members need to register their children at their community school.</p>
<p><i>Is there an option for a hybrid model? Could a student be enrolled in Niton for Grade 9, but have some at home learning and some in-class learning? Would that bridge the gap with people moving out of the school to Home School option?</i></p>	<p>Alberta Education provides the guidelines for parents who decide to Home School their children and the funding model and registration tracking requirements are significantly different.</p> <p>Parents who home school their children have specific reasons or rationale for doing so. Prior to moving into a Home School platform, parents should discuss their rationale with school leaders.</p>
<p><i>Niton’s junior high numbers for the past 2 years and this year are at the threshold that the Board Policy 15 has as a signal to review the viability of a school. Specifically, 1.1.2 critical enrolment and 1.1.2.2 junior high, 7, 8, 9 (30) students. When will this review happen?</i></p>	<p>The Board values small rural schools and is committed to protecting them from closure.</p> <p>There was a plan during the 2022/2023 school year to engage the community around decreasing student enrolment numbers. The wildfire situation caused the May meeting to be cancelled.</p> <p>The Board is reviewing Policy 15 as it currently does not align with the <i>Education Act</i> – which supersedes policy.</p>
<p><i>How are kids doing that have already transitioned from Grade 8 at Niton to elsewhere? Are their grades consistent? Do they feel they have more/less opportunities? Are they adjusting to the larger schools well?</i></p>	<p>Tracking and publicly reporting on this information is complex and cannot be generalized.</p> <p>Particularly during puberty, children respond to change and develop differently. The academic/social-emotional status of children is private.</p>

<i>Do students who leave early flourish or fall behind?</i>	
<i>What has been done to retain students in Niton – by the school and by the Division?</i>	<p>NCS is committed to ensuring students are welcomed, safe, respected, and feel cared for; NCS is an inclusive public school that strives to provide an exceptional education and the Board's first priority – student learning – is evident in every classroom.</p> <p>NCS is first on the Board's 3 Year Capital Plan to Alberta Education and Infrastructure, requesting the facility receive a complete modernization.</p>
<i>What are the division-wide student teacher ratios by schools?</i>	<p>The per-teacher ratios are different by grade/course/school context.</p> <p>As noted in the 2023/24 Budget Submission to Alberta Education, the student per certificated staff average is approximately 18.</p>
<i>Why don't you offer incentives – with support from the community? (E.g., locals charge minimum room and board to new teachers that don't want to relocate.)</i>	<p>Actions within the control of GYPSD are led by the HR team. HR staff attend every teacher recruitment event in the province to promote the division. The Board provides each teacher \$2,500 per school year for professional development – the best PD fund in the province.</p> <p>Questions about the community's range of options should be directed to Yellowhead County.</p>
<i>Do Niton students stick with current students from Niton?</i>	<p>Students' schedules are determined by course requirements for the high school diploma and their individual post-secondary goal and class sizes.</p> <p>Students are enrolled in their Grade 10 courses based on their post-secondary goals – i.e., a university degree, a college diploma or certificate, a Trade, or a career training program.</p> <p>Student social groups are fluid and constantly evolving as kids mature and explore new/different interests.</p>
<i>Where are the parents that called for this conversation?</i>	<p>Every community member within the NCS/Lobstick zone county area was invited to attend the community conversation.</p>
<i>Why are staff leaving?</i>	<p>Staff leave schools for a range of reasons: school culture, community culture, different career opportunities, new challenges/experiences, etc.</p>
<i>How does the new GTS K – 12 affect boundaries?</i>	<p>Completion of the construction on the K-12 Grand Trunk School is scheduled for December 2025. Once this school is ready, only 2 schools will remain in the Lobstick Ward – NCS and GTS.</p> <p>New attendance area designations must be drafted. These updates will determine where the designated boundaries will be for the ward residents to clarify registration and support the two schools.</p>
<i>What development is being done in Niton community for more families to move here?</i>	<p>GYPSD has placed the modernization of NCS first on the 3 Year Capital Plan submission to Alberta Infrastructure and Alberta Education.</p>

	<p>Questions about the community’s range of options should be directed to Yellowhead County.</p> <p>Interested community members could consider operating a before/after school program at NCS to address childcare needs for working parents.</p>
<p><i>Is it possible for NCS to offer a farm school program?</i></p> <p><i>Are there options at the jr. high level similar to the options sr. high students can take, like Green Cert.?</i></p>	<p>School curriculum is determined by the provincial government. Schools can deliver curricular outcomes through a specific program focus, for example, the Canadian Agricultural Partnership document connects agriculture knowledge to outcomes in Science, Social Studies, Health/Wellness, literacy, and numeracy.</p> <p>A specialized program focus, like a ‘farm school’ requires designated resources, careful curriculum/activity alignment, and significant support from the entire community.</p> <p>The first step would be for the School Council to survey the entire parent group for interest and support. Then a fund-raising committee would need to be established to purchase the needed resources.</p> <p>Off-campus Education – which includes the Green Certificate - is only available for students in high school (10-12).</p> <p>However, there is a CTF cluster that teachers can access to allow students to explore occupation areas under the “Resources” branch – that includes agriculture, forestry, wildlife, primary resources, and environmental stewardship.</p>
<p><i>Can NCS be a school of choice?</i></p>	<p>NCS is a SoC for families living in the Lobstick ward.</p> <p>SoC requests begin with parents discussing their reasons to leave their community school with that principal. The reason for this step is to ensure that the community school principal has the opportunity to address the student’s needs and respond accordingly with the goal of keeping the child in the community school.</p> <p>The next step is for the family to reach out to the principal of the non-attendance area school to see if there is space for their child. Every school has an attendance area and must ensure their area families are registered first and there are adequate resources and space.</p>
<p><i>Small schools are very isolated. Is it possible for collaboration days with other schools? Like shop class – 1 per week.</i></p> <p><i>Can students be bused to other schools?</i></p>	<p>Yes.</p> <p>Principals are responsible for school programming and, as site-based leaders, arrange educational opportunities for students.</p>

	Based on mandatory subject-specific instructional time, resource allocation, and student interest, principals determine which activities are relevant, engaging, and connected to curriculum.
<i>Can volunteers teach option classes?</i>	<p>They can lead a lesson or enhance specific outcomes as long as a certificated teacher supervises them and assesses the student's learning.</p> <p>Teachers regularly have guest speakers in their classrooms. Volunteers can share their expertise with students only under the supervision of a certificated teacher, and after passing a criminal record/vulnerable sector check.</p> <p>See AP 490 for more information.</p>
<i>I have Home Schooled my kids for the last 4 years: all 4 of my kids for a year; 2 years just my older 2; and this year all 4. No one [from GYPSD] has contacted me to find out why.</i>	<p>Many parents pursue home schooling platforms outside of GYPSD, so our division does not have their info. Currently GYPSD is not supervising any Home School students.</p> <p>Ultimately, we want young people to be connected to their communities and support their local school. Students benefit from experiencing a range of perspectives and opportunities to navigate differences in order to thrive in society. Making sure all the kids in the area know each other is an important aspect of a strong, thriving community.</p>
<i>Would [Home School Families] be willing to use some of their funding (paid to the school) for some classes/activities?</i>	<p>Not applicable. The ways parents can use their Home Schooling funds is set by Alberta Education.</p> <p>If the child would benefit from attending their community school, we would encourage the family to consider their rationale for Home Schooling and discuss what is ultimately the best long-range educational decision for the child.</p>
<i>You do not try to bring in community members to help with anything. There used to be reading and math blitzes that many people volunteered for. Moms could mark math/spelling, help with math, reading, activities...?</i>	Please see AP 490, which outlines the process principals follow, all informed by legislation, when determining volunteer roles in the school.
<i>Can full-day kindergarten be full-week?</i>	Yes. Niton is bringing in full-day/full-week kindergarten in the fall.
<p><i>The Board provides "School of Choice" out of Niton [Lobstick], but not [out of other wards].</i></p> <p><i>Example: the bus will go to Edson [ward], but Edson does not go to [Lobstick]."</i></p>	<p>Currently, the transportation service route out of the Lobstick exists because one of the designated schools for students in Grades 10 - 12, depending on where they reside in the ward, is PCHS.</p> <p>The Board is reviewing Policy 17 to clarify SoC service to ensure it is protecting the NCS attendance area.</p>

<p><i>To help with programming, the [K-12] school should have been built CENTRAL instead of on the out edge of the district. So many of the rural schools that are central would have benefited from a [K-12] school being central. Niton School has more to offer, pool, full library, county playground.</i></p>	<p>The provincial government determines which Capital projects get approved.</p> <p>Alberta Infrastructure and Alberta Education look at student enrolment and facility utilization rates to determine which projects they'll commit to.</p> <p>The K-12 amalgamation and modernization project in Evansburg is not a new build and will merge both the elementary school in Evansburg and the elementary school in Wildwood.</p> <p>The modernization of NCS is currently at the top of GYPSD's Capital Plan.</p>
<p><i>School of choice needs to be clear as to— > choice to ALL schools or is it [only] into Edson. Until boundaries are decided, no decisions should be made. Boundaries with school of choice and with Grand Trunk [need to be fixed]. The numbers of students have dropped and some students' movement has been due to them being the youngest students and parents pulling those kids to Edson. The current Grade 7 class is full of many eldest kids and won't be moved early [as those with older siblings].</i></p>	<p>The Board and central team are beginning the process of updating the Lobstick attendance areas and reviewing Policy 17. The goal is to re-establish processes and update designations to confirm the Board's commitment to protecting small rural schools.</p>
<p><i>Looking into promoting the benefits of rural schools will be greatly beneficial. Also, boundary issues are HUGE because if we [keep] more students then it 'fixes' the problems that we're having.</i></p>	<p>The Board and central team are beginning the process of updating the Lobstick attendance areas and reviewing Policy 17. The goal is to re-establish processes and update designations to confirm the Board's commitment to protecting small rural schools.</p>
<p><i>We never asked for Grade 9 to close, we as parents just asked about the viability of it. We never wanted it closed. We as a community wanted to know how to keep it.</i></p>	<p>Some parents requested the Grade 9 program be moved out of NCS. Some parents requested that the Board look at how to retain students at NCS.</p> <p>The conversation illustrated important areas for the Board and Admin team to address in its' commitment to protecting small rural schools.</p>