



For immediate release

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Group hopeful schools will be spared

With elementary enrolment projections up 48 per cent, education advocates are hopeful two Regina public schools will be spared Tuesday evening.

“There’s never been stronger arguments to keep schools open than there are for Haultain and Dieppe,” said RealRenewal spokesperson Trish Elliott.

Haultain’s enrolment is up 32 per cent over last year, with 17 children in pre-kindergarten, Elliott noted. The designated community school is located in Eastview, home to Regina’s second-highest proportion of children under five.

Unlike other closures, there’s no Catholic school alternative in Eastview, making access to a distant school and its programs a challenge for area families, said Elliott.

“Eastview is a high-needs neighbourhood, with 37 per cent of families single-parented. If you’re alone with a baby or toddlers and no car, how are you going to pop over to the school to talk to a teacher, pick up a sick kid or participate in a helping program?” said Elliott. “It’s one thing to take your little ones on a walk to school, another thing to load them onto a city bus.”

The alternative for a Dieppe closure is just as problematic because of over-crowding, said Elliott. Combining Dieppe’s 103 students with McLurg’s 327 will immediately create a school above the board’s promised 400-student maximum. Meanwhile, developments like the Global Transportation Hub are expected to attract even more families to the city’s fast-growing west side.

The schools were originally slated for closure based on a plan created in 2005 and expanded in 2007. At the time 10,000 elementary students were projected by 2018, a figure since been revised to 14,000.

Since enrolments began climbing, the board has publicly stated the seven-year-old plan must nonetheless continue because larger schools provide improved education and more extracurricular opportunities. “If this were so, Saskatchewan’s top-achieving schools wouldn’t be in small towns like Fillmore and Englefeld. Mossbank wouldn’t win provincial volleyball tournaments, and smaller highschools like Usher – now closed – wouldn’t have graduates in the CFL,” responded Elliott.

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The board will vote on the proposed closures at its regular board meeting, following a public presentation by Haultain parent Lara Quintin.

RealRenewal is calling on the board to suspend all closures until the new population trend becomes clear and the City of Regina releases its renewed Official Community Plan.

“We’re confident the board will see times are changing. We can’t afford to shed schools in the midst of a boom,” said Elliott. “The options for placing these students elsewhere are simply too limited.”

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BACKGROUND:

Haultain Community School’s enrolment has risen 32 per cent over last year. There are 17 children in pre-K, up from 13 the year before. To compare:

2010: 79 K-8 + 13 Pre-K = 92 total

2011: 104 K-8 + 17 Pre-K = 121 total

Haultain is just 19 students short of the board’s 140-student cut-off. In this context, it is important to note that enrolment increased by 29 students between 2010 and 2011.

According to the latest available census data, the communities with the largest proportions of children under 5 years of age are:

- North Central (8.9% of the population is under 5);
- Eastview (8.2%); and
- the warehouse area (7.3%).

It should be noted that the warehouse area includes areas that the City recognizes as belonging to Eastview (City as opposed to Census boundaries).

Thirty-seven per cent of Eastview families are headed by single parents.

Haultain is a community school, meaning it has been specifically recognized as an important pillar of support for area families.

The 10-Year Plan originally anticipated just over 10,000 elementary students by 2018. The latest projection is just over 14,000, a 48 per cent increase. A potential shift of this magnitude is more than sufficient cause for a pause in the school closure timeline.

There are a number of planned developments on the city’s west side, including the Global Transportation Hub, that are likely to effect Dieppe and its surrounding neighbourhoods.

Even before these developments, the 2006 census identified Dieppe as Regina's fastest-growing neighbourhood.

The main receiving school for Dieppe's 103 students, McLurg, already has 327 students. A closure is likely to immediately place McLurg above the board's 400 maximum recommended enrolment for quality education in an elementary school.

Dieppe is a well-built, structurally sound facility with a new roof. It cannot be easily or economically replaced when need arises, as it most certainly shall.

A visual inspection report states Haultain is in 'fair' condition, while a structural report suggests \$3.2 million in repairs. This is not prohibitive, within the overall capital spending scope of the 10-Year Plan (last costed out in 2007 at nearly \$100 million), or compared to investments made in other neighbourhoods.

As buildings age, RealRenewal recommends the board should begin learning how to successfully renovate older structures, as a more cost-effective alternative to endless cycles of demolition and new construction. A tour of Moose Jaw's renovated schools would be a good first step.

The City of Regina is in the midst of developing an Official Community Plan that will impact the future of Regina neighbourhoods. To date, the board has not communicated with the City about this plan. RealRenewal calls on the board to reserve its decisions until the Plan is presented, as it would make more sense to work with the City plan rather than forging ahead alone.