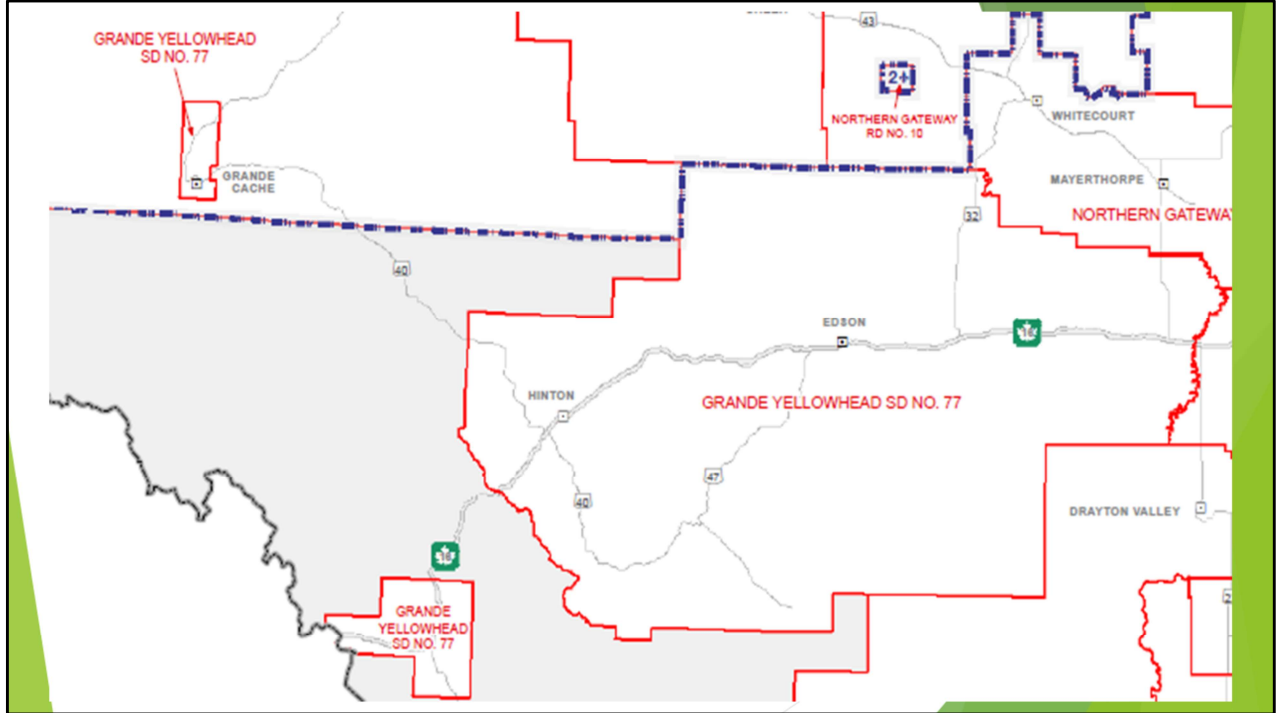




# Fulham Community School Information Shared at October 10<sup>th</sup> Event

The following general information was shared with the attendees.

This slide deck is not a transcription of the event nor does it reflect verbatim how the information was shared with the attendees.



In GYPSD, there are 17 schools. The 17 schools fall within 5 electoral wards: Lobstick, Edson, Hinton, Jasper, and Grande Cache.

Hinton and Edson have two trustees and the other three wards have one each. In total, there are 7 trustees that make up the corporate Board.

School boards are responsible for directing students to a specific school – this is stated in the *Education Act* – section 10. Trustees work together to review all school operations to support decision making in the best way – taking into consideration information like population trends, staffing, maintenance costs to the building, and student enrollment.

Student enrollment numbers determine a school’s operating budget, and the budget determines the number of teachers within the building, which impacts the range of options and extra-curricular experiences the school can provide.

In communities where there **are more than one school offering elementary programming** – such as in Hinton, Edson, and the Lobstick – the Board establishes attendance areas, policy, and processes to ensure student enrollments balance out so that those school environments can offer engaging learning opportunities for students.

The sustainability of a school also requires that the majority of the families living in the attendance area support it.

On February 28, 2024, the Board heard from Principal Marshall and School Council President, Ms. Baillie, about their concerns over the declining enrolment at Fulham School. They attributed the declining student enrollment at Fulham to the school of choice bus service option into the Edson area. In response to the concern they raised, the Board voted to restrict choice bus service to elementary students in K- Grade 6 residing within the Fulham attendance area at the April 17, 2024, Public Board Meeting. Included in the policy change was a restriction of choice bus service out of the electoral **ward** - impacting k - Grade 9 Niton area students.

As part of ongoing work to review and update school attendance areas which began in 2021, the Board invited Fulham and Lobstick constituents to share their thoughts on possible changes to school attendance areas - particularly the Lobstick schools as they had not been reviewed in over 20 years.

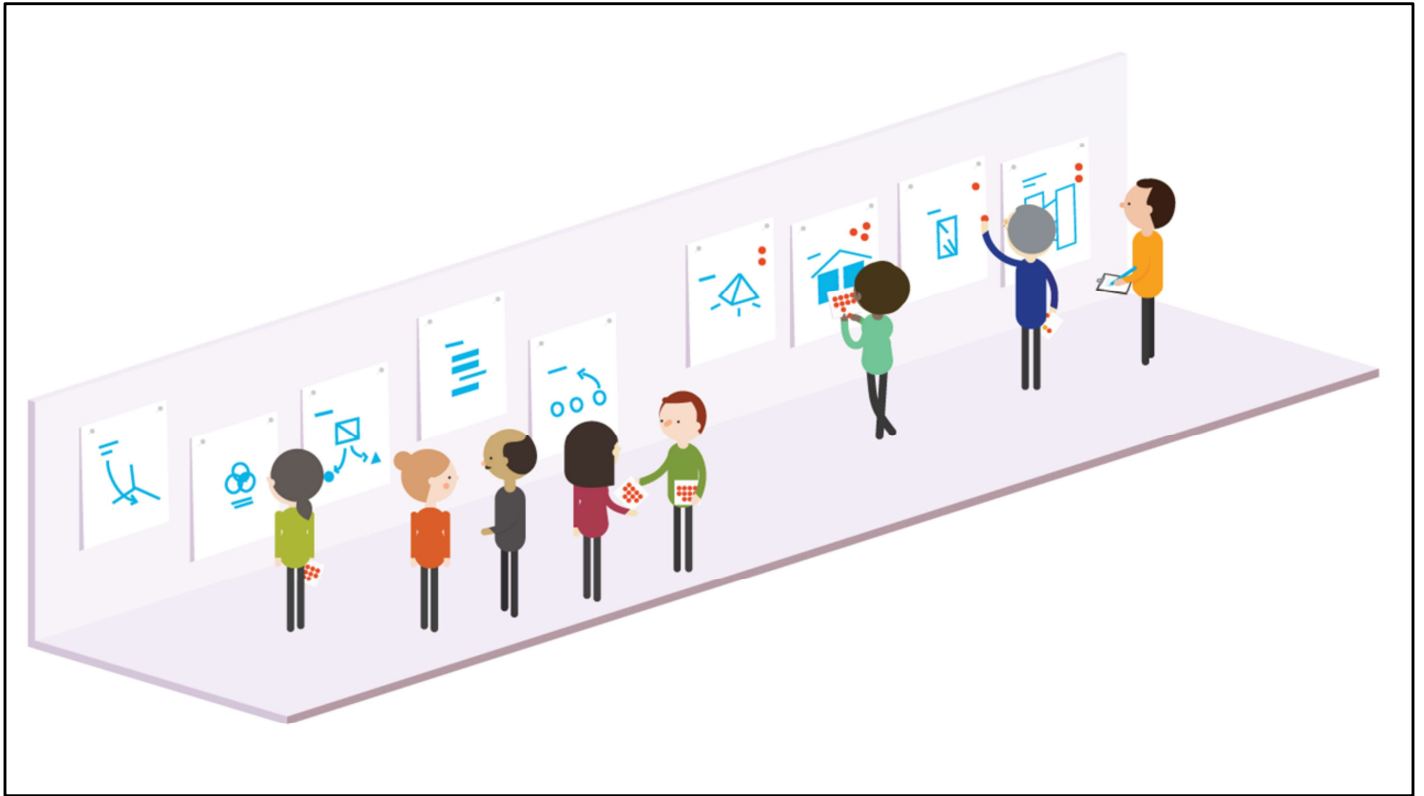
On May 14th, the Board held an in-person event at Wildwood Elementary School. One idea proposed at the time, was a change to the Lobstick/Edson electoral ward boundary. Following the in-person event, the proposed ideas for changes to Fulham were laid out in an online survey and sent to all the Fulham families. The survey was open from the 15th to the 19th.

The majority of participants and survey respondents said they were not in support of a change to the electoral ward boundary, Fulham's school attendance area, nor would they support the Board's restriction on the choice bus service. A similar response to the proposed changes to the Lobstick schools' attendance areas was received from the participating Lobstick stakeholders.

Following the May engagements, the Board received significant feedback from a number of families, including a signed petition to the Board from 49 stakeholders residing in the Fulham attendance area on May 15th. After reviewing all of the feedback, the Board reinstated the choice busing options for k-6 students in Fulham and the k-8 students in Niton for service into Edson at the May 22, 2024, Public Board Meeting.

School attendance boundaries are the area around a specific school that families residing in that area have the right to attend. School attendance areas are created inside ward electoral boundaries. The Fulham school attendance area is within the Edson electoral ward.

Why this meeting now? Members of the Fulham School Council and Principal Marshall noted their continued concerns in June - that not enforcing the attendance area for Fulham greatly impacts the school with its declining enrolment. They asked the local trustees for a meeting with the Board specifically for Fulham constituents only to discuss the matter again.



## What have we heard?

In May, the Board proposed possible change ideas to the Fulham and Lobstick constituents at an in-person event, and then again in an online survey that followed. To ensure the feedback we received was matched accordingly, participants were asked to identify where they lived and where their children attended school. This was done to ensure the data we collected correlated to the appropriate community and not only by the school their children were attending.

At the in-person event held in Wildwood, **14** participants identified themselves from the Fulham attendance area out of the 57 attendees. When we reviewed the responses on the proposed ideas for change, 13 of the 14 Fulham participants said that they did **not** want a change to the Fulham attendance area, **nor** did they want to see a change to the school of choice bus service into Edson.

An online survey with the same change ideas was sent out to all Fulham families on May 15th until the 19th. 84 respondents indicated they resided in the Fulham area. 54 responses indicated they did not support a change to the Fulham area, and they did not support a restriction to choice bus service into Edson. In addition to asking each constituent to note their support for a change, we also invited folks to explain their response.

On May 15th, the Board also received a signed letter from 49 Fulham area constituents confirming they did not support any change in Fulham.

Here is summary of the responses, arranged into themes for the reasons given for attending a school of choice.

## Convenience

- Parents work in Edson - want their kids close by in case of an emergency, illness, and/or appointments
- Before and after school childcare is in Edson
- Extracurricular activities - kids are in clubs, play on teams, and/or access after-school community events in Edson

The first theme that emerged from the responses is convenience – many families work in Edson and spend most of their time in Edson; they do not want to have to drive back and forth to practices, childcare or appointments.

After the wildfires in the last two years, parents also indicated that they wished their children to be closer to where they were located during the day in case of emergency pick-ups.

## Range of Experiences

- Larger schools in Edson afford more staff, more options, more extra-curricular experiences for students to explore.
- Larger schools offer students a larger pool of peers from which to make friends.

The second theme that emerged was the range of educational experiences larger schools could provide – more staff, more options, more peers.

## Choice

- Parents said they believed Edson is able to provide better education, more supports and it was their choice to select a larger school within a larger service centre.

The third theme emerging from the feedback was around choice. Unlike other wards, Edson has the highest number of competing programs for elementary students in kindergarten to Grade 6.

Parents voiced their opinion that the larger centre offered better educational experiences and access to more services.

# Current Fulham Facts:

## 1. Student Enrolment



As of the September 30th enrolment date, there are 43 students attending school at Fulham:

- 7 children in kindergarten;
- 5 students in Grade 1;
- 5 students in Grade 2;
- 6 students in Grade 3;
- 5 students in Grade 4;
- 9 students in Grade 5, and
- 6 students in Grade 6.

Available data for the Fulham school attendance area show that there are **94** K-Grade 6 students in the area attending school:

- **43** Fulham area students are attending their designated school;
- **33** students are attending a GYPSD school elsewhere.
- **17** students are attending the Private Christian School or the Catholic school division.

We do not have any data on students in this area that may be home-schooled.



## 2. Budget



Student enrolment determines a school's operating budget.

Fulham School is subsidized by the Board to keep it operational as its funding from the province does not cover all of its costs, including facilities, staffing, and transportation.

The grant allocation school divisions receive for **property maintenance** are based on the student number. With 43 students enrolled in a building with the capacity for 147 students means Fulham's utilization rate is very low. That means that the grant allocation for maintaining the Fulham property is very small. Board reallocates funds from other areas to maintain Fulham.

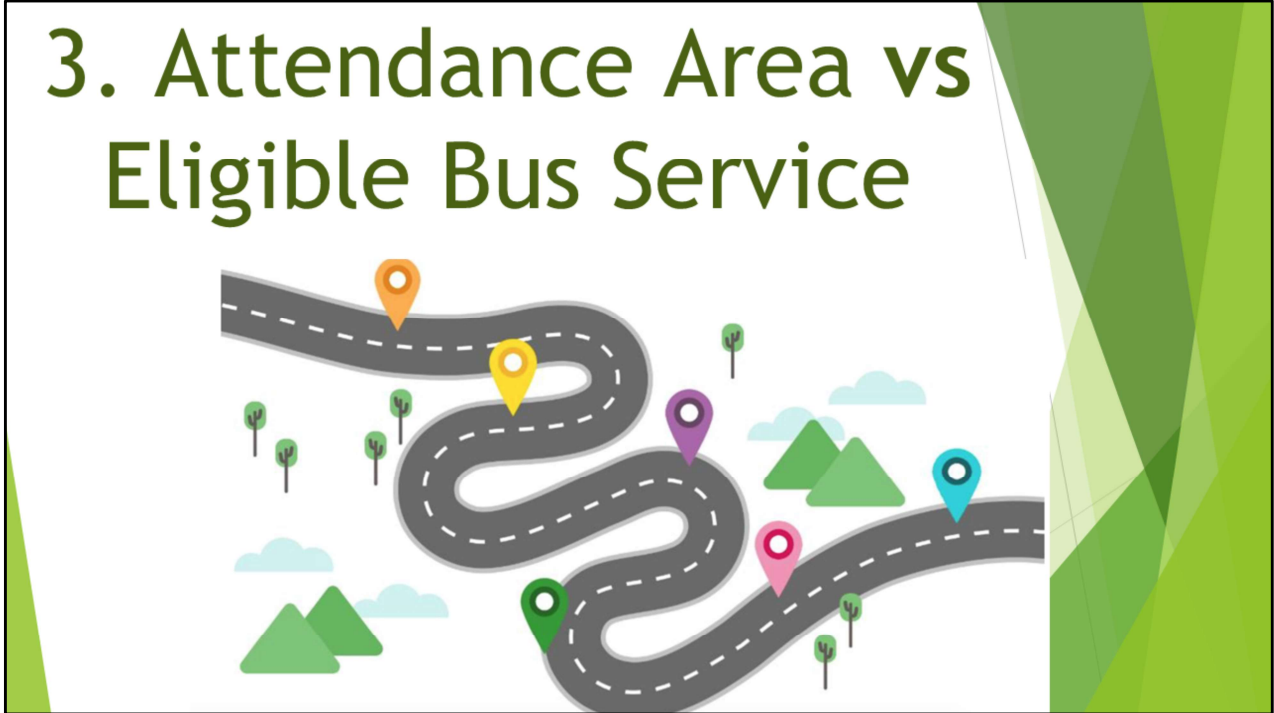
On average, it takes approximately **26 students to cover the base cost of one teacher** as funding is based per student with additional funding for other items such as special needs and so on. Based on a student population of 43 students, the budget allocated to Fulham could support 1.6 teachers. Fulham has 3.5 teachers serving children in kindergarten to students in grade 6.

The province does provide a special grant for small schools; however, if the school's student enrolment drops below 35, this grant funding disappears. If this happened, Fulham would lose more than 60% of its current budget. As an approximation, that would mean a possible school allocation of just over \$340,000.

The Board has been asked to provide the 'hard number' that they would need to consider a possible school closure. The simple answer is that there is not one number. The Board takes into consideration a number of factors including their fiscal responsibility for the public funds, how its subsidy impacts other schools under their purview, projected enrolments and community population, educational opportunities and potential limitations for their students, and so on.

Before a school closure is considered, the impacted school and its families are notified and provided opportunities for discussion. This is outlined in Section 62 of the *Education Act* and is a process a board must follow.

### 3. Attendance Area vs Eligible Bus Service



There is a very clear governance distinction between school registration and funded transportation service for eligible riders.

First, Boards have the authority to determine attendance areas for its schools and to direct students within its boundaries to the school they will attend. As outlined in Section 10(1) in the *Education Act*, Boards have the role to direct students to the schools they will attend. This means that families residing within this area have a designated school which is their right to attend. Those families receive priority for space in that school. Boards also have the right to enforce those school attendance areas so that families can only register at the school in their attendance area. If it is the Board's choice, they can decide to approve registration at a non-attendance area school within the authority if it better serves the student's educational needs and there are resources available.

Second, Boards must provide transportation service for students to their designated school when they meet the distance criteria. Boards can determine, again by their choice, to offer other services - such as bus service to a non-designated school **after** the student's enrolment has been approved.

Boards **do not have to provide busing** for students leaving their attendance area. As outlined in the *School Transportation Regulation* if parents decide not to register their children at their designated school, they are responsible for transporting their children to the 'choice' school.

Boards are funded to provide transportation to the student's attending school if they are able to provide the service. The *School Transportation Regulation* provides for the following criteria:

**IF** a bus route exists to the choice school, and there is seat space after the eligible students attending their designated school have been served, parents can apply for bus service to the choice school. They must meet the bus on the established route to the choice school.

## UNPACKING THE COMPLEXITY

Throughout the Fulham area, **bus service routes into Edson exist.**

- Fulham resident students are designated to Pine Grove for Grades 7 and 8. Then they are designated to Parkland for Grades 9 -12 , both in the Town of Edson. This requires bus routes leaving Fulham to go into Edson.
- As these routes have existed for decades, many families have requested bus service into Edson for their younger children. Specifically in the past decade, previous boards supported these choice busing service requests.

Our Board amended Policy 17 in the spring of 2024 - adding two important clauses.

- First, for new families in the Fulham area just entering their first child into public school, we expect them to attend their designated school. We added this statement to support the full-time-full-week kindergarten programming our Board funds at Fulham.
- The second condition we added into Policy 17 was the specific role of the principal. Policy directs, if a principal receives a registration request from a non-attendance area family, they are to direct that family back to their attendance area school.

We also asked the superintendent to add the requirement into Administrative Procedures 300 and 305 which identifies the schools attendance areas and outlines the principal processes for student enrolment.

## 4. Fulham Busing Information



In addition to Grade 7-12 students attending their GYPSD designated schools in Edson, our Board holds cooperative bus agreements for Living Waters and YKCS - these contracts have been in place for over two decades. The buses are not segregated based on the different Edson school locations. The buses are assigned to routes within an area and they pick up all the students on that route. The distance between the students' residences and the Edson schools contribute to the length of the bus ride.

Some years, depending on where students reside in the county, bus rides can be longer or shorter. On average though, the first student pickup time for students attending Fulham have been the best across the various communities - this was because the bus allocation for Fulham did not change to align with the decline in student population.

This school year, we reduced the school bus routes for Fulham School from three to two. This change was overdue and necessary - first to address the actual number of riders to Fulham, and second to add a route for Edson to address the ride times and first student pick up times.

Unfortunately, there are simply not enough students to fund multiple routes in this attendance area. As of today, there are only 20 students riding on F-01, and 20 students on F-03. These two bus routes pick up students from K-6 **only** going to Fulham; they do not pick up students riding into Edson.

The reduction in one route has led to an increase of ride times for 21 students (average 11 minutes) and a improved ride time for 9 students (average 7 minutes). Two students have a significant increase in ride time with a first pick-up time of 6:55 am. This is still an improvement from the first pick-up time in the 2021/22 school year which was 6:46 am. Transportation services offered the impacted parents the option of a second bus run (the drop off time would be slightly after the current bell time).

The Board receives funding for students eligible to ride the bus. Last year for Fulham, the Board received just under \$54,000 to transport 43 students. The operation cost to operate those three routes was over **\$220,000**.

Many of our routes have pick up times prior to 7am; the earliest this year is 6:37 am in the Edson area (an improvement from 6:25 am in 2023-2024 because of the reallocation of F-2 to E-17).

Our transportation department is continuously reviewing routes to minimize where they can but this is unfortunately the reality in most rural school divisions with spaced residences over long distances. The Board will receive approximately \$42,000 in grant funding to cover an operational cost **of \$190,000** for Fulham's two routes.

# Question Period

What questions do you have, or other information do you need from tonight's event?

**See the Question and Answer Summary document.**



Your input is very much appreciated and will be carefully considered when making any future decisions. The information from tonight, paired with the information and feedback we received in May and June, will be collated and analyzed to support our decision making as we move forward. Our Board will take into account all the factors guiding our roles and responsibilities for the entire school division.

The Board can change school attendance areas as is their right, and they can make them effective at any time, but any amendments that impact families will not take effect until the start of a new school year. Whatever our Board decides, we recognize there may be disappointment, and some may be unhappy. We want our decision-making to reflect the Board's belief in, and support for, the longevity and viability of rural schools.

I want to emphasize this Board's value for you - our stakeholders - and for the strong education rural schooling provides to our young people. We value public schools and the inclusive, welcoming, and safe environments they provide.