

## Trustees eye two schools as closure looms

By Leanne Ritchie

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The school board has begun a 60-day process to look at the possibility of closing either Kanata or Seal Cove elementary, while Conrad has been taken off the closure shortlist.

Despite urging from staff not to make decisions before they have the analysis of what would happen in each of the situations, school trustees said they were not prepared to put people through the painful 60-day process at Conrad, where there is clearly the largest population of all three schools and a site in the most central location.

"The discussion alone will cause so much against," said trustee Janet Mirau.

To guide them through the 60-day process of deciding whether or not to close either Kanata or Seal Cove elementary, the board has hired Dick Chambers, a retired superintendent of schools from Prince George, who during his latter years had to go through the process of closing 14 schools.

Board chair Tina Last said School District 52 has been lucky because it has not had to close any schools for financial reasons while most other districts in the province have had to.

The idea behind the investigative process is primarily to see if the district can improve learning conditions for students and reduce problems, such as classrooms that have three grade splits, by closing a school.

Secondary to that is the concern that the district cannot get funding from the province for seismic upgrades for schools at the current low population levels.

Most trustees agreed with commencing the investigative process for Kanata and Seal Cove, with the exception of trustee Brian Johnson who opposed looking at any closure.

Johnson said the district expects to have a surplus of \$400,000 to \$600,000 this year and has no need to damage neighborhoods by closing a school.

"If we were really in a situation where we really had to make a decision and we were seeing red through the budgetary process, without a surplus coming I would say sure, let's take a look at this," said Johnson. "But until I see red and until I see surpluses disappear, I don't think this is a process we should be going through."

However, trustee Russell Wiens said now is the time to look at it, not when the district is in a financial crisis.

"And we have too many issues amongst those schools of seismic. We are responsible for all those children and God forbid if we had an earthquake and one of those schools got damaged and children got hurt, we are responsible," he said.

Last concluded the discussion by saying the idea behind the process is to look at what is best for the education of the students.

"If we do nothing, will it go away? If we do nothing, will it get any better? If we do nothing, will it get any worse? Hopefully, through this process, we will answer those questions."

In addition, the district is expected to look at the possibility of school closures on the east side of town at some point in the future. The district expects to provide notification to the public about the 60-day consultation closure process for Kanata and Seal Cove in the near future. Once the process is complete, the district will decide if one school should close and if so which one. At a previous meeting, board members were given a look at how students could be redistributed.

If Seal Cove were closed, around 30 students, who mainly live south of Eighth Avenue East, would go to Conrad Street while 30 or so students who live near 11th Avenue East would go to Kanata.

If Conrad Street were to have closed, 23 students who attend the school from around the district would have gone to Lax Kxeen, while 42 and 57 students, who mainly live in and around Hays Cove Avenue, would go to Kanata and Seal Cove, respectively. Students who are brought in from Metlakatla that attend the school could be placed anywhere.

Lastly, if Kanata were closed, 50 students who live north of Eighth Avenue East and east of Frederick Street would go to Seal Cove, while 50 students between Portage Road and Frederick would go to Conrad and 20 students in the Cormorant Road area would go to Lax Kxeen elementary.

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