

| Edmonton Catholic Schools |

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

| ST. BASIL CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY JUNIOR HIGH  
SCHOOL CLOSURE PROPOSAL |

*Updated February 15, 2022 (please be advised responses that reflect further clarification are indicated in blue)*

## 1. Why wasn't the deficit for the whole school split between St. Basil and JFLA, which previously shared the space with us? What portion of the deficit shown should actually be attributed to JFLA?

Similar to the approach at other schools with multiple programs, allocations and costs for the two programs at St. Basil were not split due to complexities associated with attributing specific allocations and costs to each of the programs.

The financial transfers to support operations, as well as transportation to St. Basil Catholic Elementary/Junior High School, were presented in the school closure proposal as well as the Information session on January 17, 2022. In both instances, the Division reported the metrics with respect to "operating the school" not the specific Polish Bilingual program that operated within the school in conjunction with the JFLA program through to the end of the 2020-2021 school year. In order to address this concern, the Division looked at relative enrolments of the two programs. The average historical enrolment over the past 5 years indicates the Polish Bilingual Program encompassed 73% of the total enrolment while the JFLA encompassed 27%. Using these numbers to allocate the transfer between the two programs in the school, the cumulative transfer to the Polish Bilingual Program is \$3.9 million as compared to the over \$5 million previously indicated in the total St. Basil Catholic Elementary/Junior High School cumulative transfer.

During the Engagement process, concerns were expressed the forecast numbers for 2021-2022 were changing. This is a correct observation as Administration was pulling modestly different forecast data from different periods between the original report and the FOIP requests in December. Using the most conservative (lowest) figures available, the 4-year average annual transfer to the Polish Bilingual Program, 2018-2019 to 2021-2022, is approximately \$574,000.

*Updated January 25, 2022*

**2. Currently, St. Basil school has a utilization rate of 55%, which means that it receives an Operations and Maintenance allocation of \$42M. Will St. Basil School still receive Operations and Maintenance funding of \$42M with no students in it?**

The Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Grant is provided to school authorities to address the jurisdiction's responsibility for the operation, maintenance, safety, and security of all school buildings, including costs relating to the supervision of this program. ECSD does not receive \$42 Million in Operations and Maintenance rather, this grant allocation is determined by weighted enrolment and instructional areas within a school.

**3. According to the enrolment numbers in the St. Basil Catholic Elementary/Junior High School Closure Proposal, adjusted enrolment stays the same, or goes up, but never goes down. Has this affected the school's allocation from Alberta Education?**

The adjusted enrolment for a school uses a Student Allowance Factor to account for the additional space required by some students with special needs for the effective and safe delivery of programs. Students with severe disabilities are counted at a factor of three or one and a half, depending on their grade configuration.

The adjusted enrolment formula is indicated by Alberta Education and Alberta Infrastructure and is listed as follows:

Total Adjusted Enrolment = ((ECS-ECS Sp. Ed Severe) x 0.5) + (ECS Sp. Severe x 1.5) + (Gr. 1-12-Gr. 1-12 Sp. Ed. Severe) + (Gr. 1-12 Sp. Ed Severe x3)

*Updated January 24, 2022*

**4. Why is two-way communication not being facilitated during this engagement?**

Edmonton Catholic School Division commits to providing the opportunity for the Board of Trustees to hear all comments from our stakeholders. The public meetings format is such that members of the public can respond in a comfortable and safe setting where everyone who wants to speak at the public meetings has the opportunity to do so.

## **5. Why could people not register for table talks that were already in session?**

Registration was closed prior to each session to ensure there were enough third-party facilitators to manage round table discussions. This was done to ensure that each person would have time to respond to the School Closure Proposal.

## **6. What has been done to decrease expenses for St. Basil's school budget?**

The school administration has worked diligently to decrease expenses for St. Basil by reducing staff and combining classes and options. The school also decreased operating expenses by over \$200,000 since 2017-2018.

## **7. We understand that transportation is expensive. If we offer to pay extra for transportation, would this allow St. Basil to stay open?**

The current cost for transportation at St. Basil is \$3562 per student, which means just over \$300 per month per student. This would also go against the feedback we received from a transportation survey conducted last year that informed us not to charge more for students accessing programs of choice.

## **8. The information showed a drop in enrolment, but it was actually only a drop of about 10-15 kids. It has also increased/levelled out in the last two years. Why is this small number such an issue now?**

From 2008 to 2021, the Polish Bilingual program has seen a decline of nearly 100 K-9 students. This is projected to decrease by another 8% by 2026.

## **9. Catholic schools everywhere are likely experiencing decreases in enrolment. Can we see how St. Basil compares to other Catholic schools?**

Many ECSD schools have increased their enrolment this year.

## **10. What will happen to the library filled with Polish literature if the program is shut down?**

Should the decision on February 23, 2022 be to close St. Basil Catholic Elementary/Junior High School, Edmonton Catholic School Division will work with all stakeholders to allocate Polish resources accordingly.

## **11. There was a \$230,000 drop in district allocations from 2021 – 2022. Why did this occur?**

The \$232,000 decrease in district allocation from 2021-2022 is due to reduced enrolment arising from the move of the JFLA program to St. Cecilia. The decrease in allocation to the school was offset by a reduction in staffing expenses related to the JFLA program.

**12. What significant changes have occurred since the Board's decision in 2020 that has justified revisiting the closure of St. Basil School?**

In 2020, The Board of Trustees directed Senior Administration to work with the school to increase enrolment and help make the school viable. After two enrolment cycles, the school continues to see a decline in enrolment, continues to have an operating deficit that requires cross-subsidy from other schools in the division, and has difficulty offering a rich and diverse Junior High experience due to low numbers of students and staff. The recommendation has been brought forward because St. Basil School continues to possess five of the seven Closure Factors in Board Policy 14.

**13. Why does St. Basil School only have the Polish program there? Why is it no longer a community school with a regular program?**

Edmonton Catholic School Division is confident that all enrolment growth could be accommodated by the four adjacent under-utilized community schools. In 2001, all St. Basil community students were redesignated to other Catholic schools in the area and stopped being a community school.

**14. Why is relocation of the Polish program off the table with this School Closure Proposal?**

Please see Question 21

**15. Why was the most current utilization reported information (which should include the presence of Genesis School) not part of the School Closure Proposal?**

Genesis Online Catholic School has its own school code. When calculating utilization, the spaces used by Genesis Online have been exempt. As a result, the capacity of St. Basil was reduced to 414 students.

**16. Why is the cost of transportation for St. Basil students an issue now, when it was not at the time of the School Closure and Relocation Proposal in 2020? Did the relocation of the JFLA program cause the cost per student to increase because there are less students on buses?**

When the 2019-2020 school proposal was brought forward, transportation was one of the factors that contributed to the school deficit. The division was able to reduce two routes due to the JFLA relocation.

## **17. Is the Division's need for the building the true reason for closing the Polish program at St. Basil?**

As per Board Policy 14, St. Basil Catholic Elementary/Junior High School possesses five of the seven factors to bring forward a school closure. The five factors are:

- Decreasing Enrolment
- Continuing low enrolment in a school or within grades in a school
- Enhancing the effectiveness of program delivery
- Improving school facility utilization
- Improving cost effectiveness

*Updated January 18, 2022*

## **18. Why has St. Basil consistently had principal changes and first-time principals being put in charge of the school? Why is the district allowing mismanagement of funds and not providing adequate training for new principals? Why does the current Principal and Assistant Principal not teach?**

Edmonton Catholic Schools has excellent administrators that are trained in managing all aspects of a school, including budgets. Additionally, the Division supports and oversees all of its schools' budgets, including St. Basil. The decision on the amount of teaching time done by the administration is a site-based decision and is supported by the Division.

## **19. When is the public meeting that is referred to in Board Policy 14?**

The public meeting to discuss the proposed school closure is encompassed in the information session, held on January 17, 2022 and the subsequent six one-hour table talks on January 18 and 19, 2022. The public meeting for the board to decide on the proposed school closure is February 23, 2022.

## **20. How did ECSD decide on the format of the engagement process for the St. Basil, School Closure?**

Edmonton Catholic Schools Division has developed an engagement approach that allows for four different ways to engage on the proposed school closure, enabling parents, guardians, and the community to choose how they wish to participate in the process. The engagement process was designed to create multiple avenues for stakeholders to respond to the school closure proposal. The public meetings format is such that members of the public can respond in a comfortable and safe setting where everyone who wants to speak at the public meetings has the opportunity to do so.

There are four ways that parents, guardians, and the community can participate in the engagement process, and Edmonton Catholic Schools Division invites all stakeholders to engage in the way(s) that work for them. They are:

- A. [Survey](#),
- B. Written and video submissions to engagement@ecsd.net or mailed to Lumen Christi Catholic Education Centre, 9807 106 Street, Edmonton, AB T5K 1C2,
- C. Public engagement through the Table Talks of which there are six different times to choose from, and
- D. Phone call to speak to Karen Garlitos, Engagement Specialist personally at 780-441-6122.

*Updated January 17, 2022*

## **21. What will happen to the Polish Program? Will it move to another school?**

The motion that was passed by the Board on November 24, 2021, did not address moving the program to another school. On February 23, 2022, should the decision be to close St. Basil Catholic Elementary/Junior High School, Edmonton Catholic School Division will no longer offer Polish Bilingual programming for K-9 students. Students would be encouraged to attend their community school, and the Division would work with the Polish community to continue making rental space available.

## **22. What will happen to the staff in the school?**

Should St. Basil Catholic Elementary/Junior High school close, all school staff will each participate in the staffing process outlined for ATA, Unifor, and AUPE staff. Continuous staff will be identified for priority placement. The Division will follow the process of looking for a position for them as outlined in their Collective Agreements. Temporary contract staff will need to secure a position through the staffing process. Those temporary staff who don't secure a position will have the option to go on the supply roster.

## **23. Why is the Polish program not given the same chance as the JFLA and a relocation suggested this time?**

The motion proposed to the Board of Trustees on November 24, 2021, does not include a relocation. A relocation was proposed in 2020. Based on community feedback received in February 2020, families did not have a desire to relocate this program to another school. It was made very clear that relocating the Polish program to any other school in the Division would not be supported by the community, and students would not attend.

**24. How has two years been enough time to increase enrolment since the last school closure/relocation attempt? We were promised three years to increase enrolment.**

In February 2020, the Division committed to working with the school community to increase enrolment. In April 2020, the parents made a request for a commitment to funding a three-year marketing plan. However, ECSD has a yearly budget cycle, and as such, we communicated to the principal that we would support the marketing on a year-to-year basis. The Division could not commit to a dollar amount at the time as the budget allocations had not yet been finalized. We did not commit to a three-year period. Since that time, the marketing dollars directed towards St. Basil Catholic Elementary/Junior High School have been five times greater than any allocation made to any other language program in our Division. Despite our combined marketing efforts with the parent community and two registration cycles, enrolment has decreased by a further 10%. Even more concerning, over the past two years, 43 students left the program. This two-year enrolment trend is consistent with what has occurred over the long term and as a result, does not indicate an increased commitment from the community to register students at St. Basil Catholic Elementary/Junior High School.

**25. COVID-19 has affected our numbers. How can you close a school when so many of our families have moved to online?**

Six former St. Basil Catholic Elementary/Junior High School students are currently registered at Genesis Catholic Online Elementary/Junior High School. That equals 3% of the St. Basil Catholic Elementary/Junior High student population. The Division has given the opportunity to all online students to return to their school of origin for the start of February 1, 2022, and of the students choosing to return to in-person learning, no students chose to return to St Basil Catholic Elementary/Junior High School but rather chose their community school. The Board needs to make decisions that are fair and equitable for all students, and COVID-19 is affecting all students; therefore, the recommendation to consider the closure of St. Basil Catholic Elementary/Junior High School is not rooted in COVID-19 factors but rather the fact that the school met 5 out of the 7 closure consideration factors.

**26. Should immediate closure of the program take place next year, what supports will there be for students to adjust to this change? Students' mental health has already suffered due to the pandemic, and this has added more stress on them.**

The pandemic has affected many students in ECSD, and as such, the Division has allocated a number of resources to support students' mental health. In the event of a school closure, the Division is committed to working with affected students and their families to support the transition to their community school.

Edmonton Catholic Schools is committed to providing an inclusive, welcoming, caring, respectful, safe, and Catholic environment that promotes the well-being of all and fosters community support for supporting all student mental health.

## **27. What will happen to the St. Basil building?**

Should the decision on February 23, 2022, be to close St. Basil Catholic Elementary/Junior High School, the Division will continue to support the Polish community. ECSD will allow all current tenants the opportunity to renew their leases in the 2022-2023 school year, allow the school facility to continue to offer community bookings within the Joint Use Agreement and make rental space available for the Polish community at a fair and reasonable rate. In addition, the building will continue to be the site for the administration of the Genesis Catholic Online School.

## **28. Why is transportation to St. Basil 5 and 1/2 times higher than to other schools in the division?**

ECSD transports 117 St. Basil Catholic Elementary/Junior High students. The bus ridership varies between 6 – 22 students per bus for an average of 13 students per route/per bus. This means that between 33 – 49 seats are unfunded. As a result, the utilization rates range between 11-40% per route for an overall average of 24% combined. As a result of low ridership and city-wide busses, the cost is 5 ½ times (451%) greater than other schools across the Division.

## **29. What was done to try and boost enrolment after the 2020 school closure/program relocation engagement?**

Since March 2020, the Division has continued its commitment to supporting the program in multiple ways. To maintain enrolment numbers, bus service remained available, and the Division has continued to subsidize costs to the school over the next two budget cycles. These decisions demonstrate a financial commitment of approximately \$1.9 million dollars over and above the basic grant dollars provided by the province.

## **30. Polish property owners direct their taxes to ECSD. As such, does ECSD not have a duty to accommodate?**

Education Property taxes are collected and passed onto the Alberta government, who in turn distributes the funds equally throughout the entire province irrespective of what public education system was declared on their property taxes. This means that no matter where you live in Alberta, the funding provided to each student is the same. The recommendation to consider the closure of St. Basil Catholic Elementary/Junior High School is also rooted in the principles of equitable use of resources for all 43,200 Division students. It is important that programs of choice be financially viable so as not to negatively impact the resources available to all Division students.

**31. The enrolment numbers in the Polish language program, as tracked by the Polish community, show an increase. Why is there a discrepancy in the numbers?**

It is statistically important to have a consistent methodology in reporting when analyzing trends over a long period of time. That is why ALL enrolment figures in the School Closure Report are based on the September 30 enrolment count of each year. It is difficult for us to comment on any other records other than the ones we are accountable for when reporting our enrolment to Alberta Education on a yearly basis.

**32. In 2019, why were two schools on the outskirts of Edmonton chosen for relocation of the Polish program?**

As part of the 2019-2020 proposal, the Division identified St. Angela Catholic Elementary School and Sir John Thompson Catholic Junior High School as options for relocation of the Polish Bilingual Program. Both schools had the required space to accommodate the students, were very close proximity to each other and are in North Edmonton, where many students live.

**33. Even though a specific time was not given for the program revitalization, a 3-year marketing plan had been discussed. Why is another proposal for closure being considered only 20 months later even though our enrolment went up from 2020/2021 to 2021/2022 and our utilization went up with Genesis moving into the building?**

In February 2020, the Division committed to working with the school community to increase enrolment. In April 2020, the parents made a request for commitment to funding a three-year marketing plan. However, ECSD has a yearly budget cycle, and as such, we communicated to the principal that we would support the marketing on a year-to-year basis. The Division could not commit to a dollar amount at the time as the budget allocations had not yet been finalized. We did not commit to a three-year time frame. Since that time, the marketing dollars directed towards St. Basil Catholic Elementary/Junior High School have been five times greater than any allocation made to any other language program in our Division. Despite our combined marketing efforts with the parent community and two registration cycles, enrolment has decreased by a further 10%, and even more concerning is that in the past two years, 43 students left the program. This two-year enrolment trend is consistent with what has occurred over the long term and does not indicate an increased commitment from the community to register students at St. Basil Catholic Elementary/Junior High School. Although the utilization rate in 2020 has increased due to Division strategies, and the addition of the Genesis Online School, it was negatively impacted by a decrease enrolment in the Polish Bilingual program. It is anticipated that the utilization for the 2021-2022 school year will decline.

**34. Please confirm which ECSD bilingual schools managed to increase enrolment during the pandemic?**

ECSD has had many language programs increase their enrolment from the 2020-2021 school year to the Sept.30 2021 enrolment count. Schools are listed as follows:

- St. Matthew Catholic Elementary School Ukrainian Bilingual Program
- St. Stanislaus Catholic Elementary School French Immersion Program
- St. Cecilia Catholic Junior High School French Immersion Program
- Archbishop MacDonald High School French Immersion Program
- J. H. Picard Catholic Elementary/Junior/Senior High School French Immersion Program remained stable
- Father Leo Green Catholic Elementary School French Immersion Program remained stable
- Austin O'Brien Catholic High School Spanish Bilingual Program
- John Paul 1 Catholic Elementary School Spanish Bilingual Program
- St. Brendan Catholic Elementary/Junior High School Spanish Bilingual Program
- Louis St. Laurent Catholic Junior/Senior High School Spanish Bilingual Program remained stable

**35. How are parents supposed to trust ECSD after this rollercoaster ride of relocation and now program elimination; you keep telling us how our children's mental health is so important, so why are you not considering the mental health of the 210 students that will be affected by this proposal? Why are you treating our children as a commodity and the school as a business, only looking at making a profit?**

This recommendation is based on the fair and equitable distribution of resources to provide efficient and effective learning opportunities for all students. Increased efficiencies will also have added benefits to students as they will have increased learning opportunities at their community school. Each school is equipped to deal with factors involved as students move schools (see the response to #6).

**36. Why was the kindergarten enrolment number capped at only 25 kids if there was such a major concern about enrolment? By capping the kindergarten program, which has historically been our largest class, you are setting up the program for failure.**

Classroom composition within a school is a site-based decision. Principals will create class sizes to optimize curricular delivery. Every student that wanted to register in Kindergarten at St. Basil

Catholic Elementary/Junior High School for the 2021-2022 school year is currently registered at the school.

- 37. If 52% of students ride the yellow bus, why is the school bus program is not a priority? Should there not have been more emphasis placed on planning routes? How can a whole route be dropped in 2020/2021 and consequently state that this did not affect enrolment? Please tell us how many students who were affected by the erratic bus schedules last year and did not re-enroll at St. Basil?**

ECSD has made bussing a priority for St Basil Catholic Elementary/Junior High School as we committed to supplemental funding (\$417,909 for 2021-22) to provide bussing throughout the city. Yellow bus routes are designed based on transportation applications received. The Division creates routes to accommodate all eligible students. Regardless of the number of students requesting transportation, the Division will transport eligible students to their school if an application is received. In terms of trying to reduce the cost of transportation to the Division, ECSD has diligently exhausted all options to reduce the number of routes to transport the Polish Bilingual students effectively and efficiently.

- 38. What actions were taken in the last two years to decrease spending? How can a school of this size justify two 100% administrative staff (principal and vice-principal), especially since JFLA left? How many principals are currently located in the school, including the Genesis program?**

See question 21.

- 39. With the Genesis program moving into St. Basil, why is the operating budget not combined for Sw. Jan Pawel II program and Genesis as it was historically done with other programs, such as the JFLA program? With Genesis moving into the building, should the utilization rate of the building not have gone up significantly?**

Both schools have been operating as separate entities with separate Alberta Education school codes. Genesis Online School is not a program; it is a school with its own school code. Combining the two schools into one is not prudent as there are too many pedagogical differences and requirements between the operation of these two schools. We needed to have them administratively separate. Further, it is important to note that Alberta Education does not allow enrolment at an online school to count towards the utilization of the school space (ex. students are not counted in utilization as they are not in the school).

**40. In the "Proposal for Closure Document" you talk about two other under-utilized schools that are centrally located: St. Alphonsus and St. Catherine. You also mention that the majority of the students at St. Basil are located in northwest Edmonton where all of the schools are over-utilized or close. How is this proper planning? How does taking students away from the underutilized core and sending them to the over-populated neighborhood schools, especially during a pandemic where small classroom/population sizes are ideal for keeping everyone safe make sense?**

The only school located in the Northwest sector that is over-utilized at this time is St. Lucy Catholic Elementary School. As part of the Division initiative of Walking Together Towards a Glorious Future, ECSD aims to reduce operating costs, balance utilization, provide enhanced learning opportunities and develop a continuum of focus language and alternative programs. Therefore, on the Division's 3-year Capital Plan 2022-2025, ECSD has made the request for a replacement K-9 school in the Palisades/Oxford; St. Lucy Catholic Elementary School and Katherine Therrien Catholic Elementary School with the creation of a Junior High Attendance boundary with a capacity of 950 students.

**41. Why was Policy 14 not followed and we are not being given a proper public consultation process?**

In alignment with Board Policy 14, School Closure, ECSD has developed a Public Participation Process that allows several opportunities to provide stakeholder feedback: information session, table talks, video and written submissions via email, online survey or by telephone. Given the pandemic, ECSD commits to providing stakeholders with a safe and comfortable environment to share their thoughts.

**42. Why did the district not listen to the Polish community and find an alternate central location if they had plans for this building?**

In the 2019-2020 Public Participation Process, ECSD received the following feedback:

- Feedback forms submitted on February 12: 72
- Additional Online Feedback forms: 93
- Additional forms received in office: 6
- Emails Received: 121
- February 12, 2020, Information Sessions Attendees: 685
- February 12, 2020, Information Session Registered speakers: 30

The theme of the feedback demonstrated clearly that there is no interest in the Polish program relocating to another school, regardless of its location.

**43. Why have we endured all the maintenance hardship just so we can see our school used as office space?**

As per the Alberta Education School Capital Manual, Operation and Maintenance funding is provided to all jurisdictions, including Charter Schools for the maintenance and operation of school buildings to ensure they are safe, comfortable, and suitable learning environments for children. The funding is different from the Infrastructure Maintenance and Renewal funding which is used for component replacement and the upgrading of existing facilities. Regardless of the school's utilization rates, ECSD is committed to providing all students with enhanced learning environments, including our Polish Bilingual students.

**44. A language school is an important part of the community. Does Edmonton Catholic Schools not believe that Canada should remain multicultural?**

This recommendation for closure is not being made based on language programming but rather the fact that the school demonstrates 5 of the 7 consideration factors under Board Policy 14, School Closure. Another school closure is currently being recommended that is not a language school and had fewer consideration factors.

**45. Why is ECSD trying so hard to eliminate heritage language, but EPSB is supporting it and moreover helping to maintain those programs?**

ECSD is proud to offer eight language programs city-wide which is equivalent to the offerings of EPSB, a School Division that is almost three times our size.

**46. Why is the board not acknowledging that the last two years during the pandemic have been extremely atypical for enrolment and should thus not be used as a barometer for how well the program is doing?**

When making a recommendation of this gravity, ECSD analyzes trends over an extended period of time. Student enrolment continues to decline, and students continue to leave the program before they finish their Grade 9 year, making it difficult to offer a viable program.